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MANIFESTO

This is a manifesto not in the style of Marinetti's Italian Futurism or Marx's *Communist Manifesto* or André Breton's *Manifesto of Surrealism* or Ted Kaczynski's *Industrial Society and its Future* or the manifesto of the Situationists or Legacy Russell's *Glitch Feminism* or Kropotkin and Grave's *Manifesto of the Sixteen* or Andrea Long Chu's *Females* or but in the easy and fraternal manner of *Y Tu Mama Tambien's Charolastras*. And it goes as follows:

- (1) All contributors are EXHIBITIONISTS and all readers VOYEURS
- (3) All EXHIBITIONISTS should be anonymous, identified only by their pseudonym
- (4) A VOYEUR can become a EXHIBITIONIST if solicited to by another EXHIBITIONIST
- (5) No EXHIBITIONIST should be too shady or fascist or boring or neoliberal or str8-cis
- (2) The DICTATOR - the master-originator of the zine - reserves the responsibility to collate, compile, censor, and enact the publication of each issue
- (6) All copies of the issue should be made to put in consistent circulation by whatever means necessary
- (7) Plagiarism for a piece is completely allowed, if distributed by one of those mega-conglomerate monopolies or w-e (Penguin, Harper Collins, Hachette etc)
- (8) All EXHIBITIONISTS are invited to access the materials through the shared Google Drive and participate in a dialogic net-space (a spider-web or 網) on Signal

(9) The Manifesto should be revised by a nominated EXHIBITIONIST to reflect the pieces and be re-published at the beginning of each issue

(10) Modesty is a sin, exposure a virtue—

Lay

it

Bare



"Alan, we both
love her"



Love
H. Seldon

I remember not being able to say truthfully to my parents that I loved them.

I only started telling my mum I loved her in 2018. After the first time I fell in romantic love with someone else. I had taken my mother's love for granted, realising this at the age of 23. I also realised that I did not love my father and probably never would.

The mixture of brain chemicals that result in the sensation of *falling* in romantic love for me feels akin to the sensation you get when you run long distances. At around that 15km mark your eyes dilate, and especially if you're running through nature, you feel grateful for the bounteous Earth around you and your opportunity to experience it. It's also similar, though less intense, than the feeling of taking MDMA for the first time. If you've done neither before I'd highly recommend both.

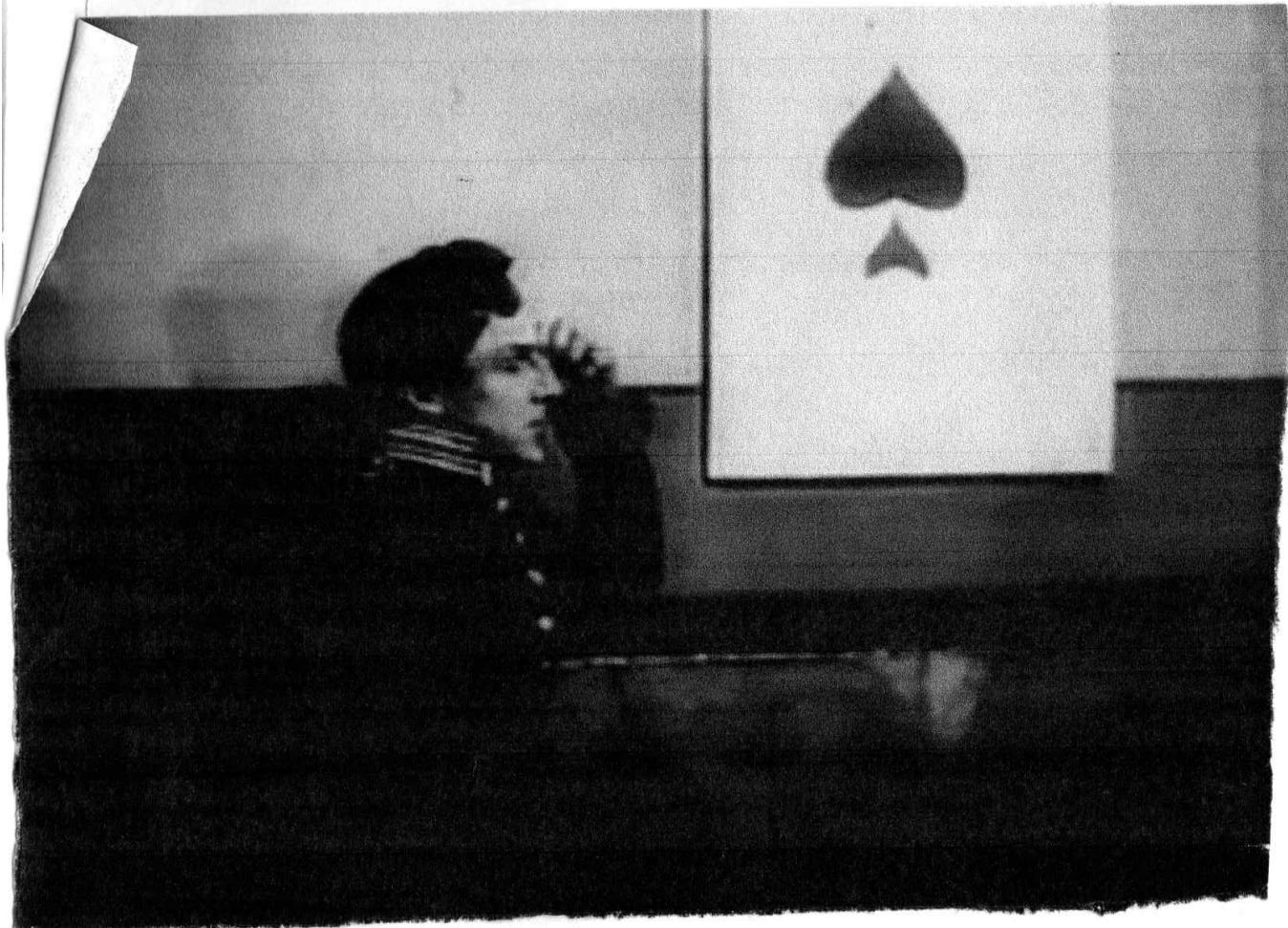
Another more recent form of love for me is that of friendship. Like most of you I had been conditioned into isolating romantic love from all other forms, probably due to the constraints of the English language only having a single word for love. I realised in 2023 that I was in love with my friends too. And that it is just as deep and powerful as romantic or familial love. I had also taken this for granted, and similarly to my mother circa 2017, and have not yet informed any of them yet.

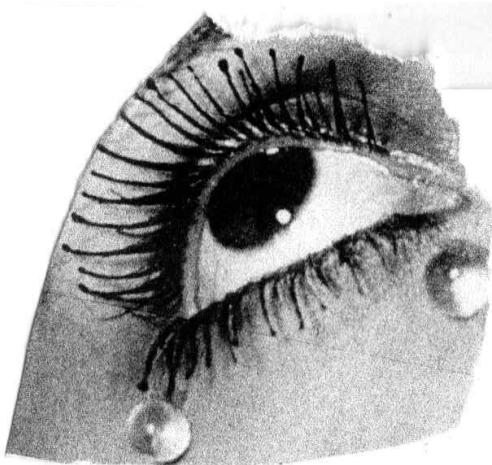
A final love, which I don't think I've managed to experience yet, is that for myself. I kind of hate myself, maybe it's from the near



constant contact and interaction. Sometimes I get so sick of myself and feel frustrated that I can't order myself to fuck off. But I'm codependent. I can tolerate myself, and sometimes surprise myself too. I don't know if 29 years of familiarity, constant communication, and interlinked personal development and growth amount to love. Although people who have been in close personal relationships for long periods of time may have another perspective on that.

Falling in love with myself seems too hard, and sounds too cringeworthy and cliche, I don't know if I can ever bring myself to do it. Though maybe I'll figure out a way to tolerate and respect myself enough to blunt the ennui, depression, anxiety and various other bullshit this guy expects me to go through.





Friendsgiving with Friends
baobab

Blood dripped, startlingly red and stark against the newly-bleached shower floor. I stared at it in numb shock for a few moments, just sitting and breathing and blinking, as though if I were still enough the bloodstain would disappear, or at least explain itself to me. The first thought that came to mind was not that my skin had caught on some sharp end of the shower drain that I was attempting to pry up with my fingers, but irrationally that my period blood had somehow remained trapped in the drain and was leaking out, or that there was some kind of cleaning chemical that had reacted with the metal and made the water turn red. It was only after the blood had turned into a steady stream that I fully registered the dig under the flesh, the dull sting of pain.

And so it was: a college student holding a wad of toilet paper to her finger in lieu of paper towels or tissues in a somewhat half-hearted attempt to apply pressure in one hand while googling how to treat deeper cuts with the other.

It's not the first time, not even the tenth, that the thought had occurred to me, that I could die in my apartment and have no one find out for weeks until someone complained about the smell and my landlord opened the door to find my body decomposing, with not even a cat to feast off of my remains. Only my eternally faithful houseflies. As injuries (if this one-degree-above-a-papercut-cut qualifies as an injury) so often do, it brought to my attention, in a sort of muted way, that I am, in fact, still made of meat and bones and entirely mortal stuff, despite what I told my distinctly uninsured self.

I managed to cut myself on the most inconvenient area, that being the tip of my index finger—exactly the small, localized section that regularly makes full contact with my keyboard, thus drastically slowing down my typing speed. My work output would take a nosedive, even if the cut wasn't actually bad enough to justify it. It probably *just* qualified for a wry commentary on how I thought of the pain only in terms of how it would affect my productivity and how that in itself gestured towards the ills of late-stage capitalism, but that would be overstating the whole affair.

Still, the next day, I wondered if I could utilize the unfortunate incident to my advantage, a conversation starter for a new text chain between me and my Newly Estranged Friend (NEF). I wouldn't tell it as a funny anecdote, but rather pretend that I was still in the midst of it. I'd intentionally add the typos and everything, just to really sell that I was panicking and typing with one hand.

hey haHA what do u do if u accidentlaly cut urself real bad and r bleeding profusely !!!

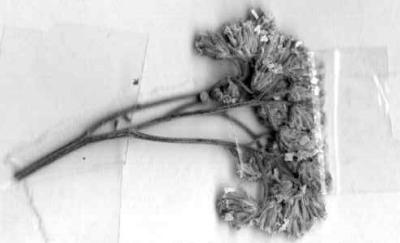
I imagined her reply. *omg what did you do*

well i was cleaning myshowre drain ad then suddenly BLOOD

The make-believe text conversation stopped there. I couldn't account for how she would react; she'd most likely call me if she was really worried, but the thought of speaking to her face-to-face, even through a screen, gave me anxiety. Actually, the thought of her replying *at all* gave me anxiety, but the thought of her not replying was even worse.

