

CHARCOAL

OLI JOHNS

**'...misunderstands the nature of suicide in stunning fashion.'** – Gary Sinise, *Gary Eyes*

**'...understands the nature of suicide in stunning fashion.'**  
– Paul Giamatti, *Giamatti Eyes*

The stretched out feet on the front cover were drawn by Soren Häxan. As were the chapter 2 pics.

The feet belong to a Korean model who hung herself last year [2009] in a Paris apartment. I don't refer to her by name in this book and I won't now, but you can probably guess who I'm talking about.

I would like to stress the point that I never met and did not know her in any way. But still, her death had a huge effect on me. Well, it did for a while, and long enough for me to write this.

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# CHARCOAL

Oli Johns



I watch Michael Portillo fake-dying on TV.  
It's almost 2am and he's trying to find the perfect way to execute prisoners.  
My housemate is asleep, and I don't have to work until late the next day, so I stay up and stretch out on the couch and focus on the screen.

For the last few weeks I've been interested in suicide.  
Not for myself, but the idea of it.  
At least I don't think it's for myself.  
But it would be nice to know there's a way...that there's a way to do it, if things really were that bad.  
Something non-violent, non-painful.  
Some kind of gas maybe?

On screen Portillo talks to a guy in one of the US State prisons.  
The guy doesn't know he's an ex-politician and a liar.

They talk about the electric chair as a humane way to die.  
Apparently, it's not.  
'Does the prisoner have any sense of agony?' Portillo asks.  
'Some,' the guys says.  
'How much pain exactly?'  
'Enough.'

After electric chairs he moves on to lethal injections and I sit up a little as I figure this one might be the one, but it's quickly dismissed.

'Some critics argue, and point to previous executions as proof, that the lethal injection paralyses the prisoner but doesn't stop the pain. In fact, it merely impedes their ability to let anyone know they're in pain. So they suspect, or at least some do, that the prisoner could be experiencing up to seven minutes of the most excruciating agony imaginable.'

Next is hanging.

There is no hope for this one.

The idea of hanging from a rope makes me feel a little sick. I think of Saddam, of the murderer watched by Capote, of John Cusack in that frontier film where he rustles cattle.

Rustles cattle? Is that right?

It doesn't sound right.

Portillo watches from a distance as an effigy of himself is dropped from a ladder a few metres up.

He winces as the head rolls off and smacks hard onto the ground.

I grip the cushion tight.

Oxygen deprivation.

Portillo sits in a room which is slowly deprived of air. Or the air is being re-mixed...with a higher count of some other gas. Nitrous oxide, maybe?

Another guy sits in there with him wearing a mask and asking questions to test his sanity.

Or not sanity, but comprehension? Cognition?

A test to see if he's okay.

Portillo does well at first, answering the first four pitches correctly.  
Then he falters.  
He gets one wrong.  
He starts slurring.  
Then he talks gibberish.  
I sit up and watch him struggle to lift his arms.  
The narration on screen tells me he's dying, that if he doesn't put the mask on within the next twenty seconds he'll be gone.  
Will they really kill Portillo?  
He laughs as the other guy tries to put the mask on.  
He looks so happy.  
He's laughing.  
The guy gets the mask on and Portillo returns to...to what? Life?  
The narration comes on again and tells us Portillo was seconds away from death yet didn't care one bit.

Portillo goes back to one of the US prison wardens he interviewed at the start. He tells him that a special mix of gases is a more humane way for the prisoner to die.  
The warden spits back.  
'They don't deserve humane, Sir. It's a punishment...'  
Portillo struggles to argue back.  
'But don't you think...'  
'...and that's what it should be, no question. They deserve a little piece of hell for what they...the evil they've done.'  
The programme ends undecided.  
I stand up and go to my room. I'm undecided too.

A week passes.  
It's still cold, but it'll be hot again soon.  
I don't feel too good about this so I tell myself I'm gonna write something while it's cold.  
I sit on my bed with the duvet wrapped around me and think of a subject.  
The pen is in my mouth, the notepad is waiting.  
I'm going to write about philosophy.  
I'm gonna think it out and write about it.

...

But the words are strange.

Not strange, but difficult.

Not difficult, but...

...

I don't understand philosophy.

...

I don't think anyone else does either.

Do they?

I get off the bus with the huge rucksack on my back carrying the book by Arguedas, the book by Burroughs, the book by Deleuze. The library is just ahead. There are school kids in green going up the stairs.

I follow them.

Inside, I walk up to the check-in desk...there's no queue so I reach down into my bag.

Burroughs comes out first.

The Soft Machine. Not the best, but the only one they had. No Naked Lunch or any of the other stuff he did.

I can't remember the titles.

Bamboo snuff junky?

No.

I look at the Soft Machine and think, renew or return.

Burroughs...I read some of it...'running out of veins' was a good line, but there wasn't much else.

I hand it to the smiling lady behind the desk and say 'return.'

Next is Arguedas. The fox from up above and the fox from down below.

I renew it for the diary entries and the suicide.

Then the philosopher. Deleuze...

### **In my notebook...**

*The concepts – Deterritorialisation.*

*Becoming.*

*Rhizomes.*

*Duration.*

*Deterritorialisation...I think I've got that one. A man is forced into another environment and loses some of himself...is that it?*

*Pac-man trapped in mazes. He's defined by....what? The Maze?*

*Becoming – Something is one thing for a short time then changes...no fixed self.*

*The coffee cup is only a coffee cup for a short time, then it's broken, then it's back in the earth.*

*Rhizomes – what the fuck's a rhizome? Not branches...roots? Roots of thought?*

*Check again later.*

*Duration – I don't get this one at all.*

*But fuck it, keep writing, Oli. Keep fucking writing.*

I sit on my bed at home listening to Avery Brooks' Hallelujah in my head, and looking at Deleuze again...the pages on duration.

I've already looked at Rhizomes and I think I understand it a little better now...it was the roots of thought...the thought springs up, the new self springs up without precedent...the new environment creates a new self, no branches from previous history.

I shift on the bed.

At least that's what I think it means.

I still can't really picture it clearly in my head.

But duration...?

I can't get it at all.

*'Memory is not stored in the brain, but in a vast virtual pool of the past.'*

**[Deleuze, riffing on Bergson.]**

I repeat it in my head several times, but it doesn't get any clearer. Where's this pool then?

How can there be a pool? What, we all have access to it?

I shift the other way on the bed.

I read some more, some references to Proust and sense memory, but it complicates things even more. How can that be linked? How can it not be in the brain?

I get up and go into the living room and say a few things to my housemate, who's watching something on TV, something about a group of people and that guy...that guy from Shakespeare in Love, and the other one with Heather Graham...the one where he fucks her against the wall...Joshua Fiennes, that guy...and he's talking to some Chinese guy about group consciousness and the world passing out.

I sit down and watch for a while, not really thinking of anything.

The next day I don't do much.

I go to the school and I'm a little late, running from the bus and getting to the school six minutes past the bell.

No one's really pissed off about it, and I don't think any of my salary will get docked, but I'm a little short with my first student anyway. She can't hold her pencil properly, and I mutter something to the wall.

She can never hold her pencil properly. She holds it like a knife.

For the rest of the lesson I watch her hold the pencil and wonder if it'd be possible to push her far enough that she would stab me.

By lunch I'm thinking of something else.

During lunch, I'm thinking of who I'll have to see that day. I don't really want to see anyone. My phone rings twice and I ignore it.

In the last two lessons of the day I have four year olds, so we sit and play the rubber game.

There are four rubbers and we take it in turns to throw them into the tissue box.

One of the students cheats, and it pisses me off.

I call her a cheat.

In the last thirty minutes or so of the last lesson I feel anxious. I don't know why, but I don't wanna meet anyone after work.

I have to meet them though. At least for a little while.

But I don't want to.

I really don't want to.

On the bus I think of a thousand different things before coming back to Deleuze.

Becoming.

Duration.

Rhizomes.

And then Arguedas and his suicide.

The bus goes up the road and through Hung Hom and then into the tunnel.

I try not to think about this.

I'm aware that I'm trying not to think about it.

Fuck.

Arguedas

Arguedas

Arguedas...he knew he was gonna kill himself. He started the book, but he knew he was gonna kill himself. How did he know he'd have the guts to do it?

The old man next to me pushes against my bag.

He grumbles.

I move an inch to the side.

I close my eyes and open them again, trying to block him out.

He's still there, still grumbling.

Outside the window I notice the tunnel walls. Up ahead there is no sign of the exit, and behind there is no longer an entrance.

No way out.

A bus full of old men, grumbling.

A world full of..

No.

Arguedas

Arguedas

I put my thumb in my mouth and chew the nail.

Fucking Arguedas...

I get back home and I'm thinking of Deleuze.

I thought I knew what rhizomes were and what duration was all about, but it's gone again.

I lie down on the bed and repeat to myself again and again...

Duration

Duration

Duration

Duration

But I don't get any further.

In the bath I think of the same things I usually think of when I'm in the bath.

Tomorrow.

Yesterday.

The friends I had a year ago.

I put a thumb in my mouth.

I bite at the wrinkles.

They weren't real friends...they were bastards.

It wasn't my fault.

I was unwell, they knew that.

They're too simple to get it. Wong Dillon talked about depression like he knew it, but he never knew it. Hang yourself from the fucking living room light, huh? Fuck you, you don't know anything.

I'll show you real pain.

I'll show you real fucking crisis.

I turn over and close my eyes. The water rises up to my lips.

You don't have a fucking clue. None of you did...

I put my head under the water and come back up almost straight away.

There's no one to hold me under.

I sit up and splash some water on my chest. It's warm, not hot.

This is bullshit.

It's not bad anymore.

It hasn't been bad for ages. Has it?

I think back and note a couple of times when it was quite bad, like the other day in the classroom, and another time before that when I was in the cinema and there wasn't any air-con and I sat there praying for the film to be pathetic and unemotional so I'd be able

to get out of there in one piece...but apart from those, no, it wasn't that bad.

I pick up the shampoo and rub it over me.

Shut the fuck up, you fucking depressive.

I slap myself in the face.

You're out of the woods.

You were out of the woods ages ago...so what's this? You like this?

I laugh and splash more water on my chest.

No one likes a depressive.

I'm not a depressive.

I'm a positive. A positivist?

I bite the wrinkles on my finger again.

Isn't that something to do with science? A positivist?

I think of science and trees and people measuring a forest with a tape measure and then more people measuring an ice cap, and then people in spacesuits measuring the whole planet.

I think of one guy in a white coat reporting his findings.

He's in a room full of cameras, a room full of faces.

He speaks to them and tells them what they've found, but the words aren't really words, and they repeat themselves and don't really make any kind of sense...

And then he's nervous.

Then he can't speak...

I bite the nail on the end of my thumb.

I don't feel good.

The next few weeks pass quickly.

I think of Deleuze on the bus and in the classrooms, and try to figure out what duration means, but whenever I try to think that way I switch. I think of other philosophers instead. I think of Camus and that book. I think of what he said about suicide.

*'No one ever killed themselves for the ontological argument.'*

But whenever I think of this I always end up thinking of someone else killing themselves.

I go to work and teach the same students I teach every other week, and play the rubber game and feel generally okay about everything. But I always come back to Camus and the suicide. And it's always someone else who's doing it.

After a while I take Deleuze back to the library and take out Camus.

I re-read what I've read before, but I don't get very far into it. I never get far into philosophy. Twenty pages maybe, and then I hit a wall.

At home, on my bed, staying out of the living room where my housemate's making a phone call, I think about whether or not it's my lack or theirs.

The words are difficult.

I can't get any context for them.

The guy doesn't know what he's talking about.

Camus doesn't know what he's talking about?

I go out for a walk and think about it some more, but don't make much progress. I can feel that it's not entirely my lack, and there's some credit in the idea of reading twenty pages and then forming your own ideas, but is that accurate?

I look at some of the people I walk past, and wonder if they're reading anything.

They're reading nothing.

They're reading gossip mags.

They don't think.

They don't even have a brain.

There's a gerbil in their head, running circles, reading fucking gossip mags.

I see a guy in glasses who looks exactly like the last guy I saw.

They're all clones.

All got the same face.

I'm fucking racist.

Am I racist?

I'm not fucking racist.

I walk onto a narrow stretch of pavement and an old couple is coming the other way so I smile and let them pass. I even move out onto the road.

I'm not racist.

But they do look the same.

They don't look the same, but those two guys, they looked the same. I didn't imagine it, it's true.

I remember back home.

Ron and me and Parker getting into Parker's car, and Ron asking me if I was gonna try and get myself a nice little nip girl.

I remember my mum asking me if I wanted to go to the chinky for dinner.

Chinky Charlie's, she said.

Or Charlie Chinky.

I look back at the faces.

There's a young couple walking past me. The girl is pretty, the guy is not.

I'm better than him.

I come from racism.

In my quiet moments, I'm racist.

At home, when she's not there, I say some horrible shit.

I say, Chinky.

Chinko, fucking Chink.

I walk further, turning back into my estate.

The security guard sitting under the umbrella by the taxi rank smiles at me, unaware that I'm racist.

I smile back and point to my building.

I'm not racist.

It's just...I don't know what it is. Madness?

I say Chinky, but I don't mean it.

Everyone's equal.

I can't even speak the language.

I'm the lesser one.

They can speak two languages, I can't.

And how do I know what they're talking about anyway? They could be talking about philosophy and Camus and culture...

There are places like that here.

I've been to places like that here.  
The culture isn't great.  
But they try.  
They're trying.  
I scratch my head and see a guy walking a little further ahead with  
a pretty girl. The guy is laughing and kissing her on the cheek.  
They don't try, not really.  
There's no culture.  
I speak a language and a half.  
I'm not less than them.  
At least I think. They don't think.  
It's better to think fully in one language than think nothing in two.  
They can't even speak English anyway.  
And they only say the same few words in Cantonese.  
Cheesin.  
Ho fan.  
Ho Goi.  
Where's the fucking variety?  
They don't think about anything.

I lie in bed and try to remember what I was thinking of before.  
The thing about Camus and...  
He talked about suicide being the only question we ever need to  
ask, and the only one we need to answer.  
I think about Arguedas and his suicide.  
There was no talking him out of it, was there?  
Was he resolute every step of the way?  
I turn on my side and look at the clock.  
No, he laid it out in the diary but that didn't mean he had to keep  
to it. No, he could've edited, he could've changed the book.  
But he was so sure.  
He knew he was going to kill himself.  
How can you know you're going to kill yourself?

I go to the kitchen and wait for the kettle to boil so I can make a  
cup of tea.

As I wait, I mumble to myself that I hate philosophy, and that I'm better than any of those fuckers will ever be.

