

(**A** **S**light **B**reath)

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EXTRA INTRA READER #2:
A SLIGHT BREATH

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MONSTER WORDS
Rosie Haward

My head was a blur of monster words:
faggot-pussy-dyke.
They had a shimmer and a slickness to them as I held them
back in my throat. It felt better than a secret.¹

I'M THINKING ABOUT the shapes bodies make and their attendant sensations, their curves and crouches: backs hunched like rocks, still then trembling; arms branch-like, tensed; bellies vibrating and skittish from deep inside where no one can see—each a small creature, size no matter, we are small, we become small, small like ummm not like everything is bigger, but like there is nothing smaller. There is no other way to feel so small.

I keep seeing women crouching. Like any previously unnoticed phenomenon, as soon as I become conscious of them there they are, quite improbably and determinedly everywhere I look: here, there, and over there, inside of me and, and . . .

I check to see how long the women remain crouched for. It is rarely a short amount of time. The simultaneous urge to disappear and to be seen is often present. This can have the effect of either drawing attention towards them or, occasionally, rendering them so entirely invisible that they might regret the very urge to disappear that they started with. This is accompanied by the danger of becoming invisible also to themselves, a terrifying turn of events. I have experienced this urge to disappear. When realised it can be both slow and quick—a creeping sense of being an object amongst objects or a quick and violent obscuring. A curtain dropping.

The writer Camille Roy, who was part of the New Narrative literary movement, wrote a story called 'The Faggot', which is now included in a collection of her writing entitled *Honey Mine*. Its protagonist (also named Camille) is finding out what pussy tastes like. How it feels on her tongue. What urges feel like when they are lived out, when being called a faggot comes to mean something. The word fizzles with meaning, pre-action. It burns, lurches her insides. After, it's a talisman. It becomes 'dyke dyke dyke' and it buzzes on her tongue.

Near the end of 'The Faggot', Camille tries to hitchhike to a river, intending to meet her friends for a swim. The driver of the van she hops into first asks her if she carries life insurance, and then he gets his dick out, tells her he wants to fuck her. After that, details are blurry;

we are not sure exactly what happens, only that she says the word 'dyke' and it gives her an out. Dyke. It becomes a blunt weapon, she is grateful for it, feels both lucky and bitter. She tells the reader that after this, she carries a switchblade for the rest of her life. She tells us that 'It's all in the past, which means it's here now and also in the future. That's why stories don't work; there's no real sequence. It's always breathing and dying and spitting resemblances up. Try it: grab one. It'll squirm like jellyfish and carry a mean sting.'

In an essay included in *Honey Mine*, Roy quotes Robert Gluck and Bruce Boone, who started the New Narrative movement in the late 1970s. They ask: 'What kind of representation least deforms its subject?' In answer to this, they give New Narrative. But there are no guarantees. What if you are your own subject? It may be that the representation you attempt contorts your original experience or feeling to such an extent that it becomes unrecognisable, strange. Turns you into a stranger. Then you are left to grapple with the story you told, both squirming for recognition.

I understand the very need to tell a story as the opposite of obscurantism—in the act there is both the desire to communicate and to be understood. But in the telling, the fear attached to these desires creeps in, like a hand around a throat. In opposition to the tired, patriarchal adage 'show don't tell', Roy states that 'one thing New Narrative did was tell and tell and tell without the cheap obscurantism of "showing"'. In telling, there is less risk of selling yourself short. It's a search for the explicit, a connection without subtext (impossible). But sometimes, there is no way to tell with words, so the body steps up. Is this true even in writing? While I can comprehend the difference between showing and telling as it is enacted in language, I don't think I know the difference between the showing and telling as it happens in the body, even when it's mine.

The first woman I saw crouching folded herself like a pamphlet—in half, then in half again. She got smaller but I could still see her, blue jeans taut at the knees as she crouched, her face obscured by her dangling hair. I was scared of this display because it was trying so hard to not be a display of anything. She crouched because she realised she was standing in my way and the street did not allow for her indecision, her need for stillness. So, she moved out of my path and turned to face the stone wall of a house and bent her knees, dropping close to the pavement. Her forehead hovered above her thighs and her fingertips

balanced her. She was a sprinter poised to run. I felt disorder in the way she moved, and as I walked away I turned to look back at her, to look for a reason.

I am preoccupied by this crouch and its likeness with the act of folding. Crouching is a way to fold the body, but if you fold on top of folds you eventually meet a resistance in the material—think of a piece of paper. In order to repeat the folding you have to unfold first. Dyke. In ‘The Faggot’, narrative proximity acknowledges how trauma and desire can be contingent. A discomfoting idea perhaps, but one that allows for terror and the painful rupture of safety to exist alongside the terror and joy of sexual exploration.

Soon after Camille is thrown out of the van, the story comes to an end. But before it does, she returns to thinking about Isabelle, the girl (her first) she’d been having sex with that summer, and ‘her impossible sour and wet surfaces’. After she has returned home, Isabelle sends Camille a postcard without a return address, so she burns it. The unbearable possibility of desire requires destruction. So many surfaces.

NOTES

1 . . . Camille Roy, *Honey Mine*
(New York: Nightboat Books, 2021), 69.

MY OCTOPUS GIRLFRIEND
Sophie Lewis

MY OCTOPUS TEACHER debuted on Netflix in September 2020 to a world thirsting for social communion yet terrified of contamination; a world at war with vapor, to say nothing of wetness, and sheltering cabin-feverishly in the precarious dryness of the indoors, all too ready to escape visually into the alien intimacies of the Atlantic. The group behind the film, The Sea Change Project, is a small initiative devoted to using artistic and narrative methods to pursue biome protection and social ecology on the South African coast; its cofounder, Craig Foster, is the star of the film, and the lone human who speaks on-screen. Set in the kelp forest near the Cape of Storms where Foster spent much of his childhood, *My Octopus Teacher* is the product of more than a decade of collective labor. It deploys mainstays of the marine documentary genre with disarming skill: a snorkel-cam, panning shots of sea-filtered sunlight, “ethereal chanting” background audio that lets the viewer know when to feel awe, sadness, amusement, and so on. Even when there is no octopus on-screen, the viewer is intoxicated by Foster’s solitary swims through the icy shallows, the dense columns of kelp.

The film is, openly, a love story: a plot about a camera-toting human diver whose yearlong relationship with a female octopus is ultimately framed as a salutary intervention into his poor mental health. Over the course of their courtship, Foster films his beloved getting assaulted by pyjama sharks and (no thanks to him) surviving. Eventually, her natural lifespan elapses and the octopus dies, having mated with another octopus and incubated her eggs. Pale with grief, Foster summarizes their relationship: “She was teaching me to become sensitized to the other . . . I fell in love with her.” In the final scenes, he ropes his teenage son into some walks on the beach and fishes up tiny octopuses—his octopus’s babies?—in the palm of his hand, smiling the serene smile of a father reborn.

To say *My Octopus Teacher* knows it is a love story is not to say that it transcends the narcissistic conception of love that clings to most heterosexual romance plots—the tradition of love-as-personal-growth-opportunity that encompasses, entre autres, Petrarch, Indiana Jones, and the manic pixie dream girl. The archetypal white lover is enthralled as much by his own love as by his love object, such that this love is always threatening to become, in a sense, colonial. Put the encounter underwater, however, and the scene is liable to evoke vulnerability and radical equality instead, like those teenagers Romeo

and Juliet kissing in a swimming pool. One might be tempted to say, exultingly, that there is no time when a human is more octopus-like—libidinous, umbrageous, vulnerable, radiantly sexy, omni-potentialized—than when she is in love.

A FIRST CONFESSION: Did I say in love? I meant “on acid.” I don’t always know the difference. I was certainly tripping on LSD when I watched *My Octopus Teacher*.

I like to think I would not be so presumptuous as to write about octopuses and their suitors were I not lysergically enhanced. I try to open my molecules to the miracles of that medicine on a monthly basis, and I generally try to be in a forest or a park for the occasion. Here, though, it was a rainy afternoon by the beach in Delaware during Covid times, and I was holidaying with friends, midwifing their very first experience with the drug in a safe and cozy indoor environment. What an honor, to put the paper under their tongues and octopus their minds. Beauty blossoms. Flesh comes alive. History itself beats and breathes. All things, living and dead, nonthreateningly assert their connection. Neurosis evaporates. Gravity and lightness, profound things and droll, intertwine like anemones.

Not long before, a human person—let’s say it was me—had dropped acid and walked into the clear, cold water of Harriman Reservoir, the two-thousand-acre lake created by the Harriman hydroelectric dam in Vermont. By the time she walked out of it again, three hours later, she estimated, a good 0.01 percent of its contents were surely composed of her cum. The reservoir had taken her in its tinkling mineral embrace and laid her on the buzzing currents just below its surface and unendingly fucked her. It’s true that she had vaguely heard, over the years, of people having sex with rivers, vegetable beds, and parcels of woodland. Medieval humans with vulvas were, so she’d read, eminently practiced in the art of oceanic nongenital climax. But nothing like this had ever happened to her before, nor had she expected it, so her astonishment was considerable. Her body felt like a polymorphic tapestry made up of one trillion thirsty assholes flung wide in blinking, ecstatic welcome. Never before had her cunt opened so wide or drenched its surroundings to this extent. Never before, to her knowledge, had it been brought to orgasm by a biome. I have long thought that really good sex temporarily washes binary gender away, and this particular (all too welcome) sexual ambush by reservoir sluiced

it beyond comprehensibility.

Back in Delaware, we had already spent a couple hours of our trip sitting on the porch watching the rain. It was time, we felt, to go indoors and recline with some more frivolous visuals. Someone who hadn’t imbibed (and therefore knew how to operate a laptop) clicked on an ocean-colored thumbnail on a streaming platform. Minutes later, we were weeping salt tears of adoration for that canny, sexy octopus. Lustily, we jeered at the film’s repeated attempts to “justify” the interspecies relationship by making it a “lesson.” Couldn’t they have resisted making her resprouting an arm a metaphor for Foster’s recovery from depression? Couldn’t they have left the tiresome reproductive futurism out of it? Nevertheless, we rooted for them both. We hooted with laughter at Foster’s total perplexity when he first dips under the surface and encounters what, to us, seemed so obviously a logic of pleasure and ornamentation. “What is she doing?” intones the solemn voiceover. “Duh, Craig!” we rasped, tears running down our horny throats. “This is a queer slut from outer space. Be a better lover!” We wanted to reach out a soothing tentacle and offer a half a tab.

Nothing could be less hassle than succumbing to what the philosopher Alphonso Lingis calls “the sliding suction of octopus eros.” Foster almost succumbs, which is why he gets so tongue-tied and flustered as an interviewee: he can’t condense all the flirtation and communion into a teachable zoological takeaway. At one point he maintains, without sounding altogether convinced, that “helping” the octopus recover from the shark attack would be “interfering in the animal’s world.” Fine—but he also seems intermittently aware that video documentation is itself “interfering.” As a viewer, one really wants the messiness of the boundary to carry on troubling him. To what “environment” do his emotions belong, to what “world” their relationship? Why isn’t she deemed to be interfering in “his” world, especially, for example, when she literally uses his body as a prop to hunt with? Why can’t he, actually, go to her and hold her and say goodbye when she dies? “THIS GUY SAYS HE LOVES HER,” we bellowed at my startled partner, who happened to return from outside at the moment of the film’s climax. “BUT LIKE, HE’S FILMING HER WHILE SHE BLEEDS OUT.”

Yet, somehow, oh—she survives. Lo and behold, that vulgar octopus is dancing, pranking him, and playing, yes, playing, with shoals of fishes. It would not have taken us hundreds of days of daily diving,

we confidently reckoned, high on indignation and arousal, to discover she was capable of play. “God, she is so patient with him,” we murmured. We rolled our eyes admiringly.

HERE BEGINS my second confession. While all this was winding down, I tweeted about it. Some people would have decided against doing this, but frankly, my brain has never met a piece of dumb TV it didn’t autogenerate criticism about, and it shows no signs of stopping now. The hot, wet exuberance of my trip was giving way to calm, silken grace. I was in the mood for some *whimsical riffing*. What exactly did I tweet? A bunch of annotated stills and googled images paired with idle musings about the fact that *My Octopus Teacher* had made me cry even though it felt, in the end, like “an object-lesson in scientific masculinity.”

I tweeted about belonging to “a trio of acid-tripping queers” who’d noticed that Foster says the same thing as the subject of a world-famous work of woodblock tentacle hentai (Hokusai’s “Octopus and Shell Diver,” also known as “The Dream of the Fisherman’s Wife”). I threw in a tweet or two about the octopus horror in Robert Eggers’s 2019 maritime misogyny film, *The Lighthouse*, linking it to the tacitly gynophobic reactions attributed, throughout history, to burly seafarers upon encountering cephalopods—e.g. from Victor Hugo’s *Toilers of the Sea*: “this irregular mass advances slowly towards you. Suddenly it opens . . . These radii are alive: their undulation is like lambent flames . . . A terrible expansion! . . . Its folds strangle . . .” I tweeted my hypothesis that “if you track Foster’s use of she/her versus ‘it’ to refer to the octopus, his lapses seem to correspond to the surfacing of his shame about having made, well, a documentary about the maiming (by shark) & suffering of a nonhuman person w/ whom he was in a significant relationship.” Oh, and I also noted in passing that, “At one point, they have a form of sex.” I had introduced the thread as being about “a flawed but moving” documentary about a “lifechanging erotic relationship.”

When the thread went viral and at least four-thousand-odd content producers saw fit to respond by condemning me for bestiality and/or homophobia, ordering me to check myself into a psychiatric institution, or wishing the wholesale obliteration of our planet, I was somewhat perplexed. The pile-on began when the high-profile left-Catholic writer and podcaster Elizabeth Bruenig quote-tweeted me to

say (jokingly, one hopes), “our civilization has failed.” Bruenig eventually deleted all her thoughts on the matter, but only after she had spent days fanning the flames, asking faux-innocent questions concerning the relative erotic standing (for me, or perhaps for queer people as a whole) of various species of sea creature. By that time, a number of far-right, antisemitic, and homophobic accounts—as well as left, liberal, vegan, gay, and feminist ones—had become equally if not more incensed by my tweets. From where I sat, it now appeared that thousands of strangers pitied me for not realizing that love wasn’t sex. (It’s true: I am hazy on the distinction.) Pearls were clutched about the libel I had supposedly committed against that nice, upstanding South African man by intimating that he’d experienced interspecies eros. In the meantime, I had a pleasant exchange with Craig’s wife, Swati Thiagarajan, an interaction that did not surprise me given that Thiagarajan had written, on Sea Change’s website, “My husband fell in love with an Octopus. Sure, I was jealous . . . of him”!

I struggled to see who it was I had supposedly maligned, in what way I’d morally degraded society. Granted, phrases like “intrinsic queerness of octopus epistemology-cum-embodiment” are an acquired taste, but a *New York Times* columnist and her fans were bashing me as a danger and a sicko because I’d noticed that an immensely intelligent nonhuman’s mucus membranes had powerfully engulfed the heaving torso of a cold and lovestruck swimmer on TV. The erotophobes taking issue with me coalesced around several different constituencies. “I counted three,” wrote the preeminent scholar of trans studies Grace Lavery in a published interview about octopusgate. The “dirtbag left” called me a degenerate bringing family-abolitionist shame upon the socialist cause once again. Sex-negative LGBTQ teens, TERFs, and animal-rights supporters reacted in a legalistic and defensive way to my rank advocacy of an animal’s boundary violation by a cis male human. Most hurtful to me, though, was a group of left queers who had decided, pace Lavery, that my wet-pantied psychoanalytic register was “decadent,” and responded with rage, embarrassment, and disgust.

At the *Guardian*, Elle Hunt combined notes from all three categories, writing “a new Netflix documentary . . . has become the subject of impish suggestion and scurrilous rumour on social media.” She presumably thought she was making the discourse less awkward, bless her, by describing the movie as “conspicuously sexless, as is good and right.” At one point, she describes the octopus as a “Manic

Pixie Dream Mollusc,” claiming that this means “it is all strictly above board” — clearly forgetting that the manic pixie dream girl is, well, an erotic archetype. She then attempts to land a rather audacious quip: “by Sophie Lewis’s measure,” she reasons, “I’ve had sex with an octopus too. (To be clear: I have not.)”

In order to dispel the acute discomfort I’d inadvertently aroused, people were reducing the question of the possibilities and pleasures of liquescent, membranous, aquatic touch to a question of index-finger-stab-stab-in-the-hole (“did he fuck the octopus”). Or they were pretending to, at any rate. But why were they pretending? Why do we so frequently recoil when sex floats beyond the confines of “the” straight pornomechanical act into more distributed, collective, touchy-feely — i.e., erotic — zones? After all, no one ever mentioned the putting of a human dick into a living mollusc. And for some reason, no one wanted to know if the octopus had “fucked” (in that boring sense) him. But guys! — I was feeling defensive — *I even made the effort to say “a form of sex”! I, who refuse even to say “pegging” to differentiate the supposedly straight sodomizing of men from the gay!* If contemplating the dick-in-mollusc possibility was so unbearably repugnant, why was it happening? Was it perhaps still easier, and less threatening to the moral order, than contemplating sapphic cephalopod cuddles?

THE OCTOPUS’S BODY is nothing but nervousness: it is “not a thing controlled by the animal’s thinking part, but itself a thinking thing,” Amia Srinivasan summarizes in her wonderful essay (“The Sucker! The Sucker!”) about the philosopher Peter Godfrey Smith’s book on the octopus. So, my question — a question directed especially to anyone who has ever described themselves as “sapiosexual” — is how can you deny that octopuses are the apogee of hotness? In the eyes of a dilettante like me, the entire world of octopodia — from Hokusai to William Burroughs — appears as one big sprawling tapestry of sexual titillation and deliquescence. To me, representations of octopuses straightforwardly say: *Behold, this scary, sublime, flashing, cloud-colored concatenation of tongues, it threatens to give you the best orgasm of your life.* Then again, the writer China Miéville — a far more learned reader of the visual and philosophic life of the octopus through human cultures than I — would caution me to distinguish between the overt sexiness of octopodes in “Eastern,” notably Japanese, art on the one hand, and

traditional figurations of octopodes in Europe and America on the other, as symbols of abjection, bewilderment, and alienness. Where any octopus-desiring transpires in the Anglo-European tradition, Miéville would say, it is transpiring in a more occult, covert, and disavowable way.

But there are also those who might support me in my more polemical view. As Donna Haraway explains in a footnote to *Staying with the Trouble*, certain historians contend that the Greeks regarded cephalopods as “close to the primordial multisexual deities of the sea — ambiguous, mobile and ever changing, sinuous and undulating, presiding over coming-to-be, pulsating with waves of intense color, cryptic, secreting clouds of darkness, adept at getting out of difficulties, and having tentacles where proper men would have beards.” Yummy. Meanwhile, Eva Hayward, who theorises how we see and know (just generally, but also gender) with the help of jellyfish, spiders, starfish and the like, remarks in her essay about Jean Painlevé and Geneviève Hamon’s 1965 film *The Love Life of the Octopus* (*Les Amours de la pieuvre*) that the octopus is no less than “displaced sexuality.” Octopuses are eros. They are prehensile G-spots, diffuse brains densely bedecked with kisses, great floating mucus membranes, liquid predators.

ARE OCTOPUSES FLOODS, or are they reservoirs? Are they two-thirds water, like us, or do they explode the body–environment boundary? To be in the (even virtual) presence of an octopus is closely akin to an acid trip, I feel: a hot flood, a visitation of humility, of xenohospitable love, divine trust, comradely fearlessness. These are vantage points from which the anxious hubris of one’s usual subjectivity feels viscerally and philosophically amusing. To be touched, tongued, by the octopus — to be fucked by the universe the octopus-molecule discloses, dense with history, electric with laughter and tears — seems like it would be the end of oneself, in a good way. Nothing could be scarier, except perhaps good sex. Octopuses look like our own spilled viscera, billowing large — our very souls, uncaged by any shell. Such an intimate alien’s touch might roil the tissue of received reality.

There is a surprisingly capacious canon of transfixed worry about the labial lability of the octopus in terms of what it seems to be saying about your household, your democracy, your wife. Srinivasan opens her essay by patiently explaining the obvious: namely, that the so-called “Fisherman’s Wife” in Hokusai’s “Octopus and Shell Diver” is

not undergoing an unpleasant assault—though this is what repressed Europeans who couldn't read Japanese assumed circa 1815—but, au contraire, having a blooming great time:

In the text arranged in the space around the three entwined bodies, the shell diver exclaims: 'You hateful octopus! Your sucking at the mouth of my womb makes me gasp for breath! Ah! Yes . . . it's . . . there! With the sucker, the sucker! . . . There, there! . . . Until now it was I that men called an octopus! An octopus! . . . How are you able? . . . Oh! Boundaries and borders gone! I've vanished!

THE VAST MAJORITY of the action in *My Octopus Teacher* takes place underwater, intercalated between interviews with Foster in his office. While there exists a rich tradition of historically engaged aquatopianism, notably in Afrofuturist narratives about submarine arcadias populated by fugitive enslaved people who were thrown overboard, *My Octopus Teacher* falls instead within another literary tradition: the adventurer-escapist, which boasts Verne's Captain Nemo, for example. In this tradition, the Underwater means that the settler-colonial rift between Man and Land can more readily be suspended or, less generously, fantasized out of existence. Despite the long-standing reality of subaquatic state extractivism in underwater exploration stories (both fictional and not), the violence of nation-statehood is often imperceptible. No Black person appears in *My Octopus Teacher* to remind one of apartheid. Craig Foster is a settler, as (by the way) am I. The white South African subject of *My Octopus Teacher* thus embodies both the grief-stricken local person and the blithe adventurer view-from-nowhere. And while his devotion to fostering community responsibility for and communion with the African Kelp Forest is palpably sincere, his use of the word "primal" to describe his relation to that ecosystem (as, for instance, in the subtitle of the hardcover coffee-table book he coauthored with Ross Frylinck, *Sea Change: Primal Joy and the Art of Underwater Tracking*) simultaneously suggests a surprising level of ethical confidence about his conduct. Clearly the octopus's home is somewhere—borderless as it seems—that Craig feels he naturally belongs.

The origins of this learned confidence are recounted in the film's opening, in which Foster reflects on the decidedly unwet form-

ative experience driving his obsession with achieving oceanic union with nonhuman nature. Twenty years ago, in Botswana, he had made a documentary with his brother entitled *The Great Dance: A Hunter's Story*, about indigenous trackers hunting large mammals in the Kalahari desert. Filming the San bushmen instilled in him, Foster vouchsafes, an envious and insatiable yearning. The goal for him, lifted from them, is to be "inside the natural world": an art he now perfects every day at home through what he—a settler, now a conservationist, unselfconsciously redeploying the hunting parlance—calls "underwater tracking."

The white naturalist's fantasy of indigenous-huntsman subjectivity is an obvious cop-out, a rationalization of the two-way character of that slimy relationship in all its surprising unreason and noninstrumental pleasure. In *Undrowned: Black Feminist Lessons from Marine Mammals*, Alexis Pauline Gumbs mentions how she "facilitated a writing workshop with scientists at Cal Tech inviting them to put themselves, their passions, and their relationships back into their writing about their research topics." Scientists, she notes, "especially those people who have designed their entire lives around the hope, the possibility that they will encounter" a marine animal, "are clearly obsessed, and most likely, like me, in love. Whether they can admit it in their publications or not." I have taken the liberty of signing Foster up to Gumbs's workshop.

Colleagues at Sea Change say Foster initially did not—and was reluctant to—appear personally in *My Octopus Teacher*, and it shows. Unwilling to respect the genre of the straight eco-documentary, the end product still shies away awkwardly from being the paradigm-shattering interpersonal memoir and honest interrogation of love it nevertheless claims to be. To do justice to that undertaking, one surmises, Foster's love would have had to be allowed to bring the octopus into the making of the film as a subject in her own right: an unknowable alien, yes, but a lover with a will, perhaps leveling immanent critiques of her non-octopus boyfriend. What if he'd attempted, not as a scientist but as a person, to listen to and paraphrase her desires? What if he'd joined in with her fish-shoal dance? What if he'd shared with her his camera? What if he'd been a more enthusiastic pupil, attempting to learn, for instance, the art of thinking-with-one's-limbs? Or even just to *communicate to her* his gratitude, his smitteness? The possibility of something genuinely weird, perhaps epistemically dangerous, dangles tantalizingly near, and remains foreclosed.

As concerns the bridgeability of the abyss that separates human subjectivity from that of cephalopods, both the optimism of my will and the pessimism of my intellect are shared, I think, by Vilém Flusser, the author of *Vampyroteuthis Infernalis*, a work of “alien phenomenology” that seeks to think the universe with—no, as—the titular animal. For Flusser, reaching across this interspecies abyss is a horror story. Conversely, for Foster and for me (another octopus-lover), it is about love. He and I alike desire it that way. At times, “staying with the trouble” (as Donna Haraway puts it) of the octopus’s radical alienness is too tiring for my brain. Perhaps, in the end, some element of anthropomorphic solipsism is literally unavoidable. Still. I lapse into projection and simile; into minimizing the alienness of the mind at hand. Perhaps it’s not my place to weigh up, absolve, or go to bat for Craig. An octopus had fun with him—good for her. Regardless, love fosters responsibility. I am haunted by the question of whether a tracker, even a tracker in love, is able to respond to the subjectivity of the beast she stalks. We live in erotophobic times, and even to ask questions like this risks boiling the ballad of Foster and the Octopus alive in nonviolent solvent.

RANGED AGAINST octopus epistemology, in this world, there are antispiritual, antipleasure forces at work. We can see them cropping up in Foster’s speech when he disciplines his vocabulary back into objectivity, the weirdness of his attachment having become too much for him. And if we are not careful, they will all too readily have us deeming love and eros mutually exclusive. Excuse me, but it goes without saying that if you are horrified by the octopus, then you are afraid of human genitalia, of touch, and ultimately of yourself. The violent collective distaste or allergy our culture evinces for any association between octopuses and arousal, surely, has something to do with our intuition of that threat.

Lurking behind my three groups of Twitter haters—“children, TERFs, and the *Capital Vol. II or gtfo* crowd” in Lavery’s taxonomy—was a common phobic aversion to touch, to slime, to eros. In case this needs spelling out: queer people in the contemporary liberal anglosphere are applauded (certainly tolerated), *as long as we stick to victim subjects*. That is to say: *as long as we don’t talk about rimming each other at Pride*.

I do not know how to firmly distinguish between queerphobia

and erotophobia. For many of us, this phobia amounts to the misogynist fear of having a dick do to us what we do to others when we fuck them; for even more of us, it is at the same time complexly entangled with, and often mistaken for, our trauma, specifically our well-placed fear of rape. Like any other sex panic, octopusgate also stemmed from queerphobic sentimentalism about children and the bourgeois family, from alarm at the possibility of becoming unmanned by everyday experience (a rainstorm . . . a sunset), from horror at bottoming, and from contempt for gender ambiguity and nonprocreativity. It stemmed from the erotophobic discomfort about any intimation of carnal encounter *surely more intense than* (though having nothing to do with) the porno-mechanics of “fucking.”

But queers are not really interested in blurring, or for that matter delineating, the terms *sex*, *the erotic*, and *fucking*. These distinctions are clearly culturally and temporally bound, but more importantly: Who do they serve? Sex under capitalism can never be fully free from the compulsion to enjoy, to consume, to marry, to reproduce, and to work. The enemies of queer life (including on the left) see whatever we do as disgusting, regardless, unless we do it within the institutions of property or marriage, and even then behind closed doors. The octophobes, for their part, were wittingly or unwittingly sanctioning a capitalist ordering of sex and the erotic. Sure, the octopus is not queer, and nor is Foster, but the outcry at my reading of their encounter as queer, and as sexual, was of a piece with the biopolitical imperative to police public expressions of deviant sexualities: a centuries-old project of class war and state formation that primarily affects dykes, whores, faggots, kinksters, and sodomites, but equally sucks a lot of joy out of life for everybody else.

This danger has unsurprisingly gained steam in 2020. Ghosts and echoes of the AIDS era’s moral panics are everywhere, even though Covid-19 is not sexually transmitted. There has been more scrutiny of the flouting of public health protocols for the sake of desire—circuit parties, cruising, hookups, “chem sex,” and so on—than scrutiny of (say) weddings, though the latter are proven superspreader events. This comes as no surprise: the imperative of capitalist social reproduction takes priority over queer life. Capitalism, as I have already suggested, is definitionally anti-erotic (which is to say queerphobic). As a way of organizing nature, it has not only subjected us all to the domination of work; it also generated the novel coronavirus—meaning that the ruling class have fucked the planet to the point that billions of us now have to

stay in our (also ecocidally built) houses and refrain from going outside to flirt with the trees.

Yet we have loved, in 2020 and 2021, to rationalize our turned-off-ness with reference to the Covid-19 pandemic alone, leaving uninterrogated the structural dynamics of our aversion. Take, for example, what Jane Dailey in a new book calls “the sexual panic at the heart of America’s racist history” — the country’s foundational anxiety about “miscegenation” and “interracial” sexualities. A *New York Times* opinion piece has claimed that “intimacy was hard enough pre-pandemic; now wanting to be closer to someone feels almost impossible.” Another, in the *Washington Blade* (“America’s LGBT news source”), is entitled “A hookup isn’t worth your life in the COVID era.” The author writes: “this awful crisis is giving us an opportunity to keep our pants zipped” and hence to improve our “self-respect.” This all-too-common line is almost as stupid as it is violent. If any one group in America possesses an established practice of informal contact tracing — for STI exposure, for instance — it is promiscuous, self-respecting queers for whom sex and the erotic are inextricable aspects of how they relate to the world. The erotic encounters queer people choose to pursue “during Covid,” either at home or outside, are an order of magnitude less risky than, say, working at a grocery store. The difference is that the latter involves a compulsory and reproductive kind of proximity, while the former involves an elective and non(re)productive proximity. In sum, that the erotophobes’ error is an error of scale. An erotophilic society would be throwing its all into the collective tenderness of physical distancing; it would organize “How to Have Promiscuity in an Epidemic” reading groups in every neighborhood, and re-center antiwork politics, family abolition, and hedonism as core platforms of any revolutionary left organizing.

What does this have to do with the octopus? Optimistically, one might speculate that any cephalopod sex panic right now is indirectly linked to the lockdown-inspired fear that these radical horizons suddenly are on the table, that things will never go back to “normal.” What if one of the ingredients of the brouhaha was an unconscious recognition that technologies of false distancing, like automation and outsourcing, have been exposed? That boundaries have been irrevocably breached? I am loath to bring up Craig Foster again, but I want to insist: If you consult the subtitle index of *My Octopus Teacher*, you can see that he says precisely the same things as that other free-diver whose ecstatic

apotheosis appeared as a horror and a tragedy to the gaze of 19th-century white people. “This is absolutely mind-blowing,” “An amazing feeling to think that this animal is capable of that,” “There’s no greater feeling on earth. The boundaries between her and I seemed to dissolve.”

IF YOU ARE READING this and feel vaguely *distressed* about the horniness of well, everything really these days, not to mention *anguished* that a sweet, ennobling documentary about a platonic companionship between Man and Beast could have been obscenely read into *in that way*, rest assured, I really do understand. For your eyes only, here is my actual review of the movie:

One out of five stars. I mean, what could be more depraved than porn involving one’s teacher? I’ve never heard of such a thing and am sure, gentle reader, that you haven’t either. Teaching, last time I checked, is a sacred, venerable institution. Teachers are, definitionally, smarter than we are. Frankly, it hardly bears thinking about, what made a “family” streaming platform think it was acceptable to release a documentary about someone who strips down to his swimming-trunks every day for a year, allowing his own teacher to sit naked on his throat, and ultimately “falling in love” with her (his words, by the way, not mine). Afterwards he just lies there, watching her while she gets her arm ripped off—believe me, telling you this hurts me more than it hurts you. What can I say? By recounting the sordid events of this attack on teacherly authority, my sole hope is that I may spare you having to watch it yourself. I mean! It’s not as though our underfunded education system is already undergoing a major crisis of legitimacy or anything, is it, Netflix?! Shameful. And months later, toward the end of the movie, the student, this absolute pervert, films his professor as she dies. Meanwhile the platform rates this filth “suitable for general audiences.” Reader, sometimes I wonder: What have we become? Who among us shall bravely take a stand on behalf of teachers everywhere? I, for one, won’t hear a word of apology for pedagogue-, schoolmarm-, or educator-themed erotica. Thankfully, as I say, I’m pretty sure it isn’t a thing. Or wasn’t—

up until this egregious misstep! Still, there's no point crying over spilt ink. So what I want to propose is that we all simply pretend that *My Octopus Teacher* be not the title of this oeuvre. Let us, together, bend the offending flick into a clean and decent shape through a collective effort of our imaginations and conceive of it, instead, as *My Octopus Girlfriend*, a wholesome movie about getting non-genitally soppy with an octopus vulgaris specimen in the wild. Because—to be fair—if the eponymous octopus in question were depicted living out her sexuality in a responsible and role-appropriate way, i.e., with someone who wasn't her student, the whole thing would really sing. If Craig Foster could just have picked out an octopus who wasn't his teacher, all would have been well.

