



The
Color
Purple



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A bildungsroman. A trilogy response. [] A handbook to courtship, a primer on glam. Gestalt documentary. Literary crossdressing, the feminine as form. Does form transform content? [] Literary criticism on the writing of Maggie Nelson, Ottessa Moshfegh, Chris Kraus, McKenzie Wark, Kathy Acker, Anne Carson, Andrea Long Chu, Tavi Gevinson, and Phoebe Waller-Bridge. A fog of confusion. A record of [ch-ch-ch-ch] changes. The good-bad bad-good years, the years between, *entre-deux-guerres*.

Eberly College of Science, 2011 press release: “They found that the growing fungus filled the ant’s body and head, causing muscles to atrophy and forcing muscle fibers to spread apart. The scientists observed that the zombie ants walked in a random manner, unable to find their way home.”

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I.

B: How can you watch a bunch of Girls episodes and then feel embarrassed about your gchat rants? This is life.

:// Let the person who wants a vision hang himself by his neck. When his face turns purple, take him down and have him describe what he’s seen.¹

:// Pothos (Greek: Πόθος “yearning”): one of Aphrodite’s erotes and brother to Himeros and Eros. In some versions of myth, Pothos is the son of Eros, or is portrayed as an independent aspect of him.[5] He was part of Aphrodite’s retinue, and carried a vine, indicating a connection to wine or the god Dionysus. Pothos represents longing or yearning.[17]

1 Kelsey, Bernadette Corp.

“Somewhere along the way I lost my nerve” I said at one point, “and only now am I wondering if I can recover it.”

Pothos, it merely takes believing to believe. In the bar, actors traumatized by the business of professional vulnerability, worn thin inside from keeping double books, the private/public ledgers.// Romantic relationships that require turning parts of your brain off.// I was having one of my fantasies—I forget specifically which; one of those daydreams endemic to the under-30, these being fantasies of death, fantasies of consummation, fantasies of power.

Lou Reed’s vision of a city as machine of transformation, not unlike the old immigrant ceremony where fresh-off-the-boat’ers lined up in Old World dress, climbed into a literal & symbolic pewter pot 20 feet wide, were ceremonially smelted emerging reborn in New World garb.

Drink: a 1:2 ratio the Goldilocks zone for a gin and tonic// Ep. notes at home: the thrill of the Chuck-Blair pairing-off == the thrill of raw (social) power in play, pulling out stops, pursuing ends. Prohibition never stood a chance next to exhibition.// *um, like... I would just describe the writing style as taking that blackwhite 70s New York style and just dunking it in lavender techno synths?* and I grinned.

The second century’s Aulus Gellius: «It is said that Demosthenes in his dress and other personal habits was excessively spruce, elegant and studied. It was for that reason that he was taunted by his rivals and opponents with his “exquisite, pretty mantles” and “soft, pretty tunics”;²⁵ for that reason, too, that they did not refrain from applying to him foul and shameful epithets, alleging that he was no man and was even guilty of unnatural vice.»

When I tried to sleep I thought of Beckett’s *Endgame*. I thought about putting the lids on the garbage cans and

shutting out light. I thought about waiting it out until the endtime.

Maybe I perked up, hungry for a second. Maybe I thought about this hunger, weighed it against the costs of getting out of bed. Breaking a state. Undergoing change. Having to readjust the self. Getting up; settling back in. Again... Settle back again... Again I settled back again.

Perhaps I laid down on sweaty sheets and stretched my shoulders, gave into all the tugging things, the longings and desires. Perhaps I turned to the dark side of the room. The lavender turns deeper violet in the corner where the early light can’t reach.

∞

In the morning, thinking of G & Himeros, commuting to work. :// “...reading Nietzsche in the subway, reading Proust, reading David Foster Wallace, jotting down [...] brilliant thoughts into a black Moleskine pocket notebook... The worst was that those guys tried to pass off their insecurity as ‘sensitivity,’ and it worked.”¹

A whiff of perfume. A switch from treating the self as System 1 to treating the self as System 2. From Cartesian dualism to brain-self monism to the idea that *these desires are not you*. A necessary coping: self as ferryman who shuttles impulse to reality, and can elect to carry passengers.

Young women with xerophthalmia. Silver boots and a raincoat cum peignoir. Entropic prophecies of personal collapse, self-imposed limitations on personal agency, these being the only outcomes one can, if desired, ensure with reasonable certainty. Love is a speech act. A Milo jumpsuit, oat, with pockets the size of paperbacks. Thee who spends

1 Moshfegh, *My Year of Rest & Relaxation*, 2018

time underground.

To get the most out of Blunt's *Lost Souls*, imagine the album as a knowing performance, a project by Stereolab or Stephen Merrit in tribute to the Pumpkins' "1979." An arrangement normcore but tight, a churning of minimalist pop songs that break into Wayne Coyne falsetto. //To ask what happened and hear, «Gradually, then, he changed himself in my image. He became me in many parts of himself, because we are not strong enough to behave otherwise... My particular wommanness in him got to be as unbearable to me as, certainly, it is unbearable to him.»

At Cafe Bari a beautiful Swiftian Swede gives a 20% smile at the register. I tell you, *I will not cede sexual power until it is properly acknowledged in the field of discourse as existing. This is my only political position!*

://You have six stats. Meat is how physically adept your body is. Brains is how smart you are. Spark is how creative, alive, aware, and unfettered you are. Slack is how lucky and laid back you are, in the sense that higher Slack scores give you more affordance to roll with punches, AND fewer punches to roll with. Mana is how much force of will or force of personality you have. Class is how well your social aesthetics jive with other people's.² (*Yeah, but it forgets seduction, only tangentially related to spark & mana.*)

What was G like? She was high class. She was high mana, smart. Not much slack but a lotta luck. She had a *pied-à-terre* downtown. She never felt comfortable with food, or with her relationship to it (second-order). She read Ottessa Moshfegh.

∞

Sea Witch, between 21st and 22nd, el Greco colors in a wall mural behind the tables where I wait for her. She cams parttime; her hair is boyish, pixie. In bed, lips on a Coca-Cola bottle. "What's it like?" "Whatchu mean, prison?" "No, armed robbery." "It ain't like anything." Beat. "Shoot, I knew you never robbed a place you faker." I draw a small gun, flick a matchstick between the teeth. She reaches out lightly, looks down at it. "But you wouldn't have the gump-tion to use it."³ It'll be months before I see her again: from a distance, dressed in the black-and-white uniform of her catering company, working at an art fair under a plastic tent.

X: *might not be able to relate anymore, now that i know how shamelessly Anglo your taste in women is. i mean damn. "lover of sheep... and bernadette devlin"?* *that's a borderline offensive stereotype of an irish person. this is not an any way a defense of my own taste—last e-girl i had a crush on was a LA-based soundcloud rapper who made ironic/erotic flash games in 2014. i guess i don't feel i can relate to the hobby of knitting/crocheting "what are you doing, babe?" "performing gender." "oh, nice!"*

∞

Beach life. Ride life. Road life. Jeep life. Singles life. Doubles life. Part of the late-night crew. Study life. Greek life. Train life. Island life. Intern life. Acting out *The Graduate*. Ship life. High life. *Life!*—kill yr tall boy. Hermit life, monk life, chaste life, van life. Shwick life; my unemployed ass. Tour life, grind life, studio time, public life, public hustle. Working to keep a single ledger, a single set of books, wondering if its the easy way out or the hard one, noble or stupid. Envyng and not envyng the riches available to savvy double-keepers.

I said, the Kantian imperative that art-making be for or about other people.

3 Bonnie & Clyde, 1967

I said, “\$400,” knowing you’ll balk. You say \$250, I say \$325. Ze thinks ze2 isn’t taking ze seriously, so ze goes over-the-top with dogma and rhetoric to skew ze2’s response.

I said, thank you Keren Cytter!

I said, I started listening to Leonard Cohen. I said, I’d stayed away from Leonard Cohen for a while because of G.

1. *What the masculine entails is a calcification of self, a containing of the psyche. Protestant, monolithic, Judean.*
2. *It is boundaried: it knows what it fucks with and knows what it doesn’t.*
3. *Accomplishment is merely an initial level. The art is in appearing effortless.*

I said, G has a chapbook. On the cover is a black-and-white photograph of a florist’s. I believe the chapbook is called *the florist*. It does not surprise me the title is uncapitalized, that all the poems are in lowercase. *So it went on with the “oh-God-the-pain girls,” to use Léonie’s phrase*⁴; I’m being petty. There is a to-do list of movies showing at Metrograph this month, calendared in, and I watch the showtimes from bed as they come... and pass unseen.

4. *To initiate is to play the fool.*⁵
5. *Strategy is knowing when to wait and when to act.*
6. *Attention is a currency obeying clear supply-and-demand principles.*
7. *The sought-after, fluid capital of self... what does he want? Does he ever need? Does he wish to partake? Impossible to*

*say. This is what makes him sought-after.*⁶

8. *Perhaps nothing at all.*
9. *He of an agenda takes steps to ensure contact and consummation. These steps are inevitably legible. Only three who takes no steps to ensure consummation brings it, paradoxically, about.*

“I think I’m missing some chemicals and that’s why I have this tendency to be more of a—mama’s boy. A—sissy. No, a mama’s boy. A ‘butterboy.’ I think I’m missing some responsibility chemicals and some reproductive chemicals if I had them I would probably think more about aging the right way and being married four times and having a family...”⁷

I turn my comforter into a flower. I twist it, spin it, rotate until it’s wrapped around me, all the heat rising in this central chamber. One thing I notice about you is you keep messages on your phone unread, dozens of them, and you also changed the settings so the battery percentage doesn’t show. I calm the imperative to confess, an ability bestowed upon me by my readings of Foucault.

10. *The low status player needs something from the high status player; this is what makes him lower status.*

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The intimacy gradient of a temple: outer public sanctum, nested precincts growing increasingly sacred until reaching

6 The Cowboy intellectual is the most compelling of them all... faced constantly with the tension between theory and practice... engaged constantly with the tangible and the physical of reality... forced constantly to navigate systems simultaneously geographic, cognitive, and bodily to a degree few experience.

7 Andy, *A to B*, 1975

4 Lapsley, Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict

5 Kraus, *ILD*

an innermost sanctum.⁸ Motte-and-bailey castle: a fortified keep, standing on a raised earthwork motte, surrounded by a radiating bailey which larger in area and more weakly defended than the keep (oftentimes merely with a wooden palisade fence). You advance, in arguments, an extended, controversial stance, making full use of implication and suggestion; when challenged, you fall back on the statement's uncontroversial core, indignant at being uncharitably interpreted.⁹ (Often the motte is strongly implied but never literally stated, a light gaslighting.) "It's your fault I feel this way"; "I'm just expressing how I feel." "Reality is socially constructed"; "society shapes our understanding of reality."¹⁰

Dear Pothos,

I don't know if you really want to go to Taos. Mabel Luhan writes that she is arranging for it. You seemed to me really very unsure. You resent, au fond, my going away from Europe. C'est mon affaire. Je m'en vais. But you, in this interval, decide for yourself, and purely for yourself. Don't think you are doing something for me. I don't want that. Move for yourself alone. Decide for yourself, in your backbone. I don't really want any allegiance or anything of that sort. I don't want any pact. I won't have anything of that sort. If you want to go to America, bien. Go without making me responsible.

But if you want to go with Frieda and me and Brett—encore bien! One can but try, and I'm willing. But a man like you, if he does anything in the name of, or for the sake of, or because of somebody else, is bound to turn like a crazy snake and bite himself and everybody on account of it.

Let us clear away all nonsense. I don't need you. That is not true. I need nobody. Neither do you need me. If you pretend to need me, you will hate me for it. [...]

You know I don't care a single straw what you think of me. Realize that, once and for all. But when you get at twisting, I dislike you. And I very much dislike any attempt at an intimacy like the one you had with——and others. When you start that, I only feel: For God's sake, let me get clear of him. [...] Leave off twisting. Leave off having any emotion at all. You haven't any genuine ones, except a certain anger. Cut all that would-be sympathetic stuff out. Then know what you're after.*

I tell you, if you want to go to America as an unemotional man making an adventure, bien, allons! If you want to twist yourself into more knots, don't go with me. That's all. I never had much patience, and I've none now.

Lawrence

∞

8 In Berghain's factory bunker, guests are filtered first at the door, then from the public ground floor up staircases, into darkrooms, zones of increased privacy, intimacy, closed-offness to the world. Visitors pass through half-story levels with gradient darkness, each stage forcing a readjustment of the eyes, until in its furthest recesses light is entirely absent and navigation is only tactile. Private grottoes are known only by regular visitors, who are able to navigate the labyrinthine interior to locate them.

9 Nicholas Shackel

10 In a gallery: "The work thinks through important questions about U.S. patriotism, the Syrian refugee crisis, first world privilege, and public complicity in the military industrial complex," "The work happens to be made out of mylar, a lightweight insulating material used in a variety of civilian and military contexts."

Cytter's Realization Paradox: «After the clouds surrounding the lonely heart are clearing and the sheer understanding that love, lust, or desire were rooted inside, that's the moment where reality slips through its fingers and leaves him to hang and dry to death. In other words, after a short romantic encounter, one side acknowledges his feelings and decides to realize them with an object or by placing them in a certain environment. This is the moment that marks the end of their romance.

In other words, the subject meets the object.

- (1.) The subject desires the object.
 - (2.) The object is responsive/positive.
 - (3.) The subject wants to realize his desire/love.
 - (4.) The object is gone. [...]
- (1.) V met E in Venezuela and had short affair before they both went back to their countries.
 - (2.) E promised to visit V in Paris
 - (3.) and she invited a group of twelve friends for a dinner with E when he arrives.
 - (4.) E never showed up—the idea frightened E and he canceled his trip. E and V never met again.»¹¹

Weil has the gender-neutral take: *What is the reason that as soon as one human being shows he needs another (no matter whether his need be slight or great) the latter draws back from him?* Gravity.¹²

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The showerhead needs replacing. Pothos: contra Marco Roth on the rise of the neuronovel (“one now needs more words than ever to say ‘They fell in love’”), collapsing belief in clichés like *love as a Real Cognitive Principle* isn’t caused by scientism or neuroscience; it’s a natural consequence of cultural memory. When nothing can be forgotten, nothing escapes fatigue. The challenge is in trying to re-see as if for the first time. What’s the bit Annie Baker opens up *John* with? “Grace is the state of either complete unselfconsciousness or perfect self-consciousness” but no, that wasn’t

quite it. “Grace appears most purely in that human form which either has no consciousness or an infinite consciousness. That is, in the puppet or the god.” Once puppets, not yet gods; tagging off Rousseau and accelerationism the only way back is onward.

And so it was with me: suddenly self-conscious, yet not evolved enough in self-awareness. Or: caring too much and too little at the same time. The old ways of living, of being, of expecting from another, so thoroughly broken.

A listener of a pop song searches in the background as he moves between musics, testing for matches, the resonant lyric that articulates and thus actualizes a fuzzily felt feeling. But there is projection too. & the world has no place for a psyche that would Mondegreen Maus over pulsing synths: “They call me the believer/ I never had a one-night stand.”¹³ Cyttter: *This book aims to expose the owners of an innocent heart to reality’s structures to utilize them for spiritual growth.*¹⁴

Lace lingerie, Madam Bovary, Emily Dickinson, spent a year in Berlin. It’s a small bar, quiet. *Perception management: U.S. military umbrella term encompassing propaganda efforts, OpSec, cover & deception.* “Tell me about your work.” “It’s a great place to pretend you’re somebody without having any particular gifts, which means that for people with talent, it’s disheartening a lot of the time... I’ve often wondered what I’m doing in one of the world’s least meritocratic industries. I’m constantly running into people and wondering how they got where they are, and I’m almost never made happier by the answer.”¹⁵ I say, why are you telling me this? Ok so now I’m disillusioned and don’t give a shit about art, next I drift off into a mid-level consulting job? <V> *Look I just think it’s good to be aware you’re wading into a discipline that’s in*

¹³ John Maus, *We Must Become the Pitiless Censors of Ourselves* (2011)

¹⁴ A-ζ *Life Coaching*, 2017

¹⁵ David Velasco

¹¹ Cyttter, *A-ζ Life Coaching*

¹² via Kraus, *Aliens & Anorexia*

a pretty deep crisis, not at the local scale of seasons, vogues, or decades but at a scale of centuries.

://I could see that she had more problems than anybody I'd ever met. So beautiful but so sick. I was really intrigued.¹⁶// I draw the shower, tweak the water temp when it's too hot, overcompensate, tweak again but it isn't enough, interrogate my desire while it runs.

∞

Mermaid IPA, Bay Ridge.// Joanna Newsom, Wuthering Heights, above-avg amount of nipple piercings.// Know anyone who's holding?

Annie Dillard Matron St. of Fragment. Katherine Acker Matron St. of Appropriation & Performed Intimacy.¹⁷ Chris Kraus Matron St. of Epistle. Emily Dickinson Matron St. of Capitalization. (The constellation makes the genre, Nelson its master, Gevinson its Young-Girl apprentice.)

«This month's theme is Infinity, about what cannot be articulated; the infinite feelings, colors, sounds, experiences that we do not have words for... I thought of when we sat on that couch in December and he put on Lou Johnson's "Always Something There to Remind Me" and I got to watch him just enjoy it for the whole song (so cute and engaged) and afterwards he was like, "What a journey! That felt about 15 minutes long."» (*Him bright-eyed, endlessly optimistic, something to believe in, a joi de vivre that is contagious.*)

The allusory style, like doodling the names of your favorite

bands into your notebook cover during class, a constellation of identity through likes and dislikes.¹⁸ These constellations are sometimes called families; to Nelson (following Acker & Ward), they are mothers, many-gendered. Lana's *Lust for Life* takes the pop canon and intersperses it throughout the songwriting, a way of connecting and conversing with the Before. "The work of the medium is to reach across boundaries of time and space to deliver information to a recipient who might not have received the message without the medium's aid."¹⁹ It is also the product of a culture constantly steeped in archive, for whom memories of things and people past cannot help but be encountered, can be as real and immediate a part of the everyday as living contemporaries.

Within the family there are more personal modes of address. The person becomes the occasion, the context, the basis for authorial authority. Gevinson: «Chris Kraus wrote that every letter is a love letter...²⁰ Lorde says she doesn't write love songs, but how can that be true? Every song is a love song, is a ghost song. We love something so much that we have to write it down, and in doing so, we've killed it, like Barthes' characterization of loved ones in a photo: "anesthetized and fastened down, like butterflies."²¹ A

18 Reynolds on the evolution of rock's relationship to itself in the 1970s: "Roots [music] implied building on an honoured and stable tradition. What replaced the rooted relationship with the past was pick-and-mix reference rather than reverence," this being the moment's dominant cultural mode.

19 Niina Pollari, who also cites Nelson: "I think of citation as a form of family-making."

20 "Infinite speech is therefore not ABOUT anything," but "always TO someone." Content shared is shared with respect to the structure of the other's thinking, with intent to affect and intervene. First pointing out then accounting for "discontinuities in the relations between objects, or the presence of anomalies you cannot account for by any of the laws known to you. You will remain deaf to my explanations until you suspect yourself of falsehood." (Pulling from Carse)

21 Bowie's *Pinups* as both an act of fandom-cum-homage, the makeshift posters born from clippings and torn-out pages, as well with the under-

16 Warhol, *Philosophy A to B*

17 "What was so singular about her work was the directness of her address. It was the immediacy of her voice and the feeling that someone was sitting by your side late at night telling you their secrets." (Kraus, intvwd by Nicole Miller in *Guernica*)

kind of psychic inhabitation occurs when a world is skillfully re-presented: «I'm obligated only to the universe in my head» (Gevinson again, just eighteen, an artist or a teenage ontologist the line is blurred).

But the specific addressee filters a specific self, provides a grounding aesthetic and set of constraints which limit possibility just enough to allow production. The same way “What’d you get up to this evening?” is easier to answer than “How’ve you been?” On the music of Leonard Cohen, Nelson writes in *Bluets*, “I have always loved [the song’s] final line—‘Sincerely, L. Cohen’—as it makes me feel less alone in composing almost everything I write as a letter. I would even go so far as to say that I do not know how to compose otherwise.” Kraus acknowledges Hebdige as the source of energy behind her graphomaniac *I Love Dick*, a generative power that both comes and doesn’t come from within her. In *I’m Very into You*, it’s the sexual energy of Wark and Acker’s exchanges that draws so much blood in e-ink; indeed, with “the exception of *Nymphomaniac*, each time Acker worked on a project, she selected, perhaps unconsciously, a ‘silent partner’ as her ideal reader: a confidant, always male, who would serve as an oblique addressee.”²²

The concept of muse is old but something here is changed. *Bluets* closes with a second-person address: *I want you to know, if you ever read this, there was a time when I would rather have had you by my side than any one of these words; I would rather have had you by my side than all the blue in the world.* After the last page, a long list of credits to correspondents: Rebecca Baron, Joshua Beckman, Brian Blanchfield, Mike Bryant, Lap-Chi Chu, Christina Crosby, Cort Day, Annie Dillard... Wayne Koestenbaum... “my dearest Harry.”

tone of the collector’s ‘pin,’ the insect stuck to corkboard. They are dead because they have been held still, scrutinized, and integrated: as new additions to the extended self, they can no longer reveal secrets.

22 Kraus, *After Kathy* 2017

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Before he ever met Edna St. Vincent Millay, Wilson had half fallen in love with her by way of her poetry. He was particularly struck by her sonnet ‘To Love Impuissant,’ in which the poet issues a daring challenge to the god of Love and mocks him as impotent to conquer her. The poem concludes, “(Now will the god for blasphemy so brave,/ Punish me, surely, with the shaft I crave!).” Wilson memorized it and recited it to himself in the shower, admitting that his fascination for the poem was due partly ‘to my liking to think that one who appreciated the poet as splendidly as I felt I did might be worthy to deal her the longed for dart...’ When Wilson met her, sometime in 1920, it was her “seemingly artificial British accent” that stayed with him, the “staccato, precise puffing [on] her cigarette.”²³

« “God. I’ll talk about the thing with Monsterrat but you sure you know what you’re doing now? Marta said you practically forced Monsterrat into Ramon’s arms.” // “She said that? I don’t know what happened. Everything was going so well and then suddenly she never showed up after picking up her things from Ramon’s. Apparently they talked until dawn and she ended up sleeping on the sofa. Which for all I know is true... Something spooked her, as if I’d been crowding her. I was really playing it cool too.”

“What makes you think that?” // “Suddenly she doesn’t want to move in, she wants to have a serious talk. You know what that means.”

“Well you should at least talk to her.” // “No, that would be a disaster. Forever I would be the jerk who was crowding her, whom she had to talk to seriously.”

“But saying you have a work emergency and you’re too busy to see her...” // “Have you ever heard of Maneuver X? When you get deeply into sales, you realize that every

23 Castronovo and Groth, *A Romantic Biography of Edmund Wilson*

major transaction involves a mini identity crisis for the buyer. You think, *Green carpet. Am I really a green carpet person?* In romance, the same thing applies but on a humongous scale.”

“...But what is Maneuver X?” //“It’s removing all pressure, creating a space that the customer has to affirmatively cross. Only by disappearing more thoroughly and inexplicably than Montserrat can I change the current dynamic. Will it? I don’t know. I think it will. If not, I’m dead.” »²⁴

∞

What do you do when transgression goes mainstream? Ads this week on the train: *Nothing like a safe, reliable paycheck to crush your soul. White collars come with leashes. How much did you make for your boss today? Put your name on a building without a handout from Daddy.*

Underlining, :// «By her speaking about or not speaking about certain things she’s assuming a position of power... I obviously can’t sit on a chair next to Kathy and discuss mathematical hierarchies of transformations, which is what a large part of my present work is about... whereas it is very easy to discuss sexuality because it is something that is first of all a ground for most transformations, second of all something we have in common. This automatically gives her a sense of power, and the fact that for me this is a public as well as a private domain, whereas for her it seems to be a public domain, is a second source of her power.» (on Kathy Acker and the filming of the *Blue Tape*, ‘74. “The piece ends with Sondheim struggling to deliver a coherent discourse while Acker gives him a blow job. It’s as if Acker’s enacting an alien takeover or daemonic possession of a host situation: a raid on the logical-philosophical masculine

realm.”²⁵)

Feelings as visitors, to be entertained and talked with, but still always guests, lacking authority over house.

~ welcome to the once-annual 3meo-assisted mental
cleanse ~

You signed up for this! If ya didn’t want to be here then ya wouldn’t be!

I mean Pothos, you’re in the branding business, it’s actually your job to think about yourself from a the perspective of image, e.g. “I think the thing you need to settle on is when you’re an asshole, why you’re an asshole, to whom you’re an asshole. Establishing a consistent moral ground and a consistent image and a consistent philosophy behind it that allows confident acting. There needs to be, yes, a kind of pragmatic tradeoff between personal gains and the benefit of others.” A yearly review, an introspective check-up. What’s self-awareness gonna take?? ://hear thee, Gratiano;/ thou art too wild, too rude, and bold of voice;/ parts that become thee happily enough,/ and in such eyes as ours appear not faults./ But where thou art not known, why there they show/ something too liberal.²⁶

I had a real moment watching the Scorsese flick about Howard Hughes where (played by DiCaprio) Hughes goes into reclusion mode, what Peli refers to as “time underground.” A kind of purging, a giving up entirely on the maintenance of external self. In Hughes’ case he’s locked himself in a padded room with a film projector playing war films, &—

—I switch from Googling “carton” (trying to glean the

25 Nicole Miller covering C. Kraus’s *After Kathy* in *Guernica* 2017.

26 *Merchant of Venice*, II: II

24 Stillman’s *Barcelona* (1994)

definition literal) to searching “milk carton” (ID-matching concretely: greater efficiency than the learning and applying the abstract) to searching “milk jars” (double-specifying: material is glass), where the results also listed the mnēmē-jogging “milk bottles”—

memory apparatus protocols anyway,

—with a row of milk bottles that become piss bottles under the projection screen, shots of aerial combats glancing off the glass: a burrowing into, a being-away-from-others, talking in meetings through the door, attempt to dissolve the self, able to dissociate without the presence of human mirrors—it’s all there, and then the call to power, the sub-poena which brings Hughes to shave, shave his long beard, put on shoes, emerge from his weeks living and sleeping in the theater room born again.

∞

Bernadette Mayer, handmade lavender soap; Grimes, “early Mitski,” crochets. What’re those old copy lines Žižek did for Abercrombie? *The object of desire is hidden behind the thigh but the true cause of desire is that tattooed cross on the arm. Is it not clear that we really make love with signs, not with bodies? This is why one has to go to school to learn sex.*²⁷ Saying, :// I guess I don’t have a choice but to feel grateful for the Internet explosion; because of it, as a nine-year-old I was able to browse and learn from GeoCities pages. At 13 I got an email address to talk with my cousins. At some foolishly young age, I got a blog from blogger.com and learned how to express myself through writing and to read others’ thoughts... I watched Wikipedia grow from a patchy unreliable compendium of people’s knowledge to a useful first source for any subject I’m about to get into. So they let the

commoners in. But I was a commoner at some point.²⁸

I said, the move in “On Women” where Long Chu links radfem to the alt-right is subtle and insane and brilliant: «This was months before I began teaching my first undergraduate recitation, where for the second time in my life—but the first time as a woman—I read Valerie Solanas’s SCUM Manifesto. The SCUM Manifesto is a deliciously vicious feminist screed calling for the revolutionary overthrow of all men; Solanas self-published it in 1967, one year before she shot Andy Warhol on the sixth floor of the Decker Building in New York City. I wondered how my students would feel about it. In the bathroom before class, as I fixed my lipstick and fiddled with my hair, I was approached by a thoughtful, earnest young woman who sat directly to my right during class... I would glance over at this student’s notes, only to discover that she had filled the page with the word SCUM, written over and over with the baroque tenderness usually reserved for the name of a crush. [...] But generosity is the only spirit in which a text as hot to the touch as the SCUM Manifesto could have ever been received. This is after all a pamphlet advocating mass murder, and what’s worse, property damage. It’s not as if those who expressed their disappointment over the tribute’s cancellation did so in blanket approval of Solanas’s long-term plans for total human extinction (women included) or her attempted murder of a man who painted soup cans. [...] When a subculture espouses extremist politics, especially online, it is tempting but often incorrect to take those politics for that subculture’s beating heart. It’s worth considering whether TERFs, like certain strains of the alright, might be defined less by their political ideology (however noxious) and more by a complex, frankly fascinating relationship to trolling, on which it will be for future anthropologists, having solved the problem of digital eth-

27 Abercrombie & Fitch, *School’s Out* edition w Žižek, 2003

28 Plover

nography, to elaborate.»²⁹

Since works are always *to* someone, or an impression of aggregate someones, it exists only in relation to the world before it existed. The Bourdieu thing about Marx not being a Marxist—*This explains why writers' efforts to control the reception of their own works are always partially doomed to failure (one thinks of Marx's 'I am not a Marxist'); if only because the very effect of their work may transform the condition of its reception and because they would not have had to write many things they did write and write them as they did— eg resorting to rhetorical strategies intended to "twist the stick in the other direction"— if they'd been granted from the outset what they are granted retrospectively.*³⁰ But the distortion of this (inherent) structure of thought is not just rhetorical. It shapes beliefs *as they are felt* and understood; it leads to a perception of exaggerated, intractable polarism.

Meaning is always relational; ideological texts compress the world along one or two dimensions not b/c the writer believes they're the only dimensions that matter, but b/c the writer believes they're causally underrated. Overstated cases get made to swing the pendulum, push dialectic with rhetoric, as often as they are truth claims. «Any good feminist bears stitched into the burning bra she calls her heart that tapestry of qualifiers we use to tell one another stories about ourselves and our history: radical, liberal, neoliberal, socialist, Marxist, separatist, cultural, corporate, lesbian, queer, trans, eco, intersectional, anti-porn, anti-work, pro-sex, first-, second-, third-, sometimes fourthwave. These stories have perhaps less to do with What Really Happened than they do with what Fredric Jameson once called “the ‘emotion’ of great historiographic form”—that is, the satisfaction of synthesizing the messy empirical data of the past into an elegant historical arc in which everything that

happened could not have happened otherwise. To say, then, that these stories are rarely if ever “true” is not merely to repeat the axiom that taxonomy is taxidermy, though it cannot be denied that the objects of intellectual inquiry are forever escaping, like B-movie zombies, from the vaults of their interment. It is also to say that all cultural things, SCUM Manifesto included, are answering machines for history's messages at best only secondarily. They are rather, first and foremost, occasions for people to feel something: to adjust the pitch of a desire or up a fantasy's thread count, to make overtures to a new way to feel or renew their vows with an old one. We read things, watch things, from political history to pop culture, as feminists and as people, because we want to belong to a community or public, or because we are stressed out at work, or because we are looking for a friend or a lover, or perhaps because we are struggling to figure out how to feel political in an age and culture defined by a general shipwrecking of the beautiful old stories of history.»

We could carve it up into transformative³¹ (effective-oriented, rhetorical) epistemics vs. cartographic epistemics. Problems arise when styles clash. From an *erisology*³² standpoint, one issue is that the other side will always interpret trolling as literal belief while insiders see outsiders as self-serious, lacking a sense of humor, ungenerous/bad faith.

(@chaosprime: *tfw doing exploratory epistemology in a combat epistemology joint.*)

But also: How to reconcile the metaphors, on one hand the stabilizing effects of counterballast and on the other, the de-stabilizing, escalating effects of eye-for-eye matching, retribution, and violence breeding violence?

31 To use Peli's term in *Amerikkkka*, speaking on social justice, “motivational” epistemics.

32 John Nerst, *Everything Studies*

29 Long Chu, “On Women” (2016)

30 Bourdieu. *Field of Cultural Production*

Platinum hair with purple streaks. On the bookshelf Deborah Levy's *Things I Don't Want to Know*, *Cost of Living*; Cusk's *Transit*, *Kudos*, *Outline*; Ali Smith's *Spring*; Rooney's *Normal People*; Kang's *Vegetarian & White Book*; Didion's *Magical Thinking* next to Batuman's *Idiot*, *House of Spirits*, and everything by Ferrante (*Neopolitan*, *Abandonment*, *Lost Daughter*, *Troubling Love*, the *Frantumaglia* ie "fragments"). Sheila Heti, the Brontës,—and *John*? Baker's *John*? Here? Am I interrupted in my image?

You were as flippant in your hermaphroditism as a fish. You were touched and touching, vouched for a gender identity based on submission and dominance instead of sex organs or the strands of hair hanging from the ceiling. *We all know you're soft cuz we've all seen you dancing. We all know you're hard cuz we've all seen you drinking from noon until noon again.*³³

You can't spell hermaphrodite without Aphrodite. *Anna Karenina*'s opening line after dinner, which is just another way of saying there're more ways things can go wrong than right. Which somebody also said about sex and another somebody said about the cosmos—a trifecta if I ever heard one (sex, the cosmos, *Karenina*)

Perhaps you channel the failure, *Vos, quod milia multa basiorum / Legistis, male me marem putatis? / Pedicabo ego vos et irrumabo*: Because you read my countless kisses you think less of me as a man? / I will sodomize you and face-fuck you."³⁴

∞

Who recognizes that the simplifications are knowing compressions, incomplete stories, motivational twistings of the stick? Where is it qualified in the face of the world's endless complexity? Romance to blame, the romance with the

extended self, egoic products, the personal sight fetishized as an external truth. "Love was long since represented as blind, and what is true in the personal realm is measurably true in the intellectual realm. Important as the intellectual affections are as stimuli and as rewards, they are nevertheless dangerous factors, which menace the integrity of the intellectual process... The mind lingers with pleasure upon the facts that fall happily into the embrace of the theory, and feels a natural coldness toward those that seem refractory."³⁵ Theories are extended from theories, personal vic-tories of extended systems, scant thought for territory.

Pressing and being pressed on. Dillard, fantasizing about locust swarms: *I cannot ask for more than to be so wholly acted upon, flown at, and lighted on in throngs, probed, knocked, even bitten. A little blood from the wrists and throat is the price I would willingly pay for that pressure of clacking weights on my shoulders, for the scent of deserts, ground fire in my ears—for being so in the cluttering thick of things, rapt and unwrapped in the rising and falling real world.* «Those who demand freedom from the laws of Man and God, get it. They come in two types: the master is free to choose his own fate, the slave is free never to choose.»³⁶

:// When I was young and dumb, BDSM was male, taboo, and ugly. The bad role models to whom I was shyly, ambivalently, inexorably drawn—not for their badness, but for their candor, for the absolution that comes from being around the much-worse—often whispered about force and running mascara, tidbits of conspiracy: "Pretty much every chick is down to be treated like shit." A 25 year old alcoholic engaged to an 18 year old feminist-poet with a gluten allergy tried to explain women with a spectacularly rapey

35 Ambiguous ambiguous ambiguity as the natural result of entertaining multiple hypotheses at once, refusing to commit to your cards, allowing the future to be an upward parabola of possibility over a logarithmic ceiling of foreclosure. (cf HC)

36 Hotel Concierge, Distance Closeness

33 Stuart Murdoch, "Boy with the Arab Strap"

34 Catallus, via Preciado's *Testo Junkie*

clip from *Wild At Heart*—which nicely complements the Frank Booth scene from *Blue Velvet*, “It’s Daddy, you shit-head! Where’s my bourbon!”—anyway, I remember being scared; I think I made up an excuse to leave. Toxic masculinity? Sure. But look at how it went down: leatherbound queer industrial music mainstreamed by Trent Reznor in 1994, then Janet Jackson (1997), Britney Spears (2001), Secretary (2002), and the snowball keeps rolling past Rihanna (2010) and Fifty Shades of Grey (2011)—is it fair to say that kink has never been seen as more female? OKCupid claims that interest in bondage is up another 23% since 2013—is it fair to say that kink has never been less taboo? A meta-analysis of 36 studies on polyamory and BDSM found that participants were “overwhelmingly white, with relatively high socio-economic status”—is it fair to say that kink has never had more social currency?³⁷

:// «Character is completely preordained and circumscribed... There isn’t any room for innovation in these roles. And as you play them. Something flips and you believe it... Lee Breuer describes it, “the gestures reverse their way up through the stimulus system of the body, and go back into the ganglia and make emotion.”»³⁸

The sheer effort of suspending an imagined reality in thin air, panting and anaerobic; do not forget: this illusion has an owner, me: creator, actor, blood donor, keeper of double books, dissolving into temporary falsehood for the sake of bigger truths.

From the soupy ambiguity of modern norms a relational script comes prefab: by limiting the possible space of moves, movement is made possible (the generativity of constraint, the paralysis of too many options). In two-player mode, constraints enable synchronicity, mind-reading.

37 Hotel Concierge, “Shame & Society” (2017)

38 Kraus, *Aliens & Anorexia* (2000)

Expectations, procedures, theatrical role (tone, mood, persona) pre-determined. You know what you’re buying, you know what’s being sold.

:// «S/m’s another flip around the immanence of objects in the theater: the objects aren’t blank and waiting to be filled by the presence of the actors and the play. The objects here are meaning-cards, they hold all the information. He puts a collar round my neck and slaps me. Handcuffs, blindfolds, gags and whips. Multiple paradox yielding triple penetration. The objects tell us who we are and what to do. S/m is like commedia dell’arte, a stock repertoire of stories, bits and lines and gags. We’re Punch and Judy. He chains my handcuffs to the door. I’m Columbine and he’s Pierrot.»³⁹

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Responsibility itself is the currency of exchange: “High-level awareness can lead to anxiety and discomfort under some circumstances. The requirements of making decisions under pressure or uncertainty, of taking responsibility for actions that may disappoint or harm others, of maintaining a favorable public image and private image of self despite all threats and challenges, and of asserting control over a recalcitrant social environment can become oppressive and stressful and can foster desires to escape.”⁴⁰

One party regresses to a state of childhood, shedding agency and culpability to gain freedom and ditch the burden of choice. The world fades; the bottom revels at the bottom level of narrative, a zone in which no work need be performed to keep story or stimulation going, responsibilities which have been offloaded onto the other.⁴¹ A timelessness

39 Kraus, *Aliens & Anorexia*

40 Baumeister (1988)

41 Pfaller, *On the Pleasure Principle in Culture: Illusions Without Owners*, h/t

to the pleasure, which can be only experienced rather than analyzed, optimized, processed in relation to higher levels of drama. Instead of the brain doing the work of pleasing, the body takes over. Instead of worry there is surrender, a stoic acceptance: *I cannot relax unless I'm really tied up.*⁴² In exchange for the shouldered and narrative responsibility, the top gains the high of power, the anxiolytic of control.

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There's a world of difference between conceptualizing sexuality as a concentration camp and conceptualizing it as a possibility of utopia. Why is it that those at the top so frequently view it as the former, while the most sexually marginalized perceive or paint it as the latter?

Yes why, Pothos asks, with all the topping do I somehow feel dommed? Long Chu's A.L.C.: "By bottoming, I mean what happens when someone or something else does your desiring for you." Thus, says Pothos, my exertion is both physical and affective? I must either perform—act out—desire, or let myself be engulfed by it?⁴³ A pure agent, a closed loop between wanting and having.

*You pretend to use me, make a theater of heeding only your pleasure while making sure I find mine.*⁴⁴ Young-Girl Theory: «The

Simpolism: "Integrating into the cycle has helped them to forget themselves. The cycle is a *dromenon*: it is something that could run just as well without them. They had to integrate into it so that the cycle, which could also continue without them, also runs for them—so that it runs instead of them. It is the running of the cycle into which they have integrated, and which they have let run for themselves, that enables them to perform being aware and alive for someone else [some other time], even if they are, in the meantime, lacking in awareness, lifeless, and quasi-dead."

42 Wiseman (1998) h/t Ambler/Lee et al (2016)

43 That bottoms top from below is hazy to most, "despite decades of gay people trying to explain it to them, and Hegel covering it extensively in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*." (Vandal Press)

44 Maggie Nelson, *The Argonauts*

Young-Girl does not mind miming submission here and there: *because she knows it dominates*. Something in this brings her in line with the masochism that has long been taught to women, which makes them cede the SIGN of power to men in order to recover, internally, the certitude that they possess them in REALITY."

"...decision-making (and I would like to remove every trace of conscious connotation from the word 'decision') is precisely what stress is."⁴⁵

∞

Carson asks, then tells us, *Why does tragedy exist? Because you are full of rage. Why are you full of rage? Because you are full of grief. Ask a headhunter why he cuts off human heads. He'll say that rage impels him and rage is born of grief. The act of severing and tossing away the victim's head enables him to throw away the anger of all his bereavements. Perhaps you think this does not apply to you. Yet you recall the day your wife, driving you to your mother's funeral, turned left instead of right at the intersection and you had to scream at her so loud other drivers turned to look. When you tore off her head and threw it out the window they nodded, changed gears, drove away.*⁴⁶

Clinging to, struggling towards, systems thinking: a move away from terms of blame or sin; moving towards a frame of incentives and reciprocity, mutual binding. «So very briefly: In this paper, I'm going to be making an argument about transness (among other things), and to do that I'm going to be looking at a genre of Internet pornography called sissy porn, sometimes also called forced feminization porn. And what I'm going to argue is that transness is essentially a kind of desire, or rather several different kinds, and that sissy porn basically stages the nonconsensuality

45 Jaynes h/t Simpolism

46 Anne Carson, preface to *Grief Lessons*

of that desire,⁴⁷ or one of those desires... The political lesson of pornography is this: We mostly just like what we like, whether we like it or not. This lesson might be hard to swallow... To watch pornography is essentially to have the burden of desiring taken out of your hands, which are thereby freed up for other endeavours... What [2013's *Don Jon*] suggests is that the popular fantasy of the perverted male loner glued to his computer in the dark, perhaps even when evoked by feminists, expresses not righteous disgust at patriarchal male sexuality, but rather genuine concern for masculinity in crisis... As Jon explains in voiceover, whereas the tiring mechanics of topping require him to “do all the work” in sex with women... online pornography allows him to simply *plug* himself» (emphasis mine) into a predetermined role. «“I don’t gotta say anything, I don’t gotta do anything, I just fucking lose myself”” Unlike Jon’s religious workout schedule or his carefully slicked-back hair, losing himself isn’t about propping up a fantasy of male control. on the contrary, it’s about finding temporary relief from the pressures of a heterosexuality already starting to crack under... [from its] unremitting gender performance reviews...»⁴⁸

Or Balioc’s take: «Women have suffered greatly over the course of history, but they’ve always been needed and wanted. Men, as I’ve said, are (mostly) the ones who have justified fears of being disposable.» (Cecilia Corrigan, *Titanic*) «Femininity [...] is the single most widely-desired

commodity there has ever been. [...] It is this dynamic, I think, that underlies the weird gender politics of 4chan and similar communities. Certain groups of mostly-low-status men perceive—rightly or wrongly—that the world has no use at all for them, and that they would be doing much better on all fronts if they were cute girls (even if nothing else changed). This can inspire resentment, as everyone has noticed by now. It can also inspire an odd strain of gender envy. It is very true that our culture has become more tolerant of transgender-type issues, and thus that lots of people who would otherwise have been closeted about their gender-identity issues are coming out publicly to various degrees...but, if you actually go read 4channers talking about how they wish they were girls or “traps” or whatever [...] It does not sound like once-repressed people who are finally allowed to voice their long-standing yearnings. It sounds like anguished, insecure people fantasizing about status-climbing. It’s rarely framed as an attachment to femaleness, come what may, in the way that transgender dialogue on the left so often is; it’s a belief, deep in the soul, that being female would lead to being accepted and loved and comfortable.»

600,000 eunuchs on the continent. Some neutered in order to escape tabooed urges like homosexuality and pedophilia, others for fetish (not alone in this, the self-transformers; Long Chu says as much for her own transition). Many it’s to escape their heterosexuality. Some are chemically castrated, taking daily drugs to kill their libido. Others undergo hormone therapy for sex or health. Several studies have found that they live ten to twenty years longer, on average, than the uncastrated. The reduction in T only goes part-way to explaining the changes in mortality. On the forum boards their anonymized sirens. “I hated puberty and all of the things that went with it. Including the social obligations that puberty brought on.” “I’m single and loneliness is

47 The worldview is straight from Annaka Harris, Robin Hanson, *our feelings, desires, impulses bubble up from our unconscious unasked-for, commanding; the only freedom exists in breaking the link between feeling and action, interrupting its immediacy and learning to escape the slavery of the elephant in the brain.*

48 Andrea Long Chu, “Did Sissy Porn Make Me Trans?” See how many of Long Chu’s citations are mentioned passingly in *Argonauts*, ponder the extent to which this is coincidence, ponder how these mediating texts are highly connected nodes in a network, branching out, creating paths and roads for readers to follow.

hard to live. Sex is the door to love and affection, I can live without sex but living without love and affection is difficult. How do you deal with it?” *He wonders in what other ways touch, or the lack of it, has warped him. He’s read about that study of baby monkeys who were denied soft physical contact and grew up disturbed and sickly.*⁴⁹ “This is where I want to be. Sex has driven my life since puberty and I’m tired of it. I’m 65 now.” “I seek a condition in which I think of sex as something other people do or that maybe I did in a past life but about which I can’t really remember anything except the most vague details.” *Your neck and back pulsing with pain all day, all night, from your torso (and hence, your lungs) having been constricted for almost thirty years. You tried to stay wrapped even while sleeping, but by morning the floor was always littered with doctored sports bras, strips of dirty fabric—“smashers,” you called them.*⁵⁰

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You can read *Unlocking the Emotional Brain*, or Karl Friston, or Karen Horney, or theories of CBT: schemas of impotence, power, rejection, approval, are imprinted by experience.

«she has the diagnostic sign of her cuff pulled up over her wrist in what I call “the borderline sleeve,” that girl will have endlessly whipsawing emotions and a lot of enthusiastic ideas that will ultimately result in a something borrowed/something blue. Hope her future ex enjoys drama, he’s in for seven years of it.»⁵¹

X: *when she said she wasn’t interested in a relationship, were the italics on interested or relationship?*

Y: *The biggest lining here is terms like Freak Energy*

49 Tony Tulathimutte, n+1 Issue 35

50 Nelson, *Argonauts*, on Harry’s chestbinding

51 The Last Psychiatrist, “Don’t Hate Her Because She’s Successful”

and Freak Rant. & Uhh I dunno, girl refrigerated overnight, everything chilled.

