

*How foolish I feel when I realise that I have spent another day in front of my inkstone, jotting down aimless thoughts as they occurred to me, all because I was bored and had nothing better to do.*

Yoshida Kenkō, *Essays in Idleness*

*Is love when you don't give a name to the identity of things?*

Clarice Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*

My mother forgot my son's name, and as she searched her memory for it, while we were on the phone, as I walked slowly around the Meadows, in the freezing air, I found myself thinking of my first day on the internet, that day so long ago, when I didn't even know what the internet was, though we had a computer at home, with a number of games on floppy disk, as well as a CD-Rom encyclopaedia which, when I was accepted to grammar school, my mother compelled me to use one day during the summer holidays for research on an 'independent essay' she was going to make me write, since I was going to grammar school, on Ancient Egypt, or perhaps just the pyramids, a prospect by which I was both excited—I liked the idea of knowing about Egypt in theory, of being someone who could recite facts about pyramids, the geometrical calculations which made their assembly possible, the symbolic relation between the structure and the environment, the materials used to construct them and the modes of transport used to move such vast quantities of whatever material (my essay was largely a copy-and-paste job) from somewhere far down the Nile all the way to Cairo, though I think I was also slightly fearful of the possibilities such knowledge could foreclose, such as the possibility that the pyramids had been constructed by aliens, which seemed like an appealing idea, not just, that is, the idea that aliens had built them, but that all this highly advanced activity, this impossible technological feat involving, I imagined, lasers and hovering

craft as well as Pharaohs and slaves and whips and ropes, had happened thousands of years ago, and that what we thought of as the past was in fact in many senses already the future (an idea which was also responsible for what was so appealing about the universe of *Star Wars*, it had a dizzying, reversing effect on history, in the sense that it suggested the undiscovered zones of the past might be shown to hold as many interesting things as the future undoubtably did)—and bored in advance, since it would require lots of sitting inside on a sunny day, looking at a screen (as I have been, here, in this small room, writing this to you, A, though with what intention I'm not yet entirely sure) with which I had already begun to self-manage my contact while playing the football game *Fifa 95* (which I often think of as my first 'training' in some of the principles of selfhood to which 'modern literature' would later introduce me, that is, that the 'I' is a fiction, that the unitary self, drawn from the idea of the soul, has long been 'scattered to the wind', that we all contain multitudes and that *je est un autre*, these all felt oddly familiar on first encounter, in part because I had spent months of my childhood, cumulatively, controlling a team of eleven players, each with their own qualities and flaws, rated helpfully in the 'team selection' interface according to category, such as speed, shooting power and accuracy, heading ability, strength and fitness, and when I played a game with my team ('Britain', I think it was, unless I am

mistaken, since there is of course no British football team, football remains the domain of individual nations, unlike other areas of life where the category of Britishness comes into play, such as at the Olympics, or on television, or in culture, artists are described as British, sometimes, or writers are British, which seems to me not a helpful designation, since in a loose, semi-formulated way I feel like national imaginaries have more weight and history, or at least more imaginative purchase, than the vague federal category of 'Britain'—Englishness and Scottishness are not synonymous, we know this, but once you've decided on that I suppose the question soon becomes how much specificity can you handle, if you are constantly dividing and subdividing groups of people until they are only named individually, how after all do you make a community (there's that phrase, 'negative community', floating up into my head from something I read at some point in the relatively recent past, where is that from, B, is it, I can't remember, I was probably only half paying attention to the book I was reading at the time, which is more than I usually pay, sometimes when I'm trying to make the best of this chronic inability to focus on a task I think of reading a book—or, rather, *not reading* in the presence of a book—as an opportunity for a bit of daydreaming, sometimes I'll sit myself down in my comfortable middle-class flat in a central area of Edinburgh, with the sound of traffic from the busy arterial road outside dilating and contracting every few seconds, and

