

# Preliminary Materials Toward a Theory of the Female Intellectual

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When a woman has scholarly inclinations, there is generally something wrong with her sexual nature.

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*.

## Introduction: Mynifesto

After one of philosophy professor Colin McGinn's graduate students accused him of sexual harassment, anecdotes like those posted in the blog *What is it like to be a Woman in Philosophy?* (Jender 2014) aimed to move a discourse on sexism and masculine biases within highly theoretical disciplines out of their insular communities and into a public discussion. In creating a "safe space" for these expositions, such realities remain insulated in female philosophical and otherwise intellectually-oriented disciplinary circles.

A similar backlash materialised in reviews of Semiotext(e)'s 2012 english translation of the "anonymous collective," – Tiqqun's *Preliminary Materials for the Theory of the Young-Girl (jeune-femme)* – in which Tiqqun uses the female body as a site for a critique of capitalism's consumer excesses. I recently had a student cite this piece in her artist's statement as a means of intellectualising the

relationship with consumerist materiality displayed in her work, ignorant of the adverse effects that might potentially be caused by giving blind consumerism a female face. She claimed too that the “jeune-femme” is not really a gendered concept, showing once more that we accept problematic uses of language and metaphor if it appears in the vernacular of Marxist post-structuralist theoretical discourse, obfuscating misogynistic overtones by presenting them in the guise of a politically progressive, subversive intellectual context.

Neither the hasty reactionary responses of feminist organisations to anti-feminine sentiments in intellectual spheres, nor the post-gender denial of them, aids in constructing an appropriate space for women in the philosophically-oriented subsets of intellectual life and/or academia. Instances such as the aforementioned exemplify the need for us to construct a radical re-definition of the female thinker; the respectable intellectual, who can and will represent herself singularly without an explicitly politically-oriented framework.

But who is the female intellectual?

Before we can comprehend the essence of the woman-intellectual beyond her aesthetic or iconic appearance, I find it necessary to define the essence of “intellectualism” for our particular context. I remember once when Eliot B., a friend of mine from college, described to me a distinction between two types of intelligent people; those who are able to provide proper or well-articulated answers; and those who, regardless of the extent of their factual knowledgability, are “into ideas” (as he phrased it). I think the latter of these two categorisations is an appropriate way of framing the sort of person we might consider an “intellectual”—that is, someone who consistently engages with ideas that s/he considers definitively unanswerable. Certainly, the knowledge of respected thinkers within the history of one’s discipline is a necessary exteriority, but such thinkers evoke the Derridean “self-pleasure” of reading—the illusion of two minds in discussion. Unlike the typical “reader,” the intellectual is inexplicably connected to the Cartesian cogito, “I think therefore I am”, a subject defined by its immaterial consciousness.

### Part I: Femininity and the Intellectual Apparatus

We see this correlation between intelligence and immateriality echoed in architectural historian Beatriz Colomina’s explication of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century architect and writer Adolf Loos’ opinion that “the lack of ornament is a sign of intellectual power” (1985, 103). He articulates this notion through the phenomenology of the “thinker,” who somehow admits his (and it is *his* here) intellect is the most valuable because it is extricated from the frivolity of ornate representation. Colomina manipulates these specific writings of Loos’ to assert that his “raid against ornament is not only gender-loaded but openly homophobic” (1996, 38). Although Colomina writes extensively on Loos’ sexism and homophobia in relation to his distaste for decoration in *Privacy and Publicity*, she does not explicitly address that Loos’ assumed homophobia stems from misogyny. She presents excessive ornament as a mask particular to the male homosexual, categorically separate from feminine adornments; Colomina makes no connection between the signifiers of the male homosexual and those of the typical idea of the woman. Her argument is structured to appear more concerned with homophobia than gender; in doing so she solidifies the effort within intellectualism to distance the self from both the female body and the connotations of femininity. Colomina wears her own mask here, rendering her subjective gender experience invisible by framing ornamentation as a primarily homosexual choice of representation.