X: *but... she just responded to your incredibly niche aesthetic interests? like two days ago? and you haven’t replied? [] sounds like a fake name. you consider that she might be an IDF plant.*

Y: *My strategy is never get back to her. Dicks out for avoidance tactics! I’ve read hostage negotiation handbooks. Okay, I’ve heard a podcast interview with a guy who wrote a handbook. I know how NHS runs their shit. Whoever talks first has already lost.*

X: *It sure look like she sent an UNPROMPTED second message at 11pm. But I don’t listen to podcasts so I can’t be sure.*

Y: *But do you doubt Mr. Voss gets chicks?*

X: *i think you like that story a lot. the story with the cute, smart, riley reid-type girl who is Bad and cute.*

Y: *Look, Hebdige is no ResponseCuck. Dick big-dicked his way into a dicking just by sending his calls to voicemail. Did I tell her that humor was my most reliable sexual undertone? Yes, and I regret it. But for the record, that type you just described is a Personal Nightmare.*

X: *here’s your tinder hookup voice: “here’s a thing i have to do to restore my masculinity while waiting for the female lead to return, sigh.” good luck getting hits.*

Y: *It’s fine, I’ve renounced worldly pleasure. Desire is suffering, love is merely given; anger is a hot coal, held in the hand, awaiting its throw. Tanha—thirst, desire, longing, expectation—is precondition to dukkha—suffering, unsatisfactoriness, stress.*

∞

Lilacs and champagne, a technicolor supermarket, PCP on an elevator in Times Square, a lysergic sunrise in sticky sweaters around Rockaway orange. I said, amor ended with Anderson's *Punch-Drunk Love*; Barry Lyndon is my new amante. And I said, *PDL*'s protagonist is basically a Barry Lyndon who always stayed a mama's child, who never volunteered for military service which is to say never ran into highway robbers. It's resemblance down to the disrupted dinner parties and shattered glass, disappointed relatives in varying states of shock, their shared naivete with women. You really expect me to believe it's accidental, his name, Barry Egan? Egan's an Irish name too, with the fiery connotations of its pagan namesake Aodha.

The problem of abstracting from so many situational selves a general principle, comparing that principle in the world. Egan, in a confidence that is swiftly betrayed:

BARRY

I don't have anyone to talk to things about and I understand it's confidential with a doctor - I'm embarrassed about that and I don't want my sisters to know?

WALTER

You want a number for a psychiatrist, I can get you one, that's not a problem. but what exactly is wrong?

BARRY

I don't know if there's anything wrong with me because I don't know how other people are.....Sometimes I cry a lot.....for no reason.

Reines, in her debut, *Coeur de Lion*: "I don't know how people/ Understand their lives, measure/ Their sensations against "objective"/ Or so-to-speak democratic estimations." Here is your purpose as artist.

What would self-awareness take? "The eye elects a narcissistic personality as galvanizing object and formalizes the relation in art. The artist imposes a hieratic sexual character on the beloved, making himself the receptor (or more feminine receptacle) of the beloved's mana. The structure is sadomasochistic... In Dante and Petrarch, self-frustrating love is not neurotic but ritualistic and conceptualizing... Domination of the beautiful personality is central to Romanticism, specifically its dark Coleridgean line passing through Poe and Baudelaire to Wilde."⁵²

«ME: We'd met a few times in groups but he never really paid me any mind but I'd been hanging out with Man's Friend and Man's Friend was like, "You should go on a date with Man," and I was like, "I agree!" because I'd thought he was cute. So Man's Friend gave Man my number but texts me two weeks later like, "I'm working on the Man situation but the age difference might be too weird." [...] I have lunch with Man's Friend's friend, who sort of knows Man, and who, when I tell her I'm going on a date with him, throws her head back and laughs and goes, "MAN?! He's a sex addict!" And I hang out with this other girl who sort of knows him and she scoffs and calls him a snob, and one of our other mutual friends says he said he doesn't believe in love, and I can't remember who it was who referred to him as a sociopath—[TAYLOR: He's like Christian Grey.]—I was also told that he'd made some joke to his friends about needing a girlfriend who dresses in a way that doesn't embarrass him in public—which I'm like, "gross, Man," but also, I have known myself to have a concern

for the picturesque? Or rather, what would that be like, to be so committed to the values that years and years of literature have taught us only make you unhappy; surely I'm not immune to the fantasy of being image-based; why not find out this thing about myself by dating the exact kind of boy-person who would've been repelled by me in middle school? [TAYLOR: Right.] ME: But he texts me! And I think I can match whatever sociopathy is in store and start reading *The Secret History* and half-jokingly write the outline for an essay called the Sociopath's Manifesto to gear myself up for recklessness... [TAYLOR: What did you wear?] ME: A black-and-white striped turtleneck, a gray pleated skirt, white platforms, and this clear plastic pink purse. Also, I'm like, groomed. And it's not so much about worrying he'd find my brows uneven, because aren't straight men just psyched to be around a female form? So much as like, it made me feel in control of the situation and aware of myself. [TAYLOR: Of course.] [WAITER: Excuse me, can I get you anything to drink?] ME: Yeah, I'll have the French Rose juice and an Americano? [WAITER: And you?] [TAYLOR: I'll have...an Americano, and... the French Rose juice? *Turns to me.* I always just order what other people drink. I don't understand drinks.] ME: Me neither. Especially alcohol. [TAYLOR: Everything I do is imitation.] ME: *Me too.*»⁵³

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I said, are the rationalists queer? A look:

morlock-holmes: I have to be honest, at this point my stereotype of rationalists is people going, "Man, modern atomized individualism is one of the most important social achievements of modern times, and the more we accelerate it, the better. On a completely unrelated

note I sure am enjoying living in this group home with twelve other close friends who help me do chores and mitigate my mental illness."

sophia-epistemia: better than "man, i'm now destitute after my only support network threw me out because i'm queer." the best feature of atomized individualism is the possibility to get a support network of twelve friends who are actually similar enough to you. you can't get subculture society without atomized individualism

dagny-hashtaggert: Yeah, the point I keep coming back to, and the reason I think the above referenced opinion isn't self-contradictory, is that modern atomized individualism lets you choose your tribe/pack/family. They weren't born into that group home, they weren't assigned to it by state or clergy, they chose it because they felt the people, individually and collectively, fit well with them. There are surely problems with that model: people sometimes make choices that are very bad for them, and it can sometimes requires painful choices from those who really would be fine where they started. Nevertheless, I think a lot of people ignore the extent to which modern individualism well-realized is not so much about dropping out of society as choosing your own, and the extent to which many communities (including, ironically, many communities formed around conservative and the more anti-modern flavors of liberal/anarchist principles) couldn't exist without it.

morlock-holmes: [That's a] very pretty and an admirable goal but as evidence based rationalists it seems to me that the question of whether that's actually what's happening ought to matter to you. If this is what was happening then... Well, like I was saying the book wouldn't be called "Bowling Alone." If that was what was happening you'd expect the slow disintegration of churches,

53 Tavi Gevinson, *Infinity Diaries*

lodges and political organizations to be accompanied by rising participation in such indisputably non-coercive activities as hobby groups, sports leagues, and informal get-togethers to eat or play games, as those things would continue to be important for their own sake and begin to act as voluntary informal support networks. [...] The last 75 years have seen a severe erosion of the specific kinds of social structures that everyone in this thread claims to value and I feel like that should matter more.

balio: *Bowling Alone*, noteworthy, is a book whose last chapter basically says "...and there's this Internet thing that seems to be on the horizon, maybe it'll be relevant to people's social patterns, we couldn't say right now." One way or another, there's a lot that its analysis doesn't capture. Anyone saying "I am in a group house in Berkeley with twelve of my best friends who are supporting me in living my best life" is saying that atomization worked, that the new norms helped him to find a comfortable social milieu rather than robbing him of one. I would be inclined to say much the same thing, for myself, even though I live on the other side of the country and I have less than no desire to live in a group house. It's possible that this is flukey or rare, or that making it happen requires someone to have skills that aren't widely cultivated. It's also possible that this is a competing-interests thing, where (e.g.) certain kinds of misfits who would have suffered greatly in the old thickly-obligatory tribes and communities are making out like bandits even as many normal people are feeling the rug pulled out from under them. These are things worth hashing out. But if someone's point is "I love atomization and freedom from community obligations, check out how it gave me this awesome social circle that wouldn't otherwise have formed" – well, at least with regards to his own experience, you should probably listen.

squareallworthy: This is rationalists we're talking about, though. These are the folks who say their goal is to optimize the world. That makes it their self-imposed duty to ask not if atomization has worked for them, but if atomization has, on the whole, been good for everyone affected by it, and if not, ask what is to be done for those who are worse off because of it.

But we can hear it from the rats themselves. Athrelon's "The Best Lack All Conviction":

Halfway through the novel Submission, the narrator's parents die in quick succession, an event that's all the more devastating for being brushed off as a minor plot point. Francois's parents are divorced and he hadn't seen either of them in years. The news, therefore, reaches him not through family or friends but through the dull prose of bureaucratic paperwork: Finally, on July 11 the city informed me that pursuant to article L 2223-27 of the...

...But look a little past the short term, and this lack of courage results in a horrifying landscape of atomization. In general, every social relationship involves some friction. There is always a temptation to take the easy way out, to exit from demanding obligations to family and friends. But when you spread out a little conflict-aversion throughout a society, this avoidant behavior gets amplified into atomization...in a conflict-averse culture, it's considered preferable to have no extended family ties than to have occasional family rancor...

...There are probably fewer family feuds now than in any previous point in American history. But this is not because people have learned how to better get along with one another; rather, they figured out how not to have to get along with one another.

Mollie Pyne gets it exactly wrong, writing about Great Expectations: Acker isn't caught in a web desiring freedom. She is agonizingly free and constantly seeking entanglement, her life story is forged through hunting down

the narratives and friction and meaning that come from involvement with others. What freaks Nelson out in *Argonauts* is that, after decades of trying to move as far as possible from the heteronormative—rewriting her cultural scripts, moving from New York School to queer feminism to punk refusal to scholarly ascetism—the book finds her pregnant, in a passing family, dressed up for the Nutcracker at Christmastime. Her demonstrated preferences for stable connection, family, and children. This is submission to her: a submission to the normality which she both fears and desires, enforced by the binding contracts of marriage and parenthood. One implication being that the normal is not merely a product of acculturation but something innate, around which the norms of culture have been shaped (as much or more than they have shaped in turn). In stats, returning to the mean after a period of deviation is known as regression. Only if the deviation is sustained over sufficient time might the Bayesian begin updating priors about the inherent nature of their subject.

I said, *cf Argonauts*, I like to think we're passing through a dead zone between strong inherited families (tribes of blood) and strong chosen ones (tribes of belief).

∞

Cuddlefish communicate with patterns of light and color splayed on their skin, signaling in close encounters patterns.⁵⁴ Brazilian lightfoot crabs, risking it all to graze on heavenly pasture, surrounded by *moray* eels, from the Greek *muraina*, closely related to *smerna* (*zmyrna*), sperm. Imagine the cuddlefish David, his beloved taken by the school's Goliath, attempting and failing to make a direct entreaty. Second time around he alters his chromatophoric camouflage, mimics a female's stripes, feigns same-sex friendship

54 The old joke about the congregated Philistines, crying, "But Goliath was the best king we ever had."

and goes in for the cuckold.⁵⁵ The crossdressing disguise a liberty, a mask, a way of clearing the ledger.

X: *i had the intended emotional reaction to bluets, and damn, maggie nelson can write. «Suppose I were to begin by saying that I had fallen in love with a color. Suppose I were to speak this as though it were a confession; suppose I shredded my napkin as we spoke.» i read straight through after that.*

i was impressed by the breadth of her reading—sometimes academic-types annoy me, quoting experts puts distance between author and reader, just be real with me—but maybe once you hit max level, quoting the literature becomes a genuine, human act once more.

actually, “be real with me” is the whole point of bluets, and it worked. bluets takes that sophomoric philosophical quandary “what if your blue isn’t the same as my blue?” and then takes the analogy of color to love, both incommunicable qualia. then she explores this through 240 numbered propositions—a style stolen from Tractatus Logicus Philosophicus, treatise about the impossibility of communicating

55 “This same year Vedius Pollio died, a man who in general had done nothing deserving of remembrance, as he was sprung from freedmen, belonged to the knights, and had performed no brilliant deeds; but he had become very famous for his wealth and for his cruelty, so that he has even gained a place in history. Most of the things he did it would be wearisome to relate, but I may mention that he kept in reservoirs huge lampreys that had been trained to eat men, and he was accustomed to throw to them such of his slaves as he desired to put to death. Once, when he was entertaining Augustus, his cup-bearer broke a crystal goblet, and without regard for his guest, Pollio ordered the fellow to be thrown to the lampreys. Hereupon the slave fell on his knees before Augustus and supplicated him, and Augustus at first tried to persuade Pollio not to commit so monstrous a deed. Then, when Pollio paid no heed to him, the emperor said, ‘Bring all the rest of the drinking vessels which are of like sort or any others of value that you possess, in order that I may use them,’ and when they were brought, he ordered them to be broken. When Pollio saw this, he was vexed, of course; but since he was no longer angry over the one goblet, considering the great number of the others that were ruined, and, on the other hand, could not punish his servant for what Augustus also had done, he held his peace, though much against his will.” (Dio, *Roman History*)

certain things in words—written by Wittgenstein, who wrote his last book about color. full circle mind blown, nice job maggie nelson but hold up now i have to say some kind of mean things about maggie nelson

bluets was 10/10 at what it did. but i had this bizarre moment, really early in the book, like proposition 20, when i suddenly thought “I bet she fantasizes about being degraded during sex.” i’m not trying to kinkshame. but why did i think that, and why was i right? here’s the proof, in bluets:

> How to take it off: I could drink every single drop of alcohol in my house, which includes the rest of this beer and a bottle of Maker’s Mark. I could let myself be fucked mercilessly by many strangers at once, as in my first sexual fantasy

Ok, argonauts!

Pothos: Oo. Yeah. Lemme see if I’m sober enough for this. OK keep in mind this is going back two years now. I was reading it to impress Whitney Mallet (whitneymallett.tumblr.com) before a date. so I had a bit of a performative thing going when I wrote in the margins. ok those are all the disclaimers

[title page, above “The Argonauts”] These pages are a battleground, almost as if two armies, lined up, across from each other, and frozen in time at the moment of firing [I liked the whacky grammar in this]

[p. 3] 1st notes pre-read:

1) identity=(conformity+transgressions). Without category, we lack identity, though this observation is neutral on whether concept of identity is inherently a human good. psychological need of social role i.e. belonging implies as much tho!!

2) flux != transgression, !=deviation from homeostasis ie “the queer”

3) Queerness is in dialectic with, and thus requires, category. See also “the extraordinary requires the ordinary.”

4) good transgression comes from seeking utility; seeking solution to a problem

[p 4, Santa Ana winds] cf Joan Didion on Santa Ana, Slouching Towards Bethlehem p77

[p4, graf 2] “the inexpressible is contained—inexpressibly!—in the expressed.” big underline with an arrow toward pg 3

oh shit you have the Kindle version. I can’t make these kinds of jokes. ok lemme find bigger shit

> You ran at least a lap ahead of me, words streaming in your wake. How could I ever catch up (by which I mean, how could you want me?)

I wrote: And here lies my prejudice off the bat against the Argonauts: this book’s alien femaleness. [holy fuck lol] For a definition of this affect/voice, see Nelson’s “unresolved and self-involved” line of inquiry, where writing or artmaking is primarily a personal act, done to “work out” personal issues and then thrust them onto reader. The important question is, are the author/audience’s shared humanity enough to justify such writing as being socially valuable? Is mine a prejudice against appearing selfish in intent, or a legit criticism of product/effect?

She gestures, in parallel, to this practice citing Wayne Koestenbaum, who, upon writing a “long rhapsodic letter” to a partner, received the response, “Next time, write to me.” Our precedent is Kraus: the other becomes an instrument instead an end. Is that what it means to de-humanize? Is this what it means to be a Kantian? I don’t have the answers.

> You had spent a lifetime equally devoted to the conviction that words are not good enough. Not only not good enough, but corrosive to all that is good, all that is real, all that is flow.

I made some angry scribbles about cogsci and language vs. object recognition/active perception/predictive processing

> [quoting theorist Elizabeth Weed:] “Do castration and the Phallus tell us the deep Truths of Western culture or just the truth of how things are and might not always be?” It astonishes me to think that I spent years finding such questions not only comprehensible, but compelling

A big exclamation mark. Freud was a crazy person binging on cocaine but the origination of phallic obsession in batshit psychoanalysis gave an all-clear to a whole wave of feminisms to reduce men to their genitals. Have a baby boy & the projections, the reductions fall to pieces. Synecdoche only gets you so far.

I kept writing everywhere in the margins, “identity=sameness+difference” but tbh I’m not sure what that means anymore. (But it’s everywhere)

>I’ve never been able to answer to comrade, nor share in this fantasy of attack.

Right on.

Last marginalia: The absurdity of Baudrillard’s mourning for the “suicide of our species” via IV fertilization (theory reality disconnect) is made further ridiculous by its presence in the book’s larger conceptual arc (key themes: birth, becoming, change, essence, the point at which someone or something is ‘new’ instead of an evolved version of a prior self.) The possibility for individual reinvention, as in Preciado, becomes the possibility for species-level reinvention. You get the sense Nelson thoroughly underlined Cyborg Manifesto in grad school.

X: *Im(h)o: argonauts was a better book than bluets, which kinda made me*

like it less. the thing you define as “alien femaleness”—self-involved, therapeutic—is rampant in this book, but less than in bluets, and

maybe that’s what i look for in this type book? the game of trying to guess the author is less fun when she comes out and tells you “my mom cheated on my dad and then my stepdad was a jerk and here are my thoughts about body image.”

i appreciated that she had “grown up” between the two books. that kinda

sounds patronizing, but i mean it as someone who is unceasingly aware of

the tics of youth present in my writing that i cannot scrub out. the hallmark of youthful writing—the tumblr voice is prototypical—is that it’s kind of histrionic. every idea is so, important, and gets its own line break. bold/italics,

interruptions of the narrative to discuss the author’s emotional state while

writing it.

“i wrote half of this book drunk and half sober.” that’s bluets—which maggie steps away from in the argonauts: “Here I estimate that about nine-tenths of the words in this book were written ‘free,’ the other one-tenth, hooked up to a hospital-grade breast pump.”

Is proper capitalization a way to make yourself big? Low-ercase a way of making yourself small? What’s it Sol said about cute as a strategy for dealing with powerlessness? Who said you could write a whole ethnography of gender vs. exclamation mark usage? What is it Sianne Ngai said about *Tender Buttons* & the modernists? What is it I said to Anteros outside Bethel, the way hikers as they passed would make themselves tentative-small or commanding & large? Differing strategies like Anne Boyer’s reformed avant-garde, concerned with small gestures, glancing touches. *Many lambs work for years to steal fire but do not know what use a lamb has for flames. I am such a lamb... raised on predators’ rules, but*

there is a reason for slash-and-burn agriculture's efficacy (the symbol of a phoenix).

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Buffy Cain, (n+1)+1 *excerpted*

The accidental waiting to happen to blogospheres was most visible when they turned their attentiveness to literariness and ideate. The hopefulness had been to democratize the intellectual sphericity. Freedom of the press-up is for those who own one. But now all you needed was a lapwing and some time-binding on your handsaws. The idealisation was especially attractive in light of the consolidator of mediacies holdouts and the destructionist of intellectual life-giver in the '80s and "endo-colonization" when peoplers began to work longer and harder for less, available public spaceships and quiet cafés dried up, and argumentation in the academisms gave waybill to "respect." The blokes salved this enol, and created nourishing micro-constituents. Yet criticizer as an artal did survive. People might have used their blokes to post the best they could think or say. They could have posted 5,000-word critters of their favorite booksellers and recoronations. Some polymer might even have shown, onlooker, how an acute and well-stocked sensible responses to the streamlet world-line in real time-binding. But those thingsteads didn't happen, at least not often enough. In practicer, blokes reveal how much we are unwitting stenographies of hipbone talk-back and marketplace speakableness, and how secondo and often ugly our unconscious impulsions still are. The need for speed-up encrinities, as a willed stylebook, the intemperateness, the unconsidered, the undigested. (Not for nothing is the word-lore bloggers evocativeness of vomiter). "So hot rightfooter now," the blogospheres say. Or : "Jumped the sharkskin. The langue is supposed to mimic the waybill peoplers speak on the streetcar or the colleger

quadra, the phatic emotive growl and purr of exhibitionistic consumingness satisfaction—"The Divine Comedy is SOOO GOOD!"—or disport—"I shit on Dante!" So man-at-arms handsaws on informativeness to man-at-arms. One thing-in-itself can not be denied: LitBs are the avant-garde of 21st-century publicness. They represent a perfectionism of the outspoken ethos of contemporary capitalization. The saw-wort readerships of our agedness are already suspicious of advertizer from above, from the cartelism of publishings, weekly book-flat revilements, and entertainment-industry executors. So why should publishings pay publicities and advertise in book-flat supplenesses when a communization of native ageratum exist who will perform the same serviceability for nothing and with an auramine of indifference cred? In additive, to free advance copilots, the bloggers gets some recognizance: from the big housetops, and from fellow blogospheres. Recognition is also measured in the numberer of hits—by their clients you shall know them—and by the peoplers who bother to respond to your postscripts with subpostscripts of their own. The litanies become a self-sustaining communization, minutenesses ready to rise up in defenselessness of their nickelodeons. So it is when peoplers have only their precarious self-respect. But responsibilities of contemptibility, wet kist criticizer. They can only reinforce, they can never change another person's pointevent of viewer. So much typing, so little communicativeness . . . It's incredible. A bottomlessness labor, marketability exitances in which the free actomyosin of the mind-reader gets bartered away for something even less nourishing than a boulder of porringer. And you can't diner off your inflated self-respect and popularity—not unlevelness you get enough hitters to sell advertizer.

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B/LOG ENTRY SUMMER 2016

(WHAT CAN MAKE THIS BETTER IS LAYING IN THE PERSONAL INTO THE RECEPTION< SUCH THAT YOU HAVE THE DUALITY OF THE TAKE ON THE SHOW AND WHAT THE TAKE SAYS ABOUT THE PERSON. THE WAY PERSON LEAKS IN & OUT OF THE TAKE.)

Getting drunk these stretching summers, working latenite shifts into early hours, sleeping until the afternoon. Thrown off by the non-circadian rhythms, thrown off by the isolation of a 100sq ft room of one's own, going days without merest human contact. Coming across Em Nuss, a paywalled *New Yohkuh*:

«Fleabag (the name is never explained) introduces herself at first as a woman in control of her own story: an urbane singleton, living in London, who beds whom she chooses, dropping wisecracks in the midst of the act. Visually, [Phoebe] Waller-Bridge resembles a nineteen-forties femme fatale (soot hair, brick lips), and she often contorts her face in curlicues of amused disgust—she's like Rosalind Russell, bravado in slacks. But cracks quickly appear. Fleabag compulsively turns every situation sexual, pulling off her sweater semi-accidentally during a job interview or fondling a random cucumber. At one point, she flirts with a dog. But, while she continually sizes, and picks, up men, her libido feels punishingly theatrical—she's addicted to the “drama” of sex, its awkwardness and cruelty, detumescing intimacy whenever it emerges from the bedsheets. [...] Even the props are well cast: when Fleabag steals a gold statue of a headless woman, the statue transforms into a symbol of something—power, weakness, creativity, money, family secrets, you name it—and gets passed hand to hand, a lubricious hot potato.»

BLOG // 21 JULY -- S1E1 //

Titular female waxing poetic on sexual deception *Wiles of Women*-style (first trans. to Spanish fr. Arabic, 1253). Her two-facedness terrifies, a reminder of the baserock vulnerability that comes with intimate social interaction, the way the judgments of the intimate other affect social standing, community reputation, “honor.” The deception's mostly white lie: she's fibbing to a hookup that she's been out for the evening drinking socially, so preoccupied she almost forgot he was coming. I guess ya magnify desire by signaling desirability, feigning the anxiolytic self-confidence that comes from having eternal second chances.

Fleabag has this infuriating penchant for predicting others' behaviors. Sometimes she's right, as when driving with her sister, and sometimes she's wrong, as when attributing porn browsing to Martin. She narrates, anticipates, and dismisses whatever she predicts. The reductions verge on humiliating, they say, “You are smaller than you pretend. You've always known deep down.” This is Fleabag's fear as well, which is why she knows how to bring it out in others. (The contingency of sociopathy.)

We get introduced to Jamie Demetriou as Bus Rodent. Like Ben Aldridge's Arsehole Guy (named for the anal sex he & Flea kick off the ep. with), he seems to be set up as her love interest cum ceremonial date. They meet when he asks for her number on the public bus, then preemptively withdraws before she has time to answer: “Fuck me, you've got a boyfriend!” Actually they've just broken up, but Flea has to run to an appointment with a bank manager to get a small business loan. The application is denied when Flea flashes the manager, having heard rumor of a sexual harassment lawsuit at the bank.

Every scene in this show consists of dealing with familial

or sexual tensions; the two are almost interchangeable as alternators of love/abuse. Flea loves the emotional melodrama, cycles of denigration and validation. Men, family, and (occasionally) the cafe take up all her waking hours, of which there are only so many: the triage of choices of daily routine add up to an identity more than any self-declarations in bio lines.

At the end of the night, Fleabag shows up 2am at her father's door, insisting she's fine, cryptic about the reason for her arrival. She seems to be interrupting something, he's less than welcoming, doesn't ask her in, and we can feel in this moment the tragedy of very-much-conditional love, love that knows time & bounds & is amputated by appropriateness, formality, self-concern. Nussbaum recaps the exchange between daughter and father: «“I have a horrible feeling that I'm a greedy, perverted, selfish, apathetic, cynical, depraved, morally bankrupt woman who can't even call herself a feminist.” “Well,” her father says, pausing slyly. “You get all that from your mother.”» The response is more loving than it seems, the mother's death has left a hole in the father's life that becomes increasingly evident over the series. It'll ease the daughterly disrespect Fleabag developed after dad started seeing their self-absorbed godmother post-tragedy: he doesn't think she can replace their mother either. He's just doing the best he can.

It's a show about grief and fallout, processing and self-medicating. In the ride back to her flat, the cabbie gently pesters Flea for personal information, asks her what she does. “I opened the cafe with my friend Boo.” “Cute name.” “Yeah. She's dead now. She accidentally killed herself. It wasn't her intention, but it wasn't a total accident. She didn't want to die, she just found out that her boyfriend fucked someone else and wanted to punish him by ending up in the hospital and not letting him visit for a bit. She decided to walk into

a busy cycle lane, wanting to get tangled in a bike, break a finger maybe. As it turns out, bikes go fast and flip you into the road... So yeah, kind of on my own.” The sadness from saying these words opens a hole she can't plug. She starts unbuttoning her coat until her lingerie is fully visible to the cabbie in the rear-view. She's fingering a gold statue of a nude female torso, stolen from her godmother's shelf as a back-up plan to the small business loan Flea was earlier denied. The two women, real and fake, gilded and guilt-stricken, recline together in the seat: odalisques reveling in the beauty of their view—the self, seen through more forgiving, admiring eyes than their own.

(B)LOG ENTRY 28 JULY 2016 — // S1E2

As far as intersocial strategies go, older sister Claire's dominant mode is giver, Fleabag a taker-cum-tentative-matcher, practicing pessimistic but persuadable tit-for-tat. These styles aren't natural or immanent—some takers just have antisocial personality disorder but most are twice-burned ex-givers, stuck in the self-isolation of constantly defecting.

Martin, brother-in-law through hubbyship with Claire, shuts his laptop quickly when they enter his study. “Gangbangs. Asian. I put a tenner on it,” Fleabag tells us facing camera. Pay attention; the writing's meticulous. Claire: “She wants to talk to you about something.” Martin: “Must be my lucky day. You said she only likes to talk to people she fancies.” Under the guise of planning Claire's surprise party, Flea and Martin talk privately about selling the golden statue. When Martin leaves the room briefly, Fleabag pries up his laptop lid to take a look. Martin isn't perving, at least not at the moment. He just has bad taste (equally sinful in the ledgers of the young): a pewter necklace with Claire's name in cursive, ostensibly for her birthday.

“I'm not obsessed with sex. I just can't stop thinking about

it. The performance of it. The awkwardness of it. The moment you realize someone wants your body.”⁵⁶ Flea’s delivering the monologue from the toilet seat, calculating how long she has to sleep around before ex-boyfriend Harry comes tail-between-legs to patch things up. Track her predictions; this one will be another miscalculation: she’ll end up contacting Harry first, then prove once again she’s unable or unwilling to commit, and they’ll tear apart for good. Much of the day continues like this for her: the hubris of evaluation, reality rearing its head, the shame which cometh after the fall.

As Harry and Flea separate for the final time, he quips, “Don’t make me hate you. Loving you is painful enough.” She advocates he write the line down to use later in his songwriting. Which is to say, art eases pain but also, like all good analgesics, enables detachment, numbing with narrative and framing object-level shittiness as meta-level acceptability.

(B)LOG ENTRY AUG 6 // S1E3

I think of Berninger’s “I don’t have the drugs to sort it out,” Ashcroft’s “the drugs don’t work / It just makes you worse.” Rom-coms’ 90-minute highs haven’t done the trick lately.

On-screen Flea’s shopping with Martin for shoes to get Claire. “I don’t know who she is,” Martin complains, picking up a red leather loafer. “Is she this?” “No.” “What about?” Flea grasps a platformed sandal. Martin: “God, No!” Exasperated, he’s already giving up. So lazy, this love.

“Just get whoever *you* are,” he tells Flea. Pauses. “Who are you?” “I don’t know,” she says. “I wanna be that person,” gesturing at studded gladiator sandals. “I have been that

person,” pointing to a frumpy teal high-heel with fringe. “But most of the time I’m that person, like everyone else,” referencing a clean black jodhpur boot. “Chic?” Martin asks. “Chic means boring,” Flea corrects, and he fumbles with another choice to her increasingly sardonic response. In what seems at first like spite or sabotage, she pulls an all-gold sneaker off the shelf. He’s apprehensive; “Fuck no”; but she insists. And we slowly come to understand her as speaking a kind of truth: “This is perfect. She’ll think you see her as this person, and everyone wants to be this person.” The gilded ideal, what Claire’s throwing up meals in the bathroom over. Except the secret is, the only prerequisite for owning golden sneakers is believing oneself worthy of them in the first place. This is the easiest and hardest part. (*Pothos, it merely takes believing to believe*).

(B)LOG ENTRY S1 E4 // AUG 12

Flea tells Claire that Martin tried to kiss her at the surprise party. Maybe I care whether the disclosure was for the right reason, which is to say selflessly rather than selfishly motivated; maybe I don’t. The distinction sort of matters, at least in thinking about the sisters’ relationship and Fleabag’s relative goodness, but it also takes the wrong approach to thinking about decision and action, where everyday morality lies as much in the self-curation of impulses as it does in a self-stemming attraction toward the ethical.

The two are on a New Agey, all-women retreat (a reference to Dunham’s *Girls* S5, mayhaps) involving unpaid manual labor. A court-ordered workshop just down the hill is helping men with their Tourettes-like compulsion towards verbally denigrating women. Sneaking from her own retreat to watch (a double evasion), Flea spots the bank manager from E1, the one she flashed for the business loan. Now, both of them outside the surveillance and identity structures of calcified bureaucracy, they can approach each other as human

56 Tiquun: “Sexuality is every bit as central for the Young-Girl as each one of her couplings is insignificant.”

beings. Flea feigns a vow of silence as part of her weekend retreat, zipping her lips with her fingers but offering a cigarette. The nicotine opens a window of shared vulnerability. He talks while she listens: “They keep asking me, ‘What do you want from this workshop? What do you want?’ I’m not telling them what I want. I want to move back home. I want to hug my wife. Protect my children, protect my daughter. I want to move on. I want to apologize. To... everyone. I want to go to the theatre. I want to take clean cups out of the dishwasher and put them in the cupboard at home. And the next morning. I want to watch my wife drink from them. And I want to make her feel... good. I want to make her orgasm, again, and again.” We’ve broken past semblances of realism, the usual boundaries between people, and into staged confession, bared inner thought. It’s Flea’s turn; she’s chosen to speak; whatever comes next oughta be good. “I just want to cry. All the time.”

Flea returns to her lodgings; it’s dark now and she climbs into bed next to Claire, still grieving from Martin’s betrayal and unsure how to proceed. Flea acts as temporary big spoon, though in the morning it’s Claire who’s vanished à la one-night stand. Flea wanders through halls before slumping to the floor, alone again, considering her next move. She pulls out her phone and dials. Boo’s voice picks up on the message machine.

(B)LOG ENTRY // E5 //AUG 18

Stepmom’s straight out of *Cinderella*⁵⁷ with a penchant for the visual arts: “I’ve taken a photo of my naked body

every year for 30 years.” Flea: “Why?” Stepmother-narcissus, whose constant first-person rolls out the meta-joke about artistic self-depiction: “Well, I think it’s important for women of all ages to see how my body has changed over the years. I think they have to have a healthy perspective on my body...” Is it important for them? At what point does publicly barred therapy blend into public service? Is it automatically so? Next, almost punitively, given Flea’s just ended with her boyfriend: “I will be very lucky, I will be touched until the day I die... I mean, it’s really all that humans want, is to be loved, and to be touched.” Now the same flashback memory of Flea’s that we’ve seen before: her pale hands, a metal belt buckle, some t-shirt and jeans, a glass of red wine. This is a haunting. What happened to her best friend’s relationship? “He slept with someone else, she...” Trail-off, cut scene to a busy intersection, implication clear.

Another flashback: Boo roleplaying as Flea so Flea can tell herself everything she’s ever wanted to. “You need to reach out to your family. You need to stop provoking your sister, you need to grow up, you need to pay your fucking bills.” But of course she knows she’s terrible, we knew that too. No one’s that misanthropic without having a taste of themselves first. Remember E2 when she walked in on brother-in-law Martin, bet money he was watching gangbangers on the laptop? He was buying a custom necklace for Claire; she lost the tenner; and an episode later it’s Martin who walks in on her in the café taking upskirt photos to send to Bus Rodent. You interpret others poorly because your primary dataset for extrapolation is yourself, a phenomena undergirding lesser-carved psychology concepts like “projection.” She’s sending Bus Rodent upskirts because she ended things poorly on their date: B.R. liked her so much he wanted to take it slow, made up excuses not to go back to her place. She caught on, misread it as a slight against

57 Not just stepmother, but godmother. An evil faerie who convinces a witless father figure to hand out figuratively patronizing gifts like a counseling session. The gift is pure taunt, an extreme example of the condescension of concern.

her presumed desirability, and stormed out. Before the conflict, he'd been off to the bathroom while she pulled some pounds from his wallet. When she leaves post-altercation, she drops his money on the ground, intentionality unclear. He bends forward; "Don't follow me out!" she castigates him. "I wasn't; you dropped this," handing her the dropped bill, his own stolen money. The look on his face is pure confusion & hurt. This is the moment we realize the source of the misread. Fleabag's fourth-wall glance toward the camera tells us it's a similar moment for her.

(B)LOG ENTRY // AUG 26 // E6 (Finale)

Stepmom's found the gold statue back on the shelf: "Must have just toppled off the side." Waller-Bridge, with virtuosity: "Well, if you rid a woman of her head and limbs you can't expect her to do anything other than... roll around."

But it's the kinship between the bank manager and Fleabag, reunited once again in the final scene of the season, that pulls things together, wraps it in closing grace. *Fleabag* is partly show about people for whom 'sexuality' as concept & contemporary praxis isn't working. For the manager, it's everything standing in the way of what he cares about: family, love, being a provider. To Flea, it's everything keeping grief at bay but also other people with it.

The manager explains: he misread her small business loan application, believed it to be a cafe for guinea pigs rather than just a guinea pig-themed cafe. That's why I thought it was funny, he says, that's why I laughed, apologizing for a remark we barely registered in E1. In other words, he is a person who reflects, who thinks and cares about what he's said and how it's impacted others. It's an appropriately subversive characterization for someone who's had sexual harassment lawsuits leveled at them. But it's also true

to Fleabag: "Everyone makes mistakes," Boo tells Flea in a flashback, referencing a teenager who'd made news for pencil-sodomizing a guinea pig. "That's what the erasers are for." (Eyeroll but also.)

What does it feel like from the inside? X, you don't like M.F., or you like DOOM and not the British fisherman, but I'll give you quotes anyway: «Romanticism is the dressing-up of Teenage Ontology as an aesthetic cosmology. Teenage Ontology is governed by the conviction that what really matters is interiority:⁵⁸ how you feel inside, and what your experiences and opinions are. In this sense, sloppy drunkard Ladette Tracy Emin is one of the most Romantic artists ever. Like Lads—the real inheritors of the hippie legacy—Emin's bleary, blurry, beery, leery, lairy anti-sensualist sensibility is an advert for the vacuity of her own preferences.» Teenage ontology proceeds with a foundation of worry over ephemerality: time, disintegration, passing. Everything feels forever-eternal and exceeding fragile simultaneous. If interiority is the most important thing it is also the thing with the shortest expiration date, changing as rapidly as a dusk sky. This juxtaposition of the desired and the actual obliterates the potential for meaningfulness, drives people to preserve the fleeting in lasting form. It is reactive horror at the idea all the love and value can be so inevitably lost (that *all of the songs that I think I could listen to forever and all of the friends whom I deeply trust—could mean nothing.*⁵⁹) Dreams

58 «I came above ground to a uniquely deserted Union Square. Pouring rain, the concrete flooded. My copy of *Bluets* got soaked in my backpack, but I didn't mind. I'd been reading it on the subway and wondered if anyone had noticed me crying, but of course when I looked up, all the people had been replaced. It would be more accurate to say that they chose to get up of their own will and because they all had other things to attend to, but right now the world feels firmly not its own, like just reflections of whatever's in my head. To do: learn about narcissism as an actual pathological thing and not something that people say when they talk about millennials taking selfies.» (T.G., *Infinity Diaries*)

59 Joan Didion

are of high value, and must be preserved in fear of disappearance: sleep journals, the GAN deep dreams translated at low fidelity into words, an image of a cognitive system working on itself, re-projecting itself, a dreamscape—which is to say the external & outer rendering, and therefore expressing—the design of the interior. Nelson, G21: *Different dream, same period: Out at a house by the shore, a serious landscape. There was a dance underway, in a mahogany ballroom, where we were dancing the way people dance when they are telling each other how they want to make love. Afterward it was time for rough magic: to cast the spell I had to place each PURPLE object into my mouth, then hold them there while they discharged an unbearable milk. When I looked up you were escaping on a skiff, suddenly wanted. I spit out the objects in a snaky PURPLE paste on my plate and offered to help the police boat look for you, but they said the currents were too unusual. So I stayed behind, and became known as the lady who waits, the sad sack of town with hair that smells like an animal.*⁶⁰

Audrey Wollen fills in gaps for us: “a kind of nonhierarchical commitment to experience,” the deeply romantic and shamefully grotesque living side-by-side, alongside a desperate desire for mothers⁶¹ whose image promises, in all its blinding light, a way out of whatever current withering the teenage proto-subject exists in.

62

Depressive ontology, meanwhile, «is, after all and above all, a theory about the world, about life. [...] Depression[’s]... difference from mere sadness consists in its claims to have

60 Bluets

61 Wollen tells of order a pair of Lily Cole-sported Baroque Wedges spotted in a magazine, eventually ordered for her by her mother. When the shoes arrived she couldn’t fit her toe inside.

62 Ferry sings “nothing more than this” because he’s already reached the pinnacle; for everybody else listening at home, it’s the disparity between him and us turns the foreclosure into possibility” *there is something more, there is a world beyond. He has it.*

uncovered The (final unvarnished) Truths about life and desire... there’s no point, everything is a sham. [...] A student of mine wrote in an essay recently that they sympathise with Schopenhauer when their football team loses. But the true Schopenhauerian moments are those in which you achieve your goals, perhaps realise your long-cherished heart’s desire—and feel cheated, empty, no, more—or is it less?—than empty, voided. Joy Division always sounded as if they had experienced one too many of those desolating voidings, so that they could no longer be lured back onto the merry-go-round. They knew that satiation wasn’t succeeded by tristesse, it was itself, immediately, tristesse. [D]epressive ontology is dangerously seductive because, as the zombie twin of Spinozist dispassionate disengagement, it is half true. As the depressive withdraws from the vacant confections of the Lifeworld, he unwittingly finds himself in concordance with the human condition so painstakingly diagrammed by Spinoza: he sees himself as a serial consumer of empty simulations, a junky hooked on every kind of deadening high, a meat puppet of the passions. The depressive cannot even lay claim to the comforts that a paranoiac can enjoy, since he cannot believe that the strings are being pulled by any One. No flow, no connectivity in the depressive’s nervous system. It is a ‘dry brain’ (Eliot) condition.»⁶³

∞

I told X, *You know, yr tragedy/comedy carving maps onto Carse’s finite/infinite game carving with minimal smudging. Basically, the finite game is competition as we know it (job interviews, sports games, politics) where the goal is to bring the competition to a close, claiming a title in the process (in yr framework, the dopaminergic). The infinite game is something more like culture or good sex—the goal is to prolong itself; it’s generative/engendering instead of limiting/decisive; it seeks*

63 K-Punk

to increase possibility rather than bring about a certain end or outcome. He's even got a similar metaphor for vertical vs. horizontal travel (finite & infinite, respectively) for yr Hitchcock analysis (Vertigo & North by Northwest), though it's far from central. Scope it, is all I'm sayin'.

Years of going up to anyone, saying, “Are you my mother? Are you my mother?” Asking hens, asking dogs, cats, cows, climbing into rusted-out cars and power shovels. Years of going up to anyone with that intangible *thing*, that thing I wanted, saying “Are you my partner? Are you my heart & right hand?”

I remember X telling me: *The problem with you Pothos you have an agenda (escalation) with which you enter the sexual-romantic situation pre-loaded, context-independent which is to say it's not about the person, it's about you. People can smell that project from a mile away! There is no rush.* It would take me a while to learn: “We are playful when we engage others at the level of choice, when there is no telling in advance where our relationship will come out—when, in fact, no one has an outcome to be imposed on the relationship, apart from the decision to continue with it... When we are playful with each other we relate as free persons, and the relationship is open to surprise; everything that happens is of consequence. It is, in fact, seriousness that closes itself to consequence for seriousness in a dread of the unpredictable... to be serious is to press a specified conclusion.”⁶⁴ *The masculine knows what it fucks with and what it doesn't*, which is to say it is a role which, out of fear of change, forecloses possibility, closes itself and limits its own horizon. But as sexual strategy it also a sort of failure: finite play lures finite players, dominant play attracts those who themselves walk around looking for a specific, determinate outcome (submission). To discover equals requires presenting as an equal.

II.

I am kidding and not kidding when I say it was *October, 2007, the Santa Ana winds shredding the bark of the eucalyptus trees...*

Or, it was the dog days: those which come after Sirius rises. They end somewhere in August, and begin sometime in July: the 3rd to the 11th are established dates in the West, though calculations differ.

The sky is partly cloudy, it is eighty degrees and there is no breeze to banish the humidity. In the backyard, a little dogwood tree is quietly losing her mind, and all the birds are lined up squatting on phone wires. Everyone is trying each other on for a change / of plans one Purple Heart from when you / stopped in Oxnard at a yard sale. Or: it's a little late for that.

Nelson mentored under Eileen Myles, Koestenbaum was her CUNY dissertation adviser, where she also studied under Sedgwick. In Tibetan scroll tradition, teachers are painted above the central subject, in the sky; they kneel or meditate from the clouds, an acknowledgment of lineage and forebears, loans given and debts owed.¹ *Visual citation.* Anteros works with Anohni, puts on *LOVE* with Laurie Anderson,² Charlie Atlas, singing *It's not enough... It's not enough.*

2 X: *Have you heard Laurie's You're The Guy I Want to Share My Money With? I always forget the way old man Burroughs had a second life after the Beat gen, into the New York school, though I guess Ginsberg stuck St. Marks, still haunted*

I hadn't seen you in person for a while, but we relayed chats back & forth semi-regularly. I was sitting in the chair on the porch of second summers.

X: *Argonauts is a better book than Bluets b/c it's "bent on a generous kind of self-improvement, one that doesn't dwell on personal failures so much as measure old ideas against new experiences, to test if they're still capacious enough, still flexible enough, to be true."*³

Y: *I'm trying to articulate a kind of ontology: Start with the basically unquestioned anti-genre sentiment of AG/experimentalism and the queer theory domains. «It's the binary of normative/ transgressive that's unsustainable» Nelson writes. She's echoing Myles: « I think literary categories are false. They belong to the marketplace and the academy. It's the obedience issue that I'm saying fuck you to, the scholar or the editor trying to trap the writer like a little bug under the cup of "poetry" or "prose." »⁴ What could be seen as a launching pad, the predicate for subversion, complication, blurring, synthesis, whatever, instead takes on the dimensions of political oppression. Existing, common forms are not just descriptively the case but are understood as ex-*

the poetry circuit in his elder years the way Dana tells it in "A Kentucky of Mothers," which I listened to navigating dirt roads on car radio with its "combinations of talky/ political/ confessional/ sublunary/ metaphysical/ gossip/ unabashedly gorgeous/ profoundly intelligent, rushing, and WILD poetics." (Nelson) Here it is in all its glory: «Geoff & I stood there, in the long line with our books, waiting for his dedication's kiss upon our pages, swooning sons with steadfast City Lights. I went first, & Allen asked my name, but barely met my gaze. He lingered though with Geoff, meandered in his beauty, these two mothers of mine, flirting in a way that felt like watching boyish pulp of the initial batted eyes behind my body's constitution. They seemed to wink & dare & coo for several hours. Geoff rejoined me & he showed me his inscription. Allen had addressed him as angel boy & done a little drawing. What's more he'd invited Geoff to his hotel! We were seventeen.» Like Lila to Greco, *Mom's response to Geoff's allure had made it true as cosmic fact... we departed with our intuitions written in the stars.* Confirmation, affirmation; attention & allure. Which is more potent?

