Radical Sense
Isolation Reader Volume 4

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Family Portrait

The girls and I circle
the wet-grassed garden to serve
noghl and tea to our mothers,
who titter and swat bugs
on each other's arms. Yana
slapping the tablah to Milad
singing *Rahim, Rahim Ulla*
jolts my ears with its sexless
faithfulness. What wrong did I
expect of him all these years?
Later, while our mothers
snore on the living room floor,
we gumshoe past jayenamaz,
pack our lives like limp geese
by the neck and let them dangle
from the window to avoid
looking at the faces
we're about to lose. Family, to me,
is only the sweat of female secrecy:
Negoor's body hair sings
to mine as she passes me
the joint, cheeks wistful
with the heaven of Afghan
blow. Finally, Leda explains to us
Foucault: there is no invisible force
to relieve us from ourselves. We are,
after all, going nowhere. And I
agree—then why, whenever
the bathroom reeks of sacred
blood and poultry, do I begin to weep
for a drill to cleave
my forehead so the light
can enter me in shuddering waves? I do
believe in God. I do. But once
Milad establishes that on judgement day
even our mothers will run from us in fear,
I tipple the night's thick milk
until it swallows me.

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Borders

It is common for sex workers' rights advocates to argue that sex work is different from trafficking. This serves as a kind of rhetorical dividing line: it says, 'We do not have to talk about this. It is a different category of thing'. This is not the argument we are going to make. The reality is both more complex and more important.

Trafficking is a topic that rightly concerns progressives. It speaks to global inequalities of power, money, and safety. It is legitimate to be sympathetic to sex workers' rights perspectives and also have big concerns about trafficking into the sex industry.

Sex trafficking is often presented as *the* iteration of human trafficking – to the extent that the two phrases often seem to mean the same thing. Given how strong this link is in the public mind, you might be impatient for this chapter to discuss commercial sex, not borders. However, a major problem with the way these ideas are lumped together is that trafficking into the sex industry is, in fact, only one symptom among many in the much larger process of undocumented migration.* Commercial sex within this context cannot be properly understood without talking about migration. Exploited people – working in the sex industry, in car washes, in hotels, or in freezing cabbage fields in Lincolnshire – are victims of problems that are *systemic* and largely originate from the state, rather than from individuals.

However, trafficking is often not clearly defined; people use the same word but mean different things by it. Focusing just on commercial sex, some people use *trafficking* to mean all prostitution, or all migration into the sex industry. Others mean all migration into the sex industry that involves help from a third party, even if that third party is not seeking

financial gain (for instance, a friend or a relative). It might cover anyone who incurs debt in the process of crossing borders without papers, or who incurs such a debt and pays that debt off through sex work. It might mean anybody who works for a manager while selling sex – or it might mean all sex-industry workplaces where abuse occurs, regardless of the migration status of the workers. It might mean kidnap and rape.

Being specific about what kinds of situations are being discussed helps make sense of the conversation, even when the speakers disagree about the problems or the solutions. Trafficking is often presented as an 'apolitical' topic about which everyone can agree. As migration academics Bridget Anderson and Rutvica Andrijasevic write, approaching the topic of trafficking critically 'is akin to saying that one endorses slavery or is against motherhood and apple pie. Trafficking is a theme that is supposed to bring us all together.'[1] But once we drill down to specifics, genuine political fault-lines are revealed. Everyone does not agree.

Governments, NGOs, and corporations all fund policies and actions under the heading of 'anti-trafficking'. UK law defines *trafficking* as arranging or facilitating the arrival of another 'for the purposes of exploitation' using force, fraud, coercion, or in exchange for 'the giving or receiving of payments' (i.e., for money).[2] *Exploitation* is defined as 'slavery, servitude, forced or compulsory labour', the removal of organs, or general prostitution offences. This means, for example, that in countries where brothel-keeping is criminalised, arranging someone's travel so that they can work in a brothel becomes a trafficking offence. US law defines *sex trafficking* as 'the recruitment, harbouring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act' – which, reading closely, we note does not necessarily entail the kinds of harms we might associate with the term 'sex trafficking'.[3] 'Harbouring', after all, can mean letting a sex worker friend crash at your place for a while. Some corporations are legally bound to do anti-trafficking work; for example, auditing for trafficking in their supply chains. Some do additional work – for example, retailers like Body Shop and AllSaints have launched awareness-raising campaigns, with a portion of their profit going to anti-trafficking work. Governments attempt to counter trafficking through legislation (for example, the UK's 2015 Modern Slavery Act), as well as trade deals and diplomacy.*

Broadly, most anti-trafficking NGOs come at the issue from either a human rights perspective, a carceral-feminist perspective, or a Christian perspective. Some mix two or more of these perspectives, but these three strands are the most useful for categorising these organisations' approaches. Generally, NGOs that approach the topic from a human rights–based perspective are doing work that is relatively unglamorous and not usually headline-grabbing; for example, they may be working on issues around cobalt mining in the Democratic Republic of Congo, fishing off the coast of Thailand, or migrant domestic workers in the United States.[4] Christian and carceral-feminist NGOs both tend to focus on trafficking into prostitution. Typically, their work tends to align around the goal of abolishing commercial sex through criminal law in order to 'end sex trafficking'.

Very few ordinary employees in these organisations are wealthy; most earn average incomes. Some grassroots anti-trafficking campaigners, like sex worker activists, struggle to earn a living. But, although individual activists may not feel it, a huge amount of money is poured into anti-prostitution work done through the prism of anti-trafficking. In 2012, in the United States *alone*, the collective budget of thirty-six large anti-prostitution anti-trafficking organisations (with many smaller organisations excluded from the calculation) totalled 1.2 *billion* dollars, while the US federal government budgets a further $1.2 to $1.5 billion annually for anti-trafficking efforts.[5] The vast majority of this money is spent on campaigning, as opposed to supporting survivors; in 2014, the United States had only about one thousand beds available for victims of trafficking.[6] (By contrast, in 2013, the collective budget for the sex workers' rights movement for the *entire world* was 10 million dollars.)[7]

Monstrosity and Innocence

Carceral feminists hold that if we could abolish prostitution through criminalising clients and managers, the trafficking of women would end, as there would be no sex trade to traffic them into. As the deputy prime minister of Sweden writes, 'It is very obvious to us that there is a very clear link between prostitution and trafficking … Without prostitution there would be no trafficking of women.'[8] This perspective also views prostitution as intrinsically more horrifying than other kinds of work

(including work that is 'low-status', exploitative, or low-paid), and as such, views attempting to abolish prostitution through criminal law as a worthwhile end in itself. For those who hold these views, defending sex workers' rights is akin to defending trafficking.

In these conversations, trafficking becomes a battle between good and evil, monstrosity and innocence, replete with heavy-handed imagery of chains, ropes, and cuffs to signify enslavement and descriptors such as *nefarious, wicked, villainous*, and *iniquitous*.[9] This 'evil' is driven by the aberrance of commercial sex and by anomalous (and distinctly racialised) 'bad actors': the individual villain, the pimp, the trafficker. A police officer summarises this approach as: 'we'll put all these pimps, all these traffickers in prison … and that'll solve the problem'.[10] Numerous images associated with modern anti-trafficking campaigns feature a white girl held captive by a Black man: he is a dark hand over her mouth or a looming, shadowy figure behind her.[11]

Fancy-dress 'pimp costumes' offer a cartoonishly racist vision of 1970s Black masculinity, while American law-enforcement unashamedly use terms such as 'gorilla pimp' and link trafficking to rap music.[12] There is a horror-movie entertainment quality to this at times: tourists can go on 'sex-trafficking bus tours' to shudder over locations where they're told sexual violence has recently occurred ('perhaps you are wondering where these crimes take place')[13] or buy an 'awareness-raising' sandwich featuring a naked woman with her body marked up as if for a butcher.[14] Conventionally sexy nude women are depicted wrapped in tape or packed under plastic, with labels indicating 'meat'.[15]

Conversely, the victim is often presented with her 'girlishness' emphasised. Young women are styled to look pre-pubescent, in pigtails or hair ribbons, holding teddy bears. This imagery suggests another key preoccupation shared by modern and nineteenth-century anti-trafficking campaigners: innocence. A glance at the names chosen for police operations and NGOs highlights this: Lost Innocence, Saving Innocence, Freedom4Innocence, the Protected Innocence Challenge, Innocents at Risk, Restore Innocence, Rescue Innocence, Innocence for Sale.[16]

For feminists, this preoccupation with feminine 'innocence' should be a red flag, not least because it speaks to a prurient interest in young women. Conversely, LGBTQ people, Black people, and deliberate prostitutes are

often left out of the category of innocence, and as a result harm against people in these groups becomes less legible as harm. For example, a young Black man may face arrest rather than support; indeed, resources for runaway and homeless youth (whose realities are rather more complex than chains and ropes) were not included in the US Congress's 2015 reauthorisation of the Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act.[17] Anti-trafficking statutes often exclude deliberate prostitutes from the category of people able to seek redress, as to be a 'legitimate' trafficking victim requires innocence, and a deliberate prostitute, however harmed, cannot fulfil that requirement.[18]

There is a huge emphasis on kidnapping and, correspondingly, heroic rescues. In the wildly popular action film *Taken* (2008), the daughter of the hero (played by Liam Neeson) is snatched by Albanian sex traffickers while on holiday in Paris. *Taken* typifies many real anti-trafficking campaigns, presenting trafficking as a context-free evil, a kidnap at random that could happen to anyone, anywhere. As if to emphasise the links between Hollywood and policy, the 'hero' is literally written into US law – the HERO Act (which stands for the Human Exploitation Rescue Operations Act) takes funding from Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to train US military veterans to fight trafficking.[19] (In *Taken*, Neeson has daughter-rescuing skills due to his time as a CIA agent.) Visitors to the website of the Freedom Challenge, an anti-trafficking NGO, are told:

> You crawl into bed and wrap yourself in your favorite blanket … You're alone, sleeping soundly and dreaming sweetly. Suddenly, a rustling in the next room jolts you awake. You … tiptoe across the cold floor and crack open the door. A bag is thrown over your head. You're carried away.[20]

A spokeswoman for another organisation told reporters that being 'stolen off the street' at random by human traffickers constituted 'a very big possibility' and warned people to stay in groups to avoid being kidnapped.[21] An anxious mother's claim that she thought her children were going to be abducted by traffickers in IKEA was shared more than 100,000 times on social media.[22] (All this resonates with nineteenth-century white-slavery fears; in 1899, a missionary with the Women's Christian Temperance Union reported 'there is a slave trade in this country, and it is not Black folks at this time, but little white girls – thirteen, fourteen, sixteen, and seventeen years of age – and they are snatched out of our arms,

and from our Sabbath schools and from our Communion tables'.)[23] Slick, shareable videos depict young girls grabbed by strangers on the street, vanishing into vans.[24]

The plot of *Taken* repeatedly highlights the traffickers' nationality. After the film's success, Neeson had to issue a statement reassuring US parents that their children could go on school trips to Paris without being snatched by Albanian trafficking gangs.[25] 'The foreigner', writes historian Maria Luddy, has always been 'an international figure symbolic of the white slaver.'[26]

The Role of the Border

People are not, en masse, being snatched off the street. A report from the UK's anti-slavery commission notes that cases of kidnap are very unusual, essentially because it would make little sense to 'give' someone the services of taking them across a border for free, when people are willing to pay up to thirty thousand pounds to be taken across that same border.[27] The vast, vast majority of people who end up in exploitative situations were *seeking to migrate* and have become entrapped in a horrifically exploitative system because when people migrate without papers they have few to no rights. Acknowledging that people who end up in exploitative situations *wanted to migrate* is not to blame them. It is to say that the solution to their exploitative situation is to enable them to migrate legally *and with rights*. Everything else is at best a distraction (sexy chains! evil villains!) and at worst, actively *worsens* the problem by pushing for laws which make it harder, not easier, to migrate legally and with rights.

You might be thinking that we seem to be talking about people smuggling rather than people trafficking, and that those two things are different. *People smuggling* is when someone pays a smuggler to get them over a border: in UK law, *human trafficking* is when someone is transported for the purposes of forced labour or exploitation using force, fraud, or coercion. It's tempting to think of these as separate things, but there is no bright line between them: they are two iterations of the same system.

Let's break it down. It is common for people to take on huge debts to smugglers to cross a border. So far, so good: clearly smuggling. But once the journey begins, the person seeking to migrate finds that the debt has

grown, or that the work they are expected to undertake upon arrival in order to pay off the debt is different from what was agreed. Suddenly, the situation has spiralled out of control and they find themselves trying to work off the debt, with little hope of ever earning enough to leave. Smuggling becomes trafficking. The discourse of *trafficking* largely fails to help people in this situation, because it paints them as kidnapped and enchained rather than as *trying to migrate*. It therefore seeks to 'rescue' them by blocking irregular migration routes and sending undocumented people home— often the very *last* thing trafficked people want. Although they might hate their exploitative workplace, their ideal option would be to stay in their destination country in a different job or with better workplace conditions; an acceptable option would be to stay in the country under the current, shit working conditions, but the very worst option would be to be sent home with their debt still unpaid.

By viewing trafficking as conceptually akin to kidnap, anti-trafficking activists, NGOs, and governments can sidestep broader questions of safe migration. If the trafficked person is brought across borders *unwillingly*, there is no need to think about the people who will attempt this migration regardless of its illegality or conclude that the way to make people safer is to offer them legal migration routes. *People smuggling* tends to happen to less vulnerable migrants: those who have the cash to pay a smuggler upfront or have a family or community already settled in the destination country. *People trafficking* tends to happen to more vulnerable migrants: those who must take on a debt to the smuggler to travel and who have no community connections in their destination country. Both *want to travel*, however, and this is what anti-trafficking conversations largely obscure with their talk about kidnap and chains.

Our position is that no human being is 'illegal'. People should have the right to travel and to cross borders, and to live and work where they wish. As we wrote in the introduction, border controls are a relatively new invention – they emerged towards the end of the nineteenth century as part of colonial logics of racial domination and exclusion. (ICE, the brutal American immigration enforcement police, was only created in its modern form in 2003; the previous iteration of it is as recent as the 1930s, an agency called Immigration and Naturalization Services.) The mass migrations of the twenty-first century are driven by human-made catastrophes – climate change, poverty, war – and reproduce the glaring

inequalities from which they emerge. Countries in the global north bear hugely disproportionate responsibility for climate change, yet disproportionately close their doors to people fleeing the effects of climate choas, leaving desperate families to sleep under canvas amid snow at the edges of Fortress Europe. As migrant-rights organiser Harsha Walia writes, 'While history is marked by the hybridity of human societies and the desire for movement, the reality of most of migration today reveals the unequal relations between rich and poor, between North and South, between whiteness and its others.'[28]

A system where everybody could migrate, live, and work legally and in safety would not be a huge, radical departure; it would simply take seriously the reality that people are *already* migrating and working, and that as a society we should prioritise their safety and rights. Some journalists and policymakers argue that migration brings down wages. However, the current system, wherein undocumented people cannot assert their labour rights and as a result are hugely vulnerable to workplace exploitation, brings down wages by *ensuring* that there is a group of workers who bosses can underpay or otherwise exploit with impunity. Low wages and workplace exploitation are tackled through worker organising and labour law – not through attempting to limit migration, which *produces* undocumented workers who have no labour rights.

However, instead of starting from the premise of valuing human life, the countries of the global north enact harsh immigration laws that make it hard for people from global south countries to migrate. You don't stop people wanting or needing to migrate by making it illegal for them to do so, you just make it more dangerous and difficult, and leave them more vulnerable to exploitation. Punitive laws may dissuade some from making the journey, but they guarantee that everyone who *does* travel is doing so in the worst possible conditions. Spending billions of dollars on policing borders actively makes this worse, without addressing the reasons people might want to migrate – notably, gross inequality between nations, which in large part is a legacy of colonial – and contemporary – plunder and imperialist violence.

Thinking about how this plays out in practice may help illustrate the absurd cruelty of this set of systems. Again, let's keep commercial sex to one side for now, because it takes attention away from what is crucial here:

borders make people vulnerable, and that vulnerability is what abusive people prey upon.

A citizen of France can purchase a French passport for under a hundred euros. If they then find themselves in Turkey, having a French passport means that they can purchase a ferry ticket to Greece – in other words, into the European Union – for less than twenty euros. Because this person can travel legally, they can travel cheaply, safely, and without the help of a people smuggler. In contrast, someone in Turkey with Somali travel documents, attempting to reach friends within the European Union, does not have the correct documents to take the tourist ferry. This person is likely to have to pay a smuggler. Because the smuggler is taking on a relatively high degree of risk – people smuggling is a serious criminal offence! – and because the person seeking to migrate is desperate to travel, the price point is high. The person without papers might be charged several thousand euros to make a similar journey to that of the tourist ferry, but in an unsafe, overcrowded boat.[29]

You can see this dynamic in action at the US–Mexico border. In 1994, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was signed. Two million Mexican farmers were forced off their land and into destitution while food prices within Mexico rose. As a result, a quarter of the population is regularly unable to afford sufficient food to avoid hunger.[30] During the same period, the border was increasingly hardened and militarised, making it more and more difficult for undocumented people to cross. (In 1992, the US Border Patrol had 3,555 agents on the southern border; by 2009, it had more than 20,000.)[31] Nonetheless, people continue to try, for the obvious reason that they are seeking to escape hunger and poverty and to send remittances home to mitigate the poverty of their families.

The clash between people's need to migrate and intensifying border fortifications has predictable outcomes. Migration scholars Nassim Majidi and Saagarika Dadu-Brown write that intensifying border restrictions *creates* 'new migrant-smuggler relationships', adding that 'smugglers will take advantage of a border closure or restriction to increase prices'.[32] Since the early 1990s, the Border Patrol has recovered the bodies of 6,000 people on the US side of the border, with as many as double that number thought to be lying undiscovered in the desert.[33] Isabel Garcia, co-chair of a local US

migrants' rights organisation, says 'we never thought that we'd be in the business of helping to identify remains like in a war zone, and here we are'.[34] The US Department of Homeland Security reports that, as the border hardened, the costs to migrants who hire smugglers significantly increased – yet the proportion of migrants using the services of smugglers *also* increased, from 45 per cent to around 95 per cent.[35] Even as the inability to cross borders legally directly pushes would-be migrants into the arms of people smugglers, it increases the fees these smugglers can charge. As ethnologist Samuel Martinez writes, 'We have known for more than a decade that higher and longer walls, increased Border Patrol surveillance, and heightened bureaucratic impediments to immigration have deflected immigrants into the grip of smugglers.'[36] This pattern repeats at borders around the world. In Nepal, the International Labour Organisation found that banning women under the age of thirty from emigrating (which aimed to tackle their exploitation) had instead 'strengthened unlicensed migration agents', increasing the ability of these agents to entrap women in exploitative situations.[37]

This interplay is familiar to us in other contexts. When abortion is criminalised, women seeking abortions turn to back-street abortionists – some of whom will be altruistic, many of whom will be unscrupulous.[38] Although the pro-choice movement obviously decries people who charge exploitative fees to perform criminalised abortions in unsafe or neglectful ways, we also recognise that these bad actors are not aberrant villains who have come out of nowhere.* Instead, the criminalisation of abortion has *directly created* the market for unscrupulous abortion providers. Rather than simply 'cracking down', the policy solution that has put them out of business where it has been implemented is, of course, access to safe, legal, free abortion services. People living in places like England and Canada who can access free abortion services do not tend to pay people to perform dangerous back-alley procedures. Why would they? In the same way, people who can cross borders legally do not pay someone to smuggle them across. Like the people who perform illegal abortions, smugglers are not inexplicable villains; instead, *the criminalisation of undocumented migration has directly created the market for people smuggling*.

Many people engaging in undocumented migration agree to repay the debt that they take on to pay a smuggler through work in their destination

country. This is common sense: people who are driven to migrate to escape poverty or war cannot normally produce large sums of money up front. Again, criminalisation directly creates conditions where harm can flourish. As a smuggler is *by definition* acting outside the law, and the migrant is already breaking laws in crossing the border, there is no legal recourse when the smuggler breaks the agreement or changes the terms. Often this happens midway through the journey or upon arrival in the destination country – points in the process where the person has little way of backing out, and has to accept these new conditions, however unfair.

Even in the best-case scenario, when an undocumented person finds work that is completely independent from the smuggling networks they used to cross the border, their lack of legal immigration status means they are intensely vulnerable to exploitation or other forms of abuse at the hands of their employer. They have little to no recourse to employment law; making themselves visible to state authorities as part of attempting to access justice or redress for workplace abuse will simply lead to their deportation. The Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM), an NGO network which defends undocumented people in Europe, writes,

> As undocumented migrants are limited to the informal sector, they often work without an employment contract meaning they have significant difficulties to prove labour-relations in a court of law. Even when a contract has been signed, it is usually considered invalid, due to the irregular status of the worker, and thus unenforceable … Further, if an undocumented worker reports violence or criminal labour exploitation to the police, they face arrest and deportation, rather than protection and justice.[39]

Focus on Labour Exploitation (FLEX), an NGO that tackles the exploitation of migrant workers in Europe, notes that 'fear of immigration authorities is a major barrier to reporting for undocumented workers … The threat of reporting to police or immigration authorities is routinely used by unscrupulous employers to hold workers in abusive situations.'[40] FLEX cites an example of two undocumented men who were forced to work without pay in a laundromat. Their employer claimed that their pay was going towards their residence permits; however, 'the employer never arranged the promised residence permit, and instead threatened the men with reporting them to the police if they complained … The two men were too afraid to disclose their situation to the labour inspectors.'[41] Carolina Gottardo of the Latin American Women's Rights Service points out that

'when women are undocumented and employers know about it, they are very easy prey for very serious manners of labour exploitation'.[42] To talk about this is not to digress from sex trafficking; it is to understand the broader, state-led systems which *produce* exploitation for undocumented people.

Let's look at another example of this dynamic: a situation where an employer controls a migrant worker's visa. Abdul Azad took on debt to come to the UK on the promise of a well-paid job in a restaurant. Upon arrival, he discovered he would be working for no pay, in conditions of absolute squalor in an isolated hotel in the remote countryside. He had not entered the country illegally, but his visa was dependent upon his employer, and Azad feared he and the other men trapped at the hotel would be deported, with their debts unpaid, if they contacted the police. His employer, he says, would 'show us copies of our visa on his computer and say, "Here is your name. I will cancel your sponsorship any time. This is my power."'[43] Abdul was not wrong to fear this: when his case came to the attention of the police, his employer was jailed – but Abdul was deported.[44]

Both the US and UK typically tie domestic workers' visas to a specific employer. As a result, a staggering 80 per cent of migrant domestic workers entering the US find that they have been deceived about their contract, and 78 per cent have had employers threaten them with deportation if they complain.[45] In the UK, these 'tied visas' were only introduced – by Prime Minister Theresa May, who was home secretary at the time – in 2012, so it is possible to see their effect very clearly. Migrant domestic workers who entered the UK after 2012 on a tied visa are *twice as likely* to be physically abused by their employers as those who arrived on a visa that gave them the right to change employers.[46] Compared to migrant domestic workers on the previous, more flexible form of visa, those on tied visas are substantially more likely to be underpaid, assaulted, and overworked, to be expected to sleep on the floor, and to have their passports confiscated by their employers.[47] Punitive immigration law produces harm.

However, much mainstream trafficking discourse characterises the abuse of migrants and people selling sex as the work of individual bad actors, *external* to and *independent* of state actions and political choices. Sometimes this discourse works not only to obscure the role of the state but to absolve it. One feminist commentator, for example, writes of the sex

trade that 'criminalisation doesn't rape and beat women. Men do'.[48] From this, we might conclude that changing the law is pointless because, what makes women vulnerable is simply *men*. This may feel true for women who do not have to contend with immigration law, police, or the constant fear of deportation, but we can see from the results of tied visas that the legal context – including migration law – is heavily implicated in producing vulnerability and harm.

For undocumented migrant workers looking to challenge bad workplace conditions, penalties do not stop at deportation; instead, these workers face criminalisation if they are discovered. In the UK, someone convicted of 'illegal working' can face up to fifty-one weeks in prison, an unlimited fine, and the prospect of their earnings being confiscated as the 'proceeds of crime'.[49] This increases undocumented people's justified fear of state authorities and makes them even less able to report labour abuses. Such laws therefore heighten their vulnerability and *directly push* them into exploitative working environments, thereby creating a supply of highly vulnerable, ripe-for-abuse workers. Increasingly, border enforcement is infiltrating new areas of civic life. Landlords are now expected to check tenants' immigration status before renting to them; proposals have been floated to freeze or close the bank accounts of undocumented people, and a documentation check was introduced in England when accessing both healthcare and education, as part of an explicit 'hostile environment' policy (although both have been challenged by migrants' rights organisers, including in court). The UK devotes far more resources to policing migration than it does to preventing the exploitation of workers. Researcher Bridget Anderson notes that 'the [National Minimum Wage] had 93 compliance officers in 2009 and the Gangmasters Licensing Authority [which works to protect vulnerable and exploited workers] had 25 inspectors … The proposed number of UK Border Agency Staff for Local Immigration teams … is 7,500.'[50]

This is the context in which commercial sex frequently occurs. Undocumented or insecurely documented people are enmeshed within a punitive, state-enforced infrastructure of deportability, disposability, and precarity. *Any* work they do – whether it is at a restaurant, construction site, cannabis farm, nail bar, or brothel – carries a risk of being detained, jailed, or deported. In any work they do, they will be unable to assert labour rights. Even renting a home or accessing healthcare can be difficult. All this makes

undocumented people more dependent on those who can help them – such as the people they paid to helped them cross the border, or an unscrupulous employer. It should therefore be no surprise that some undocumented migrants are pushed into sex work by those they rely on, or that some enter into it even if the working conditions are exploitative or abusive.

The experiences of a Thai woman working in the UK illustrate-some of these complexities. She speaks of her high debt to get into the country and the bad working conditions and low pay she encountered in restaurant work, but also the higher pay she gets from sex work now that she has no debt to repay:

> I came to work in England because there is no money in Thailand … To come here so I made a contract with people, I had to give them back £22,000 … I used to work and live in the same flat [a brothel], twenty-four hours a day, with three other Thai girls. We used to give her [the smuggler] all the money, except £200 to send to our families, but she did not take care of us … we only had one egg per day to eat and she put washing-up liquid in the shampoo bottle. I paid up in eight months and was free. I work here [in a brothel] and in a restaurant now. The restaurant is better because it's got good reputation. Whereas here it's good money but bad reputation. Now I am okay, but I am only scared that immigration could come here and make me go back to Thailand.[51]

A Brazilian woman explains to the same researchers that if she had legal immigration status, she would do a different job than sex work: 'I decided to come to the UK because a girl I was working with in Spain took me here … She was Brazilian as well. She had told me that the UK was better for work and I needed money … If I was legal I would look for another job.'[52] Another migrant woman, who had also previously worked in Spain, notes that even decriminalising sex work does not make undocumented workers safe from the state: 'I felt more secure in Spain. I guess the only way would be to make it legal … to work in brothels, but then that would not be enough because I could not be working there as I have no papers.'[53]

The constraints of immigration law come up again and again. One woman tells researchers, 'It is so difficult for Thai people to get a visa for the UK, why? If you want to come here to work you need to use these systems and people and it is very dangerous.'[54] Another adds: 'It is very bad, the girls want to go abroad and have a better life, but these people make money out of them, and on the other hand it's the only way to come! … The Home Office should give more visas. It's difficult here if you are illegal!'[55] Nick Mai, who conducted the research, writes,

> There is a direct correlation between the degree of difficulty in obtaining and maintaining documentation and the vulnerability of interviewees to exploitation, whether they work in the sex or in other industries … *Immigration status is the most important single factor* engendering migrant workers' vulnerability to exploitation in the UK sex industry. [emphasis ours][56]

However, the way trafficking is discussed allows exploitation to be presented as unrelated to this system. For example, in 2018, news agencies reported that German police had 'smashed' an organisation that was trafficking Thai women into German brothels.[57] In response, one anti-prostitution feminist in the UK noted, 'this is the problem with legalising prostitution. Demand outstrips willing supply, and so you get trafficking.'[58] The Thai media reported that the women in question had been intending to migrate and had been aware that they were going to be selling sex upon arrival. They had paid to be smuggled into Germany, and had been deceived as to their remuneration and the conditions in which they would be working.[59] In the aftermath of the raid, the German authorities were weighing up the possibility of prosecuting these exploited undocumented people *for working without the correct visa*.[60]

To locate the problem in the existence of prostitution, as the UK feminist commentator seems to, renders invisible the material things that made them vulnerable to harm. Europe's border regime meant they had to pay exploitative people huge sums of money in order to be smuggled in, and that once in, they had zero access to labour rights as their discovery by the state risked them being prosecuted. These two factors combined to produce a situation wherein they could be horribly exploited by their employers. None of this is to downplay what happened to them – instead, it is to highlight the inadequacy of a carceral 'anti-trafficking' response to their situation. Such an approach actively obscures the role of the border in producing the harms they suffered, and compounds these harms by rendering it prosaic that they face deportation and potential prosecution. Indeed, it is striking that although the spectre of commercial sex attracted attention to this case among the UK commentariat, the idea that this was an anti-trafficking raid – and therefore simply a 'good thing' – foreclosed any interest in what happened to these people after their discovery by the state. Their potential prosecution – and inevitable deportation – become unremarkable and unremarked upon. As Nandita Sharma writes,

> Anti-trafficking policies do a great disservice to migrating people, especially the most vulnerable. By diverting our attention away from the practices of nation-states … they channel our energies to support a law-and-order agenda of 'getting tough' with 'traffickers'. In this way, anti-trafficking measures are *ideological*: they render the plethora of immigration and border controls as unproblematic and place them outside of the bounds of politics. [emphasis ours][61]

Instead of locating exploitation within the state systems that push migrants into debt and force them to work in the grey economy with no workplace protections, anti-trafficking ideology locates exploitation in the figure of the villain. In Houston, Texas, one anti-trafficking organisation set up a 'museum of modern-day slavery'. In it they displayed a shackle dating from chattel slavery in North America, next to a high-heeled shoe. The shoe was titled 'A Modern-Day Shackle', and the caption reads:

> This shoe was found after [a] … cantina known as Las Palmas was raided by law enforcement. Women are forced to wear clothing like this shoe to attract business. This type of clothing marks them as business property and is considered a modern-day shackle.[62]

The shoe is an ordinary high-heeled shoe of the sort that you can buy on any high street. For anybody to claim that it is 'considered a modern-day shackle' is an absurdly overheated fantasy. Comparing it to an actual shackle trivialises the real history of chattel slavery, a history which, as racial justice organiser Robyn Maynard writes, remains 'a living, breathing horror for anybody … with Black skin in the Americas'.[63] This fantasy also obscures something real, which is that *a woman kicked these shoes off in order to run from the cops*.

As the caption notes, these shoes were found after a cantina was 'raided by law enforcement'. In choosing to see an ordinary shoe as a 'shackle' rather than identifying the key problem as criminalisation and the police, anti-trafficking activists misdirect attention away from the structures of the state and onto a fictional, shackle-wielding monster.

White Guilt and the 'New Slave Trade'

Trafficking anxieties have always been deeply tied to white nationalism. White women's bodies – threatened by prostitution – come to stand in for the body politic of the nation, threatened by immigration. This is clearly legible in late-nineteenth-century concerns over 'white slavery', a panic that

overtook Britain and the US in which campaigners thought that young white women were being lured into forced prostitution by Black and Jewish men. This panic was driven by the rapid growth of cities, women's increasing migration to cities as workers outside the home, and fears around women's economic independence, which combined with white-supremacist fears over 'race mixing' to create the conditions for a racist panic.

