

**AVIVA SILVERMAN**

EST  
SAY  
YEX!



EATERS    EATEN  
 |        |  
 OVERFED    OLD  
 |        |  
 TASTERS  
 [EARNEST]

NOTE- PASSAGE

PLENTY    |    SCARCITY  
 --SUSTENANCE  
 --HEALING  
 --COMMUNION  
 |  
 HOLY

GASTRONOMICAL    HIGH    GROUND  
 |                                |  
 UNTOUCHED GIFTS    SPOILS--  
 \                                |  
 -MEAT                                DILUTED VEGETAL FILTH  
 [MIXED WITH]                        |  
 -MILK                                SOUP    LUMPS [FOR THE PEASANT]  
 |                                |        |  
 GETTING    FULL?  
 |                                |  
 SWINE    BREAD  
 |                                |  
 TWISTED NERVE    TWISTED GRAIN  
 |                                |  
 |                                [MOTHER DOUGH FEEDS  
 |                                MIDDAY STOMACH]  
 |                                |  
 |                                SEASONAL  
 |                                PAIN  
 |                                |  
 |                                LOCAL

SIGNIFICANT  
 |  
 CONCEPTUAL--- DINNER ---CARNIVORES  
 ^  
 NIBBLING    FEASTING    --FOREIGN [OR DIETING]  
 |                                |  
 TABOO                                SYMBOLIC [ARTISTIC]  
 --BEARS  
 --PLACENTA  
 --BUGS

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A decorative, winding orange path with 30 numbered stops, each featuring a virtue in cursive script. The path starts at the top left and ends at the bottom left, with a final stop for 'Index'.

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# Introduction

## Ruby Tandoh

Here are some things to put in soup: green lentils, the tiny speckled flying saucer ones; greens that taste rich and dark like blood-iron; a stick of celery cut into small dice; an onion and saltwater tears; vegetable stock; a shake of the jar of dried thyme; maybe a carrot, for sweetness. Sit close enough to the hob that the steam fogs your glasses and the smell of the cooking pulls your appetite to the tip of your tongue. Leave it as it is or, if you crave muddling and oneness, take the blender to the soup until it is as smooth as silk. A squeeze of lemon at the end defines the edges, and pulls the muddled flavours into line.

Soup is pure matter. It exists to be transformed. What about the brutality of the killing, plucking and harvesting that lands the ingredients in a heavy stockpot, or of drowning those ingredients in liquid. And then consider the flame that the pot is set over. Heat is a violent disruption, serving to break down the integrity of the building blocks of the soup. So carrots and onion soften and meld, and become carrot-onion-broth. This joining is violent, and so soup, by its very essence, is brute, destructive physicality. It is stuff.

Hold the stuff in your mouth and it will wrap to your gums; let it sink with gravity, and feel the warmth of it linger in your throat. Eventually it cools to the temperature of blood. It acquiesces, and draws into your cells. The body tears it apart into the finest shreds of substance, and these molecules subsume to the fabric of flesh, bone and bile. You eat soup; soup is eaten by you. It is to be taken in, undone, and used up. Eat. Make the soup become you.

This brutality isn't coherent with the tenderness that characterises the home kitchen, and yet this duality—violence and nurturing, destruction and growth—is at the heart of the act of eating. First there is the artistry of the cook, and the subjective, careful tactility with which she feels, tastes and smells her food. The aim is not just sustenance but pleasure. To share a recipe is an act of charity. To share a plate of food is a gesture of love. The metaphorical and folkloric weight of soup is well-known: chicken soup, hot borscht with sour cream, sinigang, groundnut soup, minestrone—each of these is rich with the promise of healing.

And yet soup is also Soylent. Soup is smoothie bowls, bone broth, nutrient pouches, an intravenous drip, jars of baby food, energy bars, protein powder, caffeine pills and breast milk. Soup is gasoline. Soup is the streamlining of nutrition, by recasting food as fuel. This is not food that resembles food, but substance minimised to condense pure energy. The debasement of the self-conscious artfulness of cooking, gastronomy even, is total. This is the other side of the duality of food. Food is both the physicality of brute substance, and the transcendence of the metaphysical questions that overwrite it. Soup is the essence of this conflicted food—reduced and distilled.

Soups occupy a special place within food writing, catering and home cooking. Sometimes this is a return to rustic simplicity. Other times this represents a clarification, or a symbolic unblurring: the tomato soup with garlic, bay, marjoram and salt that tastes more like tomato than tomato itself. This is the note that rings clear against the discord of physicality that characterises the reality of what it is to make, and eat, soup. Soup is definition, becoming, and essence, and it moulds the bodies that it feeds. You make soup, and soup makes you. Your soup makes you strong; it makes you Iranian, or German, or Ghanaian; it makes you warm, heavy and full; it makes you a disciple of your parents' cooking; it makes you colonial violence; it makes you native; it makes you a chef; it makes you an animal; it makes you softer across the flesh of your belly; it makes you soup.



