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The Body Makes No Sound Against Glass

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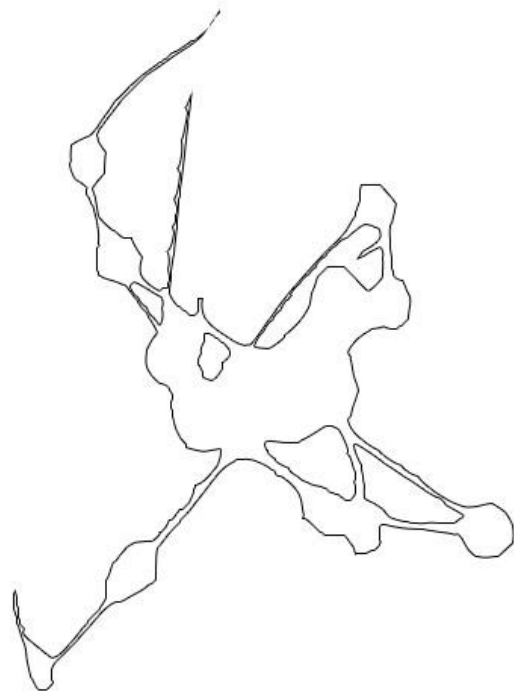
The Body Makes No Sound Against Glass

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Languages and Literature
of Bard College

by
MJ Bond

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

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Thank you to my advisor, Valeria Luiselli, for guiding me, patiently and kindly, with an ever-inspiring presence.

To my friends, for the late night white-boarding sessions, for the trips to the river, for the meals shared and the drinks spilled, the broken windows, the thoughts lost and found again, for your unrelenting love and support. Everything I do can only be traced back to your love and loyalty.

To those I can no longer be with, the ones in the place with no time, the lessons taught and learned exist always, love exists always.

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The Bruising

It's still early. I push blackberries against the roof of my mouth, slowly. The sun barely gives shadow in the kitchen. I feel the light through sheer green curtains; a dry lick across my back. The berries turn to liquid on my tongue. The ripe sweetness moves through my throat and chest, and drips down to my stomach.

A friend overdosed and was in a coma for a week. Her face was bloated and pinkish, like a newborn, and was held up with a stiff white neck brace. Her hair was matted with sweat and hung heavy around her ears and cheeks. I was told to pray for her, to think of her kindly.

I filled the first thin needle an eighth of the way with testosterone, rubbed the outer side of my thigh, and slowly pushed in through my skin and into my muscle. I was drunk and didn't switch the syringe needle and injection needle. It left a small yellow and green bruise. Seven days after this, she overdosed, her body strapped to a hospital bed.

I was in New York. Faith swallowed the thousand-mile gap between us. She was alone when she overdosed — they tell me fentanyl.

Her family made the decision: the nurses pulled the cord. I got the call in the morning. I said, okay. I moved myself to the bathroom, my mind pushing outwards, beginning to melt on my skin. I filled the needle an eighth of the way and injected it into my thigh. I didn't cry for two days, then I filled the needle an eighth of the way and stuck it into my body again. Another two days, again, and again. A month of doses in a week; an imitation.

Paul B. Preciado writes:

“From this moment on, all of you are dead. Amelia, Herve, Michel, Karen, Jackie, Teo, and You. Do I belong more to your world than I do to the world of the living? Isn't my politics yours; my house, my body, yours? Reincarnate yourselves in me, take over my body...”

I told the first person about the death, after the doses of testosterone made me feel like I was seductively coked out. They asked if I needed anything, I said no. I waited for them to hang up first.

Months passed, two or so. In the kitchen, the morning light begins to reflect off the snow. It reaches lower branches of the trees, but it has yet to touch into the kitchen. When I inhale, I wrap another blackberry with my tongue. On the exhale, I press the fruit against the back of my teeth.

When the breath comes in, it moves through my mouth, to my esophagus, passes my tearing larynx, through my trachea, and then disperses into my lungs through two bronchi.

The thyroid is above the trachea; it's shaped like a butterfly. Butterflies are thought to be the most notable symbol for “ADC's,” or after-death communication. I read this on a website, where the words “After Death Communications Confirms That Life and Love are Eternal” are displayed in a giant and nearly-illegible cursive font. After the butterfly, there's the trachea, which looks like a straight pipe, then branches into the right and left bronchi.

When a trachea is inflamed, it does not grow in entirety; the exterior's size remains. It is the inner tissue that moves inward and creates a moderate to extreme narrowing of the trachea. This makes it harder to take a deep breath. This also means you may have to chew your food a little more so that the swallowed substance is nearly liquidized.

Some common symptoms of tracheobronchitis are:

Severe cough,

Sore throat,

Fatigue,

Shortness of breath,

Wheezing,

Cyanosis

Grief lives in my trachea. Time does not pass well. I breathe in counts of two and juice the blackberries in my mouth. I let them move through me, dewing the swelling with sweetness.

Inflammation is more likely to occur in the larynx, the 'voice box.' The larynx is above the thyroid; it is closer to the opening of the mouth. When it is swollen, it can be visible if you have access to hospital-fluorescent lighting and a decent camera. The inflammation turns the throat into a thin slit more than a circular hole, and it feels more constrictive. This case is more familiar.

My larynx is torn and growing; the vocal folds lengthening and thickening. This will eventually make my voice adopt a deeper tonality, after a period of synthetic croaks. My larynx is only centimeters above the swelling. When the juice moves through my vocal cords, I feel uneasy. They are gaining a new texture, a scrape.

Testosterone causes ossification, or hardening of the cartilage, making the larynx less flexible. This can create problems: namely, a condition called “entrapped vocality” where the voice sounds permanently weak and hoarse.

I use three fingers as a tongue depressant and slide them deep into the middle of my throat. I tilt my head back, eyes closed, and gently prod around my throat. This is one way I tend to grieve. I want to feel the scrape; to know it still holds space. I am careful not to touch the butterfly.

My fingers are damp with saliva; I pull them apart slowly and watch the saliva become a small thread that falls back against my fingers. The wetness is tinted with mucus and a dark blue, I lick it off my fingers. I feel the scrape, I cannot hear the butterfly, and the swelling remains.

