

COPPER

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Copper,  
and its alloys.

*Standing there on the embankment, Staring into the current,  
I realized that – in spite of all the risks involved – a thing in  
motion will always be better than a thing at rest; that Change  
will always be a nobler thing than permanence; that that which  
is static will degenerate and decay, turn to ash, while that  
which is in motion is able to last for all eternity.*

Olga Tokarczuk, *Flights*. 2019.

Once a thing is set in motion, it is inertia that continues to propel it along the same trajectory. If no force acts against it, it will continue at the same rate for eternity. This is how meteors move through the vacuum of space, hurtling at thousands of kilometers per second, forever, unless they meet an opposing force: they collide with another body, or their trajectory is warped by a gravitational pull.

When a meteor enters the Earth's atmosphere, the friction caused by our dense air burns the surface, it is set aflame, giving them tails of light, and for those large enough to not be burnt completely before impacting, this friction leaves thumb-sized pockmarks across their surface.

As they draw closer, our languages also change to accommodate their new qualities. In English, once on the ground this dimpled stone is called a meteorite and in German, it is almost the same, *Meteor* becomes *Meteorit*. In Ngunnawal, the language of the first inhabitants of the region where Australia's capital city, Canberra, now stands, the words for these phenomena have been lost. The closest I can find is *gurbung*, which means, simply, *rock*.

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The thing about the Law of Motion is that it ties all material together: all our composite, tiny parts that at any given time are momentarily distributed into all of the Universe's varied forms, are all bumping about under the same rules. Humming, repelling, attracting, forming old beginnings, and new ends where one material loop slips seamlessly into the next. Sometimes one loop is built up gradually, as fine silt collects on a riverbed. At other times, it is explosive.

I was born at the cusp of the 80s in the Royal Canberra Hospital. I don't remember a thing about it, like I wasn't there. Biologically speaking, I wasn't actually. Human babies are born developmentally much earlier than our mammalian cousins. Our erect posture means that our hips are drawn closer together, making the birth canal much too narrow for the head of a fully formed, small human. This is why only weeks after birth a puppy can already run and play, but a human doesn't take its first shaky steps until it has done at least one full lap around the sun.

The hospital I was born in was demolished spectacularly in 1997. A controlled implosion had been planned and what I do remember is: standing on the shores of the lake on a bright day, looking across the water at the hospital's silhouette, an

angular cluster of buildings dwarfed against Black Mountain that rises behind it. I imagined my mother laboring, armed with an epidural and a neat, preventative episiotomy as was routine practice then. She laboured, twice, once for me and then once for my brother.

But there was no implosion. The opposite happened; the hospital partially exploded and before we understood what was happening, great plumes of water rose up towards the sky as the shrapnel arched towards us. Great parts of the hospital flew at high speed towards the crowd in a silent theatre of gravity and mass and the unharnessed possibilities of matter.

The one person, a child, who was hit, died instantly. Struck directly in the head by a fragment of steel, she had accompanied her parents to watch the spectacle. She had sat only a few 100 meters away, like me, pegged in between my brother and parents, and all the other faces.

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The year which my son was born I looked online for images of the hospital that I had been born in, the hospital I had stood and watch blasted into the ground some nineteen years earlier. Just nineteen years; not long at all as far as lived histories go, but it felt longer because as I scrolled through the search results, I sat some 16,000 km away at a small desk in Berlin, made simply from a cupboard door pulled off its box.

I discover a home video of the implosion that someone has uploaded: it must be a VHS transfer, I recognise those faded 90s colours, just as the voices in the background, a laugh with a hearty Australian inflection, and those rolling hills, my dear Molonglo. The person behind the camera pans the scene, then locks hurriedly on the hospital at the first, small snap. There are two skinny plumes of smoke, then a pause and the crowd continues to talk, to laugh, uninterrupted.

The pause is long enough for the smoke to have cleared. The timeline of the video is cut and when we are back, suddenly there is a monumental detonation, a deep thunderous boom from whose heart a red ball of fire expands, then retracts, and as it does, it brings with it the entire building. The building collapses, a liquid wave of cement, folding onto itself. It's just after this moment that the

smoke stack collapses and the shrapnel, propelled from the force of the explosion, flies out across the water.

In the centre of this spectacle, for a moment, there is a quieter act, fleeting and unrehearsed. A great chunk of what looks like brick or cement skims, ever so lightly, across the surface of the lake. Once it loses momentum it spins on one spot for a moment, with the lightness of a dancers' pirouette, before gravity pulls it through to the other side.

Throughout the whole event the white noise of the crowd continues; talking, laughing, music, then at the very end a handful of fireworks are ignited, releasing their atom bomb-shaped plumes of white smoke against the bright blue sky. The audience breaks into applause.

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35. *The email message number 24095 clearly indicates that as at 26th February 1997 implosion was still only an option. The subject heading is "To implode or not to implode."*

27. (...) *A public event was effectively guaranteed by the inevitable large numbers of people wishing to view the collapse. A mid week collapse, suggested for a Wednesday, would have made the prospect of excluding the public an impossibility due to the close proximity of the City.*

26. (...) *A major reason for choosing implosion over a conventional demolition is to minimise the disruption to the Hospice. While implosion will result in approximately thirty seconds of noise followed by a dust cloud, mechanical demolition will require at least an additional six weeks of exposure to both unnecessary noise and dust.*

29. (...) *The Chief Minister was not advised of any potential risk to spectators on the lake or its foreshore. The regrettable aspect of the Chief Ministers reply to Mr. Tolley was that the advice that she had received did not emanate from anyone who possessed any expertise in implosions or explosives.*

4.5 *"On each implosion day an exclusion zone, expected to be in the order of 50m will be established around the building to be demolished."*<sup>1</sup>