Příloha – Výchozí text

'Only a crisis – actual or perceived – produces real change. When that crisis occurs, the actions that are taken depend on the ideas that are lying around. That, I believe, is our basic function. To develop alternatives to existing policies, to keep them alive and available until the politically impossible becomes the politically inevitable' – Milton Friedman

Oh my god, a change is coming – can you feel it?

Of course a change must come! All the signs are there. We have wealth inequality that has returned to Victorian times. We have 50 million refugees across the world – the most people in transit since the Second World War ended. Depending on where you stand on climate change – with, on the one side, the 97 per cent of scientists who say it's a certainty, or, on the other, Donald Trump taking advice from his wig, like the deludo chef with the rat under his hat in *Ratatouille* – you can't argue with the fact that we're demonstrably running out of lions, fish, glaciers and sparrows. I'd like to think they've all just popped down the shops to get the papers and some fags, but I suspect they're kind of … extincting.

With industry in terminal decline in Britain – replaced by financial services and banking – the best contribution the average, low-wage citizen can make to the economy is to get in debt. Hence the lack of willingness to deflate housing prices, and the subsequent huge mortgage payments. And the shift to fees for higher education – thus tying young people into long-term loans. The average *non-mortgage* debt of a British citizen is £10,000 – plus interest. And this huge national debt is a key part of our current economic model. We are now an economy largely

based on people *buying money*. It's seen as normal. But it is, of course, incredibly risky behaviour – because if interest rates go up, so will the number of people in financial ruin. This seems like a … bad plan.

And then, of course, there's inequality – the frankly mortifying under-representation of the working classes, women, people of colour and the LGBT community in any seat of power – business, government, finance or media. The under-representation of the *majority* of people, in other words.

Things are … unbalanced. There are too many monopolies and bottlenecks. The spread of power – of ideas – is puckered and lumpy. The upward generational rush of social and economic improvement – the hallmark of the twentieth century – has ended: my children and your children, are, by all indices, set to fair worse than my parents, or your parents. If history has taught us anything, we know that, by necessity, a change will have to come.

Because a change is *always* just about to come. One of the delightful delusions we have as a species is that changes only occur very rarely – and when they do, they are seismic, and sudden. In between these seismic changes, everything is still, and peaceful. Old maids cycle to church, and the thwack of cricket bat on ball, etc., etc.

In reality, change is constant. We are a species that is always on the move – all our civilisations were built on the run. There is no walking pace. There is no rest. Change was happening yesterday, and last year, and now, and tomorrow.

You are, infinitesimally, changing things now, by Tweeting, or drinking Fairtrade tea, or booking a flight, or talking to your child about Equal Marriage – or, more likely, listening to your child tell *you* about Equal Marriage, because your children are often far ahead of you. They cannot remember the past, and they see more of the future, because they will be in it for longer than you. That's why they're posting pieces about teenage coders in Ghana on their Facebook pages, or telling you what 'vontouring' is (don't look it up. It's plastic surgery for your vagina. You don't want to know. Just imagine your flaps looking like the Bride of Wildenstein and leave it at that).

So! A change is coming – and there's no change there. As far as humanity is concerned, change is business as usual.

'Revolution Number 2' – the song the Beatles never wrote

I have heard, in the last five years, the word 'revolution' mentioned more times than I did in the proceeding twenty. In protest groups, at meetings and, overwhelmingly, online, I have heard people talking about 'revolution' as if it is a coming thing – a necessary thing. Occupy, Syriza, Podemos, the Arab Spring, the near break-up of the Union during the Scottish Referendum – we slip into talk of revolution easily these days. It's where the heat is. When Russell Brand wrote a book called *Revolution*, it sold over half a million copies, and his interview on *Newsnight* was watched by 11 million people – twice the number who regularly watch *EastEnders*. For a man discussing the overthrow of the entire political system, dismantling multinationals and setting up anarchist collectives! Not even the drunkest gambling addict would have put their money on that in 2000.

Personally, I'm thrilled with the current modishness of 'revolution', because I like the word 'revolution'. It's my third favourite, after 'cathedral' and 'shagreen'.

But, I should make clear, I like the word 'revolution' as defined in the *second* entry in the dictionary, and not the first.

The dictionary's first definition of 'revolution' is: 'Rebellion, revolt, insurrection, mutiny, uprising, riot, insurgency, overthrow, seizure of power, regime change, anarchy, disorder.'

