

Towards a whole riverbed of what may or may not be

Billy Head

~

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Abstract

This thesis is a presentation of the formation of my writing practice as a poet; and of the profound imprint on that practice of spending much of my life between 2007 and 2023 living and working in Antananarivo.

The main body of the thesis comprises writing derived from a notational practice that I established during this period. It is divided into four parts: *lobataona*, *fabavaratra*, *fararano*, and *ririnina* (Malagasy names for the four seasons in Madagascar). Each of these parts features writing in a variety of registers, drawing on experiences of various kinds, including as a journalist and as a teacher of creative writing in the Anglophone Department at the University of Antananarivo. Across these multiple registers, the writing is also conscious of itself as a working-through of the many questions arising naturally out of its own conception.

Alongside this work, the thesis also features my translations of texts—or of fragments of texts—by five writers whose own practices, in some way or other, have also passed through Antananarivo: Jean-Joseph Rabearivelo’s *Nadika tamin’ny alina / Traduit de la Nuit*; Jean-Luc Raharimanana’s triptych *Enlacement(s)*; Julia Sørensen’s *Cocon-fort*; Johary Ravaloson’s *Antananarivo intime: carnet de crise*; and a Facebook post by Joey Aresoa. These translations are presented as an extension of my writing practice. They also offer an oblique commentary on my own encounters with Antananarivo in *lobataona*, *fabavaratra*, *fararano*, and *ririnina*.

The thesis presents a collection of photographs; setting up another strand of dialogue with the writing and bringing a reader who is unfamiliar with Antananarivo a touch closer to the origins of the writing.

The thesis also explores what it experiences as a lack of fit, epistemologically speaking, between the above writing as research and the language of the institutional framework into which it is placed here for a PhD in Creative and Critical Writing. The section *away from Descartes* looks at work by a handful of contemporary Western writers whose unease with a Western rationalist orientation speaks to this lack of fit. This section includes reflections on some of the potential pitfalls in moving away from this orientation in academic writing. The section *[un]ethical matters* locates and critiques that same orientation in the language of two procedural checkpoints that this thesis has journeyed through: Probationary Review and Ethical Clearance. This section adopts a mode of inquiry via negative space that is omnipresent in Antananarivo.

The thesis opens with some lyrical writing in the present tense from a stretch of the river Dart in the UK. Written between July 2022 and April 2023, this work is self-consciously experimental in exploring what happens when my writing is disconnected—geographically, at least—from Antananarivo. Interwoven between introductory remarks, it also serves to link the thesis with my notational practice up front; it serves to link the thesis with its title; and so it introduces, too, the fundamentally performative nature of the thesis, which is essential to its functioning. The thesis is not divided into “creative” and “critical”.

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~

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of the late Alessandra Cavalli, who offered me a different kind of supervision and introduced me to what poetic language is really capable of. I hope she is clapping her hands in heaven.

*

We went on a journey, my friend and I, at night in a very long train...
the name of the train was thought.

We journeyed, journeyed on through the night to the end of a very long line...
the name of the place was nought.

—BRYAN ILLSLEY, from *The Great Book of Nonsense* (unpublished)

*

*Introduction*¹

¹ Teny fampidirana



July 2022 – April 2023, Dartington

5.06

~

in the upper reaches

under the leaves,
wrecking the dark

dappling
on a forest path
an untroubling

where things are brackish,
shafts

right through the highest bit
of the riverbed

~

don't look under the rocks, let it all be

*

Almost fifteen years ago, I moved to Antananarivo to learn how to write. The writing you will find here is that writing.

It is not about that city.

But the formation of my writing practice, as things have turned out, has been inseparable from it. In some way I grew up all over again in Antananarivo.

This thesis, first and foremost, is a presentation of the formation of that writing practice.

*

loosening a rock and

/ amalona²

*

For a short while in early 2007 I was living with a family friend near Paris. At some point during that period, I started clipping a pen inside the right pocket of my trousers³. It soon came to feel like I was missing something if I left the house one morning without it.

I was thinking about how to set about becoming a freelance foreign correspondent; a “stringer” in journalistic parlance. I’d done a couple of short internships on the foreign desks of national newspapers in the UK. But I was conscious that I couldn’t yet know for sure if this kind of work, and the lifestyle that goes with it, was something I would be suited to in reality. So I did a “hostile environment safety training” course. I made some useful journalistic contacts in Paris. I worked hard on the kind of French I thought I’d need as a journalist. I had nothing keeping me in the UK. I had the money for a scoping visit to Madagascar; and a passport that would get me a visa without complication. And one evening in early April that year, that was where I went.

I had meticulously avoided reading about Madagascar before departure.

*

way up | above the roof, now | the sycamore releasing its seeds | gust | in the ferns, parsley, everything | and I brace

*

I returned to the UK about six weeks later.

² freshwater eel

³ An orange and white *BiC* “original fine” ballpoint pen in four colours. On a clothes rack in the next door room as I write this are some jeans with a new redbluegreen stain on one leg. The offending pen rattling around in the washing machine yesterday was of the same kind.

For half of the trip, I had spent what time I could picking the brains of journalists and ex-journalists based in Antananarivo (Malagasy, French, British). For the other half of it, I had bought a taxi-brousse⁴ ticket and had headed out of the capital, and then out of Madagascar's central highlands, south.

*

pm heat, smell-of-the-ferns

iron rod fused | with stone | parr, minnows | in the shallows, bullhead's | tail | greengreen quartz | near-black | gully under | almost a boat-of-roots, tugging | at the rushes | sapling, twisting | accretions of foam

what's left | standing, sticky-out | the slime- | -in-places, all things | ruddied | furling, tangled | in themselves

~

and all afternoon

people ~~emerging~~ out of the forest | in various states | of startlement

*

Once back in the UK, I transferred a regular writing practice I had begun while in Madagascar from a big notepad to small A6 artists' sketchbooks.

I had decided to set about becoming a writer, whatever that would end up looking like for me.

(Exactly the same kind of sketchbook sits to the right of the keyboard under my 2023 diary, as I type this.)

*

what would've been 3-something

Orion's belt

⁴ Minibuses used for public transport across Madagascar.

~
still unable to tell

pebble

from leaf,

oak from ash from alder from beech, still

forest as edge

not depth

~

and the joy of an external door

ajar

all night

*

I lived with my parents and found casual work redecorating a pub. I made a handful of radio documentaries and gained some experience of producing international news broadcasts. I continued building journalistic contacts of the kind I thought would be useful to me.

In August 2008 I applied for a role filing news stories and photographs for a global newswire agency from Madagascar. (A “string”, in journalistic parlance.) I got it, and so I returned to Antananarivo and set about making a life for myself there. I hoped this new work would also open a door onto the kind of experiences I could also, in due course, draw on as a writer.

*

on the island

water up a good foot, at least. dippers more present. knowing i will find a way back, but the water level is menacing. state of the cow parsley a reminder that things end, move on. smacking on a beech leaf. it'll be okay. everything'll be okay





*

Through the long northern hemisphere winter of 2021-2022, I sat down and read carefully through the writing that had ended up in what was, by then, about two hundred A6 sketchbooks, dating back to 2007.

I circled with a pencil language that I felt, in some way or other, held promise; that could be worked into something. At the end of this reading and circling for each sketchbook, I typed up what had been circled in a Word document.

I printed off this document (in the end about 530 pages, all in) and had it put into six ring binders.

I read back through the writing in each ring binder and circled with a pencil language that stood out.

I read back through one further time and placed some sticky labels on the pages of the now-circled language.

I then opened all pages with a sticky label, located the now-circled language in the Word document, and copied and pasted it onto a fresh document. That document was the starting point for the four sections you will find here: *lobataona*, *fabavaratra*, *fararano*, and *ririnina*.⁵

Some fresh writing was then added to *fabavaratra* in late 2022 and early 2023.

I will try not to comment directly on what is contained in these four sections—other than summarising, as best I can, why it is presented here in the way that it is.

*

tomorrow: focus on oak leaves

how they start by floating, then half-submerged, then at some point
towards

*

Antananarivo sits about 4,000 feet up above the Indian Ocean. It is, for me, blessed with its natural climate. I have always found myself to be highly sensitive to the weather there; and so also to the changing seasons. My memory synchronises itself to the clock of the changing seasons to quite an extreme degree, such that when a new September, say, clicks round (marking the end of the southern hemisphere winter), in some

⁵ \approx *spring, summer, autumn* and *winter*.

way I feel closer to Septembers of the past than to the August immediately passed. I'm not suggesting this is particularly unusual, but I experience it to quite a pronounced degree. The implications of this for my writing are quite pronounced, too, therefore: time, in my writing, has never felt straightforwardly linear.

The above, along with an encounter in 2021 with the poet, Gillian Clarke's, essay-journal *Roots Home*⁶ suggested to me that the natural form for the writing presented here should be as you now find it: moving slowly through the cycle of a year, with different years moving together, in parallel.⁷

*

the water more powerful today, more going somewhere

chopped-up slate, riverglass, china flecks, grit. and all of the extra matter rotting along it, everything going the same way

~

still some light-in-the-larches

<—vintsy⁸

to have got to this, today

and that it mustn't matter in the least if I write something
or not

*

⁶ Gillian Clarke, *Roots Home: Essays and a Journal* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2021).

⁷ While putting finishing touches to the thesis, I have also come across the poet Zoë Skoulding's fascinating book *A Revolutionary Calendar*, which 'maps out a temporal intersection, bringing historico-political time (linear and progressive) into conjuncture with seasonal agricultural time (cyclical and recursive)'. Zoë Skoulding, *A Revolutionary Calendar* (Swindon: Shearsman Books, 2020), back cover.

⁸ kingfisher

Likewise in relation to places in my writing: being in / writing from a particular spot immediately brings with it a sense of close alignment with previous occasions at that spot.

And so I have often marked a particular location in *lobataona*, *fahavaratra*, *fararano*, and *ririnina*: either a place where the writing was actually written, or a place that the writing is concerned with; a place it had travelled through, as it were. It is possible that needing to put a “dateline” when writing newswires as a journalist is an influence here. Likewise, the newswire-like form of updates on the news page of the *Orange.mg* website⁹, which I’ve found a useful resource over the years, including for my own safety at times of tension on the streets of Antananarivo.

All together, this form for the writing also has the advantage of partially disrupting linear time. Only partially because in the course of the four sections it still, I hope, allows for a gradual filling-in of a context surrounding it; for the emergence of things for you, the reader, to follow the development of. It also seemed to make sense to separate these four sections from one another and space them out over the course of the thesis; to heighten the sense of something developing and, I hope, also to provide you with breathing space, helping you avoid reaching saturation point with any one register of writing.

I will mention two locations in particular here, since they come up repeatedly.

Isoraka is a small neighbourhood that was my home in Antananarivo between 2008 and 2017. For readers not familiar with the city, it sits on a small promontory: with the city’s poorest neighbourhoods arcing round to the west; Antananarivo’s central boulevard in Analakely, the avenue de l’indépendance, to the north; the Ambohitsorohitra Presidential Palace and an assortment of street stalls, cafés, shops, hotels, banks, and the city’s central post office around a small garden in Antaninarenina just to the east; and a lake, Lac Anosy, to the south, beyond which lie an old luxury hotel, the offices of state media and most government ministries.

A mile or so to the east, Ampasanimalo is a partially wooded and hilly neighbourhood that has been my home in Antananarivo since 2017. On another, more thoroughly wooded, hill just to the north at Mausolée is a memorial to the Malagasy people who died during a large rebellion against French colonial rule in 1947 and, close by, the main barracks of the Gendarmerie (military police); within walking distance to the east is the University of Antananarivo campus; to the south, a densely populated valley; and to the west, looking towards the city centre, is a prison and clusters of small businesses lining a major ring road, the route circulaire.

*

⁹ <https://actu.orange.mg/>.

on Staverton bridge,

swelling catkins

apple pips
rain from the west,
roughly

first alcove:

a mature oak smashed

up,
pinioned on one of the ~~arches~~ buttresses

the riverbed

murked over, now
heavily laden

the pink and slate and

greens,
the very beginnings
of a thickening-out

~

day of almost nonstop rain, washed out with bug. am resourceful, but there are limits.

~

the two men playing chess in a polytunnel

as it beats on down

*

Alongside work on my writing, from 2010 onwards, I have also taught in Antananarivo. (I stopped working as a journalist in 2009.) Some of this teaching has been English-as-a-foreign-language teaching. The rest has been in the English department at the University of Antananarivo where, in June 2011, I got a job effectively setting up a creative writing unit. Over ten academic years thereafter, I had the joy of designing from scratch, teaching and, at times, leading other teachers on a variety of courses; initially to big groups of 100-150 undergraduates; and, increasingly, to small groups (2-10) of masters students with specialised interests.

I will share here a few general thoughts about my experience from this work, since it has informed my writing over the years; and my encounter with the institutional framework within which this thesis sits. Whether with simple sense-based tasks in workshops along the edges of eucalyptus woodland by the “Prefa” block on the university campus; or empathy-based tasks in workshops in amongst the din and fumes of Analakely and Ambohitovo in the city centre, outdoor workshopping has always been at the core of this teaching—trying to catalyse in students a fuller state of reflectiveness; with that one foot always outside of the classroom door, as it were. I’ve also tried to impress on students the usefulness of cultivating their own journal practice—of learning to notice better, essentially. And I have tried to keep space in class for any additional reflection from that practice to feed back into shared activities; and on into assessed work, if students wish. As my understanding of Malagasy cultures has become sharper over time, I’ve also increasingly tried to structure teaching in some kind of relation to culturally-specific phenomena: looking at traditional forms of performativity in the highlands of Madagascar within writing workshops, say; or encouraging masters students to work together and write in the Malagasy-French-English composite ‘vary amin’anana’ that is, in reality, their first language.¹⁰ There is an ethics to doing this: it is part of my trying to make clear to students I acknowledge their cultural identities in our work. But I also believe it makes for a richer learning experience all round. In not insisting that inquiry be framed in any one way, I’ve had fascinating insights into new ways of talking about the world. Conversely, my sense has been that being able to lean into English has enabled my students to find new ways of transcending particular Malagasy taboos without losing face.

Towards the end of 2019, I designed and taught two 50-hour masters courses, entitled *Gender Dynamics in Poetic Language* and *Shaping Silences: Language, Ethnicity and Otherness in Madagascar*. Under the place-marker “University of Antananarivo”, I have included writing derived from notation made during these particular cycles of teaching in the *lobataona* and *fabavaratra* sections of this thesis. *Gender Dynamics in Poetic Language* was a course for M1 (first-year masters) students; one group of five students majoring in English Literature and another group of five students majoring in Gender Studies. *Shaping Silences: Language, Ethnicity and*

¹⁰ From ‘vary’ (rice) and ‘anana’ (a kind of leafy green vegetable found all over Madagascar): a dish. The anana is chopped into tiny pieces and mixed in with the rice. As a composite language, vary amin’anana is normally a mix of a Malagasy dialect and French. However, because of the English in their lives, the vary amin’anana spoken by students at the University of Antananarivo is more commonly trilingual.

Otherness in Madagascar was a course for an M2 (second-year masters) group of four students, majoring in English Literature. Run as twice-weekly seminars of three hours with a short break, I tried to keep my level of participation in proportion to the size of the group, such that in working with five students, say, I was not speaking for more than 1/6th of the time. Students moved freely—often within the same sentence—between English and vary amin’anana. I chose the English texts and students chose the Malagasy texts. Notes I made during the teaching of these courses served both (a) as a teaching aid for myself and (b) as writing that fed into my doctoral thesis. And so, exceptionally for my notation practice, these notes were made partly with a reader other than myself in mind; hence, in places, the explanations of things that I would myself understand implicitly. Students were aware that my taking notes on our work together in the course of teaching time also fed into my doctoral research. After consultation and careful consideration, my sense was that not one of them was uncomfortable with this. (In my view, neither written nor verbal consent of the kind that is conventional in an ethical research practice in the arts and humanities in the UK can necessarily be taken as consent if applied to a research setting in Antananarivo. See the *[un]ethical matters* section of this thesis for some further discussion of this.) I have included fragments of students’ spoken exchanges here, but not of their written work. I have omitted the names of all students in these groups, marking each simply with a double underscore, “__”. This practice of anonymising is also in keeping with my approach to anonymising elsewhere in this thesis, across *lobataona*, *fabavaratra*, *fararano*, and *ririnina*. It is my hope that as with much of the ethnographic writing of Kathleen Stewart, for example (encountered in the *away from Descartes* section of this thesis), the decision to quote “interlocutors” whilst not disclosing their identities in this way strikes the right balance between my wish as a writer to preserve the vitality of the language, and my ethical duty to protect each of the individual students I had the pleasure and privilege of working with.

*

slumped, queasy in amongst the ivy and garlic and goosegrass and lords and ladies and bramble and nettles
and radio 4

reasoned argument

personally-felt buzzard testimony,
a sea change in where we think knowledge
and authority come from

who knows more
about __, __ or __—
someone

*who's experienced it,
or someone who's studied it?*

pungency
of six months' rotting
under the ivy

*expertise,
shared empirical standards¹¹*

squatting, spreadeagled
buttocks presented, a faceful of moss
and lichen

*

I have also selected, translated and am presenting here alongside *lohataona*, *fahavaratra*, *fararano*, and *ririnina* a small amount of work by five writers whose practices, one way or another, have also passed through Antananarivo. These writers are: Jean-Joseph Rabearivelo, Jean-Luc Raharimanana, Julia Sørensen, Johary Ravaloson, and Joey Aresoa.

Entitled respectively, *From Jean-Joseph*, *From Jean-Luc*, *From Julia*, *From Johary* and *From Joey*, these translations amount, together, to a polyphony of voices; to be read alongside those in *lohataona*, *fahavaratra*, *fararano*, and *ririnina*. My approach to aligning these two sets of multiple registers (and so to selecting the particular five authors and texts that you will find here) has been guided above all by the following considerations:

I have been keen to work with texts which (like the writing in *lohataona*, *fahavaratra*, *fararano*, and *ririnina*), whilst not necessarily understanding themselves to be *about* Antananarivo, are nevertheless very much *of* it, in the sense that they are discernibly the product of each writer's particular relationship with that city and its surroundings. To be clear, this does not mean that these translated texts are presented here together as being representative of a national poetic tradition in Madagascar. On the contrary, in an era of "transnational experience" (in which I include Madagascar's and Malagasy people's experience of French colonialism and neo-colonialism), each of the source texts selected may be seen to resist such a notion.

¹¹ *I Feel Therefore I am, Episode 1, From Facts to Feelings*. BBC Radio 4. 20 March 2023, 23:00. (Listening on 29 March via BBC Sounds: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m001j43d>.) A radio programme about experiential knowledge.

Indeed, their authors have been carefully selected here, in part, precisely on account of the diverse ways that each of their lives, literary influences and identities as individuals transcend borders.

Likewise, chiming with the writing in *lobataona*, *fabavaratra*, *fararano*, and *ririnina* taken together as a whole, my selection of these particular five source texts was guided in general by a wish to maximise formal and stylistic variety in the body of translated writing presented. Similarly, in terms of specific geographical and temporal reference points across *From Jean-Joseph*, *From Jean-Luc*, *From Julia*, *From Jobary* and *From Joey*, these texts have been carefully selected for translation and are presented here in order, as a whole, to offer the greatest possible overlap with those in *lobataona*, *fabavaratra*, *fararano*, and *ririnina*.

As I hope will be clear, there are also moments in the translations that resonate with questions raised in the *away from Descartes* and *[un]ethical matters* sections of the thesis.

I would like here to offer a few remarks about my approach as a “creative writer”, practically and theoretically, to the task of translation in relation to certain aspects of discourse in the field of literary translation (centred in the Anglophone “Global North”). Of course, as this is not strictly a thesis in literary translation, these remarks will remain relatively brief and introductory in nature.

As will, I expect, become clear from parts of the writing found in *lobataona*, *fabavaratra*, *fararano*, and *ririnina*, I am intensely interested as a poet in the strange contiguities that sometimes arise in resisting the hunt for dynamic or functional equivalence, in favour of preserving, instead, “literal” meaning or formal equivalence.¹² The prevalence in Antananarivo of both French and Malagasy—and, in particular, the delights of everyday conversation over many years in and between languages of such very contrasting sensibilities—is no doubt partly at the root of this interest¹³. It seemed appropriate, therefore, that in the course of translating each of the five source texts here, I should remain similarly inclined. This approach

¹² I am conscious here, of course, of the many vexed questions around notions of “equivalence” in literary translation studies, including of the argument that “literal” translation is impossible in the sense that any modification of the source text in a target language is already an interference too far on the part of the translator’s subjectivity. As Peter Bush has it, for example, “There can be no such thing as a literal translation in a drafting process. The first draft is the first stab at the rewriting; at an imaginative transformation in which the translator is reconnoitring the territory for the new literary language”. For me as a poet, this nevertheless does not dispose of the basic distinction between forms of equivalence (above) derived from the field of linguistics. See Bush, P. and Bassnett, S. (2006) *The Translator as Writer*. London: Continuum, p. 30, as cited by Rossi, C. (2018) ‘Literary Translation and Disciplinary Boundaries: Creative Writing and Interdisciplinarity’ in Van Wyke, B. and Washbourne, K (eds.) *The Routledge Handbook of Literary Translation*, p. 47. (Secondary referencing is unavoidable here as Bush and Bassnett’s book is not freely accessible in e-book format. It should be noted in the context of academic conventions discouraging secondary referencing that there would be no possibility of accessing such a book—either in physical or, most likely, digital format—for a graduate researcher at, say, the University of Antananarivo.)

¹³ The Malagasy spoken in Antananarivo tends to favour directness as a last resort, while the tendency of the French language, to generalise, is arguably towards the opposite; preserving “literal” meaning from Malagasy in French and vice versa can therefore be enormous fun.

extends beyond content to form. Indeed, in translating every single source text, I have mostly tried to avoid the temptation to modify and adapt indentations, line and stanza breaks, etc simply on the grounds that the original form jars with the way that I myself might prefer to handle white space on the page. (The recent “creative” turn in translation studies seems to encourage me to see the five translated texts here as an extension of my own practice as a creative writer, albeit in a writing that is collaborative, dialogical with that of the author in an obvious way.¹⁴ But I have felt strongly that the presence of the source texts’ authors should remain as distinctive as possible in the translated text—including, by dint of their very differences, to maximise the five translated texts’ ability to offer an oblique commentary on the writing in *lobataona*, *fabavaratra*, *fararano*, and *ririnina*; and vice versa. Needless to say the same goes, in turn, for the relation between each of the translated texts. And formal idiosyncrasies in the source text are, of course, a vital part of their fabric.)¹⁵ An exception to this approach has been my decision to extend to the translation of three¹⁶ out of the five source texts included here an editing process that has become second nature to me in the course of assembling *lobataona*, *fabavaratra*, *fararano*, and *ririnina* out of the writing in two hundred or so A6 sketchbooks—namely, the use of a fragmentary form; a form that of course excludes altogether from the translated text other fragments, sometimes very large fragments amounting together to the majority of the source text. To do so is clearly a consequential decision, methodologically. As Sinéad Gleeson writes in a 2020 online essay on the non-linear form, ‘A collection of essays is by its nature, already in fragments. Each piece is discrete and self-contained.’¹⁷ The same can, I firmly hope, be said of any part of this thesis in relation to the whole: my widespread use of the fragmentary form as method has been a crucial part of building a space that is intended to be, like a poem, an open dwelling. When applied to the use of the fragment in literary translation, again, the recent “creative” turn in translation studies would seem to validate such a move on the grounds that literary translation may quite legitimately be seen as the writing of a reading; that the literary translator is a writer in their own right, whose work stands simply in relation to the author of the source text. And as this is a Creative and Critical Writing thesis, such a justification does not

¹⁴ I’m mindful in particular of work in this area by Clive Scott. See, especially: Scott, C. (2006) ‘Translation and the Spaces of Reading’ in E. Loffredo and M. Perteghella (eds.) *Translation and Creativity: Perspectives on Creative Writing and Translation Studies*. London: Continuum, pp. 34-46.

¹⁵ On the question of the inclusion in this thesis (or not) of the source texts: as part of specialist consultation sought from Dr. Cecilia Rossi of the British Centre for Literary Translation in relation to the presentation of these five translations, I was advised that this was not necessary (nor, arguably, advisable owing to space constraints) because this is a Creative and Critical Writing thesis. The acknowledgement of translation extracts as an extension of my “creative” work submitted, it was agreed, would suffice.

¹⁶ I judged it appropriate to present translations of two source texts in their entirety so as to achieve a formal diversity across the five translated texts, as a whole, that could be seen to adequately reflect the variety of forms found across *lobataona*, *fabavaratra*, *fararano*, and *ririnina*. These two source texts are, by some measure, the shortest source texts of the five selected. The first is a full sequence of thirty lyric poems using numbers exactly in a manner featured in parts of *lobataona*, *fabavaratra*, *fararano*, and *ririnina*; the other, snatched from the pages of a social media platform in a way that bears comparison with certain passages in *lobataona*, *fabavaratra*, *fararano*, and *ririnina*, is very short and, somewhat journalistic in content, can perhaps be considered a fragment in its own right. Details of each are at the end of this sub-section.

¹⁷ Gleeson, S. (2020) *Fragmented Narratives Are Broken, Independent, and Honest*. Literary Hub [online]. Available at: <https://lithub.com/fragmented-narratives-are-broken-independent-and-honest/>

seem out of place here¹⁸. There is also a practical consideration: it would not be possible in the space available to translate these five source texts (three of which are book-length) in full; and nor, clearly, would such a move be in line with the purpose, as has already been stated, of setting up the five translated texts as interlocutors—formally, stylistically, and otherwise—of the multiple registers contained within *lobataona*, *fabavaratra*, *fararano*, and *ririnina*. It is also worth noting that each of the three translated texts featuring fragmented language use already, in their different ways, adopted fragmented forms in their full versions as source texts. My handling of the language contained in each is in a sense, therefore, either a continuation of a process already initiated by the author themselves; or at least arguably in the spirit of such a process. ‘True translation’, John Berger wrote, shortly before his death in 2017, ‘is not a binary affair between two languages but a triangular affair. The third point of the triangle being what lay behind the words of the original text before it was written. True translation demands a return to the pre-verbal.’¹⁹ There is a further, final, consideration that I would like to touch on here, in the context of debates in translation studies around approaches to the act of reading in the “initial phase” of translating a source text²⁰. Whilst studying for an MA in Creative Writing: Poetry at UEA in 2014-2015, I was able to indulge my interest in translating poetry by attending workshop seminars for students on the MA in Literary Translation at the British Centre for Literary Translation; and, later in 2015 at the beginning of my PhD studies, I attended a BCLT symposium on the concept of untranslatability²¹. Other than the above, I have no formal training in literary translation and very little institutional experience to draw on as a literary translator in that moment in which I first encounter a source text. However, in regard to translating writing associated with Antananarivo and its surroundings, at least, I am not convinced that necessarily puts me at a disadvantage. To evoke John Berger’s ‘pre-verbal’, after many years of living and writing in that city, it would be nice to think I have other useful skills to turn to.

It remains for me here to say a little more by way of introduction to these five writers, and about the nature of my interest in the particular source texts selected.

¹⁸ Recent critical literature on experimental forms of translation as a part of contemporary creative-critical practice encourages creative-critical writers to be bolder still; with increasing emphasis placed on performativity, positively inviting “manipulation”, etc. As Delphine Grass writes, ‘multimodal and creative-writing translation experiments can be used to engage critically with translation theory and criticism in ways more conventional forms of academic writing might not be able to do. Conversely, by materialising language through translation, translation as creative-critical practice extends the material textures of creative-critical practice beyond writing and authorship as traditionally understood’. See Delphine Grass, *Translation as Creative–Critical Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023). Available at: <https://www-cambridge-org.uea.idm.oclc.org/core/elements/translation-as-creativecritical-practice/CAB7EFF5BFA456C0D33BA241566B797D>

¹⁹ John Berger, *Confabulations*. (London: Penguin, 2016), p. 4.

²⁰ I am thinking here of some of the lenses through which the act of reading in literary translation may be primarily understood: as cognitive; or as phenomenological, etc. I am conscious of the extensive work by Jean Boase-Beier in this area.

²¹ 6th International Postgraduate Translation Symposium, held at the University of East Anglia. See: <https://research-portal.uea.ac.uk/en/activities/6th-international-postgraduate-translation-symposium>

My first close encounter with the writing of Jean-Joseph Rabearivelo (1901 or 1903²² – 1937) was at a large contemporary art festival in Antananarivo in April 2011 curated by the artist Joël Andrianomearisoa, entitled *30 et Presque Songes*—a riff on Rabearivelo’s famous work *Sari-nofy (Something-resembling-a-dream) / Presque-songes (Almost-dreams)*. Casually googling Jean-Joseph Rabearivelo throws up references to *Africa’s first modern poet*; or the *modernist Malagasy poet*; or the *first major French-language poet in Africa*; or *a pure African surrealist*; or *the great African surrealist*, etc. Certainly, the influence of French modernist poetry is present across Rabearivelo’s later work—especially so in a sequence of thirty poems called *Nadika tamin’ny alina (Translated During the Night) / Traduit de la Nuit (Translated From the Night)*, which I have translated here²³. I have selected this text as it is a particularly fine example of Rabearivelo’s signature fusion of surrealist technique with his sensitivity to the highland landscape which in his time, as now, just about, reaches right into the heart of Antananarivo (and is an abiding presence in my own writing in *lobataona, fabavaratra, fararano, and ririnina*). The result is some surprising and sometimes extraordinarily delicate imagery. As with quite a lot of his lyric poetry, Rabearivelo wrote this particular sequence of poems in Malagasy and in French.²⁴ My translation here is the only English translation I am aware of that is based on the Malagasy version.²⁵ Rabearivelo was never able to visit France.

The writer and artist Jean-Luc Raharimanana, also known as Raharimanana, was born in 1967. He grew up in Antananarivo, settling in France in his twenties. He has been primarily based there since, whilst maintaining links to Madagascar. In 2013, or thereabouts, I attended an event he hosted at the French cultural centre in Antananarivo and was transfixed: both by his writing and by his electrifying presence as a performer. Raharimanana is also a gifted musician and a gifted photographer. His father, a history professor at the University of Antananarivo and an outspoken social and political commentator, was famously arrested and tortured in 2004. I have chosen to translate here fragments of Raharimanana’s 2012 triptych, entitled *Enlacement(s)*—in English, *Intertwining(s)*—, comprising *Des ruines*, (Ruins); *Obscena* (Obscene), and *Il n’y a plus de pays (There Is No More Country)*²⁶. A characteristically genre-defying piece of work, the three books come, fittingly, in an unusually-shaped, bookshelf-defying presentation box, about 45cm long by 20cm

²² The likely year of Rabearivelo’s birth, as it appears on Wikipedia. It is given as 1903 in (eds). Laurence Ink, Serge Meitinger, Liliane Ramaroso, Claire Riffard, *Jean-Joseph Rabearivelo, Œuvres complètes: Tome II*. (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2012), back cover.

²³ If Rabearivelo’s original manuscript for *Nadika tamin’ny alina / Translated From the Night* is to be believed, it was written as a direct continuation of *Sari-nofy / Presque-songes*. See Ink, Meitinger, Ramaroso and Riffard (eds), *Jean-Joseph Rabearivelo, Œuvres complètes: Tome II*, p. 619

²⁴ One can only guess at what Rabearivelo’s method was in the writing of these poems as he went along. But my own assessment is that it is not as simple as the same poem being translated from the one language into the other: in various places, where a near-identical similarity between what is in French and what is in Malagasy would have been perfectly possible, there has seemingly been no attempt to ensure this.

²⁵ The American contemporary artist Robert (Bob) Ziller’s 2007 translations are evidently based on the French poems. (See Robert Ziller, *Translated from the Night: Rabearivelo* (New York: Lascaux Editions, 2007).)

²⁶ Jean-Luc Raharimanana, *Enlacement(s)* (La Roque d’Anthéron: Éditions Vents d’ailleurs, 2012).

wide. I will not attempt here to be precise about how—that would be a reductive, ultimately futile exercise—but I can certainly say that upon first encountering it, the language pulsing through *Enlacement(s)* appeared to come from somewhere that was instantly recognisable: *Enlacement(s)* contains an extraordinarily deft handling of certain concerns with which I feel that I, too, have been grappling, naturally in a quite different way, since my work as a journalist. It seems appropriate, therefore, that I should attempt to work with it here as a source text. I have not yet had the pleasure of meeting Jean-Luc Raharimanana in person, but he has kindly given me permission to include these translations of his work here.

I had the pleasure of spending some time with the Swiss writer and artist Julia Sørensen (born 1979) in Antananarivo in 2011; and of crossing paths with her again briefly at her home in Switzerland in 2015. One day in June 2011, we had a walk around central Antananarivo together; including (I can no longer remember why) the redbrick grounds of an old catholic school. We talked of our artistic / photographic / literary interests at the time: we shared an admiration for the writing of John Berger. Before she left Madagascar in 2011, Julia gave me a printout of the manuscript for her book-in-progress, *Cocon-fort* (a play on the word for ‘cocoon’ (‘cocon’), ‘strong’ (‘fort’) and ‘comfort’ (‘confort’) in French). This book was published in French the following year.²⁷ It was only years later, in 2022, that I sat down properly with this fascinating writing, ordered in book form from Amazon.fr. (The manuscript was out of reach at the time, on a bookshelf at my home in Antananarivo.) In both form and content, there seemed to me to be striking similarities between *Cocon-fort* and aspects of what I had been attempting in the writing presented here in *lobataona*, *fabavaratra*, *fararano*, and *ririnina*.²⁸ Julia has therefore kindly agreed for my translations of fragments of *Cocon-fort* to be included here.

I knew Johary Ravaloson (born 1965) by sight long before we met: I would pass him in Antaninarenina; not far from his office. He was pointed out to me as being a lawyer before I knew anything about his writing and publishing work. (He and his wife Sophie Bazin, an artist and photographer, founded the fabulous imprint, Éditions Dodo Vole, showcasing art works and literature from across the Indian Ocean.) Johary has lived between Madagascar, La Réunion and France. When we met in 2016, he, Sophie and family were preparing to leave Antananarivo, having spent several years there during more or less the same period I had been living there. It is Johary’s writing emerging out of this tumultuous period which is of particular interest to me, here. *Antananarivo intime: carnet de crise* (*Intimate Antananarivo: notebook from a crisis*) was published in 2020, but I only came across it in a French language bookshop in Antananarivo in 2022²⁹. Printed on beautiful thick, textured paper, it is a collection of short stories from that period, interspersed with a striking

²⁷ Julia Sørensen, *Cocon-fort* (Genève: éditions des sauvages, 2012).

²⁸ The blurb on the back cover of *Cocon-fort* reads: ‘Small or large anxieties from daily life, captured or extrapolated, transformed into pieces of fiction. Taken to Madagascar by a project, the author gathers moments of fragility...’ Sørensen, *Cocon-fort*, back cover.

²⁹ Johary Ravaloson (author) and Sophie Bazin (photographer), *Antananarivo intime: carnet de crise* (La Réunion: Éditions Dodo vole, 2020).

assortment of photographs taken by Sophie; formally-speaking, in a way that is similar to the way text and photographs inhabit the pages of *lobataona*, *fabavaratra*, *fararano*, and *ririnina*. I have therefore selected and translated extracts from five of these short stories. This work is included here with Johary’s kind permission.

The painter and poet Joey Aresoa (born 1986) is a friend. I don’t remember where and when we first met. But I vividly remember her occasional performances at events hosted by a poetry syndicate in Madagascar, the Faribolana Sandratra, before we had met. Joey has lived in Antananarivo for many years. However, part of her family is from the far southwest of Madagascar, a region associated with the Mahafaly ethnic group. She grew up in the city of Mahajanga in the northwest; and also has family ties to Antananarivo, where she lives today. Joey’s Madagascar is therefore quite different to the one I have come to know. She writes across languages: using French, the kind of Malagasy spoken in Antananarivo with which I am familiar; and the Mahafaly dialect, often mixing them. She also occasionally writes in English. There is a panoramic viewpoint in Ambohipotsy, at the spot where the road winding up and along the hill that is the historic heart of Antananarivo finally comes to an end. It is a special corner of the city: a bubble of calm that still, just about, feels rural. The view southwards over rooftops, across ricefields and eventually to a mountain, Tsiafajavona³⁰, is wonderful. And the calm of the area also affords precious privacy—especially, perhaps, for young people who otherwise live with their respective parents. It is a corner of the city that has offered me tremendous solace over the years, too. The viewpoint itself features a concrete structure with a roof. Over time, the walls, pillars, and the entire roof filled up with myriad utterances; scratched with a stone, in pen, spray-paint, anything that would write. In March 2021, the Commune Urbaine d’Antananarivo (Antananarivo’s City Council) painted over the lot. I have chosen to translate and include here a small post Joey put out in French on Facebook in March 2021 in response to that act; included here with Joey’s kind permission³¹. Such a post; such an act; such utterances have for me a literary significance equal to any writing associated with Antananarivo and its surroundings. And so they belong here, too.

*

given up on the idea of getting writing done—of the kind I’d like. just feeling bollocks. but the right spot, I have found

*

It would obviously be impossible to list here the innumerable inspirations for and influences on my writing over such a long period. But I will mention a few in passing.

³⁰ From ‘tsy’ (not) ‘afaka’ (free, free of) ‘javona’ (mist).

³¹ Facebook post by Joey Aresoa. Aresoa Rezomiha [Facebook]. 10 March 2021. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/joey.aresoa>. Accessed 30 April 2023 and on numerous occasions previously.

In the last two or three years, I have been re-reading the work of Carl Phillips, Peter Gizzi and Fiona Benson more than that of other poets. Anne Carson's *If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho* will have been an influence on my approach to handling the language in my A6 sketchbooks: an enjoyment of using negative space suggestively; and of pared down but highly image-rich language. Likewise, in thinking about ways of working with fragmented language, coming across Oli Hazzard's use of the vertical bar (|) in *Within Habit* a number of years ago. Ocean Vuong's use of footnotes as part of the body of a poem in *Night Sky with Exit Wounds* features somewhere, no doubt, in the course of my own experimentation with footnote use over time, including with academic footnotes in this thesis. The formal experimentation in Harriet Tarlo's book *The Ground Aslant: An Anthology of Radical Landscape Poetry* has offered much encouragement, introducing me to the work of Carol Watts and Zoë Skoulding, as well as that of Tarlo herself; and prompting a rediscovery of the writing of Thomas A. Clark. I think it was reading Lawrence Durrell's book, or books, *The Alexandria Quartet* when I was a teenager that first taught me lyrical writing doesn't necessarily mean a book of poems. I had found the mechanical way in which English literature was taught throughout my school days off-putting. And so, for better or worse, I parted ways with it as soon as I had the chance. I first discovered contemporary poetry in English in Madagascar, in having to teach with it. The poetry I have returned to most often in my own teaching is Lavinia Greenlaw's project *Audio Obscura*.

I would also like to mention here a small number of other writers: other lights on a literary landscape in Madagascar who, in their different ways, have also been instrumental in the development of this project. Firstly, the late Henri Rahaingoson, a grand wizard of the Malagasy language, with research interests in other Indian Ocean languages as a linguist that had taken him as far as Mogadishu. I have been fortunate to get to know the novelist and literary activist Michèle Rakotoson. It was Michèle's eagle eyes on Malagasy cultures which first drew my attention to the signifying weight of silence. And her generosity in opening up her home to me and other writers has afforded me invaluable insights into traditional ways of life in the Malagasy highlands. I have never encountered anything like the poetic rantings of Iriana Mpisorona when in full flow. And packed events he has hosted over the years with his fellow members of the Faribolana Sandratra poets' syndicate, Riambola Mitia, Avelo Nidor, Tahirintsoa, and others (sometimes I would have to join people lying under tables to squeeze in!) have always been an inspiration. And in thinking of the bilingualism that characterises so much contemporary poetry in Madagascar (which lends it its own kind of performativity), witnessing Na Hassi's performance of her *Prozodiké* in December 2016 in person still feels like a formative event for me as a writer.³²

However, my induction into the poetic qualities of the Malagasy language and its various dialects and blends has not, primarily, been through reading or hearing literary works; but in my everyday life in Antananarivo.

³² See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VRGR1AeKpK8>.

My being immersed over such a long period in a language operating according to an internal logic that is very different indeed to English will, undoubtedly, have trickled into how I write.³³

*

talk of lights

___ says the bend in the river is known for being dark | and yet | *paint*
what you feel, not | what you see

*

I had the gift of a free-roaming, rural childhood. And the home environment I grew up in was infused with my parents' fondness for wild places and for certain craft and art traditions, especially those associated with the western tip of Cornwall. A family link with a Scottish painter who settled in St. Ives at the end of the nineteenth century, Thomas Millie Dow, has made my sense of connection with these traditions feel more personal. In my thirties, I have become more interested in the influence of all of this upon my chosen path. This has led me to Kettles Yard in Cambridge, and on to Zennor in Cornwall, and to Dartington in Devon; and eventually to East London and a friendship with the multidisciplinary marvel, Bryan Illsley, whose work and approach to that work I take particular inspiration from. If there are influences worth emphasising here it is these.

I would also like to say something here about the Scottish painter Peter Doig, who settled in Trinidad and whose work, over twenty years or so, is deeply connected to his experiences there. There are obvious differences, to say the least, between his and my working lives. But there are maybe some similarities, too. I remember visiting a Doig exhibition at the Scottish National Gallery in the summer of 2013 and being struck by a kind of painting-via-fragment style, at times—a boat bleeding colour here, a palm frond there³⁴. This led to a breakthrough in writing a poem I had been struggling with at the time: I think it became the first poem I ever wrote that I was pleased with. Doig talks somewhere of his own brand of “realism”; that no object is too unpainterly.³⁵ He adds something to the effect that allowing these things into the

³³ There have been extended periods living in Antananarivo when I have scarcely spoken English at all. An unforeseen consequence of this has been that I have sometimes found myself having to think harder about how I am using English than I might otherwise have; my hold on it as a native speaker having been shaken just a touch. This can be a little disconcerting, talking with family and friends in the UK, say—and liberating, from the point of view of my writing: making the English language appear a little more plastic.

³⁴ For example, in Peter Doig's 'Figures in Red Boat' (2005-7). New York: Private Collection. Featured in Peter Doig (author) and Judith Nesbitt (ed.) *Peter Doig* (London: Tate Publishing, 2008). Book accompanying exhibition at Tate Gallery, London.

³⁵ I can't remember where Doig says this. But in thinking of objects found in Doig's paintings in general, examples that spring to mind include a road sign; a security grill over a window; a dead pelican, etc.

development of a painting—even making them a painting’s central focus—is not just an aesthetic decision, but a way of working against any romanticisation of what he finds around him, particularly as a white male painter in what, at least from a [white] Western art historical outlook on the world, is an “exotic” location (in relation to his Trinidad work, especially). There is something about the way Doig handles light and “things in the air” in his work, for want of a better expression—especially in his larger-scale paintings—that I find particularly evocative and inspiring. Doig collaborated in the book, *Morning, Paramin* with the Saint Lucian poet, the late Derek Walcott; a friend of his.³⁶ It is a beautiful book. In creative writing teaching at the University of Antananarivo, I have also often used the American writer Hilton Als’s heartfelt text, *Islands (For Peter)*. Als is also a friend of Doig’s.³⁷

But I would not want to overstate the influence of any of these people upon the development of my work. Before anything else, it is living in Antananarivo that has taught me how to write.

*

the island now a carpeting of garlic, celandine, primrose, wood anemone. weight and force of the water not enticing

*

43 KILLED IN MADAGASCAR POLITICAL VIOLENCE

Thus, the headline of a news story I filed from Madagascar’s capital Antananarivo sometime late on Wednesday 28 January 2009.

The headline, and the three hundred words of text that followed it, are fairly typical of the language to be found on a newswire: some basic facts and figures; an effort to establish relations of cause and effect; a few quotes and observations to add what is known in journalistic parlance as “colour”.

My main job in Antananarivo on that particular day was to find a reliable figure for the number of deaths that could be attributed to a political crisis that was beginning to spill onto the city’s streets.

³⁶ Derek Walcott (author) and Peter Doig (illustrator) *Morning, Paramin* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2016). Doig subsequently produced a set of etchings in response to Walcott’s poems in this book. These etchings went on show at the Courtauld Gallery in London on 10 February 2023 (running to 29 May 2023). See: <https://courtauld.ac.uk/whats-on/peter-doig-etchings-for-derek-walcott/>.

³⁷ Also featured in Doig (author) and Nesbitt (ed.) *Peter Doig*, and available online at: <https://harpers.org/archive/2014/06/islands/>.

Eventually I got through on the phone to the director of the hospital which houses Antananarivo's main morgue. She had spent much of her day so far with calcified bodies.

Our conversation lasted longer than I had expected. And it was not, strictly speaking, much of a conversation in that for most of it my interlocutor was either silent or sobbing. After 15 minutes or so of few words exchanged, I still needed a number for the newswire. Our main competitor already had theirs, my editor in Johannesburg had politely pointed out. The hospital director and I agreed to speak again later in the day, which we did. She was then able to give me a number, and thus a news story that understood itself to be informative.

It felt clear to me, though, that the kind of language I was being paid to use on that particular day had done no justice to what was happening in the city at the time, including in this woman's world; on the contrary.

And in general at the time, I was starting to feel deeply uncomfortable with the distance between the kind of notes I was making as a journalist from one day to the next, and the kind of notes I just wanted to make.

A different kind of attention was called for, it felt to me.

*

and the rain moves in across us all

*

There is a photograph I took on the morning of 26 January 2009, which has always had special meaning for me. It was taken from a spot I had often walked to at the end of the working day, once I had moved to Isoraka in Antananarivo the previous year: just above Lac Anosy in the city centre, with a view roughly southwards over zinc roofs towards the *Carlton* hotel, a block of flats, state media offices, government ministries; and the contours of Mount Tsiafajavona sometimes forming the horizon many miles behind.

I suppose I associate this photograph with a series of experiences at that time that, I have come to realise, were foundational to my becoming a poet.

I found myself taking an A3 copy of this photograph along to my very first supervision meeting, in the café of the *Sainsbury Centre* on the UEA campus—a prop, perhaps, as it was slowly dawning on me that there was something odd about the kind of language I had used in the proposal that had got me onto the PhD programme and had secured me research funding. But I couldn't yet place what that was.

(‘Mpanelanelana’ means a go-between, catalyst or spiritual medium in Malagasy. Liminality may be defined as the state of being on a threshold. Through creative practice and critical analysis, this is a project in search of a language for things which are unspeakable or unspoken. It is rooted in the context of a sudden collapse of order in the Malagasy capital in January 2009, followed by a coup and five-year transition period; and in the context of a society that does not encourage giving voice to inner thoughts or feelings.

The creative component offers a lyric voice born out of and conversant with the above context. Through the extensive use of white space as a poetic tool, and a language of fragments, traces and 'code-switching' between English and Malagasy, I translate to the page a form of communication via negative space that is omnipresent in Malagasy society. There is an exploration of liminal poetics at a technical level, therefore, through an experimentation with poetic form. At the same time, the creative component takes liminality in its myriad forms as a central concern thematically.

The critical component rides a recent wave of studies of liminality, but argues that the interdisciplinary in-betweenness of the concept can make for a certain slipperiness when it comes to really rigorous critical enquiry [sic]. My thesis gives these debates concrete reference points and opens a new space in the field of liminal poetics. It parallels (a) critical analysis of the uses of white space as a poetic technique with (b) a socio-anthropological reading of creativity through critical analysis of artistic responses to Madagascar’s liminal crisis period during 2009-2014, so as to work towards (c) a new theory of poetic white space as a tool of special significance for the interrogation of the liminal, the apprehension of the poetic and both individual and societal journeys from silence towards utterance.)³⁸

I arrived in that first supervision meeting with my doubts, then, and no doubt rather sheepishly brandishing the old rolled-up photograph I had brought; not quite sure whether to place it with us on the brightly-lit café table or not. My supervisors at the time, for their part—doing the job required of them by the University—arrived with a freshly printed and stapled copy of the University’s *Research Degree Policy Documents; Section 12: Guidelines for Probationary Review* document, which was gently pushed over the table in my direction at the beginning of the meeting. It was soon clear to me that our conversation would be focussed on the stipulations of the latter document.

But my doubts about the kind of language I had used in my research proposal were to last. And, in the end, it was to prove a worthwhile exercise thinking more carefully about where they were coming from.

³⁸ Extract from the introduction of my original PhD project proposal, ‘White Space as ‘Mpanelanelana’: Developing the Poetics of Liminality’.

*

return of an old friend

a quickening

swaying trunks

the oh I really don't like the look of that

that things can turn in a flash

the safe until it isn't

the leaving an ex margin of error / being there anyway

the write, just write, now you're here

*

The section *away from Descartes* is derived from a critical essay of the kind that I was required to write in 2017 as part of the “Probationary Review” process.³⁹

The section opens with a reflection on the origins of that requirement, epistemologically speaking; and then explores the work of a small handful of contemporary Western writers whose discomfort with those origins, and their continued reach, I have come to share as I have thought further about the lack of fit between my use of language in my writing as a research practice on the one hand—and the language of the institutional framework into which I placed my writing for a PhD on the other. These writers are the German-American literary theorist Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht; American philosopher-ethnographer Alphonso Lingis; and “new ethnographers” Kathleen Stewart (American) and Stephen Muecke (Australian). The writing by Muecke is especially interesting to me because it arose out of some time that he and a photographer friend and colleague Max Pam (also Australian) had spent in Madagascar, not long before I first arrived there.

I identify the ways in which each of these writers seem unable to move on from a conceptualising language that is inherited directly from the Western rationalist epistemology that is the main object of their discomfort.

*

³⁹ See UEA Research Degree Policy Documents; Section 12: Guidelines for Probationary Review, 28 April 2015 (updated October 2019). Available at <https://portal.uea.ac.uk/documents/6207125/6873036/Section+12+-+Guidance+on+Probationary+Review.pdf/a03d1318-71bf-486c-9e63-c0f0833d76fe>.

forest bending every few minutes. and not even white water, just murk. ripping through the oak, alder, island. dog² chunk of wood² cacophony above. and a pigeon, somewhere in the rafters. the finding calm in this, having to

time to go

*

The section *[un]ethical matters* offers a kind of institutional critique, identifying that same conceptualising language, with the same epistemological origins, in the institutional framework that hosts this project. And it invites you, the reader, to revisit with me two of the main procedures acting as checkpoints in the completion of a thesis such as this: exploring, firstly, the *Guidelines for Probationary Review* document intended for PhD students as they pass through the probationary period to “PhD Candidate” status (usually 6-9 months into the first academic year); and secondly, the journey of this project through the Ethical Clearance process.

Officially, PhD students like me are obliged to engage with both of these procedures. (Assuming that the production of “creative” writing involves encounters with human beings. And, in most cases, it is probably safe to assume it does.) But I understand that it is only a very small number indeed of students on the Creative and Critical Writing PhD programme at the University of East Anglia who take their projects through the Ethical Clearance checkpoint⁴⁰. It is possible, therefore, that I could have given the latter a wide berth, too. But I had an inkling that a direct engagement with that process might well be a fruitful exercise as an integral part of research undertaken for this thesis, and so it proved.

Broadly speaking, my experience has been that the kind of language used by the institution in its engagement with me as researcher in the course of these procedures is not in the best interests of the research at hand; far from it. This section offers a commentary on that experience. It contains criticisms of the institutional framework that it would be difficult for me to make more explicitly in this thesis because of the power dynamics in operation here in my interaction as researcher with the institution. I have adopted in this

⁴⁰ I find the word ‘checkpoint’ for such procedures thought-provoking. In Antananarivo, checkpoints of police spring up around dusk and operate till dawn. They are known locally as ‘contrôles de police’.

section, instead, a mode of inquiry via negative space that is everywhere in Antananarivo⁴¹: placing two linguistic units in close proximity or side by side, but without being explicit about why.

*

sometime before 7

first pinking
on St. Mary's tower
and

right along the length of the moor

~

mists according to their own not with the current not against it

~

the weedy slabs, ochres, nothing with a sharp edge

~

beds
of branches,
breaking the surface

just twice

~

and over here
in the peaty dark,
this

⁴¹ There is a Malagasy verb 'mihodikodina', literally 'to turn around-around'. It is often used to refer to the way in which direct statements are avoided, in favour of tracing a finger around a point until its shape becomes visible, as it were.

is where it runs deepest

*

In amongst the writing in this thesis, I have also decided to include a collection of photographs I have taken. This sets up another strand of dialogue with the writing; and, I hope, also helps bring a reader who is unfamiliar with Antananarivo a touch closer to the origins of the writing. I would not say that they are influences on my approach to photography, but work by the photographers Rija Randrianasolo (Rijasolo), Fabrice Delannoy, Malala Andrialavidrazana and Walter Astrada in Madagascar has particularly resonated with me.

*

7.49

and the mist is gone

first rays through the redwoods,
freckling |

a whole riverbed of colours and contours I haven't [shotgun report in that direction half a mile off]
and for ~~half a~~ a (^whole) quarter of a second I ~~am in dialogue talking to reassuring myself~~ I feel it in my
| even | in my left ~~hand~~ wrist

*

It remains for me, perhaps, to say here a little about how I see the interrelation of the constituent parts of this thesis. Suffice to say that I have wanted to promote a lively dialogue between form and content throughout. In fact it is probably accurate to say that, for me, anyway, this dialogue is the beating heart of the thesis.

