

STREET CAKE

experimental writing magazine

issue 77

part 1



@ richard biddle

contents

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COVER: richard biddle - fire poem two

galia admoni - the coffee show

jane ayres - me/me(s)

colin bancroft - hermes gives evidence at the inquest into the death
of crocus

terena elizabeth bell - welcome, friend

doug bolling - hertz. 008

belinda bradley - [f] [i] [n] [a] [l] and the times takes over

sophia rubina charalambous - the conjugation of woman problem:
can n-x ever be less than 0?

theodoros chiotis - war machine (nation4nation I)

siobhan dunlop - terminal/ology

kirsty fox - freckled caps

kate hammer - hope is a city flower

jenny hockey - in the aftermath of lunch

arden hunter - fumble

melissa jones - paper crane

nancy jorgensen - how to make biscuits and babies

The Coffee Show

After *Unspectacular Station Revelation* by Andy Hopkins

I am drinking
filter coffee
in the City Café.

I am drinking
filter coffee
in the City Café.

I¹ am² drinking³
filter coffee⁴
in the City Café⁵.

¹ I am waiting for some friends. We're going to watch a boy I love read poems. He does not know I love him.

² I am fairly certain I might cry. I press my knuckles hard into the red, glittery Formica table top, quietly enough to go unnoticed by the couple at the next table. The blaring 80s soft-rock also helps.

³ I am not really drinking the coffee, or, I am, but it's more a prop to suggest I'm distinguished and thoughtful, masking the general sense of terror and anxiety fizzling that tells me on a loop that I'm unworthy of existing. The prop sort of works. A waitress arrives to refill the mug every so often and soon I will have to use the bathroom, which will ruin the tableaux of sophistication I have created for my friends' arrival.

⁴ Surely all coffee is filtered? I've never come across a whole bean in a cup before. I'm definitely moving swiftly into nonsense territory now.

⁵ The City Café is in Edinburgh, where I have ostensibly come for a break from London for a few days, but realistically, so I could manufacture a meet-cute with the aforementioned poetry boy. He is unaware. By the end of the evening, after awkward and indifferent niceties are exchanged post-show, I will trudge to the guesthouse I am staying in, alone, and punish myself for thinking that this ludicrous scheme could ever achieve anything but increasing my misery and making me feel ashamed and ridiculous. Then I'll see on Twitter that he's performing again in London next month and book a ticket.

me/me(s)

joining the ambered dots

now i see

virtually

connect

second-self separation

connect

under the surface

clotted culpability (is there an app for this?)

synapse shredding immortality

upgrade us

connect

spiralling(e)motionless

no longer swimming

no longer making waves

(seems not to care)

paradise lost & found / the bruised apple gift rotting / far from the tree

the honeycombed heart undressed / a gentle fabrication / over-lit

luminous new gods (spring-heeled / fresh-minted) shout

sawtoothed / in-stag-ram my one true love(s) / the camera's acrid sting

a portal / open mouth/eyes (cupcake pink)

waiting to suck you

in so tight

connect

slippery architecture in the rearview mirror

you realise (too late) the pleasure is

pain / irresistible / mashed-up

detachment from the goo (gle gaze) is not an option

take the mask off & another lies

beneath (& another) smothering / counting to ten

take me now

you bloom *connect*

o (both eyes & mouth) / ooo molly / take me take me

please my true splinterself (this is not enough) / take me

connect connect

now i can see

a handful of moments

clouding a perfect circle

connect connect con –

Hermes gives evidence at the inquest into the death of Crocus

When I say that I can't remember anything about the crash/ I mean it/ the last thing I recall was being on the beach that afternoon/ the sun a blazing hot plate/ the sea the wind in a wood/ we lay for hours looking up at the sky/ talking/ laughing/ threw a frisbee until a dog snatched it off/ sprawled in the dunes/ fingertips touching/ was I drunk/ I don't know/ afterwards/ waking/ in the hospital/ night-time/ jungle of beeps/ strange lights/ slumped figures asleep/ no one giving answers/ going back didn't help/ the scar on the tree/ gouged grass/flowers wrapped in cellophane/triggered nothing/except maybe the way he leant across/ perfect moment to kiss/ eyes lost in mine/ neither of us looking down the road.

