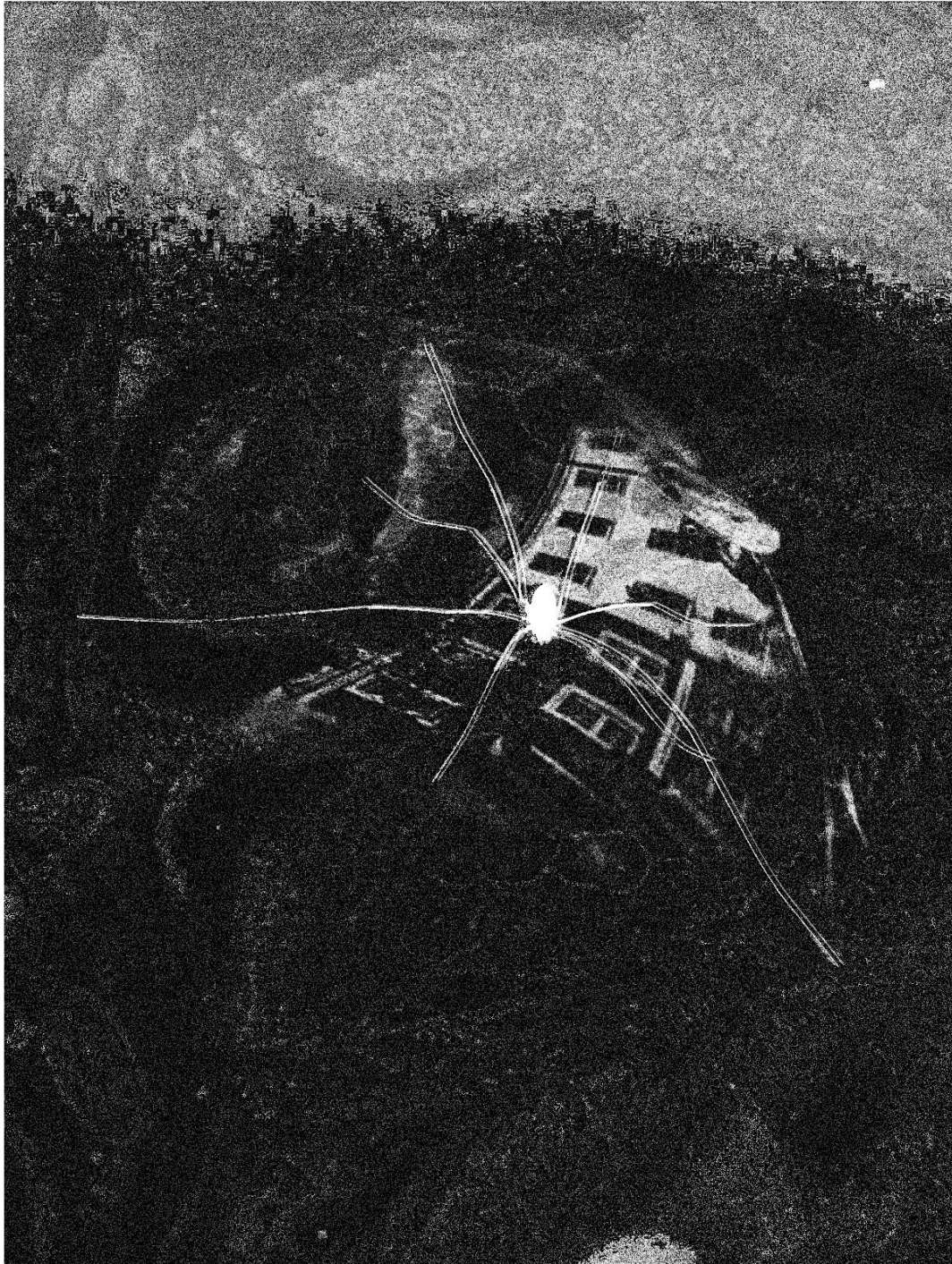


Gyllasynta

Q. A. Zanjani



Foreword

I'll actually be brief this time. There's only so much yap that one can tolerate. Here's a very hastily compiled collection of some prose writings. I had meant to write a trilogy in the vein of the first text, but decided against for reasons that I will explain now.

These are two brief experiments in a style I've been calling *Introspective Journalism*. Think of them as diary entries, but with the intention of being read. The entire idea is to explore ideas through the passage of the paper; by not setting out with an immediate plan or resolution, the reader and author are placed on even footing. The intention was that this lack of framing or structure would allow for greater authenticity and honesty. I am abandoning the effort because I fear that it is too indulgent in execution, whereas I was hoping it would yield something more essential.

That said, I still think these texts have some value. I will confess that I am proud of some of the writing, even if much the content and genre falls short of what I had hoped. The first is a document on synaesthesia, and the loss of that faculty. The second is a kind of polemic on art and artifice, which is likely the better piece of writing overall.

I said I would keep this brief, but have not been able to do so. Consider these failed experiments, but hopefully interesting ones. Enjoy, or don't.

n.b. the collection name is a pretty word I saw in a dream. I couldn't define it, but it means something to me.

Purple In Seven

A little text about texture.