Back on the bed, I return to pretty much the same thoughts as before, and pretty much the same track.

Suicide.

Suicide.

Suicide.

What do I know about suicide?

It comes to me that the only thing I know about it is what I've read in books and what I've thought of doing to myself.

But I've never tried to kill myself.

I love life.

I would never kill myself.

I'm stronger than the rest of them.

No, I'm jealous.

I don't think it's jealousy, is it?

I want to beat them to it.

I want to have stronger depressions.

I don't like it when someone kills themselves and I'm still here.

Who's done that?

I can't think of anyone so I go back to the suicides I can remember.

There was the girl I met online. She said she had tried to kill herself three times. She wrote a book about the last attempt, and at the end the main character let himself burn to death.

But she's still alive.

How can you fail three times?

I never told her this, but I know she never really wanted to die.

Another week passes.

At work, on a Wednesday, I'm sitting in a classroom, bored and thinking of random things, a connection of thoughts which lead to Deleuze and Bergson and duration.

Fucking duration.

I still don't get it, and since I took the book back to the library I'm even further from getting it, so instead I think of time passing, and

the idea of the week I'm in passing, and what it means to live within a week.

It's time, but time isn't really anything.

'Time isn't really anything.'

I say it out loud, to the student.

Time isn't really anything.

The student shakes his head.

'Is it?' I ask.

'What?'

'Time.'

The student looks at his watch.

'No, not that.'

'Four forty-five.'

'Yeah, I know. I was talking about...'

'What?'

I shake my head.

'Nothing. Forget it.'

I turn away from him and he goes back to his work, and I look out the window and onto the street where some school kids in blue are smoking and pushing each other around.

Time isn't really anything.

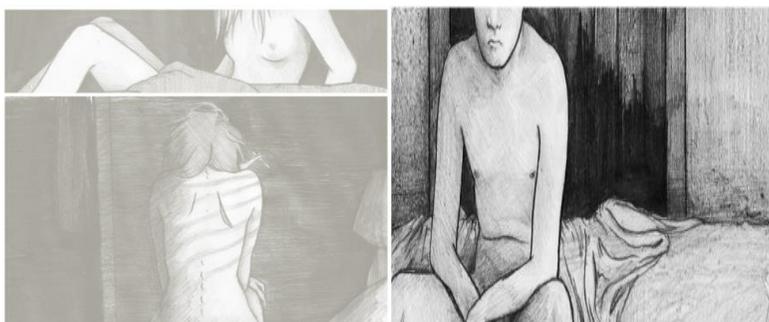
It's too simple.

Too fucking easy.

What is duration?

A month passes and I take Camus back to the library and take out some Evelyn Waugh and then some Wang Shuo, and I half-read them during the month but, mostly, I'm distracted.

Mostly, I'm trying to fuck a seventeen year old I met online.



## **The [imagined] chasm between a prick and a seventeen year old girl...**

We talk online for a few weeks first.

She tells me she's still in high school and originally from the mainland and not Hong Kong.

I tell her I'm a teacher.

She tells me she doesn't have many friends.

I tell her I have no friends.

She tells me she sits in the library at lunchtime and reads books because she can't face talking to anyone.

I tell her I like that.

She tells me she wants to meet me.

I tell her I want to meet her too.

I sit in the living room alone, waiting for her to call and tell me she's outside.

My housemate has gone to bed and I'm a little worried she'll come out when Momo is here, but it doesn't worry me too much.

After an hour, I start to get more anxious.

She hasn't called yet, and she's giving me too much time to think.

I don't wanna do this.

I don't like her.  
She's too young.  
She's too stupid.  
She doesn't read the same books I read.  
I'll disappoint her.  
She'll see my glasses and be disappointed.  
She'll nitpick.  
We'll have nothing to talk about.  
She'll figure me out.  
She'll see me sweating.  
I won't have anything to say.  
I don't care what I say.  
Why should I care?  
I'll forget my lines.  
I don't know my lines.  
I'll shake when I kiss her.  
She'll slap me in the face.  
She'll phone the police and say I tried to rape her.  
I'll try to rape her.  
I'll come inside her.  
She'll annoy me and I'll smack her in the fucking jaw.

She comes half an hour later and we sit on the couch for a while talking.  
She looks around the apartment and picks out some DVDs.  
I try to get closer to her.  
She asks me where my housemate is.  
I tell her she's asleep.  
She looks relieved.  
I feel relieved.  
I don't want my housemate to see any of this.  
She sits down on the couch and we talk about why she doesn't have many friends and she tells me she feels lonely a lot and drinks in her room.  
I tell her that's not good, but I understand why.  
I try to figure out when to kiss her.

I talk a little about my own lack of friends, but I don't really care what I'm saying.  
I want to fuck her.  
I want to get it done.  
Why am I doing this?

After I've fucked her, I wait for the dread to come, but it doesn't.  
I wait a little longer.  
It'll come. She's seventeen, she's dumb, it'll come.  
It doesn't come.  
I cuddle up to her back and run my hand up her leg.

The next week, we see each other three more times.  
I fuck her every time.  
The second and third time, I don't want to do it, but as soon as she's close, I do want to do it.  
She tells me about her last boyfriend, who worked at a gym. She says he never introduced her to his friends, and only called her when he wanted sex.  
I say he doesn't sound like a very nice guy.  
She asks if I'm different.  
I try to figure out if I am or not.  
I tell her I'm different, but not that different, and she's seems happy even though it doesn't really mean anything.  
I'm not different.  
I can't introduce her to my friends.  
I don't have any friends.  
But I can't introduce her to the people I know.  
I want her for sex.

The third time we see each other I tell her about the books I'm reading.  
Camus, Deleuze, and a few others I can remember off the top of my head.  
She doesn't know any of them.  
After the third time, another week passes where I don't want to see her. I ignore her messages and hide in my apartment.

I start reading a book by Cela. The life of Pascal Duarte.  
I finish three pages and then go for dinner.  
At dinner, I'm alone.  
I order the same thing I've ordered before.  
As I eat, I start to think about the future. And not a vague future,  
but a detailed one. I think of events and relationships and things  
I'll have to do, and the people I'll have to talk to...and the  
conversations...the conversations I'll have to take part in...  
I put my fork down and look around.  
Suddenly it doesn't feel so cold in here.  
I look up at the ceiling and see the vent, but there's no wind.  
No air-con.  
It doesn't matter. It's cold outside.  
There's no pressure.  
There's no...no one cares here. They're eating, they don't care.  
And it's not back.  
...  
It's gone.  
It's not back.  
I take breaths, telling myself it's not back and even if it is it's no  
big deal as all I have to do is look directly in the faces of the  
people around me and show no fear. Show that they're nothing.  
Because they are nothing  
They're nothing  
They're nothing  
They are...  
I look hard into an old man's face. He's eating alone and doesn't  
look happy.  
I look real hard at him.  
He's nothing.  
He looks back.  
I look away, down at the food.  
Now they're looking  
They've noticed  
It's back...they've...  
They've noticed  
They have, they've...

There're a hundred of them in this...this fucking place already, and they all know...

They...

They've all noticed

No

They've all...

I put my wrists against the glass with my iced tea.

No

They don't know. Noticed what?

There's nothing to see

There's nothing to...

No

There's nothing...

Nothing can happen

Nothing can...

...

...

But everything can.

Everything can happen.

Everything can...everything will...it'll turn and...I can't, but...

No.

You useless fuck.

You worthless...

Krist...

I want to get up and go to the toilet, but I can't, my bag is here, I can't...I can't...so I stay where I am.

...

...

I wait for it to happen...and I wait...and I try to breathe, and I try not to show that I can't breathe, and I keep waiting...longer...

...

I can't...

I can't breathe.

...

I can't fucking breathe.

I lie in the bath, biting my wrinkles.

I'm trying to think of reasons why it's not as bad as I think it is, but I've got a comeback for all of them.

The way I see it, there are too many challenges now.

There are too many challenges and I can't rise to any of them.

I can't even rise to tomorrow.

I don't want to face tomorrow.

I slap myself and tell myself to grow some fucking balls and beat this thing.

Beat this fucking thing, Oli.

Beat it, you pathetic piece of shit.

Fucking melodrama...melodramatic...

Self indulgent piece of...

I slap myself again.

Self indulgence...

No, self abuse...

I know, but...

I try to tell myself some more ways why it's not the end of all things, but in my head I know it is. Not all things, but me. It's the end of me.

There's no sadness to it.

Not really.

I tell myself not to worry too much about how people will see this.

It's a problem, that's all. It's a problem that just got too big and I got beaten by it. There's no shame.

No, there's no shame.

But I'm still beaten.

I'm still beaten.

I put my head under the water and hold my breath for around half a minute then come back up.

I try it again, and fail again.

There's no one to hold me under.

Is there anyone who would...

I stop the thought and think instead of other ways.



## **A room with a grey, fucking view...**

The next few nights I go online.  
I go on wiki and search for 'suicide methods.'  
A long list comes up on screen, too long, so I narrow the search to  
'Hong Kong suicide.'  
Another list appears, this one much shorter.  
Apparently there are three popular ways to kill yourself in Hong  
Kong.

*Throw yourself off a building.*  
*Hang yourself.*  
*Burn charcoal in a sealed room.*

I look at the headings but don't click on anything.  
I don't want to do this.  
I don't even want to look at this.  
I go back to the football website I was on before and read a little  
about what Liverpool and Benítez expect from the coming season.  
The next two nights I ignore wiki and the suicide page.  
I don't feel so bad anymore.

The next week I go out almost every night.  
I go to a new live music venue in Wan Chai and listen to some  
local bands.  
All the bands playing that night have a girl with a guitar. That's the  
promotion, and they don't lie.  
The first band is crap.

The lead singer is a pretty, local woman in a purple dress, with a purple flower tied into her hair, but she can't sing, and she can't move.

The second band is made up of four women and one guy on drums. They're a little better, and the guitarist is pretty, but by this stage I don't care as I'm starting to feel strange...that old feeling... By their fourth song I'm thinking ahead to when it'll all be over and I'll be able to go home.

I stand with my beer as the others call for an encore.

I hate encores.

Why do they want an encore?

They play an encore and the others clap and cheer, and a couple of them shout 'woo'.

I put the beer down and walk to the back of the room, and sit down on one of the stools hidden behind a column, where I can't see the band and no one can see me, apart from the people at the bar, but they're not looking.

I take breaths.

I don't want to be here.

I don't want to be around people.

There's a man who's living up in the mountains in Canada somewhere. There's another man living in a fishing village in Newfoundland. That writer...Rudy Wurlitzer.

Why can't I do that?

I take more breaths.

This is ridiculous.

I like people.

I can perform.

Despite what you think, you pathetic fucker, you can always perform.

I look at the others in the bar. It's too dark to see anyone clearly, but I can see that everyone's generally Chinese, with a few white faces.

There's no one here you can say is better than you.

No one's gonna fuck you up.

They don't care.

Why would they care?

I take more breaths and try to make sense of it all for the millionth time.

I know they can't fuck me up, but...it doesn't matter that they can't fuck me up, because...I still feel it, and...I don't know what it is I feel, but...it's dread...it's some kind of dread...potential dread...is that it?

I can't take this.

I can't.

At the weekend I see Momo the seventeen year old.

She's a little angry that I haven't called her, and explains again about the other boyfriend who worked at a gym and didn't call her all the time, and only did call her when he wanted a fuck.

I say sorry.

She doesn't say anything.

I feel annoyed.

I say sorry, but I didn't want to talk to anyone.

'You didn't wanna talk to me?'

I think about saying not exactly, I just didn't wanna talk to anyone, but I don't.

'I didn't want to talk to you.'

She falls into silence.

I do the same.

I don't take her home that night and I don't fuck her, and I'm relieved when I get into bed and I'm alone.

I get on the bus and realise too late that there are no seats.

I stand near the bottom of the stairs and do what a friend told me to do.

Blank mind, no thoughts.

...

...

It doesn't work.

The bus moves through the traffic and towards the tunnel and my heart starts to beat faster and my head starts to sweat.

My thoughts come back to being trapped on a bus and people...people as aliens, people watching me as I sweat and the

spaces between us become alive and they contract and move inwards on themselves until there's no real space there anymore and I feel the person next to me and the person next to him and all the others standing beyond that, as the bus moves into the tunnel and I reduce the whole image to what it really is...a tunnel with no space, holding a metal block on wheels with a hundred people on board and no space...no space to move into...no space...

I close my eyes and wipe my hands on my jacket, but it doesn't make me feel any better because I know I'm trapped on this bus, so I put my head against the side and close my eyes and try to think of something else, anything, but I can't because I'm still trapped on this fucking bus and everyone is watching me run through this performance and they all know I'm about to lose my fucking mind...

The bus stops in the tunnel.

There are cars surrounding me.

Something comes up my throat but I push it back down.

I scream at myself to stop this.

I fake a yawn.

I moan that I can't stop it, it's always gonna be this way.

The bus doesn't move.

I can't move.

I look around for space to move into but there's nothing.

I'm gonna scream.

I'm gonna smack someone.

I can't...

I move quickly towards the stairs and walk up halfway and sit down and put my head in my hands and try to control my breathing.

Not many people can see me here.

But I know they saw me move.

They think I'm a nut.

They're talking about me.

I can hear whispers, they're talking about me.

They know.

The bus moves again, and a few seconds later we're out of the tunnel and I instantly feel a little better, but it's not enough.

I walk back up the concrete steps in Lam Tin and into my estate, my hand feeling under my shirt and wiping off some of the sweat. It's not enough.

It's over.

That's as bad as it's ever gonna get, and you survived.

That's not the worst.

It's gonna get worse.

People will see.

I walk into my building and say a friendlier than usual 'hi' to the security guard.

You knew it would come back.

It was always coming back.

I lie in the bath again, my mind stuck on the bus and the tunnel and the thought of the next bus I'll have to take.

The only other thought I allow is charcoal.

Charcoal and a sealed room.

It's always coming back.

Isn't it?

It was there in winter, and it'll be there in summer.

Always.

Omni-back.

I go back on wiki and click on the page for charcoal suicide.

Hanging and jumping off a building are not gonna cut it for me.

I've always been a coward and the pain would be too much to get past.

But if you're gonna go then...would jumping be so bad?

There would still be pain.

But only in your head.

The actual suicide, it would last seconds.

Yeah, but...

Dead as soon as you hit the ground. You could go to the roof now and just jump. Don't think, just jump.

I could just jump.

Could I?

The journey up to the roof and the edge...I'd talk myself out of it.

Why do people do it?

Suicide is impulsive.

I think back to the only suicide I've read about that wasn't impulsive.

