

FOSSIL

James Newitt

5/6

(actually 5/10)

*Already ~~N~~ night night – ready for you.
You ready – for you would.*

Deleted...

Surely not!?

They literally *can't* be deleted. They were etched in there, traceable, encoded, impossible to erase.

These words were important for us. You made them with tiny, nervous, shivering letters. Your already impossibly small handwriting further abstracted into twisted shapes that bumped into each other. Interrupted by partially formed thoughts and sudden absences. Sentences without commas, or full stops
black outs, blind spots, blank ...
they were almost decorative, seismic amplifications of the tremors in your wrist.

Dated perhaps?

We have to search. Scratching at the screen, we hurriedly flick through transparent layers, timecoded and indexed, we descend – passing days, months –

When was it? The dates don't correspond. Your notes and the timecode that is – it seems you were writing months out of date.

The text we are searching for is not text as such, but images of text. Not making itself available to keywords. Barely traceable. Illogical.

You smile, aware of the irony.

(long silence)

You glance in my direction.

You don't remember do you?

[...]

Do you remember when I shoved the phone in your ear so you could mutter your last words (maybe) into the black glass? You summoned your most polite accent and said something about being busy with exhibitions (!) which was crazy because you've never had an exhibition.

Remember?

[...]

Of course you don't.

Night

Nigh

Night

It's almost black. Almost, like when digital noise attempts to interpret the greys that are too ambiguous to render properly. Until a fluorescent light flicks on, illuminating a small room full of cords, equipment, folded clothes, still-wrapped boxes of chocolate, wilted flowers and a bed – awkward in the middle of the room. The bed has wheels (we can move it later), a board with notes hanging from the foot-end. A fluoro green sticker on the board – FALLS RISK. In the bed a figure, wrapped in sheets, its head swallowed by puckered pillows.

The light goes out –

Night

The figure, its outline now visible in the dark, heaves breath into the room. It's breathing through its mouth. Sweet and wet, infused with that awful fucking food they feed it. Then a slow creak made by a conscious movement.

The sudden shock realizing that the figure is not asleep, it's lying with its eyes open. Its chin pushed down towards its chest, it releases a soft smile. Maybe its hand moves slightly, its wrist wrapped around the edge of the bedding, the hand seems upturned, not quite grasping but open.

Stay with it,

The fluorescent light flicks on and the figure is suddenly asleep. Like it was never awake, like it is perhaps dead, like the improbability of seeing the figure's eyes move in the dark suggests that the subtle gestures may have been illusions.

Light off again

– is someone doing this on purpose?

The figure is more active in the dark. Still fixed in this position it's forcing some word-shapes through its lips. Spitting the first part of a word then rounding off the rest with a smile. A hint of satisfaction in it, like blowing bubbles of spit. Repeating these movements, slowly, with infinite time.

Eventually, the room reveals itself to be not as dark as before. In fact, there is a diluted haze which illuminates more details, the source of light coming from another room, reflecting off walls through the open door. The figure – always in the same position – is wearing soft touches of blue, violet, grey-green, grey-blue, etc. Its face swollen, slightly damp, glowing it seems. A tiny crack of white between its lips gives away the smile again. The crack disappears and reappears.

The figure whispers –

good night
turn the TV off please,

(pause)

turn off

(pause ... why doesn't anyone hear me?)

Over and over

Please turn off
Off TV
Off
tv
TV days

(...?)

FOSSIL

*If and if if be had try and have have a cover cover off TV
off T.V. of TV days*

Waking up suddenly. Gasping. Fuck ... (deep sigh).
 White noise fading as white light replaces sleep.
 Then remembering much more clearly than usual,
 a dream where you die. Well, a dream where the
 doctor calls and says you have died. The phone
 ringing (I think it was connected to the wall by the
 staircase). Already night in the dream. Standing
 next to myself while speaking solemnly into the
 handset. The voice of the doctor not coming
 through the handset but resonating directly into
 my ear, so I don't need to even listen because it's
already in there.

We're very sorry ...

The disconnection of standing next to myself,
 hearing the anguish, *so sorry*, in my voice while
 feeling a deep sense of relief bubble in my chest.
 Almost joy. Being shocked at how bad I am
 at pretending grief. Thinking about breakfast.
 Wondering if I could do eggs.

– *ready for you*

The call happened, you actually died, but not for
 long – it was a temporary death. We've never
 spoken about this, the fact that you died

[...]

or that I felt relieved of your death, as a permanent
 reality. Or that I usually don't recall dreams. But I
 remembered this one, the lightness, triggering guilt,
 that *pang*, and a resolve that I shouldn't tell anyone
 about the dream. Those long, pitiful faces would
 become suspicious. She would have *wanted* it this
 way, I would have urged, with a fragile but persistent
 tone. It wouldn't take much to convince them.

So – what do we do now?

[...]

What am I supposed to do?

I ask your advice as usual. That's not going to
 work so well any more. We look at each other,
 momentarily serious before breaking into laughter.
 We both get the joke –

you can't respond.

While we rush, satisfied with our purpose: making important phone calls, repeating the diagnosis, folding things, etc. You sleep. You make mental notes that fall to the ground. Easter eggs! You think with excitement. Eggs and chocolate will help. Chocolate that we have to search for is the best. Also: BBQs, a dog, something about an exhibition, Sydney, Frank, the words, flowers for a friend who's already gone, his moustache, my girlfriend from 5 years ago – blonde maybe, and a bottle of wine. Anything that is red and gives the pleasure of numbness. You try and collect them and bring them closer. You will offer them to us all, as soon as you're feeling better. But for now, it's egg and fried or what you think. Fried doesn't make sense because it tastes bitter with Sydney. The tube is so bitter. Pricks me. Tubes and pricks. The taste is awful. Get it out. You start to gag. You wake up, wondering why we would talk about eating Sydney. Sydney is not here and you're already back. Did I tell you?

Your curiosity is met with concern, the long faces that say there is something you're missing.

Sydney already saw saw Frank... so?

We smile softly –
you look down at your hands.

