



an eco-urban poetry journal
sprout

SPACE

ISSUE 1



Issue One:

SPACE

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<https://sproutpoetryjournal.com/>

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Editorial

Welcome to SPROUT’s first issue. In creating SPROUT, we wanted to offer a poetic space for creatives to think about the various through lines and intersections between poet, nature, and city. We decided to approach our first issue through the deceptively simple theme of Space, inviting contributors to situate themselves in the eco-urban imaginary, and share their own conceptualisations of (to borrow Bachelard’s trenchant phrase) “the poetics of space”. This theme speaks to the ways in which the poem (whatever its form or function) holds space—capturing attention, taking up hold in mind and body—for writers and readers, alike. To experience a poem is to give it grace and the space to move—leaving it just enough space to expand, contract, and expand again from one place to another.

In inviting new work to reflect expansively about space, our contributors took up this call to carve out space(s) for themselves. The collected product reflects a multitude of poetic practices. What brings them all together is a particular attentiveness to the liminal, the in-between, the beingness of being-in-space, and acts of seeing out(or, indeed in)wards, into space.

In this issue, the poetic eye/I attends to what happens, in and around space. This can be the haunting space of absence, when someone we love dies, as Supriya Kaur Dhaliwal’s “For all the Rothkos I will ever see” summons in its last two lines,

The dichotomy between existing and living—
Calling a city *a city* and calling a love *love*

Poetically, space is not only what is centred, full, or abundant, but can also be that which is marginalized or assigned to edge of things, as Joanna Walsh contemplates in “Scrub –”,

If you grow up on the edge of things you know about scrub, how the end of things is written in every leaf that insists on sprouting each spring out of decay.

Caitlin Stobie’s prose-poem, “Spaces / Places”, ruminates further on transplantation and dislocation, troubling the divide between places and non-places, where “place is a certain piece of space that has meaning”. Other contributions attend to more visceral and material embodiments of space, how space is interior—felt on the inside—as in Dylan Brennan’s “Botany”:

This solstice it's just the two, no, three of us: the tiny boy (unwithered) punches softly in your belly.

Against this, space can also entail erasure, or somewhat contradictorily, liberation. This is made evident in Koleka Putuma's "Exhibition",

take take take take take take take

backspace

Here, the "backspace" can be a record of an act—it frees up space—or it doesn't: it depends entirely on your point of view. Differing points of view, too, is a concern—something worth paying attention to. In this vein, the aurality of Christodoulos Makris's "frontiers (radio edit)" invites us to listen to the world around us to take note that we are not only embedded in space, we are space:

we're not part of
the environment we are the environment.

The works in this collection point to the various ways space is granted, and by extension, not to be taken for granted. The submissions speak to the ways in which the poetic subject traverses the interstices of both city and nature, disrupting artificial binaries between them—something that is prominently conveyed in Madhur Anand's destabilizing of animal-human ontologies. Nature flows through cities, much like water in subterranean recesses or pipes—the sound of which, as Claudia Luna Fuentes reminds us, "accompanies us from our own conception". The natural rhythm of poetic language, in its original form, and in translation, creates a space for more traditional ruminations concerning what poetry can (and cannot do) in and with space.

We are excited to share these meditations on space and place, the presences and absences they offer, and the displacements and emplacements they shore up—with you—our new readers. We hope you enjoy finding your own pathways through the various visual and textual spaces (and blank spaces) exhibited in this issue.

Thank you for joining us here in our new space. Come inhabit it with us.

Dimitra Xidous and Kirby Manià
SPROUT, Executive Editors

Exhibition

Koleka Putuma

it has become a freak show
backspace
it has become a strip show
backspace
it has become a show
showing up here
callous bone and no skin

it has become hazardous
running vulnerable and unarmed

it has become surgery
spilling here

it has become ritual
standing here
splitting insides open for you
to grab to microscope
to pick and poke
to make sacrificial
to make Venus
to make Krotoa
to make Eunice Waymon
to make Megan Thee Stallion
to make Anaracha
to make Bometa
to make Heed
to make Jadine
to make Winnie after the death of stompie
to make Sula
to make Pecola

to make Sorrow
to make Beloved
to make token

it has become a cult
this obsession with dead or dancing
[you know what]

it has become witchcraft
this scientific experiment
where [y]
does [x] on [you know who]

it has become spectacle
this anthropological [you know what]
this Q&A
this gathering
where [you know who] shows up
takes all the seats
all the photographs
asks all the questions
hogs all the microphones
cries all the tears
strangles all the air

it has become old and familiar
this performance
this cycle
where you take take take
take take take take take take
take take take take take take
take take take take take take

backspace

steal.

Inhabiting space [desert / forest] with acts [rituals] and matter [object poems]

Claudia Luna Fuentes

Water is a feminine word.

Its sound accompanies us from our own conception.

I write about water, because it is writing about life [life in dispute].

Scriptural curiosity has led me
to observe the beauty
of the letters on the page,
then their migration as sculptures that
inhabit space when spoken.

And then, look back at the body, that first resonance box,
where the voice lives.





Ritual act [healing] in the General Cepeda desert, in a place called El Gavillero.

Why there? Deserts are spaces that receive facilities with toxic waste even when their communities do not contribute to generating them. Thus, the water that runs under these places, tends to be contaminated by filtration, affecting all their interrelations [rupture].

I placed water on the worn skin in this place, and acupuncture needles that I would use on my body at another time, while placing flowers from the site.

There I was
listening to her,
thinking about her.

Ritual act [restitution] in the Cuatro Ciénegas desert, in a valley that is a biosphere reserve.

Bacterial mats and blue-green algae that gave rise to life on the planet are still being born there. I brought bottled water that was released to receive the lost minerals and also as a symbolic act that returns some of the flow that is drawn from the valley, since the intense extraction and tourist projects [violence] continue to affect plant, animal and human communities. Here, the water, due to the characteristics of the soil, is drunk immediately upon being deposited.



Ritual act [accompaniment] in the forest, in the Sierra de Zapalinamé.

From here, more than forty percent of the water is extracted for the operation of the city.

Day and night the pipe sounds when it is extracted under pressure,

water

that lets its forced voice
be heard.

For this act I took a little water from the tap and went up with it to receive the rays of the sun, to just be, to contemplate without haste what you cannot see underground. It is an act of recognition of her rights [the rights of nature], to see water as a feminine entity that is de facto alive, but which we have used and monetized, to the point where it has become invisible as a germinator.





Matteric poem [mutation]

that through boiling
allows me to
unite the candelilla wax
with the threads
of the lechuguilla,
in order to
inhabit the space
with a message [letter]
that, by imitating
existing forms
of flying seeds,
he wishes to
pollinate the mind
of the observer.

