

SAVAGE

ISSUE 5 / DIRT





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 looks to art, literature and philosophy to enrich our perception of modern life.



John the Savage



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

EDITORS' NOTE

SPRING 2017

Dirt is tactile, subversive, playful and loaded with cultural baggage—it is also a forcefully pejorative term for society's rejects, and suggestive of the harsh realities faced by those on the margins of society. Informed by Mary Douglas' seminal study of dirt as 'matter out of place', this edition charts dirt's role in delineating social boundaries—a focus on dirt is also an investigation of what is deemed acceptable and why. While some writers find energy in testing these boundaries—championing what is often considered messy and impure, or riffing off dirt's smutty implications—others focus on its grotesque materiality. As something that we have an urge to Other, expel and forcibly remove, dirtiness is unsettling when it is felt to encroach on the body and mind. These articles suggest that rather than distinct and polarised spheres, self and Other, dirty and clean, pure and impure feed off each other: they are inextricably entangled and mutually reinforcing.

This edition's multi-faceted, multi-tonal, multi-coloured response to the word 'dirt' reflects the term's own multifariousness. But it is important that dirtiness is not simplistically glamourised. Alice Aedy's documentary photographs show people in a stark, desperate reality; a situation where 'dirty' means rats, disease and sub-zero temperatures. We hope this grounding sets off the vibrancy of Elliot Nash and Joanna Hobbs' design.

Once again, thank you for reading.

Alastair, Sophia and Charlie.



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PHOTOGRAPHING



THE BORDER

An interview with documentary photographer ALICE AEDY.

What led you to take these images of the refugee crisis?

It really happened by accident. Just over a year ago I headed to the 'Jungle' in Calais to volunteer for a weekend. I went with a camera around my neck, but as a volunteer. Since then I have volunteered in and photographed camps across Europe, predominantly in Greece. There are approximately 60,000 refugees in Greece, 65% of which are children. I spent two months in Idomeni cooking 7,000 meals a day for the 15,000 residents—Idomeni was Europe's largest informal camp since the Second World War. It just made sense to take photos. It's an old cliché to talk about humanising people, but unfortunately with the UK media so hostile towards refugees, it was necessary to show the faces of the victims involved in the crisis, most of whom were children. Calais became so politicised and such a focus for the UK media when it was only a tiny fraction of a much larger crisis. There were 10,000 migrants in the Calais 'Jungle' at its biggest, whilst 1.3 million refugees crossed the Mediterranean in 2015. All the while the press were creating this discriminatory hierarchy between 'legitimate' and 'illegitimate' migrants, refugees versus 'economic migrants', a discourse in which children aren't considered as the innocent victims of conflict that they are.

What are the most important things you have seen first-hand?

For a time it was possible to hope that refugees might be able to start new lives here, but early this year the Balkan countries brutally closed their borders. Thousands of refugees have become prisoners of sorts, trapped between borders, in camps marked by truly shameful conditions. Stuck in these 'prisons', these refugees face boredom, depression and despair. Reports of self-harm, drugs, sexual abuse, human trafficking, theft and child prostitution are all too frequent. Approximately 9,000 refugees in Greece are pregnant women. Their babies will be born 'stateless'. The camps, envisioned as a short-term solution to an emergency situation, are here to stay. Most of Greece's refugees are now in 47 military-run camps located in disused industrial warehouses. Softex, an old toilet paper factory on the outskirts of Thessaloniki, is so hard to find you need exact GPS coordinates to locate it. Access for press is extremely difficult and filming inside is mostly banned, keeping refugees out of sight and out of mind.

Do you think photography can usefully portray the situation currently unfolding and the desperation of those caught up in it?

Calais was a difficult place to photograph: there were so many photographers



there. I found it difficult to work. I try to create intimate portraits so that viewers can connect with the subject and relate to them. For me, this is a lot about portraying people with dignity, rather than showing images exclusively of suffering and misery.

You've recently been in Serbia, filming refugees sheltering in a squat in Belgrade for *The Guardian*. What did you see there?

I went to Belgrade to document a disused railway depot consisting of a few warehouses which are home to 2000 Afghan and Pakistani refugees, as young as eight years old, turned away from the official camps and sleeping rough. The film we made is called *Frozen Out*. In the squat, temperatures as low as -17°C meant that the men and boys were

burning anything they could to stay warm inside the warehouses—plastic, rubber tyres. Medics reported burns from the inhalation of toxic fumes. The air quality inside the warehouse was so bad that even with a scarf over my mouth it was hard not to become light-headed after a few minutes. There wasn't even one porta-toilet, so there were faeces all over the floor and rats too. I had heard about the squat from volunteer friends operating on the ground there, but when I first went, I couldn't believe that it had hardly featured in the press. However, when the snow started to fall, the press arrived.

It was the worst place I've been since covering the crisis—there was something brutal about the urban nature of it. The 500m walk between my hotel and the

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squat literally transported you between different worlds and this was hard to comprehend. Sitting down in the hotel lobby, I would still smell like the smoke inside.

This settlement is now Europe's largest informal squat, positioned just opposite the 'Belgrade Waterfront', a four billion-dollar property development financed by a businessman from the UAE. I photographed a man collecting firewood wrapped in a blanket in front of it. For me the image captures the devastating inequalities of globalisation in one frame.

You have mentioned your worries about the 'predatory gaze' of much photojournalism. What makes the way you take photographs different?

I am haunted by this idea of the 'predatory gaze' and I'm desperate to avoid it! I think it is nearly impossible to do so, and I don't think I can claim that my work is really any different. However, I feel the least that I can do is to really invest myself in dedicating a long time to each project—and to the subjects I photograph. This is partly why I call myself a documentary photographer and not a photojournalist. Many photojournalists are sent in for two days on assignment and then fly on to the next location. I spent nearly three months seeing and being with the families that I met in the Idomeni refugee camp, and have gone back to visit them in subsequent camps they have moved to in Greece. I stay in touch with many of the people I have met and photographed. I speak with two Kurdish families from Syria almost every day. Using a 50mm lens, as well as the type of portraits I like to take, forces me to engage in

conversation with all my subjects. I don't currently own a zoom lens. There are choices you can make in the field to treat your subjects with respect and portray them with dignity and humanity, and this is what I try to achieve in the intimacy of my portraits. I have seen some very bad behaviour in the pursuit of images.

You had a series of really powerful photographs featured in *Vice* of discarded objects left after the clearance of a camp near Calais. How do you approach each new project?

It's hard to publish work about the refugee crisis: it has been well-documented and it is difficult to find a new angle on it. People have become hugely desensitised to stories about the crisis. The *Vice* piece I did was very different to my usual work stylistically and was driven by a concept unique to the camp in Dunkirk, where tents sagging in the ankle-deep mud evoked images of the trenches during the First World War. The most striking element was its location—a forest bordered by a residential road and huge, beautiful houses opposite. The juxtaposition of these two worlds was shocking.

I returned to the camp six months after its eviction to see what was left there. It was locked and fenced and I had to find a way in. The objects I photographed, set into the ground or submerged and overgrown with plants, are like scars in the ground, a memory of the suffering that happened there.

Interview by LOUISE CAMU and CHARLIE MACNAMARA.



Photographs by Alice Aedy

VILLA

BAVIERA

TOMMY WALTERS uncovers the disturbing history of Villa Baviera, the picture-perfect German village in the heart of Colombia.

Come and visit Villa Baviera, the Utopia where everything went wrong.

Deep in the thick wooded forests and bright yellow cornfields of Southern Chile, a tall, glamorously dressed woman of 40 sits herself down at my table in her restaurant. I am in Villa Baviera, a brightly polished, squeaky-clean Bavarian village nestled in the foothills of the Andes, home to around 120 Germans including Anna Shellenkamp, the woman in front of me.

Previously named Colonia Dignidad, Villa Baviera is a 37,066 acre colony founded in 1961 by a community of Christians who travelled to the ends of the earth in a bid to forget the devastation of the Second World War and create a Utopia based on values of enterprise, hard work and goodwill. It expanded to build dairy farms, concert halls, hospitals and schools to help the impoverished local area. This experiment soon descended into a quasi-religious cult that enslaved its own people, and became the focus for allegations of torture, paedophilia, arms trafficking and disappearances. It doesn't take much prompting before Anna relays this underlying ruthlessness and aggression to me herself.

'I didn't know my mother or father until I was twenty-seven, despite growing up less than a minute's walk

away from them,' she tells me. Children in the village were taken from their parents at birth and put under the supervision of 'aunts'. This was the colony's policy of generational and gender segregation, as its mastermind, Paul Schafer, saw the family nucleus as a threat to his authority.

Schafer, an Evangelical preacher on the run from a child abuse scandal in Germany, was known for his shiny grey suits and glass eye—a caricature of the most unoriginal Bond villain. He wielded total control: marriage and sex were banned, and spiritual guidance came from Schafer alone, who insisted on being referred to as 'The Permanent Uncle'.

Our waiter speaks in monosyllables and has an insistent grin pinned to his face. He twitches and limps as he walks. Pointing to him, Anna explains that he had tried to escape the colony five times in his youth. 'He was caught every time, sometimes sleeping rough out in the mountains towards Argentina. When he returned he would be given electroshock therapy and a cocktail of sedatives in the hospital, which has left him physically and mentally damaged. Some escapees got as far as the German Embassy in Santiago, but were brought straight back. Schafer was friends with the Ambassador.'

The Ambassador was not Schafer's only high-placed friend: the 1973 coup in Chile brought in a brutal military regime run by Augusto Pinochet, who frequently visited on holiday. An arrangement between the two turned Colonia Dignidad into an ideal spot to hide, torture and execute political dissidents. Paul Schafer disappeared following some raids on the colony, a few years after the Pinochet regime fell in 1990. He was eventually found in Buenos Aires in 2005, and arrested for human rights abuse and 25 counts of child sexual abuse. He died in prison in 2010.

Today, Villa Baviera feels like a desperate re-enactment of 1940s Germany. Everything feels synthetic. The sickly bright flowers and the glossy buildings with their waxed cruise ship aesthetic all contribute to the sense of overwrought immaculateness. An uneasy hum of Bavarian music closes in from every corner. The restaurant's walls are lined with miscellaneous artefacts, from soup spoons the size of spades to neatly arranged sets of wooden clogs. I finish my portion of *schweinsaxe* a chewy ball of pink pork floating in a plate of applesauce.