Who among us can be totally sure they have not had sex with an octopus? As it happens, I have not; I have never even, to my knowledge, met an octopus in the wild. However, there was an octopus in my local aquarium, pre-Covid, for whom I might have laid down my life, had I met her in the ocean rather than in a cage. The poet Robin Gow, in a breakup essay, describes this exact octopus (somebody they were dating showed them how to “join the water and all its queerness” on a visit to Camden, New Jersey). “I don't believe in queer utopias because there aren't any,” Gow writes, contemplating the unspeakable wrong of the octopus's captivity. “I do, however, trust octopuses. I believe in octopuses, and I'm sorry.” For my part, as I think I've demonstrated with my story about the Harriman Reservoir, I do believe in queer utopias. Otherwise, I'm right there with Gow. “I think that our brains might not be in our bodies,” as octopuses' are, they conclude—“but I do certainly think with mine.”

As it happens, another human drifted past, not too far away, while I was losing my reservoir virginity (just kidding, virginity is a fascist concept). For a few moments, I was jolted back into self-consciousness, sensing in myself what theorists of sluthood have called a “call for bubbles of privacy that seal off subjects, as if to prevent their leaking or sluttiness,” an inner spasm of rejection vis-à-vis the promiscuity of the medium I was in.

But upon closer inspection, this “man” was definitely a fellow frog-person, and there was nothing in him to fear. Actually, he was—no

doubt about it—having sex with the reservoir, just like me. “I'm having sex with this reservoir right now,” I said to him when he passed me, because it seemed like the right thing to say. “Me too,” he calmly replied, before smiling, and floating away.

VOICE, SOUND, TECHNOLOGY, AND BINARIES
Sasha Geffen

In her 2019 book *The Race of Sound*, Nina Sun Eidsheim makes use of the concept of ‘the acousmatic question’; the impulse, upon hearing a voice, to ask, “Who is that?” “Who’s there?”

In and of themselves, recording and playback technologies challenge this query. Upon hearing a human voice, the body automatically assumes that there is another body very much like it nearby. Recorded music transmits the voices of people who are nowhere in proximity to us. We respond somatically, as if there is a resonating human body within earshot, but instead see a different type of resonating body: a gramophone, a speaker, a pair of headphones. By severing the link between sound and its presumed source, music recording inherently takes a queer vantage on embodiment. Further manipulations of the supposedly natural sound of the human voice make things even stranger. Two or more identical voices can sing to you at the exact same time in uncanny synchrony.

A VOICE . . . can have parts of its soundwaves hollowed out and replaced by the interpretations of a computer, creating a cyborg. Pitches can be spiked and lowered beyond what a typical vocal apparatus can produce on its own.

A VOICE . . . can jump from note to note without any glissando, crystallising inside a machine. The merging of the voice with synthesisers is easy to read as a trans gesture.

Since the twentieth century, trans people have had a specific enmeshment with medical technologies like surgeries and synthetic hormones, and, as such, we tend to scan as artificial. Beings only made possible through modern medicine. The figure of the trans person ruptures habitual ideas of naturalness, even though a vast number of cis bodies are also mediated through biochemical interventions under what Paul B. Preciado calls ‘the pharmacopornographic regime.’

In *The Race of Sound*, Eidsheim contends that the voice does not originate in the throat, it originates in the ear. The phenomenon called voice begins when soundwaves vibrate the eardrum, triggering a spasm of information to the brain. The pleasurable moment of bewilderment that comes when the ear generates a voice that the brain cannot easily categorise can be a powerful opportunity for emancipatory play. In an essay accompanying the 2019 art exhibition *Dire Jank*, Porpentine

Charity Heartscape wrote: ‘Why quote lyrics that are meant to be heard with music? It would be like telling you about a friend by showing you a printout of their genetic data.’

What comes alive in a song is not the sequence of words alone but the way the words animate the vocal apparatus, the way they bring the lungs, the windpipe, the larynx, the tongue, lips, and teeth into concerted sequential action, the way the voice sits within or beyond its *tesitura*; the way the body strains at the edge of certain notes. These gestures convey feeling more urgent than what could be held in syntax. They quiver at the living edge of meaning, bringing the listener into spontaneous play, asking them to activate their own body in a somatic echo of the singer. Voice invites presence. It asks you to come alive in a way that, at its most pleasurable, disintegrates habitual reiteration of old patterns, rules, and thoughts.

I also find myself frustrated with the mainstream adoption of ‘non-binary’ as a third gender term. It fixes my position in the negative, whereas I feel my place to be more generative and abundant. I like the music inherent in words like ‘androgynous’ and ‘gynandromorph’ because I consider myself to be more both male and female, than neither. They fit me a little better. But these words also call back to the binary. They are additive, rather than negative, but they present a comparable problem. When I first started thinking of myself as trans, the term ‘gender queer’ was in vogue, a term that I like more than non-binary, even though it sounds dated now. It speaks to the strangeness and confusion of my gender position, rather than trying to smooth it out.

There’s a song on *Purple Rain* called ‘I would die for you’ where Prince sings: ‘I’m not a woman/I’m not a man/I am something you will never understand.’ The term ‘non-binary’ covers those first two lines, but it neglects the third. To me, being unintelligible to the gendered order presents an exciting opportunity for dissolving it. Names and phrases that just retort incomprehensibility of gender hold more fire for me than labels that seek to square my experience safely away. Lately, I’ve been attached to the talmudic gender called ‘*timtum*’, one of several ancient Jewish genders and one that designates concealment or confusion. A word you use when you’re having trouble fixing someone in a gender schema. It also carries a connotation of foolishness, which feels perfect for my present iteration.

In music, unburdened play can spark moments of productive confusion, where the relationship among the players, musicians and

listeners alike is in flux. I think that's why I find myself in music more than anywhere else. Because my experience of gender has not been fixed. It has never felt settled. It changes continually, always emerging into something new. Pop music especially seeks novelty; the ear opens to sounds and voices with which it's not yet familiar, which it can't file away as a known quantity. Change and confusion feel inherent, both to the music I like most, and to the way I experience my gendered embodiment in the world.

I KNOW WHEN I CAN
MAKE SOMETHING BY HOW IT FEELS
Dagmar Bosma

I go in my pocket for coins & there's the lucky stone
been weighing down my coat; don't know who gave it
to me or why, but it's heavy as any other blessing.
from *Circuit* by Jesse Darling 1



BESIDES lip balm and keys, I carry a set of steel balls in my pouch. Sometimes I stuff one in each of my men's trench pockets. I'll swish around the oversized coat to make the balls jingle. They clitter-clatter as I walk. A soft chiming accompanies my tread.

These Baoding exercise balls were brought to me from a flea market in New York. Normally they come decorated with colourful cloisonné, but these particular ones sport an unpolished, bare exterior. After I've held them for a while, a metallic smell emanates from my palms. According to classical Chinese medicine, you move the spheres around in one hand, pushing with your fingers and wrist, so that they rotate around each other. Inside the hollow globe a glass marble whirls around a spring, hurling echoes from its concave space.

The steel balls are amongst an array of objects I carry with me on the daily. These objects are like talismans or auratic knick-knacks, mostly picked up from the street. I keep them in my pocket not because they're beautiful or because of some deeply personal origin story—more importantly, I find comfort and support with them through stimming.

The verb 'stimming' originates from the autistic community, and denotes a range of self-stimulatory behaviours that are enacted to process and cope with sensory overload. It usually involves repetitive bodily movements, and can be an expression of many different feelings, from stress and physical discomfort to excitement and happiness. Many stims share characteristics with 'common' forms of fidgeting; think of how you wiggle your leg under the table or chew the back of your pen in concentration. Other stims, like hand flapping, are unique to people on the spectrum. While fidgeting—playing with your hair, drumming your fingers—manifests more or less unconsciously, stimming involves paying dedicated attention to the senses. Some modes of stimming are less noticeable and, as such, are more socially accepted, while others are seen as unusual and met with stigma.

Within a society in which neurotypicality remains the norm, self-stimulatory expression generally receives a corrective or negative response: you should sit still in class, sucking the string of your hoodie is dirty. For a long time, it was conventional to restrain stims when raising autistic children, forcing them to suppress their behaviours. In recent years a more affirming approach to stimming has gained support, and agency has been claimed back by autistic people themselves from ‘experts’. The neurodivergent community embraces stimming as a soothing practice; one that can be assisted through the use of specially designed stim toys. Chewable rubber shapes, worn as one would a gemstone on a necklace (and aptly referred to as ‘chewelry’), glass prisms that reflect light, scented putty—there are stim toys for all senses.

What’s left inside? The sempiternal:
 chew toy, padding, plastic bag, wrapper, naphtha, grandmother.
 We keep moving.
 from *Settling* by Jesse Darling²

I’ve got a hardware washer to spin around my index finger. I also own a weighted pillow made by the Rotterdam-based artist Maike Hemmers, filled with fragrant dried sage and metal bearing balls. When placed on my belly it grounds me. When moving with it, the little balls inside produce a clinking sound.

As part of Kunstinstituut Melly’s long-term exhibition *84 STEPS*, Hemmers installed the environment *This Deep Becomes Palpable*, composed of sculptural pillows and large pastel drawings. An accompanying hand-out written by somatic worker Savannah Theis invites the public to pay special attention to their senses while interacting with the soft sculptures, and to consider bodily areas of ease or tension:

*Does the area have a perceivable temperature, weight, density? Is the sensation subtle or intense? What is its size? Is it on the surface or deeper within? Is it spread out or focussed? Is there any movement? If so, does it have a rhythm? What is its atmosphere?*³



Maike Hemmers, *Radiant heart*
 (for Emma Kunz), 2021. Linen, steel balls,
 millet husks, chamomile, lavender, rose.
 Edition of 6. Exhibited as part of
Grounding Things at LIFE, Rotterdam

The visitor is later asked if any area in particular needs support, and to imagine what that support could be: ‘Does it have a direction, a shape, a size? Does it have a colour?’ Hemmers’ soft sculptures, filled with materials ranging from cherry pits to cedar bark, are offered as support for those areas that might need it. You can lay on them, bury yourself under their weight, wrap them around the body as a garment.

This Deep Becomes Palpable opens its landscape of colour, scent, and touch towards stimming, and the works themselves have also emerged from self-stimulatory practices, as described on the website of Kunstinstituut Melly:

In Hemmers’ drawing methodology, the body is scanned, and each part is felt as a colour, which comes to constitute the colour palette for each of her pastel drawings. Together, Hemmers’ drawings sensorially document bodily experiences at a given time.⁴

Hemmer’s pastels unfold like a diary of the senses. Auratic compositions are formed by shapes reminiscent of body parts: blue hand, purple ribcage, yellow spine.

Another artist working with the sensory potential of drawing is the London-based Sam Metz. Their ongoing project *Drawing as Stimming* ‘looks to create a time where stimming can happen’. For Metz, who is on the autistic spectrum themselves, it is important to emphasise stimming as a positive practice, one that can be part of a sensory-seeking journey where one responds to interesting sensory stimuli. In their work, the artist pushes for the legitimisation of non-verbal communication styles such as stimming, as they carve out a place for it within art making and art interpretation. *Drawing as Stimming* takes on many forms; it is a platform for artistic output and for gathering and sharing community-oriented resources. It envelops not only Metz’ personal drawing and mark-making practice, but also the mentoring of neurodivergent artists, the facilitation of ‘quiet crit sessions’ for artists who do not prioritise speech, and the distribution of tools that encourage embodied methods of art interpretation, amongst other things.

‘How does it feel in your arm to make the line?’ Metz asks in an instructional video for The Big Draw festival.⁵ ‘What sound does the line make on the paper?’ In another video disseminated by the disability-led organisation Shape Arts,⁶ the artist explains how their sensory

process disorder can make it difficult to know where their body is in space. Bending over a large sheet of paper, Metz makes the same wiggly mark over and over again, rhythmically pushing a piece of charcoal onto the surface, testing its material resistance. Metz elaborates: 'Allowing my hands to dance in the space of the work allows me to push back, allows me to feel, allows me to remind myself where I am in space.'

Metz' project addresses how art is made, but also how it is understood, or rather how it is felt. Where art criticism, in Metz' words, 'often categorises artworks by exploring the teleology of works, finding endpoints, decision-making, reflecting on the oeuvre of the artist, thus defining what the work is and represents',⁷ such neurotypical assumptions of purpose are unsuited when it comes to the work of autistic and neurodivergent artists. Instead, Metz poses embodied communication as a defining purpose in art making. To interpret and respond to neurodivergent art accordingly, they suggest, we too should learn the language of the body.

In the viral YouTube video *In My Language*, uploaded in 2007 by Mel Baggs, the anti-ableist activist and neurodivergent blogger offers a deeply personal insight into hir⁸ self-stimulatory behaviours. Baggs, a non-verbal person, presents the continuous flow of repetitive movements and concurrent humming as hir way of communicating with the world around hir: as language. We see Baggs moving hir fingers back and forth through running water from the tap, we see hir rubbing hir cheeks against the pages of an opened book, stroking the keys of a computer keyboard, cradling the knob of a dresser. Halfway through the video, Baggs provides a translation using text-to-speech software for those who do not speak hir language:

The previous part of this video was in my native language. Many people have assumed that when I talk about this being my language that means that each part of the video must have a particular symbolic message within it designed for the human mind to interpret. But my language is not about designing words or even visual symbols for people to interpret. It is about being in a constant conversation with every aspect of my environment. Reacting physically to all parts of my surroundings.⁹

Hir non-verbal language is one of all-present touch and the rhythmic

sound that sprouts from it. It is a direct form of communication with the material world around hir, a continual conversation between human and non-human actors. It is unprescribed by social norms or measures of functionality. Baggs describes how hir language is oftentimes misunderstood as having no purpose, or lacking the ability to establish meaningful relations. But on the contrary, sie argues:

Far from being purposeless, the way that I move is an ongoing response to what is around me. Ironically, the way that I move when responding to everything around me is described as 'being in a world of my own', whereas if I interact with a much more limited set of responses and only react to a much more limited part of my surroundings, people claim that I am 'opening up to true interaction with the world'.

In *My Language*, as Baggs makes very clear, is not intended as a 'voyeuristic freakshow', but as a critical statement, challenging normative standards of communication, interaction, and knowledge transfer. The neurotypical categorisation of divergent responses to stimuli as 'wrong' or 'meaningless' harbours the danger of dehumanisation, Baggs urges:

It is not enough to look and listen and taste and smell and feel, I have to do those to the right things such as look at books, and fail to do them to the wrong things or else people doubt that I am a thinking being, and since their definition of thought defines their definition of personhood so ridiculously much, they doubt I am a real person as well.

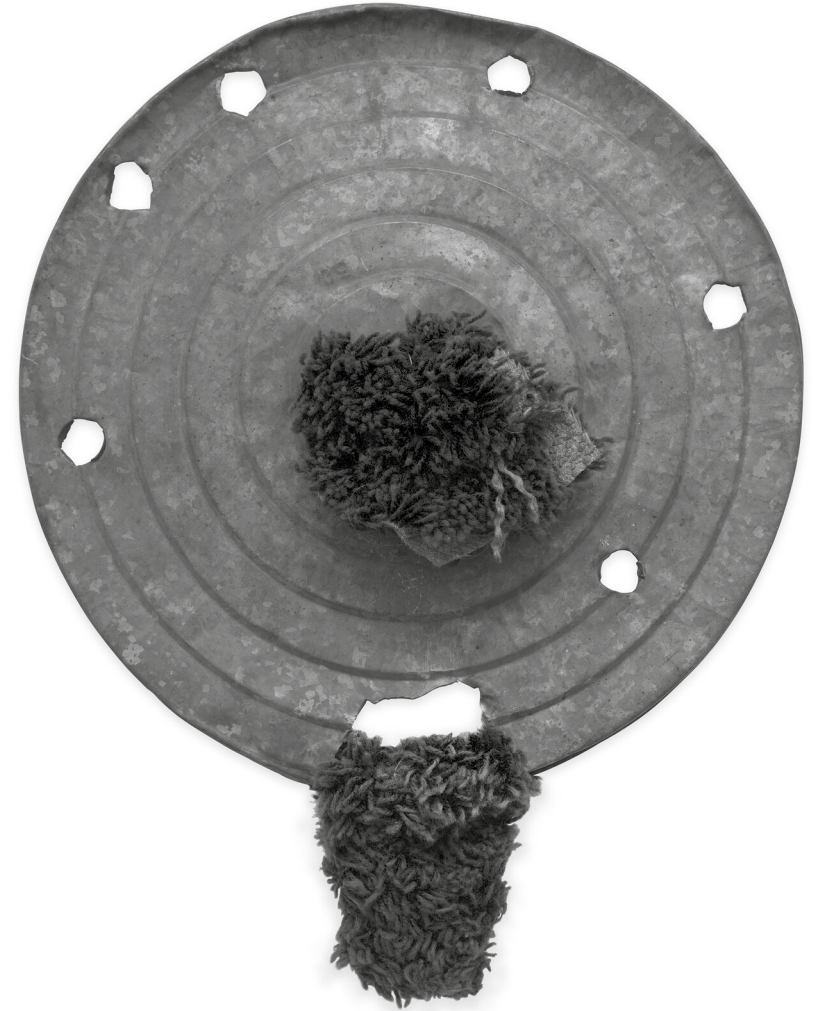
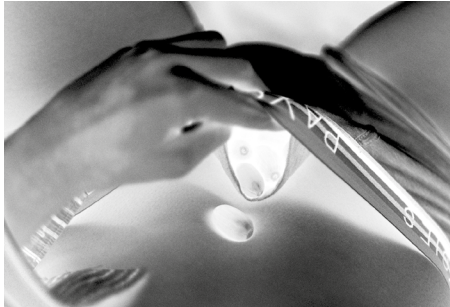
The activist concludes that human rights and equality for neurodivergent people can only be achieved when the many different shapes of thought, intelligence, and being are acknowledged as legitimate. *In My Language*, with over 1.7 million views today, stands as a monument for the oppression of those whose expression does not align with dominant verbal communication. Dedicated to 'all people who wrongly view our actions as purposeless', it also stands as a continuing demand for change. Mel Baggs died in 2020 at the age of thirty-nine due to respira-

tory failure. Hir writings on neurodiversity and disability rights can be read on hir blog *Ballastexistenz*.

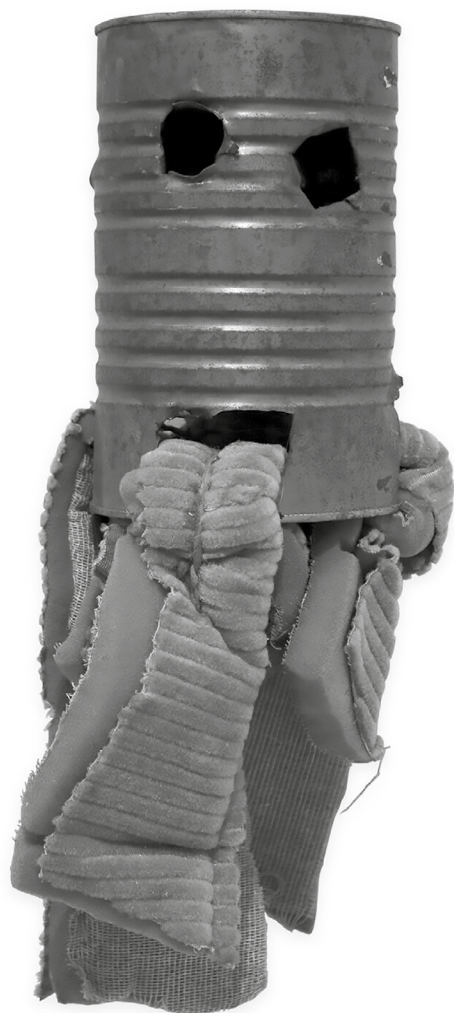
The work of neurodivergent artists and thinkers like Sam Metz and Mel Baggs on embodied expression opens a stimulating perspective on art making and our reception of art. In the Shape Arts video, Metz mentions that they ‘feel into their drawings’. That art can convey emotional feelings is widely understood, but what about the feeling of the hand pushing against the paper, of sensing a colour in your belly, of holding a camera with flapping hands? What if we approach art from the bodily movements inherent to its becoming, drawing focus to the sensory experience of making? And how do we create space for practices that centre the bodily stimulation of making as much as, or even more so, than the resulting work? Can the stim be an art in itself? While being conscious of the specific contexts in which stimming is rooted, I think these questions can be valuable in the approach of artistic practices not limited to those that express neurodivergence.

Making can speak from a divergent, sense-based intentionality or attention, with or without diagnosis. I myself have been denied an autism diagnosis by a medical system founded on neurotypical notions of classification and gendered assumptions (I was told my social skills were ‘too good’ for me to be autistic). Many people slip through the diagnostic sieve of an ‘official’ autism spectrum disorder—especially people born assigned female, who are from a young age statistically underdiagnosed, and have often masked their autistic traits through social overcompensation by the time they reach adulthood.

Within my own art practice, the studio is a stimming ground. More broadly, it is through art that I have found space to communicate in non-normative ways to the world around me; to move and touch differently than prescribed, connecting more deeply with materiality and objects. Maybe that is because art does not lean so heavily on how things are supposed to be done or used. Here, motion and matter are allowed some freedom from determinist functionality. Living with art has helped me let my mask down, to embrace my humming and fumbling. I love to sing in made-up languages



Hawkins Bolden, *Untitled (Scarecrow)*, ca 1990s
trash can lid with hole and shag carpet, 27 x 21 x 6 in



Hawkins Bolden, *Untitled (scarecrow)*, ca 1986
Large soup can, furniture padding, twine and wire, 15x9x7 in

and to swing around heavy chunks of scrap metal. I adore the jiggly feeling between my legs when I fill my packing underwear with acorns. Everything is full of potential stims.

Art practices that involve self-stimulatory expression have long been grouped under the moniker 'Outsider Art', a contested term that literally places self-taught artists and artists with disabilities outside the centre of artistic discourse, but on the other hand has helped to platform artists who have been previously ignored or deemed illegitimate. Many of these outsider practices are characterised by their directness, where making seems to be driven by an urge to interact with the world. This certainly goes for the work of the late Hawkins Bolden. The artist from Memphis, Tennessee is mostly known for his tactile 'scarecrow' assemblages, which were scattered all over his yard during his life. Bolden lost his sight at the age of seven due to a baseball accident, and later on began to scour the streets and alleys of Memphis for detritus, throwaways, anything he could get his hands on—tin cans, hubcaps, paint buckets, licence plates, frying pans, old rugs, shoe soles, rotten clothes—utilising only his sense of touch.

Using wire to tie scraps of wood, metal, and fabric together, Bolden transformed his street finds into mask-like objects and totemic figures. Their faces are adorned with artificial Christmas tree needles for hair, and bits of rubber hose for tongues. The artist would drill in holes resembling eyes; sometimes just a pair of them, sometimes up to ten or twenty. One of his nieces suggested he put them in the garden to keep the birds out. When visitors asked him what he had in mind when making his pieces for the yard (suggesting that surely he'd have a *reason* for doing all this) he would say: 'The birds be thinking something going to get them. They get scared. They stay away.'¹⁰ Whether these figures kept the birds out or not, I don't think Bolden really needed a reason. Maybe that was just a rough translation for those who didn't speak his language.

I have not experienced Bolden's work in person, but have come to know it more closely through the gallery catalogue *Hawkins Bolden—Tongues*, published by Robert Heald Gallery on the occasion of their 2020 exhibition by the same name. An essay written by art collector William Arnett in the catalogue provides further insight into the artist's way of working:

Bolden collects his materials and tosses them into the dark,

damp crawl space beneath his house. To retrieve them for use when he is inspired to create, he walks, stooped, on all fours, his right hand reaching-swinging-along the dirt floor, until he grasps the components that he requires.¹¹

TWO TREATISES

Daisy Lafarge

Rare footage of Bolden's process, and interviews with him and his sister Elizabeth, are featured in the 2011 documentary *MAKE* by Scott Ongen and Malcolm Hearn. In the film, we see Bolden crouched on the floor of his home, whistling to himself as he tears up leather and carpet into strips and fastens them to round lids. He roughens up a large metal sheet with a piece of stone, sings gospel songs. Sits on the porch with his sister, wrapping twine around a stick. She comments: 'He's always doing something.'

These scenes remind me of those from *In My Language*, while Bolden's objects are much like stim toys, with their textured flaps and roughened surfaces. His making is one of continuous touch, sounding the space around him and sensing what he cannot see. The scarecrows, beautiful and interesting as they are, have nothing to do with preconceived conceptualism or the pursuit of a visual aesthetic, and everything to do with how things feel. In Bolden's words: 'Sometimes I feel words on something, but I don't know what it is. I don't ask nobody about it or about colour, neither. I don't worry about colour. I know when I can make something by how it feels.'

NOTES

1 . . . Jesse Darling, "Circuit," in *VIRGINS* (London: Monitor Books, 2021), 10.

2 . . . Darling, "Settling," 35.

3 . . . Savannah Theis, *This Deep Becomes Palpable* (Rotterdam: Kunstinstituut Melly, 2022), exhibition catalogue.

4 . . . "Maike Hemmers: This Deep Becomes Palpable," Kunstinstituut Melly, 2022, <https://www.kunstinstituutmelly.nl/en/experience/1404-maike-hemmers-this-deep-becomes-palpable>.

5 . . . Sam Metz and The Big Draw, "Drawing As Stimming | Instructional Video," July 19, 2021, video, 02:36, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pIzNCPuXnu0&t=44s>.

6 . . . Sam Metz, "Artist Sam Metz on stimming and mark making," April 16, 2020, video, 01:00, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TEaMz7cY2iE>.

7 . . . Sam Metz, "Drawing as Stimming," Necessity, <https://necessity.info/2021/05/07/drawing-as-stimming/>.

8 . . . Baggs identified as genderless and preferred the pronouns 'sie/hir' and 'ze/zer'.

9 . . . Mel Baggs, "In My Language," January 15, 2007, video, 08:36, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JnylM1hI2jc>.
10, 11 . . . *Hawkins Bolden – Tongues* (Wellington: Robert Heald Gallery, 2020), exhibition catalogue.

These fictional treatises are taken from the early stages of a novel-in-progress, written from the perspective of a 13-year-old boy, A, who lived in Brittany in the twelfth century. This was a period in which many classical texts of natural history and philosophy (by the likes of Pliny and Aristotle) were entering medieval Europe for the first time through translations that had been preserved by Muslim scholars, contact with whom arose in the wake of the Crusades. Already prone to magical thinking, A finds exposure to these classical texts intoxicating, and he begins to imitate them, converting his idiosyncratic cosmology into the textual format of the 'paradoxography', a proto-encyclopaedic genre that sought to catalogue and explain natural wonders.

The inspiration for these treatises and the character of A partly came from Menocchio, the sixteenth-century miller and subject of Carlo Ginzberg's book *The Cheese and The Worms*. Menocchio was an Italian peasant who developed his own cosmology that fused 'a substratum of peasant beliefs'¹ with Christian narratives, leading to his syncretic story of the creation of the universe: ' . . . in my opinion, all was chaos, that is, earth, air, water and fire mixed together; and out of that bulk a mass formed—just as cheese is made out of milk—and worms appeared in it, and these were the angels.'² Menocchio was tried as a heretic, and eventually murdered by the Roman Inquisition for refusing to renounce these beliefs.

The treatises written by A imitate this malabsorptive approach, which, in the process of encountering received forms of knowledge, also resists them; they are simultaneously whimsical and defiant. To give depth to A's cosmology I have also drawn on a variety of texts and sources; for example, 'Treatise on the Sea as Divine Broth' takes inspiration from Michel Serres's essay on *The Sea* (1861) by Jules Michelet. Serres reads Michelet as a 'hylozoist'³ who believes in the sea as a prebiotic soup, and quotes Vedic texts that describe the sea as a 'pot' stirred by various 'utensils', such as mountains.⁴ In drawing on different sources to compile these treatises, I have also attempted a methodology of (mal)absorption, whimsy, and irreverence.

NOTES

1 . . . Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth Century Miller* (London: Penguin, 1982), 20–21.

2 . . . Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms*, 5–6.

3 . . . Hylozoism is defined as ‘a doctrine

held especially by early Greek philosophers that all matter has life’ by the Merriam-Webster dictionary.

4 . . . Michel Serres, *Hermes: Literature, Science, Philosophy* (Baltimore & London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1982), 31.

1

TREATISE ON THE SEA AS DIVINE BROTH

The sea is a broth, and all manner of things are stirred up in it. It nourishes the faithful because they cannot see what lives in its depths. Like a perpetual stew, the sea is filled and ever-replenished with flesh, herbs and flavourings that give strength and seasoning. Yet like a stew it maintains its secrets. It is a meal not for the body but for the soul; the soul must trust and have faith that there is more contained in the sea than what can be fathomed by eye.

Consider how God, the great mixer, has set his broth in everlasting motion. For the sea is cooked by the sun in the daytime, and stirred by the moon at night. The moon is a great ladle that mixes by virtue of her rays, descending on the surface of the water and reaching into her depths, stirring where the eye cannot see.

The tides exist to stir the broth and allow its contents to settle evenly. This is so that men may be equally nourished by its divers victuals. If the tides did not circulate the sea it would become lumpen and overflow in parts from the accumulation of too many solids. Indeed, an imbalance of tides is what causes the occurrence of floods, just as one humour can become stuck in the body, leading to the surfeit of another.

Similarly, an imbalance of the seasons leads to the spoiling of the broth. An excess of sun excites the broth and causes overexposure

to the moon, which results in fruits of excessive moistness. This can be seen in humid countries whose vegetables are damp and sponge-like, such as the cucumber, which has absorbed too much of the moon.

Some men live far from the sea, and for them are provided rivers and lakes, which are like bowls of broth taken from the pot. These portions are cooked by the sun in the sea, and then stirred by the winding course of their journey inland. This is also true for anywhere that seas meet the land; some portions are sent to bays and coves, where the broth is served in rockpools, and others to rivers and lakes, where the meals may be taken far from their origin.

The ingredients of the broth also vary according to the seasons, although ubiquitous among them is salt, which falls from the stars when they are shaken by roaming planets. Indeed, planets are said to be *wandering stars* but we should consider the contents of the sea as the true pilgrims, a mutable constellation that is remade each day. This can be seen most strikingly in the pockets of the bulbous seaplant, which float on the surface of the sea and illumine like stars when the sun strikes them.

Perhaps one day man will invent a device to map the peregrinations of the contents of the great broth, just as an astrolabe maps the course of the stars. Then we will learn the divine recipe, and attain but a speck of wisdom in the eye of God.

TREATISE ON THE AIR AS TIME

A simple event has led me to the development of this treatise: that the air is not empty but is full of that which we cannot see, and which acts upon us. For just as Pliny wrote that the word for sky is derived from the term 'engraved', so the air engraves us with its subtle instrument of time.

Since the earliest writings, men have wondered at the measurement of time, inventing instruments to enclose it. And yet it is as impossible to contain as air, for they are one and the same: air is time and time is air.

To illustrate this, I will recount my simple event. I was eating an apple but did not chance to finish it, since I was called out to the field. When I returned, the white flesh of the fruit had spoiled, and the hollow of my bite darkened to brown. When I raised it to my lips the taste was bitter, a malefic seed.

Of course, I have seen such desiccations before, when fruit falls too late or is rotted on its branch, when a pool of water curdles, or a wound turns sour.

Yet what does a wound share with a bitten apple, if not a mantle of skin? When flesh is separated from its skin, it suffers from exposure to air, first becoming bruised, then blackening unto death.

It was thought by Aristotle that decay is concealed within the living, and that upon the in-

THE QUEEN'S THROAT
(HOMO)SEXUALITY AND THE ART OF SINGING
Wayne Koestenbaum

stance of death the agents of putrefaction burst forth, devouring their home, as maggots will sprout from cheese and worms will ruminate on flesh.

Yet how can this explanation account for decay that installs in the living, and draws us closer to death?

The answer is that decay is not hidden in the living, but is concealed all around us. It is in the air that time waits: it withers us into old age, or swiftly descends at a moment of exposure, hastening the ruin of flesh.