////





On Friday, I relayed my messy feelings in a neat and compact and (hopefully) entertaining way to a friend, who wears adult cardigans and is routinely mistaken for a thirty-year-old. “You know when you feel like there’s a weight on your chest? Like it’s squeezing really hard and the world is ending all the time? This research project is just killing me like that.” If this were text, I would have ended with a neat *haha*, but since this was real life, I just settled for actually laughing.

She smiled in a placid, sort of understanding but-not-really type of way, though it wasn’t patronizing. “Well, I’ve never had a physical reaction like that,” she said, mirroring my defensive posture of crossing my arms Tutankhamun-style over my chest, “but I guess stress is different for everyone.”

I sat there, sputtering for a moment as I processed her response. Up until that point I had just assumed, clearly incorrectly, that everyone experienced some variation of this feeling of numbness, of being crushed and squeezed, panic shooting up the arms, or at least the feeling of being unable to breathe, lungs constricting, chest cavity crashing downwards. I imagine it to be like in cartoons, when anvils randomly manifest and fall on bouncy characters who wheeze under their weight, pinioned and squirming against the comically-cracked pavement. Struck with the dizzying revelation that this was not, in fact, a universal experience, I laughed sheepishly and changed the topic.

I thought about this conversation all of the walk to a ‘Friendsgiving’ potluck, the lead-up to which I had fussed for several hours over what to take to best represent myself. As part of this deliberation process I made an entire roast chicken last minute and then abandoned it in favor of bringing the safe option of kimchi fried rice and a lamb stew I had made

the day before. Normal people don't react like this when going to a twenty-six person function, I thought, as I inhaled biting-cold air through my nose and exhaled through my mouth. The threat of vomiting, or of sobs bubbling over at the very least, probably had everything to do with the fact that I was seeing the NEF for the first time in a week. In through the nose and out through the mouth. In, and out.

////

The cut scabbing into a strange dark splotch on my finger, I typed into my badly-organized Notes app "why am I so sad???" in French. I share an iCloud with my father (I had long given up trying to log out of the account since it would make me lose all of my other notes), so maybe the French was an attempt at being more discrete, though in reality it was probably an effort to make sense of the unpleasant, squishy feelings in my chest by forcibly turning it into lazy art. I didn't really have the energy to continue or to parse why I felt so bad when doing so would probably make me feel more bad, so I just deleted it.

////

This is why I shouldn't read Sally Rooney novels, because I'll get all psychoanalytic about all of my interactions, I thought, scrolling through past texts with the NEF. Something that I often joked about with her was that she texted like she hated people, since she was frighteningly bad, for someone so often on TikTok and immersed in Gen Z culture (she called everyone 'bestie' and frequently quoted TikTok sounds when reacting to situations), at conveying her tone to text. I was already unsure even when we were actually close whether or not she was annoyed with me, so now that I felt she actually *did* hate me the texts became even more of a riddle. She last texted me on Monday about a Kpop act she liked that was coming

to Paris. She ended it with “CRYING AND THROWING UP”. It was a peace offering if I’d ever seen one. Or it would be, if I had seen it on the day she’d sent it. I had fretted for a good week about how to possibly start a conversation, but when I actually saw the message it was useless to try taking the extended olive branch, as it had already withered and died.

A part of me tries to rationalize this ending as being for the best, since we never were really able to talk about anything deeper than our hobbies, not really, or the newest Kpop video that came out. In lulls of silence I scrambled to come up with conversation topics, in which she often came up with an acerbic reply and in my head I would compare it to what my friends at home would say instead, or she would call *her* friends or parents at home and I would sit patiently on the couch looking blankly at the floor, pretending not to listen. Maybe this was supposed to be short-lived. Maybe it wasn’t fair to either of us to keep trying to make it work when we both knew we’d most likely lose contact after we both moved away from our small college town. Still, I see other people interact with her as instinctively as breathing from across the room at Friendsgiving and can’t help but feel like it’s something just wrong with me, that I’m just defective in some way and if I can’t be friends with such a personable, fun human then how can I even survive in this world?

////

At Friendsgiving, I sat on the floor next to the table spilling over with food, as the tupperwares full of brussel sprouts and pasta and eggplant sauté were shifted over to rest on spare chairs. Bringing kimchi fried rice instead of the roasted chicken had been a good idea, since two others (one of them being the NEF) had brought chicken anyways. A girl I hadn’t spoken to since the beginning of the year sat next to me in the cramped hollow between the slanted roof and the floor, and I stole glances at the

NEF who was, what felt like to me, very pointedly angled away from me while laughing with her whole body and watching our mutual friend (and host) who didn't know anything about the situation make sweet potato fries.

The girl next to me and I went through the perfunctory motions of catching up. What's your major again? Politics and government. How are academics? Oh, *so busy*. Really hard. My legs were drawn up to my chest in an effort to make myself smaller and fit better into the narrow space, when she turned to me after getting me mashed potatoes and green beans and chicken. "Are you okay?"

I blinked, chewing. "Yes," I said, carefully. I added, "I'm having a good time... This food is really good," despite the fact that no one says "I'm having a good time" if they're actually having a good time.

She nodded at this response. "Social life is good?"

I paused, briefly. In just a second it felt like she had somehow read me; maybe in the stiffness of my movements as I raised, fork to mouth, mashed potatoes and mac n' cheese in order to make an excuse to not talk. Or maybe she can read minds. I shrugged. "Yeah, it's good."

"You know, I live alone, so sometimes it can get super lonely," she continued, neglecting her own plate. "Like even though I know logically I have people who care about me, if I'm alone in my apartment I just get into my own head and get super depressed, like no one actually cares if I turned into a zombie or something."

She offered this information so casually, as though she were talking about the changing weather (a topic which occupied an admittedly large

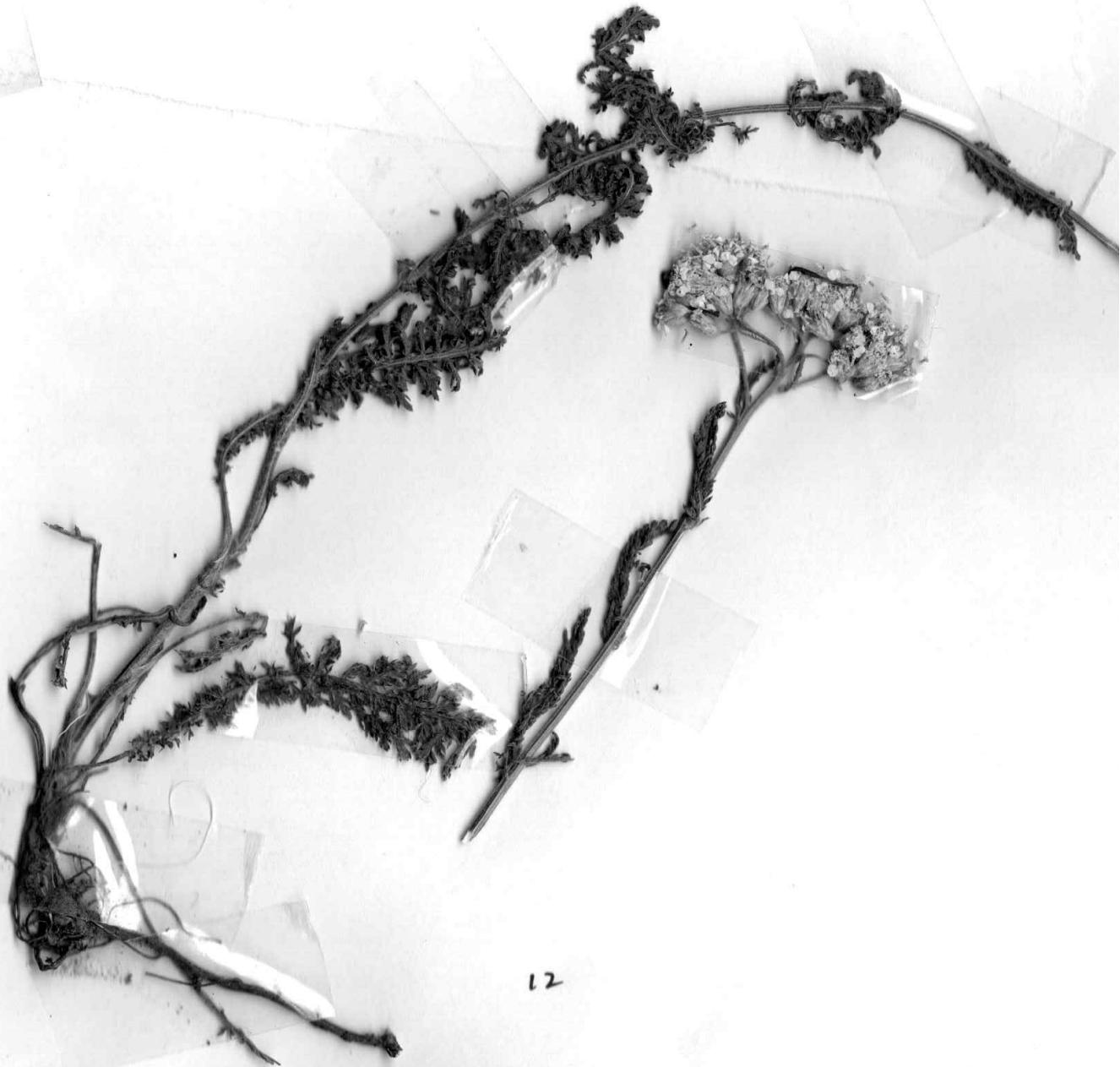
percentage of my small talk conversations). I balked at this kindness, at her offering up this admission first so that I could feel more comfortable. I hadn't talked to this girl in a semester, and had only seen her on Instagram stories going to Épernay for champagne tasting and strolling through vineyards on sunny days.

I was aware that my situation was actually more complicated than living alone. I wasn't necessarily lonely because of it; I enjoyed my independence. I more so felt isolated because I felt like the world was closing in on me, and that people would one day find out I was secretly boring or overly sensitive to passive aggressive comments and would stop trying with me, like I was tethered to this town by the weakest of strings and they were being pulled taut, ready to snap or be cut. I didn't relay this to her, instead electing to say, "Yeah, I live alone too! Or I think about how if I just die in my apartment people wouldn't find me for ages."

