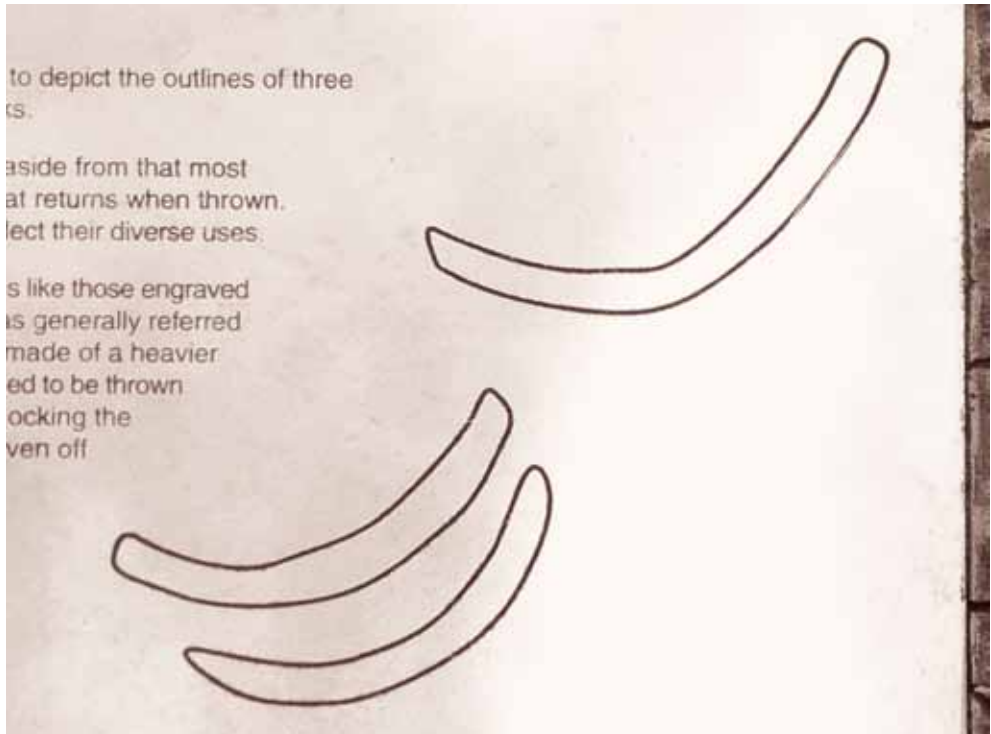




OFFCUTS

1.



While on a bushwalk I watched three American men – dressed in blue, red and yellow T-shirts – discuss and argue about the Aboriginal rock carving they were looking at. As one man (blue) demonstrated what the drawing was of by walking around its edges, the other (yellow) yelled at him to get off the ‘sacred site’ while the third man (red) read out the information on the accompanying placard. After two or three minutes they moved on to the next carving.

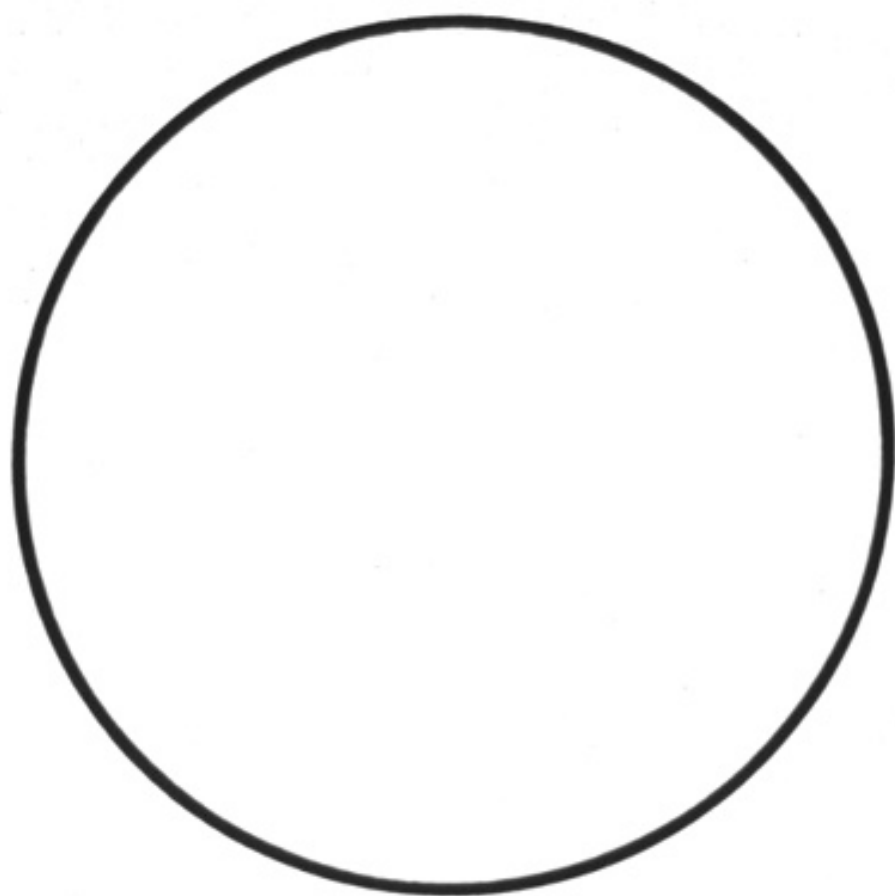
2.

During my first year at art school I worked in a bottle shop where one of my duties was to deliver wine to local businesses or customers' houses. One day I delivered several cases of wine to a Bangladeshi doctor, a new customer, in a nearby suburb, L_____. He had recently moved into a house perched on a rocky cliff rising steeply above a main road.

Since early childhood I had marvelled at this house – perched all alone like the gatekeeper to some invisible castle – when passing as a passenger in my parents' car. The man warmly welcomed me into his home before taking me out on his balcony; as I stared down at the noisy traffic the man was telling me how happy he was with his new home and in particular its “very beautiful” view. I nodded in agreement while suddenly feeling the strangeness of a word like beauty.

A few minutes later, when I told him that I was at art school, he began revealing his plans of commissioning an artist to make a crucifixion for his new house. With big eyes he asked if I would like to be this artist. His vision for the work was very particular – something like a three-dimensional painting, but “not too big”. I noted his passion with curiosity, not knowing how to respond to his offer; I was still intoxicated by the traffic below.

It was strange to suddenly be in a house I had always looked at – now looking down at the passing cars where many drivers and passengers showed the surprise I would have once shown to be seeing people up here.



3.

On a hot spring day when leaving the gallery I exhibit my work in, I noticed a pile of household objects and rubbish on the nature strip next door. The goods had obviously been removed from the small semi-detached house from which issued noises suggesting a clearing out. I crouched to look in the pile where I found collections of personal documents and letters – all showing the European name T____. The documents went back to the 1950s and I concluded that this man was recently deceased.

After some digging through the pile I took an alarm clock, a tray of slides and a photograph showing an aeroplane about to take off. As revealed by the propeller in the foreground, the photo had been taken through the window of another aeroplane.

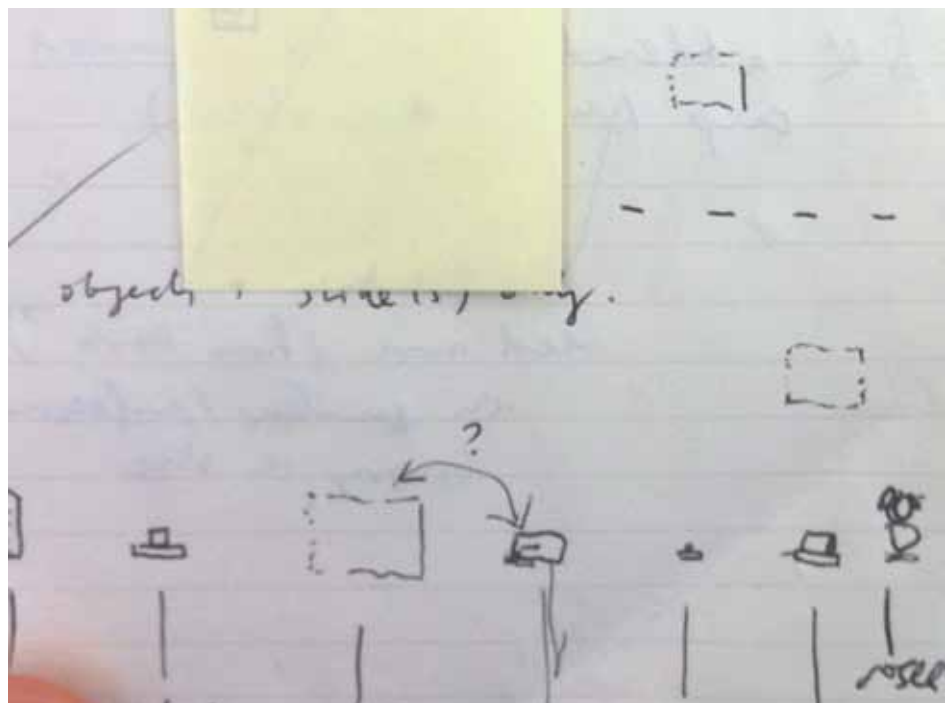


After borrowing a slide projector I viewed the slides. Almost all of them showed scenes in a backyard: a man sitting at a table, a vase of roses, a wire shelf holding pot-plants.



The neighbourhood in which T_____ lived had recently gentrified; as evidence of this process many cafes and art galleries – such as the one I show my work in – had emerged. Some months later, when next visiting the gallery, I noticed a FOR SALE sign in front of the house. In the centre of the photograph was the same backyard as in the slides, only partially obscured by a SOLD sticker. The whole area seemed to be in transition; with its sales and departures it felt like an airport.

Since finding these objects I have moved house six times and emigrated two times. In each of my kitchens I have used the clock radio while the other things have remained in a box with assorted found objects. Leading up to each move I have encountered these objects when sorting through and ‘rationalising’ my possessions. On each occasion I have laid out the objects and considered how they might become a work of art.



4.

Since first visiting my wife's village K_____ some twelve years ago, I have received many perplexing responses to my being an artist. Initially this came in the form of confusion over not having set up an easel and painted 'en plein air' the village and its surrounds. The village and its surrounds, though beautiful, are in fact very poor and at times shabby. From the responses of relatives it was clear that art was a decadent and largely alien activity in these parts and therefore viewed with considerable suspicion.

On New Year's Day, during a visit about five years ago, I met the local priest who had come to bless the grandparents' house. I had been lying low upstairs, photographing a composition of buttons on a chair (for a painting) when I was called down to meet him. Learning that I was an artist he proceeded to ask if I could paint the church. Having noticed the peeling walls of the church I took this to mean painting the church rather than creating a painting *of* the church. Non-committal murmurs by my wife and her grandmother were made on my behalf. On his way out, after politely refusing grandma's Christmas biscuits, I realized my mistake when, smiling at me, the priest gesticulated the broad dimensions of the painting he wanted me to make.



More recently I was told a story by my wife's grandma following her visit to the local doctor's surgery. While waiting to see the doctor, the other women in the waiting room, having heard of my being an artist, began discussing me and what it was I do – or more to the point, what I don't do. Grandma presumably sat silent and blushing as these speculations took place; in a village it is seldom a good thing to be noteworthy. Interestingly, one of the women, also keeping quiet, was grandma's neighbour – a long-time enemy who at the height of their falling out was suspected of killing grandma's chickens.

To grandma's surprise and relief her neighbour and enemy eventually ended the gossip and speculation by saying that they, the other women, didn't know anything; I wasn't the kind of artist they were imagining but an artist "of the Academy".



5.

On our last visit to my wife's village of birth we went to visit her aunt in a nearby town. I had my camera with me and later noticed with surprise how consistent the colours were across a series of photographs taken between the village and the nearby town that day.







6.



She was a recently retired scientist who had just written a book. She was also a friend of my late father – they had worked together and she had sent my mother an invitation to her book launch with a note explaining that one of the characters in the story was based on her “dearly missed” husband. To the small audience she told the story of how the people she had sent the book to had all complained that there wasn’t enough emotion in her writing; for her, she explained, it was much more important to think through the brain than the heart. After her speech, a trio of string musicians played a melancholic adagio while she signed copies of the book.

7.

I had noticed the hand-painted sign for many years before eventually entering Leo's nursery.



I rang the doorbell and a man I guessed to be Leo took me through to his backyard nursery. He was of stocky build and possibly Italian descent; he spoke softly and with a slight accent. Everything in his nursery was arranged with great care and it seemed clear that this was where he spent most of his lifetime. I asked him if he had succulents and he seemed pleased to show me his selection, explaining the different varieties while picking out little dead leaves that had fallen into their pots.

After telling me to take as long as I liked he went back inside the house. I chose a few succulents – all considerably cheaper than the same ones to be found in bigger nurseries – before returning to his front door to pay and leave. Beside the front door I noticed a couple of big cactuses; I asked him what they were and his smile turned to a frown before saying “they just the small ones, I used to have much bigger...”.



He then told me the story of a man who had turned up one day and wanted to buy them, offering \$80 dollars per cactus. Leo told the man that he didn't want to sell them because he liked having them in his garden. The man kept showing Leo his money but eventually left empty handed and perturbed.

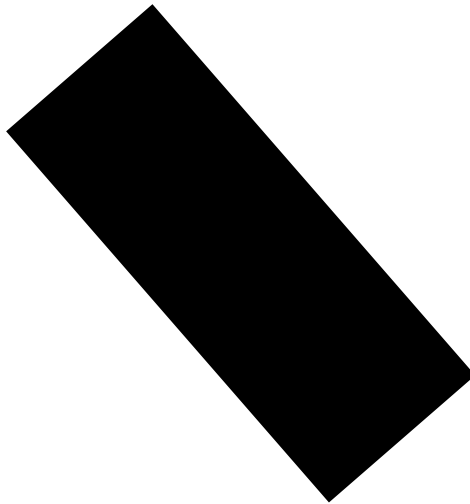
A couple of weeks later Leo returned home from an outing one day to discover the three biggest cactuses gone; he then found an envelope which had been slipped under his door containing \$240, but no note. Shrugging his shoulders he said to me “people like that...what can you do?” Given his evident affection for the plants I was surprised that he wasn't angrier but it seemed in keeping with his gentle and friendly manner.

