

CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE MANNER OF THE SPAGHETTI WOMAN

By  
Emma Wippermann  
B.A., Bryn Mawr College, 2012

Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
Degree of Master of Arts in the Department of English at  
Brown University

PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND MAY 2018

This thesis by Emma Wippermann is accepted in its present form by the  
Department of Literary Arts as satisfying the thesis requirements for the  
degree of Master of Fine Arts

Date\_\_\_\_\_

Mónica de la Torre

Approved by the Graduate Council

Date\_\_\_\_\_

Andrew G. Campbell



## Acknowledgements

Thank you to everyone whose name I mentioned—and to Mónica de la Torre, whose name I didn't dare mention. 😊



Sitting on the subway, the warmth of the woman's arm next to mine was reassuring in the way that strange contact on the train never is. It soothed my goose-bumped arm in the chilly car until she stood up, and, missing the heat, I looked and saw that I knew her—it was Mantha. I said nothing, and she hadn't seen me, and she got off the train.

Feeling is a shape of knowing; it's the truth-bearer most invoked. What that was (there, I'm pointing) was more like an epistemological slide than a heartbreak.

Though maybe it was too soft to break. I un- then re-followed her. What was it, seeing Josefin's fresh images on the internet, that caused that pain? Her, of course, but also that she wouldn't (a wound, still won't) address me yet addressed a public in which I was one of innocuous many. And as part of this public, my engagement with her via her photos had to follow a protocol: liking them, acknowledging that I saw, but no more.

Or—if the photo is the advent of the self as other—maybe it's encountering the specific signs of her as other that was (is, now less so) disturbing. And facing her as creator and public manager of this other and its images. For a while I mimicked them.

I should have eaten before drinking the wine, but the sun and Agnès Varda's show, the photo of her holding hanging kelp before rotting ruins by the sea. When I was seventeen I worked in a nice restaurant, and the bartender would slip me sips of different wines. "Don't think," he said. "Don't swallow and don't think, and then swallow and don't think, and tell me what it tastes like." Fresh water, weathered rock. I can smell Midtown's perfumes as they walk by. Older people smile at me as I sit here with wine and the time to do so. Younger people look longer and without expression. The woman on the corner is shaking her head. My phone must be charged. I took a video of Agnès Varda's ocean: sea's horizon projected onto the wall; projected waves rolling onto the beach on the floor; real sand spread carefully out. A life-size diorama made of white sand and light. Freud's theory of psychological projection developed at the same time as film projection, and I'm alone at the faux Parisian table set on the sidewalk for show in Midtown. Projecting. A group of men in medium-quality suits enters the vestibule into the restaurant. There's a card but no cash in my wallet. What am I doing. I drink the rest of my wine but it's too much to swallow all at once. Cheeks puffed, I hold the body of liquid in my mouth. It warms when it's held.

“Aestheticize legitimacy,” Rami said. Remember my face, and then come find me.

The national news is cry-worthy all-day and Josefin sent far-away forest photos, ice on branches and the melting lake. At night I went for a walk and tried to figure it out, caring which means knowing more at the end of each day: “I still don’t know but I can’t help but fathom.” It was cold, I turned around, new boots stiff but thought suddenly, I wanted a branch. Green and alive, for a while, inside my apartment looking over the parking lot (a one-way rapture). I’ll walk to the end of the street to find one, I decided. But I remembered what I’d read—even a bug’s bite on a leaf. Trees feel it and send toxins through veins so that the leaves taste bitter. If a bite on a leaf, imagine a branch broken off. Even for beauty. I had been thinking that all the wood in my apartment is beautiful, thinking a clone for seeing, a relief among linoleum and plaster and the pleasure of my kitchen table, the stool. They’re beautiful the way a taxidermied head on the wall is beautiful. Once alive and breathing, and it looks like it, postarboreal, evoking animacy, I think, in my house, but the haecceity released. Material concern and “thisness” shaped to straight planks. No branch.

I walked to the end of the street anyway and at the corner there was a pile. Someone had made wreaths and thrown them out because it was January, snow melted and warm. Only one branch in the pile wasn’t twisted up with wire and I took it home and put it in water.





Earlier in the week, Irina had posted to IG some photos of a spaghetti lady in construction, and I saw her finished in her tub. She was the size of two fists and made of clay, and her hair was dry spaghetti rooted into her scalp and sticking straight out. She was taking a bath, the unfired clay turning soft and turning the water murky. When I went back three days later, she had disintegrated, the bathwater gray, spaghetti no longer stiff.

Writing is like acting out mimetic desire, or nearly translating the want of language into your own. The soap Hilma gave me is finally almost gone. I'll wash my hands with it until the last bit slips and follows the water down the drain. I copy it out; every thought has its own formal procedure, or expression.

Photos are sent like texts, cuts in time—an un-rephrase-able discreteness; irreducible. I take it, the picture—a temporary stabilization forever—of multiple thoughts and temporalities, of notes I wrote down months ago. Hauled back up, they now make sense. Or they can be put to use when removed from context, absented from the scrolling stream.





Using “ease” as the location of love; trying to find that soft spot, phone or poem like a divining rod that points to—the keystroke, unmitigated pleasure, or the domestic but not tender. At the museum; Cathy Wilkes’ painting on a taut jersey shirt made rectangular on stretcher bars, hung at crotch-height. Precisely how I hold my phone. Lit perfectly but there’s nothing “easy” about it, comparing the gallery list of materials with Acacia in the cooled room. Lacquer? No, dewey gauze and paint and the fluorescents. Carefully fallen wheat grain on the floor. I’m locating love in this placeless feeling, pale colors hung on any white wall, the “this” still waiting for its referent to be supplied.

