


A collage featuring a cup of coffee and the text "So fi: zine" repeated in a stylized, overlapping font. The text is arranged in a diagonal pattern across the image, with the words "So", "fi:", and "zine" appearing separately on different lines. The background is a warm, orange-brown color, and the coffee cup is visible in the upper right corner.

so fi zine





so fi zine

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Sociological Horoscopes

Aries: throw off, once and for all, the yoke

Taurus: you will have to face the question

Gemini: be devoted

Cancer: horrify us

Leo: acquire a body, a tangible form

Virgo: do not think that we are deluding ourselves

Libra: great care must be exercised

Scorpio: believe in the possibility

Sagittarius: make it up

Capricorn: seek others

Aquarius: work steadily and persistently

Pisces: exert pressure

From Emile Durkheim's *The Rules of Sociological Method*

Editorial

Ash Watson

Welcome to the 16th edition of *So Fi Zine*.

This a bountiful project of creative social inquiry that I have shepherded now for almost eight years. Thank you to the writers, artists and readers who keep coming back to this space and to anyone who has stumbled upon it today, meeting it new in the world.

I am writing in the middle of a near-perpetual heatwave, a humid December in Sydney, which means I am spending a lot of time inside reading or out in the ocean. 2024 has been a tumultuous year – for me, for many people I know, for the world. I find creating and reading to be both an escape and a way to hold myself face to face with troubling times, a way out and in and through the mess of life, the shit, the beauty, the parade of horror, the bliss, the whole ride.

I hope this edition of *So Fi Zine* offers you a slice of this too – an impression of life, a way to witness, to remember, to be there, to think on it, to feel.

Contents

Editorial

Ash Watson..... 1

Monsters

Julia Bennett..... 4

Poems for Gaza

Katariina Rahikainen..... 8

Wondering

Kayte Branch..... 13

Migrant Home in Japan: Delusions of Temporary Home

Işıl Bayraktar..... 16

There Will Be Others Like Me

John-Paul Smiley..... 20

Rewind and Fast Forward

Alison McCandlish..... 23

A Love Letter

Micol Pizzolati..... 25

Cleanshaven

Alexandra "Xan" Nowakowski..... 27

advocate for mind-body health, Kayte combines her passion for yoga, creative arts, and nature in her work. She is a 200-hour registered yoga teacher and the creator of the Create program, which promotes creativity and connection within her college community. An avid trail runner, she loves spending time outdoors and finds inspiration in nature.

Micol Pizzolati is a constantly worried mum and someone who likes to pack a lunch to share. She keeps her dog company while he waits for his favourite human, who is also her favourite person. Micol makes her living teaching at university and doing social research, which she loves most of the time.

Rituparna Sahoo is a poet, writer, essayist, and a storyteller from Bhubaneswar, India. She is neurodivergent: she is autistic and experiences attention deficit and high sensitivity. She has psychosocial disability defined by the interludes of depression followed by elusive gladness. Her work explores her ever-changing psychological landscape; her neurodivergence and her psychosocial disability; and her experience of surviving child abuse, family violence and a flawed mental health system. She holds an MA degree in sociology from University of Hyderabad. Her work has appeared in *Ink*, *Sweat & Tears*, *Wildcourt*, *Litro*, *Eclectica*, and *David Oluwale Anthology* published by *Peepal Tree Press*. Her poem 'Solitude' that appeared in the anthology was reviewed by the Yorkshire Times. Currently, she is working on a volume of poetry.

J.E. Sumerau (they/them) is an associate professor and the director of applied sociology at the University of Tampa. They are the author of 7 novels, 5 research monographs, and numerous articles, chapters, and short stories exploring sexualities, gender, health, religion, sports, music, and violence in society. For more information, visit www.jsumerau.com.

John Gilbert Ellis is a poet and songwriter. Born in Bristol and lives in West London. Seized by the need to write and not giving up anytime soon.

John-Paul Smiley is a writer and independent scholar. He has a PhD in Civil and Building Engineering (Loughborough, UK), an MSc Social Research (Leicester, UK), and a BA Politics and Sociology (York, UK). His interests include futurism and science fiction, as well as politics and sociology

Julia Bennett is a sociologist, yoga teacher and writer of creative non-fiction and short sociological fiction on the theme of place and belonging.

Katariina Rahikainen is a researcher and a parent. She previously worked in academia and perhaps will one day again. She is trying to alleviate her anxiety and heartbreak by turning them into poems and helping one family escape genocide before it is too late at bit.ly/helpashraf.

Kayte Branch is a professor of criminology and criminal justice at the University of Tampa, where she has held various roles since 2006. Her research centers on the impact of sexual violence on college populations and trauma-informed practices. A lifelong learner and

Contents

An Unusual Answer to an All Too Usual Question <i>J. E. Sumerau</i>	28
A Hill to Die On <i>John Gilbert Ellis</i>	31
Room <i>Rituparna Sahoo</i>	32
Edith <i>Julia Bennett</i>	37
A Kind of Sadness <i>Ian C Smith</i>	38
The Place of Books at Migrant Home in Japan <i>Işıl Bayraktar</i>	44
Crass Hat (Sonnet) <i>John Gilbert Ellis</i>	48
True North <i>Alexandra "Xan" Nowakowski</i>	50
Author Bios.....	53
Horoscopes.....	56



Monsters

Julia Bennett

Wednesday

The Swiss cheese plant she bought just keeps on growing. It is nearly at the ceiling now, headed towards the Velux window in the roof of the attic, desperate for more light. Up and up it goes, like Jack's proverbial beanstalk. In an odd moment sandwiched between Zoom meetings, she wonders what will happen when it reaches the window. Perhaps she ought to open it, let the monstera escape, as she is clearly not capable of doing. Of escaping from the boring, the mundane, the treadmill of twenty-first century life.

There's a spider plant too, on the edge of the desk, taking up valuable desk space but, apparently, good for cleansing the air of whatever bad stuff laptops and screens excrete. That's what the woman in the shop told her, and she was happy to believe it. Or rather, happy to consider it sales bullshit, but buy the plant anyway, because she liked it and was unlikely to kill it. Spider plants, like actual spiders, are pretty tough. Now though, she starts to wonder, as she's waiting in the Zoom waiting 'room' (where is that? Is she really there? Or here, in her attic?) whether the laptop really is sending out bad stuff into the air which is slowly poisoning her mind.

On a whim she stands up to open the Velux and bangs her head on the sloping ceiling. Ouch! She lets

Author Bios

Alexandra "Xan" Nowakowski, PhD, MPH is an Associate Professor in the Geriatrics and Behavioral Sciences & Social Medicine departments at the Florida State University College of Medicine, and an Associate with the Pepper Institute on Aging. Their work as a medical sociologist, public health program evaluator, and community advocate focuses on health equity in aging with chronic disease. They have published poems in several different journals and authored the social fiction novel *Other People's Oysters* collaboratively with J Sumerau.

Alison McCandlish is a Lecturer in City Planning at the University of Glasgow. She is passionate about creative approaches to exploring the city, and making planning and urban design accessible to more people.

Ian C Smith writes in the Gippsland Lakes region of Victoria, and on Flinders Island. His work has appeared in *Antipodes*, *Coolabah*, *cordite*, *Griffith Review*, *Journal of Working Class Studies*, *Meniscus*, *So Fi Zine*, *Text: A Journal of Writing and Writing Courses*, & *Westerly*. His seventh book is *wonder sadness madness joy*, Ginninderra Press.

Işıl Bayraktar is a sociologist and writer of sociological creative fiction, her doctoral thesis at Kyoto University, Sociology, Japan is on art-based research methods in exploring migrant women experiences. Her work on Japan has appeared in *Writers in Kyoto* publications. She has a BSc and MSc in Social Sciences from Turkey and writes on gender, sexuality, identity, belonging and migration.



trace frozen mailboxes with
gloved fingers that shake,
seizing up from within.
My heart, aching,
pulls back their tempered blood.

I shared it with him once—
not in the way I drew
my mother's all those months,
but somehow.
Until I find him,
I carry his ticking
heart beneath polar floors.

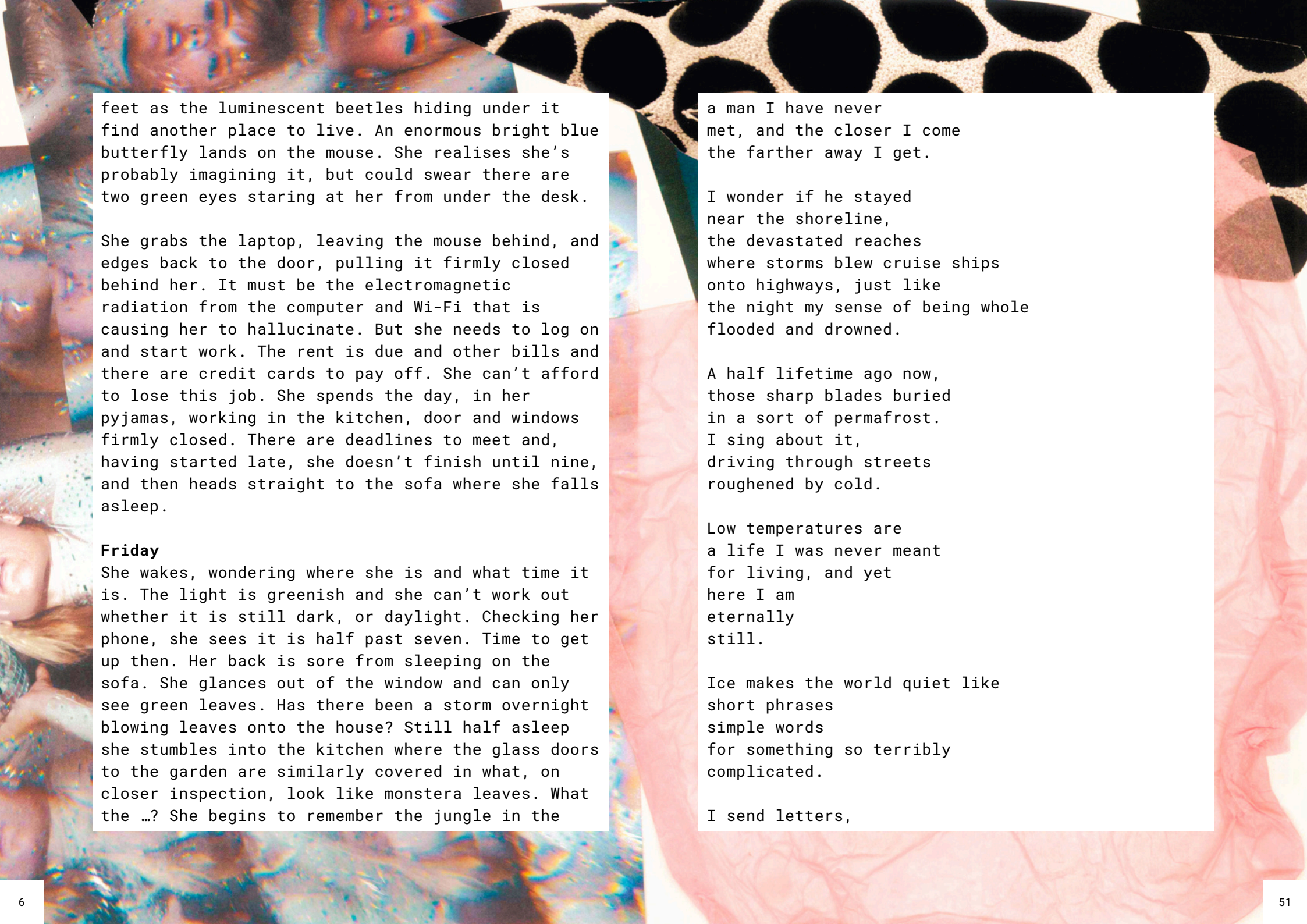
True north never had faces
for me, just shadows behind
objects left to sink
in falling snow.
A charcoal grill, a garden hose,
shovels we used
to bury secrets.