Academic Jo Doezema writes that the image of the white slave 'in her ruined innocence' represented 'the real and imagined loss of American rural innocence'.[64] Writing in 1909, the social worker and activist Jane Addams declared that 'never before in civilisation have such numbers of girls been suddenly released from the protection of the home and permitted to walk unattended upon the city streets and to work under alien roofs'.[65] Historians note that journalists' breathless reportage of white slavery 'provided virtually pornographic entertainment to the reading audience'.[66] It was amid this obviously racist freak-out over swarthy men luring white innocents to their ruin that one of the first recognisably modern US anti-trafficking laws, the 1905 Mann Act, passed. The bill, which was ostensibly against forced prostitution, criminalised Black men in romantic relationships with white women.[67] In the UK, white-slavery legislation passed between 1885 and 1912 'created provisions to monitor and restrict the migration of women'.[68]

Little surprise, then, given these origins, that anti-trafficking policies are primarily either anti-migration policies, or anti-prostitution policies. Neither helps undocumented people, and both harm migrant sex workers, who are doubly in the crosshairs and disproportionately criminalised and deported. Abhijit Dasgupta of ActionAid Asia remarks that:

> anti-trafficking measures were being used internationally to prevent the migration of people, especially women who are driven by poverty and globalisation to move country. Governments claim that millions of women are being trafficked by a billion-dollar sex industry, but the UNHCR [United Nations High Commission on Refugees] and others have pointed out that because of tightening immigration controls, paying an agent is often the only way to migrate.[69]

Although racist panic about migration is never far from the surface of politics in countries that perpetrated and continue to benefit from colonialism, the last twenty-five years have seen an uptick in these anxieties. Campaigners often deliberately heighten this racism; for example, depictions of 'hordes at the border' featured prominently in the 2016

'Brexit' referendum on Britain leaving the European Union.[70] In 2017, a Conservative election strategist tweeted: 'I was in [the] 2005 Tory campaign – we worked assiduously to ramp up anti-immigrant feeling. And from [then–Labour Party leader Gordon] Brown on nobody challenged lies that immigrants took jobs, were here on benefits.'[71] That same year, Sarah Champion, the Labour Party's then shadow Secretary of State for Women and Equalities, wrote, 'Britain has a problem with British Pakistani men raping and exploiting white girls. There, I said it. Does that make me a racist or am I just prepared to call out this horrifying problem for what it is?'[72] Indeed, it is possible to trace these growing xenophobic and racist anxieties not just in phrases, tabloid headlines, and election strategies but in concrete and barbed wire. As geographer Reece Jones writes, 'as late as 1990, only fifteen countries had walls or fences on their borders. At the beginning of 2016, almost seventy did.'[73]

The history of the transatlantic slave trade and chattel slavery looms large in contemporary trafficking conversations – often in the form of claims, subtle or not, that modern trafficking is *worse* than chattel slavery. Politicians and police officers meet to tell each other that 'there are more slaves now than at any previous point in human history'; a UK former government minister insists that 'we are facing a new slave trade, whose victims are tortured, terrified East European girls rather than Africans'.[74] Matteo Renzi, then prime minister of Italy, wrote in 2015 that 'human traffickers are the slave traders of the twenty-first century'.[75] The Vatican claimed that 'modern slavery', specifically prostitution, is 'worse than the slavery of those … who were taken from Africa'.[76] A senior British police officer remarked that 'the cotton plantations and sugar plantations of the eighteenth and nineteenth century … wouldn't be as bad as what some victims [today] go through'.[77]

A 2012 anti-trafficking 'documentary' that was screened for politicians and policymakers around the world, including in Washington, London, Edinburgh, and at the UN buildings in New York, proclaims: 'In 1809 the cost of a slave was thirty thousand dollars. In 2009, the cost of a slave is ninety dollars.'[78] White people co-opting the history of chattel slavery as rhetoric is grim, not least because the term *slavery* names a specific legal institution created, enforced and protected by the state, which is nowhere near synonymous with contemporary ideas of trafficking. Indeed, the direct

modern descendant of chattel slavery in the US is not prostitution but the prison system. Slavery was not abolished but explicitly retained in the US Constitution as punishment for crime in the Thirteenth Amendment of the Bill of Rights, which states that 'neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, *except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted*, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction' (emphasis ours).[79]

The Thirteenth Amendment isn't just a vestigial hangover. In 2016, the Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee released a statement condemning inmates' treatment in the prison work system:

> Overseers watch over our every move, and if we do not perform our appointed tasks to their liking, we are punished. They may have replaced the whip with pepper spray, but many of the other torments remain: isolation, restraint positions, stripping off our clothes and investigating our bodies as though we are animals.[80]

There are more Black men in the US prison system now than were enslaved in 1850.[81] Seeking to 'end slavery' through increased policing and incarceration is a bitterly ironic proposition.

White people in Britain and North America have been very successful at ducking any real reckoning with the legacies of the slave trade. Historian Nick Draper writes, 'We privilege abolition … If you say to somebody 'tell me about Britain and slavery', the instinctive response of most people is Wilberforce and abolition. Those 200 years of slavery beforehand have been elided – we just haven't wanted to think about it.'[82] By rhetorically intertwining modern trafficking with chattel slavery, governments and campaigners have been able to hide punitive policies targeting irregular migration behind seemingly uncomplicated righteous outrage.

Men of colour become 'modern enslavers' who deserve prosecution or worse. Their 'human cargo', figured as being transported against their will, are owed nothing more than 'humanitarian return', and the racist trope of border invasion is given a progressive sheen through collective shared horror at the villainy of the perpetrators. Meanwhile, in crackdowns and deportations, European governments position themselves as re-enacting and re-writing the history of anti-slavery movements to make themselves both victims and heroes. Of course, these actions by European governments do harm. For example, their policy of confiscating or destroying smuggling boats has not 'rescued' anyone, only induced smugglers to send migrants in

less valuable – and less seaworthy – boats, leading to many more deaths.[83] This policy continued for years, despite clear evidence that it was causing deaths.[84] But, faced with twenty-first century 'enslavers', there is little need for white reflection. Instead, Renzi later wrote that European nations 'need to free ourselves from a sense of guilt' and reject any notion of a 'moral duty' to welcome arrivals.[85] At the time of writing, the Italian government's 'solution' to the migrant crisis is to pay for migrants to be incarcerated, stranded in dangerous, disease-ridden detention centres in Libya.[86] As Robyn Maynard writes,

> By hijacking the terminology of slavery, even widely referring to themselves as 'abolitionists', anti–sex work campaigners … in pushing for criminalization … are often undermining those most harmed by the legacy of slavery. As Black persons across the Americas are literally fighting for our lives, it is urgent to examine the actions and goals of any mostly white and conservative movement who [claim] to be the rightful inheritors of an 'anti-slavery' mission which aims to abolish prostitution but both ignores and indirectly facilitates brutalities waged against Black communities.[87]

What does the fight to save people from 'modern slavery' look like on the ground? In 2017, police in North Yorkshire told journalists that they were fighting to rescue 'sex slaves' and asked members of the public to call in with tips, adding that the 'sex slaves' themselves 'are prepared to do it [sell sex], they believe there is nothing wrong in it … We have just got to … educate them that they are victims of human trafficking.'[88] It seems fairly obvious that women who are 'prepared to do it' and 'believe there is nothing wrong with it' will not particularly benefit from being 'educated' about the fact that they are victims of trafficking – which in England and Wales means a forty-five-day 'respite period' (frequently disregarded) followed by a 'humanitarian' deportation.*

In 2012, Alaska passed a law which essentially redefined prostitution as 'sex trafficking'. The *only* two people charged in the law's first two years of the law were sex workers 'caught in ordinary prostitution stings'. One 'was charged with *sex trafficking herself* when the state alleged that she "instituted or aided" in her own prostitution'. In the other case, 'a woman was charged with multiple counts of felony sex trafficking … for sharing space with other sex workers when she booked a duo [threesome] for herself and another worker with a police officer' who was posing as a client. After five years, the Alaskan state had not charged or convicted anyone with coercion, deception, or force relating to trafficking; the law

had only been used against sex workers, their family members, and their landlords.[89]

In 2016, Irish police arrested four Romanian sex workers. Police claimed that the women had been trafficked but prosecuted them for brothel-keeping regardless – a 'crime' which simply entails sharing a flat, as sex workers often do for safety. The women stated in court that they were selling sex in order to send money home to their families in Romania. The police commented that '*they are four little girls* and they made full admissions that they were providing sexual services to a large number of men' (emphasis ours).[90] Their ages ranged from twenty-one to thirty. The police added, 'They were paying €700 rent to a greedy landlord for an apartment that they should have been paying €350 for. So, they were being used and abused by a lot of people.' The police took €5,000 from the women, and the court fined them another €200 each.[91] It is hard to see how taking all this money tackles the harm of an overpriced flat, and easy to imagine that these women might have preferred working in their apparently overpriced flat to being raided, being prosecuted, and having their cash taken as an 'anti-trafficking' initiative.

Anti-trafficking policing looks like border policing. In Canada, a 2015 human-trafficking raid on massage parlours led to eleven women being deported.[92] One migrant sex worker named Mi spent two months in a Canadian detention centre. 'They took away my phone and didn't allow me to contact my friends and family. [They] did not allow me to leave, as they said they had to protect me. They thought my friends and clients were bad people and dangerous for me. They did not allow my friends to be a bondsperson to get me out of those chains.' After Mi was deported, Canadian Immigration officials refused to return the $10,000 they'd taken from her, which included savings she'd brought with her when she moved to Canada.

Fanny, another migrant who was detained for eight days, said, of her arrest, 'it was very clear that [the police] were only looking for us as non-white workers. There were other women working in the same hotel who were white, and the police didn't bother them or even talk to them at all.'[93]

In October 2016, London police raided a series of massage parlours in Soho and Chinatown and arrested seventeen women on immigration charges.[94] In the northern UK town of Bolton, a 'crackdown on human

trafficking and modern slavery' found two Romanian women who described themselves as sex workers. A local journalist writes that 'immigration officers served both women with papers instructing them to get a legitimate job … within 30 days or else risk arrest and possible deportation'. Meanwhile, the police forced the women's landlord to evict them.[95] In Northern Ireland, two asylum seekers – both homeless, one seventeen years old – were prosecuted for human-trafficking offences for the crime of smuggling *themselves* into Northern Ireland on false documents.[96]

Michael Dottridge, the former head of Anti-Slavery International, writes that on several occasions he has heard UK government ministers suggest that the police should destroy the basic shelters that migrant people are living in at the French-British border of Calais, the site of a large refugee camp, as a way to 'stop trafficking'.[97] Police Scotland put out a press release noting that they had refused entry at the border to more than a hundred people as part of their anti-trafficking work – offering as an example a Romanian woman who 'had previously worked as a prostitute in Glasgow'. The BBC reports, 'She was refused admission at Glasgow in May 2017, then again in Liverpool in July 2017 and was encountered recently at Belfast docks attempting to get to Scotland. She was removed to Romania.'[98] The same report describes another Romanian woman refused entry at the border because she was known to the police to be a sex worker. The police knew she was a sex worker because of an incredibly traumatic event. When she had previously worked in Scotland, she and another worker were held hostage in a flat in Falkirk by a client with a knife; they both were raped and the other woman, Luciana, was killed. On this basis, immigration police detained her at the border and deported her while claiming a humanitarian anti-trafficking mantle.[99] There are more examples of cases like this than could fit into one book.

At borders all over the world, sex workers are treated as both villain and victims. Homeland Security officially ban anyone who has sold sex in the previous ten years from entry into the United States, along with spies, Nazis, and terrorists.[100] The border to the United States is a No Man's Land – and people detained at a Port of Entry have few rights. No warrant, or even reasonable suspicion, is legally required for agents to demand

passwords and search through electronic devices like phones or laptops, or even to clone all the data they find.

Sex workers attempting entry into the US for any reason can be questioned and detained for hours or days before being sent back. The numbers of people affected by this have risen significantly since the start of Trump's presidency. Many in our community – including personal friends – have spoken to the trauma of been stopped at customs and put through twelve-to-forty-eight-hour ordeals in which they were denied food, rest or medication. They were often handcuffed or shackled to chairs, including in public areas of airports, where immigration enforcement agents subjected them to the humiliation of excessive frisking and invasive bodily searches, and deliberately withheld sanitary products. No filming or recording of border agents is allowed, and many of them use illegal tactics to force sex workers to sign an admission of guilt banning them from the United States for ten years.*

In the era of the War on Trafficking, the hypocrisy is galling. While their agents taunt sex workers with screenshots of escort sites and naked photos during interrogations, US Customs and Border Protection condemn the 'heinous' crime of sex trafficking on their website, and advertise job vacancies that smugly proclaim the 'vitality and magnitude' of their 'mission' to secure the nation from threats like human traffickers.[101] US lawmakers say equally poetic things about the tragedy of sex trafficking – and how appalling it is that the human rights of prostituted people are so violated – but do nothing to overturn the travel ban that meant current and former sex workers couldn't attend the 2012 International Aids Conference in Washington, D.C. to do valuable human rights work. Nor do they act to change these harrowing and traumatising experiences that sex workers are subjected to at the US border. Instead, they produce the 'Fight Online Sex Trafficking' Act and the 'Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers' Act (known together as FOSTA-SESTA), laws which claim to create safety – while in fact decimating the internet spaces that help sex workers protect themselves from rapists or earn what they need to keep a roof over their head.

This cruelty is not an accident. The UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons is not a human rights document – it is a descendant of the Convention Against Transnational Organised Crime.[102] As such, it is concerned with *criminalisation*, not healing (or even harm reduction) for marginalised people. As Dottridge notes, the only measures

that are obligatory for all states to uphold are those linked to law enforcement. Protection measures, in contrast, are weak and optional.[103] The protocol merely suggests that states *consider* adopting 'measures that permit victims of trafficking in persons to remain in its territory, temporarily or permanently, in appropriate cases'.[104] It is much firmer on the 'repatriation' of victims, 'without undue or unreasonable delay', and firmer still on strengthening border control, instructing signatory countries that they 'shall strengthen … such border controls as may be necessary to prevent and detect trafficking in persons'.[105]

None of this has gone unnoticed by the far right, with tabloid newspapers and white supremacists deploying the language of human trafficking as part of campaigns to 'turn back the boats'. One Canadian white nationalist travelled to Italy in 2017 to join a French far-right group's 'direct action' against arriving migrants, brandishing a banner reading 'NO WAY for human trafficking'.[106] British columnist Katie Hopkins praised an openly fascist youth organisation for 'shining a light on NGO people traffickers'.[107] Although unsubtly expressed, these far-right views have a huge amount in common with more mainstream and even feminist conceptions of human trafficking. The head of Frontex, the European border agency, has also claimed that NGO rescues in the Mediterranean were facilitating traffickers.[108] (Indeed, aid workers across Europe are increasingly facing prosecution under anti-trafficking laws for helping people migrate.)[109] Feminist anti-prostitution campaigners sometimes share hard-right reportage of sexual violence supposedly committed by refugees in Europe, with one such campaigner commenting that European countries should 'take in the women and children, but leave the nasty men home'.[110] Alice Schwarzer, a prominent German anti-prostitution feminist, draws extensively on the racialised figures of 'pimps and traffickers', linking migrant men of colour to sexual violence.[111] (Schwarzer uncritically recounts a police officer telling her that '70 to 80 per cent of all the rapes in Cologne [are committed by] Turks'.)[112] When sex workers organise against deportations, we are told – by those with ostensibly progressive politics – that they 'should be deported if [they have] no right to be in the country. Such women are being trafficked into [the] country. Do you support that?'[113]

Hard-right politicians are keen to enact anti-trafficking agendas. US President Donald Trump has described human trafficking as an 'epidemic',[114] while Theresa May is positioning the 2015 Modern Slavery Act (passed while she was home secretary) as central to her image and legacy.[115] Uncritical use of the term *trafficking* is doing the ideological work required for these contradictions to 'make sense'; it hides how anti-migrant policies *produce* the harm that we call trafficking, enabling anti-migrant politicians to posture as anti-trafficking heroes even as they enact their anti-migrant policies.

Where Next?

It should be no surprise that carceral feminists and sex working feminists have such difficulty even discussing this topic. We disagree not only on the solution but on the *problem*: for carceral feminists, the problem is commercial sex, which produces trafficking; for us, the problem is borders, which produces people who have few to no rights as they travel and work. The solutions we propose are equally divergent. Carceral feminists want to tackle commercial sex through criminal law, giving more power to the police. For sex workers, the solution includes dismantling immigration enforcement and the militarised border regimes that push undocumented people into the shadows and shut off their access to safety or justice – in other words, taking power *away* from the police and giving it to migrants and to workers.

However, we also want to gently criticise the sex workers' rights movement. A common refrain among people who advocate for sex workers' rights is that sex work and trafficking are completely different phenomena that should under no circumstances be conflated. It is easy to understand why: all across the world, the total criminalisation of prostitution is advocated for – or enacted – on the basis that it is 'tackling trafficking': arrests of sex workers' colleagues, partners, landlords, and managers are 'justified' on the basis that they are perpetrators; arrests of sex workers are 'justified' on the basis that they constitute rescue. Our movement is desperate to convince the public and the media that these arrests are not legitimate – and rather than problematising the framework of trafficking (which has taken us several thousand words!), they reach for the

idea of the category error. They say that 'sex work is not trafficking', meaning, '*these* crackdowns are not legitimate'. When possible, we need to be pointing more clearly to the *border* as the problem. Otherwise the effect can be to disavow those working in exploitative or abusive conditions – to say, 'these issues are not our issues; these people are not the concern of our movement'. It places them outside the remit of 'sex workers' rights'. It implicitly accepts carceral 'raid-and-rescue' approaches, so long as the target is 'right'.

To say that 'sex work is not trafficking' mirrors the error of carceral anti-trafficking campaigners by positioning trafficking as an inexplicable evil, shorn of the crucial context of the conditions of migration and the impact of immigration enforcement on the labour rights and safety of migrants. To assert simply that sex work and trafficking are completely different is to defend *only* documented sex workers who are not experiencing exploitation but say nothing about those exploited at the intersection of migration and the sex industry. As a slogan, 'sex work is not trafficking' suggests that the current mode of anti-trafficking policy is broadly correct and merely – on occasion – misfires. In fact, of course, carceral anti-trafficking policy is *not* misfiring: like the global prison industrial complex, of which it forms a part, it is a system which is working in the way it is supposed to be. As the Migrant Sex Work Project writes, 'it is an intentional and effective system.'[116] Immigration and border control are crucial to maintaining the exploitation of workers and resources in the global south, and to maintaining an exploitable pool of undocumented and insecurely documented workers in the global north, while border policing and the incarceration of migrants funnel huge sums back and forth between corporations and governments.

Fundamentally, the claim that sex work and trafficking are different operates as a way of refusing to talk about 'trafficking', since such conversations are often used to attack us when we organise; people reach for any easy way to shut the topic down. But sex workers should start welcoming such discussions. They are an opportunity to talk about how border enforcement makes people more vulnerable to exploitation and violence as they seek to migrate – an analysis which should be central to sex workers' rights activism.

State borders and the architecture of coercion that surrounds them can now seem so natural it is difficult to imagine the world without them.

People who migrate without papers are, after all, 'breaking the law', implying that punitive state action against them – such as incarceration and deportation – is legitimate. This is, in part, why we historicised border controls in the introduction: to recount the recent history of borders is to see that they are not natural or inevitable. It is beyond the scope of this book to fully detail a migration policy centred on human rights and safety of all people who seek to migrate. It should be clear, however, that attempts to limit migration are producing horrific harms, from exploitation and abuse in workplaces, to deaths at sea and in deserts. The wealth of a handful of the world's richest people would, if fairly re-distributed, be more than enough to ensure that everybody who needs to travel – and everybody who does not – could live in safety and dignity. In the meantime, everybody should be fighting immigration enforcement, which rips families and communities apart and imprisons people for years in detention centres.

To defend the migrant prostitute is to defend all migrants: she is the archetype of the stigmatised migrant. Borders were *invented* to guard against her. There is no migrant solidarity without prostitute solidarity and there is no prostitute solidarity without migrant solidarity. The two struggles are inextricably bound up with one another.

Julia Gjika
Autumn Afternoon

The sun was setting just as I'd finished cleaning
the offices of a two-story building,
ending another day of work
near the dumpster
with the last bag of trash I tossed away.
I was alone with my exhaustion.
You could hear nobody's footsteps.
Somewhere between my exhaustion and a faded dream,
I thought I was lost,
when suddenly in the gloaming
the flight of the wild geese—
I raised my head.
Their white bellies
glided through the numerous hues
the firmament had stolen from the season.
In an instant, exhaustion and rest became one.
The green, blue, pink, amber-gold hues
and the sounds calling from the birds' beaks
carried me toward the dream
that never dies.
How hard it is to believe
that after a tiring, monotonous day
which you forget in a night's sleep,
dusk opened a window,
so I could see
what my memory
safekeeps.

8

Women on the Market

The society we know, our own culture, is based upon the exchange of women. Without the exchange of women, we are told, we would fall back into the anarchy (?) of the natural world, the randomness (?) of the animal kingdom. The passage into the social order, into the symbolic order, into order as such, is assured by the fact that men, or groups of men, circulate women among themselves, according to a rule known as the incest taboo.

Whatever familial form this prohibition may take in a given state of society, its signification has a much broader impact. It assures the foundation of the economic, social, and cultural order that has been ours for centuries.

Why exchange women? Because they are "scarce [commodities] . . . essential to the life of the group," the anthropologist tells us.[1] Why this characteristic of scarcity, given the biological equilibrium between male and female births? Because the "deep polygamous tendency, which exists among all men, always makes the number of available women seem insufficient. Let us add that, even if there were as many women as men, these women would not all be equally desirable . . . and that, by definition . . . , the most desirable women must form a minority."[2]

This text was originally published as "Le marché des femmes," in *Sessualità e politica,* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1978).

[1]Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (*Les Structures élémentaires de la Parenté,* 1949, rev. 1967), trans. James Harle Bell, John Richard von Sturmer, and Rodney Needham (Boston, 1969), p. 36.

[2]Ibid., p. 38.

Are men all equally desirable? Do women have no tendency toward polygamy? The good anthropologist does not raise such questions. *A fortiori:* why are men not objects of exchange among women? It is because women's bodies—through their use, consumption, and circulation—provide for the condition making social life and culture possible, although they remain an unknown "infrastructure" of the elaboration of that social life and culture. The exploitation of the matter that has been sexualized female is so integral a part of our sociocultural horizon that there is no way to interpret it except within this horizon.

In still other words: all the systems of exchange that organize patriarchal societies and all the modalities of productive work that are recognized, valued, and rewarded in these societies are men's business. The production of women, signs, and commodities is always referred back to men (when a man buys a girl, he "pays" the father or the brother, not the mother . . .), and they always pass from one man to another, from one group of men to another. The work force is thus always assumed to be masculine, and "products" are objects to be used, objects of transaction among men alone.

Which means that the possibility of our social life, of our culture, depends upon a ho(m)mo-sexual monopoly? The law that orders our society is the exclusive valorization of men's needs/desires, of exchanges among men. What the anthropologist calls the passage from nature to culture thus amounts to the institution of the reign of hom(m)o-sexuality. Not in an "immediate" practice, but in its "social" mediation. From this point on, patriarchal societies might be interpreted as societies functioning in the mode of "semblance." The value of symbolic and imaginary productions is superimposed upon, and even substituted for, the value of relations of material, natural, and corporal (re)production.

In this new matrix of History, in which man begets man as

his own likeness, wives, daughters, and sisters have value only in that they serve as the possibility of, and potential benefit in, relations among men. The use of and traffic in women subtend and uphold the reign of masculine hom(m)o-sexuality, even while they maintain that hom(m)o-sexuality in speculations, mirror games, identifications, and more or less rivalrous appropriations, which defer its real practice. Reigning everywhere, although prohibited in practice, hom(m)o-sexuality is played out through the bodies of women, matter, or sign, and heterosexuality has been up to now just an alibi for the smooth workings of man's relations with himself, of relations among men. Whose "sociocultural endogamy" excludes the participation of that other, so foreign to the social order: woman. Exogamy doubtless requires that one leave one's family, tribe, or clan, in order to make alliances. All the same, it does not tolerate marriage with populations that are too far away, too far removed from the prevailing cultural rules. A sociocultural endogamy would thus forbid commerce *with* women. Men make commerce *of* them, but they do not enter into any exchanges *with* them. Is this perhaps all the more true because exogamy is an economic issue, perhaps even subtends economy as such? The exchange of women as goods accompanies and stimulates exchanges of other "wealth" among groups of men. The economy—in both the narrow and the broad sense—that is in place in our societies thus requires that women lend themselves to alienation in consumption, and to exchanges in which they do not participate, and that men be exempt from being used and circulated like commodities.

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Marx's analysis of commodities as the elementary form of capitalist wealth can thus be understood as an interpretation of the status of woman in so-called partriarchal societies. The or-

ganization of such societies, and the operation of the symbolic system on which this organization is based—a symbolic system whose instrument and representative is the proper name: the name of the father, the name of God—contain in a nuclear form the developments that Marx defines as characteristic of a capitalist regime: the submission of "nature" to a "labor" on the part of men who thus constitute "nature" as use value and exchange value; the division of labor among private producer-owners who exchange their women-commodities among themselves, but also among producers and exploiters or exploitees of the social order; the standardization of women according to proper names that determine their equivalences; a tendency to accumulate wealth, that is, a tendency for the representatives of the most "proper" names—the leaders—to capitalize more women than the others; a progression of the social work of the symbolic toward greater and greater abstraction; and so forth.

To be sure, the means of production have evolved, new techniques have been developed, but it does seem that as soon as the father-man was assured of his reproductive power and had marked his products with his name, that is, from the very origin of private property and the patriarchal family, social exploitation occurred. In other words, all the social regimes of "History" are based upon the exploitation of one "class" of producers, namely, women. Whose reproductive use value (reproductive of children and of the labor force) and whose constitution as exchange value underwrite the symbolic order as such, without any compensation in kind going to them for that "work." For such compensation would imply a double system of exchange, that is, a shattering of the monopolization of the proper name (and of what it signifies as appropriative power) by father-men.

Thus the social body would be redistributed into producer-subjects no longer functioning as commodities because they

provided the standard of value for commodities, and into commodity-objects that ensured the circulation of exchange without participating in it as subjects.

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Let us now reconsider a few points[3] in Marx's analysis of value that seem to describe the social status of women.

Wealth amounts to a subordination of the use of things to their accumulation. Then would *the way women are used matter less than their number?* The possession of a woman is certainly indispensable to man for the reproductive use value that she represents; but what he desires is to have them all. To "accumulate" them, to be able to count off his conquests, seductions, possessions, both sequentially and cumulatively, as measure or standard(s).

All but one? For if the series could be closed, value might well lie, as Marx says, in the relation among them rather than in the relation to a standard that remains external to them—whether gold or phallus.

The use made of women is thus of less value than their appropriation one by one. And their "usefulness" is not what counts the most. Woman's price is not determined by the "properties"

[3]These notes constitute a statement of points that will be developed in a subsequent chapter. All the quotations in the remainder of this chapter are excerpted from Marx's *Capital,* section 1, chapter 1. (The page numbers given in the text refer to the Modern Library edition, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, ed. Frederick Engels, rev. Ernest Untermann [New York, 1906].) Will it be objected that this interpretation is analogical by nature? I accept the question, on condition that it be addressed also, and in the first place, to Marx's analysis of commodities. Did not Aristotle, a "great thinker" according to Marx, determine the relation of form to matter by analogy with the relation between masculine and feminine? Returning to the question of the difference between the sexes would amount instead, then, to going back through analogism.

of her body—although her body constitutes the *material* support of that price.

But when women are exchanged, woman's body must be treated as an *abstraction.* The exchange operation cannot take place in terms of some intrinsic, immanent value of the commodity. It can only come about when two objects—two women—are in a relation of equality with a third term that is neither the one nor the other. It is thus not as "women" that they are exchanged, but as women reduced to some common feature—their current price in gold, or phalluses—and of which they would represent a plus or minus quantity. Not a plus or a minus of feminine qualities, obviously. Since these qualities are abandoned in the long run to the needs of the consumer, *woman has value on the market by virtue of one single quality: that of being a product of man's "labor."*

On this basis, each one looks exactly like every other. They all have the same phantom-like reality. Metamorphosed in identical *sublimations,* samples of the same indistinguishable work, all these objects now manifest just one thing, namely, that in their production a force of human labor has been expended, that labor has accumulated in them. In their role as crystals of that common social substance, they are deemed to have value.

As commodities, women are thus two things at once: utilitarian objects and bearers of value. "They manifest themselves therefore as commodities, or have the form of commodities, only in so far as they have two forms, a physical or natural form, and a value form" (p. 55).

But "the reality of the value of commodities differs in this respect from Dame Quickly, that we don't know 'where to have it'" (ibid.). *Woman, object of exchange, differs from woman, use value, in that one doesn't know how to take (hold of) her,* for since "the value of commodities is the very opposite of the coarse materiality of their substance, not an atom of matter

enters into its composition. Turn and examine a single commodity, by itself, as we will. Yet in so far as it remains an object of value, it seems impossible to grasp it" (ibid.). The value of a woman always escapes: black continent, hole in the symbolic, breach in discourse . . . It is only in the operation of exchange among women that something of this—something enigmatic, to be sure—can be felt. *Woman thus has value only in that she can be exchanged.* In the passage from one to the other, something else finally exists beside the possible utility of the "coarseness" of her body. But this value is not found, is not recaptured, in her. It is only her measurement against a third term that remains external to her, and that makes it possible to compare her with another woman, that permits her to have a relation to another commodity in terms of an equivalence that remains foreign to both.

Women-as-commodities are thus subject to a schism that divides them into the categories of usefulness and exchange value; into matter-body and an envelope that is precious but impenetrable, ungraspable, and not susceptible to appropriation by women themselves; into private use and social use.

In order to have a *relative value,* a commodity has to be confronted with another commodity that serves as its equivalent. Its value is never found to lie within itself. And the fact that it is worth more or less is not its own doing but comes from that to which it may be equivalent. Its value is *transcendent* to itself, *super-natural, ek-static.*

In other words, for the commodity, there is no mirror that copies it so that it may be at once itself and its "own" reflection. One commodity cannot be mirrored in another, as man is mirrored in his fellow man. For when we are dealing with commodities the self-same, mirrored, is not "its" own likeness, contains nothing of its properties, its qualities, its "skin and hair." The likeness here is only a measure expressing the *fabricated* character of the commodity, its trans-formation by man's (social, symbolic)

"labor." The mirror that envelops and paralyzes the commodity specularizes, speculates (on) man's "labor." *Commodities, women, are a mirror of value of and for man.* In order to serve as such, they give up their bodies to men as the supporting material of specularization, of speculation. They yield to him their natural and social value as a locus of imprints, marks, and mirage of his activity.

Commodities among themselves are thus not equal, nor alike, nor different. They only become so when they are compared by and for man. And *the prosopopoeia of the relation of commodities among themselves is a projection* through which producers-exchangers make them reenact before their eyes their operations of specula(riza)tion. Forgetting that in order to reflect (oneself), to speculate (oneself), it is necessary to be a "subject," and that matter can serve as a support for speculation but cannot itself speculate in any way.

Thus, starting with the simplest relation of equivalence between commodities, starting with the possible exchange of women, the entire enigma of the money form—of the phallic function—is implied. That is, the appropriation-disappropriation by man, for man, of nature and its productive forces, insofar as a certain mirror now divides and travesties both nature and labor. Man endows the commodities he produces with a narcissism that blurs the seriousness of utility, of use. Desire, as soon as there is exchange, "perverts" need. But that perversion will be attributed to commodities and to their alleged relations. Whereas they can have no relationships except from the perspective of speculating third parties.

The economy of exchange—of desire—is man's business. For two reasons: the exchange takes place between masculine subjects, and it requires a *plus-value* added to the body of the commodity, a supplement which gives it a valuable form. That supplement will be found, Marx writes, in another commodity, whose use value becomes, from that point on, a standard of value.

But that surplus-value enjoyed by one of the commodities might vary: "just as many a man strutting about in a gorgeous uniform counts for more than when in mufti" (p. 60). Or just as "*A*, for instance, cannot be 'your majesty' to *B*, unless at the same time majesty in *B*'s eyes assume the bodily form of *A*, and, what is more, with every new father of the people, changes its features, hair, and many other things besides" (ibid.). Commodities—"things" produced—would thus have the respect due the uniform, majesty, paternal authority. And even God. "The fact that it is value, is made manifest by its equality with the coat, just as the sheep's nature of a Christian is shown in his resemblance to the Lamb of God" (ibid.).

Commodities thus share in the cult of the father, and never stop striving to resemble, to copy, the one who is his representative. It is from that resemblance, from that imitation of what represents paternal authority, that commodities draw their value—for men. But it is upon commodities that the producers-exchangers bring to bear this power play. "We see, then, all that our analysis of the value of commodities has already told us, is told us by the linen itself, so soon as it comes into communication with another commodity, the coat. Only it betrays its thoughts in that language with which alone it is familiar, the language of commodities. In order to tell us that its own value is created by labour in its abstract character of human labour, it says that the coat, in so far as it is worth as much as the linen, and therefore is value, consists of the same labour as the linen. In order to inform us that its sublime reality as value is not the same as its buckram body, it says that value has the appearance of a coat, and consequently that so far as the linen is value, it and the coat are as like as two peas. We may here remark, that the language of commodities has, besides Hebrew, many other more or less correct dialects. The German 'werthsein,' to be worth, for instance, expresses in a less striking manner than the Romance verbs 'valere,' 'valer,' 'valoir,' that the equating of commodity B to commodity A, is commodity A's own mode of expressing its value. Paris vaut bien une messe" (pp. 60–61).

So commodities speak. To be sure, mostly dialects and patois, languages hard for "subjects" to understand. The important thing is that they be preoccupied with their respective values, that their remarks confirm the exchangers' plans for them.

The body of a commodity thus becomes, for another such commodity, a mirror of its value. Contingent upon a bodily *supplement.* A supplement *opposed* to use value, a supplement representing the commodity's *super-natural* quality (an imprint that is purely social in nature), a supplement completely different from the body itself, and from its properties, a supplement that nevertheless exists only on condition that one commodity agrees to relate itself to another considered as equivalent: "For instance, one man is king only because other men stand in the relation of subjects to him" (p. 66, n. 1).