Well, finally,
what is a seed [promise]
without a territory where water can go?

frontiers (radio edit)

Christodoulos Makris

a woman with a dog named Amy
eyebrows shaved unhounded by the press
space cowgirl sex and drugs and
divorce inside the first year of our show so cool
in each of three media tie-ins there's a chapter in the middle
kind of a wild dude she does things he doesn't do
a tsunami of black computer-generated goo
a full gaming script called portrait in black and white
an enterprise of black in charge & the whites are the slaves
you gotta remember the Jonathan Swift formula
extraterrestrial content and sightings and things like
our relationship when I came out experiencing
how many stars in our galaxy and how come just some planets
one percent of one percent supporting intelligence
minus time there's gotta be more to this
you can't do a futuristic piece every week and expect a hit
what can you tell us about this character queen
what is it you wanna say with this piece of lit
we can't help but wonder at the demands of the medium
always a ghost city the present upstaged by the past
swinging at each other contrary to your enlightened
take five philosophical ruminations on memory we're not part of
the environment we are the environment
built as action adventure or a science fiction trope
in bed with either her daughter or her clone
(I find all this confusing; maybe it's meant to be)
after having been to Las Vegas the 50th anniversary convention
virtually touching all of the things people love
a longing to really get closer hold
these things in your hand whether it be a model
a woman pole dances athletically to Girls Just Wanna Have Fun

these three volumes are the voyages where we would literally
walk and drive more than a thousand miles
that's started the whole fan culture
teetering on emptiness evoking fractured histories

Partition 1

Madhur Anand

When the Natural History Museum of Delhi
goes up in flames, Ashok whispers hai Ram, the feathers!

A bystander sees what can be salvaged: don't worry
about the one hundred and sixty million year old

Sauropod bone, yaar. Dr. Singh yells Asiatic
Lion! Those good films in the permanent collection!

Crocodile tears fall for plastic mitochondria
in a case labelled Cell: The Basic Unit of Life.

A grad student grieves for the loss of his planned future
exhibit. Climate Change: Effects and Adaptation.

By that time, in the Western hemisphere, the present
tenses of verbs are erased by an invisible hand.

Her nickname as a child was Sheru (Lion)

Madhur Anand

I'm on my porch simulating shrubs and grasses
because when Mother dies this house will become the Bird

Building. The path leading to the sidewalk will be darkened
by its staff to create the illusion of constant

night. That's when I'll travel, time resplendent among bright
purple birds towards the sun we share. Invisible,

I'll feast my eyes on feathers well-lit since '48.
We'll have chai and croissants in the café of the zoo

in Antwerp. And there'll be no cage between us and them.
And no need. The Hindi for savannah: *savānā*.

Scrub –

Joanna Walsh

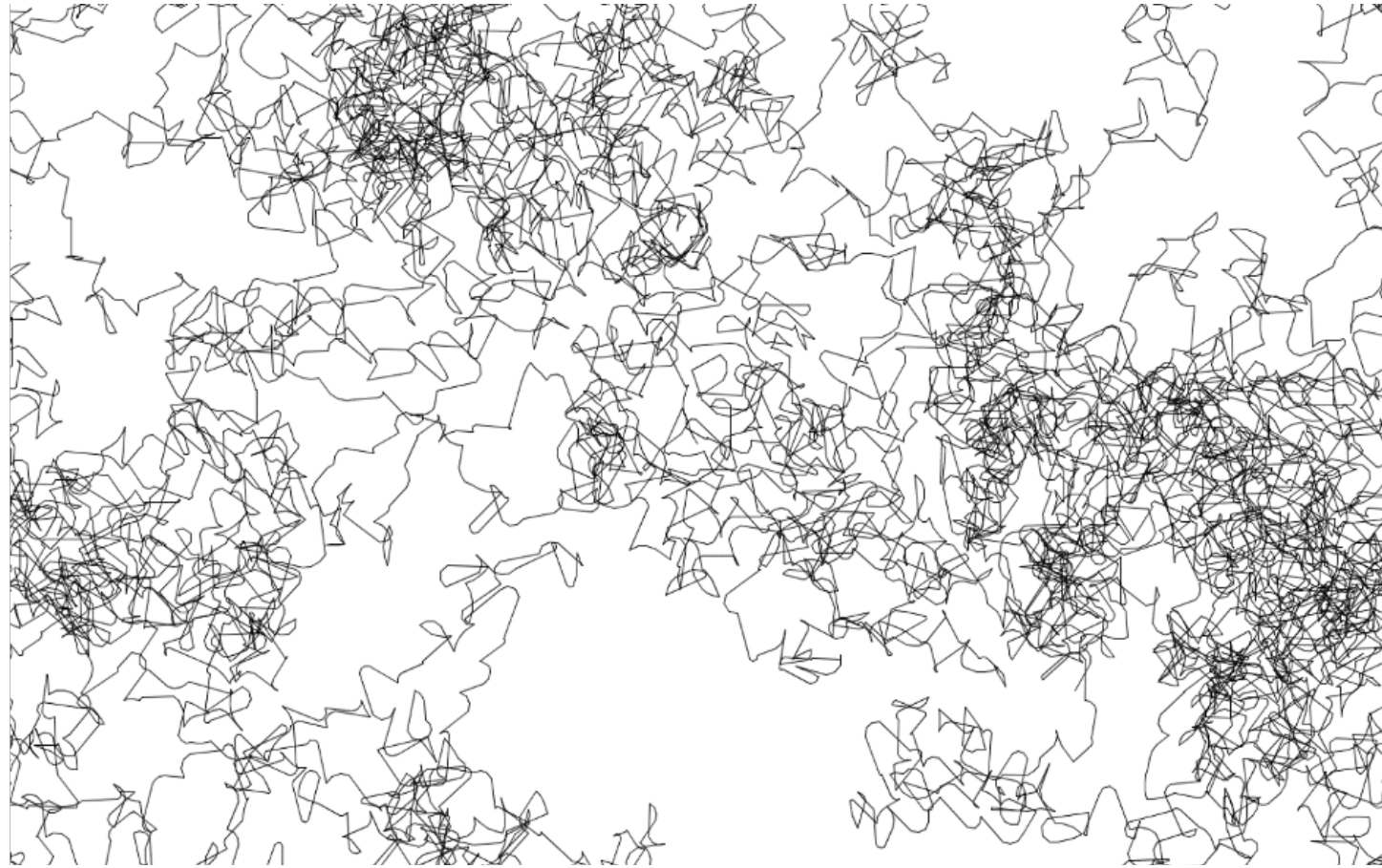


If you grow up on the edge of things you know about scrub, how the end of things is written in every leaf that insists on sprouting each spring out of decay. Scrub is not country, and it is not town. It is not a garden; nothing is neat here. It is not wild, or not wild enough. It exists on the edge of cultivated land, between the hard shoulder and the wheat field, between the livestock fence and the first occupied houses on the new estate.