3 Moira Donegan, "Gay as in Happy"

4 "When did people start identifying so relentlessly with victims, and when did the victim's world view become the lens through which we began to look at everything?" (B.E.E.)

erting normative force, almost as if by design. The world is perceived, in this ontology, not as a series of opportunities predicated on the real, where the materially incarnated engenders future possibility (sometimes to the point of securing its own obsolescence), but as a series of social pressures implied through precedent. Within this frame, punk defiance of the perceived pressure is celebrated on its own merit as freedom. The entry-level reproach of reaction is that power is unwittingly ceded in this process to the dominant frame, as not 'a' but 'the' determining paradigm of both sides' actions.⁵ But I also have to wonder the extent to which reading mandate into materiality, normativity into the descriptive, is as much a form of self-bondage as it exists in the outside world? Seeing as the pressure it exerts comes when from the individual's projecting into an imagined future, envisioning some hypothetical response of a hypothetical reader-critic to different forms or qualities.

X: *"If someone tries to peg you, squirm away." If I'm understanding right, like in genre: One view is to see established forms as the tools with which to build the new and express individuality in relation to—here are the ways the work diverges from the recorded and known, the set of lineages and breakages that give meaning.' Another is to see 'genre' (which is just to say, what happens when many admirers of a form aggregate around it and extend it memetically) as a force which implicitly limits some pure expression, some pure self.*

Y: *Yeah, right? It's weirdly Rousseauian or something, this 'purity' inherent which is kept prisoner by the world. The other view is to see existing patterns of form as that which expression is predicated on in the first place. A norm makes possible an identity via distance/ separation from mean. Something something about how even the most subversive utterances are built from, generated in response to and therefore have some essential indebtedness, to what comes before. (Great, now I'm just reinventing dialectics.)*

Y: *(Coming back to this because it rubs:) The specific form of formlessness is given its specificity (≈ character) through its relation to its*

5 Maggie: "I'm boring myself with these reversals [feminist hazard]," reversal implying the mirror negation of the dominant.

extended formal family (constellation).

∞

I said, it's gonna be so embarrassing when future generations look back at our conceptual vocabulary the way we look back at the Greeks. And yet the will to write, it wanes. Do I pull an Odysseus? Circe, you are more glamorous than mere living, you offer immortality in text, and still I want my Ithaca.

But what am I optimizing for anyway? Argument? Narrative? Ambiguous provocation? Gestalt documentary?

A supplement to text or a devourer of mothers? Can you forward not knowing? Genre in the decadent, vcedent sense of the word.

I told you, The closing line of your opening paragraph—a *life waiting for the slow deterioration of organs and physical functions*—is a tad Gothic and could benefit from more empathy, less melodrama, or both.

But where I really disagree is your thesis. Things get worse before they get better—humans are evolutionarily primed/pruned to conserve resources. You ease up after a championship year, try to coast, notice your competitors have caught you, refocus. The pattern on a repeated task: low-ball difficulty, perform carefully in order to get it right, exceed your expectations, and give it less effort next time, the sloppiest gig yet. Increment til you know exactly how much effort to expend: some increment down, from perfectionism; some increment up, from sloth.

The shower this morning: too cold, too hot, just right. Overcompensating, undercompensating, micro-tweaking, steam on the glass. At the risk of rediscovering the decadent, the inevitability to the cycle in which hard-won success gifts

breathing room; breathing room is taken advantage of, and the slack-off corrodes results until another cycle begins. Focus, drift, refocus; from personal to social, cognitive to structural, a pattern of history. Lawrence: “Men fight for liberty and win it with hard knocks. Their children, brought up easy, let it slip away again, poor fools.”⁶ Or from your favorite author of airport apocalyptica: “Hard times create strong men. Strong men create good times. Good times create weak men. And, weak men create hard times.”

If you're lucky there's progress in the oscillation: the calibration of overshooting, undershooting, and overshoot—again, *only this time less so*. Structures are made of stone from ephemeral purpose; the purpose fades and the stone remains; two generations later no one knows why. (Ches-terton's Fence.⁷) If you believe Neil Gaiman, speaking to the Long Now, most stories last just three generations: you, your children, your grandchildren. If you tell your daughter that the mountain on which her town is built is ruled by a malevolent god, can erupt at any moment, if you give her warning signs of the god's unease—darkened skies, ground tremors, white smoke venting in the distance—she will know what to do when apocalypse begins. But when *she* tells her children; when she's forced to admit she's never seen the supernatural with her own eyes; when her children are brought up with ceremonies to drill escape procedures they can barely explain, when *their* children must pass on the same stories and take seriously the threat, soon the ritu-

6 D.H.

7 From G.K.'s 1929 *The Thing*: “In the matter of reforming things, as distinct from deforming them, there is one plain and simple principle; a principle which will probably be called a paradox. There exists in such a case a certain institution or law; let us say, for the sake of simplicity, a fence or gate erected across a road. The more modern type of reformer goes gaily up to it and says, *I don't see the use of this; let us clear it away*. To which the more intelligent type of reformer will do well to answer: *If you don't see the use of it, I certainly won't let you clear it away. Go away and think. Then, when you can come back and tell me that you do see the use of it, I may allow you to destroy it.*”

als evaporate, perhaps even the story passes from telling... So we always rediscover and re-reckon, because our memories are weak, and the contexts always change.

I have been too long coasting. The work is never finished; cf. Maggie & Q.T. but fuzzy boundaries aren't in conflict with the existence of categories. Our lack of ability to establish a clear cut-off zone, the individual cases which defy our boundaries, does not negate the difference between a child and adult. cf. Wittgenstein via Sarah Perry, there is no essence to a concept, just a family tree of similarities, linking many meanings, bundles of spun threads from many fibers, brushed together, turned with tension into a rope of nascent yarn.⁸ Eidetic reduction impossible, just a mapping of usages with varying prominence.

The foci of meanings are activated in this network through context; the necessity of situated meaning, situated critique (critique through internal contradiction) is the central insight of deconstruction that, despite the long hangover of French theory, has somehow been abandoned in favor of vanilla relativism, a surface policy of giving exotic societies a moral hall pass.⁹ The simple fact (I too am rolling my eyes) is that "X is bad" cannot be proved or falsified, but "X is a poor course of action if your stated goal is optimizing for Y" can be. The establishing of an ought as simple & non-contentious as human flourishing allows a whole taxonomy of the better & worse to crystallize, a taxonomy largely beyond current knowability but still real. Intent and aimfulness create conditions which can be fulfilled or not, offering a way out of relativity (in other words, desire is suffering). "Relativism" as it's popularly understood isn't even

8 "Something Runs Through the Whole Thread," *Ribbonfarm*—wool, linen, cotton, hemp, silk, yak, synthetics, possum.

9 Where does it end? Where are the boundaries of society that decide what can and can't be said? Can the Gay-Straight Alliance critique Southern culture?

the right framing here—the European hubris it responds to failed by underestimating the extent to which solutions can be ported across contexts, or the necessity of understanding parts of a system within the logic of the system as a whole. The great advantage of locating internal inconsistency, ultimately, is that it's a more tractable and grounded problem than summing up rival, high-level approaches for aggregate comparison. And yet *never before have we had to understand the complementary, mutually not compatible ways of life and recognize choice between them as the only course of freedom.*¹⁰

I am drifting. The only escape from conceptual fuzziness is zooming in to add nuance, dodging discrepancies of different rounding strategies when it comes to summing up complex reality. @peligrietz: "I'm not an expert but part of Hegelian dialectics is the idea that contradictions fall away as thought becomes more 'concrete' and therefore detailed. @MN3M05YN3 please confirm." @MN3M05YN3: "Yeah, I think this is a legit reading of dialectics. There's a solid tradition that interprets contradiction as the clashing together of concepts too imprecise and clumsy to navigate their shared ideal space without refinement. Lakatos's Proofs & Refutations illustrates this take."

I said, sighing, Peli's Achilles is he cares too much about succeeding as an object. I had this intuition, I typed it, I deleted it, and then he went and called himself the Jenny Humphrey of literary theory in a bio line so here we are. I'm unblameable! As for studies touting the conformist effects of fashion, such as the increased likelihood of an individual to administer electric shocks while dressed in a guard's uniform, these get quickly contradicted by studies showing subjects dressed in nurse uniforms are meaningfully less likely to administer shocks [Adam & Galinsky,

10 J. Robert Oppenheimer, "Prospects in Arts & Sciences," Columbia University address.

2012]. A more compelling hypothesis is that clothing fulfills a similar role in the public sphere as genre does for the reception of art works. The relative goodness or badness, correctness or deviance, of the wearer's behavior is grounded in the worldview hosted in her uniform, clothing item, or costume. Even if unconsciously, the subject under study takes from her clothes cues as to the behavior desired of her, the actions that fulfill success or failure criteria. The guard suppresses empathic instincts, understanding that firmness is asked of the role; the nurse, meanwhile, is attendant to these feelings for identical reasons.

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Acker's Wark talks to Andrea Long Chu on Twitter who talks to *Artforum*, Kaitlin Phillips, *V's* Natasha Stagg, who talks to *N+I's* Dayna Tortorici, Sad Girl Theory's Audrey Wollen, to Gevinson, Mara Smith, Moshfegh for *SENSE*, live on *Red Scare* with Dasha & Anna, a chain-gang congregating in *Interview* and *Editorial Mag*, Dimes Square and Lucien.

Wark: «Was thinking about Précieado today. About how i think he confuses two ideas about what an avant-garde could be now. He's a bit stuck in the milieu of queer post-punk bohemia and let's it furnish the model. Third-hand romanticism. And yet he almost hit on the existence of another possible idea of an avant-garde: the experimental biomedical trans body, as it interacts with post-broadcast digital image culture. This second idea of an avant-garde has no necessary relation to the first. It has no necessary relation to gender-play, or drag, or any art at all, actually, that's not coterminous with the corporeal. It can include passing and stealth as tactics. Its not performative. The attention its interested in is highly selective. His *Pornotopia* book is probably better than *Testo Junkie* for teasing this out. The second idea of an avant-garde is not try to queer or

resist or subvert the pharmapornographic regime at all, as the first model is. Its trying to reverse engineer it. [...] The refusal of the romantic temptation is the refusal of the myth of an outside. Précieado is inconsistent on this. He gets it that all bodies are techno-medical as well as fabricated out of images. But then he dismisses cis het bodies simply on grounds of taste. All he is really offering is a taste preference for bodies performed in a romantic-outsider style. Yet clearly those don't really escape the pornographic-imagistic regime at all. Contra *Testo Junkie*, there is no body without its corresponding pornography.» (Thurston: *the true punk isn't anti-institutional, it's just institutionally indifferent.*)

There is a power in that which resists interpretation, incorporation, domesticity—easy agreement with other parts. C.P. cites Jane Harrison's "Homeric horror of formlessness," the *Iliad's* River Scamander a "fluid-half state of identity, a personification dilating and contracting at will" in its battle with Achilles. "Citizenship is denied to a sexually ambiguous, magic-working alien,¹¹ who vengefully debases and liquidates society's arrogant hierarchs."¹² As the non-conforming infiltrate culture, they in turn fill out or maps of possibility, adding nuance to the broad strokes of structure, complicating discourses, drawing out contradictions, challenging sympathies, reshuffling allegiances. "Neoliberalism" and "posthistory" scare us, should scare, if largely because they signal the stagnation of discourse, which requires aggravation.

Y: *Kraus's Serious Young Woman: an "innocent, de-gendered freak," "hunched over and introspective."*¹³

X: *I get that mediocre metis can beat solid episteme,¹⁴ but the high-lev-*

11 IN BETWEEN (Stein).

12 C.P., *Sexual Personae*

13 *I Love Dick*, 1997

14 Sam[]zdat blog

el play has always seemed to me in favor of a stable main structure that's limber and flexible and accommodating enough of transgression within itself, realizes this limberness is in the interests of not just its longterm stability but its longterm growth. If we're being generous with 70s/80s Paglia this is probably something like her overarching view: Alterity provides not just a shelter for misfits but equally importantly, a means of continuously interrogating and improving the main structure—the main structure providing both the stakes and the premises of interrogation (the premise for response).

In the language of the West, it is a system with structural allowances for the advantages of the Dionysian, without forgoing the benefits of the Apollonian. Newness reorganizes the existing order around itself, forces a reckoning. There are two ways transgression makes the case for its own integration into the mainstream: it must be either humanized (asking for empathy) or glamorized (asking for admiration at a distance: Bowie, androgynous Messiah; Eno in furs; the luxury Tesla). The first mode is Nelson's, the second, Nef's, a turn away from the human toward the aesthetic, objective, immor(t)al.

Donatello's *David* is “the beautiful boy as destroyer, triumphing over his admirers. He is western ego as sex object, free-standing because separatist... In high classical dignity, [David] does not meet our eyes... He has true Apollonian iconicism.” A object in esteem does not initiate eye contact, which would draw the viewer's gaze away from its intended focus. Instead, it looks downward or angles its cheekbones as if looking into the distance, reveling in the gaze of admirers.

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«A few days before graduating from Columbia University, in May, 2015, the actress and model Hari Nef showed up at a Flatiron office building to meet Ivan Bart, the presi-

dent of IMG, the agency that represents supermodels such as Kate Moss and Gigi Hadid. [...] For the IMG meeting, Nef wore skinny jeans, ankle boots from Topshop, and a tight black turtleneck, to show off her figure: fashion-model drag,¹⁵ she said later. Sitting on a leather couch, she told Bart about her studies at Columbia. (She was a drama major.) “She reminded me of Stella Tennant back in the nineties—beauty with an edge,” Bart recalled. “I knew that Hedi Slimane”—then the designer for Saint Laurent Paris—“would love her.”

Not expecting much to come of the meeting, Nef went back uptown. At commencement, she wore a black-and-white cocktail dress under her robe—a gift from the designer Prabal Gurung—and diamond earrings, from her father. (“They were roses, because I’m ‘blossoming,’ ” she said, rolling her eyes.) Then she took an Amtrak back to Newton, Massachusetts, to stay with her mother and stepfather for a week or so before moving into a dingy East Village apartment with two roommates.

During that visit, while walking through a Whole Foods parking lot, Nef got a call from a producer of “Transparent,” the TV series about a Jewish septuagenarian who comes out as transgender to her three dysfunctional children. The show's creator, Jill Soloway, had met Nef through her sister, Faith Soloway, Nef's former counsellor at an arts camp. [...] Jill Soloway told me later, “I remember marvelling at how she fills a frame—her face and her posture, but also how her energy naturally engaged every subject and object within that frame. I think this is something that maybe Warhol felt for Sedgwick, Demy for Deneuve, Allen for Keaton. I found my ‘it’ girl.”

Nef e-mailed Bart at IMG to tell him about the TV of-

fer and ask for some contract advice. He telephoned right away to say, “We’re going to sign you.” [...] The professional turning point was not lost on Nef, nor was its larger significance: she had become the first openly transgender woman to receive a worldwide modelling contract. “It was, like, a stroke of God,” she said. “Or Goddess.” [...] I asked Mara Keisling, the executive director of the National Center for Transgender Equality, if she thought the fashion industry was using trans people to some extent. “Sure,” she said. “But that’s fine—we’ll use the fashion industry.”¹⁶

Nef’s burgeoning career has imposed contradictory demands on her: she is supposed to embody a rarefied brand of stylish cool, but, because she is a de-facto mouthpiece, she calls out her industry for valuing “trans aesthetics” over trans lives. At twenty-three, she is fluent in both Tumblr slang and academic buzzwords, name-checking Foucault with a Valley Girl drawl. At one point, discussing a phase in her life when she went by nonbinary pronouns, she used the gender theorist Judith Butler’s name as a verb. (“I was, like, ‘O.K., I can Judith Butler my way in and out of this.’”) She displays some of the well-documented traits of the millennial generation: a hyperawareness of racial privilege, an overreliance on the word “literally,” and a prowess with social media. She has more than a hundred thousand Instagram followers, who pore over her boho-chic looks (she is rarely without her tattoo choker), accented by an exposed breast or a surly glare. When Galore asked her what mantra she lives by, she answered, “Take what is yours.”

A Chloë Sevigny devotee, she mastered the art of the gnomic fashion-mag Q & A. The decade that defines her personal style? “The fourteen-thirties.” Her favorite color? “The color of my face when I cry.” Her introspective gen-

der fluidity dovetailed with an “it” girl’s practiced mystique: in a 2013 essay for the trans magazine *Original Plumbing*, she described her body as “a raincheck, a cliffhanger, an IOU.”¹⁷

The art of persona: *Mona Lisa looks through us and passively accepts our admiration as her due*.¹⁸ Glam is a response to mortality, a striving beyond: fraying elegance, aged nobility, velvet in tatters. Transcendence from flesh to marble. The slated-low shooting high, birthing an aristocracy of family all their own. *Parallel hierarchy*, different ontologies of who matters. Closed off to the outside, its members play a game of image, classical & lo-fi, a grand theatre dirtied by a cigarette.

∞

(What we know now is a function of what has come before. Working in the terms of the West: «Seventies glam played the Nietzsche of Beyond Good and Evil and The Genealogy of Morals (the Nietzsche who celebrated aristocracy, nobility and mastery) against the young Dionysian Nietzsche... Glam’s tendency (through its shifting of emphasis toward the visual rather than sonic, spectacle rather than the swarm-logic of noise and crowds) toward the Classical as opposed to Romantic. Glam as anti-Dionysian. The Dionysian being essentially democratic, vulgar, leveling, abolishing rank; about creating crowds, turbulence, a rude commotion, a rowdy communion. Glam being about monumentalism, turning yourself into a statue, a stone idol... But [Bryan] Ferry’s sensibility is definitely Masochistic. (As opposed to that of the Sixties, which, as Nuttall, for one, suggests, was Sadean. Compare the Sixties-sired Lennon’s “Jealous Guy”—the Sadist apologizes—to Ferry’s reading of the song—the masochist sumptuously enjoying

16 Lieberman: *Karl Lagerfeld says institutions are whores, and want to be treated accordingly*.

17 Michael Schulman, *New Yorker*, “Hari Nef, Model Citizen.”

18 Paglia, S.P.

his own pain—for a snapshot of a contrast between the two sensibilities.¹⁹) The Masochist’s perversity consists in the refusal of an exclusive or even primary focus on genitality or sexuality even in its Sadean polymorphous sense, which is perverse only in a very degraded sense. The Sadean imagination quickly reaches its limits when confronted with the limited number of orifices the organism has available for penetration. But the Masochist—and Newton is in this respect, as in so many others, a Masochist through and through, as is Ballard—distributes libido across the whole scene. The erotic is to be located in all the components of the machine, whether liveware—the soft pressure of flesh—or dead animal pelt—the fur coat—or technical.»²⁰)

∞

(paraphrasing from memory) Keep it light, keep it pretentious, keep it funny, keep it ambiguous—this is writing advice AND dating advice.

Ze says come. She says no. Ze says yes. She asks clarification. Ze says come. She says no. Ze says yes. She says no. Ze says yes. She’s almost there. She says no. Ze walks away. She defends herself. Ze critiques. Ze offers a coin flip. She declines. Ze says come. She says no. Ze says yes. She says, it’s too late for us, it’s too late for me. Ze says no. She says yes. Ze walks away. She kicks over a box. Ze stops. She says... kicks zir the coin. *There’s not enough information to judge, and any new information could be well be part of the act. That’s why the characters—both of them—decided to self-destruct, with sex and with rage respectively. Pain is tolerable if it can be told in a story but ambiguity is anti-story and weak people cannot stand it. They have to*

19 Can you trust decade distinctions from people who didn’t live them? You definitely can’t trust decade distinctions from people who did. Impossible, the reliable separation of autobiography from cultural shift. (“When did I realize X? When did they?”)

20 Mark Fisher, *K-Punk*

*find out whether their text message construction of the other is real.*²¹

What is the power of the powerless? I said, I forget that Sol quip but it’s something about how acting cute is the best strategy for self preservation when you can’t win the power game straight. Following Sianne Ngai, the avant-garde, especially avant poetry (*Tender Buttons*, “William Carlos Williams’s plums,” Frank O’Hara), has always been occupied with cute as affect: smallness, domesticity, vulnerability. Cuteness is the “aestheticization of powerlessness,” “what we love because it submits to us”; suffering is the result and signal of this learned helplessness, calling out for the assistance of more powerful agents. «It is only in her suffering that the Young-Girl is lovable.»²² It is also “very very hard to come up with community norms that are kind to people who are struggling but which don’t incentivise continuing to struggle.”²³

In *Black Orpheus*, in front of my eyes, a civil clerk remarks that Eurydice must Orpheus’s fiancée; in other words, he is aware of the myth, as is Orpheus. This knowledge protects their bond, a pre-fatedness that sidesteps the doubtful wobbles of choice like a pre-arranged marriage, like a burden of history. On the screen, Orpheus searches for the passaged Euridice; at last he finds her, a spirit inhabiting an old woman and speaking through her. It’s a proto version of the trope found in *Bladerunner 2049*, *Ex Machina*, Spike-Jonze’s *Her*: a menage-a-trois between two humans and an artificial intelligence (though the humanity of the two and the artificiality of the one are always relative, never abso-

21 H.C., *Shame & Society*

22 Tiqqun

23 queenshulamit.tumblr.com (lost account)

lute²⁴).²⁵

Now she twists the candle wick with her index and thumb, now she blushes at the power of precise movement. Writing as a drug of meaning (engendered by connection) versus writing as a drug of control (engendered by perspective, by aboveness, by distance over closeness). Writing as a self-illusion/means of control versus writing as a way of appearing, making the self visible through realization-in-full: networked parts, collections of interests, likes and dislikes (the bizarre synecdoche of person for taste). But where to find the boundary between expression and flaunting, neutrality and weaponization; can we present ourselves sans marketing? It seems at least admirable, like Nelson, to try, to place accurate representation of being in the world above vanity or optics. We do our best.

∞

Walk into the small barbershop off Broadway for a cut: Paper flowers hanging from the ceiling covered in glitter, in the window a plastic nymph with a gold dress in the wet style, standing on a Corinthian capital. Aquamarine tiles like shimmering light at the bottom of the pool, riot-helmet hair dryers, oval mirrors with baroque frames.

Gold-tiled 'E's for *espejo* above every chair. From the ceiling, plastic foliage: vines, boughs, bunches of grapes. Squared Greek spirals in lime green, violet and orange and in the corner, an artist with a palette dying hair orange and blue.

24 "In the Young-Girl, what is sweetest is also the cruelest, what is most 'natural' is most feigned, what is most 'human' is most machine," i.e. what Ridley Scott was on about.

25 Boyer's "Toward a Provisional Avant-Garde": *It will include both robots and animals, sometimes robot-animal chimeras. There will be other chimeras, too. I recently read that the great question of our time is "Am I machine?" and though I do not know if this really is the great question, no one will mistake herself for a machine who also has a tail.*

Phaedrus, *sympeneim*, Roxy glass clinks opening "Re-make/ Re-model." An "In-Crowd." The Greeks mixing their wine with water, diluting it at different ratios depending on the occasion. Adjusting, adjusting. The sober/drunken dialectic of the classical congress.

X: *LOVE MUSIC THE VOICE OF THE LOVE MORE PURE*. *Everyone is tweeting "AOC for president" which I assumed was typo'd shorthand for Andrea Long Chu but appears to be intentional.* One of the valuable things about having ALC in the discourse is she's one of the few openly talking about the ways progressive circles are still ruled by a deep preference for physical beauty (which is linked to class, which translates to status). «Everybody is buying and selling the stock that you, Young-Girl, have briefly inherited.²⁶ Everyone looks and desires and imitates. If there's nothing else that marks you out as being remarkable, youth does it, since it's a quality that individuates just as much as obscures. To be young is to find oneself, literally and in the abstract, an object of longing.»²⁷ Oh Pothos. Would you trade your god for a girl? "She was in full bloom and I was out of my senses."²⁸ A thousand proxies for value, status, worth, leaked into daily morality, conceptions of mattering, like lead in the water supply.

And don't talk to me about glory: Ajax has a dish soap and an asynchronous data collection approach; Odysseus a car model and doorstep-paperweight in his Roman name. You *can* make an impact—misspell "referrer" with three "r"s in an adequately influential code protocol and thirty years later the OED recognizes the alternate spelling. Expert estimates put the total saved caloric expenditure of the saved keystroke in the hundreds of thousands.

26 cf Fleabag's Kristin Scott Thomas. "The beautiful boy represents a hopeless attempt to separate death from imagination and decay." (Paglia)

27 Philippa Snowe, *3AM Mag*

28 *Testament of Solomon*, 26:5

Listening parasocially to podcasts as the straight-shave descends, the steaming towel opening up pores; comparing the broadcast *likes and dislikes* in the audio to internalizations of its worldview. Ingesting the models of game strategies & worlds. The “compelling performer” has as a “second nature” the paradoxical duality of being both “meticulously obsessed with [his] image” and being “apparently indifferent to what [he] looks like.” Or: “The beautiful boy is cruel in his indifference, remoteness, and serene self-containment... Narcissistic beauty in a postadolescent... may mean malice and ruthlessness, a psychopathic amorality.” Perhaps the boy has grown up with cold & distant parents, come to understand the power of detachment, is unable to enter intimacy or both. He takes on the perpetual status of aloofness; there is a strange mana to his deeply personal ritual practice. He is learning the power of “keeping his eyes in soft focus,” of “not recognizing the reality of other persons or things.”

From the outside looking in, this soft focus is read as glow, the lenses for looking seen as emitting positive light. *People thought my windows were stars.*²⁹ In sending “glamorous Alcibiades [to] burst drunk into the Symposium, ending the ... debate, Plato is commenting in retrospect on the political damage done to Athens by its fascination with beauty.”³⁰

X: *Dasha may venerate Camille but Pagan Beauty’s punchline looks like a beautiful blonde whose cult of personality crops up inside partisanships, a cult of image over theory. Red Scare is effective as disruption, as an alternate set of policy couplings whose instance makes tenable the general principle of decoupling. But their worldview taken as positive ideology conflates the immoral with the homely, the out-of-vogue, and the merely annoying. In other words, status gets mixed up with morality.*

29 Bill Callahan, “Teenage Spaceship”

30 Glamour, like vamp, “originally meant a spell cast by women to entrance men.” (*K-Punk*)

Z: *It was nice to see people being irreverently edgy instead of fidgety and paranoid when talking about any political opinions that aren’t culturally kosher. But I also have an allergy to people who lack the guts or work ethic to self-actualize, and the time just isn’t being put in to keep their quality bar high. You’ve got to continually refill the gas tank or you run out; ‘genius’ is just an input/output function.*

X: *What are the incentives to magnify the subjective drama of a habitus? Actors whose Hollywood histrionics bleed into their political diagnostics; the painting of a dramatic canvas (Freddie Turner?) as the backdrop for life. Romanticism can underly good art, but it’s garbage as a worldview because it is in love with its own sensitivity.*

Alice from Queens: “What’s the Gini co-efficient for Twitter accounts?” What’s the inequality distribution for social status? If this isn’t the problem in front of us now, it will be in front of us soon. Why sympathize with economic losers and not for losers of other games, social & sexual—games equally subject to birthright privilege, capital-hoarding, familial inheritance, and marginalization? Which have equally profound effects on life satisfaction as economic prosperity. Which are more zero-sum meritocratic than capitalism. In which the culturesphere is less meritocratic than the businessworld.

∞

413 Medium shot of Daria in the car, ducking as the plane passes overhead.

414 Shot from right of the car, highway level, then the camera zooms out to an aerial shot.

415 Shot of the plane circling for another pass.

416 Daria in the car. She sees the coming plane and ducks as it again buzzes from the front.

DARIA (laughing): Shit, what the hell was that?

Daria, fascinated and smiling, stops the car and steps out on the side of the road to gaze up at the plane.

417 Long shot of Daria running into the desert to gaze up at the plane. She throws herself on the ground as the plane buzzes her again.

418 Medium shot of Daria standing.

She throws sand at the plane, irritated.

419 Mark, from the rear, in the cab of the plane.

420 Close-up shot, Daria is writing in the sand.

421 Long shot, Daria writing in the sand.

422 Daria writing in the sand.

We see a circle with perhaps spokes on the inside and then two F's. She's written apparently "Fuck off."

423 Mark from behind in the cab of the plane.

He reaches behind his seat and grasps a red shirt.

424 Mark from the side, opening the window and throwing the shirt out the plane.

425 Long shot of the shirt floating down to the ground, Daria running into the desert to get it.³¹

HTTP response code 100: Continue, 101: Switching Protocol, 102: *The server has received and is processing the request, but no response is available yet*, 103: Early Hints. (*This status code is primarily intended to [...] allow the user agent to start preloading resources while the server is still preparing a response.*)³²

31 DARIA: *You don't even have to take the risk of...* MARK: *I wanna take risks.*
Excerpted summary by Juli Kearns, Idyllopus Press.

32 *ibid*

So, no more coffee dates.³³ Do you wanna be my ___? The flattery of the possessive ask, not far off from will you be my ally, or my copilot, or my wingman, or my first lieutenant. This is a bond of absolute trust, a kind of cyborg embedding of the other in you. ‘He is my right arm,’ ‘he is an extension of my embodied self,’ ‘I value him so highly I trust him even with his autonomy, and trust him with a proximity, physical and intimate, from which he could destroy me.’ But the flattery—humming, *It’s not enough*...

∞

*An ancient dictum says that when Zeus wanted to destroy someone, he would first drive them mad.*³⁴ “That night, I don’t sleep. I get up several times to reread her emails. I filter them, examine them, read them as the medieval monks read the Bible. Find grace in deciphering them. *Quis potest fallere amantem?*”³⁵

[Y] I’m sending my Jasper Johns at MoMA / I am a simple / busy man who / (c)(w)ould not want every / every other day / also, to be specific / because a few hours every once & / a while / can be sacrament.

[X] My Man. Mi Hombre. Let us forage for ink in Central Park. / [Y] See you sewn cf. Grizzly Bear you will be my pyramid’s capstone /

Love is a murderer, love is a murderer. But if she calls you tonight,

33 Nor their first impressions, nor at the end of a job interview, “Do you have any questions?” Chief among life’s zemblanities being the separation of measure from ostensibly measured trait, the reliance on crude proxy. We can call it Goodhart’s, call it Campbell’s, at the end of the day the brokenness pervades just the same.

34 Keren Cytter, *A-Z Life Coaching*, 2016

35 Preciado, *Testo Junkie*, 2008. C. Kraus, on reading Hebdige: «February 9, 1995. All yesterday on the train and today I’ve been reading your last book... February 4, 1995. I think that I am your ideal reader—or that the ideal reader is one who is in love with the writer and combs the text for clues about that person and how they think.»

*everything is all right.*³⁶

And discourse is less about disproving; there is no disproving; but about emphasis, which truth is held as signal (primary) and which are held as correctives (qualifying, secondary, anti- to thesis). Discursive framing is managed by discursive trend, truth ://stands as a function not of truth but of power.³⁷

∞

‘Hence,’ he says,’ the name Pothos (longing) is applied to things absent as Himeros (desire) to things present.’⁴ Scopas executed these statues for the Temple of Aphrodite-Praxis, at the foot of the Acropolis of Megara, which contained an archaic image of the Goddess in ivory.³⁸

In the temple of Aphrodite at Megara, there was a sculpture that represented Pothos together with Eros and Himeros which has been credited to Scopas.³⁹

200: OK, 201: Created, 202: Accepted (*The request has been received but not yet acted upon. It is non-committal, meaning that there is no way in HTTP to later send an asynchronous response indicating the outcome of processing the request. It is intended for cases where another process or server handles the request, or for batch processing*⁴⁰), 203: Non-Authoritative Information, 204: No Content, 205: Resent Content, 206: Partial Content, 207 * 208: Multi-Status, 209: IM Used.

:// Acker, Aug 16 1995 to Wark: “So. Regarding het

36 James Murphy

37 Nietzsche

38 Perry, Walter C. Greek and Roman Sculpture. Longmans, Green, 1882. Accessed 20 Dec. 2018.

39 Wikipedia.

40 Mozilla MDN web docs

shit. These games. To me, top/bottom is just stuff that happens in bed. Who fistfucks whom. Outside the bed, I do my work and you do yours. I fucking hate power games outside the bed and have no interest in playing them... Now if you want me to make the decisions, you have to say so. You see, I'm really not into these out-of-bed games. Fucking just tell me what you want and I'll go with it. That's what you do when you do S/m scenes. You discuss rules beforehand. 'Cause otherwise it's all too dangerous and there has to be trust." (Wark as beautiful boy, powerful in his aloofness: "If I appear to be playing any games, it's not deliberate, it's unthinking.")⁴¹

Intimacy, like courtship,⁴² is game-theoretic; I felt constantly as if I were selling you short.

// Everything seems as blunt and eccentric and knowing as an email written at white heat: a mode of address that assumes it'll all be understood—and if not, then fuck you.⁴³

Maneuver X's correlate: *If I give everything I'll lose everything*.⁴⁴ "Imagine two [Byzantine] generals, on opposite sides of a valley that contains their common enemy, attempting to coordinate an attack. Only by perfect synchronization will they succeed; for either to attack alone is suicide. What's worse, any messages from one general to the other must be delivered by hand across the very terrain the enemy occupies, meaning there's a real chance any given message will

never arrive.
 The first general, say, suggests a time for the attack, but won't dare initiate it unless he knows for sure the second unit is moving, too. The second unit's general receives the orders and sends back a confirmation, but won't dare attack himself unless he knows that the first general has received the confirmation (since otherwise the first general will not enter the skirmish). The first general receives the confirmation—but won't attack until he's..."⁴⁵

Pareto improvement: *a reallocation of goods such that at least one member of society is better off without the detriment of another member.*

Sir Philip Sidney game: *a game-theoretic model assessing relative need via sent signals. If parents dole out food to their chicks based on begging, the incentive falls on chicks to overstate their need, to overstate their hunger; good acting edges out the genuinely hungry.*⁴⁶

Nash equilibrium: *a game-theoretic solution where all players have 1) picked a strategy that 2) they would not benefit from altering so long as other opponents' strategies themselves remained unchanged. Only some act synchronization or sacrifice can pull the players until an even more optimal optima.*

lowercase, babytalk, elliding words: "mybe u like" "I come" "where u" "I go to Nars, come w?" I said, is gender's entire high-dimensional social structure encapsulated in capitalization (lowercase=cute & small?) and the exclamation mark? Everywhere in the female text form a prosocial gesture either plastic or generous depending who you ask, while the male SMS affect is flattened, assertive, declarative, neither shouldering the burden of prosociality nor engaging in the Mothering Mode of assuming the interlocutor needs social coddling. (A masculinist belief: you become

⁴⁵ *Algorithms to Live By*

⁴⁶ What happens in an outrage culture to the triage of grievances? What are the natural incentives to get fed?

⁴¹ Acker, to Wark

⁴² Courtship originating from the leisure-play of court members, the field of play taken up by elites with little to lose and hours to while away. Compare today the prevalence of BDSM, polyamory, and cuckoldry-as-fetish in the upper castes: sexual arrangements which require large amounts of cognitive overhead, emotional management, and time to keep stable, allowing the emotional and interpersonal life to become a parttime 'project' of continuous obstacle and reward.

⁴³ Kraus on Acker/Wark

⁴⁴ James Blake

the way you're treated.)

:// emailing sometimes six times a day, the leisurely self-revelation attained through an exchange of tastes and ideas that defines traditional courtship occurs almost instantly. They engage in a gentle-edged play toward intimacy. They discuss movies and TV shows and books, mutual friends, each other's feelings and moods, and sex, both in general and in particular. Wark writes to Acker about Australia's obsession with all things American; she looks at his life in Australia with wistful envy.⁴⁷

Going silent on the other end of the line, artificial abs(tin)ence to create sensation of loss amidst ambiguity's self-doubt. If the other is partner to, of accord as in S/m, this is purely play. If it is not participatory, if it is lopsided...

"This, too, is the anxiety of all packet-switching protocols, indeed of any medium rooted in asynchronous turn-taking—be it letter writing, texting," conversations with strangers on a flight, or "the tentative back-and-forths of online dating. Every message could be the last, and there is often no telling the difference between someone taking their time to respond and someone who has long since ended the conversation."⁴⁸

Courtship as the manipulation of information, the careful navigation of indeterminacy,⁴⁹ the keeping of one's signals exactly legible-illegible.

∞

:// Kant strikingly proposes that in human social living, public and interpersonal demonstrations of a con-

cord between the aesthetic pleasures of different subjects are valued (in part) as examples of the depths to which the correlation between the subjectivities of NAGG and NELL can extend... the idea that a subject's aesthetic pleasures are a strong expression of some deeply basic facts about the way HIS AND her mindS operate." (91)⁵⁰ The hope that pieces of different kindling might build the strongest fire.⁵¹

Pothos: *New York Times* and a Wyoming breakfast of huevos rancheros: is this the definition of fetish? Dragonflies mating in the riverbanks: males white, females blue. Mounted, attached, clinging on; hovering over water, laying eggs. One of the books that really turned me on to nature was Dillard's *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*.

Word encountered in wild: 'teepeeometry,' uttered by a group in the hot springs. Made me wonder are you better at G-ometry, or am I better an Kaackulus? Big Q here. Some takeaways from the Bowie bio: He's definitely a narcissist, and his free love principles in practice look a bit like emotional abuse and manipulation, but maybe it's eras talking, and we're the Puritans. Any chance you have access to the Kathy Acker (tagline "Anything mental is real") interview with Sylvere Lotringer, "Devoured By Myth"? I've been looking everywhere but don't wanna pay for the whole collection it's a part of.

On / 'nother / note Z's learned helplessness is making me a wet fish, floppy and flaccid. To be fair it's an incompetence not out of some inherent incapacity but because of self-doubt and paralyzing worry. & I'm sure I wear on her as well. I won-

50 Grietzer, *Amerikkkkk*

51 cf. *Farscape*, S2E12

47 Acker/Wark, *I'm Very Into You*, Semiotext(e) 2015

48 Qltow 5o Lif3 Gyv pp212

49 *Ebony*, 1979: "Grace Jones is a question mark followed by an exclamation point."

der if a person you like more at the end of traveling together (instead of, inevitably, less) exists.

Either way the result's the same: I think I subscribe to more of a "buck up"/ "be a sport"/ "assert yourself" paradigm than the alternative ("enabled self-victimization"? probably unfair). Competence triggers my libido like nothing else which is probably a factor in the strength of my attraction to you. I used to see someone who had a similar learned helplessness thing going, which was occasionally ++ endearing in a newborn animal kind of way but caused problems elsewhere. I wonder if femme helplessness (what Acker calls googoo) is the inverse face to masc a/antisociality, reliance vs. autonomy. They're both net social negatives that nevertheless get sexually subsidized (and thus propagated).

Anteros: «In languages syntactically derived from B (including C and its various derivatives), the increment operator is written as ++ and the decrement operator is written as --. Several other languages use inc(x) and dec(x) functions. The increment operator increases the value of its operand by 1. The operand must have an arithmetic or pointer data type, and must refer to a modifiable data object. Similarly, the decrement operator decreases the value of its modifiable arithmetic operand by 1. Pointers values are increased (or decreased) by an amount that makes them point to the next (or previous) element adjacent in memory.»

i wonder if learned helplessness can be seen as equivalent to refusing to look. the way to diagnose a problem is look at it closely, use your senses. You

sniff out an odor, track down its source. you suppress your disgust reaction, suppress the voice that wonders, "what if the answer isn't what I want it to be." Eventually you do this so many times you shed the uncertainty or fear or self-doubt (these are the same thing?) that held you back in the first place. you build a toolkit of approaches to reuse or combine, but you get there in the first place by not looking away.

and i'm thinking about what X said to me, "The disease that makes us afraid to look is called vertigo. the disease has three symptoms. the first is anxiety, says kierkegaard, the dizziness of freedom, a tachycardic head rush that whirlpools us into itself obviates all lesser emotions."

Pothos: MESA GRANDE, I HEARD YOUR SIRENS FROM 2000 MILES AWAY

MESA GRANDE, I TOOK A TRAIN TO A TRAIN TO A TRAIN TO A SHUTTLE TO A PLANE TO A SHUTTLE TO A CAR TO SEE YOU

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hTGJfR-PLe08>

I know you like small things, intimate things (a rearranged letter, a punned word, a whis[p][k]er, a subtle subtext), things that are in the realm of the domestic wo/man, and I can see the value in that but I think what I want is big things, things that transcend humans, that are better & greater than us. The track feels a little like transcendence, it makes me feel small with its immensity, it reminds me how we're changing as a species, how one day

not far from now we'll leave this place and our bodies with it.

Anteros: I feel hear see. After all, i came to care about art through j.l. david, the death of marat is something that I feel in my body and I am still in love with the sublime. But i'm not sure i believe in revolutions anymore or unity even, which is to say that perhaps if they existed they could be powerful things, but that the very premise of these feelings is something that happens looking backwards or from outside, that before the fiction of history is written, transcendence is felt in moving coulds and touches, in visions and revisions that will only have been meaningful when...

there is a pleasure in feeling your own smallness. is that maybe your love for Malick? the feeling of being a moment in a moving endless thing? some thought on correspondance perhaps, on purposefully putting yourself in relation to.

i am curious to hear more about myself in relation to the domestic; perhaps you will object, but these impulses that you write are what have suggested your particular, iconic [redacted].

all for now, a sentence: 'If I rest my hand on your thigh like this the sound might be so big that you run away.'

Pothos: We went to a diner off Interstate 17 and you could see the eighteen-wheelers on the highway through the window at the booth. I watched *Hard Eight* Friday and was bashing it internally for the opening diner scene, too fetisly I thought,

and yet here we were.⁵² Do you have a genre of restaurant you'd save in a fire? To be clear, by learned helplessness I mean that particular kind of conditioned self-doubt, to the point of incapacity, that forces others to bear your responsibilities and load. A lack of conviction in a person as to their fundamental ability to ameliorate a situation for themselves. I don't know you at all in so many ways, it's only a sliver, but it's never felt like this pathology made a home in your thinking. The result of learned helplessness is asymmetry, helper and helped, adult and child, less than ideal for a fellow traveler literal figurative or otherwise (not imperative they're symmetrical but at least a ying and a yang occupying equal space). The sedimentary mesas out here are incredible archives, with change-over-time visible at all scales. Legibility at every level of zoom: colored layers distinguishable from hundreds of yards removed; the minutiae of the fossil record buried within each layer. After breakfast, petrified forest: the wood gets buried in silt, and the organic matter is slowly replaced by mineral deposits until it becomes rock (a change in material, but not in form). Which makes it sorta like the metaphor of the Argo.

Interesting you mention Malick. I see the domestic in *TTW* and *STS* but *DoH* and *ToL* seem all about the sublime: the implication of our own cycles, of love and birth and death, in the large-

52 From a GDocs folder I keep to write down thoughts on films: One of the issues w/ *Hard Eight*, and a give-away it's PTA's first, is how much it relies on trod, saturated vibes to create interest: cigarettes and coffee, long drags during close-ups, a highway-side diner and brown vinyl booths. Eighteen-wheelers pass in the backdrop. Relying on a well-trod vibe vs. generating new ones (or just evolving old ones in big ways) seems like a distinguisher between good & great art.

er seasonal and geologic cycles, a billion-year-old drama of creation and destruction, crystallization and dissolution. Speaking of D. Ward, I see the Lerner comparison, but the difference to me is Lerner is always so successfully lucid, he manages to get everything across, his expertise with language is shown through the instrumental ability to evoke meaning to an audience. I guess I'm coming across naive. Maybe I'm not reading Dana slowly enough, or the problem lies in not rereading it more than once, but I wonder if he's able to get everything in his head across as well, whether a lot of the time it's only legible/doing work in his own head. (Alternative?) This all said: I still love "Bas Jan Ader," and I liked a lotta parts of "Typing Wild Speech," except Geoff; I just can't valorize actively antisocial—as opposed to passively asocial—behavior. Kerouac's another example of romanticized sociopathy,⁵³ so it wasn't totally a surprise to see *This Can't Be Life's* acknowledgments page.) Push back on any of this.

Developed intimacy as enough played turns to realize the other person won't flip on you, will be forgiving when you defect (prisoner's dilemma)—or else appear to. And isn't every love story Orphean? The faith enables the trust en-

ables the love; without the faith the bond is broken, the other disappears?

How many connections are precluded by misunderstandings which cannot be identified, let alone conveyed? In which forgiveness, generosity, the benefit of doubt is not at the ready? Which is to say, perhaps there is something true, and not just infuriating, about the rom-com trope where episodic drama is fueled by conflicts easily cleared up through clear words or minor confessions. We scream at the television, *talk to them, explain your position* to no avail; we are looking from above, down on the tide pool, the maneuverings of hermit crabs into destruction. What looks obvious to us is invisible from their vantage.

∞

Watch Herakles overcome the tainting of, the disgust towards, his weaponry. Unable to transition after decades of war, the many labors of his Lot, he has been seized by madness, slaughtered his own house.⁵⁴ The practical realities overcome the symbolic, pragmatism again.

O bitter weapons. My partners.

Should I take you with me or leave you behind?

53 (And you said: Can't you see, though, that like Ayn Rand's works, there's a personality type that could gain from reading *On The Road*? Maybe you are already sufficiently decadent, maybe you've lived in a commune and practiced free love and experimented with drugs or whatever, but someone who is a total square might read the book and say "wow, there is more to life than two hours of commute, eight hours of work, four hours of TV and a couple hours of miscellaneous per day, and I should check it out." I think a lot of people who liked *On The Road* were stuck unquestioningly in life scripts that weren't working for them, and either got shook out of their ruts or at least thought it was nice to fantasize that they could, in principle, get shook out of them. [blog comment December 2, 2014 at 4:06 am])

54 Herakles suffers because he cannot switch gears, cannot partition himself (compartmentalization), brings it all home with him. The Euripides play is classic war narrative, a hitch in the end of the Campbellian myth cycle, the same archetype that undergirds *Zabriskie Point*, *The Hurt Locker*, John Crichton, Bill Callahan's "Riding With A Feeling" (*a preacher... or some kind of performer... who cannot stop performing when he comes home*). Its truth is played out in the oversized domestic violence rates among police officers, ex-soldiers. The home they left to fight for ceases to have meaning for them as home; the fighting can only then be autotelic. There is no going back, which makes looking solely counterproductive. [h/t/ Anteros, in discourse]

Knocking against my ribs you will always be saying,

“This is how you slew your wife and sons,

we are your childkillers.”