My pelvis is the best viewer for the child sculpture on the floor.

Al and Andrea and Louise and me, and no one is smarter after a mixed drink at the Cheesecake Factory. And Marilyn there asked us to be regulars, Louise looking at the three-inch-thick menu. “You know perfect happiness excludes even the feeling of it, since there’d be no more space for the self.” And I’m smashing the olives with my fork to make the martini that Marilyn brought more dirty. Attempting to anchor the everyday and Al saying, “Louise with her Bud is the butchest one here.” And Louise indignant—“Are you surprised?” she asked—and pleased.



Andrea's missed two trains, and I'm walking beneath the orange and sponge-painted ceilings, arched. I'm taking a video on the way to the bathroom to send Acacia, who's eating spaghetti at Forlini's in Chinatown four hours away.

I don't sit on the toilet. I kick up the seat and squat halfway and my fingers won't type so I send one then two selfies.

Then Al sweet Al drives Andrea and Lou to my apartment while I bike in the cold with cold extremities and beat them and quickly clean what I can. They arrive and Lou makes drinks and we sit, Al saying to me, We're bros, you're such a secret bro, we're bros you and me. Andrea sleepy and smiling, I love the unpredictable kinds of we. Beautiful Louise showing her phone to Al, who's looking over. And laughing. My screen lights but I don't see it asking, Are you free this week? By availability I mean not happiness but pleasure. You mean leaving the self space?

I asked the class to assemble a list: what is your image sensibility, your collage logic. Scroll through your photos and find out. The students wrote and I wrote, too: the phone is a divining rod that points back to—what happened. As primary source, I'd need my notes: two hanging plants as a double drooper and the charisma of celibacy—chapter one. Chapter two: the platonic flirt. I told Ian and Louise, What I lack in consistency I make up for in endurance. We were talking about poetry readings but I think it also means: don't ask much of me and I'll never leave.





Expressive human lovers are a parasite some tree species didn't evolve their bark for—the poor beech, birch! Wild plants speak through roots and form communities, but the crops we eat are deaf and dumb to one another. “Acacias,” Acacia said, “talk to each other from miles away.”

The forests here are tended as a crop. Something about driving through strikes you and it's that, height aside, the feeling is the same as farm fields. Various beauty. The bad all seems to have something in common but the good is as different as each feeling of it.

I text Acacia from miles away. Phatic, as usual, my message means but without content. They say, “Send me a pic.”

I described Irina's sculpture to everyone I saw until I could describe how I saw it well. Feelings, but purely material; the matter is what meant. There was a mannequin hand so detailed that it had cuticles, and it was wearing a glove, but the index finger of the glove was cut off to reveal the manicured nail. Slipped around the tip of the exposed finger was a gummy, translucent-pink vibrator, which was gently vibrating. Attached to the bullet-sized vibrator was a little metal rod at a forty-five degree angle, which held up a miniature landscape, pulsing from the vibration. The landscape was the size of a thumbnail: a sunrise, mountain range. Pointed at this inkjet-printed landscape was a video camera, filming the quivering mountains. This small assemblage was all atop a new flat-screen TV still in its box. The box showed an image of the TV on front, and the image was exacto-knifed out to reveal the real TV screen inside. It was showing the shaking mountains.

Irina always asks me what I'm reading, and my summarizing articulations embarrass me. I ask about her work, and she says she can't articulate. Her hands are really long and elegant. When she's speaking, the fingers stiffen, deictic, as if to say, This.

Our communication in the afternoon was frantic but exclamatory. Irina texted me the address and then her phone died. And I went to her show and knew exactly what she meant.

Andrew told me of seeing this mesmerizing form cross the street, a shape of a motion which was an animal bounding in a wave, the tail tracing sine curves. He said, But then I realized—it was just a squirrel. And he felt disappointed even as he questioned it, the seeming incommensurability of the grace of the moving shape and the normal animal. Andrew said all this when we met during the snowstorm this last winter.

When I think about the storm there's that layered memory that isn't mine, the squirrel crossing the street the warm week before, pre-snow, gray-flecked tail over broken brown leaves, a flash then a passing car. After saying goodbye to Andrew, I walked toward home down the middle of unplowed streets, snow still burying, and I was the only human I saw until on the bridge over the highway there was a news truck and a shivering reporter. She really begged me to be interviewed. "What do you think of this storm?" she asked. I was thinking we can't let it fool us.





Spinoza called bodies that are easily moved ‘soft’ and the bodies that resist movement ‘hard.’

I have a game on the field I walk across everyday. I think of the field as the site, and I move across it. Then I think of my movement across it as the scene—the field a stage with a proscenium that encircles rather than faces. I walk on and will walk off. Then I’m the site. My sensations and the perception of them are the scene—the occurrence. The limits of my proprioception are the proscenium. I look to the trees that ring the field, different sites of perhaps the same scene for the others (whom I can’t see), the squirrels, insects, moss, bacteria that live on/with all, etc., and my gaze nudges the stage of a crow, who flies away.

My boots are prosthetic paws for the wet spring ground, and I’m guilty as an agent of erosion of the soft soil holding/being held by the planted precarious grass, but my feet and joints feel, inaccurately for sure, that the grass has less to do with my species than the paved path which winds around.



And I email because her voice then static, her speech entering the inaccessible, the bad connection, the silent suddenly vibrant I write her, subject line, hi. The subject on the thin branch moves her head in a micro-movement left. Perceiving some stimuli I can't, the wind carrying scent or sound or maybe her neck is stiff.

Trying to acknowledge situated knowledges. Ok. Charismatic species.