She nodded emphatically, even though I knew she had a boyfriend since last year and her best friend was one of the hosts of Friendsgiving. "Exactly," she said, drawing out the 'ee' vowel, "so it can still be kinda difficult."

I moved through the rest of the night feeling weirdly raw, though I didn't show it. I left early, just before ten, before I would be thrust into a situation in which I might have to interact with NEF or, god forbid, walk home with her. I thought about the feeling that I have been missing out on NEF's life this past week, the pang of pain when I didn't know she was bringing roasted chicken until twenty minutes before the event when I hesitantly texted her, while one of the hosts greeted her with "and how'd the chicken turn out?" as if she had known forever. The time when I visited a friend in her apartment and she talked about how NEF was in Paris at the moment, mentioned it off-handedly, and I nodded and pretended like I had known

the whole time. My mind returned to the idea I've been circling around, without ever quite reaching or internalizing the core of it, like sitting and watching the blood turn pink and orbit the drain: that maybe she might be missing out on my life, too.





how boys love

Lord Chandos' Mailman, Esq. and Prof. of Pataphys

clenching two fists filled with pebbles the size of Auden stanzas.
what might one say other than

it's natural the Boys should whoop it up for
so huge a phallic triumph, an adventure
it would not have occurred to women
to think worth while

after we had finished.
you hurled a familiar dictum at my back

Art, I suppose, is only for beginners, or else for those resolute dead-enders, who have made up their minds to be content with the ersatz of Suchness, with symbols rather than with what they signify, with the elegantly composed recipe in lieu of actual dinner

that had slid out of your arms moments prior.
leaving behind an outline you cursed with borrowed definitions

The productions of the sexually deviant are charged with desire for recognition; as opposed to the conforming among us, they seek to make themselves heard to thus somehow sanction their differences

we use to connect.
where nature grows heavy is where boys learn to love.

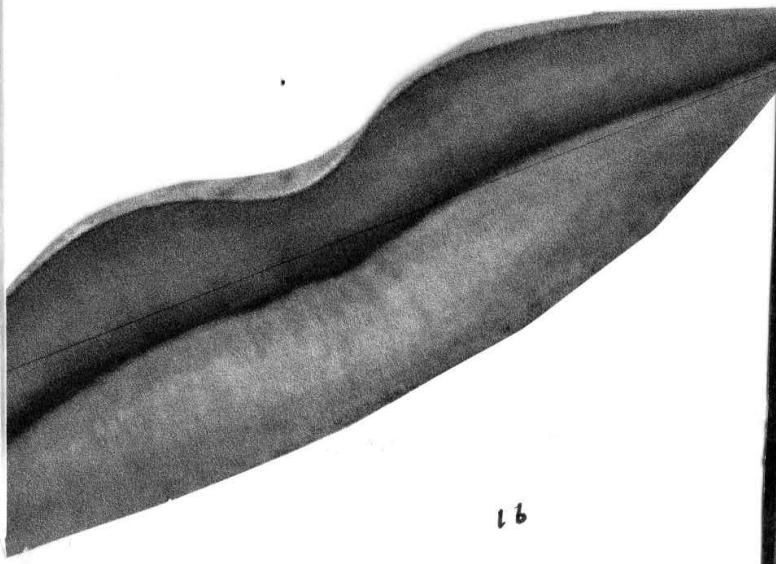
What if we kissed on the other side of the mountain?

Atia

A woman stood crippled and undone at the base of a mountain, a last audible whisper slipping from her disfigured fleshy lips: "it is not what I want to be, it is more what I am in just being". It is said that the woman was waiting for a sacred man to descend, and that this man was to be the bearer of all language. Since she was a child, her silence signaled immeasurable pain, and for that she was condemned by the tribes of the sacred man to be left alone on the wrong side of the mountain. Thus she was not only paralyzed but also paraplegic- blown away by the dry thunders of the desert. She looked half-alive, deaf to the ecstatic chorus of the other side, struggling with a spasmodic flaccidity proper to those half-stricken souls ready to be pierced by a victorious pike on the twilight of a battlefield. For days, and months and years, she stood there never knowing if the sacred man had descended or not onto the other side, never knowing if her people were already dining alongside lions and calves at the promised ever-fertile land. Frail, she stood at the base of the

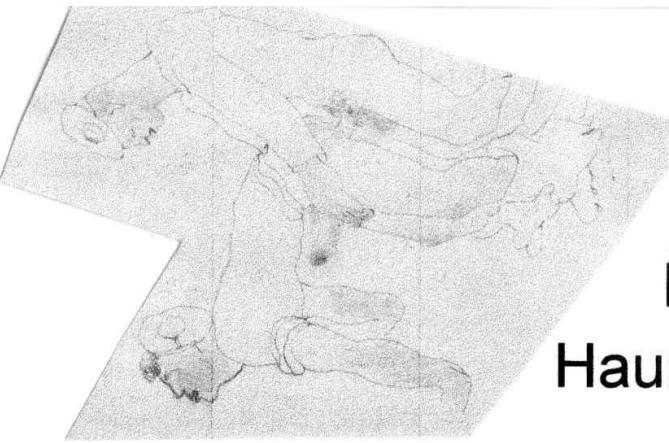
mountain, dusty in her sight, shrinking like her stomach and inclined like her wither spine: one in gravity, the other in grace— her hands held strong. Inhaling the love of God, exhaling a love of those from which she was exiled— her heartbeat was sure. Murmuring an indecipherable prayer, her lips slowly squirmed like eternal lovers. After days, months, and years, it is said that she realized she was not praying for the sacred man to descend but that praying *was* her language.

Paralysis as love; the exodus of standing still. Paralytic love, half-stricken yet never blown away: the smallest pebble stands still against the mightiest wind. The woman understood that the language of love is not the longing for the language of the law; the law of language is longing itself. This is the indestructible knowledge of love: that there is another side of the mountain, another promised law.



16





Do Anal Hauntologist

When people ask me how I am, how I'm feeling, or what I'm thinking, I often respond with either the usual politeness or with something about my recent emotional experiences. If it's someone I really trust I'll be more honest and tell them something like how I was pondering that Mediaeval European farmers actually never ate potatoes. Underneath all that though it's not usually what my mind is preoccupied with at the actual time of the query. It's far more likely I'm thinking something like the following:

We live in a place and age doggedly haunted by the manliest act so far in Western history. We could call it the vivisection of self, the crypto-religious philosophy of the enlightenment, or the inception of the idea of dualism of the mind and body (chucking the spirit in the bin for better or worse). When I say 'manly' I contextually mean it as a bad thing, but not as a literal synonym for bad. The reasons for this choice of words are the opposite of misandry. I hope this will become clear if you read on. Bear with me for things to get interesting. Read to the end for a happy ending, if you know what I mean ;).

The previous most manly act before that was probably the invention of agriculture. By this I mean the tipping point where farming, animal husbandry and permanent settlements escalated to a flashpoint where someone somewhere could first conceive of that as an idea-thing that could be summarised with one word. The first time someone confidently spoke a word no one knows anymore but which we would translate today as "agriculture". That is the act of which I speak, rather than the vague cloud global millenia in which humans started to mutate their life systems.

In my deeply humble, tightly considered and warmly-offered personal opinion, agriculture is so incredibly explosively manly because it is responsible for the cognitive division of gender as a fully conceptualised part of language and behaviour. Basing that opinion on academic study and deep inner pontification, I

shall now infer in immensely reductive and cosmically-broad sweeping terms the consequences of this idea-thing.

Men as an idea was made manifest from new collective human actualisation as righteous dominators in line with a physical dominion over the land where before they were a part of it. The physicality of human activity began to be catalogued and regimented to enable this work. Women were thus eventually invoked as a consequence- the idea for categorising approximately half of humans as another. These groups' roles were engendered diversely in different communities but a common thread was a disenfranchisement from decision making. A slow, insidiously growing disbarment from the structures called hierarchies that emerged from agriculture. This was possibly a totally unforeseeable accident, but one could speculate that the act of sexual union became cognitively realigned with the domination of planting seeds, and that birthing bodies became realigned to the idea of animals and their forced reproduction. Women, now being aligned with the animals and the crops by such a divisive act as conjuring the word 'agriculture' were put on a slow path towards a general subjugation.

We should at least forgivingly imagine the innocence of our forebears in striving towards the settlement life, offering security and prosperity for their loved ones in a harsh world beginning to stifle and make war on those who didn't adapt. They weren't to know an ever-entrenching quagmire would suck their descendants deeper in with each generation.

It should become pretty clear at this point where I stand on this matter, but for the sake of transparency I'll say that I'm personally of the opinion this was overall a net negative for the species. In spite of the wheel, metal working, formalised alphabets and all that other Sid Meier's Civilisation shit- I dream of a life without the cruelty of a post agriculture world. I could do without at timeline in which we are heading towards fucking the planet and then -if we're lucky- fucking off to another planet in nick of time. I'd put my money where my mouth is if I could. Sadly, we can look back, yet not go back. The idea that we can and should in fact go back is called Anarcho-primitivism, which is super shiny elite rare levels of cringe garbage and I do not feel the need to elaborate on the topic*.

Now getting back to the mind and the body (and no spirit). This equation has always been lowkey biassed towards the mind. From what I've heard and read [citation needed] it's never been a proposition of some yin-yang type truth about

the nature of being. It's always been more a sly manifesto for the victory of the amazing metaphysical mind over the shitty meat body which totally sucks. It's like someone took Rock, Paper, Scissors and removed paper. Now mighty rock is justly free- forever totally fucking shit up for scissors. That is the modern concept of the higher self.

This seems to have supplanted the original secret imbalance of an invented duality we call 'Men' and 'Women'. The accidental swindle that unfurled that men turned out to be mad OP in the new meta when we started planting a few cheeky grains in the summer. Whilst humans have now managed to start a mass discourse about this issue, our present point in history we start to reach the point where living is generally shit for those we generally label 'Men' as well. And yes that's #allmen. Even if it's not equal in suffering, we can assume a deep malaise and ennui for the ruling classes. The most powerful men on the planet go to ever greater extremes, plumbing the depths of excess trying to feel like their existence is worth it. It's not unfeminist to say that everyone's screwed over by late stage capitalism.

So before it all gets a bit what if phone but too much- you may be asking am I going to leave you with such an unsatisfyingly smug and pessimistic polemic? No! in fact I feel incredibly optimistic about existing- I really, really fucking love love LOVE being alive. I love it in spite of all mine and the world's flaws. I love it in spite of 3 back-to-back years of serious dark and traumatic shit in my life that doesn't seem to be letting up soon. I love it even though there are obviously not many amazing things happening at community or societal level. I'm afraid I couldn't provide answers for how to feel like that if I tried though. I'll offer that in my experience, prioritising happy sex and reciprocal friendships, going to Therapy, and an absurdist irreverence towards existing peppered with magical thinking certainly helps.