*

this is not a place for a thesis,

where

the best thing I can do for my writing
is to not be writing

~

less than an hour to finish this, nearer 40 minutes

~

the menace has gone, the water
at least
two metres down

and the island has reappeared,

smudged, squeezed
a little

but what was well
underwater
not quite two weeks ago

is now garlic flowers, celandine, vintsy

~

downstream,

what will
in a couple of months
be thick rushes
again

~

the mucky baylets

~
the drama
of a giant redwood
trunk,
ramrod straight,
now bridging both banks

~
nothing is still

~
11.30

I must go,

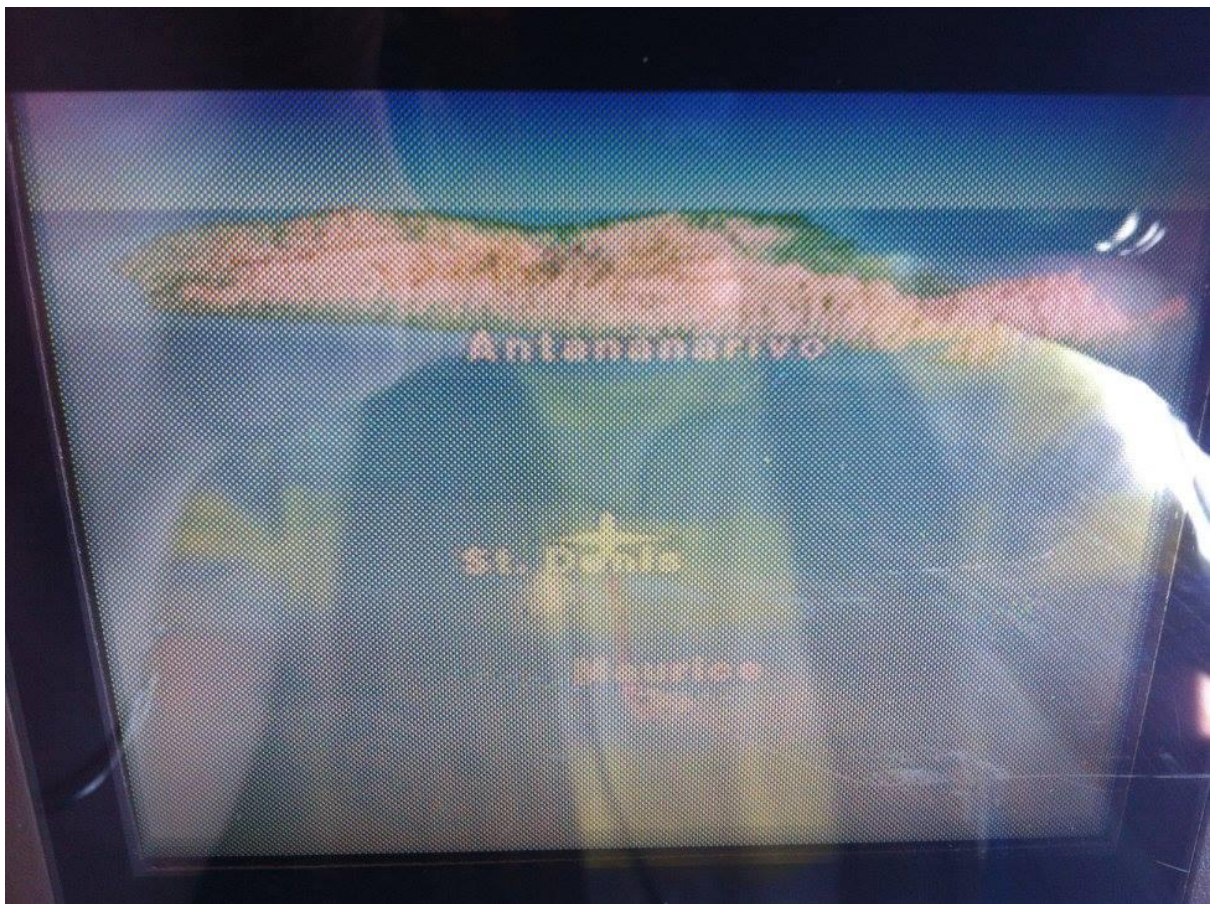
there is no completion
of this



*

*lohataona*⁴²

⁴² from 'loha' (head, mind, front; leader) and 'taona' (year, age). (Roughly September-October.)



September 2008

In a curious way, as if I never left.

Dry air. Absence of people on streets gives feeling of intimate relationship with sun.

prostitutes in the cool indoors. Ça vas, etc. And onto the Boulevard de l'Indépendance with newly planted foliage.

Large scraggy rat passed under my crossed legs. Otherwise new **ANTANANARIVO** on hill. Hotel by airport in green ?tarpaulin under construction. New US embassy down by [the] digue. Jacaranda beginning to sprout scatterings of grey / brown / citrus colour leaves. Aigrettes whiter in these dead-coloured trees.

~

On meeting ___ today @ Immeuble ___, didn't recognise her at first. Deep red lipstick. Her manner a seemingly deliberate effort to maintain / emphasise the business relationship. Whiteish jeans. She'd clearly dressed up compared to last week. A cream linen jacket; bag strap slung across one shoulder. Smart. A second apology for the wait; her explanation that wearing high-heeled shoes (expected of her by clients, she said) normally ok because her clients drive her around. Wonder how many pathetic fuckers there are like me on a weekly basis. (^3 a day looking around places, she said.)

~

The haute ville⁴³ on a Sunday is a joy. Villagey.

A wind this morning. Up to the Rova, the windy route. There is something to be captured in these places. The tumbling bougainvillea which, yes, blow purple down the streets.

*

September 2013, Fort Dauphin

Light from the wrong side, this morning—sandy rain. At the Bank of Africa cashpoint: long queues, backs to the ocean.

⁴³ Upper town (the oldest neighbourhood on a hill in the city centre; contains sites of national importance).



*

September 2013, Asomeso

awake, a loss

of contact with the ground

my *cute white feet* root mannerism, bit of blue sea-girt today, merciful water-up-the-nose, a cut that needed closing

in the intimacy of *God's laboratory* where everything has a jagged edge

a clearing is just

an absence of trees in the littoral *tena tonga dia ala* two turtle doves curdle turquoise & soak too much in nightconjuring love as husk & hook & thorn & gauze & calves stretched out just waiting for the approaching tide

*

September 2015, Antaninarenina

The light sometimes just flicks in September. Started grey today.

~

Coffee w/ ___... *vulture material*; parties that *start fine, end badly*; holes in curtains; machetes in trousers; amulets; *the bush all looks the same*; a pin pulled from a grenade as a joke; her photographer colleague in ___, ___, found shot in the head, *unlikely* caught in crossfire; that the ___ rebels shouldn't be romanticised, *they're cunts*.

~

being greeted instinctively in Malagasy by Air Mauritius rep at Ivato, nice feeling⁴⁴

*

September 2016

Jovenna⁴⁵ station | headlights cut | windows slightly up, waiting | for essence

~

the darker laterite, etc

to turn it all into literature | for what?

*

1 September 2010

The light suddenly changed. White, almost green-white. Fumes. Walked the length of Analakely, soaking in it. With ___ yesterday on terrace @ ___, where UN checkpoint used to be. Her new red hair, and a self-consciousness (that suited her). Drinking Bonbon Anglais⁴⁶. Interruption of a sudden bang, taxi engine backfiring, tingle downwards from my head, left forearm, legs, her?

*

early September 2013, University of Antananarivo

Light changed. Sky gone white, no longer cool in shadows. Conversations about the heat.

~

...thwarted, perverted by education; crushed out of them ... brought up in a state of fear ... it's like a train, starting from Soarano to Tamatave and it's somewhere in Brickaville already; and from Brickaville to Tamatave, what can you do? ... you

⁴⁴ (And not in French.) “Ivato” is a reference to the international airport in the suburb of Ivato, just to the north of Antananarivo.

⁴⁵ A fuel company in Madagascar.

⁴⁶ An extremely sugary soda drink, made and bottled by Brasseries Star (an offshoot of French drinks group, Castel) in Madagascar. Like lemonade, but not very lemony. Available widely in Antananarivo.

receive things from teachers, parents ... it has always been like this ... obedient, receptive, one who can vomit up on exam paper ... the massive, ludicrous acceptance of hierarchy ... you try not to impose ideas ... even the good teachers are pretty dogmatic ... a system which stifles creativity... they don't want to get lost—they don't want to experience that ... tsy mahasaby⁴⁷ ... they like security ... it's very difficult to criticise. That's another culture we do not have; it's difficult to criticise and it's difficult to listen to all the criticism. It's like that and it was always like that ... we don't dare complain because they are teachers and we are children—ankizy... so we just waste our time waiting there and this is so boring ... we want something new...

*

12 September 2009, Isoraka

driving back [through Analakely with ___], dawn. 4x lorries [of] soldiers. [right up] behind one. metal glinting in the gloom. the day shift

-

shots in the air, ?Ambohijatovo by 11ish

more around 12

(landlord playing fucking Für Elise)

1.20 bursts

2.10 birdsong children, laughter

2.35 but further away

2.53

2.57

4.15

*

⁴⁷ ≈ there is no daring, risk-taking



12-13 September 2019, University of Antananarivo

— talking about her poems in general: *I don't really like talking about love [...] and if someone thinks it's about love, I will be angry.*

~

Our language is too soft.

~

[On Karen McCarthy Woolf's *Landay*...] ⁴⁸

(‘Darling, your affair was obvious. / Only an imbecile could have been oblivious.’) ⁴⁹

The impossibility of evenly balancing condemnation with tenderness in translating the above poem into Malagasy. (*Except for the tenderness, it is possible.*)

Students’ attention quickly centres on finding a good word for “affair” in Malagasy—*ilay zavatra nataonao* (\approx the **thing** you did)?; *ilay ditranao* (\approx your **naughtiness**)?; *mampirafy ianao* (\approx you are **being unfaithful**)?

A sense of childlike naughtiness in “ditranao” clearly lightens the tone in relation to the man’s infidelity in a way which would probably make the conversation easier for both the woman and the man (and therefore more plausible when adapted to a Malagasy context), students agree. ⁵⁰ This sense is clearly missing in “affair” in the English.

“Mampirafy”, they agree, is likely more painful and humiliating for the woman because in its etymological make-up, it directly acknowledges the place of the second woman (rafy \approx adversary) and so makes more explicit the nature of the man’s actions. It also directly acknowledges wrongdoing towards the [“first”] woman by the man. Like with “affair”, therefore, it openly names the action. But unlike in the English, it is very difficult to be so direct in Malagasy, particularly for a woman, without sounding hostile.

⁴⁸ The two-line poem ‘Landay’ by Karen McCarthy Woolf. Karen McCarthy Woolf, *Seasonal Disturbances* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2017), p. 73.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ It is naturally supposed by students that the speaker in this poem is a woman, that the person who is unfaithful is a man and that they are married. When students talk in general terms of “men” or “women”, they probably tend to be referring to Malagasy people from Antananarivo or the surrounding highlands, associated particularly with the Merina ethnic group.

Students agree “ilay zavatra nataonao” is probably the most natural-sounding in the Malagasy. But to refer to “the thing you did”, again, lacks the full sense of moral judgement [as well as the slightly old-fashioned feel] of “affair”.

That in the region ___ comes from, ‘Darling, your affair was obvious’ is *just not even worth saying*.⁵¹

Students go on to rehearse what men might say upon returning home to their wives at the end of the day, having spent the evening with a lover: eg. *nitondra gôuter abo !* (≈ I brought you a treat!).⁵² Much laughter.

~

That *this is not a poem about love*, ___ insists.

~

On catcalling, the comments that stalk women in public. How *when a man doesn't get what he wants, he insults*.

~

___'s poem, creating uncertainty in the reader as to whether a “he” is a baby or a husband. Leads to conversation about the seamless way in which, when a couple marry here, the wife takes over from the man's mother in preparing food for him.⁵³

~

They are prostitutes but they are sincere.

~

That henamaso is *blocking people from saying things seriously*.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Because in this region, relationships are normally understood to be open.

⁵² The treat might be a small and very creamy cake from a patisserie in the city centre. There were no male students in this group.

⁵³ Only marriage between heterosexual couples is legal in Madagascar.

⁵⁴ Literally from *henatra* (shyness) and *maso* (eyes), it amounts to a strong—many would say immobilising—fear of a loss of face.

~

On the limitations of the Malagasy language when it comes to discussing mental health. That a reference to alahelo⁵⁵ is probably the nearest one can get to vocalising feelings associated with depression. Agreement that a pervasive cultural pressure not to be seen to seek attention would tend to discourage someone suffering a mental health crisis from asking for help.

~

...something wild like getting a divorce.

~

*Vazaha are not ashamed of emotions.*⁵⁶

~

On henamaso: *I want to speak and yet something stops me.* A discussion on whether the scenario in which we find ourselves in the Literature M1 group⁵⁷ inhibits or facilitates conversations. No doubt a bit of both.

~

We're very secretive in our lives... even if a man is beating his wife, she won't leave him because tsy mety amin' ny fiaramonina ny misaraka (≈ society isn't okay with couples separating).

~

___ talking about the crowds of people returning on foot from Soamandrakizay at the weekend, covered in red.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ ≈ sadness

⁵⁶ Vazaha tends to mean “white foreigner” in Malagasy.

⁵⁷ Ie. five female Malagasy students and me as a male vazaha teacher.

⁵⁸ It is widely estimated that a million people attended the mass led by Pope Francis at Soamandrakizay on Sunday 8 September 2019. It was a blustery day, and the movement of such large numbers of people created clouds of red laterite dust that could be seen from many miles around.

___ has a page full of notes, yet says nothing.

*

13 September 2019, University of Antananarivo

___ on how French is used when “talking upwards” in Malagasy society (to authority; to the state, to *olona ambony* (\approx *someone in a high position*)); and how Malagasy is used when “talking downwards” (to social inferiors, to individuals, to *olona tsotra* (\approx *ordinary people*)). Illustrated flamboyantly in his notebook, with two arrows indicating directions of travel.

~

Women are easily oppressed

~

Women have more rage

~

Literature is being poisoned by the question of gender⁵⁹ [...] For women, it's a field for power search

~

___'s silence in class. Then, towards the end, with ___ left hand bunched up below ___ nose, slowly leaning forward on the sofa

and saying nothing.

~

___ opens ___ mouth

and ___⁶⁰ speaks.

⁵⁹ Meaning literary study.

⁶⁰ A different student.

~

On what men do with their anger rather than arguing: *we try to find games, we play football.*

~

On what it means to be “lyrical” in Madagascar, when it can be so difficult to speak in the first person in Malagasy: ___ refers to the phrase used by people signalling that they want to get off a bus in Antananarivo: *misy miala !* (*≈ there is someone getting off*); not *izabo miala !* (*≈ I’m getting off!*).

On the number of writers using pen names.

~

On vocalising anger in public, as if on a spectrum towards madness... religious figures, the homeless, fanatics; others in society who may have nothing [further] to lose. *Who are those who shout?*

~

That is a very from-this-area-way-of-thinking—said with feeling, whipping his right forefinger around forcefully.

*

15 September 2010, ___ terrace, Ampasamadinika

by a French man in his late 60s/70s with a coffee, a glass of some spirit he adds to the coffee; a beer, a few samosas, a Boston cigarette and his head in his hands. the look of someone who’s aware they’ve been here too long?

*

mid-September 2009, ___ terrace, Ampasamadinika

Teenager + Frenchman. Dragged upstairs before her dessert’s arrived. Accompanying ?friend: bolt upright [at the dining table], napkin folded immaculately on her lap.



Out he comes, yawning, an hour later. And off they go (two girls), laughing. As if free from a dentist appt.

*

mid-September 2010, Antsahavola-Antaninarenina steps

—*Monsieur-donnez-l'eau*⁶¹ [young girl sitting on the ground holding a baby, to me.
An inch or so of water left in the bottom of a 1.5-litre plastic bottle I am carrying.
I give her the bottle and its contents.]

—*'saotra*

—*Merci, chef* [smartly-dressed man (my age) passing me, further up, near the very top of the steps].

—*c'est rien* [me]

—*oue, oue* [man]

—*veloma, tompoko*

—*veloma, ciao*⁶²

*

mid-September

morning sincerity

in a garden well cared-for. jackfruit and fennel, passionflower, raving bougainvillea

and what isn't recoverable. plums, peaches, quickly fucked when they hit the ground. a fridgeful of dark vegetation, the stains

⁶¹ *Monsieur-give-me-the-water*. Asked, as is quite normal and not discourteous in Merina culture, in a tone that does not expect an answer 'no'.

⁶² *thanks, boss; it's nothing; yeah, yeah; goodbye, sir; 'bye, ciao*. I then bought her a fresh bottle. (I try to always carry a water bottle when out and about in Antananarivo. If ever I forget not to keep it out of sight – if it is in my hands, rather than in my bag – and I am then asked for it, I give it away. As a young child I once ended up in hospital due to dehydration.)

of our love

lived

backwards, incubated

whilst it learned

to atone

for being touched

only

when it burns

in the late afternoon

mind

out in the forest, unravelling

with old razor wire

yards of orchidspill

s t rfauwr§ shutter gust invisible

pyrrhocoridae simbaina tomobily ny bozaka⁶³

sicklybougainvillea approximativité rottingpassion framboazy

dogfear goldenorb spidersilk kitethread tay blue malicemihilan' andro mulberry

mucus parasy lay⁶⁴ pearl pin bobolosy rarana ny mikapa hazo mampiditra biby dopey

git *junglejuice* mud-slick au bord des larmes landslip lu-

xy lustrousarmfold waterearthdungsand turquoise on hadiana ny tany

avy eo lemana rano ny ampitso zay vao ampiana

rano sady hosena

no

*

⁶³ sharp grass

⁶⁴ cocoospine



18-19 September 2019, University of Antananarivo

[On Mary Jean Chan's *Dress...*]⁶⁵

(...your fingers brush the wrist of / another girl as you jostle into the assembly hall, and you understand that sin / was never meant to be easy, only sweet...)⁶⁶

Slowly dawning on students that the speaker in this poem seems to be writing of her attraction to other girls. One or two in the group keen not to read the poem in terms of this? Long silences.

...*dia vao maika very be!* (*≈ and now I'm even more lost!*). [Laughter.]

— covering her mouth with a hand, eyes shut, digging fingers into her cheek.

Am trying to imagine how does it feel.

She knows what she wants.

She feels like... emboxed.

—, who had already said in an earlier class that she is particularly interested in LGBTQ+ issues, not saying a thing.

—, fingers to her lips, breathing heavily: *otran boe maloto ilay izy sa..? Izabo mandoto amin' ilay izy?* (*≈ so it's like dirty, or..? Am I making it dirty?* [laughs nervously])

— fidgets continuously with a piece of paper, the edge of it much of the time covering her mouth.

Some halting discussion of the notion of 'cleanness' in the poem. Then, possibly safer ground for all, collective experiments in lifting lines and putting them into Malagasy: '...you shut your body up' becoming: ***hampangiana*** (*≈ quieten*) *ny vatanao*; ***akatona*** (*≈ close*) *ny vatanao*; ***fehezana*** (*≈ restrain*) *ny vatanao*...

(All students stumped trying to think of the word for "wrist" in Malagasy.)

⁶⁵ 'Dress' in Mary Jean Chan, *Fleche* (London: Faber, 2019), p. 10.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

__ and __ subsequently upload onto the group's Facebook page translations of the poem, which they had worked on voluntarily after class.⁶⁷

∩

There are many things in a house that only a woman can do. Said as a statement of fact, not as a record of injustice.

*

18-20 September 2019, University of Antananarivo

[On Epistolier's *Sara-bazana feat. Melo-J*...]⁶⁸

On the singer *giving advice in a soft way*.

—*'Don't do this, do this...'* He's saying *what the person is already thinking*. *If it was a woman singing, you'd feel more attacked... He's masculine, but mature... If you're not mature you don't have a place at the table, you-don't-know-life-yet-so-shut-the-fuck-up.* [Male student]:

—*It's like you're listening to your older brother.* [Female student]

—*Older brother?* [Another female student]

—*Yes, because he's more experienced; he has more wisdom.*

∩

Discussion about a hypothetical candidate for mayor of Antananarivo: one candidate is married; the other unmarried. Students discuss if the candidate's marital status affects the way they will be viewed by the public. (No consensus.) The candidate is always referred to as *he*.

∩

⁶⁷ One student translating an extract; the other student translating the whole poem, clearly the result of a considerable amount of work.

⁶⁸ Epistolier: *Sara-bazana feat. Melo-J*, 6 November 2016. Via YouTube [online] 'EPISTOLIER – Sara-bazana feat. Melo-J'. Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kk-nweQm_KQ.

(___'s poem)... more natural to describe the imprints of physical violence than to describe physical violence in action?

~

All female students discussing lycée girls in Diego Suarez⁶⁹, who *finish school and put on cabaret clothes*.

*

late September 2009

three truckloads of troops in Antaninarenina, just ?600 metres away. Talk of *reservistes' marche* on Antaninarenina. Otherwise normal...

~

that peace will be all the more peaceful for having tasted this? Like a cool pool, from the heat

~

[___ talking of his mother-in-law...] who looks like Queen Ranaivalona, he says; spends an extra ten minutes in the mirror doing her make-up when things are topsy-turvy in town

*

late September 2015, Antaninarenina

lunch with ___, fresh in from Paris. expensive lipstick, exposed bra strap, air of profound indifference to the world. spectacle of her suddenly turning on her crap Malagasy with the waiters; weaponising it, knew what she was doing, I think

~

I didn't go
into your

⁶⁹ Far away from Antananarivo, on the northern tip of Madagascar. It is a city associated in particular with sex tourism, amongst other things.

& reappearances
of fire
of what is &
at some point isn't

really
recoverable in the
contours of
jackfruit in
rotting bellies
in an acknowledged divergence in
layers of feeling in
a little

fucking guiltlessness
sunbird

hairband watercress
as a measure
of purity
of morning sincerity or

into the little increments of pain
iron oxide in
the meaning of real wickedness

in misplaced middle fingers
in a lippy
indifference to the need to be *civilisé*
in chippiness in a fresh bombsite
of feathers
of blessings in discretion
in bloody corners or
in the most brilliantwhite moon on a wish to live

in a city where joy

& agony can be expressed without filth
& flinching if a light bulb

falls and breaks with tyres
& black with wire
& white paint with black
& white because they are *clean*
& *perfect*

*

23 September 2009, hotel ___

___, friend of [receptionist]⁷⁰, ___, emerges from room ___, wiping her mouth. Sips from ___'s bottle of water. Frenchman. Something he didn't like.

~

[Lac] Anosy today. Kicked off while I was still in flat (11.30ish). Kicking myself slightly, decided to go down with amusements to ___. Didn't hear a thing throughout. Tyres burnt; skips overturned etc, apparently. 1x gunshot wound injury to Befelatanana⁷¹, another; someone beaten up by the foule⁷². Not good. And close. Yet, not being here today, doesn't feel it.

~

adjusting my creativity to [this] tension. A good idea? (remembering how it soared from peace of ___ day last year). Tsisy olana⁷³, can be bent back in theory

how I crave peace, ease

*

⁷⁰ And herself a receptionist at a hotel down the road. (And, years later, turning up near the back row in a session I had scheduled at the last minute for creative writing students at the University, helping them prepare for an exam.)

⁷¹ The main hospital in central Antananarivo, near Lac Anosy.

⁷² the crowd

⁷³ No problem.



25 September 2010, Antaninarenina

___'s story of man jumping out of box outside ___ [nightclub] on Friday night; furious, telling those around to be quiet then disappearing inside box again further up street. His home.

*

25-26 September 2019, University of Antananarivo

[On Hollie McNish's *Embarrassed...*]⁷⁴

...because the baby is sucking the ... [—nipple, not said].

~

In general here, we are not ready for this modern life.

~

Students discuss a story they had heard of a woman who sold second hand clothes in Mahamasina market⁷⁵: story goes that the woman was wearing a very short skirt one day and was raped by an *adala*.⁷⁶ That bystanders supposedly did nothing. Some were probably thinking *Ataovy ihany* (\approx serves you right), says ___.

~

___ on the difficulty of expressing her love for her elder brother to him directly. (He had been living in the North of Madagascar for five months, but had now returned.) That she might ask him *bande ho aiza ialahy?* (\approx where are you off to, dude?). When she really means “can I come too?”; which really means “I love you”.

~

⁷⁴ Hollie McNish: ‘Embarrassed’, June 13 2016. Via Youtube [online] ‘Embarrassed // poem by Hollie McNish // directed by @dypka // @holлиеpoetry’. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-2z-Cd3luqA>.

⁷⁵ In the centre of Antananarivo, by Lac Anosy.

⁷⁶ “Adala” could be translated as “homeless person”, “alcoholic”, “junkie”, “crazy person”, “weirdo”. A social outcast, in any case.

Asked students if it is harder to find language for feelings in Malagasy than in English—three *yes*'s, straight back.

—'s story about writing a card for her father to go with a portrait of him, given to him by his children upon his retirement. That she wanted just to convey that she was proud of him, and ended up writing the card in English. That *it would've been so hard in Malagasy... I don't know why*.

Lebilahy kapaina tsy hita fery (\approx *When a man is cut, you don't see the wounds*) An ohabolana (\approx proverb) taught in Malagasy language classes in primary schools. *Like cutting water*, says ___. *It is taken very seriously*, ___ says [to me].

Tokatrano fibafinana (\approx *A household is to be endured*). Something you hear. Taken literally, it would appear to apply to both women and men, but tends to be heard more in female circles, as advice from a mother to her daughter, for instance. Students discussed it in terms of keeping *secrets* in the household—almost certainly a euphemism. That it is part of a broader picture, they agree, in which men are not normally accountable for their actions... *You don't realise till she's dead*.

—*I'm sorry to say it, but... making love*—.

Malagasy women don't say "I love you".

Discussion of how society puts pressure on men not to show feelings, not to complain. Women, however: *tsy rariny kosa*, etc (\approx *it's not fair*).

Because in our culture when something happens in our house we have to not say it.

~

...a married woman, a housewife... (said as if interchangeable).

~

Yeah, tiako (≈ I like it). Head on its side, whispering to herself, looking at ___'s poem.

~

It is always said that we women have to be beautiful for our husband.

~

So the husband can do whatever he wants to his wife.

~

...to make things appear beautiful in front of people.

~

27 September 2009

Gecko in the kitchen last night. Light, fresh yellowy colour. On ceiling. Then, next thing, dropped to the ground. Landing with a splat, face up. Paused, then scuttled under fridge. Bottom of two tumblers bouncing together sound. Hardcore torch deployed. Two of them under there, rattling intermittently.

*

29 September 2010

[___ on a certain kind of sarcastic greeting she sometimes has from Malagasy passers-by; and how she feels like replying...]



—*Salut, vazaba...*⁷⁷
—*Salut gache*⁷⁸ *now fuck off, quoi*

~

__ on her experience of getting mugged the other night, somewhere down below __ Hotel: the feeling of their fingers in her mouth

*

30 September 2009

boy comatose, limp [in the main square, Antananarenina]. lines of ?saliva from his mouth. flies around his face and penis.

~

[inside the CCAC] not just *un corps envahi de joie... la dance n'est pas une abstraction de la vie; c'est la vie elle même*⁷⁹

[dancers] in white balaclavas. Convulsing, shrieking, scratching; a box containing riot gear, and the words *RIEN QUE LA PAIX*⁸⁰

~

Police 'intervention' by Conforama⁸¹. A safety catch off. Brilliant white G-string of prostitute crouched, a fire already lit, getting ready for the night. Hands both above her head.

*

October 2013, Frontline Club, London

⁷⁷ ≈ *Hi*, [white] *foreigner*.

⁷⁸ From Malgache, the French word for Malagasy.

⁷⁹ ≈ *a body invaded by joy... dance is not an abstraction of life; it's life itself*. Centre Culturel Albert Camus (French cultural centre; name subsequently changed to Institut Français de Madagascar (IFM)).

⁸⁰ ≈ *NOTHING BUT PEACE*.

⁸¹ A medium-sized store selling electronic products in Tsaralalana, which is also Antananarivo's main red light district.

philosophically, I'm a basket case... there comes a point where you just can't do it any more, it just explodes your brain

*

October 2016

~

KE'TSA, *s.* Rice plants, that is the young rice when grown to the height of six or eight inches. In the ordinary method of rice culture these are taken up and transplanted in the larger rice-fields or TANIM-BARY.⁸²

~

furious green | ploughed up water | allowed in mud | roughly up | to the knee | and simply placed | so there is space enough | for it to grow | too | perfectly

~

RPANA, *s.* Water flowing over and on to rocks; a cascade, a cataract.⁸³

~

of water where | legless | boulder & | salty tamarind | tendrils muscle | & ribcage | thudding | in a bucket | across chest | deep | swelling & | expression | less kind | of water where | you hit your head & that's it

*

1 October 2018

___, adamant, angry over dinner: sarcasm is a form of lying.

*

⁸² Rev J. Richardson. *A New Malagasy-English Dictionary*. (Antananarivo: The London Missionary Society, 1885), p. 330.

⁸³ Richardson. *A New Malagasy-English Dictionary*, p. 515.



2-3 October 2019, University of Antananarivo

[On Caylah's *Malala Adala*...] ⁸⁴

I hate it more and more! Students identify a paradox running through the song—all the more surprising for being written by a famous female slammer: that it sets out to encourage women to say no to domestic violence and be more independent, while still using the language of patriarchy, seemingly without realising that that is what it is.

For example:

‘...nangalanao ahy tamin’ ny ray aman-dreniko, tsy ho ampijaliana na koa hoe ampitomaniana, fa atero mody izaho rehefa tsy tiana...’ (≈ ‘you didn’t take me from my parents to make me suffer and cry, so take me home if you don’t love me’).

And:

‘...fa na dia vehivavy aza ny tena mba misy hambom-po mba manana hazon-damosina ihany koa’ (≈ ‘but even though I myself am a woman, I have some pride, and a spine as well’)

And:

‘...Mendrika haja ny vehivavy hanitra sy ravaky ny tokantrano kara folera kara vase mendrika kalo sy vazo ka karakarao izy tsy ho vaky tsy halazo’ (≈ ‘a woman deserves respect as she is the perfume and decoration of a home, just like flowers or a vase; a woman deserves songs and chanting, so take care of her so that she doesn’t break or wilt’). ⁸⁵

~

—’s horrifying poem, in which a parent appears to be preparing their daughter for an abusive husband. Some lengthy discussion of forms of repression in this poem. And, afterwards, some discussion about the

⁸⁴ Caylah and M.E.N: *Malala Adala* (≈ Crazy Darling), March 10 2017. Via YouTube [online] ‘CAYLAH and M.E.N – “Malala adala” Clip’. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oaotvUUm1NE>.

⁸⁵ Ny vehivavy ravaky ny tokatrano (≈ a woman decorates the home)... a well-known proverb, often heard in Kabary (a traditional kind of formal public speaking). Used without irony in Caylah’s song, seemingly to add weight to her point about the need for men to avoid violence towards women. The phrase “ny vehivavy ravaky ny lalana” (≈ “a woman decorates the street”) is also sometimes heard in everyday Malagasy. It is used by both men and women, and most often used in all seriousness.

habit __ has of tagging on *tsy-haiko* (\approx *I dunno*) to the very end of her contributions to the discussion. Was this her way of marking genuine uncertainty about each of the things she had said? Or was it, possibly, an extra diffidence bred in her by society, as a woman? [My question.]⁸⁶ She and her [all female] classmates agree that certainly male students they know are less likely to have the same habit.

[On Hilton Als's *Islands (for Peter)*...]⁸⁷

Discussion about how the text, which features one man's expression of love for another man, would read if transposed to a Malagasy context and written in Malagasy... *It will ache the eyes.*

Discussion of the top story in a broadsheet newspaper that day about new regulations supposedly forbidding Malagasy women from leaving the country unaccompanied, unless they have the "authorisation" of their husbands.⁸⁸ Not one student questions whether it is accurate reporting. Students compare the "protectiveness" of the state with the "protective" husband who won't allow his wife to leave the house.

Discussion of attitudes towards virginity, especially of the phrases used (by men and women) to describe women who are not virgins: *daba loaka* (\approx *a barrel with a hole / already pierced*), *vaky* (\approx *broken*); *vehivany sotasotaina* (\approx *made dirty / made depraved*).

Discussion of sex as something that is supposedly not "clean" in Malagasy society... __ simulating the kind of advice a grandmother or mother would have for their [grand]daughter: *tandremo ny fahadiovanao*, (\approx *take care of your cleanliness*). __ illustrates further with the image of a glass of water: *it is just you; once you have sex, there is a bit of someone else in you.*

Discussion of supposedly desirable qualities in a woman: to be *malemy fanahy* (\approx *soft-souled*), *mandefitra* (\approx *a willingness to endure hardship / suffer / put oneself second*); and of supposedly undesirable qualities in a woman: to be *mokon-doha* (\approx *strong-willed*), be **loha** (literally: *big head* \approx *stubborn*), *mola* (\approx *extravagantly flirty*), *jomaka* (\approx *tough, thuggish*).

⁸⁶ With hindsight, I found myself saying 'I dunno' in exactly the same way in creative writing workshops on my own masters at UEA.

⁸⁷ Doig (author) and Nesbitt (ed.), *Peter Doig*, pp. 194-207.

⁸⁸ Elise Nandrasanela. 2019, 'Voyage à L'extérieur – Restrictions de sortie pour les femmes', *L'Express de Madagascar*, 5 October 2019. Available at <https://lexpress.mg/05/10/2019/voyage-a-lexterieur-restriction-de-sortie-pour-les-femmes/>.

*

3 October 2008

You have a good day... full of magic and mischief. Parting salut from ___.

*

6 October 2009, Lac Anosy

[from mediation talks...]

rain on inside of conference hall windows. 11.45am, here since 9

journos huddled in corner. *nous avons prie note de[?]s] forte[s] objection[s]*⁸⁹. Elections Feb?

heavy rain outside, now. No protestors as a result, selon ___

___'s lot laughing

___ in spotless shiny brown shoes, a Samsonite briefcase

___ delegation in a Ford Focus, flag on the front left; fluffy lemur toy in back. That the

could end up in cups of rancid coffee 10 months later, in the very same place; that, even eight days ago, live rounds for protestors all around the lake here

*

6 October 2010

The heat today. Bleaching white sun. Thoughts, with some longing, of cyclone season.

7 October 2010

⁸⁹ *We have taken note of the[se] strong objection[s].*

disorder. to know what anarchy means, but do you know what it feels like?⁹⁰

*

9-10 October 2019, University of Antananarivo

[On Geeta Tewari's *Discipline...*]⁹¹

Students discuss the considerable challenge of rewriting the sex scene in this story in Malagasy; preserving the way that in the English it is not dramatised but uses matter of fact, moderate language. In the Malagasy, they agree, this kind of directness would very easily be perceived as drawing attention to itself, as *vetaveta* (\approx *vulgar, dirty*). They simulate possible responses from Malagasy readers: *tsy hoe tsy mety izany fa... tsy mety amiko* (\approx *it's not that it's unacceptable but... it doesn't work for me*) [laughter].

.

___ on the birds and the bees talk her father had with her when she was 12; that he used the word *filelena* for sex. Conversation about how this word, like *mamany* (to urinate) and *mangery* (to defecate), despite being the “correct”, original Malagasy word, is more shocking to the ears than the French equivalent. Students can't agree on why this is.

.

...*mbola tsy manam-bady* (\approx *not yet married*): a passing reference to a woman's marital status as part of an anecdote, but ___ seemingly unaware of the assumption in her inclusion of *mbola* (*yet*).

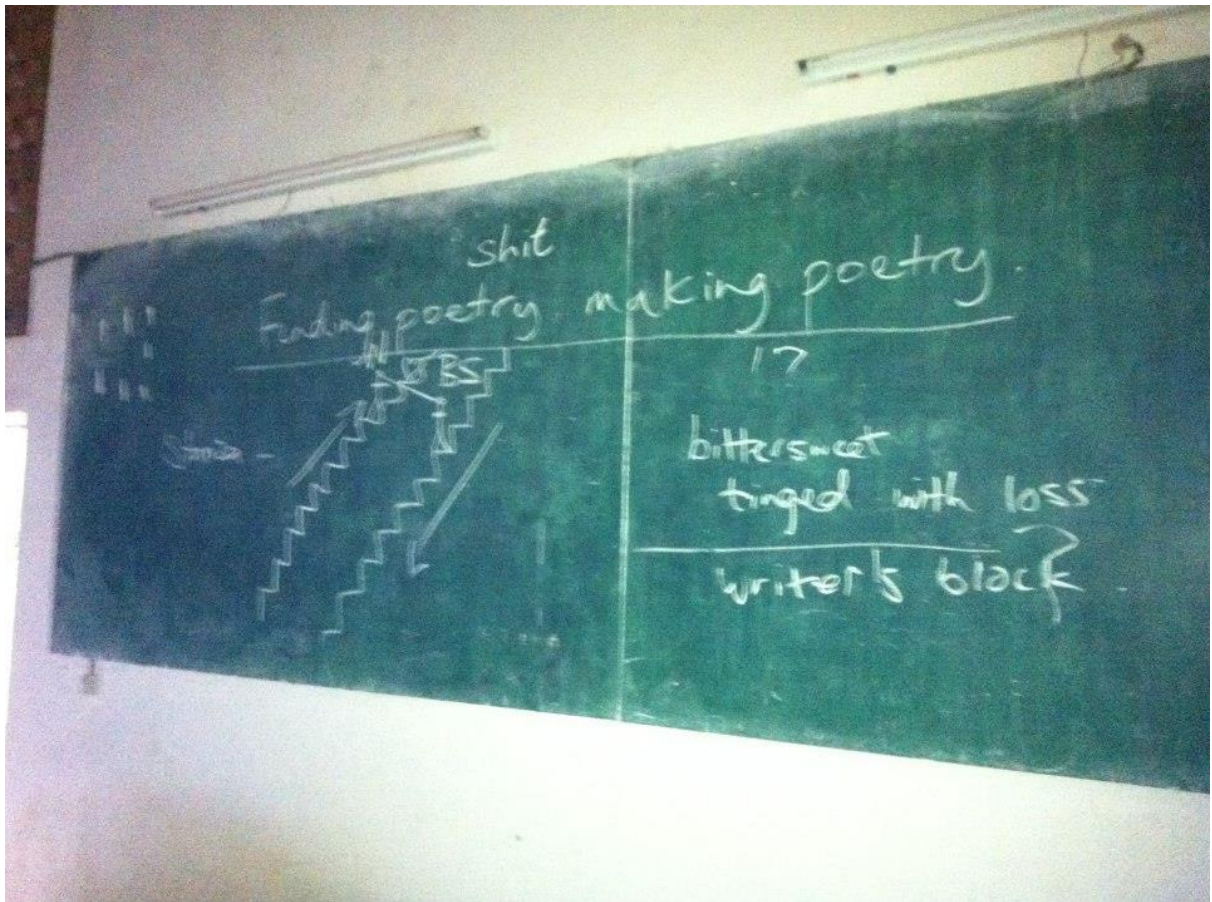
.

Students discuss their practice of keeping a journal.

___ on her relief about the arrival of the rains this last week; ___: *I only like the rain when it doesn't fall on me.*

⁹⁰ Following an email from ___, who was writing something on order and disorder at the time; and would, presumably, have referred to that in their email.

⁹¹ Geeta Tewari, *Discipline*. (Granta [online], 2017). Available at <https://granta.com/discipline-tewari/>.



FARABA NY TABLAG
REHEFA AVY
NAMAFICANA
MISAOITRA TOMPOKO

ao an-tsaing'ny Avy a zava-misy fainana andavan'ny
From the world. It comes from our feelings andro
From our mind. Somewhere from things that happened
any an-ny fahiny
everywhere
From our around us
Heart
Where does a poem come from?
From our life zavatra hita na hisianana.
from our emotions Avy aiza no nianjan'ny
avy a Tononkala iray. people animals
aingampiasa zava-niseho avy amin'ny zavatra
From his mind inspiration toe java mibangy avy amin'ny zavatra
manodidina avy amin'ny zavatra avy amin'ny zavatra
zava-mibangy avy amin'ny zavatra avy amin'ny zavatra
fiainana from love story
life

___ shares a story about recently sitting next to a nun on a bus. Leads to conversation about the particular smell nuns supposedly have (some speculation as to whether it is to do with their uniform), and whether they feel desire.

*

15 October 2018, Ampasanimalo

___ has been beating the water for almost five minutes, can hear it from here. This morning we cut his feathers

*

16 October 2009, ___ café, Isoraka

Small acts of kindness. *Tu veux un verre?*⁹² (Outside.) I have just lost my phone. She has just lost her daughter.

*

16-17 October 2019, University of Antananarivo

[On Zazangaly's *Tsy natao ho sorona...*]⁹³

Conversation around an assumption in this poem, written by a young spoken word poet (which calls on women to end a relationship if it is not working for them): that, normally, a woman would tend not be the one to end a relationship. Some anger in the [all female] group about a sense of being patronised. *As if a woman doesn't know her own mind.*

Talk of the phrase, *lany zara* (\approx *luck used up*). A situation in which a woman has effectively lost her 'value', being with a man (or more than one man) in public for a long time without being married, such that it is possible no other man would ever want to marry her if it didn't work out with this man. ___ on the cruelty in this concept, and how once being warned by her mother against ending up like this still hurt.

*

⁹² \approx *Would you like a glass?*

⁹³ \approx *Don't be a sacrifice*; unpublished in text form, not available online.

18 October 2010, Soarano

0320714378 / Message du / consulat de / France du 18/10: / Eviter de circuler / dans les / quartiers de / Behoririka et / Antanimena. / Sent: 18-Oct-2010 / 14:08:02⁹⁴

~

Hot. Onset of tension for first time in 6 ½ months? Bowls awry. Adrenalin. Chest tight. ___ tear gas in Behoririka / Antanimena... my eyes stinging intermittently earlier. Once again, can only take so much of this.

~

Shops boarded up. Sec. guard @ ___ with automatic gunfire ringtone—*excuse me*, he says, taking call, laughing. Had been discussing whether calm up in Ambohitovo for the mo (actually a lone soldier beaten the shit out of, at around that time). His *on sait jamais... faut courir vite!*⁹⁵

~

how ___ has eyes like mine. the twinkle when talking of the myth of the vazaha maty⁹⁶ on ___. his *il faut faire très attention!*⁹⁷; how *you* [he, I] *could be, at any moment,*

*

18 October 2019, University of Antananarivo

___'s story about feeling humiliated one day at secondary school in a coastal city where ___ had not grown up, when ___ word for crab (in a dialect from a different region) was ceremoniously crossed out on the board by the teacher.

___'s story about a girl from the highlands at ___ school by the coast. She had mispronounced the region Antemoro, *Antaymoro*. (tay = shit). That she almost had to be moved from the school for what was an innocent mistake, she said. ___ on how there was *always something at the back of people's minds*... ie. people in

⁹⁴ Message from / the consulate / of France [...] Avoid circulating / in the areas / of Behoririka and / Antanimena...

⁹⁵ ≈ *you never know, gotta run fast!*

⁹⁶ ≈ dead [white] foreigner

⁹⁷ ≈ *one has to be very careful*

that region on the coast always on the lookout for people from the Highlands considering themselves above the rest.

___ to the rest of the group: *have you ever come across a work of art [in Madagascar] that deals with racism?* All struggled to think of one. *And why not?* Speculation that it could be to do with pride, with the difficulties of admitting fault in Malagasy cultures, with the fear of violence; of opening up Pandora's Box? No consensus.

Discussion of Merina phrase *malama volo* (literally "slippery" [ie. very straight, Asiatic] **hair**);⁹⁸ and of *mako* (curly hair, commonly associated with people from coastal regions); and of *malama loba* (literally "slippery head")... a phrase used by people from coastal regions to refer not just to the [often straighter] hair of the Merina, but also to their supposedly 'slippery' ways. That if speaking in front of people from the highlands, coastal people might say *malama volo* to refer to the Merina, but amongst themselves they might refer to the Merina as *malama loba*.

They can come out but you cannot come in. ___ talking about a certain place in the region populated by the ___ ethnic group, that part of his family is from. ___ adds that in his own region there is, likewise, a place where Merina people are forbidden from entering.

How can you like the Other when you don't know who he [sic] is?

~

[On Mary Jean Chan's *Written in a Historically White Space I* and *Written in a Historically White Space II*...]⁹⁹

(*'I grew up in a city where parks once displayed / this sign in my mother tongue: CHINESE AND / DOGS NOT ALLOWED. We were creatures with knees kissing colonial ground...'*)¹⁰⁰

Students play around with the above lines, testing out 'MALAGASY', 'MERINA' and 'COTIERS' in place of 'CHINESE'. The violence in these test versions could be clearly seen in students' expressions as they tried each one out.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ The Merina are a large ethnic group in Madagascar, mostly they settled in the central highlands, where Antananarivo is located.

⁹⁹ Mary Jean Chan, *Fleche*, p. 43 (*Written in a Historically White Space I*); p. 66 (*Written in a Historically White Space II*).

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, p. 43.

¹⁰¹ The French terms 'cotier [masculine form] / cotière [feminine form]' are used by all in Madagascar to refer to people who live in coastal regions.

~
Rebefa miteraka ianao, dia otran hoe 'amizay ianao vebivavy...' (\approx *and when you give birth, it's like 'now you're a woman...'*).

~
Manatsara taranaka (\approx *improving the offspring*, a phrase that might be used by parents in encouraging their child to marry somebody with lighter skin than their own; usually implying marriage to a vazaha (\approx white foreigner)). Cf. manimba taranaka (\approx to damage / ruin the offspring).

Mba fidifidio ihany (\approx *Still be a bit picky* [in relation to the racial origins of a potential life partner]), ___ imitating the way her mother once said this.

Voa mafy (\approx *hit hard / short-changed / drew the short straw*); a phrase that might be used to comment on somebody seen with a partner considered undesirable on the grounds of their ethnic group or “caste” within that group; and so their status).

~
20 October 2010

home via Ambanidia steps: the desiccation and decay, butterflies; high above the city, two students doing their homework in the shade

~
clumps of fake hair along the ___ road. *Love is Solution* on corrugated iron fence around the wasteland at ___, where one day, without a doubt, s/thing will be built

~
call from ___: was that an explosion? photojournalists lurking around pres. palace and govt. buildings. casing from a live round found in Behoririka, according to ___; supporters of ___ now vowing to *throw effervescence in town*

— in a corridor in a rush; jewels in his hair, a wooden earring, looking faintly refreshed. Off shortly to a *terrain de bandits*¹⁰² near Moramanga, he says (gives directions). And off he bounces. *On est tous des pirates, ici...*¹⁰³

*

21 October 2010

how I'd love to lie tangled in someone and to wake next to them, humble and quiet

*

22 October 2009

can no longer separate the conflict here from the city, and hadn't noticed. Golly

*

23-24 October 2019, University of Antananarivo

[On Elaine Kahn's *Women in Public...*]¹⁰⁴

Students discuss what it would mean to translate a text like this into Malagasy... unanimous agreement that this process was a reminder of how difficult it is to talk of female desire in Malagasy. That it is easier to talk about sex. *Women are to satisfy desire, not to have it.*

~

Cos I think even men can feel that...

~

¹⁰² ≈ *bandit country*

¹⁰³ ≈ *We're all pirates, here...*

¹⁰⁴ Elaine Kahn, *Women in Public* (San Francisco: City Lights, 2015).



A discussion about men and frailty: ___ that *women are physically weak and mentally strong; men are physically strong and mentally weak*. Said as a simple reminder to the group, as if entirely axiomatic. Widowhood cited as an example: that *a man cannot live without a woman but a woman can live without a man*.

*

24 October 2013

Motif de voyage / Purpose of trip .

[] Tourisme / Tourism

[] Affaire / Business

[] Visite familiale / Family visit

[] Autre / Others...¹⁰⁵

*

25 October 2019, University of Antananarivo

[On Imiangaly's *Manja* (\approx beautiful)...]¹⁰⁶

Students discuss this song, how supposedly it is addressing associations of lighter skin with beauty; darker skin with ugliness. ___ uncomfortable about the sepia light used in the video: making Imiangaly appear lighter skinned? *Possibly she doesn't mean what she says*.

~

On the language of skin colour in Malagasy: *mavomavo* (dark yellow—used pejoratively in referring to skin colour... connotations of being from the countryside and therefore supposedly backward; of no renown); *manga* (blue—meaning black, shiny-black, lustrous; also meaning excellent, admirable).

Discussion of a phrase like *somary mangamanga izy*, to describe somebody with dark skin when speaking in public (\approx *he [she/they] is[are] kind of blue*)... can be used when the speaker doesn't want to risk offence by referring to someone as *mainity* (*black*)—blue also being associated with excellent / admirable things.

¹⁰⁵ On the immigration form to be torn out of the small welcome booklet always distributed to air passengers before landing at Ivato International Airport, Antananarivo.

¹⁰⁶ Imiangaly: 'Manja' (\approx Beautiful), February 18 2017. Via YouTube [online] 'Imiangaly - Manja LIVE'. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h8RSI6Ew7zY>.

___'s visible anger about the apparent need to euphemise in the first place: *if you don't think "mainty" is bad, why do you have to say it is good?*

~

volotrandraka (volo = hair; trandraka = a hedgehoglike animal, that is regarded as dirty and that it is forbidden to eat in the ___ of Madagascar; ___: *for them, it's less than shit*). Phrase apparently used in parts of the ___ to refer to people from ___, presumably a reference to the often straighter hair of the ___.

~

___'s anecdote about a high-ranking police officer who was of the party at a wedding she attended. That he had apparently made calls to traffic police colleagues all along the route from Ambanidia to Anosizato so that the procession glided through Saturday traffic in 15 minutes.¹⁰⁷ *He opened the way.*

___ linking this story to his notion of the power of "the Lyric I" in Madagascar (essentially that powerful people tend to feel more comfortable using the first person.) *Sheltering under another's Lyric I*, he quips [much laughter].

~

___ asks ___ how he would feel using the dialect of the coastal region where he spent his childhood in his writing: *Would you dare?* (Answer, yes.)

~

Foreign naked women are okay. ___ on the supposed hypocrisy of the bourgeoisie in Antananarivo—how they would have paintings of vazaha¹⁰⁸ nudes on the walls of their homes, but *absolutely no way they'd allow Malagasy bodies.*

*

26 October 2010

¹⁰⁷ Ambanidia is a neighbourhood in Antananarivo just southeast of the centre. There is a tunnel under the city's central hill there. The neighbourhood of Anosizato is on the city's western edge.

¹⁰⁸ ≈ white foreigner

Image of a well-known face. Traffic island, Tsaralalana. Vomiting up papaya. Not because she's drunk but because she's dying.

~

(On some other day sat there with spectacles putting pen to paper one leg over the other, just as I am now.)

~

(On est tous des pirates)

*

27 October 2009, Andohalo

with __, looking down in dark at lights along main avenue in Andrefan'Ambohijanahary... how he finds *quiet* on streets *terrifying*. (The *drip, drip* of political developments in Madagascar of no interest to __ *head boncho*¹⁰⁹ in Johannesburg.)

*

27 October 2010

policeman and [alleged] bandit killed in Mahamasina last night. Blood still on ground—and __'s breed of softness, as workpoint

*

29 October 2009, Analakely

*Valse avec Bachir*¹¹⁰ @ the CCAC¹¹¹, the end-of-film-moment... ?30-year-old French girl immobilised in seat, bearded bf's sheepish efforts to console... an arm around, then leaving her. Elsewhere, near the back, __¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Head of the bureau to which __ was filing his news reporting.

¹¹⁰ Waltz with Bashir (an animated film, exploring psychological impacts of the 1982 Lebanon War).

¹¹¹ French Cultural Centre.

¹¹² A journalist.

and __: a kiss. And me, out to find a taxi. (A NO loudly, too loudly, to three prostitutes.) And back here, alone.

*

30-31 October 2019, University of Antananarivo

[On Poety Rebely ‘Ampela, vehivavy’ (≈ Young woman [in dialects in southern Madagascar], woman)...]¹¹³

Talk of *gender mainstreaming* in Madagascar. __ on how she was given a toy kitchen set as a child, that her parents would not have questioned this.

Students pick up on a reference in Poety Rebely’s song to a woman not being a servant (mpanompo)... except when she is, in fact, a servant. Leads to a lively discussion about the invisibility so far in students’ own conversations about conventional households of the mpanompo / mpanampy¹¹⁴. Ie. when students have referred to *the man* and *the woman* in a household, they seem to forget that there is often likely to be another woman or girl also present. Students discuss what gender equality might mean for the mpanompo / mpanampy when, almost by definition, their role is characterised by a lack of power and equality. No consensus.

The moment when, in passing, __ refers to *a woman’s role (a wife, a mother)*. This was picked up on by the rest of the group, leading to a conversation about how comprehensively patriarchal frames of reference have been absorbed in society such that, just like Poety Rebely, even they (metropolitan middle class female gender studies students), find themselves holding exactly the kind of attitudes that it is their work to critique.

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[On Ottessa Moshfegh’s *Jailbait*...]¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Poety Rebely: ‘Ampela, vehivavy’. 9 March 2019. Via Facebook [online] ‘Poety rebely – AMPELA, VEHIVAVY’. Available at <https://www.facebook.com/poete.rebelle.slam/videos/1036736663183438>.

¹¹⁴ literally “helper” ≈ a carer-cook-cleaner, who is given a small salary, often without a contract, in return for their “help” as well as sometimes food and / or lodging. It could be argued that many mpanampy in Antananarivo today live in a dynamic that resembles modern slavery, according to most English definitions of that term. It has also been my experience that many mpanampy in Antananarivo are treated with kindness and, relative to norms in society at large in that city, at least, paid an ordinary wage. It is not unusual to witness genuine mutual affection and tenderness between mpanampy and their employers. Even where trust is minimal. Mpanampy sometimes address a man in the employing household with words meaning “uncle”; or a woman “aunt”, etc.

¹¹⁵ Ottessa Moshfegh, *Jailbait* (Granta [online], 2018). Available at <https://granta.com/jailbait/>.