Where has my ring gone, you think? Staring at the white band of flesh that hasn't been visible for more than 31 years. I must have left it somewhere. You forget to ask us, instead you are distracted by your fingers.

They are so swollen –

what –

(...?)

*Would be go me light & delighted to go on the delighted delighted
to go just to just be testing testing to testing up no now.*

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Last opened 27/11/2009

White wall. A4 size whiteboard in top right corner with black handwritten text with your name + MS. Directly below whiteboard a panel approximately the same size with various plugs including: yellow button that reads STAFF; orange light with text below POWER AVAILABLE; two red switches; two power points below with text ESSENTIAL and RCD PROTECTED; two white switches that read NIGHT LIGHT and EXAMINATION LIGHT. Bright orange sticker below panel that reads FALLS RISK. A3 sheet of paper pinned to wall directly to the left of the panel which reads: MANUAL HANDLING GUIDELINES CHART with various instructions below three headings: BED MOBILITY, TRANSFERS and MOBILITY. Grey photo board leaning against wall with two cards: one of Uluru at sunset and another with an Egyptian figure painted on stone. Cream coloured bed head in front of photo board with large, white, crumpled pillow.

Now when you yawn it seems that the air is reluctant to leave your chest. You contort your face, so we move closer. Checking (sometimes under the sheets). You open your mouth. We're standing around you, waiting for you to speak. You swallow the air deep, greedily taking more in. Sometimes you give up mid-yawn, close your mouth and look at us curiously. Sometimes you remain there with your mouth open, head pitched back into the too-soft pillow, bellowing hot air into the room.

A friend of yours said a whale. That there is something about the way you yawn that resembles the movements of a whale. It shouldn't make sense – whales can't yawn (they would drown). But the bloated chin, small eyes, smooth skin, immense size, you beached on the bed, it all somehow triggers an image of a whale. Also, their unspoken intelligence, the unnerving sensation of being watched by that incredibly small, black eye expelled from the huge mass of body. The black eye that appears so calm, lacks emotion, sees everything but says nothing. The eye that reveals its fragility only when the whale strains to see its own tail. Now the bloodshot rim that was buried in the whale's skull is visible. Also, the barnacles, the horror of being afflicted with these clumps of calcium that can't be touched, scratched or removed. The utter passiveness of

having alien lifeforms grow on you because of your immense size and restricted mobility. Also, something in their melancholy, the all-knowingness of a whale that can't or won't say anything of the terrible things it has seen.

Less whale-like when you eat. You transform into a more desperate state, a body *being fed* (it's the conditions here, something about bare-life). The twice-cooked chicken, or beef or pork or whatever dry, grey food they cover in the sweet/salty gravy and boiled, refrigerated, microwaved vegetables. If only you could see yourself, pushing forkfuls in your mouth, stretched again. The mouth now mechanically trained to receive the only stimulation it can get. I read an article that scientists had found a fossil which possibly describes our earliest known ancestor. It's a tiny creature that lived 540 million years ago. They describe it as having a bag-like body, a huge mouth and no anus. While you eat you keep *an eye on us*, almost with contempt, as you force more in. I wonder if this is also connected to the swelling. As in, is the food that you crash into your mouth contributing to your swollen face? Or, more likely, the drugs and the massive trauma.

We also look swollen. Lack of sleep. Crying without crying. Alert but exhausted. Hyper-sensitised and beyond feeling, while feeling too much. Like saturating ourselves early in the morning with powder that won't kick anymore. Forcing more in our frustrated and inflamed noses that have been rendered completely numb hours ago. Still – relentlessly vacuuming with a desensitised hole that just drips it back out. Useless, grey sludge that now only tingles a little. Faces distorting in the most incredible ways. Blood rushing to the back of silicon coated eyes, not being released by tears, so remaining there.

The crying without crying somehow related to sneezing with eyes forced open. Or yawning, or deep lung coughing, all with eyes open and attempted neutral expressions. These involuntary movements stimulating (you once said small orgasms). If not released they remain, fizzing in your head, lungs, throat. Only ever temporarily suppressed. Like sneezing while driving, while also eating an apple. Feeling terrified that closing your eyes to sneeze will trigger a complete loss of control. Still wanting to sneeze, trying to hold the tension until you can find somewhere to park. To finish it off properly without interruption. Without the fear of impact.

The other connection also being contagious. Your yawning, or constant near-yawning, triggering a parody all around you. A Mexican wave of yawns that ricochets in all directions. Heads thrown back. All the air suddenly sucked out of the whole building. The acidic bile collects at the back of your throat, while you try to gasp one last mouthful of oxygen in this room that has none. Retching and reaching for it. Everything already swallowed by all these gapping fucking mouths. And how interesting that you would have started this. And how strange that you wouldn't realise.

The sound of the radio at night. Constant noise. Before you came here. BBC for 24 hours. The world news on infinite repeat. No music (from memory), but a voice. Well rounded and so familiar, by your pillow as you sleep (do you sleep?). Slipping under the door in the darkness and arriving beside my bed, uninvited. A barely present guest during the day, functional, easily dismissed. At night taking advantage of our incapacity, it wanders the house. Complete liberty to explore all corners. Talking all the time so you know where it is. A hollow gesture of reassurance. Shining-like, saying one thing, doing another. Waiting on the other side of the door, crazed eyes, with a calm voice, saying: I'm fine, I don't need to rest, it's been a long time, I'm better now, I'm happy here, of course I'd say something ... etc. The voice wearing your robe. Sitting on the couch reading out headlines and highlights to no one in particular. Mentioning death and war with the same tone as it talks about the weather in Liverpool. The weather in Liverpool at the moment, that's something to talk about. Also, a story about a man. He could only say five words: YES, NO, THREE, ALWAYS, and LELO (a mispronunciation of his own name).

Solid state, almost immediate access.

The time to write, to allow the words to travel all this way, from brain to mouth to hand to paper. There is too much space for forgetting. The words change as they are being written. Their original form lost, or at least distorted. They shift into something else, in order to survive ~~light is already~~ ~~lost~~

pieces and we've recognise seen

elsewhere.