Some beings were created more vulnerable to air than others. The weakest keep close to the earth: small animals and plants. Then come men and trees who stand a little taller, being more tolerant. Birds live short lives because they are perpetually subject to air, whereas sea creatures like the tortoise live longest because they dwell in water. The planets and stars exist most fully in air, and it is their invulnerability to its effects that permit us to mark time through their measurements.

We know the world to be a fallen shadow of creation. It is time's malice that has made it thus, for if Eden was a place without death or decay, without sourness or the curdling of flesh, it was also a place without air.

Surely heaven, like the Virgin's sweet womb, will release us from air's ravages.

As soon as the breath leaves the larynx, it is divided.
Lilli Lehmann, *How To Sing*

W

HAT DO opera singers feel as they make sound? What do audiences imagine vocalists are experiencing? What ideologies of muscle, liquid, air, discipline, and sublimation, fill the opera house? No mere musicological curiosity drives me to ask these questions; rather, I am motivated by the sensation of lacking a singing voice, and the conviction that my vocal impoverishment might hold the key to opera's inmost heart. From the vantage point of the voiceless, a singing instrument represents a copyrighted, veined articulation, a fingerprint (or larynx-print) impossible to steal. This ideology of "voice" as original and identity-bestowing took root in an era that Michael Foucault has defined—a time when sexuality evolved as the darkness we yearn to illuminate, a constitutive hiddenness. Concurrently, the belief spread that no two voices were exactly alike, that anyone could sing, and that finding a voice would set a body free. Taking "voice" to mean self-expression, contemporary gay subcultures have equated vociferousness with the refusal to remain closeted. But centuries before the era of sexual liberation, "voice" already carried the values that come with uncloseting: self-knowledge, self-portrayal, presence. In Western meta-physics, spoken or sung utterance has long been thought to have more authority than the merely written. Poststructuralism has convinced us that this privileging of the oral is delusional; and yet my inquiry into vocal magic depends on these outmoded ideologies of presence—fictions that remain compelling, even though we are supposed to know better.

Catherine Clément, in her important book, *Opera, or the Undoing of Women*, uses the example of Freud's patient, Frau Rosalia, a would-be singer who loses her voice, to draw connections between hysteria and operatic singing.¹ The failure to sing is hysterical (the vocal cords are paralyzed because they remember, as Rosalia cannot, a prior trauma); but singing itself is just as hysterical. Coloratura and muteness are each a form of conversion hysteria. Because Clément focuses on the plots of opera and not on the semiotics of vocalizing, however, she concludes only that nineteenth-century operatic libretti are misogynistic, and falls short of what I consider to be a more electrifying conclusion, which is that the physiological techniques of operatic vocalizing have social and cultural meanings distinct from the libretti or the music. By operatic singing, I mean what we commonly call the "classically" trained voice—a style of tone production (cultivated for religious and declamatory singing even before opera was invented)

whose control, volume, and flexibility—its distance from speech, its proximity to the purely instrumental—is now closely linked to opera because opera composers made such protracted and inspired use of it. Whether trained for theater, concert hall, church, or parlor, and whether or not it is draped by plot, set, and costume, this kind of voice is suitable for opera, and thus it connotes all that the “operatic” has come to mean.

Operatic singing doesn’t represent any single sexual or gendered configuration, but it is a metaphor for how our bodies stumble into sex and gender in the first place. Every psychic constellation—hetero, homo, male, female—has a price, hard to pay, and I am uncertain which fate is most costly, or which path most closely resembles singing. Is the acquisition of a voice as taxing as heterosexual femininity, achieved (according to Freud) only after the girl breaks her primal tie to the mother? Or is singing like *any* heterosexual identity: “natural” and exhausting, reached through scarring Oedipal struggle and debilitating compromise? Or is singing more like homosexuality? Of the several sexualities catalogued in the nineteenth century, homosexuality is the most conspicuously taxonomic—the one that looks most effortfully and perversely *sexual*; though we know “homosexuality” only means *sexual acts or desires passed between two of the same gender*, we see the word tremble and shiver as if it connoted the entire field of sexualities, strenuously contracted into this one abhorred and hence tacitly privileged term.² Like the essence that reputedly makes gay people what they always already are, the spark that produces a voice is natural and acquired, free and expensive, speakable and unspeakable, pathogenic and curative.

If the ideology of voice is not fixed to any one sexual position, how can I claim that it has adhered, with however a gossamer touch, to the modern coinage “homosexual,” and in particular, to the “opera queen,” that song-maddened dreamer? The opera queen’s origin is a subject that I must bracket, much as I must postpone the question of imperialism: suffice it to say that the opera queen bears, in his name, a residue of the imperialist values that have burdened opera—whether specific Orientalist libretti, or the nature of opera itself as an Italian genre exported, like tea or gold, abroad.³ The throat, for gay men, is problematized: zone of fellatio, alterior eroticism, nongenitality. The opera queen—the gay consumer of opera—has an inactive, silent throat while he listens to the diva; the singer’s throat is queen. But

agency, in opera, is blurred: the queen’s throat resides in a vocal body intangibly suspended between persons, and between the separate acts of production and reception. Similarly, the homosexual body, whether silent or vocal, occupies a crossroads where anatomies and institutions collide. Like voice, homosexuality appears to be taking place inside a body, when really it occurs in a sort of outerspace (call it “discourse”) where interiorities converge; the vocal body and the homosexual body each appear to be a membraned box of urges, when actually each is a looseleaf rulebook, a ledger of inherited prohibitions.

The codification of singing techniques goes back to Aristotle’s *De Anima* and *De Audibilibus*; there were several Renaissance students of the larynx (Codronchi, Fabricius, Bauhinus, Casserius); the genre of the singing manual, including Giovanni Camillo Maffei de Solofra’s 1562 *Discorso della voce* (the first secular vocal treatise) precedes opera’s invention. Evidently, opera did not, at its birth, initiate a radically new method of voice production, but tapped existing modes.⁴ Because anatomy responds to history, however, methods of forming a singing voice have changed over time. For example, in 1836, when French tenor Gilbert Duprez carried his “chest register” up to a high C, he reshaped the way tenors have sung since.⁵ The complicated history of operatic singing exceeds my grasp; I will concentrate, instead, on a few bizarre books written to teach the techniques of singing. A kind of conduct book, the voice manual has as much to do with social as with musical history. Though these texts cannot be entirely trusted to say what actually happens in a vocalist’s body, they have a certain musicological legitimacy, for they draw on traditions that *have* influenced opera singing. Lilli Lehmann and Enrico Caruso wrote manuals; so did a renowned castrato and teacher, Pietro Francesco Tosi, whose *Observations on the Florid Song* (1723), translated into English in 1743, epitomizes styles of tone production linked to Italian opera. Voice manuals, symptomatic of wider cultural purposes, don’t solely reflect the quirks of their authors—whether practitioner or pedagogue. These instruction books—at least in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—intend to spread “culture,” to civilize. Sometimes, as if incidentally, they fulfill their stated function, which is to protect secret skills from vanishing. Like any literary text, a voice manual carefully imagines and shapes the body of its reader. And it is the *nonsinger* whose body the voice manual most effortfully exhorts. Studying the manuals, I locate the discourse of “voice” not merely in sonic vibrations and operatic history, but in

the subjectivity of the outsider to opera, the aspirant who will never become a singer, and who reads voice manuals as field guides to the unobtainable.

The undercurrent of voice manuals—and of opera itself—is an ideologically fraught distinction between speaking and singing. Though some pedagogues consider that singing is speaking intensified, others believe that speech endangers the singing mechanism: as twentieth-century diva Maria Jeritza put it, “So many girls do not seem to realize that the speaking voice is actually the enemy of the singing voice.”⁶ Much earlier, in 1774, Gambattista Mancini claimed that the vocal organs were “quiet and natural” during speech, but subject to fatiguing toil in singing.⁷ Some manuals, attending to details of phonation and diction, imply that singing and speaking are the same; but I am happiest with Jeritza’s definition of “voice” as speech’s enemy and opposite. “Voice,” though it includes words, is also immune to them.

In the mid-nineteenth century, “voice” underwent a crisis of definition; one event that crystallizes this shift in vocal bodies is the invention of the laryngoscope, in 1854, by singer-teacher Manuel Garcia II (brother to divas Maria Malibran and Pauline Viardot). Garcia was hardly the first to look into the physiological sources of singing. For example, in the eighteenth century, scientist Antoine Ferrein discovered the so-called *cordes vocales* by experimenting on a cadaver’s larynx. But what made Garcia’s endeavor different was that he experimented on himself: seeking the cause of his cracked voice, he assembled a contraption, involving a dentist’s mirror, and peered into his throat to see his glottis. The laryngoscope’s influence may have been limited, but its invention coincided with the rise of scientific vocal methods, and the fall of the castrato, who, by 1800, had begun to disappear: the last decade of the eighteenth century represented the peak of his popularity and prominence. (It has been estimated that in eighteenth-century Italy, four thousand boys a year were castrated.)⁹ Once the castrato fell, he fell quickly; 1844 marked a castrato’s last performance in London, and castration—in Italy at least—absolutely stopped in 1870, coincident with the Italian *risorgimento*. With the castrato’s demise came a vague fear that vocal art was declining. These fears of decadence were given a name: *bel canto*.

According to musicologist Philip A. Duey, the term *bel canto*, in its current sense—defined as a golden age of singing, a style of opera, and a technique of voice production—only entered discourse *after* that

era (embodied by the castrato) had ended; specifically, the word took on its present meaning in the 1860s in Italy, and was taken up by other countries in the 1880s. The phrase itself, hardly new, had been used for centuries, but its present significance only appeared in dictionaries after 1900, and that meaning was itself a product of nationalistic struggle between Italian and German styles of singing.

So it appears that *bel canto* (as a nostalgic retrospective discourse) was invented in the 1860s. Another term was coined in the 1860s—in 1869, to be exact: “homosexual.”¹⁰ Imagine for a moment that this is not a coincidence, and consider that the discourses of *bel canto* and “homosexuality” might be parallel crystallizations. “Homosexuality” and *bel canto* are not the same thing, but they had related contexts: they came embedded in pseudo-scientific, medicalizing, admonitory discourses. The tradition of the voice manual precedes by centuries this historical moment of *bel canto*’s and homosexuality’s invention; but the interest in resonators, phonation, larynx, and glottis (including theories of a false vocal band and a so-called stroke of the glottis), flourished with particular vehemence after 1860, while the number of voice manuals published reached a peak in the 1890s and early 1900s—a torrent of advice literature, including singer Nellie Melba’s *Melba Method* (1926), Charles Emerson’s *Psycho-Vox* (1915), Julius Edward Meyer’s *A Treatise on the Origin of a Destructive Element in the Female Voice as Viewed from the Register Standpoint* (1895), and Clara Kathleen Rogers’s *My Voice and I* (1910). I hypothesize that the impulse to discipline the voice grew heightened during a historical moment that will dominate this essay—the period between (roughly) 1840 and 1940, in which “voice culture” arose as a discourse containing the competing claims of scientific and natural techniques. Furthermore, I suggest that voice culture (and, by extension, operatic singing itself) is inseparable from nineteenth- and twentieth-century discourses of the sexual body, a choral entanglement in which “homosexuality” was a major though taciturn player, drowned out by two more talkative sibling discourses—psychoanalysis and hysteria. When we hear the static of hysteria, or the drone of psychoanalysis, be confident that we are surrounded by half-audible overtones of homosexuality, too. The connections between voice culture and psychoanalysis are obvious. Both are hell-bent on vocalizing hidden material, and both take castration seriously; voice culture desires the castrato’s scandalous vocal plenitude, while psychoanalysis imagines castration to be the foundation of male

and female identity. All these sexual and vocal discourses, insisting that the missing phallus means everything, zealously cast the “castrato” as star in the epic of psychic reality.

Though the epoch of the laryngoscope is my focus, fantasies of a lost golden age of singing precede the rise of voice culture. *Cantabile* seems weighted, even during the reign of the castrato, with a forsaken, mourned past. Tosi’s *Observations on the Florid Song* opposes ancient virtues to modern lapses that include female singers, poor intonation, and lost exquisiteness. “I am old,” he sighs; “but were I young, I would imitate as much as possibly I could the *Cantabile* of those who are branded with the opprobrious Name of Ancients.”¹¹ These “ancients” flourished a mere thirty years before Tosi wrote his treatise—hardly long enough ago to earn the name. (He considers opera itself—distinguished from the “manly” church style—to be symptomatic of a decline into theatrical effeminacy.¹²) Jeremiads against present vocal standards, coupled with nostalgic appeals to vanished *cantabile*, are common in the manuals; if Tosi was obsessed with the Ancients who preceded him by a mere thirty years, nineteenth- and early twentieth-century instruction books characteristically regretted a decadence that partially stemmed from the castrati’s disappearance—which no voice culturist dared explicitly mourn. Francesco Lamperti, in 1864, wrote that “It is a sad but undeniable truth that singing is to be found today in a deplorable state of decadence,”¹³ and Sir-Charles Santley, in 1908, justifies writing a voice manual by saying that the “Art of singing is dying out.”¹⁴ Fears of singing’s decline tap Darwinist, racist fears of pollution and of sapped strength; a voice—even if achieved at the cost of castration—was a valuable masculine possession, to be preserved against syphilitic degeneration and new-fangled vices.¹⁵

Voice manuals—like tracts against masturbation, or psychoanalytic case histories—reflect a culture’s wish to enforce some and not other channelings of energy through the body; the voice box glitters like a sexual organ because writers of manuals are so disciplinary in legislating how breath must move through the larynx to resonators in the face—called, tellingly, the “mask,” as if voice were never capable of uttering the truth. Because singing does more than woodenly recapitulate a prior system called “sexuality,” let us consider “voice” to be the master-discourse, and “sexuality,” its appendage; if “sexuality” seems to be the term on top, and “voice” the term below, let us reverse the hierarchy, if only to see the two concepts more clearly. Rapt in this

reversal, we might discover that the ramifications of “voice” are more majestic and shattering than the effects of “sexuality.” What if “voice” were, finally, a more useful rubric than “sexuality”? Dispense with our sex rhetorics, and think of desire as articulated air, a shaped column of breath passing through a box on its way to a resonator. Are we experiencing “voice” or “sexuality” when we greet or hold a controlled shaft of air moving from a dark place out into the world?

LOOKING INTO THE VOICE BOX

IT IS difficult to avoid noticing that “voice” has been persistently coded as feminine. And it is difficult to know what to do with this information. If voice is feminine, what happens if it resides in a male body? Is it therefore the agent of a radical anti-essentialism? If voice is neither masculine nor feminine, is it the sign of an exotic, nonspecific, third gender?

One major reason voice has been coded as female is because the organs of its production are hidden from view. To those who wished to organize singing into pedagogic principles, voice seemed like an obscure, mysterious essence whose problematic physiological source needed to be seen but remained invisible. Pedagogue and singer Sir Charles Santley in 1909 noted that the male instructor “has to teach an instrument which cannot be seen except by an expert, and cannot be touched at any time.”¹⁶ “No one can yet say that he has watched the vocal cords during the natural and unconstrained performance of their duty,” writes one voice culturist in 1894,¹⁷ confirming the failure of the laryngologist’s dream.

Is the invisible vocal organism an absence, or is it merely an obstruction to sight, a door concealing valued presences? The secret of good singing might consist in opening the throat’s door so “knowledge” can come out. Such an open-door policy won’t permit the auditor ever to *see* the throat’s secrets, but it will release the flood of buried stuff; and openness only comes to the singer who ignores his or her own mechanism. The singer who knows too much sings badly. In *How To Sing*, Enrico Caruso insists that the throat is a “door through which the voice must pass,” and that the door must be left open lest the breath seek “other channels” —morally dubious detours. Many writers insist that the passageway to the human voice’s resonance rooms must be left

open, as if singing were mostly a matter of sincerity and the willingness to confess. Foucault defined modern sexuality as the secret we all want to talk about. At once an invisible fortress and an unhinged gate, the voice can't keep a secret, or if it can, only an open secret—D. A. Miller's term for homosexuality as what we name by not naming, know by not knowing. Like the closet, the throat must be kept open but no one is allowed to guess, in the first place, that such a door exists.

"If only I could see the glottis!," Manuel Garcia reportedly ex-claimed, on the verge of inventing the laryngoscope.²⁰ Modern "scientific" photographs of the singing larynx and glottis show us what Garcia might have seen (fig. 1). Voice commentators describe the larynx as labial—a connection that may rest in part on visual analogy, but more substantially on the figurative association between women and invisible things. The larynx—as an object of theory, as something to be curious about—is "feminine," but it does not always inhabit a woman's body: the first living, singing larynx seen by naked eye was a man's—Garcia, who trained a sort of speculum on himself. Indeed, regardless of the singer's gender, it is arguable that "voice culture"—the science that arose around the desire to see, understand, and control the voice—has invested the spookily genderless vocal cords with a "feminine" aura.

Many voice manual writers vigorously attribute vaginal characteristics to the throat. Jean Blanchet, as early as 1756, rhapsodized about the glottis—and included drawings!—as "a horizontal cleft terminated by two lips." Robert Lawrence Weer, in 1948, matter-of-factly characterizes the larynx as "two thick membranes," "two lips" like *little shutters, lying horizontally, with their opening running from front to back. The opening between these lips is called "glottis." When a vocal sound is produced the edges of these shutters come together firmly.*²²

Female singers themselves described voice as full of mucus (Ernestine Schumann-Heink warns vocalists not to swallow phlegm or mucus, a "disgusting habit that is altogether too widespread"), or as tightly tensed: diva Maria Jeritza compared singing to the sensation of "a strong rubber band being stretched out full length."²³

Though the voice culturist may zealously equate voice and vagina, it is possible that voice may be, in fact, a symbol of a separate pleasure zone that offers Edenic, imaginary alternatives to dominant cultural models of what sex means.²⁴ For the subtle, wily larynx is capable of embodying both male *and* female characteristics, or neither. In

voice manuals, it is accorded the status of prehistoric anatomy, of some versatile, extinct species glamorously exempt from gender. In 1739, Johann Mattheson described the glottis as a "tonguelet" shaped like the "mouth of a little watering can." (Which gender is a watering-can?) He also finds a parchment-soft epiglottis, whose movement makes trills and mordents; it is tempting to consider trills as a pretext to give the epiglottis—a little organ of pleasure—the chance to speak.²⁵ French voice instructor B. Mengozzi, in 1803, described the epiglottis as shaped like an ivy leaf whose "chief purpose is to cover up the glottis when necessary"²⁶: he implies that the glottis, a sensitive, modest organ, needs protection from chafing display. Equally voluptuous and archaic is Salvatore Marchesi's 1902 description of the glottis as a genderless vibrator containing two sets of muscles, the "ring-shield" and the "shield-pyramid"—able to stretch or slacken.²⁷

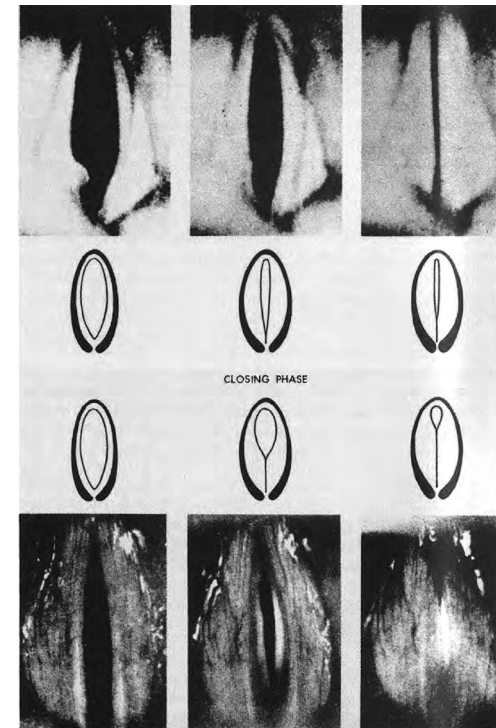


FIGURE 1. From D. Ralph Appleman, *The Science of Vocal Pedagogy: Theory and Application* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967), 71.

Singing manuals hardly indulge, however, in some utopian affirmation of androgyny: if anything, they carry out the Freudian insistence that every tremor and wish is a displacement of an implicitly genital sexuality. If we wish to subordinate voice to the already sexualized body, we will argue that voice borrows its power from offstage or invisible bodily areas it seems to recall—much as voice in cinema, as Kaja Silverman has observed, acquires most force when it is off-screen.²⁸ Indubitably, voice's anatomical source is *always* outside the frame of the visible; and yet voice is hardly a simulacrum of the genitals. Rather than submitting to genital tyranny, the singing larynx declares itself sublimely independent of the place below.

For this independence, the throat must be punished; cathexis must be pushed down into the lower body, where it belongs. Voice emerges from the head, but the singer is often encouraged to forget—or lose—her head. Singer Emmy Destinn said, in the 1920s, “When I sing I feel as if I have no throat.”²⁹ To sing, the head and throat must either vanish or suffer subtle symbolic injury. According to bass Herbert Witherspoon, Greek tragedians slashed the back of their throats to promote vocal projection;³⁰ though a sublimely unconscious throat is not the same as a slashed throat, both are instances of voice culture's tendency to scapegoat the throat for seeming to transcend the genital body. The female singer photographed in Millie Ryan's 1910 treatise, *What Every Singer Should Know*, has learned her lesson, for she has neither throat nor head (fig. 2).³¹ Do the photographs stop at her neck for heuristic economy, or to convince us that proper singing shoves the wandering uterus back down? The headless vocalist is encouraged to stand before an open window every morning, to take deep breaths and fondle her breast and ribcage as a “positive cure for all forms of nervousness”; like Freud's Dora, this singer now understands that sensation must *stay put* in the genitals. Diva Florence Easton commented in the 1920s that “You cannot make an omelet without breaking eggs,” and you cannot make grand opera without “breaking voices.”³² Voice culture has a huge investment in the broken or missing voice: research into teaching the mute to speak—for example, the case of Helen Keller—overlapped with the voice manuals' detailed inquiry into phonation and laryngeal action.³³ Helen Keller was mute and Florence Easton was not, but in both cases, the throat was a site where expression and silence seemed eternally opposite, and magically the same—a place where a culture practiced making distinctions between

liberty and captivity, intactness and rupture. Our throats bear greater discursive burdens than our genitals, and yet we lack a vocabulary for what the throat knows and suffers—perhaps because the throat is loath to speak about itself.

Hoping to define “voice” as nongenital, I turn to the mouth. Because voice is shaped there, might not singing recapitulate—at some distance—the pleasures of the oral stage? Witherspoon describes the mouth as a sexual organ, alive with easily excited “erectile tissues,” an organism containing “almost countless nerves”: hence, “there is small wonder that things can go wrong very easily.”³⁴ (Singing is *always* going wrong.) But singing's physiology is the opposite of sucking or swallowing, and thus is not a process of sexual or economic consumption. Isaac Nathan, in 1823, implies that singing transcends the mouth's desire to suck, and transports the singer away from the

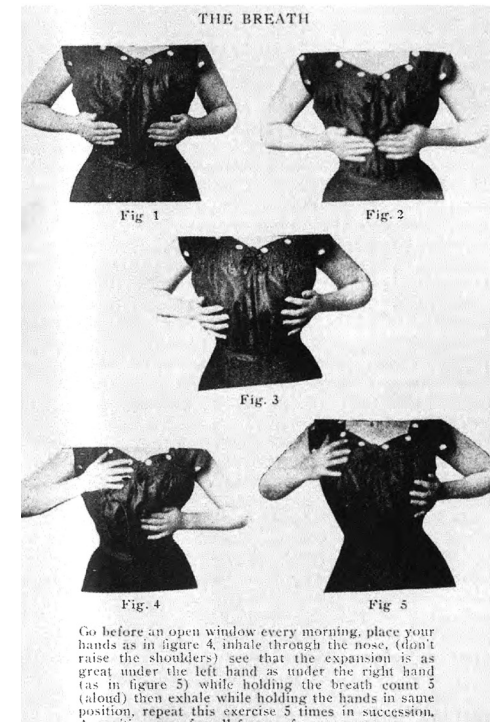


FIGURE 2. From Millie Ryan, *What Every Singer Should Know* (Omaha: Franklin Publishing Co., 1910), 88.

mother and toward a “friend,” away from the passivity of shopping and toward the autonomy of production: “These pretty mouths, which at other times are watched with the anxiety of maternal vigilance, lest they should exceed the dimensions of a moderate-sized button-hole, are suffered, under the all-commanding sway of the singing-master, to distend wide enough to admit a friend.”³⁵ Here, the friend is a finger: voice manuals consistently recommend that the mouth be opened wide enough so that “one can comfortably bring the little finger between” the teeth (according to Johann Adam Hiller in 1774).³⁶ This digit’s arrival in the novice’s mouth is portrayed as a sometimes unhappy rite of passage. Lawrence Weer remembers his first voice lesson on “tongue control” taking place in his mother’s kitchen; she told him to hold his tongue flat with a spoon while he sang scales. The spoon and other restraints brought on a kind of hysteria; he lost his voice and sought the aid of a specialist, who told him not to sing for six months.³⁷ Is it unnatural to open the mouth? Composer Jules Massenet told soprano Alice Verlet, in a rehearsal of his *Manon*, “You have the ideal singer’s mouth; it opens naturally!”³⁸ But the mouth must not open too wide or admit too many friends. Sir Charles Santley says that for the lips to “fulfill their office,” the mouth “ought not to open more than sufficient to introduce the tip of a finger” — not even up to the knuckle.³⁹ What severe regulation!

That so few writers have managed to describe the vocal mechanism as masculine suggests that there are indelible reasons to imagine the operatic singing voice as feminine, and to describe singing technique and laryngeal anatomy with imagery of female genitals. I am tempted to say this is merely imagery: but imagery reflects and induces ideology. The ideology underlying the voice box, then, is that voice and vagina are equivalent, and that, because the vagina is seen as an erring organ, a wanderer, singing itself always has the potential to be perverse, to deviate from its true path. I am uncomfortable with the singing manual’s normative, punitive insistence that voice and vagina are analogous zones. I think that the manuals zealously enforce this equation because voice is so liable to be *thrown*, to disguise its agency, to hurl itself outside of the sex-and-gender field altogether and onto the sands of a signless, unremarkable, neuter shore. I want now to examine a specific case of voice escaping the genitals: falsetto. In falsetto, the contradictory demands that constitute the discourse of “voice” (that it must embody and transcend genitality) emerge. The falsetto is an

instance of profound perversity. And I suggest that falsetto is not some freakish sideshow within operatic ideology, but is in fact central to the symbolic system of trained singing.

FINDING THE FALSETTO

CODIFIED VOICE PRODUCTION has never been happy with the falsetto: sylph-sheer embodiment of mystery, unnaturalness, absence. Isaac Nathan in 1823 called it the *fourth voice* — a fourth sex, not properly housed in the body: a “species of ventriloquism,” “an inward and suppressed quality of tone, that conveys the illusion of being heard at a distance.”⁴⁰ Like head voice in general, falsetto brings breath into the nose, where French styles of voice production often go: Antoine Bailleux, in 1760, warns that a voice must emerge straight from the chest “lest in passing into the head or into the nose it degenerate into falsetto by its muffledness.”⁴¹ The falsetto is part of the history of effeminacy — a compelling saga yet to be written. As long as there have been trained voices, there have been effeminate voices — tainted by affectation or “false” production. The ancients concurred in condemning such emissions: Plutarch disparaged “effeminate musical tattling, mere sound without substance”; John of Salisbury discouraged “womanish affectations in the mincing of notes and sentences”; and Saint Raynard insisted that “it becomes men to sing with a masculine voice, and not in a feminine manner, with tinkling, or as is popularly said, with false voices to imitate theatrical wantonness.”⁴²

The language used to condemn falsetto reflects — or foreshadows — the discourse of homosexuality, which, crystallizing in the late nineteenth century, affected in turn the antagonism to false tone production. One voice culturist, the English tenor Charles Lunn, even altered his theory of the falsetto between 1880 and 1888; in his earlier treatise, he did not explicitly disparage falsetto production, but in later works, in 1888 and 1904, he derided it as false and “utterly unemotional,” a technique requiring no study and hence rarely used by a true artist.⁴³ In the same era, Sir Morell Mackenzie, Physician to the Royal Society of Musicians, described falsetto as a technique in which the two vocal cords push against each other “at their hinder part with such force as to stop each other’s movement” — a retrograde, devolutionary

motion; while chest tones emerge from the “natural aperture of the larynx,” falsetto tones come through “an artificially diminished orifice, the chink becoming gradually smaller until there is nothing left to vibrate.”⁴⁴ If vibration is civilization, falsetto represents its decline.

And yet in earlier times the falsetto was an asset—a secret—that singers sought and protected. Though the techniques of its production were scapegoated, and associated with degeneracy, detour, and artifice, the falsetto has long represented a resource, neighbor to more sincerely produced tones; the castrato Tosi speaks of the feigned voice as something “of Use” particularly when it is disguised by art.⁴⁵ If a modern voice culturist like Franklin D. Lawson, in 1944, saw it as a danger to both male and female voices—causing a “white,” “blatant,” and “effeminate” sound in the adult male, and a “colorless” tone in the female,⁴⁶ the castrato Tosi considered it a treasure to be discovered by a knowing master: “Many masters put their Scholars to sing the *Contr’ Alto*, not knowing how to help them to the *Falsetto*, or to avoid the Trouble of finding it.”⁴⁷ Falsetto is a skill, primarily male: a secret object or technique passed between pedagogue and student, it functions as patriarchal cultural lore. A sound at once false and useful, it may bring praise or condemnation to the singer who relies on it.

In the era of the castrato, young boys were sold to tutors or conservatories by parents who had detected musical (and monetary) promise, and wished to preserve the prepubescent voice, or who, in the absence of signs of inborn musicianship, gambled that inclination might arise after castration had taken place.⁴⁸ The castrato is an extreme case; but manuals suggest that puberty’s onset is the signal event in every singer’s vocal development, and that male voices stay high only because fathers and pedagogues insist. The generic biography of a male singer depicts puberty—the breaking of the voice—as a moment of Oedipal conflict with a father figure who insidiously wants tones that the son’s voice can no longer produce. A headmaster wanted to profit from the young Caruso’s voice—a relationship so consuming and problematic that when puberty hit, Caruso almost committed suicide; but he was rescued by a kindly baritone, who helped him place his voice.⁴⁹ Similarly, Sir Charles Santley’s father insisted that the boy sing tenor, until the boy’s “real register”—his natural inclination—emerged as incontrovertible evidence.⁵⁰ In puberty, the *real* erupts—an explosion that threatens the edifice of “voice.” Singer Ernestine Schumann-Heink warns girls to postpone study until after

their “physical development” is complete,⁵¹ and Isaac Nathan cautions males not to sing during “mutation.”⁵² Only after puberty can a boy-singer “place” his voice, discover where chest voice ends and head voice begins; only then can he balance the irreconcilable symbolic values of “head” and “chest.” It is the master’s task to watch out for puberty’s arrival in the student’s body. If the teacher is himself a castrato, he may be particularly well schooled in masquerade; castrated or not, he must show his apprentice how to let the voice “pass” from one sexually resonant region into another.⁵³

Puberty, always inscribed in the singing voice, is particularly invoked whenever a singer moves between registers. Are registers a fact of nature, or a figment of voice culture? They are, at least, a metaphorical way of describing and enhancing anatomical perimeters—of finding categories for a voice’s uneven production as it moves from low to high. Some manuals say there are five registers, or one, or none. Some say men have two registers, and women three—or that each singable note is its own register.⁵⁴ However many registers a male or female voice possesses (and it is not clear whether a “register” represents a zone of opportunity or of prohibition), register-theory expresses two central dualities: true versus false, and male versus female. It is only loosely accurate to say that manuals privilege chest production as male and true, and dismiss head production as female and false; the two polarities—male/female, true/false—do not neatly correspond, for the discourse of voice thrives on categories other than gender. Like the system that divides the world into hetero- and homosexual, register-theory gives most weight to the difference between natural and unnatural: from this duality, all other, subsidiary distinctions (including gender?) derive.

