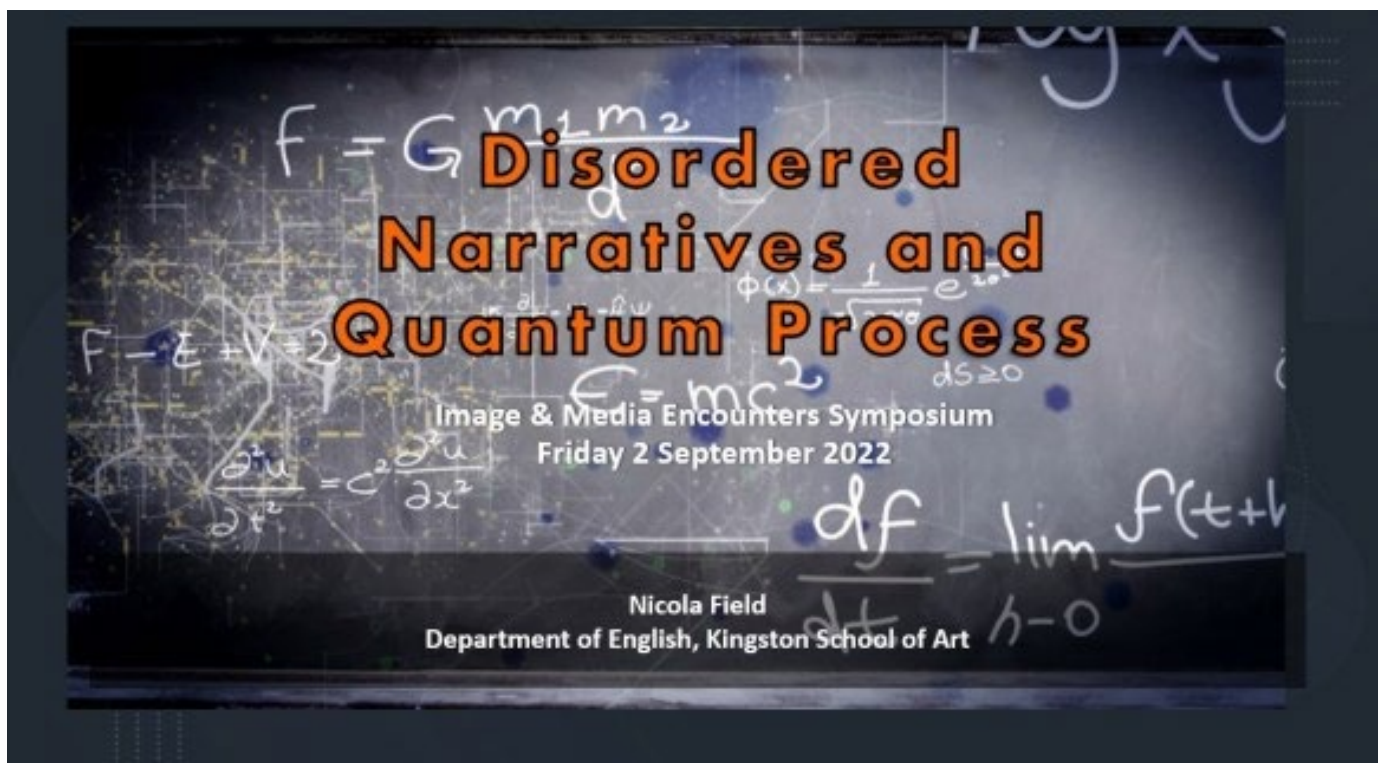


# Always, Often, Sometimes, Rarely, Never: Disordered Narratives & Quantum Process

Nicola Field 2022

An exploration of the use of metrics in mental health, by way of disordered poetics, visual text and the power of The Little Prince



First presented in shorter form at the  
**Image & Media Encounters Symposium**  
**2 September 2022**

*Kingston School of Art & Institute of Contemporary Arts*

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## INTRODUCTION

An exploration of the use of neoliberal use of metrics in public mental health assessment processes, by way of disordered poetics, visual text and the power of *The Little Prince*.

My research is part life-writing and part literary criticism, within a historical materialist critical framework. It's asking questions about the social basis of post-traumatic narratives in fiction and life-writing and calls for the development of a Marxist approach, through critical analysis and poetics, to family trauma as an endemic social experience in capitalist society.

The focal artwork of this project, below, is made by hand in graphite and watercolour and the original fills an A2-sized sheet of heavyweight cartridge paper.

