

‘Always informed by materiality, Lola’s writing penetrates staleness and cynicism with a translational poetics, a form-rejecting imaginary, and a bold ambition that, on my best days, makes me embrace feeling like a dreamer.’

— Zoé Samudzi, co-author of *As Black as Resistance: Finding the Conditions for Liberation*

‘A stellar book with the capacity to help collective navigation in this time of multiple pandemics. Here is a balm that soothes the soul and eases the heart as it stakes out the coordinates of doing differently; an open invitation through the portal that collapses Time, Space, History, Ontology of the normative known and into the *otherwise*.’

— Gail Lewis, co-founder of the Organisation for Women of African and Asian Descent (OWAAD)

‘Reading this book wrought magic in my spirit. I am floored! I am flying! The writing here is revolutionary. It breaks open the world. Here is some breath-giving medicine for this gasping historic moment. Here are some weapons for lovers, for feminists.’

— Sophie Lewis, author of *Full Surrogacy Now: Feminism Against Family*

‘Open any page and decide how you wish to make sense of it—Olufemi’s writing is, at its core, collaborative. With characteristically playful insistence and ease, she reminds us once more: the light is within us!’

— Imani Robinson, writer and artist

‘I was blown away by the ethical and aesthetic ambition of this book. It’s rare to come across a voice so committed to challenging every convention of thinking about systemic harm with such generosity, clarity and freshness of tone.’

— Preti Taneja, author of *We That Are Young*

‘Lola Olufemi breathes life into the pockets of possibility in the present, recovers militant hope in the past, and lovingly conjures revolutionary futures. This book is alive with ideas, jokes, dreams, rage and wisdom.’

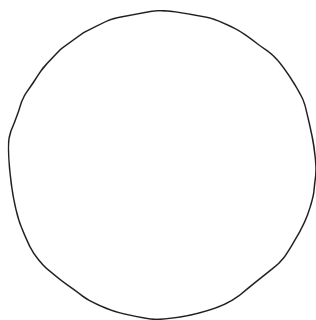
— Sita Balani, co-author of *Empire’s Endgame: Racism and the British State*

PRAISE FOR LOLA OLUFEMI:

‘Reading her is to believe that another world is possible.’

— Nesrine Malik, *The Guardian*

EXPERIMENTS
IN IMAGINING
OTHERWISE



First published in the United Kingdom in 2021
by Hajar Press C.I.C.
www.hajarpres.com
[@hajarpres](https://twitter.com/hajarpres)

© Lola Olufemi, 2021

The right of Lola Olufemi to be identified as the author of this work
has been asserted by her in accordance with the Copyright,
Designs and Patents Act, 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced,
distributed or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without the
written permission of the publisher.

ISBN 978-1-914221-05-7 Paperback
ISBN 978-1-914221-11-8 EPUB eBook

A Cataloguing-in-Publication data record for this book is available
from the British Library.

The story 'Red' was shortlisted for the 2020 Queen Mary *Wasafiri*
New Writing Prize for Fiction and first appeared online in May 2021.

Extract from June Jordan, *Civil Wars: Observations from the Front Lines*
of America, Touchstone, 1995. © 1995, 2021, June M. Jordan Literary
Estate Trust. Used by permission.
www.junejordan.com

Cover and interior art: Hanna Stephens
Cover design: Samara Jundi
Typesetting: Laura Jones / lauraflojo.com

Printed and bound in the United Kingdom by
Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

EXPERIMENTS
IN IMAGINING
OTHERWISE

LOLA OLUFEMI



It seems I knew you long before our
common ties—of conscious choice
Threw under single skies, those like us
Who, fused by our mold
Became their targets, as of old

'FOR CONSUELA—ANTI-FASCISTA',
Claudia Jones

Abeera, my first reader—thank you.

To Farhaana, Brekhna and Hanna,
for bringing this text into focus so gently.

Like everything, this is for my loved ones—you know who you are. Here is my sealed promise to a life lived *with* and *for* you. Against a backdrop determined to siphon off, isolate and estrange, to lock us into closed nuclear family units; against an environment determined to make the prospect of knowing each other impossible, I promise to keep opening up this world until the next comes into view; to make it habitable for us and everyone else.

This book was written during a global pandemic; I turned twenty-five in the process of writing it. I wish to mark it here only by saying that so many people died needlessly. If we could comprehend it, we'd spend most days wailing. Many do. I don't believe writing has the power to do anything grand enough to help us. I would just like a space to set down my despair.

(This is not a book about despair.)

PLAYLIST

Tracy Chapman – ‘Paper and Ink’
Sun-El Musician feat. Msaki – ‘Ubomi Abumanga’
Nina Simone – ‘Baltimore’
X-Ray Spex – ‘Oh Bondage! Up Yours!’
Mohammad Assaf – ‘Dammi Falastini’
Soul Syndicate feat. Johnny ‘Dizzy’ Moore – ‘Riot’
Miriam Makeba – ‘Pata Pata (Mono Version)’
Gil Scott-Heron – ‘The Revolution Will Not Be Televised’
Noname – ‘Rainforest’
Florence + The Machine – ‘Bird Song Intro’
Laura Mvula – ‘Safe Passage’
Madeleine Peyroux – ‘We Might As Well Dance’
Laura Marling – ‘When Were You Happy? (And How Long Has That Been)’
Scorcher – ‘Sandpit’

a note on language

If I ask you to connect *point A* to *point B* and you inevitably draw a straight line, what do you *think* you think of history? If you draw a circle, do you think of history as living commotion, a sprawling mess of the not-quite-said, or did-it-actually-happen, or what-year-was-the-massacre, or what-ushered-in-the-epoch? I want you to remember that most things are an invention. I am not the first person to invoke the *otherwise*, and I won't be the last. Most concepts with potential start to droop from overuse. I might present it to you limp. Indulge me! I write to say, I do not wish to box you into the *otherwise*. We are not trying to put a finger on it; I bet you have heard that before. Here, the *otherwise* is a linguistic stand-in for a stance against; it is a posture, the layered echoes of a gesture. I promise you that no approximations will be made. Only pleas, wishes, frantic screams, notes on strategy, contributions in different registers. Substitute the *otherwise* for that thing that keeps you alive, or the ferocity with which you detest this world.

PAST
(PRESENT /
FUTURE)

I hold, like those before me, that experiments can and do fail. I am trying to make an argument for the *otherwise*. Not *otherwise* as in>>>>>over here!!!!>>>>>come find me, or a small black dot that recedes as I approach. Not that thing that is obscured and needs to be unobscured. Not a smudge, or an absence, or an entity to be owned or conquered. The future is no one's property; no need to shackle it. Not *otherwise* as in, the political horizon awaits; *otherwise* as in, a firm embrace of the unknowable; the unknowable as in, a well of infinity I want us to fall down together.

Otherwise: the future is now and all those political promises we make to one another, all the wishing and hoping in earnest (say it three times like a spell: wishing and hoping, wishing and hoping, wishing and hoping), all the leaps from the edges of bridges and mountaintops, all the reaching for and around, all the drug-taking and sex everywhere-we-should-not, all the serious study and strategy, theorising and making anew, all the breakages that slice historical space-time—all those movements that clear space and mark our struggle to live *free*, live *better*, love *more*, to knit abundance, all that is the work of another realm that is not-here.

I am trying to make an argument for unbounded affective technologies that go beyond the body, beyond the rights-bearing citizen, that precede revolutionary violence, subtend misery, technologies that eject us anywhere but the drawn-out present.

Now, the counterarguments. Against the idea that this is not ‘real’ politics, or that the material is stripped by every wish for the unknowable, I say... yes!

I am trying to inflate the material.

I am reaching for the creation of a general mood, for a stirring that awakens; I am trying to shake you so you wake up and wake up ready. You are going to have to give something up and it will not be easy. Some of us are not ready for narrative disruption. We will have to be pulled, kicking and screaming, from this world and its falsities.

Here is my method: above all, *feeling!* I aim, through experiments in feeling, to reveal and destroy what it is that keeps us here, what it is that stops us from deciding to leave even as the cinders mix with our hair, the smoke corrupts our lungs, the flames engulf the people we love. Only when we know this can we activate the bond of the *otherwise* and turn back to meet it. Some call it the communist horizon (this implies some distance between us and the future), others call it prefiguration (the future in our actions), others ‘the worlds we seek to build’ (desire desire desire)—any name will do.

Don’t be afraid. I am aiming for an untethering, a *letting-it-go-to-the-sky*, a movement so incapable of restriction it seems impossible. I am trying to craft a multi-directional and personalised journey through a number of political states.

For now, our orientation is: *against this*. *Against this* is a point of possibility, and in the emptiness of never agreeing what we are for, with hands gripping the edge, wet and slipping, we will finally agree that *against* is habitable, *against* has room for all of us. *Against* is not without conflict, it is not without pain, it is only brief respite before strategising begins.

Against is bound to *trying*, and all the frustration inherent in these concepts are an important component in this method. To *try* is to take the prospect of the future (now, then, to come) so seriously that we dedicate our lives to living in and with it. Some of you still believe a liberated future will unfold like the soldiers who stormed the citadel, or like those members of the October Revolution said it would. Their words jump forward to meet you on the page or whatever screen you find them on. More than a belief that revolution requires a set of identical conditions, you are in awe of their courage and predilection.

You look at the past, and you see them say:

I want things bigger than they seem.

I wish to be ENGULFED by the horizon.

You want that too. You can want to be frenzied enough by your own yearning, frenzied enough to risk everything.

I belong to a legacy of those who saw what this world had to offer and refused it. Before they refused it, they fought

it, and not just with words. This method emerges from the substance of everyday things. So, *excuse me* if it seems at times like I am grasping at nothing. I am. Hold on with me.

no poetry and no hope as an empty gesture of optimism. hope as a riot or uprising or revolution or many other names. simply, steal everything, burn everything. hope as commitment to see through around and beyond unending misery. hope to abandon hope when hope fails. better yet, determination to own a condition of disaster. no more epicentres or dead people as catalysts or disastrous events, no more constructing the timeline, reflecting on the turn of events, or ripple effects, please no more global v local—only a commitment to extending the disastrous moment if it means the possibility of more living, or refusing ongoing brutalisation of the self and others. maybe no more ‘humans’ and no more appeals to biology—only determination as ‘keep going’, use thinking to spur you on but remember everything constructed has its limits, think resistance strategies from the home you will eventually destroy, from the family that is an albatross about your neck, from the prison of identification. no resistance that retains private property, or the machine of the critical professional. resistance as tension and incompleteness, as a call to tell the truth. tell the truth. tell the truth about the tightrope of black life in the midst of disaster—the future depends on it. decide to become illegible, no universal, no binding struggle that means one thing and one thing only at any given time—only pockets of continuous action, non-action, faceless contribution, thankless labour, all in the spirit of quite simply, we will not tolerate suffering. repetition. here are strategies for resistance, they’re not total, they’re

not right, they are there. pick them up and put them down depending on the horror of the day. don't waste time being surprised by the horror. no more performance for surveillance capital and friends—whisper only one promise, to remain steadfast in the belief that this cannot be all there is.

I.

These days, I can only write in fragments. Maybe it is because I know that in order to live, I give away something finite in service of a system that takes pleasure in maiming before it kills. I slow it down a little here and there when I attend the meeting, or do the food run, or help my neighbour when she is sick. I hope she will help me when I am sick. Maybe it is because I can't know anything absent what I have been told the earth means by capital. What a cruel trick—to say, knowledge is at your fingertips, you can now know more than ever! but you will spend all of your time (every exertion) trying to break out of a paradigm that you cannot even see. There is nothing we can be sure of, friend. No fiction we can invent to escape the fiction the world tells about itself. But do you think that they were sure when they descended on Spaghetti House in 1975? Or when they squatted 121 Railton Road? Or when they occupied Holy Church in 1982? Okay, and even further back, I know it sounds silly, but do you think they had time to rehearse the Haitian Revolution?

2.

Can the commodity speak? Well yes & when 'it' did, the masters died. That's the story told.

3.

I feel embarrassed when I say *feminism* and people do not think *revolution in service of every living thing*. I think I will spend my life trying to rectify this.

4.

When I approach the otherwise, I hope it does not back away, frenzied, yelling, 'No, not yet. I am not ready for you.'

5.

Do not be fooled, the quiet ones know their enemies.

6.

Maybe I am wrong to advocate 'rebuilding'. I have already outgrown everything I have ever written. Revolution necessitates destruction. When I listen to the podcast about how police cars are on fire over there, I am ashamed that the first thing I think about is how that could never happen here *even though* it has happened before. *Even though* it will happen again. Maybe it is because we are stuck in the logic of incremental change, and the circle of pointing out we are stuck in the logic of incremental change traps us again and again and again. The world imprisons our pangs for more, who am I to think my structure of feeling will go untouched by that? Maybe the better question in regard to rebuilding is: where, what, from what, *for whom?*

7.

Genuinely synthesising resistance strategies might bring about untold beauty. Fuck! I hope we get there.

8.

All this 'the left needs its own narrative'. Are we storytellers? Don't we deal in the material? Personally, I want

everyone to look at the pain and the horror, I want to peel back eyelids to the fire and ask, 'Can you abide by this?' and if they can, *well*.

9.

Anyone with sense does not listen to the rich writer's opinions on the goings-on. They are not with you—although their writing makes you feel bright red and exposed like raw muscle—they will cling to the desk when the world bursts. When it comes to it, they will not stand with you, unless it is above you at the podium giving the beautiful speech.

10.

I believe that imaginative thinking is fuel. No, I am not an accelerationist! I once heard, 'Optimism is too facile a thing,' sitting in a Korean restaurant surrounded by friends. That's when I decided that I refuse to leave anything to the arc of the moral universe.

II.

