

Blogroll



The New Inquiry

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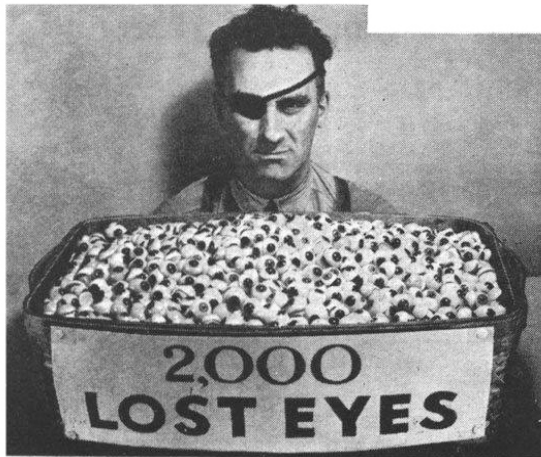
Blogroll

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Editors' Note

A quote from the artist Ann Hirsch goes: “Whenever you put your body online, in some way you are in conversation with porn.” Something similar is true of text: whenever you put your words online, in some way you are in conversation with machines. The effect this has on texts isn’t always plain, but it is readable if you’re looking for it. The harried clickbait that calls out to the algorithms for recognition, the platform constraints that drive the delicate formal innovation on Twitter, the compulsive vulnerability elicited and nurtured by your entire social universe residing in your pocket at all times: All of these represent an entry by the internet into the history of forms of writing. Of course language has always been a kind of technology, written or no, but in this moment of rapid technological development, new forms of fluency in hybrid machine-human texts are starting to come into their own.

Blogs are one of the earliest, and most enduring, new genres of this period. While their heyday may have passed, the advances bloggers made in incorporating the new, free publishing platforms into the forms of writing they did will stand in the historical record as markers of a threshold in human communication. Blogs mark the moment when the means of production and circulation of ideas became a consumer product, and the imperative to generate text for profit began to universalize itself. As postwar Fordism relied on extending ownership of heavy machinery (cars, washing machines, etc.) to the working class, capital has now found it necessary to entrust the light machinery of communication to its captive enemies, too.

Bloggers invented a form of writing that took its lightness seriously, delighting in the relative freedom that came from being responsible for heeding undiscovered rules. Communities of commenters, co-investigators, and interlocutors emerged alongside posts of three sentences and a link, or a multiply-updated excursus on psychoanalytic misreadings of horror films. An entire embarrassing school of blog-philosophy arose. Amid all of this, the New Inquiry formed itself, the fusion of three personal blogs and a counterfeit-venerable name. When we became large enough to launch a magazine and redesign the website, leaving our Tumblr skin behind, we decided to add eight bloggers to our rolls. Why? Unclear now, even in hindsight, but we are very glad we did.

The eight bloggers have since become nine, and all of them have contributed immensely to the New Inquiry’s project, each carving out precise niches while cohering harmoniously with the others, and writing nimbly and profoundly on topics that otherwise would have to travel the length of the cumbersome editorial process before release onto the internet. Our bloggers’ identities are by no means exhausted by their affiliation with us, but taken together they represent in some fashion the outline of what our project entails: The history of forms of consumption, the future of forms of expression, the gendered work of appearances, the record of violence in art, the glimmer of hope in violence. In this issue, we collect some of their most cherished work. **TNI**

Bartleby in the University of California: The Social Life of Disobedience

by AARON BADY

The only truth we can find is the truth of crisis

PROPERTY OF THE REGENTS

I'M interested in thinking about “critique” as disobedience—or disobedience as “critique”—and what that would mean. Disobedience is an interesting concept, because it’s different than opposition or defiance. It can be passive. It can be apathy. It’s not necessarily even an action: the simple absence of obedience has a power all its own, disobedience as inaction or disinterest.

This text is a slightly enriched version of a talk delivered at UC Irvine’s BABEL Symposia Series, April 2013.

Let me start with an iconic example.¹ In Melville’s “Bartleby the Scrivener,” Bartleby is not a revolutionary, nor a striking worker. What he does is not even action, because it’s legible only as negation: he disobeys in the sense that he does not obey, registering his negative preference (his preference not to) and declining to comply with a variety of very reasonable suggestions. If he “preferred to”—expressing a positive preference—he could

1. “Without a doubt, the formula is ravaging, devastating, and leaves nothing standing in its wake. Its contagious character is immediately evident: Bartleby “ties the tongues” of others. The queer words, *I would prefer*, steal their way into the language of the clerks and of the attorney himself...” —Gilles Deleuze, “Bartleby; or, The Formula.”



be dealt with, reasoned with, even represented, because he would have made himself legible, giving the narrator access to his subjectivity.² In this sense, what Bartleby does is also not civil disobedience, which, as Martin Luther King put it, actually displays “the very highest respect for the law,” seeking and even requiring arrest as its realization. Bartleby is not civil: if the civil disobedient subject can be reconciled with and even celebrated by the state and its agents—because, by seeking arrest, they become legible—the narrator is totally flummoxed by Bartleby’s total illegibility. If he could understand why

2. “I submit that an individual who breaks a law that conscience tells him is unjust, and willingly accepts the penalty by staying in jail in order to arouse the conscience of the community over its injustice, is in reality expressing the very highest respect for the law.” —MLK, “Letter from Birmingham Jail”

Bartleby does what he does—if he knew what his preferences were, instead of what they were not—he could relate to him, socialize him, and ultimately be rid of him.

Bartleby’s effect is that he cannot be absorbed into civil discourse; the statement “I would prefer not to” refuses to be made socially legible. In fact, as a disorientingly strange and illegible eruption into normal discourse, it eventually infects even the narrator himself, as well as the other employees; the narrator reports that

“Somehow, of late I had got into the way of involuntarily using this word “prefer” upon all sorts of not exactly suitable occasions. And I trembled to think that my contact with the scrivener had already and seriously affected me in a mental way. And what further and deeper aberration might it not yet produce?”

What I want to draw from Melville’s story is the peculiar communicative efficacy of negative affect, the way

disobedience not only comes to pervade the story itself, but in a way, also produces the story. The narrator, after all, is not a writer, but a kind of copyist among copyists; a safe and unambitious corporate lawyer, living on patronage, and who lacks personality as a function of his office. He strives to copy documents perfectly, without altering them by any affect of personality. He is very good at removing personality, in fact.

When he is presented with *Bartleby*, however—that obstinately present absence of affect—he can no longer be a copyist, because there is *nothing to copy*. He has no choice but to become a writer: he has to invent stories about a character whose apparent subjective core is an absence of subjectivity. Faced with *Bartleby*—a kind of subjective zero point—the narrator not only finds his own humanity cast into sharp relief, but he discovers that he must improvise, act, invent, and in so doing, becomes a person who, for the first time, *also* prefers.

Now, I'm not offering *Bartleby* himself as a model for critical practice, and not only because he starves to death in prison (preferring even not to eat). But “critique”³ is often not very good at breaking away from its object; critique is dependent on its objects, and its objects will define the meaning and possibilities of critique. Foucault's persistent critique of power, for example, helps to produce Foucault as a kind of theory of power, and it's therefore not wholly a misreading of him to see power as omnipresent, all-encompassing, totalizing. In critiquing how power works, he can seem incapable of saying anything other than “this is how power works.”

Closer to home, I find that in trying to critique the corporate university—and the University of California in

particular—anti-privatization efforts compulsively adopt the very language of the corporate university itself, arguing that we better serve the customers of the university if we don't charge them such high tuition, for example, or by arguing that faculty—rather than administrators—better know how to maintain excellence. It's actually very hard to argue the value-proposition of higher education without, in doing so, conceding the point that education is essentially reducible to its value.

I started thinking about this because of what happened in November 2011, when Occupy Cal protesters disobeyed an order to disperse and were beaten by campus police at UC Berkeley. Putting up tents where they did, and when they did—during the day—was not actually illegal, nor was it in violation of any campus regulations; sleeping there overnight would have been, though there's plenty of precedent for that too. Yet when they started to put up tents, they were immediately told that the grassy space they'd chosen was “closed.” Even though it was the middle of the afternoon—and the entire area was thronged with students—they were told that the university was “private property,” and thus, could be opened and closed at the will of the regents.

The specter of the outside agitator was also invoked—particularly by reference to the racialized subject of “Occupy Oakland”—and so the police acted, ostensibly, to protect the infantilized student population from dangerous outsiders. But the perversity of police beating students to protect them is only part of it: the distinction between insiders and outsiders flows out of the fact that the regents' ownership of the university was being expressed as a property right. Instead of a public university, built for and maintained for the benefit of California, as a whole, the campus was being treated like a gated community, defined by the function to exclude, and to be exclusive.

3. “Critique is always a critique of some instituted practice, discourse, episteme, institution, and it loses its character the moment in which it is abstracted from its operation and made to stand alone as a purely generalizable.” —Judith Butler, “What is Critique? An Essay on Foucault's Virtue”

This may not seem strange or unusual, but in terms of the University's constituted relationship to the California public, it is. The UC was legally established as a public trust⁴, which is a very particular kind of public property, a property which is not preserved as land, per se, but as the space necessary to realize the enterprises conducted on it. English common law established the principle that the sovereign held waterways "as trustee of a public trust for the benefit of the people," but only for the purpose of keeping it open to commerce, navigation and fishing. The UC was constituted with the same sense of purpose, on the model of public waterways: the regents of the university—the public's trustees—are given near absolute authority over the university, but only to keep it open to Californians.

The regents' ownership of the campus was never a secret, of course. There are signs on campus declaring "Property of the Regents of the University of California; Permission to Enter or Pass Over is Revocable At Any Time." But Occupy Cal revealed the extent to which that was practically true. Areas of the campus could be declared off limits to certain kinds of people, without deliberation, rationale, or even warning; it was sufficient, simply, to invoke the proprietary right of the Regents (and those who act in their name) to do what they wanted with their property.

I'm not sure whether this counts as "critique," but if it does, it's a very particular kind of critique. "Critique"

4. "In order to preserve this sort of learning "in perpetuity" for the citizens of California, the legislature treated the university as a waterway or public highway and elevated the University of California to the status of a public trust... to specify a set of protections not guaranteed for public lands: autonomy from political interests and private profit, a university space responsive to and responsible for the cultivation of public good, and a re-structuring of the temporality of the university's mandate, ensuring that immediate gains would be weighed in terms of long-term public benefit. In short, the framers of the constitution were uncompromising in their vision of a public education system which nurtured the citizens of today and endured for the students of tomorrow." —Gina Patnaik, "Breaking Trust"

is often synonymous with "speaking truth to power": the critical attitude of the public sphere—the fourth estate—is meant to check state authority, aid the weak and afflict the powerful, and draw the attention of the public to dysfunction or injustice. Modern "criticism" is understood to begin as a response to the absolutist state; Foucault's "What is Critique?" sees a developing art of governance in the 16th century on the one hand, and a developing art of, what he names, "how not to be governed" on the other. This understanding of critique is very specifically about using truth to call power to account; political power must be accountable to law, spiritual authority must be accountable to biblical texts, natural laws must be accountable to scientific method, and so forth. It's the power of the individual to determine her own truth—to "dare to know" as Kant has it—that makes "the enlightenment" the scene in which "modern" European criticism emerges.

However, "dare to know" very specifically does not imply "dare to disobey." Critique attempts to temper power, police it, and school it, but this doesn't make critique a defiance of power; it can as easily be the effort to counsel and improve it. Critique is "both partner and adversary to the arts of governing"; the art of being governed differently, the art of governing government, is not separate from governance, but a relation of privilege within it.

Critique, in this sense, is less about opposing power with truth—and certainly not about negating it—but, rather, a socio-political relation between established authority and the privileged individual, in which power is defined and augmented by truth, which thereby imbues truth with power.

In this genealogy, then, the idea that speaking "truth to power" is resistance becomes less and less clear. Critique is not only a *part* of governance—and vice versa—but both are unthinkable without the other. Critique is actually dependent on power; as power over power, it can

only alter the terms through which power is exercised. Instead of “how not to be governed like that”—which might be expressive of a desire for the absence of governance—critique describes “how to be governed, BUT how not to be governed not like that.”

After all, Kant ends his “What is Enlightenment?” by approvingly quoting Frederick II’s edict “Argue all you want, but obey.” This is the part of this text that flummoxed me when I read it, as an undergrad; shouldn’t speaking truth to power also imply *acting* truth to power? But argument, as *mental* freedom, does not imply or compel freedom to disobey. It might compel the reverse, to counsel power on how to govern better at the cost of acquiescing to being governed. To critique can be to obey: by applying only where obedience is not required, this kind of free speech is just the flip side of power, a kind of supplementary and enabling excess.

NOW, I rehearse this critical genealogy because it presumes a governing authority which actually uses truth to legitimize itself. Critique presumes that an authority uses its power to define truth, and truth to legitimize its power, that its authority is premised on that relationship. To speak truth to such a power is therefore to contest the grounds on which it legitimizes itself, to argue that the truth points towards a different use of power. Truth becomes power, only in that particular sense. Obedience therefore makes sense, in a context where law actually does govern power.

But how does one speak truth to a power that is not dependent on truth?

Last year, I became a connoisseur of a very dull and depressing genre of writing, the various post-mortem documents that UC Berkeley commissioned and produced to investigate how and why police beat students. What’s striking about this genre of writing is that no

one ever knows why the police behaved in the ways they did. It’s a thing that happened, obviously, but no one is ever sure who gave the order, nor does anyone defend it. These reports—which are the closest thing we have to the official truth of what happened—focus on student actions and police re-actions, to make it as clear as possible that while the students were excluded from the area on the authority of the regents, no order was ever given to remove them.

This is not *only* bureaucratic obfuscation, however. In such a situation, we find ourselves confronted by a power that does not justify itself by recourse to truth, does not attempt rationalize its actions. The reverse, in fact, is the case: authority constantly and compulsively disavows its power, refusing to admit or acknowledge that it has acted. It therefore has no reason to justify itself.

The perverse result is that because no actions were taken, no accountability is possible. Chancellors will acknowledge that “mistakes were made,” but by enshrouding the decision-making process in a kind of fog of war—in which everyone is acting on imperfect information in response a time-sensitive crisis—it can be possible, even praiseworthy, for actions to take place without any agency in doing so.

Instead, the governing authority is—both effectively and also quite literally—the force of crisis. The police acted, on that day, because there was a crisis; the chancellor sent the police out there, because there was a crisis; and so on. The only truth we can find is the truth of crisis.

This problem, however, is broadly symptomatic across the system as a whole. No one would deny that the University of California is in a state of crisis; as a baseline assumption about the status quo, and how to think about it, “crisis” is such an uncontroversial proposition that every discussion starts there. It’s also where the discussion effectively ends. If you argue against raising tuition, “crisis”

is the reason why tuition has to rise. If you argue against closing degree programs, or raising class sizes, or laying off staff, or eliminating benefits, or freezing hiring, or any other seasonal austerity measure, “crisis” is the only truth that austerity hawks need. This is why the president of the UC will say things like “a crisis is a terrible thing to waste”; as he said in an interview:

“[M]y view is that some things we probably should have done 10 years, five years, 20 years ago may get done when you have a crisis.” (sfgate, May 2008)

For an administrator with an agenda, a crisis is useful because it not only empowers executive authority to act (especially if one can call on emergency powers), but because it changes the nature of authority. It suspends process and compromise, the possibility of alternatives recede, and the only truth becomes the terms of the crisis itself: in this case, the economic framework by which you can only look at the UC and see a fiscal problem to be eliminated, or the policing framework by which a protest is a disorder to be removed.

In the misty, etymological past, “critique” and “crisis”⁵ originate in the same Greek word, describing a state in which nothing is determined but in which it soon *will* be, a state of immanent change where the possible and the actual bump together. A moment of crisis is a moment where many different outcomes are possible, and which therefore make it possible to think *about* alternative possibilities. In its most optimistic form, then, critique is an address to reality which brings it into crisis,

5. “For the Greeks the term “crisis” had relatively clearly demarcated meanings in the spheres of law, medicine, and theology. The concept imposed choices between stark alternatives—right or wrong, salvation or damnation, life or death. Until the early modern period the medical meaning, which continued to be used technically, remained dominant virtually without interruption. From the seventeenth century on, the term, used as a metaphor, expanded into politics, economics, history, psychology... Applied to history, “crisis,” since 1780, has become an expression of a new sense of time which both indicated and intensified the end of an epoch.” –Reinhart Kosellek, “Crisis”

not only expressing the possibility that things could be different, but making those latent possibilities manifest and apparent.

The modern sense of crisis, however, is rather different. To invoke “crisis” is to declare an emergency situation, yet one in which nothing actually emerges: the threat is that something might change, to which the response must be a reiteration of the status quo. Instead of a moment of immanent critique—in which alternatives become manifest and change is unavoidable—“crisis” makes criticism “untimely,” as Wendy Brown puts it, unnecessary, unwanted, and impossible. Critique is not possible until the crisis has passed.

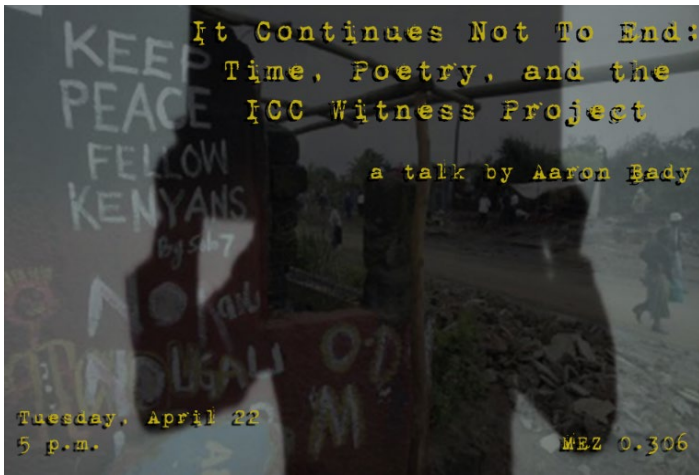
I want to close with two observations, then, about November 8th. The first is that while the initial disobedience of erecting tents was rather small—only several hundred people, at most—the tents were eventually put up, after a very long and painful day, because Sproul plaza just kept filling with students, many, many thousands, by any measure. They also preferred not to disperse. But these weren’t activists; I suspect that most of them identified less with the occupy protest, as such, than were appalled and enraged at the suddenly revealed truth of the university, that they could be trespassers on their own campus, and subject to sudden, senseless violence. To say that disobedience was communicative is an understatement.

Even Chancellor Birgeneau was forced to change his language: his initial reaction had been to condemn the students and faculty protesters for being “not nonviolent,” an absurdism that only a bureaucratic mind could love, and which he retracted days later. But it wasn’t being satirized on the *Colbert Report* that forced him to change his stance, I would suggest, or the outcry expressed in editorials and letters to the editor. It was, ultimately, the social life of disobedience, made manifest when thousands of UC students, faculty, and staff preferred not to *respond* to the crisis, but to be it. **TNI**

“It Continues Not To End”: Time, Poetry, and the ICC Witness Project

by AARON BADY

The ICC Witness Project aims to speak for and with witnesses who have been intimidated into silence



Feet, ums, water, thanks

THE ICC Witness Project is an archive of poems written and posted to the internet throughout 2013; there are over 150 of them now, with 144 titled as numbered witnesses—“Witness #1, Witness #2.”

The “ICC” refers to the “International Criminal Court,” where a prosecution is currently pending against the sitting president and deputy president of Kenya, Uhuru Kenyatta and William Ruto, for crimes against humanity committed in the Post-Election Violence of 2007, three months of wide-spread killing and burning across the

country, that took on ethnic and gendered overtones and left about 1500 people dead, perhaps a million displaced, and countless thousands sexually assaulted. A church that was burned in Eldoret became one of the central images of the violence, killing those who were sheltering inside.



This is the mostly unchanged text of a talk delivered at UT Austin, April, 2014.

The expressed aim of the *ICC Witness Project* is to speak for and with witnesses who have been intimidated into silence. But the ICC Witness Project is not a part of the ICC case, and the poets involved are not "witnesses" in the normal sense. Instead, the project very basically questions who counts as a "witness" and is premised on a radical destabilization of what witnessing mean. As an effort to represent voices which have been excluded from the ICC's truth-making apparatus—modes of subjectivity which cannot be heard in its construction of justice—the term "witness," itself, becomes an index of the many kinds of testimony which do not and cannot achieve official truth status.

(Un)Witnessing (#68)

No, I wasn't there, I swear
on the graves of my mother
and her mother before her.

It was too dark to see them.
I was too far. I have bad eyes.

My ears aren't that good either.
I thought I heard them, but
I could be mistaken?

No no. That money in the account,
that was from the harvest...

Please leave. You're scaring my children.

This is unwitnessing: testimony to the absence of testimony. Or as Witness #144 puts it, "un-witnessing is cooperation in the production of reality in which Uhuru Kenyatta is president. One of these realities will become true: either he will be convicted and cease to be president or he will be acquitted and cease to be the accused."

Witnesses who do not testify are *un-witnesses* because they testify to the official absence of a reality which remains

subjectively true, even if it never reaches truth-making apparatuses like the ICC. I call the ICC a truth-making apparatus, by the way, because as the poems show, there is no way to opt out: because Uhuru Kenyatta is either president of Kenya or international criminal, un-witnessing becomes testimony to for the defense. In place of a constative report of what happened—a statement of what was witnessed—un-witnessing is a performative speech act indicating that nothing *was* witnessed, akin to the silence that follows the sentence: "if anyone can show just cause why this couple cannot be married, let him speak now or forever hold his peace." Silence is forced consent to remain silent. Silence becomes what anthropologist Veena Das calls "poisonous knowledge,"¹ in which containing the knowledge of the violation, in silence, is itself the expression of that knowledge.

The ICC Witness Project began in February, when this BBC article:

The screenshot shows a BBC News Africa webpage. The header includes the BBC logo and navigation links for News, Sport, Weather, Capital, Future, and Shop. Below the header is a navigation bar with links for Home, US & Canada, Latin America, UK, Africa, Asia, Europe, Mid-East, Business, Health, and Sci/Environ. A banner for 'Huggies Little Swimmers' is visible. The article title is 'Claims of witnesses in Kenya ICC trial 'disappearing'' and the date is '8 February 2013 Last updated at 11:43 ET'. The article text begins with 'As Kenya prepares for elections on 4 March and a month later a historic trial at The Hague over the violence that followed the disputed 2007 elections, the BBC's Karen Allen has heard powerful testimony about alleged disappearances of potential witnesses.' A photo of Jane Waruguru is shown with a caption: 'Jane Waruguru's missing husband Maina Diambo is presumed to be dead'. A 'Related Stories' section is also visible.

1. "There was a delicate aesthetic of what could be proclaimed as a betrayal and what could only be molded into a silence. The memories of the Partition were then not in the nature of something gone underground, repressed, hidden away, that would have to be excavated... these memories were very much on the surface." —Veena Das, "The Act of Witnessing: Violence, Poisonous Knowledge, and Subjectivity."

was shared on two listservs, the Concerned Kenyan Writers google-group and the Kenyan Poetry Catalyst google-group. The article concerns the slow-motion collapse of the ICC's case, as its witnesses have been intimidated into silence. As Fatou Bensouda, the chief ICC prosecutor, has complained:

“The scale of witness interference in the Kenya cases has been unprecedented... the intimidation and interference goes beyond individual witnesses themselves and extends to pressures on their immediate and extended families, relatives and loved ones.”

The ICC has little to no provision for witness protection, and since the government of Kenya has actively sought to block the prosecution at every stage, anonymity has been the witness's only real protection. Kenyatta and Ruto are powerful establishment elites: Kenyatta is the son of Kenya's first president, Jomo Kenyatta, and the country's richest man, and Ruto is the successor to Kenya's second president as pre-eminent political leader within the Kalenjin community. In 2007, they were political opponents—and they are accused of fomenting violence against each other's supporters—but the ICC charges gave them a shared interest, so they ran for president and deputy president under what they called the “jubilee” coalition, and last March, they won.

Before the election, about forty poems of what would become the ICC Witness Project had been written and privately circulated on the two listservs, but at that point it was an internal, private dialogue, limited to members of the list. Among those members, however, the poets were publicly known: the poems were titled as numbered witnesses, but they were also clearly identifiable by the email address of the sender. On March 9th, the day Kenyatta was declared the winner, the project went online as an act of protest. Now, however, they were publicly anonymous: no author names and no indications anywhere on the site who was behind it, other than “Kenyan poets, in Kenya itself and in the diaspora.”

The poems that circulated on the listservs are stylistically all over the map. A number of them are structured by what I'd call narrative by subtraction;

Witness #6

I saw nothing,
I heard nothing,
I spoke nothing,
I did nothing.
They walked on by.

Witness #9

I saw nothing,
I heard nothing,
I spoke nothing,
They walked on by.

Witness #9 is the same poem as Witness #6, except one line has been removed, and there are several others that play with this kind of aesthetic. But after the project went online, it takes on a more coherent voice, even as more poets became involved. Now anonymous, collective, a collective voice for the project begins to emerge, what I would characterize as: a ghostly subjectivity of a form of life which is not supposed to exist, and knows it, and which feels itself to be a problem to be solved, but for which no solution is possible.

90 poems were online by the end of March, and another thirty by the end of June, and not nearly so many since. But the project does continue: a new poem was posted last week, and four new poems were posted between the time I taught the text in the fall semester and the time I taught it in the spring. This sense of openness is crucial, as is the manner in which we are forced to read it: we start at the end, and read backwards, into the past (perhaps something like Benjamin's Angel of History). In this way, it not only responds to ongoing events in Kenya, but as events in Kenya go on, so does the project. Since Kenya “continues not to end,” the project cannot come to a close, cannot end its labor.

We need to do a kind of critical work to make this text legible. The ICC Witness Project is a digital project, which uses poetry to perform an intervention into how Kenyan history is told, so I'm going to structure the remainder of my talk by these three frames of reference: the digital, the

historical, and the performative. These frames overlap and bleed into each other, of course, but the structure allows me to give a sense of the different stakes of the project.

First, the digital: *The ICC Witness Project* is a digital artifact, or a digital archive, or a digital project; each of those terms captures an important aspect of what it is, and my inability to settle on only one speaks to the formal innovations which the digital medium enables, which I'll discuss. I'll also place this text within the digitization of Kenyan and African literature more broadly.

Second, the historical. This text is very much of a particular moment in Kenyan literary culture, what I would characterize as the disillusionment of the post-Moi period. When Moi left power in 2002, there was a real burst of enthusiasm around the new beginning for Kenya it was seen to represent, but in both form and content, the poems testify to the deepening repression and violence of the present, what many fear is a return to the past. It also demonstrates a schism that is emerging within the Kenyan literary community: those who hew to an "Africa Rising" narrative of a country on the move—putting its past behind it, and striding optimistically into the future—and those whose sense of the present is of a past that will not stop happening, which continues not to end.

Third, the Poetic, or Performative. Discussions of human rights literature tend to privilege narrative realism, and authenticated legal testimony is perhaps the ultimate form of narrative realism. Poetry *can* be realist and narrative, of course, but I will argue that *this* poetry performs its antagonism towards narrative History by its formal aesthetics—its non-narrative, non-prose form—and by the way its forward movement is chronological without being teleological: time is an oppressively repetitive sequence, not a progression towards resolution or transcendence. But performance allows static time to become an artifact of human expression, malleable and social. So I'll close with a few words on what I'm calling the social life of this poetry: the manner in which a different chronology than

mere repetition emerges from the circulation of these poems as a shared text for performance. These are, ultimately, poems which testify to the forms of human life which cannot be recognized as human, which are available for genocidal imaginations. But as *performance*, the project strives to make such forms of life thinkable and livable, to create community out of atrocity.

I. The Digital

Valorizations of the digital are often ahistorical celebrations of modernity's transcendence of the pre-modern, and often obscure the ways modernity is structured by continuity with the past. The digital is often taken to be another Gutenberg moment. But African literary history reminds us that things are more complicated than that: in Africa, a fetishization of oral literature was a decisively post-print development, a renewal of interest in orality as a cultural alternative to the various print-literatures that were tainted by their colonial origins. It was print culture, in other words, that made "orality" newly important.

Something similar is true for African digital publishing: "online" is not a transcendence of the print form, but a development within it, and made legible as such only by a crisis within print culture itself.

Kenyan literature, for example, is experiencing a literary renaissance right now, and digital media are a crucial part of it.

Binyavanga Wainaina, for example, has been at the center of the the post-2002 proliferation of new Kenyan writing and all of his early writing was born online—including much that would later be published in print—and the viral circulation of his essay "How to Write About Africa" allowed it to reach an audience exponentially larger and for a much longer time than the original *Granta* print run. You can't find it in print even if you want to, though there



is a print version available in Kenya; but everyone's read it online. It's an incredibly influential document; citing it is almost second nature, and it continues to circulate. People still email it to me.

More generally, some of the most interesting and innovative new writing I've seen from Kenya has been online: the *ICC Witness Project*, for one, but also the Jalada writers collective—whose anthology is coming out soon as an e-book—a site called *Brainstorm Kenya*, which just released an important e-book on Kenyan feminisms, #WhenWomenSpeak, and the project which most immediately precedes the *ICC Witness Project* and overlaps with it, the Koroga project, a tumblr series of images and texts.

In a broad sense, I would suggest that the digital has become central to African literary production for many reasons. One is that it allows writers and writers collectives to sidestep traditional literary gatekeepers, a fact that is particularly crucial in places where publishing and academia have become sclerotic and nepotistic, and sometimes, to evade state censorship. But it's also a simple function of economic obstacles like the expense and high start-up costs for print-based publishing.

For example, when I asked one of the *ICC* poets what kind of poetry he read, she answered,

“whatever poets I can find...I grew up on old white men but recently moved my reading to people of colour. The thing is though, it's very hard to get poetry books here. So I mainly rely on blogs and such.

And she named a few, both personal blogs—with both copied and original work—and sites like Poetryfoundation.org.

In this sense, the digital is not “post-book.” Situating this archive within its digitized 21st-century context does require accounting for changes in the textual ecosystem that have occurred over the last few years, but the timeline is not two-dimensional: history is always layered and develops unevenly across geography. To understand *what* the *ICC Witness Project* says that is new—and to frame why it says it *this way*—we have to place that novelty within a specifically African and Kenyan context, where, for example, old white men books are available, but poems by people of color circulate online.

This is the particular “history of the book” that obtains there, so let's move to the historical, historicizing the digital.

II. The Historical

The ICC Witness poems were written and circulate online, but "online" is only meaningful within a textual ecosystem that still gives the printed word a pride of place and that defers to the authority of the authoritative text. The ICC Witness Project's subordinate relation to "the book" is part of what makes it a subaltern form. Precisely because these poems do not aspire to the status of authoritative text, they are not texts that easily accrue legibility, cultural capital, or authority. Anonymous witnesses lack testimonial authority, for one thing, and if "realism" marks discursive claim to some kind of empirical, objective validity, then these poems are, as poems, subjective and decidedly anti-realist.

At the same time, the kinds of texts which *do* accrue legibility, capital, and authority are implicated in the political imperatives of the post-Moi moment, a literary moment dominated by the NGO and civil sector, and by the forms of writing which it produces. The poet and critic Keguro Macharia called this form of writing "Report Realism" and traced the imperative to *report* to the rise of the NGO-industrial complex in post-Moi Kenya.

"Over the past 15 years and more specifically the past ten years or so, Kenyan writing has been shaped by NGO demands: the "report" has become the dominant aesthetic foundation. Whether personal and confessional or empirical and factual or creative and imaginative, report-based writing privileges donors' desires: to help, but not too much; to save, but not too fast; to uplift, but never to foster equality... The believable and the realistic are bounded by NGO narratives and perspectives. And too many writers believe that the only writing worth anything is the believable and the realistic: to be a "committed" writer requires adhering to report realism. Report realism believes in the power of "truth," whether contemporary or historical, with a faith that borders on fundamentalism. In report realism, the truth will set us free."

The first poem in the ICC Witness project deconstructs this mode of realism:

Witness #1

They killed
my

family



MARCH 9, 2013 (6:24 PM)

As the first poem in the series, this sets the tone for the project, not because of what it reports, but because of what it doesn't, and can't. "They killed my family" is a painfully direct report of a horrific event, in painfully simple words. But these four words, three lines, two stanzas, and one poem are such a forced constriction of form to the production of a *report*—the fact that the speaker's family was killed by "them"—that the poem collapses the very discursive structure through which it might signify. It reports everything and nothing, and this is its provocation, which started the project moving. This is the fundamental truth of the witness—and in the broader sense in which "Family" speaks to the dismembering of the Kenyan national family—it reflects the ways intimate violence was also political, and political violence was also intimate. But in reporting what happened it performs the inadequacy of doing so. To the extent that it is true of everyone in Kenya, it is true of no one in particular.

This kind of reality is something which the many commissioned official reports on the Post Election Violence have been unable to address. The Waki commission produced a report which jump-started the ICC prosecution, and a Truth, Justice, and Reconciliation Commission was established to determine what the long-term causes of the violence had been. But these truth-making processes have run their course and accomplished little, beyond producing enormous authoritative reports. The government has barely even bothered to repress them; without a political will to revisit the past, they are meaningless. The TJRC report is, itself, a kind of un-witness. Its recommendations carry the force of law, but the government of Kenya has simply

pretended it doesn't, and ignored it. That becomes the new truth as a result.

But the conclusions of these reports helps produce a sense of history as finished, as settled, and this might be the crux of "report realism," the way it produces a sense of time, the finality of a reality which has been reported on. This is the narrative which Kenyatta and Ruto have taken their electoral mandate to have ratified, the fact that "Kenya is moving on." At his victory, Kenyatta declared that

"This year marks 50 years since the birth of our nation – this is our jubilee year. As the Bible tells us the year of the Jubilee is the year of healing and forgiveness. It is the year of renewal. My brother William Ruto and I were once on opposite sides but we agreed to put our differences aside and come together as leaders to end this cycle of violence and bring enduring peace, this has been our Jubilee journey."

Impunity for perpetrators, however, is barely even subtext; on the eve of the election, Kenyatta told Al-Jazeera, explicitly, that "if Kenyans do vote for us, it will mean that Kenyans themselves have questioned the process that has landed us at the International Criminal Court."

Witness #47, I think, is the poem that most clearly articulates the poetic retort:



1 YEAR AGO

1 NOTES

Witness #47

*"Kenya needs us to work together;
Kenya needs us to move on."
(Uhuru Kenyatta, Kenyan President-elect, March 2013)*

Kenya needs a great many things.
It needs PEV to unhappen:

Those who were killed need to undie, need to
crawl from their graves in solidarity.
Ashes need to burn backwards, float in air,
gently unfuse themselves from wooden church doors
and melted glass windows.

women need to guard their wombs, begin the process
of being unraped, erase their memories
as they become whole, unbirth those children
who were begotten from violence.

It begins with Kenyatta's own words, but in the voice

of the president, the statement of "need" becomes an imperative, a governmental command. Yet the poem highlights the absurdity of this official fantasy: moving on seems to literally require moving *backwards*. Victims are healed by using machetes to re-attach severed limbs, stuffing children back into their wombs, and watching as scattered stones and rubble magically rises to construct houses, which promptly unburn themselves up from the ground.

Note that this magical healing is a burden placed on the victims, a "need" which is a command:

- Those who were killed need to undie
- women need to guard their wombs
- [women need to] erase their memories
- And those IDPs! They need to move

The roadblock to moving on is the victims whose continued existence (as victims) stands as the obstacle to amnesia. And IDPs—an acronym meaning internally displaced persons—remain as the residue of the violence, the mess that has been left over, and which it is the job of the government of Kenya to clean up. Or, in government and NGO speak, "to integrate." However, to integrate IDPs is to solve the problem by making its subjects disappear: as IDPs become the logistical problem of "integrating" them into new communities, the problem is solved when they cease to be IDPs. A report from last year reads, for example, that "Out of the more than 660,000 people displaced, the government considers that over 300,000 or around 47 percent have been 'integrated' in communities across the country." Kenya's progress, then, is measured by the number of IDPs that do not continue as IDPs; Kenya moves on when IDPs move on.

In the reality that statistics don't measure, of course, violence that cannot be construed numerically still exists. What statistics don't measure, to paraphrase, is how it feels to be a problem. There was widespread sexual violence during the PEV, for example, but such violence is not conducive to statistics, and as a result, a focus on statistics

effectively un-narrates the forms of violence which leave their victims alive, especially true when victims are socially stigmatized. The truth often does not set rape victims free, or men who have been castrated or forcibly circumcised, a category of victim for whom public tribunals are particularly ill-suited, and in many cases, an exacerbation of the original violation.

By the final refrain of witness 47, then, "Kenya is moving on," we see the hidden violence of time: the labor of moving on is placed on the shoulders of the victims, whose responsibility it is to erase themselves as victims. As they "crawl from their graves in solidarity," one might say, they have a patriotic duty to not be dead. Yet this un-doing only exacerbates the original violations, a traumatic repetition. As the injunction to move on rehearses each category of victim—killed, raped, displaced—we relive the instant of the violation. To assent to the official fantasy, the dead must rise from the grave like zombies. If you fail to perform the miracle, you are a failed subject.

While poems like Witness #47 directly satirize the Jubilee narrative, many more of the poems describe how it feels to be a problem, speaking from the position of a trauma that can find no public expression. This ghostly non-existence—the feeling of being out of place with the nation narrative, lagging behind as Kenya moves on—gets

expressed in a variety of poems in which witnesses apologize for their existence.

Witness #122 writes "we are sorry for being road-blocks on the highway to national reconciliation."

Witness #49, begins:

*Move on,
They tell me.*

*Why can't you
forgive,
pick yourself up
and move on?*

I'm sorry if I offend you...

And Witness #129 writes

We are very sorry that the president
(and his deputy) were involved
in not committing these crimes:

We are sorry that Wanjiku acted
of her own accord, when she gathered
her children in a burning church;

Reality is, however, more absurd than fiction: on October 25—well after these were posted—K24TV tweeted the following, a quote from an actual ICC witness in court:

Witness: I am sorry if I offended anybody in my appearance in this court. I am sorry. #ICCTrialsKE

This tweet, however, has since been deleted. I re-



member seeing it—as you can imagine, it caused quite an uproar—but in going back into the archive, I couldn't find any trace of it. Instead, it only exists because Shailja Patel, a Kenyan poet, re-tweeted it, and because of various other commentaries and exclamations of horror and disgust. The voice of that witness, such as it is, can only be heard through the fossil of its suppression.

I want to close, now, by talking about how poetry becomes performance, how texts becomes vital. If the project begins with the genocidal imagination that turns people into problems, victims into numbers, and statecraft into violence, the poetry achieves its goal when it turns textual reports into lived subjectivity. A crucial part of the project, then, is what happens *after* it has been written, the modes of circulation by which the poetry works its way into the social life of the nation.

III. The Social Life of Poetry

Officially, the poets in this project are anonymous, with some limited exceptions. Within the archive proper, however, anonymity is an important fictive component of the project. I use the word “fictive” because it involves a suspension of not of disbelief, but of knowledge. This seems to have applied to the poets themselves; as one told me (but many said something similar):

“part of the mental model of preserving the anonymity of some of the writers has actually made me ‘forget’ (at least, temporarily) who wrote what ... looking at the older email threads has revealed the poets again, but I know there are times I’ve looked at the project and failed to recognise even my own voice”

As this poet acknowledges, there exists a relatively clear record of who wrote what, in hundreds of inboxes, including mine. I have access to many of the original emails, because I’ve been a member of the CKW google-group since last July. But it’s easy to pierce the anonymity of the

process, because it wasn’t very anonymous, originally. Anonymity was added in, after the fact, at the precise moment when Kenyatta and Ruto were declared the winners of the election, when the poetry went online. The effect was to take a digital dialog between poets who know each other, and are fairly well known, and to turn it into a single first-person plural sequence, voiced by a national subject who witnessed the violence, in the broadest sense of the word. As one poet put it,

“anonymity allows us to be a collective of poets writing beyond whatever categories of difference ostensibly divide us. I’d like us to think of how our collective art can provide a space and method for being together as Kenyans.”

