

SO FIZINE



So Fi Zine

Edition 18

December 2025

Sydney

Created by Ash Watson

ISSN 2209-3208

sofizine.com

francesstreetpress.com

keen to submit?

submissions open again in 2026

see sofizine.com

Libra

be
prepared to grapple

Scorpio

each mark you make is a
stepping-stone

Sagittarius

live in your example

Capricorn

put it behind you.

Aquarius

in the middle
of the fight, we learn how we must fight.'

Pisces

rebel

Editorial

Ash Watson

I have spent my last day on campus for 2025, a hot and sunny summer's day, making this edition of So Fi Zine, collaging the pages and re-reading each piece. It has been a therapeutic way to end the year, listening to Caroline Polachek, looking occasionally to the flowering magnolia tree outside, filling my office floor with immeasurable magazine scraps and collecting them up again, my fingertips sticky with glue. Prospective students fill the lower end of campus, receiving a bounty of information about the programs and courses they could commence next year. I cannot quite hear the whole hubbub from my office; just the small conversations of people trying to navigate the maze of buildings towards or away from the fair. Somehow, suddenly, there is a zine in my hands (or I imagine there will be, once I finish these sentences and hit print; I write ahead into the liminal past), and it is a wonderful collection of work. Edition 18 (eighteen!) brings you brand new sociological fiction, poetry and visual art from around the world, from long-time contributors and first-timers. I hope it will reach readers who are old and new friends of the zine too. Find meetings, music, birds, histories, vegetables, a mouse, a mountain, mirrors, pepper spray, sandalwood, the ballpark. The sociological horoscopes are found poems from John Berger's *Landscapes*, a beautiful book that shows us how to see, that makes the world anew with words. A bounty of lessons.

Contents

Editorial Ash Watson	1
Should Have Been an Email and Definitely Not a Meeting or a Poem Either for that Matter JE Sumerau	4
Bound Together Anna Clover	5
In the Middle of our Street Julia Bennett	6
Shifting and Settling John-Paul Smiley	9
His Landlady Ian C Smith	13
Elegy for the Unyielding Matthew Wilkinson	15
Snack Break Kira Gondeck-Silvia	16
Audition Kira Gondeck-Silvia	17
Land Line Kira Gondeck-Silvia	18

Aries

drawing is discovery.

Taurus

To observe
You must learn to compare.

Gemini

teach others to lead their own lives.

Cancer

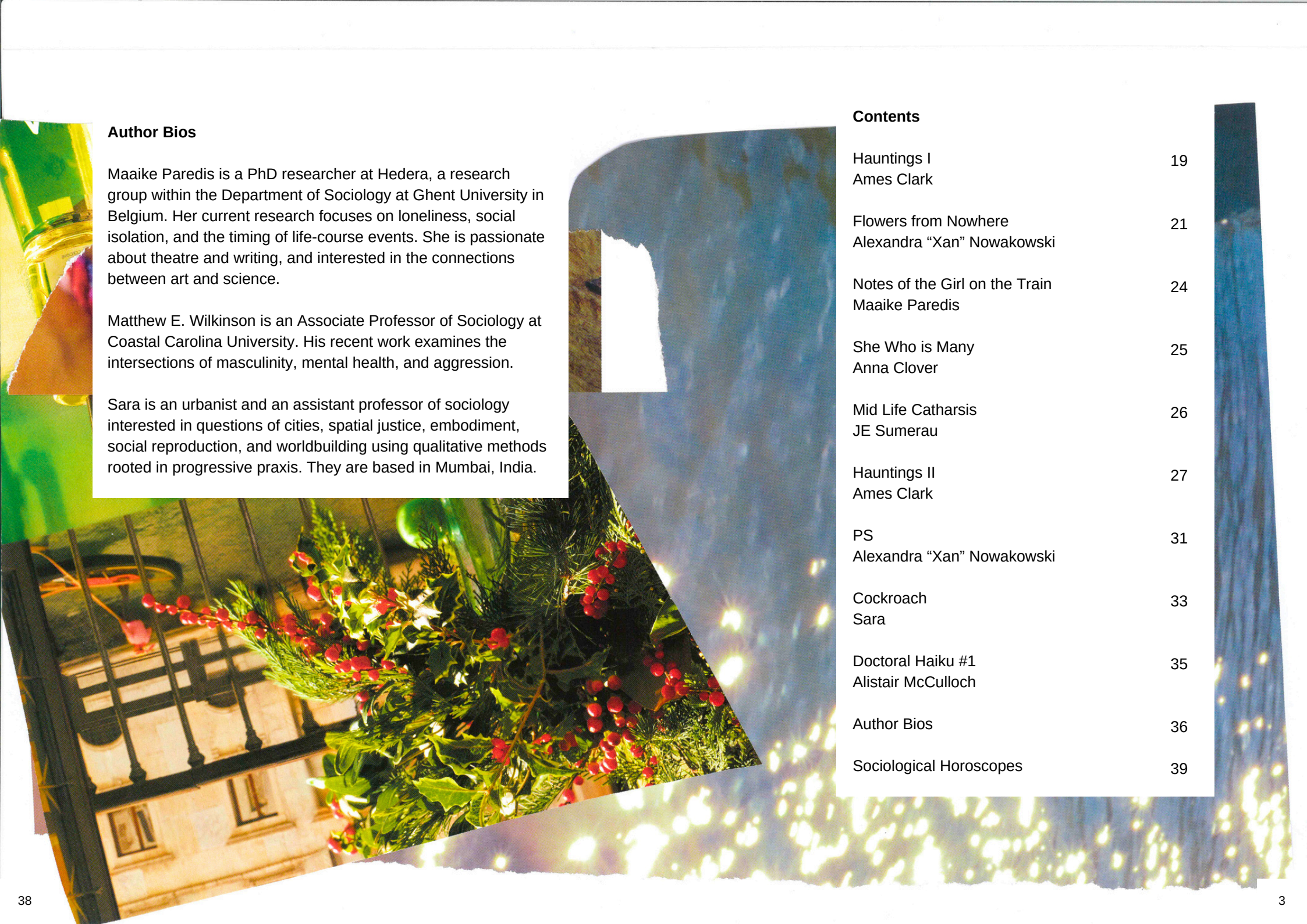
resist the bourgeoisisation of finished work,

Leo

never for an instant be
confused

Virgo

Study your rulers



Author Bios

Maaïke Paredis is a PhD researcher at Hedera, a research group within the Department of Sociology at Ghent University in Belgium. Her current research focuses on loneliness, social isolation, and the timing of life-course events. She is passionate about theatre and writing, and interested in the connections between art and science.

Matthew E. Wilkinson is an Associate Professor of Sociology at Coastal Carolina University. His recent work examines the intersections of masculinity, mental health, and aggression.

Sara is an urbanist and an assistant professor of sociology interested in questions of cities, spatial justice, embodiment, social reproduction, and worldbuilding using qualitative methods rooted in progressive praxis. They are based in Mumbai, India.

Contents

Hauntings I Ames Clark	19
Flowers from Nowhere Alexandra "Xan" Nowakowski	21
Notes of the Girl on the Train Maaïke Paredis	24
She Who is Many Anna Clover	25
Mid Life Catharsis JE Sumerau	26
Hauntings II Ames Clark	27
PS Alexandra "Xan" Nowakowski	31
Cockroach Sara	33
Doctoral Haiku #1 Alistair McCulloch	35
Author Bios	36
Sociological Horoscopes	39

**Should have been an email and definitely not a meeting
or a poem either for that matter**

JE Sumerau

Eight people meet in a building on the west side of campus.
None of them have been in this building;

except for the scientist with an office in this building.

But

he has not been in a classroom in this building.

That all changes today.

Nothing else does.

See

the meeting has a goal

the goal has a plan

the plan has a task

the task may one day have a force.

If the force is ever allowed to assume the task,
however,

it must meet in another building –

to outline a goal

a plan

a task

that may one day gain another force.

Which, of course, will report to the original
and

in a timely manner

no less.

Author Bios

Ian C Smith writes in the Gippsland Lakes region of Victoria, and on Flinders Island. His work has appeared in Antipodes, cordite, Eureka Street, Griffith Review, Journal of Working Class Studies, Meniscus, Shaping the Fractured Self (UWAP), &, So Fi Zine. His seventh book is wonder sadness madness joy, Ginninderra Press.

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, poems, essays, and short stories exploring sexualities, gender, health, religion, sports, music, and violence in society. For more information, visit www.jsumerau.com.

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.

Born and raised in the subtropics, Kira Gondeck-Silvia might've ended up at Salpêtrière in another era. Today, she channels visual energy into human-centered design, chats with the dead, and carries a mountain of student debt. She lives in Central Florida with her writer husband, four cats she puts bandanas on, and a neurotic dog.

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.

Alistair McCulloch has worked in in universities in England, Scotland and now South Australia. He is a political scientist by training and, for nearly 30 years, has focused on and undertaken research in the area of doctoral education and graduate research training. While doing this, he insists on trying to listen to good music as a way of staying sane.