I believe in collaboration, so I have left this space for you—write something:

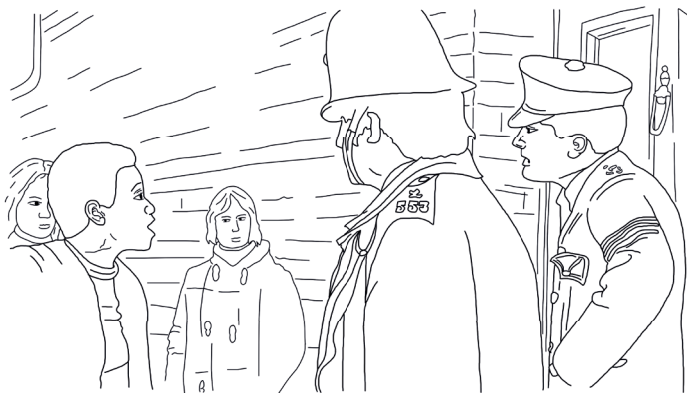
12.

The *otherwise* requires a commitment to not knowing.
Are you ready for that?

13.

I want to spend my life in service to others. This is not a 'human instinct'—it is a choice. I promise, above all, engagement with rigour, with integrity, to take you in, all of you, without pre-empting how we will fail one another. If it is going to take all of us, give me sticky, sticky, relation!

Narrative consistency



Olive Elaine Morris, © Hanna Stephens. Based on an image found at <https://libcom.org/history/morris-olive-elaine-1952-1979>.

The image is a dead-end because it implies an archive: a point of entry, a site that enables us to access the story of *how the image came to be*, a record of conditions. The archive, with its shadows and gaps, is a colonial invention in narrative consistency. Its greatest trick is to convince us that ‘time’ signals forward movement, a determined motion from which events may be regulated, predicted and anticipated. Its ideological reach is second only to the map. I want to loosen my attachment to the facts of any given historical encounter, like a deep inhale; I want to feel how the cold air changes the shape of my lungs. What if, like a map, the archive is not a record of the past or an arrangement of physical space, but, as Mogel and Bhagat

write, *a topography of procedures*?¹ That is, a continuous, fickle, evolving set of processes that eschews definition, or concreteness, or knowing. What if we do not need to know the past to *know* the past, or, indeed, to feel it? Hall writes that the archive represents an end to a kind of creative innocence.² I wish to reintroduce it.

To look at the image you see before you is to ask—before its historical reverberations, echoes, hums can be registered or make themselves known—where it came from. More specifically, *which archive does it belong to? where did she find it?* We are always in search of a diagrammatic grand design, an authoritative structure that elucidates our position in relation to the image, *the object that we believe is separate from us*. We ask this instead of realising that some images are simply a way to commune with the dead. A reminder that there is a cyclical historical process that connects and makes us responsible for one another. We are always looking for an author, always looking for some legitimate body to give the image meaning and purpose. We do this because it is only when the image has a purpose that it can be wielded ideologically. The process of reading images is a game of inference, a game of *this possibility* or *that possibility*.

The problem with the visual is that it appears to announce its limitations as soon as we glance at it. We become

1 Lize Mogel & Alexis Bhagat, *An Atlas of Radical Cartography*, Los Angeles: Journal of Aesthetics & Protest Press, 2007.

2 Stuart Hall, 'Constituting an Archive', *Third Text*, Vol. 15, No. 54 (2001), pp. 89–92.

trapped in the fixity of our own position; we assume the story begins and ends within the image's four corners. We encounter the image, we make up competing versions of the past from our encounter with it, we craft a story of *what was* and how it differs from *what is*. But what if the image is also an echo that sticks to its context? What if the past is here now, intruding and muddying the present? If we listened hard enough, could we hear Olive's voice? What is the rhythm and cadence of that voice? Are we really foolish enough to imagine this isn't possible?

Here I want to propose a speculative method that anticipates nothing, that does not try to recover context but, instead, lets the image do the work, lets the image make its own argument. I want to begin not with everything-we-do-not-know about the image but all the ways it is self-evident. *Can narrative be an antidote to dishonour?* Hartman writes.³ Is narrative a useful means of redress? Let's see.

*

'He knows he can't evict us without a notice!' Olive screams. She hates that the pigs assume she doesn't know the ins and outs of squatting law. Where is Liz? Why has she left her to deal with them on her own? Olive gets real close to the officer's face, makes sure she covers him with her saliva, just to show him she isn't

3 Saidiya Hartman, 'Venus in Two Acts', *Small Axe*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (2008), pp. 1-14.

afraid. That's one thing they said at the meetings: never let the pigs know you fear them. If they know you fear them, you are easier to kill.

The police officer is giving her this smug look like he knows something she doesn't—it makes her stomach turn. They come by every week just to make sure Olive and Liz know they're being watched. They didn't treat the women's centre squatters like this; that level of contempt is always reserved for black women and members of the Panthers. The white women just stand there, looking on. Someone takes a photograph as the crowd gathers; it makes her feel a little safer. She knows that if anything happens to her, there will be witnesses. She wants to make the two of them feel small; she is convinced that the superiority conferred by the uniform is inseparable from the men's sense of self. They have chosen to aid the state in its project of dispossession; they have sworn allegiance to destitution, to watching the homeless suffer, to bullying and killing the working class.

She feels like a performer in a circus, explaining to these white men that her home cannot just be ripped from under her feet—and for what? So a landlord can increase his monopoly on housing in Lambeth, when she knows women who have never had a place to call home, whose lives depend on the good will of the next person who lets them sleep on their couch? The flats lie empty, day after day.

When Olive and Liz decided to move into 121 Railton Road, they didn't know it would become the site of one of the longest-running squats in London's history, or that Olive would end up on the cover of the Squatters Handbook. They just needed somewhere to stay, and it was easy enough to get in through the laundrette windows and secure the outside. They'd spent many nights there together, planning and plotting. Letting the Panthers and BASH use the space to figure out how to escalate their campaigns against the SUS law. That's when she felt the purest kind of contentment, surrounded by comrades in the struggle, friends in arms. That was what made the harassment bearable—coming back to a house full to the brim with sound, with all the rejects of this world who wanted to build another.

She wanted to talk to Liz about a space specifically for black women's organising. Olive knew that beyond accusations of division, the black woman's position could tell them something specific about the worker and racial capitalism. Every time they were dismissed in the meetings, something inside her broke. The movement was falling apart. But it was women that kept things alive on the ground—they worked with the lawyers to get brothers out of prison, to stop deportations in action; they ran the mutual aid networks, stocked the bookshop, facilitated the meetings. Yet their strategies were picked apart, their ideas whispered between brothers' speeches.

She didn't understand how everyone else slept so soundly at night, with so much *wrong* with the world. Sometimes the sky in London would settle into a black so thick, so dense, it was impossible to see through. Watching it roll over the city, she would think of the global chains that connected her to other anti-colonial movements across the world. She'd never felt more power than as a squatter, firmly in the centre of an organised, relentless communist movement. They were showing the people that things could be had for free. This world wasn't about how much you owed, or keeping your head down to avoid trouble. She remembered Lenin: *So long as the state exists there is no freedom; when there is freedom, there will be no state.*

Still, this life was not without its indignities. Never knowing if this would be your last night in the building, whether they would send dogs in to chase you out. Olive knew they could rely on support from burgeoning anarchist movements, but the relationship remained uneasy. They didn't organise together because their visions of freedom didn't always align. Some days, she didn't know if she would come home to find that Liz had been taken to the police station again; it was exhausting, nobody spoke about how humiliating the struggle could be. Yet Olive knew resistance held no promise of an easy life. Every day she got dressed considering her commitments to her comrades and to the movement. Today, she was committed to showing these police officers just how far she could throw her contempt.

*

Resisting the urge to contextualise is a movement against narrative consistency. We are reading the image, and reading the image is not the same as knowing its history. Perhaps reading the image tells us more about Olive Morris than the facts of her life do. To imagine she is silent until we have sketched out a timeline, complete with dates and a record of her comings and goings, is to capitulate to the demand for categorisation, order and containment that gives coloniality substance. To imagine she was ever silent is to trap her twice over—once in the colonial archive and once in our own minds. So perhaps the image that we stumble across, fragmentary and incomplete, perhaps the image that finds its way to us somehow is all we have. Let's set it free.

In common parlance, the imagination is understood as the process of conjuring that which does not exist—presently or subjectively. To imagine, then, is to conjure an idea, a feeling, a thought, a sensory or affective response that was not present before the act of conjuring it began.

For reference, or a poem thwarted by copyright:

I wanted to play with words that weren't my own. Too many permissions needed. So, think of this as your litany to the future—do what you want with the space.

(there is actually space on the page, use it)

No more presidents, please! /

I want a world that lets me say, plainly, /

I am not afraid. /

Sometimes I want to scream /

Please, no more 'law-abiding citizens', only /

Prepare to /

Turn away from this world. /

Are you ready to take up your role? /

The scariest part is letting go /

Keep wonder in your wheelhouse, /

Many things remain an open question. /

How do we rearrange the land so /

Instead of flag or nation, we swear allegiance to /

The past with eyes of glass, if you die before you are ready /

It is important to know what you are against, /

*When consciousness-raising gets boring, scream from the top
of your lungs /*

Before something else comes into view, /

If you are tempted to retreat into dreams, remember that /

My aim is to produce a map that is nothing like a map at all but rather a record of traces that make connections between the past(present/future)----the present(future/past)----and the future(past/present). I want to demonstrate how these temporal regimes encroach on one another, so to tell the story of the past means telling the story of the present, which is already where the future resides. Maybe time is a many-pronged spiral: a thick and firm approach and retreat, steady and unrelenting. The place where memory and repetition are disguised and reconfigured.

Glissant writes, 'Trace thought enables us to move away from the strangulations of the system. It thus refutes the extremes of possession. It cracks open the absolute of time. It opens onto these diffracted times that human communities today are multiplying among themselves, through conflicts and miracles. It is the violent wandering of the shared thought.'⁴

In doing away with possession, I wish to abandon the idea that it is possible (or even feasible) to provide a complete account of any given phenomenon.

⁴ Édouard Glissant, *Treatise on the Whole-World*, Celia Britton (trans.), Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2020, p. 10.

[X]

[X]

[X]

[X]

[X]

I think the imagination calls on us to
understand and embrace

[XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX]

as a project of resistance without
determinable end.

Do not underestimate its relationship to the
material. If we take imaginative potential
seriously, we can properly articulate a politics
committed to the expulsion of misery,
a politics that is not 'politics', a schema that refuses
persuasion, compromise, sacrifice, the trap of
practicality.

Repeat after me: Our freedom is not a policy
popularity competition.

Revolutionary movements require a
teleological pool from which to draw.

The imagination is that teleological pool: it
not only creates liberatory drives; it sustains,
justifies and legitimises them. It undoes entire
epistemes and clears a space for us to create
something new. Though this 'newness', or
the demand for *something else*, can never
fully be realised in the realm of the
discursive, it exists in other registers: it can
be felt, heard, touched, tasted. The structural
limits of this world restrict our ability to
articulate all that the imagination is capable
of conceiving.

Do not forget this.

The feminist imagination carves out a site of agency that forms the impetus for action. It has many purposes, but in this regard, it enables resistant acts to take place by dismantling hegemonic notions of what is permissible under current conditions.

The imagination is central to the cultural production of revolutionary movements; its primary role is to signal *what could be*.

What could be is a linguistic stand-in for a set of political, social and cultural demands, strategic aims, revolutionary longings. As such, it resists singular definition:

It is an unwieldy phenomenon and its
currency is chaos.

It is an unwieldy phenomenon and its
currency is chaos.

That is, the future is not in front of us, it is everywhere simultaneously: multidirectional, variant, spontaneous. We only have to *turn around*. Relational solidarities, even in their failure, reveal the plurality of the future-present, help us to see through the impasse, help temporarily eschew what is stagnant, help build and then prepare to shatter the many windows of the here and now.

Stop the clock!

And so, the timeline remains, watching over us. Looming large.

All we have to do is stop the clock. At the time of writing, it is 5:01 p.m. on Sunday, 28 February 2021. Okay, are you ready? I am going to stop the clock.

are is
you backwards?
readingthis
this the onlywayl
can tell?

Okay, I've restarted the clock! But really, if we stopped time (which is the clock, and vice versa), everything would float. We'd bounce from one moment to the next, knowing both moments had already happened, and were destined to happen again. If we stopped the clock, we could stop talking about erasure and start talking about the grand narrative of History.

I hate the way people reduce human life to the 'need to tell stories'—no, human life is the process by which some

of us are crushed whilst others make money from the crushing, or carry our blood around in vials, or display our bones in the museum. We are in a fight for our lives, wherever it is on this earth that we end up. So, if some historian can declare, 'these were the motives of human civilisation between [X] year and [X] year', or, 'language begins here', or, 'here are the three main causes of WORLD WAR ONE', then I can try my hand at invention too.

That's not the kind of story others want to hear, though.

If we are not there, then we are not THERE, which means nobody will *know* about us. We feel cheated by the systems that cheat us: the school, the university, the museum, the history book. Erasure lights the path in our search for History. We go searching for the tools and archival methods to set the record straight. We might even lament the failure of elders to preserve History for us. We need to know that our History is good History, righteous History, spirited History. We need to know so badly. But there are a thousand conversations, weaving the fabric of the future, that we are not privy to. Many grand narratives are being constructed as we speak and we will not appear, not even as minor characters.

What if the political question were not preoccupied with excavation?

Then we'd be forced to evacuate.

There is no erasure in no-time or

past(present/future)~~~

present(future/past)~~~

future(past/present).~~~

Erased? *from where?*

Why don't we let the substance breathe a little?—let's not dominate what constitutes History.

but without the grand narrative, how will we agree that anything has happened/is happening/will happen at all?

The better question is, with no confirmed History, who are we? What have we done to each other? In the space between these questions, what we crave begins to circulate. This craving is always in motion, always being made and then used up and then reproduced to feed itself.

I want to fall into the gaps and then tear the gaps, smudge them, stretch them, rip them into tiny pieces and submerge my body in the material scheduled to be discarded, so that History will never find me.