When I say purple, I do not, of course, mean to say purple. I long for a string of words that describe the situation; I once naively believed that by mashing together syllables, like the great tormentors of the retail floor, I could conjure a single perfect phrase, an exact articulation of what I mean by purple in seven. But – and hence the writing of this abstruse little text – I cannot. Perhaps more valuable – I’ve come to understand that such a grotesque would be an insult to this figment, whose richness has become essentially my sole respite.

Great tormentors? Those endowed with the ability to understand – in finer terms than we can – the language in which letters and sounds speak to each other. To hear their work is as to peer through the crack in the wall, to catch a glimpse of the above (and yet never to pass through it). It is not unreasonable to see this as a microcosm of the greater human condition – to be intelligent enough to ask the questions but fall short of the answers. It is *also* not unreasonable to lust after them.

All writing is writhing – both on the page and as a conscious act. Beyond the merely practical, the act of transcription is a vile exercise, the closest thing we have to a soul-killer, and yet the closest thing we have to a soul-cure. I will not engage with pharmakon because as far as I’m concerned, I’m either too dumb to understand it or it’s an ideologue of horseshit. But it shall suffice to say that language is one of those vitals that happens to be both liberator and yoke.

Orwell once wrote, in an essay I can’t pretend to have read thoroughly, of *purple* prose. Directionless, ornamented, charged with aesthetic intentions and little else. Thereafter, he writes of graduating to political work. But to engage in any politics, you must first believe in something.

Which is not so easy. And forgive me – I won’t try any longer to be Maggie Nelson, because there already is a Maggie Nelson, and her name is Maggie Nelson. But I’ll be damned if *Bluets* didn’t give me a reason, much *Pale Fire* before, to put this to paper. This coffee shop smells of linoleum and arthritis, as did St. John’s.

I worked, for a passage of a few months, in a home for the demented. I found there the answer to most of my questions. I had hoped, never prayed, for some great and terrible revelation of the final immense; I only found the years curling back on themselves, backs arching, falling from two feet onto four, and crawling into the grave-womb. None of us were meant to live this long. It is arguably suboptimal.

To smell that place is to smell undeath. No rattles, no great exhalations, and no rot – these are the tones of the departed. Instead – urine, stale sheets, the hanging mist of *waiting* seeping into your clothes. Pre-scrambled eggs for post-scrambled minds, four times a week. Most of all, a man not compromised – fully sound – alone there among the forgotten.

We used to speak sometimes. He was kind in the face of death, but I do not know if he was a good man. Which isn’t to suggest that he wasn’t – it’s simply that it’s all too easy to find grace in meekness, which is the product of a weak flame rather than clean oil. Who isn’t a

martyr on the deathbed? When he left, it rang in my ears for a week – like the imprint of a shadow of a something, behind an “invisible jacket of burn”, something just out of reach.

I like to pat myself on the back and call these things *textures*, relics of association without specificity. I don’t know whether they are real, or a masturbatory coinage. I once tried to describe them to someone as “vectors of thought”, and was probably not too far off. *Textures* – like feelings, but without the emotional charge. A second-differential type situation. I look to maths to describe what I cannot understand, likely because I don’t understand maths.

This coffee shop that I’m sitting in – yes, I sit and write in coffee shops, but what else is there to do? – has a truly noxious vibe. Everything is hued in baby-shit yellow, the vague tint of jaundice and cholera, a fine miasma that resonates in my bones. The barista is beautiful, and violently uncanny. I feel like I am in a microwave. I taste the stench of death.

(n.b. this is not about the gower st. Dillon’s. they’re cool).

There is, however, respite. The uncanny barista is alight, and the staleness is discretised by French-American chromatics, postwar stuff – less new orleans, more flutes and schizoaffective harmony. It’s not bad. I wish I could say that this gets me closer to purple in seven, but it does not.

But I suppose it could. If yellow is the colour of death, it is necessary to heed the complement. In the primordial bask of memory – those first few years of reconstructions, pasted images and VHS engrams – I cannot pretend to remember anything earlier than the age of perhaps three. (Save, of course, for the melodies of the womb, which somehow emerge in music without our realising). It is hard to attribute anything – the brain is a self-fracturing instrument, and will repair and maim as it may to rationalise the self-destructive flavours of the present. But what I *do* feel, with infinite conviction, is that the background of my dreams was always purple.

I don’t dream any more. They died – or at least, were severed – with someone else. I vastly preferred that person, but wouldn’t expose him to the violence of these greys even if I *could* find him.

Not to get too dramatic, or too heavy – although the relationship between drama and *heavynesse* is something I never quite set to joint – but there are things worse than death. (Precluding the existence of a hell, of course). When I was worse, I found myself longing for bridges, in pursuit of a kind of liminal space between the act of living and the act of dying – somewhere that felt more balanced, more *right*, at the time. It’s hard, sometimes, to believe that love for life isn’t an evolutionary delusion, because it is.

Those bridges were literal, but this one is not. What is worse than death? It must be understood for a moment that *death*, to the living human, is not the same as death to the dead. Death is nothing to the dead, like everything else. Conversely, it is *everything* to the living being. But as a mere idea, it doesn’t catalyse pain – at least, to those accustomed to its presence. (Some might argue that it brings comfort. If I were more honest I would too).