Ames Clark is a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Sheffield, investigating queer youth wellbeing and imagined futures. Their other work explores queer, feminist, and abolitionist futures; collective care practices; and temporalities in political organising.

Anna Clover is a sociologist, visual artist and trainee therapist from the University of Glasgow. Her visual practice combines elements of sociological inquiry with exploration of the subconscious, engaging with themes related to gender, girlhood, work and mental illness, approached through intuitive collaging, drawing and painting. View more work @ghostfaceclover.

Bound Together

Anna Clover





In the middle of our street

Julia Bennett

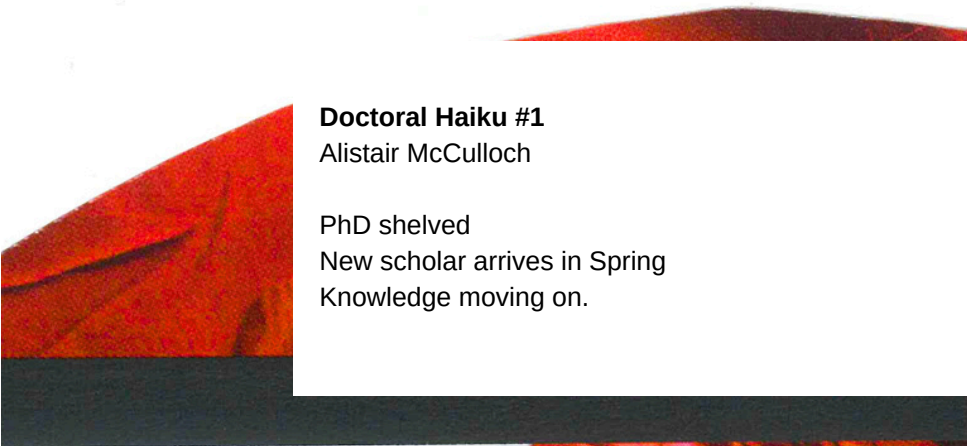
The white sheets on the washing line sway gently in the breeze, like brides dancing their first dance to their favourite love song. Mrs Oakley always hangs out her sheets and towels on a Monday. Tea towels are washed separately, on a different day. They tell a story of her travels over the years. There's one from Edinburgh with a picture of the castle, and another from Cromer in Norfolk with a stripey deckchair. Jo holds her ever-expanding, beach ball of a belly as she thinks about how white nappies might look on her washing line.

Félix plants seeds in pots on the windowsill. The pictures of red and yellow tomatoes on the packet tempted him into buying them. But now the packet is open they seem dried up and lifeless. They don't look like they could grow roots and leaves and flowers, let alone tasty fruits. But they will, with some love and care. He thinks of the possibility of making tomato pasta for Jo's baby and smiles to himself.

Next door there's an HMO[1]. Different people seem to come and go, at all times of day and night. Care workers, Félix had been told. There's a corner bed in the front garden that is filled with purple crocuses in February. Every year they spread a little further. From a distance, they look as if someone has emptied their pockets of Cadbury's wrappers there. The sparrows attack them. Perhaps they are hoping for chocolate; remembering childhood Easter egg hunts.

From her desk by the window in the back bedroom, Jo can see William walking along the alley with Benji. They go slowly now, both feeling their age. Ziggy is sitting on the wall in the sun. He watches closely as Benji ambles past – far too dignified these

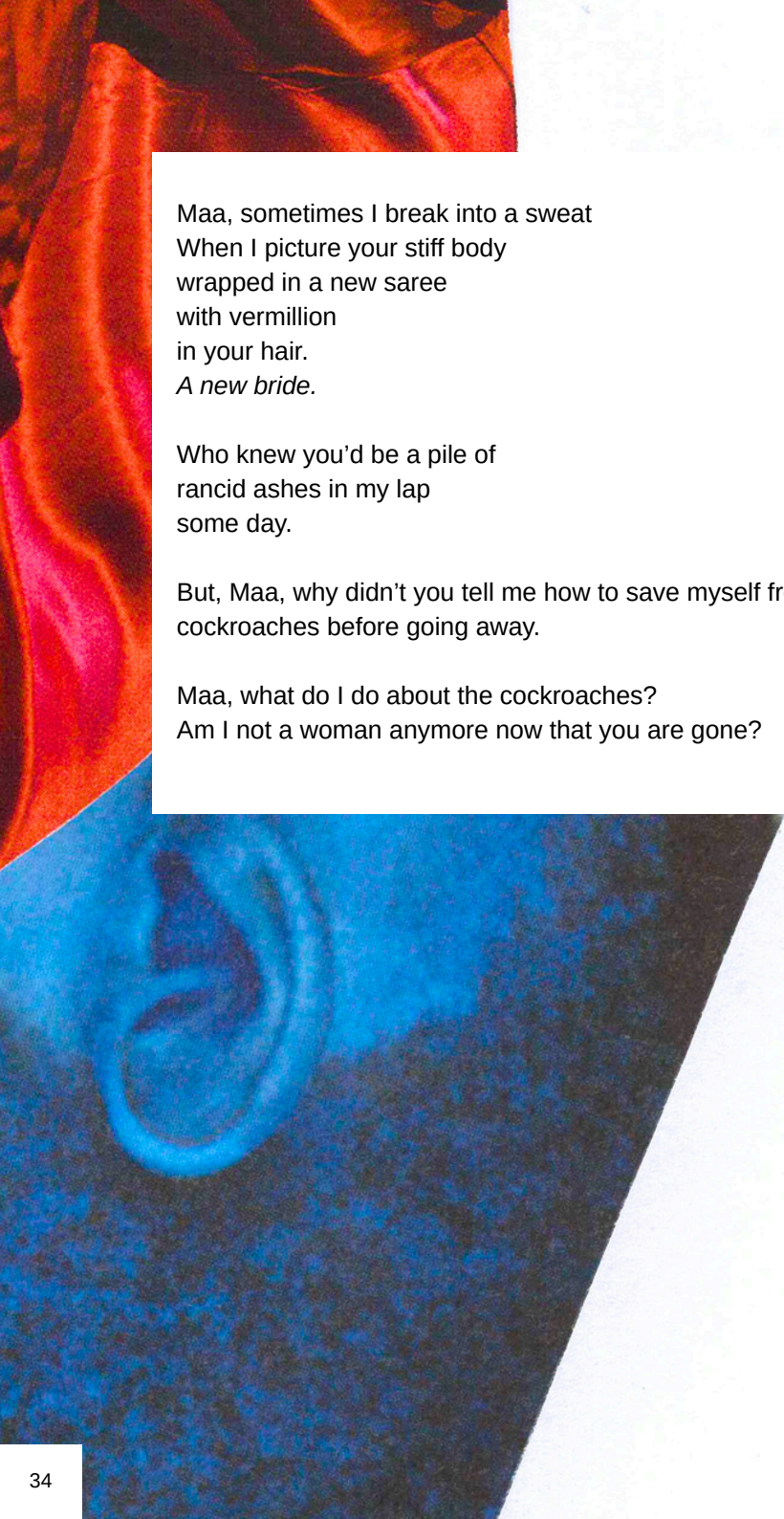
[1] House of Multiple Occupancy – each room is rented separately



Doctoral Haiku #1

Alistair McCulloch

PhD shelved
New scholar arrives in Spring
Knowledge moving on.



Maa, sometimes I break into a sweat
When I picture your stiff body
wrapped in a new saree
with vermillion
in your hair.
A new bride.

Who knew you'd be a pile of
rancid ashes in my lap
some day.

But, Maa, why didn't you tell me how to save myself from the
cockroaches before going away.

Maa, what do I do about the cockroaches?
Am I not a woman anymore now that you are gone?

days to chase a cat. William looks deep in thought. Jo wonders
how he's managing without his wife.

Giles is gardening. Trying to control the Japanese anemone that
tends to take over the whole bed. As he gently pulls up one baby
plant he comes across another 'plant' – more stalk and leaves
above the soil, connected underground to the one he had just
dug up. They are, essentially, the same plant: a rhizome. They
flourish here. Perhaps he should leave them be.

The sounds of a saxophone drift over from next door. Shouts
from the school playground mingle with the E harmonic minor
scale. Jo knows that once school is finished there will be a few
much squeakier versions of different scales before Howard can
get back to his own practice, which she looks forward to. Howard
is the master of impro.

Jay celebrates the end of the school day by doing a wheelie
down the middle of the road. At home, he changes out of his
school uniform, grabs a bag of crisps and shouts to his Mum
working upstairs – I'll be back for tea! His friends are circling on
their bikes at the end of the street. They head off to the park, Jay
pedalling hard to catch up.

The blokes doing up the long-empty house are packing up for
the day. The overflowing skip taking up a valuable parking
space, their white vans blocking the front windows of Mrs
Oakley's house next door. She must be sick of the noise of
drilling.