After hearing Villa Baviera's sinister backstory, I see traces of it everywhere. The barbed wire fences and watchtowers that surround the town's perimeter were designed to instil paranoia of invasion from an imagined enemy, but became tools for keeping people in. At first, a tree house for 'peaceful reflection' seems harmless, until I find out it was used as a watchtower to look over the residents working silent twelve-hour days in the fields. Anna's early memories do not consist of the swimming pools and playground young visitors enjoy today, but

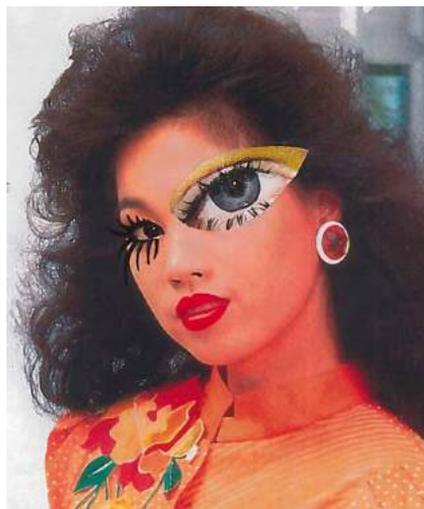
of clearing rocks from fields to help build an airstrip big enough to land a jumbo jet.

In 2011, Villa Baviera opened as a tourist resort that now boasts a hotel, horse-riding tours and lagoons under snow-capped peaks. These guests also have access to a swimming pool and hot tub to soak in, just beneath the soundproofed torture chambers now used as storage space. 'It would put some people off, but I'm just here with my girlfriend for a break from the city', one Chilean visitor remarked to me.

Tourism, however strange it may seem, has given the trapped residents here an economic and cultural lifeline. The opening of a museum on the premises is still in its early days, but will focus on recognising the site's torturous history. Today's children speak both German and Spanish, scroll on smartphones and think about one day going to university. In a village that has been totally sealed off to the outside world, it is only through openness—both in terms of confronting their past and allowing tourists in—that can they recognise the pain and suffering and look forward to the future.

Anna is also looking to the future. She plans to travel to Europe: 'Paul Schafer deprived me of my childhood and my freedom,' she says, 'I may be 40, but I am happier every day and feel the youngest I have ever felt.'

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Artwork by Juliette Cottu

FLORENCE WILDBLOOD investigates political rhetoric via *Take a Break* magazine.

The website for *Take a Break* magazine is in equal parts hilarious and unsettling, with its gaudy pink and yellow interface and harmless stock photo illustrations. 'Britain's biggest women's magazine' is written majestically in a banner at the top, a bold reminder of its popularity, directly above a stream of news so gritty you kind of wish it was fake. 'Lying hubby DUMPED me as I gave BIRTH!' runs one headline. 'I wished I'd

TABOO

NEVER had my miracle TRIPLETS' shouts another. All are accessorised by unnervingly frequent EXCLAMATION marks and CAPITALISATION that tells you exactly where and when to be shocked.

Its website may look like it has not changed since mid-2005, but *Take a Break* has been the UK's most popular women's magazine for over a quarter of a century, and receives over 100,000 reader communications every week. Stories are introduced with 'why', 'how' and 'what it's like', simultaneously alienating and normalising their subjects. In the words of Sophie Hearsey, editor of *that's life!* Magazine, 'forget fiction, it's your lives that are fascinating.' The irony is that these 'real life' stories are in no way representative of the blissfully monotonous 'real lives' of most people. From tales of stalking to vividly depicted sexual fantasies, their content may well have been unmentionable in the past, but it now occupies a hugely exploitable space between the taboo and the real, one that is gritty

and extraordinary and also everyday. Our natural fascination with topics beyond the realms of our personal experience has become intermingled with a new type of 'truth' that seeks to provide instant gratification through an obsession with every gory detail. The effects of this are beginning to extend beyond the glossy pages of magazines and shape the way we look at real life political landscapes.

All forms of entertainment—theatre, film, literature—are moulded to appeal to mass audiences. The aestheticising of the offensive is easily done and usually lucrative. What the sociologist Edward Shils labels 'brutal culture', with its 'general grossness of sensitivity', is everywhere and always has been: the pulp magazines of the 20th century could sell a million copies per issue at their peak, and the exploitation film genre consciously intends 'to attract an audience by means of its sensationalist or controversial content.' The difference now is that one strand of this exploitation of the shocking is not self-consciously melodramatic,

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but rather comes hand in hand with fake realism.

Since it deals with the realms of fears, fantasies and nightmares, taboo has a historically complex relationship with 'truth'. This is developing as truth tries and fails to keep up with the demands of a society predicated on the right to 'know everything'—immediately. In a sense, the appeal of *Take a Break* and reality TV shows like *Geordie Shore* stems from the same sentiment as that of the brutal live murder videos that appear incongruously on Facebook feeds, and intimate details of celebrity deaths and natural disasters: they all use the premises of realism to bring taboo subjects into everyday platforms.

This appeal has deep roots. Things that are attractive are often dangerous, so we classify them as forbidden to shelter us from our personal vulnerabilities. As a result, we need and respect boundaries on a societal level but get vicarious stimulation from watching others cross them. We are voyeuristically transfixed by the details of the

horrific things that happen to others—as a means of assessing what we ourselves would do in those situations. Scrutinising what and who we ostracise is, in evolutionary terms, an essential facet of our survival instinct.

Clearly, taboo has an elemental function, but this is becoming distorted as it is exploited for entertainment value. Beyond *Take a Break*, much of our now fast-moving and omnipresent mainstream media relies on instant gratification through shock value, setting a precedent where reality starts to look like a reality TV show. Trading on taboo as political capital is nothing new, but a shift in what is considered newsworthy has arisen. This seems to go hand in hand with our generation's first experience of a destabilising of what is and isn't acceptable to say in politics, via the boundary pushing rhetoric of Farage and Trump. Both politicians acted out a version of live-streamed, real-time *Take a Break*, and with real-world consequences. Their 'straight-talking' was a way

of dressing up boundary crossing as a kind of truthfulness and exploiting the addictive nature of taboo subjects by saying what (they claimed) 'everyone was thinking'. If fact, this mechanism of encasing toxic fantasies in realistic aesthetics isn't all too different from what we see in the Big Brother House and on the gaudy pink and yellow website of *Take a Break* magazine. Maybe *Take a Break* is what a post-truth world really looks like.

Bubbles that fizz acid

And it is raucous. And I am uneasy.
And I can feel them, feel each metal shriek
Against porcelain that flakes and cements
Again with the friction of your knife,
A percussive stroke, no, scratch.
Punctuated only by that tap, tap, tap,
Wood pecker drilling, that I still hear
Even when it's been hours since

Cutlery. Less dynamic when your skin peels from the bubbles,
Corrosive like the silences they follow
After dinner, when you seem just full,
And just unclean.
No courtesy, napkin untouched and upper lip
Still wet.

I used to wear gloves but now there is no point.
Since there is no in between
The meals and the washing,
No speech stipulating our time,
Unless between mouthfuls.

We used to go Dutch, but I wish we'd go Greek
From splitting bills to smashing plates
Because I'd rather a dustpan in my hand
Than that oozing sponge again.

Dishwasher

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Kiss me never with your dishwasher mouth
The splash back from those spoons' steel curves are all I taste now
And all I see is my face in them,
distorted
Made prune-like from the wetness

As I shrivel from the dirt,
Oh that you would allow me a dishwasher.



NATALIE ROOM

Latrinalia

PEACH DOBLE

Latrinalia is toilet art. It refers to the quips, reflections, crude drawings, personal attacks and messages of solidarity you find in toilets around the world. Each and every word I use in my project comes from a toilet wall that I found and documented. This project started with conversations about the hilarious and inspiring messages found on toilet walls; I started obsessively collecting images and recording tidbits wherever I went. These were then made into ceramics, evoking blue and white delftware patterns. This traditional ceramic style, associated with twee British etiquette and aesthetics, spars with the smutty and ironic messages. Watercolour paintings were printed onto tattoo transfers to be imprinted on the ceramics and exhibited in a bathroom in Kingston. Later tiles were fired and displayed on a wall for an exhibition at Hackney Studios. The project looks at British etiquette and the joy we get out of subverting it from behind closed doors.



AN INSOMNIAC'S PLAYLIST

A personal tour of the music that gets ANNA WESTWELL through sleepless nights.

Jeff Buckley drowned in a lake in May 1997 at the age of 30, not living to witness the enormous cultural resonance his album *Grace* would have through the noughties. Karen Carpenter, of The Carpenters, passed away when she was just 32 after a heart failure resulting from her extreme anorexia. Amy Winehouse died from alcohol poisoning in 2011, aged 27. In 2016, Justin Vernon of Bon Iver cancelled the tour of his third album *22, A Million* due to manic depression. These artists, considered amongst the greatest of their generations, adored and listened to by millions, were each plagued by the spectre of mental illness.

When I was 11, I began to develop what has now been diagnosed as bipolar disorder and severe insomnia. The equivalent of months were spent lying awake in bed, miserable. Across these eight years I have listened to Buckley, Carpenter, Winehouse and Vernon, all in the hope of distracting myself from my restless mind. Each week, I selected a different album and listened to it on repeat every night. By Sunday, I had uncovered its beauty and detail and every musical nook and cranny. When Monday arrived, I would choose something new. It was each album's novelty and unfamiliar detail that distracted me, and provided a temporary escape from myself.

One of the best albums I found was *The Year of Hibernation* by Youth Lagoon.

Written during counselling for anxiety, Trevor Powers busked at night to save up the money he needed to record this album at home. The result is beautiful: the melodies are simple yet packed with atmospheric twists, and his subtle, auto-tuned voice provides the perfect lullaby. '17' spoke most clearly to me: 'It's just me in my room / With my eyes shut', and 'When I was 17 / My mother said to me / "Don't stop imagining, because the day that you do is the day that you die"'. I wrote down the lyrics that found particular resonance with me: I still remember them late at night, and they act as a reminder that I am not alone.

Fireflies by Owl City was released in 2008, when I was twelve and sleep had become laborious. This album's lead track was the first song I heard that explained my mind to itself. Owl City's third album *Ocean Eyes*, released in 2009, is entirely about insomnia. It is rare for an electronica band to write such thoughtful, introspective lyrics, and the synthetic sound acts as a structured canvas for the moving words. At twelve years old, I was able to define myself as an insomniac because so was Adam Young—a reminder that music can change our internal lives in the profoundest of ways. 'Vanilla Twilight' is a song I still come back to: 'I'll find repose in new ways / Though I haven't slept in two days' and 'But drenched in vanilla twilight / I'll sit on the front porch all night / Waist deep



Artwork by The Line Girl







in thought.' The immersive imagery of this line envelops me in Young's own mind: I become part of his landscape of sleeplessness.

