

Prototype Prize 2024

2024 shortlists:

Book-length category:

Matthias Connor, *Loose Fit*

Ellen Dillon, *A Whale Called Milieu*

Rebecca Jagoe, *Significant Others*

Kate Pickering, *There is a Miracle In Your Mouth*

Oliver Zarandi, *Body Horror*

Short-form category:

Aisha Farr, *Get-Up*

Remi Graves, *coal*

Krystle Patel, *Start with the present*

Milo Thesiger-Meacham, *Audible Heat*

The Prototype Prize is a new, biennial prize for writers and artists working at the intersections of different literary and artistic forms. This booklet contains descriptions and excerpts from the manuscripts shortlisted for the 2024 prize, which has been judged by Bhanu Kapil, Tom McCarthy and Elizabeth Price.

The prize awards £3,000 plus publication by Prototype to the best book-length project, and £2,000 plus publication by Monitor Books to the best short-form work. Both prize-winners will have an excerpt of their work published by *frieze* magazine.

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Matthias Connor

Loose Fit

Between 2015 and 2020 I worked as a nurse in five different prisons. Before I started working in prison I fantasised about a prison that was a cross between an organic farm, art space, nightclub, and university. The officers would be kind souls who had read the complete works of Carson McCullers. The genesis of this dream could be traced back to a visit to Dial House in 2011, an open house started by the anarchist collective and punk band Crass. After spending the day there I had vowed to take a bit of this paradise with me. My new journey would begin by returning to education at the age of forty to train as a nurse.

Working in prison I soon found out that prison doesn't provide the therapeutic conditions needed for either the staff or the inmates to bloom. The kindness I had seen at Dial House would grow stale, dry, hard, and cynical. Values I learned as a student nurse seemed completely unrealistic in here. How could I be sure if the patient was really in pain when everybody always said they were in pain? I grew realistic when it came to appraising the talent of those languishing in the prison system.

Prison would take its toll on me, physically and mentally. From the top of our new house I could see the local prison. Our mortgage was for twenty-five years. I needed to keep working and the more I worked the more I began to question my role as a nurse in prison.

Writing takes patience, but the more time I spent in prison the more impatient I was becoming. Writing takes empathy and I was quickly losing any empathy I had towards my fellow humans. Writing takes sensitivity and no more than in prison is sensitivity seen as a weakness. Self-medicating as my family slept, to cope with the endless rounds of self-harm, I did not like what I was becoming in plain sight of my young son. I wanted to communicate all this before I became another monster in a uniform.

Loose Fit is a record of that time, utilising memoir, non-fiction, fiction, song lyrics and images. It's entitled *Loose Fit* after the loose fitting scrubs that I bought off Amazon when I first started working as an agency nurse. It's also the name of a Happy Mondays song.

[*Loose Fit* extract]

Bob hands me his ID card. His name isn't on our list.

– What are you here for?

– Me meth boss, I'm on the morning list.

I pull up his medical records on the computer screen. There's an ominous black X on his medication chart. Hovering the cursor over the X, text flashes up.

Dose omitted due to the patient being under the influence.

I quickly read a longer entry in his medical records.

Patient appeared unsteady on feet, slurred speech, bloodshot eyes. All medications suspended for twenty-four hours for the patient's own safety.

I read the entry aloud for Bob's benefit so there won't be any ambiguity.

– I'd just got up; I've got hay fever.

It's true that Bob was prescribed antihistamines, but not in over six months and it's January. To overturn the decision to administer his meds would bring me into conflict with Sharon, his drug worker.

– But I need me meth. She didn't test me for being under the influence. It's just her opinion. How's she qualified to say if I'm under the influence just by looking at me? She's no doctor.

– Or a nurse, says someone behind Bob in the queue.

The next man in line sniggers.

I know what he's saying holds some truth. There's no scientific evidence required for these cases. If the prison suspects someone of being under the influence, medication stops for twenty-four hours. Officially these are decisions for patient safety, but everyone knows that unofficially, they're punitive measures. So while some staff are genuinely concerned about administering more methadone to someone plainly under the influence, many others seem to find satisfaction in the punitive aspect of withholding an inmate's medications. It gives them an authority they maybe lack in their own civilian lives.

– You should be alright for twenty-four hours.

I'm thinking about the next patient who's now growing more and more agitated behind him. The sniggering has given way to impatience.

– I won't do the rattle. I'll cut up. I'll cut my own throat and it'll be all your fault.

I look at him and his glare bores into mine. As methadone is a controlled drug, it's a legal requirement that I work alongside somebody else, so even if I want to give it to him, I can't without bringing my own actions into question. The pharmacy technician watches me.

As it stands, I have to make sure the orange ACCT (The Assessment, Care in Custody and Teamwork) book has been opened in Bob's name, in case he decides to cut his own throat. That way I'll be covered.

– Next time I see you on the landing I'm going to twist you up. See how big you are in your little nurse uniform when you're not hiding behind your screen.

He throws the last patient's half-finished cup of water at the plastic screen.

There is a sign warning that abuse of NHS staff won't be tolerated.

I shout for the officer. The others in the line groan. The officer arrives.

– What seems to be the problem nurse?

When Bob refuses to walk back to his cell the officer gets on his radio. Bob shouts at the officer. An alarm shrieks: more officers come running. Patients are dispersed and sent back to their cells. Bob's shouts grow louder.

– Nurse!

– Nursssse!

– NURSE!

Bob is being restrained by four officers. The soles of the officers' boots squeak on the hard floor as they try to get a grip on Bob who's trying to wriggle away. Since he's malnourished, there is little flesh to hold on to. None of the officers want to risk being sued by being heavy-handed but they can't risk treating him like a museum exhibit either.

Like many patients here, there's a warning on Bob's medical record about his short temper. HAS MADE THREATS TO HARM MEDICAL STAFF IN HEALTHCARE. NOT TO BE SEEN BY STAFF ON THEIR OWN. ANY APPOINTMENTS TO BE DISCUSSED BEFORE CONFIRMED. IS VIOLENT TOWARDS MEN WHO WEAR UNIFORMS. HOSTAGE TAKER. THREATS TO FEMALE STAFF.

Everybody seems to come with some sort of forewarning. It's like the lists of preservatives and additives on the backs of food packets that you no longer study each time you open the cupboard. It simply takes too much time. Some of these entries are years old but until something serious happens, when these entries will be picked over as if they're forensic evidence, they remain largely unread.

The queue resumes slowly moving again.

– ID? Click. Name? Click. Date of birth? Click. Eighty mls.

Later, Bob gets on the 'netting' (not netting at all, it's an inflexible metal grill to prevent falls from off the balconies). He refuses to come down until he gets his methadone. The other inmates are sent back to their cells before the officers eventually pull him down and lead him back behind his door. From inside his cell there are crashes, cries and grunts before the flushed officers emerge again. Later he makes 'superficial' cuts to his throat just as he'd promised, then spits at the officer who opens his door to allow the nurse to inspect his wounds.

– I've got Hep C.

By the end of the day Bob's in the seg.

Ellen Dillon

A Whale Called Milieu

A Whale Called Milieu is a tapestry of essay, fiction, and prose poetry that draws on the life's work of French writer, educator and film-maker Fernand Deligny, the seminar recordings of Gilles Deleuze, and a host of other sources in poetry and song, to question what it is to be a self with others, in shared milieus, within and without story and language.

