

IRAQ VAG PANIC

You could say it wrong, like *my wracked*
brain or with the wrong *g*
like gag or Garamond.
Some words are nearly in ruins.
Yesterday the gynecologist told me
I spell my name wrong, should have an *o* between the *f* and *u*.
Am I trying to get pregnant?
In my country, he begins.
And then, between my parted legs, tells me that over there,
they do everything that we do,
just behind closed doors.
Am I anxious?
Well, someone is tweeting at me from a burner account,
or my step-grandma's trying to troll me again.
But I've already gone quick-violet.
On the plane, beside me
is a healer who tells me about her interest
in belly dancing.
Belly good is what my grandpa says instead of *very*.
Not his accent, just his joke.
We approach the fertile crescent:
Hewlêr, Kirkuk, Baghdad—three neon shocks.
Across the aisle a woman opens up
a document that just says ART.
Then selects the text in baby blue
and makes it shrink.
Timing, says the healer. Such a powerful force in life.

OBJECT PROJECT

Finally I am feeling the soft cramps of menstruation

Another red start

Another spreadsheet where every cell is a day containing local weather

It adds up to a project

What about a war that only lasts five hours?

Still the pixels green and die

Still I navigate to *objectsubjectsobjects.com*

In 8th grade geometry I learned to hate the sound of *trace* emerging from beneath my teacher's
mustache

A wobbly copy of a circle

I am still interested in simulation

In trying to understand a thing by recreating it in small

This epidemic isn't real, I tell my students as I use an eyedropper to indicate who is diseased

They hold their plastic cups out toward me and the ones containing water laced with soda ash
turn vivid fuchsia and they scream

Well, terror is infectious, too

My final project, I decide, will be planting

I dreamt of wildflowers again

The bird said, if I seize you I will seize you and will squeeze you till you squirt

Well, not actually, but that's a trick to easily identify this bird by name

The warbling vireo, a tiny songbird

I identified the bird using a video that captured the sound of the camera zooming in to find
the bird, metal against metal, singing *krrrrrrrrr*

The river thrilled me, I would tell you

This thing runs all day, I said

Sometimes it feels it isn't me who's speaking when I speak

Well, I am my own personal stranger

My own personal jerk emails me to say that *videographer* seems reductive
and “idk what happened but it happened”
and that he “like(d) having me as a friend”
and signed off *fart noise*
which is the part that made me sad, that asterisk jacket
I read that song diversity predicts the viability of fragmented bird populations
Whether they will live in the face of widespread anthropogenic habitat destruction
Basically the birds aren’t learning songs the way they used to
And they’re dying
A bird’s birdsong is its species language, special
I want this in this poem though it is already a poem
The birds, I mean; the singing
I learned to hide my body when I was young
How to be a highway and rest stop and dirt road and all-at-once
I believe that recreation is dangerous
As evidence: The Oregon Trail, developed as an educational computer game
As evidence: my childhood home in Indian Hills
As evidence: my faithful daily pop-up, telling me to update to macOS Mojave
As evidence: in 4th grade I made *mastaw* for Heritage Day and watched as everyone spit it out
I hadn’t known until that day how *sour* yogurt is
Whose idea was it to hold a Heritage Day?
Well, I’ve taught and failed children too
Sometimes italics really sting
In Kurdish *mastaw* means yogurt-water
Mast is yogurt, *aw* is water, and together they mean exactly what they mean
My mother called to say she is officially a master naturalist
She earned her certificate by weighing native birds

In the hand, she said, the body of a bird feels mostly empty
My own hands are dense and mechanically healing
How much can a project contain?
Well, I dreamt of wildflowers again
I dreamt I roamed the field and scattered a crafted mix from a bag labeled *fleurs sauvages*
What makes a flower wild?
Not my hand that casts its seed in soil and says, *now you can grow*
But maybe flowers can refuse domestication
Can grow wild, again, all on their own

AN ABRIDGED HISTORY OF BUTTONS

*The first were made as ornaments. A mud disk, spun until it buzzed.
Then, a method of adherence. This to that, a coat closed tight against the wind.*

*Bone, shell, and vegetable ivory; knobs of knotted rope.
To be tight in the right places; to suggest their own undoing.*

*Some, containing tiny iron needles pointing north to guide in war.
Or punched from the mother of pearl dragged up in Muscatine,*

*stripped of meat in chemical baths, workers paid by the blank
until the strike and town-wide riot. Before the ubiquitous toggle,*

*a simple switch. Then affixed to lettered slugs. Then digits and a circuit.
A keypad and cash register. Pressing and depressing.*

*Color coded to avoid grave error. A badge of counter-culture.
Then mass produced in plastic. 50,000 migrant workers, slap-bang*

*in the middle of nowhere. A thing that can be pressed toward irritation.
Or with quotation marks to emphasize the consequence.*

*To give illusory control at crosswalks and office thermostats.
To drop the mustard gas and then to fire the Tomahawks.*

*To begin and end the sanctions. To dial and to hang. To eject
or power on. Pause and rewind. And then a flat graphic. A coded event.*

*A box with a thin gray shadow. To login, reset, delete. To give consent.
Click submit. Click to like. To enter the site. To go back home.*

*Do you want to stay on this page? Do you want to leave without finishing? No,
Sometimes I wish to unknow North. Sometimes I don't want to be a form*

so easily undone.

REPORT OF THE EXCAVATION AT TELL SITAK

The shards found at Tell Sitak are mostly made of reddish earth,
some containing small white grit or chalk-like temper.

The site had been exposed during the dig to lay a concrete foot for a summer home
here in the sloping hills of Kurdistan, which in the springtime, turns to Eden,
where some say sheep and wheat first bent to human will.

This land is always shrinking, loose earth sliding toward the floors of the valleys,
which makes me worry for the mountains; for erosion and an earth gone flat.

There's no trace of the summer I spent here:

A glitch of new condos flank the hillside,
and when I ask, in halting Kurdish, where the school is, everyone says there isn't one.

Ten years ago, my grandpa says, my light was the only light the eye could see.
Now that I've come back he looks at me disdainfully, like I'm a condo and encroaching.

The older something is, the deeper it is buried.

The ruins here were further ruined by recent war and roots of oak,
but still, beneath remains of modern bombs, the dig reveals a fortress built by the Assyrians:

defensive walls of stone and three stone towers;

a courtyard floor incised with flowers;

baked bricks, a kiln, and iron slags;

in a threshold, three jars of living earth, each large enough to hold a child;

a fragment of a tablet pressed with wedges,

a record of the sale of seven people and a field.

Even then, this land was bought and sold.

DEAR: I am writing the alphabet with my left foot at five in the morning
I am peeling this moment and finding it skinned
Now, peering behind the heap where I think a man is skinning a sheep
A boy is sharpening knives on a bicycle
I am rubbing the leaves with milk to make them shine
The hard road is soft enough to become grooved where buses veer to bypass
I am not a flower, I said to the bee
Though I may turn my face to the light
Tomato, persimmon, persimmon
I will eat a nut before I sleep
I have been on this video call for months!

mewizh		raisins
mez		table
mezar		turban
daru		valley
darûn		inside
darwesh		dervish
chaw		eye
chawr		grease
chawsân		to suffer