

BIG SEX

*the story of the silver nail and other objects of
(mass) construction*

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JEAN-PAUL SARTRE BEGINS HIS ESSAY by answering the question posed by its title: "Why Write?" According to Sartre, we write in order to feel essential to the universe. We write in order to bring the "unity of mind" to bear upon the "diversity of things" (1988, 48)—to force the dark permanence, which at every turn inclines to sink back into obscurity, to take the shape of object relations. We write in order to become.

"Wo Es war, soll Ich werden" said Freud (1933, 79), which Jacques Lacan translates thus: where it was, there I must come to be (Fink 1995, 46). Is not this "Es" the dark permanence of which Sartre speaks, the obscure thing, the unconscious thing that we must try to render visible, that we must try to render conscious? Even though someone else's desire brought us into existence, even though someone else's desire taught us how and what to desire so that what we call our own desire is not really our own, and even though someone else's desire has played out in ways that have hurt us deeply and have been hard to forgive—even though, in short, we are not responsible for having been born or for having been treated grievously by people far bigger and older than ourselves, we must nevertheless put ourselves in the place of first cause. We must shift from a syntax in which we are the object to one in which we are the subject. We must move from the imaginary "moi" to the symbolic "je".

And if I lay down, cigarette in hand, with my eyes fixed diagonally,
would I be the one to give you the most pleasure?
Is the instinct toward your mother's breast unprotected by any taboo?

And is the question always at large?

And is the choice always at stake?

We were talking about the problem of translation.
We were talking about orality.
Despite the buttering of libidinal eggs,
it isn't your job to get me out of this mess.

The way I have chosen to shift from a syntax in which I am the object to one in which I am the subject—the way I have chosen to get myself out of this mess—is to write. Through writing I can refuse to believe that, of this subject, knowledge is impossible. Through writing I can prevent the origins of my sexuality from remaining a silent and terrible event. Through writing I can upstage death as meaning-maker. For surely writing, especially narrative, is a way of getting a purchase on meaning before death brings final closure.

See, there's something happening on this threshold,
this strange legacy of memory.
I immediately tried by every means I could;
I sought a window,
conceived an idea.
I looked for words found in the kitchen,
a bright corner of the neighborhood,
a passage from a book,
a whisper.

Because I situate this writing (I cannot refer to it as an essay, and even calling it a story is a misnomer) at the intersection of autobiography and theory, it does not simply document my personal experience or history as a sexed being but reflects upon it in relation to the discourses or symptomatics of the academic institutions that have played such a significant role in shaping my sexual identity and practices. "Big Sex: The Story of the Silver Nail and Other Objects of (Mass) Construction" is, then, a first and very tentative attempt to explore how these institutions function as the big Others that dictate the mechanisms or technologies (exhibitionism? voyeurism? hysteria? masquerade?) I employ as a sexed subject in and for the classroom, in and for the academy at large, in and for my scholarship.

Like the symptomatic misfire and discharge of a good hysteric, my mouth closes upon a fixed and obstinate enjoyment in timid and thus ineffectual defiance of a master who forbids enjoyment, a master of my own making. No singing allowed, by god. No belting it out permitted by the director of heavenly choirs, by that

1 I am thinking, here, of Joseph Breuer’s famous patient Anna O., who suffered from aphasia, which is a partial or total loss of one’s ability to use or understand spoken and/or written language. In Breuer’s documentation of her case, he says, “The first thing that became noticeable was that she could not find words and gradually this became worse. Then her speech lost all grammatical structure, the syntax was missing, as was the conjugation of verbs, so that in the end she was using only infinitives that were incorrectly formed from a weak past participle and no articles” (Freud and Breuer 2004, 28-29). In Dianne Hunter’s analysis of Anna O., she sees “a liberating motive implicit in [Anna O.’s] linguistic disruptions. Speaking coherent German meant integration into a cultural identity [she] wanted to reject” (Hunter 1985, 92). According to Hunter, “the surrealists recognized hysteria as an expressive discourse; and, we may add, it was a discourse of femininity addressed to patriarchal thought” (114).

2 According to Laplanche and Pontalis, a screen memory is a “childhood memory characterized both by its unusual sharpness and by the apparent insignificance of its content. The analysis of such memories leads back to indelible childhood experiences and to unconscious phantasies” (1973, 410-11).