I love the determination of the woman in the story... Nowadays it's the easiest way to get what you want.

What I like is this really shows the arrogance of literature people, their moral violence.

She dared to say no.

~

[On *Haody haody Ramatoa* (\approx *Knock knock, Madame*), a poem from the *Hainteny*...] ¹¹⁶

It really describes the situation of married people... Students agree that this poem, though well over a hundred years old, exemplifies differences in present-day attitudes towards the fidelity of men and women in marriage. Conversation moves on to a comparison of the commonly heard phrase *tokatrano fiafina* (\approx *to be in a household is to endure suffering*; something that might be heard if it is a man that is unfaithful to his wife) and *vehivavy alika* (referring to a woman as a dog; something one might hear in relation to a woman who is unfaithful to her husband.)

~

___'s story of how, as a child, boys like him in the coastal region where he grew up were forced to kill an animal (for example, a cow, a dog, or a chicken) as a rite of passage. *Now you're a man.* That a boy he knew, whose mother was a single mother (this detail was evidently significant, in ___'s mind) couldn't do this... and then faced ridicule in their local community. That it would have been totally acceptable for a girl to decline.

___ saying, with feeling, that he wants men and women to be equal, *including emotionally*. (What about in terms of the right to carry a gun? ___ asks... — No difference, same goes for that, he says.)

Students discuss the language one would tend to hear in everyday conversation in Antananarivo concerning attitudes towards transgender people: if a woman wants to become a man, that's *her choice*... whereas if a man wants to become a woman, that's *his problem*.

*

Sunday 31 October 2010, Isoraka

¹¹⁶ Leonard Fox, *Hainteny: Traditional Poetry of Madagascar* (Lewisburg, Pennsylvania: Bucknell University Press, 1990), p. 220.



9.45

— leaning against concrete pylon by windows of church at Ambatonalita, listening in to sermon (not his usual spot)

~

rain on a million (tin) roofs?

*

*away from Descartes*¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷ The first draft of this section was written in Antananarivo in 2017.

‘Cogito, ergo sum’, the French philosopher, René Descartes famously contended (I think, therefore I am). Descartes declared himself certain that ‘I can have no knowledge of what is outside me, except by means of the ideas I have within me.’¹¹⁸

In the opening chapter to their 2015 book *Retrieving Realism*, contemporary philosophers Charles Taylor and Hubert Dreyfus discuss Ludwig Wittgenstein’s contention in *Philosophical Investigations* that ‘A picture held us captive’. Wittgenstein’s claim here, they write, ‘could be interpreted as saying that mainline epistemological thinking, which descends from Descartes, has been contained within and hence shaped by this not fully explicit picture; that this has been a kind of captivity, because it has prevented us from seeing what is wrong with this whole line of thought. At certain points, we are unable to think “outside the box” because the picture seems so obvious, so commonsensical, so unchallengeable.’ Taylor and Dreyfus characterise the book as an effort to explain this dependency in Western thought: ‘There is a big mistake operating in our culture,’ they write, ‘a kind of operative (mis)understanding of what it is to know, which has had dire effects on both theory and practice in a host of domains...’¹¹⁹

What if the workings of a PhD thesis lay at least partially out of reach to Western rationalist epistemology and its methodologies?

Whether within conversations around “de-centring” and “decolonising the curriculum”; or around the reimagining of critical methods and orientations in the wake of the “postcritical turn”; or around “hybrid writing”, “creative criticism” and the usefulness of a demarcation between the “creative” and the “critical”; or around “practise based” or ” practice-led” research, such a question would probably not struggle to find a home within discourse in the arts and humanities during the period in which I have been a postgraduate researcher (2015-2023). Yet it has haunted this project from the outset, because of a situation in which the institutional frameworks that host it (and, through formal review checkpoints, hold the power of life and death over it) appear to make no allowance for such a possibility, much in the way that Taylor and Dreyfus describe.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ ‘...assuré que je ne puis avoir aucune connaissance de ce qui est hors de moi, que par l’entremise des idées que j’ai eu en moi’, from René Descartes, “Letter to Gibieuf of 19 January 1642,” in *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, vol. 3, trans. John Cottingham et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 201; quoted in Hubert Dreyfus and Charles Taylor, *Retrieving Realism* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 105), p. 2.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ See UEA Research Degree Policy Documents; Section 12: Guidelines for Probationary Review, 28 April 2015 (updated October 2019). Available at <https://portal.uea.ac.uk/documents/6207125/6873036/Section+12+-+Guidance+on+Probationary+Review.pdf/a03d1318-71bf-486c-9e63-c0f0833d76fe>.

At various points across this thesis, I touch on a sense of disorientation I have come to feel as a writer (both before and after beginning my doctoral research) with regard to the distance between different realities I have been moving between: geographically, lexically, otherwise. At times, this sense has been quite acute.

This section traces a finger across that distance in an arc: progressing from the meta-discursive work of literary theorist Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, via the writing of philosopher-ethnographer Alphonso Lingis; to the more focussed disciplinary work of “new ethnographers” Kathleen Stewart in the United States and, finally, to that of Stephen Muecke, walking streets I know well in Antananarivo—far away, therefore, but how far away from Descartes?

Running through these various figures’ writing is a firm advocacy of non-interpretive practices within contemporary scholarship—of interest to me here, since I have not found in conventional interpretive practices with a Cartesian ancestry much that is useful to me in developing my practice as a poet in Antananarivo.

Also running through these figures’ writing, I will argue, is a paradox: that, on the one hand, whilst they clearly share a frustration with models of language use with a Western rationalist orientation rooted in Cartesian dualism, they also seem to share a difficulty in letting go of language derived from that same understanding of what it is to know, in the course of trying to reach for an alternative.

This section is intended above all as a review of a set of writerly possibilities, from which I am then taking my bearings as a researcher at the creative-critical interface in this thesis. It should be read as the first part of a two-part methodology, directly informing my presentation of writing in *lobataona*, *fabavaratra*, *fararano*, and *ririnina*, and *From Jean-Joseph*, *From Jean-Luc*, *From Julia*, *From Jobary*, and of my own photographic work; and proceeding on to its conclusion in the *[un]ethical matters* section.

German-American literary theorist Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht has devoted much of a distinguished academic career to questions related to the limitations of the Cartesian epistemic picture. Though a number of his books contain essays bearing on these questions, it is Gumbrecht’s 2004 publication, *Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey* and *Atmosphere, Mood, Stimmung: On a Hidden Potential of Literature* (2012), that together set out most comprehensively his vision of the ills of the modern tradition of hermeneutics, as he sees it, and how these might best be remedied.

“[The] Cartesian dimension,” writes Gumbrecht, echoing Taylor and Dreyfus, “does not cover (and should never cover) the full complexity of our existence, although we are led to believe that it does with probably more overwhelming pressure than ever before.”¹²¹ *Production of Presence* addresses itself to an academic climate in the arts and humanities in which, according to Gumbrecht, ‘the absolute dominance of meaning-related questions had long led to the abandonment of all other types of phenomena and questions’¹²²—including that of “presence”, ‘a dimension in which cultural phenomena and cultural events become tangible and have an impact on our senses and our bodies’.¹²³ Gumbrecht identifies such effects as “presence effects”—typologically distinct from “meaning effects”, to which he says we are receptive, instead, through cognitive processes in the mind. He argues that modern Western culture is predominantly a “meaning culture” in that the dominant human self-reference in the West is consciousness; whereas medieval Europe and many non-Western cultures today (he is not very specific) might be characterised as “presence cultures”, in which ‘the dominant self-reference... is the body’.¹²⁴

Gumbrecht then goes on to sketch out in brief his vision of future practices, which might help recover for “critical writing” some independence from the iron grip of Western rationalism, as he sees it. He proposes three possible conceptual toolkits to this end: “epiphany” (emphasising the presence element and, in particular, “moments of intensity” in the field of aesthetics); “presentification” (emphasising the potential aestheticisation of history, i.e. tangible contact with the past) and “deixis” (*deictic* teaching practice, i.e. drawing students’ attention to phenomena and problems without specifying how these should be approached).¹²⁵ The book concludes with a chapter (“To Be Quiet for a Moment: About Redemption”), which dwells on the place of non-verbal inquiry in exploring “presence”, as he sees it.

Atmosphäre, Mood, Stimmung effectively attempts to apply the arguments in relation to non-interpretive method developed in *Production of Presence*, but with a twist on the notion of presence in the form of *stimmung*: a German word approximating to “atmosphere” or “mood” in English. Literary moods or atmospheres, Gumbrecht contends here, are the natural extensions or by-products of moods or atmospheres in everyday

¹²¹ Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *The Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey*. (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2004), p. 42.

¹²² Ibid, p.16.

¹²³ Ibid, back cover.

¹²⁴ Ibid, pp. 79-81. Gumbrecht’s characterisation of these terms is a little vague and can confuse. He mostly presents the “presence culture” vs. “meaning culture” distinction as more of a continuum than strictly a dichotomy - and one primarily for use in discussing the nature of specific cultural phenomena; i.e. certain cultural phenomena are more on one side whereas others are more on the other. At one point he explicitly acknowledges that the distinction cannot be binary in characterizing a given culture. However, his repeated references to “a presence culture” or “presence cultures” plural, i.e. as a countable noun, have the effect of slowly undermining this and implying that he may perhaps see the distinction as more binary than he suggests. His repeatedly comparing certain modern day non-Western cultures to mediaeval Western cultures as presence cultures arguably appears to support this. His discussions here remain mostly in the abstract.

¹²⁵ Ibid, p. 95.

life—of which the material qualities of language in texts carry seemingly endless proof. After a brief introductory discussion of its origins, the book comprises a collection of nine essays: each in a relation to a different literary text or other cultural object, from Shakespeare’s sonnets to Caspar David Friedrich’s paintings, to the voice of Janis Joplin—and each establishing itself, in its own way, as an argument in favour of a reading that (a) is attuned to *stimmung* and (b) transcends practices one would normally recognise as being interpretive (and thus inclinations one would normally associate with Western rationalism). The book concludes with three essays discussing cases of *stimmung* in Western intellectual culture.

‘I am engaged in an experiment,’ writes Gumbrecht, ‘where the certainties and conventions of how to write are still undefined.’¹²⁶ It would be tempting to put it down simply to this spirit of experimentation, but there is in these two books a persistent tendency towards equivocation in the way in which Gumbrecht outlines his alternative methodologies, such that one begins to wonder how far he has doubts himself about their usefulness; whether he seems clear in himself on what he is suggesting they should entail—and if he is not, one begins to wonder, why might this be? Almost as if admitting defeat before the relevant chapter gets under way, Gumbrecht introduces his ‘tentative concepts’ of “epiphany”, “presentification” and “deixis” in *Production of Presence*, by regretting that ‘we are not able yet (for sheer lack of appropriate concepts) to enter an intellectual world of postmetaphysical epistemology.’¹²⁷ Similarly, in a chapter on states of feeling in Thomas Mann’s *Death in Venice* in *Atmosphere, Mood, Stimmung*, Gumbrecht reflects that ‘in the best of cases, we can amplify the impression of fullness they produce’—hardly a ringing endorsement of the value of reading for *stimmung*.¹²⁸ More generally, there is such a variety of verbs used in phrases describing what is to be done with literary *stimmung* that the reader can perhaps be forgiven for some confusion: are we to ‘uncover—’¹²⁹ or ‘retrace—’¹³⁰ or ‘identify—’¹³¹ or ‘concentrate on—’¹³² or ‘follow configurations of—’¹³³ or ‘review cases of—’¹³⁴ atmospheres and moods? And what might these terms amount to, in practice? Gumbrecht does not elaborate. Sooner or later, one may begin to question how far any of Gumbrecht’s activities are from the very interpretive practices he sets out to distance himself from.

In a 1994 essay entitled *A Farewell to Interpretation*, Gumbrecht discusses a precursor to his notion of “presence”: that of “materialities of communication”. However, he sounds here a more radical note with regard to what making adequate space for “materialities of communication” in arts and humanities research would require in terms of moving beyond conceptual thinking: ‘Perhaps we even jeopardize the most

¹²⁶ Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Atmosphere, Mood, Stimmung: On a Hidden Potential of Literature* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2012), p. 18.

¹²⁷ Ibid, pp. 91-2.

¹²⁸ Ibid, p. 75.

¹²⁹ Ibid, p.16.

¹³⁰ Ibid, p.16.

¹³¹ Ibid, p.17.

¹³² Ibid, p.12.

¹³³ Ibid, pp.12-13.

¹³⁴ Ibid, p.13.

important option offered by the materialities approach', he states, 'if we dream of a new stability for renewed concepts in a future age of theory'. He goes on to evoke the possibility of seeing the world as 'a sphere of extremely short-lived phenomena and without any stable or general concepts for their description.' In other words, an end to the dominance of "critical writing" led by concepts. 'Rather than overcoming the resistance that "materialities of communication" offer to our contemporary concepts and theories, we might profit from this resistance,' he suggests.¹³⁵ It seems that the difference between the trajectory of these early reflections of Gumbrecht on the one hand and his later cries for, for example, '*concepts that would allow us to point to what is irreversibly nonconceptual in our lives*'¹³⁶ gets to the heart of a problematic ambivalence pervading Gumbrecht's work on Cartesianism, taken as a whole. As the author of an excellent review of *Atmosphere, Mood, Stimmung*, Matheus de Brito has it, Gumbrecht 'defended the end of Theory and, still, here he is, doing Theory.'¹³⁷

One does not need to look far in *Production of Presence* and *Atmosphere, Mood, Stimmung* to note that for all of his eloquent, meticulous dismissals of Cartesianism (there are a great many!), Gumbrecht appears still surprisingly at home with concepts and the language of interpretation. He is quick to demarcate 'layers' of moods in Shakespeare's sonnets.¹³⁸ Introducing his discussion of the appeal of sport in another book, he refers unprompted to fascination as his 'concept of choice'.¹³⁹ And at one point in *Atmosphere, Mood, Stimmung* he appears effectively to slip and refer to the reading for *stimmung* he advocates as a 'kind of interpretation'.¹⁴⁰ It should also be said that the typological distinction made between "presence effects" and "meaning effects" in *Production of Presence* is itself reminiscent of Cartesian dualism.

Moreover, the kind of positioning that Gumbrecht seems to feel naturally comfortable with is classically one of mediation—in a way entirely in step with orthodox interpretive practices, albeit between the reader and presences, atmospheres or moods contained in a text, rather than conceptual content. 'It is less a matter of disclosing the meaning that underlies the text', Gumbrecht writes, 'than of setting free the potential it contains'—still seeming to argue against the autonomy of works of art and to imply the need for such extra work in the first place. But does Gumbrecht really believe in the need for this mediation? Sometimes one detects that he may not. '*Stimmungen* from the past can strike us directly and without mediation, provided we are open for them. *Stimmungen* are capable of leaping across the boundaries of hermeneutic

¹³⁵ Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, 'A Farewell to Interpretation' in Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht and Karl Ludwig Pfeiffer (eds.) *Materialities of Communication* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1994), p. 402.

¹³⁶ Gumbrecht, *Production of Presence*, p. 140.

¹³⁷ Matheus de Brito, 'Stimmungen or "In the Mood for Differentiability"'. *Materialidades da Literatura* 2, 1 (2004), p. 187.

¹³⁸ Gumbrecht, *Atmosphere, Mood, Stimmung*, pp. 48-9.

¹³⁹ Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *In Praise of Athletic Beauty*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 151.

¹⁴⁰ In a discussion of Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*, Gumbrecht calls for 'a third way of reading—the kind of interpretation that places greater stock in Mann's 1911 visit to Venice than in his working through his own self-image as a writer', *ibid* Gumbrecht, *Atmosphere, Mood, Stimmung*, p. 74.

interpretation, so to speak,' Gumbrecht states, rounding off a discussion of the affective qualities of light in Caspar David Friedrich's paintings.¹⁴¹ Elsewhere, he advocates 'discovering sources of energy in artefacts and giving oneself over to them affectively and bodily'¹⁴²; and, elsewhere in a discussion of the novellas of María de Zayas, he refers to literary atmospheres 'in which we may—and should—immerse ourselves.'¹⁴³ Is a degree of conscious receptivity to "critical writing" on a given text not inevitably, to some degree, disruptive of a strictly immersive, bodily engagement with that text; a reading in which one "lets go"?¹⁴⁴ Naturally, it is likely to vary from genre to genre and it depends, too, on the manner in which one re-reads. In any case, one might reasonably ask how much reading-*for* is necessary in order to spot moods or atmospheres in a text to give oneself over to and enjoy dwelling in—and therefore whether the role Gumbrecht is taking on for himself here is perhaps ultimately redundant. In the last chapter of *Production of Presence* entitled 'To be Quiet for a Moment: About Redemption', Gumbrecht writes slightly ominously, 'We should pause from time to time and be silent', for presence cannot use too many words'.¹⁴⁵

What, then, of the ideas for non-interpretive methodologies Gumbrecht proposes in place of interpretive practices—according to the terms in which they are conceived? In both *Production of Presence* and *Atmosphere, Mood, Stimmung* the reader is left in a slightly strange position. In the case of the former, "epiphany", "presentification" and "deixis" are sketched out in such a lack of detail (and so briefly: three concepts over just 40 pages of a 150-page book) that it is hard to know what it is one is supposed to critique—other than the summary I have offered in my introduction. Speaking as a creative writing teacher, I couldn't possibly disagree with the value of directing students towards the experience of inspiration; towards a sensuous connection with our past, and towards an approach to exploring philosophical questions without first prescribing a "correct" method.¹⁴⁶ But Gumbrecht makes no explicit link with "creative" teaching or, indeed, writing practices. Indeed, he offers no view on a mode of writing that might be better suited to implementing his non-interpretive methods than the one he uses to introduce them. To borrow once again from Matheus de Brito's account of reading *Atmosphere, Mood and Stimmung*, either Gumbrecht relies in this book on an approach that is not actually all that intuitive when it comes to it or he was 'not able to elaborate a proper presentation of his very working principle, which is aesthetics as the opposite of literary theory... It is as if he has eliminated the procedure after getting the by-product, not going too far from any reading for semantics.'¹⁴⁷ It is hard to know what to critique in *Atmosphere, Mood, Stimmung* in terms of non-interpretive method, as the book effectively fails to model any method or objective other than drawing the

¹⁴¹ Ibid, p. 20.

¹⁴² Ibid, p. 71.

¹⁴³ Ibid, p. 55.

¹⁴⁴ A recent book by Christina Vischer Bruns discusses "lostness" in immersive reading as fundamentally in opposition to literary-critical modes of reading. See Christina Vischer Bruns, *Why Literature?* (New York: Continuum, 2011), pp. 11-36.

¹⁴⁵ Gumbrecht: *Production of Presence*, p. 134.

¹⁴⁶ I have found this is particularly important in my teaching at the University of Antananarivo, where a French teaching method foregrounding "dictée" (dictation) has died hard.

¹⁴⁷ de Brito, 'Stimmungen or "In the Mood for Differentiability"', p. 189.

reader's attention to the importance of mood or atmosphere—a given for the ordinary reader, while arguably something of a moot point to a readership ordained in the workings of Western rationalism: there is a simple, unresolvable incommensurability between a presence, an atmosphere, a mood; a manifestation of *stimmung* (rather than simply the *notions* of presence, atmosphere, mood, *stimmung*) on the one hand—and the Western rationalist language of conceptual thinking and analysis on the other hand, which Gumbrecht does not seem to allow for.

‘When my colleagues, the literary critics and literary theorists, speak of “language” they normally think of something that requires “interpretation”, something that invites us to attribute well-circumscribed meanings to words,’ writes Gumbrecht elsewhere.¹⁴⁸ There are interesting moments in *Atmosphere, Mood, Stimmung* when Gumbrecht appears to be on the point of discussing the limitations of Western rationalism in the light of the so-called problem of ineffability. Atmospheres and moods have a singularity that can ‘never be defined absolutely by language or concepts’ he writes;¹⁴⁹ indeed, ‘in many cases, it is better to gesture towards potential moods instead of describing them in detail.’¹⁵⁰

Yet, tantalisingly, these references tend to fizzle out without being developed and, at other times, labelling atmospheres and moods reductively is exactly what Gumbrecht sets about doing most purposefully in relation to texts, or even to a whole genre: ‘this mood of embarrassment lies thick on the whole work’, he writes of the *picaro*;¹⁵¹ and words such as “calm”, “joy”, “pain”, “irritability” are used in a way that does an injustice to the particularity of what it is they are referring to. Ragnhild Tronstad, another reviewer of Gumbrecht’s work on the limitations of Cartesianism (such reviews are surprisingly few on the ground), refers to this problem in *Production of Presence* in the context of her work in performance studies. ‘Treasured, yet virtually ungraspable,’ she writes, ‘presence is radically determined to evade conceptualization: the more concrete and tangible its representations, the less it lends itself to representation; in particular, to verbal representation.’¹⁵² Tronstad reminds us that Gumbrecht never fully tackles the inherent slipperiness—or as she has it ‘the uncompromisingly evanescent quality’—of presence as a concept.¹⁵³ It is hard to see how a reflection upon this aspect of presence would not enrich Gumbrecht’s discussions.

Finally, here, I would like to touch on Gumbrecht’s stance in his writing in relation to the world of feelings. In his short introductory chapter in *Atmosphere, Mood, Stimmung*, Gumbrecht effectively forces his own hand on this with a passing reference to Hegel’s warning against dissolving into the “mush of the heart” when discussing atmospheres and moods. Gumbrecht’s response to this phrase promises to be revealing,

¹⁴⁸ Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Our Broad Present* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), p. 2.

¹⁴⁹ Gumbrecht, *Atmosphere, Mood, Stimmung*, p. 15.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

¹⁵² Ragnhild Tronstad, ‘Presence and Mediation: on the participatory SMS performance Surrender Control’. *International Journal of Performance Arts and Digital Media* 11, 1 (2015), p. 54.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

whatever it is. And in the end, it is as if he blushes: ‘No definite answer exists to this question, nor is there a sure way to guarantee immunity. Concentrating on formal phenomena permits one to avoid the worst...’ and so Gumbrecht continues, apparently entirely without irony.¹⁵⁴ One might imagine Gumbrecht to be a firm advocate of modes of writing that focus on the personal and microscopic in his critique of a Cartesian failure to cover the fullness of human experience, rather than the cultural and macroscopic. Yet the evidence is largely to the contrary. His missing the opportunity to counter Hegel in the passage above is, I believe, particularly telling and his criticism of the dominance of the metrics of Western rationalism in the arts and humanities is, on the whole, strikingly free of language likely to appeal to the reader through anything other than the metrics of Western rationalism. Or as Matheus de Brito has it, maybe Gumbrecht ‘is lagging behind his own insights – making too much sense out of its very refusal – in order not to sound too “intuitive”, and that’s why he sounds like an academic even when avoiding being one.’¹⁵⁵

The work of American philosopher Alphonso Lingis on the limitations of Western rationalism in many ways speaks to that of Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht. Lingis’s writing is stylised and perambulatory in comparison to Gumbrecht’s—a very different reading experience. But both writers set out to define themselves against the same tradition in Western thought: “the rational community” or “the Evil Geniuses of Interference” or “our White Mythology of Reason” as Lingis has it. ‘The established discourse’, Lingis writes, ‘can limit and even dislodge our experience of what is important and urgent.’¹⁵⁶ The Western rationalist researcher ‘sets itself up as a legislator of his own laws’ but ‘excludes the savages, the mystics, the psychotics—excludes their utterances and their bodies.’¹⁵⁷ Other people are not just other perspectives, other points of view, bearers of other data...¹⁵⁸

These kinds of protests quickly develop in an almost rhythmic refrain throughout Lingis’s books. They are repeatedly mixed with, and animated by, an exposition of the everyday importance of what one might call the “how” of communication: meaning that may only be felt or conveyed non-verbally. It is in this area that Lingis’s texts are perhaps at their most compelling in their critique of Western rationalist modes of inquiry. This sometimes takes the form of a discrete phrase before the discussion bolts off in another direction: ‘It is on the faces of others that we see their values’, he writes. Or it may be a paragraph: ‘Our father turns off the video game and seats himself in front of us. Our wife looks at us in the eyes and asks what is wrong. We look to her eyes to see if she is pleased or displeased with our response, if her eyes

¹⁵⁴ Gumbrecht, *Atmosphere, Mood, Stimmung*, p. 15.

¹⁵⁵ de Brito, ‘Stimmungen or “In the Mood for Differentiability’, p. 189.

¹⁵⁶ Alphonso Lingis, *The First Person Singular* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2007), p. 123.

¹⁵⁷ Alphonso Lingis, *The Community of Those Who Have Nothing in Common* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 11.

¹⁵⁸ Alphonso Lingis, *Dangerous Emotions* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2000), p. 101.

sanction or stigmatize. The pleasure or displeasure is not like a color or shape on them; it is the trace of the inward movement of her subjectivity... the eyes that fix us are black holes'.¹⁵⁹ Or it may span as a kind of set piece (Lingis's writing is nothing if not performative) over a chapter or, indeed, several chapters—his chapters are rarely longer than ten pages and can be almost aphoristic at a page or less. Much as chapter and book headings may suggest tantalisingly otherwise, Lingis's work resists, in fact, *any* effort to divide it into tidy thematic concerns so as to be more bite-size for conventional "critical analysis". This is almost certainly a tactic, to make his work resistant to a linear, "orderly" reading.

Lingis's relentlessly detailed, highly sensual, often bawdy invocations of the physical apparently form part of the same line of attack—sometimes to great effect—and are equally unpredictable in terms of length and apparent relevance (or irrelevance) to anything immediately prior: 'The echoes and the murmurs that wander off things, the odors that emanate from them, the voluptuous contours and hollows of things and of the waves and rain that caress, the mossy forests and nocturnal fragrances that fondle one's surfaces and penetrate one's orifices, and the night they cast about their luminous outcroppings belong to the reality of things and make the things visible and real...' is a sentence plucked from his 1994 book *The Community of Those Who Have Nothing in Common*.¹⁶⁰ Though followers of Lingis's writing through to his most recent books would likely agree that a passage like this could belong in any of them, and in any part of them. Dutifully annotating a whole book can begin to feel like a joke on Lingis's part at one's own expense!

What, then, *is* the solution Lingis advocates for offsetting the legacy of "the rational community"? Or does Lingis's own method mean to set itself up as the only necessary answer to this question? And how far does Lingis eventually stray in his own method from the disciplinary conventions he dismisses with such vigour? He does not seem to reach for conceptual tools quite as naturally as Gumbrecht, but his work nevertheless reveals what one might imagine him to regard as alarming tendencies—as measured, on first glance, against the politics and ethics in his critique of Western rationalism. For a philosopher seeming to invest so heavily in a purely performative element, it makes sense, perhaps, to look first to the constituency of his audience in an attempt to explore better the question of his writing's intentions.

'He brings an anthropological gaze to the largely marginalized and enigmatic Western understandings of emotions,' writes reviewer Anton Mischewski of Lingis's *Dangerous Emotions*; 'readers are taken on a rich and strange itinerary that spans Te Pito O Te Henua (Easter Island), the Brazilian working-class barrio of Balconcillo, the deepest canyon on earth (...) to name a few places... His rich descriptions of these emotional intensities disturb conventional definitions, reactions and understandings.'¹⁶¹ It is possible that to many Western academics like Mischewski—and, perhaps, to many a casual reader in the West—there is

¹⁵⁹ Lingis, *The First Person Singular*, p. 96.

¹⁶⁰ Lingis: *The Community of Those Who Have Nothing in Common*, p. 42.

¹⁶¹ Anton Mischewski, 'Alphonso Lingis's *Dangerous Emotions*: A Review'. *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 2003 5, 2 (2003), p. 167.

a Rider Haggardesque “titillation factor” to Lingis’s writing as philosophy and that so many passing references to quetzals, sphinxes, Nuba women (‘elegant as gazelles, bold as lionesses’), orphaned HIV-positive children, sphinxes, swamps and so on are somehow considered benign¹⁶². Separating intentional from unintentional irony in Lingis’s work can be disorientating. Perhaps, again, the joke is on his readers and Lingis’s whole career is a deadpan parody of Western orientalist rhetoric, as well as of Western rational thought. However, it is probably safe to assume that it is not. And in any case, unsurprisingly, there is another constituency of reviewer that looks considerably less favourably on Lingis’s brand of intertwining the bodily with the exotic.

In an article entitled ‘Spurning Alphonso Lingis’ Thai ‘Lust’: The Perils of a Philosopher at Large, Thai Studies specialist Peter A. Jackson delivers a coruscating critique of the hypocrisy and eurocentrism in Lingis’s work that brings to mind controversies surrounding writers such as Ryszard Kapuscinski. ‘In writing on the history of male homoeroticism in Thailand’, Jackson writes, ‘I have often felt constrained by the required forms of academic discourse, a highly recalcitrant genre which in many of its varieties objectifies the people one wants to talk about while creating a god-like aura of omniscience around the author’.¹⁶³ He goes on to document extensively how in his view this applies to Lingis, who ‘looks only for confirmations of Western theory in the [Thai] other and distorts the [Thai] data to fit his view.’¹⁶⁴ In another review of four of Lingis’s books, *Alphonso Lingis’s We—A Collage, Not a Collective*, Alexander E. Hooke appears to give Lingis the benefit of the doubt in his unapologetic use of the first person plural throughout these books, whilst acknowledging that he is “seemingly oblivious to the ongoing controversies over any legitimate use of *we*.”¹⁶⁵ However whether provocation or oversight (or an unresolved quandary of his own about the presentation of the “anecdotal” in academic publications), Lingis’s default position is, at best, to depersonalise his subjects—giving the overall impression that his interest in individual subjectivity is primarily a conceptualised one. Indeed, despite Lingis’s protest that Western rationalism operates such that an individual’s experience is ‘divested of the individual light and tone they have for the one who sees and experiences them, and divested of the surprise and significance when that person came upon them’, his writing, taken as a whole, is surprisingly cleansed of affective content and displays a quintessentially Western rationalist ease with objectification.¹⁶⁶ As reviewer of *Dangerous Emotions* John Lechte puts it, ‘despite appearances, this is a book of the greatest detachment, where description of the erotic rubs shoulders with the coolest of analysis.’¹⁶⁷ Again, it is hard to believe this is all knowing and ironic—and even if Lingis’s

¹⁶² These are too numerous to list here. The particular reference to Nuba women is in Lingis, *The Community of Those Who Have Nothing in Common*, p. 181.

¹⁶³ Peter Jackson, ‘Spurning Alphonso Lingis’ Thai Lust: The Perils of a Philosopher at Large’. *Intersections: Gender, History and Culture in the Asian Context*, 2 (1999), p. 29.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p. 30.

¹⁶⁵ Alexander Hooke, ‘Alphonso Lingis’s We: A Collage, Not a Collective’. *Diacritics* 32, 4 (2001), p. 11.

¹⁶⁶ Lingis, *The First Person Singular*, p. 90.

¹⁶⁷ John Lechte, ‘Dangerous Emotions (Book Review)’. *Australian Journal of Anthropology* 13, 1 (2002), p. 117.

books *were* all a sort of dystopian vision of the lifelessness wrought on the world by Western Reason (a move that would clearly also be in the service of Western Reason) they do not offer readers a vision of a happier alternative.

Lingis's writing at times strays into incoherence. Again, it is impossible to know for sure whether this, too, is a tactic and part of a practical joke on readers designed to destabilise the language of Reason. But the presence of factual errors (Tuareg do not live free of possessions¹⁶⁸, Madagascar is not in the Pacific¹⁶⁹; transvestites are not invisible in Bangkok¹⁷⁰—one wonders if, rather like the painter Henri Rousseau who never visited the jungles he painted, Lingis has ever been to the places he evokes) suggests this incoherence is another part of Lingis's almost hyperactive refusal to sit still and speak in concrete terms: apparently more obfuscation than careful ellipsis for a specific purpose. And then there is his tendency for repetition, sometimes even of the same sentence in different books. Compare, for example, 'In leaving overpaid private nursing of the pampered rich to care for the wounded and the famished in a refugee camp, a nurse finds that she is doing what she really wants to do,'¹⁷¹ from *Dangerous Emotions* to 'In leaving highly paid private nursing for the pampered rich to care for the wounded and the famished in a refugee camp, a nurse finds that she is doing what she really wants to do' in *First Person Singular*¹⁷². There are other such examples. Even the photographs in his books can be recycled: the image of a man posing at the beginning of Chapter 7 of *Foreign Bodies* turns up ten years later on the front cover of *Trust*. This kind of pattern seems to point more towards a carelessness on Lingis's part than anything else.

'There are no intelligible concepts that grasp the languorous liquidity of the water in the bath', writes Lingis in *First Person Singular*,¹⁷³ elsewhere, he writes, 'there is never a perfect fit of words on the things they designate.'¹⁷⁴ Perhaps, rather like Gumbrecht, Lingis's missed opportunity in advancing the cause of a non-interpretive method in his critique of "the rational community" is his not experimenting in any sustained way with another mode of writing that might be more at ease in the liquidity of bathwater; and at peace with the limitations of descriptive language. Again, especially if Lingis continues to publish academically, it is surely not enough from the point of view of arguing the cause of a different method to that of "the rational community" simply to identify the problem. Ultimately, Lingis displays the same tendency to name and label as does Gumbrecht—for all his implied interest in the *concept* of inexpressibility, Lingis's liberal use of adjectives is not marked as provisional meaning-making; it is not tinged with any apparently sincere sense of a writer frustrated with the limitations of their tools. On the contrary, we have 'the agile luminousness that shines in my eyes, the warmth in my hands, the ardour in my face, and the spirituality in

¹⁶⁸ Lingis, *The First Person Singular*, p. 63.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p. 24.

¹⁷⁰ Jackson, 'Spurning Alphonso Lingis' Thai Lust: The Perils of a Philosopher at Large', p. 18.

¹⁷¹ Lingis, *Dangerous Emotions*, p. 111.

¹⁷² Lingis, *The First Person Singular*, p. 36.

¹⁷³ *Ibid*, p. 67.

¹⁷⁴ Lingis, *Dangerous Emotions*, p. 97.

my breath, the other seeks the pleasure that is enjoyment in, involution and the dying in the elemental. The other seeks the contact and the accompaniment.’—And with this, another of Lingis’s chapters ends.¹⁷⁵

Admired by Lingis, Kathleen Stewart’s 1996 publication *A Space on the Side of the Road* draws on encounters in the coal-mining region of West Virginia in the United States.¹⁷⁶ Her *Ordinary Affects* (2007) draws on encounters across the United States, though mostly in the suburbs of large towns and cities. It is quite difficult to summarise the workings of these two books. As works of what has come to be known as “new ethnography”, both seek to distance themselves from any possible whiff of anthropological heritage, with its roots in Western rationalist models of knowledge-composition and language use. This leads Stewart to a so-called *ficto-critical* approach: blending forms of descriptive notation, narrative, quoted dialogue and a style of commentary that is particular to new ethnographic writing. Though their titles might suggest otherwise, these works have a common cause, therefore: each labours at some length both to renounce Western rationalist modes of inquiry within ethnographic writing and to deviate from the scholarly tradition of trying to maintain a “critical distance” between research subject and research object.

As with the writing of Lingis, undertaking an orderly discussion of the main argument that seems to run through *A Space on the Side of the Road* and *Ordinary Affects*—essentially that cultural critique can and must be free to exist outside the language of Reason, as well as within it—is not a straightforward task. In fact, in keeping with the spirit of her argument, Stewart opts for a writing style which seems to consciously resist methodical handling. As Kathleen Stewart writes in *A Space on the Side of the Road*:

What if I tried to arrest the progress of truth claims that reduce “anecdotal evidence” to a secondary and deeply suspect status? What if I tried to invert the hierarchy of “conceptual thought” over “data” and to take my own task of cultural translation as the supplement? What if in the place of a transcendent system or code there was only the anecdote, the fragment—insufficient and unfinished? What if the density of trash, porches, and hand-painted signs [in West Virginia] were allowed to disrupt intellectual concentration to a point where their material substance rubs against thought with a friction that generates cognitive sparks?¹⁷⁷

Indeed, new ethnography, writes Kathleen Stewart, consists in the effort ‘to displace not just the signs or products of essentialism (generalizations, reifications) but the very desires that motivate academic essentialism itself—the desire for decontaminated “meaning”, the need to require that visual and verbal

¹⁷⁵ Lingis, *The Community of Those Who Have Nothing in Common*, p. 132.

¹⁷⁶ Lingis, *The First Person Singular*, p. 113.

¹⁷⁷ Kathleen Stewart, *A Space on the Side of the Road* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 71-2.

constructs yield meaning down to their last detail, the effort to get the gist, to gather objects of analysis into an order of things.’

Writing in a similar vein in *Ordinary Affects* eleven years later, Stewart expresses her wish ‘to slow the quick jump to representational thinking long enough to find ways of approaching the complex and uncertain objects that fascinate us because they literally hit us or exert a pull on us.’ Likening them to Raymond Williams’s “social experiences in solution”, Stewart writes that ordinary affects, too, “do not have to await definition, classification, or rationalization before they exert palpable pressures.” Her effort, she writes, ‘is not to finally “know” them—to collect them into a good story of what’s going on—but to fashion some form of address that is adequate to their form; to find something to say about ordinary affects by performing some of their intensity and texture.’¹⁷⁸ And in this endeavour—a series of small, sometimes journal-like, attunements to everyday events or “affects” stretched out over 120 pages—*Ordinary Affects* makes for some compelling, sometimes poignant reading: an unexpected smile at the check-out of a convenience store (entitled ‘Encounters’¹⁷⁹); a faltering first date at a café on a town square in Ohio (entitled ‘First Date’¹⁸⁰); a jail term of twenty-five years for a half-hearted robbery with a baseball bat in Texas (‘Botched Robbery’¹⁸¹); clothes drying in the breeze beside the river at the Mexico border city of Nuevo Laredo (‘Border story 1’).¹⁸²

However, one seems to be never very far away from a tendency in each of *A Space on the Side of the Road* and *Ordinary Affects* towards exactly the kind of interpretive and discursive reflexes that these texts aim to query; a straining to conceptualise unfolding events, and to spell out their “meanings” in a rhetorical style which can only work against the texts’ simultaneous evocation of the importance of immanence. Why the need for what Stewart calls “cultural translation”?

For example, there is the story in *Ordinary Affects* of a friend of a friend of Stewart’s who passed out drunk on some railway tracks one night and was then killed by a train. It is a gripping story, with vivid imagery. However, the effect of the story is then spoiled by an apparent urge, the moment that the telling of it is over, to summarise and “translate” it into the language of concepts, rather than allowing the story to speak for itself; to ask its own questions in its own way:

It’s as if the train sparks weighted promises and threats and incites a reckless daydream of being included in a world. This is the daydream of a subject whose only antidote to structural disenfranchisement is a literal surge of vitality and mobility. A subject whose extreme vulnerability

¹⁷⁸ From Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 132-3; quoted in Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affects* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2007), pp. 3-4.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p. 81.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 30-1.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid*, p. 99.

¹⁸² *Ibid*, p. 123.

is rooted in the sad affect of being out of place, out of luck, or caught between a rock and a hard place, and who makes a passionate move to connect to a life when mainstream strategies like self-discipline or the gathering of resources like a fortress around the frail body are not an option. A subject who is literally touched by a force and tries to take it on, to let it puncture and possess one, to make oneself its object, if only in passing. A subject for whom an unattainable hope can become the tunnel vision one needs to believe in a world that could include one.¹⁸³

Similarly, Stewart mentions the way in which the word “ideal” in poor mining communities of West Virginia sometimes stands in for the word “idea” in everyday speech there. She transcribes a miner’s account of his drinking habit and the behaviour this leads to, before proceeding to some theorisation on gender-related roles in the mining way of life and a lengthy deconstruction of the word “ideal”, such that the man’s story, far from apparently being given value for all it contains immanently and allowed to stand on its own two feet, begins to look like a pretext for another conversation. The difference in tone between the man’s style of language and Stewart’s own in discussing it does not sit easily with her wish stated elsewhere, to collapse distances between research object and research subject, and to mould her mode of critique around their utterances:

ARBUTUS ANDERSON: Oh, I was a sinner. I’d do anything atall [sic].
I’d get drunk and lay out all night on my wife, gamble, rob people, oh, just anything, I didn’t care.
Me and some of my buddies, we’d do lookin’ somebody to beat up.
And this one boy, we got him down to where he couldn’t git up no more and I kicked him in the mouth and the blood a comin’.
That’s right! That’s how I done people! And I jess stood there and laughed a watchin’ that blood come and havin’ me a good ol’ time.
But praise Jesus, He saved me.¹⁸⁴

—and then Kathleen Stewart:

The problem of *ideals*, then, is not that of a simple tension between notion and its always incomplete realization, or between the ideal and the real, but a split born within the dialectical structure of the notion itself. The internal split, or gap, in *ideals* creates the possibility, if not the necessity, for complex appropriations, resistances, and excesses. It posits not just the possibility of different voices or points of view but a wound in the very notion of the natural, the necessary, or the good

¹⁸³ Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*, p. 116.

¹⁸⁴ Stewart, *A Space on the Side of the Road*, p. 187.

in the social order. It introduces an “Other” order of mysterious discontinuities and continuities, strange reversals, surprising revelations, and unexpected eruptions of agency.¹⁸⁵

Stewart then continues, finally (as if this had, perhaps, been her main intention all along) trying to situate Arbutus Anderson’s words and her own thoughts on the use of “ideals” in West Virginia within Western critical discourse:

In the dizzying spin of naturalized and denaturalized meanings, *ideals* (ideas) are read out of acts and appearances as if they were signs that could reveal something more. They show themselves and retreat again, at once submerged in and emergent in an immanent subtext that reads events in the mode of “as if”. *Ideals*, then, take on the weight of the very dialectic of centripetal and centrifugal forces (Bakhtin 1981) itself—the sheer chronicling of “things that happen” in a dialectic with a sense of something more and underlying, the revelation of a hidden meaning discovered in the accidental contingencies of the everyday, the gathering of the accidents of birth and circumstance to the momentary clarity of ideas of fate and social *place*, the dismantling of the seemingly natural in the face of critique and surprise reversal. The space of a fluid and shifting boundary between naturalized “ordinary” speech and speech-that-turns-back-on-itself gives rise to both affirmative, reproductive, hegemonic forces in culture and critical, innovative, counterhegemonic impulses (Bauman and Briggs 1990). Both are formed together in *ideals* as a form of semiotic praxis that is itself social act. Like all language taken as a form of social praxis, they are deviations from the reductions of the “ordinary” and “standard” and proliferations out of the bare bones of the Really Real. (S. Stewart 1984; Thibault 1991; Volosinov 1986).¹⁸⁶

Just as with Gumbrecht’s labelling of atmospheres and moods, or Lingis’s ramblings about what may be contained in a look, there seems to be a simple incommensurability between Arbutus Anderson’s utterances on the one hand, and the interpretive language found in Stewart’s attendant explications, on the other¹⁸⁷.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid, pp. 187-8.

¹⁸⁶ Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*, p. 188. Writing in the journal *American Ethnologist*, a reviewer of *A Space on the Side of the Road*, Patricia Sawin, notes that ‘one might criticize the repetitiveness of the critical vocabulary—desire, memory, excess, trembling, indeterminacy’, though suggests that ‘practically speaking, this will make it easier to extract individual chapters for readings!’ The repetition in Stewart’s discussions echoes that in Lingis’s: words like sociability, dense, signs, trembling, re-memberings, de-compose, mimetic, culled, etc are repeated throughout *A Space on the Side of the Road* and *Ordinary Affects*. See Patricia Sawin, ‘A Space on the Side of the Road: Cultural Poetics in an “Other” America by Kathleen Stewart (Review)’. *American Ethnologist* 25,1 (1998).

¹⁸⁷ I can well understand why many readers of such a passage would gladly accept the invitation it appears to extend towards further discussion of what it raises. Speaking for myself, however, to do so—to take at face value the interpretive work she is undertaking—would feel disingenuous (and possibly, therefore, unethical) in the light of the incommensurability I refer to. I quite fundamentally do not believe in the value of such work in relation to poetic language such as Arbutus Anderson’s here, as quoted by Stewart.

Readers of this kind of new ethnographic writing might eventually be left wondering if Stewart's "immanent critique" in the end adds up to much more than a critique of the concept of immanence.¹⁸⁸

In some way, "new ethnographer" Stephen Muecke and photographer Max Pam's book *Contingency in Madagascar* is an unremarkable blend of the things I have discussed in the writing of Gumbrecht, Lingis and Stewart. I feel it deserves special attention here, though, because it is, to my knowledge, the only example of a "new ethnographic" writing practice that has passed through Madagascar.¹⁸⁹ My engagement with this particular book is inevitably a more personal one. So I will be writing more extensively in the first person than I have so far.

Muecke's own use of the first person and certain passages written in a diary entry-like style of notation brings a sense of immediacy to the work, a sense of things unravelling in real time as the book progresses; that an end destination is not already known:

Diary entry, 21st June. Went down to the Ave de la Liberation. Very few people about, cars off the street because the government feared 'hotheads' would get out of control. Quite a few 'normal' sunglasses indicating a nervousness, as did one family with the protective eclipse-watching glasses taped to their two little boys' heads, so that the elder boy seemed to have watched the sun all the time, and the little one was looking away, seeing nothing through the opaque material. Another family went past quickly at the height of the eclipse, the woman with a shawl completely covering her face, the man holding up his newspaper to protect himself; they hurried on.¹⁹⁰

Regarding his position in relation to the people in his writing, Muecke also seeks to adopt a similar stance to Stewart's (he quotes 'A Space on the Side of the Road' at some length). Muecke writes of 'a New Ethnography which flattens hierarchies, which endorses a more symmetrical relationship between *Us* and *Them*, and expands that to a network of relationships without a clear control centre. It speaks of its writing as fluid, mobile and even nervous about how it relates to any system'¹⁹¹. There is also something effective about an approach to form in much of Muecke's writing, which might best be described as 'digression as method'. Just as with Stewart's and Lingis's writing, to some extent *Contingency in Madagascar* does not order

¹⁸⁸ Stewart, *A Space on the Side of the Road*, p. 24.

¹⁸⁹ Stephen Muecke and Max Pam, *Contingency in Madagascar* (Chicago: Intellect, The University of Chicago Press, 2012), p. 42. See also Muecke's earlier journal article based on the same Madagascar trip: Stephen Muecke, 'Contingency theory: the Madagascan Experiment'. *Interventions International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 6, 2 (2004). Please note: my writing in this sub-section is based on Muecke and Pam's book and not on this article.

¹⁹⁰ Muecke and Pam, *Contingency in Madagascar*, p. 42.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid*, p. 25.

itself into a narrative. Instead, for much of the book, each chunk of writing is allowed its own silent conversation with other chunks.

Like Stewart, Muecke unsurprisingly takes aim at conventions historically followed by anthropologists or ‘pillars of the “modernist settlement” of European rationality’ (a phrase that would also not look out of place in Gumbrecht and Lingis’s writing). Muecke criticises a tendency towards ‘systematic purification of the field of data’ and makes the case for a writing of ‘tipping over into new paradigms where encounters (with other peoples, for instance) can teach us, not necessarily by direct instruction but by putting our preconceived ideas in jeopardy.’¹⁹² Muecke refers variously to ‘the objective positivism of an anthropological practice, which constructs an other society as unified, “over there”’¹⁹³; to ‘a familiar colonialist story where civilisations are lined up on a historical scale of technological progress’¹⁹⁴; to the world of philosopher Richard Rorty as being ‘too ivy covered and congenial’¹⁹⁵. He reserves his most trenchant criticism, however, for an article written in 2000 by ‘Karen Middleton of Oxford’ in a special issue of the University of Antananarivo’s anthropological journal *Taloba* (meaning “before” or “in the past” in Malagasy), about ‘The Rights and Wrongs of Loin-Washing’ among the Karembola ethnic group in southern Madagascar: ‘What does this little bit of social scientific prose do?’ Muecke asks, ‘It unifies and separates off the others... It is in the eternal present tense; it is not a historical process, nothing is expected to change. There are ‘contradictions’ and ‘paradoxes’, but I would bet the Karembola do not talk about their practices in these terms. These are the philosophical terms, which Middleton wants to resolve in the vocabulary of the social sciences, using words like “represent”, “social and political processes”, “cultural values” and “exchange relationships”’.¹⁹⁶

Much is made, then, in Muecke’s writing of the apparent freshness of his perspective as a “new ethnographer”; his safer ethics, and his philosophical distance from orthodox registers in anthropological discourse. On closer inspection, however, the writing in *Contingency in Madagascar* is not so squeaky clean:

‘I turn to Max as we sit in the departure lounge and remark with a wry smile that I have a little guiding slogan for our work; we will be on the hunt for Beauty and Wisdom. I say this is the kind of thing we might say to someone we meet leaning on the bar at the Hotel Glacier (I’ve already mentioned my evenings at this notorious joint to him, from my last trip 2 years ago). That is, if anyone could be bothered to ask (and, of course, they will not)...

¹⁹² Ibid, p. 32.

¹⁹³ Ibid, p. 18.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, p. 43.

¹⁹⁶ Karen Middleton, ‘The Rights and Wrongs of Loin-Washing’. *Taloba*, 13 (2000), pp. 65-98; quoted by Muecke in *Contingency in Madagascar*, p. 23. (I would use a phrase like “cultural values” because I would say there has to be a place for generalisations in writing concerned with culture(s). But overall, I share Muecke’s unease about the mode of writing adopted by Middleton in her piece.)

One of the curiosities of *Contingency in Madagascar* is Muecke and Pam's ambivalence about how to clothe their extensive interaction with Malagasy sex workers. For a very long time, the Glacier in downtown Antananarivo has had a reputation for its live music and as a place where men can easily meet women who accept money for sex. Other than a national park guide ('my blue ball gown girl'¹⁹⁷) and two hotel owners (a Madame Chan and a nameless French woman) the majority, if not all, women who make an appearance in this book are sex workers or, as Pam has it, 'these delicious public bodies and the women that inhabit them'; 'enchanted young prostitutes'; 'local hottie prostitutes... openly curious and autonomous with medusa hairstyling and pointy breasts and dead sexy eyes'.¹⁹⁸ Indeed, as Pam recounts, 'On my first day I became aware of the consistent message of primal, body centric openness of certain Madagascan women.'¹⁹⁹ Muecke himself is a little more restrained in his own descriptions. But being published in a book containing Pam's macho, lecherous ramblings about sex workers surely undermines any claim to the ethical high ground as an ethnographer. And there is a lingering sense even in Muecke's own writing both of prurience and braggadocio in relation to these women—however much using interactions with them in order to launch a discussion of the 'ethically contingent individual' might seem to suggest otherwise. (These interactions are in some way more, not less, questionable alongside this kind of manoeuvre.) Muecke's stated position on the question of what "critical distance" to maintain from his interlocutors as a "new ethnographer" can be confusing: how to be seen to do differently to the 'objective positivism'²⁰⁰ of conventional anthropology while also asserting that 'it is not the researcher's responsibility to critically judge the sex workers or their clients'?²⁰¹ Muecke is at pains to point out that at no point in the making of the book did money change hands in exchange for sex. But even if this is the case, is a scenario in which two Australian men in their fifties pay young Malagasy women to strip down on the beds of hotels that charge by the hour in order to be photographed in the name of a concept really that much more ethical and less objectifying than if they were to pay these women for sex? The facial expressions and posture of some of the women photographed suggest not.²⁰² And how does all this sit alongside a commitment to 'the progressive tendencies of an ethnography which embraces alterity with a view to *distributing* rather than *centralising* the capacity for the production of knowledge'?²⁰³ One might wonder how, in reality, Muecke and Pam are distributing the capacity for the production of knowledge to the sex workers that they spend time with, apart from by handing over some cash. Could these women easily afford to buy a copy of *Contingency*

¹⁹⁷ Muecke and Pam, *Contingency in Madagascar*, p. 30.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid, pp. 134, 138, 142, 144.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid, p. 146. 'Madagascan' is not a word you hear inside Madagascar, except when querying its use.

²⁰⁰ Ibid, p. 18.

²⁰¹ Ibid, p. 53.

²⁰² See, in particular, the photographs on pp. 108-9; both entitled 'Hotel Room, Nosy Bé'. There is extreme sensitivity in Madagascar around public display of the naked body, particularly a Malagasy body. It is likely that these women would have been more comfortable accepting money for sex than accepting money to have their naked bodies displayed publicly somewhere.

²⁰³ Ibid. p. 33.

in Madagascar, even if it was on sale in Madagascar?²⁰⁴ Who is deciding here how, when, and where knowledge is produced? The writing featured in Muecke and Pam's book may sit comfortably within a corner of contemporary ethnographic discourse. But are the objectives of this writing also something of a fig leaf? The tone of the text here and there may leave the reader wondering if scholarly imperatives were occasionally also a bit of an in-joke for the two men, presumably themselves on tourist visas, as they worked their way round bars well known in Madagascar for sex tourism. Would Muecke and Pam have seemed out of place in these locations? 'There are the tourists, only about 150,000 a year. They are not normally philosophers—devoid of concepts, full of money. Their capacity to spend is their necessity,' writes Muecke; and 'there are sex tourists who are a bit different; the corporeal desires they would have left at home in an earlier era are now part of the tourist economy, and a globalising prostitution comes out to meet them...'²⁰⁵

It is tempting from my point of view to nit-pick *Contingency in Madagascar* for factual errors in relation to Madagascar and the Malagasy. However, for a book that was the product of a short three-week trip to the country for Muecke and Pam, this might not be fair. I would, however, disagree with the essence of Michael Taussig's dismissal of the 'authority that accrues with foreign culture [that an anthropologist would like to claim]' in his introduction to the book; and with Muecke's dismissal of the '2 years of intense fieldwork as the minimum to make our knowledge "rigorous"'.²⁰⁶ I can understand Muecke's impatience with this view, but the amount of time spent with the concerns of one's writing cannot be immaterial. For example, had Muecke and Pam been able to spend three months and not three weeks in Madagascar, it is hard to see how this could not have resulted in a richer range of encounters on which to base their writing. I think it is fair, too, to observe that there is just one Malagasy name in twelve lines of acknowledgements at the beginning of the book. That a diary entry reads '*Madagascar, July 2003*' is also telling. (Imagine how an entry stating simply '*Australia, July 2003*'—in specifying just the country—would read). Likewise, Muecke's tone in referring to: the 'likely subject' in the port at Mahajanga with 'a ready smile and a face beaten about by Indian Ocean storms'²⁰⁷; the 'friendly native' supplying a fiction writer with drugs;²⁰⁸ a nameless taxi driver who 'is getting antsy, wants to get back on the road and punish the Renault with a bit more screeching around corners'²⁰⁹ and, perhaps most uncomfortably, a reference at one point to "surfing" Madagascar.²¹⁰ It is also worth observing how Muecke and Pam do not seem to have much questioned the implications of their use of the French language in most of their interactions with Malagasy people, in the light of Madagascar's history. It would be very challenging to get to a functioning level of Malagasy in the space of just three weeks. But speaking the language of the old colonial power will inevitably have had an impact on the pair's interactions with the Malagasy people they encountered—in a way that can only have worked

²⁰⁴ As far as I can see it isn't.