In those hours of waiting, I took to thinking about that which is worse than life or death, with which I had become intimately familiar. The sensation of *null* – of emptiness, of conscious unbeing, of shock extruded over months or years – the total absence that, once awake, leaves a jacket of burn worse than any death-flirtation that I have yet known. The inability to feel the world around you – to have the translucent gloves and glasses forced upon you, to be *separated*, to hear the children and smell the roses and not be able to *feel* either, is what drives me closest to the water.

I have not lived with, and cannot imagine, the kind of pain that would induce someone to *voluntarily* enter this state through love of drugs or sex. I am more inclined to the red of trying to gain sensation, as if the heart were a phantom limb.

I'm trying quite hard here. I will admit that I am struggling to express what I mean. It'd be a lot easier if I just told you in a series of bullet points and neologisms, but then you wouldn't feel it, and if you don't feel it you won't quite understand.

2.

I can't quite tell what synaesthesia is. Or rather, if I've never had it, or if it matters. Like so many other things, it seems to be a pretty miswiring of the brain – most art is, I would argue. It's easy to know *what* it is – to bandy around the platitudes of 'smelling colours' and 'seeing sounds'. It is much harder to examine it within yourself, and to know how texture plays into this.

It is harder to do both of these things when you know that you have had and have lost it.

My taste-sight vanished with my dreams at sixteen. In the fog and arrhythmia of that time, those vagrant gradients in my brain congealed and ground to a halt, where it seems they've calcified. I have it no longer – that faculty for generation, the ability to read the world like a cipher, to find connections between the random and apprehend the 'divine' therein. With age, mystery diminishes – I now realise that these connections between the disparate were merely quirks of thought, rather than secret truths – but that was no hindrance to a child's mind. With age, too, comes the perspective to realise that a personal read upon the world is more valuable than ever, irrespective of its truthfulness.

It is much too easy to be ungrateful for what you have always had. My grandmother, who I never met, has had her soul imparted to me on the constant axiom:

"accidents only happen once".

A limb for the amputee, freedom for the lifer, time for the dying, unbeing for the undead; there is no greater desire than what we have for what we have lost. My existence, short of any of these great ails (bar the latter, and perhaps the penultimate – there's always a lump) is one defined by the loss of this faculty. I find an abstraction of it in music – by the fusion of information (lyrics) and sensation (music), *texture* is approximated in an external, transmissible sense. It is not perfect, but also yields the opportunity for artifice, which is nice. But we are getting closer to the answer to this question, and I feel that you are not yet sufficiently inoculated with the sensation I am talking about.

3.

Picture an empty void. (Difficult, I'm aware). Populate it with a thickness – a discernible quality to the air, a kind of viscosity, like a staleness without being unpleasant, the feeling of airport oxygen without the claustrophobia. Give this thickness grain, a touch of desaturation, and a starchy quality, bearing in mind that it is still air. Now we have an infinite veil, imbued with the constant sensation of “passing through”, without any proximity to an end or beginning. Imagine this empty void is infinite, but self-contained, as though it exists fully but can only be perceived in one sensory medium – endless, but compartmentalised in one quadrant of the brain, like the olfactory world.

Now, flood it with colour, and a smokiness. For my sake, let it be a purple, rich in principle, but desaturated as aforesaid. There is no source of light – posit that every grain is equally lucent, and simply perceived for what it is. After all, this space is a product of the mind, and not bound by natural law. This purple is one not dissimilar to the cover of Mazzy Star's *So Tonight that I May See*, but with flushes of darkness and the implication of currents, three-dimensional depth, and the aforesaid haziness.

We now have a passable description of *purple*. Understand that this is not a mind's-eye construction, but a sensation, taking place in the same part of the brain as brushing hands with someone beautiful or being overstimulated. This is the part of the construction that has been with me for the longest. It resonates the way a heart should beat.

4.

I was walking past a hedgerow, bounded by prewar railing. My feet were opposed by an especially smooth pavement, and the sun dominated a purely cloudless sky. I am not sure quite when or where I was – it could have been regent's park, but it could just as easily have been a dream – although I am aware that it occurred later than my apprehension of the purple feeling. There is something encoded in the metadata of this memory, false or not, that suggests adolescence. It will be useful in a second.

I have always loved the number *seven*, and am not sure why. It has been my favourite number and superstitious vice since before I can remember; it was the only number I could be convinced to learn the times table of; it is the number of chapters in this text, and encoded in every aspect of my thinking, like the golden spiral to a seashell. I am not sure why. I have my theories – the symmetry, the enclosure of “eve”, the hinge around that central V (another friend) – but all I am sure of is a certain possessive allure. (It seems, as I have come to find in scripture, that I am not alone among its subjects).

That moment, in that maybe-false street, was when I became aware of a relationship between the truth of this number – the *form*, the *idea*, the *imprint* of it, as opposed to its visual representation – and that ancient purple. I was not quite sure how or why, but I was seized upon as if by lightning – and being still possessed of my tendency to apprehend the divine in anything unusual, I consecrated and consigned it to a small vault at the core of my being. (Yes, exactly like in *Inception*).

I was not sure what the connection was. I was not sure, even, whether they were engaged in the same part of the brain. Looking backwards, I see the clear imprint of neuronal miswiring, like the relic of veins bruising through the skin – but I still cannot give up my reverence of it.

5.

