

R a v i o l i

I had really good mushroom ravioli at this Italian restaurant in Oslo that used to be an old pharmacy. The meal was impromptu and the best things in life are unplanned. I was sat around the table having a meal with a group of people that I have never had a meal with in my life - and one of the other artists said something really nice about how language can lock people out of a conversation.

Oh no that's right he said language is a code and you can use that code to sort of communicate with who you want to.

I like this thought about language *not* communicating something.

Like art not being about what we choose to express but instead uncovering something we're ashamed of about ourselves. And then how to navigate that shame and give it a form.

Turn it inside out like a mould.

Out it pops.

Robert Carter

It made me think of how sometimes I will revert to British idioms or vernacular, which I know will exclude people from the conversation here in Norway but I do it anyway. It is a forceful insertion of my regional identity. My masculinity(?) My Northern persona. An act that's so well baked in, at times it's hard to know how authentic it really is or just how well I perform authenticity.

In *The Road to Wigan Pier*, a study of poverty in England in the late 1930s, George Orwell talks about the North-South divide and the curious cult of Northernness: *A sort of Northern Snobbishness. A Yorkshireman in the South will always take care to let you know that he regards you as inferior. If you ask him why, he will explain that it is only in the North that life is 'real' life... The Northerner has 'grit', he is grim, 'dour', plucky warm-hearted and democratic; the Southerner is snobbish, effeminate and lazy.*

I grew up on one side of this divide. With my mother swearing at the weather forecast (in earnest), for they always had the better weather down south, as well as all the money. Perhaps since I moved to Oslo from Bergen this kind of regional split has been on my mind again. Re-framed in a Norwegian context. Hearing people (me) big up one (Oslo) and denounce the other (Bergen). My understanding isn't deep or nuanced, typical stuff

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to do with the weather and needing to live somewhere built-up enough to enjoy an aimless urban wander. Get a decent falafel.

I barely register any difference in dialects, people just have different voices. And as such I exist outside of these nuances and social codes that I feed off so much in my own language.

Once, in Bergen during a conversation with my friend from Kent, I invoked the dialect of my Northern, Rochdale born mother (I only once in my life had a discussion with her about class and she said 'she knows where she belongs' and the conversation ended abruptly thereafter) by using the phrase:

“to trap off”

What do you mean? queried L. She'd never heard this outmoded expression before which I explained to her meant:

“to pull”

Meaning; to pull someone, a romantic coming together, to seduce. But like so many old idioms once I'd begun explaining it I realised it sounded a bit...wrong somehow? A bit predatory.

“Here am I, for instance, with a bourgeois upbringing and a working-class income. Which class do I belong to? Economically I belong to the working class, but it is almost impossible for me to think of myself as anything but a member of the bourgeoisie. And supposing I had to take sides, whom would I side with, the upper class which is trying to squeeze me out of my existence, or the working class whose manners are not my manners?” (George Orwell)

~

Over the last year I have found myself most months hanging out in the studio kitchen at Kunstnernes Hus (occasionally crashing the staff lunch on Tuesday) with my new cohort of artist-peer-friends who welcomed me into their clan without question around the turn of 2023. Having formed such close bonds in a relatively short time makes me wonder if friendship (still) offers me a form of intimacy that I substitute for other forms of closeness (romantic love, family ties). As a result, do I get ‘too close’ at times? Should I have better boundaries? Of course as artist-friends we spill into one another’s lives in more ways than one. That’s a given.

One evening I am in Sara and Naeun’s home for a kimchi making workshop. Naeun was clearly stressed out at having to guide this idiot western

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man through the (basic) process of making kimchi. I remarked upon this, wondering out loud how fun this would actually be, in Naeun's stressed-out kimchi workshop.

I took the big jar of kimchi home and noticed the supply went down quickly before my housemate confessed to eating rather a lot of it without asking. I felt kinda upset, because it took so damn long to make the kimchi, and you know this wasn't like borrowing a bit of milk or coffee. I knew my housemate wouldn't make kimchi, not in a million years, so once the supply went down that would be that.

Maybe I should have better boundaries with my housemate or something. Although our relationship with each other's groceries is kind of open access. For the sake of balance - I took a glass of her wine the other night, without permission.