Testosterone: a synthetic hormone to be injected at .21 m/L every week. Viscosity like thick motor oil. Not quite opaque, yellow-tinted. Manipulates and re-defines the body. Increased sex drive, higher risk of addiction, increased hair, deepened voice; narrowed emotions.

Each time I pull the needle out of my thigh, I feel the swelling grow closer to the butterfly, closer to the scrape. I want to protect the swelling; I want it to rupture to a thunderclap. Permanently.

The other night, I fucked someone with my body and desire, now controlled by synthetics. When they grabbed my throat, I think they wanted my tongue and I let them push harder against the swelling. They told me to cum inside them — cum in me, cum in me, cum in me. Cum in you? One hand closing my throat, the other with a death grip on my thigh.

In the kitchen, I slip my boxers off and walk to the bathroom. My thigh is yellowish, and green in the middle; where their hand was. Cum in me.

The bruise is a prize for my drone attachments; for becoming half-mechanized, a reduction of being; for keeping the scrape unscathed with a quiet voice, for feeding the swelling with the cum still clotted on my molars.

Years, months, or days pass without acknowledgement of where the present has gone, where the body is shrinking and growing, attached and detached. It fluctuates, it's specific: the space between my jawline and collarbones is slouched and collapsing into the other; the space where my ribs round off, my sternum, aches against the compression. I want this to rupture, to snap.

I have become addicted to the injection process. I worship the growth, the swelling, the bruise of a new body. New and rendered, dose by dose, into a constant state of being.

Being: condition, state, circumstance; presence, fact of existing; that which physically exists, a person, a thing

Becoming: change from one state of existence to another; meet with, fall in with; arrive, approach, enter.

I allow the golden oil to become a new sense of linearity; to become *my body, yours?*

The growth will never exhaust itself.

Timothy Morton writes:

“The threads of fate have tied our tongues.

Tongue twisters inclined towards nonsense.

Logic includes nonsense as long as it can tell the truth.

The logic of nonsense.

The needle skipped the groove of the present.

Into this dark forest you have already turned.

I take present to mean for the last twelve thousand years. A butterfly kiss of geological time.”

The Injury

I am unwrapping my index finger in a room, my palm facing downwards. First, I unwind the masking tape wrapped around stained cotton balls and wet bandaids. Then I peel off the white fuzz that sticks to the wound, is inside the wound. Blood flows from the middle of the finger to the floor, following a dried red path. In the room, one window is covered with trash bags, held taut with blue painters tape, and a duvet cover nailed over that.

The cut is along the middle phalanx, the first joint after the knuckle. Tendons run through this joint, connecting the muscle to the bone. Nerve tissue surrounds the tendons, working with them to allow movement: bending, and pointing. The cut is a quarter of an inch long, hard to spot from the eager blood.

I practice bending my finger for days: my brain sends signals while my finger stays limp and bloated. I prod at it, trying to move it with my other hand. I regret this immediately, pain shooting down my throat, back up my spine, to the back of my head. The blood rushes out in higher volumes. All I know is to keep it elevated, so I walk around with one finger in the air, as if I'm about to say something, the other fingers curving into my palm.

Glass does not have a molecular structure. When it shatters, it goes from being one solid slate to ten, twenty, and a hundred microscopic more. The lack of structure means that even the tiniest amount of damage immediately becomes the glass' weak point; the likelihood of it shattering is unavoidable. In the breakage, thousands of incisions are formed along the edge of the glass,

acute angles acting as blades. An arsenal of weapons dehydrated and waiting, dismembered and hiding in my carpet.

There are white spots forming around the injury. The nail bed has turned a light blue, with white streaks. The flesh between the joints is swollen and bruised.

Cyanosis refers to a bluish tint to the skin. It's usually caused by low oxygen levels in the red blood cells or problems getting oxygenated blood to your body. When blood has a lower level of oxygen and becomes a darker red, more blue light is reflected, making the skin appear to have a blue tint.

The cleaning process is only beneficial in sterilizing the wound. When I unwrap my finger, the bleeding starts again; regressing the healing, restarting the process. I hold chemicals to it patiently, tending to it like it's alive, like it has its own body.

Breaking glass, when there is the intention of breaking, is a ritual of luck and gratitude usually marking a passage into a new existence: a long lasting marriage, an acceptance of good fortune to come.

Breaking a mirror is, commonly, bad luck. The superstition originated when mirrors were made out of volcanic glass: obsidian. Obsidian was thought to be a portal to both the underworld and the afterlife; one's reflection in the glass was their soul. These beliefs stemmed from the

Romans, tied with their belief that one's life was renewed every seven years. Thus the fracturing of the glass resulted in the fracturing of the soul, leaving the person with seven years of bad luck. After that time, their body is renewed, along with their soul.

Obsidian also lacks internal structure — when it is shattered, it can fracture down to a single atom. It is the sharpest and strongest of crafted blades, delicate and smooth, blindingly reflective. Prior to obsidian, or even in continuum with it, water was used as a sort of mirror, a source for reflection. Looking into a somewhat translucent pool of water would reflect your image, drawn about with the streaks of the current, turning your silhouette into a dancing outline. The well-known myth of Narcissus hinges on this reflective power of water, emphasizing the symbolic nature of physical reflection.

Ovid writes:

“It's here that, weary from the heat, the chase,
drawn by the beauty of the pool, the place,
face down, Narcissus lies. But while he tries
to quench one thirst, he feels another rise:
he drinks, but he is stricken by the sight
he sees —the image in the pool. He dreams upon
a love that's bodiless: now he believes that what is
but a shade must be a body.”

A reflection can be best caught in a window during the night. In a room with lights on, you can look through the window and only see yourself. The inner lights do not pass through the window; it reflects back at you in a faint, holographic version of yourself. This does not work well during the day, unless you are in the darkest of rooms. There has to be the lightness and darkness on either side, yourself the meridian, seeking a reflection.

Breaking a window can mean that there is evil in your house, and the broken glass allows it an exit. The severing between interior and exterior; a serendipitous coincidence.

