

ABRIDGED 0 -75

# THE MERITS OF TRACER FIRE

Polaroids by Dragana Jurišić

Poetry by Sarah Cave

Essay by Susanna Galbraith

*curated by Gregory McCartney*

## INTRODUCTION

*Greg McCartney*

**T**he Merits of Tracer Fire was originally a title of a long-lost poem written by one of the Abridged personnel. It explored the various small towns during The Troubles that only seemed to become visible when there was an atrocity and local (occasionally international) TV news crews were dispatched to report to us at teatime. The towns were then coded in an equilibrium of action-reaction, attack and retaliation. And we all became binary. The codes of childhood that said don't go to the place with the (insert as appropriate) flags or particularly painted kerb-stones are hard to escape, even in this all-connected if still fragmented age.

Of course, we were all, if not pretty comfortable, at least used to our individual programmes, until the Covid pandemic resulted in a radical reimagining of our lives and how we interact with people and places. Distance became official and intimacy potentially lethal. New coding inevitably has bugs and by this stage (late 2020) people are confused and resentful at the various fixes and patches streaming from our politicians.

Then there's the people offering alternative realities, those conspiracy

theorists who see Satan worshipping, child-abusing, world governing elites behind our new coding. They may be ridiculous but they're gaining a foothold, particularly on the internet and they muddy the water enough for people to begin to believe in them. The internet is closing time at the biggest bar in creation, brim-full of frustration, violence and anger interspersed with the odd moment of beauty and inspiration and its reality has bled into the everyday changing our modes of operation often subconsciously, without our realisation.

And what of the future? We had one other poem title that seems to sum up any potential new world: 'We'd step into the Light if we could take the Darkness with us'.

Thanks go to the Arts Council of Northern Ireland who generously funded this commission and have helped us in these difficult times. Thanks to Dragana Jurišić, Sarah Cave and Daryl Martin for taking part in this commission. Thanks to Verbal, Golden Thread and all our other supporters plus of course to those readers that have stayed the course throughout this weird and very trying year.

# ON TRACER FIRE

Susanna Galbraith

Now find a WikiHow on how to 'fold yourself into a box marked 'safe''  
— Sarah Cave, 'on listening for ghosts at the bedroom door'

Tracer Fire were missiles that, in being fired, marked out their trajectory. They left a *trace* ((noun): something left behind by something else that has gone). To *trace* (verb) is to discover by investigation, to *take a path*, to follow a line. A *trace* is a unit of code, a type of sign to be read; it is by way of codes that we can *trace* our way through the worlds in which we move and live.

My niece is one and a half. She is learning to speak to us in the language she has learned from us about the world she occupies with us. Getting steadier on her feet, she loves to play with the football in the garden. She says 'ball'. In the kitchen she is given an apple, shown a melon. 'Ball. 'Ball?' Every pig must also be 'Peppa', the friend from screens, TV, phone, I-pad. Her first trip to a farm is a shock, the unprecedented smells, the sounds, the enormous muddy paleness of the animal she thought she knew the word for, that here snorts rather than speaks, the twisting tension of the categorisation. 'Peppa'

'Code' comes from *codex*: a manuscript; an official list (of medicines, chemicals, statutes); a block of wood. This is the etymological *trace* of 'code', the meanings tucked in its pockets. The story of the word 'code' is of the division of solid wood into leaves of paper and the rebinding of those leaves into a single object again, what we refer to as a book. And with the book remains the ostensible insistence of a fundamental unity: one object with limits, (one author, one argument), solid, with defined edges.

Codes and safety not only overlap but are often mutually determinative. Code of conduct. Highway code. And, in our everyday, the codes of conventions and language itself (the codedness of which usually goes unnoticed) let us feel at home in the world, in control and in the know. Codes are agreements that we usually take for granted, that seem to offer security and stability in their patterns. Codes are what we use, constantly, to distinguish

between one thing and another, to thereby orientate. They erect walls, limiting, but at the same time they lay paths and open windows, facilitating movement, facilitating views. In the operation of the code - that is, any system of symbols, signs, conventions, rules, any shared language - is always a simultaneous potential for movement and solidification. Codes are, in effect, *architectural*.

Even so, it is instantly overwhelming to try to think or talk about codes. As I sit with the subject matter the world starts to splinter into the complex minutiae of its codes, the tiny cogs, swarms upon swarms of intricate systems churning around me, blurring. Codes are something we can never quite step outside: they are everywhere, and we exist within them. To know is nearly always to decode, a process that exists between us and *that*. We often forget this, unaware of our constant *reading* of our surroundings against systems of conventions and rules of relation, that our knowledge isn't innate or direct but generated *through* these. The world is coated in code, multifarious and muddled, both sticky and slippery.

It is even more overwhelming to think about codes *online*, a world that adds numerous layers to the din of codes that already squirm about our offline lives. There are codes we use, direct

and change, and codes by which *we* are used, directed and changed. To try and think about it is like being pulled under a wave. We are swimming, but also pulled by invisible currents, and we are always *in it*, simultaneously active and passive participants in coding and decoding, and the growth and adaptation of the logic of codes we exist within.

"Text is that *social* space which leaves no language safe...'; '... like language, it is structured but off-centred, without closure'; the word text 'refers to the image of an *organism* which grows by vital expansion, by 'development'.'<sup>1</sup> In the 1970s Roland Barthes distinguished the idea of 'text' from 'work'. The latter term refers to the traditional notion of a piece of writing, for example, that closes on one 'signified', one *meaning*, that is unitary and might be conceived of as a single object with a single authorship, solid, like a book, a contained system of resolving rules.<sup>2</sup> As such, it echoes the etymological load of the word 'code' (see above).

Text on the other hand, in Barthes' conception, breaks down the solidity and the security offered by these connotations; every reader of a text is complicit in the writing of it; decoding is re-coding, the signified meaning shifts, the system morphs, the closure

infinitely deferred. Though we often rest on (or resent, depending on our need) the idea of its immovability, its security, language is also parallel with this mutable text-ness: all active communication is movement, and the codes that are close to us in daily life, that we are *adhered* to, are not static but moving, changing, constantly making new connections. The text of our communal life ('text' from 'texture') is continuously rewoven.

'[T]he metaphor of the text is that of the *network*.'<sup>3</sup> I'm inclined to think of the operations of codes in our online existence as having an accelerated *text*-ness, in this sense. Online is a monstrous expansion of 'social space', an enormous 'network' of networks. There are more and more connections to be made at rapid speed, across vast cultural and textual terrains, exchanges made via various and mutating media. We have seen the units of our language, our communicative codes, change and become turbulently various, as we use images, video, fragments of media and other texts as well as words to *speak*, their usage migrating and connotations transforming like plant-life in a time-lapse film.

Moreover, inside the digital world, its unreal non-materiality, there is a synthesis of texts. The physical definition and boundaries of the book

(the 'codex' and the 'work'), to give one example, are gone. We read and watch and listen and play fragmentarily, to many texts at once, scrolling, opening and closing tabs, interweaving our strands of attention. The only 'real' boundaries are the surfaces and edges of our screens, though even this, in experience, is ambiguous. Playing amongst the networks, we are constant active writers and developers of the *cosmic* text, code system, of online.

This is an image of freedom, of creativity. But a freedom too vast for us to comprehend, or even, perhaps, to desire. Within such freedom, such expanse and rich chaos, it is human nature to seek both orientation and shelter (architecture, safety, home). And in this lies the power of the algorithm, another side to the story of the coded world of online. The digital world is, at its foundation, fabricated out of the invisible code of binary that underlies the chimera of structures and units we (the average person) perceive and decode in our online life. Here, however, algorithms are another 'invisible' network of code systems that construct the architecture of our experience. And with algorithms we are not merely the readers but the read, the coded.

An algorithm is a set of rules to be followed. They are systems that solve

'problems', decide on direction based on construed information,  $x + y =$  this-way-forward. We are becoming increasingly culturally aware of how algorithms structure our paths so it becomes difficult to get off road, beyond the frame, into the unfamiliar where things lack clarity, are hard to recognise, don't fit the code of our day to day (like at the pixelated edge of an old video game). Algorithms read us, our ostensible desires and behaviour. They interpret, reorientate, read, interpret, reorientate, all behind the scenes, behind the wall of the corridor they carve out for us. Our experience shifts, and loops back on itself, because everyone wants (when afraid) what is familiar, to feel at home.

This echo-chamber of algorithm networks is powerful in itself, but also because it isn't working entirely against us. Rather, algorithms bolster a tendency that is already part of our behaviour, how we are *coded*: to stick to the paths we can recognise, to stay with what we know, to build a territory.<sup>4</sup> And so with the algorithms we slip so easily, becoming increasingly blinkered and out of control of the maps we live and orientate by, taking paths, as in fairy tales, that lead us back to the same place, the same markers, leaving a crumb trail behind us to be read by those who will benefit from stalking our desires and preying on our

weaknesses (the word in marketing is 'targeting'). That is, leaving our *trace*, which is then *traced*.

'... "Terra Incognita," unknown land. The phrase was common on old maps... and is seldom found now. Between words is silence, around ink whiteness, behind every map's information is what's left out, the unmapped and unmappable. One of those in-depth local or state atlases that map ethnicity and education and principal crops and percentage foreign-born makes it clear that any place can be mapped infinite ways, that maps are deeply selective.'<sup>5</sup> In *Field Guide For Getting Lost*, Rebecca Solnit, speaking so of mapping, cites various categorisations of the 'known' and 'unknown', known unknowns and unknown unknowns.<sup>6</sup> While the former might be understood as a lack of knowledge that is coded, marked on our maps, the latter is uncoded, and therefore unseen.