At the time of Michael Jackson's death, whilst preparing for his tour *This Is It*, he had gone sixty days without REM sleep. His doctor, Conrad Murray, claims that he had been displaying symptoms of chronic sleep deprivation in the period leading up to his untimely death, evident from accounts of Jackson forgetting mid-performance the lyrics to the songs he had been performing for decades. Though his insomnia may not have influenced his earlier albums, such as *Off the Wall* and *Music & Me*, when I listen to these songs I feel a close affinity with him. An artist's later work often colours the ways in which you view their corpus as a whole.

Remy Kay's *In The Mourning* is perhaps the most comforting album out there for an insomniac. The simple yet intricately plotted guitar strums that open the album act as a welcoming prelude to Remy's sonorous, velvety voice, calming a chaotic mind and ironing out the creases of neurosis. Though 'Talk About It' is only one and a half minutes long, it remains soothing rather than frantic, compact rather than rushed. 'I'm Good' is another anthem I listen to regularly, with the repeated mantra 'I think I'm better now' serving as an excellent start to any morning, no matter how sleep deprived the night has been. In a sense, music can provide an opportunity to start again, a form of spiritual cleansing.

As my manic depression and insomnia worsened, I only fell in love with music more: I wasn't alone at night ever again. One can find solace in listening to great music, even that written from a dark place: through this I feel as though I am made part of a community with all the artists who have used creativity to escape. It is in this escape that we find freedom from our own experience, and proof that mental illness can be transformed into a source of beauty.

THOMAS CURY asks Grime's most recent followers
to remember where it came from.

The unbridled optimism surrounding Grime is contagious, one that I couldn't help but get caught up in when I attended Skepta's sold out show at Alexandra Palace. Near the end of the gig, Skepta told the crowd emphatically: 'Today we put the fucking flag on the moon.' The set was delivered with intensity, rawness and charisma; the visuals were lavish and at the centre of the show was a true MC. Yet there was something strangely off-putting about the performance. Grime has now reached peak exposure, with the once marginal art form now enjoyed and consumed by millions. However, that success has come, to a degree, with a disregard for the genre's core foundations and

cultural roots by its new consumers.

Grime has deep roots in London's black, working class communities. In its early days, MCs worked with their producers in small council flats in North and East London, using 130 and 140BPM as the rhythmic foundation of their songs. Reliant largely upon the oral traditions of spoken word and UK Garage, the songs told stories of working class life in the city, with MCs competing to be heard over the cacophony of lo-fi sounds. These qualities are still very much present in popular Grime today, but they have been softened and adapted to cater to the tastes of an ever-growing consumer base.

T H E E V O L U T I

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Low-frequency drums are now paired with glossy, trap-flavoured sub-bass; the mixing remains dense but individual sounds are more tangible and distinguishable.

Grime has by no means lost its edge, despite its increasing commodification in the UK and its exposure to American markets. Instead, the relationship between American hip-hop, pop and Grime reflects a much more complicated and reciprocal picture. Though cast through the lens of this pop-ier, smoother sound, Drake's recent catalogue reveals a long-held love affair with Grime. In 2011's 'Cameras', he interpolates Sneakbo's 'How You Mean' on the hook, through this reference introducing an element of Sneakbo's border-pushing persona. Drake adds a further layer to his cult of personality on 2015's 'Used To', where he pays direct homage to Boy Better Know's co-founder: 'Shout out to the G's from the ends, / We don't love no girls from the ends'. This is

layered on top of a thick, low frequency bassline—looking to Grime's reputed (and often self-conscious) 'aggression' to nuance his popular image as a sensitive male artist. At the 2015 Brit Awards, Kanye West premiered his track 'All Day': though the performance was praised by high profile figures like Wiley, others were sceptical. Remel London pointedly asserted that Grime artists are too good to be reduced to 'back-up dancers'. This debate demonstrates the complicated balancing act of appreciation and appropriation that grime is currently navigating.

Grime has emerged, however, as a powerful political tool in England. The video for Skepta's 'Shutdown' was filmed at the Barbican in London, the venue which not long before had pulled—his brother and fellow Grime Artist—JME's show on the advice of the City of London police. The success of the song, and its unapologetically loud and brash sound, was an unmistakable statement aimed at the state's

historical repression of black culture and black music. Another of Grime's most exciting and forward-thinking artists, Novelist, gave a more explicit critique of the racist treatment of black men at the hands of the state on 'Street Politician'. The song's bleak imagery of the life of young black British men was overlaid with the sound of sirens and a looped sample of David Cameron repeating: 'Keeping people safe is the first duty of government'. Nowhere was the disconnect between the black British experience and the Government agenda so painfully apparent. Despite this resilience, the genre has in some ways fallen victim to the wider commodification of blackness ongoing in our cultural moment. The slang employed in Grime lyrics, with its complex reliance on vernaculars such as Jamaican English, often explores themes of cultural hybridity and the migrant experience, and speaks meta-communicatively across a range of linguistic levels. However, to the increasingly white

O N O F G R I M E

contemporary consumer base, these dimensions are more or less irrelevant to the ways they listen to the music. The words are viewed as soundbites to be chewed up and spat out as de-racialised means of expression. 'Mandem' and 'Rudeboi' have been co-opted by white bros and lads as a means to momentarily live 'through the body of the Other'. The humour in mimicking the speech of black Grime MCs allows the white bro to ostensibly engage with black British culture whilst remaining firmly within the comfort zone of his own whiteness. The figure of the black man in a hoodie was for a long time vilified by the media as part of a strategy to paint racial minorities as a homogenous, threatening group. Now known as 'the roadman aesthetic', trading off the hard-won cultural capital of Grime MCs, it has become a fashionable look. The white middle class use the aesthetic as a costume of Otherness, a new and fashionable persona that can be tried out, without fear of being marginalised and oppressed by society as a result. To paraphrase 16-year-old actor Amandla Stenberg: what if we loved

black people as much as we love black culture?

Grime is at a complicated crossroads. Though the genre's rising popularity makes its cultural roots susceptible to trivialisation and appropriation, by opening itself up to a more mainstream market it has undergone an intriguing revolution and is reshaping the music industry in the process. The best musical evolutions occur when artists retain a sense not just of who they are now, but also of who they once were.

Where 'dance music' is seen to engage with politics, it is usually in terms of looking forward. References to the Utopian vision dance music presents—of a future in which we are united by the rebellious, unifying energy of the club—have become a journalistic cliché. Artists have welcomed this narrative by playing up the music's futuristic elements: ever since Afrika Bambaataa's Afrofuturist spin on Kraftwerk's sci-fi aesthetics in the 80s, the idea that dance music offers a path towards a Utopian future (particularly for marginalised groups) has been touted by musicians and listeners alike.

Elysia Crampton and the Geology of Resistance

Mark Fisher, the critic and cultural theorist who sadly passed away in January, believed in the political capital of dance music. In 1993 he wrote of a favourite genre: 'Jungle is the impossible combination of blackness and the future, the dark continent we're heading towards.' Fisher was not alone in his belief that Jungle (a mutant strain of UK dance music that combined sped-up breakbeats from old Motown and Funk records with samples from sci-fi movies and rolling sub-bass) represented a Utopian, Afrocentric vision of the future.

MILO GOODER visualises the political potential of a geological dance music.

The writer Kodwo Eshun, in his 1998 book *More Brilliant than the Sun*, figured Jungle as the product of a new, post-human black identity, communicating ‘paralinguistically from a future which today’s media can’t even begin to decrypt.’ By the end of the 90s however, this Afrofuturist potential seemed to have been replaced by a homogenous, hyper-masculine Drum & Bass culture. Eshun and Fisher’s conception of lighting the way to a post-white-supremacist future by imagining one sonically seems today like a strange combination of over-academicism and naïvety. Dance music is, for the most part, a boys’ club, and clubs remain predominantly white and male spaces.

If the Utopian dream of dance music has failed to materialise, should artists and listeners stop looking forward in expectation of a brighter future? Elysia Crampton, a musician whose identity as an indigenous (mestiza) trans woman inflects all her work, offers a new paradigm for dance music’s political potential. Crampton shares some sonic referents with Jungle—90s sci-fi ambience, samples that are simultaneously cheesy and ominous, a DIY approach to mastering—but her inspirations are far older. Stylistically, Crampton draws on the rhythms of Andean genres like Cumbia and Huayño—sounds with origins in pre-colonial South America, and drum patterns from South America’s African diaspora. Thematically, Crampton digs even deeper into the past, looking to the geological foundations of the Americas. On her 2015 EP *American Drift*, images of rocks, mountains and earthquakes proliferate, intoned in the measured voice of frequent collaborator Money Allah. Even the instrumental ‘Petrichor’ is (according to a press release) ‘based on the etymology of the word petrichor’, a word which describes the smell after rain caused by the liquid mixture of organic compounds collecting in the ground.

Whilst this fascination with geology might seem strange or overly conceptual, the earth (soil, rock, the American continent) is an apt metaphor for the condition of ‘brownness’ that Crampton explores. Commenting on *American Drift*, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen—whose book *Stone* revealed that ‘inorganic’ matter is in fact restlessly animate—explains the correlation in terms of ‘the geology of contemporary American racism as active sediment and abiding foundation’. Geology is history manifest, and in Crampton’s music, the landscape exhibits the wounds of the violence of colonization: a valley becomes a ‘primeval gash’ and mountains are cut down, serving also as a reminder of the vulnerability of brown bodies as the engine of slavery. This is not an abstract conceptual gloss tethered unconvincingly to some music: Crampton’s compositions are soundscapes in the truest sense of the word, evoking massive subterranean depths and jagged Paleolithic formations.

SAVAGE



In Crampton's music, the victimhood of marginalised subjects is reproduced in landscape. Across the dark plain of history: her album connects the story of Bartolina Sisa, the indigenous revolutionary brutally murdered in 1750, and the disfigurement of Veronica Bolina in 2015. Bolina, a Brazilian trans woman assaulted by police, is quoted epigrammatically in the album's liner notes. Crampton shows us that the 'dark continent we're heading towards' imagined by Fisher already exists and resists under the surface of white America.

Crampton's historical investigations also turn up less sombre artefacts from her trans, indigenous heritage. The artwork for last year's collaborative album *Demon City* depicts 'Ukurunku', a trans deity who stands as part of the long legacy of queer indigeneity. Crampton employs the Aymara words *Ipa* or *Orua* (a third-gender classification), demonstrating the inclusion of trans subjectivities in pre-colonial Andean societies. References like this make it easy to see to how the relationship between this ancient past (vastly distant from dance music's usual referents) and present are particularly resonant for Crampton. This is encapsulated in the Aymara language. Crampton says: 'In Aymara, instead of implying a gaze directed forward, moving through time (with tomorrow coming sequentially ahead of today which came ahead of yesterday), speakers instead face the past and have their backs to the future.'

