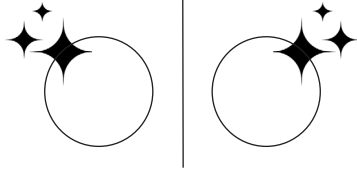


DOUBLE ENTRY



EVELYN WH-ELL
HUGO HAGGER

A fatal motorbike accident. A fisheye lens.

Double Entry is a novel about trying to find one's point. Two protagonists play out two parallel storylines of self-alienation and dislocation in a tale about the queer joke that is life and its ending.

Double Entry follows an alternating structure, whereby the novel oscillates between the work of each writer, creating a simultaneous intimacy and disconnect between the two protagonists. The text was written via remote collaboration, using digital archiving, common search-histories and mutual shitposting to locate a shared affect and set of aesthetic-academic interests, from which a text was produced in two halves, each half the work of one writer echoing their double—isolation and obsession explored in relation. This collaboration shapes both form and content, choreographing moments of connection and separation, caesuras and dead-ends. This movement enacts a transformation – things change on entry and exit. Images collect and shed references as they move into new contexts.

Double Entry presents its doubling as a mode of queer relation across parallel universes. These universes are separate but porous—characters and motifs move through portals between the two texts. A motorbike becomes a dog. A bush becomes a boy. These self-conscious genre tropes, their obviousness, reveals the insufficiency of the text, the flimsy-ness of the protagonists' private interior fantasies in helping them navigate their dead-end circumstances. Flimsy perhaps, but these shared tropes also constitute a pooled data set, proffering a set of queer interpretative strategies for the world at hand. A roadmap for solidarity in solitude, if not a solution.

This text is being developed into a large-scale performance, using voice and gesture to push the limits of legibility and force new conditions of reproduction. This iterative quality, the reworking of this text into a third thing, also makes conscious reference to historic queer artistic practice as an unfolding, DIY, repurposive economy.

FALSE START

I was still in short trousers when I first came across Derick Thrill's 1937 manifesto against the sartorial trappings of an industrialising society. In *TROUSERS & THE MOST PRECIOUS ORNAMENT*, Thrill foretold of the coming end to virile liberties, the enclosure of manhood under fly and gusset, and the resultant collapse of correct moral form and proper social order. Raised on a diet of sugary breakfast cereals and television commercials, this was the first book I ever saw, let alone read. Having lived such privation, I was starving for the strident lines of text which marched straight into my aghast mouth. Thrill's proclamations and predictions were, to my small mind, shocking and gripping in equal measure, for I found he gave voice to a fact I had always felt yet not understood. As Thrill put it, there is an undeniable although poorly comprehended relation between the general attire of a society and its social formation, found both at the level of the total composition and each

ever decreasing unit of relation between members. This observation is uncontroversial in its own right – instead, what is commonly misapprehended, which Thrill attempts to elucidate, is the very nature of this relation. As Thrill explains, the causation is in fact reversed – industrial commercial civilisation, whether capitalist, communist, or fascist, affects a profound change in society on all levels, including physiognomy, altering the very fabric and flesh of the body politic and the polis's bodies. For trousers, Thrill argues, are capable of altering 'the quality of sex itself,' by which, he means quite plainly, 'turn[ing] men into women.' Indeed, as Thrill says, 'a man in his own clothes is as much sexless as possible. He shaves his face so that, if he be young and fair, you'd not know but that he might be a girl, and any protuberance by which his sex might be known is carefully and shamefully suppressed. It is an organ of drainage and not of sex. It is tucked away and all sideways, dishonoured, neglected, ridiculed and ridiculous.' There is no good justification for male trouser-wearing in Thrill's mind, bifurcation of the limbs not being enough reason for such sex-splitting garments. The sartorial suppression provided by these villainous pantaloons amounts to nothing less than the eradication of the male sex under commercial industrialism – there is no longer any need for men, only feminised machines.

It was under Thrill's influence that I came to have my own personal revelation. For this author had just reacquainted me with my own powerful tool, one which I fully intended upon wielding. If indeed one's kecks were capable of changing the fate of oneself and one's society, then this was not just my ticket out of the sad petrification of childhood, but also into a new world of my own making. I just had to find my smuggled ornament, expose it, and I'd be on my way.

I went to ask the one person I was sure would know where such an object was stashed. My mother had always been a darling and devoted minder and companion, although infrequently charming, drawn to tragic heartache, and prone to spells of intense religiosity (it was the guilt that got to her – I did suggest that she try Catholicism for its confessional approach, but she never took to it, finding repentance was just too easy). I found my mother irritating, but trustworthy, and her opinion was always valuable even if just for discarding.