In the context of this particular discussion of Loos, Colomina does not make a distinction between actualised homosexuality (sex-acts) and the idea of a “homosexual aesthetic.” She assumes that when Loos states that ornamental style on men is a form of “degeneration,” he specifically refers to homosexual acts. However, when Loos writes that “the person who runs around in a velvet suit is no artist but a buffoon or merely a decorator” (1985, 103), he does not explicitly admonish homosexuality. What upsets him is not a man’s private sexual activities but rather a man’s public performance of occupying a feminine role. When we consider the socio-cultural climate of modernist Vienna, in which Loos wrote and designed, I do not think the “degeneration” Loos names can

be so clearly essentialised to Colomina's claim of homosexuality.

Femininity or perceived female attributes were not only the markers of homosexuality—they were associated with many forms of deviance and difference, including the syphilitic body, masturbatory insanity, and the Semitic (Jewish) race. Loos uses the German word *ornament*, a synonym of *schmuck*, which carries with it the Yiddish meaning—a vulgar term for the penis—or in the context of non-Jewish Vienna, its “true” German homonymic derivative: *schmuck*. In this specific example, it is Loos' language that serves to demonstrate the complicated connotations that would have influenced his engagement with ornament—both philosophically and aesthetically. Loos might have had some contact with the works of psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, ostensibly allowing him to make some connection between ornament, fetishism, and homosexuality. I also see many parallels between Loos' sensibilities and Austrian philosopher Otto Weininger's 1903 book *Sex and Character*, which constructs a category of the Jewish man as having a third gender—the feminized non-man. If we return to my original example from the Yiddish language, it is not a far leap to assume that linguistically, the ornament (*schmuck*) and the [Jewish] penis (*schmuck/schmuck*) might have been conceptually conflated.

The ornament as a stand in for Jewish masculinity is integrated with Loos' image of the adorned, “degenerate” man. Even if you do not follow the particularity of my linguistic example, it is undeniable that, in a climate of rampant anti-Semitism, Weininger's contemporaneous works would have had some effect on integrating feminine “other” sexuality into the stereotype of the Jew. Unlike the homosexual, whose deviance is rooted in his perceived object(s) of desire, the Jewish man is recognised as sexually other through the castrating mark of circumcision and the emasculation of being considered racially inferior to the “true” Austrian—whether or not his sexual-object choice is male or female becomes irrelevant, as he is an innately “unnatural” sexual hybrid. Certainly this example of the feminised Jewish man does not foreclose upon the possibility that Loos was homophobic (he probably was); rather, it illuminates the complicated nature of prejudices based on exteriorities, which emerge

through visceral disgust before the mind is able to ascribe logical meaning to such reactions. That is to say, by including the example of the Jewish feminised man, it becomes even clearer that femininity could be understood as the fundamental signifier embedded in the ornament that Loos allocates as a marker of non-intellectualism.

Though the “feminised” man is [perceived as] one too concerned with the materiality of his appearance to produce serious work, strong homoerotic male-male relationships have long been a part of academic traditions. Hundreds of years after Plato's *Symposium*, sexual relationships between older and younger schoolboys were purportedly an integral aspect of British private school culture. Roland Barthes openly wrote about his young male lover(s) in *The Lover's Discourse* (1977). Although Michel Foucault remained closeted in his public life, his *Histories of Sexuality* (1976) present a bias toward the acceptance of homosexual activity as an aspect of male sexuality that should not be regarded as aberrance or a category of identity. I doubt Sigmund Freud could sincerely deny an unconscious homoerotic basis to his intense connections with so many of his male protégé-colleagues. The dissolution of his relationship with Carl Jung so clearly mimics a romantic break-up that it is almost comical.

There is a way in which homosexuality is the ultimate masculinity, as it is ideologically capable of constructing a world from which women can be entirely excluded. Removed from the homoerotic basis of male intellectual relationships, French writer and filmmaker Marguerite Duras is able to write that “all men are potentially homosexuals—all that's missing is awareness of the fact, an incident or revelation that will bring it home to them” (1990, 33). She muses that the male-male relationship is naturally intellectual, which in turn creates the potential for such a relationship to become sexual. Inversely, the female-male relationship is primarily sexual and undoubtedly plagued with a history of unequal power relationships that make balanced intellectual connections more forced, if not impossible. The shame associated with male homosexuality is a re-enactment of an unequal power dynamic, in which a man chooses to be a “bottom,” to feminise his own body in the sexual relationship. Provided

the gay man's bedroom door remains closed, feminine representation is, in essence, the only signifier that can "out" the gay man's choice to occupy the submissive "female" position.

