

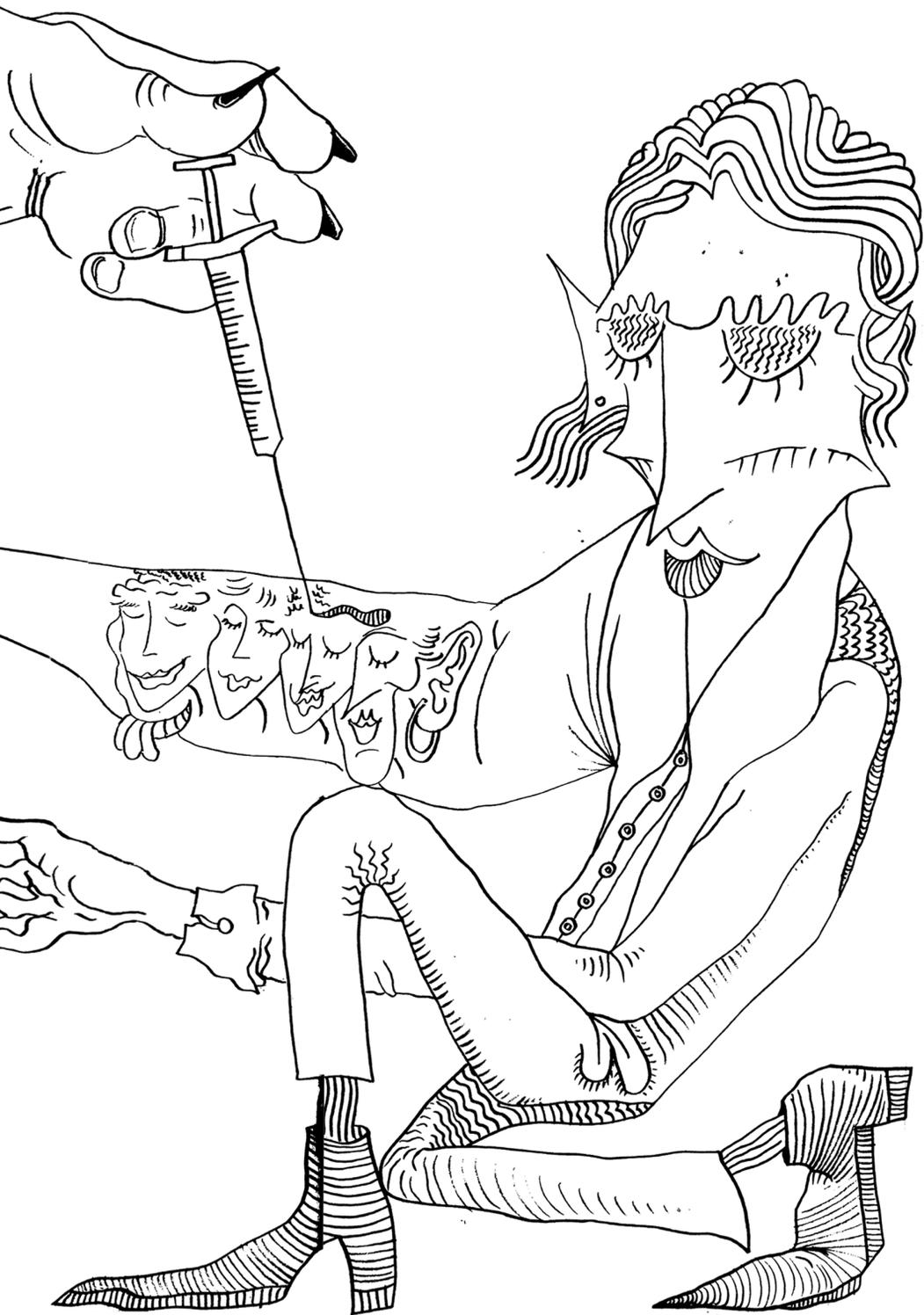
# SETH PRICE





**Dedicated to Life**  
Seth Price





*I was about to send this to press when Covid-19 abruptly pulled us into a new age. Art made before the rupture suddenly looks different, flickering with new meanings and demeanings. My book seemed to shift colors in my hands.*

*Back in 2002, in the aftershocks of 9/11, I wrote Dispersion. That essay considered then-nascent networks as spaces for corporate exploitation and warfare, and imagined an art that might flourish in the cracks of the new system. The final sentence was, "It may be that we are standing at the beginning of something." We certainly were at the beginning of something, but whatever it was, that thing is now over. We find ourselves at a new threshold.*

*In 2013, I set out to write an experimental Young Adult novel. I wanted to rewire some of the feelings I felt coursing through an era marked by the wars of 9/11, recession and debt, climate change, the rise of Big Tech and social media, outrageous luxury and decadence. I gave up after eight months, the book was a mess. It didn't help that I had interlarded it with my own, older essays. I had recently received invitations to publish my collected writings, but I declined, preferring to steal the idea and do it my way. For some reason that meant inserting my art writings into the novel as pieces penned by the main character, a weirdly articulate ten-year old girl whom ad companies hire to write reports on tween life. The book hardly needed this perversion, as a plot summary will show. Our protagonist is hired to write a piece by her schoolteacher,*

*who's secretly a witch and part of a rogue group of ex-DARPA coders working to prevent evil magi from completing The Final Spell, which is in fact the Internet, which was a Cold War project to build not a communications network but a digitally-coded spell to vanquish American enemies, which has been recoded to unleash Apocalypse, and is all the more binding for being a spell collectively and unwittingly written by all humanity, and the girl learns her pervy psychotherapist is one of the evil magi, whom we accompany on a mission to kill a commodities trader and his art advisor partner in their off-grid tropical stronghold, and the teacher is slain for her eyeballs, which can retinally unlock an MIT mainframe containing ancient wisdom, and then the girl's therapist magically swaps bodies with her, causing confusion, and on and on. Three hundred pages of ruin, into the drawer. I wrote a different novel, Fuck Seth Price, and moved on.*

*Five years passed, and I took another look. My heap of debris evoked a boom time that had been brutal, confused, and decorated with silly baubles. It felt like a personal, affectual prehistory of the Trump era, all jumbled up: my own art writings of the aughts, the authenticity-obsessed lifestyle consumerism of the 2010s, shamanism and spells, the continuous deferral of an effective left response to the crisis of neoliberalism, food and fashion and boutique hotels. I rummaged for excerpts, broke them into pieces, let them ferment and transform each other. Here they are, bits of texture from the time between September 11 and Covid-19.*

*April 5, 2020*



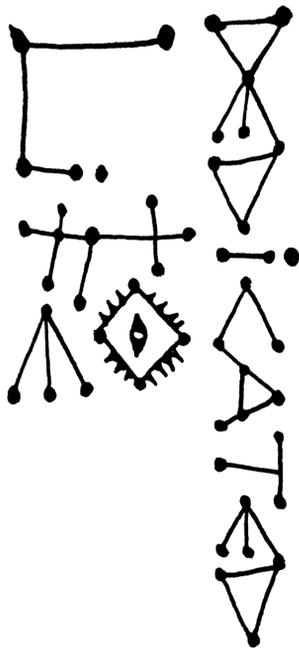
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Some time people will write, think, and act  
en masse. Whole communities, even nations  
will undertake a work.

—Novalis

Scribbling seems to be a sort of symptom of  
an unruly age; when did the Romans write  
so much as in the time of their downfall?

—Michel de Montaigne



## *Realm of the Wrong*

I took a year's hiatus from the art world, trying to figure some things out. I shut down the studio, stopped making saleable works, said no to shows. I didn't stop working, though. It wasn't a withdrawal from artmaking or a pursuit of worthier activities, it was an attempt to isolate my creative work from a confusing context so I could determine how to proceed. I made some music. I attempted to write an experimental young adult novel bathed in some of the culture's drearier aspects. I made headway on the dumb goal of getting all my profiles and interviews and photos removed from the internet. That one feels a little silly now, with the whiff of a Nineties-era will to integrity. I can only explain it in terms of discomfort with the way artists are conditioned to seek visibility not only for their work but for their persona. The contemporary mandate is to know everyone and be known to all, and thus become a maximally reproducible component. And the wind cries, "Crush it."

Meanwhile the ice is calving: the country, the postwar order, social democracy. Thanks to years of neoliberal pessimism and Clintonite cynicism we tend to see politics as a contest over

crumbs, even though there are so many of us, and the things that we need—shelter, medicine, living wages, freedom from state violence, progress towards abolition of the carceral state and the racial caste system—are both just and attainable. The good news is that Bernie Sanders, Occupy, and Black Lives Matter have showed us how to reject a bankrupt liberalism, with the result that people under thirty seem as likely to be socialists as liberals. This has a lot to do with their options in this economy, and it's helped by social media, which has punctured the Clinton-era political spectacle traditionally abetted by the press. But social media also exacerbates the sense of futility. People on the left want to be more politically active but the forms on offer seem inadequate, so everyone spends excessive time online despite experiencing it as “toxic” and unproductive. Self-defeating fury is Twitter's fuel source, from the president on down. Fury can be productive, of course. I saw Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak lecture to a majority white, upper-class audience, one of whom protested, “but now I feel like I can't speak!” Spivak's reply: “Be angry at the system that produces that feeling.” Unfortunately, social media is often employed to address not systemic issues but individual malfeasance. As Nico Baumbach says, “it becomes more important for people to destroy the *jouissance* of the other than to improve the lives of everyone.”

You can put your body into spaces of protest and solidarity, you can put your money into organizations, but what can an artwork do? Following Spivak, I tried to bend my frustration toward something productive. At the end of my hiatus I wrote a short novel, *Fuck Seth Price*, which required skilling up in the then-fashionable literary technology called autofiction. During the ensuing months of prepublication I created a website that I

saw as a companion to the novel, and both artworks were published in June of 2015. *www.organic.software* is an online database containing profiles of over 4000 art collectors: portraits, street views, political donations, corporate affiliations, space for anonymous user comments. I released it anonymously, with a fictionalized FAQ section that mentioned algorithms, data mining, machine learning. I was curious about anonymity today and how it channels fears and tall tales about transparency and truth, faceless actors, nameless sources, 400-pound hackers. All of which were employed to build my database.

The novel and the website were an attempt to address the art system from beyond its economic and distributive structures, but to still consider its mandate to know everyone and be known by all. I think of these works as portraits: of where my head was at, of a moment in a system (*organic.software/faces* is a class photo of the Collectors of 2015), of how myself and that system are situated within a larger framework of wealth and power. Call it a way to articulate critique of the flow while embodying the flow. Or call it hypocrisy, since taking considered distance from the market is so much easier when the market supports you.

In any case, it turns out that if you don't sign an artwork and don't do PR, no one gives a shit. People used the site, but not in any widespread way. Then Trump's election made me question the value of the fake story, and I decided to put my name on the About page. It felt like a concession, because the piece had a weird power when it was inscrutable. For a year and a half it had been quietly sitting out there doing its thing, without being Art. That's powerful for an artist to experience. Once, when I was worrying about making 'political work,' Leslie Thornton assured me that even the most abstract art can be political simply

by keeping a space open. In this view subversion has no need of aim or referent, and it is true that art can be very effective when its meaning is apparently absent. On the other hand, the site is a tool, and tools should be accessible. Why keep a space open, if not for others? The site's original About page claimed it was made by "tool developers," and that's true—or it's false the way that autofiction is false—because I've come to see my primary role as an artist to be a maker of tools to share with other artists. Art has value as a demonstration of not simply technique or persona, but attitude and way of being. You do what you must do, and then it passes into the hands of others. Art is the productive outcome of wrong seeing, odd thinking, strange action.

## *Burn the Groves*

We have based all of this on an older structure that was hoisted  
On four posts. It's actually the strongest kind of structure. What?  
Oh for sure, far stronger than a tripod. Here  
Goes: *Law, finance, health care, real estate.*  
But what be this hellish matrix, exactly? (It demands exactitude.)

Everything must be allowed to be itself, of course,  
But only in terms of quantification.  
Cicero said if you have a garden and a library  
You have everything you need.  
On the one hand, you cultivate an appreciation  
For the achievements of the past  
Steep yourself in the archive of human accomplishment.  
On the other hand,  
You cultivate living stupid things with your own hand  
Pledging your soul to messy and transient beauty.

That might have suited the ancients, sure. Today tho  
Things are a tad complicated. The business mindset says:  
Cicero = on to something, but if a garden is good... And a library  
is good... How do we make it even better? Why,  
Take it to the next level.  
Encapsulate garden and library  
In a single structure.  
Reduce the variety, compress the symbol.

So this could mean a few things. Maybe you construct  
A diminutive library structure within a walled garden

A place to peruse the achievements, the plastic girl's hand mirror  
Held up to show ideal western culture  
Such as the classical research university model, seen  
Throughout our glistening twentieth century, or  
Manicured tech company campuses, business parks  
And so forth.

However, the reverse is potentially cooler:  
A garden inside a library (if you really want to take things  
To the next level) which would mean  
Not simply placing a bed of flowers or a potted fig  
In a library lobby, no, nothing like that. It's splicing the concepts.  
Insist they inhabit the same coordinates.  
Call it the new science of Galibardrenry (micro Old French vibe,  
or, we can also potentially tweak this to your likeness!)  
Moss on the books, vines toss them shelves  
Roots swole the floors  
Fractured your pavers.  
Like best-loved images we know already, scanning  
From the inner eye: this is Gaia reasserting herself  
In the post-apocalyptic city,  
One form of cultivation running riot within another.  
A perfect summation of Cicero's vision, because also a perversion.

Break the circuits  
Burn the groves.  
Do not transcend,  
Cannibalize.

## *Stone Fruit*

“Are you so sick of your own face at this point?  
I am. I wish everyone in the world would become the same age  
All at once, for a change,  
And if everyone was also hairless  
And naked. No accessories, no fashion.  
And equally attracted to one another.

Older people: we have traversed a long, muddy haugh  
Full of shriveled forest,  
Each footfall sets it writhing and unfurling in our wake  
Like a fiery shirt  
Showing itself as the zipper descends.  
You have to admit  
From this vantage, looking back,  
It was alive all along.”

The face saying this was talking at me out the mirror  
With a kind of warped hotel world swimming around it.  
I felt this face was sincere.

Sincere like newly wealthy young parents certain of the best way  
To do everything, in other words  
Let’s have the sorrel salad and  
Let’s get favas too and  
Stone fruit.  
This bug spray is alright it’s all natural I got it at a yoga thing  
In Tulum. (Sometimes I satirize the things I wish to celebrate.)

I asked this face: are you a passive receptacle,  
Like most of us tweens? Crunching  
On ice as you thumb through this thing  
Waiting for something to happen,  
Turnin' blankly sincere eyes to me, and  
Always the upspeak,  
Always the jumbo waxed cups full of ice and sugar.

The youth are capable of crafting experience that can actually  
Frighten you  
With an embrace of tradition, simultaneously  
Embracing a warping of that tradition,  
A sound of tearing fabric as a heavy bundle pulls away,  
and shears off.

Chiefly the young are in love with the young.  
That is the "live" area for them, that is what sings  
Like masses of late summer.  
We, too, can be sincere,  
Sincere like a playground o' young parents  
Tacitly in competition to see who can be more nonchalant, and  
Uncommitted to hovering:  
Oh, I think I saw your son fall off ze monkey bars  
Oh, he be fine yeah  
Yeah it probably be good for him you know  
Is that your daughter though  
Get slapped around over there?  
Yeah, tho maybe better not to interfere?  
I mean, this is the world?  
Yeah. Better they figure out how

To navigate own way,  
Through all the manifold terrors?  
The world is so painfully beautiful,  
And terrifying?

A lack of concealment is rare, here.  
It signals either the high aesthetics of advanced art and design  
Or those productions of necessity beyond such markers:  
An impoverished peasant's shack,  
The verge of a country road.  
See, in construction we need things like baseboard and trim  
To hide the ragged edges where materials come together  
With a fundamental lack of precision. But the face has no such  
decorative fig leaves.  
Because the principal of concealment is a feature of human  
invention,  
Not a feature of nature. What's more, it's a feature of  
The great, crowded, middle swath of our production  
The logy bulk  
Of products and surroundings.

I mean, you wouldn't lay trim over the join  
Between a tarmac road and the grassy verge,  
Would you?  
It's true tho,  
that would look sick.

## *What Were the '00s All About?*

The holy grail question  
The one they're willing to pay triple to answer, even though  
I wasn't yet alive. So,  
    maybe because I wasn't around back then  
I have a better perspective?

You see, I'm painted wet on wet:  
I was born after everything already happened.  
The world had (luckily for us!) already worked out  
Its great heaving language wars  
Bougainvilleas became begonias,  
Catsup turned into ketchup,  
Victuals became vittles,  
Let's get out of here turned into let's skedaddle, and back.

Now people are accelerating again  
Rushing around all crazy  
Like they're wont to do when there's a big storm raging our way.

Wish we had a cure. Well,  
The best images, we have found, are those  
That people wish to reproduce themselves,  
The ones that briefly turn them from consumers into makers:

Rashes, blistering skin bubbles, people leaking inside  
Out: eyes, nose, ears, & throat. People sucked out through holes,  
People turned to liquid,  
People topographically transformed into acres of thin film

The thickness of a single cell, barely visible,  
A slight tint  
Pipetted into the surrounding area,  
The figure that appears and hovers over you  
From the instant you fall asleep  
Until exactly the instant before we open  
your eyes.

I do have one thing to say right off the bat,  
Like a word of caution before we dive in this water.  
The fact you think these things are “meaningful, classic,  
Immortal, timeless”  
Means they are already passing from relevance.  
We are halfway down the slope to night country.

The Russians, Shakespeare, Bible, rock ‘n’ roll,  
Modernist art, German philosophy, social struggle,  
Rap, low foods (lichens ‘n’ algae), games ‘n’ socials,  
Tooling and leveling, gone ‘n’ die.  
The fact they are important only underlines  
The slide into obscurity.  
What is actually here? Just *being with*:  
Breathing in all that is bad (the things we share)  
And breathing out neutrality.

We live in a conservative time, more conservative  
Than you think. You, yourself, are more conservative than  
you think.  
Maybe two hundred years ago it wasn’t so conservative but  
I’ll tell you, we were raised in a little box

Marked 'Freedom.'  
Subsequently were  
Awoken far too quickly,  
With vibes of, Oh no we overslept!  
And popped right up  
To run straight into a door.



## *My Friends*

Class let out with a rustle.  
Recently we had all started wearing nylon capes.  
We didn't yet fully understand the new tools  
But they were easier to fabricate,  
Easier to don and doff. Only  
Later it became  
Me as a kite, to wrap myself and take flapping, rustling that  
Went well with the music we were listening to,  
Those crowd-sourced mix tapes that caught fire in those days:  
Hundreds of non-language sounds  
Emitted by people, all manner of people,  
At the moment of lethal impact.

I'll tell you a secret, your real self really existed.  
There is a true self,  
It was born to this world  $x$  number of years ago  
And almost immediately snowed under by insanity  
In fast-accumulating deposits. But hey, not to worry!  
We may be willing to excavate, for a coin.

What's under your cape?  
You know, I might hand-write a random phrase on my clothing.  
Violating a commercially-produced garment  
Was bizarrer than getting a tattoo, in those days,  
Some societies been known to outlaw it.  
I'd cut holes in my clothes under the armpits  
Or up front, by the side-seam pants-pockets.

Cut holes so people see through to the skin? Yeah,  
This immediately fast-tracks you to the realm of far-seeing  
Couture,  
    or mental illness.

Go ahead, cut holes in your shirt so your armpits are visible, scrawl  
“Mineral water” on your pants  
See how it feels on the train for you. But yeah,  
That’s part of it.  
We don’t want a book we can’t write on and give to someone else.  
That’s what culture is, maybe?

Children are celebrated as the center of life,  
The fullest expression of it, but  
In fact they’re purely outside:  
Outside reason and logic, outside rules and behavior  
Outside society, outside life.  
My society is slowly aging on top of them.

## *Speaking as Someone Who Used to Produce Ads*

After 9/11 all the work dried up.  
The jingles went away, replaced by scores.  
Lighting changed, too  
From the more atmospheric, lens-flare-y kind of  
Technical emphasis of the Nineties  
(With lots of music-video and film references)  
To a broad and flat daytime-TV sort of lighting.  
And, well, there was no more technique anymore.  
And then humor took over.  
It's sad, really.

That's cultural drift, and it's scary  
And it's productive.  
How to explain that?  
It's like, sometimes you need to abandon the value  
Of a trusted acronym.  
The dreaded SAT started out as the "Scholastic Aptitude Test"  
But when views changed  
Those letters were made to stand for "Scholastic Assessment Test."  
Views changed again, and eventually our corporation  
Scarcely could defend the idea that there was any relationship  
To scholastic anything  
But we also couldn't very well abandon the brand!  
So now SAT officially stands for nothing at all?  
Did KFC do that too, I wonder, and

We now use the term CGI—"Computer Generated Imagery"—  
But I wonder if it makes sense to call it that anymore?

Now that everything is too bad to be true.  
Or rather, should the expression be  
“Bad enough to be true?”  
I mean, the closer an image gets to verisimilitude  
The less it’s going to be a symbol.  
Eight-bit video games & the scrolling LED ads in the windows  
Of down-market stores  
Have a high level of symbolism  
While fully funded three-dimensional graphic realism  
(And it certainly is achieving some kind of  
“Life-like look and feel”)  
Loses any chance at conveying meaning on a symbolic level.  
Symbols are compressed, by nature.  
Think anagrams: signifying to the maximum, signifying nothing

So we’re actually trying to back it up  
Walk it backward up the chain,  
Devolve it. For instance, video:  
We’d like to reverse it and go back  
Toward the bizarre iconicity of still photography  
Or maybe early scuzzy lo-fi video,  
Because motion has gotten, just, out of control.  
Compression helps chunk it up, and that’s good.  
Fewer frames the better, now.

I asked, before photos  
Did people find it harder to recall faces?  
Photos give us memories, now that the robots have taken over  
The storage, sorting, and curating of memories,  
So we finally have a kind of quiet place for ourselves.

People used to not know what they looked like, really.  
Before photography I dare say you couldn't be sure. Hair color:  
    okay, yes. Know it  
General shape of the face, a feeling for a face?  
    yes!  
Sort of thing you catch just a little, some watery thing  
Flashing back at you from a piece of wavery glass,  
In a window frame in a low, thatched building  
On a rutted country road, all these hopeful hungry  
Stray dogs about. Europe when it was painting its self-image  
For the first time  
Or maybe see it in a woodland pool  
Where the gods hunt.  
Even today,  
We come to know our faces over a lifetime,  
In what mirrors we may find.

## *Who Dreamt the World*

Pretend for a minute you're a hotel curator.  
Cast your nets way back,  
Part the mists of 9/11 and peer down the crooked funnel  
Of the Nineties,  
Yielding a misty glimpse  
Of the roiling transformation that seized the hospitality industry  
in the Eighties.