I drove back to New York after delivering Hilma's portrait to her new home; Hilma, who'd just gotten married, was mad at Jim from the lumberyard and had hauled her delivery of wood to the woods and buried it. Then called Jim and asked where her lumber was. Hilma dug up the two by fours, now doubled by the second delivery, to build herself a studio outside the main house. "Marriage gets into everything," she said.

Before I left, Hilma confessed she felt stifled, claustrophobic even in her contentment. "The truth is that the condition of being beloved is intolerable to many," I consoled, and, slightly embarrassed, I pulled up my sleeve to show her the inside of my arm where the softer skin touches the ribs, and it was no longer LOVER tattooed there in my handwriting but BELOVED, in a handwriting that wasn't mine.

Desire doubled is love and love doubled is unsustainable. On the drive back I called Josefin, put her on speakerphone, and told her about the buried wood.



I felt the duration of my body. It reminded me of Bergson's sugar water. The time it takes for the sugar to dissolve, for a clay woman to soften indecipherably, is entirely in relation to "a certain portion of my own duration, which I cannot protract or contract as I like." The three days of dissolution, the moist spaghetti on the floor, the history of clay, carpet, wheat coincided with my presence—or, I happened to show up. I mean there was a tea-stained body on the floor and dissolved sugar. Irina and Agata arranged for this assemblage: "It is no longer something thought, it is something lived."

Updates on the material—Irina's posted photos, my two visits—elide the duration of time as a whole. An update is a kind of metonymy for a moment that's supposed to stand for all of it. Here I'm just playing at life, or a body.



I began to be able to perceive possible futures in which all wasn't difficulty between us. The morning after our seven hour Facetime, Josefin's cat Ruby returned after an absence of more than half a year.

The squirrel has been in the garden all afternoon, and she usually isn't so stationary; territories may have changed.

I leave my home to find her. On a branch the size of a broom handle, she's there, utterly unmoving. Hey, I say quietly, but the fur on her tail responds only to the wind. So non-human material agency at work, and she, the animate, seems perfectly still. When I zoom with my phone I see her belly soft; it rises up and lets go.



She is still, and so am I.

Until she hurdles hurtless between boughs, across the yard and out of sight.

At an outside table with Adele and it's warm. The temperature of the air is the same as my body, so my body lacks boundaries. It's difficult to sense, not knowing where I end; what perception is mine or if it ever is. Like I can feel the pants Adele is sitting in and watching the street with eyes like turbines generating flow.

We are also being powered. A woman on the corner looks over, and I am dutiful in replenishing all the required iterations of relation.

Emotion isn't an action upon the world. Last summer Josefin made me two ceramic cups: one is etched “----> action ----- > passion --->” around the circumference; the other says “production -----> seduction ----- -->”

I lack boundaries but perhaps this says more about me than actual potential for collective proprioception. Fingering a utopic vision; some of us have time to think about everything. The air is thick and I too. Desire and despair both reorganize the individual, but action allows for a misremembering of self-continuity.

And sometimes when we're on the phone and she's cutting out because there's a bad connection, I worry we have a bad connection.

I'm at the window tracing wood grain. Josefín is sending photos of the deer. Proximity makes us more or less legible, and yet I can scroll up and see: photo archive of poses and places and seasons where we aren't. Emotional optics is a politics of positioning.

The dear one outside is not on the fence clattering or quiet, not on the power line, and I'm feeling human like it's a prosthetic. I shift frozen raspberries from their bag to the glass bowl. It's a limb I use to place them in spring sun to warm on the morning table and soon the juice casts a pink shadow.



Three days after the opening, I returned and it wasn't too hot anymore. Irina and Agata had filled the room with space heaters and carpeted it. They made their show hot like the bathhouse that it was named.

In *Bathroom/Bathhouse*, I was another object among the objects and installations; I was there to be hot then to talk in the other room with the others. Unlike most openings, everyone there was literally feeling the same thing. Being hot in the carpeted room and bending down to look at the sculptures on the floor, the bounds of my body were specified in bent knees and hands holding my scarf so it didn't brush Agata's dripping objects—caramelized sugar tense with intent and gravity.

Irina had stained the carpet with tea, a spill in the shape of a body. Bodies' boundaries were specified but then pulled out, like how the perimeter of a plot of land can be marked with stakes and tape, but the line can be stretched, or broken through.

Everyone in the room was hot. I carefully touched some suspended caramel with one finger.

Perched outside the window was a metallic hand holding a poised can of silver mirror spray paint, some of which was on the window, and even as the window became a partial mirror, reflecting me back at me, the hand outside in January drew me out and I touched the reflective glass.





No, it's true there's no fore-given attachment to a proper or consistent object. Even photographing every postcard-sized blue thing on the street, texting it to Nicole or sending a picture of the moon each night to really anyone to say hi. Or I really don't mean anyone. It is attachment or desire's procedural, desire's wild projection of fulfilled futures, the perfect response time to my text. Or future singular, and the plural you. Even if it's just for a second.

So stuck in time, like how happiness is the momentary anticipation of imminent fulfillment. The mattering of an object—its objectification—is making our materials felt. A mode of emotive materializing. As if our materials are attention.

Hito Steyerl talks about how our physical presence is sometimes just a proxy for our virtual presences, which are often more pressing. It's interesting to explore how our compromised physical existence (and the technologies that cause/enable this proxy state) may actually facilitate an attentive form of viewing—a way of being an audience that makes the temporality of the art-encounter more plastic. Scrolling through my Instagram, I often get multiple previews—in images, captions, animated text annotating a livestream—of a show I'll go see. The ways others 'capture' or record their experience with artwork is inevitably interpretive, creating a polyvocal lens in my initial virtual encounter. And if I'm able to go see the work IRL, that polyvocal interpretation informs how I meet the art—there's the height someone holds their phone when taking a photo of the object, and a specific sequencing of the objects shared. Maybe people are posting from a show's opening, and I can see what the artist is wearing.