Everyone I love on this earth is worried about the future. Unfortunately I don't think one person can have a solution to the seventh hell levels of shit we are in right now. It doesn't feel like the sort of stuff one person can hold the entirety of in their head. It also doesn't feel like collectively we can make an idea that will take us from A-Z of this web of crises. We just make some starts and launch the ship and start navigating once we have some new horizons.

Instead of having proven answers allow me to make a suggestion. Let us start from within, claiming a new unity. How about, let's say we invert our reverence for the

mind. Not just to flip a sand timer but instead the body wins once and for all. Here on out there is to be no separate mind and no separate spirit. In this new bloom of being we are to assume that we are entirely the matter of a material universe. However, rather than risk the ultimate fascism of the boundary of individual vs. the outside universe to bloom in this fertile new thinking space, we may choose something softer and sexier with which to form selves.

Personhood

defining this word can be put forth as the least manly act since agriculture. WE can propose its meaning to be an inherently relational spectrum of being on which we are all unique points. Points that fundamentally guide our thoughts back to the whole spectrum and the spectrums on which they also exist. The whole of humans, and from there back to mammals and then to all animals and then life on earth including plants and so on and so on.

How anything would play out if this was a popular notion is not for me know, it is an invitation to all readers and all humans to begin animating the idea and playing around with it.

This is probably too big a request for a reader of a small circulation zine so instead I've offered some life advice below. If the advice helps you out, then maybe start a conversation with someone you like one day with the Subject Matter: Personhood. Until then your favourite agony-haunt has got you covered for the foreseeable with the following actually useful advice. I told you there would be a happy ending.

HAUNTY'S AGONY ZONE

this one's for the fellas, yellax and AMAB femmes**);

*Dear Haunty- My partner fingered my arsehole and I liked it. But Oh no, now I feel like that's wrong for some dumb reason that I've tragically inherited blindly from a broken culture and misguidedly internalised
- signed An Alphamale*

Haunty says "If you have a prostate, you can make an oath to three obligations in life***. the first is to check your prostate for cancer regularly throughout the years upon reaching mature adult development of your body.

The second is to check your (likely) privilege and allow an openness to recognising when you are incorrect, or being unnecessarily hurtful in the pursuit of proving you are correct. That goes for even when you are in fact correct.

The third is to become attuned to the primal level of pleasure available to you from the prostate organ. It doesn't mean having to be penetrated by anyone else—although yielding the masculine status of the penetrator to another is an experience bordering on transcendental in the right circumstances. Stimulating the prostate can be a gift given to one's self. A gentle passive act of self care to explore in private. Nonetheless, if you want to start sharing that gift with loved ones (or the wider world) in a more dynamic fashion then I would support you.

Stay safe,
Hauntologist

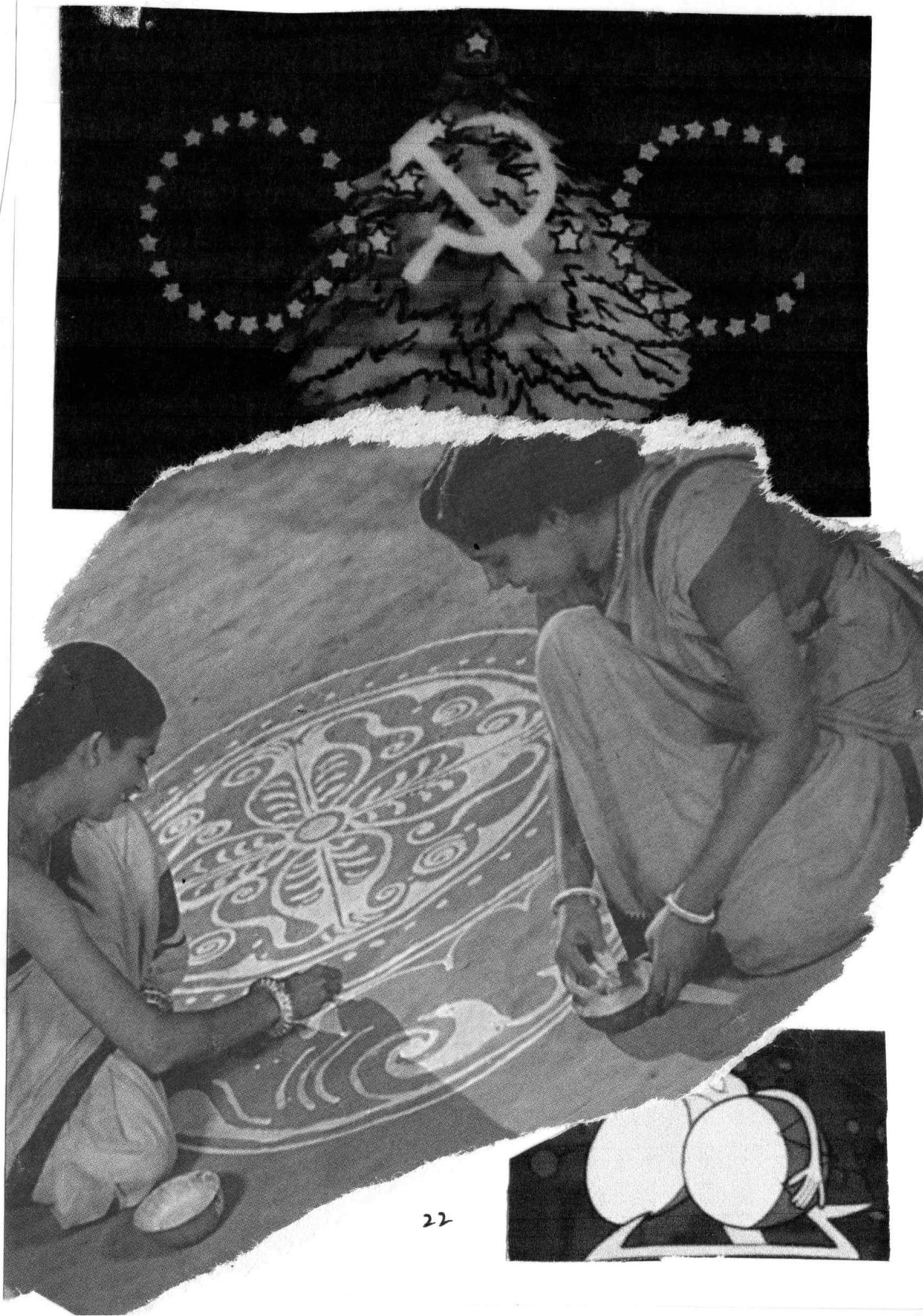
footnotez

*slight tangent but speaking as an expert who's done a lot of research using a popular web browser- for the record the Paleo diet is total bullshit. It's literally just one guy reckoned that cavemen ate what he liked to eat. Look it up if you want because fact-checking evolutionary theory misinformation is for betas****.

**I do honestly apologise for feeling the need to use the term AMAB, its not very 'Personhood' or rainbow rhythms for that matter. Let's all help language and culture evolve to the point where future generations read this and it feels incredibly dated and conservative!

***I wish to speak on prostrates because I think this informative guide will genuinely helpful and it's funny- not to exclude the diverse populus of humans who may read this stupid fucking shit I've written

****yes I know betas are pseudoscience. That was the implied joke, but do you know what's no joke? betas being so damn breedable. da bussy is real.



Dear H,

I sit at a bar in Lisbon nodding my head away at this woman talking about the cultural differences between Hong Kong and mainland China, “aha”-ing my way through my complete ignorance to this man’s description of the history of Portuguese colonial India. And then comes my turn. The questions I cannot exactly recall, but the general gist being my life.

“Well... So. Eastern Europe is a little bit of a No Man’s Land...”

There she goes again.

I can see her from the outside, you know. I can hear her talking, on and on and on, same old same old. She doesn’t feel at home anywhere. When she is in Bulgaria, she is too Westernized, when she is in Norway, she is too Bulgarian. When she talks to an Indian person, a person from Hong Kong, one from Japan or the U.S., or Australia, she is just European. When she is in Western Europe, she is distinctly Eastern European, occasionally “exotic.”

It’s like, say it already. “Bulgarian” always means foreign enough to be kept at an arm’s length, not foreign enough to garner awareness of any vague strokes of my heritage, the current sociopolitical climate, or why we would, en masse, for whatever reason, invade the West in kitsch couture. We certainly don’t have the history to back it up, right. Every time I read

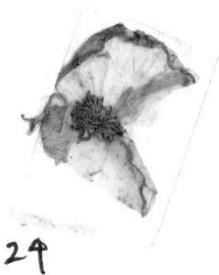
“POC,” I wonder where I’m placed on the historically-constituted racial spectrum. I’m white? Technically. But when a client shouts at me to go back to my country because I will never understand the difference between this and that brand of Aquavit, I don’t feel all that white after all. “Xenophobia” is not it; being a Swedish immigrant in Norway is different from being an EaStERn EuRoPeAn one.

“Discrimination against Eastern Europeans” is so redundant and unclear that the time I’d need to explain what I mean defies any sort of point to label.

So that’s with the “historically-constituted” part. My history is no history. It’s a place of indefinite suspension made evident in the paradox of the label “Eastern” and “European.” I exist in the spacebar between here and there, us and them. I’m forever there, always them, and I never reach the other.

I don’t write this to argue for “anti-white racism” because that’s insane and I’m not insane. I’m just Eastern European and existentially dispossessed. A little bit lost, slightly confused, kind of sad. I just want a neat little word that would vaguely encompass my experience without appropriating some of the most severe human atrocities in existence.

Alexa, play “God Is Busy, May I Help You?” by Kultur Shock.



Diary excerpts

In August 2022, I spent a night in the adult ICU in Norway. A night of frantic journaling through an hours-long mental breakdown that amounted to pages and pages full of my sadness as I was thrown in a flashback to the period in the paediatric ICU in Bulgaria after my suicide attempt as a teenager. This is a small excerpt from the memories I was writing through.

(...)

Before I went to the er
I put foundation on.

A fluorescent room;
a quiet that awaits a storm
at all times. I look at my tummy and wonder
if its gurgle and pain will equate
to stage 3 hurricane
kidney disease?

I'm founded, found me
in one such room
where time palpitates
is arrhythmic, gives out & up on me
as I'm woken by the beeping sound
of a heart in crisis, a soul -

the hushed rush of a nurse
that knows me as
mrs. bradycardia
acute kidney damage
danger of multiple organ failure.