So, one afternoon after I had returned from school, I posed the question. In the first of two uncharacteristic moves she made that day, my mother drew me up upon her knee (she hardly ever expressed physical affection: this woman had many ways of communicating herself, but touch was not one of them). In the second, she cleared her throat, and began to monologue at length. She paused only for sips of water which she gargled over my head which was uncomfortably jammed against her firm, comely bosom:

I knew this day would come, although I feared it greatly and half hoped I could delay it indefinitely. (She began.) Well, the world has its ways, and for this we give thanks to Your Lord Almighty Father in whose Terrestrial plan we must trust. You always did take after daddy; I would be a damn fool to deny that. He had an inquisitive mind too. That's why he took off, in search of greater knowledge about the opposite sex--one vag does not a statistically significant sample size make. And now you must fly the nest also, for the answer to your question lies beyond these four walls and a mother's warm embrace. I did my job cleanly and efficiently, if I may say

so, and now I pass the baton over--you'll have to finish dragging yourself up. But while I still have you in my arms, let me impart some final words of wisdom to help guide you on your merry way in righteousness. And remember, I know you better than anyone, I suckled you in front of Jeremy Kyle and felt your teeth bite my breast as secret sexual indiscretions were revealed.

(Infuriated, I was only another childhood anecdote away from stabbing the woman, and we were only a fraction of the way through.)

I have seen you dressed only in your birthing suit. I have wiped snot off your chin. Remember when I took you to the cinema for the first time? I think it was to see one of those Mission: Impossible films. I paid good money for those seats, and we got dressed up - I finally managed to unpeel you from your usual filthy attire and into newly shined shoes. We sat near the front, picking pieces of stale popcorn up off our coat hems. Something came over you that day. I have never seen a child sit so stiffly, eyes locked on the flickering vision of Tom Cruise. It was like you had your own gravitational field--something was holding you in suspended animation, like you had given over your life to the moving pictures before us. I cannot recall what happened to produce such a spontaneous reaction, but all of a sudden you began to scream. You were screaming and screaming. Your mouth was so round, a black hole in the middle of your face, sucking in all your features to their central point. You were swallowing yourself only to spit yourself out again in a projectile of sound. Your whole face was

one round black hole, your tiny milk teeth like a noose of pearl trimming. Like everyone else in the screening, I wanted you to stop. I reached over to put my hand over your open mouth, but there was nothing but hole, nothing to be closed, and, like trying to lean on a wall which is actually a fabric backdrop of a wall, my hand fell through. I was up to my elbow in you and I couldn't feel a thing. I had reached through and dipped into another world.

(She had told me this story many times before, but each recount was given the quality of a long-held secret finally revealed. I was fiddling with my diamante-encrusted belt buckle, bouncing shimmers off the ceiling and walls, trying to land them like the laser from a sniper. The tale was an uncomfortable reminder of my constant relation to her fantasy of me.)

From that day forth, I knew something special lay in your future, I only prayed it would not obliterate me, or worse, lead to public humiliation and ruin. I began to undertake precautions lest something like that day in the cinema came to pass again. These daily practices of self-regulation are what I wish to impart before you leave my home. It would normally go without saying, but with you I firstly need to convey the import of...

(The rest of her sentence was lost in a loud squeal which ripped through the front room, the spine-melting screech of metal as it scrapes along

itself into ungodly folds. The noise triangulated the living quarters, forcing apart the filial form of my mother, and I in my startled surprise, rolled from her lap, unspooling myself across the carpeted floor. As I bounced along, I became aware of a strange stretching – each rotation took longer to complete than the last, as time altered its normal flow, and the front room entered a state of slow motion. I came to a halt at the foot of the sofa. I could see my mother still seated in the armchair I had been ejected from moments before. The room was spinning on its axis, the result of my own revolutions, a dizzying spiral which seemed to keep a kind of stasis within it. Then, amidst the continuing squall, as cleanly as if it had been sliced by a rotary blade, a hole appeared in the side wall, adjacent to my mother. Through this hole came hurtling, as much as a thing can hurtle in slow motion, a big black motorbike, chrome gills ablaze in the glow of fluorescent fire decals decorating its throbbing hulk. The machine struck my still-serenely-seated mother square on, tunnelling right through her chest. Blood sprayed the magnolia walls a delicate fuchsia, a magnificent arc which made its way over to my corner, soaking my shirt front. Rib bones flew from their cavity and fell to the floor. A beam of light circled its way round the rider's visor before extinguishing itself in the wink of a single pointed star.