•

✱

////////////////

✱

////////////////

✱

////////////////

AND THEN:

> >

< <

How to name the many causes of the rupture and
resulting splinters,

What we call the “moment of political consciousness”
is really the meeting of temporal regimes

How to name the many causes of the rupture
and resulting splinters,

Imagine them slipping and sliding against each other,
fish in a barrel.

How to name the many causes of the rupture
and resulting splinters,

They can never get a firm hold, never linger long
enough to lock.

How to name the many causes of the rupture
and resulting splinters,

That is why when we read the memoir, or look at
the photograph, or look at a photocopy of the manifesto,
something inside us is awakened. We are light on
our feet. Our legs unbuckle. The heart plummets.

We shore up our own perception.

We give this a useless word: archive.

How to give form to the power of the cultural object
to make the earth shake,

to break open in the hands of the holder, on the
other side of the world.

It is not an understatement to say the holder is remade.
The holder goes on to act differently.

((((((((The poem, the novel, the play have no answer for
this, of course)))))))))

A note on design:

*'I would wish us to indicate the determining relationship between architectonic reality and physical well-being. I hope that we may implicitly instruct the reader in the comprehensive impact of every Where, of any place. This requires development of an idea or theory of place in terms of human being; of space designed as the volumetric expression of successful existence between earth and sky; of space cherishing as it amplifies the experience of being alive, the capability of endless beginnings, and the entrusted liberty of motion; of particular space inexorably connected to multiple spatialities, a particular space that is open-receptive and communicant yet sheltering particular life.'*⁵

— June Jordan

We don't think that the layout of a house or street can determine our capacity for being. Living as we do, on top of one another, with no room to stretch our legs or for our children to play, and being so isolated, not knowing our next-door neighbours, not knowing whom we could depend on in an emergency, is a political question.

Design is more than just an architectural component; it is more than just the arrangement of physical objects in order to make something. Design is also the speech we use to build and give meaning to the world around us. June Jordan knew this; if you changed how people conceived

⁵ June Jordan, *Civil Wars: Observations from the Front Lines of America*, New York: Touchstone, 1995, p. 28.

of living, you could also change their understanding of themselves and their relations with others, breaking the inertia of this unliveable life.

The way we talk about this life and living, the language we use, builds a kind of structure that turns the horizon (that point where potentiality meets the substance of our reality) into a mirage. When we say 'housing for all' and the government responds with 'the homeless are being temporarily housed in hotels to avoid the spread of the virus', they are building a linguistic structure that defines the realm of the possible, that implicitly tells us to want less, to expect that total reconfiguration is out of the question. Like a poorly designed building, linguistic structures affect how we think, breathe, move and act. The mould sticks to our skin. We are familiar with a particular kind of linguistic structure: the preservation of a system of organisation that places capital before all else. This system ties our hands and feet together.

But... if we follow Jordan, 'every Where and any *place*' has a comprehensive impact, and so, everything we do and say that brings place and space into existence, that defines its contours, that explicitly makes clear who can and cannot enter also has an impact. To get free, we have to redesign linguistic structures before they morph into linguistic loops, or, in the meantime, at least get comfortable with repetition.

Red

They were calling it disaster communism. At the meetings they encouraged people to orientate themselves toward ‘the common good’, recognising disaster as an ongoing state of emergency, as the very fabric of the old way.

Aude struggled to make sense of the coming days, let alone months and years. It was getting harder to see the outline of things. Before long, she would need a cane, making her more visible in public. She was near excellent at pretending to recognise faces until they were close enough for her to discern. Soon, she wouldn’t be able to walk alone, a thought that weighed heavy on her heart. They kept saying things would be safer, but Aude couldn’t shake the memory of what was inscribed in the contract of the old world: the vulnerable were the first to go. What she had learnt in these months, as her grip on reality left her trailing in its wake, was how nature opened itself up to intruders. Blooming flowers were newness; she liked taking the risk, eating petals and hoping green stalk would sprout from her belly button. Rea kept telling her that in the aftermath of disaster, no matter how big or small, a collective conditional emerged. Losing your sight would not be a problem in a world built for it.

Any space that could be repurposed had been. The arches stood tall and wide; Aude recognised the church instantly. She’d been dragged there against her will as a child. Following her mother in Sunday best, she’d tried

desperately to mess up something about her appearance, running her fingers through her hair in circles, removing the lace bows and clips when her mother wasn't looking, untying her shoelaces, letting her socks fall below the knee. She refused to be prim; from a tender age, she'd cultivated a desire to disgrace herself in front of the Lord.

Despite the rays of sunlight streaming through the stained-glass windows, the outline of objects remained fuzzy. The cascade of colours running down his left side obscured the shopkeeper's face. He towered over her, impatient.

'Can I help you?' She'd knocked over the mangoes.

'No, I'm fine.' She tried to smile, but all she saw him see was big white teeth in a black face. Often Aude worried that she did not qualify for sympathy, even though this was what the revolt had promised. This worry made the business of living harder. Most of all, ordeals like this were humiliating. She smiled and retreated, grabbing a bottle of water to calm herself as she exited through another arch. She called Rea, who rushed to her aid with the speed of a mother.

In the beginning, as chaos had washed over the city, they'd erected fences to keep others at bay and turned only to each other for replenishing. Aude cherished Rea's care; her embrace was primal—it comforted you, made you hungry for more. Before she knew that intimacy could

be organised in another way, Aude had frequently rushed home to find solace in Rea, to follow the marks running across her body with her tongue. Aude had trouble letting go of the old way. She had selfishly resolved to grab joy when and where she could. They kept talking about the end of ownership, but she stole Rea and locked her away. Aude and Rea enjoyed their communism of two. When Rea cried, Aude would cocoon her, letting her know that it was okay to let go, it was okay to allow a little invasion for mending. That's how the two moved together at first, crashing into one another, making each other more robust in the process.

*

The conditions made living impossible. She was sure her mother had died of waiting. The tragedy kept time moving; it pushed the days along, dragging all those left behind with it. In the early days, everyone was in mourning. Strangers wandered the streets looking for lost loved ones, hoping to find them in the ruins of burning buildings, overturned police cars, abandoned warehouses. Aude realised there were big pains and little pains. The little pains were sometimes so overwhelming they made you forget about the approaching darkness.

*

The ghouls were coming for them—they knew as much. Aude hated to remember. On the few occasions when she

permitted herself to, she saw in her mind's eye how the events had unfolded. Slowly, families were disappeared by the state's army; the pitchforks foreshadowing their deaths appeared outside their doors weeks before. She'd lost Kai that way. When the stakes had appeared on the concrete outside the East Tower Block and everyone fled for their lives, his mother had insisted on staying put. She feared God more than anybody else; that was her biggest mistake. She didn't understand that the state *was* God, for all intents and purposes. It regulated their lives using the Grim Reaper's utensils. The culling began with the tower blocks that lit the path at night. On the night Kai disappeared, Aude washed her hair. She couldn't get a comb through it; hands either side of the sink, she had broken down in frustration. She couldn't have known then that she'd never see him again, but she'd sensed it. She reached for the clippers. Her friends were dead, and with them had gone any care for her appearance. When she emerged from the bathroom, her mother screamed. That was the same day Aude told her that when she kissed boys, she was only pretending to like it.

※

Rea spent days tracing the patterns on the curtains, only to come up short. She feared having more time on her hands to be idle. Each day, she performed chores in their shared home in silence, making sure Aude did the same, lest the figure behind the camera in the corner of the room turn them in. When they reclaimed control before

the second insurrection, the state installed cameras in the homes of revolutionaries. They never admitted to this, but everyone knew it was true. This pushed organising underground; Rea knew that every minute spent in the flat was an elaborate performance. She had to make them believe things were returning to normal. Rea wondered if they turned off the cameras when couples had sex; sometimes she felt someone else's eyes on her as they undressed each other. Some days this did not bother her, but on others, the eyes made her want to shed her skin like a snake.

*

This is how she told the story to those who had not witnessed it. There came a time when capital began to eat itself; they told everyone there was no longer enough to go around. All the systems and signs that kept the world tightly knit together—Austen's head on a banknote, Jefferson's face on a coin—began to disintegrate. It started with people losing their jobs, then their homes. Philosophers had predicted that this thing called life (capital accumulation) would not last forever. There would be a transition phase before human flourishing began. That was this moment: those who could not let go, those who could not loosen their allegiance to the flag and the anthem joined the state and carried out the culls. In large groups, they marked their targets in blood, shattered the dreams of rebuilding communities from the root. Their actions were an ideological

force; they maintained the state of emergency. Rea had felt like a conspiracy theorist watching things play out; it had happened exactly as they had predicted in the meetings. An appeal to order, then the people responded with disobedience of all kinds. In a meeting before the first street battle, one person had stood up and asked if they were ready to risk it all.

Communities organised into small confederations to try and fend off the attacks. These were sustained by care work, provided by women at first, and later by everyone who could. Those who were physically able stood watch in red, waiting for any sign of attack from government militia. They chased the state's men out with chants and eyes on the unmarked cars that said, 'We are ready for anything.' They fed, clothed and bathed the wounded, using the doctors and nurses out of work to make the sick well enough to run again, well enough to defend their loved ones if it came to that. Those moments, when Rea bandaged a leg or helped stitch together a flesh wound, made her feel useful. She was unfamiliar with the flood of warmth that followed acts of service, when your energy went towards something other than manufacturing a product to be bought and sold. She started teaching basic first aid to anyone who would listen. The day she put on the red shirt, she knew that the old way was dead. There was no going back.

*

They lock eyes at a meeting. Aude, who is embarrassingly sympathetic to the idea that we can transform the state into what we want it to be, secretly misses her old life. She has come to try and figure out how to adjust to living in flux. What will happen to property? What will happen to borders? She misses the order of things, the intimate disappointments of limited political possibilities. Before this, the choices that filled her with this much anxiety were trivial. The chaos of this moment is saying: *you can have what you have always dreamt of, Aude, a world free from violence*. She is deciding how to respond. Aude is wearing black to signal her undecidedness; red has never suited her skin tone. She has not come expecting to meet the woman who will give her so much more than political consciousness. She has not come expecting to meet the woman who will shatter the romance of what was, dragging her kicking and screaming into what is.

Before, she had little to focus on but herself. The things that mattered to her were simple. In the old world she was allowed to be selfish; to preach the mantra of personal responsibility and to look away from the horrors that resulted. It was okay to dream of *having*; it was not smart to proceed as if lives were actually dependent on one another. In this moment, she thinks it is asking too much of her to relinquish the fantasy of the good life that she deserves. She misses music, spending her days smoking up and dancing around her room pretending to be sexy. God, is there sex in this future? She has not even considered this until now.

‘It’s important we know how to defend ourselves when we are under attack. They are sending firing squads to kill us and calling it order.’

Rea is striking. Her hair is scrapped back into a big bush; she has bits of grass in it from when she took a nap in the sun. Aude feels her belly drop and knows she is in trouble. She feels the heat radiating in her hands, then up her arms to her face.

‘It’s unclear what will come next. But we must protect ourselves. Think of violence not as moral or immoral, but simply as a question of who has the power to justify using it.’

Rea looks over and sees a new face. She knows instinctively that this girl will not pick up a knife; she can’t even sit up straight. She decides to talk to her after the meeting, to introduce her to the other women and find out where she’s from. She is not wearing red. Rea smirks; that will change soon enough.

※

The first time Aude dropped a plate, she thought it was just carelessness. She kept missing the drying rack. She had tried to ignore the shapes appearing at the back of her eyes; they disappeared if she blinked hard enough. She didn’t want to worry Rea. She hated this in-between-moment—they called it ‘survival pending

revolution'. But pending meant being stuck in limbo. The sun still shone in the same way; the air was only slightly sweeter. Rea kept saying, revolution is not a one-time event, it is always already happening; the question is, are you ready for it? Are you ready to sacrifice everything when time ruptures and events begin to ricochet in unknown directions?

*

The streets were... quieter. They stopped counting time in the old way; it was hard to get a sense of how far away they were from the bloody summer. Many people had been lost—they'd invented a new ritual to remember the dead. They tried to mix the old and new way as little as possible. There was something about old traditions—a coffin, mourners in black—that they had outgrown.

She'd fallen in love with Rea; they had proceeded as lovers do. Aude finally understood the talk of new modes of intimacy developing in the wake of disaster. Unlike before, she loved without possession or domination. There were no defined stages in their relationship; nothing happened too fast or too soon. They lived together because they were living with everyone. This new intimacy collapsed expectation. It allowed for a flexibility that responded to moments as they unfolded. Aude and Rea were allowed to *change their minds* and then change them again, knowing that they belonged not to themselves or to each other, but to the ground beneath their feet. There was new space to

breathe. Aude knew that she could find comfort in others when Rea disappointed her. They complemented one another, rooted in an ecology that could not be threatened.

*

One day, Rea was wonderstruck by the world she was building. Suddenly, colours were crisp and vibrant; she awoke without the familiar heaviness in her chest. It was as if she *saw* for the first time, and in the connections forged with others discovered that she could choose her relation to the world. She wondered if Aude felt the same; she wanted to bring her outside so she could witness. As they walked, glimpses of transformed holding centres and former prison sites convinced her that embers were a construction material. Rea began to believe, seriously, that destruction could not last forever. They decided to walk for as long as their bodies allowed, exploring the state's ruins. Every empty home was revived terrain; the private had been made public, and with it, every illusion of intramural living had disappeared. The clamps on their tongues fell away. No longer captive to hesitation or the anxiety that caused their mouths to dry up, Aude and Rea let go. They let go of the old world that had never really been a world at all. They gave in to the openness born around them; finally, they could share their pain with others without fear of reprisal or humiliation. They moved across the city like feathers bursting into open air, light on their feet, landing soft but deliberate.

