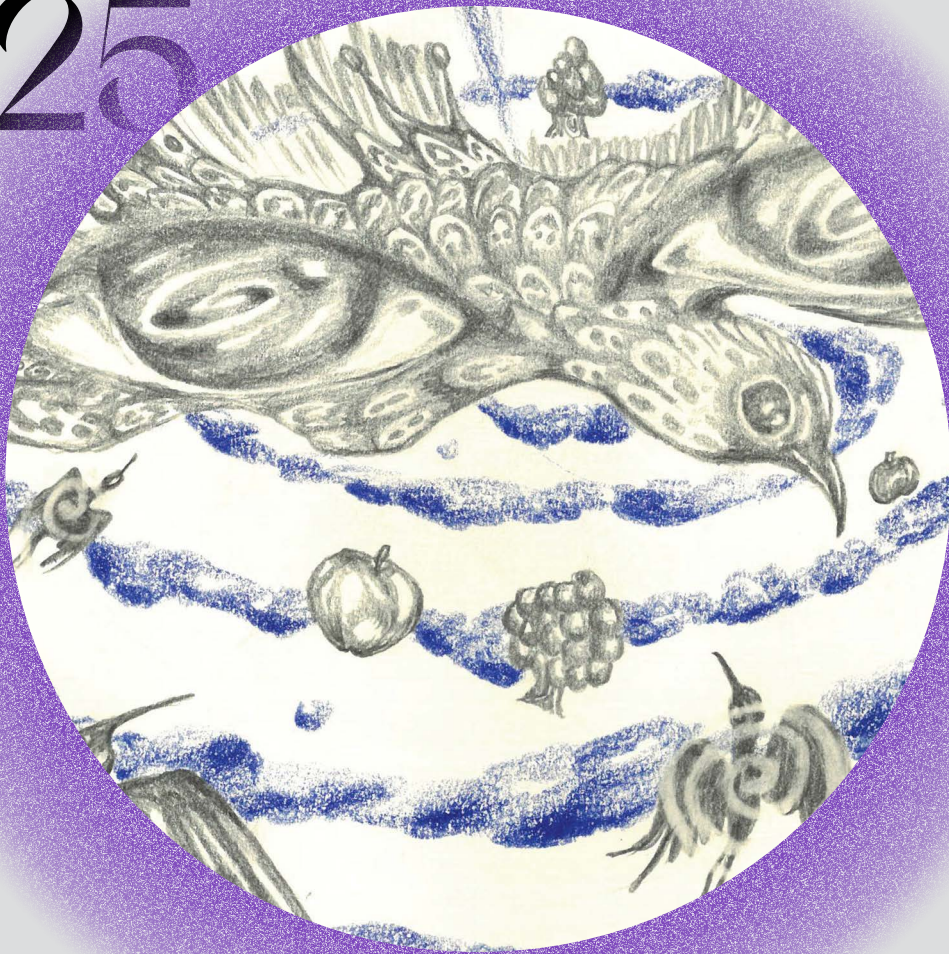


# dSCRIBE: ISSUE 18 SPIRALLING 2025



**Free Publication**

Fiction, Non-Fiction, Poetry, Art, Local  
[arts.darebin.vic.gov.au](http://arts.darebin.vic.gov.au)

# EDITED BY PANDA WONG

Cover Artwork / Apples Floating from a Tree (pencil on paper) / Jacquie Meng  
Designer / 3sidedsquare



Last year's *dSCRIBE*, edited by Madison Pawle, was themed 'Desire Lines'—a term for the unofficial paths that weave their way through cities, markers of collective movement, impulse and thought. This year's theme 'Spiralling' extends on that, referring to lines of rotation, return and radiance.

'Spiralling' is to be in constant motion, such as the dreaded 'emotional spiral', a loop to break out of or move through. Or the ever-present spiral found in nature, the living world's most special shape—the way that seals sleep in the ocean, the tininess of DNA, how ants swirl themselves into death spirals, the ridged tips of our fingers. Its infinite coil brings to mind the multi-temporal nature of deep time, a mode that brings distant pasts and futures into the present. To spiral is to constantly arrive at a change in perspective, to shift towards expansion.

Many thanks to those who submitted—unfortunately, it was impossible to accept all of the wonderful work we received but we are grateful for the deep engagement with the theme. I am thrilled to share this year's *dSCRIBE*, a collection of writing that invites the reader to consider alternative times and spaces; new ways of seeing, being and feeling.







# CONTRIBUTORS

**Michaela Bear** is a Naarm/Melbourne-based writer who values generosity, connection and fostering softer states of being. She has written for arts publications in Australia, New York, London, Hong Kong and Vienna. Michaela often embraces playful, messy and fragmented qualities within her writing in an attempt to speak authentically to the human experience.

**Edward Caruso** has been published by *A Voz Limpia*, *Australian Multilingual Writing Project*, *Burrow*, *Communion*, *Kalliope X*, *Meniscus*, *Melbourne Poets Union*, *P76*, *StylusLit*, *TEXT*, *Unusual Work* and *Well-Known Corners*. His third collection of poems, *What Distance Means*, will be published by Hybrid Publishers in 2025. Since 2024, he has co-judged the Ada Cambridge Poetry Prize.

**Rosa Cass** (she/her) is a poet living on unceded Wurundjeri Country in Naarm. Her writing is a love letter to her Jewishness, queerness and her ancestors, who passed on their love of words and storytelling to her.

**Bradley Visaka David** is a writer and artist of Sri Lankan descent. Having spent half his life in precarious work and restaurant kitchens, he is currently interrogating the processes of neo-liberal colonialism through art. He was recently awarded funding to write a novel on diasporic inheritance and liminal bodies.

**Liza Dezfouli** is a writer, poet, lived experience speaker, performer, and stand-up comedian who also makes up silly songs. Her one-woman show, *Binosaur*, will premiere in 2026's Midsumma Festival. She's written short stories, plays, essays, articles, a yet-to-be published novel, and is working on the first of several memoirs.

**Joe Goddard** (he/him) is a young reader and poet living in Darebin, interested mostly in rap music, modern poetry, and postmodern fiction, currently studying a course in librarianship. His work has appeared before in *dSCRIBE 17*, last year.

**Edward Hodge** (he/him) is a poet and fiction writer based in Melbourne, Australia. His poems appear in *dSCRIBE 18: Spiralling*. He is also the author of *'When the sun passed through me'*, a science fiction short story published in *Radon Journal*, Issue 9.

**Ariele Hoffman** holds a PhD in Melbourne's history from the University of Melbourne. Prior to this, she was a curator at the Jewish Museum of Australia. She is an avid writer of poetry and art criticism. Her book, *Inclusive Moderns: Jewish History and Identity in Melbourne's Architecture and Urban Space (1940-1980)*, will be in bookstores in 2026.

**Emilie Kilvington** works in the bush and loves camping. She has degrees in psychology and fine arts, and is currently studying public health. This is the first piece of writing she has shared. Her work explores the tensions of modern life and the quiet relief found in nature.

**Abbra Kotlarczyk** was raised on Bundjalung Country in Northern NSW. Like Jackie Wang, she is also a library rat. Unlike Jackie Wang, she is not a professor. In 2022, a poem of hers was recognised by the Overland Judith Wright Poetry Prize. She lives on Wurundjeri Woiwurrung Country.

**Aaron Leyshon** writes an assortment of fiction, poetry and unclassifiable classified ads. His work has appeared in *BOMBFIRED*, *Rejection Letters*, and the University of Canberra Vice Chancellor's International Poetry Prize anthology for 2024. You can find his books on Amazon and hopefully one day on thrift shop shelves.

**Claudine Marie** is a horticulturist, amateur comedy writer and cat mum living in Preston. She loves cooking for friends and family, playing guitar, walks in the forest, rehoming stray cats and saving sad plants. She is currently working on her first full length novel.

**Zarzokimi Moss** is a writer, producer and artist based on unceded Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung land (Naarm/Melbourne), working experimentally across film, performance and text. Their practice weaves temporal circularity, rupture, mythic rhythm and dream logic into layered modes of storytelling—as a means of building infrastructures of belonging.

**Cee Powell** is a writer and art teacher, working and living on Wurundjeri and Bunurong land. They use words to consolidate disparate research about ideas like labour, community and reconciliation.

**Cushla Scanlan** is a writer and editor living in Naarm. Her creative non-fiction works have been published by *Catalyst Magazine* and *Bowen St Press*. She has edited for *Farrago*, *Grattan St Press* and most recently edited Oscar Revelins' debut novel, *Delicate Friends* (2025). For any enquiries, please contact [cushlajj@gmail.com](mailto:cushlajj@gmail.com)

**Stephen Smithyman** is a retired schoolteacher, living in Preston. His poems have won numerous awards and been published in a wide range of magazines and anthologies. 'An Open Window' is included in his third collection, *Reading 'Anna Karenina' on the Beach*, which is due out from MPU later this year.

**William Stanforth** writes fiction, non-fiction and screenplays in Melbourne. His work has appeared in *Overland*, *The Victorian Writer*, *Visible Ink* and other publications. He is currently working on a collection of short stories and his debut novel. Find out more at [cargocollective.com/wstanforth](http://cargocollective.com/wstanforth).

**Eli (Liz) Sutherland** (they/them) is an award-winning poet and writer from Naarm/Melbourne. They are a non-binary, queer, and disabled creative, are studying a Master of Arts (Writing and Literature) at Deakin University, and are on the Overland Board. Their writing appears in various anthologies and across the internet.

**Tharidi Walimunige** is a writer hailing from Reservoir with a passion for poetry and short fiction that navigate fantastical worlds. She has edited and contributed to publications including *Voiceworks*, *n-SCRIBE* and *Farrago Magazine*. In her free time, Tharidi likes to craft with macrame and watch animated films.

**Carl Walsh** (he/him) is a neurodiverse poet who lives and writes on Wurundjeri land. After having poems published whilst at school, he had a 25 year break before his poetry appeared in *n-SCRIBE 8* (*dSCRIBE*'s predecessor) in 2013. *Tarp Green Light*, his first book of poetry, was published in *Flying Islands Pocket Poets* in 2024.

**Stephanie Westwood** is a Naarm-based writer and film producer, interested in speculative fiction that comments on the current state of political doom through intimate relationships and dark humour.

**Rowan Williams** lives in Northcote. He is an editor for *Visible Ink* and sometimes makes autobiographical comics. Rowan is currently studying professional writing and editing at RMIT University. You can find him on Instagram at [rowilliams\\_](https://www.instagram.com/rowilliams_)



**Darebin  
Arts**

The Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people are the Traditional Owners and Custodians of this land. We recognise their continuing connection to land, water and culture, and their powerful storytelling traditions. We pay respect to their Elders past and present.