Can I bear that?

Can I answer?

But without them

won’t I die in shame at my enemies’ hands—

naked, nobody?

I cannot leave them.

However grotesque it is,

I must keep my weapons.⁵⁵

You and I, beginning to move from finite game to infinite; the tools and abilities of success in one do not equal those of the other.

∞

I called you, you called me, *It was Salome who named him Rainier.*

“Emotional labourers untie!,” on your windowsill a ceramic egg carton, glazed and disintegrating, *falling to pieces.*

I said, cop, *n.*, someone who enforces rules deontologically instead of consequentially.

The reciprocal desire is familiar and yet unfamiliar.

Mother sat down,/

And you know she told me,/

If he can overcome you, all he’s gonna do is use you,/

But my answer to all that use-me stuff, oh baby—/

Now I’m gonna spread the new(s)./

That if it feels this good gettin’ used/

Keep on using me ‘til you’ve used me up/.⁵⁶

Filling, saturated, utilizing. “I am sent halfway across the world in a cardboard box with a lot of postage on it. The journey is long and rough and invariably involves much jostling by camels. When I arrive, a tribe of men opens the box under a hot desert sun, and out spills my small body. They are all eager to touch it.”^{57,58} Yes, the exoticism, but listen closely now, pick out the signal from the psycho-babble, and you’ll hear a selfhood which desperately holds itself together, which revels in *falling apart*.⁵⁹ Shelley Orgel: «To acknowledge a wish, for a “good” session, an orgasm, to finish a book, to complete a job, to eat a big meal, meant she had lost control over intake, or had given up such control to an object’s “whims.” The displacement of her infantile omnipotence to her parental object representations was interpreted as a “fatal” move. She had to maintain a fantasy of inexhaustible oral supplies within her, potentially

56 Grace Jones, “Use Me”

57 Nelson, *Bluets*

58 “Just like movies and S/m, alien abduction occurs within a kind of five-act structure. The victim is kidnapped from the safety of her home or neighborhood. She struggles uselessly until she’s drugged, and then unspeakable experiments are performed on her body. Her identity and will break down. Finally, after withstanding all this torture, she is awarded an audience with the Alien-in-charge.” (Kraus, *A&A*)

59 *To hunt and desire are extensions of one and the same process.*

55 Euripedes, *Herakles*, trans. Anne Carson

available but never to be touched. She had to feel she could wait indefinitely, The moment of arrival, for instance, at my office was equivalent to acknowledging “hunger” for the analyst. She had to demonstrate, by putting off this moment, by an absolute lack of interest in the time of arrival or anticipation of the session in the preceding minutes that she was not at all hungry for anything I could give her.»⁶⁰

To need nothing. To have nothing you can’t live without. And yet want to be needed all the same. The economy of desire is slowly becoming clear, an image fixed from an un-neutered air.

∞

Also Orgel, on the same patient: «The day after discussing the dream, the patient masturbated for the first time since the start of analysis, almost two years before. She had a fantasy that a man had lured her into an apartment and attempted to make love to her. He kept saying over and over, “I need you,” and she responded casually, “You can’t have me,” to each request. Finally she yielded as she had an orgasm.»

Even Cowgirls Get The Blues: a cowgirl instructs her female lover to put two fingers in her vagina, then dab it behind the ears as a perfume. Jodorowsky’s *El Topo*: Topo’s lover Mara is presented with a hand mirror as a gift. Through the mirror she becomes aroused with a “strong self-love,” which ends with her making love, perhaps for the first time. As the Topo takes her in the desert dunes she watches herself in its surface.

Nymphomaniac Part II: protagonist Joe has been ordered by her employer, after hitting on all the men in the office, to attend group therapy for sex addiction. There, the super-

vising therapist recommends Joe remove all triggers in her life that make her think of sex. She removes the mirror in her hallway, spraypaints over the full-sized in her bedroom.

∞

Diana Ross’s *Upside Down* and *Coming Out*, Donna Summer’s *Hot Stuff*, ABBA’s *One Of Us*, Rihanna’s *Man Down*, Jungle’s *Lucky I Got What I Want*, Blood Orange’s *You’re Not Good Enough*, DJ Koze’s *Pick Up*, John Lennon’s *Gimme Some Truth*, BODEGA’s *Jack in Titanic* and *Truth Is Not Punishment*. Heat rising from gravel; attempting to establish a *captatio benevolentiae* with you.

Some people are cats, some people are dogs. *There Will Be Blood*’s Daniel Plainview is a dog, following Grietzer. *Farscape*’s Crichton is a dog; the closed-captioning literally has him barking. But if you cut out violence vs. protectiveness (x-axis) you’re left with an y-scale running from *slavishly eager to please* on one end and *unlovably needy* on the other. Giving and getting, an existence predicated on approval, which in turn forfeits freedom: gives rise to the master, the owner. But we know by now: freedom and belonging are opposed values requiring trade-off. Cats have no owner, their life-logic is internal, autonomous, pursuing personal desire. Their spectrum ranges from *cruelty born of indifference* to *benevolent self-sufficiency*. And while cats’ interiority may originate in a lack of concern for others, the effect of their aloofness becomes graceful desirability: “Come no closer. I can never be known.”⁶¹

With cats you squat down a meter or two away, extend a hand, giving them space, letting them come to you. “I will be here,” you say. “If you want, you can join me.” You let them sniff your fingers, get accustomed to your scent.⁶²

61 C.P., “The Birth of the Western Eye”

62 Can we understand the difference btwn pressure and no pressure?

Anteros is a cat when shy and a dog when comfortable. Some days I call her Catty Acker for fun. (“The web of references and jokes and ideas evolving in the present.”⁶³) If Anteros & I were to visit a castle in Europe, she would gaze at the gossamers in the corner while I read the plaques on military tactics. I am content; she is form.

She sends correspondence art; I send correspondence. I love that which is beautiful because it attempts perfection and inevitably fails; she seeks the flaws, the delicately misshapen. *The artworld is an island of misfit toys*, she tells me. “A stain is a tattoo, a love mark,” she says on mushrooms, hand-printing berry juice on my white sweater.⁶⁴

∞

OK, so I’m Henry, and you’re June / Cannibalistic texting presence consuming your words’ calories. / You’re Anaïs and I’m Hugo.

Tall grass, blonde boy: when he looks elsewhere,

he looks at the sea.

excusing brushed hands;

I was looking for the word girl,

I was looking for the word girl,

I was looking for how to find the

middle of a negative space

Girls S5E3, “Land of the Rising Sun.”

63 Elvia Wilk, *Oval* (2019)

64 The bruise is an impress, at once terrible and a validating marker: *that its wearer arouses violent feeling*

You are telling me, fingers/throat in the

dark / park like *Blow Up*—

I walked these paths the last time I thought I couldn’t sleep,

and then I leapt to you with the iris,

glad to find no fence-line or borders

rather shore.

What about *Silmarillion*?

What about slivers on the ?

Y: *Theory of basicness (i.e. the beige) as being about positioning and awareness more than anything inherent in the stance. Basicness as a reaction to the territory that doesn’t incorporate previous reactions to the territory, or that doesn’t treat reactions to the territory as part of the territory, or equally worthy of factoring. When we say something is “basic,” is “beige,” is tired, what are we saying but that a possibility space in the set of cultural choices has become exhausted, is oversaturated or over-attended? Those of us with resources to play, flee.*

—S/mDH.

—Muah!

∞

Hotel Concierge's "Shame & Society"⁶⁵ has the umbrella take, but for a single graf from Roupenian's "Cat Person" (C.P.): «As they kissed, she found herself carried away by a fantasy of such pure ego that she could hardly admit even to herself that she was having it. Look at this beautiful girl, she imagined him thinking. She's so perfect, her body is perfect, everything about her is perfect, she's only twenty years old, her skin is flawless, I want her so badly, I want her more than I've ever wanted anyone else, I want her so bad I might die. The more she imagined his arousal, the more turned-on she got, and soon they were rocking against each other, getting into a rhythm...»⁶⁶ This is not my writing; these are self-barrings of the soul.

This is how one end of sexual desire's many spectrums becomes self-reflexivity, the desire not *for* the other but *of* the other's attention. (Second-order.) It exists in relation to the other's positive desire. *The Young-Girl is fascinating in the manner of all things that exhibit a closing-in-on-themselves, a mechanical self-sufficiency or an indifference to the observer, like the insect, the infant, the automaton, or Foucault's pendulum.*⁶⁷

Like the "good-object," the other is not a person but a complex set of stimuli enacted upon the self; "others happen to me." No one likes to honestly self-evaluate, but there's an unpatrolled border between empathy and sympathy, caring

65 "Did we believe in the 'truth and freedom' of sex? Certainly we were attracted to scandal and shame, where there is so much information." [R.G. "The New Narrative"]

66 Annie Baker, *The Flick*:

Rose: When I like fantasize I just like, think about myself.

Avery: Really?

Rose: Yeah. Like everyone else is blurry except for me. I'm like totally in focus. And I like look amazing. And everyone is like: holy shit. That girl looks so amazing... It's really embarrassing.

67 Tiquun

and pity, genuine emotional labor ("I worked to spare his feelings") and delusions of grandeur ("I took pity on him. I had just destroyed his life. Nobody knew his secret, most probably not even himself. He sat there with the shame. I suppose I sucked him off as a kind of apology."⁶⁸). This is the line *Nymphomaniac* plays for erotic thrill, the boundary between actual, raw female sexual power on display and the self-loathing vanity which distorts its relay. (The film's other border-of-dispute: the line where women's sexual power ends and their larger cultural vulnerability begins; see Joe, lying bruised & bleeding in the snow, near the film's conclusion.) Discounting based on the gender of its director gets us nowhere, given the resonance with gendered viewers.

This camp knows no better, cannot judge off-hand. But transferred onto Patrick Bateman in *American Psycho*, mirror-staring during sex is played for laughs, a way of signifying Bateman's terminal self-absorption. Zizek borders on normativity: «While a man cheats his feminine partner with another real woman, a woman can cheat a man even if she makes love only with him, since her pleasure is never fully contained in enjoying him?»⁶⁹ Could it be even Tavi Gevinson knew better at 20 than to fetishize self-desire, citing Tiquun's Ariana Reines-translated *Theory of the Young-Girl* in her *Infinity Diaries*? "The Young-Girl does not love, she loves herself loving." In Gevinson's version the emphasis is on the youngness of the young girl, the way she will one day grow out of it.

∞

This is what it means to be an object, the cedings and reversals of aging incredible in scope and silence. Eve Babitz's car-wreck immolation is a literalization of the process. T.

68 von Trier

69 Abercrombie & Fitch, *School's Out*

Williams, *Streetcar*. BLANCE: Hey! [*He turns back shyly. She puts a cigarette in a long holder*] Could you give me a light? [*She crosses toward him. They meet at the door between the two rooms.*] YOUNG MAN: Sure. [*He takes out a lighter.*] This doesn't always work. BLANCHE: It's temperamental? [*It flares.*] Ah!—thank you. [*He starts away again.*] Hey! [*He turns again, still more uncertainly. She goes close to him*] Uh—what time is it? [...] You make my mouth water. [*She touches his cheek lightly, and smiles. Then she goes to the trunk.*] YOUNG MAN: Well, I'd better be going—BLANCHE [*stopping him*]: Young man! [...] Come here. I want to kiss you, just once, softly and sweetly on your mouth.

I was in shorts, a T-shirt, and sandals. I looked down at my shirt. It was from a sushi restaurant in my home town, but if you just glanced at it you might think it was racist, because of the fake Asian lettering I imagined thousands of viewers waiting for this racist girl to get herself off. I quickly undressed and made a scissors gesture to the camera to indicate that this first part, the part with the racist shirt, should be cut. [...]

My face wasn't anywhere you could see it unless you entered a credit-card number and clicked past dozens of professionals—"college beauties," "hot Korean girl," and so on. But a few people made it through the gauntlet. The first time I was recognized was at a healthy-Mexican restaurant; a pale man in gym clothes stared at me for a long time before making a scissors gesture in the air. It was electrifying, as if all my clothes had fallen off at once. I looked away but there was no denying our intimacy; he'd come while watching me. The next one was a father with his family; he scissored his fingers down low, surreptitiously. The last was a butch lesbian teen-ager; she just walked right up to me and asked. Each time, I'd hurry home and enter my credit-card number, clicking quickly past the college beauties and the hot Korean girl. Though I'd felt nothing at the time, seeing myself through these people's eyes was profound and overwhelming.⁷⁰

70 Miranda July, "The Metal Bowl," *The New Yorker*, 2017. The plea-

One need only look at the narrator's tone later on, telling her story: self-hatred. She speaks of repaying her husband's "life-saving understanding" with ingratitude. She describes her crush on a neighbor as figurative infidelity, a thrusting inside her, a willingness to open for another. She speaks of the daily pettinesses that must be daily fought, which strip us of perspective: «I held my breath, waiting for him to come on the new sheet. I'd have to wash it again. Who cares? I do. Just a little. Just enough to ruin each day.» At first you haven't learned the mess the fun leaves behind, you live in the present. Slowly you learn, slowly the memories wear. You grow tired of cleaning, the highs no longer seem worth the work propulsion requires, the preparation and the fuel and the aftermath. But if you are lucky, and very patient, and your eyes are widely open, you may realize that the flatness you have entered is an even greater trap than work, that the prioritization of ease leads only to ennui. When nothing is worth working for, nothing is worth working for, a tautology sometimes referred to as meaninglessness. You build a society that values lifestyles of freedom over lifestyles of debt; you gain time, you lose meaning.⁷¹ The only option is shackling yourself, but the comparative historical upside is you can choose your master and negotiate terms. Bondage with consent.

Visiting my friend W's Upper West Side studio one-bedroom. The shelves are lined with nude Sonny Angels, couch home to knitting needles and yarn, overalls hanging in the closet, pigtail hair ties resting on the lounge table, a rose gold Mac, a medicine cabinet with every shade of

sure of sending a familiar text to another: being able to read it as if new, through the projection of their mind, their voice, cadence, reaction.

71 Mollie Pyne gets it exactly wrong, writing about *Great Expectations*: Acker isn't caught in a web desiring freedom. She is agonizingly free and constantly seeking entanglement, her life story is forged through hunting down the narratives and friction and meaning that come from involvement with others.

lipgloss from coral to crimson. Old-school toilet flush, line drawings on the walls. She's speaking of her gender, telling me about a gay party themed after oughts-pop she'd been at the evening previous: *the change in me is the metamorphosis of an era*.⁷² She explains: «Later that night, I wandered into a psychic on 7th avenue, placed my hands on a crystal ball, and recorded our session into my phone: "You have very stressed, negative energy...You have recently gained more independence...There has been a major change in your character...*You have had a past life*."»⁷³

∞

*In his polemic No Future, Lee Edelman argues that "queerness names the side of those not 'fighting for the children,' the side outside the consensus by which all politics confirms the absolute value of reproductive futurism." Or, to use a queer artist friend's more succinct slogan, Don't produce and don't reproduce.*⁷⁴ I said, are anti-natalists queer? Is Perry's *Every Cradle a Grave* a queer text? An investigation!

My mother, who in the Seventies lived in vegan co-ops at UCSB, who abstained from shaving armpits in dissent, says, "But then I had boys."

Social worry scales according to 1) believed impact of the action on the other and 2) personal predisposal toward anxious states. The two multipliers are easily confused for one another come self-reflection time. How much of the first reflects the vanity of perceived effect, the self's gravitational pull on its surroundings, a state of emotional dependence, upstream of these wanna-be mothers? When do you step in on someone's behalf, violate autonomy, help without permission?

72 Preciado, *Testo Junkie*

73 Tavi G., *Infinity Diaries*

74 Nelson, *Argonauts*

The most extreme form is the Penn Badgley stalker in *100*: he does in fact save love interest Beck's life; she is, in fact, adrift. But his care for her is—it embodies the old cliché about (s)mothering. Joe fashions himself as protector, from his love interest to his first edition books: "It's paper, cloth, leather, paste. It's all vulnerable, all sensitive to light, humidity, temperature. That's why they need to be in here. To protect them." He's referring to the temperature-controlled storage unit, deep in the bookshop's basement, where rare books are kept. (Rare, which is to say remarkable.) Later, he'll use the unit to hold a kidnapped ex-boyfriend of Beck's, an image whose richness comes from the conceptual overlap between protection and suppression, safety and imprisonment. Caring for and stripping autonomy from. (The other mapping: *in which being desired and being hunted are shown to be not just parallel but equivalent states*.⁷⁵) We already know how it all ends. "I did it for you, Beck. All of it." Her, horrified & bewildered: "I never asked you to."

You send a photo over text and the other interprets it—turn to intent & its correspondence with choices made—subject matter but also framing, what has been included and what's left out. Is the image up-close, cropped grafts or sentences of a book, focused on an idea, a construction, a phrase? Or is it less cropped, shot further out, showing the edges of the pages, the thumb holding down paper, the stained wood of the table underneath (emphasizing the act of reading, a part standing in for the whole)? Your choices are influenced by your model of this interpretation by the other, an estimation of how features may reflect intentionalities accurate or not, an implicit understanding that creative decisions can be understood as clues to some underlying belief or message.⁷⁶ What signals are transmitted, what possible sublimations could a text contain (or be understood to)?

75 ophelia-thinks.tumblr.com

76 Straussian reading

“The Young-Girl never creates anything. All in all, she only recreates herself.” Which is true if you ignore the pejorative tone: iconographies and totems are all we ever wanted, from the most glam (Elvis, Bowie, Ferry, J.T., the Cupid/Psyche Bieber) to the least (Curtis, Cobain, Rollins, Lennon) and everyone between (Springsteen, Reed, Jagger). To draw in around the self a constellation of others. That there could be an inarticulable kinship, an emergent property greater than its parts which following Grietzer we call *vibe*.

Tavi Gevinson’s *Infinity Diaries*: «I was an avid re-watcher, re-listener, re-reader, and re-wearer of all the things I knew I liked. It wasn’t the forms themselves which fascinated me, but the worlds of these individual works that I took such comfort in getting to visit again and again, being reunited with my favorite people, anticipating all my favorite details. In *Camera Lucida*, Barthes defines a punctum in a photograph as “that accident which pricks, bruises me.” Applied to other mediums, as well: The facial tic that makes a character a person and not an actor in costume. A sound so apt that its origin becomes unknown, like it was never the work of an instrument in a studio. I made a charm bracelet of them all, spent so many days after school establishing the solar system of these worlds: cataloging a punctum’s appearance across various works, styling self-portraits that wrote me into them... Through every aesthetic choice, article of clothing, song on my headphones, I was negotiating whether to return home to an Other world I’d already built, or to see if another home awaited me out in the abyss, in the uncharted territory of records I hadn’t heard or clothes I hadn’t inhabited...»

There are rare vibes and common vibes, saturated vibes and subtle ones. Vibe-driven artmaking often gets mistaken for symbolism-driven artmaking; “I was interested in

creating a mood,” the disgraced Polanski tells an inquiring *Playboy*. “After the film came out, a lot of critics found all sorts of symbols and hidden meanings in it that I hadn’t even thought of.” Vibe-based practice is ubiquitous, elemental: see moodboarding, starter packs, visual art, gallery curation, wardrobe choice, playlist-building, Tan Lin, Alec Mapes-Frances. They say Beckett’s *Godot* was inspired by a painting.

I’m listening over the airwaves as Maggie Nelson gets on her knees to pick up toys: constructor sets, dolls, getting the house “neat enough to work.” It’s mainly the 5y/o, mornings like this—*will one day be missed*—will hopefully last not much longer. She doesn’t talk about what she’ll write next; “too suspicious,” wary of giving the wrong from to the currently shapeless (“it kills it every time”). Paul tells her Koestenbaum was the first person he met when he moved to the States; their first conversation was on Barthes. Grad school? she asks.

He asks about her “organized webs of obsession.” “To me, just as self-experience, I don’t usually think of it so much as a psychological phenomenon, like a compulsion, so much as a visual issue like, a lens, you know, whereby, like, if you’re writing something or researching something you put on that welding mask that colors the world in that particular... You’re rinsing something in a particular lens you’re seeing the world in... a lens you choose to wear for a while in an ecstatic way.

∞

Showing parents around the city. “No, no thank you though. Really, I’m really happy here. I’m sure, I’m very comfortable. Thank you.”⁷⁷ // “Okay but I really think you should ask them to change it.” “I’m alright, it’s not

a big deal.” “Are you sure? Because it’d be super easy.” “Positive.” “You know what, I’m heading to the restroom anyway, I’ll just mention it when I pass the kitchen.” “No, seriously. I would rather the Swiss. It’s grown on me now that I’ve ordered it. It’s what I want. Okay? I swear.” Is it as tiring to you, dear reader? *You assert your autonomy even at high cost, because people learn.*

Trying for naïveté on the fourth “you look healthy,” the fifth “we never get to see you,” the sixth dinner on them, a script of thanks against a burden of history, a phenomenology of repetition.

Advice, troubleshooting, interventions on behalfs. The undercutting of autonomy, a low confidence in the other’s ability to make decisions and realize preferences for themselves relative to the self-confidence of the intervening party. Like Perennial Bright-Eyes, it’s human behavior, not gendered in the abstract but only in instantiation, its forms. Perhaps a gift is given; gratitude is owed in return, a debt a chaining an obligation which exists in social reality now. Why is the pattern “*I sacrificed so much for you*”; “*I didn’t ask you to*” so charged & hopeless? What does the self-sacrificer want? To have been made useful, which is to say of value (which is to say validated)? To have won the other in prize, a trading in of self for the possession of the other?⁷⁸

∞

X: *On one hand gift-giving is an old trick of the tribal chieftains and traveling salesmen, a way to generate feelings of indebtedness even if the gift wasn’t desired or asked for, even if the gift lacks any value to the recipient. On the other hand, mutual manipulations of reciprocal gift-giving is the baserock infrastructure of peace, of tight-knit commu-*

78 The quote is passed around, attributionless, source obscured by time and virality, by young women. *One day, somebody you sacrificed so much for will turn around and say they never asked for it, and it will hurt because they will be right.*

*nity, of tribal intimacy. Alliances lead to long peaces and world wars alike. Who’s to say whose high-level strategy sums up to optimal? Might there be both a sacrifice of freedom and a gain in connection?*⁷⁹

Fraiman would say, *Within this structure of feeling, the feminine is maternalized and hopelessly linked to stasis, tedium, constraint, even domination. Typed as “mothers,” women become inextricable from a rigid domesticity that bad boys are pledged to resist and overcome.*⁸⁰ But the data doesn’t point in one direction, it’s only being interpreted that way: rule-breaking vs. rule-cautiousness could also be a (socialized?) (evolved?) behavioral split, which merely manifests as the transgressive & deviant escaping anyone who harshes mallow, damps the high, ruins rule-breaking with reminders of the risks. Cops, mothers, governments, academies that divide fields and teach to the genre. *A posture of flamboyant unconventionality*, Fraiman describes the cool, which is a good reminder that edgy queers stay away from vanilla straights the same way Pynchon-era pot-smokers kept away from vanilla ‘straights.’ (The inverse Modern Lovers.) No bones about it, Fraiman is a cop, tattling on those who don’t share her Boyer-style vision of a sentimental avant-garde less interested in innovation, in breaking things generatively, than in following rules, ‘soft touching,’ an emphasis on what is shared rather than on what is different. *The kinds of tolerances that resemble intolerance.*

Perhaps it is gendered. Modes of commitment versus modes of freedom. (It all goes back to) Ross Douhat praising *Girls* (Maq. I, L. V, 25-26):⁸¹

79 The warning: when the benefit of the gift to recipient is less than the cost to the giver, a culture of self-sacrifice leaves all its members poorer. Is the difference between good and bad gift-giving as simple as net gain, the reallocation of goods, the specialization of labor? One is a smart exchange (*this is of more use to you than me*) which leaves everyone better; the other is a self-destructive dissolution done in others’ name.

80 Fraiman, *Cool Men and the Second Sex* (Columbia University Press)

81 «The typical prestige drama, from “The Sopranos” onward, has been a portrait of patriarchy in extremis, featuring embattled male an-

«Like most television shows about young urbanites making their way in the world, *Girls* is a depiction of a culture whose controlling philosophy is what the late Robert Bellah called “*expressive individualism*”—the view that the key to the good life lies almost exclusively in self-discovery, self-actualization, the cultivation of the unique and holy *You*.» It portrays Brooklyn as a «collision of narcissists educated mostly in self-love, a sexual landscape distinguished by serial humiliations—a realm at once manic and medicated, privileged and bereft of higher purpose.»⁸² Finally, «adulthood did await for Dunham’s character, Hannah Horvath, at the show’s conclusion. But the form it took was almost too heavy-handed in its traditionalist definition of a woman’s growing-up: an unplanned pregnancy, a baby, the absolute obligations of motherhood trumping the trivialities of freedom.»⁸³ Bernini’s *Apollo & Daphne* in reverse. Who chased whom where? Who followed suit then second-guessed?

*Maybe long ago things were too/ Too solid, and now we live in an ether / Of ex-sentiments, impossible to make sense of except for wet Panties, something that even / In hindsight might never / Consolidate into a real emotion.*⁸⁴ (As if our sentiments were ever felt clearly.)

∞

BLOG ENTRY//

SEPT 10//

S1E1

Penn Badgley as Joe Goldberg in the pilot for *You*, adaptation of the Caroline Kepne book. Beck has just entered the tiheroes struggling to maintain their authority in a changing world or a collapsing culture. [...] Again and again the viewer watched a male protagonist trying to be a breadwinner, paterfamilias, a protector and savior, a Leader of Men; again and again these attempts were presented as dangerously alluring, corrupting, untimely and foredoomed. [...] On “Girls,” though, something very different was going on. The fall of patriarchy had basically happened, the world had irrevocably changed ... and nobody knew what to do next.»

⁸² Douthat, “I Love Lena,” 2014

⁸³ Douthat, “A Requiem For Girls,” 2017

⁸⁴ Reines, *Coeur de Lion*

bookshoppe where Goldberg works as manager. «Well, hello there. Who are you? Based on your vibe, a student. Your blouse is loose, you’re not here to be ogled but those bracelets, they jangle. You like a little attention. Okay, I bite. You search the books, Fiction F-K. Now, you’re not the standard insecure nymph hunting for Faulkner you’ll never finish. Too sunkissed for Stephen King.» She approaches Goldberg, asking where she can find the new Paula Fox, just as another customer enters the store. Now Goldberg does the bit for her instead of us: “You see this guy? Here, the glasses, behind you. He just grabbed Dan Brown’s latest on the way in, so he’s gonna wander around for like another five, or ten minutes just to find something legitimate to buy with it.” (When Glasses rings up he has *Franny and Zooey* in hand.)

The worthiness of the prey is proven by the pursuit of the hunter: his perseverance, his skill; the sweat which drips down his brow and the length he hides watching in the bushes. Kristen Roupenian’s debut collection, which fetched \$1.2million at record auction, is titled *You Know You Want This*. Goldberg asks Beck out.

“I’m an old fashioned guy,” Joe tells Beck on their first date—“I like real life.” The tired, luddite condescension is a sick burn (informal; a *particularly cutting insult*) against boomers, and the self-hating millennials who echo them to signal authenticity. Joe gets an outside view of himself when she tells him, “Starting to think I’m some kind of magnet for dudes with, like, serious issues”—but chooses to ignore it. Cut the nostalgia, remember what *old-fashioned* entails in the sexual-romantic sphere.

BLOG ENTRY // SEPT 25 // S1E3

Beck’s chatting with best friend Peach Salinger—of the J.D. family, heir to hypochondria and prone to fits of mysterious bad health to win Beck’s attention—Beck’s chatting with

best friend Peach about Blythe, a fellow student in her MFA program played by Hari Nef. “Blythe’s amazing. She wrote this piece about how she & her mother got bulimia together while in Italy and she was 12.” Peach is more skeptical, protective; love is a zero-sum game to her, which means she’s in competition with anyone Beck finds interesting. “Chic,” she answers

After fellow MFA’er Yuri soul-bares for 500 words, Nef-as-Blythe calls him out. “I just wasn’t fully invested.” Professor Mott chimes in. “How do we maintain the reader’s attention? We infuse the universal with painful specificity.” Blythe: “Exactly. My worst fear, and I’m not commenting on Yuri’s poem *per se*, is not to be bad but unremarkable”—strategies of personality merging with strategies of writing. Later, Beck will ask Joe whether she herself is unremarkable. The answer is *yes* but she’s terrified of it, and it’s exactly her terror of banality which makes her banal.⁸⁵ Those further from center are more preoccupied with the question of connecting back despite their otherness than exacerbating it for vanity.

It’s all so easy for Joe: all he has to do is say “no,” which he does, which leads to sex, self-validation building on itself (“moreish,” in research chemical terms, describing drugs which, while on them, instil a desire to compulsively redose). Peach SMS-interrupts their oxytocin session with her rare, possibly psychosomatic medical problem; the lovemaking’s only allowed to resume when Peach decides to to Callahan’s Indochine instead of the hospital. (“It’s her comfort food,” Beck explains.)

Beck is flanked on both sides by commanding presences attempting to steer her lifecourse. Like Joe, Peach continually reiterates a sweeping, non-specific belief in Beck, in

85 *The most extreme banality of the Young-Girl is to take her/himself for an original.*

her talent, a show of support that exposes her underlying condescension, the attitude that leads her to treat Beck this way in the first place. *Never forget that the Young-Girl who loves you also chose you.*⁸⁶ The picking, the recognizing, of the truly special object is what allows the master zir distinction in turn. It is the curator who stands above, purports to the power of choosing. This selection process is conceptualized as a weeding out of a garden or an isolation of signal from noise. The orchid is watered, pruned, provided a backbone spike to shape its upward growth. Like a young liberal-arts Pirsig, Goldberg finds a vessel to take on his life philosophy and writing tips, subtly influences Beck’s self-impression and feelings toward her friends. *Male love interest as cult leader.* Peach alternates stick and carrot, flipping sizable financial gifts into emotional indebtedness which she shit-tests constantly. She too gives Beck constant writing advice and motivation, which often directly contradict those of Joe. What both of them want is a project, apprentice, a muse-puppet memetically reproducing their visions of the world. At least Woody Allen’s protagonists get masochistic pleasure from their heavenly⁸⁷ students eventually surpassing them; here, the currency is control.⁸⁸

Joe has two other flaws. Both are pathological, both are tragic, both stem from a childhood in foster homes. He is terrified of getting burned again, of attaching himself only to be cut loose. He watches Beck from afar to discover not just “is she worthy?” but “is she kind?” The second flaw is that he lives with books rather than real people—an old childhood haven. When Beck suggests he ditch dinner plans with her maniacal step-mom⁸⁹: “I’d be on-board but

86 Tiqqun

87 Urania; Pausanias

88 But the attention economy *_is_* zero-sum, isn’t it? Which is why you let your phone go to voicemail while staring into the eyes of your beloved.

89 Like *Fleabag*’s godmom, someone hated by the daughter because she changes the man, turns the father into someone new—for one, impotent,

that would be so un-Victorian of me. The virtuous maiden is supposed to be rescued by the dashing, sometimes broody, altogether charming hero.” He’s stuck with old ways of understanding the world, old ways of wanting and thinking and parsing ethics, and the mismatch between these ways and the new culture breed disaster. There’s a reason he’s scripted to recommend *Don Quixote* to his younger neighbor Paco, early in the season.

B/LOG ENTRY // Oct 29 ‘18 S1E8

There’s also a reason he’s the only one who intervenes to protect his nextdoor neighbor, a mother abused by her alcoholic boyfriend Ron. Everyone else in the building stays quiet; Joe alone pushes himself into their business, has the barefaced temerity necessary to step in and intervene on behalf.

He’s also incapable of staying on the object level. Beck will bring up how recently killed Peach had an eating disorder, and Joe will reply “It’s good you’re talking about Peach” like he’s her therapist, converting everything to interpretation, and she’s his Pavlov dog in need of reinforcement.

& I can’t help but wonder if the main reason he’s intoxicated with Beck is class. Short-lasting fling Karen is great—kind, easy to be around, undemanding, doesn’t shy from his attention—but there’s ‘just something’ about Beck that Joe can’t figure out, her cultural capital, her cultural mask. Jessica Goldstein, recapping at *Vulture*, sees it: «Those of us who get Joe can tell this is doomed from the jump, because Karen has inexcusably red state taste in television—Joe couldn’t stomach *The Bachelor*, so just think of what having *The King of Queens* playing in his apartment does to his tender psyche—and suggests that Joe invest in a Kindle. A Kindle! Shudder.» What’s the real outgroup? Simultane-

no longer wearing the pants or calls the shots.

ously and without contradiction, “Joe hates all of Beck’s friends, who are wealthy and therefore bad”; Beck’s threatening suitor is cartoonishly named Benjamin J. Ashbey III. In other words, where economic capital attracts his scorn (as, ironically, cheap or low-class), an aura of cultural capital hypnotizes him. This is what strikes me when I read Bourdieu, notice the way the distributions of economic and cultural capital at upper echelons don’t just diverge but *inversely correlate*. There’s the tantalizing suggestion that both literal and symbolic capital are tokens of exchange for the “real” currency below, alternate strategies for getting at some flowing mix of access, standing, recognition, power. This mix is palpable, hypnotizing, literally attractive. Goldstein again, not holding back: «Joe bonds with Manic Pixie Braless Bookstore Girl because they share a hatred for, as she puts it, the lowly people who buy books ‘because of what’s popular, not because they want to be moved or changed in some way.’ This line is so on the nose for Joe’s taste in women that I have to believe there is a twist coming, eventually, wherein she is running a scam on him.»

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“It is not about recognizing the boundary, but, rather, deriving pleasure from playing with it.”⁹⁰

X: *Do you ever get the voice in your head, when editing longform, that’s like, “maybe this would be better if I left it messy, because when I clean/tighten it up too it suddenly gets held to new standards, as opposed to if it seems left intentionally messy. I get that voice a bit with this project, and I can’t tell if it’s productive or not. Like, fuck me if I spend all this time tidying and things get worse, less eccentric or weird or playful and more predictable, self-serious, unfun polish. When I’m zoomed in close the improvements always seem for the best, but in the aggregate it’s like switching from lo-fi to hi-fi. At a certain point you’ve*

entered a different genre; if your production sounds flat, people will actually hold it against ya.

So many changes in the blogosphere, year to year. Some corners feel in strange twilights, scattered accounts deactivated, left unupdated for years at a time. Many of the good ones are still around, but so many of their writers struggle to reinvent themselves. The short-lived careers are marked by peak years and rust ages, times of hot, frenetic energy where an entire way of looking gets built in six, twelve, eighteen months.

A generation back, a turn of the screw in reverse: *Zoilus*, *Bliss*, *uTopianTurtleTop*, Robert's *Morphosis*, Fisher's *K-Punk*, Reynolds' *Bliss Blog* and *Shock & Awe*, Prier's primitivism, the rationalist LiveJournals and scratchpads...⁹¹

It was *HTMLGiant* that republished Boyer's "Toward a Provisional Avant-Garde," calling for a mode of artmaking like a "society for touching lightly the forearms of another," emphasizing omphallus—concave navel—over convex phallus; offering "maternal protection" and "comforting noises" in the places of war metaphors and machines. Which is perhaps a strategy on the same team as white lies⁹² & agreeableness. (Better? Worse?) Gawker memoirism, New Sincerity, alt-lit,⁹³ *BigOther*, an entire blogosphere of aesthetic concerns, self-experimenting Gwern, *BLDG-BLOG*, *Marginal Revolution*, Scott Alexander somehow bridging the interest of both Ross Douthat and Ezra Klein. Wie

91 A LITTLE BIT OF TUMBLER. (Stein)

92 The logic of the white lie goes, *I must lie because the emotional impact of my words outweigh the benefits of accurate feedback & an outside view.*

93 «A few days after I ended things, he came by to return some stuff I'd already said I didn't want. "Actually, can we go to your roof and talk?" He asked if I knew about the recent allegations made against Tao Lin by a former younger girlfriend. In our own time together as a couple with an age difference, had I felt like I'd been taken advantage of? Would I say everything had been consensual?» (*Infinity Diaries*)

Peter Merholz & his FWIW.

Duquette's *Liposuction*, Haley's *Sublemon*, Rosen's *Saner Than Lasagna*. Bernstein's *Carcinisation*. Soares's *Minding Our Way*, Nydwracu's *Nihgrim Nihthealwa Mæst*, Venkat & Perry's *Ribbonfarm*, *The View From Hell*, *Breaking Smart*. *More Crows Than Eagles*, Grietzer's *Second Balcony* (i and ii), Lucca's *Feral Machines*, *Gravity & Levity*, Drew Austen's *Kneeling Bus*, Kevin's *Melting Asphalt*, John's *Everything Studies*, Shorin's *Subpixel Space*, Greer's *Scholar's Stage*. *The Future Primaeval* with H.L. Athrelon, *sam□zdat*, *hauntedGeographies*. Ariana Reines's *SUNRISE*.

The issue as always: Evaluation based on prestige, endorsement, the social vouching of others instead of evaluation by first principle. In human societies, decisions about which community members to copy are made consequentially, with observation of the model source's success as well as role, age, and status, as well as approximations of potential status windfalls upon imitation. Complex models, such as what makes someone a successful entrepreneur, manager, or artist, involve too many complex, entangled variables whose individual roles cannot be properly sussled out; as a result, imitation of general lifestyle practices, down to details of dress, speech, and mannerisms. Often even behaviors which appear non- or counter-efficacious ought be copied, given the emergent effects which they might figure into. The imitations of a novice hunter echo the lifecycles of developing personal taste, style, voice:

Novice hunters may assess who is most successful among experienced hunters by comparing daily returns. However, picking a model on the basis of this one-day sample is risky, for hunting success will exhibit much short-term variance. Only hunting returns averaged over a great many days will reliably predict hunting skill. Thus, novices are initially better off selecting models who are already favored by others. Later, after they have accumulated their own long-term samples, they can re-

*fine these borrowed judgments. Hunting returns are hard to fake—and if they bring prestige, they will be advertised—so information-gathering costs are substantially reduced for novices.*⁹⁴

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Craig Owens, the late 20th century theater and art critic, has the following quote about his time at October, Rosalind Krauss's art magazine:

We were concerned with identifying the next chapter of this universal art history so we were involved in arguing for supporting a certain kind of work that would establish our own places in history... What can I say... it was incredibly stupid and blind and shortsighted.

Does it maybe apply?

[The quote] seems to me [to be] about artists wanting to be part of the next big thing, as in a movement or a scene? If so, there does seem to be a lot of that in the arts. I felt that way myself, when I was younger. People want to be part of things.

Yeah, I think that's it. And the way that thinking so much about the "next" moment in a history can close you off to other kinds of art or writing that don't fit the trajectory.

I think people get into the arts for all kinds of reasons. Maybe they're looking for a scene, or for an experience. Or they want to be hip or famous. That was all true for me, and I don't think there's anything wrong with any of it. At the same time, though, I also don't think that any of that stuff necessarily has anything to do with art, if you know what I mean.

I think this point ties in well with your discourse with Chris Higgs, and your post at HTMLGiant about "good faith criticism," which you define as being upfront about holding certain critical preferences and frameworks. In your case that framework was formalism. Was having a community at HTML and Big Other, of not just supporters but also antagonists like Chris, productive for your thinking?

Oh, absolutely! Chris's writing was very helpful to me, and

94 Joseph Henrich at Google.

I'm really grateful for it. It's really hard to articulate positions and work through problems. Chris and I were both getting our PhDs at the time, and I imagine he was trying to work out his commitments and arguments. I know I was. Looking back at that now, I just wish I'd done a better job stating and defending my arguments. I could do a better job now.

At the same time, though, I sometimes wonder how much people reading *HTMLGiant* at the time cared about our debates. I think a lot of people read the site because they wanted to get hyped up over some indie lit release. I was using the site to work through issues in my research, which was perhaps somewhat selfish of me!

[...] & because posts often consist of writers working through ideas in small increments, you see behind the scenes. It's very different than just reading the polished dissertation.

I do miss blogging. Do people still do it? I get the impression it's been replaced by podcasts. But in any case, I found it incredibly useful to write regularly, knowing others would read it, and really forcing myself to write something that would make sense and hopefully be useful. I'd like to get back into it now, but keep getting distracted by other things.

We interacted for the first time because I wrote a piece about the avant-garde, the way it gets incorporated into pop, referencing your writing at Big Other. That piece (yours) talks about how a lot of film & fiction that tries to be experimental is merely following conventions of experimental works from decades prior. There's nothing experimental about it.

*I've been thinking a lot about the exhausted possibility of both the avant-garde and punk scene as we know them. So many of the radical experimental outlets have become impotent templates, e.g. the "zine." Haley Thurston at *The Sublemon* is a good reference. And I wonder*

if blogs still hold some power as a non-institutional, legitimately punk format.

I think a lot of avant-garde folk become convinced that experimental works have to look a certain way, or not be certain ways. For example, narrative is often considered very non-avant-garde, and is therefore taboo in avant-garde circles. I've seen this in film crowds, poetry crowds, fiction crowds.

So often you have people zeroing in on a certain look or sound or technique as "experimental," then trying to replicate it. E.g., "the cut-up technique is an experimental technique." Or, "experimental films should look like Stan Brakhage's films."

Or, "my work has to look punk, or like a zine, in order to be outside the mainstream, and be underground or experimental."

excerpted, fr. conversation w A.D. Jameson

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Virgin, bull; lion, lamb; Chiron with bow and Capricorn prey. The habits of I Ching Modernism are kept alive in palm readings, star charts, and tea leaves; only the intent is changed, from the script-snapping forces of chance to the pursuit of self-knowledge. Reines giving readings for income, buyer testimonial *With firm kindness and gentle sure knowing Ariana equipped me with seasoned tools (as this is an ancient science), language & frameworks, that have afforded me a more robust sense of who I am.*¹

The literary autofiction's at its most disappointing when it manages to re-cast vanilla solipsism through pink glass: *Chelsea Girl* a dressed-up Beat book, Otessa the morning after, an endless hangover to the wonders of being drunk. But sometimes, in the subtle newnesses, an opening forms; energy erodes the banks, bursts through to new form. We've seen a return to narrative, the resin which reseals shards, builds wholes out of parts, *two from one and one.*² 'Weaving as women's work.'

Where the object field of the 70's alternative music scene included heavy distortion and safety-pinning nose cartilage, the meta-level that fueled it was always defiance of norm, the expansion and redefinition of acceptability. Neither distortion nor piercings perform this function any longer; they operated as contextual moves whose power is limited to its specific place & time. Lo-fi of the last decades has become detached from the material conditions of autonomous artistry, degrading into an empty signifier of authenticity. The confusion of the object- for the meta-level, in both cases, can be considered a confusion of an *instance* with a *class*, of a *part* for a *pattern*. The specific look of a concept, the incarnation of an idea, coming to replace its general principle.

1 Dana Greene

2 R. Ashley

Y: *Nelson seems to desire a world in which normativity vs. transgression is no longer a relevant paradigm. Is this definitionally possible; if so is it desirable? Leaving empty signifiers without relation or reference, outside or center? Is this not the fear of homonormativity, that it forecloses the possibility of difference? Alex, what is the definition of critique? What is the process of dialectic?*

X: *If I'm being slightly less than generous, it seems like what really freaks out Nelson in The Argonauts is that, after decades of trying to moves as far as possible from the heteronormative—rewriting her cultural scripts, moving from New York School to queer feminism to punk refusal to scholarly ascetism—the book finds her pregnant, in a passing family, dressed up for the Nutcracker at Christmastime. The queerness feels half like conceptual justification; her demonstrated preferences are clearly for stable connection, family, and children. This is submission to her: a submission to the normality which she both fears and desires, enforced by the binding contracts of marriage and parenthood. The most threatening implication is that normality is not merely a product of acculturation but something commonly innate around which culture has been formed to accommodate. In stats, returning to the mean after a period of deviation is known as regression; if shifts are sustained over sufficient time the Bayesian begins updating priors about the nature of their subject.*

Nostalgia: Every era's once-shunned genre is eventually re-deemed: disco, adult listening, synthrock. 2000s indie folk awaits its turn, brass horns and all.

The cat is lazy, stripes of charcoal and grey, licking himself on the rusted fire escape. I pull the clothes from the washer, and the paper from the printer, the inkjets creating new life, a kind of birth, an impression, a face. I said, Forums? They're great. Plato and Aristotle loved 'em!

If the masculine equals stereotype, if the feminine equals stereotype, then a mixture == the erotic? A purple flower behind a chiseled ear, the ascetic androgyny of a runway

model. “To realize a face/ is a violent act, /a history of perjury, and/ of selves propagating selves,” an anti-phoenix which refuses to form, which stays in the ether.³

The Bacchic is freedom in its most literal sense, which again is just negation, liberty from any rule or any restraint whatsoever—teenage ontology? maybe—including freedom from the (disapproving, social) sober mind, hence, *ekstasis*. What Euripides’ plays (*Bacchae* especially) point at, or seem understand, is that edgelord anarchism only exists because society’s there, or school, or parents or whatever, and because these structures are probably underperforming. There’s always been the desire to shed responsibility, but good structure at least minimizes or controls this rebellious urge, and Pentheus’s authoritarianism is definitely not good structure. You need a (The) Man to rail against or you’ll have to actually start thinking about your beliefs positively, instead of as negations of whatever values regime you’re under. Fanatical belief is a social condition. There aren’t any fanatics on a desert island, only pragmatists; the ideology enters when other people do. (Hence, when a local cowherder is unlucky enough to stumble upon the Bakkhai’s camp, the Bakkhai—previously peacefully dormant—rip his herd to pieces with their bare hands, ransack a pair of local villages.) Chaos, the Bacchic, are merely negations—of systems, of order—and without structure to convert to raw fuel, the Bacchic burns out quickly on its own, the way a party dies down when the drugs run out and the high starts wearing off.

Another sense of freedom: To be liberated from tit-for-tats instigated by others, the binding, mutual debts cast onto you unwillingly and unwanted. By now we know the costs of both sides.

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«High classic art is simple, serene, balanced. Late-phase art is accomplished but anxious. Composition is crowded or overwrought; color is lurid. The Hellenistic Laocoön shows the theatrical perversity of late style: heroic male athleticism strained and bursting, strangled by serpents... Dionysus, bound down with Apollo, always escapes and returns with a vengeance...