When ice melts on puddles
and the southern sun
dives back into palms and pavement
I will shed layers,
fabric and lies.
Until I find him,
I freeze only out of view—
harden like wet papers,
like old blood, and wait.

some fresh air in, just in case, then realises that
she's in the meeting and everyone can see her
pyjama trousers paired with her smart work top.
Sitting down, hurriedly she quickly switches off
the camera and sound to compose herself, allowing
the fierce red to fade from her cheeks before
turning the camera back on and pretending the Wi-Fi
was playing up.

Thursday

She slept late so rushes up to switch on the laptop
while the kettle is boiling for coffee. Not
dressed, showered or having brushed her hair, but
there are no meetings until this afternoon. She
needs to be logged on though, as they can check
whether she is working or not. The door to the
attic seems to be stuck. She pushes hard with her
shoulder against the door and it bursts open. What
on earth? The room seems to have morphed into a
tropical garden overnight. The monstera covers the
walls, ceiling and is waving tendrils out of the
Velux. The spider plant seems to have given birth
to lots of babies which are dotted on the chair,
bookshelves and over the floor. There is the sound
of birdsong and she spots a flash of yellow and red
amongst the green. As she edges her way into the
room she spots a spider's web in one corner of the
ceiling with an enormous black spider at its
centre. In her still sleepy state she's more
concerned about losing her job than what has
happened overnight so she reaches out for her
laptop, to take it down to the kitchen. As she
lifts it from the desk there's a scurrying of tiny



feet as the luminescent beetles hiding under it find another place to live. An enormous bright blue butterfly lands on the mouse. She realises she's probably imagining it, but could swear there are two green eyes staring at her from under the desk.

She grabs the laptop, leaving the mouse behind, and edges back to the door, pulling it firmly closed behind her. It must be the electromagnetic radiation from the computer and Wi-Fi that is causing her to hallucinate. But she needs to log on and start work. The rent is due and other bills and there are credit cards to pay off. She can't afford to lose this job. She spends the day, in her pyjamas, working in the kitchen, door and windows firmly closed. There are deadlines to meet and, having started late, she doesn't finish until nine, and then heads straight to the sofa where she falls asleep.

Friday

She wakes, wondering where she is and what time it is. The light is greenish and she can't work out whether it is still dark, or daylight. Checking her phone, she sees it is half past seven. Time to get up then. Her back is sore from sleeping on the sofa. She glances out of the window and can only see green leaves. Has there been a storm overnight blowing leaves onto the house? Still half asleep she stumbles into the kitchen where the glass doors to the garden are similarly covered in what, on closer inspection, look like monstera leaves. What the ...? She begins to remember the jungle in the

a man I have never met, and the closer I come the farther away I get.

I wonder if he stayed near the shoreline, the devastated reaches where storms blew cruise ships onto highways, just like the night my sense of being whole flooded and drowned.

A half lifetime ago now, those sharp blades buried in a sort of permafrost. I sing about it, driving through streets roughened by cold.

Low temperatures are a life I was never meant for living, and yet here I am eternally still.

Ice makes the world quiet like short phrases simple words for something so terribly complicated.

I send letters,

True North

Alexandra "Xan" Nowakowski

Cold comes rarely
around here, but when
the wind picks up
the rain hits heavy
I feel the edges of myself
freeze like buried ponds.

I swim beneath ice,
circling. Still that small child
wrapped in layers
gathering frost.

The heart hides a cold spot
even in beginning summer
when the light grows long,
cascades through trees.
There is always
one icicle, an endless
hard morning.

It gathers in my toes,
days like these—
paralysis in sickly white
that looks like yellow
against the purple zones.
Disease paints me
many colors of longing.

I spend my winters missing
spend my summers missing

attic the previous day. She thought maybe she'd
dreamt it, but was now wondering if it was real,
after all.

She tries to see out into the garden but doesn't
dare open the door in case the monstera starts to
occupy the kitchen as well. She can't see much so
checks her phone to see if anyone has posted on the
local groups about storms, leaves or monster-like
plants. No-one has. So there's nothing for it but
to go upstairs and see what is happening there. The
attic door is still closed but, putting her ear to
the door, she can hear buzzing and the chattering
of birds, with perhaps a low growl of something
bigger and scarier too.

This is ridiculous. She must be going mad. She
needs a holiday. This job, this life, is all too
much.

Taking a deep breath she opens the door and steps
into the jungle. It's hot and humid. Noisy with the
chattering of birds and buzzing of insects and
there is a large black cat – a puma? – curled up
asleep on her chair. It opens one green eye and
looks at her. The monstera is climbing out through
the window, a stalk that looks strong enough to
hold her weight. Jackie starts to climb, out of the
window and up into the sky.

Parent's Poems for Gaza

Katariina Rahikainen

1#

As I look at your beautiful face
Tears are falling down my cheeks
Because I know how the occupation slaughters
Children like you

2#

The hypocrisy
I don't post photos of my child's face because I
want them to have a free childhood and teenage
years
And for them to be able to choose
When they are old enough
And to protect them of predators
Yet I post photos of someone else's child
Trying to survive a genocide
And the audacity I have
Why do I have that audacity
And then I think
If my child, or this child, was to die
I would want them to live forever
On social media
If not
Where else would they live if my heart was to stop
beating?

3#

I feel like
What I feel like
Is intensified by the bombs



Crass Hat (Sonnet)

John Gilbert Ellis

Been through the wars and wiped many floors.
I was there when the vice squad kicked in our
doors.

Battle ground gigs, infested with right and left.
BM Neo Nazis and SWP anti-fascist reds.

This life we chose runs deep in my fibres.
Revolution lives long among us real punk outsiders.

Best before 1984?
Is that really the truth?
Do they still owe us a living?
Of course, they bloody do!

A lost to the cause and no way home.
Discarded at the 100 Club, in lost property and all
alone.

Surrounded by society, stuck on a shelf.
An essential accessory left, to endure a mainstream
living hell.

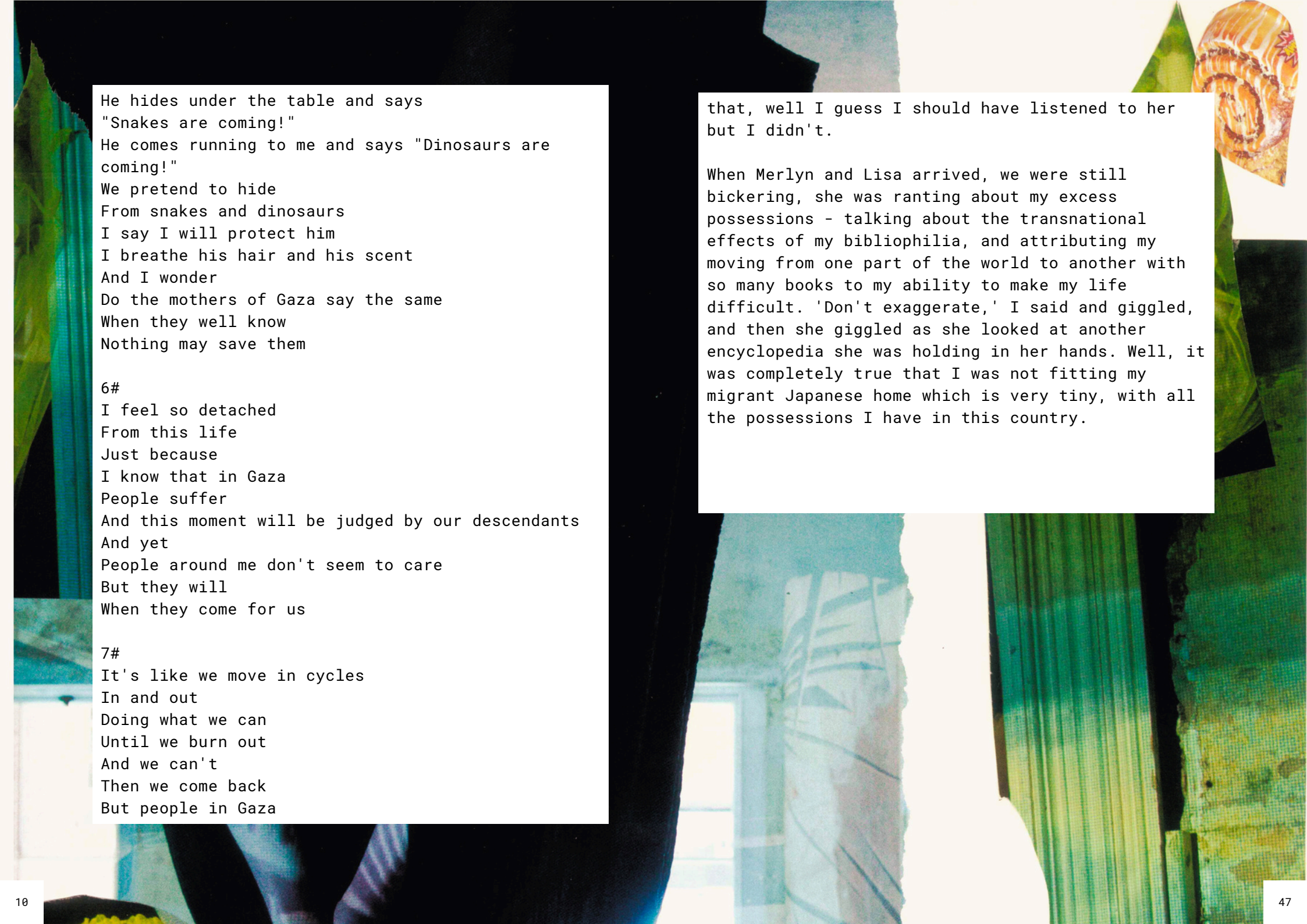
*Sonnet for a forlorn looking hat left in lost property after a
punk festival in 2024.*

