

# ***STUDIO STUDIO'S MAGAZINE***

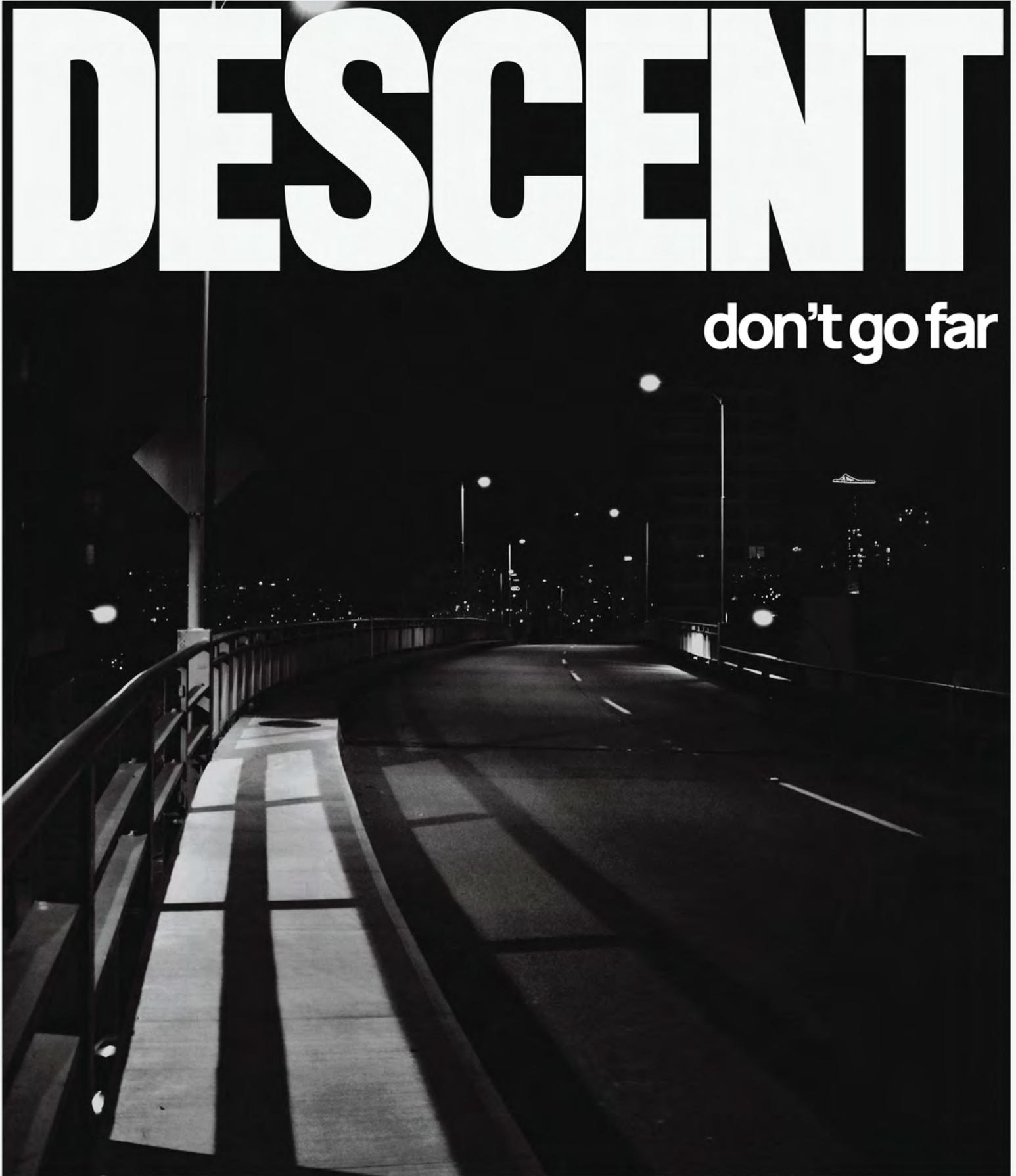
Issue 13

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# **DESCENT**

**don't go far**





# Studio Studio

Winter, 2024

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the Wendat peoples and  
is now home to many  
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Inuit, and Metis peoples.

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"The Eruption of Vesuvius" (1771), Pierre-Jacques Volaire, Art Institute of Chicago

# Editor's Note

Raphael Gutteridge

An army of skeletal figures pour out of a chasm in the rocks while ships burn at sea. One skeletal figure executes a kneeling man and a starving dog desperately gnaws at the face of a baby lying in the dead arms of its mother. The massacre is Pieter Breugel's *The Triumph of Death* is hardly a complete event. And yet, while tortured figures sweep scythes through fields of horrified victims, the outcome of total destruction is certain. Death has triumphed even before it has totally killed life. Descent into chaos, Breugel posits, is just as good as the chaos itself.

Descent is an ecstatic process. Surrendering is a sensual act, the wave of pleasure as tension lifts and is replaced with a cooler, smoother feeling, like dread. Descent is the whistling harmonies of the air as you fall, delighting in the pull of gravity. The process of descent is a thrilling reward for anxiety. Breugel's slaughter is a beautiful event, the platonic ideal of a cataclysm.

I would be remiss in this letter not to mention the horrible massacres of our own time. *The Triumph of Death* is a disturbingly resonant work at the moment because it seems that we

too are witnessing death's new triumph. In this decade alone, a horrible pandemic and a series of brutal wars have re-familiarized us with the imagery of mass death. Even at home in North America we've been forced to contend with a monstrous drug overdose crisis and the truly horrible discovery that mass graves of children are everywhere under our feet, all the while watching entire regions burn into toxic smoke.

Let us descend. Let us descend into mass hysteria, to become so haunted by the tragedy we have been subjected to that we become crazy enough to take action. Let our process

of descent be one so hysterical we go beyond a sense of dull despair. Let our surrender be as sensual an experience we can make it so don't instead become numb and mute.

This winter, descend into action. Demand a ceasefire, demand reconciliation, demand human dignity for all. Descent is a process. It's time to engage with it. Descend into a version of yourself so hysterical from the injustices of the world that you're spurred into action, and then, only then, will it be our turn to triumph over death.





# WHAT KEEPS YOU UP AT NIGHT?

Think back to the last time you weren't able to get a good night's rest. Were you plagued by visions beyond your comprehension? If not, it's possible that you're just not drinking the right coffee. Only S+R Roasters' own signature blend can deliver you the awakening that you so clearly need. With notes of dark chocolate, allspice, elderberries, and loam, S+R Roasters "The Awakening" will have you energized for a fully sleepless night as you're tormented by knowledge you were never meant to understand!

## Prologue

My first moment of existentialism was when I was 10. It was past my bed time and I had snuck downstairs--sitting by myself on the carpeted steps of my old home. I wasn't doing anything devious, just sitting and staring between two of the posts on the staircase. As I stared and zoned out, my brain started zooming out, making things smaller and smaller and smaller as it kept on zooming and zooming until I saw nothing but black space. I started thinking about what happens after we die and the concept of time and the impermanence of it all. I don't think I blinked for a full minute.

On some February day in 2018, I watched *The Revenant* for the first time and proceeded to dive into a 2 week long existential crisis. The classic question of what to do with my life and thoughts about how lucky I was to be alive dominated my mind. I was made acutely aware of my own existence. I couldn't shut it out and it was exhausting. When I finally shook the feeling of what can only be described as inevitable dread mixed with gratitude, I blamed it on the movie and never watched it again.

In the summer before my senior year of high school, I was once again reminded of how time moves fast, too fast. I yearned for a change in pace and environment but I also didn't want anything to change at all. So, I created a bucket list of all the things I wanted to do before I went off to college. I concluded that when I was finished with these items, I would be ready. Items included: stomp in a puddle, go skinny dipping, and crack an egg singlehandedly. I completed all 20 items, graduated, and in the blink of an eye, moved across the continent.

As much as we want change, we are never fully ready for it. We grasp onto familiar things and rituals and routines so that the new things don't seem as scary. So that we don't feel as untethered. And so, when I began university, I promptly created a new bucketlist of all the things I wanted to do before I graduated. The first item I wrote was: Do the Enchantments. 37 months later, I got to check it off.

The Enchantments is a 21 mile point-to-point trail in Eastern Washington with the lowest elevation at 1,200 feet and the highest at 8,900 feet. There are two ways one can go about a point-to-point trail: moving from point A to point B, or the reverse, from point B to point A. In the case of the Enchantments, the natural choice was to start at Stuart Lake because it sat at a higher point than Snow Lake--a difference of about 1,800 feet. The logic being that the thought of climbing 7,800 feet sounded far more daunting than descending it.

In the months leading up to the hike, I was mentally counting down the days and training my body as best I could. There was never a doubt in my mind that come August, this would happen. Yet, even with a date locked in, it always felt so indefinite, so intangible. My summer had been the antithesis of calm. I felt so far away from nature, from where the trees feel right. I was overworked and under socialized. For some unexplicable reason, I felt like I was letting myself down. I was tired. I felt like I was spiraling, struggling to keep myself grounded. In a silly way, I worried that the mountains had forgotten me. Perhaps that is why the Enchantments always felt so far away: a little part of me didn't want it to come. In my head, I had rabbit-holed myself into this idea that when I had done it, that would be it-- the green light would shut off and there would be nothing left. And what then?