Carol has her hands full with Tim and Eric the twins on either
side of the pushchair and Lisa strapped in tightly but desperate
to walk with her big brothers. At the top of the road, a cul-de-sac,
Carol agrees that Lisa can walk the rest of the way. Eric quickly
jumps in the pushchair and Tim pushes him, pretending to be a



a racing car driver. Jo watches from her bedroom window,
breathing carefully, waiting: it's nearly time.

...

Sparrows are noisy birds. They live together in the hedge and
are constantly partying, making so much noise they might wake
the baby asleep in her pram under the tree. The leaves in the
breeze providing a natural mobile. At the top of the street, in the
churchyard, her brother sleeps under a bed of fallen leaves.

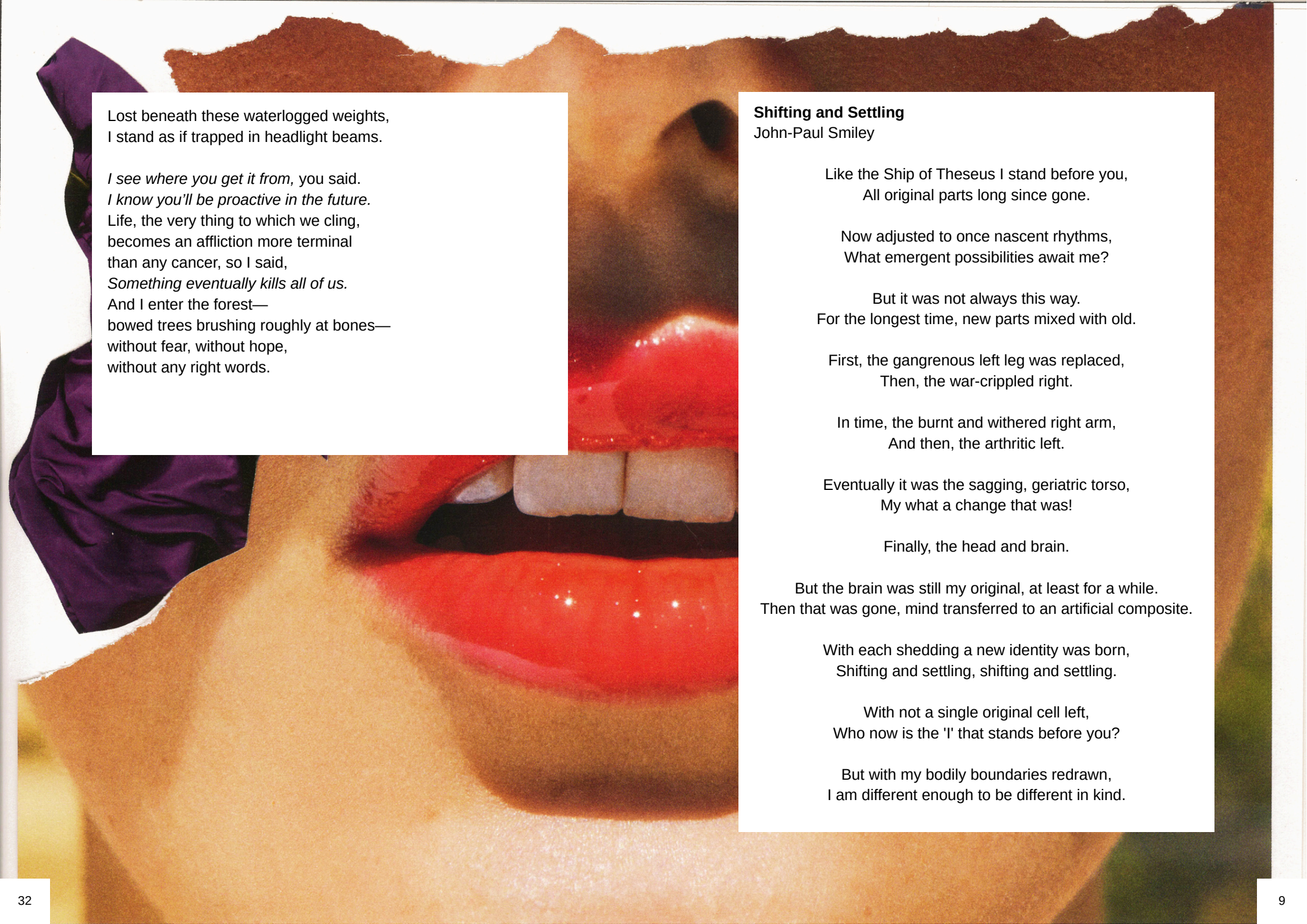
Cockroach

Sara

Ma,
or was it 'Maa'?
I forget.

Maa, the house is teeming with cockroaches.
I see them flying across the room-
in drawers,
your cupboard,
the fridge,
in your bags,
baba's cigarettes,
my clothes,
our home,
in biscuit jars,
under the stove,
in cat litter.

Each time I kill one,
Crush it between my thumbs-
I am reminded of your pale, chaste face
Ashen with death at the crematorium
I think of the ugly garlands and
Fragrant incense sticks
Sandalwood paste and sweets
Balls of wheat and milk that they made me knead
to feed the crows.



Lost beneath these waterlogged weights,
I stand as if trapped in headlight beams.

*I see where you get it from, you said.
I know you'll be proactive in the future.*
Life, the very thing to which we cling,
becomes an affliction more terminal
than any cancer, so I said,
Something eventually kills all of us.
And I enter the forest—
bowed trees brushing roughly at bones—
without fear, without hope,
without any right words.

Shifting and Settling

John-Paul Smiley

Like the Ship of Theseus I stand before you,
All original parts long since gone.

Now adjusted to once nascent rhythms,
What emergent possibilities await me?

But it was not always this way.
For the longest time, new parts mixed with old.

First, the gangrenous left leg was replaced,
Then, the war-crippled right.

In time, the burnt and withered right arm,
And then, the arthritic left.

Eventually it was the sagging, geriatric torso,
My what a change that was!

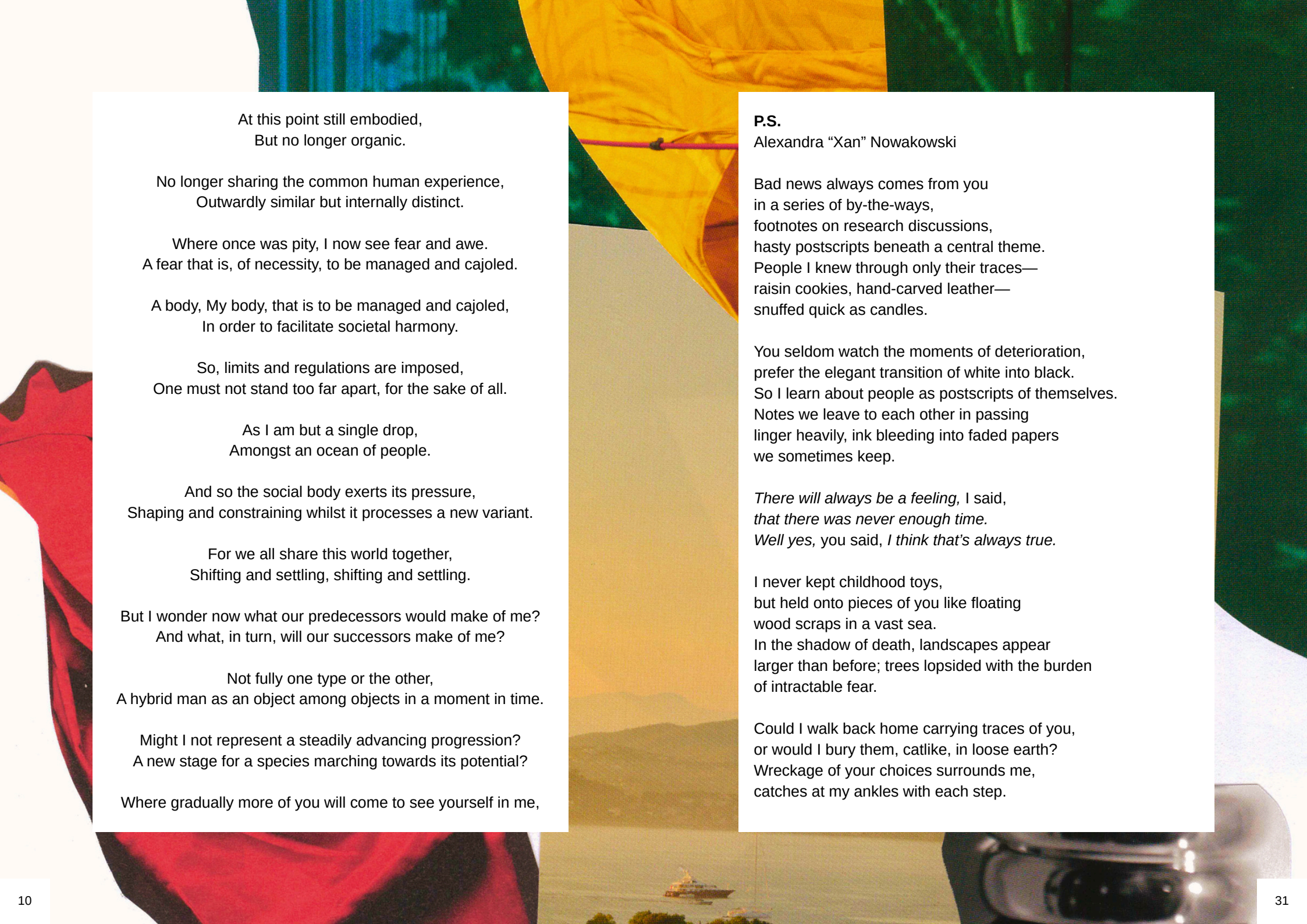
Finally, the head and brain.

