

Bricolage

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Preface

Two novels published in the past few years have inspired this small experiment.

First, I was intrigued by the manner in which George Saunders incorporated passages quoted from other texts into *Lincoln in the Bardo* (Bloomsbury, 2017). They provided background context to the central narrative. They also raised a question, through their multiple, often contradictory voices, regarding to what extent history is itself a fiction.

The other novel was Jeremy Gavron's *Felix Culpa* (Scribe, 2018), the entire narrative of which is composed of a patchwork of fragments stitched together from other texts. The novel as bricolage.

In both cases, quoted passages from different sources follow one after the other. There is no additional commentary. They are creative exercises in curation. Yet they also speak to the notion, in which I strongly believe, that books converse with one another – across time and space.

I am indebted to all the writers quoted in the following pages.

Woven

In connecting the dots, traversing the gaps between fragments and stitching them together – a meaningful whole emerges.

— Nick Sousanis, *Unflattening*

The association between weaving and writing, between thread and text, between seamstress and artist, is a constant in the history of literature and art.

— Jorge Carrión, *Bookshops*

weaving is itself a model for storytelling's integration of parts and materials into a new whole; it is a technology that creates containers and models complexity.

— Rebecca Solnit, *Whose Story Is This?*

It is no coincidence that our terms for fibre and fable intertwine. When we want to recount a story, we spin a yarn. If we deceive, we pull the wool over people's eyes.

— Esther Rutter, *'Making'*

A meandering line sutures together the world in some new way, as though walking was sewing and sewing was telling a story and that story was your life.

— Rebecca Solnit, *The Faraway Nearby*

I passed my workdays making sense of the world for others, taking up fragments of sensation and information and piecing them together, stitching quilts from leftovers and rag-ends of the world's fabric.

— James Sallis, *Others of My Kind*

A thread now most often means a line of conversation via e-mail or other electronic means, but thread must have been an even more compelling metaphor when most people witnessed or did the women's work that is spinning. It is a mesmerising art, the spindle revolving below the strong thread that the fingers twist out of the mass of fiber held on an arm or a distaff. The gesture turns the cloudy mass of fiber into lines with which the world can be tied together. Likewise the spinning wheel turns, cyclical time revolving to draw out the linear time of a thread. The verb to spin first meant just this act of making, then evolved to mean anything turning rapidly, and then it came to mean telling a tale.

— Rebecca Solnit, *The Faraway Nearby*

Women who spin, weave and knit are legend, from Homer's Penelope, unravelling and reweaving a shroud as she waits for Odysseus's return, to mythic Ariadne, saving Theseus in the Cretan labyrinth with her ball of yarn. In Greek mythology, the three Fates, the Moirai, hold the mother thread of life – Clotho spins it, her sister Lachesis measures it, and Atropos clips it short. In Norse mythology, the Norns, goddesses wielding shears and spindles, do likewise.

— *Esther Rutter, 'Making'*

The world is made up of facts, he says in his book, facts that are atoms, the smallest unit into which spoken reality can be divided. Language weaves meaning together like an invisible needle, linking these facts by means of the thread of its logic.

— *Luis Sagasti, Fireflies*

The world is a fabric we weave daily on the great looms of information, discussions, films, books, gossip, little anecdotes.

— *Olga Tokarczuk, Nobel Lecture*

Every history has more than one thread, each thread a story of division.

— *Ocean Vuong, On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*

Coupled, their interplay and overlap facilitate the emergence of new perspectives. Actively interweaving multiple strands of thought creates common ground. A richly dimensional tapestry from which to confront and take differences into account, and allow the complex to remain complex.

— *Nick Sousanis, Unflattening*

Tantra is the practice of extending, of stretching to make connections, of creating something from those connections. Tantra is the weaving of multiple threads and the extrication of one part from the whole.

— *Nisha Ramayya, States of the Body Produced by Love*

Stories are not only a sequence of things that happen, they are also – or they can be – *patterns* as well. The shape of a story-line can weave in and out in a shape that is attractive in an abstract way, which is aesthetically pleasing no matter what it means.

— *Philip Pullman, Dæmon Voices*

Woven

Like Ariadne's thread allowing Theseus to journey into—and safely out of—the mythical labyrinth, a story means to lead the reader somewhere.

— *Peter Turchi, A Muse and A Maze*

To spin a yarn. To tell a story. You take something amorphous and lumpy and you order it. You twist it into something with a purpose.

— *Nell Stevens, Bleaker House*

a truth that is built, like all human truths, on a story woven of wishes, possibilities, and lies.

— *Michael Chabon, Manhood for Amateurs*

I think of threads as parts that frame, as repetitions that enable memory, destruction and recreation, as continuities that loop and accrue meaning. Threads are moving bodies and the movements themselves, narratives and the processes of narrating.

— *Nisha Ramayya, 'Threads'*

The reader is Theseus in the labyrinth, unspooling thread in order to find his way out of what he's getting himself into.

— *Peter Turchi, A Muse and A Maze*

Theseus must use the 'clewe of twyne' that Ariadne gives him. The word 'clewe' derives from Old English cliwen or cleowen, meaning a rounded mass, or a ball of thread. Eventually it became our word 'clue'. It lost its material significance, and retained only its metaphorical meaning. But still, there it is, hidden but present: the clewe is in the clue (and the clue is in the clewe). Every step towards solving a mystery, or a crime, or a puzzle, or the riddle of the self, is a length of yarn tossed us by the helping hand of Ariadne.

— *Charlotte Higgins, Red Thread*

A labyrinth is an ancient device that compresses a journey into a small space, winds up a path like a thread on a spool. It contains beginning, confusion, perseverance, arrival, and return. There at last the metaphysical journey of your life and your actual movements are one and the same.

— *Rebecca Solnit, The Faraway Nearby*

The labyrinth is about power and powerlessness, mastery and terror; it is also a coiled line, a thread, a narrative, a fabrication, a fiction.

— *Charlotte Higgins, Red Thread*

In this folding up of great distances to small space, the labyrinth resembles two other manmade things: a spool of thread and the words and lines and pages of a book.

— *Rebecca Solnit, The Faraway Nearby*

The scene that we weave and pull apart together is learned by heart, it dwells in memory; not simply a context, or an event, or an image, but a frame, a programme, a system of relationships and repetitions. In other words, the scene is not simply that which is created, but that which creates; not simply a part of a whole, but a part that comprises a whole.

— *Nisha Ramayya, 'Threads'*

its recalling an understanding of pattern instead of a wound, something woven into me, a part of that composite I had become which was a fraction of what I might have been

— *Jessie Greengrass, Sight*

The web and the labyrinth are first cousins among metaphors. A woven web (whose threads can resemble a labyrinth) is made with the same skill, Minerva's skill, required of the architect of intricate buildings, or poems.

— *Charlotte Higgins, Red Thread*

for all the other buildings and creatures, all the waves, ships and forests of the earth were contained in this tapestry, and the tapestry was the world.

— *Thomas Pynchon, The Crying of Lot 49*

Reading as creation

This is part empathy, part thievery. Empathy, in art, is art's part-exchange with us, its inclusivity, at once a kind-ness, a going beyond the self, and a pickpocketing of our responses, which is why giving and taking are bound up with the goods, with the gods, with respect, with deep-seated understanding about the complex cultural place where kindness, thievery, bartering and gift-giving all meet, make their exchanges, and by exchange reveal real worth.

— *Ali Smith, Artful*

I was reminded of a question a student once asked me: 'When does a work of art happen?' Firstly, in the moment of its production – in the mind, then studio, then display, when its constituent parts lock into context. Secondly, when the art meets its audience and gaps, productive or otherwise, between the creative intent and its reception emerge.

— *Dan Fox, Limbo*

no act of reading can ever be passive.

— *Jonathan Basile, Tar for Mortar*

Every reader writes the book he or she reads, supplying what isn't there, and that creative invention becomes the book.

— *Siri Hustvedt, A Plea for Eros*

The meaning is what emerges from the interaction between the words I put on the page and the readers' own minds as they read them.

— *Philip Pullman, Dæmon Voices*

What we give the reader is a raw code, a rough pattern, loose architectural plans that they use to build the book themselves. No two readers can or will ever read the same book, because the reader builds the book in collaboration with the author.

— *Neil Gaiman, The View from the Cheap Seats*

the reader's imagination automatically completes the writer's.

— *Milan Kundera, The Art of the Novel*

But imagination is not and never has been optional: it is at the heart of everything, the thing that allows us to experience the world from the perspectives of others: the

condition precedent of love itself.

— *Katherine Rundell, Why You Should Read Children's Books, Even Though You Are So Old and Wise*

The novels I like best, if we're going to get individual, are the ones that invite, or demand, that their reader take part in their making, be present in them, be creative in response to them, and in being part, be the opposite of excluded, be active, be alive to them and them in turn alive to the reader.

— *Ali Smith, 'The Novel in the Age of Trump'*

We write and we read in order to hold another human being close.

— *Anne Michaels, Infinite Gradation*

The writer does not know for whom she writes. The reader's face is invisible, and yet, every sentence inscribed on a page represents a bid for contact and a hope for understanding.

— *Siri Hustvedt, Living, Thinking, Looking*

Perhaps the ultimate blank is the space between the reader and writer – or, more accurately, the space between the story we create and send out to the world and the story each reader perceives.