My mother was dead. It was time for me to move on.)

CONTENTS

At night he follows the ancient sound of branches locking and unlocking overhead, the wet flashing of a tongue as it scoops up mouthfuls of cold clear river water, distant gunfire cracking the day, *prances off*. We know these places, they have crouched next to us and pointed- look, look there.

The boy's shadow flickers on the ceiling of his inviolate page - thrown there by the light from a nearby barrel fire.

He would frequent this clearing to have his ankles kicked apart by the other bxys with queer shaped members; each with a unique curvature and serif - allowing him to unlock innovative and top shelf ideas for his personality. He would obscure himself there, nested with other like minded creatures while the city happened somewhere else.

Tonight the boy, yes, the boy, yes, was completely alone, not a scuttle

- the bushes that encircled the clearing hid no-body. The yew in which he was ensconced, shredded the beams of light from parking cars (the grubby patch of woodland edged the car park for an Odeon) into buck-shot all around him; how a disco ball pummels light in service of musicality. He savoured these moments, life being what it was for the boy; a goad, a pull of the tail. He interns at a digital marketing agency, he writes blogs for influencers to become better influencers. He is interned as an intern he jokes, boring joke.

The boy, in his irradiated attempts to give an account of himself, had sadly scared off all human contact- his own mother had stopped calling. He felt lonely

He flips the top half of a ram's skull, part buried under pixels of dead leaf, with the rubber tip of his right shoe. He tilts his head. With his left shoe the boy rolls a nearby beer bottle over to meet the side of the flipped skull. It clinks, cheers!

The boy knew that although he could not influence his lot in life; away from savage isolation, he could certainly influence the bits of shit and death that lay underfoot into little melodramas.

He chuckles to himself, haha! He tilts his head the other way and attempts to make the little assemblage at his feet into a facial expression, what might that look like? He pushes his tongue into the roof of his open mouth and rolls his eyes back into his head, from here he tries to curl his lips into a smile.

Beneath the rumble of cars, he ears a quiet chiming sound, a wind chime or the chiming of knives under a leather trench coat. His face returns to rusted focus.

A note on one of the boys senses. The boys ears have never been good, untrustworthy. As a child he was slow; various, cognition and hearing tests would prove no fathomable hypothesis, until one sympathetic doctor covered her mouth with a file and he was unable to place the little wooden family in their little wooden holes in the order she instructed. He left with two hearing aids. As he grew into adolescence, the boys hearing improved and the ability to lip read faded like an unpracticed language - he would train on muted episodes of long-running serial dramas, he would put the little wooden families in their little wooden boxes as instructed. He will often tilt his head to allow more sound into his ear hole.

The boy bends into an arc and braces for sexual company, his spread fingers moving over the rough peeling bark of the yew tree.

Then, suddenly, as though suddenly struck by a sudden epiphany the boy suddenly spins out from his position, looks out of his page, and into the camera.

The boy would have completely missed the thing (him being under yew, at that time of night) had it not been for a passing car bouncing its light off the round perversion of air and onto his cold, rubbery hand. Now, having spun rather dramatically (the boy was sure he was about to be shot) the light illuminates his narrowed left eye. He blinks - the car turns and the spotlight scurries elsewhere. The boy's eyes refocus.

Yes, a glassy hemisphere, a droplet of water on the image - five feet above the ground in front of the boy there, look there; the unmistakable dimensions of a camera lens.

The boy tilts his head.

The boy walks in circles around the lens. The wisp rotates like a ghostly coin; its curved face smoothly attuned to the boys - he stifles the urge to bark.

Halt! We have deprived the boy of a body; a torso, a crotch, arms, and legs. We have mentioned that the boy has fingers, recall them feeling the pulsing bark of the yew tree. We have seen the boys left eye, remember it lit up by the car beam bounced on the floating lens. From there, perhaps we can begin designs on his darkening right eye, cus If it aint' broke! He has his red cheeks which will redden again in the next paragraph (they appear to shame him often). We know the boy has urges and shoes, he has ankles that are kicked apart by handsome strangers, and the beginnings of a childhood. He has a mouth, that opens. We can flesh the boy out a little more, his story, we may scribble biro hearts and flowers on his inviolate page, but remember, if we draw flowers we must also draw waaaa! Scary skulls!

