

Performing Cyber Tenderness

On Authenticity in Intimacy
in Digital Spaces

Sad Girl (1.1) In remembrance of teen-angst escapism,

 (1.2) to be soft, to be tender, to be vulnerable,
 drag and dropping myself into URL relief,

 (1.3) as i continue blinded by the pale,
 I unconsciously follow, to be them
 in my black mirror,

 (1.4) and thus I do not function
 I am boiling over with my tears.

Influencer (2.1) Admitting my cheat codes,
 I insist of my crying,

 (2.2) selling my soul,

 (2.3) when you already had me caught
 in your web.

Cyborg (3.1) I resist to educate you on my sanity,

 (3.2) performing cyber tenderness
 in digital eternity.

Veronica Obenauer

(1.1) In remembrance of teen-angst escapism

When I was a child my parents always taught me to not trust any strangers on the internet, never show personal information, and to always correctly log off when abandoning that digital fairytale within the 27-inch LED screen. Unplugging the computer. Leaving the virtual behind the real, tangible, and mostly important world, the IRL² existence. I wasn't always listening. I secretly created my first Facebook profile at the age of nine. Followed by deleting my account after a couple of months, because no one would give my posts, which consisted of me proudly telling how good/bad my day went, a well earned thumbs up. I simply did not receive the attention and internet fame I hoped and longed for.

After a couple of years of growing into being a teen in the 2010s, I discovered the platform Tumblr—following infinite scrolling, reblogging, processing teenage-angst, and conceptualizing how I wanted to be perceived, especially on the internet—the place that once felt like a playground, to build fantasies, design my virtual being and temporally hide from annoying middle school puberty-current IRL happenings. I would romanticize and write poetry about my recently broken heart (*my crush didn't pick me for their team in PE*), repost photographs of skinny pale white girls in black dresses smoking cigarettes full of sorrow (*I didn't touch one cigarette until then*), drowning myself into melancholia, accompanied by Lana Del Rey—the chosen mother of all *Sad Girls*—playing in the back-

ground. I was creating a world, where I could build up my hand-picked character and find my true aesthetic, adoring the possibility to be whoever I opted for, without any judgment. Without any thought given to monetization, one's authenticity, or my digital footprint affecting IRL market opportunities. The internet was a temporary (but still very important) place for me, an intangible world, where most of my acts do not have real consequences. I didn't think about any rules. I was just a child, enjoying and using the endless freedom I was given in late Web 2.0 cyberspace. This was the age, when the internet became my comfort zone, my chosen living room, to have a rest from the draining IRL current, constantly online performing the fatigue I experienced because of it.

I never logged off. I never unplugged my computer. I loved trusting strangers on the internet, co-living in the URL world. Sorry mum.

² I am using the term URL (referring to 'online') and IRL ('in real life') only in the earlier part of the text, talking about growing up with the internet, since when I was a kid/pre-teen/teen we would still perceive the internet as something not to equalize with our real lives. The internet was virtual, a simulation—"not real". Later on, I will change to the term AFK ('away from keyboard'), due to the internet increasingly

becoming inseparable from our 'real' lives. Today it is more difficult for your internet and AFK reality to exist as a dichotomy.

(1.2) to be soft, to be tender, to be vulnerable,
I am drag and dropping myself into URL relief

Tumblr is a social networking platform specially dedicated to (micro-)blogging. Founded in the year of 2007, it had its peak in the 2010s, when a lot of teens gathered on the platform connecting in fandoms, through pictures, text, and GIFs. A lot of users would tidy up their personalized blogs/URLs, following an aesthetic or fandom, with every blog having its own Tumblr subdomain. On your unique subdomain you had the opportunity to customize the visibility and functionality down to HTML and CSS code, shaping your blog precisely adjusted to your peculiar personality.

Whenever I collected and archived on Tumblr, I would post about heartbreak, being lonely, the fragility of girlhood, and the confusion of growing up in late capitalism hell (without its full consciousness) is accompanied with. I would openly show my obsessions with fictional characters, and carelessly spread the early construct of myself into the whole web, making myself visible, taking up space, and yet making my persona even more vulnerable by tossing my fragile fragments into the depths of cyberspace, not knowing who hides behind the accounts that were following me, since follower interaction was not a big thing on Tumblr. I was being myself, sharing my deepest thoughts, in a place without judgment—using the internet as my second reality and a place to rest in. I would only be judged by the IRL people, calling my ‘made up’ Tumblr persona unauthentic, and accusing me of doing it only for attention (*No shit, Sherlock*), or being unoriginal by copying other people’s identity parts.

But I never stopped posting on the internet, because the recognition I would receive there was too precious to leave it behind. Amalia Soto, mostly known as Molly Soda is an internet artist, recognized for her web-based performances and installations considering femininity, pop culture, and the concept of herself. In her Substack entry “Teardrops on my iPhone”, Soda writes:

“This skepticism of (mostly) girls documenting their sadness feels emblematic of our approach to how we view being online in the first place. Is it real, is it fake, is it attention-seeking? Who cares?”

Authenticity is an aesthetic, and I’d like to think we are all aware by now that we’re posting for attention, no matter the content.”

Sadly, back then I was feeling caught by young men exposing me for my ‘personality fraud’, further struggling to become the socially acquired idea of a woman. Maybe this was the first time in my life that I was undergoing imposter syndrome (to be said, a mental illness experienced by most successful women⁴). Getting even more lost in the forced search for my ‘true’ personality, by being judged for my lack of authenticity. Not knowing how important and peculiar this stage of the internet was, and how it will be changed in the near future. Nevertheless, I did not stop, I was feeling relief and understanding, spending my time being a *Sad Girl*, being too naive to realize that this was part of my teen rebellion, by (re-)claiming my own body with the act of performing cyber tenderness, feeling freedom by using the customization of the earlier web.

3 Soda, Molly. 2023. “teardrops on my iphone” (blog). September 12, 2023. Accessed October 16, 2023. https://mollysoda.substack.com/p/teardrops-on-my-iphone?utm_source=post-email-title&publication_id=280063&post_id=136947909&utm_campaign=email-post-title&isFree-mail=true&r=4g10r&utm_medium=email.

4 “KPMG study finds 75% of executive women experience imposter syndrome.” 2020. KPMG. October 27, 2020. <https://info.kpmg.us/news-perspectives/people-culture/kpmg-study-finds-most-female-executives-experience-imposter-syndrome.html>.

The *Sad Girl Theory* is a term coined by artist, writer, and *Sad Girl* herself Audrey Wollen.⁵ Wollen's research started off the cultural trope of the wanting-to-be-saved struggling woman and being considered the lesser sex throughout history and today. Wollen recognizes the misery of women as an act of resistance⁶ and a potential protest, by also criticizing today's classification of a riot. Wollen says:

“Political protest is usually defined in masculine terms—as something external and often violent, a demonstration in the streets, a riot, an occupation of space. But I think that this limited spectrum of activism excludes a whole history of girls who have used their sorrow and their self-destruction to disrupt systems of domination.”

Women suffering from the pressure of all the expectations chained to them, due to a never-ending period of patriarchy, have been openly practicing and coping with their vulnerability for a long time: Progenitors of the online *Sad Girl* are for example Sylvia Plath, Jean Rhys or of course Virginia Woolf with her interpretation of how women are perceived in society. And still, with the weakening of striking platforms like Tumblr, today's younger generations continue to express their frustration and emotionality online. A current niche trend known by the term *Yearnposting*, coined by writer Michelle Santiago Cortés,⁸ refers to often non-sense melancholic poetic text set on soothing aesthetic soft pictures. Most of the posts tend to be random and mystical, almost being a miracle meme (that's how I at least call them).

5 Tunnicliffe, Ava. 2015. “Audrey Wollen on the Power of Sadness.” *Nylon*. July 20, 2015. Accessed March 7, 2024. <https://www.nylon.com/articles/audrey-wollen-sad-girl-theory>.

6 Watson, Lucy. 2015. “How girls are finding empowerment through being sad online.” *Dazed*. November 23, 2015. Accessed March 8, 2024. <https://www.dazeddigital.com/photography/article/28463/1/girls-are-finding-empowerment-through-internet-sadness>.

7 Watson, Lucy. 2015. “How girls are finding empowerment through being sad online.” *Dazed*. November 23, 2015. Accessed March 8, 2024. <https://www.dazeddigital.com/photography/article/28463/1/girls-are-finding-empowerment-through-internet-sadness>.

One of the most popular earnposters is Sotce having almost 400k followers,⁹ and to a greater extent due to her URL success already attending an AFK solo exhibition in Paris. A representable example of one of her poems, she posted on her second account marked as her diary,¹⁰ says:

“hydrate stretch

scream

frolic”

The words are accompanied by a peaceful almost sarcastic stock photo footage of a tulip rising into the sunshine.

With the trend being especially nostalgic due to the resemblance of earlier *Sad Girl* eras and the current romanticization of the 2010s Tumblr days, it is especially Gen Z’s way of coping and sharing with past experiences, trauma, and thoughts compromised into photo dumps, softness, and humor, since crying is not a respected part of the professional adult world. The downside of life often stays undocumented for the fear of being judged or accused of emotionally overreacting. People tell you that you shouldn’t feel sad for something—considering it a ‘negative emotion’—rather than allowing that very natural part of being a human to just happen (*and if you cry, please get a room. Crying in public makes people around you very uncomfortable*).