This supplement of equivalency translates concrete work into abstract work. In other words, in order to be able to incorporate itself into a mirror of value, it is necessary that the work itself reflect only its property of human labor: that the body of a commodity be nothing more than the materialization of an abstract human labor. That is, that it have no more body, matter, nature, but that it be objectivization, a crystallization as visible object, of man's activity.

In order to become equivalent, a commodity changes bodies. A super-natural, metaphysical origin is substituted for its material origin. Thus its body becomes a transparent body, *pure phenomenality of value.* But this transparency constitutes a supplement to the material opacity of the commodity.

Once again there is a schism between the two. Two sides, two poles, nature and society are divided, like the perceptible and the intelligible, matter and form, the empirical and the transcendental . . . The commodity, like the sign, suffers from metaphysical dichotomies. Its value, its truth, lies in the social element. But this social element is added on to its nature, to its matter, and the social subordinates it as a lesser value, indeed as nonvalue. Par-

ticipation in society requires that the body submit itself to a specularization, a speculation, that transforms it into a value-bearing object, a standardized sign, an exchangeable signifier, a "likeness" with reference to an authoritative model. *A commodity—a woman—is divided into two irreconcilable "bodies"*:her "natural" body and her socially valued, exchangeable body, which is a particularly mimetic expression of masculine values. No doubt these values also express "nature," that is, the expenditure of physical force. But this latter—essentially masculine, moreover—serves for the fabrication, the transformation, the technicization of natural productions. And it is this *super*-natural property that comes to constitute the value of the product. Analyzing value in this way, Marx exposes the meta-physical character of social operations.

The commodity is thus a dual entity as soon as its value comes to possess a phenomenal form of its own, distinct from its natural form: that of exchange value. And it never possesses this form if it is considered in isolation. A commodity has this phenomenal form added on to its nature only in relation to another commodity.

As among signs, value appears only when a relationship has been established. It remains the case that the establishment of relationships cannot be accomplished by the commodities themselves, but depends upon the operation of two exchangers. The exchange value of two signs, two commodities, two women, is a representation of the needs/desires of consumer-exchanger subjects: in no way is it the "property" of the signs/articles/women themselves. At the most, the commodities—or rather the relationships among them—are the material alibi for the desire for relations among men. To this end, the commodity is disinvested of its body and reclothed in a form that makes it suitable for exchange among men.

But, in this value-bearing form, the desire for that exchange, and the reflection of his own value and that of his fellow man

that man seeks in it, are ek-stasized. In that suspension in the commodity of the relationship among men, producer-consumer-exchanger subjects are alienated. In order that they might "bear" and support that alienation, commodities for their part have always been dispossessed of their specific value. On this basis, one may affirm that the value of the commodity takes on *indifferently* any given form of use value. The price of the articles, in fact, no longer comes from *their* natural form, from *their* bodies, *their* language, but from the fact that they mirror the need/desire for exchanges among men. To do this, the commodity obviously cannot exist alone, but there is no such thing as a commodity, either, so long as there are not *at least two men* to make an exchange. In order for a product—a woman?—to have value, two men, at least, have to invest (in) her.

The general equivalent of a commodity no longer functions as a commodity itself. A preeminent mirror, transcending the world of merchandise, it guarantees the possibility of universal exchange among commodities. Each commodity may become equivalent to every other from the viewpoint of that sublime standard, but the fact that the judgment of their value depends upon some transcendental element renders them provisionally incapable of being directly exchanged for each other. They are exchanged by means of the general equivalent—as Christians love each other in God, to borrow a theological metaphor dear to Marx.

That ek-static reference separates them radically from each other. *An abstract and universal value preserves them from use and exchange among themselves.* They are, as it were, transformed into value-invested idealities. Their concrete forms, their specific qualities, and all the possibilities of "real" relations with them or among them are reduced to their common character as products of man's labor and desire.

We must emphasize also that *the general equivalent,* since it is

no longer a commodity, *is no longer useful. The standard as such is exempt from use.*

Though a commodity may at first sight appear to be "a very trivial thing, and easily understood, . . . it is, in reality, a very queer thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties" (p. 81). No doubt, "so far as it is a value in use, there is nothing mysterious about it. . . . But, so soon as [a wooden table, for example] steps forth as a commodity, it is changed into something transcendent. It not only stands with its feet on the ground, but, in relation to all other commodities, it stands on its head, and evolves out of its wooden brain grotesque ideas, far more wonderful than 'table-turning' ever was" (pp. 81–82).

"The mystical character of commodities does not originate, therefore, in their use value. Just as little does it proceed from the nature of the determining factors of value. For, in the first place, however varied the useful kinds of labour, or productive activities, may be, it is a physiological fact, that they are functions of the human organism" (p. 82), which, for Marx, does not seem to constitute a mystery in any way . . . The material contribution and support of bodies in societal operations pose no problems for him, except as production and expenditure of energy.

Where, then, does the enigmatic character of the product of labor come from, as soon as this product takes on the form of a commodity? It comes, obviously, from that form itself. *Then where does the enigmatic character of women come from?* Or even that of their supposed relations among themselves? Obviously, from the "form" of the needs/desires of man, needs/desires that women bring to light although men do not recognize them in that form. That form, those women, are always enveloped, veiled.

In any case, "the existence of things *qua* commodities, and the value relation between the products of labour which stamps

them as commodities, have absolutely no connection with their physical properties and with the material relations arising therefrom. [With commodities] it is a definite social relation between men, that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things" (p. 83). *This phenomenon has no analogy except in the religious world.* "In that world the productions of the human brain appear as independent beings endowed with life, and entering into relation both with one another and the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men's hands" (ibid.). Hence the fetishism attached to these products of labor as soon as they present themselves as commodities.

Hence *women's role as fetish-objects,* inasmuch as, in exchanges, they are the manifestation and the circulation of a power of the Phallus, establishing relationships of men with each other?

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Hence the following remarks:

On value.

It represents the equivalent of labor force, of an expenditure of energy, of toil. In order to be measured, these latter must be *abstracted* from all immediately natural qualities, from any concrete individual. A process of generalization and of universalization imposes itself in the operation of social exchanges. Hence the reduction of man to a "concept"—that of his labor force—and the reduction of his product to an "object," the visible, material correlative of that concept.

The characteristics of "sexual pleasure" corresponding to such a social state are thus the following: its productivity, but one that is necessarily laborious, even painful; its abstract form; its need/desire to crystallize in a transcendental element of wealth

the standard of all value; its need for a material support where the relation of appropriation to and of that standard is measured; its exchange relationships—always rivalrous—among men alone, and so on.

Are not these modalities the ones that might define the economy of (so-called) *masculine sexuality?* And is libido not another name for the abstraction of "energy" in a productive power? For the work of nature? Another name for the desire to accumulate goods? Another name for the subordination of the specific qualities of bodies to a—neutral?—power that aims above all to transform them in order to possess them? Does pleasure, for masculine sexuality, consist in anything other than the appropriation of nature, in the desire to make it (re)produce, and in exchanges of its/these products with other members of society? An essentially *economic* pleasure.

Thus the following question: *what needs/desires of (so-called) masculine sexuality have presided over the evolution of a certain social order,* from its primitive form, private property, to its developed form, capital? But also: *to what extent are these needs/desires the effect of a social mechanism,* in part autonomous, that produces them as such?

On the status of women in such a social order.

What makes such an order possible, what assures its foundation, is thus *the exchange of women.* The circulation of women among men is what establishes the operations of society, at least of patriarchal society. Whose presuppositions include the following: the appropriation of nature by man; the transformation of nature according to "human" criteria, defined by men alone; the submission of nature to labor and technology; the reduction of its material, corporeal, perceptible qualities to man's practical concrete activity; the equality of women among themselves, but in terms of laws of equivalence that remain external to

them; the constitution of women as "objects" that emblematize the materialization of relations among men, and so on.

In such a social order, women thus represent a natural value and a social value. Their "development" lies in the passage from one to the other. But this passage never takes place simply.

As mother, woman remains on the side of (re)productive *nature* and, because of this, man can never fully transcend his relation to the "natural." His social existence, his economic structures and his sexuality are always tied to the work of nature: these structures thus always remain at the level of the earliest appropriation, that of the constitution of nature as landed property, and of the earliest labor, which is agricultural. But this relationship to productive nature, an insurmountable one, has to be denied so that relations among men may prevail. This means that mothers, reproductive instruments marked with the name of the father and enclosed in his house, must be private property, excluded from exchange. The *incest taboo* represents this refusal to allow productive nature to enter into exchanges among men. As both natural value and use value, mothers cannot circulate in the form of commodities without threatening the very existence of the social order. Mothers are essential to its (re)production (particularly inasmuch as they are [re]productive of children and of the labor force: through maternity, child-rearing, and domestic maintenance in general). Their responsibility is to maintain the social order without intervening so as to change it. Their products are legal tender in that order, moreover, only if they are marked with the name of the father, only if they are recognized within his law: that is, only insofar as they are appropriated by him. Society is the place where man engenders himself, where man produces himself as man, where man is born into "human," "super-natural" existence.

The virginal woman, on the other hand, is pure exchange value. She is nothing but the possibility, the place, the sign of relations among men. In and of herself, she does not exist: she is a simple envelope veiling what is really at stake in social exchange. In this sense, her natural body disappears into its representative function. *Red blood* remains on the mother's side, but it has no price, as such, in the social order; woman, for her part, as medium of exchange, is no longer anything but *semblance*. The ritualized passage from woman to mother is accomplished by the *violation of an envelope:* the hymen, which has taken on the value of *taboo,* the taboo of virginity. Once deflowered, woman is relegated to the status of use value, to her entrapment in private property; she is removed from exchange among men.

The *prostitute* remains to be considered. Explicitly condemned by the social order, she is implicitly tolerated. No doubt because the break between usage and exchange is, in her case, less clear-cut? In her case, the qualities of woman's body are "useful." However, these qualities have "value" only because they have already been appropriated by a man, and because they serve as the locus of relations—hidden ones—between men. Prostitution amounts to *usage that is exchanged.* Usage that is not merely potential: it has already been realized. The woman's body is valuable because it has already been used. In the extreme case, the more it has served, the more it is worth. Not because its natural assets have been put to use this way, but, on the contrary, because its nature has been "used up," and has become once again no more than a vehicle for relations among men.

Mother, virgin, prostitute: these are the social roles imposed on women. The characteristics of (so-called) feminine sexuality derive from them: the valorization of reproduction and nursing; faithfulness; modesty, ignorance of and even lack of interest in sexual pleasure; a passive acceptance of men's "activity"; seductiveness, in order to arouse the consumers' desire while offering

herself as its material support without getting pleasure herself . . . *Neither as mother nor as virgin nor as prostitute has woman any right to her own pleasure.*

Of course the theoreticians of sexuality are sometimes astonished by women's frigidity. But, according to them, this frigidity is explained more by an impotence inherent to feminine "nature" than by the submission of that nature to a certain type of society. However, *what is required of a "normal" feminine sexuality is oddly evocative of the characteristics of the status of a commodity*. With references to and rejections of the "natural"—physiological and organic nature, and so on—that are equally ambiguous.

And, in addition:

—just as nature has to be subjected to man in order to become a commodity, so, it appears, does "the development of a normal woman." A development that amounts, for the feminine, to subordination to the forms and laws of masculine activity. The rejection of the mother—imputed to woman—would find its "cause" here;

—just as, in commodities, natural utility is overridden by the exchange function, so the properties of a woman's body have to be suppressed and subordinated to the exigencies of its transformation into an object of circulation among men;

—just as a commodity has no mirror it can use to reflect itself, so woman serves as reflection, as image of and for man, but lacks specific qualities of her own. Her value-invested form amounts to what man inscribes in and on its matter: that is, her body;

—just as commodities cannot make exchanges among themselves without the intervention of a subject that measures them

against a standard, so it is with women. Distinguished, divided, separated, classified as like and unlike, according to whether they have been judged exchangeable. In themselves, among themselves, they are amorphous and confused: natural body, maternal body, doubtless useful to the consumer, but without any possible identity or communicable value;

—just as commodities, despite their resistance, become more or less autonomous repositories for the value of human work, so, as mirrors of and for man, women more or less unwittingly come to represent the danger of a disappropriation of masculine power: the phallic mirage;

—just as a commodity finds the expression of its value in an equivalent—in the last analysis, a general one—that necessarily remains external to it, so woman derives her price from her relation to the male sex, constituted as a transcendental value: the phallus. And indeed the enigma of "value" lies in the most elementary relation among commodities. Among women. For, uprooted from their "nature," they no longer relate to each other except in terms of what they represent in men's desire, and according to the "forms" that this imposes upon them. Among themselves, they are separated by his speculations.

This means that the division of "labor"—sexual labor in particular—requires that woman maintain in her own body the material substratum of the object of desire, but that she herself never have access to desire. The economy of desire—of exchange—is man's business. And that economy subjects women to a schism that is necessary to symbolic operations: red blood/semblance; body/value-invested envelope; matter/medium of exchange; (re)productive nature/fabricated femininity . . . That schism—characteristic of all speaking nature, someone will surely object—is experienced by women without any possible profit to them. And without any way for them to

transcend it. They are not even "conscious" of it. The symbolic system that cuts them in two this way is in no way appropriate to them. In them, "semblance" remains external, foreign to "nature." *Socially,* they are "objects" for and among men and furthermore they cannot do anything but mimic a "language" that they have not produced; *naturally,* they remain amorphous, suffering from drives without any possible representatives or representations. For them, the transformation of the natural into the social does not take place, except to the extent that they function as components of private property, or as commodities.

Characteristics of this social order

This type of social system can be interpreted as *the practical realization of the meta-physical.* As the *practical destiny* of the meta-physical, it would also represent its *most fully realized form.* Operating in such a way, moreover, that subjects themselves, being implicated in it through and through, being produced in it as concepts, would lack the means to analyze it. Except in an after-the-fact way whose delays are yet to be fully measured . . .

This practical realization of the meta-physical has as its founding operation the appropriation of woman's body by the father or his substitutes. It is marked by women's submission to a system of general equivalents, the proper name representing the father's monopoly of power. It is from this standardization that women receive their value, as they pass from the state of nature to the status of social object. This trans-formation of women's bodies into use values and exchange values inaugurates the symbolic order. But that order depends upon a *nearly pure added value.* Women, animals endowed with speech like men, assure the possibility of the use and circulation of the symbolic without being recipients of it. Their nonaccess to the symbolic is what has established the social order. Putting men in touch with each other, in relations among themselves, wom-

en only fulfill this role by relinquishing their right to speech and even to animality. No longer in the natural order, not yet in the social order that they nonetheless maintain, women are the symptom of the exploitation of individuals by a society that remunerates them only partially, or even not at all, for their "work." Unless subordination to a system that utilizes you and oppresses you should be considered as sufficient compensation . . . ? Unless the fact that women are branded with the proper name—of the "father"—should be viewed as the symbolic payment awarded them for sustaining the social order with their bodies?

But by submitting women's bodies to a general equivalent, to a transcendent, super-natural value, men have drawn the social structure into an ever greater process of abstraction, to the point where they themselves are produced in it as pure concepts: having surmounted all their "perceptible" qualities and individual differences, they are finally reduced to the average productivity of their labor. The power of this practical economy of the meta-physical comes from the fact that "physiological" energy is transformed into abstract value without the mediation of an intelligible elaboration. No individual subject can be credited any longer with bringing about this transformation. It is only after the fact that the subject might possibly be able to analyze his determination as such by the social structure. And even then it is not certain that his love of gold would not make him give up everything else before he would renounce the cult of this fetish. "The saver thus sacrifices to this fetish all the penchants of his flesh. No one takes the gospel of renunciation more seriously than he."

Fortunately—if we may say so—women/commodities would remain, as simple "objects" of transaction among men. Their situation of specific exploitation in exchange operations—sexual exchange, and economic, social, and cultural ex-

changes in general—might lead them to offer a new critique of the political economy." *A critique that would no longer avoid that of discourse, and more generally of the symbolic system, in which it is realized.* Which would lead to interpreting in a different way the impact of symbolic social labor in the analysis of relations of production.

For, without the exploitation of women, what would become of the social order? What modifications would it undergo if women left behind their condition as commodities—subject to being produced, consumed, valorized, circulated, and so on, by men alone—and took part in elaborating and carrying out exchanges? Not by reproducing, by copying, the "phallocratic" models that have the force of law today, but by socializing in a different way the relation to nature, matter, the body, language, and desire.

MEMOIR

I was born cautious, under the sign of Taurus.
I grew up on an island, prosperous,
in the second half of the twentieth century;
the shadow of the Holocaust
hardly touched us.

I had a philosophy of love, a philosophy
of religion, both based on
early experience within a family.

And if when I wrote I used only a few words
it was because time always seemed to me short
as though it could be stripped away
at any moment.

And my story, in any case, wasn't unique
though, like everyone else, I had a story,
a point of view.

A few words were all I needed:
nourish, sustain, attack.

freaks and queers

I. NAMING

Handicapped. A disabled person sits on the street, begging for her next meal. This is how we survived in Europe and the United States as cities grew big and the economy moved from a land base to an industrial base. We were beggars, caps in hand. This is how some of us still survive. Seattle, 1989: a white man sits on the sidewalk, leaning against an iron fence. He smells of whiskey and urine, his body wrapped in torn cloth. His legs are toothpick-thin, knees bent inward. Beside him leans a set of crutches. A Styrofoam cup, half full of coins, sits on the sidewalk in front of him. Puget Sound stretches out behind him, water sparkling in the sun. Tourists bustle by. He strains his head up, trying to catch their eyes. Cap in hand. *Handicapped.*[1]

Disabled. The car stalled in the left lane of traffic is disabled. Or alternatively, the broad stairs curving into a public building disable the man in a wheelchair. That word used as a noun (the *disabled* or people with *disabilities),* an adjective *(disabled* people), a verb (the

accident *disabled* her): in all its forms it means "unable," but where does our inability lie? Are our bodies like stalled cars? Or does disability live in the social and physical environment, in the stairs that have no accompanying ramp? I think about language. I often call nondisabled people able-bodied, or when I'm feeling confrontational, *temporarily* able-bodied. But if I call myself disabled in order to describe how the ableist world treats me as a person with cerebral palsy, then shouldn't I call nondisabled people *enabled?* That word locates the condition of being nondisabled, not in the nondisabled body, but in the world's reaction to that body. This is not a semantic game.

Cripple. The woman who walks with a limp, the kid who uses braces, the man with gnarly hands hear the word *cripple* every day in a hostile nondisabled world. At the same time, we in the disability rights movement create crip culture, tell crip jokes, identify a sensibility we call crip humor. Nancy Mairs writes:

> I am a cripple. I choose this word to name me.... People—crippled or not—wince at the word *cripple,* as they do not at *handicapped* or *disabled.* Perhaps I want them to wince. I want them to see me as a tough customer, one to whom the fates/gods/viruses have not been kind, but who can face the brutal truth of her existence squarely. As a cripple, I swagger.[1]

Gimp. Slang meaning "to limp." *Gimp* comes from the word *gammy,* which hobos in the 18th century used among themselves to describe dangerous or unwelcoming places. Hobo to hobo, passing on the road: "Don't go there. It's gammy." Insider language, hobo solidarity. And now a few centuries later, one disabled person greets another, "Hey, gimp. How ya doin?" Insider language, gimp solidarity.

Retard. I learned early that words could bruise a body. I have been called *retard* too many times, that word sliding off the tongues of doctors, classmates, neighbors, teachers, well-meaning strangers on the street. In the years before my speech became understandable, I was universally assumed to be "mentally retarded." When I started school, the teachers wanted me in the "special education" program.

My parents insisted I be given yet another set of diagnostic tests, including an IQ test, and I—being a white kid who lived in a house full of books, ideas, and grammar-school English, being a disabled kid who had finally learned how to talk—scored well. They let me join the "regular" first grade. I worked overtime to prove those test results right. Still I was *retard, monkey, defect* on the playground, in the streets, those words hurled at my body, accompanied by rocks and rubber erasers. Even at home, I heard their echoes. My father told me more than once to stop walking like a *monkey.* My mother often talked about my birth *defect.* Words bruise a body more easily than rocks and rubber erasers.

Differently abled, physically challenged. Nondisabled people, wanting to cushion us from the cruelty of language, invented these euphemisms. In explaining her choice of the word *cripple,* Nancy Mairs writes:

> *Differently abled* ... partakes of the same semantic hopefulness that transformed countries from *undeveloped* to *underdeveloped,* then to *less developed,* and finally *developing* nations. People have continued to starve in those countries during the shift. Some realities do not obey the dictates of language.[3]

Differently abled is simply easier to say, easier to think about than *disabled* or *handicapped* or *crippled.*

Freak. I hold fast to my dictionary, but the definitions slip and slide, tell half stories. I have to stop here. *Freak* forces me to think about naming.

Handicapped, disabled, cripple, gimp, retard, differently abled. I understand my relationship to each of these words. I scoff at *handicapped,* a word I grew up believing my parents had invented specifically to describe me, my parents who were deeply ashamed of my cerebral palsy and desperately wanted to find a cure. I use the word *disabled* as an adjective to name what this ableist world does to us crips and gimps. *Cripple* makes me flinch; it too often accompanied the sticks and stones on my grade school playground, but I love crip humor, the audacity of turning *cripple* into a word of pride.

Gimp sings a friendly song, full of irony and understanding. *Retard* on the other hand draws blood every time, a sharp, sharp knife. In the world as it should be, maybe disabled people would be *differently abled:* a world where Braille and audio-recorded editions of books and magazines were a matter of course, and hearing people signed ASL; a world where schools were fully integrated, health care, free and unrationed; a world where universal access meant exactly that; a world where disabled people were not locked up at home or in nursing homes, relegated to sheltered employment and paid sweatshop wages. But, in the world as it is, *differently abled, physically challenged* tell a wishful lie.

Handicapped, disabled, cripple, gimp, retard, differently abled, freak. I need to stop here. Freak I don't understand. It unsettles me. I don't quite like it, can't imagine using it as some politicized disabled people do. Yet I want *freak* to be as easy as the words *queer* and *cripple.*

Queer, like *cripple,* is an ironic and serious word I use to describe myself and others in my communities. *Queer* speaks volumes about who I am, my life as a dyke, my relationship to the dominant culture. Because of when I came out—more than a decade after the Stonewall Rebellion—and where—into a highly politicized urban dyke community—queer has always been easy for me. I adore its defiant external edge, its comfortable internal truth. *Queer* belongs to me. So does *cripple* for many of the same reasons. *Queer* and *cripple* are cousins: words to shock, words to infuse with pride and self-love, words to resist internalized hatred, words to help forge a politics. They have been gladly chosen—*queer* by many gay, lesbian, bi, and trans peoples, *cripple,* or *crip,* by many disabled people.

Freak is another story. Unlike *queer* and *crip,* it has not been widely embraced in my communities.[4] For me *freak* has a hurtful, scary edge; it takes *queer* and *cripple* one step too far; it doesn't feel good or liberating.

This profusion of words and their various relationships to marginalized people and politicized communities fascinates me.

Which words get embraced, which don't, and why? *Queer* but not *pervert*. *Cripple*, and sometimes *freak*, but not *retard*. Like most of the ugly and demeaning words used to batter and bait marginalized peoples—racist, sexist, classist, ableist, homophobic slurs—*pervert* and *retard* nearly burst with hurt and bitterness, anger and reminders of self-hatred.[5] I doubt LGBT communities and the disability communities respectively will ever claim those words as our own. In contrast *crip*, *queer*, and *freak* have come to sit on a cusp. For some of us, they carry too much grief. For others, they can be chosen with glee and pride. *Queer* and *crip* are mine but not *freak*, and I want to know why. What is it about that word? What bitterness, what pain, does it hold that *cripple*, with its connotations of pitiful, broken bodies, and *queer*, with its sweeping definitions of normality and abnormality, do not? I want to unravel *freak*, to pull on the thread called history.*

II. FREAK SHOW

The history of freakdom extends far back into western civilization. The court jester, the pet dwarf, the exhibition of humans in Renaissance England, the myths of giants, minotaurs, and monsters all point to this long history, which reached a pinnacle in the mid-1800s to mid-1900s. During that century, freaks were big entertainment and big business. Freak shows populated the United

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* Since 1999, I've been taken to task by folks in BDSM and leather communities more than once for my analysis of the word *pervert*. In my 1999 endnotes, I try to soften my analysis by claiming that the word hasn't been "used to construct both individual and communal identities." But my reasoning is exactly wrong when seen from inside BDSM communities where claiming *pervert* has in truth been central to building a communal identity. The ways I have misread the word as an outsider to the BDSM world is a great example of how reclaiming the ugly words has so much to do with context. My original intent to find words in LGBT communities that were analogous to the word *retard* in disability communities becomes extraordinarily complex.—E.C., 2009

States, and people flocked to the circus, the carnival, the storefront dime museum. They came to gawk at "freaks," "savages," and "geeks." They came to be educated and entertained, titillated and repulsed. They came to have their ideas of normal and abnormal, superior and inferior, their sense of self, confirmed and strengthened. And gawk they did. But who were they gawking at? This is where I want to start.

Whatever these paying customers—*rubes* in circus lingo—believed, they were not staring at freaks of nature. Rather, the freak show tells the story of an elaborate and calculated social construction that utilized performance and fabrication as well as deeply held cultural beliefs. At the center of this construction is the showman, who, using costuming, staging, elaborate fictional histories, marketing, and choreography, turned people from four groups into freaks. First, disabled people, both white people and people of color, became Armless Wonders, Frog Men, Giants, Midgets, Pinheads, Camel Girls, Wild Men of Borneo, and the like. Second, nondisabled people of color—bought, persuaded, forced, and kidnapped to the United States from colonized countries all over the world—became Cannibals and Savages. Third, nondisabled people of color from the United States became Natives from the Exotic Wilds. And fourth, nondisabled people with visible differences—bearded women, fat women, very thin men, people covered with tattoos, intersex people—became wondrous and horrifying exhibits. Cultural critic and disability theorist Rosemarie Garland Thomson argues that the differences among these sometimes overlapping groups of people melded together:

> Perhaps the freak show's most remarkable effect was to eradicate distinctions among a wide variety of bodies, conflating them under a single sign of the freak-as-other.... [A]ll the bodily characteristics that seemed different or threatening to the dominant order merged into a kind of motley chorus line of physical difference on the freak show stage.... [A] nondisabled person of color billed as the "Fiji Cannibal" was equivalent to a physically disabled Euro-American called the "Legless Wonder."[6]

In the eyes of many rubes, particularly white and/or nondisabled folks, the freak show probably was one big melting pot of difference and otherness. At the same time, the differences among the various groups of people who worked as freaks remain important to understanding the freak show in its entirety. But whatever the differences, all four groups held one thing in common: nature did not make them into freaks. The freak show did, carefully constructing an exaggerated divide between "normal" and Other, sustained in turn by rubes willing to pay good money to stare.

Hiram and Barney Davis performed wildly for their audiences, snapping, snarling, talking gibberish from stage. The handbill sold in conjunction with their display described in lengthy, imagined detail "What We Know About Waino and Plutano, the Wild Men of Borneo." In reality Hiram and Barney were white, cognitively disabled brothers from an immigrant farm family who lived in Ohio. Their mother, after many offers which she refused, finally sold them to a persistent showman for a wash pan full of gold and silver. Off-stage Hiram and Barney were quiet, unassuming men. In one photo they stand flanking their manager Hanford Lyman. Their hair falls past their shoulders; they sport neatly trimmed goatees; Hiram folds his hands in front of him; Barney cocks his hands on his hips; they look mildly and directly into the camera.

Ann Thompson, a white woman born without arms, posed as "The Armless Wonder." From stage she signed and sold photographs as souvenirs, writing with her toes sayings like, "So you perceive it's really true, when hands are lacking, toes will do," or more piously, "Indolence and ease are the rust of the mind." In her autobiography, which she hawked along with her photos and trinkets, Ann presented herself as a respectable, religious lady. In one photo, she sits beside her husband and son, all of them wearing formal Victorian clothing.

William Johnson, a cognitively disabled African American man from New Jersey, became the "What Is It?" the "missing link," the "Monkey Man." He wore hairy ape-like costumes, shaved his head bald except for a little tuft at the very top, and posed in front

of a jungle backdrop. The showmen at P. T. Barnum's American Museum in New York City described William as "a most singular animal, which though it has many of the features and characteristics of both the human and the brute, is not, apparently, either, but in appearance, a mixture of both-the connecting link between humanity and brute creation."[7] Although the way in which he came to the freak show is unknown—Barnum may have bought him at a young age and coerced him into performing at first—William died in his 80s at home, a rich and well-liked man, referred to, by his co-workers, as the "dean of freaks."

Charles Stratton, a working-class short person—*dwarf* in medical terminology—from Connecticut worked the freak show as General Tom Thumb. He played the role of a European aristocrat, complete with resplendent suits, a miniature carriage pulled by ponies, and meetings with rich and famous people around the world, becoming in the process a rich man himself. When Charles and Mercy Lavinia Warren Bump, a short woman who also worked the freak show, fell in love and decided to get married, P. T. Barnum set out, in an extravagant example of showmanship, to turn their wedding into a huge media spectacle. He was successful; 2,000 people attended the event, and the *New York Times* ran a full-page story, headlined "Loving Lilliputians." Charles and Mercy played their roles and used the publicity to springboard another European tour.

Two Congolese men and thirteen Congolese women, wearing large, heavy jewelry in their pierced lips, were bought by circus agent Ludwig Bergonnier and shipped from Africa to the United States. The poster advertising their display in the Ringling Brothers Circus freak show proclaimed them "Genuine Monster-Mouthed Ubangi Savages World's Most Weird Living Humans from Africa's Darkest Depths." The women were forced to wear only gunny sack skirts; the men, given only loincloths, carried spears. Ubangi was a name randomly pulled off a map of Africa and had no relationship to where these women and men had actually lived. Their real names and actual homeland are unknown.

The Davis brothers, Thompson, Johnson, Stratton, the now

unknown African men and women did not slide into the world as infant freaks. They were made freaks, socially constructed for the purposes of entertainment and profit. This construction depended not only upon the showmanship of the "freaks" and their managers. It also capitalized on the eagerness of rubes to gawk at freaks and on the ableism and racism, which made the transitions from disabled white person, disabled person of color, nondisabled person of color, to freak even possible. Without this pair of oppressive ideologies, the attendant fear and hatred of all disabled people and all people of color, and the desire to create an Other against whom one could gauge her/his normality, who could ever believe for even one farcical moment that William Johnson was Darwin's missing link; Barney Davis, a wild man from Borneo; Ann Thompson, an armless wonder?

Ann, in that photo of you with your husband and son, you sit on a rug decorated with crosses, a rug you crocheted. The showmen made a big deal of your dexterity. But did you learn to crochet as a freak show stunt? Or did you, like so many women of your time, sew and knit, embroider and crochet, simply as a necessity and a pastime?

Within this context of ableism and racism, the people who worked the freak show did not live only as victims. Many of the "freaks" themselves—particularly those who were not cognitively disabled or brought to the United States from Africa, Asia, South and Central America, the Pacific islands, and the Caribbean—controlled their own acts and displays, working alongside their managers to shape profitable shows. Many of them made decent livings; some, like Charles Stratton, Mercy Lavinia Warren Bump, and William Johnson, even became wealthy. When P. T. Barnum lost all his money in a bad business deal, Stratton came out of semi-retirement and rescued him by agreeing to go on yet another lucrative European tour. Others, like the Hilton sisters, conjoined twins who worked in the mid-1900s, became their own managers, or, like Bump and her Lilliputian Opera Company, formed their own performing groups, which were employed by dime museums and traveling vaudeville companies. In other words, white, nondisabled freak show owners

and managers didn't only exploit "their freaks." The two groups also colluded together to dupe the audience, to make a buck off the rube's gullibility. Within the subculture of the freak show, rubes were understood as exploited victims—explicitly lied to, charged outrageous sums for mere trinkets, pickpocketed, or merely given incorrect change at the ticket counter.

Charles, there is a picture of you, taken during a visit with the Queen of England. You have a miniature sword drawn and are staging a fight with a poodle. Your wife, Mercy, writes of embarrassment and outrage. Of presidential candidate Stephen Douglas, she remembers: "He expressed great pleasure at again seeing me, and as I stood before him he took my hand and, drawing me toward him, stooped to kiss me. I instinctively drew back, feeling my face suffused with blushes. It seemed impossible to make people at first understand that I was not a child."[8] *Did you share her embarrassment and outrage as you faced that poodle? Or did you and Barnum laugh long and hard as you concocted your stunts?*

The questions about exploitation are complicated; simple answers collapse easily. Robert Bogdan in his history *Freak Show* excerpts a letter he received from freak show manager Ward Hall: "I exhibited freaks and exploited them for years. Now you are going to exploit them. The difference between authors and the news media, and the freak show operators is that we paid them." Bogdan comments, "[Hall's] use of the word *exploit* was playful. He does not think he exploited them. He had a business relationship, complete with contract, with his troupe of human oddities. His livelihood depended on them, as theirs did on him. He had no pretensions of doing good...."[9] Although Bogdan chronicles the social construction of freaks in amazing detail and refuses to situate the people who worked the freak shows as passive victims, I believe he is reaching toward a simple answer to the question of exploitation.