*Generosity*

polyurethane food ingredients (oyster mushrooms, cauliflower),  
oriental rug and woman figurines, epoxy resin, ceramic bowl



## Serenity

polyurethane food ingredients (rye bread, broccoli, noodles),  
hobo with light-post, plastic flora, epoxy resin, ceramic bowl





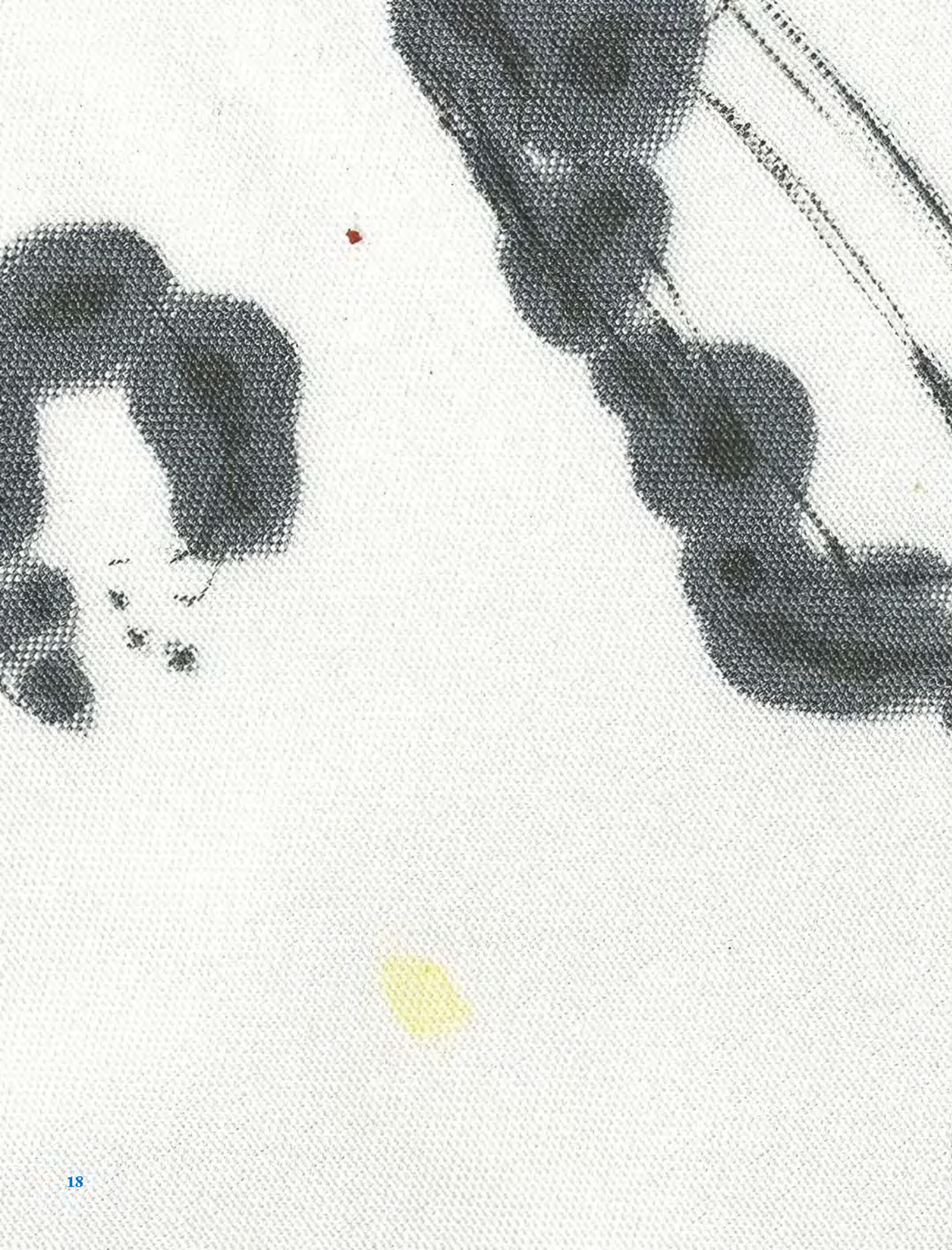
*Patience*

polyurethane food ingredients (soba noodles, enoki mushrooms, salmon roe, fried tofu slices),  
seagull figurine on pier, epoxy resin, glass bowl, midcentury serving bowl



## Cleanliness

plaster food ingredients (onion, avocado, rice, polyurethane leaves),  
polyurethane apple slices with berries, iron devil's mask, iron key, drunk hobo figurine,  
epoxy resin, graniteware wash basin, enamel bowl