The boy tip toes and peers through the lens. He spies only the bloated fisheye image of whatever scene was screened behind. He runs his finger along its edge and tilts his head again. His face, as though in slow motion, moves from puzzlement to childlike glee. His cheeks redden, he thinks, he giggles.

The boy sits on a rusted fold out chair, undoes the fly of his leather chaps and reveals to you a series of stills;

A word penned over liver spots.

A little wooden family, drowns.

A young male pornstar with a ll t. he. Sca. rs.

A snuff box in the form a lamb.

A torchlit goth hunt through trees, that divides as a river-

The boy chugs a red drink from a can it falls through his body. THE
RULES SEEM UNEVEN **exit thing** AND SPLASHES ON FLOOR!!!

THEY DON'T MAKE 'EM LIKE THEY USED TO

Lights come up on some average motel room. Patterned carpet, brown curtains. A man is seated on the edge of the bed, his face lit by the cathode technicolour glow emanating from the television set on its wooden sideboard, an alternating pattern of blue, white, orange, red. The man is wearing a dark suit, lightly soiled and ill-fitting, the jacket unbuttoned with its flaps spread around him like an anaemic turkey after Christmas. His loose shirt is undone at the collar, his offensively-clashing purple-gold striped tie is pulled loose at the neck. Engulfed by his outwear, the man appears to be in great internal, perhaps also external, discomfort. He is at home neither in his surroundings, nor in his clothes.

There is a low rumbling noise which cuts across the chatter from the television. A slit of light slides across the interior of the motel room—a car is passing outside. As the beam reaches the man on the bed, his

profile is thrown into stark relief. Under the bright light, his features are surprisingly youthful, delicate even, his moist eyes shaded by long dark lashes, his jaw soft and evening-shadow-free. He licks his pink lips. His skin is smooth, almost waxy, a strange pallor which absorbs the head-lights' beam. On the bed next to the man is a wide-brimmed fedora, a mud-splattered trench coat, and a black hard-shell briefcase. The briefcase lies open, revealing its contents. Rows upon rows of plastic ball-point pens line the case, each one face-up, displaying a generic printed logo: navy capitalised text contained in the swoop of a red halo.

The television is tuned to a 24-hour news station. The newscaster is closing a story about the recent troubling rise in swimming pool-related fatalities. He shakes his head in front of a photograph of a large flamingo-shaped rubber ring:

Some pretty deflating news. He says. His eyes twinkle.

The seated man suddenly turns his head sharply to look over his shoulder, his eyes scanning the corner of the room. Heartbeats slow in the auditorium. But his gaze slips seamlessly over the fourth wall and returns to his own storyline; location non-descript motel, character non-descript travelling salesman.

The seated man blinks. His eyes refocus.

On the wall behind the television, just above the set, a still scene flickers up and settles into focus, shaded and sepia toned.

A boy stands in the middle distance. He stands at the paved corner of an

intersection, one arm casually looped around the pole of the streetlamp he stands under. His hair is a gilded marigold in the streetlamp's golden pool.

The seated man sucks a wet intake of breath through his teeth. With one hand he reaches down to his trouser front and squeezes. The picture begins to move.

The circle of the streetlamp fizzles. The boy, hands in pockets, shivers; he is dressed only in a pair of shorts and a thin t-shirt. A nearby shrub shakes in sympathetic tremors. The pavement is empty of pedestrians, but the intersection is busy with traffic, a regular flow of vehicles taking the right-hand turn along behind the boy and his streetlamp. Every thirty seconds a new car appears, drives the several paces to the intersection, then makes the sharp right. When each car passes by the boy, he sways gently, as if caught in the currents of air displaced by the moving vehicle. He has a cardboard frailty; a two-dimensional character.

[Voiceover:] The new look in blue movies is to stress story and character! This is the fashion for our motorised age—blue movies must express our collective longing to escape from flesh through sex. Story, character development, scene setting, and backdrops are no longer incidental to sex. Instead, the relationship is reversed. In the motorised age, sex is incidental—everything is sex, and therefore nothing is sex! Sex has ceased to exist! There is only the purity of exchange.

A car drives up to the intersection. Instead of turning right, it stops next to the boy. Noiselessly, the passenger door pops open. The boy steps out of his circle of light and gets in. The car drives off.

Dramatic cut to a close-up on the bush. Its gentle tremors are now a storm, branches lashing against each other, leaves flying off every which way, severed twigs dangling precariously from their thin tendons of bark. Sap leaks from every wound, beads of the stuff, weeping in great ropes to puddle on the tarmac slab. The bush is taking the loss of its sole companion very hard.