They heard the sounds before they saw him. He'd played in the same spot even before the conflict began. He leaned against a tree beginning to bloom, unaware of the eyes on him, his strong breath blowing the notes out whistle-clean. It was not a performance—the concept of remuneration had been abolished—he played *just because*, he played to usher in what was coming. The way he gripped the instrument made his lack of sight apparent to Aude—his grip was deft; unknown muscles in his forearm flexed as he hit his stride. Aude wondered if his blindness was obvious to Rea. She smiled as they watched him create sound from memory. It was not a song they recognised, which was fitting.

The notes floated through the air and surrounded them, wrapping them up, sliding across their skin as they danced. At this, the man turned in their direction and smiled; he played not for the dream of success but because this new world necessitated beauty of all kinds. The new world was not just labour, but labour for the sake of life-making. Was this what they meant, Aude thought, when they had screamed, *another world is possible, be brave*? She knew the private satisfaction of this moment belonged to her, but also to Rea, also to the unnamed musician. That was the difference between how they had lived then and how they were living now; her interiority was not a closed entity to be protected from others at all costs. She threw her chest to the sky, head back, and relinquished the last piece of doubt. She felt her face for the first time, smiling anew and rubbing her black skin in

amazement. Then she looked over and saw Rea, *saw* her and the infinite prospects, chances, the glory of potentiality that encircled her. Melodic phrases left her mouth before she could think of their meaning; she was being moved by what *could be*. Rea stared back in disbelief—she laughed and laughed.

The linguistic loop:

It's clear a total transformation is needed. The question that burns is *how*, but maybe the how brings us back to the fact of the matter. *It's clear a total transformation is needed.* Okay, when? But time has never been a good indicator of anything; look at how probability seems to wax and wane depending on the century. Across societies, across time, one thing has remained clear—a total transformation is needed. Indeed. Does this mean a return to atavistic society? We're getting ahead of ourselves—back to the point: **a total transformation is needed.** But what are the practicalities, will it happen on a Wednesday? Will it be continuous? Will we need to rewrite the master script before we can set it in motion? Here, some start to weary and resign themselves to an alienated life. We plead with them, A TOTAL TRANSFORMATION IS NEEDED!

....

And it can go on and on like this for many years.

P R E S E N T
(F U T U R E /
P A S T)

when she is dreaming, she is dreaming of some place where people do not suffocate to death in the back of a lorry, or where a little black girl does not die from air pollution without ever seeing the other half of the city, when they are dreaming, they are dreaming of mastering vulnerability so they could stop distancing themselves from everything and everyone, when he is dreaming, he is dreaming of a place where the thing he makes with his hands does not make him sick or fill him with dread or give his great-great-great-great-granddaughter a heart defect, when she is dreaming, she is dreaming of a heavy embrace, the kind that is not about the tyranny of intelligibility, when they are dreaming, they are hoping that it is not a dream, that the thing can and will be actualised, when he is dreaming, he is dreaming of some sensory impression that does not have to come from an encounter in the mausoleum, when she is dreaming, she is dreaming of togetherness, when they are dreaming, they are dreaming of the time and space that could turn the photograph into an object of continuity, when he is dreaming, he is not dreaming of his goddamn responsibilities, when she is dreaming, perhaps she is watching her mistakes cascade, when they are dreaming, they are dreaming of the limits of form and text and books and visual art and sound experiments, when he is dreaming, he is dreaming of practical application, when she is dreaming, she is dreaming and no longer feels repulsed by the prospect of staying alive, when they are dreaming, they are not dreaming of an unmoored fucking utopia, as if they don't know that is a code word for 'not possible', when he is dreaming, he is

dreaming of abolishing himself, abolishing 'he', when she is dreaming, she is dreaming of lighting the 'culture war' on fire, when they are dreaming, they are dreaming of not giving away children who should be protected to a school system that will crush them, when he is dreaming, he is not dreaming, he is trying to work himself into a trance so as to feel something different on a Thursday evening, when she is dreaming, she is dreaming of how easy the task becomes when you set yourself parameters, when they are dreaming, they are dreaming of the cultural politics of emotion, which is always another word for presentiment, didn't you know? when he is dreaming, he is dreaming of coming first and reminding himself that competition is anathema to those revolutionaries he would like to emulate, when she is dreaming, she is dreaming of nothing new, when they are dreaming, they are dreaming of all the things they would do come the time, like diving into the ocean with a body that is only the remnants of discourses on ontology, when he is dreaming, he is dreaming of not messing up, when she is dreaming, she is dreaming of letting go of the fear that grips her every time they ask her to break the law, when they are dreaming, they are dreaming of going forever and ever and ever, when he is dreaming, he is not dreaming of possessing anyone (imagine that!), when she is dreaming, she is not dreaming of the failure of integration, when they are dreaming, they are dreaming of a world where soul is never finished, when she is dreaming, she is thinking *how long can I keep this up for?* when he is dreaming, he is thinking that they call the wrong people scum of the

earth, they leave the wrong people to die, when they are dreaming, they are realising that in the dream-space things that do not otherwise exist are brought into being, when she is dreaming, she is not dreaming of jobs on the commune, when they are dreaming, there is no clear point at which the dream ends, when he is dreaming, he is dreaming of how political practice without pleasure leaves some stuff out, when she is dreaming, she keeps returning back to her body, when they are dreaming, they are dreaming of repetition, of grinding in an already well-ground groove, when he is dreaming, he is dreaming of anywhere but here, anywhere but now, anywhere but the local leisure centre, when she is dreaming, she is dreaming of how Keats would be horrified by the place he grew up in, success! when they are dreaming, they are dreaming of how the construction of race must surely be followed by its dissolution, when he is dreaming, he is dreaming of how the best feeling is listening to songs in a language you can almost speak, when she is dreaming, she is dreaming of flinging everything she owns into a black hole, when they are dreaming, they are dreaming of how the dream is just a convenient visual trick that lets your brain work through the detritus of everyday life, when he is dreaming, he is dreaming of Troulliot's idea of unthinkability, when they are dreaming they are dreaming of how *something is changed in the doing*, when she is dreaming, she is dreaming of falling, when they are dreaming, they are dreaming of how academia is sad sad sad, when he is dreaming, he is dreaming of how mushing language and flinging it at the wall to see what

sticks is a new hermeneutics, when she is dreaming, she is dreaming of how it is kind of beautiful that anonymous people can be called up to defend against fascists, when they are dreaming, they are dreaming of the people time forgot, when he is dreaming, he is dreaming of how they always leave someone out when they list the revolutionaries on T-shirts, when she is dreaming, she is dreaming of all those doing the work who do not want to be seen, when they are dreaming, they are dreaming of how the reference must always be furthest from the identity of the speaker so as to confer a wide breadth of knowledge, when he is dreaming, he is dreaming of how they are collecting all of the information that might be used against us and all this talk of visibility helps them, when she is dreaming, she is dreaming of an ending that is not an ending at all

Everyday atrocity

The UN Declaration of Human Rights, Articles 13, 14 and 15:

Article 13.

- (1) Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state.
- (2) Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.

Article 14.

- (1) Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.
- (2) This right may not be invoked in the case of prosecutions genuinely arising from non-political crimes or from acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

Article 15.

- (1) Everyone has the right to a nationality.
- (2) No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality.

These 'universal' human rights were adopted by fifty-eight members of the UN General Assembly in 1948, following the end of World War II. They are not legally binding and are understood to be a milestone in the use of universalistic language that makes no particular reference to culture, language, religion or political orientation.

*

Many years after these rights are adopted, a Boeing 787-8 Dreamliner flies more than 3,500 feet above the ground; it has departed from Kenya. Residents on Offerton Road, South London hear his body before they see it. It lands next to a sunbather.

I want to linger here because I think it sounds like something impossible. A man's frozen body falls from the undercarriage of a plane into someone's back garden. Once more: a man's frozen body falls from the undercarriage of a plane into someone's back garden.

But it happened, and still some of us know little about his life, his name, the how or the why. Kenyan officials claimed he was probably someone with access to airside, as it would be near impossible for a member of the general public to stow themselves away without being caught. Witnesses say that the body was intact because it was an 'ice block'. There is no way for us to properly understand a story like this. It remains a distant short of fiction, narrativised by liberal journalists for its peculiarity. We have

to feel the space between us and this man. So he remains immemorial, his body removed and buried in silence; the sunbathers deal with the intrusion quietly, the story appears once or twice (always accompanied by a picture of an airplane).

‘Rights’ cannot make this man, the man who fell to his death from an airplane, known to us. They’re too cold. Rights say this much and no more—enough liberty to make you think you exist but never enough to make you anything but abject. They only tell us what he was, in theory, entitled to.

What good is it to talk about rights if people do not have *means*? I want to ask, how do ‘rights’ fail us and what would happen if instead, we supported each other’s claims to a liveable life? What does a ‘claim’ do that a right cannot? What could a pact do?

I’m thinking of Gwendolyn Brooks’ poem, I’m committing her to memory: ‘We are each other’s harvest; we are each other’s business; we are each other’s magnitude and bond.’⁶ Bonds might be more powerful than rights; they’re insoluble, they signal a mutual commitment to remain involved with one another beyond the narrowly defined limits of the law. Bonds are a kind of sealed promise, bound tightly by interrelation. In this context, our promise might be to build a world of abundant life,

6 Gwendolyn Brooks, ‘Paul Robeson’, in *The Essential Gwendolyn Brooks*, Elizabeth Alexander (ed.), New York: Library of America, 2005.

an existence where premature death is impossible. Claim means 'to state or assert that something is the case, typically without providing evidence or proof'; and as a noun, 'a demand or request for something considered one's due'.

I'm stuck on this question: *what was his due?*

ROMANCE, A CLASS POSITION

Love is locked up. I promise you, this has nothing
to do with 'you' or 'me' or 'us'—it is the world.

All the high streets and the wars and the
impending doom and the endless catastrophe and
the failure of parliamentary politics and drones
and torture camps and land grabs and class
betrayal and centuries of children abused and
every person left to die, every person whose pain
keeps the engine running. They haunt me when
you roll over.

Look, I think love is a matter of positioning.

When you are tempted to tell tales, to turn love
into a drunken ardour that survives no matter the
odds, when you lie and say love is elusive,
peerless, fantastic, when you are tempted to
imagine that everything begins with love or the
lack of it, remember,

we make a mess of it and each other (I make a
mess of you and I'm sorry) precisely because we
divorce it from the market and the means of
production, from echoes of violence that stretch
for miles. Love continues to be crushed by
RIGHT NOW, by the prison, by cycles of
dispossession.

It is only as grand as the world allows it to be,
so
that's why I don't say awe or dumb luck or fate or
I knew the moment I saw you because I see the
distance between what is and more favourable
conditions. I can't pretend.

Me and mine, we're trying to make love mean something. In the recovery position, in a room full of workers, love gains a certain distinction. Less laboured. I can say yes, *I love you*, without qualification, and yes, forever exists, I can't wait to do it with you and several others and actually believe it, because in the recovery position (unalienated) it is possible to say such a thing and actually believe it, and the trees and the moon and all the wonders of being are drawn on to make sense of such statements, to express the boundlessness of giving up, giving in, giving over to one person, or five people, or 500 people.

In the meantime, what passes for love is righteous obligation. It is 'we can become owners of property if we combine our savings', and other smart considerations. God, look what the world has done to us.

**A list of some of the places they would like us to forget
[Nigeria]**

Kaduna Prison, Independence Way, Kaduna State

Kirikiri Maximum Security Prison, Lagos State

Lekki Toll Gate, Lagos State

Chibok, Borno State

Asaba, Delta State

Ogoniland, Rivers State

Owerri and Calabar provinces (*Ogu Umunwaanyi*)

Enugu Colliery

Ikot Ada Udo village, Niger Delta

Odi, Bayelsa State

STRIKE!

What's the *mood* of the general strike? I think something changes in the air. Particles rearrange themselves to spell *enough* kidnapping in the dead of night, murder, endless poverty stretching for miles and miles. If you observe the mood, you might be able to hear your heartbeat in your tooth and then your toenail, then the very tips of your fingers. The mood of the general strike is not in the body of man. It's burrowed deep in the earth; it begins to shake every time the past defeats itself and the clock simmers. The mood of the general strike might only be defined by what it is not. If I had to approximate, I can only say something like, imagine you are a free diver and you break the surface when you were expecting to drown. Imagine that breath: the sheer scope of it, the relief that floods through you. In Haiti and Sudan, it's hot sun and barricading the streets. For Amazon workers in America, it's union meetings in non-descript buildings; for the enslaved it was choosing your own death, sabotaging commodity. The general strike happens when North meets South. It's when newness runs its fingers over the impasse that is the contemporary. The general strike is a point of departure; it's strike-out, a refusal to play the game, it's a strike, the act of marking one's target, it's a strike, an act of violent insurrection, it's a strike, a correction of the old mistake, it's a strike, hard to read and even harder to describe. The mood of the general strike is... solemn. It's the moment you realise that you have to do something with the life you have taken back.

The general mood of the general strike is the parcelling out of the bosses' bones to pick our teeth with. The mood of the general strike is either you are with us or you will be crushed, no nuance. The mood of the general strike is scorched earth and nobody narrating it as it happens. The mood of the general strike is when the text becomes discernible, just for a moment. The general strike is staring at what was once obscured until you can make out its edges, like you are doing now. It's recognition despite restriction. A recognition of yourself for what you are: a worker. The general strike says: instead of working for the man, let's work for love, let's work for each other, let's work so nobody ever has to work again, let's work for song and for dance, let's work in service of pleasure. Let's work and work and work so finally we can talk about something other than work.

What's the colour of the general strike? Well, to know that, you have to know the colour of the future—that's easy. A mix of every colour currently imaginable, but mostly that colour that is the absence of light. You know the one.

