

■  
her visceral  
interior

leah  
coughlan  
■



hellscape // in the club // the various pains and ailments of being // worldview // the pathology of us // the boys and girls who live in my mind rent free // the walls (fuck the tories) // brain // hellscape pt.2 // narrative // fire signs // ghosting

hellscape

holding your breath under water and wondering  
if the pain lingers  
sticks to the ceiling like a moth  
will swatting at the leaves that seclude you  
help you to be seen?

i wonder late at night if i am alive and what that  
really means for me  
for i can do anything i want  
and yet nothing at all  
in this hellscape they call london, the uk, earth.  
the cosmos?

i wonder if you know that i am simply fucking in-  
sane or whether i'm actually masking it quite well  
that on the outside i seem like i am capable of  
normal conversation that doesn't over analyse  
exactly why you said 'how was your day' in a  
tone that carried with it anger and surprise and  
therefore i must wonder 'have i done something  
wrong?'

anyways





in the club

wander in about 10:30  
smells sour and sticky  
feet stuck to the floor  
gum stuck to the door  
being asked where you're from a thousand times  
curly hair and big boobs feels like a crime  
like an insult  
where am i from?  
why does it matter and why do you deserve to know  
because i look different therefore you have a  
claim to me? a claim to my body? the jokes thing  
is that i'm not even that fucking spicy looking  
just a bait lighty but whatever  
to these michael's and tom's im the most exciting  
thing they've dipped their toe in since they came  
out with white twix's or peanut butter oreos.  
lightskin fetishism is real but we move.  
i roll my eyes and wander away  
prising arms away from my waist  
safe haven is the girl's toilets where i can vent to  
someone pretty and use their vaseline. why so  
many fucking questions?  
all i want to do is shake my ass to dua lipa in peace.

the various pains and ailments of being

trash baby  
aching thumb from my phone  
scrolling scrolling  
scoliosis from my head bent at my desk  
face tats and hand tats and  
airpod volume up to max  
eco-warrior  
pink hair  
eat the rich  
we don't care

the metro calls them 'generation drugz!'  
i have to firmly stand by that name  
not because i love white powder or anything  
gosh (!) no haha  
but because 1 in 4 of us takes sertraline to  
deal with daily life  
while we try to heal  
chatting to our therapists  
through delayed macbook screens  
feeling undermined and lost  
squeezing every last crumb out of your 6 weeks of  
free therapy cos it's all you can afford its continual





and everlasting. these are the terms of the state.  
the system. our forefathers worry we  
spend too much time on tik tok  
(we probably do)

eco warrior in the daytime  
cash obsessed in the night time  
side hustles and zero free time  
hairy armpits  
no sense of purpose  
this planet is a fucking mess it makes me sick  
it makes me itch the way  
we're being guzzled  
slurped and sucked bone dry  
do we even realise we're being eaten ???  
giant salt and pepper shakers grinding heavy  
flakes onto our backs  
icy shards that cut us  
before we've had a chance to rise/bloom

### worldview

tatted on your chest  
are all the places you've seen  
all the feelings you've felt  
it doesn't hide the sadness and pain inside the  
bitterness and anguish inside sometimes  
i wonder if i will ever make the cut  
etched into your skin with a pencil  
the words we aren't saying aloud  
battyman fi dead  
arms over my head  
my existence a problem  
that making yourself small won't fix  
a mulatto and a race traitor  
scum of the earth half breeder  
could be worse  
i guess i have the 'state' to thank  
for my pitiful pennies and ting hands slap-slapping  
the keyboard and writing myself into oblivion through  
the deconstruction of everything you've ever known  
lost in the tresses of your lovers mane  
for when wrapped up in blankets, you shall feel no  
pain  
for when the world is ending, you shall have no  
name.





the pathology of us

psychosocial daydream  
dipped in burnt umber  
passed from mouth to mouth till nothing was left  
but a crumb a stem  
the memory of you.

you laughed more than the sun beamed  
and when the laughter ended, anger cascaded  
down around us i didn't mind as long as it was  
you. *us*.

you said you didn't mind that i was leaving but i  
knew it was a lie because  
you held my hand close like  
a loose grip would have brought the end closer  
and it was already too close.  
close enough to taste the  
antiseptic iodine around your mouth  
that bitter residue  
still clinging to your folds.

