ISSUE 7 / TERRITORIES

SAVAGE JOURNAL

Cover Art by FRANCISCO RODRIGUEZ PINO

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

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

EDITORS' NOTE

Spring 2018

Whether we realise it or not, we are constantly negotiating territories; dancing the fine line between ownership and occupation. The concept of territory is surprisingly amorphous and its applications are far-reaching; territories can be literal or metaphorical, physical or mental.

One of the territories many of us take for granted is the home - a place that shapes us and becomes a part of us. Joanna Pienkowska and Daniel Ocampo's respective articles on Grenfell Tower and the Central American refugee crisis explore what happens when this 'home' is inaccessible, or else ripped from beneath our feet. Joanna investigates alternative ways of reclaiming space, when it is denied to you: for the community surrounding Grenfell Tower, a blank wall has come to be a symbol of solidarity, resilience and strength. Daniel looks at those for whom 'home' is never a stable territory in the first place.

But territories are often more complex than a line in the sand, a point of geographical reference, places you are and aren't allowed to enter - they can be intangible, often invisible restraints either imposed or self-inflicted. In light of #MeToo and #TimesUp, 'Our Bodies' and 'The Ansari Question' address what happens when the personal becomes political; when the most intimate of territories - our bodies - are not only violated, but thrust onto the public stage.

Several writers explore the state of territorial flux triggered by conflict and the questions this raises about both personal and collective identity. Farida El Kafrawy explores the splintering of emotional and geographical territories brought about by the Syrian conflict in 'Taste of Cement', whilst Xara Zabihi Dutton considers the question of Kurdish independence through the lens of Kae Bahar's 2014 novel, *Letters from a Kurd*.

Throughout this issue, the concept of territories has been applied in multifarious ways. Some articles deal very graphically with potentially triggering topics, namely sexual assault and racial prejudice. We hope the diversity of thought with which contributors have approached the topic sparks debate and incites meaningful conversations.

This is our last issue editing SAVAGE Journal. It has been a pleasure, and we will be sad to go - but we look forward to welcoming next year's editorial team in September.

Thank you for reading SAVAGE Journal.

Bella, Sophie and Flossie

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THE OTHER REFUGEE CRISIS

DANIEL OCAMPO works in Texas, helping to find pro bono legal representation for unaccompanied Central American children in deportation proceedings in the US. Here, he discusses gender-based violence in Central America and the legal problems that confront women and children who migrate to the US

Jessica* was fourteen years old when Mario forced himself into her home to take her as his de facto sexual slave. She knew immediately who he was when he showed up – his tattooed face marked him out as a member of MS-13, one of El Salvador's most brutal street gangs. Without parents or an adequate justice system and only her ailing grandmother to protect her, Jessica fell into an abusive non-consensual relationship with Mario for the next five months. It was only when she fled to the United States, pregnant and in search of refuge, that she escaped the captor who had ripped away her childhood.

In parts of Central America, grotesque gang violence has become a way of life. MS-13 and its rival gang, Barrio 18, have spread to dominate the political landscape since coming to El Salvador in the 1980s, when early members were deported from the prisons of Los Angeles. The 'Northern Triangle' - El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala - is the bloodiest place on earth outside of official war zones. Murder rates in its cities are some of the highest in the world.

More specifically, this is a machista gang-culture where women are treated as male property, and gender-based violence is therefore especially common. By the age of 24 Mario was a senior member of MS-13, a gang that targets youth above all, which meant that Jessica was totally defenceless against his advances. Her story reflects the growing issue of high rates of femicide in the region, something that is dangerously close to being declared an 'internationally recognised epidemic' in El Salvador. In Guatemala, on average fourteen underage girls are sexually abused every day and more than sixty women are murdered every week. The authorities are incapable of controlling the ubiquitous gender-based violence in the region, and sometimes even complicit in it. According to the United Nations, 98% of all femicides in Honduras go unpunished.

Once she learnt she was pregnant, a fifteen-year-old Jessica decided to flee El Salvador,

terrified and alone, to make the treacherous journey through Guatemala and Mexico. This threat of gender-based violence posed by unbridled gangs has become a major factor in the deepening refugee crisis at America's southern border. Every year some 500,000 people cross the border into Mexico in search of a better life, most fleeing the endemic violence of the Northern Triangle. Many of those who flee are children: more than 50,000 unaccompanied minors arrived at the US-Mexico border in 2014 alone.

Although Jessica crossed into the United States safely, she was apprehended almost immediately by Border Patrol and charged as an unlawfully present 'alien' to be placed in deportation proceedings. Shockingly, children like Jessica in this situation are not guaranteed the right to a lawyer. States are required to provide counsel to criminal defendants who cannot afford to hire a lawyer on their own, but this does not apply to immigration law. Expecting a fifteen-year-old – let alone a ten-year-old or a five-year-old – to navigate the United States immigration system without an attorney is patently absurd. Yet tens of thousands of children who may be eligible for some kind of lawful status are instead deported or drift into the shadows, for lack of access to legal services.

Even with an attorney, women and girls seeking asylum face an uphill battle. In order to win an asylum case, the applicant is required to show firstly that they have suffered 'harm rising to the level of persecution'. Clearly, an applicant like Jessica can show that she was the victim of persecution. However, the court also requires the applicant to demonstrate that they were persecuted on account of one of the following protected characteristics: race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. Countless young women and girls come to the US fleeing persecution on account of their gender alone. But there is no obvious legal recourse for being persecuted because they are female, and the majority are denied asylum and deported, however horrendous their persecution might have been.

Under current case law, there is some precedent for Central American women and girls to gain asylum by arguing that they belong to a 'particular social group'. The Board of Immigration Appeals recently ruled that 'married women in Guatemala who are unable to leave their relationship' constituted a cognisable 'particular social group', thereby offering a path to asylum for victims of domestic violence. But for many others in gender-based cases, formulating an asylum claim using the 'particular social group' clause is excessively difficult, and a host of other cases brought before the courts have been lost. Many more are at risk of facing this outcome, including Jessica, whose asylum case is still pending.

The notion that gender is a basis for oppression and persecution just like race and religion should not prove shocking to anyone. Until this reality is codified into law, and gender is a protected characteristic along with race, nationality, religion, and political opinion, cases like Jessica's will continue to be denied.

**Names have been changed*

For more information, Kids in Need of Defence (KIND) is an international non-profit dedicated to ensuring that no child appears in immigration court without an attorney.

THE GRENFELL WALL: AN URBAN GRASSROOTS MEMORIAL

JOANNA PIENKOWSKA looks at an important space of collective remembrance for those affected by the Grenfell Tower fire

We all remember how we first saw it: the image of a charred Grenfell Tower engulfed in orange flames, encircled by smoke. This photograph of the burning building lends itself to wide circulation because it overcomes the ethical difficulty of representing and visualising suffering. It doesn't show death as something certain and confirmed; rather, it is an image of presumed death, represented by an inanimate tower in flames. In her analysis of visual representations of 9/11, Barbie Zelizer writes that images of presumed death allow for bodies of the dead to be 'erased so as to more fully emphasise extravagant, memorable, and striking visual scenes in their stead.' We see the building on fire, knowing that there are people inside, and imagine the death it represents.

While distance can often be an effective way of making sense of a tragedy and working through trauma, it also tends to dehumanise the victims. The towering image of presumed death obscures the disaster's human dimension, blocking out both victims and survivors from our imagination. The Grenfell tragedy was notable for its absence of bodies. The fire made it difficult to identify remains, which meant the death toll was unconfirmed for months. Bodies that were found could not be identified, so former residents of the tower remained nominally missing, rather than declared dead. Some of those living in the tower were undocumented migrants who therefore could neither be accounted for nor mourned for. The scale and nature of a catastrophe like Grenfell poses an obstacle to conventional forms of mourning and remembrance.

As part of the commemoration process, a white wall was constructed outside a community church near Grenfell Tower. Erected in the same spirit that brought community centres and volunteers together to coordinate relief, lacking help from local officials, the wall acted as a spontaneous grassroots memorial for the victims of the fire. It became a public physical space for mourning, marked out like a shrine by material objects

associated with expressions of grief: flowers, burning candles, lights, stuffed toys and written messages.

The wall was adorned with messages of remembrance and collective healing. Promises to 'never forget' alongside 'RIP' and 'forever in our hearts' were repeated all over the wall – language typical of traditional memorials and sites of mourning. Such messages were followed by those showing love and support for the bereaved community. 'Pray for our community' was written in the middle in large colourful writing, surrounded by messages from visitors, both local to Grenfell and across London, wishing strength and showing solidarity.

In the aftermath of the fire, the wall also functioned as a message board for the community. Missing posters were put up amongst the cluster of memorial messages in an effort to locate lost loved ones. These posters displayed a contact number and photographs of the missing person. Over time, as some of the people described as 'missing' in the posters were declared or presumed dead, the posters themselves became individual memorials, with messages of mourning scribbled over them. Each of these posters publicly reasserted the human loss of the tragedy by showing individual faces, acting to counteract the dehumanising effect of visualising the disaster as a building or talking about victims in numbers.

Some messages on the wall were overtly political in content. These confronted the injustice of the disaster, demanding accountability for the failure to prevent a tragedy that residents of the tower had anticipated. 'Justice for Grenfell' echoed across the wall, while other messages directly addressed the government or the local council, with rallying calls to 'fight the power' and 'jail those responsible'. The wall gave political voice to a community that had been neglected and marginalised.

Though not explicitly political in intention, other aspects of the wall were functionally political in bringing the issue of ethnicity to the forefront of the discourse around Grenfell. Messages of prayer, for example, written in different languages and of different faiths, reasserted the ethnically mixed character of this largely working-class community. The act of making visible the faces of victims served a similar function. It demanded the inclusion of these minority communities in a sense of Britishness that is too often narrow and exclusive, while at the same time highlighting how inequality and injustice hinge on social stratifications of race and class. The high visibility of these photographs, like the one of young Jessica Urbano Ramirez, on posters as well as social media, meant that even to those outside the Grenfell community these individuals became familiar.

Importantly, the wall was a physical manifestation of these marginalised people's effort to reclaim a part of their city, a city which is increasingly exclusionary. With their homes destroyed and their community displaced, those who had been based in and around Grenfell Tower laid claim to a physical space in their urban environment, reinstating some sense of belonging and power. In this way, the wall became a space of solidarity not only for those within the Grenfell community, but also other working-class or ethnic minority groups and council estate tenants across London who felt, and feel, similarly marginalised. While walls around the world seek to separate and divide, the Grenfell memorial wall stood as a symbol of unity and inclusion, helping us to imagine a more united and inclusive London.

Artwork by FRANCISCO RODRIGUEZ PINO

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THE ANSARI QUESTION

DAISY CLAGUE argues that focusing on the case-by-case specifics of what legally 'counts' as sexual assault obscures the wider significance of what #MeToo reveals about our society

The condemnation of Harvey Weinstein has been unanimous. Upwards of fifty accusations of sexual misconduct and multiple ensuing criminal investigations provide incontrovertible evidence of his wrongdoing. Other cases are less clear cut. As #MeToo expands its remit from workplace assault to 'awkward sex', the initially united Twitter jury has divided over which experiences should qualify for #MeToo exposure. As self-appointed expert on the semantics of assault Matt Damon insightfully observes, groping and rape are two different things: "they shouldn't be conflated, right?" But even established feminists are advancing a similar critique: where is the line between sexual assault and an 'awkward' sexual encounter, and should they even be part of the same conversation?

One woman's account in particular, of her date with Netflix comedian Aziz Ansari, has stirred a backlash against #MeToo. In an online article, using a pseudonym, 'Grace' describes her evening with Ansari. He rushed through their dinner date and invited her back to his apartment, where he grabbed a condom 'within minutes' of their first kiss. He then performed oral sex on her and motioned for her to do the same in return. Uncomfortable with how quickly things had escalated, Grace repeatedly pulled away, using 'verbal and non-verbal' cues to indicate her reticence. Ansari persisted, apparently unaware of her distress, and after an hour of back and forth Grace got a cab and cried the whole ride home.

Since she publicly identified her experience as sexual assault, Grace's account has provoked a response from many young women on social media for whom this was an infuriatingly familiar experience. But Grace's exposé was too ambiguous for other commentators; it has been derided as an example of #MeToo taken too far. One article condemns Grace's account as '3000 words of revenge porn', another calls it today's McCarthyism. In *The New York Times* Bari Weiss argues that if we start ostracising men like Ansari along with the obviously worse Weinsteins of our society, #MeToo will end up implicating most men in sexual 'misconduct' that would previously have just been thought of as 'bad sex'. Critics further claim that blaming the man in a case like Grace's strips women of their sexual agency; we infantilise women by always presenting them as victims, and if Grace was so uncomfortable she should have made her 'non-verbal' cues clearer.

I disagree. The issue is not that Grace should have behaved differently, the issue is that even this middle-class, educated, white woman whose societal advantages surely put her in the best possible position to rebuff unwanted advances, did not feel able to do so. Grace may have been more inclined to put up with her discomfort because Ansari

is famous, but her livelihood would most likely not have been at risk if she had rejected him more forcefully. Writers who condemn women like Grace for speaking out about ambiguous experiences of sexual assault are often similarly privileged. But if it's hard for a privileged woman like Grace to 'say no', it is exponentially more difficult for women whose economic and personal security might be under threat if they were to do so. On top of this, Margaret Atwood's famous quote comes to mind: "men are afraid that women will laugh at them. Women are afraid that men will kill them." The risk of further physical violence is arguably always present and can deter victims of assault from saying 'no'. That critics assume that every potential victim of assault is equally equipped to tell the perpetrator to "get your hands off me right now", as Weiss puts it, demonstrates a complete lack of awareness of their own relative power.