Cut back to a medium shot of the street. The bush, inconceivably and imperceptibly, has shifted across several feet and is now suddenly directly under the streetlamp, its leaves glistening in the warm fluorescent glow, directly in the spot previously occupied by the boy. The bush even has one branch resting up against the streetlamp pole where the boy had his. With one final shudder, the bush strokes its leaves across the surface of the metal pole, still faintly warmed with the boy's flushing body.

GOODBYE BACK THERE, WHOEVER YOU ARE!

Through the aperture (that had torn a small hole in the wet textile of the boy's desultory life) the boy was certain he might see a second life (one of unbridled dereliction and imperceptibility) play out like speculative puppetry, but he could not find a way through. A picture held him captive and he could not get outside it for it lay in his language and language seemed to repeat it to him inexorably.

In the staff kitchen of the digital marketing agency, where he interned. He sits on a stack of orange stained Tupperware with peoples names written on them in sharpie; Arkle, Milton, Pirata, Warrior, Eclipse. He turns on his chair in tandem with the microwave. He flexes mental categories, he puts a contradiction through its paces.

We leave him spinning there; like a water-logged lump of left clay -

In popular series, narrative organisation typically takes place on the go,

while the story is moving forward, replacing itself with continual variations of itself.

The boy has a job; we mentioned this. He has co workers with queer names. All named after famous and winning racehorses. This is perhaps significant - It might elude to a certain other, kind of, geometry taking a kind of; *shape*. We could inseminate the boy with a destiny, which will later mature and crawl out of him.

One thing is for certain.

On the train home his bare knee touches the bare knee of the girl sat next to him. The poem starts again, they both flinch and wish they were somewhere else-something-else.

He scans the rest of his carriage, there are a few dozed off; wobbling with the train. He imagines them never waking and the journey never ending, he imagines purgatory as an endless rerun of a persons final episode. He imagines you and the consequences of drowning in this. An old man, yes, is sat opposite the boy watching close-up porn on his apple watch. The boy is suddenly struck for the second time in a week. The old man is the striking proleptic image of the boy, all grown up. It was as though the boy himself was sat before himself many years later.

Mike. Echo. Oscar. Whiskey. is written in stencil font above a cat wearing a military helmet on the old mans t shirt. Next to the stranger; on an empty seat, his metro is folded over a ball point pen, the boy can make out hateful phrases scrawled inside clumsy speech bubbles on Rolex adverts and around images of protesters. The man hits off his watch, opens the foil lid of a yoghurt and eats it with a
plastic knife.

The boy smiles at the old man until the old man finally looks in the

boys direction and smiles back. *The rush! The will they won't they!* The handsome stranger felt indelibly linked to the floating cesura he had encountered and befriended in the clearing. The present suddenly felt fabulous and inhospitable.

Nudged, the boy reaches over and takes the mans biro from inside the fold of his newspaper, he grabs the old mans hand and writes something on his silky skin. The boys head obstructing our view.

The boy walks from the station and through the carpark to get to the clearing, tonight however, on the grass toward where it darkened at the tree line; a violent, noiseless theatre had begun its first and last act. The action was, in part, occulted by a low smoke that spanned the whole width of the carpark. The boy treated the distant spectacle as a warning to go no further and watched crouched from behind a bin.

In an unwatched moment, out of frame; a small french greyhound boings back and forth through a bowing sprinkler on a ratty square of patch. We relate to experience under language's supervision, but also, folded in an oily rag- partly

In the blue distance a Policeman with rainbow glitter on his cheeks introduces his grey anus, shrinking in a cool wind, to the lip of a glass Coke™ bottle, he receives it entirely into himself.

The policeman picks out the bloody pieces and painstakingly rebuilds the bottle in the shape of his mother using an ancient reparative tradition, "Your pain should never inspire shape for someone else's." His mother says as a glass bell, then seeing a rainbow acquiesce in a wet mist, she follows it- to context, then shatters. The policeman bleeds out. Nearby his partner repeatedly mimes the action of gently pushing a head down into a police car - it is like she is doing tai chi. Her hands

adjust the air carefully, down then forwards, down then forwards. The clear, mentholated winter submitting to her recursive action.

The boy turns back and chooses to head home.

The far off sound of hooves make a Christmas drink. He curls up in an empty server cage and makes things singular, one at a time.

The boy wakes to find a German Shepard is sat wagging his tail and glaring at him from the corner of his bedroom. It lets out a happy bark before turning around and walking through the wall.