But what about the future? In a performance from last year titled 'Dissolution of The Sovereign: A Time Slide Into The Future', Crampton delivered an actual science fiction narrative in the form of 'a visual and performative essay over DJ production'—but one with a characteristically historical bent. The half-hour performance ends with arachnid AI robots uncovering and reanimating the remains of Bartolina Sisa, who leads a global uprising against sovereign oppressors. This story of archaeological resistance is not unlike the one Crampton enacts in her own music: geology and history are employed to strip away sedimentary layers of historical oppression and hegemony, revealing bright kernels, calcified remains, tangible legacies of resistance. If dance music wishes to realise its political capital, perhaps it too should turn its back on the future and look deeper into the dark soil on which we stand.





Artwork by Hannah Kessler

The deadly sin I fear the most
is the terrifying gluttony.

A main character in my life,
Gluttonous, Gluttonous, Gluttonous me.

Queen size — the home of my gluttony:
I wake up in bed, eat in bed,
chill in bed, Netflix in bed,
smoke weed in bed, legs spread.

My hours alternate between,
Ebay and masturbation,
consume, consume, online and food,
it's gone far past procrastination.
It has take on a new life,
it is my new life,

What next will I put in my mouth?
What next will I buy?

Saroking my pubes, eating my cheese,
I'm the picture of repulsion.
I've managed to make my decadence,
ensure complete revulsion,
Lying there, drinking copious amounts,
wine, gin, cream or cum,
glug, glug, gluttony.
So much waiting, arse goes numb.

Dumbing myself with gluttony,
every hour I get more thick
in the head and at the sides,
I barely even move for dick.
Unbelievably fertile,
yet too lazy to fuck,
well sometimes if I've had a few
lines,
the strength I muster up.

The consuming never stops,
to my body I'm destructive:
pointless sex with pointless boys,
It's never (re)productive.
My pussy isn't the only thing that's plump,
as I'm expanding my skin,
often extra weight is sexy,
but I am less vulgar when thin.
My core hasn't been activated in months,
my indulgence has taken its toll,
I live the life of a greedy girl,
Sex, drugs and belly rolls.

Glug, Glug, Gluttony,
I'm a lazy odalisque,
a slave to my indulgences,
on my back I like it best.
I'm being all that I hate,
whilst living like a queen.
Why am I still unsatisfied?
I'm a cat with plenty of cream,
I've lost myself in consumption,
unsure of what I want to be,
I'm lost in all the excess,
Gluttonous, Gluttonous, Gluttonous me.

ISABELLA BORNHOLT

GLUTTONY



Barbara Hepworth's Conversation with Matter

FLEUR ELKERTON traces the contours of Hepworth's material response to nature.

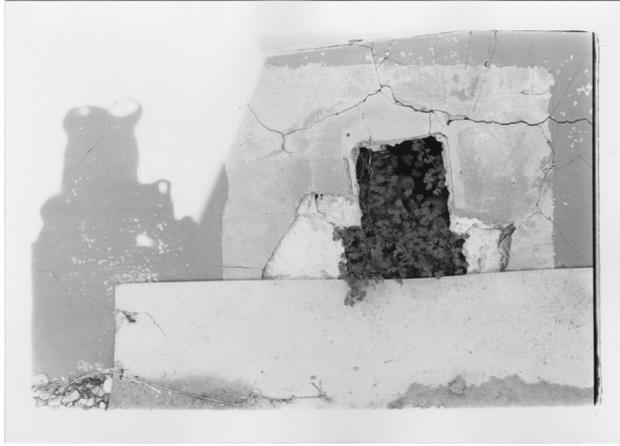
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In Argentina, around 13,000 years ago, our ancestors blew mud onto their hands, using them as stencils to make ghostly handprints on the walls of their caves. These early humans used the warm earth as a pigment, mixing it with water or saliva to make colour; their own bodies and mouths were all the tools they needed to create patterns and shapes on stone—shapes that they felt the need to replicate. The elements that surrounded them were simultaneously their muse and medium, as they are still. From the first muddy beginnings to the modern art world, nature and dirt permeates the meaning of art.

More recently, no artist demonstrates connection with the landscape more than the celebrated sculptor Barbara Hepworth. Her unique artistic talent fused with an innate connection to the earth to produce a woman who reinterpreted what it meant to experience nature, and translated that into marble, clay and stone. Her works blend seamlessly into whatever setting they are placed. Hepworth's forms are more shaped, polished and smooth than the Argentinian cave artworks, but they respond to the same primal impulse to engage with the earth using its own raw materials.

Hepworth conversed with the natural world, and reinterpreted what it meant to connect with landscape, wildlife and the base dirt itself. Her sculptural forms curve into contours that evoke hillsides, viscerally pierced by select holes that offer tantalising glimpses of viewpoints in the spaces they quietly inhabit. As synaesthete, her sculptures are a discussion between the form and their context. They offer a window into her perception of the sensuality of the world around her, as well as demonstrating her spiritual understanding of nature, and talent for communicating her





Photograph by Carò Gervay

emotional responses to the land.

Hepworth grew up in a wild, luscious Yorkshire landscape, with an innate feeling for the shape and form of the undulating hills that surrounded her. After graduating from the Royal College of Art she began to produce her curvaceous marble sculptures. Initially they were quasi-naturalistic responses to her environment: 'Mother and Child' suggests a reclining maternal form with an infant balanced on her knee, its rounded corners and negative spaces tenderly carved from pale green alabaster. Like the

makers of the ancient handprints, Hepworth drew inspiration from figures and wildlife around her. Hepworth progressed to more abstract, pared down forms, exploring tension and texture with strings and wood. Her sculptures were initially created in plaster but progressed to stone or timber and were placed and pierced to evoke spatial energy. In 'Wave', Hepworth used smooth plane wood to produce an egg-like shape, polished to a sheen. Internally hollow, the concave sides are a calming white. At one end is an apex from which strings attach to points along the curve's

interior. This invokes a sense of movement within the piece, which seems simultaneously on the brink of tipping over and also perfectly, harmoniously balanced. As she wrote: 'In all these shapes the translation of what one feels about man and nature must be conveyed by the sculptor in term of mass, inner tension and rhythm.' Her way of seeing and visually expressing emotion was unlike any other, rooted in her intense and idiosyncratic understanding of landscape.

At the outbreak of the Second World War

Hepworth and her second husband, fellow artist Ben Nicholson, moved to St Ives, where they established an artist's colony. The dramatic Cornwall coast—a subtropical climate beset by the elements—and the quality of the seaside light contributed to the 'open air and space' that Hepworth called 'magic'. Hepworth acquired a studio alongside a garden, and began to formulate a space in which she could truly expand and fuse her love for the natural world and sculpture.

The geological space of St Ives increased her creative impulses; the rock formations, mineral deposits and bitter sea winds seemed to feed her insatiable ability to carve shapes from organic materials. This was a symbiotic relationship, evoking prehistoric art, that was individual to Hepworth and her habitat. Her work adapted and acclimatised to changing conditions; the greater space available after her move encouraged a shift from stone and wood to creating larger bronze sculptures. Hepworth's sculptures prompt a conversation between

herself, the viewer and the ground we stand on. She once aptly described herself: 'I, the sculptor, am the landscape. I am the form and I am the hollow, the thrust and the contour'. Just as our ancestors painted with mud, Hepworth carved using materials from nature, and took her inspiration from the natural world. There is no superficial 'shock factor' to Hepworth's sculpture. The pure simplicity of a human bond with the earth means that her works resonate with us all; they connect with an ancient subconscious, that feels like a refuge from urbanity and modernity. Much like the mud-streaked hand prints of our ancestors left on an Argentinean cave wall, Hepworth's legacy is a connection to dirt, and the environment as a whole. In Hepworth's sinuous, evocative body of work, it is landscape itself that is lovingly presented as 'mass, tension and rhythm'.

Going Mouldy

SOPHIA COMPTON asks whether food can be art.

Which images have been more overlaid with meaning than flesh, bread and wine? Depictions of food in art are uncontrollably symbolic. From a basic struggle for survival to lavish, ritualistic feasting, images of people eating spill over with iconography from the past. But eating is also something we need to do each day or we will die; a process in which enzymes churn in the stomach and create energy and poo. Depictions of food in art, no matter how culturally loaded, always contain a metaphorical awareness of basic organic processes.

Like ourselves, food has a life-span: the symbolic overload of food imagery comes largely from the fact it is caught up in the all-too-familiar cycles of death and new life. The pictorial representation of food is always chained to this temporality—either conscious of inevitable decay or blatantly avoiding the issue. Velazquez's 'An Old Woman Frying Eggs' is the perfect *memento mori*: it contains every stage of human life, from an embryonic egg (about to be cracked) to old age in the shape of the woman. Conversely, still lifes of fruit and vegetables are framed, contained and temporally fixed; their spatial backdrops shut out the real world so we can focus on the impossibly motionless foreground. Sam Taylor Wood's putrid still lifes of death—vegetables fuzzed over with mould; a stop-motion of a mortifying rabbit—bring to the fore the decomposition that lurks, unspoken, behind each static composition.

But the resonance and meaning of food—and its connection with art—goes so much deeper than its visual signifying potential. Not

just an essential ingredient of artworks, making food is perhaps the oldest creative pursuit. Marcel Duchamp reminded us that 'etymologically speaking the word art means make'. In a conversation between artists, critics, and chefs at elBulli (the Catalan restaurant that won multiple 'best in the world' accolades) Peter Kubelka invigoratingly revealed the ethnographic heritage of cooking. Cooking, he says, traces back to humanity's earliest origins, where a person might have picked up an egg and mixed it in their mouth with a nearby herb, say rosemary. This combination reflects a deep urge to take the substances of nature and adapt them, sculpt them, give them new form—in other words, to create. This bringing together of elements that in nature are apart is in essence a 'metaphor', which derives from the Greek *meta* (across, over) and *pherein* (to carry, bring): much as a dressing brings together the apparently incompatible substances of oil and water, a metaphor is an emulsification.

Anybody who has cooked themselves a masterpiece (which definitely includes the perfect boiled egg) knows this instinctively. While the magnum opus of the greatest chef or sushi master cannot be revisited like a favourite novel, it lives on in our incredibly potent sense memories. Rooted in traditions of smell and taste, whose origins and trajectories do not appear in the written records of 'high culture', cooking has been ignored as a subject of intellectual discussion and excluded from definitions of 'the arts'. But like any art form it relies on genres, customs and traditions that are inextricably embedded in time and place; eating is a highly ritualised and performative activity. Considering cooking as an expression of artistry helps redefine the boundaries of art: rather than something rarefied that you need a foundation degree to take part in, it encourages the pragmatic, democratic instruction to simply do and make. In the words of architect Charles Eames, 'process is not magic'.

