

# SAVAGE

JOURNAL



ISSUE 8

// NOISE

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An outsider in Aldous Huxley's *Brave new World* John the Savage observes the world around him with eyes informed by the works of Shakespeare. Like John, SAVAGE Journal looks to art, literature and philosophy to enrich our perception of modern life

Cover Art by Sung Feel Yun

'Listen, I beg of you', cried the SAVAGE... 'Lend me your ears.'

Sound travels as vibrations into our ear. The eardrum beats. The liquid in the cochlea judders. Hair cells react and the auditory nerve sends signals to our brain that are decoded into – what? Language? Music? Meaning? Noise?

These categories are not in conflict: they intersect and overlap and it can be hard to pull them apart. Alice Edmond shows how language in Nabokov's *Invitation of a Small Clown* is fragmented and reduced to noise. Similarly, Anna Chippendale unravels the language of theatre set design which speaks through a universal understanding of visual cues.

What's harder to listen to is the silence between the beats. Dorrotya Agoston lays bare the difficulties faced by those struggling with the effects of alcoholism, navigating cultural representations of the disease that leave those affected feeling unrepresented. Away from the individual, Olivia Hetherington considers the power of stripping away spoken dialogue in film, urging us not just to hear the constant buzz but to really listen for the drop of the pin. Turning to the streets of London, Daisy Avis-Ward encourages us to tune into the silence left in the wake of the ongoing erasure of the city's musical subcultures.

More than ever, we feel caught up in monumental changes in the political tide. The pervasive sense of catastrophe created by increasingly polarised voices has instilled a broad feeling of helplessness. But dispossession creates space for empowerment. Matthew Sardegno shows how the student body has found a voice through the Cut The Rent movement, fighting the unfair conditions tenants are subject to. Moving the focus to those already with a platform, Phyllis Akalin looks to the artist and asks what their responsibility ought to be at a time of political upheaval. As we come towards the end of a year that has seen some of London's biggest ever protests, it is clear that it is not time to put the banners down.

In a world that is becoming inescapably noisier, in which we hear so much, it is difficult to know what to listen to. We thank all our contributors, editors, curators and designers who have dedicated so much time to bringing this edition together, and we thank you for taking a moment to listen to them.

We hope you enjoy!

Nick, Daniel and Freya



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## OUR THOUGHTS

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# Time to spring back against the mattress

**VICKY STEWART** looks at the makings of the so-called 'sleep industry'.

Mattresses are undeniably having a moment. The myth of a deep and restful sleep is being pushed upon us everywhere. Sleepwalking through rush hour on the tube this week my bleary eyes came to rest on the row of adverts above the seats. Campaigns planting the idea that maybe it isn't the crush of bodies and lack of oxygen making us weary but a lifetime of not having the sleep we deserve. Suddenly, I was fully awake: I had just read three consecutive adverts for mattresses.

Now everywhere I look I see adverts marketing mattresses and promises of better sleep. Soon, not just the tube but all my devices were in on it. Casper, Eve and Simba are no longer just names you might expect to hear called for lost dogs on Hampstead Heath: they are a breed of 'tech-enabled' companies slugging it out through slogans to be your new friend with a comforting name. Promotions on podcasts, sleep-monitoring apps and targeted ads on social media make it impossible to escape the burgeoning 'sleep industry,' selling everything from soothing sprays to sleep enhancing pyjamas. A 2017 McKinsey report found the sleep industry in the US to be worth almost \$40 billion, rising at a rate of 8% a year. As technology encroaches further into every area of life including the bedroom, the market only shows signs of accelerating.

The 'sleep industry' did not create our fascination with sleep. Right now you can't get away from anyone and everyone (Mark Wahlberg, Oprah Winfrey, Ryan Reynolds) sharing on social media what time they have to get up to meditate in an ice-bath: Mariah Carey needs a solid fifteen hours while Tom Cruise sleeps in a sound-proof 'snoratorium'. However our interest in sleep predates celebrity culture, as Dickens reportedly slept facing North to improve his creativity, Leonardo Da Vinci took twenty minute naps every four hours, As neurotic and bizarre as these might sound, we are interested because even the most successful people have to sleep sometimes. Sleep is universally fundamental, ever since the rich in Early Modern times elevated their mattresses off the ground to avoid bugs, it was only a matter of time before someone realised its marketability.

Without the sleep industry would we just lie down and pass out? During the industrial revolution sleep was seen as a waste of time and a barrier to productivity. But now for the very reason that our society craves productivity we are obsessed with being well-rested. Rest has become the opposite of restful. The 'sleep industry' is cyclical and self-perpetuating. In order to sleep well you have to buy something new and in buying a new mattress or white-noise machine you will only become more consumed by a need for sleep. It designs demand for its own supply.

Our noise-cancelling headphones have shut out the senses in our body and we would rather be told about how well we slept by a machine. The elusive dream of a perfect night's sleep has become the tagline, the priceless item is now on the shop floor and within reach. All we have to do is achieve a perfect set of data. Wearable sleep tracking devices such as fitbits and



Artwork by Liam Mertens

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smart watches measure your movement during the night, which in theory produces accurate data of how many hours of deep sleep you have a night.

All of this has given rise to a new sleeping disorder: orthosomnia. Researchers with the Journal of Clinical Sleep Medicine coined the term in 2017 for those who become so obsessed with their sleep patterns that they self-diagnose insomnia, when in fact the real problem is a misapprehension of wellness triggered by the process of what is often false sleep data. It is no surprise that the pressure to achieve a lofty curve on a graph every night often only leads to more restlessness and fatigue.

The sleep industry provides yet another assembly of adverts to make you worry on a daily basis, when worry might already be a symptom and product of your sleeplessness. Three mattress adverts was a frightening wake-up call. It was threatening to see how easily we can be induced to believe we aren't sleeping right, despite knowing better.

Next time you are asked on the tube or through your headphones if you are feeling tired, tell them 'yes' - though not because of an old mattress, but because you are being made restless by the very voice that claims to be telling you how best to rest. The sleep industry has created so much demand they have created a new type of sleep disorder. So leave the sleep trackers at the door. You never minded a lumpy mattress before – why do so now?

# Renters Making Noise

*MATTHEW SARDEGNO discusses the rise of collective tenant action in the Cut The Rent movement.*

If there's one thing everyone living in London can agree on, it is this: living here is too fucking expensive. While wages stagnate and maintenance grants are cut, rents are increasing, and with them the letting fees we pay for the privilege of having to wait weeks on end for letting agents to send someone to fix a broken light switch. It is undeniably becoming more and more unaffordable and inaccessible to be a renter in London.

Although certainly exaggerated in the capital, the problem is nationwide. There are more than 205,000 empty homes in Britain, worth over £50 billion – and this number is only rising. Stolen deposits and poor conditions are becoming the norm across the country. Social and affordable housing is being knocked down by property developers and replaced with luxury blocks of flats, often with the assistance of local councils.

Despite – or perhaps because of – this increasing attack on people's very right to live, tenants are becoming more organised than ever. Fed up of paying what is often over 49% of their paycheck to landlords, tenants have begun to fight back. In the last five years there has been a massive rise in collective action by tenants, the like of which hasn't been seen since the 1970s.

Tenants' unions are also on the rise, with ACORN (Association of Community Organisations for Reform Now) being founded in Bristol in 2013. Other branches swiftly followed in Sheffield, Brighton, Manchester, Newcastle, Birmingham and Belfast. They have won hundreds of thousands of pounds in compensation for stolen deposits and illegal letting fees. In 2014, the Scottish tenants' union Living Rent was founded, with branches in Edinburgh and Glasgow building community power to win back money for tenants and to stop evictions. Then just this year, London Renters' Union launched city-wide in the capital. It has already gained over 600 members, stopped multiple evictions and won money back for tenants. It has also teamed up with Generation Rent in starting a campaign to ban Section 21, the law that allows landlords to evict tenants without having to give any reason.

However, the rise in tenant power and action is not limited to just tenants' unions. Communities have come together to fight against development in their areas that would see green space and social housing destroyed and replaced with luxury accommodation, displacing working class families in the process. In 2015, the local community living in the Aylesbury Estate in Southwark occupied their old estate, which was due to be demolished and replaced with luxury housing. Similarly, earlier this year local residents in Lewisham occupied their local park, Tidemill, in order to stop it being redeveloped as part of new housing plans that the local community opposed. Both of these occupations required hundreds of police and bailiffs to evict the occupants, with the proposed developments in both these areas facing major setbacks due to the actions taken by the local community.

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But where have students come into the campaign for better housing and tenants' rights? Surprisingly, student action has played a major part in this re-insurgence of collective tenant action across the UK. In 2012 students played an instrumental role in stopping plans by UCL to demolish the Carpenters Estate in Stratford to make way for the development of UCL East. Later In 2016, 1000 UCL students went on rent strike in UCL with the campaign group UCL Cut The Rent. They won over £1.5 million in rent cuts and bursaries. Since then, multiple other Cut The Rent groups have been founded across the country, with six other universities having rent strikes and further strikes taking place at UCL every year. Many of the students involved in these campaigns have gone on to play key roles in the founding of the aforementioned tenants' unions, including ACORN Brighton and London Renters' Union. In January of this year, UAL students also twice occupied the London College of Communication in order to pressure them into ditching their assistance of property developers trying to build new luxury flats in Elephant and Castle.

As students it is often easy for us to feel not apart of our local communities, and to sit by and allow ourselves and those around us to be pushed around. However, these examples all show how much power we have if we join together. At a time when we are being forced into accommodation with worse conditions and higher rents, as well as being pushed around more and more by letting agents, it is more important than ever that we connect with the people living around us and start fighting for our rights!

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# Father, Mother, Addiction

**DOROTTYA ÁGOSTON tells the story of a dysfunctional family and how taboo begets silence.**

*Hi everyone, this is my first time at Al-Anon and I decided to come today because my dad started rehab a couple hours ago, and I'm physically a thousand miles away from him.*

My dad is an alcoholic. My family struggles with alcoholism. We are taught to feel shame and hide this part of us from society.

How do we see alcoholics and alcoholism? The portrayal of people struggling with alcoholism in the media and in our cultural narratives is simple: one-dimensional characters being defined only by their addiction. 'The bad guy.' 'The low-life.' 'The violent abuser.' Meanwhile upper-class heavy drinkers are often glamorised for their extravagant lifestyle. Thus, you're either imagined as living the 'high-life' and are somewhat romanticised for your drinking problems, or as a drain on society. In everyday life alcoholism is used as a joke. We throw it around daily when our friends have an extra pint, or we go out a couple of nights in a row. But how are we, the people growing up around sufferers of this disease, supposed to feel seeing and experiencing this?

I experience a terribly harmful disease affecting the life of my family and the only response society can offer to it is to disregard and even humourize it. And as we uncomfortably and guiltily laugh along, we become part of the same culture of condemnation that has caused us pain.

I keep hiding a huge part of me. I am afraid to share my story with the people I trust most. I know they would not judge me or my family. I know it with my brain. Meanwhile my heart is full of anxiety and the voices keep telling me to keep it to myself. We create lies. We push people away by keeping information from them. 'I can't today... I have a family thing...' I can feel people around me getting hurt by these comments. Are we so afraid of judgement that we are willing to lose the people closest to us?

'Pretend that everything's perfect.' This is what we expect from everyone. Shut it out. We are so concerned about appearance, we forget how such silence erodes ourselves day by day. It's almost as if we think that if we don't pay attention to the seriousness of alcoholism as a disease, it will stop existing. We ignore it, push it into silence, and we pretend the issue doesn't exist. Addressing the problem is the first step of the healing process, in fact it is the only solution yet discovered to help to live a healthy life and accept our situation.

International non-profit Al-Anon Family Groups teaches you not to hide, not to conserve everything inside. The organisation provides support to anyone whose life is, or has been, affected by someone else's drinking. Al-Anon is not a therapy group nor a religious organisation, it's simply a safe space for us to share our experiences and is about helping find solace and support in others who have been similarly affected.

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'Simply', I say. It may be a simple concept, but it focuses on processing, sharing and consequent healing. There is no such thing as an immediate solution to overcome alcoholism. It is built into the lives of the ones affected and will stay that way. But we can ease the pain, we can learn so much from each other and our experiences. And we do need all the help we can provide each other.

