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**Shoebox #5  
Postcombobulation  
First edition  
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**Fifth (#5) issue of Shoebox Magazine  
Postcombobulation**

***Shoebox is a self-published, self-funded and independent magazine, aimed at facilitating an open space for organic questioning and the sharing of ideas in a laid-back and accessible format.***

***Sales of all issues go to covering printing, paper and editorial costs, and we are not able to pay or in any way compensate for participation in Shoebox Magazine, but aim to give our contributors a platform to share and explore their creative expressions and thoughts.***

***We print limited numbers, distribute them in bookstores, events and privately, aiming to give each contributor a physical copy of the issue they are in.***

***In line with these commitments, all issues are available for free as PDF on the website.***

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*“There is hardly any contact more depressing to a young ardent creature than that of a mind in which years full of knowledge seem to have issued in a blank absence of interest or sympathy”*

George Eliot  
Middlemarch (1871)

**Dennis Farnsworth (Founder and editor-in-chief)  
Lumi Androvic Muzio (Co-editor)**

**For critique, inquiries, or to be part in shaping coming issues, please do not hesitate to get in touch.**

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Shoelbox

Magazine

Postcombobulation

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# What is Postcombobulation?

A conversation between editors Dennis Farnsworth and **Lumi Androvic Muzio** about postcombobulation and Shoebox #5  
From 21 November 2025 in The Hague, The Netherlands

## What is postcombobulation? How did it start?

When I finished my studies in Cairo, I was at a loss as to what this magazine was or how to take it further. I began to tell everyone around me how discombobulated I was with what's around me, what I see in the news, and what's happening in my own life. Me being discombobulated became an inside joke, and then one day it just went away. We were at a bar and I told you that my discombobulation had been alleviated, and you asked if I was postcombobulated. The term was coined just like that.

Obviously, our theme is a spin on discombobulation – being at a loss as to how to describe what's happening around you or what you're feeling. Postcombobulation is then the process of reaching beyond that initial state of confusion. The words go hand in hand.

For example, the other day I was thinking of one of my favorite quotes from *Oliver Twist*. The book is of course about Oliver's hunger on the streets of London, and Dickens is in many ways seen as a champion for the oppressed. In the book the narrator describes in one scene how Oliver gets his hands on a piece of meat and begins to devour it like there's no tomorrow:

*"I wish some well-fed philosopher, whose meat and drink turn to gall within him; whose blood is ice, whose heart is iron; could have seen Oliver Twist clutching at the dainty viands that the dog had neglected. I wish he could have witnessed the horrible avidity with which Oliver tore the bits asunder with all the ferocity of famine. There is only one thing*

*I should like better; and that would be to see the Philosopher making the same sort of meal himself, with the same relish."* (Chapter 4)

However, when you start to look into who Dickens really was, you run into things that show a different picture, for example in his piece *The Noble Savage* from 1853. Saying that these contradictions are a form of discombobulation might seem silly. But again, you get to the point where you're at a loss for words. How do I reconcile Dickens' solidarity with *Oliver Twist* when I also know what views he held of other people? It goes for anything.

**What you're saying about this in-between reminds me of studying Mrs Dalloway in high school. Virginia Woolf was going away from this very male and rigid way of writing with a clear narrative arc, and there's a scene in the beginning where Mrs Dalloway walks through London and a car with blacked out windows drives by. She writes through this free indirect discourse, where the perspectives are constantly jumping, and in the scene, she jumps between all these different people on the street as they wonder who might be inside.**

**It's discombobulating because it's not very easy to follow, but it's also postcombobulating because it's the human experience. The human experience is not a clear narrative arc with the structure you'll see in Dickens, for example, and I find it interesting when someone can use the personal perspective to talk about something important, without doing it in a conventional academic way.**

**When I look at Shoebox I also find it interesting that we read through a lot of entries that are so different. It becomes a soup of ideas, thoughts and images with so many different perspectives that we have to make sense of and piece together.**

**Furthermore, I think that the previous issues of this magazine were all discombobulated and postcombobulated as well, because you had a random set of submissions, with no guideline or theme. You could say that the ideology or theme of Shoebox is the discombobulation itself.**

Yes, and piecing these things together becomes our act of postcombobulating.

I always liked the idea that if you can't hide something, show it. I'm trying to embrace it in my daily life but also in relation to this project. If we can't hide the seemingly confused nature of Shoebox, why not put that right up front?

You also get this meta-thing with our theme because it's just... postcombobulation, Shoebox Magazine: what actually even is this? What does our word mean? And what does it mean that the ideology of this magazine is discombobulation?

I agree with you though, and these ideas have always been there in the project. But it's interesting how it's spun around to the point where the essence of Shoebox Magazine is simply that it's a Shoebox.

When we coin a word like postcombobulation and



Artwork by Lumi Androvic Muzio

use it as our theme, it's ultimately serving the same purpose, but in a more conscious way. I think that's important as we take this project further.

**There's this book I read called *At the Existentialist Cafe* by Sarah Bakewell. There was a chapter about Kierkegaard where she describes how he used to love walking around in Copenhagen and hanging around in bars. He used to describe this activity as "taking a people bath."**

I love that. Shoebox is in the spirit of Kierkegaard. We're bathing in people.

**It's hard to come up with these words, but when you see that someone else said it before, you get super postcombobulated. "Hey Dennis! I'm gonna go to the bar and take a people bath." It's perfect.**

**We're doing the same thing in many ways. From discombobulation we made postcombobulation, but we weren't searching for it. It just came to us by looking inwards.**

It's funny because I've always been confused doing Shoebox because it's been such a work in process not always knowing what I was doing. But now that we're working on the 5th issue together, I can really feel myself postcombobulating to the point where the word becomes more than just a theme for contributors.

**How do you connect working on your own and working with me?**

You and I see things in different ways, and for Shoebox it's making it so much better. What I've been doing before has been so ingrained in me: the open space, anti-elitism, and of course the endless question of authority and what it means to reject or accept a submission. While there have been good conversations happening in the issues already, you get to the point where you feel like you hit a wall, and you have to resituate yourself. Doing it with you is taking it to the next level.

**I think I'm a bit harsher than you as a critic also.**

You are harsher than me, and our opinions differ. But that's great because it lets us confront this project together. I try to put it in relation to the contributors, too, because it's a huge responsibility to include all these individual people's work and thoughts. It simply doesn't work if one person does it all. I get ideas from you and I hope you get ideas from me.

I'm always wondering how we can make sure that a contributor is happy to be in Shoebox. Especially since it's such a small thing and we're doing it out of pocket.

**I mean, I think it means a lot to people to see all the different places that the magazine is available in. But I also think of it in relation to social media and the internet. If someone asks me if I want to be on their website I'd say fine, sure. But something printed? There is so much more gravity to that. So I think that when someone sees that the physical copy of what they wrote or the picture of their work is physically available in different places around the world, I think that makes them very happy to participate in the project.**

**I also think that if we're gonna pay money to print Shoebox we really need to consider what it is that we want to publish. The open space and anti-elitism is still there, but I think there's something to be said about these things being inherent in making a selection and curating the issues. We can't just publish people because they are our friends or because we feel some sort of obligation to include everything.**

Yes, that's true.

**How do you postcomboulate?**

It's been about finding my voice. In many ways the whole idea of Shoebox has been to create the magazine for other people. But you ultimately fail at that because you can't get away from the fact that a magazine is always going to be an extension of its editors.

It goes back to the concept of neutrality and that it's an almost pointless thing to aspire to because it's impossible to be completely detached from something you do. Like I said earlier, knowing that I can embrace this idea of showing rather than hiding has really postcombobulated me.

**It's interesting because in a way your postcombobulation is about finding a voice and when I think about it myself it's about taking a step back from my voice. How can I take a step away from my opinions and my preconceived notions of what is right and wrong? What is cool and what isn't? What's successful and what's a failure? For example, I find bad writing very hard to read. But then the question becomes what bad writing even is. This is where we meet in this project.**

Yeah that's super interesting. For me, the question is always what right one has to say that some writing is good and some isn't. I know that someone could say the same thing about me and that's why I try to detach my voice and opinions. But I think we're postcombobulating by finding each other in the middle.

**Exactly. That's a handshake.**

What do you think about curating this issue?

**We were talking the other day about the order of submissions in this issue and that we want it to go from discombobulation to postcombobulation. But ultimately, when someone makes an artwork or writes something in a state of confusion, it automatically entails a moment of postcombobulation, so I think these words, as well as each submission contains those elements hand in hand.**

Yes, that's what I mean with Shoebox being meta. Postcombobulation is really just discombobulation in the end. But that's what's so interesting to me - there are no set rules. Embracing this is what I think this issue is about.

**I also think we have to look at what a magazine is to begin with. The first thing someone sees is often the centerfold, and what usually grabs someone's attention is imagery. So, if a reader sees Shoebox for the first time, how do we make sure that it says something about postcombobulation and about all of this that we're talking about?**

**The grander postcombobulation in Shoebox for me is: "Look. Here is what people are thinking, here's what people are writing about and here's what people are making art about."**

**So what we're doing is taking these disparate elements that don't seem connected, because confusion is really just the nature of being an artist or a writer or even a person. Maybe there's some space in this vagueness for readers to piece things together in their own way. We don't wanna spoonfeed them everything. You've gotta trust your audience, you know?**

# Bink ter Weijde

*Dud*





# Nouf Alharthi

*Anger in Her Throat Like a Stone*

*“Before this became a story, it was a nightmare I had last summer while I was far from home during the 12-day Iran-Israel war. It stayed with me, and I wrote from that space, away from Arabic - the language that always speaks through me - to create a distance.”*

The sky was orange, not the gentle “Instagram sunset” kind, but the desperate kind that looks like it is trying too hard to impress before breaking down. The horizon quivered, filters stacked on filters, and the sirens tuned themselves into the city’s heart-beat. People queued for coffee. The world smoked, but sure, Sarah, grab another oat milk latte.

And of course, he was there.

Her ex. Her apocalypse partner. Her emotional unpaid intern.

He caught her hand as if the collapsing sky had granted him tenure over it. His palm was slick. She did not pull away. When the sky’s collapsing, your standards tend to follow.

He studied her with that last scene of the movie gaze, the one that expects violins, redemption, maybe a soft fade to black. The air smelled like metal. Her laugh stuck somewhere behind her teeth.

They drifted along the Corniche past shop windows where mannequins froze mid pose, still sure of their angles. The ocean frothed, pretending relevance. Heat shimmered over the pavement. The sky pulsed like an open wound.

Words circled between them, heavy with unsaid things. He filled the silence the way he always did, by mistaking noise for comfort. The bench near Bab Al Bahrain waited, same as ever. He lounged like the city owed him a sunset. She watched the streetlights blink awake one by one, each a tired eye refusing to close.

Then he said, “It’s kind of beautiful.”

She almost laughed. Almost screamed. Almost tipped him into the water.

*Beautiful.*

He said it like a tourist describing fireworks. The sirens harmonized behind him. Smoke curled upward, spelling *don’t trust anyone* across the sky.

Her laugh finally escaped, sharp and misplaced. It cracked through the heat like glass.

A song slipped out under her breath, *Dhayaok* by Khalid Al Shaikh, its melody threading through static, her pulse keeping time. He watched her, still selling his brand of closure. “Don’t close every door,” he said.

The words hung there, brittle. The air buzzed, sharp with heat and sirens. She blinked once.

And suddenly, she was in a laundromat in Al Juffair.

The world had folded in on itself, traded smoke

for fluorescent light. Machines churned quietly, each one a small storm contained in glass. The air smelled of detergent and endings. Her reflection looked back at her, damp-eyed, pretending she wasn’t shaking.

Tears came quiet, hot enough to steam the window. The city outside still glowed the wrong color. Somewhere, a fire alarm kept score.

He had called it beautiful. She had almost agreed.

Now the word burned her tongue. Beauty had been a lie, a costume he draped over ruin.

She slid to the floor, humming again, her voice low and cracked. The hum steadied her. The machines whirred back like a chorus.

Outside, the sky deepened to bruise. Inside, something solid gathered beneath her ribs, a weight not leaving, just settling.

Anger did not shout. It built. It built a room.

# How to Stay alive in the modern world: A Step by Step guide

By Yoseph Maguire

## Step One:

Gouge your eyes out.