A counter-pull to the inconceivable expanse of new information from corners across the globe ostensibly offered by the internet, algorithmic systems help us to leave the unknowns of our world *unknown*, supporting our underlying fears of that unknown, that which is other, for which we don't already have a word that is some sort of control. 'The terra incognita spaces on maps say that knowledge too is an

island surrounded by oceans of the unknown, but whether we are on land or water is another story.’<sup>7</sup>

When I was little I fantasized about being a pirate (in an old-fashioned sense). It had nothing to do with the pilfering, but with another aspect of the rebellion piracy represented. It was the idea that you could get in a boat and disappear, abandoning your identity for unknown territory. I despaired at how impossible this seemed now, how floodlit the world was with mapping and identity tracing, passports and satellite technology. In other words, how *held in place* we were by codes. And over the oceans of the internet, it seems even more impossible for the average explorer to travel without a name, leaving no trace.

When we move through online, though we feel we are pioneers, often we are more like passengers. When we can’t see the map, how can we come to know the raw unknowns we have been steered around? The map is the wood, and we stay fixated amongst the trees. Apparently only by ‘going Incognito’, supposedly making ourselves unrecognisable, *uncoded*, might we feel we can stumble upon them, from real-price airline tickets to adverts for political parties we don’t usually support. But even this idea of being ‘incognito’ is largely an illusion. We are

still tracked, our behaviour still traced from our first footprints.

The terminology used for our life online often tells of its paradoxes. These words, too, are coded, shifting old signifiers on to new experiences, carrying the trace of historical ideas (one of the oldest advertising techniques in the book). The brand names, like *Internet Explorer* and *Safari*, speak to the idea of the freedom, the expanse of the internet and what we might discover. Then there are the old terms ‘web’, and to ‘surf’ the ‘net’. *Surf* connotes play, adventure. *Net* and *web*, connection. But deep in these words we might also find something of the reality that most of us are caught, guided by structures (*nets*, *webs*) that are built around us, to accommodate us, satisfy us with familiarity, not directing our own movements through the expanse but riding the tides and currents, *surfing* the waves that return us over and over to the same shore.

The central paradox of the code is that it is both obstacle and bridge: a *skin*. Codes are the medium of barriers, and also of empathy, *touch*. It might be said that there is something of a loss and something of a gain, even an intimacy, involved in every event of coding and decoding, of communication, in every *sign*. Codes are always limited, imperfectly aligned with subjective

thought and with other codes. Things get lost down the cracks in the exchanges, just as things come within reach. (Think of a phrase pushed through Google translate, from one language to another to another, the slippage through synonyms).

(Semiotics 101... ) there are different types of sign in our coded world. One of these is the *index* which, unlike others, bears a physical relationship to its referent. An index is the *trace* of something, that which it has left behind (like a footprint that ‘reads’ *a human was here*). There is a feeling of intimacy that comes with the index through this physical connection, but also a feeling of loss. It is an absent-presence, a present-absence, and a reminder of removal as well as proximity.

Chemical photography is indexical, photographs bearing a physical trace of the light reflected from their subjects, the shadows about them. Polaroids have additional layers of intimacy built into their mechanism. They are instant, emerging as image not in the isolation of darkroom but in the rooms and moments in which they are made. They are small frames, intimate spaces, showing only a fragment, stimulating the *erotics* of the photograph, taking ‘the spectator outside its frame’, alluding to the invisible.<sup>8</sup> And they are small objects, things that might be

carried in pockets and tucked away in bedside drawers. As a medium by which any non-professional might commit private moments with friends and lovers to material memory with no need for a mediator, before digital photography came on the scene, they are loaded with these connotations of closeness, of touch, of the personal, (the pornographic, as Carol Mavor suggests).<sup>9</sup>

Pre-digital, Polaroids were valued for how they allowed for viewing and appraising a snap almost instantly so it could be retaken, if needed, with adapted pose, in the moment. Digital photography made this redundant, allowing checking and deletion on the device itself, before even committing an image to materiality, all *traces* of trial and error potentially eradicated. The persistence and recent revival, fetishisation even, of the Polaroid is probably largely founded rather on what they offer that we feel the lack of in digital technologies; physicality, something to touch and be touched with, strangeness and a relinquishing of control.

‘It’s a cacophony of trying the impossible and that is to photograph the internet with a Polaroid camera which cannot focus or compose (what I see in the viewfinder is very different to what I get.’<sup>10</sup> When I look at Dragana

Juriscic's *The Merits of Tracer Fire* images (albeit, a digital scan of some of the polaroids she has emailed to me) I feel moved by an enormous and perpetuating tension at work in these tiny objects. This tension, of course, is between the codes of the Polaroid and the codes of online, of which these images are a simultaneous *trace*. Online we relinquish control passively, half-aware if aware at all of what we are leaving unknown. Juriscic's Polaroids are, rather, an *active* relinquishing. They feel like a turning-inside-out, a through-the-looking-glass vision, wherein the familiar is made strange and, therefore, newly *visible* as against our new sense of its strangeness we try to decode it.

That the portraits, especially, are so unnerving isn't just down to the blurring of half-familiar facial features, the disorientating truncation of spaces and body parts, the deepened shadows about eyes brought out by the quintessential development. Many of these faces seem themselves startled by their own defamiliarization, snatched from the gush and churn of moving images online. Like photographs of ghosts, moreover, they startle us with an ambiguous suggestion of what may be there that we don't normally see.

Un-manipulatable, a Polaroid, in one sense, 'speaks the truth'.<sup>11</sup> But

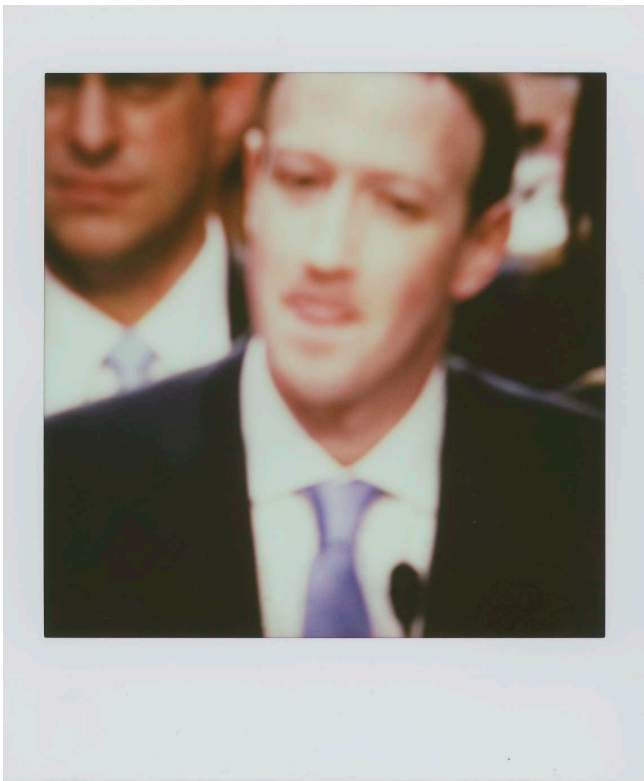
they don't *look* real. Dreamlike, they are something entirely other to the aspiration toward hyperreal imaging on our latest digital devices. They embody a reminder of their unreality, their detachment from their subject, at tension always with the fact of their physical trace, connection thereto. Juriscic's images are the epitome of the uncanny. I feel both closer to and farther away from the details of a familiar online territory, alienated by fragmentation and blurring, isolating and silencing. Suddenly aware of my floundering effort to *read*, I feel put-out from my everyday shelters of code.

These images represent a warped *translation* of the supposed public realm into a document heavy with privacy, of digital illusions and social constructions into index, a code of touch, echo and haunting, that all the same undermines their reality. As such, performing the tracer fire of our life online and the social textures reinforced there, they amplify the uncanny impossibilities of translation, the disjunction, shadows, losses and longings between one code and another, and our ultimate craving to *touch* for what's real.