The simple things, she is doing so well with the simple things

[...]

like the weather, keep it simple, ask for a room with a view,

she is doing so well –

so well but if she could see the weather ... if she could see the weather she would be doing so well

the weather these days, just some sun –

just small and simple

All of them nodding in chorus, everyone agrees, you are doing especially well, so very well. Now each one approaches, bringing a new wave of disinfectant with them each time. Well fed, well bred, those blushed cheeks. They smile and nod, you are doing so very well ... (next ...) so especially well (next ...) so well (next ...) well

especially well, considering –

we are just going to touch you here, it might hurt but don't worry. You are doing so especially well. Please put your head here, and your hand here, can you feel that? Oh, it hurts? Just a little longer, you are doing so incredibly well. And thank you for doing so well. Isn't this strange? Come and look at this ... so well, just a moment. The helmet? Oh, you don't like it? I think it looks ... playful, (half grin). Doesn't it make you smile when you see it? You know you're doing very well. Leave it a while longer. Yes, we have taken note. No, there aren't any others. Sorry. Now if you would please, yes, oh you remember, that's right, your elbow. No, it's impossible, isn't it? That was a joke, apologies, bad humour. But yes, with the thumb, push in as far as you can, until you can feel the pulse. Come on now, you know, so well, that's it, OK so hold it and push harder, we don't want you to break the

skin. No, but yes. Yes, very hard. Try and ignore the feeling. Strange, isn't it? This will help. Please take her other arm, the one she is trying to counter with, yes hold it tight. Oh, no not you sorry, just keep pushing until you feel it might tear, that's it, and look at me. Oh, so very well. A fly! How *do* they get in here? No keep the pressure, yes, with your thumb. Can you help her? Did you notice her finger nails? We will have to be careful with them. Incredible how the fingernails continue to grow, even after death. Well they don't actually grow, it's just that the skin around them *retracts*. It's true! OK, just a little longer, yes tight on her arm, the cramp will stop when we finish here. Just a little longer, oh look at you. I'm sorry. You're doing so very well. So especially well –

and me, not actually there but imagining I was there. Smiling at the one with the long coat, through my teeth. The *head* of the group who keeps saying push in deeper while he knowingly winks at the rest behind him, standing in formation like flying ducks. The one who never dares to look you in the eye, never for a second glances directly at your soft, knowing whale-eyes, just keeps asking you to push your thumb in deeper. Not looking so not noticing me as I gently rise from my usual position in the room, the high school, public sector, primary school, community centre, fucking uncomfortable chair. Reaching behind him so he doesn't see but all the people with pads, taking notes see, but are too slow (reluctant?) to tell him that I have picked up the vase. Him turning back for another sneaky wink as I drive that vase into his own fucking head to see how he likes the feeling of strange shapes being forced into places where they don't belong. Now burying it deep beneath his shiny skin. Me still holding tight so the shards of glass compress between my angry fist and his once clean but now deformed skull. Keeping the pushing, plunging movement going as he slumps to the floor so the hit is not just a hit but a complete pulverising *strike* that is both hard, crack and full bodily thud. Him lying there in front of me like a shitty, lumpy puddle. Fuck him and his broken

skull. Looking down at his twisted form on the floor, I think about pissing in the shape I left in his head, just to finish. The last thing he sees, my piss filling up his horrified and horribly decompressed forehead. Before I can pull it out, the room folds back to its original shape, so quickly. The waiting, the sounds, the urgent whispers. You thankfully not noticing any of this, because he never had the chance to tell you that you could remove your thumb. Still waiting.

Infinitely patient you are.

*not quite quite deligetfue delightful
delighewow—*

NOT quite a delightful ride.

*Often manage to receive (but)
pieces and we've recognise seen
elsewhere.*

*But many do ~~and~~ have, a have
~~any~~have a*

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Last opened 27/11/2009

A bed, covered with a sheet that has a blue and teal floral pattern. A helmet placed on the bed, upturned. The surface of the helmet has multiple colours mixed together, including: green, yellow, purple, orange, pink, etc. A small, cream coloured table with several objects next to right side of bed. The table has wheels. Objects placed on table include black rimmed glasses, plastic cup, blue biro. A figure sitting facing bed and table seen from above. Figure is wearing a blouse with a red and white floral pattern. The figure has chocolate brown hair with grey roots. The figure has shorter, grey hair near its forehead. There is a scar on its forehead that roughly traces the area of shorter hair.

We ignore those characteristic deadly sounds, the whirrs and clicks, until finally they fall silent. Pure blackness, transferring loyally we hope.

Doped.

Corrupted perhaps.

We look at each other,
(silence)

... shit, is it dead!?

Did I kill it?

You put your cheek next to it and try and feel for some internal warmth. The sounds have stopped but maybe the transfer will still produce some friction. Non-mechanical movement but movement nonetheless, still *labouring*. We move closer to it, stooping slightly in concentration, hoping for some binary heat. You turn the device over in your hand, caressing it, fascinated with how its mechanism is completely *encased*. It reveals nothing of its function to us, which just makes it more seductive.

While nursing it close to your ear, I whisper some ideas that come to mind that might help. Carefully leaning over, in order to get closer without spilling

the luke-warm, milky tea you insist on adopting *all* the time. Racking my brain ... OK, try this, I need to use the word *strategy*, it will help us focus ...

Repetition and recall!

Of!?

Of ... um ... targeted words, yes – a strategy of repetition and recall to help strengthen orthographic representations and improve single word reading, writing, and naming, etc.

I glance left and see that you're still focused on gently touching its perfectly smooth surface, you're leaving traces with your greasy fingers and have forgotten to listen. Transfixed you mumble something like:

resistant to *Shock* or trauma, the trauma of being dropped 3 flights of stairs, landing on your side, buckled and broken.

