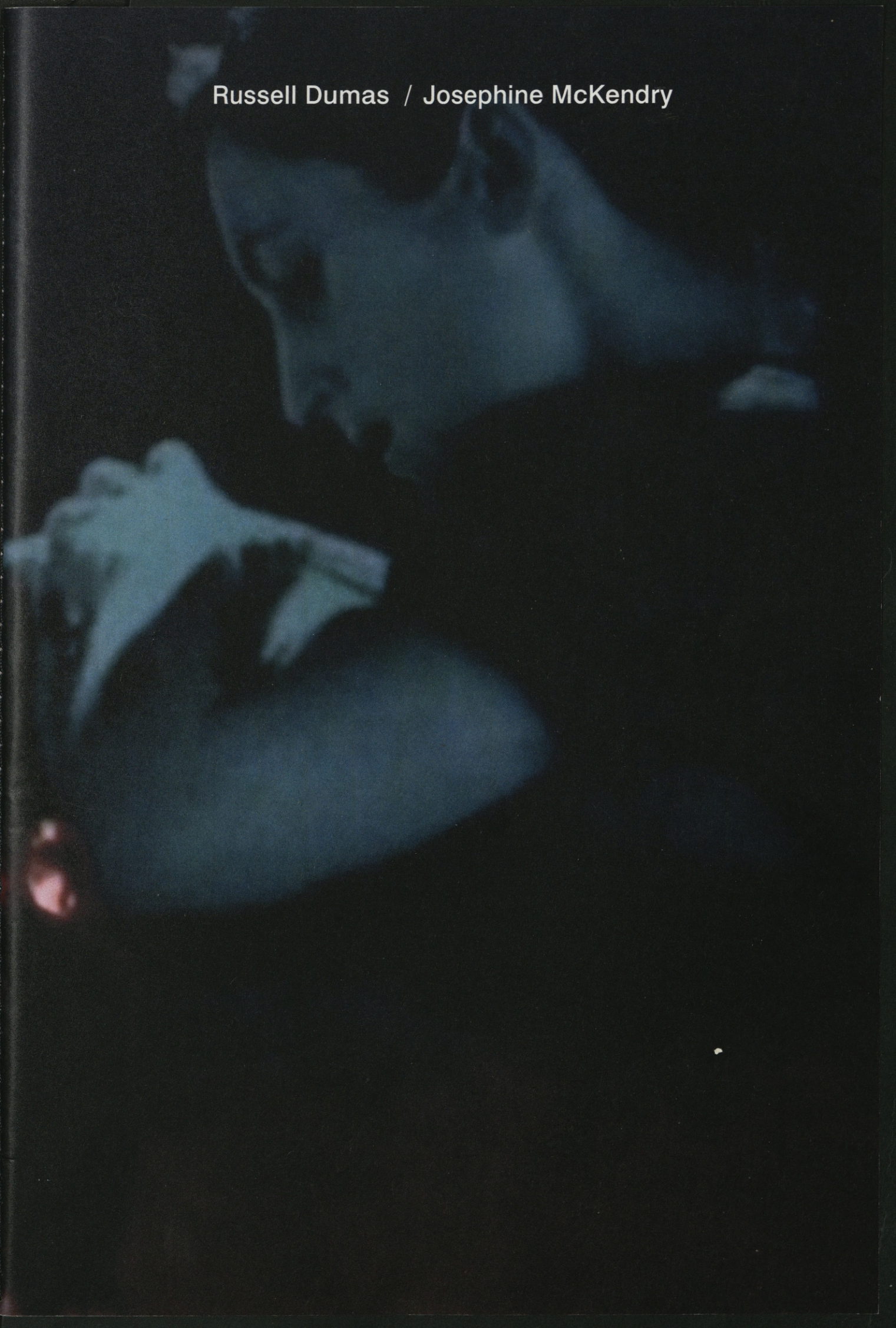
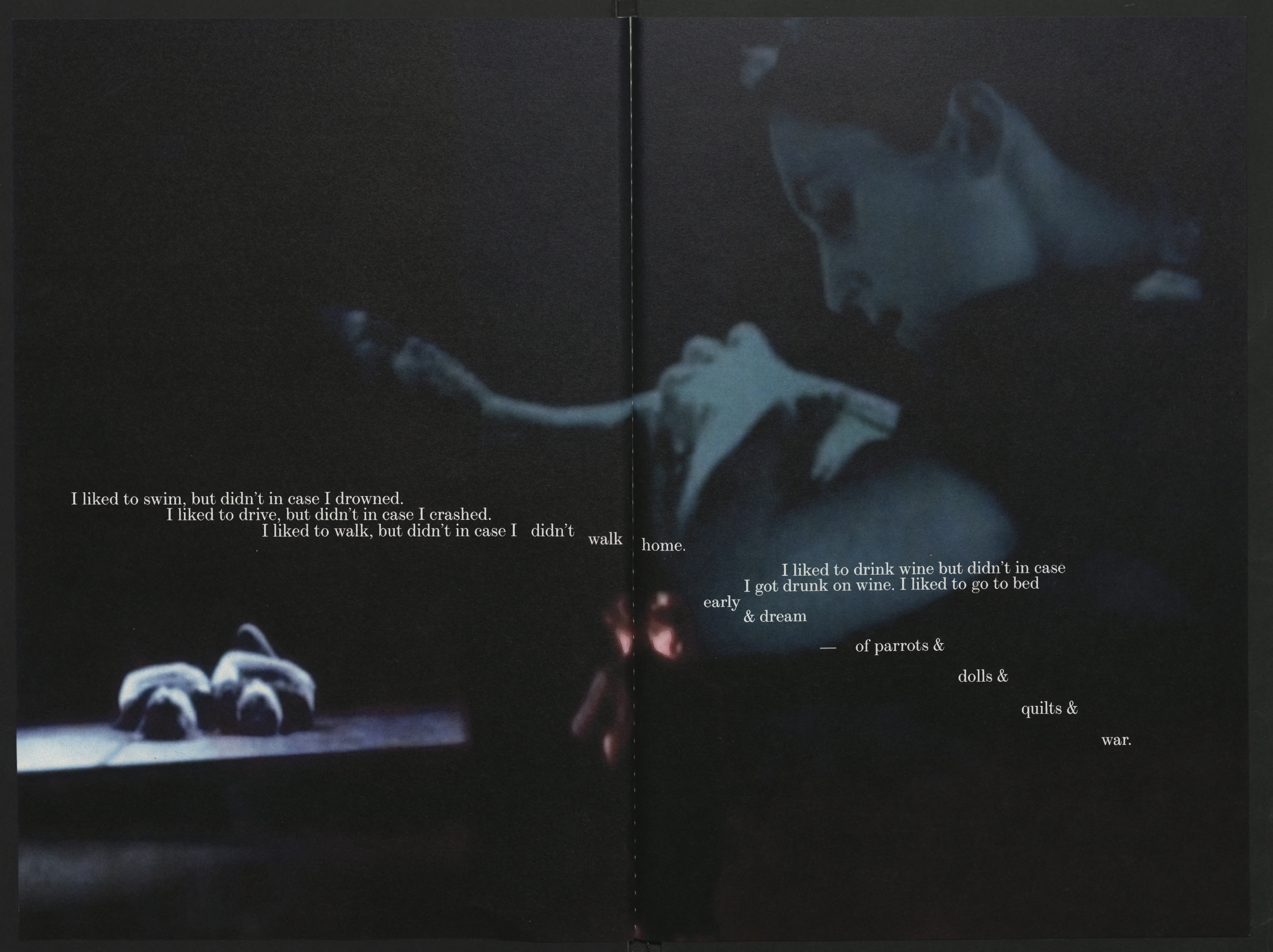


Russell Dumas / Josephine McKendry



“... beauty is disreputable, no protection anymore”

— Ingeborg Bachmann



I liked to swim, but didn't in case I drowned.

I liked to drive, but didn't in case I crashed.

I liked to walk, but didn't in case I didn't walk home.

I liked to drink wine but didn't in case  
I got drunk on wine. I liked to go to bed  
early  
& dream

— of parrots &

dolls &

quilts &

war.

