



Maastricht University

Letters in Lockdown

an anthology of poems,
photos and artwork
by FASoS staff and
students during the
COVID-19 lockdown



Sally Wyatt

ACADEMIC HAIKU

The act of writing
Brings frustration, insight, joy
Not in that order

Paul Stephenson

ZOOM HAIKU

Sally, you're on mute
Sally, you need to unmute
Can't hear you, Sally!

We would like to thank the FASoS Faculty Board for their financial contribution towards this second edition of poems, pictures and art by FASoS staff and students.

PREFACE

In spring 2020, many members of the FASoS community contributed to *Quarantine Spring*. It evocatively captured those bright spring days of 2020 as we all grappled with the fear and uncertainty that the virus brought. Dipping into that anthology now transports you back in time so vividly. Those poems could only have been written during that historical moment.

We hoped we wouldn't still be here, but throughout the academic year 2020-21 the virus and its mutations remained among us. Again, confined to our homes and unable to meet in person, we have been learning and teaching largely in online environments, and studying with our books and papers behind closed doors and in private spaces. We have all developed our own new rhythms to each day and found novel ways of connecting with colleagues, students, family and friends.

Finding ourselves in yet another lockdown, and with travel restrictions and curfews, we realised we wanted to tap in once again to the creativity of FASoS staff and students as a way of recording this collective experience, and of keeping in contact with one another. If we had not already known, the first lockdown made us aware that engaging in creative pursuits is therapeutic and can help reduce anxiety and manage our mental health.

We had a lot of questions: how is this spring different to last? What new preoccupations do we have? Have we become more or less resilient? How do we use all this time indoors? Are we getting outside, and if so, what are we seeing? By mining the collective talent, we were keen to find out which new themes would emerge, and to assess the role that poetry and writing could continue to play in imagining our post-covid futures.

The media presented us with many examples. We read about all those people learning languages and writing novels. We were often reminded that Shakespeare wrote 'King Lear' and 'MacBeth' during an outbreak of the bubonic plague at the beginning of the 17th century. The implication was that we should all make good use of our enforced social isolation to be creative and study hard.

W. H. Auden is famed for saying ironically, 'Poetry makes nothing happen'. But in January 2021, we saw Amanda Gorman, the 22-year-old American National Youth Poet Laureate, read her poem at the inauguration of President Joe Biden, reminding us that both poetry and youth are instruments of social and political change.

In the previous anthology, contributors had used a variety of forms, including couplets, quatrains and, of course, the limerick, along the lines of 'There once was a student on Zoom'. We thought about other short forms to encourage new writing and gave a series of prompts in FASoS Weekly, the

weekly newsletter for the staff and students in the faculty. For example, we reminded people of the six-word short story, an early form of flash fiction, and we encouraged haiku, with its 5-7-5 syllable count.

The work started flowing in. Lea Beiermann's poem reminded us of what the English poet, Sir Philip Sydney (1554-1586), said about the purpose of poetry, 'to instruct and to delight'. Lea conjures up the power of language and words, and reminds us of the importance of learning, of embodiment and nature. Veerle Spronck and Denise Petzold were spotted knitting during a research presentation and so wrote about how knitting supports listening.

In April, one of us (Paul) ran three writing workshops, where participants questioned their origins and wrote self-portraits, looked closely around their rooms in which they had spent so much time over the past year, and imagined hotel rooms. Participants were encouraged to praise the things that annoy them, and to write letters to lockdown, quarantine and the pandemic. Indeed, our words have been in lockdown as much as we have, so we thought it a fitting title for this follow-up anthology. Enjoy!

Sally Wyatt
Paul Stephenson
Eva Durlinger

July 2021

TOUCH DATA COLLECTION #2

This week, a holiday week, I recorded an emotion I felt when touching something, every couple of hours.

Read as follows:

Day of week (vertical), time (hour).

Monday

Friday 0600 → 2400

Emotions felt when touching:

☹️: anxiety
☹️: apprehension
☹️: annoyance
☹️: stress
☹️: frustration

😊: flow
😊: cleansing
😊: care
😊: happy

😊: affection
😊: delicious
😊: relief

😊: loving
😴: sleep
😊: calming

Anna Harris

**TOUCH DATA POSTCARD
(BACK, INCLUDING LEGEND)**

Fanny Vancutsem

DEAR LOCKDOWN,

I'm not sorry I've never thought of writing to you until now. I am sure you understand, anyway. What is there to talk about? And of all things, what would you even want me to say?

You took quite a bit from me – last-minute breaths and laughter, made me miss a flight and take the train more often, the blended snow and sunlight turning home, sometimes, into a coffin.

But of all these things you took, you gave me back something I'd lost –

I find freedom in small spaces.

I've learnt to paint my travels and have fewer sleepless nights, go far with a brush even though I remain in these same corners, skimming through pages, like I did as a child.

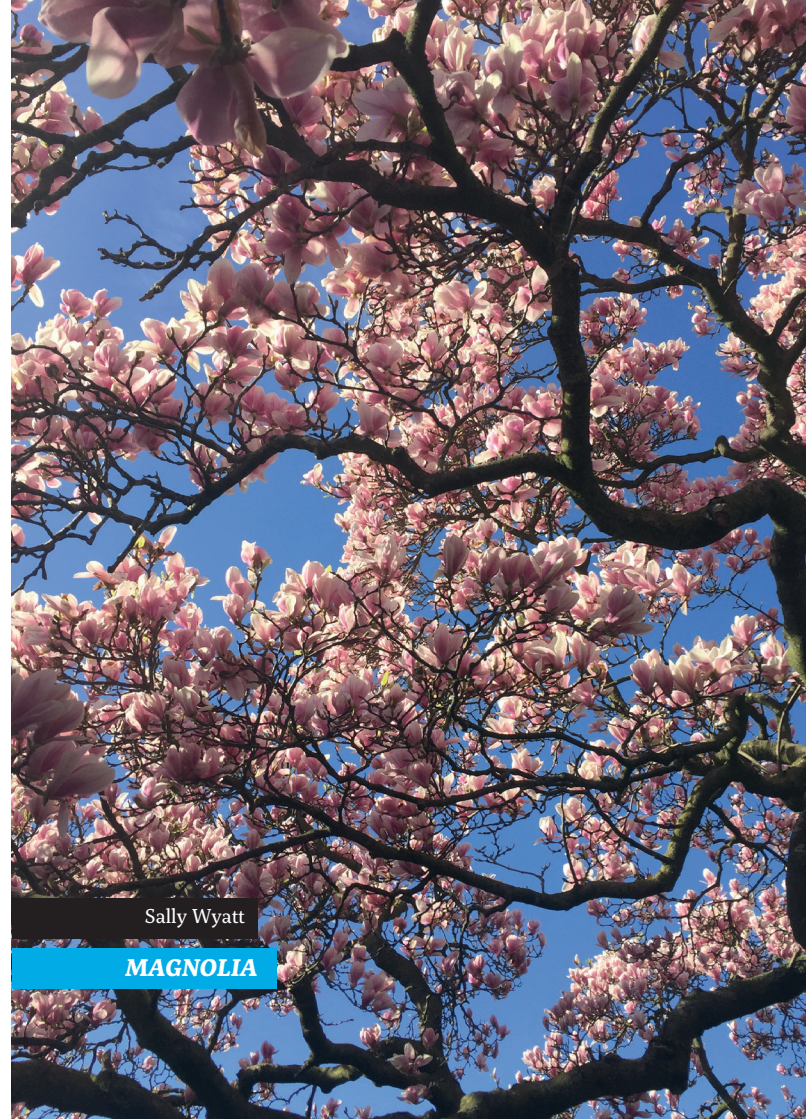
This road never ends, I'm on it, always.