Personally, I'm not up for that. The kind of people who are up for mutinies, and riots, tend to be young men – the kind for whom an afternoon of being kettled by 600 Metropolitan policemen before breaking free and wanging a brick through the window of Greggs feels like a life-affirming alternative to sports.

I, however, am a forty-year-old woman with very inferior running abilities and two children. I don't like riots. I don't like anarchy. I've

read enough history books to be resoundingly unkeen on extreme politics of either the left *or* the right, breakdowns in society, anarchy, overthrows, seizures of power and disorder. They tend to work out badly for women and children. They tend to work out badly for *everyone*.

My general rule of thumb is that you're always a *little* bit closer to the conditions that led to the outbreak of the Second World War than you think you are – which is why I'm all for political and economic stability, non-tumultuous cultural change, the bins continuing to be being emptied on time, etc., etc.

I like order. I like calm. I like not Googling 'how to get/hide gun cache in case of break-down of society'.

That's why the revolution *I* like is the second dictionary definition: 'Revolution: sea change, metamorphosis, transformation, innovation, regrouping, reorientation.'

Now that's a revolution I can get behind – metamorphosis. Sea change. A revolution that sounds like the moment *The Wizard of Oz* goes from black and white into colour; Cinderella's ball gown appearing around her in a blaze of Fairy Godmother magic. Not upheaval, but an *upgrade*. Even the most entrenched conservative would find it difficult to argue with the idea of a notable upgrade to the way we do things. Capitalism has been the defining political movement of my age – but it's not really gone through a thoughtful, planned improvement in my lifetime.

By way of contrast, I've lived through ten OS upgrades on my Mac – and that's just something I use to buy playsuits from Topshop.com, and piss around on Twitter. Capitalism is, surely, due an upgrade or two. Snow Leopard capitalism. Yosemite capitalism. Isn't that the fundamental point of capitalism, anyway? Of competition and markets? Constant product improvement and more choice? It's kind of weird that, under market-led capitalism, we can get 300 different kinds of latte but only one kind of market-led capitalism, with all the main political parties save the Greens peddling pretty much the same basic model.

It's almost as if the current political system doesn't see itself. It just believes it exists – that it sprang fully formed, via evolution,

as the natural way of things. It doesn't see itself as so many others do, as something that was constructed by human beings – fallible, faulty human beings – and so therefore could be changed by human beings. We don't even really have a *name* for this current economic and political system – to call it 'neo-liberal capitalism' is seen as an inherently left-wing labelling; it marks you out as, well, a Marxist. And when you can't even *name* a system, you can't have a conversation about it – which is proven by the general confusion, and feeling of being tongue-tied, in most voters when they discuss how things are, and how they'd like them to change. When you live in a social and economic system that is presented merely as *the* system, you prevent people from naming and inventing new ones.

But we do need to start talking about new systems. This restless feeling – that's what it is.

So, we're due an upgrade. What would this upgrade be? Where will this upgrade come from?

Well, it's us. If we're talking about a basic upgrade of the operating system of the Earth, there's one huge, untapped resource which would allow a light-speed jump in progress – and it's us. *We* are the big, obvious resource of our age.

And we are the key and unique resource of our age – for, in all of history until now, most of our processing power has gone to waste. Unless a brilliant mind was born into the fortunate circumstances of a) being male b) not dying of a terrible disease before the age of three c) being able to afford education and d) being in a social situation – usually predicated by location and wealth – which enabled him to disseminate these ideas, then, without that, all this potential died with its owner.

This, then, is the ultimate argument for the urgency and necessity of equality. For equality isn't some fabulous luxury we treat ourselves to when we're rich enough – the legislation and infrastructure we get round to *after* we secure our economies, or wrangle our foreign policy. Equality isn't humanity's cashmere bed socks. It's not a present we treat ourselves to, like champagne. It's a fundamental necessity, like water.

In the twenty-first century, humanity's greatest resource isn't oil, or titanium, or water, or gold: it's brains. It's people's brains. The reason the more unequal countries are so troubled is, to be brusque, because they are more stupid. They disregard their female population – thereby halving their potential brainpower – and then limit themselves to a problem-solving elite made up of a tiny percentage of the remaining 50 per cent.

And so while we keep these billions of tons of brains offline, we put humanity in an illogically difficult position. By believing some people are naturally superior, we make our species, as a whole, inferior. Weaker. To be frank: stupider.