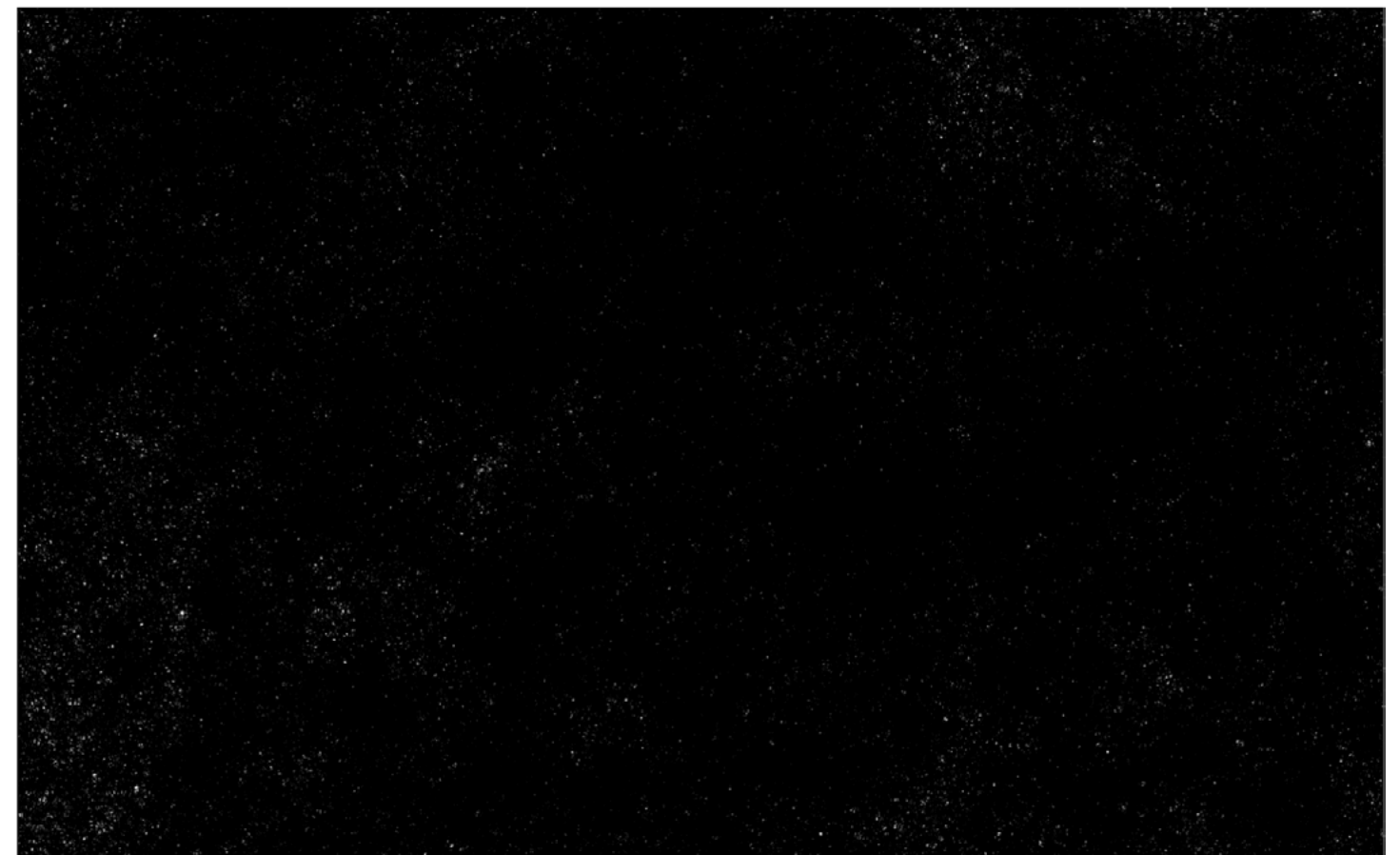
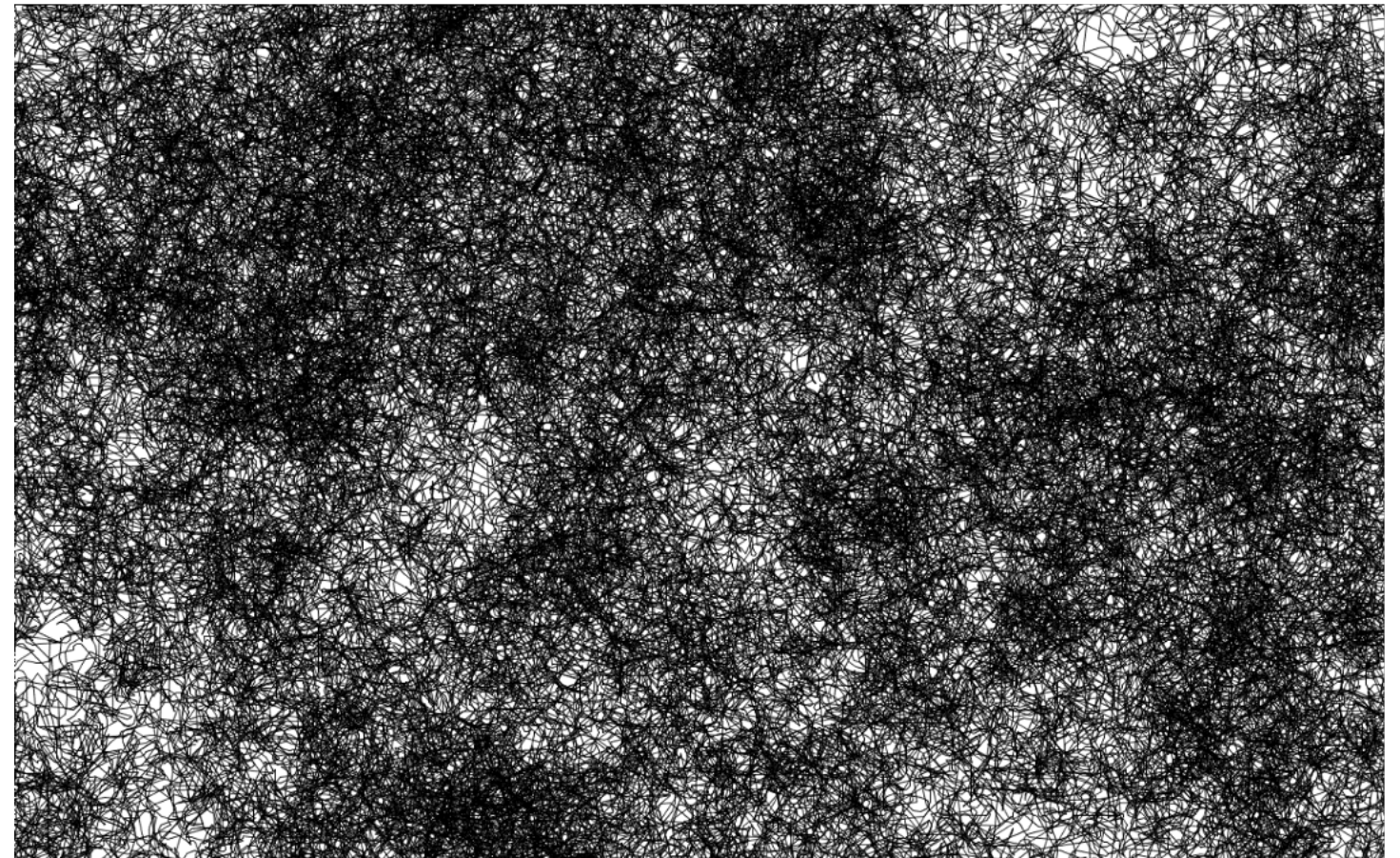
When you grow up on the edge of things you know what wild plants look like though you might not know their names. You know what they feel like: run your fingers across their heads to release the seeds; squeeze their stems for sap. You find out which ones give you hives, but you don't always know why, or what they're called.