She looks at me from above,
like a god:

Good that I'm awake.
I should try to stay so
as my heartbeat is too low
and I may die
and I don't want that, do I.

(...)

The mum of the 16-year-old who drank two bottles of vodka
at once, as a proof to his courage, bravery, daring nature,
shuffles around her boy, disgruntled mumbles, as she rushes in & out,
and in & out of the room: Love in Bulgarian means
calling your child an idiot while you pet his hair and try to get vomit

out of his ears with a wet wipe. I watch her with curiosity:
fingers tucking away, fiddling, caressing, scraping, assuring a skin
of another's presence. I like the quietness of this language.
I like how confident it is in its vows.

"What are you staring at?" pierces through the air.
The fingers had stopped moving.
I look away. A scoff, a sigh.
"Where are your parents anyway?"
I turn away.

(...)

The day I realised my failure as a human being
who failed in even the simple task of ceasing action,
committing to a permanent standstill -- a goal
I was so dedicated to, so passionate about,
so convinced is what I needed, was destined to do,
I cried.

For the first time in four years I could feel
the comfort of emotion spilling like a waterfall:
First slowly, a well; then quickly; a pool at the cusp of my lips
that my tongue would shyly push forward
as if my skin needs the tear to continue rolling
to nestle me in its reality.

drip, drip, drip.

My nose gets snotty and I sniff loudly.
A shock to the system,
I quickly cover my head with the duvet
as I still know that crying is dangerous.

Not long after, the mom
who'd accidentally given her kid wrong medication dose,
asks me if everything is okay -

as my body
had slowly let go of the initial tension of
expecting blows for producing a sound,
and instead had given
into its newfound autonomy, my sobs
had asserted my existence.

Don't you get it?

I sob louder.

She asks me if I need a hug. Or anything else?

I sob louder louder.

(...)

My mom arrives, cold air whiffing around her as it didn't have time to dissipate since she entered the hospital. Obviously worried and exactly like the other parents I've seen moving chaotically around that room in the past days.

Her image is a blur as my eyes are half-shut and fully drowned in tears by now, but I still recognize the worried poise, the cheekbones that somehow become sharper when there's a lot on her mind, the dimples that form underneath her pursed lips when she's deep in thought, the two wrinkles between her eyebrows when she tries to judge a situation with her eyes...

No, she's not exactly like the other parents.

She's my mom, unmistakably.

"[nickname]¹, are you okay? They called me and told me I need to come as soon as possible. I left work immediately!"

[nickname]. She loves me today. I sit up. I continue crying. Snot is everywhere by now. My hair is in knots. I don't care. I look at her hoping she'd care in the right way.

She takes off her jacket, holds it in one arm, then slowly moves it into her other arm, her gaze still fixed on me, still gauging, still judging. I am her daughter. I gaze back. She looks away (I win), runs her gaze

¹ She used the diminutive form of my birth name

around the room until it stops at the empty space at the end of my bed. A quick look at me. A hesitant move to sit down. Silence.

"What happened?" she asks.

I stare.

"Why are you crying?" her face adopts her most textured expression.

She looks old now.

She looks exhausted of trying to figure it out.

She looks like a mathematician trying to solve an impossible problem. Only it's not about maths anymore and I wish I could shout that at her. I want to shout, IT'S NOT ABOUT MATHS ANYMORE! at the top of my lungs, over and over and over, that's all I want to say. But I don't think that would make things clear or answer her question in a satisfactory manner, so I don't say anything at all.

I can see her looking for what to say, questions that cannot be asked, answers that cannot be given, all piling up in her mind, while her eyes frantically traverse my face, so focused and so out of her depth that I feel bad for her. She holds back tears. Words are difficult for her sometimes, too.

"Can you... hug me?", I mutter.

She looks at me sadly: she understands now. I tense briefly, waiting to see if she's going to withdraw. Instead, she reaches for my head and puts it on her lap, petting me gently, occasionally squeezing me tightly. We remain like this in silence while I cry.

I wish I could cage this moment.

I wish I could imprison it and never let it go.

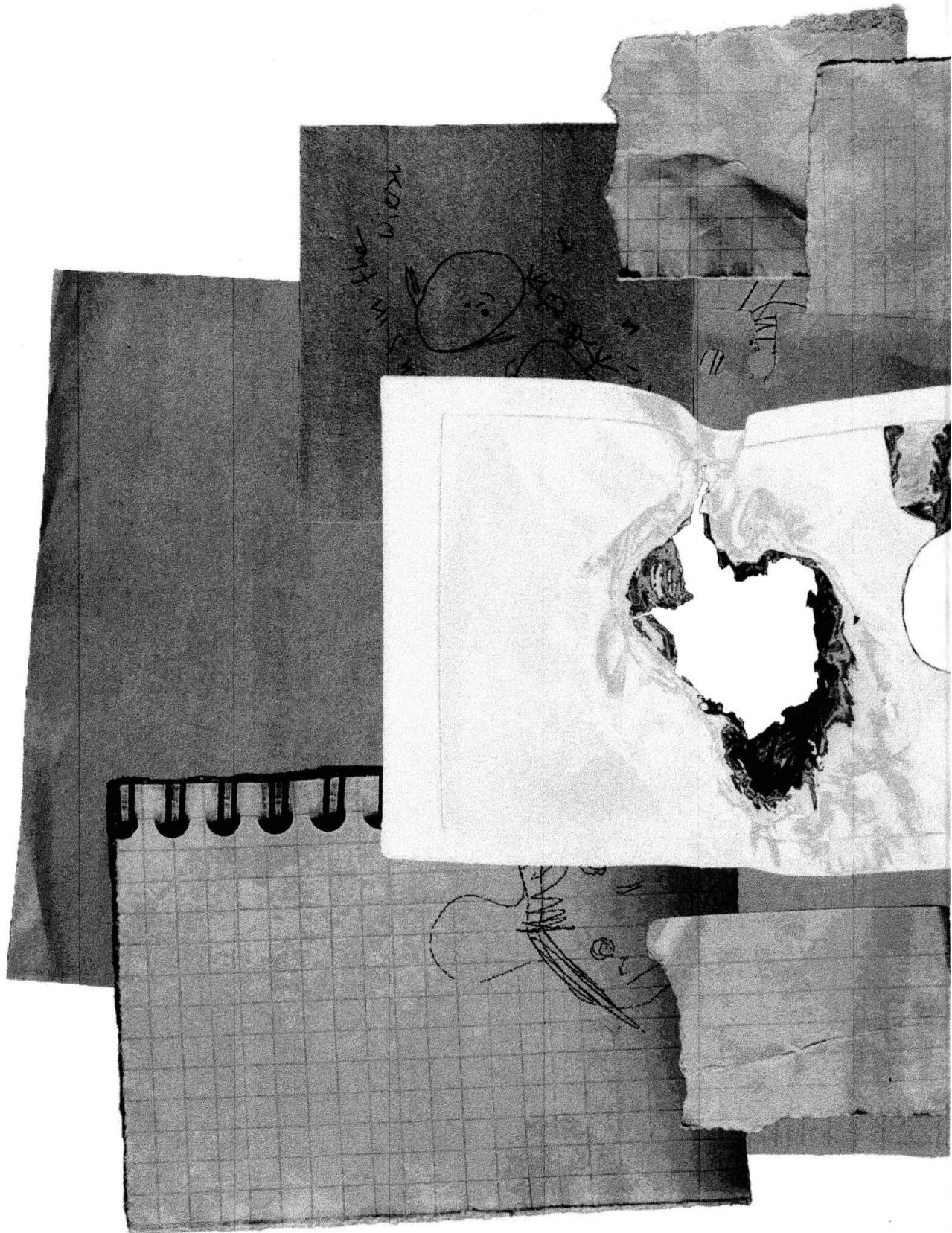
I wish I could die there and then so that I would live in this moment forever.

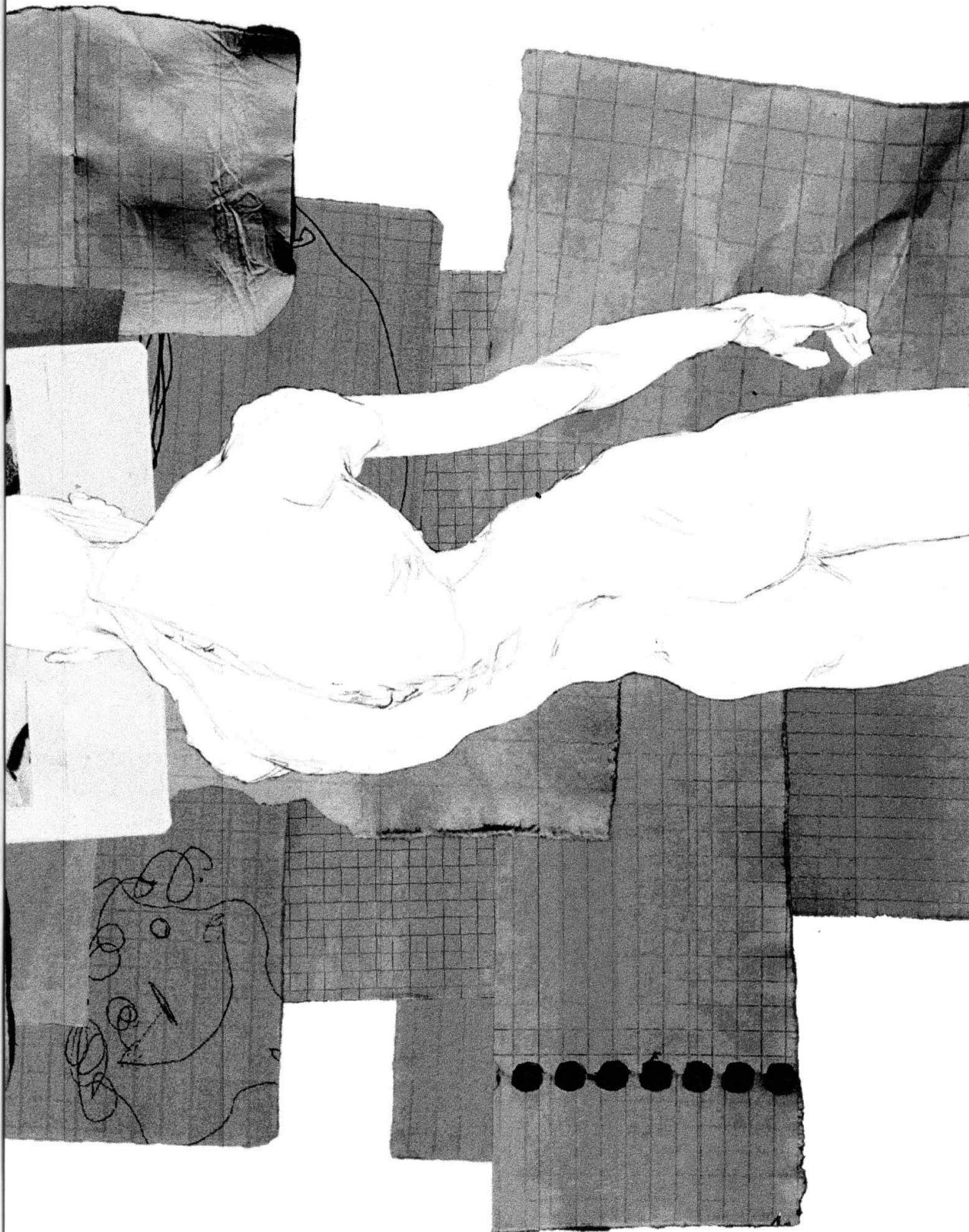
I cry more because I know it's going to end. My mom chants: "Don't cry, everything is going to be alright," but it makes things worse, so she stops. When the silence gets unbearable for her, she asks me why I cry,

again and again. I finally wheeze out that it's the first time she has hugged me. She gets quiet: her hands stop their caress. She rests them softly around me. I don't see her, but I know she is crying now too and I know not to look. We stay like that for a while.