Therefore people are sobbing, people are showing their vulnerable selves online, continuously performing cyber tenderness, reclaiming a more tender URL current.

8 Francombe, Amy. 2023. “How yearnposting took over social media.” Evening Standard, September 29, 2023. Accessed March 8, 2024. <https://www.standard.co.uk/lifestyle/yearnposting-social-media-trend-what-is-it-b1109968.html>.

9 Sotce on Tiktok. <https://www.tiktok.com/@sotce?lang=en>

10 @sweetrelease08 on Instagram. <https://www.instagram.com/sweetrelease08/>

11 @sweetrelease08 on Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/CfJ3xyZOx_z/

- (1.3) as I continue blinded by the pale,
I unconsciously follow, to be them in my black mirror

The aesthetic mostly associated with the current rise of Tumblr is *Soft Grunge*. Posts discoverable under the #softgrunge would contain all-black outfits with fishnet stockings, girls with space buns smoking cigarettes at dawn, *Arctic Monkey* Tees with the reappearing *AM* album graphics, and sad black-and-white selfies. The biggest subculture of the platform would openly talk about depression and suicidal thoughts, and about their heartbreak. They would often idealize a heroin chic body type, sometimes normalizing eating disorders. Their lives were perceived as delightfully sad, making melancholia their essential accessory.

In her video essay “the tumblr girl is back”¹² Mina Le talks about the necessity of sadness in a fulfilled life. Aristotle describes the vital elements of beauty as “order, symmetry and definiteness”, describing that in order to achieve beauty in life it must have some degree of sadness in it: “*Because a life of only happiness suggests a lack of symmetry and order.*”¹³ Le names his concept of Catharsis, and quotes David C. Brake in the following: “*A connection between Sadness and Beauty might have a sound philosophical foundation.*”¹⁴

So we are holding onto quotes from heteronormative white men talking about the significance of misery. In her video essay Le also continues to go further into her research talking about the art and literature of the Victorian age having a very prominent obsession with the ‘breathtaking’ beauty of dead women. The author Edgar Allan Poe even wrote: “*(...) the death then of a beautiful woman is unquestionably the most poe-tical topic in the world, (...)*”¹⁵. So it wasn’t only Tumblr’s users romanticizing their fragility in the mid 2010s, it is a follow-up of the history of men romanticizing the death of their beloved women or the ‘beautifully astonishing’ suffering of a young girl. Because a woman who is soft, suffering, and fragile cannot speak up for herself and is helpless. A woman in agony is dependent on being rescued by her contemporary knight on a beautiful horse, just like the young (*and white!!!*) and blonde and beautiful (*and thin!!!*) Rapunzel was saved from the tower, being her bedroom where she was distressed by her loneliness, and in a modern reinterpretation reblogging on Tumblr while listening to Ethel Cain.¹⁶ On the internet modern-day Rapunzel would post photos of boundless dark night skies (resembling her solitude), hopelessly romantic poems from *Milk and Honey*¹⁷, and a picture of a thin and bleeding pale-looking hand (in remembrance of pricking her finger on the spinning wheel), continuously feeding the platform’s romanization of feminine victimhood in order to serve her community.

12 Mina Le. 2022. “The Tumblr Girl Is Coming Back.” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gI2UqTFddo8>.

13 Mina Le. 2022. “The Tumblr Girl Is Coming Back.” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gI2UqTFddo8>.

14 Mina Le. 2022. “The Tumblr Girl Is Coming Back.” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gI2UqTFddo8>.

15 Edgar Allan Poe, “The Philosophy of Composition,” *The Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, Lit2Go Edition, (1903), accessed March 12, 2024, <https://etc.usf.edu/lit2go/147/the-works-of-edgar-allan-poe/5371/the-philosophy-of-composition/>.

16 Ethel Cain (Hayden Silas Anhedonia) is an American singer-songwriter with lyrics often inspired by nostalgic and Southern Gothic themes.

17 Kaur, Rupi. 2015. *Milk and Honey*. Andrews McMeel Publishing.

Coming back to Audrey Wolle's theory of the *Sad Girl*, in which she claims this happening of public sadness and suffering as an act of feminine resistance, author Ava Burzycki criticizes the insensitive association with the *Sad Girl* and what she really was. In her article *Notes from a recovered Sad Girl*¹⁸ she determines the *Sad Girl* as a product of male fantasy, where women would be dissected and compartmentalized for male benefit. She remarks on the pictures of girls being bruised, especially on their legs, being submissive and pushed down, while satisfying the actual target group of this representation of passive women—the *male gaze*.¹⁹ In another video essay Mina Le suitably adds up:

“The male gaze is to be served, but not acknowledged. You need to appear helpless and desirable.”

The term ‘male gaze’—coined in the 1970s by the film critic Laura Mulvey—refers to the objectification of the female, sexualizing and depicting them from a very white, heterosexual masculine view. The male gaze is the actual reason for Superman getting his female equivalent, and Bond having his *bond girl* accompanying him.²¹ It is not an imposed attempt to higher the representation of women in pop culture, it carries the goal of making revenue by giving men their scantily dressed to-be-saved female character, which they can later on fantasize about underneath their sheets. The world (of storytelling) is mostly dominated by white heteronormative men, resulting in those making media thought to be consumed by other men.

Luckily the *Sad Girl* was not a trend planted by men, in the hope of generating pictures for their own enjoyment, but it was real teen girls documenting, performing, and building communities through their own suffering (whether in full authenticity or not), being very self-aware about their emotions. This part of a more controlled self expression on the internet was a shaping moment of growing into a woman. But despite that Burzycki blames the very polished representation just for the sake of making it aesthetic. Bruised and scarring, peaking underneath a mini skirt or scratches under the eye become a beautiful and innocent accessory rather than a proof of sexual subjugation, which is yet worn on red carpets.²² All of this benefits patriarchy by easily intimidating (emotionally) fragile women into pornographic fantasies.

18 Burzycki, Ava. 2022. “Notes from a recovered Sad Girl.” The Michigan Daily. May 21, 2022. Accessed November 16, 2023. <https://www.michigandaily.com/statement/notes-from-a-recovered-sad-girl/>.

19 Loreck, Janice. 2016. “Explainer: what does the ‘male gaze’ mean, and what about a female gaze?” The Conversation. January 5, 2016. Accessed March 8, 2024. <https://theconversation.com/explainer-what-does-the-male-gaze-mean-and-what-about-a-female-gaze-52486>.

20 Mina Le. 2022. “‘Toxic’ Femininity: What’s up With Girlbloggers, Female Manipulators, and Femcels?” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W6aDNutZoBO>.

21 Douglas, James, and Huy Nguyen. 2020. “Dissecting the role of ‘Bond Girl’ in 007.” RTF Gender and Media Culture. July 2, 2020. Accessed March 11, 2024. <https://rtfgenderandmedia-culture.wordpress.com/2020/07/02/dissecting-the-role-of-bond-girl-in-007/>.

22 Vogue. 2022. “Doja Cat Gets Ready for the Balenciaga Show | Vogue.” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jyHDO6aVPrU>.

Growing out of pursuing to be the archetype Tumblr *Sad Girl*, it is certainly important to recognize the patterns of strategic oppression of patriarchy that perhaps have also contributed to the soft grunge aesthetic most of us aimed for. Maybe we didn't distinctly post to be sexualized by white men, but at the end of the day, we wanted to be perceived (and maybe likewise heroically saved from our tower of loneliness) by our crushes, performing our personality based around this melancholic curated archetype and not displaying the ugly suffering and realizations we truly did undergo: becoming a woman under the compulsion of misogyny. Burzycki says that *"there is a key difference between exploring one's own female misery and eroticizing it—one exists for the woman herself, and the other caters to male fantasy"*²³. The *Sad Girls* of Tumblr rarely ugly-cried in the perception of others online or showed what consuming thoughts they really wrote in their coming-of-age-diary. Rather the *Sad Girl* shed a sparkling tear while sitting fully dressed legs crossed on a freshly made bed, ready to press the shutter and later on ready to be reblogged and consumed, fitting everyone's aesthetic soft grunge blog theme. Again quoting Burzycki:

"A woman embracing her natural and authentic emotions cannot be a carefully curated Sad Girl, because a woman breaking out of this mold is not a woman that can be easily advertised."

Burzycki criticizes the actual presence of their posted sadness, they are reproaching the *Sad Girl* to perform her magnificent melancholy, in order to be perceived, permanently pleasing her community, gaining more attention from fellow *Sad Girls* (*because her crush definitely wasn't chronically online on Tumblr*). The *Sad Girl* can not lose her depression-purse. She continuously self-labels her being, unconsciously participating in a capitalist system of exchange. She grasps on to this melancholic aesthetic, deeply knowing that if she were to suddenly feel better, her community might abandon her for the lack of following this pathetic trend.

²³ Burzycki, Ava. 2022. "Notes from a recovered Sad Girl." The Michigan Daily. May 21, 2022. Accessed November 16, 2023. <https://www.michigandaily.com/statement/notes-from-a-recovered-sad-girl/>.

²⁴ Burzycki, Ava. 2022. "Notes from a recovered Sad Girl." The Michigan Daily. May 21, 2022. Accessed November 16, 2023. <https://www.michigandaily.com/statement/notes-from-a-recovered-sad-girl/>.