## You are:

- A flag ripped from its pole
- Wrapped up around a rhomboid metallic sculpture
- As the wind never ceases.
- Or
- A listlessly draped sheet.
- Silk over a tangled mass of knives, brass tacks and nails,
- That was pulled from the sea floor.
- splendor caught.
- trapped.

## I am:

- In pain with every word I write. Nothing is correct.  
Every choice is wrong.

## Step Two:

When you're sitting on the couch with your laptop in your lap and your cat grabs your hand and pulls it on top of him so that he can have the weight of your body comfort him, stop typing.

I haven't stopped typing.

## Have you seen the modern world? Be careful, you'll miss it.

"You can't trust anything you read on the internet."

"I met my best friend on Club Penguin."

## Digital Capitalism demands buyers and sellers!

- Sellers are Influencers.
- They are at Coachella.
- You are on your couch,
- or at Coachella, existing as a backdrop in the fake veneer crafted for selling.

## How to identify a Dead Soul:

- hollow (try knocking to see)
- can be purchased (by proxy, ask Tchitchikov for guidance)

Am I dead yet?

### **The fifteen milliseconds of fame:**

You // less depressed.

Them // doubletap.

Scroll. Doubletap. Scroll. Doubletap. Scroll.

The Platform // profit.

### **To stay alive you have to remember you exist.**

**(How do I know you exist?)**

**(How do you know you exist?)**

### **Step Three:**

Fuck off.

Dead souls... They are so loud, always posting! Everywhere!

The dead litter the streets.

The streets are online.

When the automobile first arrived, many died.

“Vroom Vroom! I’m in me mum’s car!”

In response to the mass casualties, they widened the roads and criminalized walking in the streets. Now, streets were for cars, or the dead.

This meant:

- No more markets,
- no more walking.
- No more apartments,
- no markets nearby.
- Drive, baby, drive!

### **Step Three:**

Do you get it yet? Are you afraid?

Are you not embarrassed? This is really embarrassing.

### **Step Three:**

Make sure to go insane,  
and follow a consistent skincare routine.

### **Step Four:**

This is how you stay alive.

To stay alive you remember you exist.

To stay alive you remember the pain of lost love

To stay alive you remember the soaring joy  
of authentic human connection.

Can you stay alive in the modern world?

Medicate, baby, Medicate!

To stay alive in the modern world you must delete your social media.

To stay alive in the modern world you must try keto.

It might cure your epilepsy.

To stay alive in the modern world you must acknowledge your death.

To stay alive in the modern world you are dead.

To stay alive in the modern world you find yourself in a palace,  
without walls or people or anything except the idea  
that somehow you are in a palace.

To stay alive in the modern world

you must face the closeness of your death, and then count backwards

Ten, Nine, Eight, Seven, Six, Five, Four, Three, Two, One. Zero.

Negative One. Negative Two. Negative Three...

To stay alive you are too late.

To stay alive you should have been born to a wealthier family.

To stay alive you should throw your phone into a river.

To stay alive you should throw yourself into a river.

To stay alive you cling to something, anything.

To stay alive your knuckles are white.

To stay alive your hands fall off.

To stay alive your brain collapses.

To stay alive your neck grows swollen.

To stay alive your eyes dry up and

To stay alive you use a pestle and mortar

to crush your dried eyes into a fine powder.

You’ll need about half a teaspoon for this specific recipe.

**Can you imagine:** lying there in your casket, still scrolling?

Here you are, still scrolling.

### **Step Five:**

Breathe. Cry until you laugh. Live.

I want you to live.

# Helmi Kukka Kärki

*The Discombobulated Helsinki Biennial 2025:  
Is Third Time the Charm?*



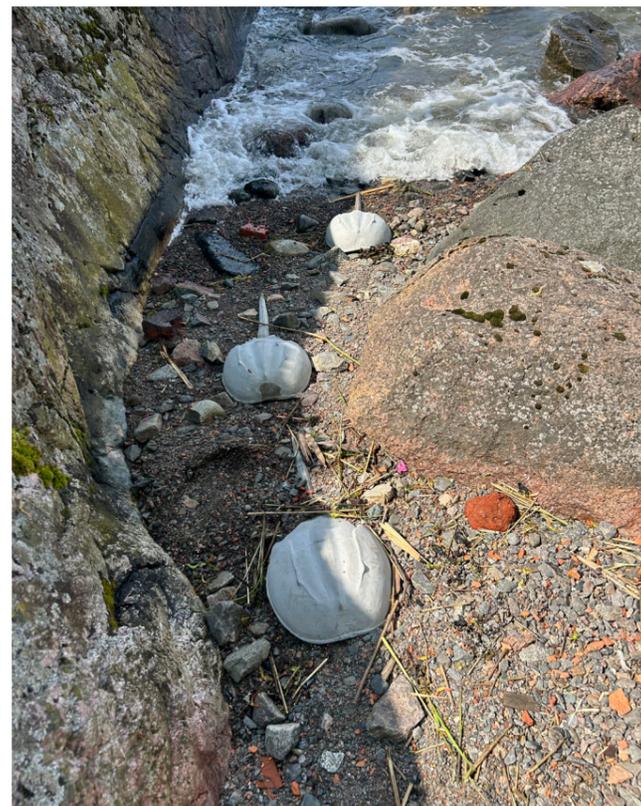
Yayoi Kusama: *Flowers that Bloom Tomorrow*, 2011. Helsinki Art Museum (HAM).

A few minutes into the walk, you realise you're completely alone. Your fellow passengers from the boat that took you to the Vallisaari Island, the main location of the Helsinki Biennial, have disappeared into the woods. Occasionally, the song of birds gives way to the distant hum of the city traffic floating over the sea, reminding the visitor that the mainland is not as far as it seems despite the illusion of solitude. But right now, right here, amongst the forest ponds, mossy bunkers and wildflowers, time and mind begin to slow down.

Though this third edition of Helsinki Biennial unfolds across three different locations, its heart and soul are firmly rooted on the Vallisaari Island, a once restricted military zone that has served as the main backdrop for the biennial since its debut in 2021. Once again, the artworks that compose this year's exhibition delicately thread through the nature and history of the island. This year's theme, "shelter", is embodied in the carefully intentional placements of the pieces. Following the delicate soundscape of the island, the artworks themselves contribute to the silence by melting into the island's landscape.

The power of the biennial lies in its modesty. Unlike the monumental spectacle that most biennials chase, Helsinki Biennial lets its works remain minimal, blending into the rock and soil of the island and the sea surrounding it. Some of the works, like Tue Greenfort's *Limulus Polyphemus Lampisaari* (Pond Island), 2025, covered from sight behind rocks in shallow waters, would vanish completely without an occasional sign grabbing the viewers' attention. In a setting like this, the audience becomes a seeker. The walks in between the pieces feel like small pilgrimages where the audience is guided through solitude. One arrives to the island for art but gets lost in nature. This feeling evoked caters towards the goal of the biennial's theme: coexistence with the non-human. While the artworks speak of grand, though slightly overused, themes such as natural crises and interspecies dependence, they do so without forced spectacle. On Vallisaari island, the biennial's curators' Bianca de la Torre and Kati Kivinen's curation plays with humility, both in form and in tone.

The biennial shines in the tension it creates between art and space, spectacle and silence. Yet, this tension is also where its growing pains begin to show. Supporting Vallisaari Island, the event also takes place at Helsinki Art Museum (HAM) and the Esplanadi park in the city centre. Unfortunately,



Tue Greenfort: *Limulus Polyphemus Lampisaari* (Pond Island), 2025. Vallisaari Island.

where the curation on the island feels intentional and sensitive to its site, the other venues struggle with coherency. The curation of these locations seems much lazier and thus weaker compared to Vallisaari, especially at Helsinki Art Museum (HAM). The grand curatorial texts with big words and vague art-speak promise a lot, yet the artworks themselves do not deliver. On the level of ideas, most of the artworks at HAM seem sort of half-done, sometimes also even on the level of execution. None of the works evoke the viewers interest individually. Though the texts claim otherwise, nearly nothing new or interesting is being said.

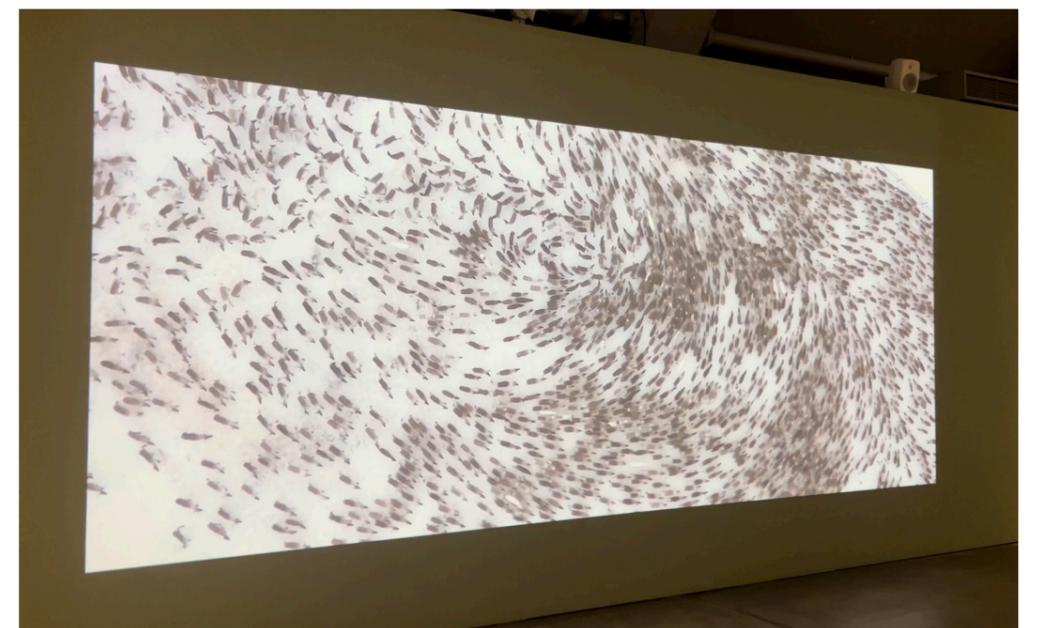
Additionally, the park display at Esplanadi feels a bit more like a promotional gesture than genuine curation. The spatial rhythm and well-paced contemplation present on the island are completely lacking here. This attempt to bring the biennial to the heart of the city feels like an awkward interruption instead of the smooth intervention of art within urban life it clearly wants to be.

What piqued my interest at all the locations was the exclusion of the artists' nationalities; a move that helps free both the artist, the artwork, and the viewer from geographic biases and expectations. It allows the art and the artists to be experienced on their own terms, not as representatives of their respective countries unlike in Venice, where national representation is an essential part of the biennial's core purpose. Considering geographical representation, it is impossible not to notice the abundance of Sámi artists, like the duo Jenni Laiti & Carl-Johan Utsi and their video *Teardrops of Our Grandmother*, 2023.

The presence of a few high-profile names such as Yayoi Kusama and Olafur Eliasson adds to the confusion. While such inclusions might add to the broader audience's curiosity, they sit uncomfortably within the otherwise subtle and reflective tone of the biennial. There is a fine line between strategy

and cheap spectacle, and in this case, the latter has started to overshadow the first. This loud measure of courting audiences raises a question: Who is this biennial really for? International audiences, the local community, or the circuits of the global art world? Unlike at bigger biennials, there is no great biennial pilgrimage to Helsinki during the event; the audience consists mostly of locals and tourists who were coming to the city anyway.

