

Person 1: *These things – can I just say, I find them a little daunting... So where did you find them? Do you have any idea what they are? I mean, who made them and why?*

Person 2: *Not really. My father's cousin left us a bungalow, and we found all of this in boxes. Hidden away. Looking at it all laid out, it's hard to make sense of it to be honest.*

Person 1: *Yes, well. I think I can see something... Someone trying to say something. Do you think it was made by one of your relatives?*

Person 2: *There are theories, you know? I mean, we think it could have been my grandmother, or her sister. It's obviously all made by a woman... Whoever it was... I think she was angry. Or crazy. Or maybe both.*

Person 1: *Well, perhaps she was neither? She, whoever she was or is, put a great deal of time and thought into these things. They things look vaguely aggressive. And maybe she wanted to throw or smash things...*

Person 1: *Exactly! Some of these are weapons, aren't they? It looks like she wanted to damage things. That's crazy...*

Person 2: *Yes. But. Did she? These things are all intact, carefully hidden. Who or what do you think she actually damaged?*

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Person 1: *I don't know. I just don't understand what would make someone do this... And then hide it. Why make things you never show anyone?*

Person 2: *Well, we all have coping mechanisms. I think this was hers.*

1990 Jan 14

~~FIGHT CLUB~~



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# 01

I do most of my crying on trains. Every week I travel to town in a carriage full of late commuters - I have never been good at early starts - and the seats are already

scattered with free newspapers. My brain cannot focus clearly enough to read anything useful or productive (or intelligent) so I pick up one of the free newspapers and scan the pages that someone else has been kind enough to crease in advance.

The pictures in the free papers influence our perceptions of other people's lives. There are no official photographers, and sometimes the images are so unclear it is impossible to tell what is actually happening. The photographs don't need to be in focus or properly framed: they simply provide a patch of colour next to the black and white text. This tells me that the images themselves are not especially important. Their quality is not something I am supposed to be interested in, and I am not supposed to care whether or not they are relevant. But the pictures are necessary, because the free paper is not designed as reading material. It is just something for my eyes to focus on instead of focussing on my fellow passengers.

These papers are shitty and trivial. They lack quality in both content and form. The articles are essentially second-hand stories lifted from other news sources. Maybe these original sources dealt with the subject matter with more skill and sensitivity. Maybe not.

The story the free paper does best - the type that makes my journey to town a living nightmare - is the 150-word 'Trauma on your Doorstep' kind. Browsing these is the best way to develop a deep rooted fear and distrust of humanity. Any one of the people in the train carriage

could be guilty of terrible acts of violence or abuse, such as those you are currently reading. The man opposite possibly owns a dangerous mistreated dog, and would not think twice about setting his dog on you or your family if you so much as look at him the wrong way. The woman three seats away might beat her children, and at this very minute one of them is probably explaining to his teacher that he got his bruises from falling down the stairs.

According to the free newspaper, the people you are travelling with, the people you are currently caged and hurtling at tremendously high speed with, are either good people or bad. They either hit their kids, or they don't. They intend you harm, or they don't. They do not catch your eye, because they are not sure what you are capable of either. So everyone reads the paper or fiddles with their smartphone, and pretends that they are alone on the train. No one is travelling with any potential wife beaters, thieves or perverts.

I am completely aware of the realities of contemporary human existence. I know that people do heinous things to one another, every day, and that something terrible could easily be happening in the house next to mine. I know this, and I think about it. What I find upsetting is the fact that words and images describing traumatic events in the lives of average people, seem carelessly squeezed into the layout of a newspaper that I pick up on the train so I don't have to speak to anyone.

To be confronted by an image of a mother, face contorted and traumatised over the death of her 18-month

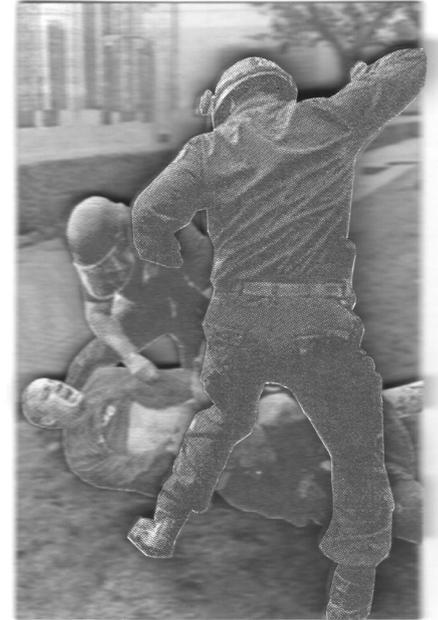
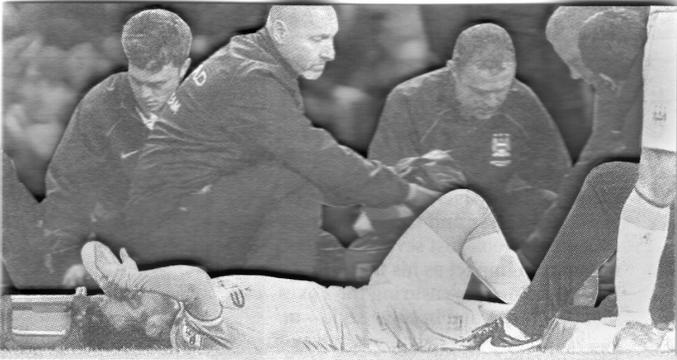
old child who was savaged by a neighbour's dog, is difficult enough. I have stepped off the train in tears many times after a sudden encounter with a story about child mortality, domestic abuse or kidnap. When this story sits beside an image of a spoilt celebrity, a disgraced footballer or an incompetent politician, the overall effect is grotesque.

These people, and their stories, are really only there to fill up space: to populate a grid. Everyday pain and suffering are presented to us using a generic template, which positions trauma wherever it fits best in a layout. People are measured by means of columns and boxes with no sympathy; forced to compete with celebrity gossip, useless products and cute animals. On a single page, a story about a family who have lost everything because of a flood sits alongside an image of a teenage pop starlet lounging on the floor of a luxury department store surrounded by bags of designer goods. The inappropriateness of this makes me want to get off the train and sit somewhere on my own for a very long time. I normally reach this point around Clapham Junction. What I actually tend to do is close the paper and leave it on the seat beside me for its next victim to stumble across.

These people need more care. They need more respect. We should spend more time with them, really looking at who they are and what has happened to them. We should feel more towards them as human beings than we are able to when we meet them in the pages of the Metro.

02

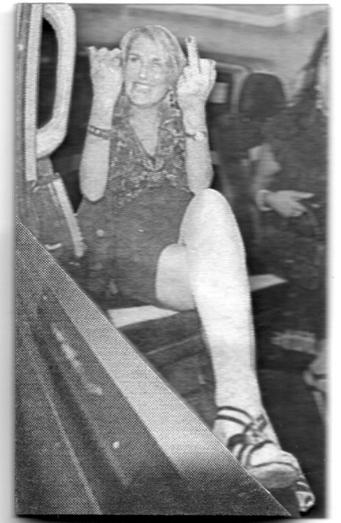












# 03

Make up advertisements are guilty of crimes against reality. What is most appalling is the knowledge, on behalf of all concerned, that the claims made by both words and pictures are wildly exaggerated. When an advert for makeup claims that “80% of women agreed” with some vague claim or other, we are fooled into thinking that this might be real proof. We think of large cosmetic brands, with billion dollar turnovers and celebrity endorsers, asking thousands of women to rate their products. And in this scenario, 80% sounds like a convincing amount of women, until you realise that only 50 women were asked for their opinions.

And who are these women, the ones whose opinions we are supposed to be taking on board? How do we know they are objective? Why should we trust their judgement? We trust, because their personal opinions are delivered using impersonal words like “clinical”, “independent” and “trials”. Words we associate with medicine and science, and which we

need to trust in order to believe the efficacy of a drug that will cure an illness. Cosmetics are sold using the rhetoric of the medical world in order to alleviate any suspicions we might have over the spurious claims of one product or another.

If we put this language aside, what do these adverts actually say? What precise information are we given by way of proof that this lipstick will be the “glossiest”, this cream the most “smoothing”, or this mascara the most “lengthening”? We are given comparisons. In tests, women agreed that their lips were ten times (x10) glossier. Glossier than what, they don’t say. We only need to know that most of the women agreed the lipstick was ten times glossier than something else less glossy. Conclusively proving nothing whatsoever.

The worst adverts are for mascara. You take a hairy stick coated with viscous dark sludge, and then attempt to sweep the mixture gracefully along your eyelashes without jabbing yourself in the eye; the same eye you are trying to use to make sure you don’t jab yourself. Not blinking or flinching whilst damn-near poking yourself in the eye. Women who can apply mascara are unnatural. Like machines. There should be machines to do this. Mechanised lash-droids. They would be programmed to apply your mascara perfectly every single time. They could be operated remotely by an expert, or use the same technology as the White House signing machine, which consistently and accurately pretends to be the hand of the US President.

If we really had eyelashes like the ones in adverts, you would see them constantly, in your peripheral vision. Your glasses would need to be further away from your face. Your eyelids would develop different muscles due to the weight and you'd need special ways to take your clothes off over your head.

No image used to advertise mascara has ever been a true and fair likeness of a woman wearing mascara. Mascara is messy. It never stays where it is put. There are detailed laws around how much digital adjustment can be made to a model's eyelashes when the advert is for mascara. There can be unlimited eyelash enhancement if the advert is for something else, like lipstick, because faked eyelashes are not making misleading claims about lipstick. Whilst this is logical, it makes no intelligent or meaningful sense. We are expected to believe that an image of a woman's lips is genuine, whilst simultaneously comprehending (and ignoring) the fact that every other part of her face has been enhanced in post-production.

Mascara adverts are insulting. They blatantly lie about the products' effects, through a falsely constructed or digitally manipulated image, and at the same time publicly admit to this deception in very small print at the margin. In this sense, they insult by pretending to be or do something obviously impossible, and then patronisingly confess to the deception just in case anyone was really stupid enough to not to notice.

One morning, on the train to town, I watched a woman apply mascara without a mirror. Think about this. A young woman sat on a moving train, in full public view, and applied mascara to her own eyelashes without looking at her reflection in a mirror, or the window, or her iPhone. The impressiveness of this is multilayered. Most women smudge or speckle their skin with mascara, even when standing still at home in front of a well lit mirror.

When women put makeup on in a train carriage, it is always a slightly strange and uncomfortable event. You are present during a moment of personal transformation, which is usually performed in private. What it means is that she cares how she presents herself to others, she wants or needs a perfected version of her natural face at the end of her journey, but the journey itself has become a kind of 'limbo': neither totally private or properly public. It isn't her bathroom and she isn't alone, but likewise the train

carriage isn't populated by people who know her. The people on the train are strangers, and so not people she needs to worry about presenting herself to in a finished (made-up) state.

It is uncomfortable being opposite or next to a woman who is making herself up on a train. You watch her make decisions which are, in her eyes, designed to make her look better (younger, smoother, brighter, sexier, healthier or whatever). You are watching someone do something intensely personal. She is self scrutinising, making compensations for flaws or faults, covering up spots or scars or wrinkles. She is looking at her face in a way that only she ever will: as a surface about to be decorated according to the tastes and functions required by the owner.

You are present as she covers up the face she wakes up with, the face you would see if you woke up with her, or lived in her house. You watch her become the person she is outside of that space, in a space that is already outside.

What does this mean about women who apply makeup on the train? Are they less self-conscious than others? They don't mind being seen in both 'states'. They embark naked, and disembark fully clothed. They are not trying to hide that fact that they wear makeup. Or at least they are not shy of the fact that it is a part of their daily routine, nor embarrassed to conduct this necessary act alongside people doing normal commuter activities such as checking their email, grabbing a quick

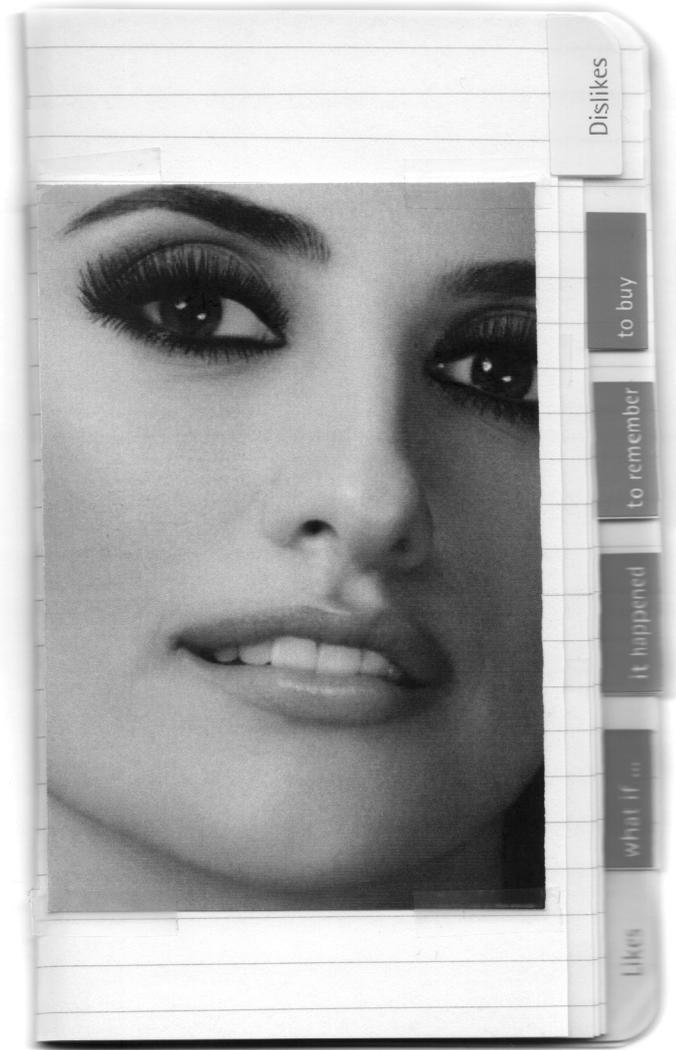
breakfast or reading a newspaper. But of course this act is different, because it is completely gendered. Only women sit in public in this way, openly performing ritualised (normalised) narcissism. Only women can be seen coating their skin with a superficial layer of attractiveness. You will never see a man applying his makeup on a train.

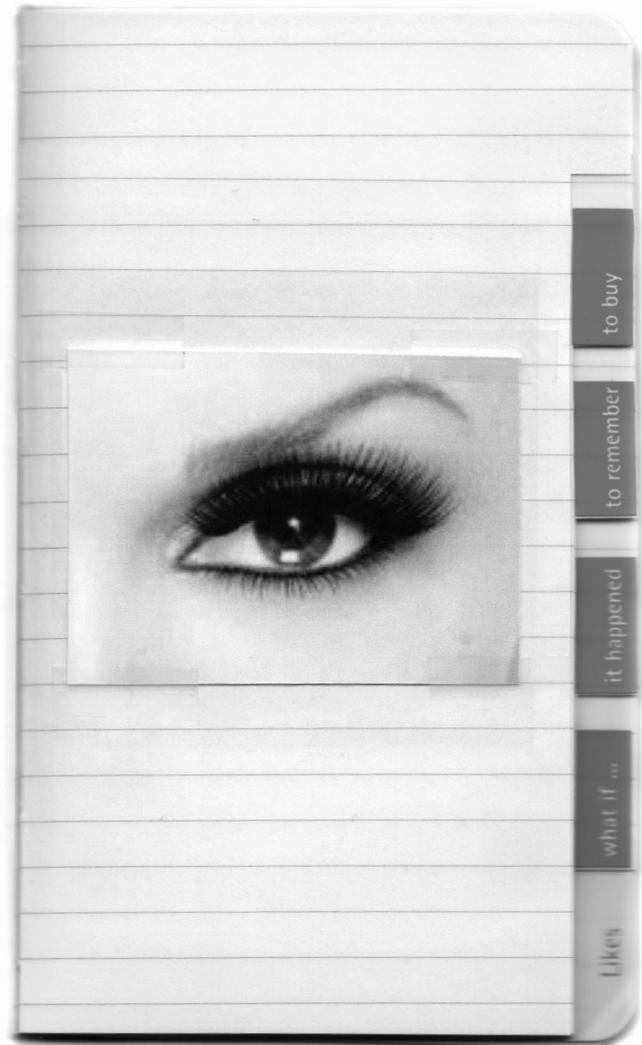
Makeup is lying, pretending to look a certain way, and so when we watch these women we actually see the lie being constructed. We observe an everyday practice of deceit, which most women choose to keep behind closed doors, and which most men don't ever think about. Why would they?

When women put on makeup on a train, people visibly squirm as though they are witnessing completely inappropriate behaviour. A woman has suddenly turned the train carriage into a different type of space - an extension of her bedroom - and this act transforms her fellow commuters into non-consensual voyeurs. I know men who are actively repulsed and angered by this situation. Which makes it all the more interesting.

