

EDITORIAL ISSUE 3 2020

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A: So, Hayley, we've decided on a particularly gentle strategy for putting together the editorial for Issue 3 of *c i n d e r*, which has fallen across the COVID-19 pandemic moment, in Naarm (Melbourne) where we both live. I'm sitting outside at the back of my house, and the light is a kind of translucent grey, which makes the purple flowers on one of the garden plants really pop. We've decided to compose together, somehow, and to converse while we read back over the articles that our authors have intrepidly put together despite the strange times. I'm starting with Daniel Jukes' work, 'A straight track through a dark valley'. An apt-enough title, one could say, for an issue at this time. Daniel's piece is our featured fiction work for this issue. It's specifically about writing, as well as our loving people, whom we may lose, and the situations we can contrive in order to be with them, and to hold onto them. These efforts, of course, are never a 'straight track'. The work manages to say some of the complications that our urge for this and its very contrivance generate. I love the fact that there is a train in this story (since we can't travel so much right now), a cherished older woman, as well as the image of her hands around a cup of tea. The writer here is an ambiguous figure. Present, but also not, with his notebook. Writing about an intensive encounter that he is aware he might be sabotaging via the very attempt to archive it. Slightly monstrous like writers can be, but staring that in the face, too. Or am I being too dark?

H: I miss travelling somewhere with someone, rather than sitting still (awkwardly speaking *over* each other on a video platform), or walking in circles around the man-made lake near my house. Sharing that kind of time felt intimate, and I miss the 'doing-with' that happened during long distance travel. The writing, the listening to music, the reading, the sleeping.

Is it dangerous to speak about the writer as monstrous? I wonder if it doesn't slip in a kind of permission. *I am a writer and therefore I can be...* but there's always something monstrous about a writer acknowledging what they do, even if it is part of the craft. Writers who don't observe life and use it probably aren't very good. But conversations around the ethics of writing in general are difficult to have. I recently had someone ask me never to write about them. I had to say I was sorry, but I couldn't promise that.

I am interested in this idea, touched on by Jukes, of 'consciously creating ruins'. In *The Rustle of Language*, Roland Barthes writes that we walk around with the ruins of novels inside us. We cannot keep them intact. We remember scenes, characters, sentences. I suppose over time these impressions change too, and this is why it is so enjoyable to read and re-read books and rediscover those future ruins. There is also a sense of loss in Daniel Jukes' work, but it is not dramatic; it is the loss that comes with writing. We could talk about Derrida here, and all those nuances. Lorinda Tang touches on this when she writes on trauma as the 'unspeakable', while also questioning that label. Returning again and again to what feels like it can't be said, and trying to lend words to that space is part of the labour, but it isn't retrieval. Perhaps I'm sensitive to these ideas because we are all experiencing a loss right now, and one that is hard to comprehend, and that will feel fragmented and chaotic eventually, upon reflection.

A: Yes, and these times are complex. Very Derridean. We are losing (and there is going to be trauma, no doubt, for too many people who aren't safe at home, and this angers me) but simultaneously, with this loss and unthinkably, invention is going on—of new selves and priorities—and the rediscovering of things: our quietness, our fed-up-ness with shopping and online worlds, our appreciation for the other's fleshy proximity. Stuff we didn't know to miss.

To be honest, though, I've been almost avoiding remembering travel (well, at least consciously, one can't do anything about the dreams...) If I turn my mind to those movements, as you say, the body racing in a train through a country—known or new—and possibly looking up to see someone's eyes, sitting opposite or beside them, between pages of reading. This aches, somehow. So, I return to the question of monstrosity. I think you hit on something very interesting (that I find comes up in all sorts of places): the balance between naming and permission. After I pressed 'send' on my reply to you, I wondered why I'd brought in the 'monstrous' word and whether it was easy and glib. I can be scathing about trends in arts language that seem to validate 'brutality' or 'violence'—you know the type of art writing I mean. As a friend says, one only uses those words for self-promotion if one has never *actually* experienced those things. Monstrosity, similarly, can be

smear to include things I don't want it to include. The 'monstrous' (as I'd prefer to slant it) can also be that moment in ourselves when we have attended sufficiently to (our) loss, and thus catch it before it becomes resentful, and so then take responsibility, opening up to what we want to, and can, offer now. This *affirming*, this turning to futurity, is what we'd associate with a certain Nietzscheanism. I tend to couple it, in myself, however, with such a fierce emphasis on ethics, such that a certain friend challenges me that I'm missing its more dangerous 'permissions' (exactly as you said!) because I'm not approaching it typically. (Reactionary stances can insist on overwriting loss, of course! The loss inflicted on others...) However, there is a way we can either mostly relate to loss or also relate to other things in a pandemic, right? Can there be an art—a seemingly, kind, sensitive, while also dynamic art—of attending to both, and in a timely way?