²⁰⁵ Ibid, p. 34.

²⁰⁶ Ibid, pp. 11, 14.

²⁰⁷ Ibid, p. 23.

²⁰⁸ Ibid, p. 22.

²⁰⁹ Ibid, p. 29.

²¹⁰ Ibid, p. 15.

against any sincere wish to collapse distance between ethnographer and “research object”, especially in conversations with sex workers. Based on my own experiences, I would say it is likely that if Muecke and Pam had been content to stick to English and some broken Malagasy, then their encounters with Malagasy people would have been quite different, and so their book might have turned out quite differently.

In arriving at *Contingency in Madagascar* as I did, via the work of Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, Alphonso Lingis and Kathleen Stewart, it is hard not to bring to a reading of this book a watchfulness for the paradox which I have discussed in the work of these other writers. (I.e. to declare oneself opposed to a Western rationalist orientation, only then to struggle to relate to the concerns of one’s writing through any other epistemological lens.) In any case, Muecke and Pam do seem to struggle in very much the same way. The irony here, of course, is that the concept of contingency at the heart of their book would seem to argue for a radical openness as method; a porousness; a wish to allow for a “bottom-up” rather than “top-down” approach to ethnographic writing. And yet the pair seem to arrive in Antananarivo bristling to the teeth with the writing of Deleuze, Guattari, Spinoza, Nietzsche, etc. There are also references in *Contingency in Madagascar* to other writers of “new ethnography”, and *Contingency in Madagascar* contains some of the stylistic tics that are to be found in work by these other writers. For example, hyphenating phrases to create “on-going” or “re-sort”²¹¹. More strikingly, there is throughout *Contingency in Madagascar*, as in the work of Lingis and Stewart, a sort of centripetal conceptualising operation in progress—seemingly from a place of anxiety about the need to extract “real [Western rationalist] meaning” from language that cannot, surely, itself believe in such a thing. It sometimes seems as if Muecke and Pam arrive in Madagascar with a wish to project their “concept of choice”, to borrow Gumbrecht’s phrase, onto almost anything they encounter.

And so we have: ‘every Malagasy, whose name emerges out of contingency’²¹²; ‘composing photography, like writing, takes in contingencies that make the event possible’;²¹³ ‘once you have created the work of art, nicely unified, you can forget, with a sleight of hand, the contingencies that played their part’²¹⁴; ‘treating the world as a complex open system, with new ethnographic techniques, means one is alert to the *feeling* that there might be something there, among the contingent effects, that could transform the research agenda’²¹⁵; ‘there are scientists, including social scientists, whose empiricism appears to proceed by way of necessity but is in fact governed by all sorts of contingencies’²¹⁶; ‘I stress writing as a contingent means of connection’²¹⁷; ‘this is a parody of stupid science, as all the stray facts must be brushed aside for the diagnosis to fit the phenomena. Looking at these phenomena more ecologically, however, leads us to contingent

²¹¹ Ibid, pp. 40, 44.

²¹² Ibid, p. 17.

²¹³ Ibid, p. 19.

²¹⁴ Ibid, p. 20.

²¹⁵ Ibid, p. 32.

²¹⁶ Ibid, p. 34.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

relationships²¹⁸; ‘many people are motivated by whole bundles of contingent forces, which are not seen as limited to the purified rational *ideal* of the secular, mortal and finite²¹⁹; ‘...that banal conclusion is nevertheless the foundation of a way of knowing, which the anthropologists would be quick to deny and banish: rather the importance will be in the descriptive details. True, and the details are important, but where and when do they cease being contingent?’²²⁰; ‘...the kinds of connections made by people in their everyday life, such life being full of inexplicable contingencies’²²¹, and so on. As Muecke himself states near the beginning of the book: ‘The trip is a pretext, naturally, for a story and an argument. The argument, about contingency, starts like this...’²²² And so it comes as no great surprise that *Contingency in Madagascar* culminates in Muecke outlining his “contingency theory for the writing of cultures”: declining ‘a contingency of the word’, ‘a contingency of the image’, ‘a contingency of the event’; ‘a contingency of the self.’²²³

‘I have argued’, Muecke writes, ‘that the grasp of the radically contingent is the precondition for developing a newer vocabulary in our writing to do with creating knowledge in our encounters with other peoples and other places. So I experimented in and around Madagascar to see if the ‘application’ of a contingency theory could generate knowledge, a bit like a fishing net where the method is robust enough to capture both the expected and the unexpected.’²²⁴ Leaving to one side Muecke’s ‘our’ (reminiscent of Lingis’s), this last sentence highlights well what, for me, is most holding Muecke back in *Contingency in Madagascar*: that, despite this book’s perambulations, Muecke’s “application” of his “contingency theory” in Madagascar is, in the end, still highly conditioned by the language of theory—to the point of critically undermining his openness to contingencies (and so also the development of vocabularies) of any other kind. This can be seen in action in the following passage, arising out of Muecke’s interactions with sex workers, with which *Contingency in Madagascar* concludes:

In relation to the sex trade of Madagascar, I have identified the community of prostitutes who went on strike because they could no longer connect with the community of clients, their contingent relationship with the Ministry of Tourism and its ‘Sex Tourism, No!’ campaign, the global community of the tourism industry and the law against sexually exploiting minors. All of these are contingent relationships, which are not activated in regard to any higher principles, but they can be described as temporal and spatial shifting relationships among bodies in community formation in which affect plays a big part. There *is* an affect-generated responsibility, which is contingent on, say, the love of the child and which is not legislatable. Likewise friendship and other feelings. They

²¹⁸ Ibid, p. 41.

²¹⁹ Ibid, p. 43.

²²⁰ Ibid, p. 44.

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Ibid, pp. 34.

²²³ Ibid, pp. 46.

²²⁴ Ibid, pp. 46.

are immanent to the sociability of the community body but not its defining identity. By contrast, all the morally principled values we seek to promote in the name of some community or another can only ever be historical. This history - the origins of our values – is an interesting line of inquiry, but is ‘out of touch’; it is not contingent on the relationships of exchange that are on-going and projected into the future. I am not talking about the utopian dream of good politics in the future but in the sense of practical calculations of what one might be able to do that is life enhancing and disaster avoiding in and amongst any contingent situational mix of law, hope, fear, power – whatever goes into the complexity of the situation.²²⁵

*

²²⁵ Ibid, p. 55.

*fahavaratra*²²⁶

²²⁶ from 'faha' (\approx at the time of) and 'varatra' (thunder, thunderbolt). (Roughly November-December-January-February.)



November 2013

___ and strawberry ice cream; like a smoker, picking up a spoon...²²⁷

*

November 2016, Café ___, Soarano

Monday on Bachelard. And back to the Suzuki, now under a foot of water. Cheaneys off, jeans rolled up. The ambany tanana²²⁸. *Who got their feet wet in this city, this afternoon?* The fucking fatuousness of putting that into theory

or poetry

*

1 November 2009, Isoraka

The smoke yesterday pm... aigrettes only visible by their shadowy undersides; the church at Ampasandraniharo by the light in tower.

*

1 November 2010, ___ patisserie, Antaninarenina (All Saints Day)

Two French men sat outside. *Elle a l'air très jeune...*²²⁹ [one to the other, after the waitress taking their order had left] ...*c'est bien*²³⁰ [the other] [laughter].

~

in walks ___. fingernails eaten short; hands clammy, trembling a little. on bike today—wind in his dreads? *Non, ils sont trop lourds, trop lourds*²³¹, with some pride

²²⁷ Eating strawberries in Antananarivo is commonly associated with cysticercosis: a parasitic infection resulting in larval cysts in the brain, or in muscle or other tissue. It is caused by a kind of pork tapeworm.

²²⁸ Literally: under town; the poorest neighbourhoods in Antananarivo, mostly built on the level of an old floodplain. In parts of these neighbourhoods there is no functioning drainage and / or sewerage system.

²²⁹ ≈ *She seems very young...*

²³⁰ ≈ *...a good thing*

²³¹ *No, they're too heavy, too heavy.*

(and seen later playing boo games with street kids along ___)

~

after coffee with ___ [working for UN] *Oh Billy... would it be tasteless if I chipped in for you?*

~

[on way home] work begun on a new fountain at ___. angle of new kerbstones left jackknifed over bank holiday weekend slightly disturbing to the senses on approach

(later: ___'s point about the number of people who are thirsty, nearby. so true)

*

1 November 2019, University of Antananarivo

When you do have Malagasy movies with people from the coast, they're in roles that are there to laugh at.

~

You know this racism is like an open wound... the more we talk about it, the more it is hurting.

~

___ and ___ (neither of them from the highlands) lead a conversation about feelings of rejection. The phrase 'a ζ a **ahilikiliky** izabo...' (\approx *don't reject me*), forms part of a song written by ___ and performed to the group as ___ workshop submission. (It wasn't written down.)

___'s response: ...*that word*²³² *dragged me in*. They discuss why ___ chose not to be specific about what in ___ was feeling rejected. It was intentional, says ___, without further explanation. No one presses ___ further.

~

²³² **ahilikiliky** (\approx **reject**)

On “dialect” and “language” in Madagascar: students discuss how anything spoken outside the highlands is usually referred to in Antananarivo as a “dialect”, whereas what is spoken in Antananarivo and elsewhere in the highlands is usually interchangeable with the term “[teny] Malagasy”.²³³

*

5 November 2009, __ café, Isoraka

(how is she doing?)—*Doucement...*²³⁴

*

6-7 November 2019, University of Antananarivo

__’s reference to *sipa ecolos* (\approx *countryside women*) brings raucous laughter in a conversation about people who live in the countryside.²³⁵

*

early November 2010, Antsahabe dump / taxi area

Composure. Small ?four-year-old girl sitting, one leg over the other, hair gathered in scarf, fire crackling beside her.

*

8 November 2010, Antaninarenina

Police truck where it usually isn’t. More violence in papers. French man, a break-in. *They threatened to chop off his penis* (front page of __)

²³³ [the] Malagasy [language]. The highlands, where Antananarivo is situated, is home to the Merina ethnic group. A legacy of the Merina’s influence, over time, across the island—outwards from its central highlands—is the standardisation of “Malagasy **ofisialy**”. Definitions of this vary, but it is mostly understood to be what the Merina speak, especially in formal settings. It has also become the “**official**” version of Malagasy, nationwide, and is commonly understood to be presided over by gatekeepers of sorts, at the Akademia Malagasy in Tsimbazaza in Antananarivo... presumably much along the lines of the way that the Académie Française understands itself to preside over the French language.

²³⁴ \approx *Softly...*

²³⁵ The phrase is also a pejorative reference to women who use leaves instead of toilet roll.



...*et tous ces petits îles, là*—__, curl of lip and flick of hand over SE Asia on the map on his desk. *Voyez-vous, on est la deuxième île...* (But Borneo and that one there is bigger than Madagascar, no?)—*Non, non, je ne crois pas...*²³⁶

*

8 November 2019, University of Antananarivo

On attitudes in society towards Others. *Burnt at the fucking stake... get their heads chopped off...* __ holds forth on what happens in the region where __ is from when there is suspicion of someone who is a social recluse or picks up herbs, etc. And students discuss the story of a woman who may have been suffering from a form of psychosis, who was lynched by a crowd near the Rova²³⁷ a few years previously.

__'s story about __ Playstation when __ was a kid: __ mother and grandmother's warnings that other children may want to break it out of jealousy. Then one day when __ had friends round, its electric blew and *everyone at school knew*. That many other kids, __ says, were probably saying *bien fait (well done)*, assuming the friends __ had invited over had broken it.

Students (all female) share their thoughts on what __ referred to light-heartedly as “street love” (ie. sexual harassment) and, in particular, the behaviour of *receveurs* (men who collect fares on buses in Antananarivo)... *misogynist and vulgar. I know it's like a prejudice... it's true!* [much laughter].

Samy mitovy fokontany tsika sy ny! (*≈ we live in the same neighbourhood, me and you, love*)... __ imitating one man's approaches.

__'s story of a stranger who harassed her on the street with a disrespectful *manaboana ny* (*≈ alright, love?*). His indignant insistence that she had ignored him when, at a later point, they crossed paths in church.

²³⁶ *≈ all those little islands, there; You see, we're the second island...* ; *No, no, I don't think so...* (The other speaker was me.)

²³⁷ The palace of pre-colonial Malagasy rulers. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rova_of_Antananarivo.

*

9 November 2016, Tsimbazaza

Trump elected, meanwhile
in the scrubiness behind the ministry of higher education four or five boys cobbles very long bamboo
sticks fishing lifting inevitably

a chameleon and in the wing mirror

plonk

*

11 November 2010

cars torched again last night, rocks thrown.

Message du / Consulat de / France du 11/10 : / Eviter le quartier / d'Anosy / Sent : 11-Nov-2010 / 16:04:55²³⁸

...whistling, eight and a half hours after arrival at __. a mantis burying its head in a butterfly, writhing less,
less

*Message du / Consulat de / France du 11/10 / a [sic] 21h00 : Conseil / de prudence / maintenu. Eviter / le quartier /
d'Anosy / Sent : / 11-Nov-2010 21:09:56²³⁹*

to fear one's nights

*

13 November 2008

conversation with __.²⁴⁰ talking of my own desire to keep sensitivity / capacity to be light, jovial. __ quiet,
then *should we keep that?*

²³⁸ *Message from / the Consulate / of France [...] Avoid the Anosy / area...*

²³⁹ *Message from / the Consulate / of France [...] Advice of / caution / maintained. / Avoid the / Anosy area...*

²⁴⁰ A Western journalist who had, by that point, left Madagascar.



*

13 November 2010

Message du / Consulat de / France du 13 / Novembre: éviter de circuler / a [sic] Antanimena, / Beoriki [sic] et Analakeli [sic] / Sent: 13-Nov-2010 / 15:46:21²⁴¹

*

13-14 November, University of Antananarivo

[On Sarah Corbett's *E Major*...]²⁴²

How translating this poem (with its repetition throughout of 'And she was /' and 'And he was /') transforms it as there are no personal pronouns in Malagasy, thus gender is never specified. Students agree that this lack of clarity might be a useful mechanism in a Malagasy poem about romantic love between men or between women.

Alternatively, the 'And **she** was /' and 'And **he** was /' ('*izy dia*' / in the Malagasy) might initially be read in Malagasy as referring to the same person throughout the poem—only in the very last line revealing that it was after all two different people, with 'And **they** were laughing ('*Dia nihomehy izy ireo*'). A nice effect, students agree; impossible in the English.

An ear with an itch: it's not a normal ear!

__: did __ classmates' suspicious reading of the text suggest a natural suspicion of romantic love? [laughter].
__ shares with the group something __'s grandmother had said: *ny fitiavana ange toy ny afo mandoro (love is like fire that scorches)*.

Conversation around gender norms in these lines in the poem: 'And he was / a flame eating up the curtains / And she was / Rain soaking through the rafters'... Students agree that a flame would tend to be associated with desire if in relation to a man; and with jealousy if in relation to a woman.

²⁴¹ *Message from / the Consulate / of France [...] avoid circulating / in Antanimena, / Beoriki [sic] and Analakeli [sic]*

²⁴² Sarah Corbett, *And She Was*. (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), pp. 2-4.

For example, says __: *Oay, mamay be ny ao tanana ao!* (\approx *Ooph, it's hot in here!*)—what a man might say when coming home late having been with his lover; that the man might then use his wife's "hot feelings" as an excuse to straight away leave the room or house... thus a mechanism for shaming / parking blame on his wife for being hostile, and avoiding having to deal with whatever might have caused her to be hostile.

A second round of coffee as all hell breaks loose with a thunderstorm outside; __ commenting that the violent wind reduces the size of raindrops. It is getting dark. Conversations for the day come to a close. The rain subsides. Umbrellas are politely declined.

~

[On Danez Smith's *Crown...*]²⁴³

How might this read, translated literally in Malagasy? __ immediately refers to *moral constraints-and-beliefs-and-thoughts* with pursed lips, tight around his teeth.

On the difficulties of being "safe" to talk about love and sex between men here; how easily the former is obscured. __ to __: *you said safer—safer for who?* (__ replies.) *So to paraphrase what you're saying, it's like... I'd like to create a sense of "it's not you, it's me"?*

Students discuss whether love between women is "safer ground" in society and / or easier to conceal. __'s story of a survey on national TV, a vox pops on same sex love. That *ny lehilahy tsy tokony manao an' izany* (\approx *men shouldn't be doing that*) seemed to be the majority view amongst men and women. __'s observation that nobody interviewed mentioned love between women.

~

A conversation about the last buses of the day in Antananarivo.²⁴⁴ How drivers *prioritise* women waiting in the dark. *But for what?!* Ie. chivalry or / and captivity. __ with a story of men also fearing the predatorial instincts of other men at night. *Being nice in the dark.*

*

14 November 2008, Isoraka

²⁴³ Danez Smith, *Crown*. (Granta [online], 2017.) Available at <https://granta.com/crown-smith/>.

²⁴⁴ Typically around 7pm.





2.15

Outside, wind before the rain in curtains...

~

Just now, first lychees under last drips of jacaranda, crickets... correspondence of mauve²⁴⁵ and dusk. Then the rain... Turning back and walking slowly, open to it, declining an umbrella, ringing hair. ___'s *ça commence!*²⁴⁶, on return to hotel.

~

Prostitutes from patch of pavement outside getting changed in hallway; staff stoned in toilets. Boredom of nightwatch.

*

15 November 2019, University of Antananarivo

___ with a reference to *people from Ambodin'Isotry*²⁴⁷, for example... probably meaning the descendants of Andevo.²⁴⁸

___'s anecdote of a Merina aunt of ___ being sat down and given a hard time at family events in ___ Madagascar: other family members needling this aunt, testing for tendencies she may have (because of the culture in which she was brought up) to not be straightforward. And at one point *'jumping down her throat, "See, you're not honest!!!"* This routine being both light-hearted and, at some level, deadly serious, ___ says.

~

²⁴⁵ jacaranda flowers

²⁴⁶ ≈ *It's starting!*

²⁴⁷ Located in the centre-west of the city on an old flood plain, Ambodin'Isotry has a reputation for being one of the poorest districts of Antananarivo. Though of course it is a mixed picture, from one household to the next.

²⁴⁸ A word, in lower-case letters, roughly meaning "slave"; as well as, with the 'A' capitalised, being the name of what is effectively a caste within the Merina ethnicity that descends from slaves. As one would expect, there is extreme sensitivity around this word.

___ on uses of space in a traditional Malagasy house²⁴⁹, emphasising especially the importance of the East-West axis. *Miady ao andrefan-trano, miombona ao antsinanan-trano... hating each other over here, loving each other over here...* His English translation and the accompanying diagram typically cryptic.

~

___ on relations between mutual Others in Madagascar: *no one gives a fuck about you unless you're useful to them.*

*

mid November 2009, Isoraka

Chat with ___ about his gout (hereditary), and his deep love of Schumann. *Il plaisant bien, eh...*²⁵⁰ How ___ can't have red meat; ___ signalling lavishly that he feels for his patron in relation to this.

*

15 November 2010

6 brownblack from Isotry already

*

17 November 2010

off w/ rucksack, just after 6

Grill still up by ___, fat chain, lock. A cry of *Fazaha!*²⁵¹... two small boys across road, kickboxing. Then noticed teenager nearby had a rock. Taxi hailed, turns laboriously, *alefalefalefalefa*²⁵² anticipating rock through window. Effect on city's youngest, very poorest. This play-violence, everywhere.

And by the pool at ___.

²⁴⁹ More in the highlands?

²⁵⁰ ≈ *He's such a joker, eh...* [___'s assistant, ___, to me].

²⁵¹ ≈ White foreigner (*vazaha*); the 'v' often a harder sound when said with hostility.

²⁵² ≈ *that's-it-that's-it-that's-it-that's-it / go-go-go-go...* (This was either me to the taxi man (it wouldn't have been a taxi woman), or someone (an adult) standing near where the taxi had been stationed, helpfully directing whilst it did a three-point turn. This is quite normal during the daytime. Less likely, at that spot, at 6am.)

A baby leaving the water, still kicking hard, still held by the nanny; grabbing at father's nose.

~

a 09b05: Eviter / de se déploie / dans la zone / d'Ivato. / Sent – 17-Nov-2010 / 09:10:06²⁵³

2.45

4.20 and then it went quiet

0320714378 / Message du / Consulat de / France du 17/11 / a 17:25: Eviter la / route d'Ivato a / hauteur de la / Hutte / Canadienne pour / cause de / barrages. / Sent : 17-Nov-2010 / 17:31:39²⁵⁴

couple power-walking around pool together

[chatter on Facebook...] *who is running the country, whose bullets do we have to duck, where not to spit?*

Sherrit falls on Madagascar coup [on twitter]

text from my father

7ish trees by anosy becoming trees after [being] troops

text from my sister

Big claps to Alexandria, Miss USA elected MISS WORLD 2011... anyway all the pageants were amazingly gorgeous ;D
[on twitter]

Madagascar....just because you're floating away from everyone else...not ok [on twitter]

RNWAfrica state of emergency declared in #Conakry #Guinea. At the same time, a possible coup is developing in #Antananarivo #MADAGASCAR #Africa [on twitter]

²⁵³ ≈ *Avoid / circulating / in the Ivato / area...*

²⁵⁴ ≈ *Message from / the French / Consulate [...] Avoid / the Ivato road / up at La / Hutte / Canadienne / because of / roadblocks...*

text from my mother

Wednesday morning, beautiful outside. coup going on in Madagascar. ho hum. [on twitter]

patrol passes by

0320714378 / Message du / Consulat de / France du 17/11 / a 19h40: Route / d'Ivato / accessible. / Circuler avec / prudence. Vols / maintenus / Sent: / 17-Nov-2010 / 19:50:00 ²⁵⁵

text from my sister

horrible... de la propaganda... [on twitter]

palms in dark, ripples across Lac Anosy. awareness of soldiers taken position outside ___. trucks of troops making way by, lights on. so, coup attempt. dark camouflage unmistakable. stately progress down ___. must shut my head down.

tomorrow, if I had to guess, quieter as military find some way with each other of avoiding full-scale confrontation

but what happens then in response to ___, etc, who knows

~

10.30

Billy, you... There's a coup d'état on there's women ran-ranning around naked looking for last sexual encounters. Um. I hope you're not sleeping. Alright. See you tomorrow.²⁵⁶

*

18 November 2010

²⁵⁵ ≈ *Message from / the French / Consulate [...] The Ivato road / accessible. / Circulate with / caution. Flights / still running...*

²⁵⁶ Voicemail message.

Still to come, what's going on in Madagascar? ...the day after a coup of several soldiers, sorry, the day after a group of soldiers attempted a coup...

...to Madagascar now and...

poster of white fluffy kittens behind as ___ reading out their *we have taken over* thing

battle of the communiqués. ___: ___ *trying to get me to say there was a fucking coup there wasn't a fucking coup*

child of five or six putting cash inside pocket of check shirt worn by baby, dirtier shirt over the top. French woman then shoving a lens in his face. a few hundred Ariary²⁵⁷; bread. then more photos, an *à bientôt* [*≈ see you soon*]

Best phone call this week? From a woman complaining that there was no full English breakfast at her hotel in Madagascar. Sigh..... [on twitter]

Nada como Madagascar para comenzar bien el dia <3²⁵⁸ [on twitter]

*

19 November 2010

So, officers still behind their barbed wire.

guys running past w/ petrol.

___, showing his teeth, chattering: *ça crispe...*²⁵⁹

Thinking about everyone in Tana at the moment... stay safe... #Madagascar so deserves some good times [on twitter]

*

20 November 2010

²⁵⁷ 1000 Ariary at this time would have been about 30 cents in US Dollars.

²⁵⁸ *≈ Nothing like Madagascar for starting the day well <3.*

²⁵⁹ *≈ makes me all tense...*

living with rolling uncertainty. a swimming metallic corrosive ___ in pit of stomach, up spine; engendering excessive ___, politeness, fidgetiness. too ___ to think too much about it

military ‘shooting’ each other. bomb blast + heavy rain. toytown siren + adrenalin... white **P O L I C E** 4x4 thunders up hill outside ___ i’net café, w/ kevlar, long muzzles of rifles + shades. Time to go.

*

20 November 2019, University of Antananarivo

Talk of censorship in poetry; of *hurting the ears of Madame le Ministre...*²⁶⁰ ___ sympathising: *ny sofin’ olona tsy taitra raba tsy maratra* (*≈ you don’t have someone’s ear until you hurt [injure / offend]*).

Discussion of attitudes towards writers / artists in general here. ___ on how you can’t write *ecrivain*²⁶¹ on a *karapanondro* (*≈ identity card*). ___ joking about the need to always prove things here: *lehilahy ve ianao... ka porofoy ary!* (*≈ so you’re a man are you... prove it, then!*)

___: *Afaka mifampanao ny ve?* (*≈ can we all call each other ‘ny’?*); ___ later saying to me that she liked the respectful tone with which ___ had used this word, as a man.²⁶²

Talk of the language of menstruation in Madagascar: *fadimbolana* (*≈ literally: the forbidden of the month*); *indisposée aho* (*I’m indisposed*).

___ on her poetics: that if she is told her work is *vulgaire* (in French) then *ça va*²⁶³; but if she is told her work is *vetaveta* (*≈ vulgar, dirty*) then *mankarary* (*≈ it hurts*).

*

21 November 2011

RPGs on a couple of front pages this morning, press pictured in flak jackets

²⁶⁰ From a workshop gathering students from all groups; from which, attending on the day were eight female students, one male student, a prominent female painter-poet; a prominent female eco-poet [my descriptions, not theirs] and myself.

²⁶¹ *writer*

²⁶² “Ny” is a term of familiarity which can be either respectful or diminishing, especially when used by men towards women. It is the tone used that counts.

²⁶³ *≈ it’s okay*



[orange.mg...] 15b25 : une grenade a été jetée à Mandrosoa Ambobijatovo, près du domicile du ___ et du Camp Militaire ___. La deflagration n'a pas fait de blessé. Un suspect a été arrêté à l'instant par les forces de l'ordre.²⁶⁴

—a coffee cancelled

*

20 November 2009

coffee with ___, working at the unité de neuropsychiatre, Hôpital de Befelatanana. *There is nothing, nothing, nothing.* Talks of kids' drawings of blood, guns, etc in a workshop she ran [earlier in the year]. Still has them. And another workshop for members of the security forces. The policeman who came to her afterwards... *Listen, I want to ask you something. Does this mean I shouldn't beat my wife?*

*

23 November 2008, Hotel ___

Kid up near my room. Last seen screaming with giggles after [illegible] and [illegible] in rain on opposite side of road by ___. Carefully-tied hair under hat. Had been asking for my hat, and bottle. Peered round corner on top floor, immediately looking to my soap (was en route to shower), then brisk scrubbing motions, [illegible] up, then another; repeated. Given, turned her round with a *veloma*²⁶⁵ and smile. Gorgeous. Bit of justice, they forgot my wine.

*

29 November 2009, bar at Hotel ___, Antaninarenina

[Talking with ___ and, old enough to be his father, ___]. ___ in flipflops, jeans, fiddling with heavily-tinted shades. A prawn fisherman on the Isle of Skye for the rest of year. Hadn't yet told his wife he'd be away for Xmas; she doesn't know where he is. When home, his father: *how was it, son?—aye, s'alright—but I don't tell him because he's a right gossip.* ___'s wife *fine with it, glad to have me out the house.* This job *a little jolly for a kinda mega rich guy, saltwater fly fisherman. Cushy number... boring, frankly.* Not allowed to wear shoes on deck. On

²⁶⁴ ≈ *A grenade was thrown at Mandrosoa Ambobijatovo, near the home of ___ and of the ___ barracks. The explosion did not cause any injuries. A suspect was immediately arrested by the security forces.*

²⁶⁵ ≈ *'bye*

board: 12 men, 1 woman: a stewardess, *over-efficient*; ___ discourages her by flashing at her. Heading shortly to the Red Sea, 10 knots, *surprised if no contact*. 20 mins from bobbing up on horizon to rpg range... *slippin puddle jumpers, skiffs*. 300m the critical range... *bellies to the floor and get the rounds down*. Orders to *make an example of them*. And if the worst happens, to not *kick a bucket-o-shite over your hostages*. Their space on deck: Two chairs. A canopy that can be pulled over. Two M16s. Flares. Four speakers. An MP3 player. *Fucking REM!* ...looking forward to replacing. ___: *my brother—just banter—says I'm a mercenary... cause he knows it annoys me...*

*

late November 2017, Ambohipeno

the drive back from ___. sliver of a moon. cool, heartwarming, nightarriving tones. that I find peace here, the thought

*

30 November 2010

Outside ___, flower stall. (Bunches.) Lady shaking flowers off flowers [jacaranda tree above]

*

December 2012

to invest in life experience, let that shape the kind of writing that's coming through

*

December 2014, University of Antananarivo

___ on the Malagasy: *un être qui ne sait plus dire non ... on fait que de répéter ... mamorina fa tsy mamerina ... nous n'avons pas été éduqué a créer...*²⁶⁶

²⁶⁶ ≈ *A being who no longer knows how to say no ... one just repeats ... to create not repeat... we haven't been educated to create.*

while evident contempt for those who... *monter sur scene et déclamer... capter l'attention—parce ce que je crie*²⁶⁷

*

December 2016, office of Faribolana Sandratra²⁶⁸, Analakely

[performance by ___...] audience all on tsihy²⁶⁹. three red light bulbs. dahalo's²⁷⁰ pipe, sns²⁷¹ on wall. talk about counterculture

best Gasy²⁷² poetry... can simply transcribe it [in English], best you could do

*

2 December 2011, Ambohipotsy

fruit jangling in the wind, ___'s pots on broken concrete. Something about the way this garden is left, yet cared for

*

4 December 2018

___'s death was sudden.

And as she lay dying, ___ *was* probably trying to mount her. Found beak down, lying downhill, wings splayed. Shit on her eggs, which were probably less than a week away from hatching. (The previous 12 smashed on her chest, one by one, as ___ and ___ hadn't learned to leave her alone.)

²⁶⁷ ≈ *Jump on stage and declaim... to capture attention—because I'm screaming.*

²⁶⁸ Faribolana from faritana (outline) volana (moon) ≈ circle; Sandratra ≈ exalted. Founded in 1982, the Faribolana Sandratra is a prominent association of poets both in Antananarivo, and across Madagascar.

²⁶⁹ A traditional Malagasy mat for sitting on, made of rushes or palm fronds; associated with receiving guests.

²⁷⁰ ≈ cattle bandits. This word has a long history. These days, it is increasingly heard in referring to the perpetrators of any act of violence (not just where [cattle] theft is involved), especially in the countryside.

²⁷¹ short for the Malagasy phrase sy ny sisa ≈ and the rest (etc).

²⁷² Malagasy.



By the afternoon, __, __ and __ had a vial of antibiotics in their fronts (up a back street in Andravoahangy), along with two as-yet-nameless females. Upon returning home, __ and __ each jumped on one. (What did I expect?)

That was Friday. Today, __ and __ are looking at home.

Rain, heavy rain, in the last day or two. Filled a bucket. Bugs on their backs.

~

That every time the rain has come I have thought it was here to stay.

*

early December 2011

last night, in the rain

near the Tunnel Ambanidia, a man is trying to lift his motorbike onto the pavement, all the water almost toppling him. A brown (not red) river from Faravohitra. The sound of metal passing by, grating the road here

and there

*

13 December 2013, Demi-tonneau __, University of Antananarivo

Students writing about the crisis. __ looking sullenly @ picture²⁷³. __ writing furiously, other hand grasping his umbrella (inside). Colours running on picture. __'s hands gathered, as if in prayer. The din from all that corrugated iron.

*

mid December 2010

__: innocence as *ignorance of evil*.

how to explore [in writing] one's own state of innocence, without belittling

~

*allusive, fragmented images that are charged with suggestion but deliberately left incomplete, allowing narrative to unfold in the viewer's imagination... the subject is what is not there—*Julião Sarmento?

*

mid December 2013, Antaninarenina

—*Fuck it, five of them* [outside Hotel __]

PIECE D'IDENTITE... *Que-est ce que vous faites ici, Monsieur?*²⁷⁴ [the tallest, in a beret]

—*Walking home.*

²⁷³ a prompt for a workshop exercise

²⁷⁴ ≈ IDENTITY CARD... *What are you doing here, Monsieur?*

—*Pas de fille?*²⁷⁵ [from a colleague; much sniggering]

...the tinkling of fingernails on metal as I pulled away

*

mid-December 2016

into Isotry and at the lit roundabout ruckus reveals small kid feet tied in white string to a lamppost mock lynching

*

mid-December 2022, Ampasanimalo

The dust.

A phone call about red rice.

A wind hammers the windows. That wind. Branches in the remaining light hurled about. And, yes, light flickers out.

~

The rain shortly after dawn. And back to sleep.

~

A hunk of ravalala
on the ground.

*

19 December 2017, Avaradoha

on a single drive into town, how much one sees

that I haven't been able to

²⁷⁵ *No girl?*

*

late December 2014, London

the willingness to take things seriously, not hide behind irony ... *impossible to write a poem when starting with a concept* ... (a poem is not a puzzle) ... *the post-modern debacle* ... *Nothing's really meant* ... *that sort of writing* ... *Why can't ___ say what [they] fucking mean?* ... that good poetry has something to do with spiritual growth²⁷⁶

*

late December 2017, University of Antananarivo

but what do you mean by "judgement"—like maybe the text is lovely?

~

9.45ish

curtains billowing in the morning wind, on balcony of apartment block—Ambohitrimanjaka behind.
fleeting feeling of a return to my childhood sense of wonder

how adulthood pummels it out of you

*

31 December 2022, Andasibe

4.40

and the first smell outside is smoke.

the outline of trees: shorter in higher places, mitady an' ilay masoandro.²⁷⁷ the hissing, dinta,²⁷⁸ fungi: hard as wood. and *tena niova... taloba, be orana be.*²⁷⁹

²⁷⁶ From some poetry event at which ___ spoke.

²⁷⁷ looking for the light

²⁷⁸ leeches

²⁷⁹ *it's really changed... before, there was a lot of rain*

That side of this place—the ratcheting up of fear several notches at once. When none of the options are reassuring.

A little under an hour along a hot road. The surface relatively good, good enough to flatten a snake. (Thinking I didn't want to see that.)

A conversation about *entrepreneurial doctors*.

Up a drive. Through into a courtyard. Two cars parked, I think; otherwise empty. A lot of clothes hanging in a garage. 'Urgences'.²⁸⁰ Door open. And not a soul.

*

1 January 2020, Ampasanimalo

4.45ish, by candlelight

This year I will be 37. Throb of cicadas in garden. Clattering of things, all linked to rice. Cockerels. A little breathless.

Last night, storm, dream: retracing steps and woke up (back along a scrubby path, expecting to find something already dead).

And suddenly less is shadow than is light.

*

1 January 2023, Ampasanimalo

Energy of multiple musics, bass; some closer than others. From 11 really almost feverish, the thrumming, thumping.

A mug of water. Still twinges here and there. But much better in general.

²⁸⁰ 'Emergency'



How this could have been worse. Oof.

*

early January 2010, Ankorondrano

lacrymatoire, a pot for tears

~

Coughing. Not breathing for a bit. Burning lungs, eyes and back of neck. Run. An oh this has ~~changed~~ altered my afternoon plans feeling. A run for my life. Iron filings: traffic / pedestrians turn run towards taxi 4?5?6? tear gas fuses coming to a [?.roll] [/standstill] ahead of taxi. A run along a ditch, Jumbo²⁸¹ in mind. Curiosity aroused. Angry words. I cry back *Tsisy Fraso*²⁸². Man grabs Telma chord²⁸³, run. Others shout, chase begins. Cross road. Slow. Same again. Back. General awareness grows – up ahead guy [?s] prepare. Man my age / younger with bottle of water waiting to smack me off balance, strikes. manage to stay on feet. Trousers falling down, aware can only do so much more before trip, on floor, make it up from ditch and - _ - security gate open so straight in.

__ mocking, *so you want me to come and save you...*

*

early January 2018

the dog that ate the rat that ate the poison

*

early January 2023, Andasibe

Fireflies. Some brown lemur. A call to prayer. On the radio: 42 burned homes in Brickaville. A swing by a ruddy stream. Dude plunging a jerry can underneath in a quiet corner; a look of being caught.

²⁸¹ Jumbo Score (known as Jumbo) is a supermarket chain in Madagascar. There is a large Jumbo store in Ankorondrano.

²⁸² *There are no French*. I thought I was saying “I’m **not** French” (which is in fact “**tsy** frantsay [aho]”).

²⁸³ A kind of lanyard I sometimes wore round my neck in those days.

—*Madama avy aizqa?*

—*Teraka teto mibintsy abo*²⁸⁴. Said with a note of irritation.

—Has it changed very much, here?²⁸⁵

—Yes. People have started building in brick and stone.

—Is the forest smaller?

—Yes.

*

4 January 2023, Mandraka

Where the road is worn away it is being filled in again. A plastic jerry can cut in two. Earth dug out of the hillside.

But the road is really filling up with people. Out of a dead landscape, and across how big a chunk of the highlands? Kininina. Mimosa. The only industry possible is fire—*charbon*. Sacks | of what is grown | just | in plastic | to be burned.

The hand | out. You slow down, shift a little. | There is always enough left unrepaired so that you need | to talk, make eye contact. The girl below Mandraka, at the bottom of the cliff. She runs uphill at the speed we can do. Giggling, yes; keeping up. But for how long?

The ariary zato²⁸⁶ tossed out from a car in front.

The men don't giggle. Some, half my age now, are ~~terrified~~. That haunted look.

Leaking out of the countryside. A hat lowered. A hand to a mouth. Supplication. An angady.²⁸⁷ And how long till it's a cudgel, a machete, a hunting rifle, a taste of what they | are living.

²⁸⁴ *Where are you from, Madame? / I was born right here.*

²⁸⁵ Or words to that effect.

²⁸⁶ About 2 cents in US dollars.

²⁸⁷ spade



A'LA, *s.* A forest, a wood.
A'LA, *adj.* and *adv.* Without, on the outside of, removed, freed from.²⁸⁸

In a yellow jerry
 can, severed |
 where the road is |
 softening | a little
 each day, a touch |
 more laterite | from
 the hill | beneath

Mandraka | with
 what | diligence |
 under the sun | the
 mimosa, kininina²⁸⁹ in
 gony²⁹⁰, gone | under
 the odd sapin²⁹¹ & the
 | main | income |
 remaining is fire |

sprinkled | near a
 hat lowering, a very
 | small | hand |
 even a sincere
 smile, even | now |
 reaching more to a
 mouth | than to

*

6 January 2010

²⁸⁸ Richardson, *A New Malagasy-English Dictionary*, p. 18.

²⁸⁹ eucalyptus

²⁹⁰ sacks

²⁹¹ pine

40ish soldiers gathered at palace after coffee w/ ___. 20ish on patrol outside ___. Fuck. My neighbourhood.

*

8 January 2010, Isoraka

Safe, I think, to sleep.

*

10 January 2023, Ampasanimalo

Over lunch with ___. That it's a *foutoir*²⁹², here; *tout le monde est dans le déni*²⁹³. (The answer?) That we all *wash the dishes, drink a glass of water, look at the sky*.

~

*Rebefa noana ny vatana dia mivezivezy ny fanahy*²⁹⁴

~

In the bog a little earlier: play of light against the wall. Twice. I look at the window. Just a single thread of a cobweb, caught in the grille de protection.²⁹⁵ Security light.

Later, at ___ Galerie. Not knowing what was a power cut and what was deliberate.

*

14 January 2012

___ this morning. Had had two motorbike accidents, whisky. His breath heavy with booze, fags and something fruity. Lines in his face deeper, mischievous smile as ever, convinced that something's about to happen / wishing it to

²⁹² ≈ *shitshow / bloody shambles / clusterfuck*

²⁹³ *everyone is in denial*

²⁹⁴ ≈ *When the body is hungry, the soul fidgets*

²⁹⁵ security grill; metal bars soldered to the outside of a window frame

*

mid-January 2012

___: *Les Africains se distinguent bien*²⁹⁶. Reference to speed of speech. Pulling his lips. *Nous, les Malagasy...* (and he conducts) ...*une langue symphonique, doux*²⁹⁷

*

mid-January 2016

tsy miasa eto intsony, i ___²⁹⁸

___'s ___ died. was on his bike, towards ___

bare feet on grass, sodden, sinking because of the season

a kidnapping in ___. supposedly a rosewood family, asked for ___ euros, not given, killed daughter; still holding son

manifestations²⁹⁹—as in when things in a mute society become manifest

a gate closed with new, blue twine

∩

___'s concern about his guests seeing bloated bellies

∩

Comme la tête, etc. most of all the difficulty of saying / hello / I am a writer / I am attracted by your bruises

∩

²⁹⁶ ≈ *Africans stand out*

²⁹⁷ ≈ *We, the Malagasy... a language that is symphonic, soft*

²⁹⁸ ___ *doesn't work here any more.*

²⁹⁹ The French word for [street] protests, demonstrations.

There are weeks
when the earth
stays wet

so that standing
barefoot
on some grass

you can see
yourself
slowly sinking—

which is perhaps
to say simply
that

disappearances
can be measured
simply—

in a gate
newly-fastened
or a *no*

X doesn't work
here any more
(and a feeling

to which you're
probably not
entitled)

or that Y's lover
died, you know
somewhere

on the road to Z,
turning
too eagerly, perhaps

over new
and beautiful
surfaces.

*

mid-January 2018

~

O'RANA, or **RA'NONO'RANA**, *s.*

Rain. [Mal. *ujan* ; Polyn. *na*.]

O'ran-katelo'ana, *s.* [HATELOANA (TELO), three days.]

The first three rainy days at the
beginning of the wet season.³⁰⁰

~

Of finding things and wanting
to leave them

exactly where they are.

~

Awakened by a rippling
and a resolve

to place things
now
where they cannot be smashed.

~

³⁰⁰ Richardson, *A New Malagasy-English Dictionary*, p. 466.



That papyrus fares best: long-stemmed

tensile, dividing
into stars.

Bamboo breaks.

Ravinala will repair rapidly

but it is
as if it loves

to be shredded.

~

HE'FIKE'FIKA, *s.* Restlessness or agitation of the head or hands, or of things blown by the wind.³⁰¹

~

Up a lane
to an umbrella factory
in a cyclone

and it is actually all just
the stench of piss and rotting jacaranda
petals by a door open to worship
away from any lexicon
of warnings
and the smaller kinds

of rain.

~

³⁰¹ Richardson, *A New Malagasy-English Dictionary*, p. 246.

E'RIKA, *s.* Drizzling rain, thick mist.
Tiako èrika izy. I love him [/her/them] still. (Prov.)³⁰²

Brutish, torrential quickly reappearing in the *chapeaux de pluie*³⁰³

in the tufts in the road in another pothole we can't know the depth of the thousands of small tears in that everything is now more approximate than we would like.

PA'TRAKA, or **PA'TRAPATRAKA**, *s.* Rain in large drops.
Pa'traka'la, *s.* [ALA, a forest.] Dripping of rain from trees.³⁰⁴

*

18 January 2010, Ambohipotsy

*Message du / Consulat du / 18/01: Eviter / le quartier du lac / ANOSY, notamment / dans l'après-midi / pour cause de / manifestation / prévue. Rester / prudent." / Sent: 18-Jan-2010. / 11:38:05*³⁰⁵

2.45

Rain on horizon. Shutters slamming. Calm, from what can hear from here, down in Anosy. First droplets on zinc.

To be made safe by a thunderstorm.

³⁰² Richardson, *A New Malagasy-English Dictionary*, p. 139.

³⁰³ Rain hats. From October to March it is easy to buy a shower cap in the streets of central Antananarivo.

³⁰⁴ Richardson, *A New Malagasy-English Dictionary*, p. 475.

³⁰⁵ ≈ *Message from / the Consulate [...] Avoid / the Lac ANOSY / area especially / in the afternoon / because of / planned / demonstration. / Remain cautious...*



___'s comment in the kitchen last night... that like living in a Marquez novel, each day, here.

*

20 January 2010, Isoraka

___ having binned porcupine quill on my mantlepiece. *Plume de porc-épic?*³⁰⁷ ...feather of a kind of pig. Not clarifying things.

*

22 January 2009, Antanimora

About to lose some innocence?

*

22 January 2009, Morondava³⁰⁸

the long edges of the forest, leaning in

upside-down teddy in flooded patch away to one side of the landing strip

Mairie³⁰⁹ fucked. 64 buildings reported gone; 145 damaged, three dead, maybe 2000 homeless. People afraid to go to hospital because of the cost. Otherwise, ___: *c'est vraiment calme*

the lady standing on top of what, until two days ago, had been her house: *j'encore triste...*³¹⁰

*

23 January 2009, Tsaralalana³¹¹

³⁰⁷ French for porcupine.

³⁰⁸ Immediately after the passage of Cyclone Fanele; as part of my work as a journalist I flew in with first responders from Madagascar's disasters preparedness office.

³⁰⁹ Town hall.

³¹⁰ *I'm still sad*

³¹¹ Notes from a fire station.



*eto ho'an ny afo rebetra / Là pour tous les feux*³¹³.

Green fireglove, long axe, flax rope, gas canisters, a bed, seven phones.

___: *I have the right to be ill, to buy clothes; to accomplir mes petites caprices*³¹⁴. *But I want my little boys to become grands hommes*³¹⁵. *Not like their father. Did I have any t-shirts, stickers, etc?*

*

21 January 2012

[Orange.mg live alerts...] *16h00 ORDRE PUBLIC : Aucun incident anormal a signaler dans les quartiers de la capitale, les rues sont à peu près calmes*³¹⁶

*

24 January 2011, Isoraka

Back along the Route Digue³¹⁷. ___ shut. ___ blocked. ___ found alone in the dark with a corossol juice in ___, talking of leaving.

*alors, c'était comment là-bas?*³¹⁸

~

How much of theory will need to be resolved, but burnt off like alcohol. Leaving to permeate by aftertaste, allusion. A way off yet. [and, scribbled over later...] *what caused me to think like this in the first place?*

*

late January 2009

³¹³ ≈ *Here for all fires.*

³¹⁴ ≈ *indulge my little whims*

³¹⁵ ≈ *great men*

³¹⁶ ≈ *No abnormal incident to report in all districts of the capital, the streets are almost calm.*

³¹⁷ Road connecting Antananarivo city centre to the international airport.

³¹⁸ ≈ *so, how was it over there?*



4000 Ar . | 26/1/09 . | [signature] || __Services | —__ . || ~~From to~~ | Tana burns – from above
! | Golly . . | . X?x . || * Smell smoke . | Don't feel that shocked/ out | of depth . Tired . but in
| control . * (^my) location . | ?abattoir [?/ambatovee] | Route Digue | __ . | __—__ . | —depot
. || TAMJOMBATO / ANKORONDRANO [not my writing] || 'TV __ . | Call for ?calm . |
10?h ?demean . | And a call for calm || Foreign *exilé* . || Confirmed dead | 2?/?2[?/3] __ . ||
English ?accents | ?until . | Local . | *Men who are taller than us* | *Nombreux* || __@ g[___] . co . uk
|| *Shame , shame , shame* . || *This isn't democracy* | Must wait for [___] | __ *calls this democr[acy]* | *No ,
no , no* . || *what a fucking mess* , but what a | beautiful moment . || Top of Carlton . torch light , |
Chivas Regal . As with __ musings , | these moments are only so far | away . And real , if not after
, at the time . | (This , too , is real.) || Cigarette mouth ; | canettes + winegums | ?2am . in bath
|| (Other day,—__ | in ear, in dark . and – oh yes – we're | landing . __ .) | Rephrase | whispers
of a ...) || How ?dishes behind | [illegible - ?water / ?waiter / ?something else-ter] reminds me
of smashing looting | ?windows ... | smell of burning, even in | room here . Howling wind . ||
?hum of ?air[c]on . | catharsis of a ?bedpad . | Howling wind . or | sirens) | 6 security guards
jovial || enough ?control [almost illegible] | * remember weak bladder . (8/3/09) . | L'aube . | *Je
vous soubaite un bon appétit* . | stupidly deferential room service boy on | top floor . 5 . 20 ish ; his
(^18/2/09) city burning . || ?Cloudy day today . . . || Shops shut . | police van ~~absented~~ deserted
. | ?__ open – huge queues . | - *sickened by what happened* . (immeuble __) __ .- Entire ?nation[?] |
supplies . looted . || __@__ . org . | (^many of whom) | ?East . || old – links with | __ , party
(^__) . ?__ Tular . | __ - ~~?Manako~~ Southeast . | *power lineages* . | families . | Ambositra . |
historically ?regional ?clout || Waking up with an *ob-no* . || __ .com | __'s points – anyway we
need numbers of backup . | - would make a big difference to have people they can call . | *We
wouldn't punish you for | putting your safety first* . || [in a ripped-out sheet still in the middle...] [in her
handwriting...] __ __ | __ . [illegible – maybe number in teens] __ (10) | ==__ (7) | Plaits . (hair)
| *Always poor* . / [illegible - ?prospects | ?prices] || ?her affected . | Touched all . Since 2004 |
?dude skipping . | X Poetic though is... (a) ?insecurity [?/insensitive] (b) Not safe . || why lost
ppcs? | ?how much cost? | income? | ~~he~~ | -pads | -receipts | -personal stuff || -> The kindness
of the lady | who washed my boxershorts in __ , returning them to be dried . | the fucking care in
it || Sunday | Cigarette in lychee garden . Thunder above . Sunflowers . Church bells. Banana
trees : *and the fucking dog broke into the vegetable patch + took a shit in the aubergines* . | __ beaming, cross-
legged , excited about thunder and rain arriving for his lettuces . || Remembering __ comment
about sustained tension in Beirut (3 days , when was it going to break..?). || The singing till late
into the night | (1/2am) the night before . | Christian | songs , softly sung by families I think .
Wasn't | a church do . Remember seeing them come || out for a break . Resting on the | railings
. || *Busculade* | 2 ?more ?guns | 2?8 ?18 ans . | *Secours* . | *We weren't in the heart* . | *We won't know |
what went on in those buildings* . || ?Chit [?/Chief] . | -conditions . | -Negs . – today ? | __
fundamentally seeking to achieve? || __ declaration in English, French, Malagasy on Radio ?__
[?__] | Opposing what __ said about || __ in charge . | __ *going to take resp for __ delegation meeting* .
| __?calling for discussions . | Just the __ . ?going + | World Bank going to meeting . || *The ?In.
Justice* (^?+) . ?*Courts are owners of ?responsibility for | whose* __ . || __ . | ?NB | Sofia region || __ of
*fandriampahalemana*³²⁰ || 10.30 . ?Pl . __ . | ?AU ?gauging [illegible] will ?lead ?meeting || ?has power
to decide whose | __ || __ . | __ || will wait | *He owns controls all the orders* . | *We need peace + order
+ to do this in an organised fashion* . || *if there's a contest for ?leadership + freedom + const process, the __ has
ability to announce to intl. community + inst. Martial Law if nec* | That said . || Au delegation . | __
justice + const court to __ || ability to call . Martial Law . | __ Emb . | __ . || *A short speech on |
Radio* __ . | Call in __ to take on || [032 number] | __ | ?__ | __@ | yahoo.fr || __ | __ . ||

³²⁰ Combining 'fandriana' (a bed, bedding; anything used to sleep on) and 'fahalemana', derived from 'milamina' (≈ arranged, in order; untroubled): ≈ security. When Malagasy monarchs gave 'kabary' (≈ a speech), they are thought to have concluded with 'mandry fahalemana ny tany' (≈ the land is at peace).



³²¹ Dwa and Pov, *Lundi noir sur l'île rouge*. (La Réunion: Des Bulles dans l'Océan, 2017), p. 40.