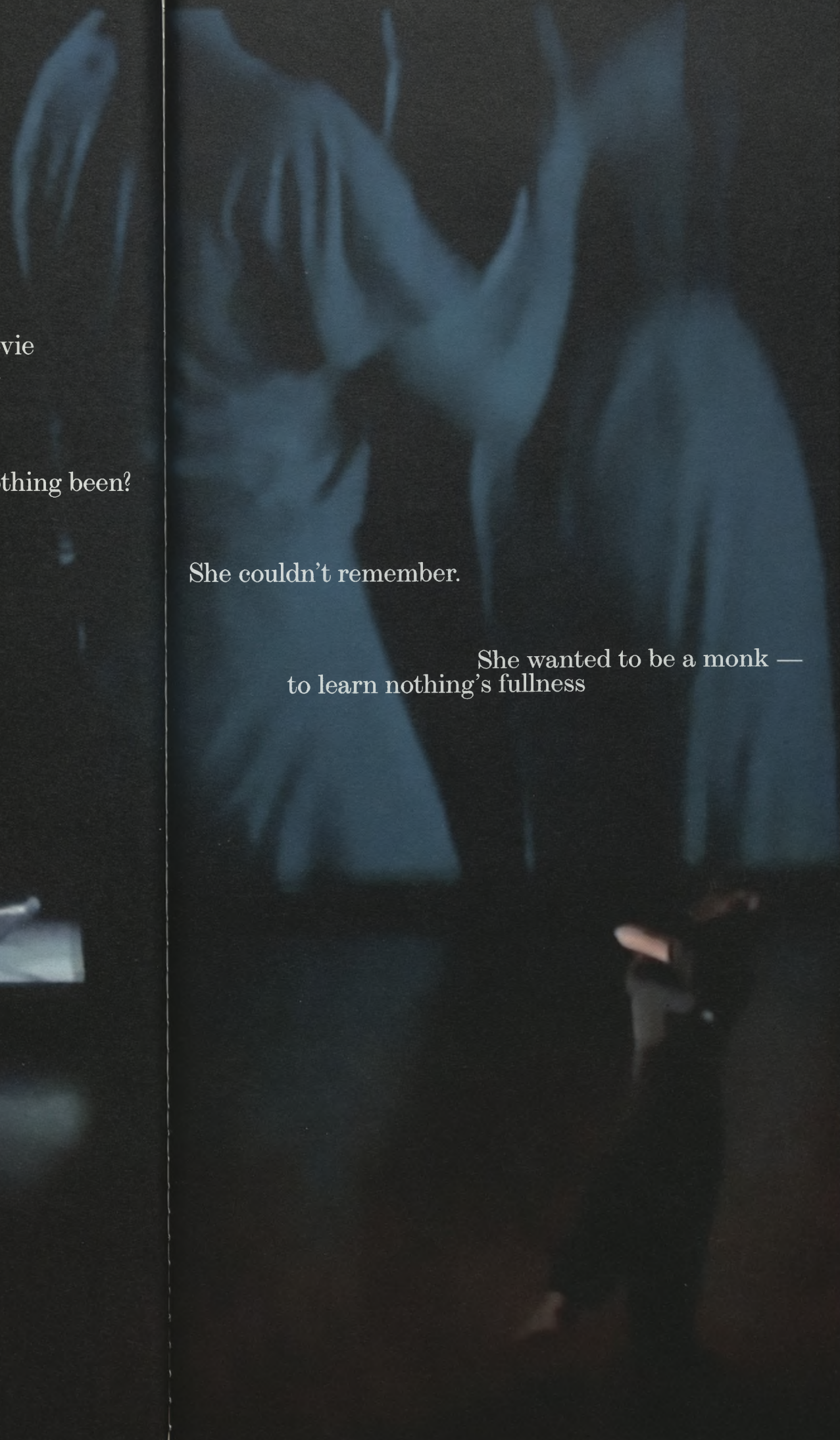
All her things appeared in a grainy movie  
or a slow-moving sepia photograph,  
nothing quite what it was.

What had nothing been?



She couldn't remember.

She wanted to be a monk —  
to learn nothing's fullness



Van Gogh wrote to his brother Theo  
that every color is *A kind of grey*.

I read that words are eternal  
which makes *eternal* doubly  
eternal but never the last word  
(I'll bet) on anyone's lips.

The world felt bright as  
not in painting or in words.  
Not as Keats made it.  
Or Kahlo, or whoever  
anyone loves

itself,

[here]





“O, sunken banquet!”

She confided in strangers & absent friends  
who filled their parts to the fullest  
expression of *being unfrequented*  
or remote.

As a farm, it said.  
Though none of them lived on one.

Her father kept on dying. She grieved  
for years in advance.

She didn't trust  
time to prove sufficient.

I went on describing  
the journey to my friends as they walked beside  
me, so that they'd see it all through my words &  
the path & me.

Other side; mythless.

Only they were left a bit outside.

A journey: to work, or school, or the shops.  
Through a park with leaves unfamiliar to me.  
I wasn't Eve, or from that part of the world.

The details — small, wild, eccentric as ladybugs —

Ah, the lousy shops.



At night, his blood-fattened fingers flutter wildly in front of his heart  
like a flock of battering moths  
till mother captures them & pins them down on the sheets between them.

He is near blind most of the time.  
Once, he calls me to him but I don't hear.  
I think his voice is water in the pipes.

He talks explicitly of being on the brink:  
there is a breathless, uphill climb

It is harder than he thought.  
He forgets to store sleep;  
some words from before.

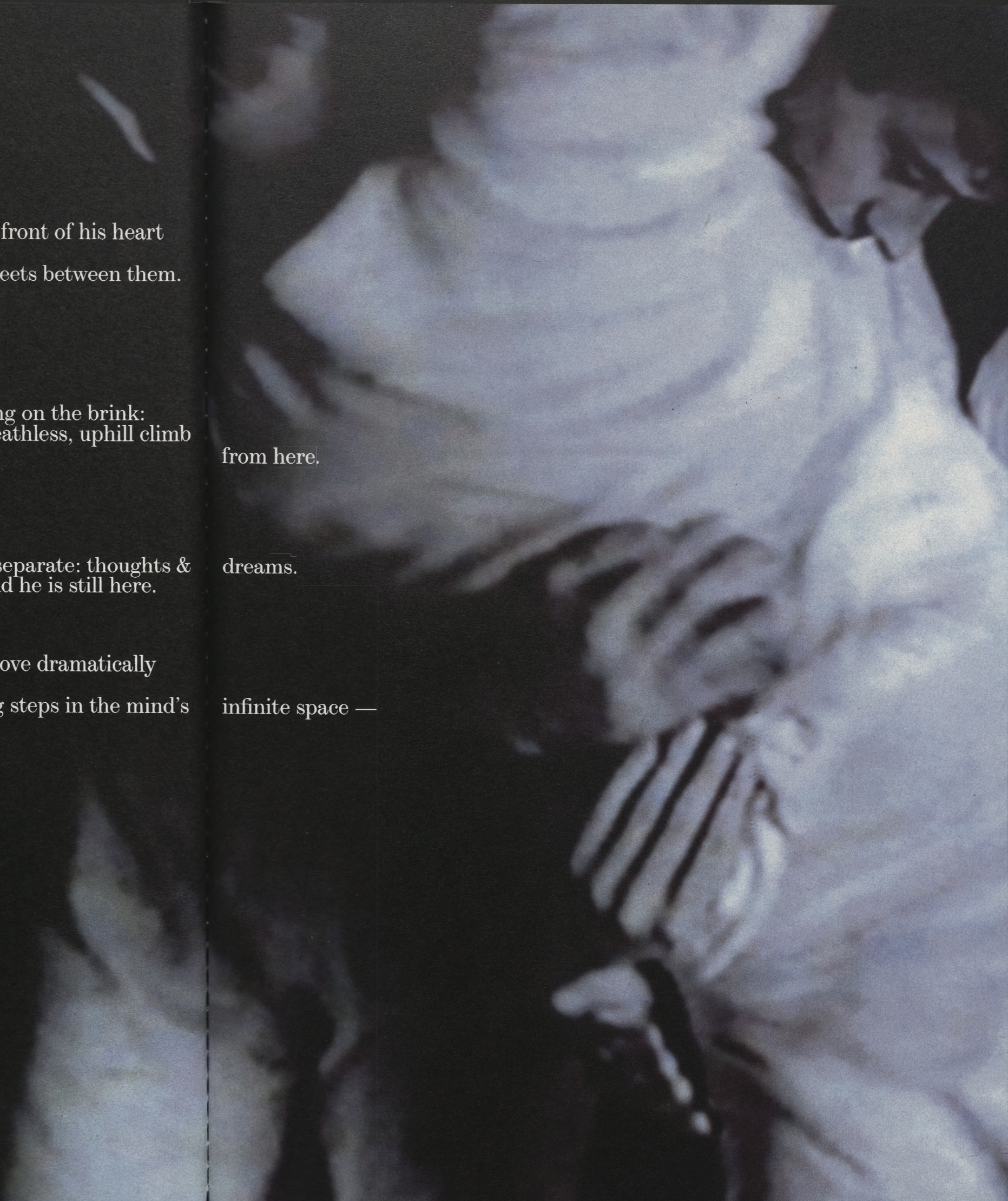
To separate: thoughts &  
In the morning, he is surprised to find he is still here.  
All day long he dozes impromptu in various chairs.


Now & again his pink workmanlike fingers move dramatically  
in front of his face like an old, old dancer  
marking steps in the mind's

from here.

dreams.

infinite space —





I got so good at understanding I saw only appearance  
and missed the world.

Come back house!

Come back road!

Come back trees!

Come back me!

Come back car lights!

Come back words  
& breath  
& saliva in people's open mouths.