One night many months later Leo was watching a popular “Urban Guerrilla Gardening” show on television, with his wife, when he noticed his cactuses on a decorated median strip, the feature of that episode. As he described this I realised that I knew of the place he was talking about, having on many occasions waited at the traffic lights where the cactus and corrugated iron cow installation remains. Each time, I had found the urban garden-cum-art installation both ugly and annoying, which only made me feel more enraged by the story I was hearing.



I told Leo that I knew where his plants were and that we should go and get them back; he showed interest in this but said “I just want to see them”, showing no signs of anger. I found his willingness to forgive the man who took his favourite plants, for a few minutes of fame, noteworthy. Remembering the story makes me think of it as some kind of morality play about art: Leo being the good, humble and worthy artist and the other guy being the quintessentially bad or villainous artist. Observing my growing incredulity he kept on saying “I’m not calling him a thief, but...”

8.



Shortly after our arrival in the town of D____, after buying a car, we hired an asphaltting company to reduce the severity of the driveway's hump (which caused the belly of the car to scrape when entering the garage below the house). The owner of the company came over and made me drive and scrape my car once more to see how serious the problem was. He took some measurements with a wheel-operated measuring device before spray-painting two lines and the word 'dust' onto the part of the driveway where the car was scraping.

A week later a man turned up wearing an orange vest and spent about half a day laying down grit. I watched from my living room window as he carefully stroked the hump to make it smooth and even. When he thought he'd achieved the right slope he'd come and get me; I'd reverse over his new hump to see if the car was going to make it without touching; when the car scraped he'd apply or remove more grit. We did this four or five times before the car finally got over the hump with no contact. The man was relieved and said that some other men would come by later to lay the asphalt. He pointed out that the asphalt would slightly raise the surface and therefore only add to the car's level of clearance.

However, after the asphalt was applied the following morning, by a crew of four men, the car scraped once again when I tried to put it in the garage. I phoned the owner and told him; he came around the next day, got down on all fours and watched the bottom of the car as it went over the now smooth black hump. Looking a little defeated, he said that in order to solve the problem they'd have to take a square chunk out of the hump just completed – in the precise area where the car was touching. He was regretful about this outcome and disappointed that a neater solution couldn't be achieved. When I said that it was fine with me as long as I could use the garage he promptly spray-painted a white square, in four distinct strokes, onto the black surface.

The following day the man who had laid the grit came by and cut out the square drawn by his boss. In comparison to his earlier work he carried this task out quickly, with a loud electric blade, parking his truck for only two or three minutes before disappearing again. This left a square hole which looked very strange until a day or so later when it was re-coated and made into a more 'dish-like' black square. The men who filled the hole also seemed careless now, leaving behind the kind of streaks and stains which I had seen them carefully removing on their previous visit. After they left I went outside and reversed the car over the hump; to my relief there was no scraping; however, on reaching the bottom of the drive – the entrance to the garage – the car scraped badly, leaving the exhaust pipe torn and twisted.

All of this has something to do with art.



9.

Searching through the shirt rack at my local thrift store I noticed on the ground a small painting, its front leaning against the wall. I picked it up and read the signature of the prominent abstract painter (and art critic) from the 1960s and 1970s. After trying on a few shirts – none of which fit me – I took the painting to the front counter. The woman looked at the painting, scrunched her face at it before looking at me and asking: “what am I supposed to charge you for that?”



10.

While cutting wood with grandpa I was pelted in the face by small chips of wood; after an hour or so he spread his hands signalling an early end to our work. Grandpa walked off in the direction of the front gate while I gathered the wood we had cut.

Beside the saw, through the gaps in the fence I could see some people next door. They were referred to by grandpa as “town people”. They were in their late sixties – he was short and tanned, she with large shoulders – and came here very occasionally during their holidays. The man had inherited the house a few years ago and since moving their possessions in, including a microwave, television and barbeque, they had been burgled several times. Now they were making the most of the sunshine: sitting in their underwear on freshly trimmed lawn, drinking beer. From their radio I could just make out a strange, rendition of “Imagine” in local tongue. As a whole, and from the perspective of the shed I was in, the scene formed something of an old fashioned summery idyll.

Grandpa would be in the bar now, talking to the owner. No longer the notorious drinker he once was, he would be licking an ice-cream – a recent addition to the bar menu – and no doubt telling one of the long and meandering stories he had gleaned from his afternoon hours looking through the front window.

I was clearing some wood in the yard when grandpa returned; on entering the gate he took out the three or four pieces of junk mail just dropped in the mailbox, before taking a seat on an upright log beside the pile of wood I was stacking. I noticed through the corner of my eye that he was transfixed by a page of swimming pools: chemical blue shapes with little piggy-pink models that seemed utterly alien amid the dusty mid-tones of this yard.

Since first visiting the village I’d observed grandpa’s fetish for ‘new’ things, as revealed by his response to advertising but also to anything new I might bring with me, such as a pair of sneakers or camera. Perhaps this was at least partly due to the backdrop of the Soviet occupation – under which he had lived much of his life. Here, I had to remind myself, the opportunity to own many ‘new’ things is still a relatively ‘new’ phenomenon.



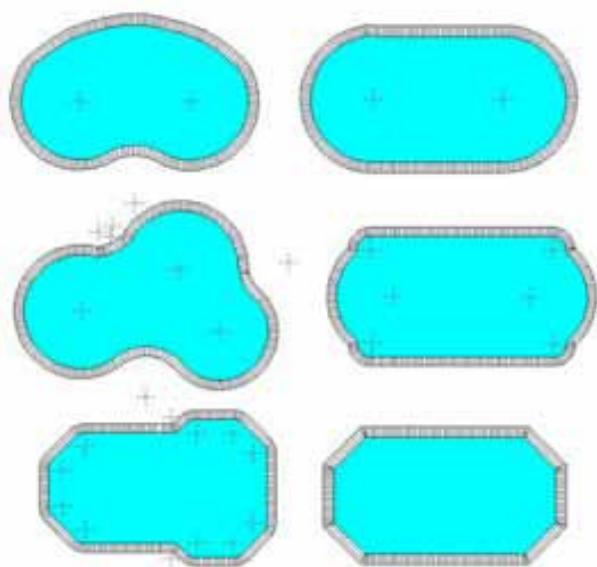
Because of grandpa's increasing infatuation grandma had begun screening the mailbox for such advertising as often as she could, while using a stack of the older brochures as his placemat: a slideshow of objects, ranging from pools to sausages and ice-cream, slowly played beneath his soup bowl.



While eating his soup above a page of outdoor furniture combinations later that night, grandpa told grandma he wanted a pool – joking that they only cost such and such Euros. “Gosh” he exclaimed as he remembered the strange blue shapes.

All the shopping brochures always looked so weird, I realized while listening to him, because there is absolutely nothing new here: everything in this house and village – including the old brochures he eats on – has the crusty patina or stitches of age.

Other new items I have heard grandpa ask grandma for (usually not joking) include: a pair of red shoes, a chainsaw, digital watches, sausages from Poland and a tractor to drive to church in.



11.

It was night time, the curtains were drawn, the television was ON; grandpa and grandma were about to watch a show.

By 10.30 that morning the thermometer had read 38 degrees. Most of the locals were hiding indoors – at home or in the bar. Sitting beside the television, through the downstairs window I watched the way the heat made every detail seem significant: the way someone walked, a straw hat, some orange shoelaces – also the near surreal sight, in this village, of a beard.

By mid afternoon there was the slightest of breezes; on the television screen I saw the reflection of the gently breathing curtain. It was daytime, the curtains were open and the television was OFF.



12.

The builder I've been working with paused while drilling into a brick wall to explain to me the merits of bricks. He was holding his hand around an imaginary brick, explaining that the width of a brick is what can comfortably be picked up and held by a human hand. Then he stretched his arm out and explained that the weight of a brick is just light enough to hold with an extended arm (5 pounds). The length of a brick is exactly twice its width, which makes them easy to stack. Then he said something about ancient Egypt and the origins of the brick but I didn't hear him, he was back to drilling the brick wall.

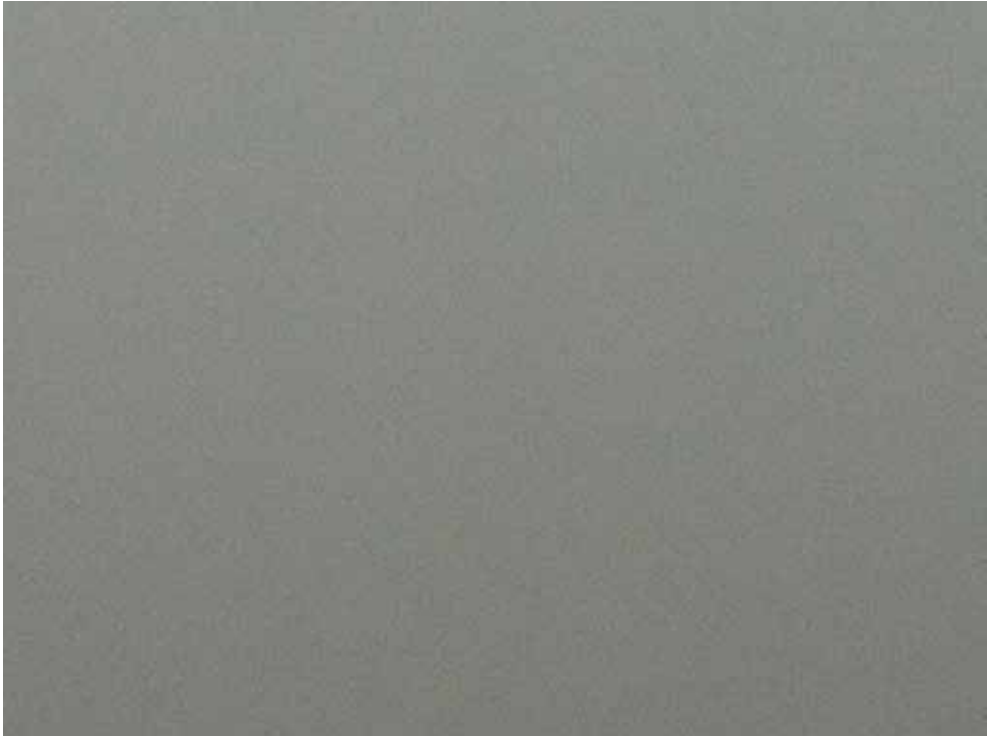
builder and his workman. The builder orders "Brick!", for example, upon which the workman brings him a brick.

We shall suppose that a child learns this language by being drilled. He is given, say, ten words, such as "brick", "column", "clay". In the description of this training is understanding left out? You will say the child must understand the words else he cannot be taught to react to orders. I reply, Certainly, if you like, just as a dog can be taught to look after sheep. A calf or cat cannot be taught; I could go through all the motions with these animals and would not get an appropriate reaction. Training can be described as consisting of two steps (1) the trainer's doing certain things, (2) the occurrence of certain reactions on the part of the subject, with the possibility of improvement. Teaching a language always depends on a training which presupposes that the subject reacts. If the subject does not react in a given case, that is, does not understand, reference to understanding will be not appear in the description of the training. But nothing is omitted from the description by omitting reference to understanding.

Now there is a certain preliminary exercise to obeying the order, namely, learning what to do when an order, e.g. "Brick!", is given. This is very close to what we should call "giving the thing a name". The mother puts a brick on a pile and says "brick", and then the child does the same thing. Notice that "brick", said in the presence of the child is not properly an ostensive definition, because in this language we have not yet the question. What is this called? It is a process of naming in a different kind of surroundings.

The question might be raised whether the word "brick" has the same meaning in this language as in ours. You might say that the builder means by it what we mean by "Bring me a brick". But this would be dangerous. Although these expressions play the same role in the two languages, in the primitive language the words "bring me" do not come in. We could imagine that even in English, although we said "Bring me so-and-so" for everything else, instead of "Bring me a brick" we said "Brick", as in the orders "Charge" and "Fire" in military usage. Then the word "brick" would play a different role from what it plays in the sentence "There is a brick".

13.



With the keys to our recently purchased mountain cottage and my wife away in Europe I invited a friend from Adelaide to come up and stay for a few nights. We took with us the basics for sleeping and eating but besides those few items the house was empty.

Our first day was a misty and drizzly one. We went for a drive to a nearby village and visited one of the many dramatic views on offer. But the only thing to be seen on this day was fog. (Do we see fog, I wondered? Or is this like negative space whereby we only see 'it' in relation

to the reference points around it?) Before the viewless view sat a young Chinese couple dining in a manner reminiscent of an Impressionist painting. But the painting they were in was unfinished: besides a tree, the railing and the pavement the canvas was blank.



Having visited this view previously I was obliged to describe it to my friend as best I could, using words such as gorge, trees, deep, plateau, ancient, bowl, vast. He half listened to me while seemingly itching to take a photo of a railing.



The following day, a sunny and clear one, we returned to the same canyon. We looked at the view (now a finished painting) I had tried to describe to (complete for) my friend the previous day. There were more people about, mostly taking photos and reading maps; in the car park a young bearded man was sitting beside his van playing a guitar.



We sat down on a rock where my friend spent the following twenty minutes engraving his initials into a rock covered in the inscriptions of many former inscribers. This took me back to my childhood: when we first met at the age of five we used to dig trenches in the rocks – already covered in trenches dug by former students – in the grounds of our school (carefully scooping the rock dust into bags, for reasons I now forget). I watched his hands, then looked into the gorge: was that not also a trench – a sublime chasm marked by the initials of its keen documenters?