That guy in The Devils.

I can't remember his name but I remember his character distinctly.

He wasn't suicidal, not really, but he was willing to kill himself for the idea. What was it? The idea of killing himself to show he was boss?

It was about power.

He feared the pain.

He didn't want to feel the pain.

But the idea was important to him.

It was ridiculous.

He would kill himself and conquer death...because he had chosen to kill himself.

But basic biology...

Death isn't a philosophical challenge, it's a physical act.

Isn't it?

But he didn't think so...he thought it was different because...because no one had ever done it before, had they?

Anyone who'd ever killed themselves had done it on impulse or for a reason or having something to die for, but...

He still died.

...

I realise the charcoal suicide information is on the screen.

I read through it...the method, the history, why it became popular.

There are some interesting facts in there. And the method seems straightforward. Find a small room, block the gaps under the doors and windows then light some charcoal on a grill and wait for the oxygen to be replaced with carbon monoxide. To make it painless, take some drugs or drink alcohol.

I sit back on the couch and put the laptop on my thighs.

My housemate is asleep, but I turn the screen away from the hallway just in case she stumbles in.

Apparently, a woman with a chemical engineering background discovered the method a decade or so earlier.

It seems she was a coward too.

And a singer...Brad Delp, lead of a band I've never heard of. He did it two years ago.

So it works.

I go back to the search engine and type in 'Charcoal suicide place HK.'

A lot of entries spring up and the first seems to have what I want.

I click on it and there's a map of a small island...Cheng Chau. I know that place. I've been there.

I read the article. It says in recent years more and more people have been checking into a hotel in Cheng Chau with bags of charcoal and killing themselves.

It says the name of the hotel and I write it down, my heart beating faster.

I won't do it.

I'll just look.

I'll book a room and just look.

I don't want to kill myself.

I don't...

The next day is a Sunday which means I don't have to work.

I go to Central and get the ferry to Cheng Chau. There's no need for me to buy a bag of charcoal and no one else on the ferry has a bag, but it still feels like I should get some, just to play the role.

I think about buying a bag on Cheng Chau.

Then light it up and...

It's that easy.

Just do it.

You think you can't, so just do it.

Surprise yourself.

The ferry sails away from Central and along Victoria Harbour and through the fog covering pretty much everything. Cargo ships

crawl out of the grey and disappear again. It feels like I'm in a netherworld even though I know it's a bullshit thought.

People who think foggy waters represent the netherworld are people with no imaginations.

I have an imagination, but I can't think of anything else that might represent a netherworld.

A forest I read about in a Murakami book?

Fire?

Space?

Fire because of Hell, Space because we know nothing about it.

Is that the best I can do?

Cheng Chau appears in the mist. The edge of the coast isn't detailed, but I can see the outline and a few rocks. And then the harbour. It looks something like a phantom shipyard as trawlers and dragon boats float abandoned on the water.

The ferry docks and the other passengers go off to see whatever there is to see on Cheng Chau while I look on the map for the hotel.

It's a forty minute walk from where I am, and as I walk through the village near the harbour I see a shop that sells charcoal.

I think about buying some.

But they'll know.

Why else would I be buying charcoal?

They'll look at me and know I'm going to kill myself.

But I'm not.

I know I'm not, so...

I keep walking for a while then stop and turn back.

I'm not gonna do it.

I'm just buying charcoal, they can think what they like.

What can they do?

You can't stop anyone killing themselves. Not really.

I go into the shop and nod at the shopkeeper and look at the charcoal lined up on the floor.

I buy the smallest bag and the shopkeeper refuses to look me in the eye. As I walk out I turn around and see her staring.

'Barbecue,' I say.

She looks away.

Barbecue, I think, as I walk through the village and past all the others looking at me and my bag of charcoal.  
The village disappears and I'm on a path.  
It's not completely deserted. A few other travelers walk past, looking at my bag of charcoal, muttering something after I've passed.  
I'm having a barbecue.  
For fuck's sake.  
I think back to what I was thinking about before, the thing about caring if others know you're going to kill yourself.  
The thing about whether or not they can stop you.  
They can't stop you.  
They can take away the bag.  
Take away the razor.  
The rope.  
The gun.  
But the feeling?  
It's a strange sadness, isn't it?  
I know I've always felt it and I know no one's ever been able to take it away.  
But it's not suicidal.  
I don't want to kill myself.  
Not really.  
And those that do...  
The bag gets a little heavy so I put it on my shoulder.  
Those that want to die...they don't always want to die.  
Is their sadness like mine?  
It is, it must be.  
They don't want to kill themselves because of the sadness.  
It's an impulse?  
It can be quelled.  
If I knew them, I could quell it.  
I could talk them out of it.  
Couldn't I?  
How?  
What's the theory here?  
Plan a theory then see if it works...

What's my theory?

The bag is heavy again so I put it on the other shoulder.

The path around me is turning into jungle terrain. I suddenly think there might be snakes.

A huge cobra blocking my way.

The Japanese...they did that, didn't they?

What's-his-name at work told me...the Japanese flew over the islands during the war and dropped a load of deadly snakes.

And they're still here.

In the Cheng Chau jungle.

I walk closer to the middle of the path and stare down at the ground.

But it wouldn't be so bad...

It's not like being eaten...it's just a bite...

The hotel doesn't look like a hotel.

It's a wooden shack with two floors and maybe ten rooms stretched out towards the cliff edge. I guess I shouldn't be surprised. Cheng Chau is a small place, and the hotels should match.

I walk up to one of the doors with my bag of charcoal and peer in through the window.

It's not the reception.

I look across at the other windows.

It doesn't look like there is a reception.

I put down the coal and sit on the three steps leading up to the hotel.

There's a sign in front of me with letters missing.

## **' H ney oon Lodg '**

Is that Honeymoon? Are they fucking serious?

A woman comes round the side of the building and asks me if I'd like a room.

'Are there any rooms available?'

'Meh?'

'Room. Okay?' I try again.

'Yes. Room. Here, good.'

She points to the room I'm sitting in front of and pulls out some keys.

I stand and pick up my bag of charcoal and follow her in.

As I walk ahead of her into the room, she pats the bag of charcoal and says something long and serious in Cantonese.

'No...no, it's not...'

She says a little more.

I don't understand.

'This bag,' I hold it up, 'This...barbeque.'

She shakes her head and says 'no.'

'Yes, barbeque. Me...very happy.'

She doesn't leave.

I put the bag down and pull out a pen and piece of paper that I've been keeping in my pocket.

I write something down and show it to her.

'I am writer. This is because of story. I am happy. Okay.'

She reads it and understands.

'Okay?'

She goes to the door and mimes a knock.

'Twenty minute,' she says.

She's coming back in twenty minutes?

'Okay, okay. Twenty minutes.'

She leaves.

I walk into the bathroom and look at the sink.

Is this where they do it?

On the bathroom floor with the door shut and...

I look at the two towels hanging off the shower rail.

The towel goes under the door...the coal goes...in the sink?

Maybe...then they just sit down and wait...how long?

I walk back into the living room and sit on the bed.

It's a double.

This is where the honeymooners were...

I lie back and imagine a bride on top of me...a beautiful Chinese bride.

Yes, this is where they fucked, and that's where the others killed themselves.

Two rooms, two different purposes.

But what about the bathroom?

They would've fucked in there too...they were newlyweds, they must've.

One guy cut himself and two lovers fucked each other.

No, not cut...

Smoke.

Charcoal.

The guy...

I close my eyes and imagine the past. The man who killed himself lying on this same bed, imagining others before him who'd ended it all. And the future...the ones after me who would come here and imagine me.

Would he have thought of the others?

Suicides aren't reflective, are they?

There's misery and that's the thing they can't see past.

This is bullshit.

I'm not like him.

I'm performing. I'm an actor. I'm not unhappy.

I open my eyes and look around the room and the light coming in through the windows.

I'm not unhappy.

The bus comes into my head and the tunnel...

The classrooms and that feeling...

I'm not unhappy, not really.

There's a knock at the door.

The woman doesn't wait for me to answer. She comes in and looks around quickly, probably checking the charcoal's still in the bag.

'It's okay,' I say.

'Meh?'

I get off the bed and pick up my bag of charcoal and walk to the door.

'I'm going.'

She looks at me.

‘Meh wah?’

After she’s gone I walk round the back of the hotel and look over the small cliff onto the beach below.

There’s no one there.

The landscape looks terrible. Small white waves crawling up the beach and dying on the grey sand.

Or not grey, but drained yellow. Or brown. Sand is never really yellow. Only in animation.

I turn back to the hotel and look in through another window.

There’s nothing inside. Just another double bed and shitty TV.

I sit down on the dirt and open the bag of charcoal.

Who the fuck comes here for a honeymoon?

Do they look out the window?

What about that sand?

You can’t not notice it’s drained yellow. You can’t not notice the whole fucking view is grey.

I pull out a box of matches from my other pocket and light the charcoal that I’ve made into a small pile in front of me.

It takes a while for the rocks to light, but they do.

A few wisps of smoke creep up out of the pile, and then a few more.

I wouldn’t call it a fire, but it’s something.

I wait a while longer to see if it gets any bigger.

It does.

Do it, Oli.

You fucking coward, do it.

But...in an open space?

Do it.

It won’t work.

It won’t do anything.

You know it won’t do anything.

Coward.

Fucking coward.

Get your nose in there...get your face in that fucking smoke.

I lean down and put my face close to the smoke.

I question myself a little, but not enough.

I breathe in as much smoke as I can.  
I do it again.  
And again.  
What the fuck are you doing, Oli?  
You performer.  
You fraud.  
I sit back up and move away from the fire.  
I'm not unhappy.  
I don't wanna die.  
I look around and see the woman at the side of the hotel, watching me.  
I smile.  
'Barbecue.'

I lean against the rails, waiting for the ferry to come.  
Most of the island is dark.  
The charcoal is by my feet.  
In the water I see a buoy floating slowly towards the pier.  
Is it a buoy?  
A fish?  
I stare harder.  
It's a buoy.  
I picture a Chinese girl next to me, also leaning, and tell her it's a North Korean spy.  
'There's a guy under the buoy and it's...he's a North Korean spy.'  
A siren blares.  
The ferry is coming.  
Coming to carry me back.  
...  
The spy drifts past the pier.  
I watch it go.  
...  
I don't want to go back.

## Bergson's duration?



**[Fucked if I know what it is]**

The next year passes neither slowly nor quickly.  
I don't know how it passes, not really.  
I guess some of it is fast, some of it is slow.  
But I remember things, events, people, books I read.

I go to the library and look for books in the religion section.  
There's not much there.  
I pull out something on Heidegger but the sleeve tells me it's not him, it's notes on him from someone else.  
I put it back.  
In the fiction section I find something by Takahashi.  
The chapters are short, the words are easy.  
I take it out.

Momo stops calling me.  
I send her one message asking her what she's doing, but she doesn't reply.

A few months later I send her another message asking if she's alright and what's going on with her.  
She doesn't reply.

I go to work and watch as five other teachers leave and move on to better things.

Or other things, I tell myself. Doesn't mean they're better.  
But it is better. It has to be.

One of the kids turns against me.

When he first came into my class a year ago he was coy and too scared to say a word, so I coached him and told him it was okay not to speak, and that when I was at school I was the same, and he didn't say anything in direct reaction to it, but I could tell he was taking it in, and slowly he started speaking more.

And then he started slouching.

Then he started speaking Cantonese to the other students.

Then he brought snacks into class.

The little shit.

Scheming little fuck.

...

It's too late to break him.

I stand on the bus and go through the tunnel and look at the other faces around me and feel okay about it.

There are moments where my mind tries to interrupt and drag me down...

It's gonna happen.

They're strangers.

They're against you.

You're gonna feel it.

It never goes.

...but it doesn't get a hold and the bus leaves the tunnel and I get home and I'm safe again.

I don't go out during the summer.

I go to the beach a couple of times, but I never go anywhere at night.

I can't.

Summer is always like this now.

On the news I see some terrible things.

A man on a bus in Canada is sitting next to a mentally sick guy with a knife. For some reason, the guy breaks down and cuts off the man's head.

A woman in a café in the US somewhere rejects the wrong guy. He comes back to her holding a knife and stabs her again and again, killing her in front of seven other people.

They show a picture of the girl in the paper. She's very, very pretty.

I think about going back and saving her for several days after I read it.

I think about going back and not being able to save her as well.

There's an earthquake in the Philippines and thousands die. The TV cameras pick up mothers and children weeping and making universal sounds of anguish. It's not Tagalog screaming, it's human.

But I don't feel anything, not really.

I'm not a sociopath.

I'm a human being, but...

The logic is...the basic logic behind my non-feeling is...I don't know them. I don't know them and they're not real.

I won't tell anyone this, but it's explicable.

I'm not a bad guy.

I go to work again and again and teach the same kids.

We play the rubber game.

Two more teachers leave and I make excuses for myself.

It's not time yet.

Just a little bit longer.

I can't...

I sit in the classroom, anxious as fuck.

I don't want to go to my next lesson and I don't want to meet anyone after work.

I don't even want to get on the bus.

I just want to get home and feel safe.

I want to go home and not have to go anywhere for a while.

I'm sweating in the classroom.

I'm sweating because I'm anxious and I can't stop it.  
I can't get a leash on this fucking thing.

On the bus I wonder if this is the time where the others will recognise me for what I am.  
There's never anyone familiar in a crowd. Just a group of objects.  
A load of computers with bigger bodies and more aggression.  
I can't predict them.  
I can predict them, but I can't control them.  
I want to turn them off for a while.  
The bus moves into the tunnel.  
I wonder if this will ever stop.

I'm on my way to the bar to meet the others.  
It's in Central and I don't really know where I'm going.  
There's a Belgian bar near here. Up some stairs, a left turn, just past one of the department stores.  
I can't see it.  
I think of the people waiting for me to arrive.  
They're not new. I've met them before, but...  
I can't talk to these people.  
There's a procedure of conversation, a line you have to follow and I don't know if I can keep to it tonight.  
I plot the night ahead.  
All the ways they can fuck me up. All the ways I can fuck myself up.  
Being asked a question and not being able to come up with any kind of reply.  
Fuck, what if I can't talk?  
It's happened before.  
Hasn't it?  
I walk past the department store and see the left turn.  
It's okay when you're in there.  
It's never happened before.  
You've always talked.  
For fuck's sake, Oli.  
I walk up the stairs and see the sign for the bar.

Before I go in I try to think out thoroughly what is wrong with me.

I know it's not the night itself. The night I can handle, when it's there. No, it's before then...it's the thinking of the night. The potential of it.

Is there a word for that?

I don't know.

Can't think.