But of course, nothing is ever so polarized. In hindsight, this was me descending into another spout of existentialism that would be cured, ironically, with a bit of time.

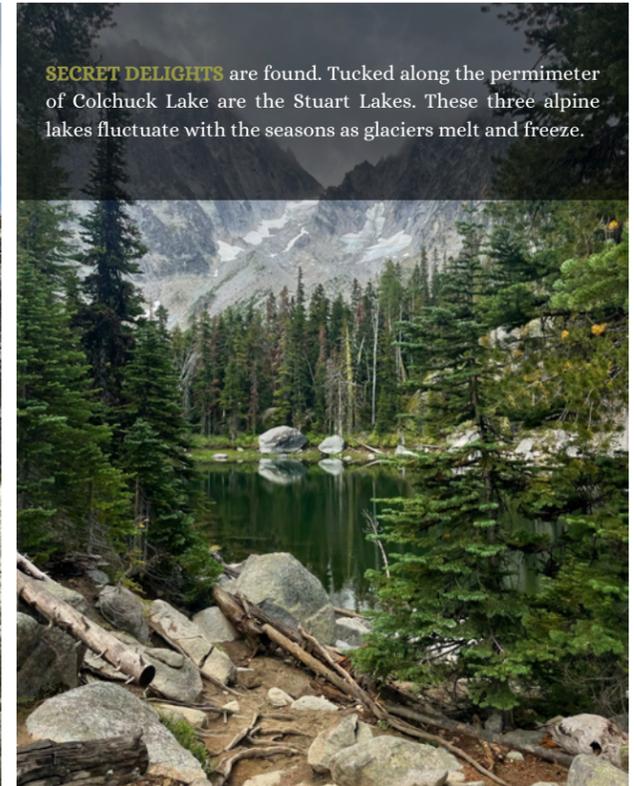




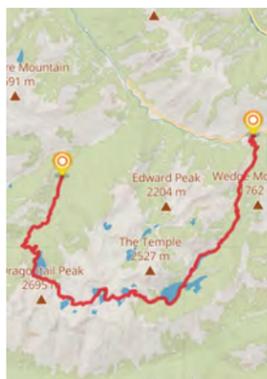
**STORYBOOK SIGHTS** are littered across the Enchantments. The trail hosts over 700 alpine lakes and ponds surrounded by the vast peaks of Cashmere Crags, which rate among the best rock-climbing sites in the United States.



**GIANT GRANITE** slabs provide a stark contrast against the pool blue lakes.



**SECRET DELIGHTS** are found. Tucked along the perimeter of Colchuck Lake are the Stuart Lakes. These three alpine lakes fluctuate with the seasons as glaciers melt and freeze.



The Enchantments is a region within the Alpine Lakes Wilderness area of Washington state's Cascade Mountain Range. Thanks to the Ring of Fire, there will always be plenty of mountains to hike.

**Victoria Zhang**

# The Enchantments

Sitting at the top of Aasgard Pass is Dragontail Peak, the tallest point of the Enchantments at 8,840 feet.

### The Ascent

It was late August and we woke up before the sky did, ate our breakfast in the low lamp light of our hotel, and set out for the trailhead in the dark. We started hiking just as the sun came up and by 9AM, we had made it to the first milestone of the trail: Colchuck Lake. The lake is titled as such because of the mountain, Colchuck, that sits in the distance--a picturesque backdrop of stone and ice and various shades of green. I could

recognize her in a heartbeat. Like the way one might memorize all the freckles and wrinkles on their lover's face, I have the curves and craters and edges of Colchuck ingrained. Yet, despite having done the hike to Colchuck Lake once before, she looked different in the morning light. Somehow, everything seemed still. The next part of our journey was summiting Mt.Colchuck. But first, getting there entailed a few miles of walking along the

perimeter of the lake. Every few steps, it seemed that the view changed; at each glance, I saw the mountain and her lake at a different angle. As we walked, we uncovered breathtaking pockets of scenery--like a little secret between nature and me. If mountains could be personified, I would imagine that Colchuck was watching eagerly, in anticipation of the delight that I would find in her gifts. When we made it to the base of

the mountain, it had been about an hour and a half of rugged but flat ground. Looking up to the summit, Colchuck Mountain seemed endless. Although the path up was just 3/4 of a mile, the ascent was 2,200 feet. For the imperial system-averse, this means that about a third of the elevation gain of the entire hike was packed into the equivalent of 3 laps around a track. The climb up is so notable that it has its own name, Aasgard Pass, coined by two passionate hikers in the 1960s. I remember staring for a while, craning my neck up and squinting my eyes to see the top. Perhaps it was because I thought of Colchuck like a

familiar friend, but never once did it cross my mind that the pass would be impossible. Simply, the only thought I had was a cheesy quote: onwards and upwards. The way up took 2 hours. If someone had been watching us from the bottom, it would have been like watching paint dry. Even for us, progress seemed slow. Which is why it was such a treat that every time we looked back, everything seemed significantly smaller. In all honesty, the climb up was equally strenuous as it was monotonous--just step after step with the occasional glance back. But to

be fair, that's all hiking really is. Some might argue it's about experiencing some form of enlightenment or disconnecting from modern society. But in reality, it's just stepping from one spot to another, ascent and descent. As for its greater meaning? That's completely up to you.

one of the tallest peaks in Washington. Meanwhile, Lake Colchuck who took hours to circle around, seemed like a pond. As beautiful as it was, we didn't spend that much time soaking in the view. We still had a lot of ground to cover and a lot more sights to see.

### The Descent

The way down took a long time. A really really really really really long time. Every mile or so, someone would ask "how many miles do we have left?", expecting it to be one mile less than the last check. And yet? It's not that we wanted the hike to end, but it truly felt never ending; both a blessing and a curse. My eyes and ears and heart could bask in it forever, but my knees and hips and toes were begging for rest. Regardless of this dissonance, what goes up, must come down.

### On Top of the World

Naturally, getting to the top of a mountain seems like the halfway point. This is not the case with the Enchantments--we still had 70% of the hike left. Even so, it felt like the hardest part was over and we relished in our climb. Looking around, some things seemed bigger and others smaller. I now understood the sheer size of the mountains around us, from down by the lake, they didn't seem that much taller than the summit we were currently on. But up here, it's clear that they are the kings of the Enchantments. To our left, Mount Stuart loomed over us,



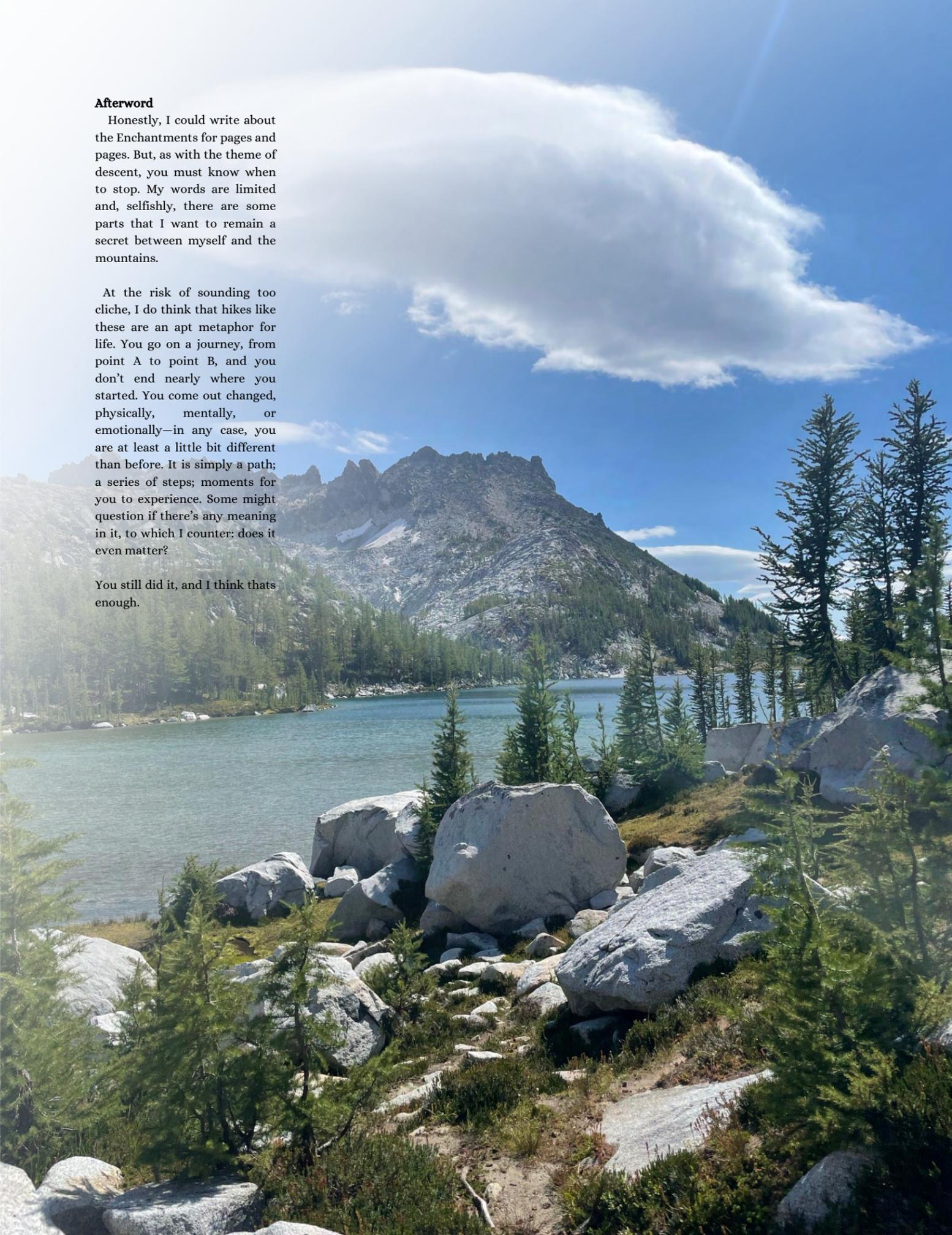
**Studio Studio**

**Afterword**

Honestly, I could write about the Enchantments for pages and pages. But, as with the theme of descent, you must know when to stop. My words are limited and, selfishly, there are some parts that I want to remain a secret between myself and the mountains.

