



*T J Watson 01.06.2019*



The enclosed works comprise digital models and their titles. The models were derived from photographs of previous works, first developed from promotional images of furniture. Pictorially related, both new and old bear lengthy titles, each encompassing roughly five thousand words.

Historically, the possible length of a digital filename – or title – has grown larger with time. Whereas early operating systems once restricted filenames to a handful of alphanumeric characters, present software permits several hundred, further licensing punctuation. This expansionary tendency has accorded with increasing desires for differentiation and multiplicity. Previously, the total combination of characters entailed a dissatisfyingly finite number of files: the fewer the characters, the fewer differently titled entries could be stored. As the character limit expanded, or was relinquished, however, the number of possible files multiplied. Consequently, each excessively lengthy filename coincided with aspirations for a larger database, sufficient to harbour ever more unique objects.

Today, despite technological advancement, most home-user operations require filenames to fall below two hundred and sixty characters; any name surpassing this limit will undergo abbreviation. In such cases, the computer makes use of a partial, incomplete title.

But what makes use of its entirety?

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Front



Back

Under his instruction, the students – the putatively unblemished promise of tomorrow – were to parse the afternoon’s task, their trim fingers raised cogitatively to prepare abstract passages, whose composition, he anticipated, would induce thought’s manumission, the imagination there unbridled and relinquished to a deluge of spontaneity as hands scribbled such that soma and psyche would converge, enveloped in silence as bodies bristled and intellect expanded, braced for the inexorable cascade of concepts that would arrive in unforeseen clusters of colour and affect, flung beyond limit and repetition and the self-similitude of degraded life, as if prose were to glance the absolute, the momentary escape of newness or the possibility of difference; or this was the intention, he supposed, and, however grandiloquently it resounded, he maintained that the class ought to have undergone some form of liberation, if only to impart their words with a modicum of concomitant intrigue, apparent in negations of rote regularity and floundering banality; yet the assignments, submitted today, stickered stolidly to the formica worktop, read as restrained and dull, engorged with only fraudulence and cliché, such that when disturbed, when marking the interminable stream of text, in a task begun some hours earlier, the mediocrity overwhelmed, each paragraph recapitulating its sovereign diktat of formal sameness, ensuring all was preformed and near-identical and as though discharged from an invisible,

internalised office that insistently stamped its uniform structure, syntax and narrative to produce superabundant tedium, excessively written yet unremarkable and undemonstrative and invariably begun with forced description of precipitation or of temperature or of light – repeatedly returning to the profound-reflection-inducing qualities of light – to prompt protagonists to realise or remember or to contemplate, as though sensation and thought simplistically harmonised, with reception begetting rumination and rumination reciprocating material, in a polite parody of rationalism, which in its obstinate imprint mocked any idea of a unique inner life, meaning that the works displayed minimal personal content, in that either they were to an extreme degree undifferentiated in themselves and therefore possessed very low content of any kind, or else the differentiation they did exhibit, which was in some cases very considerable, came not from the writing itself but from a non-personal source like chance or from an erratic analysis, such that the texts, with little exception, read as if enunciated by a lone voice, stale and steadfast, and confined to the unrelenting repetition of its sermon, which, if descriptive of history, spoke not of progress or redemption but of atrophy and tendential indignity, the reckoning with which depressed Leo, who, wearied by school and by life, sat with shirt unbuttoned and shoes removed and countenanced the glum possibility that unthinking

repetition saw the pinnacle of teenage consciousness, this thought's drab pall unfurling to all aspects of the task at hand, such that awareness of his compact with monotony grew inescapable, Leo there agonizingly conscious that tutelage had conduced little if anything novel: neither new flights of thought nor bizarre phrasings, nor odd structural gambits, only acceptably-worded, inoffensive prose, with any sense of otherness categorically banished; although his sense of responsibility there wavered, upon thought of his role in the pupils' uninventiveness, as he considered whether he should rue trammelling their latent ingenuity, with lessons and exercises that subdued creativity, or if he should accept that his role was one of a mere observer, resigned to the absence of novelty and impotent to rectify an entrenched homogeneity, which was an accurate appraisal, he thought, though said little of his teaching specifically, which he knew was capable of imparting another prose style, should it seek to, in an idiom free of the embarrassing tropes of today's work, simulating past talents with a collaged impression of literariness; but this held little appeal for Leo: the decisive matter, he thought, was not that of training imitation but was that of educating without imposing style at all, for style, whatever its miraculous, self-defining nature, was the equivalent of etiquette in society: a consistent grace that established a sense of place and was thus essential to the social order, and so to teach style was to teach

conformity and to defer the more troubling problem of how otherness and newness – whether construed as latent givens or laboured constructs – might be found, their sources continually eluding to Leo, his surveying insufficiency corroborated in the students' vapid froth, whose repetition persisted in marking, individuality there harder to discern as each assignment congealed with the next, meaning that as he strove to discern the works' independence – in their authorially irreducible cores – he merely reflected on their agglomeration, in abstract aesthetic quandaries of his own, there overcome by the sense that the roots of novelty were somehow undiscoverable, thinking that even if cognisant of the circumstances that engendered unanticipated novelty – of the conditions that begot contemplation's self-transcendence – newness might merely cease to seem new, reduced to foreknowledge of its own production, and thus, whilst contemplating the conundrum of thought's outside, he abandoned the kitchen table and ambled sinkwards in search of coffee, pensive yet confused, there opening cupboard doors to retrieve a kilner jar before he powered the kettle, attempting to clear his head as he shifted grounds from tub to cafetiere in rough-heaped spoonfuls whose caffeination was deemed necessary for labour's continuation and whose powdered slumber was soon disturbed by the tumble of water, swirling therewith to foam the fuscous brew, which he lidded and carted back to work



and poured for a first cautiously positioned cupful, Leo wary that the slightest spillage would violate a host of meticulously maintained divisions: between home and profession, between disembodied intellect and somatic need, and between the class' work and the world, which – if the students were to overcome their proclivity for hackneyed guff and produce art – remained necessary to endow the texts with requisite unity and objectivity; so Leo moved his head cupwards to imbibe, eager to retain the promise of the integral work, unadmixed with traces of home or self, taking several overly hot mouthfuls before raising pen – an emerald green biro – and proceeding to annotate, determined to complete his workload before sundown yet careful to write unobtrusively within margins, in a hue so chosen as to avoid the pitfalls of combative red or authoritative black, in a common sense decision adopted by teachers everywhere, but which, whilst marking, he came to question, supposing there was little reason to believe others received the ink as imagined, for its affective resonance surely depended on the viewer and their interpretative faculties, he thought, which if sufficiently dissimilar to have construed the pitiful assignments as interesting – in a verdict Leo strongly diverged from – were equally liable to consider the significance of colour differently too, so, conceivably, it made no difference which pen he used, yet tradition had made its decision and further introspection would only delay,

he conjectured, so he silenced his procrastinatory doubts and continued to grade and comment, as neatly as possible, self-consciously considering the severity of remarks as he refrained from sincere judgment, inserting only banal grammatical corrections and jovial encouragements, in annotated banalities and exclamations, for he knew that if honestly articulated – with neither diplomacy nor personal consideration – the objections would sound more intolerant than they were; there are qualifications, he thought, yet little space to elaborate thereupon, to defend the importance of newness, or of rupture from barbarism, or to argue modernity's virtue, so that, muting his grievances, he begrudgingly ploughed through further, alienating similarity, finishing his first mugful of coffee once three assignments had been marked, whereupon downing the drink he took sight of a double-sided bundle that threatened reprieve from boredom, in a strange and unfinished piece, whose perusal revealed a plotless carnivalesque scenario that rotated a cast of characters, turntable-like, around a central male voyeur, in a piece unbridled by psychology or narrative and in which figures engaged in what the narrator could only describe as total pandemonium: the people around him were shouting, laughing and gesticulating; and the replies were sighs of love, volleys of hiccups, poems, moos, and the meowing of medieval Brutists; one man in front of him was wiggling his behind like the

belly of an Oriental dancer, another was playing an invisible violin and bowing and scraping, a woman, with a Madonna face, was doing the splits, and a character was banging away nonstop on a great drum, with a man accompanying him on the piano, pale as a chalky ghost, hammering until the scene terminated without conclusion, the text left to drift mid-sentence, as if to claim distinctiveness through incompleteness, there registered, its hallucinatory panorama reverberant as Leo poured a second coffee and smiled, pleasantly surprised at the deviation from school standard though unsure of his assessment: structurally the writing was unique, he thought, yet it lacked the luculence required of the curriculum, with each of its two swollen paragraphs littered with flagrant misspellings and wayward punctuation, its clumsily constructed sentences left to rove overly long, indifferent to their solecistic missteps, such that it engendered a grading dilemma: whether to award marks for novelty or to reprimand for clumsiness, in a difficulty pondered whilst slurping the lukewarm brew, there rising to prepare an evening meal, an oven-cook moussaka, purchased whilst commuting, which he clutched before discarding its card sleeve and film lid, unsheathing the metal-cradled hulk to load the oven, hovering nearby as he distractedly dwelt on the story and its author, Simon, a meek and conspicuously ungroomed teenager, who for all his artlessness had conjured wild and

unpredictable images, ostensibly too extreme for his uncultivated way with grammar, in words sufficiently odd as to prompt Leo to consider fantasy and the unhabitual, and from whence they came in such a student: whether from memory or from some other subterranean force whose shadowy recesses brought forth alterity and whose nature Leo wished to probe further but did not, deciding, instead, to continue marking, there quietening his thoughts as he sensed the creeping approach of twilight, conscious that little more than half an hour's labour awaited if undertaken with concentration and parsimony, meaning Leo ignored his ruminations and resumed station, where he stowed aside Simon's passage and deferred grading until morning, delving once more into the melange of middling English assignments, briskly running his eyes over a duo of sunset and sunrise parables that portrayed protagonists gazing upon bucolic and urban half-lights as they considered childhood and aging and a host of other fluffily-posed existential questions, which he patronised with ticks on correct semi-colons and adjectival clauses, dotting the sheets green until, once adequately bejewelled with written approval, he cautiously awarded "B plus" grades and disregarded the pieces, there seeing he had only four passages left, so that, swiftly, he reached for another stapled bundle, which was unnamed and untitled, and while this was irritating for administration and for teacherly contextualisation it was relatively

inconsequential, because identification would unfold in tomorrow's class regardless, and, hence, unperturbed by anonymity, Leo inspected the handsomely penned text with relative indifference, allowing the passage to unravel as he found himself captivated, ensorcelled by the alarming course plotted therein, which, though begun inconspicuously, rapidly turned odd, departing from a petit-bourgeois familial home decorated with polished glass and steel cleanliness, white and mirrored furniture marooned throughout its parquet expanse, such that eloquently described cubes and cuboids afforded seats and podiums for two siblings, who, home alone, danced to the radio, happily and without stress, in jovial banality until the story introduced a disturbance, its two siblings witness to a thudding at the door, to which they approached and saw that the frame to be cracked, creaking under an incessant thundering that pounded until the hinges buckled and broke and the splintered mass tumbled groundwards, three tall men phlegmatically stamping thereon to intrude, striding forward without discernible interest in the flat's modernity and music, too focused to notice as they marched to the siblings and clutched and throttled them, to prevent their escape, their hands pressed into throats as wriggling bodies struck the wall, slammed sufficiently hard as to dissuade resistance; and so, docile to their captors, the two siblings were jostled to a black vehicle and driven to a benign looking cul-de-sac, where,

once ejected, they momentarily glimpsed a crisp, sunlit day, redolent of growth and imbibed, before they were trudged to a suburban dwelling, hauled within as they traversed bleach-clean hallways bedecked with biscuit-shade carpets and stencil-painted walls and were thrust, stumbling, down a staircase to a dimly lit and cavernous cellar, which lay empty besides the men and their prey, whom, once positioned in the gloom, were kicked to the floor and booted twice more until the two lay still, groaning and teary-eyed, as the men departed to leave them to sob and cling to one another, in coldness and dismay, awake to their imprisonment yet ignorantly terrified of their awaiting ordeal, which though ambiguously poised was to unfold more grimly than anticipated, as untold privations, beatings and violations were delivered, in humiliations and abuses that saw the two tossed, carcass-like, about the room, stripped nude and coerced into debased performances and dances, their bodies scarred by flames and scalpels that etched and tattooed cruelties onto once-soft flesh, crude and personal slurs imprinted thereon for the kidnappers' pleasure, in rituals that continued, repeatedly and repetitively, there delineated in an obscene and relentless detail that chronicled the pair's combined slide into diarrhoetic frailty, until, after an indefinable period of distress – lingered upon with writerly relish – one of the two died, starved and limp, such that the siblings no longer faced their torment together as shared