...

I walk into the bar.

It's the last days of summer, but summer isn't really summer anymore, it's autumn. Or it should be.

It's hot outside and I'm walking near the estate.

The day before I was waiting at the bus stop and it happened again.

And the week before

And...

It never goes.

Not really.

I sit down on one of the walls and watch a couple of men unload a truck. I wonder if I'll ever get any better.

One of the men drops a box and shouts in Cantonese.

But there's nothing wrong with me.

It's in my head.

Summer's nearly gone.

Winter will be better.

Winter comes in December and the temperature drops into the teens and I do feel a little better.

I walk around thinking of ideas again. Of philosophy and concepts.

It doesn't cross my mind that there's anything wrong with me.

On the news they tell me about a local girl who was murdered by a man in Sham Shui Po. She was a whore apparently. Or close to a whore. She met him online and arranged to go to his place and

fuck him. She went. They fucked. Then he killed her. He strangled her then chopped her up into pieces and threw most of her into the harbour. Other parts he cooked and ate. Only a few parts of her were found.

I go to the library and take out another book.

The Book of Disquiet.

As I read it I find half of it speaks to me and the other half makes me mad.

He's good, but...

Is he right about everything?

He's not a complete match for me. Close, but not complete.

There are no funny lines.

Why are writers always so humourless?

Do I not get it?

I go back and read the author biography and find out that the author was shy and inward and never exposed himself in society.

But still...

For most of the month I think about this book.

I take the anxiety from it and merge it with my own and try to come up with a theory, a theory I can call my own, and not a copy.

### **In my notebook:**

*Potentialism?*

*This is the name of it...the dread of the potential...dread of the future?*

*Or not the future, something else...the potential of the future made in my own head...which is still a future?*

As the New Year comes I feel good.

I'm happy, fixed, stable.

As January rolls on I notice everyone else is depressed, yet I am not.

I've never felt so good.

Anything is possible and even if it's not, it's still a thing to try.

What does that mean?

I sit in a café on the fourth floor of some building in Mong Kok and try to reason it out a little.

The thing has to do with success.

Achievement.

Don't I want success?

I want control.

Success on my terms and control of my audience.

Is that it?

I write down '*achievement = abnormal success*' on a napkin. My notebook is by my bed at home.

*Success is marketing yourself and producing yourself differently and...and patience.*

I turn the napkin over.

I scratch the edge of my thumb.

But I don't write anything else.

On the news a new author wins the booker prize.

He's surprised, but ready with his opinions.

I watch the clipped interview and think, 'why the fuck do I care now?'

I hate his book.

He's achieved nothing, not really.

I turn off the TV.

His life has just ended, that's the truth of it.

In the library I take out one of the Fitzgerald books.

The Pat Hobby stories.

I sit down on one of the seats and read the preface. It tells me Fitzgerald never recovered from the peak of Gatsby and he knew it himself. He knew where he was heading.

I nod my head slightly, vindicated by Fitzgerald's descent.

Fuck, even Fitzgerald...

I read a couple of the Hobby stories and enjoy them. I wonder if they're really a backward step.

Gatsby was good, but it wasn't this funny.

I lie on my bed and think of Fitzgerald and his slump.

He never came back.  
He never wrote anything good again.  
Pat Hobby was good, but samey. Slight and samey.  
But funny too...wasn't it?  
Did he really fall?  
I stare at the wall and paint my argument onto it.  
He started in the right place...then he shot up...when you shoot  
up too fast, you can't create...you have to stay low and  
unknown...  
I think of Gatsby.  
But that was a one off...that was...what was it?  
How could he write that when he'd already shot up?  
No, it was different...he was...that was his one shot at the...at the  
new world he was in. The world of fame and elegance, he wrote  
about that, but...but he could only do it once...that's why it was  
so good, it was unrepeatable.  
I turn over and look at all the coins on the table by my bed.  
He was too rich...there was too much money behind him...then  
he slumped...then no one wanted to read him anymore...why?  
I think of The Last Tycoon.  
Was it that bad?  
I've never read it.  
But was it really that bad?

On the bus I come back to Fitzgerald and find the answer I've  
been looking for.  
He wanted to descend.  
There was nothing else to write. He was too comfortable.  
He had to descend.  
I play with my thumb and look down on the people getting off the  
bus.  
But what about Pat Hobby?

At work I introduce a new section at the start of lessons.  
News updates. From me and them.  
They have nothing to report.

I flash anger whenever they tell me they did nothing during the week, but then I remember that I did nothing when I was thirteen. It doesn't matter what they did, not really. I tell them some wacky things. All my plans and ideas. I tell them I'm gonna follow Mo Jack Dong's trail around Middle China and then write about him. I tell them I'm gonna write a philosophy novel. I tell them I'm gonna perform poetry on the streets. Most of them don't know what poetry is. Or philosophy.

There's a bar in Central where they have open mic nights. It's not the biggest place in the city, but it's an audience. I have the idea of writing down a few lines and reading them out. It doesn't matter if I can't do it. But I can do it. I will. I will use the anxiety to aid me. There is no worst thing that can happen. I take the bus over to Central after work and write the lines on the bus. As I'm writing the bus goes through the harbour tunnel so I write about that. I get to the bar and no one is reading. The manager stands up and asks someone to read. 'Anyone?' I look at my lines under the table. It's the anxiety, laid out. I read a little and start to sweat. 'Is there anyone who's got anything...?' she asks again. 'Even a few lines?' I sit rigid and drink my green drink. She asks one more time and someone stands up and reads. I put my lines back in my pocket and finish my drink. 'The moon cascades, the night shimmers...shimmers...slipping into fatality and consequence...' the woman on stage says. I walk out with bile in my throat.

The next few weeks, I make excuses.

I still feel okay, but not as great as before.  
I tell myself it wasn't the right place.  
I tell myself it wasn't the right crowd.  
I tell myself I was too honest.  
I tell myself and write it down that, '*art...real art is never presented, it is found.*'

I go to the old airport late at night and climb the fence that says 'no trespassers.'  
I have a spray can and an idea.  
As I walk across the old runways it surprises me they've done absolutely nothing with the place. No reconstruction. No development plans. They haven't even tidied the place up.  
There aren't many walls either. Just fences.  
I shake the can and try spraying my message on one of them, but the spaces between the wires are too wide.  
I find a wall and think about spraying it there, but who's gonna see?  
I climb back over the fence and look at one of the walls holding up the overpass.  
People will see it when they look out of the bus windows.  
And from the cars.  
And there are no cameras watching.  
I cross the road and shake the can and start spraying:

## **ART IS BURIED IN A TRUNK AND DISCOVERED**

Summer is creeping closer, wearing the costume of spring.  
I hate spring.  
It's hot and it's a fraud.  
It's summer in a costume.

It's the equator in fancy dress.

It's thirty-three degrees outside and I'm in a café reading a newspaper.

There's been a lot of achievement the previous day.

A movie made a lot of money.

A piece of art was bought.

A new band won the Mercury.

But something else gets me.

On the third page from the back, where the international news is, there's an article telling me about a suicide. A model from Korea, twenty years old, hung herself in a Paris apartment.

There's a picture of her next to the article.

She's the most beautiful thing I've ever seen.

And she's dead.

I sit in the classroom telling a fourteen year old girl about the Korean model's suicide.

I want to know what she thinks.

I've told almost all of my students.

They don't think much.

The fourteen year old tilts her head to the left and says, 'maybe she was too sad.'

'Yeah, clearly...but?'

The head tilts the other way.

'I don't know...'

I tell her the Korean model was beautiful. The most beautiful woman you'll ever see.

The student doesn't answer.

'So why?'

'I don't know.'

We sit in silence for a few minutes and the student returns to her work, but my mind is still busy.

'Maybe...she shot up too fast...'

The student doesn't look up from her work.

'The model, I mean...maybe she became successful and...I don't know...too successful...you know?'

The student looks up and nods quickly then goes back to the page.  
'You know 'successful?'

I lie in the bath thinking of the Korean girl in front of me, naked  
with a rope around her neck.

I slap myself in the face and give her a dress.

If she was unhappy...with all she had...then...

What?

I remember the island, the charcoal burning...all those times I  
walked by the highway late at night...

I remember my theory.

When you're that bad...is there any way to talk you down?

I think of the Korean girl and what she was thinking as she put the  
rope around her neck.

The article said she had a boyfriend...wasn't he enough?

No, he didn't care.

I bite the wrinkles on my finger.

He didn't understand.

I understand.

I could've talked her out of it.

It's full on summer and there's no escape from the heat.

I don't feel so good anymore.

Every night after work I leave quickly and get on the bus.

On the bus it's cooler, but there are still people, and I don't want  
to see any people. I want to be at home.

At home I think about the future.

Or not the future exactly, but the potential future. The one that  
exists in the cracks, the one that probably won't happen but, I  
convince myself, could happen, that will happen, and even if it  
doesn't happen, it doesn't matter, not really, because there'll be  
another potential future taking it's place, and there'll be more  
things to be afraid of, more things to run from...

I don't feel well.

I take a bath at the same time every night and think about how long and hard the next day will be and all the things that could go wrong, and all the things I might be unable to do.

It's the same thing again.

I won't be able to speak.

I'll forget my lines.

I won't function.

I'll snap out of the way of things and it won't let me back in.

I bite my nails and my skin and tell myself to stop being so fucking ridiculous.

It doesn't work.

I am ridiculous.

I'm scared.

It's the most irrational thing you've ever heard and I'm still fucking terrified.

And there's no talking down from it.

There's no confidante.

There's no boyfriend who understands.

There's only rope, and an apartment in Paris, and a place to hang.

It's my day off and I'm running up a hill in thirty-two degree heat.

It's good to sweat.

I reach the top and think of the Korean again.

My beautiful Korean.

She just needed some help.

Someone to give her options.

I stretch my legs out and look at the buildings and the other runners lit up by the beautiful sunlight and I think, 'God, it's not that bad.'

It's never that bad.

It'll come back, but it'll go away again too.

Think of the good times.

Think better thoughts, Oli.

I run back down the hill and into the estate and see kids messing around on the tennis court.

I don't want to die.

I love life.

The kids pull down the net and point fingers at each other, each one laughing.

I laugh too.

I fucking love life and I never want it to end.



## **Telling the Korean it's never that bad...**

I'm in Paris, on some steps running up the side of a wall.

I climb up and when I reach the top it's night.

Where am I going again?

I pull out my phone and look at the words.

'Korean Model – 2222-2222'

I dial and someone picks up.

'Hi.'

It's her, in a neutral voice.

She's in her apartment, in Paris, in close up.

I tell her...nothing. I don't know what to say.

Then the apartment is empty.

She's gone.

I walk along the road and then I'm on a bridge with water below, possibly the Seine, and Jack Nicholson is on the other side looking over the rail at what I assume is more water.

The same water I just looked at.

At least, if it flows at the usual river rate, it's the same water.

Which means?

I walk away from him and down a street that looks French and onto another street that also looks French.

That water...it was my present...becoming his present...  
Was that right?  
But it wasn't my present...I didn't have a present, did I?  
An image of myself looking into water and then a frame cutting it  
off to make it into a block of the present...  
But it's not the present...is it?  
The framed image drifts backwards replaced by a new frame of  
myself looking at the frame of myself looking into the water.  
That's the present.  
And that frame is replaced by a frame of me declaring, 'that's the  
present.'  
And it continues on towards Jack, who wasn't really Jack anyway.  
Which means?

I keep walking, looking for what I think must be her apartment.  
I put all the frames out of my head and go back to my doubts.  
She won't see me.  
She doesn't know me.  
I have to leave.  
Hong Kong is waiting for me.  
What do I say to her?  
She has a boyfriend.  
But the doubts are outweighed by conviction...a strange sense of  
absolute conviction.  
She doesn't know you, but you know her.  
You understand.  
You can help.  
The boyfriend doesn't understand a fucking thing.  
No one knows her like you do.  
Yes, no one knows her like I do.

I find an apartment with an open door and a block of mailboxes.  
One of them has a note saying, 'At Fashion show, back soon.'  
It's her, it has to be.  
I take the note and put it in my pocket and go up the spiral stairs  
to the third floor where I find another open door.  
I walk in and see an empty apartment.

There's no furniture, only a bed.  
The plastic sheeting is still on.  
I lie down on it and picture her shape next to me.  
She knows I'm coming.  
She wants to be saved.  
There's misery at that fashion show.  
Walking in front of all those people must be hell.  
She doesn't like any of them.  
She's better than them.  
I look around the room and see something I'm sure wasn't there  
when I first came in.  
It's a line of rope.

I'm asleep on the bed when she comes back.  
Her make-up has run down from her eyes but she's not crying.  
I'm still asleep as she sits down next to me and stares at the rope.  
She stares at it for a long time.  
Finally, she pushes my leg and wakes me.  
'Hi,' I say to the back of her head.  
I think of my lines.  
I know you're sad.  
I understand.  
The rope is an option. I won't lie, it is an option.  
But there's another way.  
You don't hate life, not really.  
You never hated life...you just hated your life.  
Do you know how easy it is to get trapped like this?  
'Can you leave, please?' she says.  
'No.'

I blink and she's still there.  
'Leave,' she says again.  
'Why?'  
Why do I say why? I'm not sure. I have other things prepared, but  
they don't seem right. Is why right?  
'Fine.'  
She stands up and pulls a chair over to the rope.

'Why?' I say again, sitting up.  
She doesn't answer.  
Shit, already?  
I skim through everything I have, all the things I've seen in films,  
all the lines and delays, and then the counterpoints, the reasons  
why she'd dismiss them and equate me with everyone else who  
doesn't understand.  
Then I think how impossible it all is.  
She's lonely.  
She's alone.  
How can I invade that?  
I watch as she puts the rope round her neck.  
But if I could invade...  
'You're lonely...you're lonely and no one's ever gonna  
understand.'  
She stops.  
There are no soul mates.  
There are no words to solve this.  
You're right.  
Kill yourself.  
'There are no soul mates,' I say. 'There are no words to...'  
She kicks the chair away and drops.  
As she hangs and chokes I can see that her legs are almost  
touching the floor.  
God, she's tall.  
God, she's beautiful.  
I sit up on the bed and watch her eyes, trying to get them to watch  
me, but they don't. She's too busy choking.  
She's the most beautiful thing I've ever seen.  
And she's not dying, not really.  
It's a never-ending choke.  
And it is.

The rope snaps and she drops to the floor.  
I get up and offer my hand.  
I have a theory.  
I think I know how to make things better.