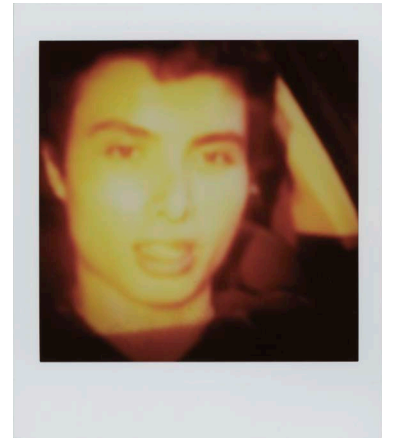
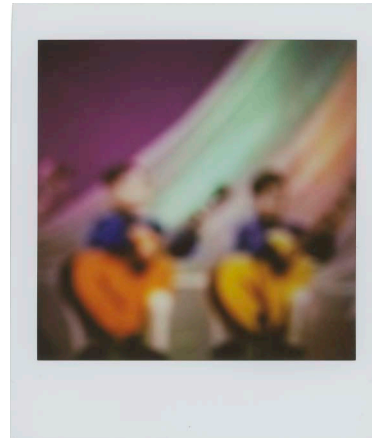
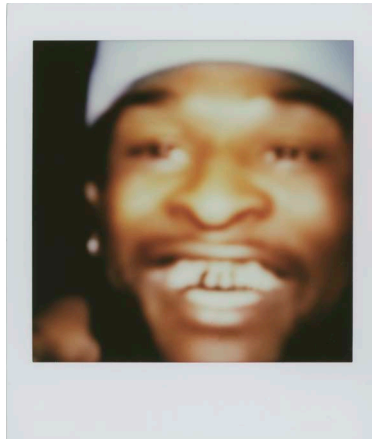
## REFERENCES

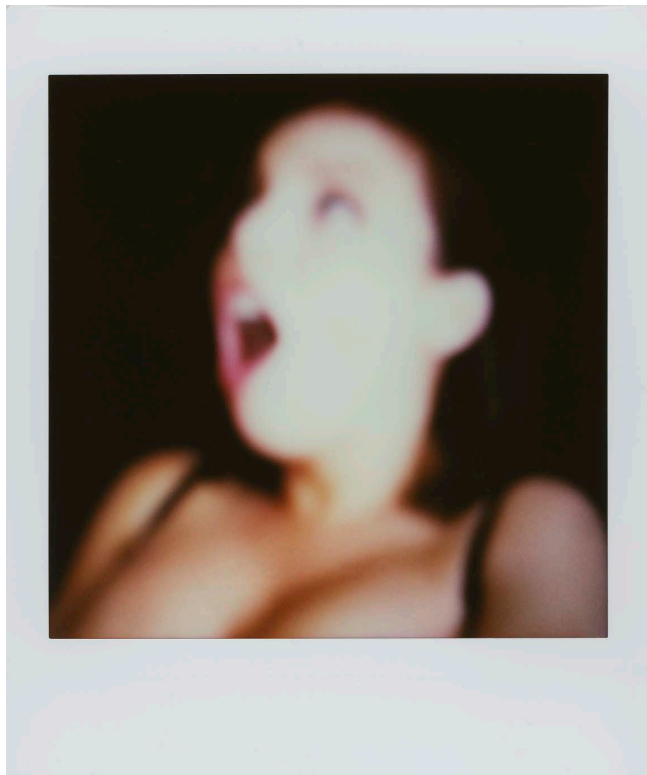
- <sup>1</sup> Roland Barthes, 'From Work To Text', *Image Music Text*, trans. Stephen Heath, (London: Fontana Press, 1977), 164; 159; 161
- <sup>2</sup> Ibid., 158.
- <sup>3</sup> Ibid., 161.
- <sup>4</sup> For a discussion of this in action see 'Everything Is Connected - Conspiracy Theories in the time of Corona', *Nothing To Look Forward To But The Past*, (Belfast: Abridged, 2020).
- <sup>5</sup> Rebecca Solnit, *Field Guide For Getting Lost*, (2005), (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2017), 161-162.
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid., 168.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid. 168.
- <sup>8</sup> This conception of the operation of the 'erotic' derived from Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida*, trans. Richard Howard (1981), (London: Vintage, 2000), 59.
- <sup>9</sup> Carol Mavor, *Blue Mythologies*, (London: Reaktion Books, 2013), 23.
- <sup>10</sup> Dragana Juriscic, email to Susanna Galbraith 23/10/20.
- <sup>11</sup> Mavor, *Blue*, 24.

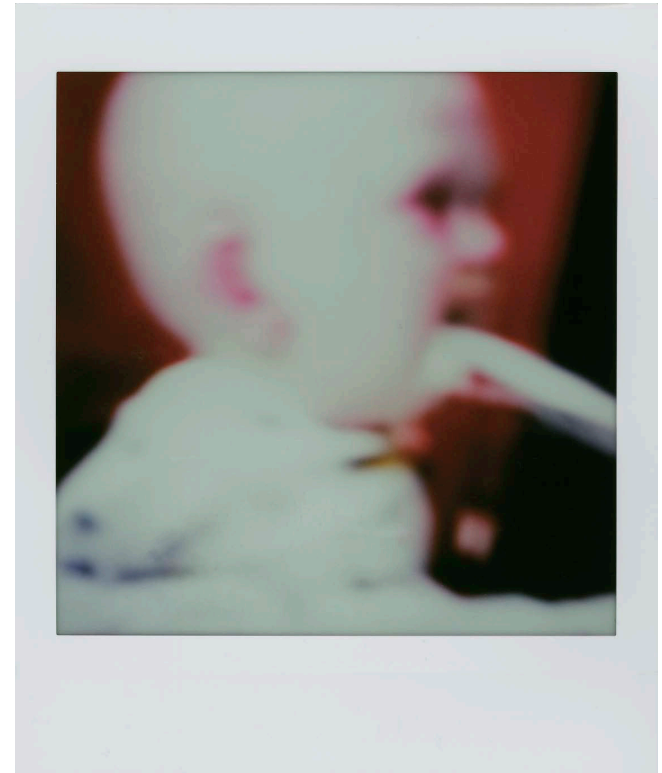














#### EVEN THE GHOSTS

Somehow, while the internet is down, we find time  
to clean out the shed – the spiders flee,  
dust patterns of diaspora – and install a drying rack,  
a silk screen bed, maybe store old cartridges.

We're searching for the right alchemy that informs  
the making of paint or ink or dye –  
to finish the unfinished  
face of the earth –

The door half-open,  
I see a terrarium; ornate, empty. I tug handfuls of moss  
from under the apple tree and paint crude faces on toilet roll;

Adam and Eve naked. I leave  
the glass roof open and the rain falls  
flooding the nest; cardboard cylinders  
*drowning. The birds raise their objections,*  
*eventual carrion – a buzzard circles*

*after Tomas Tranströmer*

**A PRAYER FOR SUMMONING MASHA**  
*for Pussy Riot*

the algorithm teaches me a ritual  
set by the motion of objects  
in and out and into prayer  
like a book read too quickly  
all the information misaligned

late at night my reflection sleeps  
on a dark screen  
the last embers of the fire  
my triangle of submission wants

to protest the icons  
I've got a crush in the cathedral  
thesis alarm excursion  
a grandmother's revolution is a crash  
of bodies against the market place

I've crashed a girl & I like it  
I've got a crush *Maria, Marya*  
*Mary, Masha* falling into the rabbit hole  
the rabbit who is always out of time

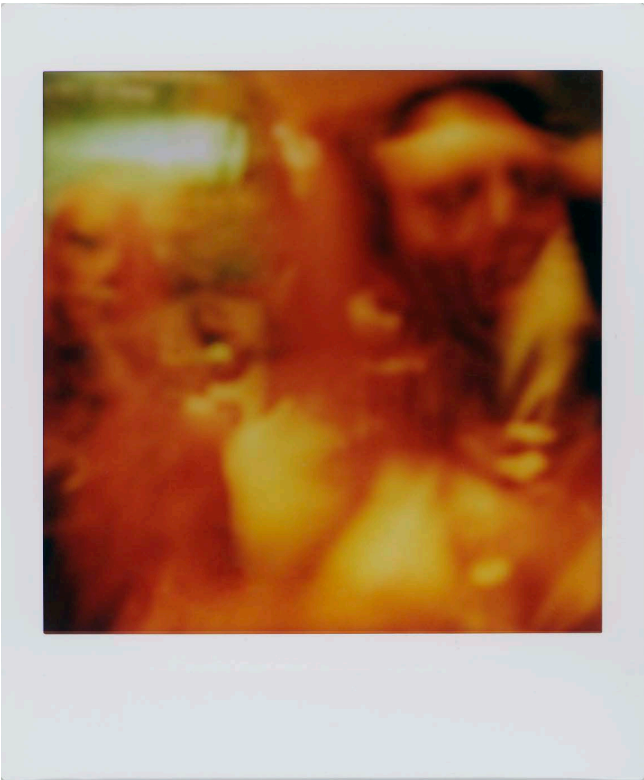
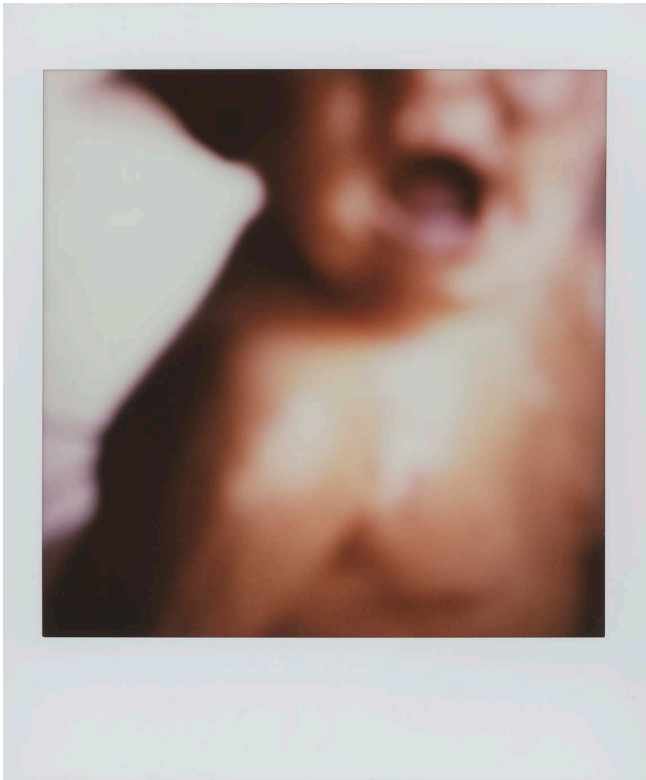
removing the belt from her waist  
was a sin  
when falling  
is a sound like  
crash I want her to wait but she falls