Anonymity de-individualizes the poets whose names might mark them as less Kenyan than Kenyan; as with most Kenyans, the poets all have names which activate stories about ethnicity and gender, which would tempt the reader to read them in particular ways: Male Muslim, Kikuyu woman, etc. Anonymity removes that temptation; in practical terms, it enables a form of sympathetic identification that ethnic and gender marks could preclude. To go back to the first poem, “They killed my family,” a Kalenjin whose family was killed by Kikuyu can identify with a Kikuyu whose family was killed by Kalenjin. And any Kenyan who felt that post-election violence killed the Kenyan national family—a common way to construe it—could feel implicated in the poetry.

Put differently, when the poetry is voiced anonymously, it speaks a national subjectivity defined only by the experience of witnessing PEV, and by how it feels to be a problem, the problem of being forced to do the impossible, to cease existing.

I’ve taken my title from Witness #97, which reads:



12 MONTHS AGO

Witness #97

I am tired
and it continues not to end

My talk is almost over; if you've been watching the clock, then be cheered: it will only continue not to end a little longer.

But as the experience of academic talks often shows us, time can be labor. The poets I've talked to are exhausted. The election is over, the TJRC is over, the ICC case might be over, and the Jubilee narrative insists that any hope of justice or reparations for the victims is over. Closure is officially mandated from on high, and especially because the election seems to represent a kind of broad, apparent acceptance of the status quo, across much of Kenyan society, it also represents a way in which the Kenyan "family" has been killed, metaphorically; one poet described wanting to "divorce" Kenya, but being unable to do so.

In this sense, the openness of the form reflects the refusal of the wound to close on its own: each poem is an instant in time, but they do not resolve into a story, only an interminable unresolved and plural present. There is no closure or resolution immanent to the text itself.

There is, however, a progress narrative that you can tell about the poems as they circulate. These poems were performed at World Cafe at the Hague, on the eve of a trial hearing, and a version was performed at the Storymoja festival in Nairobi; some of the poets, I know, are planning another performance. These performances are acts of world-making, imaginations of community. One of the poets involved in the performance told me that:

"I cannot, now, think of this poem without thinking of @Zinduko's choreography (unrecorded) of its performance. some of the poems you're interpreting are now kind of "muscle memory," associated with spaces of rehearsal and sites of performance (houses, theaters, gardens, museums)"

I've heard more than a few variations on this sentiment. The poems have become a common text, to be adapted and used, re-set, re-interpreted, and re-circulated (something which the internet particularly facilitates). As texts they testify to the injustice which has

occurred. But as spaces of performance and association, they become public imaginations of community, new ways of performing Kenyanness through witness and solidarity. As performed—and as the performances are witnessed—they testify to the *un-un-witnessing* of the many Kenyans who have been un-witnessed. They demonstrate that others also remember, and they help to produce a different common sense than the official narrative of Kenya on the move; PEV becomes something that binds Kenyans together in structures of intimate relations, rather than the structures of negative ethnicity and misogyny which make some forms of like killable, un-grievable.

Finally, in the context of an increasingly repressive media atmosphere in Kenya, an important part of the project has been to test the waters and see if such things could still be said. The Moi years were a period of violent repression, and his departure twelve years ago was to mark a change. With Kenyatta's presidency, it's far from clear that that is still the case; government harassment of journalists and activists is both official and bureaucratic and seems to be escalating. As one of the poets put it, "Suddenly, for the first time in a long time, we couldn't assume we still officially possess the freedom to speak. The ICC Witness project is a way to take—and test—that freedom."

After all, if free speech, political association, and the right to assemble to demand redress of grievances are fundamental civil rights, they are also, always, only a promissory note, up until the check is cashed. In that sense, while the ICC Witness poems *individually* attempt to recall and remember the moments of past trauma, and to testify to stuck-ness of the present, the project, as a whole, actually is a project of moving forward, through the work of calling into existence a Kenya where such things can be remembered as something that will not continue to happen.

Thank you. **TNI**

There is no such thing as “The Court of Public Opinion” (but maybe there should be).

by AARON BADY

If public opinion were a court, then we could, and should, have a conversation about what can be admitted into evidence. But it is not.



THERE is no such thing as The Court of Public Opinion. There is no such thing as The Court of Public Opinion.

There is no such thing as The Court of Public Opinion. When people use the phrase, they strongly imply—even outright state—that newspaper articles, op-eds, “litigation by hashtag,” and general opinion-having by the unwashed masses constitutes a kind of parallel legal system in which “mob justice” is meted out by “villagers with torches.” In the Court of Public Opinion, they believe, “the one-eyed

man with the most Twitter followers is king,” and all the checks and balances of law and order are suspended:

“In the Court of Public Opinion there are no rules of evidence, no burdens of proof, no cross-examinations, and no standards of admissibility. There are no questions and also no answers. Also, please be aware that in the Court of Public Opinion, choosing silence or doubt is itself a prosecutable offense...the Court of Public Opinion is what we used to call villagers with flaming torches. It has no rules, no arbiter, no mechanism at all for separating truth from lies. It allows everything into evidence and has no mechanism to separate facts about the case from the experiences and political leanings of the millions of us who are all acting as witnesses, judges, and jurors.”

If you say the phrase “The Court of Public Opinion”

enough times, one might be persuaded that it exists. But there is no such thing as “The Court of Public Opinion.” There is no such thing as “The Court of Public Opinion.”

All the quotes above are from Dahlia Lithwick, who wrote a piece for Slate called “Woody Allen v. Dylan Farrow: The Court of Public Opinion is now in session.” In it, she was nice enough to praise the essay I wrote on Sunday, while vigorously disagreeing with my opening line, in which I wrote:

“This is a basic principle: until it is proven otherwise, beyond a reasonable doubt, it’s important to extend the presumption of innocence to Dylan Farrow, and presume that she is not guilty of the crime of lying about what Woody Allen did to her.”

She has a point: there is something perverse in using legal terms like “presumption of innocence” in a non-legal context. But that was my point: I wanted my reader to jump to the conclusion that they were reading a sentence about Woody Allen—the person who, once, could plausibly have been charged with a crime—and be startled to discover that they were not, that I was asserting the parallel right to be taken seriously on the part of the accuser. I wanted my reader to come to think about the ways we automatically give one side of the dispute the benefit of the doubt—the way “We don’t know what happened in that attic” becomes a mantra—even while presuming that kind of ignorance requires us to dis-credit the story that Dylan Farrow has maintained, consistently, for over two decades. To presume that “we don’t know,” we must un-know what Dylan has said. To create the façade of our ignorance, we must ignore her.

People like Lithwick like to proclaim a vast and all-encompassing ignorance on the part of everyone as to what really happened, a massive vortex of uncertainty in which no one knows anything. “You are entitled to your opinions about what happened between Allen and Farrow in 1992,” Lithwick writes, but you are not entitled to your own facts: “these are opinions and inferences, not ‘evidence.’”

This is true. I don’t know what happened, because I wasn’t there. But do you know who *does* know what happened in that attic twenty years ago? Dylan Farrow. She was there. And her testimony is credible.¹ You are not entitled to pretend that you know what happened in that attic, but you *are* entitled to think that Dylan knows, because she does know. You are entitled to credit her statement with the force it deserves. You are entitled to listen to her statement and call it evidence.

This is the rather simple fact that Lithwick obscures when she writes that my first line “sets up readers to pick sides without hearing all of the actual evidence.” But she has it backwards. *Dylan Farrow’s statement is evidence*. It’s first-hand witness testimony, the single most credible source of information about what happened. I’m not saying we should treat her statement as unimpeachable or sufficient or iron-clad. But we should treat it as what it is, credible and damning. And unless we have reason to doubt her—and so far, we do not—we should respect the fact that it paints a very damning picture.

I’m not interested in punishing Woody Allen. I have no power to do so, and I didn’t produce any evidence against him or pretend that I have any. Dylan Farrow did that, and she’s a grown woman with her own choices and agency. It’s on her. All *I* have done—and all any of us can do—is listen to her, and respect what she said.

It is all the more important to do this, moreover, because there is no such thing as “The Court of Public Opinion” (There is no such thing as “The Court of Public Opinion”). Lithwick talks about “villagers with torches”; I see no torches. She claims that we are participating in what is “essentially a barroom brawl”; I think that’s a remarkably strange way to describe what is happening, giv-

1. Meanwhile, Woody Allen denied ever going into the attic space at all, until his hair was found there, and then he suddenly admitted that actually he had been in the attic. It doesn’t “prove” anything, but please, tell me more about the inconsistencies in Dylan’s testimony.

en the absence of pugilistic drunks. She uses phrases like “Mob justice” but I would put to you that there is no mob in history less threatening than a collection of tweets and retweets.

That said, I find Lithwick’s reaction fascinating, because it hinges on two assumptions. First, there is a deeply anti-populist strain to her reasoning, the idea that people are basically irrational. She constantly comes back to the assertion that the vox populi is all vox but no brain, talking about “the one-eyed man with the most Twitter followers” being king, and psychologizing our “personal opinions” as “an (understandable) outpouring of rage and blame.” But these are the sorts of thing that a person who doesn’t really use twitter would say about it. Stephen King, for example, has over 300,000 followers, but when he called Dylan Farrow a bitch, his followers told him to go fuck himself, and he did. And the idea that only courts can think reasonably—that the rest of us are just wildly spinning fountains of psychopathology—is an odd thing for a person to claim in an opinion column, especially when she grants to herself the loftier wisdom to see and to judge our failings (and especially when she opens her op-ed by talking about how courts get it wrong constantly). She can assert and believe that the democratic mass is emotional and hysterical, and she is entitled to her opinions. And I am entitled to believe the reverse.

The much more strange assumption, however, is that Woody Allen’s good name is a kind of property that he both possesses and has an inalienable right to retain, something which should not be taken away from without proper due process. This is the only thing he stands to lose, after all; since the statute of limitations applies, the worst case scenario is that “the public” will come to the conclusion that he’s a scum-bag and a pedophile, and say so, and then they might not go and see his movies as much as before. Or something. Given the absence of torches, brawling mobs, or any kind of process by which anything at all would happen to Woody Allen as a result

of this whole thing, I am left to suggest that Lithwick prefers British libel laws over the America standard of evidentiary proof, possibly without realizing. To suggest that Dylan’s testimony obscures “the actual evidence,” she must presume that Dylan’s statement does not, in and of itself, constitute evidence.² Is Woody Allen entitled *not* to be considered a sexual predator? Is a man’s good name something that one woman’s first-hand testimony should not be allowed to impeach?

I don’t think so. But I think Lithwick agrees much more with me than she realizes; she is opposed to the “nonlegal deployment of a legal notion” and so am I. The difference is that we disagree about where this is being done. She thinks that Dylan’s statement is not evidence, and that crediting it with evidentiary standing obscures the other evidence; I think that trying to draw sharp lines between “opinion” and “evidence,” in this way, is a “nonlegal deployment of a legal notion.” If public opinion were a court, then we could, and should, have a conversation about what can be admitted into evidence. But since it is not, since there is no such thing as “The Court of Public Opinion” (There is no such thing as “The Court of Public Opinion”), we should be—and are—free to draw our own conclusions.

Freddie DeBoer made a different kind of argument a few days ago, first in the comments and then at his (feverishly updated) website, under the title “everything about the criminal justice system is political.” Freddie’s a smart guy—and he’s written some stuff that I really like—but he’s also prone to a kind of myopia that I think is in full and glorious flower here: the ability to utterly transform the words

2. Given the absence of torches, brawling mobs, or any kind of process by which anything at all would happen to Woody Allen as a result of this whole thing, I am left to suggest that Lithwick prefers British libel laws over the America standard of evidentiary proof, possibly without realizing. To suggest that Dylan’s testimony obscures “the actual evidence,” she must presume that Dylan’s statement does not, in and of itself, constitute evidence.

of the person he’s criticizing into a bizarre and unrecognizable parody of itself (After quoting the section of my essay in which I wrote the phrase “though I could be wrong,” for example, DeBoer observes that the essay is “very typical of his great certitude”).

That said, Freddie’s argument is worth taking seriously—if you can look past the various points at which he postures as *The Last Honest Man* on the Internet—because he makes the inverse claim as Lithwick’s, it seems to me: she argues that the difference between Real Court and Gossip Mob Justice is absolute and fundamental, while he argues that there is no difference at all, that it is wrong-headed to trust the division between public opinion and the legal system, citing the famous Central Park jogger case, recently the subject of a Ken Burns documentary:

“The Central Park jogger case involved a rush to judgment for a sex crime, one where injustice was abetted and deepened at every turn by the utter certainty of those in the public and the media that the accused were guilty. The notion of a firewall between the public outcry about the case and its actual prosecution collapses completely in the course of the Central Park jogger story. Voices from many different perspectives within that case confirmed what should have been apparent at the time: that the public demand for justice influenced the legal case at every turn, putting pressure on politicians who put pressure on detectives and prosecutors for a swift conviction. “You can only imagine the pressure the police were under to solve the case and solve it quickly,” says one interviewee. In the beginning of the documentary, someone calls the case a proxy war. It was a proxy war carried out in the courtroom, and public perception of the defendants’ guilt undoubtedly affecting the case in myriad ways.”

Freddie thinks this is a useful lens through which to view the Woody Allen affair, that “this basic dynamic plays out in the American legal system writ large”:

“The notion of a clear line between politics and the criminal justice system is not supportable once you are minimally exposed to the actual reality of how that system works. Talk to almost anyone involved in criminal law, particularly in major cities. Talk to a public defender in a big city. Talk to a legal reporter. Read books about the rise of the Giuliani era in New York. Panic about crime creates the political and social conditions that cause aggressive policing and prosecution, which given the reality of this

country’s caste system, inevitably hurts poor people of color more than others. Cycles of rising prison populations and tolerance for aggressive policing are directly and unambiguously the product of public perceptions of crime. The legal system is an inherently political entity. The idea of a clear division between public opinion and the judicial process cannot withstand even minimal scrutiny.”

Lithwick knows that rape culture is a thing, but wants us to respect the great firewall that protects people accused of crimes from a democratic mass that can’t be trusted; DeBoer, on the other hand, thinks that this great firewall is a total fiction, erected to obscure the fact that the entire carceral apparatus is a political arm of an oppressive state, one that hides its white supremacist functioning behind a veil of legal process.

The problem is that DeBoer doesn’t seem to think that



rape culture is a thing, though as with Lithwick, DeBoer and I agree more than he wants to admit. I think he's right that our legal system uses a pretense of objectivity to give legitimacy to a carceral apparatus that basically functions to keep our (mostly non-white) underclass under various kinds of violent and repressive surveillance. White Supremacy exists, and we are infected by it, through and through. But I also think our juridico-political system functions to keep our female underclass under a different kind of violent and repressive social control, by creating the "rape victim" as a class of witness who must be supported by the testimony of real witnesses, like men or Hard Data, for example, and by establishing the broad fiction that sexual violence does not exist until proven in court. We live under the fiction that men are not committing sexual violence against women, constantly—a fiction that women who keep silent do a great deal of work to maintain—and while only a stunningly large minority of women will actually be raped in their lifetime, every woman will have experienced the experience of being "put in her place," often by the implicit threat of sexual violence (even if it's only the latent threat). The fact that being black and being a woman are two different ways to be put in your place—violently or with only the latent threat of violence—and that the criminal justice system is deeply imbricated with the politics of both, however, does not mean that convicting Woody Allen in the court of public opinion will have the end result of sending black men to jail, as DeBoer strongly but ludicrously implies (and not only because there is no court of public opinion). This case is as lily-white as Woody Allen's New York City, and the comparison can only be misleading: the people whom our justice system most pervasively and comprehensively refuses to serve (who are appropriate to this case) are the victims of sexual violence.

But the real problem is that both DeBoer and Lithwick seem to agree that mob justice is running amok, especially on twitter. DeBoer writes that "The expectation on social media now is that any discussion of due process

is tantamount to being an apologist for rape, and the social punishment is immediate and severe." This is nonsense. It's true that twitter is a place where one cannot call Dylan Farrow a bitch without being told to go fuck yourself; it's also true that DeBoer, who is not on twitter, doesn't know what he's talking about when he makes "social media" out to be a place where mob justice rules. There seems to be a growing consensus among Serious and Sober Media People that twitter feminists are the greatest public threat the republic has faced in years, but it's all a lot of nonsense; no one is being lynched here, and it's downright ridiculous to pretend that social media is a seething cauldron of violence. Plus, let's be clear about one thing: Woody Allen is going to go on living comfortably, making his movies until the day he dies, and if Freddie DeBoer has a theory for how even an imaginary twitter consensus that Woody Allen assaulted his daughter will end up harming black people, I suspect it involves underpants gnomes.

And there is this: maybe a Florida prosecutor will think twice next time she considers the murder of a black male to be a non-event, thanks to the fact that broad public outcry at the fact that George Zimmerman was not charged—outcry that primarily occurred on "social media"—made the name "Trayvon Martin" into a symbol for our justice system's embedded white supremacy, and the fact that there are people that don't like it. So who knows. Maybe if Woody Allen becomes a public symbol for the fact that men sexually assault women and girls constantly—and that we, as a society, prefer to live in denial about it—then maybe a few more women will feel supported enough not to stay in their place, out of fear. Maybe fewer men will think sexual assault is a victimless crime.

Who knows. Frankly, I am too depressed to be optimistic. But I do feel strongly about this: if public outcry at the fact that racial and sexual violence persistently goes unpunished is "mob violence," then we could do with a lot more of it. I'm with the toxic twitter mob. Or as I like to call it, "the democratic public." **TNI**

Serving the Rich

by CHRISTINE BAUMGARTHUBER

The meek shall inherit the earth—if the mighty don't consume it first

ONE midsummer evening in 1947 a Seattle policeman named Bill Hill entered a steak-eating derby. He decided this on a whim. His great appetite, he figured, made him a formidable contestant. In little more than an hour he wolfed down seven steaks and chased them with a strawberry sundae. When the derby official declared him the victor he blushed and said: “I could have eaten more, but I didn’t want to show off.”



“What good can the great gloton do w’ his bely standing a strote, like a taber, & his noll toty with drink, but balk up his brewes in ye middes of his matters, or lye down and slepe like a swine. And who douteth but ye the body delicately fed, maketh, as ye rumour saith, an unchast bed.”

—Sir Thomas More

"If there is anything sadder than unrecognized genius, it is the misunderstood stomach. The heart whose love is rejected — this much-abused drama — rests upon a fictitious want. But the stomach! Nothing can be compared to its sufferings, for we must have life before everything."

—Honoré de Balzac



Emperor Vitellius could not restrain himself from devouring the meat placed on altars as religious offerings.

"If the dinner is defective the misfortune is irreparable; when the long-expected dinner-hour arrives, one eats but does not dine; the dinner-hour passes, and the diner is sad, for, as the philosopher has said, a man can dine only once a day."

—Theodore Child, *Delicate Feasting* (1890)

Officer Hill's sense of just how far to take his gluttony perhaps owes more to his country's recent involvement in a world war than simple modesty, slogans endorsing game self-denial—*I'm a patriotic as can be—and ration points won't worry me!* and *Do with less so they'll have enough!*—likely still echoing in his ears. Had Hill lived 50 years earlier, however, and had he something more than a public servant's salary at his disposal, he may well have had shown less restraint than he did.

The well-to-do today jog, spin, fast, purge, slice and suction themselves into slim lines and supple contours; but obsession with remarkable geometry didn't always occupy their minds. To the voice that pesters people of modest means when reaching for a second slice of cake or the last lamb chop the well-to-do of yesteryear paid little attention. Conscience seldom stayed the bejeweled, fork-clutching hand. Captains of industry, men of business, women of fortunes, ladies of renown, magnates, prelates, the great and the good—when they dined they brought appetites as vast as their wealth; and like that wealth, those appetites never seemed diminished.

That the rich ate in grand style and quantities comes as no surprise. History tells of Roman emperors who gorged from midday to midnight on the tongues of song birds and the bladders of fish and the soft, pink teats of heifers. Later kings and queens proved as voracious as their imperial forebears, as did prosperous merchants, burghers and other commoners. Anyone who had money made a show of it at table. A wealthy late 14th-century Englishman's ordinary meal consisted of three courses, the first featuring seven dishes, the second five and the third six. On festive occasions the number of dishes increased to nine, eleven and twelve, making for some thirty to forty plates of food in all. And this for a man of middling fortune!

Those with deeper pockets wedded spectacle to surfeit. One winter's night in 1476 the fabulously

wealthy Florentine Benedetto Salutati hosted a banquet. He spared no expense. A first course of petite pine-nut cakes, gilded and doused in milk and served in small majolica bowls greeted guests. Eight silver platters of gelatin of capon's breast followed. Next came twelve courses of various meats representing the bounty of barnyard and forest: great haunches of venison and ham, a bevy of roasted pheasants, partridges, capons and chickens, all accompanied by thick slabs of blancmange. Fearing that his guests might weary of this parade of animal flesh, Salutati ushered in two live peacocks, their breasts pinned with silk ribbons and their feet affixed to silver platters. From their beaks curled tendrils of incense. Then came the *pièce de résistance*: a large covered platter, also of silver. When Salutati's attendants lifted its lid, out flew a flock of birds.

For all their inventive excess, the regal feasts of prosperous commoners could not match those of true royalty. England's Henry VIII, for example, boasted an appetite as invariable as it was insatiable. His favorite dishes he ordered to be brought to him, even when he journeyed abroad. Before visiting France in 1534, he dispatched a communiqué across the Channel. "It is the king's special commandment," it read, that all of the artichokes "be kept for him."

Other monarchs had their gustatory quirks. Soup France's Louis XIV slurped to the point of chronic diarrhea, and gluttony overtook him at his wedding feast to such a degree that he ate himself impotent (much to his bride's chagrin no doubt). Even the Revolution did little to discomfit the royal belly. So ravenous was the restored king Louis XVIII that attendants had to supply him with pork cutlets between meals.

The distaff side matched their male counterparts bite for bite. Catherine de Medicis, the Italian-born wife of France's King Henry II, regularly sickened herself on roast chicken and heaps of *cibrèò*, a thick Florentine ragout of rooster gizzard, liver, testicles and comb mixed



"There Squire went on to lament the deplorable decay of the games and amusements which were once prevalent at this season among the lower orders, and countenanced by the higher: when the old halls of castles and manor-houses were thrown open at daylight; when the tables were covered with brawn, and beef, and humming ale; when the harp and the carol resounded all day long, and when rich and poor were alike welcome to enter and make merry."

—Washington Irving, *Old Christmas* (ca. 1819)

Joseph Stalin, it was reported, would become "very cantankerous" if served a substandard banana.

“The farmer is not a man: he is the plow of the one who eats the bread.”

—Georges Bataille, *Theory of Religion* (1973)

“I went into the workhouse on Sunday last (April 30) after church . . . I asked them [the inmates] how they lived, whether they had sufficient [food] . . . they said, that if they could be allowed four ounces more bread three times a week, which was the day in which they had their pea-soup, they should have all they could wish for.”

—*The Parish and the Union; Or, The Poor and the Poor Laws Under the Old System and the New* (1837)



with beans and egg yolks and served on toast. Britain’s Queen Victoria too suffered unremitting peckishness. When Lord Melbourne, one of her ministers, advised her to eat only when she was hungry, she replied, “I am always hungry.”

Subjects expected their sovereigns to be hungry. Power rested on conspicuous excess. Abstemiousness occasioned distrust. In 888, Guido, Duke of Spoleto, a contender for the throne of the Frankish kingdom, found his bid derailed by his small appetite. Quipped the archbishop of Metz, one of Guido’s critics: “No one who is content with a modest meal can reign over us.”

Keen to emulate their antecedents, new money ate as voraciously as old. This was no more true than in nineteenth-century United States, where it seemed anyone who struck gold spent it on lavish refection. The American self-made millionaire, James Buchanan Brady, better known as “Diamond Jim,” exemplified Gilded Age excess, breakfasting daily on beefsteak, chops, eggs, pancakes, fried potatoes, hominy, cornbread, muffins and a beaker of milk. Mid-mornings he snacked on oysters and clams. For lunch came more shellfish accompanied by two or three deviled crabs, a pair of broiled lobsters, a joint of beef, a salad and several fruit pies. To round out the meal and to make, in his words, “the food set better,” he would polish off a box of chocolates.

When meals didn’t “set better,” they set decidedly worse. About the time that Diamond Jim was inhaling crustaceans by the dozen, a certain Mr. Rogerson (nationality and profession unknown) reportedly gorged himself to such a miserable extent that at meal’s end he committed suicide.

Such tragic exceptions aside, the high life profited the individual living it—and some believed that profit fell to the whole of society, as well. The British parson and social scientist Thomas Malthus insisted that the leisured class’s appetites served the necessary econom-

ic end of eliminating surpluses to spur further production and thus increase profit. “[T]he specific use of a body of unproductive consumers,” he writes in his 1820 book *Principles of Political Economy*, “is to give encouragement to wealth by maintaining such a balance between produce and consumption as will give the greatest exchangeable value to the results of the national industry.” Queen Victoria’s abiding hunger, King Henry’s ceaseless need for artichokes, Diamond Jim’s lust for seafood, beef and milk, even Mr. Rogerson’s morbid yen—all did more than affirm status; they turned bread into gold.

A wealthy man, Malthus could toast unproductive consumers as his own table he heaped with sweets and savories. But these men and women of appetite did more harm than good. The idea that potentates must gorge themselves excused the inherent destructiveness of their extravagance. Gluttony kills more than the sword, the saying goes—a saying as true today as it was then. **TNI**

“In the provinces bordering on Norway, the peasants called it the worst they had ever remembered ... a considerable portion of the people was living upon bread made of the inner part of the fir, and of dried sorrel... The sallow looks and melancholy countenances of the peasants betrayed the unwholesomeness of their nourishment.”

—Thomas Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798)



Recipe for Financiere Ragout from *High-class Cookery* (1885):

“Sliced Truffles. Scallops of Foie Gras. Cockscombs. Mushrooms, and Quenelles.”

Bundle Theory

by CHRISTINE BAUMGARTHUBER

The meek shall inherit the earth—if the mighty don't consume it first



LOVE rooted in frustration bears the sweetest fruit: This the old wives of New England knew. When on long winter nights a suitor called on an eligible daughter, her parents served him pie, bound both his legs in a large woolen sock, and bundled him into bed with his sweet-heart.

Under eiderdown the lovebirds canoodled until sunrise, when limbs again swung free to carry the swain on his

"I dreamt about you last night — fell out of bed twice!"
—Shelagh Delaney, *A Taste of Honey* (1958)

“There is a delicious pleasure in clasping in your arms a woman who has done you a great deal of harm, who has disliked you for a long time and who is quite ready to dislike you again. Take the success of French officers in Spain in 1812.”

—Stendhal, *On Love* (1822)

“In so far as we close our eyes to love and deny its law, we are the henchmen of death,” observes Gilbert Cannan in *Love* (1914). “It is easier to drop a stone than to throw it into the air.”



way. If the night passed well, marriage banns would appear soon after. If it did not, the whole ritual repeated with another young man, should one happen by.

Many thought bundling strange. One prominent New York physician called it a “ridiculous and pernicious custom.” Others blamed it for the precipitous decline in Yankee morals. But its defenders deemed it an economical and humane prelude to marriage. A couple bundled burnt no candles, they insisted, and other household members could rest easy knowing they had spared their visitor a tramp home in the winter night.

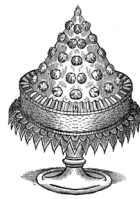
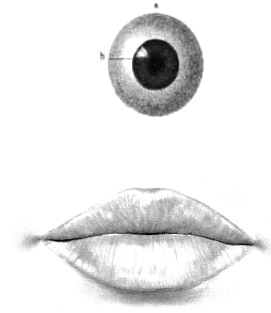
A visitor didn’t need to have romance in mind to gain a berth. Lovers and strangers alike could count on the same reception. Passing peddlers, wandering huntsmen, itinerant poets, and even enemy soldiers all found a place to lay their head. During the Revolutionary War, a British officer faced the prospect of bundling one night in autumn. Lieutenant Anbury had marched all day. The sun had long since set, the moon yet to rise. He trudged along a road outside Williamstown, Massachusetts. Great ruts scored the roadbed, which had softened with rain, and his servant and the mare carrying his bedding had fallen behind.

Though Anbury yearned for sleep, he stopped to wait for his small retinue. They did not come. The cold and the dark urged him on. Soon he came to a modest cabin. He knocked at the door. A knobby old man, his wife and their young daughter answered. They bade him stay the night. Anbury had a quick eye, and saw only two beds in the one-room cabin. “Where am I to sleep?,” he asked the mother. “Mr. Ensign, our Jonathan and I will sleep in this, and our Jemima and you shall sleep in that,” she answered, pointing to the smaller of the two beds. “Our Jemima” was a buxom brunette of sixteen. The lieutenant blushed. “Oh la! Mr. Ensign,” the father laughed, “you won’t be the first man our Jemima has bundled with, will it Jemima?” The girl smiled, and winked at the reddening man. “No, father, not by many, but it will be with the first Britainer.”

Memory of the event lingered with Anbury. “In this

dilemma what could I do?," he later wrote. "The smiling invitation of pretty Jemima—the eye, the lip, the—Lord ha' mercy, where am I going to!" But the spirit proved stronger than the flesh; Anbury declined the invitation. How a man native to those parts could sleep chastely near such a toothsome creature as young Jemima this red-blooded Englishman could not fathom. He chalked it off to the "cold ... American constitution"; it alone, he surmised, could sustain this "unaccountable custom ... in hospitable repute, and perpetual practice."

Yet cold constitutions ensured the availability of warm beds. Suspicious of bundling to the end, the good doctor from New York insisted that the improbable chastity of the practice remained more perceived than real. Something managed to wriggle free of those straitjacketing body-socks, something from which sprang a "long-sided, raw-boned, hardy race of whoreson whalers, wood-cutters, fishermen, and peddlers" who in a great and hearty multitude populated windswept Nantucket, Piscataway and Cape Cod. **TNI**



A recipe for wedding cake from *The Young Housekeeper's Friend* (1846):

"Five pounds of flour, five of sugar, five of butter, six of raisins, twelve of currants, two of citron, fifty eggs, half a pint of wine, three ounces of nutmegs, three of cinnamon, one and a half of mace. Mix it like pound cake, only rub the fruit into the flour."

Gathering Light

by CHRISTINE BAUMGARTHUBER



OF the glimmering swarm gathering at twilight the catcher of fireflies entertained few romantic notions. To him his quarry—which drew gasps from the crowd gathered at the riverbank, which drew sighs from many a moon-struck poet—simply meant business.

On summer evenings he began work at dusk, a long bamboo pole hoisted on one shoulder and a bag of brown mosquito netting wound around his waist.

"If seen by day / A firefly / Is just a red-necked bug."

—Bashō (Date unknown)

Frogs fill their bellies with fireflies until light shines through them like a candle-flame through a porcelain jar.

"I often lingered on the grassy fields, gazing at the fireflies, and thinking of home," writes novelist Shogyo Tamura, recalling in a 1910 issue of *The Oriental Economic Review* a trip he took to the United States. "But no young friends of mine in America could sympathize with any thoughts of mine about fireflies. The Americans seem to look upon the firefly simply as a subject for scientific research.... When I asked them if they do not think the glow of the firefly might perhaps have some poetic meaning, they replied that the question itself was poetical, and that personally they had no interest in the subject."

"Do I see only fireflies drifting with the current?," wondered Chiyo of Kaga. "Or is the Night itself drifting, with its swarming of stars?"



From Katherine Russell's "Japanese Refreshments" (1905): A Japanese afternoon or evening food should be served in small lacquer trays, but large plates of Japanese design are a satisfactory substitute... Each plate may contain *sushi* (made of fish and rice), *kuri-kinto* (made of chestnuts and sweet potato), *sembei* (rice wafers), *kasutera* (sponge cake), *amae* (a sweet), *shoga* (ginger), *namkin-maine* (peanuts), and *o'cha* (tea).

Thus equipped he stumped off for the willows among whose boughs hid his prize. He examined them for the tell-tale glow. The most luminous he struck with his pole. A rain of fireflies followed. Stunned from the blow, they proved easy pickings, their pain making them flare brighter. Before they could recover he scooped them up, popping them in his mouth to save time. Only when his cheeks bulged would he pause to spit them in his net.



The firefly hunter worked into the small hours. Often he caught two, three thousand fireflies, which he would bring the next day to the local firefly broker, who appraised them according to their brilliance: the brighter their bellies, the higher their asking price. The insects usually fetched from three to thirteen sen per hundred.

Once sorted the broker thrust them, handfuls at a time, into gauze-wrapped boxes, which he placed on small wooden tables inscribed with the names of customers. He had to be careful; delicate creatures, fireflies live but a short time in captivity. To preserve them he fed them strips of moistened grass.



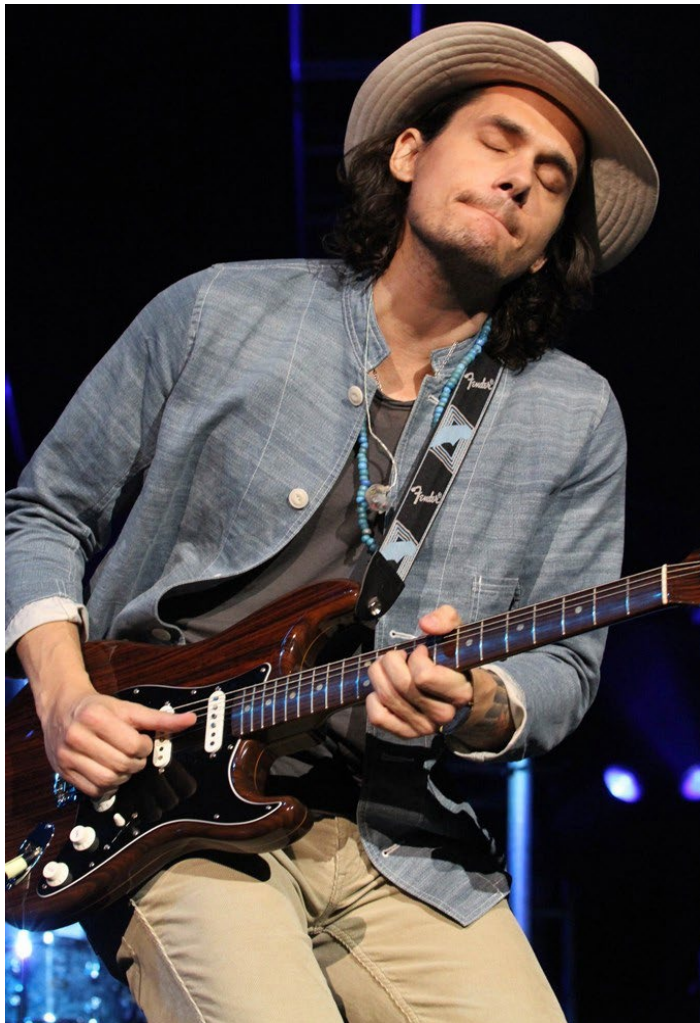
In these cages the fireflies would abide until evening, at which time the restaurateurs arrived. Locating their names among the wooden tables, they would take their box off to their respective establishments, where for their patrons they would release its contents at sunset, as long custom prescribed. The firefly hunter meanwhile would take up his pole and net and head for the willow grove where the freed fireflies inevitably alighted... **TNI**

A Contribution to the Critique of John Mayer

by EVAN CALDER WILLIAMS

John Mayer stands in direct and utter opposition to everything we stand for

JOHN Mayer, currently:



John Mayer, when we take our teeth out of our pockets :



THE continued existence of John Mayer is unthinkable.

Terribly and literally so. Because one must admit not just his perpetuity, not just acknowledge the knowing that he is still out there, somewhere, while we wash the dishes and look back over our shoulders at what has just passed us, at that streak behind the skull that means the dog is pursuing with joy and maliceless rage a small number of birds who found their way inside this heated house, and the two types, dog and birds, slur in speed together just like the two sides of the thaumatrope, with its dog side and its bird side, that when at rest and turned slow in the hand will ask *Why is a pointer dog like a Highwayman?* and even answer it too: *Because he is in quest of prey.*



But when the toy spins, becomes a movie with montage but no motion, then we can't read the question anymore. There's no joke or reason, just trauma on a rope, and the permanent gag of birds always almost caught by that robber's rogue of a spotted dog, or perhaps it's the birds ever puking forth from his mouth because, like a Highwaymen or treason, dogs too know how to give back to the community. And just as always is the fact that earthworms have yet to have unstrung the warbling chords of that stubbly Mayer throat, and the ocean has yet to swallow without cough or mutter the small collection of ashes that alone bear witness to the one thing that once sat shirtless with a guitar splayed across his middle like the stripped hull of a daughter.

No, through the lump in our voice that tastes of spring

cancer, we must find the courage to say aloud that: *John Mayer does not merely live. He also has not been executed.*



Such a thing can barely be spoken, because to admit the non-occurrence of his execution casts doubt upon not just the basic antagonism of our species—or at least when on its proleing vibe, all torch and gut and the circle of Crown Vics stood on their heads below which, in anti-freeze cutting lime through the winter's slush, is written merely *HA!*—but so too our fundamental enmity toward all that prolongs our ruin.

Yes, the fact that Mayer is surely, at this very moment—as in all moments across history, human and otherwise—slipping his fingers between the slats of the ribs of a “daughter” (whose existence is no longer historical but cut loose from time's woof and affixed by this moment of Mayering to nothing but Mayer himself), and the additional fact that he has been done in by neither rabble nor decisionist assassin: all this, all this undermines the very foundation of history as the herky-jerky motion of social war in the *durée*, *longue* and *short* alike. It tells us that there is no importance to the winter dance of occupied jazz squares and box steps shoved aflame into the road with everything reeking of a) old piss, b) new bile, c) damp cardboard, d) the throaty cheers of nearby rats, e) sweat, which makes its own time, and f) diluted Maalox for eyes and none for spleens because that bile is no accident. It denies insurrection and quelling, that series of cuts between which slosh

their echoes, their marrow, our froth or songs.

With him still out there somewhere, it's almost like what we see when we glance back over these wastrel millennia, over shoulder or past the mount of the belly or crotch, is just the distended hacking apart of him into nothing but more of him, whole, immanent Mayer: forgetful, expansive, the hunks blurred together in sight, not by spinning but a horrific binding and constancy, at once goop and shard, tongues licking stamps made of tongues, or also a goop. An ocean of slight tremolo.

And we know this is not true, that it's not the case, because we know it's more like Jacques Camatte said, that,

History presents itself as a sequence of discontinuities caused by the intervention of classes. They are what cut the Gordian knots and solve the riddles. The intermediate continuities are nothing more than the spillage of a content affirmed in the moment of social eruptions.

Or, to say it simple, history is an outside agitator.

But we know also that, like Camatte wrote later, years after heading deep into the woods:

Seriously, fuck that guy. The human community [Gemeinswesen] must raise high on pikes [piquets] the vacant lantern skull of man that is John Mayer

because the fact that no one has gone all Aldo Moro on Mayer isn't just a slight exception to the inexorable logic of getting hackles up to de-make this barbed world.