*Health*

polyurethane food ingredients (ramen, oyster, duck, snap peas, oyster mushrooms), lamp, ceramic tiles, miniature tin oven, piano baby, LED light, epoxy resin, enamel bedpan



## *Fortitude (cold/wet)*

polyurethane food ingredients (snap peas, carrots, tomato),  
miner figurines, epoxy resin, ceramic bowl



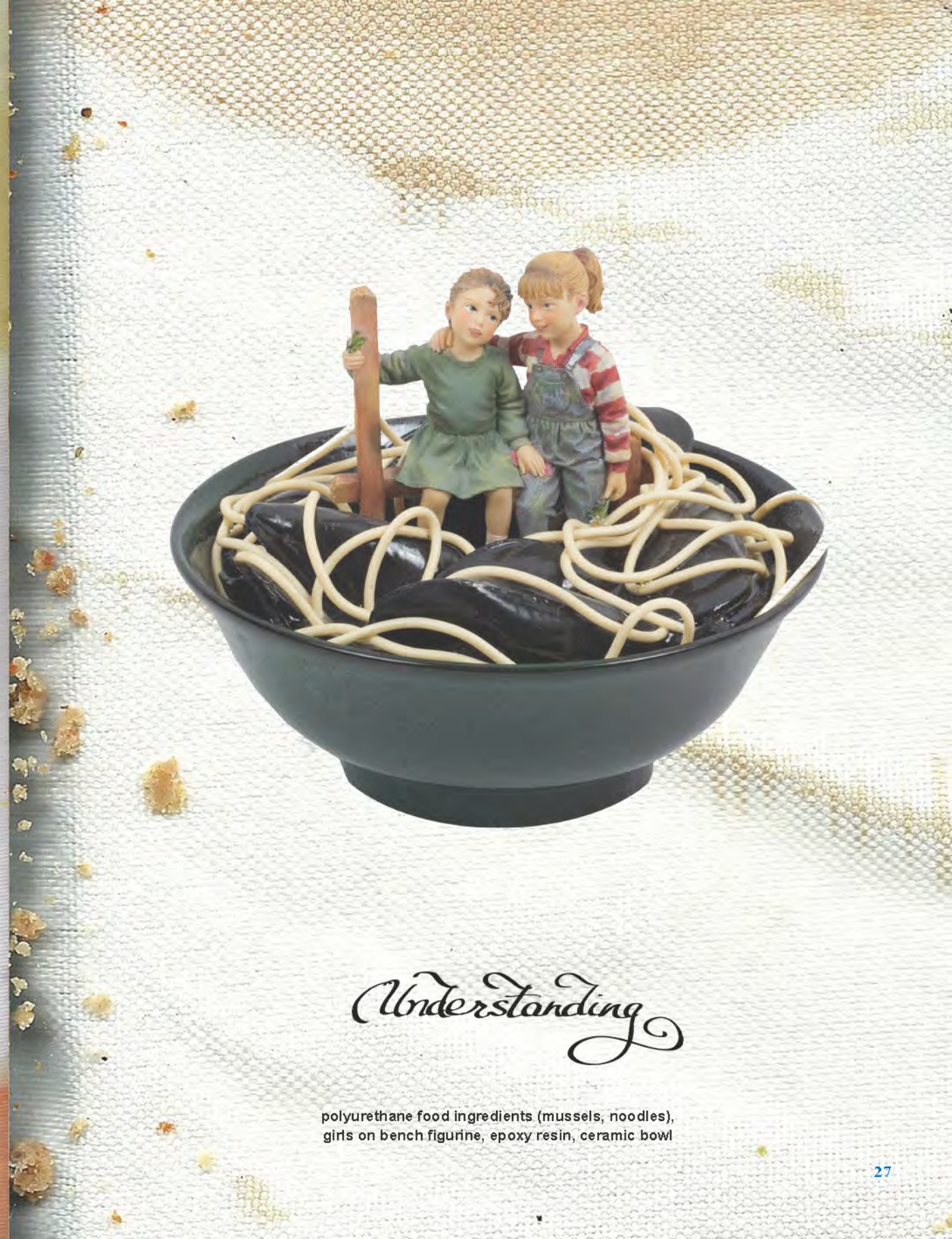
*Courage*

polyurethane food ingredients (soba noodles, shiitake mushrooms, radish, carrots),  
porcelain child with goat figurine, plastic flora, epoxy resin, scalloped serving bowl



polyurethane food ingredients (shitake mushrooms, sprouts, beef), compact mirror, hobo, woman and small boy seated at piano figurine, epoxy resin, ceramic bowl





## *Understanding*

polyurethane food ingredients (mussels, noodles),  
girls on bench figurine, epoxy resin, ceramic bowl