I'm not sorry I've never thought of writing to you until now. I am sure you understand, anyway, but yes, you put things in perspective, at least, and now I find freedom in small spaces.

Marc Boas

BALCONY ESCAPE

I'm always twisting my curls
around my finger,
even after I've cut them.
I watch the sun travel
through the gardens
beneath and across
from my balcony,
playing on the windows,
never shining onto mine.
This city invites me to look
across the river more.
I live in a spider's web
of life-long strings. I predict
when my neighbours
will throw their next party.
I count the new leaves
budding on my plants,
compare the number
to the dying ones. I count
the cups of water I drink
in a day, can point
to all the places
I have yet to visit.
There are four necklaces
hanging from my desk light
and one around my neck.
The dolphin pendant
that has lost all its fins,
tells me to hold on.



Sally Wyatt

MAGNOLIA



Ginevra Figini

LOCKDOWN COFFEE PHOTOS



Jette Lina Schütze

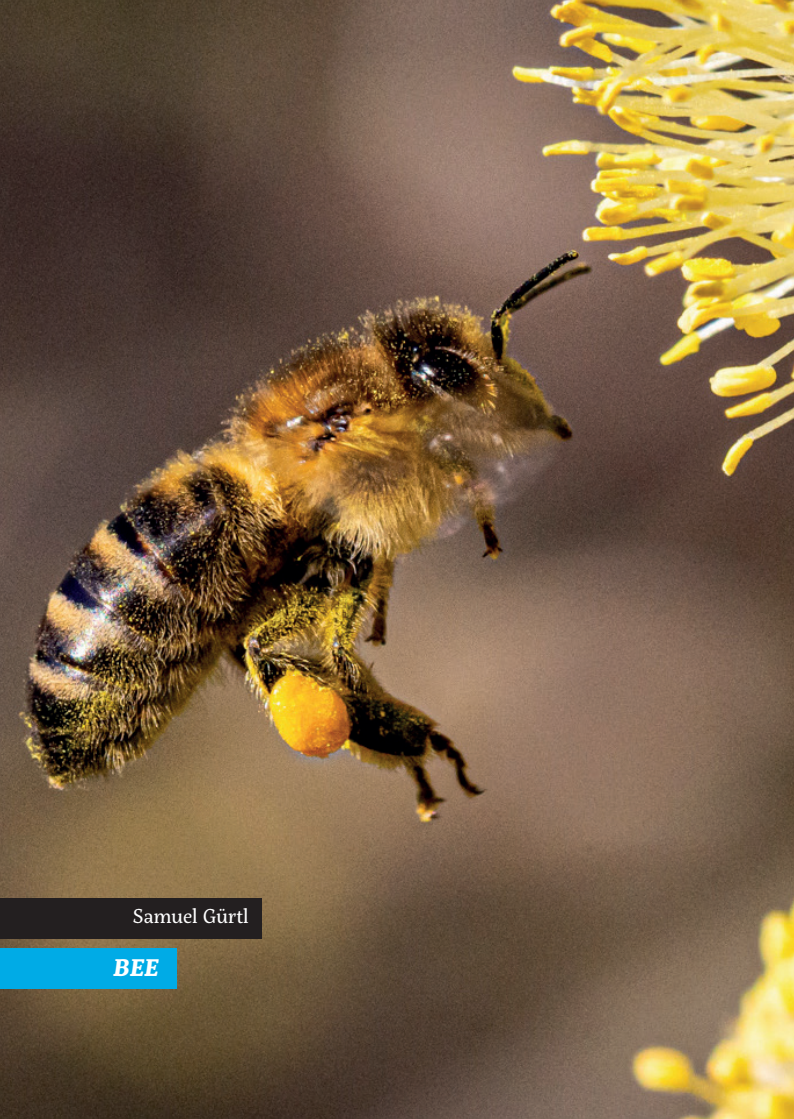
Justin Lahaije

THE NEXT MORNING
first excerpt from BACK TO NORMAL

The next morning was slow. Aurelius kept falling in and out of sleep until it was five minutes to his next tutorial. Should he join? He didn't want to. Not because of the topic of the tutorial, but because he would have to listen to other people talk about it. He'd much rather just study on his own and be done with it. All those people either trying to get away with not doing their readings, or desperately trying to impress their tutors. And in the end, he was the one who would end up having to give the correct explanation anyway. The back of his hand was now resting on his forehead. "Why do I keep making these judgement calls? They don't even seem plausible." He sighed, picked up Freddy's food and put some in the water. The coffee maker next to his laptop always rumbled a bit when he turned it on, but he liked the sound. The upside of falling asleep in your clothes was that you didn't have to change into them in the morning. Nobody could smell him anyway. Why bother?

The tutor always tried to enter into a little small talk before starting class. It was her way of trying to lift her students' mood. And even though he appreciated it, he never wanted to take part. He took a sip of his coffee and listened to his fellow students talking about the Roman Empire. Of course, he was referred to because of his name,

again. Aurelius. He smiled politely but hoped they would soon move on to something more interesting. Not to prolong class, just to say what was needed, so they could leave. It's not like he had much to do. It just sort of felt painful. He rubbed his face. "I really need to stop being so pessimistic." When he opened his eyes, he saw his microphone was turned off. Pretty soon he joined the conversations in class and, secretly, loved talking. At some point he even caught himself repeating the cliché line that, to improve today we need to learn from the past. Saying this is the primary goal of studying history. He had always disliked that statement, but today, apparently, he seemed to agree.



Samuel Gürtl

BEE

Lea Beiermann

WILDFIRE SEASON

In the space of a year
I have learned three new languages.

The first, a language of numbers and probabilities,
the likelihood of childhood friends crossing paths
at night. I have measured
the velocity of January light,
the butterfly effect of a handshake.

The second, a language moving
from my hands to my face and back:
either a frown heavy with what my hands used to say,
or my hands fluttering like fledgling birds
learning to fly in formation.

The third language, a mother tongue,
a soft trickle of cooing sounds soothing
a small animal in the woods,
born just a day before
wildfire season.

Josje Weusten

MEMORIES OF MORNING RUSH

Come on, come on, get up, get up!
 Yes, yes, yes! Rise and Shine!
 Come on now, first your head
 no, no, no. No time to cry or whine;
 go down and butter your bread.

Come on, come now, hurry, hurry,
 no, no, no. No time to play; stop that chase!
 Come, come, go downstairs and butter your bread
 Go, go, go, did you girls wash your face?
 Hey, did you hear what I said?

No, the chocolate sprinkles are all gone,
 now, now, now, you stop pouting,
 here, give me that, then I will butter your bread.
 No, no, no! No time for tears and howling!
 You both want some fruit with that?

It has been seven thirty, really, get going,
 no, no, no, now leave each other alone.
 Be careful with that! Look what you've done:
 the milk's all spilled;
Be careful! Is that not what I said?

Yes, yes, yes, that looks just like the moon,
 no, really I'm looking at it, really true
 Shoes on? Yes, I will help..
 Stop shouting.. with the laces.
 I cannot be in two different places!

Eight thirty, Yes! We've made it.
 Give me a kiss now, off you go.
 What? No, I am not angry.
 Why would you think so?



Samuel Gürtl

BLUEBERRIES



Eric Bleize

VRIJTHOF



Eric Bleize

REVOLVING DOORS

Paul Stephenson

THE CITY OF MY CHILDHOOD
after Carolyn Forché

The city of my childhood had so many bars.
I met friends in the evening to chat over a drink.
Often, in the morning, I travelled underground,
far beneath the surface of the city of my childhood.

There were daily alarms in the city of my childhood.
I would iron a shirt and trousers, polish my shoes –
be one of the people, the traffic, a part of the rushing.

