

I USED TO
THINK THE
ONLY LONELY
PLACE WAS
ON THE
MOON

FALL OUT

Anna Sanderson

INSTRUCTIONS TO LIVE BY

Laura Preston

ONLY LONELY

Amy Howden-Chapman

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FALL OUT

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In the Whangarei library high up on a cinderblock wall:

'Happiness is making a bouquet of those flowers within reach.' Anon.

What did I dream last night? A man with broken skin.

Dad said, 'My mother was a lovely woman. My father had some bad points. He also had some good points.'

A man with a t-shirt which says EASILY DISTRACTED in American college lettering. He looked sideways.

The space was grey, not coloured like the womb. Mum, where were you? I was concerned. Your lips quivered and curled down, you were trying to keep your lip down over your teeth. When we left you looked grey.

I imagine our future visits like prison visits. They might be supervised. I will be wearing a white blouse and a dark brown skirt. Both cotton, both clean, and in repair. Just half an hour. A few little murmurs here and there. Anyway, free now.

What happened? Mum?

Where was that grey place?

I am still there.

This morning is bright. Emails on a smooth computer. Still nervous. A woman walks in in a bright synthetic blue dress the same colour as this diary. And a plastic necklace, graduated blues, navy through to eggshell. Di said nothing when I said we need to grow Evie's hair for a while as she calls herself a boy/girl. Is silence disapproval?

I had wanted my speech to be like an oyster. Limpid, endlessly subtle, amorphous but invisibly contained. But I had a jagged club and I bashed edges of blood, levered away bitty chunks.

Had a dream I bit Moses and Anne was pregnant. I wanted to display myself like a peacock.

Puff. She blew me off her hand like a dandelion fairy. Today what will happen? The domestic tussle. Adam Phillips: constructive conflict. Must read him.

Failed businesses: camera shop, gifts for men cafe, design studios, bike repair shop, Presbyterian Support Services op shop, accessories and beads, Expressoholic, Christopher's crystals, Japanese novelties, gay bar, Asian supermarket.

Seemingly good businesses: Southern Cross tavern, Fidels, Tattoo place, Hunters and Collectors, Mr Bun, two dollar shop, Satay Kingdom, fish and chips, Licks,

il Bordello?, Floriditas, Italian cafe, Glassons, Dick Smith.

Interest. Tiger. All art is sublimation. (Adam Phillips). Patchworks of images then flowing story. The bestiary. Thought yesterday could focus on smaller things. Re-read the weeds article. Life is happier when expectations match reality. Therefore, if you expect, as Phillips says, the continual unresolution between interest and sublimation, it'll feel ok.

Adam Phillips said John Ashberry said that speech became flawed when something important was being said. Can this explain failed communication with parents?

Stuck unexpectedly in Matakana. Where people go for boutique organic food. Who said that a culture that eats excessively well is a culture in decline? The motor lodge looks horrible Tony said. He wanted to find somewhere at the beach.

We went down to a place with all bones, but the bones were...some were alive. Someone had warned us of this. The bones were like ceramic, and that flesh, mushroom, pink colour. Sometimes they were flesh; a contour part of a body, like a hip or a side. One had thick black hair and looked Mexican. Some were alive and mad – as unpredictable as mad people are.

There was a 'For Sale' sign up in the front. I walked along the driveway, which seemed very bright and smooth and long. I was carrying Cal, who was wriggly and heavy. Inside a room we passed I saw French vanilla walls and a cheap clothes rack on wheels.

When I got to the reception and ding-donged the bell, a gargantuan young woman in shorts appeared, swallowing a mouthful of some takeaway, something greasy and pungent. She was probably an excellent netballer or rower. With greasy fingers she asked her unseen mother which rooms weren't empty.

In the room everything matched. There was a blue couch, blue curtains, carpet, towels. There was a blue plastic rubbish bin. The prints on the walls toned in too. The young woman and her mother would've flipped through through racks of prints somewhere: 'Yes, this one of the girl in the fine cotton dress lying near the lapping waves'll be good.' In this nest. Where did we read about the nest? But we were in it! It was big and very competently woven out of plastic wicker and soft fabric, perhaps by a machine. A nest lined with all shades of blue and a bit of cream.