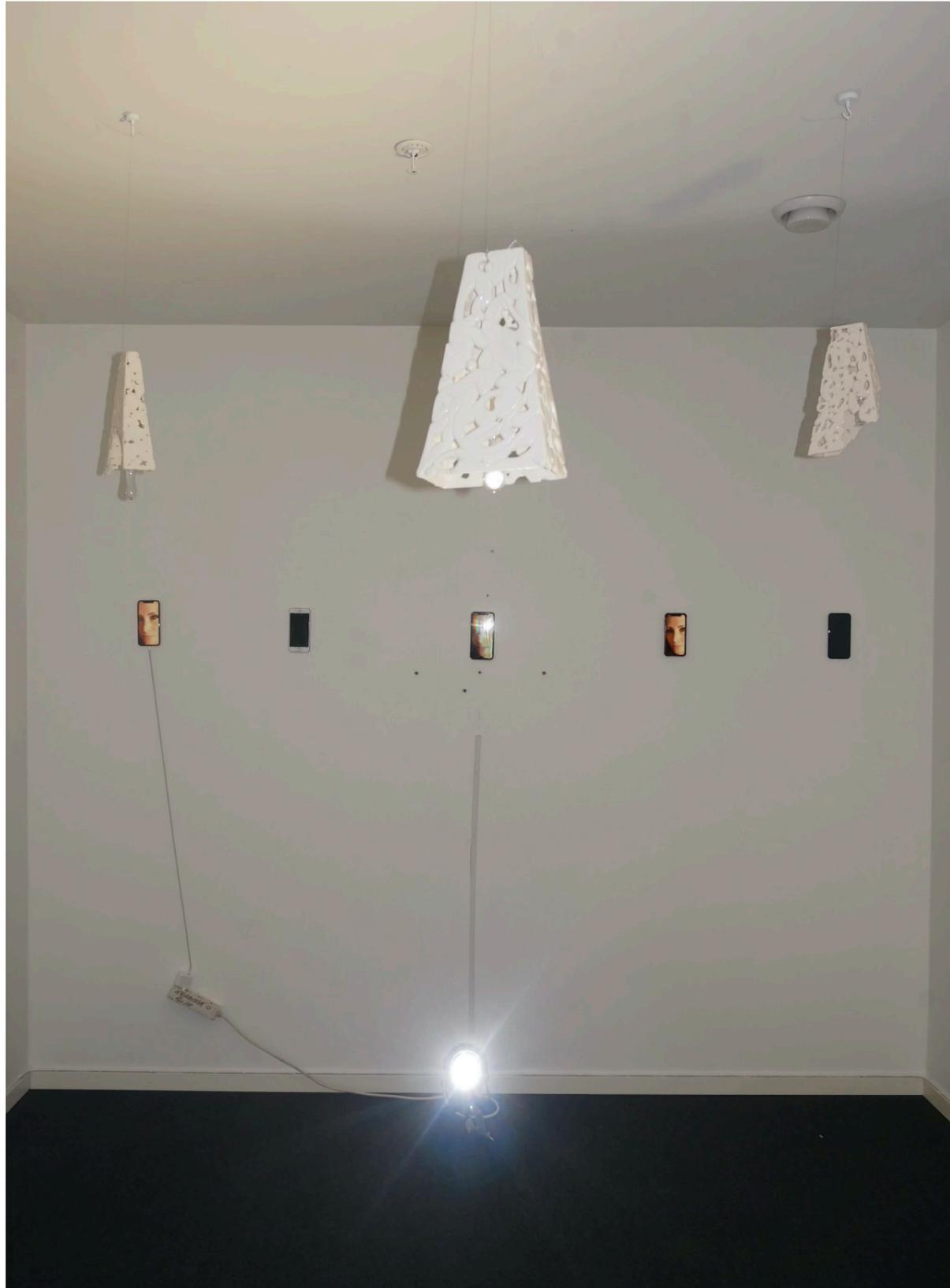
The broader ambitions of the Helsinki Biennial remain slightly tangled. As stated on the biennial's website, its goals include transforming Helsinki "into an art capital with wide appeal as a cultural destination" and "to establish Helsinki Biennial as one of the most well-known biennials in the world". These ambitions sit uneasily next to its most successful aspects: intimacy, reflection, and modesty. Bigger is not always better, and a smaller player trying to fill in bigger shoes has the risk of creating something awkwardly in-between. The biennial's future shouldn't include competing with bigger ones but resisting their models altogether. In the end, what Helsinki Biennial gives us is not answers but atmospheres. A promenade in nature, paced by art. An open question about being human in a world bigger than humanity. And maybe that's enough, not to make Helsinki the next global art capital, but to make it something rarer: a place where art doesn't demand attention but waits quietly for the right audience to find it.



Jenni Laiti & Carl-Johan Utsi: *Teardrops of Our Grandmother*, 2023. Helsinki Art Museum (HAM).

# Mira Wood

*That's When I Ate Some of Her*



and that's

when I ate

Some of her

digging holes

to

combobule

# SPONS

## SPONS2

SPONS is short for the word sponsor, which refers to a legal entity or private individual who knowingly provides financial support or services to another business in exchange for something in return. To sponsor someone is to help with expectations attached. In *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins, the main character, Katniss Everdeen, quickly realizes that she must make people like her, as her likability could literally save her life. The structure of the games allows her to gain so-called sponsors - wealthy individuals who can help her survive and potentially win. These sponsors provide her with essential items such as food and medicine - crucial resources that ultimately contribute to her survival and victory.

In our world, sponsorship is a livelihood for many. Promoting the latest Nocco flavor or Caia's new makeup palette can be a significant source of income. But what would happen if all sponsors disappeared? Would influencers finally be able to take a break, as Antonija Mandir joked about during the pandemic? One can only hope. Even though sponsorships are vital, it raises the question: Should we be so obsessed with chasing sponsors, connections, or clout? The very word becomes a kind of inner struggle for us. Could we, as influencers, manage without sponsors?

It's about creation and creation is about context. It's about being among like-minded individuals who share your thoughts, ideas, and aspirations. Surrounding yourself with people who create in the same spirit enhances your own creativity. It offers a source of inspiration and opens the door to meaningful discussion and dialogue. Dialogue is essential, not just for development, but for giving your work meaning. Being around people who are passionate, driven, and talented provides motivation, purpose, and growth. It allows for experimentation and understanding. It's production. This is what it takes to create something that feels meaningful, enjoyable, and fulfilling and, of course, something that delivers a worthy result.

That is SPONS.

A creative collective based in Årsta, Stockholm.

Started September 2024

The members are:

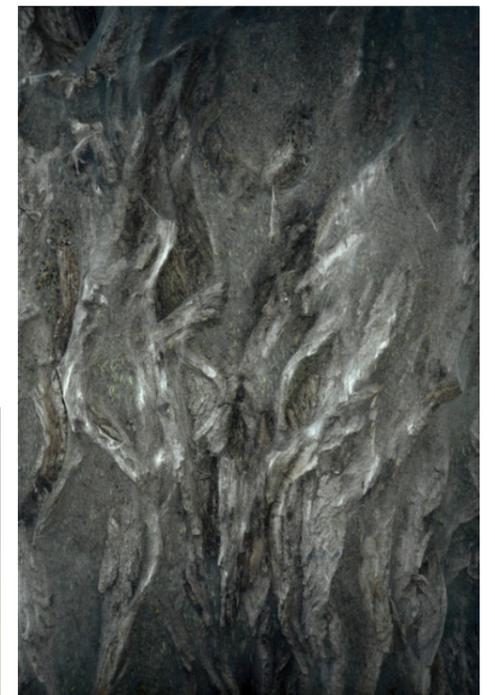
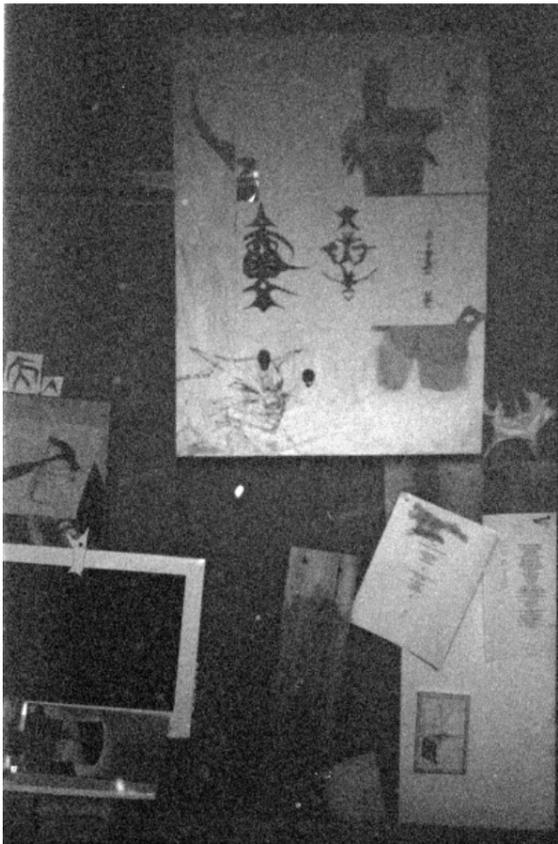
Alice Harrling

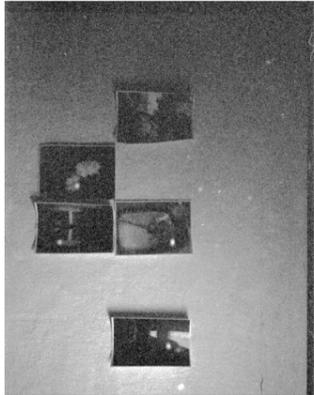
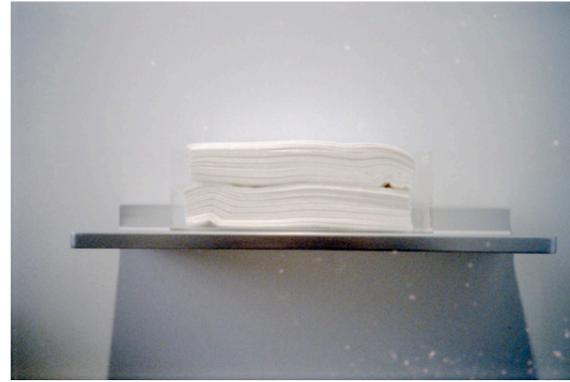
Rolf Jacobson

Henrik Luhr

This is SPONS2, their second production. SPONS1 was an exhibiton in Stockholm.







# What's your media?

## Shoebox Hits the Streets



### What's your media?

Jag heter Mira Wood, jag är 25 och nästan tolv månader. Jag fyller 26 om en vecka. Min media är en uppläggning av Ulysses av James Joyce läst av tre dudes som sitter i ett rum. Mellan varje kapitel är det en fiddle som spelar. De kan inte hålla sig och skrattar mellan varje kapitel för att vissa kan inte läsa upp det. Det är min media.

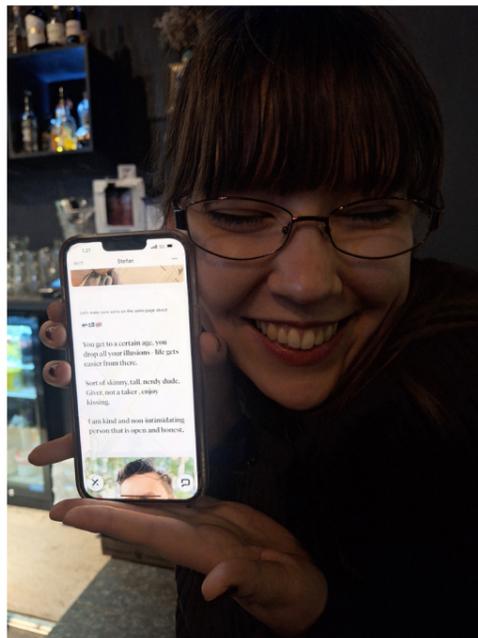
**Translation:** My name is Mira Wood. I'm 25 years old and almost twelve months. I turn 26 in a week. My media is a rendition of Ulysses by James Joyce read by three dudes sitting in a room. Between each chapter there's a fiddle playing and they can't hold themselves and laugh in between because some of them can't read it. That's my media.



### What's your media?

Jag heter Måns Fridlitzius Lindberg. This CD. Just bought it from second hand. From Dubai to Marrakech. Jag gillar det. Jag tycker det känns schysst liksom i det här vinterlandskapet att föras till Marrakech.

**Translation:** My name is Måns Fridlitzius Lindberg. This CD. Just bought it from second hand. From Dubai to Marrakech. You know, I like it. I think it's nice in you know, this winter landscape, to be transported to Marrakech.



### What's your media?

My name is Helmi Kukka Kärki and my media is Hinge profiles. Save me from Finnish men!



### What's your media?

Jag heter Leon Grünberger. Jag är 25. Min media är This Past Weekend med Theo Von och Joaquin Phoenix. Den såg jag idag när jag duschade och den var väldigt bra. Det är en podcast och de pratade om hans pappa och att de tappat bort hans aska och jag tyckte det var väldigt bra. Pappans aska var borta och hela familjen försökte leta reda på det. Jag kände igen mig typ, kanske.

**Translation:** My name is Leon Grünberger. I'm 25 and my media is This Past Weekend with Theo Von and Joaquin Phoenix. I watched it today when I was taking a shower and it was very good. It's a podcast and they were talking about their dad and that they had lost their ashes and I thought it was very good. The dad's ashes were gone and the entire family was trying to find them and I related to it, almost. Maybe.