witnesses to suffering, comforting one other in respite from savagery, with misery assuaged by solidarity; rather, barbarism was faced in solitude, accepted alone, day upon day, beheld only by a lifeless corpse that blankly lay fetid and motionless before the healthier and older of the two, who eventually, driven desperate with hunger, felt compelled to eat its sibling, its belly ballooned and filthied, teeth piercing the elastic-like sallow peel of the younger kin, greedily gobbling what little tissue remained on the sagging body, such that, while repulsed and spluttering and weeping, the oldest was fed and slept and dreamed of another life, if only briefly, before they were woken for yet further vileness, which elapsed more slowly than typical, endured in intense and screamless brutality, unfolding mercilessly until one of the men announced a desire to conclude and grabbed the remaining victim, who, sodomised and shaking, their rectum bruised and scabrous, with bloody ichor dribbling anus-down, felt their head stiffly rotated in clutching and insuperably strong fingers as they were forced to lick the rancid residue of loose faecal matter from the kidnapper's member, tasting their own unwashed wretchedness as they vomited and retched and were struck across the face, mockingly probed for their final words, which, after pausing, they released from their gingivitis ridden mouth, their bruised and fractured jawline swollen red, wobbling unclosed as they looked to their oppressor and pawed

the inspissating spew from their lips, eyes bleary and wide, hypnotically fixed as they spoke, plaintively, in soft, almost canorous tones, “I will not avenge my humiliation; I will not resist,” they uttered, “no, I will not valiantly cling to life; I will not gain strength, righteousness or goodliness through suffering; I will neither forgive my tormentor and receive salvation, nor will I obtain enlightenment in my final moments; no, I will not benefit spiritually, epistemologically or otherwise; I will die, diseased and degraded and disposed of, subsumed in my entirety, and this is merely how it is, for I am spontaneity and you are order; and history will be no more,” and thus their soliloquy ceased and the three men silently glanced to one another and gripped the beleaguered body, striking thereupon with repeated thwacks of fists and boots, hammering persistently until ribcage and consciousness and skull gave way, shattered and concave, seeping soft scarlets onto the concrete floor to coagulate in puddles of marbled pink and umber as the sibling died and the story ended, which left Leo dumbfounded and aghast, uncertain of his response and alarmed and confused, on untold levels, but mostly eager to determine the student responsible for the text, immediately turning to discover their previously hidden identity, frantically skimming through each sheet marked and unmarked in a process of elimination, fingers flicking, until, after counting, he saw that several of the class – at least six – had failed



to submit work, such that, even once this handful were winnowed out, the problem of attribution remained, which he attempted to resolve but failed, unable to attach any of the unaccounted names to the writing, knowing their work, their syntax, their style, and that it diverged from the expressive yet hateful account of torture read moments ago, and that his class, of unfocused Emmas and ever-uncooperative Connors, were unlikely to have sat in stoic concentration and written so voluminously, irrespective of the piece's content, which in all its repugnant design and grisly particularity further foiled attribution, Leo unable to imagine student contriving such detailed and gruesome text, images from which returned to him now, unfurling in their chaotic aggregate, as wrists were clamped and nails hammered between knuckles, as urine splashed the lineaments of a weeping face, and as an emaciated body was forced to twirl – as if to music – whilst electrical cables whipped, plug pins lacerating its jaundiced chest to leave Leo physically sickened, nauseous, as he continued to search for a name to attach thereto, for a student whose psyche could have conducted such prose, thinking of his class and of the life that precipitated this work, for if art came from a kind of experimental condition in which one experiments with living, he thought, then this demanded reflection on the writing's underpinning experimental iniquity, on whether it was actively seized or was suffered in the abuse of a

friend or relative, or was passively absorbed from a hyperviolent reservoir of computer games and extreme pornography, discovered whilst browsing, where cheap production rendered simulation and suffering indiscernible, in tears and in punches and coerced participation, which, if responsible, framed the writing not as a dark indulgence but as the cathartic processing of an imaged violence: as an almost healthy response to the immanent weight of a sadism that permeated even the most innocuous details of domestic life, from catalogue-bought furniture to hearty repast alike, demanding cognitive digestion in written expositions of violent gratification, whose undertaking ought well to be construed as sanative and not deviant, however oblique its therapy might seem, which he thought should alleviate him of any duty to intervene, though the possibility that the work belonged to experience remained, he supposed, besieging him with thoughts of lived deprivation and abuse internalised through years of clandestine barbarism, delivered at the hands of a peer or parent or acquaintance, troubling him with the necessity of response: to act, to contact the author's guardian, in an imperative that left Leo further disordered, for if the author resided within an abusive household a parental phone call would only risk further harm – if the abuser caught wind of the writing's explicitness and sought punishment, or if they were prompted to launch accusations of disclosure and wreak

vengeance – and, thus, considering the potential imprudence of familial intervention but the obligation to react, Leo judged social services a better option, with their relation to the school vaguely recalled from a hurriedly scanned child protection document, long since folded and discarded, and whose precise procedural details eluded him as he considered his report on the student and his interactions with them, the contemplation of which elicited the further realisation that his classroom routine had unfolded with complete indifference to their suffering, with lessons delivered in boorish oblivion to the harshness and dolour endured, ignorant of the stigmata of trauma borne in the student's answers and mannerisms and prior assignments, which if parsed diligently and without concern for hastily finishing his work – without his haughty dismissal and reduction to a preconceived idea of literary homogeneity – might have unveiled the hellacious reality suppressed from view, such that intervention had been possible yet had been missed, which there left Leo momentarily overcome with shame and contrition, abashed at his readerly hubris and his post-work proclivity to disregard; though, upon thinking thereof, whilst mired in speculation, he came to question his discomfiture, somehow unsure as to whether the writing indexed misery at all, uncertain as to whether accumulated abuse could be read into the assignment or whether it arose from the murky pits of the imagination, from

some spring beyond or before reminiscence, for ultimately, without additional evidence, there was little reason to construe direct experience as responsible; rather, such a supposition merely testified to his own low expectations of pupils, grounded in the conjecture that novelty would arise only from the particularities of authorial biography, as if reproduced from memory without the genial interference of creativity, in a force he had longed to affirm, with Leo there loath to deny originality without justification; and so, plagued with doubt, he elected to postpone the social services protocol and instead resolved to consult members of staff in the morning: a move designed to defer responsibility and to allay anxieties, the mere prospect of which left him lighter and unburdened, happy to rise and recover his moussaka from the oven, there relieved as he imagined his colleague's ardent arrogation of the problem, as he pictured their adroit kindness, handling student and careworker and family alike in a humane and punctilious investigation, contentedly envisaged as he grasped the steaming ready-meal and a cupboard-cold plate and slid the former to the latter in a smooth arcing motion, permitting the béchamel topped stew to slump and cool whilst he idled, pleased at the prospect of food and of the assignment's resolution, momentarily serene until it occurred to him that any internal enquiry would inevitably beget inspection of his own conduct too, given he, as teacher, had been

partly responsible for the pornographic submission and so would undergo some form of disciplinary action, with his forgotten lesson plans and flippant utterances subject to scrutiny, the possible outcome of which remained uncertain as different eventualities floated in protracted and unpredictable garlands of consequence, extending from demotion to redundancy to disgrace, envisioned as he stood passenger to speculative peregrination, twisting and knotting its path as if there was nothing there to exhaust: it was endless the way a road might be, so that every possible action appeared to harbour malign effect beyond comprehension and control, meaning that, on the cusp of despondency, he supposed he might simply not act at all: instead, he thought, he might treat the assignment like any other, because, ultimately, the assignment could be less exceptional than judged: other staff might have regularly encountered assignments comparable in content, or more intense still, for maybe students often plumbed the hollows of extremity and only his teaching inhibited their transgressions, perhaps most of the work now was involved with a denial of any kind of absolute morality and violence and sexuality was the norm, and perhaps he was somehow more conservative and less capable of nurturing difference than his fellow teachers, whose tutelage opened pupils to experimentation and emboldened prose to roam impulsively, without self-censorship; yet this conflicted with recollections of

past faculty meetings, in the discussions of set texts and starter activities that had disclosed the staff's deeply planted traditionalisms with respect to meaning, where students' work had been constructed around a notion of intention, in a way that pointed directly inward: to the privacy of a mental space, such that the teachers seemed to expect truly creative writing to arise from a pre-programmed, almost robotic method, without montage or grammatical irregularity, in a manner that struck him as depressingly conservative, its rigidity unlikely to conduce little, if any, writing of merit, since such work required the transcendence of tedious repetition, with novel prose neither specifiable nor knowable in advance: it refused to conform to any check-list-like inventory of characteristics, and so, he maintained, work need only be interesting, it could inhabit diverse forms, employ montage, experimental punctuation, or indulge in page-length digressions, or develop characters, or not, with or without its self-recursion, because there were no defined criteria for interest, and had there been it would have made little difference, because aesthetics was to students as ornithology is to birds: a codified, irrelevant aside, without which writing functioned contentedly, the few remotely novel contributions submitted evincing little deference to formal doctrines of quality, there written as if conceived by mystics rather than rationalists, whom he considered as he swept forkfuls of overcooked yet tepid moussaka

towards his face, cream and umber daubs furnishing the corners of his mouth until, once finished, and satisfactorily swollen, he smeared himself clean and carted his plate to the sink, where he rinsed the crockery and brushed lazily and incompletely, such that discoloured water lacquered its residual tomato streaks, dormant as he pictured tomorrow's class, whom he expected to encounter as unresponsive to instruction and reluctant to work as ever, to whose apathy he had long since been resigned, believing that all students were alike: they dreamed of doing something more social, more collaborative, more real than the tasks imposed on them, and so sophisticated teacherly method, he supposed, entailed waiving immediate demands to coax what one could when one could, in respect of the dreams that dragged young thought to its future and away from the classroom, each student – even the author of the obscene assignment – alive to visions of progress and betterness, though precisely what that was, and the the perverted author pined for remained unclear, and remained likely to disturb, he thought, and so, longing to silence the disquietude endured since reading, hoping to relieve his implacable anxieties, he resolved to bathe and to masturbate and so wandered to his bedroom, slipping his shirt from his shoulders as he walked, where once inside he drew the curtains and slid trousers and underwear over his feet and perched on the edge of the mattress, dressed only in dark cotton socks as he

attempted to imagine sexual scenarios sufficiently novel to deterge any thought of his evening's work, envisaging foreign locations and different partners whom he might watch or embrace, permitting their blurred abstractness to give way to memories of former lovers and former encounters from youth and adulthood, returning in a familiar carousel as he attempted to self-gratify, for pleasure must not demand any effort, he reasoned, and therefore moved rigorously in the worn grooves of association, recollection offering the past physicality of soft lips once pressed together, and hips struck as torsos undressed and writhed, with fingers tucked into flesh, imagined as he felt himself stiffen against his palm, desirous and pulsating, aroused, until images of the abused and abducted pair somehow returned to mind, casually intruding but refusing to depart, unavoidable as the text enforced itself upon him once again, flashing the self-same images, of incontinent cramping and hopelessness and desertion, of blood and tear-begrimed bodies that wished for their parents, and of the eldest of the two siblings staring, again, its stale, cannibal breath spreading the stench of the molested dead as it wept, repeating, "I will die, diseased and degraded and disposed of, subsumed in my entirety, and this is how it is, for I am spontaneity and you are order; and history will be no more", its mantra reverberant as Leo tensed his entire body in a motionless internal cry, clenching his fists as if to squeeze himself



beyond the text and beyond remembrance, no longer aroused or inclined to pleasure but hunched and desperate, shaking as he gazed at his image in an ovoid mirror, such that he saw the reflected outline of his nude and fatigued body, his erection diminished to a soft a doughy mass nestled on his thigh and glared at as he watched himself and thought that even his most patently unalterable property, shape, did not remain constant, but, like all aspects of his person, was subject to the implacable cataract of chance and of time and of a hideousness that neither psyche nor soma could resist, dragged to and fro by those images and sensations and ideas that fell thereupon, with little regard for volition, leaving him to sit, confused in the evening gloom, static as the street noise ebbed and blackness enveloped, the faint thud of a distant walker's tread mingling with an electric hum as his alarm clock shone oddly lucent, illuminating the dim edges of furniture whilst he surveyed his possessions and his person, strewn dumbly across space, there feeling himself unbearably alone and more stupid and helpless and pathetic than before, a shard among ruins, dumb and dull-witted in the face of an indomitably advancing world, as if for the first time he grasped the scrabbling gracelessness that had constrained his every attempted thought and had done so since birth, palpable in the dark as he puffed heavily to imbibe the silent desperation of home, there unable and unwilling to move, enmeshed in his own

ineptitude and the pointlessness of any attempted action, thought self-constricting whilst he frantically wished for transformation, as he hoped for chance to concede and engender stability, in a new and more bearable condition, which it would not, and which he thought of that night, when, like thought and like text and the glibly persistent spectre of torment, he did not sleep, shaken with doubt, spectator to the tussle of order and spontaneity, which refused to yield, proud before death.