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# ODE TO FLINDERS ST, WURUNDJERI (THORNBURY)

BRADLEY VISAKA DAVID / WINNER DAREBIN MAYOR'S WRITING AWARD

## I.

Everything on my street is for sale. Everything the buzz, dig, whirr of organised money mixing, churning, crunching, sealing. Every thing cordoning new concrete dendroglyphs. Every, thing, muscular HiLuxes line the laneway grid with their chiselled grin sons shirtless to sip coffee from polystyrene and pave the aquiline driveway with pastel aquatic tones while Nonna looks on into the deep blue sky that houses EveryThing all at once and nothing all the very same. All things, everything. All the very same.

## II.

My sister, after her appointment at the clinic, over lemon myrtle tea, asked if we saved the Djab Wurrung tree, asked if the plot her and Lachie had recently purchased, just enough away from the Eastern beaches, was built over an Aboriginal Burial Ground. Everything contained within 'Australia', as a formal construct, is the site of Indigenous massacre. You mean metaphorically, she said. I do not. Flinders tried to buy off the Wurundjeri with five shirts and a donkey. The Colony waggled their chins and said he went rogue, as any deal would 'legally nullify' *terra nullius*. Wominjeka does not actually mean 'welcome', exactly, however many times it elasticises in white mouths. She sighed and asked about anything else. If I had any appointments coming up, if my Rent was going up. (I don't, because It is).

### III.

Owning something, anything, has Its own lineage, speaks Its own language of contingency. Spurring Its own little cottage industries, always defenestrating complicities. Crowding most out to outsourcing and outsourcing until there's nothing there but the transaction and a funnel and a bag and a feed, and a queue of replaceable appendages all breaking down, holding it. The appropriate elegance of a gravedigging dealer nation, speaking statutorily in growth and dividends, their mouths full of dust and sand and 'land title', of greener fracking, greener dishwashing liquid, greener activewear, greener data mining, greener banking, greener petrol, greener green green green. Covering yourself in petroleum; has consequences, surely, even when you try to call it clean. Voting, twice, for a guy that brings coal along to the House, as his only friend, counting his bricks on the crossbench. This here graveyard country now. We make only houses and/or graves, so die or sell, either immolating, or liquidity. Even your bones, ashes, dust, are not your own. Ground up small into tar-grey asphalt, into white and pastel stone.

### IV.

Those young pavers pace with fighter's gaits, working their inheritance, whilst grey elders burrow with epitaphed eyes into the ever greyscale, landfilling sky, situating themselves to sell another life's work, in another quicksand house for change, in speculative auction houses ready for first home buyer wolves, spruced up as functioning society.

After they've gone inside, when the boxy limbed sons have left in their HiLuxes for the Eastern beaches, I write in quicksilver in the quickening, portioned cement holdings of the driveway:

I was never here

# EPONYMOUS TREE [EXCERPT]

ABBRA KOTLARCZYK / HONOURABLE MENTION DAREBIN MAYOR'S WRITING AWARD

my kid's latest affection is slapping you on the bum. i read *why did saint nicholas slap* & think it reads as slang for why was saint nicholas extremely good, excellent or amazing. by this point my kid has latched onto you caught you from the rear guard as if to say *i'm here* as if you hadn't noticed & i'm not convinced this is extremely or even good, but against historic examples of physical transgressions denoting the presence of someone who was not here a moment ago his hand comes in good faith. strong hands that land build not only structures but character. strong hands is one of the features in my latest portrait made by my other kid, my fingers depicted as if bananas or small speech bubbles popping off the limbs ready to ignite a relation of holding or inflating / i read them, i inhabit their air. as slang the word slap is attributed to hip-hop culture to describe a song that resonates strongly, it was catchy as in it caught as in it makes you want to move or dance & did saint nicholas dance, i want to know. his other name was nikolai the wonder worker, nikolai like my brother (the saint not his namesake) which gives me some clues to the DNA of language the way it twists, a spiral staircase inside the dollhouse our rails all made of sugar & phosphates leading you in or out / eponymous like a family like a tree.

there's another riddle i've always wanted to understand. when we visited his hometown in modern day turkey i was beyond the whole north pole thing but i was still confused, it didn't matter that my dad & i had just visited the nearest version of what my child mind could attribute to a snowy wonderland in the middle of a bristling desert summer / pamukkale that calcium cotton castle that lime lit version of a white place pooling similitude / & so it didn't matter that a mental version could be drawn from the fact that we spend australian summers celebrating white christmas. does santa claus also slap & i wonder about the proximity here (his lack) to the animal laborans because he's more of a homo faber character with strong hands holding the reins of the deer which is not the same as the function of a claw for the cat who works all day to catch the mouse. santa claus was inspired by the wonder worker born in patara, modern day demre in the region of antalya on the mediterranean coast, what was then the greek city

of myra of ancient lycia. while it is extremely excellent that claus was greek (it also makes for a good come back in the age of theological white supremacy) what of the never-ending bloody conquest of shifting borders colonial frontiers that also unearths the riddle of the lycians, lydians & luwians, all anatolians. we mustn't confuse the film the smack with the book the slap.

i visit the website of the ancient roman hadrian's granary ('grain house' / 'horreum') located at the site of the ancient agora ('open place for assembly' / 'market') in the port of andriake in myra, recently converted into the open-air lycian museum, a place that did not yet exist when i was there in 1996. a window pops up aggressively thwarting my virtual view of modern diggers beside ancient ruins alongside edge banners all sporting variations of vine trestles i'm yet to make for future passionfruits. another passion is bread, moreso now that i can't eat it the way it's historically been made to eat & so in honouring my intolerance for gluten, i dishonour my ancestors, bakers on my paternal grandmother's side animal laborans pawing the flour homo faber attending the klepisko with spirals of sypanie piaskiem sand pawing hard earthen floors to render motifs of beauty protection in the tiny polish town of brześć kujawski, a bullseye a whorl in the middle of the country the kuyavian-pomeranian voivodeship, another way of saying one province amongst sixteen that reads in english like an iced vovo encountering a spaceship. i wonder what desserts my ancestors would have made there in the kujawy the barren sandy land & if they danced & is that why the earthen floors of the hearth be hard & because of the existence of bias they most certainly would have slapped, which i picture them doing to the sand straw & clay to make their tough resilient ground, though i cannot know for sure.

in turkish saint nicholas is known as noel baba, baba in french being a light kind of plum cake, etymologically related to baban (early 13c. 'babe') from where the sounds they make come to be babble to prattle make a confused medley in the place for babel (tower) a twisting together of tongues (genesis xi), closer to babushka (russian 'grandmother' /

## NOTES

'Animal laborans' and 'homo faber' are terms used by Hannah Arendt to characterise the biological and repetitive nature of labour applied by the human species towards its own survival, and the ability for the human species to make tools and apply knowledge to shape and control their environments, respectively. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, second ed. The University of Chicago Press, 1958.

DEI is an acronym for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.

Chalka is the Polish word for Challah: a sweet and soft braided egg bread, typically used by Jewish people in Sabbath and holiday rituals.

Klepisko is a traditional Polish hard earthen floor in the interior of houses.

Kujawy is a region in central Poland within the Kuyavian-Pomeranian Voivodeship, where the town of Brześć Kujawski is located.

Lycians, Lydians and Luwians were distinct ancient peoples inhabiting different regions of Anatolia (modern-day Turkey).



'old woman') by sound but means father, the one who historically towers over the fact of his own root deriving in baby. sometimes my kids & i appropriate the kate bush lyrics sing / *mamuśka mamuśka mamuśka-ya-ya* / generational devotion one letter slipping from russian grandmother to polish mother (abbreviated 'mamu' / also affectionately known as 'moo moo') me calling until they come home (the kids / the cows) then i turn forty & one of them starts calling me 'old woman'. it's true i could be seen to be the equivalent of an elder (a father) in the home but in our sapphic attempts to debunk homonormativity we obviate equivalences / we (adults) do cook do clean do think do sleep to dream paw the floor mop the pee to varying & mostly unequal degrees.

another nikolai surname vavilov (a botanist) shares more than a nose profile with my brother, was the russian & soviet father of oleg, yuri, what we now call 'biodiversity', most notably of the centre of origin of cultivated plants (the 'vavilov centre') describing those regions brimming with crop wild relative diversity. he gave his life to the study & improvement of wheat maize & other cereal crops towards the sustenance of the global population / the bridge of the bridge you might say. vavilov's breed of biology was anti-mendelian (it was 'scientifically' based) so *off with his head* or we could say *off with his bread* he was imprisoned by stalin during that former age of pseudoscience when 'dei' was not yet an acronym but was an adjacent clause in action which the cats employed to feign attempts to catch a mouse but were actually bottomless myths of faber reigning in: kulaks ('wealthy peasants'), old bolsheviks, red army leaders, ethnic minorities, ordinary citizens meaning anyone who was 'enemy of the people' / & who were the 'people' if not the citizens / steering them all to the gulags. another nikolai (yevzhov) notorious leader of the great purge under stalin's order found to be himself a kulak despite attempts to feign proletariat, was also head of a brothel deputy people's commissar for agriculture was also reigned in, known as the vanishing commissar after his execution in 1940 made to disappear from all pictures. does something that is forced to disappear not catch & so by definition not slap?

one of the reasons saint nicholas is believed to have slapped is that he gave his rich parents' fortune away became known as the gift-giver by night (enter santa claus complete with a catchy tune flying into your child's imagination by the tightly held reins of a deer). one notable story is that he snuck around leaving dowry for three virgins who being otherwise unable to marry would have been forced into sex work . while the story is contested its credibility is argued for on the grounds that 4c. christian women (opposed to women of greco-roman paganism & later periods like the 9c.) slapped, by which is meant they had prominent roles by which we can infer they were 'respected'.

this evening on my phone trending slang words you should know listed goat as 'greatest ever' where it should have read 'greatest of all time'. was the 4c. the last time women in the christian world slapped (i wonder) were they goats then (i wonder) & did they dance (surely, riotously). women in the non-denominational non-national imagi-national family of mine are riotous they are catchy they catch they are a tune to be caught but not like a bird, not like a bird to be caught by the claw of a cat. the tune of the cha cha is characterised by a four / slash / four time signature the fourth beat split in two to create a synco-pated rhythm as in one two three cha cha!!! the music typically has a steady beat but the syncopation adds a lively feel a lively feel we feel alive dancing the cha cha it's funny partly because we don't dance the cha cha & partly because my kids call my mum cha cha short & folded over in time to create a fun (easy) version of babcia (polish 'grandmother'). of course it's babcia folded over braided like a loaf of chałka challah challah!!! we live in australia everything is shortened folded over mostly with an over accentuated 'ay' 'ee' or 'oh' sound usually added to the end. other slang words listed are rizz ('romantic') & gyat ('booty') / *we can dance we can dance we're doing it from pole to pole* / chałka chałka!!!