The heartbreak I have every day
Amplified by the thousands of Palestinian voices
The limbs held by parents not letting go
At the same time
When I kiss the soft cheeks of my child
My gratitude is also amplified
But I will remember this heartbreak
This inaction by our world leaders
Forever
And whilst every day I feel like I crumble
I try to stay strong
For what I want
Is a better world for all of us

4#

She tells me
"I don't post political stuff on social media cuz
it's not my brand"
He tells me
"I don't post pali stuff cuz I had a colleague
investigated by the university cuz of a complaint
by a Zionist Jewish group"
I tell myself
"These people shouldn't be trusted if an injustice
falls upon me"
I yell the world
"Why don't you care?!"
They tell me
"We do care!"
But their silence speaks louder than the actions
they don't take

5#



He hides under the table and says
"Snakes are coming!"
He comes running to me and says "Dinosaurs are coming!"
We pretend to hide
From snakes and dinosaurs
I say I will protect him
I breathe his hair and his scent
And I wonder
Do the mothers of Gaza say the same
When they well know
Nothing may save them

6#
I feel so detached
From this life
Just because
I know that in Gaza
People suffer
And this moment will be judged by our descendants
And yet
People around me don't seem to care
But they will
When they come for us

7#
It's like we move in cycles
In and out
Doing what we can
Until we burn out
And we can't
Then we come back
But people in Gaza

that, well I guess I should have listened to her
but I didn't.

When Merlyn and Lisa arrived, we were still bickering, she was ranting about my excess possessions - talking about the transnational effects of my bibliophilia, and attributing my moving from one part of the world to another with so many books to my ability to make my life difficult. 'Don't exaggerate,' I said and giggled, and then she giggled as she looked at another encyclopedia she was holding in her hands. Well, it was completely true that I was not fitting my migrant Japanese home which is very tiny, with all the possessions I have in this country.

me? They all have something of me in them, they all have something from my life, from the people who came into my life. They are parts of my story.

Nadya, Nadya, Nadya! Okay, I won't talk anymore, but please leave the sorting of the papers to me! I wonder what you threw away and there shouldn't be anything in them that I have lost the memory of, these are the things I want to remember, these are the things that are here and I live with the thought that once something is thrown away I have lost it completely and this leads me to a deep grief, at one time I checked these experiences one by one to see if I had noted them in my memory.

I had given up waiting for her to understand, I knew she thought I was weird, but I realized later that I was wrong to think that only Nadya would think that at the time. Before Nadya arrived, I had taped up a big box I had filled with her, again with a lot of fighting. She told me that it was unreasonable to carry so many books in such a big box and told me to find another box, that we should split this one in two. It was almost freezing outside and I was cold, the nearest grocery store was 10 minutes away, and as far as I was concerned, there was no reason to leave the house and freeze in the cold to buy more boxes, then come back and tape and fix the pieces of these boxes. I wasn't going to make her carry that box. I said okay, let's carry it with the friends who are coming, really don't touch it. She kept saying it wasn't

Don't have time
To burn out
Unless they actually burn
Out of this world

8#
The grief
So inseparable
From what is mine and what is theirs
As my heart aches
Both for the loss of humanity
But also my friends
Who are too immersed in their own privileged lives
to see
That I am hurting
And by acknowledging that and doing something
ANYTHING - because little things one by one become
big things -
They could lessen that hurt
But instead
They do nothing but continue their privileged lives
And silently continue being complicit in
Genocide





9#
He finds a megaphone
And he runs around the house
And he yells
Oh he yells
"Free free Palestine!! Free free Palestine!!"
Like we all should




10#

Aaron Bushnell

I understand your decision
When my heart aches for Reem
And for countless of others
Who are not numbers
And for countless of others who are yet to suffer
I understand
It is easier
Just to go
Because this heartache
Does not seem to end



you've accumulated, Cynthia, you can't live this life like this. This is the first time in all these years that you've lived in a completely different country and city for so long, and maybe that's why you're so giddy and confused about what to take and where to take it. Of course, then you make a big fuss about not fitting in anywhere. If you live like this with yourself and your own things, where can you fit? Anyone who sees this pile might think that she is creating herself with her things. However, in this period of your life when you are so mobile, you can't take so many things with you, if you want to take them with you, you will see that you can't, she said, tearing the contents of a file in front of my eyes, and threw it in the garbage. It was as if something was missing from me. She had added a new one to the ones that had come out of me and it felt like another piece of the past was taken from me, and then I wondered whether I had recorded that piece (a piece about my travels, my time in this city, Kyoto) whether I had written it down. When she asked me what I did, I thought how hard it would be to tell her, as she looked at the torn pieces of paper in the garbage that she had taken out of that file. Of course she knew I was a writer, who was trying to think and work and act sociologically, she knew that I am trying to survive in my migrant home. She looked at my books and said *I'm proud of you*, but I was telling her not to exaggerate it, that it's a state of mind, a way of life. It's like not being able to do without it and not being able to live. *Can you understand what all these pieces of paper mean to*



The Place of Books at Migrant Home in Japan

Işıl Bayraktar

My friend Nadya, who came home, threw away a lot of the things I had collected in this country over the years, thinking that they were trash, and I let her throw them away. I've always thought that there is a difference between the concept of trash in the mind of a migrant writer who is collecting her migrant memories and the concept of trash in the mind of someone else. And after a while it becomes impossible to explain to them why you collect so much stuff, and you are seen not only as a mad person, a lunatic, a collector, but also as a junk collector who goes back and forth between unnecessary things and issues, who loves to confuse her life as much as her soul is confused.

Brochures from museums visited, catalogs of places visited, notebooks with crumpled pages, files written in old languages that you will probably never look at again, files of your friends who have left this country, books written in their own language; Indonesian and Malaysian, Spanish, outdated printouts of masters and doctoral student's presentations in Japanese, a memory, a leaf, a notebook, a file from everywhere, and Nadya's words *'you can't carry everything and everyone that comes into your life with you!'* I replied, *I'm not trying to carry everyone and everything, I'm only taking what's important.* She screamed; Oh yeah, I can tell you the story of all the time you spent in the city with this pile

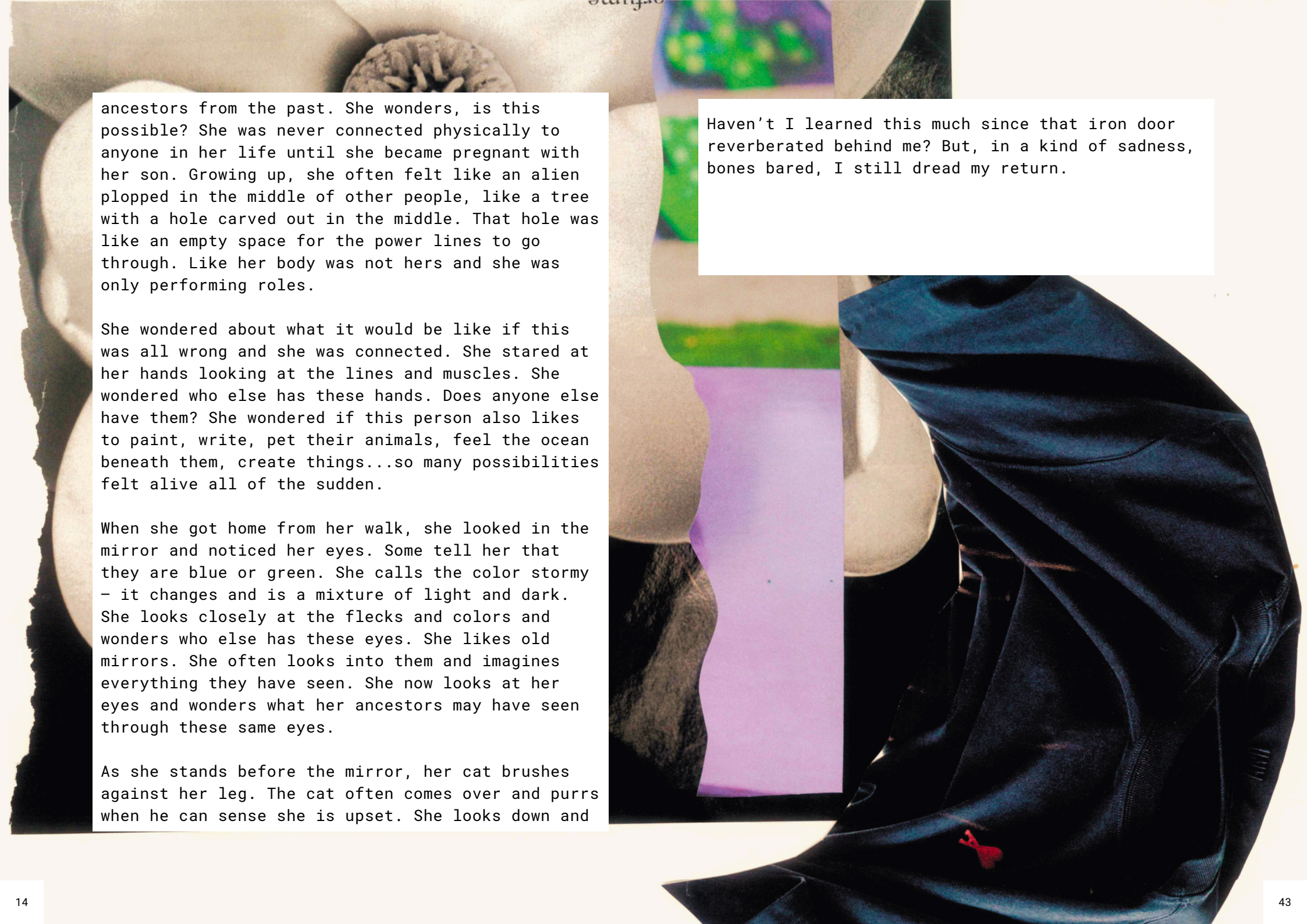
Wondering

Kayte Branch

Her face was lit by the blue screen. She could see the reflection in her glasses. She stared at the screen trying to take in what she was reading. The person who sent the email said she was a first cousin, was related by dna, asked if she knew who her parents and grandparents were. The email sender asked as if they had the right to ask, as if the answers would be simple and obvious, as if they were entitled to the information. She stared at the screen trying to take it in. She was adopted. She doesn't know anyone she's related to except for her son. This is the first time in her 45 years that someone has reached out. She wonders if this is real?