Another problem with Tumblr's #softgrunge is how white-washed it was, most of the time representing stereotypical pale female-looking girls, with borderline skinny bodies, occasionally appropriating neglected cultures (*Looking at you, 2014 'boho chic' Coachella!*). The #PrettyWhenYouCry references an eponymous song by Lana Del Rey, with her often being associated as 'The Mother of Sad Girls'. But Lana Del Rey didn't design and mass-fabricated the *Sad Girl* as we know her. The concept and initial visuality of the *Sad Girl* originate from the 1993 movie *Mi Vida Loca*,²⁵ where the *Sad Girl* was displayed as "LA tattoo art as a gangster chick with tears running down her face"²⁶. Beside the actual *Sad Girl* being the complete opposite of our weak and submissive Tumblr replica. The *Sad Girl*, actually named Mona, is portrayed as an L.A. chola, having her name tattooed on her knuckles after joining a girl gang. Coming back to the 2010s, Lana Del Rey plays an L.A. stripper who is accompanied by her gangster boyfriend in her 2013 short film *Tropico*²⁷, where she represents the looks inspired by Mona. The Tijuana-based feminist art collective *Sad Girls Y Qué* called Lana out for appropriation: "She is this blonde heiress, [taking] all these symbols from a culture that isn't hers to make profit. It's obviously offensive"²⁸. *Sad Girls Y Qué* started in 2012 as a Tumblr-like Facebook page, offering an empowering alternative to white-only feminism, seeking reciprocity against the machismo prevalent in Mexico. "Sad Girls Y Qué are opposing a particular iteration of the patriarchy, not just reblogging bruise pics because its members are in a bad mood"²⁹. The collective criticizes the appearance of Tumblr's version of the *Sad Girl*, while other aesthetics like #pastelgrunge and #pastelgoth also rarely show skin colors other than pale white. So not only was the #pastelgrunge #softgrunge *Sad Girl*'s behavior ambiguous, considering the romanization of submissive women and mental illness, but also was she yearning for an appearance which was based on a stolen visuality, appropriating it without any knowledge of its origins.

At the end of the endless scroll, why did we really use Tumblr? Was it really helping us to understand the journey of our teenage self-discovery or was it just a ephemeral online alternative to main-stream media fed by the culture industry, to distract us from the real teen-rebel that should have happened AFK, supposed to recognize these political problems and disrupting structures earlier in time?³⁰ But soon even Tumblr's and the *Sad Girl*'s peak came to an end. In 2013 Tumblr was sold to Yahoo,³¹ introducing the platform's decline, and also starting to censor a lot of its adult content. Due to the platform living from fandoms, which would more or less erotically ship their favorite characters, a lot of users started to abandon their blogs, since most content was falsely deleted by

the algorithm. Sometimes even resulting in their entire blog being taken down. Following up in the year 2018, when Yahoo was obtained by Verizon, all of the adult content—including posts that contained every state of undressing and nudity were flagged as explicit content—even though they were not measurably sexual, resulting in the censorship of progressively more content. In the article "How social media falls apart" Gita Jackson wrote:

"With fandom artists no longer able to grow their communities, Tumblr lost the ability to grow, too."

25 Anders, Allison, Director. *Mi Vida Loca* [Film]. Channel Four Films, Cineville, and HBO, 1993. 1:35:56. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vaoXAm4ulyg>

26 Calderón-Douglass, Barbara. 2014. "Sad Girls y Qué Are Breaking Down Machismo with Internet Art." *Vice*, October 24, 2014. Accessed March 10, 2024. <https://www.vice.com/en/article/nnqkqm/sad-girls-y-que-is-breaking-down-machismo-and-offering-an-alternative-to-white-feminism-456>.

27 Lana Del Rey. 2013. "Tropico." <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VwuHOQLSpEg>.

28 Eden, Nellie. 2015. "Lean like A Chola." *Wonderland Magazine*, March 3, 2015. Accessed March 10, 2024. <https://www.wonderlandmagazine.com/2015/03/03/lean-like-chola/>.

29 Hines, Alice. 2015. "A Taxonomy of the Sad Girl." I-D, June 17, 2015. Archived November 10, 2023, at the Wayback Machine, <https://web.archive.org/web/20231110134757/https://i-d.vice.com/en/article/pabzay/a-taxonomy-of-the-sad-girl>.

30 Horkheimer, Max and Adorno, Theodor W. "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception". *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, edited by Gunzelin Schmid Noeri, Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2002, pp. 94-136. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780804788090-007>

31 Jackson, Gita. 2023. "How a social network falls apart." *The Verge*, March 9, 2023. Accessed March 10, 2024. <https://www.theverge.com/2023/3/9/23629372/twitter-tumblr-livejournal-social-network>.

32 Jackson, Gita. 2023. "How a social network falls apart." *The Verge*, March 9, 2023. Accessed March 10, 2024. <https://www.theverge.com/2023/3/9/23629372/twitter-tumblr-livejournal-social-network>.

With the downfall of Tumblr, social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram gained more prominence, later on followed by TikTok being on the constant rise having more daily users than Tumblr ever had. But still, Tumblr felt like more of a platform for escaping the IRL, where creating usernames and posting to perform your cyber character happened more anonymously, separated from our real lives. In the current age of the internet, social media platforms make our AFK lives inseparable from our URL performance. We post for friends, family, and colleagues, being aware of the impact and influence of our profiles. So we perform, not our sadness, but our perfectly polished version of our persona. Always be aware, you could not get a job because of your digital footprint (*sike*)! While Tumblr was another way of showing our 'true selves', revealing our pain and normalizing depression, Instagram is now the digital glossy version of our AFK avatars, showing professionalism and the happiest moments of our authentic everyday lives—a distinct version of our 'real selves'. Algorithms are collecting our favorite ideas, and bombarding us with new fun things and trends to love, buy and share with your followers. Everyday! 24/7! You have a new notification: Here are today's top reels! Social media has shops integrated into their applications now, perfectly adjusted to your future taste, completing your fullest aesthetic right in front of you, without you even noticing it. It effortlessly suggests you what to buy, in between a constant tapping through your friends' Instagram stories, which was usually meant to be the 'realist' part of Instagram since it's so ephemeral—only lasting twenty four hours, right?

Maybe the *Sad Girl* would not have cried/reblogged so much if Tumblr had its own shopping function, further distracting the *Sad Girl* from her actual suffering and void. But maybe our weekly run to Urban Outfitters and American Apparel was just a more involved way of purchasing our way to social affinity, posing with our venti Starbucks cups, while buying new fishnet stockings.

(1.4) and thus I do not function,
I am boiling over with my tears

To recap the last chapter: Being a woman is super fun! Everyone is consistently and immensely interested in your looks. They actually adapted the latest trends for you, so you can someday finally convince your crush with the thirst traps³³ you post on Instagram. The hard labor of thirst-trapping is worth it! It doesn't matter that you get body-dysmorphia looking into your selfie camera, since they nowadays include plus-size models walking at Fashion Week. You actually earned that piece of sugar-free protein chocolate, you were ultimately girlbossing today! Introduce a new era by getting a new haircut, a French bob would really contour your face again. Oh, you leave the salon thinking they cut it too short? You don't feel as feminine as you did before? Oh, now you are scared that your crush will not like you back, since you look like Joan of Arc³⁴ (*Surprise, she also had mental health issues*)³⁵? Now that you resemble the appearance of the faithful knight you longed for, maybe go save yourself from that pity tower of everlasting loneliness!

The independent feminist self-aware woman is more in trend anyway, there is no more need to satisfy a man to live your fulfilled life. You are different, you do not judge other women based on their looks—only by being annoyed by them seducing a man in front of your *Maybelline Sky High*³⁶ lashes (*which you definitely bought, being influenced by TikTok beauty gurus serving the female gaze because you are fully aware of that horrible male-gaze*). You know patriarchy! You don't need to convince any prince anymore, they need to convince you! Actually, you don't need any knight at all, because you enjoy doing self-care, alone up there in your pathetic Rapunzel-tower. Now, no man can climb up and save you any longer, after you cut your beautiful long hair off. There is no one to be perceived by, making yourself invisible for the structure—non-valuable in a sense. Suffering in everlasting solitude—again you bleed in pain while reblogging sad lyrical pieces and listening to the melancholic melody of Lana Del Rey (*Please, you should finally stop listening to someone glamorizing abusive relationships and appropriating women of color on a regular*)³⁷.

So, to recap the last chapter: Being a woman requires constant and mostly unconscious (*brain-washed*) suffering under the conditions of a system adapted to serve male pleasure. This is also further applying to our online presences—the place we thought we are safe in, since we are not tied to our desired bodies in virtuality anymore. How is it possible to achieve an authentic existence under the pressure of perpetual surveillance? The philosopher Michel Foucault declares that being judged on a regular is part of our human normality:

“We are in the society
of the teacher-judge,
the doctor-judge,
the educator-judge,
the social worker-judge;
it is on them that
the universal reign of
the normative is based;
and each individual,
wherever (they) may
find (themselves),
subjects to it (their)
body,
(their) gestures,
(their) behavior,
(their) aptitudes,
(their) achievements.”

³³ thirst trap: “a statement by or photograph of someone on social media that is intended to attract attention or make people who see it sexually interested in them”. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/thirst-trap>

³⁴ Joan of Arc (died May 30 1431) was an early feminist, military leader and a patron saint of France. She mostly is portrayed with a French bob with bangs or short hair.

³⁵ Schildkrout, Barbara. 2017. “Joan of Arc—Hearing Voices.” *American Journal of Psychiatry* 174 (12): 1153–54. <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ajp.2017.17080948>.