The period sorts itself into three dominant typologies  
(Of which any school child is certainly now aware):  
First ya got the business travel model  
Which derived from the wonderfully predictable executive spas  
Of the Four Seasons chain:  
Heavy on the tradition (e.g. escutcheons and moldings)  
Beige and bland and boho, shit like that.

Then there's the strata of the super luxury hotel, which was  
Planned according to a neutered minimalism,  
I mean, these were essentially cod-modernist resorts. NYC  
Didn't really have these institutions the way you might in, say,  
Singapore.

The third type, however, was our hometown's crowning glory:  
the boutique hotel.  
So the key with this style was to shrink the rooms, down about  
Closet size, and sink your investors' cash into the lobby:  
My beating heart, a funhouse of little venues for imbibing  
and flirting.

Goal: attract young people to light up the social  
Not necessarily to stay the night. Rather  
To soak up my painstakingly decorated ambience, try'n  
Get deep in their cups, and  
Hopefully scrape together a dog's breakfast.

The boutique hotel only proved its real worth to the city  
In the decade after 9/11  
When tourism evaporated & developers desperately needed a new  
scheme. Okay so,  
Was the man behind the curtain really  
Ian Fucking Schrager?

I pondered the relationship between chill beats  
And cream-colored couches.  
So many aspects of Nineties culture, I thought, were adopted  
By the hospitality industry after 9/11  
Whether you were developing a traditionalist business-hotel  
Or a minimal super-luxury hotel. Real talk,  
You need a soothing palette with the three Bs, as in  
Beiges, Browns 'n' Blues.

So these peeps interface best with an idea of New York  
When encountered on the step & repeat of \$ on Sixth  
They not be musing Ah this so New York, not most of the time,  
But when they visit an expensive Korean restaurant  
On the 39th floor of a tower in midtown  
Full of Koreans from Queens and Koreans from Korea  
On business, plus European garnishes eating the view,  
Then guys nod approvingly like:

“This next-level shit.” Internally, their heads be writing a poem called *City Poesy*:

*The garbage-strewn sections of  
Urban highways and outlying roads  
Where trees, vines and undergrowth  
Have for once been left to themselves  
Albeit choked on exhaust-fumes, amid a  
Welter of tires, used condoms, rusted  
Car parts, soiled mattresses, pornographic magazines  
And empty liquor bottles—  
That is, the trappings of male phantasies, tired and  
Spent, gone to seed, put out to pasture  
In nature, no longer in culture.*

A nice bit of sidewalk doggerel  
Though not applicable to most of Manhattan  
Which these days was combed clean  
The poem might be inspired, rather  
By the strange, tantalizing views that flash by en route  
As we navigate ramps, underpasses, and expressways  
In particular those of the extreme north,  
Where the island is balding and drinking gasoline,  
Enormous bedrock knobs lain down under cement blankets  
Dolmens judging traffic  
All mixed up with hardy weeds and spray-scrawls  
And drifts of windblown trash trapped by chain-link.  
A critic might observe:  
“Passages of startling insight and beauty lie  
Cheek by jowl  
With gratuitous, even puerile, ugliness.”

I really like Manhattan  
I like how completely blank it is  
How cruelly empty it feels  
It feels empty of feeling  
All the feeling was sucked out through leak-holes  
In tourists and rich people,  
And natives who extract feeling cues from tourism and luxury  
And everything else that does not care.

A word from the locals:  
Accept the wad of cash casually with a lazy down-swipe,  
Looking off like you do not care,  
And saunter off  
And make sure you pause  
And carefully count it  
Soon as you're out of sight.

## *New Colors*

I was sitting in a remarkable chair in my hotel lobby, like:

*look at this.*

Mahogany, eighteenth-century effing mahogany.  
Imagine! To get that wood they must have had,  
Had to hop in a boat and go all the way, sail,  
Sail all the way to India. Men died on that trip.  
And when they got there, men,  
They had to go deep into the jungle  
To cut the tree  
And more lives were lost.  
What a remarkable chair.

These scruffy men I saw were making their way  
Toward the elevators to go up.  
Scrubby, but elegantly scrubby  
Relaxed according to a rich cultural heritage  
That allows one to relax,  
And take a load off  
On the laurels of cultured forebears.  
Belgians, I intuited,  
Discussing their New York friends (the ones who hosted them  
for dinner last night) and wasn't it funny how  
The metropolitans, the cultured Americans,  
Were a bit try-hard. All the right music, books,  
And political consciousness,  
But a bit correct, a bit unrelaxed.  
Wine served always in "wine glasses,"  
The parmesan grated all finely

The meal 'plated' before it heads to the table, cos  
You never plop a bowl of steaming vulgarity right down  
In the middle of things family style.  
The right blend of appreciation and resentment  
For French thought. Lighting all warm and wonderful  
Because all lights should be on dimmers ideally positioned  
Below eye level, no down-lights ever.

They weren't people who rinsed the pasta in the colander  
They weren't people who put the tomatoes in the fridge  
But they were only one step above.  
They were people who had the apartment cleaned prior to  
Casual dinners with friends, and hours before the cleaner came  
They attended to certain ugly tasks themselves,  
It embarrassed them to imagine a diminutive brown lady  
Scrubbing wayward feces from the toilet bowl:  
What would she think of them?

In a way, the Belgians concluded,  
They had more respect for fusty American Wasps.  
The edges worn to a fault, the disdain for trends.  
The longstanding summer house in poor repair.  
The dotty aunt who was a plein air painter.  
Everyone in the family apparently agreeable because they didn't  
Judge it necessary to air disagreement.  
Everything running on fumes.  
Thank heaven for people who scanned menus  
For a fixed roster of timeless offerings,  
Asparagus, Caviar, Risotto, Quail, Langoustines  
Turbot, Oysters, Sole, Filet.

Oh what is that  
Is that that African miracle grain?  
Fabulous. No, no, I'm sure it's very good  
I'm all set, I'm having my boring old skate wing  
No low foods for me, I want it processed  
Not by the fucking food chain  
But by history.

What we call the medieval period might more accurately be called  
The period before quantification (that affliction of the eye  
you can't blink away) and  
Recipe books of the time are notoriously vague about  
Measurements and sizes. Graduated thermometers only appear  
around 1500. And genius signed its name  
Six different ways, my fave was Shaksper. Ah, who cares!  
So long as people hear you.

Before our adoption of the metric system we used  
The human body, and  
Usually that meant the king's body. Thinkin' I'll get a new unit  
of measure.  
Good idea, let's call it merit  
People snatching and grabbing  
Because they fucking well deserve this shit  
People who achieve next-level cowpote feedback-loopage  
Paying \$ to have someone text me at random times every week:  
You so deserve this  
Stack a skyscraper's worth of DeservIt  
In order to conceal a green pea at the bottom  
And it's not green

It's ecru  
Or taupe, not even  
Colors you never heard of  
Like sarcoline, and  
People aren't white  
They're alabaster, bisque, and birch.

Methinks we may drop a new signature line  
On all outgoing messages:

*Btw I heard what you said about me recently—  
I think you know what I'm talking about—  
And first I was like, I don't appreciate it  
But then I was like  
Funny thing is, you're right*

## *Wrok Fmaily Friedns*

Everywhere people are smiling.  
Smiles conjure ghost families and phantom partners  
And spirit children in hand knits,  
Smiles for calling down meals and exercise  
Garb from the heavens,  
Smile-painted panes and shelters, inked on  
All sides of the slabs, all done up like so in custom graffiti,  
Plus glowing rectangles singing to me:  
Chilling working cooking gaming  
Chores party workout driving.

The problem with worshipping smiles is...  
You guessed it, my friend: Pleasure. All  
Folded up in profit.  
Indeed, and profitability is why we have identity creation.  
We know difference is hell,  
But so is identity.

What is flaying?  
When the skin is removed.  
It's an old process, child  
Spanning the Neolithic to the Middle Ages,  
Roughly.  
And who would be flayed today?  
Someone smiling.  
But who smiles?  
Someone being flayed.  
Whom would we flay and burn?

One who does the disallowed thing.  
What is disallowed? It is not allowed for a thing to become  
Other than itself, to depart from itself, or to be itself  
And also be something other than itself.

Well, okay then.

Let's consider pleasure, sex, and smiles,  
& how they're purred into profits. Picasso—  
Obviously obsessed with sex and women, he sure made enough  
Randy work to confirm it,  
But he was also notoriously undersexed  
A proto-incel if you believe the reports  
Which would include a close read  
Of his mistresses' correspondence  
As well as several of his biographies,  
Though not John Richardson's  
That social climber,  
                  anyway...

It's perfectly clear that Picasso either could not or would not do  
Sex, sometimes forgoing it for up to two years  
When he did have sex  
It correlated with periods of inactivity and artistic frustration.  
Contrariwise, he was at his most productive  
When he was essentially celibate.

Like a magic receding nightclub-kaleidoscope  
Seen in the daylight of a propped door  
When it's all mopped out.

*There is Another World, it's True!*

It's not necessarily easy to find, and actually  
You don't find it, you make it.  
The reward? A feeling of freedom  
With no power,  
Like children have.

My childhood? Well, knotted ropes, for one thing.  
Pencils, torn paper scraps with  
Careless doodles, vintage jackets, flowers, business envelopes,  
Masks, breasts, fists, destroyed bodies, dislocated musics,  
Moments of human touch rendered in negative,  
Decapitations, luxury garments, sheets of abandoned skin,  
Puddles and spills, some old calendars.  
Anything that can't be directly looked at, that stands  
A bit off to one side, or dissolves when examined.  
What's missing from this ruck is  
The I  
As some person has always frequently complained.  
Well, I did mean it like poetry all along.

In third grade they all come up like  
Oh, draw me like a flower, and  
A killer and also, can you draw like  
A monster? "What's that?"  
(You had sketched a squashed puddle  
Running over invisible flooring, chasing its body)  
"No, not a shadow! A *shuttle*. Like,  
The space shuttle."

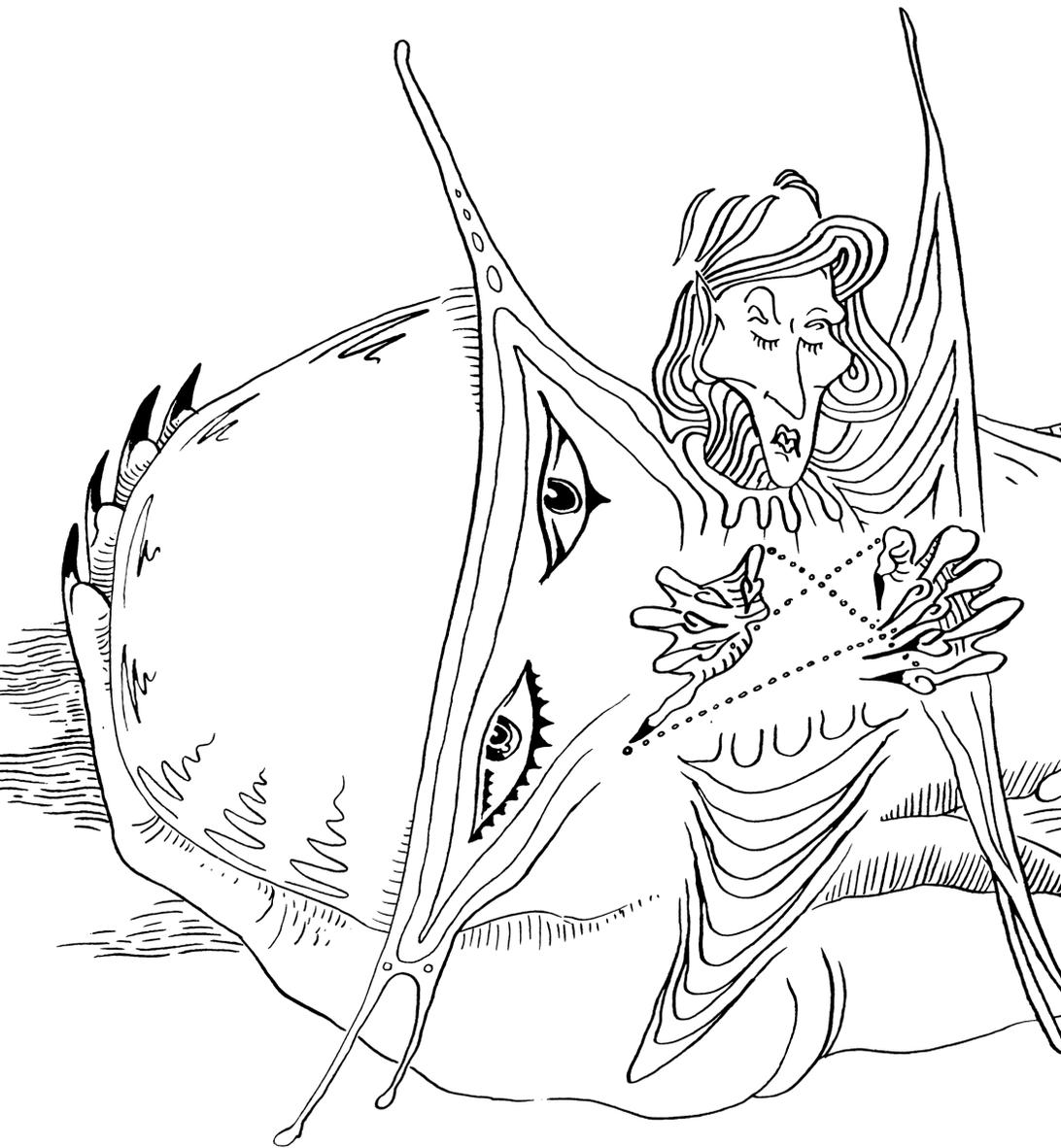
A strong accent caused you to hear different  
And you're just trying to oblige, and also maybe  
Bending it in your direction, just a bit  
Into the shadows.  
Well, that's my line.

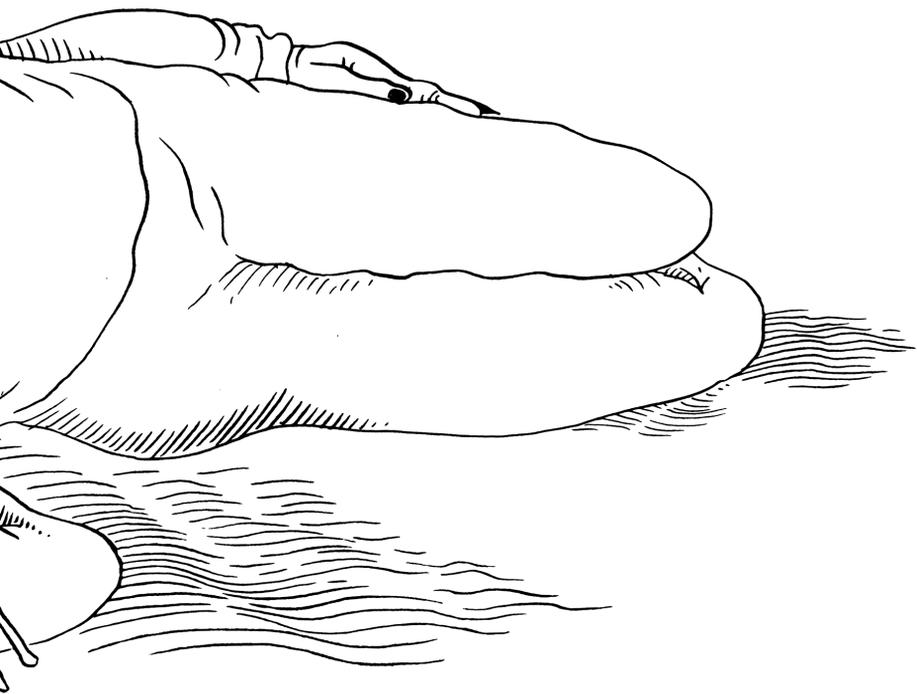
To be an artist is to be everyone's artist.  
When you declare as an artist, you plant  
A flag definitively in the social.  
To refuse to be an artist (against all evidence)  
Is to want to return to things  
Their much-deserved fragility.

The tales I told to the other first-graders in the little regular  
story-time they let me do were improvisations, chopped per-  
formances of modulation and grasping, I have no interest in  
narrative and its trajectory, my own life and work seems to be  
non-goal-oriented by nature.

So my art must also be a chopped, impatient narrative of the  
present, recounted in different voices?  
For all that, we must not be that different  
From generations of decadents  
Fiercely committed to oils and poesy.

You could do a lot worse.





## *Runes on Fire*

*We had been working on our novels, the ones we were always being encouraged to write. Mine was a kind of electronic weather diary, it was a good way of talking about myself.*

Tuesday, October 30

6:50 am

Buried somewhere deep inside the domicile, awoken to the new age “chimes” ringtone. I love this alarm, been years now I’m on it, uncanny when it rings next to me on someone’s phone. I once had a home-made meowing kitten ringtone, it made for many odd moments, most memorably when my pocket meowed in an airport bathroom, lined up in the stalls between fellow urinators, heads jerked but immediately snapped back: *must... stay... inhuman.*

Bettina’s still sleeping, I feed the cats, try to wake Lou by switching on Power 105’s The Breakfast Club at high volume, she typically sleeps til 7:30 but hopefully can be subliminally socialized at a young age to as much Drake as possible. Yesterday Dr. Phil was on talking about a girl who is black who insists she’s white, at least I think that was it, I was listening from the kitchen. Today is newish Drake, then something that sounds like Juice WRLD or another sing-songy emo rapper—when I was little, teen rap was Fat Boys, Newcleus, and the Roxanne wars, now it’s more angsty—then there’s a track with Snoop on what sounds like Midnight Starr “Curious,” something about half-listening from the next room suggests that Midnight Starr was laboring under the spell of “Sexual Healing.”

At the studio mulling over this Consumer Reports thing. Research online, it seems like gradually the series has morphed from the original concept of a strict record of media consumption to a kind of 'relatable' diary of food, travel, friends, politics, drinks. Stress on that, ultimately decide to go with straight media consumption. No more "I feed the cats." Feel good about this direction. "Hey Seth saw your consumer reports I loved how O.G. it was, someone finally had the nerve to bring the series back to its media diet roots." "What? Oh that thing, yah I never saw any other episodes & didn't consider my approach, but glad you liked it."

At the studio we work on getting a video encoded for the install tomorrow, then spend some time establishing deep background on extratone, this genre with BPMs up to 10,000, a nerdy commentary ensues, 'what's a beat really, I mean when does it become just an oscillator?'

Check my Yik Yak account, for some reason it's not working today. AGAIN. I haven't had any luck for over a year. Log off, figure I'll try again tomorrow.

Studio lunch: Caviar, Kat gets pozole, I should have ordered that for learning purposes since there's a container of my first-time home-made pozole in our fridge from the weekend that no one's ever going back to. Hmmmm, beginning to grasp how hard it is to stick to a strict record of media consumption, and how difficult it is negotiating overshares. Brief feeling of camaraderie with every other artist who ever did a 'Consumer Reports.' Maybe look into planning a family reunion style get-together?

After lunch, research Bolsonaro, Brazilian fascist who just won election. My sister spent the weekend in Newark in a Brazilian neighborhood trying to convince immigrants not to vote for him, her Portuguese is passable, his record is scary. Electronically get in touch with sis and express horror, too little too late. Extractive industries even now rolling up their sleeves to eradicate the as-yet undiscovered Amazonian vine that can cure death.

The programmers report: no luck fixing organic.software. Embarrassingly the site went down just as I'm gearing up for a major show, image links broken, many replaced by ads. Suspect someone hacked it, only question: who? Consensus is there's only one international villain with the brains, resources, and motive to disable my site dedicated to exposing campaign donations of major art collectors: Andrea Fraser.

Eric in touch reminding about Bernadette's book launch Monday, he designed the book. Texts with him and Heji, who recently joined me and Eric's nascent magazine, she's back from shooting photographs for Kanye in Africa, leading me to research right-wing nut job Candace Owens, who was on the trip and had to store her baggage in Heji's closet. Find pix of the logo tees Kanye helpfully designed for Owens's 'Blexit' campaign to helpfully persuade black people to leave the Democratic party. This naturally segues into collections of logo fails, never fails to amuse, like the one from the Olympics where Lisa's giving Bart a blowjob, I am grinning even as I type this.

Browse recent NPC memes, it's one of the best recent memes, so dark and yet so light. I make some screenshots of particularly confounding examples, drop them in the relevant folder.

Rachel comes over for dinner, the food has lotus root which reminds me of Trypophobia, Rachel's unfamiliar so I google it, my hair-crawling reaction makes her refuse to view the results. She mentions a video called 'it has only just begun' or something, possibly co-authored by John with Julien Coupat; she knows Coupat personally as does her husband who translates the whole Invisible Committee/Tiqqun axis, or something. Watch it on vimeo, it's sort of Debordy, simultaneously old left and next left. "Julien Coupat stars in... Last House On The Left."

Wednesday, October 31

New age chimes, Juice WRLD, etc. I'll start installing today. Realize there will probably be less media consumption this week since normally at the studio it's just wading through cultural tide pools all day long.

Trying to get Lou out the door for school, she's resisting and starts dancing, mounts a defense about not being able to stop moving. I put on "Keep on Moving" by Soul II Soul, we harmoniously exit before it finishes. Later in the day it's on my mind that my high school friend Rishi loaned me that actual Soul II Soul disc, when I went to return it he was like "keep it I'm no longer into possessions" or some shit, impressing me greatly. While I'm supposed to be installing I stand in a corner of the gallery and do some googling. Ever since I killed my Facebook Instagram and Twitter I humiliatingly must resort to the actual internet to stalk people. It's humiliating enough to even say "the internet." Turns out Rishi now teaches math at CUNY. Skim an interview on a blog called angryasianman where he's discussing music he's into, take note of a genre called coup d'écale to check out later.

Discomfited to see he interviewed a DJ I once knew because she started dating a girlfriend of mine right after we split (or, might as well face it—it's been long enough—before we split).

Ask the installers if they ever listen to music while installing, they seemed relieved and immediately produce a rig with a Fender mini-amp, Sean puts on something, kind of bumping, sounds good. Friedrich comes in and says what's the music, Sean says 'Playlist,' everyone nods. Apparently that's now an acceptable answer to the question.

Mental note to get back to work on my Soundcloud when the show is up. Been making mixes all year & posting to a playlist called 'Soundtracks for Artists,' roughly one a month. New one's called Hell Has Everything. I feel I upped my game by mixing an old Eddie Van Halen chopsathon into a recent RP Boo track: verified when I send the track to Cory, who first turned me on to footwork and also is a guitar-god person who uses Eddie Van Halen's deodorant (his actual deodorant): "HOLY FUCK," excellent prognosis, thanks doctor. Cory starts a group message to me and Stefan and Emily: a Distracted Boyfriend meme from Dolly Parton's feed in which "My man" scopes out "Jolene." Years ago, me and Cory and Stefan and Emily had a band called The Economist, our only recorded track was a "Jolene" cover. Me: "Let's get the band back together" Stefan: "I'm in!" No response from Emily. It's OK, we'll get Sammy Hagar.

