

lost and



LOST AND FOUND

Two words that speak to us of absence and recovery. Here, text and images resist the simplicity of this binary, looking towards the fleeting, the often overlooked and the transformative. We have found something growing in the cracks of the concrete, reassembled from the dust within an archive and in the light that the moon casts upon the sea. We have lost many things, but not in their entirety. Like an atmospheric sound that lingers over us, they remain living, waiting for our attention. An unknown quantity of reverberations surrounds us, conjuring memories, ~~what~~ both material and affective so as to offer a careful rereading of the present.

As this 12th issue of *Unknown Quantities* unfolds, a myriad of disciplines converge, asking you to dwell in the tension of impermanence. Reflecting on what we lose, what we find and what we hold, even if just for a moment.

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unknown quantities

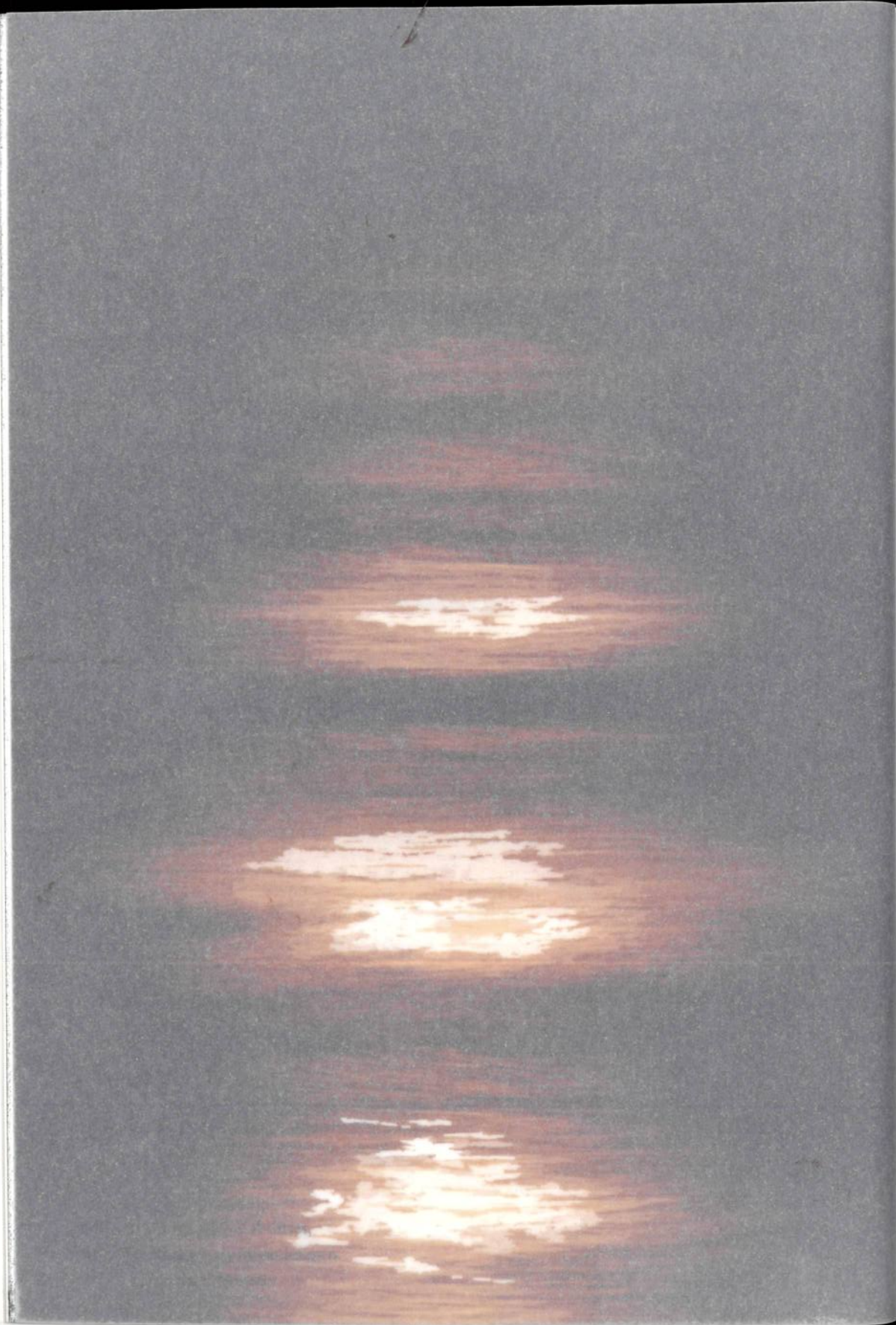
people or things whose abilities,
powers or effects are not yet known

Hazel Graham

MÅNGATA

"The road-like reflection of the
moon in the water"

Mångata, a Swedish noun found in *Lost in Translation: An Illustrated Compendium of Untranslatable Words from Around the World* by Ella Frances Sanders. Expanding on the definition of Mångata, Ella reflects on contemporary culture, noting how "perhaps people don't notice these glimmering, lyrical moments enough anymore, but the way the moon reflects and leaps across the black water of the ocean at night is a sight to behold".



Hazel Graham

6

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I find a path.¹

Not a road. A road is man-made and wide and strong
and is for vehicles connecting definable destinations.

A path is found.

A path, to me, is both formed and found and lost, in nature. The sea;
the moon: a path.

A path.

A path?

A path to somewhere

A path to nowhere?

The path.

Your path?

Are we all looking
for a path?

The path is glistening, twinkling, a diva in the spotlight. I find
the path is tempting me. Suggestive.

The streets path are is paved with gold diamonds.

The promise of "good things" lies at the end of this
path. A thousand shimmering eyes winking seductively at me.
Alluring and luring.

The path commands my consciousness; drawing my eyes to each
of its eyes, pulling me in, asking me to follow it and all
the sparkling diamonds it offers. Consuming me.

This path to nowhere.

This path back to where it starts.

This sliver of backlit glory taking all my atten-
tion, in a vast scape of other.²

Blinking eyes grow sinister: watching, waiting,
seeing. What do they see? What are they looking
for? Twisting into frenetic flashes: eyes become
sirens. What do they warn of?

Sirens.³

Sirens.⁴

Warning. Fear.

To be feared.

Or protecting? Care.

To protect? Protectors of nature? Protectors of
other? Misunderstood?

Sirens.⁴ Harpies.⁵

Aello, Podarge, Nicothoe or Aellopos, who
"snatched food from your table and left a foul
smell" [full stop] according to Jason the Male
and the Argonauts.

The Harpies who snatched food from the table
and left a foul smell to punish King Phineas for
his ill-treatment of children.⁶

The illuminated offering a
path of least resistance.

A linear path.

One direction. Straight. Easy, simple,
well-trodden = trusted.

A patriarchal path?

What is lost when we look only at the light?

What is found when we look to the side, above, below,
around, beyond?⁷

Psychedelic patterns in glossy muted tones. Undulating, a
calming totality of smoothly morphing circles in triangles
– a horizontal lava lamp of liquid metallics. A symphony
of space, time and sound, silently expressed through soft
emotional eyes.

A path.

An alternative path.

A path not initially visible.

Hidden in the darkness, lost in the margins,
dancing on the periphery.

A path identified by nuanced movement, sweeping sideways,
lost in its own consistent transience.

A lyrical dance performed by elemental forces found only
in glimpses of analogous inks from the moon's penumbra.

A path that isn't defined by feet, size, shape, light, direction,
course or conclusion.

A path that sweeps you along;

A path that encompasses you so wholly it is the destination.

1 [noun] a way by which people pass on foot, a line along which a person or thing moves or a course of action (Oxford English Dictionary).

2 Patrick Keiller explores space as a "felt volume" in 'Film as Spatial Critique', *The View from the Train: Cities and Other Landscapes* (2013). He argues that in filmmaking in the early 1900s space was present in the frame, allowing the viewer agency in what they chose to look at. By the mid-1900s, close-ups and editing started to appear as the filmmaker *tells* you how to read the scene. Our eyes are the early 1900s lens, but our focus is continually narrowed by shiny things (... mobile phone screens) that stop us really *seeing* what is in front of us.

3 [noun] a device that makes a loud prolonged signal or warning sound (Oxford English Dictionary).

4 A Siren has multiple definitions that have been constructed over time.

A Siren in Greek mythology is described as a creature that is half-bird and half-woman who lured sailors to destruction by the sweetness of her song (Britannica).

Sirens continued to be used as a symbol for the dangerous temptation embodied by women regularly throughout Christian art of the Medieval era.

"Siren" can also be used as a slang term for a woman considered both very attractive and dangerous (Cambridge Dictionary).

5 [noun] grasping, unscrupulous woman (Oxford English Dictionary). "Half-human and half-bird" (Wikipedia). A harpy was thought to be the "wind spirit" branded "horrible and loathsome" in Greek mythology (Britannica).

6 Caroline Criado Perez writes about the "default male" in *Invisible Women: Exposing Data Bias in a World Designed for Men* (2019) whereby everything is (not maliciously) based on the male perspective. She quotes Simone de Beauvoir: "Representation of the world, like the world itself, is the work of men; they describe it from their own point of view, which they confuse with the absolute truth." Exploring the definitions of Siren exposes the patriarchal lineage of how a mythical Greek half-bird half-woman comes to mean a woman who is attractive and dangerous. Looking beyond what is presented to us (see note 7), were Sirens and Harpies protectors? Of nature and children? Both assigned female gender, categorised by the male gender, how would a female "see" these creatures and their actions?

7 Georges Perec describes how to "see" in *The Species of Spaces and Other Places*. Perec uses the art of looking at everyday things to find value and meaning in them. He advises to look at something "until you can no longer understand what is happening or what is not happening". Through looking in this way at the moon's reflection you see beyond what is initially presented to you (what is in the "felt volume" as Keiller describes - see note 2) and find depth, life, space, time, sound and metaphors. In this case the intoxicating reflection monopolises your attention in the same way a mobile phone screen monopolises your attention when there is a whole vista around you.

THE DUST AFTER THE STORY

DUSTA AG DEIREADH AN SCÉAL

Isabella Millett

*"It is called a fort. It is made
of stone, it is a big rock.
There is no ditch around it or
there is no hole in it. There is
ivy growing on it.
Lights are said to be seen in it
and music heard."*

I found Ita Curtin's schoolbook in The National Folklore Collection. It is the 1930s and she is writing about faeries living on my great-grandfather's farm in County Cork, a story told to her by her own grandfather. There have been endless conversations about the farm in my family. I heard that my great-grandfather could not look after it properly, and was in despair when one day he had to sell it. Someone else had claimed that it was stolen from him by a malevolent brother. I even heard he migrated to America to play the fiddle and bootleg whiskey in his longing to save enough to reclaim this farm he held so dear. With these stories and all the others, my familial past had been pieced together through brief fragments, half-told across dinner tables: a means to an end for laughter, thrill or warning, always accompanied with exuberant profanities and an unbridled imagination. Ita's schoolbook was the first time I had seen my great-grandfather's surname in handwriting. *Emperor*.

Like many Irish school children at the time, Ita was asked to make a record of the world around her. In 1937, the Irish Folklore Commission, an organisation seeking to capture what was thought to be the disappearing Irish oral tradition, asked children to write down folklore in their communities. They scribed what they knew and what they could gather from elders and friends. Three-quarters of a million pages' worth of their writing were collected from 26 counties in Ireland.¹ The National Folklore Collection, now partially digitised as *Dúchas*, offers a glance at a place where storytelling was a collective exchange, inseparable from people's lives and the geographies that intertwined them.

1 Joelle Jackson 'How the Homework of 1930s Irish Schoolchildren Invites Folklore Studies Participation Today', *Folklife*, 2021

THE DUST AFTER THE STORY DUSTY DIRECTION IN SCÉAL

1 [noun] a way by which people pass on foot; a line along which

people move; a mode of transport; a track; a line of travel (Oxford English Dictionary).

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to look. By the mid-1900s, the camera and editing started to appear

as the medium itself, and the viewer's agency was reduced to the early

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I found the Siren in the National Folklore Collection. It is

the 1930s and she is wearing a dress that is half-bird, half-woman.

There is a story told to her by a man who is half-bird, half-woman.

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9

like many Irish school children, I was asked to make a record of the world around me. In 1930, the Irish Folklore Commission, an organization that was set up to collect and preserve Irish folklore, asked school children to make a record of the world around them. This was a time when the Irish language was still being spoken in many parts of the country, and the commission wanted to capture the stories and traditions of the people. I was one of the children who was asked to do this. I was given a notebook and a pen, and I was told to write down everything I saw and heard. I was to write about the people I knew, the places I lived in, and the things I did. I was to write about the stories I heard, the songs I sang, and the games I played. I was to write about everything that was part of my life. I was to write about the world around me.

10

It is called a fort. It is made of stone, it is a big rock. There is no ditch around it or there is no hole in it. There is ivy growing on it. Lights are said to be seen in it and music heard."



1. Joelle Jackson 'How the
Homework of 1930 Irish
Schoolchildren Involves Folklore
Studies Participation Today',
2021

There is a fort in Knockafertig in Michael Emperor's farm. It is called a fort. It is made of stone, it is a big rock. There is no ditch around it or there is no hole in it. There is ivy growing on it. Lights are said to be seen in it and music heard.

The owner of the land never interfered with it.

There is another fort in Rockhill at the bottom of Martin O'Leary's farm. It is called a fort. This fort is within view of the fort in Michael's Emperor's farm. It is made of earth. There is no ditch, or stone fence around it or there is no hole in it. Lights are said to be seen in it and music heard. It is called the 'Bleachain'. It is round in shape.

The owner of the land never interfered with it. There is an Alley near it. It is haunted too.

Told to Ita Curtin by her father.

Patrick Curtin, aged 45 years

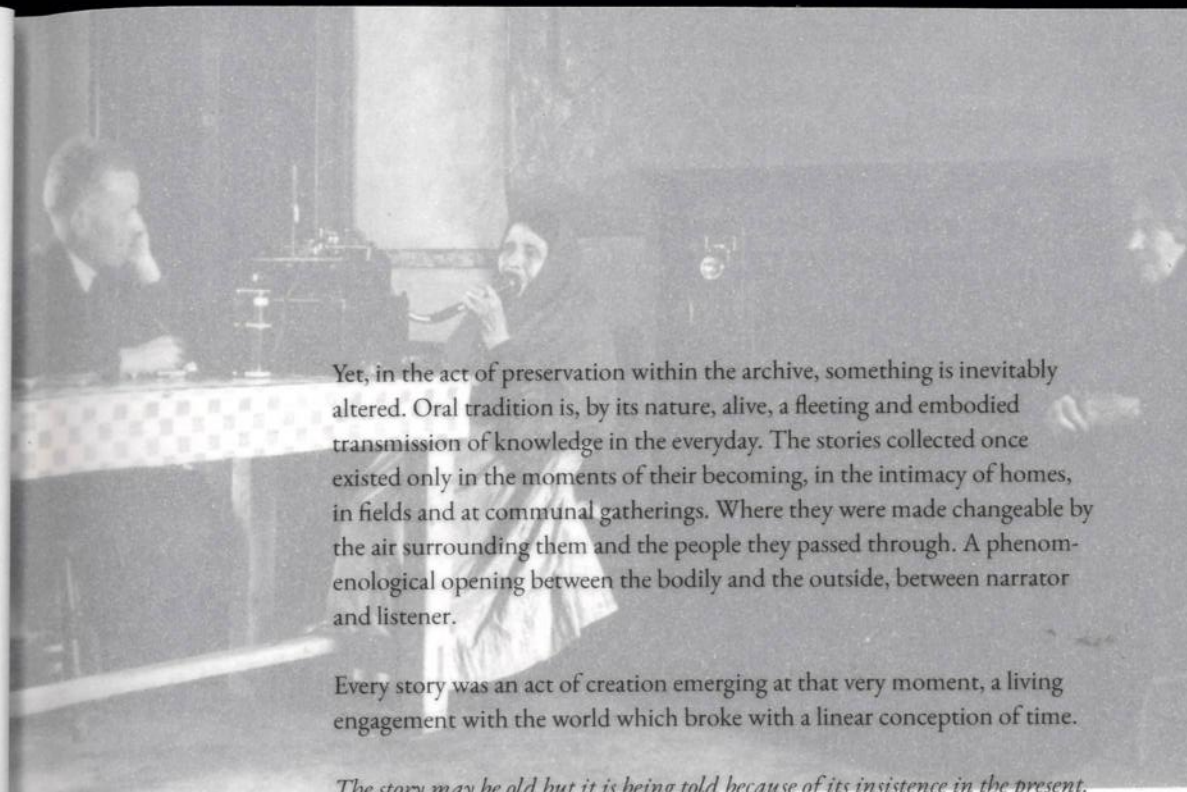
Rockhill,

Rockchapel,

Co. Cork.

James's Lifetime at this address.

There is a fairy fort in Lynneague at the bottom of John Linehan's farm beside the river Feale. It is square in shape. It is called a



Yet, in the act of preservation within the archive, something is inevitably altered. Oral tradition is, by its nature, alive, a fleeting and embodied transmission of knowledge in the everyday. The stories collected once existed only in the moments of their becoming, in the intimacy of homes, in fields and at communal gatherings. Where they were made changeable by the air surrounding them and the people they passed through. A phenomenological opening between the bodily and the outside, between narrator and listener.

Every story was an act of creation emerging at that very moment, a living engagement with the world which broke with a linear conception of time.

The story may be old but it is being told because of its insistence in the present.

2 Achille Mbembe 'The Power of The Archive and Its Limits', *Refiguring the archive*, 2002

By removing these stories from the moments of their recital, they are transformed into artefacts. This shift is a paradox. The archive salvages them from erosion, but in doing so removes them from the very conditions that gave them life. Where can we find the echo on the walls and the mesmeric reverberations of the storyteller's voice? These are the elements that the archive cannot replicate. In transforming the ephemeral into the perpetual, we lose the texture and the immediacy that made the stories vital. The theorist Achille Mbembe once said that archiving is like laying something in a coffin.¹

Yet the archive does offer a different kind of vitality, where the stories, though altered, may serve another purpose. Where the past is not commemorated, but carried. The archive must be seen as an invitation for us to listen, where we should hear the stories through the dust left behind, knowing the archival inevitability of loss in preservation. What is a reminder of the archive's limitations, and the transformation that occurs when the spoken word is made still, is also an imperative affirmation for collective memory.

The oral tradition in Ireland continues to be embodied ceaselessly in the present. These records of Irish children are traces and testimonies. Ita's written words tell me now about the faeries who lived on my great grandfather's farm and I can imagine his fearful but curious reverie when he heard the music they made. And at this moment, I find myself compelled to tell the story again.

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 of The Archive and Its Limits',
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MYTHOLOGY FOR THE GLOBAL VILLAGE

Niyi Okuboyejo

This narrative is drawn from an interview with designer Niyi Okuboyejo, founder and creative director of Post-Imperial, a global lifestyle brand rooted in the African diaspora. Though all words in this article are Niyi's own, certain segments were moved around to form a single stream of consciousness. Moments of reorganisation are denoted by the use of //

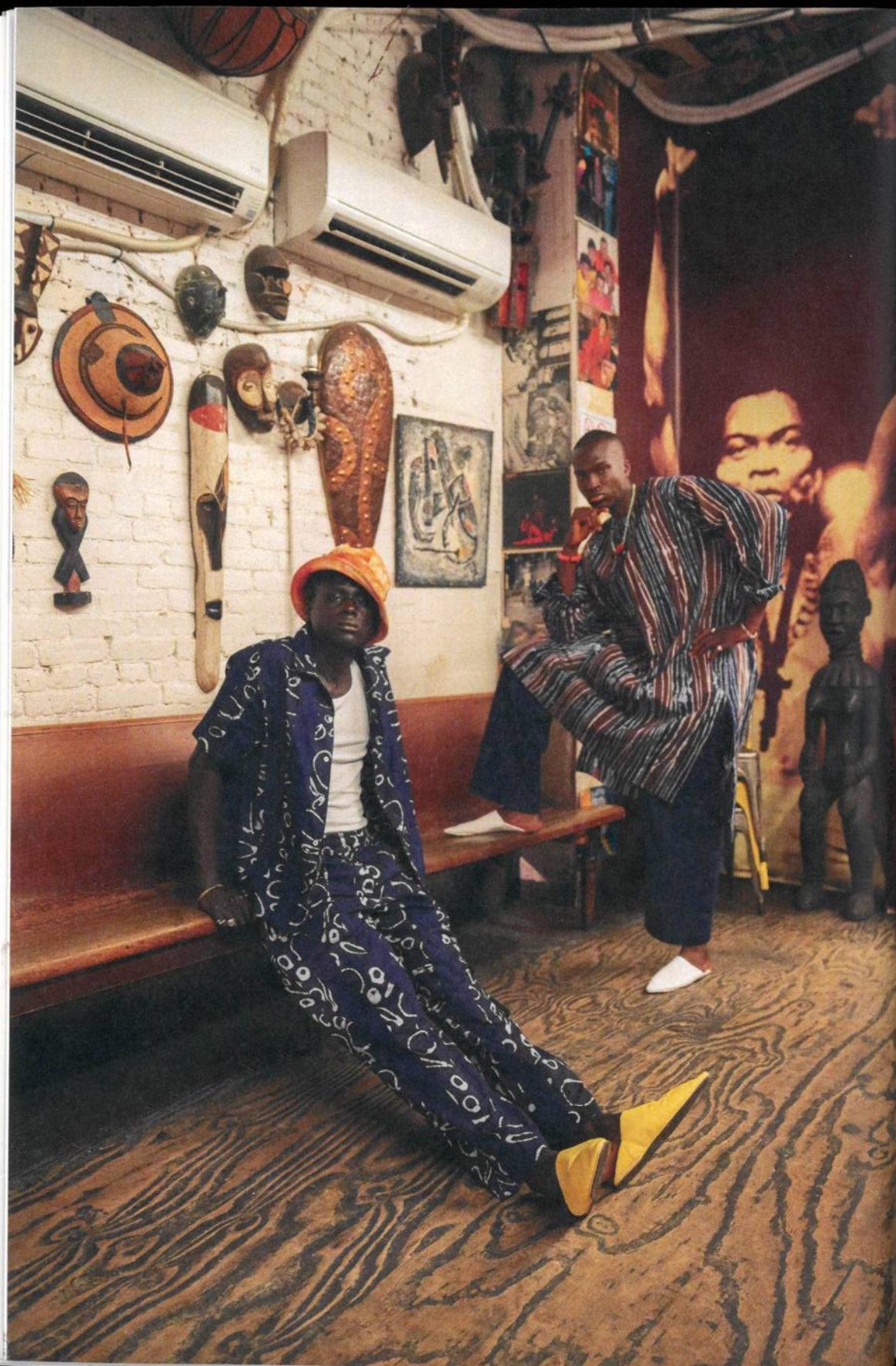
13

I was born in Nigeria and lived there for the first 14 years of my life before moving to Houston, TX with my older brother. From there, I went to the University of Houston to study marketing, later moving to New York to study fashion design at Parsons.

