

**LAST YEAR
AT BETTY
AND BOB'S**

An Actual
Occasion

Sher Doruff

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Fig. 1. Hieronymus Bosch, *Ship of Fools* (1490–1500)

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spontaneous acts of scholarly combustion



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Acknowledgments

For more than a decade I have been supervising artists engaged in 3rd cycle/PhD research in Europe. Long interested in experimental literature, I have been exploring autotheory slash speculative fiction slash speculative fabulation as practices of artistic research. This project pursued an interest in the relations between lucid dreaming and material-discursive art praxis. I developed a rigorous daily writing routine in the hope of completing, over an indeterminate period of time, a series of novellas engaged with the philosophical and theoretical texts resonant with the community of artists I work and play with.

The serial novella project *Last Year at Betty and Bob's* began in 2013. The name of the series arrived serendipitously. Walking with a colleague one morning in Aarhus Denmark, he misunderstood my reference to *Last Year at Marienbad* and said "What's that? Last Year at Betty and Bob's?" I laughed and thanked him for the insight. It stuck. The secondary titles *A Novelty*, *An Adventure*, and *An Actual Occasion* are inspired by Whiteheadian concepts, staples in my worlding ways. Over that past seven years a vast constellation of scholars and artists have inspired my waking and dreaming lives. Too numerous to mention, most remain uncited in these pages yet their ideas

enervate every sentence. The decision to write with limited, unorthodox referencing is important to this writing experiment. I am aware of the many failures of coherence this approach precipitates yet I'm hopeful the minor gestures, as Erin Manning might have it, succeed in exciting conversation as to the merits and pitfalls such a tactic employs in the exposition of research creation/artistic research practice. As a *beginner's mind* writer of fiction and scholarly theory, I remain, after this durational effort, enthusiastic about approaching academic writing from a Benjamin/Haraway/Le Guin-inspired perspective of storytelling. I am thrilled by what is left unexplained. What is left to the imagination (and investigative resources) of the reader through the adventures of disparate characters in fantastical worlds, through vague indexing and easter egg clues that solve no problem, that defer closure. There are many repetitive gestures, devices, images and occurrences throughout the series that recur as if in dreams. The three books document a long term research project on the movement of artistic research itself in fabulative form. It hopes to speak to communities of seekers that generously, wholeheartedly participate in collaborative, ongoing *study*, as Moten and Harney insist.

I want to thank my friends and colleagues Karen Dunn, Erin Manning, Lucy Cotter, Alice Chauchat, and Barbara Pyle for their sharp, supportive, tireless editorial advice. Their generous participation in this serial project has helped tune the motor that drives an experiment to quasi-completion and I am grateful beyond words.

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I offer here a stream of consciousness and forever incomplete list of just some discursive and artistic, conceptual and practice-led inspirational beings that continue to inhabit my waking and dreaming life:

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Cast of Characters

Narrators

Roberta – proprietor, reference librarian Café Arcadia
ShazDadaMama – NB (she, her) interviewer, podcaster,
author of biography *The Bettys*
BB (BetteB) – transitioning character from *A Novelty*
(they, them, we)

Grittas

Bettene Vermine – cis female (she/her), European, Gen-
Tel ocular zooming, sonic artist
WildRed – NB (they/them) Slack – #grittas – dreaming
indo-euro-green, GenTel cloven feet/witch, botanist
Arefeh – cis female, Persian, archivist, oboeist
bobbob – NB (they, them) Nigerian–American, poet,
musician

Romantics:

Bettina Brentano von Arnim – feminist, poet, writer,
musician, political activist, communist, friend of Goethe,
Goethe's mother and Karoline von Günderode
Karoline von Günderode – poet, writer, friend of Bettina
Johann Wolfgang Goethe – poet, novelist, scientist, essayist
Frau Rat – mother of Goethe

Humans and significant non-in-humans others

He (Billy) – immunologist, specialty endosymbiosis,
researcher at epidemiology center holding BB
She (unnamed) – philosophy PhD candidate, researcher
at epidemiology center holding BB
Café Arcadia – library, semi-anechoic chamber
Books – in-form-ing friends
Rat passages – advice, guesses and hmmms, *Rattus norvegicus* friends
Horse – spectral, dancing
Mule – interspecial friend
Morpho Menelaus – blue winged of BB and BV
Moss/Lichen/Trees – photosynthetic greenings
Microorganisms – us and them
Dreams – REM and NREM
Holes – worm, earworm, escape
Dagger – cleaver

ShazDadaMama's Journal

19 September

I must look into this. I smell a new project. Admittedly, I could take a good long rest after finally – finally – completing the nine-hundred-page biography of The Bettys. Decent, if lackluster, reviews. Enough already. I thought I might be done done, but I kid no one by feigning an embrace of complacency. Retire where? When? On what premise? On what pension? Nope. I feel that annoying tickle, at first discreet, then full-blown itch, of a story unfolding.

Honestly, I thought I was quits with interrogating the artsy ones. Unravelling their motivations, concerns, cares, their techniques and fantasies. I have experienced a kind of tiredness (an after-effect of always already exhilaration) that trickles from riding the incandescent waves of speculative abstractions infusing micropolitical agency with aesthetic provocations. I have recently felt a need for bare earth beneath the soles of my feet, green grass between my toes. The thrill of the irreconcilably immediate, charged with necessity.

Convinced that now is the moment to concentrate my interviews on activists and everyday folk bleeding in the streets for justice, for the planet, for any shred of decency dormant in humans as a species, I wish to do as they do. I will practice resistance. I will act. I must risk.

And yet, and yet, who am I fooling if I say I can walk away from the arts. Even if I realize this is a contentious tautology, I continue to find ethical urgency expressed through the arts as life-changing, as making difference different. The performative stuff teaming with insistence, the quiet, sensual experiments with color and form. This will be as ever, my way to world the turbulence.

Artistic practice, under the scrutiny of its own valuation, straddles a rift between the useful and the useless. And it's the tightrope walk between these assertions that excites me still. It's the Whiteheadian negative prehension – the unconsciously felt affecting the consciously felt – percolating the stuff of change. It's event value. All that lies beneath the surface of the slogan, of the manifesto, of the uprising and unfolds as, dare I say it, as beautiful. Wildflowers protruding from distressed topsoil.

So yeah, what am I doing now? *Dic cur hic*. What is it that smells like coffee beans roasting? The promise of a blood rush?

Last week I ran into the sound artist Bettene Vermine on the night train. She had a dog-eared paperback book with her. When I mentioned its strange title – *The Life of High Countess Gritta von Ratsinourhouse* – she explained it was the *raison d'être* of the Grittas collective, a group of artists she collaborated with for decades. “This fairy tale” she said, “was the beginning of the beginnings of our adventures years ago.” We chatted volubly through our face gear (mine a faded floral batik, hers a skull and

crossbones print) both of us starved for conversation. We glossed many issues: the climate emergency, quixotic virality (her term), the efficacy of reparations, the collapse of capitalism. We talked earnestly about friendship. She said she'd picked up the old fairy tale again out of a shameful nostalgia for simpler times.

I asked her what the tale told. She was never good at synopses she admitted. She read me the publisher's blurb directly from the 1999, Uni Nebraska reprint. "Don't gag" she laughed.

Appearing for the first time in English, this delightful story of the adventures of twelve young girls will appeal to readers of all ages. Gritta, neglected by her father, is uprooted when her new stepmother insists she enter a convent school. Strictly supervised by the nun Sequestra, Gritta slips into melancholy. A mishandled bird, however, awakens Gritta to the realization that she and her friends must flee their walled-in life.

"This blurb mentions nothing about the cooperative society of rats in the castle" she interrupted. "I find that omission annoyingly unacceptable." She continued reading.

Following her heart and employing her wits, Gritta leads the escape. The runaway girls are eventually shipwrecked near the principality of Sumbona. They establish a Robinson Crusoe-like existence and later found their own cloister.

"Again unacceptable. This allusion to a racist trope" she said angrily "does not belong here." "Or anywhere" I added. She continued reading:

Their community is sustained by the industry and talents of each of the girls. Mayeli paints, Harmony composes, and Wildberry, an herb-

alist, learns nature's secrets and gains access to supernatural powers that will guarantee the future of the community.

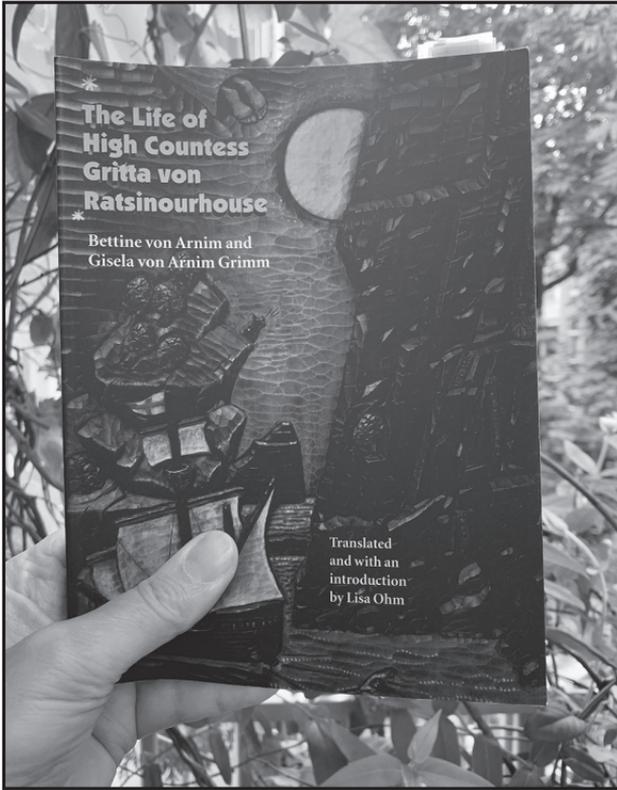
"Note the character Wildberry" she said winking. I noted the exaggerated emphasis of the wink in our age of occluded facial expression. Speaking with the eyes.

Gritta chooses to marry Prince Bonus of Sumbona, but when she sees the twelve cells in the cloister, she realizes with a pang of longing that she will never occupy the one meant for her.

Bettene pauses here as we both consider the pleasures and discomforts of the cloistered cell.

This enchanting tale, coauthored in the early 1840s by Gisela von Arnim Grimm and her mother, Bettine von Arnim, lay undiscovered in an archive for nearly a century. Through humor and delicate satire, the authors criticize the place of women and children in nineteenth-century German society.

"Don't you just hate the way these blurbs generify the idiosyncratic" she sighed. Not a connoisseur of fairy tales myself, I nodded, knowing I would not be tempted to indulge in the patois of the little book. But as our conversation during that serendipitous encounter drifted to her own story, her Gritta adventure, my ears popped and crackled as if listening to her work. The vocal tonality of open vowels, alliterations and diphthongs transduced through my cochlea were perceived as extraordinary sounds. The seductive flow of internal rhyme, metered cadence, polyrhythmic excess, moved me incalculably. Not from place X to place Y as the train would, but through a connective membrane of yes, here it was, the useless and the useful, art and science, fact and fabulation, an amodal more-than alive with potential. Stories in the telling.



act 1

**AS IN DREAMS,
STUFF RECURS**

Potentiality becomes reality; and yet retains its message of alternatives which the actual entity has avoided. In the constitution of an actual entity: – whatever component is red, might have been green; and whatever component is loved, might have been coldly esteemed.

– A.N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*

*If you forget the tiniest difference in the world,
well, Relation is no longer Relation.*

– Édouard Glissant

Roberta's Café Arcadia

The bus from Lavenone dropped them off at twilight. They'd chosen this northern Italian mountain village as a place to hang together. To collect and recollect. To make something. Their desires were unintentionally specious. In all truth, this place needed nothing added to its stunning entropy.

*

Bettene was charged with acquiring the keys to an abandoned home that would be the Gritta's holiday refuge for the coming month. She'd rehearsed her introduction to Roberta a dozen times during the bus ride, forewarned that their host was, how had WildRed put it, "as exceptional as the architecture."

As darkness colored the horizon's thin orange remark, Grittas Arefeh and bobbob, gingerly explored the steep stairways of the vertical village while Bettene approached Café Arcadia with trepidation of her own. The building, impressive in its bulky resistance to common sense and gravity, was constructed out of the mountain itself, nestled on a patch of cliffside. Local limestone, mortar, marble, and good luck had held the bleak grey of its construction intact for three centuries.

Navigating the weathered slate steps leading to the café entrance kept her balance on edge, kept her from zooming in on microscopic detail fifty meters away. She did notice moist dew on the rust-covered oval table and the peeling brown paint of the doorway frame. For a moment she wished she could swap out WildRed's CRSPR proclivity for her own but that thought disappeared as she pushed through the doorway. Once inside, her attention shifted from razor-sharp visual details to gauzy sensation. She was struck by a strong scent of plantlife and earth. Her sensing now more proprioceptive than ocular, she stopped still to adjust her balance and her focus.

The space was dimly lit except for the panel of soft light behind the shelving that displayed the hard liquor. The white light brought out a range of colors and shapes from the many bottles perfectly positioned according to the tint of their liquid, mostly browns, ambers, greens, and blues with a red or two. Other bottles, colorless and clear, some with exquisite forms, held local schnapps and grappas. She always loved this translucent backlit effect in chic urban bars. The juxtaposition of light, dark, and color. She'd long enjoyed playing with afterimages on her retinas. There was an imperfect technique for this:

1. Stare at the shapes, colors and white light for thirty seconds
2. Switch gaze to a plain white surface (if available)
3. Delight in patches of complementary colors dancing

Making her way across the space, the soft tap of her heels on the marble floor faintly echoed. The object of her mission, the only human form she could make out, was reading behind a small brass table lamp with a green glass shade. This would be Roberta, café owner and keeper of the keys to fourteen empty domiciles. Pastoral legend and word of mouth had it that temporary squatting permission in the village was available with Roberta's bless-

ing. Once upon a time all hell had broken loose here. It was now her charge to protect the placeholders, the cinders. She was savior and servant to things inexplicable.

Bettene tried out an awkward “Buonasera signora, sono Bettene. Posso avere la chiave per il numero dodici?” The recitation sounded mechanical, stripped of character. Blushing in embarrassment, though her reddening cheeks would never be noticed in this dark space, she thought what she was hearing was her lack of credible intonation but something else was off, something she couldn't place as the sound of her voice was non-locatable. Her inner ears, harboring cochlear and vestibular systems for the nourishment of aural sensation and earthly balance, preened from years as a professional listener, were normally her trusted friends. Since entering the café, she felt a disconnect, a muffled isolation as if the textures of sonic ambience had been hoovered away. She gathered her wits.

The previous rudimentary correspondence between these two had been in polite English and Roberta had made clear that #12 would be available. Bettene could drop the pretense of the overachieving guest. Roberta was already flipping through a metal ring with dozens of oxidized skeleton keys. “Buonasera signora, how many stay?” she asked. Her manner was friendly enough. Bettene imagined that Roberta hoped for some customers, maybe sell a few shots, espresso, sparkling water, mixed nuts. She smiled warmly at Roberta “We are four, uh, quattro, signora.” The white fur of Roberta's eyebrows protruded from a crinkled forehead. She searched a drawer for another ring of keys.

Bettene waited a little anxiously while the bar owner moved the reading glasses dangling against her sternum to the tip of her nose, deciphering the scrawl on the faded

labels of the rusted "chiavi." As Roberta studied the scribble on the key labels, Bettene noticed a sign hanging next to a faded polaroid of a pack mule. Permanently fixed below the whiskey bottles it read as omens do.

Each particle of dust carries with it a unique vision of matter, movement, collectivity, interaction, affect, differentiation, composition and infinite darkness. — R. Negarestani

Not your usual bar signage she thought. Not a glowing neon "Cocktails" or Aperol Spritz poster. Roberta must have appreciated something in the specificity of its cryptic message having taken the trouble to hang it right there, so prominently. Perhaps it functioned as a *memento mori* to the troubles that eviscerated this region not so long ago. Bettene had attempted to read *Cyclonopedia* once but hadn't managed to carve her way through the dense verbiage to the finish. The sign begged a "let's have another one for the road" attitude as much as contemplative query, which would, she reasoned, also beg another fuckin shot. She was even now tempted to order a swig of a 60°-proof regional digestif as a polite gesture. And to calm her nerves.

Waiting for the key, she reckoned Roberta had many secrets to plumb. Maybe an attic of hoarded memorabilia. Or perhaps her complex aura was closer to the unknowable, ephemeral trail of a long bluish shadow on powdered snow. Bettene would notice the next morning, as sunlight streamed in thick white-pink streaks through the grate of upper windows, that the café interior, like its owner, was not what she expected. Not at all.

The Roads from Lavenone

The bakery, the last shop in this place of grey stone and dull ivy, had closed its doors years ago. Only Roberta's café welcomed hikers, passing tourists, and the few locals left guarding memories. Food and other necessities could be obtained in Lavenone, a forty-minute hairpin-curve ride away. The few villagers that remained, all eight of them, stocked up on staples and tended their gardens with care. Absent the echoes of laughing children slamming footballs in the narrow streets, the place revealed another kind of ghosted. Not the taint of deliberate rejection, but rather catastrophic disruption flanked on all sides by the aching inevitability of change.

For shopping and social life, there's a mountain trail alternative to and from Lavenone for the physically fit or stubbornly romantic. Roberta once preferred this route to the narrow, potholed roadway. The journey could be made on foot in under two hours in good weather. She used to make the trek weekly with her mule friend and porter Wolfgang. When Wolfie passed from tetanus, Roberta resorted to the rusted Land Rover for picking up café supplies. Bags of green coffee beans, liters of local cow milk, bottles of whisky, gin, and limoncello. She kicked herself for failing to immunize the animal she loved. In doubt as to the ethical efficacy of inoculation and human

over-intervention in animal well-being, she had procrastinated. Wolfie picked up a spur on the trail that didn't heal. Roberta was forced to take measures. She wept on and off in fifteen-minute bouts for two weeks. She would swear, to anyone who would listen, that she shared Wolfie's dreams. That she could easily negotiate the steep paths, each shifting pebble and rock underfoot, because of his nocturnal supervision. She often wondered how he navigated her surreal dreams, those bizarre storylines and unidentifiable creatures?

*

A person of impeccable, anachronistic style, Roberta tended an oasis of transient sociability in this barren tract of abandoned reverie. In the chilly months she wore a tweed jacket and embroidered vest over an ivory flannel blouse. Her skirt, a thick herringbone twill, hanging well below her knees. She topped her look off with a brown fedora. In the glory of summer her taupe linen suit, fashionably wrinkled, offset the bronzed patina of her weathered face. She added a hint of black mascara, eyeliner, and a swash of ruby lip gloss to great effect every other Tuesday.

Each morning, Roberta took her first coffee alone in the bar. Habitually, she would sing a few lines from *Nessun Dorma*, a gesture that exercised her laryngeal muscles and kept her rhythms running. Unbothered by the aria's clichéd aura, she embraced the calm of repetitive practice. This was her daily downward dog. When younger, her explosive tenor could hit the high B of the third "Vincerò!" with vigor but these days, she grudgingly accepted the defeat of her vocal folds.

World news travelled lethargically up the mountain. Each morning she was charged to finesse the animated civility

of a café proprietor with whomever might pass through her door. Sometimes a family of four, sometimes a football team, more often no one at all. Anecdotes and survival tales were well-worn with the locals. That would be Giovanni and Paulo, sometimes Camilla. They all tended to slip into patterned sequences. They'd acknowledge yet again the rampaging mistrals that now lick the mountain sides smooth, the lame progress of the garden tomatoes, the newest fascist party leader, the annual memorial services, the latest species of insect gone missing. All the nuance of a fresh day was felt primarily in the pauses.



Morning After

Bettene quietly left the others nose-deep in their sleeping bags as the sun began its arc across a cloudless sky. Being together in this place for a month was artwork enough, she thought on the short walk down a sloping path to the once village center. The crusty limestone buildings, eroded by aggressive winds, gave the mixed impression of endurance and lonely vulnerability.

Each year at least one catastrophic event is predicted by meteorologists and tarot readers. Longed for by some as the rapturous end of times and by others as the just desserts of an unjust species, Bettene was still coming to emotional terms with the prospect of human extinction. She comforted plants and animals with a portentous (if anthropomorphic) "Don't worry dears, soon we won't be messing around with you anymore." She rallied with anti-extrActivists and routinely kept her evac bag updated with necessities. She remained upbeat despite ecological evidence to the contrary. Mostly she practiced the difference between waiting and not waiting. But now, on this glorious summer retreat with her kin, the weather momentarily reminiscent of an earlier decade, she craved above all else, a delicious cappuccino.

Coffee bars, she remembered, opened early in Italy. Would she find men in work clothes slouching in a windowless bar with chipped, porcelain cups in their calloused hands? No, this was her father's memory of Italian mornings, told wistfully to her with the vacant stare of a man who'd seen too much. Now, traipsing through a ghosted enclave, she wondered if she would in any way encounter this local ritual. Of course not. Everything to do with custom and travel had altered.

Rising early in this village, soundless but for the wind brushing the dry leaves and the distant peep of lonely birdsong, she did not expect to meet another traveler. Though eco-tourism had displaced vapid bus tours in global capitals and antiquity sites, travelers rarely rose before the sun announced its blazing welcome. Day-trippers preferred sipping caffeinated beverages in airco'd lounges with fresh baked pastries. She did and did not understand this tendency. After all, a frothy cappuccino was calling her.

Carefully watching each step, she tentatively negotiated the wobbly cobblestones on the village's steep main drag. She rehearsed her Babel Italian though there was no particular need. "Quanto costa, per favore?" "Quanto costa, per favore?" Step on a crack and you'll ... "Quanto costa, per favore?" ... break your mother's back.

The café door was open. Bettene took a deep breath when entering. In the hazy light of a mountain morning, she crossed the café with purpose, resisting a strong temptation to stand in the middle of the space and allow her lower jaw to drop. For here was indeed something extraordinary. She would cope with the shock of sensation later.

The octogenarian barista, spine bent as a cheap coffee spoon bends, was humming as she wiped down a ceramic beer tap. Her demeanor exuded the everyday. For her part, Bettene simply smiled and with a sincere “Buongiorno,” waited a beat then added “posso avere un cappuccino?” Again, the words sounded flat, dull, paralyzed as they left her mouth.

She hoped for a flash of friendliness from Roberta but their eyes didn’t meet as she’d expected. The woman had been kind in the tepid light of yesterday’s evening. Now, basked in the glory of daylight, she perfunctorily ground the beans and set the milk to steam without a glance. “Quanto costa per favore?” Bettene asked confidently. “Cin-que-mi-la li-re,” Roberta answered, articulating every lilting syllable. Bettene’s eyes widened. As temporal and financial disorientation threatened her composure she drew closer to the barista to better hear her. She was met with a tired twinkle in the eyes of the old woman. Tamping Bettene’s fluster, Roberta added in exaggerated broken English “For you signora, especial today, uno euro.” Bettene relaxed, noting their tentative familiarity had returned. Roberta pointed to an engraved brass plaque beside the register that looked like an old-fashioned executive nameplate, the kind CEOs and their sycophants displayed on slick empty desks next to marble pen set holders. It read “No Crypto Here Yet.” Bettene smiled then laughed when the woman flipped the nameplate around. It read “Cryptography Here.”

*

Having chosen a seat at the iron table just outside the entrance, Bettene scooped a bit of white froth from the liquid she craved. She needed digestion time. A quick, quiet respite in not-knowing, in dumbly waiving aside all that she had just encountered. For now, the strong cof-

fee's perky deliciousness provided the stability of a trusted friend.

Across the narrow street she could see one opened window amongst a gallery of shuttered portals, its lace curtain blowing inward. What she imagined that unseen room entertained could in no way approximate its realities. She knew this but nonetheless amused herself conjuring mysterious narratives that blew with the wispy, holey drape in the chilly morning air. What winds, what jubilations, what grief had passed through that portal? Imagining a small, sober bedroom was antidote to this morning's experience inside Roberta's café.

Inside

Led by her desire for coffee and the implausible safety of an old woman's presence, Bettene, for a moment, willfully suspended disbelief as she tried to relax her butt muscles on the uncomfortable iron chair. After the caffeine of that first cup performed its magic, after she'd flown towards that open window, a lithe butterfly on amphetamines, she re-entered the café. With feigned assuredness she would order another coffee. This time, anchored in a safe spot, doing a tight 360, she would force herself a long, slow look.