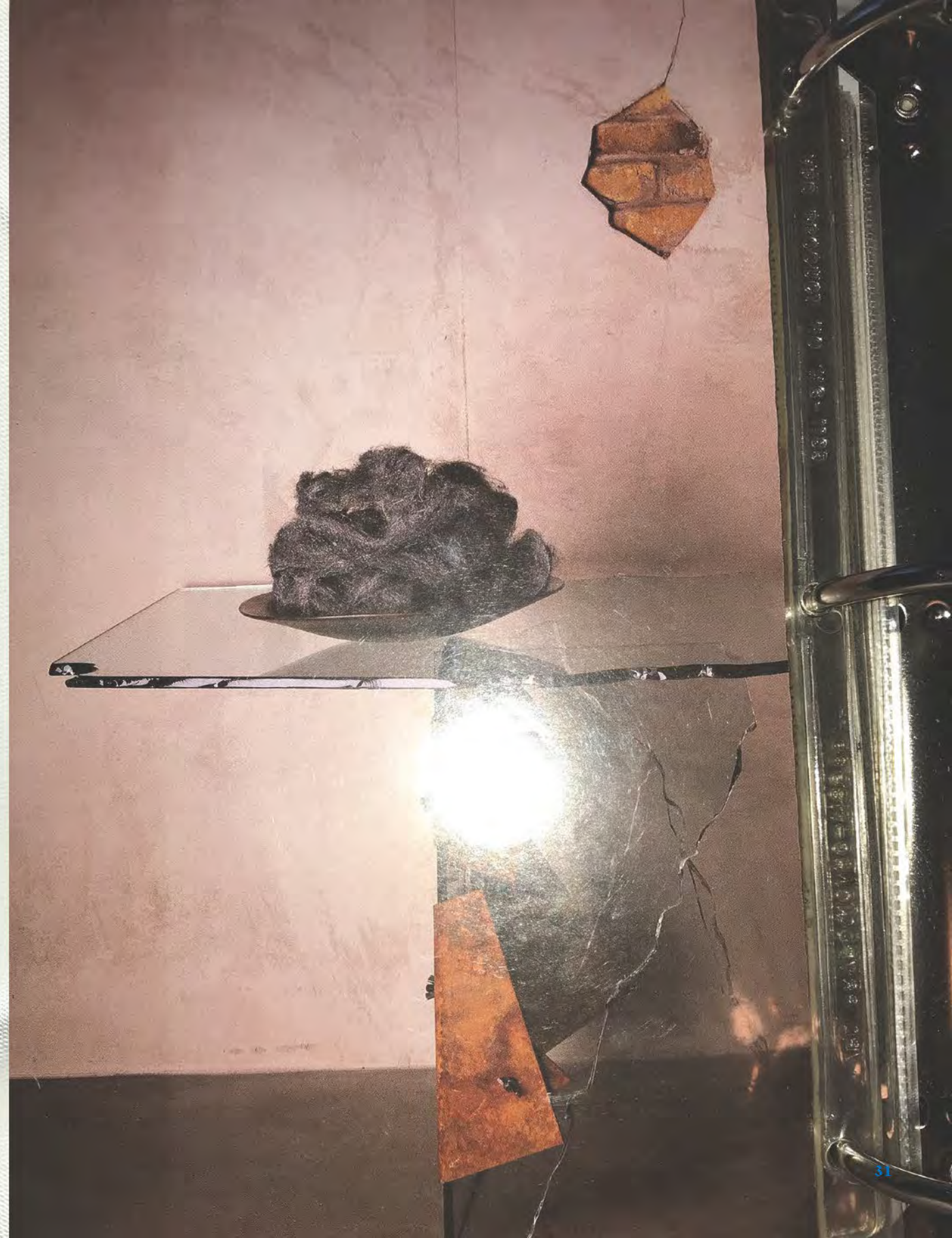
*Mercy*

1950 Ford Ranchero badge, horse jaw bone, porcelain dove,  
LED light, polyester stuffing, enamel basin



*Fairness*

polyurethane food ingredients (snap peas, mushrooms, green peppers),  
sheep and doctor figurines, epoxy resin, ceramic bowl





*Autonomy*

polyurethane food ingredients (enoki mushrooms, squid-ink pasta), ceramic hands, porcelain door knob, laceleaf stem, plastic flora, epoxy resin, enamelware bowl