I also believe that in criticising Grace for her 'mixed signals', critics overlook what her experience shows us about the deeply ingrained gendered power structures in our society. Does it have to take Grace screaming 'no means no!', or threatening to punch Ansari in the face, à la journalist Julia Hartley-Brewer when Michael Fallon repeatedly put his hand on her knee, for him to deduce that this woman just doesn't want to have sex with him? Incorporating Grace's 'ambiguous' experience into a conversation about clear-cut rape and assault allows us to explore what this huge spectrum of violence against women tells us about our society. These experiences are all connected to a patriarchal system of normalised misogyny that dominates our culture and enables men to behave aggressively towards women, often without even realising or needing to acknowledge that what they are doing is wrong.

Ansari's inability to recognise Grace's discomfort points to a sexual culture in which men are legitimately encouraged to persist and persuade in the face of resistance, while even the most privileged of women often don't consider blunt refusal to be a viable option. Perhaps this is fuelled by the fact that the average boy is first exposed to porn at 12 years old; it is not at all hard to find porn that contains high rates of violence against women, which in turn promotes a degrading idea of sex for boys, and a sexual framework to which girls are pressured to respond. The gender disparity in the ways we are socialised to understand sex is further highlighted by men and women's different definitions of 'bad sex', when it happens between consenting individuals. For men, bad sex tends to mean failure to orgasm. For women, the low end of the bad sex scale is a very different matter: research has shown that it most commonly denotes physical pain. That men and women's baseline expectations are so unequal speaks to a culture that is just not good enough.

It is essential to acknowledge the different levels of severity in sexual assault and harassment: Ansari's actions do not make him a Weinstein, and nobody has suggested he should be treated as such. But bickering over whether something 'counts' as legally reprehensible sexual assault obscures the wider significance of the sexual culture that #MeToo has exposed. By highlighting the more ordinary sexual misbehaviour perpetuated by men such as Ansari we might actually begin to comprehend the ways in which our culture enabled the open secret of Weinstein's behaviour to go unchallenged in Hollywood for so many years. #MeToo is an opportunity to redraw the acceptable boundaries of sexual behaviour, and move towards a sexual politics in Western society that is good enough for women as well as for men.

Artwork by FRANCISCO RODRIGUEZ PINO

OUR BODIES

ISABEL WEBB and ALIZAY AGHA introduce SAVAGE Journal's new Instagram platform, created to redefine the narrative around sexual assault

Our bodies. They are lumps of muscle and bone and blood and sweat and tears; they carry us from A to B, they live and breathe and cry. Their borders change, in a flux of constant negotiation between cake and kale, bed and bootcamp. We pierce them as teenagers, shouting into the wind that we are grown, and we are autonomous. We tattoo them, clothe them, strip them, and love them. But when our bodies are assaulted, they are stolen from us. And this theft is not as obvious as running into a bank wielding a gun and wearing a balaclava; the silence it thrusts upon us isn't as explicit as a thick wodge of tape pressed over our lips. This invasion of our bodies is an intangible, fluid, effervescent anaesthetic.

We started Our Bodies as a way to reclaim the narrative around sexual assault, as a way to give the criminally under-documented statistics a human face. As survivors, we are silenced during the event and in the aftermath; our agency is taken away. Our Bodies is a new photo series run by SAVAGE Journal that aims to give agency back to survivors by offering them the chance to tell their story in their own words and be believed. If you

@_ourbodies_

would like to share your story, know that it is on your terms. If you want to remain anonymous, you can. If you want to be photographed, you can. These are our bodies, our survival, our stories and our voices. We will not be silenced anymore.

#MeToo provided a public platform for survivors of sexual assault and harassment to step onto, to claim their space and be acknowledged. But it also shone the harsh light of public opinion over the minutiae of their experiences, allowing the average Joe Bloggs Twitter-user their star turn as Judge Judy. It exposed the risks of putting a personal narrative into a public space, as if the space in which you share something alters the ownership. There are no comments on Our Bodies, no names and no specific details. Anonymising the accounts not only protects the survivors involved, but creates a survivor-lead narrative that others can identify with. Instead of reading the opinion pieces attached to #MeToo and having doubt and judgment thrust upon them, survivors (whether they want to submit their own story or not) can read Our Bodies and instead be confronted with positive affirmations of their own feelings. They can be comforted by the fact that they are not alone, and if they ever do choose to come forward with their story, they will be believed.

Our Bodies works to make the personal political, and with each person who steps into this new territory and adds their voice to the rising chorus, we get stronger. Our narrative is powerful because it is raw and personal, but so many of us share in it: each person we have spoken to has at least two or three stories and some have five or six. The platform isn't just for the survivors sharing their experiences; it is also for the ones reading it, who have their own perfectly valid reasons for not sharing. It traces invisible lines between millions of dots drawn and forgotten. Together, we are painting a picture of strength and resilience, lighting a spark that will fuel a thousand fires and lead to change.

Sexual misconduct infiltrates every level of society. It will take a lot to change it, and ultimately needs to start at the root; future generations needs to be educated and socialised in a way that champions consensual, safe sexual practices over warped power dynamics and brutal, albeit often silent, sexual oppression. Sex education in schools needs to be addressed, provisions need to be made in universities and workplaces to prevent damaging sexual behaviours, and we need to think critically about the messages that culture and art deliver to young people. Films, for example, have a way of burrowing into the subconscious mind, leaving ideological breadcrumbs for the viewer to follow in their everyday life. But just look at the people making films, the people shaping culture. If our tastemakers look and act like Harvey Weinstein, far too many people will grow up to uphold and facilitate their behaviour.

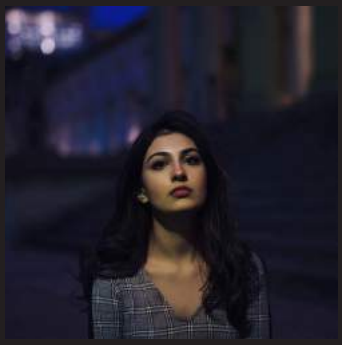
Challenging the culture of sexual harassment and assault at universities raises interesting questions about the nature of university as both a personal and a shared territory. What is each student entitled to in terms of creating a safe space in which to learn? Should UCL focus on 'impartiality' as an educational institution, or on its pastoral responsibilities to individual students? We are calling for an anonymous reporting system, a clearer and more humanised support system and compulsory consent workshops to prevent this epidemic from spreading in the first place. Find Our Bodies on Facebook and Instagram to get involved or stay updated. Together, we can end this.

@_ourbodies_

I suppose my photo looks like consent. We call it black and white but the reality is a thousand shades of grey. If it were really black and white, then you would have stopped when I said 'no'. If consent were really that binary, my tears would have been enough for you to know that I meant 'no' and not just 'try harder'. If it were really as simple as black and white, my story wouldn't have been met with confused faces, startled friends scrambling to testify to your good nature, or the incessant, dismissive raised eyebrows asking 'are you sure?' I used to say the hardest thing was facing up to the fact that I froze. The fact that in that moment - for all my pride in my feminism, my false security in equality, my belief that I had some kind of sexual propriety over my own body - in that moment I froze and thought the best way to survive was to let it happen. Were my no's too quiet? Was my cold, stiff body not enough for you to realise? Would my stomach ever stop turning at the sound of your name?

After a few months, I said the hardest thing was letting myself trust again. I tried not to conflate you with all men. I ran into the arms of men I knew had treated me well in the past, desperate to assure myself it was just you; desperate to reclaim my sexuality, my body. But I was empty. Another few months went by and I told my mum. Then the hardest thing was the shame. My dad still only knows as much as the whispered conversations, my silent tears and my newfound determination to end this epidemic. But I realised that my strength was in our solidarity. The more survivors I spoke to, the more I found peace; the more agency I gradually clawed back from you. I won't let what you did rot inside of me anymore.

I never reported what happened for fear of what people would say about me in trying to defend you. For fear of ruining your life when I still hoped that you would realise what you did and change. For fear of having to tell this story again and again, first on a form, then to a counsellor and then to all the other officials who would inevitably pass me round like a hot potato no-one really knew what to do with. For fear of being labelled a victim. I wish I had reported you. I'm telling this story now because I want you to know what you took from me. And I want you to know that I found the strength to take it back.



The morning after, he asked me to meet him at the portico steps and amongst the bustle of fellow students and their laughs, he said this: Please don't Harvey Weinstein me.

The prospect of what he had done was very real but he, in his ignorance and selfishness, was not ready to accept it; he refused for it to be his reality when I had lived, breathed and suffered in it. He joked, laughed and waited to be reassured. And me? I was still frozen in the shock of the moment that had occurred so many hours ago and like then, I didn't scream, I didn't rise up and denounce him, I didn't even cry. I was desperate to make things okay, knowing they just weren't. The night before, I had said I was uncomfortable and didn't want to do anything but in response to my rejection, he told me I was more than just a prostitute otherwise he wouldn't have treated me in the way in which he had up until then. He made me feel guilty for not wanting to let him treat me like a body and as someone who has suffered from emotional abuse for years, I truly felt as though I had succumbed to the pressure of the world and lost my voice. Back at the steps, I felt weaker than ever before, riddled with self-doubt and shock. So I went home, screamed, cried, banged my head against walls and blacked out eventually a few days later.

Then I called him back there, told him what he did wrong and he half-heartedly apologised, not because he wanted but because he had to; he wanted it to go away, for me and my inconvenient reality not to exist anymore. I accepted his apology but then witnessed him joke about consent, me and the incident, on numerous occasions afterwards. I so desperately wanted him to understand but the truth is, his redemption does not, and will not, equal my justice. That is within me; the system has failed people like me but we must not allow it to fail the empowerment we owe to ourselves.

As a South-Asian woman, I have been told since I was a baby, since I had a body, that if I have been touched I have been stained and if I have been stained, then my stain will bring shame upon my world until finally, I will be shamed out of it, made to live with my reality and never touched again. As the famous Hindi folk song goes:

Laga chunari mein daag, chhupaaun kaise? Aake baabul se nazrein milaaun kaise Ghar jaaun kaise kaise?

It translates to: my scarf has been stained, how will I hide it? How will I meet the eyes of my father? How will I return home? But I have not been stained by anyone's foul touch nor the world's incapability to understand the territory of a body. I have only been tainted by the strength I have gained from these past few months. I am now returning to my community, to my whole world and beyond, looking it in its eye and saying this: Yes, I have been sexually assaulted but I am better, I am stronger and I am human. So let us open our minds and hearts to the people who exist in the reality of sexual assault and harassment. You walk past them, you laugh with them, you breathe with them and in my case, you sit with them on the steps of the portico, unknowing to the stories behind the silent faces. We are everywhere.

But to the bystander who knows and does nothing, you are complicit. To the ones who think this is a grey-area and a 'matter of perspectives', you are blinded by this problematic and systematic culture where 'no' and 'I feel uncomfortable' are different, but still not enough. To you, who did this to me, you are nothing but a stain wanting to cling itself to another body but failing each time. And finally, to those who have survived this, let us survive the tide together and find our justice beyond the murky waters, firmly planted on the shore with both our bodies and minds existing together, not apart.

THE 'MYSTERY OF LOVE' IN SUFJAN STEVENS

BEATRICE TECHAWATANASUK explores the intersection between Christian faith and sexuality in the music of Sufjan Stevens

Oh, to see without my eyes
The first time that you kissed me
Boundless by the time I cried
I built your walls around me
White noise, what an awful sound
Fumbling by Rogue River
Feel my feet above the ground
Hand of God, deliver me

'Mystery of Love' – Sufjan Stevens

Sufjan Stevens is the household indie-rock name who was recently nominated for an Academy Award for his song 'Mystery of Love', featured in the recent film *Call Me by Your Name*. A multi-instrumentalist, Stevens can play the banjo, church organ, electric bass, oboe, flute, and vibraphone, amongst many other instruments. His voice, gentle and hollow, seems to whisper to the depths of any soul. With this combined skill set, Stevens orchestrates a spiritual experience. Luca Guadagnino, director of *Call Me by Your Name*, commissioned Stevens to compose a song for the film for this exact reason. In an interview with *Consequence of Sound*, Guadagnino said: 'I wanted to have a narration that was not the banal usual literary narration. I wanted it to be more about something that really came from the soul. I wanted his epiphany in the movie and I had the privilege that he said yes.'

Stevens' songs capture a sense of intimacy that is rare today: he is not afraid to be vulnerable. This unique sensibility has led fans to contemplate: 'Is this Sufjan Stevens song gay or just about God?' – a Facebook page with over thirty-thousand likes. The serious answer to this question is that Stevens is a devout Christian, who has not spoken publicly about his sexual orientation. Yet this question encapsulates his work, albeit in a very uncouth way: the worlds of sexuality and spirituality often collide in Stevens' music.

