

I'm sick of life being dominated by the police state and rape.

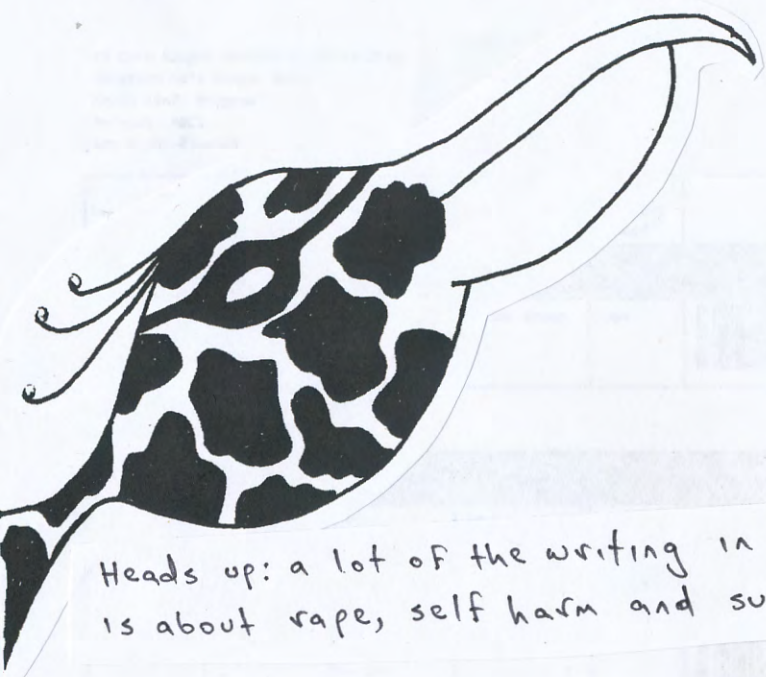
I just want ice cream and puppies, Karaoke and hot sex and swimming in the sea.



Don't be afraid

of ruins

#4



Heads up: a lot of the writing in here is about rape, self harm and suicide.

Thanks to everyone whose care, patience and generosity got me through the last four years, especially Ace, Maia, Dr EZ, Lucy, Entropy, Makimaki, Neon, Cassia, Bamboo, TB, Kat, Nigel & Chompsky.

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This issue is brought to you by Adobe Caslon Pro, Futura Std, Underwood Champion & Grease Monkey.



I spent so much time wishing I wasn't alive.

I don't wish that anymore.


I'm not sure what I thought back in Wellington would feel like but mostly I feel tired. I've skipped too many meals the last few days. I feel lighter too, less anxious. This is not what Wellington usually feels like. Memories that used to hurt don't anymore. Happiness is a strange and exotic experience.

Seven years ago I wrote a zine about my experiences with depression. When I read it now it's like reading a letter from a past self, reminding me that no matter how together I think I am, no matter how much I think I've got it beat, depression never goes away.

I've been struggling for the last couple of years. I've been unhappy. I keep trying to fix it by changing my life—moving, travelling, going back to school, trying to find a life I want to live. I'm starting to realise that it's not enough to change the life I'm living now, because the past doesn't just go away when I leave. The trauma remains. The anger is still there, as much as I want it to go away. I want to be over things that have happened, that have ended. I don't want to still be upset about things that I can't change.

I can't get rid of it. I can't just excrete it out of my body or put it away somewhere for storage until I have time to deal with it. It's there no matter where I go or what I do. It's not enough to change my life. The damage is done.





I've been dreaming lately. The venlafaxine does that. Fantastic dreams. Some of them make great stories when I'm awake. Some of them make no sense. There are some patterns. Flying, for instance. Not in a good way. I don't feel free when I'm flying. It's a strain. I have to concentrate so hard when I'm doing it. I'm scared of heights. Usually I'm running away from someone. Sometimes I can make myself invisible. Sometimes I can shrink so small that no one can see me. Sometimes I become a ghost you can't see or touch me. What does it say about me, that I dream of being invisible?

Another reoccurring theme is repetition. Going round and round in circles. Repeating the same story over and over. Sometimes it's a circular track I have to travel. Sometimes it's time itself repeating in a loop.

Once I dreamed I could time travel. I was passing through the centuries, not in chronological order. I was running away from someone. I was looking for a time to hide in.

Once I dreamed that Judith Butler rode in on a huge black dragon and gave me magical powers.

Once I dreamed I was travelling on the back of a gigantic elephant big as a ship. The journey was going to take 40 years. I was feeling nauseous and wishing I'd flown instead.

I dream about what I've lost. At least once a week I dream about my childhood teddy bear, who I left stashed at a friend's house and never found again. In the dreams I'm always so relieved to be reunited with him.

I decided to keep a list of one nice thing that happened every day this year.
I only got as far as January.

- being horizontal
- cooking food
- writing
- tater tots
- mail from lovely far away cousins
- morning cuddles with Lil' Kim
- sending off finished edits
- dinner with Laura
- new design project
- blueberry pancakes at the narrow house
- grilled veggie salad & anarcho-rants with Jeremy
- finally recovering from writer's block
- having groceries in the pantry
- getting my room tidy and putting posters on the walls
- pizza/dog park/pub/comedy date with Sasha
- money!!!
- getting drunk at a party full of random strangers
- morning walk with Sasha
- watching The Mindy Project and eating chocolate spread on white bread rolls
- realising that I can keep traveling and having adventures and still spend lots of time in Sydney
- anarcha-feminist meeting
- neighbourhood cats being friendly
- watching a cool burlesque show
- cooking up a massive breakfast feast
- watching Star Trek at work
- successfully avoiding all Australia Day celebrations
- Entropy arriving in Sydney
- taking Entropy grocery shopping and then cooking dinner
- library and pizza date with Entropy
- going to Red Rattler with Entropy
- finally getting hold of ADHD meds

Last week I had a dream that my band was playing a house show. I couldn't remember any of the chords and I couldn't remember what our name was and I had no idea what to wear. The song I sang went:

'you always want to talk about love
I just want to gaze at the stars above.
Even when I'm walking away from you
Your face is in front of me.
We're the Ghada and Ghassan of our generation.'



I dream about my grandparents' house, my childhood adventure land, which they sold the year I turned 18.

I dream about my parents' house, the house I spent my teenage years in, which they sold last year. I dream about Nika, the cat I left behind in that house, because I knew forcing her to move with me would be selfish.

I dream about safta. I dream that I got to see her one last time before she died.

It hurts.

There I am walking through the airport in that floating-swimming-through-tar kinda way that you move when you're real tired and I'm singing songs in my head like:

I'm gonna die of tired
I'm gonna die of leg-turned-to-stone
I'm gonna die of tar inhalation
I'm gonna die of loneliness.

As it turns out I didn't die at all. I just slept the eight hours to Kuala Lumpur.