Breaking a window can mean, in likeness to the myth of Narcissus, that one is too entrenched in vanity: spending too much time reflecting on the appearance and image, reducing all meaning into the body and physicality. Dreaming about breaking a window can mean that you are burdening yourself with someone else's problems; it's an indicator of a weak sense of self.

Wrapping the wound is tedious; the cut reacts tenfold to anything that comes close to it. Shooting pain, pulsing flesh, blood spilling. It recreates its initial trauma without hesitation, preying on its own physical form, its own scarring and rebuilding.

window (n.) c. 1200, literally "wind eye," from Old Norse vindauga, from vindr "wind."

Replaced Old English eagpyrl, literally "eye-hole," and eagduru, literally "eye-door"

Windows can represent a sort of glass shield; the interior wrapped around the looker, the voyeur. Through the shield, the world looks back at them. The window protects action, protects their passiveness; it draws a vertical barrier between relationality, connection, language from the voyeur and the surrounding world. When that is broken, the transparency lays to the floor, allowing entrance, allowing action, relationality. The person inside is left doe-eyed to hundreds of high-beams, fluorescent and daring.

Most of the readings and interpretations of broken glass point inwards. The reflection is treated as the body, not in likeness, but in sameness. The reality of one's appearance and demeanor can be trusted in the reflection. This instills too much truth, too singular truth, within the mirror; within the likeness reflected back at you. The shattering is nearly fateful. The desire to connect the body to the reflection is mostly condemned as soulless and vain.

The window carries a similarly-structured symbolism, focusing on the spatial understanding of interior and exterior. If one finds too much comfort within the interior, the exterior will ridicule it, and the shattering will break the barrier. It seems that the 'glass shield' is a prop of some psychological shyness: the space becomes the body, the window becomes the eyes, the person inside is the naive voyeur.

The exterior is generalized, personified into a disciplined pair of eyes staring back, waiting. The fracturing proves the person to be closed inside the body, shut behind these eyes — 'closed mind,' closed body.

Both window and mirror reduce to the reflections in glass; the one looking at and the one looking back. Neither of them should be held to differing esteems, or held in vain. The glass is the barrier, one that inevitably breaks, breaks again, breaks infinitely. The closed body constantly seeks desire inwards, to fulfill a false sense of wholeness within.

Ovid continues:

“If I could just be split from my own body!

The strangest longing in a lover: I

want that which I desire to stand apart

from my own self. My sorrow saps my force;

the time allotted me has been cut short;

I die in my youth's prime, but death is not

a weight; with death my pain will end, and yet

I'd have my love live past my death. Instead,

we two will die together in one breath.”

Narcissus dies in his own image, in love with his own image. He was unable, and un-wanting to find love in others before this. Even the one who pursued him directly prior to reaching the pool of water, Echo, was not deemed worthy of his love.

Echo lived with a curse that only allowed her to repeat what people said to her; she could never initiate speech, for herself or with others. When she saw Narcissus, she fell madly in love and followed him through the forest. She eventually jumps on him, trying to express her new and burning affection. Narcissus says “Do not touch me! Don’t cling to me! I’d sooner die than say I’m yours!” to which she, fatefully, replies “I’m yours.”

Echo, in her brief moments with Narcissus, is an auditory reflection of his speech, an imitation. But this is not the reflection worthy of his love. It is the steadfast image of himself, on still water, where he lies himself bare, accepting death. He dies by the side of his true love: his physical body, his exteriority. The duality of love in this myth is not vanity and selflessness, but of tongue and flesh.

Echo returns to the mountains where her flesh disintegrates and her bones turn to stone. She remains, aptly, as an echo: a resounding cry of grief that sounds through the caves and land surrounding her: “the power of sound still lives within her.”

I buy a cast for my finger. It has a blue styrofoam cushion surrounded by aluminum, *a bluish tint to the skin*, and two thin velcro straps to wrap around the finger to keep it stable and straight. This way the nerve tissue, in the case it’s torn, will have a chance to reconnect and heal within a month or so.

I begin to tell people the windows have a soul, are the eyes of themselves, the window is the soul of the eye, the soul of the window is not for the eye but of the eye, the eye's soul is the window is the soul. The soul with no internal structure.

Windows also give the interior a sense of temporality: the sun rising and setting, wind sounding against the glass, light pouring in and dragging itself back out. A sense of time for the space and people inside.

I sleep through the morning sun. The room is congested with caught wind and dust; candle smoke is trapped, voices are trapped, smells are trapped. The dust begins to catch in my throat, becomes in my throat. My voice rasps in the mornings, I cough into tissues that pile around my bed.

A condition called "entrapped vocality" where the voice sounds permanently weak and hoarse.

When I take off the duvet cover and trash bags, the sun greedily climbs through the window. It's instantaneous, unhesitating: a tsunami of light reaches around my body and paints everything with highlights and shadows. I turn the center fan on, open the rest of the windows, and leave the room for a day. What was trapped will find an exit point, and eventually I'll be able to speak through a sentence. At night, I cover the window again, with newly contained winter wind.

Microscopic fragments still live in the carpet. There are few shards left in the pane. I look at them from the outside, running my finger over them, trying to find matching textures. The windows transparency is turned opaque against the darkness of the tightly taped trash bag. It's a cartoonish depiction of obsidian. It reflects my belt and jeans, the paint streaks across the pockets.

The fractures of the glass distort the reflection, the thin plastic bag in the middle sounds against the rushing wind. I lift my finger to reflect in one of the shards. I hold it slanted so the bottom of my hand, the space below the injury, shadows on the peeling white paint around the glass. The top of my finger reflects back to me in the smallest shard, reduced with no color, a shadowed and saturated outline, a silhouette. A refraction of light, refraction of image.

An imitation

I tightly compress my finger in the cast. I use it to assist in vocal practices meant for loosening up the throat, the voice. An exercise called 'the larynx ladder.' I let out a groan with a high octave, and place my casted finger under my jaw, where it connects to my neck. The cold aluminum is the only way I can tell it's on the right spot. I have to press hard against my skin, to feel for my larynx, hard and circular, vibrating above the aluminum. As I drop octaves (going down 'the ladder'), I move the cast down my neck; it's pushed deep into the skin to mimic a spotter for the larynx. When moving from low to high notes, I place more of the cold pressure under the larynx, ushering it back to the high spot under my jaw.