And this weakness extends into our politics. The 'poli' in politics, the 'demo' in democracy – they both mean 'people', and that's what's currently missing. Us. Despite all the hot talk of revolution, when it comes to voter turnout the problem of apathy is rampant. Even with the highest voter turnout since 1997, over 40 per cent of young voters (18–25) did not vote in the last UK election – arguably the demographic that should be most politically engaged, as the business of politics is inventing the future *they* are going to live in.

And just as huge swathes of the population are missing at the polling booth, so they are in Westminster. Out of 650 constituencies, just 191 are represented by women.

Britain's non-white population is also seriously under-represented – just forty-one MPs to represent 13 per cent of the British population. And when it comes to working-class representation in Westminster, 33 per cent went to private schools (compared to 7 per cent of the population).

Out of 260 new candidates in 2015, forty-seven had previously been 'consultants', twenty-nine barristers and nineteen journalists. Sometimes, on bad days, it does seem that, if you have the right 200 people in your social circle, you've got a roughly 50/50 chance of being the next Prime Minister.

However you look at it, that's not a wide, healthily diverse mix coming into Westminster as fresh blood, and bringing in new conversations and ideas.

And little wonder we have such a small, incestuous slice of the population representing us – for politics has been terribly devalued. These days, if your child announced that they wanted to be a politician most people would react as if they had come down to the breakfast table and said, 'Mother, Father – I've decided to become a massive pervert.'

Our default belief is that politicians are venal, shifty, double-dealing liars, out to serve the interests of their friends and business associates. It's hard for an honourable man, woman or asexual to say that they wish to run for government without instantly being suspected of slight … evil. And that is, to use the scientific phrase, balls. There's no point in us *having* a democracy if we distrust everyone who wants to engage with it officially. If, in the very act of trying to gain power, you lose the trust of the people you wish to represent. That by wanting to stand for something you are presumed to be standing only for yourself.

There, the entire notion of being a public servant – a key tenet of the modern age – fails.

So: the problems are, as it stands, who engages in politics and what they do. That the idea of politics has become threadbare and dirty; the debates clownish and offputtingly pugilistic; the participants limited and lacklustre. The system's borked.

The good news is, we have a billion ways to improve it. Us. For we are the point of democracy. We *are* democracy. We are the conversation. We are the climate. We set the tone – we make the spaces where conversations turn into ideas, which then turn into action. We are the drivers – not just at the polling booth, every five years, but in the choices we make every day in what we buy, what we eat, the language we use, the ideas we share, the comments we make and the connections we make across the world.

In many ways, culture and society are a billion times bigger than politics. The coming of the internet – and the rapid surge towards everyone being connected and being able to talk to each other – means there is a whole other world of power, influence and knowledge operating independently from the conventional old institutions of

power, knowledge and influence – Westminster, Holyrood, Stormont, universities, the City, the media – and on a vastly larger scale.

In many ways, social media already *is* the media, and in a way that can only accelerate as the years go on – even the biggest news organisation in the world, the BBC, has only 3,500 employees. Facebook and Twitter, on the other hand, have 1.3 billion between them: 1.3 billion reporters, photographers, hackers, opinion writers. These days, we both receive *and* broadcast. There is no such thing as a passive audience any more. We all wish to have our say – whether our 'say' is a 6,000-word blog entry, or just the simple act of intellectual dissemination and approval that is pressing 'Like', or 'Re-Tweet'. I enjoy bringing Karl Marx into conversations, so I'll just point out that, in this respect, the internet is Marxist: it has seized the means of production – producing news – but *only* because monolithic capitalistic multinational corporations like Google, Facebook and Twitter have enabled it in the first place. There's a pleasingly knotty paradox for the next time you've had three gins.

Look at one of the biggest stories on social media in the last year: racism in the USA. By all accounts, white cops have been beating and shooting black citizens for years – and the reporting of it by mainstream media was cursory and short-lived. Twenty years after the savage beating of Rodney King, these incidents were still being presented on TV and in newspapers as isolated events.

In 2015, however, social media took on this story and made it huge. It set the climate. Advances in technology mean that people have been able to film violent incidents, and finally show the world what is happening. Activists blog, start hashtag campaigns – #blacklivesmatter, #icantbreathe – and even in the simple act of re-Tweeting these stories, the topic has been pushed to the forefront of the news agenda, and stayed there all year. Questions about racism in America are now being asked in a way that has become pressing and urgent. In a recent poll, 53 per cent of Americans said they believed that racism had become worse in the last five years. No. It's just that we're *talking* about racism more. We're finally *seeing* it – in iPhone footage posted to blogs, of white, armed cops pinning down crying fourteen-year-old black

teenage girls in bikinis, crying for their mothers; in Eric Garner in a chokehold, saying his last words: 'I can't breathe'.