There is a truth presented in Duras's musings that Colomina's essay seems to miss. It is wrong to assume homosexuality as a pure category of identity; the prejudices it evokes stem from a fear of transgression, the appropriation of a role that is not expected of one's sex. I do not intend to use "transgression" here in its Christian definition but rather the most literal sense of the word—(criss-)crossing between two categories of difference, completely disregarding their separation. When we see that feminine and masculine attributes move freely between personalities and bodies, gendered language temporarily loses its meaning. For those in whom these differentiations are ingrained, such a transgression can appear as the "abject" that Julia Kristeva describes in *The Powers of Horror* (1982). It evokes the feeling of the carnivalesque, the unheimlich; it reminds us of the instability of all comfortable categorisations, blurring the division between the decent and the indecent, the man and the beast, the body and the corpse.

I do not mean to re-iterate here what I find to be a tired argument of third-wave queer theory feminisms, which cite the spectrum between male and female sex and gender as a means of derailing a dichotomy between them. Both mainstream and "queer" cultures reflect the notion that language assumes that "masculine" and "feminine" are distinct ideological categories; as Luce Irigaray frames it, for "each apprehension of being, there is nothing more than one idea" (2002, 229). While it may be easy for a politically correct consciousness to accept an individual's "unique" gender identity, such an identity is defined entirely by its "difference"—to borrow Derrida's terminology—from the ersatz gender identities constructed through language. That is to say, the construction of a non-female, non-male gender identity accepts the unchangeability of the ways we respond to words that describe gender.

When Colomina focuses Loos' criticism of ornament on homophobia, she does

more than distract us from her earlier descriptions of his sexism; she separates homosexual male ornament from feminine adornment. To construct these two aesthetics or mentalities as separate categories makes it impossible to address the connection between femininity and homophobia. Homophobic bigotry directed at men reveals this discomfort one has when s/he witnesses traces of femininity penetrating the male-male relationship; even in a world absent of women, such traces are somehow present.

## Part II: A Critique of Aesthetic Judgment

Sometimes I catch myself thinking about other women the way I wish men wouldn't. Because of this, I cannot quite conceptualise how I am seen. To be a woman in your world is to be perceived as woman presenting intellectualism. The "intellectualism" look is not feminine. And so, in avoiding the signifiers of femininity, we become women before anything else. The absence of the expected representation becomes the focus of the presented representation. Intellectual becomes an affected look masking the female body, the recognition of which ascribes all the connotations of femininity to the body that cannot escape its sex.

Marguerite Duras dubs her look "The M.D. Uniform," a "black cardigan, straight skirt, polo-neck sweater, and short boots in the winter." Repetition adds meaning to what would otherwise be considered a standard presentation in "an attempt to reconcile form and content, to match what you think you look like with what you'd like to look like, what you think you are with what you want to suggest" (1990, 65). When the clothes cease to change, they become an extension of the body. They cover the nakedness that is potentially exposed in every outfit by truncating the trajectory of another's imagination. Having a look means being recognised for that look instead of the looks we are arbitrarily handed. I can't help but think of my own chosen representation as artificial fetish—my makeup is a face to cover up a face—a mask to cover up another mask.

By calling her look a "uniform," Duras masculinises her fashion by ascribing

to it the language we associate with military dress, placing herself both within and outside of identification with female-ness and femininity. She describes the social histories of power that alienate women from masculine intellectual circles, yet she exists on an intellectual plane separate from that of the women she criticises. She acknowledged this directly when she writes that “one doesn’t listen to women, doesn’t pay attention to what they say. But we’re not blaming you for that. Women do tend to be boring still, and a lot of them haven’t the nerve to step out of line” (1990, 39). In the English translation, the use of “one” as the subject, as opposed to “man,” leaves a space for Duras, and other women, to be implicated in assuming that the female voice says very little.