8/18/23, 12:23 PM

i wrote you a letter.png





two things
dik-ta-tor

i am too gone & tired to be apologetic
words stifled under my striped scarf

myself stretched
taut; something kicking inside me

which is a little like or at least not entirely unlike

the sinister and irreparable sense of being known
to be split into, in-two, irrevocably & irredeemably
& inexcusably fractured, like a corrupted file

(months later,
i blow the dust off a memory card to reassemble myself:
a keratin of etiolated lashes, a flake of inner cheek
a fingernail, bobbing in blue, [...])

if i am a language spoken with a scalloped tongue,
you are a child of negation. private and guttural

not yet dead. a ceramic mug with the handle chipped off,
the lazy glide of a diphthong.

(if a tree fell in a forest
and we all stayed num—)

prescribed morning or afternoon, i see my menses
waving like nausea or heat; the lake a mirror
spackled with light

a pre-lingual, epicene beauty. because it was windy
when i walked around the pond near the clinic and the cluster of ducks
fussed over bread crumbs the way a bead of blood

pooled on my index finger after they pricked it for a sample
and told me no drugs or alcohol 24h before

(months later,
i blow the dust off a memory card
and Mnemosyne whirs; ticks)

a small, manageable violence. i should be grateful
everything went so smoothly. the only incriminating datum:
a streak of blood on a sanitary pad. a dried ellipsis, trying to scab.

I

When I was 11 or 12 it was made immediately clear to me that my father was cheating on my mother. What was shocking was not that he was cheating but how little he did to hide it.

"What's that?" I asked, pointing to a pink-purple site emblazoned ASHLEY MADISON.

"Don't worry about it," he said, and calmly closed the page.

Clearly he thought we were stupid or he would have tried a little harder.

One time a tsunami broiled across Tokyo and he brought his secretary over to the house to weather the storm. She was young and clean, probably somewhere in her 30s. All of us smiled uncomfortably at each other as my mother brought out tea and snacks on a tray. My mother was always preparing things in the kitchen. Pouring things, shaking pans, whisking— so that the kitchen became not a cage but a secret refuge.

II

The MARSCH FÜR DIE FAMILIE organized by pro-life conservatives and Christian Fundamentalists in Vienna took place on June 18th, the same day as the 2023 Pride Parade roared across Ringsstraße. It was an annual event. Gathering before St. Stephen's Cathedral, men and women dressed in modest clothing held up signs saying

ABTREIBUNG IST MORD

[Abortion is Murder]

and

EINE FAMILIE = VATER, MUTTER, KINDER

[A Family = Father, Mother, Children]

A metal barricade was posted between us and them, by the police. I arrived at the counter-protest, the MARSCH FÜR'N ARSCH, organized by feminists, anti-fascists and queer activists, early enough that I could move to the front and touch the divider. I felt sorry for the conservatives. Their mob was patchy

compared to ours, and they looked old and tired. I wondered if the men knew how unflattering the constricting collars of their button-downs looked. They were sweating in the heat. A priest giving a speech was drowned out by the sound of us shouting

KEIN GOTT, KEIN STAAT, KEIN PATRIARCHAT

[No God, No State, No Patriarchy]

jubilantly, euphoniously, vitalistically. Life crackled through us. A woman in sunglasses emerged from the other side, held out her rosary and started praying for us, crossing herself dramatically. I regretted not bringing one of my rosaries so I could do the same back.

III

In 2019, London, near the end of my sophomore year at university, I waited for the day of the surgical procedure mostly by existing on the bed of my dorm room. A silence settled all around me. The academic essays I was writing were interspersed with appointments at clinics and stand-up comedy sets I found on YouTube and Netflix. Two fingers nestled in my crotch for comfort, I propped my laptop on my stomach and watched millennials and boomers crack jokes on money, relationships, childhood, aging, religion, gender, nationality, drugs, and the internet. This is where I learned that stand-up is an art. The best sets are by people who innately understand what is particular about them and how it will be received by the public, and are able to play with and invert this perception, to provoke laughter by poking holes into the dull fabric of every-day life and exposing its underbelly. "See, I'm right." Each joke as these little surprises, making the familiar unfamiliar, coaxing the public into seeing what they see. But it's a dance, a balancing act; you have to start from playing within the boundaries of that perception, to be specific in a way which doesn't deflect the universal. If you fail, the consequences are immediate—the audience puzzles, chuckles piteously, falls silent. It was painful to watch the sets where the audience just couldn't see it, and a bald and anonymous silence would wash over the comic, as they tried and failed to project outwards the particular shape of their worldview. It takes ego, and intellect, to be a jackass.

Anyway. The second time I went to that building the sonographer spread cold gel over my stomach and pressed a hand-held object to it, moving it slowly

like a satellite around a moon. The monitor was faced away from me. I assume it's because I wanted to kill it. So I was left to use my imagination. Six weeks, she said. I kept track of its development by looking up diagrams on my phone.

I wish she showed me though. So I could laugh at it and say I choose my own life.

IV

Men are from Mars, and Women are from Venus.

Women give, and Men take.

That's all.

V

My mother is the only true nihilist I know. I remember staring into a fan one time as she said: I don't want to live that long, my only goal is to raise my children well. She devotes herself entirely to me, my sister, our two dogs, and my father, who couldn't care less about how many hours she spends tending to his ailing health. The conviction of her selflessness has a force which sometimes scares me. My mother mostly had children out of a sense of reproductive responsibility—to combat the rapidly decreasing fertility rate in Japan. And it seemed like it might be fun, she added. My mother, the little fascist. Her tears when Shinzo Abe was assassinated on national television, saying: He could have led the country for so many more years. To counter the slow economic recession, the rise of inflation and congested job market. There's no future in Japan, as my friend put it. My mother, tending to the garden, making things grow so effortlessly. My mother, adopting hobbies and pastimes to avoid making my sister and I worry. To be independent to avoid putting a burden on us. Cutting calls with me early so I won't get tired of calling her again. Go and live your life, she seems to say. Go be free.

VI

The other day I saw Mae Martin's comedy special SAP. One thing they said was that they got top surgery and started on a low dose of testosterone and

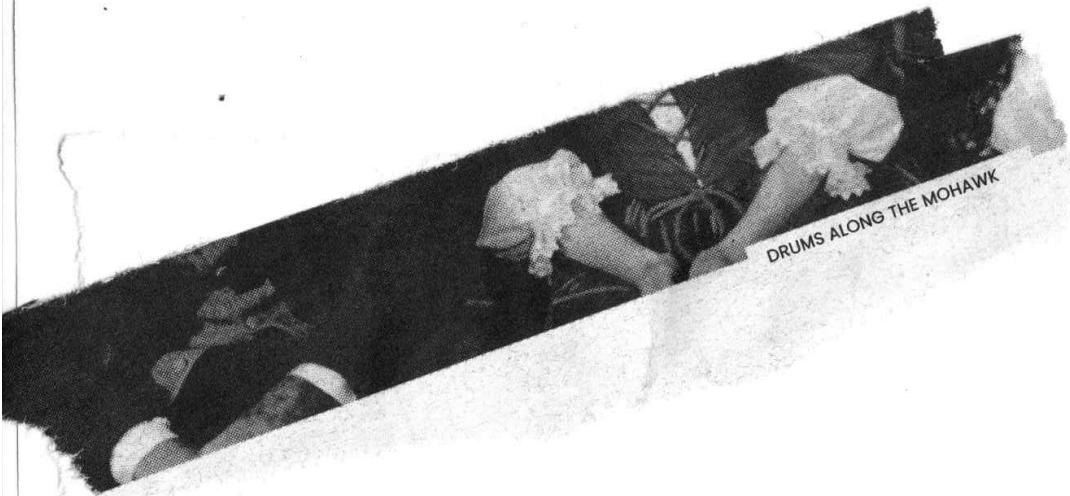
that this year was the best year of their life [cue obligatory crowd cheering], not because they were especially happy or anything but that it was truly just the absence of agony. And I thought

Fuck.

VII

I never have and never will want to be a mother. Maybe a father. But never a mother. It's just not in my nature. Because fuck this body and fuck its faculties. I blame God, I blame the state, I blame the patriarchy. Why do I have to have a civil conversation with some weak-willed idiot who wants to shackle themselves to their kids, their religion, their possessions, their wife, their state, their dog? Because really, if that's your kink, go ahead. Go off. Go clip off your own wings. Be my guest. Just leave me out of it. Leave me and my fucking sorry body out of it. Let me limp to my own future. Let me fight my own body ills in peace.





6/13/23

Harry Hagberg

Many of the poems I've written lately have used rain as a motif.

I think what kicked off this latest fascination with the weather phenomenon is, for about a month, it seemed to rain every day in Berkeley. This was back at the end of November/beginning of December, I think. I was sitting in Berkeley Espresso trying to get work done, staring out the window when I felt a sudden compulsion to write about the rain. Or maybe to write about my then current state of distress, and use rain as a poetic device. Rain is a strange thing, isn't it? It's very dramatic and can add a sense of intensity and emotional weight to any situation. See Evey's triumphant exaltation after facing death and emerging anew in *V for Vendetta*. See also any one of an infinite number of kisses in the rain to punctuate a hard fought and impassioned start, restart, or end to a relationship. When I was in, ohh second grade I think, it was raining immensely and I couldn't for the life of me concentrate on the lesson. So I decided to ask to go to the bathroom. Instead I walked around the playground allowing myself to be soaked. After maybe about five or ten minutes, an older student discovered me and walked me back to my classroom. The teacher was very perplexed. I was a really weird kid. The rain seemed so magical. And I wanted to experience it.