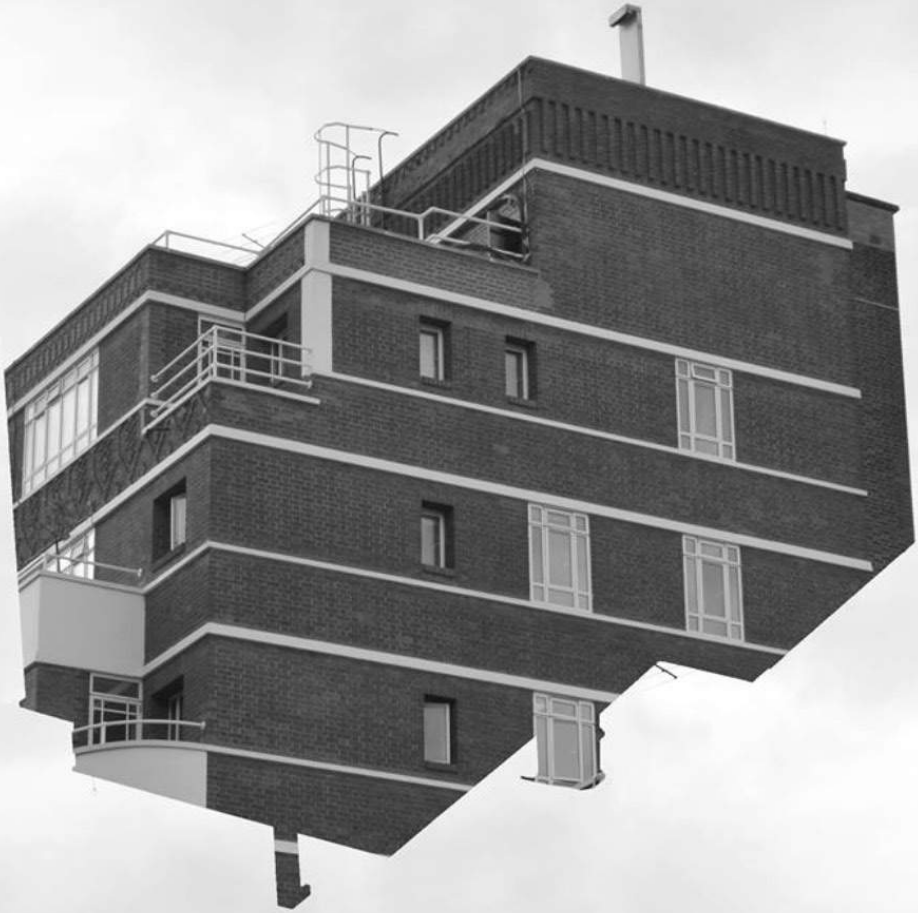
Stevens' approach to Christianity is unique – he is unafraid to bridge the gap between what appear to be separate worlds. Other Christian artists compose their music with the sole purpose of worship; lyrics are focused on bible verses or generic motivational diatribe. In Stevens' music, on the other hand, his faith comes across organically, through the beautiful, vulnerable melodies he composes. On 'Casimir Pulaski Day', Stevens describes the speaker's experience of losing their teenage sweetheart to bone cancer; his faith takes centre stage in amongst the heartbreak and confusion:

All the glory that the Lord has made
And the complications you could do without
When I kissed you on the mouth
Tuesday night at the Bible study
We lift our hands and pray over your body
But nothing ever happens.

To Stevens, teenage sexual experimentation and disappointment in God's unfulfilled promises are not antithetical to his faith: it is a natural result of being both an evolving human being and also a deeply Christian one.

Stevens often purposely conflates romantic relationships with his relationship with Jesus. On 'John My Beloved', the first verse describes his time at a bar: 'Beauty blue eyes, my order of fries/ Long Island kindness and wine', but then goes on to describe what Stevens believes John's relationship with Jesus was like. He provocatively describes John leaning on Jesus' chest (as mentioned in John 13:23) as 'I'm holding my breath/ My tongue on your chest/ What can be said of my heart?' Stevens subverts biblical imagery, using it to delve into his own experiences with his sexuality. Although some might consider this blasphemous, especially since the imagery in the song has clear homoerotic overtones, it reflects how integral Christianity is to Stevens' understanding his personal, private identity. Furthermore, this conflation gives listener a profound insight into Stevens' experiences and his unique understanding of his faith. Stevens intertwines the theological and the personal, thus creating a mystical, spiritual atmosphere surrounding his romantic life.

Stevens has said that he does not want to be labelled as a Christian artist. It is not hard to understand why: music that is labelled this way is largely limited in its audience to those who are religious, even conservative, and often does not allow for the brazen honesty that Stevens is known for. In an interview with Pitchfork, Stevens said of his 2015 album *Carrie & Lowell*: 'Don't listen to this record if you can't digest the reality of it.' In an increasingly secular world, Stevens provides us with a unique opportunity to re-connect with our spirituality and our understanding of the nature of faith, proving that religion of any kind can open up new ways of understanding ourselves and the world around us.



Artwork by MICHAEL MASCI-GORE

‘PLANET EARTH, HEAR MY VOICE…’: THE SPACE AGE SOUNDS OF AFROFUTURISM

SAM PRYCE investigates Afrofuturist music and its radical re-imagining of Black identity

‘Coming to you directly from the Mothership!
Top of the Chocolate Milky Way, 500,000 kilowatts of P-Funk power!
So kick back, dig, while we do it to you in your eardrums…’

So begins the first track of Parliament’s 1975 concept album *Mothership Connection*, set in a technicolour space-age utopia, with its Black protagonists (otherwise known as ‘Afronauts’) being the cultural arbiters of the future. Like so much of the work of George Clinton in his sister funk bands Parliament and Funkadelic, *Mothership Connection* transports the listener to an alternate, outlandish universe, taking them on an intergalactic quest for the almighty ‘P-Funk’.

Clinton’s P-Funk universe was inspired by his love of sci-fi classics like *Star Trek* and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. But it also offered a way of envisioning the future of the Black experience in a new and hopeful way. Around the same time, cosmic philosopher and poet Sun Ra toured the world with his Intergalactic Research Arkestra, playing far out free jazz in glittering costumes. Today, their innovations continue in the psychedelic hip-hop of Flying Lotus and the ArchAndroid persona of Janelle Monáe. It is a cultural phenomenon we now call Afrofuturism.

The actual term ‘Afrofuturism’ did not appear until the late twentieth-century, first coined by cultural critic Mark Dery in his 1993 essay Black to the Future. Culturally, it is by no means limited to music. Afrofuturistic ideas can be found in all mediums of art, from the science fiction of African American writers like Octavia E. Butler and Samuel R. Delany to the graffitied canvases of Jean-Michel Basquiat: it is a concept which has universal relevance.

Afrofuturism first flourished in the 1950s and ‘60s with the astral jazz and philosophy of Sun Ra and his Arkestra. Born with no legal birth certificate as Herman Poole Blount in the Jim Crow state of Alabama, Sun Ra (after Ra, the Egyptian God of Sun) crafted himself a mythological persona as an alien from Saturn, sent on a mission to Planet Earth to preach peace. Considering the social position of African Americans at this time, violently excluded and alienated from twentieth-century American society, it is no wonder Ra believed himself to come from another planet.

The unmapped territories beyond Planet Earth, explored by artists like Sun Ra and George Clinton, and the breakdown of these frontiers, are symbolic of new alternative visions of tomorrow, reclaiming Black identity by positioning it at the centre of fantasy. Blending technology and magical realism with African traditions and aesthetics, Afrofuturism is a bold reimagining of the experience of people of colour, a form of escapism from past prejudice.

Coupled with the philosophy behind the music, Afrofuturist artists often experiment with fashion and performance, using costumes and personas to enhance our perception of their ideas. We see androgyny and sexuality played with in the performances of Grace Jones, transforming herself into a genderless alien with her outlandish costumes. When asked if she preferred being 'masculine' or 'feminine' by an interviewer, Jones replied:

'I like being both, actually. I mean, it's not being masculine. It's an attitude really. Being masculine. What is that? You tell me what is being masculine?'

Similarly, in the music video for 'Two Weeks' by FKA Twigs, she incorporates the decadent iconography of ancient Egypt, portraying herself as a futuristic goddess persona overseeing a harem of women who are smaller versions of herself — at once, dominant and submissive. Janelle Monáe, too, crafting herself as the messianic cyborg Cindi Mayweather, communicates a message of self-awareness and empowerment in her concept albums and music videos. In an interview with the Evening Standard, she said:

I speak about androids because I think the android represents the new 'Other'. You can compare it to being a lesbian or being a gay man or being a black woman... what I want is for people who feel oppressed or feel like the 'Other' to connect with the music and to feel like, 'She represents who I am.'

In the spirit of Sun Ra, these women create ethereal, otherworldly personas for themselves, leaving them untouched by deep-rooted prejudices about race, gender and sexuality.

Monáe's work, in particular, often transcends racial boundaries, reinterpreting Afrofuturism as something more than a purely Black concept. Ytasha Womack, author of *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture*, says:

I think that's why a lot of people enjoy Janelle Monáe, because she talks about this android, this "other". A lot of people can associate with this concept of otherness for a whole host of reasons, many of which are not racial, so there's a connection there.

Perhaps this is one of the key reasons behind the enduring popularity of Afrofuturism — this sense of alienation, this feeling of being an 'Other', is something many of us can identify with, regardless of our racial background. After all, Afrofuturism is an ongoing journey; it is a paradoxical form of escapism, simultaneously commenting on our own world whilst also transporting us somewhere entirely new. Who knows where it will take off to next?

Artwork by MICHAEL MASCI-GORE

GABRIEL

A poem by ISOBEL ROBINSON

creation fable: amputeed again
left hand man, mythicised into the right side of the bed,
I keep your cells on my nightstand in saline,
suspended like tinned peaches
engobed {lover/lovered}
; was it not u who taught me sweetness?

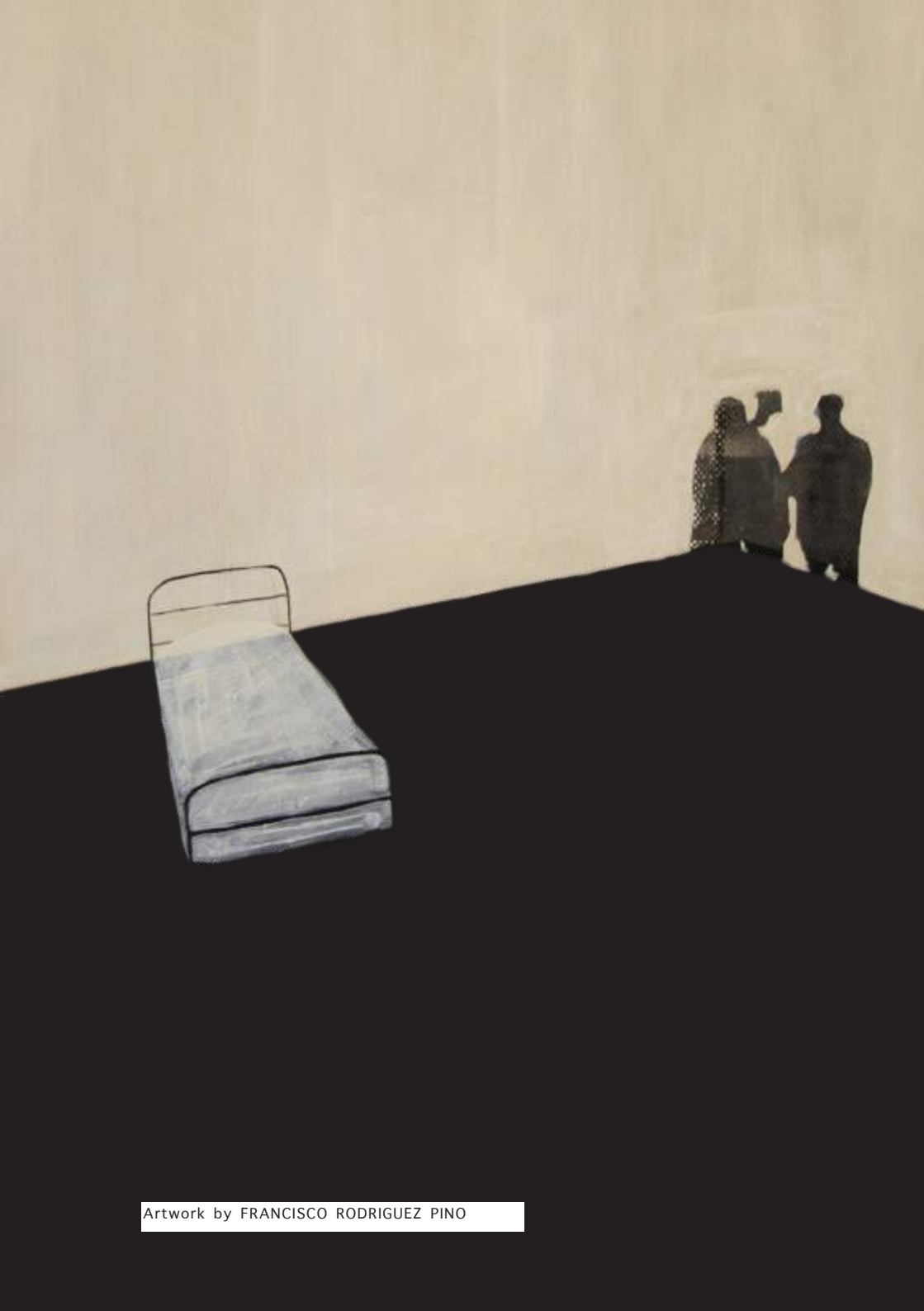
Beatrice, Laura, Gabriel; I'll kill you into this page, lay down my limbs, remember how as we kissed the sky fell in! Sun-lit tide, moonlight, fucking for the first time; projection, platonic conception, cinematic lust, popcorn dust underfoot; maybe like Laxton or a god I'm fleshing you out in high contrast ratio, blinded by your light, Gabriel, Gabriel, Gabriel

it's only now I know
you were not the wave
holding us from hell
Gabriel! You Persian prince
now it's my turn of phrase: gonna metaphorise you all over again
tracing sonnets into skin, tattooing you, there she goes; mourning monophthong,

Our lost love appendaged like a club-foot—here's my footnote to u: sorry I'm not sadder, you're not Caesar, I'm not Caesareaned / no conquest, no landmass, no empire fallen. U just reached into the Guf, pulled me out like a song-bird or white dove, or laurel tree or any leitmotif of female peace or poetry

Let this be your columbarium; doves and ashes

Nietzsche had u down, boy, exhaling your strength and coolness, characteristic of mathematics / the truth is, my truth is sexier than yours / truth is, at least I admit I'm a metaphor.