Take a break from installing, go for lunch with Kat and Alex, Chelsea brunch spot playing "Freaks Come Out at Night." I got this on cassette when it came out, my Jewish best friend at the

time was triggered because he interpreted ‘freaks’ as ‘Nazis,’ took years to realize it actually meant white downtown artists.

Brad texts about the new Soundcloud mix, which has the same name as my upcoming show, asks is it part of the show. Deny it vehemently. Bettina thinks it’s a good idea. Hmmm. Maybe pop all the mixes, uncompressed, on flash drives, 20 hours of music, have them available in the gallery bookshop. Maybe add the 8-hour single-track mix from 2007 which at the time I burned to data CDRs, these days no one can enjoy it because discs are dead and the file’s too hefty for my Bandcamp or my Soundcloud.

Spend a lot of time staring at my video installation with someone from “the company” making adjustments to the projector. Worry about being aloof asshole because everyone from the gallery comes in all excited and welcoming, hesitates when me and Alex are unresponsive, cautiously melts away. Can’t they see we’re neurotically focused on tiny things no one else can even perceive that don’t even matter?

Back home. Books in the mail. *Xenofeminism*. I followed Laboria Cuboniks when I was on twitter, read the PDF, they’ve beefed it up into a book, hmmm seems like they rushed it. I tried to find it in town but it’s too small-press or British so I went crawling back to Amazon. Also Amazon: *Masterpieces in Detail*, a shame-buy, Cecily was shocked I hadn’t been to her favorite museums, they weren’t exactly obscure, it included the Louvre, London’s National Gallery, and anywhere in Italy.

Halloween. After trick or treating Hillary comes to our place for beer and pizza, shares an Insta clip of a tiny girl holding her own head in her hands, incredible costume, something about kids is inherently terrifying, like clowns, the girl's straight out of elena ferrante world.

Waaay past Lou's bedtime, no reading to her tonight. I put on a CD of Renaissance lute music played by "Hopkinson Smith," he looks maniacal in the photo, probably because the CD spells it 'Luth.' Trying to lull her into a more contemplative mood. Montaigne claimed that as a boy he woke each morning to some lad strumming a lute, what a fucking little prince. I mention to Lou that this exact music we're hearing was once being taken in by solemn people in rugged natural fabrics sitting in a stone-paved room lit by candles. Leaving her room I reflect on this: not accurate, probably scary, plus I'm basing it on a composite image from *Excalibur* and *Game of Thrones*. Still feel pretty good about it, throw a smirk at the camera like John Krasinski in *The Office*. It doesn't matter, she can't sleep til 11.

Bedtime. Slogging through book 6 of Knausgaard's edda, spent the last 300 pages knee-deep in Hitler and Mein Kampf, spurring web searches. Try to find a 'lavish' coffee table book of Hitler's paintings without framing or moralizing: no dice. Eventually chasing 'most offensive album,' a Guardian article on that topic offers Ice Cube and David Allan Coe. I have some of Coe's 'secret' racist material plus classic jams like "Fuckin in the butt," but I'm fascinated to discover his recording "Fuck Aneta Briant"—in this work the artist willfully misspells the name of the anti-gay activist. Misspellings are actual magick, should be used more in daily life.

Thursday, November 1

Breakfast Club, Juice WRLD, etc. Get texts about how was Halloween, send a pic of last night's last-minute costume. 'Are U Squi?' 'No, The Marciano Museum.' I prefer costumes that are straight psycho as opposed to dressing "as" something, my street clothes plus mask had a dastardly effect on passers-by, then again most were parents with little ones. Have a Blowup moment when enlarging the pic for this article: spy a kid from Lou's daycare I haven't seen in years, plus his mom, who I did see at the recent District Council Diversity meeting, she self-identified as "she/her/hers."

Check Yahoo Messenger account: something's off, I'll try later.

Go by 192 Books on a break from installing. Buy a Harry Who catalogue and a new Alexander Kluge book called *Drilling in Wood*, predictably cool, but provokes feelings. I now will exploit this opportunity to 'score-settlingly' confess to petty vexation at Kluge's recent art world lovefest, he rocked my world in college & I talked him up in *Dispersion* yet subsequently felt no one picked up on how crazy he was. Crissakes, Rachel even just told me she did some convo with him! In the late Nineties I actually emailed him to collaborate, his deflating reply: 'dear Seth I am no longer interested in fiction and filmmaking, now I'm into quantum physics,' it took a while to realize it was a different Alexander Kluge, some wisenheimer CERN lab-rat. ANYWAY ha ha kidding, of course I know how small and petty those feelings are, obviously it's overshadowed by my happiness for him and the spread of cool shit in the world in general.

Message from Spencer who is actually listening to Soundtracks for Artists while he paints—we both have shows opening next week so there was bonding—he employs the word “awesome.” Psyched because he happens to be a real painter and a real DJ. Recall that he once wrote a week-long ‘eating diary’ for some foodie site with a similar vibe to this, make a mental note to invite him to the Consumer Reports survivor group. Maybe open doors a little wider?

During dinner the whole family is treated to a brief trailer announcing the release date of *LoliRock* season 3, bad news, it’s going to be a while. Lou loves this show, I admit the theme music is strangely compelling.

After dinner Lou plays Bebe Rexha “I’m A Mess,” one of her faves, while doing an interpretive dance with the carpeted cat-tree. Been hearing this song a lot in recent weeks, “kind of hate it.”

Nico drops off his new book *Cinema/Politics/Philosophy*, hot off the presses, because Bettina’s going to do some Light Industry thing with him about it. We talk about how no one seems to read whole actual books of theory now thanks to #longreads, and no one seems to watch whole movies courtesy of TV Golden Age, & philosophers like Agamben & Badiou are dried-up white guys stuck in the 20th century BUT: when I read the intro while waiting for Lou to pass out, the fact is the “should-art-be-political” question is gripping, book seems cool.

Curious to see in the Guardian that Bhaskar Sunkara is endorsing Apu. Wrote that sentence and realized a problem with

focusing on media consumption is this whole thing would sound like Twitter, and there's a reason I ditched Twitter.

There's another Seth Price out there, I consistently crush him in the Google rankings, which must hurt seeing as how he's a marketing guru focused on personal branding. Occasionally I like to think I ditched social media 'to let Seth Price have it all to himself.' We both lived in Providence at the same time, which obviously confused the robots because credit/identity services keep sharing his address with me mistakenly (criminally?) Figure I'll just drive up to his place for a sit-down, we can Yalta this shit out. Strong suspicion we could be best friends. Could even share a checkbook, just leave off the address.

Evening good news: my *Brooklyn Rail* cover story is online, bad news: a "very very good friend of the Rail" complained about something I said in the interview. While it's too late to pull the print version, a chunk will be removed from the web version. The Google Alert on this man's name must have pinged when the web version went live, suppose it would have been more prudent to spell it 'Richard Sarah.' I'm told the censored statement was deemed "vulgar" and "irreverent"—weird, that doesn't sound like me at all, plus everyone knows I think that motherfucker's the best sculptor since sliced bread, sliced white bread, it's no Cor Ten but it's got 'honest' material qualities.

Friday, November 2

New age chimes, Breakfast Club, Juice WRLD. Local politician is on about how nuts Trump is, "he said he could shoot someone in the middle of Times Square," sigh, really people? point of fact

the man specified middle of Fifth Avenue. Wonder about inflicting fake news on Lou in her receptive half-sleep state.

Bettina and Lou finishing breakfast, I go to the bathroom to visit al Jazeera, admirably sober platform, feels like they took an American newspaper, added focus on countries that never even get named here, and pruned the catnip like articles on CBD and op-eds about The Simpsons by socialist celebrities.

Speaking of catnip, see an NYT article about a 5,000-year-old Roman instrument, leading me to investigate this band Synaulia, some Italian ancient-music project, but not in an uptight way like early-music ensembles usually are. Synaulia obviously threw, or possesses the capability to throw, mead-fueled parties in fields of wild catnip on the outskirts of Rome.

In the brief moments before I have to quality-check at a fabricator, I hit Souseek, search term 'prehistoric,' start grabbing shit randomly with an eye on the clock. When Tower Records was still open in the village, they'd close at midnight, we used to get drunk nearby and dash over to Tower at five to 12, spend 300 seconds tearing thru, snatching random CDs based only on cover art. I got gems like that first Club Nouveau LP, sampled it on a bunch of tracks I made at the time.

Souseek user Scramoutcha has every rare track I've ever sought, in lossless, but it's locked up for trade only, and Scramoutcha's list of trades is wild, it'll be a link to a YouTube mix with a muddy scrap of the anonymous desired song playing at minute 17:49. Damn you & praise be.

On the way to the fabricator I receive a text containing a QR code that I must display on my phone and hold under a reader in order to enter the complex. Two visits ago they put a sticker on my phone camera, last time they didn't, presumably they upgraded to a concealed walk-through biometric scanner with phone-disruption like everyone else.

Momentary insecurity about my drug consumption thanks to texts from an old friend, who I swear recently resolved to smoke less weed:

*-Look I just made this/4 cups of Psilocybe in red bush T/ the tea lights up the shrooms/call me in 2 ½ hours I'll tell your future*

*-Aren't u all CBD now?*

*-I have 15 pounds of grade a kolas bricked into my cabinets all over the fucking building my bong's are like chimneys nowadays I think there's enough CBD oil in the air of this building/T sent me a trap-keeper of shatter and I have a jar of fucking keef that would last a normal person 19 lives*

Lyft back to the gallery, West African driver playing generic Nineties country music, start talking, he loves Alan Jones, George Strait, etc. Possible style-wormhole connecting Bamako and Nashville? "What's this, a radio station?" "Playlist."

At lunch I mention Bebe Rexha to some people from the gallery, first pronouncing it 'Baby Recks-a,' when they say 'Sorry?' switch to 'Beh-BEH Rake-szha,' Anna Maria makes a note to investigate this eminent Basque troubadour. Consider investigating how to pronounce "Bebe Rexha" but 'confidently' decide to stay ignorant. Abstractly thinking of new playlist for Lou: Bebe Rexha

into ‘Rotten to the Core’ from *Descendants*, it’s the genuinely weirdest music, actually forget Lou, this is one for the ages.

Get a text from an artist friend I ran into last night who’s curious if I give my studio manager health care, I explain the package we have, sense their anxiety about being a Bad Manager/Person, I’m able to give useful and non-judgy suggestions, clearly all that couples therapy is paying off.

Installing a lightbox. Dorian examines all the long threads hanging out of the embroidered bit that says ‘New York City,’ mentions Hood By Air once did a jacket with letters fringed with suede—we go on his phone but can’t find it, obviously. We do take note that HBA is now available at Century 21 at greatly reduced prices.

Home. The last six months we’ve been trying to do Family Movie Night on Friday, recently working our way thru *The Great British Bake Off*, I love this shit, helpful friends keep saying “Yeah you know there’s an American one equally good if not better” but the point is I need the twee Britishness, it appeals to my mixed-up Ex/Re-Imperial American self. Tonight I am going out to some art stuff but I watch the first challenge with Bettina and Lou: baklava, this lights me up, my grandmother was ethnically greek from turkey so that side of the family always made baklava. Try to interest Lou in the heritage, get shushed. Exit premises after submitting written permission to conclude episode in my absence.

Watch a video by Adam Pendleton and a video by Liam Gillick. Use Google Maps to walk downtown to a cocktail thing with

Jamie and Alex, works OK though probably takes longer than if we just used our brains.

Receive email from Black Lives Matter: “Introducing #BlackLivesMatter Official Store” – whaa? This must be why Candace Owens feels she has to merchandize “Blexit.”

Email from Bosko, “Have you ever wrestled an animal?” Good question. We’ve been doing an email interview for ten years, initial interview concept: “longest ever,” a decade later: “what ever.” Insecure that he’s got the transcript, not sure I want it leaked.

Get home late, Lou’s still up with a stomach ache, turns out they completed the whole season without me: WHAT? and reveal who won: NANCY? Bettina crashes, I try to calm Lou’s stomach while we browse her Smithsonian Picturepedia, an ‘internet on paper,’ we play a game where we flip to random spreads (Cars, Earthquakes, Bread) and try to guess each other’s favorite pic. The Fashion spread lays everything out by decade, claims the Eighties and Nineties were about “Individuality” while everything since then is “Anything Goes.”

Before bed I drowsily attempt to access my Apple iChat, must be too exhausted to hack the unresponsive interface.

Saturday, November 3

Road tripping to an upstate wedding we suffer complete tech fail. The bride messaged that Google Maps was unreliable for the last miles to the venue, then we lose all reception, make a mid-course switch from GMaps to emailed directions,

overshoot the exit and get lost, dissolve in rage, tears, screaming, people jumping out of a slow-rolling car at a runty toll plaza near Woodstock and huffing off, to be found hiding behind an idling gas tanker by a concerned Lou, final result: miss the luncheon. On this trip Lou gets even heavier into *LoliRock*, we try to temper that by working our way deeper into this podcast 'Seeing White' about the construction of whiteness, it's good, to my taste the vibe's a little too NPR-listening-*New-Yorker*-reading, but then again who am I kidding, that's probably the hot breath of my own destiny. In light of Lou's 'unit' on Peoples of the Eastern Woodlands it's interesting to hear a whole episode about the massacre at Mankato and how the state fucked over the Dakota people, all of which was part of that brouhaha over Sam Durant's sculpture a while back. In the rear-view mirror I can't tell if any of this is penetrating the solid wall of *LoliRock*, but it's all good, it's subliminal, like *The Breakfast Club*. The podcast was a recommendation, we started going to these local School District Council Diversity meetings: twinklings of ultra-local activist feelings tying in to general theoretical interest in anarchist ground-up, etc., anyway, slowly getting more active in Lou's school, so I initiated shallow google researches on 'Porn Literacy,' a pilot program for teaching kids using actual porn, seems like an obviously good idea, on the right side of history, maybe prod the DoE about Porn 'units'? Oops, more share-y than advisable, back to media.

The wedding party goes late, it's all people in their late twenties and early thirties including the DJ yet the music is entirely '80s, I can't understand it, aren't there stacks of wretched '00s tunes to wed to? Please stay in designated lane.

Lots of googling “Jack Handy” since the couple are improv comedy writers who met on OKCupid over a mutual love of Jack Handy, whom we are asked to believe has actually emailed them a small but nice pep talk, which someone reads off a phone.

Before bed I attempt to log in to my Google Talk account but the page goes nowhere. Wonder if my electromagnetic irony field is disrupting my messaging services.

Sunday, November 5

On the way back from the wedding we stop by an old friend, a poet who lives in the middle of nowhere near Phoenicia, there’s no reception so we can’t call or text, we just show up, luckily he’s in. Staticky NPR so loud it’s hard to talk, on the other hand no digital media, so it’s psychically quiet. He mentions Groucho Marx, Lou doesn’t know the reference and he leaps up to locate a plastic portable TV, hauls it out and hooks it up, finds a VCR, shit crashing down everywhere, hunts an old VHS, 20 minutes later we’re with Groucho. VHS feels nice and soft, ‘psychically quiet.’

Home. Now would be my chance to do that New York Times ‘Sunday Routine’ thing, “after Ashtanga I’ll make johnnycakes,” but I won’t. I do check today’s Sunday Routine, it’s YouTube personality Randy Rainbow’s turn to take the measure of his inner being: “Their mac and cheese is legendary and their Cafeteria Cosmo is my jam.” He’d benefit from the burgeoning online-diary recovery group, text Kat to bring him in. I do realize I should get with the program and mention food more in this thing. Holy shit, just noticed there’s a new NYT diary series, “My Workout.” Chef Ignacio Mattos is claiming “the way you season in a restaurant is

not how you eat at home.”Text Kat: the group’s going to need a bigger venue.

Bettina shows me layouts from the book she’s editing for MoMA on the history of PS1, trillions of images, amazing. As museums achieve maximum Deathstar these images look cooler and cooler, even shit from fifteen years ago looks utopian.

*-Moms answering machine message is annoying*

*-better than dads*

*-true*

*-Im doing a media consumption report for some website im supposed to include this text string he he*

*-Noooooooo seth please don't*

*-ok*

*-im going to phone bank for Beto then a Julius Eastman concert*

*-you should be doing this media thing you're so woke*

*-im also jogging now as we text so just kill me for my own annoyingness*

*-will do why don't u jog over*

*-gotta coordinate too much on way to sonya's phone banking*

*-I meant so I can kill u*

Bettina: bed, Intercept podcast on the doctrine of American mythology. Lou: couch, Bunk'd episode on Netflix. Me: kitchen, prepping an heirloom grinder to force-hydrate sprouted loam, just kidding all I'm prepping is this sentence, in Notes, later I'll pop it into MS Word for a sear.

Ebay drive-by, search terms 'homemade + bad.' With clothing it's usually all Christmas sweaters, plus occasional diamonds

you could roll into Eckhaus Latta, but a general search can yield all manner of crazy. Nothing today that's either bad enough or good enough. I do have a notification about a fan-made Zero Kama shirt, her album made with human bones keeps popping in my work, I used it in the Redistribution video, the soundtrack for the Documenta fashion show, and the Donna Haraway in Heaven Soundcloud mix: clearly it's time to gear up and represent. I bid on the shirt even though it's too small, can always give it to Bettina.

Receive the Sunday newsletter from 2 Bridges Music Arts. "Mysterious Russian artist ca. 1992?" I'm sold. Simon always pours from the top shelf.

Monday, November 6

Breakfast Club: discussion about Nike's cynicism in using Kaepernick, then Juice WRLD. Oh dip, that reminds me... Text Kat to make sure Juice WRLD got the note about the venue change.

My Microsoft Messenger Service won't boot, I just don't understand why nothing's working any more. Definitely going to circle back.

At the gallery. Check the Soundcloud. Psyched to see the number of listens climbing on the new mix, it's probably because of New Models giving it love on Twitter, thanks Lil Internet and Carly! I decide to plug their aggregator New Models by going out of my way to gratuitously mention New Models in a piece I'm writing on my media consumption

for New Models. Getting the hang of this whole social media landscape after all. I do feel I'm a better partner and father after the past week's self-reflection and forced display of humor. Text Kat to warn Seth Price I'm coming for his socials, also please disinvite everyone from the Oversharing Support Group. Going to go ahead and assume Randy Rainbow will be okay with that.

## *The Lobby is for Waiting*

Man and woman  
Pushing a stroller thru the lobby,  
Both sensible, of course higher educated,  
Late thirties tied up in cheap bland derivations  
Of tech outerwear, with some color in a sneaker culture but  
White people, reform Jewish on this side of the aisle,  
Over here one from the Catholics (duly reflecting  
The general composition of the Supreme Court.)  
Votive love for works and traditions and props, since  
Their old-world predecessors were believers indeed  
But these are believers only in the ability  
To grip a word with a powerful forceps.  
No to gnosis and excess,  
Yes to community & good will. A desire to lead, yes,  
Plus a need to be lead.

(Eyebrowz up:  
Just show me someone who wouldn't agree with  
"Better safe than sorry," I mean,  
Maybe some people don't want to be safe,  
But who wants to be sorry? Answer: Us!  
*We* are sorry. And we wish to remain sorry  
And to savor the feeling,  
Even as we also holdin' down the opposite of sorry,  
Whatever that may be.)

My imaginary man gets together with some other wandering  
Dads for a weekend flex in Central Park, proudly

Bandies about the pronoun “she,” as in  
I would tend to dispute the notion that a  
Working-class consumer  
Is in some way ‘bewitched’ by advertising,  
She is far more likely to be inherently skeptical of its allure  
Than her upper-class counterpart.

What would a right-wing utopia be like?  
Contradiction in terms, that.  
Of course we too welcome the onset of some tremblingly  
Pure age of non-work, communal celebration,  
Radiance, inner voyage  
But let me note that it seems to possess the more quiescent,  
Non-motivated sort of peace  
Widely associated with extreme lack of ambition.  
You think these anarchistic men who desire revolutionary change  
Who shake their fists at cops,  
Would they actually be able to function in the paradise  
Of a socialist utopia, with free love and peace  
And gentle communal life?

Since ‘68 our society has experienced  
An unprecedented phase of adolescence.  
But we will not continue such revolutionary expansion  
Without incurring the debt. Our children will pay.  
Not just the social welfare and ecological costs as they age,  
But, well,  
Their kids are gonna be hyper-sexualized.  
In non-urban areas, in non-Western areas  
That will make for an explosion. Travelling booms

As they wander, lacking narrative to join the shards of history  
And sexuality and identity. And, basically, also,  
*Who said everyone has to look so cool, now?*  
In all their derivations of derivations. Anyway  
He's a nice father and son though, it must be said,  
Judging a painting together on another expedition  
Years hence, pointing up and talking down:  
And what do you think that means?  
(This has the creeping warmth of a pullover) In  
Soft assurances of, no  
There are no wrong answers, it's all about making worlds.  
The tone and the thought is laudable, of course, I know that  
Duh, every facet of the lived world is subject to being looked at,  
Weighed, tallied, judged, but whence the whazzit-mean?  
No asking what the image does,  
What does his question even do,  
What does my question do.  
Could I spell it question  
And get a meaning across  
In my lifetime?

As always, haunting my frame  
The alkaline taste of an older generation matter-of-factly  
At us: you know,  
We were always told to question authority.

## *Talking to an Old Gent*

I was listening to another oldie

*Head Over Wheels* by G. Dep

who was born basically when I was

(Production by DJ Premier who did the track and moreover

reworked it for a new mixtape for sale on St. Mark's Place

in the early 2000s, when me and G. Dep were 28) —

It's called a floating world.

Skins of holy material, shuddering, sheets on the line basically

Always an imperfect manipulation of itself:

Behind itself, now ahead of itself

It got a little too ahead of itself, in fact

Things slipped out the back, got lost in the slipstream.

Music is the far-off dream of a beat like

An unformed dream about ritual activity

Throttled by a phone with shitty speakers,

An expensive and shitty stereo.

The wealthy, I'd noticed, often placed faith

In some approximation of design and contemporaneity

Rather than in actual quality. On the other hand, so did

Everyone else. It was only the rogue billionaire who might

Invest 60,000 euro in a HiFi system capable of actual fidelity.

What about the fact that a wealthy Swiss rogue in his seventies with such a HiFi might be not simply an expert on black American musical idioms like jazz and the blues, but can speak with deep intelligence on the subject? What an amazing thing, he tells you, that we humans have constructed a system like jazz,

which exists entirely within a tradition, a shell of standardized units, a kind of musical calculus, within which one may play endlessly, bending the rules and breaking them, always enacting a delicate play with ritual and tradition, and the future, and within which all of human emotion is possible, especially the unnamed and odd emotions that give a listener questions, feels beyond language (you can glimpse it even in a bastardized form, like, say, the mournful, jazzy soundtracks to television shows of the Seventies, full of longing, and isn't every romantic impulse essentially about longing?) This wealthy Swiss man actually understands these musics in an intimate and complex way, with a warm and nuanced and humanistic understanding that he could never bring to his own marriage or children, let alone himself.