Hall's exploitation of people who worked as freaks may not

have revolved around ableism and racism. Maybe he wasn't acting out of fear and hatred of disabled people and people of color, out of his internal psychological sense and the external legislated reality of privilege. And then again, maybe he was. But most certainly, like all the people who profited from the freak show, he used ableism and racism to his benefit. This use of oppression by white, nondisabled businessmen is common, fraught, and ultimately unacceptable. In his letter, Hall explicitly casts himself as a boss exploiting his workers, placing the freak show within the context of capitalism. Bogdan defends Hall in a backhanded way when he writes: "[Hall] had no pretensions of doing good." But since when do bosses in most profit-making business have real pretensions of doing good by their workers? Doing good may be a byproduct of making profit, but only a byproduct. Is Hall any less exploitative because he was acting as a boss rather than, or in addition to, a racist white person and an ableist nondisabled person?

Any estimation of exploitation in the freak show needs to also include Hall and "his troupe of human oddities" colluding together to exploit the rube. Sometimes this exploitation carried with it a sense of absurdity, a sense that the rubes would believe anything, that they were simple, gullible fools. Other times this exploitation was pure thievery, the sideshow creating situations in which it was easy to steal the rube's money. But to cast the audience only as victim neglects the very real ways in which the freak show bolstered white people's and nondisabled people's sense of superiority and well-being. The social construction of freaks always relied upon the perceived gap between a rube's normality and a freak's abnormality. Unsurprisingly, normality was defined exclusively in terms of whiteness and able-bodiedness.

The complexities of exploitation pile up, layer upon layer. White people and nondisabled people used racism and ableism to turn a profit. The freak show managers and owners were bosses and as such had power over their workers, the people who worked as freaks. Boss and worker together consciously manipulated their audience. That same audience willingly used lies to strengthen its

own self-image. Given this maze of relationships, I have trouble accepting the assessment that exploitation in the freak show, if it existed at all, wasn't truly serious. Rather, I believe it exerted influence in many directions.

Working as a freak never meant working in a respectful, liberating environment, but then disabled people had no truly respectful and liberating options available to them in the mid-1800s. They could beg in the streets. They could survive in almshouses, where, as reformer Dorothea Dix put it, mentally ill people and developmentally disabled people lived "in cages, closets, cellars, stalls, pens! Chained naked, beaten with rods, and lashed into obedience."[10] They could live behind closed doors with their families. Consider William Johnson. As a Black, cognitively disabled man who apparently had no surviving family, he had few options. P. T. Barnum found William's counterpart, the woman displayed as the female "What Is It?," abandoned in an outhouse, covered with shit, left to die. In a world such as this, where the freak show existed alongside the street, the almshouse, the outhouse, William's position as the "dean of freaks," although dehumanizing in a number of ways, doesn't look so bad.

William, late after the exhibits had closed, the rubes gone home, did you and your friends gather backstage to party, passing a bottle of whiskey round and round? Did you entertain some more, pull out your fiddle and play silly squeaky songs? Or did you sit back and listen to one joke after another until you were breathless with laughter?

In many ways working as a freak was similar to working as a prostitute. Cultural worker and working-class scholar Joe Kadi writes, "Left-wing working-class analysis ... situates prostitution within the context of capitalism (one more *really* lousy job), celebrates the women who survive, thumbs its nose at the moralistic middle-class attitudes that condemn without understanding, and relays the women's stories and perspectives."[11] This same theoretical and political framework can be used to examine the job of freak. Clearly, working as a freak meant working a lousy job, many times the *only* job available, in a hostile ableist and racist world. Some-

times the job was lousier than others. The African women and men who performed as "Ubangi savages" made a nickel on every photograph they sold, nothing else; whereas their manager, Ludwig Bergonnier, made $1,500 a week renting "his display" to the Ringling Brothers Circus. In contrast, Charles Stratton became rich, owning a horse farm and a yacht. Still others, like William Johnson, found community among the people who worked the freak show.

You who ended up in the history books named only "Ubangi Savages," no names of your own: night after night, you paraded around the circus tent, air sticky against your bare skin, burlap prickly against your covered skin. Did you come to hate Bergonnier?

What did the people who worked as freaks think of their jobs, their lives? I want to hear their stories, but like the stories of other marginalized people, they were most often never told, but rather eaten up, thrown away, lost in the daily grind of survival. Some of these people didn't read or write, due to their particular disabilities or to the material/social circumstances of their lives. Or, as in the case of many of the people brought here from other countries, they didn't speak English and/or didn't come from cultures that passed stories through the written word. A few people who worked the freak show did write autobiographies, but these pamphlets or books were mostly part of the whole production, sold alongside the handbills and photos. These stories ended up being part of the showmen's hyperbole. So, in order to reconstruct, celebrate, and understand the lives of the people who worked the freak show, I rely on historians, like Robert Bogdan, who have sifted through thousands of handbills, posters, newspaper articles, and promotional garbage used to create The Armless Wonder, The Wild Men of Borneo. In large part, I will never truly know their lives but can only use my imagination, political sensibilities, and intuition to fill the holes between the outrageous headlines in the *New York Times* and other newspapers and the outrageous handbills sold at the carnival.

The historians who moralize about the freak show frustrate me. These academics will take a detail, like the fact that Hiram and

Barney Davis's mother sold her sons to a showman, and use it to demonstrate just how despicable showmen could be and how oppressive the freak show was. The disturbing fact that many of the people who worked as freaks—disabled people from the United States[12] as well as people from colonized countries—were sold into the business needs to be examined. The question, why were they sold, has to be asked. Certainly, in many cases, the answer must revolve around fear and hatred, undiluted ableism and racism, imperialism, and capitalism. But consider Hiram and Barney. They were sold for a wash pan full of gold and silver. What did that wash pan mean to their mother, Catherine Davis? My sources suggest, although don't explicitly state, that the Davises were a *poor* immigrant farm family. Did that gold and silver mean economic survival to Catherine Davis? What happened to working-class and poor disabled people who needed care but whose families could not provide it? The options did not abound: the almshouse, the street, the freak show. Rather than moralize and condemn, I want freak show historians to examine the whole context, including racism, ableism, and classism, and begin to build a complex understanding of exploitation. Like the women Joe Kadi refers to in his analysis of prostitution, the people who worked as freaks—especially those who had some control over their own display—grasped an exploitative situation in an exploitative world and, as often as possible, turned it to their benefit.

At the same time, the people who had the least power in the freak show—people from colonized countries and cognitively disabled people—underscore just how exploitative this institution could be. Many of the people of color brought to the United States died bleak deaths of pneumonia, pleurisy, or tuberculosis. They died on the long ship rides. They died wanting desperately to return to their home countries. They did not want to be part of the freak show; they never came to like the freak show; they didn't become showmen and -women in their own right. Instead, the circus, the dime museum, the vaudeville act, the natural history museum were simply sites of imperialist atrocity. Likewise, cognitively dis-

abled people most frequently had no control over their displays. Some lacked the abilities to say yes or no to their own exhibition; others were simply trapped by unscrupulous managers, who typically were also their legal guardians. Although some cognitively disabled people had what appear to be good and happy relationships with their managers, the dual role of showman and legal guardian is a setup for exploitation.

The display of both groups of people capitalized on the theory of the time that nondisabled people of color and cognitively disabled people embodied the missing link between primates and humans. Eminent zoologist Baron Georges Cuvier wrote in the early 1800s:

> The negro race is confined to the south of Mount Atlas. Its characteristics are, black complexion, woolly hair, compressed cranium, and flattish nose. In the prominence of the lower part of the face, and the thickness of the lips, it manifestly approaches the monkey tribe.[13]

Much the same was believed about cognitively disabled people. Following the same train of thought as Cuvier, German scientist Carl Vogt wrote in 1867 even more explicitly about evolutionary theory:

> Microcephalics [people with a type of cognitive disability medically known as microcephalia] must necessarily represent an earlier developmental state of the human being ... they reveal to us one of the milestones which the human passed by during the course of his historical evolution.[14]

The racism and ableism imbedded in these theories intersect intensely in the exhibition of cognitively disabled people of color. Consider the story of two cognitively disabled siblings kidnapped as children from San Salvador. Called "Maximo" and "Bartola," they were declared to be from "a long-lost race of Aztecs." Scientists and anthropologists studied them; showmen displayed them. Both groups helped create and defend the "long-lost race" fabrication,

anthropologists to substantiate their theories, showmen to make money, each feeding off the other. They used a variety of observations as their proof. They emphasized physical attributes associated with being disabled by microcephalia, particularly short stature and a slightly sloping skull. They took note of "Maximo's" and "Bartola's" dark skin and thick black hair. They made much of their subjects' language use and food preferences, citing the cultural differences between "civilized" white people and "barbaric" people of color. They exaggerated the specific cognitive impairments of "Maximo" and "Bartola." In short, these white, nondisabled men totally intertwined race and disability, racism and ableism, to create "their freaks."

In one set of photos, "Maximo" and "Bartola" are stripped naked, posed against a blank wall. I imagine scientists measuring the diameter of their skulls, the length of their legs, taking notes about their skin color and speech patterns, then snapping these pictures to add to their documentation. A second set of photos has them sitting against a stone wall. "Maximo" wears striped pants and a shirt with a big sun on its front. "Bartola's" dress has a zig-zag design woven through it. Their hair is teased into big, wild afros. "Maximo" looks dazedly beyond the camera; "Bartola" looks down. I imagine showmen carefully arranging their props, calculating their profits. There are no complex or ambiguous answers here to the questions of power, control, and exploitation.

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During the freak show's heyday, today's dominant model of disability—the medical model—did not yet exist. This model defines disability as a personal problem, curable and/or treatable by the medical establishment, which in turn has led to the wholesale medicalization of disabled people. As theorist Michael Oliver puts it:

> Doctors are centrally involved in the lives of disabled people from the determination of whether a foetus is handicapped or not through to

> the deaths of old people from a variety of disabling conditions. Some of these involvements are, of course, entirely appropriate, as in the diagnosis of impairment, the stabilisation of medical condition after trauma, the treatment of illness occurring independent of disability, and the provision of physical rehabilitation. But doctors are also involved in assessing driving ability, prescribing wheelchairs, determining the allocation of financial benefits, selecting educational provision and measuring work capabilities and potential; in none of these cases is it immediately obvious that medical training and qualifications make doctors the most appropriate persons to be so involved.[15]

In the centuries before medicalization, before the 1930s and '40s when disability became a pathology and the exclusive domain of doctors and hospitals, the Christian western world had encoded disability with many different meanings. Disabled people had sinned. We lacked moral strength. We were the spawn of the devil or the product of god's will. Our bodies/minds reflected events that happened during our mothers' pregnancies.

At the time of the freak show, disabled people were, in the minds of nondisabled people, extraordinary creatures, not entirely human, about whom everyone—"professional" people and the general public alike—was curious. Doctors routinely robbed the graves of "giants" in order to measure their skeletons and place them in museums. Scientists described disabled people in terms like "female, belonging to the monocephalic, ileadelphic class of monsters by fusion,"[16] language that came from the "science" of teratology, the centuries-old study of monsters. Anthropologists studied disabled people with an eye toward evolutionary theory. Rubes paid good money to gawk.

Hiram, did you ever stop mid-performance, stop up there on your dime museum platform and stare back, turning your mild and direct gaze back on the rubes, gawking at the gawkers, entertained by your own audience?

At the same time, there were signs of the move toward medicalization. Many people who worked as freaks were examined by doctors. Often handbills included the testimony of a doctor who verified the "authenticity" of the "freak" and sometimes explained

the causes of his or her "freakishness." Tellingly doctors performed this role, rather than anthropologists, priests, or philosophers. But for the century in which the freak show flourished, disability was not yet inextricably linked to pathology, and without pathology, pity and tragedy did not shadow disability to the same extent they do today.

Consequently, the freak show fed upon neither of these, relying instead on voyeurism. The "armless wonder" played the fiddle on stage; the "giant" lived as royalty; the "savage" roared and screamed. These performances didn't create freaks as pitiful or tragic but as curious, odd, surprising, horrifying, wondrous. Freaks were not supercrips. They did not *overcome* disability; they *flaunted* it. Nor were freaks poster children, the modern-day objects of pity, used to raise money on the telethon stage. Instead, the freaks performed, and the rubes gawked. In a culture that paired disability and curiosity, voyeurism was morally acceptable. Thus, people flocked without shame or compunction to see the "freaks," primed by cultural beliefs about disability to be duped by the lies and fabrications created at the freak show.

In the same way, cultural beliefs about race—notions about the "wild savage," the "noble savage," and an eagerness to see both—made the exhibition of nondisabled people of color at the freak show and other venues extraordinarily profitable. Take for example the display of Filipino people at the 1904 World's Fair in St. Louis. The exhibit was billed as the "Igorot Village," complete with mostly naked women and men dancing wildly and eating dog stew. One among many "anthropological" displays at the Fair, the Village, as a near perfect representation of the "wild savage," attracted by far the most Fair-goers and media attention. Christopher Vaughan in his article "Ogling Igorots" writes:

> The "civilized" Visayans, despite offering hourly theatrical and orchestral performances—concluding with "The Star Spangled Banner," sung in English by the entire village—went relatively ignored in comparison with the Igorots.... Gate receipts at the Igorot concession nearly quadrupled the total for the Visayans and tripled that of the colorful Moros.[7]

It was all too easy for white people to gawk at people of color, using the image of dog-eating savages from far-away "uncivilized" islands both to create and strengthen their sense of white identity and white superiority.

During this same period of time, imperialism had intensified to a fevered pitch, both abroad in places like the Philippines and at home as white people continued to subjugate and destroy Native peoples and cultures. By the time of the 1904 World's Fair, the United States had won the Spanish-American War and gained control over the Philippines. In explaining his decision to solidify the United States' colonial rule there, President McKinley referred to "our civilizing mission." What better way to justify that mission, than to display Filipino people as "uncivilized savages"?

This interplay between politics and the freak show also occurred on the national level. For instance, the missing-link evolutionary theory, used so profitably by showmen, supported slavery before Emancipation and the suppression of civil rights after. But the freak show didn't only *use* this ideology. The display of Black and white cognitively disabled people and nondisabled people of color as the "missing link" and the "What Is It?" actually bolstered the theory. The scientists and politicians could point to William Johnson and say, "See, here is living proof. Look at this creature." In doing so, they were reaffirming the less-than-human status of people of color and rationalizing much of their social and political policy. Simply put, the freak show both fed upon and gave fuel to imperialism, domestic racist politics, and the cultural beliefs about "wild savages" and white superiority.

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The decline of the freak show in the early decades of the 20th century coincided with the medicalization of disability. As pity, tragedy, and medical diagnosis/treatment entered the picture, the novelty and mystery of disability dissipated. Explicit voyeurism stopped being socially acceptable except when controlled by the

medical establishment. And later in the 20th century, as colonized people of color fought back successfully against their colonizers and as legal segregation in the United States ended and civil rights started to take hold, the exhibition of people of color also became, at least ostensibly, unacceptable. Along with these changes came a scorn for the freak show as an oppressive institution from the bad old days. But I'm not so sure the freak show is all that dead.

Consider Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gomez-Peña's performance piece "The Couple in the Cage," created in 1992 as part of the "500 Years of Resistance" celebration.[8] Fusco and Gomez-Peña costumed themselves in everything from false leopard skins to mirrored sunglasses and posed as native people from a newly discovered tribe. They toured natural history museums, art galleries, and street corners in a cage, performing the script of exotic and noble "savages." In the long tradition of showmen and -women, they even invented an island in the Gulf of Mexico from which they supposedly came and, as they toured, didn't let on to their ruse. Fusco and Gomez-Peña expected their audiences to immediately recognize the parody. Instead, as documented in a video shot at the scene of several performances[9] many people apparently took the ruse seriously. Some people expressed shock and disgust. Others, particularly white people, expounded on their theories about why Fusco paced back and forth, why Gomez-Peña grunted, staring out at the audience. Still others paid 50 cents for Polaroid pictures of the "savages" posed at their bars. Whether these people were serious, whether they all left the performance sites still duped, whether they truly believed their own theories, is not clear. But at least to some extent, it appears that "The Couple in the Cage" easily replicated the relationship between rube and freak—even as there are significant differences between this performance art piece and the freak show—suggesting that the old images of race, rather than being dead, live painfully close to the surface.

The scorn for the freak show also assumes that the bad old days were really awful, but I'm not so sure that they were in actuality all that bad for some of the "freaks." Listen to the stories

Robert Waldow and Violet and Daisy Hilton tell. All of them lived during the freak show's decline as medicalization took hold.

Robert Waldow, a tall man born in the 1920s, resisted becoming a giant, a freak. He wanted to be a lawyer, but unable to get the necessary education, he turned to shoe advertising. And later, after being pursued for years by showmen, he worked for the circus, earning a large salary and refusing to participate in the hype that would have made him appear taller than he really was. At the same time, doctors also pursued Robert, reporting him to be the tallest man in the world—this being medical hype, not circus hype. They refused to leave him alone. In 1936 a Dr. Charles Humberd showed up uninvited at the Waldow's home. Robert refused a physical exam and wouldn't cooperate with the interview. Humberd left disgruntled and the next year, unbeknownst to the Waldows, published an article in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* called, "Giantism: A Case Study," in which Robert became a case study of a "preacromegalic giant." Because of the article, which cast him as a surly brute, Robert and his family were deluged with unwelcome attention from the media, the general public, and the medical establishment. In the biography *The Gentleman Giant,* Waldow's father reveals that Robert was far more disturbed and angered by his dealings with doctors than with showmen.

Conjoined twins Daisy and Violet Hilton echo this reaction. These women worked the circus, carnival, and vaudeville circuits from the time they could talk. Early on, their abusive guardians controlled and managed the show. They would lock Daisy and Violet away for days at a time to ensure that no one but rubes paying good money could see them. Later, after a court order freed the sisters, they performed on their own. The cover of one publicity pamphlet has Daisy playing the saxophone, Violet, the piano, and both of them smiling cheerfully at the viewer. Much of their lives they spent fighting poverty as the freak show's popularity waned. And yet in their autobiography, they write about "loath[ing] the very tone of the medical man's voice" and fearing that their guardians would "stop showing us on stage and let the doctors have us to

punch and pinch and take our picture always."[20] Try telling Robert Waldow and the Hilton sisters how enlightened today's medical model of disability is, how much more progressive it is than the freak show, how bad the bad old days were. Try telling Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gomez-Peña that the freak show is truly dead.

The end of the freak show meant the end of a particular kind of employment for the people who had worked as freaks. For non-disabled people of color from the United States, employment by the 1930s didn't hinge heavily on the freak show, and so its decline didn't have a huge impact. And for people from Africa, Asia, South and Central America, the Pacific islands, and the Caribbean, the decline meant only that white people had one less reason to come kidnap and buy people away from their homes. But for disabled people—both people of color and white people—the end of the freak show almost guaranteed unemployment, disability often being codified into law as the inability to work.

In the '30s when Franklin Roosevelt's work programs employed many people, the federal government explicitly deemed disabled people unable to work, stamping their work applications "P. H. Physically handicapped. Substandard. Unemployable," sending them home with small monthly checks. The League of the Physically Handicapped protested in Washington, DC, occupying the Work Progress Administration's offices, chanting, "We want jobs, not tin cups."[21] In this climate, as freak show jobs disappeared, many disabled people faced a world devoid of employment opportunities.

Listen for instance to Otis Jordan, a disabled African American man who works the Sutton Sideshow, one of the only remaining freak shows in the country, as "Otis the Frog Man." In 1984, his exhibit was banned from the New York State Fair when someone lodged a complaint about the indignities of displaying disabled people. Otis responded, "Hell, what does she [the woman who

made the complaint] want from me—to be on welfare?"[22] Working as a freak may have been a lousy job, but nonetheless it was a job.

III. PRIDE

Now with this history in hand, can I explain why the word *freak* unsettles me, why I have not embraced this piece of disability history, this story of disabled people who earned their livings by flaunting their disabilities, this heritage of resistance, an in-your-face resistance similar to "We're here, we're queer, get used to it"? Why doesn't the word *freak* connect me easily and directly to subversion? The answer I think lies in the transition from freak show to doctor's office, from curiosity to pity, from entertainment to pathology. The end of the freak show didn't mean the end of our display or the end of voyeurism. We simply traded one kind of freakdom for another.

Take for instance public stripping, the medical practice of stripping disabled children to their underwear and examining them in front of large groups of doctors, medical students, physical therapists, and rehabilitation specialists. They have the child walk back and forth. They squeeze her muscles. They watch his gait, muscle tension, footfall, back curvature. They take notes and talk among themselves about what surgeries and therapies they might recommend. Since the invention of video cameras, they tape the sessions. They justify public stripping by saying it's a training tool for students, a way for a team of professionals to pool knowledge.[23] This isn't a medical practice of decades gone by. As recently as 1996, disability activist Lisa Blumberg reported in *The Disability Rag* that "specialty" clinics (cerebral palsy clinics, spina bifida clinics, muscular dystrophy clinics, etc.) at a variety of teaching hospitals regularly schedule group—rather than private—examinations and conduct surgery screenings in hospital amphitheaters.[24] Excuse me, but isn't public stripping exactly what scientists and anthropologists did to "Maximo" and "Bartola" a century ago? Tell me, what is the difference between the freak show and public stripping? Which is more

degrading? Which takes more control away from disabled people? Which lets a large group of nondisabled people gawk unabashedly for free?

Today's freakdom happens in hospitals and doctors' offices. It happens during telethons as people fork over money out of pity, the tragic stories milked until they're dry. It happens in nursing homes where severely disabled people are often forced to live against their wills. It happens on street corners and at bus stops, on playgrounds and in restaurants. It happens when nondisabled people stare, trying to be covert, smacking their children to teach them how to pretend not to stare. A character in the play *P.H.*reaks: The Hidden History of People with Disabilities* juxtaposes the voyeurism of the freak show with the voyeurism of everyday life, saying:

> We're always on display. You think if I walked down the street of your stinking little nowhere town people wouldn't stare at me? Damn right they would, and tell their neighbors and friends and talk about me over dinners and picnics and PTA meetings. Well, if they want to do that, they're going to have to pay me for that privilege. You want to stare at me, fine, it's 25 cents, cash on the barrel. You want a picture, that's another quarter. My life story. Pay me. You think I'm being exploited? You pay to go to a baseball game, don't you?[25]

Today's freakdom happens all the time, and we're not even paid for it. In fact disabled people have, as a group, an astounding unemployment rate of 71 percent.[26] When we do work* we make 64 cents

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* In 1999 I incorrectly cited the unemployment rate for disabled people. I assumed that the *unemployment* rate equaled the *employment* rate subtracted from 100 percent. However the two rates are calculated in entirely different ways. The *employment* rate for disabled people factors in all non-institutionalized disabled people between the ages of 18 and 64; whereas, the *unemployment* rate factors in only the disabled people who are actively in the labor force. In 2002, the employment rate for disabled people was 21 percent; the corresponding number for nondisabled people was

to a nondisabled worker's dollar.[27]

We don't control today's freakdom, unlike the earlier freak show freakdom, which sometimes we did. The presentation of disability today has been shaped entirely by the medical establishment and the charity industry. That is, until the disability rights movement came along. This civil rights and liberation movement established Centers for Independent Living all over the country, working to redefine the concept of independence. These centers offer support and advocacy, helping folks find accessible housing and personal attendants, funding for adaptive equipment and job training. Independent living advocates measure independence not by how many tasks one can do without assistance, but by how much control a disabled person has over his/her life and by the quality of that life.

The movement founded direct-action, rabble-rousing groups, like ADAPT[28] and Not Dead Yet,[29] that disrupt nursing home industry conventions, blockade non-accessible public transportation, occupy the offices of politicians committed to the status quo, and protest outside courtrooms. Disabled people have a history of direct-action protest, beginning with the League of the Physically Handicapped's WPA protest. In 1977, disabled people occupied the HEW (Department of Health, Education, and Welfare) offices in San Francisco for 25 days, successfully pressuring politicians into signing Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, the first civil rights legislation in the United States for disabled people.[30] And today, ADAPT is rabble-rousing hard, both on the streets and in Congress, to pass legislation that would make it more possible for people with significant disabilities to live in homes of their own

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78 percent. In the same year, the unemployment rate for disabled people was 14 percent, while for nondisabled people, it was 6 percent. Underlying these numbers is the reality that a far greater percentage of the total nondisabled population is in the labor force (83 percent) than of the disabled population (24 percent). For more information, see www.ilr.cornell.edu/edi/DisabilityStatistics/issues.cfm (accessed May 20, 2009).—E.C., 2009

choosing, rather than nursing homes.

The movement is creating a strong, politicized disability culture with a growing body of literature, performances, humor, theory, and political savvy. We have theater, dance, poetry, anthologies, fiction, magazines, art exhibits, film festivals, analysis and criticism written by disabled folks, conferences, and a fledgling academic discipline called disability studies. At the same time, there are disabled people working to crossover into mainstream culture, working to become models photographed for the big-name fashion magazines, actors in soap operas, sitcoms, and Hollywood movies, recognized artists, writers, and journalists.

The movement lobbied hard for laws to end separate and unequal education, for comprehensive civil rights legislation. The 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) did not spring from George H. W. Bush's head, fully formed and shaped by his goodwill and understanding of disability issues. Rather lawyers schooled in disability rights and disabled White House appointees with a stake in disability politics crafted the bill, disability lobbyists educated and lobbied hard, and grassroots disability activists mobilized to get the ADA passed. In short the disability rights movement, founded in the same storm of social change as women's liberation and gay/lesbian liberation, riding on the energy and framework created by the Black civil rights movement, came along and is undoing internalized oppression, making community, creating a culture and sense of identity, and organizing to change the status quo.

These forces are taking freakdom back, declaring that disabled people will be at the center of defining disability, defining our lives, defining who we are and who we want to be. We are declaring that doctors and their pathology, rubes and their money, anthropologists and their theories, gawkers and their so-called innocuous intentions, bullies and their violence, showmen and their hype, Jerry Lewis and his telethon, government bureaucrats and their rules will no longer define us. To arrive as a self-defined people, disabled people, like other marginalized people, need a strong sense of identity. We need to know our history, come to understand

which pieces of that history we want to make our own, and develop a self-image full of pride. The women and men who worked the freak show, the freaks who knew how to flaunt their disabilities—the tall man who wore a top hat to add a few inches to his height, the fat woman who refused to diet, the bearded woman who not only refused to shave, but grew her beard longer and longer, the cognitively disabled person who said, "I know you think I look like an ape. Here let me accentuate that look"—can certainly teach us a thing or two about identity and pride.

Pride is not an inessential thing. Without pride, disabled people are much more likely to accept unquestioningly the daily material conditions of ableism: unemployment, poverty, segregated and substandard education, years spent locked up in nursing homes, violence perpetrated by caregivers, lack of access. Without pride, individual and collective resistance to oppression becomes nearly impossible. But disability pride is no easy thing to come by. Disability has been soaked in shame, dressed in silence, rooted in isolation.

In 1969 in the backwoods of Oregon, I entered the "regular" first grade after a long struggle with the school officials who wanted me in "special education," a battle won only because I had scored well on an IQ test, my father knew the principal, and the first grade teacher, who lived upriver from us, liked my family and advocated for me. I became the first disabled kid to be mainstreamed in the district. Eight years later, the first laws requiring public education for disabled kids, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Section 504, were signed. By the mid-1980s, mainstreaming wasn't a rare occurrence, even in small, rural schools, but in 1969 I was a first.

No one—neither my family nor my teachers—knew how to acknowledge and meet my particular disability-related needs while letting me live a rather ordinary, rough-and-tumble childhood. They simply had no experience with a smart, gimpy six-year-old who learned to read quickly but had a hard time with the physical act of writing, who knew all the answers but whose speech was hard to understand. In an effort to resolve this tension, everyone ignored my

disability and disability-related needs as much as possible. When I had trouble handling a glass of water, tying my shoes, picking up coins, screws, paper clips, writing my name on the blackboard, no one asked if I needed help. When I couldn't finish an assignment in the allotted time, teachers insisted I turn it in unfinished. When my classmates taunted me with *retard, monkey, defect,* no one comforted me. I rapidly became the class outcast, and the adults left me to fend for myself. I took as much distance as I could from the kids in "special ed." I was determined not to be one of them. I wanted to be "normal," to pass as nondisabled, even though my shaky hands and slurred speech were impossible to ignore.

Certainly I wasn't the only disabled person I knew. In Port Orford, many of the men had work-related disabilities: missing fingers, arms, and legs, broken backs, serious nerve damage. A good friend of my parents had diabetes. A neighbor girl, seven or eight years younger than me, had CP much like mine. My best friend's brother had a significant cognitive disability. And yet I knew no one with a disability, none of us willing to talk, each of us hiding as best we could.

No single person underlines this ironic isolation better than Mary Walls, who joined my class in the fourth grade. She wore hearing aids in both ears and split her days between the "regular" and the "special ed" classrooms. We shared a speech therapist. I wish we had grown to be friends, but rather we became enemies, Mary calling me names and me chasing her down. I understand now that Mary lived by trying to read lips, and my lips, because of the way CP affects my speech, are nearly impossible to read. She probably taunted me out of frustration, and I chased her down, as I did none of my other bullies, because I could. I understand now about horizontal hostility: gay men and lesbians disliking bisexual people, transsexual women looking down on drag queens, working-class people fighting with poor people. Marginalized people from many communities create their own internal tensions and hostilities, and disabled people are no exception. I didn't have a disabled friend until I was in my mid-20s, and still today most of my close

friends, the people I call "chosen family," are nondisabled. Often I feel like an impostor as I write about disability, feel that I'm not disabled enough, not grounded deeply enough in disability community, to put these words on paper. *This* is the legacy for me of shame, silence, and isolation.

Pride works in direct opposition to internalized oppression. The latter provides fertile ground for shame, denial, self-hatred, and fear. The former encourages anger, strength, and joy. To transform self-hatred into pride is a fundamental act of resistance. In many communities, language becomes one of the arenas for this transformation. Sometimes the words of hatred and violence can be neutralized or even turned into the words of pride. To stare down the bully calling *cripple,* the basher swinging the word *queer* like a baseball bat, to say "Yeah, you're right. I'm queer, I'm a crip. So what?" undercuts the power of those who want us dead.

Many social change movements have used language and naming specifically to create pride and power. In African American communities, the progression from *Colored* to *Negro* to *Black* both followed and helped give rise to the pride and anger that fueled the civil rights movement. "Black Is Beautiful" became a powerful rallying cry for Black community and culture. But while the word *Black* so clearly connects itself to pride, the use of the word *nigger* among Black people causes much debate. For some, claiming that word with affection and humor rejects a certain kind of pain and humiliation, but for others, it simply reinforces those same feelings. The ugly words—*faggot, queer, nigger, retard, cripple, freak*—come highly charged with emotional and social history. Which of us can use these words to name our pride? The answer is not logical.

Let me refute even the slightest suggestion that LGBT people who hate the word *queer,* disabled people who hate the words *cripple* and *freak,* Black people who hate the word *nigger* are trapped by their internalized oppression. That would be far too simple and neat. Instead I want to follow a messier course, to examine the ways in which the ugly words we sometimes use to name our pride tap into a complex knot of personal and collective histories.

I want to return to my original question: why does the word *freak* unsettle me?

But even as I veer away from the simple and neat argument, the one centered upon the ways oppression can turn around and thrive in the bodies/minds of oppressed people, I must pull my self-hatred out of the bag. Even though the answer to my question about the word *freak* is bigger than self-hatred, I need to stare down the self who wants to be "normal," the kid who thought she could and should pass as nondisabled, the crip still embarrassed by the way her body moves. I can feel slivers of shame, silence, and isolation still imbedded deep in my body. I hate these fragments. In the last decade I've stretched into the joy of being a gimp among gimps, learning anger and subversion, coming to recognize the grace in a gnarly hand, tremor, rolling limp, raspy breath, finding comfort and camaraderie with disabled people. Yet I have not stretched far enough to imagine flaunting my CP, even though flaunting is a tool many disability activists use. They are in effect saying to nondisabled people, "Damn right, you better look. Look long and hard. Watch my crooked hobble, my twitching body, my withered legs. Listen to my hands sign a language you don't even know. Notice my milky eyes I no longer hide behind sunglasses. Look at me straight on, because for all your years of gawking, you've still not seen me." Is flaunting the same as pride? I don't know. But I do know that every time I hear disabled people call themselves freaks, my decades-old self-hatred collides head-on with my relatively newfound pride.