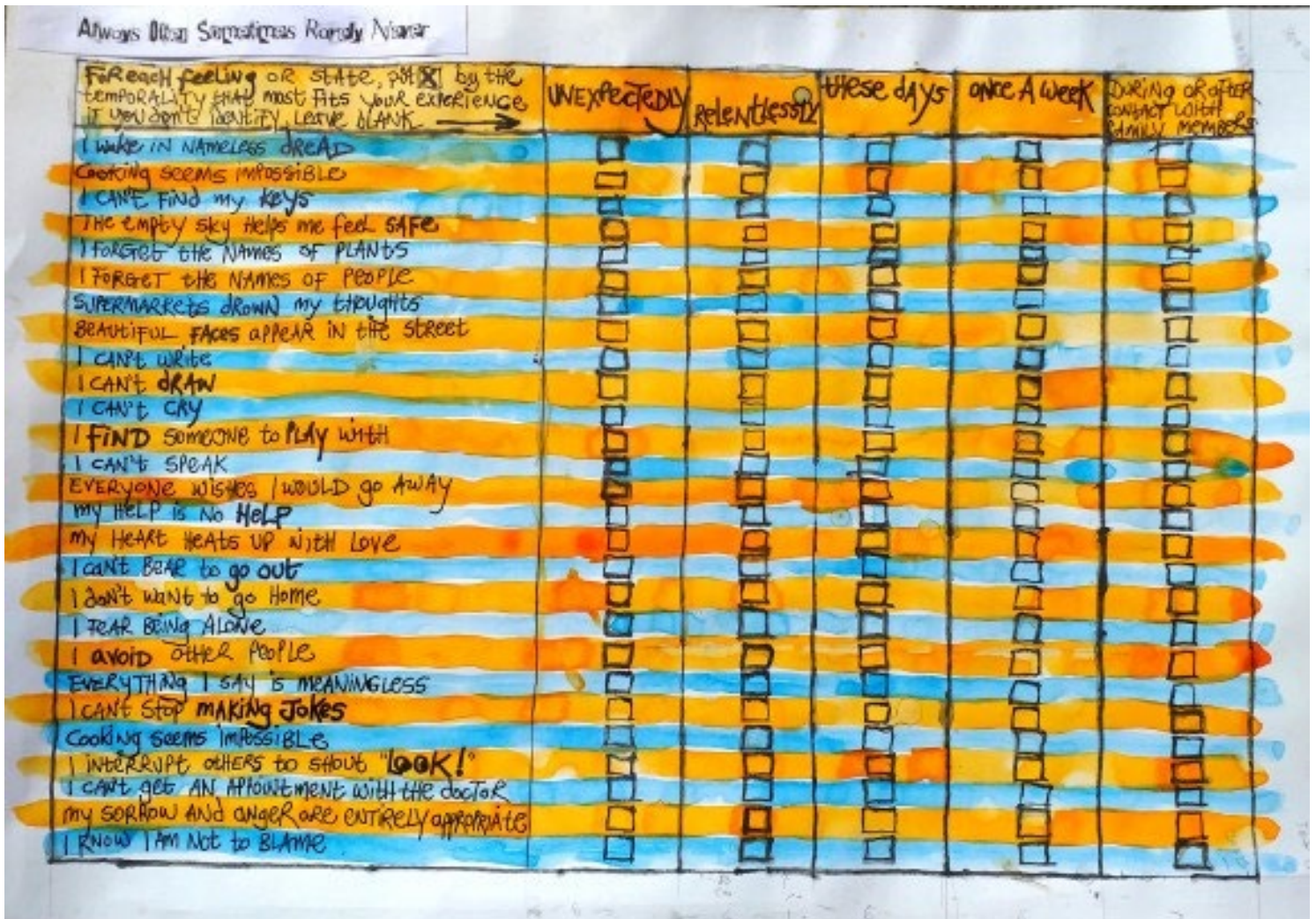


Figure 1 Always Often Sometimes Rarely Never mixed media on paper 2022

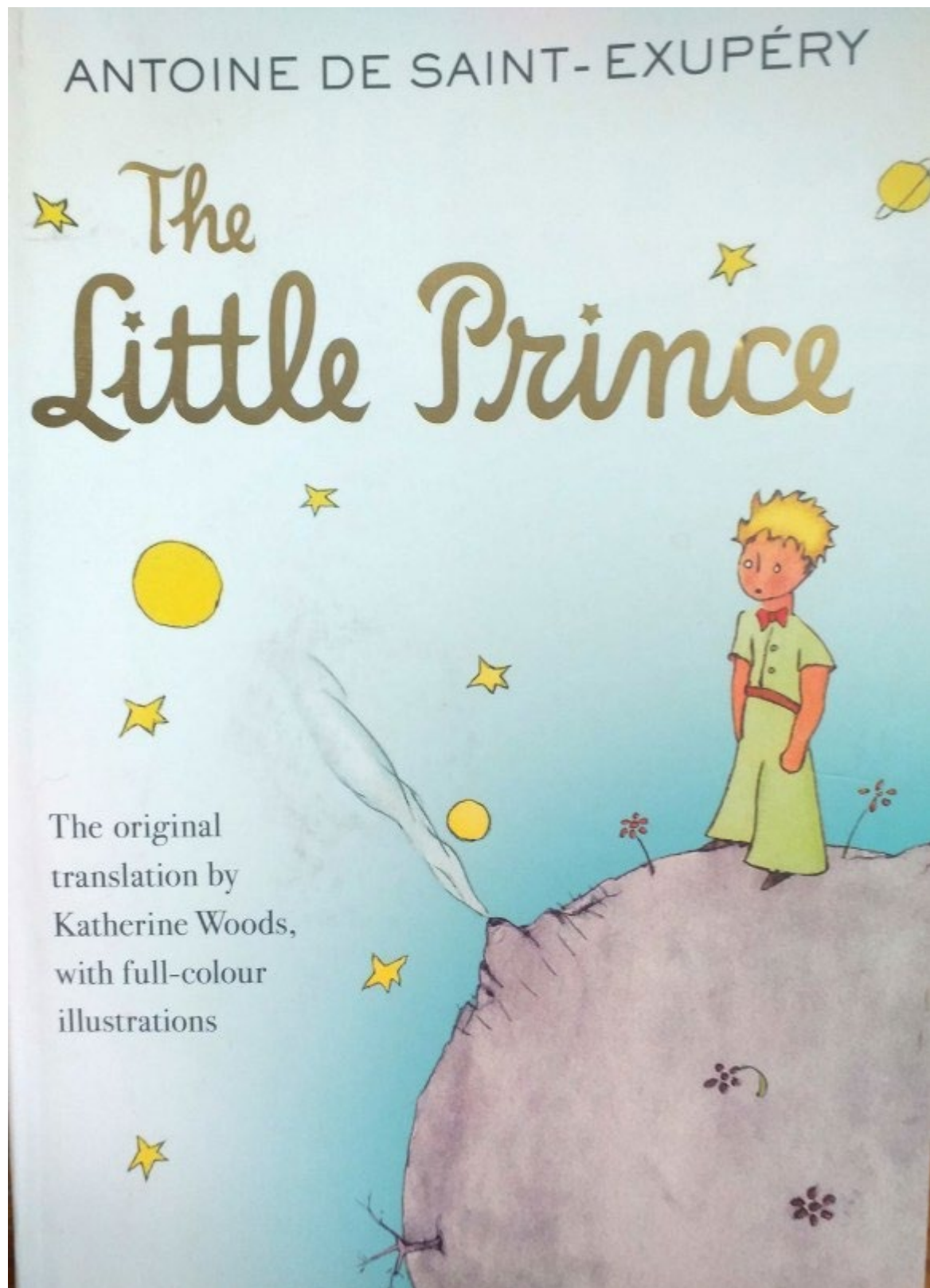
My methodology creates autoethnographic pieces combining visuals and text, through what I define as quantum process: elemental, experimental, scientific, disordered, neurodivergent and politically resistant. These perspectives are intertwining as I begin the second year of my part-time PhD research. Here are some examples of my drawings and visual-text journal entries:



Figure 2: Images from the journal mixed media on paper 2017-2022

### **METRICS AND BEING LOST IN A DESERT**

As an A-level student in the 1970s I studied *The Little Prince*, a picture-story book by the French writer, illustrator and aviator, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, published in America in 1943 during the author's exile from Vichy France after being labelled a 'defender of Jews'. It's a satirical fable about grief, loss and loneliness, narrated by a pilot who is desperately trying to repair his plane after crashing in the Sahara.



Cover of *The Little Prince*, Egmont, UK, 2001

The pilot meets the Little Prince, a visitor from Asteroid B-612 seeking a cure for loneliness. The Little Prince relates his journey of encounters on different planets with a series of characters – including a businessman, a

geographer, a rail worker, an alcoholic, a king – whose rationalised calculations and power-seeking strategies are exposed as self-defeating. On Earth, he befriends a fox who reveals:

*‘Here is my secret, a very simple secret: It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye.’*

(Antoine de Saint-Exupéry and Katherine Woods, *The Little Prince*, Farshore/HarperCollins 2017)

The Little Prince admonishes the interplanetary characters, and the narrator, to look beneath the surface of things, as children do, and this is the central theme of the book.