~

I read in a recent interview with a writer that there are different kinds of love, the love you experience in your early twenties is not the same as if you fall in love at forty. Different loves. Still one word for it though. Or rather one word in English. Like the English own the word. *Lufu*, *liubi*, *liebe*, English roots in German - Sat in L's house we make up our

own version of a word game with Bananagram tiles where the Native English Speakers have to guess if a word the Swede or the German put down is a real word in their language or one they've made up - we learn the word *Bummeln*, to stroll, lounge around...

I exclaim to the group that this is where the slang for homeless person, *bum*, must come from. I am proud of my new discovery. I actually feel like I've learnt something instead of just repeating things I already know.

Message copied and forwarded to me from SK, "*When one says I love you in Albanian, it almost means, I will eat your heart out*". In Persian, "*I will eat your liver*".

In the q&a section with the celebrities. Their answers to *have you ever said I love you and not meant it?* Which is a funny idea that someone would answer 'no' to this, as if they knew what they meant every time they opened their mouth. Impervious to lies. Who's truth checking love? Comparative beings. I know they say think before you speak but when I speak I then think about what I've said as I hear myself not thinking but sharing unfinished thoughts like this text. If I could write quicker than I could think believe me I would (!)

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In her book *On the Benefits of Friendship* critic and writer Isabelle Graw uses the fictional diary form to question some of the dynamics and power structures that exist within the art world between friends. She talks of instrumental friendships - those friendships that are useful to you because they aid the development of your career say. Writes critically around the Aristotelian vision of friendship - loving someone for 'who they are', conceding this model is a bit outdated because the 'real me' is not always easy to separate from the one that is writing, making art, working, discussing ideas or being in the studio.

There is peer to peer support.

But there is also competition, envy, watching your friends do better than you etc etc.

I have definitely leant too hard on my friends in the past.

Over abused their generosity.

My Italian friend said a nice thing to me once, after the endless favours she and her partner had done for me, propping me up in life, offering practical and emotional support, the supply having gotten too big with interest for me to ever really pay back, that one day someone else will need a place to sleep or a hand

with something and I will provide it. So a favour owed to one friend gets cashed in by another. Is it weird that I'm using so many banking metaphors in this paragraph?

The Socialist Sighard Neckel recently traced the omnipresences of envy to the fact that now humans are comparative beings: we constantly compare ourselves to others, and we mourn any recognition afforded to them that is denied to ourselves. This is all the more true since we live in a competitive society, whose 'economic ethos,' Neckel claims, is one of comparison.
(Isabelle Graw)

Her note that we only compare ourselves to those we are closest to (we don't envy the queen for example) echoes the lines I read after lunch in another Orwell book (I'm having a moment with the man), who writes of a tramp he befriends called Paddy:

...he had a low worm-like envy of anyone who was better off - not the rich for they were beyond his social horizon, but of men in work. He pined for work as an artist pines to be famous.

(Down and Out in Paris and London)

My friends paid me to write this text and said when do you want paying and I said now please, and with that money I went for dinner the same evening at an Uzbekistan restaurant with them. They said write

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until the money runs out and it being Norway it nearly has because it wasn't that much although it felt like a lot at the time. There's about 80 NOK of it left. But I'll probably keep writing anyway. Or maybe it's good just to stick to that as a kind of restriction. I haven't decided yet.

~

When you move country and city, ties with friends become mediated more heavily by messaging, which I find isn't always the best way to communicate. Passive. Short hand. Immediate. Photographs. Copy pasted. Voice notes I like though. Fun to record. The urge to sometimes pick up the phone and hear the familiar tone of an old friend's voice strikes...to tap into a bond that's deeper than the 1.5 yr long ones I've so far held in Oslo.

Not expecting Francis to answer but he does. He's in a Premier Inn Hotel, in the bath, watching Jamie Oliver air frying food on TV. He's loving Jamie, if not his own current work-life predicament (art handler for a massive secretive company that works for rich people he can't tell me about). In a previous message, I asked him how it was going, his reply:

"Hard I'm fucked and true hell isn't till September wear [sic] I will be bleeding from eyes and ——— The work canteen area is like a crack den of shame the

work[er]s are salt[y] sea dogs that have no time for newbs like me."