If you grow up on the edge of things you know about improper use; about fences mended with ad boards for new houses; feed sacks spanning hedge gaps, shower trays for horse troughs. You know about fences, and you know about barbed wire. But you also know how to cross them. You know about things that shouldn't be there and you know that you shouldn't be there either. You know about rusty cans in the bed of streams, which bushes might hide needles, you navigate by a pair of knickers trodden into a tyre rut, by that odd shoe on the edge of a field, a women's shoe, fashionable, cheap and broken down. You know how long it's been there and that nobody moves it. You know what grows over it and how long it takes to not quite hide it. You know it will be there the next year and the next. You know that it won't break down.

If you grow up on the edge of things, you know things don't grow up straight; that on the new estate that newly planted hedge will never thicken across the gaps; that those saplings will never be trees, not before you're gone, if you're gone. You know that hogweed creeps into gardens and wallflowers and lobelia onto the edge of fields. That's scrub. But you also know that in between the stems of industrial wheat nothing else grows at all. I grew up in scrub and I did not grow up straight. I grew up knowing I was in the wrong place, a place that didn't have a name, but also that I was in the right place because in these in-between places scrub grows up without being noticed, and it spreads without being watched until it cannot easily be eradicated.



Spaces / Places

Caitlin Stobie

An accident can shake up how you view time and space, like a childhood memory of a kaleidoscope lens: sharp red and emerald fragments turning sepia as they grind against the here and now. My most recent fall brought up one such set of shards. There’s no concussion, dizziness, or tinnitus, but the injury has still changed something about my head. I’ve seen that I’ve been zoning, stuck in two different times at once. I’ve been confusing spaces with places.

┐

The satirical novelist Tom Sharpe once described my home town as “half the size of a New York cemetery and twice as dead”. Pietermaritzburg is wedged in a dry bowl between mountains and sea; head for the highway, turn left or right, and within an hour you’ll either reach the foothills of the Drakensberg or the Indian Ocean, where hills of sugar cane shimmer with waves.

My childhood was spent waiting for the weekends we’d drive to one of these places. While my sister collected cowries and the adults squinted for oil tankers, I’d turn to stare long and hard at the cityscape. I’d burrow my toes in rough sand and wish on Durban’s lights to live there, instead, with its humid winters. Then a breaker would knock my back and send me swimming.

More than once, my sister begged to take some gobies home and at the end of the trip, in the car that smelled of dust and sun, I’d clutch onto jam jars full of our new pets. Within a few days, the fish would be dead. Then the waiting would start again.

So, like many kids in once-colonised countries, I styled my address by centralising space. After the street and postcode, I’d embellish each letterhead and envelope with

KwaZulu-Natal
South Africa
Africa
Earth
The Milky Way
The Universe.

Together with an old map of the galaxy I’d stuck next to my bed, these lines gave me comfort. Places mattered less when I remembered we all are very, very small.

In high school, a few classmates and I were interviewed on a TV show about local travel. Pre-selected for purposes of Diversity, we were there to represent both Pietermaritzburg and the Born Free generation—whatever that may mean. In a cabinet somewhere there is a video tape of one of the young hosts, a glamorous redhead from Jo’burg, asking, “Is this place, like, a *dorp*, or something smaller?”. Neither, I wanted to reply. It is a non-place. Just space.

After a few years in the Eastern Cape, where I did my undergraduate degree, I moved to the UK. The climatic differences between Pietermaritzburg and Durban paled after wintering in England. Some friends from KZN moved here, too. Before 2020, when we still saw each other, we’d laugh about the inevitable question from well-meaning acquaintances: “Cape Town or Jo’burg?”. We’d compare the spaces we’d left with the places we’d met. Most of all, we’d talk about what lies above.

Take two maps: one of South Africa, one of the UK. The measurements just cannot compare. As in land, so above; dissimilarity is scaled through a mirror of blue. Isn’t it, we’d nod to each other, the truth? First thing you notice after disembarking. The sky gives away where you’ve landed. In Europe it’s apologetic, with wisps of cirrus clouds. Even summer days can be washed-out as Turner’s paintbrush.

Africa’s sky is, and has always been, different: in 1890, Olive Schreiner described the Karoo sky in a letter to Havelock Ellis as “stainless blue, with just one cloud floating in it like a ship, one doesn’t know why”. When there’s a truly clear day, we’d say, the sky seems so saturated—pregnant with the twinned potential of droughts and storms—that it’s hard not to feel stranded. Especially when you’re inland. Sometimes, it is just too big to feel like belonging, to feel at home.

Home: the word that sucked at our guts, even as we shucked it from our tongues. Little limpet of recognition.

┐

There is a short strip of cycle lane near Leeds Arts University. I ride along here once or twice a week on my way to the supermarket where plant-based foods are cheapest. The lane is next to a school and a row of old trees keel over its fence, lifting concrete with their roots.