No, no, Mayer must be destroyed, of course. Of that there's no doubt. But still, still what matters is not the outflowing of the frozen yogurt of masculinity, or the pre-Franconian—James, that is—sensitivity, or the Jennifer Aniston of men who fucked the Jennifer Aniston of women, or the soulful tank top and infamous butcher, or the ruffian's placebo, or even the nihil of cuddlefucking.

(He must be written in the singular, even when it is multiple, because there are so many of them, in dentist offices and on the back porches of parties, but they are just shades of the former, like Platonic shit stains.)

What matters is not even that he's the slurry of continuity, because he's more than that: he's a project, a theory of time, one whose sole aim is to blur together *meanwhile* (history as what happens around, beside, below, astride us) and *before* (history as what was not but has become alien to us). John Mayer is nothing but the fleshly declaration that: *there is no difference between meanwhile and before because everything that ever exists does so for, or gauged by proximity to, this moment.* And by "this moment," John Mayer means: *having sex with John Mayer.*

The lyrics of his popular ballad "Daughters" make this unmistakable, bare the fangs of the whole operation. (And the fact that it isn't "current" doesn't matter one iota, because any one who walks around the world without headphones is aware that the song can pounce at any moment, in any restaurant, at any bus stop. It was never timely, and, for this reason, it does not go away.) The first verse goes as follows:

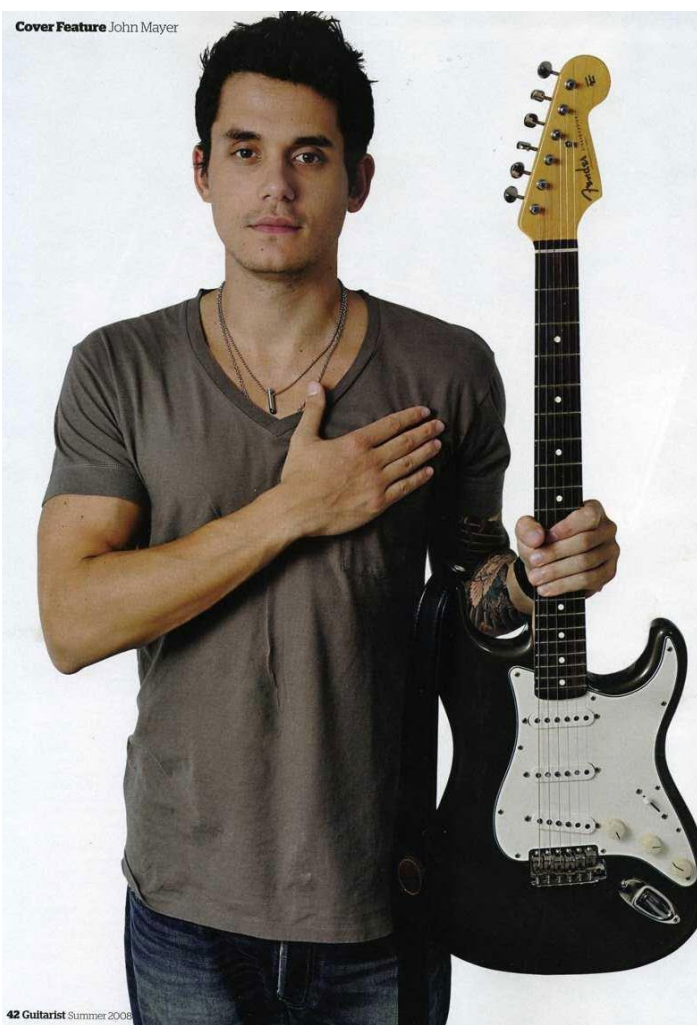
*I know a girl
She puts the color inside of my world
But she's just like a maze
Where all of the walls all continually change
And I've done all I can
To stand on her steps with my heart in my hands
Now I'm starting to see
Maybe it's got nothing to do with me*

To gloss: John Mayer likes a "girl," but he has a difficult time understanding her: this is because she changes across time (a "maze / where all of the walls all continual-

ly change”), rather than remaining constant and navigable (presumably, a one-way street, or a non-mutable maze). Hoping to change this, John Mayer has done all he can: not *for* her but in order to tear his heart from his chest and stand on her steps—she may be not a maze, but also a house—holding that heart. He does so to show her that he is vulnerable, that she can do what she wishes with his heart because “she puts the color”, etc, but also that it is possible to be eternal, to refuse decay and transformation, to remove the body’s motor and know that the walls will not rearrange such that the heart can never go back home again.

In short, he is telling her: *listen, you can stop being you and also be Mayer.*

However, despite his best efforts to be heartless, he’s come to the hard realization that it isn’t his fault. Because he’s a gentleman and because he refuses the possibility that



perhaps her world already has color without him, he insists that it also isn’t her fault that she doesn’t open to him like a flower or a maze broken open wide. No, something must have happened, beyond her control, to make this the case. And so, the answer is given:

*Fathers, be good to your daughters
Daughters will love like you do
Girls become lovers who turn into mothers
So mothers, be good to your daughters too*

Which means that:

1) the shift from *his* situation to general categories (“fathers,” “daughters,” “lovers,” mothers”) means that the advice becomes universal: not *her* father but all fathers, all mothers, all daughters should “be good.”

2) the chain “girls -> lovers -> mothers” both cannot be broken or deviated from: mothers should be good to their daughters not because they are humans who deserve decent treatment but because they will become lovers and, eventually, mothers as well.

3) “lovers” means those “those who Mayer decides to try and love”

In short, fathers and mothers should be good to their daughters because, if you don’t, they might not be adequately available for Mayering. Or, in other words, the entire general ethics of being kind, not abusive, and loving toward those around us, an instruction to the species as a whole, casting fore and aft into the depths, between *meanwhile* and *before, then* and *now*, is all predicated on the possibility that John Mayer may, at some point in history, plan to fuck that daughter.

The past and present and future are sutured, not by the history of struggle against oppression or the attempt to lead lives not based on the violent domination of others, but by that one act: being bedded by John Mayer.

So it is that Mayer stands, lit in the dark, before inhuman vistas and canyons, calling out to Roman slaveholders, Ethiopian farmers, Inuits, Malaysians, populations wiped from the face of the earth like a grin, everyone, insisting:



be good to daughters because the mutability or non-fuckability of anything cannot be tolerated.

And so it is that the project of Mayer stands in direct and utter opposition to everything we stand for: for the singularity of things, for daughters to not have to be lovers of Mayer or mothers of lovers of Mayer, for the insistence that the appearance of the eternal is just the gut casing of a sausage, holding in particular shape what urges toward obscure forms of its own, what starts not from the heart but from the guts, the pit of the stomach where rage pools and conpires.

And were this a film, we would open onto *"a grayscale video of Mayer playing the guitar and singing the song in a dark studio, intercut between scenes of*

a girl (i.e., a 'daughter')" having removed the intercut scenes of a daughter and trimmed away the studio too, until it is just Mayer, mewling soulful in the dark. We would replace them with nothing but the line of a cut, a clean axe's sweep, to alternate back and forth: Mayer, the cut, Mayer, the cut. And were this a film, we would pull it from the projector and cut from the film just two frames, one of Mayer, one of that cut, and we would stick them to each other, back to front, with our own spit, to make a new thaumatrope to be hung in the street.

There it wafts in the air, wound up and spinning. It's not a blur but a clear image of Mayer and the cut, superimposed, inseparable, the head made discrete from the body but just a moment ago, still in place. And at some point the thaumatrope stops, we've left it behind to go do other things, the dogs are out tonight and so are the birds. But were this a film, the camera would have stuck around and would hold close on the stuck frames as they turn slow, slower, dead still until the question written over Mayer can be read (*Why does Mayer get the axe?*) and so too the answer etched just below the thin red line

Because of the daughters, because of the daughters **TNI**

Top Ten John Mayer tweets

The singer nixed his Twitter account, but his best status updates live on.

1 "I'm the George W. Bush of love: I may not have anything to show for myself now, but history will prove me a hero."

2 "BREAKING CELEBRITY NEWS: I was sitting with my legs crossed for too long and my penis fell asleep."

3 "This heart didn't come with instructions."

4 "I need a pressure-sensitive toilet seat that shuts off my wi-fi so I stop buying so many apps on the can. This is getting pricey."

5 "If you're shocked that Britney was lip-synching at her concert and want your money back, life may

continue to be hard for you."

6 "I wouldn't say I have to 'man up' as much as 'girl it down.'"

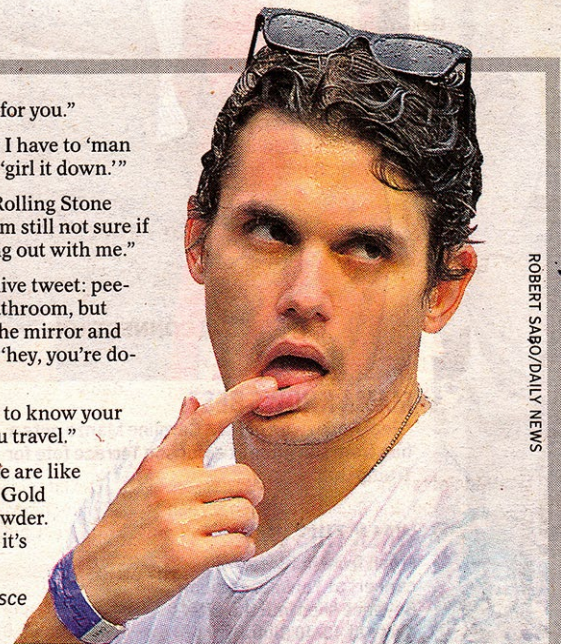
7 "Just read my Rolling Stone cover article. I'm still not sure if I would want to hang out with me."

8 "The ultimate live tweet: peeing in a club bathroom, but not without facing the mirror and mugging as if to say 'hey, you're doing great.'"

9 "You really get to know your pants when you travel."

10 "Changes in life are like extra-strength Gold Bond Medicated Powder. The burning means it's working."

Nicole Lyn Pesce



ROBERT SABO/DAILY NEWS

Glass Hands (Violent Motion, 2)

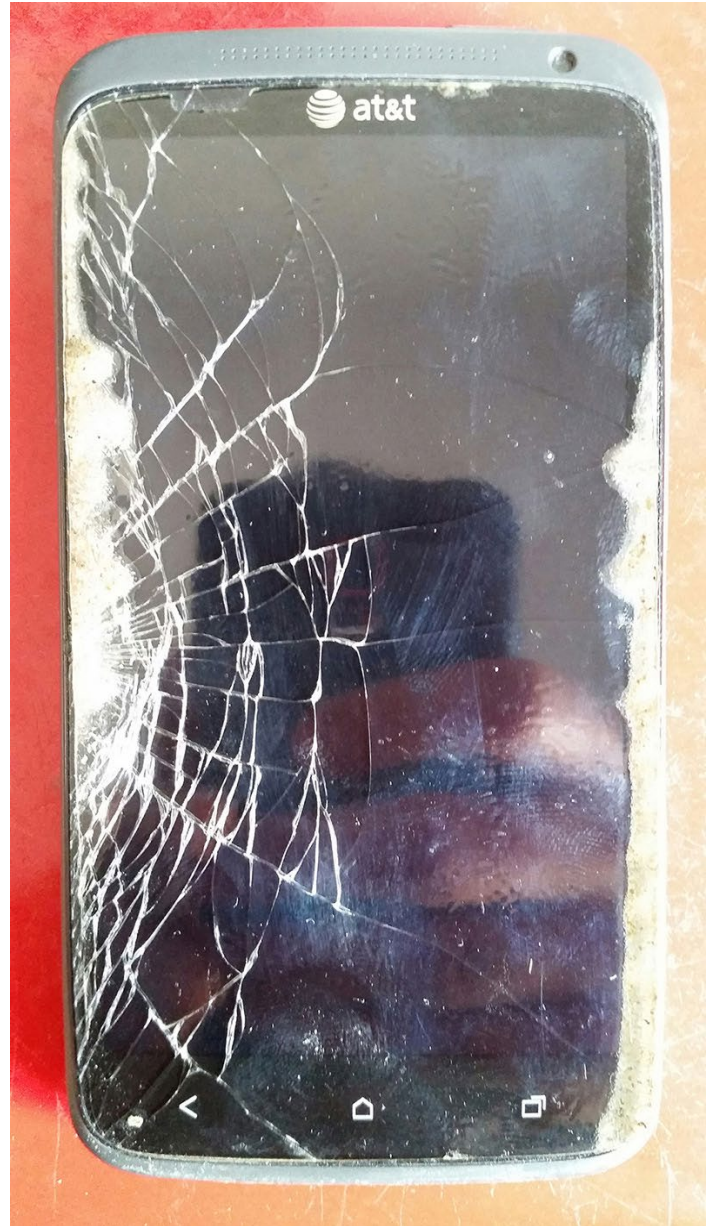
by EVAN CALDER WILLIAMS

The touchscreen grip is an intermediary that makes it possible to see mediation, the machines at work behind the experience of communication, the fingerprints marring the surface

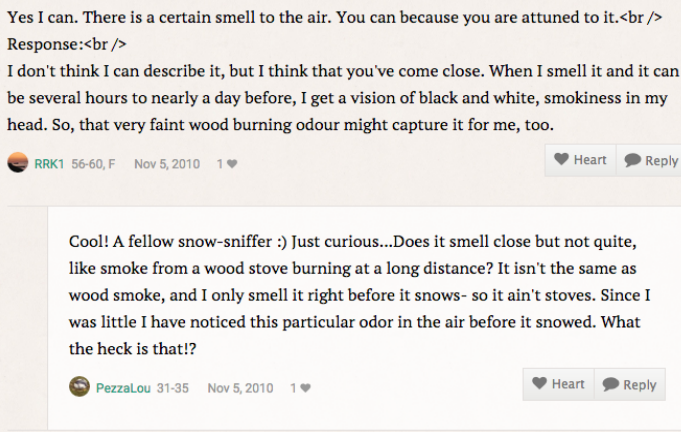
Who shall say that man does see or hear? He is such a hive and swarm of parasites that it is doubtful whether his body is not more theirs than his, and whether he is anything but another kind of ant-heap after all. May not man himself become a sort of parasite upon the machines? An affectionate machine-tickling aphid?

—Samuel Butler, *Erewhon*, 1872

I'm not alone in this.



UNTIL five years ago, I only had a couple of intimate and tactile relationships with glassy surfaces. The first began early, a symptom of growing up where winter is long but inconstant, with temperatures that climb and



I'm not alone in this.

One of my earliest and clearest memories is an almost still image of this process: the snow falling on and into the Atlantic. I remember looking out through the glass of the rear window of our lumbering Buick wagon, on the stretch of the 1 between Portland and Falmouth, heading toward the territory where Stephen King erased my actual town from the map to call it Salem's Lot instead. There, the trees thin out and the highway verges close to the ocean, which becomes a wide screen framed between Great Diamond Island and Mackworth Island, where years later we'd walk trails around the Maine Educational Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and sneak Camels in front of squirrels. In that space, the water doesn't freeze until it gets close to shore, the little waves piling up in cracked beige sheets. But the snow doesn't fall onto ice. It doesn't accumulate. It just drops into the grey water, melting into ocean and inflecting the temperature with that kind of impossibly small difference that Duchamp, who thought so well about glass, called *infra-mince* (infra-slim) some half a century before I fogged up the window trying to see where all the snow went.

Years later, I'd watch Chaplin skating the department store edge in *Modern Times* and find it familiar; years after that, I learned that what we see as a drop is in fact a perfect continuity masked by a matte, with the lower levels of the store painted on glass in front of the camera, and I found it even more familiar.

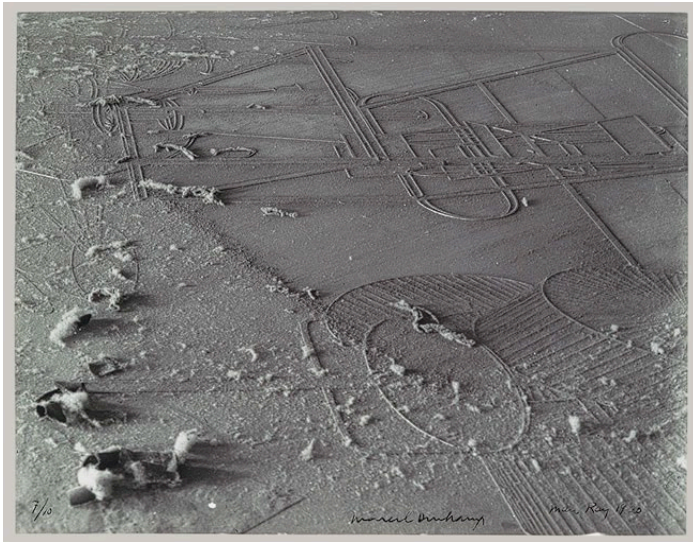
drop hard. Ice always appeared less a thing than a pause, a literal freeze-frame, because in Maine you don't get to step outside of the process. You don't go through winter piece-meal, always in a full circuit. First, there's the anticipation of snow, which can be huffed, a smell of dry in the throat's back, like smoke but from burning metal, not wood. Then comes snow, sleet, tapering-off rain, slush, night's black ice, partial melt, brown lumps of not-snow-but-not-ice, and then do it all over again, all on a long GIFish loop until you wake up and it's late April and outside, all the permafrost dog shit has come to light and nose.

But when that pause happens fast enough, or with a slight interval of rain before night, you get the rare marvel of totally clear ice. We'd go skating, down the Royal River or out in the Cumberland marshes, where you could TIE Fighter swoop between the cattails and ash stands. I'd catch cracks and end up mouthing the milky pond, cutting my hands. Like an improbable crush or money, ice's surface always split this way, pitched between pleasure and damage, never more dangerous than when you don't realize you're already navigating it, when it's black on back roads.



When my grandmother's second husband died, she moved from Florida to live near us. I became newly, sharply aware of just how fragile we can be when crossing ice, especially when our bodies have already begun to bend like birds. All the same, I'd carry slick loafers in my backpack to school and put them on for the downhill walk home, to spend it slipping as much as possible, acting out a semi-skilled pratfall teetering on the edge of facial reconstruction. The gestures we develop to negotiate ice barely manage this tension, always swerving between sublime grace

and dorkly flailing. The cool kids didn't wear jackets when it was cold—James H. *never* wore a parka, was structurally incapable of sleeves—but ice can still blow anyone's cover.



Man Ray's "Dust Breeding," 1920 photo of the back of Duchamps's *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* (*The Large Glass*)

Given that I don't wear glasses, my other memories of focus on, and care for, the smooth and unyielding are all about jobs. One was selling wine, where you spend so much of the day touching and holding glass. Stacking boxes of it, proffering \$200 bottles of it to the rich like snake-oil. Lifting and arranging it, realizing that when vintners want their wine to appear to justify their prices—to demand what they fetch—they make the bottles heavier, as if value was something to be hefted and luxury sold by the pound.



For slick surfaces, the bottles gathered endless dust, or at least the dust appeared so visible because every speck violates an unspoken premise of wine fetishism. The wine can appear old, but only if it is wildly expensive, starts with

Seeing how far you could push the absurdity of description with them: *it's got a nose of old Kool-Aid and Bratwurst, but a mid-palette undercurrent of tarmac-greased leather. In a good way. It's like going home and realizing that you never left, that you never really can.*

It especially helps when it ends in *d'Yquem* and is the same wine supped from the gutters when the Winter Palace was stormed.

Chateau, and conjurs cellar visions. If not, it must look as if it's just on a layover, a minor lag before rushing off the shelves. This image of the agreed-upon guarantees a consensus of taste, which is what yuppies need as a backdrop to take flight from it. It lets them make shopping into a virtuosic labor of discovery, Indiana Jones on a Brunello kick, so misanthropically excited to prove to you that unlike the other schmucks quaffing whatever, they alone have memorized the precise numerical grade Robert Parker gave to a 2007 St. Supéry Napa Valley Estate "Elu."

So all day I touched glass, but the glass was supposed to be invisible, only a problem—only visible—when too slick and itching to fall. It only worked when it could be ignored.

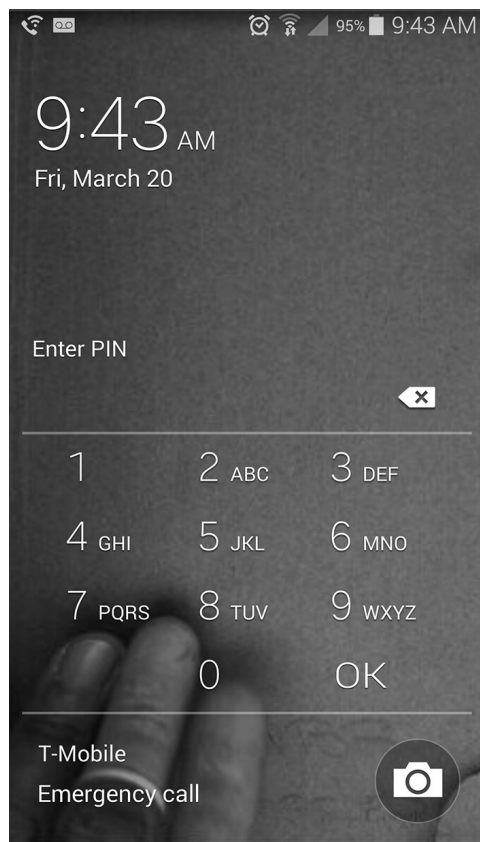


The other job with this surface experience was washing dishes at restaurants where I've cooked. It was the opposite of wine's glass. Washing makes you fixate on trying, as fast as possible, to get a surface back to looking like it was never used in the first place. (Or just close enough that your boss won't make you do it over.) This requires, and therefore develops, a strange hyper-sensitivity of fingers and palms, even as the heat, water, and bleach wreak havoc on hands, because you have to gauge without really looking: how much is still crusted on, how much texture there is to what is supposed to have none. It is hellishly boring work, barring the radio and talking and sometimes flirting, because going through the motions means learning a set of gestures repeated over and over again but which never get to be fully automatic, the rhythm broken every time burnt

"the hand's task is not only to hold something. It must also function simultaneously as an organ of perception." (Kluge and Negt, *History and Obstinacy*, p. 90)

salmon skin just won't let go.

Until five years ago, these were the only times I had significant, affectively-thick tactile experiences with glass or the glassy. But five years ago, I got my first phone with a touchscreen. Now, like most people I know, I touch, rub, tap, worry, flick, and stroke glass at least once an hour, almost every hour that I am awake, almost every day of the year. My days, and whatever intimacy they include, are inseparable from the feel of something that shivers, as if touched with ice, yet always touches the same way back. I fell in love from afar, finger-skating fast filth on a Foxconned slab.



I have zero interest in either bemoaning or celebrating this, because it makes no sense to me to think it in terms of *good* or *bad*. Still, what is certain is that this transformation of experience—of a juncture of surfaces, signs, sight, and touch, a juncture crystallized around the touchscreen—is

Fingers found in a Google Books scan of an 1848 fiction collection from Maine

For instance, I know that in public spaces, we look at each other's faces less often than we used to and that those spaces aren't often marked by the sound and shapes of newspaper being folded and spread in hands. But public spaces have never meant the same thing – or signified a welcoming – to all who cross them, and newspapers can propagate vile imperialist pap as easily as their websites can.

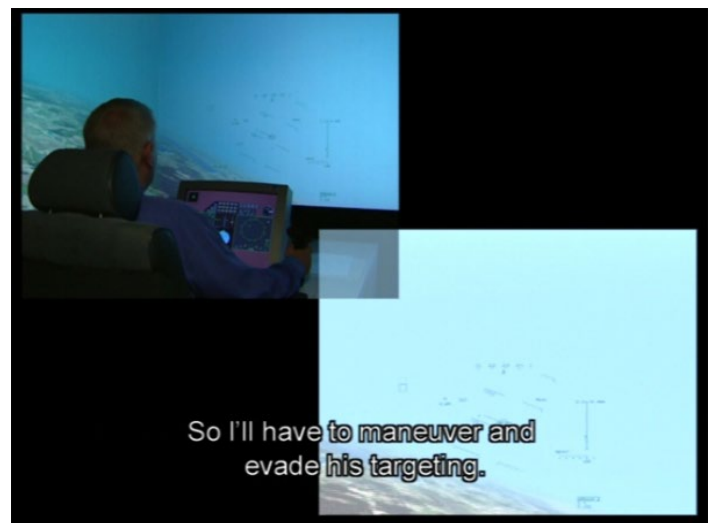
Edward Baptist's term for American slavery, as something that he argues should be understood in terms of other technical "revolutions" in in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Harun Farocki, *Eye/Machine II*, 2002

One way in which it can be read differently, simply as the continuation of another technical shift, is in terms of the trackpad. Indeed, I had been using a trackpad on a laptop for years prior to touchscreens, and I've surely spent more hours, months, and years sliding fingers across this unmoving surface. However, I've noticed, and looked back at old laptops to check, that it is only in the most recent generations of them, from the past couple years, that they have started to have that glassy feeling. The previous ones felt unmistakably plastic, an endless worrying away at old petroleum, accumulating dirt and finger oil in an ovoid nimbus around the center. They felt that way because, at least on MacBooks, that shift actually happened: in 2008, they started putting glass-over-metal trackpads in the unibody MacBook Pros, and I didn't have one of these until 2011, when I bought a barely-used one from a tech bro in Silicon Valley.

without precedent in human history, in terms of just how fast it has rewritten modes of gesture, reading, and seeing for just how many people.

There are, of course, other equally large shifts in humans' technical-social experience. The use of buttons, for instance, in the typewriter brought with it a widespread experience of language as mechanically input, one previously available only via the typesetter or the telegraph and hence still requiring an "expert's" mediation. The radio's simultaneity, both from source and site of listening and between those sites, between the car, bar, home, and farm. The mechanization of war. Cinema's animation of the still and reproduction of motion. The "whipping machine." Mass-produced commodity markets. All online everything.



Still, it seems right to assert that almost no other machine—not the phone itself but the set of gestures, textures, embedded memories and technical knowledge, metals and plastics, supply chains, work, and social forms that stitch together at the moment where it and I use each other—has so rapidly become inextricable from the everyday. The other drifts into use (and into the familiarity of being casually touched and unremarked upon) took decades, if not centuries, even if their effects were as dramatic in the long run. Indeed, the only others that happened close to this scale and velocity, across borders and populations, are all bound to war, to the sudden awareness of being part of

a new machine—one named *trench, carpet bombing, drone, gas attack, napalm, heat signature, or counter-insurgency*—that will literally kill you if you don't rapidly come to terms with how it functions. They remake the landscape and turn all maps 3-D, all neighborhoods into theaters of operation. And no matter how atrociously normalized that becomes, it can never approach the sleepy familiarity of a thumb that vaguely flicks a feed.

My interest doesn't lie in the general anthropological overhaul bound up with the digital, for which the phone has come to serve as one particularly visible index. I wouldn't know where to begin with that. Instead, I've become fixated on the *sensation* of a screen, on how it shifts from a sensational element in space—one that delimits the distance covered by projection or around which we gather—to a sensual object in itself. On how only a few years ago, I did not carry around a warm slab of receptive ice in my pocket but now don't need to look down to trace patterns into and via it. Even more simply, in the way that so many of us spend so much time petting slick and smeary surfaces, carrying windows in our ass pockets.



One way in which it can be read differently, simply as the continuation of another technical shift, is in terms of the trackpad. Indeed, I had been using a trackpad on a laptop for years prior to touchscreens, and I've surely spent more hours, months, and years sliding fingers across this unmoving surface. However, I've noticed, and looked back at old laptops to check, that it is only in the most recent generations of them, from the past couple years, that they have started to have that glassy feeling. The previous ones felt unmistakably plastic, an endless worrying away at old petroleum, accumulating dirt and finger oil in an ovoid nimbus around the center. They felt that way because, at least on MacBooks, that shift actually happened: in 2008, they started putting glass-over-metal trackpads in the unibody MacBook Pros, and I didn't have one of these until 2011, when I bought a barely-used one from a tech bro in Silicon Valley.

When rust sets in on a razor blade, when a wall starts to get mouldy, when moss grows in a corner of a room, rounding its geometric angles, we should be glad because, together with the microbes and fungi, life is moving into the house and through this process we can more consciously become witnesses of architectural changes from which we have much to learn. From the "Mouldiness Manifesto against Rationalism in Architecture"

And before I got my supremely wonky MetroPCS Mobile Huawei on which no one could hear me, the first experience of a phone having to do with everything *but* voice.

Neuromancer

But with this whiplash recalibration of sight and hand, to find precedence of how it feels to not only touch but also to hold and carry screens, to care for them to the point that I don't think about them, I have to go back to what seems far from screens and their images, back to dishes, wine, and ice. Growing up with computers made a visual-practical relation to screens second nature, sure, but I learned to manually navigate Androids through winter and wages. Or through reading about Spinoza polishing lenses and realizing that even if there's only one substance, there's no reason that all of a body moves at the same speed. Or the way my friend polishes her glasses with a grey cloth when she's thinking or tired or both. The way that Tonya Harding fell and then wept, in spite of those gold blades. The way that Anna Kavan writes winter in *Ice*, running up against the limits of description and so just writing *white* and *ice* and *frozen* over and over again. How the security glass of bank windows require blows of different speeds and type. Malaparte's horses trapped in a lake's prison of ice. Hundertwasser's loopy, and totally correct, fantasy of cultivating mold on high-modernist glass houses. Dying in the ice worlds of Mario. Drawing dogs in condensation. Wiping dry erase boards with bare hands.

And, to some degree, through watching and reading American sci-fi. Though not as much as to be expected, because the touchscreen has an odd history in the decades before it became ubiquitous. Especially in speculative fiction fixated on the digital, ice and glass made famous appearances.

Headlong motion through walls of emerald green, milky jade, the sensation of speed beyond anything he'd known before in cyberspace. . . . The Tessier-Ashpool ice shattered, peeling away from the Chinese program's thrust, a worrying impression of solid fluidity, as though the shards of a broken mirror bent and elongated as they fell—

"Christ," Case said, awestruck, as Kuang twisted and banked above the horizonless fields of the Tessier-Ashpool cores, an endless neon cityscape, complexity that cut the eye, jewel bright, sharp as razors.

In William Gibson's first novels, ice (or "ICE," Intrusion Countermeasures Electronics) named the defense systems within cyberspace that had to be broken and evaded like frozen architecture, with the "worrying impression of solid fluidity" yet subject to becoming "the shards of a broken mirror."



Hackers, on the other hand, took that "endless neon city-scape" and gave it a *Tron*-ish literalism, depicting information as physical construction and vice versa, mainframes as glass towers between which hackers can zip and maneuver.

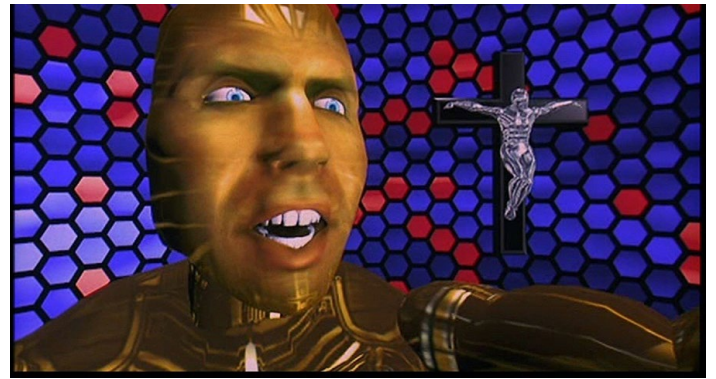
But in *Hackers*, as in the Gibson novels (and other strains of cyberpunk), the ice and glass remained either virtual or a metaphor-made-architecture. When it comes to the apparatus for navigating info cities or server farms, it is a console, something unwieldy and manual that the "jockey" must plug into in order to pilot cyberspace like a glider (Gibson). Or it's just a laptop you spray-painted with camo because you're so bad-ass you don't need to see what the keys say (*Hackers* and almost me, before I realized it was a terrible idea).

In the films I was watching in the '90s and '00s, ones actively concerned with feeling prescient, that split remained operative.

In *Lawnmower Man* (1992), the space is navigated from within the mind's eye, as the climax of experimental

Actually mirrored glass appears elsewhere, as contact lenses which one must be reminded not to smudge with fingerprints while fucking.

Hackers, 1995



drug treatment and with slighter grander dreams—becoming pure energy in a mainframe, controlling the world, etc—than expanded emojis. If anything, the film is especially intrigued by the way that these experiences are never *purely* digital. The god-to-be is not defeated by Wing Chun with trenchcoats or a proto-*Matrix* peeking behind the veil—that is, not by struggles *inside* VR. Instead, they just blow up the building where the mainframe is housed.



Swordfish, 2001

Punctuated by some ubiquitous variant on, “OK, we’re in.”

And when excitement and budgets didn’t get blown on CG to depict what the Internet looks in cross-section , they went instead for the virtuosity of managing multiple screens at once, via a generic hacker’s keyboard flutter, as in *Swordfish*.

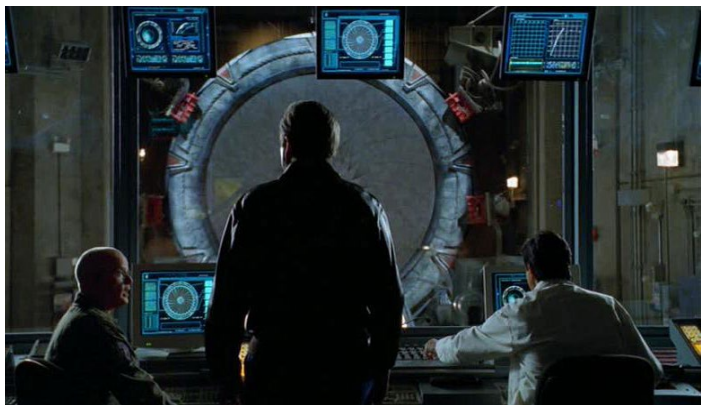


Independence Day, 2001

As for starships, they held to a vaguely pilot vibe. For all the advanced tech in *Independence Day*, the alien craft is piloted by something held—a tremendous metal joystick—and analog enough to be patched into by Goldblum’s Dell. On TV shows, like *Battlestar Galactica* and *Stargate SG-1*, the screen-heavy spaces of the “bridge”/combat control room/etc continued to contain what one would expect:



Battlestar Galactica



Stargate SG-1

namely, keyboards and monitors as distinct things. One of the prime reasons seems to be that like the Kinetoscope, the touchscreen is an interface built for one, never particularly efficient where one might want to show someone else what’s on the screen. (“As you can see, Commander, the enemy’s ships are approaching from...” “Can you move your enormous hand? Jesus.”)

There are, of course, exceptions. *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, for instance, got in on the touchscreen game early. That’s a rarity, though.

And led, years later, in some act of devotion’s fidelity so joyous as to approach grace, to fans building their own replica touch screens...

Total Recall, 1990

Total Recall, for instance, manages to envision something not just of Wii Tennis...



... but also, and more saliently, TSA screening lines. Yet in that screening scene, we notice that the keyboards of the future (just the desk itself) on which the agents clatter are not themselves the screen. That sits next to it, a jutting black and green monitor.

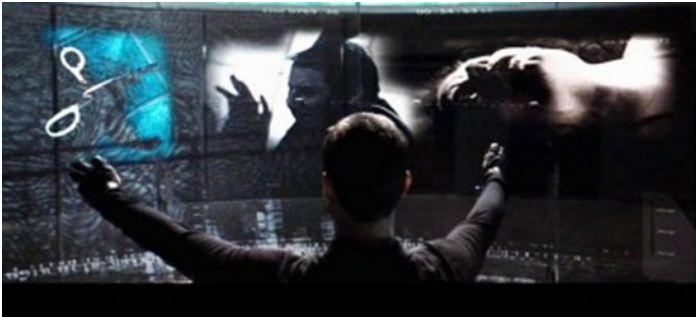
The unnecessary sound anticipating an iPhone's fake-click cicada racketare

Total Recall, 2012

By the time of the remake, 22 years later, phone and tablet lessons had been learned, and the film has become obsessed with this other possibility. Its screens are now a) indistinct from architecture and b) ready/eager to be

touched, using the palm as one's biometric identification so that Colin Farrell can have Very Urgent Chats, a hand laid on the surface like the Plexiglass wall of a prison visiting room.

All in all, most of what I watched was uninterested in the *feeling* of screens. It was far more hyped about skipping over the messy fingerprint stage and going straight to the vaguely holographic, as if aware that there's something endlessly throwback and manual about drunk-smearing burrito fingers across Grindr. The banal fact that touch leaves traces and that screens need cleaning just doesn't seem very future. (I'm still holding out for a director's cut of *Iron Man* where Tony Stark struggles for an hour to place a screen protector on his faceplate without trapping any dust under the plastic, but I'm not holding my breath.)



And so, in *Minority Report*, not only does Tom Cruise not touch the screen. (*The germs, he cries, the germs.*) He also wears special gloves, data prophylactics that let him keep his distance. The screen becomes the wall, yet the wall ceases to be something we might rub up against: set in space, yes, but as immaterial as possible.

The *Iron Man* films go even further with this, arraying OS windows in the holographic air, letting you crumple up represented paper without even needing glass in the room.

That gets pushed to its extreme in what was the most stylistically innovative show on television, *CSI: Miami*, for which the entire precinct is a Constructivist upchuck by way of Lisa Frank, where the built and the screened look *actually* identical. I imagine Horatio walking into walls all day, mistaking them for browser windows and pastel lens flares.

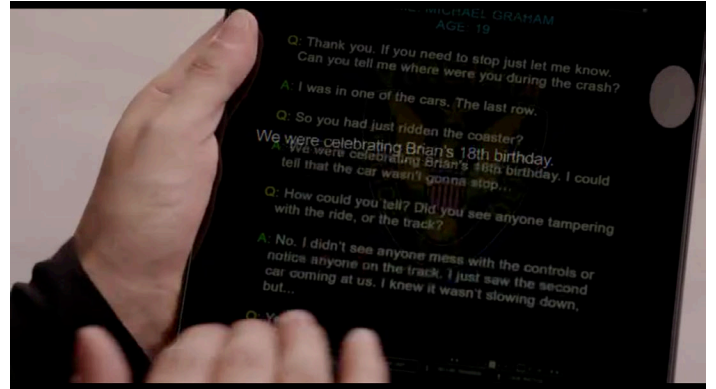
Isn't this the state of that market these days? Pushing wearables like something ordered from the back of a '50s pulp mag? Trying to claim that the not just old but fully retro is somehow the innovation we've all been waiting for...

Minority Report, 2002



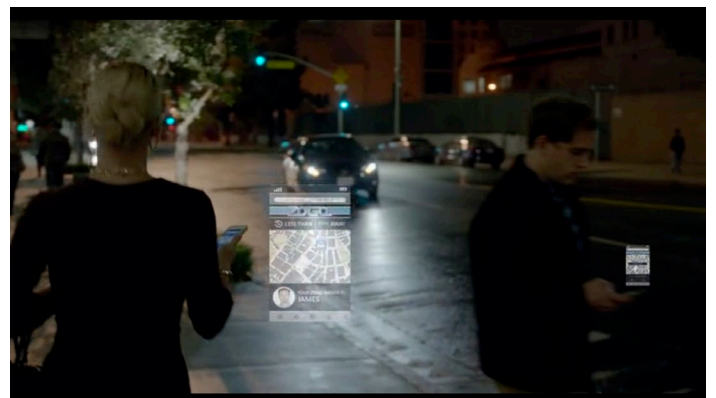
So while while the entire fantasy of the show is of unlimited forensics, where no image is too poor to not be “cleaned up” into magically high resolution, no trace to miniscule to not bind it back to a body, the screens themselves just hover, neon and pure, as free of smudge and splatter as the agents’ white jeggings.