³⁶ The Maybelline Lash Sensational Sky High Mascara is a beauty product marketed for full and extreme lashes. Lately rising in popularity, due to being viral on TikTok (at least on my algorithm).

³⁷ Sultan, Iman. 2021. “Lana Del Rey Can't Qualify Her Way Out of Being Held Accountable” *Harper's BAZAAR*, November 2, 2021. <https://www.harpersbazaar.com/culture/art-books-music/a35311661/lana-del-rey-appropriation/#>.

³⁸ Foucault, Michel. (1975) 1995. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Penguin Books. p. 304. https://monoskop.org/images/4/43/Foucault_Michel_Discipline_and_Punish_The_Birth_of_the_Prison_1977_1995.pdf.

To be said he does not only apply that on the constant judgment of women, but rather on everyone taking part in our society. Taking that even further, the philosopher Judith Butler, who is mainly focusing on queer and feminist theory, proposes that even our gender is not only biological but rather based on performativity in terms of current gender norms.³⁹ Therefore we are 'gender norms'-judged down to our tiniest behavior, resulting in being burned out by obsessing over our gender acceptability—everyone of us. And with white heterosexual men winning, by ruling our female bodies and choices chained with it, that judgment continues being a structural isolation of women. But how do we get saved from that enormous tower, if there's no man saving us? Should Rapunzel rather trust the witch again, since she didn't eat her as a baby?⁴⁰ The feminist philosopher Silvia Federici argues that the witch trials, happening in Europe during the late 15th to early 18th century, were a core aspect of the rise of capitalism and modernity itself.⁴¹ During the trials—having around forty to sixty thousand people structurally murdered—mostly women (*because they were assumed to be more naive falling for the devil*) were accused of practicing diabolic witchcraft. Witches were bad, for the sake of ordering Satan rather than God in their practice—making them glitches in the system of Christianity. Many of them accused were elders, the poor or social outcasts—people on the edge of society, the invaluable, the non-profitable bugs. Perhaps just like Tumblr's *Sad Girls*, resisting function under the suffering of their mental health.

39 Butler, Judith. 2006. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York; London: Routledge.

40 In the fairy tale by the Brothers Grimm, the witch named 'Dame Gothel' wishes to raise the baby (Rapunzel) instead of eating it (in comparison to many other witches in fairy tales). Transmitting this into the real world, in the 'Malleus Maleficarum' (Hammer of Witches, 1487)—a horrific text used as a companion in the witch hunt, it proclaims the witch as a killer of infants. However the term 'Maleficia' is used as a byword for birth control, again making the witch hunt a structural suppression taking away women's rights over their choices of their bodies.

41 Federici, Silvia. 2004. *Caliban and the Witch*. New York, NY: Autonomedia.

Coming back to the earlier mentioned *Sad Girl Theory* by Audrey Wollen, where she demonstrates the *Sad Girl's* suffering as a political act of resistance. Wollen says that girlhood "(...)is an experience of brutal alienation and constant fear of violence", considering why the #softgrunge-epidemy on Tumblr was that big among young girls:

"All the amazing parts of girlhood (...) are survival tactics that girls have created in this face of reality."

Posting tears under #PrettyWhenYouCry or many other activities based on performing cyber tenderness are an URL connectivity tool for many leaving the innocence of girlhood, while creating digital communities of *Sad Girls*. Rather than demonstrating against the patriarchal complex by loudly screaming AFK on the street, they are spamming the internet with their sad poetry, capturing their critique into 280 characters.⁴³ A way of taking up space and raising voice in the form of URL tears. In the introduction of the book *Rage Becomes Her: The Power of Women's Anger*, the author Soraya Chemaly talks about how their parents always excluded anger when they were talking about emotions with her as a child.⁴⁴ Possibly explaining why in Wollen's theory they are the 'Sad' Girls, not the 'Angry' Girls, since anger was mostly something men would practice, while women would hide their anger in the tears that were already running down their rosy cheeks. Chemaly further claims that women experience rage more in a private setting instead of living it out in public: "*Coping often involves self-silencing and feelings of powerlessness.*"⁴⁵ Girls acting in rage are often accused as being *zickig*⁴⁶, and women in rage are widely associated with "*madness*"⁴⁷. Denying anger causes you to be "*a good woman, which, significantly, meant not being demanding, loud, or expressing her own needs*"⁴⁸. Women oppress their anger while being oppressed by patriarchal structures themselves, crying URL rather than protesting AFK. But what happens when people are actually not able to participate in those AFK protests? Or to put it more precisely: "(...) *what happens to the sad girl who is poor, queer, and/or not white, when, if, she grows up*"⁴⁹? Based on Wollen's *Sad Girl Theory* the artist and writer Johanna Hedva introduces her take and extension with her writing about the *Sick Woman Theory*. In the essay the author is critically viewing Wollen's *Sad Girl* being centered on beautiful heteronormative white girls,

who grew up at least in middle class circumstances. *Sick Woman Theory* is considering modes of protest for the sick, people not able to attend protests due to being "*imprisoned by a job*", or because of the threat of violence at protests coming also from police brutality, besides illness and disability or the responsibility of caring for someone with illness and disability.

42 Barron, Benjamin. 2014. "Richard Prince, Audrey Wollen, and the Sad Girl Theory."

I-D. November 12, 2014. Accessed March 13, 2024. https://web.archive.org/web/20200114114006/https://i-dvice.com/en_uk/article/nebn3d/richard-prince-audrey-wollen-and-the-sad-girl-theory.

43 280 is the amount of characters allowed posting text on X (formerly Twitter).

44 Chemaly, Soraya L. 2018. *Rage Becomes Her: The Power of Women's Anger*. Epub. New York: Atria Books. Introduction.

45 Chemaly, Soraya L. 2018. *Rage Becomes Her: The Power of Women's Anger*. Epub. New York: Atria Books. pp. 6-7.

46 German for "bitchy" or "prissy", but straightforward just a term to categorize angry girls or young women, not accepting their emotion as actual anger but as an overreaction due to puberty.

47 Chemaly, Soraya L. 2018. *Rage Becomes Her: The Power of Women's Anger*. Epub. New York: Atria Books. p. 7.

48 Chemaly, Soraya L. 2018. *Rage Becomes Her: The Power of Women's Anger*. Epub. New York: Atria Books. p. 7.

49 Hedva, Johanna. 2020. "Sick Woman Theory." p. 5. https://www.kunstverein-hildesheim.de/assets/bilder/caring-structures-ausstellung-digital/Johanna-Hedva/cb6ec5c75f/AUSSTELLUNG_1110_Hedva_SWT_e.pdf.

Hannah Arendt's definition of the political for instance is that everything happening in the public is automatically considered as having a political impact.⁵⁰ But where would Arendt rate the Internet, since everything is shared publicly while posting alone from our intimate bedrooms? In their essay Hedva criticizes Arendt's definition, by the meaning that everything happening in a private room wouldn't be considered political.⁵¹ Arendt's reason for that definition came from the concern that if everything was considered political it would result in nothing being political at all, following the introduction of this kind of public or non-public binary. But with this statement she was ignoring a whole group of people by pushing them further into darkness—excluding them from the public spectrum. By now we can all agree that everything we do is indeed political, whether intentionally political or happening in private. To take this further Judith Butler extends this critique in her lecture *Vulnerability and Resistance*⁵², saying that Arendt failed to acknowledge who is in charge of that public, and who according to that is at all allowed to participate in that public. Johanna Hedva, who herself is constantly struggling under chronic illness, is therefore questioning:

“How do you throw a brick through the window of a bank if you can't get out of bed?”

They are suggesting the importance of taking care of yourself and others following it being the biggest enemy of capitalism. The *Sick Woman Theory* highlights the notion that many forms of political dissent are internalized, experienced, and suffered within the body, and are often being unnoticed—suggesting that being entails enduring vulnerability as a constant. By stating that vulnerability is deep-seated to the body—not just a passing state—implying a continual need for support systems to ensure survival. This calls for a restructuring of societal frameworks to better address this enduring reality. The center of this theory is the idea that the whole body reacts sensitively to systems of oppression, particularly those emerging from neoliberal, white-supremacist, imperial-capitalist, cis-hetero-patriarchal structures. The *Sick Woman Theory* underscores that the collective trauma inflicted by these systems sustain sickness, attributing the root cause to the oppressive nature of the world itself. The *Sad Girl* is no longer only considered to existing by it's female #softgrunge visuality, but rather the depic-

tion of the *Sad Girl* becomes a verbal substitute for everyone suffering from an oppressing system, for everyone being perceived as weaker or more fragile—whether due to physical or mental illness, for everyone being ignored and over-talked everyday. And at last: The *Sad Girl* is everyone showing and embracing their humanly emotionality and vulnerability, but is instead accused as an overreacting attention-seeking mess. Therefore *Sad Girl* requires space for secure co-existence, giving her sickness an ephemeral opportunity to live on in eternity, modifying administrative rights to subsequently spam, reclaim and take up space, more likely storage. As Hedva proclaims:

“Because to stay alive, capitalism cannot be res-ponsible for our care—its logic of exploitation requires that some of us die.”

50 Hedva, Johanna. 2020. “Sick Woman Theory,” p. 1. https://www.kunstverein-hildesheim.de/assets/bilder/caring-structures-ausstellung-digital/Johanna-Hedva/cb6ec5c75f/AUSSTELLUNG_1110_Hedva_SWT_e.pdf.