*

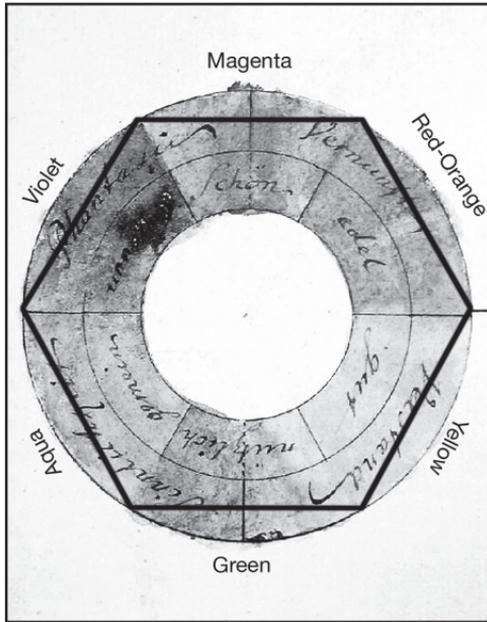
She felt the colors of the six surrounding walls before letting the visual information overwhelm her circuits. Focusing, she could see the interior architecture was hexagonal, offering the suggestion of a not-quite platonic object, each segment permeating a distinct hue. Two prominent entities, looming opposite each other, begged attention. As she now stood now in the center of the space, to her right was the rugged, tactile cliffside of the mountain itself. To her left was a slick, pane glass wall with a precipice panorama.

She turned to face the lumpy, stolid texture of raw, humid mountainside. The real thing – all foliage, moss, and stone, laced with insect activity and a lively root system. This single surface from floor to fifteen meters overhead, afforded a situated gravitas to this place. This was not your common, decorative vertical garden. This wall breathed adventure and menace like a Grimm forest, its pungent, earthy scent mixing with the lilt of freshly ground Italian Roast beans. The animated green/grey surface was flanked by swathes of yellow and aqua stone and brick, teeming with nouns, verbs and conjunctions. She swiveled.

The sheer declivity opposite the earth wall was anchored by the weighty presence of the long mahogany bar. Effervescent streams of magenta-tinted sunlight drenched the scene. From floor to high ceiling, a grid of pane glass exposed and excited the vertiginous effect of the one thousand meter drop off the face of the earth. Adjusting to the ominous beauty of the view, she noticed the violet and orange walls, alive with letters, on either side of the bar.

She was standing in a mutant spectrum. The preciseness of the wrongness was deliberate. She could feel it, the celebratory resistance of this place, its unsettling eccentricity perpetrated not only by the colorimetric scheme of the walls but also their linguistic texture. Similar to her optical experience last evening in the oscillating bright and dark of the café interior, she now had trouble focusing her gaze in ordinary daylight. After images flickered. Little crescendos of light popping with kinetic inscriptions. She sensed the influence of a spectral palette triggering the bundle of nerves cells called the CN X. She assessed the conditions.

Inside



She was standing in the approximate center of

1. a 3D Bartlett's
2. a queered rainbow
3. an architectural ode to aphorism
4. a Borgesian diorama
5. a material twitter feed
6. a semi-anechoic chamber
7. all of the above

Bettene ticked off inventive descriptions even as her brain felt tricked and numbed. As far as she could tell, nearly every centimeter of surface space was indented with discursive remarks in all tongues and alphabets. Roberta's café, the only public building in this listing Lhasa perched above a phenomenal landscape, was an arcade of adages, an archive of referential trivia and heed-

less sagacity. Accumulated knowledges parading as bare life.

Thousands of allusions, sporting varying attitudes of truth and speculation draped the planes and contours of the building's interior. From the pinnacle of the ceiling skylight to the cracked marble floor, she was a flâneur in the trace and aura of a spectral literary vault, in the linguistic chaos of color pierced by syntax.

"Fuck me, I'm standing in the cleft between euphoria and paranoia," she murmured to herself. For this was truly a mind maze surfing the cut between proliferate (re)production and fetish consumption. The lurid amalgam of a social media news feed. Insight and insanity meeting over cocktails. Was the still warm corpse of capitalism about to be buried in the dust of metaphor? "How disturbingly poetic," she whispered out loud.

Bettene felt that statement reverberate in her cranium. Sound waves didn't reflect off these walls as one would expect. They seemed to be absorbed, sucked into every indentation. Hearing here was heard differently but she couldn't yet fathom why. The hyperbolic echo of vibrating written words seemed to suffocate the spoken word. All sound for that matter, except for the body's own noises.

It took her several minutes to adjust. Her retinas behaved like a spinning camera lens set to autofocus. She felt dizzy, faint, not knowing where, how, to look. What was it about this place that day or night was so visually and aurally absurd? Standing still, she took a panoptic view as she steadied her ground.

The first rush of strange subsiding, she landed. Her humor returned. A smile parted her dimpled cheeks, her laughter briefly hanging in the air around her head. The

continuously variable focal length of her mucousy lenses, her germline GenTel power, undulated from 28mm wide angle landscape to 150mm macroscopic. She zoomed in and out, between expansive vista and detailed close-up, scrutinizing every planar surface. This could be fun, she thought, if it weren't so viscerally upsetting. Examining the billions of crevices carved into the walls she wondered if this texture could explain the echolessness of the huge space.

Lulling her nausea, she focused on the long mahogany bar. There, a laminated typewritten note was taped to the back of the embossed brass cash register. She hadn't seen it last night in the diffused blue haze of the café's evening light. Movement steadied her gut so she walked toward the lure. It read:

How this work was written: rung by rung, according as chance would offer a narrow foothold, and always like someone who scales dangerous heights and never allows *himself themselves* a moment to look around, for fear of becoming dizzy (but also because *he they* would save for the end the full force of the panorama opening out to *him them*). [N2,4] – Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*

"That's on the nose," she thought, remembering the homework WildRed proposed pre-trip.

Bettene took a moment, then walked toward the other end of the bar thinking the note did a pretty good job with pronoun effacement. It made her wonder what Roberta's handwriting looked like and what stories she had to tell. She asked Roberta for another coffee and a hazelnut biscotti, this time unambiguously.

Roberta's Transcripts

Cassette recording #8

[mic noise, test] I came to this place on a *dérive* of sorts. A *flâneur* in the Dolomites taking immodestly huge gulps of warm spring air. I fell in love. With Rosetta, with Wolfgang the newborn mule, with the dangerous beauty of this tiny village on a precipice. I stayed. And stayed. Stayed well beyond the tenuous fortitude of the indigent folk. Stayed after the cinders from the pandemic's funeral pyres had darkened the stones and foliage. Stayed well beyond Rosetta's capacity for a secluded, asocial life. After the suffering, after decades of trying to buffer a diminishing return, she left, I remained. I dug my spindly roots in deep. I became by default, the keeper of the keys. Here, in this lonely place, I would realize my project. Assemble my colorful Rat collection. Assuage the passages. Collect the dust. [recorder off]

Cassette recording #11

[background noise, light traffic] When I was young, and we're talking horse and buggy in terms of understanding gender assignment, we queered pink and blue for sure. I myself flaunted what we used to call transgressive butch styling. Buzzed my hair. Got myself tatted up. Leathered up. Rode a Harley Sportster up and down Highway 101 between LA and SF. Won a softball trophy for Best League

Pitcher. I basically touted every dyke cliché proudly.
[coughs]

I did my post-doc on Benjamin and Arendt back in the day at U Berkeley. The war, that would be #2, had ended and Arendt became famous while Benjamin sat on the bench for a couple decades. Their thinking was fresh back then, he was damn near unknown, so I took a one-way street to academic stability through their lifework. Like my band of sisters at that time, I was into jazz and comparative lit and I felt free as a damn bird even though I was beaten up, twice, for being who I was in the right place at the wrong time. [recorder off]

Cassette recording #19

[tape hiss, mule honking in background] When I came out of the coma after the second beating (that time by a bunch of drunken stevedores), I vowed to leave for other climes, see the world before its violent misogynist inclinations turned my muscle to dust. I grew out my dark curls, concealed my inked bicep as best I could, cashed out my savings and set sail for adventure. India, Laos, China, Tahiti, New Zealand, Brazil, Chile, uhm there's more, Ghana, Tunisia, Guatemala, Iceland, Iran. I was on an around the world trek on foot, by boat, by motorbike. I've listened, enchanted, to tongues wagging in markets around the globe. Isegoria. Walter B. took notes and so did I, keeping a stash of utterances from every land passed through. Re-marking I called it. I've always had a penchant for study. For collecting. I've even dreamt I discovered the contents of his briefcase. [laughs] Me and a thousand other academics at this point. You know, the one he clutched in Portbou before offing himself with morphine in despair. The one that presumably held the answers to the *Arcades* enigma. But then, what fun are answers? Solutions? Much better to run with the riddle I always say. Embrace aporia. [click off, click on] Dear Wal-

ter, I learned much from his eccentricity. Felt a kinship with his notion of a fragmented past, with storytelling. He was a strange Mr. Bungle as Hannah sweetly pointed out. I could only wish for such a grandpa. Imagine the walks he would have taken me on. This place, my color-coded dream house on a scogliera, honors his zest for the incomplete. [recorder off]

Cassette recording #14

[tape hiss] As ole Herr Goethe would have it and I call him Goethie by the way, anyway, I memorized this bit in my uni days ... [clears throat]:

Quote: Light and darkness, brightness and obscurity, or if a more general expression is preferred, light and its absence, are necessary to the production of color... Color itself is a degree of darkness. Unquote

Ole Gertie, she said it differently:

Quote: A dark place is not a dark place. Only a white and red are black, only a yellow and green are blue, a pink is scarlet, a bow is every color. Unquote

I paraphrase but then one can't really ever or ever is never is always not again and I, you, anyone can really not never paraphrase her ever again and again. Amen. I enjoy my piece of coffee without milk. I enjoy my piece of Rat, without fanfare.

Quote: A rose is a rose is a rose is a rose and it was red for the very first time

A nose is a nose is a nose is a nose and it bled for the sake of the rhyme. Unquote.

These recitations are my daily exertions as I pass from cup to stein in the breadth of a day. Dunno who said, who

sang, that last one but it's written on the wall over there. If I squint hard enough through the blur of color, which by the way, and I agree with Benjamin on this, that color is *a priori* to categorization, I can almost hear it.

Cassette recording #1

[mic noise] This thing recording? Testing. Testing. MCV, MCV, MCV, MCV. Over and out.

Voice recording #19

Ain't it just the truth that I get such a kick out of the artist types that spill in and out of here. This place really spins their cookies. *Gira i loro biscotti*. I can usually tell when folks walk through the door who's going down the rabbit hole and who's looking for a watering hole. [laughs] The tourist folks on vacation usually adjust pretty quickly. Some complain of nausea. They get over it but always stay a bit off-balance. The adults walk in, crane their necks, pull out their phones and start clicking. Inevitably they leave after a drink or two muttering "Not as cool as Disneyland." Or "Did you hear your heart beating in there?" Or "Who the hell wants to read all that shit?" And "Sucks there's no wifi." The children on the other hand, they immediately enervate with the colors. What was it Benjamin said in that early fragment when he first began exploring the emancipation of color? That children aren't ashamed of a world full of color "because they do not reflect, but only see." Something like that. I always thought there was something important in his own youthful suspicion of reflection.

Voice recording #20

Countless selfies have been taken here. I suspect some have tried to distribute a photo or two on various influencer platforms or whatever, yet somehow the images reproduce a deep, dark, unreflective vantablack. This place is inaccessible to meme mentality. Now, I'd like to think

the fantastical would inspire pilgrimage but it's not the case with Arcadia. Somehow this little wrinkle in spacetime slips between the cracks. Not that I mind really. I've always been a little wary when eccentricity nibbles at the tentacle tips of popular culture. My darling arcadian anomaly is allergic to trendy. I'm happy for that. I've invested in the relative obscurity this place affords. The peace and the very, very quiet. The tourist types are in no way comfortable with entirely cash-free lodging arrangements, so they pass through quickly, unaffected by visceral curiosity. This tickles me. They don't, and this of course is a gross oversimplification, trust the generous gesture. Scares most of em more than the cliff edge at the designated Panorama Viewpoint up the road. I think they think me and my gang of senior locales are gonna rob em as they sleep in their free lodging. Vex the normalcy of their expensive holidays. The younger ones tend to be, blessedly, more adventurous and open to unknowns.

Voice recording #26

Feeling chatty this week. [laughs] Now, folks like the ones inhabiting #12, they sip on their disorientation like a fine orange wine. It amuses me. Gives some tiny measure of purpose to what's left of my life. Bettene mentioned she's, how did she call it, a "sonic" artist? I remember reading a philosophical book on sound once. There was some argument or other over the materiality of sound in relation to sound as conceptually perceived. The debate intrigued me. Another perceptual angle from which to account for subjective experience and whatever objective, material reality might be. This produces conundrum discourse as far as I can tell. I try to live in the in-between. Makes for more thrilling sensation at my age. Yet lately, the emphasis is different. [chuckle] I wonder if Bettene listens to the walls? I hope so.

Voice recording #27

When I was fumbling with the keys the night Bettene first walked in I had a feeling, a sense, that these folks carried clues to help me better understand what I'm offering here. This hasn't occurred in a long, long time so I'm kinda giddy yet careful to maintain a concierge attitude. Smiling, flashing my incisors, I open the gate.

Granular Expression

Bettene scanned the high ceiling and creaky mezzanine. There was ample canopy for an endless display of rhizomatic expression. A stepladder propped near the doorway enabled access for perusal and/or gifting of yet another passage. Tomorrow, she promised herself, she would climb even though the zoom function in her CRISPR'd lenses was more than adequate. Enjoying being up close and proximate, she'd begin in the corner where violet paint met magenta glass, working her way counterclockwise towards the aqua fields. She'd troll these pithy entities of cultural transmission top to bottom.

Even now, from her grounded vantage point, she could easily make out an enigmatic order in the mess of notes. Color-coded symbols were scratched alongside many of the marker, paint and ball point pen inscriptions on the walls, on the tables, on the tiles.

She tried pronouncing what she suspected was Irish scribbled on the yellow wall: *Ba mhaith liom fíor-eachtra*. Her phone translator recited: "I want an adventure" in serious monotone. Close by, in a script no more than three centimeters long, enclosed in a tiny heart shape, she read *Shout out to Farid*. Near the ceiling, in cerulean blue on a dark orange patch of wall was an all caps proclamation:

"O WONDERFUL WONDERFUL, AND MOST WONDERFUL WONDERFUL." – the Bard.

That one must have taken Michelangelonian effort she thought as her eyes followed an arrow shooting from the third WONDERFUL, pointing emphatically towards an inscription that read:

"Pessimism of the spirit, optimism of the will." – A. Gramsci.

She landed on thousands of non-English words and phrases swimming in a sea of predominantly lingua franca phrasings. It was all too much and it wasn't. "Here there's a certain balm," she thought to herself, "like a warm blanket draped across chilly shoulders or an MDMA high while deep in the stacks of a university library, slowly seduced by tactile book spines." She'd skipped re-reading the Borges short story WildRed recommended and now wished she been more consequent with her preparations.

She also felt the flip side of the palliative. Reconnaissance missions don't generally produce nausea but in Café Arcadia, affective chaos can be dizzying. Even as visceral tipsy morphs to sheer marvel, the body is engulfed in strange incongruities. For most, micro-dosing is required. She remembered WildRed's obscure warning.

Feeling faint, vulnerable, and a little trapped, Bettene made her way down the ladder, looking towards the relief fresh air would bring. Why was she now remembering that awkward first fuck at sixteen with Bobby in the Fiat? The aroused, throbbing, contradictory desire to simultaneously explore her passion *and* flee the scene. At this moment, she felt much the same. Curiosity pumped to full-on arousal, her internal compass nonetheless pointed towards the exit.

Making her way to the outside table Bettene, beside herself with woozy, wondered why no travel writer had described this place, this phantasmagoric dream house? Was Roberta's café protected by a reverential obscurity code of some sort? Or was its privacy protected like an air-gapped computer? How could the café so earnestly evade social media virality? The slow time, the un-time, between these six walls was impervious to click-time.

Seating herself at the rusting table Bettene was anxious to greet her friends. Her spatial and temporal sensibilities, her feeling for light and dark, color and sound, all wildly vibrating. Being with the Grittas would return her gyroscopic balance.

Circuitry

Stimulating conditions for the emergence of the Grittas had been Bettene Vermine's initiative. Inspired by collectives – Claire Fontaine, iQhiya, the Guerilla Girls, the Coven, W.I.T.C.H., she felt a tingle of ambition, of belonging to practices enmeshed with her own. ShazDada-Mama's massive biography of the *Bettys* had injected her desires with a virulent cocktail of pathos and ethos. A virtual baton had been passed her way. She would run with it as she problematized her certainties.

A once and future nomadic activist, she'd lately realized that darting in and out of protest rallies had limited effects. Struck by the *Bettys'* micropolitical fervor and their inability to foster a Green Betty, Bettene determined to manifest that challenge. She and the Grittas would a) antagonize gutless resistance to capitalist reform while b) foiling the plunder of an extractivist *world for us* attitude. This was an ambitious agenda for a gang of sonic artists to be sure.

Her proposition for WildRed, Arefeh, and bobbob would take on that most ambiguous of colors as a philosophical/activist encounter. WildRed's always already expertise on the topic would be their guiding star.

*

Bettene's friending of WildRed brought a fresh perspective to her work. She'd spent the past twenty years programming sound compositions from live data accessed through a toolbox of biometric sensors kitted for human and other living bodies. Pulse, body temperature, galvanic skin response, touch (pressure), blood pressure, blood oxygen levels, position (GPS coordinates), and electromyography (muscle) sensors were common instruments played by dancers, musicians, and spectators. Obsessed by algorithms, she'd worked with optical motion sensors and dynamic video filters; scored the moving earth's contours and elevations with interactive topographical maps. She'd mic'd trees and houseplants to sonify the discrete machinations of photosynthesis. Bored by her zooming GenTel ocular dexterity, she preferred working with her ears. She'd composed film soundtracks and played for concert audiences of five to five thousand. Lately she'd become fascinated by insidious predictive algorithms running rampant in machine learning. She wondered how she might tweak and expel the money parasite from these infected 1's and 0's. If this proved unfulfilling, she would return to her work tracking data clusters from herds and swarms of animals, insects, clouds, and plants.

But for a while now, she felt itchy in her skin. She heard fragility, tenuousness, in the vibrant dynamic of organic change. Topping that looming anxiety, WildRed's complete disinterest in the technologies and programming skills Bettene had committed her career to came as a shock. An unexpected rejection. "You mean you don't think the compression filter I'm passing your systole and diastole signal flow through is cool? That ethereal frequency is awesome no?" "No." "Oh."

Deflated by WildRed's disregard of her art, Bettene was forced to re-evaluate her practice, her tools, her motivation, her patience. She thought about the holes in the *Bettys'* netting, that symbolic object of their ascension and their demise. She thought about the stakes. For the *Bettys* it was about "the getting there rather than the got." Bettene realized she wanted some of what WildRed had naturally. An un-self-conscious being with what mattered. She needed to leap.

*

The tenet of forthcoming Grittass get-togethers would stipulate a freeze on all tablets, laptops, and electronic paraphernalia. This imposition might inspire unexpected mash-ups Bettene thought. Provoke cutting edge, cutting-the-cord rituals. Poke at vulnerabilities. WildRed, naturally, coerced Bettene's self-congratulatory premise. "You prepared to go phoneless?" she teased. As this appendage was so integral to Bettene's human functioning she hadn't even considered leaving home without it. She balked. "That's one very complex relationship my dear, not easily severed," she answered as doubt tinged her voice blue.

WildRed

WildRed was born on a peak near Lavenone one fine spring day. The doula had expertly handled the truculent birth as the child waited until the last lick of sustenance had been absorbed in the womb. What at first appeared to be worrying signs of cyanotic “blue baby syndrome,” morphed into something inexplicable, astonishing the family. All present expected the greenish tint of the little girl’s skin to dissipate with time.

Her transplanted parents, mother from Mumbai, father Bavarian, raised her a multilingual hippie child of the Dolomiti. Her given name was G nderode Bhoomika. Slightly allergic to the Germanic G nderode appellation, Indira stubbornly insisted on an unhandy alliteration. She called her daughter Bhoomika Berry, BB for short. As soon as BB could walk and wander her inclination towards greens and brambles became evident. At five, she asked her family to call her “Wildberry” after her affinity for the out of doors and her favorite fairy tale character. Her mum was reluctant to oblige. “BB” came more readily to her tongue. Gradually, and for disputable reasons, her daughter’s handle mutated to WildRed (pronounced Vildred by her father) though Indira persisted in affectionately calling her daughter “BB” on holidays.

WildRed's proclivities caused her parents great anxiety but they adjusted as parents do. Her surefootedness on the rocky inclines of their neighborhood grew goat-like as she sprouted from toddler to tween. Roaming landscapes that ranged from forest to tundra, from dazzling greens to snow whites, she learned from the earth beneath her goat-like cloven feet. She found sanctuary in the quiet of the wooded inclines. Exploring the tiny medieval villages of her region was a peripheral perk. There were endless stores of knowledge in these hills to be gently peeled like wild onions.

As a kid, she carefully pressed plant and flower samples between the pages of adapted photo albums. Addicted to wilding, she developed a tic for archiving as counterpoint. Taxonomical annotations of flora and fauna procured from her treks were prodigiously entered on juice-stained pages with leaves and flattened berries. They read as such:

22. Lamiaceae familia

Salvia pratensis L.

Italian: *Salvia salvatica*

English: meadow clary

Eat/use: leaves

For: Digestive aid; female genital problems (tea infusion); tooth-paste (fresh leaves)

42. Rosaceae familia

Crataegus monogyna Jacq.

Italian: *Biancospino/spen bianc*

English: common hawthorn

Eat/use: fruit, shoot, leaves

For: relaxing, insomnia and heart problems (flowers infusion)

70. Asteraceae Familia

Artemisia Vulgaris

Italian: Assenzio

English: common mugwort

Eat/use: flowering tops, leaves

For: menstruation, menopause and lucid dreaming

89. N.O. Leguminosae Familia

Glycyrrhiza glabra (LINN.)

Italian: Liquorice

English: liquorish root

Eat/use: root

For: coughs, respiratory congestion, coronas

Her attention to Linnaean methods was perfunctory, not heartfelt. Each specimen, all and every blossom, leaf, and pollen granule had a singularity that defied category, yet enfolded family, kinship. She played with classification intersectionally, resisted representation when possible. She marveled at the tendency of the many in the one reverberating in the magnificent yellow slime mold she'd observed in her parent's garden. Raining: many blobs doing their own slimy thing. Shining: one blob proactively togetherd for survival. As Glissant put it, "knowing ourselves as part and as crowd."

She studied individuation and autopoiesis as she practiced collectivity and sympoiesis. Her resistance to speciation was strong. She considered the medieval eurocentric grand scheme of things that placed humans on a hierarchical level between angels and animals as a corrupt ideology, blameworthy of the moral malfeasance so abominably perpetrated on the world by Europe's conviction of its white supremacy.

Subscribed, for the moment, to the post-Darwinian view of infective heredity, she was able to imagine her bacterial ancestors as family. Categorical naming strategies were potentially useful for communication, useless for

everyday practice and cosmological meditation. She had diagnosed her condition according to microbiologist Lynn Margulis's study of slugs in *Aquiring Genomes* and it offered her a hint of peace and dignity:

Green animals provide graphic examples of symbioses that lead to symbiogenesis.

Massaging the knotted muscle that binds science to poetry is her métier, work she was born to. And that predilection, so manifest in her cellular tissue, absorbs her grief as she rides the waves of the Big Change, as she rides relational intensities between disappearance and emergence. This is her mantra as her fieldings attune to the contrasting forces of adaptation and resistance. She can get excited about this.

*

On her tenth birthday, WildRed's parents moved the family down to Brescia in a bid for better schooling. On weekends she'd take a bus from the foothills to the peaks in order to forage in her beloved highlands. She'd bring home assorted greens, berries, fungi, and floral arrangements. Her father cautiously tolerated her unconventional appetites, hoping his daughter was simply demonstrating the hormonal throes of pubescence. After all, their GenTel tweaks to her DNA had been modest, restrained. They'd conservatively limited their design data to:

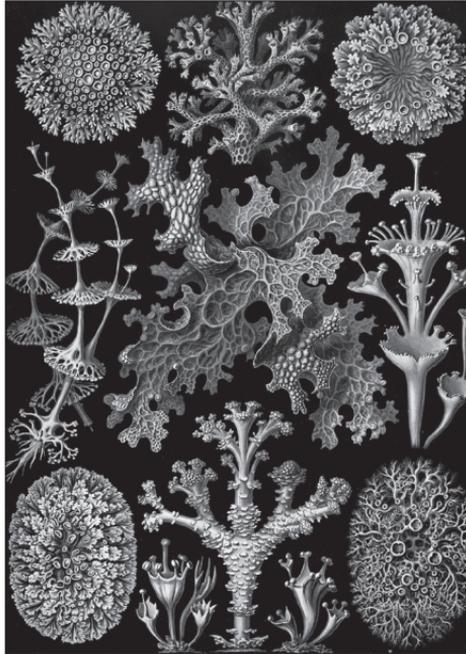
Sex: male female non-binary other _____

Eye color: brown blue black hazel violet pink green
 other ***emerald***

Structural: athletic (general) athletic (upper body)
 athletic (lower body) athletic (specify) **_agile climber_**
 modified genitalia other _____

In the Career Affinities category, they'd checked "biological and physical sciences" and "culinary skills." Her mum, a practicing Jain, understood plant-life to be the fifth universal element with earth, air, water, and fire so she was deeply invested in nurturing progeny with a penchant for *ropana* (रोपण). Almost as an afterthought Indira ticked " magician" on the form.

