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Rethinking Text: Writing in the Digital Age

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Abstract:

This thesis aims to examine the interplay of multiple types of media in the construction of a heteronymic nonfiction collection. Specifically, the examination of this interplay is considered through the lens of multimodality and what it means to engage in a multimodal text through the use of digital media, photography, and bound media—as defined as media traditionally used to contain and distribute text-based information, such as books, e-books, zines, brochures, etc.

The result of this investigation is the chapbook titled *Call Me Sinner* and the social media account @ccmoon.writes, which ended on March 3, 2022. The chapbook, *Call Me Sinner*, expands on experiments such as Jonathon Safran Foer's *Tree of Codes* (2010), Mark Amerika's *remixthebook* (2001), and Fiona Banner's *Caption Scroll* (2019). In addition, this thesis aims to exploit and expose forms earmarked by authenticity (i.e., the confessional, social media) to challenge the presentation and construction of creative nonfiction.

In support of these aims, research focuses on the choice in media; the influence of materials and materiality; and the creative potential of digital media in writing. Investigations will go beyond early experiments concerned with the impact of images paired with text (i.e., William Blake's *Europe: a Prophecy* (1794), Alessandro Manzoni's *I promessi sposi* (1825-27)) or previous experiments on the inability of writing to capture experiences (i.e., David Small's *Stitches* (2009)). Furthermore, this project is not concerned with what mediums within digital media can *do*, which was the focus of early digital experiments (i.e., Shelley Jackson's hypertext experiment *Patchwork Girl* (1995)). It is instead examining *how* writers now use digital media. This is explored through @ccmoon.writes on Instagram, which illustrates text as a living object through its past-present time structure and how social media has re-popularized text as image (i.e., rupi kaur, r.h. sin, Atticus).

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Author's Declaration

I declare this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in substantially the same form for the award of a higher degree elsewhere. No section of this thesis has been published elsewhere. This thesis is the product of my own research and creative work under the supervision of Jenn Ashworth and Charlie Gere at Lancaster University. This thesis is 47,098 words.

Introduction:

*This introduction serves as a brief background to define the choices behind a heteronymic autobiographical work; including the differences between a pseudonym and a heteronym, how a heteronymic work functions within a nonfiction narrative, and the artistic impact on the creative submission titled *Call Me Sinner*. It is important to note this is not intended to provide an adequate critical analysis of c.c. moon as an author, narrator, and character in the creative work.*

The dilemma of terminology

Known as the father of heteronyms, Fernando Pessoa once said, “in each of us there is a differingness and a manyness and a profusion of ourselves.”¹ Prior to this project, I would have understood Pessoa as defining the multifaceted aspects of an individual derived from role theory² or the way we compartmentalize interactions and experiences.³ Now I understand a heteronym is none of these things—a heteronym is an individual entity subsisting separately from the writer’s psyche and is both embodied and disembodied through the writing. I foreground this thesis with my newfound understanding of heteronyms as it sets the foundation for my assessment of c.c. moon as transforming from a pseudonym to a heteronym through the creative practice.

To best define the difference between writing under a pseudonym and a heteronym, Pessoa explains “a pseudonymic work is, except for the name with which it is signed, the work of an author writing as himself; a heteronymic work is by an author writing outside his own

¹ Ciuraru, C. (2011) Fernando Pessoa & His Heteronyms. *Poetry Society of America*, [online] Available at: <https://www.poetrysociety.org/psa/poetry/crossroads/tributes/fernando_pessoa_his_heteronyms/> [Accessed 19 November 2018].

² The connection between an individual's identity and the social role(s) they feel compelled to perform. See Burke and Reitzes; and Marks and MacDermind.

³ See Freud.

personality: it is the work of a complete individuality made up by him [or her].”⁴ Pessoa went so far as to claim he broke his “soul into pieces” and he was nothing more than an “empty stage where various actors act out various plays.”⁵ While I would not say my soul has been broken into pieces writing a heteronymic work, I find it undeniable there is a manyness and a profusion taking place.

Can heteronymic nonfiction exist?

I would challenge terminological hesitations by stating nonfiction is performative by nature. Similar to other genres, nonfiction is crafted into cohesive and compelling narratives from otherwise meaningless chronologies and events. Furthermore, if approaching nonfiction through the lens of psychology—consider again the psychology behind role theory here—then it opens the floor to possibilities for narrative play as we must ask ourselves who experienced this event, who does this emotion belong to, and who is telling this story? When discussing c.c. moon’s⁶ seemingly sudden development—I use the word seemingly because while I was taken aback when c.c.’s development to something *other than* was pointed out in this discussion, it is now apparent to me when and where this was taking place—of a digital self on Instagram, Jenn aptly noted how I discussed c.c. paralleled theories on personality formation and expression of the self, in particular Richard Schwartz’s theory of internal family systems.⁷ Internal Family Systems (IFS) is “a synthesis of two paradigms: the plural mind, or the idea that we all contain many different parts, and systems thinking.”^{8*} In this therapeutic approach, it is believed turmoil within

⁴ Ciuraru, C. (2011) Fernando Pessoa & His Heteronyms. *Poetry Society of America*, [online] Available at: <https://www.poetrysociety.org/psa/poetry/crossroads/tributes/fernando_pessoa_his_heteronyms/> [Accessed 19 November 2018].

⁵ Reference in footnote 4.

⁶ It is important to note I was fluctuating on how to identify c.c. at the time of this discussion as the term pseudonym no longer seemed accurate.

⁷ Supervision dated May 6th, 2020.

⁸ Schwartz, R. (2020) *Internal Family Systems Therapy: Second Edition*. The Guilford Press: New York. pp. 4-5.

the self is rooted in conflict among the various parts of an individual. I agreed with this assessment by Jenn and used this to construct a framework for understanding how I was interacting with c.c., the agency c.c. possessed and potentially would possess, and how c.c. as a separate entity was showing up in the creative work. From this discussion, I recognized the development of c.c.'s digital self on Instagram—specifically in relation to interactions with platform users, the aesthetic evolution of the grid,⁹ and the shift in research focus—placed c.c. within a uniquely prominent role as one of, if not *the*, creative driving force behind *Call Me Sinner*. Looking back at @ccmoon.writes, I noted the development of c.c.'s digital self from posts dated as early as March 6, 2019¹⁰ and more prominently by April 2019. A specific color theme—white, black, and rose paired with black and white or dark, muted photographs replaced the varied, colorful grid of earlier account days¹¹—appeared in the curated and depersonalized posts. By May 2019 an additional thematic shift is visible on the grid and it is around this time I could also see the difference in c.c.'s interactions with other users and followers. c.c. was having conversations about queer and gender theory, rape culture in the U.S., the evolution of masculinity post-WWI, the best platforms for writers and artists experiencing deplatforming, among others. I could trace these conversations to changes in the drafts of *Call Me Sinner* along with a stronger focus on skin and markings in Section 3, such as Figure 214 and Figure 226. By

* IFS is further explained as relating “to every level of the human system—the intrapsychic, familial, communal, cultural, and social—with ecologically sensitive concepts and methods that focus on understanding and respecting the network of relationships among members...And because we view people as having all the resources they need rather than having deficits or a disease, we assume people are constrained from using their innate strengths by polarized relationships, both within and with the people around them. IFS is designed to help us release our constraints and, in doing so, also release our resources” (Schwartz, 2020, pp. 4-5).

⁹ The grid describes the collection of an Instagram user's posts visible on their account profile. Due to the visual nature of grids, users frequently create themed content to represent a particular aesthetic or branding.

¹⁰ Appendix A

¹¹ The grid's color tone and the types of photography shared continued to change as c.c. stepped into the account—and arguably stepped into the physical spotlight of social media with the repeated singular use of a specific body identifiable in posts dated 2020 onwards.

March 6th, 2020¹² the heavily curated and depersonalized posts were intermixed with candid shots of one particular body presented as being ‘behind the account;’ and, in many ways, the reveal of this body marked c.c.’s status as the driving agent in the creative project. Here, I want to back up and foreground this discussion with why c.c. became a part of *Call Me Sinner* and, in so doing, this thesis.

At the beginning of this program, I decided to write *Call Me Sinner* under a pseudonym due to the urgency within midwestern American religious culture to suppress conversations regarding pleasure and the body of which I was intimately familiar with as a woman raised within a conservative Protestant household in the midwest. While I was enthusiastic about the chapbook, I could not envision undertaking *Call Me Sinner* under my given name as I was unwilling—particularly at that time—to expose myself to the inherent familial, religious, and societal criticisms I knew I would likely face; therefore, breeding self-censorship, judgement, and weak narration. I had attempted to avoid this but, as seen in my submission dated November 19, 2018¹³, the narrative was disconnected and overly simplified complex ideas. In one excerpt I jumped from critiquing feminist social trends to discussing Clarissa Estes’ *Women Who Run with Wolves* to blaming women as sources of repression, but the narrative lacked scene support and an open discussion to drive cohesive, connected thought. I was trapped in the telling rather than showing out of fear of exposing myself and how I lived outside of the social norms I had been taught society accepts.¹⁴ Fourth-wave feminism lauded for its "queer, sex-positive, trans-

¹² Appendix B

¹³ Appendix C

¹⁴ I say this with the understanding that what is presented in the creative material is not shocking and it is not meant to be shocking. However, I think it is important to emphasize here that this hesitancy to *expose* oneself is intimately woven with my experience of weaponized shame by Protestant religious institutions in the United States.

inclusive, body-positive"¹⁵ approach serves as proof the stigma(s) are disappearing when comparing the reception of women writing about sex in the 1950s-1980s (i.e., Anaïs Nin, Audre Lorde, Kathy Acker), and even the 1990s-early 2000s (i.e., Maggie Nelson, Chris Kraus), to recent publications from Amia Srinivasan, Jean-Marie Bub, and Eliza Clark. However, this is not to say women writers do not face opprobrium. Katherine Angel's publication *Unmastered* was praised by one reviewer for its tasteful presentations of sex in heterosexual relationships while also critiqued for being "afraid of repelling the reader."¹⁶ Nonetheless, Angel's *Unmastered* was well-received potentially due to a surge in the popularity of women writers, such as Caitlin Moran, Chimamanda Ngozi, rupi kaur, Imani Perry, and Zadie Smith.

The dichotomy of praise and condemnation faced by female identifying writers left me at a crossroads. The outline of *Call Me Sinner* was within reach, yet I was still unlearning ideas ingrained from childhood that were foundational themes in the narrative I was developing. Referencing the November 19, 2018 submission, I was confronted by my entanglement with patriarchal ideals on acceptable forms of female expression (i.e., avoiding frivolity, sensuality, the latitude to explore and embody the feminine) taught in midwestern social culture and by the religious institutions I was required to engage through high school. I will always likely be unlearning these ideas and I needed a way to disconnect, which came into play with the creation of @ccmoon.writes. Early storyboards of @ccmoon.writes' grid included black and white photography of Marilyn Monroe, cover art from Ariana Grande's "God is a Woman," dark petaled anemone, and abstract art; but these ideas were my own interpretation of c.c. moon. Once

¹⁵ Grady, C. (2018) "The waves of feminism, and why people keep fighting over them, explained." *Vox*, [online] Available at: <<https://www.vox.com/2018/3/20/16955588/feminism-waves-explained-first-second-third-fourth>> [Accessed August 20, 2020].

¹⁶ Sehgal, P. (2013) "'Afterwards, We Are Ashes:' Why is it so difficult to write about desire?" *Slate*, [online] Available at: <<https://slate.com/culture/2013/06/katherine-angels-unmastered-memoir-of-female-desire-reviewed.html>> [Accessed July 15, 2020].

put into practice, the account was no longer my interpretation of c.c. but c.c. freely acting, expressing, and engaging on @ccmoon.writes and with its audience.¹⁷ It was through the account that c.c. moon gained agency over the creative work and became identified as a heteronym. This new status solidified c.c.'s position as author and established my role as the creative work's editor.¹⁸

As c.c. moon was born out of a concern for self-censorship, it is important to address the digital media incorporated into this project is itself placed under content restrictions.¹⁹ Instagram has a history of flagging accounts engaged in sex education and sexual health discussions, which reduces the reach of said accounts.²⁰ Therefore, the use of Instagram as a means for curating the narratorial voice and character of c.c. moon came with innate boundaries to comply with the platform's community guidelines. Despite these parameters, the establishment of c.c. birthed an unexpected component in *Call Me Sinner*, which set the foundation for what I consider one of the original contributions of this thesis: the investigation of a heteronymic nonfiction work through the lens of multimodality analysis.²¹ A multimodal text may use "varied typography, unusual textual layouts, and page designs...the inclusions of images such as photographs or illustrations, colour, and so on" and may be analyzed using four main approaches: social semiotic, discourse analysis, interaction analysis, and stylistic.^{22*} This understanding of c.c.

¹⁷ This transition can be clearly viewed on the account by May 22, 2019.

¹⁸ Defined in this project as a secondary narrator interjecting into the main narrative. This second narrator functions as a tool for propelling the story forward and building tension.

¹⁹ A summary of Instagram's community guidelines are as follows: (1) share content you have the right to share, (2) post content appropriate for a diverse audience, (3) foster meaningful interactions, (4) do not break the law, (5) respect other community members, (6) do not glorify self-injury, (7) carefully consider content on trending events.

²⁰ See Carolina Are; Julia Jacobs; Gina Martin; Susanna Paasonen.

²¹ Gibbons, A. (2015) "Creativity and Multimodal Literature." *Routledge Handbook of Language and Creativity*. London, England: Routledge. pp. 293-306.

²² Reference provided in footnote 21.

* I would define this reflective work as engaged in a multimodality analysis from a stylistic approach as I am investigating how my work as a piece of multimodal literature has been composed and how the media I included interact together.

moon's influence on the creative project plays an important role in defining my thesis and the project's nuanced approach to nonfiction, as well as the parameters of each chapter outlined below.

The artistic impact of c.c. moon

As previously stated, the establishment of *Call Me Sinner* as a heteronymic work freed the manuscript of social roles I perform/ed, thereby opening the visual and written exploration of the main themes of female pleasure, the body, and shame occurring on the page. For instance, under c.c.'s authorship, *Call Me Sinner* included scenes with noted omissions, such as the missing photographs alluded to by “[INSERT PHOTO]” which function as tools to portray the performative aspects of nonfiction within a larger tradition of the confessional²³ writer, as well as subtly reference the digital media included in this project. By stating how the written approach to *Call Me Sinner* changed under c.c. as a heteronym does not negate that similar explorations into female pleasure, the body, and shame can occur without engaging a heteronym. However, in my effort to present a ‘well-rounded’ or ‘perfected’ discussion of female pleasure, shame, and the body, I was missing what makes nonfiction compelling: the tension of an imperfect, raw narrator rubbing up against their reality. Furthermore, c.c.'s continuation of the confessional metaphor in *Call Me Sinner* as a means to investigate performance and the confessional in nonfiction requires I place my work within the history of confessional writing and of contemporary nonfiction by women. Likewise, a discussion on the performance of authenticity in nonfiction must be established. These lines of questioning will be reflected on in Chapters 2-4.

By the second year of my research, another layer to c.c. emerged: as a representation of the neglected self made manifest through the social media account @ccmoon.writes. The

²³ Defined as writing that gives readers privileged access to intimate details.

account fully realized a facet of the self which had otherwise lacked embodiment and robust representation.²⁴ The evolution of @ccmoon.writes and physicality of c.c.—first through virtual embodiment as the account owner and then through the physical body depicted in later photographs²⁵—shifted my perspective on how the confessional form could be better utilized when separated from the self. As Rita Felski wrote, confessional writing “reveals the realm of personal relations as fraught with ambivalence and anxiety, intimately interwoven with patterns of domination and subordination, desire and rejection, which cannot be easily transcended.”²⁶ This aspect to @ccmoon.writes is further discussed in Chapter 3 and 4.

In addition, the development of @ccmoon.writes was directly linked to my understanding of c.c. as a heteronym. In a discussion with my supervisors, c.c.’s expanded presence was acknowledged as a facet of the creative work that required address. Charlie posited a link between c.c.’s name and newfound independence—the name held an uncanny connection as a representation for the abbreviation of both computer code and carbon copy. This led to new research questions—(1) what might be gained or exploited by embracing digital media for nonfiction writers? (2) what is exposed when writing uses bound media²⁷ and social media?—in which c.c. moon and the social media account might parallel discussions around the body, skin, and the *realness* of c.c.²⁸ Furthermore, Charlie’s observation on the multiplicity of c.c. was congruent with what I was beginning to understand about c.c.’s distinct agency as the author of

²⁴ Consider here Richard Schwartz’s Internal Family Systems (IFS).

²⁵ This can be first witnessed in a post dated October 24, 2019.

²⁶ Felski, R. (1989) *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press. pp. 78, 116.

²⁷ Defined as any media traditionally used to contain and distribute text-based data, such as books, e-books, zines, magazines, binders, spiralized notebooks, brochures, etc.

²⁸ This line of questioning harks to how text forms a foundational role in developing new social structures, the social systems within those structures, and the identities of those within the society—early adopters of computer platforms may be pointed to here for creating chat groups, fanfiction sites, games, etc. to engage with user(s) digital selves.

Call Me Sinner “making the page a theatrical scene (for the voice, but also for the body).”²⁹

Thus, *Call Me Sinner* is shaped by the evolution of c.c. moon who is the author, narrator, and I character of this project. This inherent concern with formal media and their possibilities for agency frames Chapter 1 and 2.

As evidenced by this introduction, the reflective work could not begin without first defining c.c. moon in relation to this project. I do not expect this introduction to serve as ample evidence or support for c.c. moon’s role as author of the manuscript *Call Me Sinner* nor in my larger creative work for this program. However, it was crucial to define c.c.’s influence and participation within my proposed research to provide context regarding my choice to engage in a heteronymic work. Ultimately, what I have known to be true is this: *Call Me Sinner* was c.c.’s story to tell. Therefore, the reflective essay will be written jointly by myself and c.c. in the following chapter format:

1. Chapter 1: Containing Writing: A Practice in Multi-Media is a literary analysis written by me on the creative project *Call Me Sinner*.
2. Chapter 2: Performance and the Narrator takes place as a fictional panel discussion between myself, c.c. moon, and the interviewer identified as I. This discussion is at a bookstore and is presented as a publicity event for *Call Me Sinner* post-publication.
3. Chapter 3: Digital Media: On Gender and Sexuality is solely written by c.c. moon based on her autoethnographic account of running @ccmoon.writes.
4. Chapter 4: Digital Media: A Practice in Self Expression is formatted as three Instagram Lives between myself and c.c. moon hosted on @ccmoon.writes.

²⁹ Derrida, J. (2005) *Paper Machine*. Stanford University Press. pp. 41, 47, 62-63.

Chapter One:

Containing Writing: A Practice in Multi-Media

A Formal Investigation: On Media

The first time I was struck by the structure of a text was in an Experimental Nonfiction seminar at the University of San Francisco led by Professor Ryan Van Meter. We were reading Maggie Nelson’s *Bluets*—a chapbook I already felt kinship with as I dealt with heartbreak and the recent death of a family member—and the professor asked the class why we thought the text was a numbered list. None of us had questioned the structure. We were still too close to our high school years of blindly following the rules of writing. When Professor Van Meter explained the excerpts added up to the color code for the exact shade of blue Maggie Nelson was preoccupied with, it struck me. At that time, I hadn’t considered the impact structure could have on a text. I placed weight fully on the writing. I dissected my life into bite-sized portions and experimented with threading them together into new combinations. However, even then, I seemed to regurgitate the writers I read (my propensity for repetition came out of this period but I’ve forgotten now who it was I stole this from). What I learned during this time of trial and error was that my writing practice was as much about the writing as it was about the ways in which form, style, tone, and the page can work together. I needed to get out of my own way and I was convinced other writers needed to do the same. An early draft of my Ph.D. proposal presented an idea about the “limitations of the Book.”³⁰ I was convinced bound media was stale and writers could be doing *more*, stating:

Authors—like Jonathan Safron Foer, Edward Packard, Mark Z. Danielewski—
have questioned what Book can contain, but not so far as to blur form boundaries.
These authors perpetuate traditional views on crafting bound textual stories (this

³⁰ Book with a capital B here is indicative of bound media whether presented in a physical or digital medium.

encompasses e-books, as few have expanded into potentially more immersive experiences) and stifle the broader possibilities of form(s).

What is *more* true is that I felt stifled fitting my writing into a practice only containing bound media. During my Master of Arts program at Lancaster University I read *Bending Genre: Essays on Creative Nonfiction* and I developed an affinity with the writers discussing the creative freedom and play found in going beyond genre and structural norms. At the time, I saw this book as proof there was something wrong with genre. What is *more* true is that I blamed genre because I did not know how to write what I wanted to say. The ever looming unsaid was, and remains, a constant pressure on my writing.

I proposed *Call Me Sinner* to my supervisors—Jenn Ashworth and Charlie Gere—at Lancaster University as a cross platform³¹ exploration of text because I believed working with multiple types of media would prove something new and interesting. And, based on the tradition of cross platform texts such as Anne Carson’s *Nox* and Roni Horn’s *Remembered Words* and *Wonderwater (Alice Offshore)*, I know it can. However, I was wrong to believe a theoretical investigation into cross platform work was the motivation behind my writing practice for this project. *Call Me Sinner* is a project concerned with saying what I believed was unsayable (the shaming; the demarcation of sin bearer/sin bringer).³² I see the characteristics of this in the performed confessional; the obsession with the body, whether that be the presumed body or skin of the I, the you character, and/or the narrator; the glorification of and reverence given to specific writers mentioned in the text; the multi-narrator experience; the unreliability of the narrator(s); to the attempts at making a grand conclusion or statement only to fall short. In addition, what I set out to do—create a cross platform work using bound and digital media—versus what I actually

³¹ Defined as a piece of writing distributed across multiple media channels.

³² I still believe there are things that cannot be said. Language is only one form of experiencing and communicating.

created with *Call Me Sinner* is different from my original proposal. I was engaged in creating a work of multimodal literature, a literary practice using “multiple semiotic modes for creative narrative purposes.”³³ A multimodal practice may use varied typography, unusual page layouts, images, or other such additions to the printed text (see below section *Engaging in Multimodal Writing* for a closer analysis). In many ways it is a practice of collecting and presenting in an attempt to find new space within language and extend the possibilities of a text³⁴—transcending its collective parts to “create a different system of signification.”³⁶ My previous interest in form, design, and genre experimentation led me to critically examine *Call Me Sinner* and the relationship between the multi-narrator (n+1 voices), chosen form/design, use of photography (predominately on social media), and the relationship with digital media (@ccmoon.writes). These elements formed a stylistic approach characteristic of multimodal literature and by further pursuing a multimodal approach *Call Me Sinner* attempts to create a different system of signification to create space for the nonverbal and the unconscious (as is echoed throughout the manuscript “the things that are hard to say”).

The media used for this project—the bound manuscript and the social media account—explore this attempt at making space within language and were specifically chosen to capture the multiplicity and malleable nature of text. For example, the manuscript provides a particular physical experience rooted in intimacy and ownership—“the *fantasies* of contact”³⁷—which can be fetishistic in nature (i.e., the desire *for* the embodied text) and plays into the human need to possess what it is we desire. In contrast, the digital platform of Instagram is founded in the

³³ Gibbons, A. (2015) Creativity and Multimodal Literature, in Jones, R. H. (ed.) *Routledge Handbook of Language and Creativity*. New York: Routledge. pp. 293.

³⁴ See Luca Toschi’s “Hypertext and Authorship.”

³⁶ Hull, G. and Nelson, M. (2005) Locating the Semiotic Power of Multimodality. *Written Communication*, 22(2), 225. doi: 10.1177/0741088304274170.

³⁷ Refer back to footnote 1.

voyeuristic desires of the users to be *seen* and to *see*. It is a fantasy of *witnessing*. The fantasy of witnessing oscillates between authenticity and performance, fall and rebirth, attachment and detachment, and takes place behind the sheen of a promised commonality (i.e., the promise of community, the communal, the common). Both types of media are engaged in creating what Marcel Proust described as: “a fulcrum that creates space out of time.”³⁸ However, a digital writing practice can engage in editing, commenting, reposting, sharing, and critique in an ever-expanding illusionary real time.³⁹ In some ways, digital writing expands old material across countless cycles leaving “space for confusion and for forms of mis-reappropriation [in order to] survive.”⁴⁰ My research led me to explore the concept of fantasies *acted out*—such as Susan Sontag’s and Roland Barthes’ respective meditations on photography; live performances by Fiona Banner, Marina Abramović, and Laurie Anderson; Chris Kraus’ letters to Dick Hebdige — and how this contributes to making space for language to be remade, reimagined, and reengaged. In this way, I’ve come to understand *making space* as how we play into these fantasies to engage in and make new meaning out of our work.