In fact, this performativity has made cooking a fascination for contemporary artists, who manipulate the ephemeral and theatrical qualities of eating. Daniel Spoerri's 1960s 'Eat Art' involved cooking for people before expelling them mid-meal. He would exactly preserve the table cloth as it was left, replete with ashtrays, wine glasses, spills and traces. 'Make a Salad' by Alison Knowles blows the activity of salad-making up to enormous proportions. In front of a crowd, mountains of ingredients are chucked into a huge green tarpaulin, to be drenched with a bucket of dressing and dished up for the onlookers. It is the scale that makes this piece arresting—the monstrous profusion



of salad seems to be already sweating its way towards decay. Much as Arcimboldo's 16th century vegetable men (arrangements of fruit and vegetables to look like human faces) seem today to be bizarrely literal versions of 'you are what you eat', these artists draw our attention to the graphic, grotesque materiality of the ingredients. Spoerri and Knowles' audiences physically digest elements of the 'artwork': food is both artistic medium and organic matter. As a creative pursuit, cooking owns its own impermanence—its creative zenith occurs when the food is about to be consumed. Eating is inextricably related to time and death.

Knowles' piece self-consciously asks: what is the difference between salad-making as performance and salad-making as performance art? It proclaims that the simple act of making a salad at home is creative and culturally loaded in and of itself.

Food in art reminds us of our atavistic urge to create—to pattern and rearrange incomprehensible nature into sumptuous form. As the most fleeting and corporeal of art forms, cooking has long been ignored in discussions of culture: but these same qualities make it fertile ground for contemporary performance art. Both in and as art, food is there to nourish, instil wonder, stimulate memory and bring out emotion. Eating it is, quite literally, a life-giving process.



Artwork by Yijia Yang

Dirtworks

Looking at the work of Robert Smithson, ISABELLE BUCKLOW explores the subversive potential of leaving the gallery space.

Art = dirt ground, pigment smudged, clay moulded, matter formed.

Grown from the fertile soils of 1960s conceptualism and minimalism, the land art movement, spearheaded by Robert Smithson, uprooted themselves from the suffocating inertia of the commercially driven gallery space. They, quite literally, sought the nutrients of the earth to feed their practice. Land artworks represented geographic and economic displacements, which mounted a 'strategic incursion into the no-man's-land of modern aesthetic and the industrial world', in Smithson's words. This attack took the form of large-scale land sculpting; it produced works that both manhandle and pay homage to their site, be that an industrial wasteland or an expansive coastline.

Mary Douglas' seminal statement 'dirt is matter out of place', reveals how ideas of pollution or dirtiness are used to draw boundaries around the culturally acceptable. Social hierarchy—the creation of 'a place for everything'—is built on the expulsion of dirt. Douglas notes dirt's creative potential and its use in renewal rituals, which harness the danger risked by transgressing boundaries. Dirt is transformative matter and artworks are the transformation of base matter to form: as such, they constantly

threaten a loss of control and need to be tightly sealed within the sterile white cube gallery environment. Taking art out of the gallery space and back to the soil uncovers its inherent out-of-place-ness, while simultaneously encouraging a renewed focus on place itself.

Smithson's work does this on a large scale. Perhaps his most famous and monumental earthwork is 'Spiral Jetty', a 1,500-foot-long coil built from silt, salt crystals and basalt rocks that extends from the north-eastern shore of the Great Salt Lake, Utah. The construction was an immensely physical process that required multiple trucks to haul the 6,650 tonnes of rock and earth into the lake. The clean suit of the conceptualist was soiled and the delicate hand of the oil painter became calloused: this was gritty, dirty manual labour. Smithson's art was in his words 'impure' and 'clogged with matter'. He gathered natural phenomena into a swirling bind, forcing an interaction between the scattered and the contained. It is this tension between unstable binaries that makes his work so affecting.

'Spiral Jetty' is a site that invites physical investigation. People would, and still do, go on pilgrimages to the Jetty. Set in bizarrely red water, with crystallised salt deposits from the volcanic horizon, the spiral feels prehistoric and almost occult.

SAVAGE

As visitors follow the winding path they enter a nauseating state that Smithson called a 'cosmic rupture'. For the visitor, this phenomenological experience binds human action to geographical circumstance; mind is inextricably bound to matter. In Smithson's words:

There is no escape from matter. There is no escape from the physical nor is there any escape from the mind, the two are in a constant collision course, it is a quiet catastrophe of mind and matter.

Smithson was fascinated by the 'oceanic' state of mind that Freud described as the primary process of making contact with matter. 'Spiral Jetty' sought to reconnect this bond between humans and the humus (soil's organic component). Earth comes from the Greek *Ge* or *Gaea*, the universal mother. The prefix 'ge' relates to modes of creation and can be seen in English words such as 'geology', 'geography' as well as in maternal expressions of giving: 'genitals', 'genetics' and 'genealogy'. Indeed, marginal matter is the very stuff of the creation myth in which God formed man from clay.

Smithson exposed the unlimited and dense potential of earth as a medium, and its readiness to be occupied and manipulated by the artist's hands. Landscape is a *tabula rasa* awaiting inscription. However just as matter can be formed, matter will always determine its form. This resonates with Smithson's remark that 'embedded in the sediment is a text'. Through his art Smithson released the silenced language of landscape, unearthing its textuality and allowing the dirt to speak. 'Spiral Jetty' stages a sculptural intervention that

honours and is subservient to the agency of the elements. Unlike the neutralising containment of the gallery 'non-place', the vast open expanse in which the jetty resides is virile. It was created when the lake's water level was low, and for thirty years it remained completely submerged by water. It was in 2002 that 'Spiral Jetty', now encrusted with crystalline salts, resurfaced. By giving itself up to chance the site was transformed. Smithson understood landscape as far more than just plots on a map, not singular but multiple, not static but spiralling. 'Spiral Jetty' led us away from the sanctified safety of the white institution and paved a way through disorientating and decentering elements.



MATERIALISING

This series of work allows me to exercise my understanding of parasitic behaviour that

THE

is analogous to human interactions. Human behaviour can run parallel to the behaviour

PARASITE,

of parasites, so that the human can be understood as embodying the parasite. People

IN

are often parasitic towards one another, which I see as a wholly positive character-

A

istic of our symbiotic interactions. In order to materialise the parasitic relationship,

PARASITORIUM

my research is an examination of understanding human behaviour through sculptural

forms that incarnate gesture and performativity, relaying the two-part vector-recipient

relationship that occurs in exchanges of communication. I have been exploring ways

of realising what I conceive as the positive parasite. The close selection of colours in-

cluding browns, oranges, reds and yellows mimics a 'control factor' within the species's

environment, creating a connection between the two parasites in question.

SABRINA MUMTAZ HASAN

THE

THE ROAD TO WIGAN PIER

BEATRICE BOWLES-BRAY looks to Orwell in a plea for our environment.

In spite of hard trying, man has not yet succeeded in doing his dirt everywhere.

The earth is so vast and still so empty that even in the filthy heart of civilisation you find fields where the grass is green instead of grey.

– George Orwell

In the wake of recent political events, many of us have turned to literature, and specifically to George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, for insight. Yet it is to his lesser-known 1937 work, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, that I am drawn. Orwell's study of the realities of industrialisation at the peak of UK coal mining feels troublingly relevant today. As the new US President makes good on promises to relax environmental standards, ending 'the war on coal', and Theresa May unveils a £1 billion shale wealth fund to pay householders for the privilege of fracking in their communities, the threat to earth's green

spaces has never seemed so great.

The Road to Wigan Pier paints a bleak picture of a scale of industrialisation to which we do not wish to return: where housing is 'distributed in incredibly filthy slums round belching factories and stinking canals and slag-heaps that deluge them with sulphurous smoke.' The author's preoccupation with smell—explored in depth in *Orwell's Nose*, a new study by UCL Emeritus Professor, John Sutherland—renders visceral the assault of industry upon the landscape and its inhabitants. 'It is a kind of duty to see and smell such places', Orwell writes, 'especially smell them, lest you should forget they exist.' Today the smell has faded, but if you travel to areas such as the South Wales Valleys you will see how vast portions of earth have been pared away and

upended in slag heaps still distinguishable by their incongruent blackness. Slums and tenement housing may no longer be prevalent features of UK urbanity, and an awareness of climate change curbs the potential of heavy industries to pollute the environment, yet these precautions merely sanitise inherently destructive systems of production we have built up.

Debate surrounding the revival of non-renewable energy generation is problematised by the politicisation and social division engendered throughout the rise and fall of coal mining. Orwell relates a popular belief among the wealthy that 'if you give those miners baths they only use them to keep coal in.' This type of class condescension is prevalent in the fiction of the period, with *Lady Chatterley's Lover* portraying miners

as 'blackened, slightly distorted human beings' who are 'ugly and uncouth'. Division deepened when reactions to the strike of 1984-5 pitted the miner against his fellow man, broke the will of the trade unions, and led to a poverty that has been the scourge of the former mining towns. D.H. Lawrence summed up the mood in these communities with his dismal assertion that 'a man without a job isn't even as good as a gob of clay'. To the many today for whom employment in a burgeoning blue collar sector would signal the end of cross-generational unemployment and its associated social issues, it seems inappropriate to preach the virtues of 'green living'.

Ever since the industrial revolution, fiction has shared reality's fixation with fuel. Following *The Road to Wigan Pier*, sci-fi narratives have often hinged on the discovery of alternative energies. From the 'tesseract' in Marvel comics to 'dilithium' in *Star Trek* and the ironically-named 'unobtainium' in *Avatar*, the search for sustainable energy has permeated popular

culture. Innovations are often imagined first in fiction; however, sci-fi's visionary momentum is countered by world leaders who seem to be looking backwards to so-called 'dirty energy'. While cuts to social care and public services are popular topics in the media, short-sighted environmental policy represents the forgotten fallout of austerity. Exploiting the current appetite for a world devoid of 'experts, what low-technology fuel could be more appealing to cost-cutting governments than the 'black stuff'?

Literature has always drawn inspiration from the landscape. In the 14th century, Chaucer, the first writer in 'vernacular' English, began *The Canterbury Tales* with a description of spring shoots bursting up through the soil. In the 18th century Wordsworth was inspired by the countryside around Tintern Abbey to compose one of the first examples of poetic sublimity. Although urbanisation has transformed the modern landscape, the dependence of art on the natural world is as strong today as it has

ever been. During the current period of global upheaval, where facts disintegrate and *Nineteen Eighty-Four's* 'newspeak' and 'doublethink' seem like the phantoms of a nightmare realised, it would be easy to overlook the erosion of other things we hold dear. *The Road to Wigan Pier* documents the 'monstrous scenery' of a UK where 'slag-heaps and chimneys seem a more normal, probable landscape than grass and trees'. In the years ahead we must not, through short-sightedness or distraction, retrace Orwell's steps.