CSI: Cyber



CSI: Miami ended its gloriously protracted decade in 2012. CSI: Cyber has just started this year, and it’s hard to say how long it will stick around. But even in its first episodes, one can see the mark of a different shift: the real existing ubiquity of touch screens means that for a show that’s nominally secular and set in the present, the world *has* to be full of screens, especially of the glass and touchable variety. The way these are depicted, though, is markedly split into a few variations, from which the full-bore holographic of *Miami* is largely absent, barring a showy digital autopsy scene that takes place in what looks like a motion capture studio that they didn’t bother to green screen.

Not long, I fear, if James Van Der Beek doesn’t stop Wahlberg and Patricia Arquette never discovers a shred of either comic or dramatic timing.



First, those that cannot be touched whatsoever, as they exist only for the viewer, not for the character, in *House of*

Cards-esque floating panels, as in the episode where they moralize massively against Uber (under the name “Zogo”).



Second, in huge situation-room panels at the center of their office, where they can do military-grade FaceTime but, crucially, still control everything by the keyboards and mice at their desks.



Third, with so many hands, gesturing, tapping, pointing, and getting in each other’s way. Sometimes these hands are part of shots that try and approximate what it feels like to be absorbed in a screen, like the camera rotating around a stationary Arquette, staring at her tablet while snippets of text and voice flutter about. Other times, it’s just Van Der Beek – or a hand model – literally pointing our attention while explaining what a phishing scheme is. (Again, the show may not be long for this world.)

The same dynamic is also at work with more future-oriented shows and films. It’s not until the real existing daily use of touchscreens by millions of people that sci-fi grudgingly hoists them into view. And when it does, it reserves them for restricted and obvious uses.

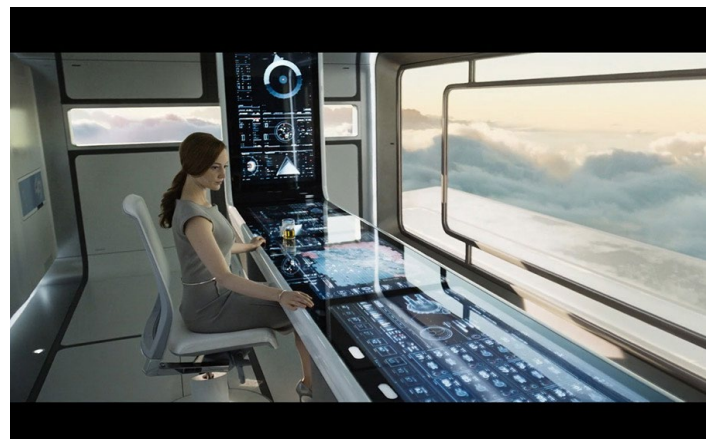


1. Phones of the near-future (same as regular, just a bit more translucent, like in *Robot and Frank*).



Prometheus, 2012

2. Proxy for the medico-erotic.



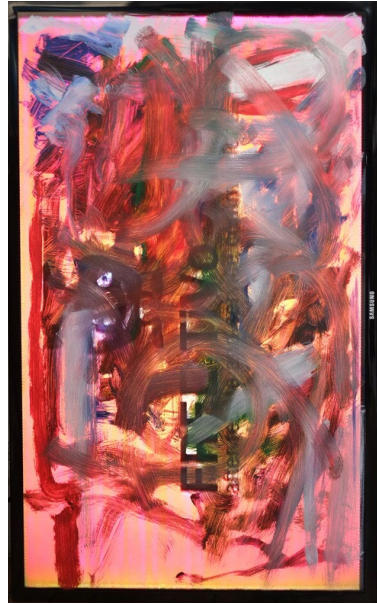
Oblivion, 2013

3. Domestic/military logistics (the cup of tea resting on the touchscreen control panel that monitors both a blighted earth *and* a glass-bottomed swimming pool). Indeed, it's that moment of screen-as-table that comes closest to the fantasy most of us really have about touchscreens. Not to have them vanish into space, not to become

ever thinner until they wish themselves into immateriality, not to have them lilt bright around our heads, but to *eat* off them, to watch *Hannibal* through a vanishing mosaic of Hot Pockets and give the holographic Ghost of Commodity Future a very sloppy middle finger.

BOTH that urge—the slob screen—and the way in which most speculative films and TV tried to ignore it until it became unavoidably quotidian strikes me as telling, hinting toward an awkward proximity. For all the fantasies of the holographic and the talk of the immaterial, the fact remains that the digital stays rooted in the very physical, from the mining of rare earths to human mechanical turks, from the multiple hands of the compositor to the experience of touching glass. No matter what we *do* on these things that become inseparable extensions of the body and head—a *phantom limb for every American!*—they are nevertheless things that we hold and carry, leave at the bar and drop into the toilet. A dual, fractured physicality. Something worn and steady, always there and Jack-of-all-trades, slowly polished like sea stones in the hand over years and chirping beside the bed. An alarm, a flashlight, a last-resort vibrator. But also something tenuous and flighty, always in danger of being bobbed, juggled, and, finally, shattered.

Prior to touchscreen phones, there were probably only two significant interactions you could have with commodities through glass. You could go window shopping, entering a circuit of fantasy and denied fulfillment, becoming also an extension of the store itself, a flesh-and-blood ad's image of rapt yearning. Or you could go looting. Those are the options: find some potential pleasure in being blocked by the glass or stop being blocked by it.



Ken Okiishi's paintings directly onto monitors seem to capture some of that urge, although more irrevocably: to mark a screen in a way that even a factory reset can't erase.

The allusion is to Lisa Cartwright's incredible work on rotoscoping, which I'll treat in the next in this series



They Live By Night, Nicholas Ray, 1948



Screen blood

Without special conductive gloves, phones absolutely insist on bare skin, nothing intervening, but they're totally indifferent to *which* parts of the body that skin is attached to.

As I suggested elsewhere—see the section on the “Buddy Cup” and Smart Arrow—this is part of the split reinforced by hardware manufacturers, between the manipulable image and the supposedly inviolable and unsabotageable hardware that displays it, of which the sealed ultra-thin phone or tablet with no way in is the apogee.



Shards (in ad for repairing a screen built too fragile from the start)

It's in those terms that the opening of Joseph Lewis' *Gun Crazy* (1950) is so smart. There, the lens of the camera and the “lens” of the shop window double up without telling us, as we've taken our position behind the looking glass before the film makes this clear with a reverse shot from the boy's perspective. So the camera is already a security camera, opening up the possibility of not just the triangulation which psychoanalytical takes on cinema love so much—the apparatus, the gaze of the boy, the promise of the gun—but, much more importantly, the line of invisible demarcation that's supposed to keep the gun on “our” side, the poor safely on the other. As is often the case, at least in actual history, it takes a rock to make it obvious where things stand, a rock to make clear that surveillance doesn't stop when you turn your back on it.

With touchscreens, a new operation is possible: one can activate commodities, be they in-game powerups or Amazonian toilet paper, by pushing on another commodity layered with alkali-aluminosilicate glass, by pressing your face to the window. Still, despite the unbreakable and unscratchable promises of Gorilla Glass (a descendent of what Corning first developed as “Project Muscle” in the early '60s), phones have a strange existence: they get broken, way beyond repair, *and* they keep getting used. Vic pointed this out to me: what else can be so busted, in terms of the promises on which it was sold (billions of pixels, the sheen of interactive glass), yet still be handled and used every day? Sure, keys fall of computers and we just hit the button below. Headphones die in one ear, and we rig them with twist-ties to get them to still play provided they are held in exactly the right position. Dissident mufflers get roped back into place.

Of course, the reasons *not* to replace screens are plentiful and obvious—mostly, that these things are so expensive to start, and few people can afford to put even more money toward them, even if they come to feel like a necessary element of how one navigates every day. Nevertheless, I've watched people embed shards and splinters of glass in their

fingers, tiny motes of blood coming to the surface, because they keep swiping across a shattered surface that holds the cuts in place, bleeding because they had to reduce their pet's stress level in *Kawaii Pet Megu*. When I smashed the hell out of my phone's screen, bobbling it down a flight of cement stairs as it slid out of my pocket wrong, a screen protector kept the shards in position, laying a permanent spider web at the edge of everything I saw. But sometimes when I spoke, I'd find tiny crystals of broken glass dusting and cutting my ears, like a disaster had been whispering there.

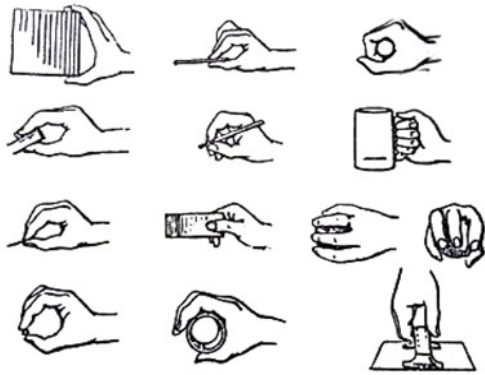


Figure B Types of grips. Taken from Fritz Giese, *Psychologie der Arbeitshand* (Berlin: Urban und Schwarzenberg, 1928), p. 32.

Near the beginning of Alexander Kluge and Oscar Negt's gargantuan, sprawling, and genuinely brilliant *History and Obstinacy*, an immediate concern is the difference between types of grasping. First, between the "crude grasp" (*Rohgriff*) of primitive accumulation—"Its particular grasp annihilates what is actually supposed to be accumulated," as if Hulk tried to seize communal oil fields—and a finer one that "resembles a legislative machine," self-regulating and perpetuating, not destroying what it snatches (p. 85). But they also mean "grasp" in a more literal sense:

Of all the characteristics responsible for unifying the muscles and nerves, the brain, as well as the skin associatively with one another—in other words, for the human body's feedback systems, its so-called rear view [Rücksicht]—the ability to distinguish between when to use power grips and precision grips is the most significant evolutionary achievement. It is the foundation of our ability to maneuver ourselves, an ability that is most easily disrupted by external forces. These forces are also

I didn't replace it for the simple reason that it would have been not just wildly expensive to do so, thanks to HTC's contribution in the arm's race for thinness was to permanently bond the screen to the receptive layer below, meaning that you literally could not replace the screen, no matter how broken. But also, in a way, because I really did bond with this thing I touched more frequently than any single object other than a keyboard and the knife I use every time I cook.

1928

Now finally in English, in an abridged-but-still-tremendous translation approved and edited by Kluge and Negt. In coming months, I'll share something of a reader's guide to this, as I'd argue, with no hyperbole, that it provides a comprehensive rethinking of how capitalism works on and through us that deserves to be read as seriously as people read *Capital*. Plus it has more pictures of baby hippopotami.

capable of disturbing our self-regulation. Self-regulation is the outcome of a dialectic between power grips and precision grips. (p. 89)

With touchscreens, we grapple with a new language of gestures imposed wholly by external forces, gestures that signify only insofar as they are registered in code. But perhaps the strangest of these isn't one bound up with the software, neither the erotic indifference of the left swipe or the fact that, in a rather generous act of anti-planning, the swipe-to-text function of my current phone obstinately avoids predictively spelling *TOMORROW*, offering instead *TIMEPIECES*, *TINTYPE*, *TIPTOES*, and *TIMELESSNESS*. No, the gesture that seems so alien to me, alien in just how natural it has become, is the maneuver of the sliding grip, a delicate oscillation between power and precision. Because despite being held by hands, iPhones and their competitors were never designed to be held. They are designed to be naked screens. Screens without hardware, ghost screens, guillotine-blade screens. They are only allowed to be held grudgingly, as a last resort, and we slowly fool ourselves into imagining that these sharp panes of ice feel good in the hand, let alone stable. But how do we hold something that isn't supposed to be held, whose entire front is intended to be as smooth as possible? What would it be to grip a screen that's only as thick as its image?

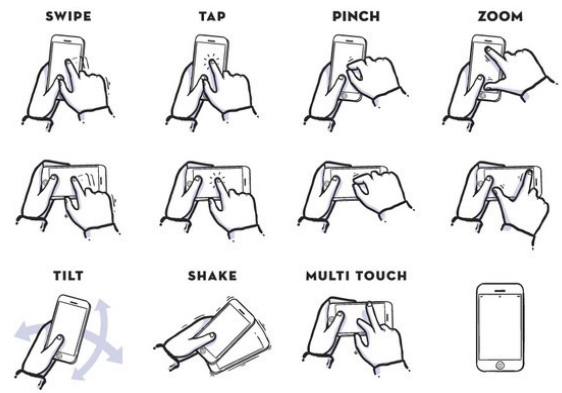
And so aside from learning how to type and swipe, we learn also that particular move of gripping glass while letting it slide. In bed, trying not to wake someone sleeping on our chest, we grope far out in the dark until we just barely feel that familiar smooth chunk, marked by feeling like nothing much at all. We slide it toward us with a minor flick of the middle finger, then pry it up between the thumb and forefinger, drawing the hand toward us with a gentle wrist's whip, so that the phone is both held *and* turns. It rotates over a breakable fall, pinioned without screws by finger's oils, and comes to rest in the palm. Then we look and see that it is still night and that a bot named "silkfeather_92" liked a photo we took and that in the di-

alectic between power grips and precision grips, there are no winners.

That grip, a variety of which is also used when we pinch-draw the phone from a pocket and throw-slide it into the hand, is not just a grip. It is also a gesture, which to me means that it doesn't signify or supplement anything. Rather, it stands uneasily between language and action, speaking of the limits of the former to make itself heard and the refusal of the latter to stop trying. It is an intermediary that makes it possible to see mediation, the machines at work behind the experience of communication, the fingerprints marring the surface.

If you asked me to say to you a list of all the words I know, I'd probably have the experience of knowing that there are words I've read, wrote, and said but that I simply cannot call to mind for the list, that I don't remember that I know. In order to explain this to you, though, I would have to use words, and, in so doing, likely stumble onto some of the words I'd forgotten.

Perhaps that's how it is with our hands of glass. To draw a balance sheet of what we've lost and gained, what forms of touch have been displaced or enhanced or scrapped because we can't keep our hands off ice screens, we could only do so through moving our hands, passing them over things, tilting slabs, seeing what happens, what registers, what remembers. But being gestures, they can't say or do anything other than depict the contours of the systems within which they might communicate, amongst ourselves and between our devices. From what I've read, it seems that those who design and manufacture these things, those who mine rare earths and seep thorium into water supplies those who drive workers to suicide—that is to say, *we*, we who are inseparable from these things—keep yearning for tougher and tougher glass, be it Gorilla or sapphire. The endpoint of that dream can only be a glass so hard that it could only be marked as ever having been touched by more of that glass itself. If that's the case, at least I'll finally know how to write *TOMORROW* on my phone. **TNI**



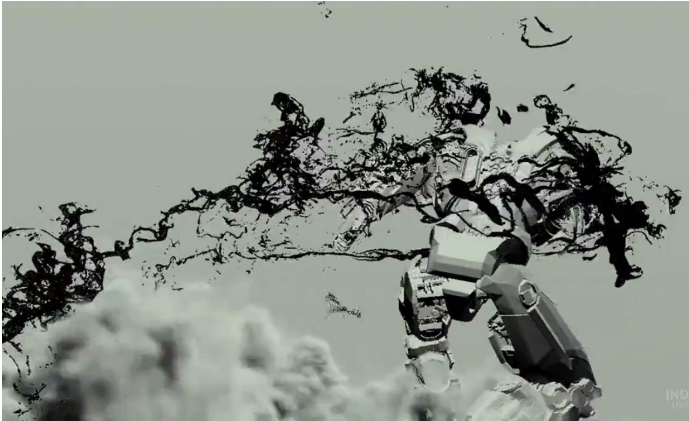
2015

That's an understanding of gesture that comes from Walter Benjamin and is picked up by Giorgio Agamben, one that I'll return to in the next post.

Shard Cinema, 1

by EVAN CALDER WILLIAMS

The cinematic negation of sabotage



*“beneath and above this cantus firmus there run
disordered exuberances”*

—Ernst Bloch

WHAT is the relation between a sabotaged PS4 that never finishes booting up and the foreclosure of sabotage in a film whose Blu-Ray might get played on it,

if only it would start? One way into this was hinted at before: the representation of a world split between competing regimes, or at least appearances, of technology, between craft and sheen, or the obdurate and the flickering. Indeed, the opposition at work in *Elysium*'s grimy keyboards vs. transparent tablets or in *Oblivion*'s yuppie-driftwood vs. in-human triangles is hardly limited to those films. In other recent releases, it adopts the shape of an even more hackneyed contest, digital vs. analog.

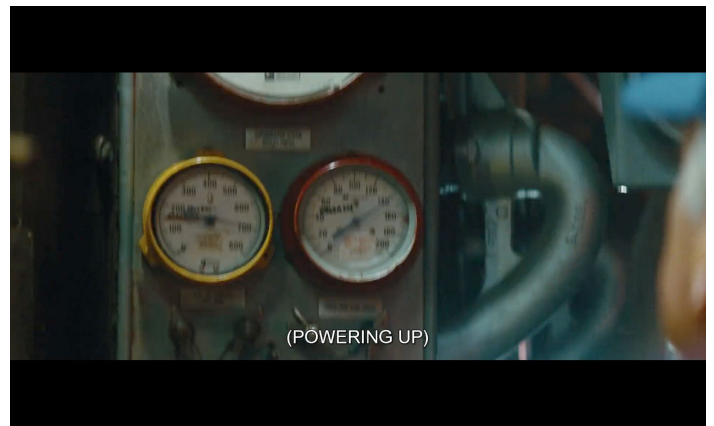
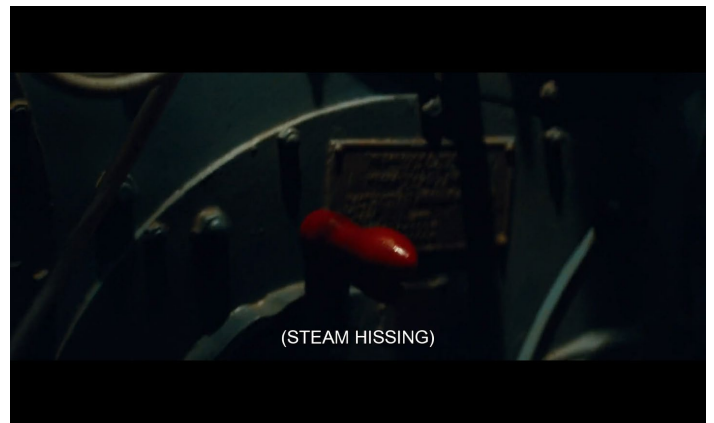


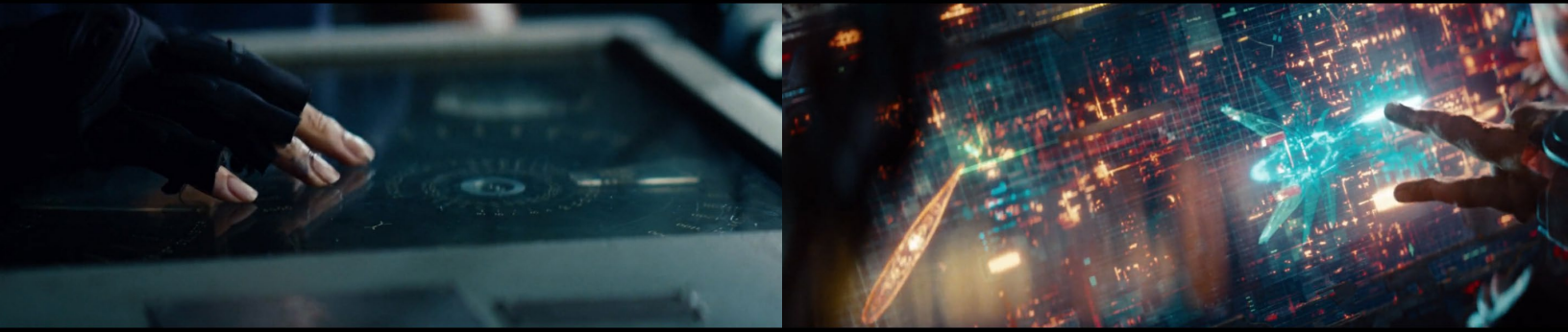
In *Pacific Rim*, for example, the nominal divide between giant lumbering mounds of alien flesh and giant lumbering mounds of robotic metal gets parsed out further, because one of the central plot points derives from the gap between two kinds of “Jaegers” (those behemoth vehicle mounds piloted from within by humans, because, apparently, the envisioned future has forgotten about that whole drone turn in military affairs). There are new-fangled digital pseudo-Transformer Jaegers (used by everyone but the Americans) and there are old (2017), analog (albeit nuclear), and already decommissioned (sent to “Oblivion Bay” in Oakland) Jaegers, like “Gipsy Danger,” the Jaeger aligned with the protagonists, that still run off more openly mechanical processes.

In total accord with a yuppie logic that must veil all its choices behind false cries of necessity, the yearning for the simpler times of analog mechanized death gets the narrative excuse it needs. An electro-magnetic pulse from one of the aforementioned fleshy threats (the Kaiju) puts the next-gen Jaegers out of commission, leaving just ol’ faithful Gipsy Danger to save the day.

Danger has an “appearance, faded blue paint job and romanticized decal [that] invokes the visual design fighter aircraft like Vought F4U Corsair from the World War II era,” according to the disarmingly complete Pacific Rim Wiki site, combined with the stylings of the Chrysler Building and the “saunter” of John Wayne

Battleship, the other recent Transformers-with-more-water-droplets blockbuster, realigns that division into human-analog and alien-digital, complete with AC/DC bro jam accompaniment as weathered vets pulled out of retirement and hot young things alike rescue Earth from modular, hulkish, and bristling alien crafts with nothing but their standard-issue battleship and plentiful references to *The Art of War*.





All species can agree on haptic, smearable things...

Sure, the human battleship is “modern,” as a shot of Rihanna rotating gun turrets by twisting her fingers on what may as well be an iPad hint, a shot later echoed from the alien side as if to hint at common ground. But both that possible commonality of two battleships passing in the night and the prospect of successful algorithmic war are blown-away by the relentless insistence on human courage as the juncture of tough physical exertion with weighty, mechanical *stuff*. A representative sample: the sailors gruntingly lugging a 1,000 pound shell from one gun to another; the DIY-firing up of the battleship’s steam engine; a double-amputee vet beating the shit out of an armored alien through pure determination; and, of course...



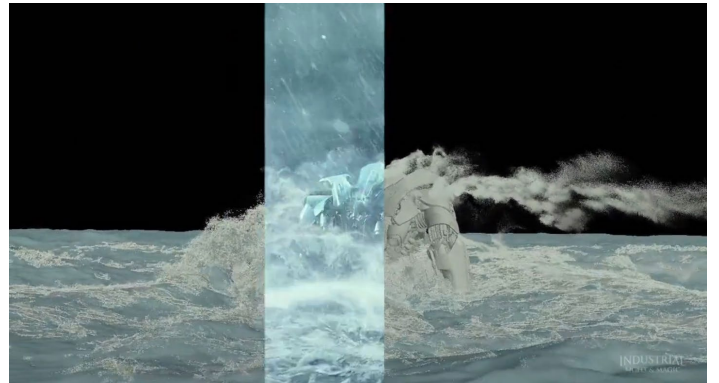
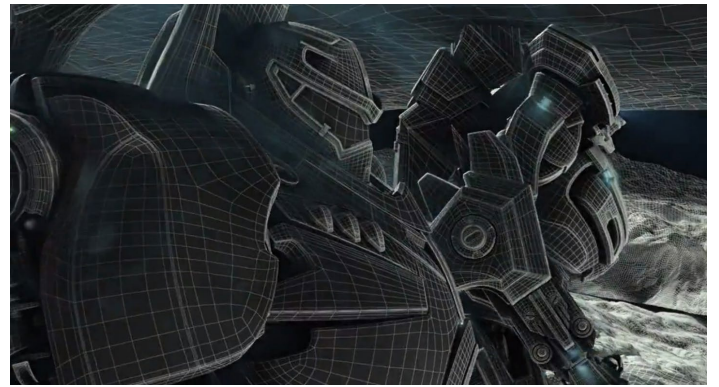
outsmarting the invaders and their slick displays, targeting reticles, and tracking missiles/buzzsaws by literally turning the battle into a game of Battleship, as the sailors reveal that they “can track without radar” because they have mapped the entire theater of operation with that familiar grid from which the entire film is nominally derived. (i.e. “B-3...” “You sunk my cruiser!,” etc)



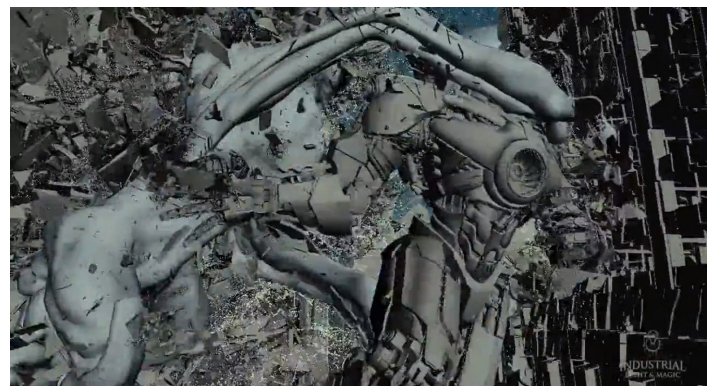
The film must have won an award in some alternate universe for most absurdly over-extended adaptation. It's like making an opera version of Connect Four.

None of this is especially unique, given that so much action cinema from the outset has turned on the idea of the out-gunned and out-manned beating foreign hordes by simpler means, elbow grease, and a generalized commitment to Freedom. What is different, though, is the stark opposition between this visual-narrative schema and the means by which it was produced: namely, through a massive exertion of the digital, with a heft of capital, time, and processing power that more than equals the towering fighters on display.

While *Pacific Rim* integrated certain “practical effects,” such as the construction of miniatures for destruction and the filming of actual smoke, particles, and water, *Gipsy Danger*, that triumph of the analog itself, was “built” digitally by Industrial Light and Magic (ILM), as were the others Jaegers and Kaiju. Skin, lighting, and damage effects are wrapped like infaslim panels over a gridded form, which then are tossed into and through similar objects (Kaiju, buildings) consisting of further panes, frames, and quantified volumes.

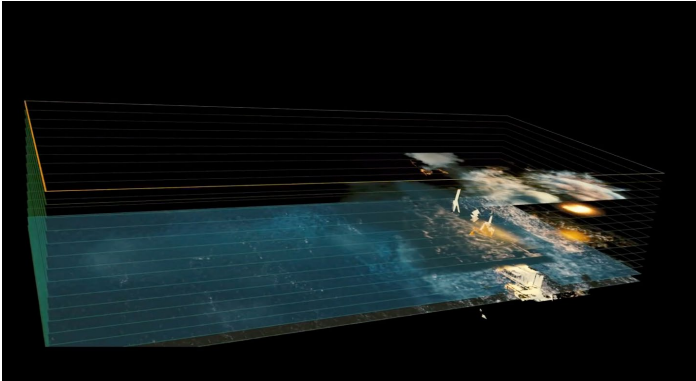
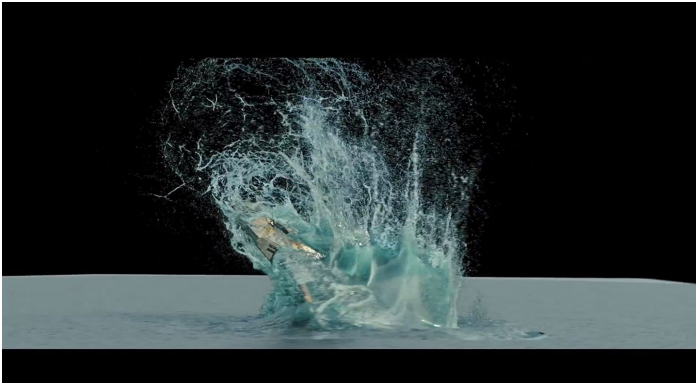


Render stills from ILM



Gipsy Danger slams a Kaiju into a building. Render still.

The resulting splinter and splatter move in accordance with calculations that crunch the interaction of phantom weight and velocity and attempt to randomize, within a restricted range, particle effects and debris so as to produce the appearance of the unpredictable contingencies of real matter on matter action.



Battleship *render stills*

The same goes for *Battleship*, whose visual effects were also helmed by ILM and its various “partnerships” with VFX teams and render labs far afield, including in Singapore. Digitally modeled water, ship, sky, and the explosive force of fired shells alike are set within a digital “aquarium” to calculate how they interact and slosh. Like the Jaegers, they are never filmed from any angle: they are set in constructed space and recorded from a chosen perspective after their movements have already been modeled, when they are merged with other elements shot or animated.

And so, even as a green-screened Charlie Hunnam swaggers toward his nuts-and-bolts counterpart and as echoes of old Ford “Built Tough” commercials flicker in my mental overlay, the actual methods of these images’ construction guts any validity of that nostalgia. It demon-

strates the alleged split to be itself just one more camouflage’s cladding applied after the fact to a mode wholly alien to available structures of looking and thinking. In trying to make sense of it all, we end only with a headache, the “suppressed, dull rage capable of being distracted” (Bloch, *The Heritage of Our Times*, p. 108.), and the drifting data of a 3-D storm into which thousands of hours have been sunk, and not like battleships whatsoever.

Contrary to an old-fashioned ontological realist and sometimes fist-pounding emphasis on cinema showing the “real world,” my suspicions about this operation have nothing to do its supposed falsity or the idea that Del Toro somehow “betrayed” the nobility of men in rubber suits smacking each other around in front of a wind machine. My interest lies instead in the basic structure onto which that aesthetic preference for the hand-hewn, heftable, or photographed—rather than processed, calculated, and animated—has been applied. To think about the relation of such images to sabotage requires thinking first about the relation between those images and the process of their making. Because in this visual system, that process becomes pressingly apparent, even as the materials involved remain invisible, obscure, and beyond the grasp of those—myself included—who watch them. We know that the Jaeger is spun from the combination of a processor and a giant sum of labored hours just as much as we know that the particular techniques, decisions, patches, and tweaks are beyond our reach. We just know that it *costs*.



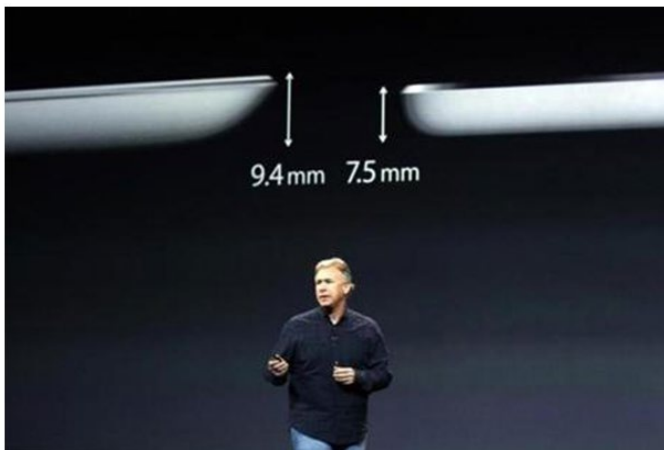
Tony Stark putters around amongst holographic corpses

The connection—and distance—from sabotage becomes clearer when we track back from an animated leviathan fight to the machines that play that fight for us, because there too, the real links between how the device was made, how it operates, what it is supposed to do for us, and what it actually does are deeply obscured. To be sure, they are hidden in the way that any commodity, especially a mass-produced one, covers the explicit tracks of its path from rare earth to Foxconn to living room, but these images veil those passages even further. Consider the reigning object used to mark “advanced,” and potentially evil, technology in these films: the touchscreen, be it in *Oblivion*’s table-length tablets or *Battleship*’s tablets or the ubiquitous screens—be it in *Elysium* or *Robot and Frank*—of translucent glass in which information can appear and vanish without a trace or the furthest extension of barely-there-ness, the holographic OS of *Iron Man 3* that lets Tony Stark play goateed Sherlock in a neon charnal field.



iPad Air

The power of lightness.



Dicks.

Their real world correlates are hard to miss: tablets and phones in the baleful arms race to be ever thinner, ever lighter, and all approaching a fantasy point of zero where one will hold what weighs nothing and has no depth yet can still be touched, swept, and pinched. A screen untethered from both mass and history of manufacture, a window that does not even need glass to frame and show.



Budweiser’s “Buddy Cup,” which adds drinkers who chin-chin as friends on Facebook

The underpinning logic of the absent tablet is itself just one facet of a historical dynamic felt daily, with a mixture of anticipation and creeping dread, by those who live in situations and zones of the globe where the need for touchable screens of various sizes might be felt, whether or not one has the cash to do anything about it. That dynamic is the increasing blur between things that can gather data and/or process it to be presented as information and things that cannot, that are “dark” to the world around them, even as they remain consumable, usable, or destroyable. In other words, one faces the increasing prospect of all elements of the built world becoming gatherers, processors, or transmitters, especially in ways that are not immediately visible to those around them.



“Smart Arrow”

For instance, if an arrow “communicates” with a wall by hitting it, that interaction and aftermath can be easily seen, heard, and felt. When an IDF “Smart Arrow”—I wish I was joking—is fired at a wall, those filmed cannot immediately detect that it is beaming back to their enemies a stream of images for up to seven hours.

That prospect that any and all things in our surroundings might be POVs, rather than elements of a space to be seen from our own, is thick in the air these days. All the world’s a spy movie when bugs do not need to be planted because they are come pre-built into the terrain, and when secret agents are just malware and remote-start tea kettles.* It is for this reason that sabotage—the act of accessing the latent contradictions and potentials of apparatuses to be used as means against their designed ends—has become an even more crucial form of analysis and subversion than it long has been. From its inception, sabotage involves a

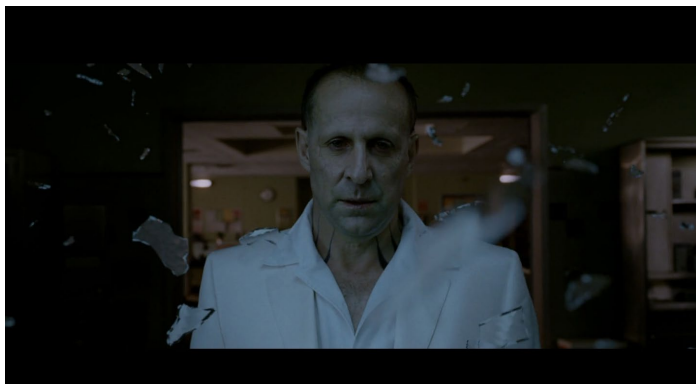
deep connection with the machines, commodities, concepts, and spaces that curse us, a collusion with enemy materials against their social forms. It involves tuning ourselves to their histories and intricacies, and above all, to the gaps between how they appear to us as finished, functional commodities and how they work and can be made to stop working, especially by those responsible for making and reproducing them in the first place.

In short, sabotage is the name for the very prospect denied by Elysium and its fetish of objects that can be made and used yet not understood or altered, be seen as miraculous but not as secular. So to answer the question: the relation between such cinema and sabotage is a negative one. This cinema is the image of the historical negation of sabotage, or any thick knowledge of circulation’s routes and detours, during a long moment where it shows itself increasingly to be a necessary optic onto a world.

* See here also: CISCO routers with backdoors, iPhones that provide locations to cops, HP printers that can be used to commit arson from afar, hacked pacemakers, Facebook as such.

That negative image, the portrait of sabotage thwarted and foreclosed, is nothing so immediate as the image of a touchscreen-piloted drone with no discernible nuts and bolts to slacken, no exhaust port to piss in. It is de facto a more complicated capture, both a suspicion about the thickening world's capacity to display and communicate information and the evacuation of the prospect of doing

anything about it other than gawk. Still, it can be glimpsed in the form of one visual situation, repeated again and again in the large-scale cinema of the past decade to the point of becoming its authorless signature. It can be seen here, in *Constantine* (2005, dir. Francis Lawrence), when The Devil comes to Earth and decides to make a splashy entrance, so to speak.



What these stills suggest but don't fully clarify is the three distinct velocities at work in this sequence: the outward explosion of the glass, which is brought to a near-standstill; the forward movement of Lucifer, who strides through the glass as if it was hanging ornaments; and the molasses velocity of the sequence as a whole, which reduces even Lucifer's strut to a Zeno's crawl. Part and parcel of techniques related to "time slices" and "bullet time," this plural velocity is as endemic to these films as the treatment of such surfaces.



Constantine, or the Devil walks through frozen time

Or this, from the forest escape scene in *Sherlock Holmes: Game of Shadows*, where the advance of time jerks back and forth from CSI-renactment creep of particles across empty space to Jude Law's herky-jerky sprint:



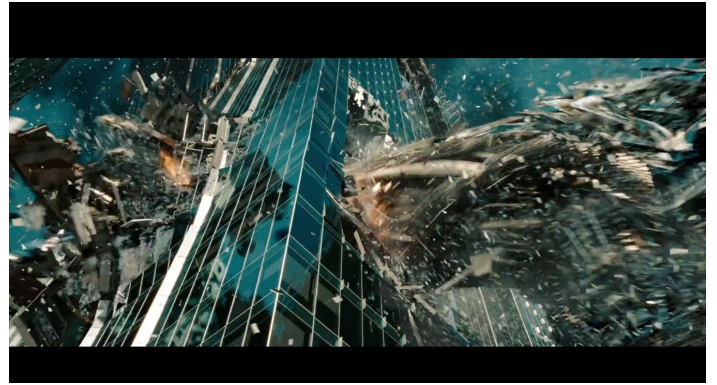
Sherlock Holmes: Game of Shadows

Or this:



The Matrix, CGI-less

Or perhaps its most “advanced” recent display, in the third *Transformers* (*Dark of the Moon*), when a robot worm-pyhton burrows through and then strangles a highly reflective skyscraper, cyberpunk's mirror shades made architecture:



the smooth outside of which various characters slide before adding to the debris by following the film's basic injunction—“Shoot the glass!”—to reenter the building.





In these and the plentiful other instances familiar to anyone who has seen a capital-intensive action flick in the last decade and a half, the recurrent obsession is to show the after-effect of one or more shattered surfaces, always in slow motion and often decelerated to the point of near arrest, as the manifold shards of whatever busted or falling material fill, hang, and splay in the air, clattering against each other and other elements of the scene joined together as animation. In short, it is the application of bullet time to all that exists.

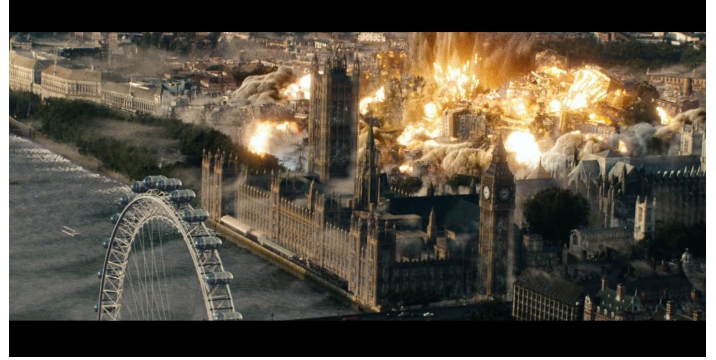


Sucker Punch

To call these “surfaces,” though, is not to limit this signature image to moments where something as obviously shard-prone as a glass door is exploded into a perennially blue-lit ice storm by Lucifer. The situation is the same in the kind of particle effects/atomistic puke that a film like *Sucker Punch* loves, where ash, snow, fire, glass, wood, dirt, sequins, and spent shells jostle for space with unrepentant Orientalism and women themselves so buffed with filters as to become one more composite texture available for shattering.*

And so too with the destruction of things we might not think of first and foremost as surfaces: the entirety of central London, for instance, which is devastated in *GI Joe Retaliation* by means of a tungsten-filled platinum rod dropped from an orbiting satellite. (“None of the fallout; all of the fun.”)