**A list of some of the places they would like us to forget
[United Kingdom and Ireland]**

Larne House Detention Centre, Antrim

Yarl's Wood Detention Centre, Bedfordshire

HMP Full Sutton, East Yorkshire

Brook House Detention Centre, Gatwick Airport

Tinsley House Detention Centre, Gatwick Airport

Colnbrook Detention Centre, Heathrow Airport

Harmondsworth Detention Centre, Heathrow Airport

HMP Holloway, Islington

Dover Detention Centre, Kent, overlooking the port of
Dover

Medway Youth Prison, Kent

Napier Barracks, Kent

HMP Glen Parva, Leicestershire

Morton Hall Detention Centre, Lincolnshire

Pennine House Detention Centre, Manchester Airport

HMP Bronzefield, Middlesex

Campsfield House Detention Centre, Oxfordshire

HMP Wellingborough, Northamptonshire

Penally Military Camp, Pembrokeshire

Dungavel Detention Centre, South Lanarkshire

HMP Oakwood, Staffordshire

Knockalisheen Direct Provision Centre, Clare

Kinsale Road Direct Provision Centre, Cork

Atlas House Direct Provision Centre (Killarney), Kerry

Atlas House Direct Provision Centre (Tralee), Kerry

Johnston Marina Direct Provision Centre, Kerry

Park Lodge Direct Provision Centre, Kerry

Athlone Direct Provision Centre, Westmeath

we are going to lose

of course. our political project is not a finishing line to be crossed every other decade.

first

disbelief

then

deflation,

finally

grieving. elsewhere, sighs from those who did not want to be right, in another place someone turns off the tv, somebody decides to quit the party. in bed, *i am so happy i get to do this with you.* someone returns to hall or marx or williams or hardie or thompson or whoever predicted it first, we tell each other it will be ok even though more people will die.

we were always going to lose

the social democrats say if only we had made the case differently, if only we held less contempt for the electorate, if only, if only. they want to pretend as if the border, the border which is whiteness, which is the nation state, which is OLD ENGLAND does not haunt every waking moment of our lives. **the state can be a force for good! they scream from atop the necks of the drowning.** *listen,* i know history well enough to be wary of those who would have us believe that all we need is job security, a union, good pay.

repeat after me: the matter of how we should live will never be finished. i am going to be vulnerable here and say we have to be prepared to LOSE and **lose** and *lose* and lose.

so the numbers fell from the sky and announced a defeat, *so what?* does politics end there?

to stop recrudescence in its tracks, we will need more than just bread and roses and the anti-racist history of the party. maybe we will need the kind of love unconnected to muscles in the chest. maybe we already know what to do, maybe every skill and strategy imaginable between human and nonhuman is right there. pick it up. why don't we make our own theory of value? we make and unmake each other. no third entity keeps us alive. maybe we should start paying more attention to dreams. do not confuse me with someone who does not know that struggle is forged at the axis of hard work and death but... after defeat, re-enchantment is needed. re-enchantment is a cigarette from a window when the sky is at its clearest, a table of friends (and, dare i say it, *comrades*) screeching, a deep exhale after a long period of stagnation, a good meal, a long hug, the moment that person finally lets you see them for the first time.

re-enchantment necessitates building feeling to a crescendo—let it rain, let it wash over you, give yourself over to it. hold your breath until the release but when you come up for air, make sure you believe again.

have you ever been stopped in the presence of revolutionary love?

seriously! the kind that could slice through your core, twist your already twisted guts, giving them back to you in a perfect pretzel-shape. the kind of love that places you at the table with your heroes and then flips the table, the kind that turns language into putty in your hands. that love so broad it is not love—you hear it as sound, you see it as sliver of refracted light.

it has to be everything but what you expect because it is so implausible. they call that a freedom dream—some of us know how to live on it.

A note on didacticism

At any given time there are FAR TOO MANY arguments FLYING AROUND THE SKY or circulating in the TWITTERSPHERE or the COMMENTS of a FAKE NEWS article. Arguments for and against life give money its substance, they keep trade trading, stocks rise and fall following language. That's dialectics, babe. That's in-fighting. All that cannot be reduced to 'right' and 'wrong'. You may be embarrassed but I am not. All the greatest had something to say—without sickly earnestness, with an earth-shattering surety, with a seriousness that rebounds and slaps me over and over again with every page turned. I don't want to be like them, I'm no star-fucker. I just know that words have to float to be useful, so I'm trying to fill mine with the hot air of polemic. You believe 'here, try this' means 'this is it, only and forever'; you assume the latter leaves no space for breathing. Ambivalence is not another word for freedom. What is *being alive* if not making an argument? The dead also make arguments; it's just that those arguments travel through interlocutors and most of the time, those interlocutors are bad at their jobs. I want my words pellucid. I want you to come right up close to the curve of individual letters and jump from one grapheme to the next. I want microscopic detail and then sweeping generality. That's flare, baby. That's style. We have to *know* to know, and yes, maybe we can never *know* but there is just as much wiggle room in *I know* as there is in *I don't know*. The only difference is that 'I don't

know, that's a question better left to the sociologists!' is now a cover for cowards when they mean 'the answers scare me'. Do not confuse ambiguity and abstraction for a panacea. I don't want to be debated in a public arena, omg, I cannot think of anything worse. I don't want to be sacrificed to the marketplace of ideas. No. I make my arguments to *pierce* something, I want you to know you can use my death to start a riot if necessary, that I would approve of unrelenting confrontation, of no surrender, no capitulation, of total refusal, of endless disaster, that if I die with things unchanged, I am turning in my grave saying, for want of better words, 'No justice, no peace.'

NOTES FROM THE D

—we pretty much followed a similar strategy to last time,

Splitting from is a good idea and should carry on. Getting worked well also, but if we have time in future should meet separately and actually hash this out.

—I think this feeds into something wider i've been thinking about, which is that it's clear loads of people already know & , which is a great thing, but it can lead to micromanaging or recreating hierarchies on who can approve stuff, or who can suggest new ideas that get taken up quickly etc. etc. would be good to look out for that, esp as lots of us aren't 'new' or inexperienced, we just don't go way way back. I think this is also the case with what happened with —concerns about security trumped our usual processes (fine), but if there had been a bit more communication with then confusion could have been cleared up pretty quickly as a trusted person ...

Understand it's important to act fast but acting out of panic can lead to people [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] from [REDACTED]

—at the beginning, it was a bit confusing and demoralising to have other people talking about [REDACTED] in the other [REDACTED] saying it was haphazard when we created [REDACTED] to clarify what we were gonna do / allow people to [REDACTED]. Not saying people can't critique but I felt like I was repeating the same thing in [REDACTED] when convos could have just been had in the [REDACTED]. Like people were saying we didn't have [REDACTED] & we did, didn't have [REDACTED] ready & we did etc. Anyone should be allowed in [REDACTED] it's just hard to incorporate the critique when it's coming from [REDACTED]

—I think generally we've been working well together but should think about incorporating more hands (lots of good ppl that can help out / be vouched for / given jobs), just don't want the [REDACTED] to be so [REDACTED] that we lose out on good ppl helping.

—I feel like maybe people were anxious and projected that anxiety onto the [REDACTED] when we were getting the same level of [REDACTED] as yesterday, though the stakes were higher so I

get that. In future this can be avoided by anyone who has something to communicate to [REDACTED] just entering the [REDACTED] because then critique / suggestions don't get lost.

I don't only want to deal in fiction. When we think about what we want, we also have to think about how we will deal with the multiple threats to our lives. One tactic is a programme of coordinated obliteration, and then using the embers to reconstruct. The question is, what to do with this world and its institutions? Surely we cannot imagine a workable strategy that does not involve conflict, transitional periods, fear and days, maybe weeks, left cold before abundance arrives. Serious thinking means less abstract conjecture and more acting on instinct. Right now, do you know how you would fight back, if it came to that? Try standing in the mirror and asking yourself what you are prepared to do, who you will be prepared to protect. Do you know how to cover your tracks? We are sometimes going to need fewer words and more vehicles for sharing skills. We are going to need to teach each other how to make it through. Instruction of this kind allows us to save those who refused to prepare themselves. The task requires constant exercise (think, one of your five a day) of the will, but also knowing where you would go and what you would do if disaster struck. Right now, how many of us can say we have a plan that has factored in everybody? I am not imagining revolution as a disaster movie but I am trying to point out that we cannot just waltz into it; it is going to wind us. We need a plan. Maybe we send those who can fight to the office of the prime minister. Maybe we create a distraction and attack them right where it hurts and hope the ripple effects break nations, maybe we strike the heart. If you cannot imagine a plan, think about what you are doing now the government has

abandoned you and everyone you love in a global health crisis. Think about that uncle who stayed on your sofa for three months at an undisclosed time in your childhood, about growing up to learn he was, and is, in the country 'illegally'. Think about that moment you learnt that snitches get ostracised. We already have a mandate for care—it is born in those tiny, nondescript moments when we refuse to be sacrificial lambs for a state that will blame us for our own deaths. Language is good when we can use it to rouse, shift, understand what is happening to us as it happens, but language is not a thing we can live on. Obliteration requires life-long commitment and the possibility of getting caught. Are you ready to be caught? There are many people who have been caught that we do not remember. Each of us has a role and can be of use. Where will we put a history of pillaging and pilfering and swindling, taking what is not yours from somebody else? What is our plan for the well-funded government agencies that orchestrate the deaths of anyone who can rile up a crowd? How will we respond when they deaden our movements by dividing us into generations, proclaiming that one half does not know the other? How will we build coalitions that will not betray us? When will we learn not to mistake pain for anti-revolutionary sentiment? Some of us are hurt that many of those who claim to be on our side do not care if we live or die. That has to be dealt with beyond assurances and being more careful who says what to whom. We have to have some workable sense of how we will make it to that tomorrow, that tomorrow we are trying to make today. That involves facing the monsters.

**OVERHEARD IN THE MEETING, or
in praise of uselessness, failure, division:**

‘Can we have one meeting, please.’

This is when men mistake themselves for chief strategists in a top-down organisation.

‘Who are the targets, though? Who are we trying to reach?’

This is the anxiety that performative gestures are no longer enough to ‘shift the landscape’, as if banners, placards, flares and stunts make a movement.

‘Does anyone have capacity to do this?’

This is how we say: I know you are so overworked, so am I, but this needs to be done, someone please agree to do it.

‘We need to think of something big.’

This is said in the small space that appears as we approach the peak, when everything is going good and fuck, fuck, people are noticing us, people are joining us.

snap, snap, click, click, temperature check, break for socialising, food and cornering new members, cigarettes shared outside come rain or shine.

‘Can everyone turn off their phones, please.’

You know why.

‘We did something similar a few years ago, it wasn’t well received, [X] critiqued us for [X], I don’t think it will work.’
This is when hierarchies, conferred by seniority (time given to the organisation, cycles of experiencing high highs and low lows), begin to emerge.

‘We need to think seriously about political education, and actually engage with the community.’
‘The community’ appears as an amorphous blob, undifferentiated, always different from us, always devoid of political ambition; we’re never quite able to reach them.

‘Back in the day, they did [X], they mobilised [X number of] people, they shut down [X].’
There’s that anxiety again. We forget that we see radical history without the tedium. We make the mistake of believing then is not also now. Time will come back around again, I promise. They’ll say the same thing about us.

notes from a dead essay

We have seen previously how peaceful political demands are always already misconstrued by sovereign power as a 'violent' act. Why, then, must violence be avoided? For whose sake?

What happens when the racial phantasm, which steals and destroys black life in such a way that it may be reduced to an explanatory listicle, refuses to capitulate to demands for equality?

Love might follow violence. If the person who strikes harms herself as well as the 'other' in the action, the 'other' does not strike back without knowing what is at stake. Perhaps violence is the kind of work that enables some to remain alive long enough to contemplate violence's in/evitability or to break its stranglehold on our imaginations. Perhaps the 'other' strikes back so she may survive long enough to end the cycle.

We are marked by our experience of each other's presence—whether that presence keeps us safe, expanding the possibilities of kinship as we know it, or traumatises us at our most formative stages. If we hold commitments and dreams to end violence, we must account for those who perpetrate it without banishment. The scope of our concern must extend beyond 'I'—the individual person who we imagine exists

in isolation—towards that ‘other’ who we imagine is separate from us.

Unlike chaotic accelerationism, which seeks to harness and extend the capitalistic grip, feminism asks us *to turn away, to refuse, to block the way*, to s l o w d o w n in order to destroy all of those patterns and formations that would have us die before we are ready.

As political demands develop, we steal from the past and *make better, or bastardise*, but we do so with the aim of extending the political traditions based on cooperation, mutual aid for mutual benefit, ensuring that nobody is sacrificed to the election, the border, the surveillance apparatus.

To understand the value of a life, one must create the conditions that enable us to defend it and then to flourish. Isn't this the most imaginative task of all? Isn't the real Ethico-Political Bind the tussle between *what is* and *what could be*?

SHE KEPT MAKING YESTERDAY, TOMORROW

There she was about to teach a class that she knew had taken place yesterday. It might easily have been dismissed as *déjà vu* if not for the speed at which she anticipated her students' responses. Rianne would have an answer prepared, Ama would say something spontaneous but never loudly enough, and Dee would arrive late in 3... 2... the door of the lecture hall swings open, Dee is out of breath, head down, scrambling for a seat.

From the lectern, Fanta was preparing to tell them that nation states were a fiction. Such fictive entities made real the categories necessary to sustain themselves—citizen/non-citizen, insider/outsider, human/alien—in the same way a circle completes itself. They ordered and sorted populations and then marked those set for expulsion. It was this cruel trick that underpinned the business of global governance. This was the work of capital—to turn the deaths of 'refugees' into something innocuous in order to propagate a simple lie: there is not enough to go around. If the citizen enmeshed in scarcity logic knows one thing, it is that anything your neighbour owns, he owns at your expense. She felt the gasps at the next slide before she pressed the pointer. It presented an ongoing count of all the people who had drowned in the Mediterranean in the last year. Next, she played clips of news reporters following the boats like game in open season, watching as they capsized, only to return to their own families and dinner tables come 7.00 p.m. It was

grotesque, but she used this part of the lecture to shake the students out of their lethargy. It was not enough to stand up there and say: someone is drowning, someone is dead, and the nation to which you belong facilitates it. You had to make them see the pain in ways that would haunt them.