When I started my design journey, I wanted to tap into my identity without necessarily flowing into the system of what a designer is supposed to look like. I didn't have a road map of how a designer from the African diaspora should approach things. School was pivotal for me because I was able to stretch my imagination and see what that approach could be. //

I later decided to start Post-Imperial, my own brand. I started off with accessories and I was figuring out how to tie in my own heritage and identity through design. I realised that we had a lot of fabric dyeing techniques on the continent and decided to work with these dye artisans. They specialised in this dyeing technique called Adire. It's a centuries old technique. // The Adire process was endangered because of the fabric market in China, where they are able to do those things faster. There are a lot of artisans that are not able to find apprentices that can carry their centuries' worth of knowledge. When I started, only a few Nigerian designers were working with Adire. // It was something that a lot of Nigerians didn't want to do because they wanted to be taken seriously by the West. Until my friend Maki, who had a brand called MaKi Oh, started using Adire and transformed it into something that transcended beyond what is considered Nigerian. Before Maki and before me, that was a tradition that we were losing. //





I was trying to realise, "how do I make something that is fully formed from the continent and from the Black experience that isn't necessarily foreign, so different people in the global village can understand it?" // I know that, within the Western framework of me being Black, my existence is political. But I want to get to a point where that is not the case, right? It is the reason why I have trouble connecting with quite a few Black creatives and how they approach things from a Western perspective. You've used it as a way to deify Blackness to a point that it strips you of your humanity. I like to show the humanity in Blackness. That's what we try to do in our work. It's the reason why I love artists like Lubaina Himid. Artists who are able to show Black people in daily life and show that humanity. There's nothing wrong with showing them as regal and showing them as gods and goddesses. I understand why they want to do that, because it's bucking the narrative that we are lesser human beings. But I feel that can become too extreme. When we place that spotlight upon ourselves we're not able to make mistakes. And as a human being, you are going to make mistakes. I'm very conscious of allowing us to embrace our imperfections, allowing us to show the good and the bad sides of ourselves. I understand this is difficult when you want to participate in the mainstream. I do as well to a certain degree. But at a certain point I don't feel like it makes sense for us to continue doing that because we get washed into the post-modernist narrative of flattening things, and it doesn't make us dimensional. It doesn't give us any breadth of humanity... It strips us away from that.

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How do I make something that is fully formed from the continent and from the Black experience that isn't necessarily foreign, so different people in the global village can understand it?

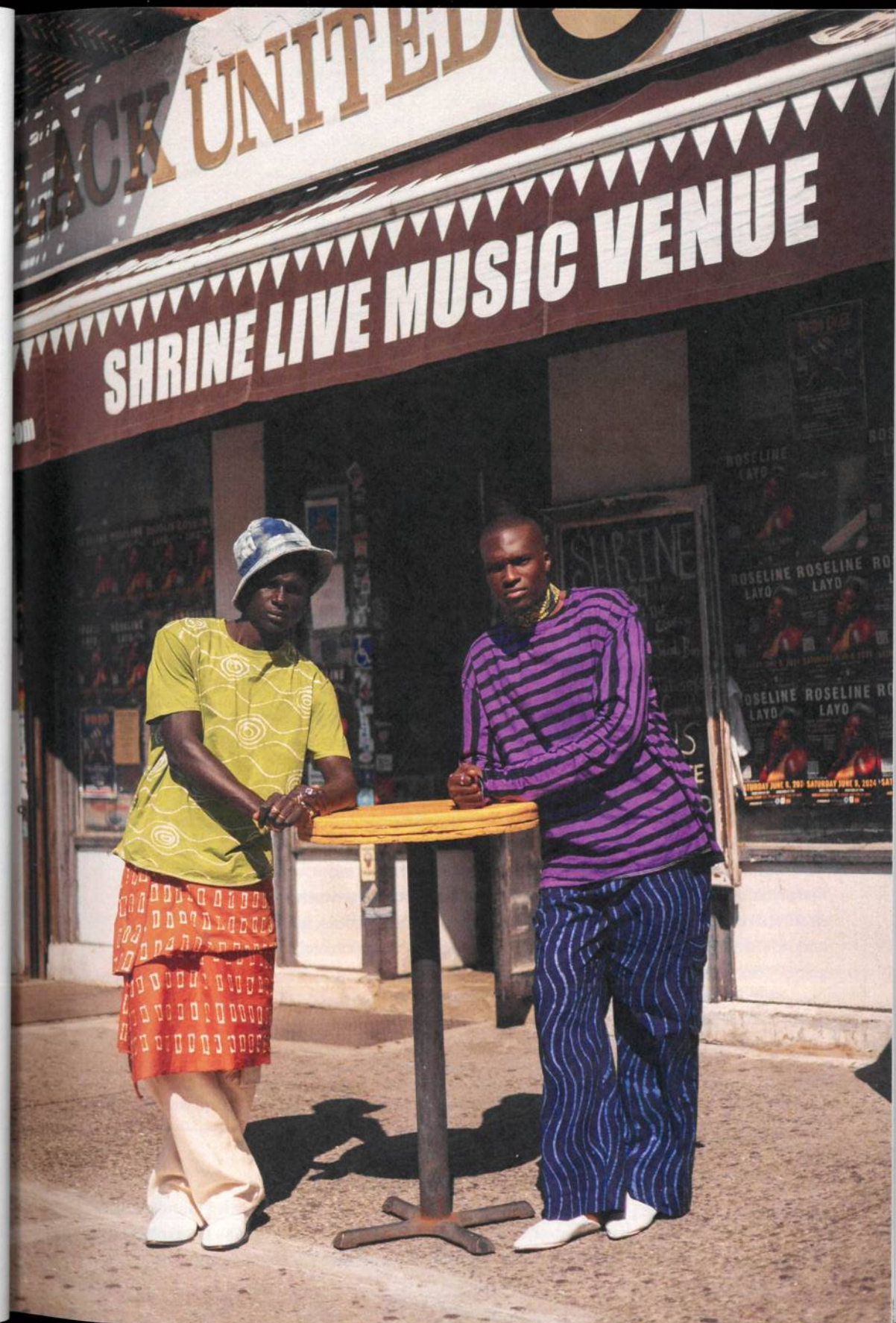
At Post-Imperial we try to highlight different philosophies and cultures and the joy found within Blackness. Focusing on healing or personal journeys. Or looking at an idea of water, what's the role of water and how it plays in the Black diaspora. One of our collections was called OMI, which centered on the narrative of water in the Black diaspora. I looked at different views of water, from Fela Kuti's 'Water No Get Enemy' talking about the good and bad of water, to the way we use water as libations on the African continent to honor ancestors or dead ones, even to a healthy fear of water across different deities and religions. That's one of the ways that I have used our mythology to build a narrative that's not necessarily tied to Western themes. Not always showing Black people as mythological beings. How do you heal collectively? What do safe havens look like for you? What is the immigrant experience like? Different topics like that. In terms of decolonisation, I believe these are things that are helping. I think it's showing a different perspective of what design looks like and how to approach design. It's not necessarily the same kind of thinking or the same type of references. Only so many people can reference Picasso or something from the West. //

We've always wanted a "Made in Nigeria" product. That wasn't feasible when I first started, the infrastructure wasn't there. So we had to take the lemons that we had and make lemonade. We would dye in Nigeria, but had to make everything in New York. About four years ago, we got the opportunity to start making products in Africa. We saw that there were infrastructures in different parts of the continent. Last year, we started working with two really good ateliers in Nigeria. They don't just make the clothes, but also illustrate the quality that we need since it's going to be standing with high fashion garments in stores. That was the result of me and my friends tapping into our community, listening to what their capacity is. We've built something that we can now say is 100% made in Nigeria and the quality hasn't suffered at all. I'm very proud of that. //

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When I started Post-Imperial, I faced the challenge of merging the artists or experiences or philosophies from my culture into a product like a necktie or a standard modern shirt. We try to channel this universal story of Post-Imperial, one that's not just mine, but is everyone's who is involved in it. // We collaborate with people through storytelling anthology, we collaborate with our materials through humanising materials and we collaborate with culture through connecting to the diaspora, all those things collaborate to make Post-Imperial. There was an emphasis on me making sure that the whole is heard and then minimising my role, but I noticed a lot of people wanted to hear from me. So I had to accept that role of being an avatar for Post-Imperial. Even though a lot of hands and a lot of people and a lot of voices make Post-Imperial, much of it is still me. The dream I'm helping to dream. What I'm dreaming is parallel to what Post-Imperial is going to be. All the other people within Post-Imperial also have a story to tell, and it's important for me to highlight their story within our platform. We're making "creative clothes for creative people", but I see Post-Imperial down the line being much bigger than that. There's an opportunity for us to take empathic design and use that as an idea to heal people through design, to build worlds or make some sort of impact. It's something in my head that I know we will be able to get to. At that point it will become "creative worlds for creative people". So it's that progression right now and the way that I see how the world influences what Post-Imperial looks like. //

Anyone that's part of Post-Imperial is a storyteller. When I say everyone, I mean the dye artisans, the shippers, anyone involved in the process. If you have given me any idea on a collection, you are part of our story.





Made in England, Video Installation, 2022

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PORCELAIN AND CAKE

Shengjia Zhang in conversation with Qianru Yang

Shengjia Zhang is a London-based contemporary artist and filmmaker born in Guangdong, China. In Shengjia's practice, he critically analyses the intersection of Eastern and Western traditions, encouraging reflection on broader cultural and historical narratives. By discussing Shengjia's discovery methods, archival research and reinterpretations of cultural symbols, we considered how everyday objects reflect deeper historical and social changes.

Qianru

Can you describe the moment when you realised the porcelain fragments you found were part of the Blue Willow pattern? How did that discovery impact your creative process?

Shengjia

Initially, I thought the blue-and-white porcelain shards I found along the River Thames were fragments of Chinese Ming (1368–1644) or Qing (1644–1912) export porcelain, so I began my research with that

assumption in mind. While researching, I came across information about the Blue Willow pattern and realised that some of the shards I had collected might actually belong to it. I wanted to get a Willow plate, and later, a friend helped me find a pair produced by Churchill in the 1990s at a second-hand market. Seeing the actual plates in person felt quite different from looking at pictures on a screen. A closer comparison revealed that the majority of the shards I had were indeed part of the Willow ware.

I found the process of solving this mystery fascinating, and it's something I want to convey in my work.

Qianru

How do you see the act of reconstructing these fragments as a metaphor for larger cultural or historical processes?

Shengjia

I am intrigued by the origins of everyday objects and frequently investigate the social and historical contexts that shape their creation. In my work, I aim to reflect this process, employing small details to illuminate broader concepts. The study of material culture in anthropology has been a significant source of inspiration for me.

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Qianru

How did the conversations with your classmates and others about their memories of Blue Willow influence your work? Did these personal stories change your perception of the pattern?

Shengjia

Some of my local classmates have shared that their families own sets of Willow-pattern porcelain. Since the Industrial Revolution, over 200 factories in Britain have produced items featuring this design, and chinoiserie-style ceramics are also common across continental Europe. A Portuguese friend's family, for example, has a collection of Nanking-pattern porcelain, a type of export ware from ancient China that is considered a precursor to the Willow pattern. These everyday objects, so widespread in Europe, are decorated with Oriental-style landscapes; however, they are almost entirely unfamiliar to many East Asians, a contrast that I find particularly intriguing.

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Qianru

In what ways do you hope your work will resonate with viewers, particularly those who may not have a direct connection to the Blue Willow pattern or its history?

Shengjia

This could be a matter of context, as viewers from different backgrounds may connect with the work in varying degrees. Europeans and East Asians, based on their lived experiences, might find it easier to engage with the themes and reflect on the work. However, the allure of exoticism is present across many cultures, so audiences from diverse backgrounds may also draw parallels to similar phenomena within their own cultural contexts.

I was surprised to find several modern statues of Hindu deities along the foreshore near East India Dock.

Qianru

How did you go about collecting and analysing the marginal archival materials related to birthday cakes? Were there any unexpected discoveries?

Shengjia

The archival materials used in the work come from a variety of sources, including museums and archival centres, as well as items purchased from second-hand markets. The photograph of Chinese immigrants in late 19th-century San Francisco, housed in the Library of Congress, was an unexpected discovery during the later stages of production. It shows four Chinese children in Qing-era attire, standing in pairs on either side of a birthday cake at the centre of the frame. This visual juxtaposition of Westernisation and Chinese tradition struck me as particularly profound.

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Qianru

With the various materials you've gathered such as images, prints and family archives, how do you decide which ones to include in the final work?

Shengjia

In constructing the narrative about the birthday cake, I initially conducted a literature review to establish a preliminary narrative framework. Subsequently, I sought out relevant archival materials in alignment with this framework.

The process of material collection and analysis is mutually influential, with the findings often prompting revisions to the narrative structure and occasionally challenging or overturning initial hypotheses.

In the current context of rising nationalism, everyday items with exotic characteristics, such as birthday cakes and Willow ware, can appear particularly anomalous and counterintuitive.

Qianru

How do you see the birthday cake as a symbol of Western culture's intersection with Chinese traditions? What does this intersection reveal about the broader cultural exchanges between the East and the West?

Shengjia

Both birthday cake and Willow pattern are manifestations of exoticism and consumerism, reflecting a phenomenon observed across diverse cultures. They offer a valuable perspective for examining how widespread intercultural influences can shape and underlie aspects of everyday life that might otherwise seem ordinary.

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Birthday Cakes From China, Video, 2024



Birthday Cakes From China, Video, 2024

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Qianru

As a mudlarker, how does the act of physically collecting and studying objects influence your creative process? Can you share a memorable find that significantly impacted your work?

Shengjia

Much of the historical material I've collected through mudlarking is unfamiliar to me, so it has largely served as inspiration for potential topics. For example, the discovery of Willow shards has become instrumental within my research. Additionally, I was surprised to find several modern statues of Hindu deities along the foreshore near East India Dock. Ironically, this area, named after the colonial East India Company, has recently seen an influx of South Asian immigrants, bringing cultural elements into the region.

Qianru

What draws you to specific artefacts like Blue Willow porcelain or birthday cakes?

Shengjia

I typically focus on objects that relate to my personal experiences or investigate how newly identified phenomena intersect with my own background. In the current context of rising nationalism, everyday items with exotic characteristics, such as birthday cakes and Willow ware, can appear particularly anomalous and counterintuitive.

FINDING THE LIMINAL

Barney Pau

Cities. Messy, loud crescendos of chaos where millions ebb and flow. Built to be monolithic, they represent the culmination of human culture and its dominion over nature. Tall towers are a testament to this, resolute sentinels guarding against uninvited intruders. Here, greenery is only allowed in its most docile form; all else is eschewed. Though they might morph and change in style and size, their permanence is absolute. Or is it?

Lost among our monuments and buildings, myriad minute ecologies thrive in plain sight; seen by many, but unnoticed by most. From the micro to the macro they take every shape and size, squeezed into the city's unexpected corners. Here, they exist in transient states of perpetual uncertainty, for each day could end in a spray of glyphosate, or the tug of a gloved hand. They're found in spots that we've forgotten, for remaining lost ensures their longevity.

25 Firmly rooted between nature and culture, the liminal ecology does more than just grow in the grey. It bridges the divide drawn by our dualism, reuniting the human and more-than-human in a messy multi-species amalgam. Beyond the physical, it becomes a metaphor of resistance, paralleled with other forms of non-normative existence.¹ Its feelers creep into crannies and slide through slivers, forming city-wide revolutionary networks of self-seeded greenery.

A bold claim to be made for a collection of pollution-muted plants growing among the brightly coloured rubbish. Yet even in the tenderest of their tendrils, one can find resilience. Their tips – so soft to the touch – can raise foundations, breaking through the toughest materials. Alone, they have little impact on our cities. Left to their own endeavours, they could well raise our foundations sooner than we'd like. United, they become a radical force against our deeply ingrained growthism.

Growthism, also called productivism, is the belief that progress is essential to human purpose.² We can see this on an international scale through transcontinental trade and manufacturing. Yet it also trickles down into the core tenets of our self-identity. We believe that we must progress to be successful. Stasis or regress are posited as failure in their opposition to growthism's supposed success.

On a societal level, in this country certainly, many core value systems are built upon growthism. This isn't necessarily on us, though. Well, not all of it, anyway. We've been taught to consume, while having the true cost of

1 Barney Pau 'Between the Cracks', *MOLD*, 2024 & Barney Pau 'Weeds and their Metaphors', *It's Freezing in LA!*, 2023.

2 Herman Daly 'Growthism: its Ecological, Economic and Ethical Limits', *Local Futures*, 2019.

3 Oxford English Dictionary entry for "weed".

4 In Spanish, there's a saying that *Hierba mala nunca muere*, "weeds never die". It's a colloquialism suggesting bad people/things last longer than good. Beneath this use, though, it could suggest the resilience needed for a life led outside the law. Most people would call this criminal, but law is a fickle thing. Aside from the absolutes – don't kill, steal, rape, etc. – many laws are designed to suppress. It's not so long since so-called "buggery" was a crime. Rather than snide, then, perhaps this idiom is en-



that consumption hidden from producing our food, mining more than we know. In this life a self-destructive force, taking pops up between the bricks, the biggest movements began at

Our cities are built upon the bigger, better, they exist under over all else. As such, they're to only the most domesticated work, the liminal ecology is a and diversity. It can exist where

More often than not the lost "weeds": plants defined by growth. Weeds have been diligently regreening our we destroy and building on the destruction, their remediation then, that even as they repair

This disdain is widespread. Spanish is an interesting lens through which to understand weeds. There is no specific name for them, they are just called *malas hierbas*, "bad herbs".⁴ This isn't so much to do with them being "bad" for us; many weeds' medicinal and nutritional properties abound. Instead, the Spanish definition aligns with its English counterpart, of a plant which is in the wrong place: defining them by their perceived lack of value.

At the start of this article, I suggested how, by being able to "exist wherever" in the city, the liminal ecology bridges the divide drawn by our dualism. The liminal ecology is a metaphor for the divide between human and more-than-human. The concept was coined by philosopher

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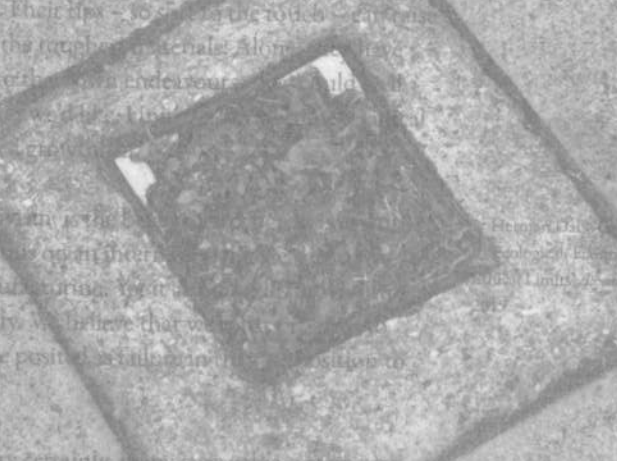


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And in the course of this search, other things sprout minute ecologies thrive in the shadows, growing more luxuriantly by most. From the micro to the macro, there are ever more things, slipping into the city's unexpected corners, slivers, the city in translation, to a perpetual uncertainty, for one day could hold the entry of a ghost, or the tug of a gloved hand. The city, though, is not a simple thing, and to remain lost ensures that honey does.

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Growthism, also called productivism, is the belief that economic growth is essential to human purpose.² We can see this in our increasing dependence on transcontinental trade and manufacturing. You can't turn back the clock. It's the core tenets of our self-identity. We believe that without growth, we can't be successful. Stasis or regress are positive attributes in the opposition to growthism's supposed success.



For a collection of pollution-related photos growing out of rubbish collected in the streets of their residence, their idea - to start the road - gains force through the touch of a child. Along the way, they tell us that their endeavor - the child's encounter with the world - finds a new, more personal and more thoughtful meaning.

prolongation is the fact that the child's presence can be as an intermediary between the world and manufacturing. You can see it in the self-identity we believe that with the child's presence are positive results in the relationship to success.

