



NB

CARRIE

BRADSHAW

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Epigraph Chapbook 003
epigraphmagazine.com
Edited by Nicholas Bon

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CONTENTS

THINGS TO DIE FOR

- Become Visible [8]
- Spinning [11]
- Old Friends [12]
- Past Life [16]
- Fragments of Exhilaration [18]
- Art Is Impulsively Crashing into the Wall [19]
- Stella [23]
- Speed Bombs [25]
- Cricketts [28]
- The Diary [30]
- The End [34]

THE SCREEN

- The Referential Artist [40]
- The Artist as Multiple [42]
- Notes on Memes [45]

DREAMS AND GEOGRAPHY

- Hello to All This [49]
- The Cosmo [56]
- No Flowers [60]
- Ghosts Of A Few Kinds [63]
- Blossoming [65]
- Faith [68]

BOYS

- Boys [72]

for the boy i will meet

“New York is only fun if you have friends, money, or both.”



things to die for

Become Visible

I want to capture your attention. I once wrote a poem where I said “i want to capture someone’s attention”. It was a call for something, anything in me to capture the interest and gaze of someone else, whether digitally or physically. I don’t know if I’ve grown to be this person, or if I always was.

There are many ways of being visible. I can see your body physically or your Instagram digitally. The third visibility is spiritual, to be seen wholly and fully. These are gazes coupled with mind games, and the revealing of longings and of secrets.

Friends are the love of our lives, our soulmates as Charlotte says. I want her to be right, maybe not always for selfless or compassionate reasons. It resonates with the feminist part of me I want to hold on to. It resonates with the escape I need from a gaze of expectancy. The gaze of needing another person to complete myself. The gaze I long for even as it eats me alive.

To dig into my desire for being seen, by crowds, by men, I would have to inevitably think about my childhood. So, I choose to think abstractly about what it means to be seen and to see. I want to be seen because it validates my choices, because it is my own reproductive future instead of a child, because I want to be adored by someone besides myself to know it is true. It is because I have a drive to be known, to be worth something, and art is tied to worth is tied to self is tied to... the ties that bind are heavy, the crown is heavier and always wants more, yet I want more. My crown would be glittery, golden, loveable.

I am told my art is good, I should submit to festivals. This does not translate into likes but it does translate into visibility, so what does it mean to be only physically visible as at a physical film festival or gallery show? Not digitally visible? Is that not success that doesn’t require you to Google me?

I told myself I would mine my feelings, but the naïve thirst I have feels too personal to reveal, even though I’m sure we share this kind of desire. In my own art, I thought talking about men would be enough, would be viral enough. And it is. It is something. But it isn’t all I want, to be visible also encourages participation.

I want to be a digital cloud seen over and over, endorsed, shared, clicked on, thought about.

It is not inseparable- romance and the longing to be loved by adoring crowds- something more lasting. It is a cagey acceptance of balance, if only in longings and denial. I once read a Harry Styles fanfic about orgasm denial. I too wanted to be denied pleasure, to be under someone, to be the source of pleasure that is taken and held and kept. The objectified, the pleasure, not the pleased.

The digital is so corporeal. So poignant. We want, we crave, we eat, we look, we gaze, and the screen becomes our reality. This has been said over and over. But why? Why do we want to be seem as pixels even more than as bodies? Do we see a global self as better than a physical self? As one worth more? If my art does catch on, does this create a better sense of self or a better life worth living? Will I stop if it doesn't?

Being digital does not relieve me of my bodily anxiety, if anything it only links and latches onto it. Florence lets me feel my body as she sings about the cosmos, but when I have the cosmos at the tip of my hand I feel dread- can anything I do compare to those that "do" something"? I wonder what it will matter when time and space collapse.

Yet I want my Youtube videos to hit 1k views. As we all do, I suppose. Does it give us anything in return to be adored other than an ego? An ego protects, an ego resists, an ego responds out of itself. I cannot always do that.

Is something well received different than something that is unseen? Or from something that you cannot touch? Why do I want to obsessively document my feelings? Of all fucking things to want to obsess over, I fell into the diary world of the thinly veiled autobiography like Joni Mitchell or Nora Ephron, mining my life for material until I am barren.

Fiona Apple became my idol in high school. If someone as messy and difficult as her could be adored, I could too. Imperfect, angry, weird, bizarre, pissed off.

Everyone has a Twitter and Instagram, but do they only hinder me...? I think they are portals to me and to my videos, but what do they actually do... They are

merely links to content and art. A Haruki Murakami novel web of traps and tunnels. To rely is to die.

How do we get seen without seeming needy?

I am needy.

I want to make more sense, to be more transportable, to be viral. But I am not easy. I am angry. I am weird pre-1990s, and scared. I am scared I am scared I am scared

just like a spider on the bathroom floor by your feet

Spinning

Directionality is tricky. How do you compress yourself into something fun but not distilled? How do you channel yourself into one pursuit without losing your veracity and fire?

I've been told, as we all have, to narrow down my pursuits to one medium. It's better, they say, it'll make you focus and develop mastery. But I don't want to be a master. What is a master in a world of masters and amateurs? What is any positionality? Why not just make...

But my anxiety spins a better web. What if, what if, how, how, what are you... If your identity is based on what you do, it becomes difficult to create at all. You freeze. What is the right thing? Julia Cameron, famed art self-help writer, would have loads to say on this artistic paralysis. I suppose these paragraphs are my own Artist's Pages, a technique Cameron herself invented.

What do we do when we make? How innate is it?

People who do multiple things are everywhere. Artists included. I was always intrigued by how Miranda July listed her work in different categories and didn't bring one into more focus than another. She is a writer, filmmaker, performer. These are things I do, I think. Can I do them all for all time? Will people care if I do multiple things- if I have more than one face?

But, there is not more than one face. These faces are destined to be close and ambiguous and bubbly in shape and size. Not as disparate as initially thought. A filmmaker writes. A performer films. We enact and we record. Record me, I record myself, I share myself.

Old Friends

I

I am in the last few days of my collegiate life. My scholastic life. Everyone says they could see me doing an MFA, but I know I would hate it. Liz always mentions how much it drained them, how rootless it made them feel. Could anyone understand their queer map-making? Could anyone understand why they ate almost a hundred boiled eggs for a performance?

School has always been a pantheon of options. Limited, but still vast. Inside of it we could understand who we were and how we were to move through the world. School was a phenomenology. A discourse on do's, don'ts, and ideologies. Even going against school was a part of school. I make outside of school, yet I'm still influenced, commenting on, wondering about... In one of my videos, I take a dialogue I had with my best friend at the time and transport it into post-coitus pillow talk. We are discussing a teacher who made us debate whether Lena Dunham was raped as she says in her book. This debate scared us for years. Our teacher questioned our own voices while we debated Right-Wing Londoners on the rights of rape victims. If this woman teaching memoir would not believe us, who would?

II

The ways that friendships unwind are important to me. I go over them endlessly. Where did we go wrong? Where did it end? At this point it is less about any specific friendship ending and more about the process of unmooring their similarities and differences. Farming the moors and the wilds into something I can coherently address to others. This is the self-help genre's favorite thing to do. What does the sum mean for the current moment? Can it help us even in the chaos of living?

My mind churns endlessly over the endings of these people I knew. One friend I was desperately close with. We watched *Broad City* together ferociously in tune

with its quirk and spark about white party girl culture. We were two quirky white girls. She literally, I emotionally. But I found myself restless over and over. Parties would end, and I would go wandering around campus at night crying or listening to Florence and the Machine on repeat. Where did my romantic life go wrong?

For her, it was a matter of not letting boys in who could hurt her. For me, I let them in too much, too early, too easily.

My friend Milly told me my life sounded like "I Fall In Love Too Easily" by Chet Baker. I've since latched onto the song. It is easy for me to feel and I feel a lot, very fast. I'm the Fiona Apple of my groups. A vicious Virgo ready to unwind and lash and cry and gnash my teeth Biblically at those who have wronged me, whether real or perceived.

I think of the choices I make that alienate others. I choose myself and eventually this clashes with others' ideas of me as a selfless mother figure. A matron in drag in drag again. I do not ask for much, just time, just love. But these are all consuming requests. I ask for all in these small puddles.

Perhaps in the end, friendships grow out and go out of style. The truth of someone absorbed, we feel compelled to make a choice. Every friendship has these moments, some every so often. With my best friend since high school - we've had fights. Moments of choosing the other person. Where one or both of us put aside our egos or our ideologies or our pettiness or our... Or where I just admitted knowingly, that I was wrong. It's a choice. It's a feeling. It's all consuming.

Other friendships have cracked-

The high school friend who didn't get cast, who didn't ask for my opinions, who I let dictate my choices, who I let overpower me, who I couldn't stand deep down but needed a role model, I signed my agency over to her and my problems too. Really, I wanted her to take all the blame if I failed. Then I could never truly fail. Unfair of both of us.

The friend who couldn't understand my night wanderings, my depression, my psychic longings. I didn't attempt to explain. I couldn't. Didn't think she would know. But maybe she would have. Maybe her whole party girl group would have. But no one wanted to just get coffee anymore and I didn't try to integrate them into this private sphere of longing.

My male friend who decided that he couldn't give me what I needed and said I had to accept less of him. The multiple men who did this. I chose nothing instead of some, until later realizing I could tier my friendships.

The friends who didn't know how to speak to me as someone who needed more than banter when I had lost my closest friends to Chicago and the UK's charms. And I couldn't ask, decided not to.

The friend who I forged a pact with, to love to cherish, but couldn't because she asked something of me that violated my code. It reminded me of my high school friend who I signed my agency over to and for better or worse, neither of these women could dialogue with me. I gave up. I took the friend out to coffee that she didn't want me to because that friend was dating her ex.

Pronouns are messy in friendships. They speak of love, of secrets, of hope. When my friends hear 'he', they have a sound of expectancy for me. I brush it off. There is no one in this hamlet for me, by choice or by chance.

III

I read Durga Chew-Bose's book today like an old friend that seeps in. I speak to myself the way I need to. Even if for a moment, there is a lucidity to my mind again. Take these moments. Have prescience. I let myself live in this nostalgia-fueled future where the future is the past. I sit in an old chair in the library and read. I think of Rory studying in Yale's grand halls. What if that had been me? What if I had aspired more swiftly? Rory strikes me as a lonely girl. A bookish girl who decides to risk things too easily out of spite and ease. A difficult but rude woman. I want to have this life of ease, but I know I would not be the strong person. But maybe I would not be a matron. Maybe I wouldn't have the dark feelings Jenny Zhang tells me about. I feel that link to the New York Twitter

writers. But I am not them. I only hear of their tales of bars and men and race and gender and ghosts and histories that I am not a part of. I will have to forge my own futures. They are beautiful, but not for me. My New York will be my own, I assume, mired with men and sticky floors, and books... snow, dandelions, parks, hot dog carts, a weird string of jobs, new videos to make, new words to write, new anxieties over how to piece that artistic identity together and also how to uphold myself.

I find that sometimes accepting friends as they are is the only way to move through the pain of them. Some friends will never ask how you are. You must choose better or choose to let them be a third tier friend. Someone to drink with someone you're with but not really present with. You need an escape from the monotony sometimes but not the same friend every single second.

Your friend working at the bar where you slept with the door-person, the door person who you then called out on your friend's Tinder for not texting you back. You make these mistakes of quick-intimacy too often, but you know you'll do it still, even if in a different or new way. You learn to let it lie. To play the pain as a part of you, but not all of you.

I'm going to my friend Emma's show tonight. She's a famous musician. She's smart and quick but a little inside herself. She wants and zigzags through those desires. She's like my friend Elizabeth. She will tell you all about her life and gently wait for you to share yours but when you do will fight for you every second.

Different friends provide different things. People show you who they are. People give you what they can. You can choose to accept it or dispose of it. Choose wisely, they'll say. But the truth is you won't know if you made the right choice all the time, sometimes you'll never know. You'll have to live with that when you're 55 in Brooklyn or Taipei or Miami. You don't know yet. And that's okay.

Past Life

I want to know about the strings of fate. Are they little? Big? Taut? I know that there's something wonderful inside of them for some of us.