But the brain was still my original, at least for a while.
Then that was gone, mind transferred to an artificial composite.

With each shedding a new identity was born,
Shifting and settling, shifting and settling.

With not a single original cell left,
Who now is the 'I' that stands before you?

But with my bodily boundaries redrawn,
I am different enough to be different in kind.



At this point still embodied,
But no longer organic.

No longer sharing the common human experience,
Outwardly similar but internally distinct.

Where once was pity, I now see fear and awe.
A fear that is, of necessity, to be managed and cajoled.

A body, My body, that is to be managed and cajoled,
In order to facilitate societal harmony.

So, limits and regulations are imposed,
One must not stand too far apart, for the sake of all.

As I am but a single drop,
Amongst an ocean of people.

And so the social body exerts its pressure,
Shaping and constraining whilst it processes a new variant.

For we all share this world together,
Shifting and settling, shifting and settling.

But I wonder now what our predecessors would make of me?
And what, in turn, will our successors make of me?

Not fully one type or the other,
A hybrid man as an object among objects in a moment in time.

Might I not represent a steadily advancing progression?
A new stage for a species marching towards its potential?

Where gradually more of you will come to see yourself in me,

P.S.

Alexandra "Xan" Nowakowski

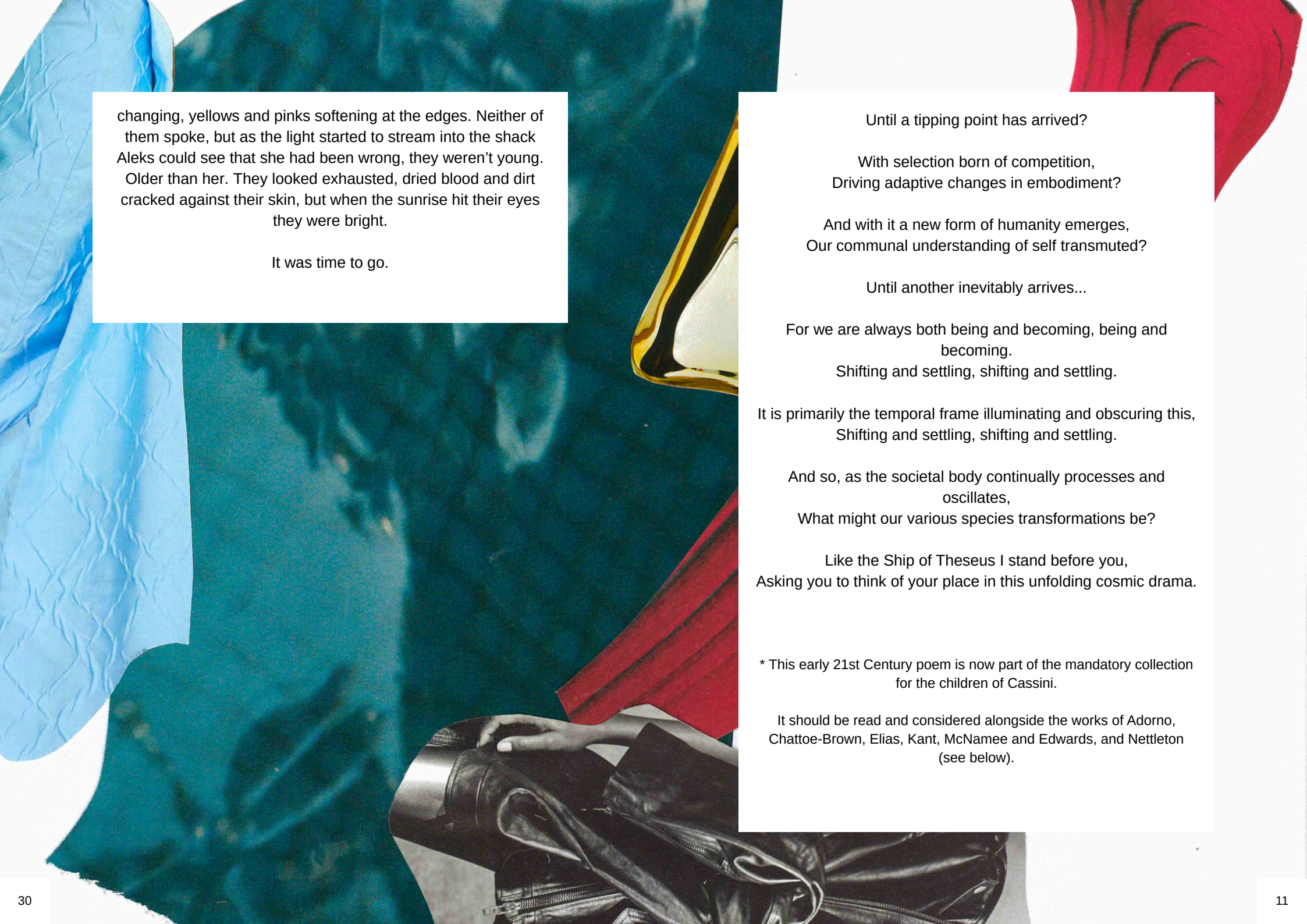
Bad news always comes from you
in a series of by-the-ways,
footnotes on research discussions,
hasty postscripts beneath a central theme.
People I knew through only their traces—
raisin cookies, hand-carved leather—
snuffed quick as candles.

You seldom watch the moments of deterioration,
prefer the elegant transition of white into black.
So I learn about people as postscripts of themselves.
Notes we leave to each other in passing
linger heavily, ink bleeding into faded papers
we sometimes keep.

*There will always be a feeling, I said,
that there was never enough time.
Well yes, you said, I think that's always true.*

I never kept childhood toys,
but held onto pieces of you like floating
wood scraps in a vast sea.
In the shadow of death, landscapes appear
larger than before; trees lopsided with the burden
of intractable fear.

Could I walk back home carrying traces of you,
or would I bury them, catlike, in loose earth?
Wreckage of your choices surrounds me,
catches at my ankles with each step.



changing, yellows and pinks softening at the edges. Neither of them spoke, but as the light started to stream into the shack Aleks could see that she had been wrong, they weren't young. Older than her. They looked exhausted, dried blood and dirt cracked against their skin, but when the sunrise hit their eyes they were bright.

It was time to go.

Until a tipping point has arrived?

With selection born of competition,
Driving adaptive changes in embodiment?

And with it a new form of humanity emerges,
Our communal understanding of self transmuted?

Until another inevitably arrives...

For we are always both being and becoming, being and becoming.

Shifting and settling, shifting and settling.

It is primarily the temporal frame illuminating and obscuring this,
Shifting and settling, shifting and settling.