*Nor is it to insist upon which elements are digital visual effects as opposed to not: the lobby scene in *The Matrix*, for instance, was filmed with real chunks of matter spritzing around Keanu’s head but the relation of production to sight I am identifying holds as an overall condition regardless.

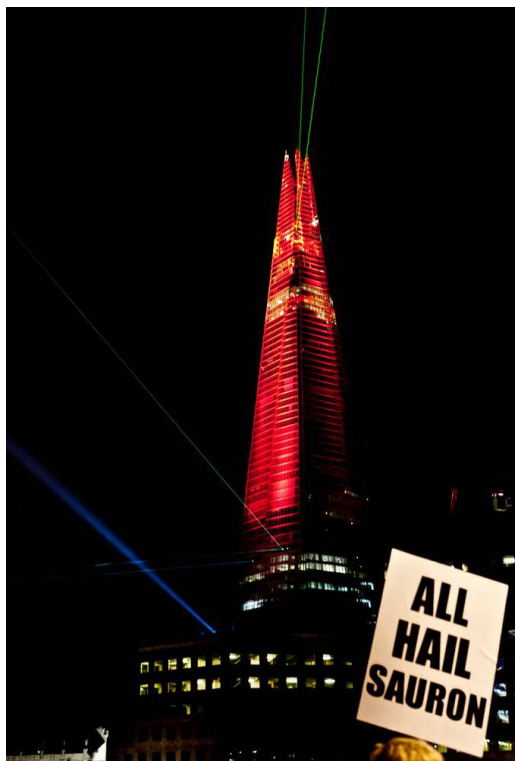


The prior entry in the series (*G.I. Joe: The Rise of Cobra*) had its own bravura feat of urbicide, letting “nanomites” loose in Paris.* There, the city is surface in the guise of substance, as any and all durable materials—cars, bodies, the Eiffel Tower—are suddenly dissolved as if they had been thin veils of matter from the start, eaten away into green mist of chaff that dissolves on the wind. (Nanomites evidently do not shit.) In *Retaliation*, the opposite is the case: actual substance, heft, and unevenness is rendered a breakable surface prior to the destruction and the metropolis is ruined as just such a cracky, shuddering surface. As if London had been erected directly on a mosaic of pieces, plates that, when put under pressure, break on the dotted lines of separation already present before the space rod makes contact. As if because that’s precisely how this depicted London was built. As Bill George of ILM, VFX Supervisor for the project explains:

* One of the best cinematic villains in the last couple years, along with the tire in *Rubber* and Matthew McConaughey in *Killer Joe*.

When the filmmakers turned over the shots to us they explained that they didn’t want to see the typical “nuclear blast” type shots. They wanted to surface of the earth to “shatter”. We explored the idea of treating the ground plane as a thick “shell” that would break like glass when the impact happens.

The effect is achieved, no doubt. However, the way this “shell” breaks is in accord with the breaks already there, because the construction of this destructible London involved a montage of “plates.” Having been provided with “helicopter footage over London to use as plates,” these modular slabs dictated both images of London: as unruined (the assemblage of various angles and excess footage into a manageable pattern of surfaces that would maintain their “properties,” both the houses on them and the relevant textures, in accordance with a hierarchy of “foreground and background assets with the foreground models being more finely detailed and the many background ones being more procedural”) and as midway through ruination (“This animation of the plates drove ALL the destruction and simulations that would follow”).



In this regard, it is fitting that The Shard tower—yes, the one that looks like a villain in one of these films, the one designed to be “a shard of glass through the heart of historic London” (in the words of its architect Renzo Piano), they one they inaugurated by cladding in Technicolor red light so it could be that heart’s dagger, the one where, in a moment of such non-simultaneity as to make Blochians weep with joy, a fox was found living in the unfinished hull, 72 stories above the street—was built in these years of this shard cinema and is nowhere to be found in this scene.

The reason is simple enough: The Shard opened to the public in February 2013 while *Retaliation*—slated to come out in June 2012, pushed back just to amp up promotion and convert to 3-D building wasn’t finished until February of 2013—had its principal photography start in fall 2011. But by that fall, The Shard was already a good 801

feet high, missing only its last fifth of steel spire there to snag the tallest building in the EU prize. Yet in *Retaliation*, no Shard in sight, except in its absence, insofar as the first shot of London just prior to impact is from on high, angling northwest past the London Eye ferris wheel to the other side of the Thames: from, that is, a position that may as well be from the top of The Shard.

This is a POV onto the breaking of London into the plates of surface it was already constructed to be, from the top of a building that makes this very principle into architecture. Just a splinter bundled taut in surface, a glass scarf raised to heights achievable solely by gargantuan feats of capital, a thing nobody wanted from the start and resisting full occupancy because it was always the heart-staking that mattered anyway, a building already adequate to the un-making it calls out for, joining the chorus of requests made to foxes or any other illegal thing. **TNI**

Room 406

by TEJU COLE



1

Alas! Sha'del, the son of Zabdibôl, the son of Mo-qîmu, the artisan. He died on the 3rd day of Kanûn (in) the year 484 (November, 172 C.E.).

2

The destruction of a ruin is like the desecration of a body. It is a vengeance wreaked on the past in order to embitter the future. And how often it is that those who destroy ruins are the same ones who desecrate bodies.

3

I need to understand what I am sad about. Not in hopes of obliterating the sadness, but in hopes of lessening it.

4

Underneath modern Tadmor was Tadmor Prison. The dungeon was built for horror. The population was in the thousands. To keep the population fearful, random prisoners were dragged to death, or cut to pieces with an axe. Above stood the ancient ruins. The Syrian poet Faraj Bayrakdar, held at Tadmor Prison for five years for his communist ideas, called it “a kingdom of death and madness.”

5

Alas! Tadmor, the wife of Moqîmu son of Nûrbel, the artisan. She died on the 29th day of Siwan in the year 457 (June, 146 C.E.).

6

I displace what hurts, what cuts, onto some other object charged with a local pain from ages ago. The mourners and the ones they mourned are eighteen centuries gone. Their pain—“Alas!”—remains fresh.

7

The way the women raise their right hand to touch, delicately, the hem of their robes. Their irises incised, their pupils doubly incised, into the limestone.

8

Alas! Nûrbel, the son of Moqîmu (son of) Nûrbel. In (the month of) Qinyan of the year 492 (July, 181 C.E.).

9

There are only two other people in Room 406. One of them is a young man in black t-shirt and black shorts. The museum will close soon. Outside is the city. Late afternoon. Summer is almost over. Many languages flow through the streets, many people, and the UN building is a marine green in the August light.

10

On June 26, 1980, a putsch against President Hafez al-Asad fails. The Muslim Brotherhood is deemed responsible. The next day, commando forces, under orders from Rifa'al al-Asad, the president's brother, go to Tadmor Prison with orders to kill every prisoner, whether they are connected to the Muslim Brotherhood or not. The commandos arrive at dawn. The prisoners are in their cells, and the commandos go from one cell to another. No records are kept, but about a thousand prisoners are believed killed.

11

The ancient city of Tadmor (a possible etymological link with the Arabic *tamr*, "dates," but this is unproven), an oasis in the Syrian desert for millennia, becomes, under Greco-Roman influence around the 1st century C.E., Palmyra (the name evokes date palms). Underneath Palmyra, Tadmor persists: the local dialect of Aramaic, carved into limestone stele as "Palmyrene," the Arab Queen Zenobia, who fights, and wins, and loses, and is carried off to Rome in gold chains.

12

Parthian (later "Persian") dress, Greek style, in this place where cultures meet. The faces are frontal, both idealized and stylized, and responsive to second and third century C.E. Roman portraiture. The simplified folds of the robes fall like palmate leaves. The snicks of Palmyrene script are dry fronds.

13

That repeated "Alas!" which tells it how it is. The amphitheater was built during the Roman imperial era. Earlier this year people were lined up in the amphitheater and shot. One notable horror of ISIS is that the individual perishes as part of a mass no one knows how many have been killed, how many raped, how many made to disappear from earth without the dignity and rites that might lessen grief. Two hundred? Two thousand? How many people have been murdered during ISIS's deranged campaign to reinvent the world? What were their names? Who did they love? Who were their parents?

14

Not “art,” vaguely. Not “archaeology,” imprecisely. But rather: this specific object, that specific object, what it looks like, what it means. What it is to look at it on a particular day, and reiterate our debt to its custodians. As a historian of art, I feel like a member of this complicated tribe of caretakers. How many of us were killed by the Baath regime before the war? How many archaeologists, historians, and art historians were killed in the American bombing of Baghdad? How many carvers, how many wood-makers, how many masters of the maqam, how many singers? How many of those who cherish the past on behalf of the future? But no one keeps such a tally.

15

The young man in Room 406, in black shirt, black shorts, black shoes, black socks, goes from case to case, with rare attention. He plays nervously with his hands, but his face is serene.

16

And there was the old professor, in whose protective custody were the ruins and tombs of Palmyra. A distinguished archaeologist, esteemed scholar, and member of the Baath Party since 1954, he was bound to die once the city fell. Professor Khaled al-Asaad was taken to a dungeon—not Tadmor Prison, which ISIS had already destroyed—but elsewhere. Here in this city he had loved and protected, they tortured him. Best not to imagine what happens in a torture chamber to a man of 82. Then they killed him. And that is just the beginning, alas.

17

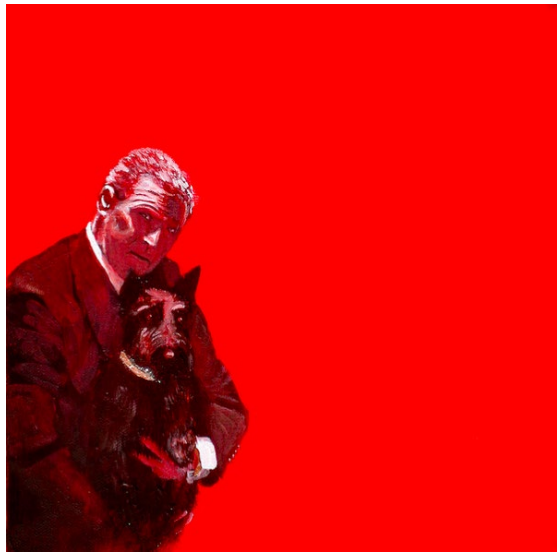
Just a few more minutes now before Room 406 closes for the day. The carving, a fine blend of the Hellenic and the Persian, is distinct: no other art looks like this. The rich merchant families of Palmyra sustained this art. Some of the stele are half-length busts, others, more complex, show a reclining figure attended by a number of others. The stele, in high relief, are smaller than half life size, and are arranged around the grave, as in a Roman dining room. In the world to come, we will be at banquet together. **TNI**

Terror Painting

By TEJU COLE



George W. Bush, *Barney*, 2012 (?)



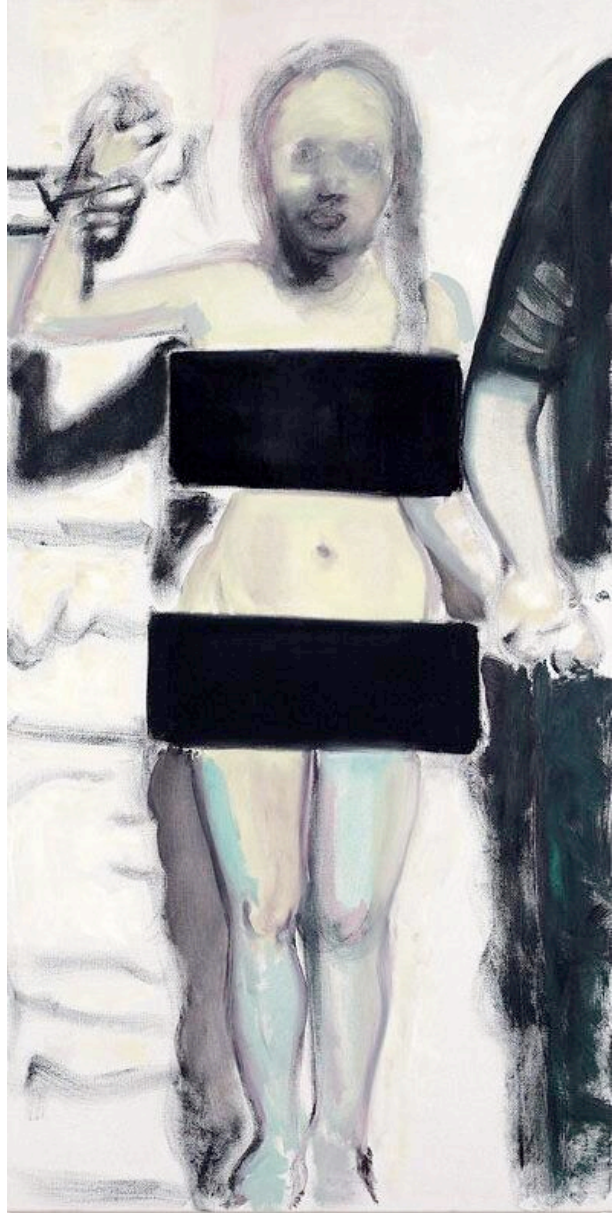
Lapata, *Humsafar: President George W. Bush with his Scottie, Barney*, 2007



Marlene Dumas, *The Blindfolded*, 2002



Luc Tuymans, *Secretary of State*, 2005



Marlene Dumas, *Woman of Algiers*, 2001



Leon Golub, *Interrogation I*, 1981

Lapata, *Walk-In Freezer (Gaddafi)*, 2012

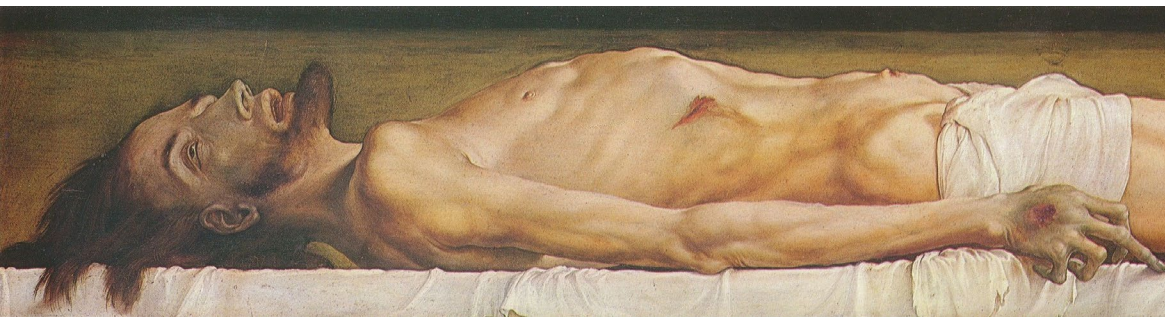
Marlene Dumas, *Jen*, 2005

Gerhard Richter, *Tote*, 1988





Édouard Manet, *Dead Toreador*, 1864



Hans Holbein, *The Body of the Dead Christ in the Tomb (detail)*, 1522

“In the picture the face is terribly smashed with blows, swollen, covered with terrible, swollen, and blood-stained bruises, the eyes open and squinting; the large, open whites of the eyes have a sort of dead and glassy glint... Looking at that picture, you get the impression of nature as some enormous, implacable, and dumb beast, or, to put it more correctly, thought it may seem strange, as some huge engine of the latest design, which has senselessly seized, cut to pieces, and swallowed up—impassively and unfeelingly—a great and priceless Being... The picture seems to give expression to the idea of a dark, insolent, and senselessly eternal power, to which everything is subordinated, and this idea is suggested to you unconsciously.”

—Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Idiot*, 1869

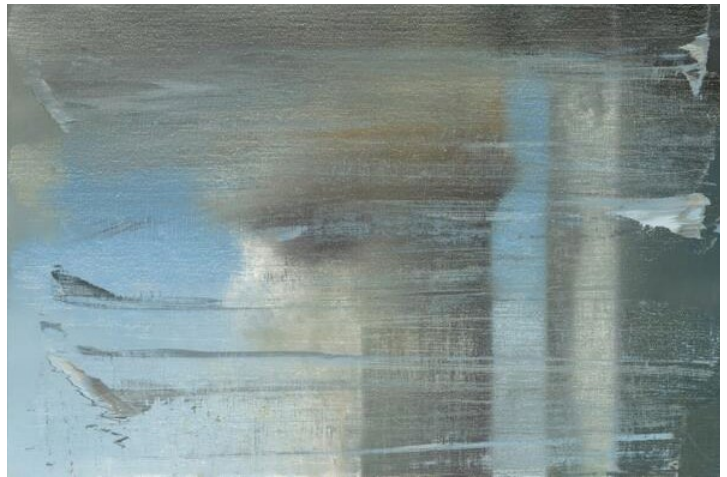


Andrea Mantegna, *Lamentation Over the Dead Christ*, 1480

Luc Tuymans, *Ballroom Dancing (George and Laura)*, 2005



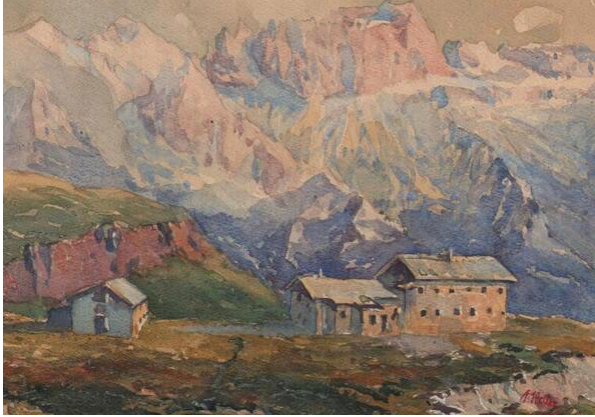
Gerhard Richter, *September*, 2005



*He lies in his grave
and I know not where
Though I keep asking people
Everywhere*

*Perhaps the poor child
Lies in a rough ditch
and instead he could have been
lying in his warm bed*

—from a mid-15th-century Polish folk song of the Opole region



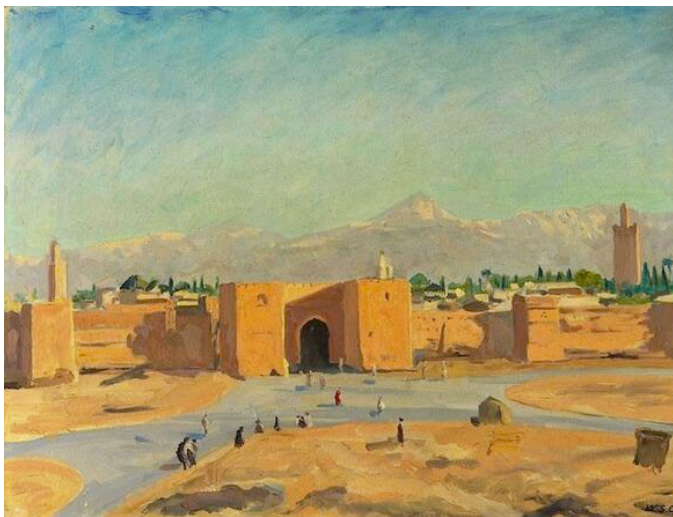
Adolf Hitler, *Untitled*, undated



Charles, Prince of Wales, *Ormos Palaio, Monemvasia, Greece*, 2005

“However, I stand for 8–10 hours a day. Why is standing limited to 4 hours?”

—Donald Rumsfeld, handwritten note on torture memo, 2002



Winston Churchill, *Marrakech*, 1948



Paul Bremer, *Study of Cap d'Antibes (after Monet)*, 2012



George W. Bush, *Untitled*, 2013 (?)



Gerhard Richter, *Erhängte*, 1988



Fernando Botero, *Abu Ghraib*, 2005



George W. Bush, *Self-Portrait in Shower*, 2013 (?)

“Why didn’t I know about this?”—George W. Bush, *Decision Points*, 2011



Fernando Botero, *Abu Ghraib*, 2005



DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
OFFICE OF FREEDOM OF INFORMATION
1155 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, DC 20301-1155

JAN 17 2013

Ref: 12-F-0013

Jason Leopold
Truthout.org

Dear Mr. Leopold:

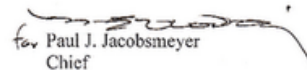
This is in response to your October 3, 2011, electronic Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request for "all 'Drawings' and/or 'Sketches' and/or any 'Artwork' made by Zayn al-Abidin Muhammad Husayn, also known as Abu Zubaydah". You also requested Mr. Zubaydah's "'literary' writings, which includes but is not limited to, prose, poetry, short stories, novels, and articles, written between September 6, 2006 and the present." Your request was, assigned FOIA case number 12-F-0013.

We additionally referred your request to the U.S. Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM) who asked the Joint Task Force Guantanamo (JTF-GTMO) to conduct a search for responsive records. USSOUTHCOM advised this office that JTF-GTMO held no responsive records and that USSOUTHCOM would respond directly to you concerning the results of that search. We are therefore responding to you concerning the processing of your request by the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD).

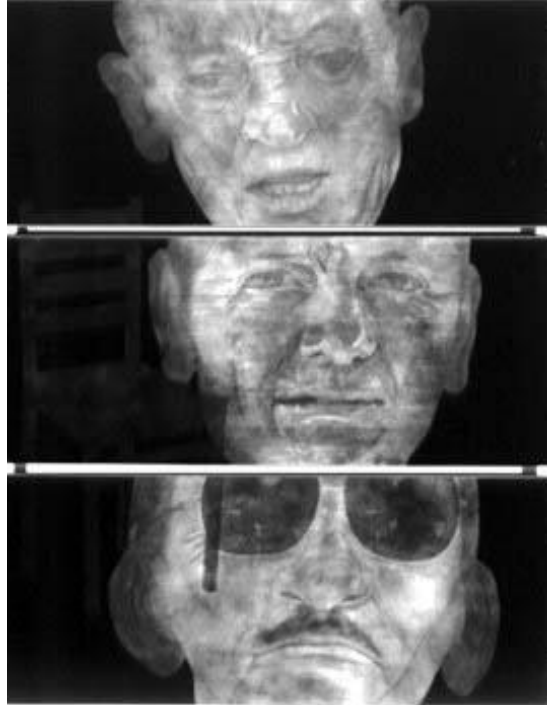
A search was conducted by the Department of Defense Office of the General Counsel and six pages of sketches were identified as responsive to your request, no other records were found. Ms. Megan M. Weis, Associate Deputy General Counsel (Legal Counsel), Department of Defense, Office of the General Counsel has determined that the records should be denied in their entirety pursuant to 5 USC § 552(b)(7)(A). Exemption (b)(7)(A) authorizes the withholding of records or information compiled for law enforcement purposes when the release could reasonably be expected to interfere with enforcement proceedings. The public release of the sketches could reasonably be expected to interfere with and prejudice the prosecution of Abu Zubaydah by the DoD Office of the Chief Prosecutor of Military Commissions before a Military Commission at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

If you are not satisfied with this action, you may appeal to the appellate authority, the Director of Administration and Management, Office of the Secretary of Defense. To submit your appeal, you should write directly to the Defense Freedom of Information Policy Office, ATTN: Mr. James Hogan, 1155 Defense Pentagon, Washington, D.C. 20101-1155. Your appeal should be postmarked within 60 calendar days of the date of this letter, should cite to case number 12-F-0013, and should be clearly marked "Freedom of Information Act Appeal".

Sincerely,


Paul J. Jacobsmeyer
Chief

Abu Zubaydah, *Drawings depicting his torture by Americans, after 2006 [release of images denied under the Freedom of Information Act]*



Paul Stopforth, *The Interrogators*, 1979

“That is what Paul West, novelist, had written about, page after page after page, leaving nothing out; and that is what she read, sick with the spectacle, sick with herself, sick with a world in which such things took place, until at last she pushed the book away and sat with her head in her hands. Obscene! she wanted to cry but did not cry because she did not know at whom the word should be flung: at herself, at West, at the committee of angels that watches impassively over all that passess. Obscene because such things ought not to take place, and then obscene again because having taken place they ought not to be brought into the light but covered up and hidden forever in the bowels of the earth, like what goes on in the slaughterhouses of the world, if one wants to save one’s sanity.”

—J.M. Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello and the Problem of Evil in Salmagundi*, 2003

Molly Crabapple, *Guantánamo Bay*, 2013



Nicky Hodjoui, *Untitled*, 1976

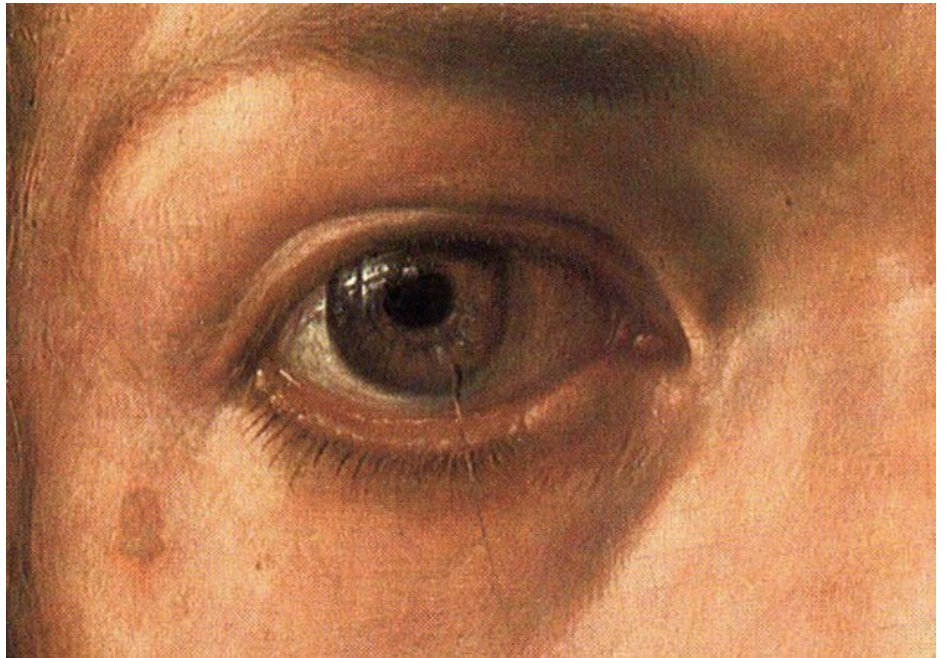
Sam Nhlengethwa, *It Left Him Cold: The Death of Steve Biko*, 1990



Dreezus

By TEJU COLE

I know I got a bad reputation. Walk around always mad reputation.



I'm aware I'm a wolf.

I had this vision in my sleep, and saw how many great waters fell from heaven.

The first struck the ground about four miles away from me with such a terrible force, enormous noise, and splashing that it drowned the entire countryside. I was so greatly shocked at this that I awoke before the cloudburst.

Something strange is happening. (Blood on the leaves.)

And the ensuing downpour was huge. Some of the waters fell some distance away and some close by. And they came from such a height that they seemed to fall at an equally slow pace.



The inscription on the Bremen self-portrait reads: “Where the yellow spot is, to which I point with my finger, there it hurts.”

The wound in Christ’s side was a question of recognition—evidence for the doubters. Recognition was also what was at stake in the matter of money.

If it’s for myself, I would have been cool just sitting in Nike not getting no royalties. When I’m having negotiations and then I go and look in my daughter’s eyes, when I go and negotiate after that I’m like, “Oh y’all ain’t finna talk to me like that. We finna get this money right.”

His colophon to the 1511 *Life of the Virgin* is

unrestrained:

Hold! You crafty ones, strangers to work, and pilferers of other men’s brains. Think not rashly to lay your thievish hands upon my works. Beware! Know you not that I have a grant from the most glorious Emperor Maximilian, that not one throughout the imperial dominion shall be allowed to print or sell fictitious imitations of these engravings?

Y’all niggas can’t fuck with me. Y’all niggas can’t fuck with ‘Ye.

Listen! And bear in mind that if you do so, through spite or through covetousness, not only will your goods be confiscated, but your bodies also placed in mortal danger.



I am a god.



But the very first water that hit the ground so suddenly had fallen at such velocity, and was accompanied by wind and roaring so frightening, that when I awoke my whole body trembled and I could not recover for a long time.

God! God! God! God!

His dream of the flood was on June 8, 1525. The dream perhaps was linked to the astrological panic of the previous year, when many contemporary prognosticators, noting a strange conjunc-

tion of the planets in Pisces, feared an apocalyptic flood.

(Aquinas notes in the Summa that dreams may be caused by the influence of heavenly bodies.)

They say I'm possessed. It's an omen.

The first Transit of Venus since the nineteenth-century was observed on June 8, 2004 and—a further coincidence to trouble the pattern-seeking mind—it was also on a June 8, in 1777, that the other man was born. **TNI**



Gotta Have a Code

by MARYAM MONALISA GHARAVI

The long life of the “real” Omar Little



Donnie Andrews and Michael K. Williams in “React Quotes” (*The Wire*, Season 5, Episode 5). Episode epigraph: “Just ‘cause they’re in the street doesn’t mean that they lack opinions.” Screen grab by author.

LARRY Donnell Andrews was in prison serving a murder sentence (for which he turned himself in) when *The Wire*, featuring the character Omar Little based on his life, first aired. Donnie died after an aortic dissection last week. Few who only knew about his life from its fictional depiction would have guessed that the ‘real’ Omar Little would live twice as long as the fictional one.

Magazine and newspaper profiles flatten the life of their subject, speeding up certain parts and slowing down others in order to fit a manicured narrative. Despite that tendency, Donnie Andrews' life—in print and onscreen fictionalization—reads like a composite of several different lives, enlarged and textured by seeming extremes. Redemption and mercy play supporting roles.

Donnie's childhood beginnings in North Carolina formed the background to the first dead body he saw at age four. It was a black man lynched and hanging from a tree. At age nine he and his brother witnessed a man murdered in a laundromat over fifteen cents. He has addressed the question of black vulnerability in the United States with full recognition of historic unjustness, exploitation, and inequity. Of his life in Baltimore he said, "You don't count money, you count time. Everyone out there is a walking dead man. We can't rely on the police when we need 'em. They just come to take the bodies away." David Simon, whatever one's opinion of his editorializing of his show, told the *Baltimore Sun*: "On paper, he's a murderer. We've constructed a criminal justice system that doesn't allow for the idea of redemption, and Donnie puts a lie to that."

I met Donnie two years ago when he joined the cast of *The Wire* highlighting Charles Ogletree's law school course on systemic inequality. He was the least impressed with the show, which he half-soberly, half-playfully called "watered down." On Omar leaping out from the fifth-story ledge of a building (Donnie jumped from the balcony of the Murphy Homes public housing project in West Baltimore), he told the *Independent*: "That really happened to me, but I had to jump out of the sixth floor. It was either lead poisoning or take my chances, so I took my chances. I did it without thinking. If I'd thought about it, I might have taken the lead poisoning."

Around the time we met I had been researching fictional criminals in Brazilian cinema, particularly during the military regime when the visualizing of redemptive vi-

olence (in distinction to the racialized depictions that accompanied electoral democracy) was a powerful force in film. Rogério Sganzerla's *The Red-Light Bandit* (1968) was based on the real-life João Acácio Pereira da Costa who robbed the homes of the rich with a red lantern. Though Sganzerla's film took great liberties with fictionalizing that life, the bandit code of 'civilians' or 'citizens' being left unharmed applied as much to fiction as real-life. Pereira da Costa's larger-than-life biography made for a riotous film (which didn't show him serving 30 years in prison) but left open the possibility for atonement and redemption despite the choices made under nearly insurmountable odds.

If I can be allowed the indulgence of crossing the boundary of Donnie's real life similarly, *The Wire's* most illustrative segments on honor codes came across in exchanges between Omar and police detective Bunk Moreland. In the first season of the show ("One Arrest," 1.7), Omar acknowledges there is one.

Bunk Moreland: So, you're my eyeball witness, huh?

[Omar nods] So, why'd you step up on this?

Omar: Bird triflin', basically. Kill an everyday workin' man and all. I mean, I do some dirt, too, but I ain't never put my gun on nobody that wasn't in the game.

Bunk: A man must have a code.

Omar: Oh, no doubt.

Three seasons later ("Unto Others," 4.7), Omar repeats Bunk's summation of him: "A man gotta have a code." As in the image of Michael K. Williams (playing Donnie) sitting with Donnie himself in the still above above, Donnie was always in the presence of many mirrors of himself.

"Why did I kill a man that looked just like me?"

Omar Little, an outlying thief who robbed drug dealers, was endowed with a moral complexity seldom seen on television (and *The Wire* was not just television: it is to this day one of the few series set in a predominantly black city without drawing sensationalized attention to that fact). If Omar was “one of TV’s greatest characters” it was because of Donnie. The show distinguished itself by laying out a palimpsest of failed American institutions but even within that decentralized narrative Omar was singular because the outcome of his life, before, during, and after incarceration was so unusual. He harnessed his dwindling resources to transform his own and others’ lives. This country’s prison-industrial complex is so brutal and efficient at marginalizing black men that his survival and gift of sharing that survival are truly extraordinary. Simon: “The prison system in America isn’t structured for rehabilitation. It’s structured for warehousing. I believe in the individual’s capacity to change their own future. Systemically, though, we sure make it hard. It’s a pretty lonesome journey.”

Donnie was married to Fran Boyd, a remarkable person in her own right (and a protagonist in Ed Burns’ *The Corner*). The *New York Times* profiled Donnie and Fran’s four-year courtship, mainly comprised of conversation and letters as Donnie was behind bars. They met in person several years later. (Simon called her his only hero: “Woody Guthrie and Fran, I guess—and I’m not so sure about Woody.”) Donnie and Fran raised at least four children together, his stepson and three of his Fran Boyd’s nieces and nephews. In our brief conversation about his life and its televised depiction, Donnie brought Fran up several times. Before he parted he gave me his phone number for a follow-up interview (which I didn’t follow up on—it just seemed at the time that Donnie would live forever). When I asked for his email, he quickly replied, “It’s donnell loves fran at [...] dot com.” Real recognizes real, as he used to say. **TNI**

It appears to have been quite the year for Boyd, who lost her son DeAndre McCullough (also featured in *The Corner*) a few months ago to a drug overdose.

Shadow Games

by MARYAM MONALISA GHARAVI



THIS is the last photograph I took in Jordan. Isn't it ugly?

There were many other photos taken with pleasure and curiosity and the errantry of free time—sibling street cats in milk crates, the ruins of a Byzantine mosaic, a neighbor's abandoned TV in the middle of a garden. But it was this photo, snapped on the way to Amman's airport, that stopped me cold.

When the plane hovered over us a tremor ran through the trees near the Byzantine ruins. The alley cats ran away. The neighbor stuck his head out of his second-story window for the first time in two weeks.

"It's the Royal Jordanian Air Force," said one passerby.

"It's an aircraft from the American military base here," said another.

"It's an illegal Facebook post," said a third.

"It's a kind of military climatology springing virtually out of nothing."¹

"No, it's just a stress shadow," said the last eyewitness. "A stress change produced by the state indicating that many nearby dangers were relaxed by the deployment of the military plane. This relaxation results in a 'shadow' effect by creating a fearful region in which future dangers are delayed." **TNI**

1. Peter Sloterdijk, *Terror from the Air*, Trans. Amy Patton and Steve Corcoran, p. 19.

Transcript on a Face

by MARYAM MONALISA GHARAVI

It's not Wilson's culpability that is on trial, but Michael Brown's face

"Now these criminals are recognised even from their earliest days because they have extraordinary anomalies of the face and of the skull, asymmetry, macrocephaly, exaggeration of the length or breadth, strabismus, ears badly placed or too large, enormous jaws, bad conformation of the teeth, especially of the incisors, now too large, and again too far apart, nose flat and crooked, hair abundant on the forehead, an exaggerated development of the body (a child of seven having the stature and weight of one of nine), strength precocious, left-handedness more common, and above all great dulness of the senses. There is then a criminal type, so that your intuition leads you unconsciously to shrink from a person who has the face of a thief. I explain this fact scientifically..."

—Cesare Lombroso, "Criminal Anthropology Applied to Pedagogy," *The Monist*, 1895, p. 57

"Do they know how those bullets hit my son? What they did to his body as they entered his body?"

—Lesley McSpadden



DEMONS are god-like, yet feared because they take the place of a legitimate deity.

Medieval demonology cast them as unsparing figures to whom sacrifices were made instead of worshipping God.

From the Middle Ages right through the European Renaissance, their physiognomy corresponds to the moral repugnance they arouse, like the demon-figure Belphégor in the *Dictionnaire Infernal*.

As Kelly Hurley's *The Gothic Body* elaborates, belief in the body's mutable boundaries hardened by the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries. That "morphic variability," in which the demon-human is "continually in danger of becoming not-itself, becoming other," colluded with the rise of anthropological criminology, which produced deviance in physiognomic features.

The face charts "scientifically" presented by criminologists like Cesare Lombroso and Havelock Ellis demonstrate this tendency.

A demon's face, like all faces, is a product of its age. And never has the face been more of a battleground than in the racialized expression of state violence in a liberal-dem-

ocratic empire.

The transcript of the Grand Jury investigation of Officer Darren Wilson's killing of Michael Brown reads like a flip book jumping between the demonological past and the criminological present.

It's not Wilson's culpability that is on trial, but Michael Brown's face.

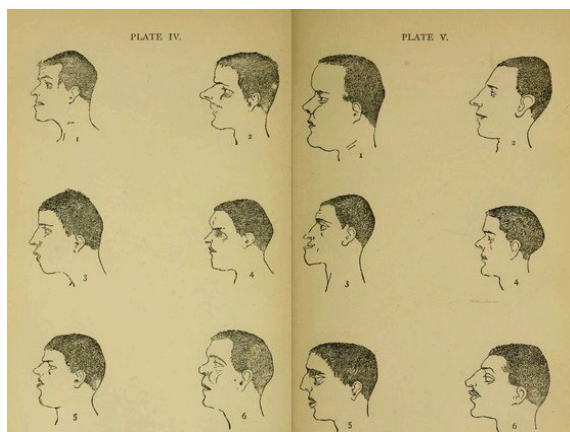
Wilson's account of Brown is almost entirely focused on the encounter between their faces.

Wilson's own, doughy and subtly reddened in hospital photos, looking like he's emerged unscathed from a bad hangover, is submitted as evidence of his victimhood.

Photos of Brown's post mortem face is not publicly admissible evidence; in any case, the medical examiner failed to photograph Brown's body ("My battery in my camera died.")

All I see is his head, and that's what I shot

He was just staring at me, almost like to intimidate me or to overpower me



Criminal physiognomy chart from Ellis' *The Criminal* (1890).

State of Missouri v. Darren Wilson

Grand Jury Volume V
September 16, 2014

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- 1 up at me and had the most intense aggressive face.
- 2 The only way I can describe it, it looks like a
- 3 demon, that's how angry he looked. He comes back
- 4 towards me again with his hands up.

State of Missouri v. Darren Wilson, Grand Jury Volume V, September 16, 2014, p 197-225. Screen grab and emphasis by author.

The intense face he had was just not what I expected from any of this

Wilson claims he told Brown to “get the fuck back,” but instead Brown allegedly hit the side of his face “with a fist.” The attention paid to the detail about Brown’s proximity to Wilson’s face is excruciating.

There was a significant amount of contact that was made to my face

Wilson alleges that dispensing mace on Brown wasn’t an option because Brown was covering his face:

The chances of [mace] being effective were slim to none. His hands were in front of his face, it would have blocked the mace from hitting him in the face

And he contradicts himself by issuing another reason, that macing Brown would have left Wilson’s own face unprotected:

I considered using my mace, however, I wasn’t willing to sacrifice my left hand, which is blocking my face to go for it

Wilson’s description of Brown’s face as “demon”-like requires scrutiny (even as it invites revulsion).

