

FRAGMENTS

What if a woman had to save the world? What if this woman, The Saver, went to her local waste facility, and said, *these workers are human too*? What if another woman, The Finder, wants to find The Saver, but The Saver eludes her? The Finder trawls through The Saver's archive, and makes attempts to meet, but the meetings are always cancelled. What is The Saver trying to teach The Finder? At The Finder's local waste facility, they conduct tours for avid schoolkids. The kids want to make even more waste to feed the machines.

~~Don de Lillo makes statements.~~

Brushing skin flakes off the bedsheet and pillow. Whose? Hers? An absent person's? A squeezing of the bum cheeks. Retention. Stand up. The cat wanders in, ruffled and dusty. The skin flakes are not the cat's.

If we organise our waste we will be organised. Waste is the key to unlock society's ills, and assess its functionality. In *Tales of the City*, Mona assesses Mary Ann's waste and creates a portrait of the lady. Our waste profiles us. We can be subjected to a waste analysis, from which a prescription can be issued: eat less processed food, read less crap magazines; lots of vegetable peelings, good, poo is no doubt regular.

I look at *Ada* by Atak based on *Ada* by Gertrude Stein. Now I listen to Gertrude Stein read 'Matisse'. I am a cultural accumulation. I can be that. And you can be certain that you can be certain. On the cover of Akutagawa's *Rashomon and 17 Other Stories*, a toothless hag: grey hair, coarse and straight, straggles either side of the mouth and furrowed brow; her wide-open eyes, circles with black pin pricks at centre. On cue, a crow. *Caw caw caw*. I return to *Ada*. And *Tales of the City*: fizzy-poppy-gossipy.

In 'Rashomon', the woman sits with fire on a stick. Visceral details: a pus-filled pimple. Animal analogies: he moved "with all the stealth of a lizard"; "crouched, cat-like". A "scrawny old woman" is "white-haired and monkey-like".

Bloody nature, swollen rivers, oozing mud, gorges, adrenaline, internality, going deep inside, waste, detritus, oozing pus. The pus-filled pimple, swelling, fit to burst, to splatter, to splay its yellow pus... onto what? Onto whom? Where? Female ejaculation – who's watching? Who receives that cum?

Alexander Chee writes about his time as a student of Annie Dillard in an article. Chee informs us that she would count the verbs in their manuscripts. *Bad verbs give rise to adverbs*, she would say. *Choose the right verb*.

Samuel L. Johnson was equally verb-obsessed.

Waste and the environment. Gender. The unknowableness of being alive. The race to keep up. Just as you get used to a scenario, a person, a season, an age, a weight, a height, a schedule, a political situation – things change. Life is slippery, a racing current against the tides. We are always in opposition to our decaying selves, in opposition to being one of many, in opposition to having no control of anyone or anything, including oneself. We make our comforts and distractions, our systems, our routines and rituals.

Under The Sword? A white horse gallops across the field behind the dyke. Der Kleine Pferd? Der Weisse Pferd? Stefan Zweig? Got it: Der Schimmelreiter, Theodor Storm.

Akutagawa's 'The Story of a Head That Fell Off' begins with a head that knows that it is a head soon to fall off. *I'm cut, I'm cut*, he says, the voice, the consciousness that sits inside. As the head prepares to fall – at last, climax, chorus – the horse, with the head flopped over its mane, gallops across the field, the ghostly spectral presence that the rider on the white horse sees in the storm. One horse from one story jumps into another.

A line is drawn.

The man's head is cut.

Under the line, his past – ten minutes earlier.

In battle they sharpened each other's swords.

We don't know this man, this warrior, in war. He was very successful.

The Making of Americans: repeating, then, is a way of repeating. Slowly, everyone comes to be clearer to someone. An ordered history of everyone. The Chinese warrior and the Japanese warrior sharpening each other's swords in the field.

He was wailing, we are told, because of the dizzying ebb and flow of his emotions, centering on his fear of death.

Go on existing. Family living can go on existing. They are quite certain. And anyone can come to be a dead one.

A diatribe against war, and the nonsense of a man fighting a man in a field, sharpening their swords on each other, such that some can come to be dead ones. Family living. Some become dead ones. Not anyone then is remembering any such thing. Everyone is then a dead one. A diatribe against the nonsense of existing.

If I Told Him, A Completed Portrait of Picasso. Would he like it?

Xiao Er was overcome by a mysterious loneliness.

Disappearing.

Now all actively repeated.

And do they do: A Modern Tragicomedy.

Life is a modern tragicomedy.

He, he, he, and he, as he, and he is, and as he is, he is and as he, and as he is, and he, and he.