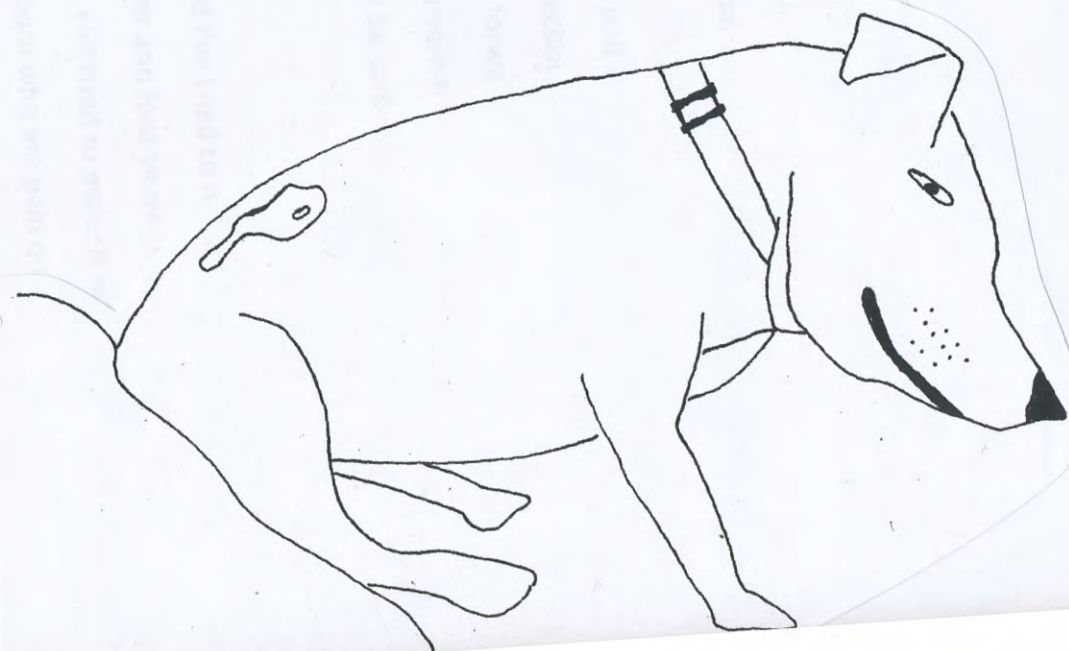
Later I had to wait for two hours in the queue at passport control which was this big florescent ominous room with huge monitors everywhere displaying all this useful educational information about UK border control and all the important work they do and how you shouldn't help asylum seekers and it was all fucking creepy.

I made smalltalk with the woman in front of me, who was from Chile and had lived in London for eleven years and this was her last time having to wait in this queue because she was getting her UK citizenship soon, and the woman behind me, who was from Tanzania and studying international sociology at Oxford and had just come back from Spain where she'd been volunteering at various churches.

The whole time I was feeling anxious about actually going through passport control but when I finally got to the end of the queue all the guy did was ask me two questions and stamp my passport, which just goes to show how far white skin and a rich-country passport will get you.

Now I'm all alone in a nice fancy house in Hackney with two cats and an amazing collection of feminist books. I got in a weird state of mind after being alone in this house for a few days. It didn't help that I forgot the pin for my new debit card and ended up with no money until a distant cousin came to my rescue. There's so much cool shit I could be doing in this city but I haven't ventured out yet. Mostly I've been lying in bed watching Stargate Atlantis. Going outside is too intimidating right now.

Living with a dog is
the best thing for your
mental health

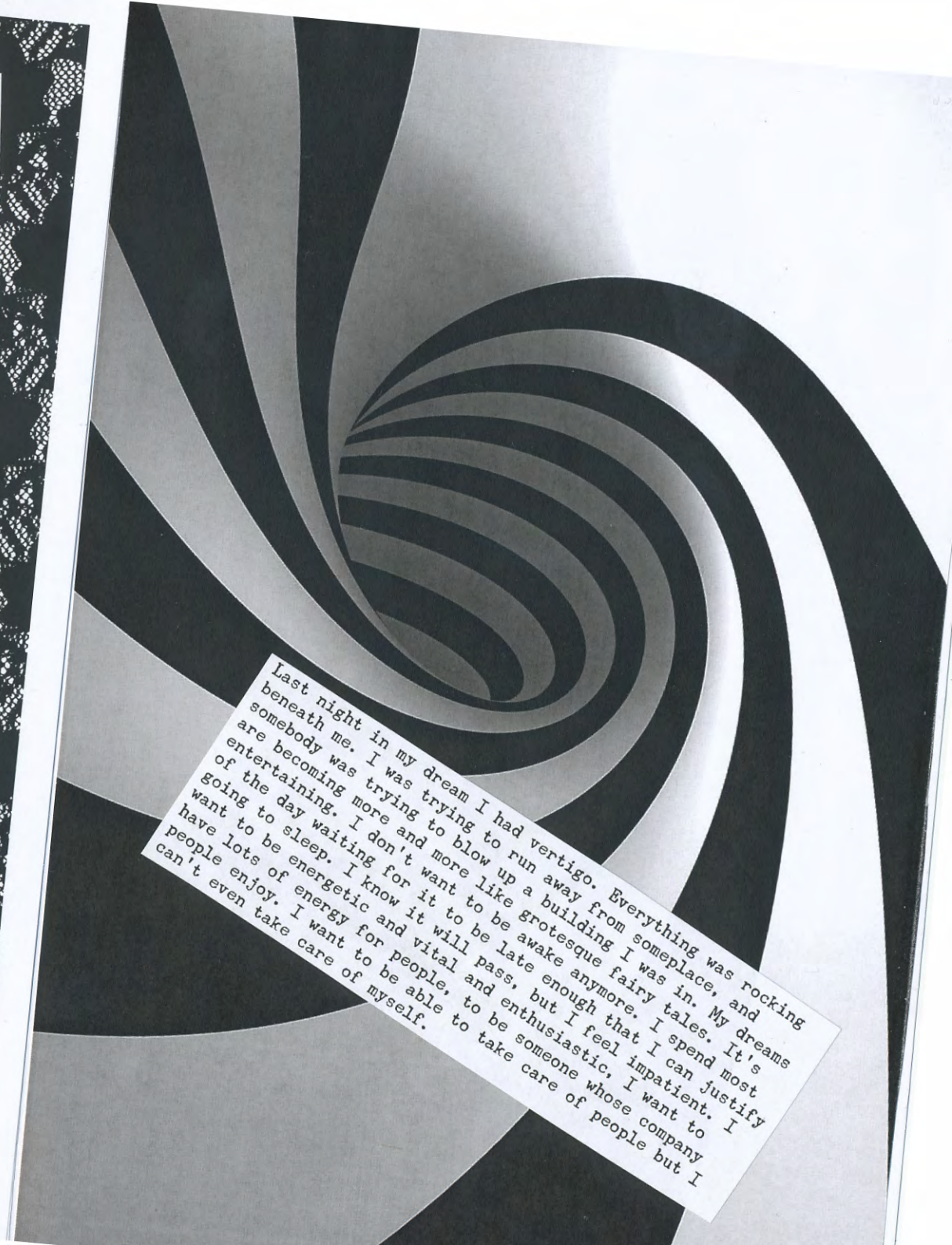


Somehow, I did make it through that year. I passed my course. I even got a merit in one unit. In some ways enrolling at polytech was the best thing for my mental health. It gave me something to focus on, short-term goals to meet, a distraction from other problems. But my mental health was the worst thing for my studies. I hadn't been able to put in as much time and work as my classmates, I'd passed up a lot of opportunities. While everyone else was accepting job offers, I was back where I started—on the sickness benefit, consumed by anxiety, scared to leave my bedroom most days.