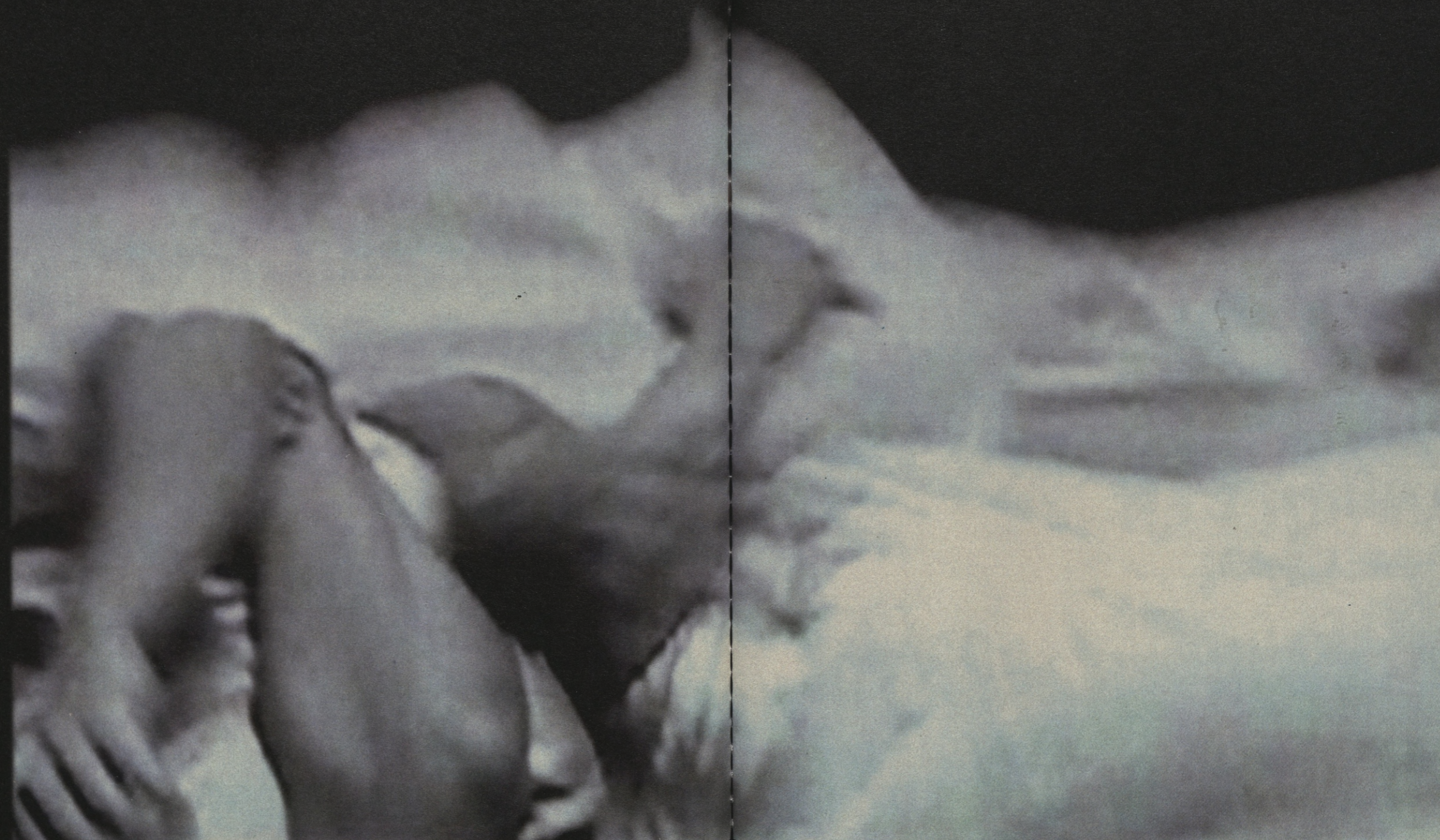
Last night my love lay curled as a soft grey  
t-shirted wildebeest beside me.


I couldn't see the moon  
but sensed it behind  
clouds.

Then

#

my dead brother came to rest at my back.