Writing for the spike. | *Ca y est, nous avons parlé* | | 800 wds | | According to a [illegible] spokeswoman
| How feeling . How staff . / families | reunion | | eyewitness . *Like somebody's dropped a bomb
on the place* – ___[?]___ . | red/white tickertape . | ___ | *So you think the people* | *through* . | | [033
number] | ___ . | [020 number] [032 number] Contacts ___ . | Bring sheets . | | (^Mme .) ___ [___]
___ garnets | (^her) husband cuts them | *It's not good ?atm* . | *It's got to end soon* . | Even the vazaha
(foreigners) aren't buying them ?any more ? | | violence / peace . | 14h . [| illegible .] | |
Responsive . *Can tell looking at it* . | *Politics* ___ *creative ways to*___ . | More aggressive on phones .
Nuances . | ___ 9-6 . [her] Mobile has email . | | ?*political ?status ?quo* . | | 8pm | needn't be done .
| | *Noon-planner* . | | gathering information and comms in one phone call | | [tucked in back – on
Hotel ___ sheet...] Toothbrush . | Shampoo . | Shoes . | Clothes . | Personal desk stuff . | | [on a
scrap of paper...] ?*just ?religion* [illegible] [?relig. radio] | | *God still exists!* and a name [___...] | |
[inside back cover...] Passport . | radio/ ipod | Chargers . | gum . | wallet . | valuables . | leads
(for sound) . | Pills . | laptop + chargers . | Sponge stuff . | clothes.. t-shirt | trousers . | boxers
 . | hoody . | 6— | Business ?red box . | credit | | water | | *B, sitting in car park Waitrose Ciren waiting
for it to open. How bout u? Mxx*

*

late January 2010

3.50

Rain coming, probs. Can't smell it in wind, but the wind!

*

late January 2018

hacked off stalk

on the cobbles, another

~

man walking calmly

from the *Pharmacie Hanitra*

at nine in the morning,

chin bloodied

for

~

a fourteen-year-old
concession

or an old promise
of blue

tourmaline

*

29 January 2010

how I would love for somebody to come up from behind + put their hands over my eyes

*

31 January 2013

sudden, surprising rainshower. not cyclonelike, just grey and that steady microscopic but very wetmaking rain. wings of ants lying around, not so many. patches of dry. politics: calm. quiet. rumblings between ___ and ___

*

February 2011

sunny evening, finally. *depression tropicale* moved on. Mauritian photographer friend of ___ on the *quite particular light* in Tana

*

February 2013

early daytime rain³²². as if place slightly sick. like episodes of some vomiting / fainting, as-yet-undiagnosed disease, the point at which you realise the person really ill. [rain] not cathartic, too light and casual

³²² Very unusual in February.

*

3 February 2010, Isoraka

[__'s assistant, __, to me...] ... *Vous voyez, nous, les Malgaches, nous sommes des intellectuels...*³²³

*

4 February 2010, Antaninarenina

Putting a postcard through a hole marked 'L'EXTERIEUR'

*

5 February 2012, Isoraka

*Vous n'êtes pas chez vous, hein!*³²⁴—from passenger in 4x4 that would have turned into me if I hadn't stepped back, got out of the way. I fucking am chez moi. And not French. Anger.³²⁵

*

6 February 2012

MSG DU CONSULAT. / DES RUMEURS / ALARMISTES / SONT / PROPAGEES PAR /
COURRIEL. / ELLES SONT INFONDEES. / PRUDENCE ET / VIGILANCE. CEPENDANT.³²⁶

*

7 February 2011

³²³ ≈ *You see, we, we Malagasy, we are intellectuals...*

³²⁴ ≈ *This isn't your home, alright?*

³²⁵ this was outside the flat I rented at the time, where I'd moved in 2009. (My words weren't uttered.)

³²⁶ ≈ *MSG FROM THE CONSULATE. / ALARMIST RUMOURS / ARE / BEING PROPAGATED BY / EMAIL. / THEY ARE UNFOUNDED. / CAUTION AND VIGILANCE. HOWEVER* [no time reference noted down].



___, two years on. *ab*—the smile, once I mentioned it.³²⁷ as if mentioned his birthday. the *bagarre*³²⁸ up in Antaninarenina today. how he wanted to turn the page, bit by bit—*il faut*.³²⁹ cutting his dreads. bad for him to be linked with *that*, he said. had been on TV previous night, doesn't like it. (possible big new job with ___ as a ___, related to ___.) but the smile

*

7 February 2013

should've been in town... Next yr

~

flowers fucking everywhere, driving back through Ambohitsorohitra, Antaninarenina

*

14 February 2014

[from the eye of a cyclone...]

brightness, buildings with hard edges. and naked on my ledge with cornflakes, UHT milk. can no longer see the Tour Orange. palms in Tsaralalana at rest, still. the dead already. the lightest spit. a car horn. wanting blue sky *please even just for today let me tell you I do still love you* Ankadifotsy, defined. the wind picking up, palms stirring. so that was half an hour. darker. a scream. clouds heading straight to my window, face. cooler. very fast clouds, now, seagulls and their sound *2 of my trees have broken the wall between my neighbours... a lot of work to do... But no blood* and now the gloaming from below. fibre glass rattles. an alarm. wind whipping *maybe we could report*³³⁰ *our day... No light, the garden like after a battle, my dog frightened, and it's not finished yet* and the calm that comes with it, a crash. a whole city in corrugated iron, alive

~

³²⁷ For context, see search results for “7 Février 2009 Madagascar” on Google / Youtube. *A warning: photographs and videos will show people being killed.*

³²⁸ ≈ *brawl*

³²⁹ ≈ *one has to*

³³⁰ The French verb ‘reporter’ means ‘postpone’.



ruffled rafaed jacaranda shreds cardboard twisted metal undergrowth still floating in air lumps kinks creaks
giant dark stains down side of Carlton curtain or sheet billowing out of upper window bright orange fody³³¹
in usual places

~

the call to prayer. boys stabbing moss in empty taxi rank. a young couple, he pulls at a dripping plant; she
at his hand.

~

[cake counter in __ patisserie...] *Religieuse café* (gone); *Chantilly* (gone); *Éclair chocolat* (gone); *Paris-Brest* (gone);
Éclair café (gone); *Religieuse chocolat* (gone); *Éclair vanilla* (2); *Manakara* (2); *Savanah* (gone); *Tarte Orange* (gone);
Tarte citron meringuée (gone); *Robusta* (gone); *Tarte le Tatin* (gone); *Alexandre* (gone); *Opéra* (lots); *Charlotte*
(gone); *Succès praline* (lots); *Tarte Boudalone* (2); *Foret noire* (1); *Tarte au chocolat* (2).

*

15 February 2010

CUA vs. marchands simmering.³³² Orange jackets run, 5-10 seconds after a couple of women go past with
boxes on their heads, giggling

guys squaring up [to each other] kung-fu style as walking down street, looking at me. Stupid atmosphere to
live in.

This sense of not being welcome.

*

mid-February 2011

__ on the Malagasy: *verrry strange... they have no story*³³³, and when they do they don't know about it... *verrry strange*

³³¹ Rice sparrow.

³³² A long-running game of cat and mouse between street-sellers forbidden from laying out stalls in the roads in downtown Antananarivo and employees of the Commune Urbaine d'Antananarivo (City Council).

³³³ One of the meanings of the French 'histoire' is 'story'.

*

mid-February 2013

An investigation of ___ and the ___, separating component parts, à la ___; ___ goes in there. [scribbled in later... *utter bullshit. And even if it were good conceptualisation, that omnipresent effort to conceptualise. Why?..*]

~

___ on ___'s writing: *cucul la praline...*³³⁴ *yes a leetle bit pejorative—but with tenderness, you know*

*

mid-February 2017, Antaninarenina

9.38

They are still there for now—under a morass of gold lettering, expensive ribbon and soiled plastic sheeting. The roses and carnations withered within a day. Then, after a couple of days, the grasses. Finally now, after nine days, the assorted tropical flowers.

*A poet's task is to show us a tree before our intellect tells us it is a tree.*³³⁵

Under the jacarandas.

~

8.19

They will be there until they are 'dry', apparently—until there is no life left in them. Two weeks now. The carnations have come loose. The lettering is peeling. There are puddles everywhere.

³³⁴ ≈ Vapid, soppy, saccharine... naïvely sentimental.

³³⁵ A quote that the French poet Yves Bonnefoy is famous for, although tracing where he once said it is no easy task. I have translated it here from this obituary: Amaury da Cunha, 'Mort d'Yves Bonnefoy, poète, traducteur et critique d'art'. (2016) Le Monde [online] http://www.lemonde.fr/disparitions/article/2016/07/01/mort-d-yves-bonnefoy-poete-traducteur-et-critique-d-art_4962338_3382.html.

*

18 February 2012

___'s story about the rice-producing area where his family once owned land, since requisitioned by the state: that if I go today, I will see seven clumps... fight my way into each and eventually I will find, without fail, a rusty combine harvester

*

19 February 2011

Message du / Consulat du 19-/ 02 : Eviter zone / Ivato pour cause / de / rassemblement / Sent : / 19-Feb-2011 / 10:57:30³³⁶

what am I doing on this unhappy island?

*

19 February 2018

rain on its way, clay tiles on the terrace still warm. pylon on hill at Ambatoroka picked out. feeling thunder in floorboards

~

effondrement³³⁷, eboulement³³⁸; a *spectacle of desolation* in Andravoahangy ambany

Ivato:³³⁹ pictures of passengers in the arrivals hall, knee-deep in water

*

23 February 2010

³³⁶ *Message from / the Consulate [...] Avoid the / Ivato area / because of a / rally...*

³³⁷ ≈ collapse

³³⁸ ≈ landslide

³³⁹ Antananarivo's international airport.

Letters on hill just an AN [of ANTANANARIVO] at mo

___'s story of encountering ___ looking dishevelled somewhere up in the haute ville³⁴⁰—*I av a been a fackeeng*

the mundane, must include. Must fight this drama

*

23 February 2011

___ as a child, story of killing chameleons + make-believe famadihana³⁴¹, years later

*

28 February 2011

wide awake, stars climbing up outside. Air Mada plane on the Ivato approach.

~

*merci de ton geste—non, c'est moi qui...*³⁴² (a book w/ appearance of being in ___ bag a long time)

*

late February 2010, Analakely

*Moi, j'aime les couleurs claires*³⁴³—taxi driver ___ on his new silky white seat covers

~

[attending dance event @ CGM³⁴⁴ with my camera...] how can I possibly write if not awake across myself?

³⁴⁰ Upper town (the oldest neighbourhood on a hill in the city centre).

³⁴¹ Famadihana is difficult to define. See: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Famadihana>.

³⁴² ≈ *thank you for your gesture—no, it's me who...*

³⁴³ ≈ *personally, I like light colours*

³⁴⁴ Le Goethe-Zentrum Antananarivo / Cercle Germano-Malagasy: German cultural centre in Antananarivo.

*

late February 2017, Antaninarenina

The flowers are still there, for now.

*

27 February 2010, Antaninarenina

Soldier (red beret) and his sipa³⁴⁵, floral dress, straw hat. Pink picnic basket nearby. Both sat across roots of old eucalyptus tree³⁴⁶. Near, if not next to, each other. Their shyness

amidst all the anger and bullshit

*

28 February 2010, Café __, Soarano

...*de se reculer*³⁴⁷, but to keep in it. *C'est une drogue*³⁴⁸, shrugging his shoulders, crouching. One of his first questions: was I there on __? How he looks around. Side to side, sunburn, piercing eyes, fidgeting. Knows his 360° from the hip or something. How people don't even know they've been *claque-claque*, visible pride. Even had some photos of me from __, he said.

~

how to write with uncocky confidence—what sanctions this? As a young writer

*

³⁴⁵ Literally: halvesoul (love interest, partner; other half).

³⁴⁶ Years later brutally pollarded, down to a stump.

³⁴⁷ ≈ ...to [take a] step back

³⁴⁸ *It's a drug.*

*from Jean-Joseph*³⁴⁹

³⁴⁹ My translation of Jean-Joseph Rabearivelo, *Nadika tamin'ny alina* (*Translated from the Night*), republished in (ed.). Ink, Meitinger, Ramarosoa, Riffard, *Jean-Joseph Rabearivelo, Œuvres complètes: Tome II*.

1

A scarlet star

rising in the depth of the sky—
what bloodflower is blooming in the grassland of the night?

Rising, rising,
becoming a kite, relinquished by a sleeping child.

As if both closing in and moving away,
losing colour like a wilting flower,
becoming mist, becoming white, shrinking
to no bigger than a diamond's culet,
scoring through the blue mirror above
where the glorious lure of a new morning
can already be seen.

2

What invisible rat
from the other side of the walls of the night
is nibbling on the milky bread of the moon?
Tomorrow morning
when it has run away
there will be teeth marks and traces of blood.

Tomorrow morning,
those who have been drinking all night
and those who have been gambling,
upon seeing the moon
will stammer, saying
*Whose bloodstained coin
is rolling on the green table?*
Ah! – one of them will say,
our friend lost everything

so he killed himself!

And they will all burst out laughing
stagger and fall over.

But the moon will no longer be there:
the rat will have dragged it into its hole.

3

The hide of the black mother-cow has been stretched,
stretched but not dried,
stretched in a shadow of seven layers.

But who killed the black mother-cow,
dead without lowing, dead without bellowing,
dead without being chased
here on this grassland budding with stars?

There she is lying motionless in half of the sky.

The hide has been stretched
over the wind's voice box
which the spirits of sleep have carved.

And the drum is ready
as soon as gladioli flowers crown
the horns of the rescued calf
which skips about
and grazes on a grassy hilltop.

There it will resound,
and its incantations will become dreams
until the dead mother-cow comes back to life,
white and pink,
beside a river of light.

4

What is happening underground
on the other side of faraway skies?
Lean over a well
near a river
or a spring:
you will see the moon
slipped into a hole,
and there, too, you will see yourself,
bright and silent,
amongst rootless trees
and approached by mute birds.

5

You are sleeping, my beloved;
and you are sleeping on her arm, o my lastborn child.
I do not see your eyes heavy with night,
while they usually shine
like natural pearls
or ripe grapes.

A pleasant gust of wind is opening our door,
billowing in your nightdresses
and catching your hair,
then lifting a sheet of paper from my desk
which I recover by the doorway.

I raise my head
and the line I had just begun is in my hand:
your eyes are blinking at the sky
and I say out loud: *stars*.

6

The bird with no colour and no name
is folding its wings
and wounds the sky's only eye.

It lives on a tree without branches,
just leaves
that no wind can trouble
and from which no fruit can be harvested
with open eyes.

What is it brooding?
When it takes to the air again
cockerels will appear:
the cockerels of all the villages
that have beaten and chased away
those who sing in dreams
and feed on the sun.

7

The ebbing of a sea of light.

Octopuses, in fleeing,
blackened the sand
with their thick ink;
and countless little fishes
like silver shells,
unable to escape,
were flipping around—
caught in a trap
laid by dark seaweed
that became lianas,
covering the cliff of the sky.

The-one-who-loves-prayers has finished reading the day's verses,
 and comes to listen to the children carefully studying
 the lessons of the bible
 on the terrace.
 Like a far-off cascade
 leaping over mossy boulders
 over there, beyond the hills;
 or like Christians caught unawares by a shadow
 while reciting the Koran
 under a calm sky.

I,
 in amongst the leaves falling from over there
 like black tears that never stop running,
 can only discern half-words
 and keep on hearing: *Egypt*
 and *Israel*.

I climb on top of a small mound
 smelling of trampled grass
 and I brush away the foliage getting in my eyes;
 there is a little migratory bird sobbing near the top
 and I lift my head up
 but it is the stars I see:
 bulbous as garlic,
 speckled like quails,
 they remind me of the prayers I just mixed up
 and, in the desert of the Imerina sky
 where it seems to me a crowd
 is once again running away from the Pharaohs,
 and look how the religions meet,
 and you, too, o my own, o Poetry!

9

The hidden beehives are in a line
near the sky's lianas
in amongst bright nests.

Suck from there, bees of my thoughts,
o bees, winged with sound
in the firmament bursting with silence;
fill yourself with propolis,
smelling of the sun and the wind:
we will seal over the cracks
that let in the tumult of life.

Fill yourself, too, with stellar pollen
for the grasslands of the earth;
and tomorrow, when the wild roses
of my poems shed their sadness there,
we will have hips from the heavens
and seeds made of stars.

10

There you are,
upright and naked.
You are silt, and you remember it;
but, in truth, you are the child of this shadow that has just given birth,
feasting on lunar breastmilk
and you are slowly taking the shape of a tree trunk
on a low wall crossed over by the dreams of flowers
and the perfume of a summer at rest.

Remembering, trusting that roots are growing out of your feet,
and run and twist like thirsty snakes
on their way to some spring underground,
or riveted in the sand

and already binding you to them, you, the living,
o tree not known; tree not named,
who is growing fruits that you yourself will pick.

Your tip,
inside your hair blown in the wind,
is concealing a nest of bodiless birds;
and when you come back to lie on my bed
and I recognise you, my wandering brother,
your touch, your breath and the smell of your skin
will bring a fluttering of mysterious wings
as far as the edges of sleep.

11

How many multiple birth siblings are the winds?

They all like mischief,
running after each other in and out of the grass,
climbing up walls and becoming a pair,
leaping over rooftops where dew would collect,
becoming hunched over hills
and shaking tall trees without trunks—
scattering birds with eyes of glass
who do not nest anywhere else,
and round fruits like clumps of quartz
that cannot grow here on earth
and dissolve into stardust.

12

For the poor, eaten by bedbugs as wide as the sky,
for the wandering exiles
from the city of light,
and for the rebels and deserters

of the shadow-army rising up out of the earth—
what are they after, these surges of countless palm trees,
lustrous like so many spear shafts,
varnished with plant oils,
and which reach up
higher than all houses
until their tips
resonate with the dreams of turtle doves
in the roof of the world?

They wave about, break up and fall,
not returning to be with the living,
but piling up in the desert of stars,
becoming many huts
for beggars without beds,
for prisoners of war clothed only in their skin reeking of dust
and for all the birds without nests
who will be saved all together.

13

All of the seasons have been undone
in these unexplored parts
sprawling over half of the earth,
adorning them with unknown flowers
and a climate all of their own.

A momentary rush of sap
in the tangle of dark lianas
strangling any living branches.
Fleeing birds rendered strangers
to their own nests,
then wings flapping—lightning
on a rock of mist—
out of soil
which is neither hot nor cold,

like the skin of those stretching out
far away from life and death.

14

Here,
the one with eyes like prisms of sleep
and whose eyelids are heavy with dreams,
whose feet sink into the sea
and whose hands re-emerge sticky,
laden with corals and sparkling rock salt.

She will place these in little piles by a patch of fog
and sell them to naked sailors
who have had their tongues cut out,
until the rain arrives.

And she will no longer be visible
and so nothing will be seen
except her hair, ruffled by the wind
like a ball of seaweed unravelling itself,
and perhaps also grains of insipid salt.

15

You are deluded,
like a little bird
lost in a snowy forest that reaches
all the way to the chests of Tagore,
Whitman and Jammes [sic],
who are replacing the Christ figure hanging over your bed,
since it isn't the old age of the world;
nor that of the day that is already thousands of years old,
stroking its beard as thick
and white as oblivion,

like hope and like haze on hot mornings,
over there, on top of all the mountains,
a mpanandro is consulting the stars
and smoking a clay pipe.

It is her youth, my child,
her eternal youth
is changing shape—
perhaps because of the songs of the songwriters you love
who invent for you religions
in this bottomless silence
home to pillars and rivers,
and to the living and the dead—
she is no more than the shadow of all things past
and listens only to the present.

16

There are countless rusted hands—
waves, shadows, smoke—
that weed and layer
in a thicket of raspberry bushes
covered in grasses taller than Rapeto³⁵⁰
from which blind birds emerge.

What will they harvest, once weary?
What will there be between their fingers of wind?
Soft berries, so red that they are black,
have already become hundreds and thousands of mushrooms
here on this riverside, there are no boatmen
to ferry all these baskets of nocturnal fruit.

17

³⁵⁰ A well-known mythical giant in Madagascar. Legend has it that the island is Rapeto's left footprint.

The black glazier
whose countless eyeballs no one has ever seen
and on whose shoulders no one has ever climbed;
the slave, decorated with beads
as strong as Atlas,
and who carries the seven heavens upon his head:
it is looking like thousands of rivers of clouds will carry him away,
the rivers already soaking his loincloth.

Thousands and thousands of fragments of glass
fall from his hands,
but bounce back up towards his forehead
bruised by the mountains
where the winds are born.

And you witness his suffering every day
and his endless labours;
you witness his agony when mud falls on him
once the sea conches call from the walls of the East,
but you no longer feel compassion for him,
nor even remember that he suffers again
every time the sun sinks.

18

You have just re-read Virgil,
you have also just listened to the children
greeting the new moon
and the tales and fables of those who are no longer here.

Is this the time for peasants
o heart begging for rest,
o heart caught in the sun like a boulder?

The shepherds? They are not here.
Their flocks? Look at those wild goats

with horns full of mist.

Their staffs? See how the treetops are one.

The shepherds over there are climbing the sky.

There are fresh grasses under their feet,
there are fruits yet to come into being around them,
and hidden springs that they seek.

And you, and you, you believe yourself to be Corydon
but there, in front of you, there appears to be an Alexis
playing the flute
from which all of the branches are derived.

19

One day there will be a young songwriter
who will fulfil your forbidden wish.
For he has found your books,
which are as rare as subterranean flowers—
your books were written for a hundred friends,
not for one, or for a thousand.

In the shadowy patch where he will read you,
merely by the glow of his heart your own will beat again,
he will not believe you
in the tranquil swells
that will still fill sunless depths,
nor in the sand, nor in the red earth,
nor underneath the boulders swallowed by mosses
that stretch out behind his back
as far as the home of the living,
blind and deaf since the Genesis.

He will lift his head
and will swear that it is there above,

with the stars and the winds,
that your tomb has been built.

20

How often relieved by another
and how often labouring alone
were those working the land above
in the streaming light?

What seeds did they sow,
what stems did they plant,
in the kingdom of the wind
and terraced mountains?

Gone to which faraway place,
behind what foliage
and what tall grasses
on the edges of the evening?

Sucking at a spring of black waters,
watercress and mint,
and there, lying down,
looking up at the budding stars.

Until you blossom,
o red and black gladioli flowers,
and until daylight loots
the area of the rice growers, high up in the sky.

21

She who was born before the light—
is it now her seventh day,
now, as it was yesterday and as it will always be,

yet to come, and already gone?

She is born again, though,
with the birds' sleep
and while the white stones are hiding
in the only passageway there is, deserted by does
like the road where silence runs.

But you see nothing of her, other than her hundreds and thousands of eyes,
her triangular snake-eyes
that open one by one
in the lianas of the sky.

22

Beside stagnant shadows,
over ditches,
hard and naked as boulders
but where eager grasses grow,
there are a multitude of fishermen lining up
and casting out their lines.

And on mountaintops rounding over
like ripening fruits,
as far as valleys lengthening and becoming more moist
than melons,
there are flights of quiet birds
and a blind streak of light—
both startling the fishes
so they do not bite.

Gods of luck
who worry about nothing,
the fishermen call out to each other in their shadow-voices
about spreading out the nets,
to return to the sea

these silver and scarlet fishes
that wriggle, uncaught, all over the sky.

23

Hobbling
like a lame cow
or a powerful bull
with its four legs cut off,
a mother orb-weaver spider comes out of the ground
and crawls up the wall
then hangs, with some difficulty, over a tree.

Spraying its silk that carries on the wind
it builds a home that kisses the sky,
casting a net all over the world above.

Where are the birds with rich plumage?
Where are the singers of the sun?
—A light is bursting from their eyes, dead with sleep,
in amongst the swinging lianas,
reviving their dreams and echoes
in this game of hide and seek of fireflies,
which become a cluster of stars
to avoid the orb-weaver spider's trap
that the horns of a frisky calf will tear down.

24

What fruits, what clusters
have dropped into the grass
and are now hidden by twigs?

What cut gemstones
are mixed up amongst the grit

covered in thick fog?

In hands calloused
and tough like bread
eaten up by the heat of sun,
colourless hands
with webbed fingers,
here are thousands of ox-dung torches
looking for what was lost
here on earth
with roots in the middle of a field of creeping grass,
providing for all that the eyes can see.

25

Mica, sparkling glasses
—lenses for the short- or long-sighted?—
velvet pupils,
smooth as the white skin of lilies
and folding more easily than a child's fingernail.

The winds are born on the other side of the mountains
and crawl as far as here, where the plants plundered
then abandoned by them
are sleeping.

A flash of light runs after them,
as far as the desert of stars
strewn with mica and glasses,
with velvet pupils
silently shining
and pointing to a pathway overgrown with grass
transected by rivers full of pebbles,
under this one-eyed moon
which is tottering
and will be lost with the smallest blinking of its lashes.

You built a tower in the wind
 and then sat with your knees up on the water,
 o faceless queen,
 with a crown whose tip
 provokes what-will-become-rain
 and whose misty diamonds
 are made of stars, and stars only.

O good soul of changing things,
 o, by turns, sister and daughter
 of the newborn moon
 on the edge of a field,
 you have built in the wind
 and live on the water,
 just like my dreams of wisdom!

What would the sudden
 fall of our kingdom do to us?
 Like your tower, like my own,
 like the cheat that our feet are treading on,
 this joy that makes our eyes twinkle
 even if it soon dries up,
 will it not return to us different and new?

Sisters of silence in sadness,
 flowers that have nothing but their beauty
 and their isolation,
 flowers—pieces of the earth's heart
 beating in harmony with their home—
 are they sleeping here or dreaming,

here, where their luck runs out?

The fingers
that needed nothing of them but their youth.
All fingers have already held each other
in the warm cleanliness of sheets—
except for mine, which are now very wizened,
and used for handling
delicate things.

My lips also brush against the flowers,
the flowers are becoming harder to know
and more beautiful, and suddenly bold.

And I hear,
in amongst the breath of the grasses,
of the flowers' last whispers;
how pitiful they will be
without their peaceful perfumes, o Lord,
which run away with their life!

28

Listen to the daughters of the rain
who run after each other, singing
and sliding down the rafters of clay
or grasses
that cover the houses of the living.

They are singing
and their songs burn
into sobbing,
into whispers...
Perhaps to hear better
the call of this bird that moves you.

A lonesome bird in the night
who has no fear of abduction by the mermaids?
O miracle! O unexpected gift!
Why are you back so late?
Has another taken your home
while you followed a dream till the ends of the earth?

29

There is springwater
which gushes over there in the unknown,
but which dampens the air
that you drink,
and you long to see it
beyond this mighty boulder
that came loose from some nameless star.

You look down,
and your fingers stroke the sand.
And you suddenly remember your childhood,
memories from when it was happy,
in particular the simple but striking line:
“la vierge aux sept douleurs”.

And there is other springwater you can
see, gushing endlessly under your eyes
but which increases your thirst:
your shadow
—the shadow of your dreams—
becomes seven
and detaches from you,
weighing down on a night already full.

30

Are all these anticipations in vain,
they that would give us wings
and promise
that we will seduce some Martian woman one day?

In vain, too, the dream
that caused the fall of Icarus
more than the sun
that drank the marvellous wax?

But it is a certain triumph
already announced by all of these signals
passed between the earth and the sky
on the edge of sleep:

here in these cities of ours, of the living,
even the most humble of huts
respond to flares
from stars that have just given birth.

*

*from Jean-Luc*³⁵¹

³⁵¹ Fragments of Jean-Luc Raharimanana's *Enlacement(s)* (a triptyque: *Des ruines*, *Obscena*, and *Il n'y a plus de pays*), which I have translated. Please note: a space of just one line between linguistic units in the translated text reflects such a space in the source text; a space of two lines between linguistic units in the translated text, however, indicates where I have made a cut. Where lines are justified in the translated text, this follows the same in the source text. Likewise, when lines end and begin again on the line below, I have simply followed Raharimanana's cue in the source text. I have inserted numbers (1-3) to indicate where each book in the triptych begins. The dot dot dots (...) are Raharimanana's.

From where I whisper, my ruins are magnificent.³⁵²

No, that is not acceptable, *pacification*, my memory must be of science, my memory must be of progress. Humanity. Peace. Science. Progress. Fine paintings. Truly. Fine paintings. Humanity. Peace. Science. Progress.

Hideous monster that I am, decimate me in the name of order and peace, and after I am beheaded, free me and instill in me science and culture - whatever it is necessary for me to understand, whatever will allow me to progress, to emerge, to join civilization, to democratise myself...

Here I am before you.³⁵³

To be forgotten: any sentiment oozing from my smashed-up land, from my land, from my flesh. Forget. Forget Moramanga. Forget Manakara. Forget Ambiky. Also Ambiky, Manakara, Moramanga, all of which mean nothing to anyone. And my land and my island. And all the awful things that permeate me and my fetid memories.³⁵⁴

I must settle, stop myself from thinking. Keep away from the vertiginous obscenity of my history...

Not think of the child. Not summon the memories...³⁵⁵

My share of responsibility in this entirely relative misfortune, due to my denial of reality and my chronic inability to face the new global order.

Learn Chinese.

And smile.

Smile.

Do you hear my smile, now?³⁵⁶

³⁵² *Des ruines*, p. 6.

³⁵³ *Ibid*, p. 7.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p. 8.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p. 9.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid*. p. 27.

Silence: the space I must invest in, not knowing how to conduct myself in the midst of all the independence given to me, the funds disbursed, the assistance lavished.³⁵⁷

I am gratitude, daughter of closed lips and unuttered misfortunes, I lower my eyes and I kiss hands, I stop looking, and I smile.

Smile.³⁵⁸

From where I write, the unacceptable must prove itself to be unacceptable...³⁵⁹

From where I write, scandal must prove itself to be scandal, a cry must be explained, and I am resourceful, I do not approach the ears that are listening to me head-on, I must respect the sensitivities of my readers, not traumatise with African stories that ruffle their consciences, my words dance, don't they?³⁶⁰

In the night, late, bursts of gunfire, we danced on the braziers of burnt-out buses.³⁶¹

I still have many such stories, but it tires me to think of them, it's so far away now, the past has taken blood from my veins and doesn't know how to sign itself on my face; I'd have liked for people to be able to read the welt of my history in my features; in my face, in my skin, merely by seeing me...

But I know only how to keep quiet...

³⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 30.

³⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 39.

³⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 45.

³⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 51.

³⁶¹ Ibid, p. 55.

From where I am, to denounce would be to incite hatred. To denounce wouldn't be very literary.
Not very poetic.³⁶²

2

What enters through the mouth. Kills me. What enters through the mouth. Kills me. What enters
through the mouth. Kills me. What enters through the mouth that twists me that kills me.

I am too thirsty. I think. I am too thirsty. I think. And I descend into the hole of my hole where I
grind myself down, I writhe, I have nothing really I have nothing but my vomit. I grind myself
down. I twist myself. I have nothing really I have nothing but my vomit.³⁶³

I come from the South, I.³⁶⁴

I took honey today from a smile that leaned in towards me, I took honey today, there was smoke
that took me by the eyes, acrid, I'd been yearning for tears and memories, embers crackled under
the ashes, it was cold weather, acrid, cold, she, she...³⁶⁵

Whipping yeast from the white to rise, egg of course, turned into meringue, light in flavour, muscles
standing out, the sweetness of vanilla, over there on the island, the floating island, Haïti or some
other outcrop of cheerful greenery, the red currant island, split and broken-up pomegranate, greedy
detour and the lips to be licked, three four euros, two three dollars, a vanilla slice of things
forgotten...³⁶⁶

It's a time of honey for me, my tongue drowsy on her stammering slit.³⁶⁷

I. Don't you forget it. I come from the South. I.³⁶⁸

³⁶² Ibid, p. 56.

³⁶³ *Obscena*, p. 3.

³⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 7.

³⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 9.

³⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 17.

³⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 23.

³⁶⁸ Ibid, p. 27.

The rage I have to pulverise. My violence. Softness is the child. Just softness. Nothing but softness.
Softness.³⁶⁹

What word under bomb won't explode reason?³⁷⁰

Aimless steps, an eye on the cobblestones, a dead bird, wings like flattened shadows, a hidden church, abandoned, its windows broken, a place at the end of a dead-end, private property, off-limits to street-sellers, a city on a reddish cross, a neighbourhood, I was only ever a distant figure, wandering...³⁷¹

South.³⁷²

That I may sleep at last, without all this filth.³⁷³

A few lines poured into the void, some fieriness, anger. Some vitrified glow in the blue shadow of the night...³⁷⁴

I am tired.³⁷⁵

One who has lived is much more sensitive to the wind, face in gashes of silence, and memory formed in flight...

³⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 35.

³⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 39.

³⁷¹ Ibid, p. 41.

³⁷² Ibid, p. 49.

³⁷³ Ibid, p. 56.

³⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 57.

³⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 59.

She, gashes of silence, face scarred by laughter that leaves.³⁷⁶

I have lived.³⁷⁷

3

Nothing is left of our dreams. I pass through these lands, ash is my path. I pass through these places where you've left yourself, your children are no longer there, your gaze moves amongst the leaves flying in the wind, you never settle, you are where I do not catch. Not yet. I turn over each leaf that enjoys attaching itself to my cheek, I turn over each leaf, and I tear it up, I must tear up all the leaves which mistake the features of your face. You are where I do not catch. Not yet. I'm coming to look for you because there is no longer a country in which to place hope, a country that replaces my belly from which you expelled yourself, a country that welcomes the steps you are taking towards your existence, a country where you lay your body, weary of being outside of my belly. I've been walking since childbirth. I've been walking since bones split and water broke. It is said that a child learns to walk. But I didn't teach you any of that. Your legs have hardened on their own, and your knees have lifted you up in good time. I just held you under the armpits, pushed you from behind, held you by a little finger and let go of you, I then had to relearn to walk, to no longer be gaze for you, to no longer be legs for you, to no longer be fall for you, to no longer be heart that skips a beat for you, to no longer be earth that deadens your run, that breathes when you stop, that comes to a standstill when you lie down.³⁷⁸

I'm coming to look for you.³⁷⁹

I.³⁸⁰

Some silence carried to the heart.

³⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 59.

³⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 61. (Page 60 is blank.)

³⁷⁸ *Il n'y a plus de pays*, p. 10.

³⁷⁹ Ibid. p. 11.

³⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 35.

A caress, the making of our skins.³⁸¹

The axe, heavy, on the filament of a breath from one mouth to another.

The axe, heavy, on the filament of a breath from my mouth to your mouth.

The axe, heavy, on the life that I spun on yours, from my belly to your belly, from my breath to your breath.³⁸²

Like everyone, we'll be abandoned.³⁸³

And I'll be in your shadow, mute, merged with the shadows of all those who refused naming.

I shan't name the breast that'll be desecrated.

I shan't name the belly that'll be dirtied.

I shan't name the milk that'll be turned bad.

I shan't name the child that I'll be carrying.

That I'll still be carrying.

That I'll carry

Forever.

My voice is already imprinted on your being, my scent, my odour, my flesh and my firmness...

I'll come and look for you, as you know.

Don't look in any book for what you already have in my flesh.

The beginnings of your world.³⁸⁴

I'm coming to look for you

a nothing.

³⁸¹ Ibid, p. 38.

³⁸² Ibid, p. 39.

³⁸³ Ibid, p. 41.

³⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 47.

A nothing nothing nothing nothing that one feels nothing nothing nothing nothing that would only ever be ire of the sensitive beyond reason / in the hour of wanderings and fleeing to the smithy of the senses.

I am unravelling the nets of mist. Threads and filaments that the winter wind brings back to my breath, to my face, to the impalpable oozing of my soul. I accept. I am no longer moving.

I am reducing myself to a chrysalis.³⁸⁵

They are there.³⁸⁶

Starting the abduction again.
Exposing in the square the
remains of an old
woman. Threads and filaments
that I tie to my
body, around my
body.

I am reducing myself to a chrysalis.³⁸⁷

They are there.³⁸⁸

Starting the abduction again.
Exposing the body of
a woman. Of any
woman.
Threads and filaments,
the envelope that I am

³⁸⁵ Ibid. p. 49.

³⁸⁶ Ibid. p. 51.

³⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 53.

³⁸⁸ Ibid. p. 55.

secreting.

I am reducing myself to a chrysalis.³⁸⁹

Mist is vanishing
me / I am
no more than
nothing, a
thing that rolls on the
ground / damp

And I am waiting for you / .³⁹⁰

To once again pull at the thread.³⁹¹

I have so much thirst waiting for the time when
mother becomes girl again, when girl becomes
mother again. By the sole link of the breath. Outside
of men's thirst for flesh. Outside of
men's hunger for flesh. Our bodies
/ prey. Our bodies / threat. Our bodies
outside predation. So much thirst waiting
for your fingers that will come and lift me
from the great scent of life.

I am no more than nothing, a thing that begins the world anew.³⁹²

In your breath.³⁹³

*

³⁸⁹ Ibid, p. 57.

³⁹⁰ Ibid, p. 59.

³⁹¹ Ibid, p. 61.

³⁹² Ibid, p. 62.

³⁹³ Ibid, p. 63.

*from Julia*³⁹⁴

³⁹⁴ Fragments of Julia Sørensen's *Cocon-fort*, which I have translated. Please note: a space of one line between linguistic units in the translated text here indicates where I have made a cut. Otherwise, when a line ends and begins again on the line below, I have simply followed Julia's cue in the source text.

I sense the presence of someone behind me. Near. Very near.

Too near. I continue to walk. I don't like it.

I accelerate. He accelerates. I slow down. He slows down. I stop.

I turn around.

He runs off.

My bag is open.

He left without my wallet. I call him, he turns. You forgot something.

He stands there for a moment.

I cough. He runs off even faster.³⁹⁵

The streets are cleaned by a tropical rain.³⁹⁶

Perhaps I am in the process of poisoning myself without knowing it.

Perhaps I am in the process of imprisoning myself without knowing it.³⁹⁷

Today I've spoken to no one.

I think I hear a helicopter, it's a van.

I'm going to sign myself up to a language conversation class.

The view is breathtaking.³⁹⁸

It's raining so hard that all visibility is lost. Just like that.

Water seeps in through the window frames. A puddle appears under the front door.

The drops kept outside drum vehemently on the windows and roof, I can no longer hear anything else.³⁹⁹

In security. Insecurity.

Fences, barbed wire, electrified. High voltage. The crisis and others things must stay outside, thieves, bandits. Wall. Guard. As for the angel,⁴⁰⁰ dismissed due to budgetary constraints.

I learned later that he'd been stealing from the cash box.⁴⁰¹

The palace is occupied.

³⁹⁵ Ibid.

³⁹⁶ Ibid, p. 8.

³⁹⁷ Ibid, p. 9.

³⁹⁸ Ibid, p. 10.

³⁹⁹ Ibid, p. 10.

⁴⁰⁰ Referring to somebody working as domestic staff... a play on the French phrase *ange gardien* (guardian angel), following the previous word in the French: Gardien (Guard).

⁴⁰¹ Ibid, p. 11.

It happened overnight, an explosion, then the rest.

Leave everything, now, later or never.

The windows are shaking.⁴⁰²

Concerto of car horns. The city wakes up. I wonder if that's a good sign.

The firefighters are at it as well.

The cockerel from next door, woken from his sleep by the sirens, sings off-key in revenge.⁴⁰³

Weather forecasting doesn't apply to this place.⁴⁰⁴

The lake is a mirror.

The birds are talking in the tree that rises between the view and the window.

Rumour has it that a tunnel has been discovered between the palace and the bank.

Lizards are eating the mosquitos.

Everyone seems relieved.⁴⁰⁵

Fireworks ring out like shots. Soldiers are everywhere, it's difficult to know if they're happy or not.

I ask for directions from one. Useless, he's completely inebriated.⁴⁰⁶

The sunset is like no other.⁴⁰⁷

The city is a made up of an assortment of hills. Exhaust fumes hide in every hollow. Rubbish piles up on the side of the road.⁴⁰⁸

The wind is blowing hard and the shutters are flapping.

It is very dark.

The crickets aren't tired. Nor are the horn-honkers, of all types of vehicle.⁴⁰⁹

A man shouts things that I don't understand. The expression on his face suggests it isn't pleasant.

Sometimes I'm in no hurry at all to learn this language.⁴¹⁰

⁴⁰² Ibid, p. 12.

⁴⁰³ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid, p. 13.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid, p. 13.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid, p. 15.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid, p. 16.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid, p. 16.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid, p. 17.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid, p. 18.

I don't want to live along the *route circulaire*.⁴¹¹

I don't like noises that I can't identify.

Every shadow in the garden could be someone with bad intentions.

Apparently intruders poison dogs.

I don't have a dog, but I don't like that idea.⁴¹²

All this calm worries me. Worry kills worry. Time passes anyway.⁴¹³

No thanks, I'm waiting for a taxi.⁴¹⁴

I don't want to hurt anyone. Despite what I may feel. I don't like having my back to the wall, except when sleeping.⁴¹⁵

The whole city is turned off, all at once.

I have candles, but no matches.

I stay in the dark behind the window to watch the lightning strike.

Even with practice I jump at every rumble of thunder.⁴¹⁶

Winter begins when spring ends.⁴¹⁷

Warning notice. The cyclonic disturbance has a female name. It is no longer the season. I shut the shutters as a precaution.

I have no excuse, I could invent a thousand.

The rain does me a favour. It erases the horizon.⁴¹⁸

The road becomes liquid in places, it comes up to my knees. Cars are now almost less useful than pirogues. The lower part of the city is flooded by the upper part.⁴¹⁹

⁴¹¹ A ring road around the centre of Antananarivo, infamous for its traffic jams.

⁴¹² Ibid, p. 18.

⁴¹³ Ibid, p. 19.

⁴¹⁴ Ibid, p. 20.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid, p. 21.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid, p. 22.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid, p. 22.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid, p. 24.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid.

I wait.⁴²⁰

The many people sitting along the pavement, waiting maybe four or five hours before being able to buy a litre of cooking oil at a cheaper price than can be found elsewhere.⁴²¹

Any young woman worthy of the name must paint her toenails in a brightish colour.⁴²²

I'm out of credit on my phone.

Not very practical.

The neighbours ate their cat, which died from an accidental hanging, so as not to waste the meat.⁴²³

The police smell of alcohol, even from far off.⁴²⁴

The spiders hanging in the trees are improbably big.

I observe them from afar, they're threatening.

I keep them in my line of vision when I pick up a shopping trolley.

The car park is half empty.⁴²⁵

A woman is not telling me the truth, and I know it.⁴²⁶

A tiny female chameleon clings to the end of a branch swaying in the wind.⁴²⁷

The forest is incredibly green.

The road is never-ending.

The mud is red like the water and the bricks.⁴²⁸

I don't know how to get to where I need to go whilst still avoiding the lake.

I'm late.

I take all gnats to be mosquitoes.

A close-up image of a man's brain is all over the front page of the newspaper.⁴²⁹

⁴²⁰ Ibid.

⁴²¹ Ibid, p. 27.

⁴²² Ibid.

⁴²³ Ibid.

⁴²⁴ Ibid, p. 28.

⁴²⁵ Ibid, p. 29.

⁴²⁶ Ibid, p. 33.

⁴²⁷ Ibid, p. 35.

⁴²⁸ Ibid.

⁴²⁹ Ibid.

I no longer read the newspapers. Or listen to the radio.

And still I don't escape the rumours.⁴³⁰

Cobblestones are placed in the road to block all vehicles from passing, a burnt-out car is stuck to the pavement.

The taxi turns around, I continue on foot. A man accompanies me. He reassures me, tells me that I'm not risking anything as long as I don't start running. I pretend not to be afraid. Passers-by are agitated, sometimes aggressive. A detonation startles me.⁴³¹

A wrecked car lies in the middle of the cobblestones.

Charred.

A rubbish skip has been overturned a few metres on. The lingering smell is not pleasant, I hold my breath for as long as I can.

The flies are aggressive.

I rejoice to arrive somewhere.⁴³²

The night appears calm. I want to sleep.

The shutters keep on creaking.

I turn off my alarm clock.⁴³³

The flowers are exposed to a Sunday sun.

Everybody is well-dressed, it is as if the week gone by never existed. There is not a sound. The air is light.

A few gusts of wind offered up, here and there.⁴³⁴

The road is dusty. Next to me a woman is squatting, depositing her excrement behind a rubbish skip. She wears no shoes, just a long red coat that she pulls up to prevent it from touching the ground.⁴³⁵

The sky keeps changing.

The clouds bring to mind the credits of a certain cartoon show.

⁴³⁰ Ibid, p. 37.

⁴³¹ Ibid.

⁴³² Ibid, p. 39.

⁴³³ Ibid.

⁴³⁴ Ibid, p. 40.

⁴³⁵ Ibid.

A man warns me that sometimes when he gives food to street kids, their parents will accuse him of poisoning them, to get money out of him. He advises me to do nothing.⁴³⁶

An elderly politician has been arrested in a luxury hotel.

In the photos he is shirtless, hands on his head.

The piano plays by itself. I don't know this melody.⁴³⁷

A passer-by explains to me that the canal was infested with alligators before it was filled with tons of waste. Bad or worse.

I wait for news that never comes.⁴³⁸

Many people gather in a place once ravaged by a fire.

Guards monitor the entry point, access is restricted.

The road is blocked by traffic jams.

I have stomach cramps.⁴³⁹

I have no idea about many things.⁴⁴⁰

In a nightmare, a child shoots at me from a rooftop. A bullet settles in my thigh. I manage to extract it.

I'm not really in any pain, I'm bleeding a lot.

A woman takes me to a minister who might be able to help me. He is wearing a dark suit and cowboy boots adorned with red and yellow flames.

We head to a secret doorway situated behind a row of mailboxes.

The woman and the minister disappear through the opening, I hear people on the stairs. Three men approach, I quickly shut the door and stand in front so they can't see it. I can't quite make out the face of one of them. I don't understand what they're saying.⁴⁴¹

I no longer want to go to restaurants.

I take back possession of my kitchen.⁴⁴²

⁴³⁶ Ibid, p. 41.

⁴³⁷ Ibid, p. 42.

⁴³⁸ Ibid.

⁴³⁹ Ibid, p. 44.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 45.

⁴⁴¹ Ibid, p. 46.

⁴⁴² Ibid, p. 47.

A naked women is walking along the main road. She doesn't appear to be going anywhere in particular.

She's wearing something on her head, like clothes rolled up in a ball.

Someone near me says she is mad.⁴⁴³

A silent march makes a lot of noise, in the end.⁴⁴⁴

The newspaper talks of an impending catastrophe if there's not some form of external intervention in the near future. The outlook isn't good.

I'm struggling to imagine what the worst could look like.⁴⁴⁵

A dragonfly crashes onto the tiles. It picks itself up, then lands in a cobweb, then manages to free itself only to get a wing stuck under the bedroom door. I catch it with a straw hat and let it out of the living room window.⁴⁴⁶

I stop in a forest to sleep. Every sound is strange. The room is damp. I start to wonder if there are mosquitos. I wake up next to an insect with colourful stripes that I've never seen anywhere, even in a book.⁴⁴⁷

The road passes through an area known for its gangs. There are multiple police roadblocks.

The houses seem to have been built out of cardboard.

I don't stop.⁴⁴⁸

The stars are not in the same place in the sky.

The nights are cool.

There is no more noise.

I get up early, someone is picking me up.

The sand is cold.

I don't want to leave.⁴⁴⁹

Sometimes everything seems perfect.⁴⁵⁰

⁴⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 48.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 50.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 51.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 54.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid.

I meet with traffic jams again and my lungs suddenly shrink.

I get back to work, even though I don't feel like it.⁴⁵¹

A full moon helps winter set in.

I forget to dress accordingly and spend the day shivering.

The lane is neither familiar nor strange to me.

I've lost a pair of shoes. I'm trying to imagine who might be wearing them right now. My feet are huge, by comparison.⁴⁵²

Two men explode with their car parked up near a building, having botched the programming of a handmade bomb.⁴⁵³

They're not looking where they're going. I narrowly avoid them.⁴⁵⁴

I routinely miss the turning that leads to the building where I live. My imagination doesn't always serve me well.⁴⁵⁵

Someone explains to me that if I have a missed call from an unknown number and I call the number back, I risk detonating a bomb and landing myself in big trouble. Someone else assures me that this is true. *The Truth*⁴⁵⁶ is also the name of a newspaper.⁴⁵⁷

I give different answers each time I'm asked the same question.

A man mentions to me that there will be violent clashes in the coming week as if he's talking of the passage of an area of high pressure.

My neighbour and his organ haven't made progress, sometimes they irritate me.

A woman admits to me that she's a little afraid.

I've still not worked out how cockroaches manage to sneak into the fridge.

It's already 3pm and I've still done almost nothing.

Today the sky is a dazzling blue.⁴⁵⁸

⁴⁵¹ Ibid.

⁴⁵² Ibid, p. 56.

⁴⁵³ Ibid, p. 62.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 63.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 64.

⁴⁵⁶ See: <https://laverite.mg/>.

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 67.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 69.

A woman tells me her sister was responsible for a man being arrested a long time ago. The man in question is very vindictive.

The mangoes are juicy, the sun is beating down. Mosquitos have arrived en masse and I'm covered in bites.

I don't like eating in a restaurant when it's deserted.

There are certain things I'd rather not know.⁴⁵⁹

The weather is perfect. I'm invited to a barbecue in a garden. The view is incredible. The other guests are surprising. I don't know the person celebrating their birthday. I'm happy to be there. I make plans.⁴⁶⁰

By the side of the road, a joyful crowd reburies the dead.

I don't dare stop.⁴⁶¹

At night, bandits attack taxis-brousse⁴⁶² and other things.

It's no longer pleasant to drive on main roads after dark, says the newspaper.⁴⁶³

A man spends the whole day cleaning a swimming pool in which nobody swims.⁴⁶⁴

In the middle of nowhere in the bush, a man from another country lives alone.

He bakes his own bread each morning.

He doesn't eat honey in the summertime because waterlilies emit a toxic and paralysing substance, he says.

He has a very large library of books about plants.⁴⁶⁵

It starts to rain. I go outside in my pyjamas to check that I shut the car windows. The man sitting in the doorway makes me jump. He has a bible in his hands. I hurry to get back inside.

I can't sleep.⁴⁶⁶

I'm invited to dinner at the home of a woman who drinks just champagne.

She buys it on the black market. The other guests talk of burglaries and massacres.

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 70.

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁶¹ Ibid, p. 72.

⁴⁶² Minibuses used for public transport across Madagascar.

⁴⁶³ Ibid, p. 73.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 74.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 76.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 80.

I'm not feeling completely comfortable.

Someone is asleep on the living room sofa.⁴⁶⁷

A man *covers his wife with projectiles*, on the first page of the newspaper. To do this, he uses a kalashnikov.⁴⁶⁸

Three lorries full of armed soldiers overtake me, they're heading to the city centre. I decide to turn round and go home. It's raining even harder than on other days. I find it hard to imagine that at this very moment people could be skiing. A policeman whistles with all his lungs, I don't know if I should stop, or if it's for someone else.⁴⁶⁹

I enjoy going to the fruit and vegetable market.

A taxi driver asks me where I'm from, if I come from... [original ellipsis]

I answer. It's not what he thought. He's relieved. He doesn't at all like people from... [original ellipsis]. Before letting me out of the vehicle he advises me to be careful.⁴⁷⁰

Soon there'll be no more flour. Nor oil or butter. The cost of petrol will be increasing sharply. I haven't stocked up on anything.⁴⁷¹

My car sat unused for two weeks. Rats have settled under the bonnet, making their nest there. I check that no cable has been nibbled at.

I set off. The colourful and dirty streets pass by in a joyous disorder.

I sometimes feel at home.⁴⁷²

A woman stops me. Her clothes are undone, one of her breasts protrudes from underneath her rags. She's carrying a baby. She hands me a medical prescription, with an amount underlined, equivalent to a coke in a grocery store.

Later I realise that she does the same thing every day.⁴⁷³

*...the boat overturns.....six pirates are in the water.....*⁴⁷⁴

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid, p. 82.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 93.

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 94.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid, p. 95.

⁴⁷² Ibid.

⁴⁷³ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 96.

A tropical storm has battered half of the coastline.
The embassy is starting to send out warning messages again.
I don't know if I'm going out or not.
I'm ill, I drink black tea and coke with no bubbles.
It rains, it rains, it rains.⁴⁷⁵

Someone dies.
I cry, then I forget.
I can buy any medication without a prescription.
If I don't sleep, I don't risk not waking up.⁴⁷⁶

A tiny gecko sits on the kitchen wall, it can't be more than three centimetres long. I hope its size
doesn't prevent it from hunting mosquitos.
I finally find the time to read.⁴⁷⁷

Rubbish is being taken by the wind. The sky is grey. I walk aimlessly, taxi drivers hail me as I pass.
I wait for someone in the wrong place. He's waiting somewhere else.
Neither of us knows what's happened. I take a few photos, then leave when the rain starts to fall.⁴⁷⁸

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 98.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 100.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 101.

My schedule is gradually aligning with that of the television. Everything seems absurd to me, I swallow and I swallow. Meal tray, tablets, effervescent tablets. Series. Series. Rehabilitation. Amusing series. Meal tray. Tablets.⁴⁷⁹

Everything is to be restarted.

I try to engage in what is beyond me.

The man in the straw hat.

Time is blurry, everything is mixed up.

No memory of the above.⁴⁸⁰

I walk.

I take to the steering wheel, then the road.⁴⁸¹

The pavements are no less irregular than before.

The rainy season is approaching and I rejoice at the arrival of the first mangoes.

Not everything is to be restarted.

I am afraid. I walk, and walk.⁴⁸²

*

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid, p. 107.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 110.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid.

⁴⁸² Ibid.

*from Johary*⁴⁸³

⁴⁸³ Fragments of Johary Ravaloson's *Antananarivo intime: carnet de crise*, which I have translated. Please note: a space of just one line between linguistic units in the translated text reflects such a space in the source text; a space of two lines between linguistic units in the translated text indicates where I have made a cut. Lines are justified in the translated text just as they are in the source text. Likewise, new chapters are marked in the translated text with Roman numerals (I-V) as they are in the source text.

I – ANTANANARIVO, 21 MARCH 2009

Postcard from Antananarivo

Since then, we've been getting used to - and not getting used to - an apparently lawless city, adrift.