A few things happened. One is that I inherited some money. Having financial independence meant that I could finally concentrate on long-term recovery instead of constantly stressing that WINZ or my GP would decide I no longer deserved financial assistance.

The other is that I finally managed to get enrolled in the public mental health system. This only happened after I made a call to the CATT team in tears, and told them I had been cutting myself. It's a delicate thing, getting the mental health system to take you seriously. You have to be in crisis—otherwise they won't treat your case as urgent enough to deserve attention. But you can't be in too much crisis—otherwise they'll send cops to your house.

I decided to give anti-depressants another go. I'd had bad luck with SSRIs, so I chose venlafaxine, an SNRI. I talked to a few friends who were on it. They said it helped, especially with anxiety, but warned me that there'd be horrible side effects for the first few weeks, and that the withdrawal symptoms would be even worse. Like I said, you don't know how new meds will affect you til you try them. The first eight weeks are especially tricky: often your energy levels lift before your mood does, so there's increased risk of hurting yourself. There's a few things that made it possible for me to take that risk: I had no work or school commitments so I didn't need to be able to do things or leave the house; I had supportive friends who could keep an eye on me; I had a social worker I could check in with regularly; I had enough money to buy food, pay rent and bills and meet other basic needs; Also, I was desperate—I was so low, and had been for so long, that I was willing to take a risk if there was a possibility of getting better.



Last night in my dream I had vertigo. Everything was rocking beneath me. I was trying to run away from someplace, and somebody was trying to blow up a building I was in. My dreams are becoming more and more like grotesque fairy tales. It's entertaining. I don't want to be awake anymore. I spend most of the day waiting for it to be late enough that I can justify going to sleep. I know it will pass, but I feel impatient. I want to be energetic and vital, and enthusiastic, I want to have lots of energy for people, and I want to be someone whose company people enjoy. I want to be able to take care of people but I can't even take care of myself.

We were driving in her car. We'd been driving all day. I was crying hysterically. I'd been crying since the previous night, when I'd run out of the house in tears and hid in the trees while I tried to calm down. No one came after me.

What was I crying about? I didn't really know and I couldn't make it stop. I had no job, no income, no house, no prospects. The pain in my hands and wrists made it impossible to do anything. I'd spent the previous week in a codeine haze. I was doing such a good job of pretending to keep it together. It was when I was with the people I trusted the most that I finally fell apart.

She resented me being like this. I could tell by the way she avoided eye contact, and the small tantrum she threw when she left her sunglasses at the supermarket and had to drive back to get them. She didn't know how to deal with me when I was like this and it made her awkward.

'Have you thought about taking anti-depressants?' she asked. What kind of question is that? Is there a depressive out there who hasn't considered medication? Did she think no one else would've suggested it to me before? Did she think when I was in the middle of an anxiety attack was a good time to provide medical advice?

Between sobs I tried to explain why I'd stopped taking anti-depressants, how terrible my experience with them was, that being told to take anti-depressants made me feel like people just wanted me to shut up and stop bothering them with my mental illness.

'Ok, it sounds like anti-depressants aren't a good option for you.' She was very diplomatic.

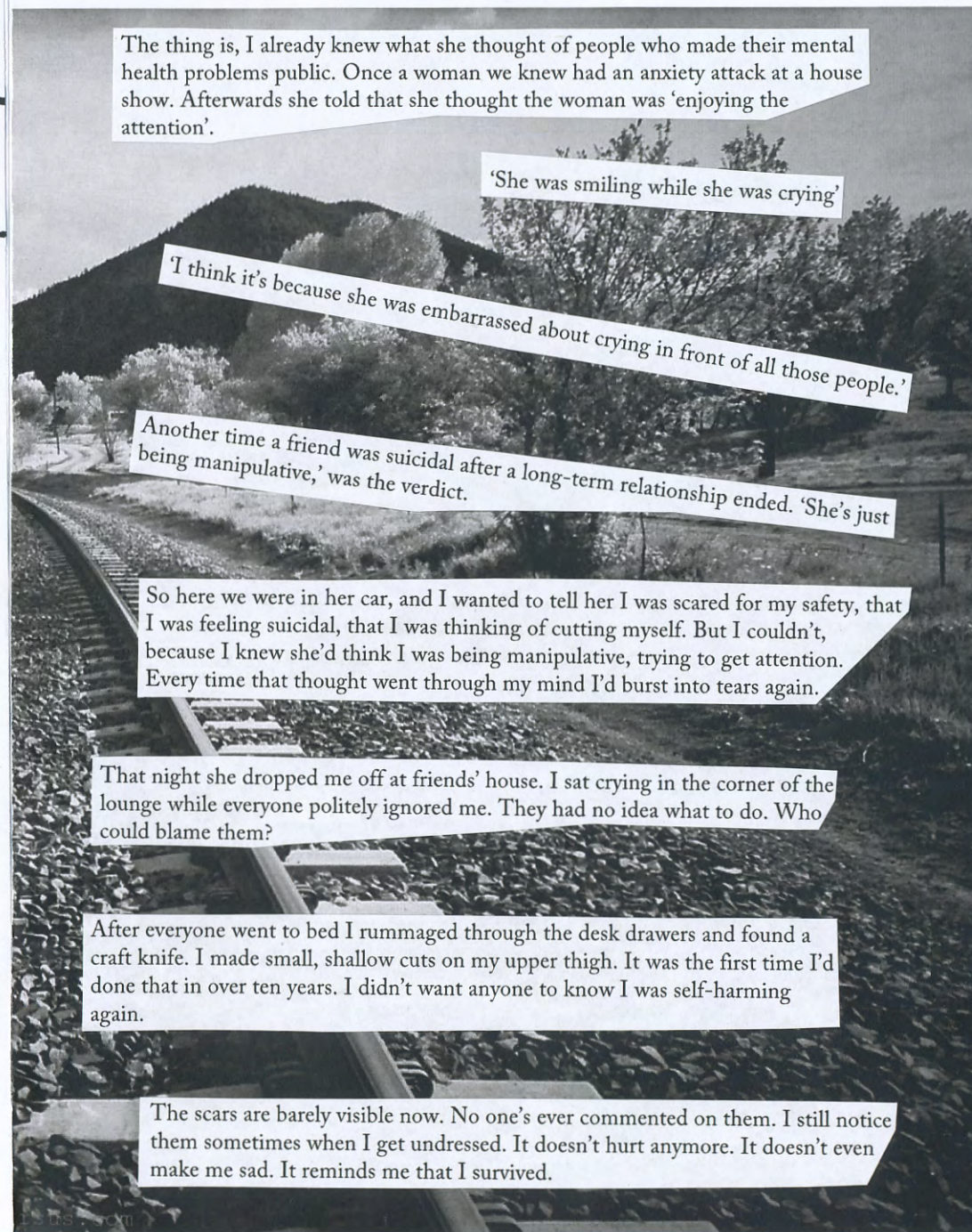
I dreamed that I co-owned a gym. That's an unlikely thing for me to do since (a) I hate gyms and (b) I have no desire to join the ranks of the petit bourgeoisie. But this was a fat-positive trans-inclusive gym. The mirror in the bathroom had big writing across it saying 'damn you look hot today' and the walls had posters with pictures of fat bodies saying 'your body is great, look at all the awesome things it can do'. My job was mostly publicity and I was in charge of writing our blog, where I explained stuff like gender identity and neurodiversity. In my free time I did fancy gymnastics on parallel bars, which I'd never be able to do in real life coz I just don't have the muscle. It felt good to have that kind of physical strength.