It is only the interrogative that can allow me full access to my agency. Only out of destabilizing can I stabilize.

I want to learn how to sit with that. I don't fully know. I want to feel alive, that is my biggest wish. Like when I listen to Adele and belt it all, fully out of my body. The scenes at the end of TV shows, full of pregnancy, full of fear, full of large orchestral songs and risings.

Are these moments livable or unbearably big- too big to form consciously, only born out of our anxieties bursting at the seams. I know that sometimes it seems difficult to fully do anything. To write anything right. I think I am writing about the wrong thing, the wrong worry, poking at the wrong scab. But why? Why not poke at all the scabs out there?

I am weak, but I want to move into meekness.

I open and close endless Google tabs, restless. I want a chocolate bar to ward off boredom. But boredom is never really boredom to me, only avoidance of something else. Of men. Of intimacy. Of loneliness. Of darkness. Of the vast emptiness of the cosmos, pink and flexible.

Where is the end of time? Where is its origin? They are stored on Wikipedia.

We know things because of Wikipedia. We know because of MUSE Journals and Amazon's troves of books. Not because of books themselves. Libraries crumble from Alexandria to NYPL, whether we want them to or not. What do you do when you think 1,000 years into the future? What scares you, what endings scare you

into submission and anger? What issues make you need and crave sex, pain, chocolate, drugs, tears out of frustration?

The past comes in on Spotify, a splash of old songs bringing up old loves who have old homes and old smells. Old things tire. But without an old we cannot make a new, we have no drive to make things different.

The past lives we leave attach onto us like a dangling keychain. We can't forget or move past we can only make peace with. Let it live, let it be. This is the only way to "move on", even though it isn't moving on at all really- only letting things be. Letting things be water even as they feel heavy.

I collect little thoughts like talismans, they only last for minutes. Sometimes when I'm sleepy or angry or depressed they return, the talismans of writing. The warnings and chants I made for myself as essays, poems, paintings. But the sadness returns inevitably, or I forget the warning I gave myself. I cannot remember everything, and I must be ok with that. Things will fall apart emotionally, physically, or otherwise. But the past reminds me too of good things: I've done this before. Others too.

As the finale of a TV show ended on my laptop, I sat there for a minute. I was skyping Casey to watch it together live. I didn't want it to end. There was no way for it to end. It just did. A song plays over credits, we move, we change chapters, but nothing ends. Nothing is stark.

Fragments of Exhilaration

Is there any feeling like Robyn's Dancing On My Own coming on in the club when you are an eternally single Carrie Bradshaw?

The best TV shows are a zen poem: action 1/action 2/denouement/loneliness+credits.

Dancing is the only form of self-love I can perform on the weekend.

Preludes are for the boring people who need a whole story.

Goodbyes, dramatic or geographic, are underrated.

Intimacy is scary for earth signs. And air signs. And fire signs. And water signs don't know something is intimate until it's too late.

Art Is Impulsively Crashing into the Wall

Love isn't crying on a couch as your cat crawls over the head of your chair.

I don't ever know how much is too much. It is not my specialty. I am psychically unaware of what it means to be just enough. I am marked as too much. Too angry. Too sentimental. Too irrational. Too moody. Too obsessed with an ex. Too desperate. Too femme. Too masculine. Too fish. Too sad. Too encumbered. Enough is a foreign concept. Enough is unreachably low. I shoot for a lot.

But that's not even true. I don't shoot for anything, I just am. I am more than anyone has the ability to swallow. I have been told I am too much to be friends with. Ghosted endless times due to- I'm guessing- my insatiability. It's not that I can't give, I can give in abundance but even the idea of a give and take is too much for random boys.

I don't satisfy myself either. I do not have all that I want. I always want more. My insatiability pours into all facets of my life.

I have not had a good boo-hoo Oprah cry in years. I've had sniffles, even two or three okay crying spells but ever since freshman year of high school I cry only once a year, usually around New Years for a half hour. It's a good cry to be sure- but it's not cathartic. Not as much as it used to be. Now I barely crack a tear. It's like a mask. I feel like I'm wearing a perpetually unimpressed anger. I cannot crack or my whole sadness will spill out like an egg yolk onto a benny that I didn't order.

It isn't that I don't want to express myself. I remember my friend and I threw rocks and screamed my sophomore year of high school in a baseball field by a church. I felt better. We drove around all night. We were teenagers. Lonely but together. Clumsy but in love. Hopeless but funny. Now, I am mature. Or so I tell myself. These displays of emotion are silly.

But maybe they aren't silly- only ways to vent and rage against the systems that oppress and hurt us. Punctures in the facades we are told to live over and over

again. To digest the truth that hurts us blindly, openly and with good faith. My good faith died and was reborn as cynicism. I stare at paintings and yawn. I ask for free goodies from friends without hesitation. I don't crack a smile unless I am deeply thrown off by a joke by one of my best friends.

Talent is never being satisfied. 11am, 1pm, 5pm, 8pm are the social media peaks. It is the rawness of needing to expose yourself and win over and over to fight the torrential downpour of saturation. It is the pain of getting only 10 viewers. It's wondering when and how things happen and trying over and over. It is never being done. It is tinkering. It is trying again and again. It is Hard Times by Paramore on repeat. It is wondering how Hayley Williams got to where she did. It is crying alone in your bedroom but you don't really cry so it's more of a dry heaving sound. It's not having a boyfriend and channeling this rage and sourness into your videos, poems, writings, thoughts, mind. You are a cartographer of gay singleness. Of what things SHOULD be but aren't. It's Amy by Green Day on repeat. It's Francis Forever by Mitski serving as your theme song even though you wish you were sleek and beautiful. It is a pain. It is a joy. It is a gift, it is everything.

Crash into the wall. Call it art. Rage. The system is wanting you to fail, it is a cruel reality. Blerg. The sadness you feel walking down on the sidewalk should be visible. Make it art. Make it known. Broadcast your fears and loves. Why not? The worst that happens is no one watches. And who watches anything anyway?

Disjuncture. Disruption. If there is no normality to return to, or even go to, what do we move towards? Lots of people die senselessly all the time. Lots of existential writers kill themselves. Lots of people watch wars on screens.

There is a death drive, a desire to destroy myself, sometimes. To ram against things. Do the things that I know I shouldn't. A restlessness late at night. I have moved away. I have moved differently. To destroy myself, to rage against the four walls of my small apartment, to feel trapped, and unleashed, then trapped again. There is no cure for anger. No cure for feelings. No cure for difficult women, only words to use to describe these passions.

Every Single Night by Fiona Apple is a rallying call for the restless, angry, mean artist. We are throwing ourselves against things that bar us and then trying again to know.

Feeling stuck and overwhelmed with thoughts is terribly inconvenient. Opening and terrible. I want to make everything, but I also want to throw myself into water. My mind is buzzing all the time with everything. Abuzz with bees and waves and bombs and mines. Tell me there's another way. Tell me there's a slower, stolid way.

There isn't.

So, I tame the devils and live with them as pets. I learn how to make slowly even when I am going faster than a cheetah. I can't listen to every impulse. I can love them and pet them, but not all will make a painting or film or profound remark.

Yet- I still have a desire to write everything, film everything, capture everything. I chart these impulses as much as possible but know I cannot keep up with my brain. I know some people say that you should keep something for just yourself and maybe I should.



Stella

When someone says my name, I am always shocked. A reminder I am corporeal. Shocked into being. It is an unspeakable juncture of intimacy- we do not name each other, instead we rely on each other's intimacy. The poetic of our everyday rhythms establish and name us. Instead of names, our bodies. Is a name a shackle?

The poetics of the everyday do not always contribute to artistic content immediately. Knowing how infrastructure works does not make content. Perhaps not even form. Sometimes knowing something is only knowing something. Observation may form art more directly.

But, observation also creates friends or bonds of some kind. I know you through what I see. What you say too, of course. These are both observations. All you do, all you say is observable.

Your table of contents would include:

- tea
- spells
- unfinished
- bedroom clutter
- door woman
- brisk worry and vulnerability
- rebel

This is what I would write about if I wrote a book about you. I would have to keep it open-ended for you are also grumpy, angry, active, loving, bored, and green-thumbed. Or what about the way your head turns and you bloop your lips into a scarlet O out of perplexity or joke or seduction. Or the way you leave things in every room as you go to the next. Your hair's reflection in the twinkle of summer sunlight on your front porch. The way you call me Joshie in a way that doesn't feel

male or patronizing. The way I listen to your voicemail and I feel overwhelmed but dance through it even as you too are anxious. Witchy.

Meandering- in a meta sense is a powerful way to reflect. It's also how I talk, make friends, fall in love, and argue. Connecting disparities. Hop from one to another- and later vaguely link them. You find this beautiful. We platonically fall in friend-love, that rare mountain to climb.

We're eating your lunch a week or two before class ends.

"Stellstell, I can't eat your PB&J."

"Sure you can, I don't need all of this."

Speed Bombs

Hurtling towards something as fast as I can has always been my pace. I hurdle through. Lurch. Speed. Why are you rushing- emotionally, artistically, geographically? I am asked. Many times. Anxiety is a rush. It propels you. Emotional cognizance is a drug of time- forward, quickly. I move quickly from friends, places, projects. I relate to witty TV banter. My classmate tells me I speak fast. I do talk a mile a minute. I get this from the Gilmore Girls, I suppose. I'm a Lorelei and my sister is a Rory.

Walk and talks are my favorite. Long Aaron Sorkian monologues. Whether the Newsroom or Gilmore Girls, these are women talking through their problems, avoiding their problems, making mountains into molehills and molehills into mountain through quips.

Banter is gay. Banter is queer. Banter is anxious. When Meredith Grey says she doesn't want to talk about her dead husband but does want to talk about the gross patient in Room 405, I'm there. When Lorelei says the poodles are over, I know the way she's smoothing over land mines. Speed bombs.

The scenes in Grey's that I love are of movement. Sex, running into a room, racing to the O.R... The list goes on. When Christina chooses Teddy over Owen, work over love, I have never been as exhilarated. Her highs and lows are mine even though I'm a Meredith through and through. She runs to the chiming triumphant notes of Cosmic Love. I want to run. I want to feel that rush. When Street Lights plays as she and Owen are dashing through despair, I want to feel that. I want to know the highs of surgery. The highs of emotions.

I want to run to *something*.

But what? New York. Art. Carrie Bradshaw-hood. Gender. Sex. People. Friend-love. I still want to learn how to talk slow too. To speak with pace and assurance. To not try to outrun the world.

Is art a reproductive future? Is it too object based? Too focused on laying a claim to an afterlife- a specific afterlife- on earth? What is there to ethically run towards if we are trying to be slow, thoughtful, and chill?

I'm not a cool girl. I do want to leave something behind me even if it isn't kids. I do want things. I am not funny. I am anal, angry, grumpy, determined, rude, nagging. I'm Leslie Knope- an optimistic mom with a lot of opinions that I will rope you into. I will also hold large dinner parties with specialized gifts.

I don't run. I laugh at runners. I am a donut eater. But I do understand and even enjoy the hope for speed. It's the ultimate anxiety and the ultimate anxiety-relief. Being fully consumed by something. I make films about movement. Thoughts while moving, thoughts while crying, thoughts while driving. I hope for something to change. Movement, geographic or emotional requires speed. Haste. A last minute jump despite anxiety. Moving is no easy thing. Not necessarily physically but psychically. Can you snap out of your malaise long enough to want something else? Do you want something else? What do you want to run towards?

Sometimes we have to make a big enough target to hit and just go vaguely forward. Sometimes we know exactly what we need to run towards, but are too scared.

I like running anyway. To. Away. From. But the best kind of running is briefly releasing, briefly cathartic, and briefly hopeful. Naive, but important anyway.



Cricket

"For a long time..."

We think history is full of advents. The birth of, the genesis of, the era of... We believe silence is old, ancient, encroached upon. But we've always had noise. Our ears, birds, bodily functions, wind, steps. In film theory, silent films were killed by talkies and the birth of technicolor. Often now they're only shown with live orchestras. Were they silent? Or were they pre-John Cage experiments? Many had scores. People cough, shuffle, cry.