Being part of a dysfunctional family affects you mentally. It's not solely how I identify myself, but it's a part of who I am. And I am proud of it. I am proud to be able to say that my family is so incredibly strong and that it's working on a problem, working for its health. It's a work in progress. It will always remain a work in progress. Part of that strength comes from not being afraid anymore. Talking. Sharing. Taking action.

We still deny ourselves the only known cure to mental recovery. We still pretend that everything is perfect. It is so tiring. Mentally. Physically. A burden we choose to carry.

By the time this article is published my dad will be out of the hospital. We don't know what the future holds for us. I couldn't possibly imagine the future, which is our present now. It has new boundaries but is also freer – on that we agree. It's full of ups and downs, but that doesn't make us different from any other family. We will be fighting until the end of our lives: healing, for all of us, is a lifetime process. The first step is breaking the silence.



# THE BEES

*A poem by SIMRAN DIVATIA.*

My pockets are filled with bees,  
angrily whirring, constantly stirring,  
let the buzz settle into  
the background.

Then, every once in a while,  
a sharp sting.

(at least 60 dead,  
and marches in streets,  
and nuclear treaties,  
and believe her)

Just add them to the collection,  
there are other pressing things,

Blue light and swipes right  
and that constant whirring,  
My pockets are filled with bees,  
they never sleep,

waiting with their stingers,  
mind your fingers when you reach in

they are not quick to let you go



Artwork by Dyveke Bredsdorff







Artwork by Loukis Menelaou

# Capitalism 1, Nightlife 0.

**DAISY AVIS-WARD** discusses how gentrification is stifling the noise of London's nightlife.

## MUSIC

The Four Aces in Dalston was founded by a Jamaican immigrant in 1966. It was soon deemed 'The Jewel in Dalston's crown' and acted as a hub for the Afro-Caribbean immigrants experiencing the cultural exile of 1970s London. However, the club was demolished in 2007 to create space for a new housing development scheme. In spite of the campaigns to save it on the grounds of its cultural relevance, the government chose to destroy the building. Trees planted in the club's garden to commemorate the deaths of the young black people from the New Cross Fire were also cut down. The Four Aces is no anomaly: the erasure of spaces is contributing to the effects of is the consequence of persistent urban gentrification at the cost of London's subcultures.

Gentrification is sweeping through London's music scene in a variety of ways. The gradual crowding out of clubs comes as a result of rising property prices, local council restrictions and neighbourhood complaints. When combined, these factors often see venues unable to pay rent or facing aggressive backlash from newer, richer, middle-class neighbours. This pattern of events is circling through London whereby gentrification capitalises upon, and swiftly erases, thriving cultures in favour of homogeneity. Areas such as Brixton and Hackney have become battlegrounds between local authorities and nightclubs, often resulting in the closing-down of culturally important spaces.

The rush to accommodate wealth and privilege throughout London has affected marginalised groups most severely. Previously sites of lower-income communities, largely in East London, are being gentrified to the extreme. Nightclubs that exist outside of mainstream culture and prioritise minority groups, such as Afro-Caribbean and LGBTQ+ communities, have faced consistent targeting for closure. Vauxhall's nightlife is gradually fading to the background following the closure of 151 gay clubs and bars since 2008, the previously dubbed 'gaybourhood' appears only a distant reminder.

When Burlesque club Madame Jojo's was forced to close ostensibly due to a violent incident in 2014, many argued that Westminster's local authorities had been waiting for the chance to close the club. The Council jumped at this opportunity to revoke the club's license, in order to further the more pristine, family-friendly atmosphere they are trying to promote in Soho. Though the community is fighting back through campaigns, it appears that the seedy underbelly that was '90s Soho has transformed into a grim spectre of consumerism. The subcultures and ethnic minorities within the LGBTQ+ community are subject to further exclusion.





Artwork by Sanna Linell

Mzz Kimberley, one of the first black trans performers in London, commented that, 'A lot of club spaces don't feel safe for me. Not only because I'm black, but as a trans woman as well.' Diversity and acceptance are integral to London's nightlife and, despite opposition, gentrification is threatening this as marginalised groups are pushed out of the limelight.

The landscape of London's nightlife is changing. Gone are the down and dirty days of Camden's punk scene, to be replaced with a generic Spotify playlist of '80s Punk Classics'. The effects of gentrification on the music industry have been detrimental. The removal of spaces for specific genres, predominantly electronic and rap music, has made it harder for new artists to reach their audiences. As Spotify enables the private consumption of music more than ever, technology is adapting to our generation's preferences and the desire to see music live is becoming less compelling. Rising rents are leading to rising ticket prices, often excluding the demographics that this music originally sought to serve. Over time venues begin to lose economic capital and become vulnerable to developers. Gentrification is affecting all aspects of London's music scene and the artists cannot be excluded from this. The inability to gain exposure is suffocating new music; we may be losing something we never knew we had.

Any city as big and diverse as London will always be subject to change. But it is the seemingly unstoppable pace and intensity of this change, and the reality of who it serves and who it leaves behind, that is worrying. The issue is being recognised: Sadiq Khan has appointed the first 'Night Czar', who fought to reopen Fabric and increase Electric Ballroom's capacity. London's anti-gentrification campaigns continue to champion the protection of culture. Bolstered by the anti-establishment edge of London's grime scene, Giggs and Stormzy continue to defend spaces for new artists. More and more clubs are being labelled as culturally significant and being granted protection from developers, acting in line with the reinvention of London's queer spaces, such as club Bloc South. The issue has entered the popular consciousness of many Londoners. But for many venues this has been too little too late, and there is much more to be done. To prevent further cultural damage, I ask you to resist the Peckhamorphosis of this city.

## Why go lo if you can go hi?

MARCELA KONANOVA discusses the emergence of lo-fi house and its use of noise of the '90s.

From as early as 2016 we have witnessed the gradual formation of a new subgenre, lo-fi house. If you have left YouTube on autoplay while listening to electronic music, Ross From Friends' 'Talk to Me You'll Understand' or DJ Boring's 'Winona' must have sooner or later made their way to the back of your mind. The most striking feature of this old-school sound revival is the use of analogue instruments and tape recordings which, for most contemporary musicians, would usually be unwanted background noise. A 2017 Pitchfork review, for example, references the 'crackling sounds' of Ross's *The Outsiders*, a description that doesn't quite suggest the melodic, or even traditionally musical, tones we expect from an album. Yet the success this deliberately rough-cut sound meets on YouTube and SoundCloud suggests that there is something appealing in the seeming imperfection of this music.

So why is lo-fi the new black? Let's follow the rule: different equals interesting, interesting equals desirable. Being different is the key to success in a music industry which is saturated with musical techniques resembling one another. TRP, a German-based electronic musician, said in Mixmag: 'I think people don't like the polished and clean sound of electronic music nowadays. Polished music is just kind of boring to me.' Seeking diversity is one of the main goals of the independent L.A.-based record label Brainfeeder, founded by Steven Ellison, also known as Flying Lotus. I would not call it a coincidence that Ross from Friends' new track 'Squaz' has been included in Brainfeeder's ten-year anniversary compilation *Brainfeeder X*, with tracks by renowned artists like Thundercat and Flying Lotus himself. Clearly, there is an attempt in the lo-fi house environment to be different; to make a breakthrough from the trite, technically pristine sounds of today's mainstream.

But it is not just about introducing variation. These artists also have different motives behind the rusty, jagged basslines and misty, sometimes funny, old-school synths. Lo-fi house craves for the past. The free parties and cassette sounds of the '90s are ideals we have lost in the vortex of digitalisation and commerce. Ross from Friends, or Felix Weatherall, taps into this concept in a very personal way in his album *Family Portrait*. He was influenced by the music he remembers from his childhood, thanks to his parents' interest in U.K. rave culture. Tracks like 'Family Portrait' or 'The Knife' evoke a nostalgic feel with their dreamy, ambient synths and doleful vocals. It may be this feature – the familiar but long-forgotten – which draws mostly millennials to this subgenre.

Another objective, spelled out by DJ Seinfeld, is the stance of rebellion against the mainstream. As he tells Mixmag, he sees lo-fi house as 'sharing some similarities to the whole punk and metal genre,' but this argument can be drawn further across multiple genre. In the 1960s,



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1980-90s and early 2000s there was a huge revival of lo-fi sound by rock, punk rock, indie rock and experimental musicians such as The Velvet Underground, Bob Dylan, Sebadoh and Ariel Pink. Underlying this aspect of their music was an ideology of anti-commercialism. DJ Seinfeld goes on: 'I think it invites some listeners to be a bit more curious and thoughtful about what they hear, and maybe make them rethink the whole paradigm of pure-sounding dance music.' This shows that lo-fi house is not just a melancholic outburst of a couple of DJs in their twenties. The idea behind lo-fi music is to question the authenticity of digital sound. Simon Frith in his study *Art Versus Technology: The Strange Case of Popular Music* explores whether the sound of music produced by digital industrialised technology can still be authentic. He claims that 'the continuing core of rock ideology is that raw sounds are more authentic than [technologically] cooked sounds.' Lo-fi house expresses just this doctrine. It makes us think what the authentic essence of the sound of electronic music is.

Lo-fi house has been a target of criticism for its grip upon the past. Some see it as a joke due to the artists' funny names copying the '90s TV series, some blame them for lacking originality due to their simple rhythms and melodies. Nonetheless, lo-fi house definitely conveys a special emotion and a striking message. The imperfection of the sound channels feelings of nostalgia and at the same time makes us think about how today's music industry has shifted, and whether it is moving in the right direction.

## Wir Sind Mehr

PHYLLIS AKALIN discusses the politicisation of music in protest.

'Unfortunately, the only one out here is me again,' Felix Brummer, frontman of German indie-rock/rap band Kraftklub, sang ironically to an audience of more than 65,000. In September 2017, Kraftklub organised a free concert in Chemnitz with six other bands and artists performing, including the popular punk rock outfits Die Toten Hosen and Feine Sahne Fischfilet. The atmosphere resembled that of a festival, but the majority of the audience were holding signs: 'No Nazis in Chemnitz', 'Violence is No Solution' or '*Wir Sind Mehr*' (We Are More). Under the banner of this last slogan, the musicians used the concert to protest against the racist marches that happened just a few days earlier in the eastern German city.

There has been tension in the air for some time. The right-wing party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) has gained significant traction with support now from more than twenty percent of the population, predominantly in the east. Many feel left behind, excluded from the political decision-making in Berlin. In the past thirty years, 750,000 people have left the province of Saxony, and young people especially tend to move to western Germany or Berlin. Having grown up in Chemnitz, Kraftklub wrote several songs about the mentality of the regions, about feeling alone and misunderstood.

Even though this tension is nothing new, it had never escalated to the extent it did in 2017. The far-right protests were triggered by the death of Daniel H., allegedly killed by immigrants. Self-proclaimed 'concerned citizens', members of AfD, and neo-Nazi groups took to the streets against Germany's immigration and refugee policy. The protests did not remain peaceful. Some groups started chasing and insulting immigrants; some showed the Nazi salute.

But others wanted to send a signal against this far-right violence, among them Kraftklub. Immediately they began planning and asked other artists for support. It was a success: people from all over Germany travelled to Chemnitz to show their opposition to racism and xenophobia. While the majority of voices in the media were positive, many comments under the relevant articles were critical. 'Since when does writing lyrics and singing make you an expert in politics?', wrote a user under an article published by national news outlet Die Welt. Another commented '#wirsindmehr would never have been as successful without these celebrity hosts'.

This raises important questions: should musicians be political? Do they possibly even have a responsibility to do so? And can we



Artwork by Milan Tarasca

count this event as a real success for the political values they represent – or are their fans just opportunistic?

As for the last question, I would argue that it can indeed be counted as a success. If the cause did not represent people's values, they certainly would not have come. In my opinion, people don't deny their fundamental values for art; they are rather looking to find them in art. The concert just gave an extra incentive to come to the demonstration. And even if everyone there did not actively support the cause, the concert remains a powerful statement.

The question of 'if and how' musicians should get politically involved is more difficult. Some think it is not the place of artists to purport ideologies. Others argue that musicians have a responsibility to use their platforms, especially to young fans who are easily influenced. But, as the Welt-user said, musicians don't necessarily have political expertise.

However, fundamental values are not necessarily grounded in expertise. Ideally, they are created by access to correct information, reason and emotions. Musicians are always expressing their values in their art, whether it is obvious or not. 'Music is somehow always political,' says Felix Brummer in an interview. 'We used to think our band wasn't political. But actually, we have been political all along.' While art often overtly integrates politics into its aesthetic texture, Brummer suggests that it's difficult to find art totally rid of political matter, even if it's only woven in subconsciously.

