



Construction

- 1: First, fold each sheet in half along the vertical axis.
- 2: Using a craft knife or scalpel, cut a horizontal slot along the centre dotted line of the first sheet. (pages 1/2/7/8)
- 3: Then cut along the dotted lines on all the other sheets. Make sure to cut to the very edges of the paper.
- 4: Stack the folded sheets in ascending order with the even numbers at the top. Curl the bottom half of the second page (pages 3/4/11/12).
- 5: Thread the curled page through the centre slot of the first page. Repeat this process with the third (pages 5/6/9/10) with the even pages in ascending order.
- 6: When all the pages have been threaded through, check the pagination. Finally, fold the booklets in half along the horizontal axis.

What if we want to get to elsewhere, but like the man and woman in Cafe Flaubert, don't know how to? Where is elsewhere?

While I was asking myself these questions, I stared at the woman who was impersonating staring into space. As soon as she felt my eyes on her, she started to write in her notebook. One thing was for sure. She was very much here, in Cafe Flaubert.

Elsewhere is a migration from Here. Elsewhere is many things, but its most important feature is that it involves a departure. For a writer, one of the places that can be described as elsewhere, is the extra terrestrial life that lives in her mind. If the mind is a space ship, the eyes are portholes, peep holes, out of which she can get a view of what it is she has departed from. It is this act of looking in and looking out at the same time that contributes to the quality of not being quite there. The man and woman who were simulating this action had now arranged their faces into an expression one might call "dreamy".

My own dream was to win the lottery. By the time my espresso arrived I had already spent six million pounds of it on three properties I had purchased in London, New York and Italy. My London property had a heated swimming pool in the garden and I was standing in the warm deep waters holding my baby daughter on my hip when the croissant jam and butter arrived. While I watched the actors at work and chased the last crumbs on my plate, I wondered whether winning the lottery was the only dream left in the twenty first century. Was Communism **the last big dream for the world?** Which reminded me to call Jana who had just returned from the Czech Republic where she might have finally slept with the man she's in love with. As I took out my mobile phone I noticed the woman was now scribbling at a pace. Her

OUT OF IT INTO IT

DEBORAH LEVY

DIFFUSION *Species of Spaces*

They are elsewhere.

- a) lying at the bottom of a glass of creme de menthe?
- b) stuck inside a kitten's paw?
- c) drowning in the right eye of a sleeping spider?
- d) splashing in the waters of a cyber-ocean made in Korea?
- e) lazily between the bricks of the Great Wall of China?
- f) speaking to God from a bathroom in Manchester?

If someone is "not quite there", where are they?

But these two actors were an absence trying to metamorphose into a (writerly) presence. They began to intrigue me, as actors should do. Suddenly, I understood the missing dynamic in their imitation of a writer at work. What was absent from their performance was the quality of "not quite being there"; in fact they were very much there because they were performing for me. I was incredibly grateful to them for attempting this, because even the most experienced actor would find it hard to impersonate "not quite being there". I had written for the theatre for some twenty years and knew that what actors fear most is being stranded on a stage not knowing what they are doing and why they are there.

who reduce their presence and the opposite of a shy teenage girl in a cafe full of men; such alchemy involves taking up as little space as possible, a kind of shrinking, I AM NOT HERE EVEN THOUGH I AM HERE, a presence, attempting to metamorphose into an absence.

I know, roughly speaking, how I became a writer. I don't know precisely why. In order to exist, did I really need to line up words and sentences? In order to exist, was it enough for me to be the author of a few books?... One day I shall certainly have to start using words to uncover what is real, to uncover my reality.

Species of Spaces and other Pieces
Georges Perec

ANGELS
EEC

system like a message in a bottle. Elsewhere was inside me in the way Artaud said the bullets that suicided Van Gogh were already inside his belly when he painted the crows that were his last painting.