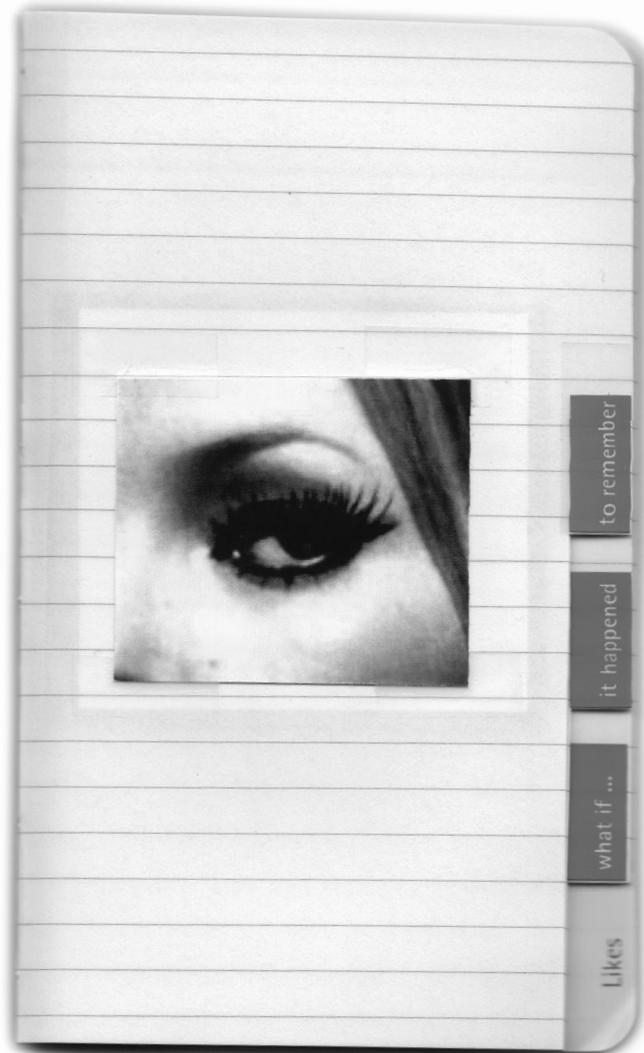
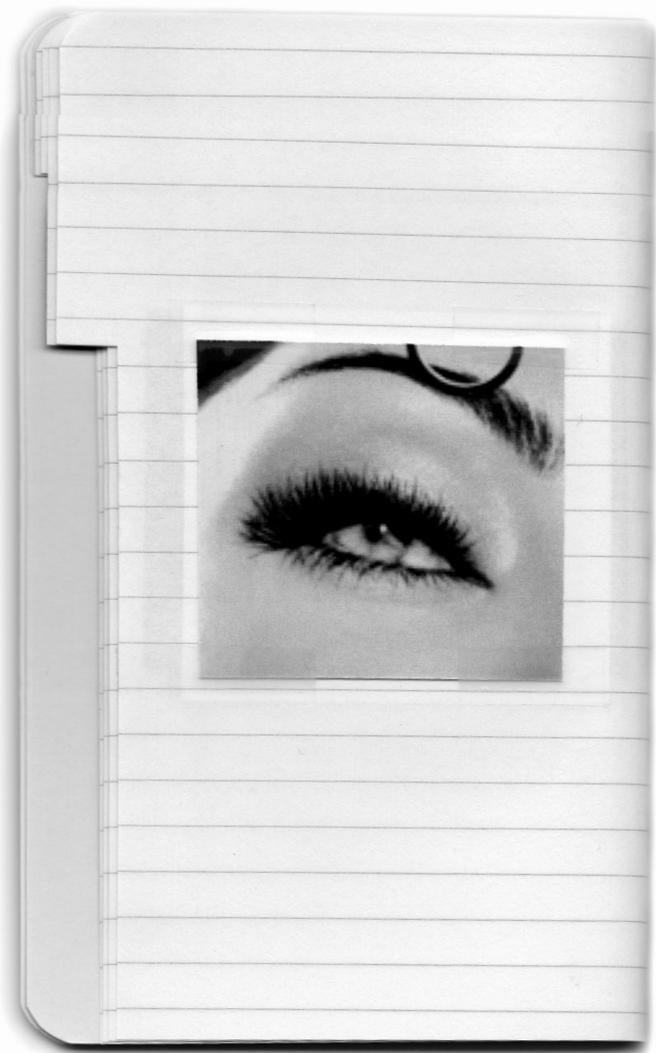
The train is a particularly strange and intimate space, because more often than not you will be facing others who are trying desperately not to look at you anyway. Applying makeup in this context, and expecting the three people directly facing you not to feel uncomfortable, is strangely arrogant and insensitive. I sometimes put makeup on whilst travelling, but I prefer the bus. No one is sitting opposite you on a bus.

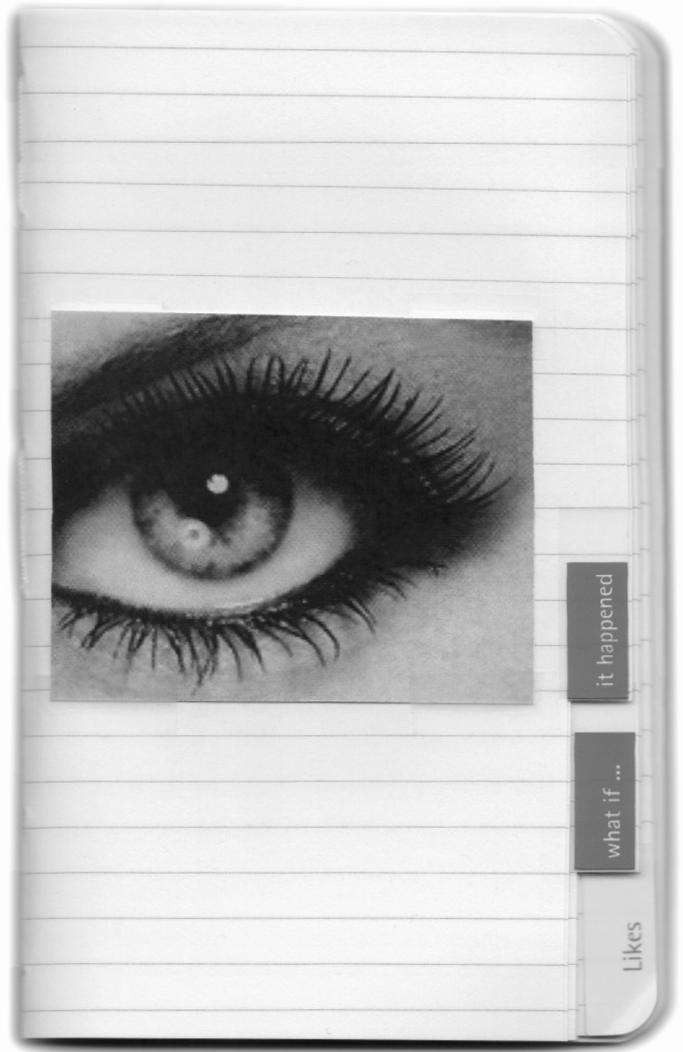
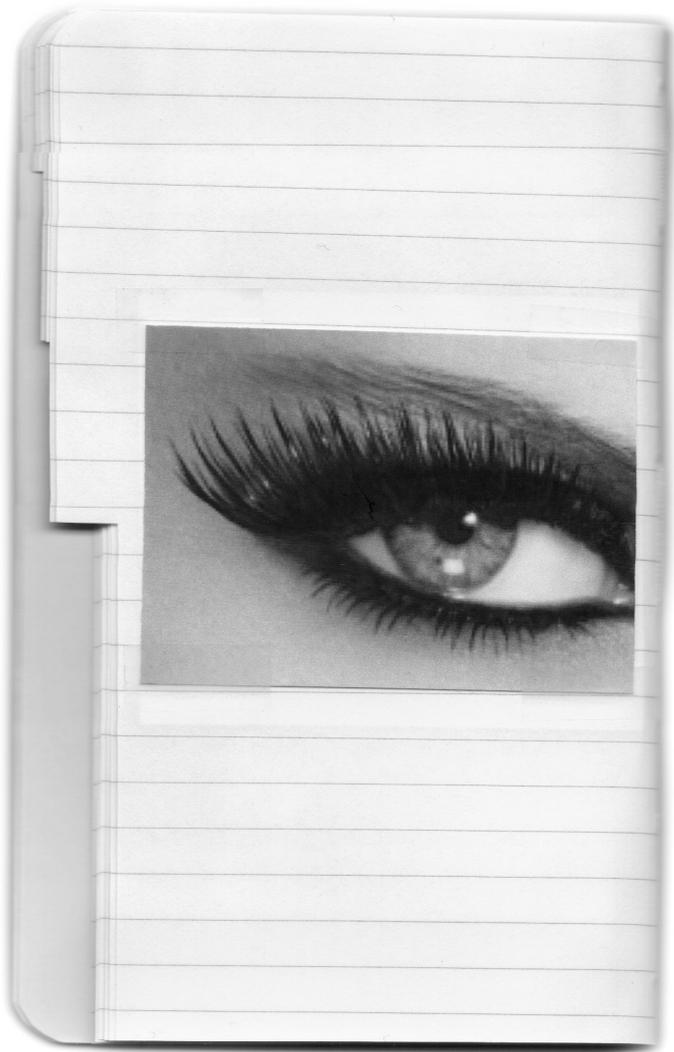
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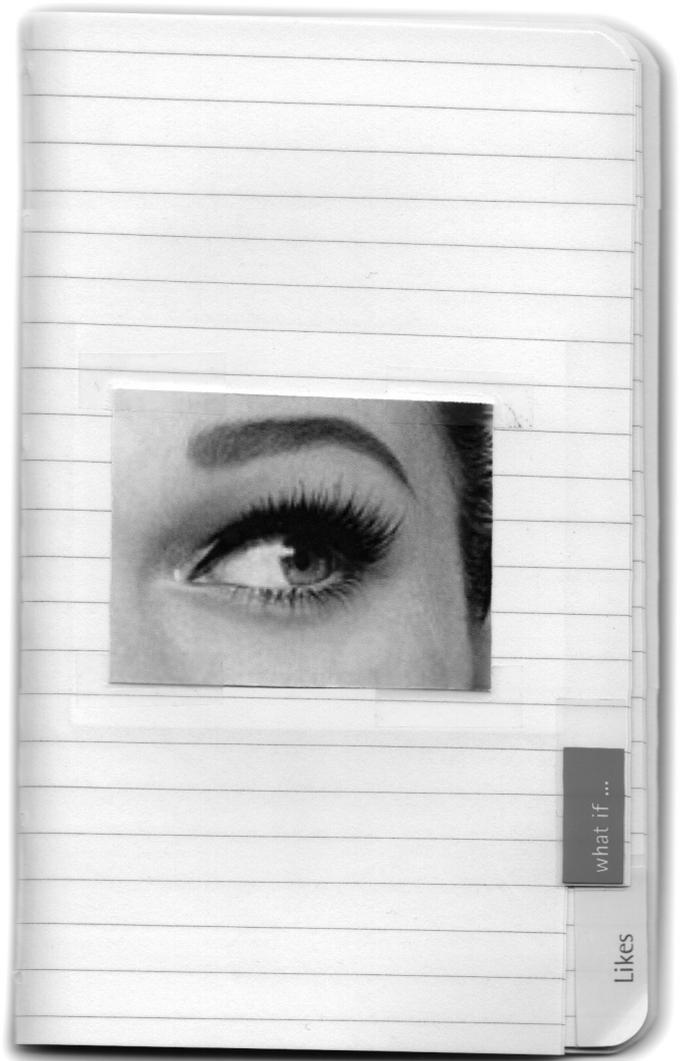












Starbucks is a place where real people cease to exist. When you patronise a Starbucks you are living the dream, except that it is an overpriced whitewashed nightmare.

In every Starbucks, you will find a small huddle of women with buggies, a pseudo-hip business meeting, a smattering of students or school children skipping class for a hot chocolate and a gossip. There is usually an older couple, tentatively ordering 'just a coffee' because they are confused by the overwhelming number of beverage

combinations. Most times you will find workmen, policemen or security guards, queuing for take-out and looking sheepish because they are supposed to be on duty. Nobody minds this. It's Starbucks, and everyone in Starbucks is a healthy member of society.

The generic customer I most like to watch is the white middle class woman with two children perched in the seat of her trolley. This is the woman that drives my loathing. The one that seems in complete control of her domestic life. She has navigated the aisles and checkouts, her children are busily chattering away, and she stops to grab a skinny mochaccino before trundling the provisions and offspring back to a shiny Prius. Her soft cashmere sweater is well looked after, casually worn, with no spots of grease or snot picked up from a grubby child. Her jeans will be skinny, showing off her gym toned thighs, and her footwear will be expensive trainers or leather boots. She may be wearing a scarf, loosely wrapped around her neck, as a symbol of her life-mastery. Even in summer, the scarf - twisted and rolled like a soft doughnut - is an indispensable sign of her style and accomplishment. Symbolic of the fact that she is so in control of her life that she can casually accessorise, the loosely wrapped scarf is something that only the most competent mother can pull off.

More often than not this woman is blonde, whether by natural selection or because careful highlights are the clever (and expensive) answer for brunettes a who are going grey. This is the artful, layered, multi-tonal blonde

of a regular salon colour, created by a stylist who takes time to consider a natural effect rather than a paint-bucket finish. Not only does this speak of financial security, but also of a nanny, childminder or (even) husband, who takes care of the children while she goes to be pampered.

She wears makeup. It looks light and natural, which means that it is high quality, and she has applied it deftly. Perhaps she does this very quickly. Despite being a stay-at-home mum, she will have help with the kids. If not then she is even more ridiculously superhuman. She manages to take care of herself and her children, ensuring that they are clean, well behaved and nourished, and can read before they reach school age.

This is the woman that exists in my mind, during every waking moment, making me feel inadequate and incompetent. She is my ideal, which is why I hate her. Perhaps the deep seated rage I feel towards this woman is driven by envy, that she appears to be financially secure through her husband, and her time is spent thinking about and caring for her family and friends. And herself, of course. She is not distracted or stressed by the extra problems of balancing a career alongside her domestic routine. She takes time to consider the small things they need, she makes and does for them, and she has the luxury of making time for her own mind and body.

Or, it might be that her composure is a lie - a carefully constructed facade - made stronger by my own perceptions and assumptions about her life. Everywhere

I look I see facades, and I cannot help but fall for them. We are surrounded by images of how life should appear, of what a perfect mother, wife, sister, friend, and daughter should look like. And so we try to look like this. All we do, is look like we are happy and in control. The reality is that no one can possibly be as happy and complete as the people in the images we base our standards upon.

So this woman looks like someone from an advert, and this is what makes me resent her. She looks like the images of happiness, of success, of completeness and normality. She looks like an advert for cosmetics, or clothing, or a mobile phone, or health insurance, or Starbucks. She is an unreal person in a space of permanent pretence. Starbucks masquerades as a space for a warm community, a personal, personable environment for people to stop and take time; to pause for thought over a cup of coffee. A place for people to interact, to talk and bond in person.

But this is not what happens in a Starbucks. It is a constructed familiarity, a corporate cosiness that extends from here to eternity. Mass produced environments with mass produced customers. As soon as you walk into a Starbucks you lose your individuality, your actual life disappears. You become a temporary extra for a global mega-brand. You could be anyone, anywhere in the world, because this Starbucks is the same as all the others. Everyone in Starbucks becomes an instant archetype, and the middle class white woman with two children and a Prius, is the one I most love to hate.

I spent hours as a teenager learning to paint my nails. Obsessing over colours, making sure I could paint neatly and accurately with no air bubbles or scratches. I don't paint my nails any more. I don't have time. Making my nails look nice no longer seems an important consideration. But when I was younger I must have thought that this was a crucial thing to learn, a skill to master, and essential for being a grown up.

I also remember painting pebbles, using similar techniques and materials to decorate smooth lumps of rock for ornamental purposes. This too was apparently something you did as an adult. Many of the houses I visited had decorated lumps of stone or rock acting as doorstops, paperweights or just sitting on a shelf. Human nature compels us to fill empty spaces with tiny decorative flourishes, and when we pick up a smooth pebble it seems to be missing something: waiting to be finished. Nails are similarly empty, like an awkward silence at the tips of your fingers. Somehow I think the drive to paint fingernails is connected to whatever it is that makes people paint pebbles.