the boys and the girls who live in my mind rent free

it was her. or she. georgina. never georgie, as she  
told me on the swings one day.

i will never forget the way her hair blew in the  
wind, amber curls that sometimes looked gold if  
they angled the sun in the right way at the right  
time.

i remember the day she moved schools. it felt  
like someone had ripped my little heart out from  
behind my ribcage. replaced it with a hollow X  
where she once was.

best friends always meant *best* friends to me.  
always meant i was seen. didn't matter if not  
everybody saw me because at least someone did.  
that was always enough.

i sacrificed a lot to feel seen. by girls at school  
who would pick you up and drop you when the  
timing was right. there was something so addic-  
tive about that rejection, something about being  
discarded that makes being held again so sweet.  
i remember she would laugh when my name was





called in the register. i remember she would pick me to bunk geography with. a dangerous dichotomy. i lapped it up. a golden spotlight cast upon me when i thought i was invisible. worse than invisible. clearly there but deliberately ignored. an awkward messed up power trip. both of us needing and needy. through her i learnt what it was to give. and that sometimes people need you more than you need them. i remember holding her in my arms in the green corridors, i remember missing lessons to sooth her waking nightmares. i remember the overdose and the wires they had clipped to her chest, the projectile vomiting. i remember the letters and the loneliness in school without her. i thank something bigger than myself every day that we both got out unscathed. almost unscathed.

i remember vowing never to take drugs. i remember that changing quite quickly. i took them because i could feel myself being pushed out. slipping away. my identity so fragile. built upon what others told me i was, what i thought i ought to be. nothing scared me more than this feeling of being in the periphery. than the feeling of being alone. forced to make a choice. be by myself or be

with them. it was easy. losing myself like that was easy. kissing boys i barely knew. giving myself to them, wholly. anything to leave the waking sadness of my body.

i've gone from not thinking much of somebody to being consumed by them within a matter of days. minutes. the boundary of me failing to keep me *me*. addicted to the lust of being seen. my skin, soft and porous. spongey. i was never scared of needles. the needle. the object that pierces skin to bring the outside in. how can you be scared of that when you have no self borders, no rules of meaning, no nothing. i busied myself with all of you for i was nothing. wondering if you've died because you're not texting me back. feeling unloved and unloveable and unfucked and unfuckable. clumsy and stupid. always knocking things over. can't arch my back properly in bed. never being able to get it just right. at least im mixed race and pretty. his grand prize. trophy girlfriend with no opinions. i shudder to think. but sometimes its like his gaze still lingers when i walk the roads we used to walk together. like the things he said still impact how i move through the world.





even if i pretend that they don't.  
perhaps i am too invested in this life. feeling  
everything too much. luckily the world has thick-  
ened my skin. im calloused with the words of  
those who used me. sharpened by the pain of all  
my grieving.

the walls (fuck the tories)

don't speak  
for the words only echo the silences  
silence attaches itself to my body  
present before i've had a chance to take a breath  
a gasp of air  
breathe  
sip from the drought of me. liquorice root and  
turmeric and ginger to help with the sniffles that  
keep you up at night after wondering what the  
silences might say if they could what the walls  
might whisper to each other in the dead of night  
for they have seen it all  
they hear the city's secrets and who would be a  
better confidant than the stony architecture that  
surrounds the bad men.  
even through the silences, the walls, they listen  
tentatively to the sounds of injustice, of greed.  
reminding you of that time you slipped and fell  
in front of pret and covered yourself in 99p filter  
coffee with soya milk and too much sugar – oops  
but its more than that  
the walls know the deep darkness inside of you  
that you choose to overlook





the walls know the real suffering  
even when bulldozed, replaced with 1 million  
pound sky rise glass apartments the walls  
the walls can tell  
i might be poor and silly and clumsy but  
at least i can live with myself.

brain

car go wrrrr  
head go beep  
wondering if my reality is real  
is why i cant sleep  
tears in the bathroom  
tears in the hallway

undiagnosed angsty brat woman  
promiscuous slut woman  
loves you the most woman  
can she be in the room with me cos  
she's my favourite person woman!!  
come to bed with me  
undress me and caress me  
make me forget me

buy me flowers but they  
just make me cry  
play the same song 19 times in a row  
walk the same route i walked long ago  
cry my eyes, dry my eyes, cry my eyes again foe-  
tal position is where i feel safe  
safety





that feeling i imitate, replicate through observa-  
tion i understand it theoretically but  
have never felt physically.