I affect femininity to obscure my inability to present myself as I wish to be seen. If I am to be taken as a woman by nature of my body, I will enact that representation to excess. I have been criticised for wearing clothes that are and look uncomfortable—men don’t do this and why should I bother with heels and so on when they have nothing to do with my intellect. But I get a sideways pleasure from letting it be known that I am uncomfortable, that my female-ness is not forgotten or ignored but is recognised for the discomfort it may cause.

Sometimes I catch myself mocking the kind of women who wear miniskirts and six-inch heels in the middle of winter; the women who wear leggings and yoga pants in public; or very large women in very small clothes. But I get extremely uncomfortable in the times that I am forced to acknowledge my own discomfort with my body and representation. I am very short and stocky, which makes me look silly in the clothes most other women are able to wear; I hope the character of my clothing distracts or overrides this fact. Sometimes I get so worked up about dressing myself that I am unable to leave the house. Like Duras, I try to do this by maintaining a consistent and recognisable look. The specific signifiers shift but maintain their functions; my clothing items are in constant rotations, perpetually replaced as my life and body change.

I am unpacking my wardrobe, the extensions of my body, the garments I’ve

kept through time despite their practicalities, worn and unworn. Every couple of years, I look through my closet and purge myself of the clothes that don’t fit, that hold the memories I want to leave behind me. Some things I have kept because those memories became me and all I can do is stop wearing them. These treasures of my collection are one-offs and oddities that, in their divergence from my expected style, become all the more representative of my presence throughout my short history. They are much more about where I was than how I choose to look.

There is an intelligence to the pieces that I choose to keep. At the bottom drawer of my white childhood dresser, now in my father’s study at my parents’ house, is a brown paper bag holding the leggings that I brought to the station on Washington St. in August 2010, that never made it into evidence. When I moved to Chicago I packed a pair of acid-wash cut-offs, even though they lost an inch of decency with every wash cycle. The last day I wore them before the crotch gave out was in Nashville in May 2013, when Louis took me to the shooting range; the first and only time I ever shot a gun. We agreed that the adrenaline felt like a drug.

My father used to call me Imelda Marcos because I had so many pairs of impractical shoes. The last time I wore the platform Mary Janes, was on the eve of my twentieth birthday when I held a funeral for my teenagehood. I still have a photograph of my friends removing them for me, my legs poking upward and my back to the ground. I can’t recall another time I wore those Mary Janes, but they’re still lying on the floor of the closet that we now share.

I promised another friend that I would never give away the silver 1970s gown she left with me before moving to the Bay Area the end of summer 2012. A drag queen gave it to her at a party in Los Angeles to soften the blow of returning to an East Coast winter. She said she didn’t need it in California, and gave it to me to keep, on the condition that I had to wear it. I tried it out the following New Years’ Eve, which started with sharing drinks at Lilli Marlene’s and ended at a hardcore show in the basement of an East Side punk house

run by the Nice Slice pizza guys. When midnight hit, I spilt champagne all over myself and felt a sinking feeling and had to leave.

Joe had worked all night and told me it was a really shitty day and he didn't want to see anyone, but I told him that it was my last day in Providence and I wanted to say goodbye before heading to New York. I walked into Joe's room; he was sitting on the bed playing a computer version of Settlers of Catan. He said I looked nice and I offered him some champagne but he didn't want any. I kissed him lightly and thanked him for letting me stop by. He said that now that I was there he didn't want me to leave. I spent what was left of the night with him. It was the last time we were together that I felt inside.

I dated a man who told me that intelligent women should not wear makeup or ornate clothing because it is an acquiescence to oppressive constructs of gender. He also told me that intelligent women should not wear makeup or ornate clothing because it obscures their natural beauty. The words and voices that make us what we are, are not our own.

In her college journals, Sylvia Plath muses how, as women, we are told "that you must compete somehow, and yet that wealth and beauty aren't in your realm" (1998, 21). The desire to be beautiful obstructs progress more completely than any gendered expectation of malleable representation. It denies one's control through implementing the fantasy that there is in fact an inherent aesthetic quality of beauty. To transform one's desire to a subjective construction of beauty does not make it less constructed.