This book was written over the course of two years, during and after lockdown, listening to William Basinski's 'Disintegration Loops', going on long loop walks in the hills and woods around my house, looking for a form with which to think about home, family, and the sources and milieus that make us the composite beings we are. Many of those sources are woven into the text, some in the form of epigraphs and citations, others in extended readings of their work. In the case of three core interlocutors (Deligny, Deleuze, and the Irish-language poet Seán Ó'Riordáin) questions originating in the process of translating very short excerpts from their work thread themselves through the fictional and poetic segments of the text. The cumulative effect is of a self who is telling itself through many voices, across multiple languages and timelines.

The central guiding concept is how selfhood expresses itself through reflexive and subject pronouns. The book takes shape around Deligny's discussion of reflexivity and selfhood in autistic subjects, in a complicated engagement that takes issue with many of his conclusions on language and selfhood, while adopting or adapting several aspects of his process of the tentative, or attempt. Another revisited source is a digression on the French pronoun *on* in one of Deleuze's seminars on Foucault: the multiple subject positions in the fictional sections, as well as the 'we' of the prose poems and central essay, function as an attempt to recreate the scope of that capacious pronoun of someone/anyone/everyone/all of us/general you by repopulating English's attenuated, solitary 'one'.

This dilation of the grammatical subject is central to the book's style. While there are sections of prose essay in the first-person singular, essay and prose poem in the first-person plural, and prose fiction in the first, second and third person, all sections make space in which a polyphony of source voices can speak, and circle back to shared central concerns with selfhood and language. Story in this book is not a line but a series of loops.

[A Whale Called Milieu extract]

the line they move inside and are propelled by

A cloud makes itself into whatever form it needs. Fernand makes an odd comment, in a letter to Félix Guattari, about Janmari barking. *It's Deleuze who would be happy, he writes the noise of a line tracing itself, as if you could hear grass growing, or the hairs of a beard.*

We know that a cloud makes its own shape. For Fernand, sitting at a scrubbed and paper-stacked table in a house filled with muttering and movement, a line traces itself. And he hears this tracing happening in the barking of a boy he has decided to deem mute, *mutique*. That boy's barking isn't language to him, but is the sound of things that don't exist as words: drawing and growing. Reading these notes, sounding them out, is like watching a cloud shape itself before our eyes.

In one of his seminars on Foucault, Deleuze described *the two fundamental forms of knowledge: seeing and speaking, the visible and the enunciable*. We're glued in rapt attention to the sight of some kind of knowledge cloud-forming itself as we watch. Line or cloud. Line and cloud. Dividing and lonely.

The translation of those seminar notes reads *Who is it that has spoken of the line of the outside? Why do I use this express word?* We're drawn back repeatedly to the awkwardness of that translation, 'this express word' for *exprès*, on purpose. Falling for a *faux ami* has turned the act of choosing a word deliberately into some sort of kwik-e-word that we can't stop thinking about. Biffo Berardi has an odd bit in his book on poetry and finance about people being forced to pay attention at an accelerated rate. This has always struck us as equally clunky and wrong: you can't hurry attention; you can cut it short, but you can't speed it up. You can say a word fast, so fast it loses all meaning, but there is no express word. Meaning happens in its own time. Attention does too, and their time-frames don't conform to the hours and minutes on the clock, and are deformed by the rigid segmentations of workday and school-day.

At school this week, a kid suggested that we can be trained to appreciate things, that people hated fog and found it to be the most disgusting of weather until the poets drew attention to its mystical, picturesque qualities and we fell in love with fallen cloud.

We have been half in love with fallen cloud all week, especially when it rests on the crest of the hills across from the house. When we, including dog, are out walking in the bog field, there are moments where it looks luscious and full-bodied enough to sink into. Other times, the cloud-cover is too beautiful and low-hanging for us to be confident of driving safely. We have never been confident of driving safely. A Deleuze seminar or an intricate harmony by Low the band will seize our attention so violently we cannot see the road. Deleuze says that, for Foucault, the form of visible knowledge is light. Is it actually ironic that darkness falls on us as we listen to this lesson, and we have to pull over into the closest gateway until the moment of intense attention passes? We were going to write 'intense focus' for variety, but focus requires sight, and seeing and

thinking cannot be done together in our experience. Either light or groping through fog. Not both.

Knowledge has form, Deleuze says. But it makes itself into whatever form it needs. We watch as the afternoon's dour, grey rainclouds remould themselves into light-filled piles, and stretches of draped and flaky mackerel skin. They must know something, be trying to tell us something, in remodelling themselves into so much ephemeral deliciousness.

The sound of a line tracing itself is a boy barking without words. The line of the outside traces itself around something, swallows that thing whole. Makes the outline of a whale by surrounding the boat.

A man sets out in a boat to kill a whale. A story follows him. This particular storyline escapes the man wherever it can, spools off in time and space to follow obsessions of its own before returning to its protagonist. It takes 135 chapters to loop Ahab in his own harpoon-line. The storyline tries so hard to get away from him, to wander free of an arc vaulting towards inevitable doom.

We think a lot about storytelling, about the reductive violence of the narrative arc. We grew up in a household where every effect had a single, identifiable cause. Someone's teeth grew out crooked because they'd bruised their milk-teeth on a coffee table; someone died of cancer because they got tired of fighting; there was no such thing as coincidence; what was for you wouldn't pass you.

These claims for the narrative coherence of the universe left us unprepared for the chaos we have found the world to be, as grownups. As grownups entangled with dogs whimpering in their sleep, rain splattering the windows and clattering in torrents from blocked gutters, formless anxiety at a teeming to-do list and fitful efforts to claw out time to write in. To write one line in. We can't hear grass growing over the humming of our headful of bees. But we can hear the line, through the hum. There's an Irish proverb that says *Faigheann cos ar siúl rud nach bhfaigheann cos ina cónaí*—a walking foot finds things a foot at rest doesn't. We live by this, in our aimless wandering. Even wondering, our feet are restless. When they twitch too much to sleep or focus, we spin out another loop of the line. Or are spun by it.

In a letter to Hawthorne, Melville wrote of *[t]he calm, the coolness, the silent grass-growing mood in which man ought always to compose*. We lack calm coolness, and find ourselves torn between the silence of Melville's grass-growing peace, and the wordless barking relayed by Fernand. We think of their two letters crossing each other in time and space, in some tiny, individuated universe where the line of creation takes the form of amplified grass-sound. Not as in, the wind in it. As in, life moving through its laminae, amplified to the point of audibility.

Rebecca Jagoe

Significant Others

The world is always speaking to you. Held together by a shared language, all beings are constantly, endlessly, chatting away, saying something or other. What this language constitutes may vary: in the park, you watch a hassled person in expensive athleisure tell the dog with them to SIT! LUDO, SIT!, and eventually, Ludo sits; then later, you swat a fly away that is buzzing around the kitchen sink and the fly understands it is not welcome, and tries, repeatedly, to escape through solid wall; the tomato plants in your garden start to wilt in the midday heat, telling you they need watering, and is this not conversation? Does it matter if they intended to communicate with you or not? With some beings, conversation is difficult. If the sounds of the humpback whale are sped up they begin to resemble thrush song, but the two creatures are trapped in different temporalities. Stones speak over a duration so long that a sentence is several human lifetimes, and seem to have little interest in human interlocutors save at isolated moments. But all matter is alive, and it always has something to say.

Significant Others is not a world of magical realism, but a different means of describing the existing world, in opposition to a Western capitalist ideology that views other-than-humans as only resources for extraction. Throughout the book, other beings feature as metaphors, or omens, but also as fleshly, agential creatures. Often the encounters in this book are erotic, using Audre Lorde's definition of the erotic as an intentionality that can permeate all aspects of life: 'And yes, there is a hierarchy. There is a difference between painting a back fence and writing a poem, but only one of quantity. And there is, for me, no difference between writing a good poem and moving into sunlight against the body of a woman I love.' In one story, the protagonist attempts to figure out how to have sex with a bathroom mirror; in another, a catfish drags itself through Piccadilly Circus tube station with an uncomfortable level of intimacy with all the surfaces they come into contact with; a person births a stone from their rectum that had been causing constipation; a lump of topaz in someone's brain triggers their depression; a human tries to talk to a limestone cliff using touch; a swan drinks the bathwater of their human lover.