Digital model  
2019



Front



Back

Hitherto morning's arrival, Louise, who would one day discover the power of God, had considered herself happy, or content, she had thought, in relation to her friends: her depressive and sporadically indigent crew, whom she deemed trammelled by self-pity, their maladies remediable by mere willed optimism; yet, that day, upon drawing the curtains to greet the window's objectless firmament, she felt herself overwhelmed by an unforeseen and unbudging sadness, convulsing a paroxysmal anxiety from stomach through jaw to confront her with the prospect of an intransigent bodily melancholy, in a feeling resistant to positivity and pleasure and which spurned all attempted evasion, her optimism reduced to pathetic velleity as despair took hold and in its grip crushed the meaning of routine, the day's purpose and possibility there expunged by persistent, energised unhappiness, relieved only in weeping, as tears streamed periodically whilst ingesting cereal and showering and venturing outdoors, her distress tethered beside her as she toured shops, immured in a newfound loneliness that myopically returned her to the self-conscious incapacity to envisage contentment or to picture congeniality or an object of desire, her suffering insistent whilst donning its mid-afternoon garb to follow to the flat, ambient as she departed the station, immersed in thought's desolation, carting groceries with lungs tightened by vernal air and eyes focused phonewards, bloodied pink, as she

searched vainly for messages and thought mostly of herself, there sufficiently absorbed to overlook an onrush of passers-by, her ears oblivious to the growing chorus of echoes that greeted each leather-tapped footstep, each occasional splattered puddle, sensorily sequestered, until – once unquarantined by the brush of a passing child – she raised her head to greet a horde of green-blazered teenagers, scuttling by, trotting over reflective wet pavements with backpacks bobbling rhythmically and hands clinging to half-eaten confectionery, their voices raised and beckoning others towards a huddled congregation yards away, amassing in an alley with phones held aloft as they permitted their guffaw-filled hubbub to drift down street and coax bystanders thereto, luring Louise and a host of ununiformed teenagers and others to gaze, tiptoed, beside one another at the spectacle, which, though partially shrouded by a row of children, revealed itself after a series of sidesteps and stretches to comprise a pair of rough sleepers, male and female, laid horizontal whilst partially unclothed, copulating before the group, the homeless man grunting as the ragged and frayed waistline of his stained tracksuit bottoms wriggled and gripped to his thighs, pinguid black fingerprints besmirching his flaccid buttocks, which wobbled to the delight of their audience, rippling as he thrust back and forth, the onlookers recording and heckling opprobrium whilst they mockingly gestured to the woman's unwashed anus, cackling

at the congealed mess slathered thereon, her flesh motionless throughout, indifferent or insensible to its spectators as a vacant expression stuck to her face, with neck curled back and mouth widened to the sky, neither pleasure nor displeasure readable as her blackened teeth shook to each gyration, the motion unwavering, until, after a brief, almost imperceptible increase in tempo, the two stopped, static before the man's head momentarily fell to her neck, there rolling to expose his partners orifices to the breath-saturated air, pearly effluent seeping forth whilst he commenced an embraceless slumber, leaving the audience to quieten and percolate elsewhere as Louise lingered, her depression unchanged upon watching the two, there stricken with hollowness, her gaze unbending until she lowered her hand to her pocket to retrieve a mobile phone that – through three habile finger flicks – she unlocked to distract herself, opening recently browsed dating software, whose inbox was empty and which she inspected in an attempt to divert herself from the sense of degradation, there somehow further dejected by the lack of tenderness witnessed, though the coldness quickly fell forgotten, Louise ever more absorbed as she departed and swiped between faces and pithy statements, advertised by a throng of prospective partners, who, smiling and sanitised, grew increasingly homogenous through repetition, their likeness intensified as she skimmed profiles, pausing only upon her

occasional, immediate attraction to a haircut or garment or an indication of cultural preference, which, thinking better of, she deemed insufficient to warrant contact, there alarmed at her inclination to objectify and to judge, the feeling intensified as she considered her own subjection to assessment, when viewed by others, when her profile was inspected and statement read and photograph passed over, without thought, her appearance considered in its desirability – and dismissed or approved – so that, through reflection on her interactions, on her few encounters with others, she confronted her social standing, and its limitations, which, ordinarily, failed to upset; rather, she saw the experience as educative, since it was only through so doing that she acquired any objective sense of herself, because had she lived in some solitary place, without any communication with anyone, she could no more think of her own character, of the propriety or demerit of her own sentiments and conduct, of the beauty or deformity of her own mind, than of the beauty or deformity of her own face: all of these were objects which she could not easily see, which naturally she could not look at, and with regard to which there was no mirror which could present them to her view, but when she was brought into society, she was provided with the mirror which she wanted; it was placed in the countenance and behaviour of those she interacted with, which always marked when they entered into, and when they



disapproved of her sentiments; though, at this juncture – with intellect clasped by sadness – such prospective reflection induced unease, because, as ugly as she felt, as hideously unattractive as she imagined herself to be, she feared its confirmation, her vague presumption preferred to certitude, such that she swiftly closed her phone and continued walking, channelling thoughts to her afternoon's chores: her tasks to beautify the flat and to earmark improvements, which engendered little enthusiasm but which she resolved to undertake nevertheless, wending flatwards whilst ten minutes therefrom, her passage sheathed by anonymous residential developments, as steel panelled mediocrity loomed, in large-scale tract housing developments that constituted the new city; they were located everywhere, she thought, they were not particularly bound to existing communities and they failed to develop either regional characteristics or separate identity, such that her desired self-estrangement – her release from anhedonic narcissism – would not spur from her environment, from a landscape that evoked little but domestic monotony and life's banal perpetuation, in frigid new-builds sat pregnant with disappointment, but required mentality to migrate, prompting Louise to blinker her vision, wrapping the journey with detachment, thankful she lived elsewhere as she gazed at her phone, there staring maniacally to shift between updates, from friends and family, which proclaimed triumph and

pride and satisfaction, through videos and photographs and snippets of writing, curated to highlight the inadequacy of her pitifully unloved condition yet sufficient to retain her attention, exasperating in images of promotions and anniversaries and exotic travel, joyful reunions and housewarmings eddying forth as she arrived at the apartment building, whereupon she paused, returning her phone to pocket to substitute its rubber-clad bulk for the metallic looseness of keys, swirled in hand, before she opened the post-box and unveiled a medley of gloss flyers and sealed envelopes, imprinted with tenants' names and destined for disposal, but gripped, tightly, as she entered the vestibule, where she looked for residents but found none, there discovering only an unfamiliar lilac paint that had been applied in recent days, which was drying pungently, as if to exaggerate the service company's involvement – deemed fee-worthy in its decoration, with paint as good as it was in the can – but which she overlooked as she slipped toward the elevator and called for the fifth floor, ascending whilst faced with the mirror's listless figure, which stood somehow limper and fleshier and older than yesterday, its clothes strangely ill-fitting and make-up less consummately applied, smeared and deformed by tears, as she saw herself as an ungainly whole, as if for the first time, helpless to a degeneration that further depressed, such that the lift's arrival brought relief, prompting her to turn, alacritously, from image to

the flat, unlatching the door seconds later to cart shopping within, there feeling the pained spectre of abandonment as she lumbered inside, as she peered through opened bedroom doors to the headrest-scratched paintwork and furniture-marked floor, the faint smell of stale cooking floating throughout whilst sight absorbed every newly emptied surface, every shelf bereft of content, and a jarless spice rack, with a sheetless mattress further obtruding to accentuate life's departure, whose absence, once ingested in its sickly proximity, conjured her phantom tenant, the polite and reticent man, who struck her as decent though tired and burdened by rental payments, afflicted in a manner that induced a discomfort, to the extent that Louise avoided contact altogether, cognisant of his exhaustion and aware that his every arduously long week was converted to cash and canalised her way, for no reason other than her property, which was itself a testament to mere fortune, she thought, acquired through familial wealth and sustained through renters, whom she had looked to ignore, overwhelmed with the guilt of exploitation, so that she strove to differentiate herself from her landlordism, from which she felt distinct, as somehow less acquisitive and less grasping and more vulnerable than was suggested, with circumstances unique, in that she had not sought to subsidise her income but merely to subsist stably, sheltered from the vagaries of finance in a mental and material cocoon that

incubated the thoughtfulness and creativity extinguished in work, which she had tried to preserve, declining all conventional employment, with neither the talent or disposition for a career, and with a hatred for forays into the labour market, from which she unfailingly recoiled, with a biting, visceral pain, suffered as if wounded, for Louise saw nothing in waged work but the governance and domination she had sought to resist, for to be governed, she felt, was to be watched, inspected, spied upon, directed, law-driven, numbered, regulated, enrolled, indoctrinated, preached at, controlled, checked, estimated, valued, censured, commanded, by creatures who had neither the right nor the wisdom nor the virtue to do so, so, yes, she affirmed, to be governed was to be at every operation, at every transaction noted, registered, counted, taxed, stamped, measured, numbered, assessed, licensed, authorized, admonished, prevented, forbidden, reformed, corrected, punished: it was, under pretext of public utility, and in the name of the general interest, to be placed under contribution, drilled, fleeced, exploited, monopolized, extorted from, squeezed, hoaxed, robbed; then, at the slightest resistance, the first word of complaint, to be repressed, fined, vilified, harassed, hunted down, abused, clubbed, disarmed, bound, choked, imprisoned, judged, condemned, shot, deported, sacrificed, sold, betrayed; and to crown it all, mocked, ridiculed, derided, outraged, dishonoured, that was government; that was its

justice; that was its morality, and Louise strove to contest its oversight in every form, determined to retain a modicum of autonomy, even if unsure how to use it, her direction there uncertain in the absence of the driving affirmative desires that might fill non-participation's emptiness: she could do this today and that tomorrow, she thought, to hunt in the morning, to go fishing in the afternoon, to do cattle breeding in the evening, to criticise after dinner, or to pursue whatever other absurdity she contrived, yet somehow she felt dissatisfied by mere concatenated pleasures, felt hollow in their aggregate, for Louise yearned to exceed their rhapsodic fun, through an achievement or narrative, which, she thought, might bestow an otherwise vacuously episodic existence with rich, continuous significance, such as would render meaningful the vapid socialising and incomplete betterment of recent years, legitimating their pointless learning and nocturnal hedonisms with the deliverance of a family, or a child, there furnishing life with semblant purpose, which she desired and which she thought of with increased regularity, picturing the warm maternity ward in which small, soft fingers were to be placed in hers, in her infant's first moments, wherefrom afterwards she would depart to a modest detached home, far from the city, in which she and her imagined partner would hold to each other and to their newborn, bathed in nourishing togetherness and thrust impossibly close, as if inextricable, glued