Artists have a large platform to promote their views, but this is a danger as well as an opportunity. They have the chance to enact change because they are heard, but change is not necessarily progressive. This raises the highly-disputed question of whether there should be any limits on the specific values musicians promote. International law states that 'any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law'. If art is allowed to speak politics, the line has to be drawn at incitement of violence or hatred.

Art is a form of communication; it is never completely silent. If musicians want to express their political views, they should have the choice to do so. Art disturbs. Art can protest. But as art is inherently human, it should never attack human dignity.

## DEAR LAIKA

SONIA TSES talks to Dear Laika, who released four albums in 2018, about her work and influences.

**What is 'noise' to you? A certain palette of sounds? A feeling? A mindset?**

This is maybe the obvious answer, but 'noise' is very much subjective, like 'tonality.' It's often used disparagingly to say, 'This is not music.' Conservative classical music listeners might dismiss rock or hip hop as 'noise'; conservative rock listeners might dismiss punk, electronic music or more experimental stuff as 'noise'; 'Western' listeners throughout history have claimed that the music of other cultures is just 'noise'. Ultimately it boils down to misunderstanding, or not attempting to understand, like a cultural language barrier. When you embrace noise as music, then there is a semiotic shift in the word towards a more positive and open-minded musical approach. I think John Cage might have been the first classical composer to realise (or at least meaningfully explore the concept) that music is just sound in time and that you can make of that what you will.

**This year you released two noise albums, *White Leopards* and *Dewy Reds*, *Fatal Jaws*. How did you make some of the sounds on these?**

It's all improvised guitar or violin run through a pedal chain and then multi-tracked with the same recording sped up or slowed down. I'd pick a certain limited set of notes and tune whatever instrument I was using to that, so that later I could decide what church mode I'd want the piece to be in and adjust the speed of the duplicated tracks accordingly. As is the case with a lot of noise music, the pedals were as much a part of the instrument as the instrument itself: I'd usually rely on the natural resonance of the guitar's body and adjust the pedals' settings to alter the tone, while on the violin I'd use a lot of harmonics.

**Before that you released *Twin Mythemes* and *Rinzen*. What relationship do these albums have to noise (if any)?**

*Twin Mythemes* was me dipping my toes into solo instrumental noise while maintaining a more conceptual approach. I visited Ireland a couple of summers ago and I was completely taken with the landscape, especially the coastal rock formations and the vast green plains (which the country's famous for) at the mercy of the changing weather. I was seeing the same land which moulded some extraordinary ancient legends, which provided the implicit programmatic material for the album. *Rinzen* was mostly sample-based songwriting taking cues from classical music, but noise plays a part in its sonic aesthetic. Again, I was trying to harness the overwhelming feeling of the natural world and beyond when you pause to focus on how terrifying and beautiful it all is. I say that sincerely!

classical music, but noise plays a part in its sonic aesthetic. Again, I was trying to harness the overwhelming feeling of the natural world and beyond when you pause to focus on how terrifying and beautiful it all is. I say that sincerely!

**In terms of influences, what was your first encounter with noise?  
Which artists are you inspired by?**

When I was maybe 13 or 14, I discovered Penderecki, Ligeti and Crumb, which was a big eye-opener and pushed me to explore more experimental music. A few years later I stumbled upon James Chance which led to Glenn Branca and that whole scene... Having never taken formal guitar lessons, Branca showed me how powerful guitar can be when played in non-conventional ways; Roy Montgomery, Li Jianhong, Richard Dawson and Bill Orcutt inspired me to pursue that. Meanwhile, Jefre Cantu-Ledesma and Ian William Craig opened my mind to a softer, more beautiful vision of noise, and bands like Coil, AnCo and Black Dice gave me courage to embrace internal diversity in my music. A lot of these artists also explicitly deal with the natural world and a certain mysticism or transcendentalism in nature. This is key. When we make noise, we surrender ourselves to powerful forces and subliminal instincts, to something fundamental and innate. Most music is like that, but noise is an intensifier.

Important disclaimer: the fact that the aforementioned musicians are (mostly white) dudes is perhaps indicative of how noise music, despite breaking down the barriers of accessibility to those who aren't necessarily formally educated in music, can fall prey to the same elitism, gatekeeping and tendencies to canonise as other kinds of music. Women like Noveller, Pan Daijing, Matana Roberts, Ashleigh-Rose, Lingua Ignota, Moor Mother, SOPHIE, Pharmakon, Sofia Jernberg, AGF, Zeena Parkins, Yoshimi P-We, Katie Dey, Klein, BLACK DRESSES, Aja Ireland, LOFT, Sachiko M, Loraine James, Kelly Jayne Jones and Lou Barnell, to name a few, are following in the footsteps of pioneers like Eliane Radigue, Delia Derbyshire and Pauline Oliveros and utilising noise in their own amazing ways.

*All Dear Laika releases are available to stream and buy at [dearlaika.bandcamp.com](http://dearlaika.bandcamp.com) and [dearlaika.neocities.org](http://dearlaika.neocities.org).*

# Magnolian's Mongolia

**ENERZAYA GUNDALAI explores erosion of Mongolian cultural identity in the music video of Magnolian's 'Өвөлжөө'.**

I am an outsider. Although I am Mongolian by birthright and origin, I am circumstantially detached from Mongolian society due to my predominantly Western upbringing, and relative prosperity. The culture I was born into lies distant within a glass orb, isolated from me and barely visible. This disconnect has rendered me mute, unable to express my native culture.

Mongolian indie-folk singer-songwriter Magnolian, interrupted my silence with the art of B. Odmandakh and M. Oyunbold, unconventionally displayed in the music video to Magnolian's 'Өвөлжөө' ('Banquet') rather than curated in a gallery. The work was directed, shot and edited by Odmandarkh, and animated by Oyunbold, and consists of a series of collages, showcasing a modernised Mongolia. My encounter with Oyunbold's collages marks the first time I became aware of other Mongolians who also stood outside the glass orb.



Mongolia's tumultuous transition from a Soviet satellite to a multi-party state with a market economy resulted in rapid cultural change, producing a deeply-felt trauma and feeling of cultural loss in the collective Mongolian mindscape. It was in this environment in 2016 that Magnolian gained a large following of listeners, receiving critical acclaim with his first EP titled *Famous Men*. From this album, 'Өвөлжөө' details the symbolic pilgrimage of a man who retreats into the wintry mountains in despair. The animation's collages are composed of Western and Mongolian icons, articulating this image of cultural erosion. Magnolian documents the deterioration of traditional Mongolian lifestyles and values through the artwork of this eruptive song which continues to resonate with many.

The video considers the idea that the epoch of Mongolian nomadism has passed as increasing urbanisation takes hold of the population. One collage depicts a family in a traditional rural setting, engrossed by a television set. Their monochrome existence is contrasted by the television which spews colourful bolts of lightning.

The halo of lightning bolts represented around this piece of technology emphasises its presence, whereas the family seated in front of the set are static and dull. The image illustrates that a simple and honest life in the country has lost its magnetism. Instead, people are drawn to the 'excitement' of sparkling cities, where reality is almost as fictitious as what is shown on television.

In a following collage, a group of young girls and boys stand in front of the Government Palace in two queues.



They wear traditional garb and look on wearily as bystanders take flashing photographs of them. These long-established Mongolian herders become reminiscent of animals in a zoo. They live in an unfamiliar and unnatural habitat, subsisting as entertainment fodder for tourists. Meanwhile, the omniscient house of parliament stands in the background, envisioning how collective suffering occurs under the watch and tacit support of the Mongolian government.



Artwork by Sarah Tew

The ageless nomadic lifestyle has been turned into a tourist attraction for the sake of making a quick buck. In the same vein of cultural loss, Magnolian addressed the prevalence of another concern: the promise of material progress seems to overshadow the preservation of traditionally Mongolian values. This idea is manifested in an image of a handful of coins trailing across photographs of historical landmarks. The coins are almost comically sized, laughably disproportionate. Presented against a backdrop of European-design floral wallpaper, the coins dwarf monumental statues and buildings situated in the foreground. Here, monetary symbols are icons that bridge Western styles and Mongolian politics. The juxtaposition proposes the idea that, to Mongolians, perhaps the most alien concept bestowed upon from the West is that of capitalism. Yet, the idea is also imbued with a sense of authority, as the word 'progress' has been on every politician's lips since 1991. Another scene shows flowers of steel and a leafless tree growing out of the ground slowly. In the place of values that emphasise the responsibility of the individual to the community grow values that are foreign and artificial, the pursuit of individual wealth and material influence.

I believe this phenomenon of loss in cultural identity is being experienced by many nations. With the propagation of multiculturalism and technological advancement in modern society, a sense of estrangement from one's native culture seems all too ubiquitous. Currently, the Mongolian outlook is still one of optimism; many of my friends living abroad plan to eventually return home. But I have seen even those most dedicated to Mongolia become disillusioned. Magnolian calls the Mongolia capital Ulaanbaatar, 'a city I don't know, a city I don't grow.' He waits for the 'moment his soul will open' again. He fears he will never wake up from his hibernation and state of cultural lethargy, while Mongolians fear their cultural heritage will not survive the Westernisation project. After all, how can we grow as a nation we don't know?

# A Brutal Symphony

*SELIN BENGI discusses the beauty of brutalist architecture in reference to the Barbican Estate.*



A concrete wall of flats stretching horizontally along the avenue. It strikes the eye when one emerges to street level from Barbican Underground Station. With its raw, greying, and rough appearance, the Barbican Estate is akin to a visual eruption of dissonance, noisily declaring its presence in evident contrast to the surrounding structures.

This unusually authoritative, monolithic character of the Barbican architecture is 'Brutalist'. The architectural style emerged in the post-war world of the 1950s, and is often disliked and misinterpreted as being intentionally (or brutally) unpleasant or harsh. In reality, the term Brutalism comes from the French phrase 'béton brut', meaning 'raw concrete'. Nevertheless, along with many other Brutalist buildings in London (such as Trellick Tower and Robin Hood Gardens) the Barbican is often deemed ugly. There have been numerous attempts to demolish these discordant Brutalist structures, many of which have been successful, replacing raw concrete with harmonised buildings of glass and steel.

Although not appealing to popular aesthetic tastes, the Barbican was intended as a new, innovative model for post-war egalitarian housing



that would contain venues for socialising and entertainment alongside the residences. Thus, the complex includes vast communal gardens tucked into rows of housing blocks as well as a cultural hub which has exhibition spaces, cafes, auditoriums, and a cinema. Built on the utopian vision of the British architecture firm Chamberlin, Powell and Bon, the Barbican Estate reveals a whole different world. The space it creates is quiet, concealed and separated from the noise of the bustling city.

To enter the estate from the Underground, one needs to ascend above street level and cross the connecting skywalk. Such an entrance feels vaguely ceremonial – and as you approach the intimidating estate, the sight of the surrounding city disappears, leaving sound as the only perceptible connection between the two realms. The inner communal areas of the estate are mostly made of crafted concrete and tiles, identical to the outside. Yet unlike the outer facade, an abundance of greenery seeps through and hugs the grey material, adding some colour and life to the hidden world inside. The buildings rise out on pilotis (columns) above massive green spaces, allowing for sunlight to reach every window without obstruction from the trees.