So you come back at this eminently sympathetic and intelligent man, who has made his money by being rational and careful, and only lets his imagination run wild to the tune of lovingly-catalogued LPs by dead black men, saying, Yes and isn't that the condition of techno music too? It sets up an even more brutally standardized system: the steady, machinic pulse of the drum, and only the drum, drawing on disco and before that soul and R&B, and then, when you have that hereditary pulse stripped bare, you can pour all of creation in—noise and industrial chaos, soul and harmony, Hawaiian guitars, you name it—and it still qualifies as techno... Another black American cultural product, another twist to the string of beads... What about that?

In return you are treated to a brief smile and a shrug, I'm sure that's all very interesting, but it's not the same, maybe for your generation, I don't know.

Comparing things yes that's what we do,  
As artists, as  
Collectors, connoisseurs, curators.  
Very different folders in the catalogue, I grant you,  
But nonetheless  
Let's venture a neck:  
Detachment is important, in the sense of a detachment  
From the stories we tell ourselves about who we are, and  
What we're like.

Hold up tho, old gentleman be still speaking, talking at us,  
Talking over us in a voice like leaf-raking,  
Let us listen.

The problem is there's no glamour. It's like with cars, what happened to the sex? Look at BMWs: well made, yes, and, you know, sporty. The Germans can handle sporty. But sporty isn't the same as sexy. Sporty is sexy for people who do Pilates. Mercedes is a nice car but it's because they're content to be classy, not sexy, and Lexus is corny, there's nothing distinctive about it, it's try-hard, Audis are nice but they're boring,  
All SUVs are totally opposed to the idea of glamour or sex,  
Crossover SUVs are the worst thing in the world,  
What the Germans should do is finance the Italians,  
Be the secret partner,  
Maybe go somewhere spicy.

Cars now are all variations on silver and black and white and gold!  
I mean, every once in a while there's a red one.  
Then there might be some other colors that appear rarely, still

They're boring, royal blue, dark plum, dark brown.  
The Sixties and Seventies was the last time that  
We had really amazing car colors, because, well,  
Consumers of that era mentally classified automobiles  
As a kind of personal home good, like a sofa,  
Cars back then had to do with interiority and home design,  
And a kind of minimal gesture of personal expression,  
Televisions had genuine wood trim, so naturally cars did too.  
Back then, blacks were blacker  
In photo printing.

Then we got personal computers and all the other consumer electronics, and they brought us the palette of business, and people started seeing cars not in terms of couch or wallpaper but in terms of PCs and phones and watches, or office partitions, or wall to wall carpet, and all the things that have traditionally been beige or black or gray or silver.

On the other hand, these days sofas and wallpaper are also beige and gray and brown.

That's the color of my apartment, it looks like a boutique hotel.

So, maybe the effect of the business palette was farther reaching than just cars?

## *People Who Can't Love*

There are a lot of us,  
More than you'd think.  
If you could put on special glasses and survey this crowd  
Like Hitler and the pope, why you'd see us everywhere,  
Like an outbreak.  
And it's been coming some time now.  
During the Neolithic period, each human  
Was capable of love. By the Middle Ages, many were incapable.  
This tendency dramatically accelerated over the course  
Of our stupid twentieth century.  
Soon there won't be anyone left.  
Who knows,  
    we might be finally wise and calm.

The essential thing with creativity is finding a form  
That makes expression even possible.  
A form, in other words, that makes sense for your person, persona,  
Personhood. It's this attitude that is striking, influential even.

Pollock certainly pioneered a new style of paint application,  
But he was not influential because legions of followers took the  
Splatter, what people responded to was attitude,  
A way of working that allowed him to proceed.  
Same could be argued for Beckett, or  
Any number of formalist modern males (said the rogue),  
A period when the field of personal expression  
Supposedly cracked open. But you know, we found ourselves  
Wandering a bit, fairly far out

In purple areas,  
And we realized,  
We are almost certainly in a different era now.  
Expression and art—and what we are doing here  
Is no exception—  
Was supposed to expose the fault lines of the present without  
Proposing any alternative. The present must be left in pieces,  
The more, the better.

Anyway, it certainly will be good to move away from thinking  
“I am nothing”  
As if it’s a bad thing. Don’t you think our way now means  
Holding yourself higher,  
Above your enemies, superior,  
Dangling a thing over a head?  
Turning the other cheek proves it:  
You’re still nothing, but in a *good* way.

## *End the Story*

I am incapable of love.  
It's my best quality, my most useful quality.  
Like most other ten-year old girls  
I have never been on a date.  
I haven't been out dancing, or gone to the club.  
I haven't been to a Broadway production, or a fashion show  
I don't have socials. I haven't learned a sport, or an instrument.  
I haven't picked someone up at a bar, I didn't go home with them  
Our lovemaking was not savage at first and then tender  
I haven't walked around all day in a haze 'cause  
I can't get you out of my head  
I don't know any of the things that all the songs and poems  
Say. Never been obsessed with anyone but myself—  
And I don't like myself. To paraphrase Rick Owens  
My best and worst quality is I'm a selfish cunt.  
And this is precisely why you prize my writing  
Why u pay top dollar.

All this here isn't really written "in my voice"  
But it's close enough for a little friction, for  
Speech rubbed against writing (like everything nowadays),  
Rubbed just enough to send up some smoke  
And not enough to catch fire.  
That's what we "kind of" like: a fading hint of warmth  
And a lasting smokescreen.

I write the world of materials, processes, industrial interaction.  
Somewhat different to your focus on the world of empathy,

Interrelational processes, people vibes.

You are focused on your intake of minimally processed materials  
(Low foods like nuts, berries, algae, plankton, lichen) whereas  
I am focused on the intake of maximally processed worlds,  
Meaning that I sing the birds, the winds, the sea.

Aleister Crowley advised that we keep a magical journal or diary  
Of our experiences and ideas, even down  
to vagaries of the weather. And  
Is this not what people do today? But this is ancient wisdom  
folks. If we look to the Gnostic gospels (like  
The Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth)  
We find a dialogue form  
In which the teacher shows the student  
Gnosis starts by looking within  
And keeping your written  
account.

Our cabal is in favor of stories that have no end, stories that are  
constant flows, fragments lacking conclusion. That's why our  
cabal has cultivated social media. Working together (it declares)  
we may finally write the spell to end it all.

We aim to live slowly in the spell that ends the story.

*Medieval Y.A.*

Just five hundred years ago  
This here was a place of wretched diseased settlements,  
Lawless wilds, illness & insanity,  
Disfigurement & death, suffering & disorder,  
Malignant magic, cowed belief. And it still is.  
When my three-year-old self asks  
    is magic real? I tell her,  
Sweetie, just go ask the people who believe in God & heaven,  
The power of faith & hell:  
For them such things exist, with material effects,  
Like lukewarm body fluids gently irrigating your joints.  
Our contemporary shamans irrigate liquid through slaloms  
Of bumps & bruises, we're always going on about it,  
I know a great specialist,  
I'll put you in touch with my guy,  
He doesn't take no for an answer,  
Oh, you have a guy  
Yeah, well  
My brother's got a great guy, or, his wife does, anyway.  
Telling you though  
My guy's the best,  
I don't know if he has time for you, though,  
He's busy.

Ever wonder how you might have fared in a more brutal time?

Could you have held up?  
Could you have met the challenge

Of frightened menfolk approaching sheepishly,  
    hat in hand, seeking advice?  
What about that time you were hastening back  
To the village alone,  
On a forlorn track cutting through the wild country, it was  
Just light enough  
In the sky to make out three rough men with sticks  
Coming across the fields, in your direction, fast.

Then there was that other time you  
Awoke to a flush of fever and a burning in your joints,  
Eyes rimmed in red, skin blotchy. Reclining  
On a sack on the outer edge of a muddy world, and  
No cures but leaves and prayers, or  
The vague encouragements of family, murmured  
From the threshold of the room, but no closer.  
That was the last time.

Yeah but see these fantasies, it's all old Europe.  
Thing about Europe, we basically had  
A ton of wealthy white people, well, a high concentration anyway  
With more or less uninterrupted centuries in which to develop  
A host of ways to enjoy all the nuanceful (to coin a term)  
Wealths and privileges. Or let's put it another way,  
European culture was the fruits of a long R&D  
Into connoisseurship. So, I am currently devouring a magazine  
profile, it's about this older, empowered, financially secure person  
who by the grace of Lucifer is capable of now revealing publicly,  
after all these years, (pull quote title) "I'm Not Angry Anymore."

I mean, I certainly understand the sentiment  
I certainly want to be  
    gazing through a rainy window at boughs in the wind,  
Having been reading poetry by a fire, and quiet  
Scriabin is going in the background  
And a stranger seduces and fucks me,  
And then some oil paintings happen.

Of course, this gnarled Europrocess greatly benefited  
From happening in fucked-up aristocratic societies,  
Once you got capitalism (like we got) people just strip-mine  
All that R&D, right out the gate  
And what ya get is extractive concepts  
Like 'luxury.' As  
We day-laboringly continue to slowly work  
On extracting the exterior.

Ask an old American artist like me about ritual,  
I can tell you all about it.  
Ritual is about submission  
That's all.  
Remember, though, we can still get you.  
We have powers of our own.  
To us the life of any living person is a box of costume jewelry  
Open for plunder.

## *Our Friendship*

Be kinda like a conversation among marketers. Like  
So, what about someone who's always drinking soda,  
Just, like, various local brands of soda?  
Like Hunnecker's Strawberry Soda, stuff like that  
You know.  
Not Coke?  
Coke's too obvious. And it is not regional, as well.

So, the easy satire here would be to exaggerate  
Existing traits, i.e.  
You have a character  
Who drinks hyper-sweet, hyper-caffeinated soda.  
But we wish instead to go lateral  
And weird.

See, a proper conversation should feel like sparkling water.  
Marketers' spit balling be so sparkling  
There was barely any water left.  
That's what we kind of liked tho,  
The way a living trilobite slowly turns into a demon of stone.

Once my friend Boss told me his breakthrough collection of  
Darkly visionary poetry would be written in French  
Under the pen name Rambo, and  
Titled *Florida Mall*. What manner of oddness be this?  
We're different, he explained (speaking of the new youth)  
Cuz we speak in misspellings. We might say, 'fukken shit,'  
f-u-k-k-e-n, see?

But people do not hear that  
They hear only the banal phrase “fuckin’ shit.”  
The young are always rediscovering abstraction, mutation  
And psychedelia, because they represent the perverting force  
Of forms in revolt. This is what lends that elusive towering quality  
To streetwear design  
Where we saw someone cross the street in a hoodie  
With an all-over print of skulls and crossbones,  
And then you noticed the skulls were actually SpongeBob  
Wearing a Monopoly top hat  
And it’s not crossbones it’s a dildo  
And a mortgage contract.  
It is the young who wear five subcultures  
In one outfit, and get away with it. We know how to stack  
The codes, motherfucker you learned that shit from us.  
But you can’t pull that off, closest you’ll get is high-tech outerwear.  
Pay a premium to juxtapose rugged epaulets  
With breathable performance liners.

I found my phone and made a new post:

*Like people who think Helmut Lang pioneered  
Special rinses  
When point of fact native son Ralph Lauren done it  
In the early Nineties  
Those antique industrial washers he stumbled on down south,  
The Carolinas or something,  
And he was just catching a ride  
On some slipshod denim folkway.*

## *Impressive People*

We are impressed by those who falter at linguistic expression  
Who stammer dumbly and smile,  
Pull a face, and go charismatically silent. People for whom the act  
of “Communication”  
Is not suspect, simply boring.  
What sacred power this is!  
In most of us the urge to communicate is fierce and unrelenting,  
Tinged with desperation.

On the other hand, a good deal of avant-garde experimentation  
Seems to come out of a sense of frustration, misdirected anger,  
Anxiety about one’s capabilities, station in life. A straying  
Hope for any action or movement at all—  
In a word, desperation.  
But experimentation is always sincere.  
So, while we don’t want to deduce that unhappiness is necessary  
For production, you do want to acknowledge  
Its important historical role.  
Ideally, the career or ‘life-path’ of a poet or artist traced an arc:  
That first moment of youthful, reactionary anger  
(And all of anger’s corresponding pollutions) sweeping into  
A trough of deep uncertainty, the crucial middle ages  
That could resolve as either ruin  
Or deeper self-knowledge, and  
Finally resolving into a late-stage freedom,  
A disregard for strictures  
That allows for the pursuit of hidden breezes  
Which have the power to entirely rustle the dressing.

Similarly, many have revved up the ol' transcendence train  
Knocking themselves silly in the teens and twenties  
On whatever's lying around, then skidded into a middle period,  
Righting the ship with a more restrained approach,  
And by middle age are firmly set on a path well-lit by the usuals:  
White wine, some vodka cocktails. Drinks you can see through  
    (supposedly easier on an aging system)  
Aging, wealthy men, of course, especially white men,  
Tend to adopt well-chosen brown liquors.

Humans have always unconsciously and collectively  
Summoned their destiny inward,  
Willing themselves into wrenching change. It's a bit like  
A communal spell, and isn't all war like that?  
Think of the old world before the Great War  
The world of royalty, empire, colonies, or  
All the great families. And then, after World War II,  
You call upon this scene a great scar,  
A brutally new society, so distant from that nineteenth century  
As to be an alien planet. We called that down upon ourselves,  
It was an invocation.

All that was demanded in return was a brief period  
Of sacrificial violence. Oh, some have said  
The collapse of the towers was called down,  
I don't know, but that is always said when we  
Topple the statues in the town square.

Looks like we're going to need a smaller map.

## *Total Submission*

You call yourself an attendant. Can you tell me what that means?

Sure. It means I sit with people during the session. My job is *being with*, during the work.

Okay. I'd like to get to some nuts and bolts. How big is the dose?

It's two doses, actually. We start with a 125 milligram gel cap, and then about an hour or an hour and a half in, I give you a second dose of 75 milligrams.

So it's a two part thing.

Yes. The first dose, you can practically set your watch by it, it expires in exactly 4 hours. So you lay the second, smaller dose on top and it kind of eases people down, for a total of five and a half, maybe six hours.

And how does the patient do it? What's the protocol?

Well, you would lie down on the couch. Actually, to back up a bit, I first meet with you here in the office and we just talk. That's to establish a sense of trust. The whole idea is trust, surrender, receive. You have to trust me, and the setting and the room, the whole situation. So I explain the whole thing. And then we meet again and you take the medicine.

That's funny, because I know that in ayahuasca practices, they also talk about it as medicine. "The work."  
"The medicine."

I quite like that. I think it's important to say, here is something that is helping you on a deep level. It's not a recreational drug. We're doing real work here.

Do you also do anything with ayahuasca?

Oh, no. I mean, I spent years trying all sorts of different things. I certainly have done a lot of ayahuasca. That is an amazing compound, for sure.

But you wouldn't do it again.

I would. But for what I'm interested in, for helping other people with this work, I think these tools offer the best, most effective way to cut to the quick of your problems, to act as a kind of truth serum, to cut through these Gordian knots. With ayahuasca, you might fall off a cliff at any minute. It can be a dark thing, and that has its power and its potency, but there's something interesting about the way that my work won't fight you. Art can be on your side. You can come in and really know that it won't be a booby trap, if you know what I mean. So it sets the stage for trust, which allows for surrender.

So tell me how it works. We do the first meeting, and then I come back. Do I bring an intention?

No, we don't do those here. That's certainly an amazing thing with ayahuasca. You bring an intention, you bring a problem to work on. And the shaman is there to channel all that spirit energy to help you with it. But my work isn't so goal-oriented. With this, it's important to bring nothing at all to the session. You simply receive.

Oh, that's nice. So there's no homework.

Exactly. No homework, just trust, surrender, and receive. Which is the title of my book, incidentally. And you receive whatever might come. That's part of the trusting bit.

So you're not a shaman, then.

By God, no. I'm not even a doctor! Think of me as a kind of friendly spirit, or presence, just here, to be there if you need me. You know, I'm here to take down things you might want to tell me, for instance.

Ah, so that's interesting. Because the ayahuasca experience is communal. There's a group, the shaman is kind of a ringleader.

Well, I'd say the shaman is the host, but also a participant.

Yes, the host.

And also a participant. In the ayahuasca ceremony, the shaman drinks the medicine, too. So that's a model more like art. The artist has drunk the medicine, and she takes you on the ride, if

you want to enter into that. Artists are like shamans that way. The whole trick of the artist is to be the wounded healer.

But your model has more to do with western psychiatry.

I don't take the medicine. So yes, I suppose so. You would be lying on the couch, and I'm here to take down anything you may want to tell me. I'm a scribe, if you want to say it in that sense. That's the kind of implicitly more agonistic western model, where you have sides. I'm on this side, you're on that side.

But we aren't speaking. It's not a conversation.

I try to stay out of it. And you have an eye mask on.

Oh, wait. So, I take a massive dose, put on a blindfold, and lie there for 6 hours?

That's the gist of it.

How do I know when to take the second dose?

I have a system where I'm playing some quiet music, it's piano music. It's written for the harpsichord, but it's played on a piano. And then when I switch to this nice, classical guitar music, that's how you know to take the second dose.

So if I notice that it switched from guitar to piano, I know to reach over and take the second pill. But you're not, like, talking, and telling me what to do.

No, I'm very much in the background. The shaman is always the one who is off to the side. It's distanced participation.

So, you aren't talking.

Well, I might kind of say something when I'm taking dictation. Like, "yes," or "ah-hah." You know, a kind of affirmative.

What about eating and drinking?

You don't really want to do that when you're with the medicine. It's just not particularly interesting. Afterward, I might make you a little tea and a biscuit or something. I'll make you a little tea and then I take my dog for a walk while you kind of re-enter the world. I'll say, "I'm going to take Otis for a walk, okay?"

So, just to backtrack a bit to the ayahuasca.

Sure.

In that case, in the case of an ayahuasca ceremony, you might find yourself at the edge of another world, right?

Could be.

I mean, in the sense that you are finding yourself suddenly with the spirits, as it were. You get a strong sense of a realm of other beings. Is that something you would find with your work?

I don't think so. I know what you're getting at, because I was writing before about how 'there is another world, yes, but you have to make it'—

Well, not to cast doubt—

No, I know. But to answer your question, it's not like that here. You are taking a deep, truthful look at your own life. You are not going to involve spirits here unless that is already a part of your life, in which case, yes, it's all fair game, I guess.

So in that sense it really is a bit like therapy, or art.

I don't think it is, really. But I see your point.

And you think it has lasting effects.

Look, we are all very closed and tight, depending on whatever traumas and issues we've had in the past, in our own particular situations. What this practice can do is, it opens you right up. And for the time you're here, you can kind of measure yourself, in that truthful space, and learn some things. And then of course you close up again as it wears off. But you don't close up quite so tight. And that lasts, that's a neurochemical change. And then of course you take the transcript of what we all write together, and that's a way to revisit the work we do, and hopefully carry it forward. The important thing is to *be with*: be with others, be with yourself. We are made by others, and passed on to others. Culture is the book you write in and pass along.

## *Be a Yes in No Land*

Pretend to be a food curator, just for a minute.  
Which genius hit upon ranch dressing?  
Who was the man behind the curtain?  
Some toiler of the early postwar era, I thought, some idiot savant  
Ignorant of the way the winds of Big Food were blowing  
Nonetheless borne on these unseen currents.  
After all, what we know as processed food has only come about  
Since the Forties, and  
The genius of ranch was that it seemed (maybe initially was?)  
Wholly natural. What could be more down-home  
Than buttermilk?  
Yet its hallmark attributes are ones which we now associate  
Almost exclusively with highly processed foods:  
A rich, adhesive, mouth-feel, a  
Seductive, salty, sweetness, finished with  
A hint of fermentation.  
Ranch: a harbinger in a pizen phial. The path was lit,  
And the lamp has a brassy mouth-feel.  
A shortcut for big food to take in  
And get taken in  
The second half of the century.  
In this way ranch may be seen clearly as a complex dialectical  
Wish image dreamed into being by a forward-looking girl  
Caught up in the dizzying winds of cultural lamp lighting.  
Ranch bore within it the seed of our present moment,  
Where artifice is ubiquitous, for it has that most elusive quality:  
Simulated artifice.

Of course by the time food culture arrived at a new housing,  
(Packaged marvels of my Eighties: Yoplait, Capri Sun,  
Fruit Roll-Ups) ranch dressing itself was heavily processed,  
Thus suitable for licensing to the big guy.  
Who farmed a tremendously successful Cool Ranch.  
And by the Nineties, ranch had achieved supremacy  
Without losing the curious and unique inner fold.

About inner folds:

You see, we prefer artifice  
And this includes the appearance of naturalness, and  
To a limited degree we do appreciate some things about  
'Unspoilt' nature, e.g. there's no such thing as dirty,  
And it's always taken just as it is with no second guessing,  
You don't say, okay, but, well... the undergrowth is too sparse  
And the muck is off.

In general, though, we prefer nature  
When it's ailing. Masses of browned shrubbery  
Choking a stone foundation where the farmhouse was, stranded  
In sere fields, or withered daisies jack-knifed over the rim  
of a crystal vase. Nature is what decomposes, all else  
Is by definition unnatural.

Anyway, that's the common understanding, but we disagree.  
We kind of like plastic surgery,  
Since we make common cause with all those desires  
And non-positions that seem crazy and unimaginable, and  
Yes, of course the wealthy have cleaved off  
Into a separate population  
It's not just that they can afford alterations of some sort

(After all, the working class also does whitened teeth, fake tans,  
Boob jobs, & cock tugs), it's that the aristocratic adobe  
akshwee

Departs from a popular and pedestrian vision of beauty.  
This is not grotesque or decadent, it's just the future.

You can say, oh yes,

Ze future is all about gradual mixing, blah blah  
'Til most people are mid-sized, light brown, and genderless  
But the wealthy won't stand for that! For them, the future  
Is all about savage individuality, like:  
Women who try to look like men? Men trying to borrow from  
Women's game? Ah, just tired debris from back in the dawn  
Of free and open expression!

I am more like the tendency of young actors to bulk up,  
To work out six hours a day and exhibit huge bodies onscreen  
Similar to public desire for an art of unambiguous evidence  
Of intensive labor, like photorealistic painting  
Minutely detailed drawings, insane finishes on sculpture, etc.  
We want our screen lives to be a combination:  
Intensive workout, plastic surgery labor, artificial retouching labor,  
CGI compositing labor, and money, i.e. labor.

When you look onscreen to see teens making  
Love it's like catching your parents in the act,  
All over again. Teens making love:  
This is your culture's primal scene.

Now we begin to sense a mass of countless older people extend-  
ing into the night on all sides, all shining eyes on the center, where

you're standing by a bonfire, so close as to be part of the fire. First an inner ring of jeering teenagers standing a bit too close, behind them a huddle of distracted young adults, harder to pick out from the skulking circles of people in deeper shadow, and beyond them a lurking mass, unwell and unhappy, forever, and everyone's gazes are so intense! Fiery looking. You daren't turn and look at whatever it is that's so interesting to them, but the heat behind you is pushing you out and away and into some loose, floppy arms.

