TRANSFER QUEEN
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Fig. 1. Hieronymus Bosch, Ship of Fools (1490–1500)
Transfer Queen

A.W. Strouse
with drawings by Patty Barth
I’m obsessed with taking public transportation. I read about a guy in L.A. who rides the buses just to pick up people. A ‘transfer queen’?

— John Waters
although i can tell
(with his hand
down his trousers)
that he is scratching
his butthole,
my muse will not
believe me
bearded men who trim their necks high
(this gym rat, for example)
i file under
“botched circumcisions”
construction worker crosses his legs
leaning against the pole
his fat ass
way passed due
as this guy picks a molar
his attempt at secrecy
prolongs the dive
awakening from
an 8-stop nap
he immediately fellates
a NUTRAGRAIN bar
jailbait in a v-neck
bats his eyes
but i aint going down
that-a-way
muslim boy in a skirt
beside an older brother
wears only one glove
that dandy in the
polka-dot fedora
sports a non-foppish tote
from any old
DUANE READE
whatever he mumbles
causes his girlfriend
to scream
biting an unopened, travel-sized ALKA-SELTZER pack,
he seems content
if his restless leg unnerves me
— the man in aviators —
more unnerving still:
his shaking leg stops.
like a trappist, he slips his left arm in his right sleeve, his right in the left
i tell him that he dropped his glove on the seat
but he believes
i have instructed him
to place his Chihuahua
next to me
reading horatian odes,
he doesn't look up
to catch my yearning
rapping about how
he gonna kill
all dem niggas,
he tastes the feeling
from a polar-bear
COKE can
in backwards cap
studying
a periodic table
he smells like a hoagie
“so, after six hours
you take a shower?”
he confirms
on his smartphone —
then walks
to the next car
it might be rude
to offer my seat
to this old, buff dude
gym shorts and moccasins
with sweater and
dean jacket —
he's a hanging chad
hasidic DON JUAN
for whom even MOSES would break the law
bloodshot eyes in
ADIDAS sweats,
this pothead wants my D
jammed in the seat
by a fat lady
he holds two gloves,
one phone
reading