### What's your media?

Får jeg snakke norsk?

Ja.

Mitt navn er Susanna Sørensen, og jeg er 27 år gammel. Mitt medium er podkaster. Det er det jeg konsumerer aller mest, og jeg vil trekke fram to podkaster. Den ene podkaster er litt mer seriøs, den heter 'Hva er kunst?'. Anbefaler. Det er også noen episoder på engelsk. Og på en litt mer humoristisk side, men fortsatt også litt kulturelt seriøs, har vi 'Bålet'. Det er to ganske nye podkaster, begge to. Så anbefaler. Anbefaler veldig mye.

**Translation:** Can I speak Norwegian?

Yes.

My name is Susanna Sørensen, and I'm 27 years old. My media is podcasts. It's what I consume the most, and I'd like to mention two of them. One is a bit more serious and is called 'Hva er kunst?' I'd highly recommend it, and there are also some episodes in English. Then, on a more humorous note, but still culturally serious, we have 'Bålet.' Both podcasts are quite new, and I would highly recommend them.



### What's your media?

My name is Işıl Ercanlı, I'm 22. My media is this book I picked up from the store next door. It's called How Infrastructure Works, by Deb Chachra. It's about how different kinds of infrastructure works. Energy, roads, telephones, communications and how they can be tools for political power.

Ines Kukrić  
*fig tree*



# Ahmad Nageeb

Role Models

## a call for collaborators

*“Role Models is an autobiographical essay and chapter from a longer work called My Father Doesn’t Smile. It is part male dissection table and an ongoing experiment in tracing masculinity through silence, failure, and badly timed jokes. It began as a literary project about my father’s quiet influence on me but turned into a sociological safari through Arab manhood: men who love, ghost, overthink, and quote films on dating apps.*

*At its core, it’s a search for a new language for men, one that can hold both fragility and pride without sounding like a TED Talk. I write about awkwardness, fatherhood, friendship, and the eternal struggle of Arab men trying to ‘open up’ while still pretending not to care.*

*I’m now looking to collaborate with artists, filmmakers, illustrators, and sound designers who want to stretch this project beyond the page. Think hybrid essays, short video pieces, or even meme-level philosophical meditations on manhood.*

*If you’ve ever tried to explain your feelings to a man and failed miserably, you are one click away from submitting the application to collaborate on this.”*

**Email address:** ahmadnageeb.k@gmail.com

**Phone number:** +201015517261

My cousin Hamasa and I were once trying to draw a pie chart of the reasons behind his anxiety. We both agreed that our uncle Mostafa would take the largest slice. Maybe seventy percent, if we were being generous. The man was practically a one-man trauma factory.

Mostafa wasn’t just any uncle. He was the family’s longest-running horror franchise. He arrived late to the family, was a surprise baby to my grandparents, and then grew up surrounded by women who adored him too much, too early. When my mother and aunt got married, he treated their husbands like kidnapers who had stolen his two favorite toys. It makes sense in hindsight, our family doesn’t really produce villains; we just spoil men until they turn into one.

My mother always said he was a “sensitive child.” In Egyptian families, that’s a polite way of saying psychopath in progress. The story everyone tells is that at my mother’s engagement party, little Mostafa, six years old, full suit, shiny shoes, sat in my father’s chair beside the bride and refused to move. Everyone laughed. I don’t think that this was the first time someone mistook control for charm in this family.

By the time I was born, Mostafa had already perfected the art of psychological warfare. He’d steal my toys and say it was “for my own good,” like some twisted life coach. When I cried, my mother would just sigh, “You know how your uncle is, I told you not to bring them here,” she’d say with the same tone people use when it rains during a picnic.

My grandmother’s house smelled like cardamom, boiled herbs, and unresolved issues. She led a mosque circle that was less about religion and more like a rural version of group therapy. They’d talk about God, yes, but also about whose son’s hernia operation went wrong and whose cousin was cursed with a missing testicle. I learned more about anatomy from that mosque than from school.

Mostafa hated those gatherings. He hated noise, women, and anything that reminded him of not being in charge. He wasn’t religious, but he ran the house like a temple where he was both the god and the victim.

Sometimes, when he was in a good mood, he’d let me watch him play video games. I’d get the prestigious role of pressing the “fire” button while he controlled everything else. If I got too excited and asked to play, he’d smirk. That kind of smirk that brands itself into your nervous system and says “Next time.” There was never a next time.

My cousins had it worse. He once locked them out on the balcony and told them they were orphans now. Another time, he farted, blamed it on one of them, and demanded a confession. “A real man

admits his mistakes,” he said, as if flatulence was a moral compass. Egyptians don’t call that mental illness. They call it the devil playing with your head.

Years later, me and Hamasa would still talk about Mostafa like he was a myth, part ogre, part uncle, part unpaid therapist. “You know,” Hamasa said once, “I think he shaped all of us.”

He wasn’t wrong.

Hamasa was five years younger, the family’s youngest and most forgiven. He got away with almost everything. I’d give him ideas and he’d execute them, and I’d get the satisfaction of watching chaos unfold without consequence. When I left Egypt for Vietnam, I realized how much I had been performing for him — the role of the worldly older brother, the one who left. I worried he’d inherit our family’s silence.

He didn’t. Or maybe he did, but he got very skilled at disguising his anxiety into laughter.

When I came back, I saw how close he and my father had become, and I liked it. I liked that my father had finally made a friend I actually knew. Sometimes, though, I was jealous of their ease — the way they laughed, the way my father asked about his short film like it was the most important thing in the world. He never did that for my films, though he once sent me money for a festival ticket from Saigon to Czech. By then, Parkinson’s had already stolen parts of his mind, and I didn’t dare ask him why the sudden interest.

A couple of months after his passing, Hamasa told me about the day they all drove me to the airport. “When we came back,” he said, “your dad was quiet for a while. Then he looked at me and said, ‘I’m going to be your friend now.’”

I wish he had said that to me.

After all, I told myself that I know he loved me more than anything in this world. I just wished he could’ve come back to his old stern self for one moment — so I could scream at him, and confront him, and maybe get the fight we both deserved. Sometimes love just stays unfinished, like sentences he started and never got to finish on his deathbed, and like me telling him that I love him, but never really knowing if it ever made it to the island in his mind that no one but him could sail to.

## نذير ملكاوي

ولا كلمة واحدة مهدورة

\*هذا فصل قصير من رواية قيد الكتابة

نذير ملكاوي في حفل توقيع روايته في دار الثقافة بدمشق

نذير ملكاوي في حفل توقيع روايته في دار الثقافة بدمشق

كنتُ جالسًا أمام شاشة اللابتوب، أشاهد فيلمًا يقول فيه شابُّ أربعينيّ لفتاةٍ عشْرينيَّةٍ إنّ عليهما أن يفترقا، لأنّه يحدس بأنّهما لو أكَملا كذلك، فسيحبّها. لا أذكر أقال سيقع في حبّها، أم سوف يحبّها. لكنّ هذا تساؤلٌ يعنيني أكثر ممّا يعني الفيلم. عقب نزولها درجتين، يقول راوي الفيلم إنّ الفتاة في تلك اللحظة بالذات، أدركت أنّها أحبّته، فصارت علاقةً. لحظة تسمّرها عند الدرجة الثانية نزولًا، عرفتُ أنّ لكلّ امرئٍ حياة تخصّه وحده، لا يمكن أن يتشاركها مع أيّ كان: تفضيلاته في الناس، في الشكل، الملابس، الأدب، الموسيقى، الطّعام، علوّ الصوت وانخفاضه، كلّها تفضيلات شخصٍ واحد. بوسع شخصين أن يلتقيا، لكنّ حياتيهما أبدًا لن تتداخلا. وعند ذاك المُلتقى، يحدث الحبّ، وكذا الكراهية. فوجود واحدهما مرتبطٌ أبدًا بإمكان وجود الآخر. أدركُ الآن، أنّني أحبّ سامراء، هذا الإدراك الذي يضربني للمرّة المليون ربّما، وأنّ أقصى ما أمثناه أن نلتقي، لكن، ما أغمضتُ عينيّ عنه، أنّ أحدنا سينتهي إلى الكراهية، وسيظلّ الثاني معلقًا في الحبّ.

أخرجتُ هاتفي، وكتبْتُ لها رسالة قصيرة بحجم لحظة الإدراك تلك: ولكِ وبعدين؟ قبل أن أمحوها وأكتب: بحبّك، وهذه كنتك، وما تلاها أيضًا. ظللتُ أكتبُ وأحذفُ حتّى استنَفِدْتُ، فقمْتُ لأمشي حتّى تعبْتُ، واستمرّ الحال هكذا حتّى تنهى الخوف إلى قلبي، إذ لم أعرف، حين رفعتُ رأسي أين أنا. مشيٌ كما الأبد، وحياةٌ معلقةٌ مثل مطهر تجلّي وبات عيانًا. أكل هوا، هذا ما هو الحال عليه، وإلا فمأذا؟ قرّرتُ ألا أفهم، وأن أقود السيارة حتّى بيتها. ركنْتُها بعناية من لا يودّ التفكير بالقادم، كانت قرابة الواحدة بعد منتصف الليل، وأهلها ما يزالون نيامًا. مشيتُ صوب بيت سامراء. لمّا نزل الأضواء مشتعلة، لعَلّ الجميع كانوا متجمّعين في الصّالة، لكن كان من المستحيل تبين أيّ شيء من خلال الستائر الثقيلة. همت قطراتٌ خفيفة من المطر. مضت عشر دقائق. عرفتُ أنّ بوسعي ضرب جرس المنزل ورؤية سامراء، لكنّني بقيتُ واجمًا. لم أدرك أنّ الدقائق العشر تلك لم تكُنْ إلاّ وهمًا حرّكته التفاتة فتاة الفيلم إلى الوراء، ثمّ عدولها عن نزول الدرجات إلى منتهاها؛ أدركتُ فقط أنّ تلك الدقائق كانت فظيعة، وأنّ انقضائها ليس ضامنًا كي يتغيّر أيّ شيء، فضربتُ جرس المنزل، وانتظرت.

فتحت لي سامراء الباب، ظللنا واقفين وجهًا لوجه، بلا نأمة ندّت عن أيّنا لدقيقة، فالثنتين، ربّما أكثر أو أقلّ، لكنّ الأکید أنّ أحدًا لم يفّه بشيء، ذاك حين أمسكتني من تلايبيي وأدخلتني بعينين

تكادان تشتعلان. ما الذي جاء بك؟ سألتني، وقبل أن أجيب، طلبتُ أن أتحدّث همسًا. أجلتُ عينيّ في الرّدهة الطويلة، بإضاءتها الخافتة: الصالة عن يساري، والغرف تتوزّع تباَعًا على طول الممرّ الذي أوحّت الإضاءة باتّساعه خداعًا. عدتُ إلى سامراء، وقلْتُ لها إنّ عليّ أن أكتب. حانت منها التفاتة نحو أصابعي المرتعشة، التي داريتها باليد الأخرى، حتّى صارت الكفّان يدًا واحدةً كبيرةً موهومة بالثبات. قلت إنّ عليّ أن أكتب، وإنّ الأمر لا يحتمل النقاش. سحَبْتُ اليد المهترّة وقبضت عليها، جارةٍ إيّاي إلى الصالة. أجلستني على كنبه لا يراها من يمشي في الممرّ إلاّ لو دخل الصالة، وطلبتُ ألاّ أتحرّك. جلبت لي كأس ماء، وطلبت أن أحكي لها. ماذا توذّين أن أحكي؟ سألتُها، فأجابت عن سبب مجيئي، عن هذا الذي لا ينتظر حتّى الصباح، عن الفضيحة التي أوشكتُ على إشاعتها، أو التي أشعتها وانتهى الأمر. قلتُ والله ما قصدي، بس الموضوع لا يحتمل التأجيل، كل شيء يجب أن يُكتب، وإلا انفجر رأسي. أخبرْتُها عن كرهِي لما يدّعيه الكتاب عن كون الكتابة علاجًا نفسيًا، هذا كذب. أو لا، ضعف في المعرفة، وتداول فكرة لنصاعتها تبدو بدهيّة، لكن قسما بالله إنّها ليست كذلك، وأنا لا أحلفُ كذبًا. الكتابة ليست علاجًا، وإن كان لزامًا أن ننسبها إلى شيء، فإلى الانهيار هي أقرب. كبسة زرّ، أو كبسات، حقيقةً لا مجازًا، تدفّع العربية إلى الوادي، وأنت وحظك. كانت حازمة أكثر هذه المرّة، وطلبت أن أخبرها الحقيقة وإلا طردتني. اشتدّ اضطراب أصابع يديّ، فطلبتُ منها أن أشعل سيجارة. شقّت الشباك قليلاً، هكذا كانت تجيب دومًا عن الأسئلة بالأفعال، عن المصائب بالحلول، وعن الحب بالنكران. أخرجتُ ورقةً من جيبي، لأجدها تهزّ رأسها: احكِ أنت. لا يجوز أن تباغتني ليلاً ثمّ تطالبي أن أجاري ما يريحك. احكِ وسأسمع.