Silence is filled with coughs. Perhaps the world is getting louder. What we fear is a loss of quiet. The hum of neon, of human machines upon "true noise". Plenty of folks now record natural wilderness sounds to preserve them from noise pollution. Is it pure?

When I was on a date with K.W. once their housemate began going on about how the noise was coming closer to the anarchist farm to drive them out. That the government conspiracies were noisy and all-present. K.W. said they thought the government wanted people to believe in that so that the government's collective power of fear would be magnified. The clutter scares us.

Are Tarantino films killing La Notte and Bergman films that crackle and hiss- that are quiet? Plenty of quiet even quiet urban films have emerged since the 90s. These quiets still crackle- no film is truly silent- they have cars, wind, and breathing.

For some people, there is no dichotomy, they are deaf. The question of silence is not even a question. It is a fact.

All silence is pregnant. It counters resolution. Speech, not noise, breaks it. But is it breaking as much as we think- the emergence of noisier, louder films? Have we just been trained to hear silence and noise as binaries- to construct a true silence when tinnitus renders this impossible? They aren't binaries. The hiss of 16mm film is a dialogue. Even quiet Apichatpong Weerasethakul films hiss with the

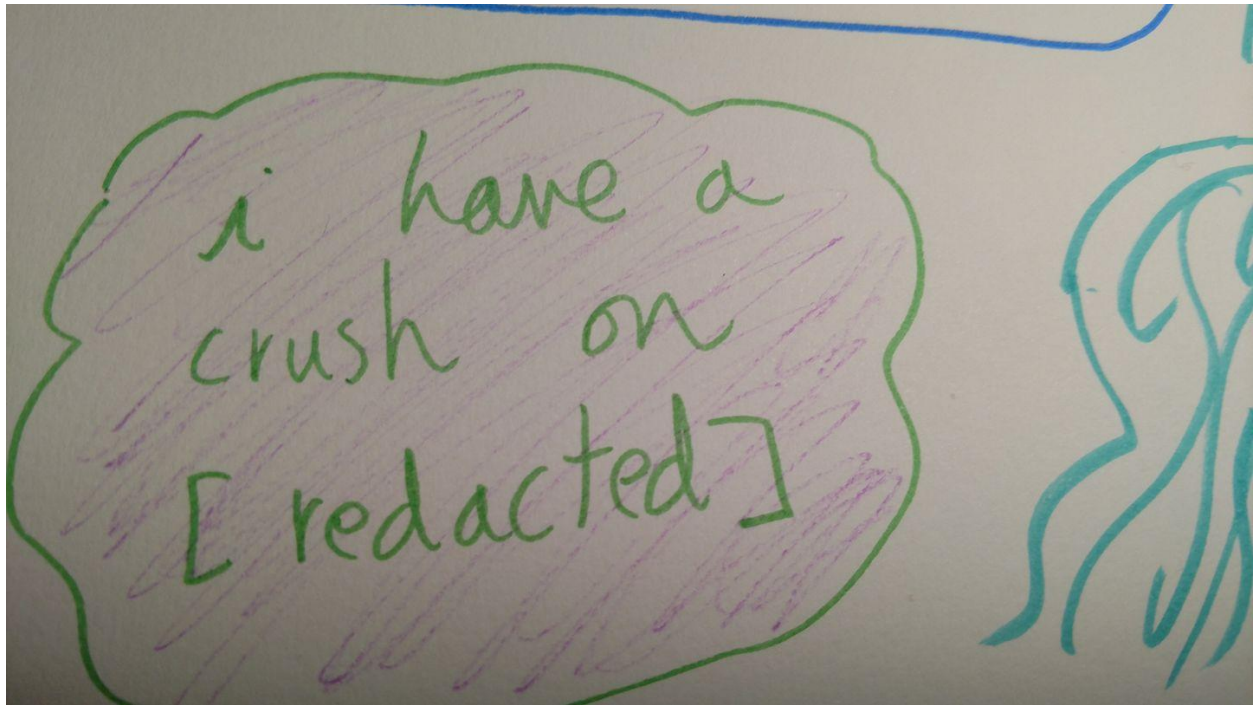
sound of the jungle. Even as they are quiet and rarely broken by dialogue, they hiss. They spur. They fight these silent ideas through natural soundscapes that are brought to the forefront.

As my film teacher, Dr. Terri Francis has said time and time again- nothing is new. Nothing is emerging. It's history.

Why are crickets a sign of silence? They are the ultimate noisiness. Incessant, unproductive, whimsical but annoying. If they really are what we consider to be quiet, then maybe quiet has always been intrusive- forcing us to reckon with what's inside us. Alanis Morissette said it best on All I Really Want. *Here can you handle this... did you think about your bills, your ex, your deadlines, or when you think you're gonna die or did you long for the next distraction.* As much as we talk about hating distraction- we also love it. We crave it. Scrolling through feeds, music, noise of any kind- emotional or physical. Doing things, hearing things, feeling things that aren't what's buried. That is too great to reckon with. It's why we say music heals and helps us cope. It does. It distracts from the ultimate silence: death.

Films and illuminations often serve as a distraction too, they cohere the incoherence of life into something tidy, hopeful, helpful. Something we can find solace in. A noise that has meaning and optimism- at least they often do. Even pondering, reflective films are a hopefulness of some kind. They pose questions, they are active. Films are never passive. They question, poke, cry, cohere, advance, advertise. But they aren't sitting with silence. Even films about death offer resolutions or curiosities. Anomalies or quirks. But when we sit alone with silence. Even in the noise of silence- crickets, pipes, hums, charging sounds- we find that there's something deep inside. Quiet, still. Oprah calls it that still, quiet voice inside- our voice, our divinity. Some call it God. Whatever it is, it is both terribly fearful and terribly comforting.

The Diary



I

What is that is so fascinating about a diary? We've all covered it. From Sarah Manguso to Durga Chew-Bose to Lena Dunham to Steve Roggenbuck.

II

Some of us thrive on exposing ourselves. Writing ourselves into oblivion. I have theories- but the only one that gathers enough steam to be true is that we want to be left alive. Morbidly so. As much as we drink in excess, cry, make things, and cry again- we want something "permanent".

my alarm will work... I am on 7% I tell her. She asks if I want to hang up and conserve battery but she is telling me about her date and I don't want to be alone without any screen-light in my now-silent apartment so I ask her to go on. She proceeds.

Now I'm deciding what to wear tonight. If I should wear a dress, cry, or just eat the apple in my bag. For as much as I think about crying- I hardly do.

V

I obsess over likes. This is my Achilles's heel. Also, that I overprotect others. That I am afraid of feelings. That I am desperate. That I am afraid of being lonely all the time. Maybe we need to be lonely though. To reflect on the space in-between notes of a Feist song or a Liszt composition. Is a composition a song? I could easily Google it, but I'd rather let it hang. I wonder if Liszt would enjoy a Feist song.

VI

I think sometimes that sketchbooks are diaries. Free associations are diaries. They imprint a moment- image or word. Brainstorms are imprints of a specific time, of a life, of a love unrequited, of ideas for a new world, of something to do. Plans are diaries. We laugh at them later on, even if they worked out, our face crinkles at the things we had to do, the anxiety we had to weather.

Sketchbooks, at their best, ask what will make me happy today? I want to wake up every day and say what will make me happy? I don't always know, though. Sometimes what makes me happy is laborious. I appreciate Julia Cameron's morning pages, but I don't have the stamina to wake up everyday and write three pages of my brain shit. Maybe this is my brain shit. I shouldn't be that lazy. But I am. I leave bars and parties early. Who are we accountable to but ourselves in the end? So when you do need to leave a party, like the end of a twentysomething drama episode, do it. Leave. Cry on the way home. Move on. Sit with it. I dunno- there's not a lot you can do in those circumstances other than what there is to do. I want to make art but I don't feel free to tell you always. I want to be known and

seen, parties don't always do that unless you are Taylor Swift singing Enchanted. I have so many desires.

VII

I want to be the Darcie Wilder or Mitski of video art. How many women are told they were witches? How many more?

VIII

I can't relax. Vacations are often more stressful than anything. The spaces in-between spark with tension, with possibilities. I don't always fulfill them.

I once went to a luxurious dinner with my parents and got lobster and my hands smelled like lobster for like a week, I felt so fancy but it also felt weird like buttery but nice but odd. I couldn't differentiate the end of the lobster with the end of that luxury. The vacation was short- just a dinner where I could talk. For once, with them. I didn't order wine though. I have to keep some things to myself. Even if I don't want to. Some things are only done to keep veiled and use as secret shields inside yourself you will never violate or share with someone else. I have few of these- so it is imperative to keep them hidden. You are your only shield.

The End

This is the essay I dread writing. This is the essay I know I must write. It is 3:15am. I just finished the first season of Veronica Mars and my cat is cuddling up beside me. He's not my cat exactly, a family friend's mom died of cancer and I am watching him. The friend texts me often for updates- I send pictures. I just made a gif of him to send to my friend who is sleeping with my other friend.

The ending of something is always notable, regardless of how big the ending is. But some endings are big.

I am moving to New York City, the hub of art, the metropole, the lover of all, the apple of temptation, the slurring skyline, the whirring subways. The gross shit in the street, the endless sense of need, the tight apartments, the sound of jazz hot everywhere, and the coldest, darkest winters around. My fear is endless. My hope is large, but fenced in.

I have three days left in my large Bloomington, Indiana apartment. I have been here three years. Soon this will be eclipsed by my last stay in Indianapolis for seven weeks and then erased by however-long in Brooklyn. Ideally Brooklyn. The universe is funny, plans and time, but this is the plan, nonetheless.

I don't know how to write about three years or even three moments to sum up those years. Right now it only feels like a ticking bomb slipping through my fingers. And not to mention that is the end of my formal education, perhaps forever. Seven years of my life are a chapter in my memoir, if I ever wrote one. Before that doesn't even count... middle school, Minnesota, the time I lived in Indy before the second time I lived in Indy... I have come so far. Done so much. I am so young yet so fucking old.

I feel like there are things to do, recollect, fold, mourn, enjoy. Instead I binge watch Veronica Mars. A fitting end.

There are no puzzles to solve. Even the boy whose name made me flinch once- is now moving in with my friend Jen, and I don't care. I said to her, "it was a long time ago". There's no sense of loss at this. No anger. Maybe not even resignation.

To be fair, there is not Zen in every area of my life. There are people it will take longer to forgive, to humanize, to understand, or let go of. I am terrible at letting go. Of over analyzing of being angry and passive over what could have been. Even Grindr flings alert my sense of loss. Things that were never mine to begin with. I forget what internet tab I closed last, and furiously fear what it is. I scan my search history- it doesn't reproduce the memory. I fear it was a "to do" I forgot to write down, endlessly in search of things to do, to make sense of it all. I can't undo anything here. I can't change it. I read Ariel Goldberg. I want to cry, but don't. I want to call a friend and say how sad I am it's ending. Even when I am not sad, I am only mourning the things that didn't happen for in reality I am glad glad glad glad to be done. To be out. To feel even vaguely free of this part of my life. The arc was ready to end. The viewers wanted a new show. Not just a new season. A whole new thing. I knew the thing was big. I had to go towards it, even as it scared me. I know. I'm terrified too. I am worried I will end up cut up in a dumpster or forced to slum it back to Indiana. These will not happen. I will at least slum to Chicago. A joke about the future lightens the pain and the excitement. It is only a thing you are doing. All things are only things. An event is only an event. Emotions are important, a garden to understand, but emotions are not things. Feelings are not objects or actions. This is a difference and a huge difference of magnitude.

I should stop writing about wanting to cry and not crying. I should cry just to write about it. Call Stella or Rose or Casey or Rachel and cry into their phone. Once I cried into the phone with someone I wasn't close to. Once I cried in the arms of someone I didn't know well my freshman year. She didn't know, she said shhh, shhh I know. But she didn't. I was friends with her friends and sober and I don't remember what I was crying about whether it was the boy or just general despondency. That is the thing about depression, I can't always tell you what I am crying about or if it is in my head or if it is "life" as a whole.