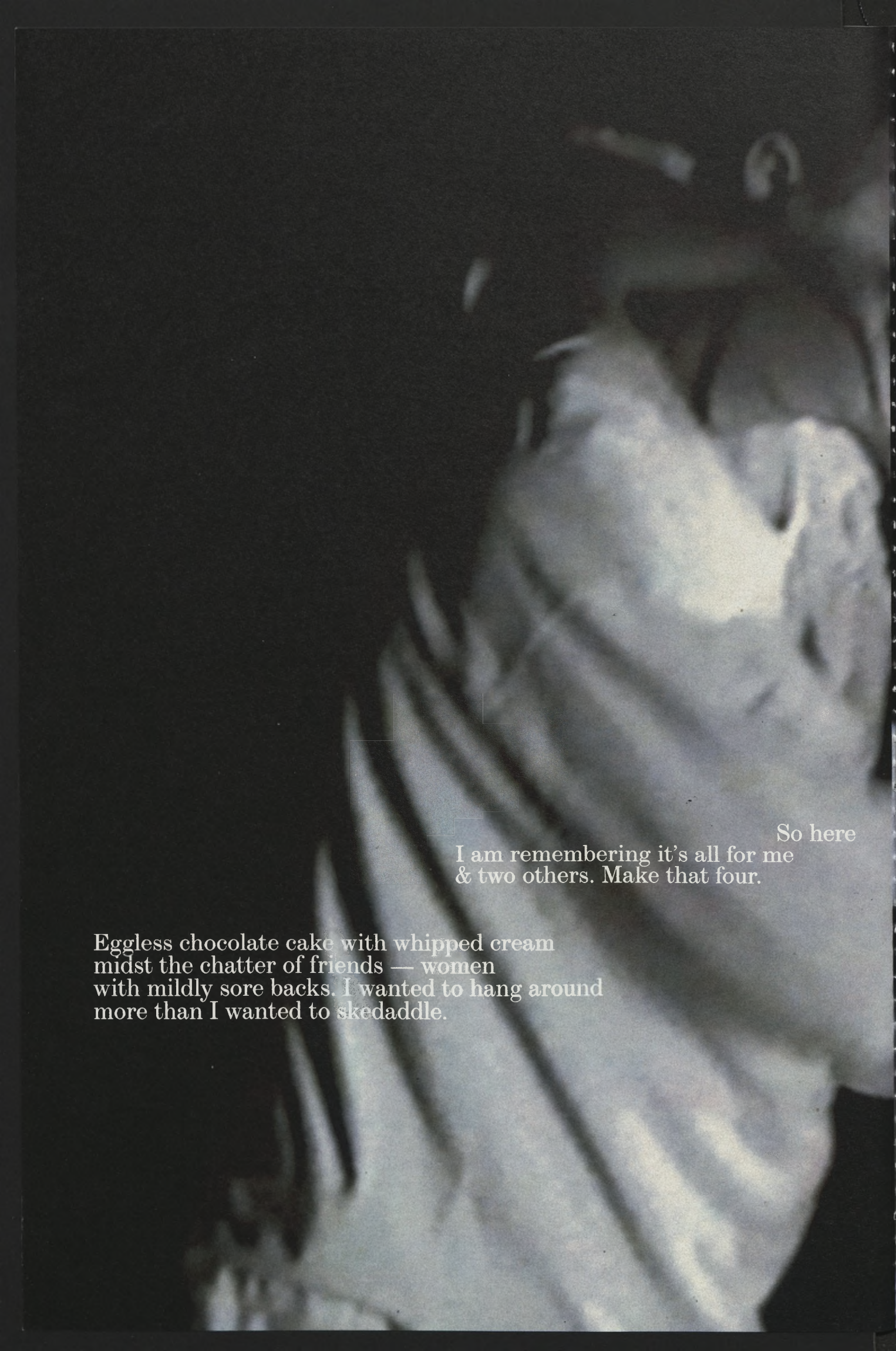




Undeported man: *If you want to do it, why you didn't do it way before?*

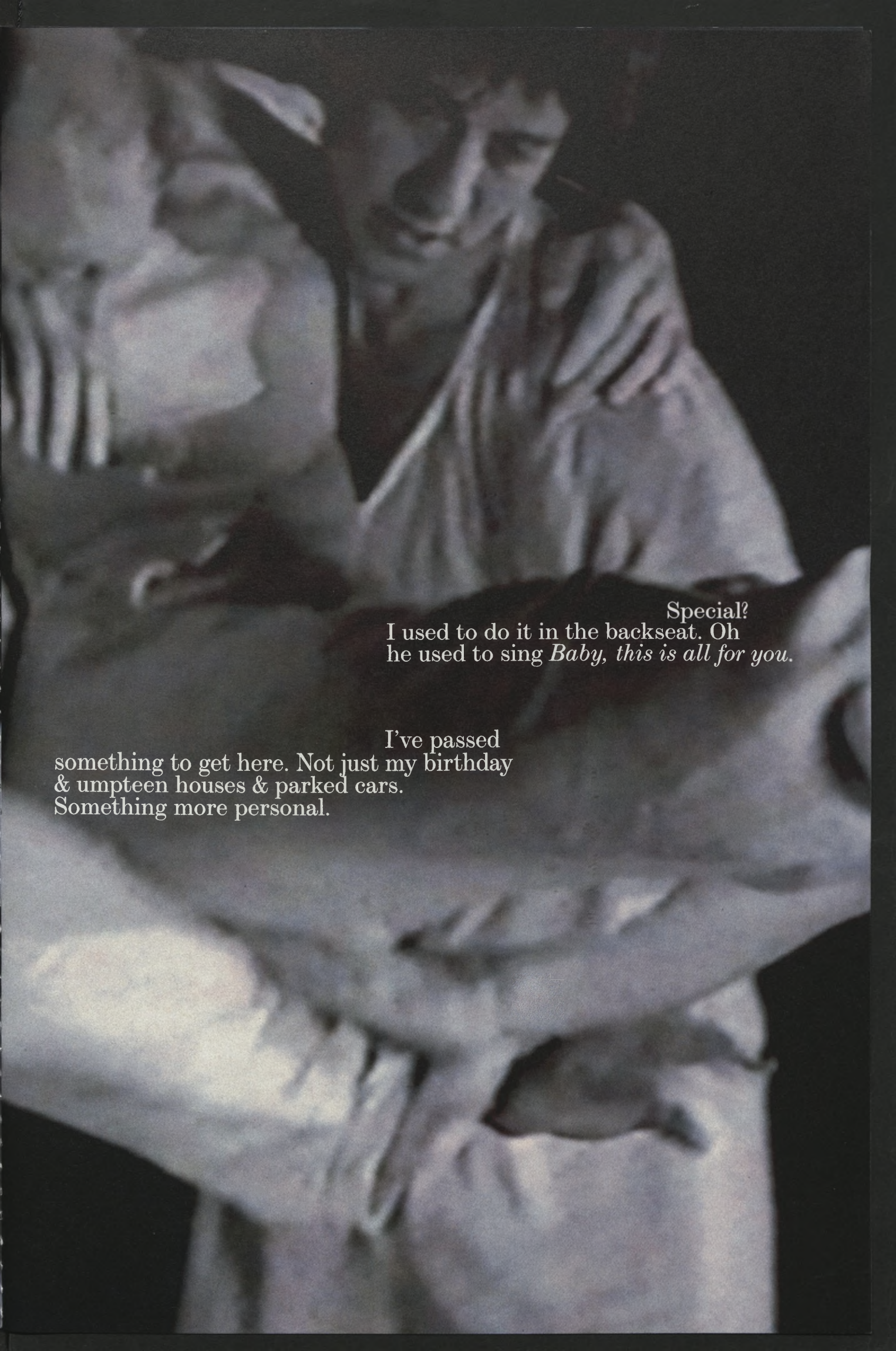
I didn't want to mix then with now, else I was suffering all along?

I knew that wasn't true.  
At fifteen, nineteen, twenty-two,  
lifted into air —  
faint with lilac —



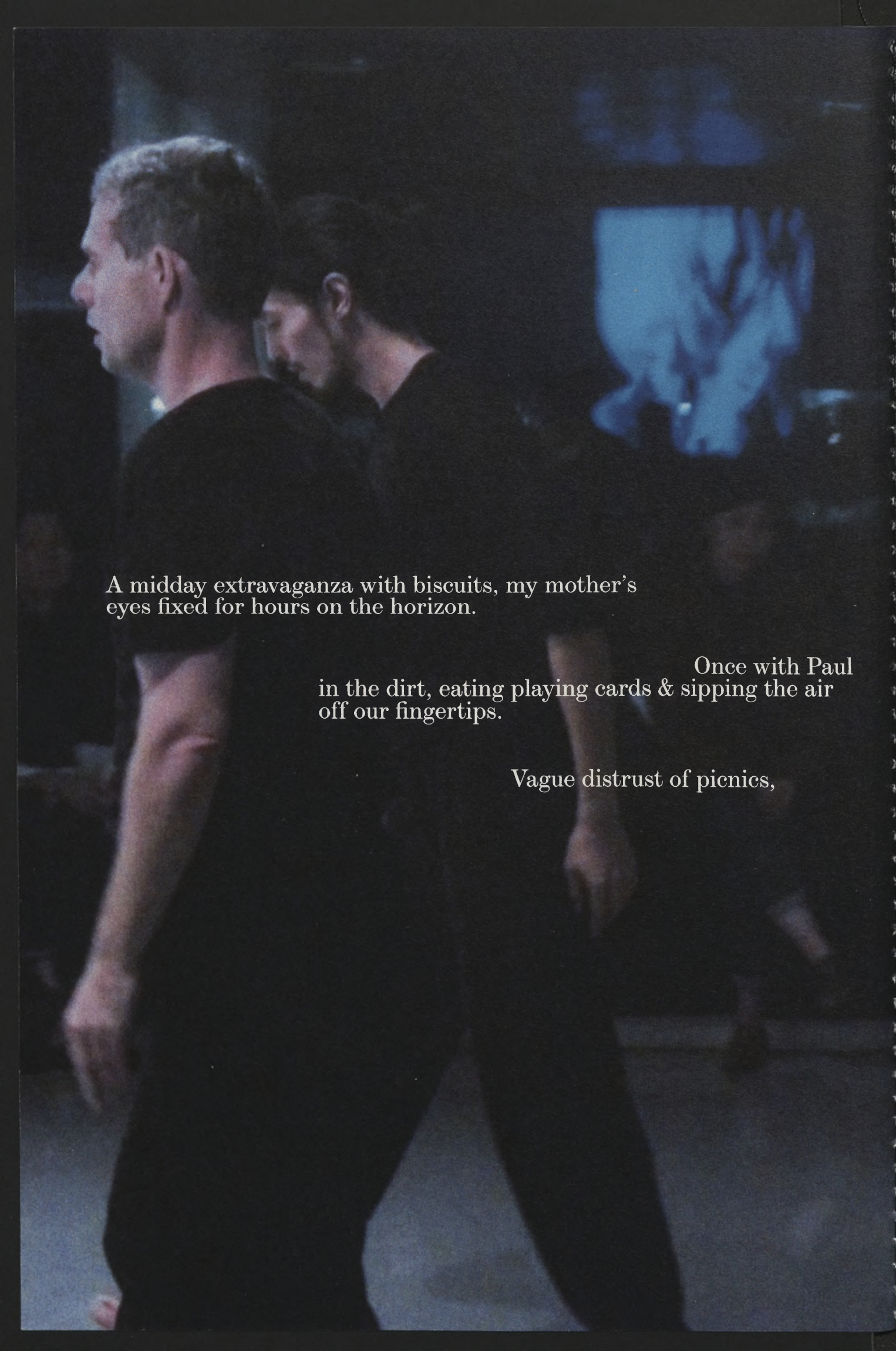
Eggless chocolate cake with whipped cream  
midst the chatter of friends — women  
with mildly sore backs. I wanted to hang around  
more than I wanted to skedaddle.

So here  
I am remembering it's all for me  
& two others. Make that four.



I've passed  
something to get here. Not just my birthday  
& umpteen houses & parked cars.  
Something more personal.

Special?  
I used to do it in the backseat. Oh  
he used to sing *Baby, this is all for you.*



A midday extravaganza with biscuits, my mother's  
eyes fixed for hours on the horizon.

Once with Paul  
in the dirt, eating playing cards & sipping the air  
off our fingertips.