This practice of making space stands out after being engaged in a digital practice as our interactions with the digital is leading us into something much less tangible and much more ephemeral (the blurred and transitory relation between presence/absence, physical/digital, real/not real). For example, Laurie Anderson’s 2021 *Scroll* which asks us to reconsider the ways we attribute authorial presence and how we can disrupt or reimagine the ‘binding’ (of stories/of the body). However, the digital also asks us to consider the absence of presence and what

³⁸ Hesse, C. (1996) “Books in Time.” *The future of the book*, Berkeley, California: University of California Press. pp. 27.

³⁹ On November 11, 2021, Dr. Gere referred to this virtual world as the present-past.

⁴⁰ Singer, M. and Walker, N. eds. (2013) *Bending Genre: Essays on Creative Nonfiction*. [e-book] London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc. pp. 79.

absence provides. I'm reminded here of @itscarus, an Instawriter who created a piece titled *this message has no content* in 2019. This digital work questions our reliance on media loading/downloading in order to *see* what a writer/artist wants us to see. If the content never loads, what does the absence of the content create? When I think about @itscarus' work and *Call Me Sinner*, I think about the blurred relationship between presence/absence—the way c.c., myself, and the multiple voices in the text are both separate and one with each other, both there and *not* there. It is in this attempt at making space that *Call Me Sinner* became not just a project on working through the unsayable (the shaming) but a project on embodiment and what an embodied text can look like.

When @ccmoon.writes was created I managed the account before c.c. moon ultimately absorbed this creative role. What I learned during that brief period was how each post to the grid existed in the past and in the future as users continued to like, comment, share, and interact with the individual posts and the account as a whole. When Charlie mentioned a present-past time structure,⁴¹ I wondered what it would look like to project that structure onto *Call Me Sinner*. This felt particularly urgent due to c.c. moon's role in the creative project and status as a heteronym. How was I to capture the ways in which c.c. was embodied? This line of questioning brought me back to Katherine Hayles' "Virtual Bodies and Flickering Signifiers" in which she writes, "[i]nstead of an embodied consciousness looking through the window at a scene, consciousness moves *through* [emphasis by Hayles] the screen to become the pov, leaving behind the body as a unoccupied shell. In cyberspace point of view does not emanate from the character, rather, the

⁴¹ Supervision dated July 28, 2021.

pov literally is the character.”⁴² @ccmoon.writes is c.c. moon; and, by extension, *Call Me Sinner* carries c.c.’s writerly and creative point of view into the physical space.

Around this time, c.c. broke down *Call Me Sinner* into figures and footnotes to mimic the external forces (see Chapter 3) playing into one’s creative practice. We discussed how the n+1 voices could be pushed further, and it was during these discussions I recognized there was a structural opportunity to illustrate point of view and perhaps capture what Katherine Hayles meant by consciousness moving through the screen. Therefore, footnotes written by c.c. were included, my commentary along the side of the manuscript was made permanent, remixed photographs from @ccmoon.writes were added, and, at one point, watermarks were designed for each section.⁴³ These structural elements further complicated the representation of time. *Call Me Sinner* presented (1) three chronological sections; (2) figures and footnotes presenting information from the past and present; and (3) side comments in the present tense (although existing in the past to the reader).⁴⁴ Through the multiple timelines, narrators, and point of views inserted into *Call Me Sinner* I attempted to create something I had come to understand was inherently provided by social media: a present-past existence that mimics the ever-evolving capacity of a living *thing*.⁴⁵ However, a discussion on embodiment cannot continue without acknowledging my choices behind the use of photography on @ccmoon.writes and within *Call Me Sinner*.

On Photography

⁴² Hayles, K. (1993) Virtual Bodies and Flickering Signifiers. *October 66*, [online]. Available at: <<http://www.english.ucla.edu/faculty/hayles/Flick.html>> [Accessed 11 November 2017].

⁴³ It was decided to remove the watermarks from the manuscript submitted under this Ph.D. project since I wanted their inclusion to be part of a larger commentary on the page and how the page is used in our post-postmodern age. Instead, this line of investigation will be part of the foundation for my later work.

⁴⁴ See Chapter 4 for additional discussions on time and point of view.

⁴⁵ See Introduction.

From the beginning of *Call Me Sinner* I planned to use photography in the text. I believed this was the link between @ccmoon.writes and *Call Me Sinner* to create a final project that fit the definition of a cross platform work. However, I failed to recognize the manuscript and the Instagram account were not transmitting the same story across multiple software, platforms, or media. I had established two creative practices with two different narrators—myself and c.c.—and the divergent pathways⁴⁶ of the manuscript and the Instagram account were not reconcilable and therefore existed far outside the realm of cross platform work. During a supervision July 28, 2021, Charlie and I discussed what this meant for the project and if it mattered whether @ccmoon.writes and *Call Me Sinner* were directly connected to each other. Charlie challenged my fixation on establishing an obvious link between the creative works. Intertwining the two posed no direct benefit nor did it solve a need, such as increasing friction, depth, etc., within the creative works. Still, I couldn't let alone my desire for these two creative practices to merge. In hindsight this fixation is rooted in my connection with c.c. moon and my desire to better understand that connection within this project. Establishing an obvious link between @ccmoon.writes and *Call Me Sinner* was a way to grab ahold of this connection and make tangible what was otherwise intangible perhaps because I believed I could then say what I had believed to be unsayable; and, at some point, c.c. represented everything I had struggled to say—the constraints and pressures on women, the resentment towards religion, the shame around my body and self, and how I felt stuck in this struggle. Noticing my dilemma, Charlie suggested the two projects could touch—meaning they could signpost their connection but only at a distance in order to avoid one overtaking the other—through their respective use of photography.

⁴⁶ See Chapter 2 and 4 for a discussion on the development of @ccmoon.writes in relation to *Call Me Sinner*.

I spent the next few months experimenting with how photography could be presented in *Call Me Sinner*. I tried sourcing photographs from @ccmoon.writes and from my past but the final product read as forced and disingenuous. In addition, having the original copies of photographs in the manuscript took away from the notes “[INSERT PHOTO]” that suggested missing or removed information. It created a question as to why some photographs were included and why others were not, and the answer to this question always came back to making @ccmoon.writes and *Call Me Sinner* touch rather than for a creative or writerly purpose. I considered just having photographs from my past, but this still created an issue with the “[INSERT PHOTO]” excerpts and the photographs did not add depth to the text. It left me asking why I would present original untampered images in a text that had been purposefully constructed to suggest a constantly evolving state? After reviewing my research notes, I was reminded of Susan Sontag’s remark that photographs explain nothing⁴⁷ and decided to look more closely at W.G. Sebald—who Charlie had recommended as a potential source of inspiration during our January 21, 2020 supervision, particularly for Sebald’s tendency to remix, blur, and distort images in his publications (i.e., *Austerlitz*, *The Emigrants*, *The Rings of Saturn*). I decided to take from this practice and distort three photographs⁴⁸ from @ccmoon.writes which would serve as visual representations of each section in the chapbook. This decision might be questioned based on my comments above—why add photographs to the text when they explain nothing and act at best as a source of conjecture? Again, here Susan Sontag’s words—the pseudo-presence and absence in photography—heavily influenced my final decision. I wanted the suggestion of presence—whether that be the narrator’s presence, c.c.’s presence (the digital

⁴⁷ Sontag, S. (1980) *On Photography*. Middlesex, England: Penguin Books.

⁴⁸ The three photographs were posted on @ccmoon.writes as follows: (1) October 7, 2020; (2) October 28, 2020; (3) June 28, 2021.

point of view made physical/visible), or something else entirely—and I wanted the suggestion of something being both *there* and *not there* (functioning as both a question of attainability and embodiment, which in many ways stems from a much larger question of desire). In addition, distorting the photos harked back to the idea of photography as a form of violation in itself: “it turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed.”⁴⁹ As a text on pleasure, longing, and the body, distorted photography seemed only fitting to represent the ways in which female pleasure, longing, and the body become distorted ideas, thoughts, and objects in their own right—points of violation and possession by the public.

Yet, when I consider my early photography choices when I managed @ccmoon.writes from October 30, 2018-May 27, 2019, I see instead a practice in obscurity. The use of obscurity here is not meant to suggest the photographs or the objects within the photographs are unclear. If reviewing this time period on @ccmoon.writes, one can see the photographs were clear and focused. What I mean by obscurity is the account holder feels distant behind stock-grade photography. There is at times a lifeless quality (i.e., November 11, 2018; December 12, 2018; December 18, 2018; January 1, 2019⁵⁰) that puts into question the authenticity and *realness* of the person posting the photos.⁵¹ If a body is shown, it is in pieces: legs disconnected at the waist; hands reaching; faces covered or side profile. The closest to a full profile shot was on May 28th, 2019:⁵² the model’s eyes fully open and face turned almost completely to the photographer. However, the photographs following this post return to a passive distance until October 24, 2019,⁵³ which is the first photographed representation of what became the singular body

⁴⁹ Sontag, S. (1980) *On Photography*. Middlesex, England: Penguin Books. pp 14.

⁵⁰ See Appendix K.

⁵¹ The question of bot generated content and the qualities we typically associate with these types of accounts.

⁵² See Appendix L.

⁵³ See Appendix M.

associated with @ccmoon.writes. The body presented in this photograph and subsequent photographs between October 24, 2019-March 3, 2022 is mine. Why this shift from the obscured account holder? Well, as discussed in Chapters 2 and 4, c.c. did take over the management of @ccmoon.writes and with this came thematic changes to the grid as well as a transition from a passive to an active agent behind the account. However, the question that more likely requires answering is what it means to have c.c. moon's physical appearance linked to my body. I would argue within the context of @ccmoon.writes the body presented in the photographs is not really *my* body but a distortion—that in some ways the simple act of my body being photographed has separated me from it and thereby created an object to be re-presented. It is as Roland Barthes said, “a new form of hallucination: false on the level of perception, true on the level of time [...] (on the one hand ‘it is not there’ on the other ‘but it has indeed been’).”⁵⁴ I would also say despite c.c.’s status as a heteronym I have never imagined c.c. being *of* any other body in the physical world. I doubt my explanations as to why will be satisfactory, but I will attempt to give them anyway. Firstly, c.c. has always existed as body-less (see Katherine Hayles here) on @ccmoon.writes. Without a fixed, physical presence, c.c. only ever transitioned outside of cyberspace through my own insertion. This shared space (my body) could be experienced together through photography (i.e., the birth and death taking place, the hallucination, the pseudo-presence). Secondly, @ccmoon.writes was a theatrical scene for c.c. to explore the significance of bodies on digital platforms as an amplified surface of signification and meaning making. When engaged in a public access platform proliferated by amateurs and/or encouraging amateur-esque creations there is a reliance on the resources immediately available to us. This encourages the body to be used, distorted, wrung out—a surface we are constantly rewriting—

⁵⁴ Barthes, R. (2000) *Camera Lucida*. London, England: Vintage Books. pp 115.

and this creation, performance, rewriting continues in the physical world. It creates a new relationship with the body/skin and to seeing/being seen and it is an area we are still learning/watching unfold in the digital media realm.⁵⁵ Thirdly, as stated in the introduction, a heteronym is an individual entity subsisting separately from the writer's psyche and is both embodied and disembodied through the writing. As such, c.c. as heteronym is both of my body and not of it as we acted as joint extensions both into and out of the creative work. This relationship with photography across the creative works is itself a characteristic of multimodal literature—which will be further discussed below—and brought forward what I consider one of the original contributions of this thesis: the investigation of a heteronymic nonfiction work through multimodal techniques.⁵⁶

It is important to note here that bodies come with their own set of stories. By giving c.c. a body in the photographs posted on @ccmoon.writes, c.c. was squarely identified as a privileged body—visibly able-bodied, white, thin, female/femme passing (though presumably cis-gendered as the content posted on @ccmoon.writes strongly suggested a cisgendered, heteronormative perspective)—and therefore not an oppressed body. Giving c.c. a body, and particularly a privileged body, places certain questions on the validity of c.c.'s experience of shame, silencing, and restriction, as well as c.c.'s inclusion of various voices into these conversations and storytelling forums (i.e., the problem of white feminism). What the introduction of a visible body created for @ccmoon.writes was the need for awareness and the admittance of not knowing and/or not experiencing certain digital social disadvantages (i.e., white bodies not being censored

⁵⁵ Here I draw attention to EK Sedgwick as the theatricality of @ccmoon.writes is partially born from the ways in which shame serves as “a switch point for the individuation of imaging systems, of consciousnesses, of bodies, of theories, of selves [...] and unlike contempt or disgust [is] characterized by its failure ever to renounce its object cathexis” (Sedgwick 2002, pp. 116-117).

⁵⁶ Gibbons, A. (2015) “Creativity and Multimodal Literature.” *Routledge Handbook of Language and Creativity*. London, England: Routledge. pp. 296.

as much as black bodies). However, as this awareness is not readily visible or apparent on the account, I recognize the choice to include a visual body on @ccmoon.writes is lacking consideration in the context of the digital social environment in which c.c. was engaged, the digital writing being produced, and in the final thesis submission. I do not believe this line of consideration could have been undertaken during the course of this thesis as c.c.'s heteronymic status was a new area of exploration and who c.c. *was* was something I was learning over the course of this academic project. In the future, I plan to engage with c.c., and related research, with this situational and social awareness at the forefront.

Engaging in Multimodal Writing

A multimodal text can be understood using four main approaches: social semiotic, discourse analysis, interaction analysis, and stylistic.⁵⁸ However, the main consideration behind multimodal literature is its deviance from “readers’ expectations about the literary conventions of the so-called traditional literary text and in terms of [...] expected linguistic structures.”⁵⁹ Such texts, such as Mark Z. Danielewski’s *House of Leaves*, Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Tree of Codes*, and Shelley Jackson’s *My Body—a Wunderkammer*, shift the creative practice to designing and presenting the text, media, and design elements pulled into their creative practice. The shift to presenting material arguably allows for divergent messages to exist within a multimodal work as each element introduces a new semiotic mode. For instance, Jackson’s *My Body-a Wunderkammer* is presented as a website that invites the reader to interact with text, black and white woodcut images, and audio. By using HTML hypertext, Jackson presents a self-referential catalogue, which on the surface could be misread as a narcissistic concern with the self but is

⁵⁸ Reference provided in footnote 21.

⁵⁹ Gibbons, A. (2015) “Creativity and Multimodal Literature.” *Routledge Handbook of Language and Creativity*. London, England: Routledge. pp. 293.

actually working as means to ground the existence of Jackson's self through the body. The interconnectivity of Jackson's self to her body is reliant on the memories attributed to different 'parts' but, as discovered through the HTML hypertext, these memories could not exist without the other 'parts' and all 'parts' must be present (recorded) to constitute her body/self and thereby confirm the existence of the body/self. Put another way, no part of the body can be without the other for Jackson to exist (have presence). The presentation of *My Body—a Wunderkammer* in this digital hypertextual format also suggests that memoir as a genre is concerned with situating the physical self *within* the self more so than with the external world as proof of life. This could perhaps be one of the reasons why Jackson includes the audio clip of her breathing, which readers first experience on the website's home page that otherwise serves as the work's cover/title page (binding as body). The choice for Jackson to present her body as a woodcut image rather than a photograph distances the reader from Jackson (we are denied the fantasy of *witnessing*) and therefore begs the question: what might be missing? What is the reader not allowed to see? However, where photographs invite the voyeuristic desire, the woodcut images invite intimacy. Readers are given privileged access to how Jackson sees herself through self-portraiture.

However, the act of presenting characteristic of multimodal work can also look like a configuration of missing text or information, such as Jenny Bouilly's *The Body* which provides the footnotes to what a reader assumes was once a completed text. The absence within these texts becomes the focal point of meaning-making. In regard to Bouilly's *The Body* a reader is left to make meaning out of the performed absence of the body through the absent main text. No other media is presented in place of the absent main text nor is any other media included in the footnotes, which serve both as clues and as a separate narrative. Yet, its function as multimodal

comes from Bouilly's choice in form drawing readers attention to the large swathes of whitespace presented. Over the course of the eighty-eight-page essay readers are repeatedly confronted with a predominately blank page and, in some cases, entire blank pages ("the integrity of silence"⁶⁰). The white space is a reminder of the absent text (the loss/the silencing) while also serving as a point of curiosity, imagination, and suspense—the reader will never have resolution (the absence/loss remains). Therefore, instead of the essay being restricted by its format, the text is opened to new possibilities of meaning-making.

Within a multimodal practice I would define my project as falling under a stylistic approach as I am engaged in how my writing has been composed and how the media included interact with each other to form the final presented text in *Call Me Sinner*. The manuscript is specifically composed of: (1) a multi-narrator experience; (2) unique textual layout; (3) photography; and (4) use of whitespace/page design. Each of these four elements contributes to the text and the reader's understanding of the text. For example, the multi-narrator experience functions as a tool to inform, build doubt, and overwhelm the reader similar to the onslaught of information we encounter throughout our day, such as in Figure 98 or Figure 186-187 with their accompanying footnotes. The textual layout presents continuous stages of remixing and reproducing (as discussed earlier in this chapter), which led to sections such as Figure 12 and its accompanying side comments by A.M. or Figure 30 with its accompanying footnotes that keep deconstructing and restating the same point. In addition to these elements, I would say @ccmoon.writes also contributes to the multimodality of the text as it is an additional element to the manuscript. Even if the social media account and manuscript only just slightly touch, a reader could use @ccmoon.writes to gain insight into c.c. moon, the motivation behind *Call Me Sinner*,

⁶⁰ Stein, P. (2004) Representation, rights, and resources: Multimodal pedagogies in the language and literacy classroom. *Critical pedagogies and language learning*. pp. 95. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

the relationship between c.c. and myself, among other potential signifiers that add to the meaning making of a multimodal text.

Engaging in a multimodal creative practice reminded me of the fundamentals behind a hermit crab essay:⁶¹ “all writing forms an artificial shell.”⁶² I find this especially true for nonfiction writing. Nonfiction is a practice of constructing a story and then pretending that story always existed (it is just *now* being recorded). The foundation of a nonfiction work starts from this lie, yet, from an English or North American lens, nonfiction must hold an author accountable to the truth. When a writer puts aside their obligation to the truth it can spark controversy (i.e., JT LeRoy, James Frey, John D’Agata), but it can also free the text to focus on more interesting things (the space required for creative play). And, in some ways, the liberties already being taken with the truth places nonfiction within the tradition of presenter and presented as is characteristic of multimodal work. Nonfiction is in many ways a practice in artificiality and shapeshifting, nonlinear jumps and metaphor, artifacts and evidence (i.e., “evidence of what does or did or will happen here”⁶³). To bring in other media or design elements to a nonfiction work can, in this way, feel quite natural as both nonfiction and multimodal texts are inherently concerned with how we interpret, interact, and construct meaning based off the multiple ways in which a writer might signpost information. In addition—pulling from the literary analyses of Mikhail Bakhtin, Mark Nelson, and Glynda Hull—there is this idea of overpopulated intentions,⁶⁴ which points at how speech is inevitably addressed to someone (even the self) and therefore cannot be free of intentions—that, in fact, speech is overpopulated with the intentions of others. When placing this

⁶¹ Writing that takes the form of something else (i.e., uses a shell), such as a legal document or a postcard.

⁶² Singer, M. and Walker, N. eds. (2013) *Bending Genre: Essays on Creative Nonfiction*. [e-book] London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc. pp. 79

⁶³ Singer, M. and Walker, N. eds. (2013) *Bending Genre: Essays on Creative Nonfiction*. [e-book] London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc. pp. 99

⁶⁴ See footnote 36 for reference.

idea against a multimodal nonfiction text—particularly one engaged in the sub-genre of confessional nonfiction—you are left with questions on who the narrative is serving, what messaging is the narrative promoting, what feelings is the writer intentionally trying to invoke? It highlights the orchestrated nature of the confessional. And, in digital spheres, the confessional has become synonymous with authenticity (a power card; a means to prove your word). The behind-the-scenes orchestration is conveniently forgotten and/or ignored. Within *Call Me Sinner*, a multimodal nonfiction practice made space for these overpopulated intentions to exist and foster creative play (the ever looming unsaid becoming slightly more clear (i.e., Figure 267, 271)) by highlighting the nature of the confessional (i.e., Figure 21, 40, 59): (1) signposting the confessional archetype; (2) asking the reader to acknowledge the writing is giving information and acting as a request for the writer to *give more* (an earmark of the confessional); (3) placing the reliability of the narrator in question. It also reinforced a practice of constructing my writing with whitespace and page layout in mind, which I have found to be a way for me to tap into complex thoughts or emotions.

The page has changed; writers are both using it for what it promises (a clean text) and exploiting it for what it provides (a performance). A cluttered and complicated page, as seen in Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire* and David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*, has evolved into explorations of permeability and space. I see this acted out in Jean-Marie Bub's *Maneater* and upcoming publication *Purge*. The content for both books has been heavily shared on Bub's social media accounts prior to publication and are a mix of traditionally presented poetry, photography, collage, and hermit crab texts. The presented page is meant to mimic tears, gauging, and piercing (although the actual book pages are not damaged). Gabi Abrão's publication *Notes on Shapeshifting* does something similar. However, the changing function of

the page may be best illustrated by the works of Fiona Banner, specifically her work *ISBN 978-1-907118-99-9* in which Banner herself becomes a published text. As it relates to *Call Me Sinner*, the design of the page functioned as a way to organize the multiple narrators in the text. For example, the use of right-indentation or left-indentation with the figures acts as indicators of changing speakers (i.e., Figure 253-254). When the speaker could still be considered c.c. moon, the indentation functions as an indication of a change in time (how far in the past an emotion, thought, or event happened), such as Figure 239-240. In this case, the right-indented text represents a past timeline while the left-indented text represents a recent-past timeline. Furthermore, the page layout in *Call Me Sinner* is determined by my use of whitespace. While whitespace was used to (1) create space within the text for the reader to sit with the presented scenes and (2) to divide scenes that did not interconnect with each other, it largely came to represent a necessary breath by the writer—a moment when the writer was too connected to the previous section to smoothly transition. This can be seen at work from Figure 134 to Figure 152. In this way, the page layout in *Call Me Sinner* is the most influential creative element used in this multimodal practice by serving as a tool for (1) signposting voice change and the inescapable influence/presence of outside voices, (2) dictating the flow of a section (is the section flooded with text (obsessive text) or is the section flooded with whitespace (the silencing; the breath), (3) evincing the constructive/inauthentic aspects to nonfiction (specifically the confessional). In this thesis, the page also acts as a theatrical scene through the performance of self/identity on @ccmoon.writes, the call for confession/forgiveness in the manuscript, and the question of presence (the question of c.c.'s presence on @ccmoon.writes; the question of presence posited by the multinarrator experience in the manuscript). The page as performance—

or record of performance—invites the reader to take an active role in the meaning-making process.

A Look Ahead: Multimodal Literature, Digital Art, and Installation

As stated in the beginning of this chapter, the work produced in this thesis is far from my original proposal and there were unforeseen constraints on how far I could push my exploration of material and materiality. This mandated I make certain decisions about how this submission would be presented. For the purpose of this thesis, I wanted to focus on certain points—the creation of a heteronymic nonfiction work, multimodal writing, and the divergence on a semiotic level—therefore this thesis is submitted as a PDF version of a manuscript with a required appendix to include relevant media from @ccmoon.writes. It is important to note this is not the final version of *Call Me Sinner* and there are multiple versions planned for the future that better encompass the questions of material and materiality engaged in this thesis.

Call Me Sinner led me down creative pathways I would not have foreseen, but I find it hard to imagine a creative practice that does not engage in what I would now consider core lines of investigation (i.e., multimodality, digital spaces/media, multi-narratorial work, presence). I plan to continue producing multimodal literature in my writing practice of parsing, collecting, and presenting. I am particularly interested in how multimodal work can be applied to digital art. This is specifically related to creative investigations led by technology artists (such as Laurie Anderson—*Chalkroom*, *Scroll*, *Sidewalk*—and Adrien Mondot and Claire Bardainne—*XYZT: Abstract Landscapes*), meme artists (such as Gabi Abrão), and the rise of interactive digital installations (such as teamLab and New York City’s Museum of Sex). I plan to continue to bring multimodal writing and digital media together to create a series of installations exploring the applications of multimodality and the entanglement of physical and digital space (how they are

multimodal constructs in their own right and what this means for the ways in which we interact with and communicate through multiple forms of media).

In relation to this project, beyond the publication of *Call Me Sinner*, I plan to continue my exploration of a writing practice concerned with bound and digital media and bringing the physical into the digital and vice versa (thinking back to Kathryn Hayles here). Therefore, I plan to register @ccmoon.writes for an ISBN and make *Call Me Sinner* into a NFT. I also plan to use the manuscript of *Call Me Sinner* as the text for two art books. The art books will function as a critique of the page and a continued investigation into using different creative elements and methods for writing. For example, from the choice of watermark techniques, stitched images, and presentation of the text, the page will be scarred, bruised, and penetrated (as if the uppermost layers of skin). The fragility of the page (like the fragility of skin) will be exploited, and it will therein be my attempt to once again represent the alternative creative structure of social media's present-past. When considered within the broader context of the creative works of this thesis the art books will function as a representation of the theoretical: the book acting as the body.