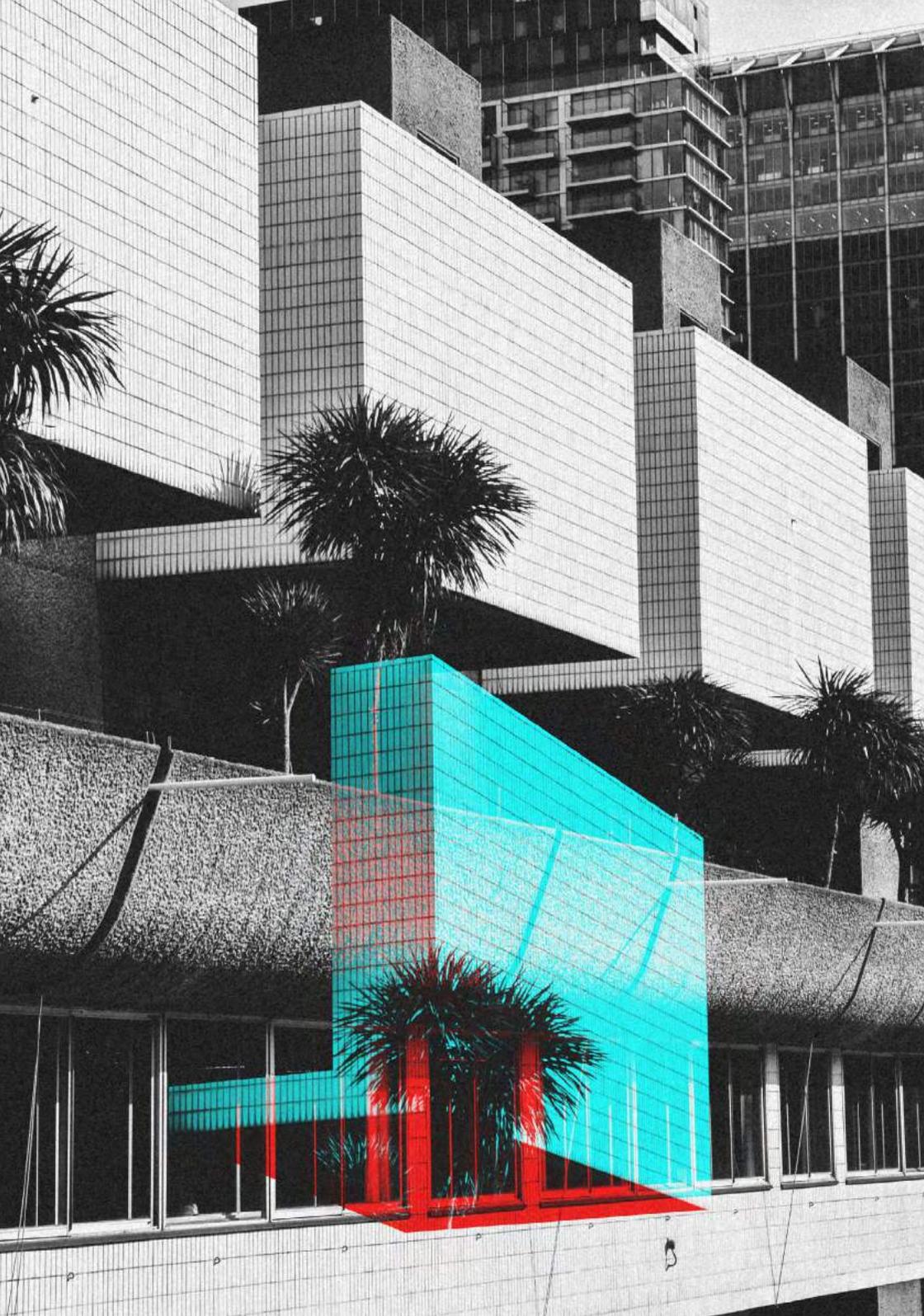
## ART & DESIGN

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Once inside the estate, it is natural to get drawn into the meandering skywalks and find oneself lost amongst a complex system of paths that seemingly lead to the exact same conglomeration of residents and gardens. Your sense of direction is lost while unconsciously moving further into the estate. The city is gradually silenced by the grainy concrete walls and a fully immersive experience of this new realm emerges. Water features flow along walkways, reflecting soft, mesmerising shadows onto the rough concrete. In the centre of the complex, the water pours

into a pond, trickling vertically down in harmony with the rising columns that frame it. At this point, the only audible sounds are chattering of people, trickling of the water, and the occasional tap of the rhythmically galloping heels. When the sun casts its warm light onto the inner world of the Barbican, combined with its own disconnect from the city, this retro-futuristic estate reveals a vision of the utopian life it intended to provide. In contrast with its domineering appearance from the outside, the Barbican is in fact a welcoming complex, an experimental form of living that realises the vision of the future as imagined in the 1950s. Although the Barbican may seem very poetic when viewed from a design perspective, it is important to realise that it is indeed a failed experiment. The Barbican was initially a social housing project with egalitarian values of raising living standards for all. Yet it turned into housing for middle-class residents shortly after; it was never used as social housing. Its skywalks were built with the intention of separating pedestrian routes from streets occupied by cars. However, raising pedestrian routes above ground proved unsuccessful as the dark alleys provided ample place for illegal activities and crime, especially at night when skywalks were largely unoccupied and hidden from view.

The Barbican stands undeniably as a monument of the past. It is precisely this connection to the past that makes the estate worthy of appreciation and admiration. Even though its appearance is not to everyone's taste, it's important to understand its significance as a retro-futuristic masterpiece, a vision from a different era. It may seem discordant in its modern surroundings, but the noise makes it a symphony in its own accord.



# Senses of Making

**FLEUR ELKERTON explores the nuances of noise within the production of visual art.**

The scratching of a pen on paper, the swish of a saturated brush into a paint pot, the exhalation of breath blowing away charcoal dust... Noises are integral to the creation of an artwork. Working with noise necessitates performance. However, as much as an artist may imbue their piece with energy and sound, the piece ends up as a static object often examined in reverent hushed tones. This disconnect between process and product is key. Does it truly matter if the end product is still and silent, if the method and message behind an artwork is noisy?

When one talks about art and sound, one would typically refer to Russian artist, Wassily Kandinsky. Attempting to capture the conscious and unconscious responses he felt whilst listening to classical music, he created abstract compositions in paint. Kandinsky was able to express the soaring notes and rhythms of the sounds he heard by using multiple colours and forms in a coherent confluence. In 1911, he wrote: 'Colour is the keyboard, the eyes are the hammers, the soul is the piano with many strings. The artist is the hand which plays, touching one key or another, to cause vibrations in the soul.' In trying to condense music and his emotional response to it, painting became a meditative practice for Kandinsky. During his Bavarian abstract-expressionist period, his partner Gabrielle Münter noted how she helped him overcome a period of artistic block on *Composition VI*. She suggested that Kandinsky repeatedly speak the word *uberflut* [flood] as he worked. When he began to do so, he ended up completing the painting within three days. Not only did sound become the message, it also became a part of the artwork's production process.

Sound isn't always the subject of focus within the artwork or its manufacture. It can be the impetus for an entire movement. This is exemplified in Dadaism, a movement born out of a negative reaction to the horrors and follies of the First World War. It flourished with avant-garde absurdist artworks. The movement was named after the vocalisation of utter nonsense: *dada*. The participants of early Dadaism focused on the creation of a genre they christened 'sound poetry', in which they created pieces of writing that were comprised of pure auditory discord. Many of these 'poems' were fashioned by dissecting words from newspapers with scissors, picking out and pasting down random pieces onto paper. By deconstructing words, the sound poets – such as German writer, Hugo Ball – were able to freely interpret the meanings of gibberish produced. Focus would be placed on the senselessness that the rhythmic sounds compose. Ball then would perform these 'sound poems' dressed in a ridiculous homemade cardboard outfit, adding to the somewhat farcical nature of the performance.

The name 'Dada' didn't just allude to nonsensical sound. The movement forged cacophony into a political statement of the mindlessness of war through a clever method of promoting the silliness of sounds. By mimicking the European leaders of the time, Ball's great oratory performances were subtly undermining their reputation.

Sound (whether real phrases or imaginary) was able to be simultaneously politically important and artistically satirical. As another Dadaist, Tristan Tzara, wrote in 'Monsieur Antipyrine's Manifesto' (1916): 'We are circus ringmasters and we can be found whistling amongst the winds of fairgrounds,

In contrast, contemporary artist Nick Cave has gone one step further. By accepting that working with noise necessitates performance, he is able to create works that invite the viewer to participate in the manufacture of noisy art. Cave's 'soundsuits' are pieces that hum with the potential of sounds not yet made. They are wearable, accessible, and fun. His pieces invite the wearer to jump around and dance (many have been used in dance performances and flash-mobs) while being covered in rainbow tassels, fur, or sequins. By obscuring the human form, his clothes enable the wearer to lose their inhibitions and make sound with wild abandon. It combines elements to form a multi-sensory experience.

Cave considers with his soundsuits what a lot of sound art doesn't: noise exists in transitory moment, while artworks are preserved to be viewed again and again. The processes used to produce his art reflects the messages behind the artworks. The way in which he produces art reflects the messages behind the artworks. Dadaism's politics are of course, important, yet we must be aware that the end product is important too. An artwork that evokes potential for sound in its future is undoubtedly the noisiest of all.



Nick Cave Sound Suit at the Norton Museum of Art. Courtesy of Michael Kagdis. <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.en>

DONUT

A poem by **ALYSON HWANG.**

There,  
in the milk tinted pool, water sloshes up the ivory tub  
just around 11, or 12, or the crack ass of midnight she's not sure  
but it's dark out.

Not that the bathroom has any goddamn windows.

Smearred red lip and clothed wet.  
She hurries, thinks about the tour for two beneath the bed sheets that will  
bleach her crimson.  
Pale skin, which he mistakes for self love, is from the nights  
spent in white rooms white sheets white dreams--

There's a suffocating silence right after her shower -  
the stinging air wrapping  
around her thin arms  
s q u e e z i n g  
itself between her wiry veins  
- she hears the belt clacking onto the floor, the intake of salivated air.

Well, she hears a lot of things - just won't tell you.

Short ones, with greasy hair and stubby fingers that think  
they're clever enough to clamber up her thigh  
the well dressed ones who pretend she's a present from a friend,  
being cute - 'I'm not this sort of person'  
But he's not that sort of person the week after, on the same street,  
waiting like  
some starved dog for her holed silhouette.

Sometimes, they're worse. not accepting that she can see the picture of  
his little girl hugging her warm mother, giggling at the sunshine that  
she's never seen before.

Requirements for employment: peachy flesh, pretty lips  
kitty grin. bruised knees and slack jaws - a sight.  
Stealing out of civics and restless at night.

Resting her head on the toilet seat, rotten galaxies colliding,  
in the porcelain crap hole that's been waxed over and over  
because other girls have left the same memories behind.  
dolloed hair left on the sink, face paint left by the door -  
the lukewarm water burns her skin.  
Glitter sashaying as she does to the floor where she is.

'I want to see you for all you are'

Why

do they always say that? soft word on cracked lips it's like they've  
forgotten

the stacked bills that they'll chuck at her, demanding a dutiful dance  
with gun play, and triggers that leave them breathless,  
her with disgust, him with pleasure

She manages, scrubs some shame off, just enough to help her sink  
faster.

It skins her out of who she was or may be,  
but isn't quite enough to leave her  
bare.

He leaves a residue: a type of drug that she hasn't learned the name yet  
it leaves you sore and hiccupping throughout dawn,  
shivering underneath the hotel blankets that seemed clean once upon a  
time

- that time when pigtails weren't a kink and hotels were castles  
now they're prisons or privileges

It makes her take the graveyard shifts  
and surely, make her graveyard shift.



Artwork by Karolina Stellaki

### ‘Frank, funny and humane’

**FREYA ALDER explores the success and criticism of poet Hollie McNish and asks why female poets are still so often told to pipe down.**

Think of a poet. It’s easy to reach for the same old stock images. Bearded guy on a hill, or maybe by a lake. Maybe you’re more enlightened than that. Either way, I doubt you think of a giggling woman wearing big hoop earrings, a baby attached to her breast, a phone attached to her hand, scrolling, scrolling, through memes.