— *Peter Turchi, Maps of the Imagination*

And this ideal reader may prove to be anyone at all – any *one* at all – because the act of reading is just as singular – always – as the act of writing.

— *Margaret Atwood, On Writers and Writing*

Meanings are for the reader to find, not for the storyteller to impose. The sort of story we all hope we can write is one that will resonate like a musical note with all kinds of overtones and harmonics, some of which will be heard more clearly by this person's ears, others by that one's; and some of which may not be heard at all by the storyteller. What's more, as the listeners grow older, so some of the overtones will fade while others become more clearly audible.

— *Philip Pullman, Dæmon Voices*

But if stories are one of the ways we make sense of the world, they are also how we experience whatever doesn't make sense, whatever cannot be fully understood. Stories are how we stand in the presence of mystery. If mystery, the genre, is about finding the

answers, then mystery, that elusive yet essential element of fiction, is about finding the questions.

— *Maud Casey, The Art of Mystery*

I know from writing lyrics that some details—names, places, locations—are desirable; they anchor the piece in the real world. But so are ambiguities. By letting the listener or viewer fill in the blanks, complete the picture (or piece of music), the work becomes personalised and the audience can adapt it to their own lives and situations.

— *David Byrne, How Music Works*

A work of art, therefore, is a complete and closed form in its uniqueness as a balanced organic whole, while at the same time constituting an open product on account of its susceptibility to countless different interpretations which do not impinge on its unadulterable specificity. Hence, every reception of a work of art is both an *interpretation* and a *performance* of it, because in every reception the work takes on a fresh perspective for itself.

— *Umberto Eco, The Open Work*

That's the thing about books. They're alive on their own terms. Reading is like travelling with an argumentative, unpredictable good friend. It's an endless open exchange.

— *Ali Smith, The Book Lover*

Composing's one thing, performing's another, listening's a third. What can they have to do with one another?

— *John Cage, Silence*

The purpose of a story or poem, unlike that of a diary, is not to record our experience but to create a context for, and to lead the reader on, a journey.

— *Peter Turchi, Maps of the Imagination*

Which means that a place is a story, and stories are geography, and empathy is first of all an act of imagination, a storyteller's art, and then a way of traveling from here to there.

— *Rebecca Solnit, The Faraway Nearby*

Journeys start in ignorance

— *Glyn Maxwell, On Poetry*

the urge to fill blank spaces is fundamental to the quest for knowledge.

— *Peter Turchi, Maps of the Imagination*

All maps are the product of human imagination. They are scripts of thought and reasoning and embody all manner of storytelling; each line, shape and symbol has a purpose, a value, a direction and a significance for those who create the maps and for all who interpret them.

— *Huw Lewis-Jones, The Writer's Map*

Trust the art, not the artist; trust the tale, not the teller. The art remembers, the artist forgets.

— *Julian Barnes, Keeping An Eye Open*

Bit by bit, discoveries reconfigure our understanding of reality. This reality is revealed to us only in fragments. The more fragments we perceive and parse, the more lifelike the mosaic we make of them. But it is still a mosaic, a representation—imperfect and incomplete, however beautiful it may be, and subject to unending transfiguration.

— *Maria Popova, Figuring*

I am simply converting the things I have consumed – food, yes, but more importantly the stories I have read, dreams I've had, people I've met and conversations I've overheard – into a different form.

— *Nell Stevens, Bleaker House*

The place of reading is a kind of yonder world, a place that is neither here nor there but made up of bits and pieces of experience in every sense, both real and fictional, two categories that become harder to separate the more you think about them.

— *Siri Hustvedt, A Plea for Eros*

The object we call a book is not the real book, but its potential, like a musical score or seed. It exists fully only in the act of being read; and its real home is inside the head of the reader, where the symphony resounds, the seed germinates.

— *Rebecca Solnit, The Faraway Nearby*

Art is always an exchange, like love, whose giving and taking can be a complex and wounding matter

— *Ali Smith, Artful*

Reading as creation

its fragmentation forces the viewer to engage in the construction of meaning, thus fulfilling the promise of every modernist work to make the audience an active participant.

— *Jan-Christopher Horak, Saul Bass*

Legacy

Seeds lead us just as much into what came before as into what comes next.

— *Nora Bateson, Small Arcs of Larger Circles*

Those who have preceded have left a rich heritage upon which to build the future. From the various cultures, lessons will be learned and incorporated with the ideas of our ancestors.

— *Jonas Salk, 'Are We Being Good Ancestors?'*

Nothing makes sense without reference to what went before, and what comes afterwards.

— *James Rebanks, A Shepherd's Life*

There's no completion in patterns,
For patterns are constantly restitched in new patterns.
There's no completion in history, which kneels
bare and mute at the feet of the future.

— *Alan Lightman, Song of Two Worlds*

In this way traditions are kept alive as new thoughts are added. The effect upon the old and the new is then not "either/or" but rather "both/and".

— *Jonas Salk, 'Are We Being Good Ancestors?'*

It stands for human life, our connection to our past, our present and our future.

— *James Kerr, Legacy*

What legacies will we leave behind, not only for the generations that succeed us but also for the epochs and species that will come after ours? Are we being good ancestors...?

— *Robert Macfarlane, Underland*

If we want to be good ancestors, we should show future generations how we coped with an age of great change and great crises.

— *Jonas Salk, 'Are We Being Good Ancestors?'*

Legacy

We have an obligation to make things beautiful, to not leave the world uglier than we found it. An obligation not to empty the oceans, not to leave our problems for the next generation. We have an obligation to clean up after ourselves, and not to leave our children with a world we've shortsightedly messed up, shortchanged and crippled.

— *Neil Gaiman, The View from the Cheap Seats*

What is a legacy? I'll never get to see.

— *Emma Sedlak, What Slight Gaps Remain*

There are never bricks to put in place from which to see everything, only stepping stones towards what's next.

— *Nick Sousanis, Unflattening*

what mattered was not the past at all: it was the future. One must keep moving, creating what will be: acting in the world and making a difference to it.

— *Sarah Bakewell, At the Existentialist Café*

No matter the self-conceited importance of our labours we are all compost for worlds we cannot yet imagine.

— *David Whyte, Consolations*

It is cathedral philosophy, the thinking behind the people who designed and built the great cathedrals, knowing that they would never live long enough to see them finished.

— *Charles Handy, The Empty Raincoat*

Cathedrals were created as compelling statements of a complete theory of life: of our deepest needs, our spiritual destiny and the guidance necessary to live the right life. The religious project may have lost its allure, but we should hold on to the scale and sincerity of its intent.

— *Alain de Botton & John Armstrong, Art as Therapy*

When the cathedrals you build are invisible, made of perspectives and ideas, you forget that you are inside them and that the ideas they consist of were, in fact, made, constructed by people who analyzed and argued and shifted our assumptions. They are the fruit of labor. Forgetting means a failure to recognize the power of the process and the fluidity of meanings and values.

— *Rebecca Solnit, Whose Story Is This?*

Legacy

But it is still not too late to act. It will take a far-reaching vision. It will take courage. It will take fierce determination to act now, to lay the foundations when we may not know all the details about how to shape the ceiling. In other words, it will take cathedral thinking.

— *Greta Thunberg, No One is Too Small to Make a Difference*

this legacy, eager to be given, yet no one wanting to carry its burden

— *Hanif Willis-Abdurraqib, The Crown Ain't Worth Much*

True leaders are stewards of the future. They take responsibility for adding to the legacy.

— *James Kerr, Legacy*

If we are to be ancestors to such a future world, we will be seen as wise forebears. If not, we will be seen as prodigal forebears who, at a decisive moment, dissipated an opportunity by not assuming responsibility for the future evolution of our species.

— *Jonas Salk, 'Are We Being Good Ancestors?'*

I want to get away from the kinship structures that are supposed to hold me together. To mess up the story I have been told about myself. To hold the story upside down by its tail.

— *Deborah Levy, Hot Milk*

Our time is limited. Understanding the fragility of life is the first step in understanding our role and responsibility as a leader. Our greatest responsibility is to honour those who came before us and those who will come after, to 'leave the jersey in a better place'. We are the stewards of our organisations, the caretakers of our own lineage. Our actions today will echo beyond our time. They are our legacy. *Manaaki Whenua, Manaaki Tangata, Haere whakamua*. Care for the land, Care for the people, Go forward.

— *James Kerr, Legacy*

To have a home is to have a biography. A narrative to refer to in years to come.

— *Deborah Levy, Swallowing Geography*

All that remains is legacy.

— *Lauren Elkin, Flâneuse*

Illumination

A candle is enough to light the world.

— *Wallace Stevens, 'The Man with the Blue Guitar'*

One brand takes fire from another, until it is consumed,
a flame's kindled by flame;
one man becomes clever by talking with another,
but foolish through being reserved.

— *The Poetic Edda, translated by Carolyne Larrington*

If thou hast knowledge, let others light their candle at thine.

— *Thomas Fuller, Introductio Ad Prudentiam, Part II, Moral no. 1784*

He who receives an idea from me, receives instruction himself without lessening mine; as he who lights his taper at mine, receives light without darkening me. That ideas should freely spread from one to another over the globe, for the moral and mutual instruction of man, and improvement of his condition, seems to have been peculiarly and benevolently designed by nature, when she made them, like fire, expansible over all space, without lessening their density in any point, and like the air in which we breathe, move, and have our physical being, incapable of confinement or exclusive appropriation.