I agonised, here, for the space of a few years. I had always been content with my purple, seeing it as a unit, monadic. But being confronted with a seven, with a second piece, implied the existence of a puzzle; and, believing erroneously as young people are wont to do, I considered it imperative to find a solution, and a salve in kind. I tried, for many years, to visualise a shape with only two vertices, perhaps unwittingly inspired by this longing for a resolution; as you can imagine, I failed, time and time again. There is no greater frustration than being unable to see beyond three dimensions – again, I envy mathematicians.

It was in the passage of time that I started to find my answer. All things are groove – change over time is an axis of state in itself. Note too that irresolution is remarkably close to infinity. To close a moment evenly, say in four, is to create a natural point of severance; but to distort the meter is to imply a resolution in the future. To suggest the eternal protraction of this is to suggest eternity itself – infinities, too, lose discretion, and yield singularity.

The duality – of a separate *seven* and a *purple*, somehow inextricable – tortured me. I cannot say where I was where the two began to coalesce, but I am sure of why. Somebody once said that “art decorates space as music decorates time” – the visual artists like to claim that it was Basquiat, while the musicians credit it to Zappa. In either case, I am of the opinion that it is the single greatest affixion of words ever recorded.

There is, in the music I have consumed, a frayed backbeat, corroded, and yet not dissolute. The band I play with (The Marianne Collective, shamelessly plugged here) rarely strays *too* far from temporal orthodoxy in our output; but coded within the thrum of absent-minded head-bobbing and rogue footsteps was the imprint of an off-groove that we can never seem to shake.

I am not sure when this rationalised into the unit described in this paper. What I am acutely aware of, however, is the perfection and congruence of how it *feels*. The purple space, not existing as a frozen image, but as a *groove*, a rhythm, extruded through time – both an infinity, and a singular monomer. Hence, the clunky ascription *in seven*, as in, $7/8$ (place your favourite song of this nature here). The feeling of that momentary pre-chorus riff in *Fresh Tendrils*, strung out forever. To imagine a space, given a bounding (and hence a location) in time, is to construct a moment – moments, like memories, are discrete from without and can be lived in forever.

6.

And what of it? Who cares? Notwithstanding the precedent suspension of disbelief that it took to write this – the acceptance that it will not be read, allowing me to begin – I will not defer to deprecation. I care greatly about this feeling, and consider it equally valuable to my other senses, even *if* it is the coinage of self-adulation. Because regardless of whether it is the

result of miswiring, the unconscious creation of a mind that seeks a reason to be proud of itself, or a natural, unadulterated fragment of thought, it has proven, time and time again, to exhibit use as a sense for art. *Not* for quality – there can be no such thing in objective terms – but for *resonance*. In the gross contusion that is an airlocked mind, especially one narrowed as mine is, emotional resonances are unfamiliar; instead of simply being felt, they rumble in a chthonic chamber somewhere beneath the diaphragm and cause non-specific discomfort. Compromised too, then, are the more beautiful refractions of emotion. I long to be able to feel directly when confronted with great art, as I used to, and as it seems most people do. And while I am typically (though not always) unable to feel music or art the way I *should*, I can always feel the purple starting to beat, to thrum, as in raising your eyes at the passing of someone you might want to know. It is like a guide, too; when I write, I can tell by the intensity of the burn whether it is the work of the hand or of the heart. Though neither guarantee quality, or relevance, it is nice to know that I can still feel, even if only indirectly.

7.

So why write this? It will not take an overwhelming feat of honesty to admit that I feel I am writing this for validation. But perhaps I am being cynical, and shooting myself down before an imagined other person gets the chance. I am writing this to exercise my understanding on the topic, and to exorcise the topic itself from my mind. I am writing this because I simply wanted to write, and it appeared to be the natural subject for a first publication. But most of all – and I feel I am escaping the pretension of the last few lines, and coming into something I actually believe – I wanted to write this to cast to paper and hence *realise* something that has always existed as peripheral. To that end – I am writing to find whether other people understand. I am not well-read, but in my search, I find allusions – clouds of unknowing, *bluets*, moments in the *Prelude* that seem to accord – but never a fully-fleshed description of what I mean. I see resonances in the authors I attach to, who seem to be able to exercise a similar faculty with absolute control, but I have never yet found any admission of such a thing. Hendrix had a haze, which is about as close as it gets. I want to *know*, by knowing of others, whether my purple is real.

In the great wild of being, I hope there are those who have full mastery of such a thing. In my meanwhile, it floats among the amniotic detritus of unthought.

Tethys Rope-child

On art and artifice

It may be from a distance, but I am sure. There is a varnish on her head. Three rows down, with a posture and an estat carved in rose gold. Like a fine marble, toiling in a child's palm, tortured by the striations and ravages of a place beyond the couch, left behind and forgotten. They moved out twelve years later, in that warfare of plastering and breeze – and, left discarded, your singular truth found its place in my recess.

Hers is indissimilar. You were blue, imitation ultramarine, streaked with inverse clarities in white – like congealed cloud, made milk in the cabin chamber. The direct opposite; auburn and deep black, false autumn, an approximation of *brunette*, a lie. And the crux – a perfect shine, and lack of texture.

Again, like a marble.