I close my eyes during the practice, learning to be familiar with the brunt and hoarse sounds. The high notes sound synthetic, coming from a helium balloon. The low notes are worse, monotone and flat. I can't find the sweet spot, the cold aluminum against my neck moves up and down the middle section, trying to point towards what a casual voice is. What my voice is, naturally (now).

Narcissus is the bench-player in his own myth. His idolization of himself, his physicality, is just a deal with death, but Echo's voice continues. She is the auditory mirror, stuck in her own grief, on the last consonant or vowel that she repeated. Even as the word is another's, it is her sound, it is Echo with no body, her eternal song. Despite the endurance of the lesson of Narcissus, the flesh has always been known to collapse. But the voice? The sound?

Someone comes to replace the window. He carelessly feels around the pane, then sporadically punches the glass that remains. I am in the neighboring room, gently poking my neck with the metal finger. I haven't taken it off for days, growing fond of the metallic reflections and distortions of light. He calls me in when it's finished, and tells me the windows are at least a hundred years old, bound to break at any time. Old-age.

My finger heals before I realize I can bend it again. By that time I bought new curtains for all the windows in the house. I continue to let time suffocate in my room until it feels right; then I pull back the curtains and watch the light manically dance into the room, swallow the space. The dust reaches high to the ceiling, and falls back, the sun illuminates its cycle.

The Blood

I begin to visit the river every Sunday, trying to be disciplined about love. Water is a sight not seen, a feeling not thought. I look towards the horizon that spills into another landscape. And the other view: where the river ravenously runs through the horizon, over it, into it, becoming it.

The sky no longer has a horizon. It's hanging only inches above the water. I can see the clouds just above my head. The texture of them is becoming decipherable: wisps of white with a heavy dry brush. The clouds look like residue of what they once were, when they used to hold the sky so far away that you could poke fun at them, say one looks like a dove.

There are small glaciers living in the meridian of the water and hanging sky. Their light coats of snow reveal uneven fractures and scrapes, boot prints and streaks from slipping. All the ice cracks and peels in sequence, creating a constant harmony of popping and snapping, breaking into halves that fall into the newly born crevices. Larger slates split into two or four, and sail into the river's weak current, newly displaced. In the distance, some of the ice is submerged, the density weakening, stretching and pulling into the surface water, into the depths. Losing its precise boundaries, liquidized.

I imagine seeing my grandfather, hundreds of feet out, in his dark green dinghy. He was a commercial fisherman and after retiring, he continued to spend equal hours on the water. He would sit in his old boat and listen to the waves. I can hear his voice calming my younger self down, telling me to listen, listen, listen, whenever I would speak over the current. He told me once that he only dreamed of water, the deep blue waves and currents, the smell of salt

overwhelming every sense. He would dream to be the surface water; half-submerged with no movement, thought, or cause. *Being an imitation.*

Pablo Neruda writes:

“and how I in your dream
free, in the sea and in the wind
yet tied and sunken
in the blue volume of your sweetness?”

The ocean was my grandfather’s deepest religion. He once walked me along the shoreline, humming in sync with the waves. At some point, he started to slow down, and pointed at something in the sand – it looked like a rock. He walked me there, knelt down, and picked up a shell. Horseshoe crab. As ancient as this Earth is.

He turned the shell to hold in his palm, revealing an underbelly with ten legs all pressed against each other, clumps of sand around its body, the starting point of the tail wrapped in a soft muscle. My grandfather held it by the edges, belly down, and walked us back to the shoreline. He waited for the tide to reach our toes, then walked into the shallowest depth. He placed it in the ocean, half-submerged. The water lapped at the body, slowly pulling it back into the blue.

Horseshoe crabs are more closely related to spiders than to crabs or lobsters. They have hardly evolved in 445 million years. Pharmaceutical industries use their blood to test the sterility of all

medical equipment and injectable medicine, along with the needles and syringes. Aside from this, their blood is notorious for being baby blue.

He died in November, 2020. It was a week or two after his wife passed away. He died on the way to her funeral: heart attack.

Anne Sexton writes:

“And what of the dead? They lie without shoes
in their stone boats. They are more like stone
than the sea would be if it stopped...”

The waves are high today. The wind still tunnels in my ears, and the winter air numbs my fingers. The ice makes the river look saran-wrapped. There’s something sadistic about looking at it. I step to the left, and sit on a fallen tree. I watch as two large pieces of ice break off simultaneously and move into the water; one is slow to catch the drift, the other delicately slips into the depth. The water washing over the ice begins to sound like my grandfather’s gospel.

I think of a soundscape I once listened to. It was based on a myth in Burma that dragonflies would seasonally swarm together and sing to attract their mates. If a mate didn’t come, they would sing at increasingly higher pitches until their chest would explode, dropping their ruptured bodies to the ground. This is the sound the ice makes.

My grandfather once took me fishing. I agitated the dinghy and the waters with my younger impatience, my frustrations with stillness. He would have one hand wrapped around the fishing pole and the other hand floating in front of it, only the index finger gently touching the string, waiting for the slightest pulse, vibration.

He would tell me that you could hear the movement before feeling it, if you listened close enough. The waves of blue would show you, tell you, that the fish were swarmed, hungry. I tried listening for a minute or two, and then sat on the floor of the dinghy. I opened the jar that stored the bait, and began to compare the size of the worms. I found one bigger than my head and named it, letting my new friend squirm in my hand. I begged him not to use it for bait, and he nodded.

The fish he caught were stored in a miniature blue cooler. He brought them home, where he descaled them and cut their fins off with scissors. I beat my fists against his thigh and kicked his shins. He killed his fish, sending me into a tantrum that got me locked in a room. I didn't eat meals for days, sneaking gummy worms from gas stations for dinner.