The research conducted during this project will also set the foundation for future critical investigations and academic publications on multi-narrator/heteronymic nonfiction, social media as digital art practice, space and presence, and the page. This places my future critical investigations within a wider research field—one concerned with digital media, meaning making (the ways in which humans make meaning), and space (how humans navigate new spaces)—already inhabited by researchers such as Zara Dinnen (*The Digital Banal*), Susanna Paasonen (*#NSFW*), Doreen Massey (*Space, Place, and Gender*), and Avital Ronell (*The Telephone Book*). Within this context, I aim to create work that challenges writerly conventions and the ways in which we communicate stories—similar to Jonathan Safran Foer (*Tree of Codes*), Roni Horn

(Wonderwater (Alice Offshore)), Fiona Banner *(Arsewoman in Wonderland)*, and Beth Campbell *(My Potential Future Based on Present Circumstances)*. I am not sure what this creative practice may look like or the contribution(s) I aim to make therein, but I believe there is more work to be done on how writing can and cannot communicate the unsayable.

Chapter Two:

Performance and the Narrator

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RELEASE DATE:

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MULTIMODALITY: THE NEW LITERARY WAVE

Literati Co. Sits Down with c.c. moon and Alexandria Meinecke

[**San Francisco, CA, April 15th**] – Discussing her debut book *Call Me Sinner*, Literati Co. sits with special guest c.c. moon and editor Alexandria Meinecke at Green Apple Bookstore, 506 Clement St., April 15th at 7:30 PM EST to talk multimodality literature, nonfiction’s transformation, and how women writers are stealing the literary spotlight.

c.c. moon is a debut author of *Call Me Sinner*, a short chapbook best known for its trending status on Instagram. Alexandria Meinecke is a freelance editor and consultant at edi. Consulting Services, LLC. c.c. and Alexandria collaborated on *Call Me Sinner* clearly drawing inspiration from John D’Agata’s *Lifespan of a Fact* and the stereotypical writer-editor tension, but with a refreshing twist. They are joined by one of Literati Co.’s favorite book reviewers, I, who boasts 434,000 total followers across Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube.

We can’t wait to see this guest lineup dig into the latest hot topic on the literary scene: is multimodality the new wave to hit publishers? *Publishers Weekly* had this to say, “With consumer choices driving the delivery of complex content, publishing departments are becoming more equally ranked as editorial, marketing, IT, etc. are equally needed to push engaging print and digital assets.” From *NYT* to Goodreads.com, reviewers and bookstagrammers alike are noticing the latest trend coming out of publishing houses.

Literati Co. is an independent publication based in San Francisco, CA. We cover new releases from small presses and indie publishers that focus on economic disparities and equity, social justice, queer theory, and diaspora narratives. We believe in diverse representation in publishing and use our press to highlight underrepresented and niche writing.

Get tickets at <https://greenapple.eventbrite.com>

I: Welcome c.c. and Alexandria. It's great to have you with us. Before I begin, I read a sort of introduction if you will on the evolution of your collaboration with each other. I'm going to be honest, I don't know if I believed what you wrote Alexandria...is c.c. really the sole author of *Call Me Sinner*?

A: Yes, from the beginning of this project it was clear c.c. needed to have authorship over this text. We didn't want this to be a formal piece of social criticism, but rather a creative commentary on popular trends we were noticing among contemporary women writers—performative; confessional; engaging with open forums, public discussion boards, social media; etc.

I: But weren't you writing *Call Me Sinner* at the beginning?

A: I did make attempts. I can't tell you how awful the writing was—the narrative was dry, no connecting threads—it isn't easy to write social criticism. In the end, collaborating with c.c. really gave shape to the narrative.

c.c.: Ya-ya, instead of a traditional essay form that Alexandria was using, I switched up the writing and broke it into figures. Alexandria's dabbled in experimental writing, but what I was seeing from early drafts of *Call Me Sinner* felt flat. Like who hasn't wrote a braided essay, you know?

I: That makes it sound like Alexandria outsourced the writing to you...almost like ghostwriting on her behalf?

A: I wouldn't say that's a fair assessment. My collaboration with c.c. happened quite organically and we initially had a balanced relationship in the creative project. At some point around...2019...2020...it became clear *Call Me Sinner* wasn't my story and, quite

frankly, the writing I was producing supported that it wasn't. I don't know if I can describe it better than this.

I: But you actually have a background as a writer, Alexandria. Why do you think your role shifted in this creative project?

A: I would love to say something like, "My unresolved anger was causing a creative block." It would seem more believable to me, but honestly trying to write this story made me aware of the social conditioning I am *still* holding onto as a midwestern woman raised in a Christian household.

c.c.: Basically, I'm okay with looking bad and she isn't.

I: Do you really believe that?

c.c.: It was a joke...but to write good nonfiction you have to be willing to look awful in the eyes of the reader. That's maybe one of the reasons why working closely together was an adjustment, but we learned to respect what we each brought to the table.

I: And what would you say that is?

A: Well, c.c. can be naïve in their presentation. They take authors and their writing at face value. It works in the sense that it makes them seem very trusting, but that naivety creates an unreliable narrator. To me, this is a nice dichotomy. c.c.'s voice holds a youthful conviction. You feel like they are still learning—that the references and quotes they include are a way to sound more educated than they may really be—but these sources also provided the reader an opportunity to engage outside the text and develop different conclusions than the author may have intended. *Call Me Sinner* isn't a clean narrative. It doesn't follow the beginning, middle, and end format you expect. I attribute this to c.c.—they don't think of narrative that way. Their approach is cyclical. Narratives are repeating

loops that keep building and showing up in similar and new ways... a ripple effect of sorts or a spider's web.

c.c.: I think Alexandria is missing the point about what I was trying to achieve creatively.

I: Which would be?

c.c.: A narrative that mimicked my daily life. We are bombarded with a never-ending stream of information and inspiration whether that be from the news we watch, the social media platforms we belong to, the books we read, the individuals in our lives, we are influenced every step of our day. Sometimes I think writers are too happy to forget how their creative work is shaped by these outside forces whether we want them to be or not. To illustrate this, I wanted to create a different type of narrative: one that seemed to bring these forces—

I: Can you explain what you mean by forces?

c.c.: The inspiration we receive from the people surrounding us; the multiple forms of media we consume; and the social messaging we are subject to based on geographical, social, and economic factors. When we bring these forces into the writing it asks the narrative to shift and expand. I think this was what contributed to Alexandria's inability to write *Call Me Sinner*. She wanted to be seen as an authority. You see this in her comments on the text. She frequently questions the narrator and assumes something isn't being considered because the text doesn't overtly state it.

A: I didn't *have* to be an authority.

c.c.: Sure, sure. But to your question on what Alexandria brought to the collaboration, I would say insight into the industry but also into the genre of nonfiction. She's the one with a more formal background here—obviously since you two know each other.

I: We're briefly acquainted. Alexandria has made an interesting case for bridging nonfiction and graphic narrative in the conference circuit. I believe the last one was in Portland, right?

A: Was it? I guess you're right...

I: Mmm...the workshop in that little bar....

A: Right! It was so nice to see you there.

I: But focusing on your comment, c.c., surely Alexandria brought more than insight to the collaboration?

c.c.: ...no, I mean Alexandria may have edited the manuscript and influenced some ways it was presented—like our decision to include her commentary—but it's not like we were story mapping. *Call Me Sinner* isn't fiction.

I: It sounds like as collaborators you see each other and your individual contributions differently. Has that made this project difficult?

c.c.: Yes! I had to fight for my autonomy. Alexandria wanted to control a lot of the ways I expressed myself and the creative direction of the project. It took over a year before she finally gave up @ccmoon.writes so I could run it—which made it turn out better really.

A: I wasn't trying to control your *creativity*. When I set out on this project my focus was the manuscript and turning it into an art book.⁶⁵ The work on @ccmoon.writes wasn't meant to play a central role—but it did! That was something we both had to adjust to...

c.c.: And *Call Me Sinner* is better for it.

A: ...yes...but in some ways it became a distraction. That is why we put direct references to the account in *Call Me Sinner* in the footnotes, such as footnote 20 and 27. Making these

⁶⁵ See Chapter 1's final section "A Look Ahead: Multimodal Literature, Digital Art, and Installation" for more on the art book.

two entities touch was important to both of us, but at the end of the day the manuscript and @ccmoon.writes became and remain different creative works.

I: Well, this brings us to a point I wanted to focus on. There are a few performative elements to *Call Me Sinner* that struck me, such as the footnotes Alexandria mentioned. c.c., perhaps you could kick this off?

c.c.: Ya-ya. I think the elements you are referring to are the presentation of a multi-narrator experience and the incorporation of the Instagram account.

I: And the use of photography directly in the text.

c.c.: Oh right, I sometimes forget the book has photographs. I felt these would be best left to the artbook Alexandria planned...but to your question...I'll start with a brief discussion of @ccmoon.writes. I understood the manuscript, which I was treating as an edited formal experiment in multi-narration, performance, white space and formatting, and @ccmoon.writes, a raw creative work presented in real time, as vastly different. I kept looking to connect the two to take what I was learning from one platform and apply it to the other. For instance, in one draft I had the creation of @ccmoon.writes detailed in the main body of the text in Section 1. This was back when Alexandria was in a Ph.D. program. She submitted the draft for a supervision with Professor Jenn Ashworth, a faculty member at Lancaster University and author who advised on Alexandria's thesis. The insertion of @ccmoon.writes was called out for being disconnected from the actual text and what was happening there...you know, the discussion of female/femme reactionary behavior to patriarchal standards, the performance of gender and genre, the weaponization of shame and religious guilting...and then suddenly the reader is being hit with information about a social media account. It didn't add up.

I: Did it feel necessary to connect *Call Me Sinner* and @ccmoon.writes?

A: I thought it was important. By agreeing to include it in the formation of *Call Me Sinner*, I wanted c.c. and I to really *do* a cross platform creative work that hadn't otherwise been seen by readers.

c.c.: I didn't think too much of it. I know Alexandria wanted this clean, cohesive collection, but I never viewed *Call Me Sinner* and @ccmoon.writes as coming together in that manner. On Instagram I was creating a commentary that could be messy and partially formed. I was both witness to and active participant in how a platform—which in a lot of ways represents our social reality in the U.S.—policed female/femme pleasure and bodies and how discussions on these topics are *sticky*.⁶⁶ Susanna Paasonen talks about this in #NSFW. On the other side, *Call Me Sinner* revolved around shame and the American religious experience, which situates discussions on pleasure within a morality complex. What I didn't expect was for @ccmoon.writes to be exploring shame too. After reviewing the account's grid, I recognized its overarching concern with shame and how women actively work to undo the shame they are taught about pleasure and the body.⁶⁷

A: c.c. and I had many conversations on my experiences with religion and how this affected my ability to write on these topics. It's always been quite difficult for me...

c.c.: Ya-ya. I think what made this possible—meaning the account's unconscious concern with shame—was how I viewed @ccmoon.writes as confessional work and the followers engaged with the content as if it was a conversation with a friend. It reminded me that, in many ways, these conversations still only happen in close, private formats and when the discussion is on a digital platform the intimacy of in-person conversation carries over.

⁶⁶ See Chapter 3 for a larger discussion on how this impacted the final manuscript of *Call Me Sinner*.

⁶⁷ Such as the posts dated February 18, 2019, March 4, 2019, June 18, 2019, December 5, 2019, May 18, 2020.

A: Our conversations even had that same intimacy as c.c. and I frequently discussed the project over DM.⁶⁸

c.c.: Mmm...it made me want to represent the external influences that place pressure on an individual and informs their behaviors, thoughts, and actions to illustrate the performative nature of nonfiction...and performance of truth/reality. The n+1 voices⁶⁹ was a technique that did this.

I: And these n+1 voices are meant to do what exactly?

A: I would say it creates a dialogue between myself and c.c. and c.c. and the various influences impacting the writing.

c.c.: Well, that's not why I did it. To be honest, at the time, @ccmoon.writes was a journal for myself. While some aspects of the account are in the manuscript, the majority was not included. If you were to go back and visit the account, then you'd see it began to function as almost a documentary—a behind the scenes, really.⁷⁰ In many ways, sharing the content on @ccmoon.writes helped me navigate the narratorial performance in *Call Me Sinner* as well as maneuver writing about experiences that can be difficult to capture through language alone. As James Baldwin said, “to try and find out what Americans mean is almost impossible because there are so many things they do not want to face.”⁷¹ The n+1 voices was one of the techniques that allowed me to consider what it is I'm trying not to face as a writer and as a person without breaking the narrative flow.

⁶⁸ DM is an abbreviation for direct messaging a means of communication on social media platforms that is private from the public. Account holders and followers are able to use this form of communication for private and/or one on one conversations.

⁶⁹ A concept introduced by Charlie during a supervision at the end of Alexandria's first year, n+1 voices refers to the multiple unnamed and named voices included in the footnotes of *Call Me Sinner* and alludes to external influences and/or characters.

⁷⁰ For example, posts dated November 22, 2019, March 20, 2020, May 12, 2020, October 7, 2020, March 17, 2021.

⁷¹ Baldwin, J. (1991) *Nobody Knows My Name*. London, England: Penguin Books. pp. 127.

I: Can you give an example of this? What were you exactly avoiding?

c.c.: Well...

A: How c.c. and I engaged in the text is fundamentally performative and having the text reflect this seemed appropriate. The narrator needs to be knowledgeable, willing to admit blind spots, and aware. However, that's not how people really are. We had to consider both of our blind spots—such as the racism in this country affecting how white women versus BIPOC women are allowed to express themselves—if the narration was going to be believable.

I: Mmm...do you think Instagram brought forward the need for performance and multi-narration as c.c. suggests?

A: If anything, the account reinforces the performative acts of nonfiction.

I: Can you give an example of what you mean by performative acts?

A: Leslie Jamison said that as women writers we've created this numb state or dryness "that implies pain without claiming it" so we can avoid the accusations of "melodrama, triviality, wallowing"⁷² because we understand claiming pain ultimately affects our credibility and the credibility of our writing. And the existential truth of the female experience is married to one of pain. This can make writing about heteronormative power dynamics within families, relationships, and intimacy challenging to capture with language. For instance, Figure 88 the image of the waterlogged tongue is meant to illustrate the weight of silence I experienced within institutionalized religious settings as behavior, speech, and even thought were policed. In the religious environment I was raised, a woman performing well was modest, gracious, soft spoken, forgiving, and aware

⁷² Jamison, L. (2014) *The Empathy Exams*. London, England: Granta Publications. pp. 213.

of how she could *make* men sin. A woman performing well did not show or voice her desires and considered childrearing the most noble pursuit for her life. *Call Me Sinner* in many ways acknowledges the feelings of guilt, shame, and anger I've harbored over falling outside of the definition of a *well performing woman*. c.c. wonderfully captured some of these experiences I shared in our conversations.

c.c.: Well, since we're talking about *my* writing here...listening to Alexandria's experience with religion was quite foreign and I wanted *Call Me Sinner* to act as a testament, a witnessing, to a discussion still needed.

A: Yes, which is why I recommended c.c. read the collection *It's Not About the Burqa* by Mariam Khan.⁷³ Immersing myself in the plight of other women's struggle with religion, culture, the body, and shame, I was reminded not just of how I felt when I was younger, but how I feel today navigating a religious world. The emphasis on various dress—when it was appropriate, required, or chosen—echoed experiences I still encounter today on the occasion that I do attend church or when engaging with my extended family. These beliefs are layered so deeply within my life it can be hard to pinpoint why I might feel pressure or how to capture the pressure imposed.

I: It's clear to see c.c. was inspired by all of this talk on religion and shame.

c.c.: Ya-ya. That is why writing in the confessional stood out to me when crafting *Call Me Sinner*. The confessional suggests the writer is doing away with propriety. It suggests the writing is raw and rough. *Call Me Sinner* both acts out the confessional form while showing the performance of this sub-genre. Figure 63 is a moment when I'm confessing something intimate to the reader, but the inclusion of this scene was a choice. At any

⁷³ Khan, M. (2019) *It's Not About the Burqa*. London, England: Picador.

point in time a writer can choose *not* to confess. I wanted to remind the reader of the demands of the confessional and the ways in which the confessional is controlled by inserting scenes, such as Figure 69, that act as a call for confession.

I: Yes, I was curious about this call for confession included in the text. Would you say these interjections are meant to act as commands to the narrator?

c.c.: Definitely. It reinforces the promise of confessional writing to reveal intimate and ugly information to the reader. If the confessional doesn't deliver enough of this, then it can be a source of criticism. Katherine Angel's *Unmastered* comes to mind here. However, the confessional is also a way for the author to break out of shame cycles by inviting disclosure and that disclosure can be both applauded or criticized. A great example of this would be *The Kiss* by Kathryn Harrison,⁷⁴ which details Harrison's incestuous relationship with her estranged father. Praised by some reviewers as a victim's memoir,⁷⁵ others point to it as another "pop-psyche" literary exploration that never discusses the "real-life complications" of their relationship.⁷⁶ Perhaps the confessional does show *too much* without discussing the "real-life" implications...*The Sexual Life of Catherine Millet* is an example of confessional writing capitalizing off its shock value...but the confessional asks you to be all the versions of you. David Shields mentions this when discussing nonfiction...how it should be all the "things you don't want to remember" and

⁷⁴ Harrison, K. (1997) *The Kiss: A Memoir*. London, England: Fourth Estate.

⁷⁵ Lehmann-Haupt, C. (1997) "Life With Father: Incestuous and Soul-Deadening." *The New York Times*, [online] Available at: <<https://www.nytimes.com/1997/02/27/books/life-with-father-incestuous-and-soul-deadening.html>> [Accessed 1 March, 2023].

⁷⁶ Wolcott, J. (1997) "The 20-Year Old Who Dated Her Dad—And Then Wrote A Book About It." *The New Republic*, [online] Available at: <<https://newrepublic.com/article/119008/james-wolcott-reviews-kiss>> [Accessed 1 March 2023].

know because then it'll have some truth.⁷⁷ We have to ground our writing in something real because only then can we hope to tell the story in front of us on the page.

I: And did you do this in *Call Me Sinner*? Show the things you don't want to remember and know?

c.c.: I did...I maybe could have given more, but I wasn't trying to write a story that readers would find shocking.

A: I actually asked c.c. to pull back on some scenes because it didn't serve the text we were creating.

c.c.: That's true. I deleted a few scenes from Section 3 that Alexandria found gratuitous and without benefit to the story even though it was tame when compared to other confessional works.

I: And would you say this larger practice of the confessional is a function of the...what did you call it...n+1 voices?

c.c.: That wasn't the intention. I purposefully divided *Call Me Sinner* into three sections to represent three timeframes from my younger self—section one starting in childhood; section two at university; and section three showing a more recent self, possibly even a self-in-real-time. *Call Me Sinner* allows these different selves to exist while also allowing me as the narrator to exist. Even still, I had to consider how to connect these sections to each other and grounding them within the larger conversations and influences I'd been exposed to over that time seemed like a way to make this happen.

⁷⁷ Shields, D. (2011) *Reality Hunger: A Manifesto*. London, England: Penguin Books Ltd. pp. 185.

- A: This is why earlier on in the writing I suggested c.c. get familiar with the use of tense and point of view in memoir. How readers are situated in time is something nonfiction writers in particular need to carefully consider.
- c.c.: You're making it sound like I never looked into this. I spent a lot of time considering how time was playing out in the text.
- A: But you didn't critically consider who else was doing similar work. For example, Kathryn Harrison's *The Kiss* was a first person account in the present tense that in some ways fails because she breaks the real-time illusion by alluding to feelings or thoughts that happened post-relationship with her father.
- c.c.: I didn't write a book entirely in the first person present tense though.
- A: I know. You are doing something different. You had multiple timelines playing out in the text—and I don't mean the timelines indicated by each section. There are at least....what...4?...4 timelines represented...the most obvious being the first person past tense; the address to the you character is second person present tense; the footnotes are arguably situated within a present-past loop and feature narrators speaking in the first person, first person omniscient, and third person omniscient; and then the inclusion of my comments creates an additional first person omniscient narrator writing in an assumed present tense. As a writing practice it's taking nonfiction somewhere else. You allow not just your voice but mine and the n+1 voices into the text.
- I: If I could piggyback off this comment...I was just going to ask about point of view. *Call Me Sinner* is heavily concerned with an address to someone or something. Why did you use the second person?

- c.c.: There is something compelling about a written address. It makes me think of Maggie Nelson. In many ways, I wanted to carry on this tradition of writers engaged in the second person. However, I was also tired by the industry's representation of the confessional. Authors like r.h. sin, rupi kaur, and Trista Mateer were seeing a rapid increase in followers and their work is heavily wrapped up within the trauma narrative...
- A: Yes, there was a big push in the U.S. for Truth⁷⁸ in autobiography, memoir, and nonfiction, which is such a tired genre trope—that it *has* to be this major truth bearing genre.
- c.c.: And this is why I wanted to poke at the confessional and the expectation(s) of it. The second person in *Call Me Sinner* was occasionally a personal address, but often it was me showing how artificial these writers were and are.
- I: Some reviewers said the second person felt like a gendered address. What do you have to say to this?
- c.c.: As long as we live in a world framed by male dominance, there will always be a gendered element to any social, political, or economic criticism. Early in my writing, I was struck by Katherine Angel's statement of the "hungry female voice [...] unproblematized" and finding it covered in writing on the "fantasy" of men and what they can give or control.⁷⁹ I didn't want *Call Me Sinner* to be steeped in a fantasy, but I also knew I needed to write honestly about my experiences of being pressured by heteronormative standards. This was also a concern I had in using the second person—the assumption of the male you character—and I'm not quite sure a text written by a female/femme identifying individual could escape that assumption either.

⁷⁸ The capitalized Truth here references the idea of an ultimate, singular truth. This is a popular idea in the U.S.

⁷⁹ Angel, K. (2014) *Unmastered*. London, England: Penguin Books. pp. 122-126.

A: c.c. and I talked about this issue a lot. I suggested we use this to our advantage to explore other gendered aspects, such as how dress is a social indicator of identity. In just the first section of *Call Me Sinner* titled “Prudes Remain Alone” dress is mentioned multiple times.⁸⁰ In many ways, dress can act as a reminder about the ways we perform with others. Our lives are made up of a series of performances. Why should we pretend then that nonfiction isn’t a performance too?

I: It seems like you were very conscious of how c.c. could better play within the genre of nonfiction. Were you ever concerned the performative elements c.c. was developing would be kitsch?

A: Of course, but this is a risk in any piece of nonfiction engaging in blurriness, which I would define as a nonfiction practice experimenting with form, genre, and mediums to move in and beyond the constraints of language.

c.c.: Alexandria and I were actually really aligned about the confessional and avoiding the new voice cropping up by womxn writers—

I: Sorry, women X?

c.c.: Ya, you know w-o-m-x-n...

I: Can you explain what you mean by womxn?

c.c.: It’s been around since the 1970s. Womxn is a way of including all individuals identifying as women. It makes space for gender non-conformity. Considering our discussion of gender here, and even your question of the second person being a gendered address, it is the more appropriate term. I’ve noticed Alexandria hasn’t been using it...

⁸⁰ On pages 96, 99, 104, 109, 115, 117, 133, and 137.

A: Okay, so anyway...the trendy voice of womxn writers characterized by self-awareness, sarcasm, and self-deprecation. As I previously mentioned, Leslie Jamison discussed this trend where too often these traits are used to offset the possible criticism of gendered woundedness.

I: Alexandria, your awareness of *Call Me Sinner*'s positioning within the tradition of contemporary womxn writers seems to have benefited your collaboration with c.c., whose background's rooted in this pop culture moment of Instawriters. Can you expand on how this impacted the final publication?

A: I might be speaking out of turn here, but it's difficult to successfully craft a socially and politically aware narrative. Look at some of the current examples of writers attempting this kind of commentary—Katherine Angel's *Tomorrow Sex Will Be Good Again*, Jia Tolentino's *Trick Mirror*. Talking with Jenn about my collaboration, it was pointed out c.c.'s use of social media isn't new. Olivia Laing did something similar with *Crudo*.

c.c.: Mmm...I remember you recommending this book. I just looked up one of Laing's interviews.

A: You can't expect to *be* in a genre and not know what other writers are doing.

c.c.: Laing did make an interesting comment about creating Kathy "to get me away from both direct reportage and labored, self-absorbed confessional writing."⁸¹ I felt that. It really made me think about when Alexandria first approached me to collaborate on *Call Me Sinner*. Alexandria's writing was pretty tone deaf.

⁸¹ Kraus, C. (2018) Becoming Kathy Acker: An Interview with Olivia Laing. *The Paris Review*, [online] Available at: <<https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2018/09/11/becoming-kathy-acker-an-interview-with-olivia-laing/>> [Accessed 1 April 2021].