One passage resonated strongly with my teenage self and has stayed with me over the decades since I first read it. The pilot explains his own frustration with ‘the grown-ups and their ways’:

*‘Grown-ups love figures. When you tell them that you have made a new friend, they never ask you any questions about essential matters. They never say to you, “What does his voice sound like? What games does he love best? Does he collect butterflies?” Instead, they demand: “How old is he? How many brothers has he? How much does he weigh? How much money does his father make?” Only from these figures do they think they have learned anything about him.’*

(Antoine de Saint-Exupéry and Katherine Woods, *The Little Prince*, Farshore/HarperCollins 2017)

## **METRICS AND OBJECTIFICATION**

Why were these words so powerful for me?

First, I felt relentlessly judged on my vital statistics. Dress size, bra size, trouser size, shoe size, ring size. Weight, height, waist, bust, hips, shoe. The smaller was the better. My mother had trained in hairdressing and beauty culture and thereby had authority to explain how the dimensions and curvatures of eyes, eyebrows, chins, noses, cheeks, foreheads, earlobes, feet, hands, nails, knees and thighs were factorised into a grand system of ‘signs of beauty’. Length and shape of hair were supported or undermined by quality, grooming, cleanliness, shine and thickness.



Me, age 21

All body-shaming values and observations were backed up by teen comics, and women's magazines, fashion advertising, department stores, television dramas and boutique windows. My parents communicated with each other and their friends through sums of money, house prices, room sizes, garden dimensions, numbers of bedrooms, numbers of car doors, engine sizes, and portion sizes. Telephone numbers were stated slowly and proprietorially when anyone called. Eventually each aspect of this differentiated system of personal expression, social value and self identification began to enrage me. I became angry, disenfranchised, unloved and isolated. I am not in a position to quantify these emotions but I seem to be able to enumerate them.

Secondly, I often miscalculated. I said the wrong thing, did the wrong thing, put things in the wrong places, broke toys, cups and plates. I was sleepless, forgetful, impatient, frustrated, unhappy, angry and violent. I wanted connection, but it eluded me. People felt sorry for my parents for having me.

Nobody had heard of complex trauma, ADHD or dyspraxia in those days.

The physicist Carol Rovelli in his book *Reality is not What it Seems: The Journey to Quantum Gravity* (Penguin, 2017) writes:



*' Our culture is foolish to keep science and poetry separated: they are two tools to open our eyes to the complexity and beauty of the world!'*

Carlo Rovelli

*Reality is not What it Seems: The Journey to Quantum Gravity, 2016*

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## **NEURODIVERGENCE: AT THE NEXUS OF POETRY AND SCIENCE**

In their essay *The Little Prince: a glimpse into the world of autism?*, Jean-Francois Lemay, Genevieve Eastabrook, and Heather Mackenzie (<https://doi.org/10.1136/ARCHDISCHILD-2017-313935>) raise the question of neurodivergence as a central theme and a driver of the narrative modes of the book. They cite three central characteristics of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) which they see represented in the character of the Little Prince:

1. Deficits in reciprocity, communication and social skills
2. Restricted and repetitive behaviours
3. Anxiety and depression

The article authors suggest that *The Little Prince* is potentially Saint-Exupéry's self-portrait and a plea for understanding of the social awkwardness, moodiness difference and childlike naivety he experienced and revealed in his own autobiographical sketches. The early definition of ASD – Asperger's Syndrome – was just coming to social and scientific

attention. They highlight the Little Prince's 'egocentrism' in interaction as comparable to those of people with ASD who have 'an inability to understand ... tacit, constantly changing rules governing social behaviour':

*'The Little Prince does not appear to understand social distance and authority when relating to others. Rarely does he feel compelled to use social niceties. Typically, he just begins talking to those he encounters and is described on several occasions as going away puzzled mid-conversation, often talking to himself. The Little Princess is bewildered by social roles. He is confused when the King refers to him as "a subject". He wonders aloud, "How could he recognise me as a subject when he had never seen me before?"... Throughout the story, he blurts out orders to the pilot. Even [when they first meet] when the pilot is attempting to repair his airplane, the Little Prince repeatedly asks him to draw a picture of sheep. When the pilot complies, the Little Prince tells him to redraw it because it appears "very sickly" and "too old", seeming to be oblivious to the pilot's increasing frustration.'*

Here are the drawings the Little Prince rejects for being 'sickly', too ram-like and 'too old':

“It is a sheep. Draw me a sheep.”

I made a drawing.

He looked at it carefully, then he said:

“This sheep is already very sickly.

Draw me another.”

I made another drawing.

He smiled gently and indulgently.

“Draw yourself,” he said, “that this is not

just a sheep. It has horns.”

I did my drawing over once more.

It was rejected too, just like the others.

“This is too old. I want a sheep

that is young.”

At last, when my patience was exhausted,

I drew in a hurry to start taking my engine

away with me. I passed off this drawing.



The Little Prince, 2017, p7

I take these issues up as a touchstone for the poetic expression of neurodivergence. The experience of being constantly not understood, and deemed ‘weird’, ‘rude’ and ‘not normal’ was an everyday part of my own childhood. However, the effort of living with that lostness and wounding, crying out for fairness, fighting in my rage and frustration – and the relentless pressure to conform and mask, ensured that the character of the Little Prince spoke to me only limply as a simpleton who would never pass exams or earn money. And that way lay a kind of living

decomposition. There was no room in my home, my school or in any other part of my life, for being different. I agreed with his reasoning, but my conformity, and need to try to get love, filtered my response so I looked down on his naivety, much as my own was despised by others. By the time I read *The Little Prince* I was fully focussed on compensating for impulsivity through dogged academic progress and unpaid social justice activism. Which came first – the trauma or the neurodivergence?

I am not equating ASD with ADHD, but I am drawing an autoethnographical connection between my visceral identification with the story of *The Little Prince* through the question of neurodivergent approaches to social and personal relationships. Through my research I am uncovering indications that trauma effects in the body, through neurodivergence, undercut the hegemonic norms of social interaction which require working-class people to observe social inequality as a natural environmental condition. We learn to be afraid of authority, to defer and hold back. We are conditioned to live within normalised unequal social relationships. Neurodivergent people frequently cannot understand these nuanced behaviours that have become 'second nature' to others. Are we therefore a kind of anti-capitalist, or resistant social element, people who can point to more authentic forms of interaction?