Vague distrust of picnics,

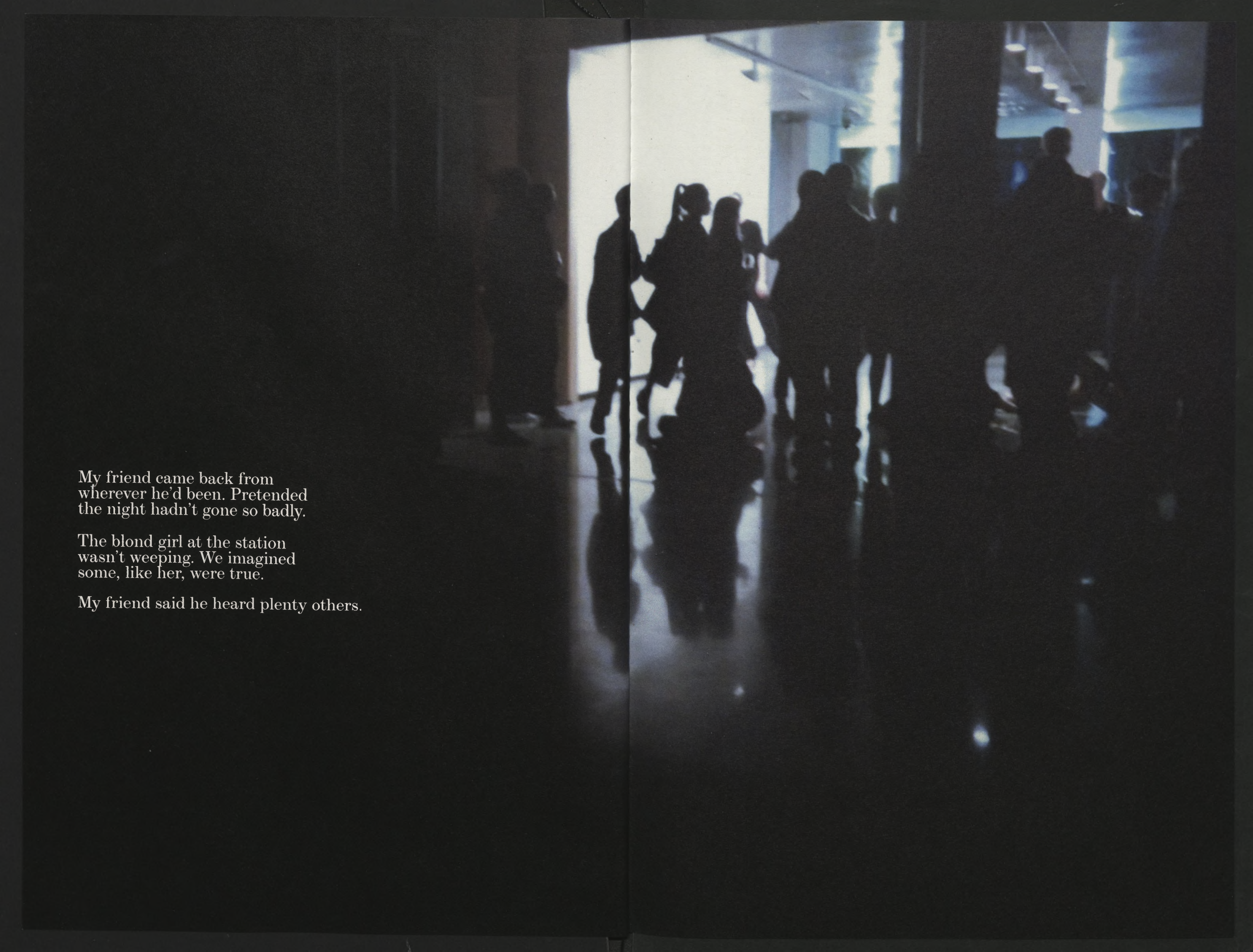


etc.

All my childhood I waited  
for what happened.



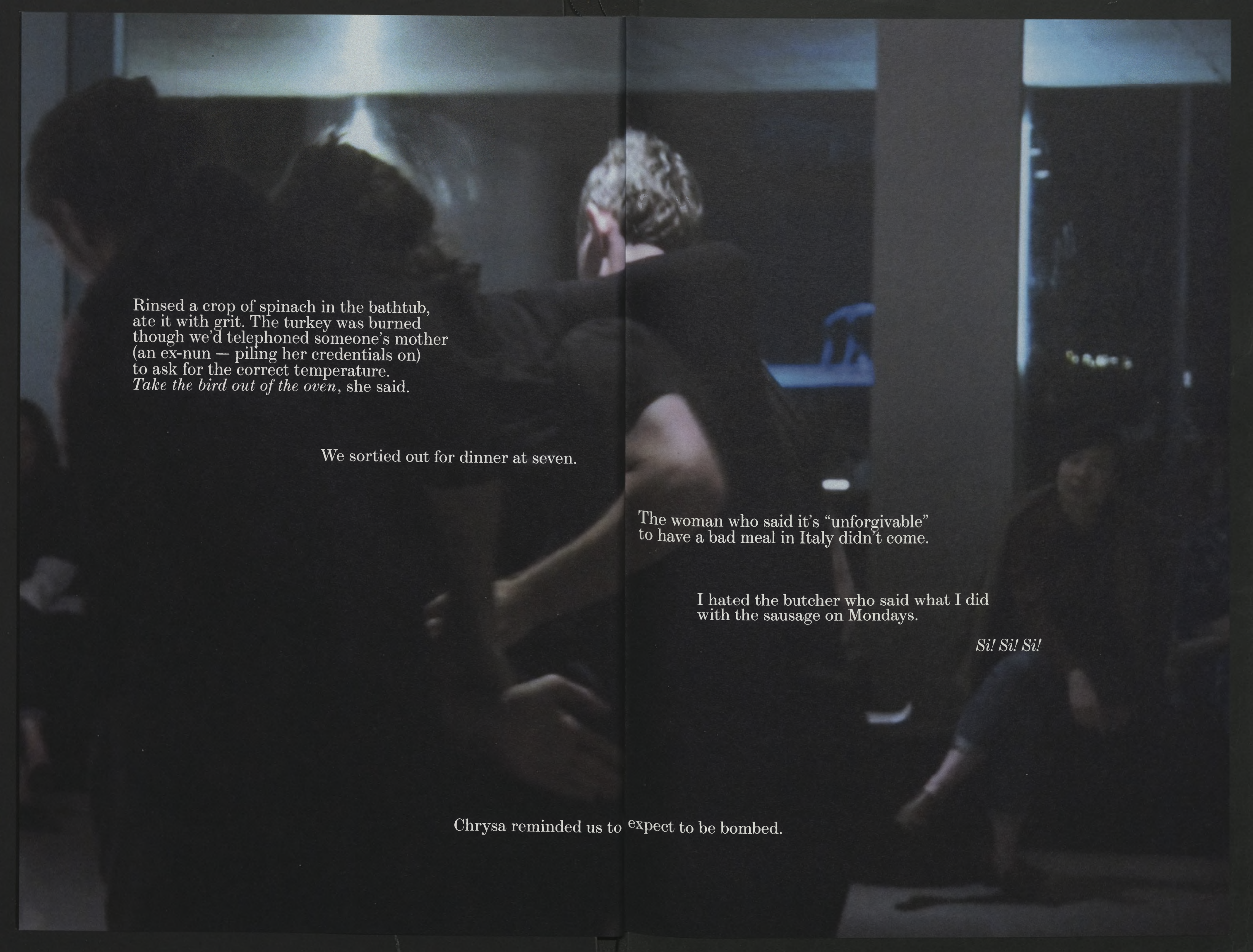
Someone has come to run his hands on your thighs vigorously. Here you are an old woman in need of warmth. Someone once said he'd love to see your face when you were old. Someone is re-circulating the skin of your arms, folding her arms around you. Brushing her fingers slowly up and down. You lean skull-first into someone's arm. The pair of you fall like silk scarves to the ground. You place parts over each other, thinking of both parts. The sole of your left foot on someone's forehead. Her right hand on your belly, your right middle finger on his neck. Her knee on your left foot. Unthought-of parts shift accordingly. You tumble and stumble, as soon as the other's thought is complete, out with your own! Someone's left eye on your upper spine, your left wrist on her calf, his neck on your thigh. The back of your head against her ribs. You think of your skin beneath his skin and edge your foot under. You mustn't stop or she'll think you're done.



My friend came back from  
wherever he'd been. Pretended  
the night hadn't gone so badly.

The blond girl at the station  
wasn't weeping. We imagined  
some, like her, were true.

My friend said he heard plenty others.



Rinsed a crop of spinach in the bathtub,  
ate it with grit. The turkey was burned  
though we'd telephoned someone's mother  
(an ex-nun — piling her credentials on)  
to ask for the correct temperature.  
*Take the bird out of the oven, she said.*

We sortied out for dinner at seven.

The woman who said it's "unforgivable"  
to have a bad meal in Italy didn't come.

I hated the butcher who said what I did  
with the sausage on Mondays.

*Si! Si! Si!*

Chrysa reminded us to expect to be bombed.

Ed had no head for mathematics, as I did, getting 20/20 on all the tests.  
*Let x equal sixteen* I read aloud from his textbook.  
Ed took affront. *But why ehxx* he wailed.  
I tried to keep us calm. *Could be anything*  
I said. *But why anything?* Ed shot back.  
I never liked it when my baby brother got rude.

*Let it be y* I shrugged. *So you're just gunna change it now?* he said, incredulous.  
*You don't like x*, so you can call it *y*. *Or anything. It doesn't matter. You can call it apple pie if you want.*  
Ed's eyes rolled back in his head. I saw the pale watery whites.  
*Forget the apple pie* I said. *Any letter will do. Ed said But if it doesn't matter —*  
a tremor in his priestly voice — *why are we doing it?*  
*So you don't get the jack.* We attended a severe little religious school  
where undone homework incurred the strap. Even girls were whacked.  
But Ed knew that. *Just let it be x* I said, *coming full circle. Pretend for a second —*  
*That's what I hate about it* Ed howled, *how it's all pretend!*  
I didn't disagree. Though my mind felt the stony logic  
of letting  $x$  equal 16 — just for a pip.  
I spied the answer to  $3x + 10 = P$ .