For me *freak* is defined by my personal experience of today's freakdom. Today's freakdom happened to me at Fairview State Hospital in 1965 when the doctors first declared me "retarded." I didn't yet talk and was given an IQ test that relied not on verbal skills, but on fine motor coordination. And I—being a spastic little kid with CP—failed the test miserably. I simply couldn't manipulate their blocks, draw their pictures, or put their puzzles together. Today's freakdom happened every time I was taunted *retard, monkey, weirdo.* It happens every time someone gawks, an occurrence

that happens so regularly I rarely even notice. I don't see people—curious, puzzled, anxious—turn their heads to watch my trembling hands, my jerky movements. I don't see people strain to understand me, then decide it's impossible. Long ago I learned to block all those visual intrusions. I only know it happens because my friends notice and tell me. Yet I know I store the gawking in my bones. Today's freakdom happens every time some well-meaning stranger or acquaintance suggests a certain combination of vitamins, crystals, or New Age visualization techniques that she knows will cure my CP. I always want to retort, "Yeah right, like I'm looking for a cure, like my brain cells that died some time before birth will magically regenerate," but the moment inevitably passes before I can even think of the words. This is my personal history of freakdom.

In addition, *freak* is shadowed for me by the complicated collective history of exploitation and subversion at the freak show. I relish the knowledge that there have been people who have taken advantage of white people's and nondisabled people's urge to gawk. I love that disabled people at one time were paid to flaunt, perform, and exaggerate their disabilities. At the same time I hate how the freak show reinforced the damaging lies about disabled people and nondisabled people of color. I despise the racism, ableism, capitalism, and imperialism that had showmen buying and kidnapping people into the freak show. I rage at how few choices disabled people had.

To infuse the word *freak* with pride, I would need to step through my personal history of freakdom into the larger collective history of the freak show. Stepping through the last slivers of my self-hatred, through the pain I've paired with gawking and the word *retard,* I could use Charles Stratton's strut, Ann Thompson's turning of the ordinary into the extraordinary, to strengthen my own resistance. I could name myself a freak alongside Daisy Hilton, William Johnson, and Otis Jordan. I want it to work.

Instead the two histories collide in a madcap wheelchair race. My personal history isn't so easy to step through; the slivers tear my skin; the old familiar pain leaves me guarded and cautious. And the collective history is hard to reduce to a pure story of resistance

and subversion that I want to celebrate and use. I keep thinking of the people who worked as "Ubangi Savages." Sure, Charles Stratton and Violet Hilton became showmen and -women; they took one set of exploitative conditions they were born into and another set of exploitative conditions associated with their work and subverted them as far as possible. But those African men and women, they were casualties of imperialism and racism; their resistance, reflected in the sheer act of surviving the Ringling Brothers Circus, is not a resistance to celebrate, but one to honor and mourn.

This collision of histories leads me to think about the act of witnessing. Are there kinds of freakdom—public stripping, the unabashed staring on street corners, the exhibition of nondisabled people of color kidnapped to the United States, the display of cognitively disabled people as non-human—that we need to bear witness to rather than incorporate into our pride? How does witness differ from pride? What do they share in common?

To unravel the relationship of the word *freak* to pride and witness, let me step back for a moment, move to the word *queer,* to the LGBT community. I think it no accident that I've paired the words *queer* and *freak* in this examination of language, pride, and resistance. The ways in which queer people and disabled people experience oppression follow, to a certain extent, parallel paths. Queer identity has been pathologized and medicalized. Until 1973, homosexuality was considered a psychiatric disorder. Today transsexuality and transgenderism, under the names of gender dysphoria and gender identity disorder, are classified as psychiatric conditions. Queerness is all too frequently intertwined with shame, silence, and isolation. Queer people, particularly LGBT youth, often live cut off from other queer folk, alone in our schools, neighborhoods, and families of origin. Queer people deal with gawking all the time: when we hold hands in public, defy gender boundaries and norms, insist on recognition for our relationships and families.

Intersex people, trans people, and people who don't conform to gender norms—such as bearded women who grow their beards—have their own history at the freak show. Queer people have been told for centuries by church, state, and science that our bodies are abnormal. These parallel paths don't mean that queer folk and disabled folk experience the same oppression; at many points the paths diverge. For example the gawkers often pity crips and beat up queers (although some crips do get beat up, and some queers, pitied). But the places of similarity, the fact that both peoples have been considered freaks of nature, push at the question of pride. How have LGBT people created pride? What are the words and the symbols of that pride?

Queer has accomplished a number of things for the LGBT individuals and communities who have embraced it. The word names a reality. Yes, we are different; we are outsiders; we do not fit the dominant culture's definition of normal. *Queer* celebrates that difference rather than hiding or denying it. By making *queer* our own, it becomes less a bludgeon. We take a weapon away from the homophobes. *Queer* names a hugely diverse group of people. It brings lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and trans people in all our variation and difference and overlap under one roof; it is a coalition-building word. For some people the word works; for others it doesn't. The same things can be said of the word *crip* in relationship to the disability community. All of this seems simple enough and is typically as far as the thinking about naming goes.

But I want to push the thinking further. How do people who have lived in shame and isolation create community and pride? How do we even find each other? Let me turn here from the realm of words to the realm of symbol. Since the mid-70s LGBT people have used the pink triangle as a symbol to identify ourselves to each other and to the world. The Nazis originally used this symbol during the Holocaust to mark non-Jewish gay men on the streets and in the concentration camps just as the yellow star was used to mark Jews. (Jewish gay men were likely to be marked with both, forced to wear the yellow star overlaid by the pink triangle.)

The pink triangle functions now as a symbol of identity, witness, and pride in queer communities. As a sign of identity, it communicates both covertly and overtly. That pink triangle graphic worn on a button or stuck on a bumper may not have much meaning to many straight people—particularly those not connected to or aware of queer culture—but among LGBT people, especially in urban centers, it readily signals queer identity to other queer people. In this fashion, the pink triangle functions as an insider's language, a language attempting to include a marginalized people while excluding the oppressor. It is also used more overtly to speak of identity, sometimes incorporated into educational work about the historical oppression of gay people, other times into activist work. As a symbol of witness, it remembers and memorializes the gay men who died in the Holocaust. It keeps the memory of Nazi atrocities alive in our consciousness. It serves as a reminder of the extremity of queer oppression. And as a symbol of pride, the pink triangle neutralizes and transforms hatred, following a similar political path as the words *queer* and *cripple*. It is worn by out and proud queer people. These functions—marking identity, expressing pride, insisting upon witness—go hand in hand, all three important for any marginalized community. In our search for liberation, we can sometimes turn the language and symbols most closely reflecting our oppression into powerful expressions of pride. And yet that equation sometimes betrays history, blurring the difference between witness and pride.

As a symbol of pride, the pink triangle has frequently been divorced from its history. In one ahistorical explanation of this symbol, the owner of a Minneapolis gay bookstore tells his customers that pink triangles represent white gay men/lesbians and black triangles—used by the Nazis to mark people deemed anti-social, including, it is assumed, lesbians, as well as sex workers, cognitively disabled people, and homeless people, during the Holocaust—represent black gay men/lesbians. Divorced from its history, the pink triangle becomes a consumerist symbol, used to sell T-shirts and keychains; it becomes a lie. It is not and never will be the rain-

bow flag, which Gilbert Baker designed in 1978 specifically as a queer symbol full of unabashed pride and affirmation. To use the rainbow flag is to connect oneself to queer identity and pride as they are currently constructed. To use the pink triangle honestly is to connect oneself to history.

I listen again to my Jewish dyke friends who don't understand the pink triangle as a symbol of pride. They ask me, "Why reclaim this symbol that has meant genocide? My family would never wear yellow stars joyfully as symbols of their pride, perhaps in witness and rage, but never in pride. Why then the pink triangle? How can it possibly be a symbol of pride?" Behind their words, I see the shadows of a collective history, the living reminders of numbers tattooed on forearms, the stories passed down of family and culture destroyed.

Their questions and disbelief ask me to unwind the act of witness from the expression of pride. Both witness and pride strengthen identity, foster resistance, cultivate subversion. People who have lived in shame and isolation need all the pride we can muster, not to mire ourselves in a narrowly defined identity politics, but to sustain broad-based rebellion. And likewise, we need a witness to all our histories, both collective and personal. Yet we also need to remember that witness and pride are not the same. Witness pairs grief and rage with remembrance. Pride pairs joy with a determination to be visible. Witness demands primary adherence to and respect for history. Pride uses history as one of its many tools. Sometimes witness and pride work in concert, other times not. We cannot afford to confuse, merge, blur the two.

•—•—•

And now I can come back to *freak*. The disabled people who use the word *freak*, are they, like many queer people, betraying witness in their creation of pride? A disabled person who names herself pridefully a freak draws on the history of freakdom and the freak show to strengthen her sense of resistance, to name a truth, to

bolster her identity. But in using history this way, is she remembering only Ann Thompson, Violet Hilton, and the cognitively disabled girl who, while on display, took to swearing at the rubes? What about "Maximo" and "Bartola"? What about the nondisabled people of color who died at the freak show, desolate for their homelands? When we name ourselves freaks, are we forgetting the part of history that calls for witness, not pride? Are we blurring the two?

How does the history of the freak show interact with the history of today's freakdom? How do our personal histories enter our collective history? If I had not internalized nondisabled people's gawking to the point that I no longer notice it, if instead I felt pissy and uppity about it, would I be more able to imagine flaunting my CP? Would I be more willing to take the resistance of the people who worked as freaks as my own? Would I gladly use the word to acknowledge a simple truth: that the world considers me a freak?

What about people disabled as adults, people who make it relatively smoothly through the first rounds of denial, grief, and rehab and maybe find the disability rights movement and disability community? They don't have a long personal history of freakdom. Hopefully shame, silence, and isolation haven't been buried deeply in their bodies. What might their relationship to the history of the freak show, to the word *freak*, be? Do they ache toward assimilation, not wanting to approach freakdom? Or does freakdom make immediate sense? I don't know, but their relationships to *freak* probably differ from mine. What about cognitively disabled people? What does *freak* mean to them? Where is the pride in a legacy of being owned by showmen who exhibited you as non-human? Again their relationships to freak show history are bound to differ from mine.

I think of the disabled people I know who call themselves freaks. Many of them are performers, helping to build disability culture and/or working to break into mainstream culture. In using the name *freak*, they claim freak show history both as disabled people and as showmen and -women. They shape pride out of a

centuries-old legacy of performing on the street corner, at the open-air fair, in the palace and at the carnival as freak, monster, pet dwarf, court jester, clown. On the other hand, could a disabled person whose personal history included public stripping but not performing as easily break through today's freakdom into that earlier freakdom? The history that for so long has placed us on stage, in front of audiences, sometimes in subversion and resistance, other times in loathing and shame, asks not only for pride, but also for witness as our many different personal histories come tangling into our collective one.

This same profusion of histories exists in other communities. For instance, even though I, along with many others, have made *queer* mine, the word holds intolerable grief and bitterness for a large number of gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, and trans people. The effeminate boy who came out in the '50s. The dykes and queens caught in the pre-Stonewall police raids. The trans people with histories that include psychiatric abuse. The folks who can pass as straight and/or normatively gendered and choose to do so, who yearn toward true assimilation, an end to difference. I can't presume to know what relationships each of these people have with the word *queer.* How do their personal histories come crashing into the current, collectively defined use of *queer?* The ugly words follow no logic, sometimes calling out pride, sometimes witness, sometimes both, sometimes neither.

What will feed our pride, that joyful, determined insistence to be recognized both inside and outside ourselves? And what demands witness our grief-filled, rage-filled remembrance? Which pieces of history, which kinds of humor, which words? Let me return once more to my question, "Why *queer* and *cripple* but not *freak?*" This time I won't expect an answer. Instead, I want to take the image of Barney and Hiram Davis's mild and direct gaze into the freak show camera and practice that stare when nondisabled people and straight people gawk at me. I want to place Robert Waldow's resistance and Mercy Bump's outrage alongside my lived knowledge that freakdom continues today. I want to remember

that whether I call myself *freak* or not, I share much with Ann Thompson and William Johnson, Otis Jordan and Daisy Hilton. I want to refigure the world, insisting that anthropologists never again construct lies like the ones they built around the bodies of "Maximo" and "Bartola," that doctors never again publicly strip disabled children. I want to sharpen my pride on what strengthens me, my witness on what haunts me. Whatever we name ourselves, however we end up shattering our self-hatred, shame, silence, and isolation, the goal is the same: to end our daily material oppression.

Elliptical

They just can't seem to . . . They should try harder to . . . They ought to be more . . . We all wish they weren't so . . . They never . . . They always . . . Sometimes they . . . Once in a while they . . . However it is obvious that they . . . Their overall tendency has been . . . The consequences of which have been . . . They don't appear to understand that . . . If only they would make an effort to . . . But we know how difficult it is for them to . . . Many of them remain unaware of . . . Some who should know better simply refuse to . . . Of course, their perspective has been limited by . . . On the other hand, they obviously feel entitled to . . . Certainly we can't forget that they . . . Nor can it be denied that they . . . We know that this has had an enormous impact on their . . . Nevertheless their behavior strikes us as . . . Our interactions unfortunately have been . . .

2

WHEN THE SICK RULE THE WORLD

"And comes from a country far away as health."
— Sylvia Plath

Have you often had to lower the regular dose of prescription or over-the-counter medication or herbal supplements because you were too sensitive to normal doses do you avoid caffeine in the afternoon or altogether because it can keep you up at night have you ever experienced adverse reactions to medications if so what happened do you smell odors when others can't what kinds of odors do you have a sudden onset of symptoms headaches skin rashes nausea shortness of breath etc. on exposure to chemicals mold dust pollens or other environmental allergens what symptoms please list all the chemicals you get a reaction to when do you last remember feeling really great describe your residence when your illness began type age carpets heat source paint proximity to industry etc. describe your work environment when your illness began type of building ventilation toxic exposure neighboring businesses etc. have you ever had to change your residence or job due to health reasons have you ever had a known chemical injury or major exposure have you ever been exposed to chemicals or toxic metals in the

course of work of schooling when how long name them have you ever worked where adjacent businesses regularly used chemicals or toxic metals when how long name them have you ever worked in a building where the windows were always closed when how long have you ever worked where you or your co-workers complained about the air quality or smells in the workplace or were injured in any way when how long have you ever heard about any air quality incidents in your place of work when describe what you heard have you ever lived near any heavy industries that regularly emitted waste into the air or water i.e. golf course dry cleaner plant shipyard mine chemical factory dumpsite or landfill what type of pollution when how long have you ever lived in a house built before 1978 how long were you there have you ever lived on or adjacent to an agricultural area what kind of area was it when how long have you ever lived in a home where mold was a problem when how long have you ever lived in a home with a water leak or water damage when how long have you ever lived in a mobile home when how long have you ever lived in a home where turning on the central air or heat caused you or family members to feel sick when how long have you ever felt there were conditions in your home that affected your health use of aerosol sprays chemicals cleaners construction painting etc. when how long are pesticides or herbicides used inside or outside our home have you ever lived near a busy highway street or gas station when how long when were your air ducts last cleaned when were your air filters last changed is your stove gas or electric is your furnace gas or electric water heater gas or electric do you wear dry cleaned clothing if yes how frequently and in which room are they stored are there animals in your home do you have air purifiers or water filters in your home do you heat food in a microwave do you have candles in your home do you regularly get hair coloring permanents or visit a beauty salon have you

ever had acrylic fingernails or been to a beauty shop where acrylic nails are done if so when have you ever used scented soaps detergents potpourri perfumes etc. do you still have you ever used fabric softener do you still have you ever used recreational drugs if so when and what compounds have you ever lived with animals that received treatment for fleas or ticks if so when have you ever lived in a home with new carpet new furniture and new construction if so when have you ever lived on or near a golf course or other areas where heavy pesticides and herbicides are used regularly if so when have you ever regularly worked with chemicals in any hobby i.e. solvents paints stains cleaners etc. if so when have you ever had silver fillings put in your teeth if so when do you still have silver fillings in your mouth if yes how many and how long have they been in your mouth have you ever had root canals implants or bridgework done on your teeth if so when have you ever had any implants stainless steel Teflon silicone etc. put into your body if so when and what kind of implants have you ever been given vaccinations if so when have you ever had reactions to any vaccinations have you ever smoked if so for how long have you ever lived with others that smoked if so for how long and how old were you how often do you eat fish what types of fish do you eat?

The wall of questions makes me feel devastated and hopeless. I have lived in and worked in and gone to so many bad places. The naturopath is young, small and blonde, and has a little girl's voice. Based on my answers she says, "You are very sick, your apartment is making you sick. You have to move." She's ordered lots of lab work on me, but she hasn't gotten back any of the results. "If I were to move," I ask her, "what should I look for?" She stares back at me, confused and suspicious, like it were a trick question. Finally she says, "You *can* move, I know you can move. Many patients have moved and they felt so much

better. If you don't move, you'll never get better." "But what kind of place should I move to?" She says to look on the internet, there's lots of information online.

I join a listserve for the sick and learn that the monthly meeting of the sick is happening the following weekend. It takes place in a nontoxic apartment building in San Rafael, built especially for the sick. No fragrances are allowed in the building. Those attending the meeting must use fragrance-free soap, lotion, shampoo, hair conditioner, gel, deodorant, laundry detergent. No fabric softener, no clothes that have been dry cleaned. I already do most of this, but my hair products and body lotion have herbal oils in them, so I spend $30 on fragrance free versions. I enjoy the ritual of carefully bathing and dressing myself in preparation for my entry into the realm of the sick. The fragrance-free shampoo makes my scalp itch, so I rub on some locally made, stone crushed extra virgin oil. Driving across the Golden Gate Bridge, I imagine a spa atmosphere, a peaceful, wood-hewn paradise, the crisp air super-charged with oxygen. Instead I find boxy, institutional, white. In the courtyard, a frail, frizzy-haired woman stops me from entering the community room. "You have to be sniffed first," she says, and she places her nose right up to my body and takes deep noisy sniffs. "I smell something," she says. She moves her nose along my arms and shoulders, "No I don't think it's your sweater." She moves her nose across my head. "It's your hair." "Do you smell anything?" she says to a large-breasted woman. "Yes," says the large-breasted woman, "it's in her hair, it's giving me a headache." The frail woman tells me I'll have to cover my hair. "But I did everything you asked," I say. She steps into an apartment and returns with two cotton scarves, a green one and a black one. They're those hanky-scarves that hippies used to wear and gay men put in their pockets to announce what sex kink they were into. "It's just

olive oil," I plead. "You're giving me brain fog," the large-breasted woman replies. The other woman holds out the scarves. "Which one do you want." I take the green one and fold it into a triangle, put it over my head and tie it in the back. "Some of your hair hanging out," I'm told. "Put on the other one too." So I wrap the black one around the back of my head and tie it on top, above my forehead. The women joke that I look like Aunt Jemima.

Most sick experience headaches, burning eyes, asthma symptoms, stomach distress/nausea, dizziness, loss of mental concentration, and muscle pain. Some individuals also suffer fever or even loss of consciousness. Motor skills and memory may be impaired. The sick practice calm abiding. They say to themselves, "I feel so nauseous in my stomach, this means I'm alive, I am a living being, that I can feel this, and all these sensations and worries," and they breathe it in and they feel good, to be a living being. When someone wearing perfume lies down next to me in yoga I get up and move. When someone sits beside me in a theater wearing perfume I get up and move. When someone sits at the next table wearing perfume I get up and move. When a student comes to class wearing perfume my nose runs, my eyes tear, I start sneezing; there's nowhere to move to and I don't know what to do. When the sick rule the world perfume will be outlawed. Dealers will stand in alleyways selling contraband Estee Lauder and Chanel no. 5. They will carry tiny capsules of perfume in their mouths, tucked along their gums, and when they open their mouths they'll look like vampires with their extra row of liquid gold teeth.

Later in the restroom I long to snap a picture of Aunt Jemima Dodie with my iphone so I can show it to Kevin and we can share a laugh, but I can't get myself to even peek in the mirror at my round bound makeup-less face. I do my toilet business

with my eyes cast down at the stone-tiled floor. At the end of Todd Haynes' movie *Safe* when sick Julianne Moore looks in the mirror and says, "I love you," she looks great, with her fluffy hair and her cheek bones, not like a bloated Bandana Monster, I imagine kids scaring one another at sleepovers: "The Bandana Monster's coming to eat you!" So I don't know what the sick saw as I sat in my chair during the sharing portion of the meeting and told them my symptoms, I've been tired and headachy, with a chronic ADD-esque lack of focus. I've been having allergic reactions to everything, and if I eat the wrong thing I'm up with diarrhea, dry heaves and god-awful nausea for like 7 hours. The sick sympathize with my symptoms. They suggest I carry Alka-Seltzer Gold with me, that Alka-Seltzer Gold will stop an allergic reaction dead in its tracks. I tell them my young, blonde, child-like naturopath thinks I have a problem with my phase II detoxification, and the one sick guy in the group says they all have that, over-active phase I detox and underactive phase II.

The sick rinse their bodies with vinegar and dry off with a blowdryer to prevent mold growth. The sick travel in used cars which they sell to one another, cars that have never been detailed, that have been aired out and cleared with activated carbon felt blankets and zeolite. Behind their used cars the sick pull teardrop-shaped trailers made from steel and non-fragrant wood. Or vintage bullet-shaped trailers made from steel and porcelain. The sick will create new families based not on blood but affinity of symptoms. The sick will travel in packs commandeering porcelain-lined fragrance-free buses. The well will no longer delete the email of the sick. When the sick rule the world hotel rooms will be obsolete, airplanes will be obsolete, new cars will be obsolete. All existing new cars will be remaindered and shipped to Cuba. When the sick rule the world fragrance-free auto shops will keep the old cars running smoothly. All service

stations will be full service, the well filling the tanks for the sick. Mechanics and gas jockeys who do not wear gasmasks will soon themselves become sick. The sick refer to people who do not wear gasmasks as "breathers."

The rest of the meeting is about the dangers of cellphone towers. Christy, our guest speaker, tells us that electromagnetic fields—EMFs for short—are slowly destroying us all. Christy, a middle-aged fleshy woman with shoulder-length straight brown hair and bangs, learned about EMFs in a weekend seminar she attended in Encinitas. Symptoms of EMF exposure include dermatitis, burning pins and needles sensations all over the body, pressure/heaviness in the head, arrhythmia, high blood pressure, migraines, insomnia, profound malaise, blurred vision, nausea, tinnitus, tiredness, exhaustion, loss of concentration, loss of appetite, mood swings, tearfulness of eyes, pupil dilation, perspiration, muscular weakness, speech difficulty, convulsions, unconsciousness. Christy warns everyone to disable the wireless in their computers and to keep their cellphones turned off and as far from their bodies as possible. "A microwave oven cooks your food," she says, "but a mobile phone fries your brain." EMFs can lead to cancer, ADD, Parkinson's and even back pain. She passes out photos of camouflaged cellphone towers—cellphone towers hidden in the cross of a church, a flagpole, clock tower, grain silo, water tower, palm tree, fake rock, cactus. The fake rock and the cactus have trap doors, which are photographed open, revealing electrical guts. They look like movie props, but this isn't a movie, this is real life, Christy reminds us. Electromagnetic fields are lethal. During the presentation, I change seats in order to get a better view. The woman I sit next to looks stunned and immediately gets up and moves across the room, as far away from the Bandana Monster as she can get. Christy passes around a swatch of cloth made from some kind

of metal—it's a surprisingly soft mesh—that she's using to make curtains to hang from her canopy bed to protect her from EMFs. You have to make sure the bed is completely enclosed, both above and below the mattress, as electromagnetic fields come through floors and ceilings. She gives us a handout listing where we can get the best deal for the mesh and other EMF supplies online. Christy also demonstrates a small box-like contraption, protruding from its top is a two-foot long antenna that's shaped like a mini-Eiffel Tower. I wonder what's hidden in the real Eiffel Tower, what dangerous implements and rays. As Christy walks around the room the contraption beeps whenever it detects an electromagnetic field. Cellphones make it beep like crazy. Wherever Christy goes she checks for electromagnetic fields and thus she knows firsthand how perilous the world is. Sometimes she can't leave her home because of all the peril. When the sick who live nearby abscond with Christy to check for electromagnetic fields in their apartments, I rip off my bandanas and flee. Driving across the Golden Gate Bridge I wonder, am I one of them—I have been sniffed and found wanting, I gave that woman brain fog—would anybody want to be one of them? But if I'm not one of them, what am I, what's going on with me?

When the sick rule the world roses, gardenias, freesias, and other fragrant flowers will no longer be grown. On Valentine's Day the sick will give one another dahlias and daisies to say I Love You. The sick should have sex as often as possible because it's good for the immune system. The sick should lie on their backs and receive rather than deliver the fucking. When two sick bodies come together their desperate hearts open, it is lovely to watch them, the thin iridescent haze of sickness flowing across their skin, when two sick bodies fuck their hazy genitals sparkle and frizzle. The sick and the well should never mingle. The sick latch onto the genitals of the well like carnivorous plants, milking the well of

their lifeforce, but the well are too rich, too funky, neurotoxic deodorant off-gassing from pores, the sick's iridescent haze curdles, congealed vinegary bits clinging to sweaty torsos, the sick spasm with so little pleasure, turn away sickened with remorse.

Sick Bonnie is married to a Rabbi. She has moved from house to house but cannot find one she can tolerate. She used to sleep in the kitchen or outside when weather permitted until the neighbors in the cul-de-sac began to spray pesticides. Now she and her young daughter sleep in her car parked at the end of the street. After looking at almost 200 trailers, sick Catherine bought a steel utility trailer with a camper shell to have shelter from the summer monsoons and winter snows. Although she does not see her three sons, she talks to them regularly on the telephone. Sick Rhonda and her husband are homeless and sleeping in their van, which is parked on five acres belonging to a sick friend. They have fashioned a makeshift shower outdoors. Rhonda's husband, a physical therapist, spends his days off renovating an old RV so they will have a place to live that is insulated from the elements and has indoor plumbing. A former psychologist, sick Nina has been living in her van for three years. Homelessness is expensive; there is no place to cook and no place to rest, which has made Nina even sicker. It is her passion to create a homeless shelter accessible to the sick. Sick Patrice used to work as a registered nurse at a treatment center for chemically-dependent teenagers. She spent a couple of winters freezing on friends' screened-in porches. When she overstayed her welcome, she rented an apartment so she could have a bathroom to use though she still sleeps in her tent outside. Sick Tom worked as a counselor in public schools. For many months he slept in the back of his truck because he could not tolerate being indoors. He finally found this Airstream, but he cannot find a permanent safe place to park it. Sick Mary used to be a

bodybuilder. She lives in a homemade tent in the desert with her sick baby. The desert will soon be leveled for a golf course, making Mary and her baby homeless.

Sex partners of the sick must wash their hands carefully before sex and avoid touching the genitals with a hand that has had contact with the anal area. For lubricants, synthetics may be a problem; experiment with butter or vegetable oils made from foods the sick are not sensitive to. Incense and perfumes cannot be used to set the mood, but good music, videos or other approaches can work. Organic cotton bedding can reduce coughing and other less romantic symptoms. Muscle spasms and cramps from pesticide exposure may be immediate or delayed by as much as 3 days up to 6 weeks. If fatigue or pain are problems, the sick should remain passive and their partners should assume the positions that require the most energy. Fresh air and improved environmental controls will help the sick gain vigor. Be creative, patient, and persistent. The sick must always empty their bladders shortly after sex. The sick should never be kissed on the lips, as lip-kissing transmits bacteria and viruses.

There is no such thing as a hypochondriac; there are only doctors who cannot figure out what is wrong with you.

When we eat in a restaurant we take in the energy of those who cook and serve it, and their energy is bad energy. When the sick rule the world there will be no restaurants. When the sick rule the world Calvin Klein will design aluminum foil window dressings and our porcelain walls will be decorated by Limoges. Gas masks will be sexy, the envy of every Paris runway.

Sick Mark, a former videomaker, has lived in his car for eleven years. Indoor air is a chemical soup he reacts adversely to. His

most frequent reactions are blinding headaches, a nasty metallic taste, tingly face, hoarseness, difficulty breathing, burning lungs, and stinging eyes. Less frequent but much more serious reactions are throat closure, asthma, chest pains, dizziness, and disorientation. Mark's car is twenty-two-years old and long ago has lost that "new car smell." It's Christmas morning and Mark is sitting in his car in a park; the park for the time being is "safe." This could change at any moment with a shifting breeze, bringing with it whiffs of industry, detergent, fabric softener, fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, burning wood or synthetic logs, exhaust from cars, buses, trucks. When an air problem suddenly arises Mark drives his car to a different area. Mark drives 2,000 to 3,000 miles per month trying to find a safe spot.

Wary of money, the sick use credit cards whenever possible. Upon returning home they empty their pockets of any coins or bills they may have accumulated and immerse them in a bowl of zeolite crystals, which absorb dangerous residues. Placing the crystals outside in the sun will recharge them. When the sick rule the world the well will be servants, and all the well will try to become sick so they too can have servants. Pretending to be sick will be a capital offense. When the sick rule the world the limbs of the well will be chopped off in the middle of the night, the well one still alive, flailing and screaming. The limbs of the well will fetch exorbitant fees on the black market, sold to sorcerers who will dry the limbs and grind them into magic powders to be placed into amulets to ward off blindness and toxins. These amulets will bring prosperity to their owners.

On her all-metal bed and organic cotton blanket, sick Elizabeth lies absolutely still, cradled in the impermeable membrane of her galvanized steel shed. The thin blue filtered air cools her inflamed lungs. The sheen of the porcelain walls and ceiling

reflects her image back to her. The clear silky arms of her ghost selves reach out and caress her. "You are totally alone," they sing in an eerie high-pitched wail. They remind her of Antony and the Johnsons, but at a whisper. Twin yellow bulbs screw into the ceiling, like glowing yolks she thinks, like God's testicles. Her naughtiness makes her smirk. She misses curtains and cushions, but she's grown used to the sheets of aluminum foil taped over the windows, the total lack of ornamentation, it gives her eyes a rest, an unbroken meditative line. She falls asleep and dreams a Bandana Monster is chasing her into an ever-receding horizon. When she awakens her ghost selves beckon, "Join us." She tries to ignore them, tries not to think of the organic rope in a ziploc bag hidden beneath her bed. With an organic rope hanging is totally non-toxic. "Elizabeth you don't have to be alone," her ghost selves sing. "We're waiting for you." "But I'm happy," she counters, "living inside my little porcelain house. It's cute as a teacup. I'm happy as a pinafored mouse living in a teacup."

When the sick rule the world mortality will be sexy. When the sick rule the world, all writing will be short and succinct, no paragraphs will be longer than two sentences so we can comprehend them through the brain fog the well bring to us daily.

NATALIE DIAZ

Abecedarian Requiring Further Examination of Anglikan Seraphym Subjugation of a Wild Indian Rezervation

Angels don't come to the reservation.
Bats, maybe, or owls, boxy mottled things.
Coyotes, too. They all mean the same thing—
death. And death
eats angels, I guess, because I haven't seen an angel
fly through this valley ever.
Gabriel? Never heard of him. Know a guy named Gabe though—
he came through here one powwow and stayed, typical
Indian. Sure he had wings,
jailbird that he was. He flies around in stolen cars. Wherever he stops,
kids grow like gourds from women's bellies.
Like I said, no Indian I've ever heard of has ever been or seen an angel.
Maybe in a Christmas pageant or something—
Nazarene church holds one every December,
organized by Pastor John's wife. It's no wonder
Pastor John's son is the angel—everyone knows angels are white.
Quit bothering with angels, I say. They're no good for Indians.
Remember what happened last time
some white god came floating across the ocean?
Truth is, there may be angels, but if there are angels
up there, living on clouds or sitting on thrones across the sea wearing
velvet robes and golden rings, drinking whiskey from silver cups,
we're better off if they stay rich and fat and ugly and
'xactly where they are—in their own distant heavens.
You better hope you never see angels on the rez. If you do, they'll be marching you off to
Zion or Oklahoma, or some other hell they've mapped out for us.

eighty

now let us shift . . . the path of conocimiento . . . inner work, public acts[1]

Gloria E. Anzaldúa

an offering

As you walk across Lighthouse Field a glistening black ribbon undulates in the grass, crossing your path from right to left. You swallow air, your primal senses flare open. From the middle of your forehead, a reptilian eye blinks, surveys the terrain. This visual intuitive sense, like the intellect of heart and gut, reveals a discourse of signs, images, feelings, words that, once decoded, carry the power to startle you out of tunnel vision and habitual patterns of thought. The snake is a symbol of awakening consciousness—the potential of knowing within, an awareness and intelligence not grasped by logical thought. Often nature provokes un "aja," or "conocimiento,"[2] one that guides your feet along the path, gives you el ánimo to dedicate yourself to transforming perceptions of reality, and thus the conditions of life. Llevas la presencia de éste conocimiento contigo. You experience nature as ensouled, as sacred. Éste saber, this knowledge, urges you to cast una ofrenda of images and words across the page como granos de maíz, like kernels of corn. By redeeming your most painful experiences you transform them into something valuable, algo para compartir or share with others so they too may be empowered. You stop in the middle of the field and, under your breath, ask the spirits—animals, plants, y tus muertos—to help you string together a bridge of words. What follows is your attempt to give back to nature, los espíritus, and others a gift wrested from the events in your life, a bridge home to the self.

the journey: path of conocimiento

You struggle each day to know the world you live in, to come to grips with the problems of life. Motivated by the need to understand, you crave to be what and who you are. A spiritual hunger rumbles deep in your belly, the yearning to live up to your potential. You question the doctrines claiming to be the only right way to live. These ways no longer accommodate the person you are, or the life you're living. They no longer help you with your central task—to determine what your life means, to catch a glimpse of the cosmic order and your part in that cosmovisión, and to translate these into artistic forms. Tu camino de conocimiento requires that you encounter your shadow side and confront what you've programmed yourself (and have been programmed by your cultures) to avoid

(desconocer), to confront the traits and habits distorting how you see reality and inhibiting the full use of your facultades.