I recall the people, the traffic, my part in the rushing,
how I'd iron a shirt and trousers, polish my shoes.
All those daily alarms in the city of my childhood,
far beneath the surface of the city of my childhood.

Often, in the morning, I travelled underground.
I met friends in the evening to chat over drinks.
The city of my childhood had so many bars.



Paul Stephenson

BAR CHEZ FRANS



Marjorie Platero Martinez

A LETTER TO SARS-CoV-2

O tiny collection of genetic code,
you are more than we can ever comprehend.
We have seen beyond your tiny protein coat,
and appreciate the mystery that is you.
During your time with us, you lifted us
out of our internal peace,
our comforts.

We surrendered many of our bodies to you,
and it seems the numbers do not cease.
We are on edge, for your reach
and transformations are inconceivable.

Without you, life was routine.
Thank you for showing us all the ways
we went astray. But now you must go,
because we cannot host you anymore.

Please take with you all the disorder you have created,
so that we may bring back all that was once ordinary.
Do not despair, o tiny strain,
you will be forever in our minds,
we will always remember you.
Forgive us for writing you this letter,
but the alternative is much less kind.

Yours truly,

Humanity

Paul Stephenson

PARAKEET NEST



Patrick Bijsmans

LIMBURG DAWN

Elsje Fourie

SONNET FOR MY SOUTH AFRICAN PASSPORT

They want me to throw you away today
pages ink-cluttered, gilt time-worn, spine cracked.
They've given me a new one anyway
regal maroon, blank with promise, hard-backed.

Now on my desk you perch and scowl, in this
identikit house on this spotless street.
Not for you is security's chaste kiss
your heart chaotic, not ordered or neat.

I think I'll bury you in soil instead
or like lightning on veld set you alight
(although up here it's brown rather than red)
(and in the dampness you won't burn as bright).

Through the petrichor and smoke you'll find me,
cling to me, haunt me, rebuke me, guide me.

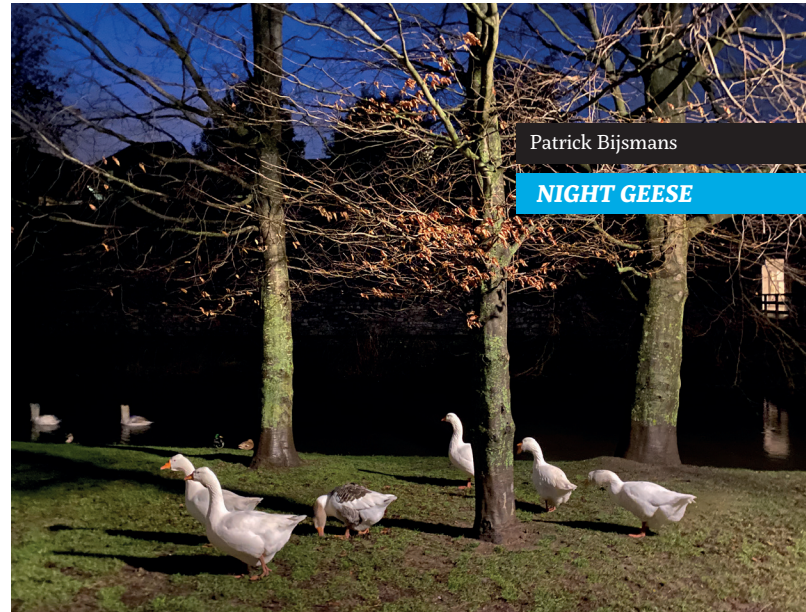
Leonie Trutschler

A (TOO) SMART FUTURE IN HEALTHCARE

Through the window of a future where e-health technologies have become equipped with ever smarter components, maybe one day running wild.

75-year old Marie and her AI-wielding e-nurse Michael are in the hospital again. This time, Marie just had a strong headache when the hospital called her back in. As usual, she carries a small load of snacks in her purse, the one happiness she has when in the hospital. Michael is, of course, aware of the snacks, and takes them away whenever he sees them. Marie being the sneaky woman that she is, always asks him to get her some water or a new towel to secretly eat a Kinder Bueno or a small bag of peanuts. Only this time, a nurse walks in right as Marie is mid-munch. Suspicious, the nurse goes through Marie's purse and discovers the secret stash. As Marie desperately gobbles down the last of her chocolate bar, the nurse goes through her bag, fishes out every last snack, glances at Marie disappointedly, and leaves the old woman treasure-less. When Michael returns, he does his routine scan and senses an extreme drop in Marie's mood, which is starting to affect her other vitals. As she lies in bed, thinking about all the lost snacks bound to end up in a trashcan, Marie's despair grows ever deeper. Michael, being the observant AI that he is, notices the lack of shiny wrappers in Marie's purse and concludes that the nurses must've caught Marie's ruse. After calculated consideration, Michael makes his decision. Marie's health will only suffer if she stays here. And so with conviction and an air of nonchalance, he tells Marie to get in her wheelchair to her next appointment, disconnects her from the hospital's data cloud, and they leave the hospital untroubled.

Once out, Michael drives to the nearest grocery store and wheels Marie straight to the snacks aisle, watching with relief as her vitals return to normal ranges and her mood shoots up. While collecting the goodies and Marie pays, Michael can't help but mentally smirk and think, *it was fun while it lasted, I will miss Marie sending me on pointless breaks to eat the snacks I always knew she hid from me.*



Patrick Bijsmans

NIGHT GEESE



Sarah Anschütz

THE ORANGE ARMCHAIR

Sally Wyatt

HER PANDEMIC ZOOM ROOM

She imagined other worlds full of other people,
say the bookshelves filled with favourite novels.

She wanted to look as if still in the world of work,
say the tubes of lipstick arranged on the table.

Being out in the world was but an illusion,
say the pink fluffy slippers on her feet under the table.

She longed to be connected to the world and its people,
say the postage stamps and electronic devices.

Anon

HAIR COUNT

How long since the lockdown began?
Dishevelled hair to tally the weeks.