by commitment as they endeavoured to sustain one another, loved in relative prosperity, with birthdays and celebrations and holidays and laughter amassing in integral form, as an unbreakable whole, to be reviewed with contentment upon death's arrival, their lives ended with a sense of completion, with the assurance that something of substance had been done; yet it had not, and, gradually, it dawned upon Louise that it would not, her childless future there projected insistently in the face of all contrary ambitions, which she had attempted to actualise – on myriad, strained occasions – when she had devoted herself to partners, and to the image of domestic development, eager for consequential life to commence, in her resolute investment in romance and its persistence and progression, committed thereto despite her lovers' demerits, despite their arrogance and their smug superiority and their insistent desire for rightness, which, whilst once enjoyable – in its smooth screen of security – soon grew repulsive, its image inexorably expressive of the accreted condescensions of the world, as if symbolic of her ongoing struggle for independence, and of her failures therewith; so that her desire waned and her partners became less interesting and less unique, and somehow unable to sustain the excitement and discovery of early interaction, ever uglier and duller as intimacy degraded to vicarious experience and faked sensation, and as Louise longed only to escape, there desperate and unsure as to whether the

decay had been her fault, yet certain, vehemently so, that affection would not be revived, such that she ended her relationships and abandoned the prospect of a motherly future – if only temporarily – to return to the plodding fuss of adulthood, aimless once more as she confronted the rudderlessness of self-interested landlordism, there doing so yet again whilst reminded of the money extracted, and of the labour enforced, for the sake of her pathetic vacillations between purpose and non-purpose, whose mere thought induced weeping, tears slipping down cheeks, saturated with disgust, as she surveyed the flat, her vision pouring over the glib veneers and glass of its remnant furniture, her sight's spread glancing stretches of laminate and plastic, once entangled in life though now detached, oddly suspended – as if forgetting the dead – and hung in anticipation of their redeployment, awaiting the steady crunch of accumulation that would enact its callous transformation, saddening Louise as she thought of the biography and history whose erasure loomed, in the imminent expurgation of dwelt warmth, whose cruelty she strove to ignore, there judging such introspection neither financially nor emotionally beneficial, and aware that – without further income – she was compelled to rent the flat irrespective of contrition, her wealth indifferent to compunction's persistence; so that if she was to exploit, she supposed, she would do so competently and meticulously, augmenting profit when possible, for if she was

doomed to suffer the guilt of her abuses, her misdeeds borne in the burdensome screech of conscience, she thought, she should maximise compensation, placating shame with comfort, there hoarding services and goods to assuage self-reproach, easing all sense of self with the support of value, rendered manifest in the indisputable physicality of consumption; because, if the world was merely an immense accumulation of commodities, its unit being a single commodity, available for trade and exchange, with one's presence and strength and personality registered in one's possession thereof, she supposed, then the more one accrued – in clothing and furniture and property – the firmer existence would grow, meaning she was to venerate its logic and prepare her chores with a sense of principle, there determined to inflate her income and to manicure the apartment as best she could, heaving her shopping to the table as she opened a list of jobs, from which she examined the first item, discerned, through scrawled characters and misspellings, to be instruction to inspect paintwork and to measure walls, with the former thought a requirement for redecoration and the latter for purchase of prints, in a strategy contrived upon the tenant's departure and devised to mask the rooms' spatial inadequacies, with Louise convinced that artwork, if sufficiently intriguing, if sufficiently internally focused, could distract from the architecture's material fact, positionable in porthole-like spots that would pierce



the new-build's constrictive monotony, affording the illusion of enchantment in the presentation of a world beyond, for if the prevailing orientation to paintings had managed to have people believe that art floats ten feet above the ground and had nothing to do with the historical situation out of which it had grown – that it could be presumed to be an entity all to itself – then, Louise concluded, such self-containment should be exploited, through the promissory facade of transcendence, rented as the deceptive image of abstraction, whose profits would there return in increased rates and additional revenue, the flat ever costlier for the mere thin mixtures of shape and colour dangled therein, its revenue enlarged by embellishments wrenched from the continuum between the monument and the ornament, with each piece densely symbolic, their ideas paramount and material form secondary, lightweight, ephemeral, cheap, unpretentious, and penetrable to the intellect, though harmonious with apartment's tone – in cool whites and clean lines – that suggested the transcendence of decoration but complied therewith, so that, when photographed and displayed, in estate agent's website and shop, the home presented a coherent picture of future happiness, maintaining the fictive potential by which property circulated, its bits and pieces put together to form the semblance of a whole, which would advertise a reconciled seamlessness, in a life of comfort and joy and progress that was

never to arise yet remained stronger for its absence, there considered as Louise began her tasks, wandering between rooms to report where required restoration and where frames might best sit, imagining possible purchases as she returned to the kitchen to retrieve tools from her bag, doing so until she felt the soft vibration of phone against flesh, the motorised tickle there prompting her to open its screen, whereupon she greeted a dating app message, sent from a correspondent of recent days whose communications had grown sexualised, with allusions to physicality and thinly veiled proclamations of libido littered therein, and whose climactic utterance, she thought, had arrived, in a message that declared the making of a video, constructed, supposedly, with her in mind and linked to seconds later, on which she reluctantly clicked, waiting nervously – though without arousal – as the image buffered, Louise there curious as to whether the file would be explicitly or implicitly erotic, casually recorded or well-composed, with background noise or silence, the facts of which unravelled seconds later as the footage loaded, there revealing a grainy recording made under tungsten lights, captured in the maker's living room, wherein the subject appeared adorned in formal attire, upright and stationary and looking to camera, with a blankly emotionless expression, which persisted, unwavering and thoughtless, as though dislocated from mentality, as they began to undress, nonchalantly dropping their

outer clothes and artlessly removing their underwear until, once entirely nude, they lingered in shot, hesitantly staring, oblivious to their audience and standing, static for several seconds, before they wandered leftwards, beyond the frame to leave only the lifeless image of their emptied apartment, adorned with ersatz modern chic, with replicas of design icons strewn throughout, faded and hollow and such that their mirrored gleam and polished surface appeared wantingly deserted, flaccid and inert, before the nude figure returned, their countenance vacant as they brandished a knife limply in hand, retaining eye-contact, with vision locked in bovine glare, coldly indifferent as they raised the blade upward, level with their stomach, and, without ceremony, thrust its edge towards their genitals, dispassionately and indiscriminately hacking to draw blood, which first surfaced in thin crimson lines, graphically etched to their pallid form, but which soon gave way to a thick cascade of scarlet, flowing in disordered blurrings of pink and red viscera, pubic hair and skin stuffed within gore as pockets of rippling red scrunched and unfolded, from thigh to belly, where hunks of glowing flesh went revealed by each carving motion, with clods of tissue falling, severed and plunging whilst vivid cherry colours intermingled with bodily texture, coursing in constellation, surging, until, visibly dizzyed, the figure collapsed to ground, broken as they thudded to floorward to depart the shot, all trace of

violence there removed as only the image of the empty, personless home remained, steely in its spotless and baleful quietude, the echo of torment whispered in hue and geometry whilst spite trickled forth, its glass and hardwoods complicit as the videomaker lay bleeding, soundlessly, without indication of movement, such that it dawned on Louise that they were dying, or had died, and that she should cease speculation to hail emergency services, to contact paramedics, to administer first aid or to record life's loss, yet she knew not where to direct them, and so, frantically, she combed her phone for an address, hoping to obtain either street name or house number, or a vague allusion to location, hurriedly perusing instant messaging exchanges to find only generalities, there confronting the paucity of information transmitted, with neither date nor place nor surname referenced whatsoever, inducing panic, as Louise fell unsure of her actions, there inclined to beckon the police, until, on the verge of dialling, with finger poised on key, she realised that the video could not have depicted recent suicide, for her interlocutor had sent a prerecorded sequence, appended with an invitation to watch, meaning they could not be dying or fatally wounded, and that they could not have recently crumpled – castrated – to ground, because the phone had not filmed in real time, with its images premade, such that the mutilation had not ended life but had been survived and shared with others, which solicited further questioning

thereof: of the purpose and yearning behind the behaviour, and of the status of previous interactions, and of their eroticised dialogue, which, in the aftermath of maiming, struck Louise as inexplicable, as a counter-intuitive denial of bodily lust, though, quickly, she reasoned, the concupiscent discourse need not have intimated copulation but could have referenced stranger, alien structures of compulsions, irreducible to mere somatic satisfaction, in more potent urges still, thrown forward by the conquering force of desire, which cared neither for health nor stability nor permanence but only for its self-sovereignty, because, she thought, every position of desire, no matter how small was capable of calling into question the established order of a society: not that desire was asocial, on the contrary; it was explosive: there was no desiring-machine capable of being assembled without demolishing entire social sectors, corporeality there impotent before its world-crushing power, with soma left frangible like dirt; yet, still, Louise struggled to envisage the psychological condition that begot such self-disfigurement, her thinking unable to imagine an affective condition conducive to its caustic abandonment, whether through misery or wrath, so that the determination to disfigure seemed insoluble, its opacity importunate as she tried, in desperation, to construe an underpinning personality, inventing a sender's biography and disposition and cogitating, intently, until it occurred to her that the video's subject

and transmitter could diverge, there aware that she had failed to examine their photographs sufficiently closely as to recognise the depicted, ignorant of their distinguishing characteristics and unable to recall any profile picture whatsoever, the realisation prompting her to open her phone's image library, where, to her dismay, she found their face obscured in every shot, furtively shielded by hands or cropped, such that she focused on their body instead, discernible in outline and passably resemblant, though lacking a conclusive likeness, there deficient in identification's requisite distinctiveness, with neither remarkable figure nor unusual complexion, neither excessively long limbs nor protuberant stomach, leaving Louise uncertain of her judgement, though inclined, upon contemplation, to treat the footage as a product of elsewhere, as fashioned by another and discovered on some subterranean website, whereon, she supposed, it was hosted for masochists or provocateurs and was reproduced to provoke, or to arouse or upset, imbued with a savage riddle, such that she felt misled and mocked by the sender, which inclined her to ignore the video entirely and to recommence her afternoon's tasks, there returning her phone to pocket as she prepared to measure walls; though, without prompt, she then suddenly halted, motionless once more as she found herself troubled with the sense that the recording had not been downloaded but fabricated – by the sender – who had not self-harmed and self-

filmed but had coerced another to do so, filming the ensuing degradation as the vulnerable stranger was drugged or threatened or disturbed to fulfill their fantasies, the actuality of which there struck Louise as disconcertingly plausible, to the extent that she opened her phone to rewatch the event, scrutinising its image for additional information, for traces of intimidation, or for the subtle presence of another, in suspect shadows or the soft exhale of breath, yet she detected neither, their intrusions absent as knife plunged and veins ruptured once more, prompting her to deliberate on the video's underpinning motivations again, which, even if uncovered, she thought, would offer little guidance for her situation, for her response or for explanation of the transmission, which, irrespective of provenance, resisted all certitude, unknowable as either threat or provocation or confession; rather, its substance remained shrouded, leaving her to speculate with vague theories of purpose that, like all theories, were made only to die in the war of time, adopted and discarded as circumstance bent logic and reason to its metre with little regard for conscious control, mangled and felt, actually, as she closed her eyes and placed hands to her head, massaging her temples, with fingers roaming in ever wider circles, rotating until, once again, she felt the timid buzz of her phone, to which she intuitively glanced to greet a message from the video's sender, whose body bore no text but a smiley faced symbol, smugly

simpering, as if delighted in its ambiguity, unyielding and impervious to interpretation, in a manner that left Louise powerless to respond or to understand, such that she there longed only for flight, from dialogue and from the day and its content, which weighed like a nightmare on her moribund intellect, urging her to relinquish the phone and tape measure and her list of jobs and to drift towards the living room, wherein she stepped and lowered her limbs to lie atop the laminate's firm, feeling the hard of the floor as her ribcage bounced gently, thudding whilst her skull rotated downward and eyes surveyed the room, from where she viewed the apartment afresh, her vision thrown over the extended beige and its obstacles, uncovering unseen umbriferous plots below table and sofa, carpeted with slight scatterings of dust, upon which she fixated in an attempt to halt memory's tumult, staring intently, as if determined to heave thought elsewhere, her vision resolute as the rumble of mentality persisted, unwavering whilst eventless hours mounted, her body motionless and cadaverous and there awake to sunlight's concession before night, when blackness returned and cleanses day of its sadness and violence and confusion, with space expunged beneath the smothering billow of invisibility that swept forth to leave Louise sightless and alone, her energies intensively directed to complete the erasure, there preying for time to follow suit and evanesce, to deprive thought of any residual foundation;



yet no such departure ensued, rather each lambent image, each brief recollection, reflected inwards to beget perpetual duration, paralysing Louise before morning's intrusion, her body persistent until dawn when space returned and swelled to accommodate life's despondency, its accent unchanged as she rose to draw the curtains and fortify her solitude, aware of her actions' futility though resolute, pausing as she stood before the window, as if to confront the heavy and godless sky, in whose nitid limits she saw reflected the wants and prayers and filth of the world, whose sight she retreated from to return to tenebrosity and weep, there collapsing to ground to lie with eyes closed as she trembled, whispers seeping from the walls, cadent and consuming, in their strict and merciless measure, "there is no home and tomorrow will not relent".