Still resistant, but now ... superseded

so then –
traces – marks left behind by you (prints etc.)
~2 ms to erase a 256 kb block

x bit per cell –
 allowing them to expand, the bits to become bytes,
 more space than we can ever possibly comprehend.
 For example, my high school teacher telling me the
 new computers have 2 gigabytes of storage, but not
 to think about it because we couldn't fill them up if
 we tried.

Now the problem not just being finding enough
 space. The challenge being about mapping the
 distribution of information. Of even-distribution
 and wear levelling. Also, the problem of forgetting,
 erasing the data which is never absolutely erased
 once etched. Clever tricks, like zero filling, to cover
 tracks. Filling everything with zero, nothingness,
 shifting all the vertical [I] to sleep, horizontal,
 inactive, *latent*. Still the zeros leave a trace, like
 your oily fingers, a crucial imperfection in their
 attempted horizontality that will always give them
 away. Not quite zero enough. Not quite flat. Binary
 fingerprints leaving the possibility of tracing
 anything back that has been erased. The trick being
 the enormous labour involved in the decoding,
 reanimating all the billions of zeros which fake
 their availability.

Is it still warm?

The topography of landmarks such as sulci or
 the specification of coordinates in a particular
 reference space; cytoarchitectonic borders; inferior
 frontal gyrus; superior temporal sulcus; etc. Non-
 linear storage, networked relations, multi-point
 access, distributed data, non-linear everything [...]

Put it down, we're getting lost in this and
 perhaps it's just *sleeping*.

I shift closer to you and say (in the most sincere
 voice I can summon):

what we are engaged in is the difficulty of
 trying to locate a fluid, networked process, which
 is by its very nature also selective. These fragments
 are distributed you see? We need to draw maps
 that roughly correspond with the damaged circuits,
 in the vague hope that they will correspond enough
 to trigger memory.

As I reach for a piece of paper to sketch a series
 of lines and circles, a sudden *clunk* sounds as the
 device hits the floor. Reeling back, I see you've
 fallen asleep –

again

Like sleeping on top of you. Or pretending to sleep but in fact being awake and excited by the warmth of your body under/mine. Both faking sleep, me trying not to get too excited while you trying to pretend I'm unconscious in sleep. Awkwardly shifting body weight, moving closer to the gap where I want to push harder, all the time pretending this is occurring between dreams, unconscious and innocent.

While now watching you sleep, almost every day. Wondering if you dream of being touched, while all the time you are being touched, but without consent and with cold, synthetic hands, always with the smell of anti-bacterial gel. The sound of the dispensers preempting the smell of the gel, mixed with sweet/salty gravy odor that persist in this room. Also, and often, usually – shit ... and piss, between rooms, lingering in the hallways –

now watching, not just wondering, but hoping you are dreaming of being touched, groped even. Hoping that you encounter the pleasures in your swollen sleep that you chose to forget awake.

FOSSIL

*Hope that Sydney was good (Sydney was good) too.
See you soon darling lots of love darling.*

Facing each other but avoiding eye contact, trying not to acknowledge how far we've regressed. We smirk, triggered by the sounds they are making over there. Fucking animals. Grunts, moans, squeaky puffs followed by long exhales. Looking around, you can't control a splutter. The sounds they make, all for such little gain. A foot lifted here, a shuffle there, some baby steps, picking up a cup, attempting to sit – but not getting there, quite. You cough another little laugh, but this time I stare disapprovingly. Weird role reversals. The humour you were feeding on disappears and you suddenly look 15 years older, like your skin drank lead. I grab your chin with my fist. Wrapping my thumb and forefinger under your bottom lip and chin I shift your defeated stare upwards with a quick tug. OK. Sit up straight, no, you're slouching to the right again. Let me help, not so much the other way. Watch me. Now, remember we did this yesterday. Remember straight, don't slouch. So, follow me and touch your elbow, (you touch your hand). No. Your elbow, (you move your hand towards your forehead). No, not there. Touch your wrist, (you touch your forearm). Closer. Where is your hand? (you hesitate and move to touch your arm again). No. Where is your hand? (brushing your fingers over your hand distractedly). OK. Now your ear, (you touch your hand in the same place). No, your

ear, (you don't move). EAR. Nothing. Your ear, (you lift your hand towards your ear but continue to your forehead, I intercept). We make eye contact and you look at me with deep confusion. Your expression shifts and I can see you're tensing up. I grab your forearm, squeezing firmly, I ask you what you *actually* remember. You cringe. I ask again and you let your forehead fall forward. With my other hand, I grasp under your chin again and pull the immense weight of your head back up. As I do I can feel the mass of your brain as it pulses. I imagine (or I hear) sounds – soft, sharp clicks, like wet tuts and bubbles blown into a thick chocolate milkshake with a wide straw. Your brain has been *clipped*. As in pinched (I first wrote punched). Are you listening? You look relaxed. Distracted.

Can you smell that?

Your gaze drops back down again, this time I follow. It seems that we stay like that for a very long time.

Let's go and clean this up.
We'll continue later –

1) ~~Tape arch when walking longer distances~~

2) Stand facing wall

Rise up onto toes standing on left leg.

Keep feet straight and keep arches lifted.

10 reps

2 times per day

3) Standing on left leg

Hold 30 secs.

3 times per day.

Big toe stretch

Big toe on architrave

Knee towards wall.

Hold 15 secs

Twice per day

Something I read (from memory, more or less):

A neurosurgeon's father suffered a stroke. The father so affected he was basically rendered hopeless, stuck in bed not able to move, communicate or function independently. The son remained composed, professional (crying at night into his pillow), he tried to find a drug or a combination of drugs, a therapy exercise or a combination of therapy exercises, a stimulus or a combination of different stimuli, to help his father recover.

The son – vulnerable, experienced, focused, exhausted – worked late nights, reading up on speculative therapy strategies. He studied infant learning behaviour, he allowed himself to follow unlikely paths beyond childhood into pre-cognitive activity. Baby stuff. Basic needs triggering basic movements. Moving being the key activity, that reveals the infinite complexity of the world. You in motion, things in motion, variability, unpredictability, billions of other moving elements around you, too much data to process without a brain.

