

Supplementary acknowledgements and references for Hoa Pham's submission.

A prose poetic reference from the consumer's point of view;

Wave

A short story by Hoa Pham

Richard Bentall the author of Beyond Madness and the Failure of the mind doctors, a British psychologist and author.

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Alister Air whose help and love means that I am still alive today

My family for supporting my work and in particular my published work

Ivor Indyk for publishing "Yolk" a short episode in HEAT magazine a piece written from the consumers point of view as below:

Inside it was warm like greenhouse flowers. Outside it was the end of the world.

*** Yolk- a short episode**

Hoa Pham

Yolk- a short episode

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Narrative is a form of hindsight. A way of drawing patterns from random experiences. Making sense of life with crises and turning points- as if life itself can be granted closure.

The mind will always strive to make patterns and make sense of the world. Even in the most obscure ways.

My mind is playing at pick up sticks. Somehow I have to piece it all together and make the structure stable. Somehow sort out the lived experiences from the hallucinations. All of my perceptions are suspect, what is most vivid to me cannot be depended on to be the most true.

I am a lucky person. I have recovered, they say, quickly. But I can see what I have lost, the world is now flat, almost in monotone instead of glowing with auras of light. I go to work and hide what is wrong with me, I only work half days and no one notices when I go home.

My mind is in fragments so I tell the tale in fragments. In the green of the hospital the vividness has faded. I used to get jolts of half memory, recognise the nurses that would bring me food, that I ordered in secret, hiding from the mirror that was a window into my world. The patients look like people I know, a man I knew who worked for Echelon, an ex boyfriend who glowers and intimidates women. But up close confirms the lie, the nurse would tell me that she is not who I think she is. One of the patients, my next door neighbour who carries around a soft toy lobster and wears bandages on her wrists, tells me she is not supposed to speak to me.

There are occasionally people here that I do know. One of them, a former colleague, knocks on my door by accident.

"Hello Kim," he says and I greet him with his name.

"I didn't see you here," he says and goes to the next door.

Another patient comes from Odyssey House. Her caseworker knows me too.

"Is she here as a patient or as a worker?" she asks the substance user.

"I think she's a patient. She's all right."

It's different being on the reverse side of the counter, on the inside of the intake system, watching others talk about you. I think the nurses treat me like a human being most of the time. They come in and check on you at night with torches and you cannot lock the doors. Just like being in a hotel- except for the checking on you part.

I'm not allowed to walk around the hospital by myself. It means I stay in my room sleeping most of the time until my visitors arrive. My room overlooks the garden between the hospital and the clinic offices. There's grass and occasionally I see people walking around, usually not by themselves.

I do not want to see my parents. I remember that to discipline me and my brother they used to lock us in a cupboard. My father would make my mother lock us in then he would let us out.

I've been sorting through my memories. Trying to order them out from the hallucinations. I can do this now I'm not so tired. Before I was asleep most of the time. Now I'm not and I walk that line between being fully conscious and just drifting, drifting away.

Grandmother

My grandmother saw cats meowing at the back door, lots of them.

She was living with us and shared a room with me when I was younger. I would wake up at night and hear her muttering to herself in Vietnamese about the cats. They were scratching at the windows and the doors waking her up.

There was only one cat, Polyphony- Polly for short.

Polly slept inside and only meowed in the morning for her breakfast.

I stayed home and took care of my grandmother one day a week so Dad could go to work.

By then she was on medication and had calmed down a bit.

She showed me her rashes and told me about the cats.

What little Vietnamese I knew helped me decipher that she was talking about cats that weren't there. Three colored cats like she used to have in Vietnam that would yowl for rice everyday.

My grandmother would scratch herself bloody and make her rashes worse.

Grandma had survived the chaos and the Vietnam war. She didn't have flashbacks to the war- she flashbaked to the cats. She talked to Grandpa too. Grandpa who was deceased a few years ago.

My brother and I decided that talking to Grandpa was all right. They had nine sons together and were by each other's side every day for decades.

When she talked about Grandpa she was fine. It was the cats that bothered her, the cats, the cats. She would get agitated and scratch again, like the cats would scratch at the door.

Mother

My mother was from Saigon- so she would say. The truth was her family spent most of the time on the run. Her father was a teacher and also a Nationalist. The family had to change their name and move to Saigon.

Mother never talked extensively about what she experienced growing up in Vietnam. We'd get little anecdotes at odd times, whilst sitting at dinner she would reminisce about how much she enjoyed living on a farm where the children would do some of the chores and look after the ducks.