## FUNCTION AND FEELING

Always Often Sometimes Rarely Never

For each feeling or state, write by the frequency that most fits your experience if you don't usually have blank	Unexpectedly	Relentlessly	these days	once a week	during or after contact with daily memories
I LIVE IN NAMELESS DREAD	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
COOKING SEEMS IMPOSSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I CAN'T FIND MY KEYS	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
THE EMPTY SKY HELPS ME FEEL SAFE	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I FORGET THE NAMES OF PLANTS	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I FORGET THE NAMES OF PEOPLE	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
SUPERMARKETS DROWN MY THOUGHTS	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
BEAUTIFUL FACES APPEAR IN THE STREET	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I CAN'T WRITE	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I CAN'T DRAW	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I CAN'T CRY	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I FIND SOMEONE TO PLAY WITH	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I CAN'T SPEAK	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
EVERYONE WISHES I WOULD GO AWAY	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
MY HELP IS NO HELP	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
MY HEART HEATS UP WITH LOVE	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I CAN'T BARE TO GO OUT	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I DON'T WANT TO GO HOME	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I FEAR BEING ALONE	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I AVOID OTHER PEOPLE	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
EVERYTHING I SAY IS MEANINGLESS	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I CAN'T STOP MAKING JOES	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
COOKING SEEMS IMPOSSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I INTERRUPT OTHERS TO SHOUT "LOOK!"	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I CAN'T GET AN APPOINTMENT WITH THE DOCTOR	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
MY SORROW AND ANGER ARE ENTIRELY APPROPRIATE	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I KNOW I AM NOT TO BLAME	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Always Often Sometimes Rarely Never

## METRICS, MEANING AND IDEOLOGY

Here is the reason I made **Always Often Sometimes Rarely Never**:

In 2017, I was diagnosed complex PTSD resulting from developmental experiences. In 2019, I was required to complete this form at the beginning and end of specialised trauma therapy. It is very widely used. It's called: Clinical Outcomes in Routine Evaluation – Outcome Measure, or CORE OM.

## Clinical Outcomes in Routine Evaluation

<b>Therapist Name:</b>		<b>Date:</b>	
<b>Patient Name:</b>		<b>Trust ID Number:</b>	

### Outcome Measure (CORE-OM)

This form has 34 statements about how you have been OVER THE LAST WEEK. Please read each statement and think how often you felt that way last week. Then tick/cross the box which is closest to it.

		Not at all	Only occasionally	Sometimes	Often	Most or all of the time
1	I have felt terribly alone and isolated					
2	I have felt tense, anxious or nervous					
3	I have felt I have someone to turn to for support when needed					
4	I have felt OK about myself					
5	I have felt totally lacking energy and enthusiasm					
6	I have been physically violent to others					
7	I have felt able to cope when things go wrong					
8	I have been troubled by aches, pains or other physical problems					
9	I have thought of hurting myself					
10	Talking to people has felt too much for me					
11	Tension and anxiety have prevented me doing important things					

**Over the last week:**

		Not at all	Only occasionally	Sometimes	Often	Most or all of the time
12	I have been happy with the things I have done					
13	I have been disturbed by unwanted thoughts and feelings					
14	I have felt like crying					
15	I have felt panic or terror					
16	I have made plans to end my life					
17	I have felt overwhelmed by my problems					
18	I have had difficulty getting to sleep or staying asleep					
19	I have felt warmth or affection for someone					
20	My problems have been impossible to put to one side					
21	I have been able to do most things I needed to					
22	I have threatened or intimidated another person					
23	I have felt despairing or hopeless					

Along the top there are measures of repetition and frequency – temporality choices:

<b>Not at all</b>	<b>Only occasionally</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Often</b>	<b>Most or all of the time</b>
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Down the left-hand side are 34 ‘feeling statements’. They include:

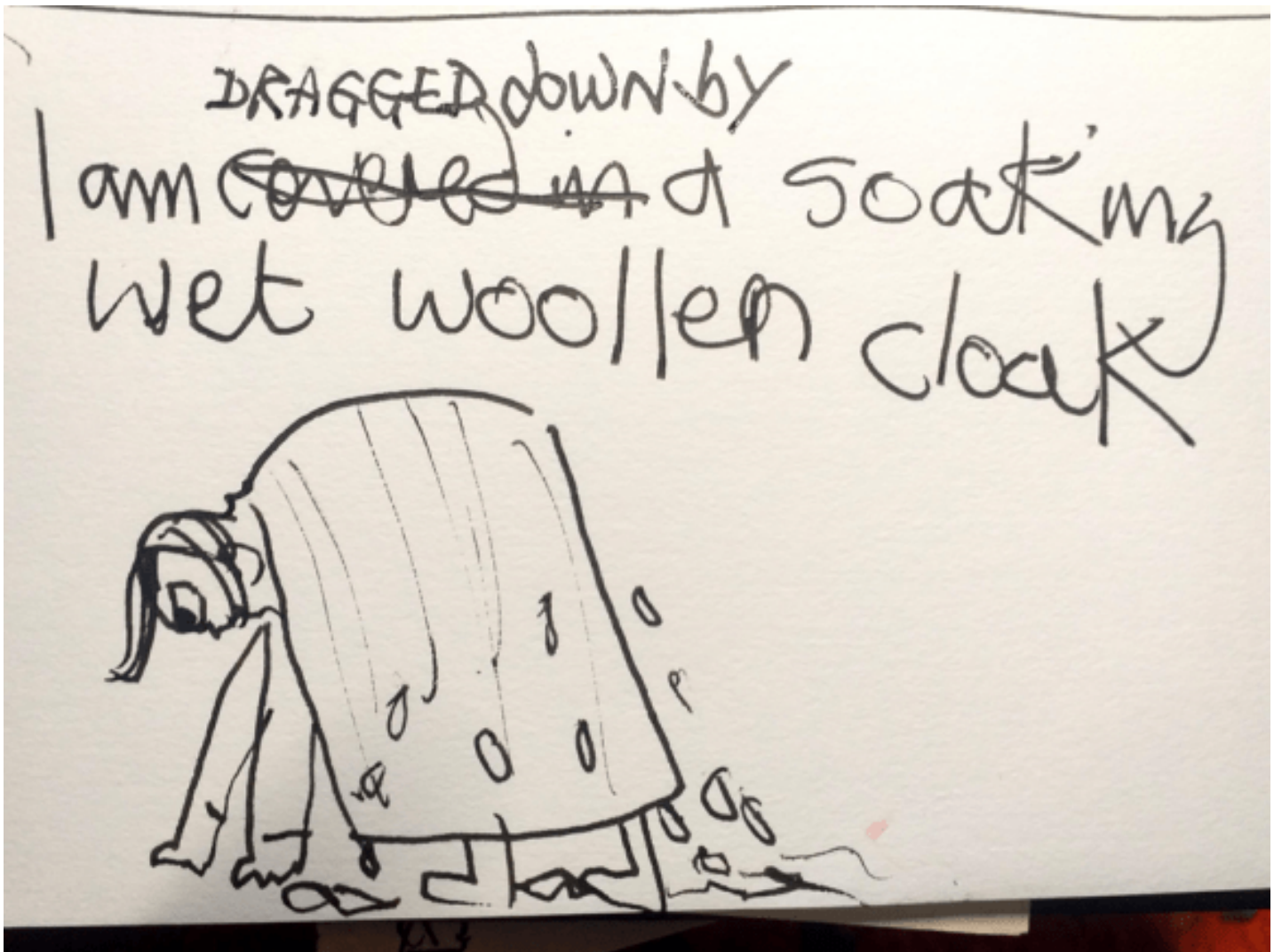
- I have thought I am to blame for my problems and difficulties
- I have felt warmth or affection for someone
- I have felt terribly alone and isolated
- Tension and anxiety have prevented me doing important things

There is a forced framing in this system. Emotions must be expressed by or translated into the given language. You can’t express your own feeling but you have to spot the similarity between your inner life and the words that have come from an anonymous clinical source, and most likely on a hard copy that has been photocopied badly.