A blink. Then she stood between *what had happened* and *what was destined to happen*, between the real and the possible. She knew philosophers had fought over the real-possible distinction for decades, and there she was, teetering on the edge of it against her will. Fanta felt a strange temporal lag. Suddenly, words gained weight. Her mind slowed down enough to see muscles twist themselves into facial expressions, to see the cognitive motivations of her students become the driving force behind their speech and actions. To be clear, she had gone from what she thought was the present to the day before yesterday's tomorrow, poised to teach a class she knew she had already taught. Fanta's eyes filmed over; the words she would say floated just above her head, close enough to touch. When she landed back in her body, the temporal burst winded her; fatigue and disorientation set in. She was not adventurous and decided to leave what she did not understand alone. But, as with all things given to a person without reason, curiosity grabbed the scruff of her neck and refused to let go.

*

The possibilities of the classroom had begun to wilt. Nobody had told her that the academy was a graveyard where collective resistance went to die. It was not that she stopped believing in pedagogical promise, just that it shifted nothing in a world geared towards the market. The university was a dead building with dead principles. She, placed precariously, wished to be ejected from it as soon as possible. The classroom was not refuge; it was not even a place to explore the relationship between thought and action anymore. It was just another layer of the metric or an exercise in surveillance.

Fanta was the only young black faculty member, and so they asked her to chair the discussion with Simon Alldo, Senior Professor in Cultural Studies at UFF. Perhaps the most progressive academic left in the department, he always wore clashing prints and ill-fitting suits. His clothes never rested on his body in the right way. He took everything too seriously, and this made him intimidating. 'It's a damning indictment of the left's failure to hold ground,' he began, like they always did. He liked to deliver this particular critique from above so that it landed, sermon-like, onto the unsuspecting ears of his listeners. They were too in love with what they imagined theory could offer. Meeting them at the door of chaos and spontaneity, he slammed it shut, told them to *get real*. The autonomous zone would never survive. Everything was being sacrificed at the altar of identity these days. You couldn't even walk down the street anymore without a twenty-something with AirPods telling you to shut up.

He missed the eighties. Back then, the smell of revolution hung in the air, potentiality chased you around campus, you could have sex without worrying about what the woman was thinking or feeling. They came close to dying so many times, and what a way to remind them what life was for! Learning was communal; in the eighties they huddled around a common struggle the way one does a campfire, wanting, above all, to find the ties that bound them to one another. Something about that connectivity had been lost; newer generations had been raised on the myth of the individual and iPhones. A tragedy.

Fanta felt sorry for him; they laughed as he bumbled in with shoelaces untied. There was a picture of him and Damisi Hassan floating around the internet somewhere. People shared it on Twitter. Where was *that* Simon? Now he was all reaction and technophobia, while sixteen-year-olds shared illegal PDFs of his books online. She wanted to scream, *libraries don't exist anymore! That's not their fault.*

*

After the lecture hall incident, it only happened in the halls of the archive library. She started taking the material home, where new realms opened up. When you tell the university that you are doing research, they mostly leave you to come up with whatever concept will win you the next award or secure your next book deal with a star-studded press. And so, she was left alone with

the material in order to have ‘an experience’. Of particular interest were black revolutionary movements and how the archive might help her redefine ideas of struggle, of emancipation and political discipline. The temporal leap was only possible when Fanta took seriously that archival objects could tell us something about ourselves. It came from a place deep inside; a desire to know what had passed. The photograph, the poster, the pamphlet were all evidence of struggle, yes, but they also contained a trance-inducing ability to reconfigure liberatory desires. The object had a relationship to political integrity; it could make us take seriously the promises left in the whispers of what survived the past.

It felt akin to being sliced right down the middle; a smooth dissolving of the material that made up the body. Skin and bones sucked themselves into knots; her body became a wave, a polyphonic reverberation. Fanta was touching what they called **HISTORY**. There was nothing prefigurative about the events she witnessed. She moved two degrees to the right and saw revolt; to her left the inner workings of the commune were laid bare. She saw the dishonoured labour that made the Industrial Revolution possible. She tried to stop 1492 to no avail.

Fanta had always known something wasn’t quite right with **HISTORY**. They created narrative totality out of the stuff of nightmares. **HISTORY** haunted her classrooms, hollowed out the knowledge she wished to share with her students. What the archivists had told us were

HISTORY's wins and losses really amounted to a series of processes and events to which she became privy. It felt divine, though the anarchist in her would not allow it to be. Unsurprisingly, it did not go how they said it would go. For example, they wrote about rebellion and uprisings, but not the human excrement the women cleaned from the streets in the coming days. Nobody wrote about who dealt with the mess (the piss, shit and bricks) of **HISTORY**, or who rebuilt entire towns and cities, how they went about ordering human life when the state crumbled briefly in the short years spanning eighteen-ninety-something and nineteen-hundred.

*

She looked up. Granules scattered in the air rearranged themselves to spell out, *you are entering unknown territory*. Ignoring the warning, Fanta watched as the words dissipated at her feet. She always made it back these days, having full control over the temporal warp. The first time had been so unexpected that the experience sent her spiralling. She tried to explain it to Tej, who looked at her with concern and worried about how much she was sleeping. Fanta was determined to bring her in; what was the point of touching temporality, of remembering its shape and smell, if not for how it might be rendered to others? Traversing the pockets of historical events alone had taught her, even as the unimaginable occurred, that events were made real only in the presence of others. In Tej, she found the most precious alliance.

She was determined to arrange these little pieces of yesterday for Tej's pleasure and inspection. Tej had to overcome her attachment to rationality first. Fanta helped by speaking about embodied knowledge over breakfast and about how love could propel them into the terrain of the impossible in bed at night. After all, there were so many forces (structural and otherwise) that reminded them of the unfeasibility of their lives together, and yet here they were, living.

Fanta's playful incursions took away the misery of wage labour. Who could see her here? Tucked into the corner of 1791, watching the executions of slave masters with glee. She realised that pictures were a satisfying portal. Soon, the archive became a way to deal with the confinement that seemed inherent in the present. A bad day at work ended with her back on the steps of the Winter Palace during the October Revolution. An argument with Tej ended in the heyday of eighties New York—it was as she expected: drugs, drugs and more drugs. Fanta realised the power of her own touch; there was no space between the object and her fingertips. The permanence of the thing fell away, and with it, her distance from the material. She became *involved* in the scenes—soon it was hard to know where each one started and she stopped. Each time she came back bewildered; who wouldn't be? One second you are in the library or your makeshift study, and the next you are witness to the people storming the citadel. She would meet panicked eyes with panicked eyes—there was no time to explain. Only, pick up a weapon and storm

with them, or die. There are no spectators in the moment that may or may not become **HISTORY**—this she learnt quickly. If the bank was on fire, or the prison, or the state building, there was nothing to be done but become part of the mass, to feel the mass breathe, to respond to its needs, to bring the skills she'd learnt on Google to the frontline.

It occurred to her that she should move tentatively so as not to upset the edges of the temporal landscape and irrevocably change the present, like they did in films. Fanta never allowed her heels to touch the ground, so that returning from yesterday, she met tomorrow unchanged. There were still the obligations she was running from, still things she was hesitant to tell Tej. The escape enabled her to go about her days with new vigour: to love, to fuck, to be a good worker, all without alerting anyone to her travels. It was amazing how little people noticed about others! She would be gone for hours, slipping into the minutes of a quick trip to the bathroom, or a run to the corner shop for toilet paper.

*

At lunch with Damisi Hassan, she brought up Simon. It was 1975 and Damisi was overworked, squatting with black radicals in Berlin. Fanta longed to know history's gossip. The archive couldn't tell you who loved and who was left heartbroken, who became comrades on the off chance, who found each other out of necessity. All the little details were erased in the construction of **HISTORY**. She

wanted to gather what she could selfishly to inform her own research. What had Damisi and Simon's relationship consisted of? Why had she left all of her papers to him? Where was his ability to conceive of that tomorrow they had dreamt up together and left in the party's papers?

Damisi's acceptance of Fanta's presence, without so much as a whiff of suspicion, was what convinced her that the past, present and future are contemporaneous. Fanta told Damisi she was from the future expecting to be accused of being an undercover police officer. All Damisi did was pull out a cigarette from the pocket of sleek black trousers, offer it to Fanta, and then invite her in.

The house had many levels, each dedicated to keeping the machine running. There was a food rota, and household labour was shared amongst all members; that was the price of admission. The lawyers worked on their justifications for remaining in the building and keeping the police at bay. At weekly meetings they decided strategy, organised the various political education projects and the free breakfast programmes for local communities. They'd painted the walls and decorated the rooms with leather couches, wooden tables and bureaux found discarded on the street. They were working on getting every person a bed. Architects from the women's centre had turned one of the floors into a printing press and built a nursery, in case a nursery was ever needed. The reading groups were heated spaces, but theory was never disconnected from the practical needs of the day.

Who is still alive in the future? Were we successful? Most importantly, did we create a foundation solid enough for others to build on?

These were her first questions. Before Fanta could answer, it struck her that Damisi lived her life believing that better days were to come. She lived for a world in which food, shelter, love and care did not have to be earned. She was adamant that we could just take what we needed, reach a hand out together and see what happened. That clear-eyed determination was somehow missing from the present. Fanta knew that this feeling said more about her than it did about the passage of time. There were overlaps, gaps, echoes, places to start where they left off. She didn't need to see **HISTORY** to know that it flowed through everything. All contemporary narratives of decline, of crises, missed one thing—the aim was never to 'win' against a singular enemy or system; it was to name current conditions for what they were: undignified, deadly, alienating. The institution, law, policy—they obscured that fact, moving Fanta further and further away from principled resistance and the collective action that could temporarily alleviate conditions and later transform them permanently.

Damisi smiled a smile too thick for her face. She had chosen Simon because she trusted he would keep the material safe. Contrary to popular belief, in his heyday, Simon had been the most daring of them all. He had planned the People's Day of Action when others were

too scared to be caught mobilising. She spoke of him like a big sister who allows her little brother to think he is protecting her when really, she is the one shielding him from the worst of the world.

*

Workers in the sun are ushering in a general strike; there are so many bodies littered on the street it is hard to distinguish a hand from a foot, a face from the smudge of ruined film that Fanta holds in the present. In the past, in front of her, the many faces are ready to *break their chains*, ready to destroy and remake the categories that have destined them never to reap the fruits of their labour. The boss is threatening to fire and replace them all, and they know he can do this. Work is hard to come by in this moment; inflation has ravaged the city.

Arms linked, they refuse to move. They don't understand themselves as placed in any spatio-temporal location. They are in the middle of a dispute, and that dispute is urgently connected to the question of how they will live. The dispute is all that matters. She joins them. The assembly line seemed so far away at first, but when she reaches it she feels a strange reverb. She is trembling. The potential stored in their bodies has entered hers. It is knocking around, the sensations pushing outwards from underneath her skin.

Soon after this, Fanta gets lost. The days begin to crash into one another, and she can't seem to make it back. It starts slowly at first. Whole days slip through her fingers. She misses office hours on Friday. The clock begins to lie, and sometimes when she looks to it for direction, it turns into a dripping mess. Without it, she can't even confirm that she is standing on solid ground.

*

I am writing this to let you know that I met the future. She was black, flustered and full of anxiety. It is unthinkable, but in her I saw myself and my grandmother and the woman who invited me to my first meeting. I think I saw the legacy of my work living and breathing, and asking me questions about you, Simon. I wanted to tell her first to calm down; capital's trick is to make us believe that there is no space for manoeuvre. We are merely living through another stage that appears all-consuming.

I am writing this because I want some record of what is happening. Things are falling apart—our operations are increasingly... unsustainable. Every meeting is a battle instead of an attempt at cooperation. You're gone, and with you, the courage that stops us from being scared to face the police, or call a demonstration, or stop an eviction. There's a split between those of us wanting to continue work at the point of need, building through political education, and those who want to take on the state more directly. I can't spend days typing up meeting minutes or compiling agenda

points anymore. I do not want to put stress on my little one. The women are, frankly, exhausted, and things are beginning to fracture, even in the commune. Police stand outside now and intimidate the young mothers who come to us for shelter. We're losing more and more of our best thinkers to the university and government advisory panels. They are hurt that some of us call them traitors. I haven't the time to write in the way I want to. Not properly—only poems here and there on scraps of paper that I never remember to keep. The strange thing about watching power break down is wondering what they will write about it. Who will remember us, here, now, in the middle of things?

*

It is Simon who finds the letter. He's been hit with a wave of nostalgia recently and wants something to remind him of being young. There's no date, but he remembers receiving it just before Damisi left Berlin. They said her mind was going, even then. He kept this one, didn't admit it to the archive, because he wanted some piece of Damisi as he knew her. She was always intent on naming what was happening, on writing it down so that it felt real. She never let him forget that a political framework without revolutionary love was just another empty structure. No one was better at making political connections than she was; no one traversed so many political genealogies with ease. He felt a pang of shame. She would have much to say about his life now.

*

Fanta crashes into Tej from behind in the kitchen, arms so happy to be holding on to something solid. She can't say how long she has been gone for. Temporal limbo is unforgiving. She feels Tej's body relax and the moment prolongs itself. **HISTORY's** past and future always linger somewhere in the here and now. Strangely, she has this overwhelming desire to speak to Simon.