wake up, wanna die but not really  
head feels fuzzy  
cant really see clearly  
mind playing tricks got me thinking that im pretty  
looking in the mirror and its someone that ive  
never seen thinking that everyone is my worst  
enemy

yellow tulips in july  
they hate me i don't know why  
limitless but confined  
tidy space tidy mind

hellscape p.2

trying to mind my own business and failing miser-  
ably flailing  
trying to remember  
who am i  
depersonalisation  
at an alarming rate  
sitting inside listening to starz  
nodding along to the tap tapping of death  
the fated rider knocking  
asking for me  
asking who's home

im answering in hushed monotone

*"im wondering if the bad place  
is here?  
the place we actually fear is here?"*

the hellscape of my nightmares  
not burning red but  
humdrum, mundane  
im staring out the window  
stuck





where the cold air skins you alive  
when you put out the recycling  
its the only thing that reminds you of the blood in  
your veins.

frightening  
watching yourself  
lose yourself  
and find yourself  
on repeat  
ebbing and flowing  
grounded in something intangible  
life's dull but steady aching.

narrative

remember the stories i was told long ago that the  
sea is the sky  
and the clouds are just water  
and that if the wind changes ya face will stay like  
that and eating bread crusts makes ya hair curly

these are the stories that help  
to reconcile the gaps  
between the you  
and the *you*  
and the **you**  
that he knew

arguing over whose  
acting strange  
when you're both  
unsure about what the memories are  
about what is here  
and what we are projecting  
the ghosts of lovers past keep haunting  
telling me that nothing good lasts forever nothing  
can remain intact.





this is  
an ode to everyone you've been  
and everyone you will be  
living to remember the sleep that will come soon  
until at last the high tides out run you.

fire signs

quick to anger  
but earthy too  
makes me wonder if he had a taurus moon an

endless list of men who live in my mind rent free.

aquarius baby  
chocolate, maybe  
but with white bits too.

sink your teeth into me to  
let me know you care  
without pain

im not sure how to be loved without pain

his eyes were made of tiny green shards of glass  
just as piercing

i still see them when i close my eyes  
hear his voice when i am alone

looking round the room wondering if anyone





knows im here  
if anyone even likes me at all  
you'll grow out of it they say  
grow out of feeling like something is wrong with  
me? im bored and tired and  
fed up with being the centre of my own universe  
eject me so i may  
cease to exist  
the colours so blurred that i  
forget my own name.

### ghosting

move to sweden. gothenburg to be by the wa-  
ter. paint your walls pink, baby pink. eat cheese  
on toast for lunch and dinner. cry at tv shows  
you've seen a thousand times. stare and stare  
into nothingness, content with your loneliness.  
comfortable in the silences. get a cat. call it purdy.  
purdy hates being alone but so do you. wake  
up to purdy's paws tap-tapping at your face.  
maybe this isn't too bad. get a call. remember  
him? them? move to paris. write a novel. burn it  
during a critically low moment. cry. write about  
the pain. purdy dies. more pain. move back to  
london. reconnect over wine. games nights. try-  
ing to piece the missing pieces together. trying  
to feel whole again. staring at faces you used to  
know. people who used to hold you close. hold  
you together. introducing yourself to each new  
wrinkle. studying every grey hair. rekindle the  
closeness you ran away from. fall in love. fall in  
love again. fall in love with yourself harder. get  
a dachshund, call it jackson. try for a baby. mis-  
carry. fall out of love with the world. everything  
in it. rebuild yourself. remember art. write a novel





about death. the feelings we can't describe. the  
hurt. bear a son, call them leo. write some more.  
move to edinburgh. do a phd in african studies.  
critique the system. participate in it. grow old.  
critique the system. participate in it. grow older.  
teach students with bright eyes and open mouths.  
that everything is crumbling. doing what you  
can, to ease the pain. together. teach your child  
authenticity and kindness. watch as they grow  
up. grow out. of you. grow wearier each day. quiet  
and appreciative. the world still turns around you.  
brighter than before. with all you've seen. grow  
still. close your eyes.