A friend once asked me if anti-depressants make you complacent—content with how things are. That's not how they work. Venlafaxine didn't stop me feeling outraged at the injustices of the world. It gave me the ability to do something about them. Instead of feeling paralysed and helpless about the atrocities happening in Palestine, I started coordinating a local campaign for BDS (boycott, divestment and sanctions of Israel). The meds gave me energy and motivation to take action against those things that make life in this world unbearable, and taking action lifted my mood, made me feel less powerless and brought focus and meaning to my life.

I think that's an important point: meds didn't magically fix my life, but they did give me the ability to change my life for the better. I found a job. I moved to a different country. Another thing: for the first time in years I had sex with someone without being triggered or having an anxiety attack. Having a lover who is also a supportive friend is a new experience for me. I've never been in a relationship that didn't make me miserable before. I've never had a lover who made me a better person. Two years ago, I wouldn't have been able to open up and let someone into my life this way. That's how I know I'm healing.



The thing is, I already knew what she thought of people who made their mental health problems public. Once a woman we knew had an anxiety attack at a house show. Afterwards she told that she thought the woman was 'enjoying the attention'.

'She was smiling while she was crying'

I think it's because she was embarrassed about crying in front of all those people.'

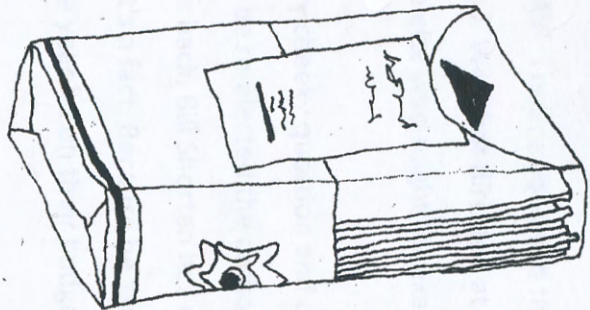
Another time a friend was suicidal after a long-term relationship ended. 'She's just being manipulative,' was the verdict.

So here we were in her car, and I wanted to tell her I was scared for my safety, that I was feeling suicidal, that I was thinking of cutting myself. But I couldn't, because I knew she'd think I was being manipulative, trying to get attention. Every time that thought went through my mind I'd burst into tears again.

That night she dropped me off at friends' house. I sat crying in the corner of the lounge while everyone politely ignored me. They had no idea what to do. Who could blame them?

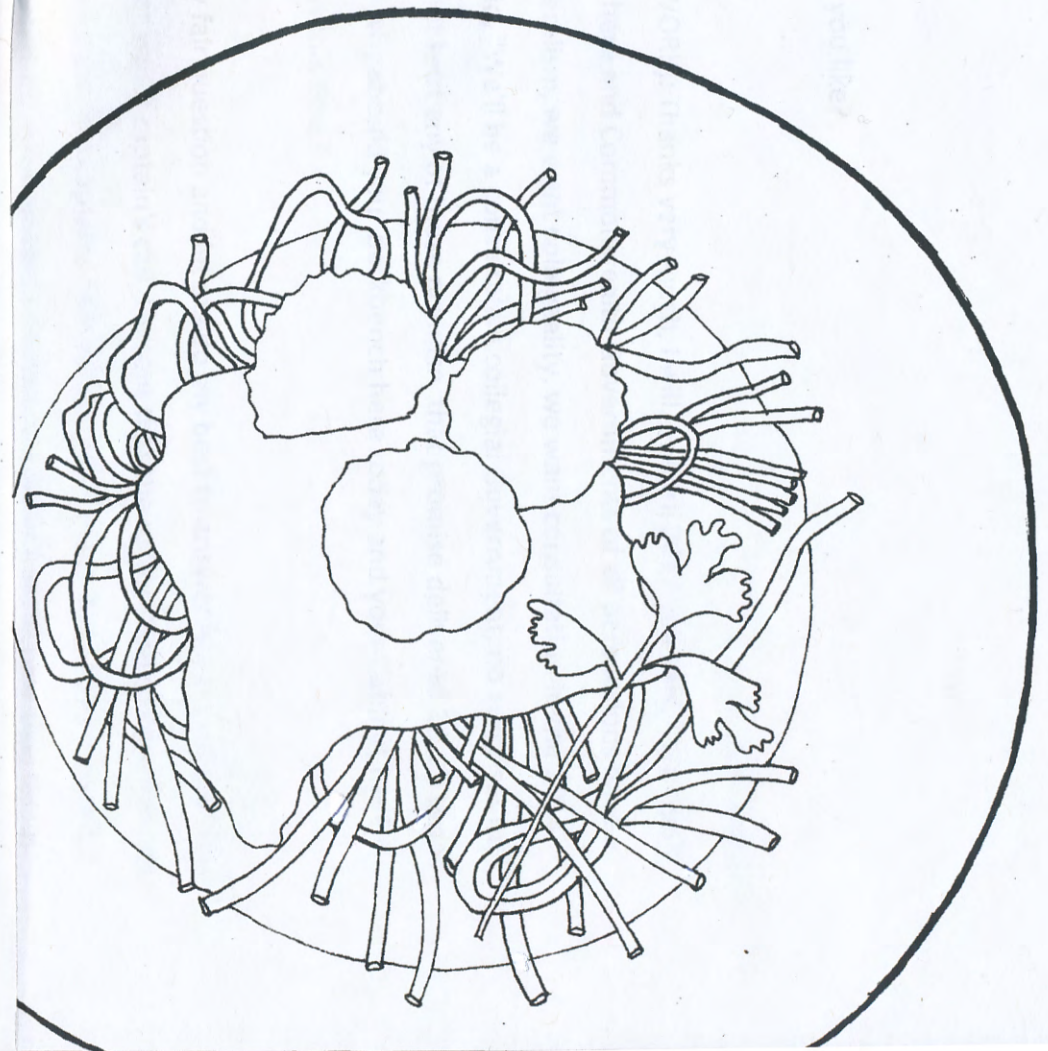
After everyone went to bed I rummaged through the desk drawers and found a craft knife. I made small, shallow cuts on my upper thigh. It was the first time I'd done that in over ten years. I didn't want anyone to know I was self-harming again.