14.

The woman at the front desk of the hospital told me to walk all the way to the end of the corridor, turn right, then turn left; the fertility clinic was to be found through the door on the right. I was a few minutes late for my appointment so I hurried along, past the patients on stretchers and tied to drips, and the accompanying family members holding plastic-wrapped bunches of flowers. On one of the walls leading into the laboratory I came upon a series of large black and white photographs of what I presumed to be sperm. Seeing them in the empty, fluorescent-lit corridor gave me the feeling of being in an art gallery.

Inside the laboratory a tallish Indian doctor in a laboratory coat was writing on a test-tube full of blood. I waited for her to turn around then told her I had a sperm test booked. She nodded and smiled, then handed me a small plastic container with a yellow lid and blank label pasted to it. Before handing it to me, while holding the jar between her thumb and two forefingers, she explained very clearly the importance of getting the first few drops of sperm into the jar. She then escorted me to a small room, pointing out the door lock, tissue dispenser and bin. The room was pink and spare: two chairs, a small coffee table and pile of 'girlie' magazines. I flicked through a magazine for a few moments before putting it back on the table; I noted with curiosity the changed aesthetic of pornography – less classical and more confronting – since my youthful days of secretly coveting such magazines.

I handed over my sperm before driving to another hospital, on the other side of town, to visit my father.



15.

It was as a ten year old, growing up in the well to do suburb Sydney suburb of M_____ that I first laid eyes on reproductions of nude women. My best friend at the time was an adept thief who introduced me to the art of stealing various items from local shops. For the most part these items included chocolate bars and sweets; my friend also prided himself on being able to steal two cans of soft drink. At about this time, while walking through the garden of a block of apartments near his house, my friend surprised me by snatching women's underpants from the hills hoist. He urged me to do the same and we did this several more times before being caught in circumstances I remember clearly but increasingly find hard to understand.

We were walking through the same block of apartments mentioned above; we took several pairs of underpants from the hills hoist before running into the lane behind the garden. At the end of this lane was my friend's house, into which we would ordinarily have retreated. But on this day we were sidetracked by another, perhaps stranger, criminal activity. Just metres from the back entrance to the apartment block from which we had just nabbed a wad of large, freshly laundered underpants, we were now obsessively involved with pasting stacks of business cards (from a box we'd discovered in the gutter) to a parked car. We did this using wet black tar; I can't remember where the tar came from or what it was doing there but I remember clearly the determination with which we were using it to stick the cards to the car. There was something elemental about the way we took to this activity – as if we were only now discovering the way things could be stuck together.

The car was about a third covered with the business cards when my friend's father – a heavy smoking lawyer who eventually ran off to an island of luxury resorts with his secretary – appeared beside us in his silver sports car. He got out of the car and approached us with what I can only imagine to be astonishment (at both the card-sticking and the underpants spilling out of our pockets) before giving my friend a series of hard smacks. I don't remember saying sorry to any underpants owners but remember clearly the time we spent using turpentine to remove each and every business card.

I was recently reminded of this brief stint as an underpants thief when living in the town of D_____ in New Zealand for a year. During my first few weeks there I came across an article in the local newspaper that told the story of how a man, living with his mother – whose

underpants had been stolen twice already – decided to take matters into his own hands and catch the thief red-handed. The man and his cousin spent an entire evening hidden in bushes surrounding the garden; sitting perfectly still and silent for over six hours, they were eventually rewarded for their efforts when the thief turned up in the early hours of the morning and was chased, then tackled, by the men before being handed over to the police.

My friend eventually moved into stealing porn, or girlie magazines. He showed me a healthy stack of them before introducing me to his artful techniques. At this stage we were far from masturbating. I can say this about myself with certainty but also about my friend who suffered from a urinary problem which landed him in hospital for one or two months a year (where I remember playing video games and drinking soft drinks beside his bed) and eventually had him permanently peeing through a catheter. My mother referred to the gravity of his situation, how it would prevent him from having children and sexual relations, but it was only many years later (after our hasty departure from this suburb and my subsequent estrangement from my friend, following the stock-market collapse) that I understood its seriousness.

I have a recollection of him broaching the subject of the magazines (which, in the schoolyard, would later develop into a business, where he sold the magazines at exorbitant prices to older boys), while we were standing outside a shed at the edge of his garden. Inside the shed was a medicine ball that we would occasionally manoeuvre onto the lawn before trying unsuccessfully to kick it. This was something we did when we were especially bored. After then showing me the new acquisitions it was only a matter of hours before I committed my inaugural pornography heist.

The preferred technique for stealing the magazines involved walking into the news agencies (where we had stolen many of our other items) and buying a newspaper on the pretence of it being for our dads; an innocent comment was sometimes made to clarify this to whoever was at the counter. The newspapers were located on a low flat shelf connected to the magazine stand and the aim was to get several of the desired publications into the newspaper while the shopkeeper was serving a customer (sometimes this involved one of us being that other customer – buying a few lollies or can of coke). As our confidence grew so too did the number of explicit magazines being inserted into daddy's newspaper; I think my friend eventually managed to get six into one paper. Saturday was the best day because the Saturday paper was much bulkier than the weekday issues.

Meanwhile, the stockpile of magazines hidden in our homes was growing to uncomfortable proportions and new caches were a priority. I discovered a secret cavity in my young sister's clothes cupboard that solved the issue at my end. The magazines were only briefly looked at by either of us before being stowed away; my memory of flicking through those glossy pages is of softly lit women reclining across beds and carpet, mounds of silky smooth pubic hair and whole page cigarette ads.

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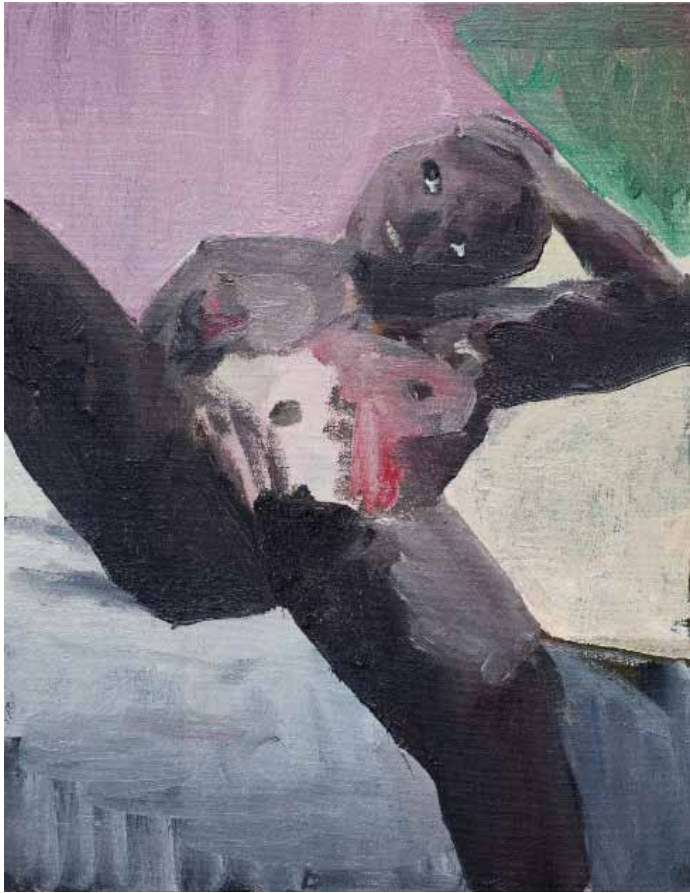


16.

In two weeks I have an exhibition of paintings opening. The exhibition is titled *Reclining and so on* and will include a dozen or so 'flesh' studies: men and women in various reclining or sitting positions, on and before varying surfaces and backdrops. The works were painted in response to images gleaned from painting and photographic history (E.M., the photographer well known for his stop-motion images, was the most utilized source). I am in the process of writing a short statement that will be included in a more detailed press release. Last week I was talking with C_____ from the gallery about the new works and a painting I exhibited last year called *Venus Painting*.

Venus Painting depicts a black woman with her legs spread. She is looking up – at an angle reminiscent of Annunciation subjects from painting history – while her hand looms ambiguously near her crotch. This image came from a daguerreotype, taken during the 1870s in Paris. Sitting in my studio one day I came upon it in a book on the history of photography. The image was far from pornographic; it exhibited the kind of poise and dynamism that made me think of modernist paintings. I executed my painting very quickly; I had spent the previous months painting still-life works from and around my wife's grandparents' seldom used dining table (in the village) when coming upon this explosion of diagonals. This was the first nude I had made or attempted to make since being at art school.

Venus Painting was later exhibited on a wall facing the still-life paintings; their being combined like this documented a shift in my work away from a somewhat funereal horizontality – as dictated by the tabula rasa of my wife's grandparents' table – into a period of much more impulsive, and flesh-focused painting.



17.

At the time of creating *Venus Painting* I was spending most of my time beside my father's hospital bed. Leading up to his admission into hospital and subsequent death I had been painting the still-life works while remaining preoccupied with some sculptures I had taken video footage of in the famous mountain range near my wife's village of birth.

The sculptures were made by local 'amateurs' during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. I had gone looking for them because of a book I had come across in a second-hand bookshop a few years ago. While their local 'professional' counterparts – working *after* the 'masters' – were being shown in museums, these sculptures, having been made for homes and small churches, proved difficult to find. Interestingly, unlike most things relating to art and religion they came into a moment of prominence during the Soviet occupation. By contrast, they are today all but dismissed; having been briefly 'upgraded' to the status of art, they now lie forgotten by the museums entrusted with caring for them.

I eventually found a collection of the sculptures in a small, semi-abandoned ethnographic museum in the spa town of B____ K____. The mineral waters of B____ K____ are well known for their curative effects ranging, historically, from hypochondria to cancer. Since its establishment in the thirteenth century the spa has attracted a number of dignitaries, including Napoleon Bonaparte's second wife Marie Louise, Duchess of Parma. My wife's grandmother also spent time there with pancreas-related problems in the 1960s.

The size of a small village, but full of once grand, now crumbling hotels, it displays the features I have become familiar with in most Eastern Bloc environments: bulky metallic and bronze sculptures amid decaying infrastructure, black money-run restaurants, and so on. On the day of my arrival the town was quiet and subdued – somewhat like an outdoor palliative care unit – as its patients soaked in the baths, strolled up the wooded trails or sat drinking the mineral water from specially designed mugs.

At the edge of the town, where the trails snake up into the surrounding woods, I came upon an ethnographic museum: peeling, closed, perhaps abandoned. In the open-air museum of folk architecture next door, I took a long shot and asked the woman in the ticket booth, whose smiles and manner defied the status quo of unfriendliness in the service industries of all such countries, about the sculptures I was looking for.



On hearing of my search and where I had come from, she gave me a set of keys to visit the museum unattended. When later returning the keys and thanking her she told me there wasn't enough money to employ somebody to manage the museum but insisted I tell everyone in Australia about it all the same.

In a small corner of the museum I found the Christ sculptures sitting, hanging and reclining in a series of oddly shaped, custom-built vitrines. The sculptures had a rare physicality; some were worn and bruised as if they were chunks of human limb. Like the patients (and infrastructure) outside, Christ was humble and vulnerable.

Five or six weeks later I was watching my father die. The cancer had taken over his body and his kidneys were failing. Between prolonged periods of sitting by his bed I returned to my video footage. During the final stages of his decay, my mind continually flashed back to the sculptures – one armless, bruised and yellowing figure in particular. It reclined in my mind, in its dust-covered vitrine, like a wounded animal, the anguished twist of its body becoming superimposed on the figure – also yellowing and reclining – of my father lying before me.

18.

Alongside the nudes in my forthcoming exhibition, I will show a video work in a separate room, about the religious folk sculptures, called *The People Will Be Healed*.

The gallery I am showing this work with asked me for a statement which reads as follows:

Thirteen and a half years ago I was in a life-drawing class – the rooms in which I first uncovered my interest in art – drawing the woman I am now married to. Between poses she walked past my drawing, clipped to a board resting on an easel and said: “that’s interesting.”

I would like to add to this statement by expanding on the pressing feeling I had when making these works; the feeling of being pressed upon by all those nudes and Venuses, by the memory of my father’s decaying body and by the small wooden Christ sculptures in the mountains of Slovakia.



19.

It had been a year since my father's death. It was a quiet Sunday just after Christmas as my mother, brother, sister and I stood in sprinkling rain burying my father's ashes. We were in a version of the same Waldorf education system school I had attended for thirteen years and at which my father had so enjoyed teaching Economics during the final decade of his life. After spreading the soil over the ashes I wandered around the small school and peered into the classrooms. I hadn't been in this or any other such schools since finishing eighteen years ago.

I was reminded of the shapes, always odd and lacking the familiar right angles of architecture. I tried, without success, to remember why it was that this philosopher, mathematician and occasional architect had believed that buildings shouldn't have right angles and later wondered how being in such an environment, always around such particular shapes and colours, might have affected the way in which I see and make things.





Looking into one classroom I saw a painting of a tree stuck to a wall; I was reminded of all the watercolour painting we had done as children. I tried, without success, to remember why it was that this particular form of painting was considered so important to a child's development and later considered how this experience might have affected the way I see and make things.



20.

Along a quiet country road, on returning from my cousin's wedding, we – my mother, my wife and I – encountered the following scene:

A large ute beside the road, a body lying face down in the grass directly beside it. Having passed the vehicle I looked in my rear vision mirror to see a second figure leaning into the front passenger window thereby obstructing my vision of him.

We pulled over and decided to go and have a closer look. We turned around and drove slowly back past the scene, seeing the following:

A large, mud-covered ute, a man's body, dressed in a light peach-coloured shirt and blue jeans, lying face down in the long grass and apparently unconscious. A second man was sitting in the back of the vehicle while a third man with sandy-coloured hair, dressed in a shirt stained with blood, stared vacantly at our passing car.