He sat me down and told me about the planet Neptune: the true blue planet, a planet where all those who loved water would go after they die: fish and humans alike. He was merely allowing fish access to go back home — obviously their home cannot be here — he laughed at me as I sat there, swallowing every word he said with a gullible and devoted belief.

[Prefix]: Trans-

Word-forming element meaning "across, beyond, through, on the other side of, to go beyond," from Latin trans (prep.) "across, over, beyond,"

The waves move with grey outlines, defining the water's movement and temper; they move without time. Winter brings the deepest blue of the river, indicating health and vitality. The decaying plants and bodies cycle from the bottom to the top where they absorb the photons and rays of the blushing sun. The light cannot penetrate from there; it cannot submerge itself in the depth. The blue indicates the strength; the surface, a glassy shield. The darker the blue, the more secretive, the more internal distance withheld.

Goethe writes:

“Blue... brings a principle of darkness with it. The color has a peculiar and almost indescribable effect of the eye. As a hue it is powerful — but it is on the negative side, and in its highest purity is, as it were, a stimulating negation. Its appearance, then, is a kind of contradiction between excitement and repose. [...] But as we readily follow an agreeable object that flies from us, so we love to contemplate blue — not because it advances us, but because it draws us after it.”

Goethe writes from the belief that colors bring degrees of light and darkness. He contested Newton's idea that darkness was the absence of light; he believed they coexisted as the two endpoints of color.

Blue is the receding color, always plummeting in its own depth, forcing the eye to strain and squint; blue is always at a distance. This can be held in comparison to red, which reaches towards the eye, bloating its image on a page, pushing itself past its designated resting position.

He relates different parts of his crafted color wheel to forms of symbolism. Blue is related to German word “gemein.” This can mean ‘common,’ or ‘mean, nasty, cruel, wicked, vile, vicious, rotten, awful.’ Modernly, this word is used to relate towards similarity; what is shared, what is *in common* with another, what is inside both parties — *not because it advances us, but because it draws us after it.*

Water is always tinted blue whether from the sea or the faucet, even as it is swallowed or sunk into, it’s never fully transparent. The color is the transient weight of distance, stretching and pulling, yet always sunken within itself.

It is inescapable, outside and inside the body, both ever-changing and with the same image. Volumes of liquid and debris, crab shells and ice, passing in and out of each other; a permanent state of flux, an image never-ending. It is hardly a whole creation despite the eye defining it; feeble meanings and values fall flat on the shoreline; the river swallows all language, and spits nothing back. It is permanent and ephemeral; the only truth being held in transience.

I put my already numb hand in the water. The tips of my fingers disappear, algae and sand dance around my palm. I hold it there for some time, taking it out only when I can see my fingers

beginning to prune. There's a theory — 'the waterside hypothesis' — stating that humans evolutionarily came from underwater, and so death will be the same deep blue embrace, bringing you back. That's why hands still prune.

The Oil

In a waiting room, I skim through a BDSM magazine I bought from a sex store. It's from the nineties, showcasing middle aged women tied up in utility rope, gagged with a ball in their mouth. It's mostly lesbian pornography, showing faces pressed up against someone's breasts, heads clasped between thighs; exhibitions of the highest pleasure.

The cover is a saturated red, well-preserved and glossy. The title reads "Bondage Life" in all caps, a light blue. I appreciate the color; red as a symbol for dominance, survival, passions of the flesh. The subtitle of the magazine says "The Magazine for and by 'Love Bondage' People," also in all-caps, italicized.

The women on the cover are all wearing separate pleasure costumes, mostly leather laced legs and corsets; one woman dressed as Wonder Woman, with a gag between her teeth. The back of the magazine, in an overwhelmingly large font, says: "HARMONY CONCEPTS — CELEBRATING THE PSYCHOLOGICAL POWER OF THE BOUND BEAUTY WHOSE "LOVE BONDAGE" IS AS MUCH FOR HER PLEASURE AS OURS!" This text is purple, the mixture of blue and red.

I skim through it, trying to find a definition for "love bondage," or why it isn't "bondage love." The magazine is filled with anonymous submissions, written and photographed. I began to read a submission called *Self-Tie Savior*. It is about a woman who is ashamed of her love for rope play. In this shame, she has learned how to tie herself up. She is not able to touch herself, but the pleasure of being restricted is enough to bring her to orgasm. She explains her set up: her

queen-size bed frame, two pieces of long rope, and a box-cutter placed on the pillow next to her head.

She ties loose slipknots on either side of the frame, then helps one hand into it. She tightens her hand by tugging against the rope, which loyally closes around her wrists. With one hand restrained, she slips her hand into the other knot and pulls until they are equally tight, pulled deep into her flesh. Once she's securely tied up, she submits herself to primal and fetishistic fantasies. She orgasms. Then, she gets the knife with her teeth and cuts herself free.

The last sentence of the submissions says, "I am an avid practitioner of self-bondage. I have hidden this from my wife, and my previous partners for ten years. I share this so that those who may also read this edition in private, can follow me in my journey of self-bondage. Though I hope one day to practice this with someone else, I find peace in knowing, for the few who will understand, we will all be tied to the posts, thinking of each other." She includes that she does this nightly, with candles lit; it's a very important, very serious discipline to her.

The image next to it is an inked outline of a body with arms outstretched to either side of the bed frame, the hands limp, and legs straight and crossed on the bed. The creation of her own restraint, a technical attachment for pleasure.

She becomes her own Eros; whether the subject, or subjects, are absent or imaginary, doesn't matter. She's instilled pleasure within a self-saving technology, one that can keep her warm in private, a way to separate her from a perceived public shame.

My doctor asks me the same mundane questions as always, asks if I want to up my dosages, if I'm feeling okay — how's your partner? Have the mood swings leveled out? Happy one year, that's fantastic. I sit on the crumpled and thin paper that's lined over the blue bed, and answer as I should.

I answer with statements I've memorized from Reddit: I feel so euphoric, like my spirit has finally reached its fullest potential; with each dose I grow closer to my highest self; my sexual desires stay intact, I'm voracious; I eat like a sloppy dog starved for days; I think I finally found God in one of these glass vials; the testosterone is working, thank you so much! My doctor is ecstatic, I truly believe she thinks testosterone is like ecstasy. The love drug, *love bondage*.