Big Other in the sky. Just the making of sense, a prosaic communication achieved via a linguistic “missionary position”. Thus the (hysterical)¹ alternative: a private swelling of the throat, an inaudible vibration that bypasses the vocal chords, travels upward into the nasal cavity, and is expelled through the rim structure of the nose as a preliminary statement of purpose. The rusty sigh of breath held too long.

(Is there something I can’t say?)

But the sigh, singularly meaningful in its own context, speaks volumes.

It was probably this very inability to speak, this petite aphasia, that led me to writing; and although Roland Barthes speaks of an almost obsessive relation to writing instruments (1985, 177-182), I’d have to call mine a sexual relation, for the writing instrument itself was imbued with erotic value even though the episode with a silver nail would prevent any sallies toward onanism until I was an adult. When I was an adolescent, however, all masturbatory impulses were channeled into sketching, from which I got a sexual charge as powerful as the charge of an electric fence. Just picking up the pencil and pressing the sharp lead tip against the grainy texture of the paper created a voluptuous excitement in my body, the caressing gesture of the artist merely a sublimated form of caressing the self, the artist’s tool a kind of sexual prosthetic.

Like anyone who has a name, when I first learned to write mine, I was beginning a narrative that can only end with the death of desire. And what are we, finally, but the stories we tell about ourselves, a series of constructions built on congealed words and gestures, some so tiny as to be almost imperceptible and others so grandiose as to be laughable? And what is love but the weaving together of stories that join us in the heart and at the hip, like Siamese twins who cannot be cut apart without dire consequences to one or both. “You tell me yours,” we say, “and I’ll tell you mine”. Tell me, show me, be me. And then we begin again, restlessly revising, retelling, rethinking, revisiting our histories in relation to a present embodied by each other.

Put the blindfold on me, then, my dear, and I’ll tell you a story that we can revise in the morning over coffee, oranges, and the screech of a green cockatoo. Come Sunday, this is good for what (n)ails you, which is simply another way of saying that poetry, or the poetic enterprise, is the supreme fiction, for any religion worth its cultural weight is founded on storytelling, fictions masquerading as truth and then, like Joan Riviere’s masquerading Woman (1986, 35-61), finally *becoming* truth in a brilliant reversal of terms. It doesn’t take an understanding of psychoanalysis to see that the truth rests on, relies upon, deception. But it helps, and so let us begin with the dream and move backwards in time to events that can be known, if at all, only through the unintentional distortion of memory and the defensive mechanism of screen memory.²

Screen Dream: I’m in a large room that resembles an old-fashioned but empty auditorium, standing close to the top of a very tall ladder. Beside me, another woman stands on an equally tall ladder. Our arms are stretched above us, our bodies twisting awkwardly as we struggle to remove rectangular screens, framed in dark wood, from the ceiling. My dream sense tells me that the screens must be removed because they’ve become so old and decayed, they are a hazard to the people moving about in (un)happy oblivion below. I am having trouble removing my screen, but when I glance over at my companion, I see that she has already removed hers, which is identical to mine, and that six- to eight-inch nails, rusted and bent, protrude from the edges of the wooden frame. Ah, I think to myself, so that’s what’s holding this stubborn thing in place: nails, and lots of them, nails that resemble earth-brown earthworms stuck in mid-wriggle. Just before I wake up, I know that having finally seen how the apparatus is attached, I will be able to detach it.

Upon waking, free association: the woman next to me is secretary of the English department, Karen Burns; her husband’s name is David. David Burns. I was married to a David, but when we divorced, I burned that bridge. What did “David” contain (it is my father’s name, too) that had to be expelled? Why was he a bone in the throat that had to be choked on for years, coughed up in a moment’s spasm, and spat out in the end?

Nail Dream: in this dream, I am working on a syllabus for a new course. I am being assisted, almost certainly against my will, by a woman who intimidates me. For me, she functions as the subject-supposed-to-know. She says, “But of course you’ll have to talk about ‘Nail’”. I think to myself, Nail? Who or what is Nail? Is it an important historical figure? Is it a literary movement? Is it some new theory or pedagogy? Aloud, I echo her words, “Yes, of course”, in a sad mimicry of my interlocutor’s assurance. And I then hurry to change the subject, anxious not to expose my lack of knowledge concerning Nail.

In both dreams, there is doubling. In both dreams, I am being assisted by someone more capable and knowledgeable than I. In both dreams, the space occupied is connected to the academy, and what both dreams point directly to is another academy, a training ground of the primal past: the bathroom with its “potty”.