Mother did not like talking about the war. Once when we were shopping she told people she was Fijian, or from the Phillipines so she wouldn't have to talk about the war.

Once she was caught out and was very embarrassed. She could not speak Filipino back.

My mother and some of her sisters are very anxious people to be around. Mother once told of a time when her eldest sister would cling to a pot of rice and protect it.

It's mine- she would say. All mine.

Mum and Dad never experienced a refugee camp. They were lucky enough to be in Australia and naturalised. The family reunion scheme enabled my father to bring most of his family over to Australia. My mother's family divided and fled to Australia, Germany and the United States.

Mother said that teachers were viewed with suspicion and were spied on in Vietnam. They would be asleep and suddenly wake up see the head of a person move at the window. The spy would duck once he was spotted. Her father had been imprisoned once already.

So I already come from a paranoid background- at least from Mum's side.

What is more likely- that my mother was taught how to strip and load machine guns at school- for a show of strength- or that my father- who does work in the public service, spies for ASIO?

What happened?

I was hit on the back of the head with a hammer.

Why a hammer? Why not a large object?

I was hit on the back of the head with a brick.

How do you know when you were hit from behind?

Because I saw it coming out of the corner of my ...

Yes. You see. We can't have you making wild statements to the police now.

Test

Banana, coffee, cherry.

One of the cognition tests wound its way into my memory. I was programmed by a hypnotist counsellor to remember bits at a time. Each bit would be prompted by a change in the objects he would ask me to remember.

Banana, orange, cherry.

Merri Creek.

Merri Creek runs through the back ways of a chain of suburbs into the Yarra. It winds past an old convent, an environmental park, a school oval and a concrete structure which is used by kids as a skateboard ramp. Alex and I would walk by Merri Creek, where a series of attacks had occurred.

Banana, orange, cheese.

One of my friends had been harassed and stalked. I couldn't do much for her except tell her to go to the police. Then I saw a picture of the stalker in the local newspaper. He was a local artist and being lauded for his work. It made me sick.

Chocolate, orange, cheese.

I had talked to Alex about this friend while walking along Merri Creek. I cried and he held me in his arms. We fell asleep companionably next to the creek on a sloping bank.

Chocolate, lemon, coffee.

The local artist overheard us around the bend of the creek. He came by and pushed Alex into the river and I couldn't stop him.

Bread, lettuce, vegemite.

I am getting so confused, even my therapy is rewriting itself.

Hospital

In the hospital I look through the window out into the garden between the hospital and the out patient clinics. I see birds, sparrows and Indian mynahs perched on the trees.

In my imagination, and I am sure it is my imagination this time, every person has a bird like a shadow familiar. Business men have pigeons, with their minor variations, purple necks or a flash of a green underwing. Other people have sparrows, that fly in flocks, wheeling in the sky.

I keep thinking I see people I know in the hospital.

Every day I take my lilly- pilly pills and the small round tablets that calm me down.

My friends come and visit me. One of them tries out the security, shows them her student card, wanting to observe the training tapes of me that they have been doing for students.

She really is a psychology student, and she is horrified when they do show her an observation tape.

At least that is what I think she says when she visits me.

Later, looking into the mirror, which I thought was a camera, I realise that this would be impossible. They would have needed me to sign a consent form and I never did.

My mind is like a deck of cards. I keep shuffling, and play mental solitaire, trying to fit my memories together and find all the links, to place them in the right order.

Echelon

Once I had kissed a man I knew had worked for Echelon, the information data gathering agency, in New Zealand. He was in Australia studying a masters in computer security. He told stories like how the security wing was obvious because there was a building with six floors and the lift only went to level 5. On level 6 you were asked embarrassing questions about your personal life. One of his referees had told them that he slept with a lot of women, and he said at the time it was true. And he was embarrassed that it would be on his security record for the rest of his life.

He did not sleep with me. We only kissed, I went home and a few days later he indicated he didn't want much more than that. He was also banned from travelling to some countries and that included Vietnam.

In Canberra the urban myth is that under the steel eagle monument in front of the defence complex is an American bunker.

In Vietnam writers and teachers are watched. Writers have their work banned, and are exiled, like Pham Thi Hoai.

In Australia I think things are different.

But it is not out of the realm of possibility that they aren't.

Hospital

I look in my notebook and know that I have been in hospital for a few days.
This morning I packed again and waited to be taken home.

This never happens. I had to unpack and remind myself that I have to be here for two weeks. Unless I can show them that I can be trusted on my own. That when I see my friends and Alex I can stay awake. That I do not hear their voices speaking for them about fantasies that could be true.