She wonders if she must respond to the email. She wonders is she wants to respond to the email. She walks away from the computer to catch her breath and clear her head. She loves to walk and feel the muscles in her legs engage. She loves the wind on her skin and face. Walking makes her feel connected to her body. She hasn't always felt connected to her body.

She wonders what biological family would look like. Do they have her voice, her hands, her smile and laugh, her toes, her hair? Do they crinkle their noses when they giggle? She read a quote written by Thich Naht Han about how the physical body is part of all ancestors, connected to the past and all




ancestors from the past. She wonders, is this possible? She was never connected physically to anyone in her life until she became pregnant with her son. Growing up, she often felt like an alien plopped in the middle of other people, like a tree with a hole carved out in the middle. That hole was like an empty space for the power lines to go through. Like her body was not hers and she was only performing roles.

She wondered about what it would be like if this was all wrong and she was connected. She stared at her hands looking at the lines and muscles. She wondered who else has these hands. Does anyone else have them? She wondered if this person also likes to paint, write, pet their animals, feel the ocean beneath them, create things...so many possibilities felt alive all of the sudden.

When she got home from her walk, she looked in the mirror and noticed her eyes. Some tell her that they are blue or green. She calls the color stormy – it changes and is a mixture of light and dark. She looks closely at the flecks and colors and wonders who else has these eyes. She likes old mirrors. She often looks into them and imagines everything they have seen. She now looks at her eyes and wonders what her ancestors may have seen through these same eyes.

As she stands before the mirror, her cat brushes against her leg. The cat often comes over and purrs when he can sense she is upset. She looks down and


Haven't I learned this much since that iron door reverberated behind me? But, in a kind of sadness, bones bared, I still dread my return.



rage, and despair etched and inked in that ancient art form, mind joking now about seeing the writing on the wall.

I lacked answers then, still do, tattoos now faded motifs these remedial years on after misery inflicted, its festering. Who am I, who has writhed in his own blood and piss as a youngster, to now indulge my disdain? There was a girl whose faithful letters finally caught up with me. She worked in a CBD department store. On my release, unmet but resolute, aglow in sunshine missed, determined to rewrite my young life after a yearning countdown, something I still do in anticipation of better times, I heard the raw cry of a tram rattling towards those tall buildings that surged my heart.

Weighted with indignant disappointment the day my neighbours arrive I set off on my long lone walk in soft rain that has driven them inside, the last of their strewn chattels left to slowly become a sodden shambles. On the town's outskirts in our wetlands' haze, insects swarming in the clean environment, balm for my blistered mind, swans, finished nesting, have flown, but wedge-tailed eagles circle above pelicans gliding in regal silence like stately galleons left to rule the ripples. Minuscule other birds darting among twigs, bathed in this beauty, I understand. What are that family's chances of their luck changing? I should have offered to help. Faced my ghosts. That would have at least been a small good thing.



pets him noticing her feet. She is grateful for her feet and all the journeys they have taken her on. She notices the color on her toenails and the calluses she earned from running. She laughs feeling grateful she has all ten toenails. As an ultra-runner this is no small feat. She wonders who else has these feet and what places they may have traveled and trails they may have walked. Do they have all ten toenails? Would they ever think to wonder about that? Have they been on a long run?

She walks back to the computer and stares at the screen. If she answers the email and says she wants to connect, maybe answers will come. Maybe there will be more than she bargained for. Maybe there are ancestors that look at their eyes, hands and feet too, and wonder if someone else has them. Maybe it is pandora's box. Maybe...

Migrant Home in Japan: Delusions of Temporary Home Işıl Bayraktar

I know I'm delayed in writing again, what can I do, homelessness is such a thing, I may think I belong somewhere, to a place, and then suddenly I realize that I don't actually belong there, I can go out of the places I thought I belonged to, at any moment. Canceled house contracts, crumpled papers of a two-year agreement halfway paid for in my hands, and surprised company employees by the departure from the house before the two years are up, despite having paid the money. Seeing a crazed foreigner in front of them, who approached to madness. The comfort that comes with these looks, curtains left as the final piece at home, curtains, curtains, curtains.

Delusional curtains that cover troubles, shortages, pains, darkneses. Long brown, murky and hallucinatory. There's a sea wave on it. It makes a sound as you shake it, it separates inside from outside as you shake it, and it creates a layered world as you shake it. Come, come closer to me, take your covered hands back from me and then touch yourself naked. Strip me from your home now, strip me from yourself, strip me from the life here, and strip me from myself. I want to leave the sense of belonging to you as well. Do I have to be me, as if I have to hang on such a huge window throughout, separating you from the outside like this, let my brownishness be mine, don't hang me like this, don't hang my neck-my neck-

Remembering us as a young couple, our work grim with poor pay in cold districts of blackened bricks, who knew nothing of filling our tank to the brim, who at first knew no people with better starts, education, their encouragement and forgiveness modelling a happier way, my empathy still struggles to delay defeat. I also remember dreaming of freedom.

In what is now edge of the city townhouses in this era of self-satisfaction, with only the statues of that other time remaining, I was swept from the streets into juvenile detention, heading for damnation via cruel bastardry, though its urgency be faded now. Protocol savage, recent tattoos serving me well, their message then so different from today's, telling each other our back stories in that pandemonium we hearkened to times when we were boys as if our childhoods occurred in the distant past which, in a way, they had.

Phones had cords, rang only in supervisors' offices, but old magazines circulated. Most inmates, some broken, didn't care to read, or couldn't, although they liked the pictures. Glossy ads featuring food outraged my craving for favourite meals, beachwear models caught my eye, and my breath. Already borne on language's parade without realising this, I tackled word knowledge quizzes using a valued pencil stub housed in my tobacco tin. Sloughed up for physically defending myself I mentally corrected spelling mistakes when dawn light crept back, reading defamation, humour,



A Kind of Sadness

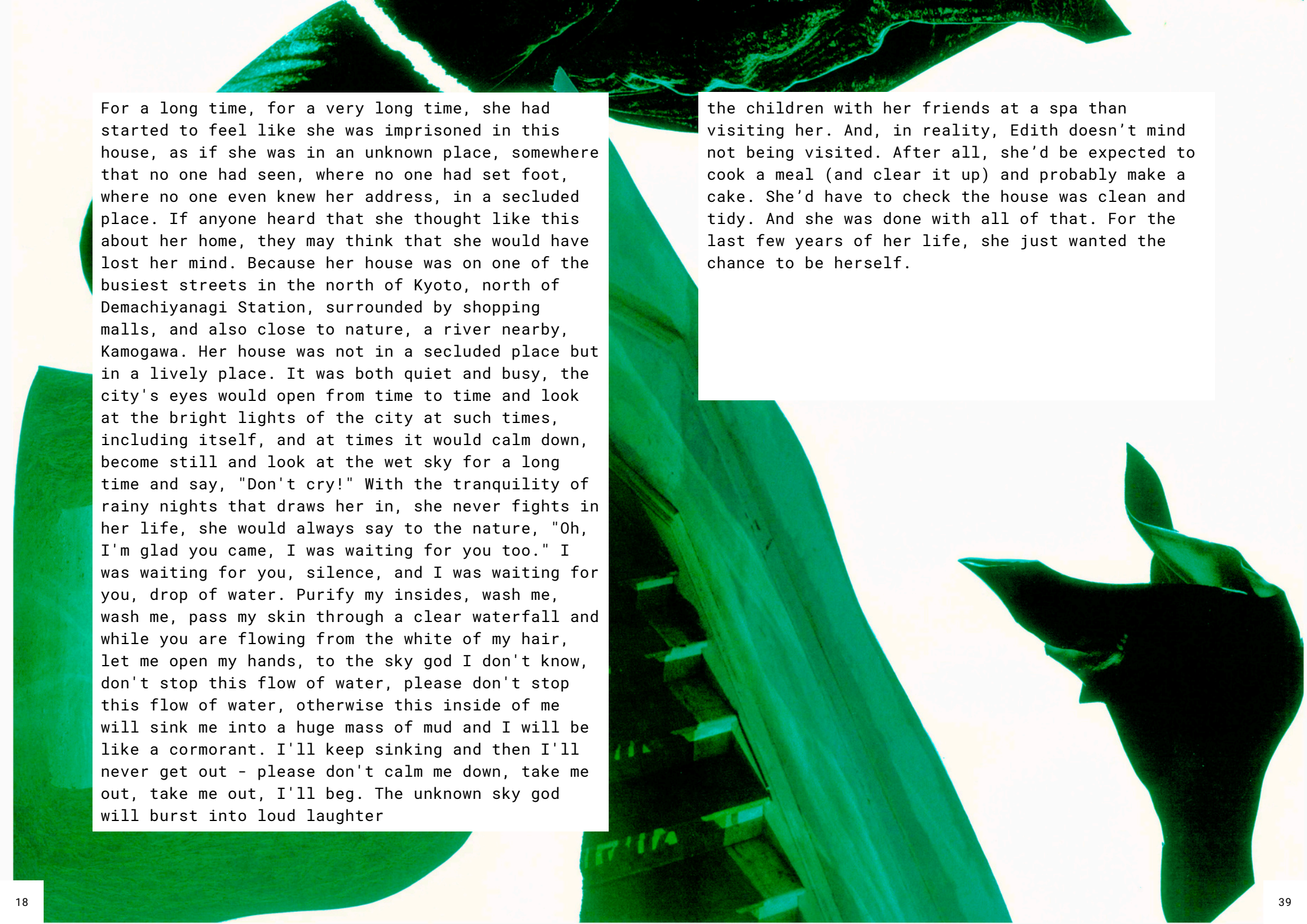
Ian C Smith

He reverses up the driveway, my audio reception ramping up from near-silent to near-lunatic, next door's house, for sale so long, now rented too soon. A youngish couple, a little boy, shrill lapdogs, chaos. Their spindly trailer, ropes taut, contains junk, plastic popular. I should know, peeking from my kitchen window like the old fussbudget I have become. After several trips my space invaders' higgledy goods resemble the sort displayed on hard rubbish days that sometimes vanishes overnight when clouds eclipse the moon.