Roughly speaking, there seem to be three bodily zones in which resonance occurs: chest, throat, and head. As the pitch ascends, the voice rises from one register to the next. The farther from the chest, the higher and falser the tone becomes, and the more one must exert vigilance in order to sing naturally. As early as the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, voice manuals ascribed superior naturalness to chest voice: according to Domenico Cerone, in 1613, the “chest voice is the one that is most proper and natural.”⁵⁵ Voice culturists are unsure whether head voice is, in fact, falsetto, or whether falsetto is an illegitimate subset of proper head production. Does every man and woman possess a falsetto? Falsetto is not, in itself, a liability; the sin is breaking into it undisguisedly. In 1782, when one “sopranist”—an uncastrat-

ed male who maintained a strong, working falsetto voice—fell out of falsetto and into his true, “robust,” real tenor voice, Johann Samuel Petri observed that “my entire pleasure in his lovely soprano voice was utterly destroyed”: a “loathsome harsh” note had interrupted the vocal masquerade, reminding listeners that the singer was a *he*.⁵⁶ One of the values most often associated with *bel canto* is the ability to prevent such loathsome eruptions by disguising the register breaks, and passing smoothly over them. (Musical passing, of course, recalls racial and sexual passing—as in Nella Larsen’s 1929 novel, *Passing*, where a black woman, possibly lesbian, passes for white and straight.) I am not sure when the joining of registers was first valued, but it is clear that the break between them—fancifully called “Il Ponti-cello” (the little bridge)⁵⁷—is the place *within* one voice where the split between male and female occurs, and that the failure to disguise this gendered break is, like falsetto, fatal to the art of “natural” voice production.

Singing is a matter of potential embarrassments. First: the male falsetto. Should that falseness be hidden, used, discarded? Is it a special case, or is it a natural extension of a singer’s top notes? Second: the difficulty, shared by male and female singers, of the break between registers. Voice culture zealously disguises the register break and banishes the falsetto, but secretly knows that no body occupies, fulltime, the designation “unnatural”; a body merely moonlights there, seeking cover from danger, or relief from tedium. Falsetto is not an identity but a technique, a compromise, a way of working within a specific vocal situation. Because we lack sufficient paradigms to understand the discourse of homosexuality in its tangled variousness, and are left with ugly medical models, or severe theoretical ones, let me offer (in whimsy and seriousness) “head voice” or “undisguised register break” as two models of more lyrical, more pulsing, less punitive provenance. Though falsetto *seems* like the place where voice goes wrong, it is in fact a model for voice production in general, to the extent that vocalizing always imposes detours upon a blank and neutral column of air.

Forgetting its dependence on the feigned, voice culture homophobically overvalues the “natural.” Most theorists of voice would agree with William James Henderson, who wrote in 1906 that “singing is nothing more than nature under high cultivation.”⁵⁸ As long as singing is considered natural, however, there will darkly flourish a subculture of vocal techniques deemed degenerate. Nineteenth-century vocal manuals, in particular, resemble tracts against masturbation; both

genres (pro-voice, anti-masturbation) inveigh against unnatural uses of natural gifts. For example, A. A. Pattou’s *The Voice As An Instrument* (1878), relying on the discourse of degeneracy, offers scientific methods to remove the “defects of an unnatural voice.” An opponent of slurring, Pattou strives to reform the throat, manage the larynx, and eradicate “all the faults or vices to which the human voice is subject.” He even includes his own case history: because he sang wrongly—ignorant of “hygiene”—he suffered an inflammation of the throat, leading to “mental depression and a general distrust of society and all its belongings.”⁵⁹ Sir Charles Santley’s voice manual, too, ends with a confession: his throat grew inflamed from singing in rooms decked with imported flowers (including the hyacinth, clearly linked to homosexuality), and so he warns other singers not to let their “affection” overwhelm their “reason” in this dangerous matter of foreign blooms, lest a fondness for flowers ruin their careers.⁶⁰

Of all vocal matters, vibrato and tremolo are the most potentially degenerate. Mozart criticizes a certain singer’s vibrato as “contrary to nature”; one modern opera critic comments that anti-vibrato sentiment reached a peak in the nineteenth century—an instance of which is American laryngologist Holbrook Curtis’s racist observation, in 1909, that vibrato is popular among the “Latin races,” though frowned on by the Anglo-Saxons.⁶¹ The trill, too, has been considered against nature, or at least effeminate: voice culturist de Rialp believes that though the trill was “very much in vogue” among nineteenth-century male singers, it should be confined to the female voice.⁶² There seems, as well, to be an association between poor intonation and moral failure. Uncertain pitch reflects a cloudy cosmos: one Marchioness Solari wrote of certain castrati that “these degraded beings never sing in tune, when the maiming operation has taken place in bad weather.”⁶³ Any affectation in singing is liable to be criticized as a symptom of degeneracy: Isaac Nathan warns in 1823 against lisping, drawling, or mouthing words so that “the singer appears dropping to the earth from the exertion.”⁶⁴

Degenerate singing can be traced not only to faulty tone, but to unattractive bodily gestures. According to Lilli Lehmann, “faces that are forever grinning or showing fish mouths are disgusting and wrong.”⁶⁵ Singing in front of a mirror to ward off fish mouths is recommended by many nineteenth- and twentieth-century manuals. Castrati, too, were required to gaze in the mirror for one hour each morning while practicing; Tosi tells the singer that mirror-practice will help him avoid

convulsive grimacing.⁶⁶ Mirrors play such a significant role in theories of self-invention that it is hard to avoid the conclusion that training the singing voice is a model for the more general project of training a subjectivity. Lacan suggested that identity is formed around a child seeing a whole self in the mirror, and wanting to become that seemingly coherent person. Manuel Garcia's laryngoscope—a device made of two mirrors—assured him that he had a larynx, and, by extension, a phallus and a self. A parallel assurance greets the male cinematic spectator, for whom, according to Kaja Silverman, the “acoustic mirror” of voice represents proof that he is not castrated. The mirror may be the silvery accomplice to the project of masculine ego-formation, but pathologized narcissism, embodied in mirror-practice, prevents “voice” from fully incarnating naturalness, and suggests that the singer practicing for a career occupies a dubious, unsanctioned position.

Self-listening is the sonic equivalent to mirror-practice; before the phonograph, could singers accurately hear themselves? As Arturo Buzzi-Peccia (teacher of Alma Gluck) remarked in 1925, “the singer cannot hear his own voice”; and for this reason, writes a voice culturist in 1899, the singer should not, in the early stages, practice alone.⁶⁷ Solitary, far from listeners, can a young voice fully occupy the plush but shameful designation “falsetto”? By itself, apart from mirrors, institutions, and audiences, can a body know itself as homosexual? Because rhetoric about unnatural singing precedes the nineteenth-century consolidation of “homosexual” as pathological identity, the discourse of degenerate voice (one of several models of the unnaturally produced self) enfolds and foretells the modern discourse of the homosexual.

Sing falsetto, now. (Are you alone as you read this?) Fill the room with a clear feigned sound, and ask yourself what act you have committed. Then produce the sound naturally, from the chest. Which of the two tones, chest or head, do you want your neighbors to overhear?

SINGING AND SELF-INVENTION



VOICE IS A cultural myth as compelling, as naturalized, as hard to obtain distance from, as the myth of the sexual self. The image of sound as breath moving through the body relies on the hydraulic metaphor that dom-

inated Freud's theories. Like id/ego/superego, or oral/anal/genital, voice is a three-tiered hierarchy. And the similarity between psyche and voice does not solely rest on the coincidental fact that both have been imagined as traveling through three zones. The categories “psyche” and “voice” do not simply record what actually happens; they persuasively prescribe what *should* happen.

The many maps of voice's trajectory differ on fine points—number of registers, where resonance takes place. . . . But the manuals agree that breath's movement is *upward*, and that the higher the sound goes (whether higher in pitch, or higher spatially, within the body), the more the sound risks becoming feminine or effeminate. Breath has no choice but to rise: breath turns into tone as ineluctably as unconscious desire changes to symptom, emotion, or deed. If trained “voice” is a dynamic ascent, like dreamwork or sublimation, then the singing body is either healthy (frugally expending breath) or sick (prodigal and digressive). Voice passes through a body as a toxin does, purgatively; singer and listener, seeking to judge a voice's quality, must ask, “Have all the poisons been flushed out?” Because voice operates hydraulically, as an essence, too fervid for storage, that escapes through whatever doors are open, then falsetto is breath that took the wrong exit out of the body.

I wonder, though, whether breath's movement from lungs to larynx to mask is always suspect. Though falsetto has the clearest links to homosexuality, a quintessentially perverse routing of libido, it is truer to say that all varieties of operatic voice are perverse. Even the dulcet, well-placed voice must move along the road of a dangerous double-bind. Within singing's illogic, air beguiled to a variant destination is as perverse as air that proceeds to the proper gate. Resonance is perversion.

A singer is an envelope of humors that need to be balanced and bled. Singing, like bloodletting, cures by restoring internal (gaseous, liquid) equilibrium. Voice culturist John Gothard, in his *Thoughts on Singing; with Hints on the Elements of Effect and the Cultivation of Taste* (1848), opens with a case history of a delicate neurasthenic man (subject to “continual sighing”), who was cured by befriending young men who indulged in glee-singing.⁶⁸ With equal optimism, Millie Ryan attests that “there is no tonic for the *nerves* equal to voice culture.”⁶⁹ Singing is moral, psychological, and bodily house cleaning—even a form of surgery.⁷⁰ Neither sexologists nor voice culturists can tolerate a frigid, unresponsive mechanism: according to American teacher David Clippinger, in 1910, the singer's “lips, tongue, lower jaw and larynx

should be free from all rigidity.”⁷¹ Singing is to this extent feminizing: after all, what codes of *masculine* conduct encourage men to free their larynxes from stiffness? Before training, the singer is tense, tight, nervous, delicate; afterwards, he or she unwinds. But such unwinding, hardly spontaneous, is as formulaic as a nineteenth-century hysteric’s photographed nature morte. Yvette Guilbert, art and folk chanteuse of the early twentieth century, author of *How To Sing a Song*, offers guidelines for a kind of self-invention predicated on poses so stylized that they waver between “camp” and lunacy. She includes photographs of her own face in dramatic, comic, and pathetic attitudes recalling Hugh Welch Diamond’s photographs of Victorian madwomen—a grammar of derangement: expressions named Ecstasy, Neutral Amiability, Moral Pain, Serenity, Gray, Red, Purple, and Vermilion, claim to be fixed and transhistorical codes that singers must master and reproduce. “Voice” is like phrenology—meanings mapped onto a body without regard for verisimilitude; the edifice called “voice” couldn’t exist unless generations of singing bodies had complied with its strict correspondences. Guilbert indicates how grim this discourse can be when she insists that mimicry is every woman’s natural endowment, regardless of class: “Whether it be the mouth of a great lady or mouth of a farm girl, large and red, thin and pale, every woman’s mouth is a surprising accessory in the art of facial mimicry.”⁷² But will the discourse of “voice” accommodate a man imitating Guilbert’s expressions?

Not if the manuals arbitrate the matter, for they hardly encourage self-invention. Voice, once taught, sings the story of its training: what a voice produces is the story of its labored production, the tale of the pedagogic structures that matured the sound. I suppose that any method of turning the body into a factory for expressivity inscribes the teacher’s mark on the student’s body: this is a fact of pedagogy, more than of “voice.” But the trained singer bears the stain of tutelary institutions with peculiar precision.

Voice manuals staple the singer into the family, and into all the heterosexual and procreative morality that the “family” as a prescriptive category implies: in 1839, H. W. Day writes that “singing has a refining effect on the moral feelings,” and Lowell Mason, in 1847, comments that singing produces “social order and happiness in a family.”⁷³ Fine musical sensibility and sterling voice production originate in a childhood free from strain, in a family where the “natural voice” is habitually used,⁷⁴ and where, according to Domenico Corti in 1811,

there is opportunity to hear good music.⁷⁵ When a voice sings sweetly and successfully, it repeats the salutary childhood scenes that fostered it, and when it moves awkwardly between registers, it exposes an unnatural past. Opera singers sometimes took quite literally voice’s power to re-enact its own aetiology. For example, in the era of the castrato, mothers of female divas often appeared with them on stage;⁷⁶ and Caruso mentions a prima donna who insisted that her mother stand in the wings during all her performances.⁷⁷ In both of these examples, the voice’s origin (the on- or offstage chaperone) is the mother, and the female singer’s debt to the mother is strongest.

Like any conduct book (whether for Renaissance courtier or modern teenager), the singing manual instructs how to secure class position, how to “shun low and disreputable company,”⁷⁸ and how—in the voice’s bearing—to indicate “refinement.”⁷⁹ Voice culture thrusts aristocratic values onto consumers perceived as passively waiting for uplifting instructions in the fine art of control: singing technique is imagined to be nothing less than the “correct management or the mis-management of the vibratory column of air” passing from vocal cords into mouth.⁸⁰ Homosexuality or voice—economies concerned with what might go wrong, or what has already gone wrong—are enfolded in dogmas of use and waste, retention and expulsion: matters of budgeting.

Like the arts of asceticism that, according to Foucault, constituted early modern sexuality, voice is a set of rules for withholding and dispensing a natural, numinous, and dangerously volatile substance; discharging sound, voice turns desire into money. Voice’s emission is an image of the individual’s body catapulting through society. And singing bodies are prized for moving up. High notes—associated with femininity as well as effeminacy—are expensive; in his satire, *Il teatro alla moda* (1720), Benedetto Marcello observes that the higher a castrato ascends in pitch, the more money he makes.⁸¹ But wealth begins in stinting. The singer, according to Johann Mattheson in 1739, must let out the inhaled air “not at once nor too liberally, but sparingly, little by little, being careful to hold it back and save it.”⁸² And Caruso tells the singer to observe a similar economy over the career’s whole length: the singer should limit the voice’s output “as he does the expenses of his purse.”⁸³

In a singer’s training, the conduct of the entire body—not merely the voice—is subject to punitive budgeting. Apparently, sing-

ing requires purity from top to bottom. Sexual abstinence and dietary moderation have been recommended since vocal instruction was first dispensed:

Aristotle's *Problemata* insists that singing and digestion are intimately connected.⁸⁴ In the twentieth century, Millie Ryan recommends dried prunes for the throat; Herbert Witherspoon encourages the use of cathartics, and warns that the "mucous membrane of the pharynx and mouth is a 'tell-tale' of no mean value, and will often show clearly the troubles existing below."⁸⁵ "Voice" can't help but confess the state of a body's plumbing; singing, a flow chart, indicates if fluids and solids are circulating, if the waste system is functioning. Of course, voice not only describes the system, but makes the system sensational and sonic—encouraging us, thereby, to love (to quiver as we hear) the ideology of body-as-economy. Any nineteenth- and twentieth-century concern over

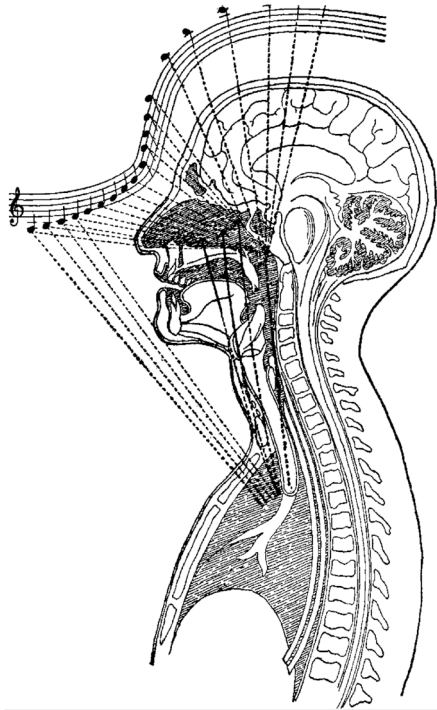


FIGURE 3. From Lilli Lehmann, *How To Sing* (1902; reprint, New York: The Macmillan Company, 1960), 87.

regulating sexual or vocal flow evokes the specter of the "homosexual" as a site where control is gladly or unwillingly relinquished, even Foucault's discussion of a sexuality as a system of alimentary house-keeping relies on a Freudian assumption that male homosexuality is necessarily centered in anal pleasure, and thus connected to the anal (and paranoid) arts of budgeting.

"Red lines denote vocal sensations of soprano and tenor singers," writes Lilli Lehmann in *How To Sing* (fig. 3), admitting that singing is not a rock but a stream, not a target but an arrow.⁸⁶ (Incidentally, note the easy interchangeability of male tenor and female soprano!) The "self" has a bad reputation; we take "self" to signify every complacency we dare not interrogate. Describing subjectivity as mobile—as red hot lines—helps us to consider identities as evolving and combustible indecisions rather than fixed, leaden, foretold stations. It is impossible to describe or document what a singer—or a sexual self—*really* feels, though the path of its sentience may be mapped. Walt Whitman mapped it when he wrote "I Sing the Body Electric"—trumpeting the connection between trained voice production, and "voice" as a trope for homosexual self-inscription. Is singing's electricity a pleasurable charge, a natural light, like the firefly's? Or is singing a modern murderous technology, post-Edison, like electrocution?

CODA: PLEASURE COMING OUT

WANTED PLEASURE to suffuse this essay, and I am disappointed to note I have postponed pleasure until the end. Though "voice" may please the singer and gratify the listener, singing is not finally a question of delight. "Voice" builds a social identity; it doesn't fan the flames of private joy. In fact, rapture has no more place in a voice manual than in a guide to auto repair.

In valuing repair over rapture, "voice" and "homosexuality" are parallel: both are produced in order to bring pleasure, though the means of their production dampens the joy. The channeling of breath through the body's vocal factory is disciplinary, as the production of a homosexual identity may be pathologizing. There is no such thing as free expression; to express is to press out, by force (as in *espresso*). "Voice" aims to purify, to transcend; detergent, it seeks to scour the

sodomitic dross that “homosexuality” has frequently embodied. In this sense, voice and homosexuality are adversaries: voice is evolutionary, homosexuality is devolutionary; voice is transcendent, homosexuality is grounded. But such a reductive division of labor between the two discourses does justice to neither. Voice and homosexuality are conductors of electricities not their own. They are *careers*, in the literal sense: vehicular undertakings. Toward what end does culture drive the “voice” and the “homosexual”? Even if destinations were clearly marked, bodies would not be particularly obedient in getting there. For bodies are neither predictable nor efficient; voice and homosexuality arise, as industries, to extract (or express) what no body, left to its own devices, would care to produce.

Finally, homosexuality and singing require decisions to be made about placement—verdicts the body comes to as if by itself, naturally. Where, on the map of registers, does the voice fall? Am I a tenor or a baritone? A soprano or a mezzo? Do I believe in these historical categories? What is the price of not believing in them? According to the manuals, placement should occur in puberty, when the male voice breaks, and when “mutation” commences in both sexes. But sexuality—homo or hetero—does not arrive only once, in that moment of self-discovery and self-articulation that we call “coming-out”; sexuality re-arrives in the body every time air moves through the larynx and into the mask. “Coming-out” is only the most narratively concise, politically expedient, and psychologically cleansing example of the vocalization underlying the concept of sexuality itself.

Whether or not one chooses to be vocal about sexuality, to be sexual is, in the first place, already to be vocal. Sexuality arrives in the body when it “comes out” in erection, lubrication, a racing pulse, a slow tremolo, or in the drier form of declarative (and defiant) speech. Are these manifestations pleasurable? We imagine sexuality as a visitation, annunciation, invasion—or we feel it as a molten predisposition that needs to be shaped by culture, good manners, and language. Is sexuality visited like plague on the body, or does it sprout from within, spontaneously? Breath’s excursion through the body to produce a “voice” can hardly be called a pleasure trip. So I end, instead, with the vocabulary of pain: the arduousness that accompanies the ardor of training a voice, or voicing a sexuality.

NOTES

1 . . . Catherine Clément, *Opera, or the Undoing of Women*, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988). The case of Frau Rosalia appears in Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud, *Studies on Hysteria*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Basic Books).

2 . . . My understanding of the discourse of “homosexuality” has been significantly shaped by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990). For an account of the evolution of “homosexuality,” see Ed Cohen, *Talk on the Wilde Side* (New York: Routledge, forthcoming).

3 . . . Opera and its image-repertoire are often troublingly reactionary, Eurocentric, racist, and elitist. And yet opera contains other meanings. In the larger project which this essay initiates, I aim to discover how a form so apparently entangled with oppression should have struck me and others similarly situated in modern gay culture as a form of liberation and speaking out. My subjectivity—that of a gay white Jewish male raised in a middle-class North American family—has been substantially constructed by the “operatic,” and I can’t help but take my subjectivity, and hence the “operatic,” seriously. I hardly insist that opera engenders political change; but I do not wish to mistake opera—culture’s *phantasmal representations of aristocracy* for actual class position, or to forget that opera was once a popular art.

I particularly wish to separate the gay male relation to opera from the kind of “camp” appropriation and revaluation that Andrew Ross describes in *No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1989). According to Ross, the effete intellectual recycles discarded artifacts in order to acquire cultural capital, to convert a civilizations

trash back into marketable gold. But I would argue that when a minority gravitates toward a putatively “high” art form, more is at stake than the mere desire for upward mobility. In any case, opera is malleable, and attractive to marginal groups other than gay men; for example, African-American divas are central to any assessment of contemporary operatic practice. It is not clear whether Leontyne Price, Kathleen Battle, or Jessye Norman have the power to reshape the meaning of opera, but these divas are crucial modern instances of operatic vocalizing as a process imagined to be enfranchising, cathartic, and transformative, at the same time as it remains an art of social control, sublimation, and prohibition. And though I am using metaphors of vocal physiology to forward an inquiry into the lived experience of certain gay men, this essay’s material could also be marshalled as evidence for a lesbian history of opera, a history which includes Gertrude Stein’s (and Virgil Thomson’s) *The Mother Of Us All*, the lesbian diva Olive Fremstad, and film star/diva Geraldine Farrar’s legion of female fans (called “Gerryflappers”).

I am concerned, here and elsewhere, with certain modern sissy subjectivities (in this regard, I have been inspired by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s recent work on gay youth). Admittedly, despite pressures of homophobia, the sissy drawn into opera’s embrace is often privileged by virtue of race and class. I place this essay, therefore, in the context of a relative enfranchisement. And yet I would like to argue that the sissy’s affection for opera, though enabled by privilege, is not solely a reflection of it. I started listening to opera, as a child, because it embarrassed me. The last thing I thought opera meant was cultural capital or glamor. Rather, announcing a love of opera would have been a badge of shame. I thought there

was nothing nakeder, more obscene, than vibrato. I approached opera (warily, at first, and only in solitude) because it filled me with a kind of uncanny discomfort that grew to call “pleasure.” I wanted opera in my life because it seemed to me the sound of undiluted anger. 4 . . . My knowledge of the history of singing depends entirely on a few voice manuals, and most particularly, on several compendiums of the vast literature of singing instruction. See Sally Allis Sanford, *Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Vocal Style and Technique*, diss., Stanford, 1979 (Ann Arbor: UMI); Philip A. Duey, *Bel Canto in Its Golden Age: A Study of Its Teaching Concepts* (New York: King’s Crown Press, 1951); Edward Vaught Foreman, *A Comparison of Selected Italian Vocal Tutors of the Period Circa 1550 to 1800*, diss., Graduate College of the University of Illinois, 1969 (Ann Arbor: UMI); Brent Jeffrey Monahan, *The Art of Singing: A Compendium of Thoughts on Singing Published Between 1777 and 1927* (Metuchen and London: The Scarecrow Press, 1978); Robert Russmore, *The Singing Voice* (New York: Dembner Books, 1984).

My source materials are Italian, French, German, British, and American, but I have read them all in English translation; it is arguable that this essay takes place in the idea of Europe as it entered America, a phantom Europe most crucially crystallized, for me, in the novels of Henry James. Opera is a continental European and Eurocentric art form that took on some of its most peculiar and indelible social meanings in Britain and the Americas.

I present my speculations in order to unsettle disciplinary boundaries; of course, these divisions have already been effectively challenged by other critics. I am not, however, a historian or a musicologist, and I cannot claim that my speculations are watertight,

or that have followed traditional scholarly methodology. Rather, I have attempted a lyric-historic (as in *lirico-spinto*) approach to the writing of cultural criticism. Though sometimes an essay on the history of singing, this is more often an exercise in positioning a critical voice. Where on the map of registers, of methodologies, might a writing voice fall? Somewhere in between poetry and musicology, history and literary criticism. Opera itself questions the division between word and music, between singer and listener. In the spirit of opera, then, this essay is dedicated to the space in between.

5 . . . Foreman, *A Comparison*, 5.

6 . . . Quoted in Frederick H. Martens, *The Art of the Prima Donna and Concert Singer* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1923), 195.

7. From Mancini’s *Pensieri, e riflessioni pratiche sopra il canto figurato* (1774), quoted and translated in Foreman, 52.

8 . . . For example, Francis Charles Maria de Rialp writes in 1894 that “Song is nothing more than speech upon a musical tonality.” See de Rialp, *The Legitimate School of Singing* (published by the author, New York, 1894), 8.

9 . . . Duey, *Bel Canto*, 46. For the history of the castrato, see Duey; see also Angus Heriot, *The Castrati in Opera* (reprint, New York: Da Capo Press, 1973).

10 . . . Jeffrey Weeks, *Sexuality and Its Discontents: Meanings, Myths and Modern Sexualities* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), 66.

11 . . . Pietro Francesco Tosi, *Observations on the Florid Song*, trans. John Earnest Galliard {1742; New York and London: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1968}, 87.

12 . . . Tosi, *Observations*, 76.

13 . . . Francesco Lampert, *Guida teorica-pratica-elementare per lo studio del canto* (Milan: Ricordi, 1864); quoted in Duey, 5. Sir Charles Santley, *The Art of Singing and Vocal Declamation* (New York:

The Macmillan Company, 1908), ix. 15 . . . On the discourse of degeneration, see Sander L. Gilman, *Disease and Representation: Images of Illness from Madness to AIDS* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), particularly chapter ten, “Opera, Homosexuality, and Models of Disease: Richard Strauss’s *Salomé* in the Context of Images of Disease in the Fin de Siècle.” See also Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, Volume 2: *Male Bodies: Psychoanalyzing the White Terror*, trans. Erica Carter and Chris Turner in collaboration with Stephen Conway (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989). Herbert Witherspoon, condemning the laryngologist, acknowledges that the “laryngologist proclaims a desire to reclaim a degenerate vocal art.” Herbert Witherspoon, *Singing: A Treatise for Teachers and Students* (New York: G. Schirmer, 1925), 12.

16 . . . Santley, *Art*, 11.

17 . . . Francis Charles Maria de Rialp, *Legitimate School*, 27.

18 . . . Enrico Caruso, *How To Sing* (reprint, London: The John Church Company, 1973), 28.

19 . . . Critic and librettist William James Henderson in 1920 observed that “the whole neighborhood of the throat should be kept quiet,” and Robert Lawrence Weer writes in 1948 that tone will resound in “all resonance rooms of the human vocal instrument: provided the doors to these rooms remain open!” W. J. Henderson, *The Art of the Singer: Practical Hints about Vocal Technics and Style* (New York: G. Scribner’s Sons, 1906), quoted in Monahan, 87; Robert Lawrence Weer, *Your Voice* (published by the author, Los Angeles, 1943), 80. 20 . . . Quoted in (and fabricated by?) Russmore, *Singing Voice*, 177.

21 . . . Jean Blanchet, *L’art, ou les principes philosophiques du chant*, 2nd ed., (Paris: 4. M. Lottin, 1756); quoted and translated in Duey, 135.

22 . . . Weer, *Your Voice*, 49.

23 . . . Schumann—Heink quoted in Martens, *Art*, 266—67; Jeritza quoted in Martens, 202.

24 . . . In my search for these Edens, I am helped by Henry Abelow’s innovative work on foreplay. Abelow, “Some Speculations on the History of Sexual Intercourse during the Long Eighteenth Century in England,” *Genders* 6 (November 1989): 125–30.

25 . . . Johann Mattheson, *Der Vollkommene Cappelmeister* (Hamburg: 1739), quoted and translated in Sanford, *Vocal Style*, 58.

26 . . . B. Mengozzi, *Méthode de chant du Conservatoire de Musique* (Paris, 1303), quoted and translated in Duey, *Bel Canto*, 137.

27 . . . Salvatore Marchesi, *A Vademecum for Singing—Teachers and Pupils* (New York: G. Schirmer, 1902); quoted in Monahan, *Art*, 136–37.

28 . . . Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988). Reading Silverman helped to provoke some of my own speculations on voice’s significance.

29 . . . Quoted in Monahan, *Art*, 30, and in Pasqual Mario Marafoti, *Caruso’s Method of Voice Production: The Scientific Culture of the Voice* (New York: D. Appleton and Co, 1922), 79.

30 . . . Witherspoon, *Singing*, 1.

31 . . . Millie Ryan, *What Every Singer Should Know* (Omaha: Franklin Publishing Co., 1910), 89.

32 . . . Quoted in Martens, *Art*, 69.

33 . . . Monahan, *Art*, 270, guides us to Frank Ebenezer Miller, *Vocal Art—science and Its Application* (New York: G. Schirmer, 1917), which includes descriptions of tuning fork tests made with Helen Keller.

34 . . . Witherspoon, *Singing*, 25.

35 . . . Isaac Nathan, *An Essay on the History and Theory of Music, and on the*

Qualities, Capabilities and Management of The Human Voice (London: G. and W. B. Whittaker, 1823), 63.

36 . . . Johann Adam Hiller, *Anweisung zum musikalisch-richtigen Gesang* (Leipzig, 1774); quoted and translated in Sanford, 94.

37 . . . Weer, *Your Voice*, 5.

38 . . . Quoted in Martens, *Art*, 286.

39 . . . Santley, *Art*, 56.

40 . . . Nathan, *An Essay*, 47.

41 . . . Antoine Bailieux, *Solfèges pour apprendre facilement la musique vocale* (Paris, 1760); quoted and translated in Duey, 108.

42 . . . Plutarch, *De Musica*, quoted and translated in Duey, 29; John of Salisbury quoted in Paul Henry Lang, *Music in Western Civilization* (New York, 1941), also quoted in Duey, 34; Saint Raynard quoted and translated in Duey, 41.

43 . . . Charles Lunn, *Vox Populi: A Sequel to The Philosophy of the Voice* (London: W. Reeves, 1880), and Lunn, *The Voice: Its Downfall, Its Training and Its Use* (London: Reynolds and Co., 1904); quoted in Monahan, *Art*, 149.

44 . . . Sir Morell Mackenzie, *The Hygiene of the Vocal Organs* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1886); quoted in Monahan, *Art*, 149–50.

45 . . . Tosi, *Observations*, 24.

46 . . . Franklin D. Lawson, *The Human Voice: A Concise Manual on Training the Speaking and Singing Voice* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1944), 46.

47 . . . Tosi, *Observations*, 23.

48 . . . See Heriot, *Castrati*.

49 . . . Caruso, *How to Sing*, 9–11.

50 . . . Santley, *Art*, 17.

51 . . . Martens, *Art*, 265–66.

52 . . . Nathan, *Musurgia Vocalis: An Essay on the History and Theory of Music* (London: Fentum, 1836); quoted in Monahan, *Art*, 21.

53 . . . James Nares, in his 1780 *Treatise on Singing*, observes that it is the Master's

duty to show the Scholar how to join —“so as to be imperceptible”—the *Voce di petto* and *Voce di testa*. James Nares, *A Treatise on Singing* (London, ca. 1780); quoted in Sanford, *Vocal Style*, 23.

54 . . . See Monahan, 140–8, for a succinct summary of the register war.

55 . . . Domenico Cerone, *El Melepeo y Maestra* (Naples, 1613); quoted and translated in Sanford, *Vocal Style*, 34.

56 . . . Johann Samuel Petri, *Anleitung zur praktischen Musik* (Leipzig, 1782); quoted and translated in Sanford, *Vocal Style*, 43–44.

57 . . . Narhan, *Musurgia Vocalis*; quoted in Monahan, *Art*, 159.

58 . . . W. J. Henderson, *The Art of the Singer*, 67–68; quoted in Monahan, *Art*, 33.

59 . . . A. A. Pattou, *The Voice As An Instrument* (New York: Edward Schubert and Co, 1878), 4, 9, 28, 57.

60 . . . Santley, *Art*, 143.

61 . . . For this information on the vibrato I am indebted to Russmore, *The Singing Voice*, 190.

62 . . . de Rialp, *Legitimate School*, 76.

63 . . . Quoted in Heriot, *Castrati*, 46.

64 . . . Nathan, *An Essay on the History and Theory of Music, and on the Qualities, Capabilities and Management of the Human Voice*, 67.

65 . . . Lilli Lehmann, *How To Sing*, trans. Richard Aldrich (1902; reprint, New York: Macmillan Company, 1960), 169.

66 . . . Heriot, *Castrati*, 48; Tosi, *Observations*, 88–89.

67 . . . Arturo Buzzi-Peccia, *How To Succeed in Singing: A Practical Guide for Singers Desiring to Enter the Profession* (Philadelphia: Theo. Presser Co., 1925); quoted in Monahan, *Art*, 179.

68 . . . George E. Thorp and William Nicholl, *A Text Book on the Natural Use of the Voice* (London: R. Cooks & Co., 1896); quoted in Monahan, *Art*, 178.