I decided on doubling my dose, so I could have more lying around. Some weeks I'll inject more than I should, leaving me with a meager supply for the next week. And for that one week, I'll have at least two days of intense energy. My mind will take a leave of absence while the testosterone shoots off inside me; fireworks for fucking, working, dancing, screaming.

Paul B. Preciado writes:

“We have been divided by the norm. Cut in half and forced to remain on one side or the other of the rift. What we call ‘subjectivity’ is only the scar that, over the multiplicity of all that we could have been, covers the wound of this fracture. It is over this scar that property, family and inheritance were founded. Over this scar, names are written and sexual identities asserted.”

Testosterone is a manipulation of the body, my revolt against time. The psychological effects are bare, and easily controlled. The bodily effects cannot be controlled. This is what is addictive in the needles and syringes. The reconfiguration of the body controls perceptive value, both of others and the self, it manipulates the world surrounding; it changes one’s politics, desire, senses.

It’s a distortion of one’s subjectivity, all while reclaiming it, as the hand that pushes the needle is my own. The hand that penetrates the covering, revealing the fracture is my own. I can rearrange my body, contorting it in the mirror. It replaces my voice bimonthly. It grows hair under my chin and nose. It gives me marks of cis-normative masculinity, and I find no peace nor hatred in it. I use my body as a pawn. *A technical tool, imitation, constant state of being.*

Love drug, *love bondage*. I fill the needle an eighth of the way with testosterone, for over a year, to become in the same image. Not the imitation, the physical structure remains; not an imposter. In the same image, with the same silhouette, hormonal imbalance or balance.

Paul B. Preciado writes:

“I’m not taking testosterone to change myself into a man or as a physical strategy of

transsexualism; I take it to foil what society thinks of me, feel a form of pleasure that is postpornographic, add a molecular prostheses to my low-tech transgender identity composed of dildos, text, and moving images...”

Testosterone as a techno-morphology: the body forming into a new mold with a new blood racing through it. My voyeuristic mind watches the contortion of my muscle-gain, my fat deposits rearrange, and revels in new reflections. It is not to avoid being a woman, nor to be a man, nor to be both, or not to be both. Not neither nor both simultaneously. Not the reduction, or the platonic form. In the chasm between the language and the performance, my mind lies in hiding, giddy like a child.

The Skin

At the table, there's a jar with a dead spider inside. Its body is wrapped in a white fuzz that clots around its joints, forming exaggerated orbs on its legs. Its last thread of web holds to the bottom of the lid, keeping the body suspended. I move the jar in slow circles. The body swings from the glass to the opposite side. If I hold it at a perfect angle, it becomes a pendulum in the middle of the jar, swinging in dead air.

The fungus that is attached to this spider mostly affects moss and plant debris, and is only deadly to cellar spiders: *Engyodontium Aranearum*.

It's deliberate, latching on to the exoskeleton and slowly growing inside the spider, like a fetus, swallowing its bloodstream for strength and shape. The spider eventually becomes cocooned in this slow death while the fungus continues to grow outwards.

Becoming

The spider dies an incredulous, yet natural, death. The fungus proves immortality can hold a physical form. The spider has become a surreal exhibition of what it once was. It's body looks crystallized, hanging in dead air, trapped mid-way in ascension.

A month ago, there were maggots rotting on my kitchen ceiling. Some were wrapped in thick webs, falling to the floor after being sprayed with bleach. The ones that were not suffocated by the web were stuck to them; left to die by immobility and harden into carcasses with time. Their bodies were dark and stale, shrunk and wrinkled.

I started noticing more spiders in my house. A possible wolf spider crawled from behind my bookshelf and under a loosely taped painting I have. The painting is from a friend, and has the words “Desires from Hell” printed on it. I watched its movements under the stained butcher paper, forming small wrinkles and shadows. I fell asleep to the faint sounds of rustling.

Desire: from Latin desiderare: long for, wish for; demand, expect. From ‘de sidere:’ await what the stars will bring; from the stars; from ‘sidus;’ heavenly body, star, constellation

In the cellar, I weighed heavy against the door, my head pressed to the splintering wood, my shoulders to my ears. There are tens of the same deaths stuck on rotting silk. The form of the spiders is applauded in their fungal resurrection. The spiders ultimately become taxidermy; only existing to give form. The cellar has become a sight of paranoia, obsession; a theatrical set up showing that absence always leaves residue.

I surround one spider with the jar, trying to cut the web with a shaking hand. The body makes no sound against the glass. I submit my own body of clay, my beliefs, baseless and shattered, to the spider.

On the bottom half of the jar, there is a taped excerpt from the Bible: “Sin will no longer dominate your life, since you are living by grace and not by law” (Romans 6:14). Julia Kristeva quotes this verse in her essay, “God is Love,” under the subtitle *Death is Immersion*. After

capturing the spider, I scoured my bookshelves, looking for a book that would give me language enough to understand.

The essay is anatomical and thorough; a clinical examination of love. Kristeva believes that true Catholic love — agape love — would not come from any derivation of this physical or sexual world, but from one who lives ‘homologous’ to Jesus Christ. This means accepting death, entirely, as a symbol, a baptism, a metaphor; it is to know and accept that ‘you’ are *not*, and have never *been*.

Kristeva writes:

“...pure love is channeled through the nullification of the entire body, which is by the same token destined for resurrection and yet put the death for the time being.”

Death and love exist in a certain mutualism; a divine symbiosis.

An imitation

I continue to move the jar in small circles, looking into it with tunnel vision. It’s either an eternal present or a present eternity. The spider did not bring death upon itself. The fungus reincarnated itself in the spider’s likeness. In its act of preservation, it revealed the body as a vessel, one that the fungus could live through forever. Their coexistence is now life living in the likeness of death. If Kristeva believes that agape love is the acceptance of death leading to *life* in likeness of Christ, then this life-death is simply a mirror of that love.