DEATH IN VENICE,

he's headed down
to battery park
CARHARTT coat and skintight jeans, he must be somebody’s pinch-hitter
i always pay
the showtime boys
for commute’s
little pleasures
cute show-time boy spreads his legs, hangs upside-down: no front teeth
there's a weird bump
like an ear, on his ear,
and his pupils suggest sincerity
since NIKE bought CHUCKS,
their semiotic stock
remains in flux
downcast in a
dashed sweatshirt
he’s fated not to know
a woman’s touch
if not the
designer change purse,
then the heavy mediterranean eyelids
signalize wantonness
i don’t care that
this teenage show-time poll-dancer
is only sixteen,
except he hasn’t learned to douche
like an art, he practices
the off-the-cuff misanthropy
of an un-offered seat
in olive coat with golden buttons
he unbuttons his shirt
starting to sweat
POLAR EXPRESS cap,
he sits at an angle
turned toward
a newspaper reader
without, however, appearing to know her
cruising this guy, 
i didn't notice 
for fourteen stops 
his wedding ring
sternly scruffy-jowled
with burnished loafers,
he is like an
unworthwhile potato
some white dude
who looks
like my hot cousin sean
contra natura are his haphazard blowfish smooches
wearing the bleary-eyed hang-over
of frat-dude repression
he tastes the throw-up brewing
like my old pet collie,
his dark eyelashes
look like eyeliner
because the dude
at the end of the car
who is spewing bibimbap
all over the floor
deserves a little privacy,
i will not write
a poem on him
asleep standing up
he licks his lips
dreaming stock options
in the land of lakes
legs askance and torso turned,
arching neck and twisting arm,
feet at angles, texting quick—
he’s an easy target for my love
sneering at his FACEBOOK friends,
the DL boy
makes me hard
embroidered rose lining
in his black leather jacket
complicates my view
that his pasty nordic face
connotes RIEFENSTAHL
tight leather pants
and elevated shoes
suggest a pussy pleaser
bobbing his head to invisible music, he gives me the finger with his eyes
earmuffs and a notebook
probably indicate
a vatic sensitivity
beneath his METS cap
and his RAY CHARLES sunglasses,
all chin
another note-taker
surveys the scene
sucking his pen cap,
a pacifier
this teenage boy
with patchy beard
looks just like TRAYVON
reading his box of prescription toothpaste
the infidel begs
silent forgiveness
chubby buddha
he is at one
but falls asleep
and cracks his phone
as i spy on his crotch
inspecting for gradation
i receive no appreciation
for my ocular blow
men on the platform
(even cuties
who smoke blunts waiting for the C)
are not eligible
for my book
wrapped in a winter scarf
he burns with an innocence
i must destroy
asian man in sunglasses and a racing suit
smells like patchouli
between the crowd
of bundled passengers
he peers at my crotch
with jeepers creepers where you get dem peepers boy
taller and broader than me, the high-yellow boy whose freckles inspire envy
something about this stranger
suggests to me today
he radically altered his hairstyle —
i gotta switch trains
hair slicked back like DONALD TRUMP, JR. —
the same,
dick-sucking pout
arab boy decked out
like a dreadlock rasta:
god bless america
short scrawny white boy in giant overcoat,
neanderthal features,
a zen-like indifference
in shorts in december
with gauged ears
what a waste
of fag potential:
the dumpy homo
in pleated pants
scratching his chin, the philosopher in the YANKEES cap
turned up waxed stache
his perfect posture habituated
to a snarky mommy
jowly, pocky, wrinkly
but cleanly shaven —
the elderly bicycle deliveryman
rugged slavic features
and big fur hat —
no jolly disposition
an apparition in the crowd:
marijuana leaf-print
on drop-crotch sweats
fright-wig hair
and prune face:
a kind of subway hitchhiker
thick neck beard
with faded cheek beard
tilting his head