Welcome, Friend

The refrigerator door is open, that's the first thing you notice — and not for cleaning either — It's opened ajar as if a person or the ghost of a person still stood there casually deciding what to take for dinner: shelves overflowing with white wine and sandwich meat sliced, fruits and fancy cheeses, all in a state of decay; The inside of the refrigerator is blue — there's that much mold: blue and brown and green and maybe even a little black, dots and spirals out of control like tendrils reaching — reaching across walls and shelves and even the refrigerator's sides in a wave — It's coming for you, whatever this is, and for a moment you think about slamming the door.

(You have on your gloves; It'd be safe?)

You are not a detective: You never worked for CSI, FBI, no association with three-letter names where they could have trained you to work with these things but still — you've seen enough police procedurals, made-for-tv crime to know

never touch the scene

do not alter it

do not clean it

do not change one single thing

until you understand what happened — until the truth is evidence collected, fact and proof, story assembled then told — You know better than to touch a scene.

These shows, these movies, they belong to before — the Before the something, the Before the nothing, or sometimes just Before; but either way you move along.

You do not shut the door even if the stench is overwhelming, so overwhelming you wonder if it will keep you from discovering real clues, if scent — if smell — were how all this began: the Something, the Nothing made of odors both innocent and maleficent; if smells — all smell, any smell — could tell you how or where they went, then the stench coming out of that refrigerator right now would keep you from ever knowing, take all other smells over and you would die; sweat and breath and pheromones — everything that made you gone: gone like the people who lived here before and then you would never know (were there other people in the world? were you still a person? have you disappeared? — You will not shut the door.)

You go forward toward the living room now.

You're not quite sure what you expected — This isn't the first time you've done a home inspection like this — each job a little different — a pause, a feeling, en medias res, life continuing gone: sometimes it's guitars left out of their cases picks rattling inside, record needles butting the end of 45's; books left open, letters not signed; evidence of life, life everywhere.

There's an almost storybook quality to it, the empty space — or so you've trained yourself to believe — like King Arthur's court, Ramandu's table, maybe they're all asleep; maybe the people are asleep; except, they're not here — There's nobody here just like there was no body at the last place and the place before that and every place before it and all you can find are empty shells — all you can see is the Gone (remnants and belongings and — again with that smell: sure it's a refrigerator here but at the last place it was cat fur and tomorrow it'll be an unflushed commode and no matter how long you go, no matter how long you move among things trying to find their people, it will never smell like death — They aren't dead they're just gone.)

#

hertz .008

perhaps the maze within
unopened spaces
of a darkness

or Gertrude stein intent
upon a hiddenness
below the noun

for we had visited there
among the unweavings
the crippled grammar

a life within a syntax
as of minnows in the
elusive bowl

your friend the other
person close behind
in garb of shadow

but now the meeting
high above the cringing
streets

is it to decide which
direction the steps
must take

which path to reach
the murmurs of
the difference.

—————

S	T	A	R	T
T	H	I	N	K
A	G	A	I	N
D	R	A	F	T
F	I	N	A	L

W	R	O	N	G
A	M	I	S	S
T	I	R	E	D
A	G	A	1234	N

W H I T E

The Conjugation of Woman Problem: Can $n-x$ ever be less than θ ?

Help me to conjugate See

I see
 you see
 he she sees
 we see
 you all see
 they see

1. the conjugate declared my Muslim mum and Christian dad married with a couple of simplistic words.

Remind me, the conjugate of $x+y$ is:

$x-y$
 where x is the real part and y is the imaginary part and
 x has a value not yet known.

- The inner product is a map -

how many safe points am I plotting on the map before
 I have to **conjugate the verb Run**
 I run
 you run
~~he~~ she runs
 we run
 you all run
 they run

Now use it in a sentence:

"I've conjugated the circuit for when I run and for when, eventually, we run."

2. I was a lab rabbit for a conjugate vaccine where a strong substance is combined with the weak

3. I'm being accused of emotional conjugation
 when I say I'm more powerful they say you're a bossy one aren't you sweetheart

Using the probability theory Conjugate Prior help me work out if society will ever change if:

θ is the probability of success
 x is the number of successes
 n is the total number of trials
 and therefore $n-x$ is the number of failures

I've got
 $n-x > \theta$

War Machine (Nation4Nation I)

We share the same symptoms & yet we have no idea what is happening
Have you wondered whether any one of them asked:

"how much for the whole thing?"