Where the heterosexual man is concerned, the field of aesthetics is inextricably linked to feminine beauty. What happens when we watch the aesthetic field of the male intellectual coalesce, is far more damaging than any advertisements or pornographies. It obfuscates the de-subjectification of female characters by placing them within larger questions of passion, beauty, and eroticism in life. As long as Aesthetics remains relevant, women are excluded from the entirety of Philosophy as discipline.

He was a Philosopher (this has been a trend in my life). Philosophers say things like "I think you're beautiful, from an aesthetic standpoint." Now my lover tells me that he likes the look of me. The look of my face. These are two entirely different ways of articulating one's attraction to another person. To tell me that I am aesthetically beautiful is to indulge in the Kantian act of passing judgment. It places me as a thing amongst other things. It is not subjective insofar as the subject in question organises everything outside himself within a judgeable structure. Something with aesthetic appeal is an unchanging object, attributed with the mystical power of a fetish.

To like my looks is to accept some in-articulatable attraction to another person. It is the passive articulation: I like to look at you. Looking, as active verb, implies a search. The imperfective continuation of the desire to look is the acceptance that there is no identifiable object to be discovered. In the Russian language, "to like"—"mne nravitsya"—is always a reflexive verb. A more apt translation would be "[it] appeals [to] me". "Mne" is the Russian "to/toward me," or "I" in the dative case, which acts here to signify "I" as the indirect object of the phrase. "Nravitsya" is "like" in the reflexive form—there is no direct action form of the word. The language reflects the passive nature of one's draw toward another thing while exemplifying the animistic qualities inherent to "things," insofar as the thing "liked" becomes the subject of the sentence. And when there is the choice to own and to be attracted, the symbiosis of the second resonates more strongly.

We do not often think about the ways that the English language shapes our thoughts in regard to gender, as it does not designate sex outside of biology, society, and occasional instances of anthropomorphism; leaving the connotations of gender to be strictly related to human social discourse. Yet we can identify its traces in a long history of the substantive discourse that makes the male gendering of language an innate presupposition. Luce Irigaray writes (in French) that language is masculine; woman is solely defined by her opposition to man, revealing ours as a perspectivist language that paradoxically renders woman a materialised "nothing." Such is a language that "would call

into question...the obstacle of nothingness and of non-being always at work in our logic, these notions of void, of absence, of hole, of abyss, of nothing...(the concept of the negative?) to which the history of thought periodically returns” (Irigaray 2002, 229). Language differentiates the material from the immaterial, constructing spaces as positive and negative, as matter and emptiness. What we are left with is language unequipped to articulate intangible materiality.

### Part III: Dialogical Materialism

The “measuring” of one’s material value cannot refer strictly to the ownership of material objects, making it impossible to understand justice as something that can be achieved through compensation. That the goal of legal justice is “to reach an ‘understanding’ by means of a settlement—and to *compel* parties of lesser power to reach a settlement among themselves” becomes problematic for identities pre-existing systems of ownership (Nietzsche 1989, 71). In both physiological and economic terms, women have been understood as those who lack, who do not have, who cannot own. The notion of a “settlement” stems from an idea based in transferable compensation—whether that compensation is “material” is not relevant because it is equate-able to material value.

Georges Bataille writes that both the economy and the (living) organism contain “greater resources than are necessary for the operations that sustain life,” presenting a theory of excess expenditure that applies as much to objective material as it does to the living body (1991, 27). Stripped of everything material he could possibly give, the male is left with his external organ, which he fears may be viewed by the sexual other as “expendable.” Terms like “the family jewels” imply corroborate this notion of the thing as precious but still *excessive* (in the most literal understanding of the word). Psychoanalytic theory attributes extreme importance to the male’s fear of castration, but by inverting the perspective, this could stem from man seeing the female body as *complete* and his own body “cursed” with excess he cannot expend. By positing the woman as the body with something “missing,” we form Nietzsche’s “original” language of man’s understanding of his value as understanding his difference from another (man).