Artwork by Sofia Lucarelli

MAKING A MONSTER

ISSARIYA MORGAN reflects on our obsession with monstrosity.

I have never seen a greater monster or miracle in the world than myself.

—Michel de Montaigne

Whether it be vampires, werewolves, zombies, aliens, mutants or ghosts, modern literature is obsessed with the malevolent monster. Yet to delve into the history of the word ‘monster’ is to discover how profoundly these figures have evolved since their original conception. From the Latin word *monstrum*, meaning a ‘divine omen, portent or sign’—which derives from the verb *monere*, meaning ‘to warn or instruct’—‘monster’ has the same root as ‘demonstrate’ and ‘monitor’. This heritage gestures towards monstrosity’s underlying didactic function. Monsters did not begin life as incarnations of evil but as signs illuminating a path towards the divine.

An early example of the monster as a sign appears in Saint Augustine’s *City of God*, written in 426 AD. The text presents an allegorical vision of monstrosity as a stimulus to contemplating the divine. From the fifth century onwards, Augustinian ideas enthralled the collective imagination, influencing some of the greatest writers of the Middle Ages. One of the most iconic of medieval monsters is found in *Inferno*, the first part

of the 14th century epic poem by the Florentine poet, Dante Alighieri. Passing through the nine circles of Hell to its frozen heart, Dante’s protagonist finally encounters Satan—a dehumanised and grotesque, three-faced figure, chewing eternally on history’s greatest sinners. It is an enduring and disturbing image. Yet viewed within the context of *La Divina Commedia* as a whole, this depiction of evil signifies the beginning of an allegorical journey towards God. If the monster is a spiritual sign, Dante’s Satan represents an identification and repudiation of sin.

Not all monsters are so unambiguous. John Milton presents a notoriously controversial Satan in his seventeenth century poem, *Paradise Lost*. While the author set out with a clear objective to ‘justify the ways of God to men’, his highly-nuanced characterisation of Satan has captivated readers for centuries. Milton’s monster has been read as a compelling anti-hero whose awed magnificence invites comparisons to tragic heroes such as Prometheus and Odysseus. It is Satan’s rebellion, expulsion from heaven and consequent revenge that motivates the action in the poem. That the narrative engine of a religious work should be driven by the devil arguably confutes the text’s instructive

credentials. Satan's qualities of hubristic pride and disobedience are uncannily human, creating a more beguiling figure than *Inferno's* dehumanised devil. While Dante's Satan drools in wordless misery, Milton's (perhaps partially inspired by the Lord Protector of England, Oliver Cromwell) commands hell with the eloquence and charisma of a military leader.

This disarming devil—also known as Lucifer, meaning 'light-bearer'—illuminates the fine line between monstrosity and humanity, and how intricately the two are interwoven in moral discourse. The complexities of Milton's Satan demonstrate that a capacity for monstrosity is consubstantial with the human condition. By endowing his devil with qualities that mankind admires and desires, Milton humanises evil and renders moral boundaries ambiguous. Perhaps this is what led the Romantic poet, William Blake, to say that Milton was 'of the Devil's party without knowing it.'

The Victorian era saw the arrival of Gothic monsters, expressing fresh anxieties about contemporary moral and political issues in an age of increasing industry and automation, at times even presenting prosthetic and enhanced visions of humanity—fantasies of power returned to the individual from the apparatus of the repressive state. Later, Darwinism sent shockwaves through society, arising in a cult of the body that would dominate *fin-de-siècle* thinking.

This was reflected in the shift from physical landscapes to the human body itself as the location of later Gothic and Romance narratives. Simultaneously, the 'scientific' theories of the influential (now discredited) criminologist Cesare Lombroso empowered age-old ideas that the capacity for cruelty is detectable through a person's physical features, presenting the monstrous Other as

scientific fact. The legibility of wickedness in one's physical appearance is a notion explored in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Wilde's eponymous anti-hero, 'a young Adonis, who looks as if he were made of ivory and rose leaves', becomes convinced that his youth and attractiveness are the only things worth preserving in life. While retaining his outer beauty, the moral decay of his soul is recorded in the distorted and 'loathsome' figure of his painted image. Wilde ingeniously presents the image of the monstrous Other as a reflection, signalling towards the true nature of the Victorian self.

It hardly needs saying that monstrosity is still a tool of political discourse, deployed violently against marginal groups in order to reinforce divisions and boundaries; but also at times, if less frequently, deployed against those in positions of power. Monstrosity is able to hold a mirror up to the nature of humanity: like Narcissus, we are mesmerised and maddened in equal measure by what is reflected. Monsters are ultimately signs, illuminating more about our own society than any supernatural evil. As Francisco Goya remarked, 'the sleep of reason produces monsters'. We must wake up to the essential truth that the monster has always been human.



A MATERIAL METAPHOR

PINCHAS KAHTAN charts the resonance of dirt and darkness through modern literature.

Of all the words which denote impurity, 'dirt' is the most insistently material. Even as a metaphor to evoke abstract moral concepts, it is impossible to forget the substance itself. The word represents a juncture between physicality and philosophy—a covering of dirt synecdochically represents the human being lying dead beneath. 'Dirt' maintains this combination of conceptual expansiveness and specific integrity even when it migrates from the exterior to the interior. In George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, when Dorothea remembers how 'I used to come from the village with all that dirt and coarse ugliness like a pain within me,' dirt is both the filth of the village and the false moral superiority of those living in spotless mansions. In Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*, 'Mrs. Joe was a very clean housekeeper, but had an exquisite art of making her cleanliness more uncomfortable and unacceptable than dirt itself.' Dickens's ironic assertion that 'cleanliness is next to Godliness', encapsulates the impression that immaculacy is often a sham, masking a meanness of spirit.

The realist creative imagination is inextricable from the Victorian metropolis, where sooty smog chokes the air and stains buildings, rivers are befouled with sewage, and streets are buried under layers of detritus. With this came also the so-called 'great unwashed', a term coined by the popular Victorian novelist and playwright Edward Bulwer-Lytton to denote the urban working class. The modernists, however, were less interested in the aesthetic of the dirt-covered

streets than the way the mind perceived them; modernism was born out of the metropolis but its focus was psychological rather than material. The definitive moral judgments of omniscient narrators yielded to a conception of the self, as a fluctuating 'myriad of impressions', according to Virginia Woolf. Through this transition, objective representation ceded to subjective experience; the enlightened neocortex of the reasoning mind became shadowed by the dark impulses of a hidden unconscious.

Dirt was eschewed in favour of darkness, uncertainty and negation. For George Eliot, narrative was the weaving together of threads—the 'perpetual spinning into intricate thickness' of plots and character arcs. In Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, this metaphor is reconceived as a 'yarn', invoking the direct simplicity of conventional narrative only to diffuse its linear energies. For Conrad's protagonist, 'the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze, in the likeness of one of these misty halos that sometimes are made visible by the spectral illumination of moonshine.' E. M. Forster famously said that 'the secret casket' of Conrad's genius 'contains a vapour rather than a jewel.' His style emphasises negation and absence—the insubstantiality of a 'glow' or 'haze' which are scant likenesses of a 'misty halo', seen only in the 'illumination of moonshine', which is itself merely reflected light. It is not difficult to imagine why some readers find Conrad's style frustrating, and, lyrical as it is, Forster's substitution of a jewel with vapour was not intended as a compliment.

Even from its title, *Heart of Darkness* is explicit in its rejection of locality for metaphysical suggestiveness. While Conrad's earlier works such as *An Outcast of the Islands* invoke a degree of specificity, *Heart of Darkness* instantly defies apprehension, gesturing at the insubstantial and unreal. The titular metaphor invites



Artwork by Nayoung Jeong



interpretations which conflict on both physical and moral grounds. The heart of darkness implies the centre point of a formless abstraction; the vital organ of some shrouded entity. Both meanings are mutually incompatible and impossible to visualise. Conrad's insistence upon immateriality is such that even dirt becomes insubstantial; his protagonist coming to feel that, 'if I tried I could poke my fore finger through him, and would find nothing inside but a little loose dirt.' Dirt becomes an emblem of emptiness, of a vacuity that is moral first and physical second, inverting the realist process for discovering metaphor.

Born in Berdychiv, in what is now Ukraine, Joseph Conrad felt that 'English is to me always a foreign language'. This alienation is imbued in *Heart of Darkness*, where language becomes dissociated with the contingencies of real life, and a colonial narrative at the periphery discovers not jewels and riches but the collapse of human experience, then violently written back onto the centre. Conrad's parents, exiled from Russian-ruled Poland for nationalist political activism, left him a stateless orphan at the age of eleven. As the perpetual outsider and writer in a borrowed tongue, Conrad was radically ambivalent and relativistic. *Heart of Darkness's* famous death cry—'The horror! The horror!'—is the summation of an authorial style which breaks with tradition. Conrad renders shadowy the hollowness of all principles and attempts at absolutism, and a novel that begins as night is falling, ends in total darkness.

TALK DIRTY TO ME

Tell me the things you never
Dared confess
Kept trembling beneath the pew
While the priest addressed
Say the Bible's too small for all your sins
The pages too thin

Love nothing could make
Me love you less
Could you say the same
I confess
That time I spilled the red wine
Across your tablecloth I could
Have stopped it
But the sight was too
Beautiful

RUBY MASON





Artwork by Tom Parkhouse

SON OF MAN



SALAR NOURI

The camera reveals the naked bodies of a man and woman wearing collars, straps and leather pants. They hit each other with whips and chains. It is a dramatic opening to *Son of Man*, a short film whose representation of BDSM is darker and more disturbing than recent films like Polanski's *Venus in Fur* or *Fifty Shades of Grey*, which have glamourised and eroticised sado-masochistic relationships. Instead, director Salar Nouri turned to films like Lanthimo's absurdist *Dogtooth* for inspiration: a chilling exploration of sexual violence within the family home, partially inspired by the Josef Fritzl case.

Nouri says *Son of Man* uses BDSM as a metaphor to explore how sex can be used as 'a tool for gaining power over others'. The film collapses the distinction between pain and pleasure. In Hayden Munt and Rita Sijelmass' script, sexual and familial relations are confused and erotic desire delivers unexpected trauma.



BAN THIS FILTH

THOMAS HETHERINGTON looks at how Mary Whitehouse's so-called 'British Values' shaped horror movies.