Our country certainly, many more systems in. This is necessary only through the system in the child to produce, with the child's

Hammer, D. & G. (1998). Ecology in Education and Social Learning. *Journal of*

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5 Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: Changing attitudes in England 1500-1800*, 1983

6 Agnes Tam and Margaret Meek Lange 'Progress', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2024.

7 Genesis. 9:3

Our cities are built upon the notion of growthism. Progressively newer, bigger, better, they exist under the imperative to prioritise human endeavour over all else. As such, they're designed to be ecologically barren, playing host to only the most domesticated of non-human species. Against this framework, the liminal ecology is a generative force, one full of infinite potential and diversity. It can exist wherever, and thrive where nothing else will.

This disdain is widespread. Spanish is an interesting lens through which to understand weeds. There is no specific name for them, they are just called *malas hierbas*, “bad herbs”.⁴ This isn’t so much to do with them being “bad” for us; many weeds’ medicinal and nutritional properties abound. Instead, the Spanish definition aligns with its English counterpart, of a plant which is in the wrong place: defining them by their perceived lack of value.

At the start of this article, I suggested how, by being able to “exist wherever” in the city, the liminal ecology bridges the divide drawn by our dualism. To elaborate, dualism is a notional division between human and more-than-human existences. The original concept was coined by philosopher René Descartes who understood physical functions as separate from mental processing.⁵

Descartes was not alone in his dualistic thinking. From philosopher Immanuel Kant's delineation between human sentience and non-human instinctiveness;⁶ to the Abrahamic notion of the world as a human resource, we have a long history of prioritising ourselves. Indeed, it's not hard to see where this superiority complex might have found its genesis, for as is writ in Genesis, "everything that lives and moves about will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything."⁷

The Abrahamic religions took this as gospel and placed humans atop a vast hierarchy, under which all other organisms were then arranged. Cue humanity's wanton environmental destruction in search of every extractable so-called "resource" we can find.

So... how does the grimy liminal ecology have anything to do with dusty mediaeval-cum-biblical notions of dualism? Well, I may believe Kant's dualism was misguided, but his other philosophising rang true: look closely, the beautiful may be small. If the permanence of our monolithic structures represents the pinnacle of our species' dominance of nature, then the small, forgotten liminal spaces in between them represent the antithesis. In their growth, they deny growthism.

That which is not controlled represents a threat to the controller. I find these ecologies to be fertile ground in which to seed alternative thought and social metaphors. The liminal ecology has always opposed what growthism values. Growing in the wrong place, it resists what we hold of "worth". This is perhaps what I find to be its valuable trait.

It is bold to label the liminal ecology as resistant. In fact, it verges on hubris. In all our busyness, we forget that we're but a blip on planetary timelines, despite all our earth-changing impacts. As Alan Weisman writes in *The World Without Us* (2007), "without us, Earth will abide and endure; without her, however, we could not even be."⁸ It's important to recognise that my sentiments are an entirely human projection, for the liminal ecology just grows where it's seeded. It has no say in my interpretation of it; just as it exists unbound by any notions I may have. Its growth isn't actually resistance, it's simply existence.

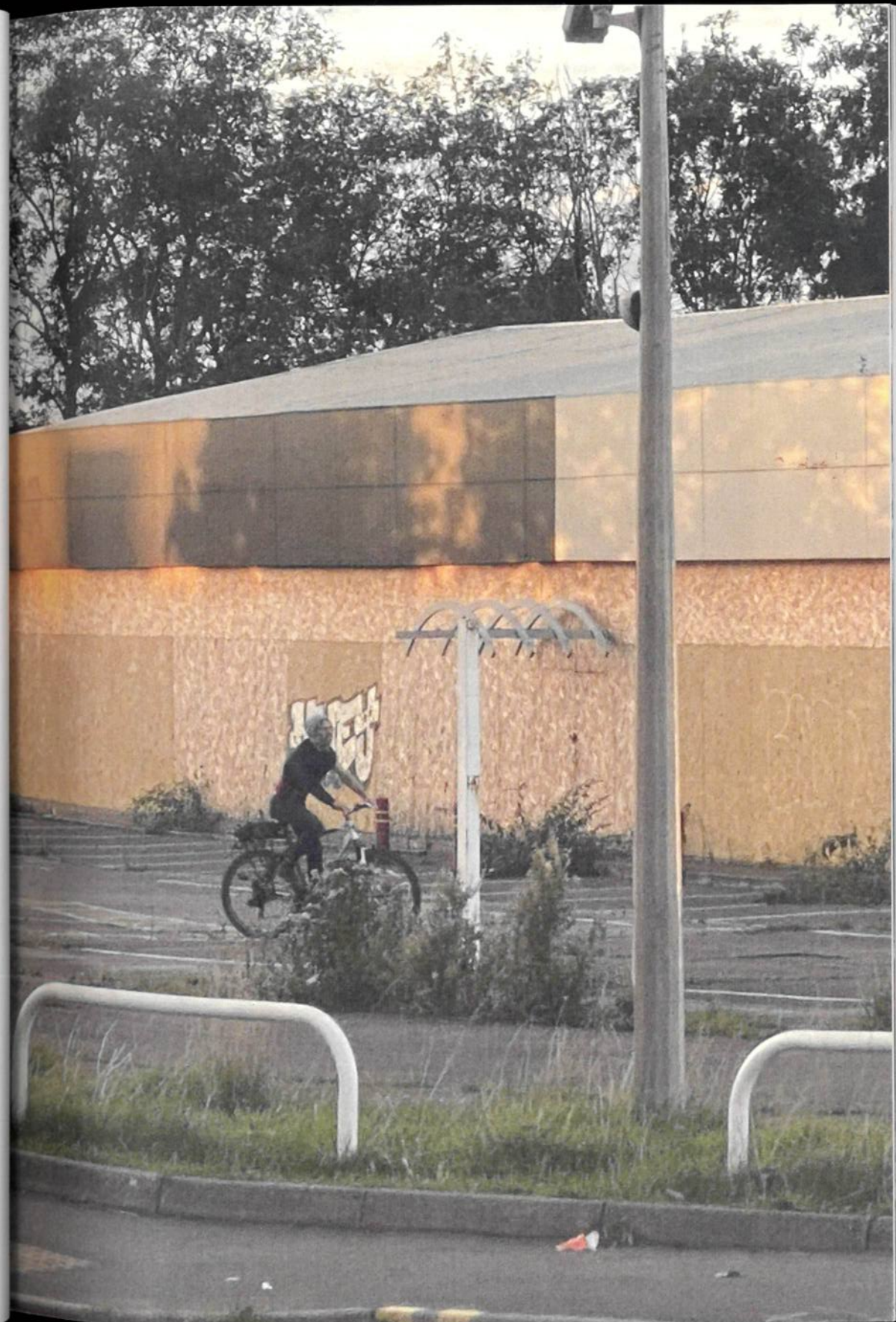
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Yet any agency it may have has been bulldozed by human bias, so to exist it must resist. This is my personal opinion, rooted in my affinity with the liminal ecology and its weeds. I resonate with its existence. Note: I do not see myself as without value, or being in the wrong place. Far from it. I see myself in opposition to those who tell me I am in what they perceive to be the wrong place. I am far from lost.

Where I do lose myself is in the liminal ecology, for here I find I am at peace. I wonder whence the seeds came; how one species interacts with another. I walk the street peering at forgotten corners, seeing which weeds might thrive where. It has shown me how to find beauty and balance in the countless existences around me, happy to walk quite lost in my own thoughts.

To lose oneself is to become deeply involved in something. So much so that all our attention and thoughts are engaged. This often takes place outside the physical realm; in a task, passion or process which consumes us. So let's lose ourselves in the liminal and find inspiration there, for in these ecologies lies embodied knowledge of how to thrive in the face of adversity. By becoming utterly rapt, we might pause growthism, and lose ourselves in the growth of other species, for they're the ones who can help us find a reconnection with nature again.

8 Alan Weisman, *The World Without Us*, 2007.



PUMPKIN BREAD

3 1/2 cup flour, self-rising	1 cup salad oil
3 cups sugar	4 eggs
2 tsp. soda	1 tsp. vanilla
1 1/2 tsp. salt	2/3 cup water
1 T. pumpkin pie spice (2 tsp. cinnamon, 1/2 tsp. nutmeg, 1/2 tsp. ginger)	2 cups pumpkin

I usually bake a fresh pumpkin. Cut it in half and remove the seeds and the worst of the strings. Put one of the halves cut side down on a baking sheet with sides to hold the juice that will accumulate. Grease the outside well and bake at 350 for 1 hour (if you have enough room you can do both halves at once.) Allow to cool and then scoop out pumpkin into a blender. Blend until it is smooth and store in jars in refrigerator. It's great for the holidays for all the pies and bread you could possibly want for parties and gifts.

To make the bread - beat eggs slightly. Add pumpkin, water, oil and vanilla. Beat well. Add dry ingredients. Mix until blended. Bake at 350 one hour in greased and floured loaf pans.

This makes three 4 x 7 loaves. Cook in pan 1 hour and then turn out on plate.

Margaret Ann Briggs

UNLEAVENED

Mary Stuart Murray

It was a grey, rainy day, when she
Extricated the recipe from that overfilled box that held
A hundred homilies to past appetisers, entrees, and hors d'oeuvres.
Prying it from slips of white paper and magazine clippings,
The recipe from her mother, transcribed onto a postcard,
Stamped with postage and grease stains.

Looking at the directions was more ritual than necessity:
Smearing a loaf pan with butter,
Sifting the sugar and flour,
Scooping the pulpy, orange meat from a tin.
Canned is fine, but fresh pumpkin is best.
James Taylor sang hymns on the CD player as she worked.

Now see the prodigal daughter, a few years removed,
Trudging homewards in the damp after
A long day spent slogging through
Pre-algebra, Latin, lunch, and the Pacer Test.
Hair pulled back into a limp ponytail, shoes holding water,
She cracked open the front door like an egg, only to
Be met with the scent of baking pumpkin bread.

Cinnamon and nutmeg, ginger and cloves,
Holy incense used in lieu of smelling salts.
It made the daughter's shoulders slump in relief.
The smell was like a hug from her mother,
Whose own arms followed soon after.

Then, pressed into the daughter's hand,
A small, warm body—
Weighted with butter and veined in allspice.
It touched the the daughter's lips; a hot coal,
Purging her soul of the day's muck as she ate.
Transubstantiation on a Thursday afternoon,
When she, the mother, took a loaf
Of pumpkin bread and made it something
Holy. Something healing.



What's your name, where
you from, what you on?
No preening, no posing,
no prejudice.

IMAGES FROM DAVE SWINDELLS, IDEA

Boy George dancing,
Ibiza, 1989

RAVE ON

Tim Gibney

You never forget your first time.

Heartbeat pounding, anticipation off the scale and asking yourself "How long will it last?" At least that's how I remember my first rave. Not that we called it that at first back then. It was just a club, a shabby little one at that, in South London but like no other we had ever set foot in.

A curious and intoxicating musical brew of house, quirky electronica and overlooked synth-pop¹ sounding more colourful, powerful and meaningful than anything we had ever heard.

Heat intense, condensation dripping continuously from the ceiling and sweat soaking through your clothes as if you had just stepped out of the shower. Taking turns to pray to the strobe light like it were the most natural thing in the world, as the DJ's sidekick happily pumped each of us with an icy blast from the smoke machine. Somebody shouted "Can you feel it?"² We could.

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Everybody dancing, everybody: joyously, frenziedly, *ecstatically*. Happy, happy, happy. What's your name, where you from, what you on? No preening, no posing, no prejudice.

This really wasn't how things were in the turbulent Britain of the 1980s. Where Margaret Thatcher declared: "who is society? There is no such thing!" If only she could have seen this. Better still, dropped one and felt it. Right there, on the dance floor, a generation begging to differ. Lost in music, we found our society.

It became a way of life, at least for a while. We grew our hair, dressed down (baggy, bold and bright) and lived for raving in clubs, pubs and bars, in disused warehouses, squats and

shut-down shops, on the common, on pleasure boats and a right carry on at Butlin's. The city was our playground. No CCTV, no internet, no mobiles and no idea where the fuck Cambridge Heath was.

We raved to Italo-house³ in abandoned factories east of the city. We fell in love with Chicago house⁴ at Cooz, a snooker hall-cum-nightclub above a parade of shops in Wood Green. We *got it* when Danny Rampling dropped Barry White's 'It's Ecstasy When You Lay Next To Me' in the vaults of Borough Market. We heard 808 State's 'Pacific State' for the first time at The Raid and needed to have it. Nights dancing and days hanging around Trax and Grooves on Greek Street chasing the latest 12-inch imports.

It wasn't just us. Kids in Bedford, Blackpool and Bournemouth, Glasgow and Great Harwood, Manchester and Milton Keynes, Stoke, Swansea and Swindon, Coventry, Liverpool, Nottingham, Worthing and all points in between were doing the same, feeling the same.

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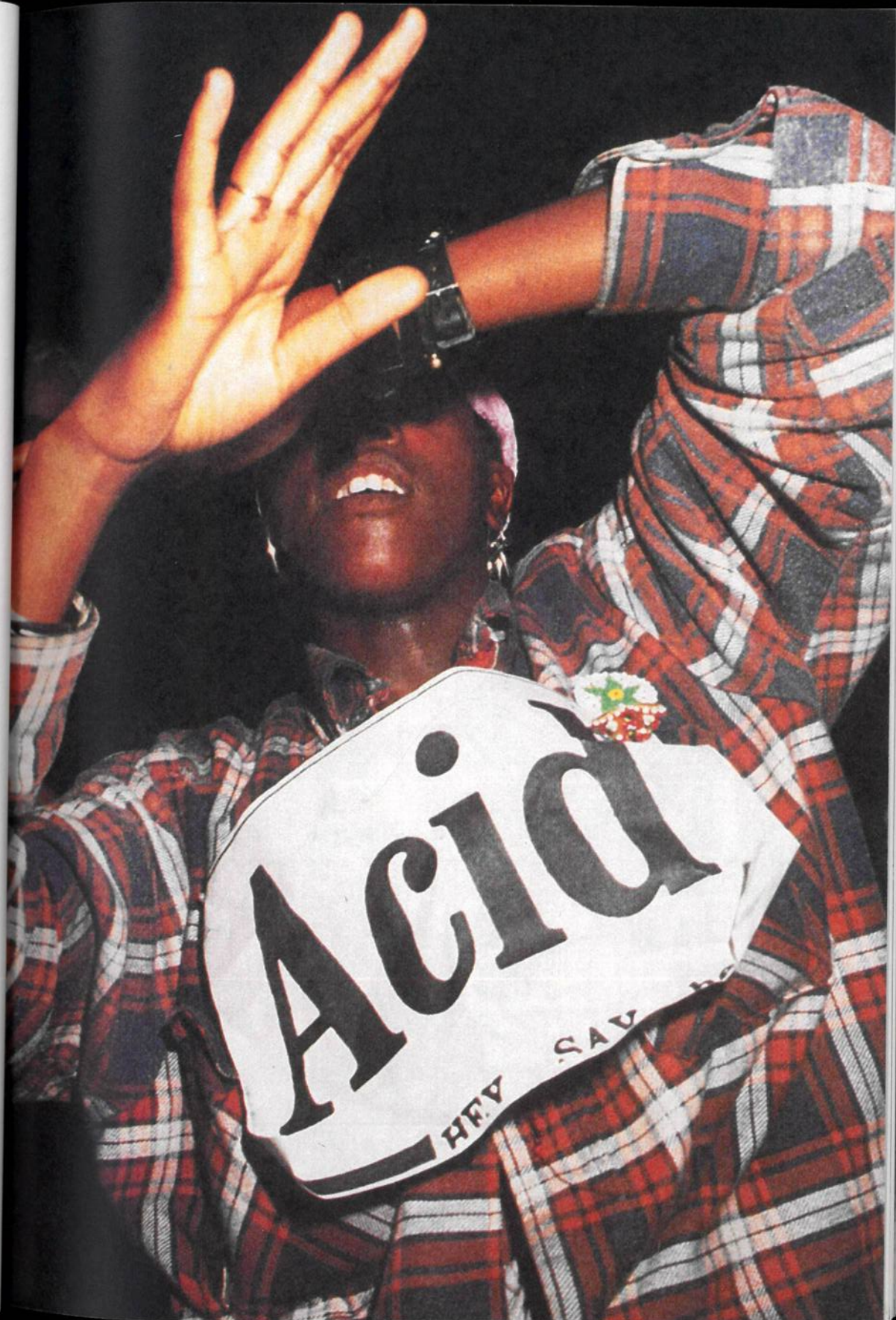
There was a summer in Ibiza paying homage to DJ Alfredo at Amnesia.⁵ Dancing under the stars alongside every kind of person. We're all the same really. Then on to Angels – Belgian New Beat ruled there⁶ – and down *that* slide. Conversations in broken English, conversations in broken Spanish. House music is a universal language. Melody, rhythm and a 4/4 beat speak to anyone.

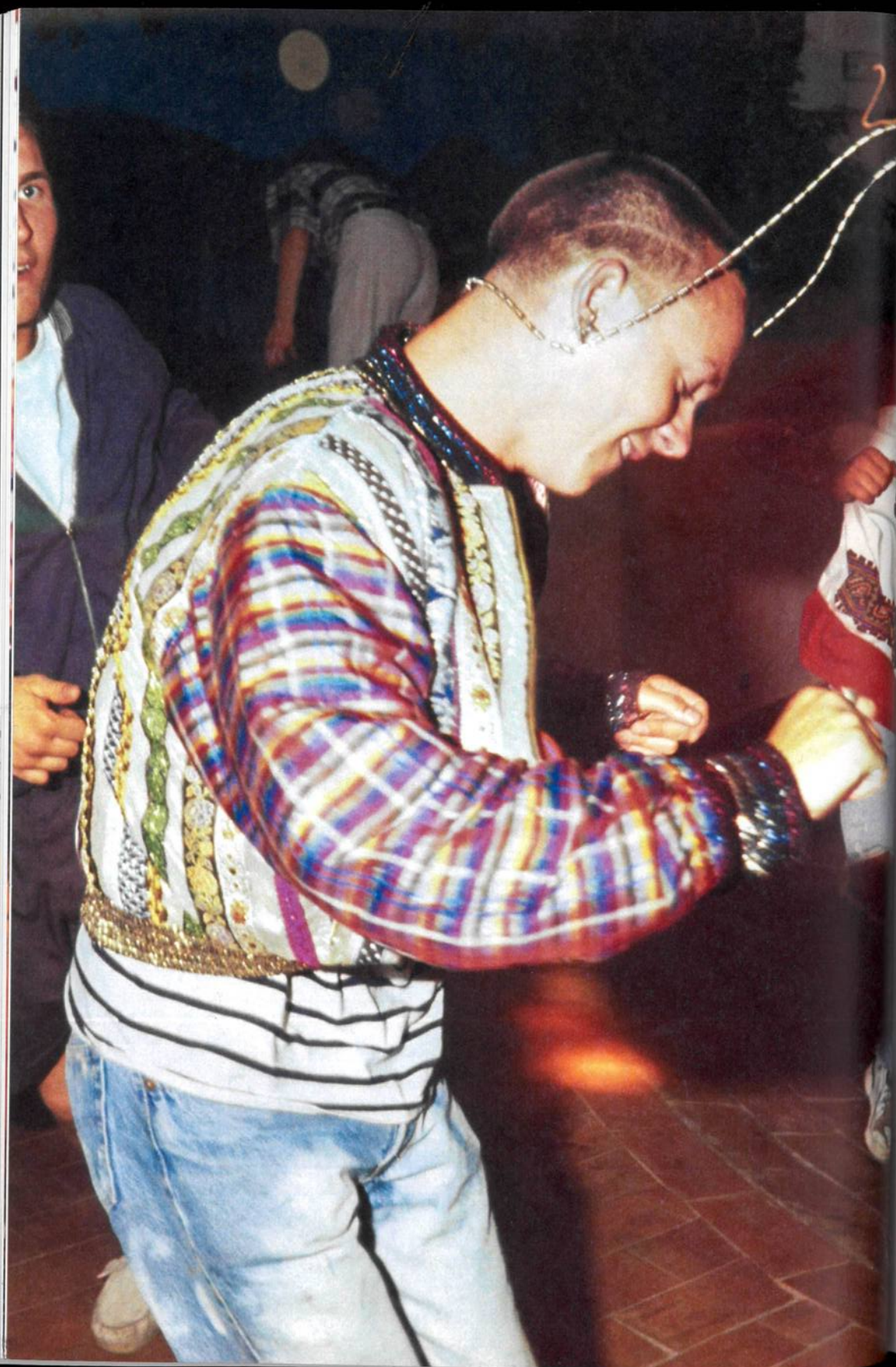
Back again to the White Isle in '91 with my lot. Older, not wiser.

Sunsets again at the Café del Mar⁷...sunrises on the road from San An...loved up...come down... arms aloft to Johnny Walker's set at Pacha⁸... Emerson playing 'Blue Monday' at Es Paradis... hardcore rave girls from Essex and Richard from Pleasure...the hippy...pony-tails...tall tales... the "secret" ingredient in the punch at Space... scraping together enough pesetas for chips...new friends...old faces...rinsing Mooney's mix tape⁹ back at the apartment...whatever happened

Sunsets again at the Café del Mar...sunrises on the road from San An...loved up...come down...arms aloft to Johnny Walker's set at Pacha...Emerson playing 'Blue Monday' at Es Paradis...

Acid House x Paisley Park,
Trip, London, 1988





Then I met a girl.
On a dance floor.
We got married
and had children.
We're still together.