The son one day looked at his father, with a tear forming in the corner of his eye but a voice

that revealed none of that emotion, said DAD, CRAWL. The father, confused, was led to the floor, perhaps tempted by some sweet snack. The son stood, watching, telling himself it would work. The idea being that to crawl would rewire his father's brain through engaging in the most basic form of movement. Still movement nonetheless that would require cognition of his environment. The first step towards relearning everything.

The father not listening, or pretending not to hear, only moving two awkward steps forward, stops and looks up at his son with a twisted expression. The son, maintaining his commitment:

Get on the ground and crawl ...

... silence ...

crawl you fucking bastard!

... silence ...

I'm sorry, dad. Please crawl

Substantial damage to tissue anywhere within the region shown in blue –

blue being roughly the size of Spain

just

[...]

27/12

(actually 20/11)

Funny thing. I will ~~will~~ walk walk ~~will~~ ~~back~~ ~~back~~
(unintelligible)

Also, walking every day past that room, not a room as such, but a chapel. Always empty, always with lights on. At the end of the hall before your door. Why a chapel here? Could they be any more fucking obvious? Do they do funerals too? Headache ringing, disorientated, crossing the threshold, suddenly standing clumsily in the space, still with the light on and candles burning. A shadow licks across the wall. A person has moved from the opposite corner and stands uncomfortably close. I can hear the material they wear fold as they shuffle in behind me, (it's probably an older man, probably a robe). Now there are two of us in here, both maintaining some anonymity, the perfect situation for confession. What if I just open my mouth and allow some words to fall out onto the floor before they crawl into the shadows, leaving smeared stains behind them? An outlet after spending days, weeks, months here with you. Always talking about bodies; touching bodies; bodily functions, always revealed; nothing discrete. What if I talk about the cleft? That ruptured *gap* that is prodded and cleaned. I whisper a detailed description of how the removal of hair makes the chafed and swollen skin more visible, more *pronounced*. The skin, when you get close, is inflamed and textured, new hairs create swollen bumps as they wrestle their way to

the surface. The edges of the cleft softened with two fingers coated in lubricious liquid, the fingers slide beyond the edge and into the hole that was partially covered. The hole pulled open with another two fingers, allowing space for two hands to grasp the entire circumference, firmly pulling it apart, seeing its limits, being aware of fissures that can rip suddenly. I ask him to look in and describe whatever colour or liquid or shape or lack of shape he can see in there. Pulling the moist skin flaps further *back* to reveal what's missing. It's wide open now. I ask him to lean right over and allow a glob of spit to drop into the middle of the hole. We both wait for some sort of feedback – how deep is it? Both of us standing now, waiting to hear the drop slap against a moist surface, alone in this room, after hours.

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Last opened 27/11/2009

A white wall. A white board with aluminum frame. Black, handwritten text: *FRIDAY 6.11.09, H. OUT FOR LUNCH WITH SISTER R BACK 2PM; Sunday 8/11/09, H going out to S and B's for lunch 11.30; S – have you any sunscreen for H if she sits in sun?* Dark grey chair directly below white board. Yellow container on chair containing: books, Nivea cream, plastic sleeves with paper, folded clothes, other items unidentifiable. Two photo boards leaning against left side of chair. Black jacket folded over right side of chair.

Your'e told not to be embarrassed, it happens often. Perhaps you have an upset stomach. The food is terrible, we're sorry. So much salt, masked with sugar. You don't seem to mind, or you just didn't find the words in time.

Now that I think about it, I noticed your fingers were filthy, I think you had some under your nails. You touched your food with them. Then you touched my face with them. I didn't say anything, but I went to the bathroom to wash before having tea and biscuits. I don't think you noticed.

The networks you used to have,
 cards archived, weekends planned, friends of
 friends catalogued, alphabetically ordered, waiting
 to be reconnected somehow. All analogue of course.

Networks severed and networks tested; or,
 networks ruptured and networks restricted; or,
 networks cut and networks cut. Some can't take
 the waiting, or the food, or the lights, or the bodies,
 or the families, or the conversations, or the dead
 flowers, or the smells, or the tea ... and OK, I guess.

Eventually you will just need to call. You can
 connect and reconnect and maybe they will come
 back, the good ones.

You're independent.

Slowly diving deeper.

5 down: your imprisonment by extremely
 evangelical radical
 22 across: most in need of tip to form
 relationships
 9 across: smoke irritated Craig

That nervous biro, the confused lines you
 help it inscribe. Scratching out and across,
 you got: CIGAR, COMMONERA (?) and
 LIONSSHARE.

Even crosswords. Crosswords!

Which is beyond-beyond really. You leave the
 papers folded, ready to be collected and disposed
 of. Making no claim to your three words, but I
 found them. I try to follow your lines back to
 their origins and find the place the words emerged
 from. Hesitantly etched, their cryptic relationships
 opaque to me. This is it, isn't it? Now *I'm trying* to
 understand. You've nurtured these little stones,
 archived them, protected them, hidden them.
 You're playing too, now it's for us to work out.

I'm blocked. Not making conversation, I rub the thin line of scab on my arm. A scratch from the dog, sharp puppy claws that pulled down the length of my forearm. Thin lines of blood that have now dried into rust. Three days ago, the lines are breaking apart into irregular patterns.

You take my hand – interrupting the nervous habit, like when you push your hand on my knee when it jumps manically under the table. You turn my arm to reveal the scratched marks and glance at it curiously.

The dog

– I begin ...

I know, it scratched you, it doesn't know better, three days ago
– you finish for me

(both looking at my arm, as if it's a small child)

um ... but how could you possibly ...