— *Thomas Jefferson, Letter to Isaac McPherson, 13 August 1813*

Everyone, after all, goes the same dark road—and the road has a trick of being most dark, most treacherous, when it seems most bright—and it's true that nobody stays in the garden of Eden.

— *James Baldwin, Giovanni's Room*

What is the meaning of life? That was all—a simple question; one that tended to close in on one with years. The great revelation had never come. Instead there were little daily miracles, illuminations, matches struck unexpectedly in the dark; here was one.

— *Virginia Woolf, To the Lighthouse*

But cloud instead, and ever-during dark
Surrounds me, from the cheerful ways of men
Cut off, and for the book of knowledge fair

Presented with a universal blank
Of nature's works to me expunged and razed,
And wisdom at one entrance quite shut out.
So much the rather thou celestial light
Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers
Irradiate, there plant eyes, all mist from thence
Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell
Of things invisible to mortal sight.

— *John Milton, Paradise Lost*

The quality that we call beauty, however, must grow from the realities of life, and our ancestors, forced to live in dark rooms, presently came to discover beauty in shadows, ultimately to guide shadows towards beauty's ends.

— *Junichirō Tanizaki, In Praise of Shadows*

How simultaneously freeing and paralyzing to untether the moorings of the previously unquestioned Known.

— *Sergio De La Pava, A Naked Singularity*

what is unknown is always more attractive than what is known; hope and imagination are the only consolations for the disappointments and sorrows of experience.

— *Italo Calvino, Six Memos for the Next Millennium*

Admitting that we don't know allows us to learn. The darkness of Not Knowing creates freedom and space for new sources of illumination.

— *Steven D'Souza & Diana Renner, Not Knowing*

the realisation of my childlike illusion that in studying a work of art I would be following a detective trail that might lead to some ultimate illumination.

— *Michael Jacobs, Everything is Happening*

In self-consciousness lies the root of our ability to reflect on ourselves, on the shortness of our lives, on the profound mystery and the absolute beauty of the physical universe. And the Fall didn't take place just once, six thousand years ago, or thirty or forty or fifty thousand years ago when the first human beings thought about death and life and who they were, and made patterns and marks and images to register this thinking – the Fall happens in every human life, at adolescence. We leave the unselfconscious grace of childhood behind and take our first faltering steps through the complexity and mire of

Illumination

life towards whatever we can reach of wisdom, which it is our job to increase and pass on. If there was no purpose in evolution, there is a purpose in our individual lives, and that is it.

— *Philip Pullman, Dæmon Voices*

This new source of illumination, what Francis Bacon called “the torch of analysis,” inspired a quest for reason – to discover answers to “Why?” and “How?” and dispel fear of the unknown. Its penetrating light pierced depths previously beyond our grasp, as nature was itself cleaved into separate elements and its underlying mechanism laid bare.

— *Nick Sousanis, Unflattening*

Suppose knowledge could be reduced to a quintessence, held within a picture, a sign, held within a place which is no place.

— *Hilary Mantel, Wolf Hall*

Because I can no longer raise
the questions,
because I cannot support
truth or its widower’s eyes,
now I will be flame,
the young man says.

— *James Sallis, ‘Memory’s Empire’*

why should we want to know everything? Imagine how sad it would be if, one day, we arrived at the end of knowledge. With no more questions to ask, our creativity would be stifled, our fire within extinguished.

— *Marcelo Gleiser, The Simple Beauty of the Unexpected*

A candle only burns once, and always downwards.

— *Benjamin Meyers, The Gallows Pole*

All nature is a fire: everything forms, everything blossoms, everything fades. We are slow clouds...

— *Margaret Atwood, Hag-Seed*

To look into those dark spaces was to have a direct glimpse of the future.

— *Teju Cole, Open City*

Illumination

The knowledge flickered with promise like a mirage, but it still trembled just out of her reach.

— *Philip Pullman, The Secret Commonwealth*

Time capture

Where shall I start? How do we begin a conversation? We would have to move around in time, the past the present and the future, but we are lost in all of them.

— *Deborah Levy, Hot Milk*

People need foundation myths, some imprint of year zero, a bolt that secures the scaffolding that in turn holds fast the entire architecture of reality, of time: memory-chambers and oblivion-cellars, walls between eras, hallways that sweep us on towards the end-days and the coming whatever-it-is.

— *Tom McCarthy, Satin Island*

For him everything happened in the present. Hopi Mean Time, a friend once called it.

— *James Sallis, Eye of the Cricket*

The minute the “now” is apprehended, it has already passed.

— *Douglas Rushkoff, Present Shock*

Now, in this moment, I feel that vertiginous thrill course through me. As I step recklessly into time I have not yet lived, into this book I have not yet written.

— *Han Kang, The White Book*

And if I can't go back, can I flatten time so it does not slide into memory, so I can see it all in the same instant, laid out like a map?

— *Joanna Walsh, Break.up*

Time present and time past

Are both perhaps present in time future,

And time future contained in time past.

If all time is eternally present

All time is unredeemable.

— *T. S. Eliot, Four Quartets*

The rules of time travel have been written not by scientists but by storytellers.

— *James Gleick, Time Travel*

Time capture

Time became fluid, a fast flow of recollections seeping into one another, the past and present inseparable.

— *Elif Shafak, 10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World*

Time is the substance I am made of. Time is a river which sweeps me along, but I am the river; it is a tiger which destroys me, but I am the tiger; it is a fire which consumes me, but I am the fire.

— *Jorge Luis Borges, 'A New Refutation of Time'*

So emotion, fear, age, isolation, body temperature and rejection can all affect our perception of the speed of time, as does concentration, or 'attention'

— *Claudia Hammond, Time Warped*

I've come to believe that all the arts are about time, but that the novel in particular is about the and-so-on of things, continuance and continuity, the continuum.

— *Ali Smith, 'The Novel in the Age of Trump'*

However, a dance, a poem, a piece of music (any of the time arts) occupies a length of time, and the manner in which this length of time is divided first into large parts and then into phrases (or built up from phrases to form eventual larger parts) is the work's very life structure.

— *John Cage, Silence*

Narration – storytelling – is the relation of events unfolding through time.

— *Margaret Atwood, On Writers and Writing*

Collage is an institute of education where all the rules can be thrown into the air, and size and space and time and foreground and background all become relative, and because of these skills everything you think you know gets made into something new and strange.

— *Ali Smith, Autumn*

Move on. Out. Into. Back. Forward. Why can't you just be a memory with the rest. Bottled. Hooded. Closed sequence.

— *Ann Quin, 'Ghostworm'*

We're well past the end of the century when time, for the first time, curved, bent, slipped, flashforwarded and flashbacked yet still kept on rolling along. We know it all

Time capture

now, with our thoughts travelling at the speed of tweet, our 140 characters in search of a paragraph. We're post-history. We're post-mystery.

— *Ali Smith, Artful*

The past is no insubstantial, thready thing, sunlight slanting through shutters into cool rooms, pools and standards of mist adrift at roadside, memories that flutter from our hands the instant we open them. Rather is it all too substantial, bluntly physical, like a boulder or cement block growing ever denser, ever larger, there behind us, displacing and pushing us forward.

— *James Sallis, Eye of the Cricket*

who had stopped time by making pictures of the movings of the world.

— *Helen Macdonald, H is for Hawk*

Nowadays we voyage through time so easily and so well, in our dreams and in our art.

— *James Gleick, Time Travel*

Stories have always manifested a twofold nature, deriving their impact and pleasure in part from the difference between the chronology of the story to be told and the ordering and presentation of that chronology.

— *Michael Chabon, Maps and Legends*

The only things which the mind cannot examine are memories of the future.

— *Han Kang, The White Book*

& time to them is not deep, not deep at all, for time is only ever overlapping tumbling versions of the now.

— *Robert Macfarlane & Stanley Donwood, Ness*

You can't, it seems, take the slightest interest in the activity of writing, unless you possess some feeling of futurity. The act of describing would involve some notion of the passage of time. Narrating would imply at least a hint of 'and then' and 'after that'.

— *Denise Riley, Time Lived, Without Its Flow*

Maybe this will be the way it goes, from now. Every few months fresh knowledge of the past, of how good it was compared to the present.

— *Megan Hunter, The End We Start From*

Time capture

As always we go on living our lives forward, attempting to understand them backwards.
— *James Sallis, Eye of the Cricket*

Yes, I think that's true: the future is always unwritten. But history and stories are written, and they are written from the balcony of the present, looking out on the electrical storm of the past; that is to say, there is nothing more unstable than the past. The past, in its indeterminacy, presents itself either through the filter of nostalgia or through the filter of preliminary impressions.

— *Elena Ferrante, Frantumaglia*

without time there is no life.

— *Alan Lightman, Einstein's Dreams*

Memory's poetry

In preparing this memoir, I have stuck to facts except when facts refused to conform with memory, narrative purpose, or the truth as I prefer to understand it.

— *Michael Chabon, Moonglow*

None of that's very close to the truth, I suspect; part of it's what my youthful mind made (and wanted to make) of the scaffolding of facts, the rest of it what memory (forever more poet than reporter) has pushed into place.