Oh, his head fell off, years later.

He fell and hit the floor and his head fell off.

A fairy tale.

A modern fable.

Let me recite what history teaches.

And the story of the man lying in the ditch looking up at the sky, seeing mirages of home, is repeated. Retold.

A dream. Jumpers on a hill: young people, crouched like stones. I walk in a stone-walled trench. I need the toilet. *Ask the jumpers*, a girl says. *I'll get them to write it on the rocks.* To my left, people on a grassy bank say there's a toilet behind them. A cubicle houses a squat latrine.¹ Dirty. Pubes. I don't go. I jump onto a two-tier display in a warehouse. I am with a man; he is looking for me.

Slipping around in the mud on the edges of the river. Feet depress sand, *schlunk*, *glunk*. Suction. Feet will not pull out. Panic. Hold still. Slowly pull. Leave the boots. Get to the edge. Escape the tide. The tide comes in fast. Sit now, momentarily peaceful, next to the hull of a houseboat. See how the water has pooled up behind you. You must wade now to regain the road. Heart races. Excitement. A thrill. Boots left behind. Walk barefoot along the riverside. Find a new pair of shoes: trainers slung up in a tree.

A dream. I am camping with people I don't know. I bought and then lost a coat. Now, in a shop, I find a second-hand version of the lost coat, as well as the coat I bought and lost. I try both on. It is

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SBY5lclUM2Y>

agreed that the one I bought previously is best. We go into a field where we have each pitched a tent. A small girl lets a ball chase around a course she created. It's an artwork. This small girl is clearly Mystery from the film *Inside Out*. The girl is unhappy that I'm not more impressed by her artwork. I explain that I'm tired. The other five have put a large tent across all the small tents. I walk with some others back to my tent. It's gone. We find one of the other tents of our group pushed down a slope. We recover it and walk up to our larger encampment past a toilet tent in which four girls are using Shewees. They snarl at us. I'm with a girl with red hair in pig tails. We talk about community. *Surely it's better to embrace community, even when we're too many*, I say.

I know I'm in London when I see a stained old mattress propped against a wall. In the 1980s, when I lived in Brixton, there was always a mattress propped against a wall. To me it's a sign of tolerance and efficiency. A declaration from a society brave enough to show its face, warts and all, and offer up its detritus to whoever wants it. The waste ecology of the city.

Slavoj Žižek in *Examined Life* says: *accept a person warts and all*.²

Cat climbing trellis,
half-in and half-out, pauses –
its arse towards me.

The mechanical beast idles as it gulps the clanking jars and bottles, the flattened cardboard boxes, the plastic cartons and lids, the clinking cans. I sit in the garden beneath the magnolia.

Meditation on a novel: a body of prose – waste prose – wasteful prose – waste-making prose – waste-making writing-making – lists as landscape – to what end – what takes place in that landscape? In *Life A User's Manual*, a man spends his life doing what he can to make his life meaningless. This involves lots of money and lots of people; lots of travel and activity; a whole lot of something.

Spatial relations between objects and meaning.³

² Tags: Zizek – trash – garbage – waste – video – abstract materialism – beauty

³ Macrobiotic cooking: John Cage. *Empty Words*. Erik Satie: <https://open.spotify.com/playlist/37i9dQZF1DWVTUSNpU0pKJ?si=217331801c484d8d>. Louis Malle, *My Dinner with André* (1981). Alison Knowles – food art – Fluxus. George Maciunas – Fluxus + Habitation. *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, Gertrude Stein

In Don de Lillo's *Underworld*, a character has waste in his car, which he is fly-tipping for a friend who runs a restaurant. This friend doesn't want to get into the car because the waste stinks. In 2015, in Southwark, waste does not stink, because it is separated: food/recycling/general.

Later, there's a garbage strike in New York.

On walking: "Bronzini thought that walking was an art. He was out nearly every day after school, letting the route produce a medley of sounds and forms and movements, letting the voices fall and the aromas deploy in ways that varied, but not too much, from day to day [...].

"Bonzini didn't own a car, didn't drive a car, didn't want one, didn't need one, wouldn't take one if somebody gave it to him. Stop walking, he thought, and you die."⁴

If we knew how to live in houses we wouldn't make waste. Does anyone need a sofa, for instance? The only reason it seems important is psychologically: better to sit or lie on a sofa to watch a movie in the designated communal space of the living room than to do so in your bedroom, which feels squalid, even though it is still you, in a room, doing what you are doing. Why not go the whole hog and shove the sofa and TV out on the front lawn or yard or street?

Let it all hang out.

⁴ DeLillo, D. (1998) *Underworld*, pp. 661-662.