Antananarivo, city of a thousand little shops, is closing its doors and carrying a thousand trash cans. The thousand alleys and the thousand staircases linking the various neighbourhoods of the lower town and the upper town are being partitioned off by a thousand roadblocks where a thousand robbers lie in wait. In the city of a thousand sighs, only a thousand hate-filled, vengeful rumours can now be heard. And since the army entered the fray, the city of a thousand noises is no longer surprised by a thousand detonations.⁴⁸⁴

I could hear my children in the next room mumbling, half-awake. I was going to wake them anyway soon, to get them ready for school. Though I knew they might be sent straight home. The school had unexpectedly been closed in recent days because of what had been happening at night, or because of what might happen during the day. Impossible to predict. I sent them in all the same. It was a school day.

As for me, I went to work. Technically speaking, we've been partially furloughed since February. But I still go in every day at the normal time. I read as many newspapers as I can for some idea of what's going on, and I go online looking for job offers abroad.

I had a mid-morning meeting. Before heading off, I called to ask for confirmation that it was going ahead - as appointments are often postponed because of insecurity. I then had to decide on a route to take. Since the beginning of this crisis, it's been necessary to avoid certain parts of town... place du 13 Mai, where supporters of Andry Rajoelina might be demonstrating; place de Mahamasina for those of Marc Ravalomanana... and also to avoid the area around the ministries where there might be trouble, around the army General Staff's headquarters in case there's a change of command, and around certain poorer neighbourhoods like 67 Hectares, Ambanidia, Andraharo and Behoririka, where looters might gather. The roadblocks are also best avoided...

With my little Chinese vespa I sometimes get through where cars can't go, and at each crossroads I see either military police in ninja uniforms - just with their armour-disguises they're frightening - or a group of andri-maso-pokonolona, so-called (civilians assuming responsibility for security). Either way you negotiate, you pay, and you pass through... or you make a U-turn... or you've

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 5.

already made three or four U-turns and you can't take it anymore and you force your way through, at your own risk... the worst I've had so far is a pair of flip-flops thrown at me and a few insults from a group of civilians, fortunately unarmed – *Manao bodongeriny, tsy manaja vaboaka, miseho azy ho inona?* Complete idiot, no respect for your own people, who do you think you are?⁴⁸⁵

And fihavanana? How can the age-old ties in society be maintained when age-old values (that is to say: a respect for one's elders, a spirit of moderation, an inclination towards dialogue) are vanishing?

The truth is that the famous fihavanana has been perverted for a long time, with people invoking it only when it serves them.⁴⁸⁶

II – ANTANANARIVO, IN DAYS OF RAIN

I woke up racked by hunger. The stars of Antananarivo shone in the sleeping plain. I tried to guess where exactly certain darker patches were, by taking my bearings from the arteries of light. These now stretched out for many kilometres and, whilst in clear weather individual lights might be confused with stars on the horizon, they also helped in showing up black holes that might correspond to woodland, marshland or the remnants of ancient rice fields escaping, for now, the tentacles of construction; or in locating neighbourhoods tucked behind elevated land; or where there had been a JIRAMA (the national electricity company) power cut.

That night, the sky was overcast. I had just dropped off my one clients of the evening and, to relieve my boredom, I parked at a special spot from where you can see a large part of the city. By putting my face right up against the cold windowpane, I thought I might have been able to pick out a few stars in the gloom – too distant, alas, to give me hope. Closer by... no sign of life announcing a possible client. I got out to stretch my legs. There was a brisk, cold wind from the direction of the haute ville⁴⁸⁷, heralding a blessing from the ancestors. After a few fleeting movements, I got back inside my cab. When the first drops of rain fell, I turned the headlights on and released the brake to descend gently towards lower constellations.⁴⁸⁸

After a few night owls who emerged out of the club and quickly got back into their own vehicles,

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid, pp. 6-9 (pp. 7, 8 are photographs).

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 9.

⁴⁸⁷ Upper town (the oldest neighbourhood on a hill in the city centre).

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid, p. 13.

a couple of vazahas⁴⁸⁹ finally made their way over to my side of the road. I greeted them in my most cordial tone.

—We drop Madame off in Antsakaviro and you leave me in Ivandry says the man.

I gave a price, a touch excessive. They got in the back without complaining. I smiled at the ancestors thinking of my belly soon to be filled, while releasing the brake.

—Sorry, what side of Antsakaviro is that?

—Near Piment Cabaret, do you know where that is?

—Certainly.⁴⁹⁰

At the exit of the tunnel d’Ambanidia, the sudden return of torrential rain gave us a start. It was all flooded. I accelerated gently, barely able to see anything. My meagre headlights could only light up the water. The cab briefly split a river, you might say, in descending towards Antsakaviro. The water was right up. It streaked down the windscreen, onto the windows, giving now a sense of precarious intimacy inside. On the back seat, they had given up kissing each other. A little while ago, like all lovers, they must have felt alone in the world. Now, behind a curtain of rain, there were three of us.⁴⁹¹

III – ANTANANARIVO, IN DAYS OF SMOKE

Ankorondrano, Monday 26 January 2009

8h20

—Hello, Monsieur Johary.

—Euh..., hello. How are things?

—Good, Monsieur.

—All calm and quiet around here?

—Yes, but we’ll be staying closed!

8h55

⁴⁸⁹ ≈ *white foreigners*

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid, pp. 13-14.

⁴⁹¹ Ibid, p. 14.

—Hello?

—Hello, Monsieur Johary? It's Lanto.

—Ah, hi!

—Hi. I'm calling because I'm not sure I'll be able to make it in to work today. There are roadblocks all over and no buses. I've made it into town, my neighbours gave me a lift, but you can't get across the place du 13 Mai. The whole city seems to be cut in two.

10h35

—Here a second!

—Were you speaking to me, Monsieur?

—Yes, please get in... Tell me, what is that, the big black smoke?⁴⁹²

IV – ANTANANARIVO IN SEPTEMBER

It's not as cold as it was a few days ago.

Less than a month ago you could see the long chain of the Ankaratra, marking the southern border of the central highlands, all white in the morning frosts. Amongst the early risers, some - those who had slept in houses with fireplaces, in comfortable clothes, in truth a privileged few - experienced the cold as a sort of marvellous exotic sensation; others, all the others, waited... adding on extra layers of old clothes, bringing out grandmothers' hot water bottles, improvising with dangerous heating methods using Chinese equipment designed for homes made for higher temperatures.⁴⁹³

Nature, in its tropical clemency, has only taken away a few homeless people... elderly who were already elderly; a few malnourished children, the few too many mouths - and Hervé, the madman in the market at Alakamisy. In the media, there have been just a few paragraphs devoted to the "snow" on the Ankaratra. All the newspaper columns, adverts aside, remain occupied - in the way that toilets are occupied when someone is inside; it's been like this since the beginning of the year - by the political movements' struggle for power.⁴⁹⁴

⁴⁹² Ibid, p. 45.

⁴⁹³ Ibid, p. 57.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid, p. 57.

V - ANTANANARIVO, WHAT HAVE I BEEN DOING ALL THIS TIME?

I'm Medza. I have the almost-white, milky skin of redheads. Créole blood somewhere in there also no doubt pulls my hair colour in that direction. My origins are lost in the meanders of Imerina, where one cultivates one's colour away from the sun. But as well as the complexion, I have the smell of redheads. That's what they all say. A smell that drives them crazy and makes them feel more masculine. I can't hide it. My modest dresses and my white lamba can't hide it. They smell me. From some way off, for some.

I am nevertheless the Madame, the Ramatoa, of the pastor. My father entrusted me to him, when I was barely of age, supposedly to ward off sin. My husband looks after a bourgeois church in the upper town. His flock don't come to church to pray, but to perform. To strike deals and strut about in their latest stylish clothes. And my Pastor isn't fooling himself. He continues to preach the good word, to bring the comfort of faith. He is virtuous. We owe him respect.

He can't stop the back-biters from back-biting and the noises that do the rounds like their beautiful cars blazing around on the cobbles... that the child I walk around with has features that look too Indian to be the daughter of the Pastor, who has the round face and fat smile of the nouveau riche. That I have taken advantage of my husband's late meetings with the deacons and offered my perfumes to an aquiline nose. All this is true. And what? I failed. But I came back to my Pastor. He is a good man. We owe him respect. But it's true, too, that sometimes I like to see their noses snuffling around my skin.

The car was moving with no lights on in the adjacent street, slowly, no doubt with the engine off. Then, a violent explosion tore through the windscreen. A red flame pierced the thickness of the night before being swallowed up just as quickly by thick smoke. He hadn't even had time to think about slowing down. He never went fast anyway, never with the kids and his wife in the back. He didn't see shattered glass falling, just four wheels bouncing on the tarmac—which were blackened but intact in the intensity of the blast; they didn't look shredded at all—the bonnet that had cracked open a bit; and the interior, wide-open and sizzling. His wife in the back stifled a scream, the youngest had just fallen asleep on her knees. Next to her, the elder two stayed open-mouthed, turning their heads, together, hypnotised by the drama which was receding even before it had occurred.

No one said a thing. It was only a few minutes later that somebody, perhaps one of the girls, asked, *what did we just see?*⁴⁹⁵

*

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid, pp. 78-81.

*from Joey*⁴⁹⁶

⁴⁹⁶ My translation of a Facebook post by Joey Aresoa, from 10 March 2021. Please note: wherever Joey has begun a new line after the end of a sentence in the source text, I have followed suit in the translated text. The three lines before the very last line appear in exactly the same way in the source text.

10 March 2021

Vandalism is any act of destruction or damage to public or private property. Vandalism most often targets buildings and movable property, natural sites, documents or artistic works, and in particular everything that constitutes the identity of a culture, its heritage.

Wiki is not your friend.

It was a construction, made with tears, promises of the infinite, expectations revealed by a bit of charcoal.

It was a public asset, for anyone finding themselves in the hope of some, in the serenity of another.

It was a site where whatever it is to dream came rushing back.

It was a living document, vivacious, of protest at times, of disobedience often.

It was a work of art or not, of letters or words, a work of time. A message in a bottle that you pick up and bury.

It was an identity slowly smothered by asphalt and suddenly freed again in the upper reaches of the city and the invigorating horizon.

I left my own there, trusting in prayer.

It was me,

It was him,

It was her.

Their traces. In this now of ours, where cleaning and acting are the ultimate arguments.

*



497 © Nantenaina Fifaliana (image accompanying Joey's post; included here with Nantenaina's permission)

*fararano*⁴⁹⁸

⁴⁹⁸ from 'fara' (the last, offspring, children; an heir) and 'rano' (water, liquid). (Roughly March-April-May.)



March, 2015

fingers, hands—remember to look at people’s hands

*

March, 2013

___ on the road to Andavadoaka... eight hours between the ala⁴⁹⁹ and translucent green, *bearing with life*

*

1 March 2010

a boy on university road, 11pmish last week. On his back. ___ talking of stopping, the feeling one should; honestly hadn’t occurred to me

~

___ barely registering passing bullets... troubled by not being more alive to the danger, she says. And wishes she ___

*

3 March 2010, Antaninarenina

aching poverty, ___’s phrase...

stains by the Bank of Africa, this morning. (police put four bullets in a man’s chest and threw him in the back of a pickup *like a hunk of meat*). and the tiny paragraph in today’s ___: the elderly lady who died *discretely* in the arcade in Analakely, yesterday. she had lived there her whole life

~

flipflops on the tarmac near the entrance to the park in Ambohitovo. first droplets. running for a more normal reason

⁴⁹⁹ forest

∩
___'s description of levels, progressions; closer to God. (sketch indicating levels, arrow upwards.) later, passing her a fallen frangipani flower, turned down. doesn't want to give me *phantasmes*

*

early March 2010

The sounds of two [alleged] criminals getting shot yesterday. Outside, garden of the Café ___. A little column in today's ___. Tsaralalana. Bullets to the head and stomach.

∩

___'s assistant, __: *Rappelez-vous que nous avons le plus des intellectuels en Afrique...* [sketch of his hands gathered as if holding something, above a map of the world on which he'd been counting the money I owed him] ...*fusillades partout...*⁵⁰⁰

*

early March

3.21

Everything is dripping.

∩

11ish

at high speed along the *nouvelle route de la francophonie*:

67 Hectares from behind, filth
and water hyacinths

shy plants / shameplants / touch-me-nots

⁵⁰⁰ ≈ *Remember, we have the most intellectuals in all of Africa; ...shoot-outs all over the place...*

lovingkindness
and thunder at 11am

sweat-around-the-neck

a hidden dip

*a please be soft
because this is something really marvellous for me*

*

7 March 2017, Avaradoha

notes becoming damp, power cut

but still natural light

the clouds gathering all day, as Enawo slammed into the northeast, now thicker

Tandremo mila miomana isika ho any cyclone enawo arabo tsara ny fepetra fanambarana loza izay homena anao, henoy ny radio jereo ny television arovy ny ainao⁵⁰¹

*

8 March 2011, towards Ampasampito

by the Min. of Mines, golden puppy dead in road. eyes lolled. head arched on ground. light red blood [illegible]. No one sees to it. 500yds down rd... an old lady feeding herself from skip (hands to mouth, back and forth)

*

⁵⁰¹ Text message to my *Telecom Madagascar* (Telma) number from Madagascar's BNGRC, literally translated as 'National Office for the Management of Disasters Preparedness' (18:33, 7 March 2017). Message translates roughly as: *Be careful we need to prepare cyclone enawo is coming respect the advice about danger we give you listen to the radio watch the television protect your life.* The word "isika"—the inclusive "we" in Malagasy, as opposed to exclusive "we", "izahay"—lends the message an extra resonance.

8 March 2017, Avaradoha

Conversations on social media about floodwater in Tana. Two red flags now raised outside the fokontany⁵⁰².
An alarm sounding. Two worms on the terrace.

~

16.37

*Avis de danger imminent (Alerte rouge) : Diana, Sofia, Sava, Analanjirifo, Toamasina, Brickaville, Vatomandry et le district d'Aloatra, Mahanga I et II, Marovoay, Ambato Boeni, Tsaratanana et enfin Maevantanana. Avis de menace (Jaune) : Soalala, Mitsinjo, Province d'Antananarivo, les districts de Mangoro, Antanambao Manampotsy et Mahanoro. Avis d'avertissement : Amoron' i Mania, Haute Matsiara, Iborombe, Vatovavy, Fitovivany ary Atsimo Antsinanana.*⁵⁰³

~

19.00

Maroantsetra: three deaths.

~

22.39

Nothing is still.

*

9 March 2011

___'s ideal partner, someone who is:

1). *Close to God.*

⁵⁰² ≈ offices of the local council.

⁵⁰³ Alert for districts in the projected path of Cyclone Enawo, on the website of Orange.mg. Orange, Madagascar, 8 March 2017. En direct. [online] Available at <http://www.orange.mg/actualite/depeches>.

2). *Not violent.*

3). *Not short.*

*

9 March 2017

Maroantsetra: report of a house crumbled—five people saved, one still under the rubble. Authorities have cut electricity.

*

10 March 2011, Andohan-Analakely

Shoprite bag on wire spike in wind, tethered. dog trailing a chain—tearing down shit-covered slope, its delight in noise it brings the world

*

13 March 2010, Antaninarenina

[sketch of notes on a musical stave...] *Meee-sieurrrr, Meesieur la monnaie...* Four kiddies, each no older than three, in the Jardin Antaninarenina. Gardens empty. All picking purple flowers, one singing. Ignoring me, or just unaware. Snotty nostrils. That orange hair⁵⁰⁴. All filthy. 8am on a Saturday morning. (Panpiped *Please Mrs. Robinson...* in the Patisserie Colbert for my croissant aux amandes, cappuccino + TLS shortly before.)

*

mid-March 2011, Ambatonakanga

___: *rice-is-bad-it-makes-you-short*

~

___: *...you know, we're an island—we don't need guns*

⁵⁰⁴ Indicating severe malnourishment.

~
?3 yr old... back to street by mosque, her mother asleep. rolling around in dirt, in a silk bridesmaid's dress

~
Talk of *des vrais gens*⁵⁰⁵. *la petite palace*⁵⁰⁶ (Ambohitsorohitra). *l'Ambassadeur est servi*⁵⁰⁷. Forks turned down. *Hôte*⁵⁰⁸ place card, caressing whopper of a vase w/ left hand; [transpires later] had been tickling ___'s back over dinner. Sense of a man who really isn't here.⁵⁰⁹

*

19 March 2010, Toliara

soldier w/ POLO SPORT rifle strap in barracks

~
The funder. A clip-on solar-powered mosquito repeller. Over-familiarity with staff not concealing sharp look of disdain for most of what he saw. *Don't get it, man... this is the Tropics and they don't have Tropicana*.⁵¹⁰ Couldn't tell if he was joking.

*

late March 2010, Café ___, Soarano

*Tactility and Turbulence*⁵¹¹

Three old ?military helicopters over Analakely. Lady stops—then continues—washing pile of towels in bucket in corner of garden. Butterfly passes. In background: chimes to *Here Comes the Bride*...

~

⁵⁰⁵ ≈ *real people*

⁵⁰⁶ ≈ *the little palace* (The palace of Ambohitsorohitra contains the offices of the Malagasy Presidency.)

⁵⁰⁷ *The Ambassador is served.*

⁵⁰⁸ *Host.*

⁵⁰⁹ From an evening at the residence of the ___ ambassador.

⁵¹⁰ From an encounter, over breakfast, with a visiting marine conservation funder.

⁵¹¹ Possibly the name of a ?*Guardian Review* article I was reading. Never been able to find it since.

another two [alleged] bandits shot dead in Antaninarenina, day before back from coast. Things that shake you up.

Seven trucks in Analakely as passed back (1/2 gendarmes, 1/2 police) and into Tsaralalana turnoff. A couple of *vazaha*⁵¹² snarls as walked by in my shorts

(my legs my *best asset*, jokes my mother)

*

25 March 2008

[dream of a...] cut on my foot while in Africa. Bleeding still now preventing me from doing things

*

25 March 2011

___ not liking it when I said something about ___ now being in the past—*oh people say it's in the past...* friendly, but walked off

~

difficulty with the idea of [writing] fiction, a novel

~

oxidising fat coil of human shit on back road to ___

~

___ on the board, this morning: *by what dreams can we alleviate poverty?*

*

⁵¹² ≈ *white foreigner*

26 March 2011

___: *men wear their babies well, here*

*

late March 2011

10.23

___ in ___ [nightclub] last night: *practising my boxing and whatnot... stayed up most of the night doing Mohammed Ali in the mirror... a bit of a sleepless night... it's not funny, Billy, I almost got ___ by a Frenchman*

~

teaching globalisation from textbooks...

*

late March

the probably fine of it,

that grills and locks
can be beautifully kept

~

| | in panels | |

~

rain in panels
overnight,

on the radio: lightning



took seven
zebu

and a man
who couldn't keep
his happiness
from the neighbours,
who

in the room
in which he slept

couldn't patrol his unconscious

*

29 March 2010

Body spreadeagled over curb in Ampefiloha / 67. Dead?

~

Remembering how an authoritative (or, rather, protective) self emerged in early days of ___ with ___;
replaced by what? ...a realisation I couldn't even look after my own security?

*

1 April 2010

this constant tension. senses for protection, not pleasure. trucks in Analakely every day this week. uch

~

to hear the language spoken
lightly, joyfully



and not in anger⁵¹³

*

early April 2011

In class this morning, ___: *Peace means being secure... the state is able to protect the citizens*. Could I sing them some dubstep?

~

*nous sommes un peuple plein de baine*⁵¹⁴—Michèle Rakotoson⁵¹⁵

*

early April 2014, Betsimitatatra

Iè, mitsangatsaaangana | dian' omby—hoofprint | manga mangirangirana—electric blue butterflies on damper patches gradually reclaiming bricks (just left) | black bees, bulrushes—tantely mainty, zozoro | only parts of a thin snake seen in the long grass—noho ny bozaka dia ampahan' ny bibilava⁵¹⁶ manifest ihany no hita | runnels of white, bone-dry oat husk ashes | corn, courgette—katsaka, korozety | golden orb spider silk between orange trees teeming with bugs | guava—goavy stuck-in-your-teeth seeds spat out | part/submerged boat, lily | upturned basket, rotting milch | malany—having a fishy smell | feet-in-the-air | crumbling brick—biriky potika | glistening in the composite: clayquartzmicalaterite | later on in the rainy season, the cracks | are only just visible | smashed up leaves | pod | teasel inflorescence | rusty rotting | rindpithrind | dia | miakatra | miakatra | miakatra | miakatra | dia | asina akofa misy lavadavaka ao anatany ao | dia | mamay | mamay | mamay | mamay | dia | asina rano dia malamalama tsara | stray netting | kingfishershit, dissipating | cabbage blues | hack & peach sap | one dead plot: cricket | click | clickclick | through wind | & wilting | fire: comb, bottle | flipflop, featherbend—remove | just one | & it will all blow out

~

⁵¹³ After an evening at the IFM (Institut Français de Madagascar; French cultural centre, Antananarivo).

⁵¹⁴ *≈ we're a people full of hatred*

⁵¹⁵ Something said at a public talk at the IFM.

⁵¹⁶ Literally: beastlong.



in this spit

in these

spat out

guava⁵¹⁷

stuck-in-

your-

teeth seeds

in this part/

submerged

lily

boat

hoofprint⁵¹⁸

in this rain

dia

mivongabongana

ny biriky⁵¹⁹

,

baby

snake

in this one dead plot:

cricket

click

clickclick

through

wilted korozety⁵²⁰

in this pink turf

⁵¹⁷ goavy

⁵¹⁸ dian'omby

⁵¹⁹ brick

⁵²⁰ courgette

in this hay

strike

a

like this

in this akofa⁵²¹ cabbage blues

dissipating kingfisher shit

in this

human touch

in this hack & peach sap

in this

MARSHMALLOW WITH JAM

in this inexplicable

noise

in a

home of gony

fire: comb

bottle-

top flip-

flop

featherbend

in these clothes

with holes

&

shreds in other places

in these piles just

⁵²¹ burntoathuskdust

left
in these orderly divots
in that further

look back in that
this is our

*land*⁵²²

*

3 April 2007, Betsimitatatra

Flashes of moonlight off a long oily river—first image. Otherwise empty darkness—forest?

[talk, with ___, of being] *riche, par definition*⁵²³

[rest]

~

windy yesterday, as today, as Cyclone Jaya passes over to the north of us

airy bread. Lunch—turnip with salad dressing and tomato. Delicious zebu with green spinach (?)

[late afternoon] barks, children's voices, cicadas at the window

the walk up and down [hill to village, with ___] in dusk and dark. ___ spoke enthusiastically of the Protestant church; its relations with others; its internal divisions; its pastoral role

the darkness now conceal[ing] differences with passers-by with whom, I was elated to discover, I felt quite at ease

*

⁵²² *taninay, ity.*

⁵²³ *rich, by definition*



Easter Day 2010

Maximum Alert in Antaninarenina. Rumours of the FIS⁵²⁴ taking position by [Central] Bank and [Presidential] Palace, lance-roquettes⁵²⁵, etc. And [me,] down in ___ with ___ and a blue drink.

Don't want to think about it.

*

6 April 2007, Antaninarenina

My first walk alone here

past some smart government palace and the Bank of Madagascar and doubled back when reached a roundabout / junction with another street, 'checking the time'. Immediately pursued by a woman beggar. I need to know more Malagasy.

~

Did my internet. Returned outside with 15 mins to spare before being collected and pursued again, this time much more persistently by a woman and her child, carried. She needed something to give him to eat this afternoon. My eventual *j'ai rien*⁵²⁶ such offensive crap. Ordered a cheese-coated croissant which was keen to eat inside, before taxi returned. But heating it up took too long and found myself eating it as I went out to the taxi.

*

7 April 2007, Ambohidratrimo

Baby boy with a stump on his right wrist, which he chewed; patchy scalp.

⁵²⁴ Force d'intervention spéciale, a military unit created by Madagascar's High Transitional Authority; disbanded in 2014. See: <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20140130-madagascar-fis-dst-dissoutes-securite-rajaonarimampianina>.

⁵²⁵ rocket launchers

⁵²⁶ *I have nothing*

___ angry about loss of Malagasy traditions to Christianity above all. Lamented her ten-year-old daughter's inability to understand certain things in Malagasy. Asked if I wanted to have children. She had a sister in Lyon. She'd like to go there, she said, out of curiosity; and hoped she wouldn't like it.

The thing she returned to, which she passionately believed, was that ___ and anyone else, for that matter, didn't govern in people's interests. A slightly stale cliché to me, but what would I know? She was very bitter and adamant.

Thinking back, it was odd that as we were shown round today (me with ___, who was going to be a teacher there, and hadn't yet been round), the focus was very much on me.

We talked of our skin. She looked at her elbows, and I said like mine they were dry—*were they*... she looked concerned.

*

7 April 2010

So, Defence Minister sacked tonight. Reports of three bursts of gunfire centre-ville. PM announcing time for a *new transition*. Things likely to shift in coming days.

*

8 April 2011

___ on her visit to the prison at ___: had worn loose jeans, a baggy top. her fear of razors (allowed in for cutting hair). Saw a pack of cards, a guitar. TV causing breakouts. Only 40% visited by anyone. *300 mecs... respectueux, gentil et tout... leur douceur...*⁵²⁷

*

9 April 2007, southwards

___ shifts, ___ Foreign Desk, ___ World Affairs desk... maybe a job on a retainer which keeps me travelling a bit, but with which I'd be based in the UK. I can't, at the moment, see myself living in Africa. The problem is I'm not really loving this.

⁵²⁷ ≈ 300 guys... *respectful, kindly and everything... their softness...*

What confidence have I lost?

~

[through the] town where everybody wore fluorescent colours—Ambohimahaso?⁵²⁸—all over their shoulders

~

and to another taxi-brousse⁵²⁹ station where, after a time, things changed for the better in the smallest of ways

*

9 April 2011

___ on fihavanana⁵³⁰ ...*but zey don't like each other*

~

___: *for me, paradise is like a clean city.* And on the political crisis: ...*it's like a fire that dies slowly, right?*⁵³¹

*

10 April 2011, Faravohitra

lunch chez ___. round the back, abundance of courgettes + assorted flowers growing into the hill, as if hidden from the city. And ___ himself. A look of constant startlement. Does he feel affected by the crisis?

*Je ne sais pas.*⁵³²

*

⁵²⁸ Ambohimahazo ≈ Onthehillwhereyouacquirethings... 'Am' from 'any amin'ny' (at), 'bohi' from 'vohitra' (hill), mahazo (to get, acquire, understand); it couldn't have been 'mahaso.

⁵²⁹ Bush taxi: the minibuses that are the main form of transport all over Madagascar.

⁵³⁰ Fihavanana is difficult to define and, many Malagasy feel, is more of a myth than a reality. See: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fihavanana>.

⁵³¹ ___, on what was known in Madagascar at the time as 'la crise' (the [[socio-]political] crisis).

⁵³² ≈ *I don't know*

11 April 2010, Café __, Soarano

Tu sors ce soir?

—*non, non, il est Anglais.*⁵³³

Call me...

*

13 April 2010

the French guy whose car torched; him intervening and receiving third-degree burns. __'s fear the military could target foreigners (not a fear I share). Her story of being caught below Ambohitovo; slit-your-throat gesticulation from demonstrators below

*

15 April 2007, Ambalavao-Ranohira

Sometimes nothing to the horizon. Just grass.

*

16 April 2007, Ilakaka

outside a gate where children (?) seemed to be digging inside with wheelbarrows, although I suspect they weren't mining; who knows

*MAIS C'EST NOIR... ET VOUS ÊTES BLANC!*⁵³⁴—at checkpoint, on producing grainy photocopy of my passport

*

mid-April 2019, Asomeso

⁵³³ *≈ will you be out this evening? / —No, no, he's English*

⁵³⁴ *BUT IT'S ALL DARK... AND YOU'RE WHITE!*



1

titanium, zirconium | __, *fucking-degenerate-fucking* __, *seriously* | supplying the wattage | jackhammers | __
playing off __ against __ | __ | *the* | __ *don't give a monkeys* | younger granite | uplift, the younger | granite
| an intrusion, *most* | *of these sands* | alluvial | separating plants | *just throw it in with a* | *separator* | *and* __ |
| __, owns | __ reserve | the big hotel in __ | __ illegal export | __ can be easily | picked up, __ | *filthy-*
dirty __

2

at the moment I am waking with a grief | that should be others'

3

in the | *strychnos spinosa* | strangler | fig, annatto | vakona fibres | vahona | ravinala, *not* | *in the banana*
family, seeds | blue | waxy & *beloved* | *of woodlice* | periwinkle, pink | hibiscus | flame | flamboyant |
flowering-in-December | bird-of-paradise-tree | bird-nest-fern | *flower* | *with the shape of the bird-of-paradise-*
tree, etc

4

between the elephant | ears, knee- | deep | in something's haemorrhage | crouched | & cleaning the lot
of us | abreast | at a time | of closeness to the earth

5

noonish, near the breakers | a toddler's | shoe, its barnacled sole | dropped out | that toddlers don't wear
shoes here | the *what to do with that?*

6

cross currents | bay-as-womb, waking | to thunder & | a new sensitivity | to cumulus, ampela⁵³⁵ | right |
in the middle of the road | at 8.30am, covered | in blankets & | congratulations, keeping all | the whorling
on the rocks | in the corner

of an eye | spume, cyan | bubbling-back-under

the nearest thing | to love | was a half- | built | house, with a sea view | & the vazaha⁵³⁶ left | *it's as simple
as that*

in the search, imperfection | uncle, teacher | how | to have a future | husband | shouting | *NO!* | *Don't
do that* | & the bird-of-paradise | asleep | on the very | tip | of a twig | *they cannot fly in the dark* | *but they
can feel something*

7

a woman must be clean | and not sitting down

of mussels | & flourishing talk | of green | flashes | after the sun | departs | there is more to know but |
basically the price | is right down | & back through | the entanglements, where | putrid ocean cannot | reach
| the ones who collect | from a single tree | lasting eight or nine years | owning others | with or without
| life- | jackets, | *a bit of coffee* | *and a bit of moonshine* | for anything | that has fallen, some | time | in the
night on a bicycle with | just | a click for a bell | & the ones who are running are | just | needing to go |
that much further

8

nights | *coups de bache* | out in the spiny | thicket, leaves | are like a hand | *when | I have no one | to protect |
I am afraid*

only to be proved wrong | by the morning

feeling | through the nose | for a body | for a cockroach | in a glass | in order to go to sleep | knowing
| there is love

⁵³⁵ a spindle, used for spinning or winding cotton, silk, etc; a young woman (in southeastern Madagascar).

⁵³⁶ ≈ white foreigner

9

a | flat | film | as | far | as | the | forest | the | rain | is | stopping | the | ocean

10

the valala⁵³⁷ | are singing earlier now, the rain | has set them awake

& even | at this hour, the stickiness

EU-funded | six | metres wide, forested & | happens to be | the road to where the hunger is

11

interpenetrant | crystals, natural | terminations, Japanese | twins | *So we're going in | in that direction* | the
blue, overcoloured *and | these | are the smaller crystals, all weird forms* | host rock granite mica feldspar
quartz amazonite | *that's | what I call my Indian beaddress* | granite, an intrusion | *this | is what you follow as the*
indication | this bleeds, this | brings the potassium into the pegmatite | grandidierite | *and you come across | this area |*
and everything's sparkling

*

18 April 2010

remembering ___'s story of having three Molotov cocktails thrown into her garden. She has a fear of fire.
Didn't see the fire. An armed guard in garden for a long time thereafter

*

19 April 2020, Ampasanimalo

There are no guarantees. There never were, here.

⁵³⁷ crickets



*

21 April 2010

Sprawled drunkenly in my bed reading and—

explosions of grenade directed at house of Justice Minister, apparently (this morning). Notable for resounding echo (?off Rova hill cliffs and lake bowl), not just a bang. Appears deliberate; targeted, not random act of banditry

~

Tired, deadened. Grenade attack overnight and gentle warmth of __. These sides of Tana; each typical.

*

24 April 2008

dream. back from Mali and [at] a family party, ?Cornwall. Process of going through a binbag and getting rid of small handguns amongst ?toys / rubbish

*

25 April 2010, Antaninarenina

So, last Monday morning here outside patisserie for a while. Piss in the air now. Winter approaching. Coats on, etc

*

late April 2007, Anakao

Last night, a thunderstorm on the horizon in the middle of the night. Lightning every other second; streaks horizontally, muffled by clouds. Violent glowings.

~



Was I a missionary? ...lady asked me this morning on handing back my clothes. She gestured at my *mouchoirs*⁵³⁸.

*

late April 2011

— not liking the gunfire so near his home in Ambatobe. Memories of Brazzaville, 1997. They'd lost all they'd created

*

late April

drift

talk of beryl and difficulty

sleeping with breasts

tucked

into

forearms

an opening out of your hair

all the roots

at head height

a sighting of scum

a night

of accumulation

and still

we are losing

at this very moment

on the

upstream

side

*

⁵³⁸ *handkerchiefs*



29 April 2007, Fort Dauphin

weird little reality this is, under a lone bulb which brightens and dips. standard mosquito net, fan, condoms and Gideons Bible

no windows, and doors mostly shut because of rain / security

We hit a dog on the way. Left it writhing in a pothole as it struggled to get up. Some people by it shouted shortly before... I only noticed as was leaning out of window and happened to look back. Will they have taken care of it?

*

29 April 2010

lights on Sicily in dawn, flecks of gold in its ore, the shapes. and the dry tears come. how hard it is, trying get [sic] beauty out of such a cancerous environment

the hunted animal climate, soul singeing

and the need, nonetheless, to be a vessel capable of receiving. spider web and fly, dreamcatcher, etc

~

feeling a twat asking a Kenyan *Can I have a glass of tropical juice, please?*

*

30 April 2011

*une société silencieuse... la dimension du silence est le plus elegant de bruits... terreur; violence, rage...*⁵³⁹ —not in *entre-tuer*⁵⁴⁰ [sense], [but in] *mots, regards, sourires*— ...*c'est une ville extrêmement violente... mais c'est une violence sourde*⁵⁴¹

⁵³⁹ ≈ *a silent society... the dimension of silence is the most elegant of noises... terror; violence, rage...*

⁵⁴⁰ ≈ *killing one another*

⁵⁴¹ ≈ *words, looks, smiles*— ...*it's an extremely violent city... but it's a violence that is muffled*. All from an event at the IFM (Institut Français de Madagascar; French cultural centre) in which Michèle Rakotoson spoke about the Malagasy / Antananarivo.

*

May 2009

Gunfire most days at the moment, it seems. Would be quieter out in _ . Trouble zones at the moment? Analakely, Anosy, Mahamasina, Ambohitovo. Between which Isoraka and Antaninarenina. How is this going to resolve itself. Only thing that can be sure of at the moment: that the path leads through further violence.

Better now to measure by injuries and deaths per day, perhaps, rather than by how many bullets being fired.

~

__ on how I used to look her in the eye when talking. Fondly said.

*

May 2017, Asomeso

the wet and wind. a plan to come back here

*

2 May 2007, Betsimitatra

As an aside, the drive from airport last night... darkening evening light on the city from across the digues⁵⁴². The Rova⁵⁴³ overlooking / overseeing all, a big bright moon and stories of deep pink clouds kicked up above. It has a very particular feel, this place

~

Also, a grey hair in left temple yesterday? ...examined and chucked to the left of basin in __ airport. Then, on going back a second time in pathetic search of it, found what I think was it on the basin so kept.

*

⁵⁴² Embankment above ricefields.

⁵⁴³ The palace of pre-colonial Malagasy rulers. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rova_of_Antananarivo.

10 May 2007, Isoraka

Headed out of town this morning, photographing. Feeling slightly jaded by the whole experience. On many occasions manifestly unwelcome, not to mention what not mentioned. At one point thought some guy would try and come and confront me. But was just a *monsieur, monsieur* and violent wave of the hand as if to say fuck off. Was taking pictures of the bidonvilles⁵⁴⁴ with Tana skyline behind, not really of him, but think it was that he objected to. He knew why I was taking the photos.

*

11 May 2007, Isoraka

Price of sex is apparently 20,000 Ariary (£5), viewed even as generous, ___ says. Used to be 10,000 when he first came in ___ and, today, on outskirts of town as little as 5,000. Worth saying that he has a huge and conspicuous affection for the Malagasy with their gentle nature, etc. All the more attractive to him after finding himself taking photographs of scenes in ___ in ___; ___ at some point, *and a couple of coups d'état*. Caused him to spend ___ years ___ in ___ to get over it. From pictures I can understand: shot ex-___ soldiers on a beach in ___; and another, of which he was proud, of two soldiers dragging a man he'd encouraged them to put out of his misery by his legs. In the rain, so blurry; a soldier's US-style assault rifle hanging over his right shoulder. He'd been in ___ and ended up next door. Not an experience I envy. Talked of *the invigorating law of life and death* (rather than legally-enshrined values of right and wrong—*all bullshit* or words to that effect). ___ clearly excited him too... camera kit and pistol in his car. Seemed to have little but contempt for Western culture (and its hypocrisy; warped views of morality; sexuality). *This is how it's meant to be*, he said, looking around us in the club, *human beings doing what they do best*. Certainly an intense faith in human goodness, but at the cost of his sensitivity I wonder. On the way back, *cherie*... (very softly from girl crossing road behind me). Whole evening left a slightly nasty taste in my mouth. Wonder how it makes them feel when you say no.

*

12 May 2007, Isoraka

⁵⁴⁴ slums



*Fuck off fuck off, ce n'est pas une chaise*⁵⁴⁵. Arrive at *Glacier* bar in car of ___. Malagasy wife, deals in ___. Very nice. Small street kid who immediately came up to him on getting out of car. Think he'd tried to sit on the bonnet.

Leaving ___ on foot and stopped at checkpoint that just happens to be outside entrance to smartest club in Tana. (Me without passport / photocopy. ___ negotiating.) Police officer: *il faut que tout le monde observe les règles*. Then his colleague, *quelque chose à boire..?* A note handed over.

~

I don't need half the stuff I have here. Walking back up through traffic in Isoraka, headlights in my face. Simply green shorts, shoes, white t-shirt and v-neck. Being at ease in all this.

*

mid-May 2011, Ambatobe

down in the Rue de ___ (cloned French suburbia), a seven-year old boy attends with the greatest tenderness to four kittens, a day old

[sketch to myself: concentric circles... depicting a teet / basket / house / perimeter fence]

~

*their death... is full of life*⁵⁴⁶

*

17 May 2007, Antaninarenina

Street kids and beggars mauling the taxi as we left ___. ___ couldn't look. *The one thing I can't take here.*

~

⁵⁴⁵ *it's not a chair*

⁵⁴⁶ ___ on seeing work by Malagasy photographer ___, exploring Malagasy funerary rituals.

The shadows of the wall of Presidential Palace, the Colbert. Walking back through the night. Dark corners
no threat.

This, too, is real.

*

19 May 2011

___⁵⁴⁷ as carcass, growing in mythological status as becomes more + more depleted

*

20 May 2011, Antaninarenina

kiddies in immaculate scout dress ?5,6,7 yr olds [selling home-baked cakes to passers-by]. [and nearby] ___,
crusty shit on bare buttocks, on his side. flies. head on paving, saliva (and / or glue) to ground. (one day he
won't wake up)

*

21 May 2011

There are no traffic lights in Madagascar.

*

20 May 2010, Filkins

Tea on the woollen mill lawn. Daisies, blossom, blue sky and regular Hercules aircraft overhead (effect on
my mother amusing). Text in from __: *...shit's biting the fan in Tana, mate*⁵⁴⁸ (And thinking *people are trying to
kill each other, at this very moment.*) My mother and I buy duck egg-coloured mugs, Pantone 337C.

*

⁵⁴⁷ A site where there was extensive looting and a large fire on the first day of the political crisis in 2009.

⁵⁴⁸ A mutiny at a Gendarmerie barracks, which left several dead (and a bullet hole in the wall of a house
that, years later, was to become my home).

23 May 2009

remembering conversation with my mother in the empty corridors of __. Quick, brave lies. Needing to go, in case she heard the gunfire

*

24 May 2009

How can you make your peace with shooting?

∩

__'s nine-month old. An epidural. *No, no anaesthetic.*

*

25 May 2010

__ as painter: restraint with colour, taste for crepuscular light

∩

__: *you can't hold a rifle and paintbrush at once*

*

25 May 2011, Akademia Malagasy, Tsimbazaza

__: *La langue malgache n'a pas la même précision logique que la langue française, mais...*⁵⁴⁹

__: *Tous ce qui est trenchant n'est pas malgache*⁵⁵⁰

*

⁵⁴⁹ *The Malagasy language hasn't the same logical precision as the French language, but...*

⁵⁵⁰ *All that is trenchant is not Malagasy.*

28-29 May 2011, Antaninarenina

Walking home past pres. palace, dark. *Tsy azo aleha*⁵⁵¹. White pickup whipped by, U-turn + parked facing us. ___ jumps behind memorial stone: *Here, Billy...* (pause) *Are they going to shoot?* We split. Me back to ___, heart slightly thumping. Turns out they were drinking tea, laughing as ___ walked on home.

*

⁵⁵¹ \approx *Do not enter.*

*[un]ethical matters*⁵⁵²

⁵⁵² *[tsy] mijanaraka amin' ny mety sy ny tsara.* // At the time of submitting my thesis on 12 May 2023 there has, as far as I am aware, still been no alteration to either the Guidelines for Probationary Review or to the Ethical Approval process at UEA that acknowledges the potential complication in mapping the writing of poetry as a research practice onto a PhD framework that is inherited from the social sciences. Nor, as far as I am aware, has there been any alteration acknowledging the potential complication in applying a Western rationalist epistemological orientation to research undertaken for a doctoral thesis at UEA based on “field work” outside the West // To help the reader’s eyes in this section, text emanating from UEA is in **Calibri** font throughout. It might also be helpful to read the footnotes in this section a little more slowly than usual!

Western values

[...]

Follow a straight line of thought

Avoid vague and shifting positions

Reveal yourself and your intentions

Be logical and direct

Make explicit statements

Malagasy values

[...]

Watch the receiver, use empathy, be smooth

Take vague, tentative and shifting positions

Don't show your inner feelings, meanings

Be flexible and indirect

Let the meanings transcend implicitly

—ØYVIND DAHL's *Cultural "frames of reference"*, from *Meanings in Madagascar: Cases of Intercultural Communication*⁵⁵³

*

⁵⁵³ Øyvind Dahl, *Meanings in Madagascar: Cases of Intercultural Communication*. (London: Bergin & Garvey, 1999), p. 13.

STATEMENT OF INTENT⁵⁵⁴

Introduction

It is now 4.55pm and I am writing this from a place where I have often worked: a café by a railway station used predominantly these days for freight – petrol, unripe bananas and whatever else passes in containers between here and Madagascar’s main port to the northeast, Toamasina.

I have just had a walk around outside in the last of the day’s sunlight: the usual scene, I guess, for this time of day at this time of year in this part of Antananarivo, Madagascar’s capital – bus queues slowly swelling; stalls offering phone credit, deep-fried bread, yoghurt in little glasses and sweet, weak coffee. A peaceful scene, one could say, despite the two military trucks parked up awkwardly on a nearby pavement. A group of male soldiers in newish uniform stood with lit cigarettes, joking around and flicking through photos on a white smartphone. The safety catch on one of the soldier’s AK-47s was off and the gun hung on a strap more or less horizontal, pointing back along the city’s main avenue as he shook and shook with laughter——an email arrives on my phone:

Dear all,

We will have our next instalment of the LDC Research Seminar today, when we will hear from one of our new postdoctoral fellows, ___. Details below:

—

"Naturalist Legacies in British Fiction of the Twentieth Century"

5.15pm

Thursday 6th of October

Arts 2.05

Wine and snacks will be provided as always...

⁵⁵⁴ What follows are the opening paragraphs of my ‘Statement of Intent’, submitted as part of my ‘Upgrade Proposal’ documentation for my engagement with ‘Probationary Review’: an institutional checkpoint in the first year of PhD study, which acts as a gateway to the rest of the degree programme. Billy Head, ‘Upgrade Proposal: Towards a Poetics of Ineffability in Antananarivo / ‘How Are You Going to Write About What You Can’t Write About?’ (2017), pp. 8-9. For general information about this procedure at UEA, please see: <https://my.uea.ac.uk/divisions/research-and-innovation/postgraduate-research/online-meetings/annual-progress-and-probationary-review-meetings>.

It has been extremely difficult to know where to begin in writing this document. The timing of the above email whilst I was beginning a draft upgrade proposal last year was coincidental – but the dissonance between the two worlds in which my PhD operates is as good a place to begin as any. (This dissonance is also difficult to describe.)

For much of this first year, I tried to find a way of integrating my sense of what I wish to achieve with my PhD, and how, within an approach that follows the various requirements outlined in the guidelines for probationary review.

Time and again this proved fruitless, until I began to think much more carefully about the nature of the rhetoric in those guidelines on the one hand, and the nature of my approach to the book I have been working towards on the other.

I would imagine that for most writers on the same Creative and Critical Writing PhD programme at the University of East Anglia, as on similar programmes elsewhere, it is an awkward business fitting a pre-existing book project into the structure of a PhD. But I can only comment on my own experience. In the end, I concluded that the problem I was having this year was a simple one: in the case of my project, at least, it would actually be impossible to reconcile what I wish to do, and how, with the guidelines for probationary review in their present form. And at some fundamental level which I realise really matters to me as a poet, I feel it would lack integrity (as well as common sense) to persist in trying.

*

GUIDELINES FOR PROBATIONARY REVIEW⁵⁵⁵

[...]

3. Assessment criteria for the probationary review⁵⁵⁶

Candidates will be asked to demonstrate that they satisfy the following criteria at probationary review. These reflect the final assessment criteria, but at a level appropriate for this stage in the candidate's study:

- Is the work presented the candidate's own, giving appropriate acknowledgement of the work of others where there is an element of collaboration?
- Has the candidate shown appropriate industry?
- Is the candidate competent to fulfil the research and to keep to the proposed schedule of work?
- Does the candidate show the level of knowledge and understanding of the field in which they are working that would normally be expected after 6-9 months of research?⁵⁵⁷

⁵⁵⁵ University of East Anglia, 'UEA Research Degree Policy Documents, Section 12: Guidelines for Probationary Review' (2015), pp. 1-2. (This is the version of the Guidelines that was active when my PhD project encountered the Probationary Review process.)

⁵⁵⁶ Unlike for the 'Research Report' (of which there are three slightly different versions for PhD Candidates in different Faculties at UEA), what is contained in the 'Assessment criteria for the probationary review' appears to be addressed to all PhD Candidates in all Faculties. So it appears that, for example, a poet and a biologist would each be assessed for the Probationary Review according to criteria worded identically. // *My hope has been that it may be considered a legitimate philosophical stance, to query institutional requirements and make them, at least in part, for a time, the object of one's research – arguing that they are themselves symptomatic of a problem in the field which merits closer examination, particularly from the point of view of the practitioner. The advice I had from ___ was that this may indeed be considered legitimate but that there is, unofficially, in practice, a certain amount of flexibility built into such requirements. I.e. that they need not be taken literally. That this may be the case, I will argue is part of the problem ('How should one take them, therefore?', a student might reasonably ask herself) – and chimes with an apparent wider ambivalence in academia at the moment about what artistic practice as research should really entail, or be permitted to entail. In short, I hope to suggest that my questions should not be read as an impertinence, but are actually very topical in the field in which I am operating. Moreover, they are not only a practical consideration for me, but part of a wider philosophical one that (though it is too early to say in what way, for reasons I shall outline) I suspect may turn out to be at the heart of my thesis overall.*—Head, 'Upgrade Proposal: Towards a Poetics of Ineffability in Antananarivo / 'How Are You Going to Write About What You Can't Write About?' (2017), pp. 9-10. Document submitted as part of my engagement with the 'Probationary Review' checkpoint procedure at UEA. // *The question of whether artistic practice might be construed as a research practice is one that has been pursued extensively since the 1990s, and though much in the discourse remains open to contention, there is some consensus on certain key themes: for instance, that art is indeed productive of knowledge; that this knowledge is to be understood experientially and non-conceptually; but that it is required to be framed in a form consistent with established procedures if it is then to be accepted as 'research'.*—Andrew Cowan, *Against Creative Writing*. (London: Routledge, 2023), p. 205. // *Let us embrace those thinker-makers, maker-thinkers who find themselves standing in the still-contested, yet enormously rich terrain of practice as research. The practitioner-researcher, the artistic-researcher, the you (yes you) doing a P-a-R, you, doing research creation, you, doing practice-led research, art practice as research, performance as research. Are you still feeling uneasy?*—Katja Hilevaara & Emily Orley 'A Four and a half Minute Manifesto for the Creative Critical'. *Creative | Critical*. (2021) Available at: <https://creativecritical.net/a-four-and-a-half-minute-manifesto-for-the-creative-critical/>.

⁵⁵⁷ ...*After over a year of thinking this through, I cannot help a sense that my difficulties have been wasteful. I have found that both students and staff in LDC acknowledge this area as highly problematic. Staff are publishing on the topic. It is something that is discussed in seminars, in internal meetings and, occasionally, at departmental events entirely devoted to the subject. I think most would agree that it is nonsense to try and dress up a creative project as humanities research like any other ('...Obhh just put something like "my methodology is revelation"', one creative writing staff member joked during a cigarette break outside the department). But the official institutional [and AHRC] diction has still failed to catch up with this, and some students may therefore be stuck with a problem that is arguably not of their making. Perhaps there is an assumption at*

- Is the candidate able to show how their work relates to this wider field and that they have developed a command of presentational and scholarly⁵⁵⁸ conventions⁵⁵⁹ and methodology⁵⁶⁰?
- Is there evidence that the work has a reasonable prospect of generating a significant contribution⁵⁶¹ to the development of understanding, for example, through the discovery of new

play somewhere that, regardless of whether it makes sense from a philosophical point of view to do so, it will always be possible somehow for a student on a PhD programme like mine to accommodate themselves to this diction.—Head, ‘Upgrade Proposal’, pp. 11-12. // *Nonetheless, one may still want to resist the wider institutional assumption that the traditional academic research paradigm can be adopted unproblematically for doctoral study in the creative and performing arts.*—Cowan, *Against Creative Writing*, p. 188.

⁵⁵⁸ *We believe in the potential of scholarly writing to make a difference. We take its challenge seriously. We appreciate the usefulness of established rules. But when those rules – the norms and conventions of our fields and disciplines – get in the way of the work our words can do, we have to act... We have to expand our idea of scholarship. We have to question and destabilize the notion of what constitutes scholarship and to make space for the possible and that which is not yet known.*—Hilevaara & Orley, ‘A Four and a half Minute Manifesto for the Creative Critical’. // *...there didn’t seem to me to be any problem regarding a poetic project as a research project. It was clear to me that such a project was discursively different from the critical PhD which I was writing. It was also clear to me that such a project would involve finding the appropriate form for its inquiry and discovery... None of the poets that I know would regard the ‘creative’ as an alternative to rigour and scholarship – though they would probably agree that the creative or the creative critical involved new forms of rigour (where that rigour would also involve the creation of new forms appropriate to the issues being explored.)*—Robert Hampson, ‘The Function of Criticism at the Present Time’. *Creative | Critical*. (2021) Available at: <https://creativecritical.net/the-function-of-criticism-at-the-present-time/>.

⁵⁵⁹ *Reflexivity requires a willingness to drop all the truisms of the field, and consider them again, from a point of view that is outside the logic of that field in order to defamiliarise and thereby reconceptualise the field. And as newcomers to the field, as fish who are at least partially out of water and therefore motivated to engage change, artist-academics are in a very good position to apply a reflexive gaze on both art and the academy, and produce something new.*—Jennifer Webb, ‘The logic of practice? Art, the academy and fish out of water’. *TEXT: Journal of Writing and Writing Courses*, Vol 16 No 2, (2012); quoted in Cowan, *Against Creative Writing*, p. 213. // *Ultimately, the notion of a ‘reconceptualised field’ is difficult to sustain if the underlying premise remains that a poem, or any other creative ‘output’, cannot be a self-sufficient ‘research artefact’...—Ibid, p. 214. // We hold that poetic inquiry is a disciplined and valid approach to social-ecological research; however, it cannot be evaluated through the same criteria as positivist/ post-positivist science.*—Maria Fernández-Giménez, Louise Jennings & Hailey Wilmer, ‘Poetic Inquiry as a Research and Engagement Method in Natural Resource Science’. *Society & Natural Resources*, 32 (10) (2019), p. 1082. // *I am already a critical writer as a poet and there are not enough poets facing down the stranglehold that conventions in critical writing in the Academy have over PhDs like mine... a poet is also a philosopher. And there is room, to say the least, for a different mode of writing in the field of creative writing that restores the primacy of the practitioner’s vision in critical enquiry [sic]; that allows me the poet, in this case, to make critical assertions in my own terms.*—Head, ‘Upgrade Proposal’, p. 39.

⁵⁶⁰ Quoting an internal guidance document written by the chair of the assessment panel for ‘English Literature and Language’ in the 2014 iteration of the UK’s national audit of research performance, the Research Excellence Framework (Dinah Birch, ‘Notes on the assessment of creative writing’, *Research Excellence Framework (REF)*, Unit of Assessment 29: English Language and Literature, internal guidance document) (2014)), Andrew Cowan notes in *Against Creative Writing* that the landscape of creative writing research output assessment has recently been changing in the UK, including in relation to understanding ‘methodology’: *The research process is assumed to be ‘inextricable’ from the writing; indeed, the process ‘is* that piece of writing’ *(original emphasis).*—Birch, ‘Notes on the assessment of creative writing’, quoted in Cowan, *Against Creative Writing*, pp. 237-8. // *I have beside me, as I write now, notes from my first visit to Madagascar in April 2007 – in the first of what is now a couple of hundred notebooks that have been at the centre of my writing practice as this book project has slowly taken shape. It is interesting now to recall that I meticulously avoided reading about Madagascar before this first visit. There seemed something important about this approach at the time.*—Head, ‘Upgrade Proposal’, p. 13.