Hollie McNish writes poetry about motherhood, gender and sex in a brutally frank, funny and humane way. You can find the poetry in many places: in chunky books, such as *Cherry Pie* (2015), *Nobody Told Me* (2016) and *Plum* (2017), as short posts on Instagram, spoken on YouTube, or at gigs across the country. These poems are not always long and are not always highly crafted in the conventional sense, but they are always thoughtful and rowdily outspoken about the experience of womanhood. McNish describes the following as ‘a train scribble’:

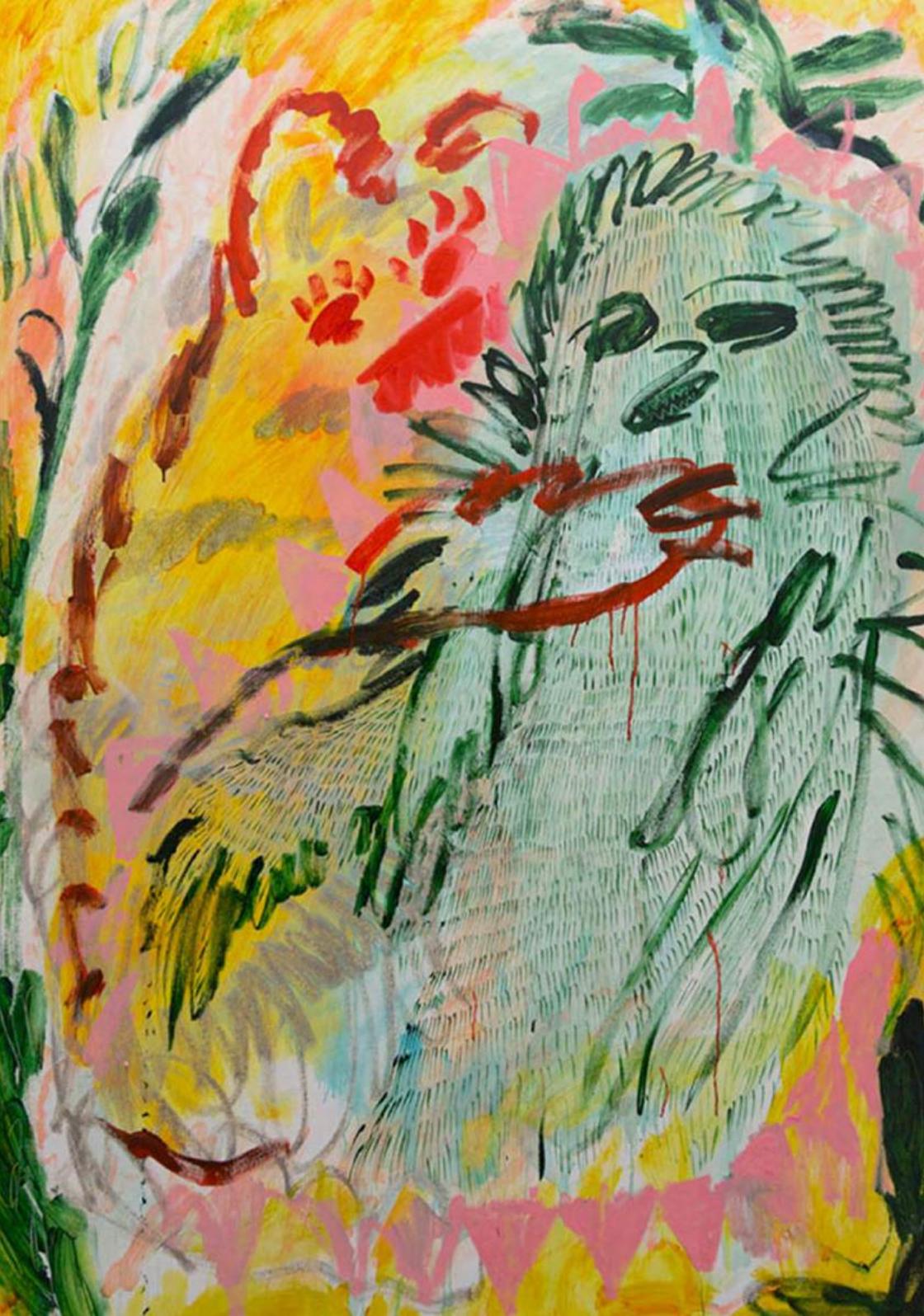
I want to sex you  
like the wasp sexes  
its figs

Crawl into your  
juicy skin  
wings tucked in  
and lick

Except I want to live  
after we’re done

Many applaud McNish for her poetry. Indeed, she won the Ted Hughes Award for New Work in 2017. However, with success comes criticism – a lot of criticism. Most notably, poet Rebecca Watts wrote a scathing review of McNish and similar ‘young female poets’ in the PN Review. Comparing them to Donald Trump, she argued that ‘the new poets are products of a cult of personality, which demands from its heroes only that they be “honest” and “accessible”’. She, like many others, would prefer these poets to pipe down.

Of course, you are allowed to dislike poetry. But what Watts’ comment and others like it suggest is not a specific dislike for a specific poet. Rather, they seem to embody a larger concern about female poets who write about what it means to be female in everyday life. These poets – who speak loudly and clearly through snappy poems on social media – somehow still don’t fit into the modern literary sphere.



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## LITERATURE

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Let's address the honesty issue first. McNish's poem 'Embarrassed' has almost 1.5 million views on YouTube and discusses feeling uncomfortable breastfeeding in public:

In this country of billboards, covered in tits  
And family newsagent magazines full of it  
W.H. Smith top shelves out for men  
I'm getting embarrassed in case  
a small flash of flesh might offend.

I hardly need to summarise: McNish's poetry speaks for itself and leaves little to be interpreted. When it comes to women writing poetry, they tend to fall into one of two categories. Poets like McNish, who thrive on writing about womanness, and poets who would shudder at the very idea of being referred to as 'female poets'. The latter, understandably, do not want to be penned in by their gender. Watts, however, is taking this personal preference and imposing it as general truth. She suggests that talking about being a woman – an experience that over half of the world shares – is something that does not belong in poetry. 'Personality' may well not belong in politics, but by comparing these poets to Trump, Watts suggests that personality doesn't belong in poetry – expressing emotion does not belong in poetry. Which leaves us wondering, what does?

Watts' second point is that by making poetry accessible, you dumb it down, a view which seems both snobbish as well as ignorant of the systemic sexism that still exists. In the publishing industry, women make up 80% of the workforce, and yet out of this 20% of men, 51% of them are managers or in positions of authority. In short, although there are more women in the industry, it is the men who make the call on what gets heard by the public. Therefore, what these female poets are doing by posting their poetry online is taking control of their own press and success, their own voice. What they are doing is fixing the imbalance for the next generation of young female poets who, perhaps not being able to afford big books of poetry, will find it online, and think 'I could do that too'.

I must admit, I quite like the idea of this consumer poetry that so many disparage: 'er, hi, yes, I will have a cappuccino and, er, a poem too. Thanks.' I want a little nugget of poetry everyday, whether I sit down and read it in a book, annotating as I go, or if I scroll past it on Instagram, skim-reading but loving every second. McNish injects poetry – poetry that makes us think hard about the lives we live – into our everyday. Whether you love it or hate it, I for one would encourage anything that makes young people – or old people – or any one – want to read poetry.

# Spirituality in Song

**ANUM MAHMOOD explores the role of music and lyricism in mystic literature.**

Mystics are people who directly achieve oneness with what they see as divinity. Music is one method of accessing the divine and it is often used in literature, expressed through the modes of song and verse. The connection between the verse form and sound becomes evident in the use of musical language and a lyrical style. Music is essential to spiritual perceptions of divinity because, to mystics, it is an echo of the divine vibrational flow that exists in the universe. This theory is prominent in the works of numerous mystical writers and, specifically, is explored across the writings of Hazrat Inayat Khan, Jalal al-Din Rumi and William Blake.

Khan, a 20th-century Sufi write, who was awarded the greatest title for a musician in India ('Tansen'), suggests that 'music may have itself been the beginning of language' and holds that our entire universe is in fact made up of abstract sounds. The vibrations are too fine to be audible and, according to Khan, once one understands the mysterious workings of sound, one understands the mystery of the Universe. In terms of sounds we actually hear, the section of Khan's *The Mysticism of Sound and Music* entitled 'Music' beautifully explains how 'everything on the earth contributes to [music's] harmony' – from animal life, where 'tigers and lions hold their operas in the wilderness [and] Music is the only means of understanding', to language in which 'music is hidden...as the soul is hidden in the body.' Nature operates as an ongoing orchestra; the musical arts of the human race are only a reflection of this. Khan points out that many of the first religious texts were revealed through song or in verse, which is in itself strongly suggestive of a yearning for rhythm, harmony, and music.

An appreciation of music as a path to divinity is also evident in Rumi's works, which are often set to song. In a poem translated by Kabir Helminski, 'Clothes Abandoned on the Shore', Rumi writes that 'like a reed flute, / you are encased by your body, / with a restless breathy sound inside', depicting the body as the instrument and the soul as sound. Rumi uses this image often in his verse. The reed is man before enduring pain; in suffering he makes holes in the reed, transforming it into a flute through which the melody of divinity is played. Constantly a relationship between soul and song is weaved through the literature of the Sufis, and in fact the reed flute is widely used in their musical practices. The breath is felt to be a manifestation of the spirit, hence why wind instruments are so important. Music and the divine spirit are unified through imagery and portrayed as one and the same. Khan's theory of the vibrational essence of existence can therefore be applied to Rumi's poetry; the essence of humankind, often called the soul, is purely sound. The essence of the universe, or God, is manifested through song.

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## LITERATURE

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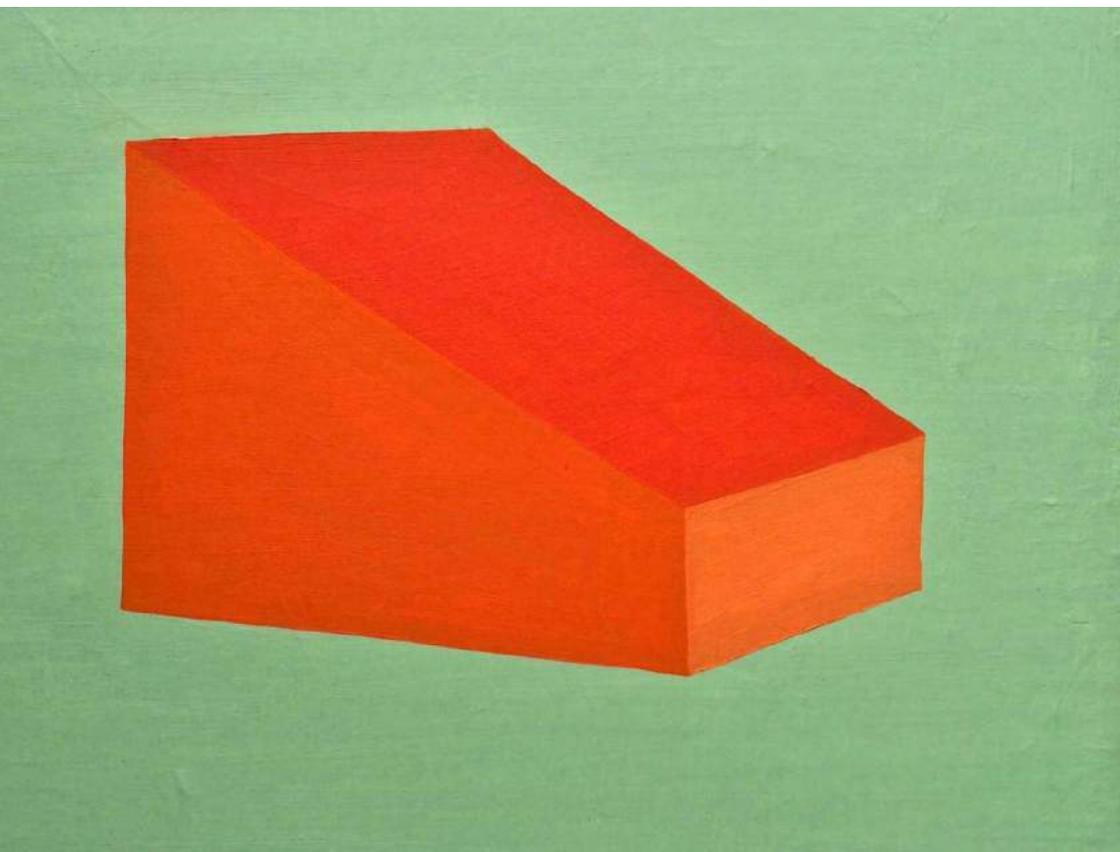
Music and sound are laced throughout William Blake's *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*. This collection begins with the piper piping 'songs of happy cheer', and ending with the much darker 'Voice of the Ancient Bard'. Blake is concerned with the duality of innocence versus experience in human existence and he subtitled the Songs 'Shewing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul'. The musicality of innocence involves much 'piping', 'laughing', and birds singing to 'the bell's cheerful sound', whereas in experience we hear darker sounds: 'the youthful Harlot's curse', 'every Infants cry of fear', and much unresolved weeping. 'Is that trembling cry a song? / Can it be a song of joy?' suggests an association between music and joy; falling from innocence distorts the joyful music, or nature's 'sweet chorus of Ha, Ha, He', and depicts a desire to return to it. The soul in innocence is a freely expressive and unrestrained song, before it experiences 'chains', 'bondage', and 'manacles'. The innocent soul represents the essence of man and, in its musicality, the essence of life, just as Khan suggests.