People with PTSD and undiagnosed neurodivergence won’t be spotted or included by this screening mechanism. PTSD is characterised by dissociation – involuntary zoning out, numbing and distracting. Giving a snap answer, or any answer can be impossible.

For me, drawing or acting a feeling is far more expressive. I’ve produced a couple of quick sketches for this project, shown below.

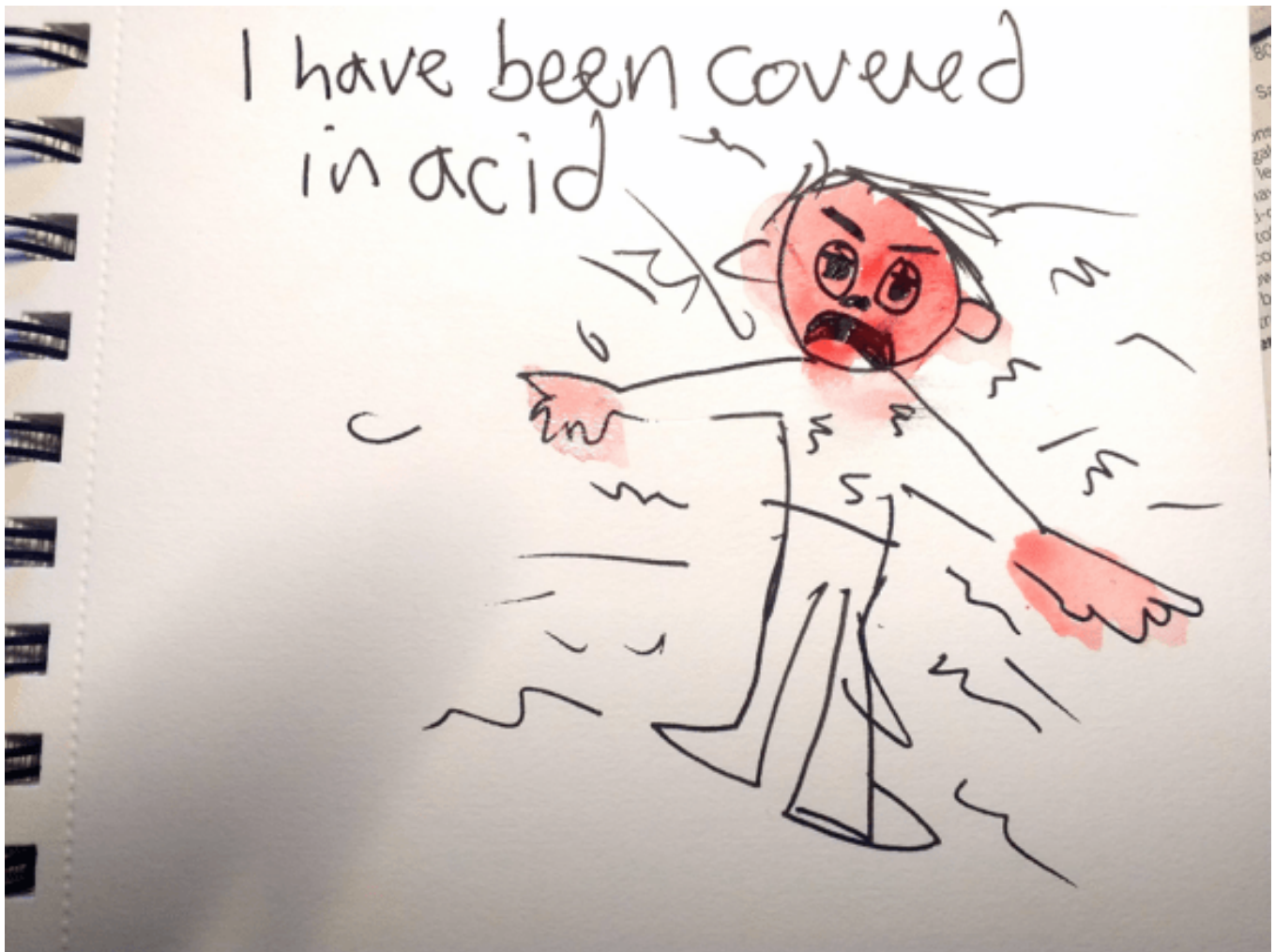
The first is: 'I am dragged down by a soaking wet woollen cloak'



This feeling could possibly translate into:

**Question 5: 'I have felt totally lacking energy and enthusiasm'**

The second sketch is 'I have been covered in acid'



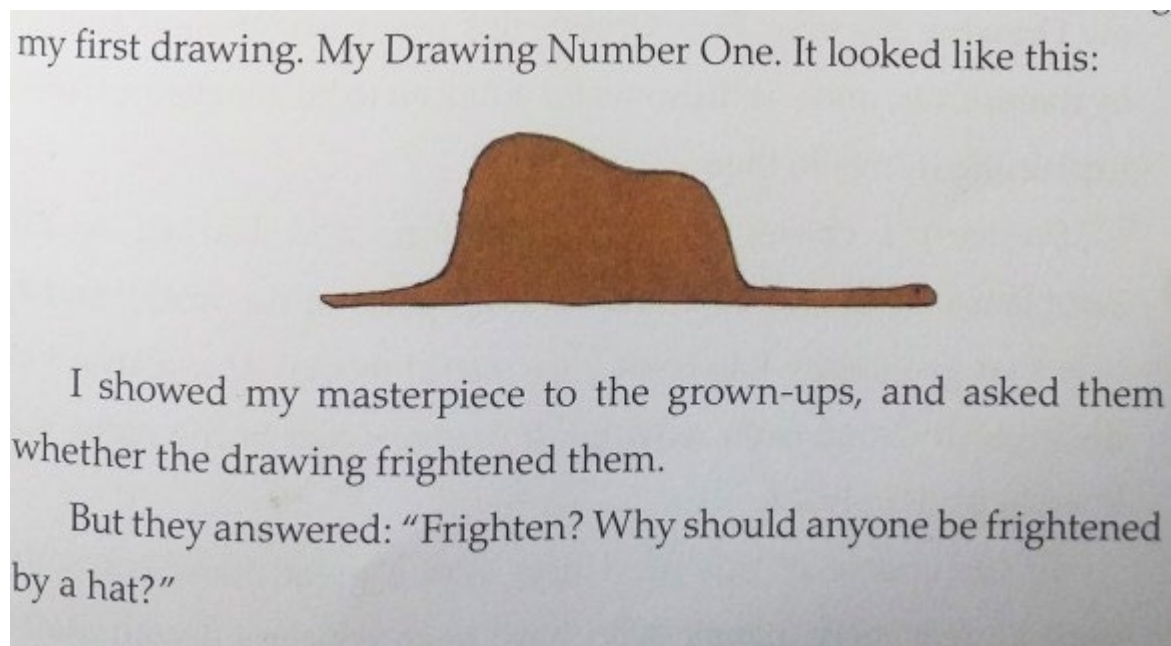
This one might have to be covered by:

**Question 33: 'I have felt humiliated or shamed by other people'**

It's an opportunity to reflect on the role of the drawings. Would the sense and sensation of the statements be equally expressive without the drawings? Could the drawings still express without the words? Perhaps there would be sense and sensation, but perhaps the drawings add something else. For me, the spiky, spidery way I draw fast and shape the faces and bodies is a visceral message from my embodied emotion which I think uses no analytical thought or planning. The drawings are like the gestures I use in conversation, melodramatic perhaps, but to be

understood by those who can. Some rear back, frown and seem repulsed by the unskilful raw expression. Others chuckle and nod.