⁵⁶¹ *Set against the academic thesis requirements of originality, significance, rigour and contribution, we must prioritise techniques that embrace their own inventiveness.*—Hilevaara & Orley, ‘A Four and a half Minute Manifesto for the Creative Critical’.

knowledge⁵⁶², the connection of previously unrelated facts, and the development of a new theory or the revision of older views?⁵⁶³

- [PhD/MD only] Is the topic⁵⁶⁴ viable as doctoral research in its originality, intellectual level and scope (for execution within the planned timeframe)?

⁵⁶² *What is regarded as legitimate academic knowledges have specified credentialising authorities by which truth and validity are established and by which 'othering' is generated.*—André Keet, 'Epistemic 'Othering' and the Decolonisation of Knowledge'. *Africa Insight*, 44 (1) (2014), p. 33. // *Poetry, as [John] Keats famously notes, facilitates moments in which readers are capable of being in uncertainty...* [Anne] Carson uses poetry to think the elusive, pushing at distinctions between the real and the imaginary to approach the unknown as a way of expanding the boundaries of knowledge to include the uncertain and mysterious.—Emma Mason, 'Critical Vulnerability and the Weakness of Poetry'. (2017) Paper presented at 'Neurosis, Poetry, and the Present', a workshop hosted by the Centre for Philosophy and Critical Thought, Goldsmiths, University of London on 18 March 2017. Available at: <https://cpct.uk/2017/05/08/emma-mason-warwick-critical-vulnerability-and-the-weakness-of-poetry-neurosis-poetry-and-the-present-18-march-2017/> // *With poems, you never get to settle on a final meaning for your work, just as you never get to feel settled, finally, as yourself. So it seems entirely natural to me that poets, exploring and nudging such unstable material, foregrounding connotation and metaphor, and constantly dredging up the gunk of unconscious activity over which they have no control, might start to doubt the confidence, finality, and the general big-bearded Victorian arrogance of certainty as it seems to appear in other forms of language...* This is the kind of uncertain knowledge made possible in poems. I don't mean uncertainty as indecision, but as a philosophical, empathetic stance: I am uncertain—Jack Underwood, 'On Poetry and Uncertain Subjects', *Poetry Foundation*. (2018) Available at <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/articles/146494/on-poetry-and-uncertain-subjects>. // *The praxes and transformative actions that emerge from the 'critical' must discard their self-certainty to be self-critical...*—André Keet, 'Africanising/Decolonising Ourselves: The Implications for Advancing Critical University Studies'. (2021) Presentation in a webinar hosted by *The Global (De)Centre Network*, 8 June 2021. Available at: https://globaldecentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Keet-GDC-Africanising-Decolonising-Ourselves_webinar-2021.pdf, pp. 6-7. // *'I don't know...'* This is the more interesting position: not to know, or not to know yet. It creates room for that which is unthought, that which is unexpected: the idea that all things could be different... This is what we may call the radical contingency of artistic research... Artistic research is the deliberate articulation of such unfinished thinking... Art invites us and allows us to linger at the frontier of what there is, and it gives us an outlook on what might be.—Henk Borgdorff, *The conflict of the faculties: perspectives on artistic research and academia*. (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2012), pp. 71, 173; available at: <https://library.oapen.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.12657/32887/595042.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=;>—quoted in Cowan, *Against Creative Writing*, pp. 206-7. // 4.18. *Descriptor for a higher education qualification at level 8 on the FHEQ and SCQF level 12 on the FQHEIS: doctoral degree...* Typically, holders of the qualification will be able to: make informed judgements on complex issues in specialist fields, often in the absence of complete data...—Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), 'UK Quality Code for Higher Education, Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards, The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies', (2014) p. 30. Available at: <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/quality-code/qualifications-frameworks.pdf>.

⁵⁶³ *There is no map, no narrative adequate to the scale and complexity of what is happening.*—Sarah Wood, 'Small Experimental Action'. (2016) Paper presented at 'Magical Mapping', a workshop hosted by the *Sussex Humanities Lab*, University of Sussex on 13 May 2016. Unpublished at the time of the Sussex workshop, the paper was emailed to me by the author on 21 March 2017. It was later revised and published in Elissa Marder (ed.), *Literature and Psychoanalysis: Open Questions*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), pp. 383-98.

⁵⁶⁴ *One of the mini-breakthroughs I have had in my thinking this year followed from an exchange with a lecturer at the University of ___ after a CHASE event. They had commented on my research topic, or in fact on whether it could actually be called a topic, a topos; or whether this might be 'too local or rhetorical for the responsiveness-to-forces that might be necessary...' At a time when I was having to think hard again about what my writing may be said to be doing, there was something in 'responsiveness-to-forces' that I recognised. I like the dual sense (or at least this is how I read it) of 'responsiveness'—the ability both to be responsive (i.e. receptive, a deeper thing to do with one's sensibility as an artist) and the ability to respond (in actual words on the page, or whatever it may be) ...that the former may be taken as seriously as the latter when it comes to writing poetry and, importantly, that something may be present without being visible or manifest, including in a research context.—Head, 'Upgrade Proposal', p. 12.*

4. Documentation

The precise documentation to be submitted varies according to School and Faculty as follows.

[...]

4.2 Faculty of Arts and Humanities

Candidates will be asked to submit a Research Report and a Training Record as follows.

Research Report

The student should, with guidance from the supervisor, prepare a portfolio report as follows, and circulate this to the members of the panel at least a week before the meeting. This research report should include:

- a declaration of originality;⁵⁶⁵
- a working bibliography;⁵⁶⁶
- a statement of intent.⁵⁶⁷ This is a crucial document since it is the document in which the ambitions of the research and its overall methodology can be most clearly seen. The statement of intent is therefore expected to be up to 3,000 words and to cover the research context (ie.

⁵⁶⁵ *It is telling that I find myself under pressure to find famous writers and philosophers who have said similar things to what I am wanting to say, in my effort to legitimise what I would like to say.*—Head, ‘Upgrade Proposal’, p. 41.

⁵⁶⁶ *Needless to say, the disciplining of knowledge, though particularly associated with the advancement of the scientific method, has long histories that are constitutively tied to the history of universities. Such histories map the production spaces and locations of epistemologies and the intellectual, economic and social dominance that ensues from it. ___ captures this well in ___ in an inclusive account that geographically spans the globe and historically extends to the ‘ancient empires’. The mistake made by ___, although common, is to present ‘coming into epistemic being’ as being dependent on ‘discovery’ by the cognitive faculties of the Western observer.*—Keet, ‘Epistemic ‘Othering’ and the Decolonisation of Knowledge’, p. 29. // *When we move beyond a Eurocentric or American focus, what do we see? Here again, we are standing on the shoulders of giants. Raenyn Connell, Boaventura de Sousa Santos, Ramon Grosfoguel, Walter Mignolo, Jean and Jon Camaroff, and Syed Farid Alatas have all proposed alternative epistemologies. Yet because these conversations often take place in languages other than English, they remain outside many scholarly discussions. The view from another standpoint quickly calls the allegedly universal into question...*—The Global (De)Centre (2022), ‘The Global (De)Centre Manifesto’. Available at: <https://globaldecentre.org/about/>, pp. 6-7. // *A research model which does not adapt itself to the existence of oral literatures or other material which is not manifest verbally is not fit for purpose here [here in Madagascar]... The articulation of things that matter here [here in Madagascar] often takes on a form designed to be traceless, unattributable; liquid... The ‘Bibliography’ I have provided above [part of Probationary Review documentation] would be a very poor guide to the overall context in which the project is conversant.*—Head, ‘Upgrade Proposal’, pp. 15, 43.

⁵⁶⁷ *...I suspected that much of the Statement of Intent had been developed from models and processes of research that are not common in the arts and humanities, which would make advising and supporting research students all the more difficult, even if, personally, I feel that a more standardised model is helpful... One participant queried the term ‘methodology’, explaining that this may not fully reflect the experimental nature of creative work, and that students might ‘think that necessarily implies an a priori, fixed... framework of enquiry [sic] along the scientific model’ (P[articipant] 3)... As anticipated, there was some ambiguity reported. This related primarily to two colleagues who worked in Literature, and specifically to the creative-critical doctoral programme. I had not appreciated before that the model in which students produce a creative work (a novel, play or collection of poems) and a parallel critical work was quite rare in academia (P1). This prompted questions about how creative work could be assessed using criteria for assessment that only seemed designed for critical projects (P1).*—Matthew Sillence, ‘Understanding Doctoral Progress Assessment in the Arts and Humanities’. *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education* 22, 1. (2022) Available at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/14740222221125621>, pp. 8-10. Sillence conducted semi-structured interviews in relation to the Probationary Review process at UEA in his research for this article. Participants in these interviews were all colleagues who had been working as Probationary Review assessors.

the established scholarship to which the research is meant to provide an intervention)⁵⁶⁸, the major research questions⁵⁶⁹ (what the research will aim to find out) and the methodological and conceptual frameworks applied;⁵⁷⁰

- an outline of the structure of the thesis with titles and a description of the likely argument⁵⁷¹ of each chapter;

⁵⁶⁸ *A philosopher who has evolved his [sic] entire thinking from the fundamental themes of the philosophy of science, and followed the main line of the active, growing rationalism of contemporary science as closely as he could, must forget his learning and break with all his habits of philosophical research, if he wants to study the problems posed by the poetic imagination. For here the cultural past doesn't count.*—Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*. (1958) Translated from the French by M. Jolas (1964). London: Penguin Books, p. xv. // ...In everyday life in the highlands of Madagascar as in Malagasy literature, then, much rides on a sensitivity to the unutterable or the unuttered. This might be a slippery research context for an anthropologist at times, but it is a delight for a poet. (A climate scientist friend of mine in Antananarivo once quipped that 'poetry is probably about the only useful thing to study in Madagascar at the moment!') Much rides on a 'responsiveness-to-forces'... if my thesis has any context worth summarising then it is this. It is in this reality that my sensibility and practice as a poet has gradually been formed; and it is, inextricably, in this reality that my work intervenes.—Head, 'Upgrade Proposal', p. 14.

⁵⁶⁹ ...In broad terms, the research goal is to generate artefacts that produce affect and resonance through evocation – hence our term, evocative practice research [original emphasis]. This evocation cannot necessarily be measured and evaluated in specific terms because the artefact may have no direct 'application' but instead may be purposefully poetic and irreducible in its meaning.—Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt (eds), *Material Inventions: applying creative arts research*. (London: I.B Tauris, 2014), p. 234; quoted in Cowan, *Against Creative Writing*, p. 208.

⁵⁷⁰ *Without proving or demonstrating truth, poetry allows the reader to become acquainted with it in a "conversational" mode that constitutes, creates and transforms... The poetic word shatters because it cannot sustain truth as a stable structure... In empirical, strong thinking, we start with what we want to say, and then attribute a word or label to it, in some cases, like science or mathematics, reducing signifiers to formalized symbols rather than words. In poetry, by contrast, there is no linear movement from meaning to expression or from what we want to say to words or sounds, but neither do we start from meaningless sounds and then add meaning. Rather, poetry presences or discloses... Poetry's transforming ecology creates the irresolutions of what Edouard Glissant calls trembling, a metaphor for welcoming the inexpressibility of the text and resisting systematic thinking.*—Mason, 'Critical Vulnerability and the Weakness of Poetry'. // *Writing poems, you don't just look up from your computer screen every so often and remind yourself that endless reinterpretation threatens to destabilize each of the terms you are using, or that those terms are calibrated and reliant upon endless further terms, wobbling, drifting, and stunning each other like a huge shoal of jellyfish. Instead, you deliberately build your poem as an open habitation; you have to learn to leave holes in the walls, because you won't and can't be around later on to clear up any ambiguities when the lakes of your readers' lives come flooding up through the floor. If a poem works it's because you've made it such that other people might participate in making it meaningful... Poetry, unburdened by the need to demonstrate knowledge in a way that is quantifiable or provable, is free to explore the world of things in a way that relies just as much on dissonance or absence as coherence, or evidence.*—Underwood, 'On Poetry and Uncertain Subjects'. // *At Monash University, we felt that the cliché defining doctoral research as 'a contribution to knowledge' was misleading and perhaps even pretentious in our disciplines... The objective in doctoral projects, we pleaded, was 'a cultural contribution of substantial significance'. This has been a very liberating declaration, which Monash as a whole received with relief and embraced warmly in amendments to the doctoral regulations. Our researchers are thus under no obligation to define their work in epistemological terms.*—Robert Nelson, 'Doctoralness in the balance: the agonies of scholarly writing in studio research degrees'. *TEXT: Journal of Writing and Writing Courses, Vol 8 No 1* (2004); quoted in Cowan, *Against Creative Writing*, p. 185. // *The more radical route might be to dispense entirely with the exegetical requirement, allowing for assessment on the evidence of the creative work alone; that is the replacement of academic criteria with more specifically artistic criteria.*—Cowan, *Against Creative Writing*, p. 186.

⁵⁷¹ *This addiction to finding a reason, a function, a quantifiable yield, has now infiltrated all aspects of our lives - and become effectively synonymous with pleasure. The modern version of hell is purposelessness... I do not plan my fiction any more than I normally plan woodland walks; I follow the path that seems most promising at any given point, not some itinerary decided before entry.*—John Fowles, *The Tree* (London: Vintage, 1979), p. 59. // *Poems appear unannounced, unsought, usually while I am occupied doing something else - cleaning my teeth, driving, waiting at a bus stop, sitting up in bed drinking tea letting the day begin. Certainly more in vacancy than pensiveness.*—Andrew Grieg, 'World at Play' (2007); in Helen Ivory and George Szirtes (eds.), *In Their Own Words: Contemporary Poets on Their Poetry*. (Cromer, Norfolk: Salt Publishing, 2012), p. 4. // *To think, for the small experimental action to happen, it is necessary to pay no heed, not to be*

- a schedule⁵⁷² of work;
- a substantial sample of written work which should include at least one chapter of up to 10,000 words. The panel will be looking at both the quality and quantity of the output, while still recognising that it is only in draft;
- a list of publications, if any;
- any additional information the student considers it relevant to supply.

Training Record

The student should also present a list of training⁵⁷³ taken to date, including successful completion of any mandatory training, both advanced research skills training and professional and personal development training.

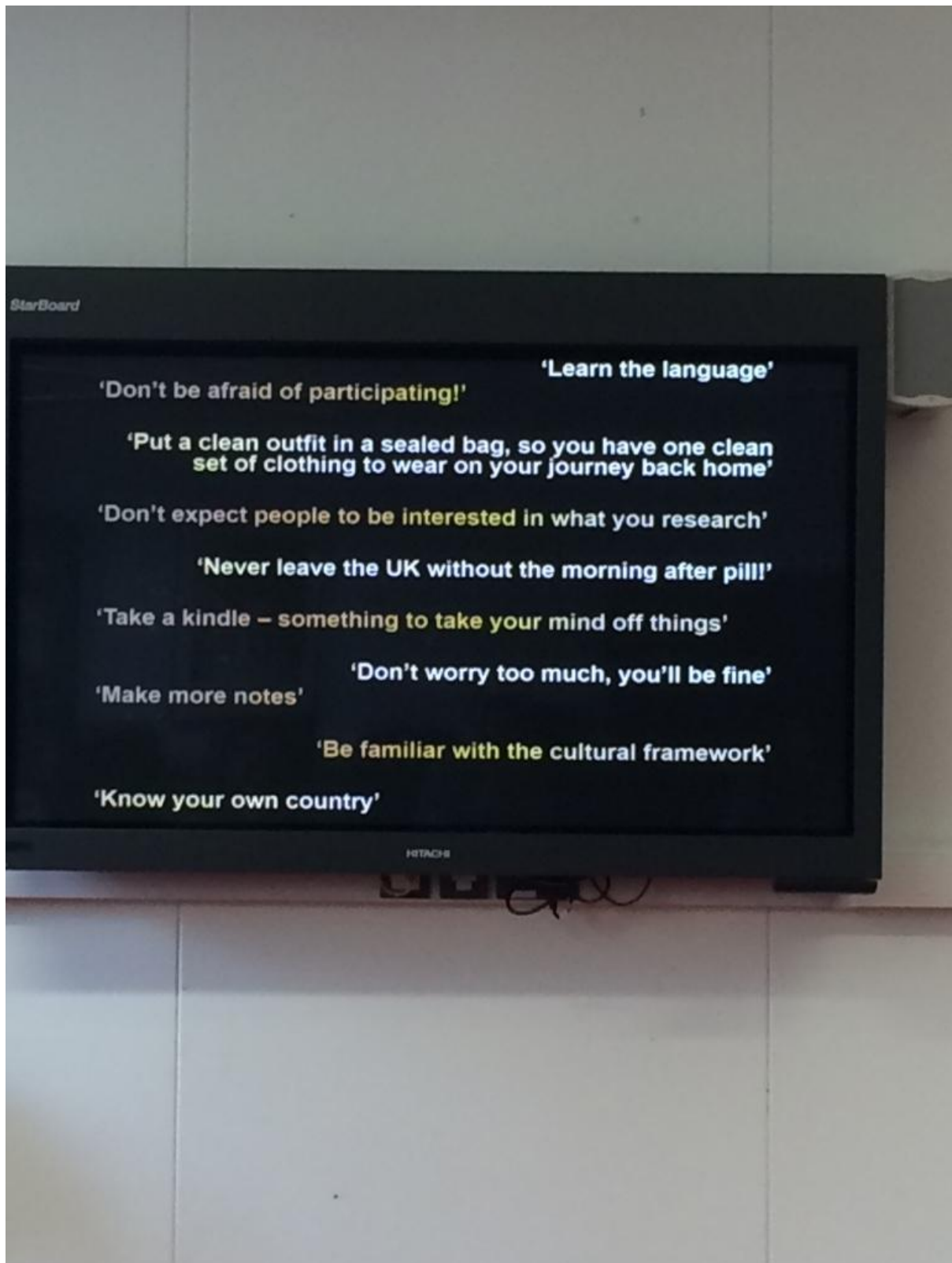
[...]

*

interpellated by interior or exterior police, the border controllers with their reception centres and removal centres. Whatever their guise may be. Instead, you day-dream. You make a break for it...—Wood, ‘Small Experimental Action’. // *We call for the legitimisation of artistic practice as a mode of thinking, as a mode of research that draws its very strength from not knowing in advance*—Hilevaara & Orley, ‘A Four and a half Minute Manifesto for the Creative Critical’. // *The only methodology I am able to pursue is that which I have always pursued and learned to trust, namely: to let writing grow organically out of experience and see where this leads (this is not an unorthodox approach for poets, nor is it aimless).*—Head, ‘Upgrade Proposal’, p. 15.

⁵⁷² *Everything must be carried to term before it is born. To let every impression and the germ of every feeling come to completion inside, in the dark, in the unsayable, the unconscious, in what is unattainable to one’s own intellect, and wait with deep humility and patience for the hour when a new clarity is delivered: that alone is to live as an artist, in the understanding and in one’s creative work.*—Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*. (1929) Translated from the German by C. Louth (London: Penguin Books, 2011), pp. 13-14.

⁵⁷³ *I moved to Antananarivo in 2008 in order to write.*—Head, ‘Upgrade Proposal’, p. 13.



⁵⁷⁴ Photograph of a slide in a presentation in *First Steps Towards the Unknown* postgraduate researcher training session, that I took on 3 December 2015; part of 'Embracing the Unknown: Practicalities of Fieldwork Abroad (HUMPR054)' module, Arts Building 01.06, University of East Anglia, 3-4 December 2015.

9 June 2021

Dear Committee⁵⁷⁵,

Please find attached my Application Form for research ethics approval, and a 'Research Protocol'.

Please don't hesitate to contact me if you would like to discuss any aspect of it.

With best wishes,

Billy Head

*

10 June 2021

Dear Billy

Thank you for your email. We have sought advice from the Committee before replying to you.

Please could you re-consider carefully whether or not you wish to submit this application. Retrospective approval cannot normally be granted and the gravity and potential implications of research misconduct are serious⁵⁷⁶. You appear to indicate that you

⁵⁷⁵ Discussion via email from 9 June to 22 September 2021 with the University of East Anglia's Faculty of Arts and Humanities Research Ethics Sub-Committee (HUM S-REC; from here on in this section referred to as "The Committee" or "S-REC") in relation to my application for Ethical Approval (Ref. SREC 20-107), granted on 7 September 2021. Throughout, I considered this discussion itself to be an integral part of my PhD research, and the Committee was aware of this throughout; as was Dr. Matthew Sillence (Associate Professor in Postgraduate Education and Training in the Faculty of the Arts and the Humanities at UEA), who provided me with input all the way through the application process and, since, in relation to the drafting of this section. See also the final paragraph of the sub-section 'A 'research protocol' in relation to an application for ethical approval for my PhD', at the end of this section.

⁵⁷⁶ ...*It is striking that the regulation exercised by ethics committees is of a much stronger form even than that of the criminal and civil law. Ethics committees do not simply set principles that are to be observed by researchers, and then interpret these post facto [original emphasis] where there is some suspicion that an offence has been committed. Instead, they operate prospectively. In other words, they require researchers to spell out what they are going to do, and the committee then decides whether or not this is legitimate (and, in effect, whether researchers will actually be able to go ahead with the research). There are few other areas of life in which adult citizens are subjected to such a severe form of ethical regulation.*—Martyn Hammersley, 'Against the Ethicists: On the Evils of Ethical Regulation'. *International Journal of Social Research*

understood⁵⁷⁷ the need for clearance might have been needed prior to commencing the research and as such this will be deemed as a serious matter and increases the potential for research misconduct.

Methodology 12 (3), (2009), p. 217. // *The novelist can't just go out and have a chat – s/he is too often circumscribed by the university ethics committee's demands that interviews and surveys be officially approved beforehand. This is not the normal process-space for a novelist; what is lost is a sense of freedom of process. For novelists to critique the culture authentically, they must feel free to range where they will.*—Graeme Harper and Jeri Kroll (eds.), *Creative Writing Studies: Practice, Research and Pedagogy*. (Bristol, UK: Channel View Publications, 2007), p. 17.

⁵⁷⁷ *Probably like most other poets on the Creative and Critical Writing PhD programme, I've not understood it to be a requirement that an application for ethical approval should be submitted in relation to what is commonly referred to on the programme as 'creative' work—even though, naturally, this work tends to be derived from the interactions we have as 'creative writers' with other humans. It is only recently that I have begun to wonder why this might be... another function of ongoing ambivalence at the institutional level surrounding the status of this kind of work as research, perhaps? In the case of my own thesis, it would be odd for me to be arguing that critical assertions contained in poetic language should be accorded the same legitimacy in a PhD as those contained in more conventional critical modes, whilst simultaneously taking advantage of what is apparently a grey area such that, as a poet, my work and the compositional processes behind it need not necessarily engage with the ethical approval procedures that are associated with more conventional research practices. And as part of my creative-critical project is precisely to question and recontextualise academic conventions and protocols in relation to the writing of poetry as research, I have come to think that it would be a missed opportunity from the point of view of the concerns of my thesis not to attempt to map my project onto the protocols of the ethical approval process, in its current form... And so at this relatively late stage in my PhD, I've decided that it would be fitting, and hopefully fruitful, for me to submit an application for ethical approval to the HUM Research Ethics Committee (HUM S-REC)—and for this application to relate to all sections of my thesis... There is another reason for wanting to do this. In the last year, my supervisors and I have agreed that it would be useful for me to devote a small chunk of the total word-count to some reflections upon my own place in the writing submitted... I have therefore attended a three-day CHASE workshop called 'Working with Marginalised Communities: Towards an Ethical Practice for PhD', and a short CHASE seminar called 'Creative Writing and Recovery'. Both of these explored "trauma-informed" practices of one sort or other. I also attended a Decolonise UEA Society workshop called 'Decolonial and Anti-racist Pedagogies', which drew from the same "social identity mapping" strategy in relation to "positionality" as in the three-day CHASE workshop. And I have read a selection of related material, and had the chance to submit a question about the implications for ethical approval processes of the 'decentring' project to Professor André Keet of the Global (De) Centre, in a lecture called 'Africanising/Decolonising Ourselves: The Implications for Advancing Critical University Studies'... Doing the above has obviously helped me build a clearer understanding of some of the common points of reference behind human research processes in general, with which I have not been familiar. This has fed into my thinking as I begin thinking about the commentary on my own place in the thesis. This work could only be enriched further from having the opportunity to draw directly on any feedback I am offered by the Committee. To be clear, in offering me any written feedback—which of course forms part of the official research ethics application—I will take it that the Committee is consenting for me to use this as material in part of the commentary section of the thesis, if applicable. I know this is probably an unusual move. But I'm hopeful that, as any feedback can be co-authored and anonymised, individual Committee members would not feel an inappropriate degree of exposure. I also believe that it is reasonable in the context of the hierarchical power dynamic at play from the moment I engage with the ethical approval process in the first place. In engaging, of course, I cannot opt out of this dynamic. It seems fair that I should at least have the option, therefore, of drawing critically on any feedback I am offered. I also hope that there might be some value for the Committee in handling my application as a sort of test case; that it might contribute productively in some way to the development of mechanisms aimed specifically at navigating the ethics of 'creative' work—both as part of the upcoming reform of the ethical approval process, and as part of ongoing work in developing the academy's critical ontology of itself. In any case, I would be grateful for the Committee's input in the form of written feedback.*—Head, 16 June draft of 'Research Protocol' (2021), p. 2 (a document to be submitted as part of Ethical Approval application. This long passage was subsequently cut in the process of slimming 'Research Protocol' down.); Workshops mentioned: Jade Lee, *Working with Marginalised Communities: Towards an Ethical Practice for PhD*, CHASE online seminar. 11 April 2021; Moé Suzuki, *Decolonial and Anti-racist Pedagogies*, second part of Decolonise UEA Society online seminar series, 26 May 2021; André Keet. 'Africanising/Decolonising Ourselves: The Implications for Advancing Critical University Studies' (previously cited).

If after re-considering your application you decide to withdraw the application you will need to consider what is included in your research. You cannot decide not to apply for clearance if your data does require it. You can remove the retrospective aspect and data from your research and apply for clearance going forwards.

We suggest discussing these issues with your supervisors.

If you have any questions please do contact us again and we will seek further advice from the committee. We will not progress your application further without hearing from you.

Thank you.

Best wishes,

—⁵⁷⁸

*

14 June 2021

Hi ___, and I'm sorry for the slight delay in responding.

Thanks very much for the points you make about retrospective approval.

My supervisors and I were aware that the Committee doesn't normally grant this. But your response has suggested to me that it would be worthwhile making a few adjustments to the research protocol, in order to bring certain key points more into focus for the Committee - including regarding adaptations to my project due the pandemic, for which I was granted a 9-month funded extension (on the same part-time basis) back in April this year.

I'll aim to complete these adjustments by Wednesday afternoon - please do let me know if this is too late.

⁵⁷⁸ Secretary working for the Committee.

Meanwhile, is there any official guidance which is intended for poets or writers on other strands of the creative-critical PhD programme in LDC in considering how to apply the ethical approval process - in its current form - to their 'creative' work? I'm not aware of any, but it would be extremely helpful to see it if there is.⁵⁷⁹

As I have tried to convey in the research protocol I submitted, 'data collection' practices are not at all the same for poets as they are, say, in the social sciences or in other areas of the humanities. (I'm not even sure how to place the concept of 'data' within the work that I do.)

For example, it is normal for a poem to collapse time, and to collect or blend images derived from past [and / or present] events. In fact, I'm sure many would see this as one of poetry's distinguishing features: that it doesn't necessarily operate in linear time. The poetic imagination is obviously quite hard to pin down. But certainly my own experience has been that all fresh writing is the fruit of the ecosystems of imagery that are already in one's mind.

Mapping the writing of poetry onto certain protocols within an academic setting raises some interesting questions, and I am doing my best to address some of these within my thesis itself. However, as I've tried to illustrate in my research protocol, and as your email to me makes clear, it occasionally presents us with some administrative challenges, too!

With best wishes,

Billy

*

⁵⁷⁹ *The clash between freedoms (of expression, academic, intellectual) and rights (privacy, confidentiality) are familiar problems for creative, creative non-fiction, and life writers. More recently, the 'research ethics' requirements for work produced in academic contexts has come to the fore. However, existing guidelines and 'ethical approval' forms have been written with different disciplines in mind (mainly empirical and social sciences), and their language and assumptions are at odds with the ethos and expectations of creative practitioners. How do one's own memories of a sibling constitute 'research data'? How can one think of a parent as a 'data subject'? How can consent be sought when the 'data' is based on lives inextricably entwined with our own, on interactions that took place well before any notion of writing arose? How can 'data' be made available to other researchers, and then destroyed, when, arguably, the ethical position for creative practitioners is the exact opposite – that all 'research data' should be archived and preserved indefinitely, but may need to remain confidential until the 'data subjects' have passed away?...—preamble in online advertisement for 'Consent, Freedom, and the Personal: Ethics in Creative Non-Fiction' conference, hosted by the English and Creative Writing Department, Goldsmiths, University of London on 20 May 2015 (a little before my PhD study period began; I found out about this event years later, sometime between 2 and 13 July 2021, whilst applying for ethical approval.) Available at: <https://www.gold.ac.uk/calendar/?id=8396>.*

16 June 2021

Hi again, ___.

Further to our previous exchange, I would be grateful if you could ask the Committee to disregard the Application Form and Research Protocol I submitted on 9 June and, instead, to work from the attached.

With thanks and best wishes,

Billy

*

17 June 2021

Dear Billy

I have sought further advice for your application and the chair of the committee is happy for this to be included at next week's committee review meeting providing you are able to resubmit your research protocol by 9am Monday taking note of the following:

- Your research protocol needs to be much condensed (typically no more than one side of A4). It must focus specifically and concisely on the measures being taken to ensure⁵⁸⁰ that any research conducted adheres to the current UEA guidelines on gaining ethical approval.

⁵⁸⁰ *My argument is that the conceptual framework on which research ethics review is built, and consequently the institutional model by which ethical review is applied within Australian universities, is not appropriate to some forms of [political] research, with serious detrimental consequences. These consequences may include, but are not limited to: research findings being potentially skewed; research going underground or being undertaken in ways which diverge from what has been approved by committees; self-censorship; disengagement from institutional research governance procedures; the generation of risk for researchers who are operating outside institutional approvals because they feel they 'have to'...*—Anthony Langlois, 'Political Research and Human Research Committees'. *Australian Journal of Political Science* 46 (1) (2011), p. 141; quoted in Sue Joseph, 'Contextualising Creative Practice Within Human Research Ethics Processes'. *Journalism Practice* 8 (1) (2014), p. 99. // *The increased ethical regulation [in social research practices across UK universities] now being imposed is not ethically justifiable: or, at least, no cogent justification for it has yet been provided, and there are several reasons why it can be judged unethical. There is little reason to believe that it will lead researchers to behave in more ethically appropriate ways, even in those respects where there is at least some agreement. Indeed, it may encourage cynicism about ethical requirements and/or irresponsibility, in the sense of a belief that ethics committees have now taken over the task of determining what is and is not ethically acceptable. Researchers will tend to be preoccupied with what will get through an ethics committee, not with what*

- All applications must be given equal attention, and carefully considered and processed in good time, the committee including the admin team are extremely busy so any application must be kept to a reasonable length.
- When conducting research and submitting written work (including dissertations and PhD theses) at a formal academic institution, it is necessary to follow the current protocol of that institution, including seeking prior consultation and formal approval for any form of research that might produce challenges for that protocol;
- It is not the responsibility of HUM-SREC to adapt our ethics policies specifically for individual researchers⁵⁸¹, rather the committee operate using policies that can be interpreted as flexibly as possible if properly followed, so as to ensure that ethical approval is as fair and consistent as possible;
- There are provisions in the ethics rules, for example, for outlining circumstances where it might be difficult, or even not be possible, to ask participants to sign a consent form, but that does not mean that personal data can be gathered and used without consent. The relevant UEA webpages provide a definition for what counts⁵⁸² as data⁵⁸³.

is not ethically justifiable.—Hammersley, ‘Against the Ethicists: On the Evils of Ethical Regulation’, pp. 219-20.

⁵⁸¹ *...a reluctance that Malagasy people in Antananarivo, at least, have in saying no. Yes does not reliably mean yes. And so, often, it is actually not fair to ask in the first place. Needless to say, this affects things like seeking consent in relation to research work. In my own view, it would not be ethical to present any Malagasy person, in Antananarivo, at least, with a consent form.*—Head, 16 June draft of ‘Research Protocol’, p. 8. (Subsequently cut in the process of slimming ‘Research Protocol’ down, as requested by the Committee on 17 June 2021.) // *The regimes and genres through which the ‘other’, as colonised subject, experiences the ‘wrong’ are incapable of being presented by the phrases by which the hermeneutic injustices became formed within the disciplines. This incapacity which sets up a dispute is the differend [original emphasis] where the wrong and the wronged are not cognisable.*—Keet, ‘Epistemic ‘Othering’ and the Decolonisation of Knowledge’, p. 26.

⁵⁸² *We could appeal to and learn from the knowledge systems and practices of those who have been historically excluded from the official sites of knowledge production. We should also recognise the ways in which this knowledge has been historically dismissed as incoherent, unscientific, and lacking epistemic authority. Simply put, untangling the Gordian knot that is entailed in decolonising our institutions and pedagogy might be enhanced by adopting an attitude of epistemic humility towards the knowledge and knowers located outside the academy... to jettison all forms of epistemic arrogance and entitlement that come with academic status and instead to humbly consider the wisdom contained in the voices of the excluded...*—Siseko H. Kumalo, Kathy Luckett, Shannon Morreira, & Manjeet Ramgotra, ‘Confronting the complexities of decolonising curricula and pedagogy in higher education’. *Third World Thematics: A TWQ Journal*, 5 (1-2) (2020), p. 15. // *While the weakest forms of thinking and writing remain the most vulnerable to dismissal and attack, they remain the most willing to address the disorienting and disruptive moment in which we live.*—Mason, ‘Critical Vulnerability and the Weakness of Poetry’.

⁵⁸³ *A poet’s task is to show us a tree before our intellect tells us it is a tree.*—A quote that the French poet Yves Bonnefoy is famous for, although tracing where he once said it is no easy task. I have translated it here from this obituary: Da Cunha, ‘Mort d’Yves Bonnefoy, poète, traducteur et critique d’art’ (previously cited). Available at: http://www.lemonde.fr/disparitions/article/2016/07/01/mort-d-yves-bonnefoy-poete-traducteur-et-critique-d-art_4962338_3382.html. // *Data is determined as having no voice and therefore must be given one by the knowing subject, and the knowing subject has no content to their knowledge without data by way of which theory is substantiated. Herein lies a form of epistemic-methodological dependency [original emphasis], to which*

If you need further guidance on any of the above please approach ___ who is the LDC committee representative to HUM-SREC. [spacing sic]

I look forward to hearing from you by 9am Monday at the latest so your application can be reviewed next week. [spacing sic]

Thank you.

Best wishes,

—

*

21 June 2021

Dear __,

Thank you for this.

Please ask the Committee to disregard my previous submissions and to work, instead, from the attached three documents, which take into consideration the points you shared with me.

With best wishes,

Billy

~

Dear Billy

Thank you for your application, which has now been logged for full committee review, we will be back in touch shortly with their response.

extractivism [original emphasis] *is central*.—Melany Cruz and Darcy Luke, 'Methodology and academic extractivism: the neo-colonialism of the British university'. *Third World Thematics: A TWQ Journal* (2020), p. 162.

Meanwhile, please remember that you must not begin to contact potential participants or start your data collection until ethical clearance has been granted, as this could constitute research misconduct.

Best wishes,

—

~

Hi and thanks for this, ___.

All best,

Billy

*

25 June 2021

Dear Billy,

Our Ref. SREC 20-107

The committee have now met and reviewed your application. They require a couple of amendments please.

- Please clarify if anonymity can be preserved with any of the data you intend to use. If photographs include people and consent has not been sought then how can anonymity be preserved?
- Please ask your supervisors to comment on your application directly to the committee. The committee have requested them to make general comments about the distinctiveness of your project and what aspects of your work mean that ethical approval is being sought.

Please make these amendments, highlighting changes/additions in yellow, and resubmit via email by 2/7/21.

Many thanks,

—

*

2 July 2021

Dear Billy,

We contacted you last week to request an amendment to your ethics application – please see below.

We have received a supporting statement from your supervisor, __, but still require the amendment to be made please.

Please could you send me the information by 9/7/21? If we don't receive a response by then we may be unable to consider your application and a new application may be required. Meanwhile, please remember that you must not begin to contact potential participants or start your data collection until ethical clearance has been granted, as this could constitute research misconduct.

Kind regards,

—

~

Hi __,

Thanks for this. With hindsight, I regret not sending a holding reply - apologies. I had been waiting to hear back from __ before responding properly. But [...] away from Tuesday this week, and I didn't know until [...] that __ had already submitted __.

Regarding the protection of individuals and 'data collection' processes in general in my project, I have thought further this week, and have concluded that I don't have anything to add at this point to what was contained in the Research Protocol that I sent over on 21 June.

In regard specifically to the use of photography in my project, I've now added a paragraph to the Research Protocol: please ask the Committee to see the attached.

Have a nice weekend,

Billy

*

13 July 2021

Dear Billy,

Our Ref. SREC 20-107

The committee have now met and reviewed your application. They require a couple of amendments please.

a) requesting that the candidate is more explicit⁵⁸⁴ and concrete about some of the forms and usages of their data.

b) suggesting that, in order to avoid the arduous and likely very damaging (to the candidate⁵⁸⁵) process of a retrospective application, the photos that include people should be omitted from the PhD Thesis.

Please make these amendments, highlighting changes/additions in yellow, and resubmit via email by 20/7/21.

⁵⁸⁴ *For the last two hundred years, the relation between knowing and acting has lost its general character and been reduced to the relation between knowledge validated by modern science and rational social engineering. As a result, all that was arbitrarily conceived of as being outside this highly intellectualized and rationalized field was ignored or stigmatized. Outside was the dark world of passions, intuitions, feelings, emotions, affections, beliefs, faiths, values, myths, and the world of the unsayable...*—Buaventura de Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South: Justice Against Epistemicide*. (London: Routledge, 2014), p. 5.

⁵⁸⁵ *...it is not enough to change the content of the conversation, [...] it is of the essence to change the terms [original emphasis] of the conversation.*—Walter D. Mignolo, 'Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and De-Colonial Freedom'. *Theory, Culture & Society* 26 (7-8) (2009), p. 162; quoted in Cruz & Luke, 'Methodology and academic extractivism: the neo-colonialism of the British university', p. 165.

Best Wishes,

—

*

14 July 2021

Hi ___, and thanks for this.

I will think about the points raised, and be back in touch when I can.

With best wishes,

Billy

*

20 July 2021

Dear Billy,

I contacted you on 13/07/2021 to request additional information about your ethics application.

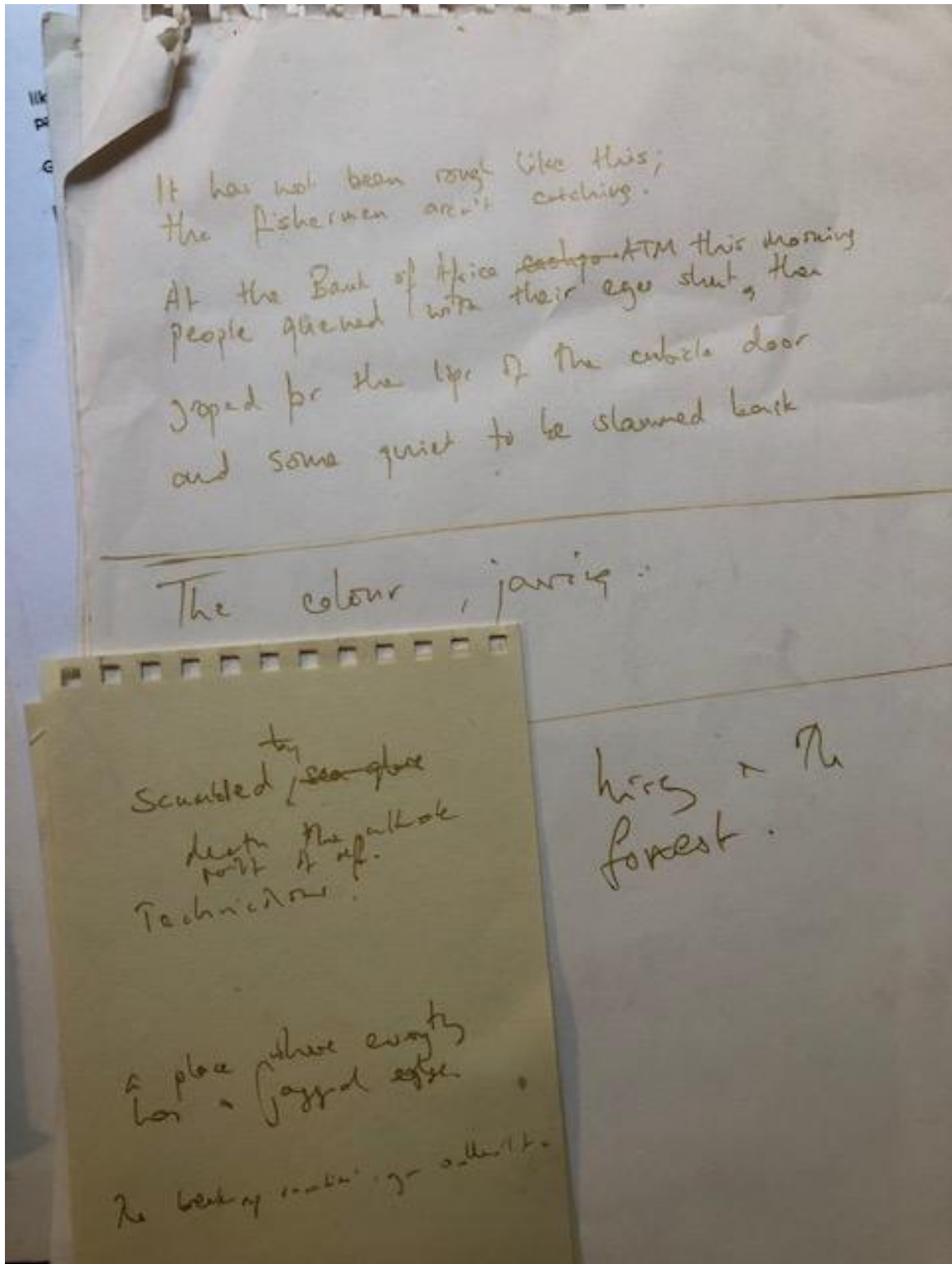
Please could you send me the information by 26/07/2021? If we don't receive a response by then we may be unable to consider your application and a new application would be required.

Meanwhile, please remember that you must not begin to contact potential participants or start your data collection until ethical clearance has been granted, as this could constitute research misconduct.

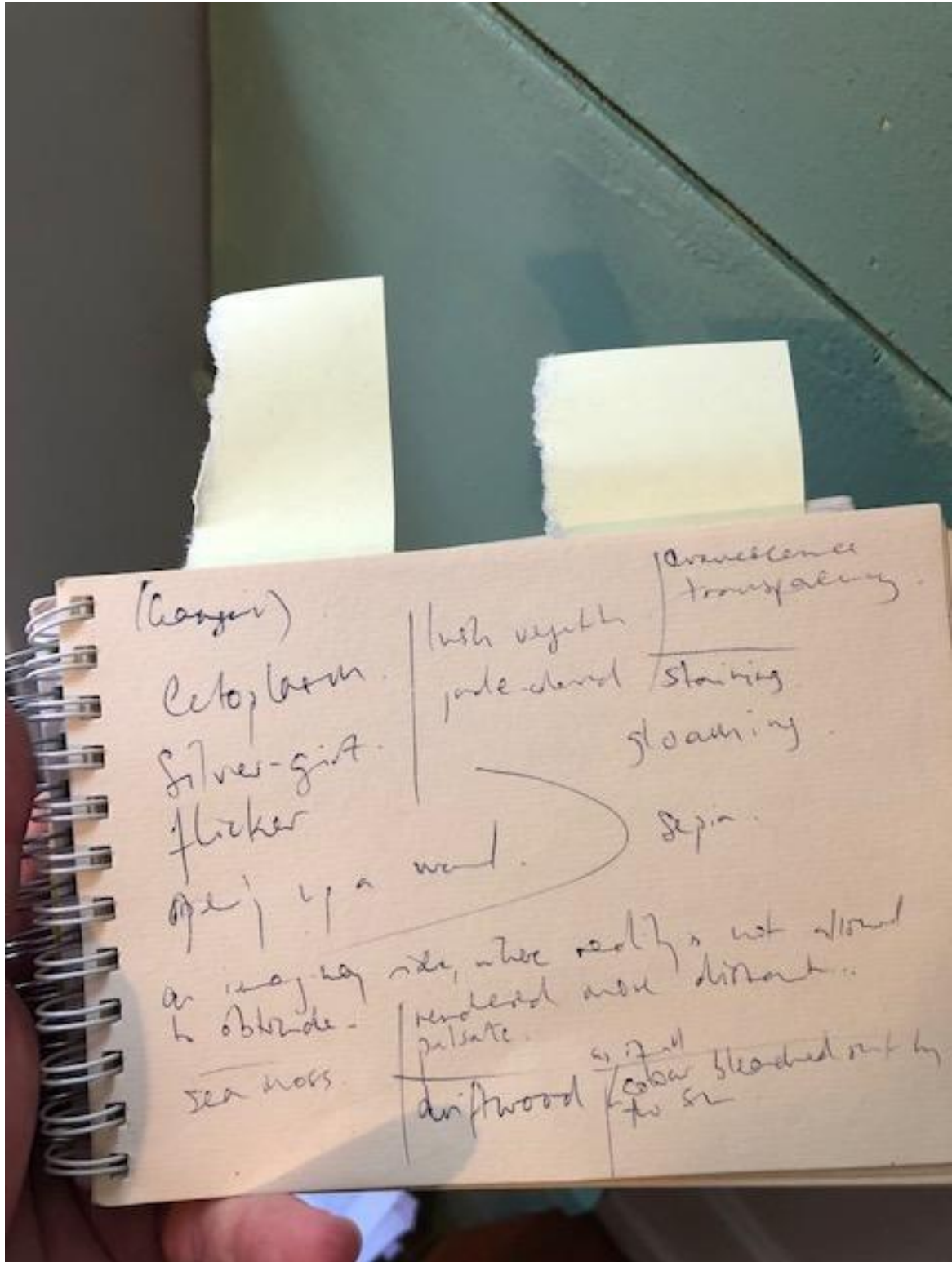
Best Wishes,

—

~



586 Picture 1 (of 2) referred to in my 20 July email to the Committee.



587 Picture 2 (of 2) referred to in my 20 July email to the Committee.

Hi and thanks for this, ___ - I hope you saw the brief holding reply I sent over on 14th.

On the Committee's first point, it is hard to be more explicit or concrete without showing you some poetry. As an example of what I have been referring to in the Research Protocol, please see [this poem](#), published a few years ago on the UEA Publishing Project's newwriting.net website. It will not be included in my thesis. But I have attached pictures of notes that fed into the writing of it (together with language and imagery already in my mind's eye), so that the Committee can hopefully better understand the process I have described. I would also like to emphasise what I have now highlighted in yellow at the top of p. 2 of the Research Protocol, under the heading 'Practices of anonymisation, omission and publication.'

On the second point, please thank the Committee for their suggestion. It does not seem to me that the wholesale omission of photographs featuring people will be necessary. I have detailed and highlighted in yellow further information on the nature of the photographs and steps that may be taken around potential sensitivities in the middle of p. 2 of the Research Protocol, under the heading 'Photography'. Please also note the new footnote at the bottom of that page, also highlighted in yellow.

With best wishes,

Billy

*

6 August 2021

Dear Billy,

Our Ref. SREC 20-107

We have now heard back from the committee and they would like some further clarification please.

a) Ethical approval for interview data of any kind must be applied for via the relevant UEA ethics committee **BEFORE** the research commences. There is still⁵⁸⁸ some uncertainty as to the precise form and nature of some of the data being used, so please provide a clear, concise statement that confirms no such interview data will be used in the PhD thesis (as our understanding is that no formal ethics approval application was made prior to starting data collection). This will allow us to exempt materials, such as the sample notes provided, from the ethics approval process.

b) Regardless of the extent of your experience, for the purposes of completing formal academic work at UEA, the committee does not accept that you can simply use your own judgement to decide what is and isn't okay by way of photo usage.⁵⁸⁹ In order to ensure that the ethics approval process is as fair and rigorous as possible, ethics approval for the use of identifiable photos should be gained by all researchers **BEFORE** beginning the research. In that regard, in order to avoid the arduous and likely very damaging (to you⁵⁹⁰) process of a retrospective application,

⁵⁸⁸ *It may prove easier to attack the racist culture and practices of coloniality in universities through manifestos and journal articles and pull down the statues of notorious racists than replace the modern episteme on which the very idea of the public Western university is founded.*—Kumalo, Lockett, Morreira, and Ramgotra, 'Confronting the complexities of decolonising curricula and pedagogy in higher education', p. 11. // *The disciplines... they are totally, totally entangled with a variety of, err, of processes, err, that disallow, erm, different sets of knowledge-formations that are able to read 'African life'... The knowledge question is so deeply rooted in how the universities operate... So this is a, this is a huge, err, question that we have to put on the table – err, not from the perspective of, of displacing different sets of worldviews, but from the point of view of where different knowledge-formations can be ma-, can be invested with certain forms, err, of schemes and interpretations that may make reading, err, the continent, err, a bit more just and a bit more, err, intelligible.*—André Keet, 'Africa – Higher Education Internationalization and Transformation'. (2020) Lecture presented at the conference, *Internationalization for an Uncertain Future: Setting the Agenda for Critical Internationalization Studies*, University of British Columbia on 26 June 2020. Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GVMf_sVPOmg, 36:45–39:05.

⁵⁸⁹ *There is no singular way of thinking about photography ethics. Research photographers find themselves having to make ethical decisions on the spot, taking into consideration many variables, including method, subject, context and intent. Rather than attempting to outline what is unequivocally right or wrong, there is greater value in familiarising researchers with the ethical arguments to enable them to think critically about how they use photography in their work.*—Photography ethics centre, 'Understanding photography ethics in social research'. (2017) Available at <https://www.photoethics.org/content/2018/5/31/understanding-photography-ethics-in-social-research>. // *...The kind of certain knowledge that shuts down revision or discussion, or suggests that knowledge can't also be (say it) felt.*—Underwood, 'On Poetry and Uncertain Subjects'.

⁵⁹⁰ *By cultural justice, we mean that the burden of constant self-consciousness must be shared or, at the very least, recognised and, where possible, rewarded. The sharing part is very important. For it is only in the mutual vulnerability that this entails that the meaning of intimacy and reciprocity in community can be discovered. It is in this sharing that, on the one hand, cultural diffidence is transcended and, on the other, cultural arrogance is overcome.*—Chirevo V. Kwenda, 'Cultural Justice: The pathway to reconciliation and social cohesion' (2003); in David Chidester, Philip Dexter & Wilmot James (eds), *What holds us together: Social cohesion in South Africa*. (Cape town: HSRC Publishers, 2003); quoted in André Keet, Kimberley Porteus & Denise Zinn 'Mutual vulnerability: A key principle in a humanising pedagogy in post-conflict societies'. *Perspectives in Education* 27(2) (2009), p. 110. // *The educational interpretation of Kwenda's analysis suggests that the actors who operate from within non-dominant or non-normative frames are mostly*

the committee advises that the photos that include identifiable people should be omitted from the PhD Thesis.

Please provide a response, sent to this email address by 13/8/21.

Many thanks,

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*

13 August 2021

Dear Billy,

Our Ref. SREC 20-107

I contacted you on 06/08/2021 to request additional information about your ethics application.

Please could you send me the information by 20/08/2021.

If we don't receive a response by then we may be unable to consider your application and a new application might be required.

Meanwhile, please remember that you must not begin to contact potential participants or start your data collection until ethical clearance has been granted, as this could constitute research misconduct.

Best Wishes,

—

required to forfeit recourse to their own 'default' or meaning-making frames in an asymmetrical power-relation with their interlocutors. This asymmetrical power-relation is for the most part dominant within educational settings and places the responsibility for constant self-consciousness on the carriers of non-normative frames. 'Mutual vulnerability' dictates that this responsibility, this burden, be shared. Sharing in this way is the incubator of 'mutual vulnerability', and the educational possibility of authentic learning that rests within the power of reclaiming vulnerability, is infinitely renewed... Further, the burden of constant self-consciousness and of deep self-awareness is an ethical responsibility within educational processes.— Keet, Porteus & Zinn, 'Mutual vulnerability: A key principle in a humanising pedagogy in post-conflict societies', pp. 110, 116.

Hi __,

Further to your email of 6 August, I would be grateful if you could forward the attached further revised Research Protocol to the Committee. New changes are highlighted in yellow.