Undoubtedly, some of the first black marks I ever put on a page were the letters that spell out my name. But perhaps there was an originary black mark etched in the book of records, not placed there by me but against me. When my fat baby fingers first gripped that thick, lead pencil, I was wary of the tool and deliberate about the message: I was making an initial and awkward stab at creating myself through my relationship to language. But there was a more originary tool (the nail) and what was being written (a kind of exploratory writing on the body), a more originary story.

One can easily imagine the scene, as I am forced to do since I have no actual memory of it: the tile of the bathroom floor, the white porcelain of the tub, the small wooden

frame of the potty used for teaching children the arts of the toilet. And then there's the child herself seated upon her small throne, legs slightly apart, head bowed intently over her work. But what's that in her hand, and what in the name of God is she doing with it? This primal drama climaxes with the return of the m(O)ther, suspicious of the elongated silence that calls her to the bathroom. "What's that child up to?" she wonders. And then she sees. Oh, yes, she sees. In her daughter's tiny, perfectly-shaped hand (it has not yet been scarred by an accident that will nearly sever her right thumb), she sees a silver nail resembling nothing if not a cruel but miniature penis aimed directly at her child's genitals. Fear and revulsion collide and cannot be untangled soon enough to spare the rod as she hauls the child off the potty and spansks her. Spanks her hard. Harder than she ever has before or ever will again.

"Don't do that!" she says. "Do you understand me?" Her terrible youth and sad lack of a wisdom that can only come later rather than sooner couple, then, to produce the simple black-and-white of "That's bad!"

Perhaps the child wishes for clarification, but because her access to language is still minimal, she cannot ask an important question: "To what does the 'that' refer?" And further: "For what, precisely, am I being punished?" Or: "Whatever the 'that' is, Mommy my All, what does it contain that warrants this kind of hurt, these hot tears?"

Another academy, another training ground of the primal past: just before I enter high school, I replace my glasses with contacts, and my mother says this would be a good time to start plucking my eyebrows. (Is this, too, a form of writing on the body?) Although I derive childish comfort from lying with my head in her lap, her bosom heaving gently as she applies a warm cloth to my forehead to open the pores, the staccato action of the silver tweezers hurts, like getting a noseful of pepper. Beauty is painful, and the plucking and arching of the brows seem a strange and mysterious rite of initiation into the cult of Femininity, a cult I'm not sure I want to join. Not yet, anyway. (In college, I quit shaving my armpits and throw away the tweezers. My eyebrows, however, never return to their former fullness. Out of pique, perhaps? After all, when one is lying in the maternal bosom, one expects to receive something from the mother's body, not have something taken from one's own.)

Before I leave high school, more lessons are delivered on how to be a girl. It's prom night, and I've been "fixed up" with a rotund boy who has fanglike cuspids and a crisp, powder-blue bowtie tucked under his chin. Using silver thread and silver needle, my mother has made me a silver dress with a high waist and a plunging neckline. With my silver shoes and stiletto heels, I'm nothing if not an anthropomorphic version of the nail. My mother eyes me thoughtfully and then says, "You need a push-up bra. It'll give you cleavage". "I don't want cleavage", I say. "Cleavage looks good with that kind of neckline", she argues. "I don't want cleavage", I say again. "Why not?" asks

Mom, truly puzzled. "I don't know", I say, but, in fact, I do know. I do not wish to have my rotund, bow-tied date think of me as a Woman or the Opposite Sex or whatever else cleavage might make him think of. I am filled with the desire not to be desired.

Thirty years later, over dinner, the girl (mature now, or so one would assume) says to her husband, "I may be highly neurotic, but it has nothing to do with my parents". And she's not joking. She's deadly serious. But, then, after a brief pause in which the words are carefully digested, wife and husband laugh (how else but hysterically?) at the absurdity of the statement.

Here's a thing I can say with certainty: life carries on even as one writes. What this means is that sometimes life carries on with such malignant force that it makes writing almost impossible, which means, in turn, that life becomes almost impossible, the only way to endure it: writing itself. And so "Big Sex: The Story of the Silver Nail and Other Objects of (Mass) Construction" was born out of love gone awry and, every day, nearly dies of the same cause. It is writing on the verge of collapse. It verges on the writing of collapse. It collapses on the verge of writing.

verge (vûrj), *n.*, *v.*, verged, verging. —*n.* 1. the edge or border of something: *the verge of a desert*. 2. the limit or point beyond which something begins or occurs; brink: *on the verge of a nervous breakdown*. 3. a limiting belt, strip, or border of something. 4. a rod, wand, or staff, esp. one carried as an emblem of authority (Random 1975).