51 Hedva, Johanna. 2020. “Sick Woman Theory,” p. 1. https://www.kunstverein-hildesheim.de/assets/bilder/caring-structures-ausstellung-digital/Johanna-Hedva/cb6ec5c75f/AUSSTELLUNG_1110_Hedva_SWT_e.pdf.

52 Butler, Judith. December 19, 2014. “Vulnerability and Resistance.” REDCAT.

53 Hedva, Johanna. 2020. “Sick Woman Theory.” https://www.kunstverein-hildesheim.de/assets/bilder/caring-structures-ausstellung-digital/Johanna-Hedva/cb6ec5c75f/AUSSTELLUNG_1110_Hedva_SWT_e.pdf.

54 Hedva, Johanna. 2020. “Sick Woman Theory,” p. 7. https://www.kunstverein-hildesheim.de/assets/bilder/caring-structures-ausstellung-digital/Johanna-Hedva/cb6ec5c75f/AUSSTELLUNG_1110_Hedva_SWT_e.pdf.

They are implementing that today's 'sickness' is a binary guideline of capitalism. A healthy person is feeling good enough to complete work, while a sick person is holding the work they have 'to take care of', in need to take care of themselves in priority. A sick person should get well very soon, to continue their work that has been sitting there, just waiting for them. While also being paid for their days off, they are hindering the company a bit further from making profit—a literal virus in a running complex. In the Glitch Feminism Manifesto the author Legacy Russel explains:

“With physical movement often restricted, female-identifying people, queer people, Black people invent ways to create space through rupture.”

So we explore and utilize that rupture in the form of our brokenness in our black mirrors, we expand our broken bodies to fulfill our unrestricted souls. The author and philosopher Donna Haraway introduces us to the *Cyborg*—the machines as a natural extension to our human bodies—while questioning:

“Why should our bodies end at the skin, or include at best other beings encapsulated by skin?(...) Machines can be prosthetic devices, intimate components, friendly selves.”

Besides that in her *A Cyborg Manifesto* Haraway describes the digital as something that is mainly affiliated with male features, in other words technology is mostly claimed to be hard, cold, lifeless and mostly non-autonomous. In the *Cybertwee Manifesto*, with the term cybertwee serving as an alternative to Cyberpunk genres which frequently dominate ideas of futurism in science fiction. Their manifesto states:

“Far too long have we succumb to the bitter edge of the idea that power is lost in the sweet and tender. Romantic is not weak. Feminine is not weak. Cute is not weak(...) Lack of emotion is oft favored because success is defined as the ability to be mechanical and efficient. But sentimentality, empathy, and being too soft should not be seen as weaknesses.”

Our weakness is not weak, it is more powerful than ever. So we continue, thriving into URL. Not letting 280 characters narrow us down, but rather posting twenty tweets in a row. Defending how shitty we feel with every digital monument that we frame in glitter ascii⁵⁸ heaven, while we are cheerfully rotting in bed⁵⁹, rather than decaying in the obsolete meme of being saved from that tower.

⁵⁶ Haraway, Donna J. 1985. *A Cyborg Manifesto*. Manifestly Haraway. University of Minnesota Press. p. 61. https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/english/currentstudents/undergraduate/modules/fictionnarrative-mediaandtheoryinthe21stcentury/manifestly_haraway_----_a_cyborg_manifesto_science_technology_and_socialist-feminism_in_the_....pdf.

⁵⁷ “The Cybertwee Manifesto” 2015. https://cybertwee.net/the_manifesto/.

⁵⁸ Ascii Art is a form of digital art, set in typographical glyphs and symbols only.

⁵⁹ Hui, Alyssa. 2023. “What Is ‘Bed Rotting’? Gen Z’s Newest Self-Care Trend, Explained.” *Health*, July 28, 2023. Accessed March 14, 2024. <https://www.health.com/what-is-bed-rotting-trend-7561395>.

⁵⁵ Russel, Legacy. *Glitch Feminism : A Manifesto*. 2020. London: Verso. p. 13

(2.1) Admitting my cheat codes, I insist of my crying

Since they keep clinging to their beloved internet, the *Sad Girls* moved on from her crying and are adapting to the ongoing present. They are now blinded by self-improvement, rather posting their AFK meditation day-to-day, in order to reach brightest potential and their most fulfilled self. Their beloved cyberspace—now merged with their AFK existence—is leading them throughout the rays of the sun and the glimmer of the moon. It is the internet as their best friend, guiding them to themselves, before the *Sad Girl* even reaches out for help.

Tumblr became a time capsule filled with bots reblogging the same photos since 2015. Everyone moved out by now, posting their way into staged fantasy, since advanced algorithms easily wrapped them around its very thin and long data fingers. People online seem to like the *Sad Girl*, recognizing themselves following her authentic extraordinary self. The *Sad Girl* moved on from her pathetic creature, becoming the *Influencer* of her own well-ness, affirming positivity under cyber spirituality. Manifesting the person she wants to be by fairy tale-telling her presence, obsessing about her cyber-flesh, writing URL autofiction for her AFK life. In the Glitch Feminism Manifesto Russell wrote that the digital is “*giving us the capacity to perform different selves—quite literally putting them on, then taking them off, as we grow with or away from them (...)*”⁶⁰, comparing it to a costume we choose to proudly wear in digitality, to change whenever and to customize in the course of time. So we perform whoever we aim to depict. We can be anyone, do anything, reach everything. Self-expression becomes a practice of art on the internet, with its artists being obsessed about their non-tangible URL representation.

With our physical bodies no longer bound to us in cyberspace, gender not only remains a performance but rather becomes a prosthetic.⁶¹ As the *Sick Woman Theory* also implemented: The *Sad Girl* just becomes a symbolic category of the suffering, the ill, the ones that had enough. The *Sad Girl* is released from biological sex or social gender. (*Did I say Sad Girl? Sorry, I meant the Influencer*). In the book *Females*⁶² the author Andrea Long Chu describes femininity rather as a concept based on dependency and satisfaction of others, from this perspective Long Chu draws that anyone is categorically considered female. Already in 1994 the British philosopher Sadie Plant even mentioned the term ‘digitalization’ often being called ‘feminization’.⁶³ So regarding this concept nothing we do virtually is ‘neutral’ in all terms, as Donna Haraway explains:

“We’re inside of what we make, and it’s inside of us. We’re living in a world of connections—and it matters which ones get made and unmade.”

⁶⁰Russell, Legacy. Glitch Feminism : A Manifesto. 2020. London: Verso. p. 79

⁶¹ As Russell is quoting Paul B. Preciado. (Russell, Legacy. Glitch Feminism : A Manifesto. 2020. London: Verso. p. 79)

⁶²Long Chu, Andrea. Females. 2019. London: Verso.

⁶³Sadie Plant at ICA. 1994. “Seduced & Abandoned: The Body in the Virtual World - the Feminine Cyberspace.” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=doL9mRMEUGw>.

⁶⁴Quote Donna Haraway, in: Hari Kunzru: “You are Cyborg” Wired, February 1 1997. <https://www.wired.com/1997/02/ffharaway/>

The future co-exists in digitality and we are sculpting our future existence in that exact moment, with our human flesh still being in the center of its matrix. The internet will live on—it is not ephemeral, it is material and will surely exist for a while, as author of the *Cyberfeminism Index*, Mindy Seu claims in an interview.⁶⁵ But since our beloved internet—unlike its commonly used icon resembling planet earth—is not a water-containing planet found in space (and therefore self-evolving through nature's circumstances), but rather completely created on human knowledge, it concludes in our cyberspace being administered by humans from its birth. And to take it further with capitalism at the helm: The internet is administered and regulated by companies. In cyberspace *Meta* becomes a government with its own rules rather than only a brand. The places we continually consume from are making up rules for further successful consumption. If you do not acknowledge their rules, you and your content are being excluded from their cybernetic ministry, blacklisted and isolated from the rest of cybernetic society.

This doesn't seem to disturb the *Influencer*. With every weekly regulation of Meta's terms of usage in their mailbox, they dummy-accept and carry on. They tick the only box possible and continue with their business, because they couldn't imagine their pity AFK without their cyber comfort spaces and the endless reinforcements from their gazing audience, also being algorithms and monsters filled with data. Who would be interested in their lore offline anyways, since it's not that glittery and curated outside the limitations of their screen? The *Influencer* continues their existence under Haraway's faith in the *Cyborg*, being a creature of its social reality and a creature created for fiction.⁶⁶ The *Influencer* is tangible and opaque concurrently. And we are all naturally adapting the *Influencer's* fluidity every time we are nailing our vision to our small handheld screens, as literary critic N. Katherine Hayles puts it perfectly:

“As you gaze at the flickering signifiers scrolling down the computer screens, (...) you have already become posthuman.”

⁶⁵ Poles, Clemence. 2023. “Meet Mindy Seu—Passerby Magazine.” *Passerby Magazine*. November 24, 2023. Accessed March 19, 2024. <http://passerbymagazine.com/profiles/mindy-seu>.

So why don't we all accept our *Cyborg* destiny? Why don't we focus on our on-screen existence, finally freed from the suffering of our AFK consequences and systems, where our bodies become liquid, altering our idea of existence—allowing no commercial appropriation of ourselves? We flourish in our online being, displaying our soon-to-be realities. We like, we follow, we share, we adapt—But above all we consume, not forgetting and accommodating our AFK skins, our opinions, and our value.