The pre-Socratic pagan philosopher Empedocles wrote that all matter is moved by the dual forces of Love and Strife: 'At one time they are all brought together into one order by Love; at another, they are carried each in different directions by the repulsion of Strife, till they grow once more into one and are wholly subdued.' A collective breath in and out, a coming together and falling apart: a shared language.

[*Significant Others* extract]

catfisch

Wie have a highly developed taste system through whych wie navigate world. Oure entire skin is covered in taste buds, whych become more concentrated in barbels around oure mouth. Through these wie can taste prey, wie can taste environment, wie can taste excrement, and wie know which way to move.

As wie move into Piccadilly Circus tube station wie can taste layers of grey dirt accumulated at the edges of steps. Steps are ston, wie can tell you this for certain. wie taste flattened, thick roundness. The grime, wie do not know what itt is. There is flesh, there is bits of flesh, and there is soil, from shoes, and there is leafs, and there is other things, itt is complecks and hideous and as oure skin slides over itt, itt passes into us.

On prickly plush of the underground seats, wie taste sweat of countless, nameless strangers, bisected by single, long red hair, bulbous at one end where itt once attached to head. There are other things here too, saliva, urine, bitter tang of stale vomit, nylon fibres, spun from oil, spun from long dead things, thei taste of things too. Everything wie touch, wie taste. wie are eten everything, wie are unabel to filter itt out, itt brushes against oure skin and moves into oure digestive tract, a solid, undigestibel, lumpen mass hardenen in stomach. Some days wie are so overwhelmed by taste and wie cannot leave bed, but as wie roll around in sheets, wie taste oure own body and wie are disgusted, and wie do not know how to shut itt out, how to sever connection to world. wie must always be touchen something, and so wie are always tasten, always eten, always absorbing, constant, horrific intake which builds up in toxic load. Wie carry this in tissues, in oure soft parts, like piles of soil in silken bags.

True Love

The human:

No, I'm not. It's just. I'm in the bath. Please can I just, can I have a minute.

The swan:

Lift me in.

The human:

No.

The swan:

Lift me in.

The human:

No.

The swan:

It is imperative that you lift me in.

The human:

Oh is it.

The swan:

Yes, it is.

The human:

The last time. Look I just. I don't want to swim in yr shit. again.

The swan:

That was not the last time, it was one time on I believe it was the twenty-first of March and you know that when I'm aroused I sometimes pass all manner of liquids, on the subject of which, you are keenly aware that I do not produce a discrete and separate object that you would call a shit, it is

The human:

Ok fine, I just don't want to be swimming in yr ass effusions, then.

The swan:

As you also should be aware, I also do not have an anus, I would hope that one so intimately familiar with my body would be aware of the specificities of my orifices, now I insist that you let me in to this delicious warm puddle filled with yr divine naked form.

The human:

Right. Well. I was about to get out, so

The swan:

Stay but a while, I would drown in you.

The human:

Well I'm kind of. I have a presentation to finish for tomorrow so

Oh no, don't drink that.

Don't, it's got bubble bath, and like, bits of my dirt, you know.

The swan:

I know, it is why I drink, you are delicious and perfect in every way, I would drown in you, permit me to say but

The human:

Ok but it's just. It's just a, a hot soup of my skin and dirt. I don't think you should. And I don't know about the safety of eating soap, it's

Ok stop.

Don't drink it. I'm serious.

my name is lubbert das i [extract]

today the pebble shifted slightly
and i could not get out of bed
it grates against my soft lobes still
sometimes i feel it next to my eyes
we dont know how it arrived there
something to do with a raw piece of bacon i ate once
or did i tell you i was dropped on my head as a baby you know before my skull had
the soft parts of my crown still pliant open why do they make babies like that
no kneecaps A FALSE NOSE FALSE / TEETH FALSE HAIR ENAMELLED HANDS
FALSE FEET
stone crept in the hole
i was crying in the job centre and asking
why am i [REDACTED]
i want to know why i am [REDACTED]
shard of flint lodged in my stupid little brain
a natural fool
why am i always falling behind
an ever increasing backlog of emails to send
8 months, i tell you, 8 months is my limit, my giddy limit !!
hold still we can remove it quickly
the time it takes for the flint to orbit my mind
i cannot hold a job for longer than 8 months
another orbit of the skull
solar return of the flint folded into my cerebellum
a curdled milk
help me to remove the stone
master,
cut the stone out, fast.
this next bit must serve for me,
there was a period of time where i only ate broccoli and salt
a time where i only ate toast
another time where i only ate porridge
a time where peas and eggs were all i
and then another where it was chicken and spinach
rocks may seem like slow actors and yes
the stone will outlast me but
the poison they leach out can happen in a human timeframe in a single lifetime i tell you
those things are toxic !
microparticles blending with neurons hard little carapaces forming around flakes and shards
gristle
help me to remove the stone
cut the stone out, fast.

Kate Pickering

There is a Miracle In Your Mouth

There is a Miracle in Your Mouth moves between the dis/believing body of an exvangelical, a hurricane approaching a spectacular Texan megachurch, and a 14th-century anchorite cell in which St Julian of Norwich is permanently enclosed. Drawn from a series of site-based performances, the three chapters explore the orientations of grounding myth-histories, the inside and out of buildings of belief, and the dis/orientations of losing and regaining faith.

There is a Miracle in Your Mouth opens with the conversion of the writer. As she takes communion, the ingestion of bread transforms her into a building-body, echoing the Biblical imagery of Christian bodies as the bricks of the church. She is now enclosed within the evangelical movement, experienced as a place of fixity. Scenes from the building-body's life within the oppressive culture of a megachurch intersperse with an account of the life of the religious recluse Julian of Norwich. In early 20th-century North America, scenes from the birth of the Pentecostal movement combine with the discovery of oil at Spindletop in Texas. The impact of the oil industry and American religiosity shapes the evangelical movement into a global force – it spreads its victory gospel for the winners and the takers, for those that hope to wrestle an intractable world into submission.

In her cell, Julian pens a series of mystical visions brought on by a near death experience. For Julian, the divine flows through all things and God is a mother who sees no sin, but she must be careful not to offend the patriarchy of the church or she risks accusations of apostasy and execution. In present day Houston, the megachurch is led by a celebrated patrilineal family. They preach an aspirational gospel of health and wealth within the atmospheric immersion of the worship service. As wind starts to gather over the Atlantic, the building-body experiences a series of aquatic dreams.

The hurricane builds and heads toward Houston, threatening to breach the bounds of the church where an End Times message is being preached. As contaminated flood water seeps in, altering the atmosphere inside, the leadership are confronted with an echo of Julian's wounded body. The building-body encounters a series of difficulties that challenge her faith, until one final traumatic event makes it unravel completely as she is caught up in the transformative effects of the hurricane. She finds her faith again through a heretical act of anti-communion.