Track list

- 1 The Race - Yello - Mercury (1988)
- 2 Can You Feel It - Mr. Fingers - Trax Records (1986)
- 3 Don't Deal With Us (Club Version) - J. T. Company - EastWest (1990)
- 4 It's All Right - Sterling Void - DJ International Records (1989)
- 5 That's How I'm Living - Toni Scott - Champion (1989)
- 6 Brylliant (33% Plus 8 Remix) - Boytronic - BCM Records (1988)
- 7 The Hypnotist (Expanded From Seven To Twelve Inches) - Sisterlove - On (1992)
- 8 Master Brass (Summer Mix) - Art Of Mix - Mighty Quinn Records (1990)
- 9 Got A Love For You (Hurley's Dub) - Jomanda - Big Beat (1991)
- 10 What About This Love (Extended Version) - Mr Fingers - Alleviated Records (1989)
- 11 Lost Area (DJ Sprinkles' Empty Dancelloor) - June - These Days (2011)
- 12 Let The Music (Use You) - The Night Writers - Danica Records (1987)
- 13 Weak Become Heroes (Ashley Beedle's Love Bug Vocal) - The Streets - 679 (2002)

"Dawsy" (left) and Adamski (centre) at Ku, Ibiza, 1989

to Dawsy?...hugs and kisses...wide-eyes...wider grins...slack jaws...sorted.

Then I met a girl. On a dance floor. We got married and had children. We're still together. Though I never really left this community that I had found and the music never left me. It's the same for many of us. Still going strong. Sort of. Liberties and lives have been taken by greed and addiction along the way, it is true. RIP Liam and Joe. But more has been found than has been lost.

Return to East London. Tucked among those spaces and places where a younger me had raved many years before, maybe even the very same space now gentrified and transformed, out in force for the genius that is Larry Heard, aka Mr Fingers.¹⁰ I met Jamie from Brighton. We drank warm beer, reminisced over old house tunes and agreed to stay in touch. Then Larry played 'Can You Feel It'. We could.

Music was my sanctuary again in the dark days of the pandemic. First time I'd been out since losing my dad to the virus a few months earlier. I'd lost interest,¹¹ and government rules had been prohibitive. Now we could go out again, but there were restrictions still; the event had to be held outside, you must remain seated and there was to be *no* dancing.

You could still use the toilet though. And it was in the queue that sly ravers, desperate to be out, to be among people, to be normal again, stimulated by alcohol and house music, threw caution to the wind and dared to dance. Including the stranger next to me. Realising I was watching, and perhaps fearing I might report her to the dance police, she stopped.

I smiled reassuringly, and told her that I loved this tune too.¹²

"I couldn't help it," she said, smiling back at me. "The music made me do it."

Enjoy.¹³



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Enjoy.¹³

'Dawsy' (left) and Adamski
(centre) at Ku, Ibiza, 1989

A SATURDAY POTTER

Nicky Kai-ho Liang

Before my first pottery lesson in London, I was slightly nervous. I tried to get myself familiar with the technical terms in English which I used to only know in Chinese. 手捏·泥條·泥板 etc become pinching, coiling and slab building. Familiar things when referred to in another language feel so weirdly alien, despite being the same equal thing.

We started with wedging. 搓 (wedge) 泥 (clay): an essential kneading to remove air bubbles that may cause the clay to explode in the kiln. I have never been good at this. People usually managed to wedge their chunk into neat uniform layers, while I often ended up in a mess. I would either wedge it too forcefully so that parts of it would stick on the table, or it looked like some poorly compressed croissant. The potential clay explosion is terrifying, all our efforts would be in vain, however determined or strenuous, in a brutal and shocking blow. That is a problem of my stress coping mechanism: before things screw up, I tend to screw them up first.

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I wedge better now, thanks to my current teacher, Yasuko-san, who reminded me to keep my fingers to the side of the clay. Ceramics making is a tactile exploration. I remember that moment of surprise when I set my hands around the clay again in the new studio. The clay was darker in colour, softer and more malleable than the one I had built my muscle memory upon. My warm palms usually dried the clay up and cracks would form, but that did not happen. The pinching went unexpectedly smoothly, and that was my first time to pinch a handled mug successfully. I would always have pinched bowl-like vessels with an unwanted wide opening. Even making the simplest objects takes time, not to perfection but just to what you want them to be.

Clay is also capricious. It reciprocates if you are gentle, but if you cross the line, it resists. Sometimes it works against all known rules, and in frustration you question what actually has gone wrong. In another lesson I tried coiling, an older method of vessel-making that knows no bounds. The coils are placed layer after layer, which have to be blended to give a smooth surface. Simple as it sounds, like all crafts, it requires careful attention and a certain degree of artistry. I would also add: an open mind. I was attempting to make the largest vessel in my collection. I say it like a conscious decision but that was not. The clay itself alluded to that possibility and I followed. I tried to intervene. The clay would allow it at times. But at others, sensing any sign of domination, it threatened to sag, misshape or fall apart. I took a deep breath, finished as much as I could and left the rest till next time. "Haste makes waste" has become a real impending danger.



1 Emanuele Coccia,
Philosophy of the Home,
2024

2 Marion Milner, *On Not Being
Able to Paint*, 1950

My previous encounter with clay was brief. In my last job in Hong Kong as a curator/cultural programmer, my colleagues and I worked with a group of artists and organised community ceramics workshops for beleaguered single mothers. We called that "Take A Break Studio". Every Saturday morning, the mothers temporarily set aside daily chores and responsibilities and spent time with clay. Sometimes I stayed with them and managed to learn the very basic techniques. Most of the time I was a childminder, taking care of the children and stopping them from going to their mums who were treasuring their unusual time to make art wholeheartedly. They were Saturday potters – some of them still are, and I have also become one. Tactility brings proximity. As I knead clay, I think of them, understanding better how they thought about the process and all the satisfaction. I make what they have made, like my tea pot. They also made one towards the end of their course.

Most of the vessels I have made are vases. They now scatter here and there in my tiny studio flat, housing flowers. In *Philosophy of the Home*, the philosopher Emanuele Coccia examines the significance of household articles at home.¹ They don't just occupy space, instead "they open it, they make it possible". I have been chewing over another proposition of his: home is that space in which things stop being just things. My vases are more than just vases. Without them I would not have noticed the passing of time more tangibly, here in a foreign place where I have decided to embark on a new phase of life. They enlighten me with the flowers they house, in order of bloom from Spring through Summer, tulips after daffodils and hyacinths, with roses now taking over. Ceramics always leave me in awe by their transcendent sense of time: how clay comes from soil that has already existed for thousands of years, and through the process of making we transform its state of being into objects which will last for another thousand of years. We make them. We use them. We create space and meaning with them. Until eventually, we are outlasted.

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As a Saturday potter, ceramics making has become a grounding routine. In her book *On Not Being Able to Paint*, the psychoanalyst Marion Milner reflects on her journey in amateurish painting.² Albeit the considerable differences between the two media, there are commonalities: we must "accept chaos as a temporary stage". Quite often, we are uncertain about what is coming into being, but if we give time to the searching process and when the anxieties and resistances are overcome, we will be rewarded with "a surprise, both in form and content". It comes across as something not only about making art. Or I would say life itself is also artmaking.

THE FRAGMENTED IDENTITY OF OBJECTS

Qianru Yang

In today's fast-paced, ever-changing world, identity's increasing fluidity prompts the question: does an object remain the same after all of its original parts have been replaced?¹ Or does this new set of components fundamentally change its existence? These questions apply not only to philosophical debates or art galleries, but also to how we understand everything around us, from treasured heirlooms to the digital images we encounter every day. Objects, images and experiences drift through time and memory like fragments, appearing and disappearing, always carrying a part of the past while hinting at something new. But in an age where everything can be recreated, copied or altered, can the original really be identified?

With the rise of digital media, a similar dilemma emerges regarding reproduced images, the line between original and copy is becoming so blurred that it can be hard to tell what is "real". We now live in a world of pixels, edits and filters. When objects are digitally replicated, they undergo subtle (and sometimes drastic) transformations. Pixels move, dissolve and reassemble in the digital world, challenging the notion of *identity*. Can an image retain its original *essence* through multiple iterations?

Take the ancient Theseus Paradox, a thought experiment questioning whether an object is the same object after all of its original components

have been replaced. In today's digital world, we can ask the same question of heavily edited photographs. After countless adjustments, filters and touch-ups, is the image still the same as the original? Or has it evolved into something new?

This idea of lost identity through transformation is not new. In *Adhocism: The Case for Improvisation*, Charles Jencks and Nathan Silver argue that all creation is initially an ad hoc combination of past subsystems, because it relies on the modification and reorganisation of something that already exists.² Take the Ise Shrine in Japan, which is completely rebuilt every 20 years using fresh materials. Is it still the same shrine, or is its essence diluted with each reconstruction?³ Does an object's identity lie in its physical materiality, or something deeper, like its cultural significance or history?

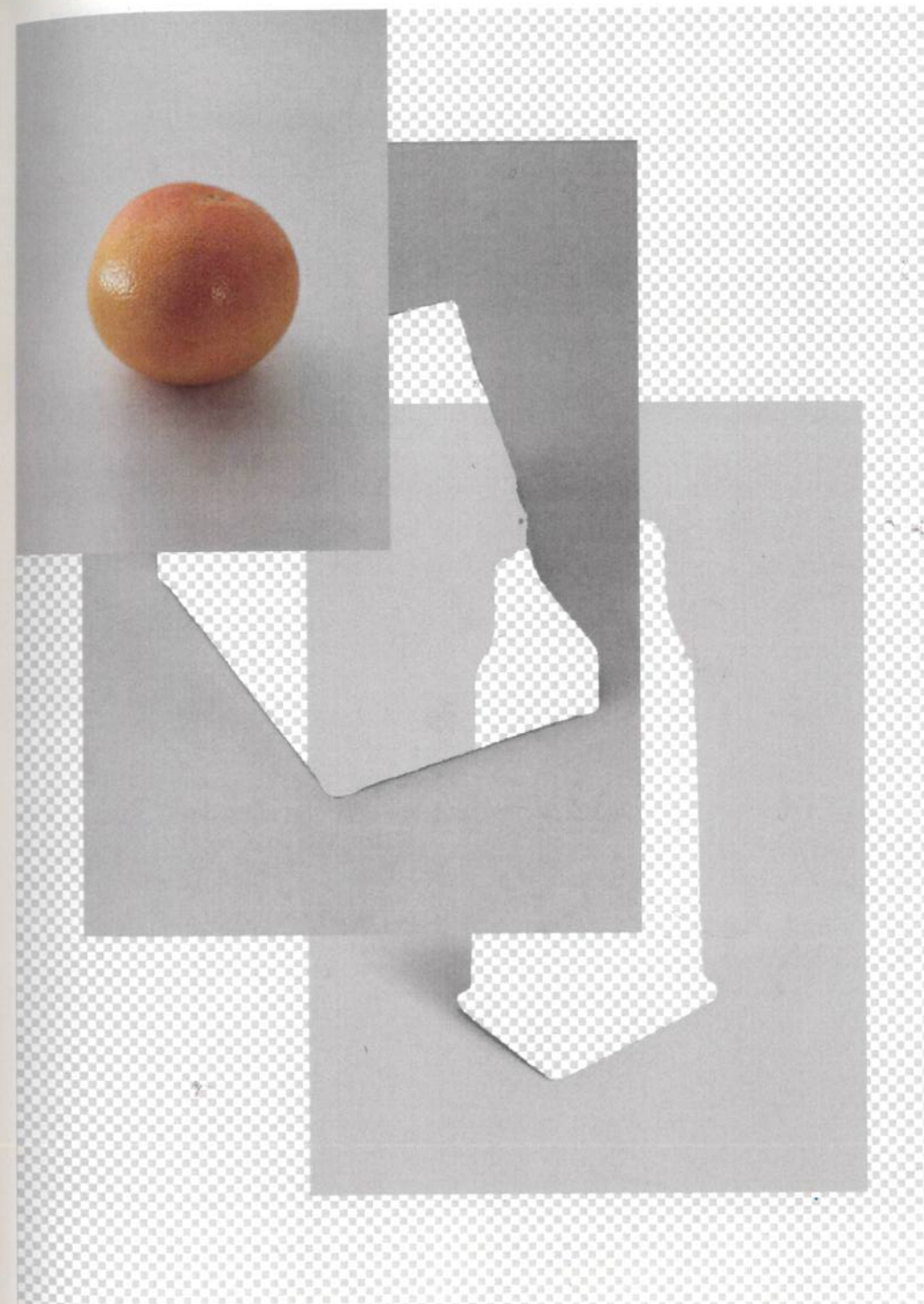
The changing identity of an object doesn't just exist in the physical world, either. In the creative world, repetition and reconstruction have their own unique role. Matthew Stuart, for example, points out that while repetition may blur the lines of originality, it also breathes new life into old ideas. Every time something is repeated or rebuilt, it becomes more than just a copy, transforming into something new while still retaining echoes of the past.⁴

1 'Ship of Theseus', Wikipedia

2 Charles Jencks and Nathan Silver *Adhocism: The case for improvisation*, 1972

3 Sean Fleming 'Japan's holiest shrine is pulled down and rebuilt every 20 years – on purpose', *World Economic Forum*, 2019

4 Matthew Stuart 'Strings 1', *Strings Magazine*, 2023



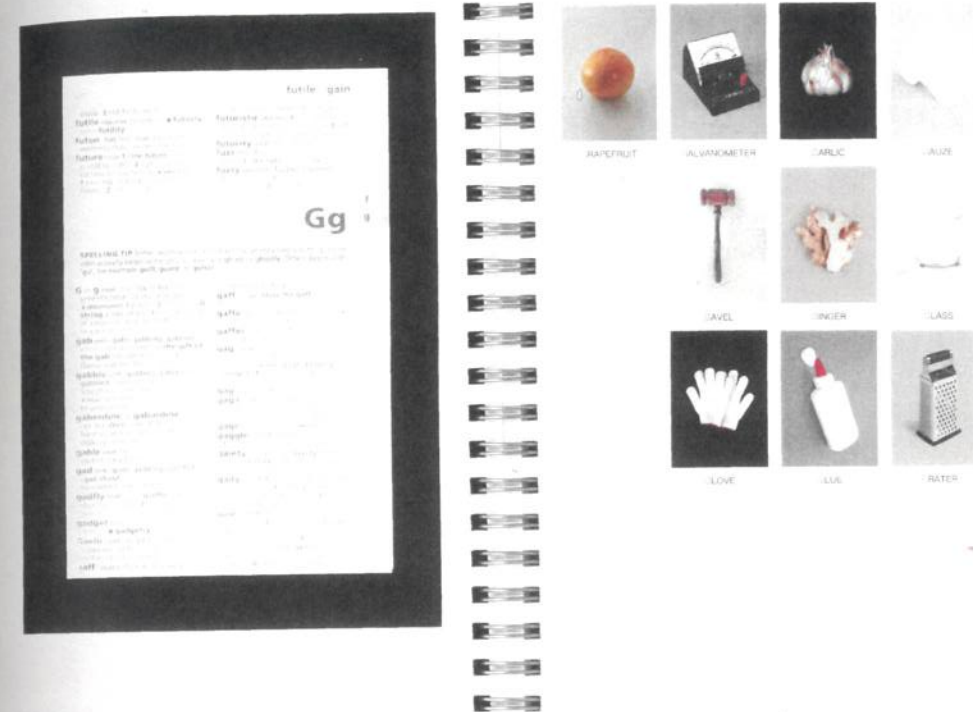
Object, Publication, 2024

In my practice, I process pixels in digital images of objects to different degrees, enlarging and shrinking, stretching and squeezing, changing positions, hoping to explore whether a series of new, "created" images of objects will affect the "identity" of objects.



Solo or Trio, Image, 2024

I take the body "copy" with clothes as the object representing my body. I do not cut the original clothes on the basis of different degrees of improvisation, eventually forming a series of images, whose final production changes people's view of the original clothes.



Object, Publication, 2024

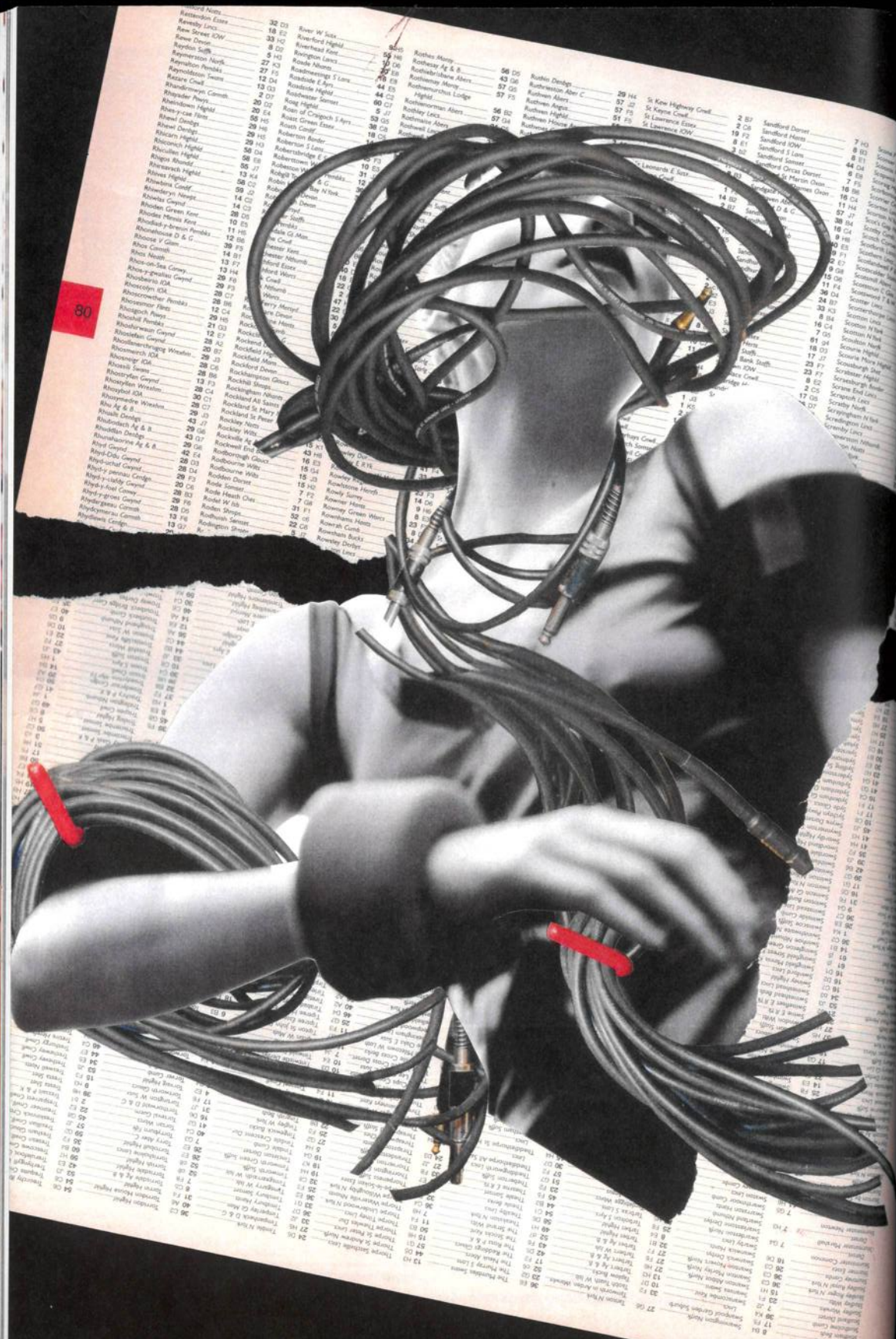
Of all the transformations we encounter, the digital world experiences the most radical. Made up of tiny pixels, images can be infinitely altered, manipulated and reprinted. Each iteration subtly changes the identity of the object, making me wonder: how many changes can an image undergo before it is no longer recognisable as the original? This question goes to the heart of our understanding of digital art and media.

Ulises Carrión once said that to make a book is to realise an ideal sequence of time and space.⁵ The same point applies to digital images. They are not just a static collection of pixels, they unfold over time, changing with every interaction, whether it's a swipe, a zoom or a touch-up. As we interact with them, we are not just observing the original image; we're also reshaping it, bit by bit.

Every act of manipulation, whether physical or digital, is a delicate balance between faithfulness to the original and openness to the possibility of transformation, seeking the sweet spot where the familiar and the new coexist.

So where does this leave us? Can an object still be considered the same after all its parts have been replaced? Can an image retain its original features after countless edits? Perhaps that's the beauty of a fluid identity. Ultimately, the original is not necessarily lost, it simply becomes part of a larger, ongoing story. Perhaps this story of change, adaptation, and reinvention is what makes the object truly *real*.

⁵ Ulises Carrión 'The New Art of Making Books', *What a Book Is*, 1985



I DREAMED IT BACKWARDS

Maia DeCamillo

And I dreamed it backwards
I dreamed it backwards

I thought it was a vision
But it turned into a ghost

It was something so familiar
It was something too remote

And time disappeared
And space lost its face

Though the system was quite fragile 44
No revolution did take place

And I dreamed it backwards
I dreamed it backwards

I was deep into the future
I was haunted by the past

We could fix it with erasure
But consensus will not last

And we cling to something
And we hold it dear

Stuck in yesterday's tomorrow
Waiting for it to appear

IMAGE ALL WIRED UP BY MAIA DECAMILLO

SEEN AND UNSEEN

Jango Cai in conversation with Mono Li

Jango Cai is a design director, theorist, member of the creative writing collective Bad Influence and an external lecturer at Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts. Cai uses critical and speculative methods to practice research-led design through writing, translating and experimental publishing.

Mono

Could you share your understanding of *lost and found* from a design perspective?

Jango

As a visual designer who enjoys researching factories, I would approach *lost and found* from the angle of design and user needs.