She further writes:

“The killing of the body is the path through which the body-Self has access to the Name of the Other [God] who loves me and makes of me a Subject who is immersed in the Name of the Other.”

The dead spider and its living skin, the sublimation of the spider to a body, to a fungal resurrection (*confirming that life and love are eternal*). It's a natural process, a reflection of primal order; it's symbolic not only in an image of inevitable death, but in the cycle of this inevitability. What was before what is will always be sought for, naturally, until what was becomes what is.

Imitation: The result or product of imitating; a copy, an artificial likeness; a thing made to look like something else, which it is not; a counterfeit.

*(n.) c. 1400, "emulation; act of copying," from Old French imitacion, from Latin imitationem (nominative imitatio) "a copying, imitation," noun of action from past participle stem of imitari "to copy, portray, imitate," from PIE *im-eto-, from root *aim- "to copy." Meaning "an artificial likeness" is from c. 1600.*

I know this spider was the same who wrapped the maggots in its web. I know that what it is now is what the maggots were before. It's wrapped in a fungus, living in its eternal present; an

imitation of the maggots, fatefully preserved. An eternal cycle ending in a crystallized moment, the likeness of death and life molding its coexistence in a jar.

Death, being love, proves that love that has existed before anything or anyone, meaning it exists on a cosmic plane that has always and will always be. The grief that happens in the in-between may mirror this cycle, but does not live in its likeness.

Grief is the body-Self. *Time does not pass well.* It is a corporeal coping in the presence of non-being. It is greedy: imposing meanings, begging that reality may be re-defined, again. The affliction comes from a span of misunderstandings — how is one to understand such an immediate existence turned non-existence? The space and distance that love can effortlessly occupy is unbearable because it has never, nor will ever, be linear. Language and temporality equally fail in grief. The dependence on progression skews a sense of the eternal. As grief lives on our skin, it aches for a lost interiority.

Grief eventually exhausts itself, it becomes too bloated on the skin. It collapses, or ascends, into mourning. It is mourning that is the death as love is the life; it is stuck in the likeness of love's eternal loop. If one thinks of another and holds belief in another while knowing that reality may, or may not, reflect these beliefs, then what can that be called, if not faith? Mourning is another Name of the Other.

who loves me and makes of me a subject

It does not require being, or becoming non-being. It only requires faith in the reduction of the body and self into pluralism, what holds you holds me holds us, becoming one. The matter of ‘the present’ is an illusion to the eternity that cannot be sought after. It is here that the present will, eternally, be present.

Permanently my-your body

By removing the spider, I caused a microscopic ecological disaster. This is only out of the need to preserve a conscious and physical *present*. It would be different if I had stumbled upon the spiders and looked at them purely. I could continue to live, faithfully, remembering that they exist in my cellar. And that they most likely would be there and live longer than my memory could stretch. But I acted with greed, disillusioned with obsession and projection. I laid in the cellar with the jar next to me, hypnotized in the webs of white feeding new life. I was living in the residue, in a landscape of absence.

One of the legs is at the bottom of the jar, curved in on itself, proving the first, of many, final deaths. When the whole body loses its living skin, it breaks this cycle, reverting back to a body. The life-death merely becoming death. It’s an eighth of the way there. The fungus will continue to survive. It will feed off its own spores in the jar. It will outgrow the spider’s death, indefinitely. The fungus may find another cycle, but in the jar, it only becomes life.

Martin Luther writes:

“Our nature, by the corruption of the first sin, [being] so deeply curved in on itself that it not only bends the best gifts of God towards itself and enjoys them (as is plain in the works-righteous and hypocrites), or rather even uses God himself in order to attain these gifts, but it also fails to realize that it so wickedly, curvedly, and viciously seeks all things, even God, for its own sake.”

Incurvatus in si: The heart curved in on itself

As months pass, the fungus grows weak; the brightness severely saturates. Another leg lays at the bottom of the jar. The spider's body, still suspended, begins to shrink into itself, the attached legs curved around its smallness. The fungus is in its non-viable stage, where it no longer grows or creates spores, it lies dormant, ready to become life again.

The Body

The original glyph of the number two was two parallel lines =. Through its evolution into the glyph 2, the lines began to slowly collapse into each other. The top line pulled towards the bottom, curving itself and intersecting the opposing line, eventually conjoining on opposite ends with a loop, the top line running over itself. This eventually flattens into one straight line, leading upward from the left, a slight curve at the top with the end-point facing downwards, facing the intersecting point.

= [...] 2

Parallel lines never touch and coexist without this intimacy, yet draw themselves in likeness, stretching with no end. As the lines curve and hold each other, they lose form and definition, merging into one. The starting point of the top line curves downwards, pointing back to the intersection point. The lines, though merged into one, still face each other, still prove their duality, their magnetic attraction, their divine symbiosis.

The number two is associated with one's guardian angel. The message they bring can be an affirmation: you are on the right path, good fortune is coming. It can be a warning: you are not on the right path, the angels are giving you protection. If it's not a message, it's a visit. Someone who has passed away, literally or metaphorically. Someone who isn't in sight, hasn't been heard, hard to be reached, visiting you.

In numerology, two is Eve's number: a symbol of balance, harmony, partnership. It's the other weight on the scale of destiny, perfectly evening the score. Eve is birthed from Adam's rib: God

sent Adam into a deep sleep, then cut him open, excavated the rib, “and closed up its place with flesh” (Genesis 2:21-22). Eve becomes his other half; they become companions, spouses. She is the missing part of him, a literal lost and found fragment from his nearly-whole body.

Two is the marriage, coexistence, symbiosis of all things. Binaries, oppositions, dichotomies, dualities. Life and death, light and darkness, order and chaos, love and fear. The synonym is faithfully bound to their antonym.

In these binaries, the two words feign agency from the other. Yet, as the glyph has the midpoint, the intersection, the intimacy, as do the words, the meanings; the two exist in likeness, if not sameness. They are always collapsing inwards, the top pulls to the bottom, the bottom stretches for the touch. The two, the pairings, exist as halves of each other. There is no *one*: there are two, and then half of two, which is not one. The words face each other, waiting to be whole. They remain fractured until they are fulfilled and satisfied in their partner-word.