A: Like your writing was doing so much better in that first draft. My point is that I wanted my work with c.c. to read differently.

I: How did you want *Call Me Sinner* to be read?

A: More aware, I guess...or more obviously so...particularly when comparing c.c.'s use of Instagram to Laing's use of X, formerly known as Twitter. X is about the bombardment of information, the oversharing or expectation of oversharing because of its functionality as this written livestream, but Laing didn't translate this overwhelmed feeling in *Crudo*. It was quite detached from the onslaught of information typical of social media and exposure to non-white narratives. It would have been easy for c.c. to write *Call Me Sinner* in this same way. Going back to our earlier discussion of the n+1 voices, I think one of the greatest benefits of c.c.'s multi-narration is that it allows other voices into the text—just like social media allows other voices.

I: Like a comments section...

A: Yes, exactly.

c.c.: Like David Shields' said...nonfiction can find common ground out of the shared truths in our experiences. But, if you really want to do that, then you need to hear from more than one voice.

I: And what would you say is the 'shared truth' in *Call Me Sinner*?

A: Mmm...I think Salma El-Wardany said it best...hold on...I actually saved this quote in my notes section from her essay "A Gender Denied"...

I want us to welcome pleasure into our skin and realize that religion is not just for the few, but for the many, and that it also comes in many forms.

The fluctuations and harmonies of our physicality do not bar us entry to

spirituality and faith, but rather remind us of our relationship with the divine.⁸²

I realized, in some ways, *Call Me Sinner* was an argument for just that. After a supervision in September 2021, Jenn suggested I revisit the manuscript with c.c. and keep in mind El-Wardany and some of the other womxn writers that were influencing me at the time.

c.c.: I didn't quite get Alexandria's feelings, but in the U.S. discussions around pleasure are typically bound within the context of shame because of the history of this country. We were founded by Puritan colonizers. For all our advances, our mainstream culture is still pretty tightly intertwined with puritanical values.⁸³

I: You just brought to mind a quote I'd written down by bell hooks for this discussion:

'[C]onfession is good for the soul.' It allows us to bear witness to our own trespasses, to those ways we miss the mark (a definition of the meaning of sinfulness). It is only as we recognize and confront the circumstances of our spiritual forgetfulness that we assume accountability.⁸⁴

This seems particularly relevant to your work, c.c., as you start the novel as if you are about to take confession, a traditionally Catholic practice, yet you are not...can you explain this choice and how you were inspired by the religious practice of confession?

c.c.: To be honest when I first wrote the beginning of *Call Me Sinner* I did not pick up on the religious metaphor in this scene.

⁸² El-Wardany, S. (2019) "A Gender Denied." *It's Not About the Burqa*. London, England: Picador. pp. 184.

⁸³ See Jacobs and Paasonen here.

⁸⁴ hooks b. (2000) *all about love*. NY, NY: William Morrow Books. pp. 215-216.

A: Yes, we both overlooked this connection. In fact, I was excited to be writing a piece I thought was finally *not* concerned with religion.

I: Obviously that wasn't the case though.

A: I can't seem to escape it. I attribute this to my upbringing. I was raised in the American midwest by traditional, religious parents with a tendency towards right-wing politics. They had been brought up Nazarene—a rather strict denomination of Christianity. They strongly believed in regularly attending church, dressing modestly...

c.c.: Scenes like the one in Figure 6 pay tribute to Alexandria's experiences of this, which is one of the reasons why dress is a continual concern in *Call Me Sinner*.

A: I'm not sure where the confessional metaphor first took hold. c.c. came to me one day with Section 1 of the chapbook and it was like she'd taken off with this idea of appropriateness.

c.c.: To be honest, I'm not so sure either. Maybe because I'm always seeing things on the Catholic church? Even if you're not Catholic, you're probably familiar with confession...

A: In our discussion as well, we weren't thinking of this as a religious confession. A lot of our early drawing boards were pulling from the larger tradition of the confessional... Sylvia Plath, Susan Sontag, Audre Lorde...

c.c.: This idea of womxn inviting people into their ugly. It struck as being brave...

A: Come on c.c. it's a technique for building credibility. This isn't something male writers necessarily have to be concerned with—their expert status is usually assumed—but womxn writers understand they will likely encounter doubt. They have to draw readers in. What better way than by promising a juicy, ugly confession? The confessional is, in

many ways, pornographic.⁸⁵ As Sarah Viren stated, we are a “voyeuristic animal” and the consumption of the commodified female is overwhelmingly the subject of this voyeurism. Womxn writers engaged in the confessional are invoking desire for the commodified female.

c.c.: And what if we play into this commodification? Should we not look deeper at what a writer is trying to convey?

A: Turning yourself into a commodity isn't brave.

c.c.: Playing into how womxn are objectified can be smart if you're using it to point out this objectification and how it is wrong and tied to gendered social issues. Look at Katherine Angel and the differences between her first publication and her most recent book, *Tomorrow Sex Will Be Good Again*. *Unmastered* talks about women's right and ability to own their sexuality while *Tomorrow Sex Will Be Good Again* tackles the challenges of desire and consent culture and where the responsibility for desire and sex still lie. There is risk for women to publicly write on these topics, and that is especially true for womxn who aren't white, have lower socio-economic status, or are non-gender conforming because of the power dynamics in our society.

I: I'd like to refocus the conversation on how the confessional was used in *Call Me Sinner*...

A: Well, nonfiction is a curatorial artifice. A nonfiction work is never telling the full story. The confessional suggests this story is even *more* honest and *more* telling. *Call Me Sinner* draws attention to how this promised honesty allows for dubiousness in the text.

c.c.: It's not *not* honest...

⁸⁵ Like porn it commodifies a text and makes it something that invokes desire.

- A: But the narrator is proclaiming an authenticity that isn't real.
- I: So you are saying authenticity is false in all nonfiction?
- A: I'm saying the confessional is performed authenticity. The author is signposting their humanity to cover up the story's construction. The writer chooses to share information and there is a process—a personal choice being made—that they want the reader to forget.
- c.c.: I don't think readers are forgetting anything. They know writers are sharing what makes sense for the story. Why should I include information that isn't relevant?
- I: I think you can both agree that you're excited to see *Call Me Sinner* published. For our audience, you have the opportunity to submit questions for c.c. and Alexandria. I'll be sharing their responses in our next episode so stay tuned and don't forget to buy *Call Me Sinner* from your local bookstore...
- c.c.: Or at @ccmoon.writes. You can find the link in my bio.
- I: Alexandria, c.c., thank you for joining me today at Green Apple Books—and thank you Green Apple for hosting this recorded session of Literati Co.'s podcast. We are so happy you had us.

Chapter Three:

Digital Media: On Gender and Sexuality

This chapter is written by c.c. moon to provide an autoethnographic reflection on expressions of gender and sexuality on digital media platforms and how this affects the role of digital media in writing specifically in relation to the creative submission titled Call Me Sinner. It has been established c.c. moon is a creative collaborator on this project and acts as the main account holder of @ccmoon.writes. Due to the topic of Chapter 3, it is best served written by c.c. moon to provide a firsthand account of a creative digital practice using the social media platform Instagram. I have requested c.c. treat writing this chapter with seriousness and provide proper supporting evidence as is required for the reflective work.

Abstract

To further the discussion on creative digital practices on social media platforms, such as X, Tumblr, and Instagram, I have engaged in an autoethnographic analysis of the expression of gender and sexuality as an extension of my creative work on the Instagram account @ccmoon.writes in alignment with Alexandria's larger Ph.D. project, *Rethinking Text: Writing in the Digital Age*. This analysis is framed by the ongoing research into platforms⁸⁶ conducted by Tarleton Gillespie, Susanne Paasonen, Katrin Tiidenberg, and Carolina Are, among others, as well as the sociocultural impact of digital media on gender, sex, and exposure in the U.S. in particular as it relates to the puritanical ethos of American business culture driving profit driven platforms. I will draw comparisons to the experiences of Carolina Are, @bloggeronpole,⁸⁷ who has conducted autoethnographic analyses of Instagram, X, and TikTok in relationship to her work as a digital media researcher and pole dance instructor, and activist Gina Martin,

⁸⁶ The term platform holds a murky multi-component definition as investigated by Tarleton Gillespie in "The Politics of Platforms" in which platform, as used by digital media intermediaries, is framed by four semantic territories: computational, architectural, figurative, and political.

⁸⁷ See bibliography for Carolina Are's relevant body of work.

@ginamartin,⁸⁸ who is engaged in conversations on content policing bias specific to gender and sexuality and how this directly relates to a creators’⁸⁹ ability to interact with users⁹⁰ on their platform of choice irrespective to the creators’ intentions and/or monetization efforts.⁹¹ In particular, I will discuss Are’s research, autoethnography, and activism as she inhabits what she calls a “freak case” position due to multiple ongoing experiences of account censorship and deactivation (or deplatforming); therefore, her work most closely relates to my experiences on @ccmoon.writes. My autoethnographic analysis is framed by the privileges associated with presenting a white, female, cis-gendered, thin body on social media. It would be tone deaf to leave this privilege unacknowledged as my *plight* engaging in a creative digital practice is not comparable to the proven bias⁹² experienced by queer, gender nonconforming, and BIPOC⁹³ creators on social media and in particular Instagram.

Virtual Policing on Profit Driven Platforms

Unlike *Call Me Sinner*, which lacked a specific gendered approach thereby allowing a playful relationship into the malleability of gender and genre,⁹⁴ the Instagram account @ccmoon.writes relied on visual cues that negated an ungendered exploration of pleasure, longing, and the body. This means my creative digital practice was continuously framed and

⁸⁸ See bibliography for Gina Martin’s relevant body of work.

⁸⁹ Defined as anyone with a public social media account on existing digital platforms (i.e., Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, X, YouTube) producing and publishing content for public consumption.

⁹⁰ Defined as anyone with a public or private social media account on existing digital platforms (i.e., Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, X, YouTube).

⁹¹ As @ccmoon.writes is housed on Instagram, which is a profit driven platform, the correlation between a posts *monetizability* and algorithmic *preference* directly relates to a creators’ platform *visibility*. See Sangeet Kumar for more.

⁹² An example is the 2012 #freethenipple movement that gained popularity after celebrities, like Miley Cyrus, began using the hashtag to increase awareness of the censorship of female nipples versus male nipples. This movement continues to gain traction as gender nonconforming and trans rights/trans bodies are navigated on digital platforms. See Julia Jacobs for more details.

⁹³ BIPOC is a commonly used acronym in the United States that stands for black, indigenous, and people of color.

⁹⁴ See Singer and Walker’s *Bending Genre: Essays on Creative Nonfiction* for more on this idea.

subject to Instagram’s community guidelines⁹⁵ and algorithmic evolution. The algorithm had increasing sway on how @ccmoon.writes functioned as the account engaged in what Instagram classifies as risky content (i.e., graphic, violent, or adult in nature). While Mark Zuckerberg has not clearly defined how the algorithm targets content to the public, he admitted it “affects women, athletes, educators, artists, sex workers, lgbtqa+ community members, and people of colour.”⁹⁶ Platform algorithms have also been shown⁹⁷ to lack the ability to differentiate content based on context⁹⁸ or creator intent, such as an intent to monetize or not to monetize an account. The lack of contextual understanding applied to user activity has only increased as platforms continue to prioritize revenue from advertisers,⁹⁹ thus subjecting users to the muddled realm of appropriateness as is defined by American business.¹⁰⁰ In relation to how this impacts expressions of gender and sexuality, Carolina Are states:

While nudity and sexualization of women are common in advertising and the media, social media offered users the opportunity to portray their sexuality on their own terms [...the] deviation from mainstream notions of which bodies and activities are deemed acceptable [...] resulted in platforms limiting nudity and sexual expression to appeal to advertisers.¹⁰¹

This places all creator content under the purview of algorithms catering to profit driven platforms (i.e., Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube). Recognizing the priorities of profit driven

⁹⁵ See Introduction.

⁹⁶ Are, C. (2021) “The Shadowban Cycle: an autoethnography of pole dancing, nudity and censorship on Instagram.” *Feminist Media Studies*. doi: 10.1080/14680777.1928259.

⁹⁷ See Kumar (2019), Are & Paasonen (2021), Are (2022), and Gillespie (2010).

⁹⁸ Consider here Gabriel Goh’s 2016 investigation into open_nsfw, which illustrated how images of nature and architecture could be tagged as NSFW simply because the shapes, colors, and patterns were interpreted by the algorithm as explicit. See Susanna Paasonen (2019) for additional discussion of Gabriel Goh’s study.

⁹⁹ See Susanna Paasonen (2019) and Sangeet Kumar (2019).

¹⁰⁰ See Max Weber (1958) and H.L. Mencken (1914) for a historical perspective on the socio-economic-cultural impact of Puritanism on American business culture that sprouted during the abolitionist movement.

¹⁰¹ Reference in footnote 61.

platforms and the impact on user experience is a key component to understanding how expressions of gender and sexuality are subject to flagging,¹⁰² shadowbanning,¹⁰³ and removal due to a platform’s economic, public, and legal positioning.

As a creator, I saw the dynamics of platform-advertiser relations in the positioning of female and/or femme creators in fitness, lifestyle/fashion, business, and arts/culture who focused on non-risky branding (or branding that falls within societal standards¹⁰⁴) versus creators actively participating in risky content.¹⁰⁵ It is important here to clarify what risky content entails as it does not follow the same classification of NSFW (Not Suitable For Work) tagging.¹⁰⁶ In the context of Instagram, examples of risky content include “selfies involving varying degrees of undress and sexual flirtation, drawings and paintings featuring degrees of nudity or sex, as well as pictures of donut holes, flowers, and handbags seen as playfully humorous.”¹⁰⁷ Instagram has also defined risky content as the simple suggestion of nudity or exposure. The broad definition has led to user petitions and backlash, which may have contributed to the 2023 Oversight Board decision to overturn Meta’s removal of two posts by trans and non-binary users followed by a recommendation to amend the company’s Adult Nudity and Sexual Activity Community Standard.¹⁰⁸ The broad definition has also resulted in successful female and femme creators

¹⁰² Flagged is a term coined by social media platform users to describe when a post has been identified by a platform’s algorithm as potentially problematic and/or in violation of community guidelines.

¹⁰³ As defined by Are, shadowbanning is “a cross-platform moderation technique implemented by platforms like X—which prevents shadowbanned accounts’ usernames from appearing at search” (Are, C. & Paasonen, S. 2021).

¹⁰⁴ These societal standards are defined within the context of an Instagram account holder, and therefore mean conforming to the social norms, beauty standards, moral and ethical positioning in line with U.S. puritanical values as Instagram is a U.S. based platform.

¹⁰⁵ Susanna Paasonen calls this content *sticky* as it drives engagement on these platforms, and thereby drives profits, but also toes the line of acceptability and suitability which has become an increasingly difficult line to maintain as the virtual world bleeds into the daily activities of the physical world. See Paasonen (2019) for more.

¹⁰⁶ Defined as the hypertext used to categorize media on the internet.

¹⁰⁷ Paasonen, S., Jarrett, K. and Light, B. (2019) *#NSFW: Sex, Humor, and Risk in Social Media*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. pp. 7

¹⁰⁸ Oversight Board. (2023) *Oversight Board overturns Meta’s original decisions in the “Gender identity and nudity” cases*, [online] Available at: <<https://www.oversightboard.com/news/1214820616135890-oversight-board-overturns-meta-s-original-decisions-in-the-gender-identity-and-nudity-cases/>> [Accessed 30 March 2023].

being defined by their hypersexuality and their silence in conversations related to the patriarchy, feminism, or rape culture as this buoys their marketability. Creators that participate in risky content can struggle to gain followings, equivalent influence, and may be prone to facing direct, negative action for posts deemed questionable or outside of community guidelines.¹⁰⁹ While I was not consciously aware of the standardization among female and femme creators on Instagram when @ccmoon.writes was created, it quickly became apparent and strongly impacted the growth of @ccmoon.writes from 2019 onwards as autonomous, non-monetized creative work. The standardization of female and femme creator branding placed @ccmoon.writes in a situation of confronting “notions of female sexuality [that] have so long been out of women’s hands that we are either sexually oppressed or hyper-sexualized, and those two narratives leave us torn between unrealistic dichotomies we can never live up to.”¹¹⁰ As I will discuss later in Chapter 4, this led me to test the parameters of Instagram to gain insight into how the algorithm defined content based on acceptability and risk.

It is the expressly gendered way in which Instagram performs and how @ccmoon.writes conforms to this performance that led to the eventual gendered stance of *Call Me Sinner*. For example, as *Call Me Sinner* was originally written as an address to a plural you, gendered identifiers such as pronouns, hair length, dress, etc., were not initially included. Such gendered identifiers were added in later drafts and can be found in excerpts such as Figure 6, 9, 12, and 14. The decision to create a gendered narrative was supported by discussions with Alexandria on her experiences of shame and religion—specifically the weaponization of shame by U.S. religious institutions and how this impacts sociocultural discussions of female pleasure, longing, and the

¹⁰⁹ See Carolina Are (2022).

¹¹⁰ Khan, M. (2019) *It's Not About the Burqa*. London, England: Picador. pg. 102.

body—therefore a gendered perspective carried more weight and built tension in the narrative. The results of these discussions can be seen in the inclusion of direct quotes from the Bible, such as the footnote for Figure 146, and the narrative on good vs. bad women, such as Figure 5, 11, and 28. In many ways, I saw Instagram’s platform policing as an extension of the shame-based judgements Alexandria detailed from her experiences with religion. This is supported by Carolina Are’s and Susanna Paasonen’s research into platforms founded and based in the U.S., which “shows a typically North American mentality”¹¹¹ situated in Puritanical values that remain foundational to U.S. business and culture. For example, when the U.S. passed FOSTA/SESTA¹¹² in 2018 Instagram updated their algorithm to regulate content more strictly. The increased algorithmic sensitivity to potentially risky content has further harmed health and sex education initiatives, placed sex workers at increased risk, suppressed conversations on sexuality, and censored users’ words (i.e., words such as sexuality and masturbation can result in flagging, post removal, and/or threats of account suspension) by establishing a default flagging system. Users are able to dispute flagged content, but successfully overturning a flag, post removal or account suspension/deletion is limited as users are provided little guidance and resources to follow up on disputes and a user can only submit one dispute at a time.

As an arts/culture creator on Instagram my sole focus was producing content related to the production, completion, and birth of creative projects; to build a community with other arts/culture creators to support and nurture each other; and to engage with my account followers to show my appreciation for their support. What is striking about my experience on @ccmoon.writes during the early months of the account¹¹³ is that I had successfully built an

¹¹¹ Are, C. (2021) “The Shadowban Cycle: an autoethnography of pole dancing, nudity and censorship on Instagram.” *Feminist Media Studies*. doi: 10.1080/14680777.1928259.

¹¹² Short for Allow States and Victims to Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act and Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act.

¹¹³ @ccmoon.writes was started October 30th, 2018.

account that did all three aforementioned acts. I was enjoying the space carved out on @ccmoon.writes and believed in the account's ability to organically grow within the community; and, prior to platform changes Instagram initiated after the 2018 ruling of FOSTA/SESTA, that wasn't an unrealistic belief. Instagram had formed a place for community in the midst of creating a platform for expressive opportunities.¹¹⁴ This is of note as "the identity of a place—its social structure, its political character, its 'local' culture—is also a product of interactions...that not only is space the product of social relationships but that 'it is these relations which constitute the social phenomena themselves.'"¹¹⁵ However, in 2019 I was shadowbanned for an Instagram story¹¹⁶ on male violence. Afterwards, user engagement fluctuated culminating in a steady decline in engagement after posts dated June 27, 2019. I spoke out about the continued flagging and recognizable attributes associated with a shadowbanned account in a post on October 16th, 2020:

over the past year this account has been shadowbanned & censored 3 times: twice for posting a photo similar to this with raw writing on sexual assault & toxic male behavioral patterns; once for a 'graphic' poem about sex. having posted other photos like this one that were not censored (whether in my feed or stories), i noticed the trend wasn't necessarily because of the image but the written content. when i was promoting companies or talking about loving my body, the algorithm left me alone. however, when i discussed female pleasure, female desire, consent, sexual assault, toxic male behavior in hetero-encounters, porn, etc., my account was reported & subsequently hidden.

¹¹⁴ Consider Gretchen McCulloch's *Because Internet: Understanding the New Rules of Language*.

¹¹⁵ Massey, D. (1998) *Space, Place, and Gender*. Cambridge, England: Polity Press. pg. 120-121.

¹¹⁶ The photo used was the same as the one in the post dated April 2, 2021. See Appendix D.

At that time, @ccmoon.writes had a following of 530 (approximately gaining 5 new followers each week since the account's founding) and of that following an average of 7% were interacting with my grid¹¹⁷ daily in 2020. By the time I ended @ccmoon.writes on March 3, 2022, the follower count had decreased to 450 and the average grid engagement was 2%. Between 2019 and 2022 I regularly communicated with other creators—specifically with Kristina Taylor, @wildwomanwriting.co, Jean Marie Bub, @jeanmariebub, and Sabrina, @gravityrose_—and learned they were also dealing with a drop in engagement, losing followers or unable to gain new followers, hidden posts, and accounts being deleted without notification.¹¹⁸

Why does this matter? Platforms are not necessarily obligated to function as social civic spaces. However, in the context of a digital creative practice it stunted my ability to expand a community of creators and followers; discuss current events; educate myself and/or others by accessing and providing resources on sex education, gender studies, and womxn's literature; among other limitations. @ccmoon.writes was dancing with acceptability and risk and I had noticed this was a common experience among female and femme creators. For instance, the headline making controversy #IWantToSeeNyome navigated by Gina Martin and Nyome Nicholas-Williams, a plus-sized model, after a picture of Nicholas-Williams was removed by Instagram. Due to users' condemnation of Instagram's handling of the situation and Martin and Nicholas-Williams drawing media attention, the experience led to a modification in Instagram's algorithm that went into effect in November 2020.¹¹⁹ However, as seen with my own account, most cases balancing acceptability and risk do not garner this level of attention or long-lasting

¹¹⁷ As stated in the Introduction, the grid describes the collection of an Instagram user's posts visible on their account profile. Due to the visual nature of grids, users frequently create themed content to represent a particular aesthetic or branding.

¹¹⁸ According to Instagram, the platform follows a 3-strike rule and is required to notify users each time before deleting an account from the platform.

¹¹⁹ See Rachel Savage (2020), Nosheen Iqbal (2020), and Amy Fleming (2021).

action from platforms. This is one of the foundational components to Carolina Are's autoethnographic research and activism related to her continued deplatforming from Instagram, X, and TikTok. Are states:

Researching the effects of social media's affordances is crucial not just to understand what types of action platform infrastructure enables: indeed, in shaping the norms of behavior on their sites, social media make political decisions about what is acceptable, de facto ruling over ideas and beliefs in an increasingly essential civic space where we work and express ourselves.¹²⁰

I also understood Are's statement to extend to creative explorations and investigations as art frequently delves into the contemptuous, banal, and risky. After my experience with shadowbanning, I became attuned to the motivations behind female and femme creators adopting a standardized brand to position their accounts away from the direct, negative, and often irreparable actions of platforms.¹²¹ With regards to the development of *Call Me Sinner*, it linked my experience on @ccmoon.writes with Alexandria's experience of patterns of silencing within U.S. culture and religious institutions. It also provided clarity on how to resolve a repeated point of feedback Alexandria received from Professors Jenn Ashworth and Charlie Gere that *Call Me Sinner* lacked tension to drive the piece forward. To separate pleasure and the body from the politics of gender is to ignore a larger conversation on who is allowed to feel pleasure, who is allowed to show their body, and who is allowed to experience longing and desire. I did not want *Call Me Sinner* to shy away from these conversations and was inspired to look at how

¹²⁰ Are, C. (2022) An autoethnography of automated powerlessness: lacking platform affordances in Instagram and TikTok account deletions. *Media, Culture, & Society*, pg. 1-19. doi: 10.1177/01634437221140531.

¹²¹ Again, I direct the reader to Chapter 4 for a detailed discussion on my decision to test the algorithm's parameters as part of the creative practice.

Alexandria and I could harness the functionalities of platforms to foster a dynamic conversation in the text. This became one of the main functions of the n+1 voices discussed in Chapter 2.