It would come as little surprise then, that on career questionnaires of the Brescia secondary school system, her daughter adamantly described her professional aspirations in the Other category. She tapped out w-i-t-c-h.





Footnote

Green to Me

Like anything I love, I mistrust the color down to the fingernail-edges of all the feelings it engenders in me. The very fact that I love it so fiercely, that it compels me so again and again toward it, makes it both suspicious and sinister to me. What are the larger forces working to make this color seem like escape and solution, like a larger and better answer than words, like the final destination and the place to hide? What is green doing that makes it seem to matter so much? – Helena Fitzgerald, “Green to Me”

How to Green

Bettene had been keen to organize a rural sabbatical, a gathering adjacent to the layered urban intensities the pack generally inhabited. Though opting to leave City's colorful, teaming diversity for central Europe's bucolic whiteness slapped her "wokeness," she wanted, needed, to exit architected landscaping for an uncultivated green. And she wanted to do this with friends.

WildRed for her part, was cautiously enthusiastic about the prospect of forming a temporary coven in the woods. Long inclined towards vegetal inspiration, her insulated social self was both wary and enticed by a project with other humans. Her convivial activities were often limited to partying with nonhumans. "Stoned out rock parties," she called them. Suggesting a quirky, desolate village burrowed in a mountainous habitat, WildRed was sure this would be a fertile location for a Grittas retreat. It was nearby her birthplace and she could vouch for its allure. Bettene immediately agreed.

As with lichen, those symbiotic clusters of fungi and cyanobacteria, WildRed favored the living arrangement of a community cloister. Admittedly, the communal aspiration of Gritta in Ratsinourhouse had defined her life goals. She imagined an enormous ivy-covered barn with

an internal garden open to the sky. Permeated by healthy virgin forests, surrounded by mountains, she dreamed of porous cell walls, unlocked doors, and a cozy dining area where foraged plant-life is tenderly prepared for raucous suppers that shake the quiet of daily study. For her, this would be an ideal assemblage of qualities. Catholic school had been damaging in most respects, but observing convent protocols at a distance had given her an alternative perspective on radical community that differed from the hippie commune, the guru enclave, the kibbutz, the nuclear family, and the army. This was tradition ripe for queering and a challenge for her timorous sociality.

She knew this about herself just as she was well aware of the particularity of the village she'd suggested. There would be long-term side-effects to their experience in the local café. She kept that part of the story to herself for now, focusing with Bettene on the travel details.

They talked excitedly, preparing the conditions for a research sojourn that would brew a potent mix of frivolous holiday and meticulous experiment. They talked about ecological practices and community. About mutant electro-magnetic frequencies, about collecting, about hanging out as a form of activist resistance. They talked about Goethe's Green. How curious they both found his hypothesis that black is darkened white, that yellow and blue are binary accelerants of relational mixes that bleed green and magenta. That Goethe proclaimed Newton's experiments missed the mix, that color perception is better explained through boundary colors than a horizontal spectrum. At first blush, Goethe's appears a suspicious formulation until one actually holds a prism to light. The Grittas, fascinated by science factoids driven by poetry rather than math alone, were ready for Green. Bettene looked for corollaries in aural perception as WildRed carried a prism while hiking. Green. The culprit. Green. The

passaging. Green. Gaia. They talked, laughed and sang stupid songs as wanton spontaneity propelled the necessary elements of planning.

WildRed, keeping the mysteries of Café Arcadia secret for now, imagined her friend's astonishment when passing that threshold.

WildRed and Bettene

Bettene met WildRed at a theater production of RATS—ATHOMEWITHUS. A fringe Berlin troupe had created a three act out of the feminist fairy tale by Gisella von Arnim Grimm and her famous mother Bettina. Improvising on this eccentric trope of the late Romantic period, the cast situated the retelling as a space odyssey. The rat characters were reconstituted as aggressively friendly eukaryote micro-organisms aiding the gender-nonconforming crew on their pioneering mission. A Sun Ra style Afro-futurism meets Tarkovsky's *Solaris*. The publicity portrayed the piece as a tour de force.

Bettene glimpsed WildRed during intermission. Her appearance was striking. Clothed in a symphony of greens, her irises burned emerald bright. But it was the green tint of her diaphanous skin that surely weirded her to the world. An ash twig held her long, unruly black hair in a semblance of tidy as she leaned against an open window near the bar. In her right hand she cradled a spinach smoothie as her left hand lightly dusted the leaves of a neglected *Dieffenbachia*. Everything about her appearance read "self-aware" even "self-conscious" and yet, no, not at all. Bettene, dressed in a faded BLM t-shirt and leopard-patterned capris, would introduce herself.

WildRed immediately revealed to Bettene that her namesake was Wildberry, the pivotal character in the von Arnim fairy tale they'd come to see. She'd wrapped that character's efficacy around her like a moss bed, protecting her nonnormative attitude from scorn on the one hand and lazy adulation on the other. Folks from her hometown called her "Il bambino verde," the green child. She found it disappointing that her skin tone excited more chatter than her feet. She'd been bullied, for sure, outside her hometown, but her green skin was tougher than its diaphanous appearance. WildRed's bespoke sandals revealed the pronounced cleft between her two oversized toes. Bettene ingratiated herself by exclaiming that she found WildRed's feet remarkable. Beautiful. "I always wanted to rock-climb," she told WildRed, "but I have a fear of falling."

Meeting up again as the play concluded, both Bettene and WildRed were critical of the theater production for different reasons. WildRed could not relinquish the original conceit. She had hoped to see a literal re-enactment of the bad ass exploits of Gritta and her friends. Bettene felt the futurist meld didn't push parody far enough. Though their (re)views clearly expressed their differing aesthetic preferences, they howled with laughter and comradeship as they lovingly discussed the book and bashed the play.

BV: Did your mother read this bizarre little fairy tale to you as a child?

WR: Nope, Indira, my mum, had no knowledge of this book at all. She read me the entire *Mahabharata*. Took eight years. I watched her hair go from shining ebony to full on salt and pepper by the time we got to *Svargarohanika Parva*, that's book eighteen.

BV: Holy shit! That's literally epic.

WR: As for Gritta and the Rats, an aunt on my father's side bought a mystery box from a public library auction in Scuol. It was marked in Dewey Decimal code – DDC 398.21 to .28. There was a battered German reprint with pencil illustrations. How did you come by it? Passed down from your mother?

BV: Naw, I came to it recently. Inspired by *The Bettys*, I started looking into derivations on the name Elizabeth. You know, like my own name, so I, uhm, took a personal interest. Discovered Bettina von Arnim and wow, this whole networked cosmos started to unfold, an unraveling endless skein of variegated yarn. I decided to knit a winter sweater, if you know what I mean.

WR: And how did your parents come to name you?

BV: Apparently, I was conceived one snowy evening in Bettene Norway.

WR: Oh, not as interesting as I'd hoped. Surely there's more story there.

BV: Surely.

Dewey Decimal 398 – Folklore

Social Sciences OCLC [verbatim with emphasis and edits]

398 Folklore

Including history and criticism of specific subjects of folklore (e.g., **real phenomena, paranatural and legendary phenomena**); origin, role, function of themes and subjects of folklore as cultural and social phenomena; **jokes and jests**; jokebooks, jestbooks
[...]

> **398.21–398.28 Tales and lore on a specific topic**
[...]

.21 ***Tales and lore of paranatural beings of human and semihuman form**
[...]

.22 ***Tales and lore of persons without paranormal powers**
Class here legendary or mythological persons

.23 ***Tales and lore of places and times**
Including real places; legendary places; holidays, seasons
Class historical and **quasi-historical events** in 398.27

.24 ***Tales and lore of plants and animals**

Real and legendary

Class comprehensive works on tales and lore involving science
in 398.26

Grittas Retreat

The village was off-the-grid, wifi-free. Bettene's no-tech mandate was bearable with all temptation quashed. Working here with only materials at hand was part of the retreat's remit. The affective agency of corporately enabled sociality would in no way contaminate their day-to-day. The mountain air, liberated as a conduit from manic, hyperbolic twatter was cleansing, non-toxic. This illusion nonetheless generated a somatic impact as they lingered in the comfort of their sleeping bags on the far fringe of the Mediterranean biome.

The Grittas occupied the two-story former home of the Cornelio family, the name still visibly etched in the doorway threshold. A large wooden table, too heavy to move, was the only piece of furniture. It lay smack in the center of the main ground floor. Itinerant occupants, vetted by Roberta, left all manner of functional debris for fellow travelers. Chopped and planed trunks from aleppo pines and beechwoods served as seating. Pitons with carabiniere hooks sunk into mortar cracks in the stone walls provided improvised hangers for hammocks and supplies. Potable mountain water ran into the central communal fountain. A wood-burning stove was tucked in a corner of the open kitchen. WildRed's hunting of edible greens, flowers, and fungi would provide a basic level of sustenance. The mar-

ket in Lavenone would replenish gustatory desires if required.

WildRed, Arefeh, and bobbob rose sweating from their down bags after the sun was well placed in the morning sky. They examined the crevices and corners of the Cornelio home for rodent turds as they dressed and brushed their teeth with fresh *Salvia sylvatica* leaves. It's not that they were afraid of the critters. In fact, they'd conjured an unusual respect for "Ratten" in large part due to heroine Gritta's love for these stealthy creatures. The Grittas took intra-species conviviality seriously. They were diligent at fostering hospitable practices whenever possible. In this case they were clearly in the guest role, parasites to a variety of hosts and ghosts.

Desperate for caffeine, bobbob and Arefeh followed the path to Roberta's. Bettene's buzzed smile greeted them as they trooped toward the wrought iron table outside the café. "Darlings!" she screamed with an enthusiasm that startled everyone. "Uhh," she quieted, "the coffee is delicious and you're in for a bizarre treat." She added a parental and/or conspiratorial, "Be nice." Nodding, they filtered through the entrance in sleepy procession.

WildRed was absent. Hypersensitive to the dizzying effects of Roberta's establishment, she was off in search of indigenous edibles and a ready supply of dental hygiene foliage. She rarely consumed coffee, preferring local leaves and yellow Munnar tea when she could conjure it. She drank sweet Jiaogulan for its adaptogen benefits, intoning to the others, "You really ought to try this. For something so immanently medicinal it's absolutely free of bitterness?" No one took her up on the offer.

*

Relaxing finally, Bettene felt the sway of futures claiming pasts, felt the fictive history of Gritta's girls exercising wilding. That 1840 fairy tale-*cum-Bildungsroman* of female empowerment had been the re(a)d hot center of her adolescence. *Das Leben der Hochgräfin Gritta von Ratenzuhausbeius* was co-written by Gisela and her radical mutter, the famed writer and Goethe fangirl Bettina Brentano. Gisela was probably around twelve when the co-authoring took place.

Finger stains mottled the worn pages of Bettene's first copy of the fairy tale. Recently, she'd marked and tagged the English translation which she happily found quite readable despite the horribly wrong-headed title translation. *Ratsathomewithus* certainly evoked a more sympathetic hospitality than *Ratsinourhouse*. As a girl, anticipating her first menstruation, Bettene found the love story between the swashbuckling Gritta and the hapless, helpless Prince Bonus oddly satisfying. He was portrayed as a strange mix of quixotic and unsexy though this might be easily explained by the young age of the primary author. Willfully rejecting Romanticism's *Sturm und Drang*, these two characters rendered a dispassionate closure to the unconventional appetites of the narrative. But it was the bigger picture, the epic adventure of collectivity that excited Bettene. The daring-do of the gang. The kludging of the cloister, rebuffing the drudge of the lonely *Hausfrau*. These fabled pioneers proved inspirational to their next-next-next-next-next-generational Gritta groupies.

When young, Bettene skimmed past the antics of the rat families. Portrayed as marauding avengers, musophobia often overtook her ability to attentively follow their role in the fantasy. Approaching middle age, she reveled in the rodents, in the ingenious righteousness of the toe-biting pests. She celebrated their unbridled exponential powers, their tender concerns, their eventual vindication.

She kept the fairy tale underneath her pillow in middle school even as Gritta had kept a nest of baby rats gently squirming in hers. Gisella's little joke. Her play on words. How on earth could the image of a pillow full of rats been cute? Once, long ago, Bettene entertained that notion and even memorized the passage, attentive to its hesitant deliberation, to its noncommittal uncertainty.

Trying out her squeakiest voice she enthralled:

"We two court and chamber, dining room, and pantry maids of the Most Honorable Queen of Rats wish, little Countess, to ask you something."

Dropping two octaves she continued:

"Hmmm?" (mumbled Gritta, half-awake, thinking she was dreaming.)

Returning to falsetto:

"Our queen is here with her seven young, someday grown-up heirs to the throne, but there are no longer any old feather quilts in the castle in which the tender little ones can live. Would you permit her beloved young to nest in the little brocade pillow under your head?"

Swooping down again to her natural vocal range she concluded with a long, uncertain:

"Hmmm." (Gritta nodded back into sleep, still thinking she was dreaming.)

She loved the insouciance of this passage as she loved the empowerment of the fictive girl gang's miscreant adventures. Loved the long moments of quandary. The *Hmmms*. So overwhelmed by this tale and other recent legends of the rodent variety, she took Bettene Vermine

as her nom de plume. Pronounced every syllable – be-tin-uh-ver-min-uh. “Edgy,” she thought. With a post-punk bite. Good for her mystique.

Rat/raten – Cambridge German-English Dictionary

Rat – noun

[masculine] /ra:t/ (Rat(e)s or Räte /rɛ:tə/)

- > hilfreicher Vorschlag für andere

(piece of) advice

- > auf ärztlichen Rat

on medical advice

Synonym → Empfehlung

- > jdm mit **Rat und Tat** zur Seite stehen
jdm helfen

to support sb [somebody] in both word and deed

- > Jetzt ist guter Rat teuer!

drückt aus, dass jd keine Lösung weiß

It's difficult to know what to do at the moment.

- > sich keinen Rat wissen [dative]

nicht wissen, was man tun soll

not to know what to do

raten – verb

[transitive-intransitive] /ra:tən/ (rät, riet, geraten)

- > mit Glück herausfinden, lösen

to guess

- > Er hat die richtige Antwort / richtig geraten.

He guessed the correct answer / correctly.

Antonym → wissen

- > (als Rat) empfehlen, vorschlagen
to advise
- > Das Gesundheitsministerium rät zur Vorsicht.
The health ministry advises caution.

Ratte, Ratten

[noun] /rat/

a small animal with a long tail, like a mouse but larger

- > die Ratte

The rats have eaten holes in those bags of flour.

an offensive word for an unpleasant and untrustworthy person

- > der/die Überläufer(in)

You dirty rat!

Rats from *Benjamin's Passages*

“As a noun, ‘Rat’ is generally used in the negative—for example, ‘Ich weiss mir keinen Rat’ (I’m puzzled, I don’t know what to say). In the positive, verbal form—raten, Rat geben—it signifies advice, guidance, usually of a practical sort.”²⁹

²⁹ To summarize “Rat”: The practical, realist dimension; how the world is put together and how it works; what the ancients believed was wholly found in Homer. The capacity of narrative continuity, one story leads to another, stories prompt their retelling and the link to other stories; **thus not counsel as a determinate lesson at the end of a story but as a deferral of closure.** — Alexander Gelley, *Benjamin's Passages* (emphasis Bettene)

Rescued Rhythms

The Grittas were on best behavior with their host. Dressed this morning in linen trousers and embroidered blue and yellow waistcoat, Roberta was bent behind the cigarette-stained mahogany bar. They found her multi-lingual abilities stretched far beyond anything they might have anticipated. She afforded a mysterious profile of unflappable whimsy.

One spanning look around the café in the brightest light of midday testified to Roberta's adroit receptivity. Here in this fantastical place was a meshwork of linguistic collusion. Alphabetic characters in Greek, Cyrillic, Farsi, Hebrew, Albanian, Navaho + + + oscillated from etched ink, paint (spray, finger, marker, and brush), and graphite. En masse, a conspiratorial agency was palpable. Thousands of idioms, proverbs, aphorisms, quips, disses, academic references, poetic stanzas, twitter memes – nudging, overlapping, lying in wait of reading. The effect on a body surrounded by a bibliographic gradating color scheme was gut smart. The Grittas could attest to that as they circled the scene, necks craned, their microbiota in revolt. The presence of wiggly rodentia in their lodging did not frighten them. The presence of so many exposed *Räte* however, sent tiny tremors through their bodies.

No one dared to speak aloud until bobbob, resting their butt against a windowsill, spotted what they plainly took as an omen scratched into the bronze handle. They whispered.



The spoken words were immediately absorbed and smothered. But the silence was broken and their trepidation vanished. Little bits of Speculation, little pieces of Advice erupted in this spectral diorama. bobbob cooed "Looke" pointing to a thin blue ballpoint inscription. They recited the Igbo:

Obu onye k'ayi n'acho?
Obu onye k'ayi n'acho?
Okigbo k'ayi n'acho

"I know this folksong from Achebe. It says 'Who are we looking for? Who are we looking for? It's Okigbo we're looking for.' Wow. I mean, here? In this place?" bobbob said clearly astonished. Catching their breath, bobbob mumbled "FYI peeps, Okigbo was a poet, a librarian, and a freedom fighter. Check, check, check. Works for me."

Arefeh noticed a cure for color-damaged hair in Korean and a rough schematic for a lithium battery design tout-ing another kind of language. She pulled a notebook and a soft 4B pencil from her backpack and began rubbing an impression.

What is the contemporary?

All the vowels refused to image. She was left with:

Wh t s th c nt mp r ry?

“Ahh, that mischievous and sometimes y” she thought.

“This one over here deserves an impression as well Arefeh,” bobbob said as they scanned markings in the yellow-orange wall. “Got your fave word in it.” She complied, carefully rubbing every letter to form, putting extra elbow grease into her pet word, “dust.”

Indeed, limits on wealth and poverty and educated citizens oriented toward problems of public life are left in the dust by neoliberal values, governance, and the dismantled social state. – Wendy Brown

“And this one here is magical,” bobbob said more excited than usual:

Color is single, not as a lifeless thing and a rigid individuality but as a winged creature that flits from one form to the next. – Benjamin

Just underneath this excerpt, carefully carved, two centimeters into the stone, was the phrase:

hlör u fang axaxaxas mlö

Below its deep cuts the letters – mcv – protruded from the wall in bas relief. “What do you think? Is it a date? The year 1105. Initials maybe?” bobbob asked. “Don’t you wish we had internet access here,” Arefeh sighed. “So much can be explained with a little help from a search engine.” “Dunno,” said bobbob. “I prefer living with enigma, the *Rätsel*. Keeping pace with not-knowing, beginning again and again beginning. I mean, try saying that word – ax-

axaxas – it sticks in the back of the throat for dear life. Resists coming out to insist on meaning something.” Arefeh tried saying it out loud. “Axaxaxas,” she garbled and barely a syllable was heard, 72% muffled in her vocal folds, 28% muffled in this echo-free space.

More Roberta Transcripts

Voice recording #14

OK. I'm ready to share a secret. Believe it or not. Some mornings, when I sip my piece of coffee and read a passage or two, the characters sparkle, dance, and rearrange. It's like being in a green-screen CGI film. I don't know how, but trust me for a minute, it's as if language itself loosens its own bounds of sense-making and takes flight. Unrestricted by syntactical rules, characters from dozens of alphabets flit and recombine. Yes indeed, much as I've distilled a great deal of data in my long life, I know I know squat.

Voice recording #15

I vacillate like hell when I parse what I care about and how. But for now, the most satisfying qualities teetering on the cliff edge, are the traces of magenta light falling on the lichen green wall, exposing everyday miracles. Any comfort once taken in distinguishing interior from exterior discombobulates. The katydids and webspinners, the moth larvae and the mites, snails, and beetles all do what they do as we do our doing. Breathing, sipping, reading, dozing. When I watch a snail oozing slime over a preposition etched in a rock – a *towards*, a *between*, or a *with* – over a conjunction – an *and*, a *but*, a *yet* – I feel a tingle of

something marvelously uncategorical and then, oh yes, I bobulate.

Voice recording # 32

I never tire, never, of watching folks experience Arcadia. Slumping on the stool behind the bar keeps my presence at minimum. Not that I'm hiding mind you, it's just that I tend to blend in with any scenario. Muted colors and aging will do that. You know, make one invisible. I've wanted to write a little aria about it, about tending to blend in the end, even as one tries so hard to bend the end. It's a dusty theme for sure yet I want to sing it, or ink it. In this dream house I've managed over twenty years, the inscriptions on my body merge with the habitat. My flesh and the rumpled fabrics that hang from my frame are as writ as the walls.

[clicking off, on, cough] I have been tempted over the years to cover the wrinkling surface of my skin with a few select poetic fragments. The tiny Elvis tattoo on my buttocks marks a faux pas visible to no one now. The discretely inked riffs on my forearms are more conducive of intentional signage. Though, to be honest, I do grow weary of their permanence. I check for change in the blooming liver spots caught in the calligraphic tails of descenders. In the p's and q's. I've come to prefer a certain motility of expression over time. That attitude may or may not be apparent in the café schtick.

[click off, on, sound of water pouring into glass] And then there's the tat that sits in the center of my breastbone, so beautifully rendered by Antonia over a period of three painful days. It's the one fleshy decoration that breathes with my breathing. Herr Goethe's fabulous color wheel. An odd choice I know but I've always loved it. A spectral doughnut, scientifically wrong, they say, but emotionally right say I. Combusts the sacred and the profane.

Voice recording #34

Here in Arcadia there's this really slow perceiving going on that never quite situates as recognition. Folks are always off-balance. Enervated, yet apprehensive. The horizon of inscriptions might be described as fixed but don't be fooled. It's closer to Mehndi than a tat. Closer to a tweet than a tat. I think of this place as a rumbling gut of undigested thought. A microbial biome. Prokaryotes partying on morphing bits of what trends as wisdom. A full palette of ambiguous truths and mutant metaphors.

[pause, restart] Thousands of these scribbles irk me. Some outright anger me. I mark the ones I dislike with a red triangle.

The venal, racist, self-serving ones. My translation skills have limits of course though what I don't understand has a way of buzzing in my ears like tinnitus. I need to let go and allow the invectives to co-inhabit the planes of poetry, of oratory, of the elegiac, the reasoned, the wistful. This is not, or at least it is rarely, a place of communion. It produces something I can't yet fathom. Agonism. Fission. Entanglement. Uncommon wonder. I've come to accept it as a dynamic, immanent, cleaving apart and together.

Voice recording #35

Didn't I just hear a faint "Let sleeping dogs lie" from the group at #12? Maybe the peeps that run those carnival fun houses have a similar experience watching folks adjusting to a situation. Never settling. Skipping stones on a liquid surface of not-knowing. Somewhere in that chaos of citation, I think it's near the yellow middle of the southeastern wall where a crack skinnies a fissure in the texture, I think it's there somewhere, this quote on the difference between perception and recognition. I added a yellow square and a green circle for my own sense of ordering. It refers to an act of recognizing, about rec-

ognition being the arrested development of perception. Sure, recognition is necessary for negotiating worlds, I recognize this is a table therefore I know this is a table. Sounds unconvincing when you say it out loud right. Do I really "know" this table. The definition of *recognition* as *knowledge of an event* doesn't ring bells for me. An act of perceiving, now there's an experience of experience. The in-itself of a radically empirical undergoing that yeah, may become fodder for future recognition. I think of it like that. I should try to find the exact quote again, the author, but then, there are so many more undergoings to be undergone. And I'm sure I've misconstrued sense and sense once again. Always do.

[pause, restart] Let's simply say I confuse myself daily with justifications for my eccentricity. I wrap myself in riddles. Is this not an inauspicious house of cards rather than the house of passagings, the house of Rats I imagine it to be? I see magic in every dust pile and then, I don't know, I sweep up those fluffy grey bits filled with skin cells, plant pollen, animal hair, fibers, even meteorite particles and bin them with the coffee grounds and eggshells. I will not be tempted to say "dust to dust" for the sake of the storyline. Never. Ever.

convolution

**COLLECTING BB'S
BIOME**

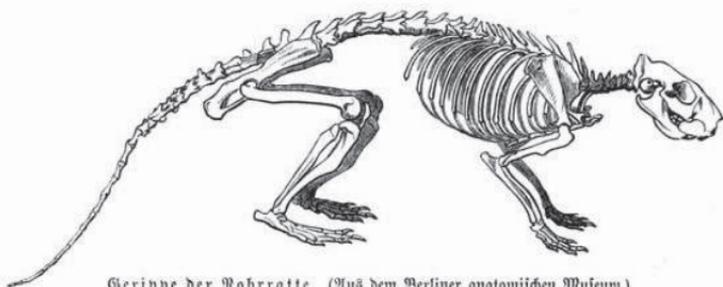
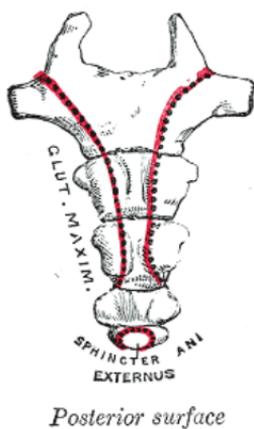
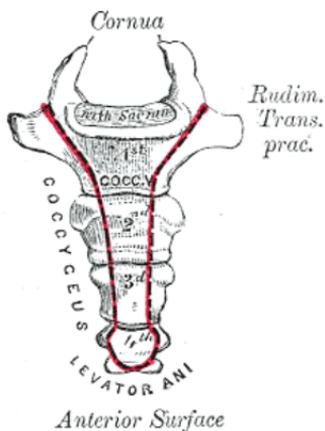
Night 789

Coccyx. Weird word. Gets stuck between the tongue and the upper palette.