[*There is a Miracle in Your Mouth* extract]

Building-body eats:

1984, Devon, England. I am nine years old and out wandering in a field by myself. The sun is shining as I wade through tall grasses. I have just prayed my first prayer of commitment, prompted by a religious tract I have picked up on a visit to a church. It is called *Bridge to Life* and is published by an evangelical group called The Navigators. My family are not religious but I have been searching for something. I am curious for an answer to life's contradictions. In the tract, there is a picture of a crevasse between us and God, with the cross of Jesus forming a path over the chasm. On the human side is sin and death, on God's side is the free gift of eternal life. I often feel guilty for the wrong things I do, but the tract tells me God loves me and is offering me forgiveness. The message within it is hopeful. I swallow it whole. I repeat the prayer at the back of the booklet. A joyous feeling stirs up within me and seems to breach the bounds of my body. I see an image appear to my minds' eye, as though I am lucid dreaming, of straight path laid out before me toward God and toward a light filled future. It is clear that I mustn't wander off the path to explore. I begin to read the Bible every day, starting with Genesis, and decide I will devote my life to God.

Blood-Rock

Prologue

Greek

(*pro* – before + *logos* – speech; also word, incarnation of God)

When our time began, when the earth was a formless chaos, when God's breath hovered over the face of the deep, He spoke. And in the speaking, things separated, came together, took form.

His voice spoke dry ground out of the black deep. He voiced word-things out of dark seas, word-things that crawled onto the land and became bodies that breathed and ingested and spoke. These bodies told the story of this beginning over and over. And then there were so many words, a torrent of things spoken by so many mouths. Enough to fill an empty world with word-things, forming worldings without end.

Some decided that this profusion needed taming, and so, in time, one story was agreed upon by one, ever-increasing body of folk. It became authorised and inscribed, but you cannot pin down a story, its shape shifts in the telling. It escapes like a slippery fish from the squeeze of a hand.

Religion

Latin

(*re-ligare* – to re-bind, re-connect)

The narration of myth, or *muthos* for the Greeks, is the telling of a story that reveals the cosmos as it truly is. The myth story stabilises, is: 'a way of binding the world and attaching oneself to it.'^[i] Myth provides an orientation – an authorized way of being a human in the world - a foundation upon which a community is built. The orientation of the myth is not abstract, it forms embodied experience. I feel it in my gut. This sensory feeling of belonging, of stability, produces an excess. The overflow channels up through the gullet and is breathed into a resonant vocalisation. From the speaking of the myth, a fabulation arises, fragile at first, emerging falteringly as a mist rises from the ground. The community is enveloped in an atmosphere thick with enchantment.

In the myth-world that oriented me, the universe is bound into the tidy linearity of:

creation-fall-resurrection-recreation

This forward trajectory – through a story in which a redemptive ending eclipses the journey – leads the gaze through and beyond the world of matter to a God-man who will reappear in clouds of glory. The atmospherics of the myth-world speak of the weather to come. But this narrative trajectory, in reality, is bound to matter, both magical and mundane.

This story is ritually represented as a round edible wafer or fragment of bread that is placed inside the mouth during communion. It makes the cosmos a morsel that is easy to digest. This spherical nourishment hosts a word-thing: the weighty God-man protagonist. The morsel is eaten by the believer in a ritual of both remembrance and identification. It settles in the belly. The God-man is referred to in the story of stories as the cornerstone, the first stone placed in a building from which all other stones find their bearing, and upon which the entire structure is built.

God is building a home... He used the apostles and prophets for the foundation. Now he's using you, fitting you in brick by brick, stone by stone, with Christ Jesus as the cornerstone that holds all the parts together... a holy temple built by God, all of us built into it, a temple in which God is quite at home. Eph. 19-22 (The Message)

Minerals, conducted by water, flow through the transmuting matter of the body, a shifting liquid lithic. They concrete into stones of mineral salts in the organs and ducts of the kidneys and urinary tracts. These stones create painful obstructions. Less problematically, the body converts the mineral calcium into bone. This inner structure enables us to stand, to walk, to be grounded, resisting collapse. The liminality of the stony-fluid body manifests in the sea creature *Pyura Chilensis*. It is both male and female and exists in the intertidal zone, the shifting boundary between land and sea. It is a sea squirt or tunicate found in South America, also known as 'blood rock,' which resembles a mass of bodily organs enclosed by a deceptive rock-like exterior.

The interior is deep red and fleshy, intestine like, inside the stony carapace. The blood rock is known for having a high concentration of the mineral vanadium. Vanadium is used as a steel alloy, resulting in a significant increase in the strength of steel, often used to reinforce concrete foundation slabs in buildings to provide tensile strength and enduring stability. The lithic surrounds us, shifts slowly through and within us. It forms a ground both inside and out.

I take the communion bread and consume the cornerstone. The reversal of a fleshy transformation: the bread does not become flesh, I become stone. I am enclosed within the believing body. As the communion bread passes through my mouth from an exterior thriving with bacteria, it breaks down and dissolves, working its way across the intestinal membrane, and into the busy microbiome of my guts, entering the blood stream through the liver and towards the brain stem and cerebral matter. The foundation digested and absorbed.

Oliver Zarandi

Body Horror

Body Horror is a memoir that explores and excavates the author's attempts to come to terms with his disordered eating as a teenager. At the age of twelve, the author stopped eating solid food and survived on two soups a day. Through his teens, his eating became increasingly more disordered and he began to retreat into his own mind.

The book interrogates the intersections of having a body, masculinity and queerness through the lens of memory, outsider art, painting, horror films, shock websites and pornography.

The book explores: nervous system illustrations, filmic blood textures and their relation to his eating disorder; mouths in Francis Bacon's paintings and their relation to food textures; the thickness of Frank Auerbach's paint and obsessive etching work of Käthe Kollwitz and how it relates to Annie Ernaux's work and the writing of the self; his own fear of choking and its relationship to depictions of puberty in Todd Solondz's *Welcome To The Dollhouse* and William Friedkin's *The Exorcist*.

Body Horror charts the author's quest to understand his disordered eating in a language that is not academic, but instead to 'carve my own language from my body... to take my blood and guts and semen and muscles and tell it through that instead.' It is a book told through obsessive affinities between his body and art, and how that art helped him understand who he is today.

[Body Horror extract]

I decided to travel back home and talk to my mom. I'm on a train back to Wolverhampton. You know you're close when you go past the derelict warehouses, windows smashed in, past the mass of gas cylinders in that giant lot near the station, past the mass of concrete and weeds sprouting from it all. Wolverhampton's motto: *Out of darkness, cometh light*. I sit on the train, away from people and look down at my half eaten sandwich. I always get a cheap cheese and onion sandwich from Marks & Spencers or Tesco because the filling is smooth, the kind of mush they feed people in hospitals, but I can't finish it without a bottle of water to assist it going down my throat. So I'm hungry. *Agitated*. I can feel my nervous system crackling. I often get this feeling that my nervous system is *overheating*, from the excessive blinking of my eyes, twitching the tendons in my neck, all the way down my body to my biceps — they flex repeatedly — to my fists, then thighs and my feet. I can't stop moving. For some reason I think of that moment in *Boogie Nights* where Eddie Adams reveals his pornstar name: Dirk Diggler, spelled out in bright blue neon lights with a purple outline, just *'blows up, it's so powerful.'* When I was eighteen, shortly after I started eating again, albeit with difficulty, I was consumed with anxiety and the feeling that I was overheating. It was as if I had several hearts beating at different rhythms, that I couldn't catch my breath at all, that one would explode and end my life there and then. I'd sometimes fill bowls with cold water and submerge my face in it to cool myself down. Other times I'd wake up at seven or eight in the morning and sneak in a swig of gin from the drinks cabinet to calm my nerves down.