Digital model  
2019



Front



Back

As she hurtled across the autumnal gloom, traversing its faceless, blanket expanse, with neither freedom nor pleasure trailered in tow, Zara typed a rhythmic clicking to accompany the judder of metal on ground, constructing her correspondences whilst swathed in electric thrum, her thoughts focused and lucid, undeviating until she sensed the inexorable push of chair against back, there noticing her deceleration, felt as gradual then sudden, as she drew to a halt at a small, dusky station, at which the cessation prompted her to look from her screen to the empty carriage, apprehending its decrepitude, in frayed upholstery and graffiti smirched tables and foot-worn flooring, from which the journey's few remaining passengers had filtered doorwards and had seeped onto the platform, orienting attention to the faintly visible concrete, whereon silhouetted figures bustled beside a reclined body metres to their left, conspicuously static as Zara's vision turned thereto, her eyes straining to puncture the window's gossamer reflection, spread by the yellow gleam and penetrated seconds later to reveal the image of a sleeping bag sprawled across a bench, the paint of which had flaked, and the frame of which was speckled with rust, positioned three paces from limply-hung refuse sacks, their skin rippling as Zara observed the slumbering stretch, spotting small dark movements above and beneath, flitting back and forth, scuttling until a dark, liquorice-like tail lingered for several seconds, bolting

upon the sleeper's shuffle, its bag unzipped to reveal a pink face and shoulder length hair, there stuffed within a jumper neck and unmoving as the figure sat upright, their palms flattened whilst their head rotated from side to side, resting to observe a bag of possessions, which conspicuously rustled an erratic shuffle, and with which the sleeper retained eye contact, sliding their legs free and delicately rotating hips to leave a pair of sneaker-wrapped feet suspended vigilantly above the floor, at right angles to the seat, until, rapidly, the two struck down, stamping a hard, frenetic dance, hammering, before the right foot froze, its arch taut and ball pressed to earth, angled as they slowly swivelled their arm and shoulder to grip the sack's edges, their trainer edging away to reveal the twitching and writhing body of a rat, whose lower limbs were clasped underfoot and whose ribs had been crushed, such that it flailed unevenly, there thrashing to one side, vainly striving to free its broken body before a second sole stamped and stamped thereupon again, followed by a volley of yet more strikes, crunching and ripping the creature's tissue, with torso gradually torn open to receive clumps of fur, its paws and mouth rendered indiscernible beneath the tramping, whose pounding persisted until only a flattened, formless mass remained, lifeless before the shoe returned to probe the carcass, scraping its contorted mess to form a bloody lump, congealing upon itself and booted forward, towards the

tracks and beneath Zara, who stared at its creator, a woman, roughly her age, who was examining her possessions and person, and was anxiously searching for damage or for rodents or for theft, and who, eventually, looked trainwards to exchange countenances, her gaze fixing upon Zara's, momentarily before she found herself overcome with a sense of inexplicably unbearable immediacy, there desperately guilt-ridden and ashamed and troubled, such that Zara rapidly assumed a series of work-like positions, glaring intently to screen with fingers poised atop keyboard, attempting to appear sufficiently absorbed to render communication impracticable, to douse any possible relationship with the cold flow of industry, visibly absorbed whilst she prayed for the journey's resumption, which, to her relief, arrived quickly, as the carriage rattled and a cohort of fresh commuters procured seats, with a pair of pink faced men sauntering in her direction, the first of which diverged, half-stumbling, to an empty aisle seat, though the second soberly wheeled towards Zara, arriving to present themselves as a young office worker, clad in thin smoke-grey trousers and a reflective white shirt, drooping at the collar, and with plastic sleeves rolled to the elbows of glabrous, toned arms, tensed as they placed lager cans beside her, there unpacking a laptop before they nestled in their seat and brushed her hip, announcing a propinquity that, in light of the train's emptiness, augured imminent, unwanted

communication, triggering Zara to persist in the performance of an immersed, readerly labour, hunched in a stoic posture she thought would pronounce a reluctance to converse, her expression bonded to the fulgent glare of spreadsheet and document, outwardly engrossed as she flicked there between, unflinching whilst she overheard her neighbour's exaggerated sigh followed by the hissing of an opened beer, which she ignored, its sound blanked with such vigour that, after staring, after pouring face forcefully to screen, she gradually found herself working, attending to open projects in earnest as she drafted an email she had intended to send days ago – to junior customer sales employees – in a missive that reiterated the imperative to follow the management-written script, extending judicious explanation of the virtues of stylistic consistency and of clarity, for she and the other senior staff were dissatisfied with the fluctuant tone and rhetorical flourishes of outbound correspondences, so that they had set out to rip out the metaphors – especially those that have to do with “up”, as well as every other whiff of transcendence – as they sought to enforce a lucid precision, aware that the art of communication degenerated as it approached the condition of theatre and that the company ought retain a precise, unitary voice, for clients and for customers, so that they encouraged replication of their finite array of pre-composed responses, consonant with broader principles of organisation and the division

of labour, for a competitive enterprise, they reasoned, was obliged to take all the important decisions and planning which vitally affect the output of the office out of the hands of the lower paid staff, and centralise them in a few managers, each of whom was especially trained in the art of making those decisions and in seeing that they were carried out, each person having their own particular function in which they were supreme, not interfering with the functions of other workers, and such that the executives controlled the business's authorial accent, crafting advance responses for employees to choose deftly therefrom, which required skill and precision of the customer sales staff – in deciding an appropriate reply – for every inquiry remained unique: the intentions are different, the results are different, so is the experience, she thought, such that even the selection of responses, in its discrimination between alternatives, obligated sensitivity and consideration, and an emotional and intellectual identification with the complainant, sufficiently sensitive as to satisfactorily react to shoppers, meaning that workers were to draw from their own consumptive experience and remembrance, acquired in excess of employment; for what distinguished capitalism from the master-servant relation, Zara supposed, was that worker confronted boss as consumer and possessor of exchange values, and that in the form of the possessor of money, they became a centre of circulation, one of its infinitely many centres, in which



their specificity as a worker was extinguished, such that she and the junior staff and the investors achieved an equality of experience and dignity in the marketplace, where prospective purchasing eroded the accumulated differences of history and of experience, which – without hesitation – returned in the office, where hierarchy reigned, irrespective of policy or proclamation or the parity of exchange, so that, much as Zara recognised each managed subject as thoughtful and independent, she simultaneously retained an acute awareness of their domination, and of her relative empowerment, manifest in the capacity to instruct and to reprimand, to raise pay and to hire, and to direct others, whose exact competencies and potentials she neither knew nor would discover, such that she had grown increasingly unsure as to the purpose and longevity of workplace subordination, uncertain as to why – without rigorous inquiry – workers would persist in their subservience, for there was no self-evident justification for her supremacy, or for their subjugation: she possessed neither palpable skill nor attribute nor epistemic advantage to vindicate the inequity, no ability that one could point to or illustrate; rather, her only proficiency was a diffuse, interactional habitus, hidden and obscure, yet somehow sufficient to uphold authority, there manifest in the subtle sculpture of managerial manoeuvre, in the plastic flex of her corporate intervention, whereby strategic acuity yielded the precise,

puppet-like orchestration of others, with synchronisation induced through incentives and discourse, in kindly praise and authoritative sanction, which, once delicately deployed, bestowed enterprise its accordance with desire, rendered comprehensible in profit and in the satisfaction of anonymous hordes, known only as aggregative data, in accounts and in graphs and in the website analytics that filtered back to chime, tuning-fork-like and sonorous, as directions for action, operating to leave Zara indifferent to the commodities vended: objects of every sort were materials for her art, she supposed: paint, chairs, food, electric and neon lights, smoke, water, old socks, a dog, movies, a thousand other things which were yet to be discovered by the present generation of entrepreneurs; not only will bold managers show others, as if for the first time, the world they have had around them, but ignored, she thought, but they will disclose entirely unheard of happenings and events, found in garbage cans, police files, hotel lobbies, seen in store windows and on the streets, and sensed in dreams, as the architecture of administration spread to even the most exotic, most distant recesses of life, charting ever further terrain for settlement, bestowing Zara with a degree of certitude for her position's persistence, comforting her as she continued to type, there working with a pronounced sense of productivity until she felt her stomach cramp, the silent scrunch of which prompted her to head unhesitatingly for the

train's bathroom, so that she saved her documents and closed her laptop, restoring the silver machine to a leather travel case before standing upright, exaggeratedly, to prompt her neighbour – immured in his laptop glare – to rotate and rise from the table, enabling Zara to leave her seat and to pass, shifting swiftly with neck arched down, there eager to impede any verbal exchange and overcome by a shivering urge to excrete, felt feverishly whilst she moved through the carriage, clenching her lower abdomen until she reached the toilet, whereupon push of the handle she found it locked, the door's mechanism violently rebounding upon thrust, such that she briefly looked to the blackly opaque window, confronting nothingness, before she noticed that the vacant sign had clicked and that the cubicle had opened, revealing a short-haired boy, who hastily sidestepped and jogged forward, his head bowed whilst departing the bathroom, wherein Zara discovered globules of urine splashed over floor and seat alike, glistening in the cubicle's fluorescence, such that she tutted to an imagined audience and bolted the door, there unspooling a scrunched handful of paper – sufficiently voluminous to bar permeative contact – that she gripped and wiped back and forth, as if polishing, buffing its plastic until, once sufficiently residue, she slackened and dropped her trousers, stooping as she felt the slow and loosening satisfaction of defecation flow from spine outwards, sinking a relieving heft as she

fell overcome with a pleasant emptiness, calmed and comfortable as she sat, aware of her enjoyment, feeling – in mystic-like fashion – that evacuation’s release denied the ego and the individual personality, evoking, it seemed, a semihypnotic state of blank unconsciousness, so that she could recline in a thoughtless, meditative state, absent-mindedly turning to her phone’s social media feed, which had grown passively consumed in recent months, enlisted merely for news, of personal and political intrigue, and for entertainment, such that Zara scrolled through cascades of anonymous non-sequitirs, in fragmentary statements, from corporate and individual voices alike, blurting incessantly in concerted competition to contort discourse to the standard of the homogeneous slogan-like utterance, which she ingested torpidly, thoughtlessly gorging on banal chatter until, roused by the rustle of handle and lock, she rose to clean and clothe herself, wiping then washing and briefly looking mirror-wards – to ensure the propriety of her appearance – before exiting, cheerily bypassing an elderly woman to meander to her table, where she arrived to find its space personless, with neighbour ostensibly elsewhere, and only an empty can and open laptop to indicate the impermanence of absence, such that Zara happily slid to her chair and resumed the evening’s work, agreeably unsurveilled as she felt the strange openness of her anus against her seat, its embrace extending

through clothes whilst she addressed her email, seizing her computer to reword each of her previously-written sentences until, faced with a clause whose rephrasing proved obscure, she grew distracted, there intrigued to examine the neighbour's work, from which she hoped she might glean a sense of occupation or personality and sate her mild curiosity without interaction; and so, bristling with inquisitiveness, she leant sideways to read, positioning herself to greet a word document, which extended beyond a single page with prose divided into three or so even sections – each running to approximately a hundred words in length and carefully spaced – formatted in the program's default typeface, but without a title, such that her vision fell to the opening unnamed paragraph, whose initial scan disclosed instructions, adumbrating procedures for an undefined subject, with a further glance revealing the other passages to be composed similarly, such that Zara began her perusal of the first with an acute sense of a second and third to follow, in serial form, as she comprehended a plain and unwriterly idiom that articulated what appeared to be directions for torture, in a process whereby a subject – posited in some indeterminate dungeon – was to confront a family member, there stripped nude with ankles attached to four divergent rails, such that the relative's genitals would protrude, spread wide, as the victim was directed to place its mouth against their anus and lick, informed that refusal or pause