At the crack of change between millennia, you and the rest of humanity are undergoing profound transformations and shifts in perception. All, including the planet and every species, are caught between cultures and bleed-throughs among different worlds—each with its own version of reality. We are experiencing a personal, global identity crisis in a disintegrating social order that possesses little heart and functions to oppress people by organizing them in hierarchies of commerce and power—a collusion of government, transnational industry, business, and the military all linked by a pragmatic technology and science voracious for money and control. This system and its hierarchies impact people's lives in concrete and devastating ways and justify a sliding scale of human worth used to keep humankind divided. It condones the mind theft, spirit murder, exploitation, and genocide de los otros. We are collectively conditioned not to know that every comfort of our lives is acquired with the blood of conquered, subjugated, enslaved, or exterminated people, an exploitation that continues today. We are completely dependent on consumerism, the culture of the dollar, and the colossal powers that sustain our lifestyles.

We stand at a major threshold in the extension of consciousness, caught in the remolinos (vortices) of systemic change across all fields of knowledge. The binaries of colored/white, female/male, mind/body are collapsing. Living in nepantla,[3] the overlapping space between different perceptions and belief systems, you are aware of the changeability of racial, gender, sexual, and other categories rendering the conventional labelings obsolete. Though these markings are outworn and inaccurate, those in power continue using them to single out and negate those who are "different" because of color, language, notions of reality, or other diversity. You know that the new paradigm must come from outside as well as within the system.

Many are witnessing a major cultural shift in their understanding of what knowledge consists of and how we come to know, a shift from the kinds of knowledge valued now to the kinds that will be desired in the twenty-first century, a shift away from knowledge contributing both to military and corporate technologies and the colonization of our lives by TV and the Internet, to the inner exploration of the meaning and purpose of life. You attribute this shift to the feminization of knowledge, one beyond the subject-object divide, a way of knowing and acting on ese saber you call *conocimiento*. Skeptical of reason and rationality, conocimiento questions conventional knowledge's current categories, classifications, and contents.

Those carrying conocimiento refuse to accept spirituality as a deval-

ued form of knowledge, and instead elevate it to the same level occupied by science and rationality. A form of spiritual inquiry, conocimiento is reached via creative acts—writing, art-making, dancing, healing, teaching, meditation, and spiritual activism—both mental and somatic (the body, too, is a form as well as site of creativity). Through creative engagements, you embed your experiences in a larger frame of reference, connecting your personal struggles with those of other beings on the planet, with the struggles of the Earth itself. To understand the greater reality that lies behind your personal perceptions, you view these struggles as spiritual undertakings. Your identity is a filtering screen limiting your awareness to a fraction of your reality. What you or your cultures believe to be true is provisional and depends on a specific perspective. What your eyes, ears, and other physical senses perceive is not the whole picture but one determined by your core beliefs and prevailing societal assumptions. What you live through and the knowledge you infer from experience is subjective. Intuitive knowing, unmediated by mental constructs—what inner eye, heart, and gut tell you—is the closest you come to direct knowledge (gnosis) of the world, and this experience of reality is partial too.

Conocimiento comes from opening all your senses, consciously inhabiting your body and decoding its symptoms—that persistent scalp itch, not caused by lice or dry skin, may be a thought trying to snare your attention. Attention is multileveled and includes your surroundings, bodily sensations and responses, intuitive takes, emotional reactions to other people and theirs to you, and, most important, the images your imagination creates—images connecting all tiers of information and their data. Breaking out of your mental and emotional prison and deepening the range of perception enables you to link inner reflection and vision—the mental, emotional, instinctive, imaginal, spiritual, and subtle bodily awareness—with social, political action and lived experiences to generate subversive knowledges. These conocimientos challenge official and conventional ways of looking at the world, ways set up by those benefiting from such constructions.

Information your sense organs register and your rational mind organizes coupled with imaginal knowings derived from viewing life through the third eye, the reptilian eye looking inward and outward simultaneously, along with the perceptions of the shapeshifting naguala,[4] the perceiver of shifts, results in conocimiento. According to Christianity and other spiritual traditions, the evil that lies at the root of the human condition is the desire to know—which translates into aspiring to conocimiento (reflective consciousness). Your reflective mind's mirror throws back all your options, making you aware of your freedom to choose. You don't need to obey the reigning gods' laws (popular culture,

commerce, science) and accept fate as decreed by church and culture. To further the self you choose to accept the guidance and information provided by symbology systems like the Tarot, I Ching, dowsing (pendulum), astrology, and numerology.

Throughout millennia those seeking alternative forms of knowledge have been demonized. In the pursuit of knowledge, including carnal knowledge (symbolized by the serpent), some female origin figures "disobeyed." Casting aside the status quo of edenic conditions and unconscious "being," they took a bite of awareness—the first human to take agency. Xochiquetzal, a Mexican indigenous diety,[5] ascends to the upperworld to seek knowledge from "el árbol sagrado," the tree of life, que florecía en Tamoanchan.[6] In another garden of Eden, Eve snatches the fruit (the treasure of forbidden knowledge) from the serpent's mouth and "invents" consciousness—the sense of self in the act of knowing.[7] Serpent Woman, known as Cihuacoatl, the goddess of origins, whom you think of as la Llorona[8] and sketch as a half-coiled snake with the head of a woman, represents, not the root of all evil, but instinctual knowledge and other alternative ways of knowing that fuel transformation.

These females are expelled from "paradise" for eating the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil and for taking individual agency. Their "original sin" precipitates the myth of the fall of humankind, for which women have been blamed and punished. The passion to know, to deepen awareness, to perceive reality in a different way, to see and experience more of life—in short, the desire to expand consciousness—and the freedom to choose, drove Xochiquetzal, Eve, and Cihuacoatl to deepen awareness. You too are driven by the desire to understand, know, y saber how human and other beings know. Beneath your desire for knowledge writhes the hunger to understand and love yourself.

seven stages of conocimiento

You're strolling downtown. Suddenly the sidewalk buckles and rises before you. Bricks fly through the air. Your thigh muscles tense to run, but shock holds you in check. Dust rains down all around you, dimming your sight, clogging your nostrils, coating your throat. In front of you the second story of a building caves into the ground floor. Just as suddenly the earth stops trembling. People with pallid faces gather before the collapsed building. Near your feet a hand sticks out of the rubble. The body of the woman attached to that hand is pulled out from the debris. A bloody gash runs down one side of her face and one arm sticks out unnaturally. As they place her on the sidewalk, her skirt rides up to her waist, exposing a plump thigh. You fight the urge to pull her skirt down, protect her from all eyes.

The first aftershock hits. Fear ripples down your spine, frightening your soul out of your body. You pick your way through the rubble, dodging bricks, and reach your car; except for a few dents on the hood it's still in one piece. Coasting over the cracked bridge and pits in the pavement, you drive home at five miles an hour. One street over from your apartment, a fire spews smoke and flames into the sky. You unlock the door of your home to find it won't budge. Putting shoulder to wood you shove back books, plants, dirt, and broken pottery the earthquake has flung to the floor.

Every few minutes an aftershock rattles the windows, drying the spit in your mouth. Each time the walls sway, you run to a doorway, brace yourself under its frame, holding your breath and willing your house not to fall on top of you. The apartment manager comes to check and tells you, "No te puedes quedar aquí. You have to evacuate, the gas lines are not secure, there's no electricity, and the water's contaminated." You want to salvage your books, your computer, and three years' worth of writing. "I'm staying home," you reply as you watch your neighbors gather sleeping bags, blankets, food, and head for the sports field nearby. Soon most of the city and county keep vigil from makeshift tents.

You boil water, sweep up the broken cups and plates. Just when you think the ground beneath your feet is stable, the two plates again grind together along the San Andreas Fault. The seismic rupture moves the Monterey Peninsula three inches north. It shifts you into the crack between the worlds, shattering the mythology that grounds you. You strive for leverage in the fissures, but Tonan, la madre tierra, keeps stirring beneath you. In the midst of this physical crisis, an emotional bottom falls out from under you, forcing you to confront your fear of others breaching the emotional walls you've built around yourself. If you don't work through your fear, playing it safe could bury you.

Éste arrebato, the earthquake, jerks you from the familiar and safe terrain and catapults you into nepantla, the second stage. In this liminal, transitional space, suspended between shifts, you're two people, split between before and after. Nepantla, where the outer boundaries of the mind's inner life meet the outer world of reality, is a zone of possibility. You experience reality as fluid, expanding and contracting. In nepantla you are exposed, open to other perspectives, more readily able to access knowledge derived from inner feelings, imaginal states, and outer events, and to "see through"[9] them with a mindful, holistic awareness. Seeing through human acts both individual and collective allows you to examine the ways you construct knowledge, identity, and reality, and explore how some of your/others' constructions violate other people's ways of knowing and living.

When overwhelmed by the chaos caused by living between stories, you break down, descend into the third space, the Coatlicue depths of despair, self-loathing, and hopelessness. Dysfunctional for weeks, the refusal to move paralyzes you. In the fourth space a call to action pulls you out of your depression. You break free from your habitual coping strategies of escaping from realities you're reluctant to face, reconnect with spirit, and undergo a conversion.

In the fifth space your desire for order and meaning prompts you to track the ongoing circumstances of your life, to sift, sort, and symbolize your experiences and try to arrange them into a pattern and story that speak to your reality. You scan your inner landscape, books, movies, philosophies, mythologies, and the modern sciences for bits of lore you can patch together to create a new narrative articulating your personal reality. You scrutinize and question dominant and ethnic ideologies and the mind-sets their cultures induce in others. And, putting all the pieces together, you reenvision the map of the known world, creating a new description of reality and scripting a new story.

In the sixth space you take your story out into the world, testing it. When you or the world fail to live up to your ideals, your edifice collapses like a house of cards, casting you into conflict with self and others in a war between realities. Disappointed with self and others, angry and then terrified at the depth of your anger, you swallow your emotions, hold them in. Blocked from your own power, you're unable to activate the inner resources that could mobilize you. In the seventh, the critical turning point of transformation, you shift realities, develop an ethical, compassionate strategy with which to negotiate conflict and difference within self and between others, and find common ground by forming holistic alliances. You include these practices in your daily life, act on your vision—enacting spiritual activism.

The first stages of conocimiento illustrate the four directions (south, west, north, east), the next, below and above, and the seventh, the center. They symbolize los siete "ojos de luz" or seven chakras of the energetic, dreambody, spirit body (counterpart of the physical body), the seven planes of reality[10] the stages of alchemical process (negredo, albedo, and rebedo), and the four elements: air, fire, water, and earth. In all seven spaces you struggle with the shadow, the unwanted aspects of the self. Together, the seven stages open the senses and enlarge the breadth and depth of consciousness, causing internal shifts and external changes. All seven are present within each stage, and they occur concurrently, chronologically or not. Zigzagging from ignorance (desconocimiento) to awareness (conocimiento), in a day's time you may go through all seven stages, though you may dwell in one for months. You're never only in one space,

but partially in one, partially in another, with nepantla occurring most often—as its own space and as the transition between each of the others. Together, these stations constitute a meditation on the rites of passage, the transitions of life from birth to death, and all the daily births and deaths in-between. Bits of your self die and are reborn in each step.

1. el arrebato . . . rupture, fragmentation . . . an ending, a beginning

The assailant's hands squeeze your throat. Gasping for breath, your scream eeks out as a mewling sound. You kick and scratch him as he drags you across the Waller Creek bridge. He shoves you against the rail. Heart in your throat, you peer at the wet rocks below lapped by the gurgling stream. If he throws you off the bridge bones will break, maybe your neck. He finally wrestles your bag from you and sprints away. Anger pulses through you. You snatch up a big rock and run after him. You survive este arrebato and witness his capture, but every night for months when safe in your bed, his snarl echoes in your head, "I'm going to get you, bitch." Footsteps behind you, people's sudden movements, stop your breath and your body responds as though he's attacking you again. Your relationship to the world is irrevocably changed: you're aware of your vulnerability, wary of men, and no longer trust the universe.[11]

This event pulled the linchpin that held your reality/story together and you cast your mind to find a symbol to represent this dislocation. In 1972 you first saw the huge round stone of the dismembered moon goddess Coyolxauhqui in Mexico City. She's lived in your imaginal life since then and this arrebato embeds her and her story deeper in your flesh. When Coyolxauhqui tried to kill her mother, Coatlicue, her brother Huitzílopochtlí, the war god, sprang out from the womb fully armed. He decapitated and flung her down the temple, scattering her body parts in all directions, making her the first sacrificial victim. Coyolxauhqui is your symbol for both the process of emotional psychical dismemberment, splitting body/mind/spirit/soul, and the creative work of putting all the pieces together in a new form, a partially unconscious work done in the night by the light of the moon, a labor of re-visioning and re-membering. Seven years after the attack, a psychic gives you a reading, telling you to find the scattered, missing parts of yourself and put them back together.

Every arrebato—a violent attack, rift with a loved one, illness, death in the family, betrayal, systematic racism and marginalization—rips you from your familiar "home," casting you out of your personal Eden, showing that something is lacking in your queendom. Cada arrebatada (snatching) turns your world upside down and cracks the walls of your reality, resulting in a great sense of loss, grief, and emptiness, leaving behind dreams, hopes, and

goals. You are no longer who you used to be. As you move from past presuppositions and frames of reference, letting go of former positions, you feel like an orphan, abandoned by all that's familiar. Exposed, naked, disoriented, wounded, uncertain, confused, and conflicted, you're forced to live en la orilla—a razor-sharp edge that fragments you.

The upheaval jars you out of the cultural trance and the spell of the collective mind-set, what Don Miguel Ruiz calls the collective dream and Charles Tart calls consensus reality. When two or more opposing accounts, perspectives, or belief systems appear side by side or intertwined, a kind of double or multiple "seeing" results, forcing you into continuous dialectical encounters with these different stories, situations, and people. Trying to understand these convergences compels you to critique your own perspective and assumptions. It leads to re-interpreting the story you imagined yourself living, bringing it to a dramatic end and initiating one of turmoil, being swallowed by your fears, and passing through a threshold. Seeing through your culture separates you from the herd, exiles you from the tribe, wounds you psychologically and spiritually. Cada arrebatamiento is an awakening that causes you to question who you are, what the world is about. The urgency to know what you're experiencing awakens la facultad, the ability to shift attention and see through the surface of things and situations.

With each arrebatamiento you suffer un "susto," a shock that knocks one of your souls out of your body, causing estrangement.[12] With the loss of the familiar and the unknown ahead, you struggle to regain your balance, reintegrate yourself (put Coyolxahqui together), and repair the damage. You must, like the shaman, find a way to call your spirit home. Every paroxysm has the potential of initiating you to something new, giving you a chance to reconstruct yourself, forcing you to rework your description of self, world, and your place in it (reality). Every morning in ritual you turn on the gas stove, watch the flame, and, as you wait for the teapot to boil, ask Spirit for increased awareness. You honor what has ended, say goodbye to the old way of being, commit yourself to look for the "something new," and picture yourself embracing this new life. But before that can happen you plunge into the ambiguity of the transition phase, undergo another rite of passage, and negotiate another identity crisis.

2. nepantla . . . torn between ways

Pero, ay, como Sor Juana, como los transterrados españoles, como tantos mexicanos no repuestos aún de la conquista, yo vivía nepantla—un aislamiento espiritual.

—Rosario Castellanos, Los narradores (93)

But, oh, like Sor Juana, like the land-crossing Spanish, like so many Mexicans who have not recovered from the conquest, I lived nepantla—a spiritual isolation. (Trans. GEA)

There's only one other Chicana in your Ph.D. program at UT Austin, Texas, a state heavily populated with Chicanos, and you're never in the same class. The professors dislike the practice of putting yourself in the texts, insisting your papers are too subjective. They frown on your unorthodox perspectives and ways of thinking. They reject your dissertation thesis, claiming Chicana/o literature illegitimate and feminist theory too radical.

Bereft of your former frame of reference, leaving home has cast you adrift in the liminal space between home and school. In class you feel you're on a rack, body prone across the equator between the diverse notions and nations that comprise you. Remolinos (whirlwinds) sweep you off your feet, pulling you here and there. While home, family, and ethnic culture tug you back to the tribe, to the chicana indigena you were before, the anglo world sucks you toward an assimilated, homogenized, whitewashed identity. Each separate reality and its belief system vies with others to convert you to its worldview. Each exhorts you to turn your back on other interpretations, other tribes. You face divisions within your cultures—of class, gender, sexuality, nationality, and ethnicity. You face both entrenched institutions and the oppositional movements of working-class women, people of color, and queers. Pulled between opposing realities, you feel torn between "white" ways and Mexican ways, between Chicano nationalists and conservative Hispanics. Suspended between traditional values and feminist ideas, you don't know whether to assimilate, separate, or isolate.

The vortices and their cacophonies continuously bombard you with new ideas and perceptions of self and world. Vulnerable to spiritual anxiety and isolation, suspended on the bridge between rewind and fast-forward, swinging between elation and despair, anger and forgiveness, you think, feel, and react in extremes. Now you flounder in the chaos, now feel cradled en la calma. In the transition space of nepantla you reflect critically, and as you move from one symbol system to another, self-identity becomes your central concern. While the opposing forces struggle for expression, an inner impasse blocks you. According to Jung, if you hold opposites long enough without taking sides a new identity emerges. As you make your way through life, nepantla itself becomes the place you live in most of the time—home. Nepantla is the site of transformation, the place where different perspectives come into conflict and where you question the basic ideas, tenets, and identities inherited from your family, your education, and your different cultures. Nepantla is the zone between

changes where you struggle to find equilibrium between the outer expression of change and your inner relationship to it.

Living between cultures results in "seeing" double, first from the perspective of one culture, then from the perspective of another. Seeing from two or more perspectives simultaneously renders those cultures transparent. Removed from that culture's center, you glimpse the sea in which you've been immersed but to which you were oblivious, no longer seeing the world the way you were enculturated to see it. From the in-between place of nepantla, you see through the fiction of the monoculture, the myth of the superiority of the white races. And eventually you begin seeing through your ethnic culture's myth of the inferiority of mujeres. As you struggle to form a new identity, a demythologization of race occurs. You begin to see race as an experience of reality from a particular perspective and a specific time and place (history), not as a fixed feature of personality or identity.

According to nagualismo, perceiving something from two different angles creates a split in awareness. This split engenders the ability to control perception. You will yourself to ground this doble saber (double knowing) in your body's ear and soul's eye, always alerta y vigilante of how you are aware. Staying despierta becomes a survival tool. In your journal you doodle an image of a double-headed, double-faced woman, una cara in profile and the other looking ahead. The twin-faced patlache of your indigenous queer heritage is also the symbol of la otra tú, the double or dreambody (energetic body). La naguala connects you to these others and to unconscious and invisible forces. In nepantla you sense more keenly the overlap between the material and spiritual worlds; you're in both places simultaneously—you glimpse el espíritu—see the body as inspirited. Nepantla is the point of contact where the "mundane" and the "numinous" converge, where you're in full awareness of the present moment.

You can't stand living according to the old terms—yesterday's mode of consciousness pinches like an outgrown shoe. Craving change, you yearn to open yourself and honor the space/time between transitions. Coyolxauhqui's light in the night ignites your longing to engage with the world beyond the horizon you've grown accustomed to. Fear keeps you exiled between repulsion and propulsion, mourning the loss, obsessed with retrieving a lost homeland that may never have existed. Even as you listen to the old consciousness's death rattle, you continue defending its mythology of who you were and what your world looked like. To and fro you go, and just when you're ready to move you find yourself resisting the changes. Though your head and heart decry the mind/body dichotomy, the conflict in your mind makes your body a battlefield where beliefs fight each other.

3. the Coatlicue state . . . desconocimiento and the cost of knowing

There is an underbelly of terror to all life. It is suffering, it is hurt.
—Ming-Dao

Three weeks after the doctor confirms your own diagnosis you cross the trestle bridge near the wharf, your shortcut to downtown Santa Cruz. As you listen to your footsteps echoing on the timber, the reality of having a disease that could cost you your feet . . . your eyes . . . your creativity . . . the life of the writer you've worked so hard to build . . . life itself . . . finally penetrates, arresting you in the middle del puente (bridge). You're furious with your body for limiting your artistic activities, for its slow crawl toward the grave. You're infuriated with yourself for not living up to your expectations, not living your life fully. You realize that you use the whip of your ideals to flagellate yourself, and the masochist in you gets pleasure from your suffering. Tormented by self-contempt, you reproach yourself constantly and despair. Guilt and bitterness gnaw your insides and, blocked by your own grand expectations, you're unable to function. You double over. Clinging to the rail, you look down. Con tus otros ojos you see the black hole of anger sucking you into the abode of the shadow. Qué desgracia.

Tú, la consentida, the special one, thought yourself exempt from living like ordinary people. Self-pity swamps you, que suerte maldita! Self-absorbed, you're unable to climb out of the pit that's yourself. Feeling helpless, you draft the script of victimization and retreat from the world, withdraw from your body, losing kinesthetic consciousness. You count the bars of your cage, refusing to name your demons. You repel intrusions, rout off friends and family by withholding attention. When stress is overwhelming, you shut down your feelings, plummet into depression and unremitting sorrow. Consciousness diminished, your body descends into itself, pulled by the weight, mass, and gravity of your desconocimientos. To escape emotional pain (most of it self-imposed) you indulge in addictions. These respites from reality allow you to feel at one with yourself and the world, gaining you brief sojourns in Tamoanchan (paradise). When you surface to the present your unrelenting consciousness shrieks, "Stop resisting the truth of what's really happening, face your reality." But salvation is elusive like the scent of a dim memory. De éste lugar de muerte viva the promise of sunlight is unreachable. Though you want deliverance you cling to your misery.

You look around, hoping some person or thing will alleviate the pain. Pero virgen santisima, you've purposely cut yourself off from those who could help—you've no desire to reconnect with community. Separated

from all your tribes, estás en exilio en un destierro, forced to confront your own desconocimientos. Though you choose to face the beast depression alone you have no tools to deal with it. Overwhelmed, you shield yourself with ignorance, blanking out what you don't want to see. Yet you feel you're incubating some knowledge that could spring into life like a childhood monster if you paid it the slightest attention. The last thing you want is to meditate on your condition, bring awareness to the fore, but you've set it up so you must face reality. Still, you resist. You close your eyes to the ravening light waiting to burst through the cracks. Once again you embrace desconocimientos's comfort in willful unawareness. Behind your isolation is its opposite—a smouldering desire for love and connection. You pour ice water on that fire.

Last night cramps in your legs jerked you awake every few minutes. The lightest touch of the sheet burned your legs and feet. Finally you fell asleep, only to be roused out of your dreams by a hypo, a hypoglycemic incident—not enough sugar in the blood. Heart pounding, dripping sweat, confused, you couldn't remember what to do. Listing from side to side, you staggered to the kitchen and gulped down orange juice with two teaspoons of sugar. The thought of one night sleeping through a hypo and slipping into a coma te espanta.

Now you sag against the bridge rail and stare at the railroad tracks below. You swallow, tasting the fear of your own death. You can no longer deny your own mortality, no longer escape into your head—your body's illness has taken residence in all your thoughts, catapulting you into the Coatlicue state, the hellish third phase of your journey. You listen to the wind howling like la Llorona on a moonless night. Mourning the loss, you sink like a stone into a deep depression, brooding darkly in the lunar landscape of your inner world. In the night mind of the night world, abandoned to a maelstrom of chaos, you dream of your own darkness, a surrealist sueño of disintegration.

Beating your breast like a gothic heroine, you burst into the melodramatic histrionics of the victim. Cast adrift from all that's familiar, you huddle deep in the womb cave, a stone repelling light. In the void of your own nothingness, you lie in a fetal curl clutching the fragmented pieces and bits of yourself you've disowned. As you listen to the distant waves slapping the cliffs, your shadow-beast rises from its dark corner and mounts you, punishing you with isolation. Eres cuentista con manos amarradas, poeta sin saliva sin palabra sin pluma. Escondida en tu cueva no puedes levantar cabeza, estás cansada y decepcionada. Los días vuelan como hojas en el viento. Impaled bats infest your dreams and dark clouds move through your soul like shadows. You wallow in the ruins of your life—pobre de ti—until you can't stand the stench that's yourself.

On the edge of awareness, you seek comfort by blanking out reality and retreating into fantasies. You succumb to your addiction of choice—binge reading. During these gray foggy endless days and nights, you lose yourself in Lucha Corpi mysteries. Sucked into Laurell Hamilton's stories of Anita Blake killing and loving vampires and werewolves, you turn pagina after page to drown out la Llorona's voice, the voice of your musa bruja. Pero el viento keeps blowing and your black angelos (daemon) whispering, "Why aren't you writing?" But you have no energy to feed the writing. Getting out of bed is a Sisyphean task. Like the ghost woman you become a pale shade of your former self, a victim of the internalized ideals you've failed to live up to.

When first diagnosed with diabetes, your response was denial. This couldn't be happening, hadn't your body paid its dues? Why now, when you had the time and means to do good work? Digging in your heels you refused the reality—always your first line of defense to emotional pain. But the reality intruded: your body had betrayed you. You no longer had the agility to climb up to the roof to check the leak over the living room. Were you being punished for having been found wanting? No, it is you, not an external force, punishing yourself.

Back on the timber bridge, the wind shifts, whipping your hair away from your eyes. La Llorona's wail rises, urging you to pay heed. All seven ojos de luz blink "on." Your body trembles as a new knowing slithers up like a snake, stirring you out of your stupor. You raise your head and look around. Following the railroad tracks to the horizon, you note the stages of your life, the turning points, the rips in your life's fabric. Gradually the pain and grief force you to face your situation, the daily issues of living laid bare by the event that has split your world apart. You can't change the reality, but you can change your attitude toward it, your interpretation of it. If you can't get rid of your disease, you must learn to live with it. As your perception shifts, your emotions shift—you gain a new understanding of your negative feelings. By seeing your symptoms not as signs of sickness and disintegration but as signals of growth, you're able to rise from depression's slow suicide. By using these feelings as tools or grist for the mill, you move through fear, anxiety, anger, and blast into another reality. But transforming habitual feelings is the hardest thing you've ever attempted.

As you begin to know and accept the self uncovered by the trauma, you pull the blinders off, take in the new landscape in brief glances. Gradually you arouse the agent in this drama, begin to act, to dis-identify with the fear and the isolation. You sit quietly and meditate, trance into an altered state of consciousness, temporarily suspending your usual frames of reference and beliefs while your creative self seeks a solution to your problem by being receptive to new patterns of association. You observe how stimuli

trigger responses from your body and how these reactions function. You urge yourself to cooperate with the body instead of sabotaging its self-healing. You draw a map of where you've been, how you've lived, where you're going. Sorting and resorting, you go through the trauma's images, feelings, sensations. While an internal transformation tries to keep pace with each rift, each reenactment shifts your ground again.

A paradox: the knowledge that exposes your fears can also remove them. Seeing through these cracks makes you uncomfortable because it reveals aspects of yourself (shadow-beasts) you don't want to own. Admitting your darker aspects allows you to break out of your self-imposed prison. But it will cost you. When you woo el oscuro, digging into it, sooner or later you pay the consequences—the pain of personal growth. Conocimiento will not let you forget the shadow self, greedy, gluttonous, and indifferent, will not let you lock the cold "bitch" in the basement anymore. Though modern therapies exhort you to act against your passions (compulsions), claiming health and integration lie in that direction, you've learned that delving more fully into your pain, anger, despair, depression will move you through them to the other side, where you can use their energy to heal. Depression is useful—it signals that you need to make changes in your life, it challenges your tendency to withdraw, it reminds you to take action. To reclaim body consciousness tienes que moverte—go for walks, salir a conocer mundo, engage with the world.

Periods of being lost in chaos occur when you're between "stories," before you shift from one set of perceptions and beliefs to another, from one mood to another. By realizing that it's negative thoughts (your reactions to events) that rouse the beast and not something "real" or unchangeable out there in the outer world, you avert being hijacked by past trauma and the demons of self-pity and doomsday ruminations. But you also know that grief and depression may originate in the outside world. You still grieve for this country's original trauma—the most massive act of genocide in the world's history, the mass murder of indigenous peoples. Before the European colonizers came to the "new world" there were five to seven-and-a-half million Indians in the territory between Mexico and Canada. By 1900 there were less than 250,000 left (Stiffarm). You descended from the world's oldest "races," thirty or forty thousand years old, and you cry out at the injustice, the waste. You mourn the devastation that the slave trade cost Africa and the United States. You lament the loss of connection to the Earth, a conscious being that keens through you for all the trees felled, air poisoned, water polluted, animals slaughtered into extinction.

Above, Coyolxauhqui's luz pulls you from the pit of your grief. Realizing that you always use the same tactics, repeat the same behaviors

in each stage, breaks your paralysis. What you most desire is a way up, a way out. You know that you've fallen off a metaphorical bridge and into the depths. You look up toward la luna casting light in the darkness. Its bouncing light filters through the water. You want to heal; you want to be transformed. You begin the slow ascent, and as you rise feel as though you're passing through the birth canal, the threshold nepantla. Only when you emerge from the dead with soul intact can you honor the visions you dreamed in the depths. In the deep fecund cave of gestation lies not only the source of your woundedness and your passion, but also the promise of inner knowledge, healing, and spiritual rebirth (the hidden treasures), waiting for you to bear them to the surface.

During the Coatlicue phase you thought you'd wandered off the path of conocimiento, but this detour is part of the path. You bodymindsoul is the hermetic vessel where transformation takes place. The shift must be more than intellectual. Escaping the illusion of isolation, you prod yourself to get out of bed, clean your house, then yourself. You light la virgen de Guadalupe candle and copal, and, with a bundle of yierbitas (ruda y yerba buena), brush the smoke down your body, sweeping away the pain, grief, and fear of the past that's been stalking you, severing the cords binding you to it.

You realize you've severed mind from body and reversed the dichotomy—in the beginning you blamed the body for betraying you, now you blame your mind. Affirming they're not separate, you begin to own the bits of yourself you've disowned, take back the projections you've cast onto others, and relinquish your victim identity. Ésta limpia unclogs your ears, enabling you to hear the rustling of los espíritus; it loosens the constriction in your throat, allowing you to talk with them. Claiming the creative powers and processes of the unconscious (Coyolxauhqui), you thank your soul for the intense emotions y los desconocimientos that wrung consciousness from you. Though you try to thank the universe for your illness, emotional trauma, and habits that interfere with living fully, you still can't accept these, may never be fully present with the pain, never fully embrace the parts of self you ousted from consciousness, may never forgive the unconscious for turning hostile. Though you know change will happen when you stop resisting the dark side of your reality, still you resist. But despite the dread and spiritual emptying, the work you do in the world is not ready to release you.

4. the call . . . el compromiso . . . the crossing and conversion

At four in the morning, the pounding of your heart wakes you. It's banging so hard you're afraid it'll crack your ribs. You sit up gasping for air,

fumble for the bed light, and pull the switch. Your arms are livid and swollen like sausages. Your face feels puffy and so hot it scorches your fingertips. Something slithers and swooshes against the inside walls. Bile rises, your stomach heaves. It feels like you've giving birth to a huge stone. Something pops out, you fall back onto the mattress in blessed relief. Is this what it feels like to die?

Cool and light as a feather, you float near the ceiling looking down at your body spread-eagle on the bed, a bed that's in the wrong place and reversed—the room is oddly elongated, the walls curved, the floor sloped. Though it's deep night and the light's off—but didn't you just turn it on?—you see everything like it was high noon in the desert. As you float overhead you bob into a white light—the lightbulb or the sun? You could glide out the window and never return. The instant you think this, you swoop back into the body. The re-entry feels like squeezing ten pounds of chorizo through a keyhole.