We pulled over once more, this time a few hundred metres further down the road. We all immediately agreed that we shouldn't return and offer our help; it seemed clear that if help was needed the man looking directly at us as we ever so slowly passed would have waved us down. Instead we called the police providing details of the above scene, our approximate location and the vehicle's licence plate number. The police thanked me for the call and asked me for my phone number in case they needed to call me for more information.

After passing the first time, the image seen through Duchamp's peephole sculpture flashed into my mind. After passing the second time, I thought of the UK murder mysteries my mother liked to watch (though less since my father died). In both cases I think it was the almost staged looking deadness of the figure dressed in flesh-coloured clothing in the grass that gave the scene the feeling of both art and one of those yet-to-be-solved murders.



Later, in the town of Y_____ we enjoyed a picnic lunch by the dark red-brown river. On the grass beside it some children played while their parents sat at a nearby table smoking. On their table was a plastic tablecloth brought along for the occasion. When we were leaving around half an hour later they asked us where we were from before telling us about the local arts festival which would be taking over the town the next weekend.



21.

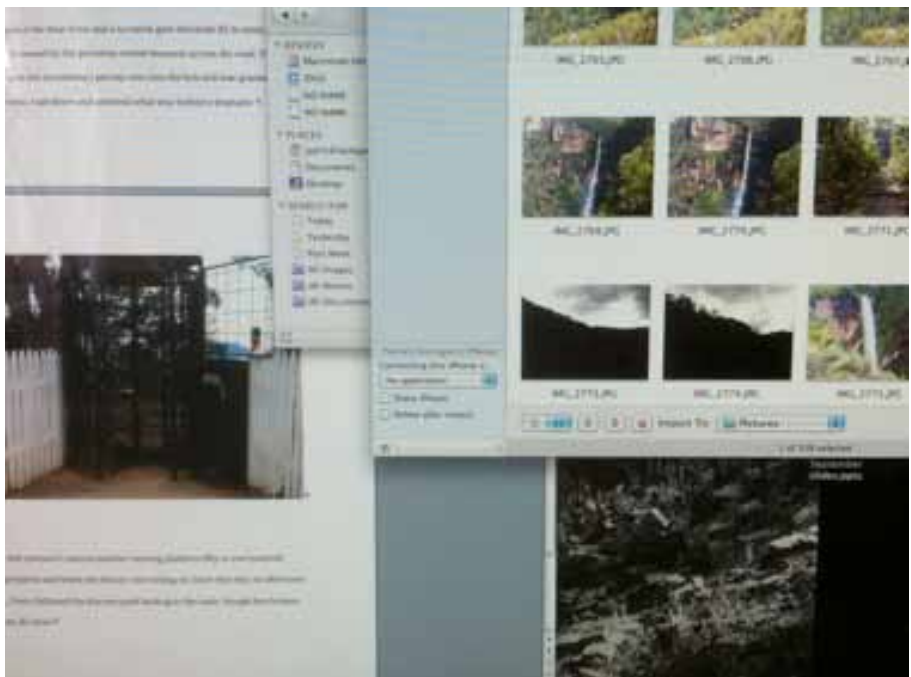
Yesterday on my afternoon walk I noticed that someone had made an entry hole through a barbed wire fence, running alongside the track I regularly walked down, using a plastic bag. I wondered why they had done this before continuing on to the lookout.



The sign declares it the Best View and a turnstile gate requires \$2 to enter. I think the land is owned by the private museum (which costs \$15) across the road. Upon first moving up to the mountains I put my coin into the box and was granted access to the view.



After a few minutes of admiring what was indeed an excellent view, I noticed another viewing platform fifty or so metres beyond and below the bench I was sitting on. Since that day, on afternoon walks, I have followed the discreet public path leading to the free view.



After seeing the hole in the fence I was reminded a few minutes later – while walking alongside the high fenced garden surrounding the museum (\$20 combined museum and garden ticket) – of the bed-time story most consistently read to me in early childhood. It was the story of a selfish giant who lets children play in his enormous garden before becoming sick and closing the gates (by the end he had reopened the gates but by that stage I was usually asleep). What I remember very clearly were the illustrations of dozens of tiny children sitting and hanging from the enormous trees.

The trees beyond the fence I was walking along were also huge. Most of them were pine – a detail noted by the friend I was with because of his keenness for mushroom foraging; he looked up at the trees and speculated that the giant fenced in garden must be full of mushrooms. Later, having found a dozen or so pine mushrooms in a nearby laneway, we went home and tidied them up before frying them in breadcrumbs.



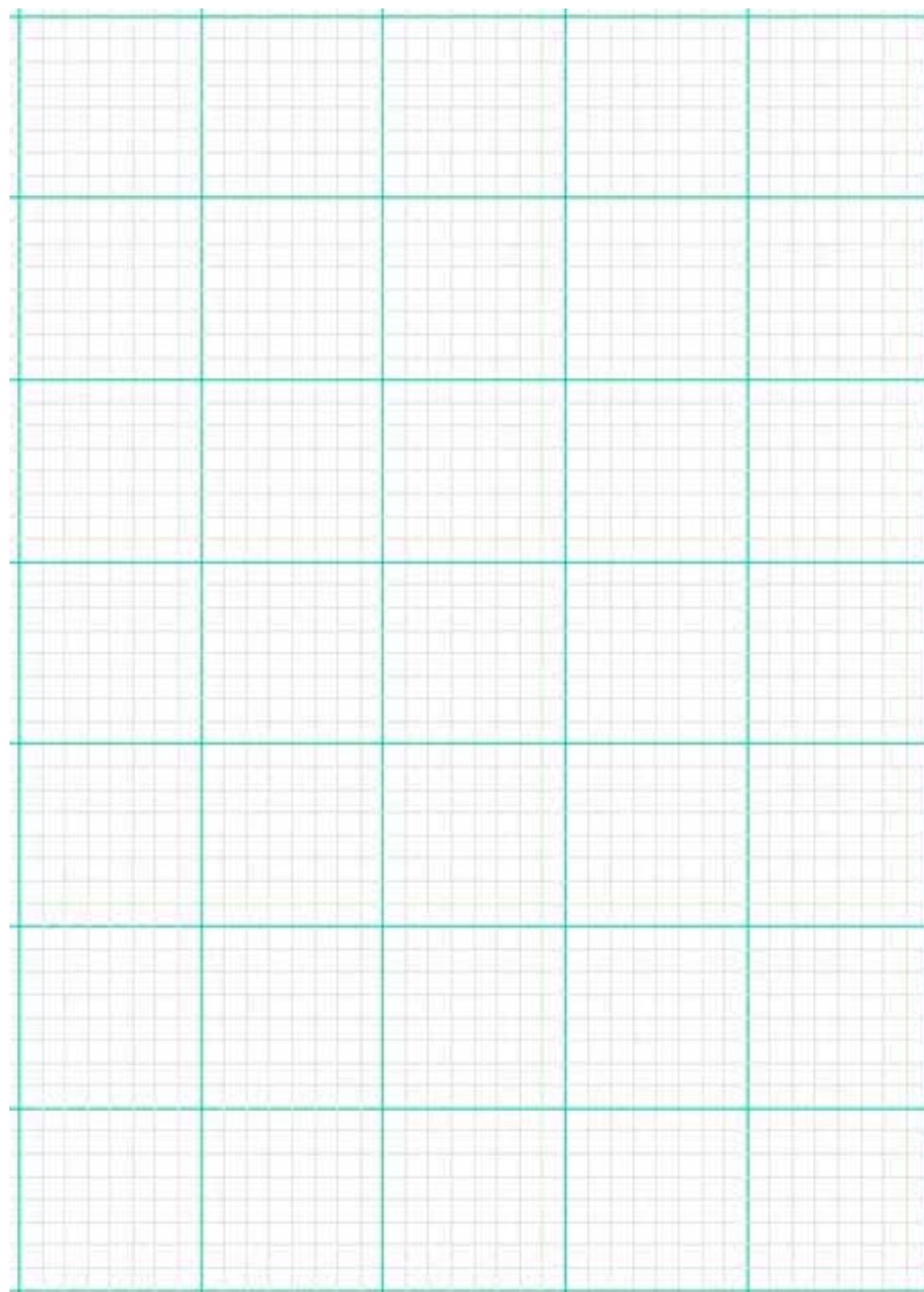
22.

I was killing some time with a friend before my train would take me up to the mountains. We drank coffee then visited a second-hand clothes shop where I almost bought some shoes (that were a fraction too big) before visiting a nearby art gallery. The art dealer, whom I'd met once before, is in her sixties and has been dealing in art for a very long time.

She welcomed us into her office – she and my friend knew each other quite well it would seem – and we began chatting about an artist now dead whom she used to represent. My friend asked if she was representing the estate of this dead man and she said she was. The word 'represent' was used on several occasions and with the non-presence of the dead man it hovered around, seeming increasingly odd.

My friend asked her how things were going and she replied that things were very quiet. There followed an acknowledgment by all three of us that things were indeed very quiet (i.e. not selling). I noticed that she had a mouth full of silver fillings that reminded me of a character – an enormous man with metal teeth used to great effect when killing and biting the necks of his victims – in a movie I watched again and again as a child.

She concluded the discussion on the state of "the market" by remarking, with a knowing smile: "but they always come back to contemporary art first".



23.

I went to see the doctor about a mole on my chest. In recent months my wife had noticed it growing and becoming less defined at the edges. The doctor firmly shook my hand before asking me what sort of work I do. I said I was an artist; he asked what kind of artist; I said I was a painter. He said that he didn't have the brain for art but his brother (who sold his photographs of landscapes via his web page) seemed to.

He measured my mole and said that he could cut it out "here and now" for me but was tempted to wait for it to get a millimetre or two bigger before doing this. He was looking at me blankly, waiting for me to choose one of these options. It seemed odd to be presented with options – both of which seemed equally plausible – in this context. Seeing my caution he made a joke about my being an artist; he hastily stood up and got me to hold a ruler to the mole before asking me for my iPhone to take a picture of it. "Keep an eye on it and come back when it's one or two millimetres bigger", he told me.



24.

Two days ago I watched a movie from the early 1960s about a recently widowed, upper middle class woman who falls in love with her gardener. He is depicted in the film as a man who lives close to the land, in lodgings amid forest and mountains built with his own hands – in isolation from the trappings and complications of the lives of the people whose trees he regularly lops. There is a crude reference in the film, in the form of a book sitting on the bookshelf of one of the man's friends, to the writer who famously documented his own journey away from the luxuries of city life into the woods a century and a half ago.

Over the course of the film, in contrast to the outdoors emphasis in the character of the gardener, are constant references to televisions. The widow doesn't have one and doesn't think she needs one while her close friends and children are forever trying to thrust one onto her. Eventually her son gives her one as a Christmas present; a large gift-wrapped item is proudly wheeled into the lounge room before the television is cautiously unwrapped by the mother. The son demonstrates the wheeling motion, explaining to her (as if to a child) that she can even watch it in the kitchen.

Yesterday I received a link to an article via email from my brother. The article was about technology addictions and in particular those associated with modern phones. The author described her increasing frustration with the compulsive and anti-social behaviour of people using their phones to check and record everything – as is now the norm in online social networking forums. She wistfully pondered that such trends might soon be reversed once everybody saw how disruptive and extreme they were. To illustrate her point she used the brief popularity in the 1950s and 1960s of the television being wheeled into the kitchen, before being wheeled out, as a trend, where entire families would have their eyes glued to it while eating their dinner.

I read the article on the tiny screen of my phone while sitting in my kitchen. I agreed with what the author was saying; my ongoing reluctance to participate in social media reflects these sympathies. I had also recently moved away from the city to an – albeit fairly urban – mountain village. However, after finishing the article I looked up and was reminded that I actually have a television in my kitchen. My wife and I rarely watch it and never while eating our dinner, but had decided to put it there – on a bookshelf without any wheels – because it is the warmest room in an otherwise cold house.



25.

On an afternoon walk, about half a kilometre from our house, we came across our neighbour – the Korean man from across the road. We could see him from about a hundred metres away; he was holding a take away cup of coffee, which he always seemed to have at this time of day. We watched as he carefully placed the coffee onto the grass beside the road before standing in the middle of the road and pointing his phone away from us to take a photo.

We greeted him when passing and had our usual three-minute conversation. I asked him what he was taking a photo of and he said that it was the big trees; he liked to put photos of huge trees on his Facebook page for his friends in Korea. I looked up at the huge row of pine trees he was referring to. He explained that in Korea all such old trees were extremely rare – national treasures in fact – following the Korean War. “All trees – gone”, he said, indicating the mass razing of trees with a slow sweep of his right arm.

My wife then told him about the huge tree in our garden, which he said he could see from his house. He thought it was an oak tree because our house is called Acorn Cottage, but we told him it was in fact a cedar. He asked us if we were going to chop it down and we explained that we weren’t allowed to because very old trees were protected by the council. He then explained that when he bought his house the backyard was like a jungle. He spent \$10,000 chopping down trees and completely clearing it (mentioning something about not being able to know whether somebody could be hiding in there) to make a lawn. “Flat space,” he illustrated with another sweep of his arm: “my taste”.



26.

I was asked to give a small talk about my recent exhibition. Standing in the space, in front of two paintings, I explained my interest in the history of flesh found in both paintings and early photography. I said that this history – of painting in particular, as told through the museums in which the paintings hang – reminded me of a stage on which flesh is constantly piled and re-formed. I described the feeling of being in a museum room and squinting my eyes to have only the impression of being surrounded by this fleshiness. With difficulty I tried to say something about the trace left by this flesh; I had in my mind the creases and marks that would remain after the nude had got up and walked off the stage.