Many of the things I will be discussing under the heading of politics are, in fact, cultural, social and technological. Society and culture often marches faster, and longer, and harder, than politics. They frequently effect change fastest, and in the coolest way possible.

One of my favourite examples is that of *Doctor Who*. Russell T. Davies convinces the BBC to revive *Doctor Who*, because he loves it. Into the first series he writes in a character, Captain Jack Harkness, who is a hot, charismatic, pan-sexual super-hero. Essentially a Han Solo who'll do it with anyone.

In one episode, he kisses the Doctor, full on the lips. This is a prime-time BBC show – screened at teatime – watched by families. Not only was there not one letter of complaint, but on Monday morning, in my children's playground at school, there were ten-year-old boys fighting to play the role of Captain Jack in their *Doctor Who* games.

Now, that's something that, with the best will in the world, no piece of legislation, or Equalities Minister, could have achieved – making ten-year-old boys think bisexual super-heroes are cool. Not overnight. Not without any arguments. Not done entirely with love, and fuelled with joy, and almost as a by-product of a show that wanted to entertain, dazzle; make you laugh and cry and gasp.

I can draw a fairly straight line between that kiss in *Doctor Who* in 2007 and the passing of the 2013 Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act in the UK – for what elected representative can vote against human rights for a section of the population that their children, and grandchildren, totally accept?

So much of the groundwork for change is done simply through human creativity, joy and a willingness to consider future and parallel worlds. The BBC made that show, and we watched it, and in a small way – while we were at play, while we were *happy* – the world was changed.

For the first time ever, thanks to the explosion of social media, the world can talk to the world – unmediated. Information known by

one person can be shared around the world in less than an hour – as evidenced by WikiLeaks. Voices that previously would never have been heard can lead the debate – as happened in the UK with the Daughters of Eve anti-FGM campaign that led to changes in legislation.

Through the internet of the world, we have, finally, gained a global sentience that was unthinkable even in the era of the satellite phone link-up, or the fax. Someone, observing the Earth from space, would have notice that, since social media opened up the skies, conversations and introductions and information and networks have lit up the globe with a trillion golden skeins. The whole world is firing up, like a teenage brain – burning neural pathways across the globe, making connections, expanding, leaping. Previous spiritual, or religious, notions of a collective human consciousness now look like simple predictions of the future. We are now in a collective consciousness. That's the ultimate purpose of the internet. Oh my God. I'm going to have a fag.

In April 2013, the woman who utterly defined the social climate of my childhood in the 1980s, Margaret Thatcher, died. Many people I knew celebrated. Many others were furious that they did. I tried to explain why, for some people, her death was something they'd waited to mark for a long, long time.

WHY WE CHEERED IN THE STREET WHEN MARGARET THATCHER DIED

It's an odd thing – being told to mourn. Being told to feel sad. Being chided into reverence.

When the news of Margaret Thatcher's death broke, Twitter became – as it always is – the village well: the place of announcement and discussion.

At first, everyone stuck to a very simple 'Margaret Thatcher has died', or 'Baroness Thatcher, RIP', or, 'It has finally happened'. The first communications were the simple reporting of news.

After half an hour or so, people started to talk about their emotional reactions to the news that she was gone. And whenever someone from the left said anything non-reverent – or even joyous – about her passing, several thousand people from the right would be on hand to scold, 'Show some respect!', or 'An 87-year-old woman has died!' or 'Can you not feel some compassion? Can you not act with kindness? Can you not bow you head, just for today?'

And this was interesting, because those who supported Margaret Thatcher appeared not to believe that otherwise reasonable, considerate people could legitimately feel like this. The right could not understand why, even for a day, some on the left could not bow their heads and make a civilised attempt at deference.

But as someone who comes from a council estate, in a town that rioted in the 1980s (Wolverhampton: the McDonald's was left intact.

Even as we rioted, we protected the chips), but now mingles with the elite (I've been snubbed by David Cameron at a garden party: my echelons are 'upper'), I know why those feelings exist. How it is perfectly possible for kind people to not be capable of mourning a death of an old lady. Why your bones can boil against someone who should, ostensibly, be assessed as a hard-working public servant.