You get out of bed, stretch cramped limbs and stumble across the room like an arthritic patient. Soon energy zings up tu cuerpo (body) in an ecstacy so intense it can't be contained. You twirl around, hugging yourself, picking up speed and kicking the walls. Later you wonder if you made up an out-of-body story in an attempt to explain the inexplicable. It dawns on you that *you're not contained by your skin*—you exist outside your body, and outside your dreambody as well. If the body is energy, is spirit—it doesn't have boundaries. What if you experienced your body expanding to the size of the room, not your soul leaving your body? What if freedom from categories occurs by widening the psyche/body's borders, widening the consciousness that senses self (the body is the basis for the conscious sense of self, the representation of self in the mind)? It follows that if you're not contained by your race, class, gender, or sexual identity, the body must be more than the categories that mark you.

Leaving the body reinforces the mind/body, matter/spirit dichotomy you're trying to show does not exist in reality. The last thing you want to uphold is the Cartesian split, but thus far you haven't a clue how to unknot el nudo de cuerpo/mente/alma despite just having had an experience that intellectually unknots it. If el conocimiento that body is both spirit and matter intertwined is the solution, it's one difficult to live out, requiring that this knowledge be lived daily in embodied ways. Only then may the split be healed.[13]

What pulled you out of your body? Was the seven-seven you drank at the party still in your system when you took the Percodan? You know that mixing booze with drugs can end in death, so why did you do it? So that el jaguar, tu doble, que vigila por la noche could come from the south to stalk you, to pull you de tu cuerpo so you could experience . . . what, a dif-

ferent kind of knowledge? In the deepest part of night you followed the jaguar through the transparent wall between the worlds. Shapes shifted. Did you assume another pair of eyes, another pair of ears, another body, another dreambody? Maybe you took your physical body, and in this other place it metamorphosed into a jaguar.

Acts of self-abuse may lead to insight—or so you rationalize your experimenting with mind-expanding drugs. Insight originates from the light of the moon (Coyolxauhqui consciousness), enabling you to see through your identifications, through the walls that your ethnic cultural traditions and religious beliefs have erected. The lechuza eyes[14] of your naguala open, rousing you from the trance of hyper-rationality induced by higher education. An image flickers—nonverbal, brief, and subtle—signaling otro conocimiento: besides the mortal body you have a transtemporal, immortal one. This knowing prompts you to shift into a new perception of yourself and the world. Nothing is fixed. The pulse of existence, the heart of the universe is fluid. Identity, like a river, is always changing, always in transition, always in nepantla. Like the river downstream, you're not the same person you were upstream. You begin to define yourself in terms of who you are becoming, not who you have been.

These states of awareness, while vital, don't last. Yet they provide the faith that enables you to continue la lucha. When feeling low, the longing for your potential self is an ache deep within. Something within flutters its feathers, stretches toward the sky. You try to listen more closely, bringing all your faculties to bear on transforming your condition. Using these insights to alter your current thoughts and behavior, you reinterpret their meanings. As you learn from the different stages you pass through, your reactions to past events change. You re-member your experiences in a new arrangement. Your responses to the challenges of daily life also adjust. As you continually reinterpret your past, you reshape your present. Instead of walking your habitual routes you forge new ones.The changes affect your biology. The cells in your brain shift and, in turn, create new pathways, rewiring your brain.

On the path ahead you see otro puente, a footbridge with missing planks, broken rails. You walk toward it, step onto the threshold, and freeze, right hand clutching the past, left hand stretching toward the unknown. Behind, the world admonishes you to stick to the old-and-tried dominant paradigm, the secure relationships within it. Adelante, la Llorona whispers, "You have a task, a calling, only you can bring forth your potential." You yearn to know what that ever-present inner watcher is asking of you. Loosening your grip on the known and reaching for the future requires that you stretch beyond self- and culturally-imposed lim-

its. By now you've found renmants of a community—people on a similar quest/path. To transform yourself, you need the help (the written or spoken words) of those who have crossed before you. You want them to describe las puertas, to hold your hand while crossing them. You want them to mentor your work within the Chicana, queer, artistic, feminist, spiritual, and other communities.

To learn what to transform into you ask, "How can I contribute?" You open yourself and listen to la naguala and the images, sensations, and dreams she presents. (La naguala's presence is so subtle and fleeting it barely registers unless tracked by your attention's radar.) Your inner voice reveals your core passion, which will point to your sense of purpose, urging you to seek a vision, devise a plan. Your passion motivates you to discover resources within yourself and in the world. It prompts you to take responsibility for consciously creating your life and becoming a fully functioning human being, a contributing member of all your communities, one worthy of self-respect and love. You want to pursue your mission with integrity, to honor yourself and to be honored. Holding these realizations in mind, you stand at the brink and reconsider the crossing.

Are you sure you're ready to face the shadow-beast guarding the threshold—that part of you holding your failures and inadequacies, the negativities you've internalized, and those aspects of gender and class you want to disown? Recognizing and coming to terms with the manipulative, vindictive, secretive shadow-beast within will take the heaviest toll. Maybe this bridge shouldn't be crossed. Once crossed, it can't be uncrossed. To pass over the bridge to something else, you'll have to give up partial organizations of self, erroneous bits of knowledge, outmoded beliefs of who you are, your comfortable identities (your story of self, tu autohistoria[15]). You'll have to leave parts of yourself behind.

The bridge (boundary between the world you've just left and the one ahead) is both a barrier and point of transformation. By crossing, you invite a turning point, initiate a change. And change is never comfortable, easy, or neat. It'll overturn all your relationships, leave behind lover, parent, friend, who, not wanting to disturb the status quo nor lose you, try to keep you from changing. Okay, so cambio is hard. Tough it out, you tell yourself. Doesn't life consist of crossing a series of thresholds? Conocimiento hurts, but not as much as desconocimiento. In the final reckoning it comes down to a matter of faith, trusting that your inner authority will carry across the critical threshold. You must make the leap alone and of your own will. Having only partial knowledge of the consequences of crossing, you offer la Llorona, who regulates the passage, a token. You pray, repeat affirmations, take a deep breath, and step through the gate. Immediately, a knowing cracks the facade of your former self

and its entrenched beliefs: you are not alone; those of the invisible realm walk with you; there are ghosts on every bridge.

You stand on tierra sagrada—nature is alive and conscious; the world is ensouled. You lift your head to the sky, to the wingspread of pelicans, the stark green of trees, the wind sighing through their branches. You discern faces in the rocks and allow them to see you. You become reacquainted with a reality called spirit, a presence, force, power, and energy within and without. Spirit infuses all that exists—organic and inorganic—transcending the categories and concepts that govern your perception of material reality. Spirit speaks through your mouth, listens through your ears, sees through your eyes, touches with your hands. At times the sacred takes you unaware; the desire to change prompts it and then discipline allows it to happen.

With awe and wonder you look around, recognizing the preciousness of the earth, the sanctity of every human being on the planet, the ultimate unity and interdependence of all beings—somos todos un paíz. Love swells in your body and shoots out of your heart chakra, linking you to everyone/everything—the aboriginals in Australia, the crows in the forest, the vast Pacific Ocean. You share a category of identity wider than any social position or racial label. This conocimiento motivates you to work actively to see that no harm comes to people, animals, ocean—to take up spiritual activism and the work of healing. Te entregas a tu promesa to help your various cultures create new paradigms, new narratives.

Knowing that something in you, or of you, must die before something else can be born, you throw your old self into the ritual pyre, a passage by fire. In relinquishing your old self, you realize that some aspects of who you are—identities people have imposed on you as a woman of color and that you have internalized—are also made up. Identity becomes a cage you reinforce and double-lock yourself into. The life you thought inevitable, unalterable, and fixed in some foundational reality is smoke, a mental construction, fabrication. So, you reason, if it's all made up, you can compose it anew and differently.

FAST SPEAKING WOMAN

"I is another" – Rimbaud

because I don't have spit
because I don't have rubbish
because I don't have dust
because I don't have that which is in air
because I am air
let me try you with my magic power:

I'm a shouting woman

I'm a speech woman

I'm an atmosphere woman

I'm an airtight woman

I'm a flesh woman

I'm a flexible woman

I'm a high heeled woman

I'm a high style woman

I'm an automobile woman

I'm a mobile woman

I'm an elastic woman

I'm a necklace woman

I'm a silk scarf woman

I'm a know nothing woman

I'm a know it all woman

I'm a day woman

I'm a doll woman

I'm a sun woman

I'm a late afternoon woman

I'm a clock woman

I'm a wind woman

I'm a white woman

I'M A SILVER LIGHT WOMAN

I'M AN AMBER LIGHT WOMAN

I'M AN EMERALD LIGHT WOMAN

I'm an abalone woman

I'm the abandoned woman

I'm the woman abashed, the gibberish woman

the aborigine woman, the woman absconding

the Nubian Woman

the andeluvian woman

the absent woman

the transparent woman

the absinthe woman

the woman absorbed, the woman under tyranny

the contemporary woman, the mocking woman

the artist dreaming inside her house

I'm the gadget woman

I'm the druid woman

I'm the Ibo woman

I'm the Yoruba woman

I'm the vibrato woman

I'm the rippling woman

I'm the gutted woman

I'm the woman with wounds

I'm the woman with shins

I'm the bruised woman

I'm the eroding woman

I'm the suspended woman

I'm the woman alluring

I'm the architect woman

I'm the trout woman

I'm the tungsten woman

I'm the woman with the keys

I'm the woman with the glue

I'm a fast speaking woman

water that cleans

flowers that clean

water that cleans as I go

Beat

1

I sat in a dark smoke-filled bar in New York City wearing a black turtleneck sweater, black jeans, and black boots. My hair was cut in a sharp pageboy, my eyebrows were plucked to arrows. I sat there thinking this thought: Journeys are perhaps always imaginary. This bar was filled with others like me, smoking cigarettes and drinking. We were listening intently (yet languidly) to poets like us who stood in a small spotlight declaiming on the ache in human beings. I snapped my fingers in appreciation, murmuring "cool" when some profound thought had been expressed. My hair formed a soft halo in the spotlight as I too rose to speak a glimmer of wisdom into the urban void. The bar, dark and spectral with smoke and enlightenment, snapped its approval. Then Ginsberg walked in and read "Howl" for the first time. Journeys are always imaginary.

I was twelve and sitting in Miss Sirju's English class. Miss Sirju called me Deanne and insisted that I answer to this name, which I had never been called but which a careless registry clerk had attached to my birth certificate when an aunt had gone to the Mayaro registry, some miles away from Guayguayare, where I was born, to register my birth. This clerk had not bothered to listen closely to my aunt or had thought my aunt's opinion on the matter of my name worthless. My aunt, I don't know which one of them, I don't even know if it was an aunt, my aunt did not look at the birth certificate, nor did anyone else in my family, nor did anyone else in any school administration or church or neighbourhood or playground until Miss Sirju, my first form mistress. Not Miss Greenidge, my fastidious ABC dame school teacher; not Miss James, my primary school headmistress; not Miss Palmer, my standard one teacher, who would have had a perfect right to investigate me had she caught me cheating at poetry recital; not even Miss Meighu, my

high school principal. None of these authorities had challenged the name my family had called me since I was born. None of them had questioned my authenticity or my identity until Miss Sirju, who decided to teach me my real name when I was twelve years old.

The transformation into the girl Miss Sirju called Deanne was distasteful to me even though there were many girls I had read of whom I was willing to embody. The girls in *Little Women*, for example, or the girls in Enid Blyton mysteries, or the girl in "Oh Mary, go and call the cattle home." But this Deanne seemed to be a girl without a story. When Miss Sirju called Deanne, I did not answer. I was not being wilful. I looked around like all the other girls waiting for this Deanne to answer. Soon enough the other girls looked at me as if the word *Deanne* were an accusation. Miss Sirju gave me a bad conduct mark for being rude and ignoring her when she called "Deanne." She somehow did not understand that I did not hear my name, my name not being Deanne, and therefore could not answer. Her class became a torture chamber for me. Some days I remembered her problem and answered just to keep the peace. Some days I forgot this obsession of hers, my mind on my own life and not any fiction of Miss Sirju's. On the days that I remembered her problem, she played a cat and mouse game with me. After calling "Deanne" once, which I answered to when I was alert, she would call "Deanne" again unexpectedly to catch me out. Miss Sirju's English class was therefore a painful place. I could not concentrate on William Wordsworth or William Makepeace Thackeray, who were definitely Williams and never had to endure someone like Miss Sirju, I'd wager. So in order therefore to transcend Miss Sirju, I sat in a dark smoke-filled bar in New York City wearing a black turtleneck sweater, waiting to stand in the natural halo of my hair preceding Ginsberg's "Howl."

I had arrived at the bar following various pieces of information as to its whereabouts. A magazine, an arts report on the radio, a reading of a poem, a novel set in New York City, a piece of jazz heard on Radio Antilles, a glimpse over a shoulder at a neighbour's television

set of people calling themselves beatniks. These led me to the bar, down the steps of a New York brownstone, a brownstone such as the one Paule Marshall described in *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, describing a girl such as me living in New York City. Down the steps of this brownstone with a blue light small in its window on any evening there could be music — a solo saxophonist or a guitarist. I also played the guitar from time to time in this bar. Sometimes a singer with a plaintive voice would sing. On any evening there could be extemporizing on the nature of life and the world; on any evening, pulling a menthol through my lungs, I could obtain cool — a oneness with the hard city and the uninvolved universe.

2

When you embark on a journey, you have already arrived. The world you are going to is already in your head. You have already walked in it, eaten in it; you have already made friends; a lover is already waiting.

When I arrived at the apartment on Keele Street, Toronto, I was in America. Somewhere downtown was the hip fast world of jazz and poetry, esoteric arguments and utopian ideas. I had sat for six hours on the airplane, excited, air sick and afraid. Up the Atlantic, perhaps over the Bahamas, my resolve had dwindled, my plans had been thrown into crisis. America had seemed too big an idea for me. I felt small; who was I to plan such a journey? I felt presumptuous, forward, putting myself on this plane and believing that I could arrive anywhere that would require my presence. I was not used to the buffeting of air against steel, the slightest movement made me queasy. And just as a weak person would betray a cause, I felt like turning back. Of course, thankfully I had no control of the plane so I sat it out, not because I had not weakened but because I had no choice. What in fact was I to return to? A dreadful house, a dubious future, an alienated present. I had made no friendships that I could sustain, no friendships that take one through life — friendships for me were a burden. I had been distracted the moment I heard the

faraway BBC voice beckoning me; I had become dissociated the moment I had read *Jane Eyre*, the moment I had played Portia in the *Merchant of Venice*, the moment I had pranced about my high school stage as King Herod. The very moment I had walked onto the stage of the Naparima Bowl and recited, "No one was in the field but Polly Flint and me" from a poem I do not recall. I had been snatched away by James Baldwin, first to Harlem and then to Paris. So here I was on a plane, and my body felt weak and incapable. My plan to get to America now seemed shaky, as tendrilled as the sky outside, which I now could not look at. I regretted the window seat. It startled me that a little physical discomfort, a small inconvenience surely, would make me want to turn back. How was I going to handle the large inconveniences, the demonstrations, the sit-ins, the jailings I had planned to be part of when I arrived? But even in this depth, back was nowhere. Forward, if I did not die of fear, was America.

So when I arrived at the sixteenth-floor apartment in the west end of Toronto, I was relieved. I was in America. America was a world already conceived in my mind, long before I set foot in that apartment, long before I ever saw it. In fact, when I saw it I did not see it; I saw what I had imagined. One knows where one is going before one arrives. The map is in your head. You merely have to begin moving to have it confirmed. My city was a city busy with people, with purposes. It was inhabited by lye-slick-haired dudes, as in Malcolm X's autobiography; there were dashikied cadres as in don lee's poem "But he was cool." Mothers like Paule Marshall's, little girls like Toni Cade Bambara's, protesters at snack counters and on buses heading south, militants on courthouse steps with rifles. All the inhabitants of this city in America were African-American. I was prepared to speak on Nina Simone's "Mississippi God damn" and Trane's "Afro Blue." I was longing to sit someplace and listen to James Baldwin warn of the fire the next time. Owusu Saduki was to come from Buffalo to speak in my city. I was already living in my city long before boarding the air-sickening jet to make the journey. The plane landed in Canada, but I was in America. I

had come to meet my compatriots at the barricades, to face the dogs and the water hoses of Bull Connors, to defy George Wallace. These moments were my city.

3

In a newspaper in another country, any country is a monograph of energetic and elliptical dispatches. This I had taken note of while discoursing my way along latitudes of newsprint, making a compendium of the salient points. In fact, I had memorized the monograph itself — the streets it sketched, the particular contours, the landmarks. So when I embarked, I was already its citizen. I was dressed in a leatherette suit, approximating as well as I could under the circumstances the iconography of a woman in my situation, my hair was bursting from its orthodox perm, my family was already not my family, my road was already laid down. My city was a city in my imagination where someone suddenly and plainly appears as if belonging and not belonging, where someone may disappear also into nothing or everything. When I landed in Toronto I put my luggage down in the apartment on Keele Street and headed for Harlem, the Apollo, 125th Street.

4

I stepped into the cool opening of the Door of No Return. My feet landed where my thoughts were. This is the trick of the door — to step through and be where you want to be. Our ancestors were bewildered because they had a sense of origins — some country, some village, some family where they belonged and from which they were rent. We, on the other hand, have no such immediate sense of belonging, only of drift.

Maps

Isabella of Castille commissioned a polyptych altarpiece in 1496. Juan de Flandes and Michel Sittow were retained to work on the miniature altarpiece. In one panel called “The Multiplication of the Loaves and Fishes,” Isabella and Ferdinand are inserted into the scene at the front of the crowd near Jesus Christ. Isabella is kneeling; Ferdinand is standing.

What can be inferred here is that Isabella led a fabulous religious fantasy life. To see herself and Ferdinand at this occasion attests to the fertility of her imagination. But perhaps it was Juan de Flandes’ attempt to ingratiate himself further with Isabella of Castille; perhaps he said to her one day, “Dearest Queen, this scene would be nothing without you. You simply must be in it.” Then again, the idea of multiplying loaves and fishes, this particular miracle, must have appealed to Isabella as she and Ferdinand acquired more and more wealth.

Copper

My uncle used to work copper. He was a tall dark man. His face was beautiful and chiselled, as chiselled as the scars that cut into the auburn face of the sheet of copper. His teeth were white and even in his sculpted jaw; he grinned easily. Just as easily he took a smile back, his face turning stern in admonition of some small weakness of nieces and nephews like a stolen mango or a too lazy Sunday when the shoes weren't whitened. But my uncle used to work copper. With screwdriver, knife, pick, and hammer, he would chisel and pound some image out of the flat surface of a sheet of copper. He worked from no photograph or drawing but from a pattern he must have had inside himself. A mask emerged which at the time, having no other words for it, we called African — serene eyes, broad nose, full lips — not a recognizable face but an image, a presentiment of a face. This face came out of my uncle. My uncle was a teacher. He wore dark trousers and starched white long-sleeved shirts to go to his job as a teacher. He spoke and enforced proper English in our house and in his classrooms like he beat out African masks from copper. My second uncle wore these masks from copper. My second uncle wore these masks on carnival day — sometimes as breastplates or headdresses on whatever 'mas he was playing. My first uncle never played 'mas. He only coaxed the face out of the blank sheet of copper. Over months he would pick and mark, beat and drum out whatever spirit lay there. Eyes, jaws, cheeks, foreheads would emerge.

Scarifications mirrored in scarifications — the ones my uncle made of the ones on the face of the image. My uncle's hands were deft, his fingers black on the back of his hands, pink on the flat of his palms. The other uncle would wear this mask on his chest or his forehead surrounded by feathers and beads and dance under the burning sun — singing nonsensical chants that stood for African or Amerindian words.

My uncle would take months to draw and cut out the masks; he would leave it for days, frustrated that a cheekbone would not level out. My uncle was not a scholar of African art of any kind. He did not know of the personal masks of the Bassa people, he did not know of the men's society masks of the Manding people or Guinea, nor the dance mask of the Igbo or the Bawa or Bamana people. He had no recall of the Baule, the Oan, the Mossi, the Ogoni, the Sennefo, the Ngbaka, or the Akwaya. My uncle only had the gaping Door of No Return, a memory resembling a memory of a thing that he remembered. And not so much remembered as felt. And not so much felt as a memory which held him.

He beat these masks out of himself every afternoon after he came home from school. What happened at school we did not know. What happened to make him search the copper face of the metal hoping for and drilling an image of a self he suspected lay in him. And he oriented that self to Africa. What made him appear at seven in the morning, a conservative young man, dutiful to his family, dressed in dark pants and white shirt, a white handkerchief to sop his forehead in the early brilliant sun, peeking evenly out of his back pocket, his shoes black and shiny, the crease in his trousers razor sharp. Then after school his chest bare, his mouth slightly open, his tongue emphasizing his hands beating and burnishing the metal face, brightly, brilliantly copper.

My second uncle had no such reserve to beat out. He was an electrician; he went to work as he liked, played 'mas, drank, ran women and card games; he was always looking for an angle. He had no discipline, as his parents said, nothing out of which to beat copper into an African face. So he made 'mas all the time. His only discipline were his mother and father but my first uncle's discipline was larger. He was trying to become someone. Which meant to be a schoolteacher or better. Which meant to lead a respectful life, an exemplary life — a life which negated the effects of the Door of No Return — to be lifted above the stereotype of "uncivilized." Not an

ordinary life, not a life that was simple, but a life always dedicated to self-conscious goodness, self-conscious excellence.

My first uncle also carved wood. He carved a profile of a man, sometimes a woman, the cheekbone high, the eye serene, the lips full, the jaw strong. He carved this profile in wood, polished it black and smooth. He carved this profile over and over again. When I was small the house seemed full of jet black heads, smooth and shiny, their foreheads serene as if looking down on some land, some jewel, some thing they owned and were happy with. These heads were as serene as my uncle's coppers were ferocious. In the burning carnival sun, laying on my second uncle's chest or over his brow, my first uncle's copper masks shone to blinding. My first uncle did not go to 'mas; he stayed home, sending instead his ferocious copper into the street battling the sun itself. His will and what was inside him screamed brilliantly over San Fernando. Dancing along, stopping to inspire awe and fear, my uncle's copper masks visited these faraway streets as emissaries, spirits from a lost place. In our house my uncle carved his serene profiles, which he never felt complete enough, over and over again.

How he must have felt. That he could not perfect serenity. He would walk around the house carving and smoothing. He would pick up one wooden face, shine it for an hour or so, finding a spot he loved, then another, smoothing the brow, glossing the cheekbone.

My uncle moved to Canada later. First to Hamilton, then to Toronto, and then to Sudbury. I do not know where his passions went then. I do not think that his hand carved any more wood or beat out any more metal. Steel and nickel parenthesized him. I do not know what he thought of that town, Hamilton, wreathed in deadly smoke and steel rust; I do not know what he thought of the equally toxic frozen smoke of Sudbury, the slag heaps close to his house, the dominant brown rock that seemed to dull every sound, every echo there. I do not know what became of him, the fierce him he tried to carve — he tried to calm to serenity. I suspect that he was drowned the way one

drowns, often willingly, in any metropole. The city drowns out your longings and your fears, replacing them with its own anonymous desire. These three cities in the northern hemisphere took him to the more mundane vulgar acts of acquisition, away from any contemplation of the self into the hurly-burly of a packaged life, property and consumption. And he may have been grateful.

More Maps

According to my uncle the world was its books, its words, its languages. His evenings of grammar drills induced illnesses, panic attacks, nausea, and sleepiness. " 'It' could never 'have,' " he would shout to some child saying, "Uncle, it have a man outside asking for you." " 'There is,' 'there are' for the plural, but 'it' could never 'have.' " No simple request or statement went without such correction, until this child forgot or regretted what he or she wanted. Soon there was pure silence around my uncle.

What is the Spanish word for butter? *Mantequilla.* What is the Spanish word for bread? *Pan.* What is the Spanish word for butterfly? *Mariposa.* Girl? *Niña.* Water? *Agua.* Beach? *Playa.* And for dreams? *Suenos.* Hope? *Esperanza.* Help? *Socorro.* Sometimes this child would discover quite by mistake his or her own hopeless desire for *esperanza, socorro, suenos* against this endless schooling.

Out of the blue my uncle's face turning from laughter to seriousness would say, "Conjugate the verb *tener."* Just as he was teaching you the waltz by having you step on his feet as he danced to Pete d'Ulyut's Band playing "Stardust," he would surprise you with the difficult declension of the verb *llevar.*

Conjugations in Disgrace *and* Paradise

Well, I suppose then, my uncle taught me to hang on to the world from the arms of books, or words at any rate. To be alert to translation even as your feet dance. Even if "Stardust" is playing, or "Via Con Dios, My Darling," one must be alert to questions of meaning that may be lying in ambush or bearing down on you, or lurking in the soft recesses of the livingroom like your beautiful schoolteacher uncle. To read is to traverse the limnal space between laughter and spelling, between syntax and dancing.

So I am on a plane going to Australia, reading J.M. Coetzee's novel *Disgrace.* It is his only novel where one can clearly read race as its subject. His earlier books seemed to refuse race. Who could blame him? Since South Africa reduced human beings to its arbitrary biological tyranny, for a writer working under the totalitarian state of apartheid, allegory was an obvious literary strategy. A way of surviving apartheid's ruthless violence. The victory over apartheid seemed to free Coetzee to realism, to more plain terms about race. That moment must have been odd — stunning, euphoric. When the world changes, even when it is the change you have longed for and dreamed, it must be destabilizing. It turned Coetzee's style from allegory to a kind of journalism.

As I read *Disgrace,* these thoughts come to me. Writers do not lead, they follow, however prescient their works might seem at times. It is only that they, unlike most people, cannot shut up. They gush out what they see — whatever thought they have, and everyone around them is startled because they've said what everyone's been thinking. Sometimes they see too early, sometimes too late. Sometime they gush their fears, and then sometimes they blurt out their affinities.

To enter Coetzee's earlier work was to enter that odd trope, the "universal," the "human." At least some of us could. Others of us who saw a less noble and more vulgar world may have been

untouched. Or may have, being more cynical, read that trope as "white"; or may have read the helplessness of his characters as luxury and, more telling, may have read his characters' inaction as hardly remarkable. I for one always felt a slight discomfort in his texts even though I longed for inclusion in his "human." As I had yearned decades before to dance with my uncle but had dreaded his jolting conjugations. For me, Coetzee's narratives, for all their universality, could not contest or enlighten the other narratives emanating from South Africa. I mean the crowds of demonstrators being shot by deadly bullets or whipped with *sjamboks*, the desert-like hunger of townships, the imprisonments, the detainees being thrown from multi-storied police buildings, the physical tortures, the political prisoners whose bodies were braced in the eloquent language of resistance. Perhaps the "universal" could not compete or respond to this din of narrations. Himself freed of the trope in post-apartheid South Africa, the results in Coetzee's novel *Disgrace* are startling and revealing.

On the plane to Australia, traversing Coetzee's South Africa, Toni Morrison's *Paradise* limns on the horizon. These two, *Disgrace* and *Paradise*, seem to be in conversation with each other. At least now in my mind. Writing is, after all, an open conversation. Works find each other. They live in the same world. The narrative of race is embedded in all narratives. My uncle loved James Baldwin at the same time he loved Lawrence Durrell. At once he cut his hair and dressed like Sam Cooke, then he enforced the proper use of English and berated the use of the demotic. So you see, reading is full of complications.

To enter Toni Morrison's fiction is to enter her rewriting of the myth of America, and so it is also a conversation about grace, redemption, and that quintessential American ideal, happiness. Against the official American narrative, Morrison narrates the African-American presence that underpins the official story but is rarely, truly braided among the narratives of the "pilgrims," the "founding fathers," the "west," and so on.

In a society so invested in its "inherent goodness" and moral superiority, Morrison's voice is always trenchant. Her project to write myth is nothing less than trying to take command of that national narrative — to call it to account for the injustice it elides. Her language is biblical the way the Bible is more than story but narrative, more than narrative myth-wide in its reach of event and meaning. Yet within all that grand beauty is a palpable disillusion, an inexorable tragedy. Myth is of course seductive, but it needs material power to enforce it. The dominant myth overwhelms Morrison's mythmaking, leaving her characters stranded in a kind of inevitable failure. In history. The daily bulletins on Black America seen through mass media encroach on the space of Morrison's narratives. She cannot write fast enough to counter them. In *Paradise*, Morrison's voice is finally sepulchral. As if having offered America Genesis she now curses it with Revelations.

Any representation of blackness interests me. Coetzee's English professor Lurie, is on a collision course with blackness however obtuse. When he is charged by a student with sexual harassment, Coetzee slyly brings him before a committee of inquiry. One cannot help but draw the parallel between this committee of inquiry and the Truth and Reconciliation Committee in South Africa. I notice that Coetzee awkwardly collapses the so-called "political correctness" of feminism with that of post-apartheid "black rule." The committee of inquiry is racially marked by their names revealing a strange assortment of "modern" and ascendant interests — Blacks, Asians, aspiring women and a token holdover from the past. Significantly the chair of the committee is a Professor of Religious Studies (shades of Desmond Tutu).

A cunning voice from my childhood living room asks if anyone else notices all this interpolation and what it might mean.

I recall one character in *Paradise* saying "Slavery is our past. Nothing can change that, certainly not Africa." Another answers too feebly perhaps against this weighty legacy, "We live in the world, Pat. The whole world." Morrison's America is the painful void of the

Diaspora. *Paradise* is about the nature of blackness. When the novel begins in the 1960s these debates are at a height in Ruby and they have found a focus in a nearby unconventional convent of stray and destitute women. The first chapter starts with the murders by the men of Ruby of women in the convent. It reads provocatively, “They kill the white girl first.”

As if *Paradise* and *Disgrace* were a call and answer chant, blackness and whiteness angle and parry perilously. Everyone else is asleep on the plane to Australia when Lurie is read the charges against him. He replies “I am sure the members of this committee have better things to do with their time than rehash a story over which there will be no dispute. I plead guilty to both charges. Pass sentence, and let us get on with our lives.” He refuses repentance or contrition. It is probably true, I think as I stretch my body across four seats in the middle aisle, that repentance or contrition or a going over of the story or even any attempts at the truth may not be sufficient for the atrocities of apartheid. I have a mind that these may be the preoccupations of victims. The “why” that wracks them even more than the “who.”

Lurie rather dramatically compares the committee’s procedures to Mao’s China with its “recantation, self-criticism, public apology.” So it seems that *Disgrace* rejects a communal remedy or any possibility of change. And this is where I find the novel ultimately pessimistic. Because Coetzee doesn’t offer any other choices except death. Lurie’s movement to some understanding about his place in the universe only comes through the work he begins doing in a clinic that euthanizes stray dogs and cats. It is ironic that he cannot find the same fealty for the human beings he encounters. Allegory again? And again the daily narratives make allegory obsolete.

The big question here is — up in the sky where the big questions can be pondered — is Coetzee saying that for white South Africans there is no meaningful or moral survival without apartheid? Is he

saying that apartheid is as much social system as physical body; is he saying that whites are irredeemable?

I'm about to fall into one of those disturbed sleeps one falls into on airplanes. Now it is amplified by Coetzee's dread. In the gaps of waking and sleeping, I plummet into the middle of *Paradise.* There, there is an exquisite chapter called "Divine." It opens at a wedding with a sermon on love which you are drawn into like being drawn stunningly into hell, well, into clarity. "God is not interested in you," declares the preacher. Here Morrison suggests that life in the Diaspora can't be put right, the imagination cannot suffice — not on love, not on grace, not on exile. Not on any thing that she can imagine at this moment anyway. The bride is a girl with a torn heart.

Why do I find this chapter "exquisite" then? Is it my own sense of hopelessness and doom? Does Morrison confirm my dread? Is dread the equivalent of beauty in the Diaspora? Is Coetzee's dread of another kind?

You have a lot of time to think, going to Australia. There is a portion of the journey where you feel that you will never see land again. Most people on the plane are sleeping through this part. I am worried about *Disgrace.* If Coetzee's white professor is irredeemable, his Blacks are horribly so. Coetzee's Blacks are acquisitive, predatory, rapine, and brutal. They have the unfortunate opacity of all Blacks in the imagination of a racially constructed whiteness — they are, in a word, scary. There is the growing or overbrooding presence of avenging Blacks. First is Petrus, a hard-working but acquisitive man. So acquisitive that Lurie's daughter is also game. But there are more scary Blacks to come — three of them — one of them a boy who is connected to Petrus by family and perhaps all of them related to Petrus by plot. Lurie and Lucy first meet them on foot along the road. Then follows the brutal rape of Lucy and the beating and burning of Lurie. As mysteriously as they arrive, they disappear. They are ubiquitous. Rape is universal but the trope of

the Black rapist is an overwhelming one. It is also predictable and overused. I was startled by its deployment in *Disgrace.*

Below me, out there in a vast darkness, or is it light yet, the international dateline is turning yesterday into tomorrow. Changing everything, even moments. So simply. In *Paradise*, without physical description of the women at the convent, Morrison leaves us to disentangle our own racial codes with the smallest of signifiers, that line: "They kill the white girl first." Reviewers have gone in pursuit and disagree on just who that is in the text. Odd the discomfort that this brings. And here I remember Coetzee and a similar discomfort. But is it? He says in his earlier work, race doesn't exist. She says in *Paradise*, race exists in the collective mind — but it doesn't exist really, does it? We all obviously find it important — we handle it, we leave it glaringly untouched, we circumvent it … like the world, in this airplane's clumsy flight.