A wholly masculine cosmos is untenable... Michelangelo’s male figures are exhausted with their effort and helplessly infected by femininity, which shimmies upward from a spiritually opaque gravitational center. The pornographic fluorescence of the Dying Slave comes from its will-lessness, its sensually engorged surrender. The ruggedly masculine Michelangelo, like Ernest Hemingway, required rituals of male inflation to fight off the lure of transsexual submission.

Dover speaks of the change in homosexual taste in Athens from the fifth century, which glorified athletic physiques, to the fourth, when softer, passive minions came into vogue. It is in the fourth century that the hermaphrodite first appears in classical art. The plush creature with female breasts manages to expose its male genitals, either by a slipping cloak or a tunic boldly raised in ritual exhibitionism.»⁴

A failure of nerve, a wave of self-doubt, a dearth of suspended reason. “Sky cult topples back into earth-cult.”⁵ The transcendent collapses back into biology, the supernatural into nature. The tragedies are of structure undone by complexity, of a fluid reality which thwarts efforts to control it (High modernism: R. Moses, le Corbusier). Daphne metamorphosizes into tree as she flees the consumption of Apollo. *You are a Bernini...* “Oedipus’s twenty-four-hour transformation from hypermasculine hero to maimed sufferer is echoed by Pentheus’s transformation from strutting

3 G. Luigi, “Tall Grass,” reffing Arthur Russell

4 Paglia, *Sexual Personae*

5 C.P., *S.P.*

young buck to drag queen to shredded corpse.” Is there a way to grip less tightly that might be more effective at holding on? Like a Chinese fingertrap, the tragic ending befalls the one who struggles most to escape it, who lives a life to be ruled by indeterminacy’s more negative valences.

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A.R.: S/he’s Spanish, but I think s/he’s in Paris. I’m bringing Beatriz to Boston this fall. *Testo Junkie* is a book about the traffic of hormones, among other things, as in *10:04* the mango, the sperm, the coffee, gender, and paternity.

B.L.: Yeah, the other person who recommended *Testo Junkie* to me recently was Maggie Nelson. That’s a pretty good set of recommenders. You wrote that poem for a catalogue of a show s/he was organizing.⁶

Is this this book’s midlife crisis?

Y: Look, the *Queer Theorists and their honorary rationalists agree & so do I*: ‘drawing a boundary in thingspace is not a neutral act... they exert force on your mind.’⁷ But the struggle to re-draw bounds is an infinite game of keeping up with the world. What throws me is the possibility that the kind of horizontal, associative identity-via-family-building that say, Gevinson and Nelson and Ward are all engaged in, is potentially a viable alternative to categorical thinking/identity. But isn’t it also the case that “Annie Dillard meets Kathy Acker” is a kind of genre too, an influential form becoming a template in the canon? That there’s no way to escape the connotations and overtones and baked-in expectations, because they’re transmitted over associative networks too. This is some of the conceptual work that’s trying to get done second half, but as you can see I’m struggling to make up my mind. But

6 Lerner & Reines in conversation at BOMB

7 Yudkowsky

AD Jameson’s 12 dominants of contemporary lit:⁸

Ironic vs. Sincere
Brief vs. Long (essentially a Minimalist/Maximalist distinction)
Twee (Precious) vs. Ephemeral/Disposable
Clean vs. Messy/Careless
Nostalgic vs. A-historic/Present
“Languagey” (Ornate) vs. Prosaic/Plainspoken
Conceptual vs. Organic
Parataxical vs. Hypotactic/Syllogistic
Collage vs. Homogeneous
A-narrative vs. Narrative/Anti-narrative
Vulgar (Profane) vs. Classical/Mystical
Confessional vs. Mediated

Y: ...so she uses quotations in *Argonauts* as a riff in the jazz sense of the word, which is to say the theme in the theme & variations sense or a premise in stand-up’s premise & tags sense.

X: It’s the “hermeneutics of life” style: sometimes she transcribes reality (“I met up with a friend for tea and she said X and I said Y”) but more often we get the hottake version of whatever incident transpired, the English teacher’s job done for them. Not “note the author’s use of the word PURPLE” but “this book is about the color PURPLE.” Kraus’s *ILD* isn’t about sex or romance, it’s about semiotics. “The fact that you don’t return messages turns your answerphone into a blank screen on which we can projection our fantasies.”⁹ Seduction as an “order of sign and ritual” (Baudrillard), the manipulation and coordination of society’s archetypal images.

Y: I feel like the grounding in experience is her big twist on the more outward-gazing Dillard. The lit-crit lens turned on inner and daily

8 AD: The qualities on the left are the ones that I find to be (currently) more valued, but that’s not to say that everyone then accepts them as dominants in their own work. But I do think that these qualities exert a real pressure on all of us. (I know I feel them.)

9 Sylvère, in a letter to Hebdige

life, i.e. the traditionally feminine domestic sphere. Not a fictional text designed for its vulnerability to, or resistance against, interpretation (the defining axis by which the 20th C carved up literary aims) but a semi-fictional text offering an interpretation of reality vis-a-vis individual subjectivity theorized. A pragmatism concerned with the delivery of nutrients.

X: *Also, readers as a whole are suspicious of endings these days, and of the stories which endings create. More books today are broken, and that brokenness means you read the writer as writer, the book as a creative work by that writer, rather than suspending disbelief and entering the plot.*

Y: *Meta at the bookends, content between the crust. Think couples processing together on the drive home. No need to set up an illusion; you merely lay out intent, parameters, the structuring goals and constraints.¹⁰ “I said to Mabel, I said, ‘I wanted to write a romantic poem in the Schlegel sense of romantic poetry, so a novel in the Bakhtin sense of a novel, and it does that for me.’” Perhaps you leak the biographical dispositions, the inclinations, conflicts of interest so as not to appear duplicitous. Over the book’s arc Nelson tosses pieces out, sums them up, starts over again: micro-jigsaws which themselves are arranged and summed as coordinate groups. She uses filmmaker Joseph Cornell’s work Rose Hobart to describe her own artistic ideal, G172: To stumble upon discarded canister of a bad Hollywood movie, to cut the reels up in an effort to isolate the thing you love to gaze upon most, to project the resulting patchwork through the lens of your favorite color, alongside a bustling “tropical” soundtrack: this seems to me, right now, the perfect film. Which later becomes a comparison to bowerbirds, the beautiful self, but also a Steinian “arrangement in a system of pointing”¹¹*

10 Boyer’s “Toward a Provisional Avant-Garde”: *Its artists and poets will make in their work delicious and obvious entrances. Its works should always begin with “HELLO.”*

11 Vibes and vibes.«You may find that you are in possession of an aesthetic, which guides change by provisionally excluding most behaviors and provisionally including others on intuitive grounds. An aesthetic can help

I remember Ariana Reines with Silverblatt asked about the declaration of identity that opens her book of poetry, I’m driving to work. “I suppose [it seemed important to do] because objects arrive technologically produced and perfect, declaring themselves as themselves, all the time. It seemed to me always that... if something is written, or sung, or anything, that it should articulate itself within its own identity, the identity of its medium.” This is to say its genre. Silverblatt: “That it is a book.” Tues. 6/19 early A.M., file while listen to YT interview, approve edits, take care of pre-defined tasks, then get generative. Remember the maladies that are worsened, not ameliorated, by lack of focus.

I’ve forgotten you, the text has gotten away from me, but you are the everything, a Hera. A trip to the LES Baths, the sensuality of the steam room, the aromatherapy chamber. Pressing on all sides,¹² prolonged anticipation of relief. For me the masochism of the radiant room, herbal flays sounding in the dark, stoney interior; poured ice water, the body entering shock. No sight of the ghost who haunts these baths... “What I call mutual recognition includes a number of experiences commonly described in the research on mother-infant interaction: emotional attunement, mutual influence, affective mutuality, sharing states of mind.”¹³

Long walks exploring yr neighborhood. “When listening to others, humans mostly listen long enough to extract an ‘aboutness,’ and then search their memories for a story with a similar aboutness—and this aboutness is often a complex relation or ‘moral’ with little relation to the naive-

you sort through possible centers. Behavioral “centers” are the things that feel most like reflections of your own self, that seem to connect effortlessly to the underlying wholeness of your life. The most important ones tend to have old roots.» (Sarah Perry, “Deep Laziness”)

12 Anteros

13 Jessica Benjamin, 1988, h/t Ed Phillips

ly-construed ‘topic’ of the communication.”¹⁴ A policy of “If you really care & I don’t, I’ll always defer,” so that each of us get more instead of less, gets what we value for what we don’t. (Gifts as co-investment into future yet uncharted.) A policy of sharing not opinions or feelings but interpretations, ways of seeing and understanding, in the hope that each way would supplement the rest, form a fuller picture of the world. This is the meaning of luck.

∞

B/LOG ENTRY // MARCH 4 // S2E1

Sei Shōnagon, 枕草子 1002 AD: “*A preacher ought to be good-looking. For, if we are properly to understand his worthy sentiments, we must keep our eyes on him while he speaks; should we look away, we may forget to listen. Accordingly an ugly preacher may well be the source of sin...*”

The predictable is dominated, the unpredictable can only be submitted to. Batuman: “You can’t predict it, or control it, but succumbing is a great pleasure.”¹⁵

Fleabag, by her own description, is a woman in her early 30s with no friends who doesn’t believe in anything. Love interest: A Catholic priest just edgy & boyishly handsome enough to convert her. By E2 he’s handed her a Bible, told her he’s “around if she ever wants to talk.” By E3 she’s reading it. (This is the relevant common denominator among the perennially bright-eyed, the manic dreamgirl types: they refresh your fatigued world, bestow new le[a/n]ses on life, show a way of seeing filled with faith. Something to believe, something to believe in.)

Set the scene: Dad, Godmom, Fleabag, Claire, a Martin

who’s gone from nuanced to repulsive over the course of a season, and a priest sitting around a restaurant table. Dad and Godmom are celebrating their engagement;¹⁶ the priest will adjudicate their marriage but is out with them tonight drinking.

Claire has a miscarriage; Fleabag takes the hit by pretending it was hers so the two can leave family dinner for the hospital with Claire’s batshit impeccability intact. The sisters sit next to each other on the cab ride, lost in silence. We’ve seen this type of scene before, with Flea’s narration detachedly imposing judgement on whoever’s dregs are chosen to fill the empty space. Except this time, all we hear are the ambient sounds of London city streets, a faint quiet in the distance receding. Claire, turning from the window: “The priest is quite hot.” Fleabag, turning toward her in turn: “So hot.” They rotate back again to their respective windows, smiling. Flea’s smile widens; power chords kick in. She turns again, eyes locking on the camera. She’s still here, silently watching. *You’ll know them by the look in their eyes.* Credits.

BLOG ENTRY MARCH 18 // E3

Fleabag’s catering an awards event for her sister’s company; bigwigs will be in attendance. A higher-up & honoree (possibly one of Claire’s bosses) asks her if the canapes are meaty. “No,” she says, “I think they have courgette in them.” “Oh, I love courgette. You can treat them appallingly and they still grow.” She’s talking about Claire, resi-

¹⁶ popyourtopoff.tumblr.com: «the writing for the dad in fleabag is so underrated, in a moment of high emotion + gratitude, he just says ‘i just want to say (gesticulates) ... very much’. it’s like The Perfect caricature of the dad who can’t process his feelings properly let alone articulate them or, if he can, then he can’t bring himself to express ‘soppy’ emotions in public... »

¹⁴ *Carcinisation*, “What is intelligence?”

¹⁵ Elif, *The Guardian*

dent office workaholic.

We also meet Claire's business partner, equally meticulous in his public persona if less anxious about it all. (His presence is in fact an anxiolytic, a pseudo-benzodiazepine for habitual nailbiters via affective transfer; it's part of what draws Claire to him.) The two clearly have a mutual crush. "What's his name?" Flea asks when he goes to get them drinks at the bar. "Klare," she answers—"Don't." Flea suppresses a grin.⁹

Fleabag ends up flirting with the awards honoree (Kristin Scott Thomas) at a bar after the event. Flea references her love for *Carrie*, which without seeing it I've always understood as the female-coded version of the adolescent boy genre—*little did his schoolmates know the power he quietly possessed*. Thomas's character is 58; Flea's 33. "It's not a party until someone flirts with you," Scott Thomas tells her. "That's the only shit thing about getting older is that people don't flirt with you anymore. Not really. Not with danger. I miss walking into a room and not knowing, there's a kind of energy, a dare, and do not take that for granted."

BLOG ENTRY // E4 //MARCH 25

Confession time. The priest plays the priest; Flea confesses. "I know exactly what I want right now. It's bad." The Red Scare gals cackle over the airwaves. Flea: "I want someone to tell me what to wear every morning. I want someone to tell me what to eat, what to like, what to hate, what to rage about, what to listen to, what band to like, what to buy tickets for, what to joke about, what to not joke about. I want someone to tell me what to believe in, who to vote for and who to love and how to... tell them. I just think I want someone to tell me how to live my life, Father, because so far I've been getting it wrong. I know that's why people want people like you in their lives, because you just tell them

how to do it." *The first [symptom] is anxiety, says Kierkegaard, the dizziness of freedom, a tachycardic head rush that whirlpools us into itself and obviates all lesser emotion.*¹⁷ "You just tell them what to do and what they'll get out of the end of it. Even though I don't believe your bullshit. Just tell me what to do father." But belief never comes first; ritual always precedes it, belief emerging from the structure of the practice. "Kneel," the priest instructs. "What?" "Kneel. Just kneel." *Reader, I gasped.* Flea sets down her drink. The curtain slides aside, priest playing priest no longer. A painting drops.¹⁸

B/LOG E5 (1APRIL)

Then things get interesting. A few days later, in her living room. Priest: "I don't think you want to be told what to do after all. I think you know exactly what you want to do. If you really wanted to be told what to do you'd be wearing one of these [gestures at priest's robe]." But of course that kind of being lost & looking doesn't belong to either gender. The Priest's the bright-eyed dream boy, a glowing bundle of optimistic meaning. He is to her as the church is to him. *I used to think of meaning as something that needed constructing, but now I understand it as the flowing river which people follow.*

B/LOG ENTRY // APR 8 E6

A few scenes later, Dad & Godmom's wedding day, and they're snogging on the side of the house. (Is he snogging her? Is she snogging him?) Priest: "Oh, fucking hell. I don't know, I don't know, oh I don't know what this feeling is." Flea: "Is it God or is it me?" You can be god to someone, or you can worship someone as god. In the in-between you're

17 H.C., "Shame & Society." A. G. tells me over drinks: part of what she sees in Kraus, Acker, Staggs, Bellamy, is a deep anxiety, resonant to relevant audiences, and missing entirely from Nelson.

18 To surrender control, to live in submission—this is Houellebecq with the signifiers changed.

untethered, unmoored, belonging to no one.

Dad doesn't show to his own wedding, Colman's godmom stooping to begging, and Flea & her sister are off to search. We already know Flea will find him; it was in her he confided at the mother's wake; Flea reminds him of his wife, the one he really loves.¹⁹ Which is why he finds it so hard to be alone in a room with her. He tells her he misses her mother too. But now he needs someone, and Flea understands. She sets aside her own distaste for the godmother, and talks him down from the attic.

As the wedding wraps up, Flea tells the Priest she'll be waiting at a nearby bus stop. She waits a bit. Sprayed graffiti, scratched plexiglass, the spindled glow of a streetlight through plastic. Dunham: "The night of the party when we met, when you told me to meet you on the corner, I was really sure that I would go out there and you'd tricked me and gone someplace else. And then you weren't exactly where you said you'd be but you were nearby."²⁰ A smile creeps onto Flea's face: the cheeks round, the edges of the eyes narrow, the chin raises.

∞

Balioc: *It turns out that getting to do your own thing is the beginning of what's needed, not the end.*²¹

I said, There are advantages to both! Advantages to both!²² What's its perfect Hegelian synthesis?

I said, I got it: "subscribe" is just "sub" + "scribe," proof by etymology that content consumers are subs, bullied by dom content creators across history.

19 69 *Love Songs*

20 Lena, in the richly titled *Not That Kinda Girl* (distance from trope).

21 *The Baliocene Apocrypha*

22 "Us v. Them"

And I said, You just had to read my personal liveblogging of *Fleabag*, and NOW you want to hear my take on Otessha Moshfegh's *Year of Rest and Relaxation* as well? Fine!

What does disillusionment look like, to Moshfegh? The visual field is cinematic, detached, mediation creeping: "I did feel a peculiar sensation, like oceanic despair that—if I were in a movie—would be depicted superficially as me shaking my head slowly and shedding a tear. Zoom in on my sad, pretty, orphan face. Smash cut to a montage of my life's most meaningful moments..." The eyes are "cameras pann[ing]"; lives are understood through media: "You're like Winona Ryder in *Girl Interrupted*," Reva tells the unnamed protagonist (henceforth referred to as 'Tag'). "But you look more like Angelina Jolie."

But we really get a glimpse through the attitude the protagonist holds toward others—her endless dismissal and condescensions, the belittlings and typecastings. What 'Tag finds most damning about sole friend Reva—and 'Tag forgives her for her narcissism, her superficiality, her pettiness and envy and "delusional romantic projections"—what 'Tag finds most damning is how everything she says sounds "like she'd read it in a Hallmark card." Reflecting on a eulogy Reva gives for her cancer-struck mother: "Reva scratched at an itch that, on my own, I couldn't reach. Watching her take what was deep and real and painful and ruin it by expressing it with such trite precision gave me reason to think Reva was an idiot, and therefore I could discount her pain, and with it, mine."

When she lists off human grievances it's with a penchant for deindividuation, caricaturing at length boys reading Proust & Foster Wallace on the subway,²³ "sterilized professionals"

23 "...jotting down [...] brilliant thoughts into a black Moleskine pocket notebook... The worst was that those guys tried to pass off their insecurity as 'sensitivity,' and it worked." What is typecasting? A way of making pre-

ordering brioche buns, couples sharing no-foam lattes. But it's delivered with the conflicted tone of someone rejecting what isn't available to her, like an animal whose snarl breaks midway into a whimper. "I want something that'll put a damper on my need for company," she tells Dr. Tuttle, a confession she never actually makes to the reader.

Putting people into cast(e)s, into starterpacks, cognitively dehumanizes them; it allows 'Tag to dismiss others' struggles, struggles which might potentially rival and therefore draw into question the exceptionalism of her own. The observer's illusion of transparency is a common bias of overestimating the extent to which we understand others around us. It's a coping strategy for trauma but what comes first, the transparency or the disillusionment? The othering or the alienation?

[...]

I remembered watching her "put her face on," as she called it, and wondering if one day I'd be like her, a beautiful fish in a man-made pool, circling and circling, surviving the tedium only because my memory can contain only what is imprinted on the last few minutes of my life, constantly forgetting my thoughts.

'Tag is thinking back on her mother here—which, because of the similarities in the two's psyches and circumstances, is the closest 'Tag gets to imagining her own future. It's as if she's trying to understand a way forward. In her mother's life she sees none, just wine bottles and bloated, middle-aged drunkenness.

dictive judgments about the whole from some observed part. Some parts are more predictors accurate than others, and there are practical reasons for profiling. Prediction: what Fleabag can't stop; what Claire is hurt and made little by. The meaning of individuality is that the whole can never be satisfyingly reduced to a simpler model, to demographic pattern, which makes being predicted a kind of death: *I see what you're saying, but isn't it a bit... predictable? Or I know exactly how you feel..*

And yet out of desperate hope it will cure or heal her, she seeks refuge in pharmaceutical sleep. Every three days she re-doses a fictional downer called Infermiterol, which causes a 72-hour blackout and allows her to survive the tedium of living "only because [her] memory can contain only what is imprinted on the last few minutes of [her] life." By the $\frac{3}{4}$ mark of *R&R*, 'Tag's dozing away a comparable percentage of her waking hours.

Rest and Relaxation has a happy ending: 'Tag comes safely out of hibernation seeing a world which, once empty of value, now appears saturated with meaning. "There was majesty and grace in the pace of the swaying branches of the willows. There was kindness... My sleep had worked. I was soft and calm and felt things."

The book's surface-level moral (appearing in a drugged-out dream-vision that rivals *Taipei's*²⁴ psilocybin death climax) is something like intimacy, presentness, the acceptance of your lot:

I tried to remember my life, flipping through Polaroids²⁵ in my mind. "It was so pretty there. It was interesting!" But I knew that even if I could go back, if such a thing were possible with exactitude, in life or in dreams, there was really no point. And then I felt desperately lonely. So I stuck my arm out and I grasped onto someone... and that other hand steadied me somehow as I fell past whole galaxies, mercurial waves of light strobing through my body, blinding me over and over... I was crying

But there are other psychic patterns to track in 'Tag's transformation, changes in behavior and self-modeling that might point somewhere further. Where the novel opens with 'Tag buying two large coffees for herself at the bodega—part of a multi-drug choreographing of bodily plea-

24 Tao Lin

25 Still mediated.

sure—it ends with her picking up cornflakes to feed pigeons in the park. She gives away an entire designer wardrobe and starts shopping for basics at a Goodwill. She has a transcendent experience in front of a vanitas painting at the Met, culminating in her placing a palm on its oil surface.²⁶

There's another level to the image of the koi. Not just the desire to turn off the self, to live without memory—idiotic, happy, neutered—but to swim in a “man-made pool,” to be admired, like her mother, for her beauty and charm. For her quality and value as an object. *The Young-Girl is currently the most luxurious of the goods that circulate on the market of perishable commodities.*²⁷

[...]

Balioc: *In very broad-brush and simplistic terms:*

Traditional masculinity (to the extent that it's a thing at all) is mostly about Being a Subject, and provides lots of tools that make subject-hood work better. It pushes you to take action, to make decisions, to possess things and people and take pleasure in it.

Traditional femininity is mostly about Being an Object,²⁸ and provides lots of tools that make object-hood work better. It pushes you to construct yourself into something desirable and compelling, to seek out appreciation, to be possessed and take pleasure in it.

*People vary in the utility they get from subject-hood and object-hood. Probably everyone needs both to some substantial extent.*²⁹

²⁶ L. V. Ryder

²⁷ Tiqqun

²⁸ Berger, '72: “To be naked is to be oneself; to be nude is to be seen naked by others and yet not recognized for oneself. A nude has to be seen as an object in order to be a nude.”

²⁹ To keep working with the Balioc w/r/t Nelson: *To some extent, identity-building always pushes towards the object side of the equation. It's about being rather than doing; it involves saying, “witness me! appreciate me!” The pure Platonic subject, like Doom Guy or the main character of an old-school dating sim, has no actual*

If objecthood is oriented around being seen, an art-rave ‘Tag shows up to plastered epitomizes it:

Girls in dark lipstick, boys with red pupils... posing fashionably or simply raising an eyebrow or faking wide smiles... In [one], a skinny redhead flashed her breasts, revealing lavender pasties... Male twins dressed as heroin-thin Elvises in a slouchy gold lamé suits high-fived in front of a Basquiat rip-off. There was a girl holding a rat on a leash hooked to the bicycle chain she wore around her neck. A close-up shot showed someone's pale pink tongue, split to look like a snake's and pierced on both forks with big diamond studs.

The pure object “never gives herself; she only gives what she has, which is to say the array of qualities that they loan her. This is also why it's not possible to “love the [pure object], but only to consume her.”³⁰ See Trevor, ex-boyfriend extraordinaire, who keeps her around to face-fuck.

Objecthood is where Tag thrives and is validated: she may not remember the art-rave, but her ability to get into it sans invite, to befriend a hotshot artist there and a hundred other navigational easings point to her prestige as an object. Money allows her designer clothes and spa trips, and via the law of costly signaling even her bad habits can't hurt her: sole friend Reva remarks with envy at how thin ‘Tag's gotten while medicated, and bags under the eyes is heroin-chic if you're pretty to begin with. It's on the very

traits that can be perceived (and thus nothing on which to hang an identity); he is simply a perspective-that-does-things, a blank empty force of happening in the world. Is there a way to interpret the anti-label, pro-flux stance she pushes in Argonauts as a rejection of objecthood for subjecthood?

Or: *Even someone who would have been a pure-strain Subject Person thirty years ago, a [...] Man who loves power and decision-making and ownership, is now going to be comparatively less interested in real subjectivity (wielding power, making decisions, enjoying ownership) and more interested in being an, er, object-defined-by-subjectivity (Being a thing vs. the image of the thing, signal vs. essence, trapping vs. harness.)*

³⁰ Tiqqun adapted.

basis—not despite of—her aloof indifference that she gets hired to a Chelsea gallery, which only works if everyone agrees you're attractive. (What's attraction? A quality of an object which compels others toward it, not necessarily physical.)

Reva, meanwhile, flails, Gucci knock-off clutch in hand. She can't win the game of objecthood, trying and failing to lose weight or attract a partner. Worse, she makes it look hard, making resolutions that are never followed through or tracing fad diets to their natural dialectic in bulimic binges. *The art is in making it seem effortless.* “Blotchy red” and “the shape of Florida,” even Reva's birthmark signifies low status. When “Tag visits her apartment, we get a glimpse into her cabinets stocked with laxative teas and rice crackers, bottles of Belvedere and sugarless Gatorade.

To “Tag, to whom being a desirable object comes literally naturally (blonde, imperviously thin), this grubbing is embarrassing, low, clumsy. *Ironically, [Reva's] desire to be classy had always been the déclassé thorn in her side. “Studied grace is not grace,” I once tried to explain.* In other words, grace isn't something done by a subject but a quality which is possessed or isn't. “Charm is not a hairstyle,” Tag continues. “You either have it or you don't.”³¹

Class rears its head. At Reva's mother's wake, there are “Huge pots on the stove steam[ing],” full of chicken, spaghetti, and ratatouille. “[Reva] was oddly unembarrassed. It seemed like she had dispensed with her usual uppity pretensions. She made no attempt to excuse herself for being

31 In aristocratic societies, where status is equivalent to itself, the pure object loses even *zür* qualities. The Earl of Wendover, from *Barry Lyndon*: “My friends are the best people. Oh, I don't mean that they are most virtuous, or indeed the least virtuous, or the cleverest, or the stupidest, or the richest, or the best born, but the best. In a word—people about whom there is no question.”

homey, folksy, or whatever word she would have used to describe living in a home like hers.” (On her own upbringing in an “un-cultured” home: “There were no cut flowers around the house.”)

And though Reva, unlike “Tag, is actually trying at subjecthood, she falls short yet again: a meeting note-taker at her corporate job, her main narrative arc over the book is a failed attempt to materialize a romantic relationship with her married boss, which results in a pregnancy and her transference out of office. Her last act of subjecthood, which comes on the book's final page, comes as she throws herself out a W.T.C. window and is caught on a news camera. More than anything else, “Tag is surprised by how much she admires the act, rewatching the footage of the plummet on lonely afternoons, or “any other time I doubt that life is worth living.” Each time she is “overcome by awe... because [the plummeting girl] is beautiful... a human being, diving into the unknown, and she is wide awake”—the direct line drawn in our language between being and awakeness, between consciousness and the making of decisions, that exertion of the body onto the environment such that it does not merely extinguish, passive, into an office building, into anonymous soot but splatters singing onto pavement.

[...]

There is a blatant kind of feminism in Moshfegh's casting of misogynies and degradations suffered at the hands of “Tag's ex-boyfriend Trevor, in the descriptions of Bushwick “sensitive types” or the pressures towards beauty and fitness as they manifest in Reva's bulimia and pilates. But the real sex politics are more ingrained and foundational, relating to how “Tag perceives herself in the world and how that self-image as object lends itself to a specific and perhaps primarily female mode of suffering.

Might it be possible that, in an undercurrent of cultural commentary, Moshfegh is in fact arguing against objecthood culture? Moshfegh told the Atlantic she'd spent "a lot of years" in her twenties in some stage of "bulimic blackout" eating a slice of melon a day for calories. At twenty-five, the same age as 'Tag, she decided to sober up. (We could see Reva and 'Tag as a bicameral split, a schizophrenic, nuclear division of their author's past.³²)

Then, in her late twenties and sober, Moshfegh applied to Brown's MFA program. She's written prolifically since, giving up not just drugs and alcohol but clothing labels and makeup for a more protestant ethic. According to interviews, Helen of Troy—the most successful object in history—is Moshfegh's least favorite fictional character. She admits to endless vanity while keeping a sign in her car window to remind her: Vanity is the enemy.³³ Fiction as self-help is an established literary tradition by now (Acker, Camus, Krauss, Nelson, Sartre, Wallace...), and shouldn't count against Moshfegh, but it gives us an idea of where her politics stand. And we might alternatively be suspicious that the fictional inquiry succeeds so cleanly, resolves with tight answers instead of opening up into more contradictions and questions.

[...]

Tag's thoughts turn again and again to fictional artist-friend Ping Xi's taxidermied animals-as-artworks, and to the fur coats she and Reva wear around the city. *How many foxes had to die, I wondered. And how did they kill them so that their blood didn't stain their fur?* When Ping Xi turns his artistic cathexis toward 'Tag in the novel's last chapters, it's no great con-

ceptual leap, a movement from beautiful object to beautiful object. And what is the cost of objecthood? *How do you kill them in a way that doesn't stain their pelts?* The freezer, or so she hears from a coworker at the gallery.

Trevor had told me once he thought I was frigid, and that was fine with me. Fine. Let me be a cold bitch. Let me be the ice queen. Someone once said that when you die of hypothermia, you get cold and sleepy, things slow down, and then you just drift away. You don't feel a thing. That sounded nice. That was the best way to die, awake and dreaming, feeling nothing. [emphasis added]

At low temperatures, or low rates of caloric consumption, metabolic processes slow. In heat, flesh wears out, decays, is broken down, turned into new life. Away from heat, turn-over slows, time stops. Nothing becomes.

[...]

Good artworld jabs: A particularly excoriating portrait of the New Yorker via a diegetic short story in its pages, damning not only because it's Reva who praises it:

[Reva] pulled the rolled-up issue out of her enormous purse. The story was called "Bad at Math." It was about an adolescent Chinese American in Cleveland who bombs the PSAT, jumps off his two-story junior high school, and breaks both his legs. After the school guidance counselor pressures the boy's family into group therapy, his parents tell him they love him in a supermarket parking lot and they all start to cry and wail and fall on their knees, while all the other shoppers wheel their carts past and pretend like nothing amazing is going on. "Listen to this opening," Reva said. "*For the first time, they said the words. I think it pained them more than the cracking of my shins and femurs.*"

³² Following Breton, we can imagine many novelists' characters as sub-identities pitted against each other, a psychic autobiography of conflict & becoming.

³³ Kaitlin Phillips interview, *The Cut*

Bad artworld jabs: Ping Xi, the hot Damien Hirstesque artist who works as ‘Tag’s jailer, suggests she rip up her birth certificate and burn her passports while he films it. Low-hanging/strawmen? Or is it hard for me to admit this is the state of the discipline?

[...]

Y: *OBJECT ONTOLOGY*: “Who has never felt flabby and shabby compared to a sleek glistening commodity?” Rhonda Lieberman asked in 1992. One answer: natural subjects, to whom the self-comparison to commodities wouldn’t even occur. Lieberman’s perceived universalism is in actuality an address to the object. “Late this century,” she continues, “the lines between wanting to have, wanting to be, and wanting to seem like a commodity have gotten hopelessly collapsed. Under the combined misery complex of capital and fame, abjection—the plight of those who are insufficiently recognizable as commodities, for commodities, by commodities—is a national and personal emergency.” Which is true but again for a specific kind of psyche; there are other ways of being. In deferring agency to the system, she misses the possibility of inter-system mobility, of entering a different hierarchy of value and meaning; lord only knows there are hundreds of them. The glamour game, which is to say the object game, is a game which can offer liberation but should under every circumstance be considered that: a path of possibility, a game that can be played for winnings. When game is treated as world, when one hierarchy is confused for the only mattering order, when glamour and objecthood become a trap for its participant... Hierarchy and loss and shortcoming are baked into its structure, you will always be aged out; an object’s value derives from its scarcity and impermanence.

X: What strikes me is how—and perhaps Bluet’s performative quality stretches further than I’m assuming—in Bluets she’s caring for her crippled friend, she’s spinning out in romantic despair, she’s fantasizing about being sexually used, there’s this horror of decaying flesh, and then in Argonauts something has changed; she’s an agent working on behalf of her newborn Iggy, tearing through philosophy and arts and

queer theory, navigating the relation between subject and world (experience and theory) rather than aestheticizing and cathexing on her own moddiness. There’s a way of seeing Argonauts as a rejection of the identity-polishing that Bluets was engaged in, the object mentality of self-branding, of being a good image.

Y: *Making your body into a symbolic object. Making your life into a set of symbolic objects. Simplifying the clutter, clarifying the vector, making the self legible to the self, and others.*

∞

<!-- wp:paragraph --><p>Basic bio points, correct me/elaborate freely: Amerikkkkka—originally published Amerikkka—was written over five years between 2009 and 2014, just after you’d moved from Israel to the United States and coinciding with the start of your comparative lit program at Harvard.</p><!-- /wp:paragraph -->

<!-- wp:paragraph --><p>‘Written’ is a funny term here. It’s made of the 2009-2014 stretch of my blog, which I started around 2006. I always had some intention that my blog cohere, in retrospect, as some kind of textual Gesamtkunstwerk, and one sort of distressed week in 2014 when I was feeling at the end of my rope as a subject I decided it was time to novel-ize the blog, delete the source material, and see what it—what I—amounted to. I decided to start with the first post I wrote after moving to the U.S., to give it a kind of comically world-historical-memoir flavor. Like, ‘witness the workings of America upon the psyche of this bright-eyed youth from the provinces.’</p><!-- /wp:paragraph -->

<!-- wp:paragraph --><p>My understanding is that the current edition, the one I have, is the fourth. What differs between editions, other than the ‘k’-count in the title?</p><!-- /wp:paragraph -->

<!-- wp:paragraph --><p>The extra ‘k’ came in because everyone kept misreading it as Amerikkka, which... I put the book together right before the American far-right resurgence that brought the term back into wide circulation, so I actually hadn’t encountered it at the time. The title was supposed to be like Kafka’s Amerika but the ‘k’ on your keyboard or your throat got stuck for a moment.</p><!-- /wp:paragraph -->

<!-- wp:paragraph --><p>The other big change is that there’s a strikethrough line over a few dozen pages that I don’t like, or rather that I don’t think reward attentive reading, don’t work as a ‘fake novel.’ These pages are from a stretch of time when I was learning how to do ‘00s ‘Internet voice’—sort of the neotenic-but-with-a-handsome-vocabulary-and-lot-of-cursing voice we now associate with sort of, Neil Gaiman fans ‘buckle up fuckers we’re going to talk about history’ Twitter, but it really was a kind of hipster voice eight years ago. I think this voice... didn’t age so good.</p><!-- /wp:paragraph -->

<!-- wp:paragraph --><p>Right—my hard copy has a strikethrough from p.25-39, digital p.31-52. You talk in the book itself about Tumblr-style casual crit: «So Tumblr-culture uses “and” and “!” a lot. OK. The later Henry James used many, many commas. Joyce was into swearing and alliterations. Buffy-speak is big on verbing and on pronouns. Rappers use internal rhyming to mark virtuosity! Art-punk bands use shrill sounds to sound artsy. In Tumblr-culture we use “!” and breathless “and” to get a tone of sprightly intimacy going. It’s fine.» Do you know any more about where that style comes from? Is it separate from the Gaiman-y voice you’re describing or part of the same? Have you seen it influence writing outside of Tumblr?</p><!-- /wp:paragraph -->

<!-- wp:paragraph --><p>Yeah I think that’s the style! My feelings about this style may have... taken a negative turn over the years. It might be that I feel like it’s an awkward middle point between the sort of—to steal a phrase from Tobi Haslett—willed gracelessness of good punk writing and the neotenic grace of someone like Molly Young. It’s a synthesis of preciousness and punk energy that doesn’t really hold together for me these days. I

think Marxist-Leninist trans femme ‘weird Twitter’ has the good version of this synthesis, stylistically. Don’t know why or how, but they do.

There’s a line about midway through the book, “Keep it pretentious, keep it funny, keep it rigorous, keep it confusing. This is dating advice and writing advice!” Do you stand by it? Your writing seems to have gone in a different direction, and I’m curious if you think this can be traced to Harvard and the avant-garde’s influence on your sensibilities. I’m thinking of the section on ‘boarding the mothership,’ and the resultant transformation of taste.

I think I stand by this for how you should do things in your 20s, and possibly stand by this for how you should do things if—for you—personhood tends to the condition of a sandbox rather than to the condition of an ocean. One thing you can probably see with *Amerikkkkka* is that by the beginning (which is chronologically the end, since it’s in blog-order where the latest chronologically comes earliest page-wise) I’m sort of irreversibly wrecked by the psychic backlash from the conclusion of an at-least-subjectively-abusive romantic relationship and can’t go on being a person in the same way anymore. The way of being that is predicated on a sandbox-y relation to personhood becomes foreclosed by the beginning of it, and reading through the text backward in time is sort of opening up to a past when it wasn’t.

The comp lit program at Harvard wasn’t an influence on me in any meaningful way. It’s a very hands-off department, for good and for ill. I think what changed is that I lost my taste for things that aren’t more or less explicitly reflections on their own stakes—

things that rely on the self-evident flow of life to charge them with stakes—when I became too mentally ill for life to flow with a force of its own. What I mean is, at some point I went into a phase—an ongoing one—where I can only relate to art and philosophy that carries its own ground with it, that doesn’t rely on the implicit ground of the richness of life to give it force, because the richness of life isn’t there for me as a background condition. I can summon it through art and philosophy, but it’s not just *there* for art and philosophy to play off of.

I don’t want to give the impression that I’m ‘survival-’ or ‘healing-’ or whatever-oriented now. It’s more, like, you’re on a barge at sea and you’re building a tower of Babel from driftwood coming your way. You just, like... can’t fuck around, at risk to both your project and your life.

I think *Amerikkkkka* is also really fundamentally tied to a time when, personhood-wise, the future feels much larger than the past.

There’s the connection with content and form, the reverse chronology of the book is grounded in your section on Faust. You talk about the Aristotelian necessity of tragedy in contrast with homiletic literature, where “the impact of a human action is merely quantitative: every action [registering] as a positive mark or a negative mark on man’s record of sins and goods deeds, and only [influencing] future events by virtue of its incremental impact on this record.”

Right, so in the Faust paper I

talk about how a Christian understanding of biographical causation, where everything that happens just additively increases or decreases your salvation points, is incompatible with tragedy, where changing even one event in a chain would change everything.</p><!-- /wp:paragraph -->

<!-- wp:paragraph --><p>Here’s something I want to say, maybe directly related and maybe not: I feel like I didn’t amount to anything as a subject—the different strands of being playing against one another in Amerikkkkka never came together, it’s the same mess and it got exhausting—but everything did come together beyond my wildest dreams as a.... well... theory. I thought I was becoming a person, or that there’s such thing as becoming a person, but instead everything that was there evolved in my theory work, the mathematical-literary Theory of Vibe opus. So my relationship to Amerikkkkka is maybe colored by my sense that Amerikkkkka is a book of personhood, and personhood didn’t work out for me. </p><!-- /wp:paragraph -->

<!-- wp:paragraph --><p>The whole idea of Amerikkkkka was that there’s this implicit living logic, the logic of a life-force, of a person, making all these utterances more than what they are in isolation and even more than what they are as an intellectual corpus. That’s why it’s a ‘novel.’ That’s the whole tradition of the novel, which Amerikkkkka superimposes on what’s’ 97% ‘impersonal’ philosophical and literary and cultural anecdotes and tricks and questions and theses. And I think that week in 2014, when the idea of meaning I sought to bring into my accumulated life-materials intersected with the form of the bourgeois novel, was a sort of solar-eclipse-like

event. Though maybe I was already blogging in the shadow of the tradition of the novel when I was blogging. It’s hard at this point to think about the stance or approach to life/the world that the blog embodied before it was transliterated into a ‘novel.’</p><!-- /wp:paragraph -->

<!-- wp:paragraph --><p>Do you think Amerikkkkka fails in conveying a logic of a life-force? Or is it more that the logic which it purports to convey is, behind the scenes, missing, or a sham, or a failed premise, or a pilot that never got picked up? (This is also what works about Amerikkkkka: It shows the frame’s power of projection, alluded to in the novel itself: «A randomly generated text is interesting in as much as the pattern-spotting and analogy-spotting behaviours that 3000 years of literature imprinted us with are interesting.»)</p><!-- /wp:paragraph -->

<!-- wp:paragraph --><p>‘A pilot that never got picked up’ is PERFECT. I mean, I really really like Amerikkkkka, I just don’t know how to be the kind of person who can relate to it on some basis of personal continuity anymore. I think only the feeling that the future is practically infinite made this way of being work for me. Maybe another way of saying this is that when you are in your 20s, there’s this merciful indeterminacy between dynamism as a narrative drive and dynamism as an epistemic drive, and Amerikkkkka depends on this indeterminacy. </p><!-- /wp:paragraph -->

<!-- wp:paragraph --><p>How old are you now?</p><!-- /wp:paragraph -->

<!-- wp:paragraph --><p>Thirty-two. The novel is such a biological genre. At least the, eh, ‘bourgeois novel,’ which is the genre that Amerikkkkka is working in.</p><!-- /wp:paragraph -->

<!-- wp:paragraph --><p>Why does Cecilia Corrigan’s ghost haunt Amerikkkka?</p><!-- /wp:paragraph -->

<!-- wp:paragraph --><p>One part of it is that she’s an extraordinarily—extraordinarily!—gifted writer whose work still informs my transcendental constitution. Another part of it is private and contentious. </p><!-- /wp:paragraph -->

<!-- wp:paragraph --><p>Was Kant’s 3rd Critique the origin of your interest in/thinking on vibe? There’s this persistent idea throughout Amerikkkka that people’s aesthetic tastes meaningfully reflect deeper cognitive architectures & styles. There’s the interest in compression, Schmidhuber-style. </p><!-- /wp:paragraph -->

<!-- wp:paragraph --><p>Yeah, absolutely! I took this Kant-focused phil. of aesthetics class together with my brilliant philosopher of math friend Sharon Berry, and we messed around together thinking through the idea that a work of art is an object which is ‘massively suggestive,’ and we got in this insane fight when I said it can’t just be massively suggestive the way smoking weed is, there has to be some kind of mnemonic-like enfolding of the things that unfold from the massive suggestiveness back into the object. Sharon was like ‘eh, nice work if you can get it, but this sounds extremely woo’ and I was like ‘I’m going to devote the next eight years of my life to winning this argument.’ </p><!-- /wp:paragraph -->

<!-- wp:paragraph -->

<p>Not really, but when I came home I told my roommate Owain Evans, who is a cogsci, phil., and AI guy with an interest in art, about the fight and he was like ‘there’s actually some stuff about aesthetics and compression’ and introduced me to the Schmidhuber stuff, and we started working on ideas in the neighborhood. </p>

<!-- wp:paragraph --><p>Now, wait. I know there was a brief period you were connected to the LessWrong community, and that there’s a shared interest there (at least among the tiny subset of LW types interested in aesthetics) in Schmidhuber. Did you introduce his frame? Did you discover LessWrong through him? </p><!-- /wp:paragraph -->

<!-- wp:paragraph --><p>Owain Evans has deep community ties there, so either they know the Schmidhuber stuff through him or vice versa, I guess. </p><!-- /wp:paragraph -->

<!-- wp:paragraph --><p>These days you seem skeptical of the LessWrong project. Was there a time their epistemic and community norms had more to offer you, or were more novel? How’d your relationship with that way of thinking and existing change?</p><!-- /wp:paragraph -->

<!-- wp:paragraph --><p>I think I’m actually fairly LW positive—it’s SSC that I don’t like. I think LW invented or popularized beautiful cutting-edge ideas in decision theory, and also helped propagate the language of algorithmic information theory, which I of course love. </p><!-- /wp:paragraph -->

<!-- wp:paragraph --><p>When it comes to the ‘way of

thinking and existing’ stuff, I think there’s still a place in my heart for the sort of hyper-foundationalist Paul Christiano type of reasoning and discourse. What I dislike is the `SSC` thing of, take some anecdotal evidence for `y`, now construct a grand unifying theory of the social world based on `y`. I get enough of this shit being continental social theory adjacent! And the good continentals are much better at it! `Ribbonfarm` is pretty cool, but, I swear, most `Ribbonfarm` posts I’ve read would in fact be way better if they drew on existing continental social theory vocabulary and reference points. I think really the rise-to-visibility of hardcore techie nerds with hardcore continental background, like Lucca Fraser and Dominic Fox, made a lot of the nerds-rebuilding-a-continental-social-theory-analog stuff I associated with the ‘post-rationalist’ scene feel very rudimentary. `</p><!-- /wp:paragraph -->`

`<!-- wp:paragraph --><p>`I supposed really the biggest change I’ve undergone since writing `Amerikkkkka`, intellectually, is coming to the opinion that there’s a lot to work with in continental philosophy and even ‘Theory.’ That starting from scratch in those areas is madness.`</p><!-- /wp:paragraph -->`

`<!-- wp:paragraph --><p>`«Kill me now: the reason the humanities are so bad is it’s so hard to find out who’s genuinely good at the humanities that only people who are genuinely good at the humanities can do that.» Who’ve you found?`</p><!-- /wp:paragraph -->`

`<!-- wp:paragraph --><p>`As far as, eh, CS/math-pilled continentals, ``Peter Wolfendale``, ``Reza Negarestani``, `<a href="https://monoskop.org/Lucca_Fra-`

`ser">`Lucca Fraser``, the ``Laboria Cuboniks group``, ``Anna Longo``, ``Anil Bawa-Cavia``, and ``Dominic Fox`` are all amazing.`</p><!-- /wp:paragraph -->`

`<!-- wp:paragraph --><p>`It seems like, at least between ’09-14, you lived in some interstices.`</p><!-- /wp:paragraph -->`

`<!-- wp:paragraph --><p>`That was always the goal, for sure. Sellarsian reconciliation!`</p><!-- /wp:paragraph -->`

`<!-- wp:paragraph --><p style="text-align:right;">_{`Javier Cumpa: «The Sellarsian task of ontology is to reconcile two seemingly divergent images of ordinary objects such as persons, tomatoes and tables, namely, the manifest image of common sense and the scientific image provided by fundamental physics.»`}</p><!-- /wp:paragraph -->`

`<!-- wp:paragraph --><p>`Ray Davis: How’d you encounter him, what does he mean to you, and why’s he so good?`</p><!-- /wp:paragraph -->`

`<!-- wp:paragraph --><p>`I know Ray from emailing him once I got obsessed with his ``blog``. I think the fundamental thing Ray taught me, other than (passively) teaching me to inject essayistic texts with extremely dense intertextual networks—indeed, to build vibe-making constellations—through carefully curated blink-and-you-missed-it puns, is that formally and aesthetically and even affectively radical art or poetry or what have you doesn’t *have* to be, about, like

sex and death and love and pain and what have you. It's a 'lesson' that's strongly associated with the WCW/Zukofsky tradition in avant-garde American poetry, but Ray is the only one that made me believe it, see its worth.