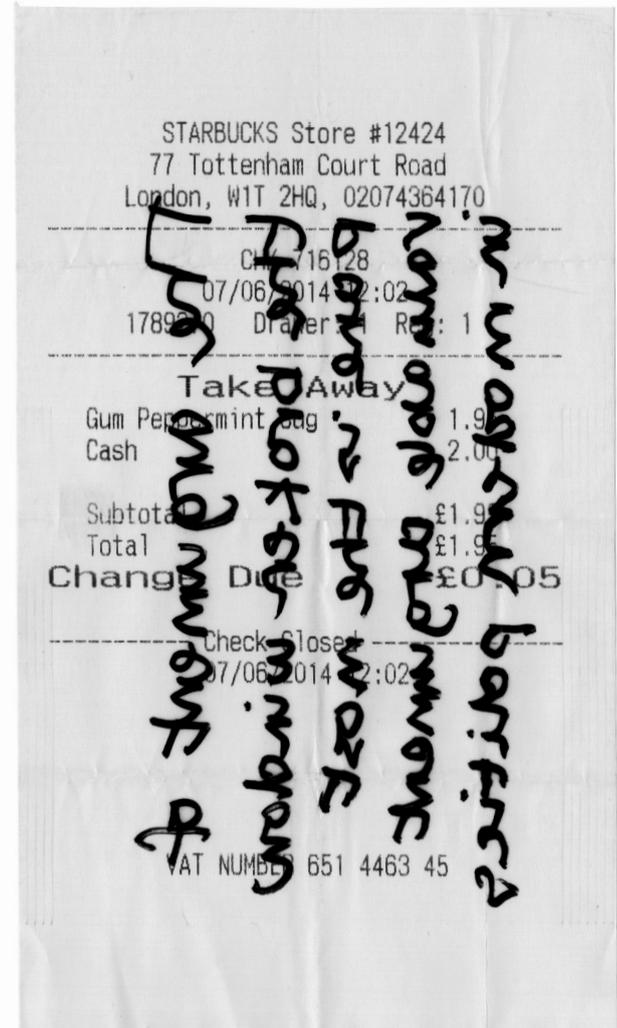
These tiny bits of us are already dead, which is one of the reasons I think we like to gloss over them. We cover them up so we don't notice they are unalive, yet growing faster than any other part of the body, transparent and with pink living skin visible underneath. Of course hair has the same quality of growth combined with deadness and speed, and its own potential for repulsion and discomfort, but in its proper place hair tends to be shiny and colourful in ways that nails are not. Hair is soft and sensual. Nails are hard and sinister. Nails exist on the borders of the uncanny. They are small islands of inert, unfeeling matter.

Somehow nails seem to be a disappointing ending to an otherwise satisfying organism. There is a soft, fragile nail bed, into which my skin grows only to stiffen and die. There should be a better way to finish off fingers and toes than with the emergence of twenty small, hard,

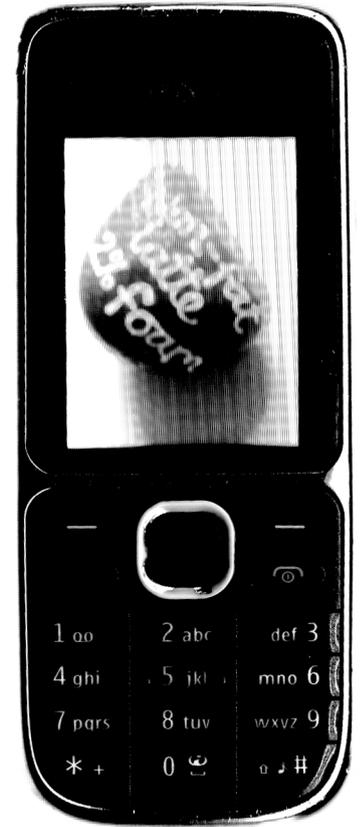
scales. Nails are in some ways detached (detachable) from our bodies. We can lose them and they will grow back. Perhaps this unnaturalness, this difference from the rest of our bodies, is what encourages us to exaggerate and extend them. Drawing attention to their separateness becomes a legitimate reason for fetishised adornment.

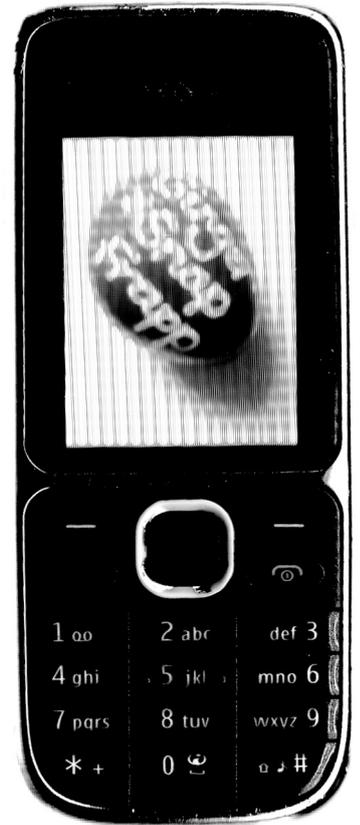
We also draw attention to them because that's where we finish: they are like the body's full-stops. Painted nails amplify the 'extent' of a person in space. And if nails act as a private spatial threshold, then the way we present our nails says something about the way we value what's inside the territory they define. The nicer we make our threshold, the better cared for and protected whatever is inside appears to be, and the clearer the message that what lies beyond is Private Property. Territorial boundaries are rich sites for personalisation, for expressions of ownership, or for demonstrations of creative individuality. The colour and condition of your front door communicates your tastes, attitudes and aspirations to the outside world.

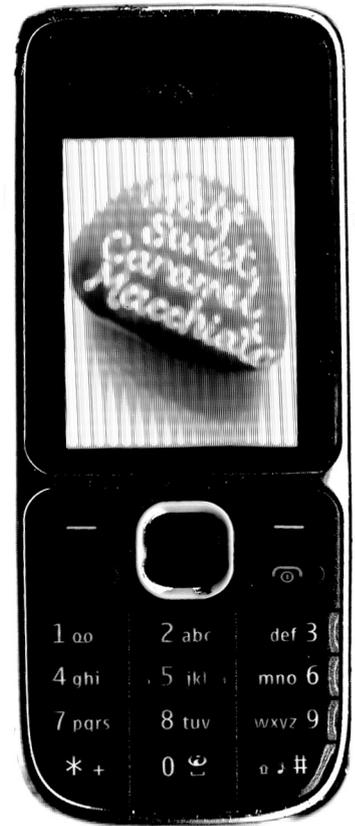
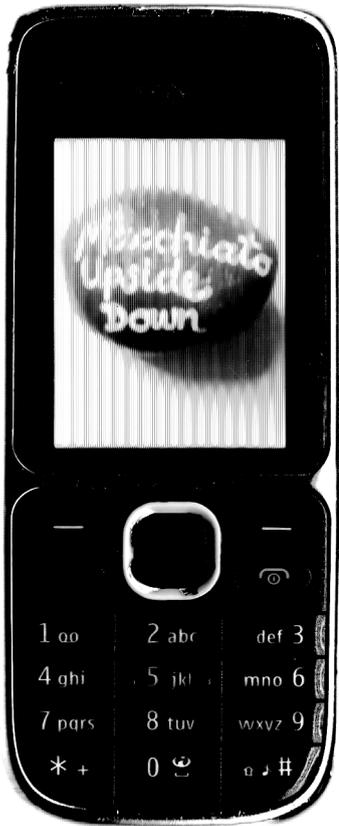
We approach our nails in a mechanical fashion, as we do wood or metal; materials that look best when they are bright, smooth and shiny. We buff using physically abrasive methods. We use files, glues, enamels, varnish and polish. We treat our nails in the same way that we treat our fences or front doors. The graphic, sometimes extravagantly ornate, declaration that your fingernails are a physical boundary gives them a legitimate social function, and I think must make them easier to live with.

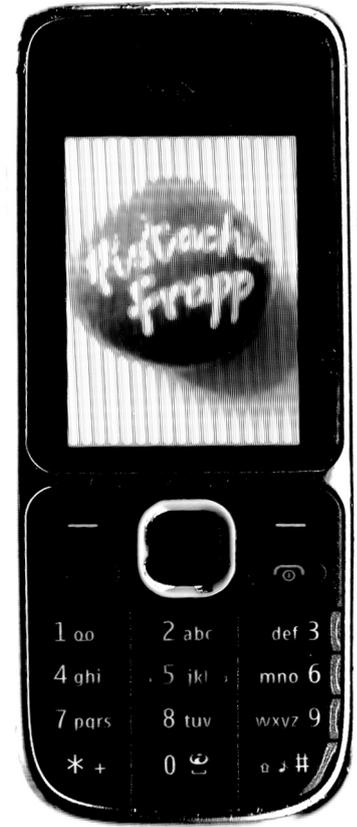


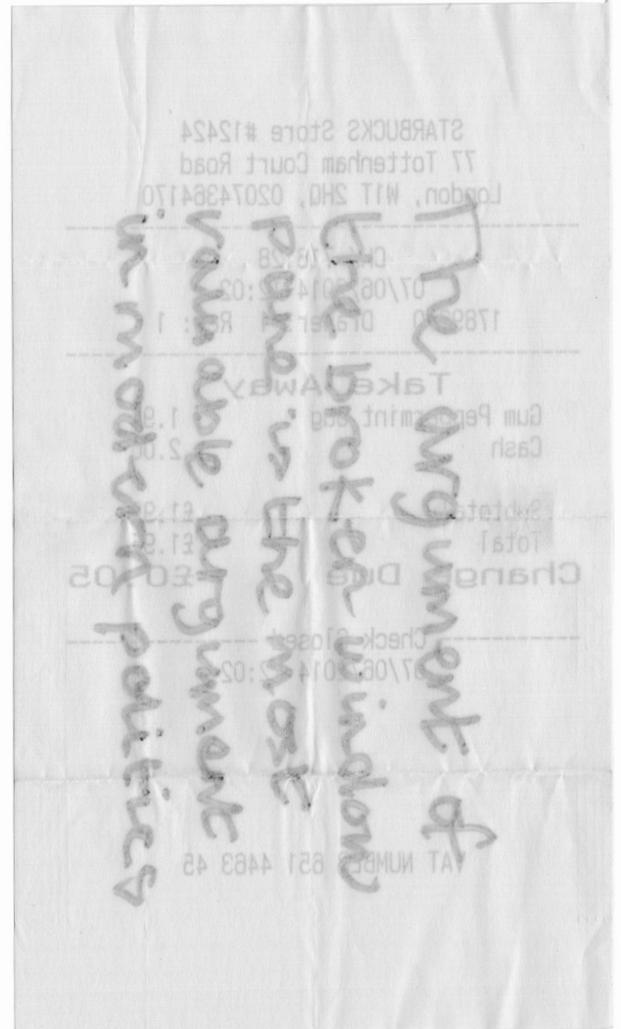
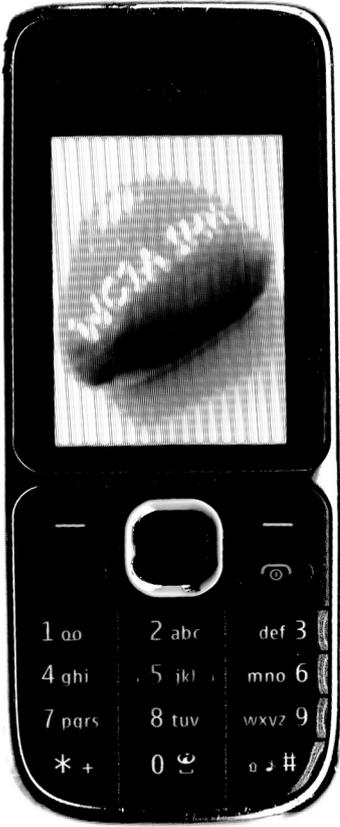
Non-fat  
latte  
2% foam











It is difficult not to have ornaments. Small statuettes made of ceramic or metal, sitting on shelves gathering dust and

having private conversations with one another. Most of my ornaments are inherited, but not in the genealogical sense of the word. They weren't handed down to me by relatives. They are fragments of other times or of specific events: things that were temporarily placed somewhere and no-one ever moved them. I have never purposefully gone out and purchased a small statuette of any kind, with the intention of placing it artfully on a shelf.

When I was young I took ornaments like this for granted. They were present in every home, regardless of the age or taste of the family inhabiting the space. My clearest memories are of my grandmother's house, where she decorated every horizontal surface with a dazzling array of glass, porcelain, brass and wood. She owned some things that were useful, but too highly decorated (and therefore too valuable) to be practical. Then there were classic trinkets, which had little or no use but to allow a bit of the outside world to infiltrate the privacy of the home. In retrospect I can see that both types of ornament acted as a concrete expression of piety or morality, either through wholesomeness of subject matter or by association with reputable, sometimes royally endorsed, manufacturers.

My grandmother's ornaments showed off her taste, and spoke of her authority over domestic matters. They demonstrated her fitness as a homemaker through the choices she made about materials and styles, and by the way she arranged and grouped things. She had ornaments

because her mother, grandmother and all of her friends had ornaments. Her material awareness, of glass making, of ceramic design, of metallurgy (how to look after brass and cast iron), was determined and legitimised by its relationship to ornament and applied in the context of the home. It was domestic 'know-how' rather than any kind of expertise or specialist knowledge. I am not sure whether she knew anything about how these things were made, about technique or production, but she understood how to 'take care' of them once they had come into her possession. She probably had more knowledge of manufacturing than I credited her for, because she worked in a munitions factory during the War.

She was especially fond of a two-tone ceramic ware from Wedgwood, which had a base form in blue or green, with white surface details. These pieces looked like a display of confectionary, like things made of icing sugar sitting on top of the television. Mostly there were small dishes, or pots with loosely fitting lids. I wasn't supposed to touch this stuff, but I must have handled it quite often because I know how these things felt in my hands. The pots were smooth and cold, and when you lifted the lids the two halves rubbed together with a dry, gritty sound. Trying to replace the lids silently was impossible.

There was also a cabinet full of cut glassware, none of which was ever used as far as I was aware. There was everything from ashtrays (she hated smoking) to sherry glasses, and a magnificent punch bowl with small, neat

cups hanging from hooks around the edge. In reality this whole cabinet was an ornament, because it was curated as a static event. The case itself was a massive, glittering decoration in the corner of the dining room. On the odd occasion we did use a tumbler, it was never a 'good' one, and the sparkly surface felt sharp and awkward in my hands. Maybe that was to do with the fact that my hands were small, and I was gripping the glass a bit too tight for fear of dropping an apparently precious and beautiful thing.

The things I could touch, and which will always remind me of my grandmother, were a set of brass ornaments by her 'fireplace' (gas fire). These were deliberately set within reach of her grandchildren, as a way to distract us from the more fragile things at head-height. There were three wise monkeys and two small bells shaped like Edwardian ladies with voluminous skirts. You picked up these ladies by their heads and swung them from side to side, making the brass ball hanging inside their hollow skirts ring with a cold 'ding-a-ling' sound. The loudest one was larger, and lower pitched. This was my favourite. My grandmother used to let me ring this bell to let everyone in the house know when lunch was ready.

I always liked being given jobs to do: I liked being trusted with important things. The brass bell was an ornament with an authoritative function. Ringing it meant that for a very brief moment, I was in charge of the house.

# 10

When I was a child I liked making fiddly things. I remember my aunt made '3D pictures' which she framed

and hung on her living room wall. She built decorative images using layers of paper, creating depth or perspective by spacing the layers with small sticky pads. I was fascinated by these pictures because they seemed extremely skillful and sophisticated. I remember wanting to make them myself. I also didn't understand them - how they worked - and I thought they were really clever.

We called this craft 'decoupage', although I know now that traditional decoupage is really more like collage, and it is usually flat. Decoupage is an old technique with a respectable history, and can be employed to beautiful and subtle effect. Images are cut out and pasted onto three dimensional objects, normally small items of furniture such as tables or screens, and then lacquered to protect the surface. But as with all craft traditions there are endless ways to degrade what was once considered an elegant art form, and whilst the results may be given the same name they sit at completely different ends of the taste spectrum. Decoupage can be delicate and refined, or crass and awkward, depending on what is cut out and where it is stuck.

The pictures my aunt made always described idyllic scenes: little girls with rosy cheeks, pretty cottages or baskets of flowers. I did not know that you could buy the images for these pictures as pre-cut shapes (called decals). I thought that she had painstakingly cut out

all the separate parts, working out as she went along how to create the proper depth and detail. I had no idea so much of the handicraft I saw as a child came in kit-form, allowing impressive household items to be fashioned by women who had very little skill or feel for materials. My mother subscribed to a monthly magazine full of projects to sew, weave, cast and carve. It was like a craft recipe book with a list of materials and tools, step-by-step instructions, tutorial images and patterns to cut out and use. It was craft-by-numbers. I thought what my aunt was doing was accomplished and difficult. I am now not so sure that it was.

I was not really interested in the girls, flowers or cottages, but from what I could see there was no real choice but to depict girls, flowers or cottages. Most householders really wanted this type of world on their walls in the 1970s, and many still do. Also, if a woman is going to spend her time labouring over decorative ornaments, the subject matter needs to be sweet and wholesome - fit for family consumption - or else trivial and inconsequential. This has ever been the way. Engaging women in domestic crafts has always been a means to ensure they aren't distracted by unseemly pursuits like reading or thinking. The content of these activities must by definition be cute or sentimental; not capable of corrupting the intellect with improper, unfeminine ideas.

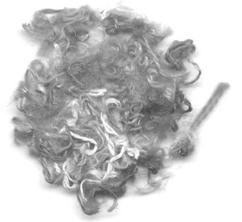
It was fine for my mother to spend time making ornamental eggs streaked with marbled enamel paints, or to cast chess figures in plaster and resin, and my aunt could construct a clean, kitsch world with small sticky pads. These were correct and proper ways for wives and mothers to occupy themselves, when they weren't cooking or cleaning or washing.

I never made a 3D picture when I was young, but I am making them now. I am not making the banal, sentimental images my relatives made, the ones that described a world that does not really exist and where thought is constrained by floral motifs. I am using images of the real people and events that are casually strewn across the pages of badly printed newspapers. These are not made to decorate the walls of my house, nor do they come in kit-form. My 3D pictures are made of everyday life, through carefully chosen low quality images from a low quality publication, which manages to simultaneously sensationalise and trivialise human suffering. They are made in order to focus my attention on what those images really mean.