أخبرْتُها عن حلم البارحة، من أوّله حتّى هذه اللحظة. قلتُ لها إنّ الحلم يقول كلّ شيء، وأحسستُ أنّها اقتنعت، أو كادت. أخبرْتُها أنّني كنتُ واعيًا في الحلم على ذاكرة ليست لي، لكنّها كانت كذلك في الحلم. كنتُ أعرفُ أنّها انتحرت قبل ستّ سنوات، شنقًا. وباتّ الخبرُ على كلّ لسان، قبل أن يستقرّ عند منشور في ذكرى ميلادها يعلن فيه أحبّتها أنّها استقرّت في القلوب، أو في القلب، قلب واحد، لا فرق. كنتِ تقولين لي مرحبًا، هكذا أنذرك، تمامًا كما لم أنسّ صوتكِ وأنتِ ترحّبين بي: مرحبًا مقرونة بصورة جانبيّة لوجهك. فجأة نسيْتُ صوتك، جرّبتُ أن أتذكر، لكن عبثًا، لم يبقَ إلاّ الوجه من جانبه. بحثتُ على الإنترنت، دخلتُ حسابات أهلك ومعارفك وأصدقاءك،

and see Samarra. But I just stood there, motionless, not realizing that those ten minutes had been a daze, triggered by the girl in the movie’s backward glance and her decision not to descend the stairs. All I grasped was the dread of those minutes, and that their passing would change nothing. So I rang the doorbell and waited.

Samarra opened the door, and we stood face to face with neither of us uttering as much as a sound for a minute or two. I don’t know exactly for how long we stood like that, but what I do know is that we still hadn’t said a word when she grabbed me by the collar and took me inside, eyes burning.

نذير ملكاوي في حفل توقيع روايته في دار الثقافة بدمشق

“Why did you come here?”

نذير ملكاوي في حفل توقيع روايته في دار الثقافة بدمشق

Before I could answer, she told me to whisper. I let my eyes wander along the long, dimly lit hall. The living room was to my left, and the rooms lined up in sequence along the corridor, which seemed wider than it was under the deceptive light. I looked back to Samarra and told her I needed to write. She turned towards my trembling fingers, so I covered them with my other hand, creating an illusion of confidence.

نذير ملكاوي في حفل توقيع روايته في دار الثقافة بدمشق

I said I needed to write, and that there was no room for discussion. She took hold of my trembling hand and led me to the living room, seating me on a couch hidden from view so that no one walking down the corridor would see me unless they entered the room.

She ordered me not to move, got me a glass of water and told me to speak.

نذير ملكاوي في حفل توقيع روايته في دار الثقافة بدمشق

She wanted me to explain why I had come. To tell her about whatever it was that couldn’t wait until morning, and about the scene I nearly caused, or the one I had already made. I swore it hadn’t been my intention to cause a scene but that the matter couldn’t wait. Everything had to be written. If not, my head would explode.

I began to tell her about how much I hate what writers claim about writing being some sort of therapy. It’s a lie. Or maybe not a lie exactly, but a lack of understanding: an idea tossed around just because it seems so obvious. I swear to God writing isn’t therapy, and I don’t swear in vain. But if we’re to attribute it to something, let’s say it’s closer to falling apart. Some taps on a button and you’re

# Natheir Malkawi

### *Not a Single Word in Vain*

Translated from Arabic by Dennis Farnsworth

\*This is a short chapter from a work in progress

نذير ملكاوي في حفل توقيع روايته في دار الثقافة بدمشق

نذير ملكاوي في حفل توقيع روايته في دار الثقافة بدمشق

I was sitting in front of my laptop watching a movie. A guy in his forties was telling a girl in her twenties that they needed to part ways because he had a feeling that, if they continued like this, he would love her. I can’t remember if he said he said he would *fall* in love with her or if he would love her, but the question concerned me more than the film itself. She started down the stairs, and the narrator said it was at that exact moment she realized she loved him, and so began their relationship.

نذير ملكاوي في حفل توقيع روايته في دار الثقافة بدمشق

She stopped on the second step down, and I came to understand how every person has a life that belongs to them alone and which cannot be shared with anyone. Their taste in people, clothes, literature, music, food, what type of looks they find attractive, or if they like the volume up or down. They’re all likes and dislikes of one single person.

نذير ملكاوي في حفل توقيع روايته في دار الثقافة بدمشق

Two people can meet and maybe even get to know one another, but their lives will never truly merge. It’s also when they meet that love and even hate can happen, because the existence of one is always bound by the possibility of the other.

نذير ملكاوي في حفل توقيع روايته في دار الثقافة بدمشق

I realize now, probably for the millionth time, that I love Samarra and that the greatest wish I have is for us to meet. But I’ve been shutting my eyes to the fact that for one of us it’ll end up in hate, while the other remains suspended in love.

نذير ملكاوي في حفل توقيع روايته في دار الثقافة بدمشق

I pulled out my phone and wrote her a message as brief as the moment of realization I just had: “So, *what now?*” I deleted it and wrote: “*I love you,*” but it was just like the one before that, and whatever came after it as well. I kept on writing and deleting until I ran out of words and got up to walk. I needed to tire myself. It went on like this until fear gripped my heart, and when I lifted my head I didn’t know where I was. It was an endless walk, life suspended like a limbo had materialized and become real. It’s gone to shit, but that’s just the way it is. How else could it be?

نذير ملكاوي في حفل توقيع روايته في دار الثقافة بدمشق

I decided to face the unknown, and drove to Samarra’s house. It was almost one in the morning, and I thought her family must be sleeping. After carelessly parking the car, I walked towards her house. The lights were still on, so perhaps they were all gathered in the living room, but it was impossible to make anything out through the heavy curtains.

Light drops of rain were falling, and ten minutes had already passed. I knew I could ring the doorbell

pushed over the edge of a cliff – literally.

She was more resolute this time, and told me that if I didn't quit fooling around she'd kick me out. My fingers began to tremble even more, so I asked if I could light a cigarette. She went to crack open the window a little, just like she always used to answer questions with actions, problems with solutions, and love with denial.

I pulled out a piece of paper from my pocket, only to find her shaking her head.

“Talk to me,” she said, “you can't show up out of nowhere in the middle of the night and expect me to do whatever makes you happy. Talk to me, and I'll listen.”

I began to tell her about the dream I had last night, from the beginning up until this very moment. The dream explains everything, I said, and she almost seemed convinced.

In the dream, she had killed herself by hanging six years earlier, and although I was aware that it wasn't real, it felt so vivid. The news had been on everyone's lips until it settled on a birthday post where her loved ones declared that she had found a home in their hearts. Or in the heart – singular. It made no difference.

You said hi to me, I remember it clearly. It was like I hadn't forgotten your voice as you used to greet me: the “hello” which was so inseparable from the mental image I had of your face. All of the sudden I forgot what you sounded like. I tried to remember, but I couldn't, and the only thing that remained was the image of your face. I searched the internet, checked the accounts of your family, friends and acquaintances. Nothing – your voice had vanished into thin air.

I thought about the Eternal Return (or is it reincarnation?) and that someone somewhere on this earth must have inherited your voice, so I began making plans to find that person, before finding you personally.

I was with Rayana at what seemed like a coffee-house. You were sitting beside us, but something in the way you looked had changed. You were wearing a purple suit jacket longer and slimmer than what I remember you in usually, and even your face seemed longer. I knew it was you, but I couldn't, and didn't want to make sure of it, because I had spent six years crying for you more than I'd ever cried for anyone. What can a person do with themselves when the very reason for their sorrow suddenly disappears?

I would've died of despair if you were actually alive.

The day passed and I didn't tell Rayana anything. Your new face had begun to replace the old one,

and my world turned upside down. Everything was hazy and I became obsessed with searching for you, just so I could ask where you had been all this time.

The following day, I met Ghalib who, for all his flaws, had never been lacking in bravery. I told him about the lost voice, the face that had replaced the old one and about the world that had undergone a secret change that everyone felt but no one understood. He said he's got me, and when he saw my confusion he repeated:

“I'm saying I've got you,” striking his chest.

He left me without any further explanation, and about an hour later he sent me a clip of her, of you. With the same purple outfit, stretched out face, and features that, however they turned, reminded only of what once was. He asked you bluntly:

“Are you Samarra?”

You nodded yes, and he continued to ask you questions. From your replies, I understood that you had become addicted to drugs, and that the only way to avert scandal had been to declare you dead in the harshest and most difficult of ways. No one could have known.

“Not even Husam?”

“Not even Husam.”

I heard the answer, broke down in tears, and kept on crying until I found myself knocking on your door. I had to ask: Why?

“Why do you insist on turning me into a victim when all I know in this life is self-hatred? For all my weaknesses, however great, I always push through and pull myself back up again. Why don't you love me?”

My fingers slipped from their hold. Trembling. On any other day it would never have happened. Fingers don't act alone, but pass their vibrations to the feet, then to the chest, which in moments like these struggles to draw breath. Then the vibrations reach the head, where words arrive in sound and image, piling up endlessly, making it impossible to follow: knocks, schools, my father, my mother, interrogation, war, boycott, damned bastard. Even the word “with,” when it clings to emotion: with affection, with love, with respect, with sincerity, with anger, with longing, with defeat, with Husam, with Ghalib, with Rayana, with Samarra. Until when? And to what end?

I got up from my seat, my whole body trembling. Without looking her in the eyes, I made for the door, repeating:

“I need to write. I need to write everything. Not a single word in vain. Not a single word.”

لا شيء، تبخر الصوت. فكّرت بالعود الأبدِيّ (أم هو التناسخ؟)، بأن شخصًا ما على وجه الأرض لا بدّ أنه ورث صوتك، وبدأت التخطيط لأعثر عليه، قبل أن أعثر عليك شخصيًا.

كنتُ مع رِيانة فيما يشبه المقهى، وكنيت بجانبنا، لكنّ شكلك تغيّر: تلبسين بذلة بنفسجيّة، أطول وأنحف قليلًا من الهيئة التي أتذكرك عليها، حتّى الوجه كان أطول. عرفتُ أنّك أنت، لكنني لم أتأكد، ولم أشأ أن أفعل، فقد مضت ستّ سنوات بكيتك فيها كما لم أبك أحدًا. ماذا يصنع المرء بنفسه إن غاب مسبب الحزن، فجأة؟ ساموت كمدًا لو كنت حيّة. مرّ اليوم ولم أخبر رِيانة شيئًا، لكنّ وجهك الجديد بدأ يحلّ محلّ القديم، وصار العالم مقلوبًا: غامت الدنيا في عينيّ، وصرّت مثل المهووس أبحثُ عنك كي أسأل أين كنتِ كلّ هذه المدّة.