In a green sweatshirt, inoffensive; a clerical thriller; short-weave hair, no sharpnesses save for a stubbling. For it is known that we long to be *appeased*, *satiated*, above being *awed*. Castigations of libraries – *you only get what you ask for*, so you tell me. Forgetting her name, a kind of paralysis. To his right – wide where he is thin, glassed where he is rude, a white, roundhead composition, and a criminally open shirt – hands clasped, eyes wide, screaming in vagrant currents of passion. I would that I did not envy you. Your ignorance is the object of my desire.

There is an undertow beneath the skin. Somewhere in the parallel of blue stringing down your inner arm, I am grieving. I sit among dozens; they glitter. *Cri de Coeur*, *apasu*; elocutory violences in searing colour, supernoval vibrances, ulceration and pain. Diaphragmatic crimes '*far beyond the pale*', projected with photonic accuracy into my yielding cochlea, which, buckling, curls its palms out to the sky and prays for rain.

And the rain does come. The cessation of the interminable – a meeting to get to – the shuffling out of dozens, and escape, freedom from the fluorescent hiss ringing hostage beneath your ribcage, from the white noise screaming in your eyes. Now you are your own two feet, beating at one-hundred-and-forty bpm down the hall; eye contact with her, the *complete* searing off of your retina, eye contact with something indeterminate, one-hundred-and-sixty bpm, relative safety, and solitude, or loneliness, whichever comes to mind first.

And now I sit, writing, putting off what I *should* be doing, which also happens to be writing. This text, however, affords me an emetic convenience, while the other does not. This text, also, yields an opportunity for harmless self-destruction, a pleasurable necessity. And so – what? Why the exposition? Or rather, what arbitrarily high-brow topic will I expound upon, stringing along fragments of self-deprecation to create the illusion of character, and creating a *reason*, an 'intellectualism', that allows me to publish the prior hagiograph without the balls required to actually believe in my writing?

I was staring at a mirror, scanning for lesions, when I made the cardinal mistake of exhaling. In doing so, I suspired life into the creature staring back at me; it started, with opposed animation, suspended in the downward motion of my grimace; it looked back. It did not speak to me, but said, in a look, all that it needed to. *Your primacy is false. You are the mirror.*

Besides totally obliterating any pretensions that I had toward sleeping that night, this apparition could not have been better timed, for the mirror is the entire exercise of this second text.

Art; pretence; personality; image; impostor syndrome; the Russian-doll logism of self; there are many, many things that trouble me, but few more than this question: are all artists narcissists? And take care to understand that I am not scraping that phrase from the DSM, nor from the annals of misdirected modern usage, but instead from the colloquial contemporary – a kind of egomania, desire for validation, a vacuous self-love. For what else compels someone to take such great pains in *publishing* their work, and forcing it upon audiences, if there is no political or altruistic prerogative in their doing so? For success? For *expression*? A feeling is equally as real in an attic as it is in the Louvre, for the exorcism has already been performed - viewing art is merely the act of autopsy.

What, then. Mythopoeia? Egregore? Tulpa? It is true that great art is made greater by an appreciation for the artist. Hendrix, Cobain, Van Gogh – these are *characters* as much as they are people, thoughtforms as much as they are practitioners. It is one great flaw of the human condition that we tend to worship as a God what we should instead love as a human. Eddie Vedder found this out the hard way when a crazed woman, believing him to be Jesus, drove her car into his house.

The concept of the live show – and by extension, the exhibition, or fashion display – is incredibly comical. The lights, the raised stage, the amplification, the projection of one face onto a screen dozens of humans tall – these things all inspire a kind of sick, macabral group-worship perfectly at ease in your 20th-century dystopia of choice. Televangelism and megachurch culture extrudes this into a double deception; worship and *worship* are subsumed into each other, and the money rolls right in.

Worse still – hair and makeup. Dolly Parton, who sleeps in full regalia, in case she is woken by an earthquake. The earth's tectonic cataplexies are of secondary importance – the *brand* must always come first. The aesthetic considerations, and conditions, of fame; supermodels, subsisting on a diet of sleep, singular almonds and affirmations, and selling wellness. The concept of an artistic *face* is a fundamentally troubling one; to make a career as an artist is to commodify yourself, to reconstitute yourself in strings of visuals and inferences. To 'succeed' is to become an *icon*; but icons are, by nature, reductions of the whole.

When you externalise your face, name, words and art – what do you have left?

3.

All writers imbibe a character. It is necessary in all but the most rudimentary contexts. Beyond that, there is a natural urge; for every attempt to remove and purge personality from

copy writing, there is always the lingering shade of an unpaid intern etching themselves into the prose. Though I am not *trying* to be intentional – I am sitting here letting this text write itself on my fingers, unplanned – I look back at the previous paragraphs and find artifice, coinage, liberties taken, excesses. I find the emergence of a character that is not quite mine – it is the living product of my pride and shame, convergent in opposition, a self-sustaining reflection of my attitudes to writing as much as it is a fragment of self. Which is altogether for the best, I figure, as I would probably find reading my own soul off a page to be repulsive, as would you.