In creating an economy of differentiation between essentially similar bodies, Nietzsche is able to eradicate the realisation of an actual other from his history, excluding an entire subset of humanity by avoiding the trauma of further exploration. By presenting the subjective, obfuscated view of exteriority as the most genuine form of seeing, Nietzsche understands the female other as nothing more than an apparition. Male perspective creates her, as there is nothing truer hiding “behind the curtain.” In this “body” economy, men and women do not begin as equal entities; man is an entity before he is given a “thing,” whereas woman is nothing before she is given an entity. The entirety of the female body replaces the function of masculine excess. I question the possibility of justice in regard to female subjectivities, which, in their treatment as property rather than active participants in an economy, never gave voice to the earliest structural elements of the morphology of morals.

The civility and bureaucracy of criminal justice systems detract from the reality that, in essence, the Law still operates in a Hammurabian one-for-one understanding of crime and punishment. Nietzsche states implicitly that (an equally measurable act of) revenge catalyses and remains a part of a system that punishes those who cause (measurable) harm. The masculine bias of our discourse of justice accepts that all damages can be compensated, be it through material compensation or a form of sadistic pleasure in the perpetrator’s suffering in punishment. The notion of “damage” is part of that same language of measurable materiality—one must have something for it to be damaged. Nietzsche does not have the vocabulary to address immaterial injustice as experienced through a body and consciousness he cannot understand.

The way that rape is treated (within the Anglo-American legal system) epitomizes this incongruity between body and ideology that we face in a system predicated in a masculine understanding of moral discourse. Rape as an immoral act exists only in the contexts of physical damage, through the visible mutilation of the (often female) body; through social damage, as an attack on the family or society to which the woman “belongs”; and, after the advent of modern psychiatry, through psychological damage. But rape can be committed without leaving

a quantifiable trace of its occurrence. A language of material measurement cannot apply to the implementation of justice if there is no discernable damage. If a house is broken into and nothing is stolen or desecrated, if there are no traces, no witnesses, if it is an unclaimed property, is that violation considered a crime? It is hard to say, since houses cannot speak.

When composer John Cage writes that we convince ourselves “ignorantly that sound has, as its clearly defined opposite, silence” (2011, 13), he touches on the exact problem Irigaray pinpoints in language—that we ignore the relational meaning of absence. That is to say, the ideological significations of “silence,” “empty,” “void,” or “nothing” do not exist in any experienced reality—they describe architectures of space, of sound, and of body. In the “Lecture on Nothing” and “Lecture on Something” that appear in *Silence*, a collection of Cage’s writings, Cage strings his lectures together rhythmically, using the space of the page to demarcate durations of non-sound (“silence”). In doing so, he imposes a correlation between silence and absence in the realm of visual space.

Having encountered Cage’s works before Chantal Neveu’s, I could not help but understand her book of poetry *Coit* in relation to them. Neveu places the words of *Coit* on its pages like a musical score. There are nine vertical lines and she calls them “tubes.” I understand her “tubes” as an alternative to the musical “staff” (this is where my conceptualisation of her work within a gendered framework begins). She leaves one tube empty of language to present the experience of “the void” (2012, 89). I see this as an articulation of absence that illustrates Irigaray’s proposition that language, as a masculine invention, complicates our ability as women to articulate (through?) a body defined by its lack.

What interests me in Neveu’s work is not what it communicates symbolically (through language); it is that she constructs a form that subverts and defies the typical “noise” that occurs when a work is translated into another language by creating a visual musicality with her tubes and words that can be read vertically, horizontally, circularly, and, in the second half of the book, compositionally. Her

specific use of biological terms, which occur in most languages as similarly-sounding cognates, presents a universal language of the body unexpected in poetic form. The medical vocabulary becomes associated with corporeality, sustaining Neveu’s tubes to the bodily organs. The silent, absent space is still inhabited by these tubes. Without words, the tubes hold bodily presence that lingers after the ephemerality of sounding linguistic texts.

#### Part IV: The Other Sex

Marguerite Duras says that “men like women who write” (1990, 66) and I think that this is true of any creatively idea-oriented subset of intellectualism. The visual object of desire is dispersed and displaced to an abstract impenetrability. What might be lacking in physical beauty is reconciled in the challenge of fucking “our minds at the same time as our bodies” (Duras 1990, 67). I laughed when I read Duras’ musings that writers who are good lovers are far less likely to be talented writers than “those who are scared and not so good at it.” But then she writes of the skilled writer that his “talent and genius evoke rape, just as they evoke death. Sham writers don’t have those problems” (1990, 67). She connects the mythology of the pathos innate to artists to sexuality, deeming it an alluring quality for the woman-writer but an obstacle for her male counterpart. It is this discomfort with one’s self—a fear of one’s own intellectual talent or prowess—that manifests in the awkward lover’s stifled rage. He seeks what he desires of himself in the woman he is fucking and simultaneously resents her for possessing what he does not.