At the risk of sounding too cliché, I do think that hikes like these are an apt metaphor for life. You go on a journey, from point A to point B, and you don't end nearly where you started. You come out changed, physically, mentally, or emotionally—in any case, you are at least a little bit different than before. It is simply a path; a series of steps; moments for you to experience. Some might question if there's any meaning in it, to which I counter: does it even matter?

You still did it, and I think that's enough.



# VACATION

I did not vacation for fun when I was a child. I was always envious of my friends who would fly off to foreign lands every school break and return with souvenirs and stories of places unlike the one we lived in. How I longed to escape my real life and experience island time, flying in an airplane for reasons other than extended family obligations filled with people I was supposed to care despite having my name spelled wrong in every birthday letter for the past 21 years. A beach vacation is the dream, the one you see from Instagram pictures with books under palm trees and a margarita in hand. Take time to reset and recharge before getting back to the mundane cycle of work or school as you count down the days before the next vacation.

My wishes finally came true having begged for permission, saved up for flights, booked an AirBnB with friends for the picture-perfect beach getaway to celebrate New Years. For a day, the novelty of being away from home and figuring out a new place keeps me on my toes and distracts me from life at home. The immediate challenge of navigating a new airport in a foreign language takes all my energy as people scream and shout about luggage and taxis. When we get to our destination, everyone around me deflates into beach chairs as if all their troubles are negated by the tropical ocean breeze and fine-grained sand beneath their toes.

***Just relax, you're in paradise!***

But how does one simply shut out all troubles from everyday life just because they're somewhere else? You can't just take a hiatus from life. Things need to be done. That To Do list that was created before vacation, remember that? Everyone says "don't worry about this until after New Years" but then the fireworks have come and gone after a few verses of Auld Lang Syne and that To Do list gets longer and longer as each day of "relaxation" turns into a day of lost productivity. Not only are there work deadlines, but there are chores to do, people you left behind who didn't go to paradise, and anxieties that simply do not go away just because they weren't an immediate threat for a few weeks. Worst of all, there is no solution. Staying on vacation forever does not fix any problems. As the days and hours countdown before you're thrust back into real life, everything becomes real again. The impending doom of what you left behind is simply waiting; a thick cloud of vapour you walk through as you turn the key to the place you pay rent at as the responsibilities of life yet again engulf and cling to your being. The chores in your home, the people who rely on you, the commitments you make, they're all right where you left them and each item is screaming and clawing for your attention even louder than when you left them. Maybe I'm just not made for tropical beach vacations.

**Elli Hung**

# When My Cup Empties

Katherine J. Desourdie

I work eight hours a day making coffee and in my spare time, free of work, I wander into a coffee shop; one I have not yet visited; one with unusually narrow tables and indie music from the speaker behind the counter. Coffee consumes my time spent at work, my time spent alone, and my time spent with friends. This is how I've come to understand that the simple object that is a cup of coffee is not quite as simple as it may appear. Its value lies far beyond a warm sip and a ceramic handle; coffee is place; it is a community; it is a feeling.

To work is to earn and to live is to yearn. I do not believe I will ever be quite so satisfied once achieving any dream because accomplishing any goal is quickly followed by the desire to accomplish another. The pulsing headache of and relentless heartache is paused for a moment, if only brief, when the next seat becomes a bed and the coffee becomes silk; when the weight of my book is anchored in my hand. These moments of coffee are my escape from contemplating the larger questions and the shame and stress and anguish that goes to follow any answer I may conceive.

Ironically, it is in these moments when I am most at peace that my mind will consider all I am sacrificing to enjoy what I am experiencing. Why must I earn a fleeting moment of tranquility? In my spare time, free of work, I trade the currency earned from one hour of labour for a latte a pastry; for a breath of silence in a city so loud that the car horns and shrieks of strangers have become ambient. In my spare time, free of work, I trade one hour of my life. And I will not hesitate to do so in the days that follow because a moment of happiness is priceless, isn't it? Maybe it isn't; maybe it costs around fifteen dollars when I'm finished adding a tip.

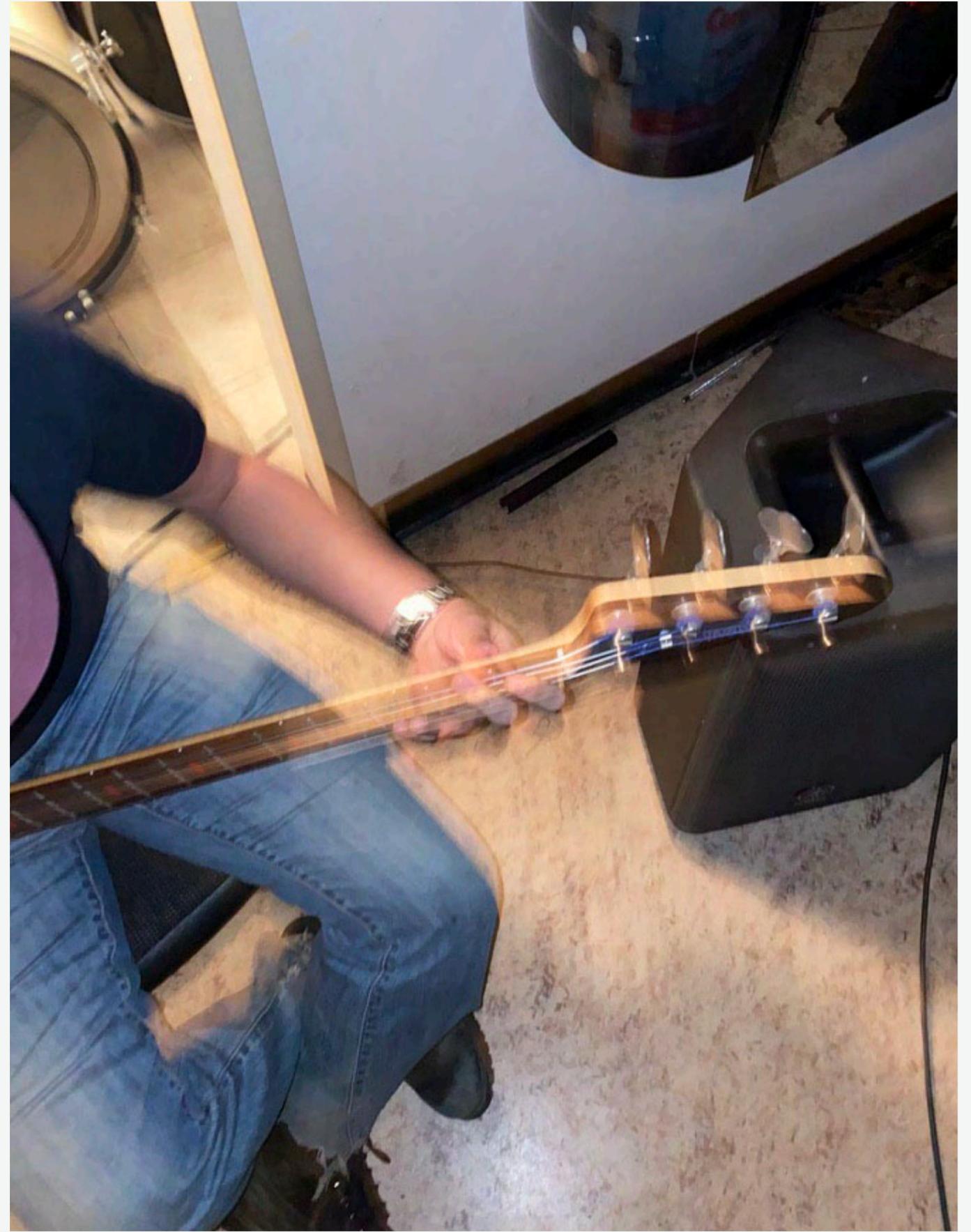
What do I leave in the coffee shop beyond a stained cup and a crumb filled plate? And what do I leave with? I often wonder if my presence has any impact at all and if it matters in the slightest if it hasn't.

When my cup empties and the door I closed behind me, the pulsing headache and relentless heartache play once more, louder than they had before.