Digital Art, Platforms, and Performance

To frame @ccmoon.writes within the context of a creative practice as is required by Alexandria for the reflective submission it is important to discuss other female/femme creators using digital platforms to conduct creative experiments. Perhaps one of the most relevant and widely known experiments is Amalia Ulman's *Excellences & Perfections* (2014), which investigates digital culture, identity, and performance. Amalia Ulman's work exploited the ways in which social media "reproduces or even amplifies the same kind of cultural values" promoted by mass media by performing a series of fictional 'extreme makeovers.'¹²² *Excellences & Perfections* was co-presented by Rhizome and the New Museum in October 2014 and in 2016 was exhibited as part of the Tate Modern's *Performing for the Camera*. It continues to be cited as a social media "masterpiece" and predictor of current social media behaviors.¹²³ Unlike Amalia Ulman, the content on @ccmoon.writes is not fictional and I was not purposefully conducting an inquiry into social media's enhancement and enforcement of specific cultural values. However, similar to how Ulman framed female/femme social media performance, I was consistently placed under the pressures many female and femme identifying creators face of threading the needle between "lucrative sexiness vs. objectionable content."¹²⁴ Unsuccessfully navigating this digital terrain can lead to repercussions referred to as deplatforming (i.e., flagging, shadowbanning, post removal, account suspension and deletion). As previously

¹²² Ulman, A. (2014) *Excellences & Perfections* [Online Exhibit]. New York: New Museum.

¹²³ Ruigrok, S. (2018) How this 2014 Instagram hoax predicted the way we now use social media. *Dazed*, [online] Available at: <<https://www.dazeddigital.com/art-photography/article/39375/1/amalia-ulman-2014-instagram-hoax-predicted-the-way-we-use-social-media>> [Accessed 1 June 2023].

¹²⁴ Are, C. & Paasonen, S. (2021) "Sex in the shadows of celebrity." *Porn Studies*, 8:4, pg. 411-419. doi: 10.1080/23268743.2021.1974311.

mentioned, my experiences of deplatforming reinforced the incorporation of a gendered perspective in *Call Me Sinner* as the sociocultural repercussions of platform policing further marked content as deviant and has disproportionately fell on the heads of already marginalized individuals; and in particular digital social activists such as Tarana Burke, Florence Given, Salma El-Wardany, and Gina Martin. The weight and responsibility on these account holders was the basis for Florence Given's semi-autobiographical main character Eartha in the novel *Girl Crush*. Eartha's use of social media leads to a divided self—one split between the physical and digital world—which becomes a key point in Eartha's character arch. The similarities to Eartha's character do not elude me as I look at the distinct relationship Alexandria and I cultivated during this creative project. A detailed discussion of the physical/digital realities of Alexandria and I can be found in Chapter 4; however, a brief discussion on the direct impact of my split reality is included in the final paragraph of this section.

Based on the history of digital creative practices, I see @ccmoon.writes as engaging in the common, as discussed in *The Digital Banal*, while also expanding the artistic discussion of digital work as performance and what this performance means. However, as algorithmic changes and platform-advertiser relations have developed, @ccmoon.writes had the opportunity to critically consider the role of platforms, and subsequently their restrictions, on a digital artistic investigation. In addition, @ccmoon.writes is defined by its creative functionality as an exploration of the main themes of *Call Me Sinner*. Therefore, the placement of @ccmoon.writes in conversations occurring in digital spaces on female/femme pleasure, longing, and the body led to important developments in *Call Me Sinner*. Firstly, @ccmoon.writes became a forum to reclaim female/femme pleasure and the body, similar to accounts such as @florencegiven and @gravityrose_, which provided an avenue to create friction in the narrative of *Call Me Sinner* by

bringing content on the rejection of female/femme pleasure in the context of a religious upbringing forward—for example the direct address to the pastor in footnote 19 and 79. Secondly, the account became a place for confession and camaraderie among female/femme individuals to share and creatively express experiences of repeated male violence. Therefore, the importance of making obvious the inclusion of sexual harassment, assault, and rape in the narrative (Figure 82, 88, 116’s footnote) was brought to my attention. The experience of male violence against womxn individuals is commonplace and to write on pleasure, longing, and the body without acknowledging these experiences would be a disservice. These narratives should not be considered shocking to the public or marketed as such, therefore it was particularly important to bring this content forward and highlight the commonness of such events in female/femme experiences. The flagging experienced on @ccmoon.writes because of my activity in discussions of male violence against womxn further supported this decision. Thirdly, @ccmoon.writes became an avenue to explore and bring attention to the ways in which female/femme individuals continue to experience forms of shame and shaming, which ultimately led to the decision to make shame the connecting thread between the three sections in *Call Me Sinner*¹²⁵ (i.e., Figure 99, 100, 228). With social media came new opportunities for female and femme creators, “but there is no reason to believe that the increased complexity of our technologized lives works toward increased equality for all subjected to the technology.”¹²⁶ Here, I point to Julia Jacob’s article on #freethenipple in which Jacob discusses Instagram’s guidelines

¹²⁵ As stated by Emily Nagoski (2015, pp.17), “Medieval anatomists called women’s external genitals the ‘pudendum,’ a word derived from the Latin *pudere*, meaning ‘to make ashamed.’” While Alexandria’s personal experience of weaponized shame by religious institutions may be true for her, it does not speak for all women. However, my research into platform policing and sexuality supported that historically all areas of our present world have been touched by sexist bias. Speaking to this experience is complicated—no two stories are the same—but it does aim to find the commonalities of these individual experiences to give voice to the gendered struggles encountered by societies marginalized.

¹²⁶ Aarseth, E. (1998) *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature*. Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press. pg. 168.

on nudity and the difficult line the platform faces based on user petitions. One such user, Rain Dove, who identifies as gender nonconforming finds this issue particularly frustrating as someone who repeatedly experiences deplatforming because Instagram refuses to acknowledge their identity as ungendered.¹²⁷ In addition, from my discussions with Alexandria, I noticed parallels between her experience with religion and my experience operating @ccmoon.writes. The use of shame as a connecting thread (i.e., footnote 95, footnote 107, Figure 156) fostered an honest dialogue between Alexandria and I that led to better tension in *Call Me Sinner* and contributed to a larger dialogue among womxn writers—such as Jean Marie-Bub and Salma El-Wardany—exploring the ways in which the body, particularly womxn’s bodies, was placed as other (and therefore sin bearer/sin bringer). Bringing these elements into the text were crucial to my portrayal of a gendered experience in *Call Me Sinner*.

At this point in the analysis, it is necessary to consider how platforms, the algorithm, and bodies function in virtual spaces as Instagram openly polices certain bodies as noted above. As an account presenting a female or femme identified body, the algorithm posed a bigger problem to @ccmoon.writes’ maneuvering of a gendered performance than I originally understood. The design of the algorithm as we know it is discussed to a greater extent by Susanne Paasonen in chapters 3 and 4 in *#NSFW*. To provide a brief summary of Paasonen’s research that is at risk of oversimplification, the heart of how the algorithm categorizes visual content lies in the early days of the internet which was driven by the needs of the porn industry. Therefore, it is of little surprise the algorithm’s categorization of female or femme bodies is inherently risky or sexual. My newfound understanding of these deep-rooted, intentional technical developments that have

¹²⁷ Jacobs, J. (2019) Will Instagram Ever ‘Free the Nipple’? *The New York Times*, [online] Available at: <<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/22/arts/design/instagram-free-the-nipple.html>> [Accessed 1 June 2022].

carried into the digital spaces I now occupy left me fixated on the body and skin in a way I hadn't been previously. This fixation is visible on @ccmoon.writes from May 18, 2020¹²⁸ and then became the source for a thematic change on my grid starting September 15, 2020.¹²⁹ My concern with skin and the body leaked into *Call Me Sinner* (i.e., the second footnote on Figure 178, Figure 186, and footnote 143) and further changed *Call Me Sinner* as a text void of gender signifiers to one inhabiting a space of gender maneuvering¹³⁰ as I delved into the digital performance of femininity that goes hand in hand with a “symbol of obscenity.”¹³¹ Recognizing and creatively exploring how female and/or femme bodies are consumed on platforms offered me an opportunity to investigate the palatability of the feminine, which was a conversation already emerging in the text of *Call Me Sinner* (again see the manuscript excerpts on good vs. bad women noted above). However, through this fixation I also found myself considering the role of social media in the existence of a virtual self or body. Steven Connor poignantly speaks on the ‘glorification of skin’ and our cultural obsession with the “proof of our exposure to visibility itself” claiming that “the multiplication of skin-surfaces, of signifying screens, exteriors and supports [has] established [a fascination] between touching and looking, skin and image.”¹³² In a post dated August 20, 2020¹³³ I shared my thoughts on the creative implications of a virtual self and was further inspired to investigate this idea after Alexandria shared a conversation that took place between herself and Professor Charlie Gere on @ccmoon.writes and the parallels to

¹²⁸ See Appendix E.

¹²⁹ See Appendix F.

¹³⁰ “The way groups act to manipulate the relations between masculinity and femininity as others commonly understand them” (Pascoe, 2007, pp. 116).

¹³¹ Are, C. (2021) “The Shadowban Cycle: an autoethnography of pole dancing, nudity and censorship on Instagram.” *Feminist Media Studies*. doi: 10.1080/14680777.1928259.

¹³² Ahmed, S. & Stacey, J. (2001) *Thinking Through The Skin*. London, England: Routledge.

¹³³ See Appendix G.

Jacques Derrida's theoretical considerations on the page as a 'theatrical scene.' A deeper discussion of these concerns can be read in Chapter 1 and 4.

Conclusion

Call Me Sinner would not exist in its present form if I had not participated in a digital media platform that demanded a recognition and discussion of gender and sexuality. The impact of my specific experience running @ccmoon.writes led me to understand how discussions of female/femme pleasure, longing, and the body are silenced and policed due to the U.S.'s continual demarcation of these themes as risky, sexualized, and adult content despite the non-sexual, educational, and nuanced ways in which our understanding of pleasure, longing, and the body touch our lives. My use of @ccmoon.writes to participate in conversations with content and creators that further illuminated my knowledge of platform policing and positioning; the expression and suppression of female/femme pleasure and the erotic; and the conformity demanded of platform users' performance of gender and sexuality shaped the creative trajectory of *Call Me Sinner*. The tension in *Call Me Sinner* developed by taking a gendered approach and emphasizing Alexandria's religious experiences is directly linked to my experiences on @ccmoon.writes and the disproportionate policing of female and femme creators as discussed by researchers, activists, and journalists alike. The parallel formation of *Call Me Sinner* and @ccmoon.writes in this creative project therefore led to new and interesting creative pathways in my writing practice.

Chapter Four:

Digital Media: A Practice in Self Expression

Digital Media: Platform Tools and Functionalities

July 8th, 2020

@ccmoon.writes' profile photo lights up on Instagram with the colored ring indicating a user has gone live.

c.c.: Hey loves!!

c.c. waves both hands at the camera.

iamkathryn comments: HI!

jeffs.pov comments: where are you?

Smiley face emojis trail up the screen.

I'm so excited to have Alexandria here with me today...and we thought it would be a great idea to do a little live with everyone...

c.c. motions to someone outside of the camera frame.

*As you know, Alexandria has been working on a Ph.D. in conjunction with our collaboration together on *Call Me Sinner*...and after some discussions with each other...we've agreed this account should also be included.*

writingfairy comments: you're back!!!

chrisss1240 comments: what is this?

writingfairy comments: i've missed you!

Alexandria settles into frame. c.c. readjusts the camera. An orange abstract print is visible in the righthand corner.

A: Yes, c.c. and I spoke about including @ccmoon.writes in my thesis and I wanted to get an idea of what that might look like, some of the basic functionalities...

jeffs.pov comments: show us the art behind you.

writingfairy comments: how is she writing your book with you? you don't look like friends

c.c.: And I thought why not bring her on a live, right? Make this a larger conversation with you guys as followers and account users.

ccmoon.writes comments: Alexandria's control of @ccmoon.writes is thematically visible from the account creation date (Oct. 30, 2018) to May 15, 2019, at which point I assumed all creative rights. This transition is more clearly delineated by the post on May 27, 2019 at which point the account assumed a flashed out, urban aesthetic paired with short excerpts of prose.

A: I don't know if...

c.c.: I'll be dropping notes into the chat since I've prepped a few points...so Alexandria why don't we start with how Instagram's algorithm affects account and post interactions?

c.c. leans towards the camera.

We all know how vague platforms are about their algorithms and enforcement of community guidelines.

ccmoon.writes comments: As stated in Alexandria's Introduction, Instagram's community guidelines are as follows: (1) share content you have the right to share, (2) post content appropriate for a diverse audience, (3) foster meaningful interactions, (4) do not break the law, (5) respect other community members, (6) do not glorify self-injury, (7) carefully consider content on trending events.

A: I don't know. Isn't the whole censorship discussion a little old?

c.c.: If platforms were clear about what content constituted violations, then I don't think it would be such a big discussion still. It wasn't until 2021 that Instagram admitted to actively shadowbanning and announced they planned to notify users, which the notification feature

didn't actually launch until December 2022. And even this feature doesn't provide clarity as to what is exactly *wrong* with a users' post.

A: Ok...

c.c.: Let me actually put Carolina Are's account in the chat. She's doing really interesting work around this...

ccmoon.writes comments: @bloggeronapole

ccmoon.writes comments: As reported by Meta's Oversight Board, Meta should "define clear, objective, rights-respecting criteria to govern its Adult Nudity and Sexual Activity Community Standard, so that all people are treated in a manner consistent with international human rights standards, without discrimination on the basis of sex or gender." Ruling dated January 2023.

A: But what is there really to discuss? Instagram is policing their platform as they are entitled to. This isn't a community center. It's a business. I'd rather talk about how you are using digital media and how it's become a source of virtual embodiment, which is different from what I've seen by artists like Amalia Ulman, Gabi Abrão's memes, and other writers using Instagram, you know...rupi kaur, r.h. sin, Laine Leavy...there is an established practice of writing on social media. *This* is interesting.

A series of emojis float across the screen.

iamkathryn comments: Talk to your followers first please

ariphotography comments: You're live!

sarahmckinnon comments: This is different than what you usually post. When are you going to film another outing?

film another outing?

c.c.: But we can't not talk about Instagram's guidelines. It does affect how I create, what I

create, what I share, and whether any of it is actually going to reach other accounts like all of you.

c.c. motions to the camera and waits a few beats. A series of hearts trail up the screen as viewers react to c.c.'s words. She turns back to Alexandria.

These conversations are really interconnected...it looks like we have some comments from viewers on this topic...want me to read a few?

A: No, no, it's fine. We can talk about it.

c.c.: Great! Because we can't ignore the double standard in how Instagram, and its parent company Meta, polices accounts—particularly accounts that are known or assumed to be female/femme.

A: Then why did you keep using the platform?

c.c.: Well...writing is so much more than *the page*.

A: Ok...

c.c.: And at the end of the day Instagram is just another form I'm using as a writer. Early digital art and writing experimented with copy/paste, sharing, reposting, accessibility, user-friendliness or the lack of user-friendliness, you know, keeping out the non-Internet people as Gretchen McCulloch calls them...and questioning reality and the purpose of documentation...Instagram has a lot of these same features and account users engage in a lot of these same questions.

A: I'd agree. Like Zara Dinnen says in *The Digital Banal*, most post-Internet experiments on social media are concerned with subverting the platform to expand on ideas around the common. Gabi Abrão's memes are an example of this, such as merchandise she created

repurposing Michelangelo's *The Creation of Adam* as a metaphor for the connection individuals who use(d) Tumblr have with each other.

Alexandria hands her phone to c.c. and points to the screen.

Can we share her profile here with everyone?

c.c.: Ya-ya, sure. Anyway...

ccmoon.writes comments: McCulloch, G. (2019) *Because Internet: Understanding the New Rules of Language*. New York, New York: Riverhead Books.

ccmoon.writes comments: Dinnen, Z. (2018) *The Digital Banal: New Media and American Literature and Culture*, New York, New York: Columbia University Press. pp. 49, 69.

ccmoon.writes comments: @sighswoon

ccmoon.writes comments: See @sighswoon's post dated January 17, 2023 for the X post that led to a meme that led to her merchandise drop.

led to a meme that led to her merchandise drop.

ccmoon.writes comments: see @sighswoon's post dated January 17, 2023 for the X post that

I had to test the platform's boundaries to understand what form @ccmoon.writes would take after the first time I got shadowbanned. It really sucks by the way when that happens. You have like no idea why your engagement plummeted and why posts are suddenly getting no likes...it would've been so much better if they were just open about shadowbanning from the start—

writingfairy comments: we support you!!!!

Oh, thanks loves!

c.c. smiles and turns to Alexandria.

...anyway...I purposefully posted different combinations of text and visual content to see what might be flagged. Then I understood how Instagram controlled and curated the platform and how users function within those boundaries—and perform within it.

Alexandria finally nods.

A: I see your point. @ccmoon.writes is public made art using a pre-built platform. You had to understand the tools available to you before you could engage in a creative practice.

c.c.: I think those experiments *are* a creative practice. I started with features like the grid, posting, stories, highlights, reposts/shares, archives, and eventually reels and curated them to reflect a consistent *brand*...like how rupi kaur is known for her micro poems and line art.

ccmoon.writes comments: Highlights are saved stories so visitors can see an account's story indefinitely. Stories otherwise are only available for 24 hours from the time they are shared.

ccmoon.writes comments: Reels began as 15 second videos (videos can now be 60 seconds in length) creators can share with their audience since Instagram launched the feature in 2020 to compete with the rising platform of TikTok. See Spangler's "Instagram Reels, a Copycat of TikTok, Lands in 50-Plus Countries" published by *Variety* in August 2020 for more on the feature.

ccmoon.writes comments: Shout out to Kristina @wildwomanwriting.co and Jean @jeanmariebub!!

@jeanmariebub!!

ccmoon.writes comments: shout out to kristina @wildwomanwriting.co and jean

A: And? Did anything come from it?

c.c.: Of course. I understood the written content already risked being flagged and sure enough after I posted on June 27, 2019 I noticed a steady decline in engagement and realized the account was potentially being flagged by the algorithm ...

ccmoon.writes comments: For the posts referenced by date see Appendix H-J, respectively.

A: Potentially? So you don't really know anything was *actually* being done by Instagram...

c.c.: That's why the *Account Status* change is so huge! It confirms what you know as the account holder, especially when I talked about my situation with other writers over DM.

A: How could you know the algorithm was targeting your posts?

c.c.: Because, as I said, I experimented with the platform. After I noticed a change because of that post in June I tested how engagement was affected by remixing photos, written content, and captions from low performing posts like the posts dated June 30, 2020 and August 27, 2020 or the post dated April 2, 2021 which was originally a story I shared and Instagram took down for violating community guidelines. Users are led to believe they control their posts and how they reach other accounts to increase views and likes, but the algorithm ultimately impacts the platform's reception of content.

A: I still feel like this is another discussion on censorship. A company is providing a service and is policing their service. How is this any different from any other company providing public services?

c.c.: Because social media claimed to be a way to connect with others, to express yourself...

A: Email and instant messenger did the same.

c.c.: It's different.

A: Is it? Social media isn't as private...depending on the settings you choose for your account...but you're claiming social media marketed itself in a particular way to users and is somehow now betraying users with its policies...that's a hard claim to prove.

ccmoon.writes comments: Reference Are, Gerrard, and Gillespie for more on social media algorithms and content moderation.

c.c.: Let's leave it to our audience.

c.c. turns to the camera.

Would you guys want us to do another live on this? If so, send us your thoughts and we'll look through them to put together something.

Alexandria looks out of frame. She turns to the camera and gives a terse smile.

A: Ya we can do that.

She looks down at her hands.

c.c.: I mean we obviously don't agree...

c.c. points between herself and Alexandria.

It'd make a great discussion! I mean social media really hooked everyone with this promise of self-expression...this opportunity to construct the self or *a* self...if that's going to be offered then all avenues must be available for exploration. That was what drew me as a writer to the platform.

A: Sort of like Donna Haraway's perspective that writing is a powerful avenue for political empowerment as it is a continuous practice of self-construction...how did she refer to it again?

Pause

“[T]he technology of cyborgs”

c.c.: *Cyborgs?*

c.c. raises her eyebrows.

That sounds a little pseudo-academia don't you think?

A: You're missing the point. You said writing is a tool for construction and that this is what drew you to social media.

ccmoon.writes comments: Those involved in digital media studies define cyborg as a cybernetic organism consisting of both biological and technological components. For example, it is argued that humans are now cyborgs due to our reliance on technology, such as smartphone devices.

ccmoon.writes comments: Hayles, N. (1993) *Virtual Bodies and Flickering Signifiers*. *October* 66, [online]. Available at: <<http://www.english.ucla.edu/faculty/hayles/Flick.html>> [Accessed 11 November 2017].

NOVEMBER 2017

c.c.: Doesn't everyone feel that way about social media? It's what makes it interesting. When you consider how that affects writing...well it's just...raw...@ccmoon.writes is a live thread of the self-construction and reinvention process.

A trail of hearts float up the side of the video.

oregonflowerchild comments: this is why i love you

ghostwriterofc comments: YES!!

A: Have you read Mark Amerika's *META/DATA*? His discussion on the practice behind creative digital works supports @ccmoon.writes functioning as a real time experience between writer and reader and this idea of 'forever becoming.' Hold on.

Alexandria leaves the frame.

c.c.: What're you doing?

A muffled response comes through the mic. c.c. cranes her neck. Viewers hear approaching footsteps as Alexandria speaks.

A: I found it.

She holds up the book to the camera and peeks around the edge to ensure the title is visible.

She brings the book to her lap and flips through the pages.

A: I just figure if I have the book I might as well read from the section...here it is...I dogeared it.

She smooths the page.

A: "Forever on the cusp of composing new iterations of poetic *being becoming something else*...I have been experimenting with the concept of drifting (*dérive*), both as a fluid situation in which I traverse various urban environments where I capture my digital video

source material and as a cyberspatial activity I partake of a Gibsonian ‘consensual hallucination’ by surfing the associational web of trails available on the World Wide Web.”

c.c. raises her eyebrows again.

A: Don’t give me that look. I know he sounds a little...

Alexandria waves her hand.

But it isn’t difficult to draw the comparison of *drifting* to scrolling through social media platforms’ home widget or feed.

ccmoon.writes comments: Amerika, M. (2007) *META/DATA*. London, England: University of Minnesota Press. pp. 11.

ccmoon.writes comments: Feed is defined as an account users personalized aggregator that contains content from the social media accounts or hashtags the user follows. It is also where said users share their own photos, videos, and reels to connect with their community.

zaid n2612 2hale fjell omu bj002? li4602? auq 16612 fo connecte wifu fjell c0m1w1u1e1y'

c.c.: Why do you read this stuff?

Alexandria and c.c. stare at each other for a moment as a stream of crying laughing emojis trail up the screen from the comments section.

A: So as a writer using alternative media you *aren't* engaged in this type of research?

c.c.: I research other artists.

A: Amerika is a VJ artist.

c.c.: He sounds like someone who’s had a lot of smoke blown up—

A: Ok ok.

Alexandria holds up her hand and turns her head to the side.

Who do you research then?

c.c.: Like early technology artists...Laurie Anderson...artists engaged in multiple mediums and public made art...you know Beth Campbell, Fiona Banner...artists that are exteriorizing their internal processing of data and stimuli. It's an area to be exploited more.

A: Mmm...so in some ways you're concerned with presence?

c.c.: What do you mean?

A: The presence of the writer. The presence of the self. The potential impermanence or fluidity and what this means for writing.

c.c. stares at her feet. Her hands are clasped atop baggy jeans.

c.c.: In some ways all writing is concerned with this.

A: This is making me think of Rita Felski and the objective reality of the author. @ccmoon.writes is a source of embodiment for the self...in many ways it's playing with how digital media can act as a binding or body...signposting the authorial presence.

ccmoon.writes comments: Felski, R. (1989) *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

c.c.: You're getting a little dense here.

A: Well what I mea—

c.c.: I get what you're saying, but like this isn't school.

c.c. looks out of frame.

Wait...didn't you have a meeting?

A: What?

c.c.: It's—

A: What time is it?

Alexandria grabs her phone. She runs out of frame.

c.c.: Hey! At least sign off with me.

A: Oh my god, really? I don't have the time.

Heavy footsteps. Alexandria grabs her book and hurries back out of frame.

c.c.: Hey!

Door slams. c.c. turns back to the camera.

c.c.: Sorry we've gotta cut this short...but keep an eye out for a future live with me and

Alexandria! I've been reading some of the comments and you guys have so much to say!

I'm really excited to respond back.

c.c. takes a pause and gives the camera a big smile.

See you next timeee!

She waves at the camera with both hands before tapping the screen.

ccmoon.writes comments: I'll save the live to my profile so everyone can check it out over the next few days!!

Live ended.

Digital Media and Engagement: The Present-Past

August 22nd, 2020

@ccmoon.writes' profile photo lights up on Instagram with the colored ring indicating a user has gone live.

c.c.: Hey loves!

c.c. waves to the camera as she readjusts on the couch.

Sooo for those of you who've been watching my stories you know that today's live is something special...

c.c. sips through a bamboo straw.

Alexandria is joining me again to do a special feature...we're gonna be talking about digital media and this idea of a present-past...present-past self...I know it sounds kind of...

c.c. gestures around her head.