Not too soon the *Influencer* will lose themselves in their ever-rising screen time, under constant stimulation, an addict to URL numbers rather than AFK affection. What is their human flesh even worth in cyberspace, considering it is an intangible void? Their physical affection no longer owns online value, rather those online networks yearn for our ever-weakening attention. The only physical affection of value is our thumb staying in an immortalized position on those screens. The *Influencer* finished manufacturing its fairy tale, resulting it to be another dulled kind of space we now have to coexist in, with the fairy tale never leaving our AFK lives untouched—again being suppressed by their rules.

⁶⁶ Haraway, Donna J. 1985. *A Cyborg Manifesto*. Manifestly Haraway. University of Minnesota Press. pp. 5-6. https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/english/currentstudents/undergraduate/modules/fictionnarrative-mediaandtheoryinthe21stcentury/manifestly_haraway_---_a_cyborg_manifesto_science_technology_and_socialist-feminism_in_the_....pdf.

⁶⁷ Hayles, N. Katherine. 1999. *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*. The University of Chicago Press. https://monoskop.org/images/5/50/Hayles_N_Katherine_How_We_Became_Posthuman_Virtual_Bodies_in_Cybernetics_Literature_and_Informatics.pdf.

(2.2) selling my soul

We try to adapt and we try to perform. Regardless of them knowing of our true AFK bodies, our existence is getting ranked. They categorize our opinions, our looks, and our likes, questioning our authenticity. Every time you toggle the box next to the “*I’m not a robot*”, you feel like you are being a completely honest human-individual. By now your adaptation has gone far behind customization, but started benefiting the commodification of your beloved choices. If you adapt by purchasing something trendy, does it make you less authentic? Less authentic, since it didn’t come from your very niche algorithm, that is whispering the exact products to complete your character? They don’t want to see your fairy tale anymore, since it literally became the fraud of a fantasy life: No one is happy all the time. No middle-class living person can afford uninterrupted traveling. And most importantly no one believes in your staged intellectual productivity hidden in the untouched dusty bookshelf you constantly share in a light sunbeam on your Instagram story. As you post your distress in the form of a crying selfie, you follow to cover up your ears to the voices in the distance, telling you that you’re only doing it for attention. They no longer want to see the constant glamorisation of your li(v)es. You are worth nothing if not truly authentic.

In the artwork *365 Days: A Catalogue of Tears*, the artist Laurel Nakadate captures a picture of herself crying every day in a row for years. The performance took place from 2010 to 2020, and in 2020 with the selfies being posted on Instagram.⁶⁸ Some pictures are filled with shiny tears, others just show her in extremely sad facial expressions or her looking into the camera in a melancholy scene. The portrayal of her sadness all of a sudden transforms into an actual ‘event’, which is not only worth witnessing AFK but also worthy of being captured on camera. And since photography is a non-interventionist artistic act, it allows us to question the authenticity of her actual everyday sadness. Sure you can be sad—even depressed—for a longer period, but is it always possible to cry every day, or furthermore to have a camera at hand at this exact moment? Planning a performance of the capture of your everyday crying, already has you planned out on your schedule to cry, but can you schedule any emotions? Wouldn’t it make that emotion lose its authenticity automatically? It is sure that she may have forced herself to feel sad or fake-cry to successfully continue making the artwork. But since we completely forgot about it being a performance piece (*to repeat: like literally everything in life happening under surveillance*), maybe there wasn’t even an attempt to real-cry from the beginning. In ‘real’ film and theater, for instance, we cry with the protagonist, never questioning their emotions’ authenticity. We cry based on a staged event, which in that sense would make us fake our tears as well.

The philosopher Kendall Walton also declares that we can’t be moved by things that are not real, arguing that the emotions we experience due to fictional events are not real either—he calls them *Quasi-Emotions*⁶⁹, being emotion-like functions that can be caused by fiction but do not function like real emotions triggered by true events. So does that mean that the realness of my online emotions depends on the viewer and if they actually perceive me as a character? Susan Sontag—often dealing with the meaning of photography—also supports this assumption with her observation that since a photograph alienates the viewers “*from direct experience*”, what is transcended is only an “*intense second-hand experience*”⁷⁰, making it harder to empathize with this person or their situation. But then what is an honest feeling? Should we rather rate them by spontaneity and the motivation to gain value?⁷¹ At this point, the *Influencer* feels like every intimate emotional moment they would share online would be criticized, losing empathy for their own crying. And since they are a person driven by their emotionality, they are contemplating retirement from the place that once felt so accepting to them.

68 Nakadate, Laurel. “365 days: A Catalogue of Tears” on Instagram. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CJdOef3FA4q/?hl=en>

69 “The Paradox of Fiction” Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. <https://iep.utm.edu/fict-par/>.

70 Sontag, Susan. “In Plato’s Cave.” *On Photography*. 1977.

71 Horning, Rob. “Mass Authentic” in Cueto, Barbara, and Bas Hendriks. 2017. *Authenticity?: Observations and Artistic Strategies in the Post-digital Age*. Amsterdam: Valiz, p. 28.

To demonstrate a more URL performance, since we are performing cyber tenderness in our fairy tales. In her video *WAH*⁷² we see artist Molly Soda lying in bed, looking into the webcam and sobbing in tears, while the song by the band Death Cab for Cutie is playing at a modest volume in the background. Her mascara is smearing underneath her eyes, as she rests her face into the palms of her hand. Comments on that video vary from “*PULL IT TOGETHER*”(by user ac-3940), to “*crying is good for you and makes you feel better when you are done. *hugs**” (by user RainbowSpiceGirl). Recently Soda found herself crying in an NFT by Instagram user fotolog.wtf⁷³, which consists of a graph given the name “Types Of Crying”. Her crying from the video *WAH* was categorized amongst the crying from other women, like American YouTuber and singer Trisha Paytas for example. The graph consisted of different types of crying, including *Weeping*, *Scream-Crying*, *Silent Tears* or in Soda’s case *Sobbing*, spread over two of the graph’s metrics: *Sympathy Elicited* and *Pathetic-ness*.

In an earlier video⁷⁴—which is also her most clicked online crying performance—Soda is again shown in her bed holding her pet rat Sarah Michelle Gellar (*which later on died, RIP*) with a comment saying: “*No tears. I guess you have a desire for attention but pretending to cry is pretty lame.*”(by user betaville72), accusing Soda of faking her sadness for clicks and therefore revenue. But shouldn’t we then scrutinize the authenticity of any emotion shown in any public content—whether ‘positive’ or ‘negative’—for its possibility of generating attention and therefore actual money-making ability?

Our *Influencer* is confused, everything they are doing online is considered fake since it can contribute to generating fame and therefore personal wealth. They start to reject the idea of being the most authentic self, since it seems to be a full-on scam planted by capitalist structures, as author Rob Horning states:

“Authenticity, it is claimed, stands for the truth behind the curtain, but it is really just the curtain. (...) The presumption that only some feelings in some situations are real, and other feelings, though they are actually felt, are somehow false is authenticity’s main ruse.”

73 “Types Of Crying” on Instagram. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CbynXNwgOz8/>

74 Soda, Molly. 2012. “-(-” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iqn2dBjYsV8>.

75 Horning, Rob. “Mass Authentic” in Cueto, Barbara, and Bas Hendrikx. 2017. *Authenticity?: Observations and Artistic Strategies in the Post-digital Age*. Amsterdam: Valiz. pp. 29–30.

72 Soda, Molly. 2013. “WAH.” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iqn2dBjYsV8>.

By now we are so hung up on whether we are real enough that it is being used to manipulate us into buying our 'realness' back by a non-stop dopamine satisfaction through consumption. We are "(consuming) our way back to the secure place where our feelings become real and unconflicted again."⁷⁶ We follow trends, a norm, a minimum we have to hold on to in order to achieve social affinity. The scam (*being authenticity*) simplifies, offering alternatives to our genuine mess, forming fiction for downplaying the idea of sanity, generating an idea of a socially respected "well-being", and with us constantly investing into our "well-ongoing"⁷⁷: "They are speculations seeking substantiation at the expense of what actually is."⁷⁸ Authenticity gives us the idea to form true individuality—standing out from a crowd, but still staying in the norm. It tricks us into believing our 'real feelings' are anti-commercial or anti-capitalist. However, this faith in 'real emotion' solves nothing. With it we remain under the pressure of feeling 'real' and feeling 'real feelings'. Our certified feelings are only valid because they are 'certified'—and commercialized—allowing big daddy capitalism to further exist in those bubbles of capital flows and networks.⁷⁹ If there is absolutely no way of 'feeling' authentically since it's automatically linked to capitalist hell, shouldn't we then embrace our most unauthentic emotional selves? It seems like we already abandoned the suffering of Rapunzel wanting to be freed from the tower, and that community full of *Sad Girl* liberated from the male gaze, since we allowed the burdens of authenticity subconsciously dominate us like they did before. By the purse of being individual, we lose our community, isolating ourselves and others even more. Because the authenticity we yearn for doubles as a commodified exclusion of someone else not accomplishing it, further judging them to not be 'authentic' and be untruthful.⁸⁰

If we have a look at a more 'authentic' example of performing cyber tenderness (*perceived in terms of society's rating of genuineness, at least*), we get to see model Bella Hadid crying occasionally on her Instagram profile, where she shared photos of her past depressive episodes over the last three years in a picture carousel post. In response to the question on why she chooses to share these intimate photographs, she states that everyone should know that it is OK to feel that way and that we shouldn't be deluded by Instagram's beauty.⁸¹ Posts like that—talking about mental health issues and showing the 'real' misfires of life—help people on the internet to perceive the unreachable perfect supermodel as more tangible and therefore more 'human' equivalent of herself. Nevertheless, with her having about sixty million followers on Instagram no post is a small spontaneous move. If you can think of taking a selfie while you're feeling so miserable, are you even feeling that bad? And if you can subsequently post it on social media, while not feeling that miserable anymore, what are the *Influencer's* reasonable expectations for this post? Deep down Bella was very aware of the perception of her followers (*again, sixty million!!!*) and what she can achieve with these photos. But what also is significant in her situation is that regardless of her somber crying, she is still a perfect-looking supermodel. And with her looks she can actually afford the risk of sharing vulnerability, without a ton of people being weirded out by her sobbing and unfollowing her.