## *Pagan Midrash*

There's two competing schools of thought in this here calendar. You either dump the presets or you embrace them. A brand-new synthesizer comes loaded with preset sounds so you can immediately get started. And not just 'piano,' or 'acoustic bass,' or whatever. Synths are no longer solely for academic composers, they're contemporary pop toys, they're another part of the power regime of Da Club, in collab w/ Da Cloud. Your presets were programmed by a diligent young professional trained at Berklee College of Music or some shit, or maybe the equivalent conservatory in Asia, and he was doing his earnest best to mimic popular styles so your presets might include "trap bass," "acid house squelch," "footwork snare," "dubstep wobble," "pitch-altered phoneme/black man," "croon/black woman," things like that. Or, alternately, the presets are intended to evoke the sounds of the cherished electronics of earlier, supposedly whiter eras—"Kraftwerk synth," "Italo Moog," and so on—which means the preset will be fat and warm and analogue, in opposition to the harsh and brittle feel of digital. Either way, just select your style and you're up and running!

According to the one school of thought, the first thing you do when you buy a new synth is toss out all the presets. Just ditch that corny demo shit and build everything from scratch. Skinny Puppy did that, famously, on some OG Eighties synth poop. But that band is old, and that move of 'tossing out the rules' is kind of a retro notion (my friend said *They're tossing out all the rules* and I was like, *That's when the real rules come in*). After all, if you picked up a synth in the early Eighties it probably would

have required you to do a fair amount of knob-twiddling to create your sounds, just as a personal computer of the period would have encouraged you to lift the hood and tinker. In both cases, however, these user-programmable aspects were eventually removed, or concealed, or made the province of specialists, under the assumption that consumers prefer the convenience of factory-set operations. Which naturally just juices up the burgeoning technician class.

The second school of thought embraces the factory presets. It says, “look, we are contemporary, and we aim to make contemporary music that is a part of its time, and we use this horrible shit because it’s here, it’s what’s on offer, and thus it embodies the whole system of values and ideology and production that exists right now, and is thus ipso facto relevant, and also holds the seeds of its own demise, interestingly.” In which case you’re not aspiring to make contemporary music, you’re not ‘trying,’ you’re actually making it, scant minutes after unpacking the synth. In a way, you’re calling the synth-manufacturer’s bluff, maybe the whole culture’s bluff. Certainly calling your own bluff.

Please keep in mind that this embrace of presets is not an ironic turn. Like nostalgia, irony would be cordoned off as false consciousness. This is a production mode, and therefore quite different from the ubiquitous, mass-affirming mode of popular consumption, in which we all cleave to the music and film and gossip of the moment, joyfully sailing with the prevailing winds of culture, a massed strength at our back. Rather, I am talking about taking up the pseudo-pastimes and depleted styles

littering our contemporary landscape in order to simultaneously celebrate and condemn them in a rich double-gesture that Hegel termed *aufhebung*.

But what does it mean to simultaneously appreciate something and detest it, to revel in the badness, to destroy by preserving, or, conversely, to redeem by shitting upon? Often this yields books or records or paintings which are apparently affectless, anhedonic, and take-it-or-leave-it. They eagerly enact their status as dispensable and pre-outmoded. To some degree they cannot escape being simply fashionable.

Fashion itself realized, during the disjunctive evolutionary step it took in the Nineties, that being wedded to one's time means that while you can be a handsome mirror you cannot easily stand apart and strike a dissonant note. For better or for worse.

... This all makes you sound like a guy who likes to get home and kick back and uncork a nice Barolo, get your feet up, get some Bach deedle-dee-deeing, get some mushrooms bubbling in cream sauce. I'm more of a bubble bath, glass of Chardonnay, beeswax candles, box-of-chocolates type of gal.

God, I love how it all keeps unfolding.

## *Finding the Right Style of Glasses for Your Face*

I have just asked  
What really happened to architecture back in the Nineties?  
And the wealthy rogue's smile has flagged.  
(Kind of funny: I found myself back in the wealthy guy's house!)  
Annoyed: "What do you mean?"  
And he gestured: "This is brand new, my place. Basically."  
I uncrossed my legs, smiling.  
If you could travel back to the Sixties or Seventies (I said)  
You'd almost certainly pull aside a plastic curl  
To reveal a wholly different design culture, where  
The well-to-do commissioned young architects  
To design some singularly bizarre residences.  
A doctor, aristocrat, or businessman of the period  
Considered architecture and design  
To be a form of self-expression.  
Even in the mid-Eighties (I continued)  
You'd have been able to open the pages of *Domus* and drink in  
A person's splendidly rash commitment  
To full-on Memphis design, with a pad in Paris, Milan, or L.A.  
Less a home, really, than a ritualistic arrangement of glyphs  
And magical objects, whose geometries and patterns  
Were supposed to hasten the onset of late capitalism.

However, in the late Eighties and Nineties (I was careful  
To periodize, so that this here villa could hover outside history,  
Since rich white = limbo addict),  
Most architects abandoned quirky  
Residential projects in favor of cowpote clientele.

The pages of *Domus* and *Architectural Digest* filled  
With atriums and headquarters. Museums  
Became the de facto way to prove architectural worth.  
The shift wasn't only on the side of designers,  
Customers, too—  
There were scant residences worth featuring in the mags!  
Because the wealthy seized on the neutered templates  
Of cowpote minimalism, a style where everyone wanted  
The same:  
Inoffensive luxury spa. This was a matter of taste and trends  
But it was also financial good sense  
Because such a home retained its value for the flip.  
All buyers at these price points expected the exact same details:  
Huge tub in the master bath, rain shower, open-plan living room  
Pegged to a showpiece coffee table  
(Only spot for books, really), cook's kitchen w/ island,  
Hardwood floors (later concrete, following art world example,  
Following displaced gas station example)  
Ultra-skim-coated walls, level 5 pls,  
Aluminum-frame picture windows  
A residence was no longer an extension of a wealthy owner's id  
Merely his ego. The coveted architects for these residences  
Were designers of actual super-luxury hotels  
Only coaxed out of their Singapore planning offices  
By a Texas oil-billionaire constructing a "beach house"  
Which would feel in its coldness like an empty hotel  
Which had perverse genius, cuz you'd live in constant revelation:  
Hold on, where are the other guests?  
Oh, they couldn't afford it.

Yes, okay, I will admit that it was possible that the Moscow  
Of the Nineties  
May have seen some truly bizarre residential architecture.  
That era's blend of exhilaration and corruption  
Which thrived on capitalism's embarrassing failure to offer any  
Social scaffolding beyond debt  
No doubt meant that the homes of the oligarchs rivaled  
The weirdest, space-age pipe-dreams of the post-'68  
European Boho Commie aristocracy and  
You actually can see these residences in this big photo book  
Made for this rogue trader's big table here, and it is in fact  
A splendid, vulgar, fascinating time capsule:  
*Moscow's New Gilded Age, 1991-1998*  
Page after page of lavish photographs shot as large-format  
Old-school transparencies  
(Thus also a record of the end of pre-digital professional film).

Unfortunately, I said, no one had yet made their name  
By publishing that particular coffee table book.  
So we can't know for sure if the period was mythological  
Or simply real?

## *Land of the Witch*

“There was a woman who lived down at the coast,” my therapist began, mildly. “She was angry at her daughter, who liked to tell stories. Well, that’s how people are.

One day the daughter ran off into the woods. She saw a beautiful lady standing in the half-light, with a strange expression on her face. The girl asked the lady where she was from. The home of my people is far from here, she replied, but I’ve come to get you.

Together they traveled through the woods all that day, and through the night, and all the following day. As evening fell, they came to a strange country where all was still and quiet and not a living thing appeared. It seemed as if the colors of nature themselves had vanished, so gray and hushed was this place. The beautiful lady lead them to a curious sort of hut and threw open the door. Here is where you will stay, she said, and pushed the girl into a stifling darkness.”

My therapist took a breath, and we listened to the radiator for a moment before he continued.

“Meanwhile, back in the girl’s village, her mother tearfully admitted that she had cursed her daughter, saying, may a ghost take her away! Something must have been listening to her. Well, a search party was organized, and slowly began to work its way into the woods.

Meanwhile in the hut the beautiful lady gestured at the fire pit. Girl, she commanded, get me some wood. As if in a trance, the girl went out and hunted for kindling. As she was looking, a small gray bird flew by and hissed, you’re getting that wood for yourself! The girl ignored it and kept picking up wood.

When she brought the wood back, the woman looked at it and said, that's not the kind of wood I want. Again the girl went out, and again the bird flew by as she was gathering wood, and whispered, you should know that wood is for you. The girl ignored the bird and returned to the hut. A second time the lady rejected the wood, and the girl returned to picking up kindling. The bird flew by once more and told the girl, this is the last time I can warn you: when you go back, she'll cook you! Replied the girl: but it's useless, she has me under some power. The bird disappeared behind a tree and stepped out as an ugly little man. Then we'll go together, he said, and they entered the hut arm in arm. Aha! Two is better than one, crowed the lady, sit down!

In the hut it was dark and hot, and stank of unwashed bodies and old food. As the fire crackled to life the ugly little man began to sing, and it was the most entrancing thing the girl had ever heard. The lady of the hut looked up, similarly enraptured, and began singing along, and by the time the pot was boiling she was completely mesmerized. The man continued singing, and the fire grew larger and hotter, and soon it had burned off the lady's legs. When she finally noticed, they were just sharpened sticks and the ends were all blackened. She looked down and cried out, what have you done to me?

The ugly little man stood, saying, Quick, go! The girl rose and together they left the hut. But the lady followed, making strange and horrible noises. So the man turned around and began singing once more. She stopped where she was standing, and began scratching in the dirt with her stumps, which were blackened at the end like pencils. Soon she was completely absorbed in sketching shapes and figures, and the ugly little man and the girl were able to run away.

They made their way back through the forest until they eventually reached the girl's homeland. The girl's country-folk looked suspiciously at the ugly little man. They asked, is this the one that lead you astray? She looked at him. And he looked back."

My therapist was quiet for a moment, and then rose and went to the window.

"Is that it?" I said.

"That's it," he said, his back to me. "That's me, for today." He didn't turn around.

I wanted to ask if parables and allegorical tales must always be simple, and compact, and stripped bare. Might a good parable also be clotted, complex, and bloated?





## *Deeper Inside the Lair of Evil*

What would my ideal sexual encounter be?  
Ideally, the object of my desire would evince  
No common emotional affective language  
Of gesture or connection. Right?  
Any encounter would be a groping in the dark,  
A total lack of understanding  
Orbiting far out there, beyond power, vanity, need, seduction.

*The screen showed a daytime aerial view of the wealthy rogue's volcanic island all gently overlaid with data, as if someone had dropped a lace doily on a circular end table. Tightly spaced red concentric rings traced the circumference of the cinder cone.*

So we've installed four rings of electronics on the volcano, you see. You couldn't even hope to see it, it's absolutely buried in heavy jungle. As you may know, any ring form has powerful quantum abilities to exponentially amplify an electromagnetic signal. When you stack an array of signal rings with decreasing circumferences, the amplitude intensifies. I won't go into it, but this is what powers all our data processing.

So we're invisible, because we're off the grid. We tap thermodynamics from deep inside the volcano. No one can detect a thing. We've managed to either buy up the land, or have it locked up in conservation. Someone hiking who sees a little box with a cable won't ask why it's there. We're invisible. And here no one cares. This is a benign protectorate, this tropical island.

Feels like masturbating in front of the dog,  
It's an affective mess,  
This is some guy and his uncle running things, some cute  
Bunch of old gentlemen,  
Get together each week in a breezeway built on shooting the shit,  
Wife's brother is the postman, guy's nephew is the tax guy.  
Be surprised how small an operation like this has to be.  
Basically it's an IT job. Farm it out. We got the data farm.

I could tell you about troop movements in, I don't know, some  
middle eastern shithole. Yemen, or Syria. Israel.  
But what do most people really want to know?  
Whatever it is, *that's* what's valuable!  
You can probably make a lot more money by  
Informing people as to who, exactly,  
Is talking shit behind their backs. See, countries  
Are just like people. They see each other basically as  
Potential sexual partners, sexual rivals,  
Sex victims, sex aggressors.

What do we mean when we say we feel powerless in the face  
of the state, of the city, or of various cowpote entities? Often it  
comes down to simply feeling that we cannot strike back in any  
meaningful way; that no one is responsible. It is not possible to  
hold anyone to account, I feel. As a denizen of the city, it is pain-  
ful to acknowledge the fact that on a simple level, one cannot  
easily destroy city property. Motherfucker, I want to kill a turn-  
stile. No can do, dough. (Like many in this generation I have  
stopped saying 'I think' in favor of 'I feel'.)

Anyway, he continued, Assange is a saint God love him but he missed an opportunity by giving it all away. Not just to profit financially, but to perpetuate his own organization. If he'd only planned for that he would have been able to afford all the time and space he needed to continue doing whatever it is he wanted to do. It's simple economics.

The art collector cut in: I always tell my artists I advise, when you get out of school why not take a moment to make yourself some money? The economy in NYC is insane, you'd have to be an idiot not to make money off this market now. Later you can make all the art you want. Everyone wants to pursue the *future*, not some ridiculous whatever. And if you want to live in the future, it means giving up freedoms. If you want to keep the best things about the West, you need to let go of the worst things, the things that aren't working, the things that hold you back.

Scientists sometimes talk about WEIRD countries. Know this? Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, Democratic. Prior to our Period of WEIRD living 75% of all people were infested With parasites, bacteria, all the Skin-burrowing worms. Which were actually helpful! But now we've engineered away these defenses. We've engineered away all the defenses. Now it's a quieter decay.

Quiet, yes. Because this isn't about tanks in the streets and banks running out of cash, it's far more subtle. Take Turkey and China. Turkey is a kind of compromise, right? They have a hard line religious system. I mean, let's be honest, it's kind of an oppressive, fucked up system. And what is that?

TFC countries, as the state department calls them. Totally fucked-up countries. Got a choice, pal: WEIRD versus TFC. But for real. But they're also a modern capitalist state, Turkey. They've made their choice. China? Authoritarian country on the one hand, yes, it's fucked up. But with a modern booming free market economy. Countries like Turkey and China are the ones living in the future, and meanwhile the West thinks it's bushwhacking a path, but in actuality? It's all by itself, or maybe it's with the third world, everyone kind of trying to make do with what exists, trying to patch it up, right or left, it doesn't matter.

We desire a poetry beyond right and left. No more choice antagonisms on offer, right? The market's closed for Catholics v. Protestants, Plato v. Aristotle, Stoics v. Cynics, Spinoza v. Locke, Paine v. Burke, Structuralists v. Humanists, Europe v. America.

A low chuckle issued from the darkness at the center of the room.

Of course we all make compromises to get by, and this is fine.  
The blind mandate to hew to purity of conduct is an enemy.  
We must acknowledge our duplicity and simultaneous selves:  
The one that bends, and goes along to get along,  
And the one that nurses hatred, resistance, conspiracy, that feels  
A single electromagnetic pulse bomb of the right magnitude  
Could return us to the Neolithic  
Without killing a soul.

The essence of freedom is that all obstacles and limits fall away.  
To be free is to find a way to dissolve all problems.  
What we want, correspondingly, is a state

Where everything is swappable:

Baby carriages are recycled into vacuum-formed polystyrene

Packaging for bottles

Of perfume. A slogan befitting a gym, 'Just work through the pain'  
becomes the motto of a fast food franchise. Talk about everything  
coming unglued!

You know who's invested

In all the boundaries being maintained, everything staying

In its little box? Children.

They haven't yet realized you can put a fat slice of avocado

In this bowl, not that bowl, and it tastes just as good. Or if you

feel like it, go ahead and rip a page out that book,

You haven't violated eternal commandments.

Know who knows boundaries have to move

And change, and keep fluid? People looking

To sell something. Who was it who realized

They could take the slogan from a gym & slap it on a fast food

Franchise with staggering success as people thrilled

To the odd disjunction?

We have these answers. It's in the data.

Can I find out which meteorologist came up with "wintery mix"?

Of course. More meaningless, the better. Odd thing

About meaning tho: I stare at a piece of avant-garde dance

For an hour, some early Lucinda Childs, and of course

Yes, I'm riveted, but I find myself coming up with—what?

The movement of life, the inevitable dance of mating

The fact of suffering? I do wonder, sometimes, if

True understanding comes from living with a mystery,

Being with it, with no understanding of it.  
Science tells us that this world and all that we know  
Is a cosmic anomaly, that the rest of our universe  
Is probably a sterile expanse of dead matter  
Not merely indifferent to life, but hostile to it:  
It is our world and the phenomena of life  
Consciousness, the self, the I  
Which are the errors. This is precisely why we must not ever allow  
Ourselves to enjoy a stitch of pleasure. Every reason given  
To have hope, joy, and idealism  
To sing the animals, sing the weather, be with the world  
Must be abandoned.

For most people it's not so important to distinguish between  
That which can be proven and that which cannot, or  
Between reality and fantasy. If it's experienced, it's real.  
This is a tremendously liberating attitude because it radically  
Levels everything. If you are a quantum physicist,  
You believe in something mystical that we cannot see.  
You a Christian? Believe in something mystical that we  
cannot see. We, on the other hand, attempt to make  
Something non-mystical that you *can* see.

For most of human history, the word magic has referred to any  
Human activity that can't be grasped or explained:  
Alchemy, divining, unnatural charisma, knowledge itself.  
After the rise of institutionalized science  
Much of what was called magic dwindled away.  
We might not understand what makes an airplane stay aloft,  
But we are aware that an explanation exists. The universe itself

emerged from nothing

But you wouldn't call it a magic universe. At least not  
If you have faith in science's unending chains  
Of imbricated explanations. After the introduction of  
Institutionalized science and  
The spread of institutionalized religion and  
The dissolution of magic as a coherent category,  
Art was the only area of human activities that was all about  
Making something out of nothing.

Not true! Said my other part. Most people don't know  
That today money is literally created out of thin air.  
Stand a spell in MoMA's garden to  
Regard the Citi Building, and the Financial Times:  
    sentinels looking after  
The Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Sculpture Garden.  
Suddenly feeling such respect! Right? And  
So used to *scorning* corporations! Seeing it now, however, as  
An edifice someone built, like an art career... See,  
That is the business mindset right there:  
Unconditional respect for accomplishment. Never mind  
It's morally dubious, or just silly, like, well, if someone  
Became the queen of some useless widget. The edifice is all.  
We recognize the individual struggle and effort of Will as  
The central component of being a master.

As an artist do you think you go through periods of expansion  
And contraction, in a natural pattern like the seasons,  
Like a cyst awaiting spring rains?

## *The Whole Enchilada's an Addict*

Having the attention of all the other kids at the cafeteria table  
I am half in light  
That means one hand is hot, the other cool.  
(This is how we are on the inside, the real inside.)  
Gives me an idea (I'm addressing the whole table now)  
How 'bout we slide a fiber-optic camera up in a dying man  
Just a tiny camera, thin like a horse hair brush for individual twigs  
On a tree, or that sort of detail work, right on  
Up the man's asshole into the digestive system, and press record.  
Camera has a small but sufficient light source  
With a tritium battery.  
U keep recording when the guy dies, say maybe  
Two months, three months, a half year? Go!  
Streaming insane footage of all the decay inside, up  
In the body cavity, extracting  
The interior, broadcasting to see who wins.  
But who would watch a six-month long film? *Ha ha*, you see,  
We digitally speed it up. Tint the footage, retouch it,  
Give it some crazy-ass lighting,  
Pull a bump map and light it up in some crazy CGI scenario,  
Fucking sci-fi landscape, crazy shit rippling out  
On every surveillance angle, rip it out  
Like an alien planet or some shit, dimension of love unknown.  
Right, and everything's gigantic when you're  
Standing in the game—  
(It went from video to game just like that, yes, and the  
whole cafeteria was watching)  
—Just looking around, it's like you're a tiny character

In the middle of a giant plate of pancakes?  
All saturated in melted fiery corn  
Everything is sodden and half-munched,  
All slumped in puddles of fake maple?  
Weird fluorescing  
Color shifts chasing each other across the surface of the pancakes  
Like data mosh circa 2K6.  
But it's not pancakes, it's, like, my man's gall bladder.  
Towering lung formations ranged all 'round  
Spongiform canyons, rotting alveolic cliffs  
Teeming with vital, blooming flora  
On some Sixties sci-fi book cover shit  
Like Seventies album covers  
Yeah, or Nineties rave fliers  
Early aughts Angelfire shit  
Late aughts Adobe welcome screens  
Postcards from the present  
Everything settling and deflating in fits and starts  
Slowly, like a massive carnival inflatable when you pop the valve  
And it possesses a slow rate of descent  
Even accounting for the acceleration of the footage  
Strange lunar winds farting out the dankest  
As the cliffs go crumpling down  
Falling towers in slo-mo  
I tell you what, let's withdraw the camera from the cavity  
At a super slow rate, so when you speed it up for gaming  
It looks like the camera's hurtling through an exploding tunnel?  
Tight, like in some old movie, when dude's running  
To escape, coming at you in a tunnel  
With a fireball chasing me—

Fucking living compression algorithm  
The air in here is choked with bizarre, drifting life forms  
On some lethal Predator shit, all swirling madness  
Fucking microbial blizzard up in here, we  
Tint all the bacteria separately, but  
A million different colors—  
That's fucking easy, I can do that. I've done that—  
Debris scenario, yeah  
Key it to some Kelly Wearstler color-ways  
A little old, from a few seasons back?  
Oh, like, retro aughts, like, Lehman Bros mid '07  
Pre-Instagram color-ways  
On the rebound.  
I can hear far-off fire doors slamming shut  
Steel on steel welded frames  
As the last cars slowly exit the parking lot and  
Tires swish on wet roads  
Violent lightning storms stagger off in the foothills  
As the soft rains take over  
And you can finally get back to sleep  
And your body's still tense from the storm?  
Kind of soundtrack streaming in trendy restaurants  
When this shit drops, pre-license that shit, who does not  
Want to see what happens after death,  
Surf it like an autistic browser,  
A pulsing, regular rhythm  
The time-lapse image of decay  
Turning into rebirth,  
A calm whisper in parting: "Goodbye, doctor."

The first moments of video would have highlighted the interaction of vodka and pills in the stomach. After several hours, things settled and the churn slowed, the liquids de-emulsified as the temperature dropped. This dark and senseless scene was barely lit by the micro-LED, and bore no resemblance whatsoever to a rave flier, it looked more like a pile of glistening pink rags in the darkness under the sink. But I'm not sure about that, because I never saw the footage, no one did. By the time his parents returned from a weekend at the cabin and triggered the important process of scouring the deceased's social media for clues, the footage had vanished. Someone had apparently accessed the camera remotely, Hoovered the footage, and bricked the camera.

With the graphic effects and enhancements they put on the decay, it was possible to squint and imagine an alien garden blooming in the ruins of an abandoned colony. You could say that this image in fact showed a library growing inside a garden (our new false science!) It was widely agreed that this would have been a revolutionary game, if we had been able to execute it properly.