The next morning, black smoke billowing from their chimney, slammed doors an intermittent havoc of rifle shots, the man coughs up his lungs outside, a phlegmy version of an old-time rooster's reveille. To my relief he seems employed, wearing road work hazard gear, albeit a job with strange hours I am to discover later when we are both abroad at 4 a.m., my bed already made. She rips into their thin boy, a hateful tirade, cigarette flashing, torching my last hope's faint threads. I fret for the tyke, big rigs rumbling fast on this road while his parents lose track of his zigzag whereabouts.

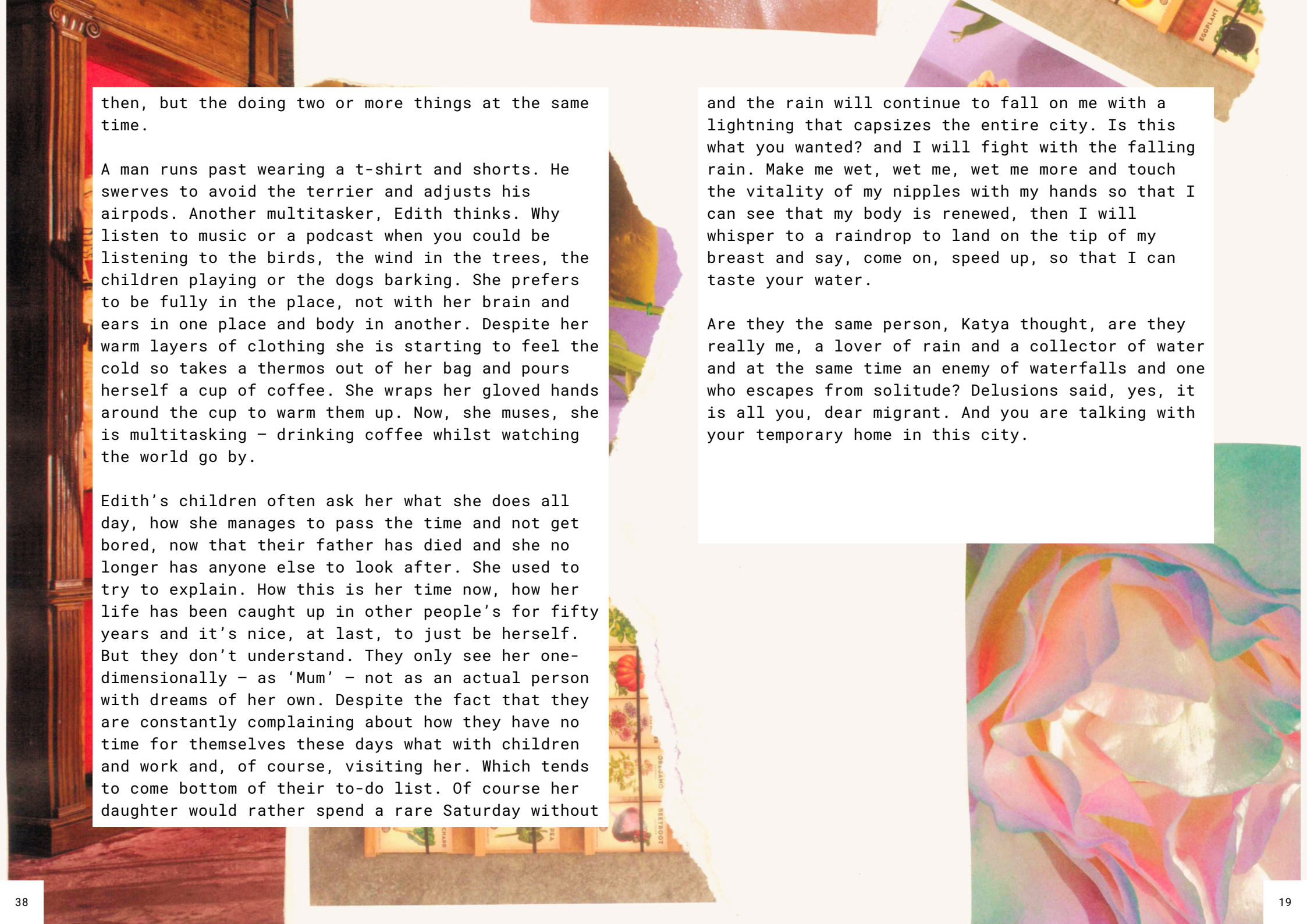
In disarray, thoughts of flight disrupt my plans to write more poems, time running out. I try to counsel myself these peace piercers are just down on their luck like characters in winter from a Ray Carver story. Perhaps they are still in love.

The last remaining thing was the curtain, even when the bell rang. It was as if I wanted to live my nakedness in that house until the last minute, to keep the memories of that house, the comings and goings, the forgotten and remembered, the loved and the angered, the decisions and beginnings, the longings and regrets inside the house, and not to share them with the eyes of the buildings beyond the balcony, with the sunlight, with the mystery of the snow-covered mountain, Daimonji, my favorite in this city, with the sound of rain hitting the window, and with the chirping of cicadas. It was about making what was inherently mine truly my own, about reminding myself not to escape from all this, about being able to shoulder the past and experiences, and about being able to internalize myself like this. Or am I internalizing the story of Katya? The storyteller and the migrant writer. The stranger. The sunlight filtering through the curtain seemed to hear all these mutterings as it glided into the empty house, filling the empty space with thoughts piercing the mind of the stranger who covered herself within, urging warmth to her face. "Come on, warm your soul a bit. Come on, open up a bit of your darkness. You can't leave this house with this darkness!" Katya could hear the sun, yet she was leaving the house because she couldn't escape from this darkness. Does one blame a house for a state of mind? Does a house just keep nurturing a feeling?



For a long time, for a very long time, she had started to feel like she was imprisoned in this house, as if she was in an unknown place, somewhere that no one had seen, where no one had set foot, where no one even knew her address, in a secluded place. If anyone heard that she thought like this about her home, they may think that she would have lost her mind. Because her house was on one of the busiest streets in the north of Kyoto, north of Demachiyanagi Station, surrounded by shopping malls, and also close to nature, a river nearby, Kamogawa. Her house was not in a secluded place but in a lively place. It was both quiet and busy, the city's eyes would open from time to time and look at the bright lights of the city at such times, including itself, and at times it would calm down, become still and look at the wet sky for a long time and say, "Don't cry!" With the tranquility of rainy nights that draws her in, she never fights in her life, she would always say to the nature, "Oh, I'm glad you came, I was waiting for you too." I was waiting for you, silence, and I was waiting for you, drop of water. Purify my insides, wash me, wash me, pass my skin through a clear waterfall and while you are flowing from the white of my hair, let me open my hands, to the sky god I don't know, don't stop this flow of water, please don't stop this flow of water, otherwise this inside of me will sink me into a huge mass of mud and I will be like a cormorant. I'll keep sinking and then I'll never get out - please don't calm me down, take me out, take me out, I'll beg. The unknown sky god will burst into loud laughter

the children with her friends at a spa than visiting her. And, in reality, Edith doesn't mind not being visited. After all, she'd be expected to cook a meal (and clear it up) and probably make a cake. She'd have to check the house was clean and tidy. And she was done with all of that. For the last few years of her life, she just wanted the chance to be herself.



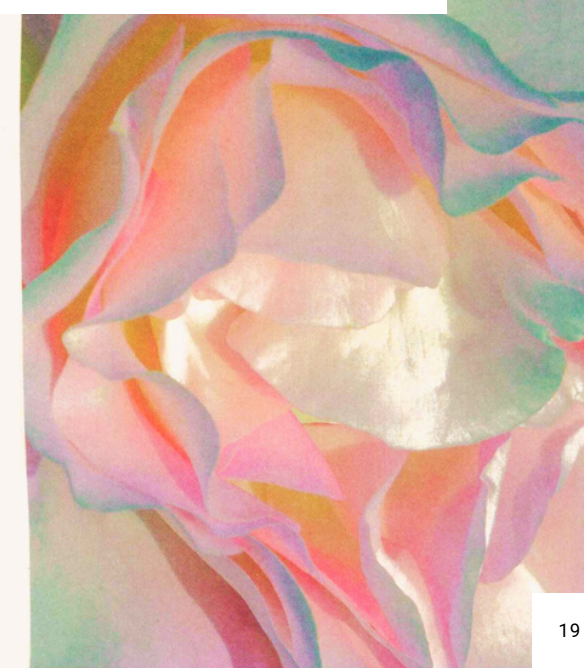
then, but the doing two or more things at the same time.

A man runs past wearing a t-shirt and shorts. He swerves to avoid the terrier and adjusts his airpods. Another multitasker, Edith thinks. Why listen to music or a podcast when you could be listening to the birds, the wind in the trees, the children playing or the dogs barking. She prefers to be fully in the place, not with her brain and ears in one place and body in another. Despite her warm layers of clothing she is starting to feel the cold so takes a thermos out of her bag and pours herself a cup of coffee. She wraps her gloved hands around the cup to warm them up. Now, she muses, she is multitasking – drinking coffee whilst watching the world go by.