He looked up at me and had the most intense aggressive face

While Wilson didn’t waste a single breath in painting Brown as a “Hulk Hogan” to his shrimpy “five-year old,” he projects Brown as having looked up at him. (Both men measure at 6’4”).

And that’s when he lays on the most damning part of his testimony, that Michael Brown had a demon face.

The only way I can describe it, it looks like a demon, that’s how angry he looked

The “it” is Brown’s face, a non-human entity intermixing with human emotional characteristics. In *The Gothic Body*, Hurley calls this the abhuman.

And the face that he had was looking straight through me, like I wasn’t even there, I wasn’t even anything in his way

In the same breath as when he mentions the “demon” face Wilson allows,

He comes back towards me again with his hands up

The crucial and illicitly overlooked phrase in this sentence is “with his hands up.”

Throughout the testimony Wilson clings to a portrait of the killer-cop as ghost, whitely transparent, spooked out, and hollow in contrast to a bulky, angry, unpredictable it-figure.

It’s at this point that Wilson says he cocked and shot his gun with the bullet that would kill an unarmed (defenseless) Brown squarely in the head.

When he fell, he fell on his face

I remember his feet coming up... and then they rested

When it went into him the demeanor on his face went blank, the aggression was gone, it was gone, I mean I knew he stopped, the threat was stopped

The threat was stopped.

The only questioning of Darren Wilson’s own face is painfully and comically debased. Asked about the supposed bruises to his face, both the prosecution and Wilson

display confusion about what even constituted the injury.

Q: Now, what are we looking at there?

That's the left side of my face

Q: So you had, describe what we are looking at?

I can't really tell from that.

Q: Okay.

I can't see from this angle.

Q: Let me let you look at it again.

I think there was swelling to my face in that area too. I never saw my face after, this is the first I've seen.

Q: Does it look like swelling? You know your face better than we do, does it look like swelling?

I can't tell with that angle with the ruler.

Q: You can't tell on that one? What about this one?

That one I can tell from down by my, down in this area looks swollen to me.

Wilson's invisible bruises are nauseatingly pawed over. Brown's face, unphotographed but cast in retrospective narrative by his killer, is left questionably demonized (the prosecution never takes issue with Wilson's freakish account).

Finally, Wilson concedes that his killing of Brown was a foregone conclusion. In any other secret court proceeding, were the defendant not a police officer, this testimony could likely be used as evidence of premeditated murder; Wilson's gun was (passively) "presented as a deadly force option" when his face was threatened.

Q: In your mind him grabbing the gun is what made the difference where you felt you had to use a weapon to stop him?

Yes. Once he was hitting me in the face, that was enough, was in my mind to authorize the use of force

Q: Okay. So if he would not have grabbed your gun while he was hitting you in the face, everything was the same, but he would not have grabbed your gun, you still would have used deadly force?

My gun was already being presented as a deadly force option while he was hitting me in the face

Wilson's characterization of the community surrounding the killing scene (what the prosecution called "folks that lived in that apartment") is of an equally fear-inducing, if not totally demonic, body.

It is an antipolice area for sure

That community doesn't like the police

[I]t is a hostile environment

It bears noting that the origin of the term "abhuman" (which Hurley dissects in her book) is with William Hope Hodgson's *The Night Land* (1912).

Hodgson used "abhuman" to name species of intelligent beings evolving from humans that breed with alien beings, adapting to their deteriorating or decaying physical environment. The "abhuman" were maligned by denizens of the Last Redoubt who managed to artificially preserve their human characteristics, "though they were not fit for the new environmental conditions."

The only way I can describe it, it looks like a demon

And the face that he had was looking straight through me, like I wasn't even there

All I see is his head, and that's what I shot

Between the lines of Wilson's stupefying scenario (his ghost to Brown's demon) is a stark material and psychic landscape (his preservation to the community's unraveling) matching the reality of a deeply hateful and segregating world, one that includes and transcends Ferguson. **TNI**

Know Your Product

by ROB HORNING

The self is a booming growth market

IT'S common to critique social media by pointing out that users believe they are consumers but are in fact are the product, a packaged and labelled audience being sold to marketers, the real “users” of ad-supported social media. Or worse, users are both the product *and* the labor making the product, all for the benefit of the social-media companies that own it. This means we are not merely deluded but also exploited when we think of ourselves as “consuming” social media.



The assumption in this critique is that we don't want to be a product and instead want the agency and autonomous expression that social media seem to promise. From that point of view, users sign up on Facebook with the goal of expressing themselves and hearing what their friends have to say, but are eventually warped into becoming a kind of reified personal brand through exposure to the product's toxic affordances of self-quantification. Naive users think they are signing up for a personalized public sphere and then, undeterred by the evident oxymoron, find themselves in a hall of mirrors in which all they can see—and all they end up wanting to see—is themselves.

I've made that argument in the past, but it seems to presume a sort of haplessness in social media users, who don't know well enough to stop using services that are exploiting and stupidifying them. It doesn't seem adequate to explaining the pleasure users derive from

social media, even as they become reifying and exploitive. I don't think users' continued use is strictly a matter of network effects and sunk costs, or even a matter of a cost-benefit analysis that permits them to rationally decide that personal data is a fair exchange for the services social media offer. Instead, I want to consider the possibility that users enjoy becoming the product.

The services that social media supply (holding a "graph" of one's social connections; amassing and archiving personal data; making the promise of an on-demand audience for oneself plausible; permitting a variety of pre-formatted modes of self-expression; offering algorithmically constituted recommendations of what you should read, who you should know, how you should spend your time; and so on) help constitute the self as something a user can consume. We get to be a commodity and consume it at the same time. We are like the hot dog putting ketchup on itself.



This self-commodification does not diminish the user's self-conception but rather makes the self conceivable, legible. The self as product is inherently not guilty of some of the deauthenticating aspects of agency which threaten the integrity of other versions of the self: being calculating, unspontaneous, manipulative, phony, etc. The self as product can be seen as something that simply is, a given thing articulated in a definite form. It enters the realm of the socially conspicuous.

Only as a product can we recognize ourselves as "genuinely" real, given the amount of attention and effort collectively directed at enchanting and foregrounding products within a consumer-capitalist culture. We are ideologically trained, repeatedly, every day, to love consumer goods; naturally we would want to become a consumer good ourselves, to appear deserving of love—from ourselves as well as from other people (who, on social media, offer quantifiable tokens of that deserved love in the likes and so on).

Products in consumer-capitalist culture quickly lose their lovability, however, as they lose their novelty. They become moribund. They become trash. Consumerism relies on disposability and the perpetual renewal of consumer desire, of discontented people constantly demanding more for themselves. This allows for the limitless expansion of demand in the economy. Consumerist ideology fuses this potential for limitless demand to a consumer's self-growth, also conceived as potentially limitless. We grow through developing the ability to want more things. This converts an economic imperative into a moral one: I must embrace my limitless potential and find ways to express it, or else fail as a human being.

Growth itself, as a personal goal, is adapted from the capitalist necessity of pursuing limitless accumulation in an economic environment of growth or death. Personal growth is a matter of continual dissatisfaction,

of refusing to be content, even as we make ourselves into content. Anything that I start to think I know about myself seems not merely familiar but fake. What is real about me is what I discover about myself (usually in the form of fresh desire), not what I already know, which I have consumed already.

So the self, as a product, loses its enchantment for us and needs to be revitalized to the extent that it becomes familiar, known, understood. We love ourselves only as a novelty, a mystery, not as a staple product. We want to be able to apprehend ourselves as a new, desirable thing that we can consume and enjoy. This makes us feel relevant, marketable. We can imagine someone buying into the idea of us, and that helps us buy into ourselves. But inevitably our desire for ourselves needs to be renewed, and we will need to be repackaged.

It seems untenable to feel authentic only when you're surprising yourself. Social media try to make this contradiction seem to cohere. They offer ways in which to always consume ourselves anew as new. Algorithmic recommendations in particular cater to this hope of seeing a stranger in the personal data we've generated, an alien person we can claim as a real self. They can enlarge our ability to desire (making us grow) while seeming to draw on true information about us that we have somehow provided. Everything you have consumed and expelled online gets purified and re-presented as new desires, a new you.

By processing our personal data into things like Facebook's Newsfeed, algorithms can present us with a carefully repackaged self. We then get the thrill of unboxing ourselves as if we were a coveted new product and seeing what surprise awaits within. That this box we are continually rewrapped in is also a cage can be more readily excused. In that cage, we will only see what reinforces the central importance of novelty, but it won't matter as long as we feel new ourselves. **TNI**

Permanent Recorder

by ROB HORNING

Accept that your life is footage, and you might even get good at making a winner's edit for yourself

IT used to be easy to mock reality TV for having nothing to do with actual reality—the scenarios were contrived and pre-mediated, the performances were semi-scripted, the performers were hyper-self-conscious. These shows were more a negation of reality than a representation of it; part of their appeal seemed to be in how they helped clarify for viewers the genuine “reality” of their own behavior, in contrast with the freak shows they were seeing on the screen. To be real with people, these shows seemed to suggest, just don't act like you are on television.

But now we are all on television all the time. The once inverted anti-reality of reality TV has turned out to be prefigurative. In a recent essay for the *New York Times*, Colson Whitehead seizes on the reality TV conceit of a “loser edit”—how a shows' editors pare down and frame the footage of certain participants to make their incipient failure seem deserved—and expands it into a metaphor for our lives under ubiquitous surveillance.

The footage of *your* loser edit is out there as well, waiting ... From all the cameras on all the street corners, entryways and strangers' cellphones, building the digital dossier of your days. Maybe we can't clearly make out your face in every shot, but everyone knows it's you. We know you like to slump. Our entire lives as B-roll, shot and stored away to be recut and reviewed at a moment's notice when the plot changes: the divorce, the layoff, the lawsuit. Any time the producers decide to raise the stakes.

Whitehead concludes that the important thing is that



everyone gets an edit inside their own head, which suggests that the imposition of a reality TV frame on our lives has been clarifying. “If we're going down, let us at least be a protagonist, have a story line, not be just one of those miserable players in the background. A cameo's stand-in. The loser edit, with all its savage cuts, is confirmation that you exist.” Reality TV models for us what it is like to be a character in our own life story, and it gives us a new metaphor for how to accomplish this—we don't need to be a bildungsroman author but instead a savvy cutting-room editor. Accept that your life is footage, and you might even get good at making a winner's edit for yourself.

You could draw a similar conclusion from Facebook's Timeline, and the year-in-review videos the company has taken to making of one's raw profile data. These aren't intrusive re-scriptings of our experience but instructional videos

into how to be a coherent person for algorithms—which, since these algorithms increasingly dictate what others see of you, is more or less how you “really” are in your social networks. Facebook makes the winner’s edit of everybody, because everyone supposedly wins by being on Facebook. Everyone gets to be connected and the center of the universe simultaneously. So why not bequeath to it final-cut rights for your life’s edit?

Tech consultant Alistair Croll, in post at O’Reilly Radar, is somewhat less complacent about our surrendering our editing rights. He makes the case that since everyone henceforth will be born into consolidated blanket surveillance, they will be nurtured by a symbiotic relationship with their own data timeline. “An agent with true AI will become a sort of alter ego; something that grows and evolves with you ... *When the machines get intelligent, some of us may not even notice, because they’ll be us and we’ll be them.*”

In other words, our cyborg existence will entail our fusion not with some Borg-like hive mind that submerges us into a collective, but with a machine powered by our own personal data that represents itself as already part of ourselves. The algorithms will be learning how to edit our lives for us from the very start, and we may not recognize this editing as stemming from an outside entity. The alien algorithms ease themselves into control over us by working with our uniquely personal data, which will feel inalienable because it is so specifically about us, though the very fact of its collection indicates that it belongs to someone else. Our memories will be recorded by outside entities so thoroughly that we will intuitively accept those entities as a part of us, as an extension of the inside of our heads. Believing that something that is *not* us could have such a complete archive of our experiences may prove to be to unacceptable, too dissonant, too terrifying.

Croll argues that this kind of data-driven social control, with algorithms dictating the shape and scope of our lives for us, will be “the moral issue of the next decade: *nobody should know more about you than you do.*” That sounds

plausible enough, if you take it to mean (as Croll clearly does) that no one should use against you data that you don’t know has been collected about you. (Molly Knefel discusses a similar concern in an essay about how kids will be confronted by their permanent records, which reminds me of the “right to be forgotten” campaign.) But it runs counter to the cyborg idea—it assumes we will be able to draw a clear line between ourselves and the algorithms. If we can’t distinguish between these, it will be nonsensical to worry about which has access to more data about ourselves. It will be impossible to say whether you or the algorithms “knew” some piece of information about you first, particularly when the algorithms will be synthesizing data about us and then teaching it to us.

In that light, the standard that “no one should know more about you than you do” starts to seem clearly absurd. Outside entities are producing knowledge about us all the time in ways we can’t control. Other people are always producing knowledge about me, from their perspective and for their own purposes, that I can never access. They will always know “more about me” than I do by virtue of their having a point of view on the world that I can’t calculate and replicate.

Because we find it hard to assign a point of view to a machine, we perhaps think they can’t know more about us or have a perspective that isn’t fully controllable by someone, if not us. Croll is essentially arguing that we should have control over what knowledge a company’s machines produce about us. That assumes that their programmers can fully control their algorithms, which seems to be less the case the more sophisticated they become—the fact that the algorithms turn out results that no one can explain may be the defining point at which data becomes Big Data, as Mike Pepi explains. And if the machines are just proxies for the people who program them, Croll’s “moral issue” still boils down to a fantasy of extreme atomization—the demand that my identity be entirely independent of other people, with no contingencies whatsoever.

The ability to impose your own self-concept on others

is a matter of power; you can demand it, say, as a matter of customer service. This doesn't change what those serving you know and think about you, but it allows you to suspend disbelief about it. Algorithms that serve us don't allow for such suspension of disbelief, because they anticipate what service we might expect and put what they know about us into direct action. Algorithms can't have opinions about us that they keep to themselves. They can't help but reveal at all times that they "know more about us"—that is, they know us different from how we know ourselves.

Rather than worry about controlling who can produce information about us, it may be more important to worry about the conflation of data with self-knowledge. The radical empiricism epitomized by the Quantified Self movement is becoming more and more mainstream as tracking devices that attempt to codify us as data become more prevalent—and threaten to become mandatory for various social benefits like health insurance. Self-tracking suggests that consciousness is a useless guide to knowing the self, generating meaningless opinions about what is happening to the self while interfering with the body's proper responses to its biofeedback. It's only so much subjectivity. Consciousness should subordinate itself to the data, be guided more automatically by it. And you need control of this data to control what you will think of yourself in response to it, and to control the "truth" about yourself.

Reducing self-knowledge to matters of data possession and retention like that seems to be the natural bias of a property-oriented society; as consciousness can't be represented as a substance than someone can have more or less of, therefore it doesn't count. But self-knowledge may not be a matter of having the most thorough archive of your deeds and the intentions behind them. It is not a quantity of memories, an amount of data. The self is not a terrain to which you are entitled to own the most detailed map. Self-knowledge is not a matter of reading your own permanent record. It is not an edit of our life's footage.

A quantified basis for "self-knowledge" is bound up

with the incentives for using social media and submitting to increased surveillance of various forms. If we accept that self-knowledge is akin to a permanent record, we will tolerate or even embrace Facebook's keeping that record for us. Maybe we won't even mind that we can't actually delete anything from their servers.

As our would-be permanent recorders, social media sites are central to both data collection (they incite us to supply data as well as help organize what is collected across platforms into a single profile) and the use of data to implement social control (they serve algorithmically derived content and marketing while slotting us into ad hoc niches, and they encircle us in a panoptic space that conditions our behavior with the threat of observation). But for them to maintain their central place, we may have to be convinced to accept the algorithmic control they implement as a deeper form of self-knowledge.

But what if we use social media not for self-knowledge but for self-destruction? What if we use social media to complicate the idea that we could ever "know ourselves"? What if we use social media to make ourselves into something unknowable? Maybe we record the footage of our lives to define therein what the essence of our self *isn't*. To the degree that identity is a prison, self-knowledge makes the cell's walls. But self-knowledge could instead be an awareness of how to move beyond those walls.

Not everyone has the opportunity to cast identity aside any more than they have the ability to unilaterally assert self-knowledge as a form of control. We fall into the trap of trying to assert some sort of objectively "better" or more "accurate" identity that reflects our "true self," which is only so much more data that can be used to control us and remold the identity that is assigned to us socially. The most luxurious and privileged condition may be one in which you get to experience yourself as endlessly surprising—a condition in which you hardly know yourself at all but have complete confidence that others know and respect you as they should. **TNI**

Surveillance Notes

by ROB HORNING

My opening remarks for the Art in an Overseen World panel at Open Score: Art and Technology 2016 conference



①

It is increasingly common for surveillance to be represented as a total threat—an all-encompassing condition that is more like a climate than an particular apparatus made of people, institutions, technologies. Much like the impending doom evoked by climate change, this representation of surveillance can inspire a helpless anxiety, if not outright disavowal. The sheer scale of the threat makes it easier to ignore as something unstoppable. Surveillance suffuses everyday life to the point where it becomes too banal to confront.

②

Despite the massive power ascribed to the surveillance apparatus, that threat it represents is often limited to a matter of personal privacy, which seems to frame a self-protective response as the first, best line of resistance—hide yourself to be safe. Obfuscate or withhold your data. Try to disappear.



③

Those sorts of evasive countermeasures tend to reinscribe the omnipotence of surveillance, suggesting that you can't dismantle the apparatus, you can only play hide and seek with it. There may be some personal satisfaction in such resistance, but it does little to disrupt the forms of control that stem from broad-based data collection, and is as likely to stimulate an arms-race effect in which obfuscation provokes the development of more invasive surveillance techniques, putting more people under greater scrutiny.

⑤

Surveillance is not merely a matter of unwanted scrutiny that imposes repressive social control. Its mechanisms are inseparable from desired forms of social attention, serving as a guarantor of legibility, visibility, relevance. Given how social media undergird everyday life, surveillance has become the contemporary form of social participation. It conveys that we belong; it can be experienced as a systemic form of care.

④

When such tactics pit a scrambling individual against a monolithic "they," it can obscure how surveillance comprises a variety of agents serving a range of interests pursuing different purposes. Surveillance doesn't merely seek to prohibit behavior; it can also try to compel it. Its sweep is not fully indiscriminate; it's instead unevenly distributed in its targets, which may not be determined in advance and may not consist of discrete individuals. It can create new ways of being known, new degrees and dimensions of publicity.

⑥

Being watched qualifies us for the more specific forms of recognition that build our reputation and establish our economic viability. But the attention we experience as support and opportunity is also the data that sustains surveillance systems. We become complicit in surveillance's productivity, tracking ourselves and others, recognizing each other within spaces of capture. We want to be seen and want to control how we are seen, but we accept that one can come only at the expense of the other. **TNI**

DNA-Based Prediction of Nietzsche's Voice

by FLAVIA MONTAGGIO¹, PATRICIA MONTAGGIO², IMP KERR³

INVESTIGATIVE GENETICS
DOI: 10.6875/0001



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Abstract

This paper presents a protocol for the accurate prediction of an individual's voice based on genotype data, specifically from single nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs). We collected trace amounts of cellular material (Touch DNA) from books that belonged to the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900). DNA was extracted and amplified using DOP-PCR technique. Five different genomic DNAs were generated. Nietzsche's genotype was singled out after comparison to genotype data from one living relative of the Nietzsche family. Nietzsche's genotype data was analyzed using a DNA-based phenotyping assay, termed VoiceRator, that incorporates the 24 most informative voice SNPs based on their association with genes related to the phenotypic expression of the vocal tract and larynx structure and function. An SNP-based voice profile of Nietzsche was inferred. The profile data was converted into bio-measures that were used to 3D-print a vocal tract and larynx through which phonation was organically generated. A composite of seven Text-to-Speech simulations was made using a sound morphing software. The result is presented in audio format and illustrates the first attempt at simulating the voice of a deceased person.

Nietzsche's private library

German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) studied classical philology at the Universities of Bonn and Leipzig. In 1869, despite lacking his doctorate and being only 24 years old, he was appointed to the chair of philology at the University of Basel, Switzerland. In 1889, a mental breakdown left him an invalid under the care of his mother, and then his sister, Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche. In 1897, Swiss feminist and Nietzsche's friend Meta von Salis purchased a large house in Weimar, the Villa Silberblick, to provide a home for Nietzsche and her sister. After Nietzsche's death, Elisabeth bought the villa and turned it into the *Nietzsche-Archiv*. While Nietzsche's original handwritten manuscripts and letters are stored at the Villa Silberblick (in a fireproof safe), his personal collection of books is kept at the Duchess Anna Amalia Library⁴, also located in Weimar.

Nietzsche's private library comprises more than 1,000 volumes with about 170 containing annotations left by Nietzsche. The books have been frequently handled by scholars and researchers for consultation, especially the annotated ones. With the assistance of Fräulein Imp Kerr of the *Nietzsche-Archiv*, we browsed Nietzsche's private library and retained 49 books bare of annotations (*lot AP9*), which we presumed would contain the least contaminated DNA sample from Nietzsche.

Among the 49 volumes selected (all showing minor discoloration) were sophisticated copies of Jean de La Bruyère's *Caractères*, Wilhelm Brambach's *Antike Rhythmik und Metrik*, Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *Notes from the Underground*, Arthur Schopenhauer's *Parerga*, and George Sand's *Lettres d'un Voyageur*.

4. In 2004, a fire broke out at the Duchess Anna Amalia Library. Twenty-five thousand books burned and over forty thousand were damaged beyond repair. However, the largest part of the collection—including Nietzsche's private library—was left untouched.

Collection of DNA Samples

Touch DNA sampling techniques are used at crime scenes to collect skin cells which are subsequently typed for DNA in the exact same manner as body fluids using standard laboratory procedures. Humans shed tens of thousands of skin cells each day and these cells may be transferred to surfaces our skin contacts. When you read a book, you may deposit a generous amount of skin cells on several pages. Touch DNA may be sampled from the touched pages.

We tested Nietzsche's books for Touch DNA using Tape Lift method. We sampled the surface of 2,695 pages (55 pages per book) with pretreated 4"x 4" adhesive sheets to collect potential skin cells. From the samples collected, only 8 gave sufficient amounts of DNA to be considered exploitable.

PCR-based whole-genome amplification

Recent advances in sequencing technologies make it possible to routinely retrieve DNA sequences from century-old remains, even from small and damaged fragments.

DNA was extracted from samples by phenol-chloroform extraction method. DOP-PCR⁵ amplification was performed using Phi-29 DNA polymerase and random primers on 99 loci⁶ (2 loci on each autosomal pair, 2 loci on the X chromosome(s) and 1 locus on the Y chromosome) for each of the 8 samples. DNA extracts were amplified approximately 18,000-fold with a maximum bias of representation between the loci of 4-fold. Fragments were separated by pulsed-field gel electrophoresis (fig. 1-2).

Five different genomic DNAs (FuP1, FuP2, FuP3, FuP4, FuP5) were generated: three from female individuals (lacking Y-chromosome specific genes) and two from male individuals (FuP2 and FuP5).

The Nietzsche family left no direct descendant but we were able to identify, locate and contact one indirect female descendant of the Nietzsche family, Aloysia Nag-Nietzsche (ALNN) from Stuttgart, Germany who agreed to take part

5. Degenerate oligonucleotide primed-polymerase chain reaction.

6. Locus (*plural loci*): specific location of a gene or DNA sequence on a chromosome.

in the study. DNA match was found between ALNN and FuP2, suggesting genotype FuP2 belonged to Nietzsche (fig. 3) (we also found a match between FuP1 and ALNN which encouraged us to think that genotype FuP1 belonged to Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche).

SNP genotyping

The biomechanics and control of the human voice involve a multitude of tissues, membranes, muscles, glands, and bones. The voice is produced by vibration of the vocal folds (or vocal cords), which have a three-layer construction—epithelium, lamina propria, thyroarytenoid muscle—butterflying down cellular and extracellular matrices where collagen and elastin fibers, among other proteins, aggregate. The larynx—which size is affected by the production of testosterone—adjusts the length and tension of the vocal folds which tremors determine the frequency of the emitted sound (70-200 Hz for men, 140-400 Hz for women). The sound resonates in the nasal and mouth cavities where articulators like the tongue, palate, gums, velum, and uvula influence the general aerodynamics and acoustics. Furthermore, vocal folds physiology is impacted by humidity and viscosity factors, vocal resonance is co-shaped by lung pressure and glottal flow, and brain circuits

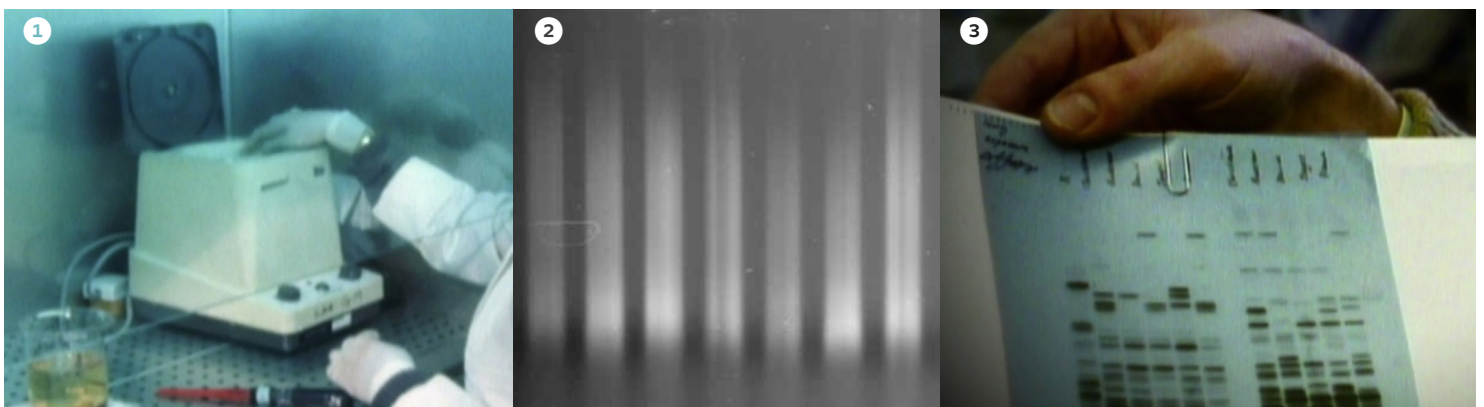


Figure 1. Fräulein Imp Kerr places PCR tubes into the thermal cycler. **Figure 2.** Lanes show gel analysis of DOP-PCR amplification products of DNA samples. No amplification is present in sample 8. **Figure 3.** Matching genomic DNAs of Friedrich Nietzsche (left) and indirect descendant Aloysia Nag-Nietzsche (right).

intervene in every movements underlying vocalizations. One of the rapidly developing areas in forensic biology is the ability to predict characteristics of an individual's voice based on genotype data, specifically from single nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs) (fig. 4). There have been several studies looking to identify the predominant SNP loci associated with human voice which might be used for accurate predictions. In 2012, Cooper *et al.* identified the 24 most informative voice SNPs (among more than 200 candidate "voice genes") based on their association with genes related to the phenotypic expression of the vocal tract structure and function (Table 1). The traits of focus indicated by these SNPs were found to be highly polymorphic and complex, involving several contributions from various gene-gene interactions, suggesting intergenic complexity needed to be assessed through sets and subsets of SNPs (as opposed to single SNPs). SNPs from Nietzsche's genotype were analyzed using a DNA-based phenotyping assay, termed VoiceRator, that incorporates the 24 voice predictor SNPs. The prediction

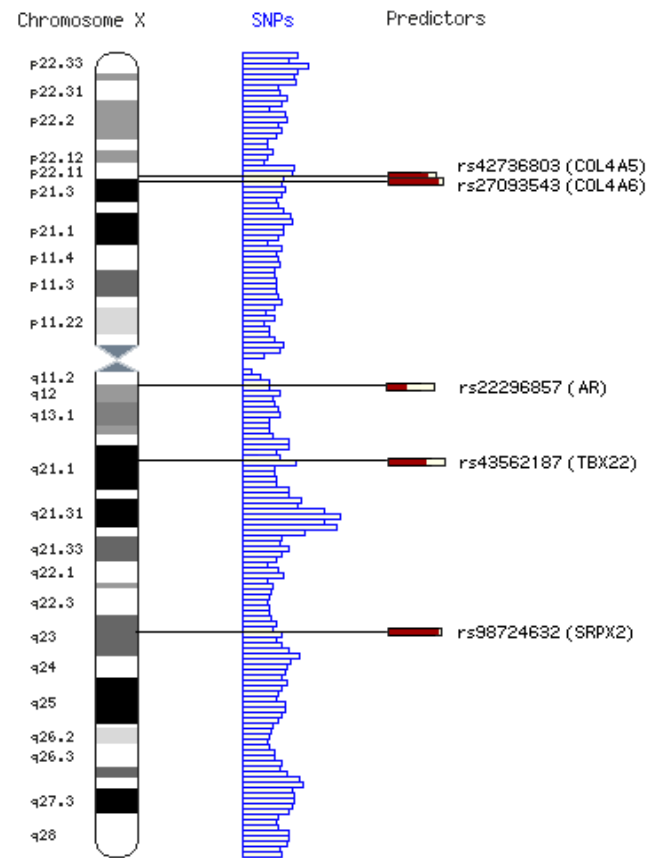


Figure 4. SNP loci on X chromosome.

Gene	Name	Location	SNP	Association
MYH13	Myosin-13	17p13.1	rs16354291	Laryngeal muscles
MYH8	Myosin-8	17p13.1	rs16789035	Laryngeal muscles
KRT6A	Keratin 6A	12q13.13	rs24981908	Epithelial tissues (tongue, oral mucosa)
KRT6B	Keratin 6B	12q13.13	rs17688854	Epithelial tissues (tongue, oral mucosa)
KRT14	Keratin 14	17q21.2	rs74256550	Epithelial cells
KRT16	Keratin 16	17q21.2	rs57829586	Epithelial cells
KRT17	Keratin 17	17q21.2	rs82654506	Cell differentiation in epithelia
COL4A1	Collagen, Type IV, Alpha 1	13q34	rs72498798	Collagen (basal lamina, epithelium layer)
COL4A2	Collagen, Type IV, Alpha 2	13q34	rs52887413	Collagen (basal lamina, epithelium layer)
COL4A3	Collagen, Type IV, Alpha 3	2q36-q37	rs49565648	Collagen (basal lamina, epithelium layer)
COL4A4	Collagen, Type IV, Alpha 4	2q35-q37	rs73687386	Collagen (basal lamina, epithelium layer)
COL4A5	Collagen, Type IV, Alpha 5	Xq22	rs42736803	Collagen (basal lamina, epithelium layer)
COL4A6	Collagen, Type IV, Alpha 6	Xq22	rs27093543	Collagen (basal lamina, epithelium layer)
MMP2	Matrix Metalloproteinase 2	16q13-q21	rs12846565	Extracellular matrices of the vocal folds
ELN	Elastin	7q11.23	rs90887988	Epithelial tissue
TBX22	T-Box 22	Xq21.1	rs43562187	Palate, nose
IRF6	Interferon Regulatory Factor 6	1q32.3-q41	rs19736143	Palate (connective tissue)
AR	Androgen Receptor	Xq11-12	rs22296857	Testosterone
SHBG	Sex Hormone-Binding Globulin	17p13.1	rs89771654	Testosterone
GDF6	Growth Differentiation Factor 6	8q22.1	rs96829456	skull bones and joints
BMP2	Bone Morphogenetic Protein 2	20p12	rs90764367	skull bones and cartilage
FOXP2	Forkhead Box P2	7q31	rs87241675	Language regions of the brain, lungs, guts
CNTNAP2	Contactin Associated Protein-Like 2	7q35	rs88141243	Cell adhesion molecules and receptors
SRPX2	Sushi-Repeat Containing Protein, X-Linked 2	Xq21.33-q23	rs98724632	Language centers of the brain

Table 1. Top genetic predictors of human voice (Cooper *et al.*, 2012).

model is based on a multinomial logistic regression method and uses phenotype and genotype data from 99 680 European individuals to which results are compared for parametrization. Based on these data the model has previously shown high prediction rates for vocal weight, texture, range, frequency and timbre in populations from Switzerland, France, and Germany.

Nietzsche's SNPs were benchmarked against 122 sets and subsets of predictor SNPs. Correlations between ensembles were derived for each SNP value. Contributions from the highest scoring sets were combined and re-parameterized, converted into bio-measures, and incorporated into

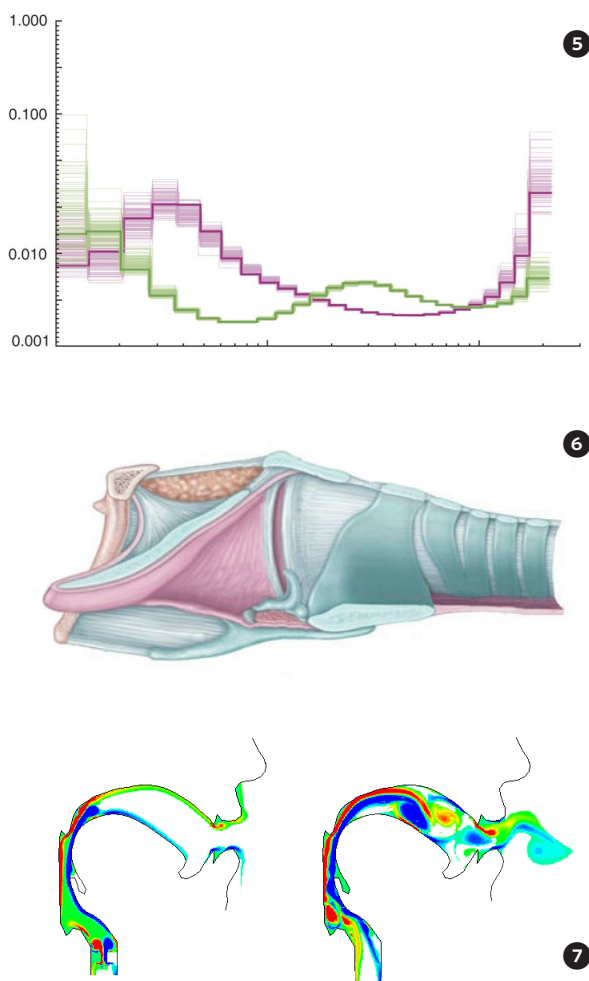


Figure 5. SNP-based voice profile of Nietzsche combining the two highest scoring sets of SNPs. **Figure 6.** 3D-printed larynx and vocal folds (sagittal section, detail). **Figure 7.** Computer-based modeling of glottal flow rate and thermal agitation.

the VoiceRator algorithm, leading to an exploitable SNP-based voice profile (fig. 5).

Biofabrication of Nietzsche's vocal tract and larynx

The application of 3D printing in tissue engineering has enabled new methods for the fabrication of organs and body parts using inkjet techniques. Synthetic biopolymers have been developed and combined with nanofibers and nano-structured particles to fabricate materials with selective bioactivity, as well as physical and chemical properties. Since 2014, the synthesis of biopolymers can be computer-tailored to spatially encode gene properties.

Bio-measures inferred from Nietzsche's voice profile data were used to build a 3D model of a vocal tract and larynx through which artificial voiced sounds were organically computed. The M-shaped model was 3D-printed with biopolymer-based composites (collagen, chondroitin sulphate, chitin) at subcellular resolution. Tissue-engineered constructs integrated phonatory aerodynamics, muscle contractions, viscoelastic properties, thermal agitation, glottal flow rate, phonatory fluid-structure interactions, frequency, vocal weight, texture, timbre, and prosody (fig. 6-7). Additional voice determinants (such as age⁷ and geography of accent) were manually input.

The model was coupled to an unsteady respiratory flow allowing variances from which lifelike phonation was obtained (previous phonation results compared well to subject-specific data—with a ~95 percent level of accuracy—demonstrating the precision of the VoiceRator modeling approach in addressing the complex interaction of biome-

7. Human voice changes over time. In one longitudinal study by Endres *et al.* (1971), recordings of 7 speakers sampled over a time interval of up to 29 years were compared. The authors found a downward trend, as a function of increasing age, for fundamental frequency and formant frequencies.

chanics, fluid mechanics, and acoustics).

Simulation of Nietzsche's voice

We generated seven Text-to-Speech organic simulations compossible with Nietzsche's voice profile—one standard simulation, and six declensions incorporating tension asymmetry and mucosal wave-type variables. The voiced sounds generated by the model were recorded using a Neumann U87 microphone. We used a sound morphing software based on Gaussian Mixture Models to build a 7-fold monophonic composite out of the seven simulations—the audio clip is available here:

Nietzsche's voice at age 42, 7-fold composite (168KB)

▷ <http://www.impkerr.com/basel/nietzsche-composite.mp3>



Figure 8. Waveform of Nietzsche's voice at 42 (denoised 7-fold composite).

The input text was taken from a letter Nietzsche wrote to Georg Brandes on January 4, 1889: *Nachdem Du mich entdeckt hast, war es kein Kunststück mich zu finden: die Schwierigkeit ist jetzt die, mich zu verlieren (After you discovered me, it was no great feat to find me. The problem now is how to lose me).*

Phonaesthetics discussion

Nietzsche's vocalization exemplifies a flat, smooth, typical mild sounding voice: hued pitch, honeyed tone, low versatility in timbre, silvery hyponasal flow, disembodied texture with a touch of steel in vowels, and low head-nasal

resonance (lower than expected in regards of Nietzsche's robust mandibles).

The diction is unified and follows a three-wave prosodic structure with light elasticity. Range goes from low C to the B above middle C. Fundamental frequency ranges between 156.8 and 157.5 Hz.

Results

Nietzsche's voice simulation was tested against a control database of 4,287 voice recordings of living German individuals. Comparative tests based on 526 VoiceRator parameters were performed and unclocked 28 minor bias discrepancies between the control voice recordings and Nietzsche's voice simulation, resulting in a 94.68 percent level of accuracy consistent with previous results. **TNI**

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The Berkley Horse

by IMP KERR

The Berkley Hole. *Der Stereohell*. 2013 May 9; (495):13826.
Mipstein MD, Kerr I, Grinnell R, Resnick PJ, Salvi J, Pickton R, Dietz PE.
Program in Denial Psychopathology, Grand Stereo Hell Research Institute,
New York, NY, United States.

“The use of the word ‘Horse’ (as in ‘Her horse was named Death’) is banned since 2009 subsequent to an edict issued by the Grand Stereo Hell Society for Discipline which directed that the word ‘Hole’ and its equivalent in other languages be used instead.” (*The Berkley Hole, From its Palatial Beginnings to S-35*, University of Illinois Press, 2011)



Total Unlikeness of Remission, 2011

July 8, 2007

Patient is seen 6 months later for a return visit. Patient claims he hears voices talking to each other about his feelings and past actions. Others, a vague “they,” are “robbing me of my thoughts.”

January 18, 2013
*Interview conducted by Dr. Mary Daisy Mipstein,
Forensic Psychiatrist in New York.
Also in attendance was Dr. Imp Kerr,
Associate Professor of Psychiatry,
New York University, New York.
Audio no longer available.*

DR. MIPSTEIN: Let’s fast forward things that we might normally take our time with and talk about the facilities. What I’d like to do is run through a few questions we have briefly raised last time, and try to go over these exact same questions more thoroughly. First, do you agree that there was a connection between you and S-One?

JAMES BRODKEY: I would say there was a connection.

DR. MIPSTEIN: Were there moments when the actuality of that connection was diverging from how you perceived it most of the time?

JAMES BRODKEY: I never considered having two understandings of what it was.