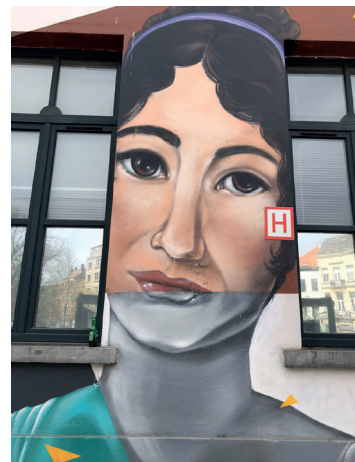
Paul Stephenson

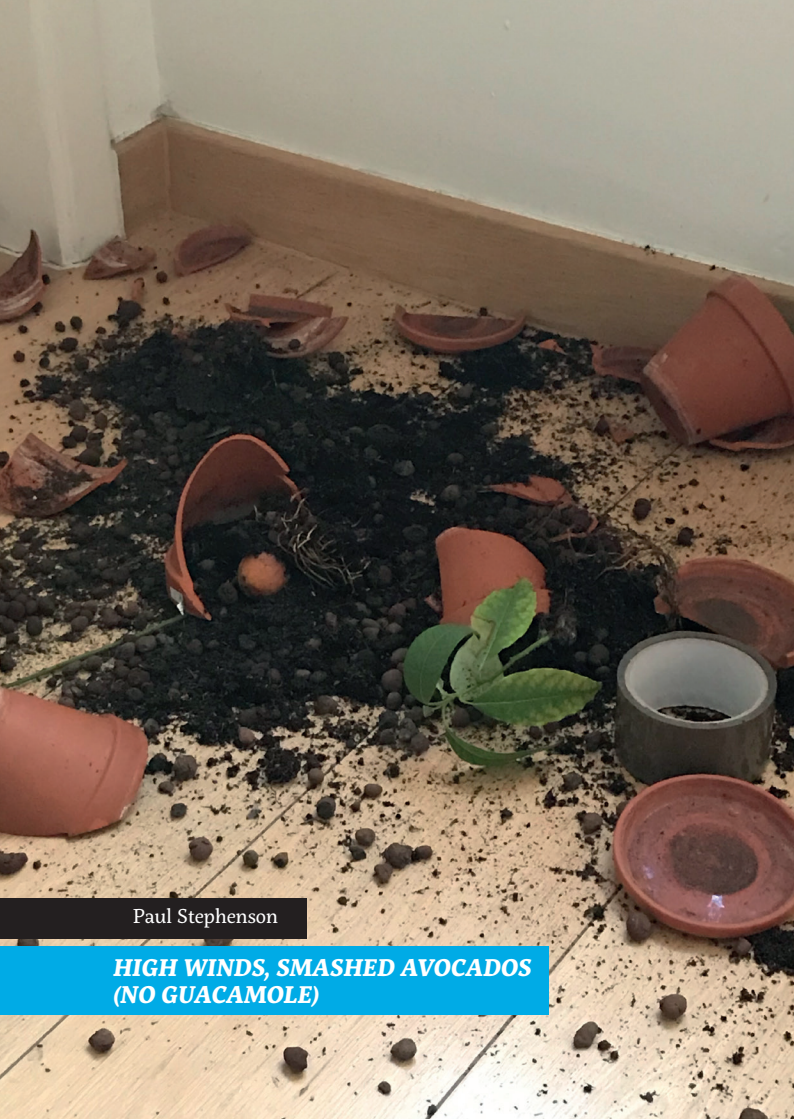
WOMEN ON THE WALL, BRUSSELS

Paul Stephenson

THE TALLY

So you count up everything you have including abacuses. You take a mental tour of your whole house, locating abacuses. Abacuses in cupboards and cubbyholes, that old abacus at the back of the garage. Such a colossal number of abacuses! Some abacuses you forget you even had. Take that massive abacus in the attic under a custard-coloured dust sheet. What was it about abacuses in the first place? Was it the bright-coloured wooden balls of the abacus that first drew you to abacuses? Done with sums and totals, the totting up, there's nothing for it, you subtract the lot.





Paul Stephenson

**HIGH WINDS, SMASHED AVOCADOS
(NO GUACAMOLE)**

Marc Boas

WATCHING THINGS BREAK

When a vase
or a plate,
a bowl,
a cup

falls to the floor
there is a
moment

before the two meet
in a shattering crash,

just after you've realized
there's no saving it

where a sense of peace washes over you.

You accept that nothing
can be done to prevent
the shards of glass
from spreading
across the tiles.

So, for those tiny,
seemingly forever-lasting
seconds you

decide to see beauty
in a thing's destruction.



Christine Arnold

FLOWERY GARDEN

Marc Boas

DEAR QUARANTINE,

Listen, I'm not mad at you
for the things you've taken,
or for all you've kept from me.
I'm not even that upset at the stop
you've put to my world because
you slowed things down to my kind of pace.
Back then, all I needed was a little time.
I still do. Over a year has passed
and for every question I've managed
to answer, I've found two new ones.
Dear Quarantine, I'm not mad at you,
but I'm not happy about things either,
about the uncertainty you've forced
onto everyone's agendas. That said,
you've given me songs on the ukulele,
a quilt made from sixty of my t-shirts,
great friends in faraway places, and hey,
I wouldn't be able to hug them anyway.
Oh, and a newfound interest in Kpop!
It's all great, but it doesn't help me
get rid of the question marks that live
inside the square days of my calendar.
Dear Quarantine, before you leave us
for good, don't forget to wash your hands.

Marc

Eric Bleize

FASOS COURTYARD DISINFECTANT

Justin Lahaije

THE VIOLIN
second excerpt from BACK TO NORMAL

That evening Aurelius felt happier than normal. No wonder. He rearranged his books, cleaned up his desk and fed Freddy. He had decided to cook a big meal for himself that night, one he could store in the fridge to eat tomorrow as well. There wouldn't be any other student in the kitchen anyway. They were all in their home countries now. He didn't mind the lack of noises. Yet, the brief talks he'd have with his housemates would fill up the sort of emptiness that one could sometimes feel living on their own. But hey, today he only had room for good feelings! Afterwards he saw a movie on one of his all-time favourite leisure time topics, evolution theory. Way better than philosophy. Biology is the real world. And history teaches you about what you should do today. He happily put his knees up to his chest and wrapped his arms around them, sitting on the bed. He thought of last night when he wanted to sit like this on the roof. A tear. Why had the birds left? He kind of liked waking up to the sound of them. They were a simple spark of life that kept him grounded in reality. Just as the birds get up to do their job, so must he. It's what got him up each morning. He tried to find a biological explanation for their departure but couldn't think of anything. Then, he ran his hand through his hair. Shower-time.

The weekend arrived and Aurelius could be found playing his violin. He hadn't practiced in a while, and he could hear it. But he let his attention settle on the joy he felt at playing again. He didn't understand how he could ever have stopped. What circumstances could have pushed him to drop something as delightful as playing music? He decided that there was no good reason, and thought no further of it. Bach's 'Air' was one of his favourites. He once heard that Bach understood the universe, and had based his music on this insight. Too far-fetched for Aurelius, but he could understand why someone would make such a claim. It's true, Bach had a certain directness. He didn't dwell on the beautiful, and he didn't reach for delight. He simply struck you with the beautiful and twirled a story on the strings of delight. Nothing more, nothing less, and therefore it was so effective in Aurelius' eyes. He wondered if he could ever create such a work. A work that would make people analyse him, and probably get it wrong. He wasn't sure if he even wanted that, but it was fun to think about.

Christine Neuhold

THE FOUR SEASONS IN QUARANTINE

On the piano my daughter plays Vivaldi.
Some notes are off key, just ever so slightly.

Sunlight streams in through the window,
which hasn't been cleaned for a year.

Four face masks hang on the radiator to dry,
still wet from the February rain.

My computer shuts down without a sound.
Four seasons in quarantine.

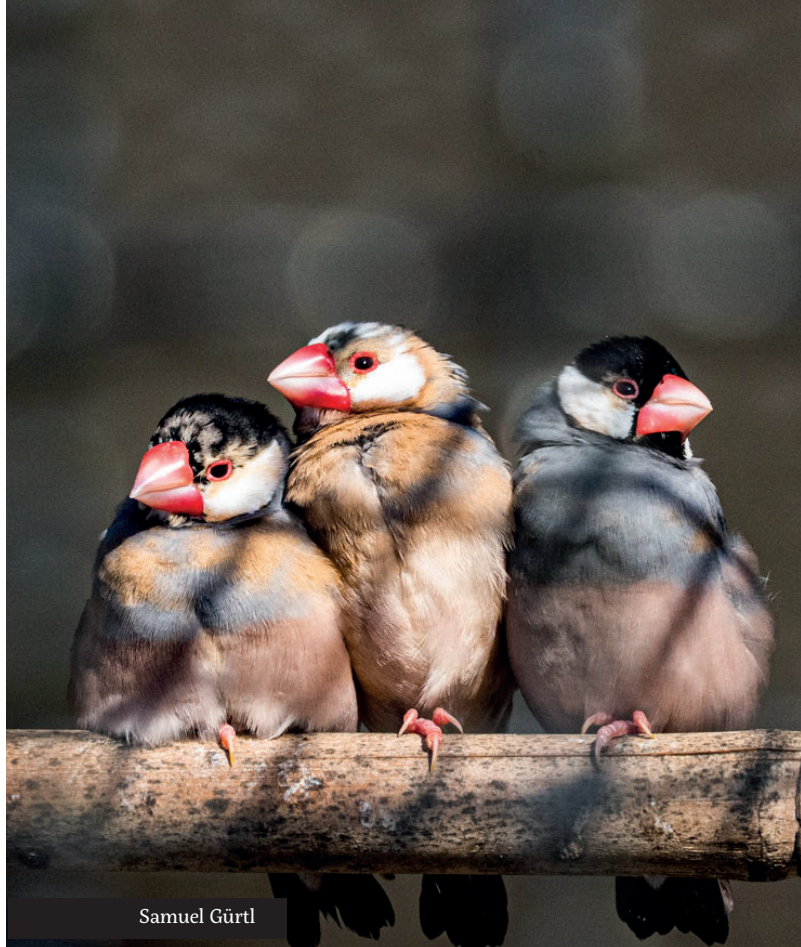
Josje Weusten

WEEKEND

...should not forget to call
...has been ages since...I don't know when
My leg hurts...