## NOTES

Mamu is a shortened term of endearment for Polish Mamuśka (Mamma).

Noel Baba translates to Father Christmas in Turkish.

Pamukkale (meaning Cotton Castle) is a city in the southwest of Turkey, known for its naturally formed terraces of travertine, a sedimentary limestone deposited by mineral water from hot springs.

Sypanie piaskiem translates in Polish to the pouring of sand and is a decorative sand drawing ritual traditionally made on interior klepisko floors, later adapted to public, exterior spaces.

'We can dance we can dance we're doing it from pole to pole' is a lyric from *The Safety Dance* by Men Without Hats (1982).

STEPHANIE WESTWOOD

A black and white graphic featuring a spiral that starts from the center and expands outwards. Inside the spiral, text is written in a circular path, following the curve of the spiral. The text is a poem by E. E. Cummings, titled 'l(a)ziness'. The text is written in a lowercase, sans-serif font. The spiral is composed of many small, dark, curved segments that create a sense of movement and depth. The background is plain white. The overall effect is a dynamic and artistic representation of the poem's text.

stand  
up meetings  
for my identity  
my id card  
my personhood  
is that i have  
fulfilled  
your order  
but my fulfillment  
my commitment  
it aches  
my heart  
my neck  
hurts  
through  
the door  
to market  
vegetables  
rotting  
in the fridge  
darklight  
coldfloor  
drop  
everything  
but the weight  
of all the faces  
i bolstered  
today  
lanyard  
tight  
but the sunset  
is throwing  
orange  
squares  
ontp  
tiles  
and your  
tiny hand  
curls  
tight  
in mine,  
oh, sky.

# AN OPEN WINDOW

STEPHEN SMITHYMAN

You opened a window and the world came in – the wind, the rain, a siren... outside it was dark and cold; inside, we were warm in our little circle of lamplight. We were going to bed. There was the usual paraphernalia – books, cushions, quilts, last drinks (not to mention those little pills) – with which we keep the world at bay. Too much reality can spoil our lives. The world is never exactly as we want – it is unruly, dangerous. There is a gap between our dreams and what happens, which we can fall through in a moment, like that long ago morning when our young daughter climbed into our bed, complaining of a stiff neck and a headache. Alarmed, we took her to the hospital, where, all day, she drifted further and further into coma and paralysis – some dark hinterland between life and death – while we talked and talked to her, unwinding the thin thread which kept her connected to us, like a kite, connected by a string. In the end, she came back to us. The winds of that hinterland did not sweep her away, as you, turning from the window, draw the curtains on the dark, the cold, that thin sliver of sound that strikes a panic in our hearts – the sound of a world we cannot control.



# UNDULATIONS IN TIME...

MICHAELA BEAR

My hands soften into the swirling currents etched onto a small smooth surface.  
I Google this familiar shell-like disc: an operculum.  
It acts as a trap door used to close the opening of a snail shell, offering protection, darkness.  
Once upon a time.  
Now pried free through the washes of the ocean, spiralling lines emerge from waves  
onto sun-drenched shores of the Bunurong people on the Mornington Peninsula.  
Exposed to light once again.

A friend gave this operculum to me last week while at the inSITU writing  
workshops where a similar spiralling provocation hung in the air from Panda's  
lips.  
A gift to transform ocean spirals into words written.

Darkened grooves mottling the milky white surface allow new stories to emerge,  
like ink flowing from pen to paper,  
forming soft sentences.  
A gentle dialogue that is not white or black, but hiding somewhere in-between.  
Shifting from salty sea hands into the fleshy hands of my generous friend, who  
transferred them into mine,  
the same hands that now hold these undulating words out to you.

Enclosing the spiral,  
my soft sweaty skin runs on a different clock,  
one that is more ephemeral, a small part of a cyclical whole.  
In my honours thesis on Māori artist Lisa Reihana, I wrote about time,  
about the concept of *whakapapa* – three-dimensional time,  
about heterochronicity – when different concepts of time exist simultaneously  
in multiple places at once.

Holding these nuanced understandings, I glimpse the vastness of this moment where snail,  
ocean, flesh and written word meet.

This humble operculum has seen many things and many more things to come,  
long after my fleshy body will decompose back into this earth.  
Its rigid calcium carbonate structure can take thousands of years to break down.  
But right now it is here with me,  
offering a ruptured moment of remembering the spiralling rhythms that envelope me  
as I envelope it in my hand, here,  
now. Witnessing time.  
A secret stillness hidden from view between the folds of my jacket pocket.  
Poised between thumb and fingers,  
time and space converge,  
we are not separate but spiralling together,  
dancing into each other.  
Two subtle bodies of accumulated memories, now shared and transformed into prose.

I recently read John Berger's potent words in his book *and our faces, my heart, brief as photos*:  
  
'The poet places language beyond the reach of time: or more accurately, the poet  
approaches language as if it were a place, an assembly point, where time has no finality,  
where time itself is encompassed and contained.'

John's ponderings flow with me as I hold this operculum and write these words, both becoming  
a tangible embodiment of past, present and future that  
exist in an ever-evolving and unfolding archive.

The true magic of this world is that time doesn't move in a straight line,  
but spirals and swirls around us,  
like the unrelenting waves of the ocean – always ebbing and flowing as the earth spins,  
so no water spills out from its spherical edges.

I realise that I am even smaller than the smooth form I hold,  
delicate and ephemeral,  
tossed around by the waves of time that mark their own spirals into my skin  
as I move through  
this world.

I find a comforting strength in surrendering to these undulations,  
allowing them to wash through me,  
their salty tears cleanse my raw wounds as  
life continues on its winding path.

Undulating backwards...

Spiralling resonances seem to follow me.

A few weeks ago, I wrote a poem that leaned into the organic rhythms of nature  
that surround and move through us,  
a vital intelligence we often forget to tap into.  
Moments grasping the operculum in my pocket remind me to tune back into  
this soft way of being.  
I hope these words offer a similar reminder for you, inviting you to flow with the undulations in  
time...

My body moves in spirals,  
in fluid motions, not at sharp angles that cut and define, there is a flow.  
This flow is what it means to be human.  
Our bodies showing us the way,  
they are soft and vulnerable,  
exposed to joy, to pain.  
This is how we feel alive, how we connect deeply to each other and the lands we tread.  
Together we move in spirals.

Beginnings from an ending...

Opercula can be found at culturally significant First Nations shell middens,  
including on the Mornington Peninsula.

These coastal areas where layers of shells and other natural materials organically  
accumulate offer unique knowledge of place, knowledge of Bunurong Country.

I was touched by my friend's gift, but soon, I hope to journey to the Peninsula and return  
the operculum back to its true home,  
offering an ending that allows new cycles to  
begin.

# SOMETHING ELSE TO FORGET

ROWAN WILLIAMS

The guy cleaning the window is looking at me funny. He's stopped mid-squeegee, as if he has just remembered something. I call out through the open door to Barry.

'Hey Barry. Have a suss at the window cleaner.'

Barry works in an office across the hall. He got the sweet view. My office looks out onto the building next door. It's one of those ugly skyscrapers built in the 80s. *It looks like RoboCop should work there*, Barry likes to remind me. One day I got to work and there was a full-sized cardboard cutout of RoboCop standing next to the potted monstera.

Barry is hanging from the door frame. 'Hey Frank. Did you say something?'

'Check it out. What's his problem?'

Barry's standing there like a cardboard cutout. He's wearing the same expression as the window cleaner.

'You ok?' I try throwing a stapler at him, but my arms aren't working.

Diana from marketing knocks on the open door and tilts her head into the office. 'Glad to see you're both hard at work. Have you finished the Bunnings thing yet?'

Barry sort of reaches out for her without taking his eyes off me, patting at the space in the doorway. Diana drops her clipboard. She's not smiling.

The window cleaner starts banging his head against the glass. It's triple glazed so we don't really hear much, just a series of dull thuds. Suds drip from the hair mashed against his face.

'What the hell? What's going on?' I say. 'Do I have something in my teeth?'

Maxine has joined Barry and Diana in my doorway. The three of them look at me in horror, grimacing each time I speak. I try picking up the stapler again, but my arms still aren't working. The phone is ringing but no one seems to notice.

The thuds from the window continue. The cleaner's platform tilts each time he hits. Behind him, in the next building, people in suits watch from their offices, stunned. Venetian blinds are cracked ajar. Curtains are raised. Every window has a face in it, turned this way. I don't think they're looking at the window cleaner, though—they're looking at me.

Barry is crying. Maxine has started making a sound like that toxic-waste guy in *RoboCop*. Diana is crawling on the floor pushing her clipboard around with her chin. Geraldine, always late to the party, splashes coffee from a 'Best Dad Ever' mug into her eyes. In the building across the street, people are hurling themselves into the floor-to-ceiling windows. They look like cartoon characters who have followed a road into a drawing of a road—they hang in space, briefly, limbs at weird angles, before falling to a heap on the carpet.



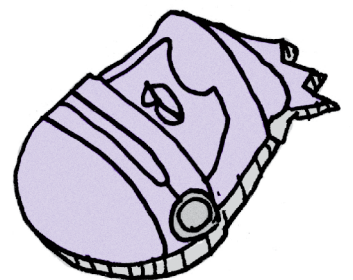


I try getting up. My legs don't work either. 'For fuck's sake,' I say, which elicits a fresh wave of animal noises from my colleagues.

On my laptop screen, in the Zoom meeting, Terrance, Beatrice, Jake and Betsy have transformed into their own profile pictures. Three of them drool. Betsy's microphone screeches feedback. The chat window is a waterfall of gibberish. It looks like the window cleaner has tipped suds into it.

More people enter my office. Who's that guy? Who's that? A courier wearing hi-vis body slams the RoboCop cutout, tearing it to pieces. More than one person is defecating into the potted monsteras, folded over like straining dogs. All while looking at me and screeching along with Betsy's microphone.

And then, the feedback stops. I can move again. A slow shuffle of strangers leaving my office. The sound of Diana picking her report up from the floor. People are doing up zippers and rearranging their hair. No one looks at me, and no one looks at anyone else. Heads down. Stepping over wet patches on the carpet—casually, as if that's the way they always walk. The window cleaner squeegees blood into his bucket and lowers the platform down to level 87. It looks like he's whistling, but I can't hear anything. In the next building, all the venetian blinds are closed, all the curtains are drawn. The reflection of a plane shimmers in the glass.