It’s a few days before the start of England’s second national lockdown, but

undergraduates are spilling over the path. I am cycling fast, mind far from wet autumns, as I think about Agnès Varda. After her passing in 2019, I felt too struck to touch her documentaries for a while. With a year's distance I have decided to watch *Visages Villages*. I am thinking about faces and places and seeing dry winter towns through tinted glasses.

A couple of students are walking in the cycle lane. I ring my bell and another woman moves but the pair keep talking with their hands. There's enough distance between us to try again, but just then, my front tyre hits a tarred-over root. The bell is not where it should be. I look down and then up and down again and I am starting to skid into a muddy bank of leaves between the cycle lane and the motorway.

Three trains of thought split ahead at once. The first must come from the reptilian brain, an instinct too pre-verbal to phrase, but it's the thing that makes me curl my head to my chest and twist away from the barriers that I am most definitely about to slide into. Second there's screaming from what must be the ego: expletives and a string of words like nowhy / ohno / whyoh on repeat. Last comes a reflection from somewhere that feels both deep and detached as the metal strikes once, twice, thrice: "It's not too bad. Could've been worse. Not my face, at least."

"Are you okay? Did you hit your head?" a woman asks. I try to answer but time feels like it's rushing forwards and my body just wants to lie flat in the past for a bit. She steps closer—though still more than two metres away—and takes out her phone. The students have moved off the cycle lane now. They peer from behind her: a Greek chorus.

I sit up and shake my head as if I'm a lolloping dog. My right ear feels hot and wet but the fingers come back clean after I reach into the canal. The woman seems pleased. "You're not bleeding then. You're sure you don't want me to stay? Till you ring someone I mean."

This brings another string of little words, though quieter than before: noone / nobody. The first people I think of are my family, who are scattered between London, rural Ireland, and two non places in South Africa. My friends are in the last throes of finishing their theses. In a passing second I think of my ex, but my neediness in such moments led us to breaking up; our relationship just grazed the vulnerability of the body. I stand and tell the woman I'll be fine. (The Greek chorus make off as soon as I get on my feet.)

It's after they've walked away that I see my leggings have been torn, and a square inch of skin has come off my knee. Three of my knuckles are scraped with mud and blood. The throbbing pressure on the right side of my head turns to stinging and

there's russet on the wool of my jumper. I push my bicycle to my nearby medical practice but there are Covid awareness signs plastered over the entrance.

T

I might like rusks because I never encountered them when I was growing up. Most of my friends' parents were of Irish and Scottish descent and so afternoon teas meant milk tart (not *melktert*) or pastel hued Zoo biscuits. In more Americanised households, we were offered Oreos. We called our hosts Mrs X or Mr Y and said Yes Please instead of Ja.

In my first year of university, I learnt there were several brands of rusks. Boxes of various sizes lined an aisle in the student supermarket. Condensed Milk flavour seemed strange to someone who ate it, on occasions like birthdays, straight out the tin with friends from res. I explored more austere flavours, like Wholewheat and Poppyseed. At first they were a cheap breakfast that held down each morning's chicory-coffee mixture. Then I became conditioned. Rusks were a reward for reading, an antidote to scholarly anxiety.

These were the years leading up to the initial Rhodes Must Fall protests. The statue was still standing at UCT. At Rhodes University, we were asked to read Shakespeare and Wordsworth and J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*. In one of our lectures, a man (the speaker was almost always a man) made a passing reference to non-places. It was unsettling to learn this was an established concept, not a word pulled from a child's head.

Marc Augé's theory zooms in on those spaces where anonymity blooms, like freeways, supermarkets, and other fleeting zones of human contact. By then, I knew places weren't spaces; a space is meant to be something abstract, while a place is a certain piece of space that has meaning. But doesn't that mean non-places are just another type of space, I wondered.

The non-place paradox states that such zones appear universal, and transcend culture, because everyone is equally alienated by them. It's in their loneliness, in other words, that we all feel at home. But this couldn't explain the beggars living in the car park of the student supermarket. Mine workers walked along the national route every day, memorising speckles of tarmac like constellations: to them, surely, the space of the highway held more meaning? Then there were thoughts of teenagers in shopping malls, toddlers jumping up and down in airports. Or, more soberly, a coercive Romanist in a motel room. It seemed to me that the academic explanation for non-places

was childlike, in its own way. Still, I stirred Cremora in my coffee and picked up a rusk and kept reading.

I liked: to tell people Muesli rusks were accidentally vegan; learning how they softened and how to lift them from my mug at just the right moment, when their heaviness still held some bite; the way they lasted for ages—like all old *boerekos*—so I didn’t feel compelled to finish an open box. But they made me uncomfortable. Sometimes, just one could leave me feeling heavy for hours. If I mentioned them to friends who weren’t vegetarian, the conversation would turn to other South African exports, biltong and *wors*, the words rotating like carcasses at the back of a grocery. And, still, it’s impossible to forget rusks are steeped in histories of scarcity and violence, even when speaking with Yorkshiremen.

Most English people think rusks are ugly, only for teething babies. Ugly comes from the Old Norse *ugga*: to dread. I wonder how these misshapen little lumps translate to just the opposite, how they comfort me, how they make me want to say *nca*, even though my tongue never twists that way.

Before all the lockdowns, I converted one friend to rusks. I liked that he didn’t ask me to roll my Rs, the last letters of the word clipped on his teeth as if calling a cat. This was our ritual: we’d make tea (Honeybush, Yorkshire). In front of our mugs we’d line up two rusks each. Then we’d just sit and slurp and talk and talk until we were drinking crumbs.

We’d speak about animals and Coetzee. I’d tell of the ways the east coast felt like a cross between *The Wicker Man* and a neo-Western. Small aircraft and road trips; an inch of snow melting on tussock grass; libraries of red brick and verdigris blending into flat charismatic churches; eating seasonally in ugly bungalows; pagan explanations for TB resistance. There were elements that required further frames of reference: Bollywood, *Shaka Zulu*, *Tsotsi*. Smoky kwela music cut to police sirens. A biryani recipe by anti-apartheid activist Zuleikha Mayat serving 800 people, calling for 4kg of ginger (and a full cup of turmeric powder, ‘used sparingly’).

“Someone will get to the roots of it one day,” I’d say, “the place that’s never seen on screens. The negative space of *Disgrace*.”

┐

I rest for just over 24 hours in the wake of the accident. It’s a long time since I’ve had rusks but the past keeps popping up and I crave comfort. I call Arththi to

vent about urban planning, about the cycling lane. Then she reminds me of an appointment we’ve booked for the day before lockdown starts. Leeds Bike Mill are offering free bicycle checks. Will I be okay to ride there? Can I handle the coincidence?