## *Refinement*

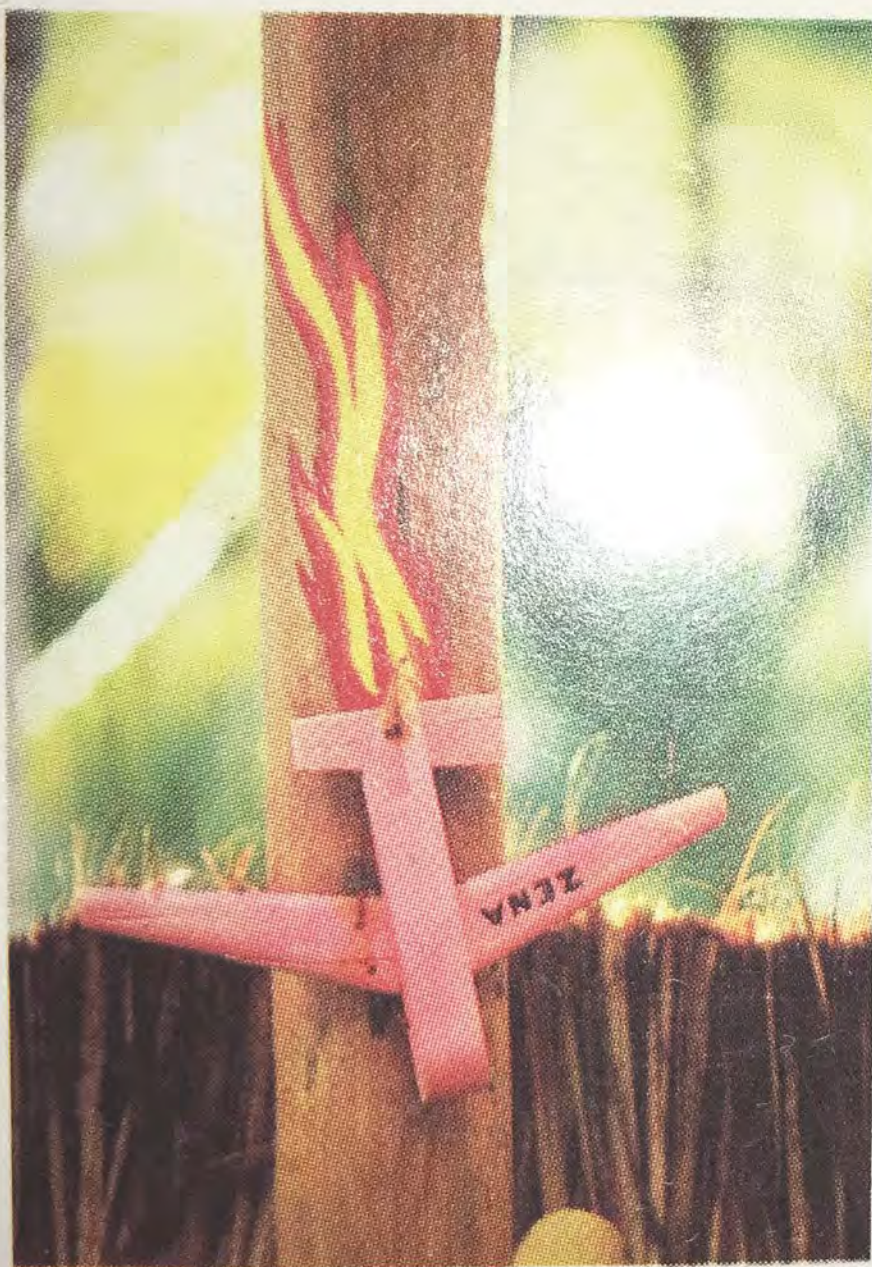
polyurethane food ingredients (oyster mushrooms, soba noodles), angel figurines, bar diorama, ceramic pigeons, plastic flora, epoxy resin, midcentury serving bowl



Control

torch light, selenite, rabbi figurine, wire, polyester stuffing, string lights, pig feed trough





## *Tender-mindedness*

polyurethane food ingredients (mushrooms, broccoli, asparagus, cauliflower), charm and young girl figurine, epoxy resin, ceramic bowl



## Order

polyurethane food ingredients (bratwurst, carrots, cauliflower, red peppers),  
taxi light, glass crow, doctor and patient figurine, epoxy resin, metal bowl



## Modesty

polyurethane food ingredients (beef, noodles), tin can, barrel, bottle, guns, clock hands, spider figurines, epoxy resin, ceramic bowl



## *Citizenship*

polyurethane food ingredients (rice), mud, vanity mirror,  
hobo figurine, epoxy resin, enamel bowl