Drawings are similarly intrinsic and pivotal to the language of *The Little Prince*. The first chapter uses illustration to articulate the pilot-narrator's own difficulties with being understood, and demonstrates the impossibility of 'grown-ups' ability to see 'what is invisible to the eye'. He shows a drawing he made, aged six, 'a picture of a boa constrictor digesting an elephant' (below) and asked them whether the drawing frightened them':

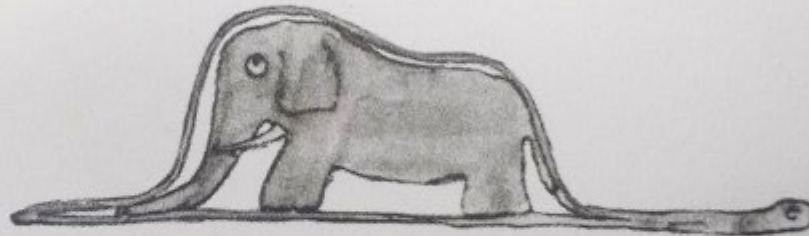


*The Little Prince*, 2017

'But they answered: "Frighten? Why should anyone be frightened of a hat?"'

Note the eye on the snake! So he draws a cross-section 'so the grown-ups could see it clearly':

the boa constrictor, so that the grown-ups could see it c  
always need to have things explained. My Drawing N  
looked like this:



e grown-ups' response, this time, was to advise me  
my drawings of boa constrictors, whether from the  
outside, and devote myself instead to geography,  
etic...

*The Little Prince*, 2017, p2

Notice again the eye. However, the grown-ups tell the boy pilot-narrator to set aside drawing and concentrate on formal education. He reflects that geography has been useful for flying planes, but says:

*'In the course of this life I have had a great many encounters with a great many people who have been concerned with matters of consequence. I have lived a great deal among grown-ups. I have seen them intimately, close at hand. And that hasn't much improved my opinion of them. Whenever I met one who seemed to me at all clear-sighted, I tried the experiment of showing him my Drawing Number one, which I have always kept.... But, whoever it was, he, or she, would always say: "That is a hat."'*

I read this opening chapter as a powerful affective statement of alienation, of isolation and the impossibility of being understood, and the resignation in the child and the adult-child, to never being fully seen or recognised. In their article on autism in *The Little Prince*, Lemay et al translate this

sadness into impairment of the neurodivergent's capacity to interact. They say:

'This impairment in two-way interaction is one of the obvious and most debilitating characteristics of autism. Lack of social reciprocity is not due to a desire to withdraw from social contact.'

This provokes difficult personal memories for me of being criticised as abnormal and of 'setting myself apart' for spending time alone in my room in the days before personal computers, mobile phones and the internet. I needed to be alone to be the person who could read and write what I wanted to read and write. If I had had a social environment where what I wanted to read and write was welcomed and recognised, and where welcoming silence was possible, rather than the din of what was regarded as normal family life, perhaps I would not have set myself apart, then or now.

In Chapter 2, having crashed in the Sahara, the pilot is stranded with only enough drinking water for a week. He 'was more isolated than a shipwrecked sailor on a raft... Thus you can imagine my amazement, at sunrise, when I was awakened by an odd little voice. It said: "If you please – draw me a sheep!"'

We saw above the three drawings of a sheep which the pilot dashed off, which did not satisfy the Little Prince. The picture below shows the final drawing he scrawls:

“What I need is a sheep. Draw me a sheep.”  
So then I made a drawing.  
He looked at it carefully, then he said:  
“No. This sheep is already very sickly.  
Draw me another.”



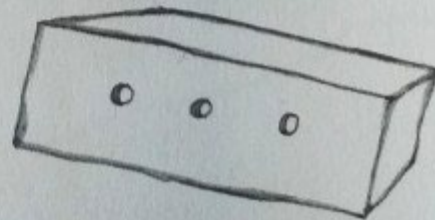
I made another drawing.  
My friend smiled gently and indulgently.  
“You see yourself,” he said, “that this is not  
a sheep. This is a ram. It has horns.”  
So then I did my drawing over once more.  
But it was rejected too, just like the others.  
“This one is too old. I want a sheep  
that will live a long time.”



This time my patience was exhausted,  
and I was in a hurry to start taking my engine  
apart. I tossed off this drawing.  
I threw out an explanation



“This is only his box. The sheep  
is inside.”



My friend was very surprised to see a light break

The Little Prince, p7

It's a sheep in a box, and the Little Prince is delighted with it. In that simple, imaginative representation, the two characters are united as kindred

spirits, and their affective relationship, which not to say it is without conflict, begins.