This publication is one of a series of essays commissioned by Probooscis for the series SPECIES OF SPACES – inspired by and in homage to Georges Perec's eponymous book. The series contemplates how we, in the contemporary world of the twenty-first century, occupy space – the virtual and physical, emotional and social – what Perec called the 'intra-ordinary'. SPECIES OF SPACES aims to radically question the trajectory of contemporary urban existence, intervening in current debates on how the virtual and the physical relate to each other, and how technological advances affect cultural and social structures.

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OUT OF IT INTO IT
SPECIES OF SPACES

GETTING OUT OF IT

When I was fifteen I wore a black straw hat with square holes punched in the brim and wrote on paper napkins in greasy spoons. I had a vague idea this was how writers were supposed to behave because I had read books about existentialists drinking espresso in French cafes. There were no cafes like that in the UK at the time (1977) and certainly not in the suburb I lived in. But I was convinced that a cafe was an essential key to Existence, to my Nausea, to my own life, so on Saturday mornings it gave me great pleasure to walk to the greasy spoon by the bus station, order eggs bacon mushrooms bubble and then, holding a mug of scalding tea, make my way past the builders and bus drivers towards a formica table to begin my impersonation of the writer's life. As soon as I sat down I reached for the white paper napkins that were kept in a glass in the centre of the Formica table, alongside the salt pepper, tomato ketchup and brown sauce and started to write with a blue biro. This is the word I wrote on my napkin.

ENGLAND

When my breakfast arrived I ate and wrote at the same time. I put down the fork in my right hand, and leaving the knife in my left hand pointing South, picked up my biro to write **the word ENGLAND** again. I was not born in the UK and England was an exciting word to write.

Although I was sitting in a greasy spoon in England, I had a whole other country inside me. In fact it was not a whole **country** because I had internally smashed it up. I had a broken country inside me and **I was pleased it was**

The act of writing made me feel more alone than I felt when I wasn't writing. This is exactly what I wanted it to do. By writing stuff down I was abandoning the possibility of any kind of human comfort. I did not want to be reassured;

As well as the England doodles I also wrote sentences very fast on the white paper napkins. This action (scribbling) and also my costume (the black straw hat) were like being armed with an AK 47; the sort of rifle the newspapers always show children holding instead of a Gameboy or teddy bear. No one felt easy about chatting me up or talking about their dog or interrupting me to pass the salt. This was a powerful discovery. Somehow I had performed a magic trick with my biro. As far as the builders sitting next to me were concerned, I was not quite there. I had written myself into some other kind of status.

In the meanwhile there were certain things about England that I couldn't quite grasp. One of these ungraspable things occurred right here in the cafe. The greasy spoon cook who was called Angie always gave me bacon that I considered raw. It was as if she put it on the hot plate to make it warm but not to actually cook it. This was very upsetting to me because the livid pink rasher on my plate made me think of the pig it had been sliced off. Somewhere in England there was a pig running around with a chunk gouged out of its side. I did not feel I could ask Angie to cook the bacon for longer because I did not live in England I lived in Exile and reckoned this was the way things were done in the country that was my host.

broken because I did not want to belong to it. When we arrived in the UK I was nine years old. My mother and father told me we were in exile and would one day return to the country of my birth.

After my call I sat contentedly in the writers cafe and made plans to mend my bicycle puncture. Where I wondered could I buy those steel spoons like shoe horns with which to ease off the tyres? I even considered doing some minor plumbing. Earlier that morning I had opened the window of my study to look at the grey plastic guttering that edged the tiles of the roof. There was a leak from an outflow pipe and water trickled down from the tiles into guttering that was bent out of shape and about to fall off. As I made a diagram on the margin of my newspaper working out how to mend the outflow pipe (this involved a perilous climb up into the attic to examine the water tank) I saw the waitress walking towards me in her crepe soled shoes. She moved very slowly, like a wave far out in the ocean coming in to crash on my red suede trainers and deport me from Cafe Flaubert. The deportation document was the bill, which she carried on a ceramic saucer decorated with glossed yellow sunflowers. "This is a Writers Cafe," she whispered in a kind, but strained voice. I thought that was very ungenerous. No one in the greasy spoon ever said, "this is a builders cafe".