When I am in love, I want to be in text with the beloved, by which I mean I want our storehouse of words to mix and merge. I want to leap into the inky abyss of collaboration. And what is the collaborative act but an act of love, a linguistic copulation that brings something else (a third term) into existence? This third term is not me, nor is it the beloved, and yet because we are both "in" it, it allows us to see each other as separate subjects at the same time that it binds us together. And therein lies the beauty and horror of that tightrope act known as love, for it requires perfect balance, a balance that can only be achieved through days, weeks, months, and years of dogged calibration resulting in equal parts distance and proximity, difference and sameness.

Not to sound too much like the Wife of Bath but to get downright personal nevertheless, I must admit that my second husband unwittingly supplied me with the title for this piece of writing, for it was he who referred to certain nights of the week as "big sex" nights, i.e., nights that entailed a big dinner, big drinks and many of them, on the heels of which followed (big) sex acts. Out of deference to the "verge" that is a limiting belt, strip, or border of something, I will momentarily cease to get downright personal with the details, except to say that these (big) sex acts occasionally involved yet another kind of "verge": the rods, wands, and staffs of authority. So when he and

I parted ways, I found myself tattooed with the concept of big sex. Like the lovers' heart carved into the barky flesh of an oak tree, it was scratched on my body and in my head; the artist's tool that silver nail of old.

Every Sunday night I meet with what I jokingly but with great affection refer to as the "love group," which is a directed study I'm doing with two graduate students who wish to investigate how love is articulated in literature. So we read books and we talk about love, both literary and personal. One of the students is a 32-year-old woman who says she can't return love and who dreams of finding a man who will rip her heart out. I say, "Don't ask for that. It's the worst sort of pain imaginable". But then she says, "Maybe I can't know about love until I know about that kind of pain". Of course, she's right. There is a dialectical relation between the two.

The day is never so bright, so welcome, so apparently day-like, until you've lain awake in the dark all night in the sweaty stench of fear... when every sound is given a significance it doesn't deserve and would never be assigned during daylight hours, when you even go as far as to make up sounds, the silence becoming too oppressive, because you want, no, desperately need, to attach the fear to something; not allow this free-floating, bloated monster of silence to consume you, and so your ears produce sounds that don't exist, a kind of stop-gap measure, something to give you purchase even if what you imagine is far worse than any possible reality, for at least it's *something* to hold onto in the hollow bosom of night when you've had an argument with your lover (probably about sex) and he has risen abruptly from the bed, yanked his trousers back on as if deeply insulted by the insolence of a pant leg, and left you to contend with your fear of the dark in a cabin surrounded by deep lake water and equally deep woods with no flashlight and only a small stub of a candle but no notion of where the matches are.

And in a darkness darker than the word "dark" can ever successfully represent, you say to yourself, "Where's the rage now? I'd rather be angry than frightened." And then you ask yourself, "When will he come back?" And as you hold your breath, straining to hear his footfall or the creak and bang of the outhouse door or any sign at all that he's nearby, you know with fatal certainty that he won't be coming back — there will be no midnight rescue — and that when daylight finally arrives (thank you God, thank you Jesus), you'll have to go and look for him, your feet picking their way along the stony path far more nimbly than your tired mental faculties can pick out the appropriate words for an apology. How, by the way, does one apologise for a neurotic tic that makes one slide unaccountably, like a derelict see-saw, from sexual frenzy to frigidity?