I find the topic intriguing because it explores the relationship between people and objects. From the moment a product is created, its destiny involves being sold, owned, used, discarded and eventually becoming waste. During its brief period of utility, the product has a user and creates value. When abandoned, it enters a box, waiting for the user to return. The product in the box still retains the functionality it was designed for and all its usable value, yet it teeters on the edge of becoming waste due to the absence of its user. When objects are abandoned, their visibility fades - they become "invisible", and to some extent, what is unseen is "nonexistent". Hence, I believe *lost and found* fundamentally represents a relationship between *unseen and seen*.

Beyond practical utility, the very existence of designed objects is meant to be gazed upon. This aspect instills in users the belief that "visibility" is a result of design. Take, for instance, the product presentation pages for the iPhone 16 or the new MacBook on Apple's official website. These designs use 3D animations to visualize internal structures and the latest technologies. This type of post-continuity visual design allows us to see effects that were previously invisible. Making the unseen visible wields a profoundly persuasive power.

However, not all visual design carries the same strength. Some designs intentionally appear "weak", such as the design of ingredient labels on food packaging or the layout of legal terms and documents for electronic products. In these cases, font sizes are deliberately reduced, and line spacing is not optimized for easy reading. Here, design feels feeble when

representing responsibility. Alternatively, this "weakness" in design strength might be intentionally concealed to serve sales objectives. Perhaps people in materially abundant societies have grown indifferent to this. But when we consider the visual design's capacity for visibility as a form of capital investment, this double standard becomes more apparent - excessive investment where profit is involved and minimal effort where responsibility is concerned.

Such use of visual design is widespread, making it difficult for the public to dissociate visual design from sales. However, this doesn't mean that the investment in visual design cannot be leveraged for fields like culture, public welfare or sustainable development.

I think this shift, from the chaotic aesthetics of internal electronic structures to the smooth aesthetics of exteriors, is a result of design.

Mono

Do you think invisible elements are intentionally hidden through design in different aspects?

Jango

I believe that "unfriendly" aspects are also often designed to be invisible. In product design, the internal structures of products are frequently concealed beneath smooth surfaces, and some designs even prevent users from opening the products. While smooth surfaces are user-friendly and align with human habits, they also block users from seeing internal components. This allows manufacturers to retain control over the product's features, upgrades, lifespan and parts' wear and tear.

For example, in phones from the early 2000s, users could open the back cover, replace components, extend the device's lifespan or upgrade the memory by swapping out the hard drive. However, with modern phones, when parts fail or storage runs out, users often have to go to an official repair center, where they are persuaded to replace the device altogether.

I think this shift, from the chaotic aesthetics of internal electronic structures to the smooth aesthetics of exteriors, is a result of design. Such design serves the imagined friendliness of the product while also facilitating planned obsolescence.

Mono

Does invisible design imply a form of control? Is design inherently political?

Jango

The answers from graphic designers may differ from those in other design fields. In the process of learning graphic design, we constantly practice how to represent – a process through which we accumulate a visual language. Before becoming a designer, we learn how to use symbols, codes, materials, graphics and colors to represent both abstract and concrete concepts.

Beyond building a visual vocabulary, we also learn how to use specific representational methods to convey the feelings we want viewers to experience or to control the information they can perceive. This selective representation is inherently political.

Mono

You mentioned that design is influenced by demand. Do you think demand and design are in a symbiotic relationship?

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Jango

It depends on how we define "demand". Whose demand are we talking about? Is it the demand of the masses or that of a privileged minority? Is it a genuine need or a desire-driven demand?

For instance, most people who have lived in mainland China have probably used e-commerce platforms like Taobao or Pinduoduo, which are filled with a variety of creative products. These products, with their various added values, are not necessarily born from actual needs. Meanwhile, you can easily find similar items with basic functions in a hardware store or a general goods shop.

Similarly, in the fashion industry, an ordinary coat and a luxury brand coat both satisfy the same material need. However, the latter clearly carries more symbolic value. So, is the creation of symbolic value part of the design process? Or let me ask it another way: can design fulfill the demand for symbolic value?

Therefore, I believe that in contemporary society, design is essentially an accessory to demand. Furthermore, I think design and natural resources exist in a symbiotic relationship. Imagine this hypothetical scenario: if natural resources were to be depleted, industrial design would also cease to exist, but demand/desire would persist. Perhaps only then could we truly understand the relationship between design and demand.

Making the unseen seen is a persuasive power. The power of design can also transform perceptions. Such shifts can lead to real change. This represents a potential in visual design that can be explored further.

Mono

What attempts can designers make to address such circumstances?

Jango

First, I recommend that designers who are unsatisfied with merely creating desires and market demands read *The Politics of Design* by Ruben Pater.

Designers can try to redirect their skills toward other fields beyond sales, such as cultural communication, public welfare and sustainable development. Of course, the execution of this idea varies across different countries and cultural contexts. For instance, in China, where the government is increasingly focused on fostering local and rural culture, designers can engage with communities (participatory design) and use their insights and skills to bring about meaningful change.

Making the unseen seen is a persuasive power. The power of design can also transform perceptions. Such shifts can lead to real change. This represents a potential in visual design that can be explored further.

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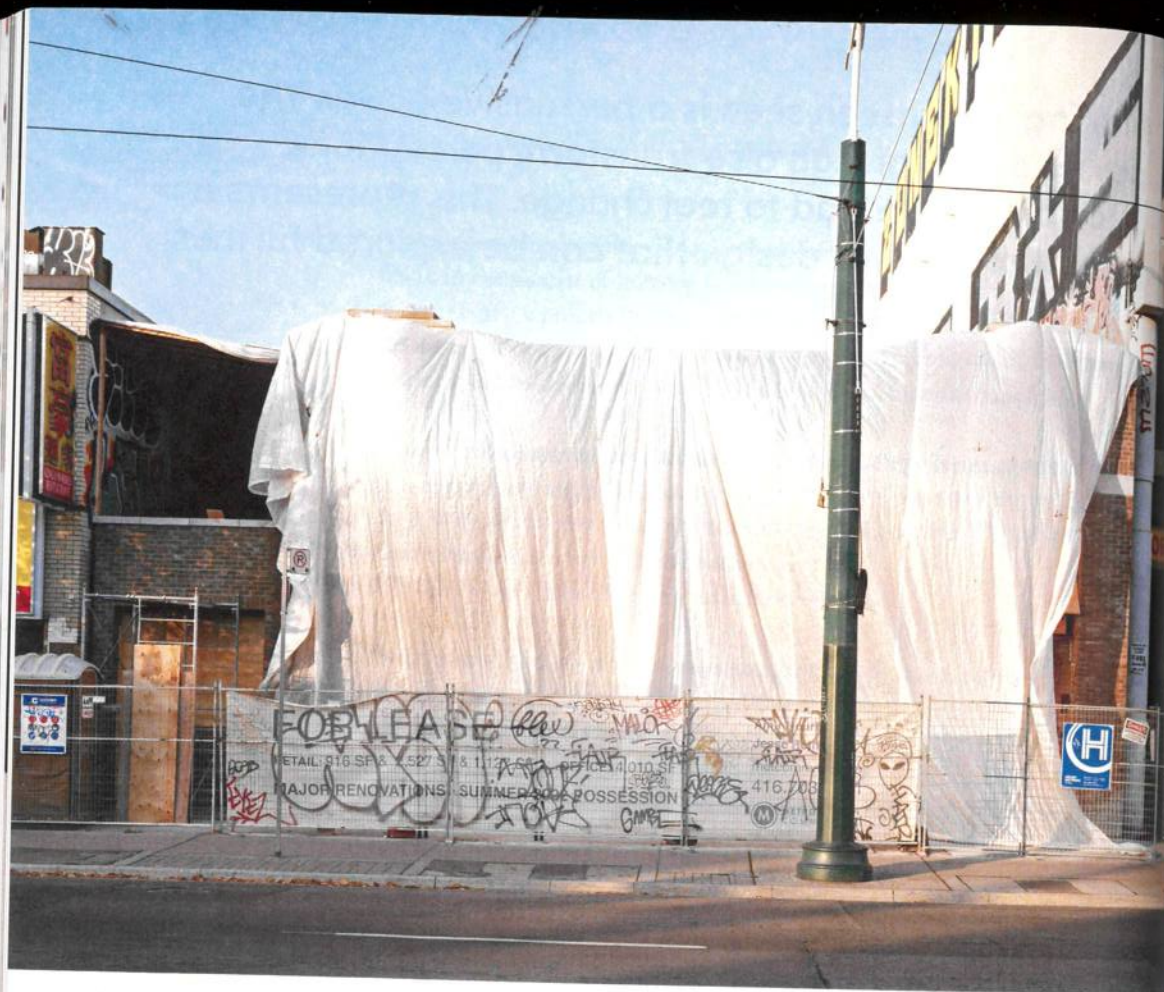
Mono

Do you think design loses its potential value when it is treated solely as a way to solve problems?

Jango

Yes. Design should not be limited to problem-solving because many problems cannot be resolved through design alone. A set of key visual designs, for example, is not the solution to everything. When we label design as a tool for solving problems, we overlook its potential to pose questions and shift perspectives.

It's similar to exploring the possibilities of design combined with technology or the literary quality of speculative design. Often, using design as a method to pose questions is the first step in solving problems. However, in my experience, this approach is frequently dismissed as an artistic act. I don't define myself as an artist, though, because I want my practice to integrate form and function, to serve others – even if it means taking only baby steps in the process.



298-300 Spadina Ave, Toronto West Chinatown, 2022

SEEING CHINATOWN

Morris Lum in conversation with Runxin Zheng

Morris Lum is a Trinidadian-born artist whose work explores the hybrid nature of the Chinese-Canadian community through photography, form and documentary practices. He was my professor for a photography course that I attended during my undergraduate studies at the University of Toronto. He once led my class on a field trip to Kensington Market, a unique, diverse neighbourhood in Toronto adjacent to Chinatown. I had just arrived from China and was living in Canada. I had been to Chinatown before, but I had never wandered around or simply experienced it. Years later, I still revisit the memory of this trip, where, for the first time, I saw the neighbourhood, the shops and the people in a different light.

Runxin

Could you share a bit about yourself and what personal connections or experiences drew you to document Chinatowns and Chinese communities across North America?

Morris

I moved to Canada in the late 1980s from Trinidad and Tobago, an island country in the Caribbean close to South America. My father was born and raised in Trinidad with Chinese heritage from my grandparents. My mother is from Macau and moved to Trinidad when she married my father. As a result, my identity since childhood has always felt mixed up. I'm Chinese and Trinidadian, but also raised in Canada. So there are different components that make up who I am.

I grew up in a suburb west of Toronto called Mississauga and on the weekends my parents and I would go to Toronto's downtown Chinatown. Going to Chinatown felt very familiar. Going to dim sum in the morning and afterwards going grocery shopping as a family was a ritual. Although I wasn't born or raised in Macau, that memory always felt like home.

When I began my art practice, I was interested in exploring my identity as ethnically Chinese but born in Trinidad and Tobago and raised in Canada. I wanted to spend time thinking about finding a sense of belonging. In many ways, Chinatown fulfilled this function. Through photography, I was able to unpack and uncover why this was the case.

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Historically, my interest was in documentary photography, influenced by the likes of Stephen Shore and Ed Ruscha. Both focus on presenting space as a way of reflecting on human experience and its interaction within the wider world. For me, this artistic influence provided a different way of engaging with Chinatowns, one which questioned how we manoeuvre through space by adopting a lens that spanned a range of experiences.

Runxin

Constant shifts are happening in Chinatowns, with buildings being demolished and people moving away, contributing to a sense of loss. Have you found a similar sense of loss or even resilience in these communities when documenting Chinatowns? If so, how do you capture these fleeting moments of culture and history in your work?

Morris

I'm trying to capture multiple timeframes of Chinatowns as the project progresses. I want to document and highlight individual spaces and community organisations that drive Chinatowns and hold a voice and a sense of power within them. At the same time, I'm also cognisant of the fact that there are other components that Chinatowns are moving away from. For example, when a family business closes, despite existing for years, due to valid reasons like retirement, I have come to appreciate these shifts. I find it important to record them before they completely disappear.

I recently realised that I have been documenting the same subjects in transition, seeing this unfold almost in real time gives me pause.

Runxin

You're one of the few photographers documenting this community. How do you see your images shaping our collective memory and cultivating new perspectives of this space?

Morris

What I appreciate and try to replicate within my work is creating an experience where if you're unfamiliar, or from a different Chinatown, there is an engaging entry point.

One reason I don't include people in my images is to allow viewers to bring their own experiences. Without people, the space becomes more open, and individuals, whether they have a deep or limited knowledge of Chinatown, can find something personal. The absence of people invites a conversation within the work itself. For example, a grandparent and their grandchild might view the same image differently, sparking a conversation about differing perspectives.

Runxin

51 Your photos reveal a vivid, exuberant side of Chinatowns, especially through the vibrant colours of your photos, which make Chinatowns almost unfamiliar and surreal. Is that intentional?

New Fashion Hairstylist,
Toronto West Chinatown,
2021



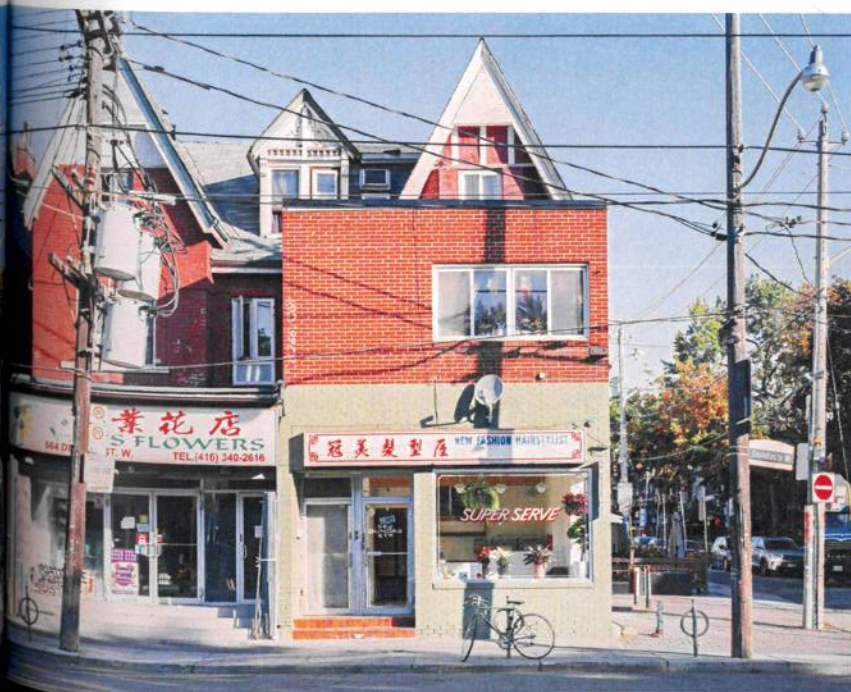
Morris

How I photograph Chinatowns is very different from how I interact with Chinatowns. There is a specific time of the day during which I photograph. Typically this is early morning when the neighbourhood is just waking up, and the streets are empty. During these moments, I can have a one-on-one, intimate interaction with Chinatowns and focus without distractions.

As for the colours of my photos, there are several types of choices, including aesthetic choices, choices of films and how that film interacts in terms of representation. Colour is really important to me when photographing because it highlights cultural elements of Chinese identity in North America. Colours like red and gold are crucial in Chinatowns, signalling identity through traditions like New Year's with red pockets, dragon dances and lion dances. These colours reflect the vibrancy of the community. These "stereotypical" Chinese elements have become part of the fabric that has validated the importance of the community and distinguished the neighbourhood from the rest of the city, marking their heritage across major North American cities.

Though shaped by the Western gaze, Chinatowns also represent a way to negotiate identity. How do we understand and represent ourselves even though we don't live in our homeland?

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Super Serve,
Toronto West Chinatown,
2023

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Runxin

Let's talk about the architectural elements of Chinatowns. How do you view their role in shaping and defining the "Chinese" identity in North America? Could the architecture in Chinatowns provide an alternative to Eurocentric Aesthetics?

Morris

In places like Toronto, San Francisco and New York, Chinatown has a very different architectural essence, which is quite dense. Often, you would see a large population within a small circumference of the city. Chinatown offers a mixture of residential buildings, retail and cultural gathering spaces, all together within a small, dense perimeter. Naturally, many interactions take place here, and that's how people exist within Chinatown. If we consider the cities today, that's more of a unique phenomenon. There are worlds within this neighbourhood where the model of the city starts to dissipate.

Runxin

I first experienced Chinatown on a field trip you led in 2012, and it was nothing like the country where I grew up. There was a disconnection and a connection between Chinatown and me. I recognised elements of China, such as Chinese characters on store signs and dragons on the façade, but the entire neighbourhood seemed strange to me as if it was something I'd seen in an old Western movie or a theme park. Do you think Chinatown was influenced by the Western gaze, and does it play a part in reinforcing certain stereotypes?

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Morris

I think it's helpful to discuss the history of Chinatowns to explain their connection to the Western gaze. Chinatowns emerged out of necessity in the late 1800s and early 1900s due to the influx of Chinese immigrants to North America. These areas were often the only places Chinese labourers could live, typically in less desirable parts of the city. To survive and make the area liveable, Chinatown residents created a unique identity, blending Western influences with efforts to preserve their traditions. This is how they reclaim their heritage and hold on to a sense of belonging while adapting to life in a foreign land. Though shaped by the Western gaze, Chinatowns also represent a way to negotiate identity. How do we understand and represent ourselves even though we don't live in our homeland? I agree that Chinatowns are not representative of modern China because people who settled there years before brought specific traditions with them during that time, which led to Chinatowns becoming time capsules of their culture, reflecting elements of their community and heritage.

Runxin

Fast-forward to 2024. Chinatowns are facing new challenges like gentrification and land appropriation, exacerbated by anti-Asian crimes committed during COVID-19. How do you think these neighbourhoods will evolve amidst attempts to undermine their identity and continuity?

Morris

Yes, some elements outside Chinatowns are starting to creep in, mainly due to monetary value. In 2024, for example, the City of Toronto is facing a housing crisis. As a result, Chinatown is seen, from the outside, as a place ripe for development.

During COVID-19, we were in a different place in terms of how society operated. We saw strong elements of survival, voices being heard and speaking out against anti-Asian racism, which spotlighted both the national community and places like Chinatown and Little Saigon. This rejuvenation is hopeful, especially when considering other challenges Chinatown has faced, like gentrification, which existed before the pandemic.

There's a balancing act needed between meeting the demand for housing while preserving the cultural identity and historical value of Chinatowns, which are crucial to the history of the Chinese community in Canada and North America, as well as the cities they exist in. There's also a shift: many people who grew up in Chinatown have moved to the suburbs, and Chinatowns are no longer the first place of settlements for new immigrants from China or Asia.

This raises the question of what we want from Chinatown today, which is a complex issue I don't necessarily have an answer to.

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298-300 Spadina Ave, Toronto West Chinatown, 2021



SONIC ENTANGLEMENT

Louis Duvoisin

The memory of sound

Architecture and sound exist in a mutual influence, entangled with one another like two sides of the same coin. Both sides can be viewed without the other, but they are part of something bigger. From Mayan pyramids to Roman amphitheatres, humans have been enchanted by the ways physical space shapes music. Our connection to sound transcends cultural boundaries, language barriers and even modernity. Despite this, our relationship with sound culture currently hangs by a perilous thread.

London, the birthplace of many beloved genres and artists has seen the rapid decline of public music venues in the last decade. More than half have disappeared, and each week, a further three close. The observer witnesses a growing tidal wave of gentrification and an intensifying monetisation of the urban realm, swallowing less profitable arts-based spaces and replacing them with homogeneous blocks the neighbourhood does not recognise. As the physical infrastructure shrinks and the demand for live music grows, tension between music and the surrounding urban fabric amplifies. We risk losing places that capture and enable free expression, imagination and inclusivity. The implications are harsh.