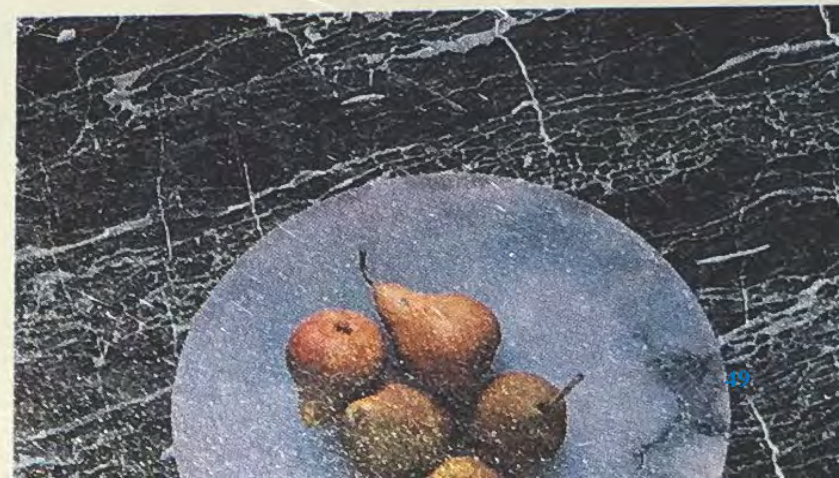
## *Watering Hole*

polyurethane food ingredients (mushrooms, broccoli, chili peppers, noodles),  
man reading with child figurine, man with pipe figurine, epoxy resin, ceramic bowl



# *Professionalism*

polyurethane food ingredients (shrimp, soba noodles, enoki mushrooms, gyoza), hat, gloves, enlarged coins, epoxy resin, pig feed trough





## *Nurturing*

polyurethane food ingredients (cabbage, carrots, udon noodles, steak),  
vanity mirror, doctor and newborn figurine, epoxy resin, enamel bowl



*Impartiality*

polyurethane food ingredients (rye bread),  
firefighter figurines, epoxy resin, ceramic bowl



*Respect*

polyurethane food ingredients (mushrooms, radishes, carrots, cauliflower, peppers), girl in corner figurine, telephone dial, ceramic bowl



## *Contentment*

polyurethane food ingredients (bulgolgi, bean sprouts, radishes), plastic flora, piano baby figurines, glass vagrant figurine, celluloid mirror, epoxy resin, white enamelware hospital bedpan



*Candor*

drunk hobo bar lamp, optometrist figurine, polyester stuffing, aerolux neon light, enamel bowl





## *Restraint*

polyurethane food ingredients (portobello mushrooms, soba noodles), plastic flora, hobo and cheerleader figurines, epoxy resin, enamel bowl



## *Tolerance*

polyurethane food ingredients (radishes, snap peas, noodles),  
donkey with landscape figurine, epoxy resin, ceramic bowl



## Reverence

polyurethane food ingredients (shitake mushrooms, sliced carrots, ramen noodles), sand, ceramic hillbilly figurines, trolley, poppy pods, epoxy resin, enamel bowl



## Sharing

polyurethane food ingredients (soba noddles, pickled egg, shiitake mushrooms, cabbage, rock fish covered in soy sauce), caddy, piano baby, epoxy resin, french pie tin, ceramic seashell



## *Persistence*

polyurethane food ingredients (soba noodles, portobello mushrooms, enoki mushrooms, chicken), piano baby figurines, Willendorf figurine, epoxy resin, nickel-steelware hospital bedpan



# *Knowledge*

polyurethane food ingredients (soba noodles, fried tofu, pickled egg, shiitake mushrooms), glass angel, glass snail, miniature beer bottles, speckled enamelware bowl, polyester stuffing, epoxy resin, enamelware basin



## *Thankfulness*

polyurethane food ingredients (clams, noodles),  
hummel boys with candle figurines, epoxy resin, ceramic bowl



## *The Return of a Lost Cause* *Abraham Adams*

One day in the year 1239, Dōgen, the Japanese founder of Sōtō Zen, spoke at a temple in what is now Kyoto on the correct techniques of Buddhist hygiene. After reminding the assembled monks of the importance of regularly cutting their finger- and toenails and of shaving their heads, he went on to address excretion, devoting a lot of detail in particular to what a monk should do in the event that outdoor meditation practice deprived him of the use of a toilet.

First he was to take off his robes, then to pick up a hunk of dirt and divide it into fourteen balls—so Dōgen specified—and, after relieving himself where he would, to take three of these balls to the closest body of water, dissolve them to the “consistency of rice gruel,” and use them as lather to respectively cleanse his anus, urethra, and soiled hand. Here, the patriarch’s instruction ended.

In an annotation to their 1994 translation of Dōgen’s work in which the lecture is collected, Gudo Nishijima and Chodo Cross observe that “it is not clear what was done with the remaining eleven balls of soil.” Fourteen were to be prepared, three consumed in washing; as for the rest, what might have happened to them seems clear enough to me: nothing. Dōgen probably forgot about them, having proposed the number fourteen arbitrarily in the first place. But readers who notice the episode at all have tended to view his omission as a secret message.<sup>1</sup>

Such readers have embodied what some philosophers call the principle of charity, by which we are purportedly obligated to seek maximum rationality in a speaker’s statements. This “principle” is

also simply a normative readerly practice, which intensifies according to preexisting organized investment in a given text (e.g., centuries of Dōgen commentary). Where reading is formalized to the point that it mimics the affect of logical proof (as in much literary- and art-historical discourse), the principle of charity, which lacks a logical limit, predisposes readers to project limitless depths into texts.