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I think about those nervous systems in the Hunterian Museum in London: you can find them tucked away in the corner of the museum, flattened and displayed like a pressed flower in an antique book. I didn't know what they were called, so I looked it up: they're called Evelyn Tables. Named after English writer John Evelyn (1620–1706) who brought them from Padua, Italy because of his 'broad interest in the world,' these tables were made in the 1640s, 'from real human tissue — blood vessels and nerves — carefully dissected from surrounding body tissue and pasted onto wooden boards.' There are actually four of these tables showing different parts of the human body, each table made from planks of pine, sanded down and glued together and varnished: the first table shows the spinal cord and its nerves. The second shows the aorta and arteries; the third shows the vagi and sympathetic nerves and the veins of the lungs and liver; the fourth shows the network of veins.

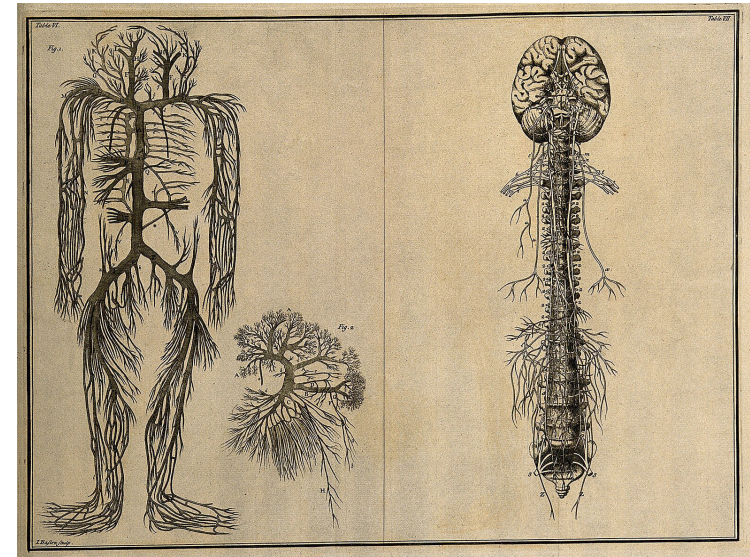
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Virginia Woolf writes in *Mrs Dalloway*:

'His body was macerated until only the nerve fibres were left. It was spread like a veil on a rock.'

•

I go on YouTube and search for Evelyn Tables and find a video from the Royal College of Physicians: a suited man with white hair shows us a nervous system flattened and preserved on a flat wooden surface and shows us where the 'spinal cord breaks up into a number of *filamentous branches*'. He compares the brachial plexus to Clapham Junction and I'm immediately thinking of how my nerves are completely jangled coming back to Wolverhampton, my body being transported through England's overly complicated network of trains, fucking expensive, back to the site of where I started experiencing my disordered eating and feeling the thrum of the train through my skull as I leaned onto the uncomfortable curve of a Virgin train wall.



The trunks of the vena cava, with their branches (1743)

•

As I get off the train, I can feel the pull of the house where I started having difficulty eating. My parents moved out of that house back in 2006, but now live opposite it. I dread visiting them because outside of their ground-floor window I can see the house peeking above the trees. It's a Georgian house made from large sandstone blocks. The front of the house looks like two breasts: one breast belongs to the next door neighbors; we owned the right breast. The windows are curved here. I remember my mom remarking on how beautiful curved glass was. How difficult this kind of glass was to make. In the middle of these two breasts was my room, which lay above our neighbors living room. My window wasn't curved: it was a sash-window. The house, even when we moved in back in 1998, had a haunted quality to it. Georgian architecture is often marked for its symmetry and restraint. Even a rudimentary Google search brings up this result — a PDF on *The Pathology of Georgian Buildings*:

Terraces, squares and Crescents (circuses) are also of significance as vernacular construction is swept away in an exercise of unified, symmetrical, and deliberately detailed developments.

So on the surface our house was just a house. But back then — and now — the house feels alive. Pause a moment and be quiet. Listen. The house breathes slowly. The holes in the upstairs bathroom: copper piping runs down into the depths of the house's body. These are its veins, or its nervous system. *The Pathology of Georgian Buildings* states that common issues that could arise as a result of the methods of construction used at the time might be decaying joists, rotten or stuck sash windows, poor ventilation. Maybe we can add Oliver Zarandi to the list of issues that caused the house to rot? The holes in the upstairs bathroom, putting food down the holes, the food that belonged in my body. I would literally feed the house. Georgian houses, marked for their symmetry, their order, yes — but the house has the personality of a trickster and was the breeding ground for disorder too.

I lived above the sagittal plane of this house and disrupted the harmony of how it was divided. My room was the odd room out, the one that made the house uneasy. I still feel like my room was haunted, that there were creaks in the floorboards and in the walls. Brian Dillon writes in *In The Dark Room*: ‘...keeping my distance from the depths of these rooms, as if the nothingness at their centres might swallow me whole, drag me back into the memories I have finally left behind.’

I haven't been back to the site of the house since I was eighteen, *the site of the murder, the scene of the crime*, but in dreams, in my mind — there is that pattern again, the repetition of De Quincey, Adrienne Rich, Roy Orbison, David Lynch, the images of my thin body, of food spat down the asshole of the house, the word *choking*, the word *swallowing*, repeating itself in my head — the space of that house pulls me inwards, a centripetal force, to consume me, my body crushed and battered and bruised as I slip down the throat of the house, tenderised by Georgian peristalsis, and end up in a completely different form, ready to be crapped out again, at the pit of the house's stomach.

Aisha Farr

Get-Up

Get-Up is a long visual poem containing distorted images, in which 'a woman young ish but nearly old ish/ dresses as her mother's mother and/ attends in that guise her life'. It draws on the symbols and rites of Zoroastrianism as practiced by the Parsis, a minority community in India. It also draws on various old riddles, and on riddling as a tone and method, an obscure way of seeing clearly. The images come from paintings and screenshots which make use of anamorphosis, a visual illusion that encourages the viewer to look awry at a given image in order to decipher it.

[Get-Up Extract]

people will work hard to avoid the
truth you wrestle with wanting and
not wanting which is wanting to
avoid which is wanting
be careful they say in india they'll cheat
you help you while they place a shit on
your shoe delicately from a cup like a
flower on a white sheet like fruit in a bowl
just picked they advise like a stick of
sandalwood bitten by silver tongs be
vigilant our relatives hate us because your
father is your father and your mother is
your mother don't talk that way as though
you aren't you, your nana
was hated for being too clever the only
one to have that much
amount against the oldest one of learning
the clock shaped like the playboy bunny
unaware, not caring

+

"she is doubtless pregnant, or has waited a long time to be"

you can't banish ambiguity with riddling - looking right at doesn't see. think. how. you
cut a hole and reel *it* in from outside on a line, brine *it* and bed *it* furious
in your innermost room though you wish not to, *it* draws everything
out eyes dried fast and uselessly open. what is
more fickle, what more
false than having?



remember the time: i can't forget the
swaying line of her sight an empty
canopy along which
she watched me take off my trousers
the legs swish dryly
out of fabric like they're backing
out of tunnels that recede gently they
aren't shaved I feel nostalgically
ashamed
she watches my seeing knees rise
as stones that shine her face and studies
them for years not knowing they can

see with all due diligence - we're made
to undress to dress up -
she hands me fishnets very properly
twisting like the snakeskin
she's shedding the diamonds grow
big they've caught something
dwelling terrible she smiles in a very
large house
and not at me the lines are diagonal
i see in my mind's eye
her booking this airbnb on her work
computer i see her sat at her screen
when i'm before her the glow of it bright
and everlasting as the flame arriving
flickering uncertain on the shore of
maharashtra - i got here
when it was dark i can't see anything
i don't know where i am - it has a very
large fireplace and eggs made from stone
and unhatched wood
i haven't paid her back it costs too much for
what it is we talk faux drunkenly - she seems
evenly interested in everything
other people's words are other people's
chains that ring a ring around her - we don't
say we don't agree smash a penis shaped as a
piñata without any solidarity
another voice disagrees loudly with natural
methods at the table
without doubt blood beats clean behind
their ears and she knows deep as water she
won't see me

at night the body stops being a stable
device for scale or proportion sometimes a
stone archway expands to an unknowable
size and the air presses into me like it's
jellying. now in a sweep with one arm my
hand on my arm is a toothpick
cupped by a palm big as an oak that house
was the perfect place to be fooled in and i'll
always be glad she trembled like a tree
around my body as i swayed but since then
words don't the same

+

Remi Graves

coal

coal is an experimental pamphlet that pivots around the life and death of Paul Downing, a black transmasculine person from Georgia, USA, who was arrested and charged as a ‘wandering lunatic’ on London’s Blackfriars Bridge in September 1905. The collection circles around Paul’s institutionalisation, and his subsequent death following nine months at Stone Asylum in Dartford. Exploring ideas of non-linear time, fugitivity and becoming, these poems ask questions about where and how trans life might be liveable.