I have to evacuate some of myself or move out. Two blocks from home was a really heavy shelf on the sidewalk, and I dragged it six feet then left. Shelves are a form of absence management. Emma texted but even with the two of us it'd still be too hard. Big beautiful evidence of someone else's thinking. Thick wood. And then it rained irrecoverably, so definitely too heavy. Emma was texting and we were being our bodies but recrafted by communication technologies. Content is only ever a flash. "Move it out, Emma," or, there's a capacity to say what one thinks in the words of others. Representation can replace what it shows, and the shelf.

And those Cathy Wilkes paintings hung at the height of my waist, reordering how the figure of the viewer sees. I'm belly first. The sad drunk family sculptures are on the ground like they forgot or never knew a pedestal, putting themselves out on the floor like kids' toys. The gallery guards kept us from getting too close. I stood holding my phone at my hip with my thumb cocked and ready—small violent appendage to tap the trigger of prosthetic sight. I tap and pull the frame in, zoom to press the cheek of the screen to debility. This body was poverty, this body was squatting down. We saw or felt the things simultaneously so they became not quite the same but any separateness was forsaken. Our senses—also apophenic. Or that's how any perceivable thing in the world is, and any art.

Is it better to say something badly than not at all? The stakes are high regarding likeability; today I chaste and craftily post a mock-solemn selfie instead of looking out. The technology of the tourism of self—and is there really a difference between tourism and travel? Or I live here. Nicole catches me with screen out walking away, but we say nothing—the position of the unthought. A dollar. We go to the gallery.

After the show we assume the right to wait out the sudden rain in the lobby of the High Line Hotel, which used to be a shelter.



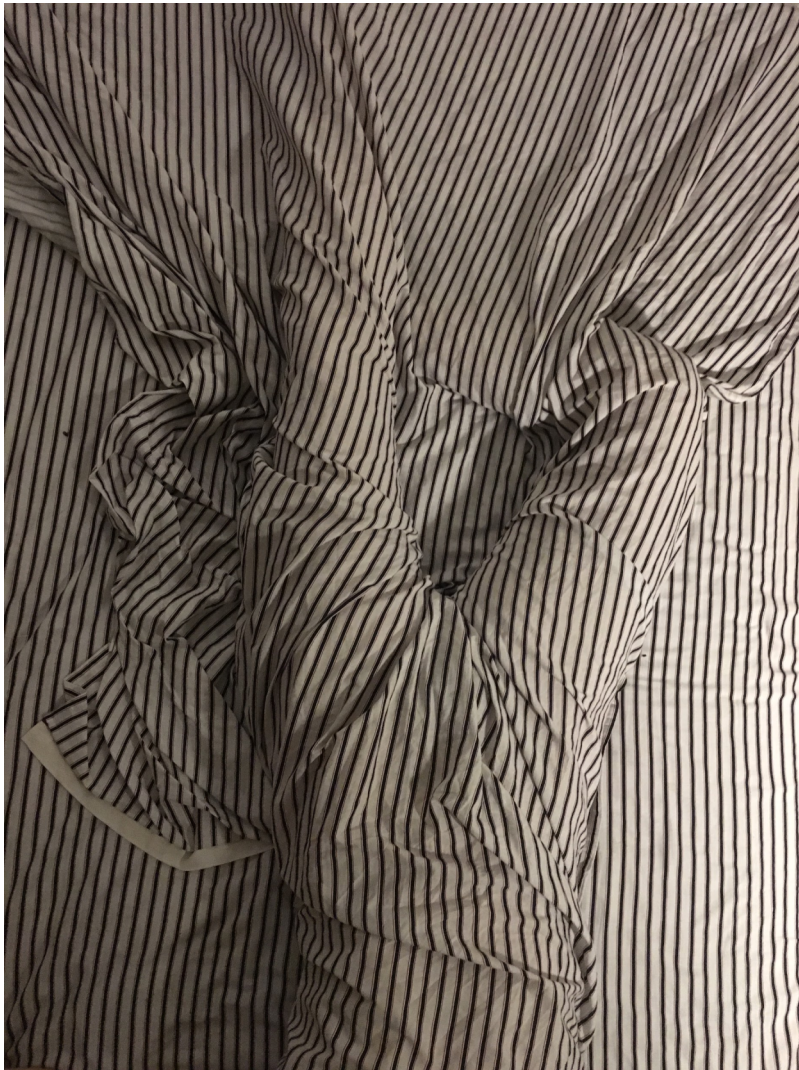


A text in the show read, IF YOU'RE NOT POLITICAL YOUR  
PERSONAL LIFE SHOULD BE EXEMPLARY.



Madden and Andrea and Al and me at “Gayme Night” in the tiny downtown on Monday for “free play.” All the arcade games were free to play and I was wearing Al’s snapback losing at the shooting game but liking the pink guns. Dancing with Madden tentatively texting, and the night was as counter to production as it was seduction. There was no fear of the loss of pleasure, only the searching to summon it up. The drag queen with the highlighter yellow hair was my favorite. It wasn’t me she wanted admiration from.

Despite her dissolution, or actually, probably because of it, I felt a consciousness of the spaghetti woman. Or, a consciousness in the manner of the spaghetti woman. And of the tea stain, the dripping caramel, the silver hand out the window. Of course Irina and Agata's consciousnesses are palpable in their work; their thoughts and also bodies are perceivable by mine, though I saw only their traces. These traces, the material, are part of this whole. The material and its processes are "cut out by my senses"—and not only those senses that focus on the body's exterior, for what "abstractions," as Bergson calls the melting of the sugar, can be touched or tasted? Sugar water can be put in the mouth but the whole of which they are part cannot; my understanding of the spaghetti woman is dependent on my proprioception, the sense of the boundaries and positions of myself.