# My Photo Fell Down

Words  
And  
Photos  
By  
Alex  
Forsyth

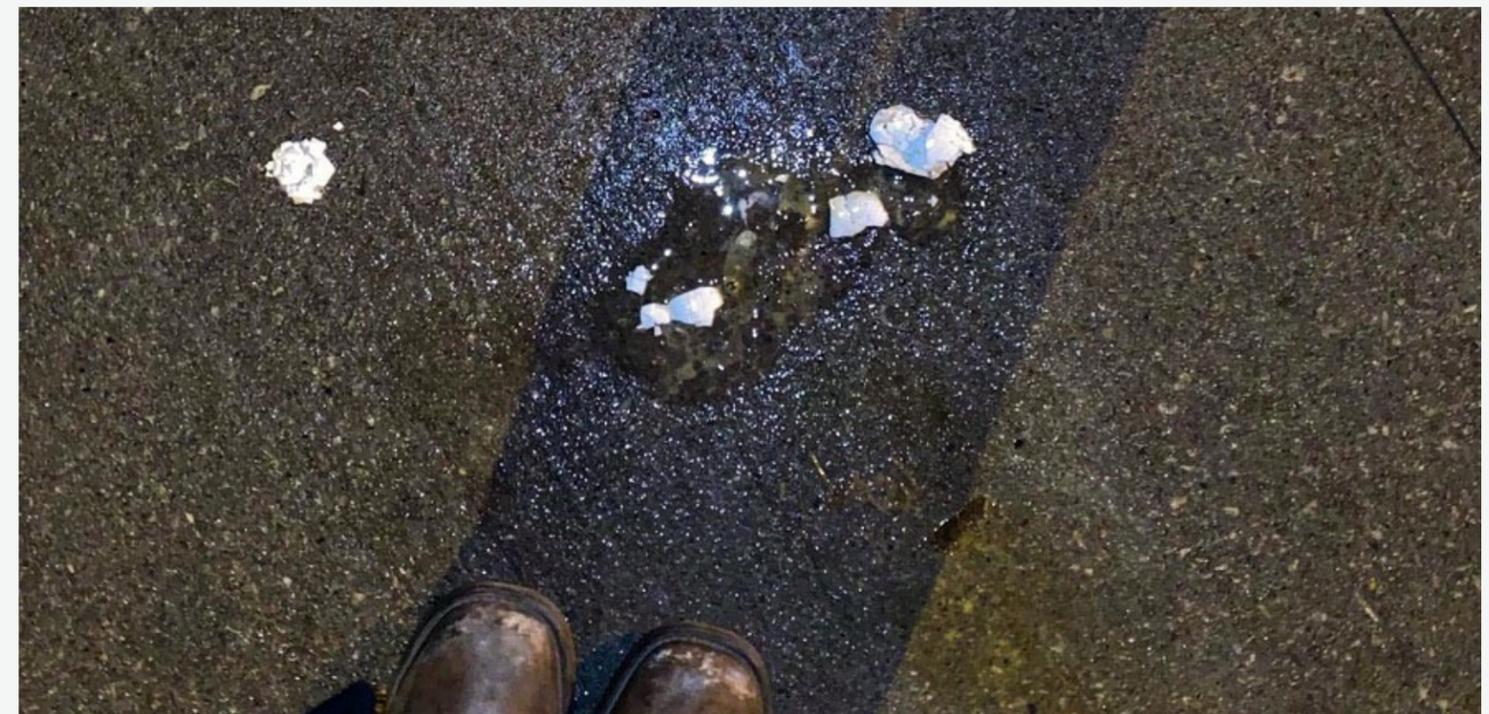


Cover your ears, or the sirens will get ya



don't  
look  
down

**egg down**

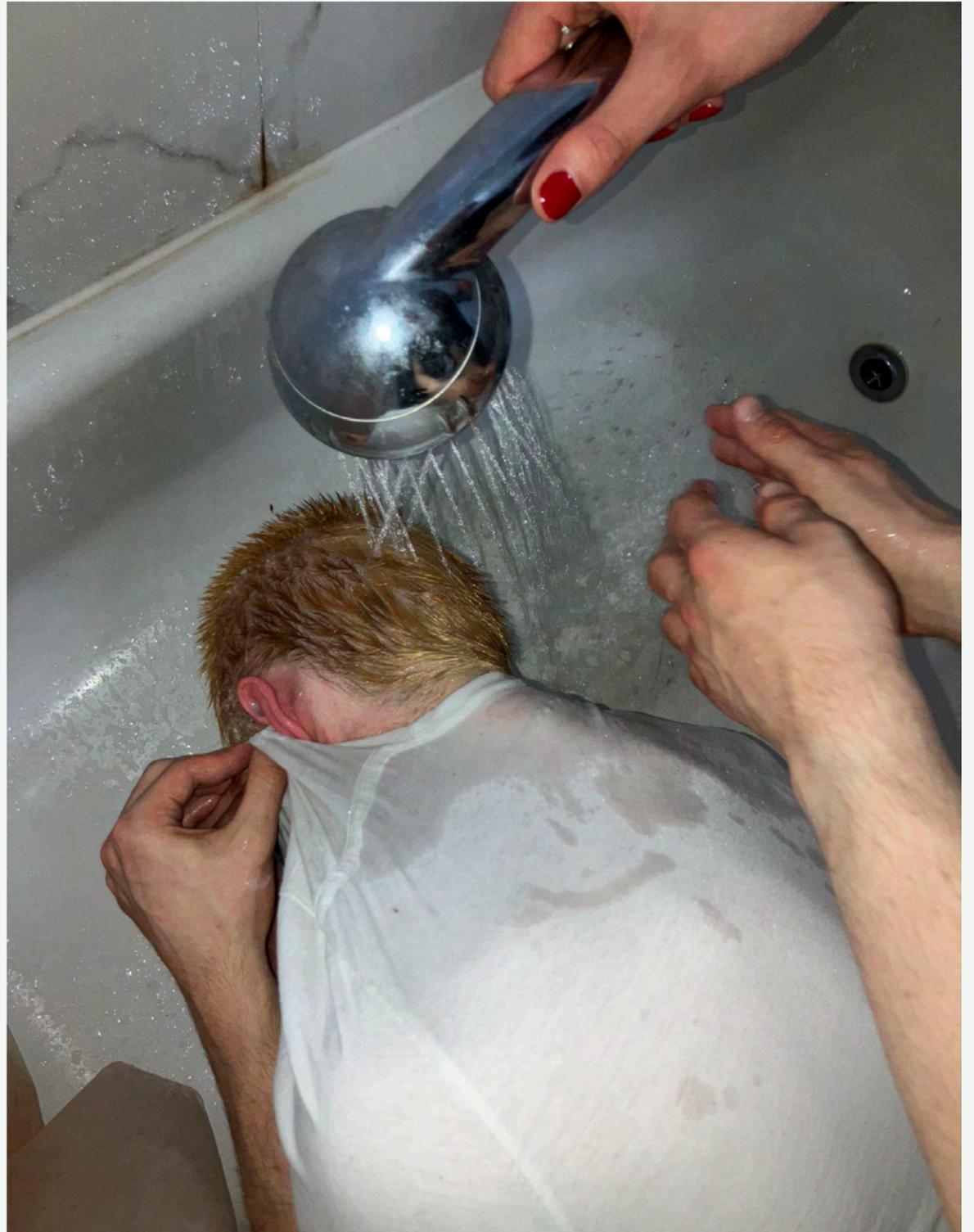




**friendship  
at  
its  
finest**



**watch  
your  
step**



**season of the scrub**



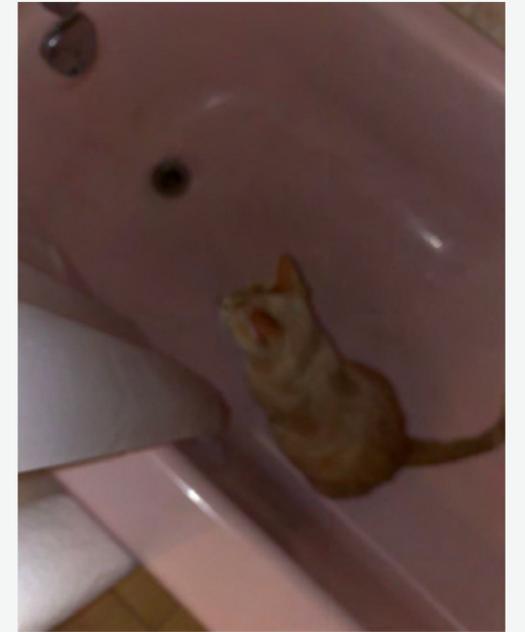
**don't lose your head**



**i'm not crying,  
it's just been raining on my face**



**a watery descent**



**when the tap runs dry**

**pick your poison**



**your sandwich may call, but do you dare take a bite**



# THE NEXT NETWORK

Raphael Gutteridge

In six simple maps, the website Cancelled Toronto details a story that residents of Toronto are resignedly familiar with. Since the 1970s, transit planning in the city has been mired by unfulfilled fantasy. Successive government agencies have spent the better part of a half-century re-drawing nearly the same lines along avenues like Eglinton, Finch, and Sheppard, each chasing the memory of the 1950s and 60s when rapid transit construction was both constant and successful.

Oldest of these plans, GO-Urban, was an optimistic vision of public transit that was sunk by a failure in realizing maglev technology. After having been sold on an experimental and unproven technology, planners dreamed of transit lines that stretched along Eglinton and Finch Avenues as well as the rail corridor that traces the Don River and dips through downtown before swooping back north towards Pearson Airport. Maglev technology never lived up to the promises that were made, and while the derivative technology would go on to become the backbone of Vancouver's transit system, the only benefit to Toronto was the under built and tortured Scarborough RT.