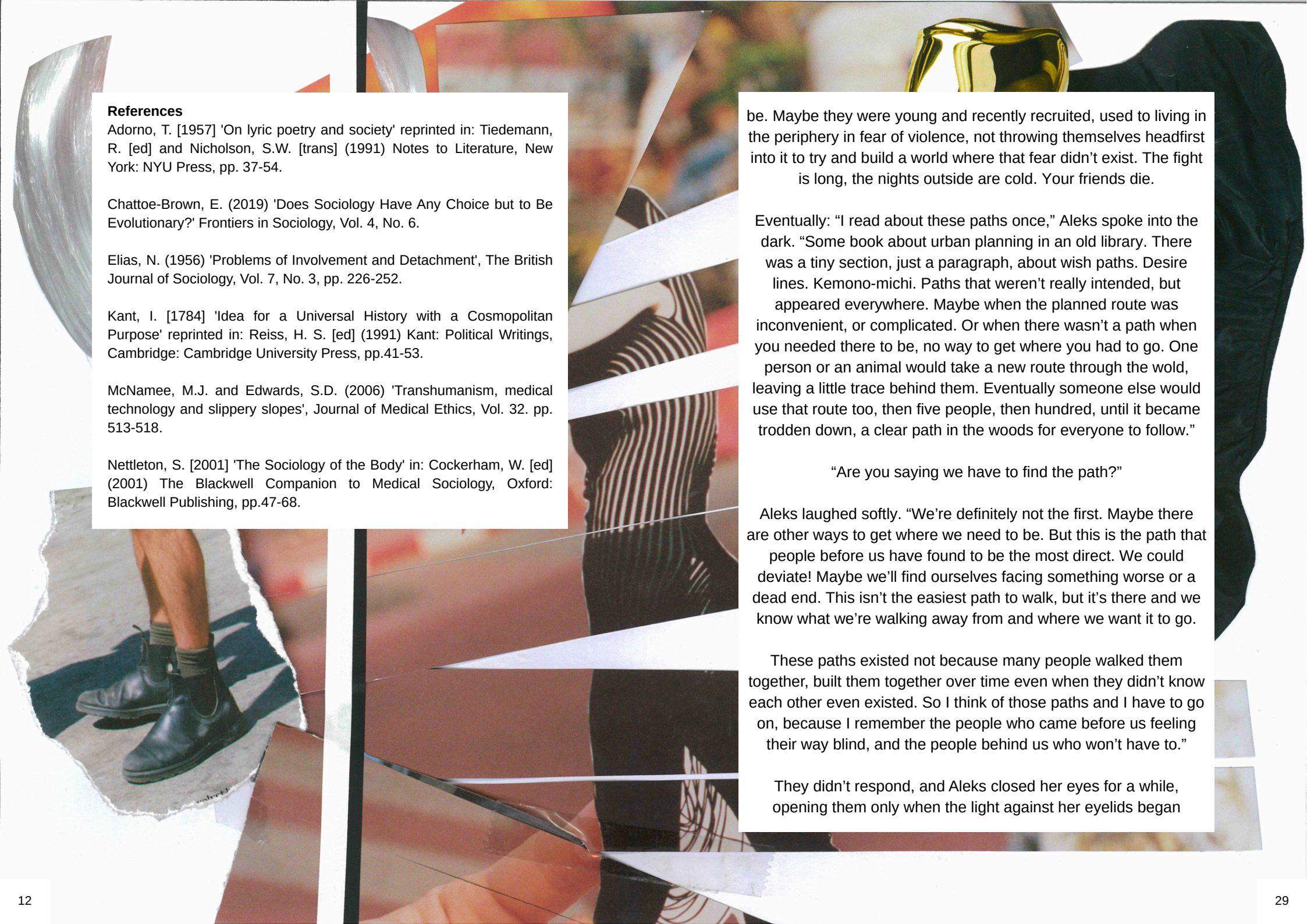
And so, as the societal body continually processes and oscillates,

What might our various species transformations be?

Like the Ship of Theseus I stand before you,
Asking you to think of your place in this unfolding cosmic drama.

* 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 Adorno, Chattoe-Brown, Elias, Kant, McNamee and Edwards, and Nettleton (see below).



References

Adorno, T. [1957] 'On lyric poetry and society' reprinted in: Tiedemann, R. [ed] and Nicholson, S.W. [trans] (1991) *Notes to Literature*, New York: NYU Press, pp. 37-54.

Chattoe-Brown, E. (2019) 'Does Sociology Have Any Choice but to Be Evolutionary?' *Frontiers in Sociology*, Vol. 4, No. 6.

Elias, N. (1956) 'Problems of Involvement and Detachment', *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 7, No. 3, pp. 226-252.

Kant, I. [1784] 'Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose' reprinted in: Reiss, H. S. [ed] (1991) *Kant: Political Writings*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.41-53.

McNamee, M.J. and Edwards, S.D. (2006) 'Transhumanism, medical technology and slippery slopes', *Journal of Medical Ethics*, Vol. 32. pp. 513-518.

Nettleton, S. [2001] 'The Sociology of the Body' in: Cockerham, W. [ed] (2001) *The Blackwell Companion to Medical Sociology*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, pp.47-68.

be. Maybe they were young and recently recruited, used to living in the periphery in fear of violence, not throwing themselves headfirst into it to try and build a world where that fear didn't exist. The fight is long, the nights outside are cold. Your friends die.

Eventually: "I read about these paths once," Aleks spoke into the dark. "Some book about urban planning in an old library. There was a tiny section, just a paragraph, about wish paths. Desire lines. Kemono-michi. Paths that weren't really intended, but appeared everywhere. Maybe when the planned route was inconvenient, or complicated. Or when there wasn't a path when you needed there to be, no way to get where you had to go. One person or an animal would take a new route through the wold, leaving a little trace behind them. Eventually someone else would use that route too, then five people, then hundred, until it became trodden down, a clear path in the woods for everyone to follow."

"Are you saying we have to find the path?"

Aleks laughed softly. "We're definitely not the first. Maybe there are other ways to get where we need to be. But this is the path that people before us have found to be the most direct. We could deviate! Maybe we'll find ourselves facing something worse or a dead end. This isn't the easiest path to walk, but it's there and we know what we're walking away from and where we want it to go.

These paths existed not because many people walked them together, built them together over time even when they didn't know each other even existed. So I think of those paths and I have to go on, because I remember the people who came before us feeling their way blind, and the people behind us who won't have to."

They didn't respond, and Aleks closed her eyes for a while, opening them only when the light against her eyelids began

"Injured?" Alex whispered, once her legs were safely through. The figure shifted, replied even quieter than Aleks. Just as alert.

"Lost."

"Me too."

"Got a way home?" At this, Aleks' fingers finally stilled. There was no home, of course; at least, no house. But all of them had a home with their comm, with each other, with each village and town they protected and received shelter from in return. A way home meant a way back to the fight.

Aleks nodded despite the dark, breathing easier. "Just need the light." There would be no names tonight, but Aleks held out her hand anyway. They didn't shake it, just brushed their hand against hers briefly, a light touch in the dark.

In the silence, Aleks thought about her comm. She'd been separated from them before, most recently a year or so ago. It happened to everyone now and again - if troops were between you and the rest of your comm, protocol was to turn and run as quickly as you can. Kir had drummed that one into her early, noticed her tendency to run into fights she couldn't win.

"Whether you're looking for glory or revenge," they'd said, pinning her against a tree after a fight that had nearly gone wrong, "this isn't the place to get it."

Four years later and she always ran.

Cutting into Aleks' thoughts, her companion drew themselves up the wall. There was a small breath in the quiet. "How," they started, a little too loudly. They tried again. "How do you keep going?"

Perhaps it was because they were both away from their comms that their thoughts had turned to this; maybe the long crawl alone up the scrub made it feel like this was all there would ever

His Landlady

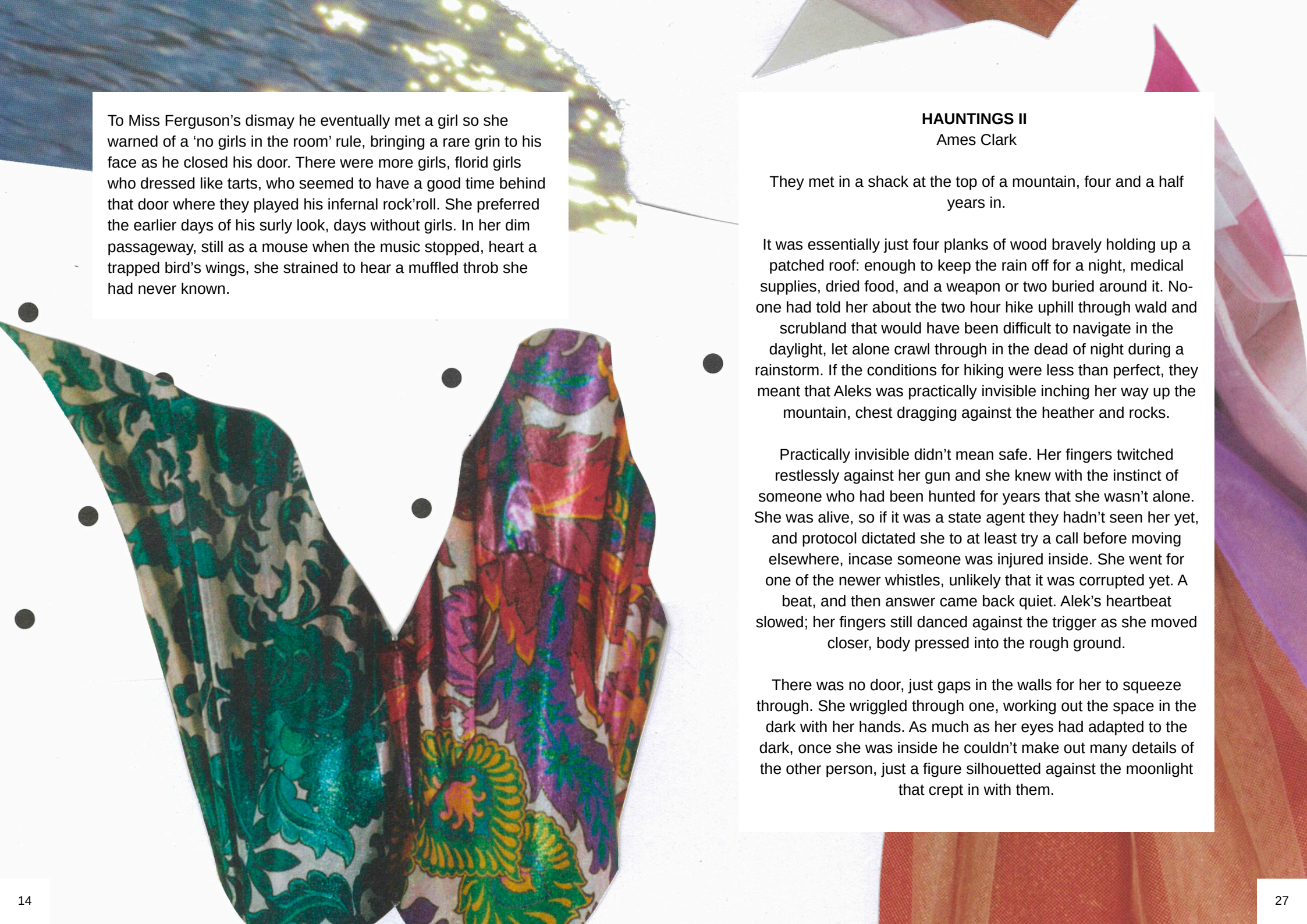
Ian C Smith

Fleeing his severe family the boy, abetted by his older sister who had escaped earlier, entered the life of Miss Ferguson by coming to live in her narrow house where before dusk fell golden shafts of light penetrated the interior, silent but for a large clock, everything perfectly still excepting dust motes dancing.