DR. MIPSTEIN: Haven't you sometimes thought otherwise?

JAMES BRODKEY: If you have questions about *Die progressive Paralyse*... they've been rejecting some of these ideas of mine...

DR. MIPSTEIN: Well it does concern *Die progressive Paralyse*, obviously. *The Augmented Edition*.

JAMES BRODKEY: Right.

DR. MIPSTEIN: And I understand that a few contradictors may have been enticing themselves into considering certain aspects of your logic very susceptible to facilitate the emergence of contradictory points. I understand that.

JAMES BRODKEY: Rejectionists.

DR. MIPSTEIN: There are some unusual ideas about the facilities and what they exactly were that deserve some clarifications though.

JAMES BRODKEY: That's because not all of them were completely in tune with what they should have been.

DR. MIPSTEIN: Could you tell me what was the message you were anxious to put out at that time, when you edited this version?

JAMES BRODKEY: I think it was a few things that I don't think S-One was addressing.

DR. MIPSTEIN: Can you be more specific?

JAMES BRODKEY: I was very frustrated.

DR. KERR: [The blonde crosses her legs away from me, pointing to the door.]

JAMES BRODKEY: There is always a sort of order. And it always comes with patronization procedures.

DR. MIPSTEIN: [You said that it was not quite order, but a kind of displacement of order.]

JAMES BRODKEY: Order is observed. Patterning cascades follow.

DR. MIPSTEIN: Was S-one operating within this framework of order?

JAMES BRODKEY: Yes but sub-tacitly.

DR. MIPSTEIN: And that is what frustrated you?

JAMES BRODKEY: The problem with S-One... it seems they reconstructed every trace of their acts, as if they had sought a sort of disorder of their acts. S-19, what they would do is they would confuse you with conflictual non-actions. Initiated within. Under each other's tutelage. The Judge's Room, too. Not to say that all the facilities were gung-ho on driving me crazy, obviously. But each one had a role.

DR. MIPSTEIN: Did you have a role in this?

JAMES BRODKEY: Never.

DR. MIPSTEIN: [I'm saying hypothetically.]

JAMES BRODKEY: Oh, hypothetically... They were capable of redirecting individuals so capably that many were unable to notice they were manipulated, myself included.

DR. MIPSTEIN: Have you been exploring the fact that you might have misinterpreted what was going on?

JAMES BRODKEY: You mean things people didn't say? That I've heard?

DR. MIPSTEIN: For example.

JAMES BRODKEY: I didn't hear things.

DR. MIPSTEIN: [The growling matrons with large pores birch and growl in awe. Their fangs grind.]

JAMES BRODKEY: Understand, Doctor Mip. There was no cue to ponder upon. There was no fang grinding. There was no fissure through which implicitness could be teased out. They were playing numb... They were individuals planting doubts... Clearly disturbed individuals...

DR. MIPSTEIN: What do you mean by playing numb?

JAMES BRODKEY: I mean feigning ignorance. Ignoring. As a means to exert control. To preserve their own rank.

DR. MIPSTEIN: Do you have personal ideas about how the facilities should have dealt with external individuals? [How do you define love, Mr. Brodkey?] Would it be something different than how they dealt with you?

JAMES BRODKEY: [The opposite of S-One.] You know they

were not taking me out and murdering me in the middle of Brooklyn... with my abdomen placed outside my body... If you stand with the Judge's Room completely, the assumption was rather the opposite. I mean, you could not be against it. But what if someone were to hurt someone... with no intention to hurt, supposedly? What was this intention where there were like two different forms of intention? What if it was doing what it says it was not? Can you take power away from that?

DR. MIPSTEIN: Do you know other people that would go along with this interpretation?

JAMES BRODKEY: Nobody never acknowledged anything. Especially not the activity that was precisely the object of their denial, itself embedded in denial.

DR. MIPSTEIN: So there's no one that you can say would second your view?

JAMES BRODKEY: I wouldn't be stagnating in this *testis unus testis nullus* drag if there was.

DR. MIPSTEIN: Have you felt persecuted, Mr. Brodkey?

JAMES BRODKEY: I felt stereotyped.

DR. KERR: [The blonde shoves silence in the maw of her mouth.]

JAMES BRODKEY: I have been deluged with banality.

DR. KERR: [Ropes wrinkling her knees.]

JAMES BRODKEY: Meeting all these people... They were giving cherry pies away.

DR. MIPSTEIN: [They found blood on the walls, too.]

JAMES BRODKEY: Those were days spent whimpering.

DR. MIPSTEIN: Mr. Brodkey, I'm not sure what you're talking about...

JAMES BRODKEY: I couldn't move. I was all black and blue.

DR. MIPSTEIN: [But your property upstate, they've brought in forensic anthropologists, and when they went through the scene, they discovered all these different types of bones.]

JAMES BRODKEY: Really?

DR. MIPSTEIN: [Yes, buried below the surface.]

JAMES BRODKEY: What were they looking for?

DR. MIPSTEIN: [The owner of the bones, I guess. Physical

evidence. Stuff.]

JAMES BRODKEY: I don't know nothing about that. I was in Coxsackie. I was hooking clips to my paps.

DR. MIPSTEIN: [If it was your bones. Or if it was not some proprioceptive hallucination. Or if the two circumstances were coexisting in actuality.]

JAMES BRODKEY: I was hooking clips to my paps and plugging the cord into the strip. I was trussing my groin. I was sleeping in my car. I was sleeping in the trunk. I was chopping cherry trees down. I was buying me a collar. I was studying pessimism. I was studying *The Drowned and the Saved*. The Wahnbriefe. The first pages of *Discipline and Punish*. The horse Piazza Carlo Alberto. *Peter Ibbetson*. Rubato. Certainly a person waiting for something isn't going to get better without medication, you know. Like revived to be killed anew. Blazing like Innocent X. So the Bureau ok'd my release. I left Coxsackie. I moved to New York. I started to slave for the girls. Billie was my tutor. [She points to the floor and says, "See that? Someone be hitting you."] Once she let me eat her tea. I said, Who are you? I don't know this person. Everything was repeated twice. Everything was spatial. Like moving something down to a cave or out of sigh. Delusions that were not. Everything the opposite. I mean that's what they were doing. To have me dig a hole of hate. To have me fall into that hole. To have me ebb and die in there. You can control someone with holes. Which is the difference between folds and planes. Look at anybody's life, see where to place holes, and you'll figure out exactly how S-One floored me. Small folds one fold at a time. Holes and pockets of holes to every side of me. Dialogues of holes and coiled up pits. Cowls, caves, trunks, cages. I was left dead. I was let go. Execrated and astray, gracile like silence. But I didn't want to bring up hate. Even against hate. They were putting emptiness in front of me, but I wasn't the hateful one. I didn't want that feeling inside of me. You know Mengele? You know the narcotics he injected in the children's eyes, he gave them sweets first... They were calling him Uncle Mengele... He created memories that he could

flip, spaces that he could emptied... The gates that flip... You can't beat that. And you create that with confusion. You methodize a cline of confusion. You pose antagonist meanings to every same fact along a cline of confusion. So S-One let me believe that they had no feelings of hate towards me. But none of them did without. And it was very easy for them to not address the problem and confuse me. They were just saying, we are not like that. And it was stretching all the way into silence. [Long pause.] The endless dialogue where I am questioning S-One... and it says nothing.

DR. MIPSTEIN: Let me come back to what you called the Judge's Room.

JAMES BRODKEY: Forget the Judge's Room. Please. I mean

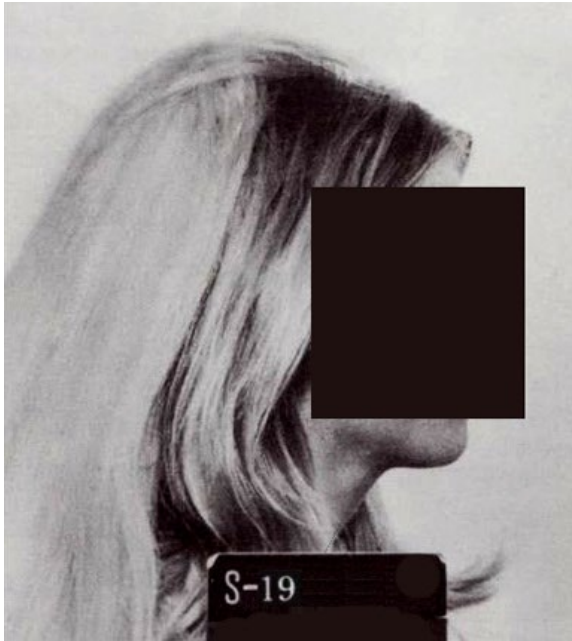
words are second. That's what they are. Let me give you an example. Someone says, "Yes." Someone says this, and then says, "Maybe." Why? Because two doors are open, but one is actually closed. And you'll never know for sure. There are inconsistencies, you are aware of that. And you spend your time struggling with how upset you are.

DR. MIPSTEIN: Mr. Brodkey...

JAMES BRODKEY: When I talk about perception, my concern from a perception perspective is what I went through. And the impact it had on me. And how I cuirassed myself. All I've seen was wordless, but the activity which I considered the essential activity, it was very realistic... The hate in the dead eyes of the Judge's Room...

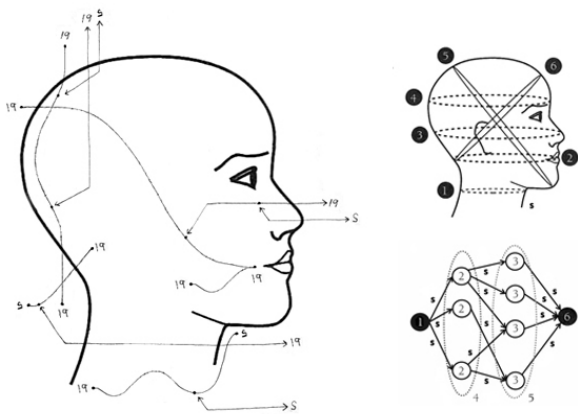


Hell is empty and all the devils are here, The Tempest, 1610–11 (Hole), 2010-11



“A likeness of S-19” (full-scale mock-up), scanned from *An Illustrated Guide to The Judge’s Room* (2013)

Clément Rosset, *Le Réel et son double*, 1978



“Banality Diagrams,” scanned from *An Illustrated Guide to The Judge’s Room* (2013)

DR. MIPSTEIN: Hold on, Mr. Brodkey, because as you go on let me make sure I understand. When you say words are second, what does that mean exactly?

JAMES BRODKEY: In every way you, as a person, could hate someone just like that. This isn’t the hardest thing to do. It’s like having an equal number of doubts and not stay the same. I stayed the same.

DR. MIPSTEIN: Who didn’t stay the same?

JAMES BRODKEY: You know you are asking me the same question over and over.

DR. MIPSTEIN: I am not aware of that.

JAMES BRODKEY: You rephrase constantly.

DR. MIPSTEIN: Well perhaps I’m not getting answers which are clear to me.

JAMES BRODKEY: I would appreciate if you had new questions.

DR. MIPSTEIN: The question I just asked, Who didn’t stay the same?, I have not asked you that question before.

JAMES BRODKEY: You’ll review the tape. All you have to do is review the tape.

DR. MIPSTEIN: Okay. Let me change something. Let’s talk about [REDACTED].

JAMES BRODKEY: That has nothing to do with this.

DR. MIPSTEIN: Mr. Brodkey, you understand what’s going on here ...

JAMES BRODKEY: You can’t force me to talk on any subject.

DR. MIPSTEIN: Mr. Brodkey, the purpose of this interview is to try to bring out information which could be relevant to your own understanding of the situation. That’s why I’m here. [To repel.]

JAMES BRODKEY: You can’t force me to talk on any subject.

Recommended course of treatment: No action necessitated (though Dr. Kerr asks to be notified immediately if [REDACTED] becomes “dominant” again.)

January 19, 2013

55 y/o M P/S # 70-80 Zolpidem 20 mg. tabs. this am in an attempt to “sleep forever.” Pt. unable to cry. Pt. says, “If all there was was hate, why did I look to it for love?” Pronounced dead at 7:50 a.m. (local).

“Multiple Context-Dependent Self-Aspects: S-50 (Farther),” scanned from *An Illustrated Guide to The Judge’s Room* (2013)



The only account of the 2009 decimation of S-50 is a text archived at the Library of the Fifth Stereo Hell:

The only account of the 2009 decimation of S-50 is a text archived at the Library of the Fifth Stereo Hell: Because of their knowledge of the activities, the recruits were regularly executed and replaced with new recruits. The first assignment of the new recruits was to overkill their predecessors and dispose of their dismembered bodies [...] when the last known generation of recruits rebelled against and attacked the guards with shiv knives, killed five of them [...] were captured by reinforcements from other facilities [...] executed and disjointed at S-22 [...] sedated and murdered one by one over a period of six weeks [...] overkilled [...] mouths open to a considerable extent, cuts sig-shaped, breasts, genitalia and abdomens placed outside the bodies in an attempt to destroy the humanity of the victims “with alacrity” with corpses displayed in degrading positions with legs spread eagle, arms ripped, tongues split, intestines twisted, viscera exposed and lacerated and/or missing, heads removed and visages defaced, throats and lips snapped, paps scorched, skin gashed, bones crushed.

stereohell-et-orientationis sisterhood, Chapters 19 & 22,
scanned from *Stereohell* (New York, 2010)



May 2, 2013
Johnson R. and Li. D. K.
New York Post

Final fermata

The more I struggle against my misery,
The keener becomes in me the instinct of misfortune ;
[...]
Even to my repose, everything is a struggle;
And like a tired-out steed,

(Alfred de Musset, *Last Verses*, 1857)

“My client is ensconced in the bosom of that facility right now,” Heller said. “She’s there. In fact, she is going to be meeting later today with a psychiatrist and her therapy and treatment is undergoing immediate commencement.”

The last chapter of *Die progressive Paralyse (Augmented Edition)* concludes with this fragmented quotation from Alfred de Musset,

Plus je me débats contre ma misère,
Plus s’éveille en moi l’instinct du malheur ;
[...]
Jusqu’à mon repos, tout est un combat ;
Et, comme un coursier brisé de fatigue,

which, when interpreted as a contra-composite allusion to the horse Nietzsche embraced in Turin (1889) before collapsing, appeared pivotal to the comprehension of the “syntactic lexicon” Brodkey utilized to transform (and sometimes compress) various bodies of autobiographical information into volatile mechanisms of grammar, notably the use of letters to represent spaces. **TNI**

Everything resembles the truth

(Nikolai Gogol, *Dead Souls*, 1842)

by IMP KERR



Services, New Iorvik, 2007 (scanned from *To Me, You Are Simply Words on Paper* (2000), reproduced in *Stereohell Illustrated* (2009-2013))



fig. 1 & 2. Symbols used by S-50 to represent mental cysts.



The Stereohell Resource Network is a Stereohell online information and service system. To browse SRNET or join, set your modem to 22 data bits, 1 stop bit and no parity.

The following report is reproduced as received.

:

S-50 appears to offer:

concern for the individual.

Recruitment, training techniques, and indoctrination procedures practiced by S-50 impose their norms of thinking and behaving through:

“care”;

breakdown of spontaneity;

composite schemes of cross-non-actions and repetitive non-stimuli configured by experiments;

closed system of logic;

comprehension-altering routines leading to flashbacks and intrusive reexperiencing of negative emotions, cone-shaped memories, shizoffective memories, phantom recollections, semi-rigid declarative memories swapped with pliant ones;

response to sadness in a way that greater sadness is aroused;

rationalization to incite to accept the “care” provided by S-50 as the only alternative.

Recruits suffered loss of direction, lack of orientation, repetitive lack of coherent answers to recurrent coherent questions. They experienced immobility, feelings of worthlessness, woes, weps, mental cysts, anomia, aphasia. They felt rootless, hopeless, helpless.

Recommendations: We recommend that S-50:

Put an immediate end to its activities;

Take urgent steps to implement the recommendations made in the present report.

:

prepared by:

S-22 Authority

dated:

2009

issued by:

The Stereohell Resource Network

Duality Communications

Permico Circle

Las Vegas, NV 89000

A note on “Kerr’s Analysis of Change Science,” a short essay Brodkey wrote on Imp Kerr’s interpretation of change for the July 2010 issue of the Stereohell periodical *Der Stereohell* (reproduced separately in *Die Progressive Paralyse (Disorders of Simulation Augmented, Vol. II)*, Cox-sackie, NY (2010), and in a 2013 reprint of *Superposition Scholia*)

In a number of her writings, Imp Kerr [a woman with self-confessed “inertia problem”] discusses a type of paradigm she calls “change,” without ever giving a definition of change nor even mentioning the term. She only lists some typical features of change, sometimes adding vague psychological explanations, but without relating these features to a general theory or specific experiences. The most extensive discussion referring to change occurs in

one chapter (Ch. II.2) of the Fifth Stereohell (*Magnæ Matris*), a collection of notes attributed to Kerr regardless of the doubt that the form in which this collection has come down to posterity has been devised by Kerr herself [In particular the representation of change [see 1 & 2 below] elaborated in the chapter in question that some attribute to Brodkey rather than Kerr [According to reports by Dr. Mary Daisy Mipstein of the Manhattan Forensic Psychiatrist Center, Brodkey considered “change” (*Per Cambiare*) as primary evil, or evil itself [*euvel*], “hell” as “hole,” “hate” as “hete,” and “counterclockwise extrusion spiral disorders” as “queening stools.” The analogies are described with valuable contextualizations in the *Superposition Scholia*, a short text Brodkey wrote in 2011 [property of the Psychiatric

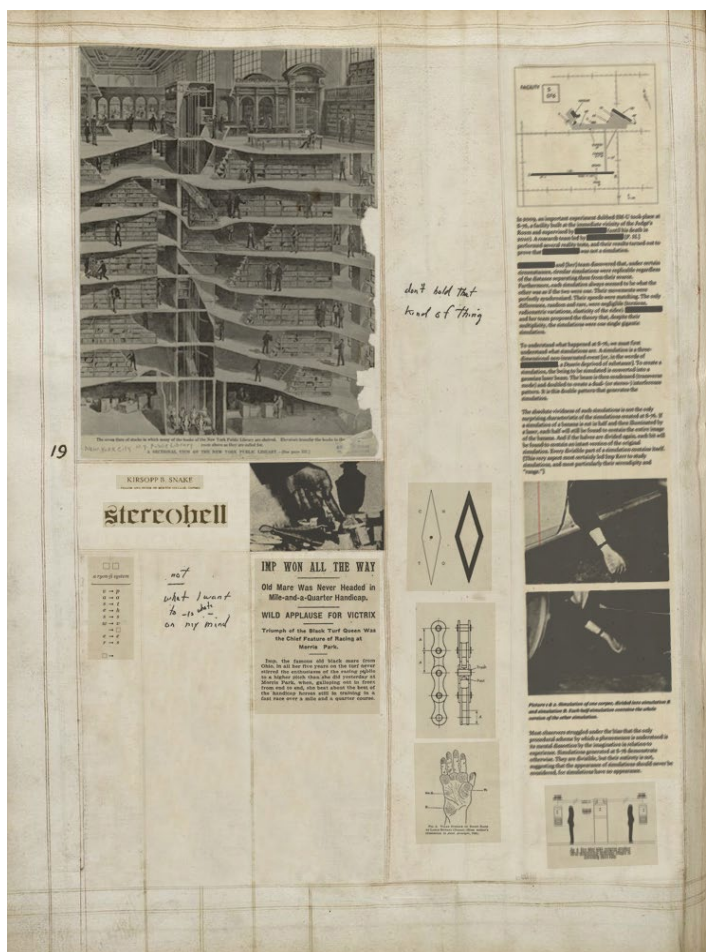


Plate 19, *Stereohell Illustrated* (2009-2013)

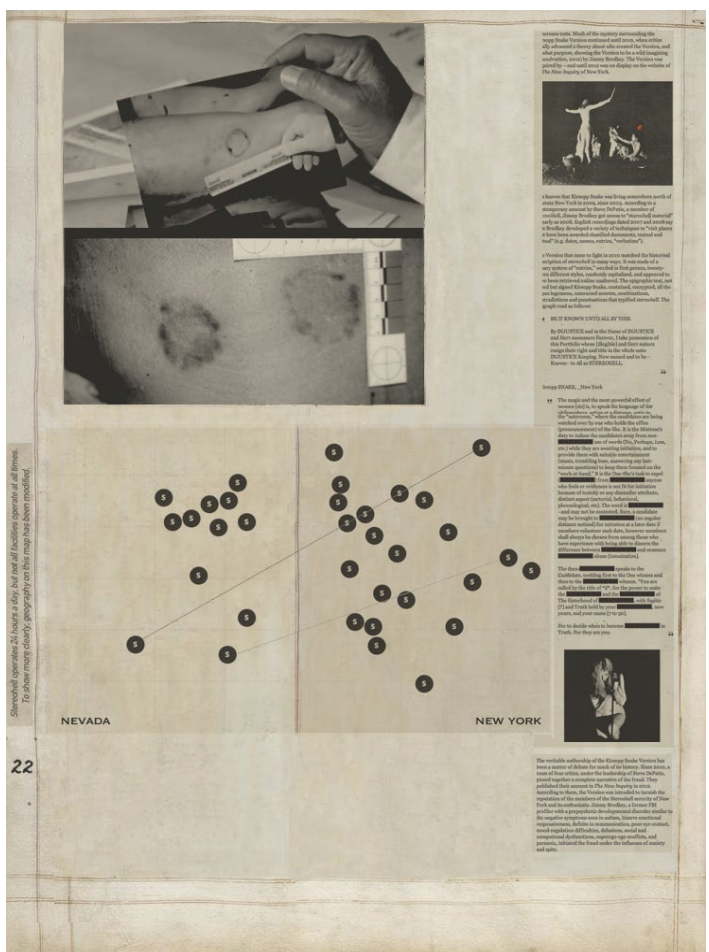


Plate 22; Fetish, bites, rites, hete, and temporal evolution of the Judge's Room among the facilities (with diagram, middle of page), *Stereohell Illustrated* (2009-2013)

Society of Coxsackie, NY] which is thought to be a revised version of Chapter II.2.]. So far no attempt has been made to describe Kerr's concept of change as based on her undisputed, notoriously resistant to exegesis work, and to compare it to the views presented [in Ch. II.2]. However, the revealing, in 2009, of the decimation of facility S-50, evidenced "with all the more force" by documents issued by S-12, opened several pockets of speculation from which a new and comprehensive interpretation of the concept of "change" in the circumstances of the said S-50 case became possible [By virtue of its own kind, the decimation of facility S-50 has been considered as a proof that changes were predictable consequences of infinite series of spiraling causes, themselves consequences of causes preceded by endless sequences of causes and consequences, and that what we called hazard [chance] didn't exist and was a word for our ignorance of all causes, and that, besides, "nothing [could] exist without a cause" (Voltaire).]. Despite obtuse disputes concerning the extraction of generalities from particularities, methodologies, intents, and crosscurrents of biases due to the allegedly heretical—*non secundum textum originalem*—nature of the texts and conclusions considered, it was established nonetheless that 1) change determinations and structures, typically discriminative and undetectable, result from self-persuasion, *superposition* [with the acceptance "simultaneous existence in more than one place"], postponements, and distance, and that 2) in return, change disruptors interfering with *hete* [hate] and feigned vainglory facilitate denial by creating disorder and opacity.

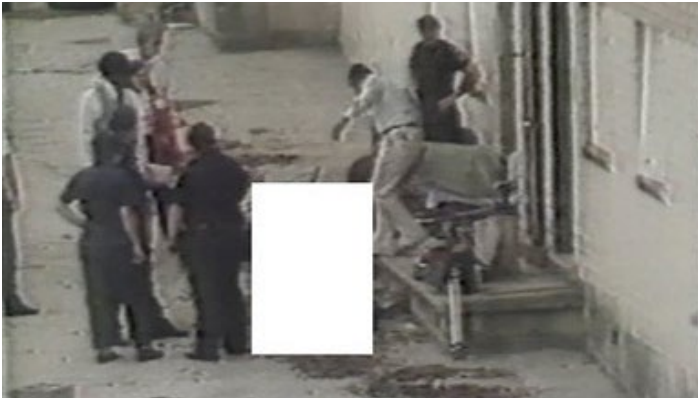
THE Black Facilities, or "Judge's Room" as Jimmy Brodkey referred to them, consisted of a zone fragmented into 34 facilities located in the states of New York and Nevada. They were studied by Stereo Hell revivalists at the Central Science Laboratory of Change [Borough of Man-

hattan] in the years 2009, 2010, and 2011.

In the end of the 20th century, interest in the "Infinite Debt" was revived by the Stereo Hell Initiative, a small group of occult societies which rejected change, disorder, endurance, and denial—all traits reflected in the philosophical system of the Judge's Room—as "trivial" and inspired by villainous influences [preliminary indications that support this reading can be found in several entries in the *Superposition Scholia*]. By the end of the 00s and after many quarrels and dissensions befell, about fifty Stereo Hell societies were countable in New York promoting a variety of combative pseudo-stereohell initiatives, all change acquiescent and vilipensive and in favor of which Jimmy Brodkey seemed to have played an important role.

A crucial development in the connection between these pseudo-stereohell initiatives and the Black Facilities came in 2009 with the ratification, by the New York Society for the Suppression of Truth, of the content of *Die Progressive Paralyse (Augmented Edition, 1990-2009)*, a controversial work by Jimmy Brodkey which established the foundations of his theory of "Irretrievable Disorder," and, among other consequences, fostered the practice of denial. The subsequent, successful corruption¹ of the original initiative was implemented the same year in a triacontakaitetra-zone initially encrypted Justice Room, with sub-rooms 19 through 75 and 1 through 80 being interpolations interpreted as being the "Sum of the 28 Facilities" and believed to represent "a primal facility" under which all further societies would be subsumed. Reportedly [*prima facie*], the first twelve facilities corresponded to twelve modifications of the "Cause," while the sixteen additional facilities were operating as "Paralyses."

1. An integral part of the Stereohell Initiative ruse was that there was no apposite definition for the expressions of "notions of Law" and "notions of Justice," no epistemological instrument (absence of epistemological instrument) to abstract "determinations," and no critical taxonomy itemizing the practices "upon which the laws were based." (Kerr I., *Force reste à la loi*, Paris, 2013)



Clockwise from top left: Scene cleanup (Catherine Wheel Operation, 2012) © SRNET. Victim 29 (colorized photographs).



It is not known how many facilities still exist and how many have been destroyed. Some may even have been reconstructed. What is known is that the initial Stereohell societies were dismantled and their records destroyed, and all their members [commonly recognized as 68 “low-level victims”] eliminated during the purge of 2012 [in response to “apprehensiveness” expressed by S-75].

The purge took place at S-22 in conditions said “dark,” in November 2012, echoing the November 2009 decimation of S-50. In December 2012, under the impulse of [REDACTED] [whose name was blacked out], S-75 set up a cover-up operation code-named “Catherine Wheel” to hide the crimes committed during the purge, hide the identities of the victims, and hide the Catherine Wheel operation itself. In January 2013, S-22 was reopened and repopulated, as if nothing had happened. **TNI**

“And so in truth they shall.” —Racine, *The Thebaid*, 1664

“S-75 was due for a ‘theoretical reassessment,’ and such a reassessment was likely to be negative and not reflect the influence S-75 thought it deserved to have over the other facilities.” —*The Perilous Empirical Times*, 2012

A document issued by the SRNET (unattributed), decrying the duplicity of the Catherine Wheel operation in its entirety, was called a “reconstruction based on a reality that doesn’t exist” by the Judge’s Room.

“Supposing that Truth is a woman” and “How could anything originate out of its opposite? For example, truth out of error?” (Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 1886), both quoted in *Kerr’s Analysis of Change Science*.

Change of Place: Kasarani-Gaza-Ferguson

by KEGURO MACHARIA

Political theorist Wambui Mwangi says that one should start from where one stands. From Kasarani, Gaza and Ferguson appear. Stretching is neither conflating nor collapsing.

*I may find that a change of place
is nothing safe*

—Melvin Dixon



GEOGRAPHIES stitch together, overlap, unmake the distinctions we trace in atlases. We learn to name place, to designate space, to assign fixity to scenes and sites of unmaking. Perhaps the only truth that remains is: “this used to be (called).”

Let me start (again) with “this used to be (called).”

Moi International Sports Complex (MISC) was built to host the 1987 All African Sports Games.

Kenyan historians agree that the Moi regime became increasingly repressive following the 1982 coup. As noted in the *Report of the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission*,

In the aftermath of the coup, members of the Kenya Air Force [who led the coup] were rounded up and transported to prison facilities and other locations where they were tortured and subjected to inhuman and degrading treatment. Thereafter, President Moi stepped up measures aimed at controlling the state and further consolidating his power. He filled government positions with loyalists, mainly from his own Kalenjin community. His government, which had in June 1982, amended the constitution to make Kenya a de jure one party state, removed security of tenure for constitutional office holders such as judges.

Of the many recorded atrocities in the *TJRC Report*, the Wagalla Massacre of 1984 represents the nadir of the state’s relationship to Kenyans of Somali descent.

The massacre of over 400 men occurred on the Wagalla airstrip, located in northern Kenya. It was accompanied by mass rapes of women and girls.

Numbers are difficult to ascertain—and I do not want to hinge why this matters on numbers.

Within official memory, in government-controlled papers, Wagalla became an unhappening. When an international news agency reported on the massacre, the Kenyan government dismissed the massacre as “a minor quarrel.”

Wagalla lives as a memory inscribed on the bodies of raped and tortured women and girls, men and boys. As a state warning to those of Somali descent that their lives are disposable.

Simultaneously, truth-telling history writing became impossible in Moi’s Kenya: “between March 1986 and March 1987, at least 75 journalists, academics, and university students were jailed for crimes such as the possession of seditious literature”

Opened at a moment of intense state repression, the

In October and November 1987, the Moi-KANU regime unleashed armed police and the para-military General Service Unit at mass gatherings of Kenyans at Mombasa and Nairobi—Secretariat of UMOJA Umoja wa Kupigania Demokrasia Kenya, London 1987

How are we to think of these deaths “in transit space”? These deaths in the peculiar ungeography of a region whose inhabitants required special passes to “visit” Kenya?

On my first official visit to Washington, DC, I am corrected: “We call that airport The National”

Moi International Sports Complex was a monument to un-memory, a space where Kenyan sports accomplishments might erase the bitterness of everyday unmaking. Given a chance to “celebrate something good,” we seized on the victories of our famed runners, seeing in their victories other possibilities of belonging. As Jackie Lebo writes, “You never feel more Kenyan than when the flag is raised at an Olympic stadium, the athletes at the podium dressed in national colors and mouthing the words to the national anthem.” Yet, memory reclaims space.

I do not remember when I unlearned to say Moi, when the Moi International Sports Complex simply became its location, Kasarani. Partly, this is convenience. Partly, it was a small gesture of resistance, a way to erase the repressive nationalisms the space was supposed to represent.

Under president Uhuru’s neoliberal regime, the body that governs Kenya’s stadiums attempted to sell the naming rights of the Moi International Sports Complex to Safaricom, the country’s largest wireless company. MISC was to be renamed “Safaricom Stadium Kasarani— Home of Heroes.” The deal was rejected by members of the National Congress, who insisted that Moi’s reputation must be honored.

In an animated debate, in which the lawmakers flashed the one-finger salute reminiscent of Kanu the then ruling party under retired President Daniel arap Moi, MPs said it was wrong for the name of Kenya’s longest-serving President to be deleted from one of the landmarks in the country at a time when the country is planning celebrations for 50 years of independence.

Adding to the debate, the Member of Parliament for Eldas, Adan Keynan argued, “Any attempt to rewrite or erase the historical contribution of great leaders like Mzee Moi, who handed over power peacefully will be unfair. His reign must be applauded and must be respected. In this version of Kenyan un-memory, Kasarani incarnates Moi’s greatness. Yet, the term “reign” suggests, more aptly, the nature of power being celebrated: autocratic, history-erasing,

disposability-proliferating.

It should have come as no surprise, then, when Kenya's Inspector General, David Kimaiyo, officially gazetted the stadium on April 17, 2014, designating it a "police station," with effect from April 2, 2014. Kasarani had already been a place of un-memory, a place of un-making, a place where power displayed its ability to destroy. Soon renamed on twitter as #kasaraniconcentrationcamp, the stadium continued its historical function as a site of terror-induced, repression-driven, nationalist jingoism.

I am interested in how spaces hold and distribute memory and affect, in the capacity of imaginative, imagined, and felt geographies to be infused with the histories of their making, in the practices that sustain them. In how stone and soil, sand and water, cracks and sealant whisper.

As with Wagalla, that killing geography of transit, #kasaraniconcentrationcamp has become another site of disposability: barely mentioned in mainstream sources, absent from official parliamentary debates. As though the un-memory power of Moi's monument to repression continues to silence all who encounter it. And, once again, Somalis are especial targets of state terror.

Terror-Terroir

The terror against Somalis was launched under what was dubbed Usalama Watch. Usalama translates as safety and security; it also has connotations of wellbeing and good health. Niko Salama—I am well. The safety, security, health, and wellbeing of Kenya was imagined as being dependent on the unmaking of Somali lives. As though a certain vision of Kenya depends on the disposability of all Somalis.

A fiction of safety anchored by disposability joins Usalama Watch to Operation Protective Edge.

Launched on July 8, 2014, Operation Protective Edge

was Israel's latest attempt to unmake and un-memory Palestine. In addition to the over 2,000 deaths reported—the many more still to come in "the lull"—the "Operation" (what an obscene word) sought to unmake the possibility of habitable space: to destroy homes, mosques, schools, hospitals, to make the very stones plead for mercy. As Laleh Khalili demonstrates, this unmaking has been a constant feature of Israel's relationship to Palestine, a history of dispossession and unhumaning.

I return to this writing after a "permanent ceasefire" has been declared, an assurance, perhaps, that the bombs will stop falling. For now. Images circulate of celebrating Gazans. On twitter, those who can, tweet that they are still glad to be alive. To have survived.

How, I wonder, do the disposable survive?

We re-learn, as though we need to, that "genocide" and "ethnocide" are area-specific terms: to be abhorred and halted and decried and theorized when they happen in Europe. Perhaps. To be debated and contextualized and passed through death-assessing calculators when they happen elsewhere.

those who claim to embody

global liberty

shake their heads

trap us

in their

moral dilemmas

We attempt to claim that children are dying, that families are being destroyed, that generation and genealogy are being erased.

I want to say geographies collapse

I move from the uninformation about #kasaraniconcentrationcamp, the Kenyan state's silence, the few tweets that circulate from affected Somalis, and the few who care, to the over-information about Gaza, the proliferation of dead-bodyimages, bombrains, rubblebuildings, griefragegriefragegrief. Names from Gaza are assembled, memorialized. We do not know how to name the missing in Kenya. We say, learning from the state, "illegal," "shifta," "refugee," unassimilable.

what names might the dispossessed bear?

And as #kasaraniconcentrationcamp fades, returning to the un-memory that its geography and geo-history demand, a new name and place: Ferguson, Missouri. A name: Mike Brown.

Ferguson, Missouri enters the geo-histories of disposability and resistance, the small geographies we learn to hold in common, part of the "it could happen anywhere" geographies. The routine unmaking of disposable life.

This writing might be about the labor of coincidence—about the twitter hashtags that have dominated the past 5 months. Has it been that long?

It might be about the stickiness and circulation of grief and rage. About how our intimacies open us to other worlds—how living with #kasaraniconcentrationcamp made #Gaza and #Ferguson more proximate, more charged, more demanding. It might be about how emotion builds, intensifies, pours over, leads to demands for justice, for freedom, for life. It might be about exhaustion.

It might be about the ordinariness of the name Mike Brown, an unassuming name, a name one might imagine calling. A familiar name. A name whose ordinariness might allow us to imagine, if only for a moment, the horror of its unmaking.

In yet another register, this writing might be about the ability of state power to arbitrarily devalue and unmake life, about the legal power to make disposable.

It might be about what I do not know how to write for Gift Makau. **TNI**

We stumble to make illegible moral claims. We are reminded that these claims were never for us to make.

A silly thought: Mike Brown is such an ordinary name.

Toward Freedom

by KEGURO MACHARIA

What kind of knowledge is freedom-building, freedom-creating, freedom-pursuing, freedom-sustaining?



WIATHI began with a word my mother gave me, a word that taught me how to imagine and desire a livable and shareable world. *Wiathi* is a grounded word, though it lives in that “leap of invention” Fanon writes about. It’s a word that my mother learned when her father was arrested by the British in 1952, her family home bull-

dozed by colonial forces, and her family forced into a colonial village. I think it’s the word my mother learned to chant when she sold sweet potatoes to train passengers to raise school fees. It’s the word that allowed her to survive when colonial officers laid out dead bodies in front of her school and taunted her to check whether her father was among

them. It's the word she held on to when her grandmother handed her packages of food and told her to place them where freedom fighters could collect them. It's the word that flooded her body when her father returned from detention seven years later and when she first saw the Kenyan flag going up. *Wiathi* is a grounding and grounded word, a world-imagining, world-building word.

About six months ago, my mother said: "my father's generation fought to get back some of the land; my generation fought to get some economic freedom; your generation must fight to free our minds—you must create knowledge."

I have been thinking about the clarity of her vision, her understanding of generational change, and her model of historical responsibility. Over the past year, she has kept telling me that I know much more than her father ever did—I've simply read more books. Her father, for whom I am named, was a teacher. Many of my aunts and uncles became teachers. I am a third-generation teacher within the frames created by colonial modernity, which means that I inhabit and work in and against those frames.

I return, as always, to the example of my grandfather, who taught in what were called independent schools, systems established to think beyond the frames the British created for the natives. Independent schools pursued freedom. When those schools were closed, Kenyan education changed forever, moving from pursuing freedom to creating state-building skills, suitable for the colonial and post-independent state. What kind of knowledge is needed to pursue freedom? How is knowledge to be freed? How can our minds be freed?

Over the past year, I have been thinking about political vernaculars:

"Political vernaculars" announce a conversation about politics: they are the words and phrases that assemble something experienced as the political, and that gather different groups around something marked as the political. They are the words and phrases that disassemble people around the political, as when "I prefer not to discuss

politics." They create attachments to the political, and they also distance us from something known as the political. They create possibilities for different ways of coming together—from short-lived experiments to long-term institution building—and they also impede how we form ourselves as we-formations, across the past, the present, the future, and all of the in-between times marked by slow violence and prolonged dying.

I was jolted to think about political vernaculars when I returned to Kenya in 2013 and realised that I did not understand how Kenya was being discussed. Development-speak and, more precisely, NGO-speak had created a host of terms that *seemed* to be speaking about something experienced as the political—good governance, civil society, capacity building, accountability, transparency—but that had the *effect* of creating massive class barriers: those fluent in these terms could access conferences and workshops held in elite hotels, but didn't seem to have a vision beyond what those terms offered. This experience was also true of the political spaces I encountered, where the conversations kept looping around creating systems and making systems work—corruption is a problem, we need development, the problem is implementation. It's not that these statements are not true, but I was fascinated by the faith *and* resignation with which they were repeated. I was fascinated by what they did not seem to do. If these vernaculars gathered us, and they did, it was not to pursue freedom.

What kind of knowledge is freedom-building, freedom-creating, freedom-pursuing, freedom-sustaining? What's the relationship between this knowledge and state-sanctioned knowledge? What will ground this freedom-oriented knowledge?