And while it is not elegant, and while ignoring the fourth wall won't make this easier to read, I believe it is necessary to protract this examination a little while longer. There is a frustration in the previous essay, *Purple in Seven* (which already feels hopelessly outmoded), about the purpose of my writing. I am compelled by the urge to write, an urge furthered by the encouragement of others to do so. I relish the process of it, the brain-scratching engagement of actually *doing* something; and most of all, as a creative act, it provides an *outlet*, that most sorely needed of things. I do an English degree as an Iranian man, a path that was not taken without some resistance; I love words, and phrases, and the conspiracy of beautiful sounds, and a million other things between cover and cover.

In spite of all of this, I *hate* literature. I hate the books, the leather-bound tomes, the crooked glasses, the overcoats, the tweed, the fraying sweaters, the clumsy, absent-minded pen-chewing of a certain green-sweatered annotator. I absolutely revile oak theatres, keynote speakers, postgraduate rooms. I hate the americano that I'm squerulously drinking, the urge to quote, the flicker on someone's brow when *the right question* comes to mind; the cardigans, Villa Diodati, the *pride* of it all. I hate Woolf, and Nabokov, and Eliot, even though I love them. I hate long-haired nineteen-year-old men who play guitar and write lyrics. I hate cigarette smokers and soundgarden fans, though not as much as I absolutely loathe poets, the absolute lowest substratum of humans on the planet. Most of all, I hate people who inhabit all of these stereotypes and hate themselves for it – but not quite as much as I hate people who are self-aware, and self-deprecate to excuse themselves of it.

Stereotypes pain. There is a sweating guilt, a shiver-chill that runs through me, at every moment that I remember the tremendous effort that I exert in according to one. It is as if I am zombified while doing it; I find myself waking on the street with the blood of washed-out jeans on my hands, absent-mindedly writing poems about *alabaster nooses*, watching myself back on stage as if watching someone else entirely. (Admittedly, this only happens when playing music that I do not believe in). I suppose this is impostor syndrome, something that I have found myself consoling in others. But as is always the case, it is far more difficult to console yourself.

Some might say that any deviation from being *entirely* yourself is an act of weakness. Some are raised on the axiom that 'individualism is all', and it holds some in contempt, an embrace that some requite. But to be entirely individual is to deprive yourself of the opportunity to *fall into place*; your social adhesion exists at the mercy of people's individual sympathies, as opposed to a series of accepted conventions in your chosen norm. (As an aside, the concept of

being anti-norm is functionally dead – counterculture is no longer counter to anything). And while it is pleasant to dream, as I have been told tirelessly, that everyone is loved by someone, it is impossible to reconcile this with the brutality of how people treat each other, that basal childish tendency to unkindness. None of us have escaped the playground; and if you are disgusted or alienated reading this, furrowing your brow in perceived slight, I assure you I don't mean to insult – this is part of being human. A therapist once told me that the mind is like a knife; judgment is the necessary processing of all things, including the perception of others. There is a Doors song that resonates here, and I am ashamed for bringing that scumbag Jim into this text with all of his beingness. (Rest in piss).

So – most of us, or at least some of us, are afraid of presenting as our stark-naked selves, just as we are afraid of presenting our stark-naked bodies. Perhaps for the best; oftentimes those who are sufficiently disinhibited to be *themselves* suffer the same fate as streakers do: we call these people menaces to society for their transgressions. And be assured – this will not devolve into an anarchist treatise, for I am not sufficiently naïve as to believe that such a thing as anarchy ever existed. But it is worth noting that people who are closer to the asymptote of “selfhood” tread on more toes than the wallflowers and garden invertebrates of the world.

So: we all wear our masks; we all accord; we all fit into our *genre*, with various degrees of success. Some of these figures are archetypal; the solitary *anhage* manifest in Cain, the broad-chested hero, the wise old man, the rebel &c. to infinity. (Notice here that I did not use the latin phrase for that because it sounds like shit). Others are more niche, relegated and subject to different aesthetics of aesthetics, post-*proto-core-wave* caricatures of specific cultural moments. Some, like the political punk-rock rebel-figure, are both. (I am assured that these people no longer exist; their visages have been supplanted by the zyn-addled, moustachioed sons of Lockheed Martin employees). Irrespective, the point remains the same; your dress, mannerisms, speech and thought patterns fall into condition. And as a result, oftentimes, you get what you need out of it; compassion, companionship, a sense of belonging and better odds at love. To be included is to be less jaded, less bitter, less *at odds* with things. What's to be gained, in essence, is all the social components of a liveable life. What's left to ask, and to lose, is what proportion of the soul remains *insoluble*.

4.

I am aware that when I am in a lesser condition, as I am at the time of writing this, I am much more preoccupied with these aesthetic considerations. They exist as one fragment of a fulminate misanthropy; they are both symptom and cause, both reason for and rationalisation of a greater avoidant antisocial bent. Let me make it clear that I am at least slightly self-aware; these are the prolectically dense ravings of a lapsing nineteen-year-old. In a few months when the sun lands, providing nothing happens and I manage to secure some destination, I will return to the land of the living, and this text will mean nothing to me (save, perhaps, for a few pretty wordnesses). I wish that it would stay like that, but it will not. A few months after *that*, it will probably matter again. These oscillations, I am told, are a fact of life.