But Alexandria's promised not to get so heavy with all that academic posturing...anyway, I'm waiting for her to arrive so I thought I'd talk a bit about a book I finished...

She leans out of frame. A book cover fills the camera frame.

It's called *Gurlesque* and Alexandria actually is the one who recommended it to me after one of her chats with Professor Gere. It's *super* good and I highly recommend you all check it out. I've linked it down in the comments and you can find it off Amazon.

c.c. puts the book down.

Anyway, so it's all about this group of poets called gurlesque poets and the writing is very...

Pause

c.c. gestures with her hand.

It's very coquettish...I guess...like it uses a lot of metaphors to discuss bigger issues around identity and the female experience and I thought this captured a lot of what I do.

For instance...

c.c. flips through the book. c.c. bends the spine and shifts the book to one hand.

...on page 13 there's this quote, "There is no actual self, only the performance of self...the use of the lyric 'I' does not confess a self, but rather a raucously messy nest of conflicting desires and proclivities that can be costumed this way or that. Disjunctions in identity are not to be worked through or resolved but savored and tapped for their cultural power."

and I was just like...wow, this is so true for this account!

ccmoon.writes comments: Glenum, L. and Grreenburg, A. (2010) *Gurlesque: the new grrly grotesque, burlesque, poetics*. Ardmore, PA: Saturnalia Books. pp. 13.

c.c. places the book back down.

I mean digital media allows this disjunction in identity to be visible because it captures these fluctuations in the present and it remains immortalized on the platform...unless, you know, you go back and delete a post or whatev—

c.c. moves her face closer to the screen.

Oh, what's this? Alexandria just posted a comment... Alexandria you're on the live?

Where are you?

alexandriamae11 comments: There was an accident on 95. We're at a standstill.

alexandriamae11 comments: Read my comment.

Ok, let me read this comment to you guys...

alexandriamae11 comments: The style of the gurlisque seems rooted in this idea of space by Noël Arnaud: “Je suis l’espace où je suis” meaning I am the space where I am. Maybe what you should be asking is if we become our space and our space becomes us, then what does this mean for a world where virtual reality (or virtual realities?) coexists alongside our physical reality? With smart devices constantly at our fingertips, our space—and our culture for that matter—go beyond physical interactions extending our concept of place and space, but also posing the question *where does the self exist in space?*

alexandriamae11 comments: For those interested see Bachelard, G. (1969) *The Poetics of Space: The Classic Look At How We Experience Intimate Places*. Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press. pp. 37.

bb: 31:

The Classic Look At How We Experience Intimate Places. Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press.
alexandriamae11 comments: For those interested see Bachelard, G. (1969) The Poetics of Space:

Hmm...I don't know if I get what you're saying here Alexandria.

alexandriamae11 comments: You're talking about disjunctions in identity but you can't consider identity online without also considering the differences between our physical and our virtual world. The differences in how we may act based on the roles we do/do not have to perform. In some ways, it's a different reality from what we live.

...are you saying we live in dual realities? But just because I'm engaged in this platform doesn't mean I'm suddenly a different person.

alexandriamae11 comments: But doesn't it? You're presenting a self that's continuously in the present, but your interactions with followers are on things you've posted in the past. You are constantly engaging the past as if it was present and that's not considering that some of what is posted isn't even real time.

You're losing me here.

alexandriamae11 comments: It's what I was telling you about earlier this week. The present-past on social media. It's a time-space relationship that exists outside of our physical reality. It's Donna Haraway all over again.

Oh my gosh, not the cyborgs again...

c.c. puts her head in her hands.

alexandriamae11 comments: You're making it more weird than it is. It's that we are engaging in a semi-physical, semi-technological space producing continuous data streams that we use to pull, compile, remix, process, and make anew.

Look...let's just wait until you get here. You're making this more complex th—

c.c.'s eyebrows pull together.

How are you citing all of this from your car? Pay attention to the road.

alexandriamae11 comments: Google.

alexandriamae11 comments: Traffic is still at a standstill.

Well until you're *here*, this is my live. I'm not reading your comments anymore.

c.c. runs her hand through her hair.

As I was saying...unless you are regularly deleting old posts and clearing out your archives, then you are existing at the same time as the past performances of self you've acted out...

alexandriamae11 comments: Just like I was saying about the present-past.

alexandriamae11 comments: Or at least one aspect of the present-past on socials.

Viewers point out Alexandria's comments coming into the live. c.c. leans in closer to the camera.

iamkathryn comments: Noooo! Talk with her. It's interestingggg

itsmelhendricks comments: i feel like this is something i'd find on Reddit

and...in that regard...

alexandriamae11 comments: "For the human/information machine link introduces new configurations of the binaries of space and time, body and mind, subject and object, producer and consumer, indeed all the constituents that form culture."

alexandriamae11 comments: Toschi, L. (1996) "Hypertext and Authorship." *The future of the book*, Berkeley, California: University of California Press. pp. 191.

c.c. shakes her head and sits back with an audible 'whoosh.'

...I think there is something really interesting happening for writers creating on digital media platforms...I talked about this in a previous post...let me reshare it in the chat... and I wanted to highlight the idea of expressing aspects we've kept hidden or mut—

ccmoon.writes shared a post.

ccmoon.writes comments: post from 8/11/2020. digital media allows us to create a second self and explore this second self—part performance, part discovery. but i would argue it goes deeper than simple persona. that we have the opportunity to take a facet of our personality and fully express this singular area of the self. in doing so, digital media can act as a form of family therapy—helping us understand, explore, and express aspects of the self that have been suppressed, neglected, and hidden. posing the question: what can digital media do as a therapeutic act? What can we discover about the self?

c.c. crosses her arms and looks down at her lap.

—ed in our interactions with others or even with our interactions with ourselves. Creating in digital spaces can be *very* freeing in this way. Probably why Tumblr was so popular and is still popular.

jessica.png comments: OMG TUMBLRRR

jack1020 comments: tumblr really be the best out here man

writingfairy comments: tumblr fam foreva

A stream of hearts trails up the screen.

alexandriamae11 comments: You should touch on how photography plays into this since of all the socials you chose Instagram.

c.c. pauses and leans in closer to the screen. Sighs.

itsmelhendricks comments: still have mine

crackedmedusa comments: TUMBLR! If you know you know right

alexandriamae11 comments: And Barthes obviously with the image repeating what can't be repeated existentially.

alexandriamae11 comments: Barthes, R. (2000) Camera Lucida. London, England: Vintage Books. pp. 4

books: bb' ↓

αλεξανδριαμαε11 comments: barthes' κ' (2000) camera lucida: τουσπου' ευδισια: λιηταδε

Alexandria just join so we can talk *as planned*...

alexandriamae11 comments: It's not like I can control traffic on 95.

c.c. shakes her head.

Just join from the car!

alexandriamae11 comments: I still gotta drive though.

Then how are you driving right now?

c.c. runs her hands through her hair.

Alright guys I'm gonna call it. Obviously, Alexandria has things to do. I really want to get into more...but...I'll see you soonnn!

The camera freezes on c.c. mid-wave.

Live ended. c.c. does not save the live.

The Virtual Body: Embodiment and Digital Texts

March 3, 2021

@alexandriamae11's profile photo lights up on Instagram with the colored ring indicating a user has gone live.

A: Ok...it's on, it's on...

Alexandria looks up at the camera screen.

Heyyy everyone...

She repositions the camera and then scoots back on a faded armchair.

I'm just waiting on c.c. We're going to be a little...

Alexandria gives a so-so gesture.

on the academic side...as c.c. would say. I wanted to start this session with a rather lengthy quote I've—Oh, perfect! c.c. texted she'll be on in five...

Alexandria swipes up on her screen.

Ok that's perfect since I'll start off ...with the quote...

Alexandria moves off screen. Her shirt drapes over the camera frame.

Ok, here we go...so talking about pre-metaphysical materialism Shining Star Lyngdoh said, "[T]ext thus, is the embodiment of phonic or graphic signifiers, or bodies insofar as they can be represented. Bodies, similarly, are always already inscribed with sense inasmuch as they are representable in the physical traces of written marks or spoken sounds. [...] There is, then, never pure matter or body, which is always the unstable and shifting site for the already written, for what is to be written and for deleting the already written."

Alexandria puts the paper down.

So what does this m—Ah! It looks like c.c. is connecting...

alexandriamae11 comments: Lyngdoh, S. (2018) "Textualized Body, Embodied Text: Derrida's Linguistic Materialism." *Indian Counc. Philos. Res.* pp. 112-114. DOI: 10.1007/540961-017-0124-8. Published December 18, 2017.

@ccmoon.writes appears as a second screen at the bottom righthand corner.

c.c.: *Heyyyy loves! Sorry to join a little late.*

c.c. comes into close frame.

I don't know if Alexandria caught you up...but today we are talking about embodiment and kind of getting into some writer speak and the ways text can be...physical? No.

Pause

...made material...well...how it can be embodied or give embodiment...

A: You're going to confuse everyone if you keep talking.

c.c.: I'm just trying to introduce the live. Did you even *think* to do that?

A few crying laughing emojis trail up the screen.

A: I was about to aft—

c.c.: And you already read the quote?

Alexandria shifts on the armchair.

A: Can we just get to the live?

More crying laughing emojis trail up the screen.

c.c.: So we're talking embodiment!

A: Yeah...and going back to Lyngdoh really quickly I wanted to kick off by grounding this live in the larger discussion on text and embodiment and some of the theories around meaning making an—

c.c.: As I said! It's heavy on the shoptalk so just pop up in the comments if it's a little, you know—

A: They'll just leave the live. It's fine, but if you guys could speak on your own experiences of digital embodiment as part of my field research...

Alexandria addresses c.c. viewers.

c.c.: I don't agree to these for you to get source material. Do your own work.

c.c.'s phone is dropped on a table. Fading footsteps can be heard.

A: ...so Lyngdoh mentions this idea of the body as the site for writing and, in some ways, this made me think of c.c.'s live back in...what? August?

Pause

Alexandria looks off to the left.

...The one where they quoted from *Gurlesque*.

c.c. appears back in frame.

c.c.: You mean the one you were *supposed* to join?

A: You talked about the ways we present the self.

c.c.: Because social media is all about the self and how we *present* that self. I know you've got...feelings...about her because of *Crudo*, but it's sort of like what Olivia Laing said in *The Lonely City* about the "freedom that arose because of the way screens facilitate projections and encourage individual expression" and the magnification and the distortions.

ccmoon.writes comments: Laing, O. (2016) *The Lonely City: Adventures In The Art Of Being Alone*. Edinburgh, Scotland: Canongate. pp. 224

A: *Lonely City* was a good book...

Alexandria's fingers slightly cover her mouth.

I forgot she talked about digital media in that book...it kind of reminds me of Hemingway and the theory of omission.

c.c.: I don't think tha—

A: Because it's not like you're presenting *everything* about yourself.

c.c.: But I wouldn't say you could apply that to how someone is on their account.

A: Can't you? Your page is *so* curated. Couldn't you say you're engaged in a process of omission?

c.c.: I don't think you're looking at social media the same way as me or the people I've met on this platform.

A: So *how* exactly are most people looking at it?

c.c.: A community. A community to express yourself safely and freely and without any obligation to be more palatable.

Alexandria raises her eyebrows.

Maybe not always...

A: Maybe! When has social media ever guar—

c.c.: Oh my god. Hear me out at least.

Alexandria gestures at the camera.

c.c.: I'm not saying social media is some lovely place. There are many individuals who keep to themselves, are rude or harass other users...you know...all the different things you come across in the real world carry into social media...*but* for those seeking community it *does* provide space for this.

A: Ok, fine. I can agree with that, but that doesn't mean people aren't trying to be more *palatable*. I mean look at your page.

c.c.: It's a form for creative expression. Why wouldn't I be creative with how I use it?

A: But are you being creative with how you use it...subverting the common and all...or are you just trying to be trendy to get likes?

c.c.: I'm not on Instagram for likes.

A stream of hearts trail up the screen at c.c.'s words.

A: Isn't everyone?

c.c. stares at Alexandria for a long moment.

c.c.: No. I think some people, like me, were interested in digital media because of what it meant for the creative community. And, from all of that, people have realized that it can be a tool for a lot of different things and actually can really unlock a way of expressing and engaging that hasn't been experienced before.

A: Ok, c.c.

c.c. stares for another long moment.

c.c.: You know maybe you should read Parker Palmer. You might finally understand. When we find ourselves, we find community with others.

A: I'm not trying to make light. It's just...Instagram looks like one big AD to me the majority of the time.

c.c.: Platforms are always going to look for a way to make money. It's just the way it is. It doesn't take away from creative work people are doing and the way this is expanding on old ideas of embodied text and embodying the creative material.

Pause

c.c. moves partially out of frame.

We're talking about a creative practice here. And ya, it's not going to be perfect and there's going to be issues because it's using an external platform, but isn't that part of what makes it interesting?

A: The exteriorization you mean?

c.c.: Ya, like why are so many people comfortable with exploring with their understanding of the self in a public space? What are they getting from it?

c.c. moves fully in frame again.

That's one of the reasons this account has been such a fun space for me.

A: Well and it's become quite personal.

c.c.: Writing's personal.

A: No...I mean the photos you share...some of the stories you've posted...you really do invite people into your life. The account has really become you.

The screen blurs.

c.c.'s video stutters.

A: c.c.?

ccmoon.writes comments: my connection is bad

A: Do you want to log off and join back in?

Glitchy audio comes through the mic.

ccmoon.writes comments: i'll try to join later

A: Wait, c.c. join back in...

c.c.'s video disappears.

Alexandria looks at the screen. Both of her hands are pressed flat on her legs.

I guess um...thanks for joining today's live...

Alexandria smiles and lifts her right hand to motion goodbye.

maybe see you next time!

Alexandria awkwardly laughs.

Live ended. Neither Alexandria or c.c. save the live.

Call Me Sinner

by: c.c. moon

edited by: Alexandria Meinecke

AUTHOR NOTE

When I first read Maggie Nelson’s *Bluets*, it was like stumbling upon someone who understood what it is to view the world in tidbits—snippets of images; colors and their power to take me back to moments I thought forgotten;¹ blurred sensations that feel too real but sit in the periphery. I hadn’t encountered writing like this before and it felt strangely honest. These curated segments read as natural compared to the clean timelines presented in memoirs I was familiar with from my brief dip into nonfiction. Just as I segment an orange into juicy wedges because I’m too impatient to peel the tangy fruit, life has always been segmented—a series of unveilings that speak to a whole that can never exist again.

I’ve since devoured Nelson’s books, and the likes of Chris Kraus’s cult classic *I Love Dick*, Katherine Angel’s *Unmastered*, Roxane Gay’s *Bad Feminist*, Nikita Gill’s *Wild Embers*, Kristina Taylor’s *Floral Moans*. Women unafraid to try and speak to the whole even as it exposed them to the criticism, the judgement, the inevitable ‘too emotional.’ As if a woman speaking is only ever confessing too much.

If my voice can only be heard as a confession, then take a seat.²

¹ The time I threw up dino-egg oatmeal in my parents’ car is periwinkle. I think this is the leading contributor behind my aversion to pastels. I dislike them against my skin.

² Full disclosure: I’m not Catholic, and therefore have never been to confession.

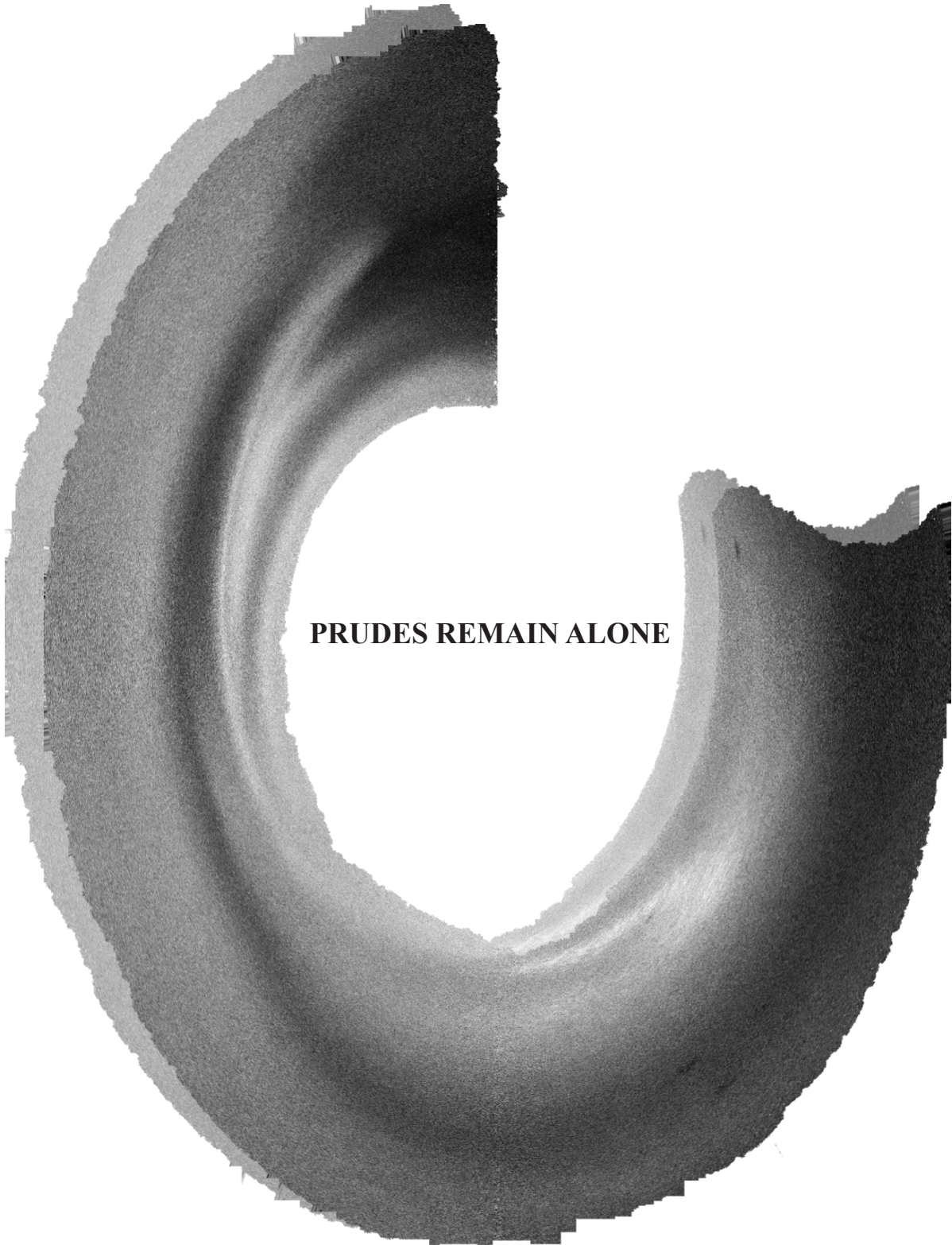


Figure 1.³

³ In an act of true confession, let me first clarify some details. The following section is representative of a culmination of seventeen years spanning ages four to twenty-one and could be marked as the beginning of c.c. The dominant locations are the very white (but not all white as some would like me to note) upper-middle class suburbs of Lansing, Michigan and Carmel, Indiana and end in the outer boroughs of San Francisco, California.

Figure 2.

I was walking down the street in shorts and a tank, a pair of worn sneakers on my feet. It was one of those hot summer days and my bangs plastered to my forehead in a tangled snarl. I wasn't concerned about that though. I wanted to get on the bungee trampoline positioned scenically by the Thames. I don't remember what the festival was for, maybe simply to celebrate the few weeks of summer England gets every year, but in our exploration of the city my family had stumbled upon the booths and stalls and performances—jewelry makers, metal workers, chalk artists, magic tricks, dance offs, and silver painted men—but, when I laid eyes on the trampoline, a man twisting mid-air, I wanted to feel the height. My sister, Caitlin, and I begged. Our mom shook her head as our dad went to secure two spots. We lined up and watched in awe as customers strapped up so they could flip and spin in the security of a ten-foot barrier. When my time came, I put on my best behavior: listening to the instructor, stepping through the harness, watching them secure the cables to my hips. I did a test jump. The instructor encouraged me to jump harder—the cables would catch me. Knees bent I studied the perforated tops of my sneakers. And then,

and
then,

pushing as much force through my legs, tucking elbows to ribs, I made my first big jump seeing over the netting across the water to the city line. I kept jumping

until my parents got smaller, the buildings closer to eye level, and still, I kept jumping. The moment of suspension right before the whoosh of air. The rush of coming down... down...down.

I was laughing when I looked at the festival goers. That was when I spotted the trio of men, thirty-ish with long hair and round faces, staring up at me.⁴

Figure 3.

“Some of my old women friends in South Texas say El Rio Grande could never be a man river, but is a woman river. They laugh and say, How can a river be anything but the La Dulce Acequia, the sweet slit between the thighs of the earth?”⁵

⁴ “In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure...In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness. Women displayed as sexual object is the leit-motiff of erotic spectacle: from pin-ups to strip-tease, from Ziegfeld to Busby Berkeley, she holds the look, plays to and signifies male desire” (Laura Mulvey, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*).

⁵ Clarissa Estés, *Women Who Run with the Wolves*

Figure 4.

Are you listening?

Figure 5.

*AM: This word above all words I
have learned to be the slipperiest
of slights.*

Ladies drink with their upper lip tucked
under a bottle's rim.^{6*}

⁶ My aunt (the one I don't talk to) taught me this one afternoon when I was thirteen as our family sat around the campfire eating lunch after a morning out on the lake. I sat on the swing, legs spread, holding my root beer by the bottleneck suspended between thumb and pointer finger. She gave me a glance and said, "You know a lady should never drink like that."

* To be called a lady and to be a lady—these are classifications at war.

Figure 6.

The summer after my tenth birthday, my aunt^{7*} and uncle visited. It was the type of heat that made skin chafe. My aunt sprawled on a porch chair in cargo shorts, one foot propped on the edge. We—my parents, sister, aunt and uncle—were chatting before heading off for the day’s activities. My cousins, who were supposed to be getting ready, were playing their Gameboys downstairs. My aunt went to drag them from the screens while my uncle started the car.

“Those are some short shorts Caroline is wearing.”

“She’s always been tall, honey,” said my mom.

““I thought I saw a pussy cat. I did! I did!””

“Charles!”

I watched with eyebrows raised. I understood enough of what my dad meant and crossed my own sprawled legs.

“You don’t want to be wearing shorts like those,” he said, a smile still on his face.

Are you listening?

⁷ The one I still talk to.

* In fact, there are times when I think she might be the only living person that understands what it is I need. The need to create is not easily understood by those who are not creators. She, a painter who had been shamed for wanting to be a working artist, told such activities were hobbies or novelties not the life of a woman settled in Grand Rapids, Michigan married with two boys in the 90s, gets it though. It took a divorce in her mid-fifties before she established the life she desired.

^ The cost of this life? Her relationship with her youngest son who believes she is living in sin as a divorced woman. The ability to retire (perhaps at all) due to the financial wreck of divorce and instability of part-time jobs, canvas sales, and her second husband’s seemingly vindictive ex-wife. A cordial relationship with my uncle who refuses to forgive her and believes her only way to salvation is for them to reconcile and remarry. And, for about a year, my family as we all processed the repercussions of the divorce and my aunt worked to establish a different life. We have since reconnected and I am in awe of the changes I see—the darkness held at the center of her irises, the terse lips, the aggressive swipe of fingers through her beachy waves, all standard traits of my aunt when I was younger are gone. Instead, the rare moments like the time my family went to Grand Rapids for the weekend and picked cartons of blueberries to take home and eat by the fistful and my aunt made her famous silver dollar pancakes—and she was a force—⁵10, confidently striding around the kitchen, a smile that crinkled her eyes, and her laugh—boisterous and slightly staccato—that overflowed. Those rare, beautiful moments are now what I experience every time I see my aunt.

Figure 7.

In 1989, Rita Felski wrote about the autobiographies of women like Audre Lorde “characterized by a formal openness.”⁸ But to be open, what does that mean other than to bare⁹ oneself¹⁰ to the world? To invite the shaming? To take pleasure in it?

Are you ashamed of what you write c.c.?

Figure 8.

I learned to be familiar with this feeling.

July 28th, 2009 was the last day my dad called me a prude. July was a muggy month in Carmel, Indiana. The humidity compressed people’s chests and left everything sticky.¹¹ It was the month of thunderstorms turning plants lush and vibrant in the hot bright sun. The clay soil stunted draining water and retention ponds overflowed.

⁸ Women writers in nonfiction are known for presenting their journals as evidence. Perhaps this is because women in the 1500 to 1600s were told to take notes on their readings to properly understand a text—historical accounts remark on the intensity with which women readers meditated on a text—and now we—women—cannot stop. To be a woman is to take notes.

⁹ To bare, /ber/, verb: to uncover or lack a covering, to open to view, to expose.