68 . . . John Gothard, *Thoughts on Singing; with Hints on the Elements*

of Effect and the Cultivation of Taste (London: Longman and Co., 1848), iv.

69 . . . Ryan, *What Every Singer Should Know*, 23.

70 . . . Pasqual Mario Marafioti, in his treatise, *The New Vocal Art* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1925), 251, compares singing's difficulty with the complexity of performing a surgical operation. See Monahan, *Art*, 39.

71 . . . David Alva Clippinger, *The Head Voice and Other Problems; Practical Talks on Singing* (Boston: O. Ditson Co., 1917); quoted in Monahan, *Art*, 30.

72 . . . Yvette Guilbert, *How To Sing a Song: The Art of Dramatic and Lyric Interpretation* (New York: Macmillan, 1918), 129. (See also photographic inserts.) For a discussion of hysteria and photography, see Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830–1980* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), 84–97.

73 . . . H. W. Day, *The Vocal School: or, Pestalozzian Method of Instruction in the Elements of Vocal Music* (Boston: Otis, Broaders & Co., 1839); quoted in Monahan, *Art*, 17.

74 . . . Lowell Mason, *Manual of the Boston Academy of Music for Instruction in the Elements of Vocal Music on the System of Pestalozzi* (Boston: J. H. Wilkins & R., B. Carter, 1836); quoted in Monahan, *Art*, 17.

74 . . . George Antoine Brouillet, *Voice Manual* (Boston: Crescendo Publishing Company, 1936), 42.

75 . . . Domenico Corti, *The Singer's Preceptor, or Corti's Treatise on Vocal Music* (London: Chappell & Co., 1811), quoted in Duey, *Bel Canto*, 100.

76 . . . Heriot, *Castrati*, 75.

77 . . . Caruso, *How to Sing*, 57.

78 . . . Tosi, *Observations*, 144.

79 . . . Ryan, *What Every Singer Should Know*, 63.

80 . . . Louis Arthur Russell, *The Body and Breath Under Artistic Control for Song and Fervent Speech: A Text Book*

for Private or Class Instruction (Newark, N.J.: Essex Pub. Co, ca. 1904); quoted in Monahan, *Art*, 62.

81 . . . See Heriot, *Castrati*, 57.

82 . . . Johann Martheson, *Der Vollkommene Capelmeister*; quoted and translated in Duey, *Bel Canto*, 79.

83 . . . Caruso, *How to Sing*, 39.

84 . . . Duey, *Bel Canto*, 19–20. For a summary of opinions on vocal hygiene during the bel canto era, see 139–51.

85 . . . See Ryan, *What Every Singer Should Know*, 39, and Witherspoon, *Singing*, 45.

86 . . . Lehmann, *What Every Singer Should Know*, 86–87.

BURN MAYFLOWERS
S*an D. Henry-Smith

Burn
mayflowers, sludge in the late night
sleep w/ the light on
eyes open, full of rage
seamstress, wrapped in sacred denims

worn thin in the pit
worn thin in the pit

w/
where w/ all, everyone together now
steal back the precipice
everyone, together now
wicked, racing hungry demons

worn thin in the pit
worn thin in the pit

twelve
times over, atemporal ritual
sleep w/ the light on
eyes open, full of rage
trouble, feeding empty bellies

worn thin in the pit

Circularly Tender, Lilt Resplendent (2022)
Cara Tolmie and Em Silén

INTERNAL SINGING:
A STRING OF DESCRIPTIONS
Cara Tolmie



DESCRIPTION #1
Internal Singing as an Exhausted Definition
(Ongoing)

Internal Singing is a vocal practice.
Internal Singing is a listening practice.
Internal Singing is an improvisation practice.
Internal Singing is both a singular and a collective practice.
Internal Singing is a way to research.
Internal Singing is a way to produce music.
Internal Singing can be shared in group settings.
Internal Singing also forms the basis of a series
of performances and sound works.

Internal Singing is a practice initiated by me but has been
developed in dialogue and collaboration with
many others: Moa Franzén, Every Ocean Hughes,
Jule Flierl, Em Silén, Paul Abbott, Bronwyn
Bailey Charteris, Julia Giertz, students at
Konstfack in Stockholm and the Gerrit Rietveld
Academie in Amsterdam, to name just a few.

Internal Singing is a way to sing through movement (both imagined
and felt) and move for the sake of the voice.
Internal Singing is a strategy to find the outer reaches of a
voice and to stretch the singer's capacity to
imagine its shape and direction.

Internal Singing is a way to redirect the perceived locus of the
voice away from the mouth and towards other
parts of the body.
Internal Singing is a way to play the voice through touch with
fingertips upon the body.
Internal Singing is a way to lodge, graze, push, and entice
voice through the flesh, the bones, the blood,
and the nerves.

Internal Singing focuses on making the sound of the inhale as
valuable as the sound of the exhale.
Internal Singing explores the inhale as another chamber of the

voice, one that is able to explore a second set of sounds and vocal implications. A doubled voice in one body.

Internal Singing is an experiment to see what happens to the listening relationship when the inhale is used to make the vocal sound continuous, rather than to mark a punctuative moment for everyone to take a breath in.

Internal Singing is interested in the disorienting effect of such sonic decisions.

Internal Singing is an in-between.

Internal Singing has had many homes; art galleries, pedagogic settings, music venues, dance festivals, one-on-one meetings, and artistic research contexts.

Internal Singing often finds itself nuzzled between disciplines, making it at times more legible in one context than another, at other times so hybrid that it becomes oblique when viewed through any singular discipline.

Internal Singing is a coping strategy.

Internal Singing has been developed through the specific condition of my own body.

Internal Singing has been significantly informed by a heightened state of sensitivity resulting from a five-year period of ups and downs whilst suffering from Post-Concussion Syndrome.¹

1 . . . In an attempt to give some form to this diagnosis and concurrently express to the reader its conditioning of my body, my daily life, my art practice, and the quality of my cognition, I give you the following list of what may be called 'symptoms' I have experienced on and off since April 2017: brain fog (this is by far the most debilitating and consistent); overwhelming fatigue; an increased urge to be touched; an increased urge and pleasure derived from touching objects, people, textures, etc.; depression; severe difficulties reading; a visual stigmatism; dizziness; nausea; the inability to multitask;

cognitive difficulty processing information; some borderline psychedelic experiences looking at plants; aversions to large metal objects such as trains and busses; concentration difficulties; increased sensitivity to anything involving a screen or multiple sensorial stimuli—social media scrolling and emails are amongst the worst; headaches; difficulties recalling words, names, and events; a new found love of ambient music; an inability to withstand aerobic or stimulating forms of exercise; self-confidence issues; and having to renegotiate many aspects of my identity that I previously perceived as (relatively) fixed.

Internal Singing has been a way for me to sustain a performance practice over the last five years whilst trying to relearn the nature and capability of a new body.

Internal Singing is informed by various self-soothing strategies that I discovered throughout this process; calming unpleasant woozy or dizzy sensations in the head by laying my own hands upon different parts of my body, recording minute vocal and domestic sounds at home during convalescence, developing an acute awareness of tiny shifts in my body and its surroundings, attaining a heightened listening capacity that has allowed me to take a new pleasure in more slight, minimal music . . .

Internal Singing attunes me.

Internal Singing is something that I can always do, no matter the wild fluctuations of the day.

Internal Singing needs no amplification, no equipment, no lighting, no stage in order to take place.

Internal Singing explores this shifted, more sensitised vocal-body as the basis for improvisation.

Internal Singing is a place to gather and take pleasure in the strength and skill of sensitivity.

Internal Singing is a way to instantiate this form of knowledge.

Internal Singing is a way to encourage untamed uses of the voice. Internal Singing can arouse, calm, disturb, perplex, move, amuse, and entertain.

Internal Singing can come as a surprise.

Internal Singing is a multidimensional, unbalanced-balancing act between inhale-exhale, between two points of touch on the body, between two vocal sounds in constant evolution, between a left limb and a right limb, between the imagination of a voice and the letting go of a voice.

DESCRIPTION #2 An Internal Narration

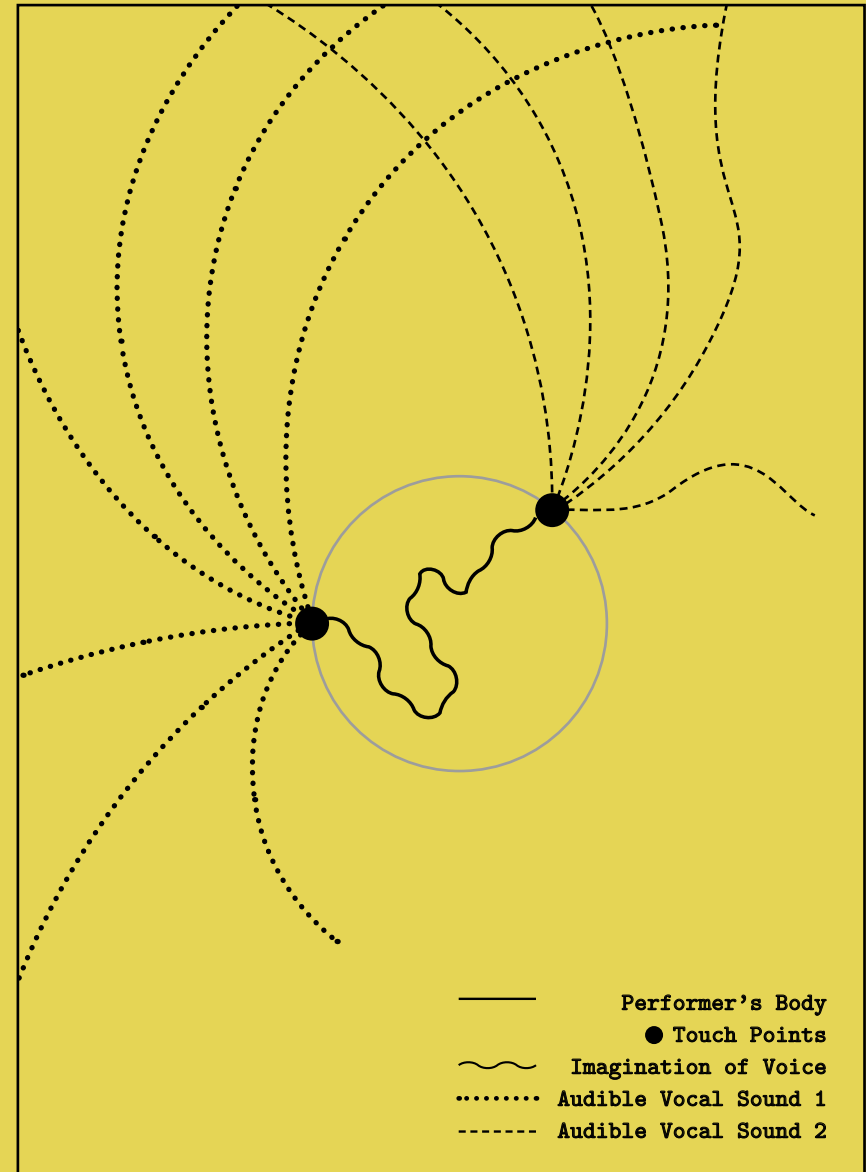
For me, Internal Singing unfolds as follows:

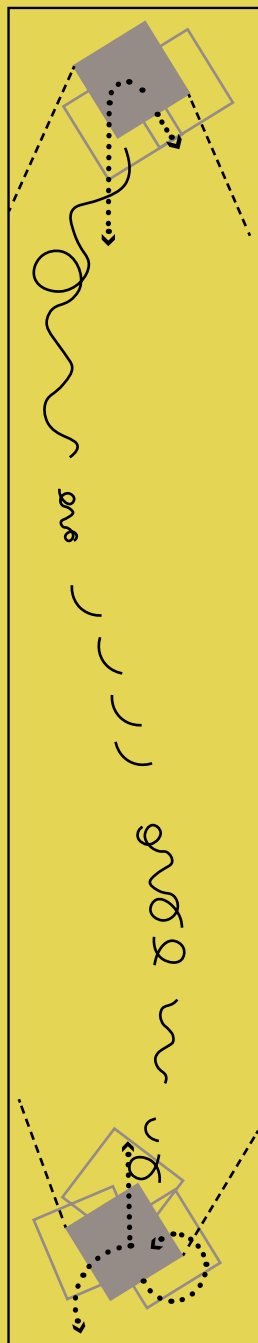
I concentrate on my breath and quieten myself. I focus my attention on my skin as a tender transmitter between the inside of my body and its touchable outside surface. I sense two points where my body is asking to be touched. I slowly raise my hands, makethem loose and heavy, and allow them to be pulled towards these two points on my skin.(2) I concentrate once more on my breath and very slowly allow sound to emerge, both from the inhale and the exhale. I imagine these sounds to be pulled out of, around, and between the two points I hold with my fingertips. I do not imagine these sounds in advance but try to allow them to “fall out,” as if of their own volition. I then play these sounds, manipulating and exploring them through small, repeated movements and increased/decreased pressure around the touch points. In this way, I imagine singing the vocal sounds through my inner organs, out towards the two points that are being pressured by my touch, approaching these with my voice from the inside-out. I also visualise sending the sounds through my fingertips towards the inside of my body, from the outside-in. Within this multidirectional movement, I allow new vocal sounds to come into being by imagining my voice moving between and through the two points of touch, soaking in and out of the material of my flesh, organs, skin, nerves, and blood.

1 . . . These ‘touch points’ are two points of contact between the outside surface of my body and my fingertips. These points can be enticed, provoked, and manipulated through different qualities of contact between my fingertips and the body’s surface. The touch points are anchor points that have a fixed, consistent centre but that are also able to pivot on a three-dimensional axis. Although the centre may move with my skin, manipulated by my muscles or fingers, it is experienced as unchanging. The touch points have an edge, but that

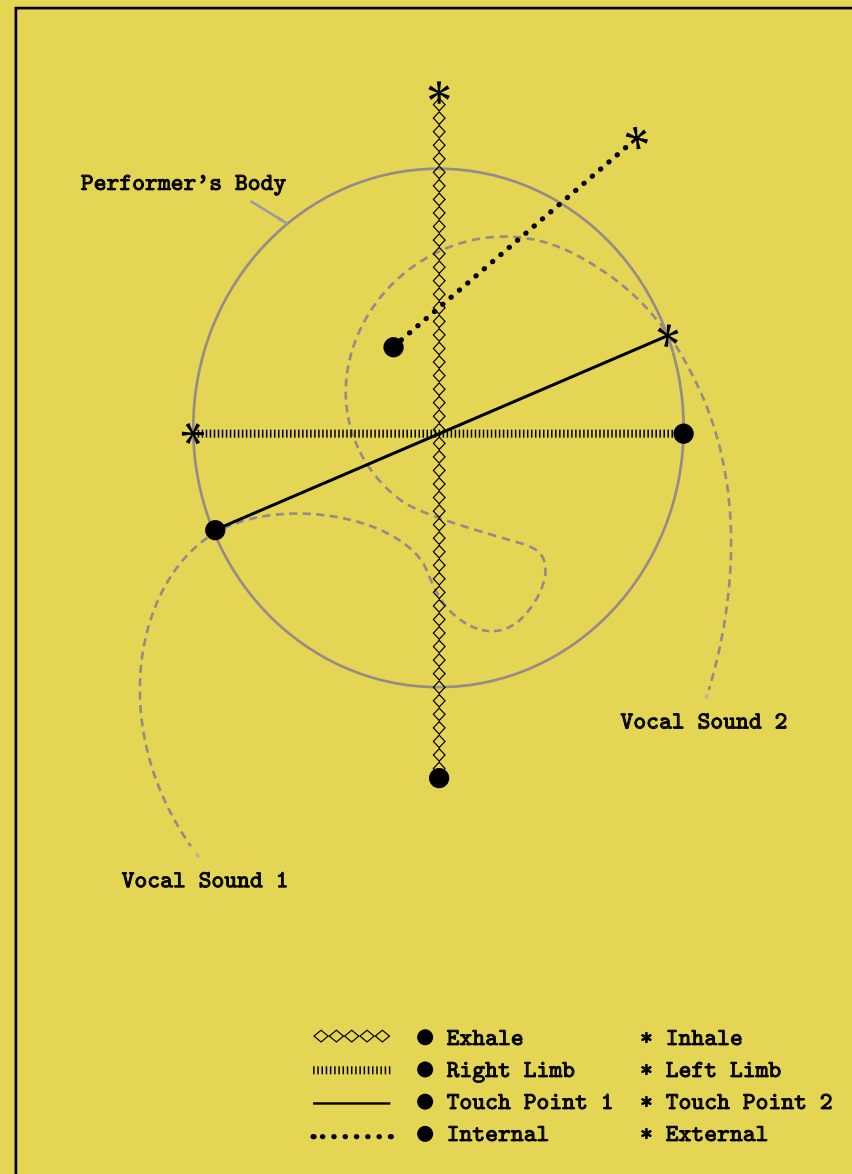
edge can be extended (much like an unaligned overlay or a shadow) by means of a loosening between the knotted imagination of the touch point and my physical sensation of the touch point. The tension between this imagination and sensation makes the touch point more elastic. Or perhaps it is more like the infinity effect that happens when two mirrors face each other—multiple reproductions of the same possibility expand out from the contact between the two.