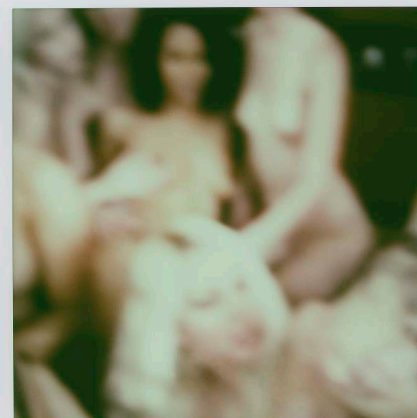
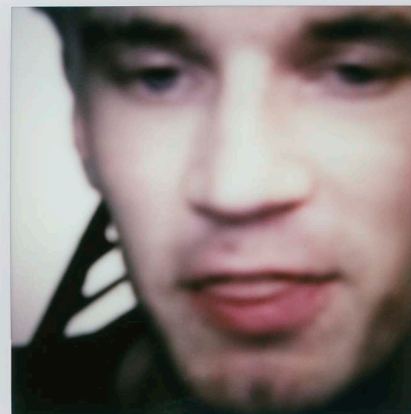
when it isn't time we think  
in sync from the kitchen  
sink turning the taps blue for hot red for cold  
the one turning the one facing

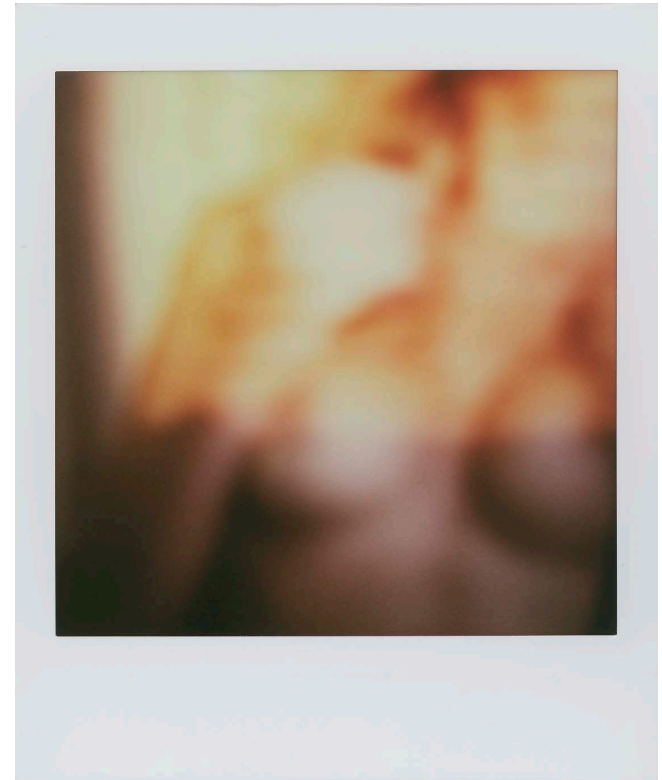
the other mimicry as  
appropriation *feels so good set us free*

rising like skylarks  
consoling like swallows  
licking like metaphors teenage onanism  
is ekphrastic response

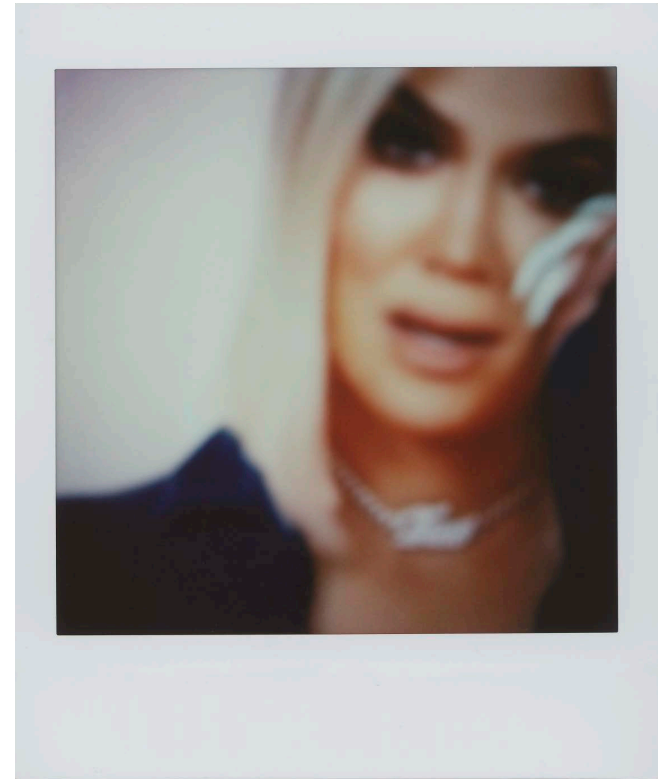
to puritanism  
while turning always falling out of time  
not the right time

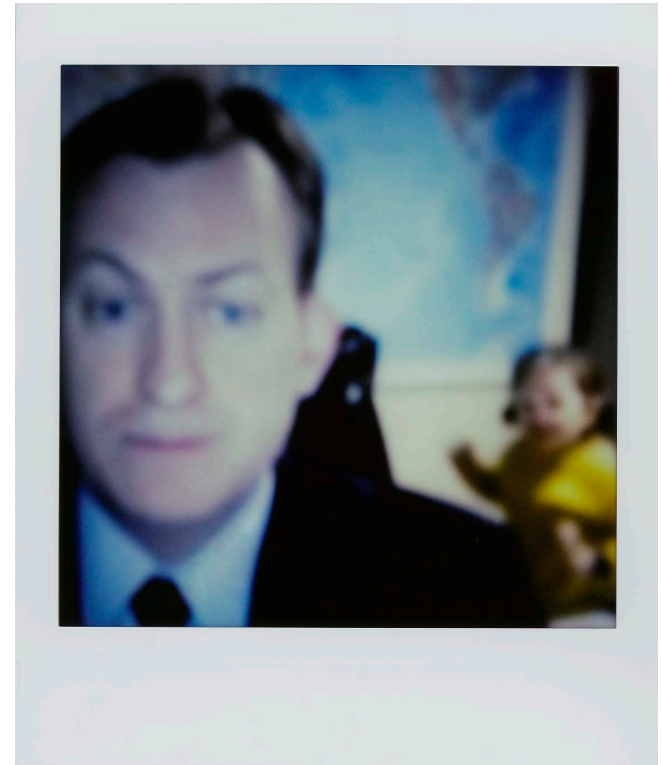














## MY GRANDMOTHER'S CELL

Insta-Gnostic obsessed  
w/ ritual This account is for those who enjoy relaxing  
in the #CosmicChrist ~ Washed ashore

or trapped in a flotation tank  
entombed in water  
as if imagining the #Godhead was like

divinity sliding off the spoon  
you'd certainly need a #Hieroglyph  
to decode The underlying meaning

of the universe beneath An emoji –  
an #apple red green yellow Perhaps a #fig instead  
You choose – but it must be

always bitten or about to be – Eve's little dog  
is a glyph between me and a girl I once knew  
who sits on her heels scrolling

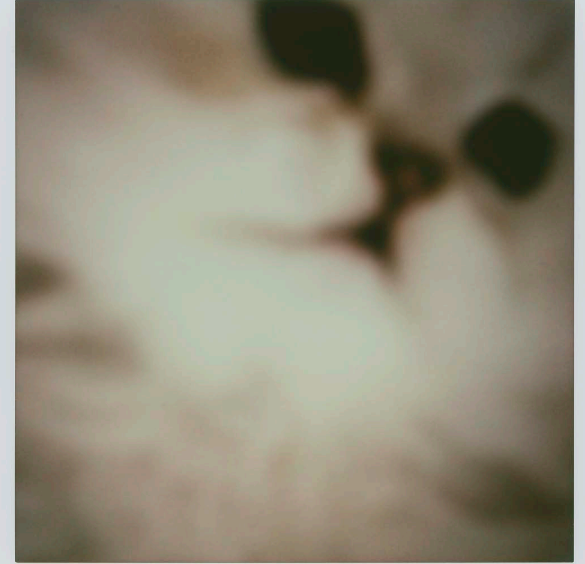
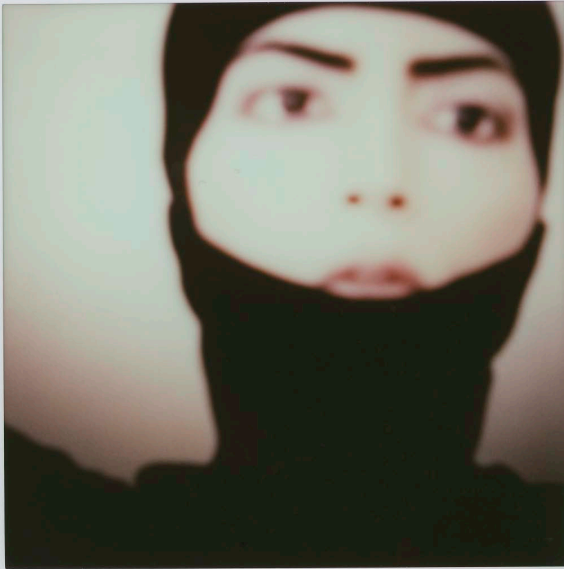
the Logos #Zootfruit  
#clusterofgrapes Since when do sheep  
sit at the table? In Cuba, there are only birds