I picked up a napkin and blew my nose loudly. It had been a long time since I doodled the word **ENGLAND** on napkins. And there was no longer a broken country inside me. I had put together the smashed up pieces and repaired them. There was now a sutured country inside me. Although it was true I no longer lived in Exile, I wasn't quite sure that I lived in England either. All the same I knew that a *mythic return to my roots* was *not my story*. If the *mathematics of exile* involves a departure and a return, there were some missing numbers in my math. I paid my bill and took once last glance at the actors. I wanted to give them a round of applause. They had made it very clear to me that although I was never going to return to the country of my birth, the virus of exile had nevertheless inserted itself into my nervous

I did not want kind words to soothe me; I wanted to throw myself off a high building and onto the page. Writing also made me feel wiser than I actually was. Wise and sad. That was what I thought writers should be. I was sad anyway; much sadder than the sentences I wrote. I was a sad girl impersonating a sad girl. In fact, although I was impersonating a writer I probably was one already. Inside me were the two books I would write twenty years later. They were inside me in the way Artaud said the bullets that suicided Van Gogh were already inside his belly when he painted the crows that were his last painting.

* * *

**EFC (espresso, frites, liposuction, guccì, psychoanalysis)
ALIENS (pressed up close up to death and suffering)**

The waitress gave me a look. I probably was talking too loudly but now that I was impersonating someone who was not a writer, I felt incredibly alert, happy and sure-footed in the world. She turned her back on me, switched off the radio and put on a CD of Mozart. The sound of shivering violins that now filled the cafe seemed to me to be a possible sound track for the asylum seekers who had just been switched off the airwaves. I saw them clinging to the bottom of a Eurostar, eyes shining in the dark, silver dust on their anoraks. The word Eurostar ceased to mean a high speed train. I saw asylum seekers clinging by their hands to the points of star that was burning its way to Europe, and in the style of *The Wizard Of Oz*, a small child clutching a dog under her arm, legs dangling in the sky.

**EFC
ALIENS**

eyes had a new grave expression. Slowly, as I pressed the numbers that would lead to further revelations about sex and desire in Prague, it dawned on me that I too was playing a part in this theatre. I was impersonating someone who was not a writer. This made me feel very much stronger than anyone else on the stage. Jana told me that she and her Nigerian lover returned to the UK together, but when they arrived at Heathrow, he (Nigerian) had to make his way to passport control via the Alien Queue.

For a start, when I asked the waitress for a croissant, I noticed she spoke in (stage) whispers, (do you want butter and jam?) and I found myself whispering back (yes). Fortunately, the radio was on (a heated debate about asylum seekers) which helped divert my attention from the writing action either side of me. All the same I couldn't help glancing at these two actors playing writers here in Cafe Flaubert while I listened to the radio. I wanted to know how they constructed their **presence**. I was **curious to work this out, not just because** I had got up to the same caper with my own impersonations when I was fifteen, but because **I could see**, that unlike myself in the greasy spoon and unlike the asylum seekers being described on the radio, **they wanted** to create a Big **Presence**. This was the opposite of asylum seekers

Many years later when I had published a few books, I walked into a Cafe in North London called Cafe Flaubert. This turned out to be a Writers' Cafe. It was set up by two Californian women and served the kind of existential coffee I had longed to taste when I was fifteen. I ordered an espresso, sat at a blond pine table and looked around me. A man and woman, he in his twenties, she in her thirties, were doing something that was both familiar and strange. He was reading through the pages of a typed manuscript, one hand in his hair the other scribbling frenzied corrections in the margin. The woman had a note book open and was slowly writing something in a measured way: stopping to think, sighing, starting again. Watching the man and woman shift and fidget in their hard pine chairs, it seemed to me they were performing a cruel imitation of the foolish gestures of writers at work. I thought I had walked into a Cafe but I had really walked into a theatre.

GETTING INTO IT