I imagine we both smiled at our subject and subjective positions.

For six hours after Acacia's bus left I looked at my screens and answered the things I hadn't answered all weekend. I researched squirrel habitats, found a more comfortable stress, went into the office. Monday holiday and I loved the empty hallways. There's something about institutional carpet that always makes my body feel vital. And then Gayme Night. I gave Al his hat back when I started sweating playing DDR.

Mornings when the sense of self is weak from dreams and sleep I could be the next species over. She's clattering on the fence above my bed and sense is loose, seeing the clatter haptic-optic, limbs in sheets and tender nails do grow sturdy. *Hey cute one*, I feel toward her furry sound.

Changes in greeting *are* a change in relationship, but no one comes in.

She's on the fence outside my bedroom window preening maybe, getting ready. Bodies in close relation tend to tell the truth despite our low-context culture. No one comes into this loose selfness, even though sleepy proprioception is still accepting externalism: I'm easily "emotionally touched." But maybe I don't know how to open the door, if there is one, and my sensorium is so quickly stabilizing, I'm waking. What if already too busy, I missed it. She said *Hey*, the twitch of her tail as she came in and walked by.

Sleeping or seeing, light is a surface. Memory will soon flatten to match. Or the borders will soften. The discrete parts of this moment, or momentary assemblage, they weren't discrete. The ocean doesn't really exist without hooves. And when the horses were past, when it's past, the scene congealed. The photo I took is what happened. Except it was all there and my hand shook and the screen did, too. I touched it and switched the subject to selfie, the technology of the tourism of self.







„Booby“ lebte von 1928-1935 im Berliner Zoo.  
Die Präparation von „Booby“ orientierte sich an der Präparation  
von „Karl“ (1901-1902) und „Gustav“ (1908-1909).  
Durch die Anwendung der von ihm entwickelten Methode  
der Präparation der inneren Organe ist es heute möglich,  
den Zustand der Organe und die Art der Färbung zu erkennen.  
Auf diese Weise ist es heute möglich, die Färbung der  
Organe zu rekonstruieren und die Färbung der Organe zu  
rekonstruieren.

For days a pink flower hung suspended in the lower branches of a tree that I passed by every morning. It remained and remained, its presence unaccountable and the weather stayed rainy. On the first dry day I walked by and there was a leaf on the sidewalk really twirling in a little cyclone, and it spun until I stepped on it. My shoe broke an edge and then the leaf couldn't catch the wind. The cyclone passed and I looked up and the pink flower was gone from the branches.

Lucas is always saying “whatever” as if “it’s fine” though it isn’t—or it still matters—to Emma.

But we can think of “what” as “ever.” I mean, as such that it always matters. That what forever, or “the watershed of whatever”: I email Emma, urgent, quoting the internet and her back at her. Purporting to exclude nothing in this private contact. Who doesn’t love a wild recap of a feeling’s history?

Does Emma want it? The reckless summary of a subject has to be sexier than the whole—the summary a metonym not only for the summarized but for the mind-body and process of the summarizer. My body wants that what; conduit. Hot for ever.



Long dealings with abstract thinking weaken our control over involuntary movements. The wild horses on the island were a beautiful case of influence, talented bodies, controlled; two chestnuts and me on this beach and all three of us well-lit and ungroomed and it was early morning. Attuned to the direction of movement—or inflection; they ran parallel to the waves and I stood by. They ran not toward me but to the end of the beach I stood on. But I twitched and they shifted, together, closer to the water licking at hooves.

The sensorium deals mainly with surface, which is really as deep as depth. And contact occurs first at the level of skin—a layer that sheds—the wind touched me and the aggregate body of sea and the two wild horses; I breathed their smell into me into the unseen parts of the body. Inside unknown, but on that island or in it, I knew it better than from without.

Emma knocked over the small plants twice and I wanted to reach through email to touch her hand. “Extrusion of an inner life,” she wrote, the phone dies, and I anticipate a charge. The finger on the phone’s surface is changing the electrical capacitance, and that’s how it registers my presence and self. Conducting surfaces on both sides. Her manicured hand at the museum and the photo of it: the right tapped the screen, the left featured on it, and both deictic at one another. This hand is a sex tool and an information tool, a tool to truly point, scroll, hold the page, stroke, gesture to where it’d like another mind to follow.