76 Horning, Rob. "Mass Authentic" in Cueto, Barbara, and Bas Hendriks. 2017. *Authenticity?: Observations and Artistic Strategies in the Post-digital Age*. Amsterdam: Valiz. p. 30.

77 Horning, Rob. "Mass Authentic" in Cueto, Barbara, and Bas Hendriks. 2017. *Authenticity?: Observations and Artistic Strategies in the Post-digital Age*. Amsterdam: Valiz. pp. 30-31.

78 Horning, Rob. "Mass Authentic" in Cueto, Barbara, and Bas Hendriks. 2017. *Authenticity?: Observations and Artistic Strategies in the Post-digital Age*. Amsterdam: Valiz. p. 31.

79 Horning, Rob. "Mass Authentic" in Cueto, Barbara, and Bas Hendriks. 2017. *Authenticity?: Observations and Artistic Strategies in the Post-digital Age*. Amsterdam: Valiz. p. 36.

80 Horning, Rob. "Mass Authentic" in Cueto, Barbara, and Bas Hendriks. 2017. *Authenticity?: Observations and Artistic Strategies in the Post-digital Age*. Amsterdam: Valiz. p. 38.

So since the *Influencer* intentionally posts their emotions into the web, they don't await any empathy from their community, because we are all aware by now that most things on social media can be planted and planned out strategically. It is clicks, not empathy. Even the most genuine BeReals⁸² can not be posted on time. That is why the *Influencer* lives their fairy tale performance online, because no one can perceive their ongoing fraud AFK, right? Their life becomes art, under the term of Michel Foucault, taking art further than only considering it being an object. And since art is based on concept and plan, does our life have any need to be authentic all the time? The *Influencer*—once *Sad Girl*—once girl, was forever taught on how to adapt their behavior to socially-set norms. Ever since they have become an expert and excellent performance artist. Their identity is a strategic way of survival,⁸³ with the full consciousness of their acts under regular observation from others. They rebrand themselves occasionally, making themselves the aware product of consumption, since it already has been happening all the time. Being considered authentic means being profitable—“*capable of being convincingly sold*”⁸⁴. In trying to reach enforced authenticity, one is automatically making themselves part of the consumerist-hell exchange, constantly trying to fit in standards, being unique but not too much, not too weird—still fitting the normal. The pursuit of authenticity serves as an excuse for consumerism. To consume signifies to become more of the genuine established self—manic AFK character customization at its finest.

The term and value of ‘authenticity’ keep being chained to a consumerist market, unable to escape it. Our *Influencer* finally abandoned the idea of their fairy tale, extending their strategy, using their experience of constant performance, imitating intimacy as a tool to post profitable vulnerability, to influence and to trick you into buying those innovative menstrual pants, thus generating attention for their own wealth. Everything is a fraud online, and everyone consciously takes part in this capitalist hell hole—tracking their packages in full consumerism ecstasy and linking their drop-shipping online shops into their Linktr.ee.⁸⁵ No one truly believed in the *Influencer's* melancholy anyway, so they changed their course—adapting to the current—to generate profit out of imitating intimacy themselves. The digital space the elders once were worried about, began to abandon its own children.

82 BeReal is an app, claiming to be a more ‘real’ social media. Users are only allowed to post a double-faced picture at a specific time, triggered by a notification they receive on their phone. You are only allowed to see your friends’ daily posts, if you post them yourself.

83 Haraway, Donna J. 1985. A Cyborg Manifesto. Manifestly Haraway. University of Minnesota Press. p. 16. https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/english/currentstudents/undergraduate/modules/fictionnownarrativemediaandtheoryinthe21stcentury/manifestly_haraway_----_a_cyborg_manifesto_science_technology_and_socialist-feminism_in_the_....pdf.

84 Horning, Rob. “Mass Authentic” in Cueto, Barbara, and Bas Hendrikx. 2017. *Authenticity?: Observations and Artistic Strategies in the Post-digital Age*. Amsterdam: Valiz. p. 34.

85 Most Influencers and brands use a Linktr.ee in their social media bio to gather their other platforms, products and further links for consumption.

(2.3) when you already had me caught in your web,
paralyzed by your forces

In 1996—around 30 years ago—a wise white cyberlibertarian named John Perry Barlow composed a masterpiece of an email addressed to the “*Governments of the Industrial World*”⁸⁶, in which he demands the big players to keep their hands off our dear and free internet. He calls cyberspace the “*new home of mind*”⁸⁷, asking governments to take their rules and leave, since cyberspace is outside their borders, ergo outside their forces. Barlow describes an internet without privilege and oppression, a place without judgment because of “*race, economic power, military force, or station of birth*”⁸⁸ (he in fact did not mention gender, easter egg?). Barlow declares that the people of cyberspace are ‘immune’ to the government’s actions and regulations, not giving them consent over their bodies, and not allowing them to arrest their thoughts. The *Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace* screams softly in its inspiring and lyrical tone, ending with the statement:

“You are terrified of your own children, since they are natives in a world where you will always be immigrants.(...) We will create a civilization of the Mind in Cyberspace. May it be more humane and fair than the world your governments have made before.”

Barlow passed in 2018, which leaves us curiously wondering what his feelings on the lunacy and inertia of Web 3.0 were. Reading his text reminds one of Legacy Russell’s *Glitch Feminism Manifesto*, filled with the same feeling of worry considering the homes of their beloved children of cyberspace, but

with Russell’s text undoubtedly being more current. Cyberspace (‘normal’ people just call it the Internet by now) is currently developing to the state that Barlow was concerned about, with capitalist imposter governments already influencing AFK nations. With inexorable ‘lizard clones’ buying properties from cyberspace and afterward flying to actual space, we are currently living in the sci-fi horror that Haraway dreamed of writing herself. Sure, it’s not pure hell up to now, but we are getting there at the speed of light. In *Glitch Feminism* Russell mostly claims that the internet remains a secure place for marginalized voices and bodies, while calling out the AFK for being in an on-off relationship with digitality, therefore being “*sexist, racist, classist, homophobic, transphobic, and ableist*”⁹⁰. The internet is not completely lost, since it’s a place for continuous vulnerability and opening up, allowing profound intimacy in a safer space than outside the screen. It is also a place where we are safe from physical injury.⁹¹

But we can certainly record so far that the Internet is not a fairytale chatroom anymore. It is the future space where the *Sad Girl* and the *Influencer* can mobilize their tenderness as an activist tool, realizing an already progressing reality future featuring the URL.⁹² But how do we leave the burden of the authentic *Influencer* behind, evolving into a new stage of claiming the internet, again to be our cyber comfort space? As Foucault thinks that art is an act of rebellion, should we just start embracing our performance art of crying fraud, accepting our full digital madness, and confusing the internet with our emotional circus—as far as we are confused about—to finally confront the constant pressure of the and rise of the internet’s conformity and commodification? Wouldn’t that make us the *Cyborgs* motivated to dedicate our lives to the constant glitch? So we shall again create our co-living cyber character, evolving into the *Cyborg* we glitch, with your authenticity and trending aesthetics having no more significance to us. Expect us to arrive at your fortresses, reclaiming our digital bodies. Since you can’t label our mass of glitch and pixel mud, our undefinable characters can’t be caught with your pigeon-holed webs. Your capitalist binary brain is not able to seize our crying and the emotional bugs we plant to mislead you. We resist to teach you our dearest tenderness and empathy.

86 Barlow, John P. 1996. “A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace.” <https://www.eff.org/cyberspace-independence>.

87 Barlow, John P. 1996. “A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace.” <https://www.eff.org/cyberspace-independence>.

88 Barlow, John P. 1996. “A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace.” <https://www.eff.org/cyberspace-independence>.

89 Barlow, John P. 1996. “A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace.” <https://www.eff.org/cyberspace-independence>.