Dancing was graceful, formal, in the youth of Miss Ferguson, now a retired clerical assistant whose voice quavered, her denture moving. She had advertised for a young woman or girl to rent a room. The boy's sister, a trainee cook, talked a doubtful Miss Ferguson into accepting him, bumping her brother's age up from fourteen and praising his culinary skill, keeping mum about his plat de jour, tomato sauce on toast.

Irking Miss Ferguson, he vetoed vegetables, never wanted to engage with her, brusque but not impolite, using the kitchen, bathroom, indifferent to her rules, her routine. At night he bypassed the privy in the rear porch, urinating on her grass, killing it. A child who prowled the city streets, he did manage to regularly attend work, and was far too immature for girlfriends, both saving graces.

One day instead of hurrying past he asked if she would go guarantor for a hire purchase agreement, a leather jacket a character strutting through an exaggerated American film might wear. Because he always paid his rent she agreed, and by the time he made his final repayment she had begun to grow fond of him despite how his surly expression spoiled his looks.



To Miss Ferguson's dismay he eventually met a girl so she warned of a 'no girls in the room' rule, bringing a rare grin to his face as he closed his door. There were more girls, flord girls who dressed like tarts, who seemed to have a good time behind that door where they played his infernal rock'roll. She preferred the earlier days of his surly look, days without girls. In her dim passageway, still as a mouse when the music stopped, heart a trapped bird's wings, she strained to hear a muffled throb she had never known.

HAUNTINGS II

Ames Clark

They met in a shack at the top of a mountain, four and a half years in.

It was essentially just four planks of wood bravely holding up a patched roof: enough to keep the rain off for a night, medical supplies, dried food, and a weapon or two buried around it. No-one had told her about the two hour hike uphill through wald and scrubland that would have been difficult to navigate in the daylight, let alone crawl through in the dead of night during a rainstorm. If the conditions for hiking were less than perfect, they meant that Aleks was practically invisible inching her way up the mountain, chest dragging against the heather and rocks.

Practically invisible didn't mean safe. Her fingers twitched restlessly against her gun and she knew with the instinct of someone who had been hunted for years that she wasn't alone. She was alive, so if it was a state agent they hadn't seen her yet, and protocol dictated she to at least try a call before moving elsewhere, incase someone was injured inside. She went for one of the newer whistles, unlikely that it was corrupted yet. A beat, and then answer came back quiet. Alek's heartbeat slowed; her fingers still danced against the trigger as she moved closer, body pressed into the rough ground.

There was no door, just gaps in the walls for her to squeeze through. She wriggled through one, working out the space in the dark with her hands. As much as her eyes had adapted to the dark, once she was inside he couldn't make out many details of the other person, just a figure silhouetted against the moonlight that crept in with them.

Mid Life Catharsis

JE Sumerau

I went to the ballpark to be around people –

To rediscover myself

To remember my moms

To hear echoes of my youth

I went to the ballpark to love writing again –

To feel surprised again

To recall the makeup of a good story

To humble myself to routine

I went to the ballpark because it had been too long –

But it still felt comfy

Even in a new city

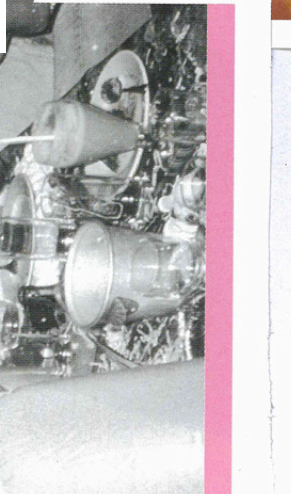
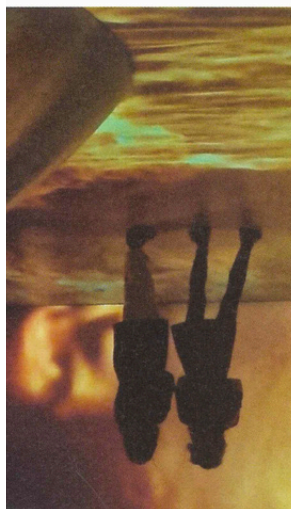
Even without you and you and you

I went to the ballpark because I always did –

And maybe,

If I'm lucky and don't forget,

Maybe I always will.



Elegy for the Unyielding

Matthew Wilkinson

How exhausting it must be

To be constantly fighting battles

And forever waging war,

Only to discover there were never any opponents-

Only imagined enemies.

You cannot convince someone

Who needs to be at war

That they are in a time of peace,

And no enemies are in range.

Standing down is almost an impossibility

For someone who has been conditioned

To always stand their ground.

For them, any sign of retreat

Is surrender-

And surrender is defeat.

The armor grows heavy,

The hand weary from wielding the sword,

As they continue to wage

The imagined war, sustained by dogmatic, tragic conviction.

Held hostage by pride, they soldier on,

Congratulating themselves

On their own strength and resilience,

While others move along to avoid the wreckage,

And avert their gaze

To escape the painful spectacle

Of watching *yet another man* self-destruct.