The phone appears, ringing.

We have once again throttled him - is this the first time we might hear the boys voice?

“Hello.” The voice on the phone says.

“Hello.” The boy says.

Hello moves neighbourly from the back-mouth to the mandibles, low to high, *hel* to low. *Hello* the boy says, of course, of course he does, *hello!* we want to say back, *hello back there!* We are able to build the boy’s personality, but are we able to build him a soul?

“We were sorry to hear about your recent road traffic accident.” The voice on the phone says asympathetically, but with a saleable enthusiasm.

“Thank you.” The boy says, crestfallen.

The boy draws a long white scar across his forearm with the tip of his index finger.

The voice on the other end says something quiet, too quiet to make out, a secret, some intrigue. The boy turns away shyly.

A tear trickles down his face followed by another tear. The second tear, meets its patient twin; waiting near the corner of the boys mouth, the two tears greet, clink - cheers! And combine. They roll arm in arm and base jump as one from the boys shaved chin in one big drip. There is drama in all things! Even the smallest things! Small enough to fit on your fingertip type things!

He reads out his long credit card number; the phone pinched between his ear and his shoulder, tapping a cigarette into an upturned shell. He flips the card skilfully with his fingers and reads out the three digit security code on the back.

The boy hangs up the phone.

The boy opens a tin of tuna and lays out some newspaper to pour it onto for the dog, whistling while he works. He pastes more newspaper onto the window before heading out.

A month long bin strike in London had caused mountains of smell.

In the staff kitchen of a digital marketing agency, he sits on a stack of orange stained Tupperware with peoples names written on them in sharpie; Arkle, Milton, Pirata, Warrior, Eclipse. The boy turns on his chair in tandem with the microwave. He flexes mental categories, he puts a contradiction through its paces. He presses his colleague's leftovers into the pages of Cormack McCarthy novels. He reads aloud the

unsoiled fragments to the other intern who sits on the counter, sucking the ends of her thick brown hair in between sips of Actimel.

“Black ‘rake pran’ beneath the tree —perennial beneath his yellow grin- his dried skull a ‘terse that passed that way— a birdcage then.’

Her hair hangs still, sucked into a feather.

“Actimel makes my eczema really bad.” She says reading the ingredients before tipping the rest into her mouth. She climbs off the counter and leaves the room.

Yes the boy thought, yes so true. She is so fucking funny and makes the job feel less suicidal. The rascal. “You are wild!” He shouts after her. “Wild.” He says to himself.

The boy interns at a digital marketing agency, he writes blogs for influencers to become better influencers. He flicks through his notebook and finds his page.

Are you having trouble with getting new followers, engagement, profile visits and reach with your accounts? Ask yourself; Does my aesthetic make it crystal clear what I’m all about, what my content is all about? If the answer is no, it needs work. Clarity is paramount. It’s the first thing people see, make sure they know what you do, who you are.

The truth drops into a puddles middle then then then then then concentric love hearts.

Apostrophes. The future predates the past when one animal preys on another.

On the way home the boy decides to take his own advice; he buys a six

pack of pedigree wet dog food from the shop along with as many safety pins as he could get his hands on.

So far we have accompanied the boy, in a donkey costume. Yes, we have jostled, us three (you driving the arse end) around an abandoned shopping mall - backwards like a dadaist cavalcade. Slipping - onshell - casin - casing - ings - slipping on shell casings while articles of ash drop from Whitney Houston's holographic cigarette.

Now... do we seek closure? Or infinite play?

ONE FINAL THING

Several years had passed since my mother's demise. In the intervening years between then and now, I had done little worthy of report. My questing ambitions were stalled by my sudden need to become an individual of independent means. In the creeping damp of my adolescent disdain for my mother I had not appreciated the companionship she provided, an invaluable edge against which to locate my own self pushing back. Without her constant presence, I began to sink into a crisis of insecurity, mistook by the world at large as grief, but knowable to myself as piteous loneliness. Who was I without my mother to define myself against, whose infatuation with the sound of her own voice had produced in her sole offspring a density, compressed into a definite form by the demands of echolocation so as to better rebound the sound. Without my mother, I was growing baggier by the second, becoming shapeless, and therefore meaning-less. Her untimely demise having cut short her