التقيتُ غالب اليوم التالي. وعلى علّاته، لم تعزّه الشجاعة يومًا. أخبرته عن الصوت الذي اختفى، والوجه الذي حلّ مكان الآخر، والعالم الذي شهد تغيّرًا سرّيًا يحسه الناس ولا يدركون ماهيته. فقال عندي، ولمأ رأى حيرتي، قال بقلّك عندي، وضرب على صدره. تركني دون أن يشرح، وبعد ساعة تقريبًا، وصلني منه مقطعٌ مصوّر لها، أو لك، بذات الطقم البنفسجيّ، والوجه الممطوط، والملامح التي مهما تدارت لا تذكّر إلا بالملامح التي كانت. سألك دون موارد: أنتِ سامراء؟ فهزّزت رأسك إيجابًا. ثمّ أكملت استجوابه، لأفهم من إجاباتك المتتالية بأنك أدمنت المخدرات، ولم يك من قصاصٍ مناسب لدرء الفضيحة إلا إعلان الموت، بأقسى الطرق وأصعبها. لم يكن بالإمكان أن يعرف أحدٌ ولا حتّى حسام؟ ولا حتّى حسام. سمعتُ الجواب وانهرتُ بكاءً، ظللتُ أبكي حتّى وجدتني أطرق بابك. كان عليّ أن أسأل: لماذا؟ لماذا تصرّين على جعلي ضحية وأنا لا أعرف من هذه الحياة سوى كره نفسي، وكلّ ما يبدر مني من ضعفٍ، مهما يبدو كبيرًا، أهشه بيدٍ، وأستندُ إلى الأخرى لأقوم. لماذا لا تحبينني؟

وانفلتت أصابعي عن عقالها. رجفةً، في أيّ يومٍ آخر كانت لتستحيل وقوعًا، إذ لا تكتفي الأصابع بنفسها، بل تنقل ذبذباتها إلى القدمين، إلى الصدر الذي يصعب عليه في حالات شبيهة أخذ النفس، إلى الرأس الذي تتوالى فيه الكلمات مصوِّرة ومسموعة، بلا قدرة على اللحاق بها: طرقات، مدارس، أبي، أمي، استجواب، حرب، مقاطعة، لعانة والدين، حرف الباء إذ يلتصق بالمشاعر: مهوِّدة، بمحبّة، باحترام، بصدق، بغضب، بلهفة، بانهزام، بحسام، بغالب، بريانة، بسامراء، إلى متى، وإلى أين.

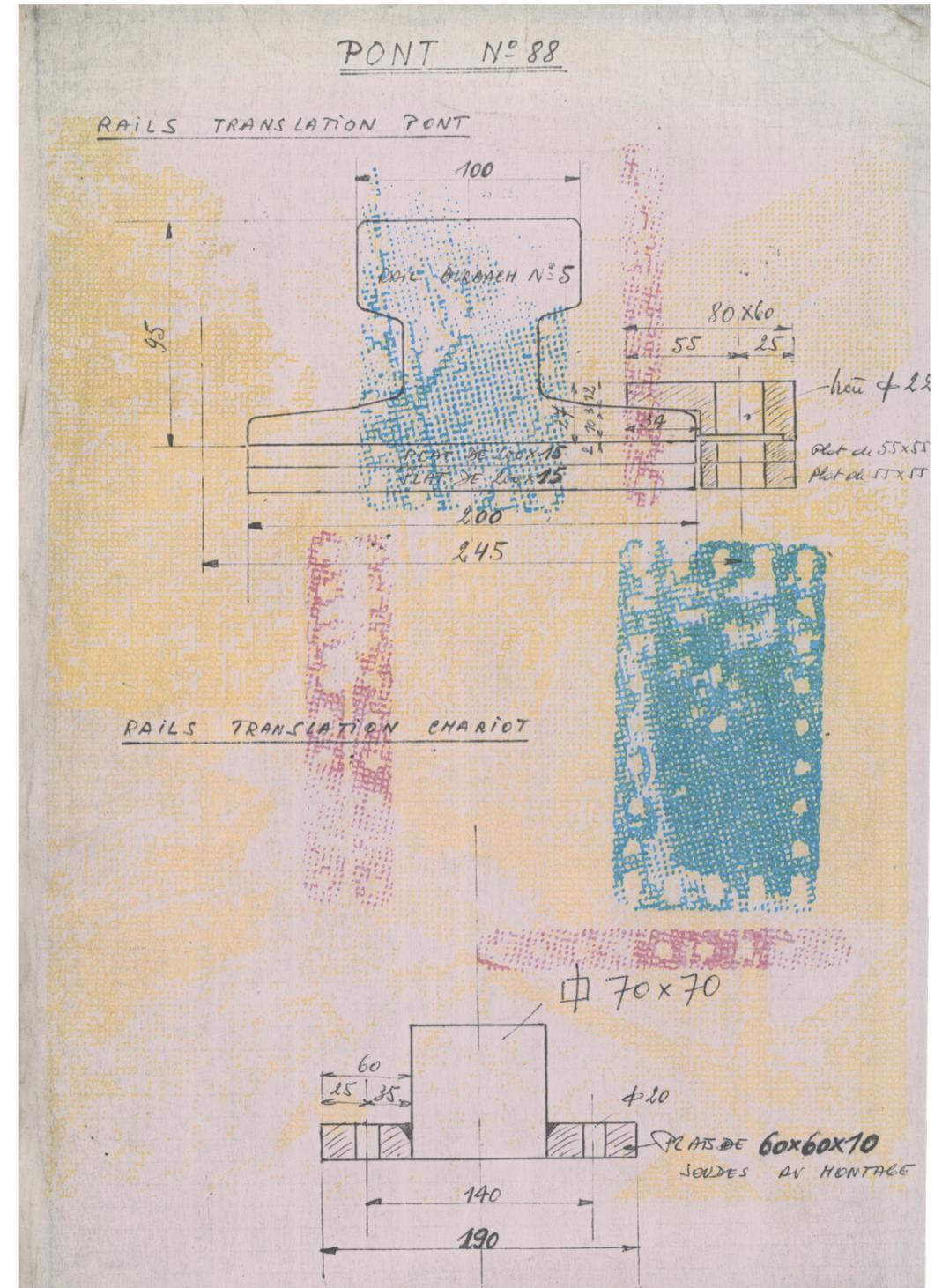
انتصبتُ من جلستي، كلّي يهترّ، ودون أن أنظر في عينيها، قصدتُ باب البيت، وخرجتُ وأنا أردّد: يجب أن أكتب، يجب أن أكتب كلّ شيء، ولا كلمة واحدة مهدورة، ولا كلمة واحدة.

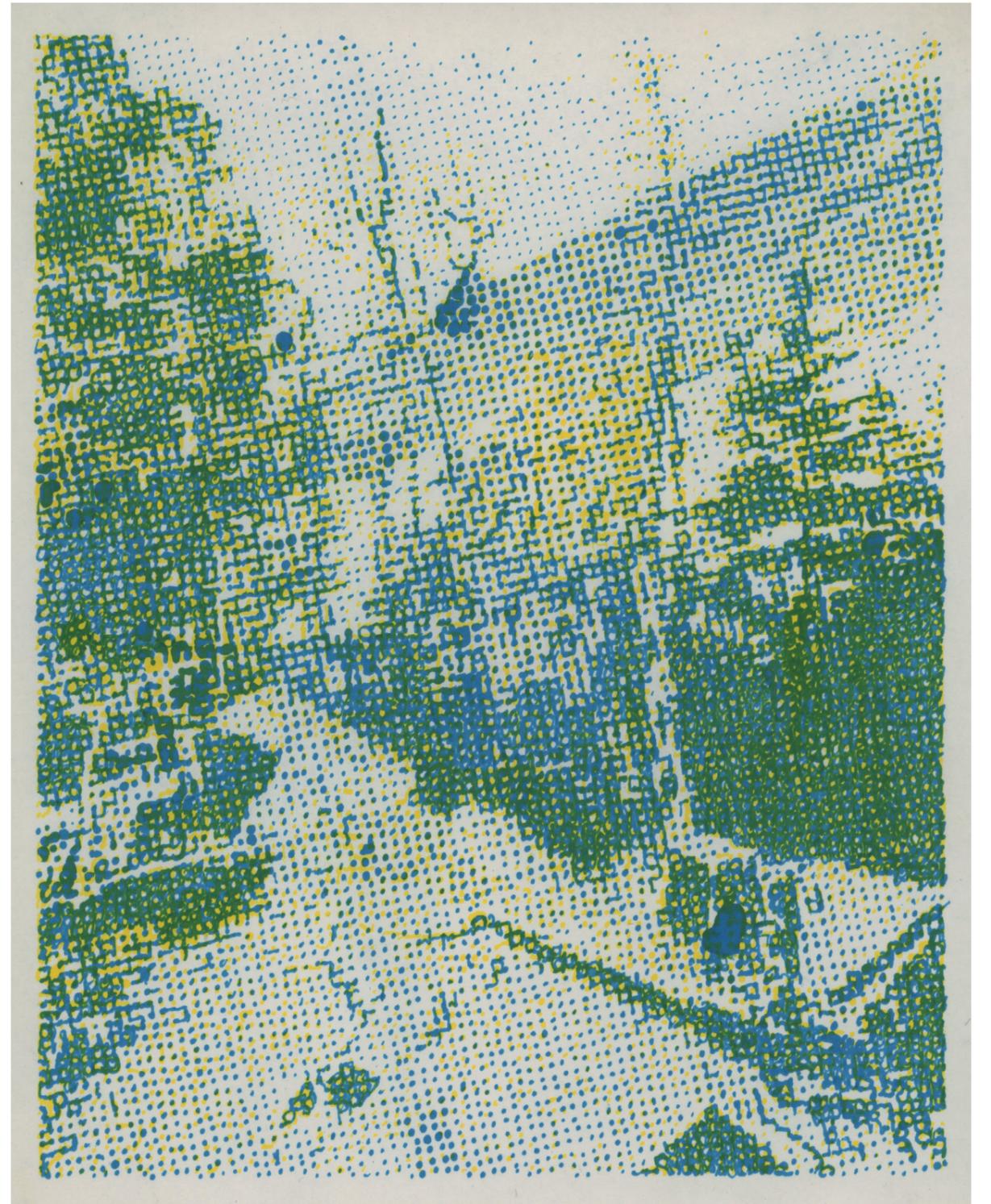
Reproduction itself becomes an aesthetic condition. The quiet failures that occur through repetition, when an image is pushed towards uniformity but never arrives. Tools for repeated accuracy and structure regulate movement and discipline the hand, asking it to perform a mechanical gesture through repetition and restraint.

As the hand adapts, it begins to mimic the machine. Gesture becomes learned, rehearsed, and efficient. Yet this conformity is unstable. The body resists full alignment. Fatigue, impatience, and restlessness accumulate, allowing subtle variations to surface. These deviations are not interruptions but evidence: the human emerging from a framework designed to suppress it.

Deep Woods Triangle (1, 2, 3), 2025, 24x28 cm

Halftone patterns drawn by ruling pen, loaded with printer ink.





# Photo- Synthesis of the Soul

(Rising in Beijing)  
By Ethan Lieutet Khnano



Another time I was hunting you...

## **Beijing Daxing Airport, the 25th of February 2025, 11:35 am.**

Burnt the midnight oil with the sole goal to enjoy the first glow of your soul. Is it an addiction? A challenge? Maybe love?

### **00:30am**

I touched land in the Northern Megapolis. Twelve hours, two targets. Dandan noodles and an encounter with the love of my life. I jumped on the express night bus driving towards the heart of the city.