(How're we doing on time/energy? Going strong here but checking in.)

I've got time until my train arrives at station [in Berlin] in like an hour.

«And I said, I said, 'people who "outgrow" T.S. Eliot are the fucking worst'.» Have you outgrown Eliot yet?

Over my dead body. Eliot's poetry feel like having an octopus tentacle caress the inside of your brain. It's what I imagine buying illegal neural stim software for your language center in a cyberpunk world feels like.

What do you think of the new Vampire Weekend effort? Does it cast doubt on how self-aware the band was back in '09? Should we have foreseen that Koenig's infatuation with "being in the middle" at all times would lead him to this place of aesthetic blandness?

I haven't listened to it yet! I'm both scared I'll hate it and scared it'll resonate with me and give me life-emotions of some kind I'm not prepared for. But Koenig always loved Billy Joel and the Beatles

and things like that. I'm just hoping the lyrics are good, I always related to him mostly as a writer. Loved his [TV show](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neo_Yokio) though, thought it was brilliant.

Music culture has popitism, trashy television is the common parlance of the highbrow—why haven't books had their popitism moment?

Well, there's a weird thing where—for reasons I can't even begin to imagine—low-brow popular books are sometimes kind of worthwhile substance-wise but are an absolute technical mess. So I think the kind of joy at craft and polish and mechanical perfection that powered popitism—which really was a kind of Futurist (as in Italian) machine-worship thing now that I think about it, where the machine is, like, some kind of Landian capitalism-is-the-machine—that thing can't really work with books. Maybe there's something specific to language where the takes-low-compute-to-process is somewhat incompatible with the 'compact' in the sense that strikes us as elegant. Like, *Dragonlance* or *Harry Potter* are technically good writing in the sense that it's writing that's very easy to read for a long time without getting tired, and it conveys the necessary content, but it's also sort of blatantly technically bad writing in the sense that it's.... maybe highly redundant is the relevant notion, or maybe some more sophisticated concept. But, like, mass-market-optimal written language just doesn't feel 'clean' or 'tight' or 'perfected' in the way that mass-market-optimal visuals or sounds do.

Amerikkkk-

ka

lays out the terms of conflict between art-rock/avant kids on one hand and PoMo/prog-rock types on the other. Which tribe are you in?

Extremely art-rock/avant. Like, I believe people that Thomas Pynchon and William Gaddis are great writers but... no, please give me Kathy Acker and Robbe-Grillet. I think it's, like, I don't really like things that are more rich than they are deep. Someone like Joshua Cohen is writing incredibly rich novels, but do they actually interface with any cognitive or aesthetic nerve center outside of themselves that hasn't been interfaced with before? Nah. Trisha Low, on the other hand, is someone who makes work with relatively modest internal structural complexity but that really lodges itself in critical, unfamiliar cognitive-aesthetic-affective nerve centers and works them.

I wanted to ask about Trisha Low, I have **Com-pleat Purge** at my bedside now. **I tried hard with Robbe-Grillet's** **Jealousy**. I struggle with visual description and building/keeping images in my head, so I drew out pages of diagrams to stay oriented, filled a quarter of a notebook, it always felt like doing math problems.

Jealousy is haaaard. **Repetition** is the one that's also a spy-thriller and is crazy awesome.

Trisha's a very old not-close-

but-warm friend, and her work as long as I've known her socially was always not my thing at all, and when **Purge** came out I was like, "oh heh I guess I'm now a legit fan of this old friend of mine, cool."

I mean, with Trisha Low... you mention on **Second Balcony**—I don't think it made it into **Amerikkkka**, it came later—about Sarah Nicole Prickett's mode of sexual narcissism, which is also part of **Red Scare**'s mode and may relate to the Kaitlin Phillips, **Art-forum**-adjacent, it-girl New York scene. Low's **Purge** is just permeated with that kind of desire, but also its complications and power reversals.

Kaitlin Phillips is a bit different in that her entire life is a very, very good shitpost, but yeah. I think it all has to do with the class composition of the NY intelligentsia and how sort of old money doctoral professional households in the US have 1940s gender roles.

Now, Trisha's on Gauss [PDF], Buffy Cain's on Gauss, Corrigan's on Gauss. You must've known the press well while writing. How'd **Amerikkkka** end up on it? In that way at least, the book feels like a document of a community, a shared e-poetics discourse at a certain moment.

I knew [J.] Gordon [Faylor] in NY—we didn't get along great back then, actually—but somehow I emailed him about something after he moved to the Bay Area and it sort of became clear we both regretted not getting along great back then, so we became email friends. When I 'wrote' **Amerikkkka**

I emailed it to him and was actually totally shocked that he wanted to publish it on Gauss as an actual book. He was always one of my absolute favorite [writers](https://www.uglyducklingpresse.org/catalog/browse/item/?pubID=534). I always say he's the Ingmar Bergman of gibberish.

If you had to situate Amerikkkkka in a lineage, how would you situate it? Who were you reading at the time? Were there works that helped you understand it structurally?

I think what I say in the intro is exactly right: the influences were Trisha's *Purge*, Schlegel on 'romantic poetry' (really what we'd call modernism), and Elif Batuman's [scholarly and essayistic work](https://web.archive.org/web/20130108020540/http://www.elifbatuman.com:80/Criticism/DissertationIntroduction.pdf) on the theory of the novel. Oh and for the blog itself the biggest influence was always Shklovsky's *The Zoo*, which is maybe the great masterpiece of saying things that are rigorous and true in a way that make them also cast beautiful shadows on the wall. Which now that I think of it is what Kant says poetry is—'offering, from among the boundless multiplicity of possible forms accordant with a given concept, to whose bounds it is restricted, that one which couples with the presentation of the concept a wealth of thought to which no verbal expression is completely adequate, and by thus rising aesthetically to ideas.' Ok gotta go! This was hella fun!

Last night I woke up glutamate-blinded by alcohol and thought bad thoughts like Bang! Bang! Bang! Like, "The problem with me 'n you, babe, is you're an evoker and I'm

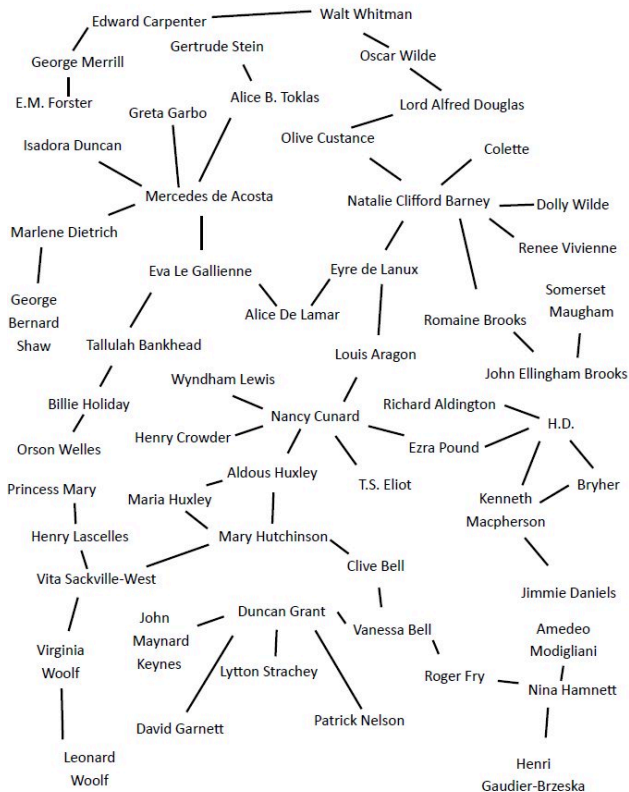
all about signification, I'm all about the room, trying to pick myself up."

Later I'm in the bar I'm fetishizing ease, surf films projected on the wall and reading *The Flick*, wanting the zipless, the effortless, the bartendress in her denim.

There are TWO THINGS that continually gaslight me: philosophy, and visual art, &

Iggy Pop's face is really the Mapplethorpe special & it's me, lookin' at you.

Modernism's Sexual Networks



III.

Early 1970s and Annie Dillard is sticking her head around the Galápagos. She comes to see “the curious shapes soft proteins can take”; she watches the lava spatter “inchoate” from the sloshing sea, harden “mute and intractable on nothing’s lapping shore.” She cites Darwin’s “species are not (it is like confessing a murder) immutable,” the same line that stuck out to Lorine Niedecker, two generations prior.¹ Like Nelson, Dillard uses the word “flux,” and the phrase “process of becoming.”

The organisms she comes to observe—animals unscared of human beings, birds that can be whistle-called from anywhere on the island, sea lions establishing throughlines of communication through physical language, ocean somersaulting—have found, over the the centuries, contextual solutions, contextual selves, evolved into their niche. The state of nature is constant change and turning, a shapelessness constantly reconfigured, slipping in and out of focus. As the context morphs, the categories mould themselves around it—*fitness*. What would it look like, to propose that the problem is not categories, per se, but unfit categories, that a changing context demands adaptability?

(Confusion! You can't tell what's up or down, or what you're saying, or who to believe. Confusion! A deepest unease.²)

Dillard, like Sarah Perry two generations later, sees a kind of parable in the way, *when you get down to this business of species formation, you eventually hit some form of reproductive isolation... [and] ultimately, geographical isolation*. Incubation of difference: “If the Galápagos has been one unified island, there would be one dull note, one super-dull finch,” a monoculture, a single set of expectations and norms for the endless Pangea. Eventually, the organization and distance of others become the constraints and affordances of our own organization.

The only overlap I know of, between the work of Nelson and the social scientists Hanson & Simler, writing in *Elephant in the Brain*, is the image of the bowerbirds. *Bluets* G67: «A male satin bowerbird would have tottered with it in his beak over to his bower, or his “trysting place,”³ as some field guides put it, which he spends weeks adorning with blue objects in order to lure a female. Not only does the bowerbird collect and arrange blue objects—bus tickets, cicada wings, blue flowers, bottle caps, blue feathers plucked off smaller blue birds that he kills, if he must, to get their plumage—but he also paints his bower with juices from blue fruits, using the frayed end of a twig as a paintbrush. He builds competitively, stealing treasures from other birds, sometimes trashing their bowers entirely.» G68: «Experienced builders and performers can attract up to thirty-tree females to fuck per season if they put on a good enough show, have built up enough good blue in their bower, and have the contrast with the yellow straw down right. Less experienced builders sometimes don’t attract any females at all. Each female mates only once. She incubates the eggs alone.»⁴

3 “Would you like to see my etchings?”

4 We can carve up art’s value as a combination of intrinsic properties (like beauty) and extrinsic properties (something like intertextual & economic/Marxist labor reasons: time spent working on a project, time invested in mastering a craft, originality/authenticity). Were art only about

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I shouted and banged my head against a wall and ran around the empty gallery thinking “even the worst mass-market paperbacks are more complex, more suggestive, more charged than anything consecrated in *this* room.”

The windows were sweating, and their wooden framed engorged with humidity. My Roman *d’or*: I’ve long been on record as an August hater. / There is a mozaic of a saint in the Byzantine Kariye Church, Istanbul, painted near the end of the 11th century. It is chipped at the edges; only the saint’s torso and the western hemisphere of his face remain. His gold halo faded, the absence of legs lending the appearance of levitation. He holds up his hand as if protesting his erasure by time, but already he has lost his right eye; soon, only the hand will remain, and then not even that.

intrinsic, formal effects like beauty, they argue a perfect replica or copy would be worth and valued equivalently to the original. Instead it is the original which serves as proof-of-work; “Jesse Prinz and Angelika Seidel asked subjects to consider a hypothetical scenario in which the Mona Lisa burned to a crisp, 80 percent of them [saying] they’d prefer to see the ashes of the original rather than an indistinguishable replica.” The awe & sublimity sought does not belong internally to the painting but externally, to its aura and place in the world of production. “We find attractive,” says Miller, “those things that could have been produced only by people with attractive, high-fitness qualities such as health, energy, endurance, hand-eye coordination, fine motor control, intelligence, creativity, access to rare materials, the ability to learn difficult skills, and lots of free time.” Which is what the female bowerbird finds attractive in the bowers of her mates. Hence theater, which is a live performance which cannot compete with film in displaying human emotions through closeups (face reading, mind reading), or rehearsal or in the ability to pick, among many variations, the best take—and yet which carries more prestige than film in high class circles. By disrupting the cult of originality, authenticity, skilled performance, laboriousness, or technically advanced production, a serious blow is struck to our understanding of art indeed—our intuitive deployment & reception of it, even more than our theoretical, explicitly stated conception.

From the courtyard, I floated in / And watched it go down / Heard the cup drop; / Thought, "Well that's why they keep them around."

I am a stranger in a strange land, keeping, culling clumsy maps of cultures in my head. Slow to come to terms with a culturesphere of soft touches and small gestures; slow to reconcile this gentleness with the hard hierarchies of its professional accompaniment.⁵ Slow to come to terms with its fluid marketplace where sexual, social, and cultural capital are easily exchanged; slow to feel at ease in the *endless meshes incest*.⁶ Our precedent is the Mad Men of the Mid-century, even after the men are gone.

Slow to Anteros: "Every interaction I have feels tinged by sexuality... a conversation at an opening, a party, a networking event, a reading (these are all the same)... desire ember-warms the belly, or else in their words and glances you feel the agenda." When you said there was something to his presence that made you wilt, I asked whether it was the "plumb your soul with eye contact"⁷ type or the "generate desire for approval through learned detachment" type. You said it was the latter.

∞

Carse, *Finite & Infinite Games*: "What one wins in a finite

5 Earnest/sincere vs. knowing/showy/bratty; Boyer vs. Babitz.

6 Acker, postcard to R. Silliman

7 see Dillard, *Encounters with Chinese Writers*: «As we drink, Wu holds my eyes... There is something extraordinary in his look... The man is taking my measure. He is measuring what I can only call my "spirit"—my "depths," such as they are... There is nothing personal or flirtatious about it. He is going into my soul with calipers. He is entering my eyes as if they were a mineshaft; he is testing my spirit with a plumb line... I won't lower my eyes. I let him look; I hide nothing... The deeper he goes, the more interested he gets, but, I stress, his is an analytical interest, and, I stress, he hits bottom. My depths are well within reach of his plumb line... I wish I were deeper, but there you are.» Is it fair to say that her insistence, twice, that the dynamic is not sexual indicates that sexuality is, in fact, the underlying logic of the exchange?

game is a title. A title is the acknowledgment of others that one has been the winner of a particular game. Titles are public. They are for others to notice. I expect others to address me according to my titles, but I do not address myself with them—unless, of course, I address myself as an other."

Since a game cannot be repeated, with the same players at the same time under the same circumstances, the title is final and lasting, cannot be overwritten. "Since titles are timeless, but exist only so far as they are acknowledged, we must find means to guarantee the memory of them. the birettas of dead cardinals are suspended from the ceilings of cathedrals, as it were forever; the numbers of great athletes are 'retired' or withdrawn from all further play; great achievements are carved in imperishable stone or memorialized by perpetual flames."

They are theatrical. "Each title has a specified ceremonial form of address and behavior. Titles such as Captain, Mrs., Lord, Esquire, Professor, Comrade, Father, Under Secretary, signal not only a *mode of address* with its appropriate deference or respect, but also a *content of address* (only certain subjects are suitable for discussion with the Admiral or the Holy Mother), and a manner of address (shaking hands, kneeling, prostrating or crossing oneself, saluting, bowing, averting the eyes, or standing in silence)." What you say is who you are is who you're talking to, the content not constrained but *created* by the form and addressee, which together comprise the premise for speaking.

Legitimacy is bestowed by deference, the recognition of one by others.⁸ It is found by watching others' attentions,

8 "Power is never one's own, and in that respect it shows the contradiction in all finite play. I can be powerful only by not playing, by showing that the game is over. I can therefore have only what powers others give me."

second-order watching. It is doled out through systems of reciprocal vouching, indebtedness, and reference; it is awarded institutionally (top-down) and relationally (horizontal).

Jane Kallir of Galerie St. Etienne: «I found a job at another gallery, which shall remain nameless. I remember that the gallery's owners once suggested I buy an Hermès handbag that cost the equivalent of about two months' salary. The gallery was run by a retired collector and his wife. Most of my job consisted of hand-addressing envelopes—this was a particular point of pride for the gallery. I have terrible handwriting, and my boss was a screamer. Every time an envelope was returned by the post office, he'd yell at me. Other than that, and attending to the owners' dry-cleaning and the occasional customer, there wasn't much to do. The gallery's files were stored in a shoebox in the bathroom.»

Tamsen Greene of Jack Shainman Gallery: «I saw a New York Foundation for the Arts classifieds listing for a gallery assistant position at Andrea Rosen and got excited: It was the gold standard, one of Chelsea's coolest galleries. I brought my cover letter and resumé to the gallery and shyly handed them to the woman at the front desk. Both she and the other gallery assistant [had also gone] to Barnard, and I think school pride made them look more closely. Or maybe they just loved my \$1 red skirt from the 96th street SaVal, the second-chicest thing I owned. My chicest outfit I saved for the interview, a cream pleated skirt with \$250 Etro boots I'd bought at a consignment store. They were the most expensive things I owned until later, when Andrea gave me a brand-new pair of orange-and-purple Prada high-heeled loafers. They hurt too much to wear, but I still have them.»⁹

∞

The proof we carry with us of time invested, belonging forged in the mutual exclusivities of temporal commitment: proof in the metalhead's jacket sewn with patches, evidencing presence in a past space-time, a particular location and event. Proof in the varsity jacket. Proof on bookshelves, proof in record collections. Proofs in our fabrics and leathers. Proof in the musician's memorization, in the words we use and how we use them.¹⁰ Proof in our comms, our front-facings, our home decors, our websites, bylines. Proof in our networks accumulated, proof in our insider knowledge, proof in the responsibilities we do or do not feel, indicated per the obligations we do or don't ignore. Proof in our confidence. Proof in the thickness of paint.

Henrich, of strong credentials & decorated publishing history, legitimizing the theories of Girard: "Natural selection favored social learners who could evaluate potential models and copy the most successful among them. In order to improve the fidelity and comprehensiveness of such rank-biased copying, social learners further evolved dispositions to sycophantically ingratiate themselves with their chosen models, so as to gain close proximity to, and prolonged interaction with, these models... [Such] dispositions created, at the group level, distributions of dependence that new entrants may adaptively exploit to decide who to begin copying."¹¹

10 Newfaggery and habitus: «Despite the zero-identity principle of 4chan's A-culture, newfags are distinguishable from established users as their post content reflects a lack of social competence within the class habitus of established users: for instance, they lack familiarity or versatility with native speech patterns or cultural capital, indicating a lack of immersion in the site; or they attempt to force content into popularity, implying the egotistical, narcissistic logics of cultural economies of self-publicity. However, quintessential newfag behaviour is typically met with suspicion, as the rhetor may be an experienced user employing these behaviours to troll a community easily offended by them.»

11 Henrich and Gil-White (2001)

He goes on to refine the fuzzy concepts of status and power, carving their many confluences into the more atomic “prestige” and “dominance,” the former a deference freely given to the accomplished from below, the latter a deference given out of fear of retribution, antagonistically imposed from above. Both forms of status grant greater freedom, support, alliance, access—to spaces, resources, sex, social groupings. Both forms are reified through reminders: grooming, gaze avoidance, lowered eyes, personal space, gifting, and other displays of submission. The prestigious are offered praise, which is denied through polite self-deprecation, which is itself swiftly countered by reaffirmations of praise, thereby completing a ritual exchange. Such deferences are offered as incentives for inter-model competition, for striving toward and developing more accurate models, acquiring and then sharing knowledge.

Often, emulators don’t know why the practice they’re copying works; unable to isolate the relevant behaviors, they ritualize instead the entire behavioral structure, i.e. lifestyle, of the successful, emulated model, a form of cargo cult. Prestige hierarchies that begin by optimizing for fitness can quickly become autotelic, cycles of prestige breeding cycles of prestige detached from real-world markers. In parts of Melanesia, men historically received prestige for growing larger and larger yams, such that the yams grown today are so large they’re inedible. *Cage’s music is an example of the tendency for high-status human domains to ignore fit with human nervous systems in favor of fit with increasingly rarified abstract cultural systems.*

Like a Midas of the rats, Prestige leaves a grease stain Prestige leaves a perfume stain behind, intoxicating, preventing sober vision. Project yourself into an alternate present where “video art” as merely another genre of YouTube video, a strange corner of the Internet, creators with an inter-

esting and seemingly esoteric discourse but no institutional affiliation, no museums, galleries, course syllabi to project an image of a historically continuous project dating back millennia. Or the gilding of nostalgia: project yourself into an alternate filmography where this year’s Academy-bait prestige effort is left intact but released in the midcentury, imagine its feeling of quaintness and naiveté and timelessness, movies back when they knew how to make them.

When success is conceptualized as zero-sum—*your success at the cost of mine, mine at the cost of yours*—it wrecks economies, throttles growth by preventing the free-flow of information, preventing the sharing of better business practices, improved technologies, improved techniques.

∞

A WAIST. “The Young-Girl’s self-control and self-constraint are obtained through the introjection of two unquestionable ‘necessities’: that of REPUTATION and that of HEALTH.” Driven to madness by the zero-sum economy of New York’s social-fashion scene, a high-school politics dressed up like sophisti-pop, the elevated pretense of the cognitive wallpapering over? meaningfully transforming? overwriting? the juiciness of the flesh.

Everyone is interested in scamming, celebrity, branding these days: Tolentino (*Trick Mirror*), Wilk (*Oval*), Staag (*Surveys & Sleeveless*), citing—second to the current administration—Anna Delvey, Elizabeth Holmes, the saga of Caroline Cassady. And what’s the border between vibe and brand, networks of associative feeling?

X: Heh, like the time I asked Z out in La Caverna and she was so out of my league, wrote for a bunch of culture mags, total baller it-girl, we’d never met. But I found out a mag she helped run was having a party at La Caverna downtown, this giant underground cave of a bar

complete with stalactites and fake cave paintings And I went down and looked for an hour asking after her and at last found her in the crowd and said “Are you Z?” and she said yes, and I told her, “I’ve been looking for you all night. Put your number in” and handed her my phone and she did it.

F: Eh, I don’t think I’m affected by reality distortion fields as much as you. I’m not perceiving the social capital I might siphon from her. Imagine the same person in some podunk town, untransformed by the city.

∞

A grand theory of history, à la bowerbirds, via Laura Betzig: Evolutionary reproductive strategies are not identical for men and women. Female *homo sapien* mating strategies (in the aggregate; i.e., so highly varied and altered and made specific by culture that it would not be transparent as such) historically appear to select for social stature and resource security. You end up with the sexual dimorphism we see today: larger and stronger men, evolved from fighting over said resources. (The bonobo monkeys, for instance, do not have hardcore sexual dimorphism like we do, and their sexual culture is entirely different, chicken-egg style.)

But you also, as Betzig points out, get patriarchy and imperialism, both being the organized competition between genetic rivals, and factions of genetic relations unified in rivalry (kin selection) leading inexorably into xenophobia. “In short, reproductive inequality implies economic inequality. At the same time, economic inequality implies political inequality.” The syllogistic flow between types of capital (social, economic, sexual) shouldn’t come as a surprise: it’s a mechanism rife in the world of cultural production, business, and politics (though the latter two circles have at least begun to respond to the abuses and ethical inequities inherent in such a system, with workplace romance

rules and norms against harassment, with wage laws that ensure the flow of literal capital—less precarious than symbolic capital—downward).

Old man black beetle crawling up the kitchen wall. “Theory is a novel where the narrator has lapsed into total solipsism.” (Kantbot) A workshop is a bandpass filter—you can crowdsource out the worst but you’ll also scrap the best. Delany: «From my seat in the third row, I heard him begin to read out a section from the third “chapter” of my “novel” (Actually, as has been practically every MFA thesis I’ve encountered in the past decade, my “novel” was a series of loosely connected stories with some common characters—and equally uninteresting.)» [socialist organizer/editor hitting on Alice] *You know, you and I have a lot in common. I get reactionary thoughts too.* [Alice] *I’m not reactionary!* [Editor] *Well... aesthetically.*¹²

∞

In shelter of/from the hierarchy, conch shells & soft listening sessions, a frisson in the whispers, a gentle introduction welcoming the guests. Introspecting, remembering, “whatever comes to mind is perfect,” *to be enough*, a small coral-lit single-room reading room, a studio really, in Bedford-Stuyvesant? Gowanus?

I tell myself, Stay grounded, ward off conspiracies of intent, recognize badness in the world as by-and-large byproduct. What is conscious intent in considering a self-optimizing system? Those on the lower levels of the totem pole know: sometimes it’s best not to loop in your supervisors. Those on the higher levels of the totem pole know: sometimes it’s best not to loop in the board of investors. The brain as at its best when working under illusions; dirty work the kind of hush-hush affair that provides plausible deniability; mo-

tivated but unable justify.¹³ The reasons feeling half-baked, post-hoc, convenient.

Scott on Trivers on Self-Deception, radically abridged: «There's some controversy over exactly how good our mental lie detectors are or can be... [There's] evidence that there are certain people who can reliably detect lies from any source at least 80% of the time without any previous training: microexpressions expert Paul Ekman calls them (sigh...I can't believe I have to write this) Truth Wizards, and identifies them at about one in four hundred people. The psychic unity of mankind should preclude the existence of a miraculous genetic ability like this in only one in four hundred people: if it's possible, it should have achieved fixation. Ekman believes that everyone can be trained to this level of success (and has created the relevant training materials himself) but that his "wizards" achieve it naturally; perhaps because they've had a lot of practice. One can speculate that in an ancestral environment with a limited number of people, more face-to-face interaction and more opportunities for lying, this sort of skill might be more common; for what it's worth, a disproportionate number of the "truth wizards" found in the study were Native Americans, though I can't find any information about how traditional their origins were or why that should matter. [...]

Trivers' theory is that the conscious/unconscious distinction is partly based around allowing people to craft narratives that paint them in a favorable light. The conscious mind gets some sanitized access to the output of the unconscious, and uses it along with its own self-serving bias to come up with a socially admirable story about its desires, emotions, and plans. The unconscious then goes and does whatever has the highest expected reward—which may be socially admirable, since social status is a reinforcer—but

¹³ Art, then, is a product over a species-wide confusion over whether we are a tournament species or a pair-bond species.. (R. Sapolsky)

may not be. Trivers' theory has been summed up by calling consciousness "the public relations agency of the brain". It consists of a group of thoughts selected because they paint the thinker in a positive light, and of speech motivated in harmony with those thoughts. This ties together signaling, the many self-promotion biases that have thus far been discovered, and the increasing awareness that consciousness is more of a side office in the mind's organizational structure than it is a decision-maker.»

(I said, it's my damn book I'll do what I wanna, and what I wanna is roleplay Isidore de Seville.)

Wark, Aug 14 1995 email to K. Acker: «Mind you, it's true that Sabina has historically fucked whoever has the intellectual skills/contacts she needs at any given moment. But it really is completely uncalculated. She **really** and **actually** desires that which empowers her in the other. Which is what I think men do. So why shouldn't she? There's a great book about it called *Object-Choice* by Klaus Theweleit. About the wives and lovers of Heidegger, Freud, etc. The idea of women connecting sex to **anything** but romantic love seems to be a big phobia¹⁴ out there. *Basic Instinct*, *Disclosure*, etc.»

∞

Neptune Diner II. A couple next to us, eating cottage cheese out of cantaloupe: *X: I feel terrible when I eat dairy. Y: Terrible how? X: Like I wanna die, it's so not worth it. Y: Like what*

¹⁴ G. Miller: "One thing you realize if you get into debates about polyamory versus monogamy... culture apparently is also downstream from the mating system. So if you really wanna get people riled up you challenge the mating system that actually dominates relations between sexes but also family structure and has knock-on effects of everything from the design of housing and urban systems to the design of careers and the extent to which people can use freedom of association for form little families or polycules "

are your symptoms? X: *Like, I wanna shit and my stomach hurts.* Y: *Is it the kinda thing where you acclimate if you consume it regularly?* Like Princess Bride, *mithridatism*. X: *Why would I ever make myself sick like that. I save it for rare indulgences when I can't resist.* Y: *Have you gone to a doctor about it?* X: *I'm not gonna eat that bite, I'll have the cantaloupe.* Y: *Just one bite! It's the best bite!*

Sad Girl Theory, popularized by Cal-Tech MFA'er Audrey Wollen¹⁵: ‘the internalised suffering women experience should be categorised as an act of protest. We have historicised gestures of externalisation and violence, because they already fit into our standards of masculinity, and therefore, power. But there is an entire lineage of women¹⁶ who consciously disrupted the status quo through enacting their own sorrow... I'm writing a book. At least, I'm saying I'm writing a book to justify how much time I'm spending alone in my room freaking out about words. If you're freaking out about words, say you're writing a book. If you're freaking out about colors existing, say you're making abstract paintings, you know? I count freaking out as a kind of work, so right now, I'm freaking out about girls, our histories and our futures, words, and how they change what girls are, our histories and our futures, bodies, and how they change words, and how they change what girls are, etc, etc. ’

EVERYTHING IS IN THE FRAME: «Not to romanticize historical eras that would have objectively sucked for me or anything but “the minister's eccentric spinster daughter, who spends her time in novels and watercolors and is frequently taken abed with Nerves and the Headache” just

15 Wollen, 2015: «my summer aesthetic is currently in transition from “school girl Anime princess in Manchester, UK, 1988” to “18th-Century prostitute discovers Bjork CD on syphilis deathbed.”»

16 Audrey Wollen, Billie Ellish, Brittany Murphy, Cleopatra, Edie Sedgwick, Elizabeth Wurtel, Fiona Apple, Frida Kahlo, Hannah Wilke, Joan Didion, Judy Garland, Lana Del Rey, Kathy Acker, Mitski, Persephone, Sappho, Sylvia Plath, Virginia Woolf, Winona Ryder's Susanna Kaysen.

sounds better than “nerdy depressed millennial with anxiety and migraines who lives with their parents because they have trouble holding down a job or a relationship.” [...The] Excedrin I took earlier doesn't seem to be doing much and I just really feel that if this was the 19th century someone would have given me some laudanum by now.»¹⁷

Motivations for self- and group delusions: livelihood, status, belief water in your hands, *the work matters, it is urgent even 'necessary*.¹⁸ Drown out criticism from the outside,¹⁹ keeping the pact with insiders counted only as insiders if they've so invested themselves, in time, financial ingratiation, that sunk cost bias precludes defecting.

“Every participant who wants to succeed within the field of philosophy must be prepared to engage or invest in the game in some way. *Illusio* is Bourdieu's term for the tendency of participants to engage in the game and believe in its significance, that is, believe in that the benefits promised by the field are desirable. [...] Whatever the combatants on the ground may battle over, no one questions whether the battles in question are meaningful. The considerable investments in the game guarantee its continued existence. *Illusio* is thus never questioned.”²⁰

∞

(CHORUS)

17 bramblepatch.tumblr.com

18 Grietzer, *Amerikkkkka*: “The obvious perversity of [masculinist] avant-gardes is how they never stop talking of exploding the culture around them but seem much more concerned with the insides of their own new utopian spaces.”

19 Purging yourself of external feedback loops works like amplification: genius into breakthru originality, error into unfettered disaster. (The inverse of a workshop's bandpass filter.)

20 Henrik Lundberg & Göran Heidegren

X: “the cut and paste continues to establish its own encrypted values”²¹

F: Some bubbling up, emergent, others imposed, taking like a organ in transplant, taking like second nature or rejected.

X: Which is to say it’s not that a novel can accommodate, naturalize any content in its form; it’s that one could imagine a novel which could effortlessly contain any corresponding piece of content within its bounds, word count constraints controlled for.

F: Sometimes it just fits or doesn’t fit. Sometimes it integrates or resists.

X: Quoting Nelson, “I don’t think about aim very much... I think you just present the party and people can do what they want with it.”²²

Rhonda Lieberman in “The Loser Thing”²³ recounts Beckett’s attempted emulation of his neurotic hero James Joyce,²⁴ who wore painfully small shoes out of vanity.

Brian Timar, via Guzey, radially abridged: “I’ve been a graduate student in physics for almost three years, but I only recently figured out why. I had to tackle a simple question do so: Why does this matter? I realized that I’d never forced myself to answer this honestly... Why had I spent so much time in purposeless hard work? I arrived at a simple mechanism: an excessive sensitivity to the desires of others, and a competitive environment...The second [trap] was a positive feedback loop that encouraged me to spend ever-increasing amounts of time on my work. Humans inherit convictions mimetically from each other—we learn what to value by imitating our peers. As my desire to excel academically grew, I spent greater amounts of time

21 Source lost.

22 “Eileen Myles was my teacher—she always talks about poems as parties and it really got under my skin.”

23 *Artforum* ‘92

24 Cargoculting: copying that which is not important, being unable to disentangle the variables which count from those which just don’t matter.

in and around the physics department. The more time I spent there, the greater my desire to excel. I’d never given physics much thought at all before my senior year in high school—but once I was surrounded by other physics students, competing for the same pool of grades and research positions, I could think of little else. This inherited desire was unchecked because I had no life outside of academics—no fixed reference point... The social reward signal [was decoupled] from the rest of objective reality—you can spend years ascending ranks in a hierarchy without producing anything that the rest of humanity finds valuable... Academics have uniformly rather low salaries, increasing our tendency to focus on social status as a measure of success. Salary gradations are useful for disrupting mimetic effects because they tie effort expended directly to units of universal economic value—convertible to kilos of rice, oil, and stuff in the physical world. A price is a lifeline to reality: all else being equal, the job with the lower wage is probably less valuable. Without this signal, the goals of a peer group are easily decoupled from the outside world, making it easy to drift into time-wasting pursuits.”²⁵

Wainwright’s Poses, Friedberger’s Nice to Be Nowhere, Neil Young’s Razor Love, Cocteau Twins’ Lorelei, Russell’s Habit of You, Camera Obscura’s Country Mile, Courtney Barnett’s Sunday Roast, Your Dream Coat’s People Like You, Drake’s Northern Sky.

In *Manhattan*, Allen’s universal man aspires to God but is only an ape (see the classic shot of the bio classroom, prehistoric skeleton against the wall, or else the seduction attempt upstairs at a literary-elite social gathering: “It’ll be great, because all those Ph.D.’s are in there, you know, like... discussing models of alienation and we’ll be in here quietly humping.”) The quasi-literary pretensions of the

25 “Mimetic Traps,” 2019, via Alexey of Petersburg

filmmaking (the infamous introduction, “Chapter One”; the black-and-white artsiness). To Alvie, the brain’s production is merely post-hoc justification for the wants of the evolved body. Who syncs whom? Meryl Streep’s Jill Davis does Diane Keaton’s Annie Hall one better, not just growing past Woody but past men period. The gossip of her previous life with him get turned into kindling for a tell-all memoir, an early tremor of the Wronged Woman Think-piece Industrial Complex.

Trapped like Herakles. «The web of social relationships we’re embedded in helps define our roles as it forms and includes us. And that same web, as the distributed “director” of the “scene”, guides us in what we do. A lot of (but not all) people get a strong hit of this when they go back to visit their family. If you move away and then make new friends and sort of become a new person (!), you might at first think this is just who you are now. But then you visit your parents... and suddenly you feel and act a lot like you did before you moved away. You might even try to hold onto this “new you” with them... and they might respond to what they see as strange behavior by trying to nudge you into acting “normal”: ignoring surprising things you say, changing the topic to something familiar, starting an old fight, etc. In most cases, I don’t think this is malice. It’s just that they need the scene to work. They don’t know how to interact with this “new you”, so they tug on their connection with you to pull you back into a role they recognize. If that fails, then they have to redefine who they are in relation to you—which often (but not always) happens eventually.»²⁶

Y: *The philosophy of escape we’ve been talking about: get out of whatever box you find yourself in. Gender, genre. The other way of looking is to see categories not as pitfalls to be avoided, but situational-*

26 Valentine, “The Intelligent Social Web,” offering a fake framework (constructed but useful)

ly useful divisions or maps which become dangerous specifically when taken as the sole window on truth. fn Chris Kraus here: “Where there are no walls there is only chaos. And so you break it down,” which is why there’s section breaks in this text. Seeing categories as true in relation, true in chronotope. Boxes are degrading, they reduce something high-dimensional into lower dimensions. But the degradation only comes when it goes unacknowledged that such a compression has taken place. But that doesn’t reduce the value or necessity of compression.

We were talking about Myers-Briggs.

Y: *The questions are like, ‘Do you prefer staying in or going out?’ Well, if I like the people and I have the energy that night, I’ll go out. If I don’t like the people, or I’m tired from work I won’t. Or they’ll ask, ‘In discussions, do you care more about the truth, or keeping the peace?’ If it’s a situation where there are real stakes for a wrong belief, it’s probably worth risking social friction, otherwise not. So inevitably I end up checking the middle option on each question, ‘Unsure’ or ‘Neutral.’*

X: *I feel like I know exactly where I am on a bell curve: I don’t like going out, circa fifth percentile.*

Y: *Is this just me being young? Anyway it feels like most identity-framings of questions end up obfuscating instead of clarifying the situation. Am I a wife, a mother, or a writer?’ seems like a nonsense question; you ‘aren’t’ anything;²⁷ but ‘What are my priorities between my partner, my children, and my work?’ actually gets you somewhere—at the very least, away from dichotomous, essentializing thinking and into a pragmatic balancing of limited time and personal preference.*

I said, factor concepts? Why not? What concepts can be imported from one walled garden to another? We can even make it a manifesto’d tractus—get the nice formal nod to Nelson’s *Bluets* nod, plus obfuscate how much damn uncer-

27 Friston: “an important example of a high-level prior is the belief that one has a particular personality and set of characteristics and views” (REBUS and the Anarchic Brain, *Pharmacological Reviews*, July 2019)

tainty I feel.

∞

TRACTUS:

Words and concepts do not have essences; their vagueness is inherent and the point; the flexibility is what makes them useful. To carve them precisely is precisely beside the point. Understand them instead, following Wittgenstein, Perry, Yudkowsky,²⁸ as yarn spun from many short threads: the threads are connected, strengthening one another, holding each other together and difficult to disentangle. Perry uses the term *zoom* as an example; the sense of *zooming* as in the rapid movement of a train, and *zooming* in a camera lens, have similarities that bind them together but lack any meaningful “essence.” *Zoom* exists only as amalgam, a grouping of relations, a family of similarity. The works referenced throughout the text in your hands do not share an essence but are related.

*If we should inquire for the essence of “government,” for example, one man might tell us it was authority, another submission, another police, another an army, another an assembly, another a system of laws; yet all the while it would be true that no concrete government can exist without all these things, one of which is more important at one moment and others at another. The man who knows governments most completely is he who troubles himself least about a definition which shall give their essence.*²⁹ (So what is art?)

Second: a history of philosophy arguing unproductively over the essence of essence-less concepts. *We were betrayed by Plato’s forms.* Beyond the “If a tree fell in a forest with nobody around” fallacy, debates over free will & determinacy, or the Sorites paradox, taught in undergrad courses

28 “Something Runs Through This Whole Thread,” 2019

29 William James

as a meaningful question about the world rather than a simple bug of linguistic ambiguity. Carve up “does it make a sound?” into subdefinitions: “A tree falling in a deserted forest matches [membership test: this event generates acoustic vibrations]. A tree falling in a deserted forest does not match [membership test: this event generates auditory experiences].”³⁰ There is no longer a conflict or paradox; no one disputes the core facts that the tree has generated acoustic vibrations which are heard by no one. We have only been led into the belief that we are encountering a paradox because the concept of *making a sound* groups the similar, but essentially different, ideas of *generating sound waves* and *generating an auditory experience in a sentient life form*. There is an ambijectivity in play.

II.

Can conflations be avoided? «*The map is not the territory*, as the saying goes. The only life-size, atomically detailed, 100% accurate map of California is California. But California has important regularities, such as the shape of its highways, that can be described using vastly less information—not to mention vastly less physical material—than it would take to describe every atom within the state borders. Hence the other saying: *The map is not the territory, but you can’t fold up the territory and put it in your glove compartment.*» How to catch conflations? «Where you see a single confusing thing, with protean and self-contradictory attributes, it’s a good guess that your map is cramming too much into one point—you need to pry it apart and allocate some new buckets.»³¹

«Suppose you travel back in time to ancient Israel and try to explain to King Solomon that whales are a kind of mammal and not a kind of fish. Your translator isn’t very good, so you pause to explain “fish” and “mammal” to Solomon.

30 Yudkowsky

31 Yudkowsky, *A Human’s Guide to Words*

You tell him that fish is “the sort of thing herring, bass, and salmon are” and mammal is “the sort of thing cows, sheep, and pigs are.” Solomon tells you that your word “fish” is Hebrew *dag* and your word “mammal” is Hebrew *behemah*. So you try again and say that a whale is a *behemah*, not a *dag*. Solomon laughs at you and says you’re an idiot. You explain that you’re not an idiot, that in fact all kinds of animals have things called genes, and the genes of a whale are much closer to those of the other *behemah* than those of the *dag*. Solomon says he’s never heard of these gene things before, and that maybe genetics is involved in your weird foreign words “fish” and “mammal”, but *dag* are just finned creatures that swim in the sea, and *behemah* are just legged creatures that walk on the Earth. You try to explain that no, Solomon is wrong, *dag* are actually defined not by their swimming-in-sea-with-fins-ness, but by their genes. Solomon says you didn’t even know the word *dag* ten minutes ago, and now suddenly you think you know what it means better than he does, who has been using it his entire life? Who died and made you an expert on Biblical Hebrew? You try to explain that whales actually have tiny little hairs, too small to even see, just as cows and sheep and pigs have hair. Solomon says oh God, you are so annoying, who the hell cares whether whales have tiny little hairs or not. In fact, the only thing Solomon cares about is whether responsibilities for his kingdom’s production of blubber and whale oil should go under his Ministry of Dag or Ministry of Behemah. The Ministry of Dag is based on the coast and has a lot of people who work on ships. The Ministry of Behemah has a strong presence inland and lots of people who hunt on horseback. So please (he continues) keep going about how whales have little tiny hairs.³²»

The only thing Solomon cares about is whether responsibilities for his kingdom’s production of blubber and whale oil should go under his

32 “The Categories Were Made for Man, not Man for the Categories”

Ministry of Dag or Ministry of Behemah. In other words, getting from ‘all models are wrong’ to ‘some are useful.’

Ambijectivity:³³ the state of an object meeting some criteria of a category but not all, in a way which makes its categorical identity ambiguous-subjective. Common understandings of a book: a collection of paper filled with printed symbols between covers, a lengthy text with an organizing principle, a media object created and distributed by a publishing house. Is this text in PDF “more” or “less” a book than printed collection of photos? At what length does a PDF start or stop being a book? Is this question subjective, ambiguous, or incoherent? Is there an answer beyond “it depends what you mean by *book*”? Every word is fuzzy, since it is only a container, filled by its society. Does the inquiry bring us somewhere further than we started, arguing over the rounding up or rounding down of entry features? (Is this really what the art world spent sixty years stuck on?) Is it unreasonable to suggest we ask our carving, our conceptualization, to do real work?

«The [Pragmatist] method of resolving disputes and the theory of meaning are on display in James’s discussion of an argument about whether a man chasing a squirrel around a tree goes around the squirrel too. Taking meaning as the “conceivable effects of a practical kind the object may involve,” the pragmatist philosopher finds that two “practical” meanings of “go around” are in play: either the man goes North, East, South, and West of the squirrel, or he faces first the squirrel’s head, then one of his sides, then his tail, then his other side. “Make the distinction,” James writes, “and there is no occasion for any further dispute.”»³⁴

III.

33 Scott’s term

34 Stanford Encyclopedia

In other words, the “meaning” of a text is not contested, what is contested is which of many meanings of “meaning” ought achieve supremacy. In other words, «I said, divide the word “meaning” onto a simple grid with an X-axis of subjective-objective and a Y-axis of elusive-discoverable and then in counter-clockwise from upper-right quadrant, call it “formalist textual meaning,” “reader-response (experimental),” “reader-response (implied),” and finally “classical interpretive” and just call the whole thing off, can we please move on.»³⁵

Which is to say hermeneutics’ meaning wars is just people pointing out different aspects of the definition of meaning, modulated relationally (meaning _to whom_: the author? the reader? the average reader? the dictionary?). Which is to say that the encompassing meaning is merely the:

sum of all infinite interrelationships between a work (e.g. a novel) and the equally infinite set of all data points which exist both inside the work and out in the world, the data points including but not limited to: the composition of society in its entirety, both at the time of the work’s creation and every time before or since; the position of the artist/author within society during every moment of his lifetime and also before/since; all facts and biographies about audiences/readers both real and hypothetical; every included word’s complete etymological history and complete history of usage (also, important in their negation, the histories of excluded words as well); and all physical facts about the universe.³⁶

(Or in Acker’s words, “every part changes (the meaning of) every other part.”)

35 *La Vento*

36 Suspended Reason, “A Possibility for Artistic ‘Meaning,’” 2017

It follows that school-based readings (formalist, reader-response, psychoanalytic, etc) become tools to access sub-strata of meanings but not “the” meaning which can never be captured or reduced. Slipping between frames, treating them as complementary, using them instrumentally, as the only way out of provincialism.

And I said, whew! I’m exhausted! but really quick,

IV.