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INSTRUCTIONS TO LIVE BY

Laura Preston

Yoko Ono gives instructions. Small statements with large visual punch. Like codes, they ask to be deciphered. They call on an action. However the sentences needn't come to anything literal. I think Ono is more interested in the work's waiting state, the conceptual limbo between the offering and the received thought. The works become suggestions for what one could do with one's time. They presuppose that we as readers know what the message is. The instructions are simple. The words also point to ideas beyond the direct line on the page. They can be repeated infinitely and translated in many ways, across different times. If repetition is based on difference, the slight divergence of the same act again and again, you can see how Ono's sentences play out this understanding. Recently I watched a documentary that featured her, filmed up-close and her face tightly framed. In sound-bite form she spoke about her work as musical scores. It isn't necessary to play out the score. It comes down to the concept written and the short-cut markings that take you there. They are offerings. Still. A pattern ready to have its potential realised. There is no specific way to interpret these forms, rather as instructions they are there to be imagined and lived with. You translate the recipe. The experience is very similar to reading novels.

Drill a hole in a canvas and put your hand out from behind. Receive your guests in that position. Shake hands and converse with hands.

Yoko Ono *Painting to Shake Hands*
(*painting for cowards*) 1961

I read some time ago about a jazz musician who would play as though glancing over his shoulder, so that what the listener would hear is the memory of the song instead of the song in real time. This is another way to think about history and how to put it to use. The score is a series of reference points that can only suggest, reminding us that we are somewhere else. The playing of the score plays with your expectations. Each time it is played it plays out differently.

Patterns are visual scores. As a series of abstract forms they rely on repetition, which subsequently enables efficiency. Like following a jump-cut. A leap across frames of time. It becomes automatic how we read the meaning of these shapes. I'm thinking of zebra crossings, type characters and architectural motifs. Finding faces, bodies in the unfamiliar and the abstract. Usually these patterns seem inherited. Even if the form is recent, the basis of the mark and its repetition seems to

tap into a world long ago when language was just forming, or conversely, like in science fiction, they become signs of some future prediction that will only be realised in a time to come. Orwell. Words on the page. Latent.

The language of abstraction allows for this. Jessica Stockholder has something to say about her use of colour matching and formal arrangement. She tells a story of growing up in Canada where the landscape was always foregrounded. In the arrangement of distant mountains and sweeping sea, an engagement with form is unavoidable. The scene you behave in becomes an image with dimensions.

This place is not necessarily utopian, nor does it aspire to be. The scene isn't without its own interpretive mayhem. The rules of form laid out by nature just seem more apparent in peripheral places. These are sites that have escaped the total build-up of a film set-like environment. The lines of colour in such peripheral places are more easily defined, repeated, willing to acknowledge the space between them. Frances Stark uses sampled forms for collage effects. She tells stories in the space that forms from assembling histories of text and texture. Her work implies that patterns can reach out beyond certainty and into a place of ambiguity. Language attempts to make sense of this place, and it is also from here that language can be best put to use.

The repeating strip. Motion pictures develop from the image repeated with ever so subtle differences. By stilling the image there is room to look closely at the pattern, the code of cinema. The still frame continues to accumulate stories automatically. The stories to be found in the still come from excavating deep within the frame rather than sliding horizontally. Instead of trains and planes they are developing technologies for particle transfer. It comes back to Ono and her sentences again.

The pattern is a well-edited form. It implies a previous use, a code that is not necessarily known but understood. W. G. Sebald writes like this. His unarticulated connections between words and images elucidate the ways in which we know without knowing, and remember without memory. He cares for lost worlds. There is an awareness of valuing peripheral vision from reading his scores and a belief that the tangential activates an intelligence of a much broader picture.

Sentences and sequences of forms shaped from intuition often come from noticing the periphery. Research into the whereabouts of these thoughts may unveil patterns

that have become archetypal. Taken from the landscape long ago and then shaped by ritual and use. The basis of the repeated form is shared by a kind of collective unconscious where the meaning of the pattern has both been forgotten and become ubiquitously knowable; such forms can be found on costumes worn by performing bodies during rites of passage and times of change. Tomma Abts has recently re-invigorated abstraction in painterly form. She speaks of working from an intuitive approach where figures emerge from a process of repeated paint strokes brushed. Faces. Attached to animated bodies that have moved to their own repetitive beat, guiding Abts into their own visual manifestation. These works have a broad power. Within the frame of the canvas it is not clear where the repeated forms are going, whether the works are finished, or if the work has since been buried through being overworked. The forms carry the same latency of the instruction. They are uncertain documents.