– through flinch or vomit – would beget their forcible restraint, their body pinioned as one fingernail was violently detached for each non-compliance, torn with pliers upon the slightest recoil or cessation, and, were this insufficiently deterring, or were all digits exhausted, the same punishment would be meted out to their kin, exposing a familial agony whose image struck Zara as perverse and obnoxious but intriguing, somehow physically energising her, to the extent that she careered to imbibe the next portion of text, pulse rising as eyes advanced to read, there excitedly encountering another nameless passage that, again, articulated orders for enactment on a featureless person, whom in this instance was to be undressed to the waist and to be cast into an empty room, left to linger in its cold, shivering, until boiling sugar syrup was thickened, with its bubbling volume introduced and flung thereover, scolding and blistering their skin before they were abandoned once more, uncovered and without remedy as hungry, stinging insects infiltrated the room, gravitating towards the injured torso, such that the figure was compelled to remain static, despite their agonies, to permit the creatures to tread ticklishly over puss and blood-smeared sores, averting further stings, whose thought induced hot shudders, stretching from spine to temple, as Zara sat unnerved yet enticed, such that she, again, proceeded to peruse, eager to plunge deeper through the textual well of sadism, her thirst unslaked, intensified

even, as she reached a third identically-sized section, in which the singular subject was to be tethered to a chair with neck and mouth braced, their lips prised apart and throat opened gapingly to the dull, loveless room, there stationed beside a modest table, upon which an array of hand tools were huddled, with screwdrivers, hammers and saws, and a bottle of bleach separated to the left, such that the subject was instructed to choose therebetween, to point, with their unconstrained finger, in either a leftwards direction – engendering consumption of bleach – or to the right – to beget dental disfigurement – as one object upon another was selected to assault the subject’s mouth, a steel file slowly turning enamel to dust, grinding upon bloodied oral tissue, or a screwdriver stabbed into gum, levered to remove teeth, so that the subject was forced to decide between the irreparable, potentially lethal consumption of poison or an improvised mutilation, the strange unpleasantness of which startled, but which, much as before, engendered Zara’s feral compulsion to resume, the document’s odd cruelties arousing an inexplicable attraction; yet, upon returning to the text, she saw the next directive extended beyond the page, in a manner that obliged scrolling, and that troublingly required a haptic interaction, in a gentle stroke of the cursor, appearing to violate some complex of physical taboos, such that Zara there looked to the carriage, to where the computer’s owner remained absent and to where no

remnant passenger returned her glance, the train's inhabitants absorbed in their own screen-based frivolity, oblivious as she gladly resolved to indulge her curiosity and decisively, yet furtively, inched her finger towards the trackpad, quickly flicking to reveal the opening of a second page, on which the short passage continued, its body begun with instruction to kidnap and to starve, and to sequester for several days, rendering the subject desperate, so that, with belly bloated from hunger, protuberant and cramping, they would encounter four separate, shining cloches, each raised slowly to unveil a captioned choux bun, whose interiors were there detailed, with the first labelled a mixture of custard and razor blades, the second as the congealed semen of an elderly syphilitic man, the third as the bloodied faeces of a disease-ridden sow, and the last as the intact severed hand of a human foetus, from which they were to choose and to eat, with the added provision that pastries were to be consumed in a maximum of two mouthfuls, so that their shell could not be nibbled free of repulsive content but was to be swallowed in its integral whole, this rule enforced with the threat of perpetual confinement or death, the notion of which Zara experienced with an odd feeling of embodiment, as an uneasily corporeal reception took hold, as what was previously neutral became actual, while what was previously an image became a thing, gnawing its way through psyche to sensation, as wafts of



putrid stench circulated from the prose to body, such that, for that brief moment, there was no outside-text; rather, the page emerged to enclose her in its psychotic phantasmagoria, swirling a dense and hallucinatory fog, thick and impenetrable, until a man, several seats ahead, disgorged a loud, phlegm-muffled cough to wake her, there alerting her to her indiscretion and prompting her to turn stiffly sideward, to the window then her laptop, upon which she sought to focus her vision, embarrassed and acutely aware of the transgression, yet unable to think beyond the images ingested, plagued with doubts and questions, and with a sustained desire to read further, there persistent as she ruminated on the document's purpose and origin, for with neither clear title nor additional information – with malice merely serially repeated – the text's function remained obscure, abandoning Zara to speculation and conjecture, there hypothesising that the writing might outline plans for forthcoming crimes, intended for exaction on an indeterminate subject or succession thereof, whom would be captured and enslaved, or that the instructions might not, their description extant merely as a therapeutic remainder through which inscription appeased a deep, internal darkness: a sublimated violence – which would otherwise erupt into fleshly danger – so that the writing had been undertaken for private use, and lacked an intended audience; though, she supposed, it could simply be creative writing too,

engineered to outrage, to test the limits of acceptability, in its plain-worded cruelty, and constructed as a work in its own right, or as a dislocated fragment of some longer piece, in which obscenity ruptured an otherwise placid tone, whereby its creator – the absent ill-dressed man – constituted a provocateur, if he was the author, which, she supposed he might not be, for the words could have been pilfered from elsewhere, downloaded from internet forums or extracted from books, penned by the dead or by friends, or compiled in a collectively authored project too, with the beer drinker merely one of many perverted contributors, there appending fantasies to a grim compendium of desires, such that the document indexed a clandestine network of sadists, somehow spectrally immanent; though, equally, she thought, it might not, for without further contextual determination, without the clear concretion of detail, the document – in provenance and design, in authorship and use – remained radically uncertain, mysterious as an impenetrable inventory of provocations that left Zara unsure of her response, there anxious in the shadow of ambiguity yet eager to view the computer's owner once again, convinced that scrutiny of their appearance would secure some conclusion, adamant that mere physical proximity would do so, much as the very thought of dialogue troubled, such that, she thought, she would investigate in a mute, guarded manner, cautious that conversational inquiry

would reveal her snooping and might anger her interlocutor, who, at worst, constituted the planner of tortures read, with savage wrath there induced by her readerly indiscretion, by her akratic submission to curiosity, which would see her confined and humiliated and force-fed, such that she dwelt thereupon, worrying, until it struck her that the man had taken few, if any, measures to prevent inspection, his laptop left on and open with text illuminated, such that she supposed the display was intentional, left as a confession, or as a lure for fellow fetishists, to read and make contact, to contribute to its world of fantastical pain; or, likewise, it might constitute a libindally-charged taunt or boast of wrongdoings, its exhibition indicative of a desired dispersal, which troubled as much as if for personal use, she felt, there discomforted by the idea of its dissemination, so that she considered moving seats, though she did not but elected to remain instead, aware that a mid-carriage confrontation might ensue were the author to return, were they to trudge through the vehicle and notice her, meaning she simply sat still, pensive and indecisive, whilst pondering the prose beside her, awash in speculation as she considered every aspect of the instructional script, which had permeated all thoughts to contort her innermost visions, such that whilst ensconced mid-journey the typed words and the tortured subject and their sufferings stood on their head and there evolved out of their textual brain grotesque

ideas, far more wonderful than if they had begun to dance of their own free will, their cacophony drowning all unrelated, embryonic ideas, in a spectacular misery, as if to cement Zara to her seat, dumbly glued as the train thundered on, the laptop and its contents unmanned, with screen wobbling to the rumble of track and vehicular heft as she resolved to return to work, there attempting to terminate rumination and regain control, her inner commotion calmed by her conception of monotonous office rhythm, whereby the vagarious cogitations of the day were moulded to consistent, agreeable form, for her employment had the feel and look of openness, extendibility, accessibility, publicness, repeatability, equanimity, directness, immediacy, and it had been formed by clear decision rather than groping craft, perfectly constructed, she thought, to filter out the world's intrusions, erasing the distraction engendered by journey and by home and by written word to institute a portable headquarters, erected in its implacable progression – work as form, work as structure, work as place – that promised deliverance from filth, in sanative images of profit and retail, of consumer and employee satisfaction, each generic and indifferent to the specific wares sold, consonant with the universality of managerial function, with her work – in ideal conception – detached from any particular commodity, so that, she thought, her workplace may construct the commodity, the commodity may be

fabricated, or the commodity need not be built at all, for concrete things would not impinge on the abstract image of labour, which remained persistent and invulnerable and imagined with comfort, as the train decelerated once more, there approaching an insubstantial station, where it halted to permit a handful of commuters to alight in exchange for fatigued passengers, who boarded and shuffled towards Zara, where her eyes danced over a huffing middle-aged man and his dog – both damp to the flesh – beside a smartly dressed woman whose feet were propped against the opposite seat and whose face stared darkly to her phone, transfixed in the tedium of a mobile television, which depressed Zara to the extent that she turned therefrom, looking to the cabin's quietude, wherein the suited possessor of transgression remained absent, their surrogate laptop tauntingly present as she contemplated his disappearance, the most obvious explanation of which, she thought, involved bathroom emissions, though this seemed unlikely as the journey wore on, since at least thirty minutes had elapsed since the departure, prompting her to suspect he had fallen ill, or had exited, yet the smug attendance of the computer spoke otherwise, its foul exhibition steadfast and magnetically drawing Zara's energies thereto, as her ruminations exasperatingly returned to the instructions beside her, as she thought of the painful ingestions and humiliations and mutilations outlined, which inexorably

bleached her mind of work, frustrating her in the recognition of intellectual impuissance, which she sought somehow to justify, calming herself with the idea that this incontinence served greater purpose, in its capacity to present novelty and newness and to offer material to surmount, such that the diversion conformed to the perennial gale of creative destruction; it cannot be understood irrespective of it or, in fact, on the hypothesis that there is a perennial lull, she thought, rather, the chaotic tide of mental tumult conducted her intellectual maturation; and so, with doubt temporarily appeased, she abandoned thought to musings and to dreams, images of violent authors and obscene prose falling forth, as the sententious speech of self-discipline fell silent and associative chaos claimed control, Zara there entranced in concatenated questions of psychic progression and suffering, of word and of action, and of authorship and life, such that she attempted to recollect the increasingly distant appearance of her neighbour, whose countenance had since veered over oblivion's declivity into darkness and was lost to the hollows of memory, overwhelming her with desire for his return, to quench remembrance's thirst and to ground the restlessness of imagination, provoking her to look once again to the carriage, over each visible seat and through the valley-like aisle, to where she saw no one of appropriate age or attire but merely the same carousel of wearied bodies, either slouched or

stirring, attentive to the news that train was to reach its terminus, such that bags were taken in hand and scarves were wrapped neckwards, the space beset with a diffuse and trembling movement, accreting, as if to contrast with the laptop, which remained bonded to the scratched formica table, atop which it would remain, obstinately projective and candescent to journey's end, whereupon neither owner nor user nor thief emerged to lay claim thereto, the object and its contents suspended in an odd condition of non-property and inertia, so that it went disregarded by all but Zara, who elected to inform neither lost property nor the train service of its ownerlessness – deterred by fears of misattributed authorship – as she continued to think without acting, and without any intention thereof, reflecting silently on her evening's encounter as she departed the slumbering train, her inner vision replaying the text's barbarism in a manner that would grow familiar, habituation inuring her to the shadow of perdition, which would surface, involuntarily as a chronic facet of daily life, its sadistic imagery repeatedly returning in the weeks and years ahead, when at home and at work, reflection spiralling its silent katabasis with interred torment bellowed within, its cruelties unfolding in secret and obscurity, indifferent to circumstance, present when with friends and when alone, insistent through joy and through grief alike, in both the anguish of bereavement and the ebullience of childbirth,

the violence incessantly rumbling with neither reprieve nor development, such that Zara would endure a perpetual disharmony for the remainder of her life, deprived of the comforting semblance of reconciliation, as pulses of intellect and material declined all alignment, their consonance broken by a self-division, whose instigator resided consistently and contently out of view, accomplice to the power of repetition, demanding, resolutely, again and again and again and again.