There is a romantic fantasy that “art” is the voice of female suffering or a feminine expression. That women are unstable and sublimate in a creativity too raw to express itself intellectually. We can attribute these behaviours to disorders of the mind or constitution, but clinical insanity cannot account for those of us who learn just enough to perform life but cannot do it well. It is just as likely that the attitudes we develop around the idea of the female artist, of the artist whose abstract language allows her to speak freely, whose pain bursts right through her work, act as another form of oppression. When

an artist makes peace with her life, her art suffers. We beg for her bare-all confessional hidden in a secret language that, when the work is “successful,” is no longer a secret.

I saw while reading Sylvia Plath’s journals that I had marked the line: “if I didn’t think, I’d be much happier; if I didn’t have any sex organs, I wouldn’t waver on the brink of nervous emotion and tears all the time” (1998; 15). What women lack is the self-contained fantasy that one can think himself into madness. We are too emotional to feel. Madmen are melancholic geniuses. An unhinged woman is a nightmare.

#### Part V: The Dead

Alan told me he thought that Joe’s last album was his most sophisticated. Joe said it was the last when he released it, but at the time no one thought anything of it. I met him at a warehouse show though he said we met sooner and I just didn’t remember. It was the winter at the tail end of 2012. We spent the evening talking about Wittgenstein and pornography. Neither of us had our cell-phones. I wrote my name and number on his arm in green marker before I drove home.

A week or so later he invited me to coffee. We walked around the park with our coffees. It didn’t feel like a date. I saw him at a show later than night and didn’t talk all that much but he took my offer of a drive home. He lived in the same house as someone I had dated unsuccessfully a few years earlier. We said our awkward goodnights. After I pulled into my parents’ driveway, I text-messaged an apology for unwanted advances. He called me immediately and said that he wanted to invite me in but didn’t because I was borrowing my father’s car. I drove back to the house. Joe started kissing me the second he opened the door and walked me to his bedroom. I started laughing immediately when I realised that it was my former lover’s old room. We spent the entire night alternating between talking and fucking and repeated the pattern every other night the two weeks before I moved to New York.

Things started to go sour pretty quickly after that. We talked on the phone a lot, and then we didn’t. I visited Providence a month or so later and Joe told me that he had made a promise to himself not to date anyone for a year, until he felt more stable in his life. He wasn’t drinking or anything. He said quitting cigarettes would be next. He never told me directly about the drugs or a lot of other things in his life. I didn’t call him for a while because it seemed to be taking a toll on him. Eventually we began talking again—despite everything, our immediate connection remained intact. We were funny friends. I thought we were close at the time, but maybe I was wrong about that. I don’t think Joe was all that close to anyone at the end of things. My talks with Joe became fewer and far between. I saw him the day before I moved to Chicago. We got coffee and walked around the park. He said he was thinking about studying psychology or social work so that he could quit his job at the hospital and work as a therapist or something. I couldn’t quite believe it when Joe told me that he had quit his job a few months later. He was passing through Chicago but I didn’t see him.

[The snow] was falling...upon every part of the lonely churchyard on the hill where Michael Furey lay buried. It lay thickly drifted on the crooked crosses and headstones, on the spears of the little gate, on the barren thorns. His soul swooned slowly as he heard the snow falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead (Joyce 1976, 224).

I was in the middle of my shift when I got the call. Then I went back to my desk to work on *Preliminary Materials*. I couldn’t. And at that moment I was overwhelmed with emotional paralysis. I felt everything and nothing acutely. Alan called it a Cartesian experiment gone awry. In psychoanalytic terms, this is called intellectualization. I remember just one year earlier when Alan told me, on his return from a friend’s funeral in Pennsylvania, that he had come to the conclusion that this man was now his friend who chose to identify as dead.

There are times when intelligence has no words.

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