FUTURE
(PAST /
PRESENT)

What happens if we extract and collapse (MAN) so (M/A/N) becomes -. For now, let's call - '–'. We've reduced - to nothing on the page. With - gone, there is nothing left to speak of. Now who will dominate history!!!! Problem solved. We will have control over our bank accounts, nobody will speak over us in meetings, people will call us Dr instead of sweetie, we'll have full recourse to equality law, talk about bodily fluids over lunch and build a fully funded violence against women sector that sends the bad - to prison. We will be bad girls—even worse women. Hurrah! We will find that the pain does not go away. Some want to smudge out - because - is their worst nightmare. - is an embodiment of the terror they buried the second they recognised themselves as an object in the world. As a thing to be owned. Even as they love -, and marry -, have -'s children and try not to sacrifice too much by refusing to take -'s last name. They want the end of -, ironically. Well, to collapse -, you also have to collapse WO-, history's second in command. *Now there's a contention.* To be free you must be nothing of this world. You must part with everything, with the naming of your body, you must try and shake it off like the skin over hot milk. Isn't it weighted, doesn't it sit on your chest so you bind it, doesn't it make an ugly silhouette so you tuck it? Don't you love it? Don't you want nothing more than these rituals to end? Doesn't your ambivalence sometimes scare you? Don't you want nothing to do with the repetitive constructions that need your body to be real? There must be other routes into being. Maybe, really, being will be *non-being*, so we will think that we exist as individual,

essential, singular creatures with true things about us and false things about us but really, we will have given up on all of that. There's the trick (the future is not gender-n e u t r a l), the only future is one where we are no longer beholden to the regime. I want more than a death-sentence body. I want to collapse – and reinstate –, only this can make – mean nothing at all. *Don't labour under the illusion that you will get to keep anything.*

So now we are floating erratum,
matter spinning out,
the ghost in the machine.

How exciting! So then, who do we come for next? Wrong question. We have to make sure there is no one left to inherit the earth.

1953.

What's behind a demand? The echo of a theoretical turn, everything you've read that makes you who you are or forces you to change your mind and then change it again. The sound runs circles around us. The point is we scream it together. I guess I'm wondering if you hear that here, the echoes. Not 'influences' but stealing on each other's behalf, so it becomes impossible to know where one theory begins and another ends. In the echoes, without theoretical ownership, in every piece shared without citation, we can start the process of mixing thought, of refusing the particular and cold praise that idolatry elicits. Fuck genius. Or anything other than what we make with many hands. Injecting mixed thoughts into the superstructure, into the fight between classes, into the annals of history's radical traditions means finding theory in the most meagre places. The most squalid atmosphere.

1994.

I am wondering how one takes control of the future without instruction. Nobody can give it to us fully formed; I mean, nobody knows what will happen before it happens. Hear me out: maybe like the anarchists we should let people make decisions for themselves; no leaders or prescriptive strategies. Maybe we let the cards fall where they may. Maybe the most pressing question is, how do we organise human life without hierarchy?

1987.

Call me old school, but now the slaughter can be accessed

via the timeline, the coordination of inertia must be resisted more than ever. Nobody listens to the cyber-feminists (not the weird ones obsessed with AI, but the ones that know how to encrypt shit, the ones that know how to hide).

67.

For those who think capitalism is just a series of patterns repeating themselves / for those who imagine the future as space exploration / for those who are tired of the wishy-washy promises of decolonial scholars / or frustrated with the lie of ‘post’ in ‘postcolonial’ / for those ML who want a dictatorship of the proletariat, we all end up in the same place. In a dead end. The choice is either: embrace negation or embrace a fickle and stupid idealism.

99.

Symbols help us mitigate the question. Take the raised fist: at the very least this image represents how we cannot be held down; it signifies the inevitability of our rising up and breaking through. There is no space to move *through* a balled fist—anything that comes into contact with it will shatter. The fist in the sky is the opposite of the boot on the ground or the neck. There’s something to be said about ‘up’ and ‘down’.

56.

How do we recruit, train and help others think critically without offering solutions? This is a conundrum. In the arena of representation, if you can’t provide an answer,

then your opposition is meaningless. I think about the commentators who memorise four points to cram into a soundbite and I despair. The terrain of the battle fucks with us.

13.

The thing is, people suffer and expect that suffering to be met with dignity in an undignified world.

1781/1981.

Pessimism is more than just the failure of hope; black mass bubbles, corrodes, leaves stains on the underside of commands that workers break their chains. Like most things, the dichotomy is false. We need some ways of thinking poetically about grief & violent repetition and some ways of thinking practically about our next strategic move. *both require a certain kind of belief.*

2084.

This is a live document. Feel free to rewrite what you don't like. No more text-as-dead-space. I, the author, am not dead. I want to spend my time making sure that others stay alive—not just stay alive but live lives that are worthy of them. I know deservingness and worth are futile units of measurement. All I'm saying is, I don't just want to give you something in exchange for money. To honour this, I plan to give many more things away for free.

I am always writing the same thing. Think of how a circle, rounded lines from a fixed point, seems to keep going and going.

I am trying to keep up with my desire for more.

So that even when I think I am not writing about potentiality,

I am.

Even if I try to write a story that is not about wanting some world that is not this world

I look at the end result and I am stunned that the same words appear, even as I tried my very hardest to omit them.

Think of how a circle, rounded lines from a fixed point, seems to keep going and going.

That could be key to our method.

I am always writing the same thing. Think of how a circle, rounded lines from a fixed point, seems to keep going and going.

You are trying to keep up with their
desire for more.

So that even when I think I am not writing about
potentiality,

I am.

Even if I try to write a story that is not about wanting
some world that is not this world

I look at the end result
and I am stunned that the same words appear, even as I
tried my very hardest to omit them.

Think of how a circle, rounded lines from a fixed point,
seems to keep going and going.

That could be key to our method.

I am always writing the same thing. Think of how a
circle, rounded lines from a fixed point, seems to keep
going and going.

They are trying to keep up.
Our desire is more.

So that even when I think I am not writing about
potentiality,

I AM!

**Even if I try to write a story that is not about wanting
some world that is not this world**

**I look at the end result
and I am stunned that the same words appear, even as I
tried my very hardest to omit them.**

**Think of how a circle, rounded lines from a fixed point,
seems to keep going and going.**

That could be key to our method.

Art, when it circulates for profit, is a commodity. The conditions of its creation matter insofar as they tell us something about the artist, something about their creative desires and impulses. The artist's intention may be to tell us something about the world through the product, but when sold or exchanged, 'Art' mostly tells us something about the market: what it feeds off, what exploitative labour practices it depends on, what the commodity's relationship to cultural capital and institutional prestige is, how it shape-shifts. The Individual Artist, capital I, capital A, represents these observations. The Individual Artist works from the singular creative impulse buried deep inside that flows through them into the thing to be made. They need a room of one's own, they need uninterrupted hours—away from the responsibilities of the family, of lovers, of work. The Individual Artist is always trying to be alone. Always trying to move further and further away from people in order to get closer and closer to the fruition of creative impulse. They want to make Art: the thing to be bought and sold, the thing that circulates.

When Art meets big business, when a person has to write or make or sell their work in order to survive, fictive imaginaries are curtailed; the possibility of boundless freedom is slowly eroded. Many have wagered that the only kind of art-making worth protecting is collective. This notion of collectivity, of the many publics against the private, goes beyond the category of 'socially engaged art', goes beyond fickle definitions of a singular artist *engaging*

with the community. It means an end to the figure of the Individual Artist altogether. Only then can we begin to conceptualise political organising as creative space. From grassroots organising spaces, movement is birthed, stunts are planned, tactics are recycled and renewed, the dialectical tradition is enriched, strategy determined. It follows, then, that what is left behind and consigned to the archive—the pamphlets, political journals, poems, all the bits and pieces used to construct the rise and fall of political life—are found objects. Put simply, political organisers are art-markers; they work in search of other temporalities, unrestrained existence; they have sworn allegiance to fecundity.

Utopian extrapolation tells us that the political actor should avoid the trap of appeals to the state and institutions in favour of producing material that encourages affinity, bonds, solidarity, that gives us more reasons to stay alive. Collective art-making rewrites what we understand Art to mean—where we go searching for it, where we find it. To struggle with the aim of freeing resource from capital, ending tyranny in all its forms, is to change the definition of Art and/or Art Practitioner. Many disagree. But dissent, disruption, dispute, resisting the crushing, crushing back in name of each other—any material that emerges from this environment tingles. It is sustained by relation. The only creative practice worth saving.

WHY SHOULDN'T THE FUTURE
BE A SPRINT TOWARD
IRIDESCENCE?

defiance, renewal, subterfuge

*We are most frequently each other's
shelter and correction. Houses to hide
in and hold up, stuffed holes, places to
keep secrets, wells to whisper down.
Wrote it on the rope we tied ourselves
together with, squeezed tightly.*

WHY ISN'T THE TASK TO
CLARIFY THE
INARTICULABLE?
evasion, deceit, opposition

*The role of the artist in the revolution
is to look around and see what needs
doing. Pick up a weapon like everyone
else, run.*

WHY NOT WISH FOR MORE
THAN IS POSSIBLE?

infinity, boundlessness, the free precinct

The Met Police are perpetually under investigation. They will create new institutions to investigate the institutions that investigate the Met Police.

WHAT WOULD IT MEAN TO
APPROACH LOVING THE EARTH?
sweetness, heady hoping, succour & synthesis

To look at soil and see more than dirt.

begin with these words:

We

want [XXXXXXXXXXXXX],

then ask, what will this require?

The otherwise is not a process of negotiation or a business transaction. Do not try and sell it to me like something you can flog at a flea market; it is not ingenious or entrepreneurial, or even worse, 'innovative'. It is not interested in perfecting humanity using AI, or colonising space, or resplendence for everyone bought with gold stolen from Mars. It does not breathe in line with the stock market or debate the worth of granddaddy's life if he cannot work anymore; it is not like the race to cure cancer or eliminate climate change by planting trees via a search engine. It is not cleaning the seas and beaches by hand whilst BP watches. It is not an edict or a declaration of independence or a manifesto. It is not a contract to sign or bargaining for better pay or a four-day work week. Even if it looks like a contract, don't sign it.

end with these words:

I

will sacrifice [XXXXXXXXXX].

'liberated future' is a misnomer
better maybe to say:
a place where the body is shared and social
a place where literature is not for oneself
we know nothing of scarcity
we have retired lack

**my having is your having
a place with no need for catharsis
or the treadmill of public opinion
no more bad dreams
joy in the form best suited to the joy-seeker**

Against ontic knowledge

Some call that an escape from the misery of the day,
'utopia'
becomes retreat, or another map for the future
but I want the full story suspended in impossibility
dripping with conjured things,
information *in medias res*
and in place of data there would only be stuff to
make more of that good stuff,
no maps—no coordinates, or routes, only a
pattern of intensities that responds to the skin on
our fingertips. A pattern that changes every 10 minutes.
I want facts to curdle. That's a spoilt substance
we could use.

I want knowledge you can sit a while in,
knowledge that won't expel you for pontificating
knowledge that knows there is no certitude
in a political economy that wants you dead, or worked to
death, or alive but not really there, or banished, or picking
off scraps, or preoccupied with the violence done unto
you—so hurt you find it hard to breathe whilst drowning
in a bed of your tears, so alienated you look at yourself
and say 'who is that?'—or sectioned, or having a heart
attack aged forty-six, or flesh blown to smithereens, or
living in the shadow of an assassinated martyr, or earning
your breakfast lunch and dinner, or going hungry so your
kids eat, or rotting in a flat somewhere, or trapped by
something as arbitrary as a border. *sorry if the fantastic
seems appealing.* We're alive there.

Somebody screams **HOLD THE LINE** and the vibrations ricochet off any available surface. There is a space between the page & the words on the page. There is a space between looking at the words on the page & hearing the words read aloud. We need to find a name for that space. When we find that name, we will realise that nothing is, as yet, decided.

Can you imagine the weight of comprehensiveness? I just want to flex my muscles. I keep reminding myself that this book is not finished; I could always add something to it. I could always pick the stitches and seams until the thing falls apart, ready to be assembled again.

Coalition is both impossible and necessary. Think of the people set to inherit the wealth of colonial administrator grandfathers who disrupt the manufacturing of bombs so that they cannot be used against [X] in [X] airstrike. Or the community that stops an immigration raid in its tracks even though half of the crowd only came out to watch what was going on. They go on to share skills and resources across the country, across borders. Imagine how much teamwork that takes.

You can theorise anything. I'm always asking girls to roll me cigarettes outside the gay club, best way into any conversation. Best way to capture a night before it leaves you. Something about how the affective dimensions of queer intimate space..... (?)

Sometimes, the girls want to put theory down and dance. But getting further and further from theoretical proposition does not automatically mean we get closer and closer to each other. Therein lies the problem. Anyway, back to the free cigarettes and shared moments; I don't care what anyone says, that's a kind of political work!

Wishes fulfilled *after the fact* are thrilling. In the 1980s, someone scribbles a note about memorialising the riot (they don't have the time as it happens), and then a mural, painted by artists, queer punks, society's stragglers, appears decades later. I see one of them talking about it on Instagram, and here it is, in this book.

Here's a simple visual. You know those plants that grow through concrete, the ones that invade countryside properties, strangle them and decrease their value (Japanese knotweed, etc. etc.)?—yeah, I want that kind of persistence.

The girl who wished to be anything but a bird

The girl turned into a bird, predictably. It kept happening. One by one, the same fate was granted to every person in the family. They sprouted feathers and hid grimaces so as not to scare the young ones. The ground always shook as their chests were forced up toward the sky. That was the hardest part to watch. She hated the pomp of it all! What she noticed, time and time again, was that they never looked back. They just took off. In preparation for her ascent, family members had told her that birds travelled in flocks because it was easier to spot predators. Still, there was something strangely singular about the Event. None of the birds came to meet the ones left behind, offering to bring them up into the sky to show them the ins and outs of this new life. It was as if everything that preceded the ascendance, all the nights spent comforting one another, making sure there was enough to eat whilst soothing fears, had never happened. When the ritual came for them, they stood alone. *Why a bird?* This was the only way they could conceptualise freedom, as if freedom meant unshackling. Freedom was the non-existence of the iron and carbon bonds that made the steel that would then go on to make the chains. She never got a chance to say this formally because the rules prevented her, but every day she gulped down cups of water hoping it would delay the process. She wanted to be weighty enough to remain firmly on the ground.