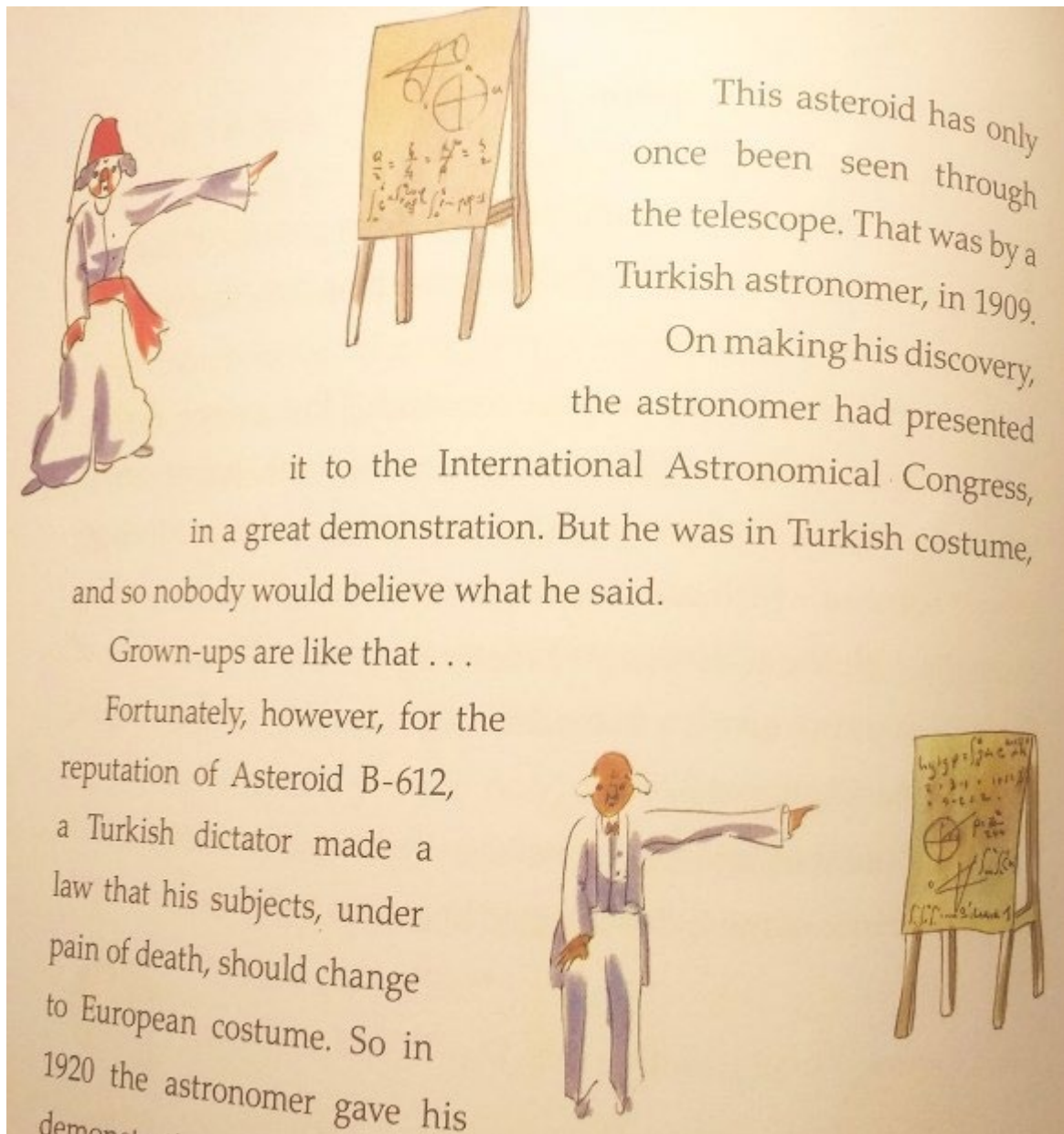
People who have been wounded by traumatic events are also characterised by compulsive hypervigilance, and rigid self-reliance – which are not present on the form but widely experienced. So, we don't even have a trauma-informed mental health diagnostic assessment system, let alone a trauma-informed society.

On the CORE OM form, the respondent is advised to answer quickly without thinking much, so there is a sense of chucking anything down just to finish it – and the therapist did instruct me to do this. But I can't express that visceral sensation through the format of the grid. The technicality immediately sends me into attempts to calculate, and to check my calculations to make sure they are right.

On the surface of this, it may seem that Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, and I as his reader, and as a practice-based researcher, may reject figures and metrics altogether. Saint-Exupéry resists the language-world of 'grown-ups' with its evaluations, lack of attunement and imagination. I resist the social systems of capitalist society: they crush human potential and creativity – and I am critiquing marketised metrics as a tool in these systems. However, as Rovelli has asserted, we need both science and poetry – beauty and measurement are intertwined in understanding inner life in our society.

Numbers in themselves are not 'bad'. It is how they are collected and used that matters. If they are used as a tool to straiten, distort, narrow, fog, normalise and homogenise, that is problematic. If they illuminate, reveal and get to the heart of the matter, show 'what is invisible to the eye', they can be part of authenticising, of liberating truth from ideological obfuscation.

Saint-Exupéry's pilot-narrator identifies the little prince's home planet as Asteroid-B612, discovered by a Turkish astronomer in 1909 but only verified in 1920 when the astronomer wore European clothing, as illustrated:



*The Little Prince*, p12

This quantitative detail, the narrator asserts, 'is on no account of the grown up as and their ways'.

So, in scattering facts and figures by inserting feeling and poetry, to what purpose are numbers rearranged? The narrator believes that grown-ups won't be interested in the Little Prince's charm, his laughter, or his wish for a sheep. They will be interested in the fact that he came from Asteroid B-612, a 'fact' and a 'figure' which obscures what is important. For this reader, the importance of the naming of the asteroid in *The Little Prince* is how this 'fact' and 'figure' are used to expose racism in science, and the

colonisation of Eastern discoveries in astronomy by Western systems of provenance.

### **THEIR FIGURES – AND OURS**

We certainly need to make use of metrics as a tool for seeing ‘what is essential’ and what is ‘invisible to the eye’. Since 2010 there has been a devastating reduction in mental health services, especially for children and young people. The number of acute beds has reduced by a third. In completing the CORE-OM form, there could therefore be a temptation to exaggerate in order to try and get help – because very many referrals are rejected.

Alternatively, such is the stigma of ‘mental illness’, there could be a temptation to downplay problems. Or in people who have lived a long time with mental distress in their lives, so that discomfort, panic and fear are normalised, there can be in denial. In my family of origin, being unhappy is normal in my family for instance. Coping is compulsory.



Melanie Field, Jill Field, John Field. Nicola Field, photographer unknown, 1964.

To my knowledge, this is the only photograph in existence of the entire family group. The mark on my cheek was the result of an infection that

spontaneously developed that year. My normally straight hair had been curled on rollers. I was 4.

So, having made these observations, and been through the experience of the questionnaire, I felt the need to critique, politicise and poeticise.

My art piece takes the spacetime of the metrical questionnaire and inserts different matter, different material. It's addressing function and feeling. But it is reflecting my own experience in my own terms: imagery, concept, metaphors, temporality. The language of affect and disorder.

### **ALWAYS OFTEN SOMETIMES RARELY NEVER: PRODUCING AND PROCESSING**

Along the top the temporalities are redefined as:

- Unexpectedly
- Relentlessly
- These days
- Once a week
- During or after contact with family members

Down the side are a series of list of 'feeling statements':

- I wake in nameless dread
- Cooking seems impossible
- I can't find my keys
- The empty sky helps me feel safe
- I forget the names of plants
- I forget the names of people
- Supermarkets drown my thoughts
- Beautiful faces appear in the street
- I can't write

- I can't draw
- I can't cry
- I find someone to play with
- I can't speak
- Everyone wishes I would go away
- My help is no help
- My heart heats up with love
- I can't bear to go out
- I don't want to go home
- I fear being alone
- I avoid other people
- Everything I say is meaningless
- I can't stop making jokes
- Cooking seems impossible
- I interrupt others to shout 'LOOK!'
- I can't get an appointment with the doctor
- My sorrow and anger are entirely appropriate
- I know that I am not to blame.

The photographs below document the physical process of making:





PTSD can generate multiplying details with the power of quicksand. I frequently drown in my details, my unmanageable ideas, and have to go to bed. It takes me weeks to formulate even a short presentation like this.