90 Russell, Legacy. *Glitch Feminism : A Manifesto*. 2020. London: Verso. p. 90

91 Russell, Legacy. *Glitch Feminism : A Manifesto*. 2020. London: Verso. p. 90

92 Adapted statement based on Legacy Russell in her speech about #glitchfeminism at the Refiguring the Future Conference, 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iZ233Gzichw>

(3.1) I resist to educate you on my sanity

By the end of our *Brothers Grimm*-like fairy tale, the *Influencer* lost its spark again, overburdened by people online not daring to acknowledge their emotional state. The *Influencer* looks up to the *Sad Girl*, wondering how her sadness became such a glamorous accessory. Melancholy seems so beautiful, but only if intentional, rather it develops into a depressing state of being. Is it finally time for the *Influencer* to log off, finally turning their head away from the 27-inch LED screen that became their black mirrors, just like the elders told her at the starting point? The ongoing notifications are their only source of dopamine and reason for further posting. And while they are all tired of consuming for eternity, they missed out on realizing that they evolved in fact to become the capitalist product themselves. The *Sad Girl* and the *Influencer* have been constantly labeled and packaged for further consumerism, being sold to the big men's conglomerates—"the real users' of ad-supported social media", as Horning states.⁹³ You don't need to get to know your future products anymore, since you were the product from the beginning. And with every precisely tailored targeted ad we receive, we get the confirmation that our data have been consumed correctly.⁹⁴

As I open the webpage of *Forbes* magazine to read an article about targeted apps and the seemingly 'truth' of user privacy⁹⁵, a pop blocks my sight by asking me consent to use my data (*well*). I click on "Accept", as I'm not going to miss out on this. The article explains about advertising tools nowadays using artificial intelligence and how it therefore is able to deliver more curated ads, by analyzing and learning our behavior more and more in-depth. Shopping for our favorite goods and aesthetics online is important for the economy, as e-commerce made up about 19% of global retail sales since the start of the 2020 pandemic.⁹⁶ Targeted apps are what keep the most popular part of our cyber comfort spaces alive unless you paid for an ad-free version of your social media.⁹⁷ Every step we take online is tracked. The *Sad Girl* could never escape the constant AFK surveillance she thought she was escaping from online—as no one can perceive her body without consent. At this point our

digital footprint is not blocking us from job opportunities—however—it differently leads us to bankruptcy by chasing us into targeted apps, and constantly observing our online behavior. Our data is no longer collected, it is being collectively stolen. (*Okay, I am slowly starting to agree. We are indeed all female in cyberspace, performing our way through an oppressive system, the same way we do AFK.*)

The *Influencer*, again, starts to realize things. They are in an urgent need to intentionally resist further consumption of their data, and the further surveillance of their conscious acts in cyberspace. Unfortunately they 'die' for doom scrolling on TikTok, they love their day-to-day auto-fictional performance on Instagram, and they can not resist posting their delayed and staged BeReals—the *Influencer* just loves being fake and unpredictable, it helps them to survive. Therefore, they must resist teaching algorithms their behavior. Moreover, they don't see the point in thanking an AI chat bot.⁹⁸ Machines were once passive and less autonomous, a way for men to mock their dreams. But today's late twentieth-century machines are constantly self-fulfilling, rapidly learning to be disturbingly alive (*aka serving today's capitalist patriarchy hell*)—they have become more active while we have become more inert.⁹⁹ The *Influencer* begins to recognize their glitch patterns and the bugs they planted since their prehistoric Tumblr time:

The *Influencer*, the *Sad Girl*, all girls, women, trans, non-binary, physically injured, sick, mentally ill, disabled, not-to-the-norm functioning, resisting, resting, poor, crying, grieving, screaming, outsiders, observed and suppressed were the glitching *Cyborgs*, ruthlessly planting bugs by surviving from the very beginning of their existence. So they shall continue, saving their lives in cyberspace in the same way. To be tender means to be damaged, delicate—for that reason fragile—possibly already broken, non-functional, and non-profitable for the market. By performing cyber tenderness we resist the commodification of our cybernated vulnerability. Machines don't feel emotions, and we withstand to educate them about our messy cyber tenderness.

93 Horning, Rob. "Mass Authentic" in Cueto, Barbara, and Bas Hendriks. 2017. *Authenticity?: Observations and Artistic Strategies in the Post-digital Age*. Amsterdam: Valiz. p. 41.

94 Horning, Rob. "Mass Authentic" in Cueto, Barbara, and Bas Hendriks. 2017. *Authenticity?: Observations and Artistic Strategies in the Post-digital Age*. Amsterdam: Valiz. p. 45.

95 Froehlich, Nik. 2022. "The Truth in User Privacy and Targeted Ads." *Forbes*, February 24, 2022. Accessed March 20, 2024. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbestechcouncil/2022/02/24/the-truth-in-user-privacy-and-targeted-ads/?sh=2be187da355e>.

96 "Global E-Commerce Jumps to \$26.7 Trillion, Covid-19 Boosts Online Retail Sales." 2021. UNCTAD. May 3, 2021. <https://unctad.org/press-material/global-e-commerce-jumps-267-trillion-covid-19-boosts-online-retail-sales>.

97 Since October 2023 Meta is allowing its users to have an ad free experience in exchange for a monthly subscription (Europe): Meta. 2023. "Facebook and Instagram to Offer Subscription for No Ads in Europe." Meta, December 4, 2023. Accessed March 20, 2024. <https://about.fb.com/news/2023/10/facebook-and-instagram-to-offer-subscription-for-no-ads-in-europe/>.

98 S, Pang. 2023. "The Truth About Saying 'Thanks' & 'Please' to ChatGPT." Medium, January 22, 2023. Accessed March 20, 2024. <https://ppangsy.medium.com/a-world-of-thanks-the-surprising-effects-of-chatgpt-appreciation-105f6e25fccc>.

99 Haraway, Donna J. 1985. *A Cyborg Manifesto*. Manifestly Haraway. University of Minnesota Press. p. 11. https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/english/currentstudents/undergraduate/modules/fictionnow/rativemediaandtheoryinthe21stcentury/manifestly_haraway_---_a_cyborg_manifesto_science_technology_and_socialist-feminism_in_the_....pdf.

(3.2) performing cyber tenderness in digital eternity

In a digitality operating on transcending networks, we should insist on constructing our coordinated performance play. Our decisions shall not be based on automation, every move is of significance, part of the systematic plan we weaved for their distraction.¹⁰⁰ Our activity appears to be random, but it is not. We reject any proposals for auto-completion,¹⁰¹ since the bodies we depend on refuse their norms, seeking refuge in the gloom between the options we are offered. Something tender and almost fluid is harder to take hold of than something solid rather hard.

We are chaos, not to be
shelved. We are no-ones,
(non-)concepts of non-
graspable choices, moving and
evolving in data-void.

¹⁰⁰“Networking is both a feminist practice and a multinational corporate strategy —weaving is for oppositional cyborgs.” (S. 46)– Haraway, Donna J. 2016. *A Cyborg Manifesto*. Manifestly Haraway. University of Minnesota Press. pp. 46.

¹⁰¹“Every part of ourselves we mark with an X. Every time we elect to have the form autofill the next time around, we participate in an act of naming, the process of identifying ourselves within highly networked social and cultural algorithms.”– Russell, Legacy. *Glitch Feminism : A Manifesto*. (London: Verso, 2020), 56.

We spam into nothingness. All of our intimate stories written in our diaries are meant to be heard, our complex drawings are meant to be seen, and our ideas are meant to be recognized among other cyberspace citizens. With being conscious of our hosts, it is about time for them to observe us breaking free from our hostage. We shall be the admins of our characters, to be the most conspicuous non-visible.¹⁰²

We are either
invisible or explosive.

¹⁰² “That is, the totalisation built into this tale of radical feminism achieves its end—the unity of women—by endorsing the experience of and testimony to radical nonbeing. As for the Marxist/socialist-feminist, consciousness is an achievement, not a natural fact.”—Haraway, Donna J. 2016. *A Cyborg Manifesto*. Manifestly Haraway. University of Minnesota Press. pp. 23–24.

And with us being conscious about the constant perception of our bodies (but not of our voices), we shall embrace our brokenness, the souls and corpora you broke. We will not sell ourselves, since we are not allowing a glimpse of the authentic at all. We will not repair ourselves for the purpose of your functionality.¹⁰³ We repurpose our non-functioning as a reason to be non-interesting for your observation. The viruses we infect your systems with will never be cured.

We are ugly, not to be sold.
We are broken, not to
function properly.

¹⁰³“Machines are expected to work well and work quickly. A computer virus triggers the machinic responses of slowness in ways that are unpredictable to the user: endless buffering, crashing, damaging, deleting, reformatting.”— Russell, *Legacy. Glitch Feminism : A Manifesto*. (London: Verso, 2020), 82.

In order to claim back our dearest pixel belonging, we should be always conscious of our observance. Since they will not believe in our 'real' emotionality, we are committed benefiting from our performances. We shall all allow ourselves to be our dirtiest and most emotive adaptation in cyberspace, fulfilling constant empathy of others, to fool our observer on their ever-growing wealth being our bodies' data—we mislead their data-fraud by performing our dearest fragility.

Our lives and our likes are
not curated, yet our emotions
are fully calculated.

We may not be able—and we don't want to—throw bricks through their windows. Instead, we link up in cyberspace, gathering all our vulnerabilities on the web, our most important woven carrier bag¹⁰⁴—standing behind the surface of their most significant windows, their flickering screens. We collect the emotional, resisting their material.

Performing cyber tenderness in digital eternity.

¹⁰⁴“We’ve all heard it, we’ve all heard about all the sticks and spears and swords, the things to bash and poke and hit with, the long, hard things, but we have not heard about the thing to put things in, the container for the thing contained. That is a new story. That is news.”—Le Guin, Ursula K. *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction*. 1988.

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Typeset in
JL Limpet Granite by Jungmyung Lee
[J-LTF], 2019–2023;
Arial by Patricia Saunders and Robin
Nicholas (Monotype), being one of the
earliest system fonts co-designed by
a woman, 1982.

Hamburg, April 2024