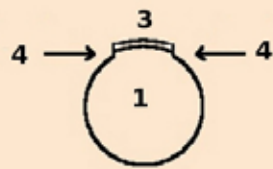
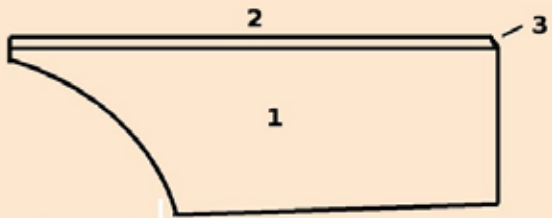
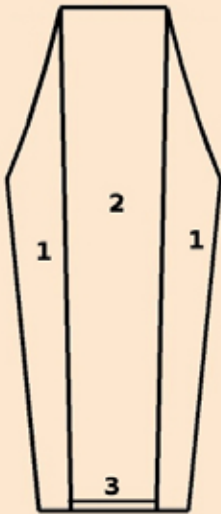
27.

Most children play the recorder for a year or two in primary school but in my case I played the recorder for eight years, until the age of sixteen. Close to the end of my time playing the recorder I gave a concert at my school. I was accompanied by my recorder teacher who was playing the harpsichord; we were playing a piece by a well known Baroque composer.

This was my first solo public performance, having performed with an ensemble for the past few years. We were in a large hall with around fifty people in the audience – presumably family and friends of other performing students. I was standing on the stage clasping my recorder while waiting for the audience to quieten when I became aware of my knees shaking. In slight disbelief, having never experienced such a sensation, I looked down and watched them. Then I looked towards my teacher to receive the nod to start.

My teacher was a small, mousy woman; the one time I saw her husband at their home, where I had my lessons, he called her Mousy.

With the audience now quiet, my knees still shaking, I looked towards my teacher and found in her face an intensity and sternness I hadn't been expecting. Her face was bright red, nearly purple. Poking above the harpsichord's music stand where a metronome had always sat she looked more mouse-like than ever. She might have been angry with me, I thought, for my shaking knees or for my having looked down at them and delayed proceedings by a few seconds.



28.

Next door to the cottage my wife and I recently moved into sits a small church. The church has a lawn that children play on after school. Since moving in we have discovered several plastic balls (red, yellow and blue) which have come over the fence and landed beside our shed. Today, while sitting here writing I heard another ball land in our side passage before bouncing down into the front garden. I went out and picked up the shiny green ball before tossing it back over the fence.



29.

Since moving to the mountains six months ago my sleeping patterns have become highly attuned to the night time sounds in and around my house.

At 11pm, after I have put a big log on the fire and when I am either in or about to go to bed, I hear the loud thud of a possum landing on the roof of the old out-house now wood shed in the back garden. A similar noise will recur soon after, by which time it usually wakes me, caused by the possum leaping onto the back section of the roof of the house; this is followed by the running footsteps of the possum up and over the pitch of the roof.

At 4am, after I have gone to the toilet, I lie in bed listening to the approach of a large truck that will soon arrive and unload goods into the supermarket directly behind our back garden. After six months I am still trying to picture the exact route the truck takes. The truck makes a series of turns before parking and having its door swung open; the unlatching of the truck's door makes a very distinctive metallic sound that never ceases to reassure me of the nearby presence of a working human. After ten or so minutes the truck returns to the highway and drives away.

At about the time of the truck's delivery I listen to the scurrying footsteps of the possum now running beside the house in the direction it first came from. There is occasionally a moment of sleepy panic when I hear these footsteps that quickly turns into affection for the routine creature completing the final stretch of its circuit.

During each chapter of wakefulness each night, my ears respond to, before discerning, the gentle creaking noises of the log I put on the fire before going to bed. At about 4.30am I am usually asleep again, the log all but burnt out.



30.

A few nights ago I was woken by a nightmare. In my dream I was walking to the toilet – as I do most nights at around 4am – when I saw a man out the back window; the blond-haired, thin faced man was sitting with his profile to me in a skeletal structure reminiscent of the paintings of a well-known post-war British painter, which are often described as haunting and nightmarish.

This structure, I now realise, was the shed without its walls. I understood this yesterday when, for reasons quite unknown to me, I took to demolishing the shed. My wife and I had discussed our desire to do this since first moving in but I hadn't expected it to happen so soon and so swiftly.

After removing the cladding from the shed I stared at the structure with a sense of unease: in addition to it having appeared in my nightmare, it only now occurred to me that I was destroying a very useful woodshed.

In diminishing light I took to removing the shed with increasing urgency. I pushed and banged on the structure until it fell to the ground. During this process I fell backwards, over a wood chopping block and onto the concrete ground behind me. I got up without paying any attention to my injury and continued my pushing and banging.

Later that night, while lying on the couch I felt pain in my back and leg. I lay there remembering my dream and thinking of the structure and the paintings it so reminded me of. The image I was now seeing had the dry, restrained brush marks of those paintings while the sensations and pains I was experiencing reminded me of the urgent and brutal way in which I had destroyed the shed and made me wonder if this had been in response to my nightmare.



31.

I was going to visit an old friend in the coastal suburb of H____. Emerging from the university, there were two options: left or right. I went right and, soon finding myself on the freeway, I knew I had taken the wrong option; I had wanted to take the much more picturesque, meandering coastal road. The conversation I'd just had, about talking or writing 'around' rather than 'at' things – art, objects or events, for example – was arranging itself in my mind as I sped up the straight, wide road.

At my friend's home, in her bedroom, I was drawn to a photocopied drawing on her desk. Seeing me looking at it she said: "It's for meditation...I have to focus on it until my eyes water."



32.

In my second year of art school I read a novel by a well-known Australian author, about an artist. I enjoyed this book and the author's other work a great deal; young and impressionable as I then was, its romance no doubt affected the way I viewed the life of painters. Interestingly, it was only minor details that became problematic for me when reading this book. In one part of the story the artist, depressed and impoverished, escaped the city for the countryside where he obsessively painted the boulders and rocks surrounding his hut. The author described the rocks in great detail but at the time I could neither imagine such rocks in the Australian landscape nor imagine how they could provide an interesting subject for painting.

A few months ago, driving along a quiet dirt road in the country, I came upon a landscape that I saw immediately was how I had apparently managed to visualize the landscape where this artist painted his paintings. It was strange to be confronted with something in reality I had failed to be convinced by in fiction; perhaps more interesting was to have awakened a long-stored image I didn't know I had created.



I pulled the car over and looked at the rocks. I then took a photo before noticing a very convincing artist's dwelling down the hill.

Since finding the rocks I hadn't known but which I had created a mental picture of, I have returned to this place on several occasions. Yesterday my wife and I decided to go and have a picnic down there – in the wide pastoral valley lying beneath the mountain range we live on. A few kilometres from the rocks, we crossed a small bridge under which ran a creek. Beside the bridge were four mostly moustached and possibly central European men in their 70s; as they packed up their painting easels they gave us serious and watchful nods of the head. "What do you think they were painting?" I asked my wife.

Having parked our car near the rocks we walked further into the countryside and came upon more rocks and boulders; mostly they were gathered around streams and mini-valleys that the track we were on dipped in and out of. We spread out our rug on a sunny ridge and spent several hours nibbling on snacks while appreciating the arcadian surrounds: rolling green hills, a cottage in the distance with a plume of smoke rising from its chimney, Willy Wagtails ducking and weaving through the branches above us, and so on.

Lying in the sun I reflected on an exhibition I'd had a few years ago (of watercolours, drawings and collages) called *Men and Rocks*. The individual works hadn't been made with the intention of having this exhibition; rather they were acknowledged as a group following an opportunity to exhibit with a gallery in New Zealand (an island full of rocks and volcanoes, I had always imagined). As a group they accounted for what was probably a month or two of time spent at my desk after finding an old book on geology in an op shop. In retrospect they look like thought experiments: how do I make pictures using rocks? It only occurred to me while lying in the valley that the catalyst for these works might have been the book I'd once read about the artist who painted rocks.

On our way back we pulled over to look at a map on a signboard at the intersection of the dirt road and the main road which would lead us out of the valley (on previous visits I had driven straight past the map). The map contained extensive information on the explorers who had forged through here some 150 years ago; amid the dotted lines and captions was a detailed sketch, presumably by someone on the original expedition, of a collection of rocks.

ROCKS



33.



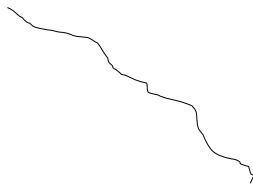
My wife has been developing vegetable garden beds in our new home. Each day she digs something up – a plastic ball with a funny face painted on it, a miniature plastic soldier, a fragment of asbestos and a marble, among other things. Once dug up these items are usually placed on the outdoor table where they might sit for several weeks, thereby being granted the aura of archaeological discoveries.

A few days ago she dug up a chunk of tile before placing it on the table. I immediately recognized the honey brown glaze as being the same as the tiles around our fireplace where there was a missing piece roughly the size of the soil-coated chunk I was looking at. Was

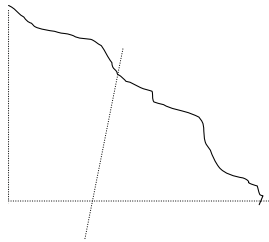
this the missing piece, and how had it ended up being buried in the garden? It wasn't in fact the missing piece but was of a size and shape that I determined could recreate the missing piece.

Last week, in response to my growing despair and disbelief about the paintings I am soon to exhibit, my wife and I compiled a list of jobs needing to be done around the house. My wife pointed out that it would be good for me to be kept busy with such tasks – away from the studio – to get my mind off things. Each time I complete a task we tick it off our list. So far it seems to be helping with my anxiety and morale. The tile restoration wasn't on our list but I was keen to put my hand to it. Hearing of my plan yesterday, my wife added it to the list.

This morning I spent several hours chiselling away at the chunk of tile. To get the correct outline I employed the technique of *frottage*: rubbing along the broken edge of the tile using a pencil and thin piece of paper.



I then cut this shape out and attached it to the chunk of tile before painting around it. With the piece clamped to a table I used an angle-grinder to cut the basic shape; the chunk of tile broke in two while performing this cut and I had to glue the two pieces together.



I then chiselled the finer contours before testing it against the tile. I scraped and tested like this for over an hour before I was content with the match. I then glued it in and noticing some chips in the glaze I went into my studio – where in a moment of frustration I had packed everything away – and mixed some oil paint to match the colour of the glaze.

While I was completing this task I was thinking about the paintings I had abandoned. It seemed to me that I was working with precisely the level of patience and commitment I was lacking in my studio. Crouched on the floor devoted to my task, I suddenly felt nearer to the grand history of painting; for a brief instant my mind was taken to all those chapels and frescoes.

After completing the restoration I stood back and surveyed my work; when my wife and mother in law came in and saw my satisfaction I suggested that we might celebrate with some champagne.



34.



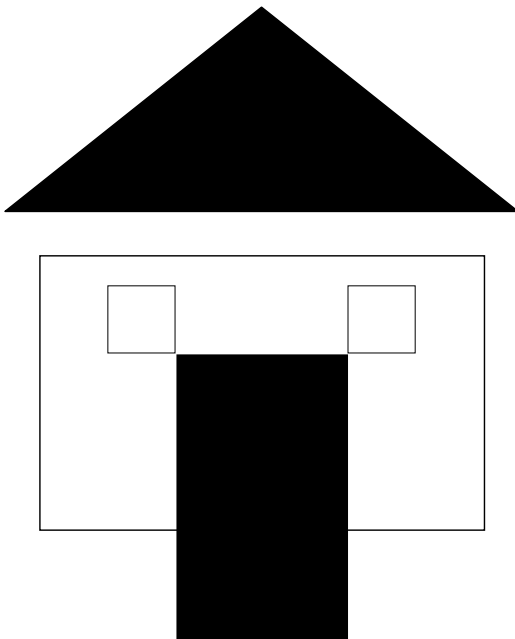
We were walking around the lake until the track ran into a marsh. We walked back for a while before seeing another track that took a wider berth; now we were walking through bushland – around the marsh and the lake. My mother in law needed to take a wee and eventually found a secluded place in the bush to do this. She caught up with us a couple of minutes later and I asked her “Is that better?” She said that her grandma used to say, about urinating: “There was nothing wrong with me berore, but now I feel better.” Back at the picnic area we sat at a table, drank our tea and wondered what these birds were.

35.

My mother in law has been staying with us; today it is her birthday. Just after dawn this morning her brother and sister called from overseas. They were in her brother's garden, drinking and reflecting on the funeral they had just attended. According to her brother the entire village was in attendance for the woman who had died in her fifties, who was liked by everyone, who was reportedly smiling when she "went" and who spent much of her adult life looking after the flowers in the church. He said he had never seen so many people in the village; when people started arriving at the House of Sorrow (the chapel in the cemetery) the rear of the procession was still back at the church – some 800 metres away.

Last night my mother in law was on the phone to her father whose angry and tyrannical ways have, with illness, given way to piety and fragility. (Related to this shift are the hallucinations he is suffering; when my mother in law last visited the village, he burst into the kitchen and declared that there were "naked black people" attacking him in his bedroom.) He was talking to my mother in law, imparting his best wishes, but very slowly because he hadn't been given his medicinal drops yet.

After expressing birthday wishes to his daughter, he started talking about the funeral of Maria (the woman who looked after the church flowers) that they would all be attending the following day. Before becoming ill this woman had worked as a surveyor and he was telling his daughter, slowly but with a twinkle of mischief, that her presence in heaven would be a good thing for the people of the village – for getting the land for their homes surveyed favourably "up there".



36.

We were standing in my friend's garden; he was picking mandarins from the tree. I was standing below the tree, squinting into the sun as I told him about my mother's cleaner. We'd just had an exceptionally strong cup of coffee and I was feeling the rush of caffeine through my system.