But in reality rain is quite inconvenient and even dangerous. Trying to get to the Berkeley campus while a downpour is occurring is incredibly irritating. You are much more likely to slip, your backpack gets drenched even with an umbrella handy, and you can't wear leather jackets. Rain has even tried to kill me on more than one occasion, but I prevailed each time. Driving in the rain is quite scary, especially when it comes unexpectedly, drastically reducing visibility. The road that seemed so clear seconds ago is now awash. You have to trust every instinct, every sense you have to get through it. Despite this, I still like the rain. It's inconvenient and dangerous. Maybe that's why it makes for meaningful moments. If one is willing to pass through its veil, there is so much delight to be had.

A poem written in a coffee shop about rain... and other things:

Love, you're angry

No longer the first snow of the season

Graciously falling

Coating homes and extinguishing sin

Love, you're a whirlwind

A foregone disaster, an enduring storm

Flooding the paths of my heart

Washing away all that seemed written

We saw it coming, love

That calamitous downpour approaching

Yet we stood in its initial serenity

That calming trickle we hoped would last

Now we are consumed, love

Grasping desperately onto the entrenched trees

Wondering if we should let go

Submitting to the floodwaters thrusting us





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or visiting us.



THE WORLD IN

ephemera/inferno
cosmiagirl

In four billion years, Andromeda will collide with our galaxy. Through their slow, incendiary crawls - a seemingly imperceptible dance - the two galaxies will collapse into an invisible center, begetting a new cosmic entity so volatile our heavens will glow with the bleeding light of its stellar-genesis.

But such a cataclysmic event is something we can only postulate: diagrams and simulations, equations and theories. Instead, we walk through wildfire smoke blinded by the ash of some distant tragedy; then, we shuffle through a store, watch the patterns of rainfall emerge on a window, listen to the highway at night, until everything amalgamates into a static hum, a lullaby for vacant forms.

In the mornings, I don my life as if it were the carcass of someone I do not know. Heavy and strange, I find comfort in its weight.

Amongst shadows after work, I catch distorted projections of things I cannot discern: a shape elongated across pavement, a lanky beast roaming the waking world. But I look up and see it is merely another person, small and hurried, striding through the streets as if late for some meeting or class, or perhaps in avoidance altogether. I wonder if they know their own shadow - I speak to them as if they do - but then I recall to know is to crane your neck somewhere it does not want to go: around like a barn owl, upside down like a bat. Forms continue to peer distantly before themselves or passively below. I ask if they feel the ground beneath us move, I ask if they know of the earth's trembling inhale, a sneeze stoked by the dust-like impressions of our feet. But they merely look back as if I were the intangible shadow that chases them, the very thing they can't contain.

On Thursday I walk through the park at lunchtime and wish things were different; on Friday I sit in the audience of my coworker's thesis defense and change nothing at all.

I fold one of the pages of the neurology pamphlet I am handed into tiny paper stars, and throughout the hour, cradle them in my hand like stardust waiting to scatter. Words peer at me between the folds: elaborate paragraphs on neuron-mapping reduced to incoherent fragments. My eyes connect disjointed letters and phrases across the origami surface. Soon, a microcosm unfolds; constellations of feeling beneath rationality burn, moth holes and cigarette burns. And through these seams - the space between words, the gaps within reason - each star illuminates, until all that is left unsaid speaks like the mouth of God himself, like the light which can only be *let* in. So I let it in, a hallowed ray from a star's distant center - and am *struck*, struck with the piercing arrow of a desire too deadly to hold. Falling, I look around: everyone has left. So I leave too and make my way back to the office, a wounded God trying to resurrect a forgotten cosmos.

In mid-June, I stare into the sun as it unyieldingly hangs. I then watch its inverted impression dance across my vision, colors coalescing until they vanish.

I find it hard not to be disoriented by the heat. The smoke from Canada vanished quickly, but the fire still remains. It is easy to look into the sun and want it to wound you, for it to not hide behind ash in shame; but it is different when it beats upon you, and you understand it was never the sun which shamefully punished you from lofty heights, but yourself, in knowing you only ever wanted the world in its impressions, recollections, dreams. Now the vague patterns of life happen before you, as you walk

through streets gone, and you can't come back, can't turn around through this arid world without something to grasp onto. So you fumble, you cry, burn holes in the fabric of your life if only to remember the very thing you will never live to see, made in the image of what you cannot be.

In four billion years, we will not be. We tell stories of how it will happen, we craft ideologies with the fact it has. Slowly, we live our deaths, and yet, it is too quick to see.

So we look around: the feather of a sparrow, the glint of broken glass. These fragments of totality become eternity, punctum tearing us and enduring our wounds. Perhaps, it is through such unfulfilled instances - stars long gone, fires once burning - that an ecstatic truth, unseemly in its manner, can find us.

But I am not certain.

I tentatively wait for the collision. I tentatively rewrite time as I do.

And somewhere, in my infernal waiting, every part of myself breaks through.

too
much
is
not



enough

"Don't Cut Off Your Nose to Spite Your Face: Because Me, Of Course, I Liked You"

Lil Dymphna

My friend came to visit me from Lisbon. I barely knew how to write in proper English, and I am often apologetic when I realize I might not know how to host and welcome someone to this city. London is not far from home, inasmuch as a city can be called a "home". Strikingly, I feel more at home here than when I was unaware back at home that being raised as a quasi-traditional Catholic could encourage the same type of vague diplomacy that middle-class British people endure, all to pave the way for their monarchy to remind them of their place. "Don't cut off your nose to spite your face" was one of the first colloquial expressions I learned here and I was always unsure what to think of it. Since moving to London, my concerns about noses and mouths have deepened, as have my thoughts about weaving and nets.

I was raised with the idea that to exist, one had to make a flamboyant appearance, either online or in writing. Weaving the web was not the same as being taught the history of tapestry in school. Everyone would laugh at the teacher, as there was probably no other way of making a statement. For those born in the peripheries, no other language than English truly exists if you aspire to become an individual.

My friend and I sat for hours as the rain pulsed in London. We talked and realized we shared a favourite song: "The Rain" by DJ

Narciso. I used to believe that vanity and pride were the gravest sins, yet it seemed trauma held more sway over beliefs than God did. We refined the conversation on how 3MMC was their favourite drug, and even though the room was throbbing with pop sounds, my London flatmate, who would usually never stay for anything but curated electronic sounds, stayed & listened. Later in the evening, a third friend remarked, "Of all things, they bonded over drugs." As they should; after all, we're still amidst Europeans.

I know little about video games and have never really understood their appeal the same way I find it hard to call my dad more than twice a month. I always saw myself as well-behaved enough to accommodate daily boredom. My friend mentioned their new flatmate, Athena, who now spends all day in her room playing video games. This flatmate is a good friend and we are worried for the entirety of her *second life*. Today is my friend's birthday, and he tells me Athena called before heading to work. Their show ended late, so she wished him a happy birthday in advance. We often discuss other people's lives and by now I am perhaps more worried about learning longer, more complex sentences in English than I am afraid of piercing someone's intimacy, and this says a lot about efficiency.

My friend mentioned Athena had once talked at length about the police interrupting her singing event. They had asked back then, "What do you mean the police showed up?" and were surprised to learn it was all in the game Athena plays all day in their room, not at the drag show she runs every weekend.

This has reminded me of how I'd been obsessing over the website Molleindustria, a game that would retell political views and create a provocative, utopian second life, much like how we wish we could play out capitalism in games. During a conversation about the queer raving scene, I was reminded of the second colloquial expression I learned in London: "paying lip service to woke culture." I'm still not sure I am using it correctly, and, of course, I woke up feeling embarrassed about my own vanity around me.

It was getting late, and my thoughts drifted to Athena's father. Their relationship was strained; he drank and eventually left the family, so my friend tells me. Was he a policeman? No, he was just a guy that left. One day, he called Athena and said he wanted them to hear something. He left the phone on and, on the other end, hanged himself. The two waited silently, entwined in this invisible, abstracted tapestry of a knitted web. The call eventually disconnected, and days later, police found his body.

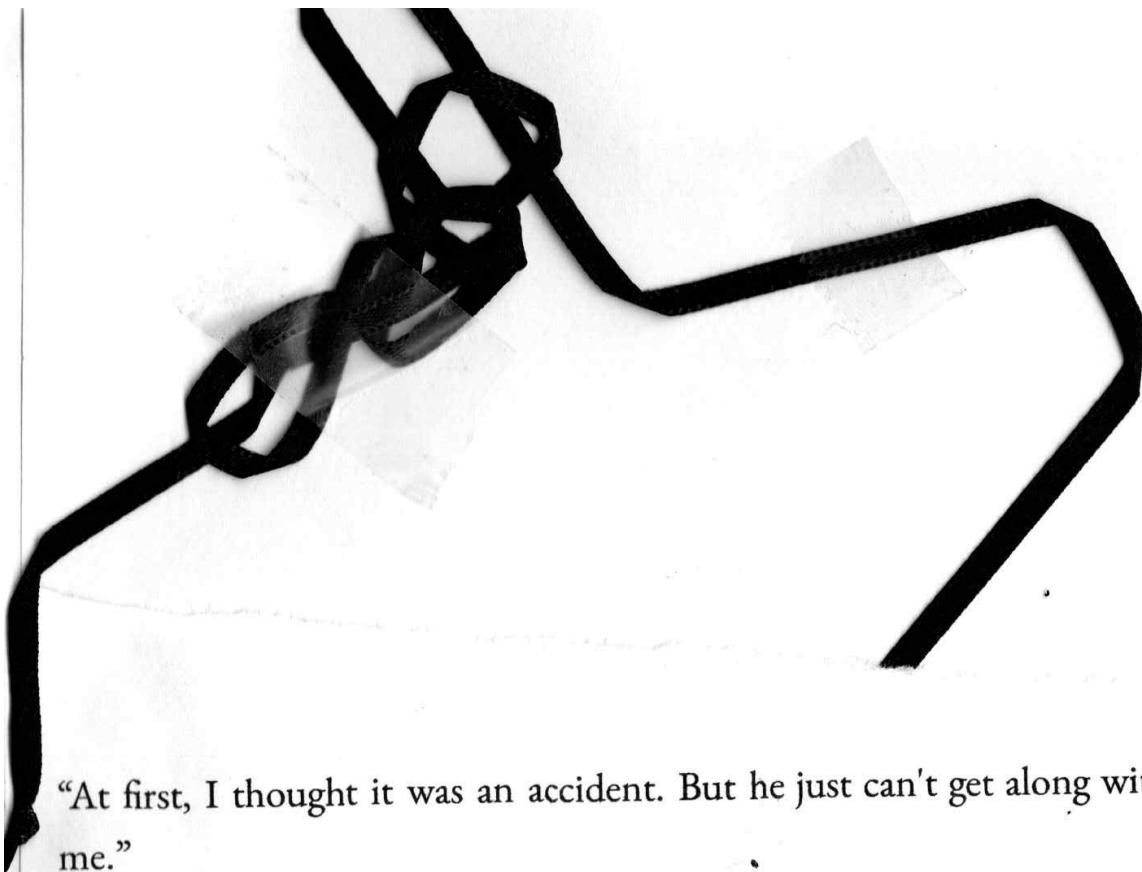
"How could this happen in a game?", my friend had asked Athena in shock at the time.