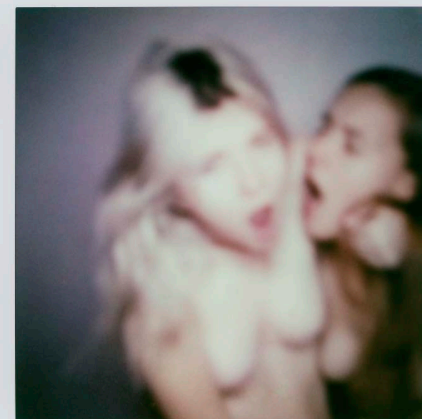
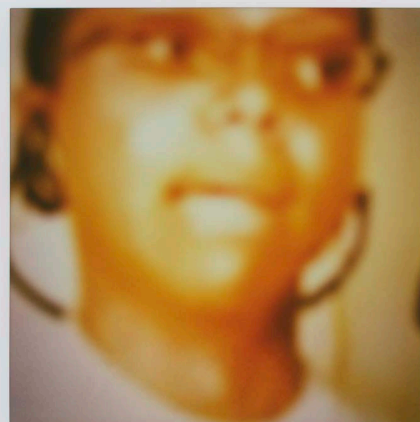
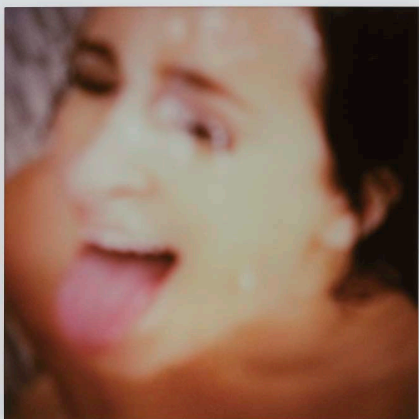
but in Eden we work three days a week – I am  
well – I am my Grandmother  
her hands her feet – an actress or a Gorse bush

in a storm – black clouds  
golden teeth A wren's song reminds me  
of Wednesdays with my Nan

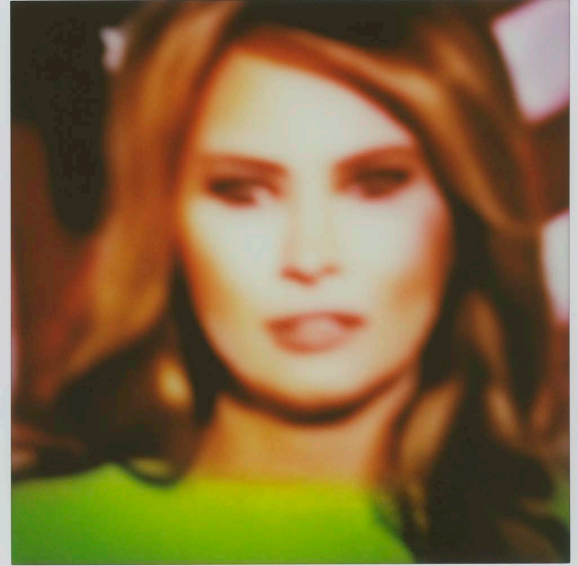
at Golgotha I try to upload a video  
rain falling into still water  
the sound of psalm 23 still finishing

learn its meaning still finishing  
poetry caught between fields still finishing  
perhaps you prefer 1 2 1  
upload distribution Love  
upload failed for you fail at times  
but overwhelm at others  
but perhaps you are  
the sky the sexual magic the adorable  
smile o etcetera etcetera











THE WOEMINX ALGORITHM:  
RECIPES FOR GENDER COMMENTARY

i.

this is a  
recipe  
for dessert  
history is a  
recipe  
a polaroid shot  
a mode of being

it's my birthday  
let us eat cake

read Rousseau  
(w/o real  
understanding)  
history is algorithm

pastoral cuts  
can't sync  
w/ urban greens  
& sylvan blues

ii.

this is a recipe  
for desert  
my love  
is utopian

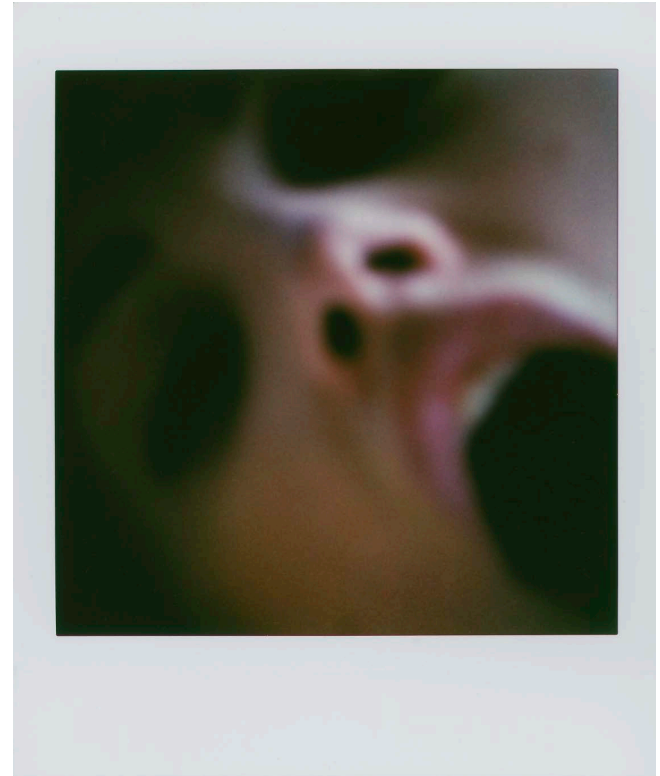
at the top  
of a ladder  
is a tin  
of blue paint

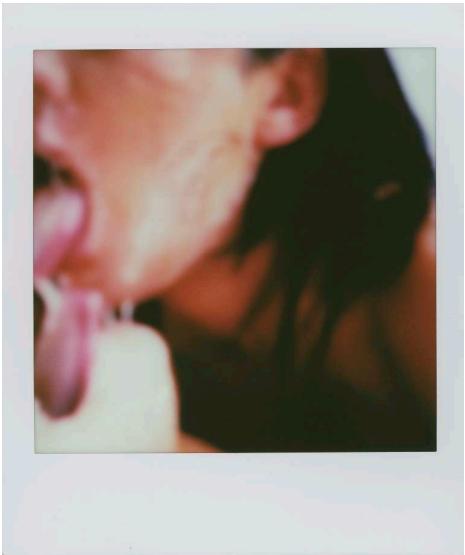
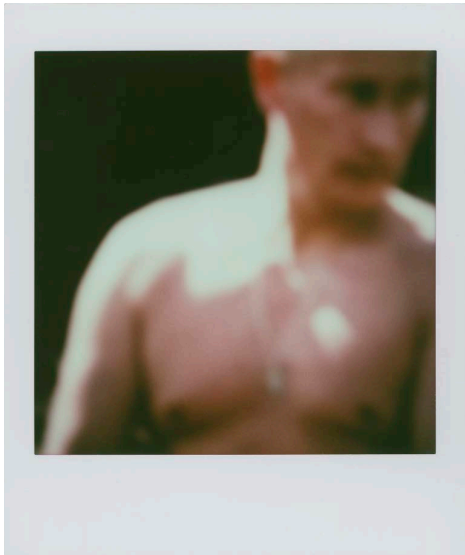
knock  
the ladder  
& the colour  
will fall  
to the floor

iii.