As a class jumper, I would say, as a sweeping generalisation, that politics can never mean as much to the professional classes as it does to the working class, or the underclass.

What is the worst – the very worst – government policy can do to you if you have a job in an industry with a strong future, live in a pleasant and well-equipped part of the country, and have enough money to have always thought of shoes as a necessity rather than a luxury? Push the highest rate of tax to 90 per cent, and let the bin men go out on strike. Annoying – but not fatal. If you are generally secure, a government can certainly inconvenience you, make your poorer, or make you angrier – it can be, let's be frank, a massive, incompetent, depressing, maybe even immoral pain in the arse – but *you*, and your family, and your social circle, will survive it. It is unlikely the essential course of your life will be much different under one government than the next, however diverse their ideas.

By way of contrast, what's the worst – the very worst – a government policy can do to you if you're poor – food bank poor? Dependent on the government poor? Well, everything. It can suddenly freeze, drop, or cancel your benefits – leaving you in the panic of unpayable bills, and deciding which meals to skip. It can underfund your schools and hospitals – death in a corridor; no exams passed: no escape route into private hospitals, or tutors, when your purse is full of buttons and old bus tickets. It can let your entire industry die – every skill learned and piece of knowledge earned left useless. It can leave your whole city to 'managed decline', as Geoffrey Howe's recently published suggestion for Liverpool revealed.

You know when middle-class people feel 'absolutely devastated' by the government's policy on the EU? They're not devastated. They're just annoyed.

You know when poor people are 'absolutely devastated' by the government's policy on housing benefit? They *are* absolutely devastated. They're in a hostel, with their children. It's not just words to them. It's the reporting of a fact.

Because if you are in the wrong town, in the wrong job, in the wrong class, the policies of a government can ruin you. And all those around you, too – so that you are all in fear. I don't know if you ever went to a former manufacturing town in the 1980s, but that's how they felt. The sadness and fear was everywhere – it saturated estates like greasy fog. It saturated the people like greasy fog: even now.

Whenever people reminisce about the eighties now, they always mention how the prospect of nuclear annihilation was a palpable thing. We were thoroughly and repeatedly talked through what it would be like to live in a post-nuclear wasteland: the lack of resources, the lack of hope. We were all conversant with what would happen when the wind blows. We knew what waited for us, if diplomacy failed.

As a nine-year-old when *Threads* – with its bomb blast, and melting St Paul's, and evaporating, screaming citizens – was broadcast, I had that hazy, childish thing of half believing, half not believing, that the dropping of the bomb had now happened. In Wolverhampton, it looked like diplomacy *had* failed. So much of what was promised for the apocalypse appeared to have come to us, bar the radiation burns – and, in the 1980s, antibiotic skincare for acne was so in its infancy that, often, one saw a particularly unlucky, gangling, pustule-crippled adolescent who looked like he really might have been the epicentre of the mushroom cloud.

We would drive into town, and my father would start the same, rattled monologue: 'When I was a kid, at this time of the day, all you'd hear was the "tramp, tramp, tramp" of people's feet as they walked to the factories – every bus would be full, the streets would be seething. This town had something to do, and money in its pocket. People used to come here for work, and get it, the same day. Look at it now,' he'd say, as we went right through the centre: boarded-up buildings, buddleia growing out of windows.

'A ghost town. Where have they gone? Where have they all gone?'

We were here to shop, at the cheapest place in town: the big, empty supermarket by the retail market, where someone had thrown up shelves inside what used to be a factory, and piled goods high and sold them cheap. Mice would run from the sacks of rice. Ghosts seemed to live up in the roof, in the tangle of pipes they'd simply painted over, in a sickly, unlikely turquoise.

It was only driving back home that you'd see where 'everyone' was – queuing outside the Job Centre, heads down. The old fellas, like my dad, who'd always thought they'd work jobs wet with sweat, who could only sign their names with an 'X', and who knew they were, in the resettling of the economy, fucked. The younger men, who looked pole-axed by knowing that 2,999,999 people had signed on before them – although part of their discombobulation could have been their jeans, which were still, at the time, worn very tight, and without the mercy of a Lycra mix.

I was, accidentally, in the town centre when the riots happened – when it seemed like every man in the city ran down the main road, screaming, and the police vans boxed us in, and our dad pulled us into a doorway, and pushed us to his chest, under his coat, with the shrill, sour smell of his sweat, as he panicked, and tried to hide us from screaming men under his padded, Burton's anorak.