Artwork by FRANCISCO RODRIGUEZ PINO

INSIDE THE ARTWORK: BETWEEN US AND THE 'OTHER'

KACPER KOLĘDA explores conceptual frameworks within the art world

A common understanding of 'art' usually places it outside of the everyday. This notion was shaped by generations of philosophers, from Kant to the aesthetic movement in nineteenth-century Britain. Art was to be detached, a category separate from our mundane existence. Whilst walking the corridors of any grand museum, we always see a gold gilt border separating our realm from the 'the other'. A framing device usually detaches us (or perhaps shields us) from the artwork's territory. In the last century, the American philosopher and critic, Arthur Danto, coined the term 'artworld' to differentiate a terrain separate from our quotidian existence.

Many developments in art practice have tried to traverse such segregated territories. One breakthrough moment occurred just over a hundred years ago, with avant-garde artists who challenged the notion of the surface of the painting as a window to another world. A substantial role was played by the development of the technique of collage. A French author Louis Aragon wrote an essay in 1930, retrospectively pointing out the 'end of the painting' in the collages produced by Picasso and Braque. The importance of the artwork shifted from the inside of the painting to its surface.

In this way, the artwork was no longer an icon, or a door to a different world. It became an animated agent: not only an object, but a subject, interacting with us beyond the world created within its frame. Danto described this as 'the end of art', marking the point when imitation stopped being compliant with the constraints of the imitation theory. The gate between our world and the art world had been unlocked.
The second half of the twentieth century brought more innovation. One of the neo-avant-garde artists, Eva Hesse, commented

on this issue in Hang Up (1966). From the hollow frame on the wall, a loop of wire protrudes towards the viewer, trying to reach us like a lasso. The artwork attempts to catch the viewer: not only their attention, but their physical body. Behind the installation, there is only a flat wall: the third dimension is not illusionary – it exists in the same reality as us. Thus, the world of art is open: we become a part of the artwork, and its structure.

One pivotal moment which transformed our understanding of these not-so disparate territories was the 'ART/ ARTIFACT' exhibition organised in 1988 at the Centre for African Art in New York by Susan Vogel. The chief item presented there was a Zandi hunting net, displayed in a white cube space like an objet d'art. The event prompted an immediate response from Danto, as well as from Alfred Gell who wrote an essay titled 'VOGEL'S NET: Traps as Artworks and Artworks as Traps': a text which has altered the way we understand the agency of art objects. The net created a serious problem for the contemporary way of seeing art: it was made outside of a western cultural context, as an object serving practical purposes. Yet, Danto advocated looking at art without consideration for its genesis, acknowledging, for example, the African roots of Cubist art. Thus, he could not exclude the world of art objects. Danto was truly ensnared by the dilemma; in this way, somehow, the net fulfilled its primary function, but in a new metaphorical way. Thus, the division between artworks and everyday objects has been challenged.

Performance Art has also played an important role in this discourse, opening up a realm between the quotidien and the cosmic. Martin Wallinger's performance in Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin in 2004 had him appear in a bear suit, interacting with the audience behind the windows of the museum (echoed in Marina Abramović's famous Artist Is Present performance in 2010). The fact that this performance took place at night, as well as in this partly-comical, partly-morbid costume, conjures the impression of a children's fairy tale. It invited the 'other' world straight inside ours.

However, all performances pieces are necessarily confined by durational limits. Perhaps we should be grateful that every performance ends and that these two worlds don't merge – it is through binaries that we situate ourselves within the world. Wallinger poses the unnerving question: are we observing or being observed? It is far more pleasant, more power-affirming to be the spectator of art. The reverse is disconcerting.

Art and Life have interacted since the beginning of time. Gradually, the clear distinction between the two has dissolved. Curation, which now extends to the idea of carefully composing an Instagram feed, has brought the 'other' realm of the art even closer to our daily lives. Even with Vogel's net within our reach, the gap between the two persists: in the white cube space and behind the bulletproof panes of galleries' windows.

BORDER-CROSSING ART

HANNAH WOODS explores the daring work of performance artist Ana Mendieta

Ana Mendieta was a Cuban American artist, working throughout the 1970s until her tragic death in 1985. In many ways her work breaks down, reconfigures and even transcends territories.

Her practice embodied numerous media: sculpture, film, photography, performance, body art, land art. Her work thus traversed artistic boundaries, refusing to situate itself within one particular medium. Mendieta refused to assign herself to a particular artistic movement. She spoke against the land art movement with which she was often associated, claiming her male peers as vandals of the very landscape which she wanted to work intimately with. She also refused align herself with feminist performance artists, believing that their feminism was 'a white middle-class movement'. Mendieta's practice was one that created dialogues between many art forms and movements, but was not bound to any particular artistic territory.

Mendieta's practice was often situated outside the gallery setting, within natural landscapes; in this sense, her work can be regarded as a critique of institutional terrain. Further, she favoured non-traditional artistic materials including her own body, which destabilised the notion of what is considered acceptable as 'art'. Her practices escaped conventional artistic conventions, traversing new domains and expanding the artistic sphere.

Another way in which her practice overcame artistic conventions was in that her work was much more process-orientated, as opposed to product-orientated. This meant that an ephemeral, disappearing practice was favoured, allowing her to escape the capitalist art market. This notion of a disappearing practice is particularly apparent in Mendieta's Silueta Series (1973-1980) in which she made representations of her body in different terrains and then, subversively, either destroys them or leaves them to disintegrate

Artwork by SARAH TEW

Artwork by SARAH TEW

over time. This means that the series is not only unable to be bought or sold, but also particularly hard for art history to stabilise and theorise, as the works are no longer present, except in documentation.

Mendieta also transcended territories through immersion in spiritual and ritual practices. Her art surpassed the earthly and enters into the celestial realm. For example, in *Untitled (Death of a Chicken)* (1972), Mendieta stood against a white wall, whilst the blood of a dying chicken covered her body. This performance resembled the ritualistic sacrifice of roosters in the Santería religion, a Cuban faith which Mendieta was particularly interested in. By performing this sacrifice, Mendieta's work was able to take her body and thus her work, into a higher spiritual site. There was a divine element to her earthworks: she said that her 'obsessive act of reasserting…ties with the earth…[was]…really reactivation of primeval beliefs [in] an omnipresent female force'.

Gender is of vital importance throughout Mendieta's work. She re-negotiates its terms, performing her identity as she desires rather than complying to the gendered identity that patriarchal society prescribes women, supporting Judith Butler's idea that gender is a performative act. For example, in 1972, she created *Untitled (Facial Hair Transplants)*, in which she attached the facial hair of a male colleague onto her face. By adorning her face with beard and moustache, Mendieta breaks free of the binary territories of gender, challenging expectations of how a woman should look. Mendieta also overcame gender expectations by engaging in activities which would not be deemed typically 'feminine'. For example, many of her performances saw her covering herself in blood; this repulsive act distanced her from behavioural expectations of women and from traditional standards of female beauty. In these performances, she transformed herself into something abject rather than desirable for the male gaze. This act was disruptive for the male viewer, denying the Lacanian creation of self in relation to her 'other'. By not complying to rules of female passivity, Mendieta confronted and disallowed male territorialisation of the female body.

Extending beyond the territories of her own body, Mendieta also fought ideas of national territories within her practice. When she was a child she was exiled from Cuba as a result of the 'Operation Peter Pan': an exodus of 14,000 unaccompanied minors to the US due to fears of indoctrination by Castro's government. Mendieta spoke openly about the traumatic effect this exile had on her. She often attributed her desire to work within the landscape as a way to find a home, as she had never truly been allowed one. By choosing the open landscape as a substitute for 'home', she ridiculed the notion of national territories: landscape is something natural and permanent as opposed to man-made and transient. Just as Homi Bhabha has stated that nationhood is performatively produced, Mendieta disavowed the very idea of nationhood by choosing not to perform it, situating her body and her work in the landscapes of several different countries rather than just within one territory. By placing herself within multiple territories, Mendieta performed her journey of displacement and exile.

Ana Mendieta's practice reconfigured and transgressed many territories: the art market, gender binaries and the idea of nationality. Breaking free of constrictive boundaries, she created work that remains difficult to control and categorise, and questions our very desire to do so.

COUNTER-CULTURE TURNED ELITE

LEAH AARON explores the work of contemporary American photographer Annie Leibovitz

Annie Leibovitz spent a long time thinking about which desk she would photograph Hillary Clinton sitting at in the Oval Office. She has been taking pictures of America's Great & Good since the 1970's – Mick Jagger, John & Yoko, Barack Obama – but somehow she didn't see this one coming. It took the bottom out of the book she was planning, which she had envisaged as not just a record of her commercial portraits, but as something greater: a survey of the Dark Times before the dawn of the Golden Age of Hillary Rodham Clinton, a historical record of liberal self-actualization. The end result, *Annie Leibovitz: Portraits 2005-2016*, will be a book that is looked back on – but less as a triumphant assertion of righteousness and more as a testimony to the arrogance and complacency of a counter-culture turned elite that became far too comfortable in the corridors of power.

This is not to say that Leibovitz is a bad photographer. She is a very good photographer. Obsessed with taking pictures since her teens, she began on the staff of *Rolling Stone* when she was still a student at the San Francisco Art Institute and it was a little-read publication for hardcore rock fans before moving to New York in 1983, at the peak of its late-century cultural renaissance. She made her name creating highly conceptual, richly theatrical images from her studio on Vandam Street for the kind of publications that set the US cultural agenda (notably *Vanity Fair*) but she is at her best on location, particularly when visiting the place in which the subject feels most comfortable. In an environment which affirms and reifies their identity (Bill Gates at his computer, say, or George Bush in the White House), her pictures transcend the glossiness of the full-page spread and capture something of the subject's true self. Leibovitz has done

much for changing the way in which women are portrayed visually in the media, allowing them to exist on the page defined by their careers, by their talents, not simply by sexuality or attractiveness – a typical Annie Leibovitz portrait is a woman holding high public office, seated behind a desk, looking defiantly at the camera.

Such images are powerful, of course, and important – there are still not enough portrayals of women as competent, as eminent and as powerful as men – but they are symptomatic of a wider cultural shift. These images, regal in their construction and their composition, imply that the only way to be taken seriously as a woman is to practice a kind of gender based imperialism, invading the traditionally masculine domain and then beat them at their own game. This is problematic, of course, because there are still many women, not only around the world but in the US itself, who do not have the means, economically, culturally or socially, to enter this cut-throat professional world. Leibovitz's work captures an American cultural establishment that, by implying that success is the product of individual exceptionalism, ignores the pressing structural inequalities which have left most of the country behind, arguably paving the way for You Know Who (who Leibovitz has photographed several times) – a man who is a symptom and not the cause of America's ills.

Perhaps it's unfair to ascribe the death of the American Dream to Leibovitz. She is, after all, simply a photographer, if a very commercially successful one, in the vein of Rankin, or Mario Testino. Perhaps we wouldn't be so interested in her if she hadn't shared an enduring relationship with Susan Sontag, one of the most prominent cultural critics of her day, for the last fifteen years of her life. Flicking through the book documenting the last years of their time together, *A Photographer's Life 1990-2005*, I am struck by the paradox that despite the lavish shoots and her gilded subject matter, Leibovitz's most compelling work is her most personal. This is a difficult one – what feminist wants to be defined by the intrigue of their personal life? Or maybe it's just our specific cultural moment, as Leibovitz herself has said – photographs take on new meanings when people die.

It is impossible not to look for clues into the kind of life she lives. People often speak of the 'liberal bubble', the 'metropolitan élite' who were too complacent to see Trump coming. I always thought they were exaggerating – surely no one's that out of touch? But whether it's her daughter smiling on a private jet or waxing lyrical about an eighteenth-century farmhouse she nearly bought in the Hamptons, you can begin to kind of see what they mean.

Leibovitz's life and work is reflective of an art world that would rather celebrate and reinforce the political class than critique it.

THE LINES ON MY CHERRY BLOSSOM TREE

A poem by WAFIA ZIA

Softly, gently, you mark the cherry blossom branches on my skin.
Bleed into my wounds and let them freeze over – it's only winter.

Somehow, the snow seems warmer on my cheekbones when I'm with you;
we are fault lines and distant places, always connected but never uniting,
stuck between borders of dust and high rise buildings.

Perhaps it is better this way.

I do not want you to see my cherry blossom tree,
see the roots decay and wither.

Our mother tongues are too different:
we were always meant to be on opposing borders.
My world is full of dust and yours is full of high rises and sky towers,
my feelings cannot reach you from the sand on which I stand.
I only look up to let my eyes be blinded by sunspots.

I am trying to hate you.
Trying to understand this world I've been plunged into,
trying to fathom how to cross our lives and be
side by side.

You and I are different.
Moons and crosses,
words and numbers.

Perhaps this was never meant to work.

I have been trying to heal the scars of my cherry blossom tree.

I put honey on my back and sugar on my fingers,
touch covers and count the stars 15 times over.
The shadows always return.

I have let our borders separate us.
Filled the gap in the roots of my tree,
never letting you cross it. My mistake.

It was wrong to assume the roots were unbroken,
I was wrong to trust my branches too.

I have been trying to heal the scars of my cherry oak tree.
To feel the wind in between my fingers,
the breath on my cheek:
it's winter again.

So please come to fix my cherry oak tree.

Artwork by SARAH TEW

CONTROVERSY UN-DONNE

CHRIS JONES revisits 'Elegie XIX: To His Mistris Going To Bed'

Of John Donne's posthumously-published 'To His Mistress Going To Bed', the seemingly-unchallengeable literary authority John Carey, says:

> *The despotic lover here, ordering his submissive girl-victim to strip, and drawing attention to his massive erection … is of course a perennial dweller in the shadow-land of pornography, particularly attractive as a fantasy role to males who, through shyness or social circumstance, find relations with women difficult.*

Such was the prevailing view of Donne's oft-censored poem from its first publication in 1654. Time and again, it has been condemned as irrefutably misogynistic for its depiction of a woman in colonial terms, as the object of an act of conquest. The anonymous female – a nameless woman so commonplace to the Songs and Sonnets – is here depicted through the language of territorial discovery, the New World being the buzzword of the 17th-century, which Donne evokes when likening the female's nude body to virgin territory ripe for sexual conquest and domination.