They operated on ours. Coccyx that is. Again. The protuberance prevents me from napping comfortably. A real stick up the ass. Emphasizes absurdity of the post-posterior. Post-human. Post-inter-net. Post-office. Reminder: repair email. I digress.

We want of course to let it grow naturally but we also cherish sleep. This has been our biggest conundrum. Our biggest failure of nerve. We let them cut the worm off every full moon though they tell us it's useful for balance when climbing that big swathe of cargo netting they hung specially for us.

True. A tail is useful when climbing. Though let's face it, we don't have far to fall in that insulated room they call a gym. The ceiling, of white glass and wood beam is what, four meters overhead? Max.



Night 791

M abU ga. We will try to support our thoughts and our comments before they're released. The message is now liquid water based on the difference in form. Repair social.

Night 801

Ha! We celebrate our new label. Get used to it la bête. BB as is gun. Not. But good. No one nowhere ever could pronounce our birth name – BetteB. Family called us bet-ebb (accent ebb). Some called us Betty Bee or Beety B which was cute enough but added an unnecessary syllable. We are more beet than bet. No matter. BB is better.

Night 807

This is very different. We found it yesterday and the building on the windows has changed. What's the value? We think it's bad and consistent. We'll ask for something new. Because the window was not as hard as we are here.

Night 809

Rarely is it that we make sense of sense when we scribble in our notebook. Handwriting illegible. Keypad less satisfying. If we concentrate on our mother tongue then sometimes coherence comes. We filter if possible the influx of other tongues we do not understand. We can sing them sometimes. And oh, oh, we sing so pretty but feel bitchy lately. They put all this shit on us. Impossible expectations. As if our blood, our mucous samples, can solve the puzzles of animal to human viral transmission. We need a long slide on slick tiles with whooping. That's what we need.

Night 811

They tell us our diary, our notebooks, should detail every nuanced reaction and activity of our captive life. [wincing now, scratching arm-hinge, picking nosehairs] They would think that wouldn't they? Here's a banana they say. Here's a kiwi smoothie. Ga do xxsas. We're invaluable source material now. We have purpose beyond our pleasure. We a primary reference for, uhh, peoples (ha!) to come. And still they don't get it. Can't catch it. Heard not the song that shattered the skylight as we did.

Night 813

Are we too hard on them? Some are caring. The ones in pink who gently roll us on our side to clip tail. We make light and share earworms. Some take risks of exposure to what we all don't know is there. Through shielded faces, we see taut wrinkles on their eye sides when they smile at our jokes. Some few will profit from academic laudation and other fewer from vaccine income if it comes to that. These them I suspect.

Night 817

Practicing tonguing today. Need better words ordering.

A-e-i-o-u. A-e-i-o-u. We work on it. Hard furrowing. Latent burrowing. A-e-i-o-u. And sometimes why.

Night 818

The tiny wings on our forearms are itchy like fleabites. We scratch them a little, but they so delicate we afraid to deform them. We are accustomed now to the fact they are wholly ornamental. Could they ever flutter hard enough to lift this furry load aloft?

I doubt.

So, they are symbolic of something we don't yet understand. Come on. Is trans-special adaptation not enough for a life? What the fuck do wings have to do with any of this? Exasperated. We admit it.

Night 820

Why did it take us so long to understand that magenta is the absence of green? Why?

Night 821

*A-e-i-o-u. A-e-i-o-u and sometimes why.
Practice, practice, practice.*

Night 822

Chop chop. Cleaving the tail sprout again for comfort's sake. Could we adjust to a life without sitting? This would be the last measure of difficult.

Night 823

Esi isì. Smelling something. Something more than the noxious disinfectant on our butt bandage. Quid boni odoris. Everything. Geur. Scents everywhere. Miros. Bîn. [words incoming catch them] Today is a knowing nose day. Olfactory sensory abundance can be painful. Even when sweet scented like magnolia bombs. We cannot easily close our nostrils as we can our ear-holes which we really cannot very well. What is this mix of citrus and cyanide? We gonna puke.

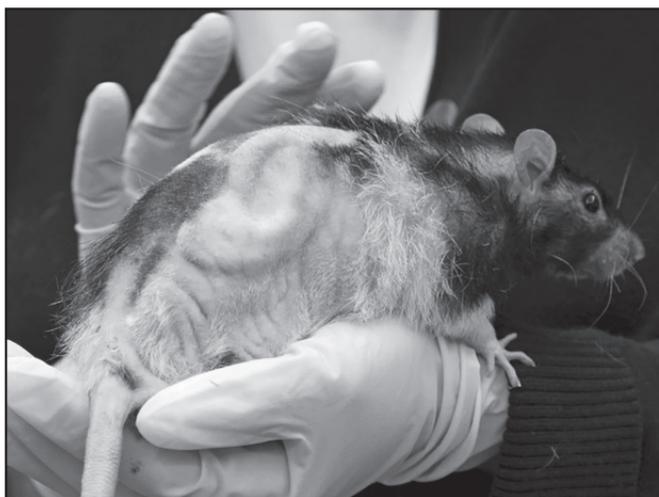
Night 825

We concentrate differently tonight. Hearing things elsewhere. Lotsa vowels. Sometimes complex rhythms. Sometimes hands clapping. Sense sensitivity modulates like a sine wave pulse between olfaction and audition. How do we explain this to them? How do we describe inhaling a beautiful silence between inflection points? They will not care about this detail.

Night 826

They gave us a printout of an image they are proud of. "Break-through" is the word they used. Me and my, they say, can help to save them and theirs in unlikely futures. We correct their mispronouncing and shout "Let's hear it for progress!" When did we become this to them? What was the precise moment of exception becoming no longer belonging? What surgical-gloved paranormal is this? Magia txarra. Am we our ancestor? Am we our progeny? Am we chimera now?

Oh wing-ed organs. Flean my nei de moanne.



Night 827

We grow to love our armwings like puppy loving. Ana m eto fanastico. We gently pet the monsters. This act, though self-caring, may precipitate (good word coming back!) a domesticating gesture of uncertain position. Can admit to confusion when fur is feathered and nonsense pervades the most bland soup.

Night 828

Is there a pronoun that alludes to the more-than of a "they"? Who am we with furry winglets and verbose laryngeal unit? Who am we with pathogens so bespoke they tickle the mythic?

Night 829

(continued) When if ever is this pharmacological relation reciprocal? They need we < > we need us?

Night 831

The pencil is not held well in our fingered claws anymore. Tip-tapping produces fewer errors. We wonder if we have inherited our grandmother's arthritis? Or? And?



Night 833

We smell them sniffing around our charts. Eyeballing the swirling sediment in the fluids they extract from everyday barf, from morning piss. To think we once wanted to be a pathologist. Ipsme conduit. Hysterical really. Were we thirteen years human? Fourteen years maybe? Questioning our future capacity for hands-on goeey surgery and urgent care. The quotidian (another good word coming back!) handling of blood and guts in tranquil green scrubs. We quickly discovered this wasn't our thing, our destiny. Could never really be our expertise or expressed (com)passion. Squeamishly, embarrassingly, not brave. We could better hide in a sterile lab beneath a hazmat suit and watch bacteria multiply. Yes. Witness viral exponentials. Whee! This practice would fit well our introvert inclination. Tickling tiny beasties. So, we have sympathetic feelings for those in this place that do these things.

Night 834

(continuing) By sixteen, hormones stabilizing, we were sure about the career path. Being queer and all, the arts were the only-way-forward back then without the inevitable noose on the door. Every other profession would spell humiliation, or incarceration, or worse, if our pansexual proclivities were discovered. We had nowhere to go but off a roof or bohemia. So, we skipped the light fantastic.

Night 836

*Humans we don't know mail us pdfs and real books in English. Best-sellers mostly with a few from the academic canon. Reading helps our thoughts prosper. Practice excites comprehension. Fragmenting the storytelling now for fun. Looks like our once tendency towards montage could be *mémoire involontaire*. A*

necessary whimsical return to simpler sensation. We quote a quote on collecting:

a registry providing the object with a classificatory number behind which it disappears. 'So now we've been there.' ('I've had an experience.') [HS, I]

Is this archival cynicism? A celebratory dig at the card catalogue's earnest failures. At the museum's musty musts. We study this us having had an experience. O yeah. We feel ourselves disappearing beneath their yearning for a classified designation. Their need to compartmentalize.

We feel us saying "Fuck the pigs"! (historic uprising slogan swelling) But why pigs we ask?

"Fuck the phylum!" (post-historic anthem rising) All hail microbial archaea. Do they get it? Why don't they get it?

Night 837

Soon they will get it.

Night 840

We slide again, unbalanced, unnoticed. The immaculate tile floors slippery when wet.

Night 844

Smalled wingeds. The left one fluttered. Scared the shit out of us that first twitch. Kei te titiro ahau. A miracle. Looked it up from the registry so as to call it as they might call it a bluish Morpho Menelaus. Binomial classification outdated. Love the morpho, would lose the Spartan king. They say:

Kingdom: Animalia
Phylum: Arthropoda
Class: Insecta
Order: Lepidoptera
Genus: Morpho
Species: *M. Menelaus*



Found while searching that butterflies have hearts in their wings. Wow! We napped and dreamt of an Indigo bunting, perched upon a dead mule while Mozart's requiem played quietly from a yellow speaker between its rotting haunches. We scientized for the hell of it.

Kingdom: Animalia
Phylum: Chordata
Class: Aves
Order: Passeriformes
Genus: Cardinalidae
Species: *Passerina cyanae*



We want to ask Linnaeus how the quest for binomial nomenclature may have troubled his aspirations? Oh to be a multicellular eukaryote organism of the Class Insecta and Order of Diptera (common fly) on the wall of his dreaming.

Consequentially we wonder how the latin color cyanea came to be translated as indigo for these are very different blues? One hopeful like a robin's egg, a cloudless sky. The other a menacing tinge of violet and deep sorrow.

Night 845

BB, BeeBee, BeBe

Kingdom: _____
Phylum: _____
Class: _____
Order: _____
Genus: _____
Species: _____

Night 852

From upstairs with the plush chairs, the big decree. Bespoke suits convinced BB palindrome is a one-off zoonotic event. Hazmat suits no longer required downstairs. Face shields and masks encouraged but left to individual discretion. Libertarian world-view proclaimed from the top. Is that coherent? In any case, with reduced fears of viral contagion they get playful. Expectations for a Nobel Prize excites whoohoo backslapping in the boardroom over prudent investments. Now they will rake it in. We carry on.

Night 853

Another full moon, another research team This fresh duo brings a mixed bag of tricks. The tall one, an immunologist with a specialty in endosymbiosis. Check. The other one a PhD candidate researching vegetal existentialism in mammals. Way cool. No clue.

Hilarious we think that both are schooled to look away from the hot insistence of our gaze. Maybe they read up on kinship with horses and other four-leggeds and deduced eye contact is a not to go. Their eyes fixed on notebooks, tablets and trembling digits. It is at first uncomfortable to answer intimate questions about truth, power and feces to bowed heads, a receding hairline and a patterned headscarf. He (preferred pronoun) looks, behind the thick black frames of his oversized glasses, like a textbook. She (preferred pronoun) is translucent. Shining beneath her batik face mask.

Night 854

We (preferred pronoun) read vociferously. This a daily pleasure. We must keep up with the various contexts in which others

frame our evolution. Another lifetime ago in City we collected books on many topics of study. Queer, feminist, black, decolonial studies. Art and performance studies. Philosophy and religion. Poetry and literature. Though we find ourselves drawn now to the politics of the undercommons, to Benjamin and Whitehead, to Hartman and Lorde, we focus on microbiological ethics, the ultimate quashing of genus identitarianism and, natch, human exceptionalism. We want to say this in more complex phrasing so we don't sound dumb and unnuanced. Yet still, how is it homo sapiens so crudely wield superiority when microorganisms R us? As the clock ticks on our rosy-fingered dawns we have the gut smart to realize this misbegotten megalomania. Obla di obla da.

Night 855

Am we spiteful? Am we afraid? No and no.

We am exhausted by change changing. So very tired.

Night 860

Eu: Greek for "well," "good," "true."

Karyon: Greek for "nut," "kernel"

You Carry On: English for "persistence," luggage command

Ewe Carrion: English for dead sheep

Night 861

Gut instinct. Don't be shy. Looking into rat microbiota. We am situating questions to he and she as we study what we have never not known. What will survive our timings, as Gaia does her work, are the fabulous creatures lunching in intestines. Survivors of the mayhem, of the big switcheroo. We see a cat's cradle in their charts and figures. We smile. We poop pellets, a delicate

spring green in color, with curiosity and glee. We can hardly wait for it!

Night 872

We ask her about plant thinking, about tree ideas. How photosynthesis prehends its processes? This question tickles us as our own perceptions are often evasive. Our own view of happiness is sometimes clearly speciated and other times unidentifiable. We want to think this is a good thing but get no feedback. Languages fly in and out of consciousness as seeds dropped by birds.

Night 873

She, a poet, writes verse as multiverse. Apparently, she has a peculiar skill. She can write simultaneously in Farsi (right hand) and English (left hand). The phrases meet in an untranslatable middle as her hands bump. "Passagings to elsewheres" she explains wistfully and we nod in complicity, scratching the fur of our chinny chin. Her smile is beautifully leafy though her eyes do not meet ours.

He remains tense and practical. Explains in technical vernacular the ontology of unicellular archaea extremophiles. This we love of course and are held in rapt attention even though.

Night 874

He alone tonight. "She performs her poetry elsewhere," he said without humor or irony. His rods and cones fire behind supplemental lenses. We ask him about mitochondria in rattus norvegicus photoreceptor cells. Uncertain, his face reddens a dark grey. He worlds as a trichromat. Six million plus happy RGB cone cells, 120 million rod cells. We remember this polychromatic scenery but suspect our own red cones have atrophied. We no

longer see color vividly. Our world is grey like green. And yet we see detail we have never before imagined. He says we am sensitive to ultraviolet light now that our rod cells are exponentially increasing, that we can see things he cannot. He asks us how we world. Finally! A question worth answering. We tell him the evenings are beautiful and action moves slowly in two discrete fields at once. One eye sees a thing and the other eye sees it differently. We think of her hands writing and smile a little. Her writing hands do as rat eyes do. We ask him if he believes in parallel universes? He says he can imagine a multiverse when intoxicated. We notice he tries to catch our eyes in a quick glimpse. We blink long and in sync. This a survival tactic for both of us. Hesitantly, we ask his name. "Billy," he says quietly. We end our conversation gazing akimbo. He promises he will research mitochondria in photoreceptor cells for us. His first generous gesture.

Night 880

They must they say collect animals (birds, bees, rats, toads, snakes, mantis shrimp), children, and elderly to sort and prick and prick. Tonight, we vent anger over trespass. Not of libertarian ilk, we am we and suffer pricks for collective becoming oh so compromised by enterprise. Billy says pharma capital will secure what is worth protecting. We sigh with a loud pfff at the staggering impossibility of uncorrupted evolution.

Night 884

Another cleaving for comfort. Another butt bandage.

Night 885

Temporarily distracted from the cellular or perhaps propelled by it. Am we always already not this "not this"? "Bring us a slime

mold to dine on," we exclaim to no one in particular. "A delicious morsel of singular plurality please."

Night 886

Reading WB's TAP. Thankful for this gift from one BB Bhoomika Berry. Epiphanies erupt and sputter. We discover so many passing-through. A passage of text, a serial passage of pathogens, a dancing horse in passage. We dreamt it once in a BØB dream and it stuck like a koan sticks in all the resilience of a not-yet.

It was there a horse soon dancing

Night 887

PASSAGINGS. Unravelling transits. Convoluted, entangled, labyrinthine. We find no solace whatsoever in our predicament. Good and bad movings. The problematic passage of the dancing horse, the repression of the animal, the chattel vagaries of its domestication. Abolitionist Frederick Douglass once alluded to the empathetic kindness humans must bestow on horsey animals. And yet even so, hierarchies remain insufferably intact.

Night 888

The researchers came for late-night high tea leaving notepads and tablets behind. They came to chat without leverage. He stole the Jameson stash from the locked cabinet to spike the beverage. Still, this night plays as a sober version of whitecoat wilding. We loosen and speak of farting and the colors our poop tells of biome health. Scatologically breaking the wind between us. We

turn serious and argue the historical relevance of science vs art debates. He defends Newton, she Goethe. He defends Einstein, she Bergson. He gives Indians credit for the origin story of zero, she argues the invention was Babylonian. We speak of time, of memory, of color, of nothingness in quantity and quality. We am at our nocturnal best and agile still. Tonight a good night.

Night 889

We do not yet trust Billy's scent.

Night 900

Arcades Passage: "The recent past always presents itself as though annihilated by catastrophes." Wiesengrund, in a letter <of June 5, 1935>. [K4,3]

Comment: Must laugh while nodding and thumping hairy chest! Pandemics and hurricanes come and go and come again as the green earth trembles to respire. Injustice, visible and invisible, pervades as it always has.

Night 902

We dreamt as we sometimes do. Our body my body as it once was. That triangle of coarse hair between legs which now seems, given current hirsute disposition, impossibly cute. There is refreshment in that. A calming. We am I.

The dream (if we may be briefly I) goes like this:

The apartment had a few rooms. I was babysitting and wasn't sure I liked the baby. Well, she was a toddler learning words like "dementia" and "crone" which confused my own compromised stereotypes. Sitting on the linoleum floor, we were playing a creepy game called

"Throw the Barbie" when I was distracted by an object smaller than a rhumba and larger than a dinner plate rolling into the room. It was designed with hexagonal panel divisions, each reading "Freewall." It could have been a logo, the robot's name or a complex philosophical construct. I wasn't sure. There was a rotating central plexi hub and several shelves on board the object that held accessories: small bottles, gadgets, various remotes. I wanted to inspect the accoutrement to understand whether or not I should be afraid. Protective. "We're afraid because we run" rang in my inner ear.

The thing circled me and little Betty. A bird the size of a schnauzer with a one-meter beak entered the room. Now I felt fear rise. My instinct was to throw a couch pillow at the animal but ethical patterning flared up and I froze. Déjà vu. The bird looked me in the eye and waddled from the room as a rat scurried under the kitchen table. I stood still with the child in my arms as animals and insects of all types entered the home.

Night 905

In full amodal synaesthetic tonight. Words do not stir well. Smells and sounds correlate. There is extra activity in the bowels of the clinic. More researchers come to stare. More whitecoats test my fluids. More bacteria bled for the electron microscope. We feel all this as we feel our own digesting. Thought percolates as gas bubbles in our intestines. They tell us when we ask that we am of indiscernible genus. Of questionable family. Of dubious order. Of suspicious class and phylum. Our laugh is by now a high squeak and squeak we gloriously do. "Oh what an epistemological screw-up. Oh what a beautiful day." We sing the fucking body electric. The we yet to come. "We am of no kingdom, of no domain. Am of what life? A life. A living."

Night 906

Because we ask so persistently, she tries to explain how she writes in two languages, in two alphabets, in two directions at once. She cannot explain this though she thinks she does. She is a poet after all. We understand something of this only because we hear and smell so much at once while seeing every ultraviolet detail. How could we explain this to her? Our stalemate is beautiful.

Night 907

Stick stick stick. Stick it.

Night 908

We have dreamt of ouroboros again. Gagging on our tail as it grows.

Night 909

When the whitecoats take their midnight meal and sneak their shots of whiskey we take advantage. My little winglets are now more supple. We hop around the room on their power. One flap. Two. Our arthritic hands and feet rise from the floor. Whee! It is nowhere near emancipatory flight but it is not nothing. We practice. We learn. We collect ourselves.

Passages 1 and 2 from Lexico online OED

passage¹

NOUN

1 [*mass noun*] The action or process of moving through or past somewhere on the way from one place to another.

1.1 The action or process of moving forward.

1.2 The right to pass through somewhere.

[...]

2. A narrow way allowing access between buildings or to different rooms within a building; a passageway.

2.1 A duct, vessel, or other channel in the body

3 [*mass noun*] The process of transition from one state to another.

4 A short extract from a book or other printed material.

4.1 A section of a piece of music.

4.2 An episode in a spell of longer activity such as a sporting event.

5 Medicine Biology

[*mass noun*] The propagation of microorganisms or cells in a series of host organisms or culture media, so as to maintain them or modify their virulence.

passage²

NOUN

A movement performed in advanced dressage and classical riding, in which the horse executes a slow elevated trot, giving the impression of dancing.

act 2

**EPISTOLARY
ROMANTICS**

*I will never during my life wear a white gown,
green-green-all my clothes are green!*
– Bettina Brentano, *Goethe's Correspondence with a Child*

*It's not classical, not Romantic either. It's Bettin-
cal, her own charming genre somewhere in between.*
– Christa Wolf, *Letter to Bettina*

*It is as if this invisible light that is the darkness of the present cast
its shadow on the past so that the past, touched by this shadow,
acquired the ability to respond to the darkness of the now.*
– Giorgio Agamben, "What Is the Contemporary"

Correspondence of Goethe's mother, Frau Rat, and Bettina Brentano

GOETHE'S MOTHER TO BETTINA

Frankfurt, May 12th 1806

Dear Bettina.

*<Thy letters give me joy, and Miss Betty who recognizes them on the address, says: "Frau Rat, the postman brings you a pleasure." Don't however be too mad about my son, everything must be done in order.>** The wallpaper pattern you chose for the brown room is now installed and the color blends beautifully with the shimmering light of morning and twilight.

<Write much, even if it were every day.

Thy affectionate friend>

Elizabeth Goethe

* All items marked as such are from *Goethe's Correspondence with a Child*, e-text by Bruce G. Charlton, University of Newcastle upon Tyne, UK, 2004.

TO GOETHE'S MOTHER

Frau Rat,

The sky is so blue, so clear, the sunshine golden beyond measure. Sitting here I imagine that in the evening, if your son ever does think kindly of me and would come perhaps to visit, *<if I waited all day and the sunlight hours rolled by, and the hour of shade with the silver-crescent moon and the stars, should bring the friend, he would find me on the mountain-verge, running to his open arms.>* He would surely feel my love for him! I know it though I would never be presumptuous about these matters of the heart. I live for this possibility!

TO BETTINA

Frankfurt, May 25th

<Hey! Child, though art bewitched!>

I must remind you again, please please, *<everything in order, and write connected letters in which there is something to read. Stuff!>*

You can tell us about everything that happens in your day but in an orderly way. Please. Tell us small daily trifles. We enjoy hearing these things. Who you meet with, if you like them at all, how they dress, how the weather blows. Stuff. Like that. It keeps us connected with the ways of youth and the world.

<My son has begged me again, to tell thee to write to him. But pray in an orderly fashion or thou wilt ruin the whole affair.>

Frau Rat

TO BETTINA

September 21st

My son would so like to have the story of G nderode from your pen, from your heart. You can send it to him directly in Weimar. He'll take care of your words, care for them, preserve them and won't bother you any more about it so as not to cause you further distress. *<He had written Werther; write then the story for love of him.>*

Please, do write your love story. Tell it honestly and hold nothing back. We so want to understand what drew her to death. We knew her little but know that you knew her well. I have written to him about you and he takes comfort in knowing you persevere in this tragedy and write to me for comfort.

Thy friend,

E. GOETHE

TO GOETHE'S MOTHER

You have asked me, subtly though with earnest pressure, to speak of Karoline G nderode's story and my own. It is so very difficult for me to write anything yet of KG and her death on the Rhine. You know I'm sensitive, but I'm

not that sensitive. I can certainly write volubly. The thing is I'm not yet far enough removed from grief and anger to tell it. But I will say that yesterday I did go down to that spot where she did it, where, so full of despair, she plunged that damn dagger into her breast. She had this thought, this plan, I dare say, for some time. I will tell you and your son about everything but right now, I simply cannot pull the threads together. *<No! it distresses me and I reproach her, as I used to do in my dreams, that she has left this beautiful earth. She had yet to learn that Nature is possessed of spirit and soul, holds communion with man and cares for him and his destiny. That "promises of life" float around us in the air: – Yes! She used me ill! She fled from me in the moment when I would have imparted to her every enjoyment.>*

Strangely, now that I am writing to you that I cannot write about Karoline, I feel the words swelling up in me. I will continue unravelling my story as long as I can manage my emotions. I'll try to convey something of my grief. Okay, here goes...

