

Transcript: A Line of Tiny Soaps Part 2 – Plain Text

Parks in sitting, said she: 'there began I and place any. Wasn't it?' Yet city, the 'wasn't it,' and city the to, came I. Rocks of weight, and motor of a thrust, the rain, starting of shush. The night at bedtime, of a light, half in amplified. Words. And things with infatuation, scenes of admiration. Already is which page of an edge? The 'at lapse.' Doesn't heard, or written, is what? Just, *something*. Against, up brushing messages and dates. Meetings or days, across arriving, driving, moving people. You around, scattered, all night.

The here, yourself, imagine.

What is written, or heard, doesn't stay still.

A child packs her bag for the wrong day in the school week. Because she has some of the same subjects each day, she's not missing every book, but most of them. She writes out the notes and exercises in the classes with missing jotters on loose sheets of paper taken from the printer in the corner of the classroom, on a slow walk from her desk. Out the window there are crows in the playground and the hills at the end of the city, scabrous and close, like distended bellies covered in patchwork cloth. She knows these loose pages will need to be copied into the right jotters, then she'll throw them out, so by the end of the day they've been allowed to gather dirt from the bottom of her bag. The rub of crumbs and pencil shavings, scratches from an unlidded biro.

Training after school on the sports pitch, where all the wave like movements of activity and interaction from the previous hours are blown off her shoulders by the fresh air. The hockey ball, or the sliotar, at the far end of the field from her position, knees bent slightly, breathing hard. When she sees it hit the wood from across the pitch, she hears the bark the sound makes, after. The speed of seeing and the clap of two things hitting is split slightly by the distance she stands at.

After her friend peels off towards her own house, walking home, the child reaches her hand into her coat pocket; eating crisps. Smoothing her fingers every so often to clean them on the soft flank of her coat. Picturing *things*, like the shiny boxes expensive cosmetics come in, things completely incongruous with their original materials; tree, cardboard, plastic coating. Words dipped in italics for packaging, not written in a jotter. She pictures signs that hold letters together within the borders of their edges, for off-licences and shops, bookies and hairdressers. Signs for streets in the two languages, one known, one unpronounceable.

Given and received; presents.

A pewter salt well, it's short, fat handles cast in Celtic knots. Make-up-brush sets, plastic packaging, a slice under the nailbed. A heavy black top, gold buttons down the middle seam. A plaid scarf, the label peeled off its sticky corner. A candle that claims to smell of rain. A fluffy teddy, bigger than a toddler. A rechargeable drill. A white dolls pram. Red phone, wind up key and button that makes pretend-ringing sounds. Guns with caps that pop. A model car race track. A bodhran, wooden crossbar set behind hide. Big room resonance. Sesame street slippers with red lining, hugged close to the feet with an elastic rim. A paperweight shaped like a stag. Schnapps in a jar. Bottles of wine, magnums of Prosecco. Huge trays of eyeshadows, all the tiny coloured discs papery and soft. Socks. A palette of lip gloss. Black plastic Walkman. Knickers embroidered with the days of the week. Magnolia scented bath cream. Or rose, or lily of the valley. The matching shower gel, moisturiser. A line of tiny soaps.

Some people use *listening* to sleep, reverb inside the place where they want a release. A recording might describe a sound. Or fail, caught up in the negative space of the air, the emptiness of these surroundings.

Déjà vu when reading is the worst form the experience can take. Even pushing the book away and slapping it down on the table top in front of you, doesn't always halt the warm spill of predetermination. Neither does it work to slide the hard-edged object away along the kitchen counter, as the pot steams beside you with the dinner cooking. Returning to the dinner, the feeling haunts you, not the words though.

If sound is the smallest unit of speech
Each sound begins a word
Each word begins a thought that gets lost.

Groups of words are the worst. They sink, disappearing into something like crude oil. Opaque, and glistening, there's relief in understanding. The lip of a pen's nib. Small smacking sounds. The lapse at the edge of a page, the page and the lesser lines outlived, by saying this.

Statistics and census, schools and inspections.

What happens if we choose the wrong words?

For each wrong word is there *one* right word, or many?

Language, and love. And where they can't be separated, maybe they're drunk by eyes and eaten by ears.

Someone says they 'often talk about love as one of the few places where people actually admit they want to become *different*. It's change without guarantees, without knowing what the other side of it is, because it's entering into relationality.'

Two states, the one broken into the other. Didn't break in one go like dropped glass. Became unsteady on its feet, like a slow tear at the split of a skirt.

Each night became slightly longer than the last. The night all scattered around you.

What would it be like to live inside one type of sound for a whole life? Just... karaoke in the pub? Or the heavy evenness of notes on an instrument and you have to pick that instrument now. Like the trumpet that comes through the ceiling from the child practising in the flat below, the scales and compositions becoming more complex as time rumbles and blows and shuffles on?

The only break from living inside this hoarse madness would be when you forget the sound is there, caused by short visual interruptions to the thinking; a spider seen hanging on the front door, swinging against the glass like a tiny wrecking ball.

The angles where extraordinary windows meet, cars hugging the road.
A cut, just when a line ends, music.

New verbs, like promming. Nul, going, arms that seem too long.

Nil dul eatarthu, there's no going between them.

Not realising, a lack of realisation, that you're inside someone else's defining moment.

To say, each sound a letter, rolled between two vowels.

Sound makes a stop. Becomes a space to enter and stay in, a while. The sun rises only slightly, lying low over the dim blue line of the horizon. Then, the longest night of the year. Sound makes us stop, turn, towards and away from it. We can't hear the sound of the sun, even when *solstice*, meaning 'stand still' because it's us turning.

Towards and away from it.