And then, in times of calm, the attempts at pleasure. We went to West Park – Wolverhampton's green space – once. We were the first people in the park that day. As we walked through the gates, the muddy banks of the lake became animated, and the water began to churn, and there was a chittering sound that made you want to wipe your hands clean over and over and over again. Hundreds and hundreds of rats were fleeing at our approach – they were swimming out to their nests on the island in the middle of the lake, while emitting odd rat screams.

So that's where I grew up. The riots and rats and ghosts and sad, silent queues. It seemed like diplomacy had failed in Wolverhampton, in the 1980s. Like some kind of bomb *had* dropped.

And when an entire city falls – when you live somewhere that feels like the ruins of a civilisation; when your elders tell you, with a look of shock that is still new, that it did not use to be like this: that things were better, that things were pleasant, but not in your lifetime; and you see that they mourn the childhood you are having, and want to cover it up with their big, hard hands – you look, as all ruined, bombed cities must, to your leaders, to see what their reaction is to your unhappiness. You look to see what their solution is.

And the government of the eighties did not come and help. I sound as pathetic as a child when I say this now, but that's how we all felt. It was made clear that governments do not help in these matters – that the spores of private enterprise blow as they may, and that everything else was down to the individual. That is your city that was ruined; it was because not enough citizens were being dynamic, and opening wine bars, or starting up tech firms, or trading on the Stock Exchange. If a city was inferior, it was simply because its people were inferior. We were the problem. We – in Liverpool, and Sunderland, and Glasgow, and in the Welsh Valleys – were just … wrong. We should have turned into something else, and we hadn't. And, as a consequence, we were disliked by our own government.

I grew up knowing that Margaret Thatcher disapproved of my entire existence: a family of eight children, in a council house, with a union-leader dad: home-educated, bohemian, scared of arguments, immersed in gay culture, with Welsh mining relatives sitting in the front room, talking about their picket lines. We were the kind of people holding people back.

In recent years I've frequently been told that my childhood dislike and fear of Mrs Thatcher was deeply ironic – as I am, in actual fact, a classic child of Thatcher. 'Look at you! Self-made! Working since you were thirteen, from a council estate in Wolverhampton! Pulled up by your bootstraps! A strong woman in a man's world! You are the absolute proof of everything she was saying! Margaret Thatcher made you!'

To which I always reply, very quietly: 'Yes. But look around. How many others like me made it out? How many ascended into the world

of boys from Eton and Cambridge and the Home Counties, at ease with walking into big rooms, and making things happen? Where are the other working-class kids from my generation? Because I look around, and I don't see them. The barriers did not come down. Indeed, compared to my father's generation, they appear to have gone back up again.'

So this is where all that anger started – the anger that confused so many, on the announcement of Baroness Thatcher's death. All those people childishly downloading 'Ding, Dong! The Witch Is Dead', or throwing parties to 'celebrate' her passing. Among many commentators, there was bewilderment over the fireworks that were set off, and the champagne – put away in cupboards for so many years, waiting for this day – being drunk. Why would you celebrate a death? The death of someone hard-working, old and confused? It is, surely, unnecessarily crude. It's spiteful.

But for all those who were left behind, to mourn their own towns, the sadness and the fear had turned to sour anger, as it always does. And that is when so many impotent but determined entries were made in diaries. Entries made when a factory closed, or Section 28 was brought in, or a relative came back from a protest, bleeding. Entries made when politics seemed to get very, very personal – in your wage packet, and in your bed. Entries when politics became dangerous, and destructive, in so many towns.

And they will all have been written differently, on different days, in different pens in a thousand different ways, but what they all boiled down to was this: 'I can't do anything else, now, but outlive this. Outlive you. All I can do is outrun you.'

And that is what all the cheap, unworthy, yet ultimately heartfelt celebration was on 8 April. It was the simple astonishment and relief of people – in the Valleys, on the estates, in the hostels and on failed marches – who felt they had, against all their own predictions, survived something.

Let's face it – we could easily have called this section 'Why Having a Vagina Is Often Terrifying'. Here is a piece on one of those other subjects feminist writers find themselves having to revisit, over and over again: women's right to control when they become mothers.