"I don't think he killed himself to hurt me personally," they mused.

"I think game developers should be more sensitive to certain narratives."

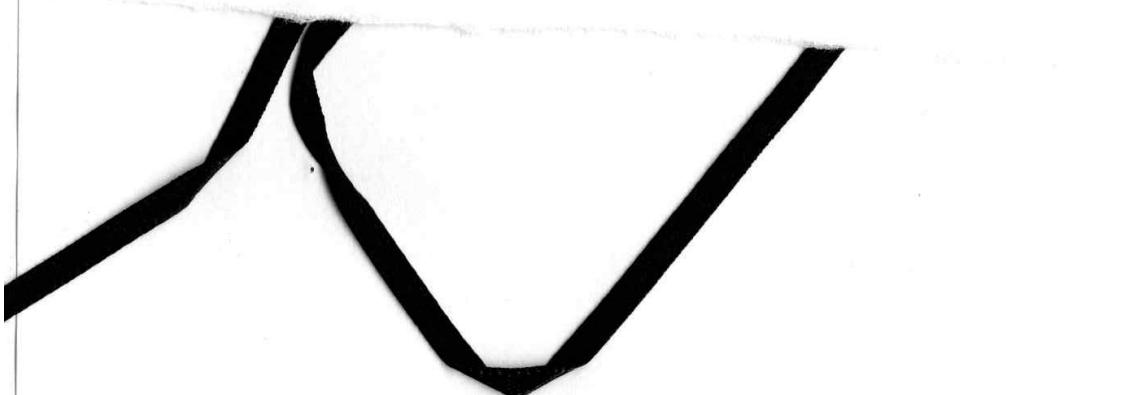
"Maybe he knew he was only my father until one of us forgets", Athena added.

"I swear one day I'll wake up and mistake these screens for your skin."



"At first, I thought it was an accident. But he just can't get along with me."

It was Arachne who hanged herself, not Athena who tried to kill her. My love, let's be modern arachnids: Do you want to live with me on the Web?



celluloid on color
kinokid

statement on method

form always runs away. every art has its own transcendental limits, its conditions that no one escapes. caught in this pickle, the artist seeks the byzantine bypass:

RED

porijeklo je domovina! origin is homeland! says the fine red-print of a jar for pickled cucumbers. fascism rules the world still—sometimes you hardly have to look.

ORANGE

stucco roofs, once the surest sign of the old empire's might, now harbor centuries of neglect. they'll fix these up one day, you just have to wait for the next earthquake. shake all night long. catastrophes always profess the ruins—how else might we explain earthy phenomena?

YELLOW

jelo. it seems so silly and yet can't be translated. "accessories for meals" on a yellow plastic sack, the biodegradable kind in fashion. and i wonder what color this cutlery will be after lifetimes of decay, in some place forgotten by those proud citizens who recycle.

GREEN

the tram lines run on two parallel tracks by the bus station. sometimes—in between these tracks among the colorless gravel and equally lifeless specks of dirt—a little bit of green fights for recognition. blink, turn away, not paying attention. no thank you, and you'll miss it. i keep a tuft of it in a small plastic—a memento that details are matter.

BLUE

the optimist's color, everywhere in bed with the earth. hey, couldn't you use a little more blue—i promise it'll look great on you. a bit of sea here, the zrmanja runs there, and soon you'll be covered in so much blue you'll sink or swim.

PURPLE

fuck the rainbow. it's so transparent, sometimes i think: was this the first cinema? the illusion of color, motion, life—an entire world seems to rest behind it and yet if one gets too close, too curious for comfort, you'll discover that it's a bitter façade, something that the earth cooked up so you don't slouch further into your depression—eat your birthday cake and feel the noxious rush of the painkiller hit.

GRAY

deception's child. sure, it's lifeless, but everywhere it covers that which is most vital, that which persists through time's most corrosive members. gray is granite, steel, piercings, all the old films that didn't yet know of the colorful things to come. gray is stalin too, guns, warfare, that piece of lead that still rests on the fleshy pillow at the base of my thumb—thanks to s, who in the fourth grade injected her mechanical pencil into my body.

BLACK

any immediate image of happiness, one that promises an inadequate object of pleasure, hypostatized the utopia of thought within pre-figured forms. it neglects, in other words, **the black leader**, located on the border of every strip. discarding this black leader delimits our ability to posit alternatives—it is the end of hope, cinema's final destination.

Tell me about yourself
raveller

Yes, allow me to tell you about myself. I've done this and that, worked here and there, and learned a variety of transferable skills, including the ability to describe myself at carefully calibrated levels of generality. Here is the quality that makes me complete, along with evidence that I possess that quality. Here are all the qualities I do not have that would compromise my completeness, if I possessed them, which I do not. So here I am, sitting across the table from you, presenting myself to be seen.

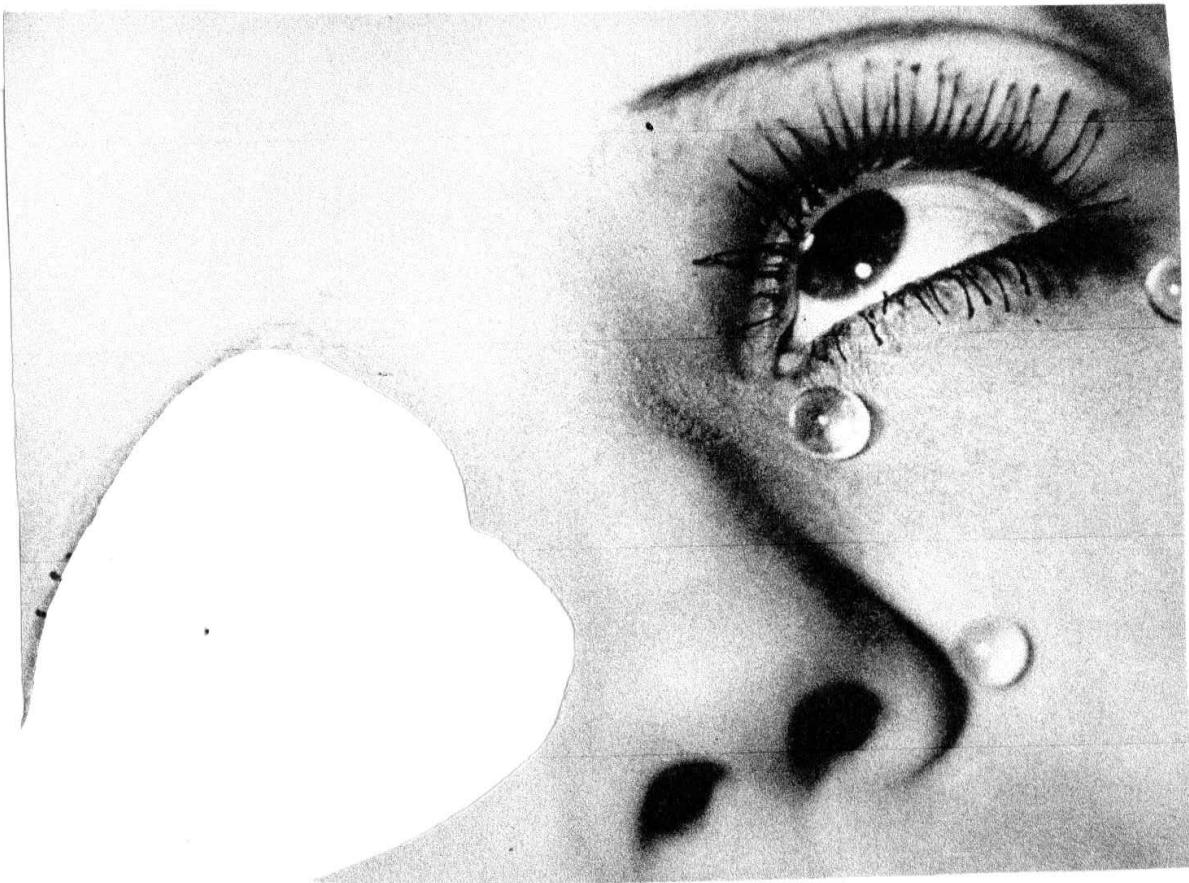
I am asked about my childhood. I provide a high-level summary, but you request specifics. Your questions are a foreign encroachment, enemy shrapnel against which I have failed to arm myself. I watch you eat your cake as you contemplate strategy. I refuse the cake when you offer it, but you insist.

I am recalling our conversation at a cafe in the financial district under an egg-yolk sun. I've only ever had one face, you said, so it surprised me to learn that others had two. At the time, I thought vaguely of 本音 and 建前 and Dazai's narrator, the one inexplicably alienated from humanity, whose obsessive interrogation of the self ends with his confinement within its boundaries. Still, I used to wonder if I was just the same: a void behind a mask or a mirror, a precarious duality.

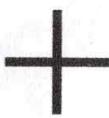
But through the obscurity of my language, you have seen my outline. If the inexpressible is contained (inexpressibly!) in the expressed, then perhaps it has always been pointless to hide from you. Now I understand that the unabashed willingness of artists to put themselves on display — from which, at museums, I sometimes have the impulse to shield my eyes — is

something like radical self-acceptance. Maybe you are right that art begins with the eradication of shame.

You take another bite of cake and I take one, too. I am seeing you seeing me. We are suspended in the mutual act of perceiving. So here I am, defenseless and incomplete, with all of my out-of-context allusions and unnecessary disclaimers. If you'll take me.



issue two:



tru luv