We are, in fact, talking about this question right here, in this conversation, as editors. The issue is an interesting case in point. There were several articles that we 'lost' for it (because pandemic isn't always the most supportive time to compose and revise and proof an article), but at the same time, perhaps because of this moment, I'm really relishing the work that has been included. Rereading Michael's piece about Peripheral Publishing, there is a sense of grounded optimism that is energising. The piece names the way that in adapting we can create. This also has to do with 'want' (joyous inclination), I'd say, rather than, say, 'cunning' (instrumental scheming). Learning about Mitchell's novella *Slade House*, and its mode of publication, for a second explodes certain conventions that can seem unquestionable—about how we make, what we can say. It makes me also feel gratitude to our anonymous reviewers (thank you all!) and our fellow editors at *c i n d e r*, Sue Joseph and Helena Kadmos, who generously worked closely with several authors to help them *say* what they wanted more clearly, in an academic context, which many can worry wants to exclude them. Dodd's piece takes up this very question astutely, warmly, and with allowance for its on-going complications. This question of 'insides', and the various personas we bring to our practice as thinkers-makers-feelers...

This lake of yours sounds as if it is at least becoming familiar... is that an intimacy with place?

H: I have become quite intimate with the lake, mostly because my geriatric chihuahua walks so slowly, I have time to observe. We are travelling together and for her it is still quite a distance. I have to say I'm grateful for all the time I'm accompanying her now. She's accompanied me through my entire university life.

I was also struck by Rose Michael's example *Slade House*. The desire to write and publish using alternative models might come from people using them more than ever, and from reading works and imagining their own existing outside the conventional novel form. I've been reading Byung Chul Han's *Saving Beauty*. He writes that the 'smooth' is synonymous with modern ideas of beauty. It made me think of zoom filters, FaceTune, and Instagram, and all these apps that make porous, cloggy, knobbly, grainy things (and people), smooth. Maybe the art we make now could be a little more lumpy. As I write this, I'm struck by how much more fun these words are to think and say. *Grainy. Knobbly. Cloggy*. We need something to counteract all these smooth images coming at us. A kind of texture revolt. Poems about curdled milk and gravelly driveways and acne perhaps. Yesterday I gave my one-legged rooster a bath. He has a callus on his knee. It is about the size of a five-cent piece and he uses it to hobble around. He is making do and adapting, and it's not beautiful but I like it. I like tending to him and his wound.

I also like that we are speaking about a 'fierce ethics' of writing. I think I used a similar term recently when a friend was commenting on the NYF podcast. All the writers were saying how terrible they were. It didn't feel genuine to me. Being fiercely ethical might produce different stories. Ones that would not be possible with other kinds of permissions. That is a condition I am willing to take into my practice. It is a condition that also creates a community, a kind of writing and maybe another way to make art right now.

A: The stances, in ourselves, that we fight for (against amazing external pressures) that enable a new, a more courageous kind of saying. Yes. Double-yes! In a pandemic clean-out (you know the ones—of the bookshelves, the kitchen sink cupboard, the wardrobe...) I managed to open a book of Clarice Lispector's that has been knocking around my world for a while. *The Stream of Life*. Cixous' foreword reminded me of all the ways we must get around language's more domineering structures, while at the same time, not abandoning language. We need to keep trying to say, and to remain nimble in the face of, that which would make us only ventriloquise the dominant paradigm. The pandemic, I feel, has allowed a lot of long overdue silence to enter some people's lives. Out of this silence, sometimes, new sparks of saying can emerge.

Adji's article was a welcome reminder of some of Jung's contributions around dreams, around the structures we carry that aren't always *only* personal. A friend of mine is having a love-affair with Jung's work during the lockdown. She is making art about dreams, is reading his massive *The Red Book*. She even found a podcast. The solitude that this moment is sometimes offering (it depends on one's situation...) can lead to these serendipitous stoushes

with titles forgotten, books hidden under other books, quotes buried in computer files. Things get unearthed. The ruins... I think also to the creative process that Adjani describes, where she tries to think the position of being an outsider, about what we push out (of ourselves, society, the things we can('t) bear to think and acknowledge). There is no pushing out the unconscious, as many of us are learning anew, during this time. We are wild beings. The writer knows that there is something very, very alive in them, and they want to keep that aspect alive. I think we can do this, *and* attend to a fierce ethics, *and* meet the other as the unknowable portal onto the infinite that they are. I think that's possible.

I'm really looking forward to meeting your differently-abled rooster. And to working on Issue 4 together. I won't say: 'Stay Safe'... it's not my style. I'll say: Stay Awake (and Rested) and Vulnerable and Full of Not-Knowing and Open to Boredom and Desire. Something cumbersome, and knobbly, like that.

H & A: Congratulations to the authors of this issue, and thanks for trusting us with your thoughts and words.

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