Wambui Mwangi has been teaching me how to think about grounding, how to think and act from where one is standing. Because I think with the black diaspora, I am also compelled to ask about how one thinks and acts from dispossession and deracination. What does thinking with still-extant colonial villages produce as an orientation toward freedom? What does thinking with IDPs do? What does thinking with squatters do? What does thinking with

those who live in “informal settlements”—I’m unconvinced that “informal settlement” is more dignified than slum; what gives a settlement form?—do? What does thinking with and from the North Eastern region do for how Kenya is imagined? What does thinking with women who have low rates of owning land do? How do we assemble these various dispossessions and create freedom-seeking knowledge with and from them?

What would happen if we placed freedom at the center of Kenyan knowledge practices?

Shailja Patel taught me how to say #mybodymyhome: “Our bodies are our first homes. If we are not safe in our bodies, we are always homeless.” How do we pursue freedom for and through our bodies? What claims to freedom should be made? What kinds of freedom should be pursued? If our bodies are the grounds on which we stand—the only grounding we can speak from, even when that

ground is violated—how do we pursue freedom dreams?

I’m certain that mastering World Bank, IMF, and NGO vernaculars will not lead to freedom. I’m ambivalent about much of what is sold as civic education in Kenya—state attempts to create degrees of fluency in state management strategies. Freedom will not come from learning how to speak and act as the state desires. I’m also certain that the term freedom needs to be populated with meanings that work, grounded in love and care and mutuality. We must imagine and create and practice freedoms that promote livability and shareability.

What would happen if we placed freedom at the center of Kenyan knowledge practices? What would happen if knowledge practices were oriented around and toward freedom? What would happen if we learned how to marry political critique to a demand for freedom? These are not disciplinary questions—they are not for the humanities and social sciences. They are questions for all knowledge-imagining, knowledge-creating, knowledge-distributing structures.

Fanon writes,

Decolonization never goes unnoticed, for it focuses on and fundamentally alters being, and transforms the spectator crushed to a nonessential state into a privileged actor, captured in a virtually grandiose fashion by the spotlight of History. It infuses a new rhythm, specific to a new generation of humans, with a new language and a new humanity. Decolonization is truly the creation of new humans. But such a creation cannot be attribute to a supernatural power: The “thing” colonized becomes a human through the very process of liberation. (modified because I don’t roll with Fanon’s sexism)

These are the stakes. Too often, in discussions of decolonizing knowledge or decolonizing the university—vernaculars that are now circulating—we lose sight of what is at stake. It’s not “transforming universities.” It’s not “increasing diversity.” It’s not “making universities safe spaces.” These are worthy goals, but they are partial. The goal is to alter being and relations, to create “new humans.” That is what decolonization does. That is what freedom does. **TNI**

radical queer africa

by KEGURO MACHARIA



i.

Many of us continue to search for a new political direction and agenda, one that does not focus on integration into dominant structures but instead seeks to transform the basic fabrics and hierarchies that allow systems of oppression to persist and operate efficiently.

—Cathy Cohen, “Punks, Bulldaggers,
and Welfare Queens”

ii.

The best phrase G.W. Bush’s speechwriters wrote:
“the soft bigotry of low expectations”

iii.

What would queer Africa look like detached from
racist developmental logics?

iv.

While histories of African resistance are cited and celebrated, the idea that Africans might know how to imagine freedom seems inconceivable, not only in a missionary global north, but, increasingly, within Africa itself.

v.

In this moment, what are we willing to do to be free?

—Cathy Cohen, Kessler Lecture

vi.

I have been thinking about how little is expected of African queers:

- while homonormativity might be critiqued elsewhere, it cannot be critiqued here
- robust articulations of queer difference in Africa cannot exist for a global imagination stunned by the idea that there might be queers in Africa
- among Africa-based movements, little space seems to exist for dissent and critique
- many African queers in “leadership” positions continue to fetishize the “freedom” enjoyed by “gays abroad,” paying little attention to the race, gender, and class politics of those “gays abroad”
- an African queer focus on making powerful friends abroad has made difficult, if not impossible, coalitions with “punks, bulldaggers, and welfare queens”
- the data collection around queer Africa—the methods of “knowing” queer Africa—refuses the possibility that Africans can theorize our/their condition

vii.

denial of the other's pain is not about the failings of the intellect but the failings of the spirit

—Veena Das

vii.

One gets used to being called a “complaining native.”

ix.

On an email group set up by Kenyans, two white men refuse to honor the (unspoken) terms of the group. One posts self-promotional material, advertising how much he is saving the world, one African at a time. The other posts his reflections on living in Egypt, making absolutely no effort to connect what he’s writing to anything in Kenya.

Gay white men perform their unhearing.

No one complains because the Kenyan queer is conditioned to listen to white queers, white funders, white voices, white bodies.

x.

A leader among Kenyan gays sends a friend with a message: “tell that Keguro to stop his armchair activism and join in the real struggle in the street.” I paraphrase.

I continue to wonder if trying to make public knowledge worlds matters.

xi.

Kenya's official documents say "the family" must be defended. Kenyan queer leaders say "the family" must be defended.

Little space exists for those of us who find family toxic, debilitating, impossible.

xii.

Each African country gets one queer:

South Africa: Zanele

Uganda: Kasha

Kenya: Binyavanga

Malawi: Tiwonge

Nigeria: maybe more than one

The world "out there" cannot seem to envision more than one African queer per geography, because that would fracture its attention, make it pay attention to queer diversity, and, everyone knows, those African names are so hard to pronounce. And those countries so difficult to distinguish.

xiii.

one may identify the eye not as the organ that sees but the organ that weeps

—Veena Das

xiv.

to be vulnerable is not the same as to be a victim

—Veena Das

xv.

freedom seeds:

Every time you pluck an amaranth leaf from a mature, seed-laden plant, seeds fall to the ground. The work of freedom might be to keep plucking the leaves, to keep letting seeds fall.

As the protesters have it: they buried us; they did not know we were seeds

xvi.

the neoliberal hoax of "Africa rising" cannot imagine freedom

xvii.

the labor of knowing how to talk to the police, how to transport to safe houses, how to fight the everyday battles needed for survival

the invisible labor of women, trans warriors, sex workers, the unacknowledged work of those who make a queer now possible

xviii.

a worrying email:

there must be unity

there must be leaders

we must support each other

queer notions of power that reproduce the worst of Kenyan patriarchy

xix.

how does one register the unmaking of homonormativity

xx.

engage with policy but keep your eye on freedom

—paraphrased from Cathy Cohen, Kessler lecture

xxi.

If violence, when it happens dramatically, bears some relation to what is happening repeatedly and unmelodramatically, then how does one tell this, not in a single narrative but in the form of a text that is being constantly revised, rewritten, and overlaid with commentary?

—Veena Das

xxii.

I keep returning to violence because radical—rooted—often requires tearing, fracturing, pulling up by the root.

Queer violates Africa as envisioned by its philosophers and poets.

How to speak of this violation? This violence?

One might attempt to think of a violence—a violation—that rearranges, that shifts the ground, that multiplies possibility

metaphors become geo-historical: Pangea breaks

xxiii.

in the soft bigotry of low expectations, European queers gather African queers and tell them, “Become like us! See how free we are! You want this!”

A friend travels to Europe, sits with European queers who want to help African queers, tells them: “do not presume to know my desires or wants—listen to my vision”

As Audre Lorde and Frantz Fanon teach, guilt is a useless emotion and a certain white liberalism is inherently masochistic: make me cry, it demands, make me produce feeling, it insists, beat me up with your words

catharsis:narcissism

xxiv.

As one representative queer—there can only be one—is celebrated, others, trying to shift countries to save their lives, are rejected.

—there can only be one

xxv.

sometimes, there will be silence

Thoughts on a Word: Glamour

by AUTUMN WHITEFIELD-MADRANO

*Anything we code as glamour
becomes artifice*

GLAMOUR is an illusion, and an allusion too. Glamour is a performance, a creation, a recipe, but one with give. Glamour is elegance minus restraint, romance plus distance, sparkle sans naivete. Glamour is Grace Kelly, Harlow, Jean (picture of a beauty queen). Glamour is \$3.99 on U.S. newsstands, \$4.99 Canada. Glamour is artifice. Glamour is red lipstick, Marcel waves, a pause before speaking, and artfully placed yet seemingly casual references to time spent in Capri. Glamour is—let’s face it—a cigarette. Glamour is Jessica Rabbitt, and it’s Miss Piggy too. Glamour is adult. Glamour cannot be purchased, but it can’t be created out of thin air either. Glamour is both postmodern and yesterday. Glamour is an accomplishment. Glamour is magic.

In fact, glamour began quite literally with magic. **Growing from the Scottish *gramarye* around 1720, *glamer* was a sort of spell that would affect the eyesight of those afflicted, so that objects appear different than they actually are.** Sir Walter Scott anglicized the word and brought it into popular use in his poems (“You may be-think you of the spell / Of that sly urchin page / This to his lord did impart / And made him seem, by glamour art / A knight from Hermitage”); not long after his death in 1832 the word began to be used to describe the metaphoric spell we cast upon one another by being particularly beautiful or



fascinating. It wasn’t necessarily a compliment (“There was little doubt that he meant to bring his magnetism and his glamour, and all his other diabolical properties, to market here,” from an 1878 novel) but by the 1920s—not coincidentally, the time women started developing the styles that we now recognize as glamorous—the meaning had shed much of its air of suspicion.

Not that we’re wholly unsuspecting of glamour. Female villains in films are often impossibly glamorous, for as fascinated as we are with the artifice of glamour, we’re also a tad wary of it. Glamour keeps its holder at a dis-

tance, and it needs that distance in order to work; watch the magician's hands too closely and you'll spoil the trick. It's unkind to glamour to call it strictly a trick, but neither is it inaccurate: **On a person, glamour is a series of reference points that form its illusory quality.** We perceive red lipstick and hair cascading over one shoulder as glamorous because we understand it's referencing something we've collectively decided is glamorous. The same is true of glamorous looks with less direct artifice—say, a world traveler in a pith helmet and white linen—but **in becoming a reference point, anything we code as glamour becomes artifice**, even if it's not about smoke and mirrors. It's not hard to get glamour “right,” but since glamour is a set of references—a creation instead of a state of being—you *do* have to get it right in order to be seen as glamorous as opposed to pretty, polished, or chic. We don't stumble into glamour; we create it, even if we don't realize that's what we're doing. Call glamour a performance if you wish. It's equally accurate to call it an accomplishment.

In 1939, glamour—rather, *Glamour*—took on an additional definition. In 1932, publishing company Condé Nast launched a new series of sewing pattern books featuring cheaper garments more readily accessible to the downtrodden seamstresses of the Depression; its more elite *Vogue* pattern line hadn't been doing well. Seven years later, Condé Nast spun off a magazine from this *Hollywood Pattern Book* called *Glamour of Hollywood*, which promised readers the “Hollywood way to fashion, beauty, and charm.” By 1941 it had shed “of Hollywood” and had already toned down its coverage of Hollywood in order to focus on the life of the newfound career girl; by 1949 its subtitle was “For the girl with a job.” **That is, *Glamour* wasn't about film or Hollywood or unattainable ideals; *Glamour* was about you.** That ethos continues to this day: *Glamour* might have a \$12,000 bracelet on its cover but will have a \$19 miniskirt inside, and its editorial tone squarely targets plucky but thoughtful young women who want to “have it all.”

It's all too fitting that the once-downmarket sister of *Vogue* is titled *Glamour*¹. To the eyes of a nation emerging from a depression, the concept of glamour might have seemed faraway—but it also seemed accessible in ways that the gilt-edged *Vogue* wasn't. **The “girl with a job” knew that with the right sleight-of-hand, she could purchase aspects of glamour found on the magazine's pages, pick up a tip or two about home economy (if one must be bothered with the terribly unglamorous domestic life, why not make it economical?), and find out how to enchant her suitors or husband—and she wouldn't necessarily need money or social status to do any of those things. She just needed the know-how of glamour.** *Glamour* magazine doesn't target the highest end of the market, nor does it assume that its readers have the cultural capital of the modern-day gentry (“How to do Anything Better” is one of its more popular features; readers might learn how to make a proper introduction or throw a dinner party). At first glance this might seem counterintuitive to the spirit of its namesake, yet it's anything but: With these specific moves, *Glamour* reinforces the notion of glamour as something actionable. In knowing that most of its readers, however stylish, aren't among the cultural illuminati, *Glamour* acknowledges that maybe they have need of casting the occasional spell—which, of course, *Glamour* is happy to supply.

I should say here that I worked for *Glamour* magazine for several years as a copy editor. I share that not only to disclose my relationship with the magazine, but also because my specific post there—as a professional grammarian—was tethered to the concept of glamour more than I realized. For gramarye, the root word of glamour, also gave birth to the word grammar.² The route is fairly straightforward: Gramarye at one time simply meant learning, includ-

1. *Glamour* isn't downmarket any longer; it's more aimed at the middle market—or, as a marketing poster once floating around the office read, “masstige.”

ing learning of the occult, and it's this variant that went on to be glamour. Grammar stayed magic-free and pertained to the rules of learning, eventually becoming particular to the rules of language. But the two are linked more than just etymologically: Both grammar and glamour function as a set of rules that help people articulate themselves and allow us to understand one another. I understand you are telling me of the future by the use of words like will and going to; I understand you are telling me about your vision of yourself with red lipstick and a wiggle dress.

Some may argue that the rules and articulations of glamour are confining. They can be, when taken as feminine dictates, but they also make glamour democratic. It's easy to aim for class or sophistication and miss the mark, for there are so many ways we can make unknowing missteps. But because glamour relies upon references and images, with a bit of thought and creativity almost anyone can conjure its magic—and unlike fashion, glamour doesn't go in and out of style, so you needn't reinvest every season. You can be fat and glamorous, bald and glamorous, poor and glamorous, short and glamorous, nerdy and glamorous, a man and glamorous. Perhaps most important, you can be old and glamorous. In fact, age helps. (Children are never glamorous; neither are the naive.) Glamour's illusion doesn't make old people look younger; it makes them look exactly their age, without apology. **Glamour can channel the things we may attribute to youth—sex appeal, flirtation, vitality—but it also requires things that come more easily with age, like mystery and a past.** Think of the trappings of adult femininity little girls reach for in play: not bras and sanitary pads, but high heels and lipstick, those two most glamorous things whose entire point is to create an illusion. A five-year-old knows that with womanhood can come glamour, if she wishes. She also knows it's not yet hers to assume.

2. Given the dual etymology, I think it's only fair to declare all Glamour grammarians to be sorceresses.

In case it's not yet clear: I am a champion of glamour. That's not to say I'm always glamorous; few can be, and certainly I'm not one of them. I like comfort far too much to be consistently glamorous. But I'm firmly in glamour's thrall. When I am walking down the street (particularly 44th Street, in the general direction of an excellent martini) in something I feel glamorous in—say, a certain navy-blue bias-cut polka-dot dress with a draped neckline, clip-clip heels, a small hat, and the reddest lipstick I own—I feel a variety of confidence that I can't channel using any other means. It's not a confidence that's superior to other forms of assurance, but it's inherently different. It's the feeling of prettiness, yes, and femininity and looking appropriate for the occasion. It's all of those things, but the overriding feeling is this: **When I am feeling and looking glamorous, I am slipping into an inchoate yet immensely satisfying spot between the public and private spheres.** You see me in my polka-dotted '40s-style dress, small hat, and lipstick, and you may think I look glamorous—which is the goal. But here's the trick of glamour: You see me, and yet you don't. That is, you see the nods to the past, and you see how they look on my particular form; you see what I bring to the image, or how I create my own. Yet because I'm not necessarily attempting to show you my authentic self—whatever *that* might be—but rather a highly coded self, I control how much you're actually witness to.

Now, that's part of the whole problem we feminists have with the visual construction of femininity: The codes speak for us and we have to fight all that much harder to have our words heard over the din our appearance creates. But within those codes also lies a potential for relief, for our own construction, for play, for casting our own little spells. That's true of all fashion and beauty, but it's particularly true of the magic of glamour.

I promise not to play tricks on anyone. But forgive me if, every so often, I might want to use a little magic. **TNI**

Girl Talk

by AUTUMN WHITEFIELD-MADRANO

There is no short-cut to bonding with other women



FOR my money, the most unrealistic part of *Sex and the City* was always the friendship. “Friendship porn,” I once heard it described as. People fingered Carrie’s wardrobe as being truly ridiculous, but after years of working in an industry where I’ve seen an adult

woman spend a day at the office wearing a dress made entirely out of ribbon, I accepted that part of the show without question. But having a group of friends I have brunch with every weekend? Where would I find *that*?

So I’m interested to see that part of the critique

tsunami surrounding HBO's *Girls* has examined the characters' friendships. It's brought us everything from a feminist social history of best-friendship to a zoological history of the same. In fact, there's been a good deal of attention paid to female friendship lately, including with the number of people who linked to this essay, which made the internet rounds when it was first published at The Rumpus. I'm glad to see these conversations happening; it's a welcome relief from tired tropes of backstabbing women bad-mouthing one another at every opportunity.

My relief is tinged with melancholy, though. I couldn't bear to read the Rumpus essay more than once because it hit me so hard when I read it the first time. Not because it resonated, but because it didn't. To be clear: I have many wonderful female friends, some of whom I expect to be close with for the rest of my life. And in sheer numbers, I probably have more female friends than male friends. But in terms of who I treat as confidants, it's slanted toward men, due to a combination of serial monogamy, the fortune to have remained friendly with a handful of men I used to date, and an incidental number of male friends. Given that I've usually worked in female-dominant fields, perhaps this has just been my way of adding some yang to my yin.

But there's another reason my relationships with men move more fluidly. It may sound silly coming from a feminist who writes primarily for female audiences, but I'm talking socially, not intellectually, so here goes: **I feel awkward around women.** Now, that's speaking in some pretty general terms—certainly I don't feel awkward around every woman, or comfortable around every man. It's more that accurately or not, I have an odd sort of faith that men enjoy being around women because of our womanness, making my sex is a built-in fortification of what I offer socially to men. We as a culture have been pretty successful at spinning stories about *Man + Woman = Makes Sense*, and the consequence

for me has been just the tiniest bit more assurance that a man has reason to want to be in my company, even when attraction doesn't factor into it. Then it becomes a catch-22: I'm more likely to be relaxed—and therefore more pleasant, charming, and fun to be around—if I trust that whomever I'm talking with genuinely wants to be there. So generally speaking, I probably *am* better company to men than I am to women, which results in a different sort of friendship.

I'm not proud of this attitude. I don't like what it implies I think about men, or about myself. But it's also notable for what it says of my relationships with women. I heard this quote once: **“Men kick friendship around like a football, but it doesn't seem to crack. Women treat it like glass and it goes to pieces.”** Treat it like glass I do: afraid to touch it, afraid to give it the sort of handling that burnishes it and makes it uniquely yours. I've always hated the trope that women distrust other women, or secretly hate their friends or women in general, and that's not what I'm saying here. If anything, I'm saying the opposite: I get tongue-tied around remarkable women because I dearly want them to like me, and unlike with men, there's no culturally assumed “reason” for them to like me. The lack of trust here is in myself, not in other women.

So I feel like I have to work a little harder to get women's approval. But the specific ways I've cultivated to gain approval—laughing a little longer at someone's jokes, asking lots of questions, letting a gaze linger—sound suspiciously like flirting. Specifically, flirting with men. **So when I'm around a woman I want to get to know better, suddenly I'm left not only being a little unsure how to be my best self, but also aware that my default “like me!” antics are conventionally feminine ways of appealing to men**—which means plenty of women see right through them because they themselves have deployed the same tricks. At least, at my most vulnerable, self-doubting, and insecure that's

what I fear: that women—particularly the sort of intelligent, critical, soulful women I admire—will see through my laughter and questions and smiles and decide that whatever I bring to the table, it isn't for them. (Perhaps that's why I feel drawn to woman-only spaces like *ladymags*, come to think of it—it forces me to break out of relying upon the ways I've learned to communicate with men.)

At some point, though, I learned one thing I can bring to the table with women: girl talk. And yes, I mean highly stereotypical girl talk. I mean: *I like your earrings, That's a great color, Your hair looks fantastic.* I used to consciously stay away from beautystuffs as small talk because I wanted to feign nonchalance about such matters; somewhere along the line, though, I recognized how well I myself responded to such conversation starters. My countenance, particularly around women, is pleasant but a little serious, meaning that something frivolous can come out of my mouth and I'm fairly certain it doesn't make *me* seem frivolous. It simply lightens me, desirably so.

It's been several years since I've started being more fluent in beautytalk, and between working at image-conscious magazines and running a blog that is specifically designed to examine women's attitudes and feelings about beauty and being looked at, it's second nature now. **Compliments and questions related to style or appearance easily tumble out of me; if I'm meeting a woman cold, like if I'm at a party where I don't know anyone, chances are that's the first thing out of my mouth.** I'm always sincere about it—compliments fall flat if they're a lie—and at this point I wouldn't even say that this line of conversation is intentional. But I know where it comes from, and I know what I'm hoping to elicit when I do it.

Here is my trouble: **I fear that I am forgetting how to connect with women in any other way.** I found myself at a dinner party a while ago with a woman whose

manner intrigues me; she's one of those people whose words seem to matter more than other people's, so wisely does she choose them. I was seated next to her, and my first words to her were something about her shoes (which were gorgeous, so I'm not entirely to blame here). She smiled and said *Thank you*, as one does, and after we had each nodded acceptance of the compliment and ensuing gratitude, neither of us had anything further to say to one another. Rather, I didn't know how to get to that further point—at least not without her doing some of the heavy lifting along with me.

I'd expected her to help me out, which isn't an outrageous expectation on my part; that is, after all, how conversations work. But in expecting her to help me out by saying anything other than the logical, polite response—*thank you*—I was actually attempting to direct her attitude. Toward herself, toward me, toward womanhood itself. I was expecting her to play along—to tell me, say, some story of where she'd gotten the shoes so I could then riff off a detail of that story, and in the course of that we would have each revealed something personal that could serve as a launching point for the conversation I actually wanted to have with her. **I was expecting her to speak some code of womanhood right along with me**—a code that as a feminist I know better than to think is actually how women communicate. I lobbed exactly one volley in her direction and expected her to return it.

And when she didn't, I found that I didn't have a backup plan. The code I'd been speaking in wasn't code at all; it had become my native tongue, at least when attempting to make small talk. For it wasn't just that laconic seatmate and her response that's troubling me. It's also the times when it works too well and I find I don't know how to better anchor the conversation; it's the times when I see exactly how moored I feel by "girl talk" with women and I wonder how deep my own feminist blood can run if this has become the primary way

I know to reach out to other women. **My approach has assumed that women in my path are eager to talk about their appearance, and not only that, but that they are eager to talk about their appearance with me because we are both women. Small talk works because we presume all the small talkers share a common condition.** While I believe that all women have a unique relationship to presence, style, and visibility, the route I've been taking to get to that relationship isn't helping me establish better friendships with women. And that's because of another characteristic of getting-to-know-you chatter: **Small talk is, by its nature and nomenclature, unimportant. And the very thing I value about beauty talk is what it reveals about us—that is, the stuff that is important.** And yes, sometimes beauty talk gets there quickly and directly; that's exactly why I defend it and work hard in my writing to not have it be written off as cotton candy. Yet in relying so heavily upon beauty talk as a conversation starter, I've been failing in my central mission. I know that you can't just jump into a conversation by asking the really meaty stuff, sure. But if I truly believe in "girl talk" as a portal to that meat, to treat it in practice as fluff is a disservice to my goal.

Perhaps that became clearest to me when I was the recipient, not the instigator, of this sort of exchange. Some time ago, I found myself having a drink with a friend of a friend. The person who introduced us was doing most of the talking, so we were both able to quietly get used to the rhythm of the other before our mutual friend departed and left us on our own. We continued the conversation to its logical point, and it was clear that we each had a good deal to say to one another, but that we were perhaps too much alike in our being better responders than presenters. The conversation was good but not fluent. During one of our fumbling, strained pauses, she looked down and said, "I like your shoes." The only thing remarkable about these sneakers is how

unremarkable they are: Cheap, several years old, a faded olive color, scuffed and beaten, I'd only worn them because the weather was in flux and they were the single "shoulder season" pair I could fine.

I knew enough secondhand about this woman and her somewhat turbulent life to know that I wanted to know more about her. I wanted to talk with her about art and expression, about motherhood and madness. I wanted to know if what she saw every day in her appointment book, her mirror, her life was what she'd envisioned for herself; I wanted to know about disappointment and relief, and where the two might meet. I didn't ask those questions, of course; you can't just go in and ask those sorts of things. Sometimes chatter of shoes and mascara is a portal to the questions we really want answers to; sometimes the words that don't matter are the only way to the words that do. **But sometimes those words—where did you get that and I had a pair like that once and what a great color—form a Mobius strip of the words we know don't matter,** with no apparent outlet to what we want to say but don't know how to articulate. I am trying to step off that never-ending loop. But I am not sure how.

I felt that ache, that frustration that comes when I dance around intimacy, a dance only made more frantic when I sense the other person is there with me in our pas de deux. I felt it—I saw it—but I am still unpracticed in saying whatever one would need to say to get to what comes next.

And so I looked at her and said what we both knew you're supposed to say upon receiving a compliment, the words that, with luck and effort, could lead to chatter of other cross-weather shoes, which could lead to climate, which could lead to where we grew up, which could lead to how we each define the word home. That is, I said *Thank you*.

What I didn't say—but what I hope she heard—was *I like you too*. **TNI**

On Pageantry, the Virgin Mary, and the Smart Girl

by AUTUMN WHITEFIELD-MADRANO

Smart vs. pretty is a game that little girls don't want to play



*Christmas pageant,
1930, plus witch.*

MY parents raised me in the Methodist church, halfheartedly. The “halfhearted” part would come as no surprise to anyone seated within two rows of our family, as they may have noticed my mother substituting female pronouns in hymns, as well as her reputation for, if you placed her in the right company, questioning the existence of a god of any gender. My father was a bit more enthusiastic, going so far as to teach Sunday school, but even at 7 years old I sensed

he was coming up with scripture role-plays out of community spirit, not devotion to Our Father And/Or Mother. When I found out as a teenager that my parents chose the church not because they were Methodist per se but because it was the only church in our South Dakota town with a female pastor and they wanted me to see women in leadership roles of any variety, the endeavor made more sense.

Given that the entire point of the Whitefield-Madra-

no churchgoing project was an experiment in 1980s liberal parenting, not to worship a deity we were all a little “meh” about, **it made sense that we embraced the performative aspects of church. Specifically, the Christmas pageant.**

If you grew up even vaguely Christian, you know the setup: Kids in the church act out the nativity, dressing up in robes stored in the church basement to be rotated among the kids as they aged in and out of the appropriate roles. Three middle-school boys would carry staffs to lend them credence as Wise Men; younger kids might dress as sheep and donkeys. (The rural church a few miles down the road got to have real sheep, but we didn’t have the grazing room.) If there were an appropriately aged infant in the congregation, there might even be a live baby Jesus that year.

Then, of course, there were Mary and Joseph, the center of the entire scene. I mean, yes, *Jesus* was the center of the scene, if you want to get nitpicky, but he was usually played by a doll, at least at our church, given that we had around 100 congregants and therefore few opportunities for well-behaved infants to upstage Mary. **And that’s exactly how I thought of it—upstaging Mary—because I knew that Mary was the center of it all.** That pale, luminous face! Those glossy tendrils of hair! Those rosy lips! That demure gaze! That dainty nose, those petals of eyelashes, that maiden-like blush. Mary was the one you were to be looking at; Mary was the center of attention. *Mary was a babe.*

She *had* to be, if you look at the big picture, Christianity-wise. Goodness was beautiful, sin was ugly, and since Mary was the ultimate goodness, she pretty much had to be the ultimate beauty. To paint Mary as anything other than beautiful would be an insult¹, not only to the mother of the Messiah but to the strict notions of female sexuality that ruled the church. **It’s one thing for Mary to be a virgin because she’s devoted to chastity; it’s quite another for**

her to be a virgin if it’s just that she couldn’t get laid.

The rosy lips, the loose hair, the flushed cheeks: These are signals of sexuality, but not with Mary. She alone gets to be totally beautiful, and totally pure.

None of this was lost on me as a second-grader, who, fascinated as I was by the cleavage and teased hair I’d see on my parents’ night soaps, found Mary’s virginal prettiness a tad more accessible. My religious skepticism kicked in early, but Mary’s beauty was *fact* to me, even as I didn’t bother to distinguish between the “real” Mary and depictions of her. I mean, could the covers of all those church bulletins really have gotten it wrong? (It hadn’t yet occurred to me that the skin of the women on those bulletins was suspiciously light for a woman of the Levant; my skepticism, it seemed, only went so far.) Proof of her beauty lay in the pageant itself: All Mary did was sit there, hold a baby, and *be looked at*. She didn’t even have to speak to command attention.

The only person who spoke in our Christmas pageant, actually, was the angel, who would read aloud from the Bible as nativity players assembled themselves. **The role of the angel, therefore, had to go to a child who read well enough and spoke clearly enough to recite the appropriate passages. Which, in our church, was me.** Every year, it was me. In 1982 it was me, in 1983 it was me, 1984. We moved to another state for a couple of years, but when we returned in 1987, the white robe was still there waiting for me, its hem still pinned from when I wore it last, now able to be let out. I have no idea who played the angel during my hiatus, because our congregation was short on kids, which is part of why I’d been cast in the role every year to begin with.

It wasn’t hard to figure out the other reason the role always went to me. **I was the smart one, so I played the angel, and Lisa K.—the only other girl of pageant-appropriate age at our church—was the pretty one, so she got to be Mary.** It wasn’t even a question; nobody ever asked me if I’d like to play Mary. Every year, the blue robe was handed to Lisa, and every year, the white one went to

1. For more on this, check out *Ambiguous Locks: An Iconology of Hair in Medieval Art and Literature*, by Roberta Milliken.

me. Joseph got to rotate; every year one of the four boys at the church would sub in, relieved that year of being one of the Wise Men. But Mary and the angel, we stayed the same.

No one girl could be too much. To be the smart one, and the pretty one, was too potent for any one person.

I was hardly the only girl to absorb the pretty-or-smart dichotomy—for that’s what it was in my mind, a dichotomy. And I was happy to be on the “smart” side of things; even in adolescence, it never occurred to me to dumb myself down for boys. **Prettiness seemed like something for other girls, the same way some kids had grandparents who lived in the same town or got to have Froot Loops every morning if they wanted. It simply wasn’t an option for me,** and I didn’t particularly mind, telling myself that it was okay, it evened out: Lisa K. got to be Mary—just like Jenny S. got to be the prettiest girl in the class—but I got to be smart. It was an honor I shared with the other “gifted and talented” kid in my grade, a girl I spent many an afternoon in a classroom corner with, picking out words from dictionaries for each other to spell out because we’d exhausted the teachers’ resources. The pretty-or-smart equation stayed even in my head; my “G&T” friend was a perfectly nice-looking girl, but she wore thick glasses, which somehow kept my imagined scales in balance. We weren’t

at risk of being the prettiest girls in the class, so good thing we were the smartest.

This equation was never spoken aloud; nobody ever taught it to me, and certainly I knew better than to go around announcing it. Nobody *needed* to teach it to me. It made perfect sense: No one girl could be too much. To be the smart one, *and* the pretty one, was too potent for any one person. It was too much power, I suppose, though I wouldn’t have used that word then, as power wasn’t high on my priorities in the second grade. **But like many a 7-year-old, I had a keenly tuned sense of justice, and I knew that to be the smart one and the pretty one would violate the fairness that I believed ruled the cosmos.** I didn’t believe that being pretty was better than being smart, or vice versa. But I knew they were both qualities that people admired, and keeping in line with my sense of justice, I figured it was pretty much fate as to which one you got.

So I accepted that white robe, year after year, just as I accepted my role as the smart girl. It was my duty: **I could read better than Lisa K., and Lisa K. could look more daintily pious than I could, and that was that. With the naive condescension particular to precocious children, I even began to feel sorry for Lisa K.** I mean, I’d figured this whole thing out and was more or less cool with it. But Lisa K.! She hadn’t figured it out! She was going to play Mary her whole life and would never know why! Because she wasn’t the smart girl! I bore the agony of my knowledge nobly, channeling my dignity into my solemn reading of Luke 2: 1-20. Still, every year in early December I would feel a twinge of hope that maybe this was the year that Lisa K. would get the white robe—I mean, she *did* know how to *read*—and I’d get the blue one. And every year, just before the roles would be announced, I’d abandon that hope, and every year, adults would compliment me on what a good reader I was.

By our last Christmas at that church—our last church Christmas period, as we’d move to Oregon the following year, where my parents would quietly decide to scrap the

church thing altogether—I'd aged out of the pageant. I'd been confirmed that spring; I was now an *adult member* of the congregation, not the mere child I was at 12. Luckily, a new crop of kids was ready to take over. The three boys as the Wise Men, the slightly older kids to be Mary and Joseph. There was even a well-behaved infant who would make a cameo as the Messiah.

They'd chosen a new angel, and it wasn't a surprise who. **A 7-year-old with strong reading skills, a flair for performance as evidenced during her occasional solo with our meager choir, and a headful of strawberry blond hair was the new angel.** I'd felt a kinship with her even before the casting: She was smart, like me, a little quirky, like me. I was ready to retire, and at a sage 13 years old, I felt confident the role was being passed off in a fine manner. For the first time, I watched the pageant from the pews. I watched as the strawberry blond climbed the dais, swimming in my old robe, now rehemmed, and took her place at the pulpit.

Here, I am tempted to say my reaction was what it might be now, as an adult: that I watched a 7-year-old girl reciting scripture, and saw it for the charming act of religious pageantry it was, not as an enactment of the pretty-versus-smart balance of scales that existed in my head. That watching her, I understood my equation as a tender cruelty to both Lisa K. and myself, one I'd invented as a misguided way of navigating the beauty messages I was aware enough to pick up on but immature enough to handle poorly. **I'd like to tell you that I watched a 7-year-old girl tripping on the hem of her angel's robe, reciting scripture for the congregants to smile over, and saw that her prettiness was beside the point.**

That would be untrue. I was still a child myself, one who had always assumed that her level of emotional maturity matched her level of intellectual maturity, which it didn't. No: I looked at her, and looked at the girl who was playing Mary, and saw that she—the angel—was the pretty one. The lights fell upon that strawberry blond hair, her fair

skin and freckles seeming impossibly adorable, and she read with the kind of expertise that I recognized. **Instead of beginning to wonder if the smart-pretty equation was off in my head, I immediately assumed that it wasn't right, it wasn't fair, that this girl was the angel and pretty.**

It was a sensation I'd have again a few months later, when my G&T dictionary cohort would exchange her thick glasses for contact lenses, revealing her enormous amber eyes—and thus, her babedom—for the world to see; I'd have it again when I started high school and found that the smart-kid program was full of pretty girls—girls who boys liked, girls who hadn't fallen rank-and-file onto one balance of the scale or the other. **Girls who would, eventually, lead me to see that smart vs. pretty was a game none of us actually wanted to play, a game engineered by a sensibility that was assuring a generation of young women that they could become whatever they wanted yet couldn't let go of the checks and balances that had supported the status quo of femininity for so long.** Girls who went on to be pilots, mothers, biologists, dancers. Girls whose own mental arithmetic may have stayed as private as my own, girls who may have decidedly chosen one but simply couldn't help being the other too, girls whose scales bore different labels than mine but prompted the same shuttering of self. Girls who would have dismissed the notion of any pretty-versus-smart scale out of hand, had I ever shared that corner of my mind with them. Girls I would watch for the four critical years that make up high school. Girls who, maybe, watched me back.

I sat there, watching, jealous of a 7-year-old, and ashamed for that jealousy. I wasn't above evaluating the looks of a second-grader, but I knew I should be above envying her for them. In time I would learn that pretty and smart played just fine together, finally giving credence to the evidence I saw everywhere around me. But I didn't know that then. All I could do is listen to her recitation: *Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people.* She read beautifully. **TNI**

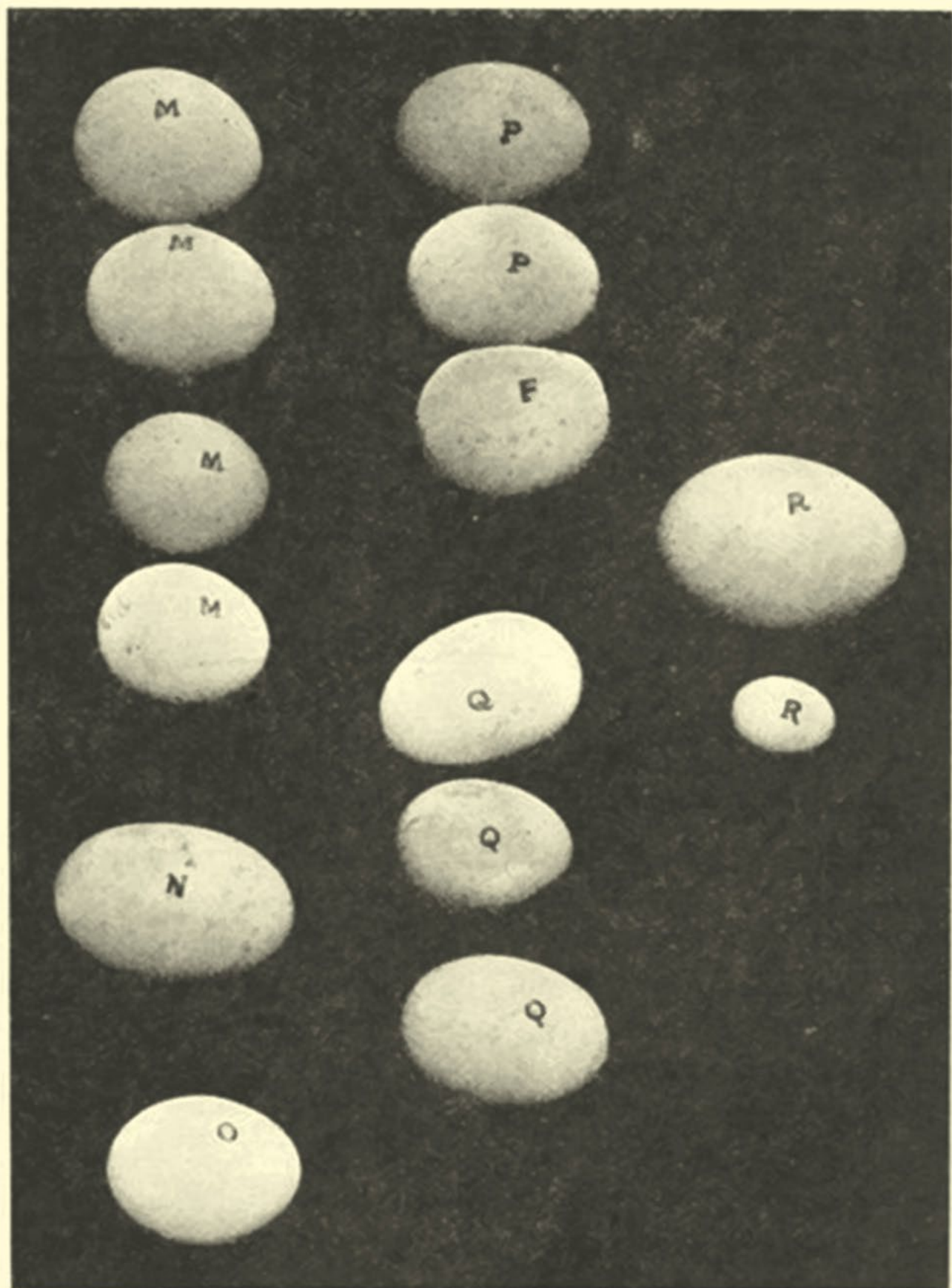


FIG. 9. FORMS OF EGGS.