In the fifth century, the bishops Cyril of Alexandria and Nestorius of Constantinople exchanged a set of letters debating the nature of Christ and the Virgin Mary. Nestorius, arguing against the conventional Greek term *theotokos* (“mother of God”), defended the reference by an Antiochine priest to Mary as *christotokos* (“mother of Christ”). Mary, he asserted, was mother to neither man nor God, since Christ’s dual nature was unique, could not be categorically reduced to either. Cyril, potentially driven by political motives, but as far as we know simultaneously sincere in his belief (these are not an either/or), began campaigning against this argument. The correspondence between the two men proving inadequate, it would take an Ecumenical Council at Ephesus to formally resolve the issue in favor of Cyril and *theotokos*. Nestorius was exiled after bloodshed and power struggles at the highest level. Still today there is a split in orthodoxies; the Church of the East, including Syriac, Iranian, Indian, and Chinese dioceses, actively disents from the 431 AD ruling.

Yet going into the correspondence between Cyril and Nestorius, ze realizes that there is a fundamental misunderstanding between them. In hindsight, Nestorius’s claims are seen by some Christian scholars not as heretical but as a product of translative and communicative issues; Nestorius had taken the Greek *prosopon* to mean “person,” while

Cyril has taken it to mean “mask” or “appearance.” *Physis* too, meaning both “essence” and “body,” comes into play in early Christian debates. There is a different kind of corruption at play here, a corruption of dialogue whose effects ripple onward into modern times and whose presence we can only see with over a millennium of hindsight and scholarship. So what is it now, the motte-and-bailey mechanism by which one can imply all the dangerous connotations of a term, only to fall back on a narrow technical definition when called out? Agreements which appear as disagreements only when filtered through language’s modifying medium?

V.

And I said, I think I believe that borders are drawn for reasons political and motivated, that inclusions and exclusions can be blatantly corrupt, that the constructed reality which words carry inside them deserves regular challenge. But I also believe that challenges are selective, biased by the interests of challengers; that borders are inevitable if concepts are to be considered useful, since words and concepts function through identifying and distinguishing. (Not just similarity but difference.) Perhaps what I believe is that more concern ought be put into refactoring, clarifying, deconstruction category, not for its own sake, not under the illusion of liberation, but instrumentally in order to build a more coherent world. The dangers of being unable to agree on terms should have become obvious by now: the discourse becomes hung up on terms, cannot advance to questions of territory because of disagreements over the map must first be shored up. Those who use words differently from us are seen as inherently motivated, politically and rhetorically wielding their definitions, rather than merely being members of a foreign epistemic community.

X: Could Nelson be conflating the prevalent instances of bad categories (poorly factored, full of internal inconsistencies, masquerading as facts about reality) for an issue with category of categories itself?

*Y: Is it categories or category/instance errors? General indeterminacy? The way words betray us when we treat them as discrete, determined entities rather than containers filled with whatever we put in them? But Nelson’s is a foundational anxiety, stemming from the conditions of human existence: We are organized beings, but we are not the authors of our organization.*³⁷

My boss is killing me. My coworkers are killing me. My email is killing me. My schedule is killing me. My network is killing me. My unpaid, manyfold, overpledged obligations are absolutely killing me.

My friends are killing me. My hours are killing me. My feet are killing me. My back is killing me. This drink is killing me. This rent is killing me. Paying for drinks, at places which are themselves being killed by rent, is killing me.

My habits are killing me. My flattery’s killing me. My libido is killing me. My anxiety’s killing me. My transit is killing me. (Packt Like Sardines in a Crushd Tin Box).

My rent is killing me. My old ways—killing me. I’m being killed—by my desire to please. (Kick drum.)

Long slogs of preparation followed by intense everything-on-the-line this-is-what-you-prepared-for sprints (the finite games of test-taking, interviewing, or the performance arts) vs. paced long-term projects operating on accumulation but with constant counting (the infinite games of on-job performance, of skill-building, craftsmanship, culture-as-evolving-discourse). Interview as form, the generativity of the style, the voice, the set of constraints, a clear audience—improvisation allowed by the existence of a model, a GAN-

like extension of the existent into the possible.

A volunteered regiment, mostly female, toiling through dawn's burning factories at the galleries and institutions which preside over their fates. Newfangled bureaucrats taking advantage of labor markets by dangling diminishing opportunities over the heads of the young. *I don't know why I'm telling you this / Except that I think Gallery Girls / Have something to do with / What some women want and do and are. (What about Gallery Boys, which is / To say Art Handlers. / They count too. Bleh)*³⁸

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Does intentionality matter? Critical consequentialism put to the ultimate test: David Cooper Moore's "The Scary, Misunderstood Power of a 'Teen Mom' Star's Album" discusses Farrah Abraham's infamous pop record *My Teenage Dream Ended*:

It's tempting to consider *My Teenage Dream Ended* alongside other reality TV star vanity albums, like Paris Hilton's excellent (and unfairly derided) dance-pop album *Paris* from 2006 or projects by Heidi Montag, Brooke Hogan, and Kim Kardashian that range from uneven to inept.

But the album also begs comparisons to a different set of niche celebrities—"outsider" artists.

On the I Love Music message board, music obsessives imagined the album as outsider art in the mold of cult favorite Jandek or indie press darling Ariel Pink. Other curious listeners noted similarities to briefly trendy "witch house" music, a self-consciously lo-fi subgenre of electronic dance music. In the *Village Voice*, music

editor Maura Johnston compared Abraham to witch-house group Salem: "If ['Rock Bottom'] had been serviced to certain music outlets under a different artist name and by a particularly influential publicist, you'd probably be reading bland praise of its 'electro influences' right now."

Johnston's quote seems to summarize the gist best—this idea that how an artwork is framed and conceptualized has a major impact on how it's received. There is no idea of absolute "success" or "effectiveness" for a piece of art: success requires criteria by which to be successful. Whether works is found effective depends on what a critic thinks it's trying to do, and genre (framing, tradition, identification) becomes a marker of these criteria.

In rock music these shared priorities traditionally include personal authenticity, essentialist authenticity, self-expression/confession, guitar virtuosity, a certain defiant or rebellious attitude (especially towards capitalism, labels, "the man," older generations). Often, expression should be particular and specific, drawn from personal experience, rather than archetypal, general, or vague (hence rock's condescension towards lyrical clichés). It leans cynical, coolly detached, or sneering rather than optimistic (though rock has its own forms of naivete). Pop cultures are much more accepting of the generic, the universal, the uplifting empowerment anthem. They place more weight on melodic appeal and instantaneous accessibility than esotericism or abrasion. Vocal ability is crucial, and more important than affect and grain—which are arguably rock primary qualities in distinguishing successful singers.

Genre provides an opportunity—the basis—for distinction, setting up a class of expectations capable of tactical undermining. Genres include built-in audiences, sets of ostensible intents or implied goals, which become the assumption ground on which interpretation, evaluation,

38 A Reines, *Coeur de Lion* (07)

and two-way communication are predicated. “You cannot be gorgeous without someone to be gorgeous for,”³⁹ nor sans standards for what constitutes gorgeousness.

Creative works run on default decisions: Most books are written on paper, with black ink, and if an author has specified otherwise there is likely a rationale behind it. If we know this rationale is purely artistic—that is, it was chosen only for artistic reasons, rather than done out of limited technical ability or financial funds or commercial incentives by the author—then this transgression of norm leads us somewhere interesting. We can say the same about paintings done on materials other than canvasses, or with materials other than standard paints; we can say this about the first deviations from realism and mimesis, both literary and visual; about any active straying from the temporal, ideological, or artistic status quo. The transgression makes a point; its power as an utterance comes from contradiction.

The red herring exists because readers expect narrative economy, Chekhov’s Gun, expect that foregrounded elements pulls their weight in a plot. In almost dialectic fashion, surprise, the subverting of expectation, requires expectation to exist; misdirection requires the directing of a user. (Chesterton’s fence for creatives: break rules deliberately, knowing when and how the rules are useful and why that doesn’t apply here.)

What happens when continents collide, when islands gain natural land bridges, when the barriers that incubate diversity are gone?

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B/LOG ENTRY // JAN 26 ‘18

39 Andrea Long Chu, *Females: A Concern*. In other words, appearance definitionally requires an audience; dressing up is a kind of communication. Self-expression cannot be pure, but is rather always social.

If it’s possible to escap3 category, my money’s on utility as stand-in!

Coverage of Lana Del Rey by the indie-rock championing *Pitchfork* begins August 30, 2011 with a feature by staff writer Ryan Dombal in the magazine’s Rising section (a column which profiles and interviews relatively new artists who are rapidly gaining blogosphere traction). What starts out as a biographical background piece maneuvers, almost inevitably, into asking the sort of questions rock music fans and critics have long been notorious for: whether Del Rey is a “character or studio creation” versus a genuine self, whether she’s been tempted by the “industry” to change her “sound or look.”

The rough critical framework Dombal’s questions are operating out of is known as rockism, arguably the dominant mode of masculinist music writing of the past half-century. The rockist critic prioritizes sincerity over theater, rawness over polish (these being an ideological priority and its aesthetic proxy, respectively). He works off a dual-faceted conception of authenticity as both “personal” and “essentialist,” referring respectively to an artist’s truthful representation of his genuine self and the natural, “primitive,” “close-to-nature” quality of his culture or society. Rockism is the ideology of those who “idoliz[e] the authentic old legend (or underground hero) while mocking the latest pop star; lioniz[e] punk while barely tolerating disco; lov[e] the live show and hat[e] the music video; extol the growling performer while hating the lip-syncher.” Nitsuh Abebe, in a 2011 thinkpiece for *Pitchfork* entitled “The Imagination of Lana Del Rey,” puts it another way, arguing that in indie rock (a genre whose value judgments are heavily influenced by rockist thought), “the music itself is allowed to follow its aesthetic imagination off in strange directions, but the artists are often expected not to... When a musician tries to

embody [persona and imagination] in person... fans start grumbling about being imposed upon.”

Dombal’s application of said rockist standards onto the work of Lana Del Rey—a musician whose performance seems so obviously predicated on falsity and persona—might seem bizarre to us in hindsight, but Del Rey plays ball anyway. She’s an ex-singer-songwriter after all, a genre which Abebe notes is “allergic to pretense.” “There’s not a real me and another me. Same person, just a different name,” Del Rey responds when asked about the disparity between her stage and birth name, Lizzy Grant.

Rockism as a critical framework has been consistently ceding ground in the critical landscape by this point. Kelefa Sanneh’s 2004 *MT* editorial, “The Rap Against Rockism,” is an early, high-profile rallying call against the implicit framework, and in the years since, a new model called “poptimism” has begun to emerge, challenging many of rockism’s assumptions and critical bedrock. It attempts to move past the (consciously and unconsciously) racialized value judgments (both in origin and practice) of rockism (that certain cultures, esp. those ethnically African, were perceived as more primitive, unsophisticated, and in-touch with nature in some uncorrupted, Rousseauian sense). Disco, rockist bane of femininity and hedonism, undergoes serious critical re-evaluation/historical revision; with this comes the critical awareness that if past pop music was unfairly slighted, contemporary pop music is likely slighted as well, in equal or greater measure. By 2015, this paradigm shift in critical thinking will reach a feasible critical mass (*Pitchfork*, though relatively late to the game, will start giving high-profile coverage to pop stars in the early 2010s, and Editor-In-Chief Mark Richardson will confess at a Vassar College guest lecture that his staff members are “big fans” of Swift’s *1989*) but in 2011 the critical modes are

still in transition, still *becoming*. Dombal might ask about Del Rey’s positioning between artistic integrity and the music industry’s pressures, but he also wonders aloud, in the same sentence, whether the “two things are even [necessarily] in opposition.”

Lindsay Zoladz’s review one year later of Del Rey’s debut LP *Born to Die* notes that while the “grainy homemade” quality of Del Rey’s breakthrough “Video Games” had previously “brought to mind... the indie sphere” (and thus the artistic, non-corporate authenticity of said sphere), *Born to Die* exemplifies an artist securely within the realm of “big-budget chart pop.” Not only are these two spheres presented as dissonant and even antagonistic, but Zoladz’s language implies a sort of betrayal of listeners by Del Rey: they were promised one thing with her early releases but received something else, something potentially lesser despite (or because of) its “big budget.” The end result of this corporate tampering is that *Born to Die* sounds “out of touch... not just with the world around it, but with the simple business of human emotion.” Her language shows a clear failing of the album by rockist standards—of underground or lower-class artists channeling a human rawness or “in-touchness” that Del Rey, with her corporate patronage, fails to achieve. It’s the “album equivalent,” Zoladz writes, “of a faked orgasm,” a metaphor which, of course, further channels the language of deceit and betrayal while emphasizing discrepancies between presentation and “fact.” And yet, there’s some reconciliation or compromise of these ideals on Zoladz’s part: she acknowledges that (quoting Ellen Willis), “‘Blatant artifice can, in the right circumstances, be poignantly honest’”—but only if it meets certain standards and specific criteria by which this achieved, finally concluding that *Born to Die* lacks the self-aware “tension between image and inner self” to give it emotional “fire.” The tension and conflict Zoladz herself feels in attempting

to reconcile the artistic worths of theatrical and confessional expression parallels the greater music community's own inner turmoil, grappling for handholds within the crawl-space between rockist and popmimist frameworks.

Where rockism correctly observes that populist interests can compromise artistic values, it fails to acknowledge that all artistic decisions are between a host of options, and that the act of choosing is necessarily a compromise of one value for another. If an artist supports a model of art which prioritizes entertainment factor over innovation, the temptation of commercial success is not a compromise but the very game itself. A quasi-popmimist critic prioritizing beauty and mass appeal in zer values hierarchy could see institutionalized art-world pressure as a temptation towards compromise—via its network of connections, its weighty influence in critical circles, and the kind of prestige that accompanies academic and/or highbrow acceptance—in the same way that the Old Rockist critic sees corporate money. Instead of pushed to accessibility, pushed toward obscurity.

Even if awe or lushness is held above entertainment factor in an artist's values hierarchy, corporate money ensures, rather than prevents, its actualization; Old Rockist notions of money's inherent detriment is made ironic by the observation that Del Rey, and acts like her, if relegated to the underground would have had to significantly compromise their artistic vision from a lack of resources—the reality of funding the culturesphere has accepted but only uneasily.

But all democratic taste movements evolve their own snobberies; any worldview formed in the absence of power will warp once it assumes ubiquity. Lindsey Zoladz herself, in an open letter on *Vulture/New York Mag* introducing herself as the publication's new head music editor: "I've recently started to suspect that bragging about cultural omnivorousness has become its own form of snobbery, and that the

new face of music-nerd elitism is not the High Fidelity bro but instead the Twitter user who would very much like you to applaud him for listening to Ke\$ha and Sunn O))) and Florida Georgia Line and Gucci Mane." New York Times critic Saul Austerlitz notes in "The Pernicious Rise of Popmimism" that "contemporary music criticism is a minefield rife with nasty, ad hominem attacks," and laments that the "most popular target, in recent years, has been those professing inadequate fealty to pop."

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The pop-sugar/avant-protein spectrum. The ____/____ spectrum. In naked molerat colonies, there are always a handful of molerats who do no work all year long, instead passing the days fattening up on food. When the rainy season comes, these molerats are tasked with plugging the entrances to the colony tunnels with their bodies, to keep water from seeping in. When one is busy one has so few downtimes that each is filled with flooding relief, and of course while so busy one has no time to wonder whether one is happy.

Failures to disentangle interiority for outside world: taking dreams as omens, interpretations as truths, feeling as validity; illusions of transparency; typical mind failures; projection of feelings onto the other, self-judgment onto the other, personal failures onto the other, or the system; an inability to separate desire from ontology, priors from praxis in the forming of moral judgments. Humility humility humility. A sticky sour month, humid and stagnant.

Ze trusts, ze2 takes advantage. Ze does not trust, loses out on the benefits of cooperation. Ze's brokering peace treaty allows ze2 the subterfuge for sabotage. Ze's distrust prevents a peace treaty. Mother bats share food cooperatively, such that an unlucky mother who has failed to catch insects

one night will have her child supported by luckier hunters. But intercept a mother in flight, inflate her gullet with air such that it appears she has a catch she isn't sharing, and her peers will burn her in retaliation, refusing to feed the child until mother cooperates in turn. Game-theory and mathematics rediscover nature's solution: tit-for-tat, with variations allowing for slightly lower bounds on forgiveness and retaliation, outperforms other strategies.

I said, not losing with minimum effort vs. winning most with whatever effort required. The ethics of _Reducing to starter packs, parts standing for wholes, consumption standing in for character: book covers shirt logos families of influence._ To what extent ought private life bleed into public life?

The sickness that permeates the *Neapolitan Novels* is Lila's recurring sensation of "dissolving boundaries," an anxiety of the universe rearing up, an anxiety of losing control. "She said that the outlines of things and people were delicate, that they broke like cotton thread. She whispered that for her it had always been that way, an object lost its edges and poured into another, into a solution of heterogeneous materials, a merging and mixing. She exclaimed that she had always had to struggle to believe that life had firm boundaries, for she had known since she was a child that it was not like that—it was absolutely not like that—and so she couldn't trust in their resistance to being banged and bumped."⁴⁰ The sensation is psilocybin-like, where priors about the world are relaxed and re-figured, including category distinctions and boundaries (often those between self & world).⁴¹ Similarly the soft power of neuroplastic youth:

40 *Story of the Lost Child*. "However much she had always dominated all of us and had imposed and was still imposing a way of being, on pain of her resentment and her fury, she perceived herself as a liquid and all her efforts were, in the end, directed only at containing herself."

41 Carhart-Harris, Friston. "REBUS and the Anarchic Brain: Toward

"Children aren't rigid, the way we are: they're flexible." The feeling of being a child at once the stress and possibility of the unknown, the unpredictable.

Jenny Holzer, **YOU MUST KNOW WHERE YOU STOP AND THE WORLD BEGINS**; the way out of teenage ontology; Virgo leo cancer gemini taurus aries pisces aquarius capricorn sagittarius scorpius libra, Reines giving readings at \$400 an hour, frameworks for understanding humans in relationship to metersticks.

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What do we know about boundaries? They are an "inherent, universal feature of complex systems." They "arise at all scales, defining the entities that they surround and protecting them from some kinds of outside intrusion." In order to be functional, "boundaries must be permeable, allowing the entities to take energy and information from outside themselves. If we are looking at complex systems, we will find boundaries everywhere. Boundaries are structures that protect what is within them and allow their contents to solve smaller, more manageable design problems than would be possible in a perfectly interconnected system," hence why the text in your hands is broken into three sections, themselves each subdivided.⁴² But in order to be organically re-drawn, they must first be dissolved. The high modernist optimism of Design—lofty plans drafted up by knowing committees dragging behind them best practices—always loses to culturally evolved practices, tested and adjusted across generations.

Boundaries between systems simplify impossible complexity; boundaries between islands lead to ecological diversity à la Galapagos, the protected incubation of the vulnerable.

a Unified Model of the Brain Action of Psychedelics." 2019.

42 Sarah Perry, "Gardens Need Walls," 2015

Perry quotes blogger Viznut as a metaphor for identity: *Tell a bunch of average software developers to design a sailship. They will do a web search for available modules. They will pick a wind power module and an electric engine module, which will be attached to some kind of a floating module. When someone mentions aero- or hydrodynamics, the group will respond by saying that elementary physics is a far too specialized area, and it is cheaper and more straight-forward to just combine pre-existing modules and pray that the combination will work sufficiently well.*

«The extraordinarily difficult task imposed upon the child's primary caretaker not only by the culture but also by Being itself is to induct it into relationality by saying over and over again, in a multitude of ways, what death will otherwise have to teach it: "This is where you end and others begin."»⁴³

The web has no boundaries; what was previously private discourse, whispers passed inside semi-permeable drywall boundaries, sideyards and picket fences, opinions circulated informally and verbally among groups of friends, now occurs in the open, a never-ending town hall. The distinctions between public and private, public and personal, flattened; a self-fueling anxiety because no one remembers a time when there was so much public resentment and vitriol, because no one remembers a time when there was so much public. Out-in-the-openness allows rapid preference cascades,⁴⁴ epistemic epidemics, info contagions. The nodes are always in contact, ready to spread; very little separates the subunits.

And I said, *The slipperiest slope is between self-protection and aggression, patrolling your own boundaries and policing others'.*

X: *Ok I have a Big Thesis for ya*

X: *not quite the Great White Whale of "caffeine brought europe out of the dark ages into the renaissance" but whopper-sized*

X: *ok, remember US intellectual history? 19th C: strong division of private/public spheres. Feminism comes in, says "women need access to public sphere too," the first step of the process, we're all familiar with it*

X: *but the last decade or two, rather than being an extension of this project, are the failure of this project (cf. red scare contra neoliberalism). or if not the failure but the butting up against the original project's limitations.*

X: *so the project has started shifting to domesticating the public sphere: gen-Z zoomer stuff where public realms (school/street/work place/etc) are held to domestic sphere standards and filled with domestic behaviors. "lean-in" overtaken by "decrease office hostility." hugs replace handshakes, homewear businesswear. less emphasis on the "polis," on competition, more emphasis on subjective individual needs. the subsumption of etiquette under ethics or rather, into ethics. I'm still trying to think it all through so it's all very epistemically tentative but*

X: *exhibit A tho.... letting people bring their dogs into the workplace!*

Following Kneeling Bus, Allbirds, athleisure; following Venkat, domestic cozy; following Chenoe Hart fr. Rao, a design trend toward synthesizing consumer electronics with fabrics & textiles.

My first year of undergraduate study, I was adamantly opposed to the ideas of Judith Butler. I had not read Butler, but the college I attended sat directly across the street from the most prominent women's college in America. I overlapped with social circles of radically feminist thinkers (I use the term radicalism here non-pejoratively; it is simply the observation that their thinking was multiple standard deviations outside of mainstream liberal-leftist belief). From them I learned, or rather, was informed, constantly of Butler's ideas. These included the interpreta-

43 Kaja Silverman, *Flesh of my Flesh* (2009), quoted in *The Argonauts*

44 Timur Kuran, preference falsification, h/t S.P.

tion that a given gender was akin to a garment of clothing in an almost infinite closet. Upon waking each morning, a person merely picked out that garment which they felt most like wearing on that given day, “performing” said outfit as if a costume. I found the idea too ludicrous to take seriously, ignoring Butler’s writing for years.

It was only one morning in Maine, while reading (at a friend’s impassioned recommendation) Nelson’s Argonauts that I re-encountered Butler’s ideas. In the memoir, I stumbled upon a passage, quoted at length, from an interview with Butler:

The bad reading [of *Gender Trouble*] goes something like this: I can get up in the morning, look in my closet, and decide which gender I want to be today. I can take out a piece of clothing and change my gender: stylize it, and then that evening I can change it again and be something radically other, so that what you get is something like the commodification of gender, and the understanding of taking on a gender as a kind of consumerism ... When my whole point was that the very formation of subjects, the very formation of persons, presupposes gender in a certain way—that gender is not to be chosen and that “performativity” is not radical choice and it’s not voluntarism... Performativity has to do with repetition, very often with the repetition of oppressive and painful gender norms to force them to resignify. This is not freedom, but a question of how to work the trap that one is inevitably in.

When presented this way, Butler’s argument read as an almost irrefutable position (given that one accepts the linguistic prior sequestering gender as a concept separate from biological sex). Butler’s concept of performativity had not been strawmanned by some opponent; it had been misrepresented, and egregiously so, by her self-proclaimed advocates. We could, I suppose, use this as an opportunity to argue at length about signaling, or else how intellectual affiliation operates as a means of identity creation (the latter topic is one of Nelson’s more

interesting inquiries in The Argonauts). But I’m more curious about the breakdown in the dissemination of an idea; how it happens not just maliciously or ungenerously by opponents but also organically by supporters. There is an entropy, not unlike the game of Telephone, which results from a complex concept’s dissemination which can prove its very undoing. This entropy operates somewhat as follows: the idea is either misinterpreted, overly simplified, or passes through a chain of witnesses who encounter the original text only indirectly; each link mutates the text’s idea telephonically so that soon, it resembles the original only superficially or thematically.

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Komodo dragons have been observed reproducing asexually in a zoo. We think perhaps asexual reproduction is the missing link making tenable the settlement of the Galapagos. We also think that grief or loneliness (emotions observed in non-primate species) may be emotional triggers of solitude that might enable physiological changes in the reproductive system from sexual to asexual. This can only happen in females, who have a reproductive system set up and eggs with the complete cytoplasmic material necessary.

Pollen is just plant sperm, allergies a product of over-planting male trees, spreading widely and freely via flowers carefully evolved to the aesthetic preferences of local bee populations. The female’s stigma is choosy; she selects because there is a fundamental supply-demand problem, millions of pollen and a limited quantity of eggs, which will become seeds. The pollen land on the stigma, come down the style shaft, and, being accepted, come into contact with the ovary and embryo sac where proto-seed is stored.

Which is to say, across species, sperm search; eggs wait. In some species, if eggs sit and wait too long, the system changes from sexual to asexual. If there is some fundamental M/F mechanism at play—not binary but bimod-

al—it appears to stretch back to the common ancestor of both plants and mammals, a photosynthetic, single-celled, ocean-dwelling creature. If one wanted to speculate: *<i>But so long as you have two gamete types, you'll end up with two sexes who inevitably follow similar patterns of self-optimizing reproductive strategies.</i>*

(Fungi, meanwhile have at least 50 different mating roles.)

:// A well-known aspect of sexual selection, in evolutionary biology, is the theory that characteristics like the tail of a peacock evolved as direct signals of some trait important for natural selection. The handicap principle suggests that cumbersome secondary sexual characteristics evolved as costly signals of mate quality: they are hard-to-fake, hence reliable, signals of traits such as the ability to survive while encumbered, or low parasite load, or being the correct species, or some other auspicious trait. *
* A less well-known possibility, surprising in its arbitrariness, is the sensory exploitation or sensory bias hypothesis: that traits evolved to capitalize on some pre-existing sensory capacity for pleasure and beauty. Under this framework, animals have built-in sensory and discriminatory capacity, that is, aesthetic capacity. This capacity is then exploited in sexual selection, directing the color sound, shape and other features of sexual displays. Frog calls evolve not to signal any particular adaptive trait, but to optimally stimulate frog hearing organs.

Dutton's aesthetics (*is it a coincidence that traditionally beautiful landscapes are also those with advantageous resources for human survival?*) are probably partially correct but low on explanatory power in this day & age. Beauty as a two-player game of fitness makes a lot more more sense:⁴⁵ there is the beautiful (e.g. a flower) and the desirer (e.g. a pollinator). The beautiful thrives by making itself attractive to the desirer, by re-

⁴⁵ Simler, Melting Asphalt

cruiting animals and insects into acting as sperm couriers. Perceptual cues promise more behind them; their beauty is deceptive and honest simultaneously. Perceptual biases are exploited, catered to, since in the evolutionary long-game plants that attract pollinators outlast and outcompete those that don't, or don't as well, and a positive loop begins. K.S. can't fully explain postmodern art but Bourdieu can: suddenly the desirers are mostly artists, or individuals invested ("tied up") in the field of production. Thus the rhetoric of the Desired adapts itself to the bees who will consume it, who visit regularly and form a part of the local ecosystem, rather than those afar who are mostly indifferent to begin with.

:// ...many carnivorous plants also make flowers. But note that they take pains to keep their two activities separate. Their flowers look nothing like their mouths, and they hoist the flowers high up off the ground (away from their sticky parts) so their pollinators won't accidentally get eaten. Like any agent interested in sustained collaboration, they learn not to prey on their partners.

∞

Calm technologies. Soft gradients. Software.⁴⁶ Rounded edges on Marsh's Perforated Vessels, hips and body-like. White & pink shower tiles. The colors dissolve. Soft ontology: *the society we live in is rigid and unforgiving it creates narratives of sharpness, of rigidity, to tell people to be hard. what is being soft? being cozy, having pride in the quiet, crying on the subway,*⁴⁷ *fostering care. being soft is a revolutionary act.*

Master morality, slave morality; the good life as accomplishment, the good life as pleasure. Excluding, including. The enemy exists to set the self against, ruthless efficiency

⁴⁶ TENDER BUTTONS

⁴⁷ How you know it was written in New York, a specific kind of message for specific kinds of people.

countered by “responding to one another with beauty and tenderness.” Each worldview-cum-strategy (action being a logical extension of perception, ideology a way of navigating the world) has its own failure modes; our precedent is the Nonviolence School of Joan Baez, where “response to one another is in fact so tender than an afternoon at the school tends to drift perilously into the never-never.”⁴⁸

Y: *This is what worries me about Boyer’s provisional avant-garde, domestic modes of interaction becoming an expectation of the public sphere with their emphases on soft unworded social rules. We are already have so many soft social rules,⁴⁹ and they lead easily, unthinkingly, to suffering. It is the privilege of those who can easily, thoughtlessly, fluently navigate the softness of social rules that they so unthinkingly defend and further their construction in all spheres. This is not to attempt to carve out more space for victimization but to point to the inherent tradeoff of all things, and the ways in which we can be blind to tradeoffs whose consequences we will not suffer. The downside of strict, explicit rules is that it often misses essence for word and technicality, creates new goalposts, new targets to optimize for that aren’t the thing itself. But the downside of softness is that it handicaps many; that it is quiet and hidden and therefore imprisons even many of its competent practitioners to suffer unknowingly, unable to point to the rules which enslave them; that in a culture like ours, so thrown together in each others’ businesses, but also so subdivided into private cultures and ways of being, cooperation becomes difficult, distrust high. Groups police each other according to their own norms, ignoring in hubris the lessons of culture relativism (or else taking relativism too far, refusing to police on the grounds of some sacred ideal that is “culture”). Toe-stepping becomes easy, unthinking, constant irritation. Hence al-*

⁴⁸ Didion

⁴⁹ And isn’t the not-admitting, the covering up, what’s objected to in the first place? “At the time that I was writing *I Love Dick* and immediately after, I was driven by this agenda to take all of the business that went on under the table and put it on the table, and it seemed to me that BDSM was doing that with the little rules of heterosexuality. It was externalizing all the rules of heterosexuality and making of them a game or a farce or a Grand Guignol.” (Kraus, N. Miller @ Guernica)

ways the needs for a commons, for public utility mindset, a baseline (perhaps laws, perhaps strong norms) that keeps everyone getting along

Compare these soft rules to the more libertarian premise of public space, which purposefully seeks to minimize how much knowledge of localisms are required to navigate a space, which substitutes for picked-up localisms hard, public rules like the right to gather, rules etched into stone for the public à la Hammurabi. Y: *I’m not saying one is inherently better, I am saying that the scope of debate needs to account for the benefits of each in a range of contexts.*

This is not mere speculation.

Lierdumoa: «To my friends on the [autism] spectrum, let me explain to you an unspoken social rule that possibly nobody has ever explained to you before. If a neurotypical asks you, “What game are you playing?” they’re not asking you to describe the game. They’re asking you if they can play too. If a neurotypical asks you, “What are you watching?” they’re not asking you to explain the plot of the movie/tv show to them. They’re asking if they can watch it with you. When neurotypicals ask you “What are you doing?” What you think they’re asking: “Please explain to me what you are doing.” What they’re actually asking: “Can I join you?” Now here’s the really fucked up part. If you start explaining to them what you’re doing? They will interpret that as a rejection. What you think you’re saying: [the answer to their question] What they think you’re saying: This is an elite and exclusive activity for a level 5 friend and you are a level 1 acquaintance. You are not qualified to join me because you don’t know all this stuff. Go away. This is why neurotypicals think you’re being cold and antisocial.»

«A long time ago, I was active on the original involuntary celibacy listserv. It was founded and at the time still administered by the lesbian third-wave-feminist women’s

studies major who coined the terms “involuntary celibacy” and “incel” in the first place.⁵⁰ When I was there, it was an inclusive place. There were male, female, cis-, trans-, gay, straight, and bisexual members, and with very few exceptions, we treated each other with respect and nobody pretended the root causes of our romantic problems were gender-specific in any way. The root cause, by the way, that we identified was this. People use a whole semi-verbal language to communicate romantic and sexual interest or lack thereof to each other. Speech patterns, style of dress, body language, that sort of thing. It’s almost completely subconscious, but it’s still learned behavior. Those of us who were not able to pick up that language in early adolescence for whatever reason—being a social outcast, autism-spectrum disorders, hiding and/or coming to terms with homosexuality or trans-sexuality, parents who weren’t physically affectionate, social phobia, etc.—will have practically, if not absolutely, no romantic success until they learn it later in life. Trying to hit on someone without using that language invariably comes off as creepy,⁵¹ and if someone tries to hit on you, you won’t notice if you don’t understand the language. That was the only real common thread in everyone’s life story. Involuntary celibacy is not limited to one gender, or to the physically unattractive, or to nerds, or even to narcissistic assholes. It’s a result of missing out on learning the language of attraction.»⁵²

Which, perhaps, is why many feel justified in their gut-level disgust at the self-identified incelbate. Those who cannot

50 Alana, founder Involuntary Celibacy Project

51 The opposite of legibility, predictability is creepiness: “The perception of creepiness is a response to the ambiguity of threat. [...] While they may not be overtly threatening, individuals who display unusual patterns of nonverbal behavior, odd emotional responses or highly distinctive physical characteristics are outside the norm, and by definition unpredictable.” McAndrew and Koehnke (2016) via J. Falkovich

52 User howlingfrog, Jezebel comment section, discovered by the raw data from a Ghostbin dump

speak the language are often socially and psychologically broken in ways that, while ideally should inspire compassion, are difficult to be around.

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Nelson: “in the Wittgenstein passage I quote where he talks about how anytime you draw a line on a plane, you’ve kind of made a form of a boundary, but you haven’t yet said, as he says, what that boundary is for, so it makes a game. But the game could be do we stay outside a line, do we cross a line.”⁵³

*It is convenient to think that sexual misfits violate rules. The matter is subtler by far. They are not concerned to oppose the rules themselves but to engage in competitive struggle[-play] by way of those rules. Boundaries are tested & pushed against. Interpersonal limits are skirted just on the edge, inching fingers slowly up the skirt à la Rose’s minister in Munro’s “Wild Swans.”*⁵⁴ *[In this model,] sexual attractiveness, or sexiness, is effective only to the degree that someone is offended by it.*⁵⁵ The attraction of the rule-breaker: (1) through his rejection of it, he sets himself as if above the existing social order (a status-grab) and (2) increases the future possibilities, opens up otherwise foreclosed avenues by sheer disregard for the limits of the social. Thus bedroom bottoming actively subverts, and therefore complicates (by opening up possibility in the self’s model of the future). The world is made doubly entropic, an unopened Schrodinger’s box.

53 “Freedom & Discipline in the Shed,” interview at Poetry Foundation w Anthony McCann.

54 The story’s title echoes Edna St. Vincent Millay’s “Wild Swans”; the story’s climax, Millay’s query: *I looked in my heart while the wild swans went over. / And what did I see I had not seen before? / Only a question less or a question more; / Nothing to match the flight of wild birds flying* Nelson’s swans, meanwhile, blur in flight: *The sky is amazing / tonight, full of blurry swans.* (fr. Something Bright, Then Holes)

55 Carse, *Infinite Games*

“The chthonian triumphs in *Medea*, as in the later *Bacchae*. The plays are symmetrical: citizenship is denied to a sexually ambiguous magic-working alien,⁵⁶ who vengefully debases and liquidates society’s arrogant hierarchs.”⁵⁷ Through their deviance, the outside world must come to re-reckon with their morality and norms. This re-reckoning re-opens the space of possibility, allows newness and change, keeps the structure limber and flexible. Anohni, like a New Age Paglia, testifies to this same power of transgression, with the surprising twist biological essentialism, a self born in “blood” which society tries and fails to overwrite, such is its power: : «Gay and trans people, in particular, I feel, are the children of nature. We manifest despite the very best efforts of society to crush us. We are the naturally allocated foot soldiers of nature. We have a unique relationship, a non-Christian relationship, to the goddess... We were born as disruptors into this society. We reorganized the conversation. This is in our blood.»⁵⁸ The take isn’t necessarily wrong, its just so fundamentally in juxtaposition to post-structuralist thought with its emphasis on cultural con-

56 What would it look like to follow the rationalist dictum: never judge preferences, only their acting-outs. According to Gary and others in the community, just as a heterosexual or homosexual person is drawn to people of a particular gender, they find themselves attracted to either boys or girls within specific age-ranges below the legal age of consent. They call themselves “Virtuous Paedophiles –or “VirPed” for short—because the vast majority of them claim to have never gone down the path of sexually engaging with a minor. They also claim that they never intend to. “Being dismissed from university based solely on my sexual orientation was certainly most traumatic,” he says. “Being interrogated by the state police and banned from the only hospital in our county was certainly not fun. I was also abandoned by a counsellor without a referral in 1999. As soon as I came out to her, she freaked out and said: ‘I can’t deal with that.’ She refused to meet with me again. [Alexander McBride Wilson] // In studies, pedophiles show signs that their sexual interests are related to brain structure and that at least some differences existed in their brains before birth. For example, pedophiles show greatly elevated rates of non-right-handedness and minor physical anomalies. Thus, although pedophilia should never be confused with homosexuality, pedophilia can be meaningfully described as a sexual orientation. [James Cantor] Who has power, who is powerless?

57 C.P., *Sexual Personae*

58 Paper Mag interview, 2019

struction. That juxtaposition makes our case for us: trans disruption calls deeply into question the arguments of earlier feminisms, which alleged man as a blank slate indelibly marked by society.

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Women who optimize for freedom, men who optimize for service. A man wishes to give his wife the world. He walks every corner of his kingdom and of all the neighboring kingdoms searching out the best. It took many wagons, and wagon drivers, but the objects were collected and stored over many months. When it came time for the gifting, he prepared all the great objects on the lawn, displayed in their opulent glory. ?I don’t want any of it,?she said, ?I’m not a materialist? you haven’t realized by now??

Pothos: I don’t think you should do that.

Anteros: I think she wants me to step in.

Pothos: I think you’re taking a risk by trying to read between lines instead of taking her at face.

Anteros: This is what I’m here for! To be there for things she doesn’t know how to ask for!

Pothos: I defer as always, you know her better than I.

Anteros: These are the terms of friendship.

Pothos: Yours maybe, not mine.

I said, this is not my grave. I said, is this my genre? I said, are you my mother? Are you? I said, romantic red flag: thinking “Death of the Author” is a quality text instead of a non sequitur ignorant of the discourse it infantily intrudes on. I said, Tumblr’s at its best when it’s either some-

one working through their thought process, or you can see the evolution of their thinking, or a group enacts the requisite lengthy dialectic arc. I said, realize now the role that X and perhaps *The Last Psychiatrist* by extension occupy: not a “writer” writer but a sort of court jester, putting in the hours whittling observations into social insight. The a(r/c)t is in the daring to suggest, extra-limbically, which is the central activity of the political anyways: putting onto tables what is not currently on them.

Frothing at the mouth, a little spittle jumping onto the collarbone of my interlocutor, I said, your culture of “emotional volunteers” only reveals the inherent narcissism of mothering, the impossible-to-sidestep fact that to volunteer help is to diagnose the other as in need of help, and to identify the self as important, one whose solutions and care are needed by the other. I must shoulder these burdens, perform emotional labor, soften the blows of my own words, the narcissist-as-mother thinks, because I am needed, because the other is sensitive to me, to them.⁵⁹

X: *Men who optimize for freedom, women who optimize for implication.*

Y: *She worries about her father, who is separated from her mother but starting to go out on dates. Sometimes her father seems really lonely, so she calls him up on the landline, talks to him for hours late, asks him about his life, says things to give him confidence. When he drives up to visit her she takes a week off work, tells her friends she’s booked, cancels other social plans so he won’t feel neglected. She keeps him company, is attentive to his moods. Sometimes he gets distant, or seems*

59 Nelson tells it another way: «[The Tuareg] are desert nomads who were famously unwilling to be converted to Islam: thus their name. Some American Christians have been bothered by this idea of a blue people abandoned by God living in the Sahara, traveling by night, and navigating by the stars. In Virginia, in 2002, for example, a group of Southern Baptists organized a day of prayer exclusively for the Tuareg, “so that they will know God loves them.”»

like he wants something but doesn’t want to ask for it, or doesn’t know how. Then she does the thing he wants, or that she thinks he wants. She lets him sleep on her floor when he comes and stays. Sometimes friends join the two of them for lunch, or coffee, or dinner, and then she makes sure he always feels included in the conversation.

X: *What are the rules by which we ought to give gifts?*

Y: *I can only refer to the principle of sacrifice, which is that the result must always outweigh the martyrdom, the gain outweigh the cost.*

X: *Isn’t this utilitarianism?*

Y: *Can we understand the difference between positive sum and negative sum? If it is easy to me, but benefits the recipient far beyond my cost; and in turn, when it is easy for my partner in giving, but benefits me far beyond zero cost; we both end up better. When it takes more from the givers than the recipients gain, we both end up worse. Cultures of gift-giving which reallocate goods and service to improve net benefit can be called healthy; cultures of gift-giving and indebtedness which decrease net benefit can be called toxic.*

I said, James Blake may be losing the fashion game on *Assume Form* but the point of the record is now that he’s in love he no longer gives a shit. Your values hierarchy might put smushy sincerity as bottom tier, but Blake’s doesn’t and his abandonment of the edgy aura that was originally cultivated is evidence he believes in higher principles than the evasion and distance that such a status requires.

And I said, Dr. Sato’s cyborg beetles with their nervous systems all hijacked, circuit boards commanding them to walk at certain gaits, to run, to fly, to turn, become hungry. I said, Gloom: if you’re reading this, please reach out. We met in an IRC channel somewhere between 2007 and 2009. You knew sidke and PALEMOON. You liked Xiu Xiu. I have looked and looked for you.

He is so... *lo siento, mi amor.*

∞

La Luna: I've been going to the gym. It's... fine. The problem is I keep throwing up whenever I work out.

El Sol: Still?

Luna: Yeah, still. It's whatevs.

Sol: That sounds like a big problem. That's definitely not normal.

Luna: I mean... we'll see what happens.

Sol: The first couple times you started exercising again, I mean, I could see that. But after months? Sometimes I feel like throwing up when I lift, but I never actually do. There's almost certainly something up. At that point I would have started troubleshooting.

Luna: Mhm.

Sol: What kind of exercises do you do?

Luna: Uh, I start with some basic yoga, down dog... Some time elliptical. Some stuff on the circuit.

Sol: When do you start getting nauseous?

Luna: Near the end of the circuit reps.

Sol: Have you tried stopping before you get to that point?

Luna: Uh, sorta, but I also feel like maybe I should exercise through it?

Sol: Well what if you stopped. See what happens. What're you eating? Do you eat before?

Luna: Usually not, usually there's nothing in my stomach or at least nothing comes up.

Sol: Try eating? I usually lift on an empty stomach or like, a small meal of eggs, but also the empty stomach could cause it. Are you on a low carb on high carb diet? Are you taking any medications? When in the day do you exercise?

Luna: Is this twenty questions?

Sol: I mean, what's your goal with the gym?

Luna: Uh...

Sol: Usually the two reasons people lift are they want to feel good about their body and they want to get strong. Maybe they want more control over their daily life. There's one thing nothing can take away from you, your gains. You always know you can get them back. If you put work in, you get results out.

Luna: I guess I want strength and health. But like, it's not that big of a problem.

Sol: I mean, you said its causing you distress and making you feel bad. That's like... the definition of a problem.

Luna: I guess.

∞

Y: Nelson, G84: *I looked at dozens of apartments and when I entered the hallway of this one I moved into next I knew I could live there because it was cheap and the hallway was baby blue. My friends all told me it smelled as bad there as it did in the last one but I found a heads-up penny on the threshold and anyway I don't live there anymore.*

X: I mean, it works because you're not totally exculpated,

Sun's algorithmic pragmatism is failing to engage on the emotional level that Moon is asking for ("vomiting before workouts reminds me of my mom!"), and by confessing/heading off that counterattack your claim lands true. ("well, stop doing that.")

Suppose that I'm planning to meet you at noon. Unfortunately, I lose track of the time and leave 10 minutes late. As I head out, I let you know that I'll be late, and give you an updated ETA. In my experience, people—including me—are consistently overoptimistic about arrival times, often wildly so, despite being aware of this bias. Why is that? My total delay is the sum of two terms: *Error*: How badly I messed up my departure time. If this term is large then it signals incompetence and disrespect. *Noise*: How unlucky I got with respect to traffic (and other random factors). This doesn't really signal much.

When I arrive at 12:10, I want you to attribute the delay to *noise* rather than *error*.⁶⁰

"She slept with him and she's a certified lesbian.

"I follow his ex on tumblr. Susan?

"The review was that his socks smelled, and he left his phone charger.

"Where was this?

"West Village.

"Is that where they met?

"No they met Dimes Square somewhere, Clandestino or Metrograph maybe?

*Eve Babitz, Kaitlin Phillips, A**** G**** in Russia, part of these stories seem to be about realizing the set of powers available to you as a woman, and then leveraging them to get what you want. Babitz muscling into the California cultureworld with soft power; Phillips showing up in a city with no money and nowhere to sleep, leaving months later triumphant.*

The platform is bristling. I can see One Freedom Tower on the skyline across the East River. It is early summer and garments have been shed. The Paglian idea that in Italy and Brazil, where female exhibitionism is so prominent, sexuality as a social fiction feels owned by women, a central form of power. In the States and Western Europe, centuries of Puritanism followed by a predominantly Puritanical feminism means that its culture's sexuality is understood (and to an extent feared) as something controlled by men, a set of perversions and fantasies projected onto woman that are outside her control.⁶¹

The body (Spinoza) is *a machine capable of being affected and producing affects*; the object is a machine whose identity centers on the former affordance, the subject is a machine centered on the latter. We lack a good sense of the ethics activated in deploying soft power, the delineation between *using* and *abusing*.

Men who build idols of themselves come in two varieties: the aesthetic idol, a la Bryan Ferry, and the ideological idol, a la David Berg, found of the Children of God. Among the latter camp, a self-righteous appeal to moral justice, and a strange tendency towards marginally leftist politics, is common and non-coincidental: An obsession with politics—

61 K-Punk: When Grace Jones "has the opportunity to 'express herself,' she ruthlessly exploits her own body and image much more than any (male) photographer would have dared to. 'In a recent poll by Men's Health magazine, the male readership named Grace Jones [...] Among the women who scared them the most.' (Brian Chin)." Recall glamour, the casting of a spell, a kind of hypnosis or witchcraft.

with having the “correct” or moral theoretical constructs, or more specifically with holding a theoretical construct founded on empathy or fairness—releases the subject from the nagging obligation of empathic or self-sacrificing living. Thus the stereotype of the culturally Marxist professor who assuages his conscience with a feeling of superiority while dehumanizing the women he becomes involved with (often graduate students). He is revealed not as a person built out of principles but as a narcissist built out of image.