I give Fran my opinion on the air fryer which I've never used but see as some kind of cost of living crisis novelty. The idea that people could save money by cooking their meals in one as opposed to putting on the oven because it uses less energy really adds to the relentlessly dire image of the UK as seen from my lighthouse in Norway. Maybe I'm wrong.

~

This morning I stubbornly think 'I hate writing' because I know how much work left I have to do. I'm worried my reader - you - might suppose this writer - me - thinks they know what they are talking about when really it's only ever just a case of "*I write to you because I don't understand myself*"
Clarice Lispector (Agua Viva)

And there must be a freer form that I'm on the edge of. Allowing myself. Getting close to. Grammar wise. Structurally speaking. That allows me to just put "short interesting snippets tightly packed together. Like a chocolate box" as Naeun puts it.

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Luflic - Applied indiscriminately to all pleasing material objects, from a piece of plum-cake to a Gothic cathedral [George P.]

Love and shame.

Love intertwined with it, legs around legs around it.

Friendship for the sake of friendship*. I quest what that means. Friendship as capitalistic enterprise.

Friendship as stealing.

Francis hangs up. Says 'love you'. Usually ends the call this way.

Looking for a picture to illustrate this text. Like it needs one. I need one.

Looking at the dildo in the fridge photo thinking it's too 'base'. Private joke from years ago. Guy humour. The dildo was the fifth housemate in a house full of men forever on the cusp of exiting youth. There was a photo depicting said dildo in the fridge right *next* to the fridge and whenever I opened the fridge I was always surprised that the contents of the fridge weren't identical to those in the photograph and the dildo was nowhere to be seen. Apparently Paul found it lying in the middle of the road one sunny afternoon and pulled

the car over ordering Daniel to jump out and fetch (rescue?) it.

This text was too long and now it's not long enough! The text doesn't need to be wrapped up or have an end say my editors. But do they forget that every text will always have a last sentence? Are they that naive? Most of the time we have to be A4. I've got no remit though. No word count. Who fits on one side of A4? Who starts off writing about social class and ends on (max) two sides of a4.

~

Finally read James Joyce *Dubliners* during a month long residency in Trondheim deep in the January gloom. Did I need a friend up there? Lonely month in the dark. Embraced it like a vampire. Warmed to a couple others. Couldn't help it. Showed me her studio and a couple months later lo and behold it gives me an idea for a road trip/buddy movie to undertake/make with person I barely know.

I text my Irish friend. By some weird coincidence she's reading it too. Psychic like that. Reading *Dubliners* in Trondheim in the January pack ice I think to myself that Joyce is the master of ending texts because he doesn't write endings for his stories, he just stops writing.

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"She deals with moral problems as a cleaver deals with meat." (Joyce)

On a wind swept walk along the coast looking out toward the old prison listening to a podcast with writers talking about essays. The form of the essay. How the essay shouldn't know how or where it is going to end up, that's why we write it. Or in another quote I occasionally tape to my wall:

A writer is someone who writes in order to know what it is they'd write if they wrote.

~

I spend the last of their money on a block of imitation not quite feta. We apply for a book fair in Athens so we can go and taste feta, together.

The story goes dad left, mum cooked a meal, then after that I went into the kitchen 'and never came out', or at least that's what mum only recently told me. Age 10 or 12. She's surprised of how little detail I remember from that period. Should I remember more? I like hearing these stories from her perspective.

I started off writing about this group around the dinner table because being from Norway, Poland, England, Cyprus and Norway - well in a

way that kind of group feels to some extent classless, defined by our interest in art instead maybe not bound by the same rules(?) But I suppose we're all bourgeoisie, if you go back to the origin of the word which referred to a 'town dweller'.

~

Last week I received a book in the post from someone I'd lent it to 8 years ago in Rotterdam. It came with a thank you and sorry note. I guess the borrower felt a lot of shame in still having the book, which kept them from sending it back.