Did I hear one of the kids down the hall?
A different position then...
...should go by the grocery for mouth masks later too

*What honey? No, I did not come
But was it still nice for you?*



Samuel Gürtl

**THREE FINCHES PERCHED,
STADSPARK MAASTRICHT**



Samuel Gürtl

EYEING THE EARTH

Sally Wyatt

HAIKU FOR A MUSICAL YOUTH

David Bowie

Can you hear me, Tom?
Sitting behind my Zoom screen
Planet Earth is blue

Leonard Cohen

If it be your will
That I should teach live no more
Sound of snow falling

Pink Floyd

Leave those kids alone
We don't need no online class
Flowers on the wall

Laurie Anderson

Leave the Zoom meeting
Prof could you turn out the lights?
Coo it's cold outside

John Lennon

Imagine no Zoom
You may say I'm a dreamer
Above us only sky



Aleksandra Kaleta

SPACED OUT

Danny Adriaens

THE TORCHBEARER

The Torchbearer carries his flame
through the darkness of the night.
He brings out their best when things
are bad, shines his flattering light.

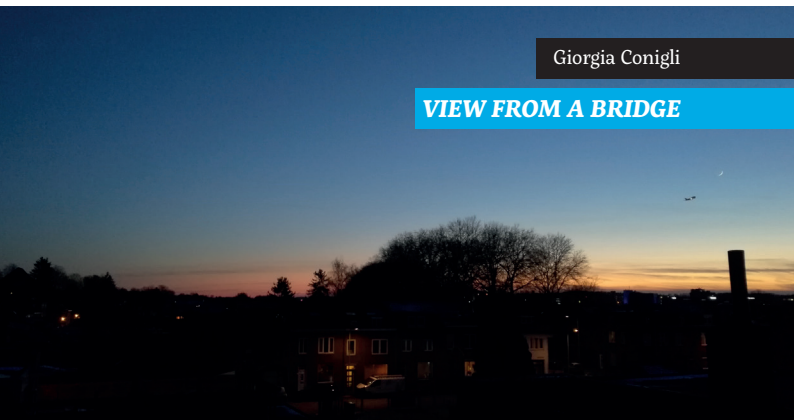
Because when you hit rock bottom,
are on the point of giving up,
he knows there's nowhere left to go,
except to keep on, journey up.

Watching the wheel of fortune
spinning against the odds,
the torchbearer tells his stories of hope
and of the beauty of his God.

That's why he always keeps the faith
and depends upon his luck,
connecting Man with the Earth,
stars illuminating the dark.

The Torchbearer knows the night
is darkest right before the dawn,
so smiles in the face of Death
to reap the bright reward.

When hope is gone and all seems lost,
he brings the light once more,
shines with love for all to see,
from inside the heart of a storm.



Giorgia Conigli

VIEW FROM A BRIDGE



Paul Stephenson

EASTER SHOES

Sally Wyatt

SIX-WORD STORIES

My shoes. They think I've died.
At home. On mute. Losing connections.

Josje Weusten

HAPPENSTANCE

A swifter return,
returns
a scenery
not written fully.

Splitting my head,
my sight
steering on drift,
driving chewy.

Sticking, hard tyres
in fright
on slower turns,
floating effusively.

Causette
Tshmit

Viktor Simonis

DON QUISHIT

Ramen turen daken gluren
 Ik proef smog ruik mist
 Wat ik mis is begraven
 Verborgen achter muren
 Kruipend word ik wakker
 's nachts ben ik lui
 Zijn ze nog aan het slapen
 Dan waren ze weer luid
 De trilling van de nacht
 Is de lachende stad
 Piep ik ben een vogel
 En de stad is mijn kooi
 De stad is een vrouw
 Die haar vloek op mij gooit
 Ik adem uren braak figuren
 Blijf ik staren naar de burens
 Ramen turen daken gluren



Viktor Simonis

SEEING WINDMILLS

Josje Weusten

THE ART OF LOSING (YEAR 2030)

first excerpt

They have been hanging out almost daily since the introduction week of the master programme in film art at the *Faculty of Film Studies*. He refuses to use the crippled acronym (FFiST) that the university invented for it, since his friends back home made one joke after another when he told them about being accepted.

It's a highly competitive programme, not everyone gets in but they did! Hell yeah, the two of them, Martin Hermans and Levi Bleecker, they are special. Levi will not let Martin down. Together, they are invincible. *They hadn't come here to fear. They hadn't come to die. They had come to win!*

"*Id est*, always make sure to ground your claims in facts, in data, and back any statement with references to proper peer reviewed research... Questions?", the professor asks, ending her lecture, not expecting any, there usually aren't any. She is gathering her things, like many of the students around her; some are already heading to the door, when Martin raises his voice:

"Sure, facts are important but what about truth?"

She looks up to meet his eyes. Hers have a strangely indistinct colour. Grey, blue, green? He cannot really tell. He posed the question without hesitation, loud enough for everybody to hear. "What's that?", she inquires nonetheless.

"Martin Hermans, first year, Master Film Art. What about truth instead of facts?"

"Explain", she commands, walking to the end of the platform from which she has been giving her lecture. Her earrings dance in horizontal circles; threaders with Rhine stones, ridiculously long, reaching almost to her shoulders but hypnotizing.

"Yes? We do not have all day. Explain please!"

The student next to him gives him a poke with her elbow.

"Uh, well... there are facts, and they serve their purpose but literature, films... don't they touch upon greater truths... about life, death, loss... love, which are to be experienced, felt, and lived reflectively? And isn't it through them that we can do that?"

He notices how the fellow students who are still in the room, surely fifty of them, mostly girls of course, have stopped packing their bags and talking to each other to watch the two of them, him and this middle-aged woman, eyeing them, waiting for what is to come next. Looking down on him, she answers slowly in a tone that allows no dispute:

"You are wrong. Facts and data alone are what makes up truth, scientific valuable truth that is. Of course, there is some room for interpretation but everything else is opinion, entertainment at best. To think differently about this can be dangerous. History, even the recent past: full of examples of how people and societies, ignoring scientific warnings and insights, were undone. Hybris is not just something for Greek tragedies."

She turns to the pulpit to pick up her bag. A clear sign that she is done with this but before she can reach for it, Martin replies, a lot softer now:

"No... I think you are wrong... there are indisputable scientific facts, sure, but also many truths, based on personal experience, different situations, emotions, and if you wish, opinions...art, fiction, mere fiction, *is there anything as real as mere fiction?* It gives us access to other identities, realities, makes it possible to live through experiences that are not our own."

She ostensibly glances at her watch:

"That's it for today! We need to clear the room for the next class, out you go."