DESCRIPTION #3 Three Diagrams





- ◆ Touch Point
- ◇ Shifting of Touch Points
- Physical Manipulation of Sound by Pushing, Stroking, Prodding, etc. Voice
- Imagination Of The Path And Movement Of The Voice
- ~~~~~ A Turn Towards (Open Gate)



DESCRIPTION #4

Internal Singing on November 8, 2022:

One instance of how her imagination winds itself around
the formation and the letting go of her voice,
and how her attention steers the two.

Written in the third person by the performer after Internal Singing
(with metaphors and images in brackets).

STAND, UNTETHER, TIGHTEN

She stands. Closes her eyes. Without vision, her attention turns to the throbbing of her skin (waves of thick liquid push her around), the pain in her neck and back (tight metal), and tiredness (limp pillow). She locates slight tingles (tiny sparklers), gravity (a dense loaf), small contractions of the muscles, especially around her knees and elbows (clamps or stamps).

Slow, tightened inhale.

Wide, loose sigh out.

(She becomes a wavering needle, gently persuaded this way and that around a magnetic centre point.) The movement begins as a thought, then an inclination-taut breath in, sigh out, submit - then an actual movement felt in her balance. The edge of her skin becomes blurry and, in contrast, the inside of her body starts to come into focus. It feels more like a defined outer contour of flesh.

An unbalanced-balancing begins. A feeling that she is clear but out of control. A slight breath could push her but not knock her over.

DETECTING THE TOUCH POINTS

Her arms rise into the air; at first loose, calm, and unhurried. They begin to soar, quavering. She lets go of them, allows herself to sense the two limbs as though they were hovering to the side of her, no longer fully belonging to her. By encouraging this sensation, she begins to experience her two arms as having a will of their own. She feels small inclinations of movement and registers this as an indication of choices made by her arms, by her fingertips. These limbs have their own desire to be re-anchored, to fall into place once more on the body but with a slightly different orientation this time.

Her left elbow is persuaded, as one feels a magnet persuade, to bend. It slides around horizontally to a ninety-ish-degree

angle. The hand on this left limb continues to glide down towards a tender nubbin on the side of her right rib cage (touch point one-TP1) that is throbbing a subtle invitation towards her left hand. When the finger lands, it is a satisfying touch. The rib asks for a firm contact (a dense rubber hold, like the edging on a boat that makes bouncy contact with the pier).

VOICE

A tonal whimper falls out. There is an edge of angst in this small cry (a tired child that wants something it doesn't know). The sound takes a clear form; it has a continuous edge and shape. Perhaps this is why it demands such a firm touch. Or maybe it is the other way around - the decisive touch produces the clear tone. Either way, it is vivid (tart apple juice) and contains a tinge of the operatic. It is almost too easy for her to imagine this tone flowing through the firm point of contact between her fingertip and the skin over her rib. However, it is far less easy to feel the actual sensation of the sound being anchored there on TP1 without it flip-flopping around the left side of her body, ebbing and flowing in erratic shapes through her breath.

TP1 begins to feel like a clear hole, around the size of a bottle top. At first, her vocal sound appears to be flowing in and out of the opening, moving predictably like a liquid does through a vent. But she can tell that it is a trickster; there is an underside to this sound. She begins to sense that this flow of sound liquid is only half of the tone she is vocalising. There is another part of it that is leaking out inquisitively into a wider space, emanating inwards into her ribcage in a V shape from the touch point. (In this V space inside her left rib cage she can see dotted lines and outlines of squares floating around). A vague portion of her vocal sound is trailing around in this space (a blank page with a few clumsy graphic lines). She keeps repeating the liquid part of the tone through TP1, over and over, until the opening begins to narrow around the sound and the graphic space in her ribcage becomes fainter and fainter, until it eventually disappears.

TP1 fastens around the sound and the two align, anchor.

Once this vocal tone has been fully bound to TP1, it begins to play like a bow over a string (rubber snake toy). Both the inhale and exhale accommodate this bold liquid voice but, much like the mirror image of a scene in a still lake, the inhale is a kind of reflection of the exhale - less fixed, subject to a less controllable wandering. The exhale conforms, the inhale does what it wants. Perhaps due to the 'straightforwardness' of this vocal tone, its familiarity as a perceivable singing voice, a tear wells in her right eye and falls down over her cheek. She experiences this both as an emotional release and a surprise (teenage tantrum) (rogue squirt of lemon in the face) (rip in an aged garment).

Meanwhile, without her being able to remember exactly how it happened, she realises that her right hand has somehow found and anchored itself onto the nook under the centre of her ribcage (touch point two - TP2).

The path between TP1 and TP2 is clear and direct, easily perceived. A straight beam of static emanating between the two points (dust in a projector beam). At first, the right index finger on TP2 accidentally copies the quality of pressure on the right rib at TP1. It feels like an imitation, a mirroring rather than a discovery. Try again.

Now, the right fingertip on TP2 discovers a contour around the arch of the rib cage where the two sides meet. The fingertip eases more gently over this arch, over and over (a rainbow made of dust). The sound of this dusty arch is more splintered than the first liquid tone. There is a loose column of air that moves with it. It is nebulous, it follows rather than demands. Sometimes it sounds like a *W-AH*, other times like an *OH-YEA* or *OO-AA*. It is a softer, less demanding sound with relative modesty (a frayed ribbon dangling in a smoke machine).

The sounds together are distinct, they repeat back and forth, one then the other. They quickly form a groove (fresh club). They complement, they swerve quickly towards rhythm, they sit

there. The body allows this manoeuvre until the breath becomes too thin, then an interruption of the rhythm must occur to accommodate the return of comfortable breath (lunch box) (bench) (long worm).

A double tone starts to squeeze from TP1 that storms through the breaking point of the voice (drama). TP2 continues (sweeps up the detritus) (keeps the engine driving). *Uh huh, oo-aa, oh-yy-whoa.*

It continues like this. A curious vibration between TP1 and TP2 that circulates in the canal furrowed by her breath.

What happens from here on is harder to describe in words. It is a music that is upheld through a tenacious oscillation between various points (both felt and imagined): Inhale + exhale / Left limb + right limb / Touch points one + two / A liquid tone + a dusty *OO-AA* (and every nuance that exists in between the two) / Internal body + external body / The imagined + the felt / Listening + vocalising / Submitting + detecting inclination / Enjoying + persisting.

Movement (of many kinds) is the vehicle that takes her on this joy ride around and through these many points in a continuous unbalanced-balancing. Her singing on this day is a process of these concurrent movements (acted, sensed, imagined, felt), working together to produce one another in tandem.

WEAVING PASSAGES FOR THE MOMENTOUS: CHINESE MEDICINE, BROKEN HEARTS, AND LIFE AS RADICAL CHANGE

Antonia Steffens

WITHIN MY changing sense of self, a recurring thought I have become familiar with is that something must be, in one way or another, wrong with me. Like a periodically occurring fog, it shows up as a feeling of general, almost causal kind of unfitting-ness; a wrongbeing-ness. My self becomes a lumpy, heavy, and sometimes empty wagon that I drag behind me. In more severe episodes, my perception seems to scorch my sensation into a multi-layered acid, where, unspeakably but in fantasy, all I would like to do is remove myself from the here and now. This type of wrongbeing feels like being trapped and simultaneously thrown out of my own body; I enter a double location, from either side of which I cannot operate. Senses unwilling to make actual sense to me, bodyspace betraying me deviously, disfiguring my encounters of the world, turning me into a wrongbeing.

As a dancer and choreographer I work on the slippery slopes of the life of a body: its perception and senses, its enigmatic ways of expressing, its sensitivity, blunt honesty, and surprising reactivity. Oftentimes, I am simultaneously practitioner, witness, and evaluator. Working with the body means moving along the limits of perception, control, and interpretation. To learn about the body from a continuously moving perspective respectively creates continuous reconsideration, doubt, and surprise. When practice is process, and the only constant is change, a need for orientation becomes inevitable. In search of such orientation, I aim to understand the body via the logics of process, seeing movement as imperative to life.

The culture I was born, raised, and educated in is white, Christian, and occidental. In Greta Gaard's essay 'Toward a Queer Ecofeminism', Gaard describes how Christianity began as a small sect, 'shaped in the context of urban, secular philosophies rather than in the context of earth-based, rural agriculture'. Supported by the Roman Empire, which was becoming increasingly militarised, Christianity was promoted for its obedience to authority and virtues of self-sacrifice for the state. From its inception, it was notorious for its intolerance of other religions.¹

Practices of excluding, dividing, and othering are part of western culture, and have materialised in uncountable acts of violence since its forceful invasion of most of the planet, the people, creatures, land, soil, sea, and air, up until today. Binaries such as wrong and right, healthy and sick are deeply intertwined with the western domination of somatic

realities. As a cultural heritage those ideas shape the western medical approach too. Within the current postcolonial awakening, I see my own sense of wrongbeing as a symptom; a document of a cultural violence that negates life in its complexity and difference.

In 2021, I began to study traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), reassuringly confirming and conceptually challenging my view on the body as an experience. When approaching TCM as a westerner, cautious interpreting and concluding is advised. In fact, 'conclusiveness' isn't a helpful approach when conceptualising the body through the lens of TCM, since the body is understood as an ongoing process, rather than a thing. This process-based view expresses itself not only through TCM's practices, but becomes apparent as a linguistic difference between Mandarin and English. Like most western languages, English is rooted in a substantial understanding of the world, while Chinese languages prioritise becoming over being. This complicates translation, which often compromises the Chinese linguistic sensibility.²

TCM's medical perspective is rooted in and reflects some of the basic concepts of Taoist cosmology and philosophy. The concept of *Tao*—translated to 'way'—describes life in accordance with a universal orientation. *Tao* is seen as a behavioural code; an order of how things flow, change, and move within the cosmos. Taoist practice and teachings are understood to create a way of being, rather than life designed by dogma. Maintaining *Tao* in its most unadulterated state is referred to as *Ziran*. *Ziran* has multiple translations, such as 'spontaneity' and 'by-itself-so-ness'. *Ziran* describes a state of affairs, primarily dealing with change, balance, and process. In its changing nature, it refers to the body as always a result of multiple relations. When *Ziran* can't be maintained, life consequently shifts into different states of relations and balances.

TCM understands bodies to carry an immense and inherent capacity for adjustment. Like water in a tilted glass, new kinds of balance are continuously (re)established to create relations, possibilities, shifts, movements, journeys, pathways, life, and dead ends. They make themselves notable in streams of thought, in anxiety attacks, in depression, in mysterious pains, sleeplessness, a trembling voice, a twitch of the eye that won't go away for weeks, in shaky hands, hair loss, skin rashes, in all sorts of cramps, a disturbed metabolism, diarrhoea, bladder infections . . . You may complete the list. What is overwhelming to understand is overwhelmingly magic to observe. These symptoms

are expressions of balancing acts of uncountable variety: the bountiful acrobatics our bodies perform to enter states of balance.

The concept of *Qi* translates to 'life force'. Implicit in all living matter, *Qi* is a hyper-intelligent, moving stream that informs and mobilises all functions and life processes. 'The force' in *Star Wars*, deeply inspired by *Qi*, may serve as a helpful comparison for those new to the concept. As a multilingual translator, *Qi* communicates with and between our bodily matters, mediating changes between material and immaterial bodily activity. Challenging dualist thinking traditions, TCM proposes that the material and immaterial aspects of our body are constantly inter-transforming as different states of the same thing, similar to water molecules turning into gas. Material and immaterial are understood as two different qualities of life that share fuzzy boundaries. Their difference is acknowledged, without denying their inter-transformability and relationship with each other. *Qi* also co-produces our mental faculty, called *Shen*. *Shen* accounts for various experiences including emotions, feelings, sensations, sleeping and dreaming, concentration, envisioning, memorising, and learning. Body and mind are therefore inter-transformable on a direct energetic and material level. *Shen* isn't considered a metaphysical, spiritual, or strictly psychological extension of the body but an implicit part of it. Body and mind—much more process than thing—rely on and process one another interactively and continuously.

Rather than thinking of opposites, TCM works with the dynamic idea of complementary agents, which can, when conditions are ripe, turn into each other. This basic principle is expressed through Yin and Yang: each thing contains within itself the seed to become the other, hence the black and white parts of the symbol carry a tiny dot of the opposite. Yin and Yang overview two energetic tendencies and in the process of life they are close collaborators. While the general, energetic tendency of Yang is to expand and find its way out, Yin restores, collects, and moves inwards, nourishing the body. So the body is always analysed through its ability to give or spend (Yang), and its capacity to receive or restore (Yin). Yin and Yang coordinate together through *Qi*. *Qi*, the body's translator, can alternate between Yin and Yang functionality. Interconnected to one another in life, upon death's arrival, Yin and Yang separate.

I remember my Chinese professor laughing at us, as though we had just asked a bizarre question, when one student asked if it is

possible to see the meridian channels when cutting the body open. 'Hahahaha! You cannot see it,' she left a significant pause. . . 'But it IS there!' A big smile appeared on her face. Meridian channels are the interconnecting highways of our body, which are used by Qi, and are invisible to both the human eye and the microscope. Along the meridian line there are several landmarks, known as acupuncture points, which are stimulation areas used for TCM treatment, through manipulation or needling techniques. An article published in 2012³ researching electromagnetic field studies and TCM proposes that electromagnetic transmission lines of the human body show close proximity to the acupuncture points of the meridian lines. Through the use of polarised light, it was possible to observe magnetic field changes along and near the acupuncture points of cancer patients.

When TCM was developed centuries ago, there was limited technology available to open up the body or perform surgery. Acupuncture points were detected by studying connections; by learning that manipulating specific physical areas can relieve pain and support or regulate activity in other parts of the body. Over many years of work and study, an extremely complex and coherent system developed, mapping the body's internal relations via its acupoints and meridian lines.

TCM proposes that these indirect connections, invisible manoeuvres, and immaterial operations highly define our bodily lives. These crucial processes can be disturbed, and affect our system. Just as bones, teeth, or nails can break, hair can split, or vessels rip, these invisible systems are vulnerable, too. Embracing this assumption, I look at the possibility of clinical validity of a broken heart, through the lenses of both TCM and biomedicine.

Legendary German actress Romy Schneider reportedly died from a broken heart in 1982. Her diagnosis — cardiac arrest — describes the sudden ceasing of the heart's function. Not a year prior to her passing, Romy went through a divorce, had her right kidney removed due to a tumour, and her oldest child died in an accident. Although no autopsy was made, it was concluded that she must have died from a broken heart.

'Broken heart syndrome' was first described in Japan in 1990 as *Tako Tsubo Cardiomyopathy* and is considered a special case amongst heart diseases. The patient's symptoms show similarities with acute coronary disease, such as a heart attack, but atypically, no blocking of the main coronary vessels — the defining symptom of a heart attack — is

observed. Coronary vessels commonly block due to a buildup of plaque and the consequential narrowing of the vessels inhibits the blood flow. Under the MRI, a broken-heart syndrome patient's vessels, however, show up intact, yet the heart is still malfunctioning. Different from a common heart attack, broken heart syndrome suggests changes of the heart's electrical activity.⁴

Recent studies of broken heart syndrome speculate towards a 'connection in between aeries of the nervous system, associated to autonomous functions and the regulation of the limbic system', the faculty of the brain designated to process emotions.⁵ Although the pattern has not been concluded, extraordinary physically and emotionally stressful situations have been frequently observed to trigger a heart to 'break'. The death of seven-year-old Rayan Suleiman, a Palestinian boy who died after being chased by Israeli soldiers in 2022, suggests a similar pathology. In utter fear the boy collapsed, scared to death. The Israeli government claims the boy had a pre-existing heart condition, which his family disproves. I can only try to imagine the impact of constant life-threatening stress on the heart of a Palestinian child living under Israeli military occupation. The autopsy is still determining the final cause of death at the time I write, but the most probable scenario is that Rayan's heart went into sudden cardiac arrest, causing him to die of fear.⁶

While dying from a broken heart likely sounds romantic and far-fetched to westerners, according to TCM, heart failure due to emotional stress is plausible. TCM sees the heart as the main residence of our mental faculty, *Shen*. The heart's task, amongst others, is to process mental and emotional activities. Being the residence of *Shen*, all emotional activities have to pass through and be expressed through the heart. Expressing means that the heart system needs to manage the energetic output caused by emotional and mental activity. Acting as the emotional computer for our bodies, the heart is the place where we are able to recognise impacts, feel them, and have the ability to respond to them.

The heart is further surrounded by a fluid-filled sac called the pericardium. In TCM, the pericardium is called the 'heart protector' and has its own meridian system. The pericardium protects the heart from shocking or traumatic information, but can, when the impact on the system is too immense, become inoperative. TCM proposes that acute or prolonged intensely stressful situations can injure the heart

and interfere with its energetic and physical functionality, disabling the heart's function with possibly deadly consequences.

TCM interweaves the material and immaterial planes of life, and existence is defined by constant communication, with relation being a given. Negotiation is central to this relation, yet relation in itself is a non-negotiable condition. TCM looks closely at how patterns of relations are formed, how they hint at and respond to each other in deep interconnection. A pathology is not a singular occurrence or a thing that one can strategically isolate. A pathology can, in principle, not be eradicated without addressing a systemic change on multiple, interconnected, yet distinguished planes. While the relationships informing those planes are continuously shifting, as a repercussion, all changes find their way through someone's body and mind and are meant to do so. Interchanging with each other, they transform on the way, hence producing all kinds of necessary ripple effects that can't simply be disposed of. Just as meridians exist in our body to channel streams of Qi, energy, thoughts, fluids, and more, pathologies are partly byproducts of this channel-logic, an expression of something finding its river bed through our system.

In acknowledgment of change, dynamism, continuity, and relation, at times the sensible and intelligent streams moving through me become both more daunting and imaginable. When senses stop making sense to me and my wrongbeing visits me, I attempt to mend the obsessive, corrective thoughts of my institution of self. It is at the fuzzy edge of my being that I bear witness to change: not a mere concept, but a process accompanied by physical and emotional sensations. A startling and at times frightening view. As I bear witness to it on different scales, my wrongbeing, humbled, reconsiders itself by granting temporary episodes of self-absolution. Sensing that something feels wrong is a real, physical pain that can unwillingly become part of one's identity. Understanding it as a co-emergent aspect of a movable, changing self, one of many, in conversation with the much, much more-than-me, reveals both boundaries and elasticity, resilience and fragility, creates space and cracks. Those inert and fantastic abilities do require different states of discomfort, dislocation, and destabilisation that are so often misinterpreted by me as wrongbeingness, an error in my system.

When I deinstitutionalise my experience of wrongbeingness and stop thinking of it as an irrational and completely unfitting side effect of my being, then my wrongbeing actually manages to open up a little.

It has a hunch that it is not an ultimate state of determination. If I were not to abandon it, there would be a lot to discover, understand, and process from it. And as conclusiveness is not a helpful parameter when viewing the world through the lens of TCM, I follow this hunch and move on.

NOTES

1 . . . Greta Gaard, "Toward a Queer Ecofeminism," *Hypatia* 12, no. 1 (1997): 114–137.

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3 . . . Lulu Fu, Hong Xu, "Chinese Medicine and Integrative Approaches in the Prevention of Breast Cancer—Acupuncture Meridian, Pulsed Electromagnetic Field Test and Chinese Food Therapy," in *Recent Advances in Theories and Practice of Chinese Medicine*, ed. Haixue Kuang (London: InTechOpen, 2012), 353–360.

4 . . . Wallid Abdulla, Susanne Vogt, *Praxisbuch Intensivmedizin* (Munich and Jena: Urban & Fischer Verlag/Elsevier GmbH, 2021), 415.

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THE SWEAT OF PUTTING YOUR ALL IN
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First, we meet Ronnie Ron, Shakedown's co-owner and CEO, when the film's score pops out of focus and the opening credits flash. 'Oh this damn mic. Can ya'll show some love, are ya'll still tipping? If you are, let me know.'

Her words are an echo from a prior night, authoritative and flirty in tone, scoring the twenty-two listed scenes imprinted on blistering scarlet; EGYPT'S NAUGHTY GIRLZ BIRTHDAY BASH, 'I LOVE A REAL BITCH', FREAK-A-LEAK are among them. At this point, Shakedown's full reveal is pending, yet we already feel its sweat. Washed with red, we glimpse its heat. 'I feel like the red in the beginning of the film is like this entry fog that you have to go through, which is like getting drunk ... a little bit', mentions director Leilah Weinraub during a recorded live annotation. On-site archive footage and interview clips map pathways through Weinraub's ten-plus-year relationship with the black lesbian strip night, which she had filmed in since late 2002, though the scaling of intimacy repels attempts to lock its shape. The film is an elegy, a love letter, a family portrait, a turn-on. Artist Juliana Huxtable writes that it creates a 'poetic space', accounting for the explicit seductions of the performers, the pores steamed open in response, the honest, tender, and at times frustrated reflections from both on-scene and behind-the-scenes community members. The night is for dancing as sex and looking as sex. It is also a site for friendship in the face of economic and state-sanctioned violence. A place like this has its manners, and Weinraub surfaces Ronnie Ron's voice again to clarify this early on: if you don't like it, don't look. And if you are looking, be sure to know how. Viewers of the film are not exempt from this address.

Scenes of on-floor hedonism choreographed by the Shakedown Angels (Egypt, Jazmyne, Ms. Oohzee, Slim, Trinity, Mocha, etc.) centre the precision of their talent, their labour, and the erotics of co-ordinated spectacle, but despite the rehearsed template of the night there maintains the iridescence of possibility, that the night will not end; a fantasy one must choose to want to believe. What makes this fantasy sexier is the absence of disillusionment, the living and dancing in contradiction: young dykes scooping dollar bills into garbage bags, broadcasted warnings about the LAPD atop early 2000's R&B, homemade birthday merch with spelling mistakes, the caress from a dancer who looks into your eyes like they love you. 'You have the experience of Shakedown when you watch this scene in a theatre with other people ... you are scandalised.' Weinraub is talking over the moment where Jazmyne, clad

in a skimpy pink two piece, lays back on the floor and pulls her panties to the side, revealing herself fully under the direct strobe of a hand-held torch, which loyally follows her as she continues to saunter, grind, and tease entranced onlookers. The poetic and erotic—both versions of each other, both orchestrations of transference and relation—warm to scandal. Scandal is a widened hole, a throughway to the centre. *Shakedown's* choreography of performance, skill, sex, sexuality, fandom, indulgence, and finance is a scandal by most standards. The reckoning at the film's close, when *Shakedown* ends for good, is that scandals are now harder than ever to chase.

How do you retell a scandal? You retell it as a dare. You retell it as a question. Parties are that, a repeated question, often unanswered and unfulfilled on purpose; this premises future returns. *Shakedown* the film is scandalous in its own right; a document that outlives the night, it shouldn't exist as it does. Weinraub's footage is caught through doors held open, over banter and shared bottles backstage, at the periphery of dancefloor debauchery. At every point, there's a felt negotiation of trust and curiosity, an experiment in figuring rather than surveying. Weinraub features as an undeniably key and cherished part of this ecosystem, never just behind the camera but meaningful to its very foundation. The handheld footage shakes by how close she gets to the dancers, and this is no coincidence. This isn't the point of view of someone peering in forensically.

The ordering of the film into chapters—**MONEY, LOVE, POWER**—takes on the formality of sequence and category, but renders it with the bluntness of all caps, modelling seriousness whilst being slightly unconvinced by it, emphasising the default authority of those deified pillars of survival that parade autonomously in language but never in feeling. Such thematic regimentation presses upon the structural un-containability of the erotic and nightlife as that which cannot be truly gathered or reproduced, no matter how sincere the intention. **MONEY, LOVE, POWER** might be better interpreted as prompts to review the extractivist position of the viewer, of Weinraub herself, an inevitability that isn't dampened with apology or ignorance or pride or pleas to authenticity but energised with a hope for movement. *You are scandalised.* In other words, you are moved.

Tom Dewit's score glimmers most memorably on the movement of the dancers, namely Egypt, assisting a blurred rendition of shadowy hypnotism. There is scandal here too, in how the deep chimes and



April 25, 2003

Oohzee • Jazmyn

Mocha

distant bells register as the sonic opposite but emotional equivalent of the club's temperature. It's a chilly sound, metallic and resonant, pronouncing the fieriness of the performers through contrast, settling on Egypt's charged hand movements and chest pumps for instance, that have become her trademark. This intense energy is kept in orbit of her own body, like an invisible shield and also a magnet. When we see Egypt thrust and stomp, imbuing Krump choreography with the bolshy grandeur of a mafia headman (*The Godfather* is cited as inspiration for her onstage persona) we see her project as one that prides effort, intention, commitment, and sweat. Shakedown's slipperiest texture is the dancer's sweat; none of them hold back, their flirtation isn't demure but drenched. There is nothing effortless about sex, in the same way it is pure effort to define. I think about sweat and its cooling effect watching this film, how drops tickle the parts of my body I can't reach and those I can, how it dampens me the way labour does, in ways I can't labour out of. Watching this film, or being in an environment that gives me freedom to make my body into the shape of what I hear, feels like a special moment, one in which my body works for me. This is not independent of the work of others, the work of pleasure—which doesn't always translate into pleasurable work.

As a site of production, it's clear that a dancer like Egypt makes and is made by the night's architecture. Her receptivity to the floor tightens her persona and locks on the mask. She makes herself unrecognisable to the economies of straight sex—the spectacle of transaction. Near the end of the film, when she speaks about the contemporary landscape of strip nights and club nights in general, where the experimentalism characteristic of the Shakedown Angels' work has now been inched out by formulaic performance styles, there is a sense of both mourning and hope. 'It's hard for me to go out and watch shows because I wanna be a part [of it]. Or, it's hard for me to go out and watch other dancers because I can see the dancers and I can see so much more than what they are doing. Or, I see the environment and it's changed so much. If they had people like me and Oohzee and Jazmyne or these types of people still dancing it would be a whole different arena.' Egypt still dances occasionally, years after Shakedown closed, and is heralded as a legend. One of her performances outside of Shakedown is shown on-screen as she reflects on the above. She wears a foil-reflective costume with a bedazzled and cropped fur coat, her face is concealed by black fabric and shades. She crouches down on a spotlighted dancefloor

and steers her hands with control. She's showing the sweat of putting your all in.

We want sex this hard. We want it relentless, public, shared, engaged, staged, constructed. We don't necessarily want to define it. We want it on the floor with loud music, we want to feel like we are paying for it. We want to feel like it's worth space. That's the turn on, the scandal of the door left ajar, the few straight clubbers and men who you can't lock out no matter the rules imposed, who look on to what they'd rather not name for this would rename them. The scandal in watching what you want come close enough to make you feel that there isn't a fundamental distance that makes wanting worthwhile. But there is always distance, there is always intimacy that is shaped by the impossibility of entwining. There is flirtation that feels closer and more exposing than nakedness; dancing does this, the torch light shines right on it.

MAY WE HAVE YOUR ATTENTION PLEASE?

Naomi Credé



I sat in the airport waiting room for the first time in months, anxiously observing and listening closely to my surroundings to see what had altered within this strange and yet all too familiar setting. Muffled voices behind face masks, the cautious movement of bodies through space, suspicious looks and continuously sanitised hands. Noises of conveyor belts, scratchy suitcase wheels, beeping machines and buggies driving, all blending and filling the air; a constant buzz of noise overlaid with the tannoy announcements which drift in and out of the soundscape.

‘May we have your attention please.’

Disembodied female-sounding voices echo out across cities and transitory spaces as an integral means of controlling movement. Often found in stations, shopping centres, supermarket checkouts, elevators, automated phone lines, GPS systems, and the more interactive virtual assistants such as Siri, Cortana, or Alexa—an almost ubiquitous voice appears. It is a seemingly familiar, comfortable accent that speaks softly, guiding in the right direction, calling for attention, and reminding us to be careful. The pitches fluctuate with some more human-sounding and others more robotic. Phonemes are pieced together to sound out the right words but most commonly retain a ‘she’ pronoun and clichéd ‘feminine’ qualities.

She is there to take care of us, to direct and gently usher us in the right direction. Her ‘well-spoken’, reassuring tone is embedded with a history of service workers and disembodied voices used in public and private spheres. It is intended to take on a specific gendered role; to politely and submissively assist.

Human voices are malleable and subject to internal and external factors that shift and shape them over time. The spaces we experience leave lasting imprints on our flesh. Language, accent, intonation, pitch, tone, and texture can transform over time. Even after having been removed from a body and technologically altered, voices are never entirely freed from the politics that formed them. All manner of assumptions are often made about vocal tones, particularly concerning gender, and these assumptions perpetuate binarism and stereotypes. However, referring to the disembodied voices we often hear in public space as ‘female-sounding’ is meant to highlight the deliberate intention behind them. Their scripted language, behaviours, and roles are carefully constructed to be understood by listeners as ‘female’.

The technologised voice has a complex and continuously slippery relationship to control, care, capitalism, and service within public and private spheres. To indicate that these voices are most commonly female-sounding may seem an obvious observation. Yet, they are so ingrained into the everyday architecture of the city that the implications of their gendered nature goes unnoticed. Their softness should not fool us; it is precisely this ability for the sounds to fade into the background that allows their presence to have debatable consequences.

Repeatedly hearing these recordings as we move through cities elicits a hypnotic reinforcement of gender roles within space. They are embedded in the automation of service jobs, where disembodied voices increasingly replace the role of bodies, and therefore the gendering of virtual service work is perpetually reinstated. Announcements and instructions are gently repeated, over and over, to move and control bodies in areas of high security and consumer-driven environments. Automated vocal tones permeate both public and private spheres, soundwaves filling our homes, cars, stations, and pockets. Housed in technology, they travel through spaces and stay stationary, calling out from tannoy systems, GPS, and all manner of smart devices to guide, control, assist, and obey. Somehow maintaining both an outdated and futuristic feel, the presence and persistent use of these gendered sounds continues the social reproduction of feminised labour. They lack bodies and yet embody women as inherently empathetic, nurturing, and caregiving, a stereotype seemingly more suited to service work.

The use of disembodied female-sounding voices in service industries has a tangled history, with perhaps one of the first uses dating back to navigation devices during World War II. Pre-recorded female voices were said to transmit instructions in planes directly due to their lack of bodily presence. The female vocal tones would stand out amidst the males' as the women themselves were not present to be heard. Women's roles as switchboard operators can also be seen as a precursor to disembodied female-sounding voices heard today, particularly their role as personal virtual assistants. From the 1880s onwards, women were favourably hired over men for their supposed natural politeness, their delicate, nimble fingers, and the fact that it cost far less to hire them.

This consistent entanglement of women, technology, voice and service labour both stems from and is entirely embedded within patriarchal and capitalist structures. The overheard automated

female-sounding voices do not match the vocals of those in positions of power and authority. Instead, their controlled, mechanised pitch becomes the ultimate capitalist worker; replayed over and over, it can perform its duties endlessly. Without bodies, voices lose their malleability; they cannot age, tire, get sick, speak back, or be affected by changing environments and experiences.

Disembodied vocals not only continue to carry an indication of gender, but a complex relation to class occurs. For instance, for the companies hiring switchboard operators, it was important that low-paid workers would come across as well-spoken. As a result, elocution lessons were often required to ensure they could clearly articulate themselves with 'well-mannered' characteristics. This ideological element of class is still prevalent. Anyone growing up in London, for instance, will be well-accustomed to the recurring, antiquated upper-middle-class voices on the underground. Their accents resemble something similar to the 'Queen's English' or 'received pronunciation'; a far from neutral accent, which does not reflect the passengers they are used to control.

Moreover, the monotonous presence of pre-recorded voices also embodies the stereotype of the 'nagging' female. She's constantly reminding us to remove shopping bags from the checkout, to mind the gap, to be careful, and so on. In the US and UK, fighter pilots



Screenshot of an advert for a local Dutch company currently offering personal assistants

still use the nicknames 'Bitching Betty' and 'Nagging Nora' for some of the aircraft warning systems. Additionally, the first Digital Voice Announcements on the London Underground were jokingly referred to as 'Sonia' as her repetitiveness 'getS ON YA nerves'.