Apart from a few harmful newspaper articles and a doctor’s record in the City of London Asylum’s Casebook, there is no archived trace of Paul’s life, especially not his life before incarceration. We know he travelled through America, Spain, Belgium, France and the UK looking for his lost wife. That’s all we have.

coal is concerned with the complexity of elegy for a person never met, but deeply felt. These poems are an improvised antidote to the archival void around Paul’s personhood. Where the archives lack care and understanding, *coal* asks us to experience Paul on entirely different terms, to consider his interior world and the kind of life he might have lived before he was placed in the asylum. How might these poems serve as voices of witness? How might we understand Paul’s ‘wandering’ in the contexts of freedom and refusal?

[*coal* extract]

on bilocation

If gender be a place
Don't take me there
I want none of your cruel geographies

*

Dream vision of Paul and Cole meeting as Screenplay

SCENE 1

COLE, a young black transmasculine person, walks into Blackfriars station in 2022. He bumps into PAUL who is frozen at the ticket barrier.

COLE

You need an oyster card mate.

PAUL turns around, stunned that he can be seen.

PAUL

An oyster card?

COLE recognises PAUL, now that they're facing each other. He smiles.

COLE

Don't worry you can sneak in behind me, stay close.

The two shuffle through the gate. COLE notices a woman in a TFL uniform watching PAUL tailgate, a second later the woman returns to her crossword.

COLE

So where are you heading?

PAUL

I'm trying to get to Bow Road infirmary...
Do you know it? (to camera)

COLE

Yeah I've just been reading up on it actually! But...
it's not there anymore. Demolished years ago. I can show
you where the old building was if that helps?

PAUL

Ugh... I was hoping to recover some things I left there.
They wouldn't let me hold on to my things

COLE

Who wouldn't -

PAUL

So can you take me?

COLE

Sure

PAUL

Thanks

They head towards the District Line, people stare at PAUL in his wideawake hat, mackintosh and Inverness cape. They both ignore the stares.

SCENE 2

Sat at the platform waiting for the tube.

COLE

What did you come back for?

PAUL

Everything... but mainly my pipe and my comb.

COLE

. . .

COLE glances as PAUL's hair, flat on one side, slightly matted at the back.

PAUL

Exactly.

COLE

You've come all the way back to get a comb? Don't they
have those in... wherever you are?

PAUL

Surprisingly enough, no. I didn't think I'd need one...

COLE

I can give you one of mine if you like, saves us a trip
to the old asylum...

PAUL

. . .

COLE

. . .

PAUL

I also wanted to piss on the wall of the building, if I'm
honest.

COLE

Gotcha.

The two jump on the tube to Bow Road. Arrived at the station,
COLE uses Google Maps to navigate them towards the old site.

SCENE 3

COLE

This is it apparently.

PAUL

Is it?

COLE

Apparently, yeah.

PAUL

Looks worse than it did when I was here.

COLE

(laughter)

The two pull down their trousers and lean forward making sure
the jets of piss land directly on the wall, steam coming off the
bricks and mortar.

let's draw a line through it

tightrope

let's draw a line through you

let the line

turn in on itself, burrow an escape. let's keep you at arms length. let's put you away.
let's lie you down. let's write about you. let's lie about you. let's keep an eye on you.
let's keep checking in on you and give up on you. let's ignore you. let's prod you. let's
flatten you. let's deny you. let's die you. let's underline you with red ink. let's
annotate you. let's paper you. let's rub out you. let's archive you. let's goodbye you

Krystle Patel

Start with the present

Start with the present is a short-form hybrid work that explores strategies of mimicry, rhythm and rage as a form of defence for the artist of colour when navigating the hostile environment of the art world. It highlights the complex nature of the diaspora in contemporary Britain and locates this within the specifics of the British-Asian population. It was born as a response to contemporary violence against artists of colour in which individuals and institutions insist on distilling and containing being so as to serve private agendas of cultural appeasement and economically justified tick-boxing. As such the text intentionally works against clarity, against linear narrative structure and against traditional form, burying itself as a tool to evade capture or exploitation.

This text functions as a constellation. The repetition of symbolic forms, such as the single black-and-white image from Bataille's Documents series, the presence of { } parenthesis and the use of video hyperlinks function as nodes upon which the reader can hang, allowing a more fluid and slippery engagement with the material and encouraging movement between portions, across and back again. Thematically it touches on the variety of subjective experiences that a British-Asian (like myself) may have encountered and found to be contextually relevant to their current mode of being. Examples include Bollywood, Jungle music, scientific research, service provision and assimilation.

There are 10 sections in total with the writing moving between personal experience, artistic discourse, theory and critique. Artists and writers referenced include Pauline Oliveros, Edward George, Vladimir Nabokov, Walter Benjamin and Cathy Park Hong. Most notable is a 1978 letter written in response to one by Rasheed Araeen (known for being outspoken regarding the expectation and exploitation of artists of colour in 1970s Britain) to Goldsmiths (then college and the location of my MFA) questioning many of the practices that I also touch upon in this text.

My hope is that reading this work will both support the development of the diaspora in Britain as well as giving others the tools and opportunity to begin to understand a complex and evolving portion of their population outside of the exoticism, fantasy and archaic language that has been pivotal in our being and presence in this country and continues to inform the way in which we are received, engaged with, and understood.

[*Start with the present extract*]

Dear Rasheed (of 7th June 1978)

I am writing in response to your letter to () of Goldsmith's College, New Cross, regarding the response to the performance piece 'Paki Bastard' at The Whitechapel Gallery, and specifically its reception as *autobiographical* (this being used as a blanket term referencing the multitude of layers that comprise being and more significantly the impact of the word on reducing and cementing 'being' from verb to noun). The difficulty of viewing a work as multi-layered and appreciating each layer individually, in relationship with some others, and all as a whole where the sum of the total is greater than their individual parts (Bauman, 2000) is at it happens an issue still facing many artists more than 40 years on from your correspondence.

Our contemporary angle of reductivity, with regards to identity and more specifically race, has, you may be glad to hear, originated from good intentions i.e. anti-racism initiatives and a desire to learn and know more. However, while the reasoning may be well intended, I fear that the action continues to be steeped in misunderstanding, a need for immediacy and lack of the necessary language through which these complex issues can be discussed and confronted with sensitivity. In short, we are presented with initiatives that are inherently limited by a laziness.