The scars are barely visible now. No one's ever commented on them. I still notice them sometimes when I get undressed. It doesn't hurt anymore. It doesn't even make me sad. It reminds me that I survived.



I think I'm turning into my mum.
I always have a pack of tissues
on me.

Taking myself out for dinner to make up for dragging myself across
the sea from everyone I love, because if I'm gonna be accountable
to everyone else, I should also be accountable to myself.



I'm not convinced that I'm coping. I hate being needy. I hate needing people. I hate people knowing I need them.

I don't know if coming here was the right thing to do. The way things are working out... I wanted to avoid winter, but I've been cold since I got here. I wanted to save up money, but I was earning better money in Wellington. I thought I wanted time to myself, away from social commitments, but here I feel lonely and isolated, like I don't know who I can rely on. Everyone's got their own lives, and I can't see much space for me. I don't just miss my friends, I miss comrades. I miss going to a demo and having that trust and solidarity that's built up over years of organising together.

The Palestine solidarity demo on Sunday did not make me feel empowered, it just made me feel more isolated. Even beforehand, anti-Jewish comments on the Facebook page made me nervous about going without a support crew. It didn't help that I didn't eat anything before going. I've been skipping meals a lot. But there were anti-Jewish placards and Syrian regime flags. The organisers kept appealing to people not to make it political, to only have Palestine flags, to keep it welcoming for all genders, religions and ethnicities. They kept skirting around the issue. They never said, 'don't be racist, don't be sectarian, that's not welcome here.'

It made me miss Wellington, where we'd tell people to leave if they showed up with racist placards. It took a lot of groundwork to get to that point—years of shutting up and saying nothing because I didn't want to derail. Years of doing work and earning people's trust so they'd listen to me. More years of pointing out anti-Semitism, patiently explaining why it's not ok, arguing with people about why it's a big deal.

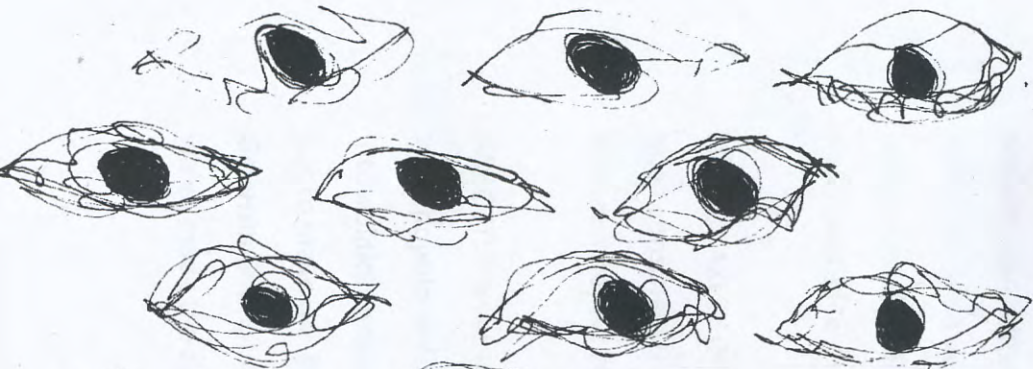
I don't have the energy to do all that all over again in Sydney.

I am staying in a tiny one-room apartment in Shapira, in south Tel Aviv, while its occupant is away in Haifa. I've never met her, all I know is she's Polish and in Israel to work with refugees. That and the way she's decorated her home is enough to make me think we'd get on well.

South Tel Aviv—everything south of central station—is supposed to be the bad part of town. The neighbourhoods on the west, close to the sea, like Florentin and Neve Tzedek and Yaffa are gentrified these days. Lots of pretty renovated old buildings, hip cafes, trendy young people and unaffordable rent. The east side, Shapira and Neve Sha'anani and Yad Eliyahu, is still mostly populated by migrant workers, refugees, poor religious people and punks. I feel a little scared walking alone at night here, and then I hate myself for ingesting all the racist bullshit they feed you in this country. I get sexually harassed just as much in north Tel Aviv.

I had an awful experience this week. I was couchsurfing with this guy, an anarchist vegan. It was one of those situations where you very slowly realise something's not right. First he told me that he'd tried to find me on Facebook, which I thought was a bit weird. Then he told me I was welcome to sleep in his bed if I didn't want to sleep on the couch. Later on he gave me a hug that was just way too affectionate coming from someone I've only known for a couple of hours. That was when alarm bells went off. Then there was the comment about how I must get a lot of men on the street telling me I'm hot. I've been in situations like that before, where I think a guy is just a bit friendly, and it very quickly escalates and becomes dangerous, so I didn't wait to find out. I made some excuse to leave and stayed the night at a friend's.

I can't describe how fucking scared I was though, I mean when I re-tell the story it doesn't sound like a big deal but at the time I was terrified. I didn't know what to do—if I challenge him he might get aggressive, if I ignore it he might take it as an invitation. It really pisses me off how guys can just pull shit like that and be oblivious to how scared and powerless they're making women feel. What a creep.



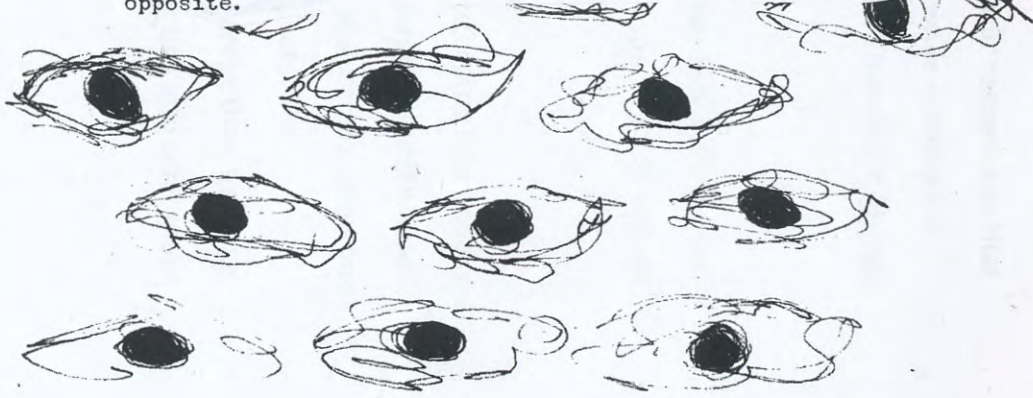
I've been having recurring dreams about vomiting. About trying to vomit. All that comes out is dust. I feel like that today. What I need to say keeps getting stuck, like syrup when it crystallises and goes solid.

I feel raw, overexposed.

I feel battered to exhaustion.

I feel lost.

I feel like I am not getting my needs met. I don't know what it is that I'm doing here and I can't remember why I thought moving to a new city was a good idea. I'm not quite sure what it is that I'm looking for. I'd like to say that I am starting over. I'd like to say that I am going to do things differently now. But I'm much too tired. My body feels frayed. I am threadbare. I should be concentrating on self-care. I should be concentrating on recovery. Somehow I end up doing the opposite.