# FROM 'EPISODES'

EDWARD CARUSO

a past that has yet to find me  
    olive trees   thick trunks  
twisted and hollow   carbonised  
or splayed in foliage  
    white stones heaped into walls  
    falling to ruin   ploughed fields  
    skies filled with cirrus   bare branches  
    grazing the lowest reaches  
    of the thickest cumulous  
        a train crawls alongside cultivations  
if I were cycling the adjacent dirt road  
through sloping land  
and intense light   breezes would fortify my upward ride  
    open spaces breached by a pot-holed road  
    stone walls overgrown with hedges and prickly pears  
    wild grasses rejuvenated by sudden rain

        I'm familiar with every grove  
its trees grown from saplings before my time  
        the terrain exposing roots  
uncovered by drought

        the harsh light of intense summers  
undulations in land   three stone walls  
meeting in one point at the borders  
of a plot

        hedges overtaken by nettles  
bereft of foliage and singed  
        shadows stretching uphill

        when those with me  
        look through me  
into themselves  
        pauses in conversation  
        halts after each step  
        our gazes into clouds  
and back to one another

# TERRARIUM (THE SEX UNSAID)

BRADLEY VISAKA DAVID

perhaps the ruby sun, hueing the conservatory, wasn't  
actually, dilating into night *iris sanguinea*. it was only  
your refraction, in *alternanthera slight ruby*, my own blood twilight  
anthropocene, moonlighting through Tyndall's lantana. but my only eyes are  
*zantedeschia aethiopica* (Arum lilies), lustily caressed  
in gilded mirrors, bubbling photosynthetic under concentrated light.

I am leaning in dharmic alignment, in the rock pool trellis towards  
the deadening crimson *geraniaceae*, perennial invasive. the unplaced  
*murraya koenigii*, spider mite, gangrenous, evading  
your explorations obliviously. only eutrophicating inside  
this vivarium, strewn beneath Monsanto wine and *monstera araceae* vertebrae  
the milky pollen pill *wisteria fabaceae* of your volcanic livery – steeping  
like white carbon saccharine molasses, crystallised

perlite. I retain all of your moistures, I am epiphyte, only  
from the pearlescent exfoliant, the terroir of your skin.  
in the leaves of my germinative memory, parasocial ecstasy, dendritically the  
vascular entropies, escape  
vacillating only for your light. where my adamant breath detaches, in  
this, our once sexed up humid air, chiming your *palisade mesophyll*, where you  
perspire my weather, leaving only stones decayed and desirous. inside  
this impenetrable glass blown house, full of topiary cut deities.

inside my terrarium, dusty sticks amongst cold volcanic bone, basking Tyndallian.  
soiled bodies, light deficient and water fasting. at last, all sum, and no synthesis.



# RUSTY HONEY

CUSHLA SCANLAN

It's May, again. I'm running my hands along the gumnuts and beheading constellations of dandelions with quick kicks. My father's in the sunset. I find him there amid the artificial glow of Northcote's orange streetlights and the sweet brown smell of a nonna's caramelising onions. I am 27 and although I distantly remember my mum telling me there is no good time to lose a parent, I am too young. I am too young. I am a child, and I don't have a dad.

I didn't know what to do with the grief in my body back then, so my mind compensated with long bouts of derealisation. This morning, I woke up and waited to feel real. I lay in bed with my eyes closed for another hour or so and imagined my body turning into fertilising mulch, my housemates finally deciding to check on me and being faced with nothing but a large patch of dirt. I got up quite soon after that. *Be sad, Kelsey, don't be silly.*

It hit me on the way to the bathroom, so sharp it felt like I'd been shot. Suddenly I was all Western action movie—~~Clint~~ Kelsey Eastwood—and I shot my grief back, re-holstered my still-smoking gun, dipped my hat to my reflection, and cried while I brushed my teeth.

I made myself a bowl of Greek yoghurt with chia seeds and the last of autumn's plums, shovelling the soft purple mess into my mouth, all over my clean, clean teeth and felt great satisfaction in sealing the crevices of my wisdom with the little pods. After I was done, I began to wiggle them back out with the monstrosity of my pink-red tongue and it was so stupid, it was so, so stupid that after all that, I'd have to brush my teeth, again.

I washed my dishes, and I had a shower and I listened to a podcast on dissociation. It told me nothing I didn't already know. Dissociation is often a response to childhood trauma and unreliable caregivers. I have a dysregulated nervous system. My dad is now dead. My brain is trying to regulate me, it is trying to keep me safe.

If I could, I would uncap my skull, draw my brain out from its confines, and give it a good long rattle. 'Ding dong! The Witch is dead!' I would yell and caw and screech. 'Look around you! It's safe! It's safe!' Instead, all I could do was look down at my rotund doughy flesh in the steam of the shower and feel as if I were a seed sewn deep inside a body.

*I am automating you.* I thought.

I forced my arms to do the robot, and I laughed.

I lugged my body back to my room, my towel heavy around my shoulders. I did my makeup routine with wet hair and shivered. The droplets of water that rolled off my half-formed curls exploded into little flowers on the cement floor. Dad didn't like the cost of flowers, so I said no to flowers at his funeral, but that had felt so wrong, so did we? Did we have flowers?

The hole in my memory gaped open wide and with horror I could see it was growing teeth. I couldn't remember. I can't remember. I—

I put memory-mouth away and pulled myself back to the mirror and distracted myself with how the childish features of my face—the eyes, the lips—were at odds with the wrinkles and the sagging jowls of my chin. I felt like that horror movie *Orphan*—where the 30-year-old woman disguised herself as a child.

I finished getting ready, walked to the tram stop and felt incredibly faint. The thought of standing behind a counter at work discussing shoe sizes with customers made me want to scream. *Oh, you thought you'd treat yourself to some winter boots? My dad's dead.*

I kicked a squashed can of Coke at the corner of Blythe and High Street, and startled a pigeon. The 86 came and I got on and I didn't tap because I was so mad and so angry at the stupidity of work and the stupidity of capitalism and how stupid it was that no one knew how much I was grieving and that I had grief and that I was grief and that I didn't feel very real and that I just wanted to feel real and I was sick to death of people trying to put a limit on how long I could grieve for because what do you mean I need to still pay rent and my housemates won't keep equally splitting the water bills with me if I keep having 40-minute-long showers?

And then a transit officer came on, making me fish for the topped-up Myki at the bottom of my bag with the terror of someone approaching the electric chair, and I tapped on in time, so I smiled daggers at him, and he smiled back, nicely, and I was crying again because really I was just upset about my dad being dead and I shouldn't have been so mean, that transit officer was just doing his job.

As the tram continued to go on and on, I continued to doze in and out of dissociation. The clips that held my fringe back felt tight and right on my head, like someone was pinning my skull together with two long fingers and telling me I would be okay. I tried to feel it. I could see the world in a way of non-seeing. Sometimes I'd close my eyes and feel as if I hadn't even closed them, the world sat so vividly in my mind. I was half-terrified I was imagining it all and was actually still in bed, decomposing into dirt.

The terror made my body leap off at Johnston Street and run downhill, down toward Abbotsford and down toward the Yarra and the Merri, my mind flailing behind. It was 2:30 pm and I couldn't face the day and my 3-9 shift in the clinical lighting at Myer. I needed to become mulch. I needed to feel real. I needed to touch dirt and I needed to scream and I needed my dad. I didn't care what trendy soul saw me at Hope St Radio, running down the cement hill in my Docs. I didn't care about the pain in my lungs, that sharp tug near my spleen. I only made it to Hoddle Street before I had to stop and walk, feeling a little silly, feeling a little more real, imagining what Dad would have said if I had forced him to run with me. Remembering the time he didn't like my attitude, so he forced me to walk home from Coburg after hockey. Remembering when I was seven, and that time he drank too much and cracked his eyebrow open on the bathroom floor and yelled at me when I suggested an ambulance. Remembering the way he always carried a handkerchief in his pocket and that time I'd come home crying, and he had open arms, but it was too late.

Memory-mouth yawned and the teeth returned and I found myself slipping back into the black, long-drawn spiral of its throat, the soft emptiness of nothing of no memory of not remembering of not being here of not being in this world, of being mulch, soft mulch, of the dirt beneath my fingers and it's grief, it's just grief. I've felt this all before. Can't it just pass? Can't it just pass again? I don't know what to do with it all.

I had the sharp idea to wander home along the Merri. I flicked my boss a message to say I wasn't coming. I wrote, 'Sorry Georgia, but I'm on a quest to feel real.'

To her credit, she responded, 'Take your time Kels. Grief isn't linear.'

I checked Maps and it said it would take an hour and a half to get back to Northcote, but I dawdled on my way back to make it three.

And now I'm here, and my dad is in the sunset, amid the artificial glow of Northcote's orange streetlights and I can smell the sweet brown smell of caramelising onions and I can feel it, all the rage and the shame and the sadness of loss and the confusion too, the confusion of loving someone who was not always there in the way they were needed. And I trail my hands along the little gumnut leaves down by the Merri, and they're soft and grey-green and they smell like rusty honey and I kick at the dandelion heads and suddenly I'm here, oh I'm here, oh I'm here and it hurts.