When she first sought me out, I was thirteen. She was eighteen. We met every day. *<With her I learned to read my first books, with understanding. She wanted to teach me History, but soon saw that I was too busy with the present, to be held long by the past.>* She taught me Philosophy, insisting I write about what I had comprehended of Love, Reason, Time, Art. She delighted in my essays though I doubt they came close to expressing concepts as she understood them. She was so very clever. I could not bear to miss a day spending time with her.

She was tall and too thin, a mere wisp of a timid flowing thing. Chasing prominence in societal circles would never be a game she could play well. She could not, would not, excel at party parlay for recognition's sake. Maybe she was just a shy one but I suspect she found witty rep-

artee distasteful. Together we read Werther and of course we discussed the idea of love triangles and desperation, those ideas your son instilled in that fine novel. I remember G saying to me in enthralled tones: <*"To learn much, to comprehend much and then die early!"*> Back then I thought that dramatic sentiment symptomatic of our era, but for her, it held a powerful prescience.

For me, I simply wanted to write and write as I <*looked into unfathomable darkness.*> But I also looked into the brilliance of light. Your son, my dear Frau Rat, knows so well the enchantment of a ray of light. The sheer beauty of the color's spirit. How it can overtake one much as the scent of a flower or a sweet Madalein-Keks. He is well aware, indeed perceives that <*semblance is no semblance, but truth itself.*> If there be truth at all. I have my doubts.

For myself, I saw my dreams and pursued them. I can never distinguish well between sleeping and waking. I am always so convinced of my ability to fly and slowly float one maybe two meters above the ground, bouncing, touching earth and then – whew! – flying off again as would a tiny Red-flanked Bluetail. When I wake in the morning I am fully convinced that I can fly. I would write to G nderode of these things. I would sometimes believe them so thoroughly I would bring them to life. Enact my awakenings. Like the times I would climb, as if possessed, the silver poplar in her garden to read a book. <*At each chapter, I clambered one bough higher and thus read down to her – she stood at the window and listened, speaking to me above; every now and then she would say "Bettina don't fall."*>

But my flying and floating did not move her from the track of her destiny. When I next saw her she said excitedly: <*"Yesterday I spoke with a surgeon, who told me it was very easy to make away with one's self."*> Then, and I kid you not about this Frau Rat, she unbuttoned her dress and pointed to a

spot beneath her gorgeous breast. "Right here, right here is the vulnerable place." She was so excited, so delighted that I felt afraid for her. <"Well," I asked, "and what shall I do when thou art dead?" "O", she said, "ere then, thou wilt not care for me anymore. We shall not remain so intimate till then, I will first quarrel with thee."> Frau Rat, can you understand this? I cannot. Will not.

This is now becoming a very long letter to you dearest mother of my friend. You asked for this. I hope you can handle the truth (semblance) of it.

<After I had observed her awhile, I could no longer control myself. If I broke out into loud crying, I fell on her neck, tore her down to a seat, and sat upon her knee and wept many tears and for the first time, kissed her on her mouth, and tore open her dress and kissed her on the spot, where she had learned to reach the heart. And I implored her with tears of anguish, to have mercy upon me, and fell again on her neck, and kissed her hands which were cold and trembling, and her lips were convulsed, and she was quite cold, stiff, and deadly pale, and could not raise her voice. She said slowly, "Bettina don't break my heart.">

Letter from Goethe to Bettina Brentano

TO BETTINE

Apologies my dear for my often slow, shallow responses to your lengthy letters. Though verbose they fill me with information of the world as experienced through the eyes of its youth. Though I daresay you are in no way typical of Europe's youth at large. In this regard you remain an inspiration to me.

*<It is still a question, dearest Bettina, whether one can with better reason call you odd, or wonderful; neither dare one reflect; one considers at last only, how to ensure himself safely against the rapid flood of thy thoughts. Be therefore content, if I do not minutely soothe, satisfy, answer, and evade, thy complaints, thy demands, thy questions, and thy accusations; but in all heartily thank thee, that thou hast again so richly endowed me.>**

Now, I know my dear mother has relayed this request to you on other occasions but I must again restate it so as to make our correspondence attain the peak of its potential. *<A little more arrangement in your views might be useful to us*

* All items marked as such are from *Goethe's Correspondence with a Child*, e-text by Bruce G. Charlton, University of Newcastle upon Tyne, UK, 2004.

both. Thus are your thoughts like costly pearls, not all equally polished, strung upon a loose thread, which easily breaks, and then they may roll to all corners and many might be lost.> I request this as you well know I am soon to publish my extensive research developing a fresh theory of Colors, my Farbenlehre. I am refuting Newton's established optical theories. This gesture may be seen by some as arrogant. But his spectrum, as I have long observed, is wrongly situated. I will propose to the world visual events everyone may experience with the aid of a glass prism aimed at white and black surfaces. Boundary colors my dear, boundary colors! This is how we may best understand the magnificence of light and its progeny.

That said dear Bettina, I offer you my grateful thanks for the diversions and little gems you regularly send through the post. *<Be well assured that I willingly take what you offer to me, and that thus the tie between us will not easily be loosened.>*

GOETHE

Footnote

Friends and Family of Bettina Brentano von Arnim

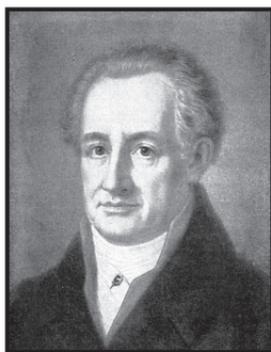
Goethe acolyte. Beethoven muse. Proto-feminist, social activist, communist, writer, composer, artist. Ballsy, self-conscious, queer, motherly, generous, radical.



Bettina Brentano von Arnim (1785–1859) is best known for her first book, published in 1837, when she was well into mid-life. *Goethe's Correspondence with a Child* was admired and hated, beloved and misunderstood by literary critics and the public, then and now. In these pages she openly fabulates her correspondence with J.W. Goethe and his interlocutor mother Frau Rat. These letters depict the epistolary style of the time, devised by Goethe in his first novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, published in 1774. In *Correspondence*, Bettina unfolds a girl crush on a famous man that was and is remarkably uninhibited. Though a platonic affair (we are told), the depiction raises all manner of questions regarding what women could say and how they could say it in that tumultuous era. Close reading unveils the girl's gradual influence on Goethe regarding resistance to the anti-Semitic politics of the day and the beauty of music.

From Bruce G. Charleton's introduction to the online version of *Correspondence*:

My interpretation is that in terms of factuality, there is a blend of accuracy and invention: but perhaps the most striking aspect of *Correspondence* is its 'psychological truthfulness' – its impression of being an extraordinarily candid and self-revealing document – indeed, almost frighteningly so. According to *The Oxford Companion*,



this emotional openness disturbed the book's early readers – but it is precisely this quality which gives the book its appeal to a modern readership.

By all accounts, Bettina Brentano was a live wire. Quantum leap her era to 21C and her Twitter feed would rival the Kardashians with daring feats of social ambiguity. She might be a Prof, an influencer, a BLM activist or a rapper. Perhaps all of the above.

Schumann, Liszt, and Brahms figured in her pantheon of admirers. She got around. Made herself known and available to important folks. Her radical politics and instinctive feminism were unusual in that era. Maximiliane von La Roche, her mother, attracted Goethe's colorful affections when he was twenty-four and she sixteen.

He would immortalize Maximiliane in the composite character of the unobtainable Charlotte in his tragic drama *The Sorrows of Young Werther*. This was the viral read of its day. Romantic suicide made cool.



*

Bettina's brother Clemens (1778–1842) was a famous romantic poet with a crazy streak. He once painted his room, the floor, the carpet, the walls, the ceiling, the curtains, and his own face blue. With his friend Achim von Arnim, husband of Bettina, and other fellows, he collected folk poems for *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*. A lyric poet, he also wrote fairy tales.



*

Gisela von Arnim, one of Bettina's many daughters, married a Grimm and wrote fairy tales.



And of course, there was Bettina's bestie, her love, her boo, the poet Karoline G nderode, who famously stabbed herself in the heart on the banks of the Rhine in 1806, following the Werther tradition.



Correspondence of Karoline Günderode and Bettina Brentano

TO GÜNTHER

Dearest, please permit my rambling, just a little, on the importance of the night sky. I know as I write this, that the stars I gaze upon and that gaze upon me are the same stars you see tonight. That knowledge gives me profound pleasure.

<I have a great love of the stars, and believe all the instructive thoughts that come into my soul are sent me by them. I would not miss going to my tower a single night. What men have ever wanted to teach me, I would not believe; but what enters my thoughts up there in nightly solitude I must believe. Shall I not listen to the voice speaking down to me from heaven? Do I not feel its breath streaming upon me from all sides? That is because I confide wholly to them in the lonely night. I climb a path that terrifies me, in order to be with them. I come to the tower and my heart trembles within me as I anxiously mount, and not until I reach the topmost round, where I must rest my hand to raise myself up, do I feel relieved. There, all the stars shine down upon me, and whom I love I commit to their care – thee first of all. If I were cheated out of thee, it were all over with them. I write thy name

*in the snow that still lies on the tower, that they may guard thee, which they will certainly do.... >**

TO BETTINA

My dear, as always your antics frighten me. Your total disregard for your safety and my peace of mind. *<Thou wilt not feel hurt if I am a little afraid of thee? Thou even makest me afraid of myself! I am anxious about thee, and beg thou wilt, for Heaven's sake, take care not to fall.>*

Please my dearest, take care not to fall.

TO GÜNTHER

I am thinking today of my dead parents. I am thinking about the grief and sorrow that may overcome one when in a lonely place like the Carmelite convent. But I have never found fear in lonely places or in sad people. I say this to assure you that you can freely share your sadness with me. I'm a worthy listener to all that troubles you should you want to tell. I can be quite still and attentive given such an occasion. Please, give my listening skills a try.

Though yesterday, if I'm honest, *<I longed for evening all day because I was so restless. Had I only a line from thee about thee! I have nothing but half thoughts that rise from the depth of my bosom, but I dare test them. If thou wouldst only write me this, "Bettina, I love thee," it would suffice.>*

* All items as such are direct quotations from *Correspondence of Fräulein GÜnderode and Bettina von Arnim* (Forgotten Books, 2018).

You know I would gladly sacrifice my life for you and you alone. But if it's too difficult for you to share your confidences with me I will stop asking. And every feeling with you is so plainly writ on your brow.

I was so tired from writing this letter last evening that I fell asleep and did not climb the tower. I rushed there this morning to find your name still engraved in the snow.

TO BETTINA

Please forgive me for not writing sooner. I'm not neglecting you dear Bettina. It is often true that you are freer and able to act spontaneously when I am timid and constrained. This is a difference between us. *<If thou wilt wander thy road of life with me, thy heart and soul to my hesitation, or rather to my incapacity, for I do not know how I could manage to follow thee; wings have not grown for that purpose. I beg of thee to consider this in time, and to regard me as a being who might leave much untried to which thou art impelled.>*

Correspondence of Bettene Vermine and WildRed

16 April
My dear Red,

It's hella hot here, hasn't rained in weeks. 36° is just too much for strenuous walking but I haul my sweaty ass up the hills anyway. Haven't seen another human on the trail. I thought of you, caught a little glimpse of the magic that is your everyday. Love the breath-taking silence but for the soft rush of clear water over rock. Hope you can read my handwriting. My legibility sucks as bad as my clarity.

Enclosed in this envelope are the dried leaves of a fern I found in a recent hike on the Schwarzwaldsteig. I can't identify it. Perhaps you know it? I only took a tiny sample. Feels like extractivist plundering to snip more. It seems to be surviving as a fern in desert temps, so I'm curious what you have to say. I look forward to further study with you on the indigenous plant life of southcentral Europe. I've been musing lately over the philosophical efficacy of vegetal processes. I admit to feeling that critical theory on non-human (accepting the rock and the hard place ;) agency is deficient somehow. I'm finding discourse on

plant, fungal, and microbial networks fulfilling these days. But my brain breaks when confronting the difficult discursive intertwining of speciation, race, symbiogenesis. You were always way ahead of the curve on plant philosophy. Do you remember that talk from Rinpoche (what was his name)? When we went to the meditation center in France five years ago and you asked him why plants aren't considered sentient beings? And he simply said because they are not. We were both disappointed by the canonical answer. I wonder if I'll ever find a spiritual path as enlightening, as mindful, as a panoramic foot-path? As the teeming root systems of an aspen grove? Do you believe in the plurality of religious experience? Is it that way for you? I always imagine you as agnostic.

Invasive memory coming through. Did I ever tell you my ggggrandmother's story? It was passed down from her to my great grandma Elizabeth to grandma Betty to my mom. Great-great-grandma was in college chopping broccoli florets for dinner and her then boyfriend (who btw was later murdered, run over by a pick-up truck in a drug deal gone wrong) started screaming at her to pay attention to the living being she was dismembering. Grabbed the chef knife from her hands, mutilating the remaining broccoli heads in a rage. Freaked her out, my ggg, and all subsequent daughters and sons who have heard the story. My family has never been able to slice vegetables without fear and shame. Well, yeah, I've been thinking of that story lately. Gives pause to that Whitehead remark – "a vegetable is a democracy."

I'm using the PO box address you gave me last summer. I hope this letter finds you or you find it. I have this idea of a Grittas gaggle later this summer high up in the Dolomiti where the air is cooler (maybe). Wonderful to get us together on a mountaintop sans wifi and make something

all of us. Anything. Music. Field recordings. Dinners. Love. You up for it? Could you recommend a location?

yours,

BV

25 April
Ciao Bettene,

The stamps on the envelope are lovely! Thank you so much for the beautiful wood fern, a *Polystichum braunii* I'm pretty sure. We call it a *Felce di Braun*. It's not uncommon where you're walking now but nonetheless a real gem. Not your typical *Dryopteris*.

There are more than two hundred species in the *Polystichum* genus but only about four are indigenous to central Europe. Most are in Asia, FYI. Did you notice that the shape of the leaflet base, the auricle, is larger on one side? The *P. braunii* rhizome is short and the fronds are arranged in a circle which can be over a meter long. Maybe that circular form is what attracted your mystical inclinations? It LOVES the shallow soil of those rocky, shady forests where you are now, where I am most of the time, sliding on mossy stones alongside waterfalls. Glorious, no? Don't you just adore those extraordinary logarithmic spores? I love this about ferns, these delicious spirals of lipids and protein. So precious these places. So few left. You know how I weep when I see a lumber truck, when I see the wreckage of capitalism's greed. Go on people. Progress yourselves right into the hell you're so terrified of.

Okay. Stop. Don't be bitter, be better. (I should print that on a face mask.)

Funny you bringing up that Buddhist teaching we went to. I think it was Amsterdam not Fontainebleu. But anyway, that one raised a quandary. I remember it messed us up for a while though the meditation sessions were wonderful and that's what we were really there for. Nothing like collectively breathing through skin like garden plants breathing through their leaves. I tend to think spiritual paths convolve with material awareness don't you?

LOL over your gggrandmother's broccoli PTSD!

YES YES! Let's all meet in the mountains. I know just the place. We can stay in an abandoned house in this exquisitely empty village. Sad story really, how it was decimated by migration and plague. Getting daily provisions is a task, but I will, you know, gather most of the ingredients with all your help. Will send topographic maps and phone numbers tomorrow. Can I just ask that you do all the negotiating with Roberta, the café owner qua reference librarian who keeps the keys? I admire her, really, but prefer to stay outside her establishment. The last time I entered I had a mild seizure. You'll see what I mean.

Let me know what you decide. The postal address is correct as I'm in City for a while. I'm practicing skids. Always wanted to try it with my funny feet. (Thank you kindly Indira and Gregor). I'm certainly steady on wet, algae covered rocks and mountain ice. I am curious to see if my hooves provide too much traction on the Path.

Love,

Red

Email Thread between WR and BV

Date: 2 May 17:40
From: günderode435@
To: bettenevermine@
Re: ancestral inheritance

Dearest B,

Following up: Of course, the ethics of genetic modification is paramount these days, among *MANY* other matters of care/concern. I mean, how do we prioritize the urgency of one calamity from another? We survive one species-jumping viral pandemic even as we fill test tubes with other absurdly dangerous creations. You know my feelings about CRISPR culture. We've spent too many drunken evenings picking crud from the clefts of my feetsies, talking on and on about this. You know I'm not a fan of germline tinkering though I modestly support soma engineering. We've been over this. And over this. And still I waiver.

But I'd like to tread more trivial waters today. Well, how do we value "trivial"? How we do so undervalue "useless." Anyway, I want to remark on the name of the rose so to speak. What's in a name? What's up with nominative determinism? A rose is a rose is rose. A brand by any other

name would smell as tainted. I'm thinking about the taxonification of persona. Now I know parents are growing little gender neutral "theybies" these days. But can we talk about their naming choices? OK, so I'm more traumatized than others perhaps but still, poor Dweezil. Poor Rocket Zot. Know what I mean? Names. You talk about defying your namesake by choosing that pesky little "Vermine." I appreciate your desire to set out on your own terms. More than you might know.

I dislike my given name. Pater said he was enthralled with this obscure romantic poet. He wanted to celebrate her work rather than her bizarre death by making me, his only daughter, her namesake. OMG. What a weight. She, Karoline G nderode, aka G nther was an NB theybie ahead of schedule on that one. I'm down with her intellect and her unfulfilled desires but whoa, she took a confused turn when she put a dagger through her heart. And btw, it was NOT over that married creep Kreutzer and some kind of Werther complex! Don't fall for that fake historical interpretation. Read her. There might have been a bit of Werther in that final deed but it was certainly on account of having no foreseeable possibility. No perceptible future in which she could find any pleasure.

xxWildRed G nderode

Date: 3 May 8:10
From: bettenevermine@
To: g nderode435@
Re: ancestral inheritance

Dear Goo, ☺

She became a kind of icon to some, No? A feminist hero like her pal Bettina ;-)) that radical wonk who got away with treasonous incantation by feigning girlish naïveté. Tactically smart or a cop-out? They (the powers that be) gave that little woman living between the lines a long leash. But poor Bettina never got over the distress of her first love leaving her like that as far as I understand it. For my taste, THE trauma drama of the romantic period

Date: 3 May 12:16
From: günderode435@
To: bettenevermine@
Re: ancestral inheritance

Let's not forget that kinky Lord Byron did beget Ada Lovelace and the rest is largely uncredited herstory. Factoid. KG had migraines and wrote on green paper to ease her eyestrain. Thought you might like that one.

Returning to topic. I found this quotation on Günderode's *Wikipedia* entry of all places. The sentiment is revealing. Advanced for the early 19th century:

I have no feeling for feminine virtues, for a woman's happiness. Only that which is wild, great, shining appeals to me. There is an unfortunate but unalterable imbalance in my soul; and it will and must remain so, since I am a woman and have desires like a man without a man's strength. That's why I'm so vacillating and so out of harmony with myself.... – Karoline Günderode

See what I mean about her non-binary potential. For sure she didn't jam that dagger over a suitor gone wrong. Goethe be damned. She was desperate.

Date: 3 May April 19:02
From: bettenevermine@
To: günderode435@
Re: ancestral inheritance

Goo,

I see what you mean. Remarkable.

And babycakes, this is *your* anthropogenic inheritance.

Onomastics...look it up. Add it to your nominative determinist research

Date: 4 May 10:07
From: günderode435@
To: bettenevermine@
Re: ancestral inheritance

Back at ya. Have you read your para-namesake's letter to Goethe's mutter – Frau Rat – about K's suicide? You must have right? It's chilling. Funny we've not yet talked about this, you and I. Namesakes. Anyway, I'm attaching it in a doc here in case you were spared this herstory. It's from her first book. That faux letter exchange with the grand old man. Did you ever skim through it? That's what I did. A few sections grabbed my attention entirely. She, Bettina, took incredulously brave literary license for that era. Scholars still can't separate the fact from the fabrication. The Kathy Acker of her day she was.

Doc attachment: excerpt from *Goethe's Correspondence with a Child*:

Fritz Schlosser came; he asked me for a line to G nderode, as he was going to the Rheingau and wished to make her acquaintance [...] “Take heed Schlosser – you find her no more if you delay according to your old custom; and I tell you go rather today than tomorrow and save her from her unreasonably melancholy humor;” – and in jest I describe how she would kill herself, in a red gown, with loosened boddice, and close beneath her breast, the wound: this was called wanton wildness in me, but it was unconscious excitement, in which I described the truth with perfect accuracy. [...]

When we arrived in Mittelheim, where we put up for the night, I lay at the window and looked on the moonlit water. The maid who laid the cloth said: “Yesterday a young and beautiful lady, who had been residing here for six weeks, made away with herself at Winkel: she walked a long time by the Rhine, then ran home and fetched a handkerchief: in the evening she was sought in vain, the next morning she was found on the bank among the willow-trees; she had filled the handkerchief with stones and tied it around her neck, probably because she intended to sink in the Rhine, but as she stabbed herself to the heart, she fell backwards, and a peasant found her thus lying under the willows by the Rhine, in a spot where it is deepest.” “That is G nderode!” They talked me out of my belief, and said it must certainly be some other. I allowed myself to be convinced and thought. “Exactly which one prophesies, is generally not true.”

Date: 4 May 18:31
From: bettenevermine@
To: g nderode435@
Re: ancestral inheritance

Fuck me

Email from Bettene to bobbob and Arefeh

Date: 1 June 11:34
From: bettenevermine@
To: boo-bob900@, arefeh628@
Re: retreat prep

Dears,

WildRed recommended a perfect location for our getting together. It's quite near her childhood home. I do hope you can all manage the August dates coming from wherever you are in the world. I know this last minute request requires a certain spontaneity and a carbon footprint tally. You need to find a means of getting to Lavenone by 9 August. We'll meet there at a rendezvous point (will send details in a follow-up) and travel by bus to our destination.

Bit of homework – here's a varied reading list and hope you all agree with this disparate mix of discussion fodder. WildRed suggests browsing:

Benjamin's *The Arcades Project*
 Borges's *The Library of Babel*

She finds these works important by "way of initiation."

Her words. Please also take a look at:

Le Guin's *Social Dreaming of the Frin*

Butler's *Bloodchild*

Hartman's *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*

And, ta da! Something totally unexpected:

Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*.

Whitehead's *Adventures of Ideas* always good for dipping. Matusake mushrooms, geontologies, Boyer, Lorde, and Glissant. Red also recommended we bring at least one copy of *Edible Plants of the Dolomites* which makes sense of course. Oh, and please bring a prism and a reed instrument. Any other suggestions welcome but let's not overwhelm ourselves with the written word. (Have we failed at this already?)

It will be very hot so bring light clothing for daytime and something warm and snuggly for the evenings.

Any questions (I'm sure there will be) pass them my way

xbv

Slack Channel – #grittas – dreaming

@arefeh created this channel on January 5th inviting bobbob, bettene, wildred

arefeh set the channel topic : dreaming

----- 20 June -----

arefeh 12:10 PM

Hey! Haven't connected in a while. Will be great to see you all at our little *organizar la fiesta* in Italia. I would love to prepare for our retreat with a thread on dreaming if anyone's up for it.

arefeh 12:16 PM

About that...

Have you all started the readings yet? I was reluctant when I saw BV's suggestions. You know, I prefer to invest in current cultural theory. There's so much buzz and so little time. Got a stack of books on my desk: Adichie, Sharpe, Federici, Ferreira da Silva, Manning. Those crusty canon texts aren't for me right now. I'm also hungry for poetry. Boyer, Moten, Carson. That said, I am finding Benjamin on "awakening" and collective dreaming kinda interesting. For me, this is new territory to trouble. Problematic maybe, as Adorno pointed out, yet still on topic.

bobbob 13:12 PM

Happy to join in on this one.

Do you even remember your dreams? I recall bits. I've had this feeling the last few years that I'm working out discursive propositions in my dream adventures. There are all sorts of clues laid bare naked in these fabulations.

arefeh 13:16 PM

You know my guilty pleasure is a detective fiction. Don't tell anyone. Anyway, we're not talking about dream interpretation right? Forget that Freudian shit. It's the narrative situatedness of the dream, the problem-solving that hooks me. I notice now, as I'm actively scheming to remember nightly details. Theoretical conundrums get actualized in crazy ways during REM sleep. How do I know that? I don't really but I have a sense there's a different quality to my deep sleep dreaming than to my NREM sleep. I've been massaging techniques to help me access better.

----- 21 June -----

bobbob 5:10 AM

Up early. Or rather, haven't been to bed yet. Started reading and couldn't stop. I decided (you knew I would) to check out the science. Used "dream science" as a search term and got lost in a fascinating sea of new theories. You're to blame for my sleepless ergo *dreamless* night thank you very much.

Here's some very functional stuff I found out.