I forgot to take my meds again last night, and I had the most intense Doctor Who/Star Wars crossover dreams. Darth Vader got hold of a Tardis, and had gone back in time to prevent the destruction of the Death Star. It created a whole new timeline. I was on a planet trying to organise a rebellion. There were these creatures like tiny brontosaurus with wings and long legs. Part flamingo, part dinosaur. I don't know why they stuck in my mind like that. There were also rock people. Humanoid and made of stone. Where is my subconscious going with all this? Other worlds, other timelines, other life forms, and always with the running running running trying to get away from something or someone.

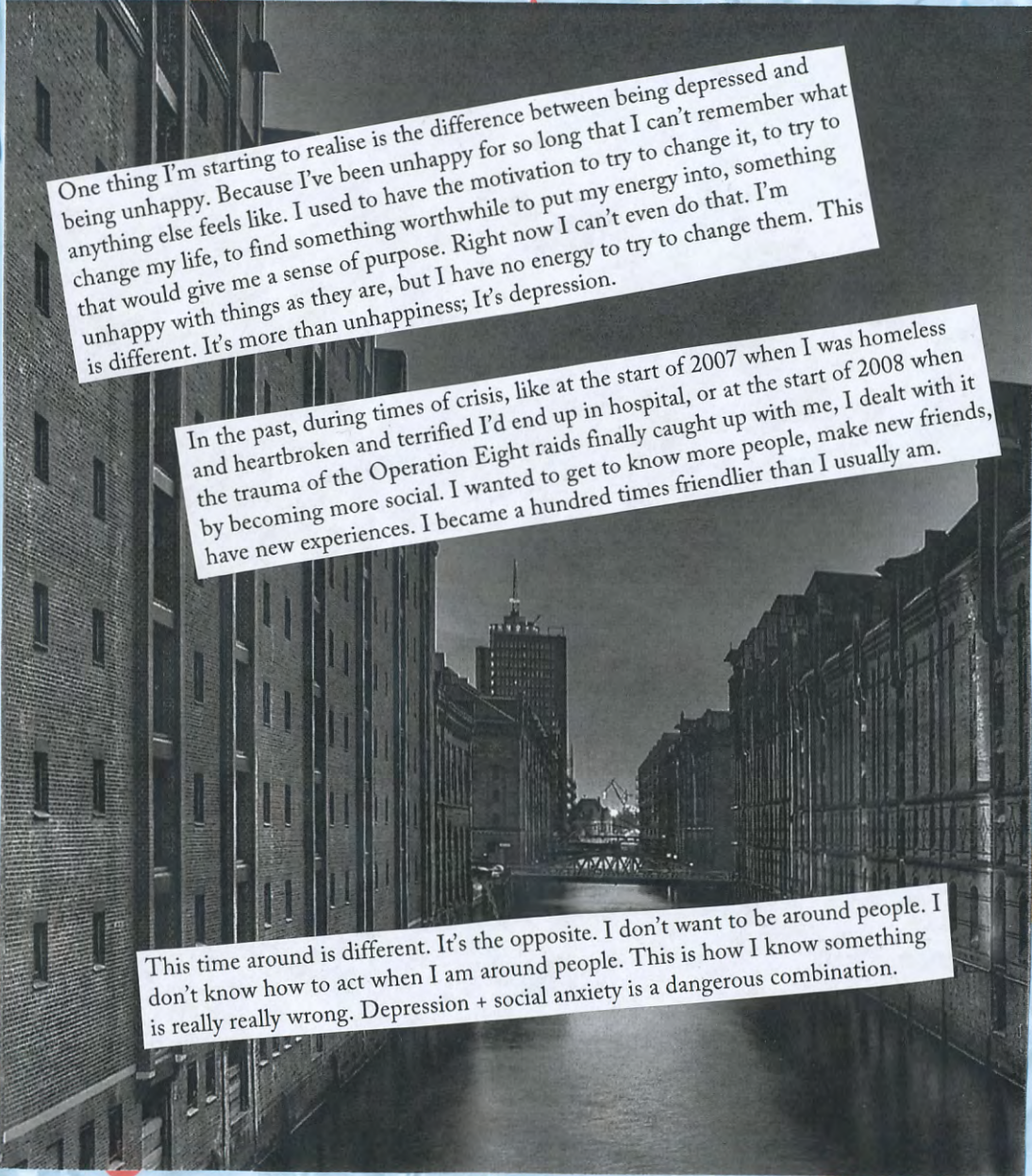


It happens in so many tiny ways that it's hard for me to identify. Like when activist meetings are held in noisy pubs and cafes (I don't have the ability to filter out background noises, so I can't follow a conversation in a noisy setting), when university courses are taught as a series of two or three-hour lectures (I can't maintain concentration for such a long length of time, especially when the lesson isn't interactive at all), or when housemates have particular expectations about the level of housework that should be done (simple organisational tasks like housework are difficult to wrap my head around and often take me much longer to complete than they do for other people).

Even when people take ADHD seriously, they rarely understands how it affects people. 'Attention deficit' is a misnomer, it's more of an attention inconsistency. ADHDers will either hyperfocus on something, or be unable to concentrate (which is why I can coordinate a Palestine fundraiser but can't keep my room tidy or remember my keys). The 'hyperactivity' part only affects some people (I was never hyperactive as a child—I was quiet and introverted and spent most of my time daydreaming).

When I read through online information on supporting someone with ADHD, there's a consistent pattern of infantilising ADHDers instead of respecting our agency and ability to make life decisions. I read that ADHDers are 'difficult to love' that we lack the imagination to understand other people's feelings, that we need people around to monitor and police us because we're incapable of looking after ourselves. The underlying subtext is that the problem is people who have ADHD rather than the barriers that disable them.