advice, I was also left adrift as to where I should seek my missing point. It was forgivably easy, then, to succumb to total malaise. I had assumed the unseemly habit of sitting amongst the wreckage of my former mother's living room, amongst which I still lived (I could find no buyers for the setting of such an unlucky and unanticipated death however well-appointed the property was otherwise, and was unable to afford a move myself). I took to staring at the hole which continued to gape obscenely in the exterior wall. This attitude was neither morbid nor sentimental—this would suggest the presence of more emotion than I would like to give myself credit. Instead, my sights were studious. My reasoning was thus: at the precise moment of her death, my mother had been on the point, albeit in her customary oblique way, of providing some essential advice which may have helped smooth my journey of self-discovery had she not been smashed to smithereens prior to its revelation. Could my mother's generosity of counsel be traced to her untimely demise? And if so, perhaps some clue as to the content of her aborted words could be found at the crash site, the place of her unfortunate final performance. This hole, which had killed my mother and birthed her newly orphaned offspring out into the world, had an understandably tight grip around my psyche.

If I am being honest, my inability to let this whole thing go was in part due to some unresolved feelings around my being mothered. Having failed to reproduce femininity in me, my mother made this the central miscommunication of our relationship. Although it could never be spoken outright, and was always smuggled into other conversations and situations—for example, her disdain for my fascination with motivational manifestos-cum-autobiographies, typically those by sportsmen, academics, and male TV personalities. Their stories of self-actualisation

would anger her intensely, in a way that could only have been prompted by jealousy, or some form of unacknowledged identification cut off at the root. My mother would decry their narratives of transformation as phony, false prophecy—she ascribed the highest degree of moral virtue to one’s ability to settle for one’s given lot in life. My latent desire, ventriloquised by social-climbing footballers, stirred something within her and therefore was shameful, and should be reprimanded out of existence.

Although I was not lacking insight when considering my past afflictions, my present hole-y contemplation had not proffered any new insight into the situation of my mother’s demise. Despite appearances to the contrary, the cavity was surprisingly opaque, leaving me somewhat stuck in my circular ruminations. In an effort to acquire some fresh input which might help break the feedback loop, I had started entering phrases into the world’s premier search engine on my world’s premier search engine-licensed smart phone. This began with strings of related key words and queries, such as ‘primary causes of motor accidents in the home’ and ‘recent developments in the relation between mothering and motorbike technology.’ These efforts yielded little of use. I was directed, in the main, to half-baked opinion pieces on the concept of the ‘midlife crisis.’ This quickly became tedious to read, and even more tedious to continue typing ever-more advanced searches, and so I switched to the Voice Search function, monologuing my thoughts stream-of-consciousness style into my phone’s mic.

And so there I was, crouched on a corner of blasted wall, clutching my phone, chattering away. Between then and now, the monologuing had become increasingly tragic. The incessant talking had caused me to slip

into the persona of a stand-up comedian. I was feeding set-ups into my phone for the search engine to spit out the punch line. So immersed in my routine, I barely registered that a spotlight had begun to illuminate my crouched form amongst the rubble. Lit from sideways and above, my forehead shone with a bright and sweaty orb. Slowly though, without breaking my patter, I became aware of my new stage presence. Alone, with no audience, my jokes falling dead into what remained of my mother's soft furnishings, this light was the sole sign that I was onto something. In the back of my mind, I contemplated who could be behind such a generous act of validation. The circle fell about me so round and precise that, even had the wiring still been intact, it could not have been the diffuse glow of the living room's big light, covered by its tiered wedding cake-like shade. From the corner of my eye, I scanned the ramshackle room. The light, it appeared, was falling through the very hole I had come here to contemplate but had started to lose sight of, deep in my comedy routine. A cold breeze rippled through my hair.

A low rumbling sound started up. Caught in the loudening hum were tiny ticking coughs, unmistakably the noise of an engine ticking over. Frozen in my newfound limelight, I was doing a very literal impersonation of a deer caught in headlights. The roaring sound revved. The light through the hole began to tremor. In retrospect, I really should have seen it coming. But the realisation hit me too late, in the manner of a tonne of bricks falling, with force, straight into the living room.

THE FINISHED ARTICLE

Within the city walls the piles of rubbish; cooked under the golden heat magnified through sky scrapers, had grown into a truly intrusive metaphor. Where once the boy might have found that foreboding, the smell carried instead a kind of atropaic quality, the universe insisted he was on the right path. The bags of rubbish piled high enough to block CCTV cameras. Looting had begun - the implacable clicking of hijacked electronic bikes was like crickets. The city had taken on a kind of inverted pastoral charm where the only relation that matters is how the waistband of your dreams pools around your dirty white trainers, where spiders have REM and dream in EDM, where the syntactical arrangements of waste and want had been mongrelised to form a discordant and unlearnable music.