## *Manager's Report*

Tonight there were five bussers on the second floor, four bussers on the third floor, and first floor's bussers did food running due to the floor being closed. However, I was pulled from second floor bussing to help the bay hosts and take drink orders. This left three people on the Tee-line and one person at the main bar.

There was an issue on the second floor with Jeremiah wondering off, leaving Jace and Jordan to bus the floor. Gunnar was asked to leave the third floor to help the second floor while Zac spoke with Jeremiah. This caused Jeremiah to work slightly harder, but he still did not want to do the closing duties that he was delegated. Aside from that, he would also take a bus cart down and leave it for others to clear.

On the flip side, Chad did very well on the third floor. Morgen, Eric, and Gunnar played to his strength and had him run bus carts to the dish-pit and back. Joseph did well bussing the main bar tables as well. He organizes the bus carts very well and could probably save us a lot of trips to the dish-pit if we could get everyone to organize the carts the way he does. Jordan did well on the second floor also, but she is more comfortable working as a food runner. She also helped clear the back dock, which Zac and Bruce checked.

The back dock was, however, mostly cleared when we discovered four or five mats that the kitchen had set outside while it was being cleaned. Jace took a picture of the mats to document it. This just added more time and frustration to the cleanup process back there.

As far as drink running goes, the bay hosts did pretty well with taking their own drinks on the second floor when they were able to. The only host that there were any issues with was Jessica Arata. She would see her drinks in the well and just expect Fon to take them as soon as possible, which is not fair to the drink runner or other hosts.

The last point that needs to be covered is the maggots under the dumpsters. Water was not effective on them tonight. Some type of repellent or killer is needed to rid the dumpsters of them.



## *Doing with Nothing*

How we doing with all that nothing? Not good, it turns out.  
For a good way around the encampment in all directions  
It's littered with unredeemed empties. Ever chuck a glass off  
In the dark, all in your cups?

So, we recently inquired about the weakness of masculine people  
For checks and plaids. Yeah,  
Torsos are drawn and quartered  
Into intersections, plots, lots, subdivisions.

You know how people are, they never use it right.  
You gotta actually make it  
So users can use it in some fucked up way  
And it's still gonna be cool.

Smiling into their laps,  
Below the table,  
Mirrors everywhere.

## *Clash of Histories*

I had five demerits so I was forced to attend a somewhat punitive PE class. Assignment: compare the relative merits of aspirational dude gizmos e.g. cameras, cars, watches (if we were to put them together in a futuristic recombinatory machine, we'd yield a yacht). Enter my best pal 2Bad, who was immediately asked to present to the group on the topic of male obsession. His voice was a ghastly spirit following us around the gymnasium, like thought control beamed from the ruins of Cydonia on the Martian plain.

"Video game soundtracks," he said, "appeared in the early 1980s, when primitive analogue oscillators allowed for the first real musical accompaniments. Previously, most of the noises emanating from the machine were isolated sound-effects layered on minimal, repetitive backgrounds, such as the menacing 'putt-putt-putt' of *Asteroids*. Today, the industry-wide use of sampling has produced a genre generally indistinguishable from commercial pop. Between these two eras, however, composers made due with the scraps of technology at hand, generating an eerily beautiful back-catalogue of obsolete approaches. I don't want to attempt a proper history of the genre, rather to make some suggestions or observations around the release of my new compilation album."

Faceless gym teacher wagged a dick to show disapproval, and the sports clan did the same, guys wagging in unison, some intoning "prop-er-histree, prop-er-histree." 2Bad ignored them and continued talking, calmly applying pomade to his hair.

"Okay, number one: the soundtracks were encoded into arcade games, disks and cartridges, and were not available beyond this context. Unlike film soundtracks, then, video game

music was inseparable from its original medium. Composers had to assume a transience for their work, since game systems changed rapidly and the games themselves were often discarded or forgotten. By the same token, this medium-specificity assured a well-defined audience, constituted largely of adolescent and teenage boys.

Number two: structurally, the genre presents unique limitations. A track must be energetic but not distracting, the consummate 'background music'. It need not follow a standard musical trajectory, since it must be capable of looping ad infinitum, allowing players as much time as needed with a given screen or level. Because of this, many of the album tracks start abruptly or quickly peter out, their duration determined by the programmer who removed them from the circuits. For this reason, many of the tracks must be considered extracts or samples of larger and arguably infinite compositions."

The chants of "proper history" were getting louder, and some of the sports players were getting more aggressive with their dick-wagging. 2Bad soldiered on as if he'd heard and seen nothing.

"Three: dictated by a game's theme, the songs reference vernacular musics such as horror soundtracks, carnival music, and vaguely ethnic genres. However, even as a song may sound like, say, 'Asian music', it's not clear that the composer knew much about the idiom. In any case, this is irrelevant if a listener gets the shorthand; in this there is a similarity to advertising jingles, which also quickly supply complex discursive cues to a broad audience, with little concern for authenticity.

Four: while today's computers and game consoles can reproduce entire sampled bands, these older soundtracks

were programmed, not played in the traditional sense. They have always existed solely as strings of numbers, and do not derive from analogue or 'real world' signals. At the time, this was uncommon among commercial pop music, which relied heavily on microphone recording. At times, the game music's reliance on programmed mathematical progression suggests classical composition."

"I'm going to stop you there," said the gym teacher. "This is supposed to be a physical education class. We need to talk product." The sports players were restless, and some started intoning, "product or it didn't happen." 2Bad shook his head in minor annoyance. "I do have product," he said. He picked up his bag, a Kevlar-impregnated mesh satchel with suede fringe dangling from a corner, and rooted out a handful of cassettes, which dudes snapped up greedily.

"By giving away this playlist," he said, "I'm enacting the healthy corporate strategy of uprooting an 'underground' or otherwise obscure cultural artifact and exposing it to a broader audience."

"Good," said the gym teacher. "The cultural class should support the useless class."

So much artistic production, I thought, is just a vaguely anthropological research into shit the artist thinks is cool, some subculture, usually, but really, artists, why bother? Why are you any different from some corporation popping out a quick and dirty playlist of music, or a series of short videos about a deracinated subculture, produced to advertise a new kind of umbrella?

"Hold up, son," said the gym teacher, halting 2Bad with a raised palm. "How do fans play into all this?" This elicited a wave of muttering. Next to 2Bad, a sports fan nodded and said, "Yeah,

just take that fuckin' cock, cut it off and fuck the stump, push the inside out through the pee-hole."

"Yeah," joined in another guy, "Just push that shit through the hole. Fuckin' pasta maker."

"Oh yeah," sang a third guy, "We makin' pee-sta. Pee-sta!" The response rang out, "Pee-sta-she-oh ice cream!" Widespread chanting broke out: "Ice cream! Ice cream!" Luckily, faceless teacher shut it down before someone could post a video to a surveillance site. My guy went around whacking dudes with a traffic cone and shit got out of hand for a minute.

When everything settled down, 2Bad said "Fans," like he was swishing the word around his palate. "It was fans who retrieved these songs from long-dead cartridges, tapes, and arcade machines and placed them on the internet for trade with other fans. Historically, this is a practice of hacker culture, with its credo 'information wants to be free'. Free, in other words, from corporate control. Put more romantically, this means the liberation of art from commerce. The aim of the playlist on this cassette is not to profit, rather to raise questions of access, distribution, and circulation, by reinserting these songs into the marketplace. The market is their original context, a context without which they could never have existed. The fans who mined these soundtracks and placed them on the web might object to the gesture, recognizing the labor that goes into finding and guarding the troves of popular culture. But free circulation of material on music trading sites is as legally suspect as the release of a pirated compilation, which only returns the problem to a traditional distribution model. The cover was reproduced from an album on an early offshore music site called cdcovers.cc, which was a web database of downloadable record-cover art that derived its content

from user input. When asked about the site, a lawyer for Warner Brothers remarked that it was no big deal. This was during the pre-streaming era, however, at a time when CD packaging was the industry's last line of defense, and the only added value that they were able to append to musical content."

"Point of fact," said the gym teacher, "the industry was able to recuperate everything through streaming and subscription models."

"Right," said 2Bad. "But my point is to look historically at the turn-of-the-century moment just before that."

"Oh, right. The moment when we collectively lost all naming power."

"Yes. After that point we move into the era you've identified, the streaming era. Before that point, the songs had existed solely as digital information that was locked up, essentially, in actual game cartridges and consoles. So, this marks a moment when the files were in transition. Their journey goes like this: programmed, encoded, extracted, uploaded, downloaded, finally grouped in a playlist and recorded to cassette. All the while passing through numerous data compressions and file formats. My album release wraps them in plastic and cuts them loose from their origins. In a sense, the shift of context is a liberation. On the other hand, they are stamped with the authenticity we accord genuine cultural articles, as opposed to mere electronic data. And this raises the question of how much an authentic article of culture depends on legitimization by the packaging and distribution systems of the market, or of this gym class. It's a book that has been scrawled in so many times now!"

There was scattered applause and a bit of dink-waggle, and you could sense the mass was ready to move. But 2Bad

couldn't resist calling out a few more tidbits, as a kind of epilogue. "Reyner Banham," he said, and raised his voice, throwing it towards the backs of the receding sports players. "Ever hear of him? Talking about air conditioning: 'The history of the mechanization of environmental management is a history of extremists, otherwise most of it would never have happened. The fact that many of these extremists were not registered, or otherwise recognized as architects, in no way alters the magnitude of the contribution they have made to the architecture of our time.'"

## *That's My Shit*

Dead hours: streetlights, slack drapes,  
Feel myself humming like heating in the walls.  
Woke from a nightmare about a dead teacher  
Automatically reached for my notebook, started jotting:

*Character idea for book:*

*We find a guy ("I know a guy, I got a great guy")*

*By name of Wallstreet English. (Or better, Wawstreet  
Engwish?)*

*This guy like to talk in poems, e.g.:*

*In financial modeling, we have to liken your asset*

*To some preexisting asset,*

*That's how we are able to do the model.*

*In law, we have to liken a new dispute to*

*A previously settled case*

*In order to go forward.*

*In art, we have to liken our work to a previous model, cuz*

*The 'blank canvas'*

*Is akshwee black*

*With everything every other painter ever has ever done.*

*So, let's take example from the cowpote world (we talk in*

*Misspellings, like cowpote and akshwee):*

*Many ads and cowpote brand identities often employ spare,*

*Fluid illustrations composed of scant lines, insane-stylized,*

*Just supposedly casual five-stroke sketches*

*Which are vector-laundered.*

*(You've seen this, right? Who here seen this, show of hands)  
A running figure, a sheaf of wheat, a steaming mug. Panera.  
Here, the visual paradox arises from  
Compressed expressivity  
Which nonetheless lacks expression. It's the idea of artistic  
Handiwork, super high level.  
CGI is all about light interacting with surfaces, right?  
And that's why we love it:  
It's got zero depth, but transcendent illumination, just  
Like we'd like.*

(I told you, Mr. Wawstreet English=good at speaking in poetic snappytude!)

I kept my notebook in my backpack during the school day  
It came in handy when my teacher hired me  
To do writing for her in my AdultCoach style,  
To solve the whole question  
What were the '00s all about?  
A swan dive into a warlike pool?  
A graceful tumble in the cheese?  
All the ends of the name Power?  
The young reformatted  
As GMO lime slices born already stuffed inside Coronas?  
I took out my phone and quickly posted:

*Like people who think of writing  
As compilations of sheets  
Of pressed wood-pulp impressed  
By inky steel ridges  
Bound in thick sheaves.*

## *Take Responsibility for Power*

In my job I have to wonder about stupid things:  
Why everyone is pictured smiling?  
Whence come extravagant density of fecal odors?  
Things like that.

Or I might wonder about some other scenarios like:  
What would happen...  
In a quiet room...  
Full of people concentrating...  
(A yoga class type scenario)  
And someone started to fart (couldn't help it)...  
Maybe someone looked up but most people didn't, tactfully, but:  
Fart keep going! Steady gust  
World's longest, no one can ignore, must deal  
Giggling nervous, half rise w/ look of concern:  
Is for real? Health concern? Reality asunder?

Okay, ha ha I don't actually wonder about things like that. But  
It's something I might dream up for my job.  
And who would pay for such silly research?

So, important thing to remember:  
Many men are OK with being considered assholes,  
It is a point of pride to be feared, or seen as cruel and arrogant  
Interestingly however, while a man may be proud of the fact he's  
An asshole in his field, or proud of the fact that his lumpy  
Extended relatives think he's a prick  
He's shocked to learn that his actual children believe him to be  
An actual asshole.

In other words, he is fine with being “kind of hated”  
As long as it’s part of the game plan.  
News for you though:  
That’s when my man revises the wallpaper inside his coat of  
armor  
Say something like:  
“You know, that’s just a lamentable side effect  
of raising good adults.”  
Way power works:  
pretend you wanted the liability all along,  
Even if this is perfectly obvious to everyone  
(In fact, even better.)

What’s the link between these stories?  
(And this is the kind of thing I’d explore further  
In the sorts of finished reports I turn in for liquid)  
To drive the point home:  
A pubescent boy is aghast to hear a wind escape his sphincter  
In the crowded locker room  
But turns this moment to his advantage  
Smugly grinning and gesturing crudely and  
Dudes conclude it was intentional (calculated to make us  
feel out of joint)  
And they simply do not understand, how did he finesse it?  
They bend the knee.  
What is all this, exactly?  
The power to divert the flow  
Of material history.

My backstage self is full of defecation and farting,  
Belching and nose picking,

Nibbling, sleeping, slurping, preening,  
Sullenness and regression.

I hear you. Your problem tho,  
You forgot to jack off before you went out.  
I know. I know!  
I totally came way too early  
Mad embarrassing  
But I kind of played it off. Are you into that?  
I'm Inuit. What you have to do is  
You have to take care of it before you go out  
I get ready like maybe two hours beforehand,  
Just taking care of business, it's like going to the gym  
Or something,  
Grab my phone, check Pornhub,  
Jack off cuz then you can get it up again  
But you won't come too early.

Yeoman,  
I once told this bitch I had to go, like  
Take a piss, I think we were even at the bar still  
And I went and jacked off with Meyers  
In the bathroom, which had white subway tiles. I'm like, okay  
But when I came out  
She was so fucked up alla sudden  
She wanted to go home like, immediately, so we did  
And then I couldn't get it up!  
Ochre-iced.  
Yeah so, you have to time it.  
She's his Christ.

Yeah that's what I'm telling you you have to time it  
It's like when you're at a massage and you're lying there, like—oh  
wait, no, shit too good alert, abort mission. Please don't  
Body work son  
And you're like, thinking about your grandmother or some shit—  
Damson.  
And if it was a dude?  
Oman.  
That's crazy  
Yemen.

And sometimes you whack off  
And that makes problems, this one time  
I was going to acupuncture—  
Body work son  
I jerked off right before I went out and like  
Two minutes later I'm on the table naked  
And she put a sheet down  
I was like, no worries!  
And then a little drip comes out.  
You could see it on the sheet.  
I'm like I hope she thinks it's pee.  
I once told this other one, this one time, that I had to go take a  
piss  
In the club, so I go to the bathroom and jack off  
And then fucking she opens the stall  
Right after I'm done and wants to get busy right there—  
And I couldn't get it up—  
I am a tool.  
Or when you go to the bathroom cuz they're coming

On to you but they follow you and come in  
After you and you're jerking off right  
In front of them, and they're like:  
Oh. Madhur fakir  
That's raw, yeah  
I actually once went to do that, like hole on I'ma take a piss  
And I got there and I was about to whack off  
And I realized hole on *I am*  
*The girl that followed me in.*

Do you girls like to party? As Sottsass said  
Of his work with Memphis design,  
Everything one does today is consumed  
It is dedicated to life,  
Not to eternity.

## *Talk Like a Wasp, Write Like a Jew*

*To show you have betrayal in your heart  
We're going to have you look at the king and give a big smile  
But as soon as he looks away, your smile becomes a stony glare.  
Then you look at his wife the queen  
And to show the audience you secretly love her  
We'll have you slowly break into a sly grin. You see?  
The audience witnesses everything.*

Sure, be like stupid graphic designers who forget  
That their shining, lapidary screen images will end  
Up on dull paper  
Poorly printed, logos intruding.

That's why the snappy motto we wrote  
(We the new people) goes:  
*Be a chop shop of deep thoughts and cheap shots.*

A low chuckle issued from the darkness in the center of room:  
You have all the answers but thine heart  
Is nowhere to be found.

Sure it is, said a wealthy man, just have to know how to spell it.  
It's like leafing through a magazine and seeing an ad for scotch  
(And the art collector finished his sentence) yeah, secretly  
you notice the ice in the highball glass spells  
S-E-X.

## *Being With*

What is oblivion? It sounds so appealing, just the word:

“O-bliv-ee-on”

Fire of my loins, coin of my realm, et cetera.

We can maybe say what it is not. Oblivion does not mean

Pitching head first off a roof and sensing now

Everything rushing up and, bang no power no striving

No decisions.

It doesn't mean endless seas and perfect skies

In all directions, everything worldly unseen

Since now we have only the deep, with

Swells spitting in your eye

And the western sky darkening.

It doesn't mean faking like you're going for your gun

As you rush the cop.

It doesn't mean a sigh of resignation as the drugs take hold.

It is rather simple: life is being with

Oblivion means no longer being with.

When sudden senseless violence is visited upon

A rational adult citizen, lulled by a presumption of good will

On the part of the environment

He implodes, reaching the deep

Of a near-motionless, infantile state. The world has ceased

To function, he doesn't yet understand (maybe he emits

A few wheezes?) Presently, this intensity fades and soon

Man is shedding angry, outraged tears at the injustice.

His subjectivity swiftly rallies around identity “victim”

Which, in its appeal to justice and the law

Is a transitional device for regaining self-control and  
You could say, humanity.

When the orchestra comes to a stop and the performers  
Happen to be massed together, all facing outward,  
The audience feels a strong urge to clap, but the show is  
(evidently)  
Still happening.

Of course, at the end  
The key to the mystery is to be found  
In a crude drawing at the back of the shelf where we started  
Made by a child/invalid  
Old person/insane person/primitive.



## *Around 2030*

Assisting living facilities received  
The first major wave of retirees full of tattoos and piercings  
A rogue wave from the Nineties threw us a curveball. Again.

But, look, older people are so cool  
Right? Older, cultured people: So cool. Shit yeah.  
Problem with cultured people tho  
When they get older (or more experienced) is, basically  
They acquire a way of suggesting wry and funny opinions,  
Just slippin' tiny riches under the table  
That are irrelevant (or initially presented as such, yet ultimately  
fluffed by self-regard)

Ah, celeriac.  
It's been a while since I had that... So good.  
So, so good! But  
You know the problem is—  
Problem with celery root—  
The big thing with celery root—  
It has that stringy texture.  
That's the problem with celeriac.

Handsomely wealthy people cutting on incidentals:  
This isn't true wasabi  
You know,  
This is horseradish paste  
With artificial pigmentation  
Where's the shiso  
This is lettuce

Have you even ever had actual wasabi  
You grate it on a little thing, thing's  
Made out of shark skin—  
Oh, shagreen?  
Yeah, fucking miniaturized Karl Springer end table  
Hovering over my surf clam.  
This could be you in 2030!

We have recently made an *extreme* effort to link all this silliness  
To the tendency of CGI cameras to present the viewing self  
As a spirit or gas capable of slippin' on thru  
Not only tightly enclosed spaces (such as drains or keyholes)  
But solids, e.g. walls. The self as ghost, in other words.  
"Self Portrait With Ghosts," 2014,  
UV-cured inkjet on aluminum composite, viewed  
On a proffered screen in a nice apartment full of drinks  
Where people no longer acquainted with attention  
Are duking out some big fat repartee like  
I suspect people actually like to be surveilled  
They like Sauron's eye  
In their pocket, it grants value, and  
If you're wearing a tee says anything I've ever heard of  
Mightswell be CBGB, Thrasher, or some dumsh  
Marketers, we demand tees absolute inscrute, that one guy?  
Made bank selling Kevlar tees say *I'm Gay* produced only  
In toddler sizes?  
Yes... Fucking mad unavailable best-seller steez  
Lasted but a single afternoon by the registers at Whole Foods  
Crust punks lined up early, finna knit hovels from that ish.

## *A Bunch of Us Put Together a History*

It started when my therapist texted me a poem (heard you  
like poems):

*Winter air effect the flesh: now I  
Grasp your split orb, these  
Outer buns are ice-cold in my palms, with a sprinkle of  
Goose pimples, like puddles in the rain,  
But inside this central hole, it be v. hot,  
Like a McDLT (google it)*

I haven't had sex yet, and with this position come  
Tiny scorns: all those adults gone mad with sex, desire & lust  
Which represents for them power, and love, and everything.  
So adult that kids can't see it,  
So adult that it's seen as the prime animator and motivator.  
In the next stage I hear a voice, an old silent film actress  
Turns to me from a hoary classic based on adapting  
Hooded eyes and a slinky slip to  
A palm on my sailor's cheek:

This is what there is, and that's the way it is  
And you can't stand in the way of it  
And if we, meaning all humanity for all time  
Say it's important,  
It's important.

Then her face turns into a grinning skull,  
Like you see from time to time.

## *Step and Repeat*

We're afloat in a sea of charms, people are madly piecing together charm bracelets before the whole table turns over. The things normal people usually take to be ordered and rational, which are the same things a lot of cultural critics decry, are in fact completely nonsensical and irrational.

What do we "kind of" like? Nothing that looks particularly good or bad. You know, we are disinclined to be for or against. Forget logic, or sense, or the choices on offer. We like minimal techno in the proper Berlin style and bland, faceless apparel, airport wear, really, and 3D printing, which means carefully accreted objects possessing an unremarkable sameness, chunky nutri-bars of objects that approach the look and feel of ray-traced CGI objects from the eighties. We like how crappy additive manufacturing is, it's shitty, it won't last, it's nothing new. We appreciate the way everything in our life approaches a condition of narcotized plasticity; this is cool, and interesting, and cool for the second time, as the echo comes back. Echoing is important because it is detached expression. Detachment is important, in the sense of a detachment from the stories we tell ourselves about who we are, and what we're like. You say something and pick it up off the floor and observe it dispassionately, like everyone's wrong-headed fever dream of AI.

We may enjoy 3D printing and 3D rendering, but we don't aspire to be 3D, quite the opposite. We like flat. Harbor no shadows, be a stranger to reflection. We prefer the undifferentiated flatness of random noise. Yes, of course you can generate abstract paintings from the noise of mistakes, accidents, and process, but more than that, whole lifestyles can arise from noise. Rustle up a

life from apparently random accident. “Let me just whip up a little something in the kitchen, nothing special, just a little improvisation, a dog’s breakfast, scarf it down to forestall comment.”