I will also summarise here these changes:

In order to address the Committee's point (a) in the 6 August email to me, I have added a statement under the heading Data collection and presentation in the context of 'creative' work on page 1 of the revised Research Protocol, stating: "*My poetry is not, therefore, a presentation of 'interview data', in the conventional social sciences sense.*"

In order to address the Committee's point (b), I have revised and expanded what is written under the Photography heading on pp. 2-3, stating: "*No selection of photography has yet been made. It should also be acknowledged that the question of what constitutes 'identifiability' in the context of protecting individuals in Madagascar is naturally a grey area. And so I would welcome detailed guidance from the Committee on any selection criteria relevant to the protection of 'identifiable people' there. I will, in any case, be able to undertake a two-stage review of photographic material selected. In the first step, upon submission, I will need to make a declaration using the Research Degree Entry Form. This includes sections (on page 1 and page 5) that highlight confidentiality and access restrictions - for example, where there is sensitive information relating to people or organisations that the examiners need to be aware of. Page 5 has several possible statements to review, depending on whether they apply. (Issues around possible identification of individuals could be flagged up in number 6. "Data Protection of Research Subjects";" in 7. "Release of the thesis might endanger the physical or mental health, or the safety of an individual"; in 8 "Your thesis includes elements of third party copyright material, which you have permission to include as part of your degree assessment, but would like redacted/partially redacted in the e-thesis"; or in 9. "Other – Please give details in the 'Further details' section below".) I should stress however that, as I say, no selection of photography has yet been made; and that I cannot, at the moment, think of any photographs in which individuals would be identifiable. As a second step, if necessary, it may be possible for me to apply for embargo or redaction of specific content in material made public via the Digital Repository following examination and any corrections / resubmission of the work. Access options comprise: immediate open access, temporary embargo, permanent embargo, and redaction of specific materials (e.g. images). I am aware of the open access deposit of the thesis, which would effectively make it a public document. In the event of valid concerns about the selection of imagery, these will be reviewed again close to submission against the relevant Embargo Checklist, and a*

concession sought for redaction of specific photographs in the final version of the thesis. It is worth stressing that this would be a final checkpoint, following earlier selection and consultation with my supervisors."

I have also added further down under the Photography heading on page 3: "*Finally, as this feeds directly into both the critical essay and the critical commentary sections of my thesis, I would also greatly appreciate from the Committee (a) specific guidance on how informed consent could be applied as an effective protective safeguard in a photographic practice in Madagascar (whether by me or, indeed, by any other researcher or academic institution); and (b) any other guidance considered relevant to using a photographic practice in an ethical manner in Madagascar (whether by me, or by any other researcher or academic institution⁵⁹¹). This further information would inform my self-reflection on my practice as a photographer in the critical commentary section of my thesis. It would also feed into analysis, in the critical essay section of my thesis, of the ethics underpinning a body of work in a similar setting and field to mine (ethnographer-academic Stephen Muecke and photographer-academic Max Pam's book 'Contingency in Madagascar'). And it would inform a wider discussion in my critical commentary about ethical questions around interactions between photographers and photographic subjects in Madagascar; and around the publication of work (written and photographic) arising from those interactions."*

With best wishes,

Billy

*

16 August 2021

Dear Billy,

Our ref: SREC 20-107

⁵⁹¹ Please visit: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/126230912@N04/albums/72157656353908636/page2>, a photograph album entitled 'Madagascar' on the official flickr account of the Department of International Development at UEA. The photographs were taken in and around Antananarivo, in July 2015, according to the web page. (I was in Antananarivo at that time, but didn't come across the UEA 'Dev' staff behind the photographs, or know of their visit.) Please also see the photograph used as a background at: <https://www.uea.ac.uk/about/school-of-international-development/research/research-ethics>, the UEA's 'Research Ethics in the School of International Development' web page. This photograph (which can also be found on page 2 of the aforementioned flickr album) will have been taken in an area of central Antananarivo known informally as La Réunion Kely, long home to some of the city's very poorest and most vulnerable people. // *Will the research involve respondents to the internet or other visual/vocal methods where respondents may be identified?*—Q. 16 (out of 23 questions), Section III: 'Research Confirmation Questions' in University of East Anglia, 'HUM S-REC Ethics & Governance Application Form for Research Projects'. (2021) (This is the version of the Application Form that was active when my PhD project encountered the Ethical Approval process.)

Many thanks for sending through your amendments. I have sent them on to the committee and will get back in touch once I have a response.

Best Wishes,

—

~

Hi and thanks for this, ___.

Best wishes,

Billy

*

24 August 2021

Dear Billy,

Our Ref. SREC 20-107

We have now heard back from the committee and they would like some further clarification please.

1. Regarding the use of notebook notes, the highlighted sentence (Page 1, under the "Data collection and presentation" heading) that states "My poetry is not, therefore, a presentation of 'interview data', in the conventional social sciences sense" needs to be modified. It should simply and explicitly state that "My poetry is not, therefore, a presentation of interview data", or words to that effect. In other words, we need to be clear that research interviews were not conducted for the purpose of data collection without prior ethical approval.⁵⁹²

⁵⁹² *The dissonance between research practice and the governing practices of the institutional discourse of research ethics is more than bothersome, galling, or benignly unsettling. It exposes an epistemological rupture—an ethical schism. When the technologies of ethics review configure themselves in ways that are disconnected from the real world of research practice and*

2. Regarding the issue of using photographs (Pages 2-3), as an ethics committee, and as individual School ethics representatives, dealing with dozens of applications, we do not have time allocated to set aside for lengthy consultation and contribution towards individual PhD research projects (which is what appears to be being requested by the applicant). As such, as we previously advised, the committee strongly recommend that unless prior consent was explicitly obtained, which it seems clear it was not in all cases, photographs of people that could reasonably be deemed identifiable (using common sense judgement) should not be included in the submitted PhD thesis. In this regard, the sentence on Page 2 that states "I cannot, at the moment, think of any photographs in which individuals would be identifiable" should be modified to "No photographs are used in which individuals are identifiable", or words to that effect.
3. Finally, as a general point, this has been an extremely taxing and time-consuming application to review and re-review, because the applicant appears to feel that the onus of responsibility is upon us to engage in a lengthy dialogue⁵⁹³ over what constitutes

discourage/preclude considering all those upon whom the research impacts, the technologies position themselves as superordinate to the moral principles and codes for ethical research.—Christine Halse and Anne Honey, 'Rethinking Ethics Review As Institutional Discourse'. *Qualitative Inquiry* 13 (3) (2007), pp. 342-3; quoted in Sue Joseph, 'Contextualising Creative Practice Within Human Research Ethics Processes', p. 99.

⁵⁹³ *Since 2016, a series of conversations, discussions and meetings has developed between a group of colleagues at UEA and in India. The focus of these conversations has been on the idea of inventing a new curriculum for the Arts and Humanities. One of the stipulations of that work has been the thought that a new curriculum of this kind could not be confined by the perspective of one national culture or, indeed, of any one world area Culture (such as Global North or South, East or West, Asia or Europe, etc.), but that it needed to emerge precisely out of a dialogue between different cultures, different texts, and different contexts.*—University of East Anglia, 'Dialogues on Decolonisation'. (2021) UEA *Humanities in India*, an e-booklet of transcripts following workshops held in India from April-June 2021, Introduction (Jon Cook & Daniel Rycroft, UEA), p. 3. // ...*dialogic approaches to decolonisation in Higher Education are a prerequisite for meaningful change.* Samir Das (University of Calcutta) in *Ibid*, p. 6. // *I see a twofold role for academic leadership. 1. To break the ice, and to take the first step to initiate dialogues of this kind across cultures and between civilisations. Perhaps the conditions are not conducive to this...* 2. ...*It is also necessary to experiment with different forms of dialoguing, for the generation and dissemination of knowledge, since there is no one golden way of conducting dialogue.*—Samir Das in *Ibid*, p. 10. // *So, I felt very oppressed. I was looking for a dialogic space.*—Sanjoy Ganguly (Jana Sanskriti) in *Ibid*, p. 32. // *This chapter employs critical discourse analysis to examine the language of national and institutional policy and practice documents. These texts inform the design of doctoral supervisor continuing professional development at one UK university, and appear to reflect a bias favouring regulatory processes over people... Language addressing 'appropriateness' involving doctoral researchers casts the latter in the role of patient (receiving or subject to action), with the agent being the higher education provider, supervisor or particular processes... The language of national and institutional policy documents and reports construct the doctoral process and doctoral candidate in ways that foreground the educational system and background themes that are existential. National policy and practice texts are concerned with the workplace context, working conditions, career trajectory, and processes of the doctorate itself. The genre matrix shows that doctoral researchers and supervisors are typically presented in the third person, rather than being addressed directly in the second person or providing insights in the first person. This suggests a discourse of agents and patients as entities interacting within a system, rather than communicative subjects. There are also three distinct terms in operation: 'candidate', 'student' and 'postgraduate researcher'. Whereas 'student' and to a lesser degree, 'candidate' are more prominent across all policy and practice texts, the designation 'postgraduate researcher' is used comparatively rarely, and is omitted completely at institutional level. This may be intended to reinforce a distinction between staff and students as two different entities.*—Matthew Sillence, 'Towards a Person-Centre Discourse in Doctoral Supervisor Development'. (2022) Unpublished version, pp. 1, 11, 13; paper also published in Britt-Marie

acceptable or appropriate ethical practice in conducting research through poetry in Madagascar⁵⁹⁴. The chair of the committee would, therefore, like to re-emphasise the point that while we respect the artistic expression of the applicant and do not doubt their probably vastly superior knowledge of the context, they have chosen to conduct a PhD at UEA. As such, it is their⁵⁹⁵ responsibility (in consultation with their supervisors) to familiarise themselves with the relevant ethics regulations and protocol (available in the information and documents on our website), and to adhere⁵⁹⁶ to those procedures when conducting field research.

4. The ethics review process is there to protect researchers as well as their subjects and that members of the committee have already a huge amount of effort into this case.

Apelgren, Pamela M. Denicolo & Marie-Louise Österlind (eds.), *Doctoral Education as If People Matter*. (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2022), pp. 106-25. The UK university on which this article bases its research is UEA.

⁵⁹⁴ *Each and every person (and institution) involved in decolonising the curriculum will at some point have to confront the issue of where and how to make specific pedagogical adjustments and overhauls. The conversation here demonstrates how long-term and dynamic thinking, in respect of minority peoples and languages especially, can provide the necessary impetus for structural and systemic changes that privilege interpersonal collaboration and intercultural knowledge.*—Sayantan Dasgupta (Jadavpur University) in *ibid* ‘Dialogues on Decolonisation’, p. 18. // *There are various areas of engagement that one could emphasise: making the invisible visible; emphasising voices that have been silenced or marginalised; generating alternative knowledges; negotiating the limits of the sayable; identifying the responsibilities of the witness. All of these relevant to an institution that is attempting to decolonise its canons, its hierarchies, its structures, and its teaching practices, etc. That is not in any doubt... I am trying to argue for a fundamental disposition towards the other, as much as towards the self... Thinking at the level of the other rather than of the self, first and foremost – that is to say ‘the other’ with a small O rather than ‘the Other’ with a big O – might result in better conversations, conversations that change all of us.*—Tiffany Atkinson (UEA) in *Ibid*, pp. 24-5. // *It seems that the decolonial will struggle to become a praxis and may instead remain a form of rhetoric – not because it does not have the resources or imaginative capacities, but because the social structure of the academy will disallow it to become a productive reference point... For instance: why are we, the academics, not called out as we should be? Why do we not readily allow ourselves to be confronted? Why did the decolonial impetus not start with us? ...It is an awkward, inept (de)coloniality, because it is unproductively steered through interpretive schemes and scholarly orientations that have always sneered at it.*—André Keet, Anne Munene, & Sahar D. Sattarzadeh ‘An Awkward, Uneasy (De)Coloniality: Higher Education and Knowledge Otherwise’. *Education as Change*, 21 (1) (2017), pp. 4, 6.

⁵⁹⁵ *...One needs to become comfortable or, at least, prepared to have one’s position dismantled... Of course, it should result in dismantling and rearranging perspectives: questioning fixed views... Decolonisation offers a powerful metaphor for those wanting to critique positions of power, and dominant culture. I believe, therefore, that our challenge is one of letting go: becoming confident, comfortable, and ready to relinquish power by letting others in, and letting others lead and thereby take things in new directions, to create new pathways. But we have to provide the framework for that... Above all, it should mean to be open to critique and reform: to confront legacies, to undo and become undone.*—Sarah Barrow (UEA) in *ibid* ‘Dialogues on Decolonisation’, pp. 7-8.

⁵⁹⁶ *In the end, ethics ceases to be ethics when it becomes regulation.*—Robert Cribb, ‘Ethical Regulation and Humanities Research in Australia: Problems and Consequences’. *Monash Bioethics Review* 23 (3) (2004), p. 55; quoted in Sue Joseph, ‘Contextualising Creative Practice Within Human Research Ethics Processes’, p. 96. // *I have done the ethics-related training that I can at UEA, including in PPD modules when first starting my PhD. But I have, above all, learned to trust the in-built ethical decision-making processes that are an ordinary part of writing poetry... At their best, my poems themselves are often asking what might be described as moral or ethical questions.*—Head, 16 June draft of ‘Research Protocol’, pp. 7, 8. (Subsequently cut in the process of slimming ‘Research Protocol’ down.)

Meanwhile, please remember that you must not begin to contact potential participants or start your data collection until ethical clearance has been granted, as this could constitute research misconduct.

Best Wishes,

—

*

26 August 2021

Dear __,

Thank you for sending over the Committee's latest comments. Please see the attached further revised Research Protocol.

I have adjusted the sentence under the heading Data collection... that the Committee refers to in point 1. It now reads: "*My poetry is not, therefore, a presentation of interview data; there were no research interviews conducted for the purpose of data collection without prior ethical approval.*"

I have also adjusted the sentence under the heading Photography that the Committee refers to in point 2. It now reads: "*Photographs of people that could reasonably be deemed identifiable will not be included in the final submitted PhD thesis.*"

I hope the Committee concludes I have now adhered to the relevant regulations and protocols.

With best wishes,

Billy

*

27 August 2022

Dear Billy,

Many thanks for this. I have sent it on to the committee and we will be back in touch once we receive a response.

Best wishes

—

~

Thanks, ___.

Have a nice weekend,

Billy

*

7 September 2021

Dear Billy

Our ref.: SREC 20-107

Please find attached an e-letter granting you ethics approval for your research project.

Best Wishes,

—

*

10 September 2021

Dear ___ and ___⁵⁹⁷,

I hope this message finds you both safe and well.

⁵⁹⁷ My supervision team.

I am pleased to report that Billy Head's ethics application has been approved by the HUM S-REC. It is fair to say that the process has been challenging, but was conducted with the right intention and the right outcome. Over the last few months, Billy and I have had several very productive conversations regarding creative writing and its relation to researcher and participant positionality. I wouldn't want these important issues raised to be lost, as I feel that the application is something of a benchmark in HUM vis-à-vis creative practice and situational ethics.

With the introduction of the University's online Ethics Monitor system for future applications, there is considerable work that I believe the Graduate School and LDC can do to support PGRs with creative-critical projects. ___ and I will be revisiting this in the coming weeks, and I plan to meet with the S-REC chair and LDC ethics representative to consider some of those points, which I summarise below.

- Guidance around creative-critical work that involves other people/organisations (either directly or indirectly) should outline the nature of the relations, contexts and information gathering
- A wider understanding of what constitutes 'data' in the context of creative fiction/non-fiction
- A clarification of the research 'outputs' in creative work, namely what the writing looks like
- An acknowledgement of power dynamics in particular situations, attending to source community traditions and expectations around informed consent that the committee should be aware of
- Consideration of the how students interact with the HUM S-REC, namely, clarification of the terms of reference for S-REC, the committee's commitment to feedback, and how that feedback provided
- Enhanced training on how to prioritise and allocate time for online applications at the start of the research degree, and the iterative nature of the process

In summary, the last few months have been a valuable learning experience, and I hope that Billy's work progresses well over the new academic year. I would also recommend that the final research protocol and approval letter from S-REC is reviewed at your next supervisory

team meeting, and uploaded to eVision as part of the monthly reporting process. It will form an important document going forward, particularly as Billy approaches the submission stage.

All my best wishes,

Matthew ^[598]

*

22 September 2021

Hi and thanks a lot for sending this over, ___⁵⁹⁹.

I'd be grateful if you could pass on my thanks to the Committee for the time they took in reviewing and re-reviewing my application.

Please also let the Chair know that I may respond in due course to points 3 and 4 in the email I received from the Committee on 24 August. Clearly the Committee can't be expected to have limitless resources, but I don't share the view expressed re. what made processing my application such a taxing and time-consuming business.

And finally thanks to you, and to your colleagues ___ and ___ for passing communications to and fro between me and the Committee over the last few months.

With best wishes,

Billy

*

⁵⁹⁸ Matthew Sillence; name disclosed here with Dr. Sillence's permission.

⁵⁹⁹ Secretary working for the Committee.

the way in which, as a poet, I am especially concerned with imagery. (My poetry is not, therefore, a presentation of interview data; there were no research interviews conducted for the purpose of data collection without prior ethical approval.) A sort of ecosystem of images has grown in my mind over this period. This amounts to an enormous reserve of material that can be worked into poetry—but I should emphasise that this material is located more in my imagination (consciously, partly-consciously or unconsciously), than in my notebooks. Moreover, what *is* written in my notebooks often differs in nature and purpose to more explicit ‘data’ or ‘capta’. A lot of the time it is closer to the idea of ‘figmenta’, ‘ficta’, or perhaps ‘imaginata’. Indeed, even by the standards of most poetry I would say my work is relatively image-heavy. In terms of my daily habits as a researcher, my world as a poet has never been one of a formalised ‘access’ to distinct ‘communities’ via ‘gatekeepers’, etc.⁶⁰¹ This unstructured approach is quite normal for ‘creative writers’, as the Australian novelist and academic Nigel Krauth notes.⁶⁰² [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] My notebooks filled up in a way that was organic. When I had the time, I would transcribe all scribbings onto a Word Document. I would then print, read through and circle with a pencil fragments that might eventually, together with related imagery already in my mind’s eye, be developed into poetry. This method maybe has more in common with that of a painter than that of, say, a novelist.

Practices of anonymisation, omission and publication

I am not aware of any specific guidance for poets or other ‘creative writers’ at UEA in thinking about how to map their writing practices onto academic conventions surrounding the issue of consent. In any case, with Malagasy people in Antananarivo, neither written nor verbal consent should necessarily be taken as consent⁶⁰³. The first way I have tended to protect anyone, including sometimes myself, is by anonymising and keeping anything else that might identify someone, if that matters, out of the writing. Sometimes I have chosen not to write about experiences shared with others, even when those others would not be identified; or when they will not necessarily read the work themselves once it is published as part of my PhD or, subsequently, in book form. [REDACTED]

⁶⁰¹ *Will the study require the co-operation of a gatekeeper for initial access to the groups or individuals to be recruited (e.g. students at school, members of self-help group, residents of nursing home, prisoners)?*—Question 3, Section III in University of East Anglia, ‘HUM S-REC Ethical Approval Application Form’ (2021).

⁶⁰² Krauth, N. (2007) ‘The Novel and the Academic Novel’ in Harper, G. and Kroll, J. (eds) (2007) *Creative Writing Studies: Practice, Research and Pedagogy*. Bristol: Channel View Publications, p. 17. [sic]

⁶⁰³ *Will it be necessary for participants to take part in the study without their knowledge and consent at the time (e.g. covert observation of people in non-public places)?*—Question 4, Section III in University of East Anglia, ‘HUM S-REC Ethical Approval Application Form’ (2021).

material gathered from conversations inside my teaching practices at the University of Antananarivo, for example, has always been handled in exactly the same way as material from any less formalised setting: ethical decisions in my work always have to be taken on a case-by-case basis, sometimes on a micro scale, within the same line or poem. If it doesn't feel right, I don't include it.⁶⁰⁴ I would add that Malagasy people can talk very elliptically, to facilitate conversation on sensitive topics. I have found this unconsciously reproduced in my work. Poetry, of course, lends itself to this.⁶⁰⁵

Photography

From 2008-2010 it was part of my job to file photographs from Antananarivo for an international news agency. This work taught me some established principles around maintaining human dignity, representation, consent, etc. It also eventually taught me how these same principles can embolden non-Malagasy photographers in decisions that are at odds with Malagasy sensibilities. The idea to include a selection of around fifty photographs in my PhD project emerged out of a critical encounter in my essay (see bullet points above) with the 'new ethnographic' book *Contingency in Madagascar*.⁶⁰⁶ This book espouses the visibility of its authors (a writer and a photographer) in their work, which I wish to adapt in my own project. However, my essay also highlights culturally-specific ethical problems in the book's use of photography. My photography tends to be more concerned with atmosphere and with the imprints of people than with people themselves. In selecting photographs, ethical decisions will be made on exactly the same case-by-case basis as in my poetry editing, based on what feels right.⁶⁰⁷

It does not seem to me that the wholesale omission of photographs featuring people will be necessary.⁶⁰⁸ No selection of photography has yet been made. It should also be acknowledged that the

⁶⁰⁴ Does the research involve vulnerable groups (children, those with cognitive impairment, or those in unequal relationships e.g. your own students)?—Q. 2, Section III in University of East Anglia, 'HUM S-REC Ethical Approval Application Form' (2021). // Is pain or more than mild discomfort likely to result from the study?—Ibid, Question 9. // Could the study induce psychological stress or anxiety or cause harm or negative consequences beyond the risks encountered in normal life?—Ibid, Question 10.

⁶⁰⁵ Will the study involve discussion of sensitive topics (e.g. sexual activity, drug use, ethnicity, political behaviour)?—Ibid, Question 5. // Will the research involve access to records of personal/ sensitive/ confidential information, or involve commercial confidentiality/ national security?—Ibid, Question 7.

⁶⁰⁶ Muecke, P. and Pam, M. (2012) *Contingency in Madagascar*. Bristol, UK: Intellect Books. [sic]

⁶⁰⁷ Cf. the approach set out at the end of this article: Photography Ethics Centre, November 2017. *Understanding photography ethics in social research*. Available at: <https://www.photoethics.org/content/2018/5/31/understanding-photography-ethics-in-social-research>. [sic]

⁶⁰⁸ (The UEA's School of International Development seem, incidentally, to have concluded the same in publishing [this](#) photograph, also taken in Antananarivo and featuring people, on their main Research

question of what constitutes ‘identifiability’ in the context of protecting individuals in Madagascar is naturally a grey area. I will, in any case, be able to undertake a two-stage review of photographic material selected. In the first step, upon submission, I will need to make a declaration using the Research Degree Entry Form. This includes sections (on page 1 and page 5) that highlight confidentiality and access restrictions - for example, where there is sensitive information relating to people or organisations that the examiners need to be aware of. Page 5 has several possible statements to review, depending on whether they apply. (Issues around possible identification of individuals could be flagged up in number 6. “Data Protection of Research Subjects”; in 7. “Release of the thesis might endanger the physical or mental health, or the safety of an individual”; in 8 “Your thesis includes elements of third party copyright material, which you have permission to include as part of your degree assessment, but would like redacted/partially redacted in the e-thesis”; or in 9. “Other – Please give details in the ‘Further details’ section below”.) I should stress however that, as I say, no selection of photography has yet been made; and that photographs of people that could reasonably be deemed identifiable will not be included in the final submitted PhD thesis. As a second step, if necessary, it may be possible for me to apply for embargo or redaction of specific content in material made public via the Digital Repository following examination and any corrections / resubmission of the work. Access options comprise: immediate open access, temporary embargo, permanent embargo, and redaction of specific materials (e.g. images). I am aware of the open access deposit of the thesis, which would effectively make it a public document. In the event of valid concerns about the selection of imagery, these will be reviewed again close to submission against the relevant Embargo Checklist, and a concession sought for redaction of specific photographs in the final version of the thesis. It is worth stressing that this would be a final checkpoint, following earlier selection and consultation with my supervisors. I should also highlight that I will bring to the selection of photographs over a decade of accumulated knowledge concerning what is "okay" and "not okay" in protecting people's dignity in a contemporary Malagasy context. This knowledge has become second nature over the years, and already shapes ethical decision-making when I take photos. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Finally, as this feeds directly into both the critical essay and the critical commentary sections of my thesis, I would also greatly appreciate from the Committee (a) specific guidance on how informed consent could be applied as an effective protective safeguard in a photographic practice in Madagascar (whether by me or, indeed, by any other researcher or academic institution); and (b) any other guidance considered relevant to using a photographic practice in an ethical manner in Madagascar (whether by me, or by any other researcher or academic

Ethics web page; likewise, [this](#) album from Antananarivo, full of people, on their *flickr* account. I agree with what is written in the *photoethics* article above, about there being no singular approach to photography ethics. And it is for UEA to decide what photographs they publish online. But as an illustration of my ethical decision-making in practice, there are photographs in the latter *flickr* album which I would not personally feel comfortable taking or publishing online.) [sic]

Committee is consenting for me to use any part of this as material feeding into the commentary section of my thesis, if I consider it to be of direct relevance.

Billy Head, 26 August 2021

*

Postscript

Following the submission of my PhD thesis and passing the viva voce examination on 28 June 2023 subject to minor corrections, the following was asked of me by examiners in relation to this section:

Finally, we would welcome a brief conclusion to the section on ethics, as we think it would be useful to spell out some of the communicable lessons that were learned in the process of challenging the University's institutional requirements.⁶¹⁰

I find myself facing two particular challenges in relation to the above request:

Firstly, as I mention towards the end of this thesis's *Introduction* section:

[The *[un]ethical matters* section] contains criticisms of the institutional framework that it would be difficult for me to make more explicitly in this thesis because of the power dynamics in operation here in my interaction as researcher with the institution.

As I try to signal with the epigraph to the *[un]ethical matters* section—the way I worked round this in *[un]ethical matters* was to adopt a mode of inquiry associated with the Malagasy spoken in and around Antananarivo that resists making explicit statements; foregrounding, instead, a certain kind of allusiveness by placing two linguistic units in close proximity or side by side, but without specifying why. How, therefore, might I honour both this request of me on the part of the examiners and the spirit of the approach above?

Secondly, given the multiplicity and intricacy of the various relevant considerations, conveying explicitly but in brief what I have learned in the course of challenging the University's institutional requirements over a period of almost ten years would be very difficult. Doing justice to this learning would arguably be best achieved with a robust, comprehensive set of recommendations (including for the revision of institutional practice on a large scale) which, needless to say, would be well beyond the scope of this section—and indeed, I believe, of this thesis.

After careful consideration, therefore, I have decided to offer here the following, very brief, more provisional set of conclusions; together with an invitation:

1. Both procedural checkpoints—Probationary Review and Ethical Clearance—in the precise form in which I interacted with them in relation to my PhD project, at least, were not fit for purpose.

⁶¹⁰ University of East Anglia (2021), Research Degree Examinations – PhD Examiners' Final Report (LDC) (PGR Service, Version 2.0), p. 4.

2. Any standardised model for each of the above checkpoints affecting researchers on the Creative and Critical Writing PhD programme, at least, should be abandoned.
3. Creative and Critical Writing PhD researchers should be encouraged to join, as widely as possible, in the consultation process with regard to designing whatever replaces the standardised model.
4. All Creative and Critical Writing PhD researchers should be encouraged to examine ethical decision-making in their practices as part of their research project.
5. This work should be supported by a department-wide review in the School of Literature, Drama and Creative Writing of the particularities of research ethics for “creative” practices.

An invitation: should anybody in the University beyond my supervision and examining team be interested to read this section and discuss it with me after I have left UEA in the interest of improving these checkpoints, that would be a pleasure.

*

*ririnina*⁶¹¹

⁶¹¹ from 'riry' (\approx cleared; swept away, as when rice is harvested) and 'ina' (\approx indicating something is being caused to happen). (Roughly June-July-August.)



June 2018

1

The sky was taller today and the wind has collapsed. Red dragonflies on the terrace at midday, taking the new heat in their wings.

Nights will be dry.

2

That not knowing the motive is key.

A woman of joy in her chest and stomach. And that we have avocados, kaky, and apples again. And more metal in the air.

3

Talk of mild winters.

Like in August, ___; short exhalation, dispersal, rotor blades in the rice fields. That blood may come out grey.

4

The woman who has taken up smoking in order to occupy her mind.

5

From the ceiling, every 50 seconds or so—halfway down the steps—it is longstanding enough for a rusty stain. There is a smirk in the northwest corner. Fingers worth smelling. And out the back, through a push on the door marked *DOOR*, there is a fruitless banana tree, a stare outheld and a knowing misdirection to

the female toilets. It is dank here, and the wasps are not biting. Our corn is not vertical. Hairbands may be found. We may look both young and old. And there is something I would like to say: light

is security and we are beginning to notice. It is coming from somewhere on the Route Circulaire. It is below. It must be below. The dying vultures; the handover of the very same vehicles. But through wing mirrors it is, after all, exhilaratingly behind us: a first outrider in his loved leather gloves and some more flashing. Yet static. They are just screeching now, gridlocked. And all of a sudden it is clear it is a silent collusion: a deliberate blocking at every turn because now for the first time in however many years they are safely weak enough for us to just inch our way down the cobbles. Windows shut. No room here for a front tyre. No reflexive giving. But three Land Cruisers are now in the left lane and the gloom says it is not a Ministry of the Lord but the mid-green of the African Union and a united mediation passing through to silence the arms in Africa and they will get away and we are left not knowing what to do with these feelings now just screaming for an outlet.

6

Safety catch on. And contempt will be followed to the lapel. A balaclava is stored above the eyes on the floors above. An *if I were your husband, love, I would never be naughty again.*

The protest is not yet delicious.

7

But when
they are capable of killing you.

8

Whistling. Tear gas, rubber bullets, that sort of thing.

There are tears of summation. One of the killed-by-bullets is moving. There is an emphatic respect for property. There are barrages of fortune. The siren is beginning to be continuous. Tenderness is not a weapon. The French are neutral. The forces of order have arranged themselves by the best ice cream parlour in town.

9

The United Nations condemns the violence that has produced itself in town. And it would like to show you proof of its restraint. It will not touch you where it's colourful.

But Facebook likes.

A ten-second clip of a girl seeing her father tapped on the nape, removed of life.

And the boy, ashamed of his new burns.

10

Talk of rosewood over pineapple juice. *Ils ne s'en cachent même pas*⁶¹². Cold and a little fermented—as it should be. Drip.

11

And above all, high up on the roof of the Hotel ____, dirty sheets are being ordered with everlasting love and backs to the street.

Traffic has returned to normal. There are wedding bells. Scorch marks. Brickdust, brickdust. A grain of rice, hardening in the sun.

*

Early June, Antanamalaza

A struggle up a hill and a moment of hesitation at a fork in the road with a crowd carrying a man on a mattress in the other direction then that they just wanted to know if they were in the way

*

⁶¹² ≈ *They're not even hiding it.*



2 June 2013

what's the difference between democracy and discipline?

*

3 June 2013, Centre de Conférence International, Ivato⁶¹³

1.11

palms in the dark, a bitter wind. journos huddled together in car park; rum, voanjo⁶¹⁴ + talking of sex to keep warm. usual trucks / pickups, weaponry—*putain*⁶¹⁵ if wasn't so cold they'd be outside + we could take *des belles photos*⁶¹⁶

a lone moped

two power walkers

at some point movement barrier up balaclavas inside cameras in faces no suspicion cream leather jewels cake waxed floors webbing police with 'participant' lanyards *cette heure tardive*⁶¹⁷... *Comment debloquer... des elections presidentiels... on attend le verdict de la Court*⁶¹⁸ and back out under the milky way—*ooph, j'adore*...⁶¹⁹

No worries. It's just that it's so cold.

*

4 June 2013, Ambohibao⁶²⁰

⁶¹³ From outside a “conclave” (meeting of politicians, military and, possibly, members of civil society, aimed at resolving the prevailing political crisis; their phones supposedly confiscated upon entry).

⁶¹⁴ ≈ Peanuts.

⁶¹⁵ ≈ *fuck*

⁶¹⁶ ≈ *beautiful photos*

⁶¹⁷ ≈ *this late hour*

⁶¹⁸ ≈ *how to unblock... presidential elections... we await the verdict of the Court*

⁶¹⁹ ≈ *ooph, [I] love it...*

⁶²⁰ From a mass circumcision event.

the concern speakers not coping with voltage forced through anxious eyes splash betadine and the cigarette smoke men sweat stench burnt cauterised skin betadine *vita, bogosy—il faut plaiser, hein*⁶²¹ little brown thigh heaving iodine stain on a right arm *dadaaaàa* for mothers outside doctor still glasses above head shaking hands white brogues scraping burning tongs with scissors no cruelty here and when the music stops just like that

the shrieks

*

4 June 2011, University of Antananarivo

That students *never been taught to do free writing... you're going to be a pioneer!*⁶²²

~

___ on the [political] crisis, said with emphasis: *il faut pas le résoudre*⁶²³

*

6 June 2015

in the papers, story of a bullet passing through a man's penis and into the stomach of a woman. She died.

*

18 June 2016, The Whitechapel Gallery

—*They're completely improvised... I've never planned a painting, I don't know how to do that, I wish I could.*⁶²⁴

[from the audience]—*you said x...*

—*yeah maybe I did, but so what?!*

⁶²¹ ≈ *done, big boy—you've got to keep them amused, eh*

⁶²² From a conversation with a literature colleague in the English department at the University of Antananarivo, at around the time I started teaching creative writing there.

⁶²³ ≈ *it doesn't need to be resolved*

⁶²⁴ Painter Fiona Rae on how she works. Event: Painting Study Day, 18 June 2016, The Whitechapel Gallery, London. See: <https://www.whitechapelgallery.org/events/painting-study-day/>.



~
make it slightly unfinished, open, in form. Obviously so.

ways of being articulate

*

20 June 2017

in ___ car park, encountering ___. telling me quite hurriedly that she got divorced, took a while to hear what she said. that better now. reversing out in a new 4x4

~

(She knew he
danced

with others,
in fact

she really didn't
mind

until
he asked

if she
was dancing

with another,
when

the real truth
is

she doesn't even like
dancing.)

*

July 2015, Betsimitatatra

akofa⁶²⁵ / turning clay. a roomful of the sound of frogs. a desire not to write

*

7 July 2013

— on choosing paint for a waiting room in the new French consulate: peach? A warm colour? *If you feel too
much home you stay too long*

*

8 June 2010

to find a tenderness with someone equal to the harshness of environment

*

June 2009

shocking thing about shocking things is that they're as real as anything else you've seen not on a tv screen⁶²⁶

*

10 June 2011

⁶²⁵ ≈ Oat husks, burned as a part of the brickmaking process in the countryside; certainly a smell I associate with winter months in the highlands of Madagascar.

⁶²⁶ Scribbled on a loose scrap of paper, tucked inside sketchbook.

*Kajio, kolay, / arovy, tantano / ny ALA satria / voabary [?] / manaso sy / manome / harena anao sy / ny taranaka
fa- / -vamandimby / MEF / Sent: 14:55:28 / 2011-06-10 / MEF⁶²⁷*

*

15 June 2011

en bon état—

en mauvais état—397km⁶²⁸

*

21 June 2010, Slad valley

bulrush seed in air, released in heat. Engine off briefly, on corner of woods towards __. To nonetheless know the meaning of peace, I suppose. To consciously pocket some of this now, and take it with me for the rest of the year

*

26 June 2011

I feel small and sad on Independence Day

*

July 2013, Behoririka

—very, very trying... cross ... to attract the right sort of people ... pretty hairy ... Aeroflot ... grisly hotel in Moscow ... exhilaratingly ghastly at times ... quite amazingly uncomfortable ... the eccentricities that I love about Madagascar ... the absolute awfulness of leading a disaster tour ... hair-raising ... our very lovely local guide ... putting them up in inferior accommodation ... I love it when our ... broke down ... don't need to tip the chaps at the airport ... the spread of what I've seen in Madagascar over 37 years... [from a presentation by a British tour group leader, __, passing through]

⁶²⁷ ≈ *Care for, cherish, protect, take in your hands the FOREST because it is natural it brings goodness and wealth for you and your descendants* MEF [Ministry of the Environment and Forestry].

⁶²⁸ ≈ __, a civil servant, is posted to __ [location], and just before departure receives a slip of paper from the Ministry of __ about the quality of roads on the journey there from Antananarivo... *in good condition— / in bad condition—379km.*

—*What's the thing that's most annoying for you in Madagascar, and what is it that scares you most?* [___ in the row in front of me, asks for the microphone]

—*I never feel threatened here... I even like the cockroaches to a certain extent, etc*

*

early July 2009, Nairobi

Gentleness of ___. So thin, bright-eyed. Chose to eat alone at lunch.

in Burundi at the beginning, and during the ceasefire

*no, you don't want to see much of that
because it changes you*

*

11 July 2009

Lonely, diminished, but myself. The kindness of friends. Picking my way through a city and life now changed.

*

11 July 2013

Position: S 22°, 04... we will be ready for departure / at any time.⁶²⁹

~

winter ochre and rust, boulders. mosses, algae. the internal logic. greys. the little deferences, harmonies, luminescences; spectacular subtleties—the fucking uselessness of language for an hour and a half, a brutal education in colour

⁶²⁹ From an aid flight, piloted by a missionary.



and form

~
O Lord, our Lord, how majestic

*

12 July 2012

Limited water. Light chalky greyness of ricefields, turned.

I am in the right place, doing the right thing. But not in the right way.

*

13 July 2013, demi-tonneau __, University of Antananarivo⁶³⁰

the girls who pitched up, walked in, saw me, hesitated, turned round, laughed and RAN!

*

14 juillet 2009

The chance for an anatomy of fear. Woohoo.

Two handguns as police guard cashbox exchange on Ramanantsoa, Isoraka. Spotted one's beret first. Cars diagonally parked. People in shops watchful (Telma today; Colbert y'day). Man with bandaged limb sitting in __ happen-to-be-sitting-here-seats. Hushed tones, again, in internet wing. Not just me that's fearful, then. Debts paid w/ __ (7000Ar⁶³¹), who complained of politicians always changing places. Talk of *reservistes* in town, he threw me his [news]papers...

~

⁶³⁰ While I prepared the classroom before teaching.

⁶³¹ Roughly 1.60 US Dollars.

many shops still boarded up. first 'A' in hillside **A N T A N A N A R I V O** lettering restored. ___ the
barometer. at ___, identified table 2 good seat (ie. sheltered from the street, bullets)

memories of wild peaches out at ___ spur me on

~

The glass-eyed map seller in Antaninarenina, jumping for joy on seeing me again. On the cobbles down to
Ampasamadinika, the child plucking an upturned bird; the Jeep full of soldiers and AKs, eyeing me. (How
they'd love to

~

Yes, it is calm atm. The eyes. But calm.⁶³²

~

Sometimes the semblance of normal life which is most disconcerting

*

15 July 2010, Anjozorobe

Have found something.

eyes in the night, twisted / roots, moss in lungs, etc

*

19 July 2009

next time the shooting starts I want to be tucked away, listening, in someone's arms

*

20 July 2010, Isoraka

⁶³² Years later, from ___: *you know, we [Malagasy] kill with our smiles.*

up on back ledge, bathroom window. lights coming on in the cold. bats. a plane, definitely not just passing here

___'s *the important thing is to be in love*

*

21 July 2013, Betsimitatatra

3.38

° _____ [sketch] This land

4.03

Woken, full moon in my eyes. Music carried in wind. Clatter of pans, echo of barking from across ricefields. Damp clay, setroka⁶³³, cricket tak-tak...

4.37

Smouldering brick blocks [sketch: little wisps here and there]. Two red points above ?Androhidapeto, moon for two minutes. Then gone. I cannot see the [illegible] now. Cloud now down. Bells. A first mosquito. Bricks steaming upwards. Through an open window.

The writer who has to hide.

*

22 July 2013

some tear gas today

~

9.55

⁶³³ smoke

by Elisabeth Bletsoe

"true anchoresses are called birds"

the fluttering heart

titmouse flurry
imprisoned under the
upturned boat of the nave

beats against glass, tinsel
claws fretting the leadlight

though the door to the sun/Son
stands open

the winged tower
grows budding heads with ex-
ophthalmic eyes talons & herpetic skin

vitreous
shadows

where are the angels?

"sealed in
yet soaring"

petitions/

petrous/

piteous

heal mi blodi sawle

INFORMATION FOR MEMBERS OF THE BRITISH COMMUNITY IN MADAGASCAR 09.55 local time

Reports are coming in about gunfire taking place in the vicinity of the BANI barracks at Antananarivo International Airport. The area has been cordoned off by the Gendarmerie which is searching any vehicles moving in the area. No further information is available at present and will issue only if the situation deteriorates.

*

23 July 2009

What I'm willing to put up with to be here?

~

Violence, then.

A bomb-layer blown up; two security guards shot dead, I think. Two nights ago. Not welcome. As ever, unlikely to deteriorate to the extent discussed [in the papers]. (Someone quoted saying aiming at deterioration to the point external troops will intervene.) But not good, and likely to continue. That's the fourth bomb attempt in about two months. And the first fatalities. *And another, today, looking on the internet.

~

Does feel, in some ways, a continuation of how things were in Feb. The pause button off. Seeing Tana under *War Casualties* heading in USA Today (AP wire). Marvellous. How am I doing? Fine, in the circs. Whole point is you do hang on in the dark years.

~

automatic weapon on a corrugated [iron] roof below ___'s house: a toy? Red cloth hanging nearby.

~

twice today, a *no bullets in our neighbourhood*⁶³⁴ (and an inability to find this funny)

~

[my] impatience with my own innocence yet [a] desire to protect it

*

23-24 July 2010, Le __, Antaninarenina

With __, late, boozy. That you can *do something* with experiences of shite. *All these flavours... taste them all!*
Much energised, fists together, upturned. Yes, but how to allow for a harmonious coexistence of the greatest richness and the greatest subtlety?

*

26 July 2010, Antaninarenina

Realise I was quite attached to the bullet holes in __, now plastered over like some concealer on acne. Something about walking over this square for coffee in the morning and back. As if plastering over is an effort to deny something, is a lie.

~

Early rain shower, now blown over by day's heat. Wouldn't be surprised if a fine day. In __ last night, __ came and sat on left after extracting herself from friends to go to the loo. Her friend __ passes, greets, asks what I'm doing—*no, leave him alone, he's working*. (Me with book, notes, beer.) Liking this.

*

27 July 2013, Antaninarenina

⁶³⁴ From when out and about while househunting.

dudes playing chess near the top of the staircase. just a few soldiers hanging around, hands in pockets, outside the Paositra.⁶³⁵ Yesterday chatting with ___ owner. (saying to her that it was all quite near Ambohijatovo)—*akaikey be loatra*⁶³⁶ she shot straight back

9ish

dude clambering up out of trailer bit to sit on top of back of roof of truck, stretching himself on rifle, arms back...

so many fluorescent red, orange, pink, green, brooms. as if they came prepared

*

late July 2013, beyond Andramasina

1.15

floodlit cloudquiet

~

a hundred in a house of fug pig-in-teeth & grease & rest

~

it is said the forest is protected

~

yesterday's sequins drying on twigs, yesterday's shrieking in the dank

~

⁶³⁵ From the French: [bureau de] poste (post office).

⁶³⁶ *far too near*



for as long as any of us are around the sequins are separated by silk knuckles along the length of a leg, tassles & sweet, weak 'Taf⁶³⁷ & *mampalabelo fa tsy maintsy mampalabelo*⁶³⁸ aloe & talk of a comet moth on a balcony of bloodshot eyes, crushing palms & a bottle cap ripped with a mouth between fingers & clarinets, top register the way we are tentative & keep them dear to touch that they may live too for as long as any of us are around

*

30 July 2009

(don't think I have ever been so tender / kind as in that week)

~

*j'ai trop peur*⁶³⁹

Earlier in town, the look of desperation in [street-]sellers in Antaninarenina. Smiling, __, in passing. Nervous tension in the pharmacy. Encouraged to go to the till.

*At present, the realities are life and death, peace and war, fascism and democracy... a writer must decide at what remove from this conflagration he [sic] can produce his best work and be careful to keep there.*⁶⁴⁰

*

August 2013, Analakely

__ explaining his position to __: the moment [protestors] on road itself, they'll get cleared. But on the trottoir⁶⁴¹ ok

~

__'s shopping list [paraphrased] of items for her son __, now living abroad...

⁶³⁷ A coffee company in Madagascar.

⁶³⁸ *it makes you sad but it's meant to make you sad*

⁶³⁹ *≈ I'm so scared.* Overheard from my table in __ (café).

⁶⁴⁰ Cyril Connolly, *Enemies of Promise*. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2008), p. 106.

⁶⁴¹ pavement

1 pack of *Jumbo*⁶⁴²
1 cluster garlic
3 fresh ginger whole pieces
1 kilo of coffee
1 bottle of achard⁶⁴³
1 jar of sakay⁶⁴⁴
½ kilo pirina⁶⁴⁵
1 tin car
1 DVD

*

August 2015, Betafo

milihan' andro (a leaning / of the sun) / segments of blue / malice / and water in a tyre-runnel / a scar,
and something acrid / in the earth / a hug, a scythe / around her neck / just far enough away / from the
clarinets to smile / water / cress as a measure of clarity / fanta / in a petrol cap, then passed / around /
that *mampiasa vatany aty fa mampirafy dabolo* / the village where you don't wave / at their eyes / the digging,
digging away at it / and eventually that / they knew precisely where / and out they come / a lot of crying,
quickly / words for moonlight / like so much scarring / a cigarette burnt to the filter / a panel of decaying
/ aquamarine / they brought the liquid with / delicious / morning cold / between the toes, under / heels,
roots, air / holes / in the laterite: little / increments / of iron oxide / pain / talk of long noses, of / deep
foreheads

*

early August 2010

...that could comprise some sketches—nothing more, nothing less—which, taken as a whole, drill out
some truths

*

⁶⁴² Stock cubes found in most small grocery stores in Antananarivo.

⁶⁴³ ≈ pickle

⁶⁴⁴ A popular and usually very hot traditional paste in Madagascar, made of scotch bonnet peppers, garlic, lime, ginger, vegetable oil and coarse sea salt (no peppercorns); laboriously pounded in a pestle and mortar. Served with almost anything savoury. I like it with pizza.

⁶⁴⁵ Dried, very small (an inch) freshwater fish. Popular with a soggy porridge-like dish called vary sooa.



5 August 2010, Soarano

5.30

wind in the big fir tree, a binbag blowing freely in station yard. noise of cavalcade in distance. cold hands.
the ever-so-slight relief—leave from the skewer, till tmo

~

youth slipping through my fingers [out here]?

*

6-7 August 2010, ___ Bar, Ampasandrainiharo

___ on *passion*, life in Gaza, and how when you think you've been scarred somehow, permanently—boom.
Someone can lift you. That ___ [bar] a *dange-erouse* place.

*

9 August 2009

Sunday chimes. *To bring back peace to Madagascar* (___ [non-Malagasy mediator]). A deal, then.

Cold air. Warm sleeping bag. Cold grapefruit juice from new fridge. Money, I do believe, I can sort. Love
more challenging.

*

11 August 2010, Antsahabe

out of nowhere, in street near ___:

—*Je suis un militaire!*⁶⁴⁶

—*I don't speak French.*

⁶⁴⁶ *I'm a soldier!*

—*Hahaaa, what time is it?*

5.10 early mosquitos; late light [picking out] hairs on my hands & wrists

5.48 first star

Liminal ADJ. psychol: relating to point (or threshold) beyond which a sensation becomes too faint to be experienced⁶⁴⁷

*

12 August 2009

Découverte d'un rat géant [with picture].

a giant rat (7.5 kilos) discovered @ Taolagnaro. *Rattus norvegicus*. Reserve Mandena. (*I've never seen a rat this big*—Chef div @ Min __)

*

13 August 2013

*...Seems like the uni has electricity then, or at least there are still students? Poetry is probably about the only useful thing to study in Mada at the moment...*⁶⁴⁸

*

15 August 2010, Antaninarenina

yes, be wary of going off on one about how extraordinary it is here—it isn't once you stay

~

⁶⁴⁷ Probably a definition I had found on the internet. This was a concept I thought a lot about over many years.

⁶⁴⁸ In an email to me from __, who had recently left Madagascar.

This am, a Sunday. FIS polishing their cars, sirens carried inside. Adala⁶⁴⁹ alone, laughing in empty sq. A man pulls out a John Grisham book.

~

___'s drunken insistence that going out not good; story of friend, ___, punched in face on Thursday by a French guy who *thought she was a ladyboy*

*

21 August 2009, Isoraka

Taxi exhaust backfiring below ___ hotel. Pop, pop. Black exhaust. Within 30 seconds 11 people gathering. Others below. *Ça va*⁶⁵⁰—dude in shades, to me

~

the big rat story a hoax, allegedly

*

22 August 2015, road to Ambatofinandrahana

how-are-you, what-is-your-name, etc; *Wil-ly* now echoing around the village

It would've been nice

to write a silk poem but really the story down here is the poverty, sense of being left to their own fate, fucking poor

~

the cocoons / kept / indoors (you look for / here / what you can find)

*

⁶⁴⁹ This could be translated as “homeless person”, “alcoholic”, “junkie”, “crazy person”, “weirdo”. A social outcast, in any case.

⁶⁵⁰ \approx *It's okay*.



23 August 2009

___'s passing reference to businessman acquaintance with a hand-made spiked ball + chain

*

24 August 2009

Roi du rond point today down, this time, on [Lac] Anosy-Mahamasina stadium roundabout... splendid red faded / ripped overall. Beret, shades, ranting to high heaven. Veteran of '47⁶⁵¹, selon⁶⁵² ___ —*un fou*⁶⁵³, he added, laughing heartily.

___'s painted *caca d'oiseaux*⁶⁵⁴ marks on front windscreen, presumably to hide cracks

~

hating the nights atm

*

25 August, Betsimitatatra

wind, grit in the eyes. sweet grass. distinct bitterness in smoke that almost isn't there. ___ *exactly* the same. the fucking light.

~

cigarette tips, a skip, dogs in the dark

a look up

sound of flip-flops fuck flashing blue one three up crowd red trano may trano may⁶⁵⁵ Pompiers hoodies varavarakelina⁶⁵⁶ old fear it's okay the window can stay down okay

⁶⁵¹ Rebellion against French colonial rule, 1947. (See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malagasy_Uprising.)

⁶⁵² according to

⁶⁵³ ≈ *a mad person*

⁶⁵⁴ *bird shit*

⁶⁵⁵ house on fire

⁶⁵⁶ car window

~
with such profound
that I go in any direction, here

*

25 August 2018, IKM⁶⁵⁷

[poetry workshop led by ___] to students at one point, during a writing task: *aza intellectualisena... sois moins intelligent, any a?*⁶⁵⁸

*

26 August 2010, ___ patisserie

*lui, il a claqué; moi, j'ai clacqué...*⁶⁵⁹ ___'s wild gesticulations. desire for intrigue. crouching, hushed tones. far from avoiding suspicion, seems to seek it out. but more menaced than menacing. his dreads as plumes, kept with such care; love, even

*

26 August 2016, Antaninarenina

___: heat in the day as of two weeks ago; the threat of rain, but none

___, chewing voanjo⁶⁶⁰ intently, flashes by in the evening light

~

Running into ___ outside the paositra⁶⁶¹. *A friend of mine was shot.* 63. On the road to ___ . *9am. 9am!* Saying the wrong thing.

⁶⁵⁷ Ivon-toeran'ny Kolontsaina Malagasy: Malagasy Cultural Centre.

⁶⁵⁸ ≈ *don't intellectualise it... be less intelligent, okay?*

⁶⁵⁹ ≈ *he snapped; I snapped...*

⁶⁶⁰ ≈ peanuts

⁶⁶¹ From the French: [bureau de] poste (post office).

*

late August 2009

opposition *recommending* military takeover tonight. Curiously unflustered. Beyond Fr. embassy, a man in grey t-shirt, pink lettering: *Nothing To Lose*. Yester [in taxi] @ 67⁶⁶², a fight broke out. Surprised by speed of my *continuez, continuez, continuez, continuez* reaction.

*

late August 2010

how ___ in Hotel ___ stands up; is often looking out of window towards Antananarenina, from where trouble once came

*

late August 2016, Ambohipotsy

over lunch, ___ on the presence of death, here; its discretion

~

MA'SOA'NDRO, *s.* [MASO, an eye; ANDRO, the day.] The sun.

Màty màsoàndro, *adj.* [MATY, dead.] Evening; sunset.⁶⁶³

~

in papango⁶⁶⁴ shreds in high places

on sisal leaves, into gaps in corrugated iron

⁶⁶² Located in the centre-west of the city on an old flood plain, and known simply as 67 (*Soixante-Sept*), Soixante-Sept Hectares has long had a reputation for being one of Antananarivo's poorer neighbourhoods. Though of course it is a more mixed picture, from one household to the next.

⁶⁶³ Richardson, *A New Malagasy-English Dictionary*, p. 433.

⁶⁶⁴ kite (both kinds)



a momentary security swelling harnessing of a feeling in its setting & the number of times I have sat
up here and gathered myself only to feel ungathered

~

sometimes here there is a fleck

of fear in everything

*

late August 2012

please be safe, today is dangerous

*

30 August 2013, Ambatondrazaka

lighter soil, thatching, more mangoes. the sound of the roof in the sun. the employee who is afraid of me
(which one)—*well you haven't seen him, have you?*

*

late August 2017, near Mausolée

*il n'y a pas de peste, hein...*⁶⁶⁵ the rumour that all a clever ruse to squeeze money from foreign donors. the
smell of fumigation on deserted campus, etc. (___, in London, on Facebook: *How serious is this plague thing in
Tana guys?*)

*

29 August 2010, Antaninarenina

⁶⁶⁵ ≈ there's no plague, you know (words of a [clearly irritated] man passing by, on seeing me wearing a facemask).

This am, a Sunday. Rot. Squashed rat. Human shit coiled up. Silk dresses. Policeman slinging AK upside down by magazine. Man who has quietly lost his mind lying spreadeagled where so many bodies had lain before. Frantic scrubbing indoors. Church bells. Relief come the evening.

*

*Afterword*⁶⁶⁶

⁶⁶⁶ Teny aoriana

~
bubbles on the surface,

islets
of cress,

cool recesses—

a whole riverbed of what may or may not be

mica,
tanimanga⁶⁶⁷

at your temples,

you are drying across me
now

and all the while

I am just
taking
the measure

of this ending.

*

⁶⁶⁷ Literally: earthblue (clay)

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