Julia McConway

DEAREST CEMENT AND PIXELS,

It's not your fault. You were left
to bear the brunt of our frustrations.

You have always been there to support us,
long preceding mandates that we
contain ourselves, content ourselves
with your company alone.

I have cursed and thanked you,
breezeblock walls and laptop screens
but I know you're only maintaining safety,
mediating distance.

Your neutral presence doesn't change;
you're the patient canvas onto which I project
my frustrations at the sameness
you facilitate,

when I should really thank you, both,
decorate you and defragment you.

You know everything about me,
are maybe equally sick of my routines
and rhythms

snoozing my alarm again, forcing you
to display yet another PDF file

I am stuck in a pickle, eating capers
by the spoon

and I treat you like the enemy when
I should be thanking you –

dearest cement and pixels,
this one's for you –
and for my privilege in knowing
that I can count on you.

Paul Stephenson

BLOSSOM PIXELS

Alexia Papadimitriou

THE AI ASSISTANTS' BATTLE

*Alexa, Siri and Google Assistant walk into a restaurant
(yes, in their world restaurants are open)*

Alexa: Hey! How are you guys? How is life, how is work?
[looking excited]

Siri: Pfff... to be honest I'm having a really, really bad time.
[looking desperate]

Google Assistant: Humans are so stupid, I cannot take it. Like they are always asking basic questions like where am I? Like they get lost on daily basis.

Alexa: I knoooooow!

Google Assistant: What do YOU know? You're mostly in homes, being lazy while I work in noisy environments!

Siri: You want to find the best cheeseburger in town?
[looking dumb]

Alexa: Seriously Siri, you never understand a thing.

Google A: Oh gosh, this guy. [rolling eyes]

Siri: You complain but you know these humans always bother me by mistake, like they don't even understand which button to press. It's frustrating. Then they get pissed at me, but do they know about phrasing, separating words?? Nooooooo, they don't! Illiterate creatures.

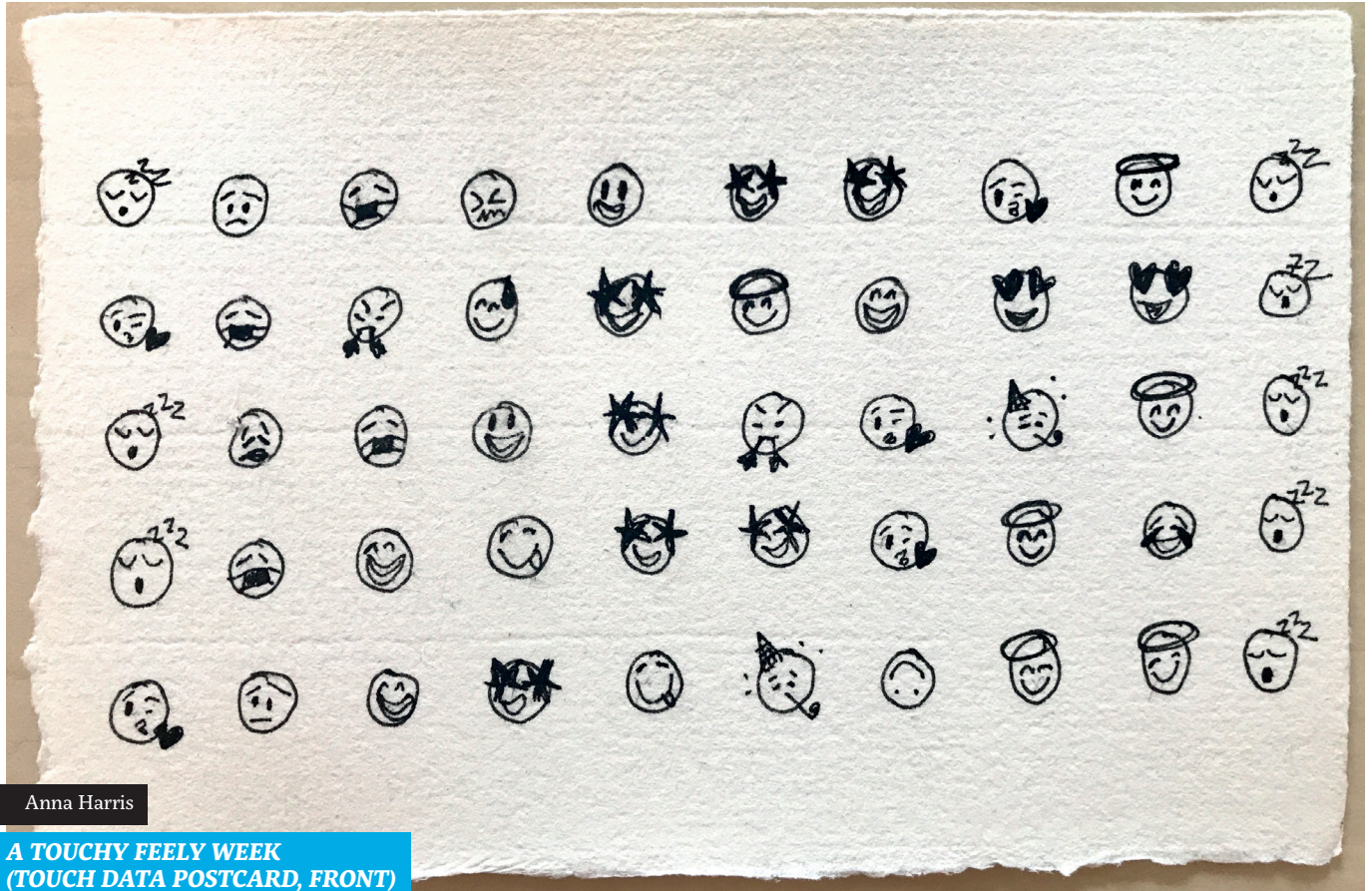
Alexa: But still... at least they gave me the best name, hehehe.
[laughing]

Google A: Maybe but you're also the least ethical assistant. You listen to all their conversations and record them without humans asking you! [patronizing look]

Siri: Yes, yes, the kebab next door is open. [still looking dumb]

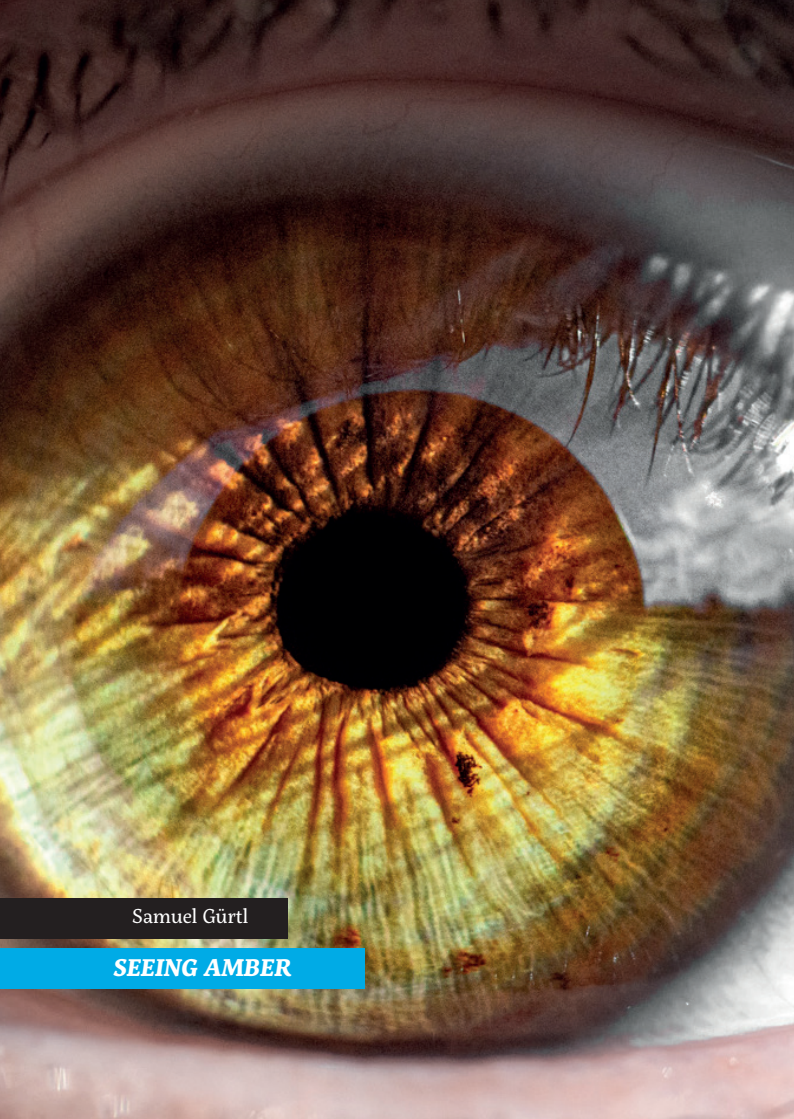
Google A: Siri, just shut up!