Edith's children often ask her what she does all day, how she manages to pass the time and not get bored, now that their father has died and she no longer has anyone else to look after. She used to try to explain. How this is her time now, how her life has been caught up in other people's for fifty years and it's nice, at last, to just be herself. But they don't understand. They only see her one-dimensionally – as 'Mum' – not as an actual person with dreams of her own. Despite the fact that they are constantly complaining about how they have no time for themselves these days what with children and work and, of course, visiting her. Which tends to come bottom of their to-do list. Of course her daughter would rather spend a rare Saturday without

and the rain will continue to fall on me with a lightning that capsizes the entire city. Is this what you wanted? and I will fight with the falling rain. Make me wet, wet me, wet me more and touch the vitality of my nipples with my hands so that I can see that my body is renewed, then I will whisper to a raindrop to land on the tip of my breast and say, come on, speed up, so that I can taste your water.

Are they the same person, Katya thought, are they really me, a lover of rain and a collector of water and at the same time an enemy of waterfalls and one who escapes from solitude? Delusions said, yes, it is all you, dear migrant. And you are talking with your temporary home in this city.



There will be others like me

John-Paul Smiley

Bright blue sky and crystal clear sea,
It was, I suppose, a beautiful day to die.

How did you feel when you stumbled upon me?
Cold and bruised and purple.

Stiff, broken, and laid bare,
Stooped over now on jagged rock.

Searing sun and scorched cracked earth,
Desperate and forced finally to flee.

This dangerous trail has cost many a life,
Draw a line to remember its treacherousness.

What will you do with me,
This empty vessel now at your mercy?

Must you be necessarily numb to it all,
In order to fully function?

Have you come to tolerate the intolerable,
For the sake of your sanity?

Does your bureaucracy spare you,
Ensuring my abjectness does not offend too much?

Can you be considered complicit in the acceptance
of such death,

Edith

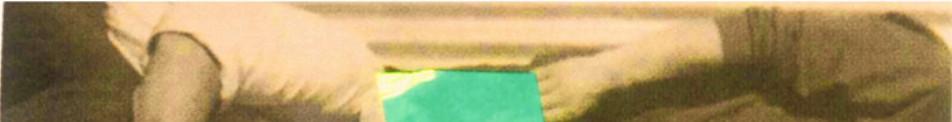
Julia Bennett

The cherry tree holds its breath, pink petals held
in limbo.

Sudden freezing temperatures have left pockets of
icy-snow in shaded spots. The tennis courts in the
park are an empty white expanse.

A blackbird rustles amongst last autumn's frost-
crisp leaves.

An old woman in a black padded coat sits on a
bench, face turned towards the low winter sun. She
turns, a dreamy smile on her face, to watch the
children as they run, scoot or dawdle on their way
to school. A purple woolly hat the colour of the
crocuses on the lawn covers most of her silvery
hair. A matching scarf peeks out of the top of her
coat. Once the children have gone, pulled along by
the threat of detention if late, dogs and their
owners capture her attention. A cockapoo runs up to
her, seemingly a friend, and she duly pats him on
the head and rubs his ears. His owner exchanges
greetings, commenting on the freezing weather. A
small terrier sniffs around her ankles as their
person is engrossed in a loud phone call. Edith
wonders, not for the first time, how it is possible
to speak to people at work and walk the dog at the
same time. Multitasking they call it now. When her
children were small it was just what you did. Not
the phone calls and meetings as work stayed at work





other, whispering of some Conspiracy. The
hibiscuses watch me. They pock fun at me mock me
with their tongues. Is there no way out of here?

I try one last time. But I can't even make it half-
way to the door. Curse my weak will. The door
wavers like an apparition, the way it is in a hot
summer afternoon. I can feel my body burn up, my
head throb, and my heart palpitate.

The insistent buzz of the rain comes as a relief.
It drowns the sound of my heart. I want to die
under the weight of the rain.

Resolved I unlatch the window and leap into the
heavy downpour which extinguishes the blazing fire
of my anxiety that spreads through my whole body.



Or do I do you a disservice?

Dare you imagine the life of the man before you?
What pleasures and sufferings I must have
experienced.

What hopes and dreams now extinguished,
What goals and promises left forever unfulfilled?

And what of those I have left behind?
Those dearly cherished family and friends.

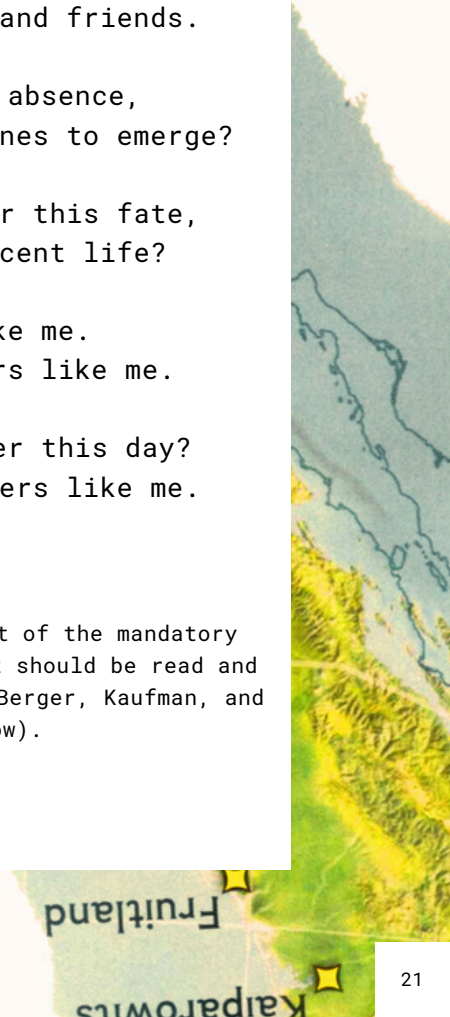
How will they change in my absence,
With old bonds mutated and new ones to emerge?

How many more souls must suffer this fate,
In the simple quest for a decent life?

There will be others like me.
For sure, there will be others like me.

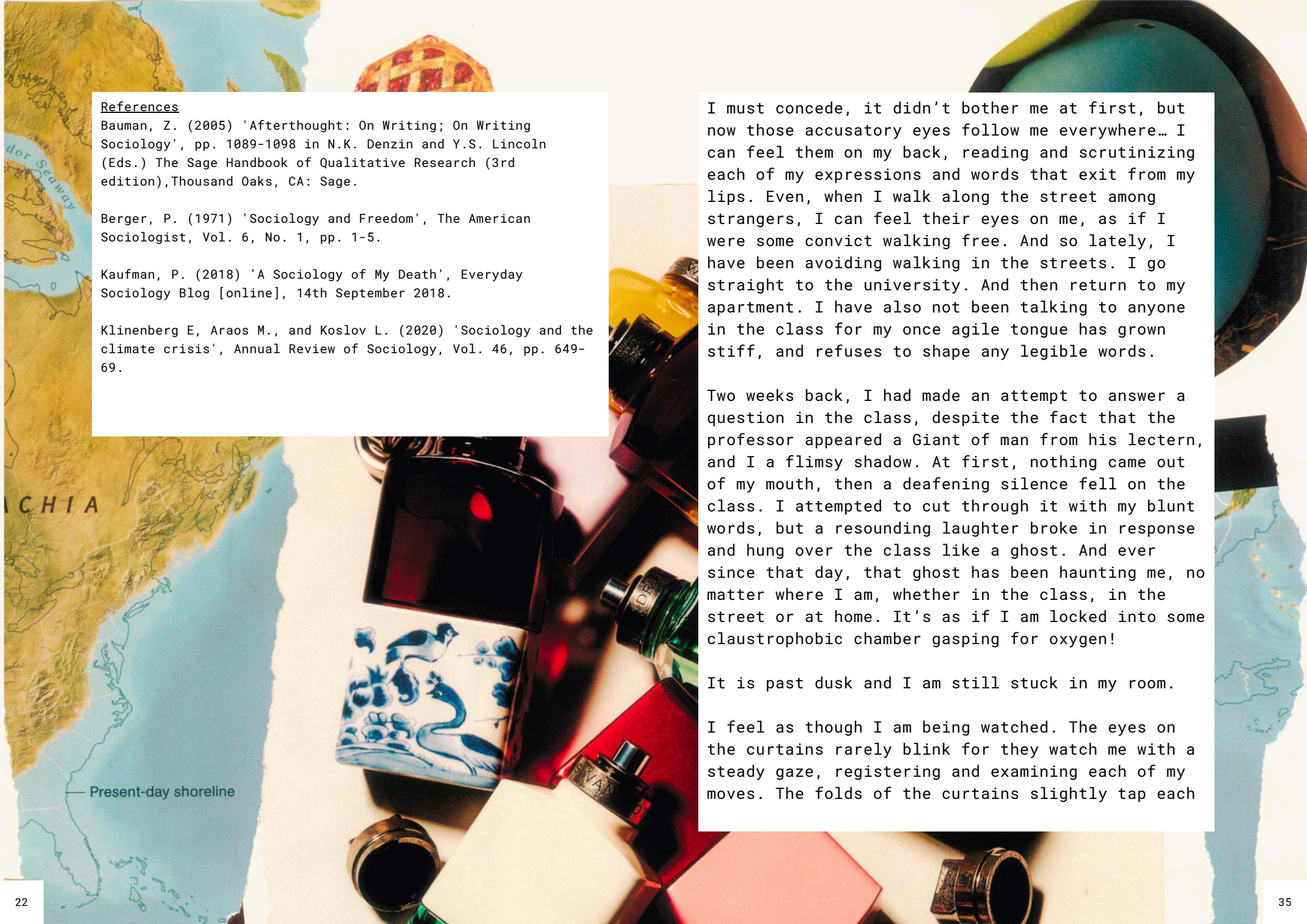
How long will you even remember this day?
Regrettably, there will be others like me.

*This early 21st Century poem is now part of the mandatory
collection for the children of Cassini. It should be read and
considered alongside the works of Bauman, Berger, Kaufman, and
Klinenberg et al (see below).



