Despite the apparent speed with which global events shuttle over the weir, the detritus of lies and misinformation polluting the water remain buoyant and unmoving. According to PolitiFact, 70% of U.S. President Donald Trump's statements in office have been false. On the same scale, his predecessor, Barack Obama, scored 24%, and his opponent in the 2012 presidential election, Mitt Romney, 40%. Coupled with the fantasies and lies underlying the campaign for Britain's vote to leave the European Union in 2016, we seem to have consciously entered an era of constant and obvious misinformation in current affairs — without even asking that the grand liars do what politicians and leaders have done for millennia: lie without getting caught.

The question then becomes: what do we do — or, more specifically, write — in an era of bad liars? To this there is only one known answer: something inadequate. At least, this is the only thing to have been written so far; it can take time to get used to living with deceit, and even more so with the flagrant, brazen deceit practised by abusers and megalomaniacs. This strain of deceit is particularly difficult to deal with because there is no established method of 'dealing with it' beyond ignoring its pedlars. No apology will ever come from a recreational liar, and this is the first thing to realise about writing in the modern day: it won't elicit an apology from anyone who should be making one, and on this basis the socially transformative possibilities of the written word have lost much of their traditional power.

Without any plausible alternative to help us reconstruct this dissolute world at variance with itself, we live in a provisional and fugitive moment. It won't hold for long, and soon a direction will begin its ineluctable pull. Before we reach the point when this elastic period of lies and negotiation becomes taut and snappable, it must instead be transmuted into material of a different kind. For the writer, with whom we are most concerned here, this act of political alchemy is almost always instigated by tinkering with the elemental atoms of her craft, which together comprise literary form. Most popularly credited with illustrating the power of form are the modernists, and many like Billy Childish and Stuckism International advocate imitating the fierce innovations in literature heralded by the Vorticists and Pound. But where literary modernism threaded its way into the tight weave of its historical moment — a moment of unprecedented social change and global violence — it is difficult to suggest that much of what passes for formal ambition in this, our own unprecedented moment, prioritises anything, let alone history or society, over gross, late-capitalist aestheticism.

Which is not to say that the fragmentation of form and the playful elision of experiential meaning by the postmodern wave did not arise out of its own historical moment, nor that it holds no value as a literary movement per se. It is simply that it has fulfilled its purpose and outlived its moment. As Agamben notes:

> When humankind is deprived of effective experience and becomes subjected to the imposition of a form of experience as controlled and manipulated as a laboratory maze for rats - in other words, when the only possible experience is horror or lies - then the rejection of experience can provisionally embody a legitimate defence.[1]

It is simply as part of the second step — which, as noted, has to be taken whether we like it or not — that we argue for a disavowal of the provisional, perfectly legitimate defence offered up by postmodernism, and advocate a renewed interest in a literature freighted with meaning. Only then might we see the cold green legs of experience unfurl from its shell and find renewed purchase in the mud.

Crucially, the consequences of this thought do not begin and end in the art world. The retreat of traditional forms like the essay or even the article from public discourse does much to obscure and

polarise our politics. As exploited by groups like Cambridge Analytica, rapid-fire formats like tweets and comments do little to carry transformative debate and instead reduce opinion-forming to a matter of constant reinforcement. Given this frame of discussion, politics can only implode into an art defined by the vague, promising soundbite: 'Brexit means Brexit', 'Make America Great Again'. In essence, politics becomes an overmighty marketing contest.

This era of misinformation and bad liars makes for a historical moment where it can feel vitiating and dreadful to sit down at a desk and start to write, especially with the hope to communicate something important; where it is tempting to surrender to Woolf's glum formulation in The Waves that 'there is neither rhyme nor reason when a drunk man staggers about with a club in his hand'.2 This kind of apathy relies on some obscure faith in the power of the status quo. It only makes sense to do nothing if we fundamentally believe that things will always remain acceptable. History, however, does not proceed on some inevitable path of progress or stability. Belief in the ultimate security and goodness of ourselves and our world is a luxury not afforded to our generation. We must acknowledge that we cannot only hope for a better world — we must actively try to change it.

Escape from our current paradigm lies, perhaps, in a return to basics; most irreverently, in an era of anonymous information, a revival in the warm, human relationship between artist and audience. The void of this relationship is apparent in both the disrespect afforded to others by demagogic liars and the self-important, self-concerned poise of bad art. Prose, as the backbone to our engagement with the media, academia and communication at large, is a necessary component of this experiment. This is not to proclaim the ready-made inception of a new mode of art and communication in this magazine; after all, art that still resonates through air grown thick about our heads is the dream of many but the action of few. We do believe, however, that the pieces in this edition begin to hum with that possibility.

Christian Moore and Harry Downes

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Endnotes

1 Giorgio Agamben, *Infancy and History: The Destruction of Experience* (1978: Reprint, New York: Verso, 1993), p.16.

2 Woolf, Virginia, *The Waves* (1931: Reprint, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015) p.159.