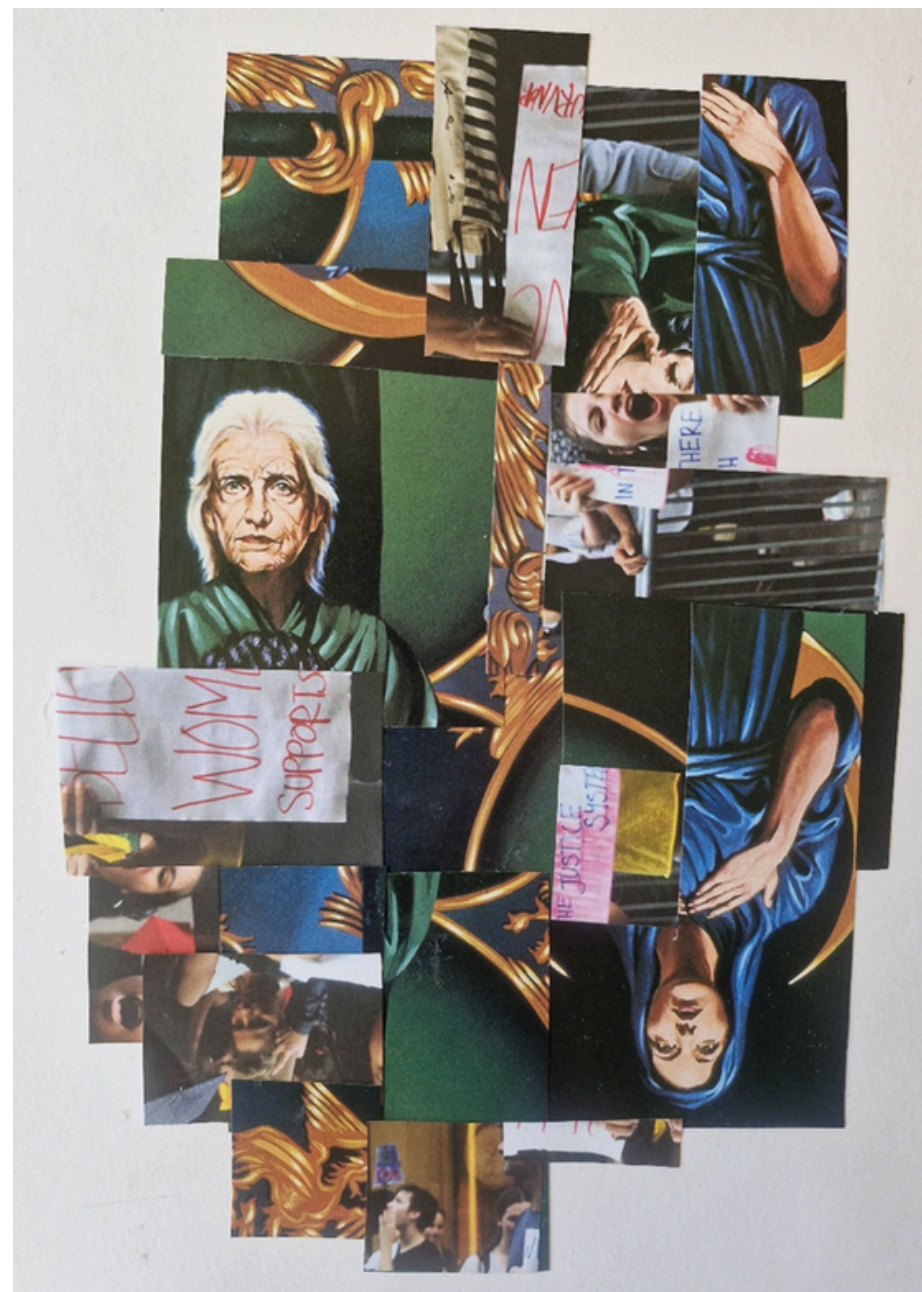
Snack Break

Kira Gondeck-Silvia



She Who is Many

Anna Clover



Notes of the Girl on the Train

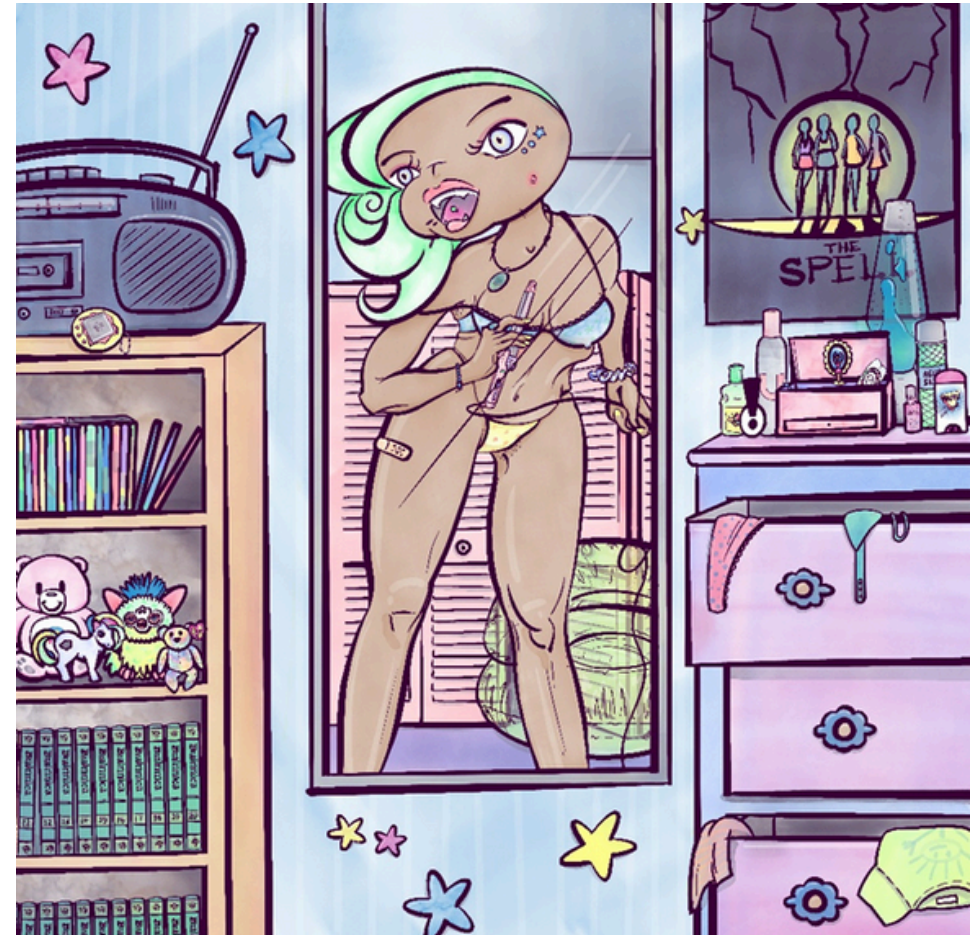
Maaïke Paredis

7:54 on a temperate autumn morning, houses flash by through the train window, sporadically interrupted by some cows. The sun reaches its flimsy beams over the fields, lighting the scene of a brutal murder. My at-best flat mood is being slaughtered by the incessant, grating, piercing sounds spilling from the phone of the man farther down the train carriage. I cough. Sigh. Throw a very obvious side eye his way, but the assault continues undisturbed. My despair grows as the man across the aisle opens his lunchbox, his chews, smacks, and gulps joining the symphony of nauseating noises. Let the next stop bring salvation, I pray, but alas. A woman claims the seat next to me, disregarding all other unoccupied places, invading into a space I wasn't using, but somehow felt was mine. How dare they defy the cardinal rules of the train, the unwritten laws that all travellers abide by: take up no space, make no sound. A passenger is a fragment on a seat, a bit of warmth left behind, a fleeting impression of a person. To be anything else is to be a nuisance.

The train tugs to a gentle halt. The fields, now waiting patiently, are coloured golden by the morning light. A soft sigh echoes over the intercom and the train conductor tells a story of technical difficulties, faulty signs and equipment refusing to cooperate. Calmly, without rushing, we collect our belongings and head out, blinking against the sun, unsure which way to go, like newborn foals testing their legs. A few quiet grins and knowing looks are exchanged. In this dormant station, we are connected by our shared misfortune. No longer fleeting fragments, but a patchwork of people, our only grievance with this unmovable machine.