Fruitland

Kaparowits



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Berger, P. (1971) 'Sociology and Freedom', The American Sociologist, Vol. 6, No. 1, pp. 1-5.

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Klinenberg E, Araos M., and Koslov L. (2020) 'Sociology and the climate crisis', Annual Review of Sociology, Vol. 46, pp. 649-69.

I must concede, it didn't bother me at first, but now those accusatory eyes follow me everywhere... I can feel them on my back, reading and scrutinizing each of my expressions and words that exit from my lips. Even, when I walk along the street among strangers, I can feel their eyes on me, as if I were some convict walking free. And so lately, I have been avoiding walking in the streets. I go straight to the university. And then return to my apartment. I have also not been talking to anyone in the class for my once agile tongue has grown stiff, and refuses to shape any legible words.

Two weeks back, I had made an attempt to answer a question in the class, despite the fact that the professor appeared a Giant of man from his lectern, and I a flimsy shadow. At first, nothing came out of my mouth, then a deafening silence fell on the class. I attempted to cut through it with my blunt words, but a resounding laughter broke in response and hung over the class like a ghost. And ever since that day, that ghost has been haunting me, no matter where I am, whether in the class, in the street or at home. It's as if I am locked into some claustrophobic chamber gasping for oxygen!

It is past dusk and I am still stuck in my room.

I feel as though I am being watched. The eyes on the curtains rarely blink for they watch me with a steady gaze, registering and examining each of my moves. The folds of the curtains slightly tap each

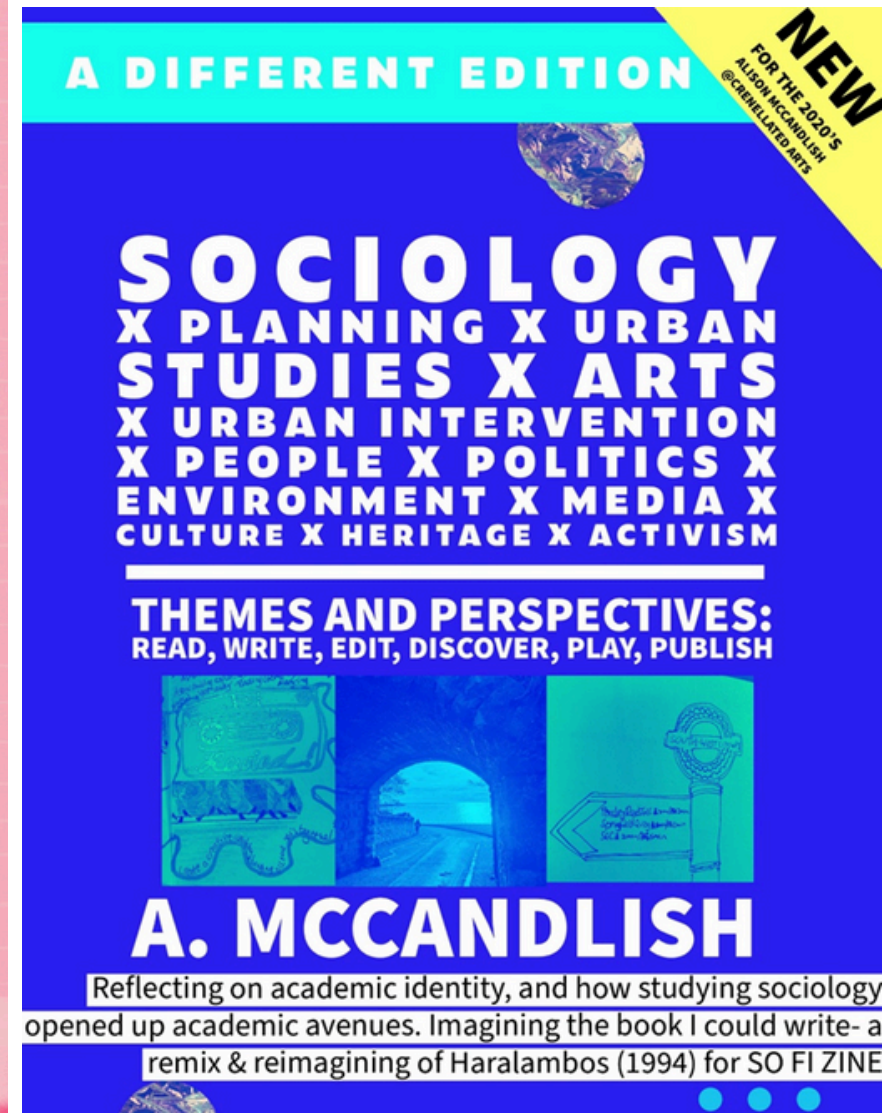
have never noticed them before. They are shaped like eyes. Red eyes, Blue eyes and Yellow eyes...

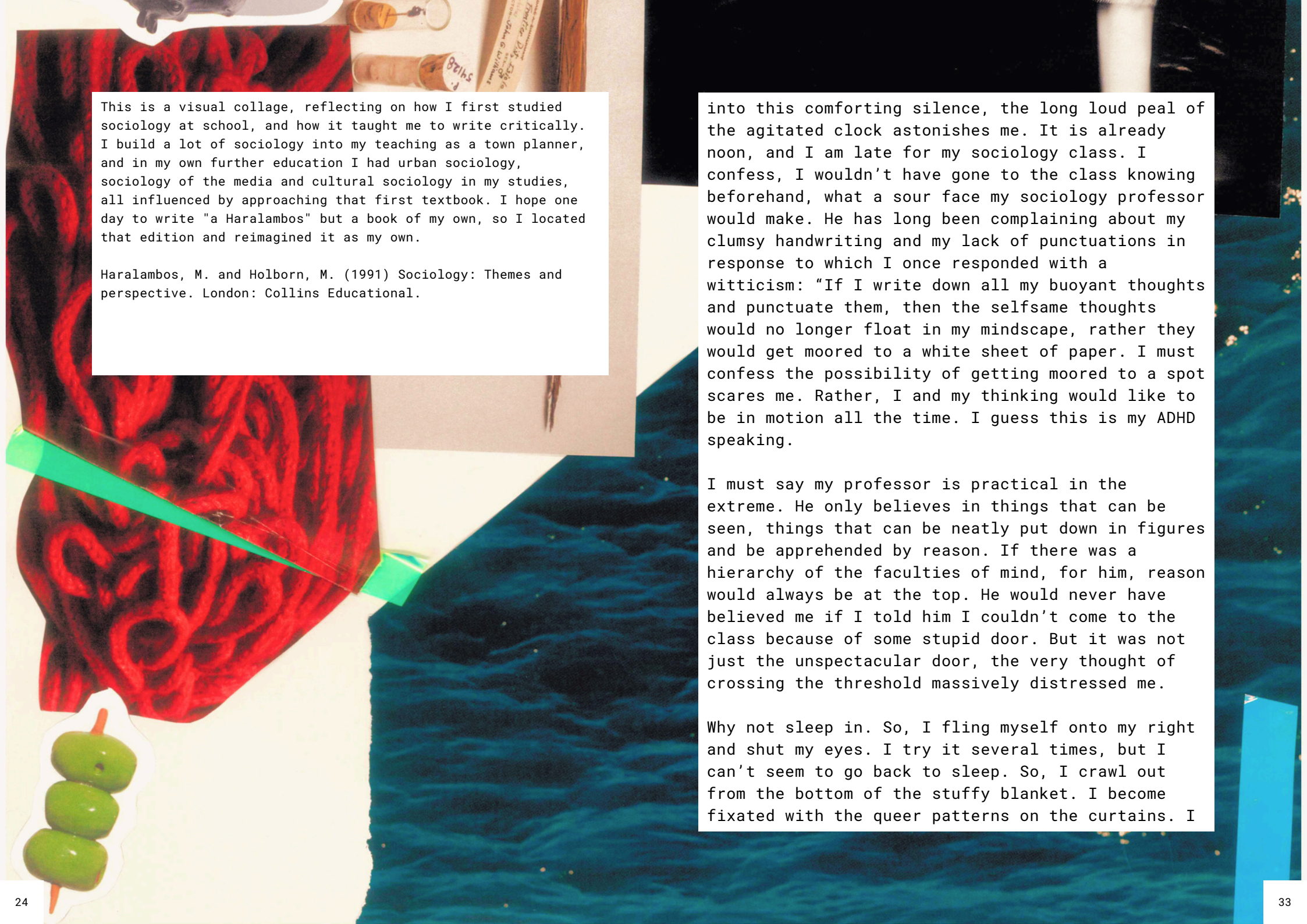
I imagine eyes stitched on featureless faces regarding me with contempt. The accusatory voices of my classmates and my professor play out in my head, refusing to stop. The vague faces gradually acquire details, and become clearer as the voices magnify in my head. I can feel the air rush in and out in and out... forming eddies inside me. And I can feel anticipation bludgeoning my heart. My heart now feels like a dilapidated drum.

Everyone in the class finds something wrong with the way I think and speak. The professor has long been telling me: "why is it you have got such a stew in your head? You stumble upon your own words when you speak. You don't pause for a breath when you write." The students in the class accuse me of being rude. They say I have the habit of talking over people. So, I asked my psychiatrist about it. He said it's a condition common among people like us. And with slight medication he should be able to fix my brain and order my unruly thoughts like an English hedge.

Truth be told, I don't find anything wrong with myself. I am just a bit eccentric, have my fair share of idiosyncrasies, but I don't see them as faults or imperfections, rather they are the best bits. Oh! Even I have the goods on my classmates. I know all their little quirks, but I don't go about incriminating them for that.

Rewind and Fast Forward
Alison McCandlish





This is a visual collage, reflecting on how I first studied sociology at school, and how it taught me to write critically. I build a lot of sociology into my teaching as a town planner, and in my own further education I had urban sociology, sociology of the media and cultural sociology in my studies, all influenced by approaching that first textbook. I hope one day to write "a Haralambos" but a book of my own, so I located that edition and reimagined it as my own.