It is a fiction that the document can act as a record of an event or an activity in time. It is as fictional as film. Both require their audience to suspend the need for the real in order to absorb the work's fictional telling. When there is a mechanism that can slow down the flow of film and show the image to be one of many likened frames, the image is abstracted from its source. Made more abstract. Paradoxically, the recorded image also allows for indexical findings and pointers to what has been, such as nature being flattened and sacrificed for celluloid. The tree really did fall.

Douglas Gordon slowed down *Psycho* but more appropriate here is his framed character of Zidane. Making instinct the subject the film follows the consummate footballer and his imparting monologue on the idea of anticipation. He confesses to knowing before it happens when he's going to pull it off and perform. Score. Emily Wardill's films enact something different but have a similarly lucid understanding of the malleability of time. Every frame is overtly strung together, and furthermore every form and pattern within the frame is simultaneously then and now. It is as though these framed moments retrieve and show the ever-present pasts that cannot speak for themselves, because the pattern has always been in auto-pilot. Motion.

Cinema is predicated on discovering the ending. The experience of watching film is based on anticipation. We continually enquire after what is to happen. Waiting for the predetermined scene to either fulfil our expectations or deny them. The environment

will be rescued or the environment will be irretrievably affected. Either/or. There is much more to tell from forms that speak without a direct narrative thread heading towards completion. They operate in the amorphous periphery, and in carrying the latency of the larger picture, will last longer.

Patterns are seemingly arbitrary and are presented merely to aid narrative flow. Yet, if again you look closely and excavate the detail, a pattern is built up and abstracted from materials that come from the earth, from the lay of the land, beneath and before the subways. Knowledge of this has since shifted to the margins. New York City is supposedly built on quartz. This is why it has become so rich, and subsequently such fertile ground for the film camera. It now even acts like a film set. Places can learn from the lay of the land they are built upon and this knowledge may give clues towards the future.

What will happen next? The image has various rooms of thought that hide behind its sidewalls. Enfolded within lies the still and the moving, the a-political and the power-full. The image waits. When slide time is covered up, the machine turns but its message is made latent, literally material. Thought in dormancy. Hiding reference points. It visualises the space that the jump-cut skips over. The most powerful images are like the b-sides that you really wanted to make. When they do surface they come after the predictable, polished package. The b-side has more room to move, both critically and intuitively. To know without knowing. It may not necessarily travel further though the power of influence is usually greater. It lasts longer.

The score, whether conceptually drawn, painted or filmically rendered, points to someplace else. The image that moves you can send you here. Sometimes this place is an even closer now to the now that you know. Tapping the sidelines. Music and words can do this too. The palimpsest of the landscape is there to be recalled in all of this. To notice the force of nature, to notice the power of culture, comes from seeing where the two come together. Culture and nature. It is time to pause the repeating strip. To realise again the instructions we live by.

Go on transforming a square canvas in your head until it becomes a circle. Pick out any shape in the process and pin up or place on the canvas an object, a smell, a sound, or a colour that came to mind in association with the shape.

Yoko Ono *Painting to be constructed in your head*(1), 1962

ONLY LONELY

Amy Howden-Chapman

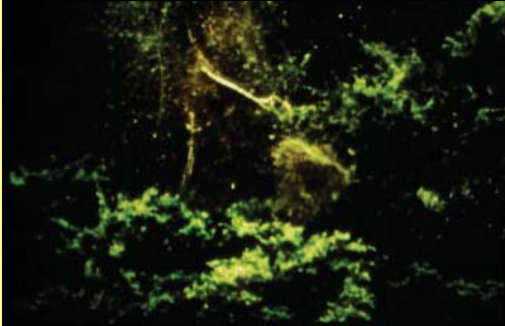
Amongst all the clutter of the nineties, people were rebelling by being openly emotional, by embracing whatever feeling something could bring. Back then there was a lot of chicken, cranberry and brie, and a lot of lime green and purple. Bulgy spirals adorned chairs and buildings and hung from the ears of 'power' women. In amongst all these ill-fated taste combinations my friend Liam went out on to the front step and tried to smoke a cigarette. It was the afternoon he found out that Kurt Cobain had killed himself. He wasn't a smoker, and couldn't really do it – finish the cigarette – but he sat there on the step trying to finish it, and thinking about Kurt and Courtney and coughing and crying.