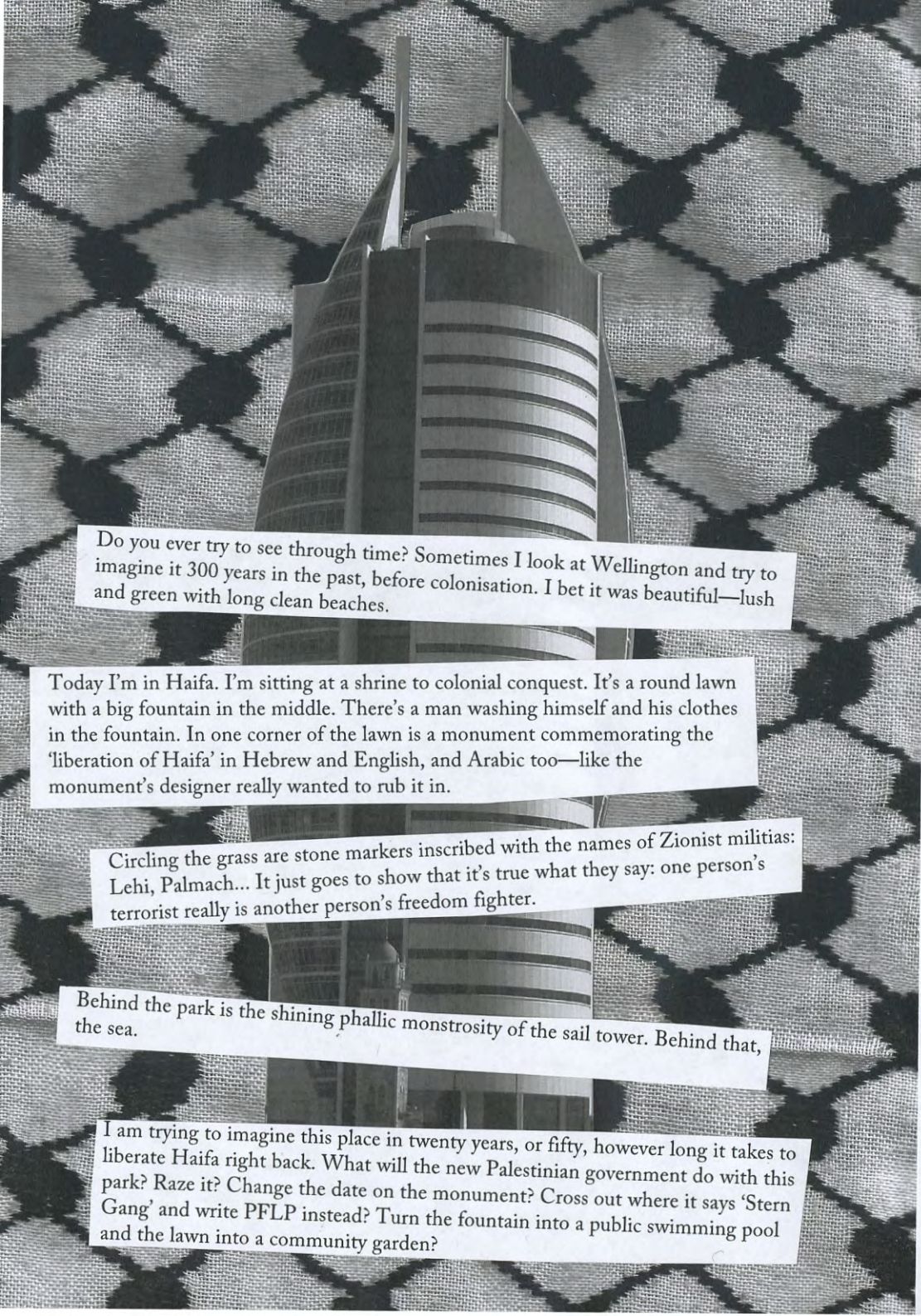
I've been on Atomoxetine for about a year. It helps a lot, but it's not magic. I still struggle with organisation, memory, concentration and time management. I make to-do lists, I write my schedule in my diary, I break tasks into steps so I can figure out how to do them, I have a wall covered in post-its. In every relationship—friends, lovers, flatmates, teachers, bosses, co-workers, comrades—I have to choose between coming out about it and risking people's judgements, or keeping it private and having people think that I'm flaky and inconsiderate. It makes a lot of everyday situations anxiety-inducing, it depresses me.



One thing I'm starting to realise is the difference between being depressed and being unhappy. Because I've been unhappy for so long that I can't remember what anything else feels like. I used to have the motivation to try to change it, to try to change my life, to find something worthwhile to put my energy into, something that would give me a sense of purpose. Right now I can't even do that. I'm unhappy with things as they are, but I have no energy to try to change them. This is different. It's more than unhappiness; It's depression.

In the past, during times of crisis, like at the start of 2007 when I was homeless and heartbroken and terrified I'd end up in hospital, or at the start of 2008 when the trauma of the Operation Eight raids finally caught up with me, I dealt with it by becoming more social. I wanted to get to know more people, make new friends, have new experiences. I became a hundred times friendlier than I usually am.

This time around is different. It's the opposite. I don't want to be around people. I don't know how to act when I am around people. This is how I know something is really really wrong. Depression + social anxiety is a dangerous combination.



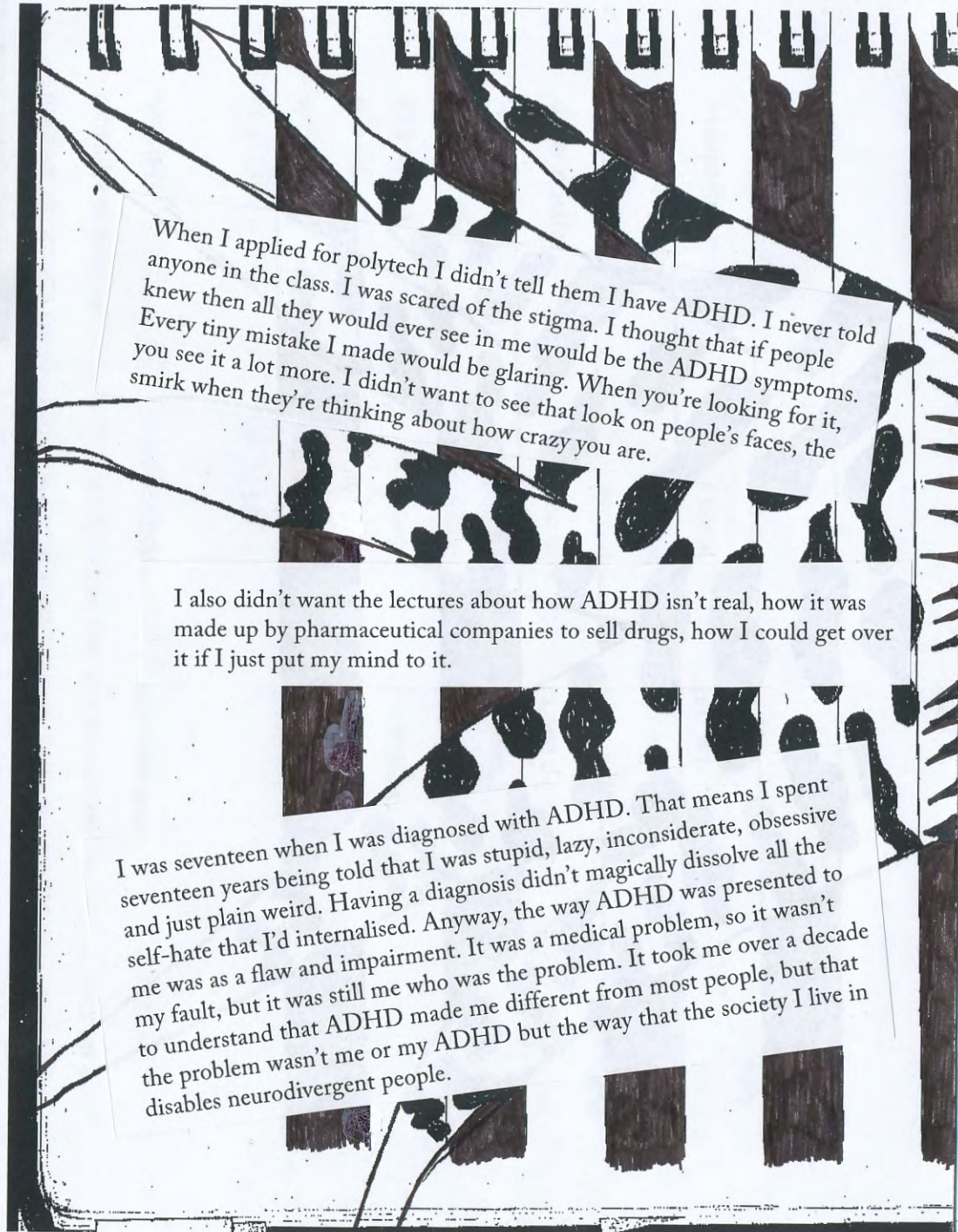
Do you ever try to see through time? Sometimes I look at Wellington and try to imagine it 300 years in the past, before colonisation. I bet it was beautiful—lush and green with long clean beaches.