I am not always lucid with clarity on emotions versus actions versus objects versus feelings. Sometimes I am just sad and sometimes I don't know.

Endings are never seamless. There are goodbyes, some Irish goodbyes, some tacit, some tearful on front porches. Sometimes there are transitional twilight periods where the next step is obscured but outlined, sometimes the next step is fully eclipsed by confusion. It depends. But there are bumps. Waiting for an apartment to show up, working at your parent's house, not sure where to move at all, crying in your friends' arms for the last times.

I do not cry yet. I don't know how. I forgot. I cried so much my freshman year of college that I only cried on New Years for the next three years and then in college only a handful of times: once in the arms of the friend of friends, once on the phone to my mom about being lonely- the same year, once when I was broken up with by the only person I have dated thus far, and once when my dog died and I had to bury him.

Maybe those are the memories I hold of these three years. They are somewhat clear. That, and the endless walking the end of the first year over the boy who didn't like me back and who refused to talk to me after a weird party. He said goodbye and then that he was fucking someone in the bathroom. I was tipsy I said something mad I don't remember. He talked to my best friend later and said it was angering he couldn't talk to me about his sex life. I was hurt. Now I don't care that he is around at music festivals and EDM shows. I walk out, or just move on. I am learning to forgive more quickly. I am learning to let go.

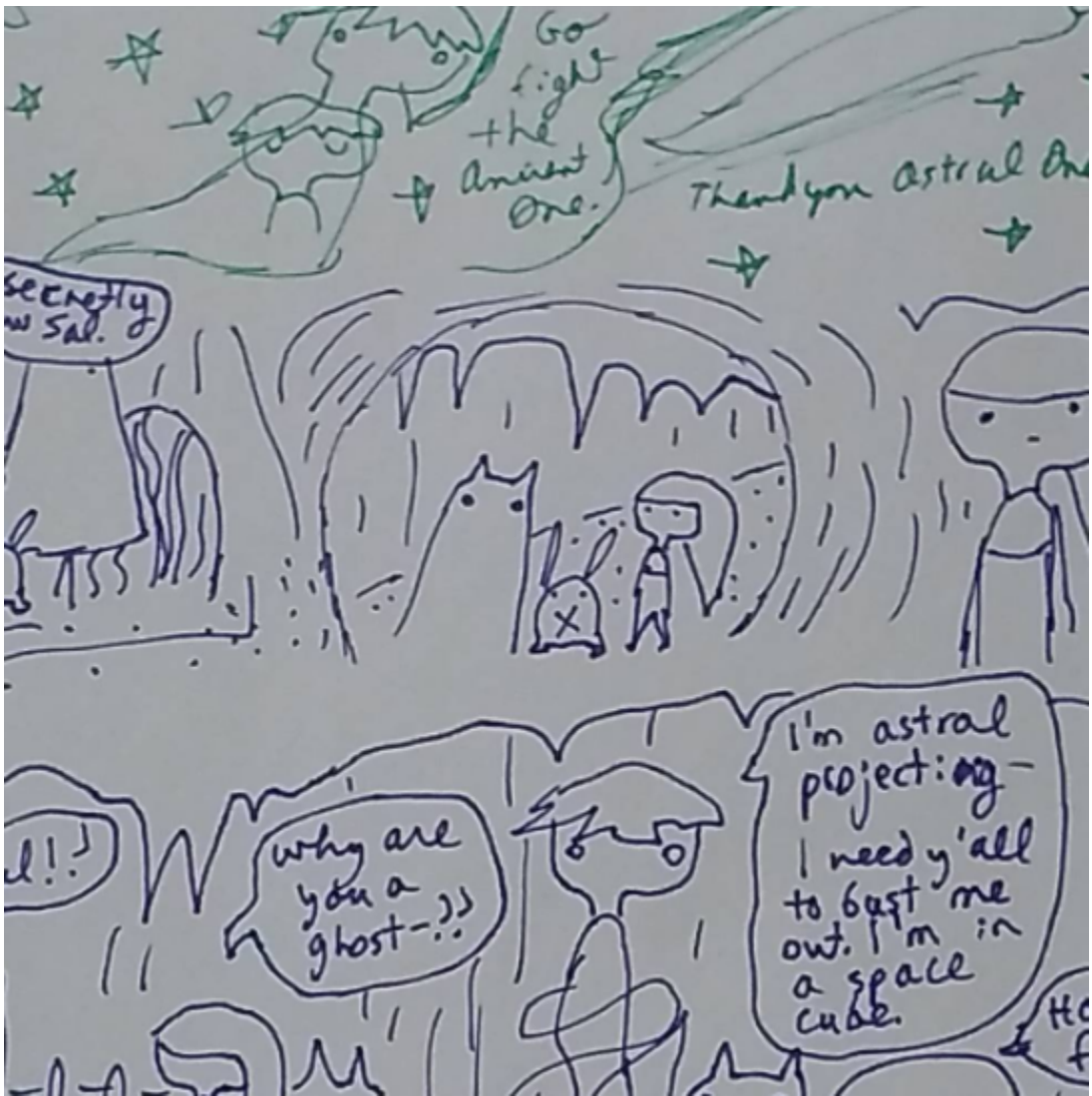
Sometimes things are stolen from us. Sometimes they are handed to us. Sometimes we take them. I saw a sign in the window of Soma Coffee for Grumpy Cat, famed Greenpoint Brooklyn coffee shop. Later, I see similar signs. Astro Poets tweets Virgos are about to embark on an adventure. Other small things like that occur. People start talking about me as a New Yorker before I am there.

The things about endings that is terrible is that they are slow. They bleed into things and we are forced to reckon with the silences and spaces in-between. I am there and here. I am around. I must field awkward questions about my hopes and dreams to random people. And even to some degree friends can ask invasive or protective-yet-condescending questions. Are you planning? Of course, I am, a Virgo is a queen of planning and overanalyzing and fear. I just need you to say you are here and I can do it. Some boyfriend down the line will read this and try and say this to me without a hint of sincerity but it will not work.

Preparation for endings can be done- but soon you will have done all the pre-labor you can do. You will be forced to sit with your emotions. The quiet. The fear. The love. All the time that went by- falls, winters, springs, summers.

There are lots of finals still- three, in fact. Tonight, I'll finish one more of them, while continuing to say goodbye. The harder of the two is the goodbyes, of course. I can only play Me & My Girls by Selena Gomez so many times. I still am in awe she defended 13 Reasons Why as a show. I decline to watch it whenever it comes up. I don't want to relive my high school traumas. I switch to No Control by One Direction. I want to kiss someone to this song. It feels like the song that makes the most sense for me right now. Spiraling around is a great feeling sometimes- for small spurts. One Direction worry about gay subtext a lot, but they replicate it too often for it to be an afterthought.

I had a dream that an ex of mine was lost after a storm. It was one of those surreal dreams. It was an ex I hadn't talked to in a long time. He was the only person lost. It was like college, except we were in a forest on a hill. The hill was all I could see. But there were bridges and large buildings and mansions. Everyone was ok but my ex. I cannot stress that enough. He was the only one I could not find. His friends didn't know where he was either. The storm had broken bridges and such. The trees did not have leaves, maybe it was fall. Anyway, I decided despite hating him, I had to find him. I recruited my friends. I don't remember who all, but I know Mary came. I know his friends begrudgingly helped. We eventually ended up in a creepy mansion that had rooms of purple light and lots of stairs. One room had green light I think. We found him, he was ok, and was begrudgingly thankful I had found him. That's all I remember. I wish I knew more. I hadn't seen him in months and thought I was over it- so it was a bit of a shock when I woke up. I'd spent that night in an insomniatic fit talking to a guy on Grindr till 5am but he was really nice. I asked him on a date but he ghosted me the next day. I hope he's ok.



the screen

The Referential Artist

Art is positioned in relation to other art. It is referential. It is an art of linking disparate information, much like the internet becomes a web of mess, it is a mess of interlinked information.

Gilmore Girls is a web of references that creates this hyperlink as an aesthetic.

Modern poetry is a hyperlink of linking internet with nature (see the work of Steve Roggenbuck). Modern Youtube is a literal hyperlink.

The hyperlink artist is one who invests, divests, and links vastly disparate experiences to create a new aesthetic. Memes are a great example of this- they combine two different aesthetic experiences to create a new one, thus linking emotion with content that don't necessarily correlate.

The aesthetic of the hyperlink, the hyper referential, is a difficult one to nail down. Just throwing things together does not create a new aesthetic. But chaos gives way to organization. The internet is the very form of the hyperlink. The artistic solvents from the internet are the internet artists who merge these disparate aesthetics into cohesive wholes through memes, gifs, color palettes, and collage.

Godard is another one of the referential artists, the hyperlink of different styles and methods that maximalize one piece. One piece uses different styles and methodologies (collage) to hyperlink and suture one "thing". The thing explodes because it is an endless amount of things. The referential explodes into possibility. Part of the hyperlinked work is that one never makes a hyperlinked work ALONE. A hyperlink work is part of a body of work. The work hyperlinks into each other. Murakami's world hyperlink into operas and sonatas but also into each other. Urushibara, a sleazy detective, comes back in multiple novels.

One piece suggests other things. Godard's films are possibilities. Apichatpong Weerasethakul's films suggest the next one (as well as others that could never be made due to time). Queerness means anything is possible, hyperlink work means

more work is always looming. They all come back to centered themes. The hyperlink creates more and more, it is never full because each work is actually many works and the links of information and references suggest the multiplicity of worlds both outside and inside the work.

The hyperlink is hyperproductive. Godard, Murakami, Weerasethakul, even Amy Sherman-Palladino create endless works. Never satisfied and returning to the same theme once then never again, they suture art into worldbuilding. Worldbuilding becomes the way of cohering the universe into a thing always built, always constructed, always connected to itself and everything. The internet means everything is knowable and everything is connected.

The Artist as Multiple

The idea that the artist must be one sort of priest is a peculiar one as it is steeped in Protestantism morals of labor. Labor is purified in Protestantism. Labor is supposed to be a certain type of work, one that is about staying in one's class and position and centers on not letting chaos into one's craft. Work is a word commonly used for one's art or craft. But it isn't a mistake that the two are conflated. Capitalism and art are understandably linked through the production and maintenance of imagery and labor. Art is labor and all the baggage, hopes, and need for money that comes along with it.

The idea that the artist must work in one medium is an example of the artist as a capitalist machination. An arm of the party of capitalism, the artist reaffirms its desires of placement. As an artist one is supposed to affirm the fixedness of capitalism, whether overtly or not, the artist is a specific breed of person. Who gets to be an artist is a long history of class, leisure, and MFAs.

Now not only is the artist a specific person but they have a specific job. One gets an MFA for one thing. One craft- painting or sculpture traditionally, sometimes now video or writing.

The artist is not allowed to be multiple under capitalism. One is an author, a filmmaker, or a musician. Even in the 60s this was true. It is very recent that the artist is a business person (one sort of multiple) or a juggler (the other sort). The jack of all trades is a traitor to the traditional model of artisan, guild, apprenticeship, genius, MFA, and so on. The artist who betrays their craft for others is a wayward person. The artist who dabbles betrays capitalism and efficiency in the name of play and chaos.

The artist who experiments, or hyphenates, or also does... is a failure to capitalist desires. They can never be a genius, only a tinker or interesting person. Not a Shakespeare, Wagner, or even an iconoclast like Rimbaud or Ionesco. The hero is the role of the artist, to enrich "culture". This is a nationalist project. Even Ionesco and the outlaw artists are eventually absorbed into these ideologies. They are marked off as theorists instead of disruptive.

The critic-maker is a newer invention in the way it now effects making, not that it does not have predecessors in the Greeks. Godard comes to mind as one of the first. Cahiers du cinema and A bout de soufflé become linked. One writes into being a film not as a script but as a theorist. The theory informs the making and the confusion of media becomes all media. Godard writes and Godard films. Godard is both. Godard is multiple and can be experienced as multiple. The artist is no longer one, no longer a genius as one.