By the mid-80s, Toronto had long since finished building out its existing two subway lines to the extents planned in the late-60s. In the hopes of continuing to develop a transit network, the Network 2011 plan ditched maglevs and returned to proven rail technologies. Subways would be

built along Eglinton and Sheppard avenues, as well as along the rail corridor that traces the Don River and dips through downtown.

A refinement in the early 90s to Network 2011, called "Let's Move" dropped the rail corridor subway and added an extension to the Yonge Subway along Finch Avenue. Construction was started on the Eglinton West subway before a neoliberal conservative government took office, axed transit funding, and ordered the newly-started tunnels be filled back in. Sheppard Avenue, which had gotten too far into construction to stop, was allowed to finish, albeit in the most reduced form possible.

In the new millennium, successive mayors proposed new light rail and subway lines along Eglinton, Finch, Sheppard, and the Don River. Constantly shifting political landscapes turned some lines from subways to light rail and vice versa, truncating slightly more each time.

Now, in the mid-2020s, light rail construction is supposedly wrapping up along Eglinton and Finch after much public controversy; the Downtown Relief (now Ontario) Line, which was supposed to trace the Don River fifty years before, is in early phases of construction; the Bloor-Danforth subway is being extended into Scarborough; and early proposals are up for consultation for the full realization of the Sheppard Subway. After what will end up being sixty years, Toronto will finally have all the rapid transit it dreamed of in the 1970s.



# Toronto Rapid Transit System



Given the incredible lag time in Toronto transit planning, it's time to start thinking of the next generation of rapid transit projects. The city's geography has changed immensely and public transit is now about more than shuffling commuters on and off Bay Street each weekday. Instead of just reaching arms out as far as possible, it's time to think of rapid transit as a network that offers alternative routes in case of disruption and opens new possibilities for travel across the region.

To facilitate the next set of plans, the following routes are proposed:

- 1) a subway along Bathurst Street to encourage and sustain density through the centre of the city while also providing necessary redundancy to Line 1; 2) a subway along Lawrence Avenue West to alleviate overcrowding on existing transit and to better serve communities in midtown; 3) a subway that runs down Jane Street and through the downtown core along College and Gerrard streets to better serve neighborhoods in the north of the city and provide better travel options in downtown; 4) a subway running under Queen Street to better serve the neighborhoods along the lakeshore; 5) complimentary rapid transit corridors along Weston North, Steeles West, Wilson, Finch East, Dufferin, York Mills, Lawrence East, Victoria Park, St Clair East, and Markham Road, and the Portlands to build out a robust network of transit options across the entire city.



# Line 7 - Bathurst

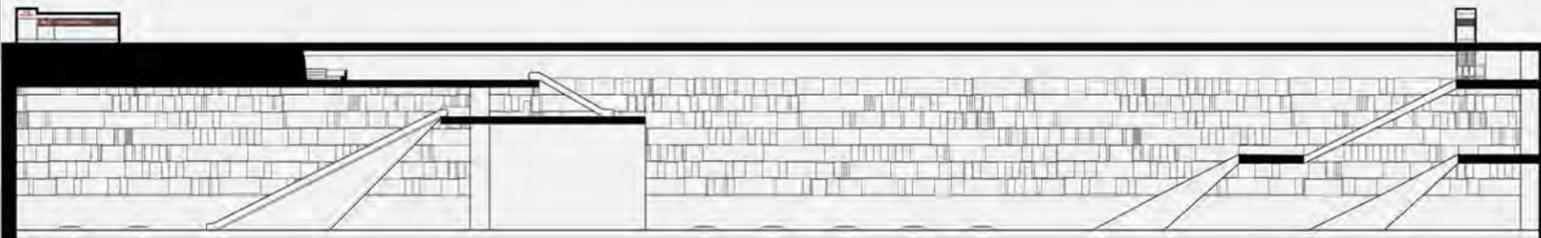
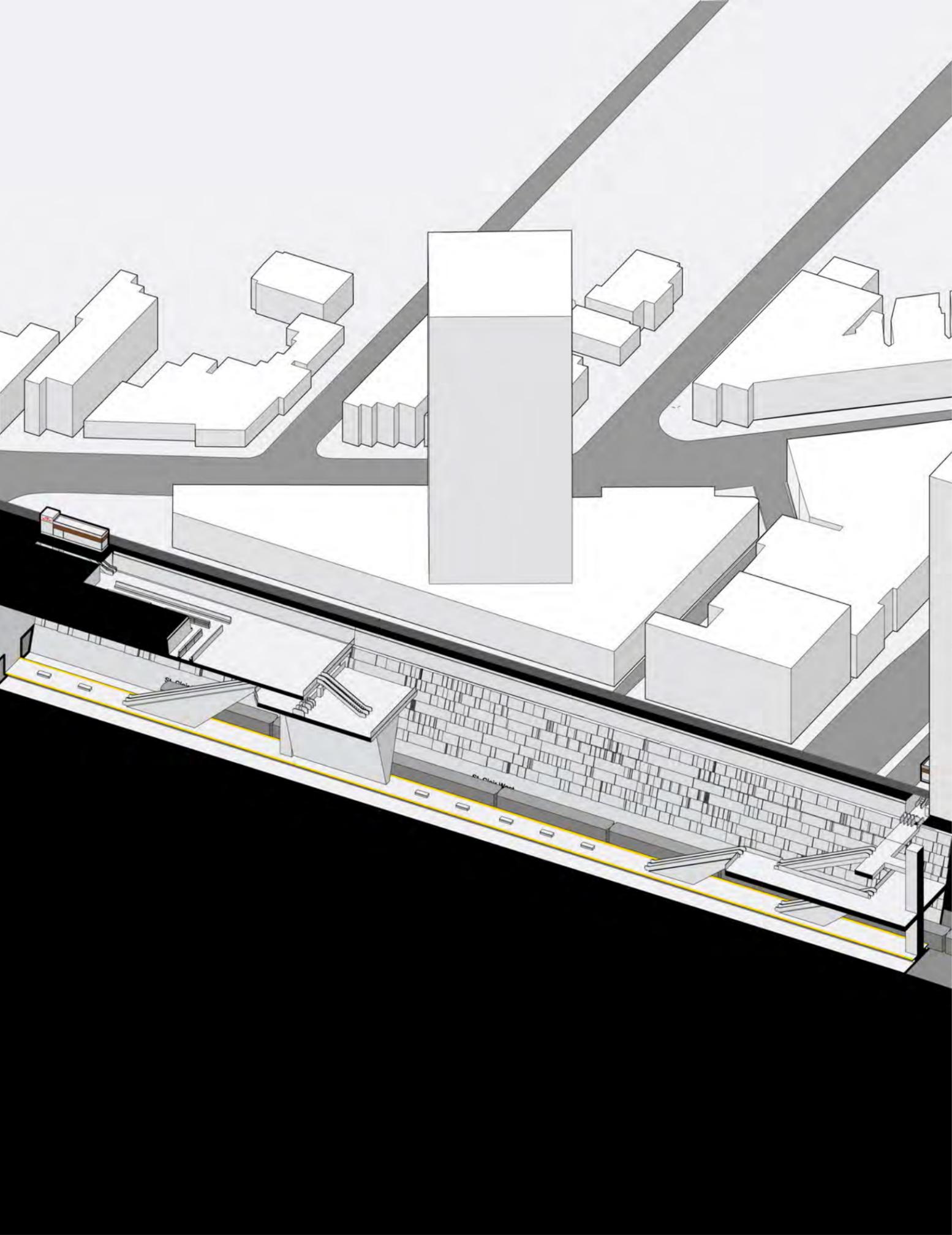
Exhibition to Promenade