The decade is an arbitrary period of numerical bracketing but it allows us to consider the eras inside it. I am too young to know much of the grunge era firsthand. For me, New Year's Eve 1989/90 was exciting because I was allowed to be awake for midnight. We went to sleep and were woken up at 11pm. We put on hats and jackets over our pyjamas and went out on to the street. There were hundreds of thousands of people. It was Berlin, the Wall was coming down, everyone was crying and hugging each other and drinking and it smelled bad, like beer. There were people climbing the Brandenburg Gate, they looked like they were about to fall off, or they did fall off and then we went back to bed.

In the nineties we went on Sunday walks through the park with our parents, and passed people selling glow sticks. We were bought glow sticks and we nurtured them in the freezer, trying to make them stay glowing for as many days as possible, shaking them till they faded. 'Remember all those smiley faces we used to see everywhere?' my brother said to me recently. There had been smiley faces on stickers stuck to everything, every post and every bench. We had begun to join in, drawing smiley faces on our books and bags. 'That must have been all the E,' my brother said. 'It was nothing to do with us, nothing to do with kids'. One Sunday we went on a 'Friends of the Earth' walk, or march. A parade is probably the best description. I remember a very positive atmosphere. Despite the fact that everyone was dressed up as endangered animals, they were smiling and cheering and chanting and singing. Our parents dressed my brother and I up as spiders, my mother stuffed pairs and pairs of her old laddered black stockings with rags and we tied them







to us as extra limbs. We must have been some kind of special endangered spider species. We painted our faces black and my brother took to sticking out his teeth like fangs and hissing at me. He scurried – bent over and walking sideways – for the whole march, but I couldn't keep that kind of impersonation up. It was hot and we were wearing pantyhose. As Friends of the Earth we had to walk a very long way dragging our extra arms and legs, and I was only small.

Melody Maker, the now-deceased British music magazine said in its 'Year in Review' article that in 1992 Bark Psychosis' single 'Scum' was the best of all:

It was twenty minutes long and every second, every grain of sound counted. Similar to Talk Talk's late excursions, it started like a slowly gathering fog and then enveloped you and whispered 'it's all about you, it's all around you, don't tell you, we're all free' before gathering up in an ear-splitting monochrome crescendo. There are still people out there who have declined to come indoors and. Are you man or woman enough not to join them, Punk?

Being inside yourself had in part become about standing outside a culture you didn't agree with.

David Foster Wallace has talked of the ability of the post-modern era to highlight that art is not just a matter of expression but of communication.¹

Pieces of art that are designed to please, gratify, edify human beings. So that you've got not just what's true to me as a person but what's going to sound true. What's going to hit readers or music listeners, what's going to hit their nerve endings as true in 2006 or 2000 or 1995, and it seems to me, and I may have a pessimistic view of it, but it seems to me that the situation, the environment in which nervous systems receive these communications is vastly more complicated, difficult, cynical and over-hyped than it used to be.

One example of over-hyped can be seen in current discussions around environmentalism. Back in the nineties, endangered species were the issue. CFCs, the Ozone Hole and Saving the Whales were the issues. People were 'Friends of the Earth' and conservationists. People were still chaining themselves to trees, and hugging them without irony. The same impulses to preserve the planet are still being played out now but with a new language. Discussions have now turned from conservation to carbon trading. Attempts by governments to implement the 'greening of the economy' has come

¹ David Foster Wallace interviewed by Michael Silverblatt March, 2006 On KCRW's *Bookworm*

with 'green washing' the manipulation of environmentalist values for profit. Cars that aren't even hybrid, but just slightly more fuel efficient than regular cars, are now being advertised as having the ability to 'protect your family *and* the earth.'