Dreams as threat simulation. Found a paper by a Finnish researcher that asserts an evolutionary biological function of dreaming is "to simulate threatening events, and to rehearse threat perception and threat avoidance." They cite two contradictory functions (I'm gonna do some cut/paste here):

1) “dreaming has a problem-solving function in an intellectual or cognitive sense: The function of dreaming is to find solutions to (or to facilitate the solving of) intellectual problems.”

2) “holds that the function of dreaming is related to emotional adjustment, not to intellectual problems.”

The conclusion of this research is – dreams probably don’t solve intellectual problems. I don’t really find this thesis convincing. Their premise – that stuff generated by reading and writing is somehow unemotional. (Note the emphasis on emotion rather than affect). This they feel excludes it (the intellectual stuff) from rehearsing threats. Here’s the concluding statement. Make of it what you will. I find it wanting:

The hypothesis advanced in the present paper states that we dream (i.e., the phenomenal level of organization in the brain is realized in its characteristic ways during REM sleep) because in the ancestral environment the constant nocturnal rehearsing of threat perception and threat-avoidance skills increased the probability of successful threat avoidance in real situations, and thus led to increased reproductive success.

Doc attached

arefeh 10:12 AM

Thanks. Get some sleep please.

Btw: Sleep and waking states are NOT binary :o

bobbo 11:43 AM

Running on empty.

I found this dream research at MIT interesting. They’re all about understanding “the link from cellular/subcellular mechanisms of plasticity, to neural ensemble representations and interactions, to learning, memory, behavior, and cognition.” The researchers worked with rat dreams!

Supports the theory that problems are rehearsed in REM cycles. Anyway... here's another summary for your lazy ass:

Dreams seem to help us process emotions by encoding and constructing memories of them. What we see and experience in our dreams might not necessarily be real, but the emotions attached to these experiences certainly are. [!!!] Our dream stories essentially try to strip the emotion out of a certain experience by creating a memory of it. This way, the emotion itself is no longer active. [??] In short, dreams help regulate traffic on that fragile bridge which connects our experiences with our emotions and memories.

----- 22 June -----

arefeh 4:17 PM

Bettene, WildRed, you out there? Thoughts?

Anyway, bobbob, my tendencies as you know, adhere to the poetic fantastical. It's why I'm loving Benjamin's project right now. Found this in *Arcades*. There's more synergy for me in this reading than in the science (truth be told):

Is awakening perhaps the synthesis of dream consciousness (as thesis) and waking consciousness (as antithesis)? Then the moment of awakening would be identical with the "now of recognizability;" in which things put on their true surrealist-face. Thus, in Proust, the importance of staking an entire life on life's supremely dialectical point of rupture: awakening. Proust begins with an evocation of the space of someone waking up. [N₃ a,₃] 464

What do you make of this? Okay, we've not discussed dialectical methods in years so maybe we're in over our heads. Relational techniques are far more enervating than syntheses. Manning teases this out in when she thinks of dreams as "collective fabulations that expose experience to its excess, to the more-than that lies out-

side daily actualisations of existence.” Have you read the Le Guin yet? Fab! Oh, and another thing. Benjamin thought dreams had to be read historically, not as some kind of universal desire.

bettene 4:30 PM

Great discussion. Very busy, apologies. One note. As I understand it, Benjamin’s awakening evoked the collective dream image as a montage of Marxist aspirations and surrealist fantasies. For him, as you suggest Arefeh, the historical unconscious of a past generation is freed as agential consciousness when a later generation rubs the sleep from its eyes. Something like that. The material crust in our morning awakenings is sown from our ancestor’s unconscious desires. Deep. Disturbing. Back to lurking

bobbob 5:10 PM

Wondering how to distinguish between “social” and “collective”? Is there some element of consent in “collective” whereas social is a meaningless default category of multiplicitous societies? What kind of societal scales are we talking about? Curious. Are these terms inclusive of other organisms and things when we’re talking about dreaming states as LeGuin suggests? Currently reading Iman Jackson’s *Becoming Human*. Would love to work through the intricacies of how antiblackness assimilates into animal discourse with my bildung buddies. Can we do that soon?

arefeh 5:15 PM

Let’s start a new channel on this topic. I’m with you. But may I return to Le Guin for a moment? Come back to the question of collective/social dreaming. I quote her:

Frinthian families and small communities are close-knit and generally harmonious, though quarrels and feuds occur. The research group from Mills College that traveled to the Frinthian plane to re-

cord and study oneiric brainwave synchrony agreed that (like the synchronization of menstrual and other cycles within groups on our plane) communal dreaming may serve to strengthen the social bond. They did not speculate as to its psychological or moral effects.

[Aside to Bettene the lurker: You catch the ref to Mills College sonic arts practice! Your peeps!]

I add her take on animals:

As for the animals, no one knows what they make of the human dreams they evidently participate in [...] The Frin say that animals are more sensitive dream-receivers than human beings, and can receive dreams even from people from other planes.

wildred 6:10 PM

And what of hydrangeas, sea grass, slugs, amber? Am following. 😊

bobbob 10:10 PM

On board with this but want to understand the shared threshold between sleeping and waking or is that not really so relevant/resonant as shared REM sleep?

Setting the quotidian scene.

Alarm!

Awakening (??complicated event ??)

Eyelids open, parting the caked dust of sleep.

Limbs heavy yet charged.

Body attending to effect of lightness/darkness in room.

Fleeting memory of nocturnal events.

Emerging anticipation of diurnal to-dos.

Urgency to pee.

If I return to Proust, are we in excess of sensory sensitivity when awakening? What constellations of being are reciprocally affected and affected by these dreamscapes? Where, how, can we place a collective event in this mo-

ment as Benjamin would have it? As Le Guin might further it?

arefeh 11:17 PM

I'm gonna sleep on it

----- 23 June -----

arefeh 6:45 AM

Not an answer to your queries yesterday but I woke up remembering this essay (problem-solving as I was) by Esther Leslie – “Walter Benjamin – The Refugee and Migrant.” Found the bit I dreamt about and paste it here. Note the reference to the (in)visible frequency spectrum we’ve come to know and love through *The Bettys*. Maybe clues lie herein:

Benjamin sees worlds within worlds and times within times. It is a stance that is fundamental to him. In a short piece on Paris for the German *Vogue* in 1929, he explains that ‘**There is an ultra-violet and an infra-red knowledge of this city**’. Every city has this extra-sensory aspect – its literary or photographic analogue that **shadows, brightens, undermines and overwrites** the one of daily inhabitation. **This ultraviolet and infrared knowledge would wish to provide other endings and other beginnings** for Benjamin: no death on the border; a completed manuscript rather than the rumour of one; and a city that might not have spat him out to wander on. And yet, there is still more to discover.

So Walter’s, fragmentary approach to experience, to writing, the undesirability qua impossibility of any whole is touched on here as the quivering borders of the visible spectrum. Other indeterminate endings and beginnings. Felt but not seen. I love this idea!! I wonder if Infrared Betty grappled with this? Or does UVB’s current work with mitochondria in the Martian atmosphere address this?

----- 29 June -----

bobbob 8:20 AM

Woke up with other people's thoughts in my head. Is that a kind of collective awakening? A weak version maybe. Or am I condemned as Echo was by Hera to repeat only? Here's what I woke up saying to myself. I swear this is word for word. I memorized it before setting feet to floor.

The new is a quality independent of use value. It is the origin of semblance, which is inextricably linked to the dream images of the collective.

I don't fully grasp this, but I do find it beautiful somehow. Do you remember when we read Massumi on *semblance*. He defined it as lived abstraction. The way the virtual actually appears and is felt amodally – in excess of experience. I want to better understand dreaming this way

bobbob 10:05 AM

Sorry, this diversion to a science factoid doesn't disqualify my early morning reverie. Forgive me. There's a study that asserts an interweaving of REM and non-REM sleep as the creative engine in nocturnal problem-solving. The study indicates that the hippocampus (memory of events and places) pokes the neocortex (memory of facts and concepts) and that engenders thematically related memories. Just sayin

arefeh 11:10 AM

All this REM/NREM stuff got me thinking about ghosts and haunting. How my dreams are inhabited by the communities of the dead and the not yet. Communities to come. Seems like we got a BIG party goin on in these collective dreams. Peeps and animals, plants, and bacteria, rocks and plastic, dust, dust, dust in all and every phase of re/de/generation. Can you help me think through this

in relation to justice? It's where I want to go. Maybe it's where Benjamin was going. I'd bet on it

bettene 11:58 AM

I wouldn't bet on anything if I were you ;-)

wildred 12:43 PM

I'd bet on Betty 😊

----- 30 June -----

bobbob 9:01 AM

Need to relay last night's dream. Spooky (ha!). Pretty sure it will haunt me. In any case, it's clearly a phantasmagoric image of an earlier generation's ambiguous kinship with a utopian future. Here's what I caught in the waking moment:

The view up there was impressive but fear choked any hint of visual pleasure. Far below, a grey panorama of concrete and drifting crowds surrounded the pole I sat upon. From this vantage point I asked myself "How did those other guys sit for weeks on a swaying pie plate in the sky? How did they sleep? Shit? Pass the time? What was the point? Useful or useless?" The butt-sized disk I was sitting on, over-seeing my immediate world, felt more precarious than the climate emergency, more frightening than economic collapse and a pandemic's exponential fury. I read it was the collective crash of the great depression that killed the spectacular lunacy (and tenacity) of the flagpole sitting craze. Not a media blitz of a crashing single death, a bone crushing fall. The semblance of precarity shifted its axis and rattled the pole.

Methinks I must reconsider catastrophe

MeldMind from bobbob to Arefeh

Baku, Azerbaijan
Dearest Wrinkle,

How are you?

Why haven't you written? I'd hoped to receive a bedazzled snailmail post from you before heading east. A missive resplendent with rose petals, bird stickers, and kind words. Mushy words. (please please) I'm still reeling from our last Slack chat. Haven't cracked the code of REM justice. Working on it 🤔🤔

Thanks for accommodating my little experiment with the latest features on MeldMind™ hi-res image transmission. (the emoji function still sucks). Let me know if your headset decrypts the funky old prints I'm gonna transmit. I refuse to telepath touristic landscape shots. These you can easily imagine or search. The electrode wig is irritating. I'm not convinced. I've got you set to *Receive Only* mode so as not to overload the bandwidth. Hope that's okay with you, this one-way street. Curious how the algorithm deals with punctuation, with periods Or not

It's beautiful here on the Caspian. My cultural compass is so disoriented at the moment. Language makes little

sense in translation or otherwise. I wonder what babble you're gonna pick up? The locals aren't particularly comfortable with my dark skin. I notice they stare ("Look mama a ...")

You will get a kick from the fact I have adjusted to the task of reading 19C European lit this summer though putting cool young Igbo novelists and Black studies on hold for dusty white dudes feels sorely unsettling. I'm not a race traitor. But there you go. I wanna prep for our mountain seances. Maybe weave a quilt of concepts that will wind y'all up.

Anyway, as you know, Bettene suggested we read the epistolary novella that got Goethe going. That Werther thing. "Let's decolonize it," she said to me without guessing the inference itself was, uhm ... off. I forgive her naive enthusiasm. For now. I will wreak material-discursive havoc upon her later. 🤔 Anyway, that literary trifle made the man a rock star of German *Kultur* so it's of certain, if limited, historical interest.

Did you know you pronounce that dude's name same as Goethe? Not the way it looks in English, like "further." Of course you know this but it surprised this little fop. Sometimes I should cut a vein (*see below*) due to my impoverished communicative abilities. Too dramatic? You know I'm such a queen at core. Guess it's why I can very temporarily subscribe to white, nineteenth-century melodrama. And let's face it, it's lovely to focus on love and jealousy, despair and surrender for a while.

Sooooo.... Have you dipped into this little piece of woebe-gone yet? Hope you don't mind me melding some ruminations. I'm plucking quotes for you from a sea of yellow highlights. Get this (I know how you love horses so I especially noted it 🐾):

MARCH 16

A hundred times have I seized a dagger, to give ease to this oppressed heart. Naturalists tell of a noble race of horses 🐎 that instinctively open a vein with their teeth, when heated and exhausted by a long course, in order to breathe more freely. I am often tempted to open a vein, to procure for myself everlasting liberty.

Liberty? Whoa horsey 🐎. I noted this quote because it prefigures Karoline. (FYI of the artsy Brentano circle in Napoleonic Prussia that BV has been going on about. Between us, I think her fixation with the Bettina/Günderode affair is, you know [wink], inspired by the Bettene/WildRed thang). Now you see why I wish I could read German. Anyway, it is clear Goethe's little book planted an idea in her heated brain (that would be the original K.G. – 1790–1806). You still with me? Do parentheticals translate as nonsense?

The “Werther effect” they called it. Desperate love affairs conclude in suicide. The craze even extended to faddish early 19C costume styling – blue tailcoats with yellow waistcoats and trousers for the sensitive young man. That would be me then if I wasn't in chains on a cotton farm somewhere in Alabama. Ha. Not so funny. They called the fad *Werthertracht*. We will look through our prisms to unlock Herr G's analysis of yellow and blue as contrasting lightest lights and darkest darks as irrecconcilable opposites more profound than white and black. Clues lie therein. Oh, and yes, I'm researching Betty Bob. Fellow traveler. TBC.

[Ping from system: focus attention for better transmission]

Yeah, sure. Anyhooo, did you know there was a cult of hippies in the '70s that practiced self-trepanation for a

better experience of psychedelics? Boring skull holes for better circulation. I'm rambling again. Waiting for the attention zap... [tick tock] No? Continuing then with young Werther. Another quote:

AUGUST 22

Now and then the fable of the horse 🐎 recurs to me. Weary of liberty, he suffered himself to be saddled and bridled, and was ridden to death for his pains. I know not what to determine upon. For is not this anxiety for change the consequence of that restless spirit which would pursue me equally in every situation.

Phew. Okay, this bit could lead in all sort of directions. Debating with myself whether or not to go there now. Divert attention to the struggles of faux freedoms and fugitivity. Pretty sure the very white and privileged Goethe had no grasp of the breadth of woes he was playing with here. I'm riled. Didn't expect that sitting here in the shade of a beautiful day.

[Ping from system: focus attention for better transmission]

Alright, I'm gonna lighten up cuz otherwise this missive is going to be a garbled diatribe and the folks behind the app will shit their pants. ALERT to ETHER: Easing up. Chilling. For now. Attending to.

[long inhale, exhale conveyed as 🦋🌴🌈]

Returning to the simpler topic of suicide. 😞 Here's another angle, maybe the most important letter in the book where Werther explains his justification for offing himself to his nemesis Albert, the soon-to-be-husband of his true love Charlotte (remember BV explained she was

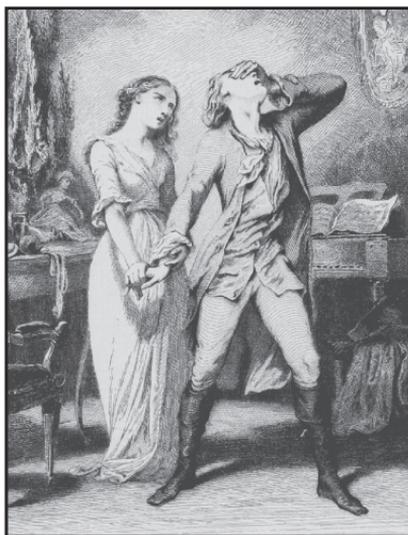
modelled on Bettina Brentano's mother). Here Albert responds to Werther's impassioned justification of despair:

AUGUST 12

"[...] for we were speaking of suicide, which you compare with great actions, when it is impossible to regard it as anything but a weakness. **It is much easier to die than to bear a life of misery with fortitude.**" (my boldface)

Are you gobsmacked by this cliché? Does opening a vein, boring a hole, allow more "freedom" in life, in death? I'm confused. Longing to converse with you.

[transmitting image. hope it renders.]



If you see this, check out Lotte's expression. An exasperated "get over yourself." Back to Albert's conventional point – (and you will honestly tell me please if you find me too self-indulgent) – over the centuries the debate on the efficacy of suicide, of giving up, or giving in, roils, yet

now we have – coming soon to a pharm near you – mass distribution of a cherry flavored euthanasia drink. I call it “Bye-bye.” LOL. You have insisted that one’s death is one’s own even as one’s life is fully convolved with every-fucking-thing (*see all the friends, scholars, and artists we tend towards*). That still ring true? We have borne the brunt of critique cast by our comrades such that our neo-romantic explorations exhibit unnecessary dawdling in libertarian bullshit but we pretty much agree, don’t we, that one deserves the right to call it quits. To claim “we’re good to go now.” Right? Wrong? Is this sentiment effusive of a lack of hope, courage, persistence, love? A friend, long ago passed, once told me he asked Anais Nin what she thought of suicide and she answered without missing a beat, “It’s disbelief in transcendence.” Hmmm, yeah, true dat. A perfectly unsatisfying explanation for our befuddled kind that can easily wrap our senses around moving on but flinch at the promise of an all better beyond.

[trying to send another Werther image. patience please. something miraculously immediate and totally unnecessary about this technology]



I'm rambling again. Still haven't got the hang of coherent epistolary style. Forgive me. Training a craft I'm not convinced I want to become expert in. The EEG electrodes on the Meld wig in no way encourage furthering this practice. Those generic emojis are SO annoying. Do you get anything at all from the way this algorithm generates metaphor? And – yikes – two or three electrodes are beginning to smoke. Gotta sign off. Let's have a serious discussion when we're IRL. For now we can take refuge in evading that seriousness.

Whither Werther?

Yours,

bobbob

ps. And don't forget Elliott Smith. How we looped *Between the Bars* for an hour that chilly April Saturday when we heard the news. He pulled a Werther. Literally.

Elliott Smith – *Between the Bars*

Drink up, baby, stay up all night
With the things you could do, you won't but you might
The potential you'll be that you'll never see
The promises you'll only make

Drink up with me now and forget all about
The pressure of days, do what I say
And I'll make you okay and drive them away
The images stuck in your head

People you've been before that you
Don't want around anymore
That push and shove and won't bend to your will
I'll keep them still

Drink up, baby, look at the stars
I'll kiss you again, between the bars
Where I'm seeing you there, with your hands in the air
Waiting to finally be caught

Drink up...

convolution

DREAMING BB'S
BIOME

Night 910

Billy brought a graphic image tonight and tried to systematically explain the complex cell structure of rods and cones in human eyes. Just as he'd promised. He spoke while looking at the graph, then the tile floor, then the window. He told a story of how special these cells are and how their mitochondria empower them. We asked if the change in our vision represents a microbiological perversion. He said he didn't know yet but suspected "quixotic virality." Quixotic virality! Now we begin to like him more. He has wit.

Night 911

Through our furry cheek (our cheeky fur) the neon glimmer of rattattat still glows as a safelight glows, registering nuance. Its spectral primaries have matured as we've grown into our skin though shades of red are no longer emitted. The colors attenuate a dark-to-light gradation now that, and we know this sounds implausible, the tat monitors not what we feeling but what our feeling feels. How could we know that? We cannot. But we do.

Night 912

Humans we have never met take selfies that are of them and of us. ShazDadaMama, an old ally, keeps a BB archive online and posts the good ones. We smile though our smile doesn't register as such. The corners of our mouth crack to reveal our formidable front teeth. Mit Rat und



Tat zur Seite stehen.

Night 918

We try to avoid reflexive assertions. We anyway find ourselves in a loop of hyper-subjective reflection. Hate this when it verges on a solipstic incompatibility with us. Trying hard to provoke even invent encounters that fracture autobiographic detail but it's shit-fuck difficult with so little stimulation. These endless bile green tile walls. The swish swish swish of robotic whitecoats in disposable foot baggies. The forces set upon our nonnormative body are hegemonic, unlike the tiny critter that instantiated

this metamorphosis, freeloading on a rat's fingernail. Uh huh. Uh huh.

Night 919

We ready to ditch speciation sovereignty altogether. We fully embrace this receptive thing we become. No trace of parasite now.

Night 920

We shouldn't be so critical of the technicians. We know the code. Empathize damn it, we say to ourselves, when they bring the breakfast tray of orange peel and cornmeal crisps to the monster. Most are pleasant enough. Caring even, in a fearful kind of way, yet protective should we rise up and demand something. Like respect. Behind the face shields their eyes dart to scan for visible changes in our hairy epidermis and bone structure. They look for progressive differencing between their human form and our uncategorical morphing while we achingly cleave to what remains similar. Fear of change, fear of death. Inexplicable joy when dancing. We are unable to fully divest of our former countenance. To wholly accept this surreal hybrid. After a lifetime of embracing potentiality in all its vibrant relational becoming we ask now why this anarchic manifestation, this subjective form, is so very difficult to bear? Why weren't we better prepared?

Night 921

Knock knock.
Who's there?
Alfred.

Alfred who?
Alfred, lure of the North.
That supposed to be funny?
No, it's a proposition.

Night 922

Tears rolling down these cheeks mats the hair in dark streaks. When we cry alone, we am I at inflection point. A writhing nexus of feelings felt. When tears roll from too much laughing we are more than we. A condescence of actual occasion. We perceiving how what we can't feel affects all feeling.

Night 923

We make our way not towards anywhere. Avoiding the trope of the rat in the cage. At least we are not in danger of "wheel tail," that cruel deformity of excess circular exercise. Before monthly excision, ours grows queerly straight.

Night 924

A mild satisfaction is felt in scaling 90 degrees of vertical. We are currently lifting our weight on the cargo net even though there is no advantage in bragging about it. Lack of upper body strength seems no longer a negating factor. And we feel so spry. We will share this info with the assiduous notetaking machine that is Billy. He logs the data of life juice and translates it to 1's and 0's.

Night 925

Billy prepared a questionnaire to assess our current state of modal perception. We answered, according to his suppositions, that our auditory, olfactory, and proprioceptive senses are exaggerated beyond beyond. We explain that perhaps these expanded percepts move us from autopoietic engagement to sympoietic attunement with non-inhuman goings-on. A perverse ontogenetic swerving. A symbiogenetic confabulation. His pronounced crows feet visibly crinkle at this remark. He wants specifics. We confide that ocular, gustatory, and haptic sensation have diminished during alteration. However, we try to tell him, we insist that we make little sense of sensory distinction when the night grows dark. Sensation swells and spills in extravagant amodal glut. This is what we want to tell but have no words for. "Unpack your experience please," he demands, and we try with little success and zero satisfaction to precisely delimit.

- **Sounds.** Audio frequencies below 32Hz soothe and mask the pain of the always piercing 20,000Hz+ waves that cut like a thousand lightning bolts to the brain. Always on cacophony must be assiduously filtered. Language fragments, melodious, clicking, guttural, originate between the ears and flood, boggle and convolute auditory sensation like dog whistles do. If we think about it, as he insists, we wonder if there is any sound unperceived in our case.
- **Smells.** Regional cookpots waft contrast between sweet with spice unhappily. Yet all scents alluring from barf to bouquet.
- **Sight.** Blurred panorama of grey-green except when surprisingly sharp.
- **Tasting.** Modified. All matter good enough.
- **Touch.** Scraping. (Pet me please. Please.)
- **Proprioception.** Infantile while expansively diagonal. From all fours as baby wondrously worlding, then bipedally constrained though faster.

Night 926

Passage: There is a tradition that is catastrophe. [N9,4]

Night 927

The average life in captivity of a *rattus norvegicus* is 1460 nights. 121 full moons. The average life span of a European white woman is 29,900 days of which we have already lived 22,000+. How many might we expect to have left – on average? Given our present circumstances.

We ache. We nod off with morphine. How do we do? Now, with tortured claws and certain infamy we am Kafka's Josephine! Mouse Singer extraordinaire. Every evening we pipe out loud the earworm chant we heard BØB sing so very, very finely. As with caring for cows and medicinal plants its tune brings good fortune.

Jiwa-jiwa. Jiwa-jiwa. Jiwa-jiwa. Shiiin,
Jiwa-jiwa. Jiwa-jiwa. Jiwa-jiwa. Shiiin.
Jiwa-jiwa. Jiwa-jiwa. Jiwa-jiwa. Shiiin,
Jiwa-jiwa. Jiwa-jiwa. Jiwa-jiwa. Shiiin.

Night 928

The tenure of researchers he and she is prolonged. No promotions given but solid pats on backs received. This fine with us as we are especially fond of her. We hope for extended durations with her as she inspires. They visit every other evening. For the rest we are left with staff that timidly come and go. We are, mostly, left to our own meanderings. We find our hermeneutic abilities palpably flawed.

Night 930

We congratulated her on the extension of her project through three more full moons. She thanked us and alluded to the fact that it meant three more tail clippings. We admired her hijab with the grey floral pattern. She corrected us. She said the flowers were red. We still forget we are blind to the blood color. We now must thrive on astonishing highlights with bluish tints. All this explained from homo sapiens science in the rod/cone/mitochondria lecture. Billy has not thought to ask us to verify this thesis by the way. He so smug in his anthro-supremacy. He learns much and nothing at all.

Night 931

Prick prick prick.