# BEND IN THE ROAD

EDWARD HODGE

}

the moon is a dog of light  
on the muddy path  
i used to walk on  
so often

other people's footprints  
are there now  
bowlfuls of the same sky  
that you and i walked under together

i am filled with happiness  
that you are  
out there somewhere  
and that i am back here

like a rhyme  
remembering us  
at this bend  
in the road

wherever  
you are  
beneath this moon  
i wish you happiness

the arm of a spiral  
passes by  
where it once was  
and moves  
along

}



# IF I HAD TO GIVE THE WORLD A SHAPE

EDWARD HODGE

{

dear world, remember when  
my friends broke that car to be funny  
how you can make violence happen so easily  
though i am an optimist

i wonder why on earth  
every sound i ever heard faded  
just feeling  
when i saw the opening flower

what was even there?  
a seagull circling air  
nothing inside of something  
just silence

but something does come  
and tomorrow you tilt again  
towards some other bend we cannot see  
i am still an optimist and i believe

the juice is worth the clench  
better to have had it  
and then forget it  
than nothing

i believe that light is  
the shadow of another light, after all  
what can trace laughter's source  
and why do some pathways call out

'come here'  
if i had to give you a shape  
it would be a cut tree stump  
where the circles have bled

and it smells of split wood  
and every instant is  
blurred together  
in a whorl of sap and bark

}

# THE BLOOD OF A BIRD PURIFIES THE HOME

ROSA CASS

April is the cruellest month  
Belly full of some new  
Cure for  
Doing too much when  
Everything  
Feels too delicate  
Glass tender, breaking  
Hard on the floor  
In here  
Just there  
Keep  
Looking for  
Mother  
Not there  
Open your  
Palms, pray  
Quickly, alone  
Realising everything is  
Something  
To you  
Under the mud, under your skin  
Violets breaking through  
Would you like to see it? Make an  
X-ray of my foot, my wings  
Yes  
Zipporah, little bird

# GLITTER AT THE CREASE OF MY EYE

THARIDI WALIMUNIGE

snail slime streaking / on pavement / bisecting chalk mum of triangle dress / and dad with pot belly / a most perfect circle at the hands of three / smashing! / i wish now i'd missed the gelatinous / mucously meandering / creature / wish i'd kept that fluttering fairy at bay / for flitting atop my shoulder / had i led it right to that morsel / a meal / SLUUURRRRRPPP! / and leftovers too / paltry offering / spiralling shell / perched on window pane for an adolescent / who'd dried tear tracks to bed / but the fae / pay forward / favours / favours / don't ask me / i will wither / die / before knowing what to do with him /

nine now / i've promised myself to many / martin at the monkey bar / sticky hands on metal / imprint / i slapped mine over / left / right / left / right / and felt his / i do / then jack who yanked my foot out the jungle gym / love / most definitely / though i wasn't stuck / had i known that marriage wasn't to be brought home / i would've honeymooned / on tan bark and skin stripping / slides / but that fae / creature / ever attentive / curled in my ear / canal / lobes unpierced for / gossamer wings / dangling / i dreamed of ballgowns / and cake / and that twittering fellow / caught the wisps of my head / clouds / spinning sugar / i slept to the pads of his / itsy / bitsy / feet across my forehead / a faint lullaby of twinkles / and manic giggles / or so i thought / i'd heard / and woke to a chewed / ring / circling my pinky / flesh ridges / right round / bites and bumps / uneven / i sobbed / for the red / nectarine flesh hanging on to the pit / that he'd made of my loveliness / and love / i married a nobody /

the window doesn't close / at thirty / i'm knuckling the lacquered wood / bed posts / waiting / starchy spud / pungent breath groaning / one / two / three / pumps / there! / weight off / and i'm pushing on elbows / bathroom in sight / but / a nip / at fingertip / a suck of breath / clenched core / belated gratification / we'll say / a dart / back out the window / a faint cackle on the wind / and a belch beside me / yes the window doesn't close /

home alone / hand languid / heated flesh / had i a martin or jack / to paste onto that void figure / weighted / above me / but the fae was mine / wishes and ever afters had gone to the pigtail / paddycake princesses / down the road / i imagine / so the void dissolves / and i pant / into nothingness / he meets me / arrogance and that pointy grin / pointy boots / eyes closed / i convince myself / the twittering is me / and yes / the faint gusts at my core / hot to cold / me too / fantasy ferrying peak / but as breath traps behind my tongue / teeny feet / perched / there! / hummingbird vibration / wings aflutter / and i'm shamed / i'm fulfilled / he lazily glides around / mounds and pounds of slabby flesh / dips to brush those cellophane crystallant sails / a lipgloss smear on my trembling pout / juices / he leaves /

i weep / nothing else for it / i imagine /

and then a new day / uninvited dawn / i welcome him / abed and arousing / my creature / to fold those teensy / weensy / kneecaps on my lips / plush cushion / and i tell him a kiss / is all that's left for us / curious little one / he hovers / slightly buoyed by my breathing / love / leaking from my eyes / currents pulling him in / he sits / butterfly open / wings framing my mouth / cupping cheekbones / he leans forward / hands braced to upper lip / peck / a kiss / peck / i don't feel a thing / head bent to me / i suck / tumbled torso / he tilts to my tongue / CRUNCH! / bisected / bitty thing / i swallow / and only splutter on the wings / gelatinous gummy mush /

husband home / i won't cook potatoes / but he will circle spit in my soft / spots / starchy / so i clean the bath / too / and the shine of the plug / winking / is magic / i say /

# JOYBELLE

LIZA DEZFOULI

Aunt Joy announced that she'd die by drowning. I believed her, and for years afterwards, half expected to hear she'd washed up on a beach, her waist-length hennaed hair tangled with shells and seaweed—a silly, pre-Raphaelite fantasy—nothing romantic about the body of someone who's drowned.

Joy and my mother were at the table in the dinette, a space you'd describe by saying what it wasn't: not kitchen, not dining room, not lounge. I hovered, watching Joy roll a cigarette, placing shreds of tobacco along a thin oblong of paper then sprinkling it with tiny white crystals of menthol. She put a filter at one end, rolled the paper into a tube, and inserted it into a carved ivory cigarette holder. Then she let me light the cigarette for her with her heavy silver lighter.

*I was eight, and Joy was a goddess.*

She formed graceful waves in the air with her cigarette holder as she told stories in her cultured voice, tales about growing up with her adored older brother in India, where they had servants and a pet mongoose. She was proud of her Anglo-Indian origins, more so the Anglo side. Joy had a seal point Siamese, Solly Binks, her familiar. She used to call him to her without uttering a word. *Watch this.* Within a minute, Solly would appear. I thought she had magical powers.

Now, I'm a good few years older than Joy was on that day in the dinette. I've dressed in bright colours for my visit—an orange shirt patterned with pink and red cartoon-like blossoms and navy capri pants. I prefer subtle, stone colours, but Joy loves vibrancy. When did I last see her? It took a while to work this out, which I eventually did over breakfast this morning with her nephew Vaughan and his partner Geoff. It must have been when Joy's third husband Uncle Col died. Over 20 years ago.

*Joybelle.*

*Will she remember me?*

'Probably not,' Vaughan says in the car on our way to the nursing home. 'She comes and goes, so be prepared.' Before she moved into the home, Joy had been living with Vaughan and Geoff, but it all got too much. We pull up outside the residence.

'It was becoming harder and harder to keep her safe,' adds Vaughan. 'She kept trying to run away.' He's not coming in; he'll collect me in an hour.

Where did she want to run to? From what? Certainly not from her nephew and his longtime partner, who Joy referred to as Vaughan's 'friend'. She would have been comfortable in their home. Vaughan and Geoff don't simply have pictures on the walls, they have an art collection. A wine cellar. And an entire cupboard filled with bottles of spirits and liqueurs. Cocktails are taken seriously. Joy's drink was gin and tonic with lime, not lemon.

A staff member leads me down a short flight of stairs and along a corridor lined with doors. Everything is beige and bland. When we reach her room, it takes a minute for Joy to answer my knock. She's still petite, upright, scarcely even lined, her ankles as dainty as ever. Her hair drifts to her shoulders like an albino Spanish moss. I explain who I am several times over, but she looks vague.

I sit down carefully on the single bed. On the wall opposite is a photo of Joy as a bride, taken at her first wedding when she was 18. Once I asked her about her husband, but all she'd say was that they'd been too young.

A sliding door opens from Joy's room onto a courtyard dotted with parlour palms, their fronds nodding politely in the way of good listeners. A few sturdy outdoor chairs, currently empty, are spread beneath them.

Suddenly, she remembers me. *Oh, Lisie!* Bursts into a smile that's so heartbreakingly familiar, I cry. I hold her, feeling her life force pulsing beneath the fragility of her body.

Joy's 90, but really only 22, she reminds me: she was born on the 29th of February, so only 22 birthdays. Part of her singular mystique.

When we first knew her, Joy was working at the local telephone exchange, way back when operators plugged cables into cord boards to connect party line numbers. At home, when nobody was looking, I'd pick up the phone in the hopes of hearing her voice: *Operator here. What number, please?* Her carefully rounded vowels. *Hang up now, Lisie, love, someone might be trying to get through.* *Women's Weekly* featured a photo of her at work, captioned 'The Golden Voice of Tolls'.

She took me on day trips; we caught the ferry to Rangitoto Island and visited Western Springs to feed the ducks and look for tadpoles. The lake was unfathomable, she told me. *They've sent down divers, but it is so deep nobody has ever seen the*



bottom. I held on tightly to her hand. We went to an Italian restaurant for lunch. The tables were covered in red checkered cloths and candles poked out of Chianti bottles clad in straw bustiers.

*You should be my little girl, Lisie. It's mean of your mother, not letting me keep you.*

By the time I was 13, Joy's clothes fitted me perfectly. She gave me shift dresses in garden shades and floral patterns, and wrapped me in her silk saris, a turquoise one embroidered with gold thread and the other pink, shot with silver. She took a photo of me wearing the pink sari, which she framed and kept on her desk.

We'd examine her shell collection, creamy horned conches from the Pacific, spiralled cones, pink abalone, pearlescent and as big as side plates, and we'd look through her boxes of jewellery: sapphire rings, a topaz, a diamond bracelet. One afternoon she showed me a huge uncut emerald.

'Col saw something in the paper, in the classifieds, and straight away took off to Australia, to Queensland,' she said. 'He was gone for three days and came back with this.'

Col and Joy's love story was the stuff of folklore. One night, Col had been at a house party with a friend. He spotted Joy across the room and informed the friend that he intended to marry her.

'Already married,' said the friend. 'But not happily,' adding that Joy's 'old man' regularly 'roughed her up'. That was all Col needed to hear, and later, apparently, he knocked Joy's husband out cold and took her home with him that night.

I stayed with them at their house on Great Barrier Island. Every morning and evening, Joy perched on the edge of the bathtub and massaged scented white blobs of Nivea into her shins. During our lengthy games of canasta with Col, I'd watch her slip two cards instead of one onto the discard pile, sending a sly wink my way. I painted a portrait of her in oils on black velvet. *Such detail, Lisie!*

I can't see the photo of me in the pink sari. Perhaps it's been wrapped up in tissue paper and tucked away in a drawer. Although he's been dead for decades, I find myself glancing around the room for Solly Binks. I remind Joy of how he'd answer her silent summons.

'Oh, yes,' she murmurs flatly. 'The cat.'

There was a cat, a soft toy, Vaughan told me earlier.

'But she kept trying to feed it,' he said. 'Things got a bit smelly and nasty.'

Cats persist, however. They come in from the courtyard after dark, Joy says, her face intense and wide-eyed. They sleep on her bed. But the woman a few doors down has complained about the night cats and wants to kill them. Joy explains how she in turn intends to have this woman killed. The mafia could do it, or a gang. She might do it herself, with a knife. She'll get one from the kitchen.