It feels good to get up the next day, even with the oozing knee. I put a plaster on my ear and tuck it beneath a beanie. We take it slow on our way to the city centre. It’s one of those northern days when the horizon’s white, but the ether is deep blue. Passing Woodhouse Moor and the universities, there are even more couples and children and leashed dogs than the other day. Students still stretch along the cycle lane. The bank of leaves against the barrier is the only giveaway of where I fell. Already my anger is starting to dampen.

The man checking the bicycles has gentle eyes; we can’t see the rest of his face, but his voice matches. He says our bikes will be ready in an hour. We linger in the market. Arththi introduces me to a Tunisian food stall. I take her to a tiny shop that sells South African imports. I show her the rusks and chutney, buy her a Stoney and a Wilson’s. The cashier overhears my warning that the ginger beer induces sneezes. She adds that it’s unwise to chew the toffee. Once I’ve paid, the woman asks where I’m from.

I tell her KZN, thinking of open spaces, of possibilities.

“Oh,” she says, “Durban. Durban by the sea.”

The words I’d wished to hear as a child don’t sound like home in her mouth. She repeats it quickly, Durban-by-the-sea. I smile and suck the treacle sweet. It’s hard as bronze.

┐

I’m on my way to meet Clare, who teaches on the same course as me at the arts university. “Am at the statue,” she texts. “Where are you?”

There are three plinths in Woodhouse Moor: each is located on a corner, if you see the park as a rough diamond. I am standing by the statue that’s closest to the university. The Duke of Wellington’s effigy is complete with rust-coloured boots. Clare replies to say she’s waiting near Sir Robert Peel, an old prime minister whom I believe was spray-painted over the summer. We meet in the middle and walk to see if the third statue, of Queen Victoria, is still standing after the Black Lives Matter protest. It is (of course it is). Soon we’ve walked every single path in the park.

“As if we’re hamsters on a wheel,” she says.

I tell her about the fall. My ear is healing over and I like to think the asymmetry makes me look hardy but cute, like a stray. We talk about fungi, lichens and algae. It's true, we laugh. Every writer we know seems to be taking pictures of mushrooms. The conversation turns to travel and everywhere we can't go.

"It's strange how we used to romanticise airports and aeroplanes."

"Yeah," she replies, "that whole theory of non-places! Ugh." Now Augé is here, again—though we're quite far from *here* and it's not really *now*. In South Africa, we don't say just-now; it's now-now, from the Afrikaans *nou-nou*. Repetition with difference.

We're revisiting the fourth corner of the park. There's no statue here, just a community garden and a kit of pigeons (flight patterns defying the logic of flock). They lift and drop, lift and drop, around a Polite Notice someone's tied to a tree; it asks people to feed them seeds instead of crumbs, to stop attracting rats. Still, the birds feast on chunks of white bread.

The path is split for pedestrians and cyclists. A fat earthworm glistens and moves towards the cycle lane with impressive speed. We bend on our haunches and, with slow fingers, I pick it up.

"Ew," Clare says. "They look like intestines. Well I guess that's what they are. Little tubes."

"True." Its pigmentation seems mottled with blue. "I wonder if they have veins." Is it possible to imagine a face? Almost. Minus the ears, eyes, nose. I toss it onto a knot of grass.

"Hope it was meaning to go that way."

"Oh dear. Maybe it'll go back again."

"Not if it's squashed by a cyclist."

I think of the fury that first gripped me when I crashed my bike. The students who were unaware of their surroundings. Then I wonder how many worms I have ridden over in my time. Add to that the countless active violences, the snails and fish plucked from rock pools. Like all beasts I, too, am equal-parts dreadful and soft inside, moving sharp as a tongue, sometimes gutsy but always at risk. I have taken comfort in imaginary places and later been confronted by ugliness. But of all the spaces I could've landed, I'd rather settle *here* and *now* with the pests, the pigeons and fungi, than in any other corner of the park. Or, perhaps, earth.

Imagine that: a now-place. A place for the people and creatures who see how negative space, how disgrace, are all just complications of the clear blue.

As we keep cycling and talking and walking, through the third lockdown and into whatever may happen now or just-now or now-now, I feel my Leeds friends

get this. Despite our shifting accents and all the ways we cannot share rusks or even touch. To the messiness of the present we each bring some portion of comfort. We make our own meaning of home. All faces, searching places, feeding on crossed roots.

Botany

Dylan Brennan

*Zan yuhqui xochitl
in zan toncuetlahui
ya in tlalticpac*

Cuetlaxóchitl: How could I not think of the ‘flower that withers’ and its heavy red petals you moistened this morning with a lukewarm spray, the same petals that, pre-conquest, were dried to an infusion to increase breast milk production, organised triangles planted down the boulevard now like an artery to Chapultepec, the failing lungs of our megalopolis. For some the remembrance of slaughtered warriors, for others: a broken little heart wailed into existence. Or a sign of the Christ cut from the roadside and sent to a slave owner’s greenhouse in South Carolina. Hard to cultivate in the high lake valley, caravans from the south at year’s end carried to the emperor and distributed to temples, the scarlet return of a low sun to ensure new life, continued light. This solstice it’s just the two, no, three of us: the tiny boy (unwithered) punches softly in your belly.





Móin: I ran along the Moat Road that divides Dublin from Wicklow as the sun felt as cold and silver as the pooled bog-water in which it was reflected. I chanced upon three apiaries nestled in a damp geometric hollow of turf cut to be burnt in winter. I saw no bees. The only sound was my heavy breathing in the sphagnum freshness. A satellite tracked my run. I stepped from the path to crouch and touch some heather when my feet sank down through sodden black fibres. With legs darkened to the knees I got back to the car where my father waited with a hot flask of tea. The next time running was back in the Alameda with my shoes still partially caked in bogland detritus. With little warning, the last downpour of the year came upon me in heavy glass sheets, flushing the Irish sediment out into the park. I watched it dissolve in moving runnels of rainwater.

Alameda: “From the market we walked to the Alameda, a public walk, or rather park, laid out in lines diverging from different centres, and planted with a great variety of trees. The roads are wide enough to admit the passage of carriages, and it is much frequented on Sundays and festivals”—Joel Roberts Poinsett. The presence of the virus means the Alameda (built on swampland and named for the poplars that have since been replaced) is blocked off with metallic barricades, allowing the squirrels and grackles to wander the interior unmolested, as human beings have been requested to no longer gather. Nevertheless, at the southern end, opposite the Palace of Fine Arts, a group of women remain camped. They sell handmade trinkets under posters and photographs of the recently disappeared and weave into the morning a grief so acute it clutches still to a hope: that the state will somehow bring back the dead. A state that, even after everything we know, still promises to take care of us. At the northeastern corner of the rectangle the last jacaranda blossom hangs on. Planted in the thirties, suggested by Matsumoto as a more resilient alternative to cherry trees, they enliven the centre every spring. They leave normally with the summer torrents that blow the bruised-to-black petals out into the streets to clog drains with single-use plastics, polystyrene scraps and discarded half-limes that turn the city back into its former self: a chaotic assemblage of plazas and canals. Purple florets waver on a branch, they might just make it to New Year’s.