— *James Sallis, The Long-Legged Fly*

Memory and imagination cannot be separated. Remembering is always a form of imagining.

— *Siri Hustvedt, Living, Thinking, Looking*

Writing creates an artificial memory, whereby humans can enlarge their experience beyond the limits of one generation or one way of life.

— *John Gray, Straw Dogs*

Memory fades, memory adjusts, memory conforms to what we think we remember.

— *Joan Didion, Blue Nights*

Memory showers desire, desire infects memory.

— *Olivia Laing, Crudo*

Memory is cumulative selection.

— *Anne Michaels, 'Miner's Pond'*

Memory would select, arrange, retouch, lie.

— *Pascal Mercier, Night Train to Lisbon*

We are all wishful creatures, and we wish backward, too, not only forward, and thereby rebuild the curious, crumbling architecture of memory into structures that are more habitable.

— *Siri Hustvedt, Memories of the Future*

In memory, time collapses. Time-that-was and time-that-will-be become simply then.

— *James Sallis, Sarah Jane*

This is, of course, exactly how both events and memory of them proceed: associatively, digressing, sliding, jolting, looping.

— *Tom McCarthy, Typewriters, Bombs, Jellyfish*

With nothing but a single memory one can endure a long and tedious existence: repeating day after day, like oxen yoked to the miller's wheel, the pedestrian gestures of everyday life.

— *María Luisa Bombal, 'The Final Mist'*

unsettling to wonder how much of it was merely imagined or improvised; melancholy to realize how much of anyone's memory is no true memory at all but only the traces of someone else's memory, stories handed down on the family network.

— *Joan Didion, Slouching Towards Bethlehem*

But memory is cunning, it completes its sleepless marvellous task in secret, breaking the substance of lived experience into fertile soil for fiction

— *Antonio Muñoz Molina, Like a Fading Shadow*

Memory is repetition. Sure. But it is repetition with a difference. It is not recitation. It is repetition that creates a felt variation in the ways things appear. Repetition is what makes novelty.

— *Simon Critchey, Memory Theatre*

Writing fiction is like remembering what never happened. It mimics memory without being memory.

— *Siri Hustvedt, A Plea for Eros*

half of memory is imagination anyway.

— *Kevin Powers, The Yellow Birds*

Memory, as it happens, is a fairly unreliable search engine. It's fuzzy and utopian, honoring an imagined past over a real one.

— *Jessica Helfand, Design: The Invention of Desire*

man is separated from the past (even from the past only a few seconds old) by two forces that go instantly to work and cooperate: the force of forgetting (which erases) and the force of memory (which transforms).

— *Milan Kundera, The Curtain*

Things don't always change for the better, but they change, and we can play a role in that change if we act. Which is where hope comes in, and memory, the collective memory we call history.

— *Rebecca Solnit, Hope in the Dark*

That's the problem with history, we like to think it's a book—that we can turn the page and move the fuck on. But history isn't the paper it's printed on. It's memory, and memory is time, emotions, and song. History is the things that stay with you.

— *Paul Beatty, The Sellout*

Memory is a tough place. You were there. If this is not the truth, it is also not a lie.

— *Claudia Rankine, Citizen: An American Lyric*

I watch my past recede. My old life still burns within me, but more and more of it is reduced to the ashes of memory.

— *Jean Dominique Bauby, The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*

I note that I've lived longer in the past, now, than I can expect to live in the future. I have more to remember than I have to look forward to. Memory fades, not much of the past stays, and I wouldn't mind forgetting a lot more of it.

— *Denis Johnson, 'The Largesse of the Sea Maiden'*

Bridging poles

Whenever there's an ending, look for the beginning.

— *Amy Arnold, Slip of a Fish*

Factfulness is ... recognizing when a story talks about a gap, and remembering that this paints a picture of two separate groups, with a gap in between. The reality is often not polarized at all. Usually the majority is right there in the middle, where the gap is supposed to be.

— *Hans Rosling, Factfulness*

Polarities to manage are sets of opposites which can't function well independently. Because the two sides of a polarity are interdependent, you cannot choose one as a "solution" and neglect the other.

— *Barry Johnson, Polarity Management*

Nothing exists without duality, simultaneous as a shadow

— *Anne Michaels, Infinite Gradation*

I am a Saturn who dreams of being a Mercury, and everything I write reflects these two impulses.

— *Italo Calvino, Six Memos for the Next Millennium*

My fox/hedgehog model is not a dichotomy. It is a spectrum.

— *Philip Tetlock & Dan Gardner, Superforecasting*

For there exists a great chasm between those, on one side, who relate everything to a single central vision, one system, less or more coherent or articulate, in terms of which they understand, think and feel – a single, universal, organising principle in terms of which alone all that they are and say has significance – and, on the other side, those who pursue many ends, often unrelated and even contradictory, connected, if at all, only in some de facto way, for some psychological or physiological cause, related to no moral or aesthetic principle.

— *Isaiah Berlin, The Hedgehog and the Fox*

It is not either-or, it is both-and, and that is a central part of metamodernity.

— *Lene Rachel Andersen, Metamodernity*

Bridging poles

The place where, inside and out, above and below, yesterday and tomorrow, life and death meet—where they bury their differences and no one takes offense.

— *Gisèle Prassinós, The Arthritic Grasshopper*

There wasn't a single meaning. There were many meanings. It was a riddle expanding out and out and out.

— *Donna Tartt, The Goldfinch*

This is not a matter of arguing so much as of perceiving. It's a matter of vision. And when it comes to vision, we need to be able to see contrary things and believe them both true: 'Without Contraries is no progression' (*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*), despite the scorn of rationalists whose single vision rejects anything that is not logically coherent.

— *Philip Pullman, Dæmon Voices*

The range of human knowledge today is so great that we're all specialists and the distance between specialisations has become so great that anyone who seeks to wander freely among them almost has to forego closeness with the other people around him.

— *Robert Pirsig, Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*

Losing perspective is an intellectual virtue because it requires mourning, confusion, reorientation, and new thoughts. Without it, knowledge slogs along in its various narrow grooves, but there will be no leaps, because the thinner my perspective, the more likely it is for me to accept the preordained codes of a discipline as inviolable truths. A willingness to lose perspective means an openness to others who are guided by a set of unfamiliar propositions.

— *Siri Hustvedt, Living, Thinking, Looking*

Change happens at the boundaries of things: the boundary between the known and the unknown, the familiar and the different, between the old way and the new way, the past and the future.

— *Dave Gray, Liminal Thinking*

The liminal area of one thing, by definition, has to meet the edge of something else even if that's thin air. Limbo suspends bodies and minds in-between.

— *Dan Fox, Limbo*

At the edges of the given patterns, there are liminal zones. The boundaries. This is where interaction takes place. These are the places where the directions of potential pathways

as yet uncharted live.

— *Nora Bateson, Small Arcs of Larger Circles*

In short, trickster is a boundary-crosser. Every group has its edge, its sense of in and out, and trickster is always there, at the gates of the city and the gates of life, making sure there is commerce. He also attends the internal boundaries by which groups articulate their social life. We constantly distinguish—right and wrong, sacred and profane, clean and dirty, male and female, young and old, living and dead—and in every case trickster will cross the line and confuse the distinction. Trickster is the creative idiot, therefore, the wise fool, the grey-haired baby, the cross-dresser, the speaker of sacred profanities. Where someone's sense of honorable behavior has left him unable to act, trickster will appear to suggest an amoral action, something right/wrong that will get life going again. Trickster is the mythic embodiment of ambiguity and ambivalence, doubleness and duplicity, contradiction and paradox.

— *Lewis Hyde, Trickster Makes This World*

He's not just one thing or another. Nobody is. Not even you.

— *Ali Smith, Autumn*

A cross-disciplinary curiosity is vital for originality in any field of creative endeavor. But solving the major unsolved problems in any one discipline requires deep expertise in it, even if the final insight is aided by a wide lens on surrounding fields.

— *Maria Popova, Figuring*

Questions are invitations to conversations in business boardrooms, community groups and in institutions of governance. Questions are ways to build bridges between these different sectors and between different disciplines that compartmentalize our knowledge. Questions – and the conversations they spark – can unleash collective intelligence and help us value multiple perspectives.

— *Daniel Christian Wahl, Designing Regenerative Cultures*

Everyone automatically categorizes and generalizes all the time. Unconsciously. It is not a question of being prejudiced or enlightened. Categories are absolutely necessary for us to function. They give structure to our thoughts.

— *Hans Rosling, Factfulness*

Bridging poles

A gift for embracing paradox is not the least of the equipment an activist should have.

— *Rebecca Solnit, Hope in the Dark*

You gotta think about it the same way as if you want to see it. You got to look at it sideways. Out the corner of your eye. So you gotta think about it out the corner of your mind. It's there and it en't, both at the same time.

— *Philip Pullman, The Secret Commonwealth*

I mean Negative Capability, that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason

— *John Keats, Letter to George & Tom Keats, 22 December 1818*

the test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function.

— *F. Scott Fitzgerald, 'The Crack-Up'*

we were born with an opposable mind we can use to hold two conflicting ideas in constructive tension.

— *Roger Martin, The Opposable Mind*

this straining and stretching to a higher level which is the specific challenge of a divergent problem, a problem in which irreconcilable opposites have to be reconciled.