A more obvious example is Miranda July. She is a true slash artist. Writer/performer/filmmaker/video artist. She defies becoming a savant at one thing to follow the artistic impulse. This is a threat to capitalist notions of genius and heroes who stand alone.

The pop star is a fake multiple. They sing, dance, and write but rarely truly. They often do these things as one: spectacle. Not that they aren't artists it is simply not the same sort of multiple.

The DIY artist is the true threat for they have no need of funding, no one who tells them to narrow their focus. They simply make. This of course can be lonely, scary, hard but it is also free. They can be writers, theorists, makers, performers, commercialists and capitalists and communists alike. They survive by multiplicities and they thrive on them.

The DIY multiplicity can never create mainstream work nor works of genius, but this does not evaluate their artistry. They are powerful and mobile. Light, free, and powerful. They are revolutionary even when they take paid normal gigs to survive, for they float and are light on their feet. The multiple artist can never be a hero, nor even can they strive to be the hero. They know community and they know that no one stands alone for they must float in and out, invest in many to create work (art) that gains any traction without monetary backing. The chaotic becomes an unhinged power. The slash artist is one who allegedly never succeeds but almost always ends up delving into uncharted territory.

The multiple survives on multimedia and its partner mixed-media. The pastiche is a thrill. Words are text and image. Images are informed by words (directly or not).

Materiality is to be pushed and objects are living and nothing is fixed. The auteur is dead, as no one really has control. No one who is a multiple has the money to have control. They must rely on concept alone and hope communities can carry the concepts through. Unprofessionalism and accident give rise to artistry of an unhinged (powerful) nature. Connections form differently, more heightened, less poetic and more hyperlinked. The columnist is also a videomaker and a poet. The poet is a videomaker. The poetry is in the video. The connections are not still, they move. The target can never be hit. First it seems to manifest in a poem then a song then a video- one chases it. The sooner one resigns the myth of genius or what medium one is supposed to work, the freer they are to explore, press, and let. Letting things is the power of the slash. Of the multiple.

Letting art flow, while a cliché, is the heart of the artist as multiple. The multiple allows for a praxis of ideas not of media. While one may not explore the technicality of cinema, one exploits it for a specific theme. Quite simply- one does not make a close shot for the tactility of a close shot but one does it to imply intimacy because the theme of one's body of art is intimacy.

Notes on Memes

I

What is late capitalism?

II

A meme is an inflection of mobility. A meme allows for two readings: the ironic and the exact. There are two disparate pieces drawn together. The meme is sarcastic. Angry. Snarky. Depressing. It allows for low culture to mask as high culture in a way that is intensely pessimistic. Memes give up and soothe at the same time.

III

Mememes are political. They raise awareness and provide information. They educate. They self-destruct in trying to explicate, they say what they mean and they can't say anything else- yet together they form a moodboard of attitudes towards mental health, communism, Donald Trump, and more.

IV

The problem is that as dense as they are they act on a specific cultural knowledge that can never be known to all. There is no Meme Pokedex, although Steve Roggenbuck once tweeted me one website... The point is there is a gap between the knowledge intrinsic to memes and the knowledge required to decipher the message. Some memes travel better because they require little to no outside cultural knowledge.

These are cats as zodiac signs or a "don't mis-pronoun me" meme on a rainbow background. Some of these still require a knowledge but not THE knowledge of

vast amounts of tv shows, jokes, Vines, Youtubes, etc. The meme is the ultimate stop on the train of the internet, the condensation of thousands of hyperlinks into digestible pieces. There are thousands of Youtube chambers, hallways of Vine stars, and more that some do know of from Baddie Winkle to articles about fisting with Sufjan Stevens. Of course, the hyperlink in the meme is flattened into just an image. The context disappears.

V

The meme is the capitalist product and the teacher of capitalist products. It is a currency of knowledge and info but also an awareness raiser of the problems it is itself the product of.

VI

The meme is flexible, even ecstatic, but it is not an essay, not a nuanced piece. It is a part of the flattening of Leftist politics that produces despair, inaction, and a either/or instead of a both/and ideology. It is not about abstraction or metaphors but of statements and dogma. Even good dogma struggles under nuance. Calling someone “bad” in a meme flattens an entire legacy of parsing through what evil means. It flattens the banality of evil as raised by Arendt. The trivialness, the mundaneness, the ease.

VII

Late capitalism is the idea that soon capitalism will implode and all the memes and tweets about revolution will become true. That now the world will give way to a primitive, stateless utopia where folks trade, dabble in communism, and either seek shelter in nuclear shelters or have destroyed the means of production in favor of anarchist farms. What this means beyond empty words and aesthetics is not clear.

VIII

The meme is the collapse of video and “the internet” into the new art form/digital currency. That memes will last longer than the other two seems doubtful, but the speed of creation and imagery is astounding and what happens next is likely a further extension of speed, currency, and collapsing.

dreams and geography

Hello to All This

1

New York is a central whirlpool, the kind of place that feeds and consumes all that come near it. It also begins to feel insufferably small the longer you live here. The storefronts on 14th street begin to feel like the pedestrian Midwestern malls I grew up with. It's remarkable only in how quickly it becomes your only reference point. The small towns of the South, Midwest, and country become quaintly small. You feel only the massiveness of buildings. Buildings, fashion, smells, subways.

This is altogether the same romance that artists crave from New York. To claim it as their own. To be a New Yorker, although the common verbiage or what I heard early on was that five years means you live in New York and ten means you are a New Yorker.

The Upper East Side becomes the part of town you never go to- the Lower East Side the land of the club kids and college kids. The neighborhoods of Brooklyn become the places everyone moved after graduation. Bushwick is hot this season, we say. Crown Heights. New York is a story of gentrification, money, history.

Whenever, wherever you are in New York, you will hear: It isn't how it was...

You will learn what areas were what. New York stirs the 50s and 60s back into existence. There are swing halls, romances, monuments, public parks, demonstrations en masse, essayists, parties with champagne. But also- cocaine, large amounts of crime, death, wild alarmist crime reports, and all the dark stories you could ever want. Barbra Streisand is big here. Everyone remembers the 50s and 60s as the time theatre was grimy but holy.

The New York of the 90s is also here- the remnants of Seinfeld are everywhere. Soup shops, cinemas, the bakeries, hair-brained schemes, tamer thirty-year olds cynical of everything. The Sex and the City businessmen worth dating, club openings, rich women, they are here too. Only in Manhattan. Only above 34th.

But you also taste the disappointment of the twentysomethings- the ones who watched SATC and failed to gather enough social capital to become the cultural tourist they wanted to be. The ones who found men who wanted to make families in Connecticut, New Hampshire, Texas, Chicago, LA. The ones who are drunk every week, saying they'll write something or paint next week. Or the ones who do, but feel ready to give up and move somewhere cheaper- Philly, Rochester, Buffalo. Most artists are leaving or saying they will soon. Almost everyone seems mad, bitter, sad. Like something was lost after gentrification drove up the Brooklyn rent to nearly unaffordable even for semi-mobile college graduates. Worse, they are now conscious of who they are displacing and feel awkward and guilty they cannot seemingly make structural change to what they are quickly becoming a part of. It is hard to tell if they actually care or must now put on masks of caring.

Coked out poets, sad momcore musicians, angry boys who write "serious fiction" about the end of the era of David Foster Wallace. Everyone here wants something and simultaneously thinks it is impossible to achieve anything. The best they can think is that something will go viral and give them a moment of pleasure. Every party is a moment to ask someone to put something up on their website or tweet their art. The folks who watched Girls are here now, but more fucked up, more conscious, sadder, and slightly more private with their private finstas, private twitters, and password protected tumblrs.

Freelancers are the other breed that is formed in the depths of North Brooklyn. They thrive on gentrified coffee chains and gourmet croissants. Bad daters, they are fiercely ready to tackle the overworked spirit of think-pieces, coding, and nebulous internet jobs like social media campaigner, optics managers, and for-hire website design.

You're weepy or overworked. Afraid of the future and too well-read to write anything.

2

My block is a sleepy one. Tree-lined and full of brownstones. Latinx families and groups of white folks with roommates haunt the bodegas.

When you first get off the subway you see the pigeons gathering in what forms a sort of square. One corner is a large high-rise of apartments, the other where cars drop off subway-riders or police cars camp out. The organic bodega spouts tomatoes, avocados, and fresh produce galore- and cheap rolls for your own sandwiches. The guacamole is \$5 and lasts only one night- but is certainly fresher than what you find at Key Foods.

As you go on you see the overpriced Chicken store, the rumblings of gentrification in a coffeeshop chain with ludicrously priced triple lattes (\$7) that me and my friend Shelby have sworn off for its terrible influence. Something small we do to superficially feel better. The mailshop. A loud zealous church in a small storefront. Two less obnoxious coffee/bars where more locals hangout by candlelight and eat buffalo mac'n'cheese with jalapenos (\$10). One of these is where I meet Shy almost weekly to drink coffee and demean the boys who date us.

Onward you find the barber and my bodega with an almost palling light and a healthy amount of men buying beer and talking in a calming rhythm about god knows what. I pet the cat whenever I see her. She licks my hand first to know that I am not going to play a joke. I doubt anyone plays a joke on her though, she is a goddess to the owners: Mice.

Then we are on my block. Families. Women, mostly. Cars. Washing to be done. The laundromat playing the Pope's benedictions. The rumble of a dozen washers.

3

I've stopped wearing headphones every time I walk. I feel more at ease in New York even as most would assume the opposite. I feel more curious, more absorptive, more artistic. I am gathering the sights. I am balancing my life out. I am zen. I am open (mu) to everything. I am Nick Carraway watching everything unfold. Joan Didion crouching and listening, not smoking hash but still in the

room. What's this? What's that? I want to be important. Or, I want to feel important.

I vacillate between wanting to be the cardboard in the rain and the model on the runway. The cellophane around cigarettes, so honest, and the cigarette itself, the sleekness of power and symbol.

Here, they are almost indistinguishable.

The neurotic persona is key to power, fame, influence. One must be radically open in the right way on the right timetable to achieve anything. L.A. is for the slick, New York is for the purely sick. We come here for a community of ragtag, highstrung, angry, sad weirdos and uptight pricks with impeccable taste. We want the same thing from our lovers as the city- twinkling lights of domination and masochism. The right kind of domination seems far-off though once we wade through the assholes who only accept obscure music or painting as art. Yet, we also don't like the neurotic capitalists driving their money-shit onto us as we are barely making rent. The Williamsburg versus Bushwick debacle. The xx versus Brockhampton. The weird versus the truly weird.

4

New York is the story of everything you have ever wanted being two blocks away but being too tired to go, or you can't afford it, but you feel oddly at ease. Or you don't.

Either- you achieve the things you want and feel that you are being swept into a narrative or you feel that it is a dismal spot of assholes, cocaine, and fear.

One of the first people I met while in the City was Jaclyn, a Bennington-graduated nanny. She seemed so full of life at this party- the natural cynic. We got tequila and joked around about sex but when I saw her again after she'd avoided my calls for so long- she was talking of moving out.

"It's too expensive, it's so dirty, it's unsafe... and I could just move in with my parents"

It's the story of money. Not only are jobs dissolving and harder to climb to but we also don't care. We don't believe in any mythology, no endgame, no winning. We only believe in a slow decline. Either you believe it is because of capitalism or because of anti-capitalism. The Left or the Right are ruining America. Maybe America never was, the anti-capitalists say. Maybe America was gone before I was born, the right says. Then they hail cabs, walk by you, give in. Everyone sees the Inquisition and says it is out of their hands.

5

The escape from New York narrative arose around the time that I began seriously contemplating moving here. So much so that reviews of New York by St. Vincent found music bloggers reflecting on the thinkpieces spawned by the "trope of leaving New York". Even Hannah Horvath left her overpriced Greenpoint apartment.

Thinkpieces warned me not to move here, that I would regret it and that it was a grimy place not for the faint of heart. My professor for video art that year had just left the City as well, because of catcalls. Yet I believed in the narrative of signs and felt that it was calling me even as the world seemed apocalyptic around me.