Maca in cuetlabuia





For all the Rothkos I will ever see

Supriya Kaur Dhalwal

I

Looking at *Green and Tangerine on Red*, the two slabs of different colours on the canvas ask me to differentiate what I need from what I desire

Knowing I could always need less and desire more, I have punctured my ability to differentiate them like the inability to take the red out of the roses, to take the grey out of black

In all the cities of the world with the tallest skyscrapers, there could be a Rothko painting

II

Do the lifeless forget human touch, as the wind forgets the storm?

I ate a cold sandwich the morning my Mum’s heart stopped beating

If we think of the number of cold sandwiches that were consumed that morning in the entire world and the number of daughters who wished to leave this world with their mothers

then the act of chewing and living feel less desolate

But do they really?

It is like not calling a beautiful snowed-down landscape beautiful anymore because it snows there every year at regular intervals—as if too much beauty kills beauty

Maybe the path to the city of death is strewn with an infinite mesh of broken antlers

III

What do we get on taking the religion out of a sermon?

What colour is the palette of our existence if we take a city out of our body? Or two?

Or three?

IV

We lose our heart in one city to catch it in another

We lose so much in one city to never find it in any other city

There could be a necklace for a name or a name for a necklace

Either way, we own it like a city owns its blood orange sunset

V

The dichotomy between existing and living—

Calling a city *a city* and calling a love *love*

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Contributor Biographies

Madhur Anand

Madhur Anand is the author of the book of poems *A New Index for Predicting Catastrophes* (McClelland & Stewart/PHRC, 2015) and the memoir *This Red Line Goes Straight to Your Heart* (Strange Light/PHRC, 2020), both highly acclaimed and considered trailblazing in their synthesis of art and science. Her second collection of poems will be published by McClelland & Stewart in Spring 2022. Dr. Anand is a full professor of ecology and sustainability at The University of Guelph, where she was appointed the inaugural director of the Guelph Institute for Environmental Research.

Photo credit: Ian Willms



Dylan Brennan

In 2019 Ireland Professor of Poetry Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin awarded Dylan Brennan the Ireland Chair of Poetry Bursary Award. His debut poetry collection, *Blood Oranges*, was published by The Dreadful Press in 2014 and was awarded the Patrick Kavanagh Award runner-up prize. In 2017 he collaborated on *Guadalupe & Other Hallucinations*, a series of exhibitions and an illustrated e-book, with Belfast-based visual artist Jonathan Brennan. In 2016 he co-edited *Rethinking Juan Rulfo's Creative World: Prose, Photography, Film* with Prof. Nuala Finnegan (UCC), a volume of academic essays on the work of Mexican writer/photographer Juan Rulfo. He has been invited to read at major literary festivals in Colombia, Nicaragua, Mexico, Italy, Ireland and USA and has twice been recipient of a Culture Ireland Travel Grant.



Supriya Kaur Dhalwal

Supriya Kaur Dhalwal was born in the Himalayan town of Palampur, India. She studied at St. Bede's College, Shimla; Trinity College, Dublin; and Queen's University, Belfast. Her poems have been translated into Arabic, German, Italian; and have appeared in *Ambit*, *Banshee*, *Cyphers*, *Gutter*, *Madras Courier*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, *Poetry Jukebox*, *Poetry London*, *Rattle*, *The Bombay Literary Magazine*, *The Irish Times*, *The Lifeboat*, *The Lonely Crowd*, *The Pickled Body*, *The Tangerine* and elsewhere. In 2018, she was one of the twelve poets selected for Poetry Ireland's Introductions Series. Supriya is the 2021 Charles Wallace India Trust Fellow at the University of Kent. Her upcoming book of poems is called *The Yak Dilemma* and will be published by Makina Press, London later this year.



Claudia Luna Fuentes

Claudia Luna Fuentes. (Monclova, Coahuila. Mexico. June 3, 1969). She has published *The fruits of the sun* (Castillo MacMillan 2005) children's book and poetry collections among which are *Casa de sol* (FECA-CONACULTA 1995), *Noise of ants* (Gatsby Ediciones, 2005), *Meat for flowers, personal anthology* (Aullido Libros, Spain 2011), *The flowers draw their thorns, a personal anthology* (Ministry of Culture of Coahuila, 2013) and *Where the skin* (Mantis Editores / CONARTE, 2019). Appears in Mexican Poetry Yearbook (Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2006). She obtained first place in photography Coahuila luz y forma 2003 and Manuel Acuña Municipal Poetry Award 2008. In poetry, she received a scholarship from FONCA, stimuli as a young creator and as a creator with trajectory of the FECA and PECDA on several occasions. She was a FORCA-Noreste 2011-2012 scholarship recipient, in Lima, Peru, where she gave workshops on object poetry. As a guest of honor at the 2013 Tangier International Theater Festival in Morocco, her poetry was read translated into Arabic. His poems have versions in English, German and Portuguese. Among the magazines in which she has published, the inaugural issue of the contemporary poetry magazine of Valencia 21veintiúnversos, (October, 2015), and Lichtungen (November, 2016) stand out. In the Literature section of northern Mexico, her poems were translated by Christoph Janacs.

