

January 26, 1962. I am born against the surgeon's timetable. They have tried to delay my birth to comply with his shift. I remember the effects of the drugs, causing me to withdraw my impulse to emerge, tucking my long neck up short, tucking in my chin.

And yet I still manage to emerge on a day which Australia celebrates with Fireworks and champagne. Fifty years ago, a day commemorating the civilising takeover of the 'blank slate', *terra australis*, by Cook's men. IN my twenties, I still watch bright fireworks light the peninsula in national celebration. Within four decades, however, I can't tell people it's my birth without the addition of their lament: 'ahh Invasion Day,' the day Aboriginal sovereignty is lost to the English Cannon. How ironic, anyway, that a child born of immigrant parents, and never quite accepted as [white] 'australian'.

No wonder, then, that another decade later, my skin crawls at the spectacle held during London's LIFT: *Un peu plus de lumiere* (a little more light), Christophe Bertonneau, Battersea Park June 7.

I am meant to smile ohh and ahh.

I have a suspicion of spectacles.

All the marshalling of forces and finances, titillating toy wars removed from the battlefields.

Guy Fawkes was a thug, an extremist, a separatist, celebrated annually in a fizz and pop night with various safeguards (in Australia now, illegal in one's private home).

At LIFT's fireworks, torches spiralled the sky. We are in Vietnam with napalm, London with firebombs: is it the shape of the burning dragon that appeases us? The ground-level rituals most of us couldn't see an attempt to change its meaning/appease us with remote rituals? Am I just a killjoy?

No, of course, I too gawped and craned and wondered how much further could they go, how much higher, brighter, more audaciously changing night to day (as do poets and lovers, more frequently, cheaply, intimately), but this is awful and awful, the crowd impatient with the inbetweens and jeering and leering and panting for the explosions once more. Our public hangings now going off with a bang.

We are cruel masters and cruel livers; we beat dogs and wives. Fireworks express and contain our violence, colouring them in hues that make the skies incarnadine or dappled green or white like stars that couldn't possibly cluster as closely, brightly.

It is very strange to be there.