In everyday reading, that is, the subjective reception of ordinary life, this pattern of projection can take on the character of what Freud called delusions of reference. To him, attributing meaning to cast-away balls of mud, or, for that matter, the attitudes of strangers in a passing bus, was pathological. “Everything is language,” Lacan wrote of Freud’s theory of the symptom: all phenomena are receptive to the projection of meaning, which could be normal or else pathological. Some contemporary psychoanalysts, such as Christopher Bollas, have been more generous about the practice than Freud, arguing that it serves the protective function of controlling experiences that might otherwise be uncomfortably uncertain.

A story of one such anxious subject seeking to assert interpretative control over the ambiguity of lived experience appears in a recent essay by the philosopher Timothy Morton: he writes of Lacan himself, encountering a Buddhist statue in a Japanese shrine. The statue, according to Lacan, was androgynous and emotionally inscrutable, and it provoked questions in him that no one else present seemed to be worrying about. “Is it ‘for you’ or completely inward looking? Further, is this male or female?” Noticing that Lacan’s interpretative preoccupations were specifically related to sex and sexuality, Morton writes that the object had become a kind of “test of queerness.”

The physical androgyny of the statue as well as the uncertain state it provoked characterize much of Buddhist iconography in general, and the latter in particular is at the heart of Zen praxis. Lacan’s attendant anxiety, Morton argues, provides a figure that explains a general intellectual aversion to Buddhism that he terms Buddhaphobia—which,

as the name suggests, is related to homophobia, via “a fear of intimacy, a fear of ambiguity, a fear of inwardness and introversion.” Meditative devotion, Morton states, is a “nonconceptual intimacy of the mind with itself”—an inwardness and a practice of introversion par excellence. Why does this provoke homophobia?

In my reading of Morton’s story, the “test of queerness” appears less related to the statue’s physical appearance (its sex, etc.) and more to a queerness belonging to the experience of readerly reception itself. Perhaps the answers to Lacan’s questions could be called dynamic or multiple (it’s male and/or female, it’s for you and for itself, etc.), but more importantly it seems that the statue possessed an opacity that brought into metaphysical clarity what any answers would be: they would be objects secondary and external to his experience of looking, and there was no way to choose among them. He was effectively stuck in himself and the conceptual contents of his original experience.

The “nonconceptual intimacy” of Zen meditation is not a magical form of emptiness but the product of a mind’s effort to witness its own contents. In this sense, meditation is a concerted version of the act of reading, in which the reader comes into contact with herself in the experience of noticing, and of noticing that noticing. Meditation and reading in general both enact a paradoxical self-intimacy within something that is both other and the same (homo); Morton’s argument implicitly reminds us that self-intimacy is inherently homo-sexual. It is the same with the inward listening that reading is, prior to interpretation, which puts the mind in contact with itself, immerses it in its own contents.



The works collected in this book grew out of Dōgen’s forgotten mud. It is quickly evident to their viewer that they are mostly compositions of tchotchkes, juxtaposed in proximity. What is a tchotchke? It is

a fragment of narrative, an excerpt of an imaginary environment, whose ambiguities—of what it is and what it is about as readable in its qualities and gestures—increase as the object is decontextualized. When it is recontextualized, as in these sculptures, emergent narrative possibilities begin to proliferate. What these sculptures do, not unlike Lacan's Buddhist statue, is create a saturation point, where the mind begins to become aware that there is no way to choose among the valences arising within it, and thus that the experience of looking consists in witnessing them together. An interpretation, as the ostensive explication of conceptual contents, can only be a retrospective narrative of a given navigation through its semantic nexus. Reading, instead, affords a nonconceptual self-intimacy.

Writing this, I have felt a misgiving: aren't ideas of preferring reading to interpretation Susan Sontag's, Roland Barthes'? But I do not believe that their calls for an end to interpretation and a new erotics of reading ever really experienced a second movement. Interpretation is still the order of the day, especially in writing about art; it is indeed difficult to avoid, even though (for honest writers, I think) it always carries the generative misgiving that one risks writing something like fiction, in the sense that it tends to lend the affect of logic to an arbitrary improvisation. Here's an example that enters that territory:

*I look at Hayley Silverman's sculpture Thankfulness, and I see that it consists of a ceramic soup bowl containing what seem to be two plastic boys of apparently different provenance (fragments of different narratives). They are both in the Hummel style, named for the German Franciscan Maria Innocentia Hummel, on whose saccharin midcentury drawings of children various German manufacturers modeled their figurines. Hummel herself died of tuberculosis at the age of thirty-seven, and she died no doubt because of the squalid conditions of her convent—which were the result of the Third Reich appropriating half the income her art produced. The government allowed her to continue her drawings despite one Nazi magazine's 1937 complaint that the figures were*

*"brainless sissies" unworthy of the Fatherland.<sup>2</sup> Given that sissy is a homophobic slur, I could conclude that the tenderness with which the plastic boys seem to face off encrypts a kind of memorial to gay people persecuted by the Nazis, and to the artists such as Hummel on whom they perversely relied even while antagonizing them (the dynamic of the "Degenerate Art Exhibition").*

I do think this is the beginning of a plausible interpretation. But I am also under the impression that, as with Lacan's Buddha statue, the real nature of my reception of this object—not only in the synchronic sense of my physical encounter with it but also as it reoccurs to me and I take up a diachronic companionship with it as a figure—is not so confined to one valence of its literal subject matter.

The artist has referred to the series as something like the return of a lost cause, which I first understood to mean that its materials are largely things that were once forsaken. Then I began to think of them in reference to Dōgen because he forgot eleven out of fourteen of his mud balls, and they returned to readers who wrote about them mostly through a sense of what they might have meant. But I think the return of a lost cause—especially here in Silverman's work, where lost causes gather and take on emergent dynamics—presents more than an opportunity to project given meanings onto historical traces. Looking at *Thankfulness* is not really *about* Nazis—if we are to speak of aboutness, and try to extend a manner of reading that embraces the readerly experience of aboutness. My interpretation is a story of a given navigation of the historical abyss the Hummels' combination conjures for me. The experience of reading them is more one of witnessing the entire abyss at once, something like looking at the ocean.

I will end this encounter with a transcription of some excerpts of notes I took over a single period of two hours looking at *Thankfulness*:

0:00 Two Hummel boys surrounded by clams,  
8 clams

**0:02** One boy, slighter, brown monochrome, is holding a candle aloft with his left arm, his hand positioned flat like a waiter

**0:05** Boys, facing each other, tenderly, are making contact at the larger, multicolored boy's right cheek, at nose level, the smaller boy's chin on the right side—no, the larger boy's nose

**0:12** Sissies meeting in secret, hence the candles

**0:30** A feeling of not knowing which angle to observe from, leading to a sense of centripetal intimacy . . . It may be that the element of opacity is what remains unattended in general . . .

**0:40** Single fragment of green sea glass. Noodles very gestural, wrapping. Spare hands tensely splayed

**1:04** Sculpture smells poisonous, really intensely of lacquer

Where are these boys? Recollection of Dane Zajc: “Man is nowhere.”

**1:30** Coziness, containment. Mock-ontology of bedtime: Being tucked in.

A feeling that senses have left and the form endures

**1:38** After interpretations are gone, the encounter of the boys remains, like a guarantee, more **confounding than illuminating**; philosophy's task of disarming the subject of authority

**1:57** First moment I consciously considered the fact their framing in a bowl could imply they are to be eaten (conversely, that the bedpan pieces have been shit)—by whom?

**1:58** Encounter as consumption. “Here, eat this. . . .”

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For example, see Hubert Nearman's annotated translation to *Shōbōgenzō* (Mount Shasta, CA: Shasta Abbey Press, 2007); Brad Warner, *Don't Be a Jerk: And Other Practical Advice from Dōgen, Japan's Greatest Zen Master* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> Patrick Killough (February 24, 1999). “Adolf Hitler versus Sister Maria Innocentia Hummel.” *Asheville Tribune*; found via Wikipedia.





## Biography

Hayley Silverman was born in Manhattan and was inspired to start this series while living on Broome St. The works in this book span from 2012-2017.

This is her first cookbook.

*"The softest of stuff in the world Penetrates quickly the hardest; Insubstantial, it enters Where no room is."*  
—Lao Tsu, philosopher

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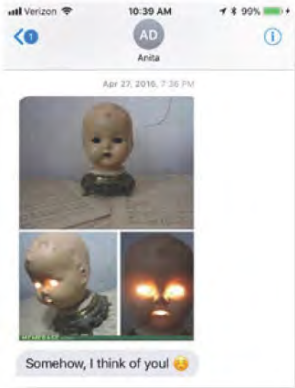
The title of this work was partly inspired by Yahoo! Answers:  
Q: Where did the phrase “is it soup yet” originate? A: Well, that line was from an old TV commercial for Lipton Soup. It was some kind of add boiling water to it to make the soup stuff and the kiddies at the table would ask Mom if it was soup yet. Don’t know which was worse, the commercial or the soup. -Lorenzo Steed • 10 years ago.

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