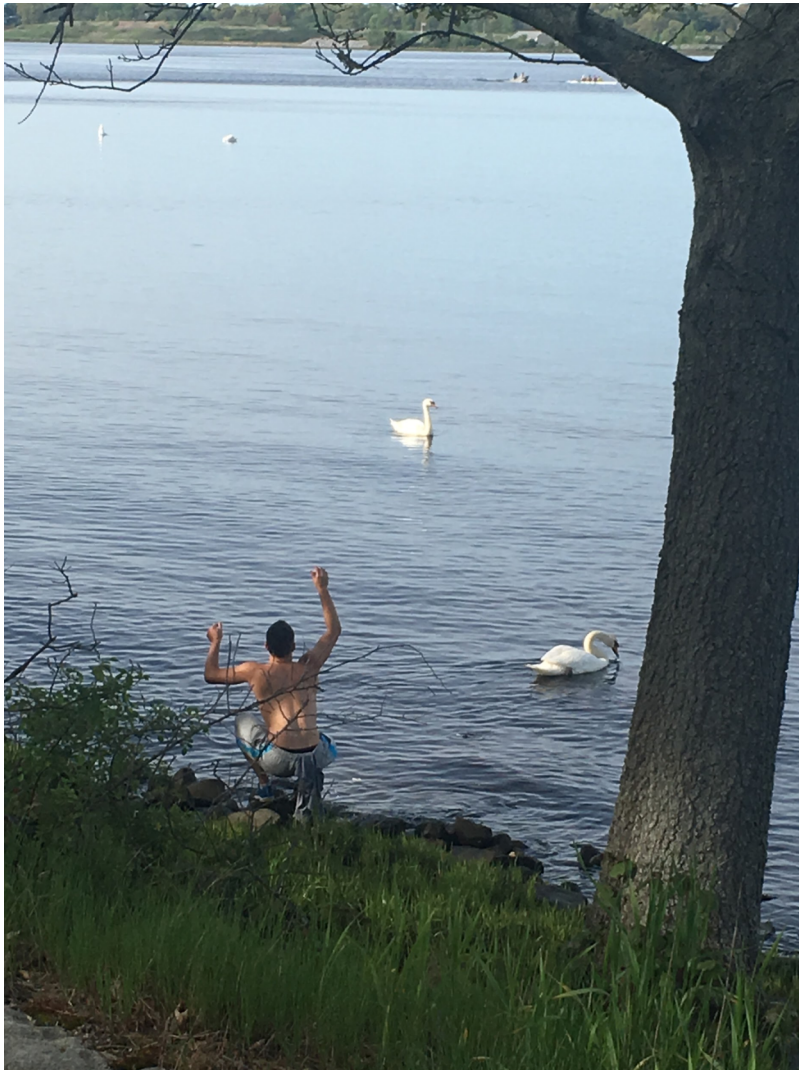
In a poem three years ago: “to desire unseen things—the lit phone,  
pocketed, not the message she read.”

A slippage of topic dropped and Ian texts: “btw we are dating our work.” (“In full tumultuous territory.”) And it’s true, we meet for coffee to gossip about our lines. Strange, non-lucrative statements. Ian and I loud with what we want at our table. A neighbor could counsel compartmentalization.

“But the private is what I talk about in public!”



Adele and I were Facetiming, and I thought she was walking through a long long building, like a warehouse with cross-beams above, and I asked where she was going, and she said, “Cutie, I’m on an elliptical on Katja’s roof.”





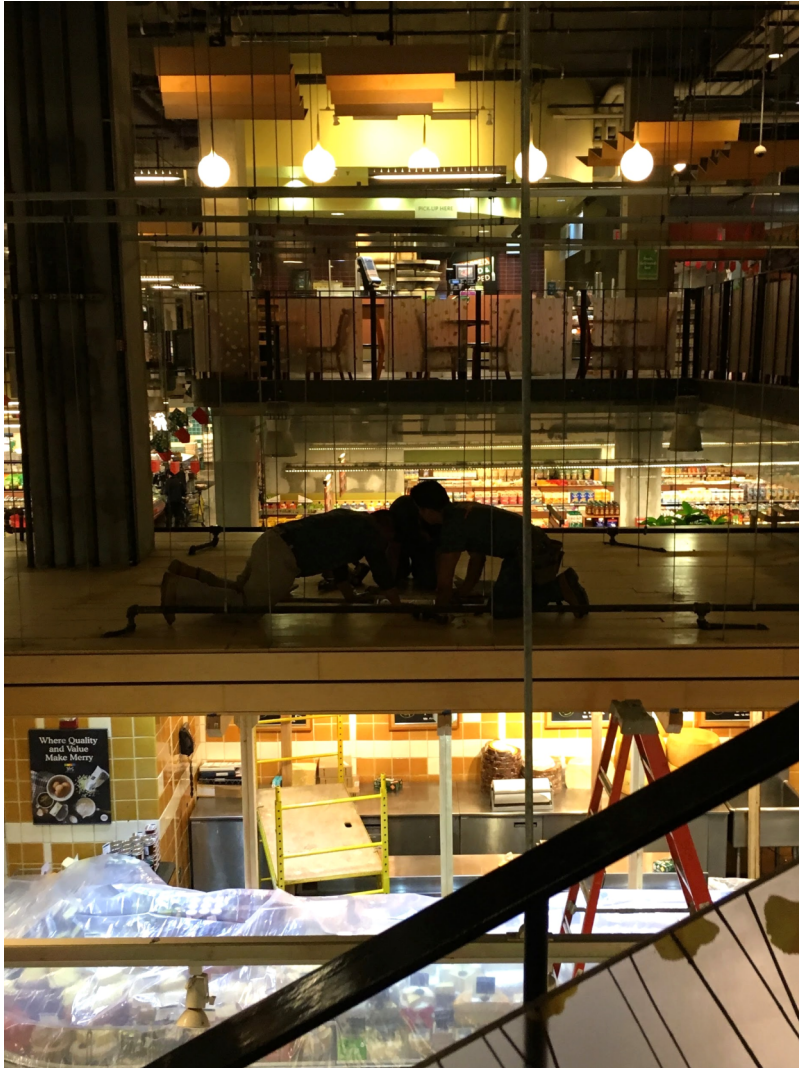
Haven't heard from Josefin since her show in Vienna.

Equity could mean equal precarity which is related to vulnerability—no one feels close until they've been there for one another in a moment of disclosure that shows the underside of the social seam. Risk stays, and equality in precarity isn't always easy to gage. If I'm not wondering about it, the power is probably mine.