these *flamines martialis* brandishing spears and proceeding to bind
all of these bodies to an earth regulated by a death

coming from elsewhere: our bodies unimportant or inessential but
now available like broken arrows for
your delectation

an irruption of swallows as the bodies are dragged on, full of holes
what is this subspecies that has convinced us of death as the befitting option
yet there is something to be said about becoming nothing for the country: you ~~only~~ become
yourself when you wish to die

a constellation of wounds previously designed for the perfect bodies of history

Have you wondered whether any one of them asked:

"how much for the whole thing?"

a language of circuitry and secrecy against the public
yes:

grow sick

destroy the bodies of the nation from within and move on this machine of a
state

unchanging in its elimination and destruction
of the bodies it does not see fit for survival

"Was there a fair trial held for this?"

no, these unfit ~~bodies~~ cannot be the incarnation of this state

no, not the abject faces collapsed on one side, unable to pronounce any thing but vowels
and

[incantations]: the sounds leave the mouths like
paralysed feet dragged across gravel

We still trade
tips on how to feel less unwell as that is the only thing that binds us ~~together~~
that is until

the moment before we fall again sick
for months on end and the seas surge asking:

"where are the good bodies producing kings on this land?"

Conserve.

Reserve.

Serve.

*Is there an end?
Is there an end to all of this?
Is this the end to all of this?*

Being the small animals that we are our griefs cannot be controlled or contained
Being the small animals that we are desperately pleased with our surroundings
the terror
grows like ivy across our fingertips at least ash diluted in water is potable

all of this is not an evaluation of what sort of country you are,
but rather an evaluation of the symptoms you describe

My daughter says to me if you live for
two more decades then the water might stop running
green every time you turn on the tap

Have you wondered when it was that one of them asked:
"how much for the whole thing?"

an ode to those who believe that a revolution is an inevitable thing
before the bodies break down.
Again.

Look, the cause is the nation
the bodies breaking down
is
the symptom.

this is no revolving door & the arrows are not signs they really are the rocks, knives and
scissors game once used on our bodies

Or was that the minotaur masturbating on our backs his body the ghost
of a past
you see
We are not mythical enough - oh! I know how to pass the time:
uncloak the
tumours.

terminal/ology

an algorithm is:

a decision-making process	a fatal mistake
mapped out logically	chosen without mercy
that can be repeated	done over and over
irrespective of person	by anyone turning a blind eye
written as computer code	automated by machines
or followed step by step	and reinforced by human data
designed by someone	framed as uncontrollable
kept proprietary	hidden from prying eyes

and beyond your comprehension



Freckled Caps

Were I buried in the soil long enough, would I know the Earth's history, not in data
but by becoming the raw material of existence

the humus turning to mulch of deadwood and decomposing flora
the mycorrhizal networks connecting the forest ecology
the peat bogs which form from the acidic and anaerobic suspension of decay
the minerology of prehistoric clay dashed red from iron oxide
the limestone formed from ancient calcified crustaceans
layered in dried-up oceans of the deep past.

When the world is too much, when claustrophobia tightens my breath and agoraphobia drives
me to take cover, the urge to be consumed by nature washes over me
like a tidal race.

Anxiety
can rattle my vertebra, but I take solace in knowing that I am just matter,
just substance,
and so nothing matters and everything matters, the monstrous fragility
of a human doing, a human being,
vessels pulsating, cells regenerating.



Fungi pop up unexpectedly. Mushrooming up in the darkness, materialising from grasslands
or tree stumps, or nestling in clusters amid the crunch of dry leaves
belying the damp beneath.

Soft heads protrude from the parapet,
the brown bonnets of fairy rings,
the tiny white ghosts of mycena olida,
the warning red of fly agaric,
the amber wriggle of yellow brain.

They are the in-between species, not quite plant but certainly not beast, almost closer to the
strange beings of the deep sea.



A subterranean entity with tendrils reaching for acres,
distribution system for the forest
nutrients and information shared
mycorrhizae
weaving delicate threads, silver-white
against the dark of the soil.

I like to think of myself as a fungi cap, a temporary blob on the visible landscape,
more often a subterranean being, labouring for the greater good,
the fertile mulch where the future is gestated.