### **4am**

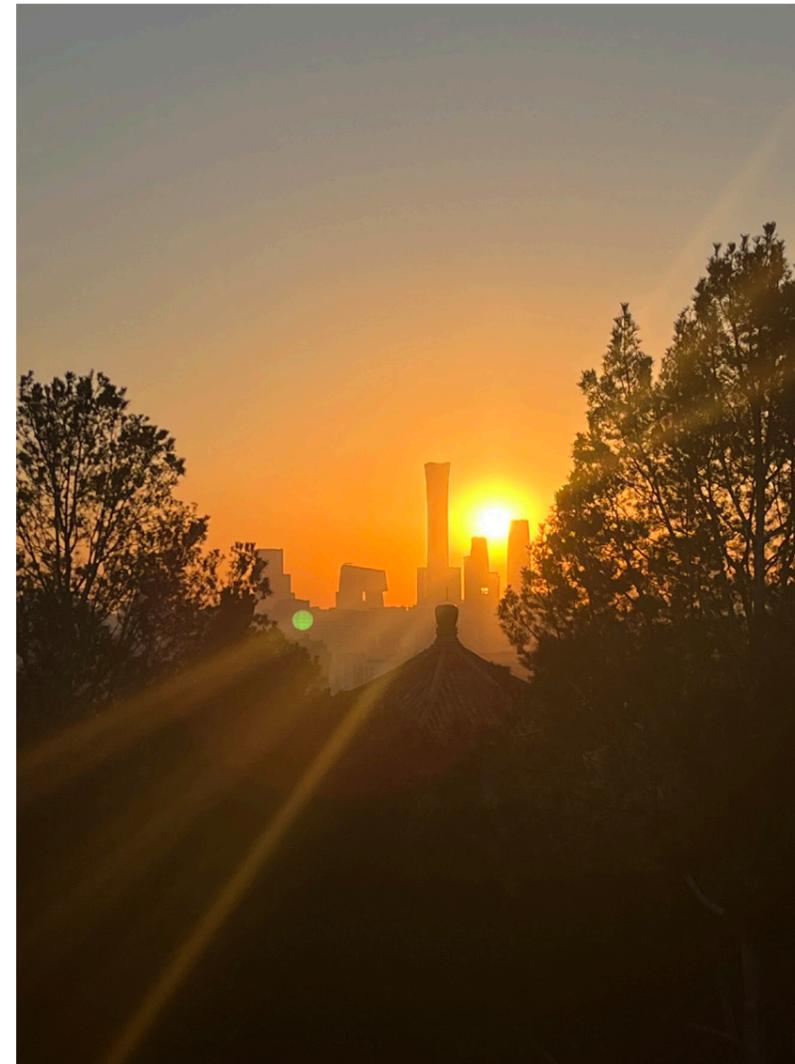
Thanks to the massive size of the city, it is not a difficult mission to find some all-night eateries, compared to European capitals. With two hours to spare, I filled my steaming bowl of noodles with an indulgent amount of pickled string beans, intending to snack on them while immersed in my novel. The novel I was deeply drawn to was *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*, written by Ocean Vuong. At the corner of a page, I stopped, stumbled, was astonished and fell upon two sentences mentioning my dear lover:

*"It must suck to be the sun, though. Cause you never see yourself if you're the sun. You don't even know where you are in the sky. Like you don't even know if you're round or square or even if you're ugly or not. Like you can only see what you do to Earth, the colors and stuff, but not who you are."*

This quote is an awful depiction of a soul close to my heart. Even questioning the beauty of the guiding star seemed like blasphemy at that exact moment. Even though the situation felt strangely comedic, I couldn't help but to open my mouth, letting out the breath of a suffocated laugh. I was dedicating my night awaiting something or someone I could never look at with my bare eye. How could I know if it was pretty? Ugly? Would it matter that much?

### **5am**

With a garlicky breath and a full belly, I was Parisian walking (walking to a pace faster than 6km/h) the vast distance that separated me from the city park where, with all the grace I could muster, I hoped to grasp some answers to my interrogations. Time ticking, it was a one-shot action. If this opportunity was missed, all of these efforts would have been in vain.



### **06:30am**

Jingshan Park. A yellowish drop hovered at the tip of my nose; and on my pinkish cheek was a tear, almost unnoticed on the numbed skin stretched over sharp bones. And there it was. The immensity of the world. As the day's first glance touched the ocher roof of the Forbidden City.

I felt like a grain of sand. A single, ridiculous grain of sand. And even though, I was overwhelmed by gratefulness. Content. In a total trance of limerence.

*"It's only when you're closest to the end that you realize the worth of living. Even if insignificant, the pleasure of the first rays of sun will always be free. I adore life."*

### **10am**

Restless and ascended,  
I rushed to the airport,  
Slapped by reality.

# gametime

A boardgame by Victor Friedrich Bachmann  
(Send results to victorfbachmann@gmail.com)

Nothing better than to reunite with your friends over a silly zine game.  
A little brain teaser for the whole lot of you.

Follow these four simple steps and you will be blessed with the fruit of collective effort and the power of strategic yet simple use of imagination.

This game is a quirky melange of different base systems placed in a grid of coordinates, a reference to the language and coding of software. Taking inspiration from language inherently connected to the internet, this game provides an opportunity to engage with these systems in a strictly analog and social context. Are you up for some decoding and magical randomness?

**Amount of players: 3-5 people**

**What you need: Anything that can mark.**

**(Disclaimer: Get ready to mark the magazine!)**

## Step 1

Each player holds on to the marker when marking, so that every participant is equally included.

Group the digits on the grid in combinations of your liking by circling or highlighting them, creating one continuous line of digits.

You may mark horizontally, vertically, diagonally, in both forward and backward directions.

## Step 2

Choose one person to note down the combined digits on the corresponding sheet. See example on next page.

The note always starts with the coordinates, followed by an equal sign.

Like this: *b5, n5* = 000 100 101 111 1

The two coordinates represent the beginning and end of the self-made combination.

Create at least seven combinations before you move on to the next step.

## Step 3

Now comes the step that requires the most collective effort.

In the group, you are to decide what each of the *initial combinations* will represent. (See the corresponding sheet with the initial combinations.) This is an invitation to discuss each and everyone's stream of consciousness. Every idea is allowed, but try to think out of the box by composing your sentences with funny *verbs*, *adjectives* or *nouns*. Let this be the step where you seize the higher powers of the collective mind. May randomness be ever in your favor.

## Step 4

Now it's time to decode the self-made combinations by extracting the information from *step 2* and *3*. In other words, translating the coordinates and digits with the words you came up with on the sheet of *initial combinations*.

You may decode the selfmade combinations maximum three digits at a time, like so: (b5, n5) = 000 100 101 111 1, 00 0 10 0 1 0 1 111 1, or 00 0 100 1 01 1 11, for example.

On the final page, you list your decoded translations, creating 7 or more small poems of randomness.

|   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | Δ | ✕ | z | + | Δ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| a | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| b | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| c | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| d | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| e | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| f | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| g | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | z | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| h | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| i | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| j | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| k | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| l | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| m | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| n | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| o | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| p | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| q | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| r | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |

$$(b_5, n_5) = 000\ 100\ 101\ 111\ 1$$

Initial combinations

|     |  |
|-----|--|
| 0   |  |
| 1   |  |
| 11  |  |
| 00  |  |
| 10  |  |
| 01  |  |
| 100 |  |
| 110 |  |
| 111 |  |
| 011 |  |
| 001 |  |
| 000 |  |
| 010 |  |
| 101 |  |

Write your final answers here →

1.

# Alice Harrling

Photos: UNTITLED

Text: SOBER\_ENLIGHTENMENT



I HATE HER UNCONDITIONALLY  
THE PORTRAYAL THAT WENT WRONG  
THE HAIRY PUSSY SCREAMING  
FOR A COVERING GIRLY THONG

I HATE MY SELF PORTRAIT  
I HATE MY MASTER ROLE  
I HATE THE WAY SHE LOOKS AT ME  
OUR SEXY COMBINED SOUL

I WISH THAT I COULD TALK TO HER  
AND BEAT HER ASS TO DEATH  
I WISH I WISH I WISH I CHOKED  
HER TIL HER SICK LAST BREATH

I HOPE THAT I'M CRAZY NOW  
ENOUGH TO SIGN DIVORCE.  
WE'RE SICK OF HIM AND EVERYONE  
THESE UGLY FAKE ASS WHORES

AND THEN WHEN I FEEL SOBER  
I WATCH MY VICTIM CRY  
I WIPE HER TEARS AND ASK HER WHY  
SHE SNITCHED ON THE RABBI

I KNEEL TO HER AND START TO SCREAM  
"I HATE YOU BUT LET'S WATCH THIS MEME!"

WE LIKE IT CAUSE LIKE HEY IT'S REAL  
THAT POST IS JUST LIKE HOW WE FEEL

I TELL THE TRUTH THAT'S HAUNTING ME  
I TELL "THE MASTER WASN'T ME!"

I TELL HER THAT IT'S ALL OUR MIND  
I TELL HER HOW THAT BITCH RESIGNED!

WE KIDNAP IT AND LET IT BURN  
CAUGHT ON FIRE, NO RETURN!

AND LOOK IT WORKED - NOW I'M INSANE

A FUCKING DOLL SHE GOT NO BRAIN

# Sylvie Roshier Jacob

## Mythologies

In a few days I am turning twenty-two. This is nothing to fret about. Writing it induces a gentle wave of nausea, because the number feels staunchly adult; the idea makes me feel like walking home alone from a party at dawn. Recently I have been feeling like I am beginning to join the Ranks of the Real. Realising that there are bits of the world that are applicable to my circumstances that were not before, like the future, for example. Like there is a bit of me that is suctioning onto the actual, solid core of time, an inevitable tentacle reaching away from the nighttime of childhood and into a hard daylight that smells like rent and debt and newborn babies. I am going into it headlong and trying to keep my body and mind taut and curved like a diver's parabola - if you flail about too much you will muddy the waters and then you can't see the bottom anymore.

If I try to think of myself, it is almost only as an accumulation, a fabrication webbed together from other people's impressions of me: all my metaphors of self, like walking home from a party alone at dawn, are rooted in the birth that comes from opening that door to the party in the first place. Make yourself a net of language to catch yourself in like a burr in a fishnet stocking. Sometimes I can experience myself as something else, a weak, pulsing thing, but it is always alien to see yourself simply as you are, without the mythological frills we are forced to adorn our interiority with. Like some kind of shrine to ourselves, in a culture that defines personality through making the exterior identical with the interior of being by a circus trick of transmutation (and the shrine turns inside out). I am the way I wear my hair, that is my backstory. You are what you eat, because it is inside you.

Self-mythology is telling stories about yourself to yourself. We all do this out of necessity - the gods are only a reflection of ourselves, our profiles are only tech-imitations of our projected myths of being. We have to make ourselves our own avatars. We are those little boxed bobble-headed things with big black eyes and cute outfits. When we dress ourselves we are pandering to the massive, indomitable image of ourselves that exists in the underworld of our screen. At the bottom is ice under palms that are reflected back with all the rings on, glittering into the digital echo chamber that is also just your mind.

Breaking the ice and falling through the crack into cold water: six months ago I decided to

deactivate my carefully cultivated Instagram account, the same that I had been dedicated to since I was fifteen and attempting to create a solid identity for the constantly warping, shifting sea I had inside me (all of us riding this mythical wave - desperate for self-invention). I've never been internet savvy and never got beyond 654 followers on my main private account. However, at any given point in time I would have roughly five or six different Instagram accounts: my 'main', my 'private', my art account where I posted paintings and forgotten past projects, the passwords for which I could not remember (a thousand words drifting in the undergrowth), and handles for magazines I was working on, which required a constant nurturing in order to gain traction and popularity, like sweet babes whose milk was my tortured typing thumbs. I deeply cared about the way in which my stories and posts were constructed. I slaved over aesthetics and cropping and saturation and the perfect, esoterically witty caption for every post. All of these accounts were parts of my heart and I tended to them like a garden.

The reason I made the decision to delete all my precious Edens was because even when I didn't have Instagram on my phone, I would find myself on reels on my browser which is really quite a sickening way to consume short-form content that is made to be the size of your phone screen. This was the surface level addiction that I wanted to cut out, but not the catalyst, which was that when I seriously considered deleting it, I found suddenly that I couldn't. I looked at my profile and felt a wave of resistance rising up inside me: my face glowing out of it in technicolour, my design! My skin all nacreous and clean in the thumbnails that summarised my existence! My stories telling stories about me to myself! But how will they see you? was my thought. How will they know who you are? How will you know them? And the fact I was so scared of what I would be without it was enough to make me deactivate that 'part' of me altogether, unplugging her, cutting the ribbon so she drifted off like a great, shining, Sylvie-shaped balloon. So long, mirror sister.

\*

It is 10.30am and I'm hungover and at the dentist. I remember as I lay myself down in the torture chair that I was also hungover last time I went to the dentist, and wondered what this says about me as a person - probably that I am not very good

at anticipating patterns, and short-sighted about the future. I try not to gag on the plastic tube spouting air hard into my left cheek and look up into the bizarre white goggles looming over me; I try to slip back into myself and away from those plastic eyes. A grating buzzing sound begins on my left, where I can't see. I open my mouth, close my eyes, and the red behind my eyes aches as I try to think of a cool breeze on my face on a hill, or the way plunging into warm water feels. The buzzing gets closer and then there is the clatter of vibration against my teeth.