Lovers of Donne, acquainted with his wider poetic corpus, know how utterly praising and appreciative he can be towards women in other works (see: 'A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning'), and thus Donne's nineteenth elegy has always been particularly problematic to uphold in light of later, post-publication colonial exploitation. It is impossible to defend Donne's depiction of women in some of his early poems (see: 'Woman's Constancy', 'Song: Go and Catch a Falling Star') – but 'Elegie XIX' is one that has been unfairly misread and placed in the same camp as the poet's earlier, hot-blooded and juvenile ranting.

What this reading of the poem hopes to assert, is that Donne's comparison between territorial and sexual conquest in the work is one that is ultimately celebratory, rather than objectifying; consensual, instead of forced – and that the poem must be read in light of Donne's acute sensitivity to the ethics of territorial exploration in the 1600s. Distant and unknown, the woman may be – but exploited, I will argue, she is not.

The poem opens with that characteristic tone of restraint common to the poet's secular writings: 'Come, madam, come' – a whisper of peace and benevolence, directly addressed in terms of respect

accompanied by three caesuras, which immediately jars with the reputation of the poet as an aggressive sexual assailant. Items of clothing are likened to 'heaven's zone glistering', whilst the female's body is a 'far fairer world' again. The intensity of Donne's later piety would suggest that this is a compliment he doesn't throw out randomly. Carey's 'despotic lover' seems thus nowhere to be found.

The work becomes turbulent when Donne begins to address the female in imperative commands. 'Unpin […] Unlace […] Off with that' indeed lead to the view that he is 'ordering his submissive girl-victim' into compliance, rather than addressing her respectfully as previously seen. The crucial depiction of the woman as 'America! my new-found-land' is the crux of the debate as to whether or not it is problematic that Donne uses the language of colonial exploration – whether he wishes to respect the female as an 'angel', or if she is to be exploited: like the 'precious stones' of newly-discovered territories.

Donne, however, was writing when only the earliest colonies had been established in America, including Virginia and Jamestown – two colonies which were desired as partly to beat the Spanish in the race for overseas territory in the Anglo-Spanish War of the late 16th/ early 17th century. American colonial exploration did not yet have the connotations of slavery and violence that it would later obtain, and this is significant. Indeed, Donne was singular amongst early modern writers in expressing doubts as to the morality of colonialism, expressed in a sermon delivered in 1622 to the Virginia Company. Criticism by Tom Cain and R.V. Young acknowledges that his attitude towards colonial discovery was far from militant, and compiles readings of the poem which see 'Elegie XIX' as direct criticism of Sir Walter Raleigh's imperial ambitions.

One couplet seems significant enough to redeem any problematic claims made previously:

License my roving hands, and let them go
Before, behind, between, above, below.

It is fundamental that Donne asks for consent before continuing his exploration of female territory. In calling for the female to 'license' his actions, the poet has asked for permission to engage in the sexual act, which is quickly succeeded by his cry of appreciation, 'How blest am I in discovering thee!' He even goes so far as to comment that he is to be enslaved into the 'bonds' of feminine territory.

The poem's concluding image of the poet being 'naked first' has great implications on the balance of power in this relationship. Fiona Shaw argues that there is in Donne's body of work 'a shiver of vulnerability through everything he writes' – and the poet is clearly the most vulnerable one by the final lines. The female remains in the process of removing her battle-armour; Donne is entirely lacking in any defence. 'Elegie XIX' is a contentious game of cat-and-mouse, but it must be read as part of the whole of the Songs and Sonnets, rather than an isolated work. As the great-great-nephew of Sir Thomas More, author of *Utopia*, thinking about the New World and its ethics was part of his familial heritage – and thus readers must at least entertain the idea that his exploration of feminine territory in the poem isn't necessarily exploitative. Donne's misogyny can and should be condemned elsewhere – but the temptation to compound his views of women and of the colonial project in this poem should be resisted.

Artwork by JAZMIN DONALDSON

KIPLING AND CONRAD: REALLY THAT DIFFERENT?

AURÉLIE DE PARSEVAL explores the lingering literary presence of imperialism

In his notable work *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said wrote: 'In our time, direct colonialism has largely ended; imperialism, as we shall see, lingers'. This inevitable lingering of imperialism, of the domination over territories in theory and attitude as opposed to colonialism's physical presence, is in many ways fostered and furthered by literary works. Though literature can be deemed a product of its time, the attitudes and opinions expressed in literary works are circulated through time by readers, and are thus sustained long after the events recounted - in this case, colonialism - have passed.

Whether fighting against, defending, or apologising for imperialism, literature has played an undeniable role in Europe's overseas expansion. Crucially, this role is often insidious; many texts that appear to be promoting an anti-imperialist agenda are, on closer analysis, rife with the sympathies that justified European imperialism in the first place. Though decolonisation can be achieved in a physical manner by withdrawing bodily presence from overseas territories, coming to terms with the racial and moral attitudes that justified colonialism is a much more intricate, and inevitably longer process.

Many science and fiction works written during the colonial period reflected an unashamed justification for imperialism; popular thinking advocated ideas of Europe's supposed moral, racial, and national superiority. For instance, late Victorian scientists such as Tylor and Kidd sought to prove that non-Europeans were less evolved - both physically and mentally - and thus unable to govern their own territories. Furthermore, the poet Rudyard Kipling, chief apologist for the imperialist elite, notably stated that it was 'the white man's burden' to 'tame' colonial subjects who at the time were portrayed as 'fearsome cannibals' and beasts.

Some texts, however, sought to alienate themselves from simply being a reflection of popular thoughts of the time, instead going against the pro-imperialist grain. Such an example would be Joseph Conrad's 1899 novella, *Heart of Darkness*. Here, Conrad recounts the journey of Marlow, traveling from London to the Belgian Congo, where he witnesses the horrors of colonialism, stating that 'the conquest of the earth … is not a pretty thing', and equating it to 'aggravated murder on a great scale'. *Heart of Darkness*'

symbolic parallel between the River Thames and River Congo acts as an implicit reminder to British readers of their own participation in similar horrors to those that Belgium was imposing upon the Congo.

However, even texts such as Conrad's that appeared to staunchly reject the colonialist agenda still contained the same underlying sentiments of subtle support for imperialism, through their dehumanising presentation of the foreign 'other'. While Kipling's salient support has always been noted, this latter idea of subtle pro-imperialist themes in writing went unnoticed until bold claims were made in the later 20th century, notably from Chinua Achebe. Achebe, in his retrospective analysis of *Heart of Darkness*, remarked how one of the only instances in which an African speaks in Conrad's work is when he is defined as a cannibal. By expressing this, is Conrad not reinforcing claims such as Kipling's instead?

Conrad was not one of the oppressed natives he writes about, and thus his image of Africa is incomplete, instead reflective of the West's desire 'to set Africa up as a foil to Europe, a place of negations at once remote and vaguely familiar'. Africa loses its sense of distinctiveness and identity in the novel, it is no longer a territory but a 'prehistoric earth, … an earth that wore the aspect of an unknown planet,' as Conrad writes. In Achebe's view, Africa becomes the mere 'backdrop' for Conrad's literary exploits. *Heart of Darkness* is in reality more occupied with questions of civilisation and savagery than with directly confronting the problems of colonialism.

Achebe writes that 'Africa is to Europe as the picture is to Dorian Gray – a carrier onto whom the master unloads his physical and moral deformities so that he may go forward, erect and immaculate'. While *Heart of Darkness* was certainly enlightening on the truths and horrors of colonialism, it did not challenge the image of Africa and the African held at the time - one of unkempt savagery - that reinforced Europe's desires to appear morally superior to their colonial subjects, in order to continue dominating their territories. The characters Marlow encounters and describes as he travels along the Congo 'howl and leap … and [make] horrid faces'. They are also described as 'ugly' and are devoid of voice - apart from only two instances in the novella at which Conrad grants them speech. Without equality of voice, there cannot be equality between two territories. In *Heart of Darkness*, the European still dominates, controlling the actions, voice, and identity of a territory that is not theirs.

Said too has written on Conrad. He argues that Conrad and other, similar authors wrote at a time when it was assumed that the natives who figured in their novels could not and would not read them – and much less be able to respond to them. However, the balance has now changed: Achebe exemplifies the response that was never before permitted to materialise. One of the powers of literature is that once produced, it remains unchanged, inscribing stories and history in such a way that we can return to past works and inevitably learn from them. But through imperialist literature, we are learning from a biased perspective. Dissenting voices, such as Achebe's, that speak out to redefine perspectives of their past, are thus evermore important and needed in the reclaiming of 'territory' – whether this be in redefining their nationality, culture, or their people's individual identity.

Artwork by JAZMIN DONALDSON

LETTERS FROM A KURD

XARA ZABIHI DUTTON looks at the question of Kurdish independence through the lens of Kae Bahar's 2014 novel

Kirkuk, an ancient citadel in the North East of the Kurdistan region, is currently under siege. The Iraqi government seized the city from the control of the semi-autonomous Kurdish Regional Government in mid-October, in response to the referendum held on September 25th last year. The 2017 referendum result, in which three million of a total five million Kurds participated, was 92.7% in favour of the total independence of Kurdistan.

Kae Bahar is a Kurdish writer who has lived in the United Kingdom for over 20 years. He perceives the referendum as a testament to the democratic dignity of the Kurds, and a historically profound step towards total independence. But, the referendum was also personally profound for Bahar; he has spent the entirety of his adult life attempting to raise international awareness of Kurdish issues through the medium of film, and in 2014 published *Letters from a Kurd*, the first English language novel by a Kurdish writer. Bahar's novel traces the development of his 'Boygirl' protagonist, Marywan, whose gender nonconformity earns him a disproportionate amount of negative attention in society. During the novel, Marywan comes to terms with his identity, as a Kurd, and as a decidedly maverick individual. Bahar draws parallels between the binary constrictions of gender that Marywan struggles against, and the arbitrary persecution that Kurds who seek self-definition encounter. Marywan engages with a myriad of poignant characters, each with their own experience of persecution to contribute to his process of self-realisation. Bahar himself was overcome by the momentous power these characters wielded over him during the writing process, and he recalls being "brought to tears" by lifelike conversations he shared with them.

Independence of spirit is a recurring feature of the novel, but the importance of friendship and alliance is a strong undercurrent. The Kurdish proverb, that the Kurds have 'No Friends but the Mountains' has been repeatedly proven in relation to the question of Kurdish independence; Bahar has a strong affinity with the phrase, using it as the namesake of one of his many documentaries. Indeed, the United States has yet again abandoned Kurdistan, despite the integral support their security force Peshmerga has provided to both neighbouring countries (including Iraq) and the US in the fight to eradicate the Daesh presence in the region. The prized semi-autonomous status of Kurdistan is threatened by an Iranian-backed Iraqi invasion. Last September, Kurdistan not only failed to gain their much desired independence, but also lost the limited extent of the autonomy they had, until that point, possessed. The US is the world's historic proponent of autonomous rule, so it may appear inconsistent that they refuse to support their Kurdish allies, who are struggling for independence from the arbitrary bounds of nationhood established by the British-French imperialist Sykes-Picot agreement. However, the Kurdistan Region contains some of the most oil-rich land in the world, and the US reluctance to advocate Kurdish independence smells distinctly of petroleum – with a similarly nauseating quality.

In *Letters from a Kurd*, Bahar emphasises the unreliability of the US as a saviour force. The 'letters', sent from the novel's protagonist Marywan to his American hero, Clint Eastwood, seem a plaintive scream into the ears of a wilfully deaf America. It is near impossible to maintain a nonchalant oblivion when reading the novel, which combines an exploration of the depths of tragedy with a style of humour that only those aware of extreme trauma can replicate. In the character of Flathead, Marywan's uncle, Bahar poignantly captures the relationship between humour and trauma for the Kurds: 'Sad things make funny jokes – that is our reality.' The Kurdish desire for independence – to be free from the oppression of their distinct, ancient culture and language – permeates the novel. Bahar conveys a powerfully emotive political statement about the fundamental human right to live free from persecution, and condemns those who are deliberately ignorant of the ways this can be threatened.

At the time of writing, for the past 100 years, Kurdistan has been defined by its neighbours, and it will continue to exist in turmoil if the Kurdish people are not allowed a greater level and scope of self-definition. Kurdistan encompasses the largest ethnic group without an official nation state, but the language with which we refer to it is still ambiguous – it's unclear whether it is a region, state or nation. It is difficult to provide an explanation of the Kurdish situation without entering into a mire of complex geographical, historical and political discussions. However, Kae Bahar is keen to avoid a tone of victimhood. He firmly states, 'We [the Kurds] are perfectly capable.' In the act of writing Bahar certainly exhibits his capability; in choosing to address the issue of Kurdish independence in a novel, Bahar achieves self-definition in a creative and captivating format. Bahar's work is pioneering in its attempts to bring the question of Kurdish independence to the forefront of the public's minds, and to the attention of their hearts.