Audio-visual syntax

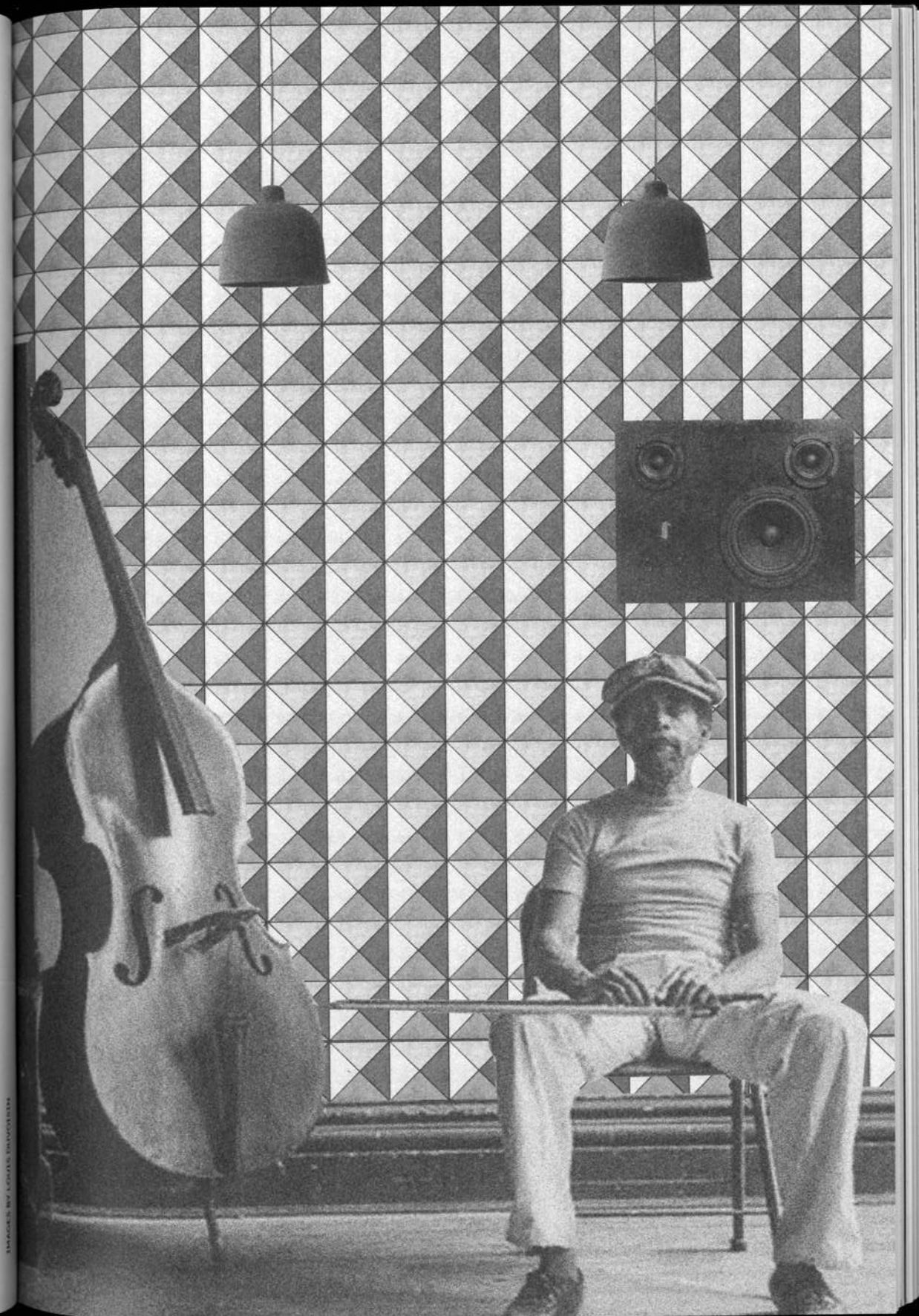
Over the past two years I have delved into methods of architectural resistance and sound preservation in a project named *A Good Vibration*. As an architect-in-training, as well as

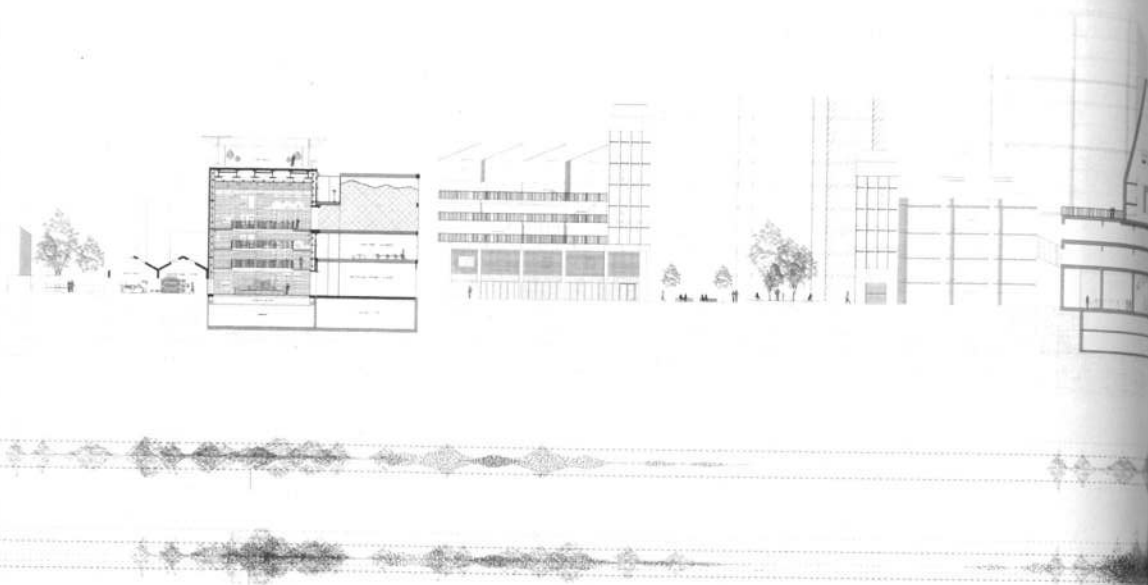
a DJ, music producer and co-founder of a music collective, I am fascinated by the syntax between sound and architecture, allowing multi-disciplinary design to emerge from the process. The project explores how architecture can protect and enhance music through a series of stages interwoven into Hackney's existing building stock.

A Good Vibration envisions a cluster of purpose-built acoustic spaces, from intimate recording studios and rehearsal rooms to recital halls, which are integrated logistically and financially within a residential context. My research confronts the idea that music venues are a nuisance, that they should be rear-facing, hidden (and preferably underground). The dialogue between existing structures and new sound sanctuaries challenges the status quo, cultivating a framework for London's future exploration of music and our collective memory.

Music is not static

Music rises and falls, flowing between verses and interludes, moments of intensity, moments of quiet. Architecture is largely similar. Rhythm, texture and harmony are fundamental to both disciplines. Louis Kahn, architect and pioneer of modernism, believed "to hear a sound is to see a space". In other words, space is dependent upon sound until sound reverberates through it: an empty body with no soul.





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Mutual influence

I started imagining space as a vehicle for sound. A room that would be one thing at 3pm and something entirely different at 3am. The changes in the vibrations propagating through it would redefine its purpose, its intent. Consequently, the way in which it is perceived would change, creating conditions that enable people to express themselves freely and interact together in different ways. It is all too easy to forget that fluid, experiential places enhance our environment, static ones do not.

Sides of the same coin

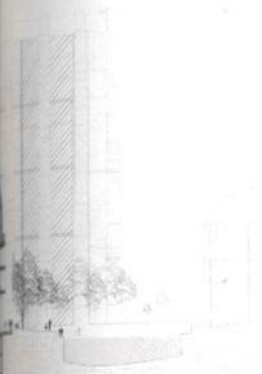
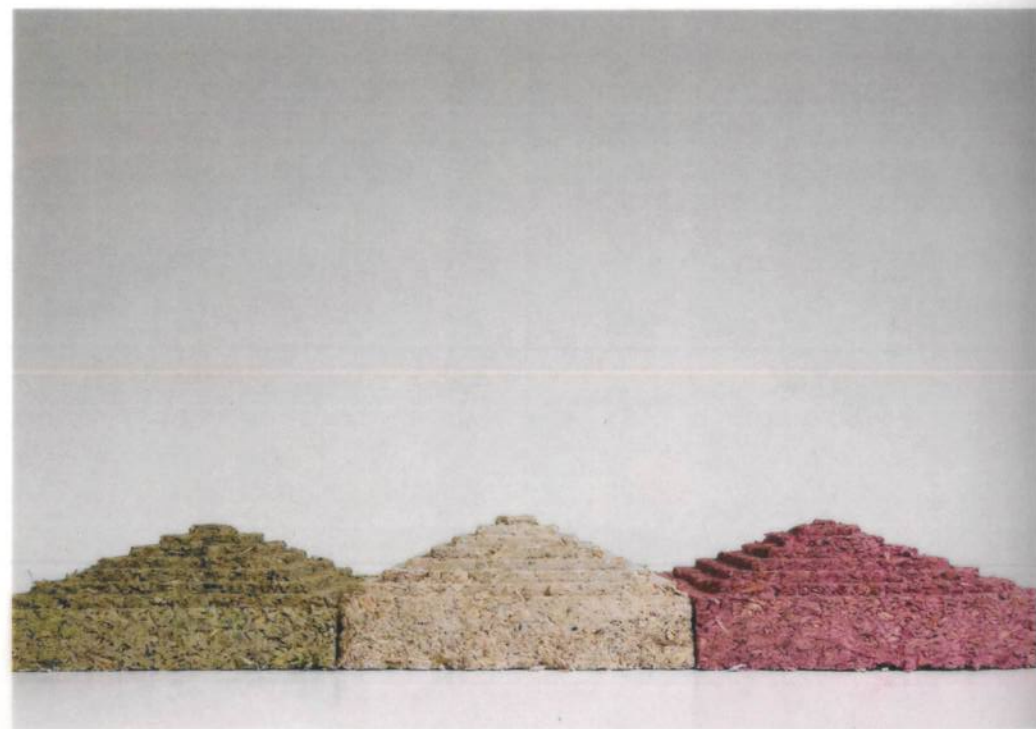
From its conception, I knew that capturing "sound" as a design tool for *A Good Vibration* was a challenge. It was not just about capturing the sound of the building, but also the sound of the people who would inhabit it. I began experimenting with less conventional design methodologies, in an effort to resist architecture's inherent

lean towards ocular-centrism (the sensory bias towards the visual). With the aim of conveying what cannot be conveyed through drawing, I collected field recordings from my project site and fused them with instruments and melodies, before overlaying those with curated samples. A soundtrack began to emerge. By delving into other senses, the way in which *A Good Vibration* could be articulated gained another dimension.

The physical architecture and metaphysical sound combine and distil fragments of a broader socio-cultural idea into a design expression. The hapticity of the visualisations, combined with the illustrious warmth of ambient music, touch more than the eye. It is a pen and paper approach that seeks to bridge the gap between the physical and the sensory experience.



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Mutual influence

I started imagining space as a vehicle for sound. A room that would be one thing at 3pm and something entirely different at 3am. The changes in the vibrations propagating through it would redefine its purpose, its intent. Consequently, the way in which it is perceived would change, creating conditions that enable people to express themselves freely and interact together in different ways. It is all too easy to forget that fluid, experiential places enhance our environment, static ones do not.

Sides of the same coin

From its conception, I knew that capturing "sound" as a medium within *A Good Vibration* would be essential. Fatigued by drawing two-dimensional and uninspiring sound-waves into plans and sections, I began experimenting with less conventional design methodologies, in an effort to resist architecture's inherent

lean towards ocular-centrism (the sensory bias towards the visual). With the aim of conveying what cannot be conveyed through drawing, I collected field recordings from my project site and fused them with instruments and melodies, before overlaying those with curated samples. A soundtrack began to emerge. By delving into other senses, the way in which *A Good Vibration* could be articulated gained another dimension.

The physical architecture and metaphysical sound combine and distil fragments of a broader socio-cultural idea into a design expression. The hapticity of the visualisations, combined with the illustrious warmth of ambient music, touch more than the eyes can glean from a pen and paper approach. They blur the boundary between the intangibility of future productions of space, and the tangibility of the human sensory experience.



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COLLECTIVE RESONANCE

Radio Alhara in conversation with Isabella Millett

Radio Alhara is a Palestinian radio station broadcasting from Bethlehem. The radio is a platform for cultural intervention, embodying the power of sound as a form of resistance and a means for building collectivity. Creating global dialogues through music, spoken word and experimental broadcasts, Radio Alhara asserts the necessity of liberated spaces. Saeed Abu-Jaber, Elias Anastas and Ibrahim Owais discuss the Sonic Liberation Front, a protest initiative that took place against the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians, which resonated across the world. They also reflect on the community that makes up Radio Alhara.

Isabella

Radio Alhara exists within a landscape marked by borders, restrictions and ruptures. How does the intangible and transgressive potential of sound speak to a form of liberation?

Elias

Palestine is probably one of the most isolated places in the world and having the capacity to use this medium in an alternative way, to channel new ideas,

IMAGE BY SOTIA LAMBROS

anchored it in reality. The sonic content, spanning from music, podcasts and talk shows allowed people to really reflect on what's happening in Palestine, and to target audiences who are not usually familiar with the different realities here. But also, I think what has enhanced the radio is the fact that it's 100% pirate. There's no real structure or filter. Everything can be said in the most transparent way.

It opened possibilities to other locations in the world that are living under other forms of struggle. Mirroring, reflecting them and creating forms of analogies with Palestinians. These analogies started to formalise, creating solidarities. For us, this is the most important form of resistance that we can start. I mean, we're not starting. It's been there for the last 30 years, but maybe the medium of sound and music could be a part of it.

Ibrahim

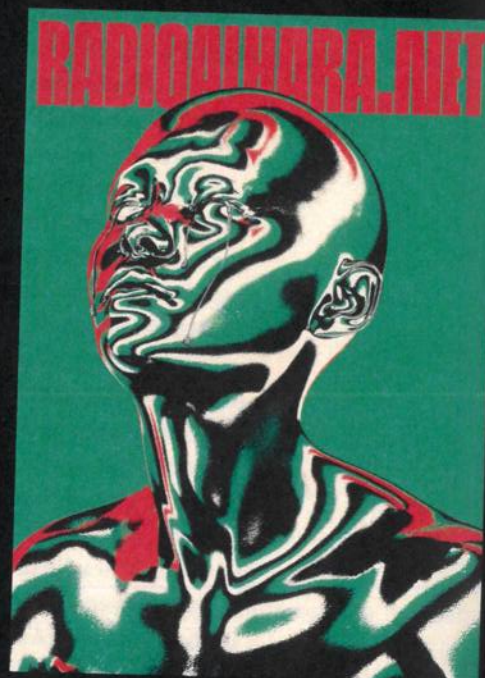
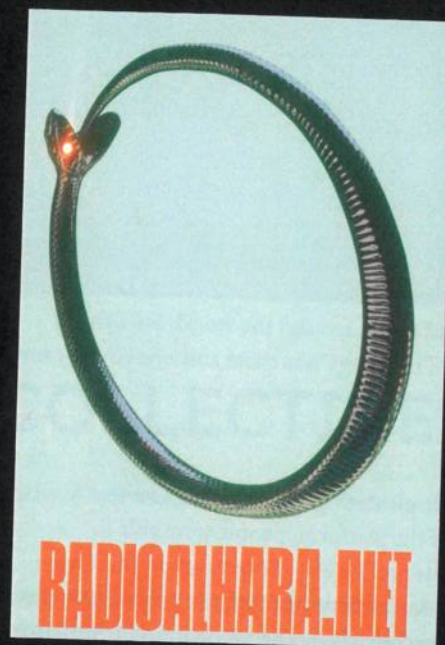
It is the position of the radio globally and the community of Radio Alhara that has made it powerful. Whenever we have an awareness campaign about what's happening here in Palestine, it becomes big. For example, the Sonic Liberation Front, which began as an idea between a few radios. We took the lead on this initiative, and the moment we started inviting artists, everyone wanted to be part of it. We continued for two months with takeovers from different labels and radios around the world. So, I think how we used sound was natural. The energy was there and everything came together at the right time.

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Saeed

In terms of restrictions, lots of people can't go to Palestine, like the Lebanese for example. Because of the platform, people were able to collaborate. We never thought this project was going to go on this long. Sometimes, when things happen in Palestine, it trends on social media for a couple of days and that's all. Once the radio started growing a little bit, we just decided to use it to keep momentum. Of course, you can ask, what the fuck does a mixtape do? I think it was just a way for people to show support using that medium. It is not a political radio per se, but many people find it political. When you live in this area of the world, it's not up to you whether to be political or not. It's in the water and the air you breathe. You're born fully aware of the remnants of colonisation.

The beauty of the Sonic Liberation Front was that it translated globally, for example, to platforms in South Africa and Colombia. There were speeches in South Africa discussing the Palestinian cause as well as the problems in their own country. I think the radio has filtered through people and pushed narratives. Another thing we are interested in is resisting the image of Palestine in the West. Many things are happening here. People with aspirations doing theatre, sound or something else. We wanted to highlight that, rather than an image of Palestine that has become so tagged.



Isabella

When so much in art institutions is restricted by funding and monetisation, projects like Radio Alhara, which focus on the orchestration of artists without constriction, feel particularly radical. Do you feel there is an increase in consciousness around these ideas?

Elias

Since 1994, the West Bank has been driven by this temporality where everything is built on this very temporary basis. The entire modular culture is built on something that is waiting for something bigger to come. During this totally endless transitional period, still happening today, we became a dependent society. Everything we do, the way we think, is already dictated by a form of control that is coming from funding. Often funding is brought into Palestine as a way to defend the idea of building a Palestinian institution. For example, for public spaces and infrastructure etc. But then there's always a second agenda that is hidden behind the main purpose of this funding, which is another way to maintain a very present control over how things are produced and in what framework.

Isabella

You have likened your radio to a public space which is collectively owned. At this particular moment when the threat of enclosure feels incredibly urgent in Palestine and globally, have you seen the radio facilitating collectivity?

Saeed

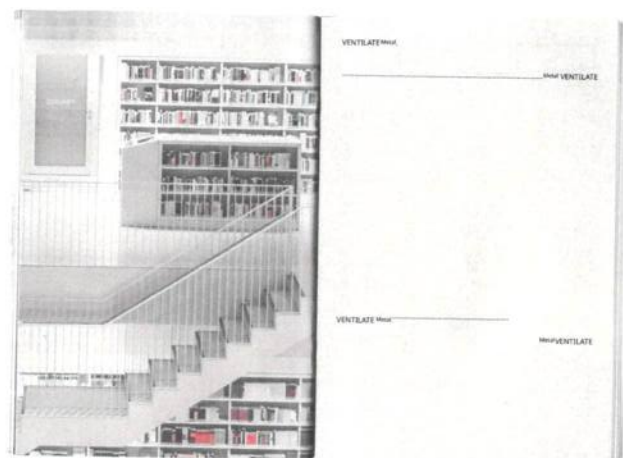
That collectivity became a community on its own. People became friends in real life because of the radio and they started working together. When you get a monthly show, it's up to you. You can invite people, you can have talks. It's free-form. We don't dictate anything. The openness creates a nice programme. You have the classic stuff and cooking shows, but you also have the ambient and weird, experimental shows. For me, this is the community that is Radio Alhara.

Elias

It started through the connectivity of all of us being involved in the cultural world, but in different places, in different ways and areas of interest. Merging our experiences, we thought about how the art institution can be challenged and how the radio can respond to a new formulation of cultural production. One which would not lose the sense of producing art. This gradually took the form of different collectives, whether the scale of 7 of us now or the 340-something artists that are part of the region. For us, the radio has all these different scales of collectivity. There's the core team that's doing the day-to-day things, trying to put a vision behind this project. However, in the end, this vision grew to become one that involves all these people from across the world.

HOW DO WE SEE TEXT?

Mono Li



65 Is it possible not only to employ text as a medium but also to articulate visual narratives embedded within an image? Both images and words harbour a duality of ambiguity and precision in conveying information. The interpretation of an image can vary vastly among individuals, implying that its message inherently possesses an elusive quality. Yet, this very ambiguity adds a poetic layer to both text and image. By leveraging words, I delve deeper into the layers of information present within an image, unveiling nuances and subtleties that often elude description, yet are palpably felt. This exploration aims to capture the intricate details and hidden narratives that lie beneath the surface, offering a richer understanding of the visual content.

From Marshall McLuhan's seminal work, *The Medium is the Message: An Inventory of Effects*, we understand that there have been significant shifts in the mediums of language from sound to text. This has laid the groundwork for subsequent civilisations, as we have never detached

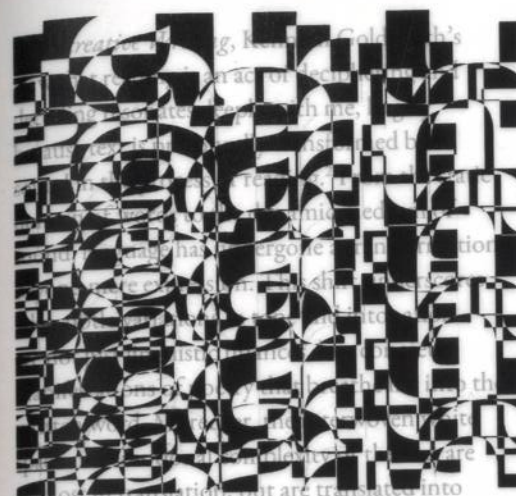
1 Marshall McLuhan *The Medium is the Message: An Inventory of Effects*, 1967

from these two mediums.¹ Today, we consider the internet as the primary communication medium, it is still built upon a foundation of text. Our computer world is constructed on a vast system of code where what we perceive as graphics, sound and actions are merely a thin layer of skin, concealing miles of language. While the focus of mediums is shifting, the establishment of new mediums still relies on the foundation of old ones. "Old media" is our root.

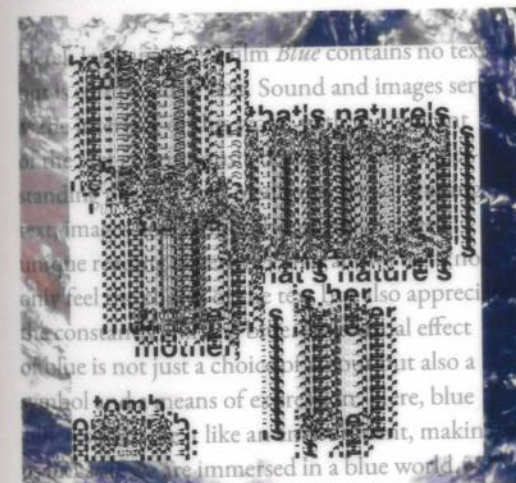
Sound and text are inseparably linked; the tone, volume and direction of sound all affect our impression of language. When we recite a piece of text, we naturally convey the emotions conveyed by the text through our voice. In Chinese classrooms, students who recite textbooks with rhythm and intonation receive praise from teachers. The emotional richness of sound is also the reason for the birth of film, opera and music. Sound fills the gaps in text, broadening the use of language from an auditory perspective.