The night Trump was elected I was with one of my lesbian friends and thought I loved her, she wanted to dance, a woman called me famous, and I couldn't drive the car up onto the highway. I thought I couldn't get onto the curve- that we would fall off. Gravity wasn't real. The unthinkable left me numb for weeks. I had panic attacks of police raids. And the police did eventually come to my house on a noise complaint due to a noise art show at my apartment.

I was dressed to the nines and scared for my life. My ex had texted me he was taking over the courthouse. Pence was promoted.

My parents were worried about terrorist attacks if I moved. And there have been. A car drove and killed many people. A failed bomb went off at Times Square.

I thought that it was the end of the world for a while in early 2017. But here we are. And my, how many times has the world ended now? At least five in my lifetime.

The fires in California are not the first. And not that things don't progress, but the world has always been ending. We just may be closer along in the cycle.

6

All the gays are awful, says every gay. You are what is wrong with the gay community, the gays say.

I am good at finding people who are introverted and becoming their one friend. Then I make them into a vague community.

Everyone here is so cynical. Which I get. When I walked with Jordan and her friends down the way we bantered and it felt very Seinfeldian. I am Elaine. I am that privileged white girl with existential angst who needs to rid herself of vanity but struggles to do so. Who loves to talk to be heard.

Here it is easy to know that the center does not hold as Auden and Didion have said, that the end is near. LA may be the Hellmouth but here you can sense the languid melancholy. The idea that not you but everyone is special. I remember as a highschooler viciously arguing in English class with a Christian boy. He said we are all made special individually and I argued that meant no one was special. He kept chuckling as if I didn't understand a dirty joke. I want to know the answer. If we are all begging to be the next Joan Didion, Carrie Bradshaw, Julia Child, Oprah, Issa Rae, and so on- then who are we? Are we only found in relation to those that found themselves? If we are all trying to speak for our generation then aren't we a collective of disembodied voices all trying to talk over the others? Chaos has receded into vigorous discourse. There is only one aesthetic: millennial pink. Rose gold. Booming drums. Reverb. The likes, the shares. If we only share our own lives there is nothing to share. We are alone in the internet with our 12 twitter followers.

7

Transcendence is not fame. It is, perhaps, an audience.

I remember distinctly staring at the blue screen of a Norwegian documentary on Janis Joplin at midnight in high school. *I want that.*

I want that.

The Cosmo

I

I go out to get a cosmo. I take the L and finally get a week pass instead of a shitty three-rides \$10 pass. I hate that you can't make them work. I hate feeling like there's a way to do this cheaper than there is. Public transport just fucks poor and middle-class people over because it, like us, is failing.

II

Arriving at the bar, I sit down at the counter. I don't want to feel alone so I order a vodka cranberry. It is cheaper than a cosmo, which is what I wanted but didn't order. I was too afraid to actually try. The bartender was nice and had endless friends coming up to them. They also hosted a story night too. Endless writers, endless stories talking about escaping Middle America.

I am Middle America.

She is hurt but is a beast sulking and suckling just like you are here. She just doesn't have as many Rite Aids and she doesn't cost as much.

III

I drink the vodka cranberry, I watch the men around me. This is a gay bar after all, and I came because I was lonely and wanted to be social. Even to be talked to. Even if that person is just doing their job. I need a job, I think, as I do everything while needing a job.

IV

The men aren't looking at me. I think maybe this one, but no he is not.

They're all on dates.

Except him-

He's on Grindr.

I check mine. No messages. Not even the man who said he was "on the sacred hunt for dick and booty".

Is this what dating in the city is like? I shrug, knowing it isn't that different. All of these feelings are more connected to being on my own now than to New York specifically.

V

I think about leaving. The bartenders change. This one guy yells at the bartender whose name I now know to be Katie. He is mad Katie didn't serve him. He claims he is also a bartender. Katie tries to say it was because her shift was over and they were changing shifts. There is a mixup and the bartenders feel differently. Some say stay, some say go to the man who hasn't been served. The bartenders are all white and he is one of the few black men in the room.

The guy leaves. I look around. I'm still lonely. The karaoke that was supposed to start after the reading hasn't started. I get up and accidentally run into a guy. He says sorry. He's the first man to speak to me all day. Even the person at the bank was a woman.

The duality: terrified and desiring

VI

I have sent so many messages on Grindr it's embarrassing. You get so few responses. Long ago, my friend Rachel said you just send a million and hope for

the best. I've made two friends from dating apps so far in the city. Ric and Eric. Later Alan will come and surpass them all.

Eric says everyone fucks everyone here.

I beg to differ, I say.

VII

I get close to home and hop into a bodega and then another. The first didn't have what I needed. I grab toilet paper and powdered doughnuts. I lost the rest of the twenty I used to pay for my drink at the bar. I buy the ninety-nine-cent toilet paper and doughnuts. I leave. Frustrated.

I watch more couples on my block. I am angry. I deserve this too, I say. I deserve so much.

I go home and finally message all the people my friends told me to connect with when I got to NYC.

I hope they are nicer than me.

VIII

What if none of it matters and we are building castles of words to protect our fragile egos?

The earth will collapse as our bodies will and then what happens? Do we just live like zombies haunting the cosmos as we continue to reincarnate as rocks, rings, bad dreams...

The music floats softly into my Bushwick apartment from the bar a block away. I am hoping for some stability and sense of purpose. I am doing so much but I am not living that vibrant Sex and the City thing and maybe no one else is either but I wish they told me they were all depressed too even if that was a lie. I also wish no

one talked to me forever and ever amen but we all know that won't happen so we must pick our words like plucked stars, so careful, so clever, so sweet.

IX

I finish "M Train" by Patti Smith off the L and then wonder if I will see her in Greenwich sometime, I wonder if she would like me I wonder what life adds up to with all that experience with all that wonder and hope.

I think artists are just curious people. I think the internet makes us all seem foolishly flat.

Our contradictions are melding into a hive mind and that sounds alarmist but I just want to be held by someone with strong arms who sings a lullaby and cooks me vegetables I don't want to eat. I want a lover who is the touch of starlight on my cheek, the moonlight is my friend, the crystals are my fingers. Later when I am more at home in the City, I will pour a vodka cran into an Ayn Rand book at a party in Brooklyn Heights.

No Flowers

1

I went to bed knowing a trans person would serve in a legislature. I went to bed with thoughts of democracy swarming in my head. What if she is murdered? What if she is one of the 27? The 28th.

I woke up and she was still alive. Still smiling in photographs plastered with dignity and the pathos of being on fire.

My Facebook friend, Joanna Valente, writes an essay on the dignity of non-binary folks and their violent erasure by the government, the medical industry, and public spaces. Of well-meaning folks who fuck up. It is poetic. It is power.

I have no flowery language today, no grandstanding tower of words to protect my feelings. Only a shift and a Perfume Genius song stuck in my head. Only a slight difference to the way people look at me on the subway. I've long since stopped thinking about them, about me, about any of the ways I shrink myself to feel unseen. I don't want to be a highlight for anything except art, yet, my body becomes an art, violently, all at once, suddenly.

2

There is a darkness to being around long enough to regret your longevity. To regret the toils of the years earlier, to not care about the years at hand. Oh, we suddenly think, my whole life- a waste.

Even though we continue we believe that chronology rules meaning.

The journal of the 20s seems thicker than the one in the 30s, the 60s seem bathed in nostalgia. But not for Patti Smith, not for Joni Mitchell, the present annihilates the past for them--- blank pages open up and ink stains them one minute at a

time. I know I am only 22 but I write like a 60 year old and then a 20 year old incongruously.

I dreamt I watched Stranger Things, I dreamt I was trying to save the world by saving myself.

3

My nose is stuffed up with the kind of snot that is stiff and crackly. I can't handle the way it makes me feel caged. I'm easily cagey. Easily feel stuck in a lack of profundity or a lack of decision... a lack, alas, amuck, a doe a female deer...

I fell asleep dreaming of Vera, sacred deer, and Kafka On The Shore. I don't even know what Murakami I am reading half of the time, only that I hope it sparks something in me to make. Making is the way we live when we have no other meaning. Or the way we mythologize ourselves into some sort of tapestry we believe the universe holds up as almighty. I wonder if the universe cares about the minutiae or if it just fools us into thinking so in a vain attempt to make us less lonely, less foggy, less hubristic. Or into making us complacent to never attempt greatness. If everyone thought they could be great, what then? The universe groans. Too much of a hassle. And so no one climbs mountains but the privileged few to have grown up believing they could do so, or the very few who climb with doubt in their frigid hearts.

Existential mysteries seem easier to solve than ones of the heart. Or at least we can untangle them enough to say they are intangible. Mysteries of the heart have an answer- just one we don't want.

Make sure the mountain is a mountain. It may be a tunnel, ocean, river, forest... the natural landscape is never just what it is.

4

Segmented into tiny little fractals swirling around, the moon bathes us if we let it.

5

He asks me a simple question: What do I want?

How many times has this question covered illicit desires in the history of homosexuals. We say that we want... something fun. Fun is innocent, children have fun. But we all know what fun really means.

Cowardly men now say fun when they have no soul to commit to your own. I am tired of cowards, bored by frauds, undone by simpletons. For a man is not a man without a sword and a whip, I am tired of those with only needles. My work is needles, his should be a strength worth matching with my own ambition.

6

Last Christmas I read Swing Time and watched a Buffy rip-off as well as Skam. Last Thanksgiving I read The Argonauts and wept. Two Christmases ago I was held by Jessica Jones.

7

I do not know how to have a straightforward conversation, he comes over for one. I delve into Murakami while he tries and tries to force innuendos. Or, the reverse, I make innuendo after innuendo in the hope that he will tell me he wants my body.

I want to go to Donguri on the Upper East Side but it is \$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$

Ghosts Of A Few Kinds

I can always tell a spooky bro from the way he talks about ghosting. Ghosting is a sexist way to make people who aren't men feel like shit. "Oh I'm sorry I had to go to a dog's wedding and I have no accountability..." Only shitty people ghost people. Mutual ghosting is fine that's different, both parties allow a mutual bond to drift slowly into the ether. Abuse is an okay reason to ghost someone. I feel very strongly about this as if being ghosted is being written out of existence, even though it is not.

The only way to destroy yourself completely is by going to a literature class and not reading the text. Only then have you become nothing.

He looks hot in this moment. His legs spread across like a mountain and his hair brisk, his voice reverberating with confidence and a jumpiness that is hard to track. All of a sudden words when you thought it was over. There's no map to this.

Just nod say yes, move on. Ask for sympathy not forgiveness. Cry on the bathroom floor when you are out of toilet paper and toothpaste like a true millennial.

Maybe they just remind me of my ex.

The distance between two things is always calculable in astrophysics even when something is collapsing into itself. We are collapsing, you out, me in. Yoga is the noticing of the flow of entropy and physics and biology.

There is a clear link between existentialism, nihilism, and Buddhism. Sartre, Nietzsche, and Thich Nhat Hahn.

A winding spire of mysteries is the way of survival, something to live for.

The only way to pretend is by blocking out the past and future and focusing on the imaginary now.

I am a try-hard, I know. A villain, a Blair, a mask of want. Those who want things are strivers and immediately less cool. Cool is chill, cool is ease. I am a mountain of trying and failing. Failure is cool but only if you don't care. I care. I care a whole fucking bunch.

Blossoming

The end of the road looked exceedingly like a mountain. A mountain is not climbable for me, never has been. I can hike, look, sweep, wonder but never peak a mountain. Maybe that was the point- to climb anyway. I'd looked over the edge so many times while working to get to the top, yet I had always been surprised when I looked down. I was further up than I thought. Still, sometimes I would look up instead of down and feel shaky, like I wasn't going to make it or worse yet that the next rung wasn't even doable. Doubt was quickly a ledge. Yet, here I am years later- standing. Wondering. Thinking. Worrying. The same.

The librarian looked at me funny. The Manhattan library card doesn't work in Brooklyn... I couldn't print anything here. I walked off into the night. When I'm with the flaky boys who lead me to sip wine or cry or become a hedonist I rarely get mad or sad in the moment. Instead I live wildly. Like Reese Witherspoon or Lauren Graham. The boy laughed and I just looked exasperated but ready to tumble. My sister called as we walked out, I joked, I laughed, he joked, he laughed.