— *E. F. Schumacher, Small is Beautiful*

It's the place where reality strikes the ideal, where a joke becomes serious and anything serious is a joke. The magic point where every idea and its opposite are equally true.

— *Donna Tartt, The Goldfinch*

When others interact with us we often have to adjust our view of reality.

— *David Didau, What If Everything You Knew About Education Was Wrong?*

Because, between 'reality' on the one hand, and the point where the mind strikes reality, there's a middle zone, a rainbow edge where beauty comes into being, where two very different surfaces mingle and blur to provide what life does not: and this is the space where all art exists, and all magic.

— *Donna Tartt, The Goldfinch*

Bridging poles

When we push beyond a boundary, we often discover that what lies beyond is not so strange. We are still ourselves. But what we learn is that to bridge differences is better than to place barriers in front of them. Perhaps there is no waste ground, only ground with which we are not familiar.

— M. W. Bewick & Ella Johnston, *The Orphaned Spaces*

Answers or Questions.

The sum or its parts.

Inside or Outside.

Light or Dark.

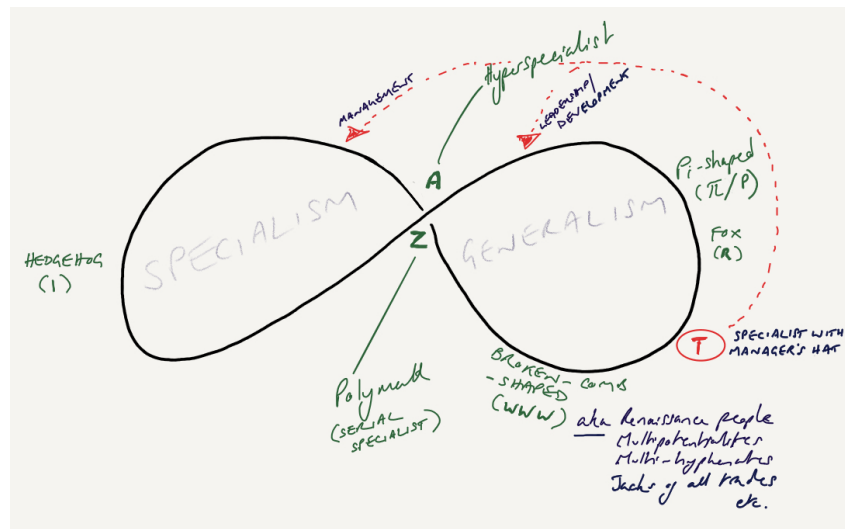
Sun or Shade.

Empty or Full.

And yet most things that seem like binaries don't really hold, once you begin to think about them in any great detail.

In the sense that every doorway is both an entrance and an exit. Open – close – arrive – depart. And so the threshold, the indeterminate place – hover, pause – is the most interesting space.

— Emily LaBarge, 'Adaptation'



Writing to understand

I stood there speechless for a long while, then I entered it. Such is art.

— *John Berger, Confabulations*

Phrases came. Visions came. Beautiful phrases. But what she wished to get hold of was that very jar on the nerves, the thing itself before it has been made anything.

— *Virginia Woolf, To the Lighthouse*

how do you find the unexpected if you already know what you want?

— *David Byrne, How Music Works*

All too often I write to find out what I think about a subject, not because I already know.

— *Neil Gaiman, The View from the Cheap Seats*

Writing is a concentrated form of thinking. I don't know what I think about certain subjects, even today, until I sit down and try to write about them.

— *Don DeLillo interviewed by Adam Begley in The Paris Review*

I am writing not only to tell. I am writing to discover.

— *Siri Hustvedt, Memories of the Future*

The many processes are really stages of an overall process one navigates in knowing, making, or discovering something that does not yet exist.

— *Kyna Leski, The Storm of Creativity*

but I think I wanted to get lost to see what happened next.

— *Deborah Levy, Things I Don't Want to Know*

As a writer, I feel it's important to set out without an entirely prescriptive sense of where you are going. Getting lost is an essential part of the process.

— *Cressida Cowell, 'First Steps: Our Neverlands'*

But along the way, we are reminded that the process is as valuable as the product, the method as potentially revelatory as the motive.

— *Jessica Helfand, Design: The Invention of Desire*

Writing to understand

The process of discovery involved in creating something new appears to be one of the most enjoyable activities any human can be involved in.

— *Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Creativity*

Some of the oldest stories we know, including creation myths, were attempts to make sense of the world.

— *Peter Turchi, Maps of the Imaginations*

Arriving at the blank page represents our coming to the end of the undecided space we call living. Now we must get down to telling.

— *Amit Chaudhuri, 'The Moment of Writing'*

Simply knowing one's intention and then executing it does not make good art.

— *George Saunders, 'What Writers Really Do When They Write'*

The not-knowing is crucial to art, is what permits art to be made. Without the scanning process engendered by not-knowing, without the possibility of having the mind move in unanticipated directions, there would be no invention.

— *Don Barthelme, Not-Knowing*

I've only ever written to decant, to provide myself an elsewhere.

— *Colette O'Connor, 'Analogue'*

I have always thought that making art, whether it's visual art, music, or fiction, is a form of conscious dreaming, that art draws from the boundlessness, brokenness, merging identities, disjunctions of space and time, and intense emotions of our unconscious lives.

— *Siri Hustvedt, Living, Thinking, Looking*

Art is philosophy. Art is putting our true nature on display before ourselves. Because we need to. Art is writing ourselves.

— *Alva Noë, Strange Tools*

We make up stories in order to give a shape to our questions; we read or listen to stories in order to understand what it is that we want to know.

— *Alberto Manguel, Curiosity*

Writing to understand

I am afraid of writing, too, because when I write I am always moving toward the unarticulated, the dangerous, the place where the walls don't hold. I don't know what's there, but I'm pulled toward it.

— *Siri Hustvedt, A Plea for Eros*

He thinks how, in all these endless pages, all these stories and poems and essays and letters, he tries to give imaginary meaning to parts of his life he doesn't understand.

— *James Sallis, Gently into the Land of the Meateaters*

Book conversations

All books are made from other books and so, in their way, all books are translations in one way or another.

— *Kate Briggs, This Little Art*

We are bricoleurs cobbling together and recombining found texts, without the possibility of immediate spontaneity.

— *Jonathan Basile, Tar for Mortar*

Since I first started reading, I know that I think in quotations and that I write with what others have written, and that I can have no other ambition than to reshuffle and rearrange.

— *Alberto Manguel, Curiosity*

For a writer everything is research, everything is material.

— *Paul Maunder, The Wind at My Back*

Before you become a writer you must first become a reader. Every hour spent reading is an hour spent learning to write; this continues to be true throughout a writer's life.

— *Robert Macfarlane, Landmarks*

Now I realized that not infrequently books speak of books: it is as if they spoke among themselves.

— *Umberto Eco, The Name of the Rose*

For books continue each other, in spite of our habit of judging them separately.

— *Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own*

Literature does not occur in a vacuum. It cannot be a monologue. It has to be a conversation, and new people, new readers, need to be brought into the conversation too.

— *Neil Gaiman, The View from the Cheap Seats*

The questions manuscripts can answer face-to-face are sometimes unexpected, both about themselves and about the times in which they were made.

— *Christopher de Hamel, Meetings with Remarkable Manuscripts*

we tell the same fairytales, because the stories have migrated across borders as freely as birds.

— *Katherine Rundell, Why You Should Read Children's Books, Even Though You Are So Old and Wise*

History is made up of the stories we tell ourselves and each other. But whose stories are we talking about? What kind of stories create our history?

— *Chin Li, 'The Otherness of the World'*

It matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what concepts we think to think other concepts with. It matters wherehow ouroroboros swallows its tale, again.

— *Donna Haraway, 'Receiving Three Mochilas in Colombia'*

Read bibliographies. It's not the book you start with, it's the book that book leads you to.

— *Austin Kleon, Steal Like an Artist*

In the modern world, simple copying is a pejorative concept, especially when applied to literature and art. Writers and artists now strive instead for originality. Plagiarism is anathema. In medieval Europe, however, copying was admired. Artists were trained to imitate each other's work. Inherited patterns and formulas were dutifully repeated without reference to reality.

— *Christopher de Hamel, Meetings with Remarkable Manuscripts*

Hip hop is an appropriation engine, an infinite assemblage machine. It sucks up whatever is placed in its path and reconfigures it—re-references it—making it part of its own circuits, its own organism.

— *Will Ashon, Chamber Music*

No image stands alone; each is related in straightforward or convoluted ways to other pictures.

— *Teju Cole, Known and Strange Things*

For books have a way of influencing each other. Fiction will be much the better for standing cheek by jowl with poetry and philosophy.

— *Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own*

a lot of ideas currently in circulation are gifts that arrived recently, through the labors of others.

— *Rebecca Solnit, Whose Story Is This?*

Isn't writing, and what I write, also a way of giving?

— *Annie Ernaux, I Remain in Darkness*

During the solitary months and years spent writing a book, it can be easy to forget that it will – if you are lucky – live a social life: that your book might enter the imaginations and memories of its readers and thrive there, that your book might be crammed into pockets or backpacks and carried up mountains or to foreign countries, or that your book might be given by one person to another.