My mother lives in a very secure inner city apartment block that recently hired a new cleaning firm to do a weekly clean of the common spaces. This morning, she expressed her confusion and anxiety about the way the new cleaner was sending her text messages.

She said that they had had a short conversation in the hallway during his first week in which they discussed details relating to the building such as how to access the electricity room. He also told her about his recent trip back to his home country to attend his father's funeral. Sympathising with his loss my mother mentioned that her husband, my father, had also recently passed. Finally she told him that she might need a cleaner occasionally (once or twice a year) to clean her apartment and did he do this sort of work?

There were five messages that had all been sent since their chat in the hallway:

In the area do you want to meet for a coffee?

What time should I come?

Yes darling.

H r you today?

H r you today?

The first message came the weekend after his first week as their cleaner. My mother read it and immediately assumed that he had sent it to the wrong number. The second message came the day before his second day of work in her building; she was surprised that he was asking about what time to come because they had already discussed the fact that he could come and clean the building at whatever time suited him.

As I read the messages – closely as if there were something to be gauged from their wording – I could hear my mother talking about his van, his nationality and religion, his wife who had been with him the first week (and who wore a headscarf) and his having been subcontracted by their old cleaner. When she mentioned these things I briefly had in my mind an image of a desert which led straight into an image of war. Having this image while listening to my

mother made me think of my father sitting in his armchair, his right arm on the armrest holding a can of beer while he watched and commenting on the “dreadful” events being told in the 6pm news. I snapped out of my reverie when my mother mentioned that he, the cleaner, would probably be here (in the building) now.

The third message was in response to my mother’s answer to the cleaner’s second message. She had replied by reminding him that the time didn’t matter.

The fourth message was the strangest. Sent on the morning he was in the building, during his second week on the job, it stared up at me ominously. I was struck by the way he had shortened ‘how’ instead of ‘you’. The word ‘today’ sent a shiver down my spine. The message had been sent twice, presumably seconds apart as the time above the fourth and fifth messages was identical. My mother had ignored these messages but wanted to know what she should do if he kept texting her. She was worried because he had keys to the building; she wanted me to reassure her that he couldn’t get into her apartment with his keys. “No”, I reassured her, “he can’t get in here”.

In the garden listening to the story, my friend, a man of careful words, seemed amused by the messages sent by the cleaner. He reminded me of a movie we had both seen, involving a bourgeois Parisian man haunted by a culturally sinister moment from his early childhood. During the ten or so minutes of telling my story the sun had become blocked by a dark and heavy cloud. After my friend handed me a plastic bag full of mandarins I dropped him at the train station; he was going to work while I was heading to my home a few stops further up the mountain.

The mandarins are sitting in a bowl in our kitchen; when I see them I remember the chill that filled the air, my knowing friend’s smile and that terrifyingly close word “today”.



37.

On our way home from visiting my mum we went to the markets. I waited in line for a coffee while my wife bought some fruit and vegetables. We sat on a log in the playground belonging to the school in which the markets were held. I remembered a game we used to play on a log like this at school: two boys would stand face to face, each trying to push the other boy off the log. The winner remained on the log until someone managed to get him off.

Directly in front of us, we watched a man playing with his friend's two young boys; the boys were sitting on his feet with their arms wrapped around his legs while he walked around as if wearing an enormous pair of shoes.

Before leaving I went to the boys' toilet at the other end of the playground. I placed my coffee on the ledge of the urinal, unzipped my pants and took aim at the target.



38.

During a coffee break with the builder I occasionally work for we were talking about the way people remember things. As I listened to him saying something about racing commentators memorising horse names according to the colours and shapes of jockey silks I started to construct a story around our conversation; I was earmarking the moment of being in the café, sitting there listening to my boss, as the basis for a story about painting. I already had a title in my mind: painting within a painting.

Now I am trying to remember what the story was.

The word painting was mentioned in our discussion at least once. When he was talking about memory in terms of reference points, such as the jockey outfits, I was thinking about the surrounds in the café in terms of a painting made up of noteworthy details: red shoes worn by the woman at 2 o'clock, man with tattoos on his hands ordering a take away coffee at 11 o'clock, and so on. I think I was thinking: it is with these details that I will try and remember the conversation, the conversation from which my story – about the process of remembering – needs to be constructed.

Usually I have an image of something – a visual reference point or clue – taken with my phone to help me remember a story. When I started to write this story I looked in my phone but only found images of the work my boss and I had been doing in his garden before the coffee break.



39.

My wife and I were back at the fertility clinic where I had had my sperm tested six months before. We were talking to a fertility doctor who was asking us questions about how we live and how long we had been trying to have a baby. He asked how much alcohol I drank and whether or not I smoked. Looking at a sheet of paper on his desk he said to me: “well, your sperm is normal”.

He asked me what I did ‘for a living’. He was interested to hear that I was an artist and said he would like to come to my next exhibition. He mentioned that his wife was very creative but didn’t make any money from what she made.

At the end of our appointment I asked him if the pin boards I was looking at, on the wall behind his desk, were success stories. He said he hadn’t been there that long but presumed this to be the case. Before leaving I asked him if I could take a photograph of the photos; he asked why and I told him that some of the pictures, of mothers holding their babies, reminded me of the old paintings I looked at in museums.





40.

My friend invited me to attend a reading group. The group of six or so young men and women, artists and art students, meet one night a week in an artist-run art gallery to discuss a book they've all spent the past week reading. I turned up about half an hour into their meeting to find them discussing a book written about the work of a performance and video artist from the 1960s whose final piece saw him sail out to sea, never to return. I took a seat beside my friend on a hard wooden stool. I surveyed the collection of journals on the large square table in front of me; on one of the journal piles sat a paper sign with the word "discipline" on it. In the centre of the table stood a vase of native flowers.



There was an air of seriousness in the room as they discussed and considered the artist's work; of particular interest seemed to be the question of whether he was being a hero or undermining artistic heroism. But my overwhelming sensation while sitting there was of the noise and smell of everyone eating chips. It immediately reminded me of a film society I had once briefly been a member of. That group was made up of mostly very old men who could be seen in the front rows of the small projection room falling asleep and sliding down their chairs before the lights came on, when they would discuss with great vigour and in great detail the film they had no doubt watched many times previously.

Between films, or half way through a very long film, the group would convene in an adjoining room where they would eat chips and biscuits. I used to watch with curiosity the way one of the leaders of the group – one of the men who slid down his chair – would disassemble the biscuit before licking off its orange cream – the very same thing I had done to this type of biscuit as a small child.



41.

While digging in the garden of the builder I work with I found a marble. Looking at the small, chipped glass ball I remembered an incident from my childhood.

I was staying with a friend who owned the best marble collection in our class. Besides being a very good marble player he had obtained many of his finest and rarest marbles from his parents who would bring them back from their overseas trips. He had some Japanese marbles that were the source of particular envy among his cohort of friends; he never played with these marbles – mainly because there was nothing the rest of us owned which was good enough to play him with.

It was a Saturday afternoon and we were playing marbles in my friend's front garden. I was going to spend the weekend with him. We were playing some minor bets when my winning streak began and continued into some bigger rounds that saw my friend lose some of his best marbles; with every game he lost he became angrier and less able to time his shots. Meanwhile, as his agitation increased – noteworthy from a conservative player intent on preserving his wealth – I entered a rare state of athletic calm and steadiness.

Eventually I won just about every marble he owned – including all the Japanese marbles. My friend got up, looking at me with an expression of anger on the verge of delirium, and told me to go home. He then walked inside his house leaving me perched on his front fence with my fat bag of marbles to ponder the many kilometres of walking that lay ahead of me. And my bag that was in his bedroom. But a few minutes later my friend's mum came outside and, totally disregarding the nature of our competition, asked me to give her son back his marbles. Under pressure I said yes but seeing my friend's smugness return the second I handed them back made me immediately regret my act of kindness.

Amused by the memory of this day I put the small chipped marble in my breast pocket. Later in the day while digging a different patch of soil I unearthed two jars. When opening the first jar and the plastic bag inside it I was surprised to find a bundle of wet \$20 notes (the old paper ones). The builder told me to put them in the sun so they could dry out and perhaps be salvaged. A few minutes later I found the second jar that contained two plastic bags; inside these plastic bags was liquid of green and purple hues that I guessed to be the ink from the old \$5 and \$2 notes. I laid these out next to the \$20 notes.

Later on the builder looked at my display of notes and gravy-like substances, and said:
“That’s what happens to money when you don’t spend it”.



42.



I was helping my brother move back to the city he had moved away from nine years ago. We went into his apartment where his furniture and boxes had been piled into a corner. The apartment was clean and mostly empty, having just sold. The last time I had been here I'd watched a group of indigenous men and women drinking and arguing in the park that my brother's balcony faced directly onto.

This time I walked out to the balcony and noticed a boomerang perched against the railing. I asked my brother about it; he came out and looked at the boomerang before shrugging his shoulders and saying he'd never seen it there before.

43.

We were having dinner at my wife's brother's new apartment. He was cooking meat on the barbeque while I stood looking at a black cat staring up at me from the lawn two floors below. It had just become dark and the cat would have been barely visible but for its unblinking yellow eyes.

My brother in law was talking about wanting to put pictures up on his walls but not being sure if the landlord would allow him to drill holes into the walls. He was asking me for advice on how to hang pictures without messing up the walls. I told him about a hanging device which stuck to the wall using an adhesive strip that was easy to peel off.

I then told him about the apartment I'd had to clean the day before. I described the images that kept rotating through my mind like a carousel of slides. I watched the meat he was turning over on the barbeque with large tongs and decided I had to stop describing the scenes from the day before in order to still have an appetite for dinner.

I pulled my phone out, turned the flash on and tried to take a picture of the cat still looking up at me. Seeing that the photo hadn't worked I took a second photo by zooming out a bit. Then I turned my flash off, leant my phone on the railing and took one more photo.



44.

I was helping a friend clean his sister in law's apartment. She was in hospital with heart problems – the result of her severe obesity. She was a recluse who suffered from depression and hadn't let anybody into her place for several years. She also hoarded junk.

I arrived at the apartment block and waited for my friend outside the entrance. A cat stood looking at me; it neither approached me nor meowed for my attention and yet never before has it felt so much like an animal was trying to tell me something. Under a tree beside the entrance was a bowl of water.



Later, I saw a photo of this cat – staring at the camera in exactly the same way as it had stared up at me – pinned to a pin-board in the apartment, and wondered if it belonged to the woman now in intensive care.

When entering the apartment I was hit by a shocking smell. I walked straight out onto the balcony and thought about whether my offering to work here went beyond the call of duty. From outside I surveyed the living room: spread across the carpet, the twenty-seven tonnes of rubbish having already been removed prior to my arrival, were rat-shredded newspapers and large stains. There were also piles of a white powder that I presumed to be some kind of poison or cleaning agent. Clinging to the walls were hundreds of cockroach eggs, large mould-coloured smudges, a meat pie with a beer coaster pressed into it and brown finger marks made with what might have been human faeces.

As we began cleaning I considered the large smudges. The position of each of them told a story of how the woman now in hospital had existed here. Below one of the marks, and beside the pie, for example, was an outline of her now absent bed frame. I imagined her slouched in her bed, semi-paralysed, with her shoulders against the wall as the oils seeped from skin into plaster. I found a similar mark in the hallway below a calendar. I thought about the nature of time briefly, imagining her shoulders routinely rubbing the wall as she navigated her way through the junk. The calendar was eighteen months out of date.

By the end of the day the apartment was fit for the cleaners.



45.

In a café I was drinking my coffee while listening to a 1930s lovesong and recalling the middle-aged man on the aeroplane yesterday who had the word LOVE tatooed along his left fingers. The man, sitting two seats away, was of an excitable, somewhat unpredictable temperament; something about his presence in the confined space of the plane cabin put me on edge and yet he exuded a rare warmth. I listened as he told the woman next to him (sitting between him and me) the story of his recent life which involved being diagnosed with a terminal illness, getting thrown out by his wife and denied contact with his children. From what he was saying about his illness it sounded as though he might have very little time left.

On the morning before leaving to catch my plane here I ate a piece of toast with a hole in its middle. For some reason, after thinking about the man on the plane, the 1930s lovesong I was listening to brought this piece of toast to my mind.

After finishing my coffee I was walking carefully along ice over a bridge on my way back to my hotel when the connection between the toast and the song became clear. The first step in this thought process was remembering the expression about dying with 'a hole in the heart'; this was immediately followed by the quote in the book I had been reading in which the famous writer C____, while dying, told his doctor "you don't put ice on an empty heart". These two quotations had linked with the man, who had a certain tragic quality, telling the story of his recent life to the woman on the plane.

While walking I began speculating that the piece of toast somehow represented either my own or the man on the plane's state of being. I wondered to myself: is this the reason I had suddenly felt the need to travel and get away from everything?



46.

In the small museum in a house that once belonged to R____, I was watching a demonstration of the way the painter prepared his materials. Until I arrived in this room I had found the experience of coming here a stifling one. Jet-lagged and hungry I'd moved through the house, accompanied by the friend who had brought me here, wondering what such a careful preservation of detail was in aid of.

Demonstrating the techniques for creating paint using pigments and oils was a pale and thin woman of about forty. She was wearing purple eye shadow that became prominent each time she glanced down at the surface her hands were working on. I instantly felt like I knew this woman. I watched the woman's delicate white wrists turn and mix the materials with her nervy and abrupt enthusiasm. Each time our eyes made contact I felt like I was being taken to a very distinct point in my distant past.

The woman went through several demonstrations and with each one the feeling became more intense. In quiet desperation I mentally grabbed people as if for a police line-up. At the time of leaving the room the only reference points that seemed plausible were a singer of pale skin and intense blue eyes and a thin actress who tended to only play very troubled characters in movies.