Making these things, using these images in this way, directs my thoughts in precisely the way that handicraft is not supposed to; towards questioning what life is about. I wonder if this is what my aunt was thinking about as she stared at girls and flowers. That life is not clean and kitsch. Pretty cottages are swept away by floods, and the flowers are often laid on a pavement. Not all children have rosy cheeks. Some have bruises and smoke.

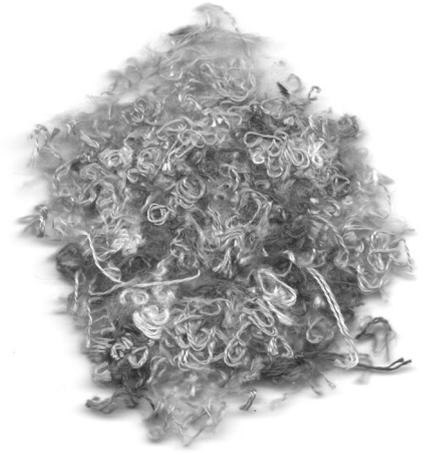
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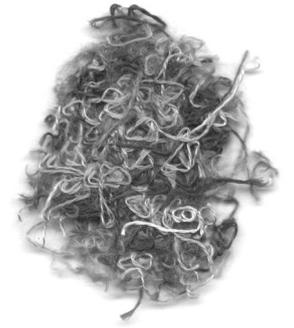












# 12

My female relatives tinkered with a lot of crafts when I was young. In retrospect, I think they were actually engaged in a kind of competitive sport to see who could make the most impressive or accomplished home decoration. This competition was designed to prove their domestic worth amongst their female peers, and (I suspect) to their husbands. Everyone had their craft of choice - flower arranging, embroidery, or the old staples of knitting and crochet - and as a child I understood that all adult women made things for their homes. My mother's best friend did 'tapestry', which seemed exotic and strange because no one in my family had ventured into this world and I didn't really know what it was. I know now.

My grandmother and her sister were champion knitters. They were fast and supremely knowledgeable. They could make jumpers and cardigans, and not just blanket squares or scarves like the younger women. My grandmother always said that her sister was the better of the two, especially in terms of speed, and my great aunt was always the person to turn to when you wanted something 'making up'. This was the phrase used to describe the process of turning flat knitted shapes into a three dimensional garment. It was a dark art, involving mysterious words such as 'blocking', 'pressing' and 'seaming'. Get these wrong, and your jumper looks

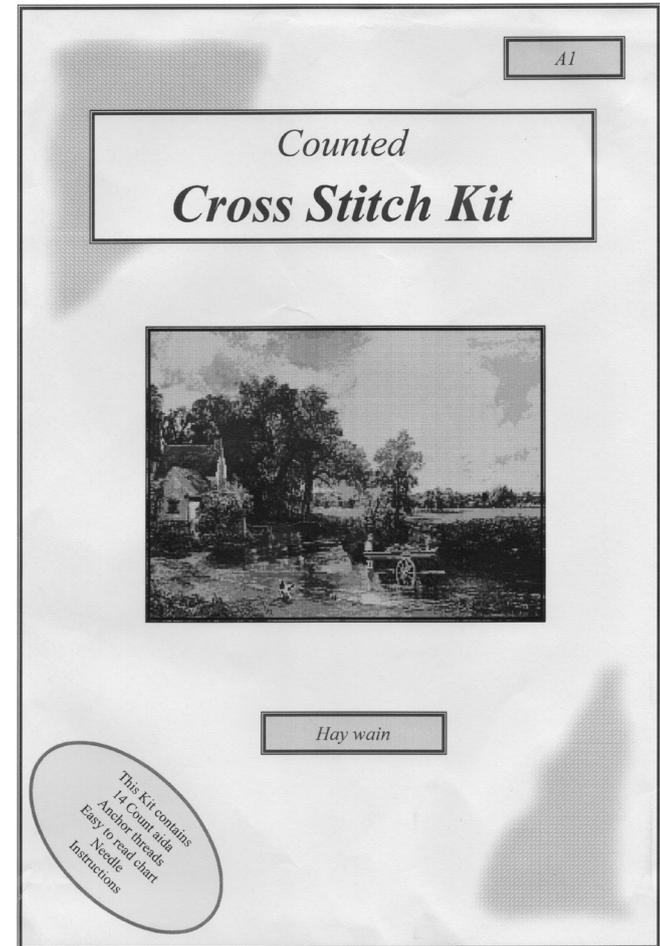
like shit. Get them right, and it will become a work of professional splendour. She could also sort out any and all mistakes. Anyone who has ever tried knitting will know that the mark of a true expert is someone who can correct what has gone wrong. This accolade that my grandmother bestowed upon my great aunt (that she was the best knitter) made her a mythical figure in my eyes as I grew up. I had the impression that she knew secret things that none of my other female relatives knew. She knew how to make things properly. She was the master craftswoman.

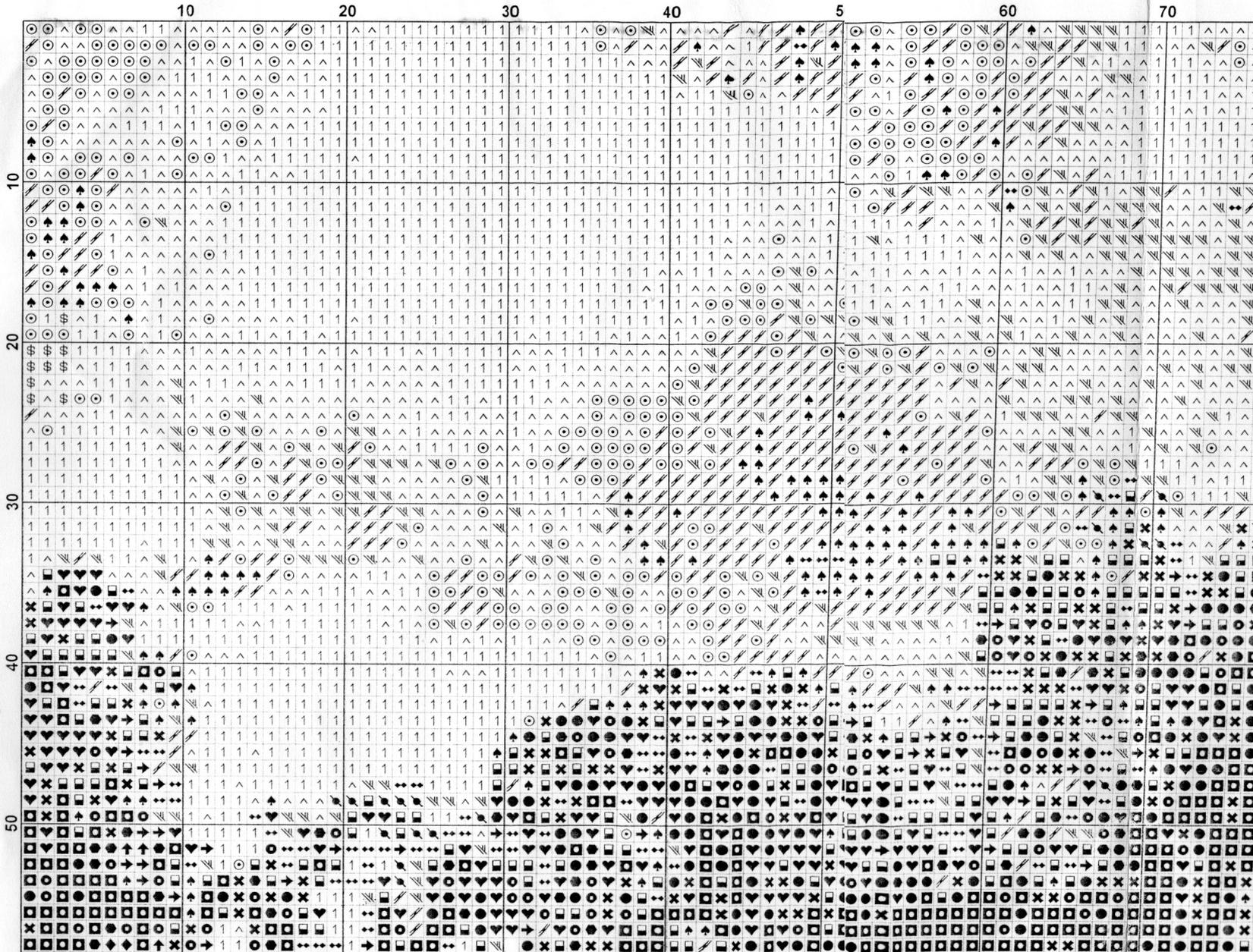
The next generation had skills depending on their ages. My oldest aunt was also a knit and crochet kind of woman. My mother and her sister-in-law were younger, and dabbled more with trendy hobbies involving felt and paper, even plaster and resin. Despite their individual specialisms, every woman appeared to have attempted cross stitch at some point in their lives. There seems to have been an obligatory phase, where perhaps each sensed that she should be employing her evenings more productively than just sitting in front of a TV, even though it was completely acceptable for her husband to do so. Maybe this is where the competitive aspect kicked in: once one decided to employ her evenings productively, her nearest counterpart felt similarly obliged to adopt an evening activity.

The unifying element in the cross stitch phase was the presence of a husband for whom the act of sitting and sewing was a performance, a conspicuous sign of domestic

loyalty and contentment. The men had no idea that the cross stitching was being enacted for their satisfaction. Neither were the women conscious of the fact that they were demonstrating a commitment to their role, by making a cushion cover while their husbands watched football or sorted fishing tackle. Cooking and cleaning were unconditional, but to make something unnecessary or decorative for their home, with their own hands, showed a deeper level of investment than just carrying out their standard wifely duties.

I have always suspected that these (cross stitch) episodes were triggered by difficult events in each relationship. I am not talking here about the emergence of marriage-ending problems, but at times when minor niggles were heightened due to stress or miscommunication, or when tensions had bubbled to the surface. When this happened, the wives did things to make it clear to their respective husbands that everything was actually fine, allowing the men to rest easy in the knowledge that their position at the head of the family unit was secure. These women bought new underwear, changed the curtains or got their hair dyed, and the evenings of embroidery acted as peace offerings to smooth over any residual discontent. These were rituals, performed in order to re-establish subservience and the adoption of a typical feminine role, perhaps because these women had been guilty of questioning their husbands' authority. At times of domestic unrest, I think they sat quietly and made gestures of appeasement.

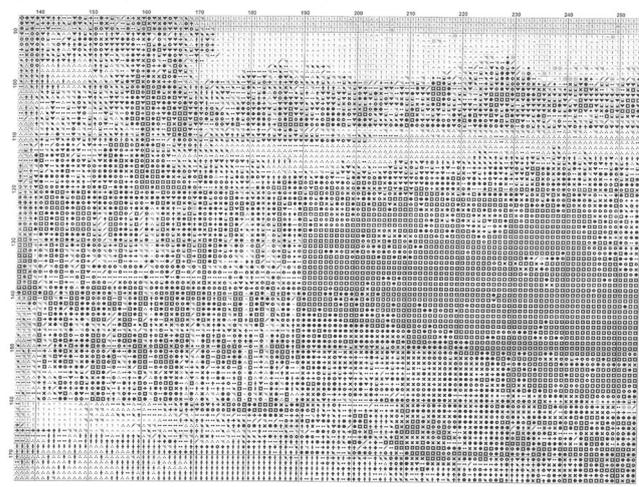
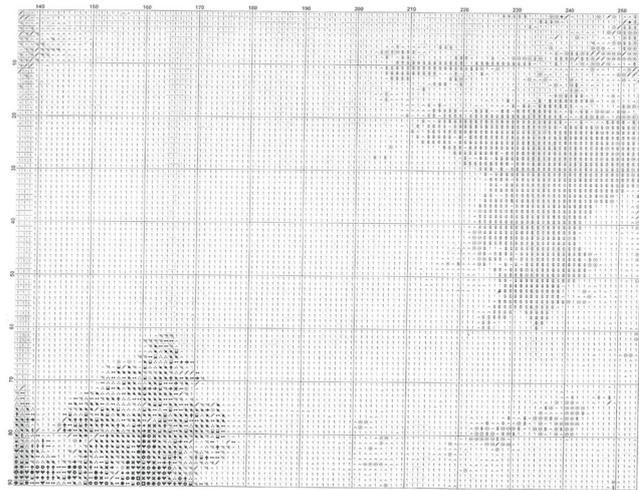
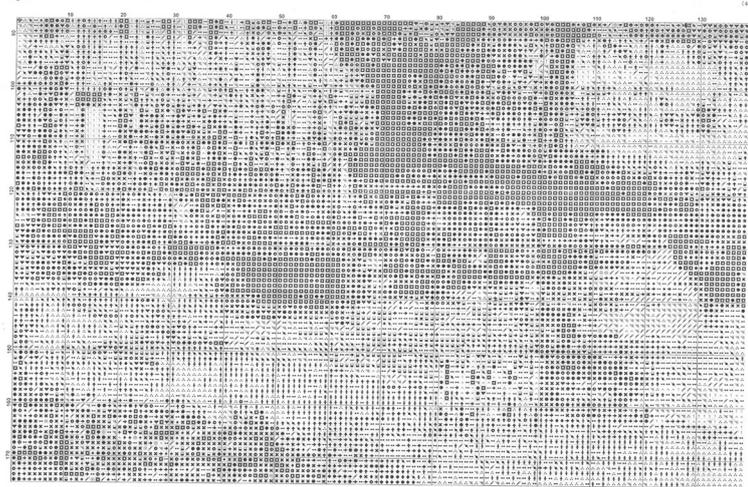
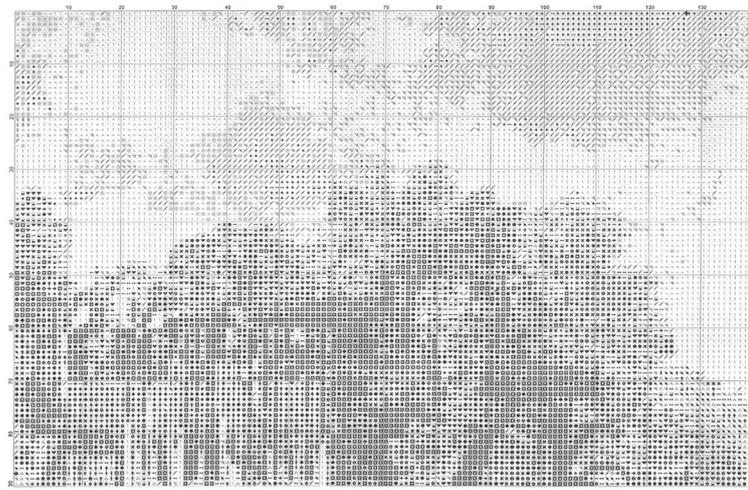


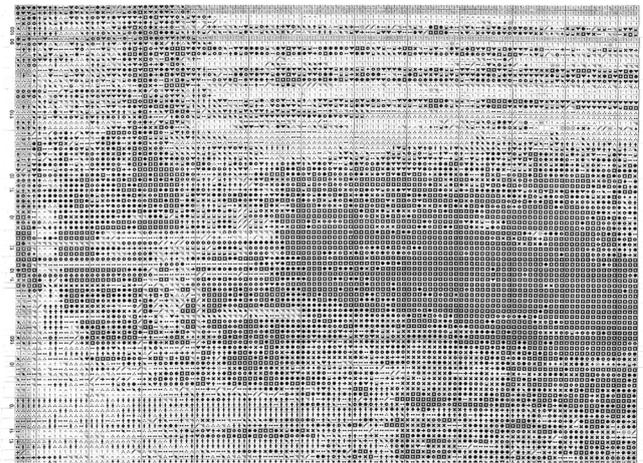
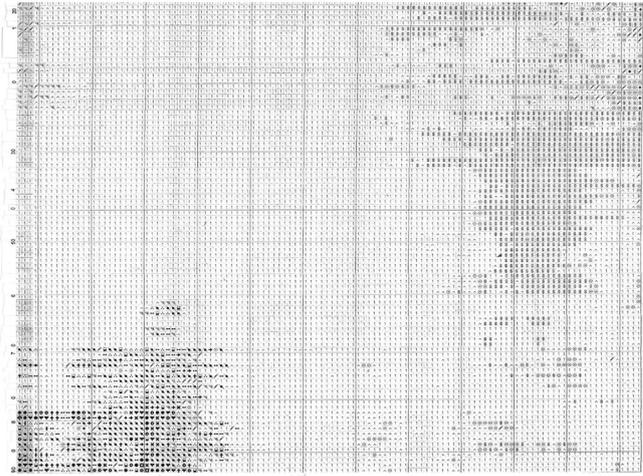