We weren't that kind of boi-gurl it was more gurl-gurl.

If I could write in a straight line I would.

The crisscross of his legs over mine, he looks at me and says "ok" as if kissing me is something he must prepare for.

He downs two glasses of red wine before he begins to join his body to mine, gently, prickly at first.

The manicurist asks me if I just want my nails buffed.

No, I want a color, I say boldly.

(I don't snap)

And she says "Oh! Ok"

She assumes I am gay or I tell her I am I can't remember what came first.

The utterance or the performance

The joy or the curse

and I go with it like a river on my best days believing it to be all it is.

What is a person of considerable enlightenment if not someone who is mindful, curious, and funny? Trauma and humor deserve pathos. Deserve joy, deserve another. Deserve your love, your adornment, your blessing. Lay in the altar of yourself. Restore your optimism by coddling your pain like a newborn child, for it is being reborn again and again and you must be sweet to its sour drippings or they will become the shit of a lifetime. You will explode.

Eat, be vigorous, nurture yourself, be grateful, be present, be aware, be open. That is the way to bloom.

I want to be livid, vivid, and fully a l i v e like a tarantula on the prowl for marrow, like a raptor on the run for money, like a giant badger looking at a toad with all of its might... I want to be the shiny thing and the depth of the oceans. I am the mountain and the oarfish, the anglerfish and the halo, the darkness of the quiet corner bookshop in a night no one remembers and the sun, the tiniest speck of dirt on Jupiter's ring and the talons of a bald eagle aching for fun. The pieces of kelp stuck to your leg as you lay on the rock almost nude with your lover and the loneliness of an aging chanteuse drinking whiskey to the sound of Puccini.

A world of experience is nothing without a lightning bug blinking by your side.

I dream of a world with walls but people who dig, who lie, who steal, who borrow, who cheat, who scam, who cry, who don't care. There are goblins and fairies and many who want it to end. But it doesn't. The golems still wait, the dragons still eat the bones of the unwed in a corner of an immaculate labyrinth with a garden of hyacinths in the middle. I dream of queer prophets, gay bartenders and bards, lesbian mermaids, ghosts with lost names, spirits of all shapes and darkneses.

Who keeps the lost alive? What drives us back to the grind?

The spread of the crow spirit's wing signals the familiar to come out and tell the witch of the movements. The wind blows on the turrets and the forest creaks loudly around the walled city.

My familiar is among them, a snowy rabbit hopping and hoping she comes back to me as I chain-smoke in a cavernous cave with potions and books. I put on a record again and write and write and write and then she tells me that the city is changing. I wonder how long until I find a coven somewhere. I change shapes to enter the city, I change minds to exist.

Faith

Rubbing shoulder to shoulder with literary elite is like a fine elixir of candy corn and absinthe. Too much and you'll wear yourself thin, too little and your life feels dull like you are on the grind all the time.

Power is an invention by Gemini to control lower beings like you and me.

Regardless, I often play into this. I want power and to be known and read and adored just as much as the next person. I know this is a capitalist tendency. I want to be the best at what I do as if this is an achievable goal. Sometimes I'm not sure what it is I'm doing but then I look around and see what I've done.

I often vacillate between feeling like the shit and nothing. I currently have a column, a web series that just came out, a few reading and screenings I'm on in the next few months, an art residency... Previously, I have curated art shows, ran a podcast, done music, comics, etc. I try and focus now but I also know I don't want to limit myself. So I say artist or writer and videomaker when people ask what I do. Keeps it simple, keeps it open.

I got to New York not that long ago. But I have already met a lot of amazing writers, poets, and video artists. I already am one of them. So why don't I let myself feel that? Overachieving Virgo. That's why.

I want the power. I don't want to be locked out.

Yet-

I realized recently, that I already am doing it. It's a good feeling. and a scary one, if we already are where we want to be- then what's next besides becoming the best of the thing we are doing? Is there another way?

I've come a long way and still feel like I have a long way left to go and that's true. But people will discredit you so you shouldn't do that to yourself preemptively.

I walk to events I'm in now while listening to Arthur Russell in Bushwick. This is my life! I look at the streets and think whoa, I chose this. and not everyone can. So if you can, feel happy.

Art usually is a climb and a lot of mundane emails and a lot of community organizing and choosing which people you admire would also make good friends and would also make good organizers and thinking through the politics of ladder climbing while also making sure you like the people you are with on these ladders and knowing that the ladder should also be about actual friends not just that person you email...

You are suddenly on the top of a plateau and wonder what is next. You briefly stick your hand in the holy pool and then look up to find more mountains. Oh, you say gently finding a new walking stick. The wind seems to push you upward. But you don't believe it. There is always a sense of desperation and impending trauma. The other shoe, the other death, the other failure. Like a house of cards that could crash on you any minute. You have hedged your bets on this and wonder what comes next. If fucking up is vital you must feast on it. There is such faith you have placed in yourself that you don't let yourself access except on dark nights when you dance it out. What if you let yourself feel that on good days, medium days, gray days? The color of confusion days. I can't list my accomplishments without twinging. It's not a MOMA show, I say. It's not a Nobel Prize. I am not Bob Dylan or Blondie or Lauren Graham or Toni Morrison or even one of those social media influencers. Not even one of the anti-capitalist Instagram celebrities. The cult of celebrity will fall, they say to a thousand retweets. If social media is a competition I am losing and letting it hurt me all at the same time.

I am fishing for euphoria. I am trying to obliterate nothingness through pleasure. Euphoria will offer sustenance enough to survive, I think. If I can have success, love, and accomplishments it will protect me from nothingness, from fear, from the end. From myself. Euphoria is a friend so we are not alone. But I cannot force

myself to do drugs to escape the moment so I sit with Nothingness like she is the only friend left on the bus on a cold night home from school.

My art grows when I give into to laying my fears on paper. I see how they are holy and stupid. I go on while listening to Go To Hell by Empress Of. I'm telling my fear off like a cheerleader for my well-being.

boys

1

Steakshake and hiking boy

The David Foster Wallace addict

The boring guy who likes beer and video games

NPR is sexy guy

Birthday boy

The boy who made me wait in the bathroom shower after we made out

The twink who hugged me after coffee

The R.A. who wanted to take things fast

The guy who never came

Boy I kissed at the party while we both wore witch hats

The guy who made moves on me to "Making a Murderer"

The guy who stayed the night and ghosted me

The probiotic photographer

The one I saw Tina Fey and Amy Poehler's *Sisters* with

The engaged couple

The poet who kissed me on the sidewalk before breaking up with me (2 dates)

The one that got away, aka anarchist farmer (4 dates)

The second anarchist on the fourth of July

The finger comedian

The communist who liked THE ROOM seriously

The one who was on tinder in my bed

The one I came back to

The wall street banker

The bad one

The guy whose name I forgot

The guy who talks a lot (two times)

The nb babe at the Christmas party I drank a bottle of champagne at

The flirty actor from Chicago I barely remember

The guy who called an uber a little too soon

The guy Izabella sets me up with to watch art flicks

The guy who slept over a year ago comes back

The guy with painted nails who calls me an uber (2 dates)

The magician twink I make dinner

The guy who talks a lot, again and again

The boy who bought me cake

The public school teacher

The let's be friends nb cutie who works for my ex-teacher

The guy who plays Donkey in a New Jersey version of Shrek

The guy who falls asleep in my bed, wakes up, calls an Uber

The guy who tells me New Yorkers are busy a lot, as if I don't know

The guy who kisses me and leaves after buying me pizza

The guy who didn't have anything in Queens

The guy who liked Sailor Moon but was bad at boundaries

The guy who was really good but not a commitment kind of guy (2 dates)

The guy whose friend sold gold on the internet

The guy who stood me up in central park

The guy who had never dated before me (4 dates)

The guy who was a 25 year old virgin and broke up with me when I tried to hold his hand (3 dates)

The guy who fuckin loved granola

The guy who Ashley was friends with (4 dates)

Polyamorous guy (3 dates)

2

There are a lot of zingers to write about boys. They suck.

I know that we hate Taylor Swift now, but rarely has someone written about the way boys make us feel so well. I once told a boy while he was high on mushrooms and I was home making martinis watching Judy Garland movies that he “made me feel like a Taylor Swift song” and he was “flattered” but not into me that way. I cried in front of my tv. It was spring break, everyone was gone, and I was working in a deli feeling sorry for myself. My friend Alex brought me to a party at a co-op and I tried to talk myself out of loneliness.

White Horse soundtracked my youth when I didn't yet know that the boys who it seemed sentenced me to loneliness because I was an oddball were actually my crushes. Their parents made them invite me to things. I think they thought I couldn't tell. I could. I felt the cold shoulder. I knew it from many childhood friends.

When I realized I was gay, I also realized I was depressed. It spilled out of me. I realized I was other long before that boy from Colorado. He had me writing stories, buying records, reading Dostoevsky, and even smoking one terrible cigarette. I made him a plush sea snake. I was a witch. A bitch. Unconsolable. He dated my best friend at the time and I went on through high school haunted by how powerful desire was. How linked to isolation. How crushing.

3

The city is full of shirtless cute twinkles who make me angry. Angry with twisted desire because I know I can never look like that. I am not that skinny. I am fine. But I am feminine. I am nb. I am trans femme. I like wearing necklaces and occasionally nail polish. Not that I do it a ton, out of fear. But I see these twinkly boys wear next to nothing and feel safe. They seem free. I watch them and lust after their bodies, not sure if I want to be them or be loved by them. The pleasure or pleased. The lack or the need.

I sometimes wonder if it would be easier to be straight. In fact, I know it would. Or even cis. I think people wonder why we do things that make life harder- but in fact- I don't want it to be harder. I am choosing my battles. I don't know how important marriage is to me, I lie. I want my cake and my fork and my ice cream. My gender, my husband, and my safety.

4

I wish that Boys by Sky Ferreira was just about how terrible men are.

I wonder if it will happen for me. If I am conditioned to see myself as smaller because it hasn't. I have yet to trust a man. To fall into him completely. It has been two years since I have been in love and many more since someone has been in love with me. I pause on the street on the way home as Glitter In The Air plays. So gentle. So piercing as I wonder if I will be invited inside in the way a groom invites the bridegroom. Out of oblivion, out of the cold and into the light of some new permanence.

Many of my friends are getting married. I went to church for a long time and many of my friends are religious. The New Christian movement marries young to protect against early sexual development. Song Of Songs: "do not awaken desire before it is time". I scroll past engagement photos, bridesmaid fittings, and wonder if I will ever marry. Will I give into the norm? The illusory comfort of it all? It's so alluring to be seen as successful and normal. I want it. As much as I rage against patriarchy and economic oppression, I want a white dress and I want to force people to party because I finally hooked a man. But I know I would do it without conscience, without commitment, without enjoyment. I would feel guilty as I licked the icing off my partner's fingers and smiled for a photo.

I think I am only kidding myself. That is exactly what I want.

5

I had a period where I used Facebook like Tinder. I was tired of Tinder, I was tired of being ignored, and I was bored. A Facebook message is harder to ignore than a Tinder ping.

I scrolled through Facebook like it was Tinder.

friend friend friend don't friend friend friend friend

We met at a journalism camp after my freshman year of college when I was still struggling to come out. He asked me if I was queer and I said it was complicated but yes.

So imagine my surprise to see him years later, open up chat to message him, and see that old correspondance.

I message him about it and we start chatting briefly. I know he's a weird indie queer so I say that I am trying to remember a certain CAN song. I, of course, remember the CAN song but he kindly finds it for me and I thank him. Then I ask him to coffee.

I spend the next few days telling everyone. It's a small town so most people know him. I'm texting my friend Milly and she tells me he has a girlfriend. Not only that but that he is flirting with Milly and Milly's friend.

I message the boy and I say I'm so sorry I didn't know you had a girlfriend.

He said he didn't realize that's what I meant but he would still like to get coffee sometime. I abruptly say yeah sure and retreat.

6

Art Hoe.