If not one, then two. Life-death to death-life, death-life to life-death. 2:2, the perfect ratio, the incisive halves. Both living in likeness of the other, until sameness. The being, the imitation, the becoming, the reflection.

In Plato’s “Symposium,” Aristophanes says that humans were originally created with four arms, four legs, and a head with two faces. Fearing their power, Zeus split them into two separate parts, condemning them to spend their lives in search for their other halves.

Zeus' severing of the flesh, and Aristophanes' understanding of soul mates. Adam's lost rib, the formation of his wife. *My body, yours?* The search for a physical wholeness; the body parts to be found in another.

Yet, for Aristophanes, the head was originally one: two faces were split, the eyes and mouths, but the head - the mind, the internal - was one, and now half. The only true fracturing, with no internal structure; the fateful promise of shattering.

Anne Carson writes:

“If we follow the trajectory of Eros we consistently find it tracing out this same route: it moves out from the lover toward the beloved, then ricochets back to the lover himself and the hole in him, unnoticed before. Who is the real subject of most love poems? Not the beloved. It is that hole.”

For Carson, it is the workings of Eros that point to the hole, the internal fracturing. It does not mediate the fracture, question it, answer it, define it. It simply turns lovers into hopeless voyeurs. But between desire, and the hole it reflects, is the body. And the body responds.

The body bruises, blood clots right under the skin; it swells, bloats, sweats, cums. The body is injectable: a thin needle penetrates the thigh, intramuscular access. A metal prosthesis to toy with the internal, to inch closer to the swelling. The hand on the sternum bruises the skin. The bruise

becomes a shadow of the hand, existing for days. It remains in its bluish tint, holding its past always present.

Desire does not produce hopeless voyeurs, it produces a sense of subjectivity; a hyper-awareness of defining, re-defining, being, becoming, imitating. A compulsion to separate, to hold onto oneness, to differ, to relate, to individualize perception, senses, the body. The belief of half-ness is lost, the head is one. The body is one.

Anne Carson continues:

“Eros is an issue of boundaries. He exists because certain boundaries do. In the interval between reach and grasp, glance and counter glance, between ‘I love you’ and ‘I love you too,’ the absent presence of desire comes alive. But the boundaries of time and glance and I love you are only aftershocks of the main, inevitable boundary that creates Eros; the boundary of flesh and self between you and me.”

The internal fracturing is coated in flesh and clothes, in mannerisms and behaviors. It is hidden and secretive, only found through moments of passion. One is left only with the love that was seeded and grown in the imagination, parented thoughtfully, and left to rupture. Left to ricochet back to the lover.

This is the body being two, not half. If halved, the top and bottom lines pull, collapse, gravity and magnetism cannot be fought in their attraction, there is no fracturing that has not already been mended.

But there is the body, the body that responds. Desire grows inside, grows under the skin, seeps through any pore, any opening. It grows on the skin, crystallizing it, showing the body as a vessel. As the external desires the internal, the internal desires the external. Internal-external:external-internal.

The transference, then, of love, grief, hate, desire: the creation of a hollow vessel dressed up in another's mind, remorphed and molded in the reception. There is the one who wills, and the object they create, and the other, with will, and the object they create. It is in the creation — the subjects — and the interaction thereof where *the absent presence of desire comes alive*. Two marionette puppets form a performance, while the executors clasp the wooden control in their hands, unable to break eye contact from each other. The controller without body, the body as a puppet, a technical tool.

Another's flesh may be rubber for the ricochet, but the eyes staring into the other, the internal, the entrance points, are all-knowing; eyes are of true desire. It is the subjects, the creations that bloat and form a mass between the two. It forms a separation, a towering defense, where the collapse is blocked; the top line pulls to the bottom, the bottom reaches for the touch. The body turns the two lovers into two hopeless voyeurs, seeking only themselves.

The intersection, the midpoint, is this collapse. It is also a severing, one that acts with gravity and pulls downwards, inwards. The intersection of desire as a black-hole, relieving all laws of attraction, physics, beliefs of their dimensionality and form. The interiority of the imploded space, where the two halves of the head with no flesh finally shows; concave ruins best hold the echo. There is no desire, because there is no attachment, there are no subjects. Still, the eyes watch each other.

Simone Weil writes:

“Not to desire that what we love should be immortal.”

The “I,” the “you,” the *I* am searching for *you*, *I* love *you*, *I* am grieving *you*, *I* am remembering *you*. The I-you:you-I, you-I:I-you. What is lost between the words, between the personal pronouns, what detaches to attach collapses into the other. It is the *I* and the *you* holding the beginning, the end, pointing back to each other, back to the likeness, the sameness, back to itself. A permanent state of flux, passing in and out of each other, yet always in the same image.

The body loses its form, the head becomes one; transference ceases to exist, there is nothing to go beyond, to cross, to go through. The lines retain their intimacy, both living inside and outside the same body; the intersection pressing the eyes against each other, desire caves into itself, into one.

I am I until I become you, you are you until you become I. Beyond the severing, inside the severing, is the collapse of desire, where the two halves are one. There are no subjects, no objects, no more fractures. There is no cover to be placed over the severing, the incision, the suction, the magnetism; it should not be wrapped or sterilized or casted.

The severing should not be looked at or thought of, written of or sung, the echo will remain. The permanent imitation collapses into one, into the eternal state of becoming, there is no other, there is *you* and *I* within a new body, which has become a non-space with no time. There, inside, inside *you*, inside *I*, desire emerges as the only one. The collapse, the zenith of love.

The bruise of this new body, a new *One*. The creation in the chasm, the recreation in the chasm, the cyclicity of creation to destroy to create to destroy. It's still early, the body-Self falls into the Self-body, the recreation of *you*, *I* only exist in the eyes; eyes not seen, mouth not heard. I inject it, interiority rearranged. The bruise of *you*, the bruise of worship, the splitting, living in the splitting, every incision. *I am remembering you, a shadow on my sternum.*

I is in you. I becomes in you. You are my body. Cum in me, cum in you?

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