Foster Wallace goes on to give the example of his writing students who

...are far more afraid of coming off sentimental as they are coming off twisted, obscene, gross, any of the things that used to be the really horrible things that you didn't want to portray about yourself and it would appear that the great danger of appearing sentimental is that sentimentality appears to be used now in very cynical marketing or mass entertaining devices that are meant to manhandle the emotions of large numbers of people who aren't paying very close attention. So that some of the most urgent themes or issues about how to deal with mourning the loss of someone you love very much, has been so adulterated by treacly, cynical commercial art that it becomes very very very difficult to talk about it in a way that is just not more of that crap.

To consider grunge is to consider how another era dealt with wanting to be genuine, to express genuine emotions without being disregarded by those they were trying to communicate with, those who had themselves become so wary of sentimentalism. It was an attempt to protect the ability to feel in amongst a deluge of manipulation. Further, in grunge we can see the move from simply trying to preserve some kind of ability to express emotions, to such expressions being the thing which the movement celebrated. It celebrated it by getting rid of decadence, of sequins and sythensizers, and replacing them with a romance for the raw.

Even though I wasn't there, I get nostalgic about the grunge era. I would have liked to be jumping up and down and believing in it rather than at home in bed. Beanies and check shirts and cold nights alone now seem so unappealing that you know they must have been serious. Grunge seems like it wasn't trying to get you to do anything. It liked being on the outside, it didn't want to change the system, it just wanted to reclaim a language, a sound for describing what it felt like to be alive. It perfected the theatrics of just being – the sound of the slackers. It wasn't trying to make you cry because it wasn't trying to sell you tissues, just records, and baggy jeans.

I will leave the nihilism, but I will take the notion that simple can be powerful. That you can invent the image of powerful, you don't have to wait to be told what powerful is. That it is possible to challenge a culture that

values profit over sustainability by speaking about the environment with feeling but without using sentimentality to manipulate a change. You can cry even when an orchestra isn't swelling around signalling the sad bit. Rough can be romantic.

In 1993 Liam didn't have a proper bag. He has told me the story, a few times now, about how he would just use a plastic bag. Some days on the way up the hill in the morning all he would have in his bag was a pen. On the way down all he'd have in the bag was a pen and a few pieces of paper. The wind must have caught it over and over, must have lifted it so it would have hovered horizontally rather than hanging from his hand. He tells me about his plastic bag bags proudly. I think back then he was too sad to contemplate investing in anything sturdier, but that's not the angle he takes when he tells me about it now. He tells me that it was something so simple, and that made it a bit beautiful.

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SMALL REASON

Genevieve Michaels interviews Elizabeth Dragoin, the playwright and author. Michaels is a writer living in Melbourne. Dragoin's most recent work, the play Small Reason, opens on 18 June in Berlin.

Genevieve Michaels: I just finished reading an advance copy of *Small Reason*—

Elizabeth Dragoin: Top secret!

GM: —yes, very exciting. And I was struck by how, while it is a departure from your previous works in so many ways, it still adheres to this unique farcical style that you have practiced throughout your career. What initially attracted you to farce?

ED: Well, farce is perhaps the closest word to what I am doing, but it is not actually farce. In my mind, farce is a purely male genre—it is based around their overly simplistic understanding of contradiction. When reading a farce, inevitably I get the sense that what the author is truly trying to convey, what he is truly upset about and what he would write solely about if only he could, is the female.

GM: But surely that is not always the case. Some farcicists have written very admirable female protagonists. And an even greater number have not been concerned with gender at all.

ED: No, it is always the case. Underneath this admirable female protagonist is a system that completely undermines her. And for the political ones, the non-gender ones, most of the time is spent showing the stupidity of male characters who act like a male's conception of female. Men are terrified of contradiction because they can't understand it, and because they associate it with us. They can only think of it two-dimensionally—what rationally should happen, and what really happens, which is irrational. Rational steps lead to irrational outcomes, and to a man that is somehow profound, profoundly funny. As a result, their depiction of human thought is strictly rational, for the punch line depends upon it.

My work is concerned with contradiction as well, but not as a plot device or source of easy judgement. Instead it is contradiction itself, and our culture's understanding of it, and the implications that follow from that understanding, that is the central subject of my work. Imitation and exaggeration are fundamentals of the farce, so it seemed fitting for me to imitate and exaggerate the male farce

to the point when the contradictions explode in their simplicity, after which we can pick through the debris and find deeper truths.

