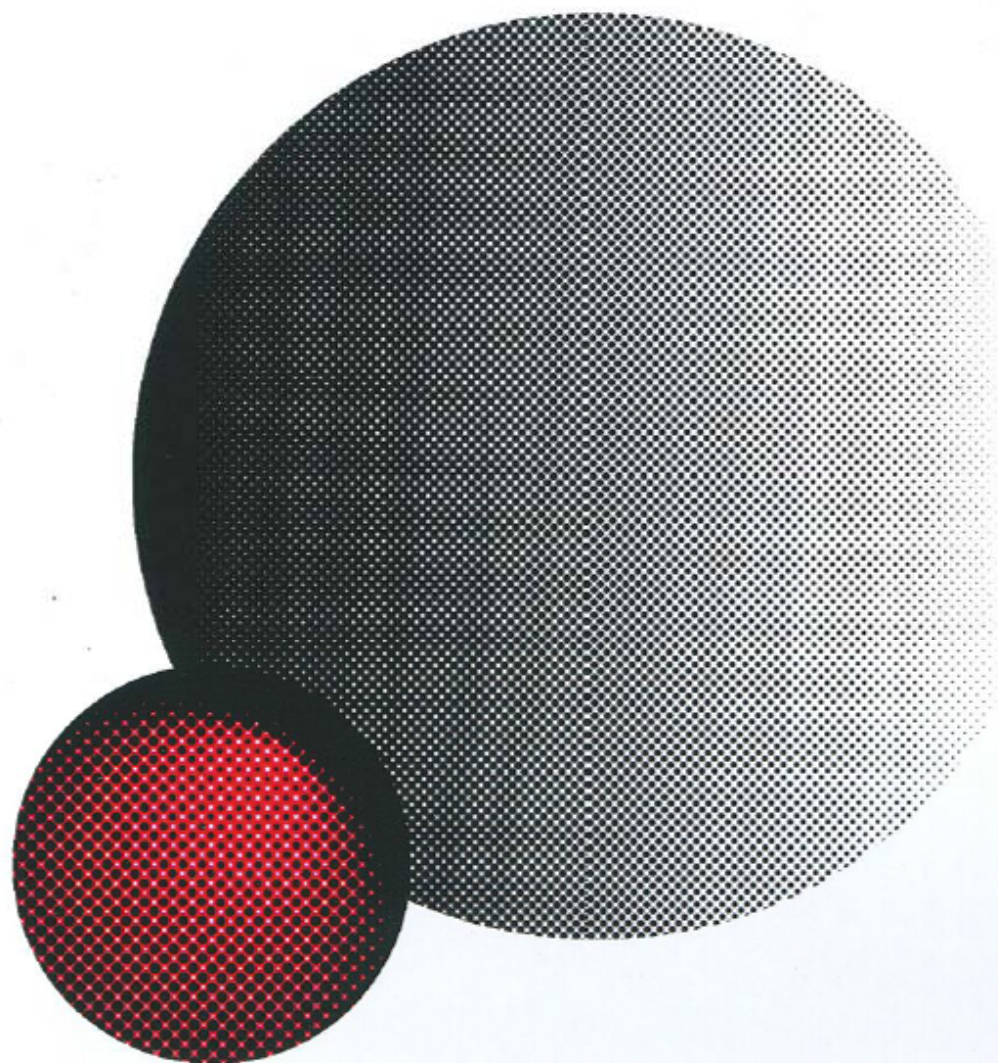


PRISM



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oranges & origins

Today, the girl in front of me was eating Mandarins in class while the teacher talked about imagery and senses in poetry, and I — I was staring, hungry, at the girl's mid-day snack, absently dreaming of citrus trees and Februaries; How strange

to watch a girl who doesn't realize that her fruit could speak in the language it was named after, the language of its roots. I watch her tear at its surface with the sharp nail of her thumb, releasing a perfect round of lunar pieces like the fresh new year,

and I recall the sight of loose skin clinging to weathered hands; saw them wrinkling from the juices and puckering from time, pushing crescents of Chinese traditions into new mouths that only recognise English words, that listen without understanding

to every sweet reminder of how a fruit could contain a mother, a land and a history spoken through the vast ocean of tongues it crossed to get here, to rest in the centre of smooth palms that don't recognize its pockmarked surface the way they used to.

I think about my other name that cannot be spelt, only drawn, and the tattered pieces of Mandarin peel left on the girl's table. Now, the poetry teacher is talking about misery and loss, and I feel the vibrations of the girl's chair scraping back as she rises.

I stay silent, even as she tosses the rest of my story into the trash. I listen for the thud of orange remains hitting hollow bottom and, for the rest of the day, I will think about the bitter aftertaste of the Mandarin; How it will surely linger between teeth.