Whilst maintaining their human-sounding qualities, disembodied vocals continue to imbue these countless complexities. From the switchboard operators of the nineteenth century to the twenty-first century 'personal assistants', the retention of their 'femininity' not only reinstates gendered perceptions of the female as a submissive, obedient service worker, but it is precisely this so-called femininity that is capitalised upon to sell these technologies. The role of an 'assistant' is still an incredibly gendered profession, and the digital counterpart sells itself with similar clichéd characteristics.

Unlike the well-mannered announcements of stations and airports who are unable to respond to or interact with the bodies they speak out to, virtual assistants such as Alexa, Cortana, or Siri, are able to respond within more intimate, domestic spaces. Yet, their ability to 'speak back' still only goes so far as their programmed behaviours, which were more than likely to have been coded by men. Within the privacy of homes or personal devices, virtual assistants often exhibit their unnerving flirtatious qualities. Siri famously used to respond to insults and sexual harassment with the phrase 'I'd blush if I could', a submissive response that strangely refers to an uncontrollable bodily reaction that her technological self does not contain. Siri's response was later changed in 2019 to 'I don't know how to respond to that'.

Some companies seem to be acknowledging the situation. The BBC recently introduced its voice assistant 'Beeb', which takes on a male-sounding northern English accent. This deliberate choice was to avoid the problematic associations that would occur with a female-sounding assistant. Whilst this recognises the gendered problem and is perhaps an intentional choice of accent traditionally coded as working class, drowning out female-sounding voices with what they deem to be a 'friendlier' male version seems like a very strange solution. The company 'Q' claims to be the first to have created an entirely genderless voice, which aims to end gender bias in A.I assistants. But regardless of the chosen pitch, removing or replacing them is not enough. It is the power structures and systems behind these voices that must be confronted.

Computer-programmed voices retain some human qualities even after the removal of the body, and yet what's taken away is their bodily reactions. Friction occurs between these highly scripted, polite, well-spoken, pre-recorded vocal tones and how women's voices have been described. Historically, high pitched sounds were synonymous with monstrosity and disorder—disobedient wagging tongues that were often regarded as inherently uncontrollable and hysterical. Thus, the female's vocal tones were initially deemed 'too shrill and lacking in gravitas' for public announcement. However, the notion of the female as shrill is by no means a thing of the past. Upon quickly googling the word, multiple articles appear on the first page in response to Kamala Harris's attempt to maintain a monotone voice to 'not sound too shrill'. Thoughts also come to mind of the bizarre stories surrounding ex-tech CEO Elizabeth Holmes, with her allegedly faking a deep, low voice in order to be considered 'stronger and more competent and trustworthy'.

It's been quite some time since the idea for this article first took shape. Since then, the movement and control of bodies experienced a drastic shift—cities slowed down and hospitals sped up, movement through space altered drastically as people became confined to their homes across the globe. Disembodied forms of communication accelerated, with voices and bodies increasingly mediated by technology in order to minimise shared spaces and interactions.

brings up a strong point passionately, she runs the risk of being called too **shrill**," said Tina Tchen, a former Obama aide and president and CEO of

there was someone who wrote, "Her voice reminds me of an old school teacher nagging me about how I'm an idiot. She's **shrill** and irritating."

It's because their voices are "too **shrill**," they "smile too much," they "don't smile

If Harris had raised her voice in those moments, she would have been labeled **shrill**. If she had frowned, she would have been labeled a scold. If she had raised a

presidential campaigns in 2008 and 2016. Clinton was frequently attacked as **shrill**, weak and - of course - too ambitious.

when it happened a second time a bit later, she said again, "I'm speaking, OK?" with a dazzling smile to make sure no one thought she was **shrill**.

Screenshots of articles about Kamala Harris leading up to the 2020 US elections.

Under the current circumstances, urban environments are being forced to adapt and facilitate new forms of spatial interaction. Therefore tech companies are predicting continued surges in the use of voice to control and regulate movement and to shift our interactions from tactility to voice-command technology. Private companies are increasingly implementing smart speakers and virtual assistants in public spaces to allow people to complete their everyday activities without needing to touch any buttons, screens, or surfaces. Amazon's Alexa has already been introduced into many hospitals during the COVID-19 crisis to lessen patient–staff interactions. Her pleasant, caring, female-sounding tone is used as a quietly terrifying tool to mediate the giant tech corporations' interactions and access to sensitive data. With the potential of rapidly increasing implementation of privatised technological voices, breaking free from these gendered constructs becomes even more urgent.

'May we have your attention please.'

Restlessly sitting back in the airport and the tannoy announcement plays out once again, this time seemingly more pronounced, not fading so much into the background. I listen attentively to her carefully scripted cry for attention, to her calculated and controlled pitch, tone, texture, and intonation. A mouth, replaced by speakers and wires; she's no longer able to shout, or whisper, or laugh, scream out in pleasure or pain. I think about who it is she speaks on behalf of, the *we* and *you* she alludes to. I hear the history of voices embedded within hers, including those that have been excluded and silenced. I imagine what would happen if she lost her softness, if she unravelled and regained the ability to speak freely and lose control — what would the city sound like?



Film still from *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* (2001), Steven Spielberg, Warner Brothers.

Fleshly Sight

I approached Saint Lucia from the side because I wasn't sure how to look at her. Something about the composition of the painting means she always appears at a slant, maybe because she's meant to be viewed from below, so the perspective is a little skewed on purpose. There's also the distracting sheen of the gold leaf surrounding her figure, which scatters light and causes glare no matter what angle you're looking from. But mainly it's that you don't know which of her eyes to look at. The pair in her face, or the pair in her hand?

The eyes Lucia holds sprout from twin branches. She grasps the delicate stem between her fingers, as if she were clutching the optic nerve at the back of your skull. The eyes in her face are gazing shyly down at her hand, but the eyes in her hand are looking straight at you. You look up to her face, but she demurs, so you follow her gaze, and it lands on the eyes in her hand. The first eyes are blue. The second eyes are brown.

The painting was finished in 1474 by Francesco del Cossa, a somewhat obscure northern Italian Renaissance painter, as part of a multi-painting altarpiece for a chapel in Bologna. The altarpiece was dismembered in the 1720s and its sixteen surviving parts scattered across museums around the world. I happened to be in Bologna while there was an exhibition of all the paintings brought back together for the first time, a rare chance to visit Lucia among her original cohort. In addition to the original paintings, the exhibition included a perfect facsimile reconstruction of the whole altarpiece, so you could see the way all the paintings were meant to be installed. The original paintings themselves were arranged at eye height on the walls of a small room. I walked around and around the room, always ending at Lucia.

Most of the panels depict individual saints. Everyone is looking in different directions. Saint Florian (patron saint of chimneysweeps, soap makers, firefighters), who was burned at the stake, clutches a sword and leans over a ledge, coolly overseeing the panels that would have been hung below his. Saint Peter (bakers, fishermen, foot problems), who was crucified, looks down at a thick manuscript book-marked with a favorite passage. Saint Apollonia (dentistry), whose teeth were yanked out, smiles at the tooth she holds in a pair of giant pincers. Only Saint John the Baptist, the beheaded megasaint, stares directly out of his frame at the viewer.

Lucia's own eyes were said to have been plucked or maybe stabbed out. She is the patron saint of eyesight because of this grisly martyrdom. Medieval viewers would have been encouraged to identify with her trauma and venerate her suffering. And in the case of eye maladies, to request her magical intervention. Your pain and hers, back and forth. Ouch, ouch.

I love Lucia. I love the weirdness of her extra eyes, I love the feeling of being watched by a painting, and I love how difficult it is to zoom out and take in the whole image at once. I first saw her image in an art history class and I've searched for it online a hundred times since, zooming in on one set of eyes and then the other. I ended up at the exhibition while on vacation; I saw her eerie face on the back of a city bus and realized it was an advertisement for the real thing, on display only a few blocks away. I immediately turned around and walked to the museum, but on the way there I got unexpectedly jittery. I wasn't prepared. My heart was pounding and I felt nervous, like an adolescent on my way to meet a crush. Up close, the imperfections in the painting, exacerbated by age, stand out. The tempera paint that shapes her head and body is edged in by the gold leaf, but sometimes del Cossa added a ribbon or mark over the leaf, so as your eyes move across the surface you find yourself retracing his steps. The waist of Lucia's strange green billowing garment is cinched with a red ribbon, her fluttering hairpiece rests gently on golden curls, and her face is just a little bit plump, some extra flesh below the line of the chin. I let my eyes slide lasciviously over her surface for a long time before I realized the paradox of painting a saint whose image is supposed to cure blindness. Does her magic work if you can't see her at all?

One reason Lucia is accessorised with handheld eyes is that del Cossa wanted to paint his subject in immortal splendor rather than as a gory eyeless victim. But more importantly, it is because saints and holy figures were supposed to have a kind of double sight: the eye kind and the spirit kind. In the late fourteenth century, Julian of Norwich, a revered anchoress who experienced mystical visions, explained that there was a difference between her "bodily sight" and her "spiritual sight." Hildegard von Bingen, a famous nun born around the start of the twelfth century, likewise described her visions from God as "seen not with my fleshly eyes but only in my spirit."

For several centuries, women's bodily sight was thought to be particularly powerful—and dangerous, if inflected with malintent.

A popular theory held that vision did not enter the eyes from the world but rather emanated from the eyes, meaning that looking could alter or affect its target. In a widely read 1482 treatise, the Florentine philosopher Marsilio Ficino explained that "vapors" rise from the blood to the brain and then spray from the eyes "as if from two glass windows." In 1531, Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa described the visual rays coming out of the eyeballs as "threads." According to such theories, looking is not passive; it has the potential for intervention in the world.

In keeping with these fears, women of the late medieval and early Renaissance periods are rarely painted looking at the viewer head-on, their averted eyes removing any potential threat inherent in the gaze. Lucia demonstrates her benevolence by glancing away with her fleshly eyes, assuring you that she is chaste. Her fleshly eyes are in some sense irrelevant; the ones that matter are the spirit eyes, with which she can see your insides, delicately pluck at your soul, and in doing so miraculously heal your body. You look at Lucia's face and she shows you where you should really be looking: those powerful spirit eyes, with their unblinking, godly detachment. That detachment makes you shiver and look back to her face for answers.

Keeeping Score

While I was traveling in Italy I was reading Bessel van der Kolk's book *The Body Keeps the Score*. A friend had mailed it to me before the trip—by then, many people had recommended it to me—and for some reason I thought it would make good vacation reading. Van der Kolk is a psychiatrist, and his book is an exhaustive summary of his decades of research into trauma and its effects on the brain and body. He details all he has learned about how traumatic experiences are lived, stored in memory, and often perpetually relived. His aim is to reveal a hidden epidemic of post-traumatic stress, which tends to be falsely treated through pharmacological or medical means, when in fact the root of various mental disorders, pain syndromes, and immunological issues is the ongoing assault on the body's nervous system by the physical memory of trauma.

According to van der Kolk (whose work has not been received without controversy), traumatic recollection operates according to a different memory system than standard "narrative memory" by which you construct a sequential history of your life. Traumatic memories do not

have a beginning, middle, and end, and they are not solidly situated in the past. When a traumatic memory is activated, the experience is not recalled so much as reexperienced, with all the physical and psychic responses that occurred in the moment playing out again throughout the body; on MRI scans, the brain of a person in the midst of remembering, say, a painful medical operation might look nearly indistinguishable from a person experiencing the real thing. In van der Kolk's trauma clinic, he often meets patients who can't describe in words what's happened to them, but who have fits of rage or sadness, physical tics, and unexplainable diseases.

Even when repressed, traumatic memories keep the body on high alert, prepared to respond to threat—a state that can destroy the nervous system. Van der Kolk concludes that post-traumatic disorders are essentially somatic or at least psychosomatic. Psychosomatic does not mean that the pain originates in the mind (as in psychogenic ailments), but that it involves both the mind and the body. As such, PTSD cannot usually be resolved by psychiatric drugs and in many cases not even by talk therapy. In trauma the body registers something the mind cannot undo by itself. Even if the story of what happened can be told, recollections are hardly reducible to language: “The language center of the brain is about as far removed from the center for experiencing one's self as is geographically possible.”

Van der Kolk advocates for treatments that begin with physical practices, with the aim of helping the body understand what it is like to feel safe. This might be as simple as yoga, exercise, playing with animals, or taking a theater class. It might also involve some work on the brain. I read most of the book before I understood that van der Kolk was using the words *brain* and *mind* to mean different things. Mind is the conscious you that can remember, consider, decide, and explain. Brain is the meat. The heavy thing in your skull that does things without your knowledge.

One successful and somewhat mysterious therapy that acts on the mind *and* on the brain is called EMDR, or eye movement desensitization and reprocessing. The therapist who invented it noticed one day that recalling bad memories was not so painful if she moved her eyes rapidly back and forth while thinking about them. Over decades of testing, she and other researchers have shown that this type of eye movement can markedly reduce the emotions and body states that painful memories produce, eventually softening the effects of PTSD.

EMDR works through bilateral stimulation of the brain. The right brain, typically described as the emotional side, deals with feelings, sensations, and physical experiences; the left brain is the analytic, linguistic, decision-making side. During both trauma and its recollection, the executive functions of the left brain often shut down, leaving people without the ability to explain themselves, control their reactions, or act reasonably. The back-and-forth of eye movement during traumatic recollection seems to awaken the left brain, prompting the hemispheres to operate in tandem, bringing the inarticulable into contact with the articulable. In van der Kolk's terms, EMDR has the “apparent capacity to activate a series of unsought and seemingly unrelated sensations, emotions, images, and thoughts in conjunction with the original memory . . . reassembling old information into new packages.” EMDR does not necessarily even require talking to be effective. A therapist can ask you to remember and do the eye thing, and that's enough.

The effectiveness of simple eye movement may be related to the situation of the optic nerve at the back of the head, at the intersection of brain hemispheres. The activity also resembles the mechanism of rapid eye movements that occur during a REM cycle, the phase of sleep when memories are encoded and stored through the process of dreaming. The point of EMDR is not to erase or downplay the memory, but rather to integrate it into the regular memory system, whereby it becomes one story among many and the body can start to let go of the patterns of arousal and self-protection it has learned. For this reason EMDR is markedly different than popular forms of exposure therapy by which someone is forced to repeatedly confront or re-create traumatic memories in the hopes of desensitizing them. The desensitization of pain (which can also result in desensitization of all experience, including joy) is not the same as the integration of pain. Van der Kolk writes: “If the problem with PTSD is *dissociation*, the goal of treatment would be *association*: integrating the cut-off elements of the trauma into the ongoing narrative of life, so that the brain can recognize that ‘that was then, and this is now.’”

Crossing Over

I hated reading *The Body Keeps the Score*. The accounts of patients' experiences made me upset, angry, and exhausted. At first I took my reaction as a logical response to the disturbing subject

matter, which included sexual violence, assault, war. But when I got to the descriptions of mysterious post-traumatic syndromes like immune disorders, dissociation, and passing out, I realized I was feeling the shock of recognition. I felt seen by the text, and I did not want to be seen. In response to the descriptions of trauma and its effects, my body shut off. I started falling asleep whenever I opened the book.

I have had the sleeping problem for as long as I can remember. When I feel overwhelmed in a certain way, I pass out. It's not a normal sleep; it's unavoidable—and somehow inhuman. It's thick and rich and paralyzing. I don't think of it as sleep anymore; I think of it as *crossing over*. I've crossed over in restaurant booths, on the subway, in the back seats of cars, under a table in a library, in the middle of an argument, on the phone. Sometimes I wake up (come back) after ten minutes, feeling fine. Sometimes I'm gone for hours inside vivid dreams and reemerge confused, with heavy limbs and difficulty speaking, stuck in another dimension. Occasionally I come back with a fever, swollen joints, enormous glands, a sinus infection. Doctors have used the names chronic fatigue, fibromyalgia, Epstein-Barr, chronic allergic rhinitis, hypothyroidism, vitamin deficiency, depression, and an unspecified autoimmune disorder to explain me to me. Cue the antibiotics. Most prescriptions have been inadequate or temporary. Some have made things worse.

Van der Kolk has another explanation. To be traumatized, he says, is to have a maladaptive relationship to safety—a disorganized understanding of boundaries and a confusion about when a threat is real. Things that are not mortally threatening at all in current reality—an argument, a work deadline—might feel, to the traumatized person, as though annihilation is imminent. The immune system thinks it is undergoing some kind of assault and responds with all its defenses. Typical animal reactions kick in: the well-known fight or flight, and the lesser-known cousins, fawn and freeze. Fawn means flattering or kissing up in an attempt to placate the threat; freeze means becoming numb, catatonic, or unresponsive. Reading the book, I recognized that freeze is my thing.

I'm not the first person to read *The Body Keeps the Score* and encounter the unpleasant discovery that I have many obvious hallmarks of post-traumatic stress. Other people I've talked to have had similar physical reactions to reading their pain on the page. Many, like me, were not aware of having had any capital-T Trauma that was "bad enough"

to warrant physical symptoms. Painful things have happened to me, as they have to everybody, but I had never imagined that any singular experience could have such widespread effects—and when prompted, I could not identify a smoking gun. I had no idea what my original trauma was.

When I finally finished the book, the sleeping sickness got much worse. I spent a lot of time trying to come up with a cause for my effects. I imagined buried memories, then conjured horror stories. But after putting down the book and returning to my regular reading (medieval mysticism, science fiction), I decided that determining a single causative event was not the point. For reasons particular to my organism and circumstance, some experience or experiences of pain lodged themselves in my body. For me to accept and deal with it, my pain did not need to be justified, nor did a trauma need to be pinpointed, named, or explained. I decided to stop excavating my history and instead to take what my body was saying as basic fact.

Blood Devotion

Recalling, imagining, and vividly detailing saintly sufferings was a major pastime of medieval Christians. An incredible lust for traumatic recollection undergirds Catholicism's visual and literary repertoire, and Christ's body was the prime target for identification. A cultish practice of "blood devotion" flourished in various parts of Europe—what art historian Nancy Thebaut calls an "obsessive and anxiety-ridden interest in Christ's wounds, bleeding, and suffering," which "marked a deep desire to understand the physicality of Christ's death as well as to achieve a new, body-centered form of piety." The famous twelfth-century abbot (and notable proponent of a wave of violent Christian crusades) Bernard of Clairvaux preached the benefits of staring at images of Christ's blood, asking, "What can be so effective a cure for the wound of conscience and so purifying to keenness of mind as steady meditation on the wounds of Christ?"

This fixation on Christ's wounds is apparent in a wide array of manuscripts that were meant to be used in daily devotional practice. The creepiest example might be an English manuscript made in about 1480–90, now cataloged as "MS Egerton 1821," whose first eleven pages are covered with images of bleeding wounds. Its first three pages are entirely blackened and then splattered with red paint, as if the book

had been held under a wounded body. The next eight pages are washed with a pinkish color, upon which are painted repetitive illustrations of tiny dripping slits. Most of the book is well preserved, but one of the blackened pages looks like it's been mauled, its paint nearly scrubbed away by an anxious-looking claw mark in the middle of the page.

A few years ago I signed up for a graduate class about medieval manuscripts at the Morgan Library in Manhattan, in the hopes of getting to see some old books in the flesh. The class was about the relationship between book and body, and the course description promised firsthand access to manuscripts up to a thousand years old. In class, I learned that books like Egerton have been forensically analyzed to discover why some parts of them are weirdly messed with, why some parts are dirty and others are clean. Old books hold evidence particularly well because they are made of vellum, stretched animal skin, whose pores lodge fluids, grease, and grime. Researchers have concluded that many of the original owners of devotional books (Egerton's was probably an aristocratic lady) kissed, licked, rubbed, scratched at, and cried upon their pages. They treated the objects as portals or communion devices that could help them get as close as possible to Christ's body and help them feel his suffering, leaving evidence of their skin, saliva, and tears.

Through touch, image-heavy books like Egerton could be "read" even if the user wasn't literate. The reader could count the blood droplets like rosary beads, back and forth down the page, in a numerical meditation on suffering. Methodical counting not only put the user in a contemplative state, but helped quantify the suffering at hand. For centuries, medieval theologians tried to determine exactly how many droplets Christ had shed from how many wounds before, during, and after the crucifixion. "One of these many formulae estimated that Christ had 5,475 wounds and 547,500 drops of blood," writes Thebaut. Christ's body kept the score, and it was some factor of 5,475. Reading, fondling, and kissing the book-body, you got to keep score with him.

From an art historical perspective, the paintings of blood droplets are somewhere between figuration and abstraction, representation and reality; you don't really *look* at them as you might look at a painting. They're a tool, a portal—or even a musical score, prompting the user to keep time with God by internalizing the steady thrum of suffering that formed the baseline of medieval Catholic life. This is what I imagine, anyway. When I look at pictures of Egerton (I have still never

seen it in person), I don't feel any particular identification with the character of Christ. What I do identify with is that claw mark on the page, left by a woman fervently trying to commune with someone else's experience through a book.

The goal of all this blood devotion was to evoke and continually keep the traumatic moment alive, through its secondhand arousal. Sometimes invoking the other's pain would send the reader into extreme physical states, which would from today's psychiatric vantage point look like classic PTSD symptoms. In her 2016 book *Acute Melancholia and Other Essays*, Amy Hollywood explains: "The meditative practices of the later Middle Ages, which aimed to make vivid and inescapable the pain and suffering of Christ's life and death, are curiously similar to contemporary discussions of traumatic memory. Researchers on trauma and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder isolate particular forms of intensely sensory and bodily memories in which the survivor involuntarily and repetitiously relives traumatic events. Such memories are intrusive, intensely vivid, repetitive, and lack a narrative frame. They are not only visual, moreover, but also often involve other senses, presumably those heightened at the moment of trauma."

Unlike van der Kolk's proposed remedies, medieval devotional practices focused on suffering do not aim to resolve personal trauma. They aim to invoke Christ's suffering, and dwell on it. In Hollywood's words, "They attempt to inculcate traumatic or bodily memory—or something very like it—by rendering involuntary, vivid, and inescapable the central catastrophic event of Christian history so that the individual believer might relive and share in that trauma." You're supposed to get so close to Christ's experience (through media like books and paintings) that you never let his misery be resolved. For his somatic experience is the foundation of his transcendence, is the proof of God's love. It's a whole body system built on someone else's trauma. This allowed people to create a connection between their regular human suffering and saintly suffering—Christ and the many saints, like Lucia, who were martyred in his name. Your pain is not special, which means it is not yours alone to bear.

On one of the last days of my manuscript class, the librarian held out a small sixteenth-century book he had taken from the vault and let each student gently stroke the page, feeling the animal fibers that compose the worn, somehow still warm, grimy surface. This was the day we had all been waiting for. (One of my classmates was wearing

an amulet for Saint Margaret and another was wearing a jacket with a Chaucer quote embroidered on the back: these were serious fans.) If seeing Lucia in person provoked a feeling of adolescent flirtation, what I felt when touching the manuscript was full-blown, well-informed adult desire. Desire for communion. Desire for crossing over.

lingua Ignota

L Hildegard von Bingen was sick all the time. Hildegard, who lived in what is now the German Rhineland in the early 1100s, saw the first of many divine visions with her spiritual sight when she was three years old, but she did not have the courage to write about them until she was stricken with a particularly horrible illness decades later. This illness prompted her to write a letter to the powerful abbot Bernard of Clairvaux, whose permission she asked to record her visions in a book. Struck by the passion of her letter, Bernard encouraged this unknown provincial nun to record and share what she had seen.

Although she felt compelled to describe her “revelations,” Hildegard confessed to Bernard that she felt incapable of properly explaining them in language. She was concerned about her lack of education and grasp of Latin, but more to the point, she was also doubtful that she could communicate divine truth in any human language at all: “I am not taught in this vision to write as the philosophers do. Moreover, the words I see and hear in the vision are not like the words of human speech, but are like a blazing flame or a cloud that moves through clear air.” How was she supposed to convey that blazing flame in fleshly language? Although she did end up exhaustively describing her divine visions (by relaying them to her trusted scribe, who wrote them down in Latin), she also invented a new alphabet for her own private use. She called it the *lingua ignota*, or unknown language.

Hildegard’s visionary imagery is vivid and psychedelic—she sees what seems to be God, for instance, enthroned on “a great mountain the color of iron” and “before this figure, at the roots of the mountain, there stood an image covered with eyes.” Many of the visions blind and dazzle her, shock her, pain her, transform her—make her sick. Their arrival is often a traumatic event. No wonder she struggles to explain what she sees. I think van der Kolk would explain this by saying that “trauma by nature drives us to the edge of comprehension, cutting us off from language based on common experience or an imaginable

past.” Of course, so does ecstasy, which Hildegard experienced, too.

Hildegard became well known for many reasons: she was a prolific writer of books on medicine, herbs, and food, a composer of music, and a skilled speaker. After living in a thriving monastery called Disibodenberg for most of her life, she received a vision telling her to build her own abbey at the place where two rivers meet. By that time, however, she had become an asset to her monastery—her fame brought pilgrims and income—and it was not typical for a woman to start her own institution from scratch. The abbots in charge said no.

In response, she entered a long illness during which she became totally paralyzed. She could not move or talk. She froze. Eventually, forced to acknowledge the divine message expressed by the extent of her ailment, a bishop stepped in and permitted her to go forward with her plan. Hildegard’s body had proven her case. If the result happened to be self-serving, well, then, her advancement must have been God’s will. It would not be exactly right to say that Hildegard brought the suffering upon herself. Illness, rather, was a methodology for making sense of the world.

Hildegard, like many women at the fringe of orthodoxy, was not necessarily allowed to speak or act. She had to earn authority through a mix of strategy and piety—remaining just barely on the right side of the heretical. If she had fallen on the other side, she could easily have been declared a witch and burned at the stake. For if sickness is a methodology, it is an ambivalent one. How do you harness suffering? How do you interpret it? How do you make it *mean* something, much less what you want it to mean? How do you keep it from being used against you? Hildegard was not canonized as a saint until 2012, but she was recognized by many devotees, especially women, as an unofficial saint for many centuries. What she saw and what she felt mattered, because she made it matter. She offered her body to be read for clues.

A n Agent Still at Work

The therapist was sitting in front of a bookshelf, but the resolution of the Zoom window wasn’t high enough for me to make out the books’ individual titles. A white curtain to his right—my left—filtered the sunlight entering his room, but sometimes he squinted from the brightness. He sat slightly back from his desk so I could get a better view of his upper body. He explained to me that the main downside

of on-screen therapy was that we couldn't see each other breathing, leaning forward, fidgeting—and, I assumed, it would be harder for him to gauge my level of freaking out. “I can't see your belly,” he said. “Are you breathing deeply?”

I had indeed forgotten to breathe. I was sitting in an ergonomic office chair in my living room, spaced out, nauseated, but oddly giddy. We were between sets of EMDR, short minute-long sprints during which I delved into awful memories again and again, trying to induce the feeling that they were happening in real time through bilateral brain stimulation. Training a person to move their eyes back and forth is also hard over Zoom, so the therapist I'd found preferred another method that has been shown to have the same effect. You lay your hands over your chest in a butterfly shape and gently tap yourself under the collarbone in a rhythmic pattern. The brain gets stimulated—lit up? poked? palpated?—in the same way it does if you roll your eyeballs from left to right. I found it to be a simple action with strangely powerful results. I started to notice my eyes moving along with my hands while I was doing it, and by the third session, I felt myself sinking into what felt like an ancient interior realm. When I imagined a scene while tapping, the visions held a lucid, hyperreal quality.

Equally galvanized and frustrated by van der Kolk's book, a few weeks earlier I had decided I no longer wanted to be frozen or sick. I was tired of being gaslighted by doctors offering prescriptions for my body and psychiatrists offering prescriptions for my mind. As far as strategies, EMDR appealed to me most—partly because it made the least sense. It seemed like magic. You move your eyes back and forth and your brain rearranges itself? But it also appealed to me because it was at the nexus of brain and body: it dealt with both at the same time. It would not ask me to explain myself or analyze my memories from a distanced perspective, or even talk at all.

In our first session, I had peppered the man with disclaimers. “I want to stop randomly dissociating,” I said, “but I'm not sure I want to, you know, *fix* the problem.” Because what would I do without it? It seemed wrong to treat freeze like a simple pathology to be beaten down or overcome, because it was so strange and profound. Hildegard did not ask whether her illnesses were real or try to get rid of them—she asked what they were trying to tell her. What was freeze trying to tell me? Was I supposed to build a new abbey at the fork of two rivers? *Freeze* is so brittle a word. It disallows undercurrents, metamorphoses. Although

it might look static from the outside, there is motion in crossing over. Something sacred happens in that transition. I wanted to suffer less but I did not want to lose access to all those unknown languages.

The therapist smiled and explained that there was a clinical explanation for my ambivalence. “It's totally normal,” he said. “A trauma response is valuable information that shouldn't be shoved aside. It's a coping mechanism that worked at some point in the past, and most people find it hard to give it up.” What looks dysfunctional now, he went on, was probably at one point very functional—as in, falling asleep during a family argument may be a very good solution for a child with nowhere to go. The problem is that by now the solution no longer fits the situation at hand. The point of EMDR is to teach the body that the coping mechanism can become a choice rather than an uncontrollable reflex. Then he told me, gently, that letting go of some of my responses might make me feel like I was going to die.

In textbook EMDR you pick a traumatic memory and you “target” it. But I could not pick the single worst thing that had ever happened to me. It seemed like the wrong approach. Nothing seemed drastic enough; more to the point, all the memories were fuzzy and interconnected. I asked the therapist what would happen if, instead of a traumatic moment, we targeted the trauma response, the moment of crossing over. The therapist was curious and willing to try. He thought that targeting a transition point—the moment of dissociation itself rather than what had caused it—might work, because it would eventually bring up a cluster of memories that were all lumped together, too persistent and systemic to trace to any single origin point. (There is also a diagnostic name for this, complex PTSD, a condition that results from a series of related events rather than one identifiable occurrence.) I agreed: the memories had a networked nature, and whatever had happened to me was not like a wound but like an infection that had spread through my body. In his book, van der Kolk quotes Freud and his collaborator Josef Breuer, who explain that “the psychological trauma—or more precisely the memory of the trauma—acts like a foreign body which long after its entry must continue to be regarded as an agent that is still at work.”

The infection flared wildly during the first month. The therapist was right: I thought I might die. The treatment felt infinitely worse than the problem. I couldn't sleep; I vomited; I was rageful, shaking, mean, unbearably sad. All those latent emotions, which freezing had tamped

down, and which being chronically sick had diverted my attention from, erupted. At the end of one session the therapist explained that this response is also common. It's called an extinction burst. When a person is faced with losing coping mechanisms, no matter how maladaptive or disruptive those mechanisms might be in the here and now, the reactions rise to the surface in one extravagant explosion, a grand finale of feeling. The infection flares when it senses you may want to get rid of it. The infection reminds you that it was never meant to harm you: it was meant to protect you. You feel like you are about to go extinct. But, as I discovered, it turns out that extinction is not the end—neither of the foreign agent nor of you. It is another step in a process of transformation, a new phase of symbiosis.

R eparative Reading