— *Robert Macfarlane, The Gifts of Reading*

This connectedness to things is what we mean by meaning. The meaning of one thing is its connection with another; the meaning of our lives is their connection with something other than ourselves.

— *Philip Pullman, Dæmon Voices*

In the realm of cultural space as the twentieth century has conceived it, there are fields (language, culture, memory, texts) and paths (utterances, discourses, images, themes); and there are labyrinths or networks fusing and confusing the two (worlds, lives, books), embracing past, present and future, the collective 'we' and 'they' and the individual 'I', 'you' and 's/he'.

— *Gerald Martin, Journeys Through the Labyrinth*

Things and people moved around me, taking positions in obscure hierarchies participating in systems I didn't know about and never would. A complex network of objects and concepts. You live through certain things before you understand them. You can't always take the analytical position.

— *Sally Rooney, Conversations with Friends*

Life, after all, was mostly the art of salvage.

— *Danielle McLaughlin, 'Not Oleanders'*

She wrote fiction, sure, but she populated it with the already extant, the pre-packaged and ready-made. She was in many ways Warhol's daughter, niece at least, a grave-robber, a bandit, happy to snatch what she needed but also morally invested in the

cause: that there was no need to invent, you could make anything from out of the overflowing midden of the already-done, the as Beckett put it nothing new, it was economic also stylish to help yourself to the grab bag of the actual.

— *Olivia Laing, Crudo*

A life's work is not a series of stepping-stones, onto which we calmly place our feet, but more like an ocean crossing where there is no path, only a heading, a direction, in conversation with the elements. Looking back, we see the wake we have left as only a brief glimmering trace on the waters.

— *David Whyte, Consolations*

When I is we

I is another.

— *Arthur Rimbaud, Letter to Georges Izambard, 13 May 1871*

For the second body, there is no stable boundary between one species and another: we're all in the same boat.

— *Daisy Hildyard, The Second Body*

We are many all the way down, because we are wholes that are always less than the sum of their parts. We don't just combine into multitudes, we contain multitudes, as any self-respecting stomach bacterium will tell you.

— *Timothy Morton, Humankind*

'I' live in a body that internally requires 10 trillion organisms, while externally my survival is ecological, emotional, and cultural. I am not an isolatable specimen.

— *Nora Bateson, Small Arcs of Larger Circles*

I am large, I contain multitudes.

— *Walt Whitman, 'Song of Myself'*

Are we perhaps condemned to wholeness, and every fragmentation, every quartering, will only be a pretence, will happen on the surface, underneath which, however, the plan remains intact, unalterable? Does even the smallest fragment belong to the whole?

— *Olga Tokarczuk, Flights*

I was pretty much all hyphen.

— *Siri Hustvedt, The Blazing World*

We are contaminated by our encounters; they change who we are as we make way for others.

— *Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, The Mushroom at the End of the World*

Instead of thinking of ourselves as single, unified selves who are trying to discover through self-reflection, we could think of ourselves as complex arrays of emotions, dispositions, desires, and traits that often pull us in different and contradictory ways. When we do so, we become malleable. We avoid the danger of defining ourselves as

When I is we

frozen in a moment in time.

— *Michael Puett & Christine Gross-Loh, The Path*

Whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. The individual can only say: 'I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am'.

— *John Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy*

When we look at the global body, it is impossible to relate that body to anything individual because there can be no certain borders between one thing and another.

— *Daisy Hildyard, The Second Body*

An ecological border, like a cell membrane, resists indiscriminate mixture; it contains differences but is porous. The border is an active edge.

— *Richard Sennett, The Craftsman*

we are in fact relational beings in a world where everything affects everything else and, as a result, to care for others is to care for ourselves.

— *Daniel Christian Wahl, Designing Regenerative Cultures*

this relationship existing within each of us, between the person as individual and the personality as bearer of culture and race, is not immobile, rigid or static, not fixed inside him for good. On the contrary, its typical features are dynamism, mobility, variability and differences in intensity, depending on the external context, the demands of the current moment, the expectations of the environment or even one's own mood and stage of life.

— *Ryszard Kapuściński, The Other*

The ability to live with differences, let alone to enjoy such living and to benefit from it, does not come easily and certainly not under its own impetus. This ability is an art which, like all arts, requires study and exercise. The inability to face up to the vexing plurality of human beings and the ambivalence of all classifying/filing decisions are, on the contrary, self-perpetuating and self-reinforcing: the more effective the drive to homogeneity and the efforts to eliminate the difference, the more difficult it is to feel at home in the face of strangers, the more threatening the difference appears and the deeper and more intense is the anxiety it breeds.

— *Zygmunt Bauman, Liquid Modernity*

When I is we

Or is the true self neither this nor that, neither here nor there, but something so varied and wandering that it is only when we give the rein to our wishes and let it take its way unimpeded that we are indeed ourselves? Circumstances compel unity; for convenience' sake a man must be a whole.

— *Virginia Woolf, 'Street Haunting'*

The idea of self-realization is one of the most destructive of modern fictions. It suggests you can flourish in only one sort of life, or a small number of similar lives, when in fact everybody can thrive in a large variety of ways.

— *John Gray, The Silence of Animals*

Modernity is characterised by uncertainty, rapidity of change and kaleidoscopic juxtapositions of objects, people and events. Finding our uncertain way through these uncertainties is a prime task of contemporary existence, for individuals as well as for cultures as a whole.

— *Stephen Frosh, Identity Crisis*

Identities seem fixed and solid only when seen, in a flash, from outside. Whatever solidity they might have when contemplated from the inside of one's own biographical experience appears fragile, vulnerable, and constantly torn apart by shearing forces which lay bare its fluidity and by cross-currents which threaten to rend in pieces and carry away any form they might have acquired.

— *Zygmunt Bauman, Liquid Modernity*

This contrast between a hermetically sealed contemporary self and a porous late medieval self intrinsically connected to nature, the "spirit world," and its community is meant to serve only as a striking example of two entirely different relationships to the world, each of which gives expression to different types of self and world that are related to each other in different ways.

— *Hartmut Rosa, Resonance*

The emerging fields of embodied and enactive cognition have started to take dialogic models of the self more seriously. But for the most part, scientific psychology is only too willing to adopt individualistic Cartesian assumptions that cut away the webbing that ties the self to others. There is a Zulu phrase, '*Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*', which means 'A person is a person through other persons.' This is a richer and better account, I think,

When I is we

than 'I think, therefore I am.'

— *Abeba Birhane, 'Descartes Was Wrong'*

Her consciousness, at this point – she was forty-three years old – was so crammed full not just of her own memories, obligations, dreams, knowledge and the plethora of her day-to-day responsibilities, but also of other people's – gleaned over years of listening, talking, empathising, worrying – that she was frightened most of all of the boundaries separating these numerous types of mental freight, the distinctions between them, crumbling away until she was no longer certain what had happened to her and what to other people she knew, or sometimes even what was or was not real.

— *Rachel Cusk, Outline*

Listen: you are not yourself, you are crowds of others, you are as leaky a vessel as was ever made, you have spent vast amounts of your life as someone else, as people who died long ago, as people who never lived, as strangers you never met. The usual I we are given has all the tidy containment of the kind of character the realist novel specializes in and none of the porousness of our every waking moment, the loose threads, the strange dreams, the forgettings and misrememberings, the portions of a life lived through others' stories, the incoherence and inconsistency, the pantheon of *dei ex machina* and the companionability of ghosts. There are other ways of telling.

— *Rebecca Solnit, The Faraway Nearby*

I swallow books upon books upon books

to unlearn like-mindedness, to externalise cosmos

— *Nisha Ramayya, States of the Body Produced by Love*

Books, conversations, and perceptions enter us and become us.

— *Siri Hustvedt, Living, Thinking, Looking*

he sensed the connections being made around him, all the objects and shaped silhouettes and levels of knowledge—not knowledge exactly but insidious intent. But not that either—some deeper meaning that existed solely to keep him from knowing what it was.

— *Don DeLillo, Underworld*

The search for origins ends with the discovery of fragments

— *John Gray, The Soul of the Marionette*

When I is we

These fragments I have shored against my ruins

— *T. S. Eliot, The Waste Land*

Hence it is with a certain feeling of urgency that I seek the nature, subject, words of the other story, the untold one, the life story.

— *Ursula K. Le Guin, The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction*

/See, the world is full of other yous/ the kid was telling John. /Is full of people who are just like you but somehow different. They may look different; they may sound different. They may have different favourites; they may have different mummies, or memories, or names. But something in them will be the same as in you. Something in them will reflect in you as with a mirror./

— *Danny Denton, The Earlie King & The Kid in Yellow*

The first time you glimpse yourself through the eyes of a person like that, it's a cold moment. It's like walking past a mirror you've walked past every day of your life, and suddenly it shows you something else, something troubling and strange.

— *Kazuo Ishiguro, Never Let Me Go*

That's the only part of himself he wants to protect, the part that exists inside her.

— *Sally Rooney, Normal People*

We are neither what we think we are nor entirely what we are about to become, we are neither purely individual nor fully a creature of our community, but an act of becoming that can never be held in place by a false form of nomenclature.

— *David Whyte, Consolations*

I am not who I am.

I must be who I become.

— *Ursula Andkjær Olsen, Third-Millennium Heart*

Stories and genes

The human mind serves evolutionary success, not truth.