Seeing images through the materiality of text, 2024

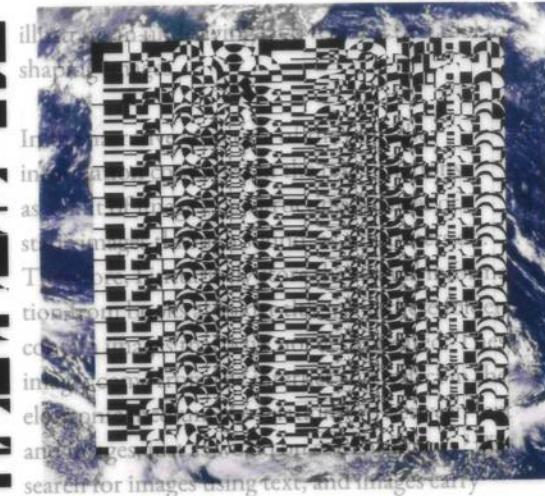
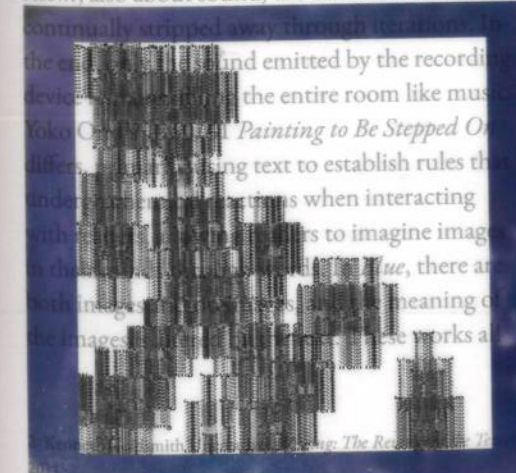
IMAGES BY MONO LI



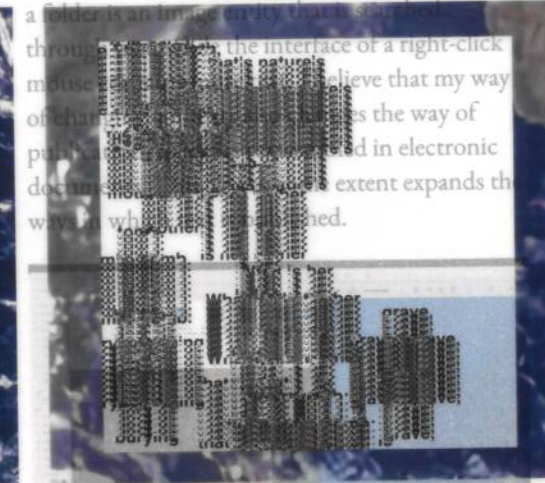
lost in translation, but are translated into auditory experiences that resonate deep within our consciousness.



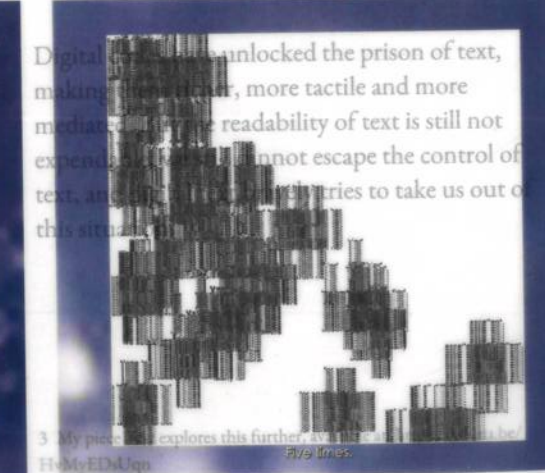
In Alvin Lucier's 1969 work *I Am Sitting in a Room*, also about sound, the attributes of text are



search for images using text, and images carry other textual information as well. Interestingly, this is also reflected in the folder system, where a folder is an image itself, that is, a container through which the interface of a right-click mouse button reveals the way of pushing the folder into electronic documents, and its extent expands the way of which it is handled.



Digital technology unlocked the prison of text, making it more tactile and more mediated. The readability of text is still not expendable. It will not escape the control of text, and it will try to take us out of this situation.



3 My piece explores this further, as it is a digital work.

RUST, CLASP AND HUMBLE HINGE

Anjuli-Irene Vadera

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Throughout history and across cultures the reality of the mineral world has always harboured an element of the mythical. Our use of jewellery is a strange form of mineral totemism, a love of matter so strong we feel compelled to adorn ourselves with it. By trying to merge with earth, we create material prostheses altering the appearance, shape and luminosity of our bodies, reflecting a yearning to be seen, visible, remembered.

Designed to endure and fit around the body's curves, jewellery sits in direct contact with the skin, standing as a permanent trace of the impermanent body. As such it forms a dazzling rebuke to corporeal decay.

Jewellery's enduring presence reveals something interesting about human awareness, a desire to be known by those who do not know us. Maybe one needs to think about ornamentation as a performative art or a medium for storytelling, allowing us to explore who we are, where we come from and what we would like to leave behind. This narrative is not linear; the wearer, the maker and the material all share in the creation of its myth and meaning.

A wearer's perspective

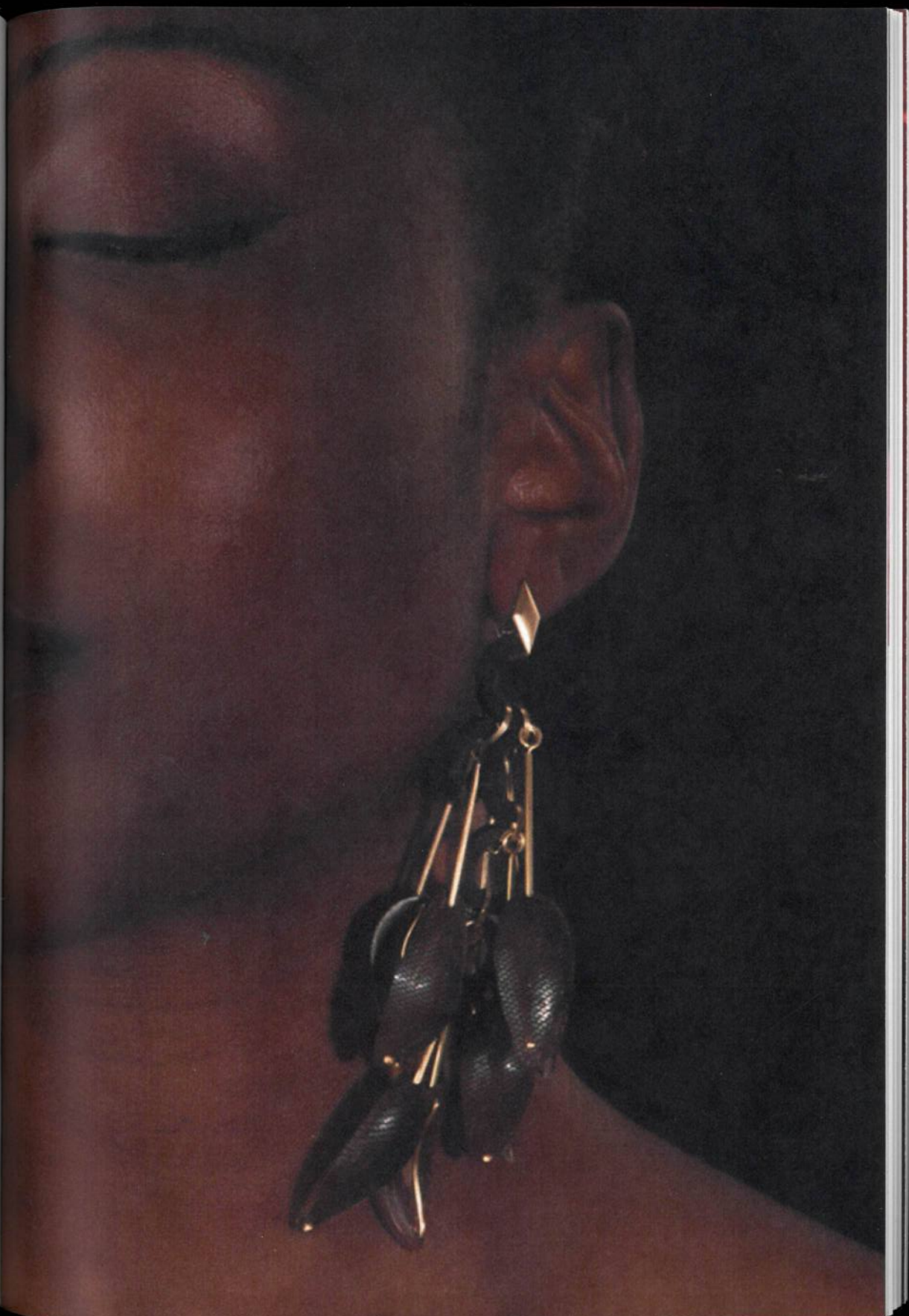
For those of us born or raised in the diaspora, the question of belonging can be complex. Our social, cultural and political lives are scattered across places, existing mostly in our imagination. For me, jewellery has been a way of reclaiming this fractured identity.

It sits in direct contact with the skin and so it becomes part of me.

However, it can also be removed, layered, altered, reinterpreted... infinitely less static than a passport. I like to think of my bangles and rings as embellished iterations of *home*.

My personal engagement with adornment as a way of expressing the fluid nature of belonging has led me to explore the works of two jewellery designers: Cecilia Leete and Makila Nsika Nkaya, who both draw creative inspiration from navigating the complexities of multiple cultures.

IMAGE BY MAKILA NSIKA NKAYA





The makers' perspective

Makila Nsika Nkaya, a jewellery maker from Congo, was inspired by the decline of traditional craftsmanship and her desire to bridge her European and African identities. She shifted from supporting local artisans to creating her own work using palm nuts, blending silversmithing and 3D printing while drawing on Congolese textile patterns and mythology.

"I've always been drawn to art and craft, especially from my homeland, Congo. My journey has been one of trying to bridge my European roots with my African heritage, creating a space where the two can coexist.

The memories I have from childhood, of sculptures, intricate designs, and skilled artisans are now ghostly echoes. When I returned to Congo as an adult, those crafts had mostly disappeared, what remained felt like hollow, shallow imitations of the past.

I began searching for a way to reconnect with that lost world. Our artisans work with wood, and as the forests shrink, so too do their materials. One day, walking along the beach, I stumbled upon a small palm nut. It was dark, smooth and beautiful, almost like a forgotten relic of the forest itself. That moment felt like a spark, a way to turn this small, unassuming object into something that could carry memory, tradition and mythology.

I taught myself silversmithing, and I began to understand how I could combine my vision with the traditional skills of Congolese artisans. But the artisans I met didn't always have the tools or knowledge to create the fine details I imagined. Their craft, like so much of our cultural heritage, had been passed down orally, through families, without formal schools or systems. There was a sense of memory fading, of skills being lost with each generation.

As I explored Congo's mythologies and cosmologies, I realised that I was not just making jewellery; I was engaging with the patterns and stories that speak of life's cycles, the forest's spirit and the fragments of a history long buried. The spiritual symbols, fractals, cycles and diamond shapes of Congo's cosmology, began to surface in my designs. I wanted to carve these patterns into the palm nuts, to give them texture and life. I sought to evoke a sense of wilderness, not just in a physical sense, but in the untamed nature of memory itself.

In many ways, my jewellery has been a way to reclaim a forgotten narrative. I was startled by how little I knew of my own culture's richness, of the great cities, kingdoms and artistry that once thrived in Congo. So much had been erased, stolen or left in ruins by colonisation and slavery. The stories of our ancestors, their resistance and their creativity are scattered like the palm nuts I work with, small, overlooked, but full of potential.

It is not just about crafting objects; it's about reconnecting. It's about how even in the smallest, most fragile forms we can find echoes of a much larger history."

Cecilia Leete was raised in East Africa, where jewellery held a spiritual and cultural significance, often worn for life, marking important events. Now based in Somerset, she continues to craft bespoke, soulful pieces with a commitment to sustainability and ethically sourced materials.

"Creating jewellery is like crafting poetry; it's full of doubt and revision. Even with years of experience, the process changes as you evolve.

I grew up between Ethiopia, Sudan and Kenya in the 1970s, engaging with various indigenous East African communities. This had a lasting impact on my creative process because for many of these communities, jewellery held a significant individual and collective importance.

I remember being in awe of the visual impact of large, heavy and permanent pieces on the body, which transformed the ornaments, rather than the clothing, into the main focus. Adorning was the statement, the story, often marking transitions and expressing cultural unity.

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Throughout my years of making jewellery I have endeavoured to give something of this weight and impact, finding my own interpretation of what this could look like. My aim is that my pieces become an extension of the wearer.

I like to imagine my jewellery being worn by the grandchildren of my customers, remembering their loved ones adorned and cherishing them for that. I love that jewellery has that potential, like the ancient jewellery from civilisations long gone, to span time and generations, holding something of their wearer's essence within them, once I have made and released them from my own.

I didn't inherit much jewellery, but I have pieces from my childhood that have lived with me for years. They're full of history and memories, though they also evoke a sense of loss for times that have passed. For example, I have a necklace my mother gave me, a simple strand of silver beads, which has grown in emotional significance as I've moved further away from East Africa.

The rugged quality of the beads still conjure memories from my trips to Omdurman, exciting my imagination about the people who might have worn them before me, the desert, and whoever made them, I don't know how long ago. They represent a myriad of nostalgic memories, a sort of *imaginary homeland*.

As a maker, I love beauty. Sometimes I wonder if I would have been a better painter. Experiences, even regrets, contribute to creativity. It's all part of the journey."

A material's perspective

As I travel across time and space, meandering between the calloused hands of artisans and the fleshy lobes of the adorned, the wrinkled knuckles of the living and the hollow sternum of the deceased, my meaning is lost and found, re-interpreted and altered, awaiting final judgement beneath the gaze of a curious beholder.

Sometimes, I am a relic of times gone by, a long-lost home, language, or landscape. A former lover, or the tender touch of a lover's living hand.

At times I am iridescent and divine.

And sometimes just rust, clasp and humble hinge.



IMAGES BY CECILIA LEETE

IN TRANSIT TO

Transit Grp. and *Unknown Quantities*

Transit Grp. is a collective of early-career artists who aim to create a peer-to-peer network and build an environment for art-making with no limitations on medium or format. Inspired by encounters within transitional urban spaces, they designed a workshop, during which the participants would be asked to produce a piece of work on their journey to an agreed location at a given time. Although the destination is set, each participant's journey will be different. This prompts them to look and notice. The push to make quickly is meant to help contributors think creatively and make do with what is available. Experimenting, taking risks and embracing failure are the foundational principles of the workshop. Once at the destination, participants are encouraged to have an open discussion, which is meant to help them contextualise their experience and the works they may have produced along the way.

Unknown Quantities took part in the workshop and met in Waterloo Station to discuss our experience. Our creative journey started with a prompt. On the next pages, you can see what the process led us to. We invite you to explore creativity in the everyday and the possibilities in transit with us.

Bon voyage.



The Prompt

Make, collect or find something when you are in transit. Bring this *something* to your meeting point.

Choose when and where to start your journey and your preferred transportation. Remember that a journey is just the transition from one point to another.

You can make a detour, get lost deliberately: let yourself be drawn in by the terrain and the encounters you find. Stop for a break if you would like to.



You can treat this as a part of an ongoing endeavour. What if the departure of this journey was a point in the past?

You can also treat this as if it starts today.

All things are welcome: a found object, a drawing, a photo, a sound, a performance, a poem, a piece of writing, a work in progress or nothing at all.

After arriving at the meeting point, share and discuss your experience and outcomes with others.

A 38-minute transit-themed playlist



A drawing by the non-dominant hand



A way of remembering



A 2.5-hour walk from home and a self-curated London postcard series

"Something Lost, Something Given"
Written while walking

At some point, I internalized a need to find morals to my failures. To salvage remnants from loss. As if a silver lining would be enough to negate the hurt. The fact that things don't be this way. It does not really work. It cannot expose I don't know. Works are coming slowly to say, I guess and yet I need these silver linings. The reminder that even when debris clatters the way forward, there is hope for tomorrow. As tomorrow there's hope for the next. And maybe that's enough. At least for today.

A poem penned while walking



A three-channel video with different perspectives on a bus ride



A journey of getting lost...

... Manifesto in Transit in Manifesto in Transit in Manifesto in Transit in Manifesto in Transit in ...

Transit is one's daily commute.

77

Transit is going from point A to point B.
Transit is going to work.
Transit is going to see a friend.
Transit is just passing by.

Transit is movement.

Transit is a walk.
Transit is a run.
Transit is a dance.
Transit is a ride.

Transit is a journey.

Transit is about the journey and not the destination.
Transit is a transition.
Transit is forgetting where one is going.
Transit is one's luggage lost in transit, be it emotional or physical.

Transit is something lost, as well as something found.

Transit is the book one accidentally leaves on a train.
Transit is the book that one finds on a bench that happens to fit perfectly in the pocket of their favorite jacket.
Transit is the people that come in and out of one's life.



Transit is looking and seeing, hearing and listening.

Transit is noticing the flowers that grow from in between the sidewalk tiles.
Transit is hearing the sound of the wind, the leaves and the song of the birds.
Transit is noticing the overlooked.
Transit is being in the middle of it all.

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Transit is being lost.

Transit is not knowing what to do.
Transit is entropy.
Transit is trying to navigate the situations that one may find themselves in.
Transit is finding the way.

Transit is the subconscious.

Transit is cautiously choosing to be in the subconscious.
Transit is daydreaming.
Transit is nightdreaming.
Transit is dreaming.

Transit is whatever comes between what most refer to as birth and death.

Transit is a testimony to the experience of being human and what comes with it.
Transit is art of any shape or form.
Transit is life.
Transit is the art of life.



... Manifesto in Transit in Manifesto in Transit in Manifesto in Transit in Manifesto in Transit in ...

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NECESSARY CORRIDORS

Andrew Murray

I occasionally find myself drifting.

Staring into the distance while wading through streams of thoughts and emotions.

A momentary respite from the day's anxieties.

I drift less frequently these days...

As I hurtled beneath the streets a few weeks ago, walls mere inches from my face and sound swallowing my thoughts, a moment of clarity emerged. *I miss driving.* I miss the space to sit alone, mind meandering freely in the solitude.

An odd epiphany for an activity I so proudly expunged from my London life. That this microcosm of the culture I fled was also a vessel for my most potent wanderings.

For years, I held a utilitarian understanding of driving, a perspective shaped by a culture elevating efficiency and productivity above all else. Driving: the unavoidable byproduct of suburban sprawl, the necessary corridor between more significant life events. It is no surprise then that I dwelt on its inconveniences. Standstill traffic, blaring horns and reckless drivers testing the collective sanity of commuters across the world. Each of us grasping for the time slipping through our fingers with every additional delay.

But I could not escape a growing sense of nostalgia for hours spent on the road. During a childhood of frequent relocations, I felt more at home on the highway than I did in my own bed. It seemed easier that way, an antidote against uprooting. With each passing year, the trunk of my car collected far more than suitcases and loose shoes. It teemed with baggage accumulated during my wanderings. Intentions for lasting friendships eroded by distance. Insecurities in rooms full of strangers. Above all, aching longings for a more permanent home. During difficult seasons, I often grabbed my keys and drifted onto back roads, fixing my gaze on ever-shifting horizons as the wind blew through my windows, temporarily carrying the weight of life's hardships far away. And beautiful things slowly crept in alongside the unsavoury stuff.

Over time, sharing a road trip became one of the most intimate invitations I could extend to someone. Here, moments of candour emerged that never surfaced in other contexts. Ever-unfurling landscapes prompting our minds to wander into states of awe, returning with previously inexpressible emotions. The prolonged cohabitation of a small space stoking fires of vulnerability. I think of my best friend and of the friendship we forged during countless journeys between home and college. Of my mother, travelling eight hours out of her way to steal a final moment of quality time with me before I moved across the Atlantic. Or my father sharing wisdom as we worked through the Mojave Desert in search of the California coast. All flecks of gold mined from the current of passing time. Not bad for a necessary corridor.

Yet I know that if I return to America, this sentiment will diminish as driving again becomes mundane. The depth of feeling will dissipate with each passing inconvenience. I will try to recall the moments of warmth in the passenger seat or cherish the bonds built behind the wheel. I will probably fail. Especially when an F-150 blinds me with its high beams for the umpteenth time.

But upon arrival, I look forward to grabbing my keys and drifting onto a back road. Because there are many miles of lost wandering to recoup, newly collected baggage to load into my trunk before venturing into the viaducts of my mind. Wind whispering gently upon my face as I accelerate, suspended between ghosts of the past and hopes for a tomorrow that is brighter than today's storms. And I will be home, even if only for a shimmering second.

DO YOU EVER ARRIVE IN A PLACE THAT IS LOST?

Liliana Della Valle

Do you ever arrive in a place that is lost? is a movement exploration through contemporary dance that investigates the notion of arrival and departure to places *lost and found*. It explores a diverging journey of known and unknown destinations, where in the act of searching for a point of arrival, the landscape changes to one unfamiliar and a shift in location is pursued. Investigated first as a choreographed dance solo and then transformed into written dance notations, the ephemeral nature of fleeting movement is preserved and documented through these scores.