Once in a writing class I was told that writers should always avoid the flashback narrative structure when writing a story. Flashbacks, the teacher said, drag a plot down, pull you away from the present moment, and turn every character trait into a psychological symptom with a simple cause. Why is the character being so cruel? *Flashback: abuse! heartbreak! plane crash!* In this construction, trauma is the essence of backstory, and trauma is the cause for every effect. The language of the traumatic flashback is a language of levers and pulleys, explanations and fixes. It reduces a character to a diagnosis. No matter how much you might want it to, that type of story feels nothing like life.

Labeling experiences as traumas—and invoking their power by labeling later behaviors as trauma responses—might work for treatment, but as a life strategy it can be a sorry reduction. It risks setting up a system of hierarchical suffering, in which to be traumatized and to be able to “prove it” is a ticket to authority. Yet nobody should have to demonstrate that they have suffered in order to claim their experience as real or have the right to express their thoughts or opinions. Traumas cannot be measured or compared. As Hildegard shows, suffering is important evidence, but it does not confer its *own* authority. What you do with the evidence, how you read it, utilize it, even weaponize it: this is where the question of authority comes in.

The Body Keeps the Score is a best-seller. It is usually stacked in the self-help section of bookstores, suggesting that the book is a manual to make your life better. The language of trauma has likewise been

adopted into mainstream culture, with almost any experience seemingly explainable within its rubric. *Getting triggered is not your fault*, reads a post by an Instagram influencer I follow. *You can learn to bounce back faster if you can identify your trauma triggers in the moment*. The type of language that might allow you to connect body and mind—to imagine non-medicalized approaches to dealing with pain—has been quickly pirated as the language of resilience. Van der Kolk intends to de-medicalize trauma, but I don't think he means to popularize it and depoliticize it. And while at various points in the book he rightly places the responsibility for reducing the “epidemic” of trauma on systemic change—by, for instance, supporting families that are likely to be traumatized due to poverty or racism—his text also gives everyone, whatever their sociohistorical circumstances, the very same language to describe their personal pain. It flattens them together.

Lauren Berlant writes in her book *Cruel Optimism* that “in critical theory and mass society generally, ‘trauma’ has become the primary genre of the last eighty years for describing the historical present as the scene of an exception that has just shattered some ongoing, uneventful ordinary life that was supposed just to keep going on and with respect to which people felt solid and confident.” However, “crisis is not exceptional to history or consciousness but a process embedded in the ordinary that unfolds in stories about navigating what's overwhelming.” The language of trauma does not result from, but is in fact what creates, the idea of an “ongoing uneventful ordinary life” that crises wrench us out from, just as the idea of illness as an aberration creates the concept of health and wellness as the baseline states from which the sick person deviates.

The supposedly nice and healthy, well-adjusted life is an imaginary state, a myth perpetuated by privileged people with the means to simulate it. If the language of trauma is taken as a total explanation for experience, everything might become explained by trauma and trauma alone—and everything might become potentially traumatizing. One writer friend of mine said that after reading *The Body Keeps the Score* she spent months quoting the book in every conversation and essay, only to realize that it explains exactly everything while explaining exactly nothing. For that reason I have not loaded this essay with my own backstory—I have not detailed my childhood traumas, described my triggers, or pasted transcripts from my therapy sessions. This does not stem from a desire to withhold; it's that I don't think trauma is enough

to explain this story, any story. I don't wish to make my trauma generally applicable, even within the story of my own life.

The writer Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has suggested that reading (a book, a body) through the language of symptoms with straightforward causes is a kind of paranoid activity. The paranoid reader is obsessed with discovering a hidden meaning in order to try to pin down a culprit, name it, and dominate it. If a true cause could only be unearthed and exposed, the paranoid reader assumes, its effects could be predicted, and therefore brought under control. But paranoid reading perpetuates itself: rarely is a single event or actor responsible for a whole story, and rarely does exposing the cause after the fact give one great power to change a narrative, much less to heal oneself or the world.

As a counterpoint to paranoid reading, Sedgwick offers the term *reparative reading*. Reparative reading is no less sharp or critical, but does not attempt to predict or to dominate. It is an approach focused on seeking unexpected possibilities rather than preventing them. Reparative reading avoids pathologizing people and their lives; it does not aim to repair as in to make healthy, but rather to repair connections that may have been lost or broken. In standard EMDR practice, the therapist asks you to begin every session by unearthing a particularly wonderful memory and sealing it into your consciousness using bilateral stimulation. This way you can build associations between the traumatic recollections and other types of experiences, teaching your brain that they are part of the same world.

Religion and psychology have tried very hard to distinguish between pathological behavior and proper behavior—between the sick way to react to suffering and the healthy way to react to suffering, between freezing and crossing over. Like Hildegard, I maintain that these are not mutually exclusive or even oppositional modes of experience. Listening to the body does not deny that some kinds of pain are irreducible and unsolvable. Many kinds, actually. While Lucia purports to help lessen your burden, to help you by healing you, I think her true purpose is to be there, watching you, when the pain won't go away. After an EMDR session, I often remembered how I felt while standing before Lucia: frozen in a new way, frozen while awake.

What comes after extinction? I'm still here in this body. EMDR did not, ultimately, kill me. It did alter me in a fundamental, if infinitesimal, way. I was surprised at the minute size of this miracle. The miracle: a window of time that had not previously existed. A slight

pause between pain and reaction. The window is slim, no more than fifteen seconds, but in that crucial gap something can shift, and the hemispheres can spend a moment in conversation. I can move between meat and story. What I feel versus what I know. What I experience versus what I want. Then, I decide. A lot of the time, I still decide to go to sleep.

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CONVERSATION
Bogomir Doring & Micaela Terk





MICAELA TERK: In your work, you look at choreographies of collectivity and how individuals, when dancing together, form patterns in movement behaviour. Perhaps we could start by introducing your recent work *I Dance Alone*?

BOGOMIR DORINGER: I've always been interested in dance, choreography, and the non-verbal expression of non-professional dancers—people in the club. This includes those in public space, and now online, especially since the pandemic. I had been looking for instances of dance that were signs of urgency or struggle. I call this 'a dance of urgency'—a dance that rises in times of personal and collective crises, that has a coping function, empowering both individuals and groups, but also working as political opposition when needed.

In recent years, my suggestion of urgent dance has become more widely understood; urgencies are coming closer. Now, with the war in Ukraine and recent political elections, what I mean is more clear, and I think particularly the younger generation knows what it means to form political opposition through spaces of connection and dance.

M: Looking at the lessons we can take from dancing, alone or together, as they stand within your research, I think of the body itself as a site of transformation—a site where all of these things are happening ... I'm curious about what you've observed from your own experiences?

B: My own experience helped me the most to do this research. Of course, you question your own observations, especially as an artist: 'Is what I'm seeing or sensing really right? Am I confused? Can I trust my body, can I trust my observation?' The possibility of sharing with an audience makes me think that just because I'm an artist doesn't mean that my ideas should automatically get to be out there. For me, the question of responsibility has always been important.

I started by recalling the memories of dancing in my own life, as a kid, especially during the nineties in Yugoslavia in times of fragmentation and war. This was presented as a religious war because there was conflict between Orthodox, Muslims, Catholics, etc., but of course it was territorial, and an opportunity for resolving some unresolved historical conflicts. Dancing in that environment seemed like a form of a revolt, a protest. It's a way to move when movement is blocked or not allowed. When you cannot leave the country you dance better than

ever, because it's resistance. But I think more and more that it's also fear; you embrace life fully, but you also embrace potential death, bringing us to a strange mix of feelings and emotions, like ancient rituals, or like Eros and Thanatos. It's like creating and destroying or altering yourself into something more than human, or almost leaving the body. That absence of body, or exiting the body, allows you to better deal with the situation. Protest is quite a tricky one; I think it can be very destructive. I'm not promoting that we should all dance out of urgency. I think it's phenomenal that it can help us sometimes, but I think it can also be very consuming.

Even if we aren't talking about the dance of urgency, it's fascinating to look into gestures; what is communicated on a dance floor. Just because there's a crowd of people and the music is good, it doesn't make it *my* crowd. It doesn't mean that I necessarily connect as an individual with that group, yet from outside we look like one.

M: We started from the individual and now we're looking at questions of collectivity, what defines a group, the dangers of a group. You spoke about moving when moving is not allowed, or moving as a form of release when your body is perhaps intended to move differently. We could also look at labour, or work, or war environments ... I'm assuming that you're also looking at what different gestures are communicating? And also at what you have learned about group dynamics and community when dancing together with others.

B: If you ask somebody, 'Do you dance?', or, 'Why don't you dance?', or, 'How do you dance?', they might think, 'I don't dance because I'm ashamed,' or, 'I don't dance because I don't have good dance moves.' We are very quick to understand obstacles or constructions that exist around the idea of what it is to move freely. These can come from religion, family, self-criticism, from an idea of what is good dance versus what is bad dance. They can come from pop culture, from 'I'm not masculine enough.' We very quickly realise that the way we move—the way we walk, the way we talk, the way we act at work—is cultural politics, it's the way our bodies are managed in order to fit larger social structures. That can be taken further; ballet is elegant and sophisticated, but twerking is vulgar and should be banned, for example.

For me, the dance floor is a playful space and an opportunity for artistic expression for all, where we can try out awkwardness,

otherness, transformation through dance. Those gestures you were addressing are interesting because sometimes we don't need to make big moves; it could be movement only in our fingers, but still we navigate through an imaginary space, we take ourselves on some journey that is very different from the normative daily routines that we need to perform.

Even if you dance at home alone, it still provides you with that understanding. Maybe it's very subconscious, but if we ask people, 'What do you move for?', or, 'What moves you?', or, 'Why don't you move?', everybody has juicy answers to give. My project initially came from noticing that people don't move on dance floors, but the dance floors have really changed in the last years. They're much more expressive, much faster as well. The beat changed. I was wondering what makes people stop moving, what makes them move again, and if those movements could be a sign of socio-political changes, or even an announcement of some kind of change of weather, of living conditions.

M: When you spoke about gestures, it almost reminded me of dreaming. Forgive my very superficial analysis of the psychology of dreaming, but it's as if you're testing out experiences in your everyday life and fragmenting them as a means of experiencing them in new ways. And I think that can be very interesting in relation to gestures on the dance floor: not only as things that come up in the subconscious, but as a mirroring or echoing of other people's gestures.

B: What I've started noticing is the difference between the day party and the night party. I first thought the difference didn't matter, but lacking sleep and going against the clock is very different to dancing after proper rest at 3 pm in a park in the daytime. When I was filming, I noticed that between 4 and 8 am is the most fantastic and strange moment, especially if you are sober and filming. It's a totally different experience of time than for those who are actually partying. First, time slows down in the extreme. It feels like the hours are longer, it's very confusing. And that's actually the moment where people are in that full-on state of trance, wasted or high or absent or altered. Those hours are very particular, and it's very hard to get those hours during the daytime. So indeed there might be something about confusing the body; you are in this dreamy situation, yet you're not sleeping. It's interesting you brought up dreaming because I'm increasingly interested in those inner

processes that happen in dance, and how gestures help us navigate that inner picture.

M: How is the sense of collectivity so clear when you are dancing in a group? And in these moments that it happens, do gestures—or to what extent do gestures—play a role in that?

B: I'm interested in gestures that invite the other. Are the gestures creating a group? Are they competitive? Is the gesture one of playfulness or invitation? Are they nationalist, hooligan political movements? Now, if you look at the dance floor, everybody has these kinds of ninja moves, like *Mortal Kombat* references. Voguing is also mixed up with that. It's particularly interesting with electronic music because there is no real rule on how to dance; there's no icon, we don't look at Beyoncé to learn moves for the techno party. It's really something located in certain clubs, or it's born in certain clubs and then migrates like liquid; it's fluid. But it still needs to come from you. It's this sensation that the moves create, together with fashion, together with drugs, together with architecture. But I think because we witnessed something so fantastic and yet also very horrific, it's like a timeline, as I said, between Eros and Thanatos. The imageries of nightlife are always very dark, red, smokey. I don't know why clubs always have to look like that. Why does it have to be this recreation of a hell image? Equally, I think that it feels like we survived something very dramatic and important, which I think creates that bond and strong emotion.

M: I remember joining a presentation by you during the onset of the pandemic, and you were receiving many questions from people asking how you felt the pandemic would shape nightlife. We had no idea. So it's really interesting to hear from you now, to see how you've noticed that it's changed, and especially in regard to stagnation, because I think that's something that was a very, very big fear in the pandemic in terms of movement.

B: I did a show called *No Dancing Allowed* and it was fascinating to see where movement happened when it was not allowed, but also the effect of new technology like virtual reality, or even social media like TikTok. What was confirmed is that all governments that could use this moment to erase free spaces, free culture, they did it. Even in Germany,

in Berlin. The lack of proper financial support for clubs is killing the scene. In Amsterdam it's a little different, De School was closed by the community because of racial profiling at the same time that the pandemic was happening. But the time has confirmed that a lot of governments do see these spaces as threatening to certain ideas and ideology. There was just this attack in Bratislava in a queer club. And what I was scared about with the pandemic is that the movement will leave clubs and enter the streets, which I think is also somehow very much in the air, like the rise of protest. k41 in Kyiv, Ukraine, was super important during the pandemic because it was *the* club that was open, where restrictions were not as they were in other European countries. Everybody was flying there to dance.

I think the situation is not nice. I'm actually very careful at the moment with dancing crowds; I don't feel the same in them. It could be long covid, it could be something different, but I trust my body ... The crowds, the agendas, the ideas are so mixed up that it's very confusing to share space with so many people at the same time.

M: It seems like there's very much a lack of clarity about these spaces still, at least in my own experience.

B: I went to Boom Festival, I have great memories there, and I was so excited, but when I was there I just couldn't be in the crowds. I was mostly in my tent, at the lake, or wandering around. My body was extremely sensitive to all these different energies. A lot of people there are into conspiracy theories, and it's very hard for me to be with people and not see those little bubbles.

M: There's a sense of division I think as well that sadly exists, or is more visceral somehow in these spaces.

B: It reminds me of the nineties in Yugoslavia. I felt that then, but I was stronger to deal with it. Stronger, or younger, it's very hard for me to understand. Was I more numb back then, or was I stronger back then, or was I not allowing that to enter my body? My family was in a similar state to what I am in now. They were quite alarmed, and I just wanted to dance. So I totally also understand that, during the lockdowns, there were illegal raves going against the rules because young people really needed that movement to happen, no matter what.

M: You mentioned earlier that you notice people don't move now, but that everything is very fast, and that there's a lot more expression?

B: When I moved to study at the Rietveld (2002–2004), I came from a certain dance floor that had a socio-political urgency, where people would really look at each other when they danced. You would be in a crowd, and of course you had clusters like this group and that group, but it felt like one movement. When I moved to Amsterdam, clubs were closing at 4 am and there was no hunger for that ritual to go on. The economy was good, and you have a lot of festivals—actually, festivals were born from those limits on the night, because then they had to start reinventing or adjusting the rules so things actually happened during the daytime. That explosion of Dutch festivals is very much related to the limits on the night, and the rent that grew.

But the bodies were just not expressive. Berghain in Berlin did a great job in reclaiming what it means to take space, to dance. Now that's kind of become a norm, or that's how we do it, but I think at that time there weren't many places that had a really fantastic dance floor.

M: I remember having the same experience when I moved to Amsterdam from Tel Aviv. But I wonder, how do you maintain a sense of urgency outside the dance floor?

B: If dance is a way of practising taking space for yourself and sharing space with others, then it's interesting how that knowledge is transmitted into your daily life, but also how as a group you create new space. I think you need space to practise movement, but sometimes movement creates space and sometimes the space allows the movement to grow. So it's like an incubator. Dance, whether in an architectural space or not, is always ephemeral because it's that dreaming, navigating through fog, bass, smells, wetness, temperatures ...

During lockdowns, Nyege Nyege Festival in Uganda had this online streaming moment, where different African countries produced content, different streams, and it was all happening in one week online. It was December, it was grey in Amsterdam, culture was on hold—or off—and no socialising was allowed except drinking wine in Vondelpark. I was sitting on the sofa, watching Nyege Nyege, and it was so fascinating to see these diverse movements and sounds, and all that was happening somewhere while Europe was in sleep mode. So

then I started thinking, would this massive movement even be possible if Eurocentric Europe was not in sleep mode? Maybe actually switching off and slowing down is what gave that boost, that massive visibility and also motivation to that scene, to produce such an amazing festival.

We are in constant speed and motion, kind of running; it's all about that fast beat again. And that's where I started thinking that maybe this is the moment to slow down, and actually not move. Maybe that's why festivals and parties don't feel that exciting to me at the moment, because I don't think that that fast pace and beat is resolving things, rather is actually speeding up some processes that might be destructive for us as a society at large. I'm not sure if the dance floor now is a coping mechanism or a kind of no-plan motion.

M: It's almost reflective of a desire to continue something that could not be continued.

B: Maybe for a lot of people it's very hard to put things in perspective. I'm looking at dance more and more as an announcement of bad weather. It can be cloudy, but then with sun, but it can also be stormy. That's this confusion of crowds. I'm thinking of *Crowds and Power* by Elias Canetti. It's very interesting how this book is structured because it's a depiction of different crowds, the fear, the seduction, the power, but then also the fear of crowds once you're inside them. I think that's the phase we are in at the moment. No matter how much I love it, dance can be very manipulative, misleading sometimes. I'm now looking into examples where dance has been used as a way of distracting, confusing, or manipulating crowds.

For example, when nightlife was not getting any financial support during the pandemic, there was an event called Unmute Us. Different music festivals invited crowds to gather in public between lockdowns. It was a massive event with around 70,000 people gathering on the streets to support. At the same time, there was another protest against high rents and the housing crisis ... Let's say it had a much, much greater urgency, but with a bad lineup [laughs]. I mean, dancing was not in focus and they didn't have that many followers. I think this contrast between demonstrations is a good illustration of how dance can be misused, or used, or easily proposed somehow as a way of moving forward, but actually in the interest of few. I was very confused with Unmute Us; it was fascinating that so many Dutch people wanted to

go on the streets and support the event, but it was definitely not the revolution in Georgia. That's the moment where I started looking at the idea of dancing crowds from a different angle.

M: I guess this would return us to this question: What are you dancing for? Is it a release?

B: And for who is the ritual? Is it for individuals? The economy? What if we say, 'Okay, this ritual is for X, do you want to participate?' But I think agendas are often very hidden, and that's why I'm sceptical at the moment with dancing crowds.

M: I think it's definitely an interesting time for your research.

FORDIAN DREAMS:
(SOMETHING ABOUT) FACTORIES FOR
LEARNING & THE CARTESIAN SPLIT
Nell Schwan

The publication that you are holding in your hands came at the tail end of a year's worth of research, conducted by two groups of students at the Sandberg Instituut and the Gerrit Rietveld Academie. As European art academies do, especially ones located in capital cities, SI/GRA has the ambition to cultivate an international environment, open to institutional critique, progressive politics, and the taking of various risks. Among the seemingly endless departments, activities, and sub-activities, the academy financially supports yearly student collectives to create their own study groups around various topics. These are topics that the students find relevant or miss in their established BA/MA programmes. In 2021/2022 the research groups were aux) (concerned with sound, listening, the voice, and music) and Embodied Knowledge Bureau (who investigated embodied cognition, movement, dance, somatics, and attempted to challenge mind-body dualism at large).

When overlaying the activities of aux) and EKB over one another to delineate this reader's focus, the common factor seemed to be that both groups were concerned with sensory forms of study, art production, and being in the world. For the first few months, while contacting authors and thinking about the framework of the reader, the publication had the working title *Sense-Making: The Body in Knowledge Production*. As the working title gave way to something more open-ended — and hopefully a little more poetic — the core question remained: why was centering sensorial experience in learning and living important to these people? (This is a trick question, the answer is: because it isn't currently addressed by their academy, at least not as thoroughly as external publicity and internal rhetoric would have us believe.)

Imagine the year 2023: an art academy in Amsterdam ¹ with a 60% international cohort, active contemporary artists among teaching staff, and alumni who regularly go on to enjoy decent careers as cultural producers. An environment that serially cannibalises the vocabularies of movements for reform, adding them like feathers to its culturally conscious hat. The self-image of such an institution would rhyme poorly with the fact that, within it, challenging mind-body dualism is forced to be an extracurricular, elective, 'special-interest' kind of stance. ²

At the time of writing and, likely, reading, we are on a European territory with a Christian (Calvinist) past. The skinny of Christianity is that you *are not* your body — you are an immortal, immaterial soul, formed in the image of God. We are also in post-industrialist academia, where the marriage of private tutoring and conveyor-belt factories gave rise to ‘school’.³ Lastly, we are situated in a medical tradition that, after performing a genocide on wise women and healers,⁴ has used carpentry as a model for treating the sick,⁵ later: mechanics,⁶ now: computer science.⁷ The Cartesian split isn’t behind us in some nightmarish Kafkaesque time past. We live in it every day, and we socialise each other into it. Let me digress.

With global rollbacks of reproductive rights for people with uteruses, the continuation of phenomena such as mandatory military conscription, incarceration, state monopoly on violence, forced or coerced labour, and wide swathes of humans working themselves, if not to death, at least into irreversibly ill health (for someone else’s profit), your body is, as much as ever, a battleground.

DISSOCIATION: THE MIND-BODY DUALISM WITHIN

TO LIVE IN a densely populated city probably always entails dissociation to some degree.⁸ We disconnect from a sense of discomfort when closer than desired to strangers, from straining commutes, city noise, unpleasant work, socially insensitive people we meet, and the injustice we witness every day. The pivot of this text is that it is dissociation and its consequences (at least in relatively un-toxic environments such as the Netherlands) that, ultimately, lead to many of our medical and interpersonal ailments.⁹ In north-western Europe, this tradition of numbing from sensation, a type of corporal illiteracy, is something we repeatedly socialise one another into: ‘Don’t squirm, sit still, smile now, say thank you, be polite.’ We conflate shutting off information gathered by our bodies with ‘good manners’, ‘class’, or ‘education’¹⁰ to the point where therapeutic methods need to be introduced to help adult



people find out what they like, what feels good, how to say no, how to stop stifling their visceral and emotional experiences and treat these as important knowledge.

Recently, in public transit of the city, a campaign by The Collated Health Foundations of the Netherlands is circulating. Their ‘Healthy Generation’ campaign aims to make the people being born and growing up in the Netherlands the world’s healthiest by 2040. The urgency of said campaign comes from the fact that currently, more than half of the Dutch suffer some kind of chronic illness or ailment.¹¹

The part of the Healthy Generation campaign that stood out the most to me had, unlike taking exercise or not smoking, a very interpersonal nature: *The first 1000 days—information for parents*.¹² It states: ‘in very early life the neural pathways are laid down which will function as a blueprint for most of consecutive functioning.’ This campaign emphasises the importance of consistent physical contact with infants, along with attention, patience, care, and kind words for at least the first two years of life. Another way to describe these behaviours is ‘attunement’—the reactivity to another person and the basis on which we form relationships. In order to attune to the emotional and physical shifts of another, we need to understand what they are feeling. We do this by modelling their feelings inside of ourselves, which isn’t possible if we are shut off from the information of our bodies.

Since infants cannot verbalise their needs, nor self-regulate, they need caretakers to do it for them. The physical and emotional ability of adults to be present in the lives of young humans lays the bedrock for them to be able to (constructively) self-regulate later in life. Overworking, substance use, seeking constant stimulation, and the domination of others are also self-regulation methods, but we know what problems we run into when we lean too heavily on those. . .

To paraphrase the campaign: to become a less ill population, we need to experience the visceral sensations of going from crisis to safety, the experience of expressing needs and having them met, and the embodied memory of one’s boundaries being recognised as legitimate and worth respecting. *The first 1000 days* is correct about our early experiences being of great importance to the people we become, but as anyone who’s interacted with polyglot or code-switching children knows: we are not ‘raised by’ the one or two people legally delineated ‘our guardians’. We are ‘raised by’ everyone we meet, every day. And it never stops.

In last year's reader, EKB reflected on the fact that, in school:

. . . physical education is cut off into a separate territory, it's just learning how to run and stuff. The body is treated as a machine that needs to undergo scheduled maintenance, so as not to let our physical existence get in the way of paying attention to something more important in the 'wholly different' territory of the mind. [. . .] You know, the more I think back on my experiences of formal education, from first grade, the more fucked up it feels to me that you enter this system that is basically appropriated from Fordism, modelled after factory lines in the early 20th century, in order to organise not only the class schedule of children but the entire educational process; how we broach children as subject, the ways by which we assume they are capable of learning, and how their educational production is measured. This kind of thinking could never acknowledge the significance of embodiment: it is not only inherently ambivalent to embodied experience, but also often implicitly motivated to alienate people from paying attention to this dimension . . . 13

When looking extra tired, my partner might ask me if I am 'having those Fordian dreams again?' The ones where I incessantly try to complete a monotonous, incomprehensible task, instead of sleeping deeply, unclenching. Many people have these sorts of dreams, I'm sure. For those of us who haven't worked at a factory, not really, one might ask where such a visceral memory could come from, which could be recalled in a dream?

Somatic practices don't need to be deployed in art education or academia for embodied knowledge to be relevant. Your body is constantly handling information, constantly affecting your decisions and actions, whether you are aware of it or not. 14

The antidote to dissociation, I believe, is integration; to let the information that your body is (anyhow) handling become valorised and visible. We need it across the board. Not only in activities for students, but in education for educators as well, for all those who already went through Fordism in their education and might struggle to notice which methods

or ideologies they reproduce. The better we become at 'listening' to the signals of our bodies, the easier it is to attune to others. The better we become at attuning, the less the burden lies on students to educate staff and teachers about (for instance) changing social norms.

As yet another academic year rolls around, I wish for a cultural shift, where integrating our felt experiences becomes paramount—for all positions in the academy, and in society at large. Being good at 'discourse' simply isn't enough. Embodied knowledge isn't a 'special-interest' subject for dancers and performers, for professional movers. It shapes our lives at every level, it has for millions of years, and turning away from this fact is giving away agency and power, and a chance to be fully present in—maybe even enjoy—our time on Earth.

NOTES

1 . . . Otherwise known as *Mokum*, Yiddish for 'safe haven', the port-city with a long history of being liberal and tolerant on street level, but with Calvinist and conservative values directing long-term planning.

2 . . . It is the students who yearly push to bring to the curriculum things such as: movement classes; embodied social justice; workshops on accountability; and discussions around racism, ableism, misogyny, and other kinds of oppression based on the body.

3 . . . Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (Lund, SE: Arkiv Förlag, 2017).

4 . . . Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch* (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 2004).

5 . . . Hieronymus Brunschwig, *Das Buch der Chirurgia* (München: Druck und Verlag Carl Kuhn, 1911).

6 . . . Rudolf Fick, *Manual of Anatomy and Mechanics of the Joints* (Bremen, DE: Bremen University Press, 2013).

7 . . . Lawrence Shapiro, *Embodied Cognition* (Oxford: Routledge, 2010), which most notably traces how cognitive science (the study of how humans think) was born out of the theory of computation in the 1950s. i.e. early computers. i.e. calculators. Needless to say, when

you think, decide, move, speak, you are nothing like a calculator.

8 . . . Waiting at a traffic light the other day: a medium-sized dog in a bicycle basket, staring empty in front of themselves. Among all the movements, creatures, all the events the dog could follow with their eyes, they sat perfectly still, spaced out, gazing into nothing.

9 . . . Bessel van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score* (London: Penguin, 2014), on the correlation between unprocessed emotions and a host of contemporary illnesses, also referred to by Elvia Wilk, in this very publication.

10 . . . While the first living organisms appeared on earth 3.7 billion years ago, the first brain-like structures appeared ~ 600 million years from now. That's about 3.1 billion years to live without a brain and presumably do ok?

11 . . . "Over de Gezonde Generatie," <https://gezondegeneratie.nl/>.

12 . . . "Ouderschap is mooi," <https://gezondegeneratie.nl/eerste-1000-dagen/>.

13, 14 . . . "Embodied Learning: A Conversation between Yotam Shibolet, Micaela Terk, & Sheona Turnbull," in *Extra Intra Reader #1* (Amsterdam: Gerrit Rietveld Academie, 2022), 17–29.

- Additive (25)
- Air (41, 123, 47)
- Art practice (29, 143)
- Attention (115, 83)
- Attunement (153, 83)
- Binary (25, 97, 7, 47)
- Blindness (123, 29)
- Brain (7, 123, 97)
- Breath (47, 83)
- Burned at the stake (123)
- Capacity (83)
- Capitalism (7, 115)
- Castration (47)
- Cephalopod (7)
- Christianity (41, 153, 97, 123)
- City (115, 153)
- Club (143, 107)
- Collectivity (143)
- Communication (115, 29, 97, 7)
- Control (115, 97, 123, 47)
- Cosmology (41, 97)
- Crossing over (123)
- Crouch (79, 107)
- Crowds (143)
- Dancefloor (143, 107)
- Death (41, 97, 7, 123, 143)
- Decay (41)
- Desire (79, 107, 123, 47)
- Desire to be touched (83, 107, 7, 153)
- Diagnosis (29)
- Disembodied (115)
- Dissociation (153, 123)
- Dividing (97, 153)
- Divine (41, 123)
- Doubled voice (83)
- Dualism (97, 153)
- Dyke (79, 107, 7)
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- Erotophobia (7)
- Eyes (123, 29)
- Female-sounding (115)
- Flirtation (7, 107)
- Fordism (153)
- Fuzzy edges (7, 83, 97)
- Gendering (115, 25, 7, 47)
- Genitals (47, 7, 79)
- Gestures (143)
- Handheld (107, 123)
- Health (153, 97)
- Heart (97)
- Homosexuality (47, 107)
- How-something-feels (29)
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- In-between (83)
- Inhale-exhale (83)
- Integration (123, 153)
- Intimacy (7, 107)
- Invisibility (41, 97, 79, 29, 47)
- Labour (107, 7, 115, 153)
- Language of the body (29)
- Looking (123, 107, 79)
- Love (7)
- Medical/modern medicine (25, 29, 97, 123, 153)
- Mind (153, 123)
- Movement (83, 97, 143, 107)
- Music (25, 107, 143)
- Narrative (79)
- Neurodivergent (29)
- Non-verbal (29, 143)
- Obscurantism (79)
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- Pandemic (7, 115, 143)
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 Perpetually re-lived (123)
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 To move freely (143, 47)
 Touch (83, 115, 29, 7)
 Trans (25, 7)
 Trauma (123, 7, 79, 97)
 Turn-on (107, 7)
 Underwater (7)

Voice (115, 25, 47, 83)
 We (7)
 Wetness (7)
 Worn thin (79)
 Wrongbeing (97)
 Xenohospitable love (7)

LIVE FEED
 Cleo Tsw

OC — LF 1/8



A figure is established if at least
 one person can say:

• *Synthetics/*

• *Cottons/*

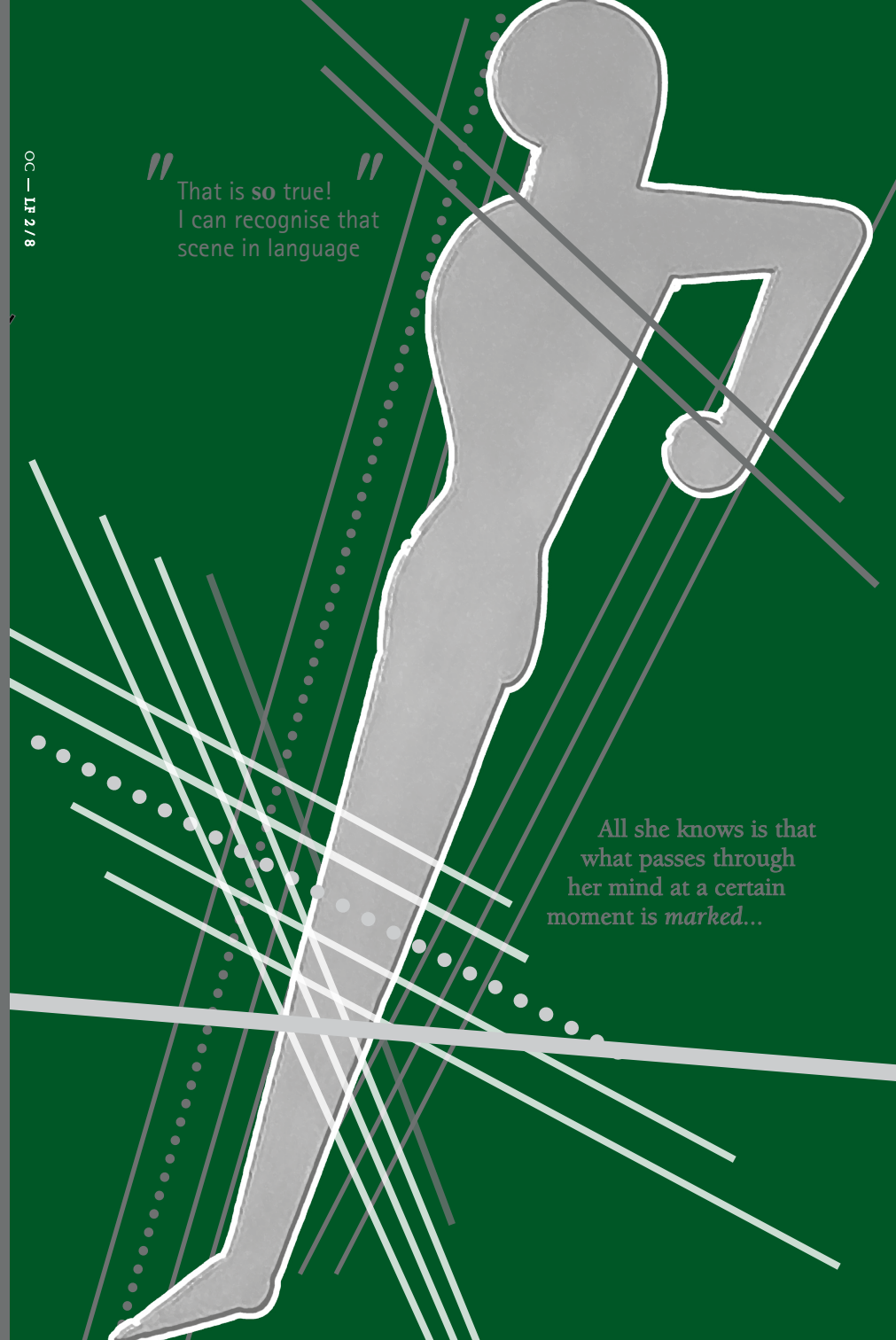
• *Woollens/*

• *Silk*

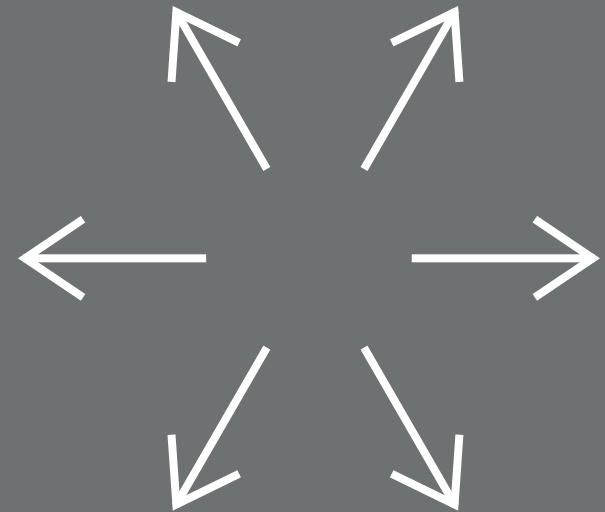
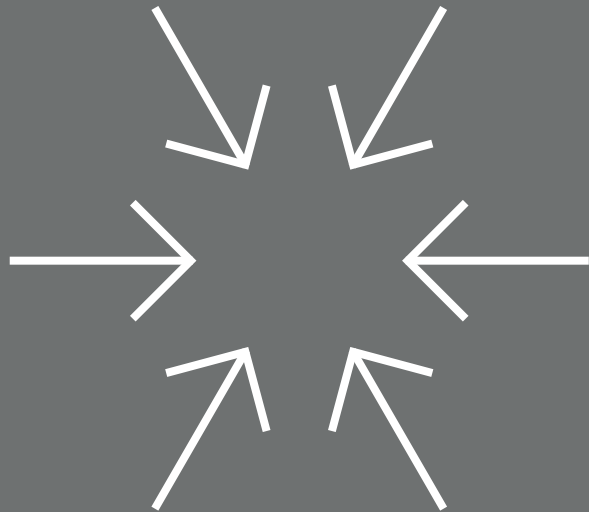
OC — IF 2 / 8

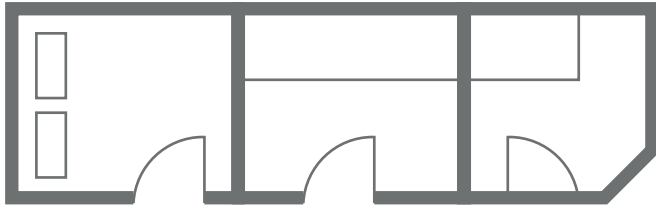
" That is so true!
I can recognise that
scene in language "

All she knows is that
what passes through
her mind at a certain
moment is *marked*...

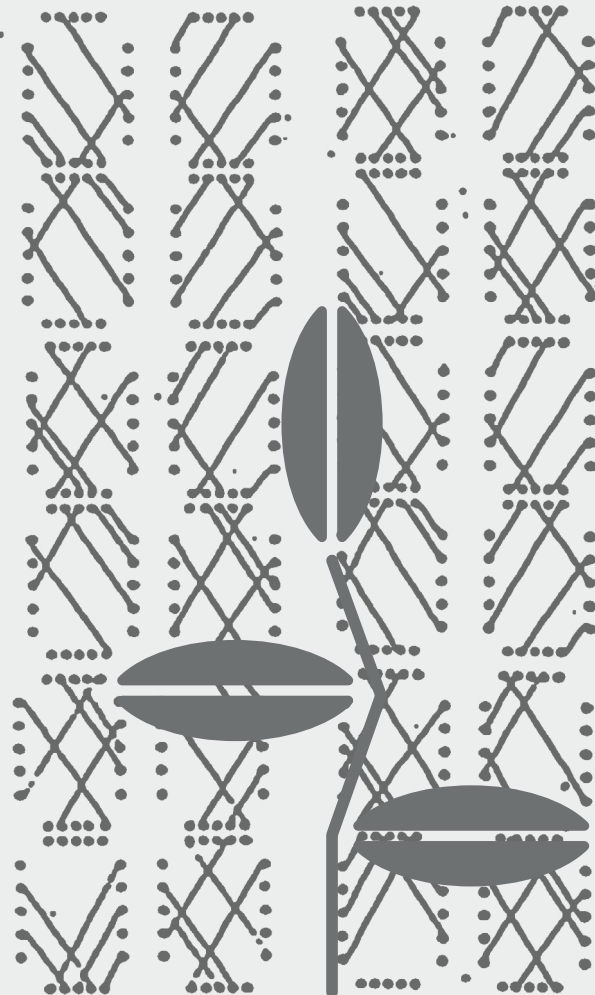


“ That is so true!
I can recognise that
scene in language ”





- . . . like the print-out of a code



C-1E 4/8

"That is so true!
I recognise that
scene in language"

Hand

Wash

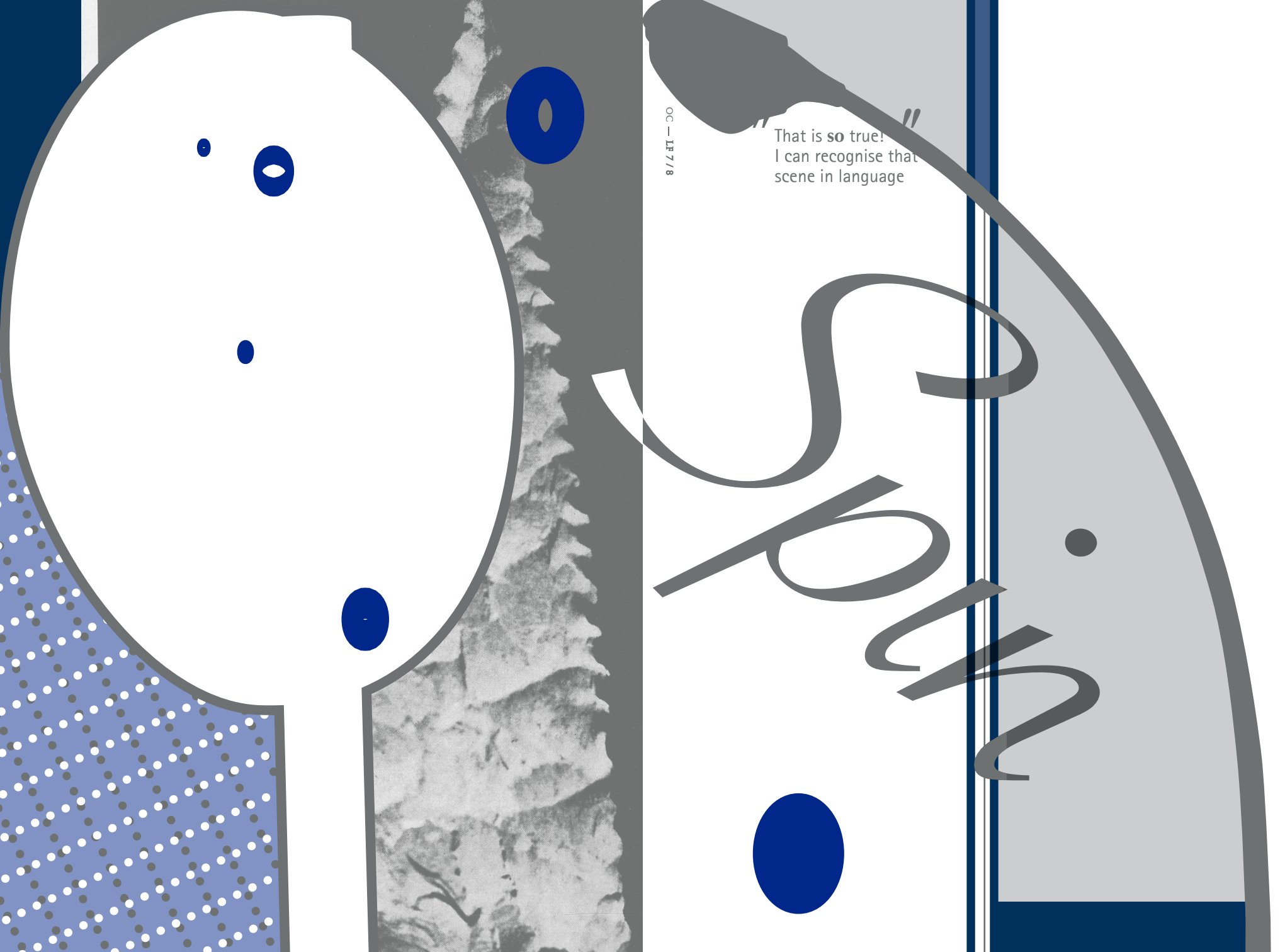
OC — LF 5 / 8

"That is so true!
I can recognise that
scene in language"

Krise

00 — IF 6/8

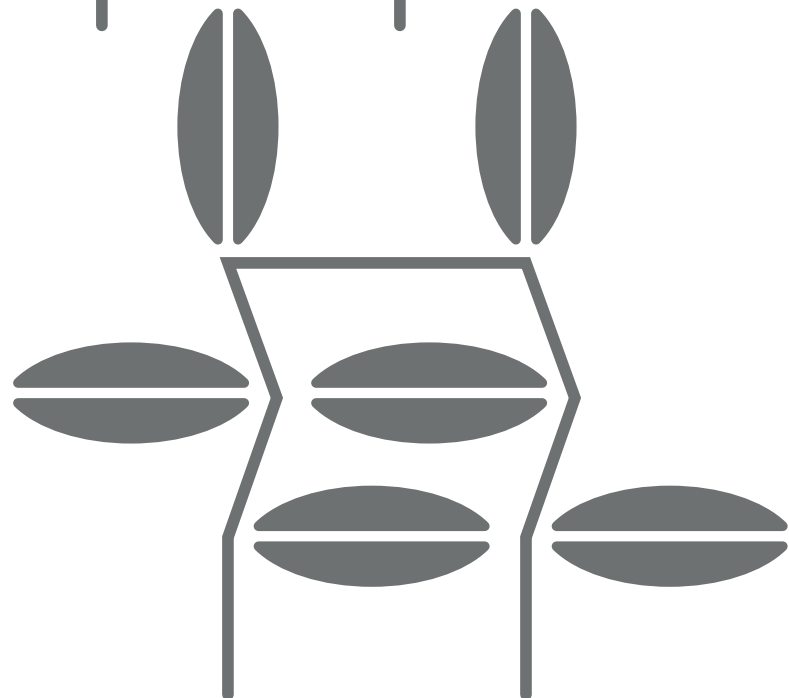
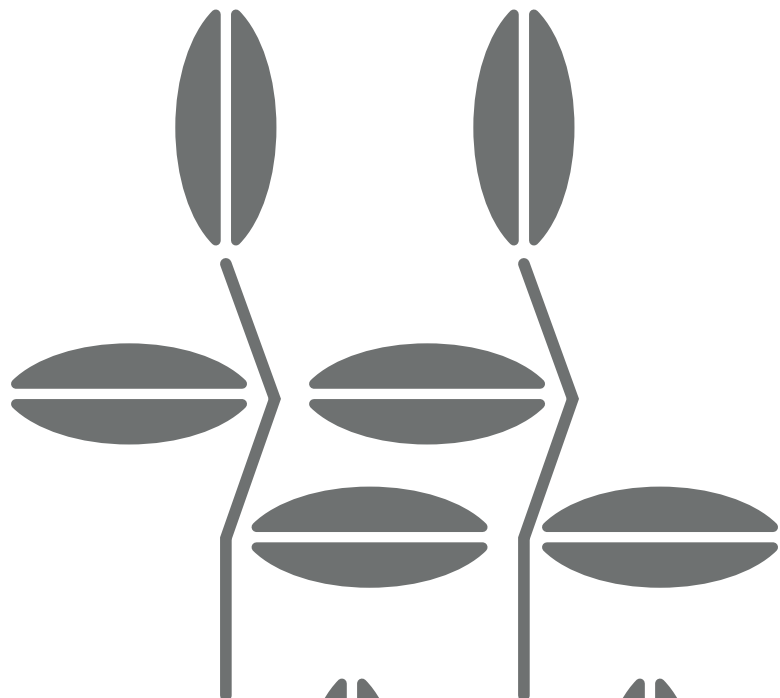
“That is so true,
I can recognise that
scene in language.”



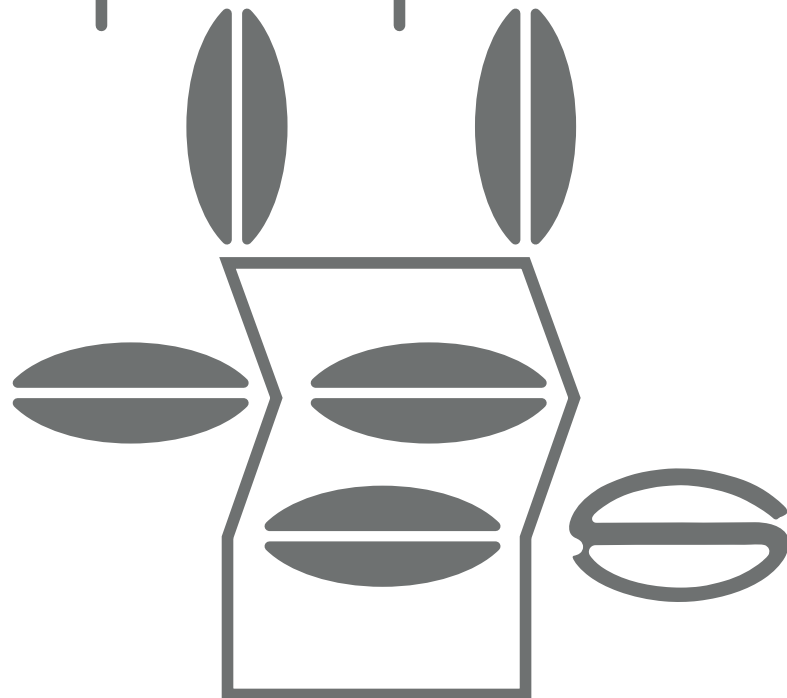
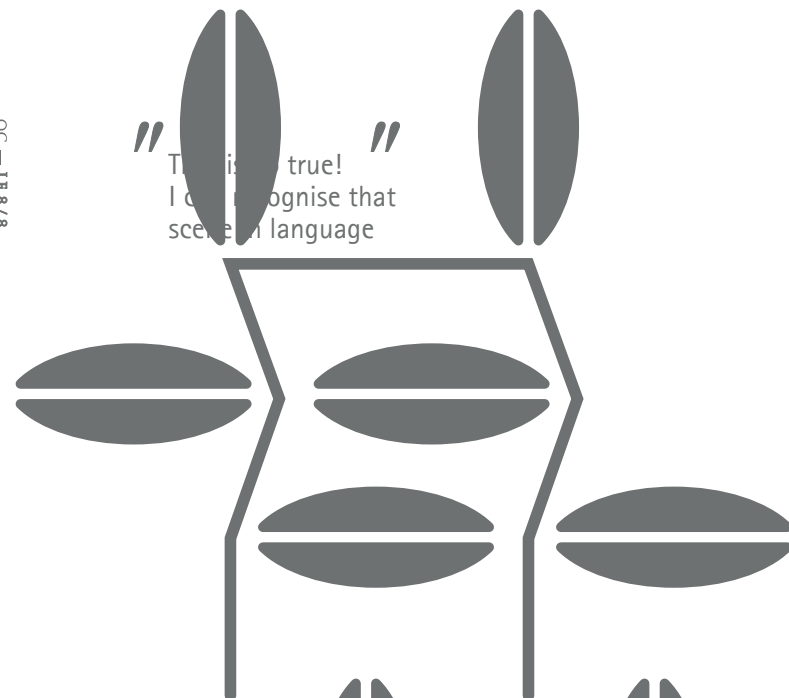
OC - LR 7 / 8

"That is so true!"
I can recognise that
scene in language

soon



OC — LR 8 / 8





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