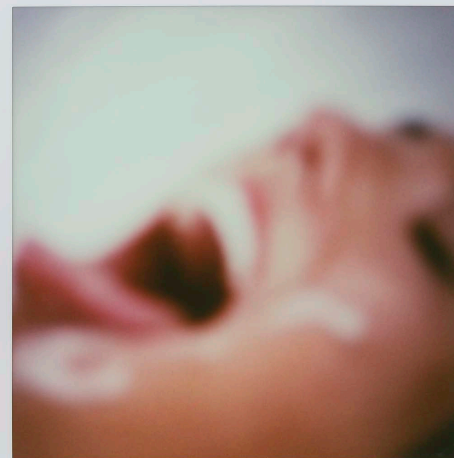
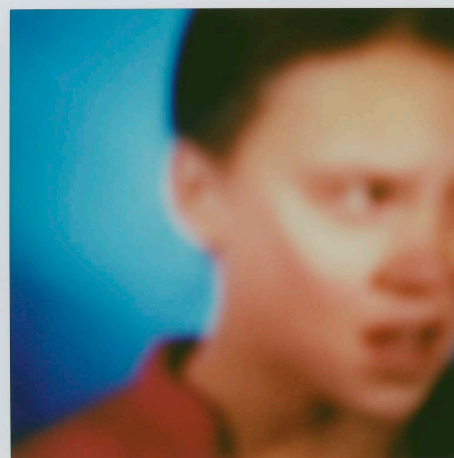
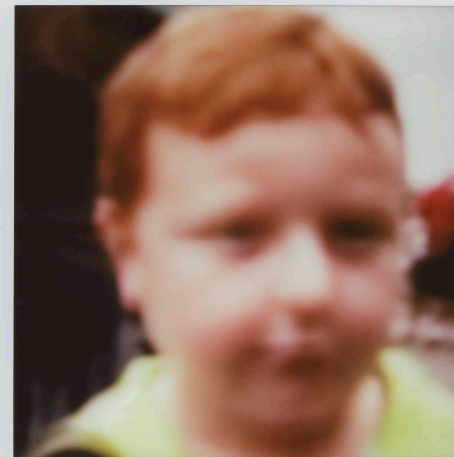
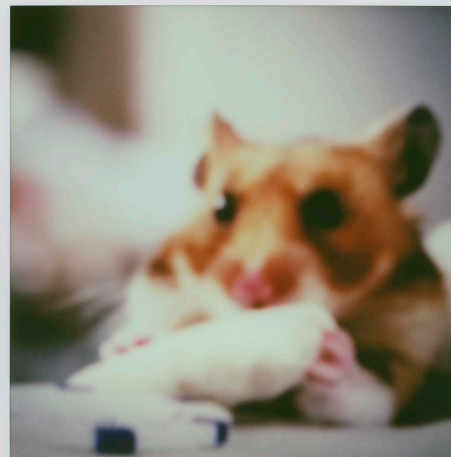
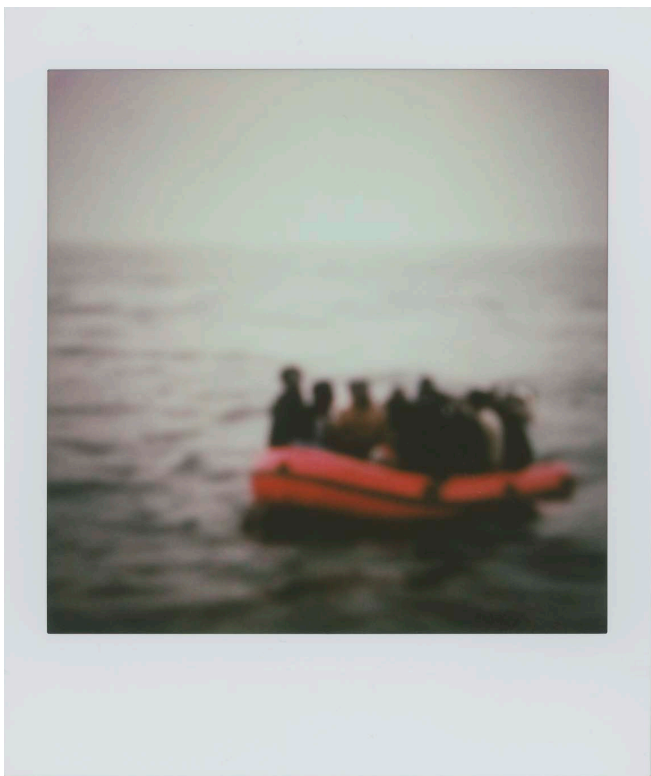
this is a recipe  
for mother  
holy mary  
apple cider  
mother of  
vinegar  
as god  
as virgin  
desensitised  
to tree

as hyperobject  
ex machina  
virginiae (lullay my licking)  
we were first  
introduced  
at night  
deus  
ex maria









## WHEN SPEAKING TO SOMEONE ON THE NATURE OF PANDEMIC I SAY

I haven't seen you for months. Not since you started calling your sourdough starter Susie & leaving your hair to grow. I wonder aloud if this is really your #bestself and if lockdown has allowed you to cultivate your latent eccentricities. Your monologues are longer and the space between us on Zoom is shorter but the three second delay belies the time difference. The gulls that circle your caravan and the view of rocky outcrop down to the Voe remind me that you are far away. It's all swallows here, swallows, willow tits, martens and ash dieback. You ask me which William Morris print best adorns your face without waiting for a reply. You show me a picture of William Morris on your phone, his beard at just that right length. You call him cuddly #cuddlysocialism. The algorithm tells us that a chord is changing in John Cage's six hundred and thirty-nine-year long piece & Donald Trump is nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize; both discordant happenings...

You wonder whether Susie needs feeding today. I ask you if you've spoken to your mother recently. You wish it was possible to hear the end of Cage's composition. I remind you that time is not the clock. You pause to consider how you might experience time away from watching the dancing hands move across the hour. You imagine those hands to be elegantly pronounced like Mirce Cunningham's. I tell you that you can easily hold 639 years in your head while you play the whole thing through.

you say, I think I'll feed Susie now.

## SOME LATE-NIGHT THOUGHTS ON THE YOUTUBE COMMENTS FOR JOHN CAGE'S 639-YEAR COMPOSITION'S CHORD CHANGE, AT THE SAINT BURCHARDI CHURCH IN THE CITY OF HALBERSTADT

12TH SEPTEMBER 2020

*'Performance occurs over a time which will not be repeated. It can be performed again, but this repetition itself marks it as "different." The document of a performance then is only a spur to memory, an encouragement of memory to become present.'*

– Peggy Phelan

I watch a YouTube video of the changing of a chord. While I wait for them to change the organ's pipes, I am aware of a man desperately trying to catch the moment on his phone.

The YouTube comments and my responses run thus:



**Itachi Uchiha, 7th September 2020**

In 2640 everyone will realise it's just the Zelda theme



250



*I had to further search the terms of your popular reference & now it's 5.22 in the morning and I'm watching a woman dressed as an elf playing a violin medley in a wood, in the snow, sometimes riding a horse, sometimes fiddling by a waterfall.*

*In 2640 people will be sad that it's over. They'll re-watch it on YouTube in real time.*



**Mr. E. Shoppa, 10th September 2020**

Yuck, that "chord" is kinda dissonant



1



**Matthew, 11th September 2020**

Some of us enjoy and contemplate dissonance

DissOnant: to lack  
harmonious relations  
with the chords that be  
revelations  
the chordal structure  
is an oppression  
sealed boxes

Read Richard Wagner's musical thesis  
& come to false conclusions  
about conclusions  
translating notes into English  
is largely futile

you'll rifle through  
only to find  
one page missing

drink lemonade, run riot, weep inconsolably at the beauty of a broken egg

don't let anyone try to fix it for you



**June, 9th September 2020**

WHAT IF – we're all living at hyper speed, and this piece is actually for the aliens living in slow speed to hear at a normal pace and know that there's a thing called music, on earth, and at the end of this piece, they will rewind, maybe listen again (or not), and make their way to earth.

👍 14



I think the being you are describing is Kurt Vonnegut's Tralfamadorian. I've not come across any other being that can control time as you've described.

**Tralfamadorians** have the ability to see in four dimensions by which I mean they have already listened to, are listening to and will always be listening to John Cage's 639 year piece and this chord change has happened, will happen and always will be happening. The

Tralfamadorian listening to the chord will be simultaneously unblocking the drains as well as having unblocked them, also achieving, leaving and achieved any other household chores that need doing in the time that is always passing and persistently standing still. John Cage's new chord strikes and Wagner's Tristan und Isolde is still seeking, has sought and will be seeking resolution for the rest of the poem. Let's hope Tralfamadorians like dissonance.

Pls now google The Carpenters' Calling Occupants.

& then think of yourself as meat or as they may affectionately consider you and all our kind, flesh monkey. & by 'they' I don't mean to say that The Carpenters consider you meat.

Pls now Google 'language is largely meaningless'.

Pls now Google Thames TV conversation on the two philosophies of Wittgenstein.



**Jason Chafee, 10th September 2020**

Imagine being the conductor

👍 1



When I was ten, I did this regularly. My dad would set up Tristan und Isolde on the record player and I would put on my most serious face and wave my arms about in time with the music. Like eurhythmy prestissimo; anthroposophy gone wild. Rudolph Steiner would be proud. The Nazis burnt Steiner's books because he liked to let children imagine 'being the conductor'. Also, because anthroposophy refused to break contact with foreign free masons, Jews and pacifists. If the Nazis didn't burn your books, then you must have been doing something wrong. Imagine being the conductor of the Bebelplatz bonfire. I digress. Wagner wasn't a Nazi, but he did blame Jewish composers for his lack of early success prompting him to write a particularly spiteful essay called 'Jewishness in Music'. A landmark in Nazi literary taste, a watershed in antisemitic writing.

Imagine being the book they left on the shelf.

Imagine being a conductor while the opera house is burning.