Digital model  
2019





Front



Back

Lodged in the plastic smother of an over-stuffed leatherette, its soft swivel eliciting a synthetic crunch, Tân reclined to apprehend the screens before him, his arm extended and palm outstretched to enclose a corded mouse, with wrist twitching to flit between desk-perched monitors, between the various camera feeds therein, such that the cursor animatedly zigged, insect-like, across transmissions, from shopfloor to hallway to a busying canteen, giddily gliding before it hovered, static, as attention turned to the wall-mounted monitors above, each proffering a further vision of the building's perimeter, stamped with date and time and spread, vivid and pavonine, as if to hold Tân captive in the flickering glow, his body there motionless, awash with electric lustre, eyes agleam before computer and broadcast as factory forms refracted through lens and camera and were transmitted to the office, where, calmly, they mounted as blue-stained sediment, their delay – their minute schism from space – carted as the ineliminable distance of the past, undetectable in action's seemingly live flow, in which the day's routine unravelled, progressing to enrapture, each channel working its spinneret to unfurl presence upon Tân, who, fixed thereby, rolled his vision from display to display, until, abruptly, he beheld his own torpidity, there aghast at the engrossment induced, so that, with a severe, gnawing sense of professional duty, he righted himself to scrutinise content: it was said that analysing pleasure, or beauty,

destroys it, and that was Tấn's intention, affirmed as he strove to puncture his attraction and reclaim a less affect-saturated competence, dutifully scanning the depicted workers to bounce between mingling and menial labours, hoping to legitimate his viewerly indulgence with identification of another's impropriety, his eyesight roaming, guided by the screen's formal constancy: a rectangle is a shape itself, he thought, it is obviously the whole shape; it determines and limits the arrangement of whatever is on or inside of it, such that he could rapidly scan acres of LCD expanse, focusing only on content, searching until he halted at an image of a corridor, in which two men loitered, both feverishly bouncing from foot to foot and hunched, there spectating a mobile phone, angled toward the camera in a manner that prompted Tấn to draw the feed to the fore of his desktop and to zoom thereupon, there startled by the recess transpiring, magnifying the scenario in increments – by ten and twenty percent – as, gradually, he revealed their focus to be a pornographic video, illuminated at arm's reach and depicting fellatio of an oversized penis, with its further enlargement disclosing a chestnut stomach and thigh, framing the screen's top and right side, so that Tấn eventually realised the workers were watching an animal's – seemingly a horse's – stimulation, its member gripped yet sliding against a performer's face, the slimy, repugnant wetness eluding control until the scene

cut, the two men still transfixed and visibly excited as the subsequent shot revealed the identical subject, there unclothed and leant exaggeratedly forward, parting their buttocks as the animal was ushered theretoward, its handler propping the creature's forelegs upon some sort of makeshift stand before its penis was grasped, the rigid length gradually eased into the faceless, skewed performer, forcefully and slowly between their pert cheeks, until the beast slipped, eliciting what appeared as a scream, registered as the men stood back, lowering the volume as they repositioned themselves there obnubilating the obscenity, with one's broad back wedged squarely in frame, such that Tân could no longer discern the phone and so scoured the computer for alternative angles, for a camera that might reveal the display, searching until he seized upon a corridor shot, delighted as he again inched closer; though, much to his dissatisfaction, he found the device unwatchable, its screen obscured to leave only the workers visible, who inanely ogled, there entranced as they unconsciously dabbed their crotches and pushed palms there against, repeatedly rubbing, as if to sate some recurring libidinal impulse, which unfailingly returned mere seconds later, their pelvises flexing and gyrating upwards as hands lowered again, stubbed genital-wards whilst the two maintained their focus, unwavering until they caught sight of another employee, whose suddenly-twiggled approach prompted the two to scatter, hurriedly

pursuing opposite directions, such that Tân – aroused – deliberated upon which to follow, there loading images of adjoining passages before concluding that he should instead rewind to identify the pair, whose profiles eluded immediate recognition but which could be verified against the database, once paused, with a clear and focused frame isolated, so that he sought only a single photograph, of a crisply captured countenance, deftly inputting the requisite muscle-memorised shortcuts, unthinkingly thumbed and fingered, until, upon doing so, upon final release of keys, an error message arose, emanating to startle and grate in proclamation of reversal's failure, the obnoxious clangour repeated as the self-same buttons were depressed once again, Tân there aware he had missed the chance for identification, his internalised sense of discipline kindled – weighted in the leaden inland of consciousness – as he rued his hesitancy, in his voyeurism and his inactive surveillance, such that he fell overcome with guilt at his inaction in the present, at his reliance on the illusorily consistency of machine, there convinced that he ought to have known better than to luxuriate in the false comfort of the archive, for the true picture of the past whizzed by, he thought, and only as a picture, which flashes its final farewell in the moment of its recognisability, is the past to be held fast, meaning that only a constant vigilance would retain a grip on the chaotic flux of history, such qualities there summoned as Tân sought to

regain his professionalism – evoked to atone for his blundering oversight – as he looked to penetrate the semblant regularity of footage and to demonstrate his worth, his sense of corporate validation felt absent yet wanted whilst he gazed upon the canteen’s placidity, and upon an almost empty exterior wall, innocuously speckled with the first soft spots of snowfall as he looked to the shopfloor, in scrutiny of which, he resolved, he would settle for nothing less than the concrete analysis of concrete situations leading to concrete actions; silence is assent, he thought, and he sought to find malpractice, through identification of tardiness or poor technique, much as he found none, there observing only the rhythmic grind of productivity, implacably driven forward and relentless in its parsimony, as if engineered to emphasise Tân’s ineptitude, with his incompetence exaggerated by the standard displayed, for once efficiency is universally accepted as a rule, as it had been, he supposed, it becomes an inner compulsion and weighs like a sense of sin, simply because no one can ever be efficient enough, just as no one can ever be virtuous enough when confronted by such proficiency, the factory’s every facet there harmonised to maximise output, with contours moulded to appear natural, as if merely given in the ideal genesis of society; though, of course, Tân knew better, having overseen its refinement himself, in meetings and discussion and in endless detailed analyses of productivity and

profitability, of security and labour, because the enterprise continually faced the necessity of restructuring the production process, not only to reduce unit costs and to elude recessions, he thought, but even more compellingly to retain their hold over the class struggle, where continued victory demanded production's advance, bolstering its logic such that Tân was glad to belong to the managerial strata, and not only for the triumph, gleaned in enduring success, nor merely for the comforts this compact afforded; rather, the quality of the labour itself pleased, for Tân had always disliked direct contact with fabrication, his disposition ever-averse to physicality – in the sullyng contact of skin and product – because, he supposed, the world was full of objects, more or less interesting; he did not wish to add any more; he preferred, simply, to state the existence of things in terms of time and place, logging and documenting the toil of others whilst sheltered by the steady substance of data, whose comforts he considered, observing camera feeds and scanning the glimmering spread for several minutes, dutifully, before he resolved to enjoy a short break, secure in the knowledge that little of note would unfold, and that adjournment would restore professional capacities, such that, in retrieving his thermos, he approached his recess with a feeling of righteousness, oddly content whilst tea trickled to cup, there smiling as he spilled the occasional drop of liquid and unearthed a magazine, reading in



relative serenity, absorbing fragments of text and images, with gratification extracted from each of its photographs – from modern reflective interiors and bucolic panoramas – that were imbibed thoughtlessly, until, upon leafing to a picture of a politician, he found himself suddenly overcome with a strange uncertainty, unsure as to where the truth of such an image resided: whether it was in their full-face shots, or in profile, but – before answering – first, he thought, it was necessary to consider what an object was: perhaps, he thought, it was a link that enabled people to pass from one subject to another and therefore live together, but, then, since social relations were always ambiguous, since his thought divided as much as it united, and since his words united or isolated by what they expressed or omitted, since an immense gulf separated his subjective awareness of himself from the objective truth he represented for others, since he constantly wound up guilty, though he felt innocent, since every event transformed his daily life, since he constantly failed to communicate, to understand, to love and be loved, and every failure deepened his solitude, since he could not escape the objectivity crushing him or subjectivity expelling him, since he could not rise to a state of being, or collapse into nothingness, he must, he thought, must look around more than ever; the world, his fellow creature, his brother, the world alone, when revolutions were impossible and war loomed, when capitalism

was unsure of its rights and the working class was in retreat, when the lightning progress of science made future centuries hauntingly present, when the future was more present than the present, when the distant galaxies were at his door, this moment, this is had to be understood, by delving, somehow, beyond his ignorance, and, yet, the clock had turned, striking without remorse to signal work's resumption, there prompting Tân's neck to tighten, his back arching upon reminder, such that his body contorted to the whims of the closed circuit apparatus, to the omniscient, penetrative eyes of capital that, ordinarily, he regarded as a marvellous machine which, whatever use one may wish to put it to, he thought, produced homogeneous effects of power, which engendered progress, as the hitherto dark was rendered visible and dissectible and was deposited in the system's archive, wherein each momentary indiscretion or tardy arrival or inefficient misstep could be recorded, coldly eroding any sense of the purely personal, there grasped and controlled as mere data, with systemic perception thrown to every crevice of the workplace, both past and present, to remould the workers, so that Tân could observe the transformation taken place in the subject once they assume an image, much as this begat sense of wrongdoing, and of violation; though, he reasoned, the qualities of publicness or privateness are imposed on things: there is no innate realm of self-ownership, and certainly no proprietary image,

which was ultimately all one was before administration, for the whole life of those societies in which modern conditions of production prevailed presented itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles, he thought, the reality of which was not merely a collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated by images, so that in his interactions, in interventionary oversight, Tân saw mere images yet manipulated real, human activity, in the clear choreography of footage transmitted, whose rhythms and values he constructed, with focus fixed to its flicker, cemented, as if all of value would appear on screen, as if all that had once been directly lived was now diverted into representation, and as if the old laws of the earthly order would no longer apply, their strictures dismantled for the efflorescence of a hollow cinematograph world, into which Tân probed ever further, his eyes fervently navigating the building's walkways, in empty vestibules and endless staircases, with click and key to orient his passage, until, soon, he had perambulated half of the factory's floor, in a frictionless sweep, smoothly veering past machine and office, through order and efficiency, tracing the building's southern-most corridors, until he stopped, paused, before what appeared to be a lone, workless worker stood dumbly static, whom he assumed to be maintenance staff, there garbed in dark, multi-pocketed trousers, and with bucket in hand, their countenance turned from camera, with slight movements

manifest in occasional nods, delivered gingerly, as if consulting some superior beyond screen, to whom they gestured for approval, with each periodic, furtive communication followed by a prolonged groundward stare, establishing a bizarre back and forth ritual, repeated five times, insistently, before the worker eventually raised their head and shuffled to the centre of the frame, where, slowly and purposefully, they placed the bucket below their legs, positioned decisively as they shimmied forward to unbuckle their belt, unlooping its leather tongue before unzipping their fly, there pinching the elastic of their underwear and tugging rapidly to expose a conspicuously pale and hairless lower body, swiftly covered as they squatted atop the bucket, with jacket hem lowered to knee height, at which it remained for what clock and camera recorded as thirty seconds but which Tân experienced as impossibly elongated, the duration deepened as he gazed disbelievingly at the sight of quasi-public defecation, the worker ostensibly untroubled by any sense of shame or fear, excreting worrilessly as fluids fell egested, squitted in a passageway that could, at any moment, undergo the footfall of fire alarm or delivery, such that Tân expected the worker to flee once evacuated, though they did not; rather, they rose without wiping, standing with trousers and underwear at their ankles, their dirtied buttocks uncovered as they leant toward the bucket, unhesitatingly plunging their arm therein, in an arcing