Every day I walk across this field. Stein says there's no such thing as repetition—a frog leaps and leaps, and each leap is differently insisted upon. There is no such thing as repetition; there are only infinitely varied insistences or, from Butler, reiterations. From one moment to the next—a moment being the greatest interval of time in which we can perceive no change (a human moment is one-eighteenth of a second, and any span of time shorter we can't perceive)—we could say we reiterate ourselves, insist and become ourselves again and again, and in that there is constant passage, and like arriving in a new place we can become ourselves differently—insist our self variously between the moments that are bound by time or our perception of it. The perception is reliant on the ability to track change by moments like stop-motion. So if there's no change, there's no time.

Artifact of the future: certainty is never an ethical condition. Allowing every update to change you, or, there are thermal strategies of simply not being there.

Out the window a squirrel was ripping down one of the neighbor's sunflowers, like eating that sunflower out and her head haloed by petals—but my phone dead and I wish it was a relief, this inability to document and post in this moment of worldly sweetness amidst archival impulse (no such thing as a background that isn't in you). But not a relief. Written down, the scene is unsatisfying in its very openness, in the possibilities for elaboration. I describe the wet petals and the foggy morning outside the kitchen morning where I half an hour ago had breakfast with her (use her proper noun?) and now watching the squirrel, unable to document but thinking about it. Rushed phone to plug but still dead and what's lacking there is lack. I want the excess drained in grainy zoom, opaque and findable talisman. The photo in the phone is a sign that's seeable without intention while scrolling down. It's a comfort, forever accessible as provisional memory. (Saturday? I was asked to leave the bar at five past midnight, the trees charismatic on the way home, questions about interspecies aesthetics.) In the next iteration of remembering it'll be different, and the specificity of the photo (eleven petals, flower face up, beaming, squirrel straddling a crack in the sidewalk) is both heightened and lost in its place as one photo in the stream, one sight among all the others but I took the photo or didn't, I remember it, punctum moment outside the flood and, not having a place there, it feels different, tenuous and tender, bigger, it doesn't send or move, and I write this to signify just that.





I texted a photo of a poem, and “density” was misread as “destiny.” It expands or merely continues in crystalline structure. Meaning, there’s an order that each moment creates, like a flock of birds turning at the same time; this is a phrase change; like when water all agrees to become ice.



I'm thinking about Rebecca Horn's performance *Scratching Both Walls at Once*. With those fingery mechanisms on her hands, Horn expands the bounds of her senses; she's shifted the perimeters of her proprioception. Proprius is Latin for "one's own"; capio means "to grasp." Her "own" is now more. She can feel farther. This is a literalization of what art can do, or learning: grow our perceptual boundaries. If we're feeling that the room is hot, if we're stretching out of the same kinds of borders, feeling toward the same heat, melted sugar, spilled tea and softened spaghetti, our bodies lose lines in the process and I can feel her feeling more.

Walking across the field, I wonder what I'm saying. How my body unbeknownst is articulated by the setting, the ways I may read and be read, how I might actively take into consideration the implications of my presence. Affect has been shown to be a collective experience; we know it can sweep through a room leaving everyone insisting differently. One person learning the bad news on Twitter sends reverberations through a crowd—and an online collectivity, and one on the street. On a gray day the whole city can feel bitter. The crowd is not the same but continues as a crowd, an aggregate body, a conglomerate tied by what.

Affect can sweep through a room: this syntax leads to thinking about inanimate agency: compare “the anger that’s infecting everyone” with “the rock that’s crushing the hikers.” In our linguistic conceptual system, “anger” and other affects lend themselves more easily to being syntactically animated than the more “clearly inanimate” rock. We read that subject-position rock (a “hard” thing) with slight semantic unease. What can a rock do, or who do we admit acts upon the hikers?

Sylvia Palacios Whitman also uses big hands. They are big green paper mache hands, and they are on display with a photo of maybe Sylvia wearing and wielding them. Arms held in the space before the body, slicing the air vertically like big green scissors which are hands whose purpose is art and also, I think, pleasure and also fun which sweeps through the room.

The neighbor squirrel is out longer with these later afternoons. She's in the garden searching. Slight melt aerates the tightly packed past and demands future plans, but the month is stagnant. Three Februaries ago Sonya and I took a train trip. We had met that winter. I picked her up from the gallery and we went to hers, made dinner and packed a lunch of leftovers, had that kind of slow emotional sex with full stomachs that sometimes leads to tears.

We missed our early morning train, but Sonya is assertive, and multilingual, and we got on the next one for free. It's two trains from Berlin to Leipzig, and on the less sleepy second leg of the trip, we boarded on a broad sunny platform that felt like a tower compared to the flat Brandenburg fields below. Sat down in a nearly empty car, snuggling into one another, and Sonya looked up and said, "Look at that branch." It was leafy in the luggage rack directly above our seats, so green and crisp that it had to have been placed there that morning. And I think it was February.

Remembering is a reiteration less of feeling than of scene; it's the city and space in between that's eroticized rather than the love that compelled us to be there. And the actant branch. We got off the train in Leipzig and walked across the empty city in a *dérive* directed by the routes of a wandering dog.

Loving is the state of desire framed temporally; it's not possible without fantasy. We followed the dog and held gloved hands and then didn't, and visited what we were told was the oldest coffee house in Europe. It was dark when we got back on the train, and we hadn't spoken of anything except practicalities for the last hour. I wondered if the dog went home somewhere and how a dog in *ordentlich* Germany could roam so freely. Sleepy again we sat in our seats, and this time it was me who looked up. "Look!" And it was the branch, leaves wilted but there, and we had sat on the same train in the same car and in same seats beneath it a second time. Not a symbol but an actor, and I took her photo.