**Anna, 11th September 2020**

Nobody rly likes opera anyway

👍 24

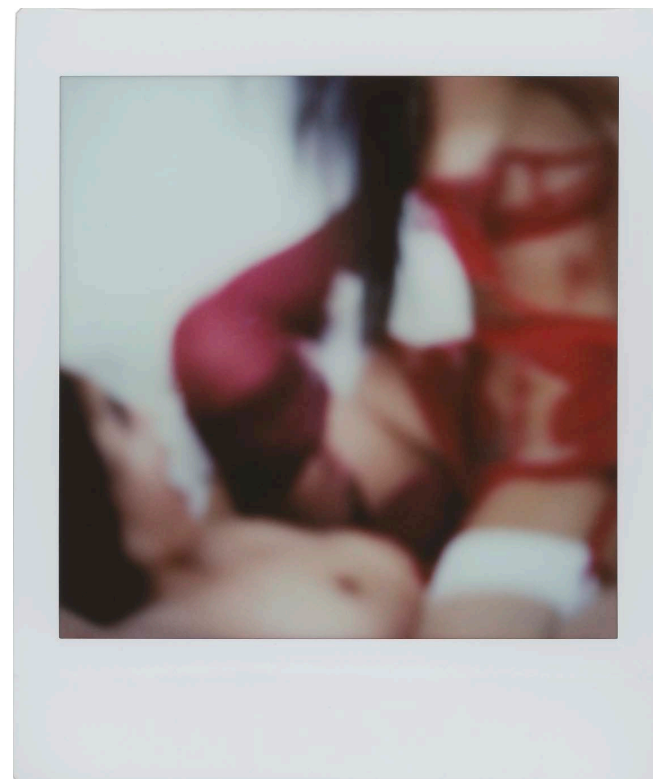
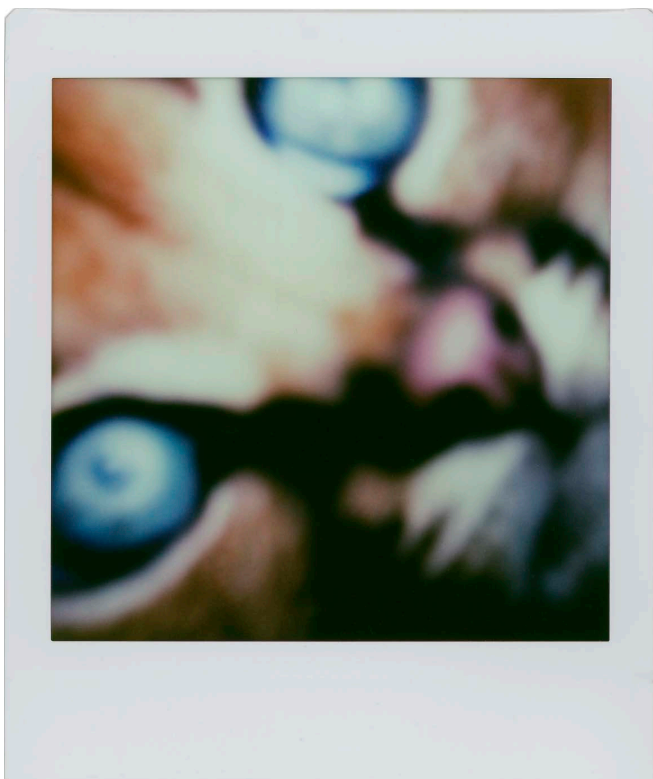


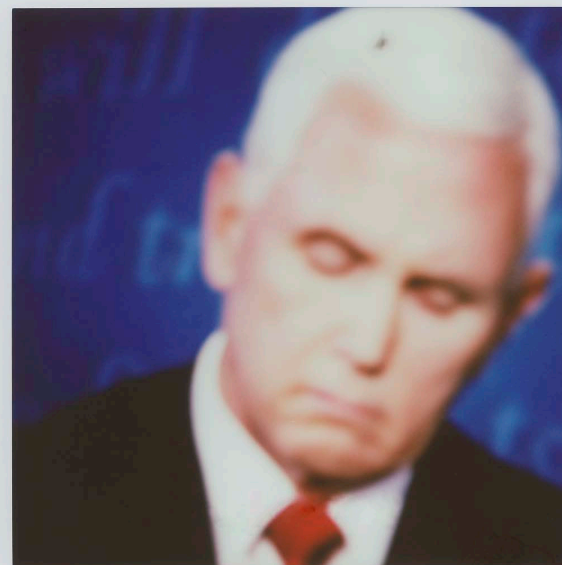
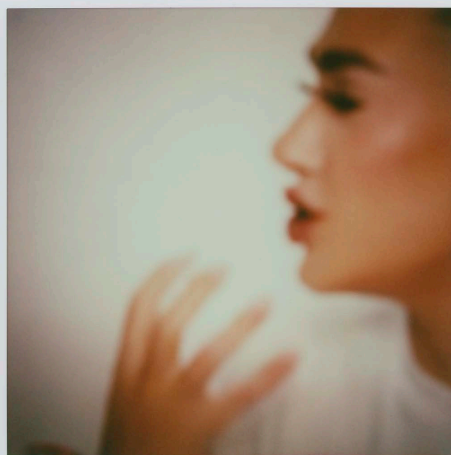
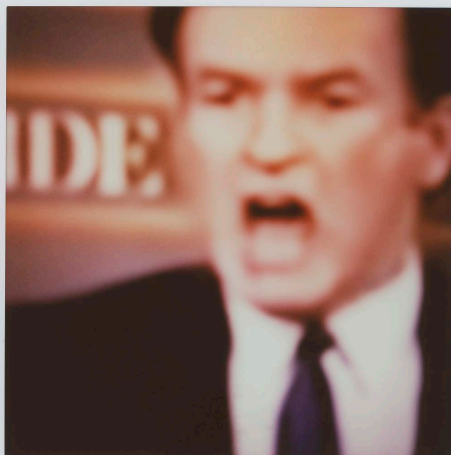
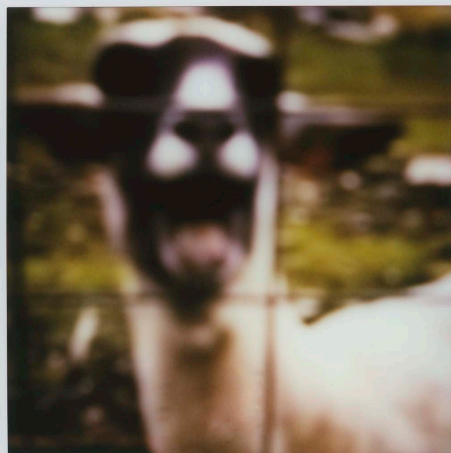
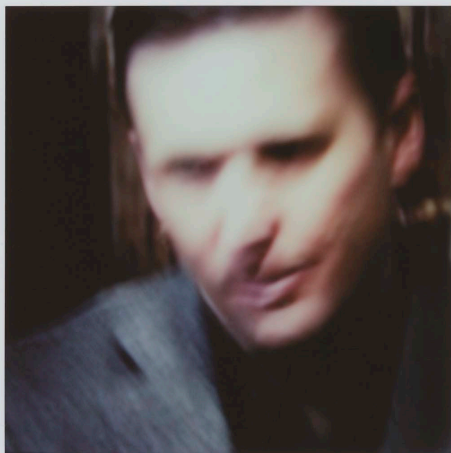
*It seems a shame to me now, as I imagine being a conductor, in my sixtieth year, that the Tristan chord should be dogged by this history. Here I am on the bus beating the rhythm of the leitmotif into an adjacent buggy. Oh boomer. Nobody really likes opera anyway. Nobody really. The chord should never come together. The chord never comes together. Don't let the chord come together. We'll never get out if you let the chord come together.*

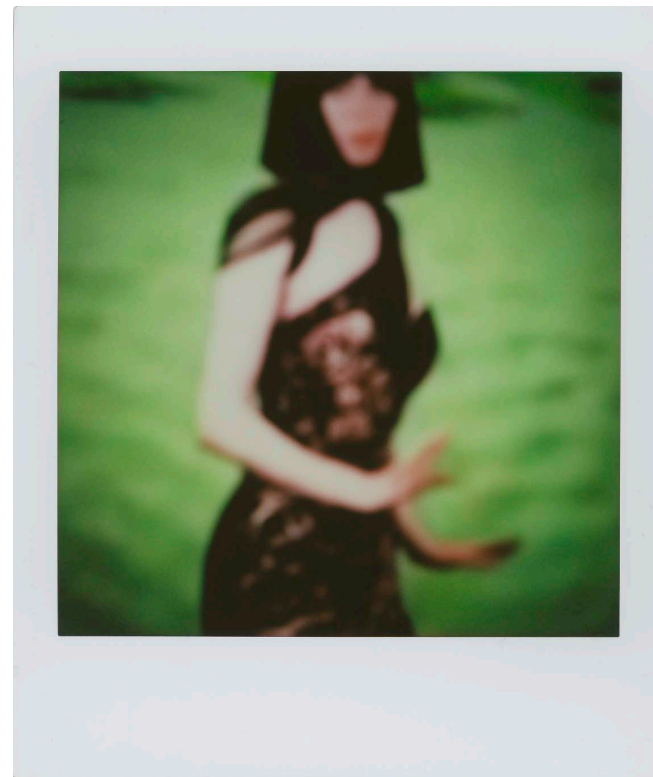
*All these years later, we collect driftwood for the garden.*













## SUBSTITUTABLE SINGULARITY

If only I had time to sit down

and read Derrida's *The Animal That I Am*  
my whole being would be glorified in the moment  
I step from the shower naked and find the dog  
touching himself. Hang on, where in *The Animal That I Am*  
does Derrida mention taking a shower? I think  
it's possible that I imagined it. I think it's possible  
I've spent the entire seminar imagining Derrida  
trying to find the soap in the bath  
Or perhaps everyone leaving the meeting  
is a response to this strange and unsettling series of thoughts.

– Hang on, I thought Derrida was taking a shower.

He's ready for the world! I imagine the drawing back of the curtain –  
Derrida in his shower cap – as an important dramatic act of revelation that  
aids the progression of the story of Derrida and the amorous dog, who for  
the purposes of this story, we'll call Alison.

– I'm pretty sure we started with a cat.

– A cat called, Alison? Are you mad?

On Sundays, Derrida likes to stay in his PJs and watch videos of Cats  
performing ridiculous and exciting stunts. This is instead of taking a  
shower and performing his usual existential commentary on cats and  
amorous dogs – weekday activities that he had to unwind from – he  
needed a break from the reminder that he is part of the spectacle that  
we call Cat and cannot escape from even when the suds are high and the  
loofah too short.

– I'm glad we're back to cats but why is he in the bath?

– I'm not sure he was ever in the shower in the first place.