— *John Gray, Straw Dogs*

Our brains are built to ensure that we will come to hold the beliefs and values of those around us.

— *Matthew Lieberman, Social*

We are part biological organism, part cultural

— *Ian Leslie, Curious*

The body itself is an information processor. Memory resides not just in brains but in every cell. No wonder genetics bloomed along with information theory.

— *James Gleick, The Information*

Genetics is shining a bright light on ancient origins of many species. We get clues from archaeology and history, but sometimes these clues can be misleading. The evidence is always patchy. Interrogating DNA, both modern and ancient, gives us the chance of filling in some of the gaps, by offering us another perspective on the past.

— *Alice Roberts, Tamed*

DNA serves two different functions. First, it preserves information. It does this by copying itself, from generation to generation ... Second, however, DNA also sends that information outward for use in the making of the organism ... The replication of DNA is a copying of information. The manufacture of proteins is a transfer of information: the sending of a message.

— *James Gleick, The Information*

For the real human story, history must comprise both the biological and cultural.

— *E. O. Wilson, The Meaning of Human Existence*

Society was there before you, it is there after you are gone, and you are a member of it. The myths that link you to your social group, the tribal myths, affirm that you are an organ of the larger organism, which is the landscape, the world in which the tribe moves.

— *Joseph Campbell with Bill Moyers, The Power of Myth*

culture has the power to shape our identity. Over time and under the right circumstances, the norms and values of the group to which we belong become our own. We internalize them. We carry them with us.

— *Angela Duckworth, Grit*

This meant that elements of culture themselves—ideas, languages, beliefs, songs, art, technologies—could act like genes, capable of being transmitted to others and reproduced.

— *Mark Pagel, Wired for Culture*

What are genes? Think of genes as little packets of instructions that tell a cell what to do. They're hereditary instructions written in a four-letter code.

— *Sergio De La Pava, The Naked Singularity*

According to the developmental psychologist Erik Erikson, the defining task of a person's middle years is to achieve generativity. This involves being able to pass on both one's genes and one's memes. The first refers to leaving children, the second to leaving one's ideas, values, knowledge, and skills to the next generation.

— *Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Creativity*

The need to make art may not stem solely from the need to express who you are, but from a need to complete a relationship with something outside yourself. As a maker of art you are custodian of issues larger than self.

— *David Bayles & Ted Orland, Art & Fear*

Art is the means by which a culture describes itself to itself. Those descriptions, in turn, form our sense of how we see ourselves in the present and in relation to the past.

— *Kit White, 101 Things to Learn in Art School*

The power lies not just in the knowledge, preserved and passed forward, valuable as it is, but in the methodology: encoded visual indications, the act of transference, substituting signs for things. And then, later, signs for signs.

— *James Gleick, The Information*

As banal as it sounds, language allows people to exchange thoughts, feelings, ideas, and emotions and to understand the point of view of their immediate neighbor. Language is about getting people together to take common action for the common good. But it is

Stories and genes

also about creating traces of our own individual existence and about writing history.

— *Jan-Christopher Horak, Saul Bass*

Words hold things. They bear meanings.

— *Ursula K. Le Guin, 'The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction'*

a story is an archive, packed with history

— *Marina Warner, Once upon a Time*

You have a way to implant thoughts and ideas from your mind directly into someone else's mind, and they can attempt to do the same to you, without either of you having to perform surgery.

— *Mark Pagel, Wired for Culture*

Before written notation systems were developed, all learned information had to be transmitted from the memory of one person to that of another.

— *Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Flow*

talking is the most efficient and effective means of communication; there is no quicker way to transfer an idea from one mind to another.

— *David Didau, What If Everything You Knew About Education Was Wrong?*

A culture that never encounters any others becomes first inward-looking, and then stagnant, and then rotten.

— *Philip Pullman, Dæmon Voices*

A leaf a gourd a shell a net a bag a sling a sack a bottle a pot a box a container. A holder. A recipient. The first cultural device was probably a recipient...

— *Ursula K. Le Guin, 'The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction'*

no frontier can keep a good story from roaming.

— *Marina Warner, Once upon a Time*

Without stories and books, we would be limited to knowing only what had happened to us or to those whom we have met.

— *Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Creativity*

Stories and genes

History, too, hands down to us intriguing stories and ideas from a cornucopia of cultures. It is our shared inheritance of curious, often fragmented artefacts that we can pick up at will and contemplate in wonder. There is much to learn about life by opening the wonderbox of history.

— *Roman Krznaric, The Wonderbox*

Viewed askew

So much of life is indirect
— *Emma Sedlak, 'Peripheries'*

There are these views
We get of other lives,
Insights, illusions, sidelong glances
— *Andrew Wynn Owen, 'Mirrors and Windows'*

and that's why nobody ever finds what they're looking for, because they don't even know what that is, and nor do they know that it's futile trying to reveal the whole, yeah, it's the parts that count
— *Alia Trabucco Zerán, The Remainder*

The creative writer, composer, or visual artist conveys, often obliquely by abstraction or deliberate distortion, his own perceptions and the feelings he hopes to evoke—about something, about anything, real or imagined. He seeks to bring forth in an original way some truth or other about the human experience.
— *E. O. Wilson, The Meaning of Human Existence*

When one artist talks about another, he is always taking (indirectly, in a roundabout way) of himself, and that is what's valuable in his judgment.
— *Milan Kundera, Encounter*

she had forgotten how roundabout scholars could be. It was difficult to tell them the truth when a lie would have been so much easier for them to understand.
— *Philip Pullman, The Subtle Knife*

Always catching him out with her sidelong consciousness, her way of listening to the sides of what you say and responding to what you didn't know you were saying, or to what you were trying but failing to say.
— *Ali Smith, Winter*

The route is rarely direct.
— *Rebecca Solnit, The Faraway Nearby*

Viewed askew

Sometimes the quickest way to your rebel goals ends up being indirect and circuitous.

— *Lois Kelly & Carmen Medina, Rebels at Work*

The path to the truth is doubled, masked, ironic. This is my path, not straight, but twisted!

— *Siri Hustvedt, The Blazing World*

I'd only manage to stalk it down if I moved surreptitiously: not in straight lines and in blocks and wedges but askew – diagonally, slyly, creeping up on it from sideways.

— *Tom McCarthy, Remainder*

The oblique solution involves recasting the problem – often described as lateral thinking – and then it becomes direct.

— *John Kay, Obliquity*

Lateral knowledge is knowledge that's from a wholly unexpected direction, from a direction that's not even understood as a direction until the knowledge forces itself upon one.

— *Robert Pirsig, Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*

Cause-and-effect assumes history marches forward, but history is not an army. It is a crab scuttling sideways, a drip of soft water wearing away stone, an earthquake breaking centuries of tension.

— *Rebecca Solnit, Hope in the Dark*

I want obliquity, essays that approach their targets, for there must be targets, slantwise, or with a hail of conflicted attitudes.

— *Brian Dillon, Essayism*

Obliquity is a process of experiment and discovery. Successes and failures and the expansion of knowledge lead to reassessment of our objectives and goals and the actions that result.

— *John Kay, Obliquity*

Our insistence on seeing progress as a line hides our world's aversion to straight lines.

— *David Weinberger, Everyday Chaos*

Yet straight-line thinking has co-opted Western thought to the point that we have trouble understanding cause and effect. We forget that the world isn't linear. It's full of arcs and loops and spirals.

— *Marty Neumeier, Metaskills*

Straight lines – how humiliating they were. How they destroyed the mind. What perfidious geometry, how it makes us into idiots – there and back, a parody of travel. Going forth merely in order to return again. Speeding up just to put on the brakes.

— *Olga Tokarczuk, Flights*

It is, however you look at it, whatever you think of it, a classic statement of the fundamentals of Cartesianism—the fetishisation of the perfect geometry of the straight line, wrapped up and disguised as the most self-evident common sense.

— *Will Ashon, Strange Labyrinth*

The line that describes the beautiful is elliptical. It has simplicity and constant change. It cannot be described by a compass, and it changes direction at every one of its points.

— *Attributed to Johann Joachim Winckelmann in Rudolf Arnheim's 'Entropy and Art'*

I grasp and find there are no completions,
Nothing in straight lines

— *Nora Bateson, Small Arcs of Larger Circles*

One need not be a mystic to accept that certain old paths are linear only in a simple sense. Like trees, they have branches & like rivers they have tributaries. They are rifts within which time might exist as pure surface, prone to recapitulation & rhyme, weird morphologies, uncanny doublings.

— *Robert Macfarlane, Stanley Donwood & Dan Richards, Holloway*

nature has no straight lines. Nature flows, nature is more connected, grassroots and interdependent.

— *Alan Moore, No Straight Lines*

There are no straight lines but those of lineage, and on maps and spider's webs.

— *Preti Taneja, We That Are Young*

My funny old brain, like those of many poets, has always done its best work sideways, seeking out tricky enjambments and surprising slant rhymes to craft lines capable of

Viewed askew

pulling their own weight.

— *Kathleen Rooney, Lillian Boxfish Takes a Walk*

You are neither here nor there,

A hurry through which known and strange things pass

As big soft buffetings come at the car sideways

And catch the heart off guard and blow it open.