But what did  $P$  equal was not Ed's question.  
My baby brother could multiply and add.  
At least when we accompanied dad to the racetrack  
Eddy had no trouble figuring the odds in the race-time crunch.

Afterwards, I figured, we'd go downstairs and eat chocolate.  
*In what universe* Ed seemed to ask *does x equal 16?*  
He had fixed this particular  $x$ , this particular 16.  
Whereas I had not. They sat lightly on the page and in my mind.  
My poor brother believed that if  $x$  was to equal 16  
this once it must from then on equal 16.  
Its character as an odd letter would permanently disappear —  
*But why x?* he pleaded. *Just let me do it* I said,  
snatching the pencil from his hand. *Don't do it too good.*  
I promised: *I won't.*

1

This part is the soft, thickening body of Helen aged 14.

2

Most girls go to the department store on East Street to have their first bra fitted. This is before processed foods made girls fat. The women who work at the department store stand behind the girls in the curtained cubicles & cup their breasts in their hands. If a girl is large they scold her mother for having brought the child 'late'.

3

Helen's bra is white satin, lifted & padded with a single layer of pouf.

4

The sluts stuff everything down theirs.  
Tampons & cigs & tissues & \$\$.

5

The girls at the convent school are masters of seeing through cloth.

6

Helen is above average at math.

7

The 'brains' don't care for her low social standing.  
At lunch she floats in a messy Venn diagram of poor & smart.  
The nuns regard her with suspicion.

8

Helen inherits kindness from her grandmother.

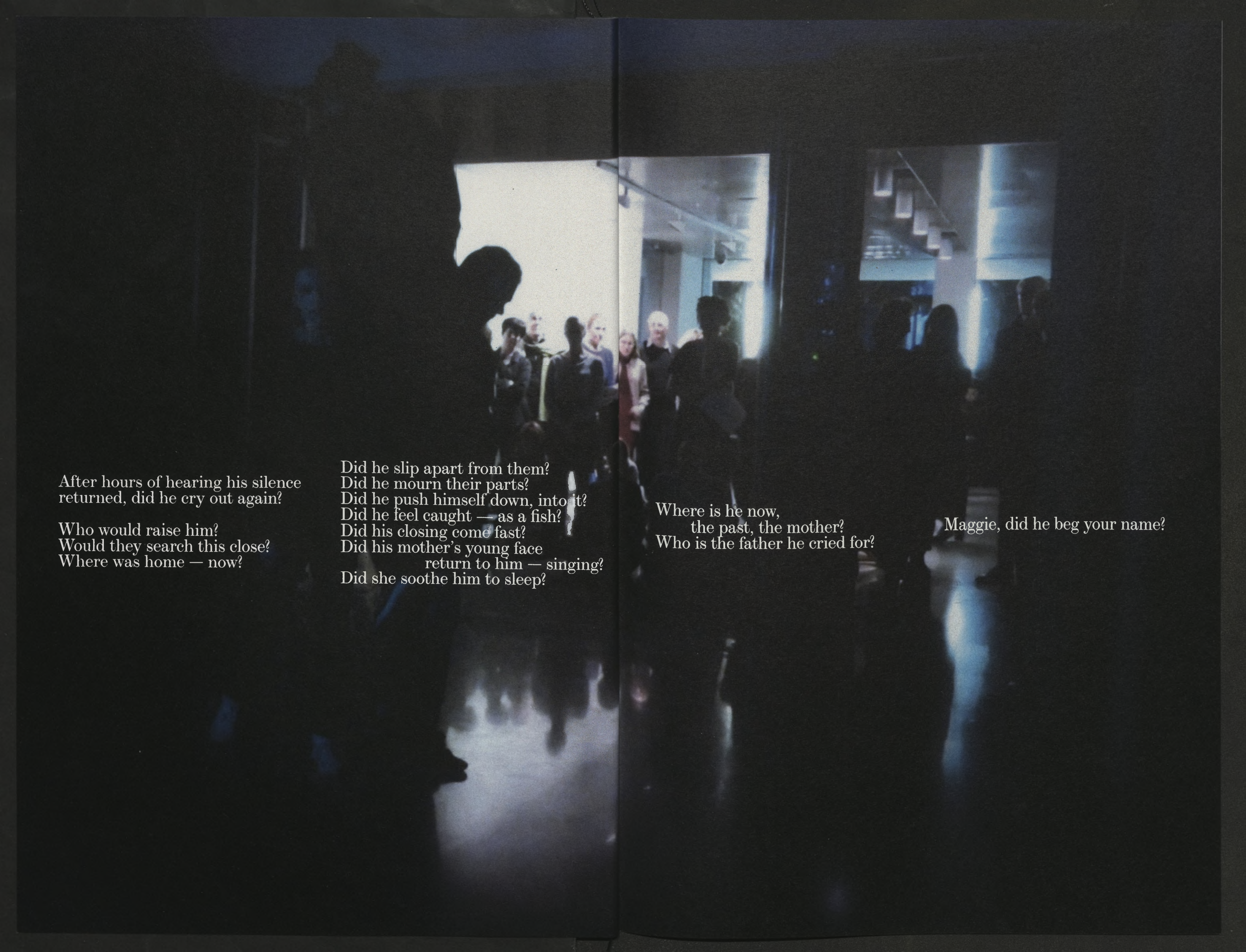
9

Her grandmother's friends take a tippie of sherry now & then.  
Helen pours, with kindness.

10

No one warns her of the prince.





After hours of hearing his silence  
returned, did he cry out again?

Who would raise him?  
Would they search this close?  
Where was home — now?

Did he slip apart from them?  
Did he mourn their parts?  
Did he push himself down, into it?  
Did he feel caught — as a fish?  
Did his closing come fast?  
Did his mother's young face  
return to him — singing?  
Did she soothe him to sleep?

Where is he now,  
the past, the mother?  
Who is the father he cried for?

Maggie, did he beg your name?

I didn't, at age six rule out 'president' the way  
I ruled out 'rock star'.

I love the way  
Brittany Spears dances. She's not in the news  
so much nowadays. She must be growing  
up.

Old. Fat.

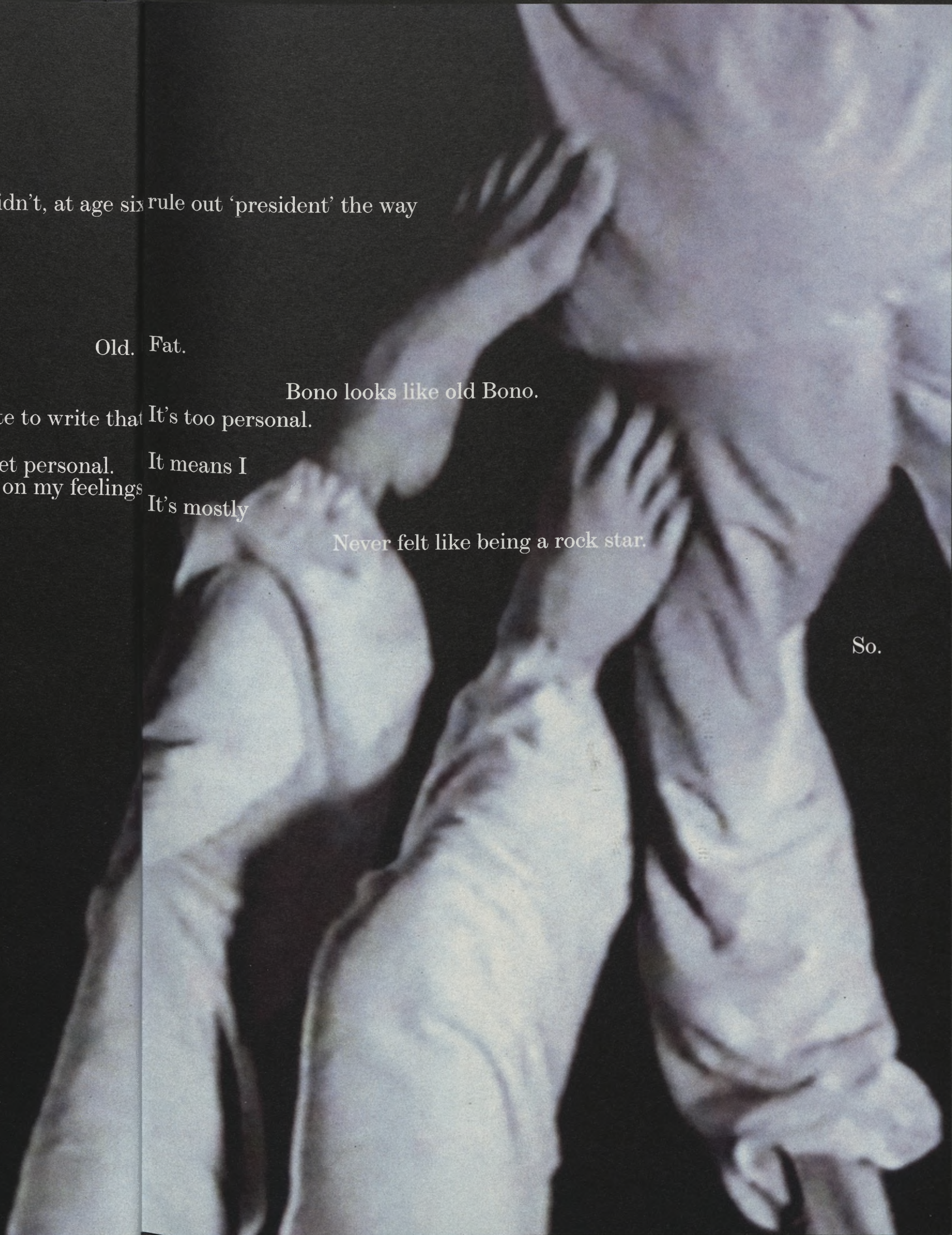
Bono looks like old Bono.