It makes me wonder how much rage she's been carrying around all these years.

Joy asks me repeatedly what time it is, will I be coming back, is it time to go for luncheon? Through the glass doors, I can see across the courtyard into the dining room. Residents sit in couples or groups of three, shakily raising teacups to their mouths. Plotting one another's deaths.

After I hug her goodbye and promise to return, I cross the courtyard to make my way out. A pond sits above ground in a case of cream brick. It's covered in mesh and filled with enough water to sustain a few lily plants. Joy's unlikely to drown in that.

I walk through the building, emerging into bright sunshine; it makes me squint, and I rummage in my handbag for my sunnies. On one side of the curved driveway, there's a wooden bench next to a bed of red lilies and I sit down to wait for Vaughan to drive up. I'm looking forward to this evening's cocktail. Of course, a gin and tonic with lime, not lemon.

# HARD RUBBISH

CLAUDINE MARIE

It was a red couch. A KLIPPAN loveseat, in *fräsig red*. Always too heavy, too small, and too unyielding to be of any practical use, except for serving as an eternal graveyard for food and debris in the tight spot between the arms and seat cushions. At least the bonded leather made the frequent wine spills easy to erase. Touted as a 'loveseat' by Swedish wordsmiths, there was nothing inherently romantic about this couch—except perhaps for its diminutive size forcing you to roll into the lap of the person sitting beside you. It was not a two-seater as advertised, but a one-and-a-half-seater of unwittingly familiar friends.

My housemate at the time had just given our agent his one month's notice—and me, a whole week of notice. Spite had become his new currency, as he no longer wished to pay his bills.

I was relieved to see the back of him. Like most housemates-gone-bad tropes, we had descended into communicating through passive aggressive Post-It notes. He refused to pay his half of the electricity bill, until I promptly returned the onion and can of tuna I had taken from his designated shelf in the pantry.

When I returned to the apartment one night, all my furniture and even the toilet brush were gone. He didn't even leave me a final Post-It note to tell me he had stolen everything. I always wondered why the toilet brush was taken, but in retrospect I'm sure he saw fit to splatter paint my remaining belongings like Pro Hart before he left.

Suddenly that little apartment in Thornbury had no furniture. No TV. No fridge. And no couch.

I saw the ad on Gumtree. A white 90s fridge, with a bonus miscellaneous red couch thrown in. \$200, no negotiations.

The fridge was perfectly serviceable, until it started to leak, leaving swirls of water all over the white tiles. And I soon discovered that the red couch had a broken right leg, so if you flopped onto the couch too ostentatiously, you would freefall for 0.7 seconds before you crashed to the floor.

The couch became a fixture in that first apartment, my cosy double-bricked soundproof bunker. I could barely hear the jackhammers and excavators across the road destroying the charming vintage buildings to make way for the new German supermarket. I slept like a baby there, the deepest sleep I'd ever had in my life. My tiny cherry-red couch sitting proudly in the middle of that open lounge room. We were blissful roommates, until my landlord decided to increase my rent.

The red couch came with me to my next apartment. The cheap toy-like one with the perpetual icy draft and the paper-thin walls. And the eccentrically clamorous neighbours—the reclusive man below me, with the affinity for blasting talk-back radio at 3 am. And the 90-year-old man with dementia, who would look inside my bins 100 times a day, searching for some elusive treasure.

It was the apartment you reluctantly moved into when your housemate left to live with his own partner.

*We've been together a while. I should probably move in with you. \$250 a week, divided by two, is incredibly affordable.*

It seemed logical on paper. Many things seem more persuasive on paper. Like how you almost never told me you loved me in person; instead saving it for the annual colloquial misspelling on a birthday card.

*Happy birthday. Love ya.*

There you were on the doorstep with all your clothes, your laptop and your guitars. I cut you a key.

That red couch was placed against the longest wall in that tiny apartment, and finally it looked like the appropriate size.

It's where I rested my head on your warm chest, while we watched action movies I could never follow. It's where you plucked away on your guitar, pensively dreaming of rockstar success. It's where we held hands on cold nights, and shared countless homemade meals together.

It was where we fought so viciously, you threw my favourite book at me and narrowly missed my head. It's where you made me cry so hard I couldn't breathe.

It's where I told you that you had no heart and zero empathy. It's where you told me I'd never amount to anything, and I was a burden on everybody. It's where we opened Christmas gifts, while I insisted we wear reindeer ears and take silly photos of each other. Photos that were taken on your much newer phone, which you later told me you had accidentally erased.

It was where you broke up with me for the first, third, tenth time. It was so lipstick-red. So sturdy. So deceptively heavy.

*Don't sit down too hard, I warned visiting friends. It has a tendency to drop out of nowhere, and you'll go on a momentary roller-coaster ride where your stomach will end up in your mouth.*

I tried unsuccessfully to prop up the broken leg with a brick.

It's where my old high school friends took turns sitting cautiously when we blasted John Farnham too loud, and the Northcote cops banged on the door and stifled laughs when they saw five of us sitting around, singing to Farnsey's greatest hits on CD.

It's where Starla, Gorgeous and Hugo all curled up peacefully and made tiny round indents on the hard leather. It was the perfect size for a cat. They're all gone now, some in urns and some curled up forever under avocado trees.

The red couch came with us to our peaceful new townhouse. It went straight into the garage while we hastily unpacked, next to your golf clubs, photos of your band tours, and cards from friends and family. *Too broken, you said. Too unreliable. Too red.*

Would never amount to anything.

From the first day we moved in, I could almost hear the soft tread of your feet walking out the front door at all times.

For two years, your body was there in that house, but your mind seldom was. And then suddenly, both your mind and body were gone.



'It's hard rubbish week,' I said to my brother. 'Can you please help me get rid of the old heavy stuff in the garage?'

It's June 2025, and that couch hadn't been moved in 10 years.

So on a Sunday morning, while I was asleep, my brother quietly dragged that red couch out to the nature strip.

I wanted to look at it one more time before it ended up in landfill. So now it's 2 am, and I'm standing outside, looking at the discoloured arms under the artificial glow of the streetlamp. In this light, the synthetic grain of the bonded leather looks like fingerprints.

The dark street is completely empty and deathly silent, except for the pedestrian lights playing their meditative percussion a block away. The inky night sky is perfectly clear, and I feel like I can see the entire universe swirling above me.

And suddenly, somehow, I start to cry. It's a freezing night in Melbourne, and my tears feel hot against my pallid cheeks.

I remember you sitting on that couch, trying in vain to get comfortable against the precariously low back. I remember you saying my name a hundred times. I remember your laugh. I can picture you sprawled on it; despite it being as hard as your heart, and too short to stretch out on. I remember it resting against the walls of every home I had lived in since I was 25 years old. When life seemed like an endless expanse of possibilities.

We had locked that couch in the garage to gather dust, never to be used again.

I remember the day you left. Coming home to an empty dark house. The new kitten we adopted together, unfed and crying. All the lights off, and all your clothes gone. You left so hastily, you left everything else behind—furniture, photos, birthday cards. I found out many months later you had started a new relationship with someone else.

It was like you had packed for an emergency evacuation, but it was just the timebomb of your anxious avoidance going off in your temples.

*Where are you?*

*I left.*

I never saw you again.

I always thought you'd say goodbye. Maybe I always thought we'd stay friends, in some distant, perfunctory way.

I touch the top of the couch one more time, its once bright red leather sullied by ten years of languishing in dust and dampness. I am almost tempted to sit on it, but I am afraid the broken leg will collapse under me, and I'll free fall forever.

Into a black chasm of grief, spiralling forever into that colourless pulp of time where you can't differentiate between morning and night, and the hours and days blend into one. When sleeping tablets become your new lover, and every day you close your eyes and pray for the new blossoms of spring to come.

I wipe my tears and walk inside.

And in the morning, the couch is gone.

# RED BRICK SCORCHED COUNTRY

ELI (LIZ) SUTHERLAND

family friends, beginning ends,  
beggars belief but believe in me.  
we are a ruination isle, the mainland  
makes a sea of us. where flags flap  
whispered hunger on the breeze.  
    red brick rib bones on display  
into blocked ears, they shout  
    *it's in the past.*  
it's not, it's not.

and so, a silence of mirrors.  
complicity in a different key.  
moral dearth, pity and hearth,  
runs hot then cold  
    and cold and cold.  
constitution crumbles like barren soil—  
like letters, words, sentences—  
    like life sentences  
we sink into the page  
then spew onto the pavement.

and here, limestone curves spread  
to bruise the horizon,  
soar in red brick scorched country.  
we're penned tight  
strapped down  
echoes bound.  
no pulses in my head  
    stitched in black thread.  
*good* my mouth tied shut;  
    *good* stifle white lies.

we downward spiral, erstwhile,  
wonder how we got here,  
what warmth or hunger—  
nationalist agenda—  
pulled us apart? beggars belief,  
begins and ends, family and friends.  
cast the mirror: see warmonger,  
    oceanic vital hunger,  
mainland sea, forever free.



# HOW THE LIGHT SITS ON THE PLACE

CARL WALSH

## Abbotsford Convent, Wurundjeri Country

from chimney-edge lodge  
magpie calls response  
  
somewhere  
    piano tinkles  
  
paint curls rough bark on iron pipe  
branches up rendered walls  
  
clouds mirror in upstairs window  
  
stairs spiral into rust  
  
birds wing air above bared branches  
  
moon split  
    in half  
        braving daylight  
  
leaves propel across forecourt  
as hearty as loosed angels

# GODSPILL

JOE GODDARD

an indian rug spills over  
in gold flowering reminiscence  
where no man escapes from the brain  
of the educated, itself spilling over onto  
the paper you write on, your head like  
a shaky hand holding a cup of coffee,  
or some small creature stuck in a trap,  
bleeding everywhere.

# NOT GONE, FORGOTTEN

WILLIAM STANFORTH

Lucia arrived at the Melbourne General Cemetery on the first Sunday of October, the first truly mild day of what was supposed to be an unseasonably warm spring. She checked her wristwatch: 4:15 pm. Almost two hours until the gates were closed—more than enough time to say hi to Enzo. A coffee and some biscotti on the bench facing his grave, and then she'd be home before sundown.

She walked the familiar path towards her husband, just as she had every Sunday afternoon since he died, ten years ago—days before his 75th birthday. They were the same age—and here Lucia was, now, alone, 85, wondering what the point of this part of her life was. The final chapter. Her only son, Matteo, gone in a car accident 13 years ago, lay buried in Castlemaine, near the small property he bought with Fay, his wife. Fay had, understandably, found someone else. Matteo had long become a memory.