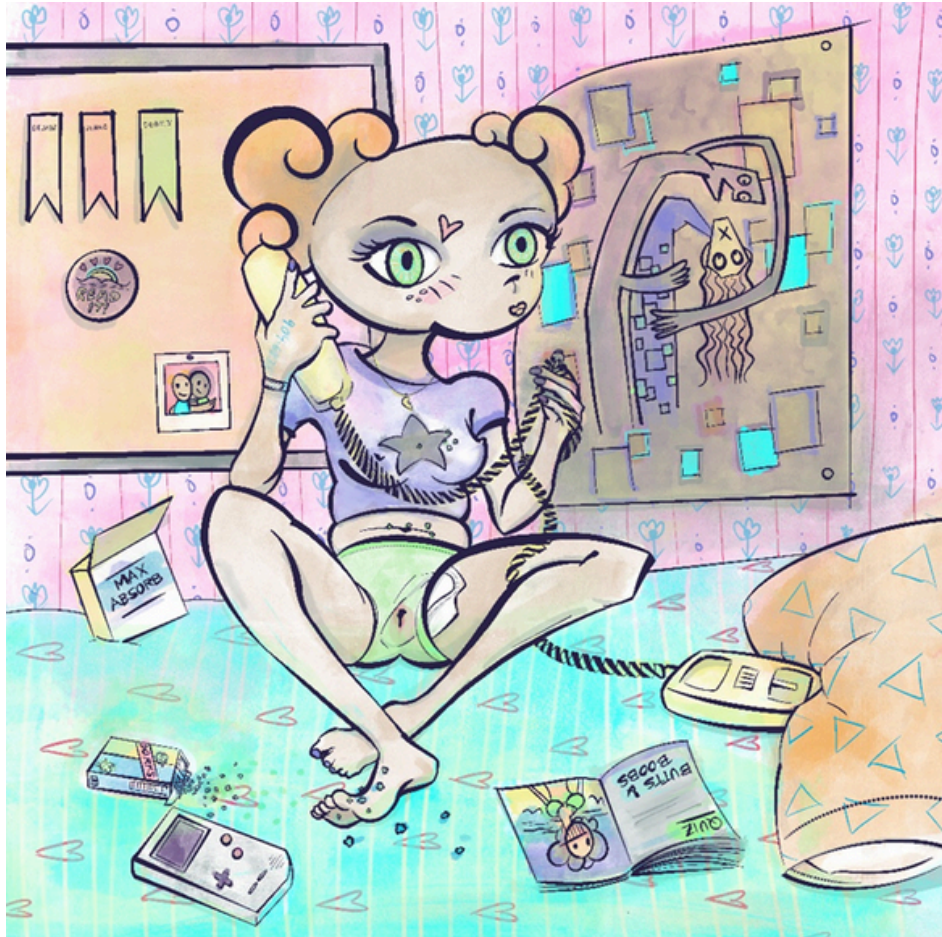
Audition

Kira Gondeck-Silvia

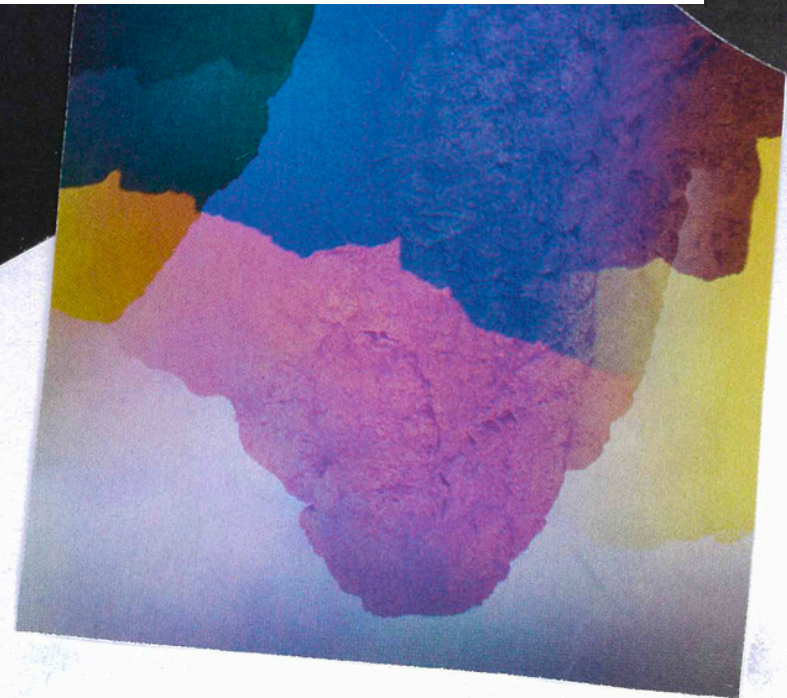


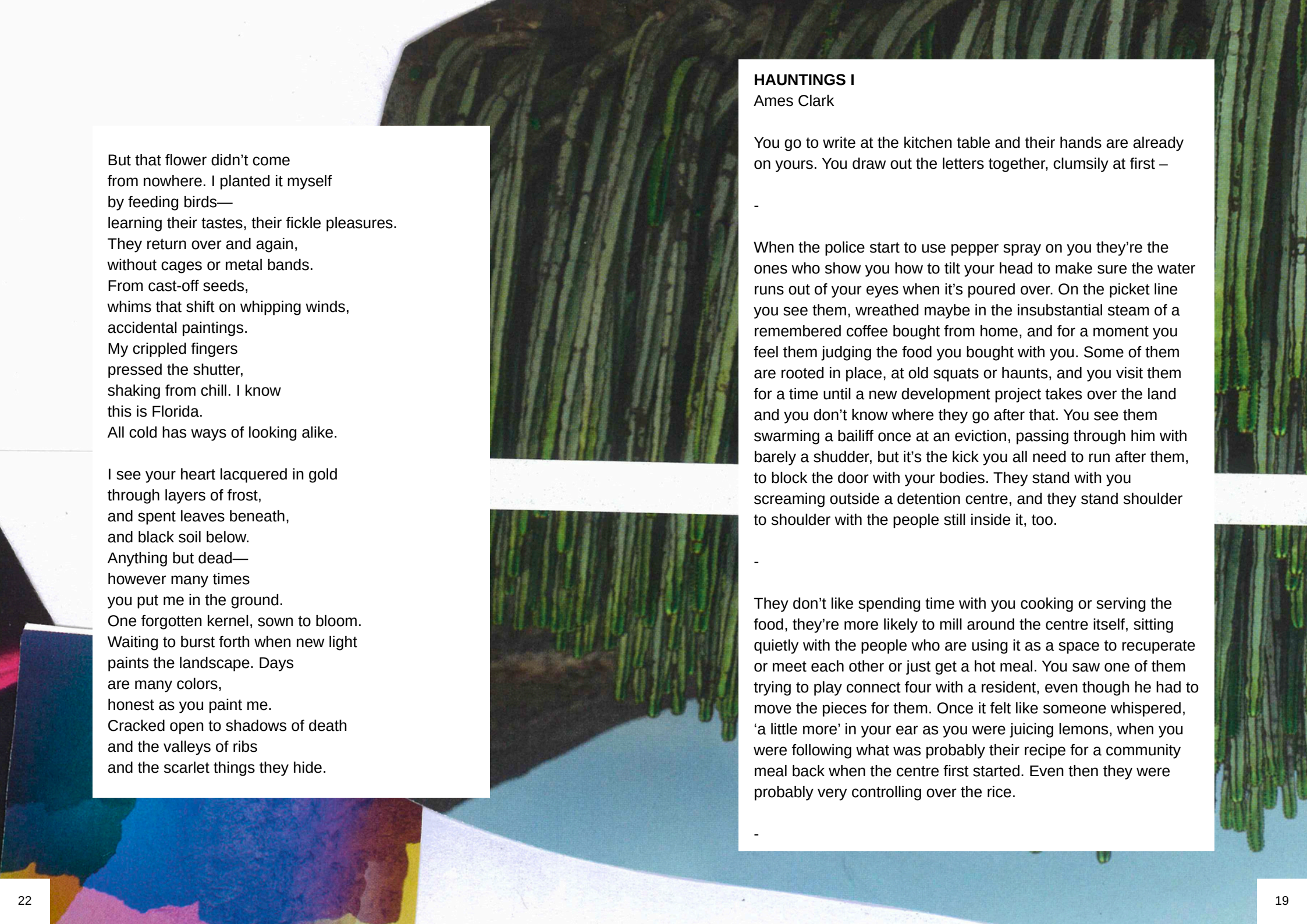
Land Line

Kira Gondeck-Silvia



We have lived
so many lives, planted
thousands of flowers. Tomorrow
I'll refill those hanging tubes
that catch sunlight in clouded plastic.
Nothing stays new.
Familiar horrors have become
my favorite brand—
exact words. I have shown you
cherry blossoms, shaking
from a twisted trunk.
Health, hope. Everything.
No cards for zero-sum games,
only blossoms and seeds,
and the stumbles of words that vanish
into thin air.





But that flower didn't come
from nowhere. I planted it myself
by feeding birds—
learning their tastes, their fickle pleasures.
They return over and again,
without cages or metal bands.
From cast-off seeds,
whims that shift on whipping winds,
accidental paintings.
My crippled fingers
pressed the shutter,
shaking from chill. I know
this is Florida.
All cold has ways of looking alike.

I see your heart lacquered in gold
through layers of frost,
and spent leaves beneath,
and black soil below.
Anything but dead—
however many times
you put me in the ground.
One forgotten kernel, sown to bloom.
Waiting to burst forth when new light
paints the landscape. Days
are many colors,
honest as you paint me.
Cracked open to shadows of death
and the valleys of ribs
and the scarlet things they hide.

HAUNTINGS I

Ames Clark

You go to write at the kitchen table and their hands are already
on yours. You draw out the letters together, clumsily at first –

-

When the police start to use pepper spray on you they're the
ones who show you how to tilt your head to make sure the water
runs out of your eyes when it's poured over. On the picket line
you see them, wreathed maybe in the insubstantial steam of a
remembered coffee bought from home, and for a moment you
feel them judging the food you bought with you. Some of them
are rooted in place, at old squats or haunts, and you visit them
for a time until a new development project takes over the land
and you don't know where they go after that. You see them
swarming a bailiff once at an eviction, passing through him with
barely a shudder, but it's the kick you all need to run after them,
to block the door with your bodies. They stand with you
screaming outside a detention centre, and they stand shoulder
to shoulder with the people still inside it, too.

-

They don't like spending time with you cooking or serving the
food, they're more likely to mill around the centre itself, sitting
quietly with the people who are using it as a space to recuperate
or meet each other or just get a hot meal. You saw one of them
trying to play connect four with a resident, even though he had to
move the pieces for them. Once it felt like someone whispered,
'a little more' in your ear as you were juicing lemons, when you
were following what was probably their recipe for a community
meal back when the centre first started. Even then they were
probably very controlling over the rice.

-



They march with you, thousands of them. More, probably, but eventually you stop seeing them and they kind of blend into the mass of people pressing in around you, shouting and dancing and moving through and with each other. You always try to spot the ones on the edges – holding the hands of too many kids to bring into the centre of the crowd and waiting for a friend; handing out masks and water and info cards and whispering in the ears of organisers; arms raised against the batons of long dead cops in the side streets that you pass by. And at 5am they smoke silently with you outside the stations where your comrades are being held and when theirs once were, and they watch as you get to each others' homes safely. Afterwards, hungover in the morning you ask yourselves ok, what next and you can glimpse them out of the corner of your eye in the doorway or sitting by your feet.

-

Sometimes you walk away from them and you feel them try to pull you back but they are, after all, only impressions.

Flowers from Nowhere

Alexandra "Xan" Nowakowski

I photographed a sunflower
growing between waste bins
one day before landscapers
cut it down.
To them, a weed. To me, a life.
Thank goodness
I took that photo
and sent it with a note
into the dead of your winter.
Holding the mangled bloom—
so small in the palm of one thin hand—
I thought about crying
more tears I never quite find.

I photographed those too,
when they happened
that one time—and truly
what a filthy little word.
Wishing for a chance, another sunrise.
Long claws of ice encircling
my neck. Is this the age
for talk of silent seas?
I would need
so many more poems
for the size of my grief
and the unknowable dimensions
of things gone dead in the spring.