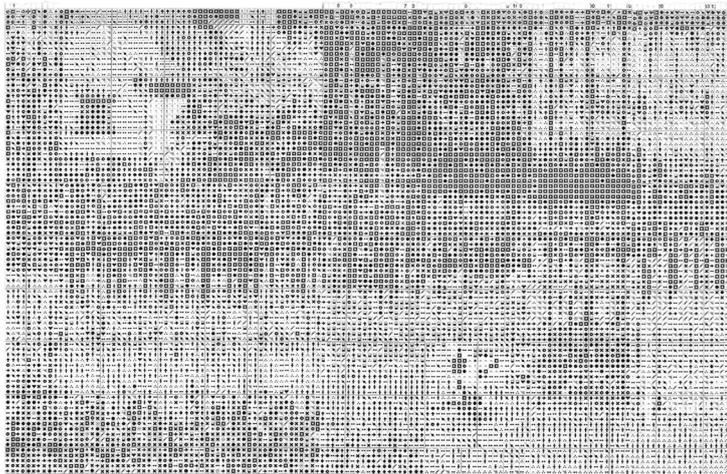
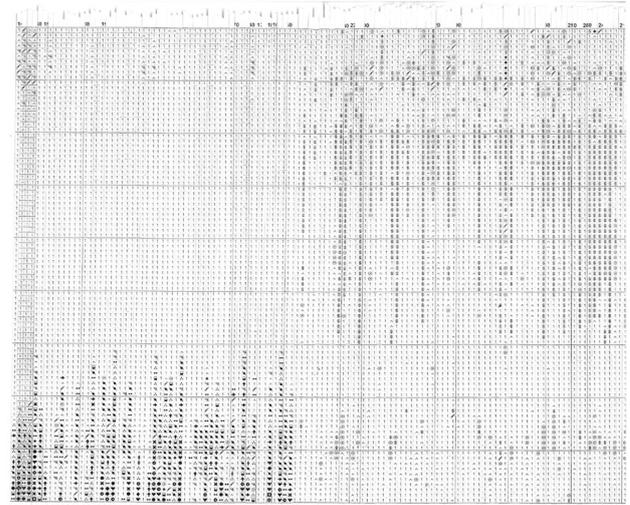
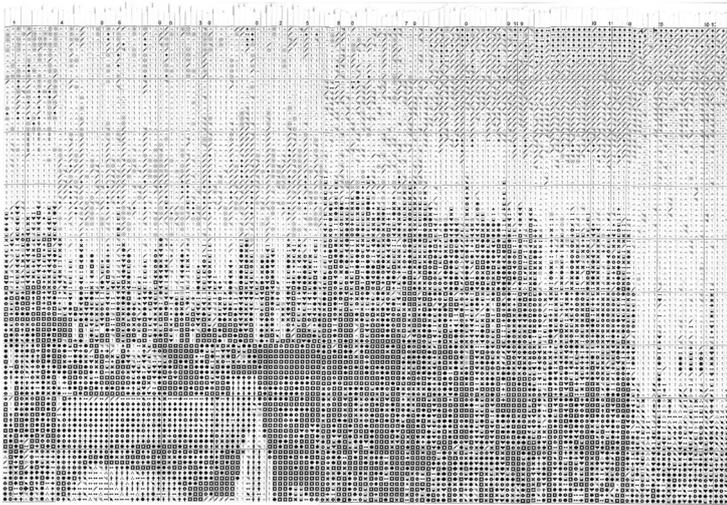




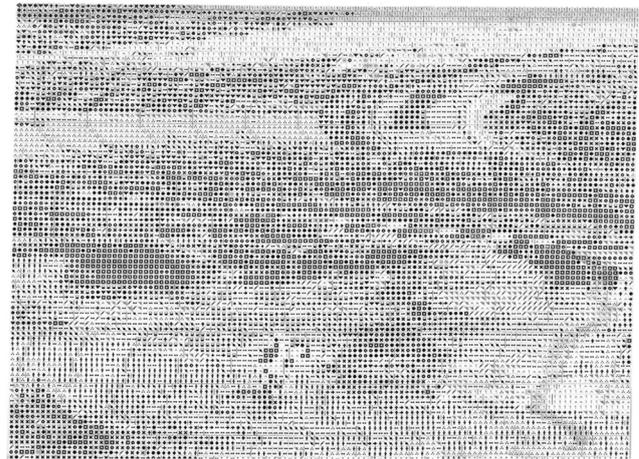


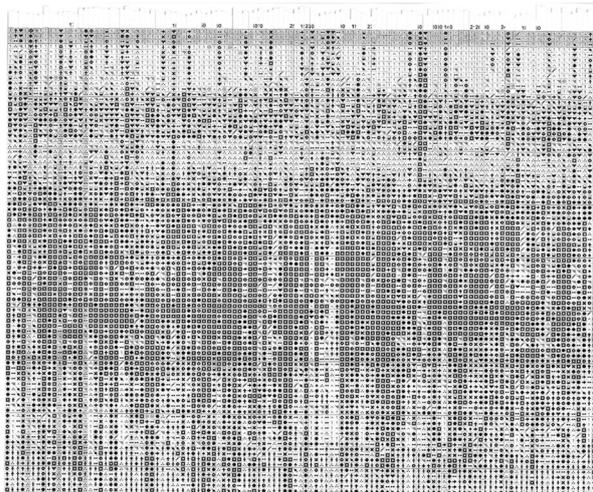
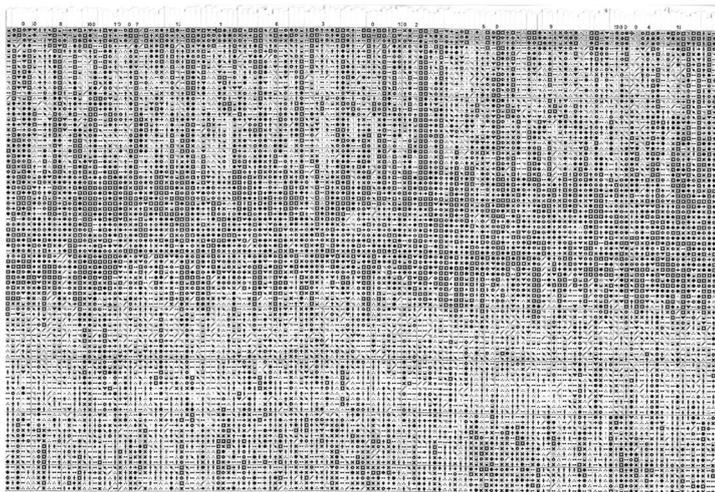
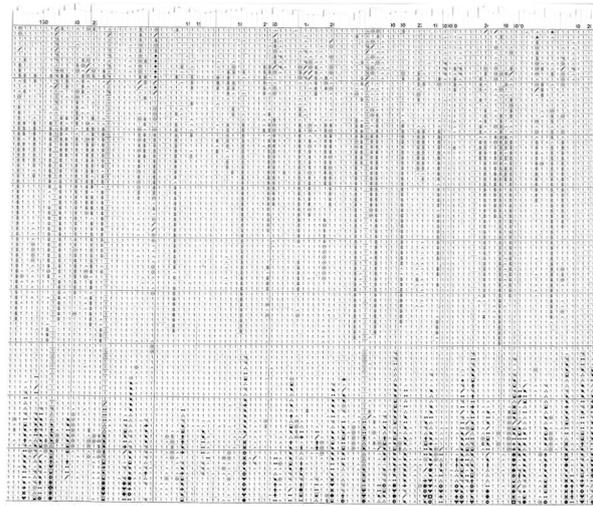
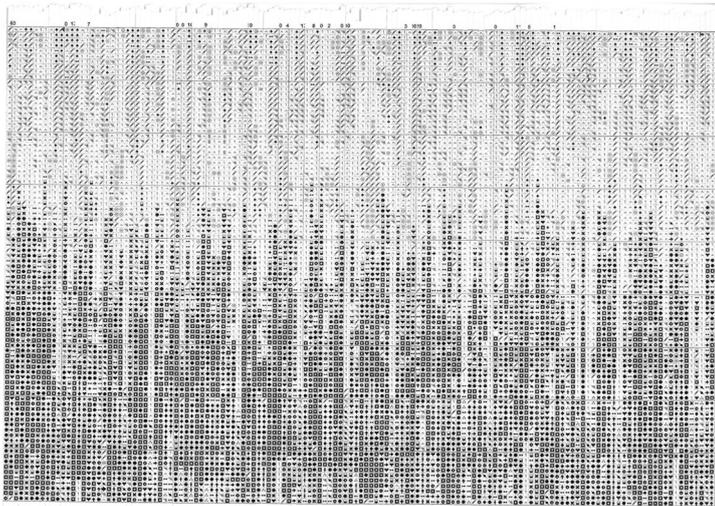












Every Christmas my mother-in-law gives me a sew-it-yourself bookmark kit. I hate them, but I have to make them otherwise I risk offending her. She is trying to make me a good housewife. She thinks cross stitch symbolises maternal competence - or at least the appearance of it - together with softness and domesticity. This handicraft epitomises the 'good housewife'. This is what my mother-in-law thinks I should be; the docile wife who sits every

evening silently crafting beautiful household items while her son watches television undisturbed.

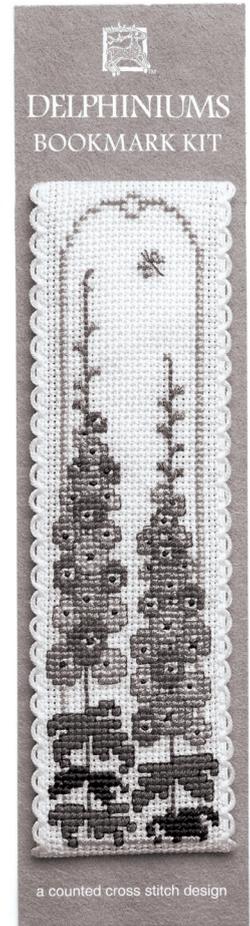
She is trying to make me the perfect wife by giving me cross stitch bookmark kits, and yet she doesn't really like women to read books (other than recipe books). Reading a book is too self-indulgent, and it provides an unhealthy space for independent thought and private knowledge. She thinks a wife must dedicate all of her energy to securing her family welfare and not concern herself with ideas or literature. Reading a book would be wasting time, which could be better employed cooking, cleaning or making things. One year I asked her for a book, and this is when the bookmark kits began to arrive.

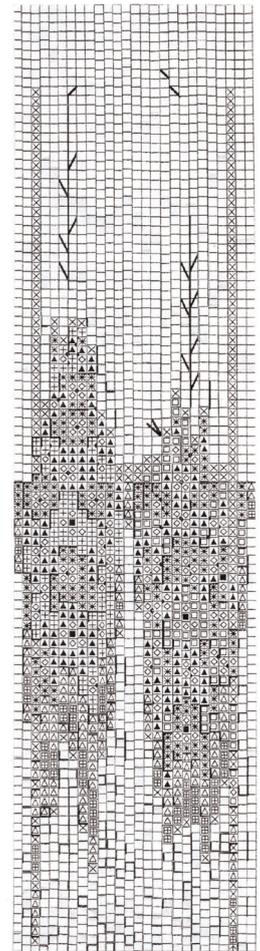
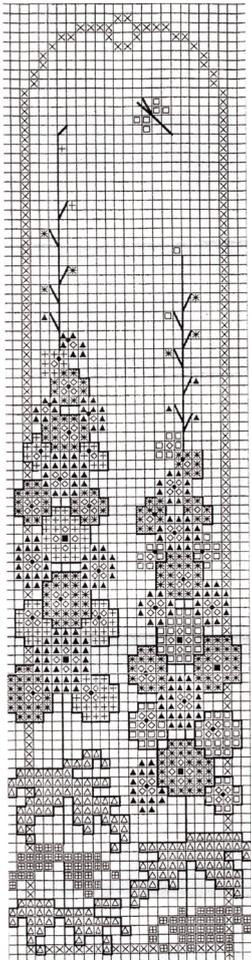
Cross stitch reminds me of my own family history: of the women who knitted and stitched when I was a girl. I was fascinated by the time and skill it seemed to take, but I rarely saw one of these projects finished. I suspect most were abandoned and left to gather dust on the top of a wardrobe. Finishing a large cross stitched picture is a bit like knitting a whole jumper: you begin with good intentions, but you never make it to the second sleeve. Likewise with a big embroidery, you imagine the smooth, even surface of the final piece, but after 6 months you have only managed to complete the first colour and the novelty has long since worn off. Cross stitch takes a very patient and dedicated hand, as well as one that remembers to always stitch in the same direction.

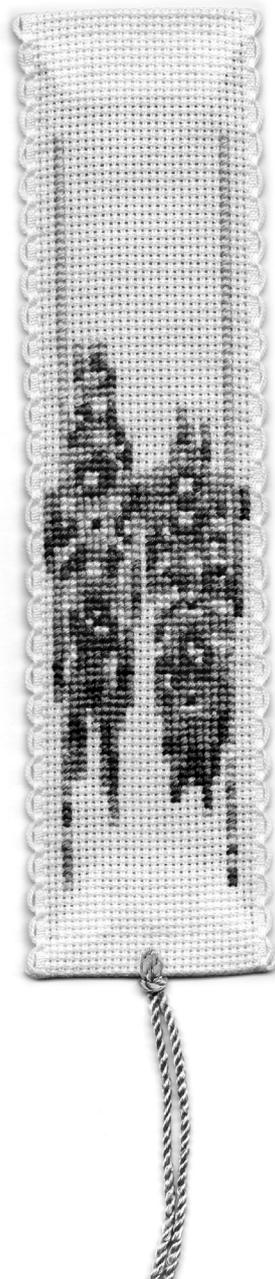
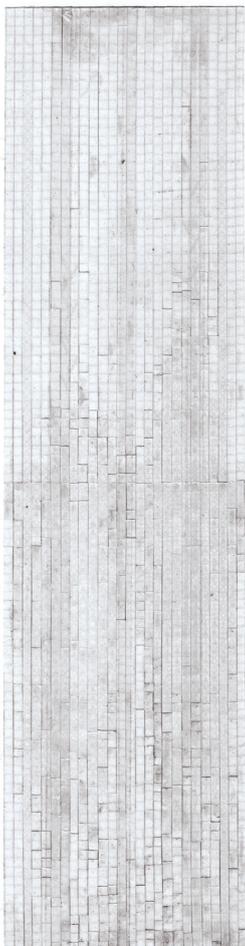
So I sit and stitch the bookmarks in the evenings while my husband watches TV. He doesn't pay any attention to this activity, and he doesn't notice that I adjust the original patterns. The children are in bed, and even if they weren't they wouldn't pay any attention to what I was stitching either. I dutifully complete every one I am given, but first I cut up the patterns and rearrange the stitches. The level of adjustment depends on whether or not I have made the bookmark before. Some of them have been given to me more than once because my mother-in-law doesn't keep track from one year to the next which ones she has already bought.

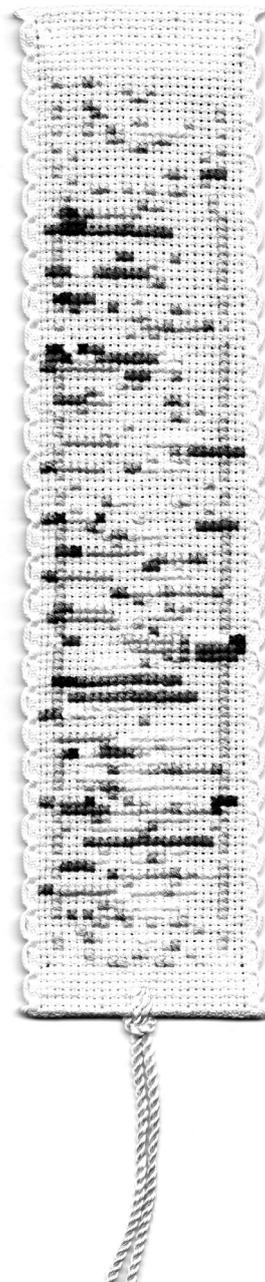
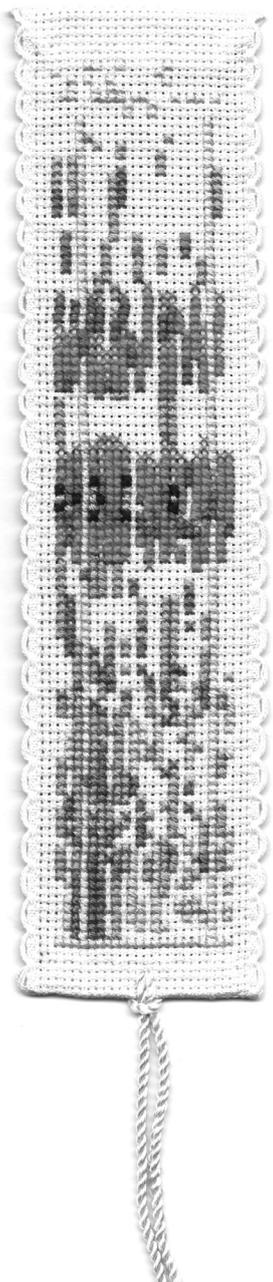
What I should do, as a sign of real commitment to domesticity, is embark upon one of those very large pieces; one that is taken from a famous old painting that everyone would recognise. Something highly detailed and complex, requiring such patience and dedication that my mother-in-law would no longer feel the need to buy me kits for banal flowery bookmarks. Obviously I will never complete something like this, but just owning the kit might be enough to appease her. She may not, however, be so easily fooled.