Today I'm in Haifa. I'm sitting at a shrine to colonial conquest. It's a round lawn with a big fountain in the middle. There's a man washing himself and his clothes in the fountain. In one corner of the lawn is a monument commemorating the 'liberation of Haifa' in Hebrew and English, and Arabic too—like the monument's designer really wanted to rub it in.

Circling the grass are stone markers inscribed with the names of Zionist militias: Lehi, Palmach... It just goes to show that it's true what they say: one person's terrorist really is another person's freedom fighter.

Behind the park is the shining phallic monstrosity of the sail tower. Behind that, the sea.

I am trying to imagine this place in twenty years, or fifty, however long it takes to liberate Haifa right back. What will the new Palestinian government do with this park? Raze it? Change the date on the monument? Cross out where it says 'Stern Gang' and write PFLP instead? Turn the fountain into a public swimming pool and the lawn into a community garden?



When I applied for polytech I didn't tell them I have ADHD. I never told anyone in the class. I was scared of the stigma. I thought that if people knew then all they would ever see in me would be the ADHD symptoms. Every tiny mistake I made would be glaring. When you're looking for it, you see it a lot more. I didn't want to see that look on people's faces, the smirk when they're thinking about how crazy you are.

I also didn't want the lectures about how ADHD isn't real, how it was made up by pharmaceutical companies to sell drugs, how I could get over it if I just put my mind to it.

I was seventeen when I was diagnosed with ADHD. That means I spent seventeen years being told that I was stupid, lazy, inconsiderate, obsessive and just plain weird. Having a diagnosis didn't magically dissolve all the self-hate that I'd internalised. Anyway, the way ADHD was presented to me was as a flaw and impairment. It was a medical problem, so it wasn't my fault, but it was still me who was the problem. It took me over a decade to understand that ADHD made me different from most people, but that the problem wasn't me or my ADHD but the way that the society I live in disables neurodivergent people.

I'm so sick of being scared all the time.

Anxiety takes this hold on me, and I can't do anything:

catch a taxi, go to the post office.

I keep making plans, but only long-term plans.

I always plan for next year.

When next year comes, I can't do it. I'm too scared.

My whole life is stuck in a rut. I keep doing the same thing

over and over because I'm terrified of doing anything new.



Maybe it's that the landscape here is the landscape of childhood, and that's why all I want now is to regress, do childhood things. I want to roll in the dirt and climb trees, finger paint, run in the sprinkler, eat ice blocks and let the pink juice drip all over my face and hands.

People who've never been on psychiatric medication seem to think it's some kind of magic potion. Just take Prozac—you won't be depressed anymore. Just pop some Ritalin—it'll make you normal.

It doesn't really work like that. Meds can help. They can also make things worse, or they can do nothing. There's no way to predict how a medication will affect your brain. It's mostly trial and error. That kind of experiment is risky. If you have a good support network, if you're financially stable, if you can afford to take a month or two off work or study, if you have people around who can make sure you eat and sleep and don't hurt yourself, then you can risk trialling new medication.

When I first started Prozac, I had terrible anxiety attacks every night. I had to take Zopiclone to put me to sleep. At that point I had left school, so there was no schedule I had to keep, no deadlines to worry about. I was living with my parents. My mother used to watch me every night til the sleeping pills kicked in. I was lucky that I had family who were able and willing to look after me while I waited to figure out whether my medication was doing what it was supposed to do.

As an adult this wasn't really an option. I had good friends, but they all had their own problems. I couldn't ask them to babysit me while I tried out new meds. At least, I didn't feel like I could ask. I suppose that's one of the effects of depression. It isolates you. It makes you feel like there's no one you can rely on.

This was not an easy arrangement to orchestrate. I made an appointment with the mental health nurse at my clinic. I had to wait several weeks. On the day of the appointment I was feeling hopeful for the first time in months. I was taking charge of my life, I was working to change things, everything would start looking up soon.

I decided that starting on anti-depressants while I was studying was a bad idea. I was struggling with the workload and with social anxiety. I couldn't afford to get any worse than I already was. I needed a different survival strategy. I had bad experiences with counselling in the past, I didn't want therapy. But I thought that if I had someone to check in with regularly, someone who was a mental health professional, so I wouldn't feel guilty about burdening them with my problems, then at least I'd have a safety net. There'd be someone keeping an eye on me and able to intervene if things got so low that I became a danger to myself.

The nurse was quick to deflate that hope. She wasn't particularly empathic or concerned about my safety. It's hard to hold it against her. Mental health services are so underfunded and overburdened, staff just get burned out. There was no public service that offered the kind of support I was asking for, she told me (not actually true, she could've referred me to the DHB's mental health team). My only option was Positive Horizons, a service that would fund up to six sessions with a therapist. I explained that I'd been to Positive Horizons before and their service hadn't worked for me—I was looking for something more longterm. She told me there was nothing else she could do for me so eventually I gave up and asked her to refer me to them.

I left the clinic feeling hopeless and suicidal. That night I stayed with friends. I needed someone to keep me company, the anxiety was overwhelming. We marathoned Star Wars til I fell asleep (Thank you Mx Neon and Mx Cassia).

I spent the next year and a half navigating the mental health system. I often felt like it was set up to make things as hard as possible. When I went to the 'free' sexual abuse survivor counselling service, they required me to go through an ACC funding application process—I had to convince ACC that what happened to me was really sexual abuse, otherwise my counselling sessions wouldn't be funded. When I asked my GP to prescribe ADHD meds, she told me that I had to get approval from a psychiatrist first. The waiting period was several months. By the time I finally got the prescription I'd already finished my diploma.

There was an economic recession, we had a rightwing government, and social services were being cut all over the place. The austerity measures I'd protested against were impacting my life in a very material way.

My theme song that year was The Mountain Goats' 'This Year'. When things got overwhelming I'd sing to myself, 'I am going to make it through this year/if it kills me'. It was my mantra, my affirmation.