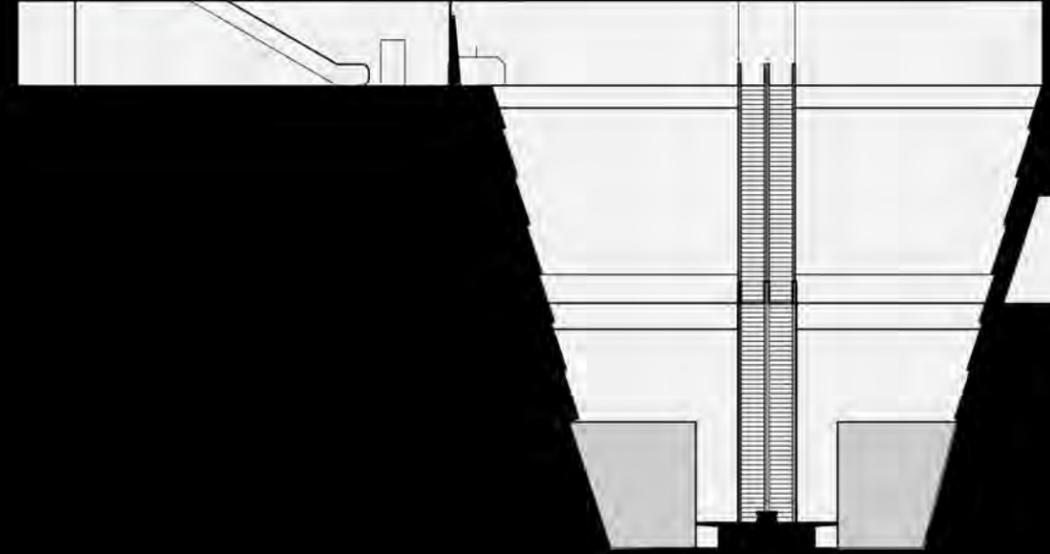
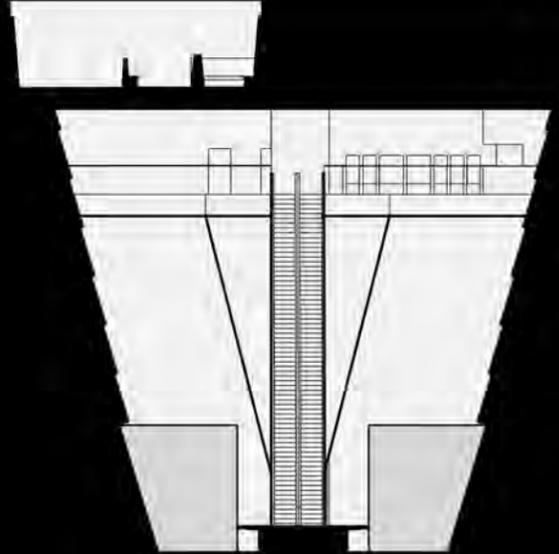
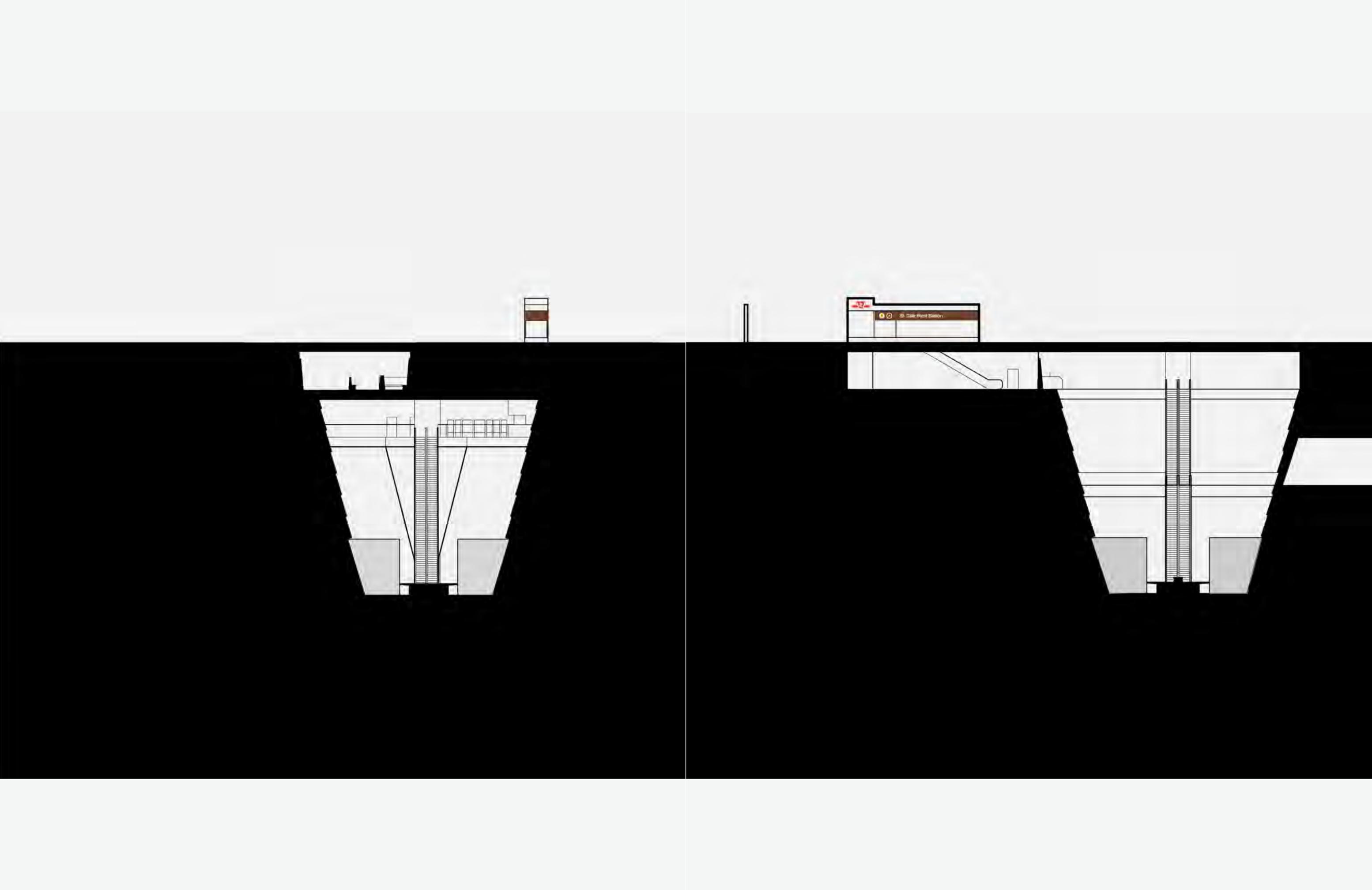


## Connections

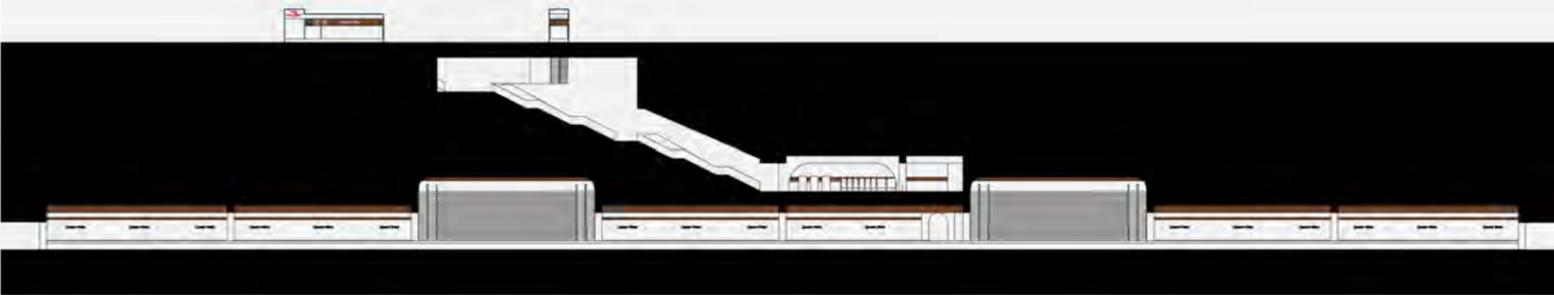
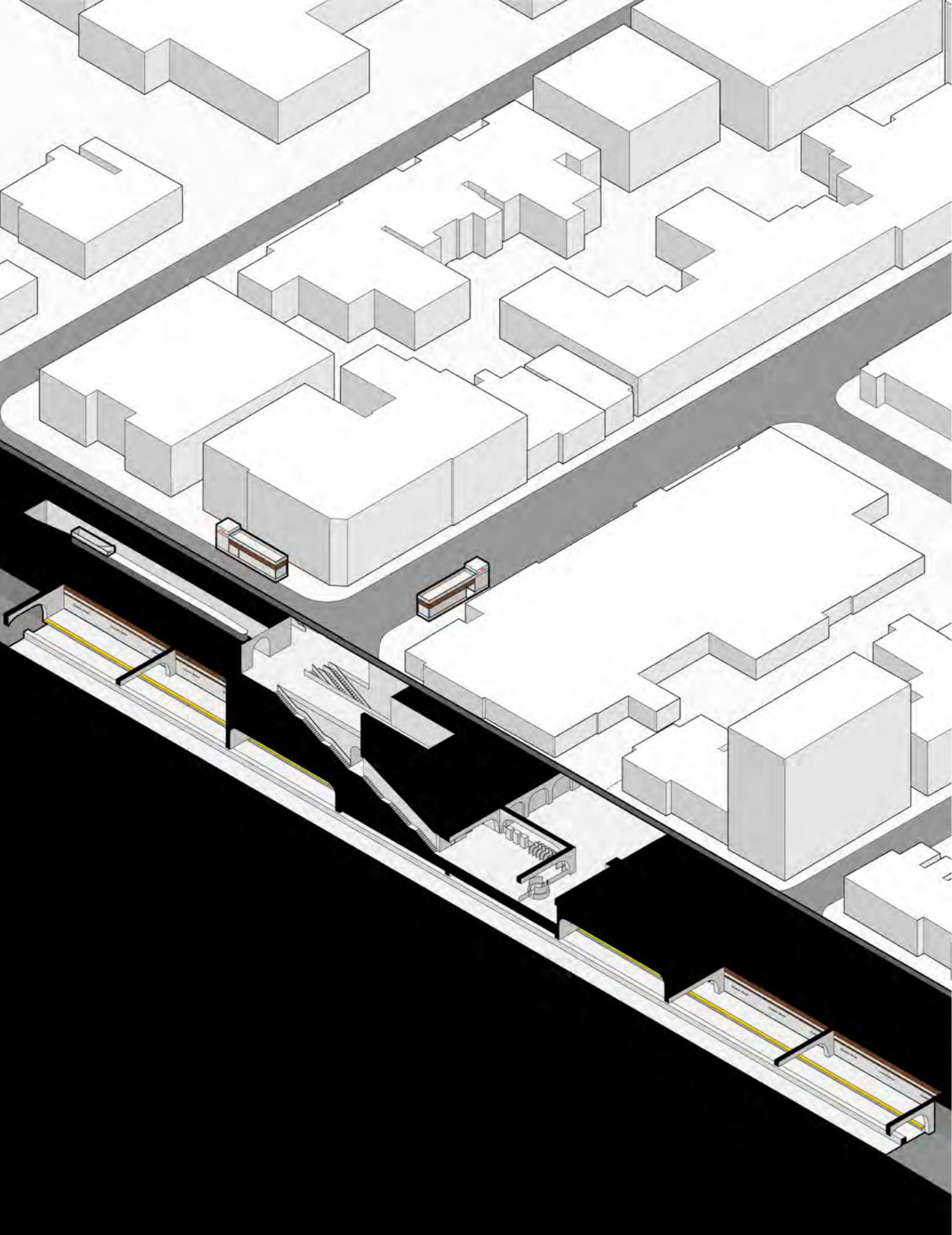
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|--------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------|
| 1 Yonge - University - Spadina | 8 Lawrence West            | Finch RT        |
| 2 Bloor - Danforth             | 9 Jane - College - Gerrard | Steeles West RT |
| 3 Queen - Don Mills            | 10 Queen - The Queensway   |                 |
| 4 Sheppard                     | 512 - St. Clair West       |                 |
| 5 Eglinton                     | 505 - Dundas               |                 |