(You say)

– of course, I remember. These things you tell me settle. They remain. They protect themselves here (pointing at your helmet), they

find a place and they stay. In dark corners, settling in the dust, backs of caves, under sinks. They remain in place and slowly solidify. They are covered with a protective film of mucus – the ones I like. I let them rest under there. I can see them, I know they are there, crystallising, slowly. I protect them but I can't remove them. They are joined through networks, but the networks are severed in places. I can sense these frayed edges but I can't touch them together, they won't reach. I can't travel into them or I'd get lost in the dark spaces in-between the threads. Do you see? I can feel where these things are, or have been, or are slowly crawling too. I just can't touch them or bring them forth. Sometimes if I touch you, the touch triggers the same shape as the shape that sits in the dark, or at least a shape that resembles one of mine. The networks overlap, they shine momentarily. I can take that shape and use it, the new shape that reflects most of the contours, lines and mass of the other shape. Then I can bring that new shape forward. It evaporates, but for a moment I can speak that shape. The new shape comes forth. I just have to try and grab it quickly, to be able to pull it. I need time.

So we sit, with all our time and we pull the words –
(no one else is here to see them, hear them, know them)

*pieces and we've recognise seen
elsewhere*

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Last opened 15/01/2010

A hallway. High gloss, grey laminate floor. Three fluorescent lights in ceiling. Two white, rectangle signs fixed horizontally from ceiling, black text reads: CUSTOMER SERVICE UNIT on first sign and DEPARTMENT OF CRITICAL CARE ADMINISTRATION on second. Four blue framed doorways on left and right side of hallway. Halfway down left side of hallway there is: a fire hose; fire extinguisher; light grey rubbish bin with blue bin liner; sink; paper towel dispenser; and disinfectant hand wash dispenser. End of hall there is a green EXIT sign and white double doors. Left door is closed, right door is open. Red letters reading MAS visible beyond door on glass partition.

Looking confident, propped up and rubbed clean with Nivea, you smile and start telling me about your day, which by all accounts sounds like a good day. With some hesitation you make your way through a timeline of encounters with places, objects, things you had for lunch, some people you met, etc. A sip of tea, afterwards, satisfied.

Incredible! The ground you covered. Who is Elle? Why did you go to the police? How did you possibly make it all the way to the sea? And it's September anyway, it's freezing outside. You look at me after your story, reading my expression, calmly monitoring my face as I glance around the room. I notice that each point of reference from your day is within eyesight of your bed, the Myer bag, the Elle magazine, the red socks, the sandwich, the new shoes, the postcard, etc. etc. All of which you mapped out, over, around and beyond my curious expression as I listened to you. I register each reference as you follow my sight. Looking back at you to try and understand. You've fallen silent, carefully holding your lukewarm cup of milky tea.

Later I try,
from where I sit it was sunny outside, after a class of yoga mat I listened to the loud bass for over an hour. Didn't eat only ripped water and some blue books after lunch, but didn't eat. 29/11/2016 that Mabel said, also the visa application I had to finish. Red covers, sorry red shapes for another book before the wind comes up. I didn't sleep but the crumpled bed did make me sleepy. No more hard drives until this one is done but only buying something worth 1 euro because I can't find anymore when I was there...

Or, perhaps – a slit, crack, fissure, crevice, chasm, opening, rift, break, fracture, rent, breach, gash, indentation; gap, hole, pit, void, crater.

26/2/12

(actually 23/11/09)

*You are doing very ~~very~~ specially well and I ~~am~~ I can see you
doing psecially well on ~~in~~ the BBQ.*

*I am away for a little while ~~but~~ but I react most rusty when you
~~but~~ while*

To be blunt,
as in a blunt hit, a blunt knife moving back and
forward, a blunt sound, echoed, beneath the
skin flap.

That sound you made when you slid off your chair
at work during a meeting. Slumped over before
your own body weight pulled you to the ground,
not so much a thud, perhaps more a wet flop. The
blunt, and also wet, click when your brain popped.
All of this because a small vein swelled, burst and
bled persistently, inside your head.

It could happen to anyone ... it's just bad
luck it happened to you.

It's also bad luck that the bleeding inside your skull
creates pressure on the brain which needs to be
released. The only option to drill some holes into
your head and cut out a piece of skull, a *plate* they
call it. The pressure for you, the pressure *in* you,
was so great that your brain forced its way out as
soon as the plate was removed. Literally falling out
of your head. They said it took them completely by
surprise, that they haven't seen pressure like that
before. Luckily for you, there was another doctor
in the room, who was able to assist the surgeon in
pushing the swollen brain back in the hole. They

said it was exciting – not something they see every
day. Also tricky though, as the displaced brain
matter didn't fit comfortably back in the space it
tried to escape from. Like digging a hole in hard
soil, then attempting to replace the *displaced* soil
back in the hole and being left with a substantial
amount of *excess*. The displaced soil seemingly
greater in mass than the soil removed from the
hole. Something about swelling, and pressure, and
mass. The frustrating displacement triggering a
frenzy of shovel slapping and furious jumps. There
were consequences of course. As well as the issue
of having a usually wet brain coated in dried blood
and eight fingers prodding deep into its folds
and bends. You didn't wake up. We watched you
sleep for eight weeks before you stirred, eventually
opening those little eyes. You were different. You
could no longer remember.

Also, forming words, sentences, phrases is difficult.
Even if you know words you can't find them. You
can't pull them out. We sit, patiently, watching
you try and make the connection between *seeing*
the words, knowing their sound, and making them
emerge from your throat. That action you do with
your hands, trying to push them forward over the
gap in your head, or when you put your fingers
in your mouth, pulling them from somewhere

within. It's not working yet. We have to try and find the words. They are there, just locked away, still crystallised.

We look for patterns, little triggers that stimulate more complex patterns, that form layers of association, that bring forth air in your lungs, that fill pockets of air in your mouth, that bring forth words, that we can hear and understand. Not so much erased as rearranged. We are not concerned with recreating the *things* that trigger the associations. We are concerned with the points of connection *between the things*. The network that has been ruptured. The things themselves remain, they are protected and you protect them. Even if the thing has corroded, its form is embedded, and with time that form can be remade. For now, it's a question of access.

Decompressive craniectomy is a procedure in which part of the skull is removed to allow a swelling brain room to expand without being squeezed. The operation is carried out by a neurosurgeon who specializes in surgery of the brain and spine.