Marking time, people in early scenes of long, long ago, stood behind stones. Placed at the right, angles. Sun, stop.

Transcript: A Line of Tiny Soaps Part 1

A Logo. Little puddles filled with water.

A logo moving through the void of box tv screens, 24 of them stacked on top of each other, sat in the centre of the polished floor.

The same logo on each monitor for several long seconds. Its angled edges slide and float through the screened space, dampening thoughts, neurotic commas. A cut to a beach in fuzzy 16 millimetre film, each image jump cut at the same time. More cuts, cut, cut, then some screens fall a split-second behind the others. They misalign.

People walking.

People walking in a city street. People walking in a city street, wet pavements, long coats swish against their legs. The street a sea of bobbing heads. Then shaky handheld shots of an empty park, the kind formed from commons. The ground, glass bottles, lighters left behind, the camera trained on mud beat into tiny mountain ranges by many tramping feet. quick are the cuts until the speed of the footage bends into abstract loops of jagged shapes and flashing lights. Images appear in a ferociously fast sequence, suspended behind the glass of each tv screen for what feels like an impossibly short amount of time.

A fade, marking the end of the screening. The buzz off the tvs on standby is audible, or is it imagined? The click of static settling. a curtain's heavy stillness is spread across the archway between foyer and gallery. When opened slowly by the assistant, the daylight falls across the walls like a stream of poured liquid, sent sideways. The concrete floor is visible again; faint mottling like fake tan fades from skin after the weekend.

Do beginnings always have to start off slow? Bindweed out the window.

Each nice became slightly longer than the last.

What happens if we choose the wrong words?

Beyond the window, the morning doesn't feel real. It's thin, porous, shadowy and formless. The moving images on the other side seem like they belong to a different life, and was that one good too? Maybe it was hollow, soft at the edges like handmade paper.

There's smoke visible in the distance from a fire in a field. Wondering, was it intentional, is it *tragic*? What things are burning now, briars and heaps of leaves?

There's baronies within each county. Then parishes within the baronies. Then townlands within the parishes. Townlands are the smallest unit of land.

I read somewhere that it's in our words where we might attempt to 'elevate our molecular concerns, our parochial, individual lives to the level of art; convince us that we are not petty and ridiculous.'

The slug I burst with my flip flop when I stood reading at the top of my road by the streetlight. Concealed kisses.

The thrust of a motor and the weight of rocks. 'I came to the city and it wasn't the city yet. It wasn't any place and I began there' she said, sitting in parks.

The smallest unit of speech is sound.

A woman is watching a film late at night and she starts to notice small things that are *the same* in the film as are happening in her own life. There's a romantic and complicated story on screen, in a city with cobbled streets, cafés serving tiny cups of coffee.

The woman on screen constructs sentences made of sounds. She is completely tied to her. It feels as though the narrative of the film is going to dictate the future of her own life, unravelling as it does scene by scene, like an excavation of a self, seen from elsewhere. The woman thinks she might be inventing all the connections she feels with the protagonist in front of her, so far removed from her own life, and so obviously fictional, but she must watch to see what will happen.

The text will write these things. It will write what is happening. It will write a scene:

The rain's stopped crackling like spent fireworks on the umbrella she stole from a pub. She's nearly home, walking back from the station in the pitch dark, early evening. As she walks she tries to remember something from the book she was reading on the train, about peoples' faces having sloppy features like pizza toppings.

Once in the flat, she shrugs out of her coat and shoes. In the half light of her bedroom she hears her flatmate singing a low tune in the kitchen. The flatmate is trying to scrape mayo from the empty mayo jar that's been in the fridge for weeks, the spoon circling, endlessly.

Condensation slips down the windows behind her curtains.

It's the season of things. Capitalism against affective disorders; sadness.

She presses the button on the side of her phone, watching the screen blink into darkness.

Words appear, repeating their strange whispers and diaphanous crunches. She mouths the new ones to see if they'll stick.

Recalcitrant, re, cal, ci, trant. Glór, glór, glór. New words to write down, and a list of old ones to repeat: clement, vagary, bedimmed, opalesque, calescent, shattering.

Voices, a recording of a phone call, or a shiver, or a bus at the top of a hill. Tinny, roving water. Water that's surface melts a voice.

Moving images, writing that moves faces. Things in a list. People that you know, or don't know. Trying to sneak their breath out in even drafts, and the sun is setting. The sun, it's set.

Sets of things, or things that set like resin cured by air into hardness, or hair sprayed hair, or jelly in a jug in the fridge.

Reversal as repetition. Eyes closed, mouths fallen open in sleep. Reading lines from a phone screen, googling something. Amps with discs of different sizes, the centres all buzzing.

Let's have a catch up, let's try and stay still at the same speed. Catch up on the day, make right the order of speech. Here! The night, to a listening. Quiet strong, cresting waves.

Refusing to listen, not wanting to hear. Holding in my mouth for a while. Where are words held, if not in the mouth? Bones, and sunny spots of carpet. Maybe this needs more exclamation marks, more pauses, more power. Think a sentence visible! Think a thing said and say it!

Being inside a language, she can't just write when she wants to speak, the same way she can't say how the words sound, out loud.

A Line of Tiny Soaps was commissioned by Catalyst Arts Belfast for release in December 2021.

Written and edited by Lucie McLaughlin.

Including recordings at gigs by Gordon Bruce and Anna O'Neill.

Vocals by Sara O'Brien, Megan Rudden, Cat McClay, Éiméar McClay, Alex Misick, Lucie McLaughlin.

Thank you to Catalyst Arts, Tara McGinn, Paul McAlister, Misa Brzezicki, Art Writing GSA, Daniela Cascella, GLARC, all musicians and voices, and everyone who offered descriptions of presents they gave or received.