Halt! We must allow the boy the toilet.

The boy goes to the toilet for a wee wee and a poo poo.

When he arrives home the boy finds the tuna he left has been eaten, he sees only the back half of the Alsatian, the rest of the dog's body goes past the wall. He stands behind its wagging tail, the long willowy hairs pass delicately across the boy's shins - the boy blushes. He yanks its hindlimb and the rest of the dog comes through, into the room holding a bloody scalp in its mouth; the gristle is feathered with ratty blonde hair - it gently relinquishes it at the boys feet - the dog retches - followed by a piece of black rubber.

The dog bolts back through his wall. The boy pins the piece of scalp and rubber to his cap which he had distressed with rocks from a nearby building site. He pins chains and badges to it too. He scalpels out the cheeks of his grey nike track pants and places stick on diamantés under each eye.

He heads to his clearing, over the car park, and under the yew of the boys story.

The boy, yes, the boy dances. The camera pans slowly down to the boys hips, tracking up his lithe body. The boy was well behaved and avoided looking directly at the hovering thing - he wanted to treat the form things were taking seriously.

In a trick of lazer light, outfitted in a monstrous semiotics of the afterlife (F/W, 1997 - 98) The scars on his torso run along his muscle lines like the relief left by two warring rat snakes. He slow motion two steps in the centre of an abandoned night club. There is no music, only the lights that land on him and move across his body and the walls, he is merely spectral in it and your eyes feel the sad contrast in looking at him and the walls dancing behind and around him.

The old mans tattooed hand appears over the boys mouth.

The boy drops his keks, the old man drops his keks.

Pause here on the finished article. Yes; *twinky*, but well fed. A satisfying dispersal of brown hair on his legs; yes. Hairy head; check - locks tousled to the extreme! His red cheeks, his mouth that opens yes, yes. His ears (partly defective), yes and hair goes behind the ears if the boy tells a lie, yes, oh god yes. His dextrous fingers, remember he flips the credit card over with one hand and feels the bark of the yew, mmmm. *Hello*, a voice, yes. Eyes, we've met these. Head, shoulders, knees, and toes. A lovely accurate little hole and an appealing front. Close up on an inflating penis, up, up, up. Has breath, a little moan - he's alive!

A rusted, fold out chair. It supports their bodies, but also their narrative position.

The camera pans skyward, the embers of a nearby barrel fire dart headlong into the night sky to become stars, the camera holds for three long seconds and then pans slowly back down to reveal a hellish close up of the boys face.

The old mans mouth loosens before dropping open to reveal a series of tableaux behind sharpened teeth that are footlights;

- 1986, Genet falls to the floor in Paris and fatally hits his head.
- The summer of 1989, a mod and a rocker fall into each others arms and clip- disappear.
- Portishead meet on a coffee break at an enterprise allowance course in 1991.
- Anonymous crowd audience, (c)awws.
- Less isolated pervert foreshadows his decomposition.

The boy steals the old man's balled up t-shirt from the floor.

He unravels the t-shirt when he gets to work. *Mike. Echo. Oscar. Whiskey* is written in stencil font above a cat wearing a military helmet. He stashes it behind the fridge never to be washed. In the staff kitchen of a digital marketing agency, he sits on a stack of orange stained Tupperware with peoples names written on them in sharpie; Arkle, Milton, Pirata, Warrior, Eclipse. He turns on his chair in tandem with the microwave. He flexes mental categories, he puts a contradiction through its paces, he presses his face into the old mans t-shirt and inhales the smell, by Friday the smell is gone and the t-shirt fades in his hands.

AUTUMN (astringent).

He redacts the letter 'I' from todays copy of the metro, he does this every day, to every issue for the next two years, stacking months upon months of enucleated papers in his bedroom. Dog companion happily barks.

One day, on the train, the same man the boy had collided with years before, wielding a plastic knife; sits opposite him, both the boy and the older man are wearing the same t-shirt; the cat, the military helmet. The man looks different, no longer the spit of the boy. Perhaps, the boy thought, he had got a haircut, the boy had changed shape too - he would not be offended if the old man were not to recognise him.

The man turns the pages of his newspaper and opens a biro lid with his teeth - he draws out a big speech bubble next to an image of an old nurse wearing a surgical mask. He looks up at the boy, the hem of his white moustache reaches past his cracked lips and onto his big golden teeth -

“Hello.” The boy says to the old man. His hair flaps in the wind.