Haralambos, M. and Holborn, M. (1991) Sociology: Themes and perspective. London: Collins Educational.

into this comforting silence, the long loud peal of the agitated clock astonishes me. It is already noon, and I am late for my sociology class. I confess, I wouldn't have gone to the class knowing beforehand, what a sour face my sociology professor would make. He has long been complaining about my clumsy handwriting and my lack of punctuations in response to which I once responded with a witticism: "If I write down all my buoyant thoughts and punctuate them, then the selfsame thoughts would no longer float in my mindscape, rather they would get moored to a white sheet of paper. I must confess the possibility of getting moored to a spot scares me. Rather, I and my thinking would like to be in motion all the time. I guess this is my ADHD speaking.

I must say my professor is practical in the extreme. He only believes in things that can be seen, things that can be neatly put down in figures and be apprehended by reason. If there was a hierarchy of the faculties of mind, for him, reason would always be at the top. He would never have believed me if I told him I couldn't come to the class because of some stupid door. But it was not just the unspectacular door, the very thought of crossing the threshold massively distressed me.

Why not sleep in. So, I fling myself onto my right and shut my eyes. I try it several times, but I can't seem to go back to sleep. So, I crawl out from the bottom of the stuffy blanket. I become fixated with the queer patterns on the curtains. I

Room

Rituparna Sahoo

I wake up late from troubled dreams to the sound of rain drumming down my window. Muzzy from the drugs prescribed by the quack psychiatrist, I stumble out of bed, bovine, to get ready for my class, but for some inexplicable reason, I simply can't leave my room. Every time, I walk up to the door, an unnatural power pushes me away from the large brown door.

I vaguely recall the surreal movie 'The exterminating angel' directed by Louis Bunuel which I watched ages ago. The ordeal that is confronted by the host and the invited guests is akin to mine. Just like them I am unable to leave my room. For some inexplicable reason the thought of walking to the door, and opening it and crossing the threshold greatly distresses me. When one is shut in a room, or shut in a closet, one shreds the napkin, and does away with the pretensions of gentility, refinement, and polite demeanor. Every attitude shows its bare bones. This ineluctable entrapment is my central problem which I must solve.

Conceding defeat, I come back to lie in my bed. I look out the window, at the unreal city smudged under the rain. Its bright colors which often assailed my senses in the past are now faded. And I listen in emptiness to the resonant flow of the heavy downpour that effectively, drowns out the roar of the traffic. But as I am about to nestle

A LOVE LETTER

Micol Pizzolati



To My Curiosity:

You have taken me to so many places. You brought me *into the So Fi Zine*.

I have often been surprised and moved, *thanks to you*.

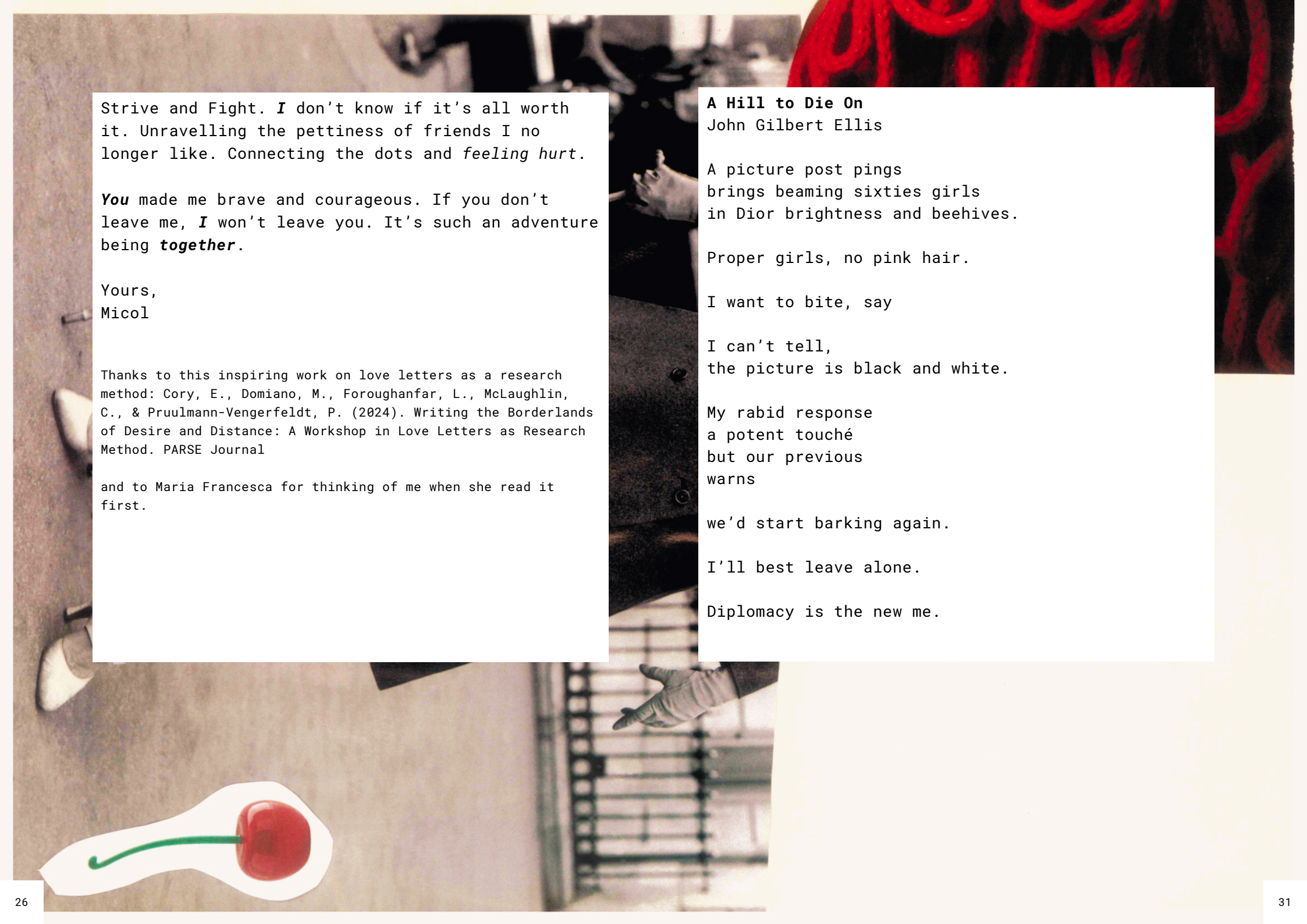
When, as a young girl, my teacher asked pupils what they wanted to be when they grew up, I answered 'An Explorer'. She put me down by saying 'everything on Earth has already been discovered'. But I didn't believe that nonsense, and *I* always kept *you* by my side, as *my companion and friend*.

And *we* have explored, *and how!*

Moments in the lives of many people, in many places, about things nobody can getaway: loneliness, body, regret, love, failure. *Passionately*.

I have collected answers and silences, written and digital memories, drawings and body maps, collages and identity boxes, along with *smiles and tears, gratitude and impatience*.

You made me struggle when I said 'yes, I'll do it', *to look closely at complicated things*.



Strive and Fight. *I* don't know if it's all worth it. Unravelling the pettiness of friends I no longer like. Connecting the dots and *feeling hurt*.

You made me brave and courageous. If you don't leave me, *I* won't leave you. It's such an adventure being **together**.

Yours,
Micol

Thanks to this inspiring work on love letters as a research method: Cory, E., Domiano, M., Foroughanfar, L., McLaughlin, C., & Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt, P. (2024). Writing the Borderlands of Desire and Distance: A Workshop in Love Letters as Research Method. PARSE Journal

and to Maria Francesca for thinking of me when she read it first.

A Hill to Die On

John Gilbert Ellis

A picture post pings
brings beaming sixties girls
in Dior brightness and beehives.

Proper girls, no pink hair.

I want to bite, say

I can't tell,
the picture is black and white.

My rabid response
a potent touché
but our previous
warns

we'd start barking again.

I'll best leave alone.

Diplomacy is the new me.



A picture taken of the newly christened Ryne Sandberg statue in Gallagher Way at Wrigley Field in Chicago, Illinois, United States of America in the summer of 2024. The picture also captures background phenomenon, which hints to the idea that no matter the focus of a photo, much else is always going on, as in the essay, all the time.

This work was supported by a RISE Grant [GR3446] from The University of Tampa.

Cleanshaven

Alexandra "Xan" Nowakowski

In servitude comes great power. Coffee you make is coffee you can spit in. Clothing you wash is clothing you can ruin. I am not your mother. And I am not your whore. But all the same my throat still burns from where you shoved it in before. Eyes already swollen from crying but you made them worse. And I'm flayed out and fucked up with putting you first. Your face in my plaster ceiling is all I see. Cleanshaven for them but never for me.

An Unusual Answer to an All Too Usual Question

J. E. Sumerau

When I was a child, Chicago Cubs' games were shown on the WGN Superstation. I don't know how long this went on, or why it happened. I was 9 years old. I didn't know the term "broadcast rights," much less anything about such matters. The Chicago Cubs were on WGN almost every day in the 1990 Major League Baseball Season. I never knew how the satellite my parents had somehow allowed me to watch this Chicago station. I never knew how I was able to get it and a Boston station and almost nothing else in my room when that was not what was playing in either the living room or my parents' room where control of the satellite receptor lived. I only knew I could watch the Cubs, Bozo the Clown, the White Sox, and the rise of Michael Jordan with the Chicago Bulls. I developed similar interests in Boston sports figures and events. I never bothered to ask or try to find out how or why.

But I did find out everything I could about the Cubs' infield. I found myself staring at second base more often than seems appropriate all these years later. The second baseman was Ryne Sandberg. He would turn the 4-6-3 double play by tossing the ball to Shawon Dunston covering the bag before Dunston threw the ball to Mark Grace at first base. Jerome Walton had center field and Dwight Smith was in left. I would later hate Joe Girardi for reasons stemming from Boston being the other channel I could access. Ryne Sandberg wore number 23 like

Michael Jordan. He was nicknamed Ryno. I remember the front of his hair would curl just a little. He would take his hat off and I would smile at his hair, forearms, ease with a bat. He would never win a World Series, but he would become a Hall of Famer. He would go on to have a career as a coach and manager too. But back then, when I was just an 8-, 9-, and 10-year-old thousands of miles away, Ryno played second base almost every day on my television.

So, yeah, that's what I say, more or less, when people ask when I first new I was also attracted to boys, men, males, and, on some level, that's really why I had to come see the new statue of Ryno at Wrigley Field.