Her mother was convinced that her turn was imminent and prepared her dutifully. All she could imagine was powder blue sucking her up, clouding her vision. When the transformation was complete, she knew she would never be able to nest long enough to feel comfortable. She remained firm in the belief that freedom is not the ability to go anywhere one pleases, but rather the elimination of the need for escape. At least small worries would be gone: making food for her siblings, the myth of non-hierarchical organisation, watching loved ones get old and die.

The Event felt very connected to ancestral mythologies of ‘a people’, something she had decided long ago not to believe in. In this regard, she was excessively rational; nothing but what could be tasted, seen, touched, heard and smelt could be known. Her mother called that a waste. She wanted her child to slip loose of categorisation a while, to let the Enlightenment go a little. They spent many nights at each other’s throats about it. Apparently, becoming a bird was a constitutive element of her ancestry, but as the moment approached, it felt like just another way to close the door and lock her into destiny. More than the ability to soar, she longed for permission to be fickle and changeable; to morph in and out of her destiny at will; to choose what she would become.

Sitting at her mother’s feet playing with the loose threads of her sandals, she would ask repeatedly, ‘Why?’ The answer always came after a brief hesitation. *That is just*

the way things are. When the words were released into the air, she saw how they floated and formed little nooses around the necks of everyone in the room.

*

There was only so much light and time together they could steal before the workday began. Sometimes, when the sun rose, she did not think, ‘the sun is rising’; rather, she thought, ‘it is almost time to get up and work’. Some looked forward to the Event, because it meant a break from the cyclical nature of the days, weeks and months. But she understood that the Event was not a rupture in the fabric of the everyday; it was merely a way to run from the drudgery of expending time and energy and strength and focus to make things for someone else to sell. Every day that they succumbed to the idea that nothing could be done to change their fate, they moved out of the realm of the living into the realm of the almost dead. Almost dead was worse than dead—it meant you were only being kept alive to work. To serve THE LAW or THE STATE or THE BOSS. She found, more than anything else, that ideology was the hardest thing to bury. It stuck its arm out of the grave, no matter how many times you beat it back down. Just when she thought she was making progress on the assembly line, feeding them stories of rebellion, teasing the possibility of refusing the Event, she’d blink and before she knew it, the *enforced* became the *expected* became the *tolerated* became the *accepted*, and she was back at square one.

Ideology was mushy, able to change shape so easily. At the end of the day, tradition, which they treated as if it were sacred, prevailed.

The order of the world was as follows. Whenever she suggested that things needn't be this way, or indeed that the way they lived was strange, designed to siphon off and isolate, designed to make each person the main character of their own life, they looked at her with wounded condescension. With her grandiose dreams and her hands constantly pointed outwards, upwards, in front of her, never by her side where they belonged, she conjured the forgotten shame of their own abandoned yearnings. They spurned her, but she refused to unlearn wonder or the deep sense of responsibility she felt to those she worked with. She had to set alternatives on the table and watch them unravel. They told her knowing the world was adapting, measuring expectations, grabbing only what was in front of you and no more. If audacity was the curse of being young, she wrapped herself in it; if wanting to bridge the gap between the dead and the living by ending the processes that shrivelled their lives was a violation of natural order, then so be it. There were only so many times she could visit the graves without making the decision to jump in. She had to put a break in inevitability. How does a single person break inevitability? Well, by finding others.

*

There was a stirring amongst the young. They had started to meet in secret two streets away from the compound to try and find a way to stop time. When they imagined time, they thought of a round glass ball, and so she encouraged them to carve these during work hours and then follow her to the cliff edge at night and throw the orbs off. The hurling would remind them that they had nothing to succumb to; they could hold time (*ergo destiny*) in their hands and do with it as they pleased. It would also remind them that time was not a black hole to be sucked into. Maybe one of them would make a good bird, but they knew the rest of them would never survive. The small glass balls shattered on contact with the rocks below, and she felt the sound reverberate through her body. It corrected her posture; the noise made her stand taller and breathe deeper, and she realised she did not need water to root her to the earth—everything she needed was already inside her, waiting to be harnessed.

Like all young rebels who have had enough, they began to plan. First, it was necessary to define the problem. 1) They wanted nothing to do with an ancestral rite of passage that did not account for their own desires. 2) The Event was escape, and escape was insufficient. If the Event could be stopped, it should be, because it was akin to moving from one straitjacket (worker) to another (bird), only the second had wings. 3) Some of them were not made to fly; they would die of homesickness. Some had qualities that would make them a good mountaintop or mermaid or monkey or pig or owl. They wanted to be the creatures

people considered low or stupid, because they understood how resourceful they were. To them, beauty was all around—even in those creatures who ate anything and everything. They realised that there was no hierarchy of integrity for living things; no actions counted more than others. Why should flight take precedence over travel on two legs or four or six; why should the sky mean more than the earth? Why should the clouds be mystics, when every object, every living being, had the potential to be wise?

Their plan centred on refusal—refusal to work, refusal to transform, refusal to believe that ‘ancestry’ was a synonym for ‘directive’. When the time came, they would simply say ‘no’, and the history of that speech-act would rise up and swaddle them, protecting them from destiny. They might use ‘no’ as a sword, or a spear, or a root that would burrow into the ground and wrap around their ankles, stopping the Event in broad daylight. They resolved to pursue this course of action and suddenly felt their backs up against a wall.

There wasn’t much space to manoeuvre here. ‘No’ was strong, but you couldn’t throw it very far. It took away the ability to be nimble, quick, light on one’s feet, to move as the world moves. They soon realised that merely refusing transformation would not save them. *Not doing* was a kind of stasis; a capitulation to the idea that one’s doing could only be understood as part of a pattern of exploitation. ‘No’ was the ceiling meeting the floor, leaving no room to answer the question, ‘What do you desire?’ And in truth,

some of them did want to transform—they each wanted to be different things. Refusal asked them to bury these inclinations, but *desire* was not the enemy. They resolved at another meeting to take back *desire* for themselves and—most importantly—for others. After all, one needs to *desire* to stay breathing—refusal on its own was akin to strangulation. It was not enough to sit there tied to the brakes or the wheelbarrow or the conveyor belt; they had to name the thing they wanted and reach out like it were possible to hold it in their hands, just as they had done with time. Destiny could be moulded into a smooth round ball if they were disciplined enough. They had done it before and they would do it again.

The moulding took many months; they developed a practice of visualising themselves as mammals, reptiles, insects, fish and amphibians, as bears, panthers, red snakes—anything but birds. They willed themselves to morph into objects, to hide from the Event when it came for them by turning into a chair, or a tabletop, or the stoop the women rested their feet on. The more they believed it was possible, the more they looked down and were met with the slippery belly of a snake for a torso, or bear claws for hands, or a snout that changed the pace of their breathing. They ran about delighted with their partial success. Something was growing; the idea that they could resist had implanted itself. *Magic*, some said. But that was an insult to their hard work. It was not magic more than the force of their own will carrying them over the top. Do not get me wrong—they failed and failed and failed,

but failure did not mark the path of eventuality. Every failure marked a new crossing, vertically into the ground, diagonally over the sea, and so they threw themselves into failure headfirst, knowing that they could try again. Their parents were horrified to see their children morphed partly into animals of their choosing, partly in the forms that they had borne them. They tried to stop them, locking doors and windows and monitoring their comings and goings. But there is something invulnerable about many people deciding to partake in the same task; you may impose limits on their geographical location or their ability to communicate, but you cannot stop the wish for more that becomes solidified in aspiration and finds its final form in action. You can even sit on their arms and legs, but they will find another way.

The young grew more confident with every new stride. Without permission, they had changed their constitution, made playdough of the ancestral lineage that dictated what they could and could not be. The point was this: that in the process of visualising, in willing themselves to become everything they should not have been, they had rewritten the trajectory of their existence. They were no longer workers destined to be ground to dust, or birds who escaped without a care for those they left behind. They used their newfound claws and scales and venom and sharp teeth to tear down every blockade erected to thwart them. In those months, the Event seemed to cease. Their proclivity for another way of being temporarily put an end to the ritual. But temporary reprieve cannot last forever.

Suddenly, the moment was here. She would be the first one to publicly defy the rules of the Event. She hoped that their collective practice had not been in vain. She used memories of defiance to strengthen herself, calming rising knots of tension that began in her toes and made their way upwards. She did not have a plan. If she failed, before she flew away, she wanted at least to show that it was possible to resist; it was possible to say ‘no’, even if that no was futile, even if no was not enough.

She was not foolish enough to believe that she was the first person to try this. There are no singular sparks to mass events—that was just the way they retold history in order to divide it into relevant sections. The stirring had been multiple, loud in several directions, including anyone or anything that would help it. It was the result of a spontaneous combustion that left nothing in its wake. Everybody had been changed—indeed, they had made history, not the kind to be unearthed at a later date, but the kind that could only be remembered via the body, remembered for what it ignited.

When the sky parted and called her into it, everyone gathered round in anticipation. Some expected that the business of resistance would finally be put to rest; she would see that there was no defying what was meant to happen, and the others would relinquish their foolishness accordingly. She fought with all her might as she was

lifted into the sky. Below, the others put their practice to good use and used the weight of their new bodies to cling onto her ankles and drag her back down. This went on for several minutes; the tug-of-war went one way and then the next, each side determined that they would be stronger when the next opportunity presented itself.

It wasn't enough. She sprouted feathers and swung her face from side to side as a beak pushed its way from its centre. Soon, there was not much of her body left in a form that she recognised. She saw in the faces below a quiet defiance towards the Event they were witnessing. She knew then that she had succeeded. The fact that they could regard her transformation as anything other than inevitable, that they were conscious enough to know there was another way even as it slipped through their fingers, meant she had unsettled and destroyed some old aspect of being. They saw differently now. She was convinced that this was what enabled the sequence of events that followed.

They let go of her ankles and turned back towards their respective workplaces, lit torches and burnt them down. They threw fiery logs in unison, not knowing what they were doing at first but feeling that it was right. As the flames rose, engulfing their livelihoods, they turned back and watched her wings wither and her beak begin to recede. There was some connection between their continued commitment to THE BOSS, THE STATE, THE LAW and ancestral flight. This was what had fixed

the Event in place all of these years. By letting go of the workplace, they cleared their own paths to becoming. It was as simple as cutting a cord. The time, craft and concentration spent making things could now be directed outside the confines of the assembly line. They could use these qualities to begin to approach one another, laying down hands and hearts, however calloused. They knew now that there was nothing left but the circulation of an intense devotion to one another's happiness, to one another's being, to the conditions of their shared reality. They felt themselves opening up: some remained animals fully formed, others half formed; others returned as human beings. As her body plummeted back towards the ground, they formed a shield, a protective barrier, to ensure a soft landing so that she made it back alive. There was much to work out. What would happen to those who had insisted on a strict adherence to ancestral tradition? What would happen to those who had refused the multiplicity born around them? She had no answers to those questions. She kissed the earth, knowing it was where she belonged. She felt the strange atmosphere from which *freedom-to* began to destroy *freedom-from*. It saturated the air, turning the sky pink. A flock of birds was visible in the distance.

They looked up, aghast. This was not a new beginning. It was an opening brought about by demolition. The moment that historic convention grazed the temerity of alternative belief, it broke apart in their hands.

when i am walking toward the light, in the arms of
those i love
i think i touch some place that is not here.
i think i squint & i can see it.
i see its shape as warm air envelops me.
i go to write another thing about TEMPORAL REGIMES.
all my friends in struggle say
...
ffs, stop looking over there,
the light is within us!

Endnote:

I wanted something of the child in here, to give them the chance to speak to you in their own words. But children are hard to imitate. They are precariously situated between ownership and mercy. The nuclear family turns children into property; to be young is to know that much of your life—your capacity for and expression of feeling, dreams and wishes, physical need—is being organised by some other entity: your caregivers, the state, structuralised brutality. You remember the pain of all those people who assigned you a fate without asking. To be a child is to be the object of fascination—your development is studied meticulously so that others may trace where they went wrong. We are always searching for a corrective, some way of tapping into our full potential as human beings: young or old. I don't know any children well enough to steal anecdotes or ideas from them for this book; I couldn't mimic them with any success. What I do know is that the promise of childhood, like so many other promises, is not often honoured.

Some theorists want to turn children into the boogeyman—children are queer negation, *everything we are not*; they represent all the things we can never achieve; they are a bore, they kill subversion, they weigh us down. When we look at children, we see the time we could have had or the mistakes of our own parenting.

We become convinced that children are only mirrors to our own sacrifice. The ecofascists want us to believe that having a child is cruel and irresponsible as floods rage and forests burn. At the same time, motherhood is either eternal abundance or lack.

The 'childfree' identity emerges through Western neoliberal vectors of personal choice and agency. What it disguises is an anti-relation that assumes that this world is a stable and habitable place from which to make choices. The childfree stance misplaces its anger; *it blames the wrong thing*. It blows up the possibility that we could reorganise the family and the buildings we live in and the food we eat and the education we receive and start taking things for free in order to raise children in ways that make sacrifice or regret or biological drives or gendered alienation impossible. When we talk about the child, what looms in the background is imperative. Well, fuck that. The stranglehold of biology and obligation has made a mess of our desires for too long. It has scuppered our plans, given us children we did not want in a world that could not help us. The imperative isn't to have a child or even to desire one; the imperative, no matter who you are, is to vow to protect them from all kinds of violence and terror and pain. That is the meaning of collective being.

The promise of childhood is not about *you* or whether or not you want a child. It is not about whether you can pay thousands of pounds to create one or enlist

someone else to do the work of gestation. It is not about whether you feel stigmatised for not having a child or can jump through the necessary hoops to be assigned one by the state. It is not about your ability or inability to give birth or about whether you purposefully create a chosen family against convention. It is about what we are going to do with a world that places targets on children's backs before they can even understand that they are in danger.

[XXXXX]