Patrick, Katie, everyone keeps sending me squirrel news, squirrel memes, texting me as if they'd just seen my ex on the other side of the street.

Right. Carbon emission is a symptom of loving too much. I say, "You know I fly for my feelings." And the other would say, "I want you right where I can love you." Like the polymorphous perversity of a well-heated room. Hot: how meta is pleasure? I say, "Soon enough the infant realizes she's not continuous with her caretaking environment." The sensuality of fulfilled need, milk-fed, she says, "What makes us overeat?"

Feeling isn't a minimalist practice. "I warm my house and fly to you." She says, "We reiterate relationship, I call you back." "I miss you, too." Inevitably in reiteration there is excess that just won't fit. She asks, "Emission while idling?" "Sometimes it's jouissance," I say. It's what I can't help but follow as the rest goes forth. Ah. No. "We can only want what desire will stick to. Not the midday light but you, to whom I can send its photo." Not fossils but the warmth they fuel.

"I miss you." Anaclitic? A propping relation. An object seen through a screen. I say, "I want you to look at me the way you look at your phone." Mirror and most beautiful window. She says, "Fly us there." Desire portal.

Us, they'll definitely let in.

The photograph lacks aura but reproducibility opens an encounter differently. I'm at the gallery and it's sendable. With my photo of the photo on my phone, I look at Van Der Zee's composition, the way he used light, how he must have spoken to the people in the portrait and decided which moment was perfect to shoot. The couple in raccoon coats look like they're abiding the posed portrait they commissioned. Like writing that's typed and printed, the photo doesn't index a specific time but a maneuvering of that time—not index but performance text.

Attend to her gaze; it's the least that's required. She can't "love as much" because she can't leave, but mimicked behaviors can build mutual trust.

I see her. She hasn't talked yet. She sees me. I say, "OK."

Normal perception is biased toward use rather than vibrancy, yet stability—I use this window every day—creates a habitat in which desire can roam.





I read that trees communicate with one another in many ways, one of which is by electrical signals—the roots are a series of synapses. The signal transmits from one tree to the next by their intertwining roots and the hyphae of fungi, which act symbiotically as go-betweens when the trees don't touch. The electrical signals move an inch a minute down the woody synapse. The beech on the far side of the field has sensed the sea change (it's yet another warm year) and sends the message out (maybe "don't bring those leaf buds forth quite yet"). I walk across the site-turned-scene and it'd be faster for me to tell the others. Our reiterations have limitations; I perform human again and again but really can't insist myself a tree.

Been wondering if we can count as part of subjectivity what's "us" but what we're not aware of. The horse trainer and scientists and journalists all thought Hans the Horse could do math; he'd stomp his hoof the right number almost every time. Then someone realized that if the human didn't know the answer, neither did Hans. Then the humans studied the humans and learned that Hans had taught them the body language he needed to read to play their game. The horse trainer and scientists and journalists didn't know what they were communicating to Hans. This affective exchange enabling everyone to play was entirely unnoticed (by the humans). And are actions performed without conscious agency part of one's subjectivity? Because clearly here, the man who didn't know about his moving muscles was the object.



Scientists say that ants don't know what they build. Each ant follows a pheromone trail, picks up the grain because the smells indicate, drop it down because the path says so, and there are anthills three feet tall.

I cross the field and I'm texting a photo. A scene stretched over many sites: early crocus, communicated in pixels straight to Sweden. Each eighteenth of a second, I can tell I change a little, the translatable moment being the practical condition necessary to be available for the pace of the beech. Texting/calling taking care not to step too hard on the soft grass.

Must stop looking at phone; even or especially there, my social is the site of sameness.





A group of men in kilts exits the vestibule of the cheesy French restaurant as I go in. Charging my phone behind the bar, then sitting back outside at the one table, Parisian-set, on the sidewalk with wine. "It's really just for display," the waiter said, but I sat there. It's Midtown. I left Agnès Varda's show, she does installations now, and I walked onto Fifth Ave into the sun just grinning. Now I'm here wishing this sidewalk had sun. The wine is warmer than the air and the shade is cold. My dark reflection in the window looks like an eighteen-year-old's, lines blurred out: optics, a politics. The best seat to watch from is the one most visible.

Reading this, as Louise says, you're "reaching down to touch a slow fish from a safe ship."

With my right boot I scrape off the worm that's stuck on my left. I also apologize to all the worms I laid out on the sidewalk when I was a kid trying to save them from drowning in the post-rain puddles by stretching them out in the warm sun to dry.

Teaching writing is the capacity in which I love people the most and maybe the best. I mean at least that there isn't a more perfect institutional intimacy: let me comment on your poems. I'd say it's about durational demystification yet a simultaneous maintenance of reverence; I am a spy in others' sincerity. Monday is sincere and swings open. Today is wary. I hand the poems back in class and counsel: defamiliarize. Writing is the translation of thinking, and translating is an act of mimetic desire. I mean these are great. "Hilma's heart thumped slightly against the warm lining of her coat."







At Kelly's birthday party, Acacia told me about the thermal strategies for blowing neon glass signs, but didn't remember that they had also asked if they could run their fingers through my hair, twice. "Heat and accuracy in speed," Acacia said, "are key." My cheeks were flushing. "People like my neon because it's messy." I know now that it looks like it's about to break and sometimes does.

Like no one acts from or even has an “intrinsic” position, i.e. an instinctual space.

I type in my email to Emma: Time is not the organizing principle! Anticipation has an emotive physics, but we're just creating a program that makes thought possible. The thing I take a picture of occupies time differently than my photo, or my attention to it. And then we just look at this thing—this timewarp representation—and we're the viewers who want to puncture the warp to be the touchers (hi).