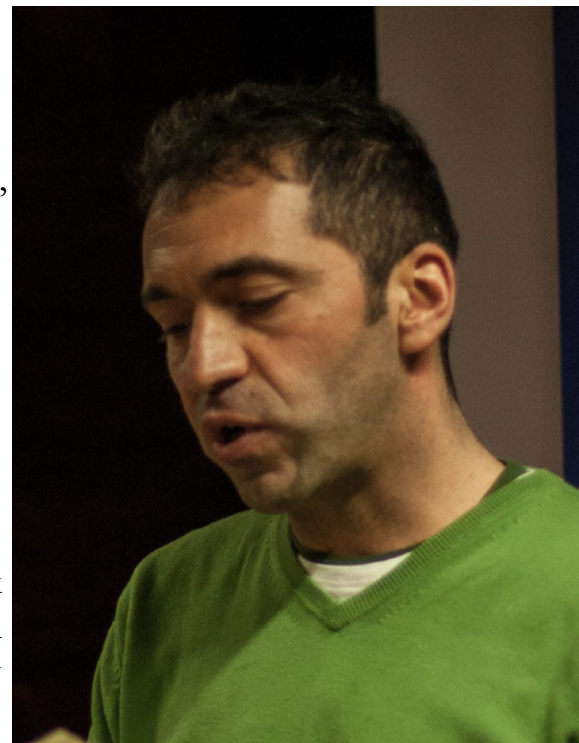


She works with visual and sound poetry and video poems, participated in the exhibition of the Contemporary Photography Program section Coahuila *Tasar el humor* (Museum of Graphic Arts, 2018) and in 509.91 +, group exhibition at the Inter-American Gallery of Human Rights, about the violence that women experience. As of March 2021, a selection of her poems are exhibited in the gallery of the Cultural Institute of Mexico in Paris, accompanying sculptures by Avelina and Alejandro Fuentes Quezada in the Continuous Extinction exhibition. She is a communicator. Director of Scientific Dissemination at the Museum of the Desert. Master in History of Contemporary Society (Universidad Iberoamericana). She is pursuing a Doctorate in Sciences and Humanities for Interdisciplinary Development.

Photo credit: Marcela Blanco

Christodoulos Makris

Christodoulos Makris has published three books of poetry—most recently *this is no longer entertainment: A Documentary Poem* (Dostoyevsky Wannabe, 2019)—as well as several pamphlets, artists’ books and other poetry objects. He was 2018/19 Writer in Residence at Maynooth University, and received a 2020/21 Literature Project Award from The Arts Council of Ireland. He is the poetry editor at gorse journal and associated imprint Gorse Editions. “In work that is at times radically experimental, and always alert to the capacity of language to remake the world, Christodoulos Makris seeks ways to break open the lyric space of the poem to alter the ways in which language operates in the public realm”—Lucy Collins, *Irish University Review*.



Koleka Putuma

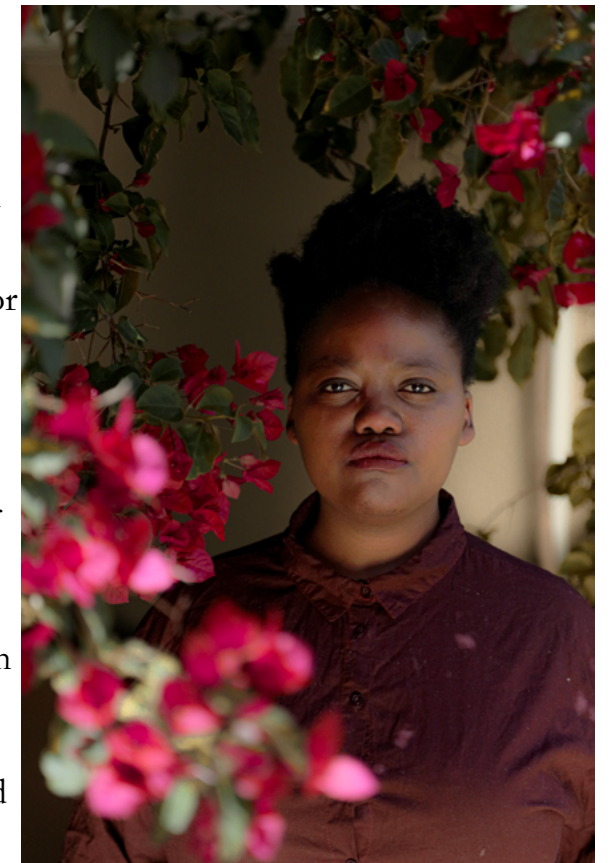
Koleka Putuma is an award-winning poet, playwright and theatre director.

Her bestselling debut collection of poems *Collective Amnesia* is taking the South African literary scene by storm. Since its publication in April 2017, the book is in its 10th print run and is prescribed for study at tertiary level in South African Universities and Gothenburg University in Sweden. The collection is the recipient of the 2018 Glenna Luschei Prize for African Poetry, named 2017 book of the year by the City Press and one of the best books of 2017 by The Sunday Times and Quartz Africa. It is translated into Spanish (Flores Rara, 2019), German (Wunderhorn Publishing House, 2019), Danish (Rebel with a Cause, 2019), Dutch (Poeziecentrum, 2020), Swedish (Råmus förlag). Forthcoming translations: Portuguese (Editora Trinta Zero Nove), and Italian (Arcipelago itaca).

Her theatre works include *UHM* (2014) *Woza Sarafina* (2016), and *Mbuzeni* (2017/8). Her theatre for young audiences include *Ekbaya* (2 – 7 year olds), and *SCOOP: Kitchen play for carers and babes*, the first South African theatre work for audiences aged 0 – 12 months old.

Putuma was appointed as creative director for the 2019 Design Indaba Conference. She was recently shortlisted as one of four finalists for the Rolex Mentor and Protégé Arts Initiative for theatre. She is a Forbes Africa Under 30 Honoree, recipient of the Imbewu Trust Scribe Playwriting Award, Mbokodo Rising Light award, CASA playwriting award and the 2019 Distell Playwriting Award for her play *No Easter Sunday for Queers*, published by Junkets in February 2020, and played to sold out audiences at the Market theatre in 2019.

Koleka Putuma is the Founder and Director of Manyano Media, a multidisciplinary creative company that produces and champions the work and stories of black queer artists and queer life.



Caitlin Stobie

Caitlin Stobie is a Wellcome Trust ISSF Fellow at the University of Leeds. Her writing has appeared in *Berfrois*, *Flash: The International Short-Short Story Magazine*, *Plumwood Mountain*, *Tears in the Fence*, *Zoomorphic*, and elsewhere. She is an editorial assistant at *Stand* and a Visiting Lecturer in Creative Writing at Leeds Arts University.



Joanna Walsh

Joanna Walsh is a multidisciplinary writer for print, digital and performance. The author of seven books, she also works as a critic, editor and teacher. She is the recipient of the 2020 Markievicz Award in the Republic of Ireland, a UK Arts Foundation fellow, and the founder of #read-women, described by the New York Times as “a rallying cry for equal treatment for women writers”. Her next book, *Seed*, will be published by No Alibis Press in June both as a paperback and as a reconfigurable artist’s book.

Thicket is a piece of generative digital art I made that grows randomly, producing a different drawing each time it is run until the page is entirely filled and all light beyond the thicket is blocked. You can run “Thicket” at <https://www.noalibispress.com/content/joanna-walsh/thicket.html>.



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Since 2012, The Nature of Cities’ motto has been “many voices, greener cities, better cities.” TNOC is a “boundary organization” interested in ideas at the nexus of science, design, planning, policy, and the arts. We create global (virtual and live) forums that explore the role of nature in creating communities, cities, and regions that are better for both people and nature.



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