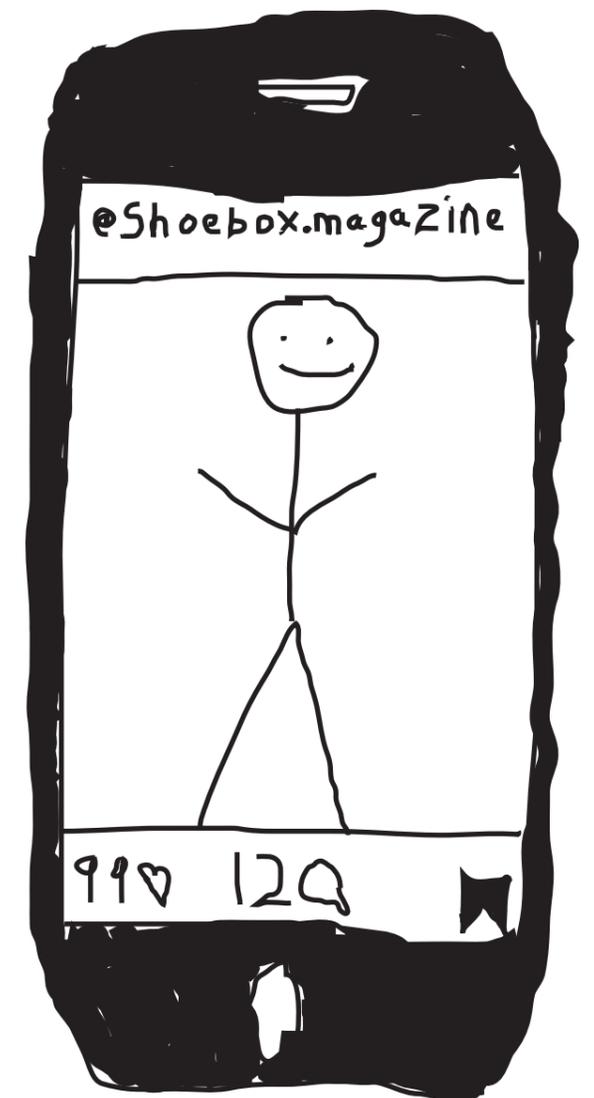
Be careful with your lower molars, he says later. They have lots of little grooves in the back. He scraped the grooves in the back of my molars with his evil metal tool. Don't drink too much coffee, he adds before I go. The very menial and very evil experience of going to the dentist in that moment felt like a karmic destruction of my life of self-mythologies. It is hard to think of yourself in a mythological way when something like the dentist happens. There is no fantasy or transcendental quality to experience when something like the dentist happens. There are little grooves on the back of my lower molars.

The experience is not even carnal, or about bringing you back to flesh, like a paper cut is. The concern is with something hard and bone, that makes you think of the skull and not skin or face. Having someone scrape and polish the inside of your mouth is like they are making a mirror of the inside of you, one that is disgusting and made of your undulating pink gums and aging teeth and black, cavernous throat. I think, as I rinse my mouth out, head aching and wrung dry, I want to think about my bones more often. I want to think about the places the bodies I have known are buried in me.

Later, I decide to write a list of Undeniably True Statements about myself. Each simple sentence was a priori, the anti-myth version of myself; even more complex ideas, as I moved through the basic functions of my reality, seemed like something I could not establish or prove or complete through living, or through myth-making. It was making a topography of my life through boiling off the florid mist that clouds the present; tabulating the flickers of certainty around that core in words that don't have flourishes as living does. But inevitably you are the heroine of your own life: you are Anna Karenina, or Jane Eyre, eponymously charted by

someone not quite you who bears your name inside them like the inscription on some club bathroom door somewhere, nowhere. Scraped in for eternity with a two pence coin.

I often feel I have no space for anything else, I am so eaten up with the narcissistic impulse to create myself for others, a painter who only paints their own portrait as they face the crowd, or an overly intelligent circus seal. There is the way of living life on my screen, inside other people who have become me. And there is the way of living that is going to the dentist and walking alone from a party at dawn with your feet always poised just between your ankles and the concrete.

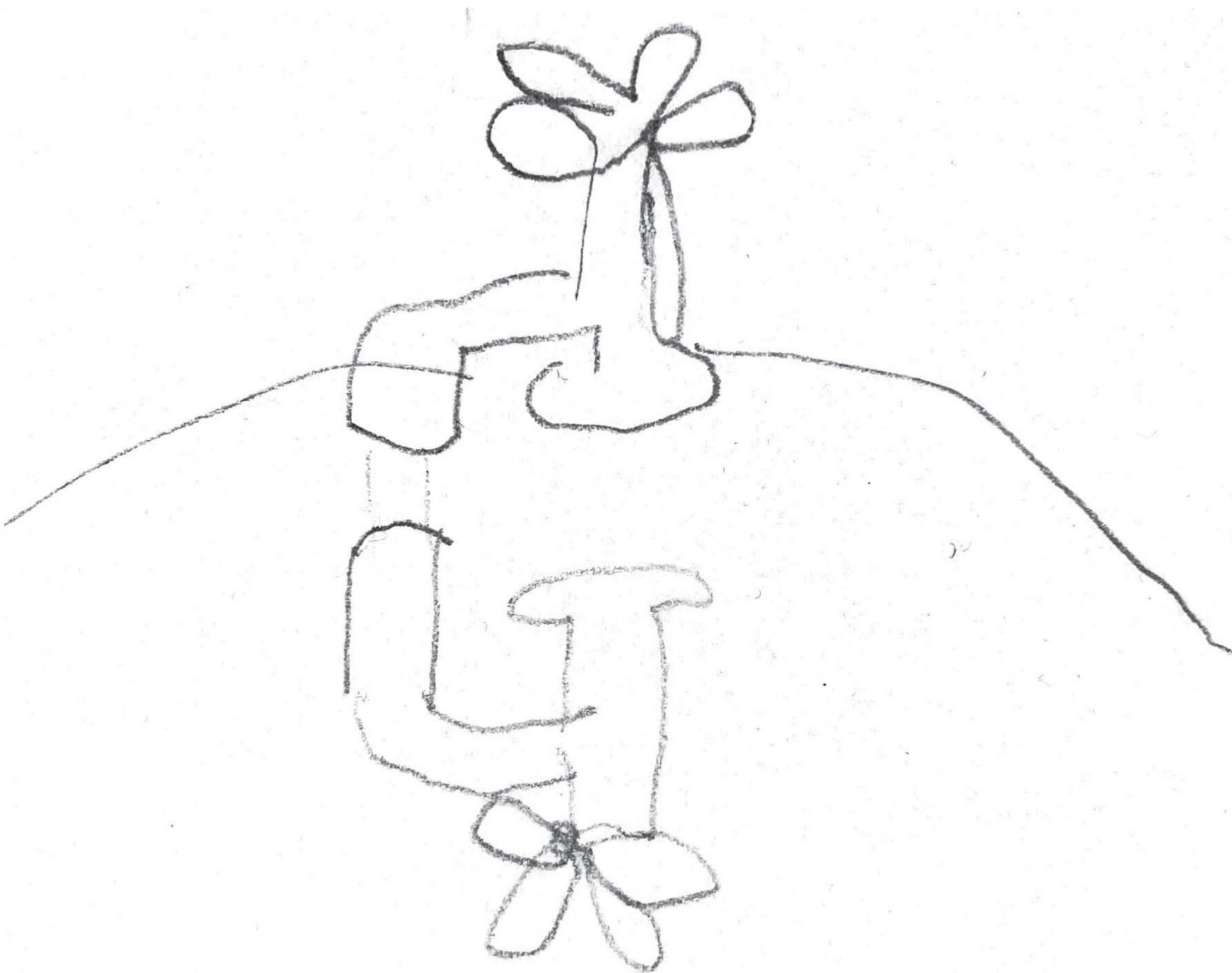


Cristina Grohmann

*Tap, 2021*

Ahmed Shehata

*Ocean of Words, Wasteful Times*



**Ocean of Words**

In the ocean of words and rhymes;  
I was lost sailing;  
sailing my faithless dreams;  
drenched in blue,  
holding the truth within me,  
in a shipless ocean,  
with my anchor floating in an odd sky.

**Wasteful Times**

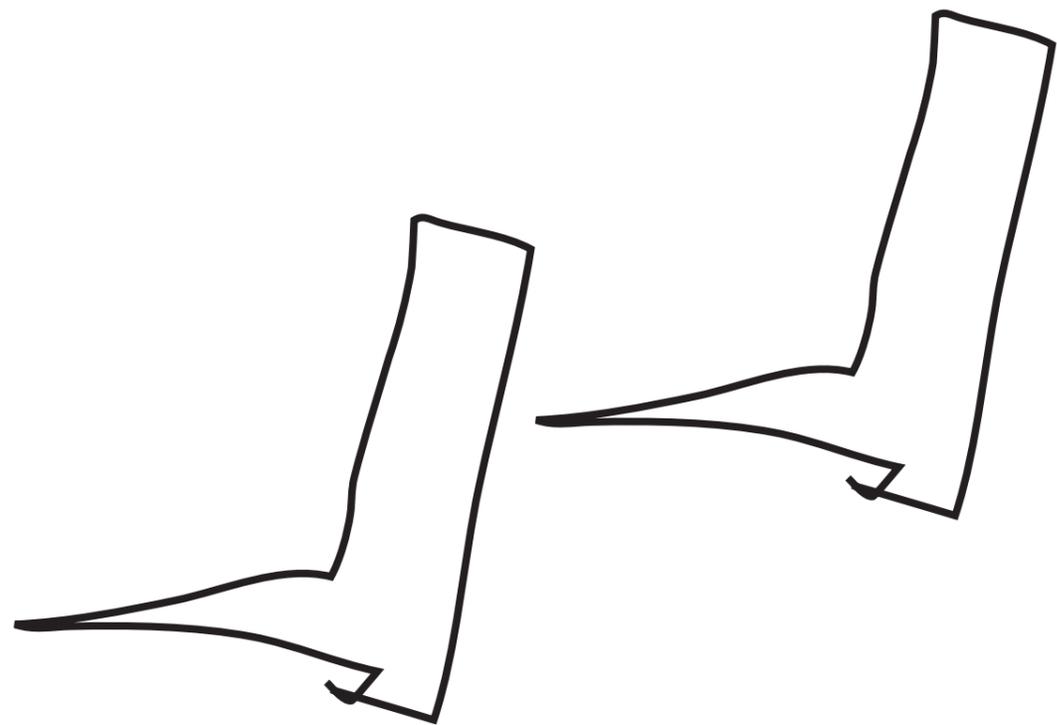
So passes my wasteful time;  
instead of writing;  
I've been staring at my fingers  
waiting for something to be written.  
I've been staring for quite a while  
that words started slipping through my fingers,  
but I couldn't keep up  
as letters started scattering on my paper.  
I couldn't complain much,  
as words that have to be written will be written  
and fate is guaranteed.

# Amir Mamin

*Brodsky*



then ended.



Shoe box

The submissions to this fifth issue of Shoebox Magazine have been collected through this open call, spread physically and electronically across our networks in the autumn of 2025.

# Shoebox 5

## postcombobulation

OPEN CALL



one week later...



(yes, it's an open call!)

In a discombobulated world, we try to grasp out surroundings through engagement and exploration, yet are faced with the fact that the *end goal* — which is what exactly? — keeps getting further away.

For the fifth issue of Shoebox Magazine, we invite explorations and interpretations of *postcombobulation*, its relationship to our personal lives, as well as to the outer world.

How do we *postcombobulate*?

Send submissions and other inquiries to [magazineshoebox@gmail.com](mailto:magazineshoebox@gmail.com) by the 30th of October 2025.

More info:  
[@shoebox.magazine](https://twitter.com/shoebox.magazine)  
[shoeboxmagazine.org](https://shoeboxmagazine.org)

For the fifth issue of Shoebox Magazine, we invite contributors to reflect on our newly-coined term *postcombobulation*, cooked up as a mouth-watering concoction of post- (after) and discombobulation (confusion, bewilderment, uneasiness.)

In a discombobulated world, we try to grasp our surroundings through engagement and exploration, yet are faced with the fact that the end goal — which is what exactly? — keeps getting further away.

In *Middlemarch*, George Eliot introduces us to Mr. Casaubon, a middle-aged and worn out scholar working fervently to finish his field-defining work after decades of research. He falls in love with the much younger and intellect-hungry Dorothea, and during their honeymoon in Rome, she asks him about the city's frescoes. Instead of being struck by the magnificence of art, she becomes disillusioned by his long-winded explanations. Eliot writes:

“There is hardly any contact more depressing to a young ardent creature than that of a mind in which years full of knowledge seem to have [resulted in] a blank absence of interest or sympathy.”

Is Shoebox Mr. Casaubon?

Like that scene, we find that the search for clarity leads only to more entanglement and confusion. How do we reach beyond that — how do we *postcombobulate*?

For our fifth issue, we are looking for explorations and interpretations of *postcombobulation*, its relationship to our personal lives, as well as to the outer world. What does the Shoebox-coined term even mean?

**We wish to give a warm  
thanks our contributors:**

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