per aspera ad astra
do-rag projecting
uneasy tenderness
highlighting every word
of RICHARD II —
an over-eager
joe college
decidedly performing
his disinterest
with blasé baseball cap
peroxide blonde
japanese buzzcut,
inexplicably masculine
another white dude
who looks
like my hot cousin SEAN
straightened hair with 
WIFE OF BATH teeth —
definitely a fruit
ELDER FOWLER
the mormon missionary
with a taste for espresso
teenage boy
with bowler and
horn-rimmed glasses
studying the cosmos
teenage homo:
greased, thinning hair
and cum on his breath
construction worker with
aquiline nose —
not on the menu
in his front pants pocket
a pack of
MARLBORO REDS,
lightly overbitten lips
pince-nez specs
in defiance of his musculature
NYPD
one-hundred percent
all-american beef—
unlikely candidate
for handcuffing
three hip-hop show-time subway teens
twerking and popping
with no latent homosexual content
whatsoever
mouthing words to his headphones
with eyes rolling along
in J-train ecstasy
showing his ass
giving an angry eyeroll
dread-headed mailman
with wide-spread knees
sipping the MINUTE MAID APPLE JUICE
of midlife regret
leans into his iPhone with head in hands: she aint texting back
poncho with highlighter, college-ruled paper—playing hard-to-get
some guy in love
with his own reflection —
in the filthy subway window
a middle-aged
straight plumber
on PrEP for the weekend
a dude who looks
like my hot cousin sean
in a yale t-shirt
asian twink with a GUCCI purse—
fat-assed like
nobody’s business
old geezer with blinged-out DOPE cap checking emails
specs on the tip
of his schnoz
spying on neighbors —
the old man
with mud on his thighs
selling WELCH’S FRUIT SNACKS
in aluminum flip-flops,
somehow post-sexual
bad posture like
slouchy gym socks
twelve wicker baskets
stacked in a sack
with his legs folded, prim,
his brow folded,
mad
in Kmart shirt,
freaky-deaky
listening to CHICAGO on his iphone
(the musical, not the band):
the d.l. chubby-chaser
shining bourgeois teeth
skimming GRUNDRISSE
beside his lanky, 
buck-toothed sister 
with sibling nonchalance:
the towering, lanky, buck-toothed
older brother
biting the inside of
his cheek,
caressing the outside of his cheek:
an inscrutable case
of itchy cheek syndrome
so much gel in his unstyled hair
nodding at whatever
his straight friend says
impeccably trimmed beard
but rough, ashy skin —
into PnP
thumbs flitting gracefully
playing CRASH BANDICOOT —
IRL, a bad
mamma jamma
twink with a comb-over, desiring
this man’s art, that man’s ass
narrow eyes and a LITTLE RICHARD stache —
like me, a transfer queen
his uneven stache and lewd gestures:
the decline of the west
his brontosaurus trapezes
credit a deep-throated complacency
his steely squint says
I AINT AFRAID
OF YER DONG
then slaps his hand
on his girlfriend’s crotch
his glasses are too large
for a crew cut so short
his pizza delivery backpack
prepares him for a
pizza safari
his eyes linger
on another man’s texts
with quiet dignity
his sidelocks long and lush,
his squint overfull
with non-kosher angst
his little leather tote:
a coat of many colors
his pants are rolled up
but his cap pulled down,
indifferent to
libido's call
his restless leg syndrome
in a three-piece suit
is an index of
a hungry hole
his pronounced lean
and pencil-thin eyebrows
suggest impotence
his yellow hat
belongs to his dad
or his daddy
his dour, turned-down lip
and harsh brows
cry out to the lord:
he’s a bottom
his lip-ring looks
like a fishhook
his cornrows say
G, but his
chapstick says
mama’s boy
his beard is square across the cheek,
semiotically vexed
and quite unattractive
his frizzy hair
and chubby face
make him look tetched:
TELL ME ABOUT THE RABBITS, GEORGE
his bandana divides
his hair and his eyes
like some brechtian mode of alienation
always already recuperated
his canvas bag says
COLUMBIA,
giving the lie
to an histrionic pompadour
his dorky subway sunglasses defy both function and style indicating substance abuse
his bike basket reads

LAW & ORDER SPECIAL VICTIMS UNIT: FILM CREW
THIS VEHICLE IS FOR OFFICIAL THEATRICAL BUSINESS
his head is cocked
like a nervous pheasant
with a lute
between his knees
his shapely clavicle
is below the age
of my muse's consent
his backward golf cap
and quarterback hunch
articulate masochism
his soft chin and the
one strand of bang on his forehead
intimate benevolent patrician
in a COOKIE-MONSTER blue fur coat
and lime green, filthy tennis shoes
he plays
CANDY CRUSH
with pavlovian predictability
a bear with coffee probably wearing
(underneath his
office corduroys)
a studded cockring
a teased-out, space-age afro-puff
on a teenage boy
with tears in his eyes
a chubby cherokee in a BULLWINKLE hat
explains to his fag-hag
the ESTABLISHMENT CLAUSE
a scholar with orange spectacles
mouthing the words
of a JSTOR essay
a CRUSTY with a carry-out thing of four STARBUCKS
a high-fashion broach on his lapel
probably means
he’s oral-only,
the DORA THE EXPLORER
high-fashion broach
on his boyfriend’s lapel:
a sign of codependence
a transparent purse
fat with
newspapers and gluesticks,
fueling my suspicion
a roll of holiday snowflake gift wrap
like a festive phallic scepter,
rereading the
POETRY IN MOTION poster
a green-eyed sissy, diplomatic with
his smartphone
an aristocratic slouch
in shit-kicking heels
a bright red track-suit
on a teenage brat
a well-fed prole
in a red-knit cap
who probably sports
a chode
a hollow-cheeked black
with over-packed suitcase—
not bound
for LAGUARDIA
an angel-headed hipster
destroyed by madness and
OLD NAVY PERFORMANCE FLEECE
a mohawked crusty in a neckbrace laying on
the floor yelling:
it only takes 5 people
10 cents each
to give a junkie
50 cents
a scowling black nationalist who likes
white dudes
who rim him
a varsity letter jacket
growing up to be
a debaser
a jerry-curled boy
asleep in a shawl
like baby JESUS
a pensive
diesel shopper
heading to the next car
makes a timely brexit
an unattended youth
with LISA FRANK binder
sends mixed signals
a PANTHER beret and a pleated skirt:
either a commie or faggot or both
a scruffy bookworm
caught in a simple misunderstanding
with his polka-dot loafers
the homeless man
exposing himself
performs a public service
the man in paisley
pursues the NEW YORK TIMES CROSSWORD
with a purple gel pen
the dark-skinned fellow
with HARPO MARX peroxide puff
kindly offers his seat
the sidelocks of this hasidic bucher:

NELLIE OLESON,
arch-rival of
LITTLE HOUSE
the guy who cruised me
(sashaying up and
down the platform)
now sits across
and won’t deign flirt
the pakistani kid
with prematurely salt-and-pepper hair
belongs in my
superpac commercial
the dude in the hoodie
smiles as he catches me
writing my christmas list
the old man, angry, 
dissertates aloud 
about blue lipstick
the cartoon bumble-bee on his hat persuades me of his humanity
the shrunken-face teen
is giving me the willies
as he commits
a misdemeanor
the gaping-mouth twinky arab boy
with his two hirsute buddies
pats his friend’s thigh, intoning
“habibi, habibi”
the tattoo on his left hand may say
MONEY TICKLES
(but ink is hard to read on skin so dark)
the clean-cut, well-dressed catamite
removes his gloves revealing his
prison-tat
knuckles
the pink-haired pixie boy
kicks a stranger's bag
just for the hell of it
the frayed denim
around the hole
in his jeans at the knee
he twists coquettishly
the YANKEES fan who picks his nose
while wearing one glove
potentially barebacks
the bro with bangs
poking out of his hat
regrettably must explain to his girlfriend
they missed their stop
the pasty homo
a MODIGLIANI
in an H&M suit
the misfolded brim
paradoxically shows
joie de vivre
the homeless, rail-thin white dude
with a grocery bag of
his own vomit
works for the CIA
the teenage wunderkind with a top-knot
looks at me angrily
like I just grounded him
the name tattooed around his throat is
(from this distance)
not quite legible, but
i stare too long and he approaches
with murder in his eyes
the triangular cut
on his nose
in the shape of a
cartoon nose
the bear with a crease on his nose bridge
& stack of
unopened mail:
his baseball cap says SORRY MOM
the busking drummer tells us to have a blessed day
but there's no guarantee
the trim on his strap
like an ancient phoenician trading ship
hunkered down
for some sexting
the rough-red stigmatism on his left eye
takes the derivative
of mid-life crisis
over teenie-bopper
cut-off tee
the camus nose of a pakistani businessman recalls the REEVE’S TALE
the CRUSTY with a heart of gold
has a worried mom
back ST. LOUIS
the long silver chain dangling from one back pocket to the other back pocket is a butt necklace
the undershirt beneath his collared shirt
cuts his neckline, revealing
the calloused glans of circumcised straightness
the contrapposto of this CANDY-CRUSHER is polymorphously perverted
the accordion panels
in his drop-crotch jeans
are mama's little squeeze box
the rip in his pants — 
a window to his soul
the flesh rolls on his upper leg
tightly bound in khakis
appear to me
like a pussy
the strange flatness of his nose
offsets and recomposes
his lack of a chin
until he is seen as
classically beautiful
like the marble bust
of some demonic
child emperor
he stuffs one napkin into his mother’s coat pocket then blows a snot-load into his other napkin
he smiles wryly as he texts a friend: “i’m dumping her ass”
he carries his earbuds in his teeth
having swallowed the red pill
he drinks from a paper coffee cup
branded UFT
forlorn pedagogue
of unending whiteboards
he’s got that lone-gunman look
as he caresses the back of the knee
of some little wifey who’s charged with
re-directing
his demons
he frowns determinedly
composing a manifesto,
a ski-mask framing
his wine-dark lips
he twists his lips, perplexed,
but his eyes in
placid focus
beam inner peace
he kind of squats
to zip his fly
with a pleased smile
he taps his phone
exactly how
i'd tap his butt
he tells his interlocutor
that they must part ways
at GRANDMA AVENUE
he wears a lime and gray flannel shirt
like the one I wore
in a former life
he looks like my student, AWN, (the hot pakistani chemistry major) but less hot than AWN because he hasn’t shaved his patchy beard
he presses his leg against mine,
the horny teen playing MARIO CART,
pwning some noobs
he has a very small face
and (with his hands in his pockets)
disappears
he keeps taking photos of himself,
the nondescript guy
whose carpenter’s pencil
tells the whole story
he pursues the subway like personals ads,
his expansive
song-of-self
he wears cargo pants
without any cargo
he is a J CREW editorial
well-built and
expertly tailored
but biting his thumb nail
he wears the sunglasses and dreads
of a vietnam vet
he has his hands
clasped behind his back
like some french
cabinet minister
he wears a paint-splattered track suit
as he reattaches
a saint’s medallion
he’s 42 but still admires
HOLDEN CAULFIELD
he twirls his pointer to
an earbud song
with sinister intent
he is decked out in
vestiges of
feudal finery
he watches
a parodia vid
on YOUTUBE
with spanish subtitles
i can barely translate
he looks exactly like my ex-boyfriend
(the one who got his eye beat out by a
homeless man)
but it's not him