What the fuck else are you gonna do?  
You're a model, but you don't have to be.  
You killed yourself because your world was narrow.  
You let your world become narrow.  
I can widen it.  
You're a model, but that can change. You can do something different. It's ludicrous. The whole world will declare it ludicrous, but their world is narrow, and so is yours, but I can make it wider. Trust me.  
You're a model, but you could be different. You could be a writer. An artist. A gas station attendant.  
'I have a theory,' I say.  
She gets up and pushes my hand away.  
'I think I know how to make things better,' I shout after her as she picks up the rope and runs out of the apartment.  
I run after her.

She runs out of Paris and I follow.  
She runs down the country alongside the canals, and I chase her.  
It's dark so she doesn't always know I'm there, but I am.  
She stops at some trees and tries to hook the rope over the branches, but she has nothing to stand on, and by the time she figures this out I'm there again.  
'Wait, I have a theory,' I say.  
But still she runs.

She runs across Europe.  
She gets to the border between Romania and Russia and thinks about going across, but something stops her and she runs down towards Turkey instead.  
I have no image for Turkey so she runs across a map of Turkey and then a map of the Middle East and then India.  
Finally we reach Thailand.  
I know Thailand.  
She runs onto a beach on Koh Samui and goes into the sea.  
I stop and wait by the edge of the tide.  
You're not in control here.

I'm in control.  
You don't know Thailand. Not this Thailand anyway.  
She looks back at me, confused.  
I give her a line.  
'Help me,' she says.  
I look at her as she swims back to the shore, to me.  
I'm in control.  
This is shit.  
I'm giving her lines.  
She's dead.  
She comes out of the water naked and puts her arms around me.  
The rope is tucked around her waist.  
She's not dead.  
It's the present and the past together.  
It's the water on one side of the bridge and then the same water  
on Jack's side.  
There is no present.  
Is there a past?  
She disappears.

I'm back in Paris, looking back down into the Seine.  
It's too easy.  
There's no open apartment.  
There's no control.  
I think it through and try to come up with a way around this whole  
thing. I suggest to myself that I'm in a dream, but I know this is  
real.  
'It's not a dream,' I repeat out loud.  
Would I be thinking of strategies in a dream?

I walk down streets and quickly-sketched houses and shops and  
continue with my thoughts.  
She has a boyfriend.  
She's unhappy.  
Suicide is impulsive.  
It's not on her mind all the time.  
She doesn't want to die.

It's not fixed.  
It's an option.  
I walk into a café and order a coffee.  
There are some magazines on the shelf so I pick a few up and skim through them.  
Paris Fashion week, they say.  
It's on and it's spectacular.  
I look through the pictures and see her in one of them.  
She's wearing practically nothing and has no expression.  
Not happy, not sad, just a thing in a weird fucking dress.  
No one knows she's thinking of rope.  
I know.  
That's my way in. I know.  
The boyfriend doesn't know.  
I put down the magazine and wrestle with the potential event of myself turning up on her doorstep and saying I know she's thinking of suicide.  
It's never been a reality.  
In films, yeah, it's happened.  
'How do you know that?' they always say to the man with super powers. The man with telepathy. The man from the future.  
I will be the man from the future?  
The man with telepathy?  
She won't believe me.  
But she'll know it's true.  
The truth of it...  
Because...  
I am from the future.  
I don't know how, but I am.  
This is real.  
She is real.  
But...how do I contact her?

I'm in a phone box with a list of fashion agencies written down on a notepad in front of me.  
I try some and get nothing.  
I don't know what I'm saying.

I can't remember her name, but they seem to understand who I mean.

Time passes, I don't know how long.

The list of agencies is down to two.

Somehow I know the next one is the one.

I dial the number and they say, 'yes, we're her agents. Who's calling?'

I say my name and tell them I'm an old friend from Korea.

'What friend?'

'She'll know. Just say my name.'

They go away and then come back and say, 'sorry, she doesn't know you.'

I hang up.

I walk circles around the phone box and think of ways to get her to the phone.

Because once she's on the phone I know what I have to say.

I walk more circles.

No one else tries to use the phone.

No one else seems to be on the street.

Just a few cars.

But as soon as I wonder why there's no one else on the street I hear people talking French nearby. And I see more people across the road.

It's a busy street.

I go back to my circles and the problem.

She doesn't know me.

She's pretty.

Men want her, and men will phone her.

I'm different.

I'm a fashion designer?

But the name...who am I?

I dial the number again and when they ask for my name I tell them a name that comes to mind.

'Karl Dargerman.'

They ask if I'm doing any work for the shows.

I say, 'yes, the Brindisi collection.'  
They go away.  
She comes on.  
'Hello, Karl?'  
'Yes, it's Karl...' I say quickly then stop.  
I don't know what to say.  
'Hello?' she says.  
I know what you're gonna do.  
Don't do it.  
I love you.  
'Hello?'  
I hang up.

I'm writing in the notepad.  
I know I'll forget what I have to say, so I'm writing it down. I also know that the previous conversation will not be remembered and I'll be able to use the same name again. I don't know why I know this, but I know it's true.  
In the notepad:

*'No one else knows this, but you're unhappy. In two days you will get some rope and hang yourself in your apartment. You know this, I know this. But I can help.'*

I re-read it a few times and it seems okay. Nothing groundbreaking, but it covers everything I need to say.  
But she'll hang up before I say it all.  
She'll be scared.  
She hasn't done it yet.  
Maybe she doesn't want to do it.  
The way she feels now isn't the way she'll be feeling in two days.  
Fuck it.  
Either/or.  
She'll either run or she'll ask how.

I dial the same number and use the same name and the same collection and she comes back on the line.

'Hello?'

I read what's on the notepad.

'What?'

I read the notepad again and add, 'I know you understand' at the end.

She hangs up.

Fuck.

I walk around the streets of what might be Paris, but when I look up and see the buildings I think they look more like Los Angeles, and the streets look far too wide to be Parisian.

But I'm in Paris.

I'm climbing through a window on the fifth floor of a modern building which I'm instinctively aware is holding a party in honour of the Fashion week.

I also know that this is the night she will hang herself and before she does she will have drinks and dinner with some of the designers and other models at this event.

The window is easy enough to get through.

I land on the floor and before I have a chance to look around the room I'm in the corridor outside.

Downstairs I can hear the party.

I walk past a huge mirror and see myself wearing a suit and a scarf round my neck. I also notice that I'm taller. Much taller.

She's five ten.

I'm five ten.

But now I'm six two.

I'm downstairs and ignoring the guests.

Not that there are many guests.

There are a few people around me, but further into the room there are just shapes that might be people.

The people I walk past all look like Meryl Steep. And Sally Field. And Danny Glover. And Joseph Gordon Levitt. And other models.

Then I see her.

She's standing next to another man, who I know is her boyfriend.  
As I walk towards her, the room shifts and blurs and each one of us becomes smaller and then bigger. She shrinks a little, and I grow, and the boyfriend becomes tiny, and then I'm in front of her.

I don't say anything.

She doesn't say anything.

The tiny boyfriend, about half a foot shorter than me, talks into my shoulder, but I ignore him.

She doesn't love him.

He's annoying.

He's one of them.

He's tiny.

He's never known a day of depression, of real depression, in his whole life.

'Can we help you?' he says.

I ignore him.

'I know what's happening,' I say to her.

She shakes her head.

'Sorry, but...you are?' he asks.

'Go away,' I say to him.

He thinks about swinging for me, I know he does, but he doesn't.

He can't. I'm bigger than him.

I lean forward and speak into her ear.

'A year ago, I killed myself in a room with coal.'

I put my hand on her waist and feel her leg shaking.

'I did it, and now I'm dead. And now I know others the same as me. And I can help.'

I move back and catch her eyes.

The boyfriend swings for me, and the scene crumbles.

We're at the steps again, the ones that run up the side of the wall.

It's dark and we're wearing black.

Above us the boyfriend is talking to the police, telling them my height and appearance and why they have to find her before I do anything.

'It's okay,' I tell her.

She doesn't say anything back.  
She's holding my hand.  
Or I'm holding her hand.  
I don't know which.

We get on the train and sit in a carriage with the police running around on the platform outside looking for us.

She's still not talking.

'Are you okay?' I ask.

'I wonder if they'll see us,' she says.

'Do you want them to?'

'When I was young I was usually happy.'

'Really?'

She doesn't say anymore.

I sit back as the train moves and we ride through the French countryside and into Italy and then Croatia.

She's not convinced.

I'm not dead.

I lied to her.

What am I again?

From the future?

A telepath?

I can't remember.

...

I try, but I really can't remember.

The train stops in Croatia and we get off. There are some taxis waiting on the other side of the platform and we get in.

'Hong Kong,' I tell the driver, who looks Chinese.

He says, fine, and starts the meter.

I don't worry about money.

I worry about her.

I point out the window and tell her we're about to see half the world.

She nods and follows my finger.

'You can talk to me, you know?' I say. 'I do understand. They didn't, but I do. Really.'

She doesn't say anything until we're in Pakistan, watching children break from street cricket to have a swordfight with their bats.

'I don't know why I'm doing this,' she says.

It's the right thing to do.

No, not blunt enough.

I stretch out my arms and tell myself to be blunt...that to win her over I must be blunt.

'Because if you didn't, you'd be hanging from a rope right now.'

She turns to me and puts her head on my shoulder.

'Was I really going to do that?'

'Yes, you were.'

'No. It doesn't...'

'Yes.'

'...make sense.'

'I don't know...'

She pulls her head off my shoulder and looks out the window again.

Fuck, a lack of knowledge.

Should there be things I don't know the answer to? Is that what she wants?

But...I don't know.

And she's not on my shoulder anymore.

'I do know. You were unhappy...'

She doesn't turn.

'...but not only unhappy. It's...you weren't in the world anymore. You weren't in the system.'

Does that make sense?

There's her and then there's everyone else, and it's different...but everyone else is in sync and on track, but the exception...her...she can't stay on track...she can't continue...

Is this what it is?

The taxi crosses into India and I re-think what I want to say.

'So...the way you were, a model...you couldn't go on that way, so you wanted to kill yourself.'

Outside there are more kids with cricket bats, playfully hitting each other.

She watches them.

‘There was no branch to jump across to,’ I add.

In Thailand there are kids throwing beanbags at each other.

I’m still explaining things.

‘But the branches you need to jump to, they’re invisible, or they’re hidden by leaves...so...’

So?

Is ‘branches’ the right picture?

Why is she still looking out of that fucking window?

‘...so you just needed someone to come along, someone like me, to pull away the leaves and show you those branches.’

In Hong Kong, there are children kicking footballs at each other.

She turns back to me.

‘In Korea the kids use baseball bats.’

‘What?’

‘They use baseball bats to hit each other.’

I look at the kids outside. What does she mean? All kids are pretty

much the same. Life is the same. Life is better when you’re a kid.

Life is violent. Life is pointless. What?

‘I guess baseball is more popular, that’s why...’

She turns back to the window.

‘Are you feeling okay?’ I ask.

‘I can’t believe I’m in Hong Kong,’ she says.

I put my hand on her neck and stroke lightly at the hair hanging over.

‘But you’re not a model now.’

‘I don’t feel good.’

‘You will.’

‘I feel so tired. So sick.’

I let go of her neck and think about grabbing her hair and slamming her face through the glass and telling her to snap the fuck out of it.

Isn’t that what these fuckers need?

‘Maybe I should go back to Paris.’

‘No.’

‘Maybe I should...’

‘I said no.’

The taxi stops and the driver gives me change. I can’t remember paying, but it seems that I did.

We get out.

There is an estate in front of us, but it isn’t mine.

‘What is this place?’ she asks, keeping a little distance between us.

I know what it is.

I don’t know why we’re here, but I know it.

‘This is home.’

I pick up her bags.

‘This is where you find your new branch.’

This is where I save you.

This is where you fall in love with me.

This is where you tell me I fucking understand.

We walk up to the eighth floor, past the other apartments and see artists and printers and writers at work, and get to an open door with a doll hanging outside.



## **The forced making of dolls...**

I sit in the living room reading to her.  
She's lying on the couch, her feet stretched all the way to the end.  
I'm on the floor, my back to her.  
I assume she's listening.

*'He went to Tokyo to become an intellectual.'*

I'm reading the biography of Kenji Nakagami.  
She doesn't know him.  
'It's my theory,' I explained to her earlier, 'that knowing about people who went before...people with problems...will help.'

*'His father left when he was young. His brother hung himself when Kenji was twelve years old.'*

I pause after this one, waiting for some kind of response.  
She says nothing.  
'He hung himself...' I repeat.  
Nothing.  
I turn and see that she's not asleep, but she's not there either.  
I prod her leg. Her beautiful, long leg.  
I want to stroke it.  
I want to kiss it.

I want to climb up on the couch and on top of her and push myself against her.

But it's sick.

You're her saviour.

You're better than that.

I prod her leg again and she looks at me.

'Are you okay?'

My finger stays on her leg.

'I wonder if anyone's still looking for me.'

'Probably.'

She doesn't say anymore.

'You want me to read more?'

She doesn't respond.

'You're not feeling so good, are you?'

A cheap line.

You've got to be better than that.

Understand her.

'It's okay. Don't fight it...let it have you.'

She turns on her side, away from me.

Fucking bitch.

Show some gratitude.

It's not easy, living with a miserable cunt.

A beautiful, miserable cunt.

I move my finger away from her leg.

I understand.

She knows I understand.

I read one more line of the book.

*'No matter whose company he was in, he never affected his speech or his demeanour. He was brash to the intellectuals, he was brash to his friends.'*

I close the book.

'We'll try some more tomorrow.'

No answer.

Bitch.

'And maybe you should start making some dolls?'

For the last few nights, since we moved in, I've been telling her to make dolls.

The one we saw outside our door when we first came, that was done by someone else.

But it gave me an idea.

And proved my theory.

I explained it to her over the first few nights, in snatches of speech as she couldn't focus for any long period of time. In fact, it seemed like I bored her, but I figured that was natural, that it wasn't just me...anyone trying to do what I was doing would bore her.

Obviously it would take more than a few nights for her to fully realise how deeply I understood.

So, I sat in various places over those first few nights.

On the edge of the bed, on the living room floor, on the higher side of the pavement as we walked around Shek Kip Mei.

'The more dolls you make...the more you create, the more purpose you will feel.'

Every line I said was self-analysed and revised. Every possible counterpoint was considered and judged.

You feel more purpose, but there is no purpose, even in purpose.

There is no endgame, so what's the point of purpose?

If there's no purpose then there's no reason to live.

There has to be a reason to live.

Or perhaps there doesn't?

She's sick of purpose.

She doesn't want an endgame.

Does that fit my theory?

There is no endgame, and that's okay.

Camus. The Rebel.