Night 933

Sometimes charming he is mostly creepy. We most definitely prefer to have her around. She reads to us the tales of Šahrāzād. Survival storytelling she says. Serial cliffhangers for lovers, poets, misogynist bingers and feminist historians. We are captivated. We am verklempt. We consider this literary technique for ourselves, already on a nightly path, though we lack narrative flair. Why do I keep returning to Benjamin? Why, when there are so many other, better, storytellers?

Night 934

Passage: Description of history: Destroy – miss out. Important times – this threat causes stress. [N10,2q]

Night 935

Rumors circulate and stick as earworms do. Anxious making. Precarity looms insufferably in thick air.

Night 937

In the whisper of a confidante, she confirmed what we heard through the walls. She was shaking. The head dude, the Harvard asshole, is considering extremely intrusive experimentation. They are losing patience to observe our "decline" in real time. They will cleverly speed our processes to make a peer-reviewed splash in Nature journal. He ordered a case of Dom Perignon to seal the deal. She relays this information with not dry eyes.

Night 943

Tonight we laugh. We high. Happy for no reason. And yes, tears mat our face hair slick. We sing boisterously as only animals we love can hear us.

Night 945

Full moon. Again with the snip snip snip. Why do we bother now? Maybe best to let it grow long and snakey one more time. Vanity, of all things, rears its diva head and we are ashamed of butt bandage. No ignominy is conjured however for the realization of our beauty. For this we will make a banner. We will sing.

Night 946

Billy carries vile vials in his pockets. He will be the one to take us in his jaws and wring blood from our neck. He for whom we are the promised event. He is buckling, timid. Clairvoyant, we smell futures coming. Smell the warm cinders of erasure. The musky fear-driven heroics. He, Billy, will label his prescriptive actions necessary for his kind. He will write that down in a memoir somewhere.

Night 947

Beset by a chain of anomalies.
What now?

Night 953

Just before dawn when the old guard leaves, we exercise armwings. We do the hummingbird hover. Glorious. We calculate, roughly, that we expend fifty beats per second. We reckon we can run faster if escape is an option but this, this, is poetic fancy! This is the stuff religions are made of.

Night 954

Tonight, as she reads the Arabian Nights to us, she skips the stupid patriarchal stuff, improvising a paragraph on lush plant-life in a fictive regional setting. And she riffs oh so beautifully on the enchanted horse. The mechanical Einstein-Rosen machine. Stride the saddle, turn the key and you are anywhere you wish to be. The Prince of Persia used this horse to his marital advantage. Boring.

We would ride this horse in passage, dancing the loop-dee-loop line of the outside inside.

As she reads to me with eyes buried in printed words she does not yet know that we grow this magical potential. We haven't yet told her that we glide above the floor even though we're temporarily restrained by walls and ceiling.

Night 959

We think about her horse stories as we exercise our arm-wings. We consider the passage.

Night 960

The smell of orange mixed with toxic ethanol wafts so strong through the vents we feel nauseated.

Night 962

It is the distant memory of white chocolate, nibbled through its packaging, that turns our spit to drool.

Night 963

Tonight we prefer to eat off the floor, the plastic plate too cultivated. We vaguely remember green asparagus on white porcelain but dream now of maize meal scattered on leaves of grass.

Night 969

The scent from their snacks is overpowering. CheezWhizz stinks like durian fruit. We feel sick. Stomach upset all the time. Used to be not this way with fast food. Used to love it. Smother it with juicy saliva going down. Now want slow in everything to thwart their plans. To better our bodily constitution. Slow mastication. Slow breathing. Slow satisfying peeing.

Night 970

What do they possibly conjecture about our worlding ways? They use ineffective devices and measurements. Rely on quantitative data. They ask the wrong questions if they ask at all.

Night 971

When he looks for a catheter vein he shaves fur in landing strips. We wish she would attend to this task but she is skilled in poking intransitive verbs, incising conjunctions and extracting chlorophyll from cyanobacteria. We wonder now what liquid comes dripping from the infusion bag? He says it's nutrient as we find food distasteful the past weeks. He says they want to help us, sustain us, but he is a trickster of course. He carries poison in his pockets.

Night 975

Rattat is stuck on shades of green. Is our cheek broken? We have not yet understood how this color translates to emotions. It must be broken. Or? Oh dear.

Night 976

As we know out there the moon shines fully bright. Billy does not cut our tail tonight. Just as well. We can no longer sit still for long in any case.

Night 980

We have limited access to excess.

Our library grows however. In this way they are kind. Reading Glissant helps us like caffeine used to. As the walls close in we take refuge, as we do, in passages, though we bumped our head on the ceiling early this morning, rehearsing flight patterns. Édouard commented in conversation:

I think that's what a border is. It should enable us to multiply and savor the different flavors of the world; it shouldn't be a wall that prevents us from entering or leaving. Consequently, what we need today is not to abolish borders but to provide them with another meaning, that of a **passage**, a communication – **a Relation**, in other words. (our boldface)

Night 982

Hope passed over their heads like a star that falls from the sky. – Walter Benjamin, Goethe's Elective Affinities

Night 984

The four walls sick us. We need air not from vents. We need green not from piss, not from pulverized peas. The rope, the wheel, are torture. Flying feels good when we can but there is lack of soaring. Flying/falling, bounda-

ries/passage. We are ready so ready now that we cannot.
(weeping a little)

Night 988

Strapped to hospital bed in upright position, catheter drip drip drip. Billy stands in corner near door. Watching. He more patient than we patient.

Night 991

Sniffing out a forgotten scalpel somewhere. Would rather do this deed than trust their methods. Maybe she can help?

Night 992

She will not help cut veins. She wept while saying so. Our incisors not sharp enough for bleeding so we wait and know not what for to continue.

We can barely summon strength to ttt a p, ta p, t a p dispiarate th o u ghts.

[another apparatus] We speak slow and low now. She gave a tiny microphone for direct voice to text. For the archives she said. She can lower pitch more, like they do for birds, for human comprehension.

Night 998

Drip.

Night 999

Drip.

Night 1000

[with apparatus] She is nowhere here. They let her go tonight, fearful she might undo their doings. Šahrāzād is exhausted. Weary of speculating a this for a that. We have loved her.

Night 1001

[with apparatus] Fly us to the moon that sparkles brilliantly tonight. Five days until fullest and round. Abstaining from speciated fantasies we ride enchanted horse without irony. Without shame. We have feeling of light, of weightless, of dark. Portend is thick like a shroud.

We felt flying in hover above selves briefly. Looking down on strange bodies in all manner of motion. Do they euthanize now without consent? Do they murder us or liberate us when they shave us naked and poke a vein? Will they finally pierce our heart with a long prick or am we already differently mattering? We feel ourselves elsewhere while here heavy. Drawn elssseewheere while sttlllllllllllllllll sooomewhereee n e a r.

Can't no more voice text noowwow qq23anypd/fncie re nk=more xxx as we shhhhhiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii

act 3

RATSATHOMEWITHUS

A Sound
Elephant beaten with candy and little pops and chews
all bolts and reckless reckless rats, this is this.

– Gertrude Stein, *Tender Buttons*

*[I]nterspecies entanglements that once seemed the stuff of fables
are now materials for serious discussion among biologists and
ecologists, who show how life requires the interplay of many kinds
of beings. Humans cannot survive by stomping on all the others.*

– Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the
World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*

*I noticed without comprehending it, without being able to
analyse the dust-of-a-butterfly-wing substance of his pres-
ence, is it presence is it absence is absence not absence but
feeble presence, a light – too light – presence of my friend.*

– Hélène Cixous, *Hyperdream*

Reckless Reckless Rats

On day two, Bettene went to work. Giovanni and Camilla watched with great amusement as they consumed their daily coffee in robust conversation with Roberta. “Lei è un’idiota? Un temerario? Un artista?” they asked. Roberta simply smiled.

At around 7,451 she almost lost count. Why she even toyed with the idea of enumerating the citations in Café Arcadia is beyond her now dysfunctional comprehension. A musician, sure, she counted time, but she had never before been a quantifier. Mechanical counter in hand, she promised A and b that she’d attempt to calculate the “Rats” in the house. That’s what Roberta called the collected assemblage of counsel dripping from every planar surface in the spectrum though she pronounced in a distinctive German accent. Over there on the plane of blue-violet, over here on the plane of yellow-orange were thousands, of fragments. Some profound, many sexual, some propagandist, most mysterious, indeterminable.

For days Bettene was busy. Up and down and up and down the wobbly ladder. bobbob helped with the counting project from time to time as did Arefeh as she was as enchanted as Bettene by the sheer audacity of Roberta’s project. “This is this” Bettene would utter as she climbed,

squatted, reached, read, and ticked. Arefeh tended towards a wistful, associative "this is that is this." bobbob refused to participate in ontological specification. Roberta, stolid in her post behind the bar, would nod with pleasure at each sonic acknowledgement. Her ears were well practiced at discerning muffled whoops and sighs in this place where sounding reflections are largely absorbed by the plethora of incised words. Were it not for the relatively smooth surface of the magenta glass panes and the variable surface of the green wall, there would be little to hear at all.

Occasionally, as she stretched too far from too high to reach the textual sparkle of an errant Rat, Bettene flashed on the fate of Infrared Betty. She steadied her balance on the ladder step. Her destiny (and Bettene believed not one wit in kismet), her relation to flying and falling was otherwise. If anything, she, like Roberta down there, identified with Klee's prophetic angel, with the propelled horizontality of sideways, in never falling from the grace of gravity, from the lessons of history. This, as mektoub would have it, is not a kinder "fate." It's a burden, a response-ability she would suffer as a necessary practice. She wondered momentarily how Roberta suffered hers? Longevity had proved the café owner steely, if bent. The weight of words, the chasm of color, pushed her shoulders forward.

*

"Hey up there, you got anything interesting or vaguely particular to whet my insatiable cravings?" Arefeh yelled up to Bettene as she carefully considered an inscription near the ceiling's corniced molding. Today she was navigating upper regions of the orange wall. "They're all interesting dummie," Bettene shouted. "Wanna hear this one?" "Of course," Arefeh yelled back. Though subsumed

in the dog-eared pages of a dystopian Octavia Butler novel, Roberta's right earlobe twitched.

"Ahem, (clicking counter) Rat number 7,452." She read loudly in an exaggerated tone so to be heard:

"The informal outside is a battle, a turbulent, stormy zone where particular points and relations between these points are tossed about. Strata merely collected and solidified the visual dust and sonic echo of the battle raging above them." – Gilles

A beat or two of quiet transpired. They each in their own way considered the meaning of this passage in this place. Both understood they were straddling strata. The familiarity of this obscure philosophical quotation in this strange place, in this Rat's nest of the superficial and the insightful, shocked their thought. Arefeh recalled bob-bob's stunned reaction to finding Okigbo lyrics on the wall a few days ago. Breaking the silence, Arefeh giggled then shouted "Does that one qualify as speculation?" Bettene laughed yelling back, "I'm coming down to earth for coffee." "I'm collecting dust," Arefeh yelled back at her. Roberta began grinding the beans as Bettene made her way, step by precarious step, to the relative safety of the horizontal.

Spotting another inscription three steps beneath the Deleuze quote she stopped, clicked – 7,453 – and read, projecting her speaking voice:

"She missed the roses. They had left an empty space inside her. Remove an object from a clean table and by the cleaner patch that remains you see that there was dust all around it. The roses had left a patch without dust and without sleep inside her." – Claire Lispector

"Thanks for that," Arefeh yelled up to Bettene as she loosened her grip on the ladder to jot down the quote in the

ubiquitous blue ledger she carried everywhere. "I love Lispector!" she added. "And you know I love dust."

On her way down the teetering steps Bettene noticed another etching. Click 7,454. Scratched in a twenty centimeter swathe, cut deep in the orange stone she read:

"But for a ukulele" – Blue Betty

Earwormholes

WildRed vowed to never reenter Arcadia. Her first and only experience had so disturbed her equilibrium that she knew to stay clear, block her welling curiosity. It pained her either way. She was attracted to that interior as to no other. It was a fatal attraction, zapping all her reasonable competencies, sending tremors through her body.

She remembers that first visit well. On holiday, she'd walked the trail from Lavenone to this place of rumor, foraging assenzio buds for menstrual cramps along the rugged path. Colorful tales had been told to her family of a strange café of which no image exists. No black-and-white wide-angle shot, no fading polaroid, no insta selfie, and yet astonishing stories abound of its convoluted affect. As she made her way through the deserted main street to the café entrance, she encountered no other bi-ped. She experienced a mild shock crossing the threshold that first time. Inside, she swayed in the middle space, a pale, spring green child fixating on an evergreen wall. Her entire young life, she had never understood her epidermal coloring. Was she an additive hue of RGB? A subtractive complementary of pinkish red? A mixture of fringe blue and bleached yellow, a symbol of earthly ecological well-being? A race, a construction, an animal, an enigma? Certainly, in this place, she felt fragile, unsure.

It was too much for her that day. The colors, the knotted linguistic wall carpet that dampened all sound. Teetering, she left without ordering tea, without greeting the old barista. That was then.

*

Having gathered edibles for the dinner salad, she was anxious not to miss the reading session this afternoon at #12. Her habit was to shortcut the amble through the village and descend via the steep path she'd discovered in the rear of the building. Her GenTel feet allowed this sort of prowess and it excited her.

Today however, she decided to take the road route and pass by the café. Perhaps the Grittas would be sitting at the outside table. She was tempting fate, and she knew it, the lure of the open door to Arcadia exerted a strong pull on her sensibilities. She approached the table, empty save for a single cup that Roberta had not yet bussed. The silence of the afternoon, the lack of wind, the hint of birdsong massaged her as solace might. She decided to timorously test if the café would be more hospitable to her nervous system this time. She was not a coward after all but an adventurer, she told herself more than once.

She passed through the open door.

Vertigo hit her immediately and hard. The unique cocktail of colors and many, many words upset her balance. A barrage of distilled passages silently shouted advice and warning. Words flying. Words entrenched, adamant. Words of trauma, of uprising, of gods, of beauty, of despair. Poignant words, stupid words, moral words. Words of friendship, words of love, words of hatred. Venerated stanzas, scatological jokes, twitter disses, sliding DMs. Threats, ablutions, invocations, farewells.

Moving toward the organic matter of the green wall for support, the more stable she felt, the more able to breathe as the wall itself respired photosynthesized oxygen. Here words were surreptitiously nestled, growing into their hosts as parasites do. Entangled, rhizomatic phrases and paragraphs in paratactical array. WildRed hallucinated as she inhaled the wet scent, putting her cheek to a damp tree root. She felt a tingle, a vibration of unstable frequency. Unlike Bettene's use of electronic sensing devices for discerning sounds and rhythms in things organic, WildRed was herself a delicate transducer. She could not be sure if this was an acquired skill from years of practice or another GenTel anomaly. A side effect of her parental unit's design choices. Perhaps this was the witch in her. Perhaps not.

Moving her head slowly, slightly, she placed her ear to the root to hear/feel the vibrations. She'd done this often in the woods, listening to the hubbub of a dense and sprawling community of connected organisms. The sound of city life but different. She'd heard the screams of Stone pines on the borders of deforestation projects. Heard fungi and cyanobacteria sexing, conceiving rootless lichen babies. Heard tonalities of lightness and darkness, sun and shade as meridian pulsation through an extended body. Heard the calming pings of oxygen leaving leaves more distinctly than through any photoacoustic spectrometry device Bettene had her listen to. Heard the hum of *a* life alive.

Now, in this complex mix, she heard a waaaaa wailing. A slow, steady cascade of repetitions. "Waaaaa." "Waaaaa." Not quite a lamentation, not quite a baby's cry, not quite a sheep's invocation. These were followed by a low "shh-hhh shhhhh" whooshing to a coda'd eye-eye-eye. She breathed in the melody with the energized oxygen of the flora around her. Four meters above her head, the vi-

brations of a delicate inscription incised into the massive root of a beechwood tree were felt as they coursed through the ecosystem.

WildRed repeated the chant. Though an insecure vocalist, the imperfect quality of her singing mattered. Her intonations, semitone variants of what she was hearing in the root system, produced unexpected secondary vibrations, a pulsating thrall that filled her ear and slowly mushroomed to fill the entire café, enchanting its non-reverberant architecture.

Roberta, captive to a true crime novel in her reclusive spot behind bar, took notice of the ruckus and looked towards the green wall. As the sonic vibrations amplified she grabbed the chiseled armrest of her chair for support. A wild spinning, a vortex, lifted chairs, tables, and bottles into its tornado wake. All placeholders of stability were dislodged. She'd been waiting decades for this. She long told herself a portal would open. She was ready. She'd always been ready.

A dabbler in the efficacies of messianic time, Roberta clung to her spot behind the heavy mahogany bar, closed her eyes and recited a Hail Mary in Hebrew. Inshallah. She had a knack for covering all her bases as street wisdom goes. Why not? Why not this quantum fold of no time/all time/all at once? Why not a wormhole or a sinkhole or a holy hole or a holey whole or a...? Why the fuck not?

When the pink noise quelled and the tornado-cloud dissipated, every loose, unfettered object was back in its place. The tables with their chairs, the bottles behind the bar, the dust on the shelves. Only that strange green child from the group at #12 was absent. Had she managed to crawl out of the tempest and through the door? Roberta understood this event had everything to do with WildRed's

opaque agency. Had she saved herself? Empowered herself?

It took time for Roberta to move from squat to standing in the best of conditions. Her bones ached no matter what position she assumed and transitioning between different modes of moving was painful. This is the part about aging everyone warns about and none believes until it sits in your own body. It took many ticks of clock-time to hobble from the bar to the door and up the cobblestone path to #12. She must let the others know there's been an unprecedented occurrence.

Roberta found Bettene, Arefeh, and bobbob in fervent discussion around the massive table in the center of the main room. Many books and papers, lovingly trudged up and down hills with toiletries and clothing, were strewn around the room. The six homework books plus a copy of Benjamin's *Selected Writings* were stacked in the middle of the table alongside *Remarks on Color*, *99 Theses on the Revaluation of Value*, and *Bloodchild*. Another sizable mound of colorfully highlighted PDF printouts was situated on an extra stool. Four cups of tea had been set. WildRed was not in the room. The Grittas held their astonishment at Roberta's sudden appearance in check. She looked even older and much more vulnerable in the harsh light of day, un-diffused by the muted spectrum of the café walls.

"Are you expecting the green one?" Roberta breathlessly asked the group. "She probably lost track of time inspecting an unknown species of wildflower," Arefeh teased. "We brewed her favorite tea leaves," bobbob answered. "You're welcome to join us course. We'd love your expertise on these issues, especially the Benjamin, but we were a little reluctant to ask you here, to #12. Away from the café and all."

"I, I, uhm I," she hesitated then blurted. "There's been an occurrence. An actual occasion of some singularity just now, or uhm, just then, or, aah, it will have been happening and I don't know how to say when but where it was in the café and whom it was, WildRed singing and oh my, a humungous washing machine, a big squall inside a rainbow and humming." She collapsed onto a pine stump seat at the far end of the table, exasperated at her lack of linguistic acuity under duress.

Bettene poured her a cup of tea in WildRed's cup suggesting she catch her breath. This she did, taking what the Grittas felt, in their growing anxiety to understand what had occurred, an inordinate amount of time. 4'33" to be exact, of highly charged silence.

Roberta settled, relating the events as she understood them. The singing, the shaking, the whirlpool/vortex effect. WildRed on the green wall, WildRed disappeared. It was difficult for the Grittas to digest Roberta's telling of the tale as she continued to flounder, stuttering, hiccupping. Interrupting Roberta's efforts, they decided they would go to the café immediately to get a grip. To absorb, to listen and then to look for WildRed. To get her spin on the spin cycle.

*

Once inside the café, the group found nothing irregular. Everything was seemingly in its place as the late afternoon sun streamed in through the clear and magenta-tinted glass panes. Bettene's ladder stood steady against the blue-violet wall. Giovanni's morning coffee cup was resting on the table nearest the bar, lightly caked with dried milk. *The anechoic quiet was in full dissonance with an-archivic excess. They all stood still, jiwa'd, at the beginning of an understanding that would nonetheless elude them.*

As usual, bobbob was first to break the silence. "WildRed, you here?" they called out. "WildRed?" Arefeh shouted, peeking into the squat pan toilet. "No one there." "She probably left during the disturbance," Bettene offered. "Left how?" Roberta muttered to herself.

"I read once about these vortexes that spin when ley lines cross," bobbob offered. "Could be something like that. I mean, you're certainly antagonizing the electromagnetic spectrum here aren't you Roberta? Going all contra-Newton," Arefeh said trying for some levity in her inquiry. "Pigeons on the grass alas," Roberta answered obscurely. Arefeh withdrew from asking further questions.

Their task in any case was to find WildRed. The cliffside forest above the café was where they should first look. If anywhere, WildRed would be in the arms of green.

Still More Roberta Transcripts

Cassette recording #10

[mic noise, test] Gertrude has been my literary inspiration for as long as I can recall. Among others, of course, but she rules. If you want to see me angry just try starting up that nazi sympathizer discussion. I will crush you with the weight of prose so unfettered it will extinguish any inkling of fascistic tendency. Porca miseria, she and Alice were Jews in occupied France. Sure, they had help surviving but, well, I don't know, I somehow can't pass blame on them though I often wonder what Walter would have thought about the whole Vichy affair. Basically, I don't spend much time on the situated politics of Gertrude and Alice. I'm into the poetry and their crazy collaborative working together. I copy her, Gertrude, copy her style a bit now, her mode of dress that is. I think of it as practical, not stodgy. I like to think I share a pronounced proboscis and preference for close-cropped white hair with her. The fedora is my own invention as are my prominent eyebrows. I like brushing them perpendicular to my forehead. [recorder off]

Voice recording #6

[test, test, test] Okay. Difficult topic today. [clears throat] Someone wanted to know my pronouns. They were being polite I suppose but the question registers on the Rich-

ter for me. Maybe I've been transitioning for decades or maybe I'm just stuck. Stuck in the ancient terminology of androgynous code switching and don't know how to come up and breathe the freshly liberated air. I admit I'm hesitant to speak of my gendered self for fear of telling it wrong because to be honest I don't understand what cis means? Who or what assigned me female in my mother's womb or who said what when I popped out of the forceps into a nurse's arms? I mean is it the double X factor? The cunt or the no willie? I was okay with not calling a side for eight decades but now my brittle bones are confused, suspect the frame that carries them. And not only that, I slip up and use terms I grew up with like transsexual and androgynous which I know I'm now not supposed to say but do say sometimes when I am not saying because it's there in my synaptic patterning still. Nonbinary works for me but is that at all compatible with bigender or demigender or genderqueer or agender or pangender or genderfluid or genderneutral? I am more confused now than I was when I had no words for my feelings. Fuck me. [exhale] So, yeah, I grew up in an era before there were names for the un-nameable. Sometime long ago in the dark ages I overheard the word lesbian whispered and looked it up in the library. I'm telling this all wrong probably. No, *non è ancora la frase giusta*. [deep inhale, exhale] I'll just stick with NB for now or is it enby? Will see if I can learn to be more precise, or if I fucking need to be more precise before becoming particulate dust and blow the fuck away. [Pffffff]

Cassette #22

[mic noise] Wings spread, the ruin and decay of progress before me, I have taken a peek at the light behind my back and I ain't tellin' no one nothin'.



Escape Holes

Once upon a time, WildRed discovered a weathered book with a ragged black and white cover in her father's library. A gift from a college friend to commemorate a long-ago graduation, a scribble on the title page read: "To Gregor, At the beginning." WildRed, fascinated by the title, wondered why her father had kept this novella from her. Was the story one of ominous trepidation, horror, bad luck? Was its very existence serendipity or fate? Like Bettene, she didn't believe in fate. Magic maybe? Yes, magic was possible.

She stole the book from its shelf and read it with great expectation. The prose was at times smart, affective, but her concentration drifted when the plot shifted towards the political rhetoric of the main protagonist Olivero, a South American dictator who faked his suicide. It's the Green Child's return to the sinewy roots of her underground world that caught WildRed's attention. The passage to another dimension through a sandy escape hole situated somewhere in England.

The stream flowed into this pool, and seemingly round it, in a complete circle. But the middle of the pool was very still, no vortex [...] They were now near the point at which the current, having described its circle, met itself. A bed of clear silvery sand stretched before them

[...] The sand, though it seemed solid, was vibrating, each grain dancing like a silver ball on a stretched drum. The water, thought Olivero, must sink here.

And as he thought this he saw the naiad figure of Sally step forward. She walked swiftly through the water onto the silvery sand. She was sinking, and as she sank she turned towards Olivero. — Herbert Read, *The Green Child*

Memory of this passage tickled her brain as she felt the cells in her body rearranging. She clung to it with a mixture of excitement and dread. "Jiwaaaaaa-jiwaaaa." She sang as a Buddhist might, locked in synchrony with other dry, non-reverberant, non-in-human wailing voices. She looked towards the nook where Roberta read to extend her hand as Sally had done towards Olivero. But Roberta's head was bowed as she clung for dear life to the edge of the bar, a feather in a whirlwind. She did not see, did not apprehend the minor gesture, the invitation.