What does it offer? Where did it come from? They aren't usually healthy. I'm rare in that sense. If I am a brand on internet dating it is the art hoe. I'm not really a twink, bear, jock, nerd, or anything else. I suppose I'm trans. But not in the way trans amorous people are looking for. I don't consider myself a crossdresser since I don't consider myself male. Branding has become a big part of my thought process in a few different ways. I need to brand myself for dating and I need to brand myself for art.

The art hoe is a trope that has permeated queer visual culture and dating but its origins are pretty undisputed: the Art Hoe Collective, a group of people of color, mostly gender nonconforming, who created an Instagram that curates art by people of color. Each week has different themes on different days such as performance, music, painting, etc. A few websites cite the creators as tumblr users 'sensitiveblackperson' and '2jam4u'. However, art hoe became a nexus of meaning, or as arthoestyle.tumblr.com puts it "a person, regardless of gender, race, class, or culture who either a) creates art, or b) appreciates art".

In fact, a white cis gay I talked to on Tinder revealed he had a shirt with the words "art hoe" on it. It's become a brand of gay, a brand of person. Someone who has some stake in the contemporary art world, usually via the internet. A friend of mine, who is a white trans woman, used the tag 'lilarthoe' for a while before changing to 'dietcokeslut'. But Mars (sensitiveblackperson) has commented in interviews that the term has become 'whitewashed' and 'vague' when it had a very specific goal in its creation. A Dazed magazine credits the rapper Babeo Baggins as the coiner of art hoe. The Urban Dictionary strips the term of context with "faghag04" merely saying: "a hoe who is mysterious and chill and like hippyish and good at art".

I have found that I date a lot of art hoes. That I pick emotionally unavailable men. That I crave a Mr. Big to tame and turn a new leaf over. Or maybe I am hiding from being seen and fully loved. From having that equal give and take.

7

dear xxxxx,

i don't think you know how much you hurt me.

it was my own fault, i know. i was way too into you too early.

i don't understand how you could break up with me in two seconds and then go back to your nap.

i don't understand how you could make me feel crazy.

i was not crazy. i constantly told you what my boundaries were.

i felt like you used me as an experiment. as a way to dabble in trans-femininity even as you were trying it on yourself.

i let you in. i don't let people in. i finally thought someone was into me and it was hard because you heard me read my diary for two hours. that hurts. that you saw that and heard that and then let me go. you charmed me in. it's not even that you did anything that special. you just showed me interest and softness.

we had coffee. you said you knew you'd like me. you mentioned i super liked you on tinder a while back. it was true that i had. i didn't connect the dots until the night before when i asked you out. you didn't give me a yes for hours. it was scary. my friend maddy thought it rude.

that picnic was so beautiful. you were gorgeous in the water. i felt gorgeous next to you. we talked about dating and i saw red flags but i didn't care. you said you were poly, you said you were into the aesthetic of trans femmes. i brought the champagne. you said you just wanted to touch me. you held my hand. i felt so tender, so utterly broken open like a small shivering egg yolk. i wasn't in love but i felt what love could be.

you had to go, you were tired so we didn't make a day of it. but i understood. i was in awe.

you came to my house and knocked so boldly, my roommate Anna answered and let you in. you brought me thyme. i love thyme. we watched each other's favorite episodes of adventure time. you asked if you could kiss me and i felt like it wasn't enough. i showed you my spot at the fountain. it was nice. we walked back but i felt like you didn't love it, didn't see it as cute as i did. we kissed a little more you said you had a low sex drive because you'd recently quit porn. i go in for a kiss goodbye you go in for a hug. you leave. i call my friend saying i know it's over.

we talk briefly at the art show, i felt weird that you said it wasn't weird.

you go to Georgia. you send me puppy gifs and i talk to you about living as visibly trans. i drink mimosas with my best friends. i pass the time.

i come over to your place and see your anarchist farm. i tell you how i feel. you say you don't know if you feel that way but feel closer since i told you. you cuddle me and i feel utterly broken and seen even though i don't see you. we watch the new adventure time and talk to an older person about the world. i leave. we do not kiss.

i decide to write you a letter. you invite me to a party. to a lot of things actually but i don't know if you really want me to. you show me your music. i feel scared. i drop the letter off in the middle of the night. i confess that i like you and want to date date or lead up to that.

the next day i have a panic attack and you said you want to talk after i ask you if you got the letter. my friends say i can't live like this. they are right. you say you can swing tomorrow.

i come. you come out. you say your piece. basically, you think i'm too into you and you don't want to start something with someone on that uneven foot. i stand there like a fool. i just let you do it in seconds. you say you have to return to your nap.

i drove on the highway in the woods to adele's 25. for an hour or two.

i rewatched avatar the last airbender and korra. my computer broke.

i wrote tons of poems. i know it's obsessive it's stupid. i cried, i repressed.

i dated narcissists, communists. i didn't let them in. even when i liked them and considered myself a fool it was from behind a shroud. not that any of them really wanted in.

i couldn't let it go. i couldn't let you go. and i couldn't figure out why.

so fall came. the boys slowed down. but you came to a few art shows, one with a girl. i felt humiliated. in my own home. at *my* art show. and at another you said i looked good. i wanted to sock you and fuck you at the same time.

once you even texted me. i didn't have your number. i said so. you told me to invite people to a protest. i did.

did you know i had to prep questions to ask your father for a video art class? we interviewed him. i sat in the corner sulking. this man would never know how i felt about his offspring.

i befriended friends of your sister in the spring. i was sad everything seemed to lead back to you.

and then i just let myself be bitter. i wrote movies about it. not the vulnerable one i had made that you saw- the water in my body- you saw it. it was about you. i wondered if you knew it was about you.

i have a line about you in my recent one too. about feeling crazy, about being too much. i let myself be angry about it in the movie instead of bowing down quietly.

now, i'm sitting here. over a year later. having stalked your facebook again- despite having unfriended you. i sit typing this trying to understand why i am sad.

two nights ago my friend said someone in my past was still haunting me. she was right. i went through and realized i hadn't had a big crush since you. no big crush. just people i dated, maybe liked but not in the same way.

i realized it hurt because i let you in.

maybe you didn't choose to inhabit all the rooms-

but i let you in.

and you chose to leave. and you didn't see that devastated me. i was an experiment in trans femmes

and you were my biggest (semi-reciprocal) crush ever.

goodnight and good luck,

josh

8

Gender as hurt. Gender as weapon. Gender as fun. Gender as play. Gender as death. Gender as irrelevant. Gender as avant-garde. Gender as diagram. Gender as three. Gender as binary. Gender as circle. Gender as unshapeable. Gender as galaxy.

9

There is a sweetness to an untuned instrument. Joni Mitchell made a living at it. A living at hurt.

10

White femininity is victimhood even in the face of perpetration. Why can't we believe in being both? Lena Dunham, Taylor Swift, the poster women of white victimization when they are also perpetrators. The victims are not always guiltless. What if white feminism was not a place of victimhood and bemoanment but of radical accountable, atonement, and renegotiating what power means? A witch can be right and wrong.

Who gets to be safe? I ask again and again. A wail, a chant, a prayer, a haunt. I want to be the ghost in the woods. Ask me if I am alive or dead. Drag my body over sand and stone, fern and bone, land and wet, fen and marsh, brick and birch. The snakes will find you. I will stare.

I always stare at cars when I jaywalk. Stare the driver down. If they kill me, I will be remembered. I will always be remembered.

My ashes will be scattered on a holy spring. Stella has witnessed this will. Now you all have too.

11

This is the essential difference of love and sex: the ecstatic. The ecstatic can be experienced in two ways: spiritually and physically. Both are wondrous, but one can make things last and one is more elusive. A physical ecstasy (even nonsexual) can be more powerful, but so quickly forgotten. A spiritual ecstasy is like a seed in your body growing over and over and over.

I used to see love and romance as intertwined. As useless pursuits on par with Paper Bag by Fiona Apple- a dove of hope that was always going down right when you think your chance is becoming. Becoming but never bearing fruit, only getting close, but never close enough. I folded too, because I worry my hands were too shaky to hold. I sometimes think of all the things that make me unlovable. Gender nonconforming, anxiety, feminine, angst, fragile yet so angry. Cold but desiring warmth. I don't want to be held, but I do. I just push you away because I need to know I am holdable in spite of everything else first. You have to prove it to make me giddy. I became a self-fulfilling prophecy of the cold career woman because I don't trust men. I think that's my motto sometimes: don't trust men. Not until one holds me and strokes my hair like William and Noora in Skam. But even then, aren't I relying on a fantasy version of love to hold me together? Who is as cute as William that would like me? Do I need to settle?

12

Each snippet of writing is supposed to be profound, but what if it can't be? Inevitably some projects are Sex and the City and some are knockoffs. Some are phony. Some are whiny. Some are desperately seeking meaning in a post-Sartre, post-Camus, post-hipster world. Alright, we say, hands up, we will listen to Arcade Fire, but only because nothing better exists. Why bother listening to Nina Simone sincerely, they say, when she is also an iconography of power?

This is the death of sincerity people wring their hands to. A dance of glints in eyes. But when sincerity dies, when words fail, when music dims, it is in the movement of the body that we find openness. My arm in yours. My head on your body. My skates on the ice. My fingers wrapped on the subway pole. my fingers over my other fingers, making ten nasty ligaments look like a Medusa.

Our meaning annihilated, we can only knowingly look at each other, or avoid each other, face to face, neck to eyes, lips to chest, feet to stone. Take off your shoes in Central Park.

I want him to sing karaoke about me. I'd prefer "Obsessed" by Mariah Carey. I want him to nap with me. To pick me up from work. To call me babe. To ask me how my day was. To take a shower with me. To want to meet my friends. To dig for clues for a Christmas present. To take me to dinner. To wonder about me. But I am rattled at the smallness of what I am in his eyes. A text message will do. All I'm doing is recounting what I have been programmed to recount.

13

I have always been looking to be adored in someone else's pupils even as I learn to see myself in my own. As everyone says you just must wait for it, you just have to stop looking, you just have to let it be, you'll be okay alone, I brush my hair in the black window. I ask myself if I am happy and stare for too long at my lips. I break up with the boy whose attention I cannot command. I pray the doo-wop songs of being a teenager in love. I wonder if I am stunted because I didn't find this of myself until later in life- the ravenous teenage girl longing for attention and desire. One of my best friends is engaged. My best friends either moan with me about our singleness or have only to snap to grab the reins on a man who will call her honey after two dates.

I wonder if I will be alone on New Years next year, again. Staring at myself with perfect composure. I am the tearless spinster in the wind, neither angry nor sad to be alone, simply a modality of being alive.



Acknowledgements

This book would not have existed without my best friends and support group. Casey Gregonen is my right arm, one of my first readers, my Gayle. Stella Shaffer is my bedrock, my absolute Samantha Jones/Charlotte combo. Rose Harding is the flower I breathe. Rachel Miller is my eternal Miranda who reminds me darkness is powerful and hot takes are okay. Shelby Everett is my NYC companion and fellow cynic. Alfredo Franco is the one good man I know. Nicholas Bon who reminded me less is more. Hiromi Yoshida for reminding me of the phrase "the artist as lover". Simon Defeo for telling me I could and should. To Milly Cai, Emma Maidenberg, Jenny Leigh, for bearing with me at the end of college when I said "I'm writing". Elizabeth Prichett-Montavon, for being a lighthouse in a world of pain and chaos. To Mary Luncsford and Josie Wenig for supporting my astrological aspirations. To Pat Stefaniak for letting me stay at his apartment one unbearably hot summer with a wild train crash. To Dr. Terri Francis, for teaching me. To my mom for letting me buy lobster and cry and to my dad for telling me I always thought I wasn't good enough, but I am. To my sister Jenna, for her infectious joy and to my sister Jessie for her love of family. To Kinzie Hoagland for reminding me writing a book is a big deal. To Alan Ruiz, Reilly Gallogly, and Marcia Lewis for being the fun I so desperately need and allowing me to be a mom. To Jared Allen for being my Christmas wanderer. To Mary Boo Anderson and Shy Watson for knowing talking about boys is important. To all of the trans poets and writers and thinkers I have yet to meet and who are already doing so much.

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