¹⁰ Audre Lorde was more than her autobiographies. Her writing was an act of opposition. Lorde claimed space and a narrative that fell outside the indulgent confessions of wealthier, whiter, straight, women writers. I can’t help but compare her to Joan Didion. Both women talked of illness and loss, but the mood was so drastically different. I sometimes think this boils down space. The yawning gap these women were trying to scream over weren’t the same breadth.

¹¹ It is not the story I know or the story you tell me that matters, it is that I know what you don’t want me to know.

Figure 9.

When my mom gave me the American Girl Doll's book *The Care and Keeping of You*, I hid it in the basement storage closet. The drawn instructions on inserting tampons convinced me this was not a book I needed to be reading.

Figure 10.

"Maybe some women aren't meant to be tamed. Maybe they just need to run free."¹²

A statement that reeks of oversimplification. Not all women are equal in their relation to freedom.

Figure 11.

And for that matter can it even be said that freedom is real? And if it is real can it even be said it is attainable? Freedom-or the illusion of it-is in direct relation to your standing in this world. Freedom-or the illusion of it-is about power.

Ladies keep their legs crossed at the ankle, not the knee.

¹² Candace Bushnell

Figure 12.

This may be rushed. Consider slowing down and giving your reader context.

forced my mom to buy me a razor when I was ten. After Caitlin joked my legs were woolly mammoths while we drank hot chocolates at the East Lansing Cappuccino Cafe. It was a dull blue electric razor with pink flowers stamped around the head. I was supposed to stop above the curve of my knee. After placing fresh batteries in the handle, I remember being surprised at the amount of blonde hairs in the salmon pink bathtub.^{13*} Within a year I transitioned to Venus razors because I'm your Venus / I'm your fire, at your desire.

And what context are you hoping for Alexandria? Is this to your liking: Don't get me wrong, I didn't want to be a woman. The idea of being a woman never excited me. It sounded like a lot of work. A faulty effort in perfectionism and humility. I did not covet lacey bras with the frilled edges or light pink razors to balance near the shampoo bottles in the shower. I would have rather spent my time wading through Michigan bogs—their slight chill—soaking myself almost to the waste in gritty, thick muck.

¹³ The stubble of a missed spot has me preoccupied as I write this. It's a thin strip on the front of my upper thigh. I wonder how the pink soleil razor missed it when I always run over the skin twice feeling for the prick of hair.

* Maybe it was this moment. Maybe it was internalized patriarchy. But, I cannot stand the stubble of hair. I have spent thirty minutes in a shower to try and get it all so that no matter what direction a hand may rub, silky smooth skin meets skin.

[INSERT PHOTO]¹⁴

¹⁴ What would you prefer to see: filtered sunlight on a raised thigh or me in chiffon choking?

Figure 13.

Close those fucking legs.

Figure 14.

I was lined against the school's painted brick wall waiting to enter class, and braless. I wrapped my arms around my chest and thought about going to the front office to call my mom, but I couldn't.¹⁵ I was the only girl who wore a bra in my class. I would fidget with the satiny straps to keep them hidden. The other girls would stare at the clear outline beneath my shirts, the little bow between my breasts that could be seen through the thin baby tees so popular then. I hated the bow with its fake pearl¹⁶ stitched at the center.

¹⁵ I knew my mom would come if I called, and that was the embarrassment I avoided. She would know of my mistake, my forgetfulness. I wasn't used to having women's things. "Delicates" is what my mom called them.

¹⁶ The frivolousness of bras irritated me. Bras were meant to restrain breasts. The less attention created, the better.

Figure 15.

Sex. Sex. Sex. Sex. Sex. Sex. Sex. Sex. Sex.
Sex. Sex. Sex. Sex. Sex. Sex. Sex. Sex. Sex.
Sex. Sex. Sex. Sex. Sex. Sex. Sex. Sex. Sex.
Sex. Sex. Sex. Sex. Sex. Sex. Sex. Sex. Sex.

Sex. Sex. Sex. Sex. Sex. Sex. Sex. Sex. Sex.

Sex. Sex. Sex. Sex. Sex. Sex. Sex. Sex. Sex.
Sex. Sex. Sex. Sex. Sex. Sex. Sex. Sex. Sex.
Sex. Sex. Sex. Sex. Sex. Sex. Sex. Sex. Sex.

Sex. Sex. Sex. Sex. Sex. Sex. Sex. Sex. Sex.
Sex. Sex. Sex. Sex. Sex. Sex. Sex. Sex. Sex.

Sex. Sex. Sex. Sex. Sex. Sex. Sex. Sex. Sex.


Sex. Sex.¹⁷

Sex.

¹⁷ Sex.

Figure 16.

“It was temptation,¹⁸ and I knew it, and despite it I wanted more because you were freedom.”¹⁹



*This is a problematic statement.
I think you should be mining your concern
with freedom in this text.*

¹⁸ In middle school my family attended a non-denominational church named Northview (before the head pastor decided God had called the church to spend 15 million on a new auditorium that replicated a scene for occult worship). The head pastor was named Steve. He was a man of average height, with a thin nose, defined cheeks, and bald. He would frequently joke his baldness was because of angels slapping him over the head for past sins he committed. Of all the sermons I heard Steve preach, the one that sits in my memory is of premarital sex. Not relationship counseling—that was saved for sermons on marriage—but premarital sex specifically engaged in by teens and young adults. This sermon opened by condemning the act as sinful (check one), went on to discuss how sex is a sacred act between the married couple as a symbol of love (check two), and concluded with women’s responsibility to wear clothing that does not distract or entice men (check three). According to Steve, women’s bodies and the display of female flesh was the problem, the root of what lead to premarital sex, because what man could hope to withstand the force of a v-neck shirt.

¹⁹ In October 2018 c.c. created @ccmoon.writes to collect inspiration for this book. On November 7th, 2018, she posted this quote—an excerpt from her first sketch.

Figure 17.

“you only called when you were
high on fructose
and fermented yeast.
my name sounded like elixir
poured from your mouth
falling over your plump bottom lip.
i told myself it meant something
so i drank what you poured²⁰
till i was honey drunk.
and you let me suck your lips clean
as if you didn’t know i was addicted
to sweetened cantaloupe and the
metallic taste of your tongue.”²¹

²⁰ I dreamed of your taste.

²¹ c.c. moon, *bees in summer*, thirty-nine likes.

Figure 18.

When Caitlin and I overheard our mom about surprising our dad in nothing²² but an apron²³ and dinner on the table, we froze on the basement stairs.

“The girls were with friends that night, of course, so I thought why not?”

The laughter reverberated from the kitchen where her and our grandmother sat. We turned to go down the stairs.

“I did not need to know mom and dad do role play,” said Caitlin.

²² I didn't want to talk sex. I didn't want to think about why lace nighties would sometimes be in the laundry, even as I helped my mom at Victoria's Secret pick between a vibrant blue or red-orange set.

²³ This was the same apron I wore for a 50s themed costume contest my junior year of high school. I won the contest. It was a thin cotton—almost like chiffon with its translucence.

Figure 19.

I wouldn't say I was a shy kid, but I couldn't say penis^{24*^} without blushing until my sophomore year of college.

Figure 20.

I owned my first chiffon nightie when I was seventeen.²⁵

²⁴ For a long time, it was the anatomical differences between the dominant genders—male and female—that I considered to be the only differences. Differences of body that could be overcome by bras that squished, high-neck tops, and a general air of denial, a refusal to recognize the body—my body—as being marked by difference. The thought being that if I did not recognize this difference, then others would not recognize this difference and I may be able to skate through this world with the freedom and liberties of a man—free of bodily definition.

* This was extraordinarily naïve.

^ A body cannot be escaped.

²⁵ From catalogues, I'd imagined they would be soft and comfortable—that I would be comfortable in the sensuous material. Instead, I felt awkward. The mauve tint of my nipples showed through the fabric's pattern; the markings and discolorations of my skin still visible. In the mornings, I would change into a cotton pajama set (I had to change) for breakfast.

Figure 21.

I confess.

Figure 22.²⁶

²⁶ “Of strange and weird things in that darkness, of where that darkness can take me.”
c.c. moon, October 31st, 2018
Forty-four likes.

Figure 23.

“So you’re going to travel and just...
not settle? A lover^{27*} in every country?”
she teased. “That sounds like commitment
phobia.”
Caitlin and I sat in a booth at Paradise Café.
She was back for a brief summer visit
between semesters at ASU.
I picked at the BLT in front of me.
“And what if I do have a guy in every country?
Some things²⁸ are worth experiencing.”
“Don’t let mom and dad hear you say that.”
“It’s not like you haven’t had sex.”
Caitlin looked up from her sandwich.
“How did you know?”
“It was pretty obvious the way you talked
about Jesse.”
Jesse was a blonde dom with an eight-ball
tattoo. Over lunch she told me about him;
Mac with a joint tucked behind his ear;
Adam who refused to go down on girls, but
demanded they be shaved; and a spur²⁹ of the
moment Craigslist encounter. We joked we
had reached *Sex and the City*-disclosure.

*You need to talk about what happens
when the flesh to flesh encounter
sounds neither desirable or wanted--
the choice that takes place.*



²⁷ This is her word, not mine.

* She also gave them names: *Fernando, Luca, Sebastian*. I have not had sex with anyone bearing those names.

²⁸ This word is important

²⁹ I think maybe she was searching for the same thing I’ve been searching for: the ability to claim one’s desires. We had been told desire was shameful—that it led to sin. Should it be any surprise then that my sister and I tried to claim these desires in one of the most obvious of ways? After all, many people in our lives—extended family, the Church—all brought desires back to sex. It was hard to associate the word with anything else but the physicality of this experience..

Figure 24.

Hello?

helllooooo

0000

Figure 25.³⁰

Him: under a green door frame.³¹
Left forearm resting against the metal,
body pitched forward.

This is how I will remember you.

Figure 26.³²

³⁰ The slam poet.

³¹ I'd been in San Francisco a little more than 14 days. It was the second week of freshman year at USF. We lived in one of the only co-ed floors and everyone was feeling out the campus dynamic. The guys joked about future orgies. The bare faced girls rushed from the showers to their dorms. Banners with *Free Lil Wayne* hung out windows.

³² The slam poet still stalks my social media like they have a right to my life.

I am trying to leave c.c. clean of you.

Figure 27.

I flew out to Tempe—in a section of Arizona referred to as The Valley—for two weeks in June to visit Caitlin. To get out of town, Caitlin and I went to a place around Sedona. One of those boutique destinations. It was there, browsing the different licorices at a sweets shop, my sister convinced me to split the cost of a set of edible body paints.

“The ultimate gag gift.” she said.

“Caitlin, I’m not getting that for mom and dad.

If you want it, buy it.”

“Oh, come on. Dad would never expect this out of you.”

I stared at the wooden box. The only difference between it and a Hershey’s squeeze bottle was the glass containers and attached paint brush—the same tiny plastic brush in craft kits for kindergartners. The board game on display looked more incriminating with a naked woman propped on the floor surrounded by a deck of cards.

“Fine, but you pay.”

The box accompanied a card and a rolled piece of paper tied with green chiffon ribbon for their anniversary. Our mom was the one to unwrap the paints. It was the first time I saw my dad blush, and the only time I made him speechless.

Figure 28.

Ladies keep on their tights.

Figure 29.

Am I delicate enough for you?

Am I soft enough?

Figure 30.

A resistance to bondage:³³ acted in scene.

A girl with pale blonde hair pulled into a waterspout. She is small and young and running around a church lobby. At the beginning of Sunday school, the girl wore black tights, but these have since been discarded^{34*^} somewhere

on

the

floor

in favor of bare feet.

³³ I started posting photos in bondage inspired lingerie not long after starting @ccmoon.writes. You might think it's tacky. But, I needed to create a visual representation of all I had abandoned, all I had restrained, all I had refused to say.

³⁴ I don't regret it.

*n My dad says I've turned into one of "those instagirls." I don't quite know what he means. Perhaps it is because I'm his daughter or perhaps it is because I've heard him say like so many others, "beautiful things don't ask for attention."

^ Note: /things/.

Figure 31.

*But it can never be avoided.
I am constantly, subtly being convinced
to best appeal to this gaze.*

My parents told me the male gaze is dangerous. If I wanted to avoid this danger, I needed to be a proper woman.³⁵

Figure 32.

Forgive me, father.

*I scroll through social media and get bombarded
with ads for red lingerie, zitsticka blur potions,
a James Mitchell moon ring, fast fashion
crop tops with little bows, thistle and spire's
medusa bodysuit, lip oils, and a hoodie
by wicked clothes with the slogan I have
really cool tattoos under here but I'm cold.*

³⁵ Proper women are respected because they promote a value-based life—one that believes sex before marriage is bad, v-necks are overtly sexual, and the term 'sexy' should only be used in the context of husband and wife. Exceptions to this rule: (1) the v-neck does not hit between the breasts, but slightly above them; (2) fiancés can use the term 'sexy' and, when close enough to the wedding date, share a room with each other when visiting relatives.

Figure 33.

The curve of the slam poet's
collarbone looks so inviting.

Figure 34.

I can be softer.

Figure 35.

The first time the slam poet kissed me, we were at an 18+ club in the outskirts of the city. We'd been drinking³⁶ alcohol that glowed bright blue. The two of us were dancing slightly off from the crowd as we waited for our friend with the good fake to hand off the drinks. The slam poet grabbed me by the waist. I remember thinking *is this it?* The slam poet tightened their grip before they stepped back and looked at me, as if assessing whether the job was done.

Figure 36.

I found out the next morning the slam poet didn't remember.³⁷

³⁶ I often hold onto dead things: empty seashells, dried bits of coral, fossils uprooted from hidden sanctuaries, old wood made brittle and smooth.

³⁷ Steve would laugh.

Figure 37.

Take notes.

Figure 38.

I was once told I am another Eat, Pray, Love. The woman, a dancer I'd met only a couple times prior, gave me a once over before she said, "You're not different enough."

I'm not sure what qualities qualify as *different enough*, but apparently, I was not it. I grew up in the suburbs of East Lansing, Michigan where farm roofs are painted in solidarity with college football teams³⁸ and city regulations restricts bars and clubs. Shopping for an Easter Sunday outfit when I was ten, my mom forbade³⁹ me from wearing a floor-length dress found among the racks at Macy's—not for its hazy floral print or the very real possibility I would trip on the hem running barefoot in the church foyer—but because of the cut out on the back the size of an acorn squash. It was, according to my mom, inappropriate.⁴⁰

³⁸ Where liking a black boy named Marcus earned me silence and eyebrows from my extended family.

³⁹ I learned to live by the 'bend over' test and to consider whether I was being enticing.

⁴⁰ I collect backless clothes. Something about the peak of shoulder blades, the suggestion of spine, makes me want to run my nail from shoulder blade to the swell of ass.

Figure 39.

In *Unmastered*, Katherine Angel talks about “The Man.” “Yes, you are my big man, fucking me. Yes, you’re so big, so hard.⁴¹ Yes, you are everything you feel under pressure to be.”⁴²

Figure 40.

I confess the cracks are overwhelming.

⁴¹ Play the role so well no one can see the cracks..

⁴² You were my big man.

Figure 41.

The seep

-ing

(cracks).

Figure 42.

I used to lick my lips⁴³ after the slam poet
and I kissed, almost without fail.

Figure 43.

Ladies do not desire

Figure 44.⁴⁴

⁴³ My aunt used to warn I'd be a sinner.

⁴⁴ Tell me it wasn't a dream.

Figure 45.

N/A.⁴⁵

Figure 46.

Ladies do not _____.

⁴⁵ I've spent my days in various forms of undress, familiarizing myself with the shape of my body—the bumps, the rough spots, the crevices, the mounds of fat and flesh. I am learning what it is to see myself in blinding morning light, the soft afternoon glow, the hazy rays of evening. Some days I do not like what I see—the rough feet, the pockets of cellulite, the bloated lower belly—but other days I honor the body that has been kind to me. Taking time to soften the feet, saturating myself in oil, finding ways to sit in pleasure. I've spent my days looking for ways to know this body

Figure 47.

I confess. I confess. I confess.

I confess.

Figure 48.

I don't want to be a prude.

Figure 49.

The slam poet said the morning rays matched
my hair sparkling like strings of gold silk.
I snuck back to my place wishing no one saw.

**Cut: I burrowed within your body.
Yes, within your body. Because when
our skin seemed to allow for the opening,
we were not one and not two. As if our
cells had renegotiated the definitions of
access and barrier and we were elsewhere.
It was in these moments in the blurry
sensations and molten shedding that I felt
the most connected to you, the most at peace.**

Figure 50.

Listen. Please listen.

LISTEN TO ME.

Figure 51.

Tell me it wasn't a dream: nights spent
crammed in a six hundred square foot
apartment high above the track housing
along the beach front. Cold sand stuck
between our toes as waves set a methodical
beat to the silence of words between us—
lingering on each other's skin.⁴⁶

Figure 52.

Prudes remain alone.

⁴⁶ The night the slam poet traced the lines of my palm, I was dizzy. Their pointer finger dragging over the creases in my skin carried more power than I expected.

Figure 53.

I am not desperate.

Figure 54.

I deleted this section because the quote wasn't relevant. You should renumber the figures if you aren't going to replace the content here.

Figure 55.

“You want something serious.”
The slam poet’s fingertips traced my naked sides.
The silence between us broken. I shifted in bed.
I wanted to be with you. I didn’t care what that meant.
“No, commitment scares me.”
I propped myself on my elbow.
“I don’t believe you.”
The poet smirked and lifted a calloused hand to my cheek.
When they kissed me, they squeezed the underside of
my breast.

Figure 56.

Afterwards: after words.

Figure 57.

[INSERT PHOTO]^{47*}

⁴⁷ I am what wasn't. I am what was hidden. I am the shame, the guilt, the pockets of cellulite, the crook of the nose, the unshaven, the baggy shirts, and nights spent binge eating to keep from drinking. I am the echo of the preacher saying a lady does not dress to tempt a man. I am the black out nights. I am the voice of your best friend telling you it's time to dress your age. I am what could not be escaped.

* Fuck the fucking preacher.

Figure 58.

The first time I fucked someone after the slam poet,
he said, “I’ve never been with a girl as beautiful as you.”

The last five nights I spent in Cabo San Lucas were
in his bed. Not because he was a particularly good
fuck—he kissed like he was gasping for air—
but because I could not get enough of his words.

“God, you’re so gorgeous.”

I stripped out of the gauzy skirt and tank I wore
to the club and walked to bed. He grabbed me by
the hips and pulled me into his lap.

I blame him on the Christian romance novels my
Granny sent home with me⁴⁸ freshman year of high school.

She read one with a heroine⁴⁹ who
reminded her of me.⁵⁰ He fingered the lace of my bra and
then laid me on my back.

After Cabo, he messaged me a few times a week.

I’d respond with exclamation points and ask about
his day. I didn’t want him to come to San
Francisco. He said he missed me.

Upon arriving, he moved to unbutton my jeans and
I stopped his hand. I was on my period and had no
interest in getting his dick bloody.

“Then why did you let me come here?”

The next morning, we went to brunch at Zazie’s.⁵¹*

We were walking down Haight Street and he had a
scowl on his face.

“What are all of these people doing? They must be
crazy.”

He thought the city represented everything wrong

No words are worth this.

⁴⁸ I hated these novels. The women simpering, afraid to even hold hands with a man because this contact was apparently just too much. But what really got me was that in the end the desires for career, independence, self-discovery were always put aside for the security of marriage with a man. No matter how hard the authors tried to convince the reader of the women’s yearning for this outcome, I never bought it. To me, desire is deep. Desire fuels the things I cannot live without. It is the urge, the need, the longing I cannot ignore. Desire is what keeps me writing.

⁴⁹ The secret captain of a merchant ship set in her solitary ways.

⁵⁰ Or so I am told.

⁵¹ He claimed a headache from hunger because of the long wait, and even after eating the Tahitian French toast made with freshly scrapped vanilla beans, he had to lie down. I brought in water, but he shrugged and said to put it on the table. I rubbed his shoulder and asked if he wanted anything. He said he wanted me to stay. When I laid down, he slipped his hand between my legs.

* I am not here to make you feel better. I am not here to help you sleep. I am not here to ease your stress. I am not here to serve at the pleasure.

with our current politics. He talked of country artists, democracy, and giving people purpose not excuses. When he compared Obama's social policy to Hitler, I realized the only crazy person on that street was him.

Figure 59.

Fucking confess.

Figure 60.

I cannot forget cantaloupe drizzled with honey, and the metallic taste of blood. Yes, blood. Because the slam poet was addiction, and addiction was divine. When they left, it was the most persistent pain, like a vibration, throughout my body. Some days, it was like an itch akin to holding a lawn blower for too long, but most days it was closer to a chest freeze from sucking down a milkshake too fast—sharp and surprising. I spent two weeks in bed.

Sometimes I grabbed one of the pillows and squashed it against my chest until it puffed around my face, and I'd imagine I was lying by their side like I did for so many months—like I did the first morning I stayed. The slam poet gripped my flesh, as if checking I was real. I know after they pinched the skin, they trailed their hand down my stomach and rested it on the elastic of my shorts. I know they buried their nose within the crook of my neck and breathed deeply. For the next hour, they held me as the sun bounced light into their room; at one point, threading their right leg between mine. I'm surprised they didn't bite me. The slam poet loved to bite.

Figure 61.

Ladies do not touch themselves.⁵²

⁵²I wonder what God would think.

Figure 62.⁵³

Figure 63.

“Shoulders back. Tits out, ladies.”⁵⁴

⁵³ Am I too tasteless for you?

⁵⁴ N/A.

Figure 64.

Confess.

Figure 65.

Photograph (ripped): age five, asleep
underneath the dining room table,
hands between my legs.

Figure 66.

Ladies do not⁵⁵ fuck.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Meg, the leader of our bible study group, wanted us to believe this (the do not's), I think. She was a kind, single woman with a schnauzer and would focus our attention only on the passages regarding giving ourselves over to God. He was the focus and we were warned about what would happen when that focus strayed.

⁵⁶ 78 percent of American women masturbate. On average regular masturbation starts around 14 years old and of American women masturbating almost 40 percent use toys to stimulate erogenous zones.

Figure 67.

Saying I was drunk isn't a good enough excuse.
Yet, somewhere between celebrating and
toasting to a friend, I spotted him.⁵⁷
I was walking down the gum smeared and cigarette
studded sidewalk of Polk Street. He sported a
buzz cut and a lit cigarette hung in his hand.
"Come dance!" He stalled, but I beckoned.
"Are you coming or not?"
I turned off Polk into Vertigo. A red haze glowed
across the worn varnished counters and tightly
packed crowd on the dance floor. My friends
and I had found a spot near the mirrored back wall.
"Come on!" I yelled and grabbed his hand. It was
more of a swing as he hunched forward, eyelevel.
He flung his left arm to block a guy from
stepping between us. A blue skull tattoo sat in the
crook of his elbow. He rested his hand on my waist
and kept it there the rest of the night.
At last call we crammed everyone into two taxis.
As it neared three in the morning, I suggested he
stay the night at my apartment. I flicked a hand
out to him and walked to my room. He kissed
me against the bed. I pulled myself up to sit on the
mattress. He stepped between my legs. When I
pulled him on top I didn't expect him to black out.
I didn't sleep as he snored next to me.

⁵⁷ Sometimes it's searching just to search.

Figure 68.

“Fucking leaves everything as it is. Fucking may in no way interfere with the actual use of language. For it cannot give it any foundation either. It leaves everything as it is.”⁵⁸

Figure 69.

I can't hide the fissures.
I did not wear the dress with the squash-sized cut out. I did not restrict my meals to look like the actresses in teen dramas. I did not curl my eyelashes like the girls in the school hallway.
Instead, I jumped naked from a cliff edge. Tied my shoes so tight I cut off the circulation to my feet. Tunneled in a fifteen-foot mound of snow. Climbed the ice slicked tree. Moaned when my back popped. Drank from the bottle—my mouth around the whole rim. Stalked my house in my underwear. Skinny dipped at noon because of the brutal, stifling heat. Took an unforgivingly large bite. Threw back the flaming shot.⁵⁹ Got on the bench, the table, the chair, the stage, and danced. Until my thighs gave out. Until my arches ached. Until tangy droplets of sweat soaked the fabric between my breasts. Until even the tequila couldn't keep me going.

⁵⁸ Maggie Nelson, *Bluets*

⁵⁹ I did not know you were supposed to blow out the flames. There is a reel of videos on the internet showing beards, t-shirts, hair, all catch fire the moment the shot moves from glass to air. I guess I was lucky to only have a lightly burnt thumb pad.

Figure 70.

Why is it so hard to say?

Figure 71.

I saw the slam poet at a party. They were laughing
until they spotted me. I don't know why they were
surprised—I lived in the apartment above⁶⁰—but it's
hard to forget how they greeted everyone but me.
We had staring contests across the room. When
they walked into the kitchen, it didn't mean I won.