I remember...you have to be in constant rebellion, not completed revolution.

'There is no real purpose, or point to it, but...but the constant rebellion is what you need...the constant challenge, never to finish...'

Never finish?  
That would lead to depression.  
Depression leads to rope.  
What was I saying?

So the first week she doesn't make any dolls.  
She sits around the apartment, watching a blank TV, not wearing  
very much, making me worried, making me hard.  
She throws the doll we already have up and down.  
'I don't want to make any.'  
'Well, what do you want to do?'  
She looks around.  
'It's a weird kind of place, this. An art estate, but...it's so grey.'  
'Atmospheric, maybe?'  
She looks at the floor.  
I walk out of the room, annoyed.  
Fucking answer me, stick.  
I get some cigarettes off the kitchen table and walk out of the  
apartment. I can't remember buying the cigarettes, but I must've as  
they were there. I light one and drop the ash onto the ground  
below. After a few flicks I notice the ash isn't hitting the ground.  
It's hitting some kind of art. A construction made of wire. That  
wasn't there before, was it?  
Go back inside, drag her out, and show her.  
Show her what people can do.  
What people can do and not get much credit for.  
But what is it?  
Some kind of wire thing. A wire monster guarding the estate?  
Could I make something like that?  
Could she?  
I finish the cigarette and drop it onto the balcony floor. I realise  
I'm quite close to the edge.  
I think for a second.  
An impulse.  
I climb over the side and fall.  
I'm about to hit the monster, and the ground.  
Then I'm on the balcony again. The eighth floor.

I step away from the edge.

I've gotta do something. Something creative. Anything.

'Cassavetes...John Cassavetes...I guess you wouldn't have heard of him in Korea?'

She's stretched out on the sofa, in shorts and a Felix the Cat t-shirt.

Her legs look impossibly long, long enough for her to step down from that balcony onto the ground floor.

She won't jump, she can't.

'He made films using local actors and locations. It was really cool, really innovative...he didn't care about success.'

She's looking at me but not saying anything.

Is this interesting for her?

The idea, surely.

But the theory?

'He cared about truth.'

I don't know, is she seeing this my way?

I know we all have different eyes, but there's common ground here, I know there is. I went for charcoal, she went for rope, neither one of us did it.

But she did. Or she would've.

Or she could.

Is she braver than me?

'So Cassavetes never killed himself. He never even thought of it because...because he was challenged. You see?'

She smiles.

'Yeah, you see?'

She holds the doll in her hand, tracing round its edges.

'I'm gonna make a doll.'

The next day she's made four.

They sit on the floor by the couch, lined up like soldiers.

I'm not sure how she knows the method, but she does. Her fingers work quickly and the material seems to have come from nowhere.

Really, I don't remember buying it.

Did she?

I walk outside and light another cigarette from the pack I'm sure I never bought.  
The monster below isn't there anymore.  
They took it already?  
In its place is an empty tank.  
I flick my ash onto it.  
I think about what I'm doing here.  
She's busy now, she's making things. A couple more weeks and maybe she'll be better. Maybe she'll get off the couch.  
But what about me?  
I need to find something.  
She won't stay if I don't have something.  
I want to fuck her.  
I've always wanted to fuck her.  
She's better than me.  
She's taller than me.  
She's prettier than me.  
I look down at my legs and they distort and lengthen and the wall gets a little smaller, and when I look back up someone else, some mysterious figure, walks past and I'm way taller than them.  
I'm six two again. Maybe taller.  
I walk back to the apartment and as I walk in she's standing up without make-up and when she sees me she skips over and hugs me.  
Her hands wrap around my back and I can look down onto her scalp because I'm taller than her now.  
She lifts her face and kisses me on the cheek, then the mouth.  
Then we're in the bedroom.  
She's on top of me, clothed.  
I'm on top of her, shirtless.  
Her legs open, I push in.  
She's on top of me, naked, riding me...  
She goes faster and faster...  
Her face in and out of focus...  
I can't see her properly.  
Then I'm outside again.  
I'm on my feet.

I'm walking into the apartment.

She's not standing without make-up, she's lying on the couch like a junkie.

She's making a doll.

I stand under the shower reading more about Kenji Nakagami.

*'His father was an angry man, a brute. Nakagami was an angry man too. This thought went with him everywhere. He hated his father, he hated himself. His wife took the worst of it. The abuse his male characters dish out in his fiction is disturbingly autobiographical.'*

The bathroom on the estate is communal. She's in the shower next to me, naked.

I'm not looking at her.

I don't want to look at her.

This is help.

Guidance.

I'm not really there.

But I am.

Is it weird to be in the shower with her?

Does she mind?

*'There was an anger in Nakagami, a primal rage, that he was convinced came from his father.'*

'What does that mean?' I say out loud.

She turns the shower off and grabs her towel.

'I used to think I wasn't Korean,' she says into the mirror.

'Why?'

She dries her hair.

'My Dad used to hit my mum.'

'Huh?'

'With a belt. Then he'd apologise.'

'Did he hit you?'

'Then he'd start hitting her again.'

'Why?'

'I don't think he ever hit a guy.'

'But why did he...'

'Maybe that's why he hit mum.'

I close the book and move nearer, seeing myself appear next to her in the mirror.

'So he was a coward?'

She rubs her face with her hands.

'It's weird how this place is shared.'

'This place?'

She stops and pulls her hands away.

'I look awful.'

'No...'

'They won't hire me like this.'

'Well, do you really want them...'

'Maybe I should make more dolls.'

'More doll...'

She walks out, leaving me with the mirror.

We walk down the stairs and visit each floor of the estate, her walking a little behind, me leading the way into each studio or apartment or whatever they're called.

The first two floors are mostly printers.

Some of them have very old machines to do their work and seem eager to explain the reasons why they're using them.

I don't care, she doesn't care.

We walk on.

On the fourth floor, we find a man and a woman making a magazine.

They explain in fairly good English what they're doing and why they're doing it. Hong Kong isn't radical enough apparently. The whole world isn't radical enough. Magazines always sell their souls. They always advertise. They all write the same way about the same things.

These two don't.

I look at their last issue.

Most of it is in Chinese, and most of the words are disordered.

They start at the bottom and move up the page before disappearing altogether.

It is unreadable.

I hand it back and tell them it's unreadable, but I respect them for trying.

I don't respect you.

You're the worst of them.

Don't be difficult for the sake of it.

Philosophy is difficult in the same way.

I hate philosophy.

I like some pages I've read of philosophy.

Like Camus.

Deleuze.

When did I read those?

I turn around and see that she's gone.

'Your friend went about two minutes ago,' the man says. 'I don't think she likes our magazine.'

'No, she's sick.'

I go for the door.

'Do you live here?' he asks.

'We live upstairs. She makes dolls.'

'Ah, interesting. And you?'

'What?'

'What is it that you do?'

But it's too late. I'm gone.

She's on the ground floor looking at the wire monster.

I walk up behind her.

'It's weird. I think they take it down and put it back up again, repeatedly.'

'I didn't like that magazine,' she says, more to the monster than me.

'Yeah, I guessed as much.'

'I don't like art.'

'Art...it's a difficult thing...'

'I don't like anything.'

There are people walking around us and then suddenly there aren't. The sky turns dark and she puts her hand into mine and her head on my shoulder.

I'm six foot two again.

'Can you tell me your theory again?'

'You sure?'

She tilts her head up to me.

'I know I seem weird, but I know you're trying to help. I know you can save me.'

I kiss her on the head.

'I know you understand me,' she says.

I clear my throat and repeat the theory. Cassavetes and art in the gutter, art without success, art in constant challenge. No interviews. No dealings with the media. No climbing upwards and feeling disappointed that you're not getting anywhere, because there's nowhere to get.

It starts to rain.

She moves in closer to me and kisses me on the cheek.

'You're the only one who could've saved me. You know that?'

She kisses me on the other cheek.

'You're the only one who doesn't annoy me. You're the only one I can stand. You're the only one I wanna talk to. You're the only one who'll sit there and not speak when I don't want you to speak. You're the only one who doesn't lecture me. You're the only one who has better ideas than me. You're the only one who's ever thought of a way out of this. You're the only one I want to hold on to.'

She kisses me again.

Then we're in the apartment, pulling off each other's clothes.

We're kissing and I'm telling her that we shouldn't.

I don't want it to be this way.

I want it to be worked towards.

We stumble into the bedroom and I push her down onto the bed.

I want to fuck her.

I want to grab her hips and put her on top of me and move her back and forth like my own little Korean doll.

I'm on top of her, but not inside.

I don't want it to be like this.  
'We should stop,' I say.  
I don't want to stop.  
I do.  
I want it to be the culmination of my efforts.  
She's not saved.  
My theory's bullshit and she doesn't believe a word of it.  
She hates art.  
I hate art.  
I love the idea of art.  
I'm better than anyone else she's known.  
I understand her.  
But she doesn't understand me.  
I'm unknowable.  
She could never come to Paris and talk me down from anything.  
No one could.  
'We should stop,' I say again.  
'I love you,' she says back.  
Krist.  
I love you so fucking much.  
You'll never grow weary of me.  
I swear.  
But I'll grow weary of you.

Then I'm outside the apartment on the third floor where the magazine couple lives.  
She's sitting on the balcony wall with her legs over the side.  
The rope is round her neck.  
'I'm going to jump and turn quickly so my head hits the ground first,' she says.  
'You can't.'  
'If it doesn't work, I'll need you to take the rope and hang me.'  
'No.'  
'I'm sick of those fucking dolls.'  
'No.'  
She jumps.  
I run to the edge and look over the side, but she's not there.

‘Fuck.’

She’s in the apartment making more dolls.

I’ve just finished telling her the theory again.

‘If you keep making them, without marketing or trying to sell them or any of that bullshit then...if you keep doing it then it’ll help. You see?’

She draws the eyes onto another doll and throws it on the pile.

‘It’ll help...because it makes no sense, right? It’s madness to do something like this, without trying to sell it or anything. And the madness is what helps. It leads to thoughts and ideas. It leads to a position for you...a position where you might not be super happy, but you’ll be okay. You’ll definitely be okay.’

She picks up the cloth and starts measuring for the next one.

‘It’s dolls now, but it doesn’t always have to be.’

She doesn’t answer.

She rarely answers.

But I know she’s listening.

These words are new.

No one’s ever used these words before.

She knows I’m helping.

I walk home from what I assume was work and enter the estate.

I can’t remember working or what my job is, but it’s dark and it seems to be the end of the day so that’s where I must’ve been.

I used to be a teacher once.

I don’t feel like I was teaching today. But maybe I was.

I walk past the wire monster and into the elevator.

There’s one of her dolls hanging outside.

Good, she’s been out of the apartment.

She’s recovering.

It’s working.

I get to the eighth floor and there are two more dolls hanging outside.

Along the corridor there’s a doll every metre or so.

Jesus, they’re everywhere.

In the apartment there are dolls all over.

It looks like there's been a snowstorm.

She's lying on the couch, covered with dolls, the storm centred on her.

'You've been busy,' I say.

'I went outside and met some people,' she says.

'That's good.'

'It's kinda boring to meet people. I don't think I want to do it anymore.'

I sit down on the floor beside her.

'Come on...'

'There are so many things people say to each other that they don't want to say.'

'That's what conversation is...90% bullshit and 10%...'

'I'm gonna make a remote where I can switch people off.'

'What?'

'Dolls can't switch people off.'

'No...but that's not...'

'Dolls can't do anything.'

I reach for her hand. It's cold.

'The dolls aren't really meant to do anything. They're just...'

'I'm going for a shower.'

She gets up off the couch and a hundred dolls fall onto me. Through the cracks I can see her disappearing out of the apartment.

In the shower I read another book.

The Book of Disquiet.

*'There are many versions of me and no versions of me. I wish to visualise a core, a centre from which I can see some true version operating things, controlling things – but I know no such centre exists.'*

I tell her this guy wrote the truth. The 10% of true conversation, 100% of the time.

She doesn't respond.

Is she listening?

I'm in the cubicle next to her and I can only see her from the neck upwards, and as she washes her hair she turns away from me.

She must be listening.

This is the truth.

The one thing everyone must listen to.

Even the author himself, who describes daydreams and drifts away from conversation, he would listen if I were in the shower next to him.

It's not like I'm talking about the fucking weather.

*'My dreams mean nothing to me – I can qualify them as a reality, and I know they exhilarate and perplex me, but it is still not enough.'*

I watch the water run over her hair and down the back of her neck.

I think of the rest of her.

I don't want it to be this way.

She doesn't talk to me.

A fuck is worthless if she won't listen to me read.

I turn a few more pages of the book of disquiet, and quote:

*'I'm tired of people. I'm tired of saving them in my dreams. I'm tired of making them and directing them and putting my touches on them. But what choice is there? On their own they're worthless to me.'*

'What do you think about that?' I ask her.

She continues washing her hair.

I'm walking out of the estate and getting on a bus. I don't know where I'm going, but the bus soon goes out of the city and heads into the countryside.

I don't have a plan.

She's back at home, making dolls.

Nothing's changed.

I put my elbow on the window ledge and look outside and think about the things I read to her earlier. It seems like it was a week ago, but I can't remember.

The words throw chairs at the walls in my head.

*'I'm tired of making them and directing them...'*

I'm not directing her.

I can't be.

She doesn't fucking talk to me.

I'm lecturing, that's why.

Am I lecturing her?

But the lecture is important. The theory is important. No one's thought like this before. No one's challenged themselves to think this way.

I'm a pioneer.

I need to write this down.

The theory, the things I've said...I need to write it down.

I search my bag for a notepad, but it's not there. I search the seat next to me and the one next to that, but they're empty.

I get up and search the lower floor of the bus then go up the stairs and search the upper floor too.

There's nothing to write on.

I start to feel hot.

Is the air con on?

I walk back down the stairs and the bus is now full. There are people on every seat and another twenty or so standing.

I stop at the foot of the stairs and look for space.

There's nothing.

I feel really hot.

My jacket is on, but I can't take it off.

I can't find any space.

It's too hot.

I'm sweating on my head.

I pull at my jacket and try to create some kind of fan effect, but it doesn't work, it's still too hot.

I put my hand up to the air vents and feel for wind.

There's something but it's not much.

I try my jacket again.

There's no space.

Someone's taken my fucking seat, and there's no space.  
And I don't have a notepad.  
I can't write it down, any of it.  
I'll forget.  
It'll go.  
And it's too fucking hot in here...it's too fucking hot...  
The bus goes into a tunnel and everything goes dark, and it's too  
fucking hot and there's no fucking space and I don't care anymore,  
I put myself on my knees and cover my face with my hands and  
scream...

I'm in the apartment, standing by the door.  
There's a note on it.