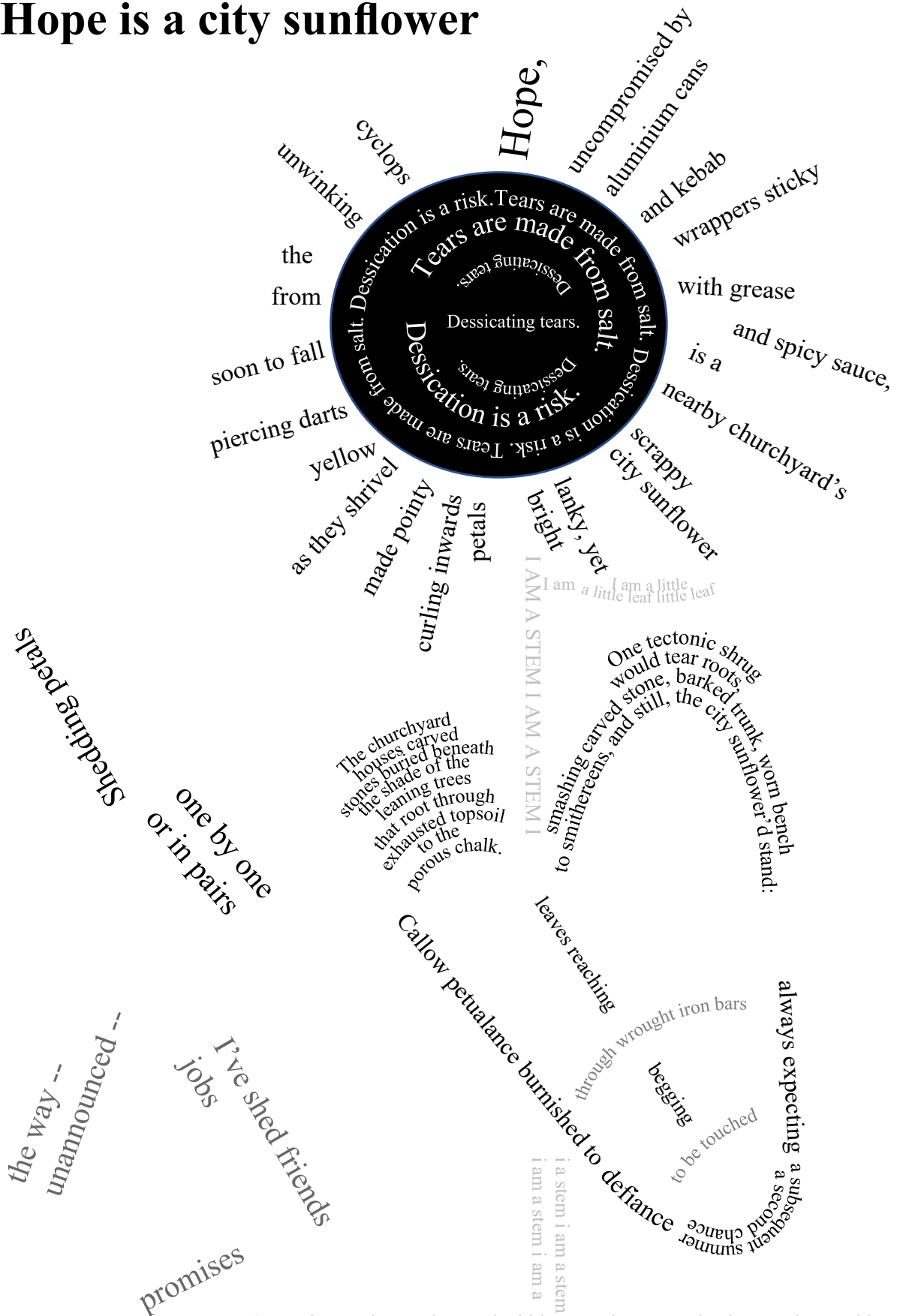
Those little caps are too soft and exposed for long-term existence,
vulnerable to being nibbled, trodden, kicked by careless boot.

So I will sustain my core existence in the belly of the earth,
and just poke my nose up now and then
so you may marvel at its silky freckles,
meditate on signs of the emerging seasons



of how the once-bright autumn
turns to soggy leaf litter
before the vast winter embraces us.

Hope is a city sunflower



Groundgroundgroundgroundpebblegroundantgroundstubgroundgrounddown

Still, seeds that fall, hope may spread.

* The concrete poem movie 'Hope is a city sunflower' is Door 17 in Full House Lit Magazine's festival cinema.

in the aftermath of lunch

when the sun — absent
these recent August days,
wraps itself around my legs

and I'm no longer sure
if the poem on my lap
was written by me or by you

and the notes on my pad
include at least three absurd
or misspelled words
arranged in the wrong order,
I succumb



oh dear let me get that for you

melissa jones



How to Make Biscuits and Babies