It's not polite to write that It's too personal.

I'm female so I can get personal. It means I  
get to feel a lot. I act on my feelings  
It's mostly  
all I get to do.

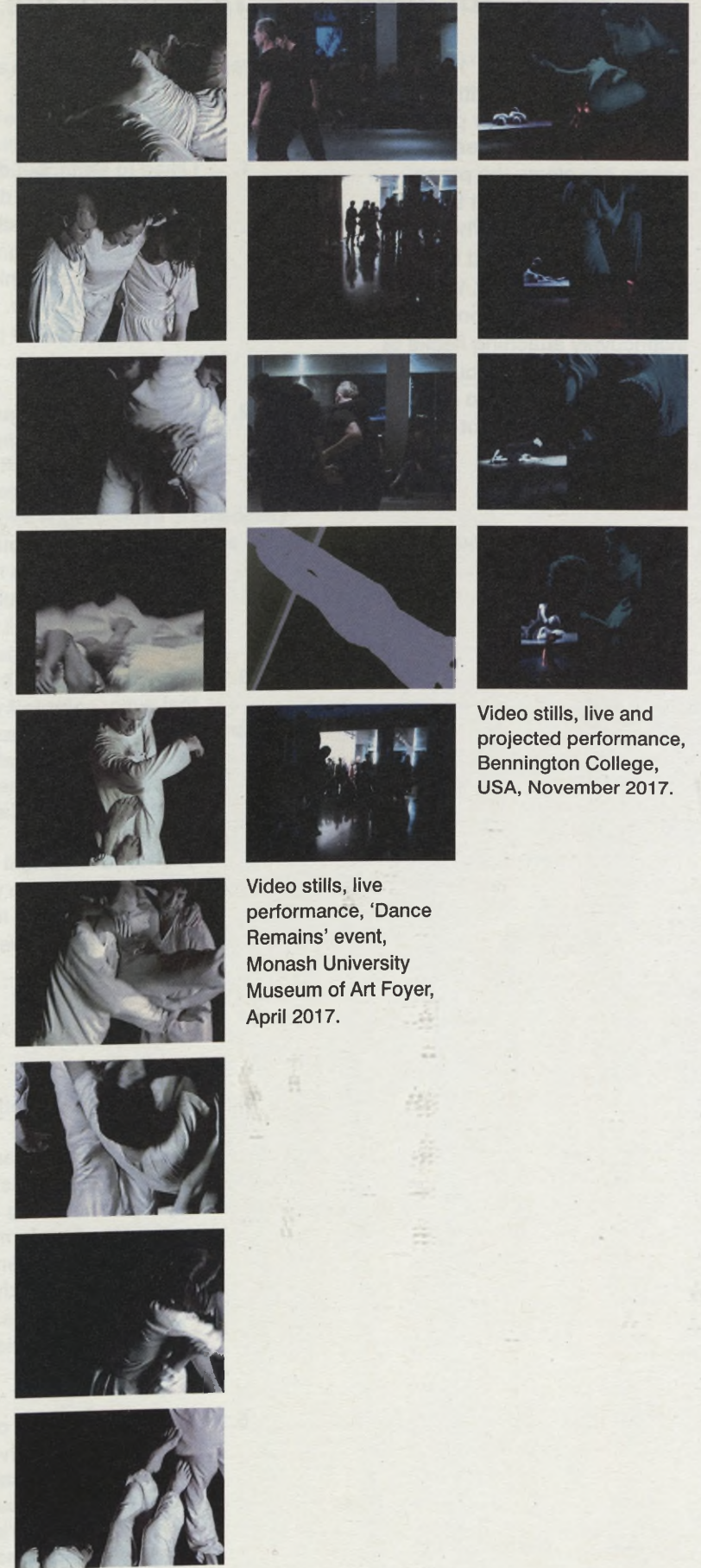
Never felt like being a rock star.

So.



## Russell Dumas

The dance images in this book have been selected by Elizabeth Dempster and Sally Gardner, and are stills from recordings of various iterations of trio dance material originally created by Russell Dumas during the late 1980s and early 1990s. This material became part of 321, a film shot by Roman Blaska under Dumas's direction, which was shown in 1991 on 'Eat Carpet', an SBS Australia television series of experimental films. Dancers in the film are Dumas, Josephine McKendry and Nick Sabel. Dumas has since continued to work with this trio material, re-visiting and re-composing it with new generations of dancers. Thus, also included here are video stills – documentation by Doug Donaldson – from an April 2017 performance in the Monash University Museum of Art (MUMA) foyer as part of the 'Dance Remains' public program, with dancers Rachel Doust, David Huggins, Megan Payne, Alexandra Petrarca and Jonathan Sinatra; and, November 2017 performances of duets during Dumas' residency at Bennington College, USA, with former and current dancers Anneke Hansen, David Huggins, Nicole Jenvey, Russell Lilie, Josephine McKendry, Nick Sabel, Stuart Shugg and Jonathan Sinatra, performing live or projected.



Film stills, 321, 1991,  
Director: Russell Dumas,  
Camera: Roman Blaska.

Video stills, live and  
projected performance,  
Bennington College,  
USA, November 2017.

Video stills, live  
performance, 'Dance  
Remains' event,  
Monash University  
Museum of Art Foyer,  
April 2017.

## Josephine McKendry

"The texts here called '18 looks at the muse', were written as fragments of prose or poems over the last twenty years. The poems are elegy; the prose, parts of a dance that I tried to write, and failed. When the photos of stills arrived I went through them quickly, with my fingers and mind, choosing and instinctively attaching flecks of writing. The photos could be angled and ordered to some small extent; I tried not to overly edit the words."

## 18 looks at the muse

"... beauty is disreputable, no protection anymore"  
— Ingeborg Bachmann

1. I liked to swim, but didn't in case I drowned.  
I liked to drive, but didn't in case I crashed.  
I liked to walk, but didn't in case I didn't walk home. I liked to drink wine but didn't in case I got drunk on wine. I liked to go to bed early & dream — of parrots & dolls & quilts & war.
2. All her things appeared in a grainy movie or a slow-moving sepia photograph, nothing quite what it was. What had nothing been?  
  
She couldn't remember.  
She wanted to be a monk —  
to learn nothing's fullness.
3. Van Gogh wrote to his brother Theo that every color is *A kind of grey*. I read that words are eternal which makes *eternal* doubly eternal but never the last word (I'll bet) on anyone's lips.  
  
The world felt bright as itself,  
not in painting or in words.  
Not as Keats made it.  
Or Kahlo, or whoever  
anyone loves  
  
[here]
4. "O, sunken banquet!"  
  
She confided in strangers & absent friends who filled their parts to the fullest expression of *being unfrequented or remote*. As a farm, it said. Though none of them lived on one. Her father kept on dying. She grieved for years in advance. She didn't trust time to prove sufficient.
5. A journey: to work, or school, or the shops. Through a park with leaves unfamiliar to me. I wasn't Eve, or from that part of the world. Other side; mythless. I went on describing the journey to my friends as they walked beside me, so that they'd see it all through my words & the path & me. Only they were left a bit outside. The details — small, wild, eccentric as ladybugs — Ah, the lousy shops.

6. At night, his blood-fattened fingers flutter wildly in front of his heart like a flock of battering moths till mother captures them & pins them down on the sheets between them.

He is near blind most of the time.  
Once, he calls me to him but I don't hear.  
I think his voice is water in the pipes.

He talks explicitly of being on the brink:  
there is a breathless, uphill climb  
from here.

It is harder than he thought.  
He forgets to store sleep;  
some words from before.  
To separate: thoughts & dreams.

In the morning, he is surprised to find he is still here.  
All day long he dozes impromptu in various chairs.  
Now & again his pink workmanlike fingers move dramatically  
in front of his face like an old, old dancer marking steps in the mind's infinite space —

7. I got so good at understanding I saw only appearance and missed the world. Come back house!  
Come back road! Come back trees!  
Come back me! Come back car lights!  
Come back words & breath & saliva in people's open mouths.