The book contains beautifully reproduced colour photographs alongside an essay that gave my writing brain an early jolt. Never straying too far from the internal jostling that takes place during the process:

...is what Pradeep said:

A part of me...wants to see...writing or reading, as personal and private and pleasurable without activating it in a strategic way...Not everything we do is for art-making, not everything we write is for public consumption....

My take on P's comment is that we tend to cannibalize experience and that we should consider spending more time just listening to music, for

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instance, for its own sake, "taking the time to live," as Baghdadadi put it in Room 666.

- Moyra Davey (Burn the Diaries)

Today I am feeling grouchy because I was on holiday (two nights in Lillehammer) with the women who wants to eat feta together and now I am back having to deal with this piece of writing that should or could have ended pages ago when the money ran out. I am annoyed that it's taking me so long to get to what I don't know what I want to say, and that the artists thought this would be doable in the time frame although Naeun did say that it was unfair what they were asking of me.

Now my attitude is sort of 'if none of the artists like this text then I will have done my job'. Why do I think like that? Using this text as an excuse to sweep all my favourite quotes in with my dust pan and brush fingers. I don't know why I try to clean up my existence when I write.

~

This Gertrude Stein quote resonated with me a little while ago, about how in letter writing there is more than one person occupying the space in which you

write, that is, the person you are addressing. When you're alone dreaming in A4 it's just that. Dreaming of A4. Dreaming in A4.

I've started buying stamps from Finn.

Mushroom ones from 1989.

The letter writing appreciation society (a real society) in England were outraged when the new stamp put a QR code next to the king's head and I totally agree, it looks terrible, a graphic design catastrophe no less, but it must speed up the process of sending the mail or make it easier or require less people or prevent mail fraud but who is faking stamps?

I began writing about slang, but then I snuck in the word shame at the beginning as a clue suggesting what this might really about. Where my interest lies. But a picture of what shame looks like is harder to create maybe, more shameful to try. Too private?

Love, friendship, romantic friendship, *huskamerater*. I send Daniel a message asking him if he will scan the photo of the dildo in the fridge for me (no reply).

The picture harks back to a time I was stationed on Francis/Paul/Daniel's sofa bed in South

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Manchester and I've been dying to get this anecdote into a text at some point. It feels I'm forever not finding the right time or place for it and I'm starting to wonder what I'm waiting for exactly.

A few weeks on their sofa bed turned into about three months. They didn't mind. In fact Francis actually wanted me there, was disappointed when I 'moved out'. To their landlord I was known simply as 'the lodger'. One morning, washing the dishes, I took particular pleasure in cleaning the moka pot, removing the slow build up of coffee grime to reveal its smooth, mirror-like surface underneath.

Paul came down the stairs for breakfast and upon seeing this gleaming vessel, freaked out and began to reprimand me for cleaning it.

Francis - eloquent as ever - later explained:

Everything else in Paul's life is orderly and tidy, his coffee pot is the one place he accumulates filth and allows himself to let go. I think Francis was implying that the coffee pot represented something much deeper and now I want to write 'the dark part of his soul' but that sounds way too dramatisk so I leave a voice note asking Francis if he remembers, knowing that he probably won't.

** I had an ex-boyfriend who didn't believe in friendship for the sake of the friendship. He only worked with favours equals favours. Also kind of made friends through giving gifts. I was thinking a lot about this, the different views we had about friendship. He said you can't count on anyone. That was his belief. Also he, and maybe many men in general(?) don't share as many personal things in their conversations as women do. Ah that's such a generalisation. Sorry this is too long. I also wanted to mention this about counting favours in friendship. How capitalist this view of friendship can be. And how it can make someone miss out on the intimacy. Some very good friendships are not close to any excel sheet of the giving and taking of each other. They know that in some periods of life, we need more and at other times we can give more. Of course, this is only one way of friendship as you say there are many kinds and we truly need them, in each size.*

(A)

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Ravioli was commissioned by Johan Andréén, Sara Guldmyr and Naeun Kang for 'Strangers, Friends and You', an exhibition exploring themes of loneliness, alienation and interpersonal relationships. It marks the end of their year-long FKDS studio residency at Kunsternes Hus in Oslo from 2023-24.

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