(DREW has to wear
an eyepatch now)
he glares at me, then dims his eyes—
an enigma
he holds his
adam’s apple
with thumb and forefinger
like an apotropaic talisman
to ward off castration
he talks loudly
about his ex-girlfriend's suicide
but i'm a sucker
for man-splainers
he has his priorities in order, scarfing kung-pow chicken
he has a rosebush sleeve tat
up his thick olive bicep:
poor banished children of EVE
he touches my leg
with GRINDR open on his cellphone
and gives me his number
but has blue gums
he has the same faux-leather bag as me,
but i’m gayer
he will be unable
to explain his MARSHALLS splurge
to penny-pinching wife
he rests his umbrella against his unzipped fly
gazing without hope
he wears baby-blue UGGS
with a SPONGEBOB bookbag
and a construction worker’s helmet —
my scanning inconclusive
he has evidently caught the transfer
from the F to the M
at west fourth street
he trimmed his
neck-beard
upon some YOUTUBE style vid advice
are those big buggy eyes the product of coke-bottle lenses
or a CHENEY-esque exit strategy?
does this pre-pubescent boy need a permission slip to wax those eyebrows so fiercely?
in capris, he carries a cherry wood folding table
a christmas gift from nana, or for her?
what is
THRASHER MAGAZINE and why is he wearing their hat —
this black hipster with white girl —
a peer-reviewed journal on jungle fever?
why do mexican bus boys only ever
grow to 5 feet 4,
i silently ask
this teeny hottie?
how can someone so tall
plead so for love?
is this very tall old man
squeezed between
two girls
committing predation?
how does the
doe-eyed traveler
staring at my forehead
avoid my eyes
these many stops
to BUSHWICK?
why does this man stare at my shoes
griping a
POLAND SPRING?
tortoise-shell glasses and a LAKERS hat —
something tells me he's celibate:
maybe his ecstatic stare?
long curly hair
like a renaissance courtier —
perhaps he’s texting
machiavellian schemes?
a palestinian
solidarity scarf
on a chubby jew —
but is he a fruit?
guy with
bloody chapped lips,
why do you mutter conspiratorially
about DEREK JETER?
his cheeks, hollowed by pock-marks
lend a simian flair —
but do apes get zits?
chinese boyfriend speaks to his chinese girlfriend
with squeaky chinese accent —
why not speak chinese?
help me disambiguate
the holes in his jeans:
is he slutty or
grungy or both?
is that businessman lost in a heroin slouch?
no, he just can’t get his zipper unstuck
long-haired chubby guy in green hoodie and green trousers — from MIDDLE EARTH?
in hounds-tooth trousers,
a package-bulge or camel-toe?
the asian boy with muttonchops
throws me off—
can't tell if he's gay or
even if
right now
i am?
he holds his fist
on his heart, beating to
what earbud song?
he puts his hand
on her thigh
like it’s his own thigh
— maybe it somehow is?
a grumpy skater boy
with poor-little-rich-girl eyes —
or is it
BETTE DAVIS eyes?
MALCOLM X look-alike
he is half-asleep
like getting picked up from grandmas
some fat

