

It was when I first walked in I saw the photograph; a photocopy from an old newspaper, rows of men walking together and, at the front of the march, was my grandad - holding a banner. He was a ship wright and head of the trade union in Leith. My gran always says he spent more time in the pub than on the shipyard, but I'm not sure I think that's a bad thing. Sometimes I wonder if there's something in that, something in these processes that make me feel like I'm talking to him; vibrations in steel replace vocal chords, my aesthetic concerns struggle against his structural knowledge, different intensions but the process is the same.

The smell of smoke on my skin
in my skin,
burning metal penetrating my own scent
cigarette smoke
a rolled up paper tube balancing on the curve of ear another rests on his lips moving as it enunciates... 'who?'

The building was now an art gallery but it used to be a container on that same shipyard. As I cradled the small metal balls in my arms, being careful not to drop them as I walked up the stairs, I wondered if my footsteps landed on the ghosts of his.

different intensions but the building is the same
different intensions but the process is the same
I wonder what he'd think of my intensions; does it matter?

The work was hard. Hard work, heavy labour. I wonder what makes it so heavy - the weight of materials, the weight of the job, bones bending under processes of industry. A workers body is deformed to produce an object, a mothers body is deformed to produce the child, and so it continues. I wonder why it is that, when used to describe labour, (the term) 'heavy' often implies power and strength, yet when used in reference to a women's body it is often a criticism of her ability to occupy space. And no one ever talks about childbirth as heavy labour. It's just labour. Implication of a labour of love, unwaged and therefor unrecognised, expected 'in-kind'. How kind can someone be before they collapse completely under the weight of their own body? Or under the weight of the work?

The steel was cold against my chest,
the shed was hot,
pearls of sweat on my skin, metal walls conducting the heat of the sun. The smell of smoke on my skin,
in my skin,
burning metal penetrating my own scent,
cigarette smoke,
a rolled up paper tube balancing on the curve of an ear, a sphere made of steel resting on a breast,
a swollen stomach,

an eye glinting in the sun,
hot sparks firework off the surface,
a rotating circular blade cuts deep into its face,
the sound is deafening and then,
silence.

In certain cultures they talk about the process of smelting iron as if it is the birth of a child; an accident in the smithy is a miscarriage and the furnace is referred to as a wife. Women are forbidden from the smelting site for three main reasons; they are menstruating, engaged in sexual activity or in case they may be a witch. The workers are married to the smithy for the period of smelting and under an obligation of celibacy; any sexual activity would be considered infidelity to

the furnace-wife. It takes on the identity of a woman whose sexuality and fertility are controlled by the worker to produce an abundance of children in the form of iron.

The spikes of the ball imprint on my skin, heavy against the softness. Maybe that's it; a rejection of my size, a contrast to my softness; do I feel as though I must compensate for my gender in acquiring skills associated with the other? A compensation encouraged not by my own ideas of myself but by those administered externally. Encouraged productivity stemming from working class guilt?

An iron ball clasped in hands, heavy against the softness. The smell of smoke on my skin,
in my skin,
burning metal penetrating my own scent,

cigarette smoke,
a rolled up paper tube balancing on the curve of ear, another rests on his lips moving as it enunciates... 'you?'

I look at the object, now more like a weapon than my gran's tumble dryer ball. Cast iron has different structural properties to elemental iron, but it's still the same really. Rusting the same red that colours my blood, circulating my body, poured from the crucible into my veins, down to the centre of the earth. A solid ball of iron and nickel; the circular coin in my pocket. There's something so primitive about seeing it transform, it is eternal, moving from one state to another but still the same, into form, through form and out of form. I'm sure that's how some people talk about God but maybe that's going too far. Or not far enough.

The steel was cold against my chest, the shed was hot,
pearls of sweat on my skin,
metal walls conducting heat.

The smell of smoke on my skin,
in my skin,
burning metal penetrating my own scent,

cigarette smoke,
a rolled up paper tube balancing on the curve of an ear, a sphere made of steel resting on
a breast,
a swollen stomach,
an eye glinting in the sun,
hot sparks firework off the surface,
a rotating circular blade cuts deep into its face,
the sound is deafening and then,
silence.

The men keep marching, an industry in decline. A last attempt to hold on, worried wives
and hungry mouths await answers but Maggie's lips are cold and hard, opening only
slightly to form the shape of a 'No'.

He rolls a cigarette and places it in his mouth,
resting on his lips, it falls as he repeats... 'No?'

A lighter sparks,
the smoke penetrates my own scent,
the furnace is lit, the ritual begins.
The smell of smoke on my skin,
in my skin,
the steel was cold against my chest,
the shed was hot,
pearls of sweat,

metal walls emphasise the heat of the sun.

A rolled up paper tube balancing on the curve of an ear, a sphere made of steel resting on
a breast,
a swollen stomach,
an eye glinting in the sun,
hot sparks firework off the surface,
a rotating blade cuts deep into its face,
I inhale, still alive but barely breathing, the fumes are thick,
A relic of the past, displaced stories of ghosts in newsprint.
An old radio

The Proclaimers 'Letter From America' crackles in the background Barely audible over the
noise

He exhales a last breath
the sound is deafening and then,
silence.

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