I BREAK MY DOLL

A prose piece by DHRUTI MODHA

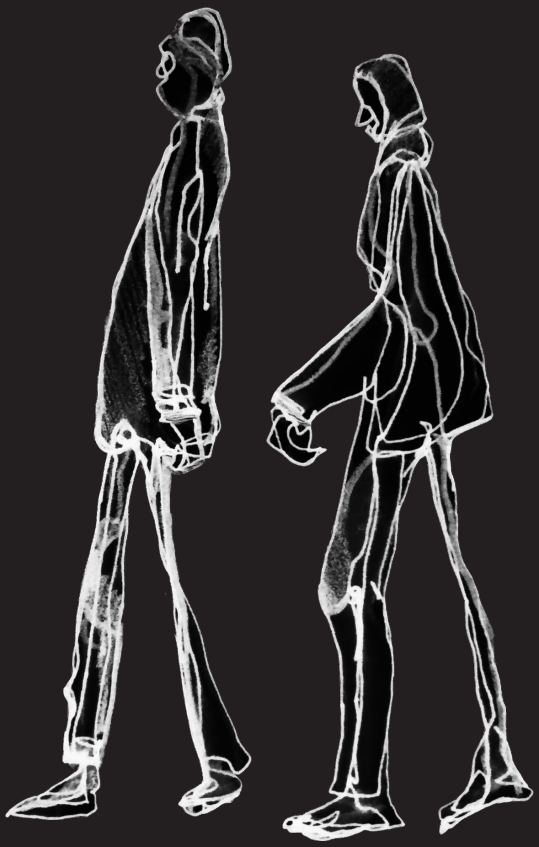
I break my doll. I rip her apart. She is soft, so limp and malleable, and when I squeeze her and she doesn't squeeze back, it makes me so angry I could scream. So I tear off her arm, and go to help my mother whisk the milk into cream.

It spills over, half-heavy, but still running down the tip of the vat, in thick, glorious drip after drip. When I swipe my finger across and let it run down my palm, when I suck on it and close my eyes, my mother strikes me across the head for shame, for indulgence. She fixes her bonnet and goes back to work. Her face and cheeks are red and her nostrils flare in, waver, and flex out.

Bright red blood blooms from my finger where I bit, stains my hands and marries the milk. I need to get clean again so I lick it off, salty-sweet iron-wine. We live a hard, cruel life, mother reminds me, and that is how it ought to be. I nod, and knead pliable, soft, squeezable dough for the bread. I push my fingers in.

In the slip between sun-up and sun-down, I watch my sister Placidia as the preacher follows her home. Mother is working the field; she will go to church tonight to pray for us, in vain, she tells me, for we are born wicked and will die wicked. Between the gap in the door shaped like a waxing moon, I watch as Placidia envelopes his mouth with hers. Their faces knot together, bargaining each other's silence. His fingers dig into her waist.

He wrestles her to mother's bed and I almost chew through my lip in keeping from screaming out. Placidia! Placidia ought to fight back! She could scorch him, burn him, hit him, strike him across the skull and off he'll tumble, all-limp. When their lips part, I hope she'll open her maw to eat him, but instead she throws her head back and allows him to suck her blood. Bruises. She wails like a ghost. When her legs part, ungainly, akimbo, he begins to rut her the way a goat would, his kind holy face made rabid, eyes rolling white.



Artwork by FLEUR ELKERTON

I have heard stories about incubi and succubi. Run, rush away to church – and desperately I wash out the spots of blood from mother's linen after Placidia is gone but I look away from men, the bile around their mouths and in my gut. Coyote, witch-like, cackles in the distance as I remember the fire and muscles in his thighs, her calves, how all I see are spots of blood when I blink. It aches between my legs, and I wonder if the devil can pass from sister to sister in sin. The prairie is wild, I cannot fathom it.

Hushed, rabid, I press against the ache, press it like a bruise. My eyes fall back into my skull and I shake, vibrate, walk home with legs weaker for it. I cry, for shame, for indulgence, I have done wrong, and the guilt makes me vomit – but I want to do it again again again it growls. It hurts; I flagellate myself with primitive, irresistible, all-consuming fire. I exorcise the demon but he finds his way back in.

One week later, Placidia weds her betrothed, the preacher, all eyes downcast. Later climbs atop him like a wolf on a buffalo, and rides him, clumsy. His hands at her hips squeeze her so hard, her flesh like dough, leaving black finger-mark dents in her skin. His face turns blue and he hisses like a steak. I wonder what must it feel like to insert yourself, like a man does, into her, to move an inch in her body and make her groan? Seething.

The sense of power is like strong perfume, the stench of urine and alcohol from the unworthy who sleep in the street seeps in. When she gives birth, the labour is long, the screeching is deadly, an Apache war choir, and the child is born in breach. Feet first. Clutching on to a clot, angry, red and luciferous, born upside-down and cross-shaped, she nearly takes Placidia's life in revenge. They name her Silence.

Nightmares come about my stomach swelling with child, my skin painful and bulging like a tight burlap sack ready to blow; from within the babe bashes its fists against my

innards, scratching and scraping with infantile nails. Dread for its expulsion consumes me. I fear feeling the child crawl through my stomach, pressing against my walls, cruel and unhuman. When I wake up, I bleed every month for five days. Deep under, bones move like aching leviathans to give way. Mother calls it penance.

Placidia, quietly with child again, has her husband on his knees in front of her. His head moves, and her legs drape over his shoulders. The neat swell of her belly pulses. I wonder if he's talking to his son (for, she said, it will be a son this time). If I listen very hard, I can hear him tell it: Sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. So thin, I almost lose it on the wind, smothered by her kettle-whistle whines, a warning. When he looks up, mouth gleaming, he catches my shadow from the corner of his eye before I am gone.

Out, out, onto the prairie in the middle of the night, half-laughing, half-crying, the sky is deep, ocean-blue and the moon is half-full. All the land is black or white. Skin all-crisp and ripe to shed, to move and metamorphose. When I run I feel it, like a knot between my legs. I press my fingers in. Just like making bread, I knead the knot, unravelling it, tearing the skin apart, ripping my maidenhead, plunging deeper, I push one finger, then two, then my fist, like a battering ram at the door of my womb.

I fuck myself to the thought of throwing away my dolls, to the thought of growing horns and a penis, of fucking women with it, soft, doughy, nubile, pluck out my womb pluck out my gut spin them into girdles walk back into town and set the whole village on fire watching Placidia the preacher my mother all burn and perish in a cry of glittering blistering scalding hot unforgiving god is cruel and takes them all to Hell

damnation.

TIDAL WAVE

THOMAS NGUYEN explores the development of French 'Nouvelle Vague' cinema and its enduring influence on modern film

The artistic realm can sometimes feel like the most stringent dictatorship of the free world. Constricted within the taste of a majority and the customs of powerful industries, the resulting creations are often by-products of strict social norms. In this sense, immediate post-second-world-war cinema is territorial, limiting the creative space to the most experienced, recognised directors who dictated both standards and methods of production. From 1959 onwards, however, the French New Wave, 'Nouvelle Vague', overturned traditional film-making, remodelling the industry's landscape with an impact that transcended national frontiers and still resonates in today's filmmaking. What some have called the 'birth of modern cinema' exemplifies how avant-garde movements can prompt the extension and shattering of artistic as well as social boundaries.

The techniques of New Wave films were fuelled by a desire to innovate. Their directors, at first stemming from the film magazine *Les Cahiers du Cinéma*, shared a sense of iconoclasm and experimentation which they later applied to the cinematic medium. While making *A Bout de Souffle* (1960), Jean-Luc Godard was said to write the script on set, whispering new lines to his actors during takes and stopping the shooting each time he ran out of ideas. This method of directing and creating was the opposite of traditional filmmaking, and was taken out of the studios onto the streets of Paris, Marseille, Nevers, and even Hiroshima. The camera was moved to the pavements, a bed in a hotel room, stuck onto the hood of a moving car, creating modern vantage points from which life was now represented on screen. The 'Nouvelle Vague' also devised a more succinct form of film-editing, as seen in A Bout de Souffle and Alain Resnais' *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (1959), both of which use successive jump cuts to create a dynamic cinematic atmosphere, breaking with traditional cutting patterns

which were designed to create a sense of continuity.

Through the ways in which stories were narrated, New Wave directors brought forward unprecedented ideas and ways to express them. Their final scenes were often open to interpretation, leaving questions deliberately unanswered. This contradicted the finite endings of traditional cinema which aimed to resolve all aspects of the plot – plot itself became less structured within the New Wave movement. *Les 400 Coups*' (1959) last shot concludes with a close-up of François Truffaut's protagonist running on the beach, without offering any further elaboration; *Hiroshima Mon Amour* was one of the first films to openly reflect on the war and its atrocities through archive images of bomb survivors and the bleak story of a French actress, disgraced and locked up because of her love for a German officer.

In *A Bout de Souffle*, dialogues mainly take place between the lead couple and never follow a single, logical train of thought. The main character, Michel, continually digresses on matters irrelevant to the discussion depicted on screen, which generates senseless, almost surreal exchanges. He also transgresses rules of propriety by referring to sex and violence, as when, hands around his girlfriend's neck while flirting in bed, he declares: 'I will strangle you'.

New Wave films are soaked in a deep sense of rebellion. In *Les 400 Coups*, we follow 12-year old Antoine's truancy and his journey across the Parisian entertainment scene. His situation shifts from skipping school to escaping the juvenile camp he is eventually placed in. Antoine's disobedience is justified through the painting of a strict, normative society: his unruly behaviour towards his teacher, his parents and the strangers from whom he steals is excused on screen. Just as transgressive and with the same sense of criminality, Jean-Luc Godard's Michel engages in a series of crimes. By showing his character killing a policeman and normalising his larceny – Michel steals a dozen cars throughout *A Bout de Souffle* – the director illustrates once again the anti-establishment atmosphere of 1960s creative spheres that was emerging in French society as a whole.

The central place of cinema in culture and its influence on norms of acceptability make innovative movements like the 'Nouvelle Vague' necessary for social advancements. Pioneers in any artistic field always mark the building of bridges towards new creative territories, which themselves often reflect wider changes in society. Late 1950's and early 1960's films were as much a response to the post-war desire for alternative ways of depicting life as to the unconventional lifestyle advocated by contemporary generations.

Conceptualising the word 'wave' itself illustrates its role in wiping out the well-guarded frontiers of art and representation everywhere. The New Wave current spread from Paris into foreign industries and was sensed as much in New Hollywood films as in 1960's Japanese, German and British cinema. For almost sixty years, the 'Nouvelle Vague' has redefined not only cinematic boundaries, but the spirit and purpose of art itself as a medium of its time. As such, contemporary film should be seen as both a mirror held up to our age and an empowering tool to bring the unheard and the invisible into the artistic mainstream.

Artwork by ELEANOR EVASON

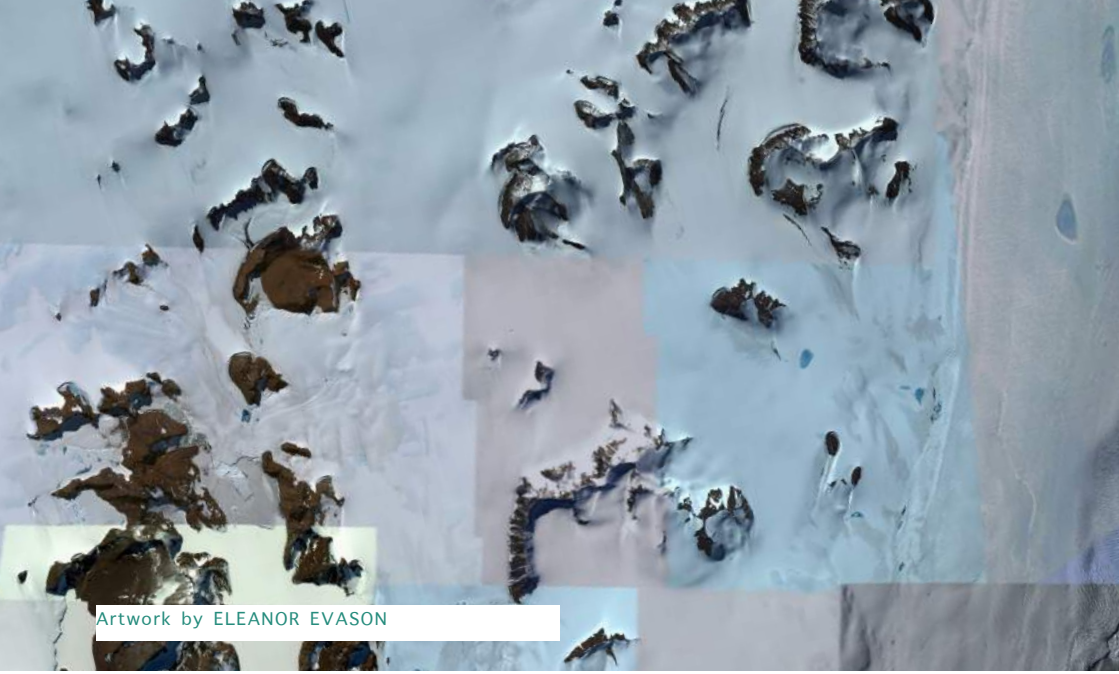
TASTE OF CEMENT

FARIDA EL KAFRAWY explores the 2017 documentary *Taste of Cement*, and its response to the traumatic impact of the Syrian conflict

At times, we all feel detached from our immediate present. Our minds wander elsewhere – out of the lecture hall, the seminar room, the crowded train commute. However, this division between the body and mind is continuous and inescapable in the case of trauma, when survivors are drawn back to their past against their will on a daily basis.

This concept is depicted masterfully on screen in Ziad Kalthoum's *Taste of Cement* (2017). Kalthoum's film is a lyrical, beautifully crafted testament to the strength of Syrian refugees, focusing on men working at a construction site in Beirut and their experience of this disconnection. Though their internal world remains caught up in the Syrian war and their traumatic past, their physical body is stuck in an almost Sisyphean cycle, with each day that passes at the construction site blending into the last. *Taste of Cement* centres on the interaction between internal and external modes of experience: Kalthoum explores how personal experiences disconnect us from the present and keep us stuck in the past.