'To avoid fainting keep repeating, it's only a movie, it's only a movie.' So goes the tagline to Wes Craven's boundary pushing, bone-splintering 1972 horror movie *The Last House on the Left*. It was, and remains, a shocking piece of cinema. A bloody, brutal, and at times tasteless comment on the use of violence in Vietnam era cinema. Despite being inspired by Bergman and John Everett Millais, and the fact that it hoovered up money at the US Box Office, *The Last House on the Left* was one of the many films that made it onto the video nasties list in 1984.

A loophole in British film certification meant that a film that might face censorship, cuts and potential banishment if shown in UK cinemas could be directly released to video without any need

for certification. This handy loophole created a culture of underground video watching, where people could indulge in the most depraved and exciting content from across the Channel and the Atlantic. Titles such as *The Evil Dead*, *Driller Killer* and *I Spit on Your Grave* were kept safe from the bloodied hands of the BBFC (British Board of Film Classification) who would have butchered them for cinema release. Collectively these films were referred to as 'video nasties'.

But if horror cinema has taught us anything it's that the fun can only last so long before the hacking and slashing begins. Thus arrived the Video Recordings Act of 1984, in part due to the fervent campaigns of Mary Whitehouse: the handbag-wielding,

no-nonsense-taking, anti-permissive patriot and president of the National Viewers' and Listeners' Association. Whitehouse has, in the past 40 years, come to symbolise the kickback against the kickback against Thatcher's England: she has become a figure synonymous with fearsome opposition, moral ideals and so-called 'British Family Values'. It is testament to her impact as a cultural figure that debate still rages as to whether Whitehouse was right or had any lasting impact.

The National Viewers' and Listeners' Association survives to this day in the form of Mediawatch-UK, whose prime focus is lobbying for restrictions upon internet pornography. Mary Whitehouse died in 2001, months before the dot com boom and bust, and it



Photograph by Bohyeon Kim

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is hard to think what she would make of the World Wide Web—one assumes nothing good. Whitehouse is undoubtedly a product of her time. And whilst the NVLA may have been a formidable force in the 80s, at the time of writing Mediawatch-UK only has 301 likes on Facebook. The role of censorship in the internet age is much harder to chart than it was in the analogue world of the 1980s. The democratising power of the net means all desires can be satisfied no matter how unsavoury they may be.

Indeed, it is hard to imagine that *The Evil Dead* and its cohort of nasty friends would have any problem getting seen today, even if they were banned. Many of these controversial movies have been remade in the last few years; *The Last House of the Left*, *I Spit on Your Grave* and *Unhinged* have all been retooled for modern audiences without half the fuss their forebears inspired. In many cases the violence is nastier; heads placed in microwaves, needles shoved into eyeballs and all sorts make the cut. But, as the BBFC themselves

admit, audiences have become 'accustomed to excess'. The violence of these remakes may be more enthusiastic but it receives a neutered response.

That isn't to say, however, that there are no buttons left to push. In 2011 the BBFC banned Tom Six's *Human Centipede II*, fearing that it may be in breach of the Obscene Publications Act. It was, they said, a film with a 'clear association between pain, perversity and sexual pleasure'. The picture was later released after two minutes and thirty-seven seconds of cuts, the details of which would make a beetroot blush, and then probably violently vomit.

Censorship, it seems, still has a role to play. It is easy now to look back on the banning of the video nasties as a shove against artistic freedom (even if some of them were exploitative bilge). Whitehouse may appear deeply conservative in today's world, but it would appear that there are still some things beyond the pail. The line between art and exploitation is no easier to mark now than it was then. The

expanse of streaming platforms and internet access makes it impossible to control content as censors did in the 80s. This might be a good thing for filmmakers releasing challenging material, but it also makes objectionable content easier to find. And, somewhat more perversely, when there's no censor there's no struggle. When everything is available to everyone the underground cult of watching disappears. Googling it and clicking the first result: where's the joy, excitement and daring in that? It's only a movie.



DETECTIVE OR PERVERT?

SOPHIE NEVRKLA explores why David Lynch's mysteries are so tantalising.

David Lynch is attracted to the quintessentially American: diners; good coffee; fast cars; the quiet suburb. As *Blue Velvet* begins, it is all Cadillacs and white fences, freshly mown grass and red roses. But, as the title song plays and the sun beams down, an old man has a stroke. He falls to the ground; the music gradually distorts and morphs into an eerie cacophony of sound, and the camera pans to a heap of dung beetles crawling through a mass of matted grass and soil. Lynch likes to cheat expectations. What we initially see is an image of the American, middle class idyll; but what is revealed is its often-concealed murky underbelly. Lynch's focus is on what lies behind or beneath—and he suggests that there is always more to be found. His protagonists are like the beetles hungrily digging beneath the surface to uncover answers; however dark these may be.

Empty 'non-places' in the US hold interest for Lynch. He constructs narratives set in small, rural towns where entertainment is sparse and excitement is minimal: *Blue Velvet*, *Wild at Heart* and his TV series, *Twin Peaks* all fall into this category. A stultifying, claustrophobic atmosphere permeates the films, which often take place in the vacuous space of summer—a black hole which he fills with mystery, intrigue and romance. Lynch's stories saturate this

dullness with possibility. As Agent Dale Cooper says in one episode of *Twin Peaks*, in which he attempts to solve the murder of popular high school student Laura Palmer: 'Harry, I have no idea where this will lead us, but I have a definite feeling that it will be both wonderful and strange.' The protagonists in Lynch's films are intrigued by the chase; by what lies dangled in front of them, just beyond their reach.

Many of Lynch's narratives start with unanswered questions: observation and understanding are immediately vital. In *Blue Velvet*, the protagonist discovers a severed ear in the bushes of a nearby wood. Listening is transformed into a subversive and dangerous act, which we are nonetheless irresistibly invited to pursue. Lynch's characters are both intrigued and terrified by problem-solving.

Lynch is fascinated by the fine line between curiosity and obsession. The characters, though starting with a legitimate motive to seek justice for wrongdoing, are soon seduced by the chase itself. In *Mulholland Drive*, Betty Elms falls in love with an amnesiac woman who cannot remember her name—an enigma personified. There is a sense in which none of Lynch's characters want the riddle to be solved. They are engaged in an act of metaphorical coitus with the mystery, and want to put off the climactic moment of understanding for as long as possible. Peter Brooks described this as intimately linked to desire and the narrative process:

the organising line of plot is more often than not some scheme or machination, a concerted plan for the accomplishment of some purpose which goes against the ostensible and dominant legalities of the fictional world, the realisation of a blocked and resisted desire.

Lynch, too, deals with what is 'blocked and resisted' within our subconscious. His films are nocturnal, 20th century gothic versions of chiaroscuro drawings. Dark streets are illuminated by sparse street lamps; dark nightclubs are filled with a red glow. Even the juxtaposition of blondes and brunettes throughout his corpus provides a visual contrast between light and darkness. These are visual metaphors for the dusky, menacing topography of the mind itself, scattered with points of light and understanding that allow us to muddle our way through.

His work fixates on the divide between the neat, structured landscape of suburbia, and the messier landscape of the natural world. In *Blue Velvet* and *Twin Peaks* the woods represent the feral and wild, which encroach upon small-town life; *Wild at Heart* portrays the desert road as a path to freedom. The forest and desert are both intimidating and tempting. They seduce not just the characters, but the viewer: both become intoxicated with their unpredictability, and the sense that anything could happen outside the all-American town. They embody the 'blocked and resisted desire' upon which the narrative rests, tempting the characters to give in to their primal urges.

Plot is organised around a 'realisation' of repressed emotion, the bursting forth of what has long been buried. 'I'm in the middle of a mystery' says Jeffrey Beaumont in *Blue Velvet* – and



Photograph by Morgan Massey

boy, is he enjoying it: but as soon as this 'desire' is realised, the narrative enters its death. Lynch's narratives usually rush their beginning, draw out their middle, and end abruptly. It is the act of seduction, of solving, that Lynch is infatuated with: his narratives want to remain in a perpetual middle, simultaneously approaching and resisting the climax.

In Lynch's neo-noir mysteries, the solution is both present and absent; it dances for us in our dreams, but disappears on the moment of waking. Desire is the 'narrative motor' which uses problem-solving to tease both characters and viewer. When the solution arrives we feel comfortable, but not excited. Perhaps Lynch suggests that excitement is unsustainable. Yet while we will always pursue the steady satisfaction of answers, Lynch reveals the potency of our craving for the seductive intrigue of the not-yet-known.



DUST AND DOMESTICITY

A celebration of the solidarity to be found in depictions of women cleaning, by SELMA REZGUI.

In so many cultures, cleaning—the removal of dirt—has been an integral part of the female experience. Consequently, films from diverse genres have dramatised this association between domesticity and femininity: relatable, salt-of-the-earth type characters are shown cleaning, often communally. In these films, cleaning does not only reveal the gendered demands of a patriarchal society; it is a way of portraying stoicism and competence in the face of adversity. Dirt and its removal is often used in film as a device to strengthen bonds: as shorthand for an act of solidarity and community between women, especially working-class women. It is an idea common to film across cultures and continents, cropping up everywhere from kitchen sink realism in 1960s England, to more recent dramas like Turkish-French director Deniz Gamze Ergüven's *Mustang*.

In Percy Adlon's *Bagdad Café*, heavy-set and imposing Bavarian tourist Jasmin Münchgstettner is first introduced as comically out of place in the expansive, dusty wilderness of the Mojave Desert: the dust isolates her from her surroundings and highlights how alien she is in this environment. She sets about tidying the eponymous motel, run by Brenda: a wiry and seemingly perpetually enraged black woman who is reaching the end of her tether with her incompetent and absent family members, especially her husband, who is quickly and unceremoniously banished. In doing so, Jasmin gradually blows away the cobwebs from the ailing café and the ailing relationships within it. By cleaning and tidying, Jasmin claims her space in an environment that she was once shut out of, and cements her relationships within it too. Restoring order to Brenda's chaotic office

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is an act of giving and removing, of decluttering and purifying. While the implication that all it takes is a big-busted, big-hearted European to resolve the problems of a belligerent black woman and her family living in desert purgatory is tedious, the common ground found between the two women through Jasmin's determined scrubbing is genuine and touching.

The conception of cleaning and domestic competence as a bedrock of female solidarity is also present in many of the films of Pedro Almodóvar. The Spanish director is renowned for his profound and intimate depictions of women and he has used the same muses to explore these themes throughout his career. The opening sequence of *Volver* depicts the women of a rural Spanish village as they tend to family graves in the local cemetery. They gossip and bond, and the act of cleaning—of maintaining or restoring order in an unpredictable world where death can strike at any moment—is depicted as a uniquely female ability.