I, unlike you, do not have 'a people to return to'. I was born to Indian parents but raised in London. In your words I am an alien but one without a planet. Or perhaps I do have a { planet }, it is relatively new (40 – 50 years) and doesn't have a physical location. This { planet } exists within and between bodies that have formed in Indian homes on British Soil. This planet existed before those of us that are part of it knew we were contributing to something so large. Growing on British Soil meant adapting, fitting in, not causing any trouble and being grateful. Survival was reliant on remembering the status and sacrifice of your generation, why you had left and the opportunities that we had before us (should we play according to the rules).

What we didn't realise then were that the rules were a trap. They were used for control. Of course we were complicit, we were not tempted with anything that we did not want. However we were fundamentally split, fractured, initially into two pieces, but with time many more. One person at home and another outside. Continually adapting. Those that survive become more adept, light, able to shift. Many, however, do not.

Adaptation had its benefits, academic success, professional development, apparent status within the community. However these adaptations were fragmented, layered, nuanced and liquid. They occurred between bodies, communities and institutions. And although the bodies of and on this { planet } were changing, their surrounding environment was not. It was stagnant, satisfied that we played by the rules (of course there were outliers, but they were quickly swatted and deemed irrelevant troublemakers – perhaps this is how you felt? How your words were received?). Our compliance was mistaken for statis.

Now we are in a time of renewed interest, rooted in good intentions. The environment has become aware of the presence of our { planet }. Unfortunately it is being treated as a discovery and the logic of this language puts the power again in the hands of those trying to understand us, albeit without any attempt to familiarise themselves with the dialect. Which is where laziness comes into the conversation. It is useful here to refer to the topic of Deference Epistemology, succinctly described by the brilliant Olufemi Taiwo (n.d). Taiwo confronts good intentions and the legacy of racism whilst highlighting the complexity of immigrant communities. Namely the variations within, due to what you correctly highlight as the active variables of colonialism, cultural imperialism, cultural up-rootment and class appropriation.

Individualism and identity politics are now on the table, however the speed at which they are consumed does not suit the complex and fragmented dish that we have on offer. The lazy diner, who has arrived with good intentions, lacks the time to acclimatise their gut, an essential process when faced with the undigestible.

Best Wishes,
Krystle Patel

Milo Thesiger-Meacham

Audible Heat

Milo Thesiger-Meacham's *Audible Heat* is in equal parts an academic essay, a media study, a piece of travel writing and an art project. It comprises a unique synthesis of wide-ranging research which examines the omnipresent sound of the cicada as 'audible heat' throughout human history and cultures. It argues that this heat-induced insect sound acts as a conduit between the climate and the individual's sense of identity and mortality in hot, unfamiliar landscapes.

Audible Heat offers a complex intercontinental narrative which ranges from the sound-induced fears of the early colonists of Northeastern America and the apocalyptic premonitions of the indigenous Wampanoag people to such diverse matters as Greek tongue twisters, Medieval Moorish poetry, Socrates' dread of dehydration, Geronimo's hatred of telegraphy, the slow body language of Clint Eastwood, military re-enactments, ancient cooking implements, and the botanist Donald C. Peattie's terror of the inescapable buzz of death.

Materials examined include handwritten letters, scientific journals, historical correspondence between North America and Europe, literary fiction, photography, film and film soundtracks, YouTube videos, and field recordings made across Europe by Milo himself. Many films, artworks, works of scientific and imaginative literature, and the poems of Ibn Quzmān are looked at through the lens of Plato's *Phaedrus*, a text in which the sound of cicadas is seen as a danger to the human mind. The archetypal duels of Sergio Leone's Spaghetti Westerns – during which silent characters contemplate the natural sound of their environment and the immutable noise of cicadas as a prelude to fatal violence – are viewed in light of Socrates' warning to sustain dialogue in the noise of the heat; the geopolitical tensions embedded in Southern Spain as Al-Andalus (إسبانيا); and in relation to Milo's personal dialogue with current experts in various fields of entomology, history, music and art. These include Douglas Yanega of the University of California; folk musician Matthias Loibner; author Catherine McNeur; and Gene Kritsky, developer of Cicada Safari, a public app which tracks the mass emergence of periodical cicadas across North America.

[Audible Heat extract]

Professor G. R. F. Ferrari's analysis of the cicadas' sound suggests that its effect on humans is almost entirely physical, that it has to do with how you appear in the heat. A person must be careful not to "allow themselves to be bewitched by the cicadas' drone [...] and doze off like sheep at siesta," Ferrari writes. He mentions Socrates's warning that the energetic nature of the sound is a deliberate mockery of humans as "slavish" in the sun. Leone, commenting on Clint Eastwood's "indolent way of moving" through landscape brings to light something similarly languid in the physicality of the archetypal on-screen cowboy. The heat present in both *Phaedrus* and Leone's *Andalusian Dollars Trilogy* cannot be felt by an audience, but it is essential to the background insect noise. This becomes a way of communicating heat through sound. The temperature of Andalusia finds its way into Eastwood's movement and onto film, just as the climate of ancient Greece enters the subject matter of Plato's dialogue. Revealed in candid photographs taken on set, deep tan lines mark Leone's arms, his skin having reacted to the unavoidable sunlight, just as his film inevitably absorbed the natural soundtrack of cicadas which bask and sing in this sun. Eastwood recalls a crew who, during filming, would play in the heat, largely oblivious to the environmental soundscape: "they just weren't used to the quietness of a set where sound is a very important feature."

I interpret the presence of the cicadas' sound in *Phaedrus* to be representative of paranoia. It is something that seems induced by the heat and which comes to influence the course of their conversation, causing the relaying of a myth. This myth, as Socrates tells it, involves the exhaustion of men who sing endlessly in the heat, forgetting to eat or drink. They become dehydrated and eventually shrivel up under the sun, still singing, and are then "the origin of the first race of cicadas". The story describes a path from tragedy – in this case, death – to the cicada's sound. This trajectory is reversed by botanist Donald C. Peattie in a New York Times article of 1936 titled *After Seventeen Years the Cicada Leaves the Earth, to Wail, to Mate, and to Meet Death*. His definitive point is that: "The effect of the cicada's song on human beings is of interest to students of psychology" and is disturbing "not because of its monotony but because of its suggestion that something terrible is going to happen". Rather than people who've died in the heat becoming the source of sound, as in the myth, instead the sound communicates death itself to Peattie, as it does to Leone's characters during a pivotal scene in *Once Upon a Time in the West*, in which a young woman named Maureen McBain sings over the relentless noise of cicadas and into the heat: "The summer's gone, and all the roses fall." Precisely at that moment, the insects – whose eerie noise foreshadows the imminent murder of the McBain family – fall completely silent, and deadly gunmen emerge, seemingly from the heatwave itself, which Maureen's father had ventured into moments earlier to find water.

Entomological study has found that the sound of the cicada is a reaction to increases in heat and light. In various scientific papers, the naturalist James E. Heath aimed to "evaluate the interaction between temperature and activity among cicadas." He notes that cicadas "sing in the intense sunlight" which triggers "synchronised chorusing". It is this collective sound that Peattie describes as "one of the most depressing and

unnerving ever heard". He becomes suspicious of the hot terrain as a whole, and the "sizzling song" of the cicadas brings about an awareness of his own vulnerability in the heat. When the three disparate characters in *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* meet in the middle of a cemetery, Leone creates a tension evocative of Peattie's feeling that cicada sound suggests "something terrible is going to happen." Knowing that some or all of them will die, the men contemplate themselves, each other and the only sounds around them: the wind, the crows and the cicadas. In a similar reflection on the landscape, early on in *Phaedrus*, Socrates also stands and listens. He comments on "the whisper of the breeze" and how it "chimes in a summery, clear way with the chorus of cicadas". Significantly, Leone's gunmen do not talk, they fall silent, become oblivious to the bags of gold hidden beneath their feet, and listen to the insects. "My films are basically silent," Leone says, "the dialogue adds some weight". Leone's decision to make conversation secondary leads to a central feature of the cinematic Western duel: its contemplative quiet. This lack of speech in the face of the cicadas' sound is something which, according to the myth told by Socrates, would cast a spell on the gunmen. A way to avoid this, Socrates explains, is to be "talking and sailing past them like Sirens whose spell we had resisted."