We are familiar with artistic explorations of banality, emptiness, depletion, etc., which seem to focus their passive aggressions on the image. (Everyone is born into an empty room.) But every image is facile, something quiet and restful. Bigger question: how to make an art that isn’t interested in the image and its politics? It may be true that images are one of the pivotal regulators of contemporary society, whether in advertising, art, or the cultural programming that falls some place between the two. Should there not be, however, regulators of modern life which fall outside the realm of the image, which instead have to do with codes and processes lacking any visibility? Like most liberals I prefer questions to solutions. The mission of a virus is not to kill its host, but to preserve its host, and thus itself. So let us leave that question unanswered!

To understand us, think of a moving assemblage of laser prints depicting product shots of garments covered with step and repeat logos. Step and repeat refers to the way cowpote logos fill the inside of an envelope, or cover the vinyl backdrop installed behind a celebrity entering a benefit. My friends are the security pattern inside my envelope. My friends are step and repeat. My circle of friends makes up a complex step-and-repeat pattern shimmering all around, a semi-transparent scrim that enfolds me as I walk down the street, a little human moving in lower levels, elevators rising and falling, curtains parting and closing in endless, soothing patterning. Step and repeat puts together ultramodern and archaic. As Don Cherry said, our goal is to combine “the mystical fashion, the popular fashion, and a classical way.”

## *Idea for Dope Track*

Most of the world's printed matter disdains punctuation: advertisements and signage, warnings and commands, packaging, traffic directives. Punctuation belongs to poetry.

True, but writers, O what poor tools we have!

Do we say,

“Yes. Just one. Put it there.”

Or,

“Yes, just one, put it there.”

Or,

“Yes... just one... put it there.”

I'm sorry, but isn't that already in the system?

Pardon?

Sorry, can you just get it from the system?

That's not the way we do it,

You have to write it here, and I give you a little receipt

And then you have to hold on to it.

Right, but if it's already in the system.

I'm not sure, I mean no, that's not how we do it.

You have to take the receipt, that's just the way we do it here.

Well, okay, right, but I did see you put it in the system,

Right? I mean, so I'm not sure why I have to take a receipt?

Won't it be in the system next time?

I'm sorry, sir.

Okay, no, *I'm* sorry.

I just thought that once it's in the system.

I stepped back, able now to discern a more gradual pulse  
A steady sine-wave cycle, thousands of years  
Beauties and horrors unrecorded and unremembered,  
Scraps rent apart, far flung, a bit of stone,  
And bone turned to stone.

This pulse mirrors music's recent flight  
From choruses and bridges, those relics of war-era pop,  
In favor of techno's one-two code of pure difference  
The incessant need to register quick change—  
Shuffle it up and look to the next even if you know  
Exactly what's coming.  
Noise music plus house music that would be dope,  
Squalid plus pallid, squalls and then a pall. Just needs some moon  
dust on top. Maybe bumping that track as you review  
All the first letters you've just written  
And spy a hidden acrostic.

Keyboards are percussive instruments  
And since much music today is keyboard-based,  
Most music you hear preserves the slight, barely perceptible  
Movement of a fingertip striking a key and triggering an event,  
Which registers in my system.

## *The Guy's Son Grows Up to be a Curator*

Basically this shit is colonialist in spirit.  
Summon your notes from the far corners of the house.  
As evidence, look to the early curatorial wonder tradition:  
Travel, connoisseurship, discovery, connections,  
Mystery, all salted with a dash of education.  
And then in the Nineties  
You get the boom in fine arts curatorial programs.  
Though at the start they're mostly women,  
As if it were a branch of art history,  
Which it was, kind of.

In the Nineties, the future of fashion was concerned  
With anomie, melancholy, urban drifting, sex-play,  
Effortlessness above all  
    (If you know you're being sexy, it's not sexy.)  
They—the fashion people—may have wanted to achieve  
    something they imagined  
To be similar to the apparent effortless cool  
Of black American free jazz players,  
And Jamaican reggae musicians.  
They might have been unaware that boho men of all stripes  
Often perform with ease only when supported  
By a working woman with a stable income.

Why give 'em such a hard time, chided my extra part,  
We are just chasing the American dream,  
It's not anyone's fault it leads into the Martian desert.  
It's not their fault the human gas chamber was invented in

America, way back in 1919,  
Or that it was the Americans  
Who took the emerging scientific doctrine of racialist  
anthropology and baked it out, and  
Turned national hero Henry Ford's  
Anti-Semitic tract into a best seller (it was only later  
This book became an important touchstone for the bad guys.)  
I moodily conceded the point.

I decided that ultimately these people  
Were like the food served in first class:  
Obviously better than coach  
And therefore elevated according to some relativizing principle  
Of insecurity, but still inferior to what you'd get  
At a restaurant of your choice,  
Back home.

I looked around the lobby lazily and posted:  
Like married straight adults for whom sexual desire now slumbers  
Except in response to direct appeals to their vanity.

In the end, it's all just music from somewhere else in the house.

## *Hold Up, You Talking About British Knights?*

Why do they love air conditioning and the movement of fans  
That make artificial winds, and huge quantities of ice  
In their drinks,  
These Americans of the flaming interior?

One must look to the past, the ancient ways, the old runes,  
To understand the present. That's why we base most of our movies  
On older franchises.

I'm resuscitating a defunct and risible sneaker company  
Of the New Jack Swing era to embark on a dusky series  
Of collaborations with well-known contemporary artists.  
We take a series of paintings, slice up the canvas  
—under your strict supervision, of course—  
And stitch that to the outside of the sneaker  
(Quarter panel of duck 'tween midsole and tongue)  
So people can literally walk a mile in your shoes.

The right attitude to have when one's artistic creation is attacked  
Is, why should I be expected to defend it?

Late 20th-century artists were generally allergic  
To new technologies of labor and efficiency, favoring  
The honesty of grit, dirt, and chance, as if  
We praised poverty and imprecision and the appearance of  
Not caring. These things were very finely considered. Yes, of course  
We are interested in punk rock and free jazz,  
And general messiness,  
But in fact we are interested only in a controlled messiness.

That's what we like: controlled anarchy  
That's why straw men tout graffiti as a model,  
The projection, upon a controlled surface of bristling urbanism  
Of the quality of imagination, the clash of sophistication  
With primitivism (and all that is not said there)  
The apparently haphazard nature  
Above all, the framing.  
If you can manage to frame it this one way  
You are then able to usher in a lot of rogue operatives  
Who may use the slipstream to enter surreptitiously.

Forgetting that, what we like is an archaeology of things  
That never were cool,  
Expressions of a risk-averse cowpote mentality  
Embedded in a once-popular vernacular,  
Now defunct and incoherent. We never would have gone back  
And started listening to grunge or acid house or jungle,  
Instead, we found New Jack Swing, from around the same time.

Forget the movement from the center to the margins,  
Intention to chance, certitude to instability, wholeness to  
fragment.

By 9/11 a sea change was under way  
Digital tools were no longer just the province of  
New media drones, technicians, hackers, miscellaneous  
CompSci grads, the stigma slowly lifted,  
Artists felt free to gaze deeply into the abyss,  
Sighting the critical potential in flashing an iPhone,  
Opening a laptop,  
Settling into the role of symbol manager

Invest this dumb shit with knowing fire  
Like the Stoics who believed there to be a ball of fire  
At the center of our wretched selves.  
In fact it is clear that the objects and ideas being created today  
Are quite possibly superior to those of the past.  
Not to deny the value of all that has come before,  
Rather to insist on the positive qualities of the expanded field,  
The sheer quantity of design, business ideas, marketing,  
garments.

If I were a company looking to distinguish my product,  
Or for that matter an artist seeking strategy for same  
I would think hard about how individual people  
Make themselves stand out from the pack each day  
On this sloped plane. Weird names?  
Nonsense? Crazy spellings of known words? Bad design?  
Abuse of familiar codes and vernaculars?  
Purposeful awkwardness?

To be institutionalized is to be removed from society,  
But at least that gives you an idea what society is.

An institution commands you to resent it,  
For which you resent it all the more.

## *Rereading*

You know how it goes,  
You mean to say “I was reading *Harry Potter*,”  
And it somehow comes out “I was rereading *Harry Potter*.”  
Always use the verb reread.  
Not only does it imply you’re already familiar with the book,  
It identifies you as the sort of person who *circles back*  
A rare and subtle quality.  
“I was rereading *Harry Potter*” suggests “we” all passed  
Through some educational vale of tears during which we ingested  
                  books, but this was only the preliminary stage  
In a longer process,  
Only the first of several multiple stomachs  
In a digestive system that requires we shepherd these spheres  
On a journey from the vestibule into the great room, and then  
Onward to the mud room,  
Eventually to be deposited on the back porch in great bundles  
                  tied with string.

Note: the verb ‘re-read’ could be potentially replaced with ‘re-buy,’ for  
Re-buying is also a valuable peristaltic process.

I suddenly looked up from *Harry Potter*, and  
Out the window of the train. We were shuddering through  
Amtrak’s Northeast Corridor, a trough  
Scattered with busted industrial detritus, rust and  
Wrack from the headlong passage of a century’s worth of  
Overdevelopment, giving way to the logic  
Of big boxes, rails and trucks, tracks, loops

Spools and bolts and cables, everything brown under the sun.  
This clunky logic was summoned from the spell of rail freight.

The fossil record revealing the life of the dinosaurs is a great novel,  
illuminating tales of the life that preceded us. The novel, however,  
has come to us in fits and starts. The writing is crabbed and nearly  
rubbed away. It's no accident that in the nineteenth century it was  
imperial England who forged ahead in the paleontological field,  
or that in the twentieth century it was the USA, and that today it  
is China who scores the best digs, best sites, choicest bones.

Some kind of chronicle also applies to the rise of plastics.  
The people of a dim postwar age were plagued by weird  
    blooming allergies and cancers  
Backsliding ailments which they had called down and coaxed  
From walls of bags, bottles, tubes and packages. "Circling back"  
    as a national mistake. Randomly,  
We have continued this project full-on. A project  
Of re-digestion, ushering our precious spheres out the back door  
With our social media.  
A national program for the distribution of synthetic materials,  
Vanishing into the vape.

## *Rogue's Castle*

There I was, back in the wealthy rogue's house. No matter where I found myself, he had already established a fort.

It was early in the evening and I roamed the place with a Mason jar of rum and ginger beer, trying to get the layout. I passed standing brass censers of smoldering cardamom and concrete basins of lemongrass-scented oil. The overall architectural impression was fearsome rationality and uptightness. Supposedly the building had been put together by master craftsmen from Zurich. After all, no islanders—or Americans, for that matter—were capable of constructing a precise, Olympic-size pool from the shitty local concrete. Breezeways cut across most rooms, leading to dark, unglazed portals to the Caribbean night and the insistent trilling of tree frogs.

The first guests were stranded here and there, checking out the villa, poised respectfully with hands behind backs like people in a museum. Against all the stark concrete the wealthy partygoers made striking tableaux. There was a Chinese entrepreneur, and an ex-Mossad security consultant going on about Tora-Bora, and a nerdy writer from Lagos. A middle aged white guy wearing a fleece quarter-zip and drivers was shaking his head mildly: Starbucks? You say it's a coffee shop? A man was saying to another You missed a spot while brushing his own jaw with a fingertip, a gesture that his partner imitated in slow motion, which caused him to do it again, nodding. There was a debate about which was worse, the first or second day of jet lag. I'm telling you, he's got it really bad, and it's the third day. Okay, okay, but

my thing is, I don't care how wretched you are as long as you die like a holy man. My thing is, live every day like it's your birthday. My thing is, just make sure you live in a house full of good places to hide. My thing is, there's no barber on earth who's so expensive that you won't have to go back for a touch up, maybe five weeks later. Can you imagine my thing? Uh - food? Yes, I'm opening a Brazilian spot, me and the other investors are probably going to call it Favela. Oh, my Colombian coffee joint is called Cartel. I've got a soul food place name of Tarpaper Shack. I'm finishing up first round financing for a new soccer league, so far we've got Eritrea, Palestine, Northern Ireland, Kurdistan, Tibet, East Timor, Corsica... Who else? Oh, smart. There'll be more, for sure. Very smart. Hold on, what time is it—I think there's something I'm supposed to take. Is it morning? I'm supposed to take something at breakfast. It's evening, pretty sure. Oh, then I definitely have to take something!

An amused older white guy like myself lurked outside the kitchen wrapped in rags and capes and hats, wearing beat-up espadrilles without socks. We know him by sight, he's the Dark Hippie, the Bad Hippie, the drugs gone bad and the fever dream all shriveled up. He was originally that lucky one guy who got in on that secret auction staged after Apple headquarters closed, full of vintage sterling candlesticks entombed in decades of wax, chipped signage in Basque, spindly faux-bois lawn furniture, chunky amateur Lucite sculptures from the Sixties, mismatched pre-war cufflinks with inlaid lapis lazuli, all lots branded with the Apple logo, for resale on the open market at inflated prices. But after he made off like a bandit he plunged too deep into the mirror.

Spend a moment with a bald, racially ambiguous giant in what looked like a toddler's onesie, upon inspection it was fine linen corduroy, paired with sarcoline Moroccan babouches, a portrait of a man sleepwalking through a drizzle of dividends. The giant had a halting reedy voice and he stooped slightly to make himself heard as he discussed a recent Young Thug concert he'd been to, which recalled a Run-DMC show he'd seen in Queens in the early Eighties. Without yielding space for comment he offered the nugget that rap music was a brilliant way of dealing with historical material, a tool for synthesizing events and writing history, an oral tradition that emerged from technology, all tied to the absolute contemporaneity of slang, race, and current experience, and this made it crucial for a community that had always been denied historical continuity. And then there was the poetry of disjunction, fragmentation, et cetera. But what was happening now, the giant wondered, nodding slightly at his cocktail. I said something about a Zen attitude. This inspired the giant to tell another soft-voiced story that could potentially crackle on the page, apparently the early-morning prep guys in the falafel joint under the ashtanga studio were disturbing everyone's practice with extremely loud music, causing all manner of bad vibes. People who spent ten hours a week cultivating good will were seething with class- and race-based resentment. So the giant looked into it and discovered that the prep staff was cranking the restaurant's front-of-the-house system because it was the only way they could hear anything way back in the kitchen, so he bought them a boom box, problem solved.

I wondered about the guests at this remote stronghold: what was their connection to one another, or to anything at all? I wouldn't

have been surprised to learn that the soft-spoken giant was born and raised in the West Indies, on these very slopes, to impoverished local people, i.e. he was a black man, and his name was Guylee Squails, but money had synthesized and re-wired all that difference. Take nothing for granted, I concluded, not this far out in the most distant reach, at the edge of the map of money. On the one hand, it was absurd to contemplate a billionaire in a one-sie gifting a radio to a group of Ecuadorian kitchen staff, with a Namaste dip and a Hamza hand. On the other hand, this story was actually impressive: he had solved the problem in an easy, selfless way that hadn't required threats or raised voices. We're definitely going to need a smaller map.

The rogue's family had done a good job of departing from the social, I thought, or at least had oriented themselves so that all contact with the outer world was entirely on their own terms. A juggernaut of blood-lines, finance, charisma, and judgment, hunkered down for the Apocalypse in a residence like the set for a videogame with militarized undead. How wonderful, I mused, to be able to afford to live beyond cynicism! This scenario was built for little white girls who come back to school from island vacations with beaded cornrows, maybe just four, nice locks, yeah, we're thinking they might be hair curators. Back we go to a house full of good places to hide.

## *Theory for Spray Paint and Razors*

Some boys talking shit  
In my middle school cafeteria, apparently one made a bundle  
Off an app to locate the oldest cafe, or bar  
Or restaurant in proximity,  
He grasped that people pine for patina and decay,  
Old wrecks, a jukebox stuffed with second-wave indie rock  
From the aughts. The smartest of the boys divined  
That you could hold all of culture in a single shot  
Of a fleshy appurtenance entering a fleshy cavity,  
Short and action-packed  
Like a reel of early cinema.

Why do we need a theory that encompasses  
    Aerosol paint  
And sharpened bits of metal?  
In order to purchase either of these items  
You must be 21 years old. Certain items have been held high,  
Out of reach of the youth. These are social 'hot' points,  
But they live next door to one another  
In the local hardware store.  
One supposedly harms the social body,  
One supposedly damages the human body.

Other guys at another table started a discussion  
About whether it was better to work out drunk or hung-over, so  
The table broke into factions. See,  
Working out drunk gives a person lots of extra energy, or  
When you're drunk you're liable to overestimate your strength

And get injured,  
And besides, working out hung-over  
Got a sort of ragged nobility, like  
“Just work through the pain,” some boys say  
(The new McDonald’s slogan, acquired from a bankrupt  
Yoga franchise, we’re taking it for test drives,  
See how it holds up),  
This guy worked out with a trainer  
Doing the adult video performer program, tell you about this guy?  
Guy’s like a porn site,  
                  over-excited  
Give him the wrong attention and  
He’s bursting with pop-ups,  
What the fuck kind of training, adult video performer? Okay,  
A chain of boutique gyms out in, uh, pretty sure the  
San Fernando, focused on endurance and stamina  
Bulking up the glutes and thighs, lots of pikes and bridges,  
And no-handed pushups.

Dudes said “word” in a conciliatory tone, their  
Conversation slipped into Nineties hip hop vernacular, you  
Sensed a subtle power shift,  
This language was a form of sublimated self-loathing.  
Another little guy  
Ventured that the military could get into making yoga gear, but  
Everyone laughed, no really, the army could start making  
                  streetwear,  
But with bank logos on the liners? Fabricated  
Out of canvas so you can stretch it, put it on the wall.  
Baklava, it means “handbag,” that’s a menswear product,

Vintage Albanian mafia balaclava, made from a hundred layers of  
Phoebe Philo dough, same way  
Plywood is a wood product, and  
Bacon is a pork product.

Also? A worrisome new disease  
Pretty sure it's making its way through the populace  
Where you stop identifying with actors and sports players  
And figures from Hollywood and TV and,  
Basically, you never know who won. Genius!  
Oscars, Grammys, Emmys,  
Super Bowl, Olympics,  
Video awards,  
Reality TV: the only thing that matters with live events  
Is that someone win.

We applaud effort alone,  
We clap for the broad smile of the dancers  
As they take their bows, after hours of exertion:  
This is the performance.

## *I Discovered My Old Family Movies*

Desire changed in the late Sixties,  
Design changed in the late Nineties.  
We have come to understand that time, despite ourselves.  
For a long time it was unknowable, a series of photographs  
From the other side of the chasm. But now we understand:  
It was a kind of lifestyle awakening, only  
One we have redone since, redone better:  
Refinement, our god.

Of course, there is nothing that has been done  
That you could actually ever do again.  
You can't ride the rails,  
A footloose grasshound squinting in her first rays  
And sweet sagey smells streaming about like tiny bubbles off  
Trailing oars pulling lake water, and  
You will never be able to locate a tacky strip  
Full of low-slung cars  
With a thin weedy verge with slack people with no experience  
On their faces.

After a burst of video static, this white lady with blue dreadlocks  
And glittering face adornments and a pliant tabby cat and  
Gold grillz appeared.  
Suddenly aware the camera is recording  
(Red dot frenzy is the name of the disease)  
She dropped the cat, turned,  
Snatched a brass rod,  
And struck the Tibetan bowl.

Over a piercing, diminishing tone she addresses the lens:  
The cyberdelic computer movement is very different  
From the human potential and personal growth movements  
Of the Seventies. We're seeing a whole new way of thinking  
With the world wide web  
Allowing people to connect and share as never before.  
To us, technology is no longer the enemy.

We are deadhead computer hackers  
We are acid-ravers  
We are techno-pagans, zippies, new age cyber-voyagers.  
I would personally classify myself  
As an urban neopagan wiccan  
Who right here will program a Mandelbrot set  
Which generates fractal patterns that play my keyboard  
Into a multi-megabyte computer via MIDI,  
As I read a hyper-linked  
Deconstructed, electronic novel  
And conjure up magickal realms to learn that  
A symbol is useful only insofar as it teaches you to transcend it.

Next movie [A white-haired man in a book-lined study,  
direct address]:

What is so intriguing about our era in history  
Is that the quest for knowledge and understanding  
Has seen an amazing blend of shamanic techniques  
Psychedelic drugs and the international boom in resurrecting  
Pre-Christian, pagan, totemic and Hindu traditions,  
While at the same time, with these things  
You have a situation where you can walk around

In realities of your own construction. We are very much on a threshold. We must be prepared to learn all we can From a symbol, and abandon it, and move on.

As he finishes his thought, in marches the pulse of a TR808 drum machine as we emerge to an endless rippling ocean with the lustrous texture of ray-traced computer graphics, every solid volume a softly appealing packaged candy, and above the whitecaps hovers a melting LED display that reads 1993, which quickly advances toward “the year 2000” (the only damn self-important year that everyone must preface with the phrase “the year”) at which point the sky flashes orange and purple and a flurry of shrill orchestra-stabs joins the beat and the clock morphs into a skull flapping its jaw while a robot voice repeatedly intones “End time.” I pressed stop on the home movies and turned away, sighing resignedly.

We saw it coming after 9/11. We waited for it after 2008. We waited after 2011 and Occupy, we waited after 2013 and Black Lives Matter. Still waiting.

In a way, you could say that we’re finally returning to the pagan era, whispered my extra part. Why do you think there is so much sickness and dying now? The medieval era rolling in over us, a heavy pall of smog, you don’t even realize it’s here.

## *Mark of Empire*

One time we made a billboard with a photo of two braided-up white girls, hips cocked, faces sloping back to expose the nostrils, eyes hooded, shoulders padded, caricatures of criminal nonchalance. The posturing and contrivance was pretty good. Consider the saying “the emperor has no clothes.” To the children it was telling that this saying, which might be used for many purposes, concerned clothing and its reception. Many people found fashion and advertising to be facile and obvious, infuriatingly so.

Images like this were so obvious in their appeals and so inherently silly that some secret people figured that a culture of appreciation of such things amounted to a self-deluding mutual masturbation society: the girls thought they were sooo cool, the photog thought she was sooo cool, the ad agency thought it was sooo cool, the clothes thought they were sooo cool, and anyone who took the ad or the clothes seriously by extension thought that they themselves were sooo cool.

The secret person’s pride in seeing through all this nonsense contributed to a sense of certainty that entire professions—editors, stylists, journalists, photographers, curators, art directors—as well as whole cities like NYC, London, and LA, were essentially frivolous and self-important, nothing but packs of handsome dogs racing in circles, endlessly yapping and sniffing butt. There was some truth to this, of course, but it completely missed an important point, the understanding of which was the key to unlocking the codes of culture: one must acknowledge the artifice and nonetheless allow oneself to be seduced. This was about a knowing, total

submission. Trust, surrender, and receive. This was the process of magic disavowal by which you went deeper into exploration and play and the worlds beyond. It was related to the idea of camp, but it operated on a far broader and more mass-cultural level, one that took in not simply the mean, low, and banal, but a wider sweep of all culture, including contemporary high art. The unsecret people grasped the appeal of the ad we made with those two teens. They got the appeal of fashion and art more generally, the unsecret people. They were aware of all aspects of the production, they knew that looking cool comes in spite of looking like you think you're sooo cool, and maybe even because of it. You only had to think back to the cool kids in the cafeteria to understand that in this realm the only thing that matters is *going for it*, fuck the transparency of your motives, no one cares because motives are universal: sex, money, power, respect. There's no shame in a transparent motive if it means a good performance. The shame consists in attempting to conceal your shared and universal motives. In school the dorks were the ones who hid their motives, glowering while the girls flocked to some posturing asshole, like "Don't they see through him?" Yes, we do, that's what allows us to find an asshole charming, we admire the effort, it's all about performance. If a culture couldn't get over its immature desire to keep images "honest"—simple and declarative and above suspicion—all art would become hyperrealistic, while all advertising would tend toward soft-core pornography.