(exposure and retraction)

An incision (cut) is made in the scalp, a skin flap is peeled back, burr holes are drilled in the skull, and then a piece of bone (bone flap) is cut out like a trap-door to reveal the brain underneath.

(drilled)

The surgeon then begins work to repair the area of damage.

(placement of matrix)

Once the repair has been made, the scalp is stitched together.

(closure)

Later when the swelling in the brain is reduced, a Cranioplasty is performed. The missing area of skull is replaced.

We need to talk about your skull

[...]

The piece that is missing. What shape is it?
Do you remember?

I'm trying to trace an outline with my eyes but the pulse is off-putting. The shape of the scar, the still-visible line of incision, the dramatic cleft below, grey matter bubbling at its edges, trying to release itself. I shudder at the thought that I can *see you think*.

(Um ...) Somehow, ironically, I can only imagine a map of Tasmania, triangularish, pointing SW. Now that shape is superimposed I find it hard to imagine any other. A fat triangle. Almost pubis. Perhaps the surgeons can choose a shape depending on their mood. Or if they are not in the mood there is a board, with outlines, suggested shapes to remove.

Your hand gliding over your forehead, hesitates at the edge of the cleft. Confused, you finger the rim. This happens regularly, every time you forget that a piece of skull has been removed, only the skin *flap* sewn back into place.

What if, when no-one is looking, you inadvertently touch yourself there. Like you really put your finger *in*. Right in the hole, while it's pulsing. I try and shepherd your fingers away. It's like watching a newborn clumsily navigating a room full of heavy objects with its head, unaware that there is a gap still exposed between several plates –

don't touch it – leave it be,

they say the plate of bone is put on ice, kept in a suspended state where it can be reanimated and reinserted, when or if you're ready. They do this with titanium mesh apparently. A miracle of medicine that is both beyond belief and incredible crude. I recently heard of a friend of a friend who had a fragment of their skull removed and placed in their stomach in order to *keep it alive*. Perhaps they wrapped it, like yours? Then it would surely need to be marked, or perhaps tagged, the system helping to connect skull fragments to owner maybe as rudimentary as following a chart of shapes, yours being the shape of Tasmania apparently.

The swollen brain. Inflamed. Blistered. Putting pressure on your memory, that exists nowhere and everywhere and it *feels* the squeeze. Movement also affected. Without a brain there would be no movement. Which is the same as saying that everything that moves (walks, crawls, limps, slides, staggers, etc.) needs a brain. Not just for coordination of muscles, limbs, tendons but also to navigate the unpredictability of being in motion. As in, how to know how to move through the world without colliding with everything else. The relation between motion and memory is important. How can you move if you don't remember? How can you know that the left foot is supposed to go in front of the right foot if you don't remember where your feet are? Even if you crawl. How can you cross the road if you don't remember that buses move fast and hit hard? We try to overlay your immediate present with your immediate past, to help you remember. The cup that you just burnt your fingers on, remember that? Don't touch it, it's still just as hot as before. The left foot, can't step again until the right foot goes next, without remembering this we're stuck here, your leg suspended and quivering with fear and confusion. *Put your fucking leg down.* Look at all these things around you, and on you, as if you were looking at the immediate past *in* the present. Think of it as a film. Allow the

images that have just flashed past you to remain, as a residue, while you absorb the present image and anticipate the ones to come. Without this there is no narrative, only billions of disconnected, singular images flashing at you – 25 times each second. You don't need to hold on to them, consciously I mean, it's impossible. Just enough to allow the residue to remain. Then you can remember. Then you can enjoy instant access, networked cells.

Then you can start moving

then,
maybe,
you can leave.

10/12

(actually 9/12)

*Inviting others in for for 40 mins work. They will not in visit it.
Be able to (unintelligible)*

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Last opened 14/02/2010

Large, bright room with yellow walls and textured grey carpet. Room at 45-degree angle. Wooden tea table in centre of room with large vase filled with white lilies. No water in vase. Tea cup and saucer sitting on front, right corner of table. Large window on far-left wall. Woman walking dog past grey wooden fence outside. Window framed by white blinds with repeating pattern of a red flower. Large blue plastic cot placed in front of left side of window. Inside cot, an old lady with thin white hair lies in fetal position, her thumb in her mouth, she looks out window towards dog.

13/12

(actually 12/12)

What day? Day or too later? He used to to focus on work.

What now? How much

You dream, vividly, with grunts and squeaks, that you sit us all at the table. The dress you're wearing, the light, you watch all this from above, making note of how we hold our cutlery, where we glance. You at the head with a clear view to everyone. Between courses you raise your glass and strike it with your fork. Swallowing mouthfuls of whatever we have carved up, we all turn, affectionately in your direction. Individually, you thank each of us for being present, you take the time to make your way around the table, complimenting us with dry humour and grace. Your choice of words always impeccable, as with your pronunciation. Finally, having gone around the whole table, you glance at the corner of the room. Everyone else turns and sees you slumped in an arm chair, head collapsed into your neck, eyes swollen closed, muttering occasionally. Again, you raise your glass and propose a toast to yourself. We gingerly oblige, stealing a concerned look at each other, not having understood this occasion is both for us and beyond us.

(you continue)

I keep everything,
it's all there –

(you point to your head, sleeping in the chair),
the problem is access!

It's not clear,
I'm trying to reestablish connections,
I improvise, find new paths, try to feel the
network, navigate it with eyes closed,
at times the fog lifts, I hurry to write
everything down before a haze descends again,
I do it while you sleep,
in the dark.

I try and write down what I need to
explain to you tomorrow,
but there is a delay – when I write,
my arm betrays me every time with its
hesitation,
it all becomes conflated (...)

You pause, looking into your glass, we wonder if
you've drifted off.

but I'd like to thank you all for coming!
So let's have a drink,
to all your patience!
Some more than others.

[...]
Also, just to say,
try and keep the words safe,
even if just for yourselves,
they might be useful one day.