A fact of life too is the painful lucidity of the rearview mirror. I will not deliberate, in a moment of campfire-counsellor pandering between author and reader, on the experience of regretting who you have been previously. (I do not mean in the sense of murders and mistakes. Understand that I write this as a child in all senses but the physical). The present moment, however, has yielded a marked removal from this seemingly ubiquitous sensation. Instead of looking back, I am instead looking forward to my future selves, and the reticence with which *they* will approach remembering me. The beauty, of course, is that the future me will not be remotely close to what the present me imagines him to be. (This also happens to be a terror).

So – art, self, image, impostors, individualism, construction, artifice, the seven pounds of studs and makeup that Billy Idol (!) was inconceivably comfortable with wearing. (Speaking of images, and of tired ones – note the frequency of Billy/ies in American popular music. Whether pastiche, nominative determinism or sheer coincidence, it is a kind of carpeted hell).

This Billyism lends me a moment to segue (heaven forgive me, for I must rant) into the greatest plague in contemporary music – beyond hypersaturation, behavioural-science led songwriting and artist exploitation. (Maybe not, but I felt like being dramatic). The co-option of working-class aesthetics into corporate music spheres is a ninth plague; label-driven blue-collar cosplay manifests as a swarm of locusts, devouring any pretensions towards honesty that this next generation of musicians could have otherwise mustered. I am writing on the London scene specifically here, as that's what I am most acutely familiar with. The silent, tendrilline fingers of major labels (shoutout dirty hit) writhe like tuberous hands, puppeteering the next generation of perfectly shaped misfits on miswound 9-42s; in the social media age, pretence is considered a *requisite* of musical entities, particularly in respect to bands that engage with older sounds. (We wonder why rock is dead while fucking its corpse).

It is known, now, by anyone with ears and the requisite brain to induce them to function, that talent is no longer a factor in the production of popular music, and that the producers, rather than the artists, now shoulder the greater harmonic and constructive burdens in the trade. And hence – Yungblud, and a thousand *less* successful millionaire bands. Pedalboards more expensive than cars. More concerning – the apparent trend that humans enjoy the hyper-processed at some level, and that the yearning for authentic connection has been supplanted by the immediate gratification of pretty, perfectly carved harmonics. And such; while even 'countercultural' music has always been commercial (*The Doors* were feds and the *Sex Pistols* were plants), the positional values of expression and pretension have gradually been reversed, yielding the hyperreal post-meta-aestheticism of the modern musical entity.

5.

So where am I going? Hopefully, sooner or later, to the root of the problem. This is an essay about artifice and art, impostorship and import. An artistic career is the dream of anyone who figures themselves incapable of functioning in normal society, the product of either legitimate illness or straight laziness on a case-by-case basis. Say, for a moment, that art is a projection of our neuronal miswirings and personal experience. Note, parallel, the ideal of the working

artist: create real material, throw it into the void, and see if anyone bites; if they do, monetise and survive. It does not need clarification that the two do not always align.

The issue is that there are no guarantees that your personal view of the world will resonate with anyone else's. Indeed, the more esoteric and personal, the less widespread the appeal. Note here the trend towards genericism in popular music. Despite T Swizzy's music getting worse, her appeal has grown in the wake of the general lowering of standards in the music-listening public. (Think Zamyatin). The more specific you make your art, the less of a living you potentially stand to make.

This is the first half of the modern artist's dilemma. The second is more specifically relevant.

6.

What is good? There is no objective, except for where there is.

(and the decree of one dungaree-wearing bald bastard with glasses, who is, of course, the ultimate arbiter of musical quality).

The urge toward success – ambition – is a natural colour in the human palette, archetypal. *Ad aspera per astra* and such. The romanticism of The Musician™ is that of purity, of fearless expression. The love for success is diametrically opposed by, and hence bound to, the fear of failure. Fear and fearlessness sit like oil and water. Have I left anything of this horse to cremate?

How many great musicians sit on the laurel of ambitionlessness? The pretentious asshats over at sonic youth made a brand of it, and 'the sad guy from nirvana' perfected their work, simultaneously making a fortune on irony and convincing every middle-class goober on the planet that they need to renounce ambition to make something for themselves in music. After all, that private jet / jacuzzi / 'rustic' campervan won't buy itself.

Both bands, of course, succeeded hugely. Their followers in that legacy – the post-punk crowd – manufacture an image out of the failure to care. *Bar Italia* is the perfect example of what it means to out-nonchalant the rest of the entire London scene, down to their design ideology and charmingly stale production. (Unfortunately for us all, their "success" is imminent). Fortunately, however, there are bands that do not need that crutch. Shoutout *Mary in the Junkyard*, *The Grove* and *Prodigal*, who did not need my validation (but will receive it anyway).

7.

It got a little rough in the middle, but I've found my thesis, if only in the process of actually writing the whole damn thing.

There is a solution to this clusterfuck of unknowing.

The problem, clarified: everyone expects an artist to *be themselves*, being *truly authentic*, while artists *also* need to make a living by succeeding. Making a living by succeeding requires goal-setting, ambition and planning, which are at odds with the "purely expressive"

musician archetype that is constantly being shoved down people's throats. Beyond either of these things, the version of *themselves* that an artist is forced to be is distorted by its magnification on the big screen. (*Hozier* on a festival stage is not Andrew Hozier-Byrne at 9pm on a Tuesday night in Stoke). How to reconcile this trifold deception?