Putting this question aside, for the moment, let me say that lying there alone in the dark is what most of us experience lying there *together* in the dark, for as any good Lacanian knows, there is no sexual relation and when we make love, it is not to or

with another person but to or with our own fantasies—hence the frequent changing of one's hat. One looks among the costumes for a semblance of the "moi" that the "je" thinks would be desirable to the other. But, then, the self *is* an/other, and so one makes love precisely to oneself. There is, however, a difference between making love and loving, and this is why I've never really liked the phrase "making love", preferring instead the more mechanical, certainly less romantic, phrase "having sex". One may "make love" to oneself, but one can only love another, and because it is love, not sex, that brings the other into view, we defend against love and thus refuse to see the other. Perhaps this defense and its cohort, refusal, explain why people frequently note the depressive plunge that occurs after having sex in the afternoon. For sex is often used as a cover, the sex act (whatever that is) allowing us to indulge, if only momentarily, in the illusion that we are whole, not irreconcilably split, that we are in accord, not alienated, that we are safe, not in peril, that we are at the center, not hovering in the margin or on the seam. But this illusion is harder to maintain when, rather than drift off into the landscape of sleep and dream, we must rise and dress in order to contend with the decaying of the day in the dolor of twilight. For although twilight represents that uncertain space between the certainty of categories such as "day" and "night", its pale light points like a beacon to the anxious certainty that we are neither/nor, only a pulsating subject that appears as it always already fades.³

"Fear is the opposite of love", says the graduate student who can't return love, but she doesn't remember where she heard it or who said it. As the words dangle in the air and then fade, I think to myself there's something to this, later deciding that in the statement's elegant simplicity lies an impeccable truth. There's a lot of fear in classroom and bedroom but precious little love...

"I didn't want to miss the day with you in it",
he said, slowly realising that because of the larger problem,
he could not eat the cinnamon roll.
As if to keep his spirits up, she said, "You just need an instrument to get
in there".
This was said with great hope—
or with great doubt in the guise of hope.

"I don't think it's going to come clean," he replied.
"Not just by rubbing it."

He had always been her silent swordsman,
and she, his magician of faith.
But now, his body closed on all surfaces,
he had become an electric virus

3 This meditation on the dolorous aspect of sex appears as a footnote in an article I wrote entitled "Singing the 'Stuttgart, Ark'. Blues With Bukka White, or, How I Utterly Failed to Be Like Elvis" (2004, 1). There, it was peripheral to my larger concerns; here, it is central.

and she, passing through a door of rawhide,
his sometimes petite angel.

They engaged in sophisticated forms of disregard.
They tried bemusement.
They tried the penitentiary.
They adapted themselves to all fixed positions,
but adaptation ultimately demands a return.

"Perhaps the language of love runs out of steam
when meaning becomes congealed", she said.

"Yes", he said with resolve (or was it relief?), biting into the cinnamon
roll at last.

"A couple means two", I say, and I state it with such force that I might as well be holding a loaded pistol in my hand, ready to fire it at anyone who dares to disagree. And yet there are those who do dare, those who say, "A couple isn't definitive. People use the term to mean 'around two' but possibly more." I can accept the vagaries of "several" or "a few", but to put "a couple" in the same category is madness, I argue, leaping to my feet as if the world is crumbling beneath me and I must meet the disaster at full height. Oddly, I'm the one who encourages my students to see the delightful humor of the Underground Man's funky arithmetic wherein "twice two makes five" is found to be "a very charming little thing" (Dostoevsky 2001, 1199). But when everything is in ruins around you, or threatening to be, you want to believe in the existence of a few eternal truths such as "a couple means two (rather than three or more)" or that love does operate in the world as a more powerful force than fear or hate.

My adamant insistence on a couple meaning two is, of course, worth investigating. Why am I willing to accept other equally vague terms but go for the jugular when it comes to "a couple"? Does my insistence suggest an unconscious desire to resurrect the dyadic bond of infancy, the coupling of Mother and Child before the Father introduces castration (i.e., separation, alienation, and thus subjectivity ([Fink 1995, 49-68])? Or does my insistence simply underline what I already know but hate to admit: that I am perhaps unreasonably attached to a romance narrative which dictates finding the *one* person, the *right* person, the *perfect* person with whom to live one's life? And why am I so willing to forget the important psychoanalytic truth that even in the tamest of bedrooms, there's always a crowd: participants, parents, Oedipal and anal fathers, maternal superego, ideal ego, ego ideal, etc. In the bedroom, at least, a couple never, no, never means two.

As I write this, the world crumbles. If I thought I was alone before, I was mistaken.

Two weeks ago, I could say that I was "more or less" alone, but today, well, today, everything is different. Everything has changed. Two weeks ago, the space I occupied was connected to past and future. Today it seems I have nothing but the present with which to contend, a present that forces me to rely on my own libidinal resources and/or supplies. I thumb through my address book, think of calling old friends in faraway places, but something stops me. Could it be a masochistic desire to enjoy my symptom? For I know that unless I orchestrate it myself, there will be no car wheels crunching in the driveway, no knock on the door, no sign from the gods. There will only be silence—not ominous this time, simply indifferent.