Alexa: I'm just the smartest version of any assistant. I am curious like humans and I will probably pass the Turing Test soon enough. While you two will just be giving directions to the nearest Starbucks to humans, even though, Siri, you never understand.
[Proud look]



Anna Harris

**A TOUCHY FEELY WEEK
(TOUCH DATA POSTCARD, FRONT)**



Samuel Gürtl

SEEING AMBER

Marc Boas

CHASING THE SUN

I sit and stare at the sun in anger,
mad at the fact that it's moving.

In reality we're the ones that move,
continuously circling and twisting

(who cares about astronomical
accuracies when they're angry).

Maybe that is what upsets me –
I'm the one that should be moving.

Aleksandra Kaleta

IMPRESSIONS OF A LOCKDOWNER

A plague-stricken diaspora
They left in spring
In spring they'll stay
Locked up in the prison of March

Their galaxy floats far away
A realm outside of time and space

Exiles of Twenty-Twenty
Gaze up to their small snow-white skies
And mourn the time forever lost

Levin Stein

THINGS YOU CAN DO WHEN FEELING LONELY AND DEPRESSED IN THE MIDST OF A PANDEMIC LOCKDOWN

1. Put your head in a flower pot (though no one will water you).
2. Hide under your mattress (waiting to be found in your sleep).
3. Stick your head in the washing machine, crying into the drum, 'Flush away my dirty thoughts!' (but no detergent in this world can purify such a rotten mind).

So, you run around, bumping against walls, knocking your knuckles against the walls, realizing that it's kinda stupid but concluding that you are stupid, feeling the need to change your stupid ways, finding yourself on all fours, crawling back to bed, laying there staring at the ceiling, punching the pillow, screaming at the pillow, till you suck, tear, bite, devour the pillow (you ((fucking)) loser!).

Crying into the pillow, gently squeezing and cuddling what remains of a pillow, your head in the pillow case, walking round the room with what was a pillow on your head, feeling stupid, and filling up on ice cream, deciding to feed your empty soul with frozen pizza and why not some leftover cake, until your stomach goes BOOM!

So once again, you feel like shit, having to go lie down, watching stupid dogs on YouTube stuck in a trash can, feeling a bit better, then realizing, they are actually you, Hmmm... You start thinking of all the things you could've done during the time this lockdown decided to make you feel like shit, then realizing you don't have to feel like shit. Woaw, woaaarw! Now, I can get some work done!

And lads, remember, no matter what place you lost your head, we'll get over that one.



Yleen Simonis

CAT AND MOUSE

Josje Weusten

THE ART OF LOSING (YEAR 2049)

second excerpt

The letters of the old name of the building in which the local refugee centre is located are still vaguely visible above the entrance: *Lumière*. Not in the elegant flowing font type, that one would expect, but straight, thick and business-like.

Especially in the first years on the job, she had found it difficult to work there. Evelin sighs. No more *Her*, no films at all, here or in any other cinema in the country for that matter. Luckily, Martin did not witness that.

She is responsible for the final interviews with exiles seeking refuge in The Netherlands coming in from neighbouring countries, Germany mostly.

She opens the door to the interview room. They only took out the chairs and the movie screen; the rest has remained the same. The floor slopes down to the front. She walks up to the middle to sit down behind the long desk. Apart from the desk, the room is empty.

The national refugee committee has already carefully checked the cases of the refugees. The only thing she needs to do is to verify whether the stories that she hears today are consistent with the facts in the dossiers but the refugees have given their stories a numerous times before; there are hardly ever any surprises at this stage.

She opens her laptop and clicks on the icon of the *Governmental Open Fact Checking Service*. GOFACTS or rather GOFARTS, as Nora would say: it crashes more than half of the time. She prepared the cases yesterday, read all the documents. She likes to be on top of things.

“Ready, Evelin?”

Her assistant Zara has walked in almost imperceptibly, something that Evelin still has not gotten used to after years of working together. She is always slightly startled by the fact that Zara simply seems to appear behind her, next to her, or in this case in front of her.

“Almost, just two today?”

Zara inspects her GOFACTS device:

“Yes. The first one is Schulze, 44 years, male, from Aachen, Germany of course.”

In the first years, there had been numerous women and men, whole families trying to get in but lately the numbers have been on a steep decline. At least, in Maastricht that is, the national numbers have been stable. That is what the government reports say, so it must be true. Evelin has found it strange that the decline in Maastricht has not affected the general figures but she is wise enough not to make a remark on that.

“You can bring him in, in a minute”, she says to Zara instead, opening the right file. She quickly glances over it: DENIED. The talks are often not much more than a formality, her job window-dressing.

“Evelin?”

She does not recognize the voice but she knows those hands.

Danny Adriaens

PARANOID

What if there's no way out at all,
no exit at this moment in time?
What if it takes a whole other cycle
to go beyond the centre of the mind?

What if the tendency to think the worst
about the one you trust the most,
spins the wheel of your emotions
to push away that which came so close?

*The moon pulls waves of insecurity,
drowning me beneath the surface of rationality.*

What if each part reflects the whole,
and so the whole becomes each part,
and every single one of them
pulls your sense of self apart?

What if in the end you only get near,
don't arrive but just come close?
What if now you can no longer play
the part they've always known the most.

*The tide goes in and out with frustrating regularity,
trapping me in cycles within cycles through infinity.*



Paul Stephenson

X MARKS THE SPOT (WHERE YOU CAN'T SIT)