The following day I stood in the state museum, before a painting (a self-portrait) by the painter whose material processes I had learnt about. This painter's work had always floored me with its intensity; it was possibly for this reason that I had resented being taken to the theme park made from his house. As I looked closely at the thickly applied paint on the painter's forehead I found comfort in recalling that tactile demonstration by someone I was so sure I knew.



47.



I visited the park which had two hills in it, made of the rubble left over from the war. I walked along the winding track leading to the top of the biggest hill, passing two joggers, a woman walking a small dog and a man in a red parka lurking behind a tree. As I ascended and coiled around the pile of war rubble I felt as if I were getting trapped in a maze and by the time I reached the top, where a young man was smoking while talking on his phone in hushed tones with a person I suspected to be either his lover or drug dealer, my curiosity had vanished and I suddenly wanted desperately to not be in the park. As I walked back down the hill, along the straight path and out the gate I had the feeling of being freed from a vine or rope that had been wrapped around me.



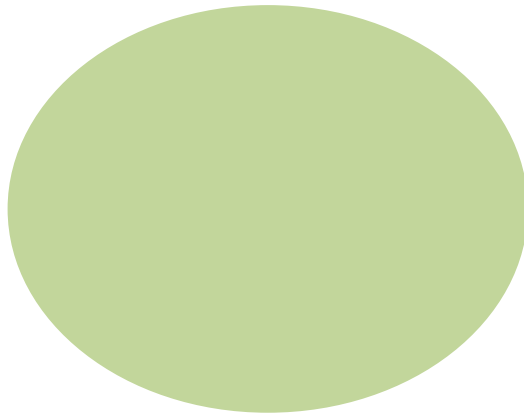
48.

My brother recently moved into an apartment overlooking, among other things, a golf course. The various structures – a highway, a footbridge and some buildings – between his place and the golf course made a frame around a putting green on this golf course.



My wife and I stayed in his spare room for a few nights. On our first afternoon there I watched as two players approached the green. One player stood beside the green while his playing companion chipped towards the hole from twenty or thirty metres away. I only caught sight of the ball as it hit the pin (the rod with the flag which sits in the hole) and rolled sideways a few feet. The man standing beside the green responded by enthusiastically lifting his arms – a gesture presumably accompanied by a yell drowned out by the traffic.

The next morning I once again watched as two male golf players approached the green. On this occasion one of the men wheeled his buggy behind the sand bunker while his companion drastically overplayed a chip from the fringe of the green, sending the ball into the rough grass beyond the green. After watching his ball race through the green he threw his golf club high into the air, presumably yelling a curse also drowned by the traffic. He then stood looking at the green for a few seconds before retrieving his club, while his friend slowly unfastened his glove and walked towards his ball on the green.



On the final morning of staying with my brother I awoke very early. As I stood in the kitchen drinking my tea I looked at the golf green with a moment of confusion before realising that its much lighter shade of green was from its coat of early morning dew.

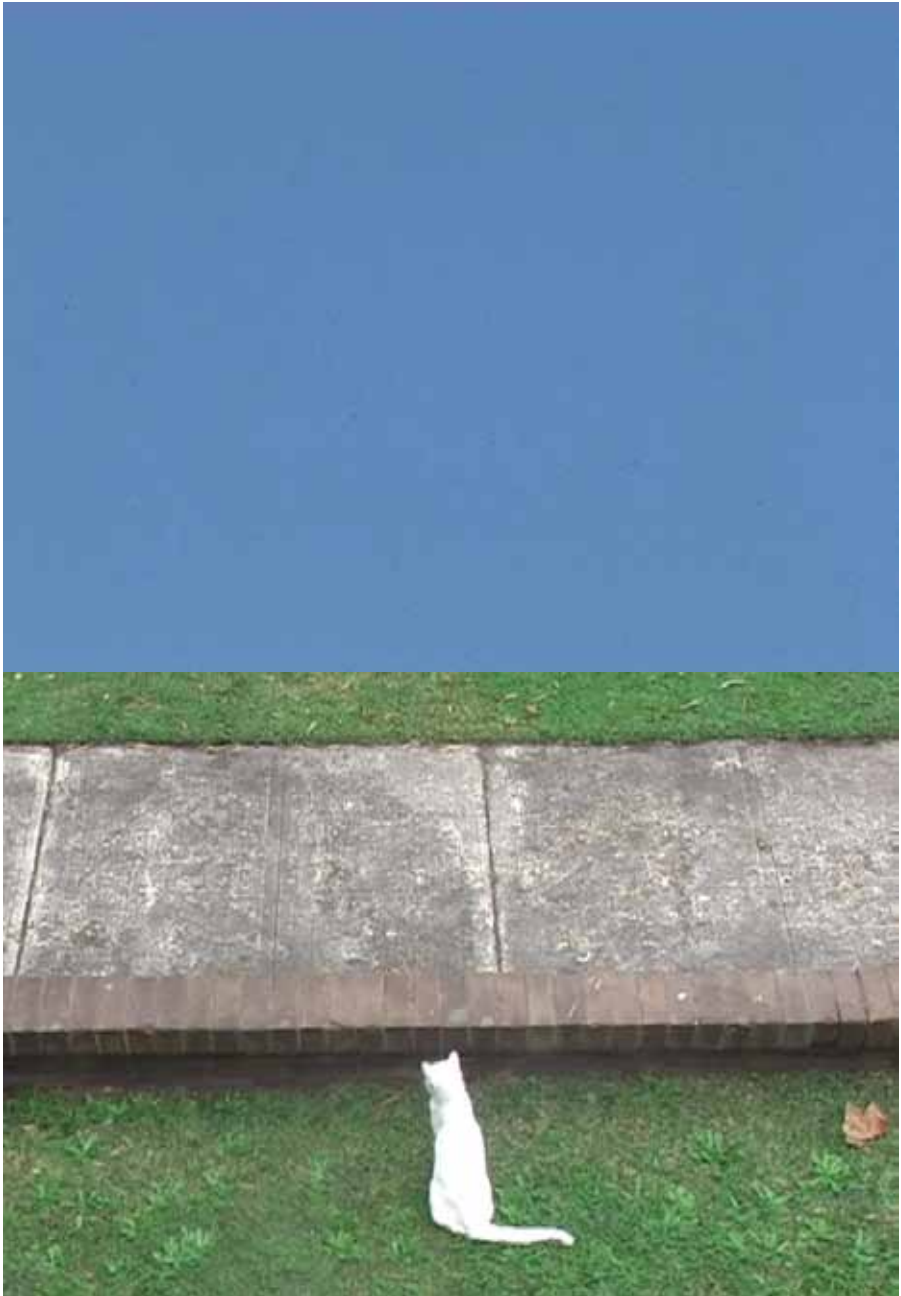
49.

This morning I put on a shirt I hadn't worn for several years. On exiting my apartment, into a day of peerless blue sky and sunshine, I realised that the shirt was very much the colour of the sky.

Walking along the street I started thinking about a video work I recently tried to make comprising views from my bedroom window. One of these views had been the sky – a perfect blue monochrome – with the tune of an ice-cream truck passing by. The video had initially gone for ten or so minutes but after chipping away at all the bits that seemed unnecessary there remained only thirty seconds of footage. This included an opening sequence of my then neighbour's cat standing on the front lawn surveying the street followed by the image of blue sky.

Eventually the footage was abandoned but for two adjoining video stills from the edited footage. I've been looking at this coupling, now printed on a piece of paper, for several months considering what next to do with it. One day I woke up and thought I might do a painting of it and wanting the blue to be exactly right, typed into Google "best blue for sky painting", a search that responded with: blue sky noise painting, best golf blue sky, best buy blue sky and goodbye blue sky. The painting idea was abandoned at that point with the Google results then forming a poem beside the images.

As I walked along in my sky blue shirt that morning it occurred to me that I no longer liked the poem idea. I briefly lamented the loss of the ice-cream music before thinking that perhaps my shirt might be the next point from which to approach this work.



50.

My wife has been suffering from back pain caused by her job that involves sitting in front of a computer all day; every night she does exercises on a blanket, often lying on our living room floor with a red ball under different parts of her back. My brother also suffers from back pain that he thinks was caused by playing basketball many years ago; he swims and also exercises – usually in the morning – with the aid of a cork block to help with his pain. My wife and I now live with my brother.



51.

A couple of weeks ago I found a cassette tape containing a numerology reading my mum had commissioned her friend to do eighteen years ago. Until yesterday I'd never actually listened to the reading, initially from unease towards its contents but later from simply not having the facilities to listen to it – tapes having long been replaced by CDs and computer files.

When I came across the tape at the bottom of a box recently I decided it was time to put the effort into finding a cassette player. Having managed to borrow one from a friend I then started wondering how and where it would be best to listen to the reading: should I be at home or in my studio, lying down or sitting up?

Last night my wife and I listened to the tape after dinner. I was lying on the couch while she stood preparing something in the kitchen. Much of the information was vague but there were some points that clearly rang true; as we listened I watched my wife, reflected in a window, acknowledging certain points the woman was making with a smile.

The points that I have remained thoughtful about include her saying that I would make a good detective, that I should be careful with alcohol and my curiosity towards marginal or underdog figures, that I would be drawn to a caring role (that in its less obvious manifestations could include being an artist, writer or philosopher) and that constantly analysing things would at times make me feel “mad” (a word she stated at least four times, with increasing emphasis).

This morning, while walking to my studio, I tried to process this information. By the time I got here to write this story I felt like a detective, surveying the crime scene while searching for the elusive shape of things still to come. Then I made a painting of the tape.



52.

This morning, while drinking a cup of coffee, I suddenly worked out why a close friend of mine had always, since our childhood growing up together, made a certain sucking noise while sipping hot drinks. I've been drinking my coffee from a white, fairly thick-rimmed cup lately – a vessel that made the liquid more prone to escaping between the rim and my lower lip. What disturbs me most about these mishaps is the way I am compelled to lick the cup clean. This morning, after licking a spill I instinctively sucked the liquid when next sipping. It wasn't so much the action as its sound that made me think of my friend.



53.

Standing at a urinal today I remained thoughtful about the encounter I'd had earlier, specifically in relation to some of the things the numerologist had said about my tendency to get drawn in by marginal and underdog figures; it occurred to me that this tendency to be drawn in and become preoccupied by certain types of people extended to merely 'charismatic' ones.

A couple of hours prior I'd bumped into a friend I'd once been close with but with whom I hadn't had any contact in two or three years. The last attempt to connect with him had been about a year ago when I'd sent him a condolence email following his father's death, an email that went unanswered. Our friendship had begun on his insistence and while feeling apprehensive towards this larger-than-life character I felt myself becoming drawn to him like a fibre of metal towards an enormous magnet. The friendship had been an intense one that ended very abruptly when the magnet moved overseas.

Outside the café this morning it was all on again; he hugged me and made me feel like we might be the very best of friends.

After finishing my business at the urinal I pushed the door leading into the room with the basin. It was at this point, and while washing my hands and seeing my reflection in the mirror, that I made the connection in my mind between how I was feeling since that encounter and the news story about the missing plane.

Two weeks before, a commercial flight had disappeared; it had vanished from all radars before presumably crashing into the ocean somewhere. The story had occupied news headlines every day since the disappearance; firstly in relation to the search for the plane (or its debris) and secondly in relation to the possible scenarios that led to it losing its radar. At the time of washing my hands in the basin the latter was being talked about in relation to some suspicious light being cast upon the pilot – a theory backed up by the strange fact of the plane's radar having been switched off deliberately.

The news items usually contained satellite pictures of the ocean where it had picked up specks of what might be parts of a plane; these possible leads would last a day or two before being replaced by fresher theories and findings in entirely different parts of the ocean. The abstract nature of those images and the way they were constantly being updated with equally abstract examples, lent an eerie quality to the event.



The mystery being portrayed by the media and, specifically, the way it had captivated everyone, including my brother in law who just the day before had asked what my theory was, reminded me of a story once told to me by an old friend of my mother's. She had been on a holiday in Rome with her husband when one afternoon they came upon a commotion next to the river. Curious, they entered the crowd of people and watched a man holding a very long stick attempting to retrieve a set of keys in or beside the river. Each time the man managed to hook the keys onto his stick they would fall off at the last second. As the suspense of what everyone considered to be the fate of a hapless tourist, who'd dropped his keys, continued, the crowd of spectators was robbed by a gang of gypsies.

While washing my hands in the basin the thought occurred to me that I was making the connection between my encounter and the missing plane story because I'd suddenly lost my radar. Something about the meeting with the very charismatic man, in relation to both the numerology reading and the missing plane, gave me a very distinct 'lost' feeling. After leaving the bathroom and heading back to my studio I realised that there was something confronting, brutal even, about having the patterns of one's life and tendencies spelled out.

Relationships now had a lens or window through which I felt I needed to look at them. But looking at these relationships, prompted by such encounters, only made me aware of how difficult the task of finding the evidence and understanding the mystery of them was. For the rest of the day I remained thoughtful; while talking with my wife about the encounter and its connection to the numerology reading I felt as though I was trying to find the switch to my radar. Once it was back on, I was floating above the ocean in search of the reasons for my having ever switched it off.

54.

Every morning I walk to my studio, every evening I walk back home. The walk is down one road and takes around thirty-five minutes. Lately I've become aware that the thought processes and observations I have when walking are crucial to the work I do when at the studio. This became clear when I recently spent a week driving; the process of driving to my studio seemed to translate into days of procrastination and confusion.

The two walks are very different. The morning walk gives me energy, makes me alert and usually by the time I get here I have some idea as to what my day will involve (today it is writing). The afternoon walk also gives me energy but is less about ideas and more about life outside my studio. There is a different sort of alertness in the evening walk, one less engaged with fleeting sights and sounds and more engaged with society. This might be in part due to the presence of the homeless people congregating as they wait for their dinner.

Each morning walk comprises a row of experiences and sensations; some of these experiences and observations are constant or stable ones, while others are more unique, defining that particular day. These experiences often overlap and relate to each other. I think of the experiences as being in a row because of the walk being like a line – straight down one road.