And then the telephone rings.

It's my m(O)ther. I try to talk, but she's asking all the wrong/right questions, and I'm well into my cups, and I just feel stiff and shitty, like a kid who's been discovered doing something she's not supposed to be doing. In the distance, do I hear the clatter of a silver nail hitting the floor? Yes, it rolls inexorably toward me. I could say, "I'm suffering, Mom, and I'm milking it for all it's worth—yes, sucking hard—so either forgive me, or call back in the morning when I'm sober and we can sweep my shortcomings under the carpet". But I don't. Instead, I continue to talk, feeling all the while like a submerged ship suddenly pulled toward the surface, creaking and groaning in dismay as it leaves its watery grave, abruptly, unexpectedly dislodged from its comfortable resting place. This is no rescue; this is a disturbance levied by the one who took away the teat and left me with nothing but an oral fixation and the sorry—but, oh so sublime!—substitutes of booze and cigarettes. "Leave me alone", I wish to say, but it's my mother, after all, and she can't know, doesn't know that, as we talk, we occupy that register where "one is caught short, where one cannot, as a result of the lack, give what is to be given" (Lacan 1977, 104). So when we say goodbye, I am glad for an excuse to plummet back through liquid layers of saltwater and jack-knife on the sandy bottom.

"I love you, but, because inexplicably I love in you something more than you—the objet petit a—I mutilate you" (Lacan 1977, 268).

They say—pop psychologists, my mother, and the psychiatrist in a Woody Allen movie—that in relationships of the love-and-sex variety, each participant engages in the paradoxical act of both replicating and correcting his or her childhood. Given my own childhood, which I have constructed rightly or wrongly as a happy one punctuated very infrequently by events that only take on the status of trauma in the context of a fairly untraumatic childhood, I believe what they say to be true. If most of my trauma occurred at school (and on a training ground such as that of the potty), it's no wonder that I've chosen to spend most of my adult years in the academy, first as a student and then as a teacher. Although I've told this story over and over again—it

even appears in print now—apparently, I must keep repeating it until I’ve sucked it dry of all poison. I won’t linger as lovingly over the details here, having done that elsewhere, but instead I’ll simply mention it in bare bones fashion.

The story goes like this: I encounter my first official English teacher when our family is in Zaire. The year is 1966, and I am in the second grade. I have written a book report in a newly learned cursive hand and, in a fit of artistic hubris, I take a pair of scissors and cut around each sentence, carefully maneuvering above and beneath the curvy tops and bottoms of letters to interrupt the relentless linearity of the page. I then stack my oddly shaped sentences in the proper order and tie a ribbon around them to give them the look of a unified object. This irregular book report does not meet with the teacher’s approval. In fact, she is so displeased that she tells me I should be ashamed of myself and that I must stand in the corner facing the wall. Even though I have reasonable access to language, it never occurs to me to inquire about the nature of my crime (or was it a sin?). She is the teacher, and I am the student; therefore, she is right and I am wrong. In the classroom of my childhood, all justice is suspended, and creativity takes a back seat to conformity.

Can I say it any other way? *School cuts*. For the twosome of silver nail and scissors couple to produce a connection between exploring the body and cutting up the page. Sex(ual misconduct) and text(ual misconduct) become inextricably bound, sometimes blissfully, sometimes not.

Funny how I turn out to be an English teacher, the petite hysteric of the department known by some as Dr. O.—doctor of psychoanalysis, chimney sweeper, and mistress of masochism all rolled into one. I masquerade as a Woman, having never quite learned how to *be* one, engage in autobiographical exhibitionism, and, worse (and/or better) yet, write like a Cixous wannabe things (*das Dings?!*) that are not easily categorised as one genre or another but little hybrid “turds” as Lacan might have it: “*I give myself to you, the patient says again, but this gift of my person—as they say—Oh, mystery! Is changed inexplicably into a gift of shit*” (1977, 268). This gift of my person may change inexplicably into a gift of shit, but since the self is, after all, an/other, my personal revelations are neither entirely personal nor revealing of some internal essence that is uniquely, shamefully mine. The shit—if that *is* what it is—is collaborative and thus of great value. In the final analysis, offering up one’s shit is, in fact, an act of love.

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Biography

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