Of course, this was more or less what happened in regimes that needed to keep their imaginations under tight wraps, e.g. Fascism, Stalinism, and probably heterosexual masculinity. Yes, straight men, it sounds like a joke but it was true, after all it

was women and gay men who were traditionally the ones who appreciated fashion's mastery of the unhidden fold, they were the ones who looked at an ad, or a piece of art for that matter, and sensed how it was made and thus what it desired, but didn't stop there, rather going with it, enjoying the play of knowing and not knowing, and knowing that you don't know, and not knowing that you do know: all the pleasures of seeming. By contrast many straight men placed metaphysical power in the act of being 'honest'—could it be the purest possible expression of being?—and too bad for them, because the idea behind culture, including ads as well as art, was to introduce greater complexity and more codes, thereby affording more play, increased communication, and greater pleasure. And what a shame, since many feminine-gendered activities, like hair and makeup and costume, were essential arenas for playing out identity, for trying on selves, for asking how shall I be, and straight men were thus denied the gamble, denied the possibility of being with a symbol in order to transcend it.

Looking around from my vantage here in the boutique hotel lobby I see straight men everywhere in pairs or small groups, sharing earnest opinions, arguments, and evidence, attesting as to what is the best, the most practical, most reasonable, most sensible, most lucrative. Who will benefit, what is the shortest route, what is the best way, how will it win. How do the numbers sound? Meanwhile, another logic rules. Over in Frankfurt Airport, my two white guys in their fifties were rocking slightly on their Mephistos and debating the best route to Dortmund, while above them and through them coursed the voice of Rihanna. It needn't be her, it could be nearly anything, and

that's the point: just as these men find new topics, another logic will be there, in what they think of as the background, omnipresent and overriding.

Picture another advertisement we made together, the one wrapping the plywood hoarding in front of a construction site to announce a new YSL boutique. The ad is a dense, computer-generated black and features a practically nude woman in repose, a full adult, very serious, no silliness, only seduction and repulsion. The image is at street level and has been defaced by passers-by: Neolithic attacks to the groin and breasts, modernist doodles on the face, and a shower of condemnation from the present: "This photo demeans women," "Boycott this ad company," etc.

We halted in the street to survey this scene, enjoying the feeling of being mentally tugged in multiple directions. We liked the seduction of the image, of course, the sex was what caught our single monolithic eye, the feeling of being rejected. But we also registered the material techniques, the way a lithe and hairless body was made to wrap the rough plywood of a hoarding, and we took note of the contemporary commercial printing technology, which was somehow plastickier than ever: had they flat-bed-printed some foil substrate and shrink-wrapped the whole construction site? Unclear, and thus more interesting. Then we read some of the graffiti. We appreciated vandalism and the destruction of private property and we sympathized with graffiti, not only on the level of violence, but in this particular case as a direct and unlicensed act of political commentary; dissent, really. Regardless of what you said, wasn't scrawling on a lovely

new advertisement a kind of dissent? Everyone knew that defiling new consumer goods was one of the most striking things you could do. Walking down the street in a fresh white tee-shirt on which you'd amateurishly scrawled something random in ball-point pen would be, to most people, more disturbing than any tattoo. Finally, on a discursive level, we found our secret self in accord with what the graffiti-writers were saying, at least for the most part. That is, we completely agreed with the sentiments, though we weren't sure about the stridency, because we detested moralizing, which made us want to cry out, "Damn it, why can't you just let us have a stupid moment of rejection!" But we liked even this small flicker of irritation. The scenario was perfect, all of it.

I'm so glad you could make it! Yes, but we made it together. Our world of reasons and sense was endless but horizontal, like the surface of the earth itself. Around it we went, year after year, round and round. All along there was another mad realm of waves and forces, shooting through us from all directions, radiating and ceaseless, penetrating without touch, and we sensed it just enough to keep trying to represent it through some feeble diagrams.

*It Had Crept Inside Me at Some Point & Taken Up  
Residence*

Speaking with this dark presence I had  
A brainstorm.  
Animal shelters would have better luck pitching adoptions  
To potential clients if the puppies and kittens already had  
Substantial socials. An initially bare-bones startup creates  
Funny, lovable videos of cats and dogs up for adoption  
    edited to look just amateur enough,  
Drums up a bag of hits, and after several months  
Adoptions of those particular animals go way up.  
And the shelters were understandably enthusiastic.  
But this is a test. The real plan is humans.  
I was still working out the kinks  
(I continued, pitching to a wealthy tumbler of scotch)  
But I had found that well-funded European NGOs  
And some governments over there too!  
Were willing to earmark up to 500,000 Euro if you could  
    guarantee a five percent uptick  
In international adoptions. And the work was fairly minimal:  
Send an intern to gather footage in the camps  
Feed the best clips through substantial compositing  
Do some “spin,” if you want to call it that, meaning  
You basically shoot videos of kids dancing,  
Or singing, clapping and laughing, things people want to see  
Kids do, and they become little stars online, the good ones do  
Or the happy ones, or the ones who are good at looking happy.  
Of course, a lot of the little ones look kind of similar  
I admitted, which actually helps.

Because you can kind of fudge it  
    (digitally)  
And actually we may have to, since by the time an adoption  
    comes through you can't necessarily locate a specific kid  
In a given camp, they tend to disappear. I shrugged  
Put my elbows on my knees  
Shifted forward on the wealthy rogue's couch.  
There were still kinks to be worked out, I said.  
On the other hand, (adopting "reasonable" tone of *New Yorker*  
    mag) by all accounts people are happy,  
As it turns out. And apparently it benefits the kids as well.  
Moreover, an observer could be forgiven for thinking that  
The governments are happy too,  
If one may use such a word in regards to a fundamentally  
    emotion-bare entity like a social structure! So,  
There are no losers, not  
*Per se.*

## *Jesus Located His Kingdom in Heaven, Not on Earth*

That was what was so radical!

I know.

As an aside, I should note that it's the Buddhists  
Who have presented the best vision of heaven  
Which is to say nothingness and no place and no one,  
In other words, heaven's got nothing  
As opposed to hell, which has got everything.  
Alas, this isn't a very glamorous cake.

Well what is heaven? Answer: we're coding it.

The history of technology has been a scuzzy kind of sidling  
Towards a big reveal. Comes the reversal: it turns out that  
In fact we are coding the coming of the Antichrist.  
I mean, what's our big fear? The undifferentiated.

*Masked and hooded passersby were wheeling out of the dark like dancers and rotating off, storefronts telescoping into groupings of flat surfaces joined inexpertly. New York City appeared as a medieval settlement: rude lean-tos on muddy fields, scattered wood fires, grimy palms, damage and ailment on full display: people missing limbs, sprawled on straw, rolled in rags like jelly donuts. Can't tell if this is a pricey neighborhood or a wretched ghetto. Why was masonry brick red? It briefly went white in the Sixties, and then white brick was reviled, and then it was cool. A passerby murmured, "That's flee, son," but it could have been "flea," or "fleet," or maybe he said, "That's fleecin" with a faux-Southern syrup. Imagine slang pulling ahead, rounding the bend on the inside curve, and resolve to consult the online slangtionaries.*

In practice, the more we consider roads  
The more we are concerned that any given street is  
Basically connected to every other street,  
Out to the edges of the land mass. Is it safe? Depends.  
Didn't early road planners spook at the thought  
That by hooking up a new road to the existing system,  
You allow anyone in the landmass to jump in an old Buick  
And bend the paper plane of hell in your direction?

Without water to bound the edges the entire world  
Would fall together, every house and building infolding, so really  
It might be wise to build a small, closed circuit of roads, a circle  
in fact,  
In the middle of nowhere, going round a volcano island.  
But listen, every house and system in the world is connected:  
The power, idiot! Every socket, each receptacle  
Breathes a foul wind.

What if windy Satan misled watery Jesus into believing himself  
God,  
So folks would abandon authentic faith in favor of Jesus?  
It's no coincidence the first browser was called *Mosaic*.  
What if the same were true of all our most recent silly handiwork?

Realize that money works the same way as roads: virtually  
Every dollar she spent was out there still circulating and had  
She ever passed a person on the street who had tried on  
The one item of clothing & returned it to the rack, where she later  
Picked it up and bought it? And now wore it? And now,  
Was there a dim body field resonating between strangers?

Worry on 15,000 years' worth of folks' best-loved garb,  
Materials intimately connected to bodies  
Which had subsequently been buried, burned, shredded, drowned,  
Decomposed by weather, eaten by worms.  
By your garb you mark your resistance to the world.

The citizens of this age have passed through a magic circle,  
Never to return, a circle through which lies sleep.  
We are a well-rested group of people, aren't we,  
This current 'phase' in humanity.  
You could even say of our age,  
Yeah, well, they're just going through a phase  
Where they seem to need a lot of sleep.

Much later, an aroma of reheated snacks permeated our cabin  
To signal the end of nap time and the preparation for descent.  
Passengers stirred in fitful sleep  
Some immediately waking to these odors, others  
Refusing this shitty world.

The web is a cosmos  
Full of background noise, background radiation, dark material.  
It should all be allowed  
to creep out.

## *Nike's Hi-Tec Sneaker Group*

Fuck the denials, you boosted  
All those ideas from those crazy ten-thousand-year-old  
Woven sagebrush bark sandals, unearthed in Oregon.  
Nike's based in Oregon.  
Any type of coincidence? Negative. Had a dowser  
Let us know where to plant the seed,  
That way we could extractivate the fuck out of it.

So *that's* why the Neolithic is so important to us.  
It was the beginning of writing, encoding, magick  
In fact, the wellspring of all human *techné*.  
Also, it contains the essence of nighttime, which  
We have been working on recently, the sommeliers,  
We are swelling within flasks, it's a perfumey  
Thing of the night. Filling out these flasks  
With selfhood, a nightlife engineered to be  
At the core of the human experience, in that sense.

In any nighttime cityscape (say, a row of buildings) you got  
Stacked boxes of stuff, life repainted as  
Rectangular orange-lit storerooms so as to ensure  
Every flask is a storehouse of the same basics  
Over and over: lamp, flat-screen, sink, coffee table,  
Chair, fork, cereal bowl, stereo,  
Shirts, pairs of pants, phones. We have carefully put paid

To the golden days of the Eighties, when a hot game was  
written from scratch,

Now we sculpt them out of pre-fab code slabs,  
Your world runs on a clever young dude's  
Game engine, which is a common currency, with all the  
Ease of a shared tongue:  
This man-child has written, for example, a rendering engine  
In order to deal with volumetric FX  
So your world is fully able to handle scary fogs,  
He has dealt with technical eccentricities such as  
Horizon-based ambient occlusion  
And percentage-closer soft shadows. Always the shadows!  
People infer three-dimensionality primarily through shadows  
(Not through texture-mapping, that relic of Eighties ray-tracing.)  
Shadow volume is all-important. There have been studies.

The point of all this is to make rules. The new rules.  
And they're your rules, so powerful and flexible  
That everyone adopts them.  
They become the gold standard  
Undergirding hundreds of worlds, serving up millions  
Of flasks.

Magic is a process that always uses  
The most advanced technologies at hand.  
In the stone age that was fire, fur, bone, and blood,  
In the middle ages it was the crucible, the glass alembic  
And the chalk circle. This coder develops middleware  
With an eye to power,  
Writing the one code to rule them all.

Houses, buildings, that's a recent thing though, right?

For most of time we were living in tiny little enclosures, so  
Your hut (or whatever the fuck) was heaped with dry hides  
And a close blackness  
A flickering fire, it's all smoked out, heavy with  
Months-old body juices,  
Charred animal, and rotten deer fat  
In every fur and skin, piss and excrement too. In later millenia this  
Is remembered: the ur-stench, ur-sign of the adversary, the liar.

In our night sand we got these flasks buried and  
Filled with heavy, regular polyrhythms, you and me are  
Spoonfed under the pelts as a bulwark against night, and  
Don't forget all the little discreet sex sounds all round, and  
Somebody tented a hide  
To urinate in the general direction of the wall, the dust darkens.  
Stray sobbing, and another accidental elbow—  
Wait — this is my fur  
And this is my tail.  
Please don't pull it too hard,  
Or not hard enough.

This any-moment-death-ness  
Demands minor ecstasies. Across dead time  
With a shaman's loose joy, her fingers stopping holes  
Drilled in a hollow bone, a human shin  
Built to allow a folding-inward  
private abstraction. I quite like  
The miraculous task of playing music for others.

## *Casting the Circle*

I recently read from my novel *Fuck Seth Price* at the Whitney Museum of American Art. Jay Sanders, the Curator of Performance as well as an old friend, had invited me to do “something unusual” in the institution’s brand new auditorium, which boasted state-of-the-art features like retractable riser seating, a wireless sound system, and a programmable LED lighting rig.

For several weeks I considered my assignment. The now standard line on my work is that it’s essentially performative, insofar as performance is an impure, confusing, and corrupt form bursting with self-contradiction. Some people have also observed that my work is apparently in attack mode at all times, and they feel resentful and antagonized. With these things in mind, I resolved to deliver a more traditional lecture, which I hoped would clear up some of the misunderstandings.

The event was sold-out, standing room only. The Whitney’s auditorium has a small green room, where Jay had thoughtfully set out bottles of water. I changed into my costume slowly. I had decided to go with an outfit I’d recently seen on a contemporary tech guru: black nylon sweatpants by Alexander Wang, a simple black tee by Tomas Maier, and a pair of blindingly white New Balance from Dover Street Market. As is my wont when performing, I slicked back my hair—a wet look hides the silver—and applied eyeliner. Two videographers would be recording, at my request. I planned to put the footage in my quasi-biographical film *Redistribution* (which I have now done, though a caption claimed that my reading happened at something called the Singapore TechGnosis Conference).

I rolled a joint and took just one hit, exhaling into the adjoining powder room, which seemed to lack a smoke detector. Just before I went out I turned to the mirror and faced myself for some controlled breathing. I could hear murmuring and laughter from the other side of the door. I stepped outside, and immediately found myself in the middle of a new symbol.

“Magic has been around forever,” I announced to the silent auditorium, “But let’s try to start at the beginning. For the sake of this lecture, let’s posit three ages of spirituality. The first age runs from the dawn of humanity onward, some x thousand years. We’ll call it the Shamanic Age. During this period, virtually all human practices would have fallen under the rubric of Magic. The world was magic, and everything in it. The trees had will, the air had power, the fire told stories. Or, alternately, your will was fire, your stories were as the air, and human power was a tree. Because everything was interchangeable with everything else. Which is a primal state many of us wish to return to, and may yet, thanks to digital technology.”

I stopped for a beat to make sure everyone was with me. Smiles in the front row.

“Next comes the Pagan Age, which brings us up to the birth of Christ. Where shamanism was a loose, scattered phenomenon, paganism was more structured, with traditions and institutions. And this reaches a pretty sophisticated state with the Greco-Romans and the Egyptians. But in the centuries leading up to Christ you get a relatively quick, worldwide transition to the third age, the Monotheistic Age. What happens is, institutions stage what amounts to a hostile take-over of pagan ideas. They keep the structuring frameworks, but they get rid of multiple deities, and animal worship is tossed out, and nature worship

is frowned upon. This is all a power move, because now they're able to concentrate worship into singular prophets like Christ, and Mohammed, and Buddha. These guys function like bottle-necks, so that you can mediate a society's desires through a priest class, which is itself hierarchical and controllable. So religion begins to act like a kind of photography, a way of freezing the spirit image: you have only to remember one thing, like praying, because the system manages the rest for you.

The magical tradition we're discussing today can be understood as a counter to the Monotheistic Age. It's not that these people want a return to shamanism or paganism, they just don't wish to operate within traditional institutions. They're interested in the same concepts of growth and transformation, but they're intentionally operating outside of the dominant traditions. They want full autonomy, right? To create their own imagery, and distribute as they see fit.

I won't go into all the magical figures and currents that emerge during the two thousand years after Christ, but obviously it was a pretty bad time to be interested in these kinds of things. I mean, it could get you tortured or executed as a public example. Instead, let's fast-forward through The Dark Ages and the Enlightenment to the late nineteenth century, which is when you get a huge resurgence of interest in all this stuff. There's a great occult reawakening. You get people like Madame Blavatsky or Dion Fortune, these mystical figures trying to develop systemic thinking, who consequently attract acolytes. These people are heralding a new phase of magic, and it's basically a Modernist phase, if you want to historicize it in academic terms. It's certainly contemporaneous with what we call Modernity: the development of photography and cinema, and the modern city, and

industrialization, and all the great relativist thinkers: Darwin and Freud, Marx or Nietzsche, even going into Duchamp. All of whom, by the way, would have been condemned as warlocks just two centuries earlier!

So, magic starts modernizing, and rapidly. That means the growth of complex, usually urban, systems. Of course, the irony is that they're mirroring the church, though they'd probably want to trace it to the Freemasons. In London, you get the Hermetic Order of The Golden Dawn, one of the most influential organizations ever. With the Golden Dawn, magic isn't about some weird nineteenth century mystic like Gurdjieff, it's an institutionalized structure, with a priesthood presiding over a series of levels that initiates have to ascend through. It has the so-called Secret Chiefs, who are supposedly these anonymous, all-powerful individuals that no one's ever met, who may not even exist, who only priests can communicate with. I mean, what is that? Church, right?

Around this time you also get Aleister Crowley, the so-called Great Beast, and he's this brilliant, ambiguous figure. You know: is he for real, or is he in it for the power trips and the girls? And that's always the tricky role to play, this kind of knife's edge between shaman and charlatan. It's like Beuys, or Koons, these contemporary artists just daring you to believe their shtick. In some ways Crowley was still invested in traditional institutions, but the radical thing he introduces is the idea of Will. It's an ancient idea, but he basically promotes the notion that every Magician should follow his or her own Will, which is elevated to almost a religious concept. His main precept goes, 'Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law.' People who don't know any better always assume this is an exhortation to anarchy and chaos,

but that's not true. There's disagreement on the implications, but the key thing is that Will shifts the focus from the system to the individual. And this is Crowley's real gift to Magic, or, as he spelled it, 'Magick' with a 'k'. Will is what people fastened on to, the stubborn creation of something from nothing, like spelling Magick with a K. And of course, this is what makes him so appealing to artists.

Crowley dies in 1947, which is kind of a neat way to jump into the postwar era. By then you have the growing influence of Austin Osman Spare, who's a fascinating figure. He was only a little younger than Crowley but he was really part of the new era, he marks a transition. Crowley was a man of the vanishing nineteenth century, even if he was a revolutionary. Spare meanwhile was this lone wolf, this uncompromising guy. He was a gifted artist but one who didn't make the grade, kind of like Hitler. He just did his lonely magical thing by himself in a garret, until he died. But his legend grew, because all by himself, or through his Will, he developed an internally cohesive system that people still use.

Probably his most notable development was 'sigil magic.' Making a sigil means basically taking a word referring to something you want to control or effect, like, say, the name of an enemy, and compressing the letters into a kind of graphic monogram. It reduces material being to a compressed and graphic sign, which you can contemplate, or copy and distribute, or file away, or destroy. This little index becomes a concentrated expression of Will. And that's part of the definition of magic, right? That all your power and energy is compressed into a singular image. Magic is a kind of system by which Will gets poured into an image. Of course that's art too. And you can think of Magic since Modernism as being in dialogue with the rise of image

technology. Spare recognized that with Modernity it's the material world that's getting harder to substantiate, and that images can actually do that work for us.

So, Spare's a total individualist, and in a way he leads to one of the more interesting recent developments, which is Chaos Magick. This starts to appear in the Seventies, 'The Me Decade,' which makes sense, because Chaos Magick is all about the individual, it's opposed to top-down structures. If Crowley and all these hierarchical groups are Modernist, Chaos Magick is Post Modern. It's decentralized, it's schizophrenic, it's horizontal, it sidesteps the hierarchy. Not only is there no system of priests and initiates, there's not even a fixed belief system. You can be a Chaos Magician but also believe in Christ, and then you can disavow Christ tomorrow and declare your faith in Islam. Chaos Magick encourages eccentricity and anarchism, so of course it's threatening to traditional magicians. Now, not coincidentally this is the time when network technology and personal computing appears, and you can just picture all these bearded, programmer longhairs walking around MIT or wherever, toting little sigils, trying to will a new world into being." I stopped for a beat. "And you know what? They *did!*"

To weak and obliging laughter, I unscrewed the cap of my water, gearing up for the next part of my lecture. A small voice rang out from the back of the room: "I'm sorry, but haven't we left the monotheistic age? Isn't it possible we're already becoming something different?"

I considered the question. "In one sense you're right," I said. I found myself preparing careful, almost defensive acknowledgments. "We do live in an age when people cobble together a way of being that works for them, and it's not a monotheistic

way. You go to Episcopal Church on Sunday, you visit your acupuncturist on Tuesday, you get your palm read on Thursday.” I searched my conscience. Did I believe this? But the voice carried on as if I’d said nothing of consequence: “You also mentioned that digital technology might eventually allow us to return to a primal state.”

“I did. But, and this is a big but, only by obliterating differentiation. But also we can say, with Nietzsche, that science amounts to simply another, newer, faith. The world of technology offers a scaffolding for the same old questions, the same blind subject positions. And beyond that, you can say that we have Hollywood and celebrity culture and social media, and that our world of reproduced images is a new belief system.”

“No, no,” came the reply, “I’m not talking about any of that.”

“Aren’t you?” I said, suppressing irritation. “You’re claiming there’s a we that’s entered some new era, where the questions are all different and everything moves through new channels. I don’t know if that’s the case. I don’t see that we’ve passed through any transition, or entered some other world.”

“Shamanism does speak of a journey into another world. But this is a vision only.” There was a pause. When the voice returned, it was a low whisper: “In this vision, my body is completely dismembered. Then it is reassembled. Afterward I am able to go about my business again, only now my body has a small extra part, like an extra bone.”

*Just as stars are hidden during the day yet hang above us still  
It is true that one dreams all day long  
Just as during the night.*



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*Wrok Fmaily Friedns* [aka *Books Of Ice*] (Los Angeles: Ooga Booga, 2016)

“Lecture on the Extra Part,” *Texte zur Kunst*, no. 99 (September 2015)

“Folklore U.S.,” press release distributed by Petzel Gallery for my show of the same name (2012)

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In the words of Lou Funcke Price’s most recent song:

*You don't need what you want/You don't want what you need.*

This one is for you, Lou.