In *Disgrace*, the Black rapists are spectres of white fear and Lurie, is like Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness*, "reduced" (by savagery, it is intimated) to savagery. Race exposes allegory. Allegory cannot lift race in its universal wings. Does Coetzee see it, I wonder, as I drift off again, for in the "universal" the "black rapist" trope *is* universal. Lucy says, "I think they are rapists first and foremost. Stealing things is just incidental. A sideline. I think they *do* rape." (not my italics). The power of this trope is absolutely fascinating to me. How it eradicates, here in Coetzee's text, a century of brutal injustice; how its possibility comes to justify, intentionally or not, "keeping the blacks down."

Well, all this stems from having to discern whether one is being asked to dance or whether one is being ordered to conjugate a verb in another language. It is not the job of writers to lift our spirits. Books simply do what they do. They sometimes confirm the capricious drama of a childhood living room. When you think that you are in the grace of a dance you come upon something hard. In *Paradise*, Blacks can never live peacefully because of racism. In

Disgrace, whites can never live peacefully without racism. Perhaps myth and allegory are worn out, perhaps they fail as imaginative devices. But so too reality. Sydney is ahead of me and behind me are hours of vertigo and restless sleep which I've left in two books.

Maps

Every shadow made by an opaque body smaller than the source of light casts derivative shadows tinged by the colour of the original shadows.

From Leonardo da Vinci's notes
on light and shadow, circa 1492

Up Here

Calibishie. Up here you are in the world. It is ochre and blue-black and nothing you can call rock but if you can imagine before rock, molten obelisk, walls of volcanic mud jagging out into the ocean, and the ocean, voluminous, swift and chaotic. But perhaps it is we who are chaotic and the ocean orderly, we in disarray and the orange ochre rock mannered. Up here you are in the world and you want to stay, though in the evening your eyes reach over the windward mist to Marie-Galante in the horizon closing down, and in Marie-Galante you conjure the chaos you know of a city.

Perhaps over on Marie-Galante someone else, like you, looking south to Dominica, Calibishie where you are, someone else sitting on a similar veranda, someone else is conjuring chaos. Though they cannot see a city in Calibishie, so their eyes would brush past farther on to Marigot.

So you are here alone then, and you cannot hold on or control the orderliness of the real world, but you are here as all around you the light goes suddenly and quickly as light goes here and the noises of dusk rise, describable and indescribable; the noise of crickets singing loudly and all at once, beginning at the same moment as darkness envelops you. Up here in Calibishie you are in the world and wondering what is the sound you make, what is the business you do, who are you in this orderliness that does not seem to need you. Well, you sit there on a veranda at Calibishie and you feel everything, feel the soft moist breeze across your body, smell the musk of the sea, hear the creak and shush of the poinciana. As suddenly and as quietly your eyes shift from conjuring a city to save you. Suddenly and as quietly everything is passing, all you've lived, and you are sitting in the lap of something big, some intimacy.

The next day we drive up into the Carib territory and it is about midday and only fools like us are out on the road in the middle of

the day when bare feet burn on the asphalt and the rain forest road is humid and long. You get the sense that the mountain road and the tree fern and the palmiste have been here absorbing and deflating other foolish incursions. The maxi taxi stops and we get out, going into the shop. A Carib man looks me in the eye as if he knows me and I settle into his look and I buy a hat whose strands of flex, he explains, have been buried in levels of mud, dyed there in grades of brown and red. We climb back into the van and he looks at me again as if I should be staying and where am I off to now, and I am half surprised but half convinced that, well, of course I should be staying. He sent his son, like my brother, to give me a small basket as a gift, as if to say, "Well, here then, go if you're determined, but take this with you." I had noticed at the back of the shop, my sister, his daughter, a whole world was in her face, 3000 years of Ciboney, then Arawak, then Carib canoeing north from South America, before it was South America, 1000 AD. In her face all the battles against the French and English for two centuries, the hit and hit and run and the intractable mountains that kept this island Carib until 1763; until settling to the west and east they crept into her face, too. In her face, now African, which people? Ga? Ashanti? Ibo? Washed in, wept in, with all the waters of the hundreds of rivers and rivulets. I swam some of those rivers — sluggish Cribiche, the crackling fresh Sarisari, the swelling magnificent Layou, the river Claire, the river Crapaud, Taberi, Mulaitre, Ouayaperi — I tried to swim them all, all 365, and say them all over and over — River Jack, Rivière Blanche, Canari, River Douce, Malabuka, Perdu Temps. And all this Dahomey in her face that would name the valley to the southwest the Valley of Desolation.

Well I left them in the road of the Carib territory, waving, and the van moved on, chewing up still-rugged highway over to Mahaut and Massacre. "Massacre," Rochester says in Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*, "And who was massacred here? Slaves?" "Oh no," Antoinette answers, foreshadowing her own erasure in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, "Not slaves. Something must have happened a long time ago. Nobody remembers now." When Rochester arrived in Massacre it

was raining, "… huge drops sounded like hail on the leaves of the tree, and the sea crept stealthily forwards and backwards." He had feared that it might be the end of the world. When I arrived in Massacre it was gleaming, the sky a glittering blue and the road, which was sea and road at once, was full of people. The rum shop was busy and someone in the van said, "These Massacre people are always on the street, day or night. This town is always lit up." The town had a certain feeling of careening, all bare feet and flowered dresses, all old men with sticks and young ones with soccer balls, all hips held to laugh and children playing fiercely. Rhys would have longed for it even more than she longed for it in *Voyage in the Dark*.

The next morning I wake up in Roseau, the sunlight pouring through the jalousie and something else, the sound of Roseau, nothing sweeter than children going to school, sun burning their lips in laughter and their own schemes, nothing sweeter in the morning than Roseau women singing in patois, "ça qa fait na?" and answering, "Moi la!" How are you? I'm there! I'm there. I've lain in rooms in cities listening before, but this Roseau is the sweetest sounding. You can't tell the difference between laughing and quarrelling. So I'm there and I wait until the morning sound turns to mid-morning and then the silence of noon and then it starts all over again and then, like and unlike Calibishie, because Roseau is a city, night's intimacy passes over the buildings and streets and commerce and over the water again.

Maps

Every light which falls on opaque bodies between equal angles produces the first degree of brightness and that will be darker which receives it by less equal angles, and the light and shade both function by pyramids.

From Leonardo da Vinci's notes
on light and shadow, circa 1492

Armour

I am always in the armour of my car in these small northern Ontario towns. They are unremittingly the same. There is a supermarket, a liquor store, a video store where there is also milk, bubble gum, and Coca-Cola, and inevitably a pickup truck parked in a lot. There is sometimes a garage with a greasy man or two and a harassed guard dog or an old dog suffering from hip dysplasia. The small town to which I drive every morning and which I never become so familiar with as not to think of my car as my armour, my town is the same as the rest. And yes, there is also a cemetery and a church, two churches for a population that can hardly divide into two. The garage in this town has a mechanic who hates to talk. He keeps a dog tied up on a filthy mattress inside the garage. One day I see this dog who has also been cultivated for fierceness and I want to let him go, even if he will bite me. The mechanic who is also the gas attendant is a middle-aged man. He has been burned by wind and snow and gas fumes. His face is scaled red with white patches. His mouth is a tight thin wire. His jeans have grown small, but he hasn't disowned them. Sometimes I am not sure if he will sell me gas. Sometimes I am not sure if the corner store will rent me a video. Money is not always the currency here. Nor books, which I could offer. There might be no way of exchanging even the things that strangers might exchange. Here I feel that I do not share the same consciousness. There is some other rhythm these people grew up in, speech and gait and probably sensibility.

There are ways of constructing the world — that is, of putting it together each morning, what it should look like piece by piece — and I don't feel that I share this with the people in my small town. Each morning I think we wake up and open our eyes and set the particles of forms together — we make solidity with our eyes and with the matter in our brains. How a room looks, how a leg looks, how a clock looks. How a thread, how a speck of sand. We collect

each molecule, summing them up into flesh or leaf or water or air. Before that everything is liquid, ubiquitous and mute. We accumulate information over our lives which bring various things into solidity, into view. What I am afraid of is that waking up in another room, minutes away by car, the mechanic walks up and takes my face for a target, my arm for something to bite, my car for a bear. He cannot see me when I come into the gas station; he sees something else and he might say, “No gas,” or he might simply grunt and leave me there. As if I do not exist, as if I am not at the gas station at all. Or as if something he cannot understand has arrived — as if something he despises has arrived. A thing he does not recognize. Some days when I go to the gas station, I have not put him together either. His face is a mobile mass, I cannot make out his eyes, his hair is straw, dried grass stumbling toward me. Out the window now behind him the scrub pine on the other side of the road, leaves gone, or what I call leaves, the sun white against a wash of grey sky, he is streaking toward me like a cloud. Frayed with air. The cloud of him arrives, hovers at the window. I read his face coming apart with something — a word I think. I ask for gas; I cannot know what his response is. I pass money out the window. I assume we have got the gist of each other and I drive away from the constant uncertainty of encounters. I drive through the possibility of losing solidity at any moment.

Maps

The early Romans drew maps based solely on itineraries, not attesting to science or geographic study. Simply maps of where they were going. So that a map looked like a graph of horizontal lines of roads heading to a destination.

Hilde Domin
Birthdays

1
She is dead

today is her birthday
this is the day
on which she
in this triangle
between the legs of her mother
was pushed forth
she
who pushed me forth
between her legs
she is ashes

2
Always I think
on the birth of a deer
the way it sets its legs on the ground

3
I've forced no one into the light
only words
words do not turn the head
they stand up
immediately
and walk off

BLEEDING

I was giving a reading in a church, in a village on a lake. Walking through one of its pretty neighbourhoods, I passed a little house that had, on its front lawn, a handmade wooden sign with shooting stars, a moon, and the palm of a hand. When I knocked, a middle-aged woman came to the door. She was wearing a pink sweater, and her hair was short and fair. She led me to a card table she had set up by the front window. I sat in a wooden chair across from her, and she draped a dark blue velvet fabric over the table.

I've never done a reading on this cloth before, but I don't like a slippery surface when I do a reading, and this helps.

She dealt the cards. *Okay, what's going on in your life? What's good and what's not good? What's working and not working? Once you figure that one out, it's a huge tool.*

Before I could answer, she got up and went to the couch and retrieved her blue-framed glasses. Putting them on as she returned, she said, *Sorry, these new cards are very dramatic. I need to wear my glasses to see them.*

When she returned, I answered her question: *I feel sort of sad and stressed out, kind of confused and depressed a little bit, like I can't get started or something. And I feel like there's a new phase of life I cannot reach—I feel sort of stuck in the old one. And my brain feels a little bit stuck. And then I'm finding that emotionally things are hard for me with my boyfriend, and I'm never quite sure how much of the problem is him and how much of it is just me.*

She said, *Oh, that's a good one. Once you figure that one out, it's a huge tool.*

* * *

Protective shield! Sorry!—I feel no protective shield with you. Very often I sit down with people and I'll feel nothing, and I'll say to the person, *Your protective shield—do you think it's made out of brick or curtain? Is it Plexiglas? Could you close your eyes and visualize taking it down, please?* Once they do that, I can do the reading, because I can't read through the

protective shield. But you don't have one, which either means you're psychic yourself, or you don't have a boundary.

Now, this first card is the Three of Wands. You've walked to the end of something, and you think there's nowhere to go. But I think this end is self-imposed. Perhaps this card is saying you've walked to the end of the real world—the concrete. See? The woman's standing on concrete? And if you look—you see how there's a point at the end?—like a sewing machine point, almost? It leads down to a spot in the river. There's something in you that knows how to keep walking, but something's stopping you. And what's stopping you is … grief. I don't know what the grief is. But it has nothing to do with your boyfriend. It's there from before you ever met him, and it's a

quiet grief. You don't feel it every day, but it's there all the time. It may be that you're porous and the grief isn't yours. Does your mother have a grief?

Yes.

Well, it might be that you were born with your mother's grief, like it got implanted in you as an energy ball. I feel a really strong energy from you, and it's like, whatever that energy is, you're a baby growing inside your mother's body, and your mother has this ball of grief or sorrow or negativity, and then it goes into your body, and you're born, and you're walking around with your mother's grief and sorrow, and you don't even know it! But it's gnawing at you.

There's a way of saying, *Could you please send that ball of pain back where it belongs, if it isn't mine?* Like actually say, *I'm sending this back now. And please send it back in the most healed and loving form it can go. But I don't want it, it's not welcome, and it's not helping me.* So there we have it. I think that's what's causing your road to end …

The next card is the Ten of Swords—the most painful card in the deck. There's something … chunks of you … are falling down. But look! Strangely, the bleeding is going up, not down. It's not coming out of your vagina or going down your legs. It's going up! Why is the bleeding going up? Softening your brain? This is a hard one … I have to feel the card.

* * *

As she felt the card, her eyes closed. I thought, *Maybe blood that goes down is period blood. It softens the lining of the uterus. And bleeding that goes up is thinking blood. It softens the lining of the brain.* When I was thirteen, the year before I first got my period, I often woke in the middle of the night and felt a tickle of blood at the back of my throat, just as it was beginning to drip down. I would rush to the toilet, head tilted back, and push a wad of

toilet paper to my nose as it grew wet and red, replacing it, and replacing it, sitting on the toilet through the long night, endless hours of thinking nothing at all.

* * *

Okay, I've got something in my mouth. Has it got to do with your voice? Were you able to ask for what you needed from your mother, as a little girl?

I don't think so.

What about what you ate as a girl?

Cheddar cheese and chicken soup?

Pardon me. I'm not understanding. Maybe I need to look in the crystal ball now. Okay, hold on. Turning on the ball … I'm slow at this because it's new, so it might take a minute … Okay, now I see it! Something's dangling, and it is making me feel a little bit sick. You're sitting in front of a computer … what does that have to do with it?

That's what I do all the time.

Pornography?

No. I think it's just writing.

Is there something about your back being to the room when your boyfriend's there, and you're sitting at the computer?

Well, we did argue the other day, and I was at the computer and he was standing behind me.

Okay. I know this sounds very weird and silly, but it's coming into my mind, and I find it's best to say the things that come into my mind. The man I'm involved with—I find it very strange that he often pees sitting down. I think it's not very manly. He says, *That way I can talk to whoever's in the room!* But it's very weird that he does that. I don't know why I'm connecting that to your story, but there's something about a person whose back is turned … because your boyfriend is wanting to be connected to you —he's sticking his connection things out, but yours are only going to be present if you're connected to yourself. So I think the central method of improving your relationship is to connect it to yourself on a very deep level.

Okay ...

And … I think I see a pregnant belly again. Why do I keep seeing…? You've talked about maybe wanting to have a child. And it seems fine if you do, and it seems fine if you don't. But this whole reading is about doing the work of stepping over a gigantic wall—and you have to find out what

that transformation is for you. I think maybe you're wanting the transformation to be pregnancy—you're talking about the happiness of the pregnancy—yet from everything I've seen about having a baby, once the baby arrives, it's not the joyride it looks like.

Now, this card is Death—your first Major Arcana. It is the burning of the phoenix, the burning of the blood. You know, our creativity is connected very deep into our soul, it's our very deepest, most central energy. I painted and painted, and then I did a portrait commission business, and then one day I fell down on the floor and I couldn't do it anymore. Because here's my heart-center, and then I start connecting it to paying my public utilities

bill, and then some fucking jerk comes over and says, *But that isn't my son's nose!* Is there any chance that your art form is bleeding you out?

Perhaps?

Well, hon, I think you're in for a big burning—and you have to let it happen. You need to make a concentrated effort, and really fall into that deep space.

But will it destroy my life?

No, no! It's not going to destroy your life. Don't worry. It's not going to destroy your life at all. Now, this is the Moon card. This shows that it *does* go back to that painful place of your mom being depressed. The Moon card is about what's hidden inside—something that's causing you pain, blocking your relationship, blocking your art, and blocking your own peace. This card is almost asking, Can you look into that corner of your life? Can you say, *I'm going to walk into that moon quadrant of me that I don't know.* That whole idea of walking in, looking around, and just letting it be the truth. *What is the truth of this single quadrant of me?* It's just one part! The part that no one sees.

And your final outcome card is … Seven of Pentacles! That's a good final outcome card! It means, *I'm starting over with something great and new.* Look at what you're going to produce! Glowing, beautiful pieces of fruit—or whatever those things are. And the light is shining through them. That pink light is gorgeous, just *gorgeous!* Maybe there can be something beautiful that happens with the bleeding out.

I walked back through the streets and returned to my hotel room, where I went immediately to the washroom, and saw that I had been bleeding on my nice white underwear, as I suspected.

You can become accustomed to anything in this life, but blood coming out of your vagina once a month is nothing. I think, *Isn't it stupid my body did this again? Will it never learn? Will it never take the hint? No,* it replies: *Will* you *never take the hint?* If I paid more attention to the bleeding, maybe I would. But I don't: I deal with it, and it goes. Will I miss it one day, once it's gone for good? Why is my body doing this inside me every month, and how many opportunities could I miss? How stupid am I really? How little I care for what it wants. How neglected and abandoned is this little animal inside me that is doing its work so diligently and well—this tiny uterus, these mushy ovaries, these fallopian tubes and my brain. It has no idea I need nothing from it. It just keeps on working. If only I could speak to it and tell it to stop. Who is it doing all this for, if not for me? And what do I do for *it?* I mop up its blood. Then I mop it up again. I never feel grateful. I never give a single thought to each expectant egg—hopeful when ovulating, then saddened when I don't get pregnant and it's released from my body, confused as a girl who no one calls, who no boy ever asks out, who no one ever invites to a party. Then one day, the school finds out: She's dead. *What? That girl we all ignored?* Yes.

Miles once told me that I bleed less on my period than any other woman he's been with. With other women, whenever they would have sex during her period, the blood would be halfway up his belly and halfway down his thighs. With me, there's hardly a spot.

I wonder if it means I have a very small uterus, I said, the one time he told me this.

He just shrugged. To him, it didn't mean anything. Yet for an hour after, I hung suspended between the thought that I must be a truly refined woman to bleed much less, and I must not be much of a woman at all.

Heading home from that village, it felt as though never in my life had I realized how uncomfortable people made me. Every person on the train made me feel inferior, shy and confused—battered and awkward. When an older man smiled at me, it felt important not to look at him. A group of men seemed very interested in two sisters. When one took her hair down, it fell to just above her shoulders, and she was even more beautiful than she had been before. Then she put her hair back up. She was wearing sneakers and a leather jacket and jeans. The sisters were wearing make-up, yet there was something masculine about them, too. Their lips were bright and prettily shaped.

I thought about how city life was only one form of life, and how the structures we make are static and not all that complex. They do not shimmer like the dry grasses on the hills or the leaves on the trees. There are not as many examples in the city of the impossibly far and the impossibly close. In the country, there is the closeness of the grass as you lay down on it, and the vast expanse of the sea stretching up to the sky. In the city, everything is of equal significance, from everything being so equally close up. True perspective is pretty much impossible. The buildings do not sway in the wind, so it's harder for our ideas to sway. You cannot look at a building for several hours, while in nature you can look at anything for several hours, because nature is alive and ever-changing.

FOLLICULAR

Barcelona was governed in the Middle Ages by an oligarchy of nobles, merchants, shopkeepers and artisans, who formed the Council of One Hundred. This council had to answer to the king, but the king did not rule absolutely. He was seen to rule by contract and not by divine right. The leaders of the council swore him this oath: *We, who are as good as you, swear to you, who are no better than us, to accept you as our king and sovereign, provided you observe all of our liberties and laws—but if not, not.*

From that, R. B. Kitaj took the title of his painting of Auschwitz, *If Not, Not.* What is this idea of *not not?*

Are you going to have a child? If I do, I do—and if not, not. I ... who am as good as you ... will accept you ... provided you observe ... all of our liberties. And I don't want 'not a mother' to be part of who I am—for my identity to be the negative of someone else's positive identity. Then maybe instead of being 'not a mother' I could be *not 'not a mother.'* I could be *not not.*

If I am *not not,* then I am what I am. The negative cancels out the negative and I simply am. I am what I positively am, for the *not* before the *not* shields me from being simply *not* a mother. And to those who would say, *You're not a mother,* I would reply, 'In fact, I am not *not* a mother.' By which I mean I am *not 'not a mother.'* Yet someone who is called a mother could also say, 'In fact, I am not not a mother.' Which means she is a mother, for the *not* cancels out the *not.* To be *not not* is what the mothers can be, and what the women who are not mothers can be. This is the term we can share. In this way, we can be the same.

* * *

Tonight, I was reading a story about the Baal Shem Tov—one of the holy rabbis of the eighteenth century—and in the story, the Baal Shem Tov's daughter asks her father to tell her the name of the man she will marry, and to say whether she will ever be a mother. Her father throws a party and at

the party her husband is revealed to her. The story ends by saying that she had two boys and one girl, and the names of the boys are given, and what they grew up to be, but the name of the daughter is not given, nor what she grew up to be (presumably a mother). Putting the book down, I realized that throughout most of history, it was enough for men that women existed to give birth to men and raise them. And if a woman gave birth to a girl, well then, with luck the girl would grow up to give birth to a man. It seemed to me like all my worrying about not being a mother came down to this history—this implication that a woman is not an end in herself. She is a means to a man, who will grow up to be an end in himself, and do something in the world. While a woman is a passageway through which a man might come. I have always felt like an end in myself—doesn't everyone?—but perhaps my doubt that being an end-in-myself is enough comes from this deep lineage of women not being seen as ends, but as passageways through which a man might come. If you refuse to be a passageway, there is something wrong. You must at least *try.* But I don't want to be a passageway through which a man might come, then manifest himself in the world however he likes, without anyone doubting his right.

* * *

There are squirrels in the walls, or mice there. As I write, I can hear them moving, chewing the insides of the walls. I can hear them scratch on the insides of the walls, their little teeth chewing. They are eating the insulation, or wood, or cement, or whatever is in these walls.

* * *

If I consider raising a child in my own home and say this is what I have chosen *not* to do, what have I chosen, if anything? Language doesn't fit around this experience. It is therefore not an experience we can speak of. But I want a word that is utterly independent of the task of child-rearing, with which to think about this decision—a word about what *is,* and not what is not.

But how do you describe the absence of something? If I refuse to play soccer, is my not playing soccer an experience of playing soccer? My lack of the experience of motherhood is not an experience of motherhood. Or is it? Can I call it a motherhood, too?

What is the main activity of a woman's life, if not motherhood? How can I express the absence of this experience, without making central the lack? Can I say what such a life is an experience of *not* in relation to motherhood? Can I say what it *positively* is? Of course, it's different for every woman. Then can I say what it positively is for me? I cannot. Because I'm still in a place of indecision, not knowing what I want. I haven't yet birthed the person who by actively choosing not to have children lives in a way that positively affirms non-parental values, nor can I affirm the maternal experience of life.

Maybe if I could somehow figure out what *not having a child* is an experience of—make it into an active action, rather than the lack of an action—I might know what I was experiencing, and not feel so much like I was waiting to act. I might be able to choose my life, and hold in my hands what I have chosen, and show it to other people, and call it mine.

* * *

I always felt jealous of the gay men I knew who spoke of having come out. I felt I would like to come out, too—but as what? I could never put my finger on it. I had ghost images of the sort of person I was like, and ghost images of the sort of person I was not like. I wanted to be able to say of myself—*I have known this about myself since I was six years old. Some people were very condemning of me, but now I feel much better. I feel so much better since having come out. My life is now truly my own.*

* * *

I fear that without children, it doesn't look like you have made a choice, or that you're doing anything but just continuing on—drifting. People who don't have children might be thought not to move forward, or change and grow, or have stories that build on stories, or lives of ever-increasing depth and love and pain. Maybe they seem stalled in one place—a place the parents have left behind.

What is chosen by those who don't want children often looks no different from what the parents lived—just a continuation of what they lived before. It looks no different from not having procreated *yet.* It can look like getting ready to choose, or even like you're trying for a child. Yet there is a positive thing that is being lived and chosen by those who don't want children. But how can we say what that is, when parents feel they have lived it too, and

that they know it well? Yet many of them lived it without choosing it, or lived it while knowing it was going to end.

* * *

Some people try to imagine what it's like not to have children—and they imagine themselves without children, instead of picturing a person they might never be. They project their own potential sadness over not having this experience on those who don't want it at all. A person who can't understand why someone doesn't want children only has to locate their feelings for children, and imagine that desire directed somewhere else—to a life that is just as filled with hope, purpose, futurity and care.

Why don't we understand some people who don't want children as those with a different, perhaps biologically different, orientation? Wanting not to have children could even be called a sexual orientation, for what is more tied to sex than the desire to procreate or not? I suspect the intensity of this desire lies deep within our cells, and then there is all that culture adds, and that other people add, which skews our innate desires. I can look back at being a tiny child and see that I did not want children then. I remember sitting at the kitchen table with my entire family, and suddenly knowing that I would never be a mother, for I was a *daughter—existentially*—and I always would be.

* * *

I know that Jewish women are expected to repopulate from the losses of the Holocaust. *If you don't have children, the Nazis will have won.* I have felt this. *They wanted to wipe us from the earth, and we must never let them.* Then how can I imagine *not* having children, and selfishly contribute to our dying out? Yet, I don't really care if the human race dies out.

Rather than repopulating the world, might it not be better to say, *We have learned from our history about the farthest reaches of cruelty, sadism and evil. And so, in protest, we will make no more people—no more people for a hundred years!—in retaliation for the crimes that were committed against us. We will make no more aggressors, and no more victims, and in this way, do a good thing with our wombs.*

I went out for dinner last night with my high school friend Libby. She recently found out that she was pregnant, and has not had one moment of joy with the idea. Her relationship had not been a serious one, but now it suddenly was. They had started looking for a condo. As she talked, I saw how it would be a trap—how the child could trap her with her new boyfriend, in a new life. Already the architecture was rising around her, like the growth of a city, sped-up. Skyscrapers were flying up; a new boyfriend, a new baby, new in-laws, a new home. The walls are being erected outside her as her baby grows inside her.

* * *

Every time I hear that a friend is having a baby, I feel like I'm being cornered by a looming force, more trapped still. You know the babies cannot keep coming forever, but for now they are raining down as heavy as night-hail, or whatever hits the earth and makes a crater sized so much bigger than the thing itself that hit it. There are craters, craters, all around, and no home is safe enough not to be pummelled to dust by these blessings, by these bits of stardust, these thousand-pound babies aimed straight at the earth.

I had always thought my friends and I were moving into the same land together, a childless land where we would just do a million things together forever. I thought our minds and souls were all cast the same way, not that they were waiting for the right moment to jump ship, which is how it feels as they abandon me here. I should not think of it as an abandoning, but it would be wrong to say it's not a loss, or that I'm not startled at being so alone. How had I taken all of us as the same? Is that why I started wondering about having kids—because, one by one, the ice floe on which we were all standing was broken and made smaller, leaving me alone on just the tiniest piece of ice, which I had thought would remain vast, like a very large continent on which we'd all stay? It never occurred to me that I'd be the only one left here. I know I'm not the only one left, yet how can I

trust the few who remain, when I'd been so mistaken about the rest? I'm shaken by their wholesale deserting. Did they ever intend to stay on this childless continent, and then they changed their minds? Or had they never intended to stay, and I understood them all wrong?

I resent the spectacle of all this breeding, which I see as a turning away from the living—an insufficient love for the rest of us, we billions of orphans already living. These people turn with open arms to a new life, hoping to make a happiness greater than their own, rather than tending to the already-living. It's not right, it's not kind, when everyone you look at is a crying baby, and there my friends go, making more—making another one! —another new light in the world. Certainly I am *happy* for them, but I am miserable for the rest of us—for that absolute kick in the teeth, that relieved and joyful desertion. When a person has a child, they are turned towards their child. The rest of us are left in the cold.

OVULATING

Returning from the shower in a towel this morning, I found Miles standing in the middle of the bedroom, getting dressed. Then he smiled and danced his fingers and sang the song of the two birds who love me.

Last week, he bought me the most beautiful coat, and these tulips on the nightstand, and he cooks dinner for me, and last month when I was in bed sick he bought me three chocolate bars, and six bottles of sparkling water, and herbal cough medicine, and real cough medicine, and he drew many fat hearts on the wall beside the bed. I can't help but say it, but I feel I have found my true love.

Last night we had sex. It seems to always be the case that on the day I ovulate, Miles wants to fuck me. Somehow his body can always tell.

Marie Stopes, a birth control reformer from the early twentieth century, wrote that heterosexual couples had sex all wrong: their timing accorded to the regular rhythms of male body, not the fluctuating rhythms of the female. She said it should be timed with the woman's body: during the week of ovulation, couples should have sex daily, or several times a day, then refrain for the rest of the month. Those weeks of abstinence will build up longing, and let the couple focus on other tasks. I once proposed this to Miles as a good idea we try, and he agreed, but we never did.

Having sex half-asleep in the middle of the night, I got scared that Miles might accidentally come in me. It suddenly felt like a prison sentence—a terrible thing that would befall us, no going back, not what I wanted, the draining of all hope. I saw both of us with our dreams crushed.

I have done so many things to avoid it—including one abortion, several instances of the morning-after pill, and only choosing men who didn't want kids, or at least never being with a man who really did.

Besides, there are so many kinds of life to give birth to in this world, apart from a literal human life. And there are children everywhere, and parents needing help everywhere, and so much work to be done, and lives to be affirmed that are not necessarily the lives we would have chosen, had we started again. The whole world needs to be mothered. I don't need to invent a brand new life to give the warming effect to my life I imagine mothering will bring. There are lives and duties everywhere just crying out for a mother. That mother could be you.

* * *

The hardest thing is actually *not* to be a mother—to refuse to be a mother to anyone. To not be a mother is the most difficult thing of all. There is always someone ready to step into the path of a woman's freedom, sensing that she is not yet a mother, so tries to make her into one. There will always be one man or another, or her mother or her father, or some young woman or some young man who steps into the bright and shimmering path of her freedom, and adopts themselves as that woman's child, forcing her to be their mother. Who will knock her up this time? Who will emerge, planting their feet before her, and say with a smile, *Hi mom!* The world is full of desperate people, lonely people and half-broken people, unsolved people and needy people with shoes that stink, and socks that stink and are holey—people who want you to arrange their vitamins, or who need your advice at every turn, or who just want to talk and get a drink—and seduce you into being

their mother. It's hard to detect this is even happening, but before you realize it—it's happened.

* * *

The most womanly problem is not giving oneself enough space or time, or not being allowed it. We squeeze ourselves into the moments we allow, or the moments that have been allowed us. We do not stretch out in time, languidly, but allot ourselves the smallest parcels of time in which to exist, miserly. We let everyone crowd us. We are miserly with our selves when it comes to space and time. But doesn't having children lead to the most miserly allotment of space and time? Having a child solves the impulse to give oneself nothing. It makes that impulse into a virtue. To feed oneself last in self-abnegation, to fit oneself into the smallest spaces in the hopes of being loved—that is entirely womanly. To be virtuously miserly towards oneself in exchange for being loved—having children gets you there fast.

I want to take up as much space as I can in time, stretch out and stroll with nowhere to go, and give myself the largest parcels of time in which to do nothing—to let my obligations slip to the ground, reply to no one, please no one, leave everyone hanging, impolitely, and try to win no one's favor; not pile up politenesses doled out to just everyone in the hopes of being pleasing, so I won't be thrown out of society as I fear I will be, if I don't live like a good maid, gingerly.

I get nostalgic for being a teenager for this reason. It never occurred to me then to be nice to other people. I look back at that time as a time of great freedom—but *that* was the great freedom, that I didn't give a fuck. I cannot give a fuck more than I already do. I feel it would be the end of me. Having children is *nice.* What a great victory to be *not-nice.* The nicest thing to give the world is a child. Do I ever want to be that nice?

Juno Mac & Molly Easo Smith
Borders (2018)

Luce Irigaray
Women on the Market (1978)

Eli Clare
Freaks and Queers (1999)

Dodie Bellamy
When the Sick Rule the World (2015)

Gloria E. Anzaldúa
now let us shift... the path of conocimiento... inner works, public acts (2002)

Dionne Brand
A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging (2001)

Sheila Heti
Motherhood (2018)

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Aria Aber
Family Portrait (2019)

Julia Gjika
Autumn Afternoon (2020)

Louise Glück
Memoir (2001)

Harryette Mullen
Elliptical (2002)

Natalie Diaz
Abecedarian Requiring Further Examination of Anglikan Seraphym Subjugation of a Wild Indian Rezervation (2012)

Anne Waldman
Fast Speaking Woman (1974)

Hilde Domin
Birthdays (1959)