*gazing, spotting,
reaching, suspending... losing.*

*rising, spiralling, losing, balancing,
calibrating*

*meandering,
not knowing,
searching.*

*focus,
reaching, grabbing... losing, dropping...
rising, gathering,*

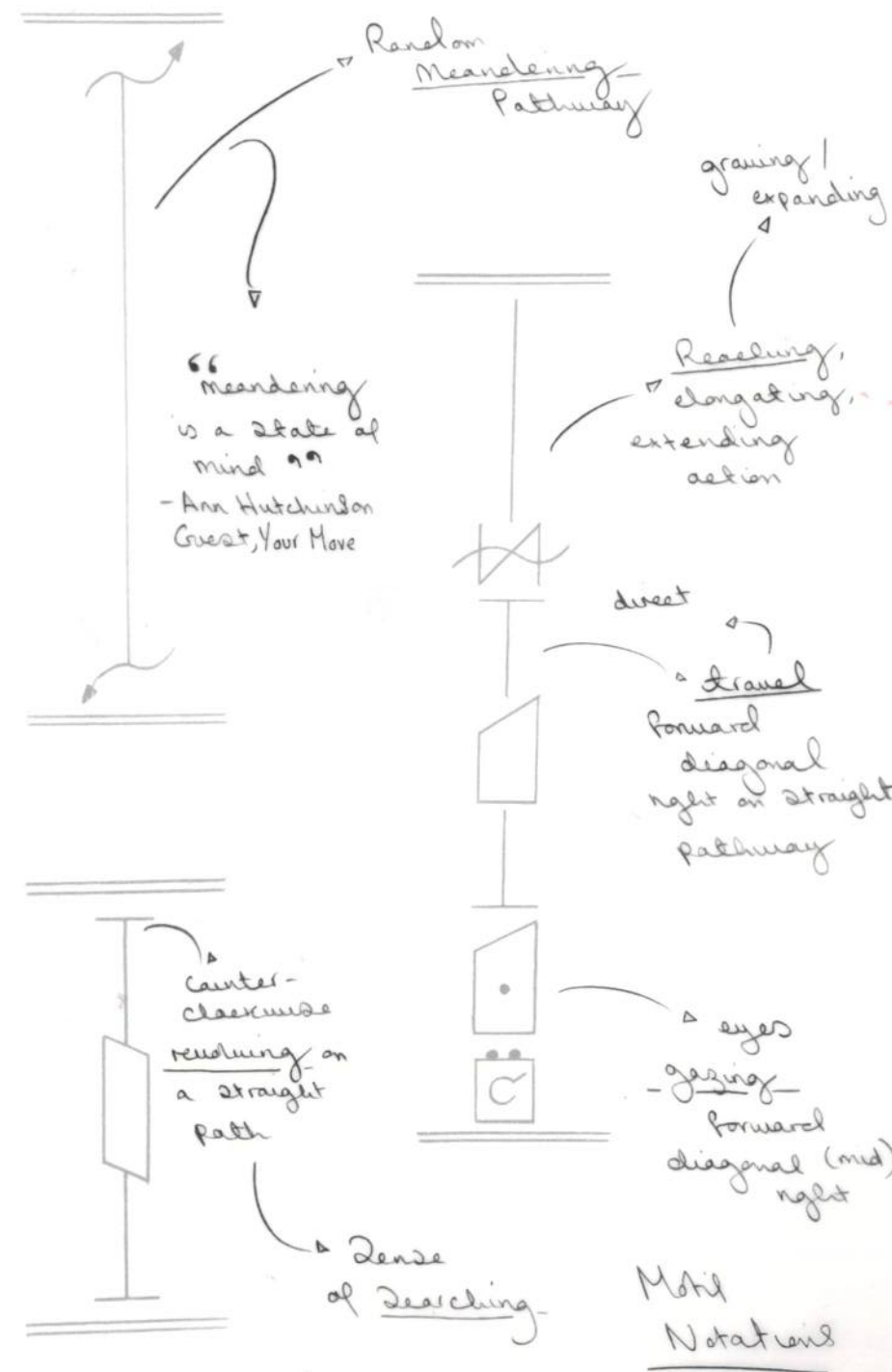
brushing.

In the solo, the dancer explores an elusive landscape and journeys along meandering pathways in search of a lost destination. In a state of curiosity and wondering, the movements of the dancer unfold as spirals, twists, extended reaches and gazes towards distant locations that appear fleetingly and suddenly. Gestural movements enclose and surround these locations, using touch to identify places of memory in the body and in the surrounding space. The dancer performs the solo three times in a cyclical pursuit to find *the place that is lost*. Each version uncovering new ways to navigate the landscape.

*clasping...
brushing...*

repeating.

Extracts from the solo are captured and drawn as motif notations, using symbols on vertical scores to depict movement directions, body parts or actions in space. Derived from the praxes of Rudolf Laban and Ann Hutchinson Guest, these notations offer a glimpse into the corporeal world of movement. In this solo, symbols represent *random meandering* in space, *sliding and surrounding touch* of the hands or *reaching and elongating* actions. Fragmented and dispersed across the page, these notations offer a map to the dancer's movement.



DO YOU EVER ARRIVE IN A PLACE THAT IS LOST?

Liliana Della Valle

Do you ever arrive in a place that is lost? is a movement exploration through contemporary dance that investigates the notion of arrival and departure to places *lost and found*. It explores a diverging journey of known and unknown destinations, where in the act of searching for a point of arrival the landscape changes to one unfamiliar and shift in location is pursued. Investigated first as a choreographed dance solo and then transformed into written dance notations, the ephemeral nature of fleeting movement is preserved and documented through these scores.

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meandering.
not knowing.
searching.
focus.
reaching, gathering, leaving, dropping...
rising, gathering.
brushing.

In the solo, the dancer explores an elusive landscape and journeys along meandering pathways in search of a lost destination. In a state of curiosity and wondering, the movements of the dancer include spirals, twists, extended reaches and goes toward distant locations that appear fleetingly and suddenly. Gestural movements enclose and surround these locations, using touch to identify places of memory in the body and in the surrounding space. The dancer performs the solo three times in a cyclical pursuit to find the place that is lost. Each version uncovering new ways to navigate the landscape.

gazing, spotting,
reaching, suspending... losing.

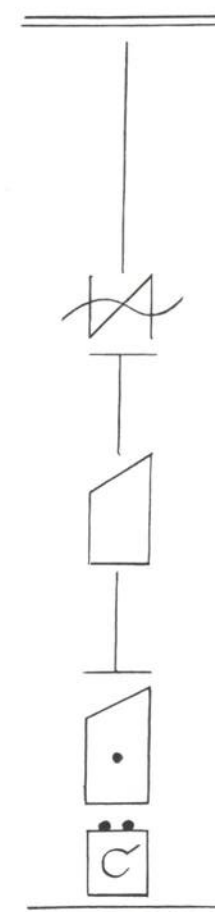
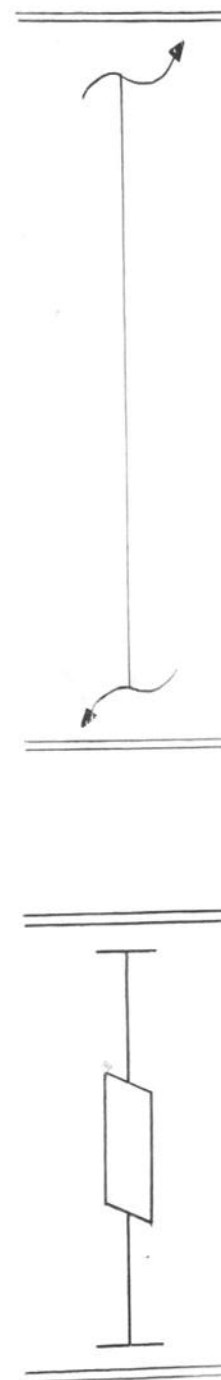
gazing, spotting,
reaching, suspending... losing.
calibrating

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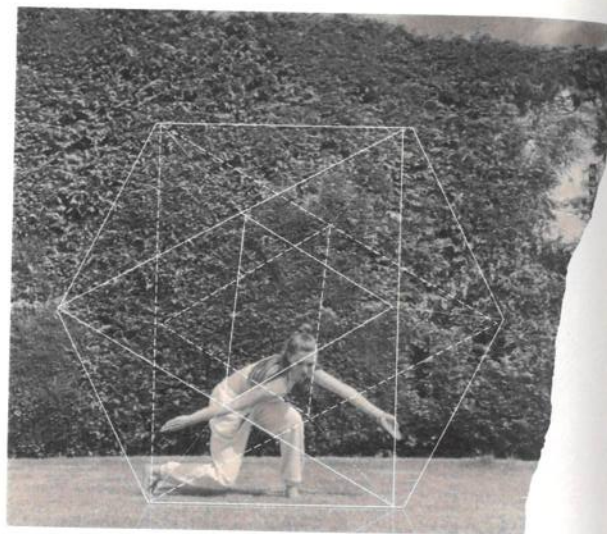
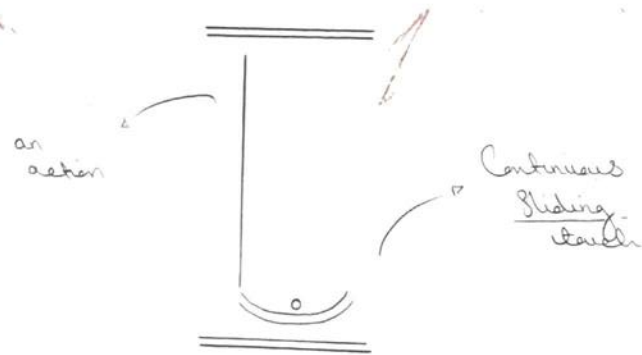
reaching, spotting,
reaching, suspending... losing.
calibrating

reaching, spotting,
reaching, suspending... losing.
calibrating

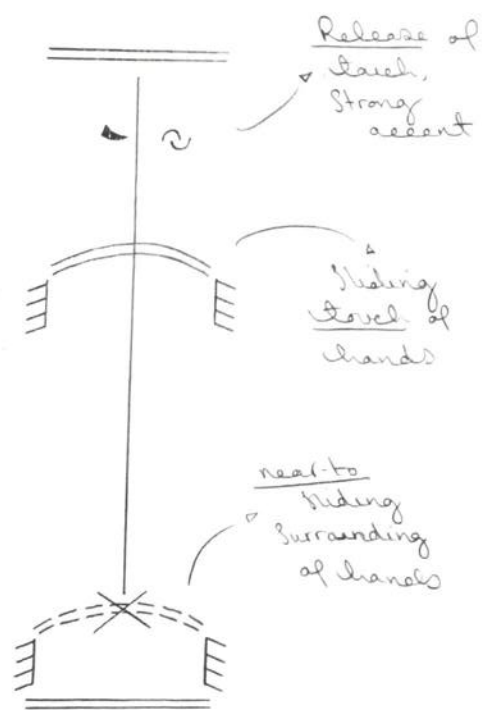
repeating



82

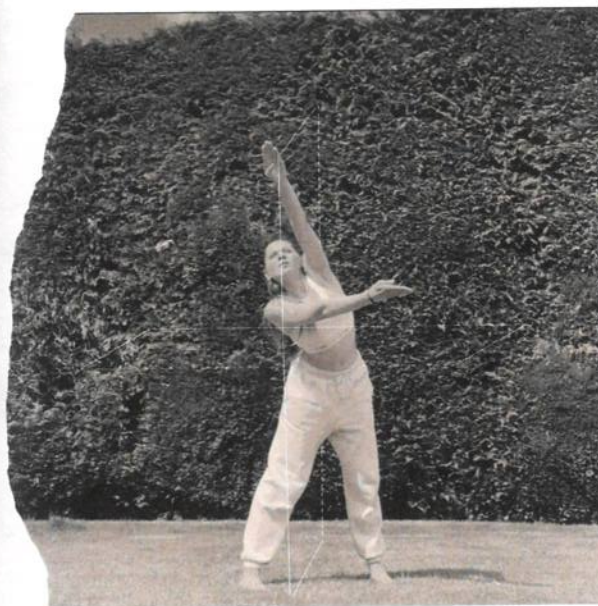


83

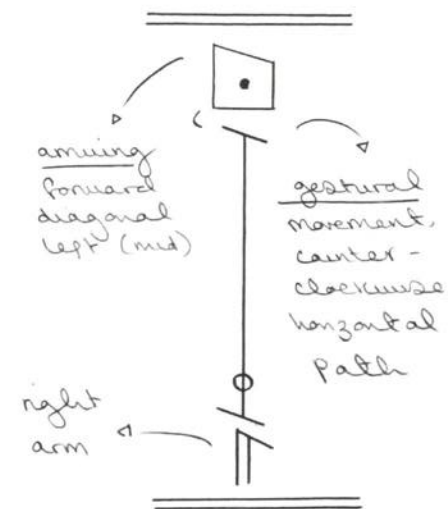


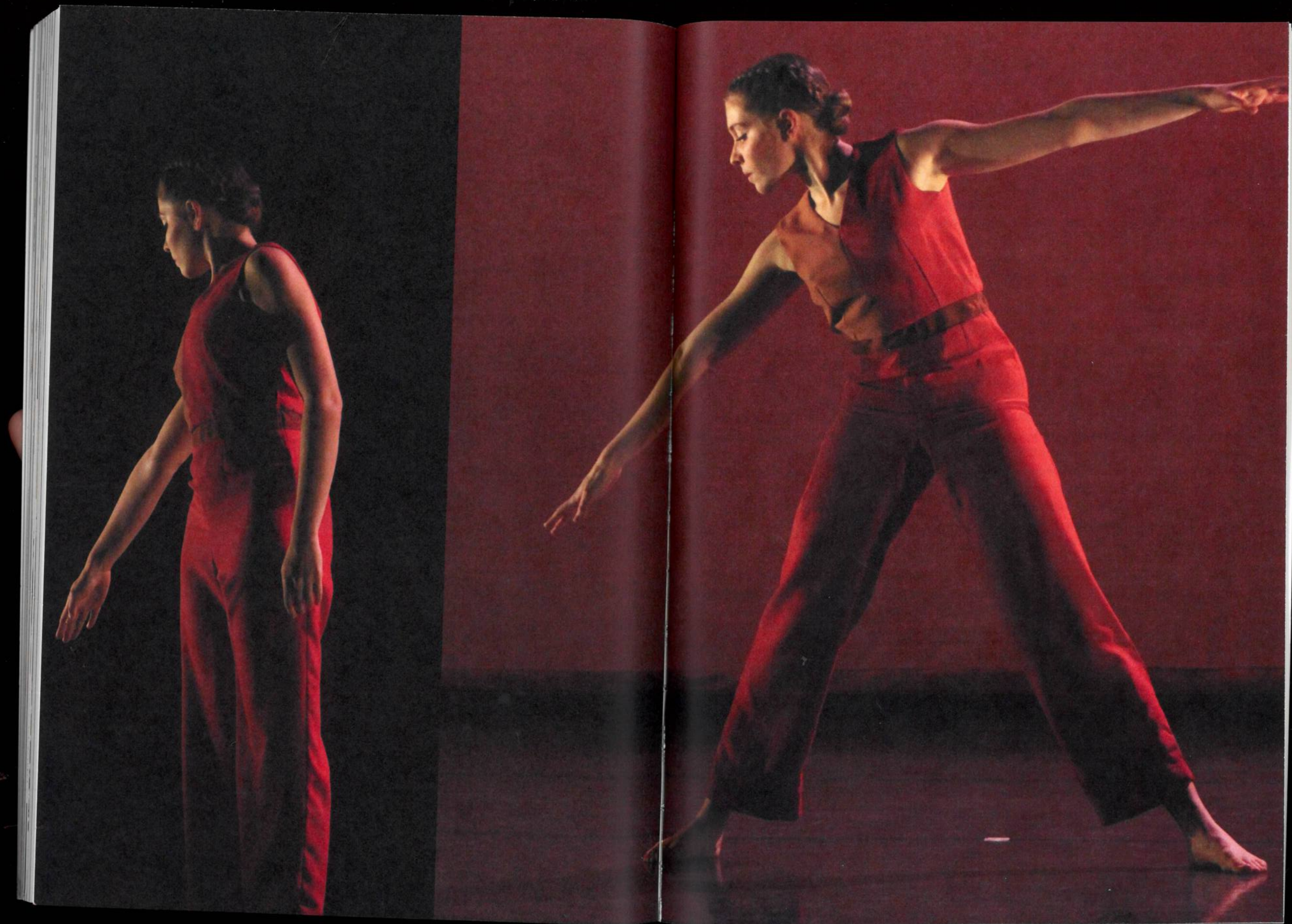
NOTATIONS BY LILIANA DELLA VALLE / IMAGES BY KIM CHILÉ

"Space is a hidden feature of movement, and movement a visible aspect of space"
- Choreutics 1947



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CONTRIBUTORS & COLLABORATORS

Jango Cai is a design director, theorist, member of the creative writing collective Bad Influence and an external lecturer at Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts. Cai uses critical and speculative methods to practice research-led design through writing, translating and experimental publishing.

Maia DeCamillo is an artist, filmmaker, actor and writer based in London. DeCamillo's *Cutting Remarks* is an ongoing project of collage work. Created with salvaged imagery and repurposed materials, the series engages with questions of character and narrative.

Louis Duvoisin is a multidisciplinary designer blending architecture and music. As a DJ, producer, and founder of an East London music collective, he creates spaces where sound and design intersect. His postgraduate research at the London School of Architecture explored how architecture can be enriched by other art forms, especially music, which he views as a powerful socio-political medium for connection, community and creative expression.

Tim Gibney is a PhD researcher at Central Saint Martins, exploring legacy, meaning and ageing in Britain's acid house and rave culture. With a background in journalism, he contributes to UAL's Subcultures Interest Group publication, *SIG News*, and has written for *Resident Advisor* and *Faith*. He self-published the electronic music fanzine *First Floor* and runs the vinyl-only label Feelharmonic. Tim has also taught media and politics at Birkbeck College, University of London.

Transit Grp. is a collective of early-career artists who aim to establish peer-to-peer networks and build environments that encourage art-making, dissolving any limitations on medium or format. Inspired by encounters within transitional urban spaces, they design workshops, during which participants are asked to produce a piece of work that reflects their journey to an agreed location at a given time.

Cecilia Leete was raised in East Africa, where jewellery held a spiritual and cultural significance, crafted to endure and worn to mark life's important events. This philosophy of timeless, functional and bold has become the foundation of her jewellery-making practice. Now based in Somerset, Cecilia creates gold, silver and platinum jewellery. Committed to sustainability, she prioritises conflict-free gemstones and recycled materials, designing soulful, bespoke pieces for clients worldwide.

Morris Lum is a Trinidadian-born photographer/artist whose work explores the hybrid nature of the Chinese-Canadian community through photography, form and documentary practices. His work also examines the ways in which Chinese history is represented in the media and archival material. Morris' work has been exhibited and screened across Canada, and the United States.

Mary Stuart Murray is an American teacher and poet living on the North Shore of Massachusetts. Her work primarily focuses on the interaction of her faith with her day-to-day life and past experiences. She is passionate about the intersection of queerness and faith, and the sacredness of those spaces in which the two can coexist, fully embodied and in harmony.

Makila Nsika Nkaya is a jewellery maker from Congo who was inspired by the decline of traditional craftsmanship and her desire to bridge her European and African identities. She shifted from supporting local artisans to creating her own work using palm nuts, blending silversmithing and 3D printing while drawing on Congolese textile patterns and mythology.

Niyi Okuboyejo is the founder and creative director of Post-Imperial, a global lifestyle brand deeply rooted in the heritage and storytelling of the African diaspora. Niyi draws inspiration from his personal experiences and cultural history. He brings a fresh perspective, celebrating the intersection of contemporary fashion aesthetics with ancestral artistry while crafting a vision that resonates globally and remains intimately personal.

Barney Pau is a London-based culinary creative exploring the intersection of food, art and writing. Barney's work focuses on food futures, queering consumption and foraging and fermenting as acts of social resistance. Viewing food as a universal language, Barney uses it as both a medium and a starting point for research to inspire new ways of thinking. In 2021, Barney founded *Finger Food Magazine*, a collaborative platform for stories, artwork and essays celebrating cooking, craft and creation.

Radio Alhara is a Palestinian online radio station broadcasting from Bethlehem. Launched at the beginning of 2020, the radio is a communal media platform that encompasses the idea of a public space and aims to blend the limits between producers and listeners.

Liliana Della Valle is a freelance dance artist and choreological practitioner. Her practice integrates Laban's movement analysis theories and notation, using choreological exploration to inform her work and teaching. As a teacher at several London dance schools, she joined the Language of Dance Centre UK, promoting Ann Hutchinson Guest's approach to dance literacy for young dancers. Liliana also contributes to independent magazines, offers workshops and shares her choreological practice.

Shengjia Zhang is an artist and filmmaker from Guangdong, China. His work examines cross-cultural exchanges through everyday objects and materials. Zhang's film *Birthday Cakes From China* was nominated for the Silver Dove Award (DOK Leipzig) and the CIRFA Award (Venice). His installation *Made in England*, exploring the Willow Pattern, won the Dean's Award and is part of the Central Saint Martins Museum collection. It has also been featured in the *Cambridge Journal of Visual Culture* and the London Design Festival.

Unknown Quantities is an experimental print publication, a collaborative effort of MA Culture, Criticism and Curation and MA Graphic Communication Design

Curation, editing and design

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Cover

Munken Pure Rough 300 gsm from GF Smith

Inside Page

Favini Tree Free Cream 120 gsm and
Spectral White 140 gsm from Fenner Paper

ual: central
saint martins

In their message to this year's journal, the previous editorial board asked us how the world has changed since *Unknown Quantities 11's* printing. We wish we could provide some better news. 2024 brought atrocities, emergencies and continued injustice. But amidst all of the darkness, shimmering glimpses of solidarity and beauty pierced through the clouds. We hope that *Unknown Quantities 12* offers opportunities for both rejoicing and for mourning that reveal state beyond its pages. Our position within this cultural moment demands as such.

Unknown Quantities 13, we trust that you will assume this responsibility, building upon the legacy of those who came before, in an attempt to present the world in the fullness of its reality.

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