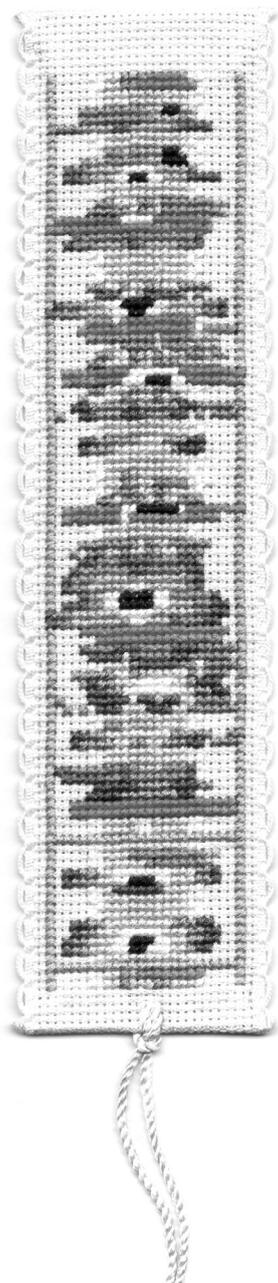
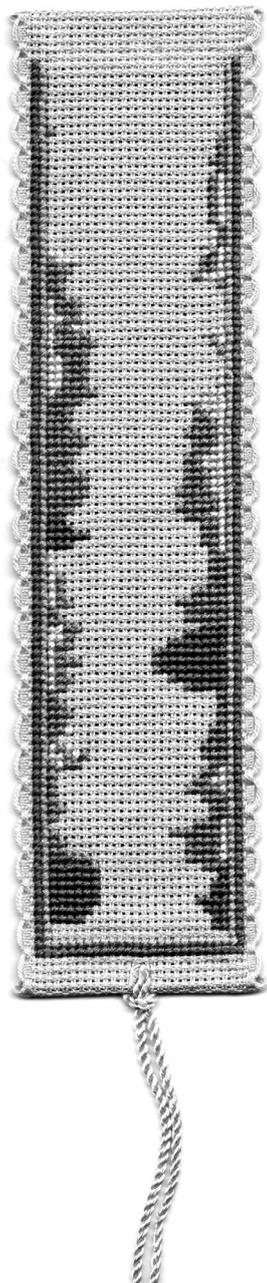
My mother-in-law buys me bookmark kits, which means she is astute enough to realise that I am unlikely to complete something bigger than a bookmark. She does not overestimate my capacity to stick with anything monumental or grand. She set her standards realistically low. An embroidered bookmark is as domesticated as I am going to get.

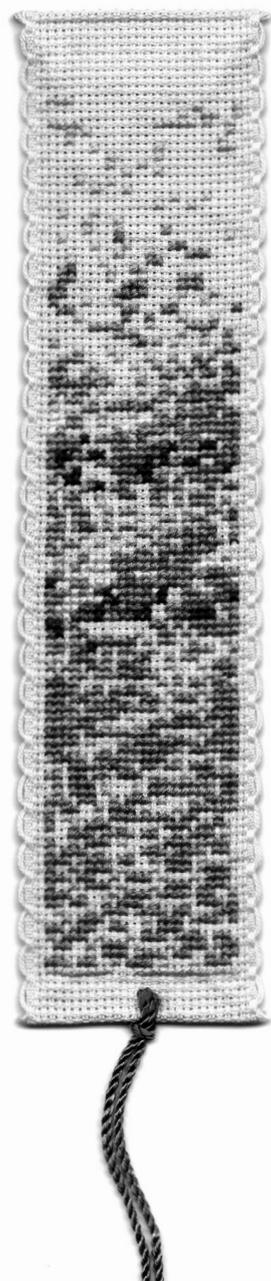
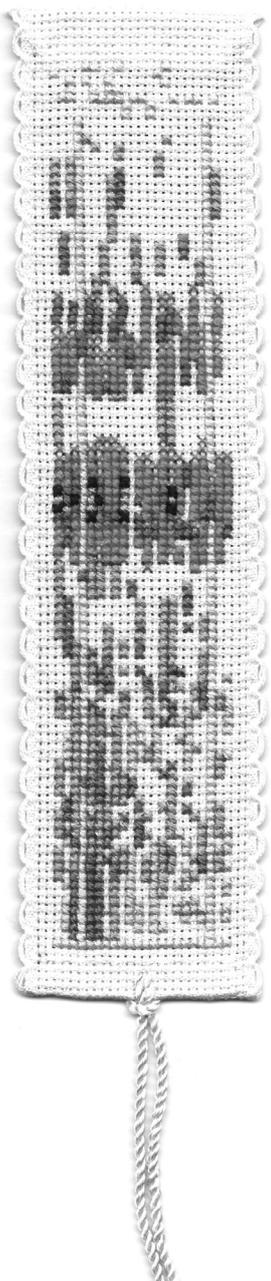


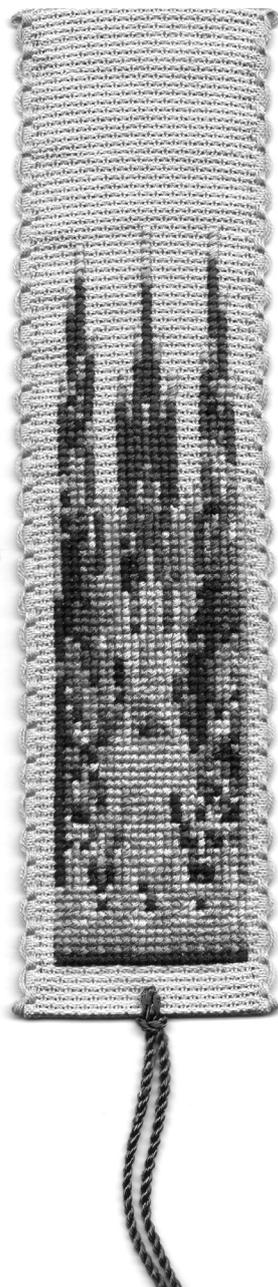
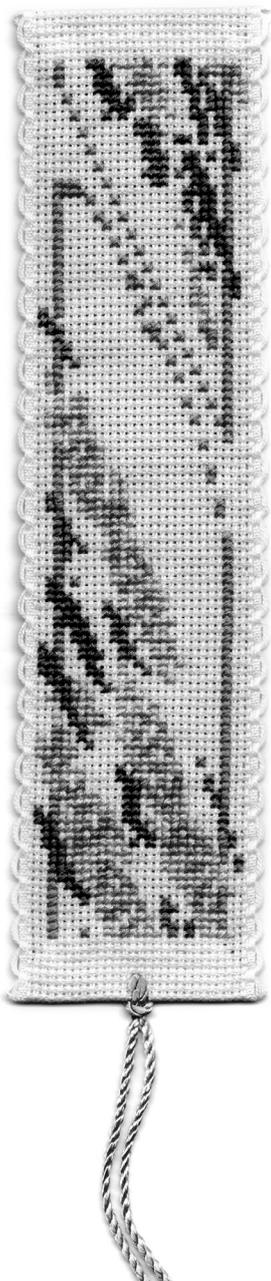












I WAS STANDING ON A CHAIR IN MY NAN'S KITCHEN. I WAS HELPING HER TO MAKE PASTRY. I MIGHT NOT HAVE BEEN HELPING. I MIGHT JUST HAVE BEEN PLAYING WITH THE PASTRY. IT WAS IN HER OLD HOUSE, THE FIRST HOUSE I KNEW HER IN, THE HOUSE WHERE MY DAD AND HIS BROTHER GREW UP. IT WAS ALSO THE HOUSE WHERE MY PARENTS LIVED BRIEFLY AFTER THEY MARRIED, BEFORE THEY BOUGHT THEIR OWN HOUSE. I REMEMBER THERE WAS A WINDOW WITH A VIEW ON TO A SMALL GARDEN WITH A BIG WALL AT THE END. THE WALL BACKED ONTO THE SECONDARY SCHOOL MY DAD ATTENDED, AND WHERE I WOULD EVENTUALLY GO, AND WHERE MY NAN HAD AN EARLY MORNING CLEANING JOB. I REMEMBER THERE WAS A TABLE IN THE KITCHEN WITH A COUPLE OF CHAIRS. THE TABLE WAS JUST BELOW A WOODEN HATCH THAT OPENED INTO THE SITTING ROOM, BUT I DON'T REMEMBER THE HATCH EVER BEING OPENED. FOR SOME REASON THIS MEMORY CONTAINS THE FIGURE OF A TEEN-AGED GIRL SITTING AT THE TABLE, MY DAD'S BOOZSTIN, BUT I KNOW THAT'S NOT A REAL PART OF THE MEMORY. THAT'S FROM STORIES I WAS TOLD BY MY NAN AND DAD ABOUT THE FACT THAT SHE WAS ALWAYS AT THEIR HOUSE WHEN SHE WAS A KID, AND THAT SHE USED TO SIT AT THAT TABLE. SHE WAS TWENTY OR SO WHEN I WAS BORN, SO I DON'T THINK SHE IS A REAL PART OF THIS MEMORY.

I MADE A CROSS STITCH PURSE AT INFANT SCHOOL. I MUST HAVE BEEN FIVE OR SIX YEARS OLD. THIS PURSE CONSISTED OF A RECTANGLE OF SQUARED FABRIC FOR COUNTED STITCHING, WHICH WAS FOLDED IN HALF AND DECORATED WITH COLOURED LINES AND CROSSES. THE SQUARED FABRIC WAS THE LARGEST COUNT YOU COULD GET, LIKE 'LEARNER FABRIC'. I GAVE THE PURSE TO MY MUM, AND IT LIVED IN A KITCHEN DRAWER AT OUR FAMILY HOME. THE MEMORY OF MAKING IT IS VAGUE, BUT MUCH MORE VIVID IS THE MEMORY OF SEEING IT IN THAT DRAWER. THE FABRIC WAS PALE, CREAM OR BEIGE, AND IT WAS FINISHED VERY NEATLY. THERE WERE NO LOOSE STITCHES OR MISTAKES.

I WAS IN THE BACK GARDEN OF OUR HOUSE WITH MY BROTHER. WE WERE PLAYING WITH LEGO IN THE FLOWER BEDS. I DIDN'T WANT THE LEGO TO GET LOST OR DIRTY.

I WAS IN THE PLAYGROUND AT SCHOOL. MY BEST FRIEND WAS ON THE BIG CLIMBING FRAME AND SHE FELL OFF. WHEN SHE HIT THE GROUND SHE LANDED ON HER ARM. IT BROKE. I DON'T REMEMBER WHETHER SHE CRIED OR NOT BUT ONE OF HER BONES WAS STICKING OUT OF HER ARM. I DIDN'T UNDERSTAND HOW THIS WAS POSSIBLE.

SOME KIDS ON OUR STREET HAD A SANDPIT. WE DID NOT HAVE A SANDPIT. ONE DAY ME AND MY BROTHER WERE PLAYING IN THEIR GARDEN AND ONE OF THE OTHER KIDS THREW SAND IN MY BROTHER'S EYE. HE HAD TO GO TO HOSPITAL TO HAVE IT WASHED OUT. WHEN HE CAME HOME HE HAD A BIG WHITE BANDAGE AROUND HIS HEAD. HE ALSO HAD AN EYE PATCH. IT SEEMED LIKE A LOT OF BANDAGE FOR SOMEONE WHO JUST GOT SAND IN HIS EYE.

WE WERE ON HOLIDAY SOMEWHERE IN ENGLAND.  
THERE WAS A SANDY BEACH WITH LOTS OF REALLY  
BIG TRAMPOLINES. I WAS IN THE MIDDLE OF A  
TRAMPOLINE AND IT WAS TIME TO GET OFF BUT I  
DIDN'T WANT TO STOP. I WAS SO SMALL, AND  
THE TRAMPOLINE WAS SO BIG, THAT IF I SAT IN  
THE MIDDLE MY DAD COULDN'T REACH ME. EVERY-  
ONE THOUGHT THIS WAS REALLY FUNNY.

I WAS PLAYING WITH A DOLL'S HOUSE IN MY BEDROOM  
AND MY BROTHER HAD SOME LEGO HE WANTED TO  
PUT IN IT. WE ARGUED AND ONE OF US KNOCKED A  
GLASS OFF THE DRESSING TABLE, WHICH WAS BE-  
SIDE THE DOLL'S HOUSE. MY BROTHER KNELT  
DOWN AND SMASHED THE GLASS WITH HIS SHIN.  
MUM PUT HIM IN THE BATH BECAUSE THERE WAS  
SO MUCH BLOOD. AS SHE POURED WATER OVER  
HIS LEG WE SAW A LARGE GASH STRETCHED OP-  
EN OVER THE BONE INTO AN EYE SHAPE. WE  
COULD SEE THE TISSUE UNDERNEATH. WHEN SHE  
STOPPED POURING THE WATER BLOOD FILLED THE  
EYE, GUSHED OUT AND RAN DOWN HIS LEG IN-  
TO THE BATH.

I WAS IN THE BACK OF A CAR. I THINK IT WAS MY AUNT'S WHITE MARINA. I DON'T THINK I LIKED BEING IN THE

BACK OF A CAR THAT WASN'T DRIVEN BY MUM OR DAD. WE WERE MOVING HOUSE AND THERE WERE BOXES IN THE BOOT OF THE CAR. I WAS SAT ON THE BACK SEAT AND OUT OF THE CORNER OF MY EYE I COULD SEE CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS: THE LIGHTS WERE IN A TANGLED MESS POKING OUT OF SOMEWHERE. I THOUGHT IT WAS WEIRD TO SEE THE CHRISTMAS LIGHTS IN THE BOOT OF A CAR. I HAD NEVER SEEN THEM ANYWHERE EXCEPT ON THE TREE AND IT NEVER OCCURRED TO ME THAT THEY CONTINUED TO EXIST, SOMEWHERE IN THE HOUSE, WHEN IT WASN'T CHRISTMAS.

OUR SCHOOL HAD A SMALL INDOOR SWIMMING POOL, AND WE WENT FOR SWIMMING LESSONS EVERY WEEK. ONE TIME I FORGOT TO TAKE MY KNICKERS OFF AND WENT SWIMMING WITH THEM ON UNDER MY COSTUME. I HAD TO SPEND THE REST OF THE DAY IN A SKIRT WITH NO UNDERWEAR. I WAS TERRIFIED THAT SOMEONE WOULD FIND OUT.

I WAS AT MY NAN'S HOUSE WITH MY YOUNGER COUSIN.

WE WERE HAVING A SLEEPOVER. WE SHARED A DOUBLE BED IN MY NAN'S SPARE ROOM. THE BED WAS HUGE, EVEN THOUGH THERE WERE TWO OF US IN IT. WE WERE SCARED THAT A MOUSE MIGHT RUN OVER THE BED WHILE WE WERE SLEEPING, AND

SO WE WRIGGLED RIGHT DOWN UNDER THE COVERS SO THAT OUR HEADS AND BODIES WERE COMPLETELY WRAPPED IN THE SHEETS.

I WAS IN MY FRIEND'S GARDEN. HE HAD A SWING. WE DID NOT HAVE A SWING. HE WAS ON THE SWING

AND I WAS RUNNING BACK AND FORTH IN FRONT OF HIM TRYING TO AVOID BEING HIT IN THE HEAD.

I WAS HIT IN THE HEAD. MY DAD CAME TO COLLECT ME AND TOOK ME TO HOSPITAL IN HIS BLUE VAN. AT THE HOSPITAL THEY PUT A BUTTERFLY PLASTER

ON MY FOREHEAD TO KEEP THE CUT CLOSED. ON THE WAY HOME MY DAD BOUGHT ME A BAG OF PEANUTS

I have never stolen anything. My life is secure and responsible. I have never done anything wrong to the extent that you would call it 'unlawful' and certainly I have never shoplifted. Taking handfuls of coffee stirrers from Starbucks is as close to the adrenaline rush of theft as I will ever get. Coffee stirrers present the ideal form of manufactured risk. They are free, and yet the morality of taking huge handfuls, especially if you haven't bought a cappuccino, is what gives this act a vague air of misdemeanour. Coffee stirrers worry me on a number of levels, as does the entire Starbucks Corporation, but these are two different subjects.

This process is not as simple as it may seem. At the doorway I survey the situation. I scan for staff because it is a good idea to make sure nobody is

cleaning the milk-and-sugar station when you sidle up for the snatch. You should also make sure there are no customers there, putting lids or cinnamon on their frothy coffees. Customers are less likely to notice if they do see you swipe a fistful of sticks, but you are obviously making life more difficult if you have witnesses.