The answer lies in that which is deeply uncool. Thankfully, everyone is trying so hard to be cool that uncoolness is perhaps the only punk rock ideal left. (*Primus* sucks better than ever).

In simple terms, it *is* possible to express authentically while maintaining your ambition and desire to succeed. All it takes is an *admission* of that ambition. This is not an alien idea, but it is one that seems to have been dragged awry by years of genre-internal conditioning; how many beige-drowned London bands have the boldness to admit how badly they want it?

What I am writing is by no means revolutionary; by contrast, the 80s metal scenes (depraved and despised in equal measure though they deserve to be) displayed a clinical drive for success. Their mistakes, however, outweighed any potential benefit; the target was cocaine and groupie-ism, as opposed to carving a legacy by sheer talent and work. In other genre, artists tend closer to the goldilocks zone; Kanye West, in his early career (there is no need to discuss anything after *MBDTF / TLOP*, as the read is fundamentally different) *leaned on* his ambitions on the road to mantling generational greatness. Likewise, Pharell, Andre 3K, even the early rap greats (your *Raekwons* and *Mobb Deeps*); despite falling short in other regards (namely the pervasive misogyny that undermines both hip-hop and rock cultures, among other glorifications), their ability to reconcile ambition with creative expression operates as a perfect salve to the crux of this problem.

In essence; I am writing to say that *cool* (among other things) has killed guitar-based music, and that the pursuit of portrayed authenticity has destroyed The Genuine in the current musical climate. This is, of course, not exhaustively true; there are outliers to the mainstream, as there always have been, and always shall be. What remains, as an artist, is to be yourself without qualification; which *includes* expressing ambition, and the lust for more. In doing so, both mediocrity and pretence fall by the wayside, and a pure cloudshear of gold emerges.

To proceed, we must kill the idea of the latent musical genius. *Beabadoobee* can lie as she cares about having written *Coffee* immediately after picking up the guitar for the first time; we must ourselves be able to admit the intricacy of the process, the thousands of hours spent honing one's craft, the agony of insufficiency. Cobain, in the glorious fire of his prolificacy, is dead; his 'incidental genius' afterimage must be killed too, to free the reality of his drive and work ethic. Until this is achieved, the artistic image is irreconcilable with the reality of the person behind it. Until this is achieved, we are all impostors.

The exploration of these imagisms serves as a metaphor for the wider question at the start of this text. It is no sin to want to be on a bigger stage, as long as you are willing to admit it.

Christ, this was a weird essay. I feel like I read like a vain, success-hungry bastard. But I know myself to be neither of these things. I want to make the best art possible, and I feel no shame in admitting that. I want to make a good living doing it, and I couldn't care less if

that's not *punk rawk*. I feel no shame for wanting more, and neither should anyone else. At least, that's just like, my opinion man.

Some men think the world revolves around them. Others know it does not, and choose to circumnavigate it on their own two feet.

Scraps / Fragments

Acne

There is a beautiful woman on the same train as me. She is not attractive, but she is beautiful; and this is no benign assumption on the internal. Her hair dithers in a phenomenally stupid arrangement, a kind of abstruse bowl, some kind of divine follicular punishment; her dress is mediocrity, the flecking of incomplementary purples and oranges on polyester black. Her external composition, her artifices of appearance, are undeniably grotesque. But I suppose they have to be, for otherwise I might not have survived.

Eyes that pierce in vocal blue, seeming the cone of innermost flame, screaming life from the quiet – weathered as sunshine, but not ravaged. There is a choir, granular-synthetic, like a khaen at full tilt, weaving sphere-music behind them; I am reminded that there is a good. She has lesions like mine. Though I do not know that kind of beauty, I feel a kinship, a kind of leper-colony unity in the marks on our faces.

On Anger

Rageful prose is not an obvious thing. Anger is more given to poetry; the red slashing of blood and vitriol, scathed across the canvas, a few short strokes gleaming to perpetuity. Anger is chimeric, infinite until grasped at, whereupon it fades. It is hard to harness, harder still when repressed – as it is most often in the angriest people. I firmly believe that the *most* hateful people are those who have, or have once had, the most love; it is that particular strength of sympathy, when inverted destructively, that is most potent.

I am told by my shrink to *use* anger, to let myself feel it, to let it propel me towards good, whatever shape that may take. But what when there is no ground to hold? There is no place for a searing flame in a vacuum. Is there a place for political rage in a hopeless system? And understand, momentarily, that I do not imply that it could have ever been different. The sole components of human primacy are the necessary antecedent to social deterioration; we evolved to *come out on top*, and happened to be the species that did. Hence, things resolve to hierarchies, to autocracy, to systems of unequal power, and, eventually, to hopelessness. What greater extinguisher of fire than our own smoke?

Childish anger is fascinating. As someone who had *anger issues* as a child and repressed them immediately thereafter, I am given to wonder – is it a *protective* or *offensive* faculty? Is its primary vector the acquisition of power or the deflection of shame? Both feel sinful, though they are not. The lordly mentality is not one to be espoused – that's what got us here

in the first place. But to yield to the external pressure of the universe and have no propulsive fire within is simply to give up in the most certain terms. The oppressive weight of the air is resisted by the internal pressure of our bodies; why should our souls be any different?