Through observing the ways in which these famous mystic poets treat the theme of music, it is clear that it is perceived to be more than mere entertainment and is in fact essential to their sense of spirituality. The innate connection conveyed between the soul and song, between music and divinity, profoundly suggests that there is something in music which is essential to life and nature. Khan's theory that life itself is vibration, and that music is equivalent to the organic manifestation of the divine creative flow, can be applied to these poets to show how the musicality in their poetry is more than just appealing imagery; it is an expression of sound as the essence of God, the soul, and life.

**'Sonic disturbance': language and belonging**  
***ALICE EDMOND explores the learning of languages in Nabokov's Pnin and the consequent difficulties of fitting in as a non-native English speaker.***

Lesser known among Vladimir Nabokov's works is the lighthearted 1957 novel *Pnin*, starkly contrasting with his more well-known *Lolita* (1955). Initially written as a series of comic short stories, the novel depicts the minor adventures and (more often than not) misadventures of Russian émigré Professor Timofey Pnin as he grapples with modern 1950s America and the English language. *Pnin* is a funny book, and worth reading for that reason alone. Although he only started to write in English when he moved to America in 1940, Nabokov's ability to creatively employ the English language is remarkable. Aside from offering sheer pleasure and amusement, the book is a moving and sympathetic portrayal of a man trying to build a life in a baffling and unpredictable America. The most striking way that Nabokov illustrates this struggle is through his depiction of Pnin's language, both English and Russian, as pure sound. Contrary to what one might expect, this does not dehumanise Pnin. The effect is comic but also compassionate and we are in solidarity with him against his ignorant and hard-hearted colleagues. The episodes in the book take place over four years in which Pnin is a professor at the rather provincial Waindell College and we follow him in and out of various lodgings. He tries to find himself a home free from 'sonic disturbances' such as workmen drilling, inquisitive residents and radiators that speak Canadian French being examples of such. But sonic disturbance is an intrinsic part of the book in a broader sense as well. Although used to great comic effect, Pnin's native Russian and muddled English are portrayed as confusing and alienating sounds that are awkward and disruptive, symbolic of him as a misfit and someone who does not belong.

The Russian language features throughout the book in the form of little asides 'vot i vsyo (that's all)', interjections 'slava bogu! (thank god!)' and seemingly random substitutions of English words for Russian 'he picked up his portfel' (briefcase).' To the non-Russian speaker, these transliterations take on an auditory quality and become sound rather than language. Even Pnin's own name is received as a noise rather than a recognisable word "'here speaks Professor—" There followed a preposterous little explosion'. It doesn't function well to the foreign ears of those around him: 'Professor – now comes a difficult one, I am afraid – Professor Pun-noon'. If Pnin's Russian is met with confusion, his English operates on a different level altogether. In fact, he could be described as living amongst three languages: his native Russian, the standard English of Waindell College, and 'Pninian' English. Nabokov breaks down Pnin's idiosyncratic style of spoken English into an evocative technical description 'he had enormous difficulty ('dzeefeecooltsee' in Pninian English) with depalatzation, never



managing to remove the extra Russian moisture from t's and d's before the vowels he so quaintly softened.' In Nabokov's hands, language is often rendered as a curiously mechanical series of sounds, sometimes seeming to act quite independently from the person producing them. While for Pnin this has the regrettable effect of making him a figure of fun to his colleagues, it endears him to the reader. The head of the English department may entertain at cocktail parties with his imitations and mockeries of Pnin, and the head of the French department may want him fired, but we are rooting for him.

In a letter to his publisher, Nabokov discussed his intentions for the character of Pnin. He wrote that he wanted to create a comic, physically unattractive character and 'have him emerge, in juxtaposition to so-called "normal" individuals, as by far the more human, the more important'. In his afterword to one edition of the novel Michael Wood disputes this, concluding that 'Pnin is not more human or more important than other people, he is what humanity looks like when it is faltering and foolish, and trying to rescue a few shreds of dignity and privacy.'

Yet Wood captures precisely what makes Pnin human: his bumbling ultimately showcases his humility and kindness, earning him loyal friendship. In response to a question regarding Pnin's peculiar pronunciation of a colleague's name, his friend fondly explains that Pnin 'employs a nomenclature all his own. His verbal vagaries add a new thrill to life. His mispronunciations are mythopoeic. His slips of the tongue are oracular. He calls my wife John'. At a point towards the end of the book when Pnin's idiosyncrasies seem to jeopardise his professional life, this personal recognition offers some hope that Pnin might yet find himself at home in America. While Pnin's fate at the end of the novel remains unclear, we have reason to believe that there is a 'Pninian' middle ground between assimilation and alienation where language is not a total barrier to belonging.

## MOHINI CAN SCREAM

A short story by RADHIKA JANI.

Mohini woke up ten minutes before her alarm. On a normal morning, bombarded with images of the day's to-do-list, she would have risen by instinct, deactivating her alarm prematurely and shrinking her every movement to not disturb her Sleeping Working Husband.

But this morning even began different.

Anand's snoring had crystallised overnight and now assumed a rhythm, and before Mohini could realise what she was doing, she was listening, consciously subconsciously following his breath vibrations, present in a marital bed at sunrise in a way she hadn't been in years.

In their marriage's infant days, a Young Mohini would catch herself watching her shiny new husband as he slept, sometimes with anthropological detachment, sometimes with tender fascination, wondering if he might break or burst into dust any moment. Back then she memorised the patchy patterns of his milk skin, the camel lashes that masqueraded as softness, the way he self-protectively slept crossing an arm over his chest and his glasses attractively dented his attractively prominent nose. Endearing and unnerving was her bubble-wrapped husband, hand delivered to her like a toy with lanky charm.

Today she forgot about his skin and his nose and simply winced at the chickpea shaak stain on his white pyjama top. Gently moving his chest-crossed arm to inspect further, she ended up wincing more when she caught her own hand stained with the tangerine smudges of week-old mehndi. *Make an olive oil and lime paste to help mehndi fade faster* she added to her mental to-do-list – her grandmother used to say it was bad keeping to wear mehndi that was no longer brilliant because it stunk of passivity.

Then, for the first time in months, Mohini's alarm rang shrill and glorious, filling the non-master-size master bedroom like a sun would in May. Anand put a pillow over his head, and Mohini began her day.

But Young Mohini pitched a tent in Mohini's heart and stayed for dinner that day. As she emptied the tumble drier, she remembered the late afternoons spent scrubbing towels in Nagpur, her mother singing to Lata Mangeshkar and battling with the monsoon rains to be heard. Back then Mohini dreamt of waiting tables at the emerging jazz clubs of Bombay – her father had taken her once as a child and for the following months she dreamt of a sax and sitar hugging, she even walked to school replaying in her mind the drum and tabla fusion beats she'd heard that beautiful sticky night. As manager, she thought, she would fill her bars with Common Folk because jazz was made for revolution, and the light skinned fat cats who smoked pipes to Leon Abbey and wanted jazz all to themselves also did

not want revolution.

She remembered she agreed to marry Anand the day he bought himself a saxophone, promising to teach her one day once he had learnt himself. She regretted her decision the day he told her they were moving to England, and he laughed when she asked, in all sincerity, how she would manage Bombay bars when an ocean lay between them. He never taught her the saxophone, and he never learnt himself – a pattern of boyish excitement followed by boyish indifference Mohini would come to know well in her husband. Eventually the thing collected too much dust and Mohini gave it to their local Sue Ryder.

That morning Mohini remembered a time when she was rinsing her rice and heard a young-sounding-woman on her kitchen radio asking another young-sounding-woman if she could 'pick her brain'. What a funny saying, Mohini thought, something so covetous about such a request yet something so flattering too. What made young-sounding-woman-2's brain so worthy of being picked? And why had Anand never asked to pick hers? After all, was hers not a brain that Thought a lot of Things and sometimes Things that were worthy of being spoken about? He asked her questions sure, many every day in fact, but never did she feel she was asked anything where her uniquely crafted perspective was required – not by him, not by her children, not even by her bright-eyed friends. Indeed, all of these people dependent on her knowledge like they might be a Google search, but nothing more, as though they believed An Idea to be outside her zone of operations.

Mohini had not realised how much time had passed until she heard the muted thunder of Anand rushing down the stairs. Muted, because Anand always found a way to be lacklustre.

Routine was a hasty kiss goodbye on the cheek, but still thinking about the radio voice that was asked to speak and was consequently listened to, Mohini made sure that nothing about this morning was routine. Before Anand reached the door, a small woman in her small kitchen found her stomach and called her husband's name. 'Anand', she sang – to him it was a mutter, to her, a roar. She had intended it to sound a question but it emerged from her stomach as a command, shocking Anand as much as it shook Mohini herself.

'Do you want to know what I think of your tie?' asked a half-dazed Mohini, the question slipping out like hot butter and without a second thought.

Anand nodded, cautiously, wondering which Star TV soap opera his wife had picked up this particular trick from.

But Mohini choked, and the couple held silence between them until it

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began to curdle. 'It's... lovely. Maybe too red' she eventually fumbled out, immediately angry at herself for asking a question she had no answer to. She closed her eyes as Anand brushed off his confusion as swiftly as he did her, and with a chuckle, he stumbled into the outside world. Stumbled, because nothing Anand did was ever done with intention.

Feeling stripped and suddenly arid, Mohini sunk herself into a pile of unfolded clothes with a brain left unpicked. She wondered if her pea green walls even knew what her voice sounded like, because in this house she barely spoke unless spoken to. If she called to them, how would they be able to differentiate between her voice and a sea of other voices calling them? Then she wondered if she herself would even be able to recognise it. With a heavy heart, she asked why the young girl who once traded sugar rotis for ACK Comics with the Gujarati boy next door grew up having nothing to say. Grew up to be laughed at by a Light-Footed Giver-Upper No-Sax husband.

So, on that morning that was so unlike other mornings, as Young Mohini wept in her heart-pitched tent, Old Mohini screamed. She screamed for three minutes, without cease, and without anyone but herself and her pea green walls hearing. It was the most noise she had made in years. If she was to lose her voice, she thought, better to have it be this way.



**Dismissing Dialogue**  
**OLIVIA HETHERINGTON explores the subordination of dialogue in films.**

Mainstream cinema, despite its rapid evolution, has yet to expand beyond two of the most basic human senses: hearing and sight. It could therefore seem crucial to our understanding of a film to leave these senses intact. Myroslav Slaboshpytskyi's 2014 film *The Tribe* is an experiment in how it feels to have one of these critical on-screen senses impaired, through the absence of spoken dialogue.

*The Tribe* introduces the bleak and grisly tale of Sergey (Hryhoriy Fesenko), a teenager who is sent to a state-run boarding school for deaf children in Kiev. Upon his arrival, Sergey is inducted into a gang who communicate exclusively in Ukrainian sign language. He survives a violent hazing, and quickly assimilates. It is only when Sergey falls in love with a girl from the organisation, whom it is his role to pimp out, that the delicate equilibrium of criminal activity is upset. This inspires an onslaught of gang-violence, full-frontal nudity and one of the most uncomfortable abortion scenes that I have ever had the displeasure of watching. And it all takes place without a single spoken word.

While on-screen communication does occur in the form of sign language, Slaboshpytskyi denies a typical audience's full understanding by withholding subtitles. But it is not a film meant exclusively for those who understand Ukrainian sign language, because sound plays a crucial part in it. Like someone who has lost the use of a sense, Slaboshpytskyi's decision to neglect vocal dialogue results in an enhanced perception of what we *are* presented with: the satisfying jangle of the headmistress' plastic bracelets, schoolboys' footsteps as they stalk a potential target, a jean zip as it's pulled down. Each sound is meaningful and their effect on the audience is heightened. Slaboshpytskyi's decision to only include diegetic sound (that which originates from action on screen), as well as his refusal to use a film score, creates an atmosphere of authenticity which demands your full attention.

It is not only for the purposes of elevated sense-perception that the rejection of dialogue is significant. At first glance, we are excluded from *The Tribe*. This is reminiscent of Anthony Burgess' 1962 novel *A Clockwork Orange*, in which the inclusion of the made-up 'Nadsat' language hinders our full comprehension of the text. The effect of Slaboshpytskyi's decision not to include subtitles is initially alienating, and mirrors the displacement felt by Sergey in his cold new environment. As *The Tribe* draws to a close, and once Sergey has proved that he's a capable member of the gang, we have already started to adjust to this alternative mode of communication.