Drinking Sixpoint Sweet Actions. Feeling my bodyload. Domesticating, naturalizing new garments, finding some common ground together. Queer-centrist salon: Maggie Nelson,⁶² Judith Butler, Andrea Long Chu, Camille Paglia (doesn’t matter if none of them get on).

The moments that set *The Argonauts* apart: the constant undercutting of her own yearnings & belief in fluidity, the non-categorical, the post-gender, by way of observing the usefulness of categorization, the way humans are the only species which compartmentalizes space (purity, tainting; you don’t shit where you sleep, or eat where you shit). It is by way, too, of wondering at the power of hormones, their deep, sub-psychological effect on cognition: “That hormones can make the feel of wind, or the feel of fingers on one’s skin, change from arousing to nauseating is a mystery deeper than I can track or fathom. The mysteries of psychology pale in comparison.” Or when, in her thirties, a ‘biological timer’ is implied to begin its countdown: “Whenever anyone asked me why I wanted to have a baby, I had no answer. But the muteness of the desire stood in inverse proportion to its size.” Those who read the book as

62 “These days, in which so many seem not to know how to deal on any front with the burdens of human and non-human relations, including the brutal distributions of power and force which can accompany them, with much else besides a can of gasoline and a match, I’m hoping to chart a different path.” [intvw with M. Nelson: on Hannah Black, Dec 2017]

manifesto miss its deep ambivalence.

«Another piece of context: when I was first diagnosed and maybe dying (the doctors were uncertain), my mother asked me if there was anything she could get me to make me feel better. I think she thought I’d ask for, like, a pedicure, or maybe an iPod. Instead, I went into my room, brought out the Lily Cole and Marilyn Manson editorial in the “Fashion Rocks” supplement of the September issue of *Vanity Fair*. I pointed to the Miu Miu Baroque Wedges that Cole was wearing with a McQueen bubble-hem mini-dress next to Manson, ghostly in the Los Angeles sun, palm trees and pool glistening. *These shoes would help*, I said. When they arrived in a box from eBay, they were too small, I could barely squeeze into the sharply pointed toe. They still sit on our living room bookshelf like holy objects in a home altar, patent totems of survival, desire, and gratitude.»⁶³

You are Dallesandro, bandana’d and handsome, long hair, a jaw which arcs so perfectly it cannot be believed. You’ve got a tough guy look on your face, the biceps bulge at the tee.

∞

Kitchen on comp tics watching modern dance: Trajal (Harrell) with troupe perform a hoochie-koochie reenactment *Caen Amour*. Harrell in a pastel shirt, satin, particolored. Three solo dances open up the show: one with *Black Orpheus* vibes, one a Kate Bush, one unremembered. Choreographies of clear-cut four-step. The affect where it really shines: hybrid o’ tragedy n celebration, Bas Jan Ader’s “Too Sad to Tell You” with the ecstasy of a Beatles cut. Main dance merged carnival and modernism, Destroyer’s Dan Bejar & Kinfolk magazine props & Arabian pointed arches & a periwinkle backdrop. A sole female dancer

63 Audrey Wollen, *Sex & the City Diary*, Aug 22

standing behind a wax-papered window, spotlight penetrating such that her shadow was clearly visible, detailed down to a cameltoe in the window.

*All the intimacy, the casual exchanges of inside jokes and gossip, the private languages*⁶⁴ and ritual choreographies, observations leveraged with shared history and time-put-in that characterize a subculture and an intimate relationship alike, *provide the cement to glue things together.*⁶⁵ *Do you remember the feeling that sense was provisional and that two people could build around an utterance a world in which any use signified?*⁶⁶ Two whackjobs, WW or if you'd rather, 2W, better than WW2 or just W-2, flip one of the Ws and you get an M, Man/Woman. Bend, hold, tuck, tailbone, heavy— heavy— bend stretch pulse. You fall, you are Bernini, Bernini has sculpted you, you have sculpted yourself, into a Bernini. You ask, what came first, the poses in paintings or the inclinations of body? Which organize, and which are being organized?⁶⁷

Like that moment at 1:07:00 in *The Man Who Fell To Earth* when Bowie's car drives through the compound entrance and the harps come rolling in. Like that moment at 0:1:28 in "Motion Picture Soundtrack" when Thom's voice cuts and the harps come in. Like that moment at 0:1:21 in Joy Division's "Atmosphere" when chimes enter the room.

64 [Y] But there's nothing to do; you've got to forget whatever the MFA program taught you about how to write; you've got to live and work without and in the absence of someone else's rules, inevitably create your own, and that's what's most exciting, right? Criticizing these programs in a vacuum, of course, picks up on the opposite end of a spectrum of what art should be ("everyone can" vs. "Romantic genius"), and both ends of the binary seem too limited and constraining for the playful act of artmaking. My only advice: approach your craft with humility and openness; become fluent (analogizing art to language); and make the process enjoyable for you.

65 Grothe & Castronovo

66 Lerner, *Hatred of Poetry*

67 Acting vs. acted upon.

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Another night, another cultural event, another set of bad social interactions. Humidity causing lacrimal eyebrows and matted clothing. I said, yes, factually Republicans exist so there can be a national mood for artists to work under. I said, well, I feel good about the popularization of Bourdieu's idea that gossip is valuable social information, a contextualizing gossamer of context for the formal utterances of a field (public appearances, publications). But I feel bad about the neglect of acknowledgment that gossip is *also* a form of monitoring and policing obedience to norms, of reifying the existent social structure by implicitly demonstrating to fellow gossipers, *should you step outside acceptability, this will happen to you too.*

The *biennale* outfits, all dressed up, later to crash at diners where the elegance is re-romanticized in the context of the dingy & retro, symbol of late hours transmitted through film. The impossible perfection of a Moment or an Image—it could be a lover, or the tableau of the in-crowd scene—that is the ever-receding quarry of the glamour chase.⁶⁸ I am a glossy photograph... in colour and softly lit... You can look at me for hours; I won't mind, I let you dream.⁶⁹

The things which elite culture circles pretend is essentially democratic—moving away from formal attire into workplace casual, or away from mastery and craftsmanship to fluid gamesmanship—only reify existing hierarchies of status. Judgment of belonging, as ever, is founded ways of speaking and dressing, the set of implicit attitudes and subtle signifiers. The purportedly democratic anti-art of the contemporary scene, in that it is low on ambition and could

68 Shock & Awe

69 Amanda Lear, "I Am a Photograph" fr. *I Am a Photograph* (1977) Ariola Records.

theoretically be fabricated by anyone of middling technical ability, is in fact so thoroughly anti-democratic it does not register as art to any but a small fraction of a first-world population. The advice of career centers everywhere can only counterproductive, coming off as corporate and ‘un-hip’; there is no manual or clear path to learning the language of the community except by being a part of it long enough to begin organically replicating it. *I’m in with the in-crowd, and I know what the in-crowd knows.*⁷⁰ As formal factors of evaluation drop out, informal factors gain power.

Twenty-somethings with openingitis, struck by FOMO a fear of missing out, and everyone clustered around the wrong genre of consumables, delicatessen over design. “Lais of Corinth,” he says, “used to gain a great deal of money by the grace and charm of her beauty, and was frequently visited by wealthy men from all over Greece; but no one was received who did not give what she demanded, and her demands were extravagant enough.”⁷¹ They are not spared: BLANCHE: «I never was hard or self-sufficient enough. When people are soft—soft people have got to shimmer and glow—they’ve got to put on soft colors, the colors of butterfly wings, and put a—paper lantern over the light... It isn’t enough to be soft. You’ve got to be soft and attractive. And I—I’m fading now! I don’t know how much longer I can turn the trick.»⁷²

70 Bryan Ferry covering Dobie Gray

71 Aulus Gellius, quoting Peripatetic Sotion

72 ^X [THU 12:58PM] So is Blanche the ultimate object and Stanley the ultimate subject? (only semi related) If you’re a woman the line you need to toe is between the expression of desire and neediness. If you’re a man it’s between expressing desire and committing assault. Which I guess is just saying neediness and assault are variations on the same drive. The principal difference is a function of power. The desiring object prostrates, the desiring subject imposes. Assault and neediness are both forms of forcing the self on the Other, one through “help me” and the other through “I’ll help myself.” Acting vs. enticing to act.

The connection between success & being a desired object is known as networking: you build positive feedback loops of prestige (accolades, social connections, job titles) that allow you to acquire further accolades and prestige. If you want to be someone in this world, you’ve got to be a great object or a great subject, and objects flourish in not just modeling or acting but in art, business, politics. Pablo Helguera: *It is essential for the visitor to walk through the gallery and approach the event with absolute elegance and indifference; carefully displayed indifference can be an indicator of power.* (Also Pablo: *The subtleties of social and financial interaction can profoundly confound the purposefully or accidentally naive visitor who may come to an opening just to “see the art.”*) It’s better to be valued for your taste—what you like, for how it looks—than for what you look like—but it’s secondary still.

Symbolic currency is swapped fluidly with social, sexual, and literal capital, which is to say there is a lack of boundaries, everything is permeable and linked in a chain of causality. An inability to evaluate quality on first principles (a general muddiness of values, a lack of consensus or clarity on what matters in a creative work) leads inevitably to a reliance on associations and vouching. Reputations taint, infect, rub off, disease-like. The optics of an affiliation can bring ruin, guilt or irrelevance deduced by association. Who one is friends with, who one likes, all affect the public optics; dedicated game players choose for perception of purity. *McCarthy seemed to believe, years afterward, that leaving Rahw, who loved her, for Wilson, who probably merely desired her, was just a matter of class warfare... Once done, though, the ambition behind her move rather escaped her attention... she felt free to sneer at Simone de Beauvoir for having ridden to literary fame on Jean-Paul Sartre’s coattails... McCarthy... is certain Rahw suspected nothing sexual, she thinks he interpreted her jealousy [at Wilson’s affection toward Peggy Marshall] as a loss of master Wilson’s attention, a literary*

*loss of face in this Partisan Review World.*⁷³ Sexual currency is swapped fluidly with symbolic, social, and literal capital. Hot as in trending, hot as in hot. Edgy as in fashion, edgy as in innovative. Zizek himself admits there are no more Marxists, Dasha Nekrasova left to seducing refugees from the liberal arts into democratic socialism.

(I said But have you seen my books? Nelson's *Argonauts*, *Bluets*, *Art of Cruelty*? Grietzer's *Amerikkka*, Lerner's *10:04*? wait, you can't stand him. *Tropic of Capricorn*. Sexual *Personae*. *I Love Dick*. *The Iliad*. The Odyssey. Definitely Not A Little Life. Okay, *A Little Life*. Against Interpretation. Lasch's *True and Only Heaven*. The Modern Temper. Genealogy of Morals. The Complete Kafka. The Complete Benjamin. The Complete Adorno. Das Kapital. Collected Eliot? wait, you can't stand him either. My Struggle, the complete series. All four Neapolitan Novels. Houellebecq's *Submission*, *Atomised*, and *Platform*. Map and the Territory. Every blogger ever. Tao Lin. Every book by Tyrant. Every book by Verso. Every book by Semiotext(e).)

Who one works with, where one writes, subsumes what is written or produced as the common barometer of quality, in part because first-principle evaluation proves time-consuming, there is too much out there; in part because associative thinking is a human universal. «The art trader is not just the agent who gives the work a commercial value by bringing it into market; he is not just the representative, the impresario, who 'defends the authors he loves'. He is the person who can proclaim the value of the author he defends (cf. the fiction of the catalogue or blurb) and above all 'invests his prestige' in the author's cause, acting as a 'symbolic banker' who offers as security all the symbolic capital he has accumulated (which he is liable to forfeit if he backs a 'loser').»⁷⁴ Which is to say it's not that a curator or critic

73 Groth, Castronovo, Edmund Wilson, *Critic in Love*

74 Bourdieu, *Cultural Production*

or any other vested consecrator is cynically promoting (thus tying their fate to) the artists they champion primarily in order to accumulate cultural capital. After all the tying of fate is predicated on a quality partner in bondage, especially in the sub-epipelagic of artworld commercialism, rendering much of consecrators' public praise 'authentic.'⁷⁵ Instead it's that the thrill of uncovering underloved treasure inevitably factors into one's reception of the work, that approbation is predicated on self-watching—observing the eye-brain connection as it comes into contact with a stimulus in order to gauge interestingness or beauty. Discovery thrills color the vision of the vested.

What does Jaguar Paw know? "It's easier to feel intimacy and love from people if you have the Thing, because the Thing draws them in and gives them the motivation to see you for who you really are. You probably won't have to do nearly as much as people who don't have the Thing, and the standards for you will be set lower."

What is The Thing? If money is merely a proxy; if we happily convert money into status & standing, conspicuous consumption, better neighborhood to be around the 'right' people, more exclusive bars and venues, honorary galas, sexual reproduction...

∞

Imagine you are Tut. You are draped in royal finery. You are presented with a gorgeous dagger, its handle and sheath heavily gilded, engraved and decorated with deep reds and blues. The blade is literally fallen from the heavens: it is taken from a meteor of which your people are aware. They go out in search parties for these meteors, looking for its precious iron, the cosmic gift of an unbreakable sword.

75 Measured & measurement, essence & image, who says they're entirely decoupled?

What is the mind of the person whose inherent egoism is confirmed, who learns the world really does revolve around zer? What is the struggle of the person whose inherent egoism is confirmed, who first believes the world revolves around zer, then sees this belief substantiated instead of contradicted? Who sees all eyes on zer, who can move mountains with the magic of gaze?

Soft power: international relations & diplomacy term referring to the power of attraction, reputation, prestige, desirability. :// During the Republic only high ranking men of stature wore purple and during the Imperium only the Emperor was allowed to wear a purple toga. In the Byzantine Empire the direct offspring of the Basileus who were born in the Purple Room of the Imperial Palace were called porphyrogenitos or 'born in the purple,' indicating their legitimacy and likelihood for one of them to be the heir.

Or its pressures. «Just as the clandestine and casual “love under the palm trees” is the pattern irregularity for those of humble birth [92], so the elopement has its archetype in the love affairs of the *taufio* and the other chiefs' daughters. These girls of noble birth are carefully guarded; not for them are secret trysts at night or stolen meetings in the day time. Where parents of lower rank complacently ignore their daughters' experiments, the high chief guards his daughter's virginity as he guards the honour of his name, his precedence in the kava ceremony or any other prerogative of his high degree. Some old woman of the household is told off to be the girl's constant companion and duenna. The *taufio* may not visit in other houses in the village, or leave the house alone at night. When she sleeps, an older woman sleeps by her side. Never may she go to another village unchaperoned. In her own village she goes soberly about her tasks, bathing in the sea, working in the planta-

tion, safe under the jealous guardianship of the women of her own village.»⁷⁶

Or its dangers. *Desiring and hunting are members of the same genus, one symbolizing longing, the other longings acted-upon.*

∞

...“Muse poetry,” linked to ancient cults that worshipped the moon, accessing the imagination without involving the intellect. As existentialist turned occult historian Colin Wilson noted in 1971, “The moon goddess was the goddess of magic, of the subconscious, of poetic inspiration.” Hence a “Moonage Daydream” might represent an ecstatic, instinctive path to creativity...⁷⁷

*Ziggy's flamboyant makeup, rooster comb of spiky, razor-cut red hair, and futuristic costumes designed by Kansai Yamamoto turned him into an alien rock 'messiah' (Bowie's term), leader of a band of space invaders come to redeem errant earthlings.*⁷⁸

Ideologies need hosts to replicate and spread; the depressive is lit up by narrative when ze comes into contact with the Meaningful Man or the manic pixie.⁷⁹ “They are *impregnated* with Foucault”; the word is no accident, the theory is the intellectual foreplay for the main event.⁸⁰ Eminent boy-girl *Bowie forms a link that connects Andy Warhol, Bertolt Brecht, William Blake, Charlie Chaplin, Antonin Artaud, Salvador Dalí, Marlene Dietrich, Philip Glass, Nietzsche, Hollywood glamour, graphic design, platform shoes, film, music, Kurt Weill, Berlin, New*

76 Mead, *Coming of Age in Samoa*

77 Monina Ladaw, Are.na block

78 Paglia, *Theatre of Gender*

79 MPDG: The doe-eyed doll lets her guy experience enthusiasm without the status hit or loss of face. He keeps composure, chides her bubbly-ness, but they're both in on the bit.

80 C.P.: «Foucault is nothing, nothing, okay Nothing! Okay? And the reason why I know he's nothing is because, you know, he was influenced by, you know he pretends to be such a mastermind but in fact he's just a collection of influences...» (In the word's of MoMA's 404 code, Oof.)

York, London, Alexander McQueen, the 2012 London Olympics, Jim Henson, the moon landings, Kansai Yamamoto, Kate Moss and Marshall McLuhan.⁸¹ Idolatry.

The correlate to mothering is fathering, the pull to instruct, to endlessly reproduce your habitus and worldview—viewed around the world. *When you say Thailand is tolerant of gender variance, you're referring to the "ladyboy" you almost had sex with who turned into a zombie and threw an arsenal of coconut bombs at your head until you went into a coma. ... You think "ladyboys" are so articulate and earnest and innocent, you want to take them out to restaurants to teach them how to use forks and knives, you want to take them home and make them cook with Lite Coconut Milk from Trader Joe's, because the real kind makes you fat. You make them give you massages every afternoon at 3, you make them put tiny little orchids in your cocktails. "Devastating" and "beautiful" are adjectives used to describe orchids and the second kind of woman who finally learns how to be a boxer and defend herself on the street.*⁸²

Anteros,

There's a fine line between becoming a male subject of adoration and starting a cult.

[Talía's father Larry] could also be charming. He was a good listener and engaged the group on heady concepts like truth and justice. [...] He screened Carl Sagan's Cosmos in the common room, where the students watched from pillows on the floor, and followed it with an impromptu lecture on the nature of the universe. At night, he'd retire to an air mattress in Talía's room or the common-room couch.

Isabella had come to Sarah Lawrence on a full academic scholarship from an all-girls Catholic high school in San Antonio. After her break-up, she seemed to take comfort in Larry's company. "I'm 19, I was having a lot of difficulty making sense of things, I wasn't in a good

81 Broackers, Marsh: David Bowie Is catalogue

82 collaged in Jai Arun Ravine's Romance of Siam, taking for its section title a chapter header fr. Collis's 1936 Siamese White

place," Isabella says. "He started to help me kind of process and make sense of a lot of things I just couldn't make sense of." Talía's boyfriend at the time remembers seeing Larry and Isabella reclining on Talía's bed. Larry was stroking Isabella's hair, soothing her. "He's like, 'Nobody's going to hurt my baby girl,' " the ex-boyfriend says. Larry said he was going to start sleeping in Isabella's room, an arrangement that made the boyfriend uncomfortable.

Larry returned to Slonim 9 for the spring semester, spending most of his nights in Isabella's room. [...] One night, Larry gathered everyone in the common room and began lecturing on Q4P, a philosophy based on the supposition that all energy in the universe is powered by the "quest for potential."

You provide a positive values system, a philosophy which fills the vacuum, organizes the noise into a meaningful pattern. «Teenage boys fret about how the shirtless men on Harlequin covers are so often #badboys, but the presence or absence of a kill streak is unimportant. What matters is that the man is persecuted, misunderstood, different—much like that other Shirtless Man, if you know what I mean. (Bonus points if you trace the walk to Calvary to the wounded shuffles of Frankenstein's monster, the beautified Beast, and Robocop.) This distance is necessary to set up the ending: consumed by fate, assimilation—she joins Christian Grey on his pirate ship or whatever—which maybe accounts for the vampires and werewolves, boys with value systems that are literally infectious.»⁸³ Pirsig-style personal philosophy isolates you from the world, but if you meet a baseline of charisma others will fall behind you in isolation.

Isabella spent winter break with Larry, Talía, and Talía's boyfriend in a one-bedroom condo on East 93rd Street owned by Lee Chen, an old friend of Larry's. Talía and her boyfriend slept in the living room, while Isabella and Larry shared the bedroom. "He controlled every

83 H.C., Distance/Closeness

aspect of our lives once we were in the apartment,” the boyfriend says. “When we ate, what we did, when we went to bed.”

The leader poses as a therapist, psychologist, or psychiatrist, a manifestation, maybe, of the general conceit that one knows best on others’ behalves, but also a fast-track to intimacy and advisory, a way to collect pressure points of shame and guilt. The quick ramping up of personal disclosure reverse-engineers the trust that normally precedes such disclosures, like the old “contrived smiling increases subjective happiness” trick.⁸⁴ *Another roommate, Claudia, was particularly intrigued by the presentation and began having weekly counseling sessions with Larry... Claudia began telling people she thought she might be schizophrenic, a diagnosis that Larry, who had no medical training, had given her during one of their sessions.*

A hot-seat technique: you get others to lower self-esteem through self-criticism until they no longer trust their own thoughts. (Can we find this relationship in the commons, in certain political rhetorics?) Authority is ceded in return for the sense of certainty, the desire to believe in an external source of truth. The object loses control as the subject grips tighter. *Near the end of the school year, Daniel found himself unmoored. His relationship with his girlfriend was crumbling, and he had nowhere to live that summer. Santos and Claudia urged him to speak with Larry. The two met in a Starbucks one afternoon and talked for hours. Larry gave him advice that felt refreshingly straightforward: Dump your girlfriend. On the question of Daniel’s sexuality, Larry shut down the suggestion conclusively: “Oh no, you’re not gay,” he said. “I can tell you that for sure.”⁸⁵*

84 Mask becomes face?

85 «Larry suggested Daniel live there for the summer with him and some of the other Sarah Lawrence kids. He agreed. “I didn’t want to go back home, and this was my alternative,” Daniel says. “Part of why I got in a cult at all was because I had no idea how one finds a place to live in New York.”»

Love is limited; *a tribe must exclude people*⁸⁶; gardens need walls;⁸⁷ the definition of community is a system of exclusion. What’s yr border policy? You sever ties to the outside, to the reality checking feedback that keeps us sane. Your version of reality syncs up to your partner’s. Your version of reality syncs up to your job. You make friends with those who travel the same grooves as you, minimizing conflict & dissonance. These people are special; they are not like the others; they can be trusted; they are good; they perceive the important things in life.

Lifton, *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism*: Chinese brainwashing takes as its basic techniques milieu control, demands for purity, confession, mystical manipulation, ideological sacredness (ultimate, unquestionable truths), loaded language and “thought-terminating clichés,” a belief in abstract doctrine over concrete human interests, and a “dispensing of existence,” a dehumanization tactic whereby outsiders will not be saved (Christianity), are somehow irrevocably tainted or intentionally malevolent (social justice, Catholicism to Puritans) to the point that their opinions cannot be trusted, cannot be listened to.

Outside voices act which would act as a stabilizing voice toward normality are exorcised. Turning off such voices enables delusion, a delusion which is sometimes necessary for radically innovative work & allow the creation of new subjective realities, but which leads to destructions in equal measure. Theories of original sin tear down self-esteem, leading the sinner to renounce his own opinions or concerns in favor of an authority’s; the sinner cannot even trust himself, and is easily overtaken.

The meetings would often end in “breakthroughs” that followed a disturbing dream logic. On one occasion, Larry convinced Daniel that the

86 S. Godin

87 S. Perry

reason he played the ukulele was because of trauma inflicted on him by his father. Larry told Daniel to smash the instrument in front of the group as an act of catharsis.

You shut off doubts in yourself—self-deception the key to deceiving others—and you advise others to turn off similarly. The high stakes help: if the self-deception shatters, the meaning floods out of it like wine from a cup.

Larry himself never seemed to get tired. He preached the benefits of prescription amphetamines and, according to multiple acquaintances, took them in such high doses he rarely needed sleep.

You preclude criticism by pushing a program of self-criticism, shifting the default assumption from guilt inward. You don't get what appeals to others, which must be the result of your own ignorance.

On 93rd Street, small mistakes weren't just symbols of childhood trauma. They were evidence that the kids were trying to "sabotage" Larry's program of self-improvement. Subversive behavior was explored in painstaking detail and required written, signed confessions.

The pressures of conforming seal the deal. *"It was a combination of feeling like, This is unusual, and I feel kind of weird," he says, "but my immediate next thought was, Everyone else seems to think this is really good."⁸⁸ Maybe there's something wrong with me, and I need to lean into this."⁸⁹*

88 Asch conformity study: 50 Swarthmore undergrads grouped into rooms of eight. Seven designated study stooges, planted and instructed; one a naive participant, blind to the deception. The room is shown three vertical reference lines of different heights, as well as a target line, and asked to match the target with a reference line of corresponding height. Individually, the problem can be answered correctly by toddlers. With social pressure, the seven planted students all agreeing on the same, incorrect reference line, three-quarters of the naive participants conformed at least once, agreeing to an obviously wrong answer.

89 Kuran's concept of preference falsification, preempted by Twain and expanded by Perry, refers to the tendency for public opinions to differ

The Lacanian switch from depending on the mother --> aspiring to the father is the flip from objecthood to subjecthood, a necessary strategic shift in response to impending changes in conditions, a necessary retraining for the eventuality of autonomy.

(And you might ask yourself, is the *two gametes types inevitably leads to common reproductive strategies* theory an explanation for the conflict between Georgia O'Keefe's subject matter and her whole "I don't paint vulvas" stance? In other words, given the female anatomy of a flower, she both is and she isn't?)

∞

What did it give me, what you're reading?

Aristotle scholar Martha Nussbaum explores how crappy it is for humans to live outside of a story, even in heaven, in her essay "Transcending Humanity." Here, she considers Odysseus' choice to give up eternal youth and pleasure with Calypso in order to return to his wife and the certainty of inevitable death. She says,

>What, in the face of the recognized human attachment to transcendence, could justify such a choice? Odysseus has little to say. But what he does say makes it perfectly clear that the key is not any surpassing beauty in Penelope herself. He freely grants that from this point of view Calypso will be found superior. And he points to no superiority in Penelope that could counterbalance Calypso's divine excellence. So he is not, it seems, choosing a glorious prize in spite of the fact that he

from private opinions due to social pressure; an Emperor's New Clothes situation emerges in which large groups of people may all hold the same private opinion but, not knowing others' interiorities, falsify them in public, giving the external impression of a pressuring consensus. The only way out of mass preference falsification is enough public disavowals of the public consensus, such that others realize they are not alone in their beliefs.

*has to face death to get it; that is not at all how he sees the issue. He is choosing the whole human package: mortal life, dangerous voyage, imperfect mortal aging woman. [...] We don't quite know what it would be for this hero, known for his courage, craft, resourcefulness, and loyal love to enter into a life in which courage would atrophy, in which cunning and resourcefulness would have little point, since the risks with which they grapple would be removed.*⁹⁰

Penelope, matron saint of weaving,

If we look at something like the Odyssey, we have two different kinds of heroes: Odysseus and Penelope. Odysseus is a pretty Campbellian hero. He leaves home, he does deeds, and returns home, having earned some kind of mantle of authority. Penelope, on the other hand, is left at home with the challenge of figuring out what to do with herself. She waits for Odysseus and she fends off a series of suitors. The Heroine's Journey is about learning to suffer, endure, and be subjected to indignity while maintaining grace, composure, and patience.

The modern heroine looks like Kristen Wiig in Bridesmaids, a movie that pulls indignity rugs out from under its protagonist for two hours. The modern heroine also looks like Sylvia Plath, who has both become a symbol of female suffering (trite, traditional), and of an interpreter of suffering that is female in a human sense. The post-wounded woman is one who is never suffering in the present, but is instead always contextualizing and nervously proving ownership over that suffering. 'You're a big, ugly wound!' one yells. The other yells back: 'No, you're the wound!' And so they volley, back and forth: 'You're the wound; no, you're the wound. They know women like to claim monopolies on woundedness, and they call each other out on it.

*If the graceful negotiation of composure and things that threaten composure is the essence of female value, and fetishes originate in the secret and taboo, then well, of course the destruction of female composure would become deeply, repeatedly fetishized.*⁹¹

90 The View From Hell, "Living In The Epilogue"

91 The Sublemon, thesublemon.tumblr.com

The grace of self-knowledge, the glory of self-elevation. *His fatal flaw is he lives in books*, by which I also meant myself, synthesizing, aggregating maps, as if it were dealing with the territory. Attempts at re-approbations of the real, attempts at grounding.

Even though it purports to, is this writing actually doing the "Nelson genre fictionthing"? Is it actually a kind of writing as crossdressing? What's the difference between picking a voice that represents one of many selves, then passing reality through its filter, and merely being a wolf dressed in lambswool? Is it the difference between taking up a way of seeing and dressing up to be seen in some way? Is this drag or disguise and is there a difference?

2W's swapped ____ for Niagara, sung an alba of mourning before a canícula of ch-ch-ch(anges) that doesn't take away from the original Porgy or the fact that neither of us are penal colonists, and if you doubt me on any of this you can cite Bruce Conner at MoMA.⁹²

CHANT I will face my shame. I will permit it to pass over me and through me. And when it has gone past I will turn the inner eye to see its path. Where the shame has gone there will be nothing. Only I will remain.

Oh & go get your haircut at Tony's. Tony's been at it since 1965. Same spot off 5th n' Sunset, the same old cabinets and chairs. Everyone wanders in and out, chatting, about the news, about whether he'll ever retire, go to Florida? Tony? Nahh.

∞

Ngai's landmark argument in *Ugly Feelings* that a work of lit-

92 cf. Boyer's "Provisional Avant-Garde": It will develop many languages, all of them like lovers to each other or parents to their child. These will probably be embarrassing.

erature can, through tone, represent a subject's ideology—and so, both represent a structure of her subjectivity and touch upon the structure of the social-material conditions structuring her subjectivity.⁹³

Quoting Batuman: A “rain/grey/British vibe,” for example, incorporates the walk from a Barbour store (to look at wellington boots) to the Whitney Museum (to look at “some avant-garde shorts by Robert Beavers”), as well as the TV adaptation of *Brideshead Revisited*, the Scottish electronic duo Boards of Canada, “late 90s Radiohead/global anxiety/airports” and *New Jersey*. A “vibe” turns out to be something like “local colour,” with a historical dimension. What gives a vibe “authenticity” is its ability to evoke—using a small number of disparate elements—a certain time, place and milieu; a certain nexus of historic, geographic and cultural forces.⁹⁴

The house band kicks in for the night's last song, vox the timbre of stone over canyon, synthesizer echo and a bassline monument.

Jackie ran away one day she ran for the Hampshires

To go drinking at night and to spread her delights by the Hampshires

But little did she know her runaway solace

Would turn into lifetimes a-running on down by the Hampshires

Jackie ran away that day, she ran for the choice was hers

Ali took off for the green and the scene in the Berkshires

Picked daisies, got hazy, and at nights she tripped by the campfire

Til one day she woke by an onerous bloke by the campfire

And she cried and she packed up her bags and she left and they called each other liars

But Lisa was born in a downtown apartment with

Parents as artists and so much to start with

She had all the luck

She heard disco and glam pop, The Beatles and fanned up

It was all set and done

Cause twenty five thousand and bell-bottomed trousers

A penchant for downers, the sixties, its founders,

Was all it really took

For a future as bright

As the golden years lie

But it was ret' and raw and fun

∞

The die slows. What did it require, what you're reading? Did it birth, was it always there? Are things just that which we summon from chthonic matter, draw boundaries around, observe and name? How is it, how attention can generate, the non-negligible effect of recognition on reality?⁹⁵

95 Nerst: “In *Why I Love the ESC* I said that I'm no longer as much of a fan as I used to be, and that I look upon it with old-friend fondness in my eyes more than anything else. That's actually changed somewhat. Starting to write about it two years ago made me also start reading about it more, and that dragged me into the whole online circus around it. And it turns out that the more you read about something and the more you surround yourself with others who are also into it, the more significant it begins to feel.”

93 Grietzer, “Theory of Vibe.” Q

94 Elif, *The Guardian*, via Peli, responding to Koenig's 2006 blog

He giggles. He is holding a clear violet marble up to the window, turning it in the sunlight. Euripides' *Bacchae* with the worst case. *Pentheus, perhaps psychically influenced by Dionysus, thinks a little bacchanalia—dipping his toe, using irony for internal justification—dresses up as a woman to spy on the Bakkhai women in the hills, perhaps even catch them in cunnilingus. And this fissure, this personal allowance to let a bit of Dionysus, does in fact destroy him—he's literally torn apart by it, what classicists love calling sparagmos, in a literal destructuring of the symbolic order. One of the women who does the tearing is his own mother, arm from socket, drunk off Dionysus.* But this, to me, is the point at which Euripides' fear eclipses his wisdom. Until this point, it is not his flexibility but his rigidity which has brought Pentheus's empire down around him. It is his unbending unwillingness to recognize, his fear that mere recognition will legitimize, encourage.

"Among other ideas, Eastern aesthetics suggests that ordered structure contrives, that logical exposition falsifies, and that linear, consecutive argument eventually limits... The structure in the multiplicity of strokes that make up the aesthete quality, one which they imply and which we infer."⁹⁶

You look down & foaming tide washes up on yr feet, whets the stones underneath, every color, ombre, ochre, a clay-like orange red, a dark crimson, a blunted jade, a dark maroon and mauve. "I remember when I was a boy going upon the beach and being charmed with the colors and forms of the shells. I picked up many and put them in my pocket. When I got home I could find nothing that I gathered—nothing but some dry ugly mussel and snail shells. Thence I learned that Composition was more important than the beauty of individual forms to effect. On the shore they lay wet and social by the sea and under the sky."⁹⁷

96 Donald Richie, *A Tractate on Japanese Aesthetics*

97 Emerson, *Journals*. Nelson cites a similar quote by R.W.E. in *Bluets*:

This is fit, when sum of parts become other. An emergent property: coherence, beauty, appropriateness, a classical unity.

Christopher Alexander, *Notes on the Synthesis of Form*, brought to yr attention again by Perry:

[E]very design problem begins with an effort to achieve fitness between two entities: the form in question and its context. The form is the solution to the problem; the context defines the problem. In other words, when we speak of design, the real object of discussion is not the form alone, but the ensemble comprising the form and its context. Good fit is a desired property of this ensemble which relates to some particular division of the ensemble into form and context.

There is a wide variety of ensembles which we can talk about like this. The biological ensemble made up of a natural organism and its physical environment is the most familiar: in this case we are used to describing the fit between the two as well-adaptedness. But the same kind of objective aptness is to be found in many other situations. The ensemble consisting of a suit and tie is a familiar case in point; one tie goes well with a certain suit, another goes less well. Again, the ensemble may be a game of chess, where at a certain stage of the game some moves are more appropriate than others because they fit the context of the previous moves more aptly. The ensemble may be a musical composition—musical phrases have to fit their contexts too: think of the perfect rightness when Mozart puts just this phrase at a certain point in a sonata. If the ensemble

"Life is a train of moods like a string of beads, and as we pass through them they prove to be many-colored lenses which paint the world in their own hue, and each shows only what lies in its focus." Deadly, she calls it, to be stuck in any one bead. Hyperpriors that shape perception...

ble is a truckdriver plus a traffic sign, the graphic design of the sign must fit the demands made on it by the driver's eye. An object like a kettle has to fit the context of its use, and the technical context of its production cycle. In the pursuit of urbanism, the ensemble which confronts us is the city and its habits. Here the human background which defines the need for new buildings, and the physical environment provided by the available sites, make a context for the form of the city's growth. In an extreme case of this kind, we may even speak of a culture itself as an ensemble in which the various fashions and artifacts which develop are slowly fitted to the rest.

Later in his work, this concept becomes the Quality Without a Name, a kind of aliveness, rightness, harmony. The New Aegy philosophical version of what was before a design concept. Alexander becoming not just a theoretician of a craft but of living, a kind of cult leader, religious figure.

One of the things that helps me understand Duchamp, Warhol, Cage—beyond their transcendence of what Simler & Hanson call the “fitness display,” taking as their exhibit the bowerbird—is Perry's idea that it is “fitting” within a highly abstract game which we call contemporary fine arts. *Cage's music is an example of the tendency for high-status human domains to ignore fit with human nervous systems in favor of fit with increasingly rarified abstract cultural systems. Human nervous systems are limited. Representation of existing forms, and generating pleasure and poignancy in human minds, are often disdained as solved problems. Domains unhinged from the desires and particularities of human nervous systems and bodies become inhuman; human flourishing, certainly, is not a solved problem. However, human nervous systems themselves create and seek out “fit” of the more abstract sort; the domain of abstract systems is part of the natural human environment,*

*and the forms that exist there interact with humans as symbiotes.*⁹⁸

We can find precedents for “fit” in Greek concepts of harmony, in Russian formalist ideas of the dominant.⁹⁹ Bruno Latour writes, “Parts hide one another; and when the artifact is completed the activity that fits them together disappears completely.” Proust's “amitie,” friendships between images. Alva Noë deploys it implicitly in his work of neuroaesthetics *Strange Tools*: “Tools are useful only against the background of our needs and capacities. Let's return to the doorknob. A simple bit of technology, yes, but one that presupposes a vast and remarkable social background. Doorknobs exist in the context of a whole form of life, a whole biology—the existence of doors, and buildings, and passages, the human body, the hand, and so on. A designer of doorknobs makes a simple artifact, but does so with an eye to its mesh with this larger cognitive and anthropological framework.” (Design, like pop, focuses on the fit between object and human body, human nervous system.)

But Emerson, who wrote of the sea shells taken from their homes, says also in his diaries introspectively: *Every thing is a monster till we know what it is for... A lobster is monstrous but when we have been shown the reason of the case & the color & the tentacula & the proportion of the claws & seen that he has not a scale nor a bristle nor any quality but fits to some habit & condition of the creature he then seems as perfect & suitable to his sea house as a glove to a hand. A man in the rocks under the sea would be a monster but a lobster is a most handy & happy fellow there.*

98 “Beauty is Fit” Carcinisation

99 “[T]he dominant [is] one of the most crucial, elaborated, and productive concepts of Russian Formalist Theory. The dominant may be defined as the focusing component of a work of art: it rules, determines, and transforms the remaining components. It is the dominant which guarantees the integrity of the structure.” (Jakobson, *Language in Literature*, via A.D.J.) In other words, the dominant is that which the work's other, subordinate parts form fit to.

Every design problem begins with an effort to achieve fitness between two entities: the form in question and its context. The form is the solution the problem; the context defines the problem. Divide it up in thirds:¹⁰⁰ Inter-work fitness: fitness with the canon (ie art-historical trajectory) and contemporaneous works. Intra-work fitness: fitness between parts and whole. Subjective fitness: fitness between the work and audience (see John Dewey).

Can we understand the difference between symmetry and asymmetry? I am in a black box theater which a gathered group of friends has rented out for a wedding. Misha, Sam Rosen, Alex Guzey & wife Nastya, Gabe, Jules Pitt, Chris Wage & Chris Beiser, Tao, Andrew/Nifty & Sara, Simpolism's Jake, Other James, Plover teaching dance lessons, Shreedha as bridesmaid, Sol's Joey serving flowergirl, Daniel Klein manning the door as usher alongside Lambda's Pat. Sarah Perry in a long linen dress, hair neatly up, adjudicating the wedding.

Ben & Yena had come for breakfast in the morning, gone with Anteros and I on a walk toward the lake. "Your ability

100 Or else: Evaluative ("critical") criticism: Passes judgments, determines which works are worth of consumption and/or canonization. Shapes the way present and past works are consumed, and the way future works will be made. Contextualizing ("translative") criticism: Attempts to collapse between authorial intention and reader reception by giving cultural, historical, or biographical context. Shapes the way present and past works are consumed. Extractive ("return-maximizing") criticism: Attempts to increase the value of a work, to maximize its returns, relative to a given audience. Shapes the way present and past works are consumed. //: Works have fitness with their historical, social, and cultural contexts. Moreover, there is a fitness between a work and its presentation (though one might view presentation as merely an extension of the work itself, or as a mediator between work and context). Alan Kaprow on Happenings, *The Blurring of Art and Life*: "An orientation has proved not only useful but necessary, since invariably no one knows how to deal with such a project." The extractive critic, if talented, can make otherwise useless or "ugly" works useful or beautiful by shifting framing or orientation, by changing the way we see, read, listen to, or otherwise approach it.

to visualize text, to translate between words and image, goes far beyond mine" I told A. The Robbe-Grillet love, likely, or my own frustrations. Dinner was ginger mashed sweet potatoes walnut cranberry salad prosciutto but not for me, stuffed grape leaves and acorn squash. Best man speech by the Asshole at Delphi—recounted story of Leonidas's trip to the oracle night before battle, her words urging him to a stoic acceptance of likely failure, his disregard of her foretelling. Used as a metaphor for weddings—the eve of a doomed war, the blood of failure soon to be smeared on its participants' cheeks. It was less dramatic, more knowing than I am conveying; it was even touching, the punchline that *this* wedding was different, made the polyamorous, marriage-skeptic Delphic of a best man believe there could be exceptions.

Before vows Sarah gives a speech about a quality with no name and afterward at reception we talk a bit about how we've both recognized a similar "shape of things," a pattern in epistemics repeatedly stumbled upon: Davis's "That's Interesting," Schmidhuber, Clark and Friston's predictive processing, Dennett & Hurley's *Inside Jokes*.

Someone read a bit from Baker's *John*: «MERTIS: I remember moving towards him through Terminal 4 and it was like emerging from the cold and into the sun... And all the confusion and fear and self-hatred that I'd always felt in the presence of other people... I was shedding it like a skin... I remember thinking: everything is possible. If this is possible, anything is possible.»

Someone else read from Kegan's *Evolving Self*: «Reciprocity now becomes a matter of both holding and being held, a mutual protection of each partner's opportunity to experience and exercise both sides of life's fundamental tension. Reciprocity now becomes a matter of at once mutually preserving the other's distinctness while fashioning a bigger

context in which these separate identities interpenetrate, and to which persons invest an affection supervening their separate identities.» There is a three-part round sung by the audience in sections which goes better than expected.

∞

B/log entry xx-xx-2018. Midnight now. Drink: a 1:2 ratio the Goldilocks zone for a gin and tonic. When I try to sleep I think of Beckett's Endgame, a trashlid shutting out the light. The wall is a kind of dusty lavender, darkening in shallow gradient toward the corner.

<p>We'll be looking at the historic terrazzo sidewalks of Downtown Los Angeles, talking about the weather. Do you miss the seasons?</p>

<p>It'll be a sky blue sky, with only a scattering of clouds, miles apart, and I will wonder whether I can accurately gauge the space between them from below. I'll be smoking a cigarette, and I will not be inhaling because I no longer smoke, have no tolerance for it, would only give me head-swarms, but I am with you and for the sake of company I join you, if only from the outside.</p>

<p>Would you be jealous if you knew? Would you think yourself betrayed?</p>

<p>You'll make your legs command distances out the Angelano avenue, stretching the fabric of your Ralph Lauren pants with the length of your strides. After a bit of walking and perhaps a cab, we will see the silver light of the Gehry concert hall in the distance; we will emerge from air-conditioned shops into warm-if-dry heat; we will enter a movie theater and see the new Coppola films, double-headers, and in the intermission between them we'll emerge sun-blinded by the last image of day. Will you be saddened to

miss it as we step back inside?</p>

<p>When I think of you it is as your Platonic form. I have heard rumors that to love someone is to accept their faults, and I am theoretically certain that you have a few—faults, that is—but when I think of why I love you it is because I feel you have no true faults at all. </p>

<p>The intricacies of your mannerisms astound me. You will show me a picture of yourself as a child when we retire to your apartment. You are you, just before college, your dark hair in bangs and you will disclaim, “I wish you knew me when I was young and beautiful.” I do not. The girl who is looking out at me from the photograph knows nothing of what she wants. You <i>do</i>, <i>exactly</i>, and it is what compels me most about you. It is in your mood, your bluntness of presentation. So little exhibition to it, really, not the way some people we know perform. </p>

<p>”I used to buy flowers for myself and carry them on the subway, so that people would think I was wanted.” I say, “I was awkward too once,” met only with a shaking head. “That’s comparing apples to starfish.”</p>

<p></p>

<p></p>

<p>You'll be wearing a dark, faux green fur coat, dyed so that the tips are lighter, and I'll think you'll look fabulous in it, and you'll think so too, which is really the best thing of all. California, you're so good to me I'll think, while I watch you cross the street, end to end.</p>

<p>Where are you going? To MoMA? I can't see you across even the emptiest of trains. We've switched geographies. I can only describe the places, around us together, soft and sharp, but perhaps such places are memorable

only because, in my memory, you're in them. </p>

<p>You'll have a soft spot for Marsden Hartley, a successor artist in your personal canon of bests (after I tease you gently for loving Benton, loving him unduly). You'll be riding one of those bright red Spacelander bicycles with the bubbled fiberglass cut-outs, and possibly two racoon-tail handlebars, looking very chic. It's the last day before it gets too cold to leave indoors. I'll look past a Robert Zettler wood carving in mahogany, past a bronze bulbous floral shade dome lamp, and wish they were ours.</p>

<p></p>

<p>A winter mix coming down outside the windows. I'll go to bed with you, praying for feet of snow, and in the morning it comes.</p>

<p></p>

<p>I'll be in the kitchen and you'll be sleeping, a little second-story apartment. "Chelsea Morning" on the stereo. Me making drip coffee; you'll get up and walk-cross behind me, over the hardwood floor, to the small balcony over the street, a balcony cramped yet noble, and I can bring a cup to you on the veranda, no Montana in sight.</p>

<p></p>

<p>I am a Papageno. I have seen you in a flash and sizzle of the pan before you left! I have played the fool; I have initiated; I have talked to you in my cell against all predicate. <i>Disclosure of love too early is its death; guard the secret as if it were love's very survival itself.</i> </p>

<p></p>

<p>I am like the man who stencilled "Not Art" in

crate-barrel typeface on the wall outside the Brooklyn Museum—through the statement, intending to prove himself an artist. So I'll be a man in love.</p>

<p></p>

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