8. Last night my love lay curled as a soft grey t-shirted wildebeest beside me.  
I couldn't see the moon  
but sensed it behind  
clouds. Then

#

my dead brother came to rest at my back.

9. Undeported man: *If you want to do it, why you didn't do it way before?*

I didn't want to mix  
then with now, else I  
was suffering all along?

I knew that wasn't true.  
At fifteen, nineteen, twenty-two,  
lifted into air —  
faint with lilac —

10. Eggless chocolate cake with whipped cream midst the chatter of friends — women with mildly sore backs. I wanted to hang around more than I wanted to skedaddle. So here I am remembering it's all for me & two others. Make that four. I've passed something to get here. Not just my birthday & umpteen houses & parked cars. Something more personal. Special? I used to do it in the backseat. *Oh* he used to sing *Baby, this is all for you*.

11. A midday extravaganza with biscuits, my mother's eyes fixed for hours on the horizon. Once with Paul in the dirt, eating playing cards & sipping the air off our fingertips. Vague distrust of picnics, etc. All my childhood I waited for what happened.
12. Someone has come to run his hands on your thighs vigorously. Here you are an old woman in need of warmth. Someone once said he'd love to see your face when you were old. Someone is re-circulating the skin of your arms, folding her arms around you. Brushing her fingers slowly up and down. You lean skull-first into someone's arm. The pair of you fall like silk scarves to the ground. You place parts over each other, thinking of both parts. The sole of your left foot on someone's forehead. Her right hand on your belly, your right middle finger on his neck. Her knee on your left foot. Unthought-of parts shift accordingly. You tumble and stumble, as soon as the other's thought is complete, out with your own! Someone's left eye on your upper spine, your left wrist on her calf, his neck on your thigh. The back of your head against her ribs. You think of your skin beneath his skin and edge your foot under. You mustn't stop or she'll think you're done.

13. My friend came back from wherever he'd been. Pretended the night hadn't gone so badly.

The blond girl at the station  
wasn't weeping. We imagined  
some, like her, were true.  
My friend said he heard plenty others.

14. Rinsed a crop of spinach in the bathtub, ate it with grit. The turkey was burned though we'd telephoned someone's mother (an ex-nun—piling her credentials on) to ask for the correct temperature. 'Take the bird out of the oven', she said. We sortied out for dinner at seven.

The woman who said it's "unforgivable"  
to have a bad meal in Italy didn't come.  
I hated the butcher who said what I did  
with the sausage on Mondays. 'Si! Si! Si!'  
Chrysa reminded us to expect to be bombed.

15. Ed had no head for mathematics, as I did, getting 20/20 on all the tests. *Let x equal sixteen* I read aloud from his textbook. Ed took affront. *But why ehxx* he wailed. I tried to keep us calm. *Could be anything* I said. *But why anything?* Ed shot back. I never liked it when my baby brother got rude.

*Let it be y* I shrugged. *So you're just gunna change it now?* he said, incredulous. *You don't like x, so you can call it y. Or anything. It doesn't matter. You can call it apple pie if you want.* Ed's eyes rolled back in his head. I saw the pale watery whites. *Forget the apple pie* I said. *Any letter will do.* Ed said *But if it doesn't matter — a tremor in his priestly voice — why are we doing it?* *So you don't get the jack.* We attended a severe little religious school where undone homework incurred the strap. Even girls were whacked. But Ed knew that. *Just let it be x* I said, coming full circle. *Pretend for a second — That's what I hate about it* Ed howled, *how it's all pretend!* I didn't disagree. Though my mind felt the stony logic of letting  $x = 16$  — just for a pip. I spied the answer to  $3x + 10 = P$ .

But what did P equal was not Ed's question.

My baby brother could multiply and add.

At least when we accompanied dad to the racetrack

Eddy had no trouble figuring the odds in the race-time crunch.

Afterwards, I figured, we'd go downstairs and eat chocolate.

*In what universe* Ed seemed to ask *does x equal 16?*

He had fixed this particular x, this particular 16.

Whereas I had not. They sat lightly on the page and in my mind.

My poor brother believed that if x was to equal 16

this once it must from then on *equal 16*.

It's character as an odd letter would permanently disappear —

*But why x?* he pleaded. *Just let me do it* I said,

snatching the pencil from his hand. *Don't do it too good.*

I promised: *I won't.*

16. 1. This part is the soft, thickening body of Helen aged 14.  
2. Most girls go to the department store on East Street to have their first bra fitted. This is before processed foods made girls fat. The women who work at the department store stand behind the girls in the curtained cubicles & cup their breasts in their hands. If a girl is large they scold her mother for having brought the child 'late.'  
3. Helen's bra is white satin, lifted & padded with a single layer of pouf.  
4. The sluts stuff everything down theirs. Tampons & cigs & tissues & \$\$.  
5. The girls at the convent school are masters of seeing through cloth.  
6. Helen is above average at math.  
7. The 'brains' don't care for her low social standing. At lunch she floats in a messy Venn diagram of poor & smart. The nuns regard her with suspicion.  
8. Helen inherits kindness from her grandmother.  
9. Her grandmother's friends take a tippie of sherry now & then. Helen pours, with kindness.  
10. No one warns her of the prince.

17. After hours of hearing his silence returned, did he cry out again?  
Who would raise him?  
Would they search this close?  
Where was home—now?  
Did he slip apart from them?  
Did he mourn their parts?

Did he push himself down, into it?  
Did he feel caught—as a fish?  
Did his closing come fast?  
Did his mother's young face  
return to him—singing?  
Did she soothe him to sleep?

Where is he now,  
the past, the mother?  
Who is the father he cried for?  
Maggie, did he beg your name?

18. I didn't, at age six, rule out 'president' the way I ruled out 'rock star.' I love the way Brittany Spears dances. She's not in the news so much nowadays. She must be growing up. Old. Fat. Bono looks like old Bono. It's not polite to write that. It's too personal. I'm female so I can get personal. It means I get to feel a lot. I act on my feelings. It's mostly all I get to do. Never felt like being a rock star. So.

**Russell Dumas**  
**Dancer / Choreographer**  
www.russelldumasdance.com

Russell Dumas has danced in musical theatre and with ballet, modern and postmodern dance artists and companies internationally, including Twyla Tharp and Trisha Brown. His own company Dance Exchange was formed in 1976. Since then, he has worked with generations of dancers to develop a distinctive practice and original body of work which has been presented by international institutions and organisations including Dance Umbrella (UK), The Baryshnikov Arts Centre (NYC), Holland Dance Festival, and the Sydney Opera House. His dance film *Approaching Sleipner Junction* won the Jury Prize, International Video Dance Festival, 1990 (Sète, France).

**Josephine McKendry**  
**Dancer / Writer**

Josephine McKendry danced with Russell Dumas from 1986–1993. She is one of the dancers to whom Dumas is indebted for her contribution to defining his signature dance aesthetic. She has also performed with Sara Rudner, Neil Greenberg, John Jasperse, Lucy Guerin, and Elizabeth Dempster. As a writer, now based in the United States, McKendry has had her work published in *Fiction*, *the Antioch Review*, *Southwest Review*, *Stand*, *Seizure* and elsewhere.

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Writings on Dance Inc., based in Melbourne, Australia, published twenty-five issues of the journal *Writings on Dance* between 1985 and 2012. The organisation continues to promote dance literacy amongst dancers and the wider public by curating performance events and publishing reflections on those events. Back copies of selected issues are available from [www.writingsondance.com](http://www.writingsondance.com)

Writings on Dance Inc. is a non-profit organisation listed with the Register of Cultural Organisations as a Tax Deductible Gift Recipient. Donations are welcome and can be sent by cheque to: Writings on Dance Inc. Donations Fund, PO Box 106, Malvern, Victoria 3144 Australia, or by direct deposit to the Writings on Dance Donations Fund: CBA BSB 063 270 Account 10056467

A note on the design: In considering how to approach the design I decided very quickly to make each image fill a double-page spread, and have the poetic text reversed out of the image in white. With the text floating over the image it seemed a small step to allow the sentences to open up and drift apart while being loosely positioned in relation to the dancers. I was encouraged in doing this by reading Josephine McKendry's note on her selecting and pairing of writing and image, particularly the phrase: 'instinctively attaching flecks of writing'. I subsequently read a 1990 interview with Russell Dumas (*Writings on Dance* 5) in which he spoke of dance phrases being 'like sentences, very particular, very precisely drawn' and observed that the demands dance makes upon the dancer aren't only physical, but are 'often to do with memory and the ability not only to organise and order but to recall sensation and feeling precisely.' His comments resonated with the personal, concise and measured nature of the poetry, and encouraged me to render the writing even more 'fleck-like' in some instances, with an increased use of word-, phrase-, sentence- and stanza-breaks hingeing on and registering syntactical shifts and steps in emphasis, nuance and detail. The text formations became frames from a floating verbal choreography, momentarily fixed in relation to the split-second images of dancers caught mid-movement during performance. — IR



Writings on Dance / 2019