It is not the first film to venture away from spoken discourse. One example of a film which self-consciously deprives audiences of dialogue is José Luis Guerín's

*In The City of Sylvia* (2007), a mostly dialogue-free account of a man exploring Strasbourg, looking for Sylvia, a woman from his past. The film is an unhurried account of voyeurism. The protagonist sits quietly and drinks in the atmosphere of the city, occasionally sketching. The only time in which we are party to a conversation is when our protagonist approaches the woman he believes to be Sylvie, and this scene is the undeniable crux of the film. The plot has been building up to this one moment, and so we savour the dialogue, valuing it all the more for its rarity.

'Fish Out of Water,' an episode from the third season of animated series *Bojack Horseman* rejects the use of dialogue in favour of non-verbal sound and visual storytelling. As protagonist Bojack ventures underwater, he finds himself unable to communicate through his diving helmet. Whilst Bojack can hear the multitude of languages that are being spoken around him, he does not understand them. This episode makes effective use of film score and diegetic sound but utilises very little speech, with the exception of the protagonist's internal monologue. The total absence of communication furthers our understanding of Bojack's loneliness and accentuates his estrangement from society.

The decision to reject dialogue in a film is a brave yet powerful one. It ultimately serves to narrow our scope of focus, demanding greater empathy from the audience and acting as an unconventional narrative tool. The absence of subtitles or spoken conversation can even, in some cases, make us feel like outsiders. Once upon a time, cinema was ruled by the silent film, until technological advancements appeared in the form of synchronised dialogue. Now, in the age of 4D cinema and trite franchises, what better way to challenge your audience than to strip it all back.



Artwork by Liam Mertens

## The Case Against Netflix

OLIVIA DALEY examines the debate over Netflix's impact on the film industry.

'There's no point looking at a movie on your laptop on your own at home... It's a communal experience. That's what cinema is' declared director Steve McQueen during the promotion of his latest film, *Widows*. The filmmaker is not the first person in the industry to take part in the debate about streaming services and their impact on cinema-going. Netflix's rejection of the traditional theatrical in favour of a same-day worldwide release via its streaming platform certainly represents a disruption to the status quo of film viewing. As a result, the consumption of film is growing into a more insular and isolated experience than the communal social ritual it used to be. But, more importantly, Netflix is democratising access to the production and consumption of films in a way that indicates a positive change for the future of cinema.

McQueen's comments follow Cannes Film Festival's decision to bar Netflix films from its competition. Echoing this sentiment, the International Confederation of Art Cinemas (CICAE) released a statement arguing that 'prestigious film festivals' should reserve competition slots for 'works of art that will be seen in cinemas internationally'. In a similar vein, Steven Spielberg, James Cameron and Christopher Nolan have all explicitly stated their aversion to working with the company. Perhaps it is nostalgia that makes older filmmakers so wary of this new era of streaming: the meaningfulness of cinema has arguably been lost, as streaming services have sanitised and depersonalised its consumption, oversaturating viewers with content. The magic that comes with the immersive experience of cinema is impossible for the streaming service to replicate.

Yet, to be against Netflix for ostensibly lowering the reputability of cinema is an unfair stance. CICAE's posturing insinuates that any film released by Netflix is tainted by an inherent lower-brow status. Watching a film on a laptop or tablet, however, should not make it seem any less commendable. The artistry of a film should speak for itself, no matter the conditions in which it is consumed.

While many titans of the industry titans have been quick to balk at Netflix's release strategy, others have in fact jumped at the opportunity to work with the streaming service. Ava DuVernay (*Selma*, *13th*) and Steven Soderbergh (the *Ocean's* trilogy, *Erin Brockovich*) have signed deals with the company, while Martin Scorsese chose it as the distributor for his upcoming gangster-crime film, *The Irishman*. Although it is easy to criticise Netflix's impact on the traditional cinematic experience, it is also important to note its role in democratising access to cinema in the first place.

It is often overlooked that going to the pictures is a privileged experience, one that is not always available to low-income or segregated communities with difficult access to theatres. This fact was deftly articulated in a recent tweet from DuVernay: 'Can't see SELMA in Selma.'

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No theater there. Can't see STRAIGHT OUTTA COMPTON in Compton. No theater there. #CinemaSegregation'. Netflix's £7.99 monthly membership, while still inaccessible for many, is far more reasonable than the UK average cinema ticket price of £7.49.

Due to its capacity to develop a high volume of content, the platform is also able to provide minority groups with opportunities to direct, write and act which are usually hard to access via the traditional avenues of film-making. Its vast output and global reach mean that the firm is able to take greater risks, such as working with first-time directors and telling stories that Hollywood would consider too 'niche'. Netflix is allowing more global, diverse and experimental storytelling to flourish. A film like Bong Joon-ho's 2017 *Okja* may be a better visual experience on the big screen, but it is questionable whether a film about a young girl and her super-pig best friend would have ever been financed without the streaming platform.

Netflix is choosing to break its own rules with the upcoming release of Alfonso Cuarón's *Roma*, with the film set to premiere in New York and Los Angeles theatres weeks before its release on the streaming platform in December. The firm has acknowledged the central flaw of its release strategy: that a film's visuals would be under-served without the cinematic experience, which could hinder its chances to win awards.

As summed up by Cuarón himself, 'Seeing *Roma* on the big screen is just as important as ensuring people all over the world have the chance to experience it in their homes.' The democratising power of streaming is not to be undervalued. Netflix should consider making their one-time *Roma* strategy a permanent one. Only with this approach can the conundrum be resolved, one which reconciles the traditional artistry of films with the innovation of future technologies.

## Soundtracking Memory

**NED PREVEZER shows why the magic of film lies not just in what we see, but in what we hear.**

You sit down to watch a film. Darkness fills the screen, which then lights up with the cartoon MGM logo, before fading to black again. After ten seconds of silence, you hear three slow drones of a trumpet, followed by the dramatic burst of an orchestra coming to life, alongside the image of the sun appearing behind the crest of the earth in the black void of space. The song is Richard Strauss' 1896 easily familiar and much parodied 'Also sprach Zarathustra', and the film is Stanley Kubrick's 1968 opus *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

*2001* is easily considered one of the greatest films ever made. Kubrick's stunning visuals combined with a mind-bending narrative make it a masterpiece of filmmaking, with this opening going down in the history of cinema as one of its finest. But half of the opening's magic lies in what plays out of the speakers while we are watching. Strauss' epic orchestral piece transforms the already awe-inspiring vision of the sun rising over the earth into an image that never leaves us, and one that sets the standard for the feat of visual artistry we are about to experience.

It is hard to imagine that *2001* could be as powerful without its music. It is no coincidence that in the first half an hour, the only sound that we hear (other than the nonsensical cry of a tribe of apes) is music. Kubrick always wanted his film to be a 'nonverbal experience'. He knew the power that music could have on an attentive audience in a darkened movie theatre; it voices abstract ideas and concepts that go beyond what can be seen on screen.

Let us not forget that 90 years ago, when cinema first became a form of entertainment for the public, the only sound that you would hear in movie theatres would be a musical accompaniment played alongside each film. We now have the benefit of movies with sound, in which music has kept a vital role. It is the voice of the film's spirit, that which lies beneath the surface of what we see. The soundtrack is no longer just the accompaniment to the visual artistry, it has become part of the fabric of the story. For composer Vangelis (*Blade Runner*, *Chariots of Fire*), a film score was not only a reflection of what was happening on screen, but something happening within it. Played throughout Ridley Scott's sci-fi masterpiece *Blade Runner*, is Vangelis' 'Memories of Green'. It is a beautifully sinister piece, with a minor key piano melody that weaves its way in between the disturbing sounds of machinery in a futuristic metropolis. The piano melody finds itself lost and out of place in the mechanical city, just as Scott's protagonist, Deckard, lives in a world which he despises.

In this sense, what we see and what we hear become part of one another – the music defining the film and vice versa. We cannot imagine Mike Nichols' 1968 *The Graduate* without hearing Simon & Garfunkel's 'The Sound of Silence', nor can we hear that song without imagining a bronzed Dustin Hoffman in his black '60s sunglasses, lying lazily on a lilo in a swimming pool of the middle-class Los Angeles suburbs. The soundtrack of *The Graduate* differs widely from the original scores of Vangelis or Hans Zimmer.

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It isn't original music made specifically for the film, yet 'The Sound of Silence' fits so seamlessly into the story that it could well have been part of the original score. The visuals and the music become synonymous with one another, even though their junction seems initially incongruous. The image of Hoffman, driving at full speed down Highway 1 in a desperate attempt to stop his lover from getting hitched, might be a tragic one – but the merry skiffle of 'Mrs Robinson' tells us otherwise. It does what the screen alone cannot do; it tells us it's going to be alright.

We are no longer just *hearing* the music that plays in the background of movies; we are *listening* to it. When we remember a scene, we do not just remember what we saw, but also what we felt when we first experienced the glorious audio-visual combination that is cinema. After seeing *2001*, sitting down to listen to 'Also sprach Zarathustra' becomes a new experience all together. The piece is stunning on its own, a masterpiece in and of itself – but surely, one may argue, it is the marriage with Kubrick's images that gives it the power it has today? Why, then, does Strauss' epic 19th century tone poem continue to mesmerise post-*2001* listeners? Perhaps its beauty and sheer power still captivates us. Or maybe we listen to relive the feeling that comes only from watching a film for the first time; the feeling that you've experienced something magical.



HOW?

A poem by SOPHIA WALLS.

How?

How do you find everything that's precious to me  
and suddenly turn it into an insecurity?

Your tattoo-birthmark of disdain still remains.

The special prison you keep your prisoners doesn't abstain.

Some pointless perfection

you plough into every rejection.

You make me fear the light:

too bright it is to see the true shadows that hide,

lurking in every false positive reality. Everything must be seen in stark  
clarity.

The goodness of life must be insincere,

with this light that blinds us here.

Together we try to tear this wallpaper apart.

But I have no idea where to start?

Flip out of these actors and out of this scene.

This stage is just a gleam

of all the worlds beyond the worlds we birth into and mean.

Find me reality: all the bare bones, debris and fatalities;

The emptiness; the grey skies;

The great void of all our minds.

The swallows in the blue skies

must be some trick we play,

to keep us going to the end of the day.

Happiness is just a trap,

Our existences mapped

On an overestimation of meaning,

one we must surely be dreaming?

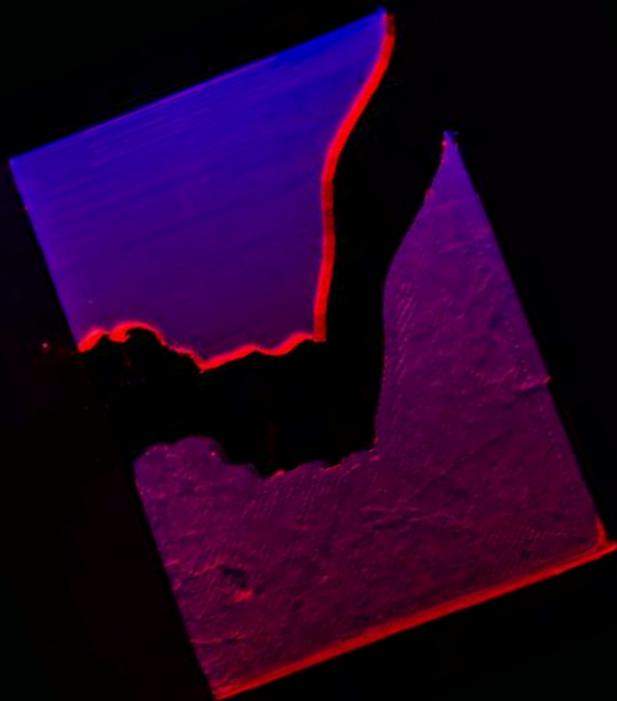
Till disappointment comes our way. But what lies beneath this stage?

Within the voices that

echo lines from another's cage?

What are these words I try to colour the world I see?

Something to fill the minds with something to be.