*'Please stop making those dolls. This is everyone's estate, not yours.'*

I take it into the living room and see her on the couch, in shorts  
and a Kropotkin t-shirt. The rope is round her neck again.  
'Did you see this?'  
I walk over and throw the note down next to her.  
'Dolls can't do anything,' she says.  
'Yeah, except piss people off...boring, bland people.'  
'I've made a remote.'  
'What?'  
She holds up a remote.  
'It's to stop people talking to me.'  
I try to take it out of her hand but she pulls away.  
'Does it work?'  
She gets up off the couch.  
'I'm going outside for a while...'  
'Wait...'  
'I don't know, maybe for a few weeks.'  
'No.'  
She walks out of the apartment.  
I said no, you fucking nut.



## **Living is a solitary act [And a preparatory act?]**

I sit in my room and re-read about Kenji Nakagami and how he treated his wife.

*'He was an angry man, and the relationship with his wife was often an abusive one.'*

As soon as I finish reading and put the book down, I forget everything I've read.

Should I have beaten her?

Women don't want fists. They want love.

Violence is an obstacle.

My theory could incorporate violence.

To have someone beating you is a spur to better yourself. The more overbearing and inescapable the thing beating you is, the more likely it is you will continue to live.

Is this right?

It's bullshit.

I could never beat her.

Men are bullies.

Women don't need us anymore.

I don't fit in anywhere with her. She doesn't want to fuck me and she doesn't love me. She doesn't think much of me at all.  
I think of Kenji and his wife.  
He helped defeat a form of racism in Japan.  
He wrote beautifully.  
He influenced Murakami and other writers.  
He beat the shit out of his wife.

I don't know how much time passes but over what seems like a few weeks I sit in the apartment and wait for her to come back.  
The couch seems lonely without her.  
While I wait I start writing things down.  
I set a target of ten thousand words a day. If I don't reach it, I go to sleep thinking I will never finish and the thought of never finishing makes me incredibly anxious.  
But mostly, I reach it.  
Mostly, I write good lines.  
The more good lines I write the more anxious I feel.  
The best days of writing lead to the worst nights.  
I know I will be lauded for my work.  
I know I will break if I'm ever lauded.

When I re-read what I've written I see that I'm dividing my thoughts between two things.  
One is the dread.  
The other is her.  
The dread manifests in the idea of *Potentialism*. I recognise the term and realise I've had this thought before.  
Nothing's new.  
Everything's old.  
But this is new, I know it.  
No one's ever put these words in this order before.  
The other thing is the theory I made for her.  
There's no name for it.  
*Cassavetesism?*

He's not the prime example of it...he flirted with Hollywood, he accepted awards and did interviews...but he's the closest I can think of.

In short:

*'To keep living, you have to be in constant struggle. For the genius, this means a creation of his or her own obstacles.'*

And an addition at the end:

*'For the caring genius, or the controlling genius, they can create obstacles for others so they too may continue to live.'*

After days and days of reading the notes I've written, I start to think of promoting my ideas.

I sit in the bath and try to justify it.

I know it's against *Cassavetesism* to promote *Cassavetesism*.

But it's not.

It's about degree.

As long as you can curb the ascent of success when needed, everything is okay.

The theory requires a little recognition.

At least a thousand readers.

But if it gets too much, disappear. End the promotion.

I put water over my face.

One of the showers in the next room is turned on and I push myself up and out of the bath to see if it's her.

It's not.

I stand there naked looking at the Chinese woman washing herself.

She turns and notices me.

It's the magazine woman from the third or fourth floor.

She holds out her finger and beckons me over.

Then I'm next to her.

I'm touching her leg.

I'm biting her arm.

I'm fucking her against the shower wall.

She says it's awesome.

I tell her I'm fucking her.  
'I know,' she laughs.  
'No, I'm really fucking you...really, really fucking you.'  
'And it's so fucking awesome,' she says.  
I don't believe you.  
You're a liar.  
Your magazine's a piece of shit.  
'Fuck me harder...,' she says.  
I fuck her at exactly the same speed.  
'Your magazine's a piece of shit,' I say.  
'Yeah...?'  
'Yeah.'  
Then I'm in the bath again and the shower's not running anymore.  
I think of the Korean on the couch.  
I miss her.  
She's my soul mate.  
She doesn't listen to a word I say.  
I don't care.  
She'll come back soon.  
She'll love me.

I sit in a café with Chinese people at the tables around me and others walking past the window outside, but for some reason it doesn't feel like China. The buildings are wrong, the roads are too wide, the buses aren't Chinese buses.  
I don't know.  
I look at all the wrongness for a while and try to figure out a name for the place I'm in, but then I think, why?  
A place is a place.  
Chinese don't have to be in China.  
I'm not talking to any of them.  
There's a circle around me, half a metre in each direction.  
No one's seen me.  
I look down at the notepad and see what I've written so far:

*Potentialism – the tenets? The source?*

*It comes from anxiety.  
The source is anxiety.  
Anxiety of the future, or an imagined future.  
Is this any different from what's gone before?  
There's always been dread.  
Everyone gets nervous when they think of future events.  
Or certain future events.*

*My one is different.  
How?  
There's a future, and you're aware it's not a real future or a likely future...it's a potential future, but with a very, very remote potentiality.  
It won't happen, but that doesn't stop its effect.  
It's more real than real?  
What does that mean?*

### *Real Vs Potential*

*Real life situations are distancing...or detaching...as soon as you enter that situation, there is a part of you that isn't operational...you go onto autopilot, using everything you've learnt about how to talk and act in public...so if you give a speech, you have to deliver the speech and the anxiety over the details detaches itself.*

*You are no longer alone with your thoughts.  
When you're alone, that's the reality.*

*The potential has more power...it intimidates...  
The potential future you create is inescapable until the actual present takes over and relieves you from your thoughts...*

*Control.*

*It's control.  
In the actual event you have control over only yourself.*

*In the potential future, you are God. You control yourself, the stage,  
the audience, the method, everything.  
It's too much.*

*Active/Passive*

*Where's the source of the anxiety?  
It's in the active, not the passive.  
Your active...your actions...  
What?*

I stop and go back over it all.  
It's in note form, and I think about keeping it in note form, even if  
I do present it in front of people.  
It's better to read notes.  
If I do read it...  
Should I?  
Can I?  
There'll be lots of people, smart people...people who know about  
philosophy and whether or not this is bullshit.  
I can't control them.  
I pick up the pen and write another line:

*You're afraid of your own actions...not being able to complete your  
actions...*

And then another:

*It's not the act of God reigning down from above that you fear...it's  
not the earthquake or the gunman...it's your own pathetic self.*

I put the pen down and think, fuck me, I'm never going to say any  
of this, ever. Not to anyone.  
Then I think of her.

I'm walking the streets near what I know is Mong Kok.  
I've been here before, watching the whores.

They don't do very much.  
The better ones stay indoors.  
They fuck in their apartments on plastic sheets.  
I sit down on one of the benches and ask a couple of the whores if they've seen a tall Korean girl around lately.  
They say no.  
'She might've been wearing rope round her neck...'  
'No, sorry...'  
'...or carrying dolls.'  
'Dolls?'  
'Yeah.'  
'What do you mean 'dolls'?'  
'Never mind.'  
I sit there a little while longer trying to work out if she'd really come to a place like this and if she'd really do what I'm thinking of.

I'm on a street in Tsim Sha Tsui turning left and walking a little further until I'm at the stairwell.  
Up these stairs are the better whores.  
The ones who advertise and wait.  
She might be up here.  
She won't be up here.  
Models don't become whores.  
She was never a whore.  
I miss her.  
If I go up there and she's a whore...I can save her.  
I'm already walking up the stairs and then I'm at the top and there are pink lights above the doors with whores.  
I knock on one.  
A middle aged Chinese woman answers and stands there.  
After a few seconds she puts her weight on the other leg.  
I shake my head.  
She's fuck ugly.  
I walk around the corridor and look at the other doors but don't knock on any.  
She's fuck ugly and...

Then I'm on the bed with the middle aged whore.  
She's got her hand down my pants, but I don't care.  
I'm reading to her.  
I'm reading my notes on *Potentialism*.

*'Your actions are the thing to fear...the idea that you can't play your own part, that you can't fit into the system...because if you get expelled from the one system there is no other...the world will be against you and the only place for you will be the wilderness...'*

She's trying to get my belt undone.  
There's no room for philosophy in her.  
She's thick.  
It's romanticism to believe whores are thinkers.  
They're whores.  
Women who fuck for money.  
Murakami had his whore as a philosophy student quoting Hegel.  
No whore knows Hegel.  
She gets to my cock and starts running her nail up and down.  
She's working though, isn't she?  
If it were Cantonese or Mandarin then she'd understand.  
She's not thick.  
No one's thick.  
They just don't think about things.  
She's not fuck ugly, not really.  
I like her.  
Then I've got her on top of me and she's making noises and screaming 'so awesome, so awesome.'  
I lie back and do absolutely nothing.  
'So awesome, so awesome.'  
I close my eyes and try to sleep.  
'So fucking awesome...'  
Then I'm on top of her and my hands are round her neck and...  
Nothing's fucking awesome.

I'm sitting on the couch where she always used to sit.

There's a doll in my hand and I'm waiting, looking at ten different  
clocks all set up on the table in front of me.  
They all say the same time.  
But she's not here.  
Where is she?  
She's holding her remote and turning everyone off.  
How much of Hong Kong is mute by now?  
She doesn't want to listen to anyone.  
But she never turned me off.  
Which means?  
It was almost, but not quite.  
She wasn't convinced by the theory.  
There's no authority behind it.  
I need authority.  
It needs to be presented and someone needs to laud it.  
Zizek needs to laud it.  
Heidegger needs to laud it.  
Deleuze, Camus, Sartre, and all the others need to laud it.  
Then she'll come back.  
And love me.  
She'll love me so fucking much.

I'm at the poetry bar in Soho waiting for the mic to open.  
My notes are on the table and this time...  
The manager comes up and asks if anyone wants to read.  
No one answers.  
She sees my notes on the table.  
'Would you like to read?' she asks me.  
I shake my head.  
It's so fucking close now...  
The event is right there, but it's still not there, and all these faces  
are gonna turn on me and I won't be able to say the words and  
there's no beauty in my voice...  
'Are you sure?'  
I dive under the table.  
'It's okay...there's nothing to fear...'

I can feel them looking at my feet and my hands tucked up down here, so I turn the table over and hide behind it.  
'Hey...what are you doing?'  
They can still see me.  
It's too late.  
She's not watching anyway.  
What am I doing?  
Get out.  
Get the fuck out.  
I pick up the table and use it as a shield until I'm out of the bar and outside.

I'm back at the apartment making posters.  
A hundred sheets of A4 placed on the living room table and the floor around me.  
The plan is to summarise...summarise *Potentialism* onto a one-sheet.  
Then I don't have to be seen.  
I won't have to use tables.  
People will see the posters and respect me for doing things differently.  
No one puts philosophy on the street.  
And she'll see it.  
She'll see it and she'll know it's me, and she'll come back and throw those beautiful fucking arms around me and tell me she never meant to leave and she always knew I understood...  
She won't understand.  
I can win her, but she'll never win me.  
I pick up the template poster and read what I've done:

## **REALITY IS NOT REALITY**

*An audience takes a part of you.*  
*Your head...*  
*Your anxiety...*  
*The potential...*

*This is the thing to fear.*

*Your actions are the thing to fear and the realisation that you...YOU...are in control of your actions and what if one time you can't play your role?*

*An act of God is easy.*

*All you have to do is react.*

*An act of self is harder.*

*What you have to do is act.*

## **ACT**

*Well, what if you can't anymore?*

## **IDENTITY**

*You have none.*

*We are all schizophrenic or sociopathic and we are numerous people on different days, and if there's no centre...if there's no core...then how can there be anything?*

*Nietzsche was wrong. This is the real Death of God. How can He be if personality, if the soul, is accidental?*

*How can there be reality if the potential reality feels more real?*

## **POTENTIALISM**

I pick up the black marker pen and add another line at the bottom.

## **FUCK YOU IF YOU DON'T BELIEVE ME**

I take the bus over to Hong Kong Island and get off near the Central library.

A hundred posters are in my bag.

I sit outside the library and watch the Chinese people walk by.

I'm not sure why but I'm waiting for her.

I have the feeling she's gonna show up.  
She'll sense what I'm about to do.  
She's been following me.  
I'm her centre.  
I'm the light bulb, she's the moth.  
There's no one better than me in this fucking city.  
I sit and wait for an hour.  
She doesn't come.  
Fuck.  
Maybe she's watching from behind a tree?  
A tram goes past with a hundred or so faces looking outwards.  
Maybe she's watching from behind that tram?  
Running alongside it, spying on me through one of the windows?  
The tram disappears round a distant corner.  
She's not watching.  
She's back in Paris.  
In the apartment, hanging from the...  
I stand up and pull out the first poster.  
There's sticky tape in my bag, and I'm not sure it'll work, but I  
take some out and put it on the back of the first poster.  
I put the first poster on the signpost near the traffic crossing.  
A man and a woman move closer to read.  
They laugh and say 'meh?'  
Fuck you.  
I put another poster on the next signpost along.  
The man and the woman cross the road and look back to see me  
putting it up and I stare back at them and mutter 'Meh?'

I put thirty posters up around Causeway Bay.  
Some of them are in busy areas.  
Is one page too much?  
Who's gonna read?  
Why didn't I stick a website on it?  
[www.potentialism.com](http://www.potentialism.com)  
Why didn't I advertise?  
No one reads here.  
Philosophy died with Camus.

People only read Zizek because he talks about Die Hard. They don't give a fuck about the theory, they just wanna read about McClane.

I put forty up around Soho and Central.

It's late now, three in the morning on a weekday night, and there's no one walking around.

No one's watching me.

She's watching me.

Has she read them already?

Philosophy's not dead.

All I need is a few to follow.

I'm the pied piper.

No one's as powerful as I am.

She'll like me with power.

I'm back in the apartment and it's five in the morning.

I know it's that time because each of the ten clocks is telling me.

All the posters are gone.

Now I wait.

I wake up and she's there.

'Hey...'

The rope is still round her neck and the remote in her hand, and she's wearing the same clothes she left in, but she's back.

I stand up and give her the couch.

She takes it.

Then in her hand is my poster.

'I feel some of this,' she says.

'You feel it?'

'There is no God.'

'You like it?'

'And there is no reality.'

'Yeah...that's what I...'

'And there's no centre to me.'

'...wanted to...yeah, no centre.'

'I'm going to sleep here for a while.'