One of my friends is involved in a group called The Forum. They have to complete a group activity that involves six people to change something. When he visits me he is buzzed by someone on his mobile.

- No I'm coming later, he says. This is too serious. Change of plans.
I never have the courage to ask him whether he and my other friend wanted to break me out of hospital.

Alex is my boyfriend. He has hypnotised me into thinking that he is my boyfriend.

Alex is my boyfriend. The real Alex comes and visits me after work every night.

He's a beautiful boy with long blond hair and wren- sharp blue eyes.

Alex comes and visits and so does Miriam, another friend. She looks at me and says- You have never had a hallucination in your life.

When Alex comes in she asks him whether I hallucinate. Alex says yes. He sat with me through it all, the worst of it all.

When I thought I was an ASIO plant.

ASIO

I thought that my mother and father were subject to sensory deprivation and taught a whole lot of refugee children how to survive immersed in a sensory deprivation tank. The children were from all over the world, from refugee camps. They were taught to go "nova" when the time came to escape, like the Orson Scott Card novel *Ender's Game*, where in zero gravity the kids would gather in the middle of the battle room and then explode in all directions, bouncing off the walls.

I thought I could read Thai, Indonesian and Chinese. When my father gave me DVDs I told Alex that if they were in Chinese or in Thai the pirated copies meant that we were being bugged by ASIO.

I thought my father worked for ASIO as an agent, and I was a plant. That was what I told the duty registrar when Alex took me to the hospital. That there wasn't anything wrong with me and I was really an ASIO plant.

No wonder they admitted me. And if I hadn't agreed and signed the admission forms they would have certified me.

Gummi bear

My consciousness is like a gummi bear. It stretches and is translucent. In its' own way sweet and beautiful. It's also melted at the moment.

I cannot stay active for more than a few hours. Somehow the hours fly by in the hospital, I'm told that the drugs make me like a zombie, my afternoon naps are longer than I'd ever had before.

Alex is my contact with the outside world.

He first thought something might be wrong when I tried to entice the cat out from under the bed using jelly beans. I got one of each color and put them in order of the chakras. First red, then orange, yellow, blue, purple then white.

The cat did not come out.

My parents have come and given me candy. They visit every day and take me out of the hospital. I cannot be unaccompanied. And the girl with the bandages on her wrists told me she was not allowed to talk to me.

If she had I might have thought that she was someone that I knew.

Hello kitty

The Hello Kitties are watching me again. So cute with little bows in their ears they must be up to something as Alex would say.

I put them in the lounge room, to remind me we were being bugged.

When I went into hospital Alex brought me a Hello Kitty. I put her opposite the door watching with black beady eyes just in case something came in.

I knew I was getting better when I was able to put the Hello Kitty away.

I lose track of how much I tell Alex. I hallucinate that I am Lucy Liu's stunt double, that my brother and his boyfriend work for ASIO and trained at Oxford, that I'm really not myself but another younger girl. We pass on secrets that way, since all us Asians look the same, and we memorise names to know where we are up to, to spread the word.

In Vietnam plays are used to spread ideas, they are embedded in myths and opera.

At least with the most recent hallucinations now I am in hospital, slowed down by Zyprexa, I can see that they are hallucinations. I was never any of those things.

Yolk

I leave the hospital two weeks later. While in there I never learn not to eat too many eggs, one night I fart a lot and almost drive a visitor away.

I still need to sleep a lot and do not return to work for another week. Occasionally I hear something- like loud music coming out of the student household, saying that I set it off- I set off a trap. But I know to ignore it.

My sanity is like a yolk. It gels together despite the buffeting, but it only takes one sharp prick for it to leak into the white.

My psychiatrist says that a psychotic episode can happen to anybody- in my case out of the blue. I need to stay on medication to ensure it doesn't happen again.

Alex asks me to break up the line of Hello Kittys in the bathroom. They remind him too much of what has happened. He remembers lots of things, including that I didn't like sleeping in red sheets- I thought that I was drowning in blood.

You have to appear normal, one of my counsellors said, the one I thought had put a hypnotic block on me. It was confirmed for me that I had never seen him before about being hit on the head with a hammer. So that was not true either.

Alex is alive, my parents are academics not ASIO agents.

I did not threaten anybody, or harm anyone.

Only Alex whom I occasionally mistook for the local artist, coming to get me.

I told the hospital shrink that he had hypnotised me into thinking that he was my boyfriend. But the shrink had already identified him, and knew that I was in the grip of psychosis- that I would see a threat in everything- even the person I loved and trusted the most.