scoop to retrieve a gloss wet stool, solid yet nitid, with liquid filtering through outspread fingers, spreading a small puddle of urine beneath their feet as they once more gazed beyond frame for approval, pausing momentarily and nodding before they tilted their face, there ushering their countenance forward, with lips parted and jaws open, to admit the faeces, accepted contactlessly – with eyes closed – as they paused, hesitant, as if undecided, as if mustering the resolve to continue, ostensibly faltering, until, with determination, they chomped down, the slopping mass of excrement breaking upon their palate, its first dense bite chewed aggressively, to elicit both retch and grimace, as ribs expanded and the remaining mess was hurriedly thrust mouthwards, speedily stuffed down throat to graze their front teeth, such that clods of acrid brown tumbled against their chest and dropped to ground, the fetid sludge smearing their chin as the stool went consumed, its minced mass sliding stomachward, completed, as the worker exhaled heavily with relief, relaxing, briefly, until their torso began to convulse, their head there darting forward, such that they seized the bucket from the floor and vomited, violently heaving orange and russet slurry, coughing, as if shouting, as they expelled the remaining spew, there hunching with palms against thighs and body visibly exhausted before they stared, yet again, to the same unrecorded location, presumably to receive additional instruction, from a real

or imaginary sadist, who remained obscure, but who seemingly imparted further orders, prompting the worker to return to the bucket, with face cloaked in resignation as they began to raise cupped handfuls of ejecta therefrom, messily attempting to eat once more and throwing the chunked broth between jaws, with the predictable consequence that – moments later – they purged the fluids, visibly pained by the expelled foulness, which, after another consultation, again with their absent master, they strove to ingest and rejected, disgorging the jumbled bodily broth once more, its colour flattened to a thin and uniform shade, there returned to the plastic vessel as a homogenised liquid, smoothed through its travels and disregarded as the worker collapsed to ground, defeated in the battle to retain their excreta, such that, despairingly, they nodded their acceptance, as if capitulating before some elsewhere-agreed covenant, cognisant of its consequences as they whispered inwardly in motivation, there disrobing to bare their chest and firmly – almost indignantly – pulling their lower clothes from their feet, atop and over shoes, such that their trousers widths snagged and stretched, their hem tearing before the worker stood all but nude except for boots, retained, as they inhaled deeply, their rubber-soled presence clarified as the worker sprinted to the corridor's end, pounding its concrete stiffness before flinging their person to the wall, their body thudding, shoulder and face first, as they

slammed with sufficient force to fall to ground, ostensibly unconscious, though somehow able to rise seconds later, with arm there limply dragging, as if inanimate and disobedient to the demands of consciousness, their eye swollen and nose bloodied, with a rivulet of red reaching to their open faeces and vomit stained maw, spat forth in a bubbled, corporeal gobbet that spread as they readied themselves for their second run, their feet leading and torso carted wearily in tow to approach the target, rushing, until – without warning – the video’s feed paused, abruptly halting, as the gallop’s progression froze, mid-run, as though mercy had there intervened to deny self-destruction its temporal prerequisite, the figure stuck, motionless, before the footage jumped, there skipping countless footsteps and frames to empty the shot, such that Tân, alarmed by the glitch, could only assume the worker had departed in the elapsed period, that they had abandoned the corridor to convalesce or, alternatively, to complete their suicidal pact in seclusion, with the video’s jump a remedy for delay, yet, whilst contemplating their absence, he saw that the worker, the self-same labourer, had returned, miraculously unharmed and fully clothed, with their empty bucket in hand, as they positioned themselves as before, their trousers falling yet again, such that Tân soon realised it to be an unchanged replay of the pre-recorded scene, the uniform voiding and expulsion and ingestion routine unfolding once more,

with duplicate acts of self-harm following in succession, its repetition watched until, moments before the figure's first ruinous collision, before the video's odd cessation, Tân resolved, quickly, to reload the feed, there hoping that refreshment might disclose the truth of the incident, in a contemporary feed of the debased procedure's aftermath, where the worker's battered body might be discovered prostrate in the corridor, or charging in the concluding stages of its ritual, or enacting some other condition, so that, inputting the requisite shortcuts, with fingers prancing over keyboard, he brought forth a livestream, which revealed neither injury nor mess, nor the worker, but only a bleach-clean hallway, dotted with meandering conversing bodies, with all sign of violence or transgression removed, such that, there, overcome with perplexity, Tân hurriedly moved to rewind, frantically seeking reversal; yet, once again, the error message emerged, prompting him to repeat the procedure and to fail, there falling panicked and feverish, desperate to overcome the malfunction, though with no recourse thereto, the system's dead chime reverberant, adamant and recalcitrant, as its peal sounded to confirm the past's succession, such that Tân concluded, amid his chairbound exasperation, that there was nothing to be done, the firm image of ten minutes ago was lost, both as object and experience, and he simply ought to have focused better, for what you see is what you see, he supposed,



and each perceptually engorged moment scurried by, with every lingering remnant endurant only at the cost of the present, such that one ought not to mourn the elapsed, he reasoned, but to address the present, there contriving possible responses to the worker's self-degradation, to their absence and the incident's strangeness, considered, as he scoured the system's cameras in the hope of locating their whereabouts, scanning eyes over room after room – through recreation area and machine station alike – with neither sign nor symptom spotted, where abnormality's absence prompted Tân to turn to the database of employees, to upload its register to identify the image of the worker, momentarily assured until – upon perusal of the record – he found himself unable to discern their appearance, their specificities somehow evanescent under examination, its detail lost as the index of faces fell suddenly homogenous, Tân there overcome with a sense of futility whilst he trawled its realms of indistinct photographs, scrolling without purpose, past machine operative and cleaner and security guard, before he abandoned the pursuit, disappointed, though resolved, nevertheless, to act in some capacity, concluding that a written report would suffice – if only temporarily – since managerial vigilance might later disclose the afternoon's events, he thought, with fragmentary patches of evidence compiled to smooth doubt's crest, prompting him to open an incident form with optimism,

cheerily inputting his name and the date and time before approaching its largest text-box – reserved for event description – wherein he entered an opening clause, which he retracted upon completion, there stricken with doubt, unsure as to how he should frame the incident and uncertain as to the style he should adopt, since, in light of the abnormality, his prose required plausibility, as otherwise recollections of the blunt mutilation and scatological feast might read as concocted, too fantastical to be believed, penned and submitted as an unprofessional joke or provocation or, worse, as a symptom of nascent madness, whose malignance, other's could only assume, would intensify, metastasising such that he warranted demotion or dismissal, so that he there pondered the means by which he might display validity, in a lack of invention, concluding that detail was vital, for only through a lingering fixation upon the otherwise insignificant aspects of the episode, in a micrologically fine elucidation, could he demonstrate the writing's veracity, in a precision sufficient to render any theory of confabulation unthinkable, so that he began to list the minute characteristics of the affair, noting the qualities of the worker's pubic hair, the textures of their vomit, and the precise duration of their defecation, among other trivialities, amassed, until he found himself troubled, worried that such excessive specificity indicated writerly indulgence, and a pleasure in grotesquery, in a manner that implied Tân was not only

a witness but as a willing voyeur, a sexually energised spectator, titillated by the literary recapitulation of the degradation, or, more worryingly, if distrust persisted – with senior management unwilling to concede factuality – the report might be viewed as the product of his perverse mind alone, with his personality deemed sufficiently warped and obsessive to have contrived its every obscenity, in every pornographic facet, without the aid of experience or workplace, reliant only on imagination or the recollected forms of home-viewed indecency, such that he would undergo professional humiliation, or even psychiatric assessment, were his superiors to think the submission pathological, should they judge it symptomatic of derangement or disorder, so that Tân felt reluctant to write anything, there confronting the document's paralysing whiteness, his fingers frozen, unmoving whilst he considered options, supposing that he might write and retain the account should doubt endure; though, irritatingly, he reasoned, he would be forced to submit some form of account irrespective of reservation, for had anyone witnessed the event, had it been recorded on mobile phone, or was evidence discovered elsewhere, he would undergo interrogation, catechised as to why he had missed or overlooked such spectacular and patent malpractice, with his professional capacities there rendered so undeniably inadequate as to beget sanction, or demotion, his silence suggestive of either a negligence of complicity,

such that he hesitantly began composition of an outline, typing a plain and succinct idiom and denying himself the slightest floridity in his adumbrations of colour or expression, stoically attempting a dispassionate and workmanlike tone as he proceeded through vomit and consumption, intensely focused, until the portrayal arrived at the injury, upon which he commenced a depiction of the worker's prostrate beleaguered body, whose reanimation he had begun to outline, in coolly explanation of its movements, before, abruptly, he paused, puzzled as to whether to describe the video's replay or not, for, strictly speaking, he thought, it ought to be reported as a technical failure – and addressed through the correct administrative protocols – yet his inaction was only explicable in relation to the system fault, in the context of an inability to rewind, such that he chose to pen a cursory sentence thereon, reflecting as he did on the strange coincidence of malfunction and narrative, whereby the worker's act had replayed from an apparent beginning, restarting at the precise moment the bucket was positioned, which he construed as oddly deliberate, with the idea of its random alignment felt increasingly implausible, so that Tân suspected his viewing of manipulation, thinking that a prerecording had been implanted into the camera stream, inserted as a joke or hoax, in which it was contrived to elicit his report and humiliate before his supervisors, though, equally, he conjectured, it could constitute the

work of supervisors themselves, deployed as a trial, with its strangeness orchestrated to test his acumen, to examine his abilities under pressure, much as it seemed unlikely; yet it could not be discounted; and so, beset with uncertainty, with chest and shoulders inflating, Tân scanned his words and considered the correspondence between video and text, there contemplating his narration and the status of the watched performance – in its mediation by camera and screen and prose – ever alert to their intrusions and to the specificities of the soundless image, which he had heard with his eyes yet not seen with his ears, such that its mute incompleteness fell translated to a writing inescapably divorced from referent, its textures unique, unliterary though unmistakably authored, to leave a stilted inelegance, oddly alien to the lived vibrancy of the observed, and morphing and diminishing in content, with word fleetingly dislocated from function to induce an uneasy self-awareness whilst his professional reluctance persevered, causing the comforts of inactivity to grow distant, there elusive as the clock persisted, the imperative to respond rendered increasingly urgent, and its undertaking required, but unforthcoming, as Tân shuddered with indecision, wheeling his chair backward in temporary retreat from the computer, where he swivelled leftward to observe a screen-free wall, the mellow blankness of which, in all its dark painted ordinariness, he hoped, would proffer abstractive reprieve, the

emptiness sufficient to permit reason's ingress once again, whereupon a conclusiveness might return, restored in the form of salvific epiphany or a gradually indubitable deduction, though it did not, and no such denouement arose; rather, Tân merely shifted back and forth from his workstation, recurrently observing and flinching from the report, in a pattern repeated over several hours, each visit contributing the occasional clause or refinement, with grammar amended and adjectives added, though without resolution, so that its word count bloated and the afternoon elapsed, the workers there departing their stations to collect their possessions, gradually emptying the shopfloor as bodies trickled beyond the factory confines, buoyantly destined for the instauration of home, such that he eventually gazed on images of an inert, labourless workspace, with vision fixed to the lifeless threat of machinery, whose glib form fell somehow estranged by toil's absence, obstinately enduring through dullness to taunt Tân, who, unmoved, faced his writing once more, downcast at the necessity of decision, and challenged by the ungainly excess of the day, such that he retreatively closed his eyes, there attempting to engender the comfort of an objectless blackness, in which he hoped to find nothing but conceptless sensation, desiring the dumb intuition that was not begotten, with his efforts inadequate as thought and memory – and their conjuncture – ever gathering discourse and

**image, and discourse and image, ever repeating and ever consistent,  
their march congruent with the ferocity of labour and of history,  
which would deny all concord and would brook no compromise.**

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