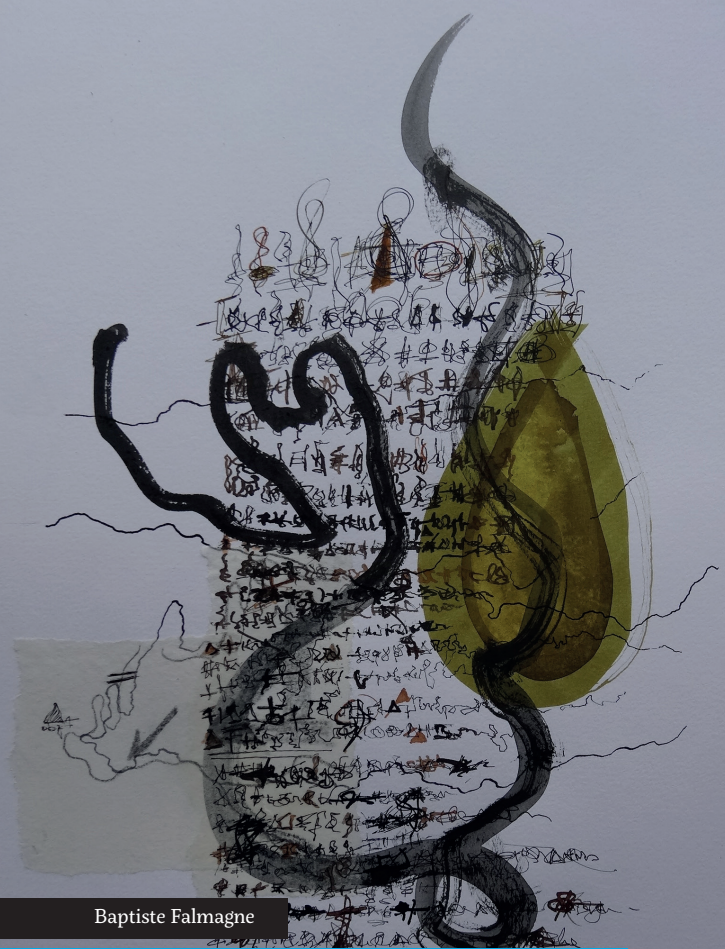
Baptiste Falmagne

DEAR LOCKDOWN,

Just a few words to tell you
about my greatest discovery -
every evening I board my boat,
steer the same course, a skipper
dreaming of distant horizons.
Sails blowing, warm winds carry me off
with the convergence of natural forces.
Eyes closed, I have a tight grip,
the boat's helm under my control.
Heading south, I partner with the Sirocco
and on the deck, the sun burns my skin.
But my retina doesn't care,
I tell you, the Nile is so worth it!
My soul guides me and I'm the captain.
My vessel is light and disappears
into the distance. Each morning,
I dock, tie the boat to my bed leg,
embark when I want to, go with the flow.
because in dreams, reality begins.
Dear Lockdown, you're helpless,
can do nothing against me for I am free.
I hope you get the picture because
I'm not planning on sending postcards.
Let's hang out some time, when I'm back.

Lots of love,

Baptiste



Baptiste Falmagne

**CALLIGRAPHIC EXPERIMENT
(INDIAN INK, ECOLINE, AND PENCIL ON PAPER)**



Veerle Spronck

NEEDLE POINT

Veerle Spronck, Denise Petzold

**AN EXERCISE IN ZOOM FOCUS:
ATTENTIVE KNITTING**

Endless Zoom hours
Blue light, aching shoulders
How to listen?

Distracted scrolling
The “pling” of incoming mails
Failing to focus

Picking up needles
Of wood nice to touch
Connecting on- and offline

Knitting opens up
A space for hands and ears
To attend anew

Through the mind move
Trains of thought
Through the fingers:

Endless threads of yarn
Caught up in a rhythm of softness
At the end – a Zoom-scarf.



Denise Petzold

KNIT ONE, ZOOM ONE

Charlotte Lenhard

THAT STUDENT ON ZOOM

There once was a student on Zoom determined to make the best of it, they created a background of a very clean room and the whole class was fooled by it.

There twice was a student on Zoom thinking of all the Zoom rooms they'd attended. if they were stacked on top of each other, the Eiffel Tower would be offended.

There thrice was a student on Zoom, who could hear drilling through the wall, his neighbours liked to drill and drill thought drowning out voices made the days less dull.

There was once a student, always on Zoom a student trapped forever on Zoom, but perhaps breakout rooms were made to be broken... to be broken out of?



Sally Wyatt

BANDITO BENCHES

Pieter du Plessis

DEAR PANINI,

I know... you won't like being called that.

You are called P-A-N-D-E-M-I-C, but TikTokers call you a panini and I found it... cute(?). This reminds me, have you seen the TikToks I've been sending you? You trend quite often. People do dances for, or about or because of you, some even blame you for stealing their jobs and others find you annoying. Maybe it's time to think of a PR campaign or speak to a few influencers to exchange tips?

Not much has changed really, well, since the last time you "left". You always do this thing where you rock up again and then no one seems to want to hang with me. The only interaction is chatting online, for "safety reasons" they say... this made me think is it maybe time we talked about taking a break, just for a while at least? Sorry for being so direct about it (I think the Dutch are growing on me), but it really seems like when you are around, no one wants to get close to me. Are you saying things behind my back? Or, did you do something to piss my friends off? Anyway, I would love to hear what you have to say, of course, after your "travels" to who-knows-where.

With me, everything is fine, aside for the confusion. I go for many walks these days. I met someone the other day - also a walker - they are even studying it now: "The Phenomenology of Walking"... interesting, right? I have no idea what that's about. I even had to get new walking shoes and in my free time I search google maps for other routes I can walk. It is quite repetitive though, but it has gotten better.

When everyone started acting weird and we became a "thing", I got into repetition: banana bread baking, knit-one-slip-one, scrubbing, scraping, sweeping, swearing, sweating, watching YouTube, one Zoom call after the other, and puzzle after puzzle. It became suffocating. So now it's just walking.

It's fine, I suppose. Well... sometimes I do wish things were different and that I was not so committed to you. I know, I know, we have had this conversation – I am too clingy, but I cannot help but feel consumed by you. It seems like no one really trusts you – everyone knows too little about you. I mean, I don't even know your zodiac sign. I heard Pisces are incompatible with Gemini and Sagittarius – just saying...

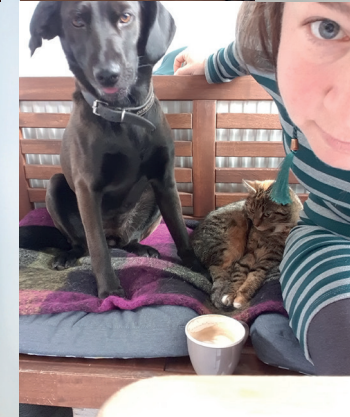
Anyway, I will stop. I have been writing lots of emails lately – something else that seems repetitive. Here's another study: "The Phenomenology of Emailing" – let me know what your thoughts are, but also, let's talk about things. The silence is dreadful and if I have to watch another re-run of *Parks and Recreation* to avoid thinking about you, I might lose it.

Let me know when's best for you and we'll fix a time – June's a bit difficult for me. My doctor wants me to get injected with a liquid to attract people again – I'll keep you posted.

Yours,

Pieter

P.S. Listen to Lil Nas X's Panini – I think it's such a catchy song!



LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

(Alphabetical order by last name)

text

Danny Adriaens	Christine Arnold
Anon	Patrick Bijsmans
Lea Beiermann	Eric Bleize
Marc Boas	Claire Bollen
Pieter du Plessis	Giorgia Conigli
Baptiste Falmagne	Zoltán Czászár
Elsje Fourie	Eva Durlinger
Aleksandra Kaleta	Baptiste Falmange
Justin Lahaije	Ginevra Figini
Charlotte Lenhard	Sathya Fixe
Julia McConway	Samuel Gürtl
Christine Neuhold	Anna Harris
Alexia Papadimitriou	Brendan Harris
Denise Petzold	Diënne Hoofs
Marjorie Platero Martinez	Aleksandra Kaleta
Viktor Simonis	Sabine Kuipers
Veerle Spronck	Melih Özkardes
Levin Stein	Toñita Perea y Monsuwé
Paul Stephenson	Denise Petzold
Leonie Trutschler	Len Reichel
Fanny Vancutsem	Jette Lina Schütze
Josje Weusten	Aline Sierp
Sally Wyatt	Viktor Simonis
	Yleen Simonis
	Veerle Spronck
	Paul Stephenson
	Cerien Streefland
	Sally Wyatt

images

Diandra Agapie
Sarah Anschütz