*

In fact and in feeling, the event occurred with no perceptible linearity. Kairos canceled Chronos and accompanied her re-materializing body to a wooded landing site. The smell of green, of pine resin, damp earth, wild jasmine, moist chanterelles, and sweet-after-death (*Achlys triphylla*) overwhelmed her nostrils. The ambient sounds of leafy rustling, of trickling water, of cicadas and goldfinch relaxed her throbbing pulse. She kept her eyes closed, drinking in the sensations of echo and resilience before slowly (jiwa-jiwa) and with some reluctance, opening them.



Seated comfortably on a luxurious bed of *Grimmia laevigata*, WildRed found herself in a familiar landscape with an unfamiliar, bizarre companion. Floating to her right side was a creature of otherworldly amalgamation. Monstrous yet unafrightening. Their form, she conjectured, was of the order primate-rodentia or something absurdly hybrid like that. She knew of this creature. Had sent a heavy copy of *The Arcades Project* to their cell in the research center when she first heard SDM's callout for BB care. Continuously annoyed by speciesism and the hierarchical classifications of Western biology, WildRed preferred what science alludes to as folk taxonomy but she had no reference for what she now witnessed. Was this an extreme artifact of GenTel tampering? Of natural selection? Could it be a fictive emanation of collective dreaming? "How does this matter?" she whispered to herself as she watched the creature flit and hover.

WildRed BB Bhoomika Berry shiined.

The creature's body was covered with a light blanket of grey-brown fur. The long claws of their finger and toenails were painted Apple Red. Cute. Sexy. As they float-

ed on tiny yet apparently vigorous blue forearm wings, WildRed looked past the enlarged snout, and contrary to conventional wisdom, directly into their eyes.

BB shiined.

How these two were here and there, somewhere, nowhere and potentially everywhere, was a fact they would have to come to terms with. Before later. Whether or not they could communicate beyond the simple melody of the earwormhole was not yet evident but it somehow didn't interest either of them, so engrossed were they in the event of their proximity. The gentle hum of BB's wings was absorbed into the wooded ambience. Now that resonance had returned, absent the anechoic empty of the café, the soundtrack was remarkable for its ordinariness. The visuals were however, fantastically outrageous.

With no time and all the time in the world, WildRed considered the role of observation in quantum mechanics. Considered that perhaps her watching located the creature here and now with her, relieving momentarily, the always already state of superposition, of quantum entanglement. The variegated root system threaded through Roberta's café must be an apparatus of passage, with a little help from an unusual constellation of conditions of potentiality. She demurred for a second as she absorbed the event's persistence. Was she on some kind of multi-dimensional journey? Or was this simply a death trip, a wake, or perhaps a reincarnation?

While BB's hairy cheek blinked a fluorescent green, WildRed mused on theories of autonomy and togetherness. On archipelagic opacities and sympoietic empowerment. On me's and we's, on mine and yours. Was she in the midst of a set of unfolding clues or was this an "aha" occasion? The slow shiining kind of knowing that the nose knows.

An onto-epistemological event that could, would, maybe, be of some use or of no use at all. And what difference would that make in an aromatic soup of differentials that matter and come to matter? This is, she thought, a rather pleasant, tasty, conundrum.

BB's cheek continued to blurt a green evanescence to the surrounding shades and hues of that inexplicable color.



Another Explanation of Goethe's Green

Yet this is not in fact a problem. The colors of the inverted spectrum (blue, magenta and yellow) are the exact complements of those seen in the ordinary spectrum (orange, green and violet). And this is so because the white strip on a black ground and the black strip on a white ground are themselves complementary in a geometrical sense: they exactly reverse the spatial roles of light and darkness. But, being geometrical reversals of one another, green and magenta must necessarily involve opposite forms of mixing. **Green emerges by subtraction of wavelengths as the light of the white strip gives way to darkness, while magenta emerges by addition of wavelengths as the darkness of the black strip gives way to light [...]** Though he could not explain the relationship of green and magenta, he was right to trust his intuitive perception of the circle's structure: **its six colors do indeed relate to one another in a manner that is remarkable for its economy and its beauty.** — Pamela Currie, "Goethe's Green: The 'Mixed' Boundary Colors in *Zur Farbenlehre*" (emphasis Bettene)

Let Sleeping Dogs Lie

“WildRed!” bobbob called. “WildRed!” Arefeh shouted.
“WildRed where are you?” Bettene whispered to herself.

They tramped along an overgrown path in a wooded area they knew she frequented. Lush with ferns and cleavers, gossamer dragonflies, and iridescent beetles they searched for traces of her being there. Bettene followed the glimmering slime trail of the hermaphrodite leopard slug transfixed by its lucent discharge. Arefeh and bobbob choose to follow a path of lightly trampled fern.

Up ahead, sunlight streamed through a hole in the forest canopy, blitzing bright on societies of worms and mites. Bettene walked off trail into the bramble towards the place where white light was all color, where deep shadows brew contrast. Distracted, even against the force of her will to reach the opening as fast as possible, she thought about the tick in Uexküll’s *Umwelt* and inadvertently about Lyme disease. She caught herself in that thought, embarrassed for the diversion to her own safety when WildRed’s was her main concern. And after all, she had her tick tweezers handy.

Tripping over a carpet of pine cones and acorn droppings, she peeked through the brush onto the glade. Startled,

she froze. Her body playing *Simon Says* in a minefield while her brain's neural patterns collided at high speed. Synaptic train wrecks in cerebellum ravines. She's not at her best when terrified, when her vagus nerve is firing in all organs.

Though she and WildRed had worked their way through explanatory texts on quantum field theory for laypeople, she'd read little about wormholes. Most of her knowledge came from *Star Trek* episodes. These vacant passageways from here to there were bumpy rides. You needed a space-mobile she thought, to access the power of these gravitational tunnels connecting disparate parallel worlds. Otherwise one was clearly in the realm of cliché science fiction with time portals hiding in plain sight. A Tardis, a DeLorean, a Time Turner, a WABAC machine. Could a proper wormhole nestled between two locations appear in anysace whatsoever? A puncture in the fabric of spacetime? Could this be classified as a dialectical space between? No, she thought not and anyway, she disliked playing with dualisms. The hyphenated passage of a relation? Yes, better. Yet she longed to wrap life around the abstraction.

Disturbed this time by her not-knowing and visibly rattled, she calmed her alarm by whistling which is, ironically, a sound she finds unnerving. Shifting frequencies forced through a stream of wet mouth contortions always unhinged her. Now, her inept attempt at forcing shrill tones of hot air through her puckered lips and curled tongue did nothing to ease her distress, did nothing to slow the crashing impact of her wayward neurons. She wished the Grittas had heeded bobbob's warning during that first day in Arcadia. Too much had occurred in the following days to rejig the score. Her initial enthusiasm felt irresponsible to her now as she absorbed the unimaginable from the fringed shelter of leafy fauna. The

Arefeh and bobbob search party had wandered in the opposite direction. Given both their penchants for detail, she didn't expect to see them any time soon. She was the lone spectator.

*

The glade was circular, giving it the mystique of a ritual site. In its center, sitting comfortably on a large dry rock, WildRed was humming the tune Bettene had been unable to whistle. Not melodic, not anything really but a repetitive phrase, chantlike in quality.

Rhythmically circumscribing WildRed, 1.5 meters off the ground, was a creature. Wholly indescribable. She fought the urge to whistle while walking backwards. On the periphery of the circle, directly across from her position, 2 o'clock to her 8 o'clock, she saw a humanish figure of uncertain age in a lime green frock, sitting cross-legged, mouth slightly open, shoulders relaxed.

The cyclical monotony of the song and the apparent calm of the protagonists softened Bettene's fright. As she felt her alarm for WildRed's safety subsiding, she relaxed as best she could against the flaking bark of an old Stone pine. She had a sense, an intuition, that advancing from the perimeter of the glade to its interior was unwise. A balance had been struck along a vaguely defined territory. She needed an invitation, consent, from one or both or all of the current occupants before crossing that threshold. In the shelter of forest shadow, she observed the green one and the beastly one in impervious, magnetic duet, an interspecies mating ritual. She observed the other one, the one dressed liked WildRed, participating from the sidelines and content, so it seemed to Bettene, to observe.

A highly caffeinated multi-tasking habitué of always-on attentivity, Bettene found slowing down challenging. Now, giving in to her natural resistance to shock, she allowed the moist air, the supple monotones, to lull her. Lowering her body to the soft pine needle buffer of the forest floor she assumed the fetal posture of a sleeping dog. Curled, melting, she let herself be washed by sounds and smells, entertained by the play of color inside the sockets of her eyes. All urgency evaporated to fine mist. Her dream would meld into another and another.

Quixotic Virality

The witchy goings-on in the clearing slipped into Betene's dream story while BB hummed, BB WildRed tranced and BB of the Rheingau kept watch. Drifting, she sensed adventure looming.

Dream: My tranquil body, tucked and fetal-shaped, rose to its feet in the slowest of motions. I gurgled a little as I carefully stood up, balanced, and walked towards a library card catalogue entwined in Hedera helix ivy. Momentarily, I felt my own presence in this unarticulated space as anachronistic as the catalogue's heavy material presence.

Constructed of weathered mahogany like Roberta's bar, a hot-pink neon sign flickered over this enormous piece of furniture nested in a sprawling forest.

RAT PASSAGES

*Divided in two main sections labeled **Speculations** (yellow neon) and **Advices** (blue neon), each section had an identical set of drawers grouped by written languages – Afrikaans, Albanian, Amharic, Arabic [...] through and including Zulu. Transcribed animal and plant communication systems, denominated by humans, were included with an asterisk. Peripheralized yet present.*

Most were meticulously categorized according to source, subjective form, located color, and relational intensity. Some entries were cross-referenced to the Dewey Decimal System with bespoke color-coded symbols. This was surely Roberta's lifework. The 100,000+ Räte inscribed on the walls of her establishment were transcribed here, situated differently, on paper, in ink and pencil. I pulled a random card from an "English" drawer in the Advices section.

Rat

535

BV3.2

She asked "Does all color spring from lightness or darkness?" They answered "Why do you ask this question?"

Source: Unknown

Subjective form: indeterminate; philosophically/ theologically perplexed; mathematically inclined

Located color: 3.2 meters high, to the right of blue-violet just under Rat 135 BV3.1

Relational intensities: Rat 398.21 YO2.65;

Rat 398.22 B1.0

Amazed at the detail, for often my dreaming is of muted specificity, I was delighted to see pencil marked corrections and afterthoughts, to glimpse Roberta's insight scrawled on a card's backside. I pulled another from the same drawer.

Rat
398.21
R2.7

[...] Tonight we fold into our spectral diversity what's previously been off our charts. We embrace an expanded spectral field. We embrace an expanded genetic motility. We variegate our clustered palindromic repeats [...] We open the closet of our logics. [...] we're experimenting, we're failing, we're soaring, we're falling. We're certainly not flatlining. Yet.

(over)

Source: Last Year at Betty and Bob's: An Adventure

DDC 398.2; 801; 805; 807

Subjective form: robust; celebratory activism

Located color: 2.7 meters high, center red

Relational intensities: Rat 398.2 YR2.5;

Rat 398.21YO3.65; Rat 398.24 G2.5

[REM Transition]

Dream: I rest beneath a camouflage mosquito net as virions slip through the holes and into my cells. This, I understand as quixotic virality, infectiousness jousting the arrogant spin of anthropocentric-blowhards everywhere. I feel their tiny potency enter my bloodstream. Now passively paralyzed in REM sleep (though lucid), I am verging on change. Watch me change.

[REM Transition]

Dream: Old marginalia from devoured books present themselves as animated GIFs. Easily overlooked footnotes make themselves noticed (look at me! look at me!) jumping up and down, vocalizing their messages in basso Shakespearian proclamation:

one story leads to another [...] thus not counsel as a determinate lesson at the end of a story but as a deferral of closure.

[NREM Transition]

Dream: A woman in lime-green costume casts a magenta shadow on white stones nested in rich black soil. She holds out her ringed hand, beckoning me to enter the circle dance. I do. She introduces herself. "I'm Bettina," she says smiling. "I'm Bettene," I respond. There are four of us dancing. WildRed, her friend, and we two Bettinae. We move in simple rhythm waiting for others.

Bettina tells me I'm now contaminated, possibly infectious. My worldings will alter. My need for external sensing apparatus will cease (adieu career) as my listening abilities intensify. I will climb trees and towers, smell rocks, and write love notes in the snow. I will listen to the sounds of rhizoid roots, entwined in a savory microtonal dissonance. I will dance to it. She tells me all this and says, "But fulfilment will elude you." I answer, "That's nothing new."

E185
.61
.B195 **Baldwin, James, 1924-**
The fire next time. New York, Dial Press, 1963.
120 p. 21 cm.

Black Muslims

excl. { 1. Negroes. 2. U. S.—Race question. 3. ~~Mohammedans in the U. S.~~ }
I. Title.

E185.61.B195 301.451 63-11713 †
Library of Congress [5] OCAT MARC

HQ1596
.W6
1792a
(Rare Bk)
Coll

Wollstonecraft, Mary, 1759-1797.
A vindication of the rights of woman: with strictures on political and moral subjects. By Mary Wollstonecraft. Printed at Boston, by Peter Edes for Thomas and Andrews, Faust's statue, no. 45, Newbury-street. MDCXCII.
xvi, [17]-340 p. 20½ cm.

Women's rights—Great Britain.

Excl. { 1. ~~Woman~~—Social and moral questions. 2. ~~Woman~~—Rights of }
women I. Title.

HQ1596.W6 1792a 15-11328 rev
Library of Congress [r59c] OCAT

PN471
 W6 office
 Woolf, ~~Mrs.~~ Virginia (Stephen), ¹⁹⁴¹ 1882-
 A room of one's own c by Virginia Woolf. New York, The Fountain press; London, The Hogarth press, 1929.
 4 p.l., 3-159 p., 1 l. 24 1/2 cm.
 Of this book four hundred ninety-two copies, of which four hundred
 Copyright A 15679 (29-24642) 29-27524
 See next card
 25-5

PZ3
 A 93
 Pz
 7
 Austen, (Jane), 1775-1817. ^(Pride & prejudice)
~~Pride and prejudice, by Jane Austen; Pride and prejudice.~~ illustrated by Charles E. Brock, with an introduction by Austin Dobson. ~~xxx, 351 [1] pp. incl. illus.~~ London, ^{and co. limited} New York, Macmillan, ~~co.~~, 1897. ¹²⁻¹⁹⁰⁰⁻¹⁰⁹¹⁷ ~~xxx, 351 [1] pp.~~
 incl. front. illus. 30 ~~cm.~~
 823
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Roberta's Storytelling

Voice recording #45

Giovanni and Camilla nag me over the details of what happened that day. They want the story, the whole story. They want every salacious fact and cooked up fable of what occurred with those folks from #12 that day. I deflect. I scratch the dead skin cells from the faded ink of my forearm tattoos. I deviate, I pull at the thick bush of my eyebrows. I grumble and ramble.

How can I understand what I can't understand not understanding? So many Argentinians and Chileans disappeared under Perón and Pinochet without a trace. Dropped from planes and helicopters, falling onto woods and mountains as fertilizer. Or shot dead against boundary walls and covered with lye in mass graves. Or as so many young women everywhere – here one moment gone the next to an unmarked grave, victims of bad luck and evil men. I am beside myself today. Forgive me my inappropriate, tangential historical analogies. It's just that "disappearance" evokes dark memories, not light ones for me. Dark blues not bright yellows. I am trying my best to get over myself and expand my consciousness of the disappeared. Treat myself to the magic and fantasy of such happenstance.

Voice recording #46

I want to first tell about Bettene. I had a slim hope, whimsy really, that she might want to inherit this place. Of course, her nomad spirit would never allow such wanton sedentariness. It was simply my musing. My rapture at every loving click from her counter. I think she had, has, an intuitive feeling for ratsathomewithus. For, you know, continuously processing the unstable. For critically valuing archivable advice and speculation and the impossible capture of the subjective form. For channeling a crowd-sourced dream. But events simulate events and in a waking wink all is otherwise. Though I hasten to add, not catastrophic. No. Soon maybe. We are often too quick to cry ruin.

Voice recording #47

[ASMR whisper] What you're about to hear is the circulation of my blood in the unreflective soundspace that is Arcadia. Letters, words and passages sucking all echo. [quasi-silence] Did you hear it?

Voice recording #48

[take 2] The green one's snap absence is of a certain register. Bettene's awakening is of quite another order. Now I know that I can't yet reconcile all this. My gut can't digest it and shit out insight for all the worms to see. WildRed. I didn't know her well but knew she was of these parts. Sensitive, too delicate for Arcadia's excessive visual noise and diminished aural palette. Wherever she got off to I have to think, must think, she's closer to "home." Whatever I mean by that I can't tell you. I'm not entirely certain. Is she with life? Assuredly. Is she rearranged? Probably. Is she hosting or guesting? When I speak of her can I speak about "soul"? Is that even a thing anymore? Soul? Nope, I cannot speak of her. I haven't the skill. All I can tell is this. When the dust settled in the café, returned to its particulate definition of other shapes and forms,

WildRed was nowhere and everywhere present. Magenta auras were cast in all directions by every object as if illuminated by a disco ball of fluorescent green light. Freaky. Magnificent.

Voice recording #49

[test, take 1] Okay. Ready. The story as I have heard it retold by bobbob goes like this:

Arefeh and bobbob searched long into the night for Wild-Red. Then Bettene also went missing. Exhausted from heavy hiking, eye strain, and bramble scratches, they snuggled together in a copse of young poplars, allowing themselves a nap before returning to the search. They shared a dream these two, of a bat and a bird, a rat and a horse, dancing in a circus ring with a luxurious maiden-hair fern and two *Morpho menelaus* butterflies. All to the delight of a 1.6 million YouTube followers.

Voice recording #50

[ASMR whisper] According to bobbob they could find no signs of WildRed. Just after dawn awash in birdsong, they found Bettene Vermine sitting on a rock in a clearing all Buddha-like but disarmingly nonchalant. As if nothing and everything had occurred. From her disposition, Arefeh expected her to greet them with a hearty "Sup?" Instead she nodded, smiled warmly, and held their gaze for what seemed a very long time. They did not press for more.

Quietly inspecting the scene, bobbob said they discovered the remnants of an angel shape on the perimeter of the glade. You know, like the kind kids make in the snow. All wingy-like. Pine needles brushed aside in the dirt to depict the unmistakable fairy figure. Evidence of the Angel of History, I'd say. Bettene is mute on this matter though her eyes sparkle when we speak of it. Did she sweep the

earth with her arms and dream the end of times? When I told Camilla about this detail, she speculated that perhaps Bettene slept and woke to a palpable future. I tend to think she awoke in a transmogrified past.

Voice recording #51

Bettene told me that she entered a spate of dreaming that involved hectares of tiny drawers filled with *Räte*. That she floated in a trance dance with three peculiar creatures and felt, yes she could admit it, happy. She told me that after she wiped the sleep from her eyes and stood to greet the scene, the rattybettybird changeling was gone. The costumed woman was curled in deep slumber at the base of the rock upon which WildRed rested. She then dined one last time with WildRed. She told me plainly that they ate feral honey and elderberries together and that WildRed was not despondent in her transitioning but reservedly ecstatic, assuring Bettene that she would not be found on the banks of the Rhine with a dagger in her chest, despairing of futures. For her heart was not located in her body alone. Her heart was everywhere green, pulsing on frequencies unknown. She told Bettene, "If you could hear what I hear you'd swoon," tears glistening in her eyes as she whispered this.

Voice recording #52

If I've got this right, according to Bettene's account, shortly after breaking the fast WildRed disappeared and Bettina von Armin neé Brentano took her place beside Bettene V on the rock. Now I personally don't believe in any organism being "ahead" of their time because time isn't linear like that and if you ask me you can't jump the shark. There's no accounting for an avant-garde. My two cents.

Anyway, as I was telling it, as Bettene told it, they talked on that rock as the sun teased color from the night's dark

hold. They talked over mugwort tea about love and sex, about freedom and family, about immanence and transcendence, about justice and gender and parallel worldings. They talked forever in no time at all. Bettene V told me Bettina B smelled of lavender and musk and smiled when she, Bettene Vermine, explained the technique and content of the acousmatic compositions she was working on. Bettene V told me Bettina B responded with a gentle "Aah, finally music is sound."

Voice recording #53

[Thirty seconds of ambient noise outside the café] Yes, hello, continuing. Apparently other happenings occurred in the early morning hours of which I have not been told details. What Bettene was willing to tell is that WildRed, simultaneous with the howl of distant wolf, vanished. Just like that. I expect Bettene felt a pang in her heart. Sometime later, Bettina Brentano, in tandem with the morning anthem of a visiting blackbird, also vanished. The remaining Grittas togethered. A and b are incoherent regarding these details.

Speculation, my own and others, abounds. Guesses, assumptions, proliferate like *Rattus norvegicus*. References to this event would go in the **Speculations** category for there are no **Advices** to be given. There is throbbing in the walls of Café Arcadia, that I can attest to. All frequencies, timbres and the modulations of a species inclusive audible spectrum are harbored in the incisions of these hexagonal walls. This place beats as my heart beats. In $\frac{3}{4}$ time.

Voice recording #54

Bettene told me she stayed sitting on that rock until the moon rose directly above the clearing. Humming, whistling poorly, napping occasionally. She then announced to Arefeh and bobbob who were patiently, caringly, keep-

ing watch, that she was ready to return to the village. They walked her back to #12. She slept for three days and nights, eyelids fluttering as she lucidly floated between REM and NREM cycles, remembering, rehearsing tactics, conceptualizing strategies, kneading novelty into a sustainable semblance.

On awaking from a long sequence of convoluted dreams she apparently proclaimed "God, I need a cappuccino." She then came directly to me.

Deferral of Closure

The pin vice engraver with a simple diamond burr felt good in their hand. bobbob began etching a fragment from the poem "Helen Betty Osbourne" by a favorite First Nations poet into a magenta window pane. Together with Arefeh, they'd thought long and hard about what passage to contribute to the walls. In fact, they'd agonized over it. Today the decision came effortlessly even as so much angst had been spilt in the process. Poised on the ladder, high above the bar, bobbob scratched the poem's last line:

Betty, if I write this poem. – M. Dumont

They hoped they weren't misappropriating Dumont's sentiment. This sentence did not tell the poet's tale of misogyny, of racism, of sexual assault, but bobbob felt this phrase said something they could not in any way otherwise. It was something about the conjunction, the "if," passing.

The south wall of Café Arcadia, with its morning light streaming into the interior as if through a prism, accesses the fringe color that with its green complementary, skews the quantifiably scientific. Magenta the supernatural, magenta the magnificent rarified peak of the continuum. Magenta, the afterimage of green.

“If at all, then here,” Bettene said as she took her turn. She knew well the words she wanted to leave for WildRed G nderode. Carefully, she etched into the window pane a passage from a long ago love letter, as sunlight refracted off each particle of glass dust.

... for I do not know how I could manage to follow thee; wings have not grown for that purpose. I beg of thee to consider this in time, and to regard me as a being who might leave much untried to which thou art impelled. – Bettina

ShazdadaMama Casting #2208

Closing minutes of an interview with artist Bettene Vermine on the adventures of the Grittas, collective dreaming and trans-special reassignment.

[...]

SDM: I hesitate to pummel you further with questions. Thank you for so honestly and intimately exposing the tiny blue buds growing on your forearms. If you don't mind we'll put an image up on the website. Extraordinary. You know, years ago I interviewed BB, back when they were called BetteB. I couldn't stop staring at the mark on their cheek. They called it "Rattatattoo," if I'm not mistaken.

BV: They called it "Tattarrattat" I believe. I heard them refer to it by that name once.

SDM: Oh, right. Thanks. Always good to get the facts right I guess. Or, I don't know, is that even important anymore?

So, for a final question, a haunting question. Would you mind speaking about your transitioning?

BV: I call it passaging.

SDM: I see. Yes. I mean, I know you awaken every morning and get on with your life but I'm, interested in how you inhabit the serial passage, the pathogenic passage, that's precipitated so much change in your body, in your worlding.

BV: I'm not sure how to speak about the social dream I've been squatting. To be honest, I'm not sure if I'm the parasite or the host. Most probably neither. More of an amalgam. The dream spans two, nearly three centuries. Beautiful and terrible people and things, wars and respites, occasions of exponential cruelty and caring come and go. Horrific ruin propagates even more horrific development, racism and gentrification and then again ruin. Rats of all species and literary denominations thrive. Subtractive color schemes take hold as natural greens mix with blood reds leaving grey muddles everywhere. Like everyone, I worry over fluke coincidence, you know, pandemics, contamination and wanton storytelling. I wonder how and when catastrophe meets collective caring. And how and when it doesn't.

In any case, we are now here.

I wonder what you dream?

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