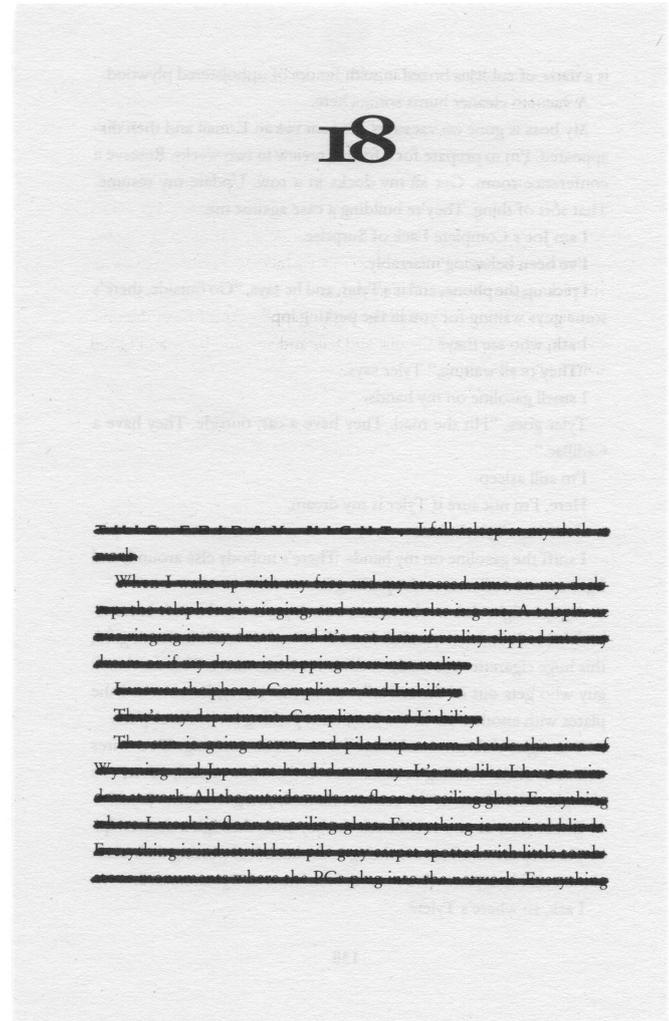
I have found that the choice of tactic depends on the specific Starbucks. You need to take into account the layout and lighting, and the number of people you wish to avoid. Taking the stirrers and just walking out with them in your hand might seem too obvious, the most likely to be spotted, but in reality if you develop a confident technique it is by far the most effective. Stashing them at the station before you walk out takes more planning, and requires a tricky manoeuvre that if botched would get you caught red-handed. Even worse, if you fudge this method you are more likely to drop the whole lot on the floor, attracting everyone's attention and prolonging your embarrassment. The most successful version of the 'stash' technique involves wearing a sweater or top with loose sleeves and tight cuffs. If you practice, you can shove a fairly hefty wad of stirrers up your sleeve without detection.

The coffee stirrer section is almost never empty. It is the equivalent of a bank vault, where the total reserves are fairly static and regularly topped up with minor transactions. This is both good and bad. On

one hand, you can always be sure of a reasonable haul. Every single Starbucks you encounter will have a fully stocked stirrer repository, however there are two main drawbacks to this. Firstly, the staff are often at the milk-and-sugar station refilling the stirrers. This makes it difficult to avoid a Starbucks employee when attempting to swipe the sticks. Secondly, a full quota of coffee stirrers is too big to take in one go (in my hand anyway). You have to take some of them, but not all. When the pot is completely full it is much more difficult to take only a handful because you have to fiddle around a bit, wiggling your fingers into the clump so that you can take a comfortable handful. This also makes a bit of noise, thus alerting anyone nearby to the fact that you are doing something other than just stirring your coffee.

You also have to be aware that if you go in heavy handed, taking too many sticks from a very full pot, you run the risk of dislodging some of the other sticks. These are going to get in the way of your smooth getaway, either because they get caught in your neat handful of stirrers making it harder to hide them, or because they simply fall on the floor with a soft but guilt-inducing clatter.

Should I feel guilty about taking coffee stirrers? Are they free to be taken in whatever quantity I desire, or am I stealing? I hope I am stealing. It is fine to steal from Starbucks.



is a man of white blond hair with a nose of a polished plywood  
A man in a clean human somewhere  
My boss gets on a station I don't see an E-mail and then he  
appears. He is prepared for a formal union in two weeks. He comes  
and conference room. Get all my desks in a row. Update my résumé  
That out of things. They're building a new engine room  
I see Joe's Complete Lack of Surprise  
Has been behaving rationally  
Pick up the phone, and it's Tyler, and he says, "Go outside, there's  
some guys waiting for you in the parking lot."  
Look, who are they?  
"They're all waiting," Tyler says.  
I see gasoline on my hands  
Tyler goes, "Hi, the usual. They have one, outside. They have  
Gallies."

It's still asleep  
Here, I'm not sure if Tyler is my dream  
Or if I am Tyler's dream  
I see if the gasoline on my hands. There's nobody else around, and  
I get up and walk out to the parking lot  
A guy in a fight club works on a car so he's parked at the curb in some  
body's black Corvair, and all I see do is look at it, all black and gold,  
think he's going to see ready to drive me somewhere. This mechanic  
guy who gets out of the car tells me not to worry, he switched the  
plates with another one in the long-term parking lot at the airport.  
Our fight club mechanic says he can start anything. Two wires  
out of the steering column. Touch the wires to each other, you  
complete the circuit to the starter solenoid, you get a start to jayride.  
Dishes that, so you could break the key code through a dealership.  
Three open men are sitting in the back seat wearing their black  
shirts and black pants. See no evil. Hear no evil. Speak no evil.  
Look, you where's Tyler?

The fight club mechanic guy is holding the Gallies open like a  
style for me. The mechanic is tall and all bones with shoulders that  
swivel like a telephone pole.  
I see some guys going to see Tyler?  
Waiting for me in the middle of the front seat is a bird, a white  
with small red eyes, a black lightning. We aren't driving.  
Even a week after fight club, you're getting a problem driving inside  
the speed limit. Maybe you're not passing a black shirt, it's not a  
fasten up, but you are not a fool. Other cars drive around you. Cars  
align. You get the finger from other drivers. Total strangers who  
pass. It's a club by nothing personal. After fight club, you're  
hardly you just want to see. You don't even see the police. Maybe  
you're still not a dog, but in fact you're every time you're a black  
Gallies. It's a club by nothing personal. After fight club, you're  
hardly you just want to see. You don't even see the police. Maybe  
you're still not a dog, but in fact you're every time you're a black  
Gallies. It's a club by nothing personal. After fight club, you're  
hardly you just want to see. You don't even see the police. Maybe  
you're still not a dog, but in fact you're every time you're a black  
Gallies.

The mechanic is there, driving. The bird by the club is not the  
mechanic.  
It's not easy, fuck, to see guys like our mechanic at fight club.  
Shiny guys, they never get lip. They fight until they're lunge. White  
guys like a slat one dipped in yellow with a nose, black hair like  
dried meat, these guys usually hang together, the way you see pictures  
of a Narcotic Anonymous. They never say stop. It's like they're  
all energy, shaking a foot they'll round the edges, these guys are  
recovery from something. As if the only choice they have is fight, but  
they're going to die and they want to die in a fight.  
They have to fight each other, these guys.  
Nobody else will tag them for a fight, and they can't tag anybody  
except on their twitching chinny, all bones and ink, since nobody else  
will get into a fight with them.  
Guys watching don't see yellow when guys like our mechanic's guys  
are on the  
All you have is the fight, breathing through their teeth, hands deep

ping for a hold, the hook and impact when feet hammer and have  
men on this hollow rib, point blank in a clinch. You see tendons and  
muscle and veins under the skin of these guys jump. Their chins rise,  
creaking, corded, and wet under the one light.

Ten, fifteen minutes disappear. Their small, they sweat and three  
guys' small, it reminds you of fried chicken.

Twenty minutes of fight club will go by. Finally, one guy will go  
down.

After a fight, two days recovery, guys will hang together for the rest  
of the night, wasted and smiling from fighting so hard.

Since fight club, this mechanic guy is always hanging around the  
house on Paper Street. Wants me to hear the songs he wrote. Wants  
me to see the birdhouse he built. The guy showed me a picture of some  
girl and asked me if he was pretty enough to marry.

Sitting in the front seat of the Corvair, the guy says, "Did you see  
this one I made for you? I made this."

It's not my birthday.

"Some oil was getting by the rings," the mechanic guy says, "but I  
changed the oil and the air filter. I checked the valve lash and the timing.  
It's supposed to rain tonight, so I changed the blades."

Just what's Tyler been planning?

The mechanic pumps the brakes and pushes the cigarette lighter in.  
He says, "Is this good? Are you feeling good?"

What's Tyler?

"The facts about fight club is you don't talk about fight club,"  
the mechanic says. "And the last rule about Duress? Maybe in your  
dreams, questions?"

So what can he tell me?

He says, "What you have to understand is your father was never  
mad for God."

Believe me, just and my office are smaller, smaller, smaller, guys  
I can't change lives every day.

The mechanic says, "If you're real and you're Christian and living  
in America, your father is your model for God. And if you never love  
your father, if your father built out on his own, in a corner of a house, and  
died and lived with God?"

This is all Tyler. Duress is degree. So what does this father model  
mean? And what does it mean to be a father? He says, "I don't  
know. I don't know. I don't know."

"What you and me doing," the mechanic says, "is you spend your  
life working for a father and God?"

"What you have to consider," he says, "is the possibility that God  
doesn't like you. God likes, God hates. This is not the worst thing  
that can happen."

How Tyler can it be that getting God's attention for being bad  
and better than getting attention at all. Maybe because God's not  
in between His and His own.

If you could be with the God, then you would see something which would  
you know?

What's God's will? He says, "Tyler, Duress, with his  
special place in his own special attention."

He says, "Get God's attention, and then you'll have a chance of  
understanding."

Which is more, hell or something?

Only if you're caught and punished, then you know.

"Down the house," the mechanic says, "and in your room with the  
Mason's. This is your house, God would love you."

The house you call, the light you'll go. The father you want, the  
son God wants you back.

"If you could be with the God, then you would see something which would  
you know? If you could be with God?"

It's not enough to be punished with the gains of your own  
hand and the other's hand.

The mechanic says the black Corvair was the old hippie high

with no passing lane, and already a line of trucks strings together behind us going the legal speed limit. The Corvairs fill up with the headlights behind us, and there we are, talking, reflected in the inside of the windshield. Driving inside the speed limit. As fast as the law allows.

A law is a law, Tyle would say. Driving too fast was the same as cutting a car was the same as planting a bomb was the same as shooting someone.

A criminal is a criminal is a criminal.

"Last week, we could've filled another four fight clubs," the mechanic says. "Maybe Big Bob can take over running the next chapter if we find a boss."

So next week, he'll go through the rules with Big Bob, and give him a fight club of his own.

From now on, when a leader starts a fight club, when everyone is standing around the light in the center of the basement, waiting, the leader should walk around and around the outside edge of the crowd, in the dark.

Look, who made up the new rules? Is it Tyle?

The mechanic smiles and says, "You know who makes up the rules."

The new rule is that nobody should be the center of a fight club, he says. Nobody is the center of a fight club except the two men fighting. The leader's voice will yell, walking slowly around the crowd, outside the darkness. The men in the crowd will stare at other men across the empty center of the room.

This is how it will be in all the fight clubs.

Finding a bar one garage to have a new fight club isn't tough, the mechanic says, but the original fight club still meets, they make their month's rent in just one fight club Saturday night.

According to the mechanic, in the new fight club rule is that fight

clubs will always be free. It will never cost to join. The mechanic will make sure the mechanic in the morning garage and the night and evening lanes outside of the room. "We want you, not your money."

The mechanic yells out the window, "As long as you're a fight club, you're not how much money you've got in the bank. You're not your job. You're not your family, and you're not what you tell yourself."

The mechanic yells into the wind, "You're not your name." A piece of metal in the back seat picks it up. "You're not your past name."

The mechanic yells, "You're not your problems." A piece of metal yells about, "You're not your age."

The mechanic yells, "You're not your age." Then the mechanic yells into the morning lane, filling the car with headlights through the windshield, and a driving job. One second then another comes to the head on screaming its horn and the mechanic yells out through the window.

Headlights come at us, bigger and bigger, horns screaming, and the mechanic comes forward into the glare and noise and screams, "We want you, not your hopes."

The mechanic yells, "We want you, not your hopes." This time, the car coming head on comes in time to come.

Another car comes, headlights blinking high, low, high, low, horn blaring, and the mechanic yells, "We will not be used." The mechanic doesn't scream, but the head on screams.

Another car, and the mechanic screams, "We are all going to die, someday."

This time, the screaming car comes, but the mechanic yells back into the path. The car comes, and the mechanic screams, head on, again.

We want and we'll at that moment. For that moment, nothing was in the car but the screaming car's horns. Not your luggage. Not your

ing smother. Not your bad breath. The windows are dark outside and the house is blowing around you. The headlights are flashing high and low and high in your face, and you will never have to go to work again.

You will never have to get another haircut.

"Quick," the mechanic says.

The car moves again, and the mechanic swerves back into its path.

"What," he says, "what will you wish you'd done before you died?"

With the car moving as it comes into him and the mechanic so cool he would like simply to look at me beside him in the front seat, and he says, "Ten seconds to impress."

"Drive."

"In sight."

"Close."

"In six."

My job, Leo, I wish I'd quit my job.

The car zooms by as the car swerves and the mechanic doesn't mean to hit it.

More lights are coming at us just ahead, and the mechanic turns to the three monkeys in the back seat. "Hey, space monkeys," he says, "you see how the game's played. For a up, you can't be all dead."

A car passes us on the right with a bumper sticker saying, "Drive Better When You're Drunk." The newspaper says thousands of these bumper stickers just appeared on cars one morning. Other bumper stickers said things like "Make Mine Yeast"

"Drunk Drivers Against Methuse."

"Recycle All the Animals."

Reading the newspaper, I knew the Misinformation Committee had pulled this. Or the Mischief Committee.

Sitting beside me, our clean and sober fight club mechanic tells me, yeah, the Drunk bumper stickers are part of Project Mayhem.

The three space monkeys are quiet in the back seat.

The Mischief Committee is printing airline pocket cards that show passengers fighting each other for oxygen masks while their planes ~~crash~~ down toward the ocean at a thousand miles an hour.

Mischief and Misinformation Committee are engineering a theater to develop computer games that will make automated book talkers intelligent enough to vomit torrents of ten and twenty dollar bills.

The cigarette lighter in the back paper cup holder, and the mechanic allows me to light the needles on the high day cake.

I light the candles, and the cake skitters under the table like a frog.

"What will you wish you'd done before you died?" the mechanic says and launches into the path of a truck coming head on. The truck hits the side door, blowing one leg clean off and then the truck's headlights, the car moving, some lights and lights to spook off the mechanic's smile.

"Mischief, mischief, mischief," he says to the car in the distance as the three space monkeys are sitting in the back seat. "We'll get a car out of a collision."

"One," he says.

"Two."

The truck is coming in front of us, blinding bright and leaning.

"Three."

"Drive better," a woman from the back seat.

"Build a house," another mechanic.

"Get married."

"The mechanic says, "Believe in me and you shall die, forever."

The late, the truck swerves and the mechanic swerves but the car's four Corvair fenders against one end of the truck's front bumper.

Not that I know this at the time, what I know is the light, the truck's headlights blinding into darkness and I feel the car's front against the passenger door and then against the high day cake and the mechanic has had the steering wheel.

The mechanic's lying on the wheel to keep it straight and

the back by smaller stuff, so in one perfect second there's no light inside the warm black leather car and our shouts all hit the same deep note, the same low tones of the truck's siren, and we have no control, no choice, no direction, and no escape and we're dead.

My wish right now is for me to die. I am nothing in the world compared to Tyles.

I am helpless.

I am stupid, and all I do is want and need things.

My tiny life. My little shit job. My Swedish furniture. I never, ever, never told anyone this, but before I met Tyles, I was planning to buy a dog and name it "Entourage."

This is how bad your life can get.

Kill me.

Grab the steering wheel and crank us back into traffic.

Now.

Prepare to encounter death.

Now.

The mechanic wrestles the wheel toward the ditch, and I am stuck to fucking die.

Now. The amazing miracle of death, when one second you're walking and talking, and the next second, you're an object.

I am nothing and not even that.

Gold.

Invisible.

I am all leather. My seat belt feels twisted like a straitjacket around me, and when I try to sit up, I hit my head against the steering wheel. This hurts more than it should. My head is resting in the mechanic's lap, and as I look up, my eyes adjust to see the mechanic's face high above me, smiling, driving, and I am cocooned outside the driver's window.

My hands and face are sticky with something.

Die.

Die. Die. Die. Die. Die.

The mechanic looks down. "Happy Birthday!"

I am all leather and not even that, but I am here.

"I am stuck to the steering wheel with your hand," I say.

I am nothing else, just the night air and the smell of cowhide, and the sound of the mechanic's smiling and driving, my head in his lap, all of a sudden I don't feel like I have to sit up.

Will you talk to me?

The mechanic says, "Oh, the fuck."

Just the night air and the smell of cowhide in heaven.

Die. Die. Die. Die. Die.

I am all leather, curled against the steering wheel, the face smiles. "Three birthday candles," he says, "happy birthday to the man who..."

I am stuck to the steering wheel, just enough to see the mechanic's head in his lap. I am all leather and not even that.

I don't remember very much about my early childhood. Many of my first memories are based around photographs, and are not necessarily of distinct or definite events. These are memories I have probably constructed around an image, and mostly these images are good. This is because people do not tend to photograph childhood traumas or miserable moments. That's not what family photographs typically show us. However candid, the images of my childhood are of a smiling round-faced little girl with dark hair and rosy cheeks.