I hit the back of my head on my desk at home. That's why I thought I had been hit on the back of the head with a hammer. I had read about it in the newspaper and thought it had happened to me.

The hallucinations gradually bleed away from me like paint from the landscape. The world bleaches out to shades of grey without the vivid reliving of my hallucinations.

I do not remember much of the first week of hospital, I can only remember Alex coming to visit, and my mother coming in too.

- Can we go home now?
- No. You're not going home today. I'll help you pack your things back in the cupboard again.
- Why do I keep doing this? I wake up every morning knowing I'm going to go home and then I don't go home.

Silence.

Mother does not have answers for everything. I learnt this when I was a little girl.

Now I am learning it again.

In the second week I begin to live in time again. I look at my watch and am able to predict that mother will come in the morning, Alex in the evening. In between times I sleep a lot. Sometimes I walk around the hospital ward. Initially I wasn't allowed to go out of my room without someone accompanying me.

I begin to be able to look back and forth in time, in memories. Alex offers to be my guide- I can ask him whether something has happened or not.

I wince in embarrassment at some of my recollections.

- Do you remember when you said we were terminators?

I do. Alex and I were terminators made by my father. Every terminator was paired up with a terminator from a different race or cultural background. The terminators were not set to kill just yet. We'd go through a series of exercises that would rebuild our bodies and show that we were terminators. Every time something horrible would happen in the world we would go up a level. At the moment the terminators were locked in the heart. There was only two more levels to go before we would start hunting down and killing.

And when we locked down to go to sleep, it would be in an embrace, male and female terminator together.

I find that when I'm given instructions sometimes it is as if a vital hook or door in my mind is missing. I'm told something then I promptly do what I'm told not to do, and I cannot catch myself. I am told I'm in the high demand ward and I should not wander around the hospital- but sometimes I cannot help it.

Recognition

I suspect that psychosis is pattern recognition gone wrong. Everytime I see someone who resembles someone in my memory I immediately think that it is them. I look back at what I thought about ASIO and Echelon, and think that my psychosis was making patterns from what could exist.

I think that the woman who brings in my breakfast is a Vietnamese girl who adores my work- who somehow recognises me and sneaks into the hospital.

One of the other patients is definitely from Echelon and so is his best mate- his brother.

The predatory male in the ward looks like my ex- boyfriend. He tries to paralyse me in the queue for medication by staring at the base of my spine. I move my energy consciously up my spine and turn around sideways so he cannot stare me down.

- What? Usually women freeze when I do that.
- She could freeze you if she wanted to.

Another patient joins in.

You know that something is a hallucination if it has a threatening aspect- the psychiatrist tells me as he drops by on the fly. I don't tell him everything that happens- if I did it would take too long. The nurses ask me questions too. I find it a strain to talk to strange people- I did even when I was not in hospital.

I suspect the staff expect me to remember instructions, they remind me when I say things that are out of line. I start writing again in an exercise book- of thoughts and feelings- what feelings I do have. I suspect if I wasn't so sedated I would be crying a lot.

I remember being held by Alex on the day of the anniversary of my grandfather's death, crying for all the dying people.

Alex berates himself for not realising I was sick. He should have realised. He didn't want to believe that I was that sick or even worse making it up for attention.

I told him to talk to someone else about it- to tell a friend- not to keep it to himself. He offered to tell me once which friend he confided in- and I said it was up to him. He still hasn't told me who- and I don't want to look at all his friends and wonder- is it you who knows?

Alex takes me home for the first time over the weekend. We go to our apartment and make love. It is the first time we have had such a long break between sessions. The warmth and immediacy brings me almost to myself again. Then I sleep in his arms for the rest of the time he is allowed to take me out of hospital.

Now I have a secure grasp of time. There is only three more days to go till I'll be allowed to go home. My immediate supervisor at work knows I'm in hospital. A card was sent from the team to wish me well.

I suspect I have schizophrenia. Although I know that you need to have two psychotic episodes within six months- otherwise it is just schizophreniform. These two words make such a difference. One is isolated- full recovery is possible and with enough medication will not reoccur. The other has the taint of movies- mad geniuses- the possibility of violence.

I have to hide my experiences from others, not flinch when they say they are going crazy, when they have not touched that schizoid world of seamless delusion that your mind can invent for you. I have not since had that certainty, the certainty of the delusion- it gave me a surety I never have in real life.

I do not miss it. The world has slowed down, has gone quiet.

And I am now silent within it.