GM: I would like to ask you a bit more specifically about the politics of your work. You are known in particular for your scathing criticisms of the Left. And—

ED: Oh, it is ridiculous, 'the Left'. They are not progressives, no matter how much they may think of themselves as such. We have this enormous demographic that calls itself progressive, and they sometimes enact their policies, and everyone thinks that now we have enacted progressive policy. It is perhaps the greatest and saddest contradiction of them all, which is naturally why I am attracted to it. But my purpose is not merely to highlight the contradiction, for it is already ridiculously obvious. I want to understand it, which means becoming very intimate with it.

GM: It seems that Jane's friends in *Small Reason* certainly would fall into this demographic you mentioned, would they not? You do not seem to hold their notion of consumer responsibility in high regard.

ED: Certainly in one sense, but this is also a case of the exaggeration I was speaking of. They begin as a character in a standard male farce, but, as they act on their ideas, psychological undercurrents begin to surface and their thinking becomes more than

[Excerpt from *Small Reason*, Act I: Scene III]

Int. Jane's house. Night.

JANE and several of her FRIENDS have gathered for a party. The music is loud, the mood is jovial, and every person in the room has two drinks, one in each hand.

JANE

We have no food because your diets are incompatible.

FRIENDS

It is our right to opt out of the immoral capitalist agritech system by using our choices as informed consumers to absolve ourselves of culpability.

JANE

Quite so, which is why you are all my friends.

merely rational until eventually they explode. The billboard, for example—

GM: Yes, the billboard, can you describe that for the audience?

ED: You describe it.

GM: [Laughs]. Well, the group of friends erect a billboard that pictures a bloody cow fetus and the words THIS BABY DESERVES TO LIVE TOO. It is wholly perverse, this reference to anti-abortion publicity.

ED: I've always felt that the pro-life and animals-rights movements would be a perfect fit for each other.

GM: But back the consumer responsibility—

ED: Do you really want to talk about that?

GM: Yes.

ED: Well, it is all horribly obvious. Let us imagine one of Jane's friends a few years prior to when we encounter her. We don't really have to imagine, because we've seen it played out countless times. Early in her life, the potential progressive reaches a point of crisis when she determines she is powerless to change the system. Luckily, the system already has a perfect solution to both solve the crisis and maintain the status quo—she can use her powers of consumership to opt out of any parts of the system she deems unethical. The system remains unethical only to the extent that the consumers remain unethical, and so, if she expends any political energy at all, it is on convincing other consumers to make more ethical purchases. The politicians and multinationals use it to absolve themselves of any ethical responsibility, which now belongs to the masses.

Journalism works in the same way. In America, since the journalistic successes of the seventies, people have become more and more comfortable with journalistic oversight of government. The thinking is that if anything really bad is going on, the journalists will pick it up and broadcast it to every home in the country. The rest of the world media has very readily followed the Americans

in this. It doesn't work, because nothing gets through the din of modern media. So many have taken up their responsibility with such gusto that they are suffocating themselves. The journalists and the rest of the populace can feel the hopelessness of their task, but they cannot bring themselves to abandon the responsibilities altogether. Nobody seems to see the folly in trying to combat the consumerist system through consumerism.

GM: So you see your role as an artist as being anti-institutional.

ED: I am inclined to say that anti-institutionalism is the responsibility of every living man or woman. But yes, absolutely, art must be anti-institutional. But what I have been trying to show you is the institutional process of assimilation of anti-institutionalism. It is as true with art as it is with food and environmentalism. Look at the galleries—they will go even to the point of commissioning works from artists who are overtly hostile to them. The galleries are happy to sacrifice whatever little chunk one or another exhibition may take out of them, because they know that they can use the popular idea of anti-institutionalism to increase their own institutional power—it gives them more credibility. Which means of course that the works are not actually anti-institutional. They will say that the works are against political or social institutions, but all institutional power is of the same source, and to empower one is to empower them all.

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[Excerpt from *Small Reason*, Act II: Scene IV]

A city street intersection. Afternoon.

DRIVER, in a new hydrogen fuel cell powered sedan, fails to brake in time for a red light. A van collides with DRIVER's car. The two vehicles spin and come to rest at the opposite side of the intersection. (Pause). DRIVER's car explodes in an enormous atomic blast.

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