Only one photograph interrupts this happy, normal narrative. There is a photo taken at my nursery school (which means I was three or four at the time), of me sat in a wooden chair, in front of a radiator attached to a purple wall. I am dressed in a pretty outfit; a navy blue dress and a white blouse with a round collar and lace edging. My hair is a bit dishevelled, but I am smiling widely and looking straight into the camera. I am holding a toy. At

first glance there is nothing remarkable or untoward about this picture, and the little girl here looks happy and secure.

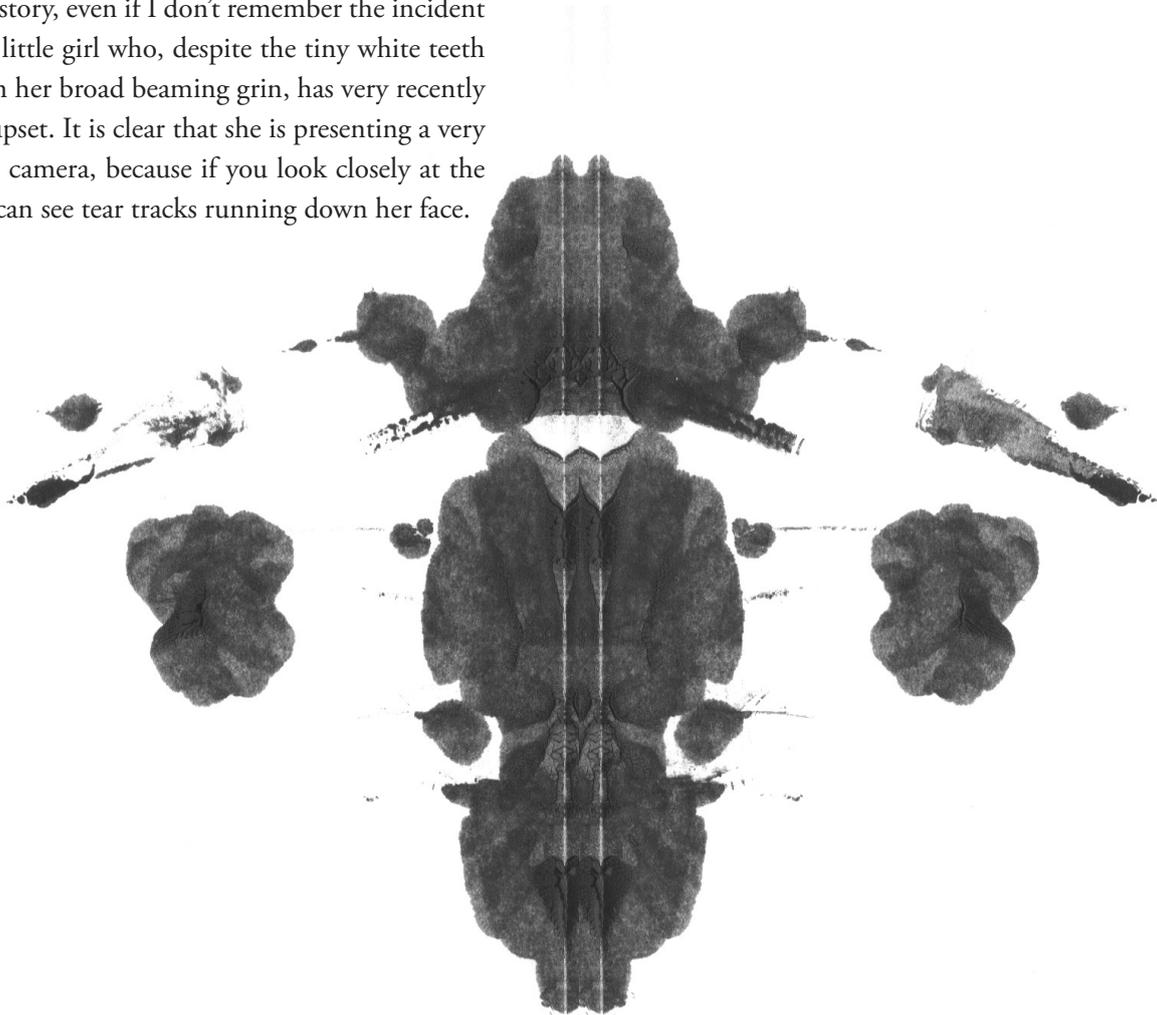
This was a nursery 'portrait', taken by a professional photographer. In the same way that all school children line up to sit in front of a generic backdrop and are made to say "cheese" for a complete stranger, we had our portraits taken at nursery school. But we weren't supposed to sit in front of the radiator on a wooden chair. Every child was meant to sit on a stool in front of a generic backdrop. On this day however, I apparently refused to sit where I was asked. I did not want to sit on the stool in front of whatever background was chosen for the day, and I protested to such an extent that I was allowed to sit where I wanted. I was even given a toy to distract me from whatever was making me so distressed.

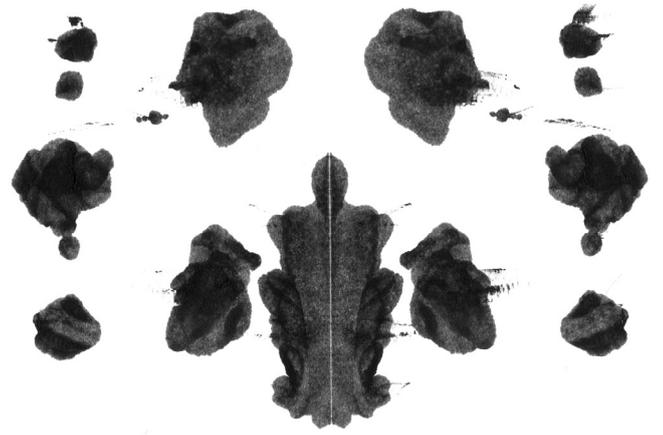
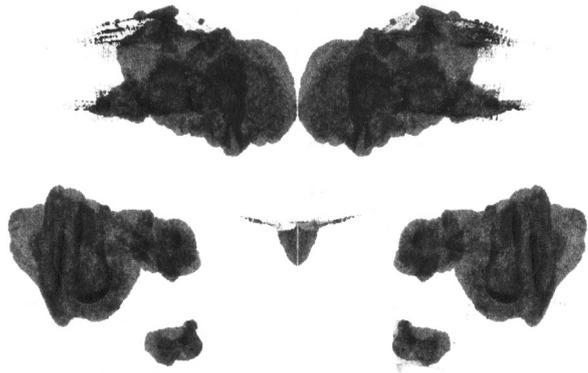
I cannot say that I actually remember this incident. I do not recall the event emotionally. I can't summon the feelings I might of had, nor can I put myself in the shoes of the small girl who, for some reason, didn't want her photograph taken at nursery. I have no idea why I refused to sit for the photographer that day.

Everything I know is contained within the frame of the photograph, and the subsequent retelling of the incident by various relatives over the years. One of these relatives was actually present when it happened. The rest have adopted a version of the story, based on the testimony of this single family witness, and the tale has become synonymous with the photograph itself. Whenever the

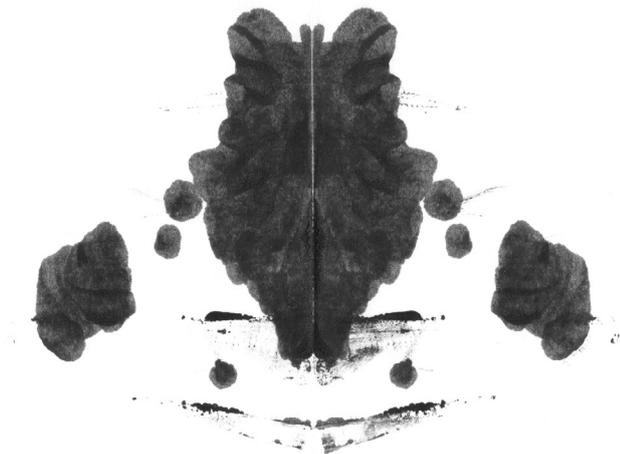
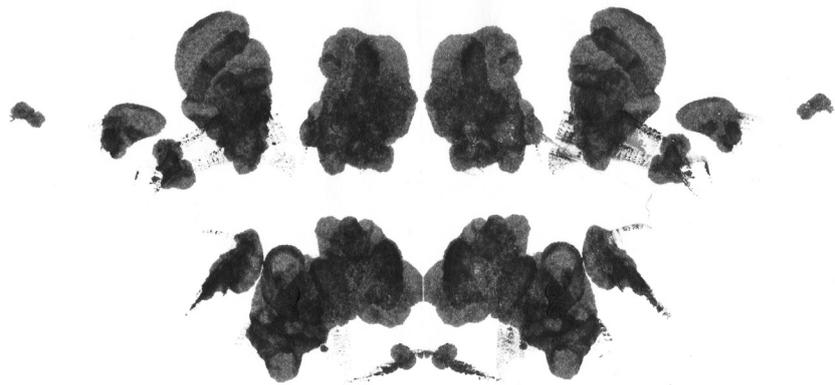
photo appears at a family gathering, someone will begin the anecdote about the time I refused to have my portrait taken. And if anyone ever doubts that this is what happened, there is a detail in the photograph that can be pointed to as irrefutable proof.

I believe the story, even if I don't remember the incident myself. This is a little girl who, despite the tiny white teeth peeping out from her broad beaming grin, has very recently been extremely upset. It is clear that she is presenting a very brave face to the camera, because if you look closely at the rosy cheeks you can see tear tracks running down her face.

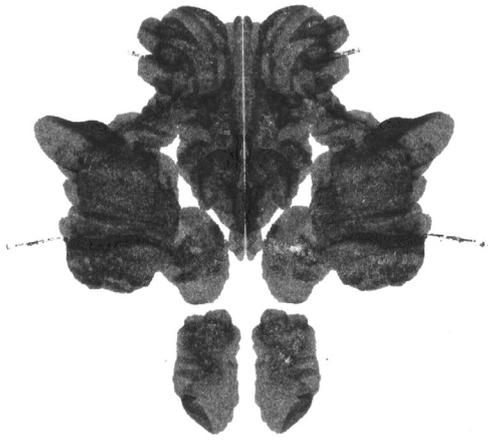














A moth beating its wings at high speed.

A tiger with bright staring eyes.

Two teddy bears sitting back to back. They are being attacked by large killer bees.

An orchid or some other flower.

Menacing like a frilly predator.

A skull with a hat on. The hat has pompoms.

This one doesn't look like anything.

An owl sitting above a lake.

A spinning top. The metal sort

from when I was child. You had to push down on the knob in the middle and when it was spinning fast enough it would give off a low humming sound.

A corkscrew.

The female reproductive system including a pelvis.

A man in a suit with a very large hat on. His hands are in his pockets.

He looks a bit like a cowboy.

The head of a fly.

A chameleon. It has two large bulbous eyes that can move independently around.

Two ugly old women talking in a park. There is a hedge behind them. They have bonnets and shawls. They might be men dressed as women.

A pale woman with tiny eyebrows and an elaborate hair style.

A whistling dog.

A roast chicken.

A woman with boxing gloves and a punch bag. She is furious and breathing hard.

A womb.

A tree with nesting birds. The birds are flying back to the nests but they have fallen out of the tree because something is shaking it violently.

A woman sitting cross-legged with her palms pressed together.

The head of an animal. It is drinking from a pond.

A turkey.

A girl bouncing a ball in the air with bat. The ball and the bat are joined together with a piece of elastic. I was never very good at this game.

A big fat frog.

A vase that has been dropped. It is smashed and the broken pieces are flying in the air.

A group of people at a party. They are all laughing at the well-dressed woman in the middle, who is both amusing and extremely attractive.

A moth with markings that look like eyes. They are not its real eyes.

A mouse with very large ears. It has black eyes staring straight at me and its mouth is open.

Nothing.

A head-on collision between two aeroplanes.

A woman in an elaborate corset. Her hands are on her hips.

Queen Victoria, Old Mother Hubbard and Big Bird.

A man and a woman dancing. The man is spinning the woman around so fast that her hat has flown off.

A little girl running to hide in some bushes.

Two women in big fur coats and hat. They are bending down to look at something.

An angry old man shouting out of a window.

A pair of fists held out towards me with the thumbs together. Not friendly or threatening. Just arms and hands.

A man's face. He has bushy hair, big eyebrows, sideburns and a thick moustache. Also an inverted bomb cloud.

Two women reaching up to put decorations on a Christmas tree.

There are baubles falling to the floor. I can also see the face of an extremely unpleasant duck.

Brains, some mittens and a fighter jet.

A person in a big hat with outstretched arms. Or someone riding a motorbike. The helmet looks like a lampshade.

A bat with its wings folded inwards diving straight down.

A passenger jet flying through cloud. It is climbing to a cruising altitude of 30,000 feet. The people on board can still see cars on the roads below. The plane will not crash.

A supersonic jet breaking the sound barrier.

The head of a praying mantis.

A big juicy cocoon with a glossy outer shell. Something is breaking out.

A winged man falling from the sky. The figure has two large horns protruding from either side of its head.

The feet of a ballet dancer. She is

standing on her toes and jumping.  
She has leg warmers on and her  
muscular calves are visible just  
above the slouchy knitting.

The lampshade from my  
bedroom when I was a child. It  
was dark pink and made of folded  
interlocking plastic pieces.

The underside of a flying squirrel.  
A pair of fish with legs, lips and  
fat feet. They are dancing and  
wearing frilly skirts.

The face of a tiger with flared  
nostrils. It is breathing hard  
waiting to strike.

The torso of a doll with its arms  
and legs removed.

A sumo wrestler crouched down  
ready to fight.

Or a silverback gorilla.

Two cats playing with mice that  
are half dead or are playing dead.

The skull of a rabbit.

Stealth bomber, Batman, great  
big fat juicy moth.

A fox-based warrior riding a  
mouse-shaped motorbike. There  
are exhaust fumes.

Two old men under attack.  
There are stones or some other  
sort of projectiles being heading  
towards them.

A section of a backbone. Four  
vertebrae with thick muscular  
attachments either side.  
Somewhere in the curved middle  
section or between the shoulder  
blades.

A small flying craft with rotor  
blades. Not a helicopter but  
something from a film or TV  
series. Looks like it is taking off  
on dry ground generating clouds  
of dust.

Old ladies with sharp chins and  
large noses. They have just been  
to get their hair done.

A black Christmas Tree.

I can't see anything in this.

A large bird like a chicken or a  
turkey. It is sitting with its wings  
folded back. It also has a lizard-  
like head. A lizard-headed turkey  
sat on a nest.

A bomb cloud.

Various monkey faces.

Something fluffy or soft being torn or ripped apart.

A child's toy. A doll. An animal.

A cow or a bird. A big fat round soft toy.

A mountain with a flat top and snow on the side. Somewhere very beautiful in the southern hemisphere.

This one is blank.

A sword in a stone. A great and heroic feat.

Very small children curled up into tight balls.

Fast and furious insects. Wasps. Hornets. What the hell is that?

Two japanese ladies bowing down low in a rock garden.

A fox peeking out of a bush.

The back of someone's head. A man with long black hair. He is standing with his arms raised out to the side and he has huge biceps. His rib cage is expanded and his back muscles are pronounced.

A cow.

Manta ray family with two tiny turtles.

A little girl twirling around very fast. She is putting her hands out to help keep her balanced.

A dog from below.

A spaceship firing missiles.

Dust clouds from an explosion.

The thing that has exploded cannot be seen any more.

A bowl of black tulips.

A camel.

Nothing.

Boxing kangaroos.

A feather neckpiece or headdress.

A fighter jet.

A robotic suit.

An x-ray of a woman's pelvis.

A bull charging fast towards a head-on collision.

A laughing clown.

An ink pen and a pool of spilled ink.

Walnuts.

A giraffe poking its head above a canopy of trees in bright daylight.

A fat lady in a bikini and boxing gloves dancing the Flamenco.

The head of a cobra or a dinosaur with frilly neck-parts.

Date of Birth:	Age:
Nationality:	Ethnic Background:
Present Occupation:	Work/Study Location:
Are you: single, married or living with partner, separated, divorced or widowed? Please underline	
Date(s) of marriage:	Children (ages):

1. Please describe the nature of your difficulties and how they affect your life.

2. What aspects of your life give you satisfaction?

3. Why did you think of contacting this Clinic for help with your difficulties?

3a. How did you find details of how to contact this Clinic (e.g. recommendation from a professional, friend, leaflet, website, etc.)

4. How do you think psychoanalytical treatment might help you?
  
5. Please tell us something about your family (with ages) and also your childhood including any significant experiences.
  
6. Please tell us something about your personal relationships.
  
7. What are your domestic circumstances?
  
8. Please tell us something about your schooling and later education (including any qualifications) and also any current studies or training.

9. Please give a brief summary of your previous employment since leaving school.

10. What are your responsibilities and prospects in your employment? Please mention any satisfactions or difficulties you have experienced at work.

11. If you have had any previous psychiatric treatment or psychotherapy, please could you give details and briefly describe the outcome.

If we may have the your permission to request a report about previous treatment/s, could you give names and addresses and sign where indicated.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Address</b>	<b>Permission to request a report (please sign)</b>
<b>Name</b>	<b>Address</b>	<b>Permission to request a report (please sign)</b>

12. Please give details of any past or present illness or disability.







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