# St Clair West Station

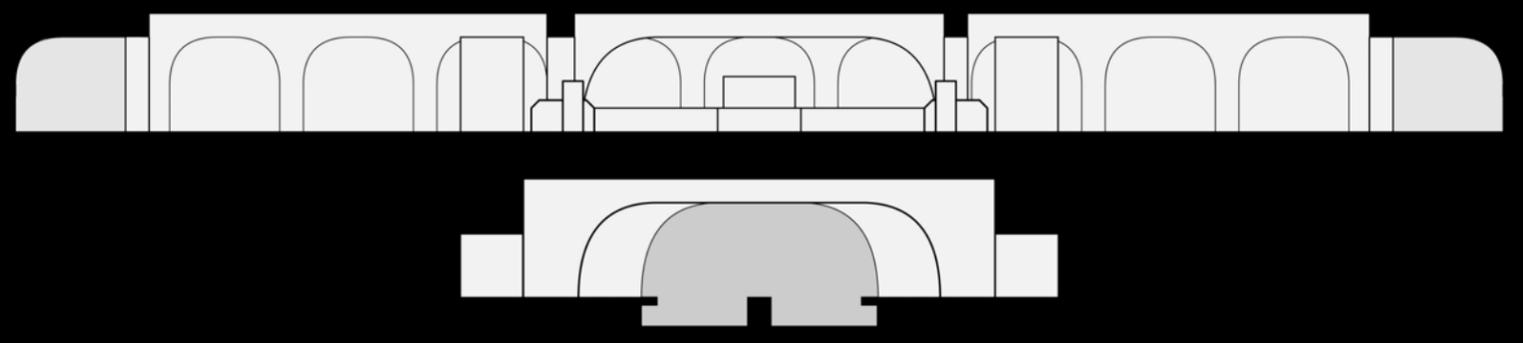
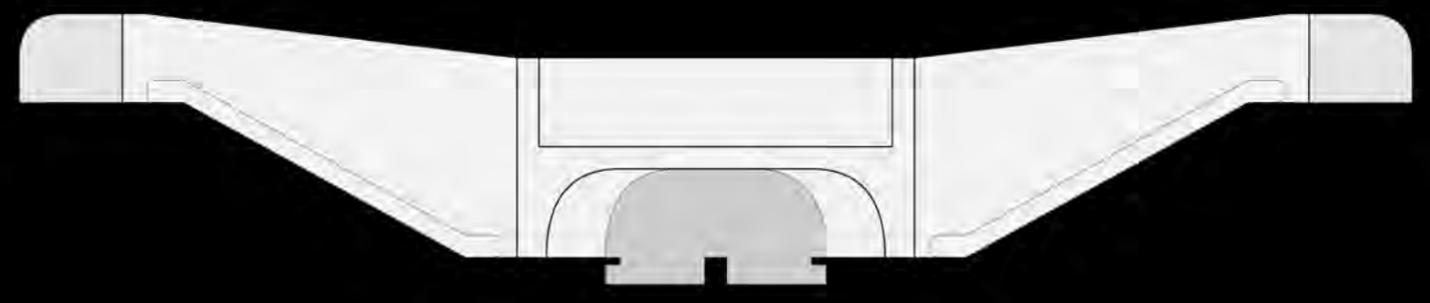




# Queen West Station



Roben West



# The Diasporic Existence of the Immigrant in a Descending World

Victoria Bagley

## Part 0: Introduction

Ling Ma takes a novel approach to the typically overwrought critique of capitalism that we so often see today in her dystopian novel *Severance*. A young Chinese-American woman named Candice guides us through the story as she looks back at the events of the apocalypse, leaving an abandoned and entirely looted New York City and following a cult to a promised land of abundance (that is in reality an abandoned mall in suburban Illinois) and the world that we see through her eyes is one entirely frozen in time, landmarked and timestamped by famous commercial products. What is especially interesting in *Severance* is the dual parallel foci on consumer capitalism and nostalgia, as consumerism is depicted to be a source of comforting nostalgia as well as an equally exploitative machine that turns out to be the sole cause for the apocalypse. In fact, Candice herself even gives up on art to work in commodifying bibles. She is paid to market various commemorative editions of it such that she might maximize her company, Spectra's revenue from this single, ancient sacred text. It is during her time at Spectra that the Shen Fever reeks its havoc over the world, infecting most everybody with what the characters of the story call 'fever.' This fever results in its victim being

overcome by nostalgia and engaging in looping mindless behaviors until the body eventually perishes due to malnourishment. A question that we therefore are forced to ask ourselves in reading the story is why Candice and the other characters we engage with do not catch this fever, being that they're exposed to the same stimuli as the others. I'd like to propose that Candice is actually fevered, but her fever isn't quite so detectible to the other characters or to us because her fever symptoms take on slightly different forms than the non-naturalized Americans that we primarily see represented in *Severance*. Before even delving into all the evidence that Candice is in fact fevered, we will first examine how it is that she is predisposed to catching the fever. Then, we'll move on to look at how Candice's fever is symptomatically different from the non-immigrants around her and subsequently less easily diagnosed. Finally, having established the differences in Candice's fever that allowed us to overlook it, I shall then conclude with the undeniable similarities Candice has to the other fevered that without this evidence we may have passed off as merely her personality.

"Memories beget memories. Shen Fever being a disease of remembering, the fevered are trapped indefinitely in their memories. But what is the difference between the fevered and us? Because I remember too, I remember perfectly. My memories replay, unprompted, on repeat. And our days like theirs continue in an infinite loop. We drive we sleep, we drive some more."

Candice Chen (160)

## Part 1: Candice's predisposition to the diseases of nostalgia

Through Candice's episodic flashbacks, we come to learn that before the Shen Fever even comes about, Candice is already genetically, emotionally, and culturally predisposed to diseases of nostalgia. To begin with the most literal predisposition Candice has to the fever, we may look to her mother's genetics. Candice's mother is frequently characterized by her ever-repeating skincare routine that she begins when moving to the United States, and never ceases to complete even as Alzheimer's Disease eats away at the functionality of her brain. In fact, not only does Candice's mother pass on this gene to Candice, but she further acts to instill her habits in her daughter by sending her skincare products as well, reinforcing this invisible transfer of genetic predisposition to cycles with physical products to be used ritualistically and routinely. Indeed, Candice picks up these habits from her mother and her "clear brown bar of Neutrogena soap" (39) becomes part of her daily "routine" (39) just as "Caress soap and medicinal Clinique" (37) were a part of her mother's, even in the nursing home after the decay of her sound mind. Moreover, Candice's parents further condition Candice to succumb to the fever through the

passive caretaking role they cause Candice to take on in her childhood because it is this role that initiates Candice's tendency of reaction taking precedence over unprompted action; those who are fevered in *Severance* behave in a purely reactionary way, repeating what is muscle memory when placed in various familiar settings, acting from no sense of personal agency, and Candice's similarly passive behavior that is not unlike that of the fevered stems from parental trauma inflicted at a young age due to narcissistic parenting. Candice's parents are both emotionally self-centered and immature and thereby create the perfect ecosystem for Candice's childhood parentification where she must behave in such a way "that she kn[o]w[s] would please them" even if it goes against her own personal "want[s]" (44). In her childhood, Candice was forced to act as her father's ally, behaving as his friend - or in Candice's own words, his "co-conspirator" (44) in the face of an "explo[sive]" (43), "melodramatic" (43) "antagonist" (184) of a mother who "was disciplinarian, restrictive, prone to angry outbursts, easily frustrated ... fascist... arbitrary... [and] unreasonable" (184); and these conditions are exactly as described in Earley &



## Part 2: Why it takes us so long to detect Candice's fever

Cushway's "The Parentified Child" that tend to result in a child who must react to her emotional parents in a role reversal and in fact parent her on parents.<sup>1</sup> This intergenerational trauma that Candice's parents perpetuate predisposes her to reactionary behaviors that pacify those around her. Even Candice's way of revolting becomes passive in childhood, and she spites her mother by passively taking her punishments and would "kneel for even longer [than she was condemned to,] going further and further, taking more punishment just to spite her [mother], just to show that it meant nothing. [That she] could take more" (185). After growing into an adult and moving out, Candice's action by means of inaction continues, and instead of standing up for herself, Candice allows herself to repeatedly undergo violence from men in the bedroom, passively "shut[ting] [her] eyes against" (37) the men, laying back in the "corpse pose" (36), and allowing things to "end[] up" (37) however the men want, even when she "d[o]es[n't] want anything" (37). Furthermore, when offered a menial and uncreative job at Spectra, Candice gives in to it – a passive acceptance that directly opposes everything she's worked for going to school for art up until this point. Similarly, in the face of Bob's senseless indulgent violence,

when Bob asks that Candice kill young Paige Gower, she does so without a hitch, shooting the girl upwards of ten times (she "los[es] count" (71) at a certain point), taking her punishment passively, repeatedly shooting the girl, proving she could take more, until Janelle tells her that "that's enough" (72).