open something I find really difficult to understand, like some C, and so well-trained have I become at activating in the presence of such texts the trance-like state of a daydream that I only have to read a few sentences, or bump my eyes against the words *hegemony* or *praxis* before I feel my brain evaporating and in its place a bubble of perfect, bland transparency taking up residence, a bobbing, jellyfish-like ambience, through which a gentle, pulsing, roaming form of inattention is enabled, guided less by a desire for escape into a particular other world than by a nosing, blind-feeling, burrowing aversion to the *facticity* of this one—somehow the vocabulary of the unread reading material nevertheless burrows its way into my own—and this experience, if it is an experience, has a syntactical quality to it which feels empty, and luxurious, has a winding, self-delighting, purposeless character, as though everything were suddenly available yet nothing could be retained, which is why when it happens I sometimes find myself saying to myself, dully, self-consciously, ‘I am like a work of art right now’, or sometimes ‘I’m like an object’, or sometimes ‘I’m a thing’ (I feel embarrassed to write these things to you, A, even though I am inventing your presence), and I feel myself reaching out with my newfound mobile jellyfish consciousness to the other things in the room—the sofa I’m sat on right now (long and low, covered in blue velvet, streaked with my son’s snot), the coffee table with the broken leg I’ve been promising to fix since I broke it maybe

a year ago (will this ever happen, probably not), the mirror set too high on the wall for me to see anything but the top of my head, books, arranged roughly according to genre, rug, carpet, lamp, curtains, television, laptop, phone, complex, mysterious and low-level menacing thing, arriving fully-formed out of a set of processes I literally cannot imagine, assembled by machines operated at whatever spatial or temporal remove by the eyes and hands and brains of people I cannot see, not just in the sense that I cannot visualise their bodies at work doing this thing that they are doing—they are doing it but I cannot see what it is, this activity from which a phone eventually emerges—but I cannot imagine their interior lives as they build this thing my hand rests upon, not an overly alarming empathetic impasse maybe, since I basically cannot imagine my own, my own *interior life*, that is, I often use the word ‘interior’ without even momentarily considering what I mean by it, though I suppose I mean my experience of consciousness, of perceiving and thinking (if that’s even what I do, sometimes it seems like I go for hours without a single bit of language registering in my mind, especially when I’m doing something intensely absorbing and monotonous, like playing *Fifa 2013* on my PlayStation, which for a long time before our son was born I would do routinely, once a week, for four or five hours at a time, and during which sessions I would enter a kind of trance that was more like being deeply stoned or experiencing the sensation of a

single blow to the head drawn out over a drastically prolonged period (like that performance piece by D, which I've never seen but feel like I've experienced by analogy many times, in which two figures move towards one another across a stage at such a glacial pace that several hours pass before their bodies touch) than any purposeful meditative state, in the sense that when I finished playing, and got up from the sofa and went to the bathroom and looked at my face in the mirror my eyes were bloodshot (as though the zoom was up to 150%) and my skin was pale and I felt like basic sensory phenomena—the cold of the toilet seat against the tips of my fingers, the sensation of piss struggling through my urethra down my penis and out of the too-small slit at the end (when I piss in such states I sometimes think of my penis as screaming or being sick, and am not unmoved), the low note of non-communicative noise I emit as this process occurs, which is expressive of neither pleasure nor displeasure but is simply a noise of *release*—have to travel through an additional layer of accreted sediment in order to reach that part of my interior that is alerted to their happening, and I feel like I am emerging from something distinct from sleep or distraction, a state of having been *away from language* for a while, and returning from the place where I had been—a place in which I 'thought' in football, in the sense that the movements of the players I was controlling were expressive of 'thoughts' (or maybe 'ideas') which I would otherwise only ever become

aware of if they were articulated in words—is frightening, partly because it makes me realise how smoothly and soundlessly language can fall away, it offers a glimpse of what it might mean to experience that falling away without the subsequent process of retrieval, of having come back from some kind of brink, which has been happening recently to my mother, she has been away from other people for a long time, forgetting words and memories and future events, living alone (I think about her most, and feel closest to her, in fact, when I am alone—aloneness is her element), watching a lot of television, with which she seems increasingly involved emotionally and on which she seems to depend for companionship, particularly programs like *Frasier*—a sitcom designed to be screened in the evening but which because of its age is now shown in two-or-three-episode clusters early in the morning on Channel 4, which results, for me at least, in a strangely and gently disorientating alteration in mood schedule—which is a beautiful program, and its protagonist seems even to me very much like a friend, in fact so much so that I found it weird to listen to E's episode of *Desert Island Discs* recently and hear him choosing all these cheesy rock tracks and telling these jocky stories, I found it nearly unbelievable—though I didn't think it at the time in words, but more as a general, hovering cloud of potential impressions—that this man could have said literally every word F has ever said without being more substantially affected by that experience, the