My research into the poetics of trauma and identification with non-linear narrative, draws on Meg Jensen's chapter *Surviving the Wreck* in the 2016 book *Bodies in Transition and the Point of Autobiographical Fiction*. She writes:

**'Traumatic experience disrupts normal memory processes ... narrative incoherence is itself an emblematic symptom ... chronologically arranged narratives and trauma are at cross purposes.'**

She outlines characteristics of post-traumatic narrative:

**Meg Jensen**  
*Bodies in Transition and the Point of Autobiographical Fiction, 2016*

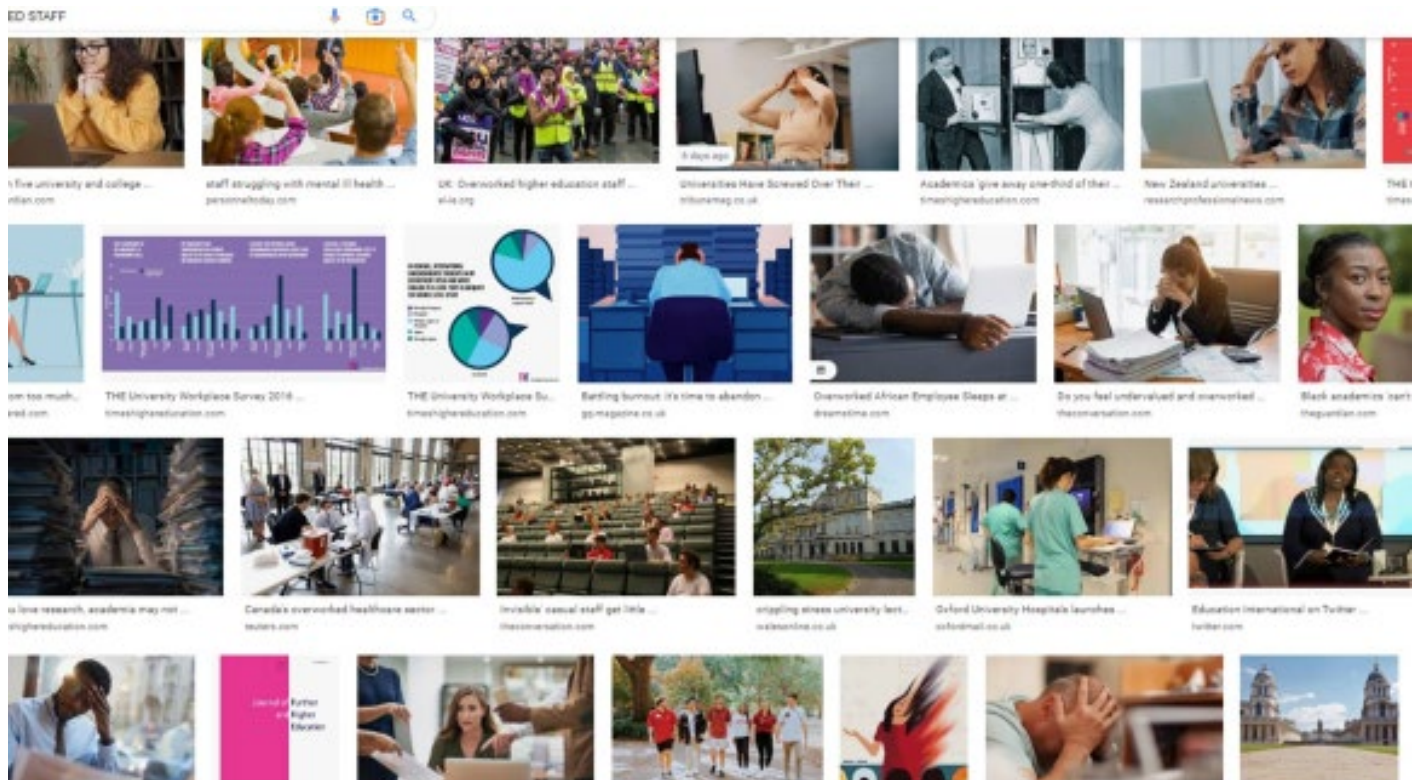
Characteristics of post-traumatic narrative :

- Repetition
- Non-linearity, fragmentary
- Prolivity, verbosity
- Mind-body splitting
- Inconsistency in telling and re-telling

Inconsistency occurs because many people with trauma never tell their story the same way twice. Many trauma victims are disbelieved or disregarded because their 'story' does not **'add up'**.

## SAND IN OUR EYES

Metrics are widely used in mental health sectors to identify and measure inner life experience – panic, sadness, loneliness, fear and so on – in clinical rather than social terms. They are a discourse of denial, denial of family trauma, workplace stress, racism, homophobia, transphobia, disablism, poor housing, lack of childcare, poverty, escalating living costs. They are therefore part of the creation and development of languages and concepts which can adapt or co-opt human experience into marketised healthcare and working environments, turning the complexities of psychological and material truths into the building blocks of a well-being agenda that puts the responsibility for workplace stress onto individual workers. Metrics can either tell a truthful story about the social experience of trauma and distress, or strip the scene of its social and political context. In our higher education sector, metrics are used in a material and ideological way. They define what constitute progress and outcomes. They are used to shape policy and generalise measurable frameworks. They are used to wipe out the crises of our current experiences: overwork and illness, inequality, low pay, casualisation, pension attacks.



Stress, overwork, inequality, casualisation and low pay currently dominate the experience of working in higher education in the UK

However, our reality can be supported by statistics on these questions. For instance, the pay freeze for teaching staff since 2009 amounts to a 20% pay cut. The pitiful 3% pay increase can be compared with the latest RPI inflation rate of 12.3%. The Vice Chancellor of Kingston University was paid £352k in 2021 – risen from £190k in 2016. These are the kind of facts and figures that can inspire the action that can bring about change.



Kingston UCU joined Wimbledon RMT on the picket line, 27th July 2022

### **CORE OM: A WARNING FROM OUR HISTORY**

Kitty McCrea managed the student counselling service at De Montfort University, Leicester. When Kitty first suggested using CORE in 2002, the counselling team were opposed, to the extent of threatening industrial action. Kitty explains ‘I decided to implement CORE not because we were under pressure to demonstrate outcomes, but to get a grip on what was happening in the service’, says Kitty. ‘I saw it as an opportunity to revise everything we did.... Unfortunately I was then faced with a collective grievance, which meant that I was unable to fully introduce CORE for a further 12 months.’

(John Mellor-Clark, CORE: A Decade of Development, CORE Information Management Systems Ltd., 2007)

So university support staff, qualified counsellors, also disagreed with this form, but were railroaded into accepting it, as was I.

## **CONCLUSION**

As a researcher and socialist, I am determined that my multidisciplinary methods should be put to radical political uses in advocating for trauma-informed services at all levels of society, but also in calling for the kind of revolutionary social change that can put people's needs before profit.

And as an artist I want to continue to ask about the dialectical, quantum relationships between the structures of capitalist society, and the fragmentary discourses of inner life, because these dimensions, which go above, beyond and below the 'common sense' official discourses of capitalist society, tell a story of a world that needs to be changed.



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