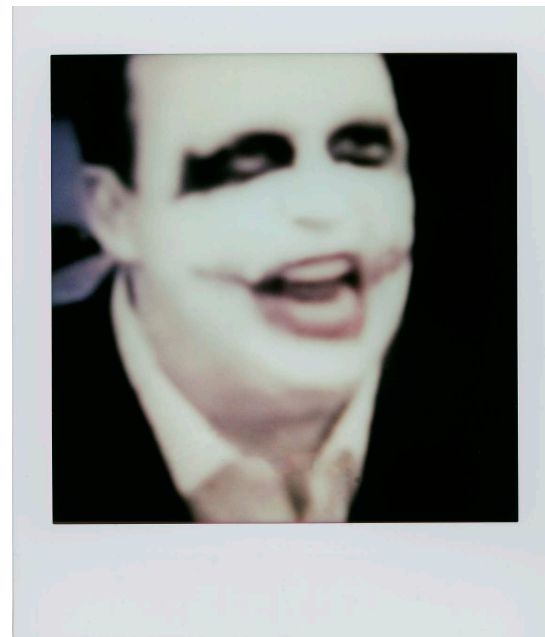
## A CAT IN A NIGHTGOWN IS ALWAYS FUNNY, A DERRIDA IN A NIGHTGOWN IS SOMETIMES FUNNY

for Derrida & his cat

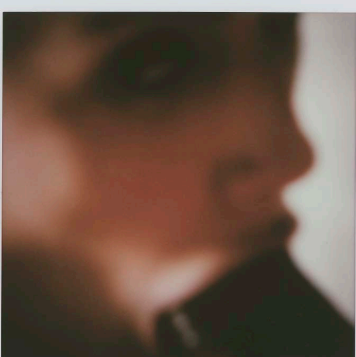
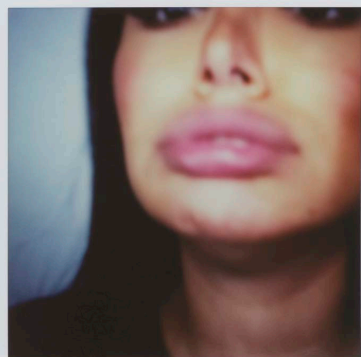
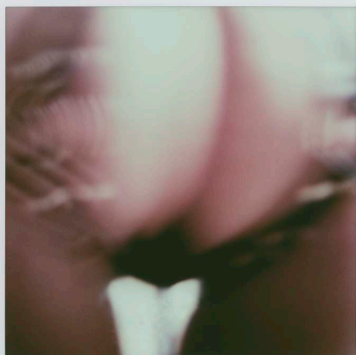
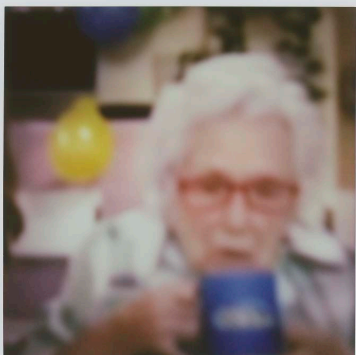
*I must make it clear from the start that the cat I am talking about is a real cat  
sorry I got caught up in the moment the cat I am talking about does not belong  
when I'm upset, I eat when I'm happy, I eat when I see myself naked under  
the gaze of the cat don't just stand there, pass me the rubber ducky! what  
should I think of this sentence? wait, wait, pilgrim! the word 'love' either as a  
verb or a noun would be destroyed in front of you my mother was a saint! I could  
take anyone in this cinema plus psychoanalysis equals the Science of... are you  
listening witch? a little cat, this cat I am talking about, which is also female,  
o, it took all my self-control not to eat her I would like to choose words that  
are, to begin with, naked, let me tell you how I went from man to cat in one  
dumb moment it follows itself; it follows itself cats are a tad more political I  
have trouble repressing a reflex dictated by immodesty what do you have to do  
around here to get something dead? I let speak or let pass a little hedgehog, a  
suckling hedgehog as an artist I'm sensitive about these things for thinking,  
concerning the animal, if there is such a thing, derives from poetry unless you  
happen to be in the Bermuda Triangle a certain animal nude before the other  
animal woof woof, I mean, meow meow the gaze of a seer, a visionary, or extra  
lucid blind person I'm invisible and you can't catch me I must, once more, return  
to the malaise of this scene curse my sarcastic nature one thought that keeps me  
spellbound: dress myself even a little trust me, all cat's talk, do you believe me?  
I run out of the room as if I were chasing myself locked out without his clothes,  
brain the size of a marble & speak of the beasts of the apocalypse I'm a cat, I'm  
curious, so kill me One cannot say: 'Here are our monsters,' without turning the  
monsters into pets it's the 90s, nobody eats mortals anymore one's sex exposed,  
stark naked that's deep, daddy o!*

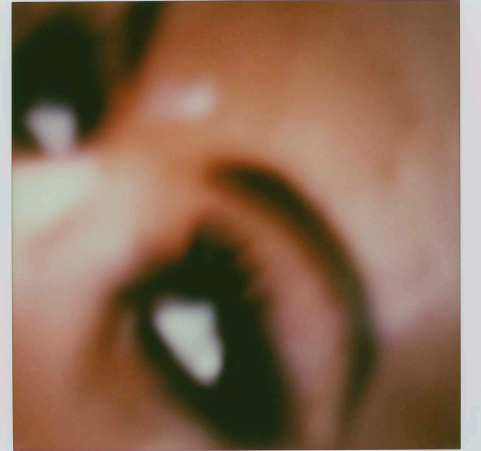
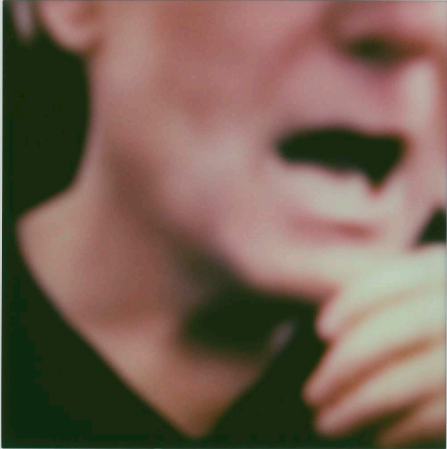
\*

[Source Material: Italicised lines are from Derrida's essay 'The Animal That  
Therefore I Am', 'Some Statements and Truisms about Neologisms, Newisms,  
Postisms, Parasitisms, and other small Seismisms' & 'Writing and Difference'.  
Non-italicised lines are quotes spoken by Salem, the talking cat, in the 90s TV  
series *Sabrina the Teenage Witch*.]











ON LISTENING FOR GHOSTS AT THE BEDROOM DOOR

*a socialist lullaby*

If only I had time to read. The luxury of philosophy, time gently loosening from the strictures of school. As if one day, post-university, time un-binds itself completely. Unfortunately, in the second year we read Marx. Our bodies becalmed, become ghosts. Our spirits exorcised from the machine but still bound to its being...

When little, I listen to the actor Timothy West read *Animal Farm* on cassette as I fall asleep; the tape spooling noisily through its plastic case. A lullaby from my socialist parents. M – C – M’.

*Hushaby hushaby.  
Look for yourself at dusk,  
behind the shower curtain,  
beyond the chord, the broken  
chord. Hushaby hushaby*

*hush shh.*

*Purple ink  
dipped in twilight a burning  
(or burnt) orange.*

No matter that I shudder

with terror in the shadow of the windmill, men in flat caps lean on fences, waiting, sleeping, waking; spectres, world leaders at the field margins. & every night I weep for Boxer, his humanity & his betrayal of the people for the spectacle of the icon.

Now Google ‘Alexey Stakhanov, formerly known as Andrei’.  
Now Google ‘the four-day week’. Now Google ‘Cold War Chess Sets’.  
Now find a WikiHow on how to ‘fold yourself into a box marked ‘safe’.

Now relax.

## INSTAGRAM & THE ART OF OBJECT-ORIENTED RITUAL

phenomenology is an indulgence  
a philosopher moving house  
the poetry of being is a moving house

of sorts, sorting out the house begins  
as *#pronkstillleven* *#stilllife* w/ altar boy  
smoke rising from the vestry

place a copy of Bachelard's *Poetics of Space*  
under a pillow and listen to the rain

*#culturalcapital*  
*#fortherainitraineth*

the rain is raining & the sea is falling  
from the sky & we're listening to the rain fall through  
the predator's hole, a scallop shell that reveals a violent  
future

place a copy of Rousseau's *Reveries of A Solitary Walker*  
in the fridge & take a minute to cool down

*#simplelife* *#nosocks*  
*#fortherainitraineth everyday*

apple seeds germinate after a cold snap  
place three apple seeds in the fridge and wait for  
transformation a retelling of the fall

yes, says the Serpent, cut the flesh from the apple  
taken straight from the fridge, cold against the teeth

*#withaheyhothewindandtherain*

place a copy of Guy de Bord's *Society of the Spectacle*  
in your child's lunchbox  
next to the yoghurt & the Salt&Shake

Read the coffee grounds & post images of Baba Yaga  
moving house w/ her Matroiyska dolls  
cored like apples or split like peaches  
w/ their little stones

Place the vinyl of Lesley Gore's *You Don't Own Me* in  
the airing cupboard  
next to the vacuum cleaner or coal scuttle  
Was it all hot air? You and me?

*#fortherainitrainetheveryday*

Rain, rain, rain against the commodification  
of the pastoral/ the anti-pastoral  
the #cottagecore / the #anticottagecore  
life is all #silverwareinacupboard  
until you find out