On the construction site, the viewer is allowed an intimate glimpse into the lives of the young Syrian men. Breaking the conventions of traditional film making, the film features no main characters, only an anonymous narrative voice. The film speaks visually: each shot is another carefully crafted line in this cinematic poem. There is no dialogue, yet in the narrator's stories of his father and the intimate retelling of his dreams, Kalthoum seems to speak on behalf of all the men who huddle inside the construction site after curfew, watching their country being blown up on television, scrolling through Facebook and zooming in on the swathes of images of the wounded and dead, dreading the sight of a recognised face in amongst the rubble.

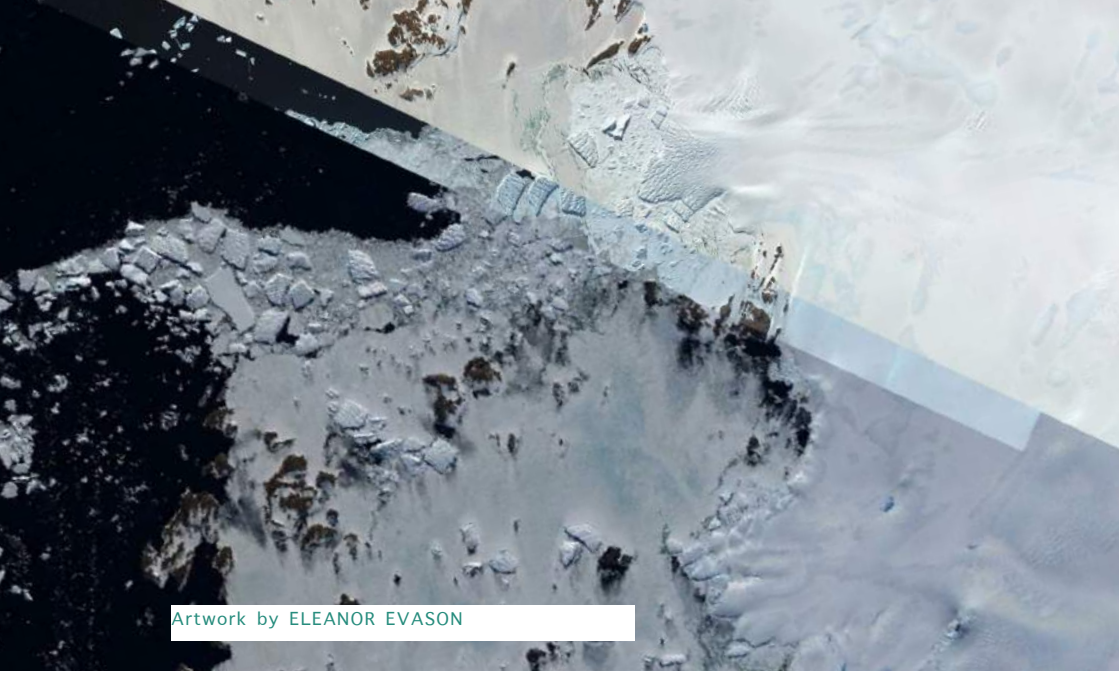


Artwork by ELEANOR EVASON

Men work with their hands bandaged, climbing tall machinery, balancing their legs on beams without any harnesses – if they fall, they fall to their death. Whilst physically safe from the dangers of war, their minds are devastated by grief and nostalgia for the days before the war changed their lives so suddenly and completely.

In one scene, Beirut swims in front of the camera as it follows the motion of a cement mixer. It is dizzying; just as the viewer feels unable to escape, the scene shifts perspective, to a man looking at the view from the construction site at dawn. However, the sense of entrapment goes far beyond physical space: war and the past are inescapable. Whilst these young men rebuild Beirut from the ruins of the Lebanese Civil War, they wait for the day when they can return to rebuild Syria, in the knowledge that when that is done they will have to seek another place in ruins. Indeed, towards the end, the film flickers continuously between footage of a tank and the machinery in use on the construction site. Images of destruction and rebuilding recur throughout the film, acting as a metaphor for the collective condition of humankind; Kalthoum recognises our conflicting ability to damage and then reconstruct in a never-ending cycle.

This sad irony is noted by the narrator's father, who also worked in construction in Beirut and would return home to Syria after long absences. His 'father's palm was the city of Beirut', each rough edge and crack symbolic of the streets and buildings



Artwork by ELEANOR EVASON

he constructed. It is implied that he died due to the continuous exposure to cement, his hands taking on its smell as it corroded his skin. The title refers to how, after his return, the food that the narrator and his father shared tasted of cement. Cement is the awareness of death; it is being trapped under the ruins of a building for a day whilst people drill you out; it is building homes and watching your own crumble on the television. It is something the narrator accepts he can never escape: whether in Syria during the war or Lebanon at a time of peace, cement symbolises everything that he will never be able to run away from, no matter how far he tries to run.

A central image in the film is 'dropping light things out of your hands because you can no longer feel their weight'. When your hands corrode to this point, the narrator asserts, time stops. It stops when the weight of trauma makes them unable to grasp the lighter moments of the present. Kalthoum depicts mundane scenes of machinery and life on the construction site – almost 20 minutes go by in a hypnotic blur, abstract and realistic all at once. The workers get relief from the sounds of the machinery which drown out their thoughts; this scene has a quiet stillness, akin to meditating. When the men return underground after curfew, the mental and the physical diverge – minds flash between war and peace, home and Beirut.

Through the lens of the Syrian conflict, *Taste of Cement* illustrates the stifling grip of the past and its ability to keep time fixed in an endless cycle. Kalthoum incites the viewer to recognise our debt owed to the past whilst living in the present moment.

CODE UNKNOWN: A TAPESTRY OF MULTICULTURAL EUROPEAN LIFE

BLAKE HARRISON writes about Michael Haneke's first French-language film and its exploration of contemporary cultural territories

A young Frenchman, in a petty act of frustration, throws a scrunched-up paper bag into the lap of a Romanian woman, begging at the corner of a Parisian bakery. This is the moment when *Code Unknown: Incomplete Tales of Several Journeys* (2000) truly begins, occurring midway through the nine-minute tracking shot that opens the film. The sullen Frenchman is Jean, who is attempting to escape from his tedious life on a farm but has just been told by his brother's girlfriend, Anne, that he cannot stay with them. As Jean strides away from the beggar, a man of African descent, Amadou, grabs hold of him and asks, 'Was that a good thing to do?'. Jean refuses to apologise and the pair begin to fight, drawing a crowd and eventually the police. The scene cuts to black as the beggar and Amadou, first and second-generation immigrants, are detained while Jean and Anne walk free. *Code Unknown*, Michael Haneke's first French-language feature film, proceeds to follow these characters' diverging lives in forty-two discrete scenes, each of which consist of one shot and one take. Haneke creates a tapestry of multicultural European life at the turn of the millennium.

The events of *Code Unknown* revolve around the realities of a globalised territory: as Paris expands to become more inclusive and diversified, so too does the potential for encounters and altercations between different classes and ethnic groups. Haneke is not criticising this reality, but he is examining the consequences of being deaf to its ramifications. This 'deafness' can be found with Anne: she is clearly privileged, a fact which the film communicates via her possession of the 'unknown code' to her apartment (characters are barred from entering this space at the beginning and end of the film). She is never explicitly racist, but she does exert a degree of racial bias in her reaction to the fight in the opening scene, describing Amadou as 'the black kid who hassled Jean' to her

white friends. However, Haneke does not just resort to a simple dichotomy consisting of the complacent privileged versus the oppressed – Anne finds herself victimised by two young Arab men on a train later in the film. They target her for being arrogant, aloof and white, a bubbling over of an ethnic tension rooted in historical events such as the 1961 Paris Massacre in which hundreds of Algerians were drowned in the Seine (Haneke specifically explores this event in 2005's *Caché*). The person who finally comes to Anne's defence is, significantly, an older Algerian man. He is one of the only characters in the film who seems to stand for dignity and unity between strangers that is lacking elsewhere.

Meanwhile the beggar, Maria, is found without the correct papers and is deported back to Romania. We see her reconnect with her family, lie to them about her life in France and eventually return to Paris. Maria finds herself constantly 'locked out' of accessing the most basic of resources in France. Haneke commented that the title for his film derived from the 'first impression [he] had felt in Paris, that one couldn't go anywhere without knowing the code number of a building'. Thus, even the smallest distances, from the street into a building, become as insurmountable as travelling from Romania to France – at least, for those who lack the cultural capital to move between these spaces.

Ironically, the only sense of a healthy, wholesome community in the film is in the drumming lessons that Amadou gives to a class of deaf children – 'ironically' because the sign-language is an 'unknown code' to the majority of the audience. *Code Unknown*'s closing section begins with Amadou's multiracial class drumming on the streets of Paris. Their song plays over the final scenes of the film, which take place on the same street as the beginning: this is the code that unifies the disparate threads we have been following.

The title promises *Incomplete Tales of Several Journeys*; indeed we do not find much traditional narrative resolution. Maria returns to begging, Anne continues to work as an actor and Amadou goes back to teaching. However, this use of music provides us with thematic resolution – linking these stories and scenes together, we are afforded a glimpse of the tensions that permeate Paris's status as a globalised space. Of course, our understanding is incomplete: scenes are often cut without resolution and the film lacks a traditional narrative arc. One of the messages at the heart of *Code Unknown* is that the individual perspectives of the characters restrict their understanding of how the entire city functions. Just as each of them is unable to see how their interactions have affected one another, the viewer is not given a satisfyingly neat conclusion to the film.

Even if these characters' situations remain the same, *Code Unknown* provides a blueprint for the viewer to better understand the intricacies and repercussions of globalised life.

CANIS IN FURS

A poem by OLIVIA ROBBINS

I let you lie beside me
because I hungered for something
tactile
empty

I was starving you see and the
flesh tasted like memories I
had spat out onto the sheets

you were bending over backwards for
me and my spine usurped yours
bent now but still in marble arch suspense

I met you under the linen
slippery with sweat
and carnality

these bedroom boarders keep
me
(cagey) canis
in furs

lips hide caustic tongues and
caricatured canines
they met like only lover's should
I took solace in the biting and the splicing of separate but no separation
I want these words to work the way that my flesh did
but

I guess I would have to split the u away from us
cleave our personas apart
peel back the skin from the bone
compartmentalise the body away from emotion just stick to that hip thrusting motion

back hunched in the corner
post coital canis latrans
I lick the cuts clean and
flash that coy coyote smile
I pad your chest and listen to faint rasping music play through bronchiole pipes

you should not play with prairie dogs
I play with the percussive beat of your pulse

my gut is short carnivorous anatomy vivisect our sex

our vivisex come mortisex when you lie limp in lust's jaws
eroticism in the furs of love's substance passes through quickly I am not satisfied

lay in the wet patch my canine double steps the boundary between fur and the flesh I lie eyes glassy like taxidermy there is no raucous chorus of howls tonight my nakedness predates my predator I met you under the linenscape with sweat and carnality I met you where the fur and the flesh and the skin and the spit can no longer split the boundary between prey and predator

INTERREGNUM THEATRE

GEORGIE KIRBY discusses the revolution in theatrical territories during the English Interregnum

The more I view'd, my Eye the farther went,
Till Understandings Sight was almost spent

'A Prospect of a Church in the Mind'
– Margaret Cavendish

The intended permanent closure of the playhouses by the English interregnum government was hardly unexpected. The satirist Stephen Gosson summed up the situation when he jokingly implored pious playgoers to 'close up your eyes, stop up your ears' upon nearing a theatre: radical Puritans had disapproved of playhouse culture since 1570, condemning the theatres as hotbeds of depravity. After the execution of King Charles I in 1649, the stage too was forcibly removed. However, this repression had the accidental effect of catalysing a total reinvention of theatre – plays were still written, but they were no longer written for a performance space at all. Alongside these threats to the theatrical space came the removal of physical space and setting, posing a barrier to creativity that now had to be surmounted.