Visiting Enzo was perhaps the only thing Lucia never forgot to do. She didn't need an alarm clock to know it was Sunday afternoon, not like the one her visiting nurse had set up for her medications, alongside the pill organiser and daily phone call that rang faithfully on her landline in Carlton. Visiting her late husband had become a kind of anchor—the one fixed point in a week that otherwise seemed to loop, blur and turn back on itself.



Not far from Enzo's grave, two young men, groundskeepers, were lounging around in a green diesel-powered utility buggy with room in the back for shovels, picks and dirt. They were staring into their phones with their feet up on the dash.

For a moment, Lucia imagined they would see her and sheepishly hide their phones, lower their feet and bow their heads in shame at what was presumably a grieving widow. But neither of these young men seemed to notice her as she slowly went past—they kept staring into their phones, flicking their thumbs at the screens, as though she were merely part of the wind hissing, or a shadow slipping across the ground as the sun dipped behind the city.

Once Matteo had tried to teach her how to use a smartphone, but it didn't stick. Its battery died somewhere in her house and she never found it. By then she'd lived most of her life without a mobile phone or a computer and didn't see any point in being tethered to it.

She turned off Tenth Avenue towards the Roman Catholic section and down one of the narrow paths that separated the rows of graves and monuments. She couldn't help studying the epitaphs, always marvelling at how young some of the long-dead had been.

*Here lies Annie Cartwright*

*1887 to 1903*

*Gone too soon, but not forgotten*

Beyond this stone was another she could just make out when she squinted through her glasses:

*Joseph Ashford*

*1899 to 1919*

*Till we meet again*

The headstones, many of them softened by more than a century of weather, had shifted noticeably in the earth, now slanting like they would in an old, clichéd zombie movie. The epitaphs felt quaint, given the context. Not forgotten—how? Forgotten was inevitable.

She stood before Enzo's grave and the plot beside it, reserved for her. They also shared a tombstone, their names etched on either side of a fading photograph set into the marble.

The photo had been taken at least 20 years ago, their faces side by side: Enzo, smiling broadly; her own expression more reserved. Next to her birth year was a dash and then nothing. An absence which, some days, felt like a pause.

Also missing was the epitaph—the one Enzo had meant to leave for Lucia. He'd organised just about everything else about his own death: the plot, the stone, the service. Just not the part that went beyond the pragmatic. He'd left the epitaph up to Lucia because either he thought she'd be good at writing it, or he thought it didn't matter all that much. Life went on, in Enzo's eyes, no matter what you wrote about it. And death was death.



She sat on the bench and poured her coffee from an old beat-up thermos. She broke her biscotti in half and ate just one. The green utility vehicle passed along Tenth Avenue, its hum low and steady. The

young men remained inside it, phones put away now. One drove; the other knelt on the seat, scanning the maze of walkways, squinting at the thousands of headstones that stretched in all directions. For a moment, Lucia thought he caught her eye, just a flicker, but then he turned back to the driver, said something, and the buggy trundled off towards the southern gate.

Usually, she stayed for about 30 minutes—less in winter, when the cold made her joints throb and spine stiffen. But today, the sun was putting on a quiet show: veiled by clouds, glowing softly through the breeze. It reminded her of home. Of Calabria. The orchard behind her father's house, the smell of olive leaves warming in the sun, crushed grass, wild herbs. Back when so much time stretched before her that she felt immortal, as if the days circled but never closed.

She checked her watch as the shadows deepened. Today, she'd stay longer, until 5:30, and she'd still have plenty of time to get out before the cemetery closed, and get home. The buggy passed one last time, and once again, the young men in it didn't appear to notice her. She was wearing one of Enzo's oversized grey wool cardigans and for a second, she wondered if she blended in with the gravestones.



She reached the southern gate—shut now—and it took her a moment to realise what had happened. Her watch read 5:43 pm, but it was actually an hour later. The cemetery had already closed.

Daylight savings must've kicked in overnight—her nurse had mentioned this on Friday, she now remembered, and Lucia had forgotten to adjust the time on her watch and the clocks at home.

It also explained why the young men had been scanning the walkways—they'd been checking for anyone left inside.

She gazed in the window of the small office by the gate, now vacant, before attempting to exit through a nearby turnstile. No luck either, it was long disused, secured with a rusted chain and padlock, weeds growing up through the seized, intertwining metal bars.

Someone half a century younger might've been able to scale the 12-foot fence and gingerly hoist themselves over the jagged iron spikes. With some luck, they might not even break an ankle in the fall.

But that wasn't an option for Lucia, and it didn't bear even thinking about.

Instead, she walked the cemetery's vast perimeter, peering through the fence at the park on the western side. In the distance, families packed up picnics and young men kicked a soccer ball. None of them heard her calls. The much closer footpath was, almost comically, empty, and the passing motorists, eyes fixed on the road, didn't see her.

The dusk slowly transformed into darkness and, for a moment, Lucia wondered if she'd already died. Or if this was merely some place in between.



It was dark by the time she returned to Enzo's grave. She sat on the bench and pulled his cardigan tighter around her torso. It was cooler now, but not cold.

At first, she'd panicked, pacing as quickly as she could along the cemetery's perimeter, trying and failing to get the attention of people who always seemed just out of reach. But now she was with Enzo, on the bench, settling in for what might be a very long night. And if the night were cut short by inevitability, she thought wryly, at least she'd be saving those two young men some time when they found her in the morning, metres from her own plot. She thought to check her watch again but didn't.

Just as the day had, the night put on a show—the big moon materialised, the stars shone as brightly as Lucia had ever known them to. She'd felt deeply, cosmically alone during the earlier panic, when no one had seemed to notice her. But now, as she stared into the night sky, she felt somehow seen. She drifted into what felt like sleep, smiling as she came up with an idea for her epitaph: *Not gone. Forgotten.*

# TREPIDATION IN TIME

ZARZOKIMI MOSS

braided reality  
runs through undercurrent  
under  
under  
runs under  
masculine force  
held  
against  
rock  
against braided flow  
and a father plaits his  
daughter's hair  
too loosely  
full of  
trepidation  
afraid to pull  
water runs  
under  
water runs over  
water runs  
under  
braided flow  
comes between clasped  
hands  
held under current

water runs  
under  
water runs over  
water runs  
under  
come under (come under)  
run over (run over)  
come under  
cell borders  
I remember facilitated  
diffusion  
where you can go  
depends on the waters  
from where  
you came

# FAMINE

AARON LEYSHON

In beautiful weather, the plovers,  
their chicks on the ground, they circle round  
and round, the shriek and the caw and the  
tutting of tongues, a tune full of hunger  
flapping their wings—loud as the grey-  
gushing wind whose roar they ignore—  
their necks and their beaks stretch forward  
to drive them, accusing and pointing out  
distant clouds, swinging their tails, those  
claws must be sharpened to threaten such  
force; peace

as they dive for their chicks,  
in beautiful weather, the plovers.



# IT'S TIME, AND TIME AGAIN

CEE POWELL

The last of the day's light elongates itself, mauve shadows deepening the shoe prints in the sandy path that hugs the curvature of the suburb limits. Time ticks towards a heavy evening and working humans are seen practicing their daily pilgrimage, shuffling from their office enclosures and out, to Open Space.

Shell navigates the meandering tramlines away of the city thrum and into the tree-lined streets of a Labour-strong postcode.

With a migraine building deep behind the eyes, Shell twists to grasp their water bottle from behind their backpack, gulping the liquid for relief. The cooling, metallic gasps harmonise with the wind tingling their cheeks... again—warm for this time of year. A peachy dusk begins to settle as a backdrop to the composition of silhouetted gum leaves, traffic glow and powerlines.

Bzirp! Bzirp!

Shell's phone has always insisted the quickest way home is to dismiss the parklands and trot the busiest road like an artery from A to B. When ignoring this demand on many occasions, Shell's phone would melodramatically hiss to recommend immediate relinking with Big Street. Both bothersome and assiduous these days, phones.

It's been a hectic one in the office. With the threshold between physical and digital worlds now permanently lucid, the sapphire lights overhead cancel the orange-y hue of the *Living Artists Incorporated* sign pasted to the wall with budget tac.

Shell is paid an hourly rate to oversee the two server cooling systems in the main office. Technically speaking, the job title is 'Mechanical Engineer', but Shell never studied 'engineering' per se, and just, sort of, slipped into the role after their Fine Arts degree.

Leonora Brown was a pretty close friend in Art School who, in her early twenties, twisted tear-drenched tissues into miniature sculptures of all the organs adjoining the gastrointestinal tract.

Leonora's dad started *Living Artists Incorporated* to equipose his offshore financial holdings and—really—has nothing to do with the artists themselves, practically or metaphysically.

For Shell—an ex-art student with a tatty first edition of *Poor Artists* wedged under their arm—Leonora's family were simply kind and simply rich and, whether

it was simply or simply not, getting significantly richer. The Browns paid for Shell's rent in exchange for five days a week to-and-froing the carpet tile flooring of their high-rise level.

This was living, simply put.

Shell genuinely felt lucky.

An undone thought is visualised as Shell's feet cross the tramway and skip onto a bike track leading to the park. Warm yellow materialises behind the smog of their pulsing head. This mind image is, both naturally and understandably, related to work and yet, the thought still manages to release Shell of their pain.

Sigh.



The script for AI 168 needs updating. Meet with Red to discuss tomorrow.

Flush more water once complete.



Shell industriously opens the notes app in their phone and thanks their subconscious for a spontaneous connection. Their face lit electric cobalt, eyes wide, fingers straight like knives, mind flickering in binaries of on and off.

In the centre of the park—the heartbeat of the electorate—a cotton jersey sweater with a high roll neck lays slumped across a large sandstone plinth. The plinth is positioned on its horizon, laying down for what might have been decades, centuries even.

The skivvy's once luminous Perinone Orange pigment is severely faded, leaving a yellow-gold residue around the neck and cuffed sleeves. Legend has it that the screen-printed text across the middle of the sweater was once a powerful carbon black tone. But now, with so much exposure to Open Space, the edges of the letters curl in towards themselves to reveal the words 'It's time' in negative space.

Shell enters the parklands through the Coles carpark. Car spaces are mostly empty, alone. Some angular electric scooters are plugged in to charge, and a 90s Toyota model with a bonnet cloaked in moss is not quite abandoned yet.

SHELL MOTIONS TO THE SOUL OF THE PARK, UPHILL IN A GEOMETRIC CURVE  
THAT MIMICS THE INGENUITY OF MICROSCOPIC WAVEFORMS.