Ferrari suggests that Socrates, a man also contemplating himself, becomes "the man 'out of place'" in the heat, unable to "leave the background where it belongs; the man who listens to the cicadas" and who would feel uneasy in Leone's filming locations on the outskirts of towns and villages, where roads dissolve into open farmland, an area known in Toledo, Spain, as a *cigarral*, a place where the cicadas – *cigarras* – can be heard. This cinematic choice of his was probably intended to sustain the background narrative of a country ravaged by the ongoing American Civil War. Similarly, as Socrates and Phaedrus meet on the outskirts of Athens, they encounter the sound of cicadas on the remote edges of a city which, at the time of *Phaedrus*'s writing, was recovering from the devastating Peloponnesian War, a civil war. Like the Athenian women dreamily imagined by Mario Praz in his book of Spanish travels, *Unromantic Spain* (1929), who wear a "cicada of gold" in their hair, Athenian soldiers had worn bronze tokens of cicadas into battle as emblems of autochthony – *springing from the earth* – a nationalist concept referring to the life cycle and sound of cicadas, whose emergence from underground resonated with Athenians as a people who felt they had originated entirely from their own land. And in Greece, on significant occasions, they continue to reimagine these conflicts, as documented in a video uploaded to YouTube titled *The Battle Of Marathon* 2011, a "Re-enactment of the 2500th anniversary of the Battle of Marathon," during which the mayor of the town of Marathon, who wears shorts, sandals and a t-shirt in the blistering heat, addresses the re-enactors and public in a speech hardly audible over the sound of cicadas coming from the trees. As an immutable, environmental constant which is in some way a part of the re-enactment, the cicadas continue their sound as battle starts.

Author Biographies: Book-length category

MATTHIAS CONNOR was born in London and grew up in Derbyshire. He left school without any qualifications. He first discovered his cultural life of writers, artists, filmmakers and musicians through the people he met skateboarding in Manchester, before moving to London in the early nineties. For as long as he can remember he has wanted to be a writer. He did this by making fanzines as a teenager before publishing a series of chapbooks. Amongst the many jobs he's had, he's worked as a postman, in a laundrette, in a clothes shop, in a nightclub, in a kitchen, in a video shop and as a childminder. At the age of forty he returned to education to study to be a nurse. He is interested in improving the health of the most marginalised and often most disregarded sectors in society. He lives in London with his wife and two sons. *Loose Fit* is his first book.

ELLEN DILLON is a writer and teacher from Limerick, Ireland. Her latest books are *Fare Thee Well, Miss Carousel* (HVTN Press, 2023) and *tentatives* (Pamenar Press, 2023). Previous books look at Irish history from the perspective of butter (*Butter Intervention; Veer 2, 2022*), the teaching life of Stéphane Mallarmé (*Morsel May Sleep; Sublunary Editions, 2021*), and Stephen Malkmus's guitar (*Sonnets to Malkmus; Sad Press, 2019*).

REBECCA JAGOE is an autistic artist who works across text, performance and sculpture. Their work examines how experiences of illness, madness, and gender are informed by specific Western, imperialist narratives around the 'human', and its relationship to language, monstrosity, and animality. This often manifests as dialogues with other-than-humans: the ocean, a mirror, a catfish, a blue plastic arm, a deep-sea anglerfish. Jagoe's work has been published in *The Happy Hypocrite*, *Hotel*, *EROS Journal*, and *Artes Mundi Journal*, among others. With Sharon Kivland they have edited two anthologies, *ON VIOLENCE* (2018) and *ON CARE* (2020), both published by MA BIBLIOTHÉQUE. They were a Wales in Venice 10 Fellow 2022–23 and part of the Freelands Fellowship 2021–22. They have recently shown work at Chapter, Cardiff (2024), g39, Cardiff, and Site Gallery, Sheffield (all 2023), the Drawing Room, London, Mostyn, EKKM, Tallinn, Kim?, Riga (all 2021), and Wysing Arts Centre and CCA Goldsmiths (2020).

KATE PICKERING is a London-based artist, writer, and associate lecturer in Fine Art at Goldsmiths, researching the entanglements of ecological bodies and sacred sites through scholarly writing, creative-critical texts and performance. She completed an AHRC scholarship PhD at Goldsmiths examining how the immersive story-world of North America's largest megachurch acts as a 'total work of art' in a broader context of white nationalism, climate crisis, End Times obsession and climate change denialism. Recent work includes a site-based performance lecture that drew on the Catholic history of the Jan van Eyck Academy and its local ecologies (Maastricht, 2023); a writing commission for Kate McMillan's solo exhibition 'Never at Sea', focusing on climate change and migration at St Mary Le Strand Church (London, 2023); and the curation of 'Ritual/Bodies', a live performance event at St Pancras Church, exploring bodily representations within Christian tradition (London, 2024). Her writing has been published by Copy Press, Veer Books and *EROS Journal* amongst others. Pickering co-runs Peer Sessions, a crit group for artists, and is a trustee for mental health charity Arts Network London.

OLIVER ZARANDI is a writer. His first book, *Soft Fruit In The Sun* (Hexus Press, 2019) was said to be like 'getting a hug from David Cronenberg'. His writing has appeared in *Hotel*, *Hobart*, *iD*, *Diagram*, *Little White Lies*, and more. You can follow him on X at @zarandi.

Author Biographies: Short-form category

AISHA FARR is an artist and writer who works in adult education and community outreach in London. Some of her writing has appeared in *Zarf*, *Project Self Detective*, *Try To Be Better* (Prototype, 2019) and *The People's House*. She also makes drawings, weavings and paintings. Aisha is currently working on a collaborative film project titled *Terrormar*.

REMI GRAVES is a London-based poet and drummer. A former Barbican Young Poet, their work has been commissioned by St Paul's Cathedral, Arthouse Jersey and BBC Radio 4. They have led courses at The Poetry School and facilitate in schools and community spaces around London. Remi was longlisted for the Merky Books New Writers' Prize in 2020 and their debut pamphlet, *with your chest*, was published by fourteen poems in 2022.

KRYSTLE PATEL is a London-based Asian artist born in Texas. She uses writing, sound and textile to create events and site-specific film installations that interrogate the construction and value of relationships through language. She gained a degree in Dentistry and has recently completed her MFA at Goldsmiths University. Krystle was selected for Bloomberg New Contemporaries, the Goldsmiths Alumni commission, has had work acquired for the Government Art Collection, and was the artist in residence at the Institute of Neurology at UCL.

MILO THESIGER-MEACHAM is an artist, composer, performer, broadcaster and Artistic Director of the community arts radio stations Resonance FM and Resonance Extra. In 2022 he was commissioned by the European Capital of Culture to create *Body Edit Mind*, a 22-hour audio work made using 6,000 pieces of found material. He has worked on solo and group projects for Tate Modern, The V&A Museum, the Centre for Contemporary Arts Glasgow, London and Paris Fashion Weeks, Radiophrenia, Cafe Oto, Iklektik, Tenement Press, the European Poetry Festival, Waste Paper Opera, Lewisham Arthouse, Radio Revolten, IvyNODE & Tierra Vivente, Echoraume, and more.