KEVIN SPACEY with
a flannel hunting hat —
solving the race crisis
he looks like
CLARK GABLE with a
runny nose from poppers
he smells like
a roachbutt
thugged out and asleep
somehow recalling
PAUL SIMON
LEE HARVEY OSWALD pudgy
playing CANDY CRUSH
MARILYN MONROE beauty mark
on his left cheek
which I would smear with cum but which probably
interferes with his shaving
little cutie pie
with REAGAN hair
didn’t cover when coughing
and needs to get spanked
JABBA THE HUT face
but a PRINCESS LEIA torso
wrapped in a sheet
slicked hair
like RALPH FIENNES in SCHINDLER’S LIST
with similar bad-boy appeal
grasping the pole and
leaning back like
my own TYLER DURDEN
giving me side-eye
he's reading the gospel according to
SAINT MATT
hands crossed over his belt buckle, 
an unlikely gesture of reverence 
given his SCARFACE teeshirt
like BORIS KARLOFF
giving me the once over,
has a frankenstein dick
in airbrushed camouflaged sweats
he smells like popcorn
and looks like PUTIN
long silver hair and big horse teeth
this dude is as horny
as EILEEN MYLES
WILLEM DEFOE face checking his hair in his phone
this stank-face twink
is just begging
to get sero-converted
this straight dude
wears a sour, faggy frown
because his girl
just chewed him out
this faded, flat-topped hustler,
whose weary eyes
graze my bulge
this NEW YORK TIMES devotee has a crush on PAUL KRUGMAN
this pretty boy
in UNDER ARMOUR
makes my day
the homeless man beside his trash bag kingdom
reads a xeroxed essay from FORBES
old man folded in a death pose
like PICASSO’s blue guitarist
— i yearn to be so detached:
but did he just wink?
with a blue scarf, blue hat, and blue book
the lonely reader doesn’t notice me.

also, blue tennis shoes.
polka-dot shoes
(blue with pink spots)
he cock-blocks me
with a game of
CANDY CRUSH
DORITO dust
on his blue suede shoes
strangely apropos
blue contacts make
his brown eyes gleam,
no homo
what the young novelist
types into
his smartphone:

“what the hell is that?” daywalker yelled.
“It’s really happening,” ricky replied.
another LITTLE RICHARD stache
unpolished loafers,
a slow sort of suicide
appearing before
in this book
(in a coat like
COOKIE MONSTER):
today he wears
a dreary flak jacket
falling asleep
with an eyeball
painted on his eyelid
warding off naughty spirits
DION, in a SHAKE-SHACK uniform, explains he's not a bum but his mom has stage-four cancer
receding hairline
like a ruined
greek amphitheater
and a face like my hot cousin SEAN
O, emerald-eyed BORICUA,
you inspire my
politically-incorrect
fear of
demonic possession!
O, JASON, selling your WELCH’S FRUIT SNACKS: let me vouch for you at the parent/teacher conference!
O, baller in JACKIE O glasses,
you carry CHARMIN, proclaiming
no femmes no fats no asians!
O, short papi chulo,
can't tell if you're gay
or if you're illegal!
A.W. is a poet who lives in Brooklyn and teaches medieval literature at CUNY. Strouse is also the other of My Gay Middle Ages (punctum books, 2015).

Patty grew up in Utah, was schooled in Ohio, and lives in Brooklyn, where he runs a custom fabrication studio.
Strouse, A.W.

*Transfer Queen*

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