And then she's asleep.  
I sit down on the floor and re-read the poster and try to see it in  
the same way she would've seen it.  
What else did she stop on?  
The anxiety?  
Yes.  
We're the same.  
We have to be.  
I stroke her hair and tell her we're the same.  
She turns on her side and opens her legs a little.  
I think about running my hand up her thigh and into her shorts.  
But I don't.  
I stay by her hair.

It's morning and I'm reading to her again.

*Cassavetesism*, not *Potentialism*.

I explain to her before I start that although it's a different theory,  
it's still taken from the same branch.

Or the same rhizome.

Whatever that is.

*'To live in constant challenge is the key to living. Even if you've seen  
through the system of things, you can still function. All you have to do  
is learn control. Manipulate things around you, stay away from  
success, burrow downwards into the swirling pool of shit that part of  
you desires to climb out of...'*

She's lying in that same spot on the couch, as if she'd never left.

But she did leave.

I still don't know where she went.

And it'll happen again.

A yo-yo relationship.

There's an imbalance and it can't be fixed. I'm lower and I'll  
always be lower.

I'm the fucking doormat.

She doesn't love me.

I put the book down and tell her about the night ahead.

‘We have to get out there, put up more posters.’  
She looks at one of the dolls on the floor.  
‘Why didn’t I take one with me?’  
‘Huh?’  
‘Maybe it’s best not to remember anything.’  
‘What do you mean?’  
‘I never feel really comfortable when I think of what’s happened before.’  
I stroke her hair again.  
‘It makes you sad?’  
‘Where did I put my remote?’  
‘The remote...’  
She gets up.  
‘I need to go out.’  
I stand up too.  
‘Where?’  
She walks around the room looking for the remote, dropping the doll.  
‘Where are you going?’  
‘I can’t make another one. It’s too hard.’  
She puts her hands on her hips and pouts.  
‘What?’ I ask.  
‘I’ll have to put bags over their heads instead.’  
‘Bags?’  
She walks to the front door.  
‘What do you mean ‘bags?’’  
Then she’s gone.

I’m on my hands and knees in the living room looking for the remote.  
If I can find it, she might come back.  
Maybe I can tweak it...control her.  
I can make her love me.  
She won’t love me.  
I can’t find it.

I stand up and walk out of the apartment and around the corridor outside, checking the cracks and the other apartments for the remote.

It's not there.

I go down a floor and search there.

Nothing.

Then the next floor.

I get down to the third or fourth floor and wonder why I'm even bothering.

Finding her toy like a dog isn't going to work.

You have to separate.

Impress her with *Potentialism*.

Show it has legs.

...

She has legs.

The most beautiful legs.

I walk down onto the third floor and along the corridor until I'm in the printers' apartment and I say, 'don't mind me, I lost something,' and they nod and continue with their printing.

I should stop.

She's confused.

She doesn't love me because she's confused.

But if she could love...it would be me.

I understand.

No one else on this planet can.

The printer woman comes under the table where I'm still searching and takes her top off. She grabs my hand and puts it on her breast.

I hesitate a second then squeeze.

Then we're flipped over and fucking again.

She's flat on the floor, her breasts squashed into the wood as I push and push...

In her hand is that magazine...

She can't see me, but she's holding it up behind her, trying to show it to me...

'This is different,' she says.

'No, it's not,' I say. 'It's a piece of shit.'

'There's a piece...there's a piece about depression...'

'No there isn't.'

'Yes...'

'It's a lie.'

'No, it's...'

'You're a liar.'

'I'm not...'

'You don't know anything.'

And then she's gone and I'm back in the apartment writing into my notepad like a madman:

*Potentialism.*

*Potentialism.*

*Potentialism.*

It is night and I'm sitting outside by the wire monster.

Another hundred posters are in my hand, with new phrases and tenets of *Potentialism* and *Cassavetesism*, written in bolder type.

Bold type works.

People don't like faint words.

They don't listen to them.

Bold attracts.

If she sees I've written in bold she'll have some respect.

I check the entrance but she's not there.

Because she's waiting for me.

She's waiting for me to prove it to her.

We both know I've got a theory, but she's not sure I've got the answer. And she needs to wait a while longer, just a little while...until other people read what I've got to say and say back to me, 'yes, that's it, that's the answer.'

And then she'll be happy.

Then this place won't just be a couch and an apartment and a shitty wire monster anymore...it'll be a castle, a palace that's never dull...with a prince who's doing things.

A doormat who's doing things.

Fuck.

I check the entrance and the bitch still isn't there.

I'm putting one of the dolls onto the couch and opening its legs slightly.

I'm pulling apart a jumper and using the thread as fake hair.

I'm taking shorts from another doll I bought from somewhere else, and I'm putting them on the doll.

I'm sitting on the floor near the doll.

I'm stroking its fake hair.

I'm touching its slightly open leg.

I'm beside it.

I'm lying on top of it and crying into its stupid fake chest.

I take my notes to the library and sit down to read them.

I mutter the words out loud, even though they're all in bold on the page.

***'To live in constant challenge...'***

The girl next to me tilts her head to listen, but doesn't look directly at me.

If I look at her from the corner of my eye then it could be her.

I read a little more.

***'To give your life purpose...to avoid that final act...you must frustrate yourself.'***

She looks directly at me and smiles.

Then we're in the toilets, our hands all over each other.

But it's not her.

She's not Korean enough, and she's not pretty enough.

I pat her on the head and tell her I can't.

Then I'm back in my seat, reading to another.

***'To live in constant challenge...'***

And it's a girl again, a pretty girl...

But it's not her.

And she's not looking at me anyway, so I stand up and look for another seat.

This time I sit next to a man.

He's foreign and looks strangely out of place.

I mean, it's summer and he's wearing a scarf.

And I read a little more softly, aware he's listening:

*'To live in constant challenge...'*

And when I'm done he talks to me.

He tells me there's some truth to what I say, but it's underdeveloped.

'What do you mean?'

He tightens his scarf.

'I mean, it sounds like something you wrote in one night.'

'And?'

He loosens his scarf.

'And...young man, you cannot write a theory in one night. It's impossible.'

'It wasn't one night.'

'I was speaking figuratively.'

Figuratively? Like metaphor...?

So he doesn't mean regular time? Not one night, but longer...

But he said one night.

'But you said one night?'

He tightens his scarf.

'I said one night, yes, but I was speaking figuratively. Mark it, the common image of abrupt inspiration, the writer spilling his thoughts out by candlelight. It's common, but it's a figuration. A tenet of duration, Bergson's theory.'

Fuck, duration.

I remember that.

I don't know that.

Fuck.

'So...what?'

He loosens his scarf.

‘Perhaps you should develop your ideas more...then present them.’

‘No.’

‘It’s your choice of course...’

‘The idea’s ready.’

He tightens his scarf.

‘Is it?’

I look him in the eye.

‘Sorry, who are you exactly?’

‘I’m Deleuze.’

Shit...

‘Gilles Deleuze.’

We’re walking towards the philosophy section of the library and I’m explaining to him that he’s dead.

He says he knows.

We reach the ‘D’ part of the cultural theory shelf and I pull out his book. There’s only one there.

‘Only one?’ he asks.

‘Yeah.’

He looks at his book and the fancy cover they’ve given him.

‘It looks like shit.’

‘It’s what they do,’ I say back.

He loosens his scarf and puts the book behind it, and it disappears down into his body.

‘This doesn’t change what I said...’

‘About my theory?’

He doesn’t answer.

‘About my theory?’

He picks up another book and laughs. On the cover is a picture of Žižek smoking a cigarette.

‘This is what it takes, is it?’

‘He doesn’t even smoke,’ I say.

He puts the book into his body.

‘Let’s go.’

‘Where?’

But he’s already gone.

I'm walking behind Deleuze out of the library and onto the tram.  
We sit down and he tells me he never liked Guatarri.

'Who?'

'The guy...the guy who rode me all those years.'

'The other guy?'

'Yes, him. They said we had discussions, that we developed ideas...' He tightened his scarf. 'I had the discussion, I developed the ideas...he sat there smoking into a tape recorder. Fraud.'

'Oh...'

The tram gets to one of the large buildings in Central and we get off and Deleuze leads the way again.

He keeps turning back and telling me to follow.

And I try.

But he's fast.

We hit the escalator and he's even faster.

There are lots of them too.

And after each one I lose a little ground.

'Hey...'

I try to call him back, but he doesn't hear.

And then he's gone.

I'm in a huge bar with a stage and a guy speaking into the microphone.

But he's not singing.

He's talking philosophy.

Something about 'Migratory Identity.'

I look at the table in front of me and see the notes.

*'Potentialism'*

And I know I'm going to read.

I look around the huge bar.

Is she watching?

The guy finishes on stage and everyone looks to me.

They know I'm next.

Is there a list?

Have they advertised me?

Fuck, I can't...  
I pick up my notes, leaving sweat stains on the paper.  
'Come on, Oli...' says the manager from the stage.  
I hold up a hand.  
If she's not watching then...  
This doesn't have to happen.  
I don't have to do this.  
Underground is better.  
Art and ideas should just appear, not be presented.  
I look at the huge bar.  
At all those stupid fucking faces.  
Fuck...  
Do it, Oli.  
For fuck's sake, ideas should be launched at people.  
Do it.  
Stand up and fucking do it.  
I stand up and pick up my notes and sprint to the stage.  
I'm sweating...  
There's a glass of water on a table nearby so I pick it up and pour  
it over myself.  
I don't care.  
I return to the mic and start shouting into it.

## **'TO LIVE IN CONSTANT CHALLENGE...'**

And then I'm back at the apartment and there's a book in my  
hand.  
I'm reading a line over and over:

*'No one ever killed themselves for the ontological argument.'*

She's on the couch, staring at me.  
I keep reading, and while I'm reading I'm thinking about that line.  
The ontological argument...  
I know it.  
The being of God.  
He can't be if there was nothing before him?

Why does she need to hear this?

Is she bored?

She looks bored.

That stare is hard to read.

She's not bored.

She's alert.

I stop reading and turn on the TV. They're showing my performance from the huge bar on the news.

I'm pouring water over my head and then I'm shouting.

It sounds awkward.

Then it sounds violent.

'This is a repeat,' she says, yawning.

Yes, they played it before.

I put it on an hour ago.

Doesn't she know that's me performing?'

'Yeah.'

She puts her hand on my arm and strokes the hairs.

'Reading books makes me depressed.'

'That's why I'm reading to you...'

She stops stroking and stands up.

'Watching the news makes me depressed.'

I pick up the remote and turn it off.

'Making those dolls makes me depressed.'

I pick up one of the last dolls off the floor and throw it across the room.

She stretches her arms out. The rope is back round her neck.

'My arms are too long. It's depressing.'

'No...'

'I'm sick of controlling my body.'

'Lie back down...'

'I'm sick...'

'No...'

'I'm tired...'

She walks out of the apartment.

'Wait...'

I chase her outside and around the corridor of the eighth floor.

She doesn't stop.

Just like Deleuze, she's faster than me.

I see the rope disappear down the stairwell to the seventh floor and I follow it down.

She's not there.

I look over the balcony wall and see her on the fifth floor.

What the fuck?

I run down another two floors and then another one as I figure she won't be on the fifth floor anymore, but as I reach the fourth floor I look up and see she's still on the fifth.

She's pulling herself over the edge.

I run back up the stairs and into the corridor.

She's almost over.

I sprint with my feet not seeming to even touch the ground, and leap over the side and swing over using some rope I didn't know I had.

I catch her in time.

She tries to bite my hand and tells me to let go, but I don't.

I pull her back over the side and put both arms around her.

'There's a way past this,' I say.

'I'm okay now,' she says back.

'I understand why...really.'

'I'm sorry.'

She stands up and I keep my hand close in case she tries it again.

'Really, I'm okay.'

No you're not.

You'll do it again.

I'm not saving her.

I know this isn't saving her, and I need to explain that to her.

She has to understand that I know catching her like that is not saving her.

I'm walking with her back up to the eighth floor and as I turn to focus on the last step, she disappears.

I run to the balcony wall and look over the edge, but she hasn't jumped.

I don't know where to look.

A different method, maybe?  
I run to the apartment and there she is, in the living room, hanging  
from the light with that dirty piece of shitty rope.  
I grab her feet and push up into her waist.  
But the rope is still tight.  
I can't cut it.  
What do I do?  
What the fuck do I do here?  
Can't she see this is wrong?  
She's leaving me behind.  
She's leaving me back to think about this.  
I love her.  
I can make her feel loved almost every day of her life.  
I can't.  
I'll get bored.  
It's temporary madness.  
She knows I'll get bored.  
The whole world gets bored and everything gets boring.  
She doesn't consider me one bit.  
I stand beneath her holding her steady until morning.  
She doesn't feel heavy.  
'I must be heavy,' she says.  
'No...'  
'There's probably a better way.'  
'I'm not letting go.'  
I don't know if she nods or shrugs, but she cuts herself down.  
'I'm sorry,' she says.  
No you're not.  
'I won't do it again.'  
She goes back to the couch and I sit down on the floor next to  
her.

I wake up sitting on the floor beside the couch.  
As soon as I'm aware of things, I know she's gone.  
I don't even have to look.

I search the estate for her body.

She'll be on the ground by the wire monster.  
But when I check, she isn't.  
Then she'll be hanging in one of the apartments.  
But I check them all, and she isn't.  
I even check the printers again, and start to bite the woman under  
the table, but she's not there.  
I go further into the city and check the roads and the pavements  
and the hotels and the parks, but she's not there.  
I go to Cheng Chau, the island of charcoal death, and search the  
holiday rooms.  
She's not there.  
She's not anywhere.

I'm sitting in a café on the fourth floor of a back alley building in  
Mong Kok, and I'm reading the newspaper.  
The international news is at the back.  
I don't want to read it.  
I know what it says.  
I read it.

**'KOREAN MODEL FOUND DEAD IN PARIS APARTMENT'**

She went back to Paris.  
Well what the fuck did she do that for?  
Didn't I tell her I understood?  
And I fucking proved it.  
I was soaking wet reading philosophy.  
I put posters up on signposts.  
I sabotaged myself.  
Doesn't that mean something?  
I read a little more:

'It is unknown what provoked the apparent suicide, but according to  
friends, she had been depressed for a while.'

I drink some of the coffee in front of me and the taste of it makes  
me think back to all the coffees I've had before, and all the coffees

she had, and how from this point onwards every coffee I have will be one more than she'll have, and even before this, I had drunk more coffees than her anyway.

And there will be others.

I don't drink any more of the coffee.

I get up and walk out the door and without taking the elevator I'm on the ground floor and in the alley.

I look around.

I don't know where to go.