The final piece of Candice that predisposes her to becoming fevered is her first language, the language she grew up speaking. The language that Candice, or any person, speaks as her brain is still in its developmental stages informs the manner through which she perceives the world – at least according to some, so even though Candice is no longer is a fluent speaker of Mandarin in her adult life, the lack of tenses in that language through which her first memories were created shapes the way she perceives and remembers the world.<sup>2</sup> People remember by means of language, and her very first one is a "language [that] does not require tenses distinguishing past, present, and future" (87), so past, future, and present bleed into one, predisposing Candice to confusion about repetitive timelines, and subsequently to the Shen Fever—a fever which is important to note, originated in China, the very country where the tenseless language that is Mandarin is native.

We have now assessed the extreme extent to which Candice is extraordinarily susceptible to catching the Shen Fever, so it is time to examine how exactly it is that some of us may never even have noticed that Candice is fevered for the majority of the story and as she narrates in the novel. I'd like to put forth that Candice differs from the other born-and-raised Americans in the story not only because she's an immigrant, but also because she doesn't reminisce about real memories like the others, she instead has imagined realities and dreams that she finds nostalgic in her own way. Therefore, her nostalgia – the primary cause and symptom of the Shen Fever – appears in a different manner, allowing it to go under our radar.

If we were to examine Candice's conception of home, we would realize very quickly that she does not in fact have one. She left China before primary school and is disenchanted with the idea of New York that was her home dream for so long, leaving her with no location that feels home: in fact she feels "like a homeless person in [her] own house" (54). Furthermore, even though the feeling of home can exist in the people we surround ourselves with, Candice is entirely "without family. 'I am alone'" (55) she says. It's an ironic mean joke that Candice's Chinese name

comes from one of the most famous poems that everyone memorizes as a kid in China about the painful nostalgia of remembering home.

It is also Candice's vivid artistic imagination that keeps us from detecting her fever. Indeed, she even admits that her "dreams mix with [her] memories" (97), and we can see this to be true when she has crazy fever dreams about her mother coming to her and telling her to escape the facility. Beyond this, Candice even has "recurring dream[s]" (138) where she's at a Bible Sales Expo for her work—her unbreakable daily routine leaching into her sleep.

<sup>1</sup> Earley, L., & Cushway, D. "The Parentified Child." *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, vol. 7, no.2, 2002, pp. 163-178. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1359104502007002005>

<sup>2</sup> Frankel, Miriam. "The Weird Way Language Affects Our Sense of Time and Space." *BBC News*, BBC, 10 Nov. 2023, [www.bbc.com/future/article/20221103-how-language-warps-the-way-you-perceive-time-and-space](http://www.bbc.com/future/article/20221103-how-language-warps-the-way-you-perceive-time-and-space).



### Part 3: Candice's fever is actually pretty typical

To be entirely frank, Candice's fever exceedingly obvious, even despite these subtle differences in how she remembers and how she feels nostalgic. Candice engages in iterative behaviors that were habits in her pre-fevered life, making frequent lists and breaking down consumer products and separating their offal into component parts in the way she used to dissect the bible at Spectra. Candice also continues to stay in New York and go to work long past when she would have any real reason to do so. She moves into her office and despite her contract that states that she will continue working, it becomes abundantly clear that the world has come to a point of apocalypse, and her bosses aren't even there anymore to see if she's working because they're fevered and long gone. Candice frequently blanks out and her peers even call her out for "blinking out again" (62) when she does. Candice behaves in a manner that is frustratingly inert, never taking any action against injustices and she is a frustrating character to read, but this too, is a symptom of her fever that causes her to only behave in ways that are purely reactionary. Now to touch on the actual narration of the story itself, Candice's tells the story in a fashion that is non-linear, different events in the real

world prompting different thought cycles of her memories that she the tells to us, subsequently causing jumps backwards every few chapters to her life immediately preceding the arrival of the Shen Fever, as she navigates two simultaneous but equally non-linear timelines that each also take leaps further back into Candice's childhood. As we jump back and forth between these timelines, Ling Ma cleverly injects us with a feeling of disorientation that cleverly functions as an onomatopoeia, mimicking Candice's own feeling of confused looping disorientation as she experiences her fevering.

### Part 4: Conclusion

In conclusion, Candice is fevered when she narrates the story. She's fevered in New York when she keeps going back to work. She's fevered when she refuses to do anything against Bob. Her genetic inheritance, childhood conditioning, and the language she spoke in her formative years all contributed to her own distinct manifestation of the fever. And even though her pregnancy feels like some light at the end of a tunnel of death, Candice and her child are not that light. Her child, even were it to survive, shares equal predisposition to fever. The Shen Fever is a biblically leveling force of nature worse than the great flood of Noah's Arc, removing humanity from earth, leaving behind the only the traces of capitalism and a dying cult obsessed with it.

Furthermore, we attributed our delayed recognition of Candice's fever to her unconventional form of nostalgia that led her to show her fever symptoms slightly differently. Unlike the born-and-raised Americans in the story who reminisce about their real memories, Candice's fever manifests through her imagination. It is her total lack of a real physical home as well as this unique nostalgic interplay between dreams and memories that create a

nuanced expression of nostalgia that differs so much from the typical symptoms observed in *Severance*. But in the end, upon closer inspection, we realized that Candice's fevering is as evident as the others, and Candice does indeed have all the usual symptoms after all. Her iterative behaviors, continued adherence to routine, and non-linear storytelling all point to the fever's influence on her actions and perceptions. Candice engages in looping, mindless behaviors, and it is her inertia in the face of the apocalypse and her frustratingly passive reactions all align so perfectly with the typical symptoms of the Shen Fever. So, in retrospect, Candice's fever is not as subtle or unique as we may have initially thought, and it is thusly that Ling Ma artfully weaves a narrative that challenges our perceptions about the boundaries between the fevered and the uninfected. As Candice's story unfolds, we come to realize that her fever, while presenting in distinct ways, shares undeniable similarities with the experiences of others in *Severance*. In this dystopian exploration of consumer capitalism and nostalgia, Ling Ma gives us pause to reflect on our own relationship to all these



familiar products and ideas.

Ling Ma begs us to ask ourselves what it means to be lucid. If we perceive Candice to be lucid when she is in fact very much fevered and all the information we receive from her is fevered, how are we in our real lives to discern fact from fiction, advertising from reality, wholesome real memory from successful infiltration of product placement. From the very cover of the book that looks to be an uncorrected proof, we have ample evidence that Candice, the narrator and creator of this book in the fictional world of *Severance*, never finished the book and died due to her fever. So, if even in this fictional world where the answer is laid out for us on the very cover of the book it is so difficult to make these determinations, perhaps we ought to more

closely consider our own habitual inaction, going for frequent thoughtless shopping sprees were we buy from shiny H&M shelves the products unfairly paid women overseas created. Perhaps we may think twice about the cheap Amazon gemstone necklaces produced in unsafe environments where an arm could be severed at a moment's notice or chemicals and gemstone dust threaten the lung health of the laborers—all for consumer ease and pleasure. Ling Ma's *Severance* provides a brilliant novel approach to fictional critiques of capitalism; the story engages us through romance, cults, apocalypse, zombies, glamor, and violence so it never becomes too preachy, yet Ma gets us to think.

Earley, L., & Cushway, D. (2002). The Parentified Child. *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 7(2), 163–178. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1359104502007002005>

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## The Winter Object

QuebecArtistNancyPlourde's Bijoux Cré-Art is a jewelry studio that defines itself by its love for materiality. The studio's love and respect for their materials runs so deep that they limit themselves to pewter, wood, and glass. Central to their pieces are chips of vividly colored glass, made in-house in a vibrant array of colors and moods. Plourde's energy is reflected in the bright and shimmering palettes, enhanced by polished pewter. Pendants are framed by patterns that seamlessly blend both organic sensibility and geometric rigor. The fish-scale patterned automne glass evokes the timeless allure of koi in traditional Japanese printmaking, especially when brought to life by bright light. Buy as a gift for people who are most commonly found basking in the spotlight right at center stage.



Did you go too far?