THIS IS A WORLD FORMED BY ABORTION – IT ALWAYS HAS BEEN, AND IT ALWAYS WILL BE

In 2013, in Spain, the ruling Popular Party drafted legislation to radically tighten the country's abortion laws. They proposed to make it illegal for Spanish women to seek an abortion save in cases of rape, incest, or risks to physical or mental health. Following an international outcry, the PP eventually backed down – but this came at the same time as American women began to experience notable restriction to abortion-access in many states, and British clinics started to see regular protests on the pavements outside, with clients – many of them young, and traumatised – being met with a barrage of abuse. There seemed to be a surprising re-framing, in many otherwise advanced countries, around the subject of abortion. It was as if abortion were some relatively recent, morally licentious activity that blew in on the same wind as disco, homosexuality and *Dallas*, and which must now – in more sore, sober and reflective times – be curtailed once more. That the only abortions are these modish, legal abortions – these clinics, and these doctors – and that now, enough was enough, and they must be stopped.

This is an odd logic for modern countries to take – as it ignores the constant, immovable, historical presence of abortion. Its commonness, currency and necessity. We live in a world formed by abortion – and we always have. Examine the social records of any time and they have their abortion remedies: pennyroyal, tansy, hellebore. Silphium was the remedy of the Ancient Greeks – the main export of Cyrene, demand

was so huge for Silphium that it was harvested into extinction – but not before its image was imprinted on to the Cyrenian coinage.

Coat-hangers, candles, carved wooden tools – fasting, bloodletting, pouring hot water on to the abdomen. Hippocrates recommended jumping up and down, so that the heels of the feet made contact with the buttocks.

And, of course, in all this there is no pictorial or documentary record of the most common thing of all: desperate, terrified prayers, over the millennia, from girls and women, desperately hoping they will miscarry.

Women trying to control their fertility, in order to have mastery of their lives, is as ancient a practice as humans trying to control their fields in order to eat. The society we live in is shaped by abortion – how can it not be, with a third of women now having an abortion in their lifetime? That is a gigantic force in the way we live – it informs every aspect of our economy, industry and sexuality – but the merciful, positive aspects of it are never seen, or discussed. Squeamish and frightened, we only *ever* discuss abortion when someone seeks to curtail safe, legal access to it.

And legal access is the key thing. Of the 40 million abortions that happen worldwide every year, half happen in countries where it is legal. The other half happen anyway – illegally. Unsafely. Of the 20 million women who abort illegally, 47,000 die. Whether it is legal or not, across the world and throughout time, women abort. And when you look at the reasons given to the World Health Organisation by these women, you can see why. It is a list that invokes mercy, and solidarity with the women, in all but the most determinedly ideological of hearts: 73 per cent 'cannot afford a baby now'; 48 per cent have relationship problems; 13 per cent have an unhealthy foetus; 1 per cent were raped.

The simplicity of why women choose to seek an abortion is devastating: they feel they cannot look after a child. *Cannot.* I assure any anti-abortionist they may disregard their sneaking feelings that 40 million women a year have abortions foolishly, recklessly – that it is done with the same selfish giddiness as binge-drinking, or twerking,

and therefore to be discouraged by the high-minded, for the greater good of society.

A woman who is so convinced she would be a bad parent that she is prepared to take a pill and bleed for four days, or else find herself with her legs up in stirrups, has made a very serious decision about what is both good for her and society. And yet because abortion is shameful, women stay silent over their grateful need for legal access to it, and we continue – despite that 40 million – to think of abortion as some fringe activity, done by 'others' – never our daughters. Our mothers, wives and sisters. Our bosses. Our politicians.

When those American states voted to curtail access to legal abortion, I wanted every woman in that building who'd had an abortion to stand up and say, simply, 'I have had an abortion.' Not just the politicians – the PAs and the cleaners, the electricians and the press officers.

And then on – outside the buildings of legislature, and into the streets: every woman – one in three – on strike that day, in a symbolic withdrawal from the running of the country. Spanish women should have done just the same. Both countries would have ground to a halt.

And the symbolism would have been apt – for when women are denied safe access to abortion, *their* lives grind to a halt. Our societies grind to a halt. Forty million a year suggests nothing less. What do anti-abortionists think, exactly, that the world would do with those extra 40 million children a year – born to unwilling mothers? For whose benefit, exactly, would we be assembling this unhappy battalion?

Women have abortions. They always have, and they always will. The only question is: in safe, legal clinics – or back to pennyroyal, hot water and desperate prayers?