Shell's long-lost next-door neighbour once said the Corolla belonged to a multilingual art teacher who described his earth art practice—a practice of propagating and growing endemic moss onto auto-mechanic structures—as part of his ongoing advocacy for moral public school funding. This long-lost neighbour is now deep in the bush with their head in a kiln, firing desert urns imbued with ancient and unending wisdom. Who can say what is true?

Shell decides tonight is the right time to reengage with the 'It's time' skivvy. They have coincidentally encountered this artefact a handful of times; when their phone battery died, and they wandered in uninhibited spirals through the parklands and far away from Big Street. Tonight though, the meeting is intentional. Shell has questions, a headache and a weirdly stiff neck from a sad swivel chair at *Living Artists Incorporated*.

Shell's dizzy, and somehow perceptive.

'It's time', they nod to themselves.

The sky is darkening slowly, birds calming their afternoon chatter into gestures more cute and serene. Shell motions to the soul of the park, uphill in a geometric curve that mimics the ingenuity of microscopic waveforms. At the peak of the incline sits the plinth, all flat and convincing, slouched, with

the sun's last beams shimmering through the surface of the composite mineral stone. Something about its form is vital.

Its objectivity renders exacting and true.

And... just as anticipated, the roll neck sweater. Still present and insensible atop its sandstone throne.

Kind of 'laying there', or 'gathering dust', or, simply, 'lost'.

Not trying to be anything and certainly not asserting its promotional political mémoire. Simply put, the skivvy is free.

In the softening light, Shell rereads the large typeface one conclusive time before the journey home. Something about the chunky serif script conjures a sense of retention. Like... there's a guerilla Christmas card in the art museum shop or 50 Australian celebrities singing as one at a well-resourced recital hall... like a vision of a distant dreamscape one might hope to revisit someday.

The distressed cotton retains its effect, and the time of day asserts the reading as magic.

The slogan says 'It's time' one more time.

And time knows again.

# I FEEL AT HOME BY THE RIVER AT NIGHT

EMILIE KILVINGTON

The colour of the past is a single grey curl of  
campfire smoke  
A harsh laugh from across the swollen, sluggish river  
The smoke loops upwards and then disappears into  
the early evening,  
Leaves no trace behind  
You watch the smoke, lying on your back, spine  
pressed into dry leaves and twigs,  
hair collecting sticks and dirt  
A damp curl sticks to the nape of your neck  
A moth circles the fire, forgetting what will happen  
if it flies too close  
You watch it, mesmerised by its dedication to  
the light

You get that way, too—a thought that isn't good for  
you, a memory,  
coming back again and again and again  
An old argument. Something you said  
Something you should have said  
A moment that was perfect until it wasn't  
*See, I have these looping thoughts, you said*  
I shouldn't have said that

A harsh laugh from across the swollen, sluggish river  
A branch floats past that looks like a body, then just  
a log, then a body again  
Turns around in front of you  
You shift slightly  
Gum leaves crack beneath you, clouds move  
softly above  
A teacher once told you the Fibonacci sequence  
could be found everywhere  
She said it was a miracle  
The golden ratio  
You remember her drawing spirals on the board  
Her hand moved in a continuous loop for four  
days straight  
She had thin wrists, long fingers, a deep melodic voice  
She said: *Nature favours the spiral*  
*Petals, pinecones, galaxies, shells*  
*hurricanes*  
*Even the way your DNA twists on itself*  
*Everything repeating, curling into itself quietly*  
You thought  
*So grief is natural, too*  
*These recursive patterns of thought*  
You touch your own thin wrist softly

Somewhere in the distance, a koel cries—  
those long descending notes that sound like  
someone slowly falling down  
a very elegant staircase  
Stair  
after stair  
after stair,  
Laughing

You used to think koels were owls. They're not  
They're cuckoos  
Intruders. Brood parasites  
Always nesting in other birds' homes,  
mimicking the babies of other birds, stealing their  
food,  
tricking mothers into raising them as their own  
You hear the koel and you hear a mother's grief  
You hear a question  
You hear yourself  
You sit up. The moth is gone  
Your fingers twitch. They want to follow it

Sitting by the river, you've been in this exact moment  
before, another time, with another heartbreak  
pressing on your chest  
You've sat here while the wind churns itself into  
circles  
and the tea trees on the riverbank bend like the  
backs of tired old women  
You've watched eddies in the river spin dead  
leaves tightly,  
spin them over and over and over again and thought  
*I get it*

Sometimes thoughts are hair in a drain  
Sometimes they're birds at dusk,  
flapping and shrieking and impossible to name  
Sometimes they whisper  
Sometimes they bite  
Sometimes they haunt  
Sometimes they sound like your mother's voice,  
sharp and startled,  
a split-second before the bowl hits the tiles  
You don't remember what was in it but you remember  
the sound  
Ceramic on ceramic. Harsh. Sharp  
You don't remember what you said,  
but you remember her saying,  
*Well, you shouldn't have pushed my buttons*

You remember how your throat closed like a fist  
Thought,  
*Well, I shouldn't have pushed her buttons*  
Eyes stinging, you remember standing still in the  
middle of the kitchen  
not knowing where to look

The corellas screech above you, try  
but fail  
to  
bring  
you back

You remember taking a bath as a child,  
watching everything spiral down the drain,  
get caught,  
water building up  
The sound of the drain sucking up water like  
a monster  
Sitting on the ground,  
whispering to yourself  
*Make it stop make it stop make it stop*

The ground is cold and the dirt clings  
You follow the warm belly of the river  
Rivers always have the answers

The water coils slowly, quietly  
Doing what it always does—gathering everything  
and letting it go  
You watch the surface  
A water spider darts in a perfect, jittery oval  
You can see your reflection, but it isn't quite you  
It's a laughing ghost with a thin laugh  
It's your face without its soft happiness

Again, you feel the familiar ache in a different place  
Feel it in your heart, your kidneys, your mouth  
The moon rises  
Brings with it both comfort and devastation  
The water coils slowly, quietly  
around and around and around  
You say  
*Go on then*

The river laughs warmly and says  
*Finally*

# NOT READY

ARIELE HOFFMAN

I don't exist on fun-size Milky Ways  
But I did burn a pile of cashola on a psychic

Your doors are flung open to me  
But you have to let go of your ex  
Run eight gold circles around him

I'm clearly not ready to let him go  
I've turned my shoes toward the bed  
They're not out to sea like Sylvia Plath...

This Break-Up is a gelato  
Autocorrect is wise  
Am I?



# ANTI-MANIFEST

BRADLEY VISAKA DAVID

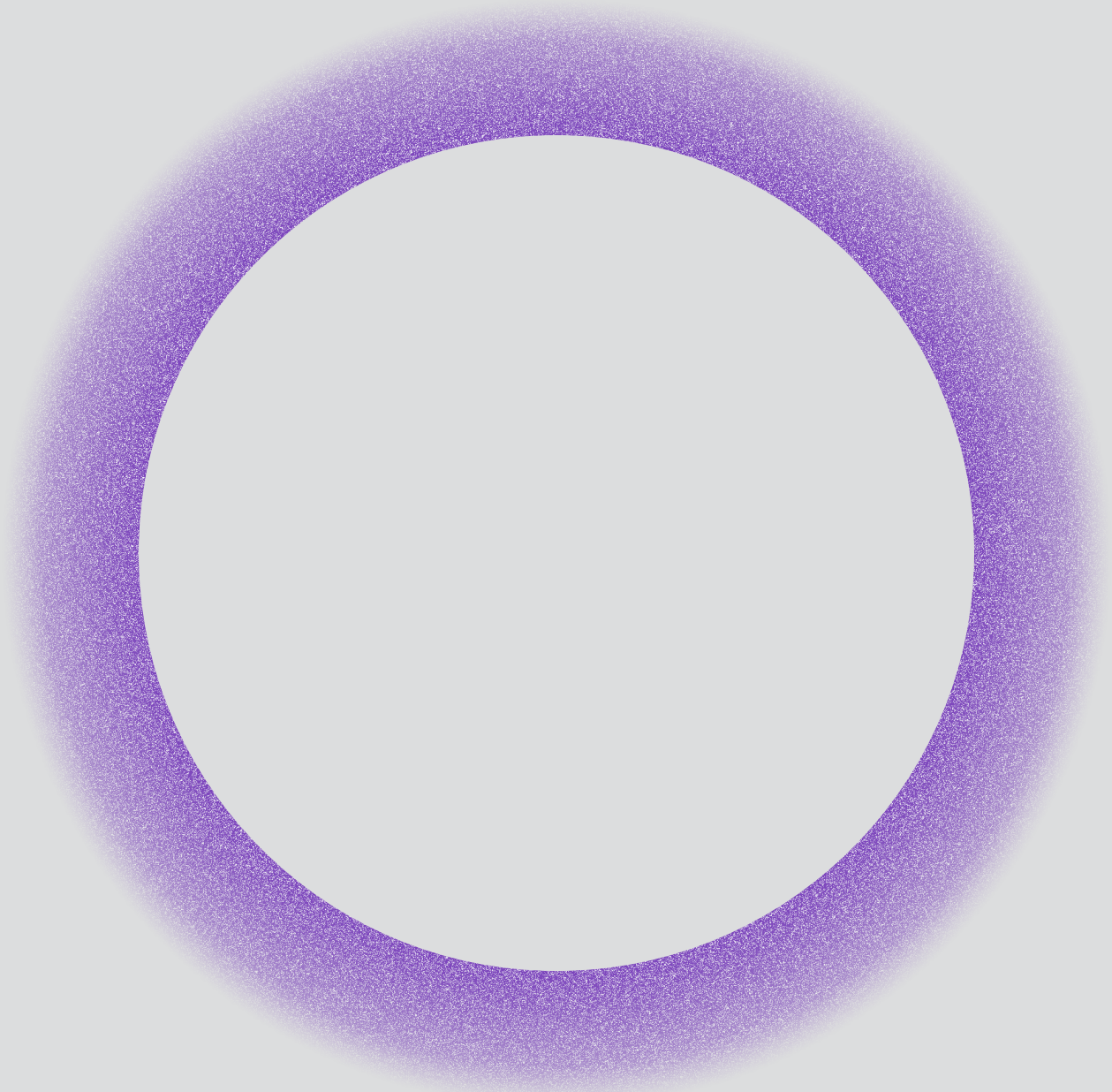
[illegible]

## NOTE

Text is directly repurposed from AI marketing material—the manifesto of 'Cluely', a generative AI company promising to 'redefine productivity' whilst 'revolutionising the social'—along with posts from its 21-year-old founder, Chungin 'Roy' Lee.



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