— *Seamus Heaney, 'Postscript'*

Trickster

You know I have been thinking about porous boundaries, shadow regions, ambiguities, and, lately, about the idea of embodied intermediaries. This is why I have become more interested in how these intermediaries have been narrated: Hermes, Mercury, Esu, and, in the case of Christian religions, angels. But no, to say “interested” is insufficient. Better to call it “invested”—an investment in what, it now occurs to me, I might call a parenthetical mode of life.

— *Teju Cole, Known and Strange Things*

what in essence is an angel?

she is a messenger, mediator, watcher and warner

— *Deborah Levy, An Amorous Discourse in the Suburbs of Hell*

The daring, I think, is always in the liminal, the space she traverses between fixed things, the place where fixed things can change, the crossing of borders between the fixed-seeming things

— *Ali Smith, In the Spirit of Spark*

The first effect of abroad is strangeness. It makes me strange to myself. I experience a transfer, a transparency.

— *Joanna Walsh, Vertigo*

Someone who has been abroad can never come home again

— *Hannah Sullivan, Three Poems*

When people asked me, what do you want to be when you grow up? I’d reply: a foreigner.

— *Margarita García Robayo, Fish Soup*

In seeking to converse across borders, we too must operate in the thresholds. Consider a door’s dual nature, simultaneously barrier and bridge while also serving as an invitation to enter.

— *Nick Sousanis, Unflattening*

Trickster

Trickster is always associated with borders, no man's lands, with crossroads and intersections.

— *Michael Chabon, Maps and Legends*

He is the spirit of the doorway leading out, and of the crossroad at the edge of town

— *Lewis Hyde, Trickster Makes This World*

With this mercurial god, division comes to mean response. His presence allows transparency, protection, a seeing through something and an act of seeing something through.

— *Ali Smith, Artful*

Trickster goes where the action is, and the action is in the borders between things.

— *Michael Chabon, Maps and Legends*

The particular thing to learn is how to get to the crack between the worlds and how to enter the other world.

— *Carlos Castaneda, The Teachings of Don Juan*

We live in these cracks, these fault-lines.

— *Sean Bonney, Letters Against the Firmament*

Quicksilver is another word for Mercury, is another word for a planet that looks like a grey boulder in space, another word for an element which is both fluid and solid, can change its shape yet still hold its form, is another word for Hermes, Greek god of art, artfulness, thievery, changeability, swiftness of thought and of communication, language, the alphabet, speechmaking, emails, texts, tweets; god of bartering, trade, liaison, roads and crossroads, travellers, the stock exchange, wages, dreams; guide between the surface world and the underworld, guide between the living and the dead, stealer of unbreakable nets for catching pretty virgins, god of free association, god of freedom of movement, fluidity, mutability of form, broad-hatted heel-winged god of all going-between, the deliverer.

— *Ali Smith, Artful*

The road that trickster travels is a spirit road as well as a road in fact. He is the adept who can move between heaven and earth, and between the living and dead. As such, he

Trickster

is sometimes the messenger of the gods and sometimes the guide of souls

— *Lewis Hyde, Trickster Makes This World*

Borders are forever being crossed; to draw a border is to just demarcate the line across which we will carry dreams, wounds, meanings, bundles of goods, ideas, children. Even the threshold of a doorway can be a liminal space between public and private, between mine and ours; even liminal means a sensory threshold, often in the sense of hovering between states rather than crossing over from one to another.

— *Rebecca Solnit, Whose Story Is This?*

To describe something as an edgeland is to be reminded that we are at an interface between the 'here' and the 'there', what is behind and what is beyond, what was then, what is now, and what will become.

— *M. W. Bewick & Ella Johnston, The Orphaned Spaces*

This is the insight that comes to all boundary-crossers—immigrants in fact or immigrants in time—that meaning is contingent and identity fluid, even the meaning and identity of one's own body.

— *Lewis Hyde, Trickster Makes This World*

The trickster starts as an unselfconscious, amorphous being. As the story unfolds he gradually discovers his own identity, gradually recognises and controls his own anatomical parts: he oscillates between female and male, but eventually fixes his own male sexual role; and finally learns to assess his environment for what it is.

— *Mary Douglas, Purity and Danger*

I'm a template. I know that, he knows that. A myth to be slipped in. Slip up into.

— *Max Porter, Grief is the Thing with Feathers*

Man of the people. Simple patternmaker. Literary outrider and trickster. A magpie sniping from other birds' nests.

— *James Sallis, Willnot*

And so work has changed its character. More often than not, it is a one-off act: a ploy of a bricoleur, a trickster, aimed at what is at hand and inspired and constrained by what is at hand, more shaped than shaping, more the outcome of chasing a chance than the

product of planning and design.

— Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*

It would be a scrapbook, a collage, a graphic novel, a dissolving of the boundaries between forms because Crow is a trickster, he is ancient and post-modern, illustrator, editor, vandal...

— Max Porter, *Grief is the Thing with Feathers*

Wandering aimlessly, trickster regularly bumps into things he did not expect.

— Lewis Hyde, *Trickster Makes This World*

Whenever humanity seems condemned to heaviness, I think I should fly like Perseus into a different space. I don't mean escaping into dreams or into the irrational. I mean that I have to change my approach, look at the world from a different perspective, with a different logic and with fresh methods of cognition and verification.

— Italo Calvino, *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*

And just as music is the space between notes, just as the stars are beautiful because of the space between them, just as the sun strikes raindrops at a certain angle and throws a prism of color across the sky—so the space where I exist, and want to keep existing, and to be quite frank I hope I die in, is exactly this middle distance: where despair struck pure otherness and created something sublime.

— Donna Tartt, *The Goldfinch*

Palimpsest

I had a powerful sensation of a text inscribed beneath it all, but I was looking at a palimpsest so thick with writings that nothing was legible.

— *Siri Hustvedt, The Summer Without Men*

Everything is plural here, one history reaching out to another, a palimpsest of voices.

— *Edmund de Waal, 'A Library of Exile'*

there are few metaphors as powerful as that of the palimpsest to represent the way culture is transmitted.

— *Jorge Carrión, Bookshops*

Everything is concealed in symbolism, hidden by veils of mystery and layers of cultural material. But it is psychic data, absolutely. The large doors slide open, they close unbidden. Energy waves, incident radiation. All the letters and numbers are here, all the colors of the spectrum, all the voices and sounds, all the code words and ceremonial phrases. It is just a question of deciphering, rearranging, peeling off the layers of unspeakability.

— *Don DeLillo, White Noise*

the important task was to scrape away the clinging rubble and dust of contemporary savage cultures and to reveal the life-bearing channels which prove their evolutionary status by their live functions in modern society.

— *Mary Douglas, Purity and Danger*

Since old codes do not disappear entirely but remain a part of the cultural fabric, none of the codes coming after the indigenous cultural code was ever entirely 'pure' though these later codes always tried and try to cleanse themselves of the previous code. Metamodernity is the only exception in the cleansing attempt, since multilayeredness is the very essence of metamodernity, and the multiple layers are seen as a strength and richness of meaning.

— *Lene Rachel Andersen, Metamodernity*

Despite what people in power assume, leaders and key strategic thinkers are almost always surrounded by layers and layers of abstraction.

— *Christian Madsbjerg, Sensemaking*

Palimpsest

The critical point is that solutions to complex problems typically rely on multiple layers of insight and therefore require multiple points of view.

— *Matthew Syed, Rebel Ideas*

Our thinking was that there was no undo function in real life, nor in drawing or painting, so to use that function on a computer seemed like cheating. Instead we would overlay another image, or scratch over the error, because mistakes leave traces.

— *Stanley Donwood, There Will Be No Quiet*

I've been thinking about the trace of our memories, whether the trace stays the same or changes as we rewrite them over time.

— *Daisy Johnson, Everything Under*

The human brain, he writes, is a palimpsest: a document endlessly erased and overwritten, but in which earlier inscriptions can still be deciphered.

— *Brian Dillon, In the Dark Room*

I was once foolish enough to believe knowledge would clarify, but some things are so gauzed behind layers of syntax and semantics, behind days and hours, names forgotten, salvaged and shed, that simply knowing the wound exists does nothing to reveal it.

— *Ocean Vuong, On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*

The lives we lead, it said, the art or artifacts we produce, all these are but scrim, one layer over countless other layers, some that reveal, some that conceal.

— *James Sallis, Moth*

The eventual result was something like an ash-drift, with partially or barely visible scraps of imagery obscured to a greater or lesser degree by billowing whiteness, a semi-opaque film concealing and revealing, a palimpsest of mistakes, a kind of invented archaeology of information that had become irrelevant.

— *Stanley Donwood, There Will Be No Quiet*

The site was a palimpsest, as was all the city, written, erased, rewritten.

— *Teju Cole, Open City*

Traces of the past city are, somehow, traces of the selves we might once have been.

— *Lauren Elkin, Flâneuse*

Palimpsest

these places are palimpsests. Built over and transformed to accommodate every new use. Layers of new construction, stories, dreams, histories coming together, shifting, mutating over time.

— *Ella Johnston, 'A Transition Zone'*

The discarded, the renamed, the reinvented, the absent and forgotten – they always leave a trace.

— *Justin Hopper, The Old Weird Albion*

We would be infused with some trace of one another forevermore.

— *George Saunders, Lincoln in the Bardo*

caught in a double bind

of writing and erasing

— *J. R. Carpenter, An Ocean of Static*