*Small and simple.
She and simple. She is
doing very well with
the simple size. "She is going longer to do to
do*

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Last opened 14/02/2010

Large room with polished wooden floorboards. Room is empty. Scuff marks visible on floor where furniture has been removed. Grey wall at back of room empty except for a single air conditioning unit installed in top left corner. In rear right corner of room two wicker baskets packed with electrical extension cords and framed images. Black iron fireplace in rear, right corner of room is unlit.

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Last opened 14/02/2010

A dark room. Several white sheets cover large objects. A cork photo board leaning on one of the covered objects – top, right corner visible. Four black and white photos: top left two young men, smiling in grey suits, sitting on a couch with floral pattern; to the right a man sitting on the ground with a large full backpack, he is wearing military uniform and is looking at an A4 piece of paper with a pen in his left hand; below right, two middle aged women walking along a footpath smiling, the woman on the left wearing a black suit, hat and glasses and holding a black bag, the woman on the right with a grey, suit and hat, they both step with their right foot forward; to the left, a man and a woman standing in the forest, the man wearing formal military uniform and hat, the woman wearing a long grey coat with white gloves and grey hat, the woman is smiling slightly, the man is not.

20/12/09

(actually 18/12/09)

*Where are we going to now? I think we'll be heading off to
somewhere ancient –*

somewhere like ~~like~~ where we pull the words to words to

Perfect temperature, we only wear light material. You've taken off your helmet and thrown it into a crevice that must have been deeper than it seemed because it didn't make a sound. Now, scrambling over a large mound, we reach an incredible expanse that opens in front of us. Macrostructural landmarks! Larger than we are able to comprehend. An archaeological paradise, outlines of domestic spaces – we imagine families cramped into tiny, windowless rooms, stinking of goat and soiled cloth. We pass epic monuments, now beautifully melancholic: crumpled lungs, a fossilised heart, a staircase or a section of spine that leads nowhere. Collapsed over there. Or maybe, appearing to have collapsed but connecting *through* the surface, to another place which supports the one we stand on now. We look at each other, neutral. A breeze cools us.

As we continue through this ancient landscape, awash with amber light, dry and warm, we take the time to look down and around. Thousands of years shaped this place, a few days wandering means nothing in comparison. A life devoted to excavating all possible meaning from every element here would still pale in temporal contrast. Considering this time scale feels both significant and pathetic. Instead I think about how I enjoy

kicking the dust, feeling the clunk of partially buried objects against my steel-capped boots, releasing them from their shallow graves, collecting them out of order, taking them for later. As I kick and grab, you select carefully, pinpointing fragments, shards, and traces that draw your attention. So slow are your movements that I have to keep pausing for you to catch up. I come to enjoy the pace you've inadvertently set and I force myself to try and forget time again and allow myself to be distracted by anything that you overlook.

We find a place to sit, with a view to the ruins (or apparent ruins) and begin to arrange our collection. You close your eyes to rest while I empty my pockets in front of me. You seem to be humming through a daydream. I notice that this would make a nice image for a film: the saturated light; the structures infused with melancholy; your humming serving as a possible sound track, or just the image of your humming – the lack of sound in the film perhaps amplifying its effect.

When you open your eyes again I've already placed all my objects in a pile between us. Perfectly naturally, without prompting or encouraging each other, we play with different formations.

We arrange them using categories of size, pattern, grammar, weight, punctuation, shape, pronunciation, etc. You're focused and discover unlikely alignments. Nice stuff, funny relations that don't immediately come to mind. Your fingers dirty, moving through the dust, you make configurations that are not quite complete, pulling the words from somewhere ancient. I sit back and watch while you keep shifting them around, you pause, look amused (sometimes bemused), then start again.

Picking up some of the larger objects we have discarded, I start to throw them at the lung, aiming for the top-right corner. I miss often. You seem to be more interested in the fragments so I collect the heavier, rounded things. The objects I throw pound into the centre of the lung, sending small plumes of dust each time they strike. Most of them remain imbedded in there, the lung being made of highly penetrable stuff, like solidified ash or soft pumice. From time to time I grunt in frustration as I keep missing. I reach for another object but you grasp my hand, pulling it towards the new formation you've made. You've cracked some of the objects in half, revealing an intricate network of lines and trace patterns. With a self-congratulatory expression you hold some of them to your ear while caressing the others that are spread out in

front of you. As I follow, curiously, I can hear your murmuring. I can't make out what you're saying, so I follow your lips to try and decode –
100 061 BC; 2 AD; 392 BC; 1981 AD; 52 BC; 39 BC; 496 AD; 499 AD; 898 BC; 1996 AD; 24 BC; 25 034 BC; 2009 AD; 1950 AD; 52 934 702 BC; 3 BC; 203 AD; 2011 AD; 10/2/2011 –

I listen, as I move as close to you as I can. It's getting colder here, the light has slipped beyond us but I can feel the heat coming off your forehead from all the sun you caught. I sit as still as I can. I listen for hours, days, months. I listen for 1 year and 8 months. I try and keep as patient as I can but the rock where we have been sitting, hardly moving, is uncomfortable. It's beyond uncomfortable. I hate this place. It's agonising to keep sitting here. Finally I urge through a cold, frustrated, clenched jaw –

The dates don't correspond, you need to work harder!

You close your eyes again, I can see that you're getting agitated but I don't care. You breathe to calm yourself and you whisper –

a human tape recorder

Who is!? Are you repeating something? –

[...]

Back to back. 'Russia' will Russia will shall you will.

This doesn't make sense! You're just repeating something you saw.

Come on.

Talk about now –

*The clever design of special ones 'one of's' probably won't last last as long – but as long as did ~~did~~ I'm happy –
My nice design of special things probably won't last that long.*

We can leave your things, it doesn't matter.
Just tell me what you really want to say –

[...]

– *I've lasted so long, I'm ready to come home*

[...]

OK mum, ok.

That was all we needed.

COLOPHON

Fossil is one of forty mineral recompositions
commissioned by A Published Event for *Lost Rocks* (2017–21).

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