When I inserted this line horizontally (to fit on the page) it became clear to me that I think of the walk along the vertical axis. I think this is because it takes me downhill in the morning and uphill in the evening, up and down describing a vertical line.



This morning I experienced the following constants: walking past the television newsreader following his trip to the gym or café, pressing the button at the traffic lights, considering buying bread from the bakery where there is usually a five minute queue, seeing the anxious stride of drug addicts as they head for the methadone clinic, smelling the distinctive musty smell coming from the row of boarding houses, crossing the road to get into the shade, seeing the tumbler of murky liquid perched on a wall and wondering how long it would remain there.

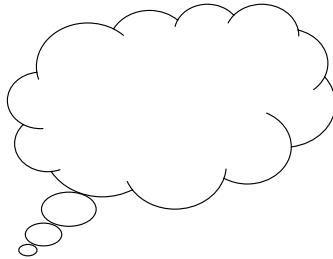
My unique experiences today included: walking past the newsreader for the first time accompanied by another man, seeing a cat sitting on a mattress leaning against a wall in a house, watching someone put a television into the back of their car, hearing the snap of a

receipt being removed from a docket book by a salesman, wondering when the boarding houses would be sold and renovated into chic homes like the neighbouring ones had been, considering the differences and similarities between my own state of baldness and that of another fair-haired man standing on the other side of the road as we waited for the green man signal to appear.



Before my walk this morning I was talking on the phone with a friend from out of town. I phoned to tell him that my wife was pregnant. I told him that my sense of wonder in relation to this news had already begun after watching the baby during an ultrasound the week before. The viewing lasted quite a long time because the baby refused to present a clear profile to the camera that would help the doctors assess certain risks. (Later, while looking at a photo I noticed the speech bubble shapes coming from the baby's mouth.)

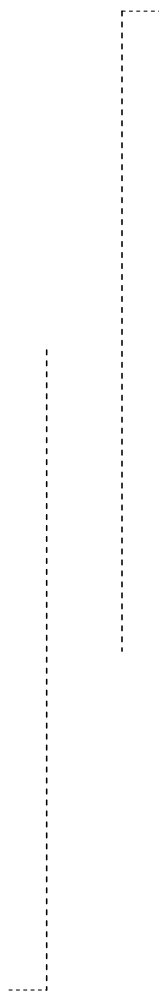




I asked my friend if he still took his daughter to school in a buggy attached to the back of his bike and he said they now both rode on a specially designed tandem bike. This led us into a discussion about the benefits of not having a car – something I’ve noticed that everybody besides this friend insisted was not an option with children. He pointed out that during their trips to school they would stop to talk to people, pat cats and dogs and collect various items or souvenirs such as leaves and rocks. While he was describing this experience I reflected on my week without walking to my studio – in part leading to the quick sale of the car – and how unengaged I was by the time I arrived here.

After talking with my friend it occurred to me that, like my friend’s daughter, I arrived at my place of work with a collection of fragments – gleaned and gathered along a line of stable and unique encounters. Walks are like mini lives or lines along the larger line of my life: together their fragments give voice and shape to my days.

55.



To get to my studio each morning I walk along one road, in a more or less straight line, for thirty-five minutes. On a recent visit to the art gallery I exhibit with I got talking with the woman who works there. We were chatting about living on the same road, along which we sometimes see and wave to each other on our way to work; she going one way, on one side of the road (presumably the side her house is on) and me going the other, on the opposite side.

This morning I thought of her when approaching the area where I seem to see her most. It occurred to me that I hadn't seen her for a while which made sense given the erratic routine I'd recently had. The last time I saw her I was about to wave before realising she was on the phone, in a conversation that I speculated might have been unpleasant in some way. She was also wheeling a large suitcase.

When talking with her at the gallery recently I had been surprised when she guessed exactly how long it must take me to walk to my studio. After telling her where my apartment and studio were, she said: "that would take thirty-five minutes wouldn't it?" But this morning it occurred to me that if she lived in an apartment where I usually see her, she would have almost exactly the same distance, along the same road, to get to work. The gallery was, like my studio, about fifty metres from this road. The area we tended to pass one another was the halfway point to my workplace while my apartment was the halfway point to hers.

The symmetry of this pleased me this morning. It also seemed significant due to the fact that where I made my work and where I would presumably at a later date exhibit it, already had a relationship. I wondered if the woman who worked at the gallery had a much quicker or more mathematical brain than I did and had calculated all of this in the moment of me telling her the two points I walked between.

56.

On my way to the studio today I had four experiences that all, quite separately, articulated forms of knowledge that seemed to somehow relate to painting.

The first moment was at the traffic lights at the large intersection where the only spot to get shelter from the sun is in the shadow of the telegraph pole to which is attached the button I usually press for the pedestrian crossing. This morning I stood behind the pole, feeling the powerful sunshine getting at me around the narrow column of shade I stood in. The feeling of the light and warmth trying to get at me gave me a vague sense of the dramatic dark and light tones of a painting.

The second moment occurred a hundred metres down the road. A four-wheel drive was idling while it waited for a car, coming in the opposite direction, to pass through a narrow bit of road. The woman driver, whose milky white face emerged from the darkness of the cabin like a painted figure might, was talking, I presumed, to her children in the back seat (too dark for me to see); as she spoke, looking nowhere in particular, her head was moving in a slow and sideways manner that reminded me of a horse and in particular of a horse I had once filmed trying to shake flies off its face.

At the café further down the hill I sat with my cup of coffee and unfolded an article someone had cut out for me. It was about the early Renaissance painter I had always admired. As I read the article and looked at the pictures my eyes were constantly drawn towards the background of one work, beyond an angel, to a room. The room, while only partially visible, was of such a clear and knowable temperature, I thought to myself. This made me think about how much of painting seems to be about temperature.

Some minutes later, as I hit the flat section of road that leads me to my studio I could feel the strong black coffee I'd just had surging through my veins. My body felt jangly, my mind sharp and definite like the temperatures of those painted rooms.

Ahead of me I noticed a gathering of chestnuts on the footpath that must have dropped in the last two days, when I hadn't walked along this section. The way they sat below the tree – articulated by the middle ground of the footpath – reminded me of the same era

of paintings which the painter I had just been reading about lived through. My legs were striding energetically as my left foot came into contact with one of the large nuts, sending it shooting and bouncing ahead of me. The physical sensation and sound of contact with the large nut was thrilling for the way it made me feel how much better I suddenly understood chestnuts.



57.

My friend asked for a video to play in his screening and I thought of the clock piece I had recorded beside my father's hospital bed. When we took my father to the hospital after his kidneys failed the doctor said that he wouldn't be leaving and that she expected he had two or three weeks of life left, at most. I remember feeling the urgency of time during those first days; each minute went by less abstractly and increasingly more ominously.

When I sent the video, taken with my phone, through to my friend, he wrote back with one word: beautiful.

Seeing the footage again and remembering my time visiting my father in hospital made me remember how fixated, in his morphine-induced delirium, he became with this clock. This wasn't entirely out of character – he had always been an incredibly punctual man; when describing a walk, for example, he always gave the exact time it took, never rounding things off to the nearest five-minute mark.

After my friend wrote back to me I watched the footage a few more times; it went for eighteen seconds and like the experience of sitting in the hospital those seconds became increasingly dramatic upon subsequent viewings.

On several occasions during those final weeks, after waking up from a long sleep and showing some confusion to see his family sitting around him, my father looked up at the clock, intensely focusing his gaze on those ticking hands, before shaking his head and saying: "They've got the time wrong!"



58.

So far we have attended three birthing classes where my wife is taught about relaxation techniques that will help her give birth. There are four couples attending the class that runs for three hours with a small break half way through. During the break the couples mingle in the corridor where there's a hot water urn and jars containing tea bags and biscuits. The class is held in a small room with a whiteboard, a dozen or so chairs and a couple of pot plants. In one corner there is also a big pile of beanbags.

In the first week nobody opted to sit on a beanbag when doing one of the various meditations. In the second week three out of six people opted for one. In the third week everybody was lying on a beanbag.



59.

My wife is thirty-four weeks pregnant. Each time she enters a new week she writes the new number of weeks on our bathroom mirror. Today she wrote the number thirty-four.



Yesterday it was my birthday. On waking in the morning my wife looked at me and gestured how I would have moved my arms thirty-seven years ago upon being born. She was drawing a correlation between our soon to be born child whose movements she had become so familiar with. Looking out our window it occurred to me that I could see the building, once a hospital and now an apartment block, in which I was born. It sits about one kilometre away on the road along which I walk to my studio each morning.

On my birthday it was raining. Not knowing quite what to do with ourselves we went and visited a tribal art auction. There was something spooky about the room of objects; under the harsh fluorescent lights I stood dwarfed before a set of large totems still bearing traces of the ground from which they had been pulled. Each item had a tag with a number on it.



60.

In the next few weeks my wife will give birth to our first child. Late at night and early in the morning, while still in bed, I put my hand on my wife's belly and feel the child's feet rubbing and kicking against my hand.

Today is my last day in a studio where I have spent the past seven months working. Over this period I have walked in a more or less straight line here most days of the week: thirty-five minutes to get here, forty minutes to get home up the hill. Over recent weeks I have been feeling an overwhelming need to empty out the space, to remove all the noise so as to be able to see what it is I have been making. On the walls are paintings I have made, while in the computer are these stories.

Until this story, the final work I made while here was a drawing made with marker pen on the table that had held my palette. The idea for doing this came when I peeled off the palette and discovered the rich collection of colour bunched at one end. I unscrewed the legs off the table before leaning the top against the wall. The colour of the paint brought to my mind a period of Picasso's output when he used a palette one would associate more with his friend and rival Matisse.

A friend came to visit me in the studio one day and saw the tabletop leaning against the wall. He suggested I do a painting on it before we both agreed that a drawing would be better. As he was leaving my studio he said "just draw a nude or something". Following our conversation I found an example of Picasso's work the left-over colours on my palette had reminded me of, a painting of a nude from the 1920s. I picked up the most ready to hand implement, a marker pen, and quickly sketched a copy of the reclining nude before signing the work "Picasso".

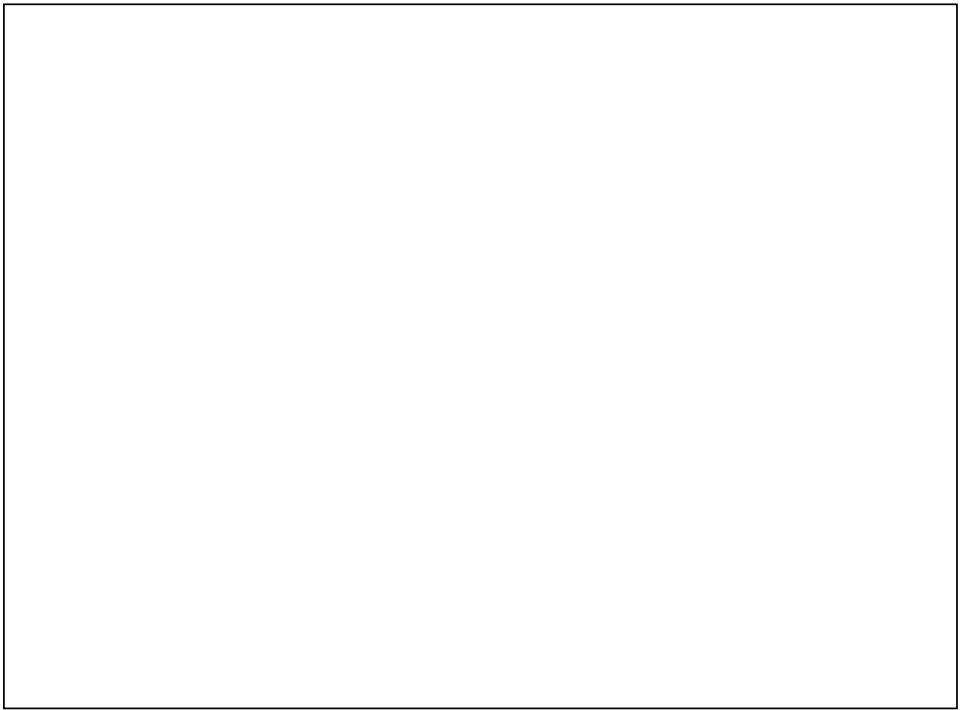
The second last piece to have made it onto the studio wall was a found panel of wood. I found it when sitting up the road drinking a coffee; while blankly staring at a pile of junk I became aware of a painting of a headland on one of the pieces of wood that might have been a door. As I looked at this presumably accidental painting comprising a few layers of loosely applied enamel paint, it became the image of some epic poem. After dragging it back and attaching it to the wall, it took on the quality of an old print.



The third last painting I made while here was on an offcut I found on my way to the studio. What I liked about this left-behind – but oddly poised against a lamppost – shape was the trace of effort it suggested. What was this the offcut of, I wondered? When I got it here I painted it with the white primer I was using to clean up the walls. I looked at it like this for a few days before digging out a small tin of enamel paint I don't remember having acquired and painting it a grubby green colour.

Over recent weeks, preceding and following these slight interventions that became my final works, I have found myself wanting not only to physically empty out my studio but also resist acquiring anything in the form of making. I sense this has something to do with my soon-to-be-born child and my perceiving the need to have more physical and mental space to greet and spend time with her. Seeing something of interest while walking to the studio, an offcut in the form of a moment or object, I instinctively fight the urge to pull my phone out of my pocket and document the observation. This morning I saw three things I didn't capture visually but will now capture with words.

The first was a wall containing three shades of a purply pink I hadn't noticed before. The second was the silhouette of a man with his back turned to me, hosing a side passage. The third were some large leaves that, when seen at the angle I approached them from, mirrored the pattern of a fence on the porch immediately below.



Offcuts

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