Artwork by Loukis Menelaou

# Holocaust and Holocaustal

**DANIEL LUBIN discusses the danger of silence in Larry Kramer's *The Normal Heart*.**

*'In a way, like a lot of Jewish men of Larry's generation, the Holocaust is a defining historical moment, and what happened in the early 1980s with AIDS felt, and was in fact, holocaustal to Larry.'*

As playwright Tony Kushner notes of contemporary dramatist and activist Larry Kramer, it was his dual Jewish and gay identities that informed his sensibility towards the AIDS crisis that ravaged the West in the late 20th century. As Kushner points out, given the epidemic's palpable echoes of the Holocaust, it is unsurprising that the period gave rise to a series of gay Jewish writers drawing parallels between the two traumas. The analogy is seen most explicitly in Kramer's 1985 play *The Normal Heart*. Given some more obvious similarities between the two events however, Kramer draws on unsettling and obscure likenesses to compose a message that is complexly loyal to and critical of the communities it grapples with.

The play revolves around activist Ned Weeks who challenges the male gay community to speak up against the American institutions turning blind eyes to the death tolls. More controversially, he calls for the community to question its own sexual practice, his self-righteous hostility bringing him into conflict with his fellow activists. 'When are we going to admit we might be spreading this?' he asks, urging the community to draw to a close the era of promiscuity that defined the '60s and '70s. 'We have simply fucked ourselves silly for years and years.' With the privilege of retrospect, a present-day audience can appreciate that HIV/AIDS is indeed sexually transmitted – in 1985 this was only suspicion. His friend Mickey expresses the confusion and despair of the time: 'How can we tell people to stop when it might turn out to be caused by—I don't know!' Ned's outcry threatens the community's culture – as Mickey says, free love was 'what being gay stood for.'

The primary similarity between the periods of the Holocaust and AIDS Crisis is the mass eradication predominantly of two specific marginalised populations. In both as well, the relative governments and media created environments that advanced the othering of these communities. Indeed this is the link Kramer's contemporary William M. Hoffman makes in the preface to his 1985 play *As Is*. He writes, 'as I heard stories of people with AIDS being abandoned by friends and families, mistreated by health workers, and evicted from apartments ... stories of the Holocaust came to my mind.' It is not just the dramatic death count that resonates with Hoffman, but echoes of the increasing displays of hostility from 'us' to 'them' – Hoffman's family were 'murdered on the street by their Polish

*Artwork by Faye Weiwei*



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and Latvian neighbours.'

While Hoffman is haunted by the rift that expands between the general and marginalised populations, for Kramer the ghosts emerge from the cracks within the oppressed community. *The Normal Heart* draws a comparison between the American Jewish body of the '30s and '40s and male gay community of the '80s. The two are linked by their shared failure to lobby either the Roosevelt or Reaganite governments to directly address the crises.

Ned's remorse at American Jews' failure to lobby their government to intervene during the Holocaust prompts him to take action. He laments the failure of Jewish-owned American papers to publicise Hitler's 'final solution'. 'What causes silence like that?' he asks. 'Why didn't the American Jews help the German Jews get out? Their very own people!' Silence is pervasive: American Jews; Roosevelt's government; the Reagan administration. Ned asks if the gay community will follow suit. The character's rage seems to be Kramer's own, and their exasperation is both at their ancestors and their contemporaries.

It is true that a primary difference between the two phenomena is that while the Holocaust was deliberate and insidious, the '80s epidemic's tragic impact on the gay community was only incidental. But, although it would be blatantly inappropriate to compare the Reagan administration to the Nazi regime – they are not equivalents in the analogy – it is important to recognise the US government's complicity in the prolongation of the epidemic. Germany proactively eradicated its scapegoat; as Kramer suggests, America quietly allowed its own to perish.

In a 2003 interview Tony Kushner discusses what he considers to be the Jewish responsibility when grappling with the Holocaust: 'The only thing that we can actively do to speak to the Holocaust now is to make sure no other holocausts happen'. He continues, 'of course they're happening all the time'. *The Normal Heart* looks to its past and then to its present, and both is *about* and *is* a call-to-arms. Through the comparison drawn, Ned illustrates the danger of silence not just addressed to Felix, but to the audience and to the contemporary community.

## Speaking in Silence

ANNA CHIPPENDALE discusses the visual language of theatre design.

The blank canvas is utterly devoid of colour. This is the same for a stage; without the set and lighting the theatre is a static box awaiting its inhabitants. The role, therefore, of the set designer is to paint the canvas. With West End theatre budgets allowing designers increasingly more freedom and space to innovate and push creative boundaries, the conversation surrounding set design is broadening. As an integral part of all major productions, the set has the capacity to speak to the audience, encapsulating the message of the show. Design is a language that can be understood by all: it is a universal discourse, coded into images that transcend language barriers, widely inclusive and utterly silent, often subliminal.

In the Donmar Warehouse's 2016 production of Brian Friel's *Faith Healer*, Es Devlin's set was as integral to the voice of the play as the actors. The piece was intrinsically 'quiet', a series of four monologues delivered by only three actors. *Faith Healer* relied upon the power of word and language, but also upon the space it inhabited. In this way, Devlin's design was crucial. Between each monologue, the action was interrupted by a wall of rain, as sweeping as a velvet curtain falling from a height onto the stage floor. A powerful visual cue, the rain evoked itinerant bleakness. Since these are moments when the play spoke uninterrupted through its design, the script's silences and the gaps between scenes were just as important as the monologues. A natural phenomenon with cross-cultural significance, the rain was as expressive as the words.

In recent years, designers have found digital devices to be just as vocal as sets' physical components, and Devlin again is no exception. In her work for Dennis Kelly's *Girls & Boys* at the Royal Court in 2018, she created a set which charted the dissolution of Carey Mulligan's character's marriage through various video projections. There were two sets for the play: an all-blue backdrop, composed using a simple screen, and a carefully crafted busy living room. Devlin's team constructed the lounge by photographing and 3D-scanning each piece of furniture prior to painting the entire set a sky-blue. Video designer Luke Halls then manipulated the digital data to create a projected image of the set in its original colours, which is mapped and superimposed onto the blue living room at the relevant moments; as Mulligan's character delivers monologues capturing her memory loss regarding the details of her marriage, a normal-looking, colourful living room becomes foggy, withdrawing into a pastel blue hue. Since *Girls & Boys* was a one woman show, the set was an entity just as present as Mulligan. The plain backdrop was quiet, utilised for intimate storytelling moments, whereas the living room was boisterous, chaotic and cluttered, important for revisiting hectic moments

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of daily life when Mulligan remembered her husband and children. The transitioning between the two sets was akin to turning the volume of life up and down, presenting the difference between Mulligan's busy home pre-separation to her more solitary existence that followed. Through her work Devlin has created her own language that illustrates how much a production's voice can be spoken, if silently, through its design.

Another case of design at its most vocal, can be seen in the comparison between the cast and set of *Matilda*. Thanks to a cast consisting of tiny bodies with an average height of about three and a half feet, the set feels enormous, looming over its little inhabitants. Having said this, Olivier Award winner Rob Howell's design permits childlike play: during the number 'When I Grow Up', audiences watch the cast lurch forwards over the stalls, thrust into the air on rope swings. In this instance, roles are reversed; the audience must look up at the children, launched across the auditorium above them. Adults must crane their heads to see them, and as the cast sings of their future plans for when they grow up they seem infinitely bigger than the 'grown-up' ticket-holders below. Intertwining child's play with intellect, the set verifies the ambition of the children, the infantile colours and components unapologetically loud.

Design amplifies meaning, providing audiences with a loud visual narrative that reinforces the message and experience delivered by the production. With theatre's leading designers as sought-after as in-demand directors, it's clear that the language of set design is continuing to be utilised critically in theatrical conversation. The set is a vital element of a production's voice and lexicon: as demonstrated by Howell's charismatic *Matilda* designs working in a technicolour, childlike idiom, sets manages to capture the true, unfiltered message of a show, visually supporting the audience's understanding from the minute the lights dim until the final curtain call.

## BLOOD MAKES NOISE

SOPHIE CUNDALL *thinks about blood and femininity in theatre.*

'Blood makes noise', as Suzanne Vega sings, and nowhere is this more true than in the theatre, particularly in the context of female characters who present the woman scorned. Blood is perceived as the most grotesque, even physically repulsive element of the female body, a gushing plasmic liquid that provokes uproar when we dare discuss menstruation, violence towards women or even violence perpetrated by delicate feminine hands.

In *Medea* and *Salome* blood takes on an entirely new dimension for the female protagonists: if virtuous virgin women represent the patriarchal ideal, then their bloody murder becomes a loud reclamation of their bodies against this image we have been force-fed for millennia. These women's bloodshed and their unabashed interaction with the sticky stuff incite repulsion and disgust, but also create the music of liberation. In embracing the ultimate taboo of the female body, and of society (murder, violence), they liberate themselves from the man-made feminine. They become heroines, all thanks to the red cells dripping between their fingers and down their backs.

The grotesque gore in the final scenes of *Medea* is a violent exclamation of the eponymous character's own suffering at the hands of her lover Jason, who has arranged to marry the pillar of patriarchal femininity that the princess represents. Medea reclaims blood as she reclaims her autonomy, moving herself outside of the ideal feminine model of the mother. Her murder of her children is constantly described in terms relating to her own convulsing flesh prison, talking of rupture, of the agony of the original abjection of these bodies from her own at birth. The audience is physically repulsed at the sight of infanticide, and our pain at the murder of her children is hers, her own repulsion reflected back to her. Likewise her children's agony is the externalised emotional response to her extraordinary suffering; the blood that spills is her own. Furthermore, she murders the patriarchal idea of the feminine, because it has contributed to her betrayal, patriarchal structures having permitted Jason to abandon her for a younger, wealthier model. Therefore, the blood of the writhing princess is that of the feminine: her death is the murder of the cookie-cutter model of woman. There is something grotesquely cathartic in this near-balletic death of the patriarchal model many a woman can relate to feeling alienated from. Additionally, the flowing of infant blood is a wound to the male-dominated society in its insufferable emotional toll on Jason, the play's patriarchal mouthpiece. Rising on that chariot, hands dripping red, she is a heroine, having rejected gender norms and reclaimed her pain through violence. She takes the visceral uproar society makes about

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## THEATRE

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the murderous, jilted woman and liberates herself through it, disgustingly victorious.

In *Salome*, blood is a similar reclamation of the scandal Salome's love for John the Baptist causes in society. Her final dance is both repulsive and strangely seductive, as she bathes in the blood from her lover's head. The red billowing onto the white silk of her dress represents expectations of innocent femininity and causes a disturbing physical response in the bodies of the audience: chests are clutched, spines shiver, but Salome's power does not waver. As she rubs the severed neck of John the Baptist over her, the blood stains proudly proclaim her as a deviant woman, they are a total rejection of the feminine. Blood causes such a physical and shocking reaction among audiences and other characters who represent power structures in the play, that to see her embracing it without shame forces us to both fear and admire her total dismissal of the social pressure under which she should deteriorate. This is her Medea-esque ascent: she liberates herself through her embrace of the ultimate corporeal taboo, from femininity and its associated expectations, and so she rises to the status of untouchable heroine. Even if this has commonly been seen as her fall, there is no more powerful a fall than one taken into the character's own hands, thereby becoming a liberation from the forces that have placed her in this position. Salome's bloodstained body, clutching the physical representation of the lover who has soiled her as the red has her dress, is freeing. It is through abject disgust that we learn to respect her rejection of societal norms.

Through an embrace of blood, these women give birth to an extraordinarily powerful rejection of patriarchal ideals. Female violence and the reclamation of blood creates a painful physical noise for both the characters on stage and the audience sat in (ironically) red velvet seats. Blood is power and it can make an autonomous heroine out of the most grotesque representations of femininity in theatre. Blood makes noise, and that noise can be made our own: the beat of our liberation.



THE TEAM



**N I C K  
F E R R I S**

P R E S I D E N T

**D A N I E L  
L U B I N**

E D I T O R - I N - C H I E F

**F R E Y A  
A L D E R**

S E N I O R  
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**N A T  
J O N E S**

T R E A S U R E R /  
E V E N T S

**L O U K I S  
M E N E L A O U**

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**Z U Z I A  
R O S T O C K A**

G R A P H I C  
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**J O S E F  
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M A R K E T I N G

**A L I C E  
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E D I T O R

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L A M C H E**

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**I N E S  
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**W A F I A  
Z I A**

R E A D  
C U R A T O R

**I K A A Y  
E B I**

R E A D  
C O - C U R A T O R

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