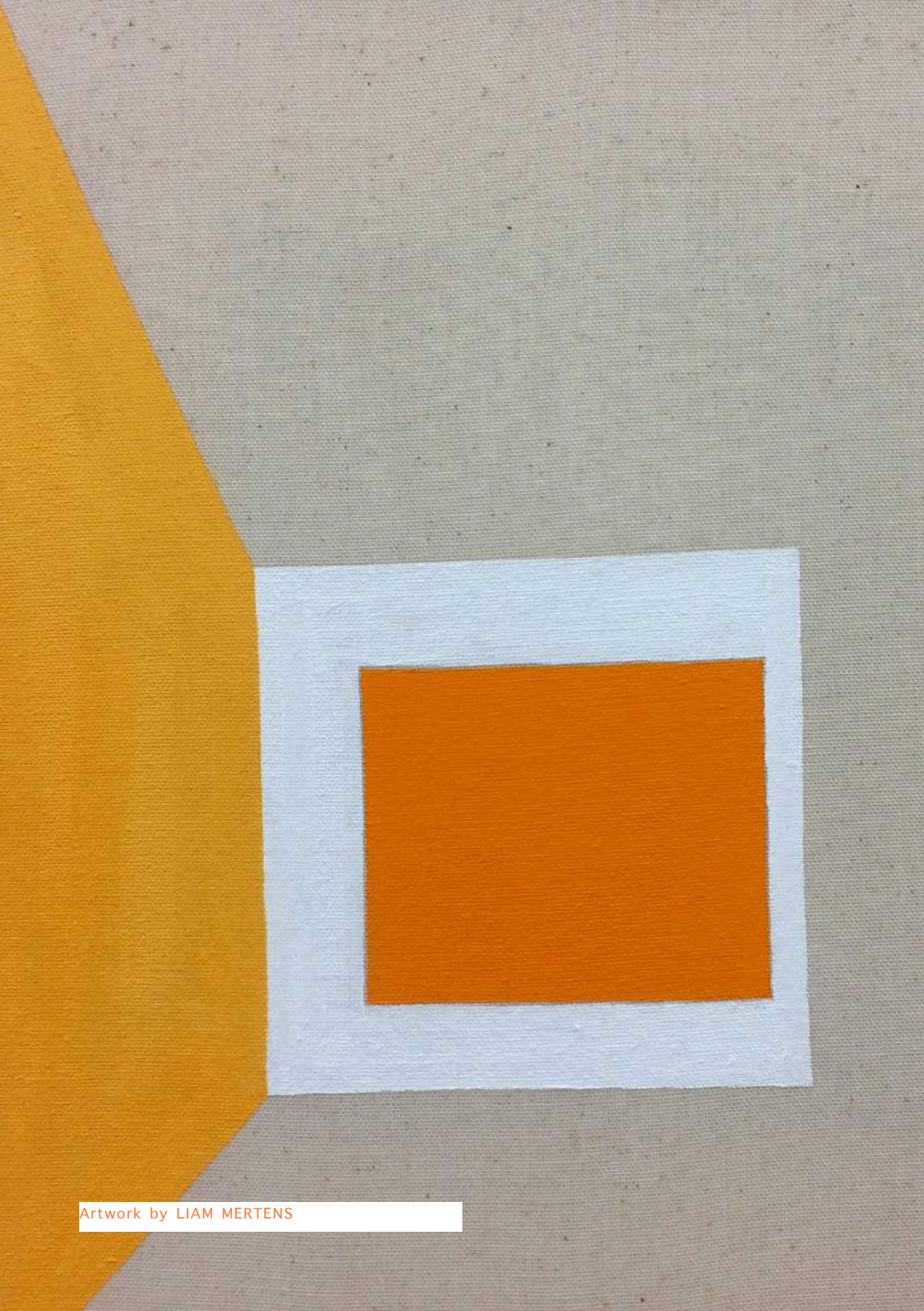
With the Interregnum came playwrights such as John Milton and Margaret Cavendish, who penned works that were not intended for performance, and also the phenomenon of staging that was imagined rather than enacted. Ironically, the restriction of artistic expression and the movement of theatre into the private realm allowed for a wider range of subject matter, since plays would no longer be subjected to censure by a theatre company. Cavendish's plays, such as *The Convent of Pleasure* (1668) – essentially a debate on the pros and cons of marriage from a female perspective – indicated her nostalgia for the pre-Civil War theatrical culture that had flourished under Henrietta Maria, Charles I's theatre-loving wife. These sympathies would have been brutally censored had her plays been performed on stage.

It could be said that Cavendish used her work to react against the limitations imposed upon theatrical expression by the closure of the playhouses, employing poetry and plays as a means of asserting the mind's right to wander freely as a boundless faculty of innovation. Milton was another to build upon the idea of theatre of the imagination, stating emphatically that his play *Samson Agonistes* was not for performance despite its publication in 1671, after the reopening of the playhouses. Samson's bitterness at being let down by his country perhaps reflects Milton's view of the Restoration, which he saw as a damnable reversion to monarchical enslavement. Consequently we see another playwright making use of this less restricted, subversive private expression.

As theatre left the stage, the relationship between the art and the spectator changed significantly. At this time, Cavendish worked to establish theatrical criticism as a female pursuit: she wrote the first critical essay on Shakespeare, showing clear critical acumen in her identification of his admirably diverse depictions of character. Cavendish commends the bard in his tragedies for presenting 'Passions so Naturally…as he Pierces the Souls of his Readers with such a True Sense and Feeling thereof, that it Forces Tears through their Eyes,' persuading them that they too are participants in the tragic action. But Cavendish notably refers to Shakespeare's 'Readers', drawing attention to the fact that theatre was evolving into an occupation of reading. It was this artistic shift that enabled enterprising writers such as Cavendish to discuss action intended for the stage in the form of literary criticism. The staging of a play could now be invented by the reader's mind alone. Playwrights relied on their readers to interpret their work, and as such the stage was transformed from the literal physical to the malleable metaphysical space. The reader became an amalgamation of director, set designer, actor, and audience, with total autonomy over their interpretation of the play.

However, the movement of the stage to the mind incentivised a specific social effect, one that we see now more than ever. In the present day, much as during the Interregnum, theatre is limited to the literate, and therefore predominantly to the upper echelons of society; playhouse culture had originally been a lower class form of entertainment. The closure of the playhouses turned theatre into the preserve of the nobility and aristocracy, who had the literacy necessary to read plays, as well as the resources to stage them privately in their homes. The result was an ever-increasing division between those such as Margaret Cavendish, who used the transformation of the stage to transcend the constrictions of the Interregnum government, and the lower classes, that were now unable to enjoy theatre on the stage. The stage therefore became a paradoxically exclusive yet intangible thing, which could be accessed only through the power of the mind or the pen.

Repression of theatre led to the mental liberation of playwrights, meaning that the death of public expression created a subversive intellectual culture; the demise of playhouses was the rise of the reader. It begs the question too: is theatre still theatre if it's not performed? Is theatre's value in its momentary existence in a physical space? Is it reliant on performative energy and an audience of spectators? As theatre leaves the stage, the stage moves to the mind's eye. In the Interregnum, theatre was totally transformed, now something liberating, elitist and potentially no longer recognisable as theatre itself.



Artwork by LIAM MERTENS

STAGING THE FEMALE

SOPHIE CUNDALL looks at the presentation of uterine spaces in contemporary theatre

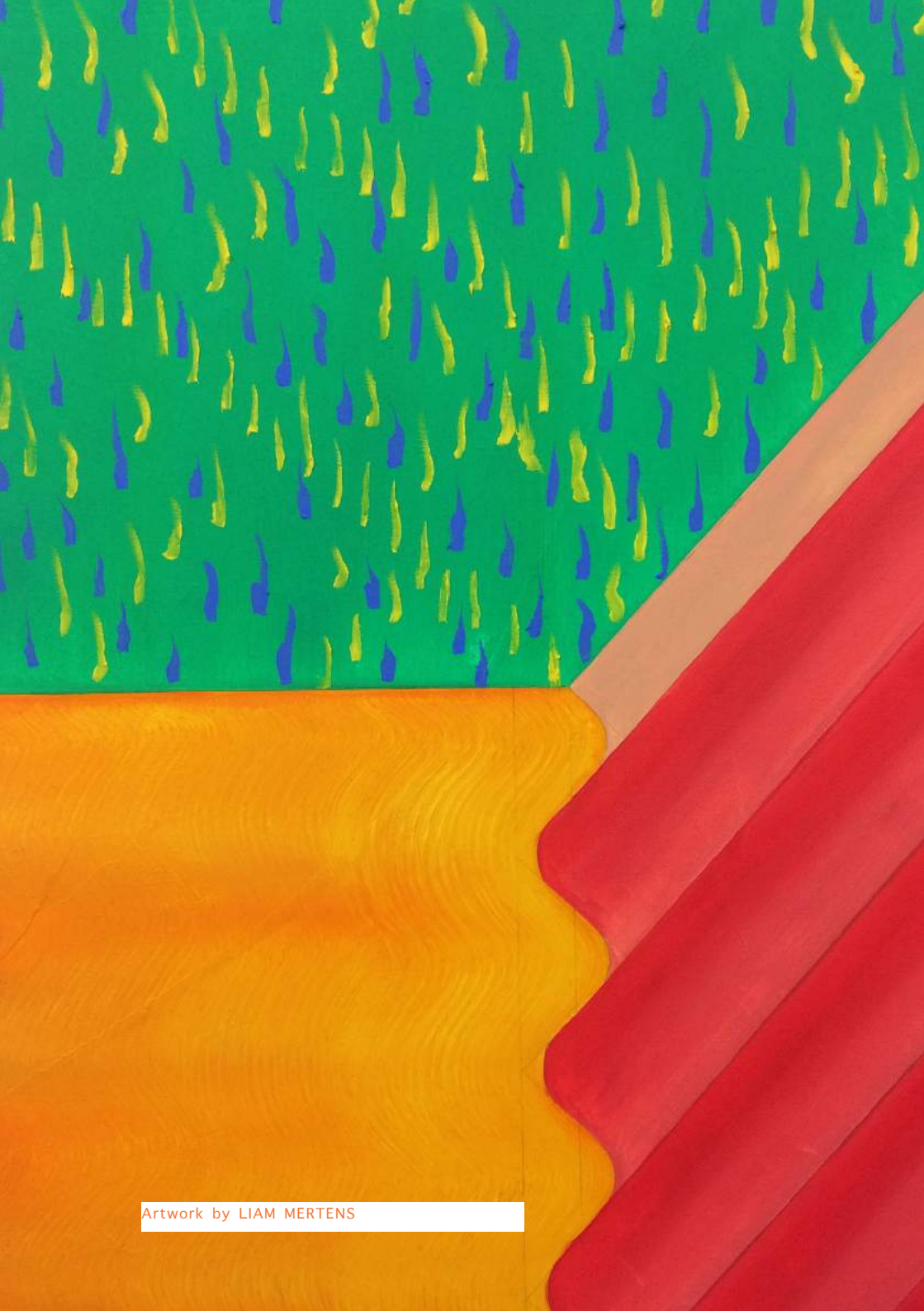
A liberating trend has started to bloom in amongst the creaking boards of the theatre. These hallowed halls are beginning to play host to a range of fascinating new stagings of the female body, engendering breathtaking explorations of motherhood that do not parallel anything we have seen before. Except, perhaps, motherhood in real life. The womb as a physical space that an actor can inhabit, one in which they can develop a character as we develop *in utero* as foetuses, has brought a refreshing, if blood-soaked, challenge to a world still guilty of glamourising the female experience. Peeping Tom's physical theatre piece *Mother (Moeder)* from the London International Mime Festival and Pecho Mama's *Medea Electronica*, Euripides' Medea set to a prog rock gig, are an excellent starting point as we depart on this explorative, somewhat embryonic journey. Both are pieces that epitomise this new disquieting but emancipating motif.

A riveting facet of this newfound tendency to stage the uterine is the use of fluid. These spaces become bodily and medical through the honest use of blood, water and something like amniotic fluid to demonstrate the viscous nature of the female body and birth. In *Mother,* female bodies mimic something like drowning in waters that we can't see, only hear. Is this the internal pull and control of the womb and its hormones? The raging river of amniotic fluid as the baby develops gives us a stunning, if somewhat sickening, portrayal of the real experience of pregnancy. It is not always painless, and one is not always glowing. Your own body drowns itself in the amniotic fluid that feeds this future extension of you, yet also embraces and soothes with its lapping waves. Of course the waters do not all run clean in these plays – as in real life, there is none of the

blue blood we are politely subjected to in tampon commercials. There is barely a moment without blood on stage in *Mother*; the uterine space is authentically so, with a regular cycle of blood appearing that mirrors a menstrual cycle. There is no escaping the aspects of the female experience that we are told are repulsive, 'ugly'. Birth is bloody, and this staging doesn't let us forget this.

Along a similar vein, *Medea Electronica* features a healthy dose of both something like amniotic fluid, and blood. As the liquids of the womb create a destructive, agonising symbol in *Mother*, the 'ocean' comes to lyrically symbolise Medea murdering her children. Their death is accompanied by the soft tone, 'I'll stay with you, as you drift into the ocean'; thus their death is a return to the fluid that nourished them in the space of the womb, and thus this is Medea's corporeal suicide too. *Medea* is linguistically heavy in terms of the pain and physical removal of self that accompanies birth, so it is fitting that the children's slaughter feels more like a birth than a death. The original text's ending with Medea ascending in a chariot with her deceased children on her back emphasises this aspect – *Medea Electronica*'s finale manages to establish this equally, with a furious orange glow and smoke to obscure Medea's ascent. Though there are no bodies on her back, we have the sense that this cohesion has already occurred, as their bodies never appear in the first place, making them internal to the uterine space in which the action occurs. Cut glass tearing into Medea's hands smears her body, in a nod to the future deaths of her children, and to the agony of the mother that only blood can represent.

A further visual motif that emerges from both these compelling works is the colour blue, symbolic of the Madonna, the figurehead for Western society's perception of motherhood. Medea convulsively tears off her blue dress in a staged rupture that echoes birth itself and takes us far from the holy image of comfortable birth Mary gives us. As the stage becomes littered with scraps of her former self, the ideal mother figure becomes her own antithesis, and her new, depraved character manifests itself. This is a uterine space, the placenta left behind in the womb of the stage as Medea the monster is born. In a more overt reference to our skewed perspective on the purities of the birthing ritual, in *Mother*, a portrait of the Madonna watches over the action. As one of the actresses hurls herself screaming, clawing and covered in blood at this gallery-esque arrangement, reality and iconography merge in a powerful moment of physical bonding. Unholiness stalks the wings and centre stage in the blasphemous revelation that, *surprise surprise*, birth is not quite the same as what the Bible teaches Western society to believe it is. The womb as a physical space in theatre is something radical, something moving and new. Perhaps it shouldn't be – honesty about this particular part of the human body, one from which we have all benefited, should be a given. These pieces make progress towards such an honesty, taking us on a slightly sickening yet intensely fulfilling voyage through the female body in all its gory glory. It is a healthy trend that will hopefully continue, gallons of blood and water notwithstanding.



Artwork by LIAM MERTENS









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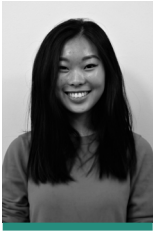










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This issue is part of a renewed commitment to diversity within SAVAGE Journal as a society. We will be consciously channelling this intersectional approach into our editorial stance and decision making process from now on. We want to not only acknowledge but celebrate the diversity of UCL's student population, to provide a platform for discussion of issues that have previously been overlooked and to amplify under-represented voices.

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