Both these films are characterised by the absence of husbands:

Brenda and Jasmin get rid of theirs within the first ten minutes of *Bagdad Café*, and in *Volver* Raimunda's husband Paco is violently removed early on. Tellingly, Raimunda works as a cleaner to support her daughter and her good-for-nothing husband. As in *Bagdad Café*, it is the actions of the husband and the women's reaction to them that set the events of the film in motion. There is a striking sequence in *Volver* after Raimunda's daughter Paula has accidentally murdered her husband while defending herself against his sexual advances. Raimunda has to competently rid her apartment of the copious blood and deal efficiently with the body. She does it calmly, without the hysteria or melodrama that might be expected from one of Almodóvar's unapologetically emotional women. Once she has finished, the only trace of the ordeal is a small smudge of blood on her neck, pointed out by a male neighbour, which she wryly passes off as 'woman troubles'. She acts out of necessity, primarily to protect her daughter and preserve their bond.

In these films, the act of cleaning is empowering.

It grows out of necessity but allows women to demonstrate their confidence, their necessary unflappability and the importance of building relationships outside romantic, heterosexual ones. Yes, the connection between femininity and impurity is archaic and biblical—and it is instinctive male disgust with women being somehow 'earthy' which leads to their archetypal role as cleaners (nodded at archly by Almodóvar with Raimunda's reference to menstruation). However, the way that women respond in these films breaks out of this tired trope. The women find a power in the seemingly banal acts of wiping and dusting—and solidarity in the universal necessity of cleaning. These films do not romanticise the cleaning that these women need to do, or claustrophobically confine them to this domestic sphere; instead these representations of women subvert the imposition of this role and find both strength and humour in it.

AIR

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I had made my bed and for the seventh week lay in it.
Lay in the same place between the wall
and the vast space between it
and my unhinged door.

YOUR

60

DIRTY

Sheets slick with the smell of
skin and of sweat and
of the ever growing space you
left
behind.

It is not the fact I did not mind
did not care for the smell of unwashed hair or the clammy
warmth of pillows that know no cool side.

LAUNDRY

Unhinged.

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I lament in my laundry avoid the tasks I should tackle
with conviction.
Cockroach disposition how am I so obstinate?
Skirting the edge of my bed in exoskeletal break down.
Now how I lie
so still
so
small

Even if I were to air my sheets I fear I would still be able
to feel the dirt as it grinds under my finger nails.

OLIVIA ROBBINS

Showcase

Blackfacing Characters

EMMA DESHPANDE traces the history of blackface and its legacy.

Blackface is the make-up used by a non-black performer in a black role. The practice is generally associated with 19th century minstrel shows, but it is ongoing. A Canadian production of the musical *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* in 2015 cast the Landless twins as white actors in brownface; the director defended his choice by arguing that the use of brownface reflected the play's 19th century setting. But darkening one's face to portray another race is rooted in racism, and its effects are pernicious—particularly upon actors of colour. Historically, the practice of blackface and brownface has limited the characters non-white actors have been able to play. They have also created stereotypes of black identities, and limited the role models available to actors of colour.

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During the 20th century, blackface was frequently used by black actors, who became famous for performances which stereotyped African Americans as idle and foolish. In the 1930s, the black actor Lincoln Perry based his career on the comic persona Stepin Fetchit, the so-called 'laziest man in the world'. While his blackface performances earned him great fame, he unsurprisingly came under fire from the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP). Around the same time, Bert Williams was ascending the vaudeville circuit to become the first black man on Broadway. Though he became one of the most popular performers of the 1920s, he was by no means treated equally to white comedians. His roles in the *Ziegfeld Follies*, a popular Broadway theatrical revue, were all blackface comedy. His castmates in the *Follies* chose not to



Photograph by Carô Gervay

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tell him about an Actors Equity strike in 1919; his blackface performances meant, as Williams once said, 'I don't belong to either side'.

Roles that should be an opportunity for actors of colour are too-often given to white actors. For decades the role of King Mongkut of Siam, in *The King and I*, was played by Russian-born Yul Brenner. Little has changed: the RSC's 2012 production of *The Orphan of Zhao*, considered the Chinese *Hamlet*, only cast three East-Asian actors, none of whom were given a major part. Last month, protests erupted outside The Print Room in Notting Hill when they cast three non-Asian actors in Howard Barker's *In the Depths of Dead Love*, a play set in Ancient China.

Up-and-coming non-white actors struggle to find a place in the industry due to a lack of role models. Chinese-British actress Anna Chen has repeatedly spoken out about how rarely she sees Chinese actors in the UK Media. Indian actor Aziz Ansari, who had been inspired by the character of Ben Jabituya in *Short Circuit 2*, later discovered that Jabituya had been played by Fisher Stevens in brownface. Neither actor felt like there was an established path into the profession. This absence is shockingly reflected in the statistic that only one eighth of students enrolled on acting courses in the UK in 2012 were people of colour.

Actors of colour who portray their own race on stage have inspired younger generations of actors and directors. In the 1820s, when the majority of black actors were relegated to blackface comedy, Ira Aldridge became the first

black actor to portray Othello on stage, which inspired several black acting troupes to form in his name. The Ira Aldridge Troupe in Philadelphia was notable for not performing plantation-themed minstrel shows; they chose to parody Irish immigrants instead. Aldridge's accomplishments also inspired Henry Francis Downing, possibly the first black playwright published in Britain. In 2016 the musical *Hamilton* cast the founding fathers of America in a way that reflected the diversity of American society today. Let's hope that this is a sign for the future.

Yet one musical cannot instantly repair centuries of marginalisation. The issue goes beyond the fact that white actors are still allowed to portray important figures from other cultures, communities, and histories. When their cultures are not being appropriated, actors of colour are often limited to parts written specifically as non-white. There should be opportunities for more than 'black roles' or 'Asian roles'. People of colour must be able to see themselves represented on stage as actors rather than examples of their race.

WAITING FOR KRAPP

LAITH CAHILL inspects Samuel Beckett's excremental satires.

Scatology is a preoccupation with the body's waste: its self-produced dirt, its faeces, its crap.

The Irish playwright, poet and novelist, Samuel Beckett, was profoundly fixated with scatology. In a review of *The Letters of Samuel Beckett 1929-40*, Colm Tóibín recounts a disagreement between the editor and Beckett's estate:

it is the editor's view that Beckett's frequent, at times almost obsessive discussion of his health problems—his feet, his heart palpitations, his boils and cysts—is of direct relevance to the work; with this the estate of Samuel Beckett had disagreed.

For my part, I take the editor's view. In his novel *The Unnameable*, Beckett

poses this semi-logical proposition:

shit, there we have it at last, there it is at last, the right word, one has only to seek, seek in vain, in order to be sure of finding it in the end, it's a question of elimination.

Beckett seeks, promises, yet fails to fulfil. Being 'sure of finding it' is absurdly preceded by seeking 'in vain', and the final clause revels in a glorious pun: shit, 'it's a question of elimination'.

Two plays which collocate Beckett's fixations on absurdity and excrement are *Waiting for Godot* and the aptly named *Krapp's Last Tape*. Listening to tape recordings of his younger self, Krapp hears his voice say:

with all this darkness round me I feel less alone. (Pause). In a way. (Pause). I love to get up and move about in it then back here to ... (hesitates) ... me. (pause) Krapp.

The character's name is a conspicuous homophone. The word 'spool', so like 'stool', is repeated fifteen times in the play, occasionally '(With relish) Spooooo!' As the tape recorder excretes its spool, it elicits one of Krapp's few happy smiles of the play. Could this be relief? After all, Krapp yearns to relieve himself. His tapes connote the accumulated ruminations of his life—of aspirations and resolutions that have led only to the 'flagging pursuit of happiness [and] unattainable laxation'. Life, for Krapp, has been constipated. *Waiting*

for Godot is a similarly costive affair. Estragon and Vladimir are vagrants, society's refuse, who wait on a country road like bolus in limbo along the digestive tract. Estragon tells Vladimir, 'you piss better when I'm not there.' However, he is always there; urine, like Godot it seems, has difficulty arriving.

The scatology of Beckett's plays speaks of his own creative process, and what critic Joshua Esty describes as the 'practitioner's recognition of their own implication in ethical, aesthetic or political failure.' In suffering the proverbial writer's block, he felt 'dim to the brink of extinction. Further work inconceivable'. Beckett's decision to write in French was intended to combat this creative constipation. It represented an 'escape from mother Anglo-Irish exuberance and automatisms', he wrote to a friend: 'from excess to lack of colour.' Beckett suggested that the measure would be temporary: 'English grown foreign resumable ten years later.' Beckett's turn to French was therefore both a search in vain and a question of elimination.

It was also a form of rebellion against the English language, which represented to Beckett—as for many Irish writers—the gross dominance of British colonial policy. Like his sometime employer and close acquaintance James Joyce, Beckett fled the UK to live in a Paris free from the English language and its colonial echoes in 1928.

On January 21st 1919, Ireland had declared independence from Britain. Both Beckett and Joyce, whose *Ulysses* was serialised around this time were writing in time of decolonisation. The scatologies of the two Irish writers comment on the removal of imperial Britain from the Irish body politic—a removal perhaps best expressed by the immense catharsis of Joyce's Leopold Bloom on his cuckstool:

he allowed his bowels to ease themselves quietly as he read, reading still patiently that slight constipation of yesterday quite gone. Hope it's not too big bring on piles again. No, just right. So. Ah!

Beckett is more sceptical of decolonisation and

Irish nationalism: Ireland had passed through the body of British colonialism and was chemically and irreversibly changed. Nationalist movements purporting a return to precolonial Ireland were searching only for 'history's ancient faeces.' As Esty asserts, 'if national allegory attempts to realign human and historical time in a fantasy of restored identity, then excremental satire casts doubt on that fantasy and opens up the gap between subject and nation.'

Beckettian scatology explores the liminality and duality of excrement as both a part of us and apart from us. Excrement can be a symbol of the gap within our own selves—as with Krapp and his unfulfilled wishes—of repressed desires or of catharsis, of the creative process or, finally, of decolonisation and the gap between independence and freedom. In Beckett, scatology is psychology. It is existentialism. It is post-colonialism.

Scatology is the study of life through its dirt.



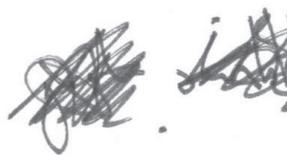
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CONTRIBUTORS

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- Beatrice Bowles-Bray - Bogyeon Kim -
Carô Gervay - Charlie Macnamara - Emma
Deshpande - Fleur Elkerton - Florence
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