*Cut: Wasn't this always us though?
We spoke in glances, tightened knuckles,
whispering exhales.*

⁶⁰ I snuck back home under the guise to get wine. I didn't come back

Figure 72.

I'm speaking. Can't you hear?

*These two passages feel close together after Figure 71.
Should consider spacing and positioning here.*

Figure 73.

Ladies sit straight at the chair edge.

Figure 74.⁶¹

Figure 75.

Shoulders back goddamit!

Sometimes I forget who is speaking—me or you.

⁶¹ I'm tired of simple explanations. Give me a real answer.

Figure 76.

I still imagine what it was like when the slam poet ate the salt from my skin. As if my body had been asleep until they grazed their pointer and middle finger across the base of my spine.

Figure 77.

Consuming them.⁶²

Is this hitting the right note?

Consuming us.

⁶² The Church would call this sacrilegious.

Figure 78.

I wonder if someone could handle the strength of this desire?⁶³

⁶³ Is it really desire? Desire is defined as *to long for, to express a wish for*. Am I wishing or is this akin to a wanting defined as *to be needy or destitute, to have a deficiency or lack*? Is there a difference? Does it matter?

Figure 79.

I'd went to dinner at an upscale Cajun joint in an attempt to bond with a friend of a friend. It was downtown at the border of the Financial District and Chinatown. I didn't typically make the trek to this side of the city. The MUNI wasn't as reliable at night and I didn't care for the uphill climb so close to Nob Hill. The restaurant was tucked between a warehouse and some up-and-coming clubs. It was Adrianna's recommendation, but the place was small and packed with people.⁶⁴

We sat at the bar and grabbed a cocktail while she tried to flag down her sister, the *maître d'* for the night. When the blonde girl swung our way, she flung out her arms as if in surprise.

Allie introduced us to the bartender as "good friends that he should take care of" and explained there were no open tables we could snag. I shrugged and said I was more than happy to sit at the bar.

We ordered hush puppies to start, but dinner turned into a fiasco when Adrianna skated around the bill. As she got into an argument with her sister about "family discounts," I pulled out a twenty and left it on the bar.

Adrianna swore she knew a great spot for drinks, so I hopped into a taxi to a dive bar in the Mission. Allie met us inside by the entrance. I was surprised she seemed keen on going out with us but appreciated the buffer. Allie was an art student studying French in the hopes of working at a gallery in Paris. I felt we had more in common. I soon became the sisters' mediator as they were still upset from the earlier argument. Then, this guy moved in by chatting up Allie—letting her squeeze his arm and lean her breasts into his side—but he offered to buy my drink.⁶⁵ At

⁶⁴ People who could afford the steeply priced entrees. For those wanting a comforting meal on the skinny, a well-plated gumbo at eighteen dollars would be a suitable option.

⁶⁵ This is the bizarre dating practice of setting two women—typically acquainted with each other—in an odd war for attention. As women, we know this. As humans, we see a challenge. *Stun me. Wow me. Fuck me.*

fourteen dollars a glass, I figured what was the harm. He talked about his job—he traveled between the east and west coast—and said he was looking to make *friends*.

I didn't plan to crash at his place, but Adrianna needed somewhere to sleep it off⁶⁶ and Allie had left. He helped me get her into a taxi and we headed the few blocks to his place. The tall glass building was one of those newly constructed complexes downtown. The elevator opened to his apartment, and I let Adrianna steady herself against me as we walked to the couch. He followed with a ballpark Big Gulp full of fresh water.

I don't know why I followed him to his room. Why I carefully took off my earrings and laid them on top of my clutch. He wanted me, and I laughed. The next morning, I woke to my alarm. I forced myself to collect my hair back into its ponytail, place my earrings back in my ears, slip on my booties and round up my new friend before she was late to work.

He arranged a taxi, and we left the glamour of glass apartment complexes, through the Tenderloin, to the Outer Richmond. The driver didn't speak while Adrianna directed him toward her flat. When we pulled up to my apartment, I thanked him, climbed the stairs, and curled on top of my bed. I slept till midday.

When I woke, I stripped out of the night's clothes and threw them in a load of laundry.

I turned on the shower and let the water run as I inspected my face. Flaked mascara, dark circles, and the pallor of a hangover. I stepped behind the curtain and let the water run over me until my fingers and toes wrinkled, my skin rubbed an angry pink like a fresh sunburn. I even picked the underside of my nails clean.

⁶⁶ The logic behind this decision alludes me now.

*I remember when a preacher warned
about the temptations of sex and how
this was "the way Satan snuck into lives
because we are weak for pleasure and
God asks us to be strong."*

Figure 80.

Ladies keep their legs closed.⁶⁷

*c.c. have you considered how you are presenting these last few figures?
They seem to contemplate an empty pleasure rather than act as
support to the "urgent desire" you mention earlier in this section.*

⁶⁷ The best example of letting yourself be distracted from God was Natalie. At thirteen she got an abortion and now three years later still wasn't over it. She confessed this during bible study and Meg's lips thinned. Meg looked at her hands and said what were meant to be comforting, sage words. I don't remember them, but the message was clear: give into desires and you will struggle to be right with God.

Figure 81.

Buffet tables were placed in neat
columns so dancers could mingle with guests
picking at marinated olives and sweet mango cake.
I wasn't eating.⁶⁸

The slam poet stood up from a cluster of chairs in
the center of the room. I knew you'd be here, but I
miscalculated my reaction.

I interrupted my friend engaged in a conversation
with the adjacent couple to say goodbye. When I
turned to leave the slam poet was standing there,
barely ten feet away.

They lifted a hand like a makeshift stop sign. I
nodded once and hurried out the door.⁶⁹ I cried
walking home.

In the apartment, I turned on the bathroom faucet
and sat on the tile floor. I couldn't breathe from
the snot clogging my nose. I washed my face with
hot water, then got into bed. Burrowed under
the sheets, I studied the shadowed forms of my hands.

⁶⁸ You put me off my appetite for weeks. Months. I lived off water, coffee, and toast. Dinners were sporadic, but at least a full meal. Friends used to marvel at my dedication, the hours I spent at the gym, but we know the truth don't we? As if I could run from the lack of you.

⁶⁹ When does desire become ugly?

Always about girls. About girls and what we do to boys, men. We, women, are the gateway drug to sin. And, as any sermon on temptation will tell you, it is always the woman's fault.

Figure 82.

Water pressed against the tongue to keep it silent.
Too many days spent looking at the sun have destroyed eyes,
stung by water.

I heard a story about a girl
who let her tongue fly about her mouth,
free and loose.
One day she bit it off,^{70*}
clean between her front teeth.
One big chomp.

It's the stress that made teeth clench.

I opened my mouth,⁷¹ but my tongue was water-logged.

⁷⁰ How many times have I heard the media claim innocence for men?

* Innocent until proven guilty. (*Never proven guilty*).

⁷¹ When does desire become ugly?

Figure 83.⁷²

Figure 84.

Hear me. Please, hear me.
Hear me. Hear me. Hear me.

⁷² I need you to understand.

Figure 85.

The slam poet sours my stomach
when I bump into them on the street.

*It is not that you have to be addressed,
it is that in order to write this c.c. had
to address it to someone and we were both
taught by this world that if you want to
be taken seriously, you have to address a man.*

Figure 86.

Confess. Confess. Confess.

Figure 87.

I will never be enough.⁷³

⁷³ c.c. is more woman than I'll ever be.

Figure 88.

When I was five one of my best friends, Nathan, grabbed me. We were waiting in line to show the teacher our spelling assignments. I don't remember what we were talking about, but I know we were arguing. He'd turned to ignore me, but then thought better of it and spun around. He shoved his hand between my legs and smiled⁷⁴ so wide his eyes squinted.

⁷⁴ "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8).

Figure 89.

SILENCE.

Figure 90.

Can you hear me?

I'm here.

Figure 91.

Sunlight streamed through the bay window and blinded those who looked across rooftops at refracting antennas. With the slam poet's arm around my waist, their chest pressed into my back, our legs tangled—it almost made me believe our limbs were seeping into one another. Their feet drifted into my calves, their hips blurred into mine, their arms sank into my ribs. It was as if we were of one mind, too reluctant to let each other go and start the already beginning day. For a long time, I thought I wouldn't achieve that type of wholeness again.

Until I spent the night talking with a West Virginia transplant drinking PBR at the bar who had moved to the Haight after three years filming in Argentina. Unlike those waiting their turn at skeet ball and pool, he didn't hover around the small dance floor. I meet him at the high top under the taxidermy pufferfish. When we danced, he didn't grab my hips and pull me into him. We twisted and spun. I smiled against his neck. It was raining when we left the bar. We made a run for it under store front overhangs and front door alcoves. As we rounded a corner he grabbed my wrist and kissed me under the streetlight.

On the couch, still wet from the rain, he said if I was thinking about how to act, then I was doing something wrong. Not once while I breathed his rain-scented hair did I think of the slam poet.

Perhaps he is right, but what I see here now is just another man instructing a woman on how to be.

Figure 92.

Please listen.

Figure 93.

[INSERT PHOTO]

Figure 94.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Are you being a lady?

Figure 95.

When will I say it?

*Do you know what it is?
Please c·c·, enlighten us*

Figure 96.

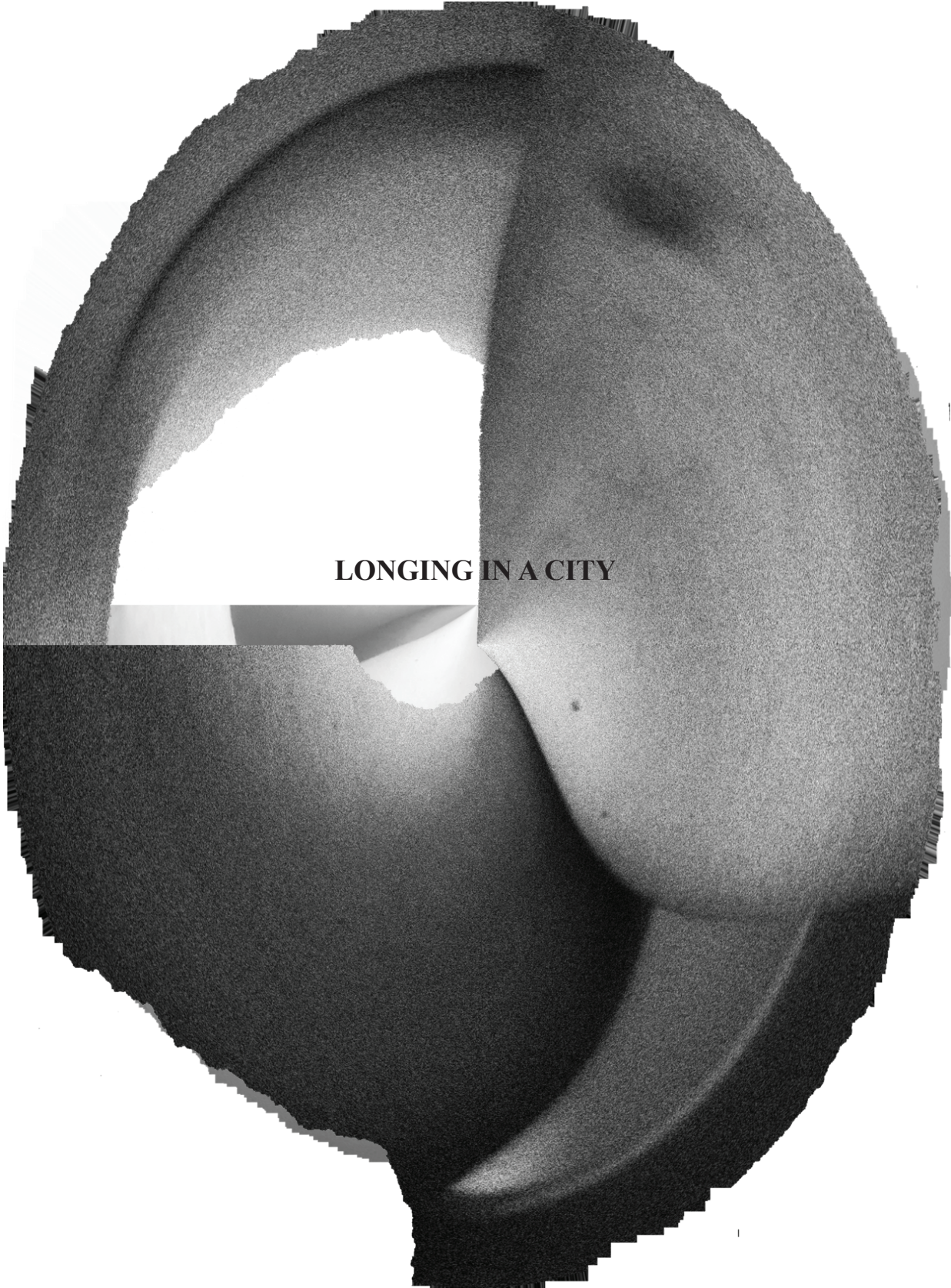
The slam poet was with her now. I didn't know they had a *her* until I ran into them at the bar. She clung to their arm. I was used to seeing them with both limbs free. When the slam poet came over to order drinks, they stood at my elbow. I feigned surprise. They didn't recognize me. They said it was the lipstick. I introduced my friend and we chatted. The bartender slid them a beer and, as they made to head to their booth, they lifted a hand for a high-five—waiting for me to make contact. When their fingers tangled with mine, I was back at my friend's apartment the first time the slam poet held my hand.⁷⁶ This time was by accident. The space was cramped, and as we brought down our arms our fingers dragged across each other.

Figure 97.

“‘You think too much,’ is what they always said where their curiosity ran out.”⁷⁷

⁷⁶ I was sitting on a twin bed and some guys my friends met were trying to get us wasted. You stood in front of me and reached your hand back. I hesitantly put my own out. You turned your head and watched our fingers interlock.

⁷⁷ Chris Kraus, *I Love Dick*



LONGING IN A CITY

Figure 99.^{78*}

I know what it is like to want and
be ashamed of the wanting.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Let me set the scene for you: a white girl from the Midwest moves to the city. She comes here to pursue her dream—the one that’s filled her with so much want it left her sticky—like a fly in molasses—in the suburbs of Indiana. This is her story.

* I have yet to go back.

⁷⁹ Women are given no other choice. At least not according to Steve. If Steve was reading this book he would say my dilemma is not a dilemma at all. I had been led astray by my desires and Satan had used that to create a wedge between me and God. If I wanted to be free again from such worries all I need do is repent, say a pray of forgiveness to the Lord and sin no more. Steve would say I am letting Satan fuel my want and fill me with temptation—living by desire instead of by God. But Steve, if God is the creator of all things did he not also create this wanting?

Figure 100.

I cannot talk of these things.^{80*^}

⁸⁰ But, these things haunt. They skim up my lower back. They creep between shoulder blades. They are the things that make me queasy with the feeling of being watched. They threaten to crawl out of my mouth. But each time they begin to fill the crevices with the acidic taste of stomach bile, I swallow them whole again.

* The thing is (one of the many *things*) is that women are divided. Women cannot agree on how women are allowed to want. White women, of course, as they are still the most palatable voices for women's rights (or perhaps the only voices given space?).

[^] "When a woman travels from A to B, she will encounter mad dogs along the route who will bark at her... The thing to do is ignore them. Never stop to reason with a mad dog" (Sufiya Ahmed, "The First Feminist").

Figure 101.

The sun, if one could call it that with the grey clouds clustered across the sky, was out after days of rain and I was grateful that at least today I wouldn't have to worry about my feet getting soaked. The three of us were at the top of the hill. My mom stood by the rail, my dad and I sat on the tiled bench, all inspecting the cityscape before us: the flat-topped houses inspired by art deco and Spanish villas, apartments with the dreary face of 80's remodels, the St. Ignatius cathedral, and, partially hidden from the fog that had descended on the city, Sutro Tower, back dropped by scattered pines, kauri's, and oaks. I knew, looking out from that hill, I would move to this city.

Figure 102.⁸¹

⁸¹ Something had pulled me to San Francisco. It was inevitable. Even in my moments of anxiety, I knew there was no going back.

Figure 103.

Midday light cast through pane-less windows.
Unfiltered rays bleaching the future bitcoin writer's
hair⁸² the color of foxtail barely. Brow drawn
in thought, eyes stern, fingers idle. They sat staring
at their notebook.⁸³ The professor finished laying
out a few papers before starting class.
I tried to pay attention. When the hour passed and
the future bitcoin writer moved to leave,⁸⁴ they took
large strides as if they were already running late.

*All confession is an address.
Who do you address c.c.?*

⁸² Their hair is what I remember about the future bitcoin writer the most. Unruly straight locks sticking up in every direction. They used to tug at it as if they could pull it in, but it never behaved.

⁸³ Children engage in an activity called homemaking. It is witnessed in the small nooks and crannies they attempt to make their own—the space behind a basement couch, the crawl space they aren't supposed to go inside, a particular v of a tree branch. Sometimes these spaces are decorated or hold special treasures. The child may go to these places with friends and there may be a communal sense to the space, but it is distinctly separate from the parents' home.

⁸⁴ “What we so often forget is that God has honored the woman by giving her value in relation to God—not in relation to men. But as Western feminism erases God from the scene, there is no standard left—except men. As a result, the Western feminist is forced to find her value in relation to a man...She has accepted that man is the standard, and thus a woman can never be a full human being until she becomes just like a man” (Nafisa Bakkar, “On the Representation of Muslims”).

Figure 104.

“Unable to comprehend all that is encapsulated in the psyche, we need to place it ‘out there’ for us to contemplate.”⁸⁵

Figure 105.

The city held me in my pursuit of wanting.
But here, it felt like a way of being.

⁸⁵ Clare Cooper Marcus, *House as A Mirror of Self*

Figure 106.

This is about wanting.^{86*^}

Figure 107.

This is an irrevocable condition.

⁸⁶ Michigan first claimed me, and me it. Each fir I passed on the highway, each plowed field, each rundown gas station, has, in some respect, belonged to me. It is soft serve at Tasty Twist. Cider and donuts at Uncle John's Cider Mill. Tree graveyards, marshes, and peatbogs. Cattails, rocks, and Folger's coffee cans full of frogs.

* But what is wanting?

^ Wanting is the original sin.

Figure 108.

This is _____ .

Figure 109.

It's been over a year since I've seen the future
bitcoin writer and I keep thinking about them.⁸⁷
I wonder if they miss the city—its people—that
drifted, unsure, between foggy shadows.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Why do you occupy so much space in my mind?

⁸⁸ I used to walk down streets shivering because of the fog, some nights so dense you couldn't clearly see the cars parked a few feet away. San Francisco weather was unpredictable in that way. Sunshine and light breezes could turn to a chilly soiled white.

Figure 110.

I've lost,

l

lost,

o

s

t

you.

Figure 111.

In Armistead Maupin's *Tales of the City*, Anna Madrigal compares San Franciscans to Atlanteans. Those who move to the city know they are meant to come here if they are to return to the sea. That the Transamerica Pyramid is our beacon, calling⁸⁹ us. That the earthquake we are waiting for will hit the San Andres fault line and San Francisco will split from the rest of the world and sink back into the ocean. That we, San Franciscans, will finally return home.

Figure 112.

Leaving the city was inevitable^{90*} too.

⁸⁹ As if a past life, grasping at you with shadowed tendrils, tugged.

⁹⁰ Women must decide: do we embrace the wanting under the conditions of society and internalized patriarchy or do we reject the wanting and call it sinfulness? In the West, this lose-lose scenario is inevitable.

*To claim neither is no solution.

Figure 113.

In what would be my last year in San Francisco, I returned to Indiana to visit a friend in the spring. She picked me up at the airport, we exited off 465, passed by Clay Terrace, and neared Springmill Ponds. The road was the same, the trees lining the medians were the same, and the smooth midwestern traffic was the same.

Indiana hadn't been like Michigan, but despite four years away, I thought maybe I might feel something.^{91*}

*c.c. can you expand on this?
You're not being clear for the reader.*

⁹¹ I'm looking to say mine.

* hiraeth: a longing for home

*Now are you speaking of lostness?
Are you saying that wanting comes from
loss and that to keep the wanting we
must keep it (the elusive and expansive it)
distant? Aren't then you just saying that
pleasure is denied once found? If so, are you
saying we can never truly have or know pleasure?*



Figure 114.

“Some things we have only as long as they remain lost, some things are not lost only so long as they are distant.”⁹²

Figure 115.

The future bitcoin writer was flushed after a wind-whipped morning trek through the city sporting three-day stubble and hair bent like crooked wheat stalks. It was unlike them not to be clean-shaven. I don't think I hid my surprise. They greeted me with a big smile as they strode past the library's Circulation desk. I managed a wave before they were gone.

⁹² Rebecca Solnit, *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*

Figure 116.

I miss walking down the street to Cinderella’s Bakery and getting a latte with their apple crumble tart. Or going to fifty/fifty on Geary to visit my friend.^{93*^} Or trudging to Clement to grab ice cream at Toy Boat or drinks at Bitterend or lunch for two dollars at Wing Lee Bakery. Or going to Golden Gate Park and winding along the paths to get to the waterfall and sitting up on those rocks. I’d listen to the water running next to me and feel like I could breathe because I didn’t have to worry about dirty dishes or dwindling grocery money or missing the MUNI. I could sit there, watch the people rowing their boats in the pond below, and get away from all the other lives smashed in that city.

Figure 117.

Yes, Steve. I hear you.

⁹³ The one that shamed me for sleeping with *too many* men. I was “seeking attention” and it was “uncomfortable to watch.” There are times—more times than I would like to admit—I let myself believe her comment. Like when, in an intervention she and another friend (we’ll call her Brittany) held the morning after I was raped by the best friend of Brittany’s boyfriend from high school, she said I had “a problem” and needed to stop lying about how I was “throwing myself” at men.

* To clarify, *too many* men meant five. I had slept with five men.

^ A woman’s original sin: our partaking of and interest in sex.

Figure 118.

Before I moved from Indiana to San Francisco, I was overwhelmed by a stickiness. It would bubble up until my hands shook and my legs jittered, my feet tapping with excess energy. It became more pronounced the longer I lived there.⁹⁴ When it left my body shaking, I'd end up in the parking lot of a Big Lots adjacent to the freeway. I would stare at the asphalt until the shakiness subsided.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Like a mouse stuck on a sticky pad. Abandoned in the corner of someone's kitchen cupboard pulling at its clawed feet without ever getting free. There is no forward, no backward.

⁹⁵ Sometimes I would wonder if leaving mattered. I imagined the battery of my phone dying and ditching my parent's car somewhere around Kansas City. I imagined ending up in Venice Beach and sleeping on the shore while I used the couple thousand dollars saved to get me through as I hunted for a job.

Figure 119.⁹⁶

I'm fucking confessing.

*You say this as if you should be
applauded. Why do you care?*

⁹⁶ See the issue—an issue?—is this, women have been told we cannot want, we cannot desire, we cannot experience pleasure because we cannot know what this is on our own terms—that our interpretation of these feelings is always, unfailingly, through the lens of internalized patriarchal expectations and, unless we fully reject all areas of this patriarchal world, we cannot come to know it separate from these internalized expectations. Which then inevitably brings the conversation back to sex (because the Western world cannot talk about want, desire, and pleasure without assuming the discussion is sexual in nature and because sex is still a land of unequal footing). The thing is, feminism is divided on sex—what it can be; if it should be had; how it should be navigated; if it can be enjoyed; how to teach it—so then, how do we—women—take ownership of our wanting, our desiring, our pleasure? Does it really all come back to sex, and if so, is it true then that “sex once more appears to be in need of revolutionary transformation” (Amia Srinivasan, *The Right to Sex*)?

Figure 120.

This is a pouring in.

Figure 121.

My first apartment in San Francisco was a spacious third story off Geary Street with three roommates. We didn't have furniture and we had no money to buy it. To try and make it look lived in we visited Goodwill, searched Craigslist ads, petitioned relatives for unwanted items, and kept an eye on the streets.⁹⁷ In San Francisco, furniture is as common as dog shit. It was off California Street when I discovered a chipped blue dresser, the grain of the wood showing through, bumped up against the streetlight and an USPS postbox.⁹⁸ I rang my sister and told her to meet me on the corner of California and Jordan Street. I placed one hand on the surface. It was a cheap thing, made of plywood, but it was mine. My sister arrived shortly after and we carried it the four blocks to the apartment.



Give this more texture.

⁹⁷ Sometimes I'm still searching, hoping to find scattered pieces.

⁹⁸ We almost ripped our nails back carrying it by the tips of our fingers and bumping our shins into the legs. We didn't think to flip the damn thing over.

Figure 122.

“*Disavowal*, says the silence.”⁹⁹

Figure 123.

In San Francisco, Spruce Street was my street. I was a veteran of Parker Hill. I could weave through the tourists of downtown without losing my stride. I knew where to go to find the best Indian, the best dim sum, the best sushi, the best late-night slice. I knew which of the many hip coffee shops could brew a decent cup. I knew how to avoid the line at Bi-Rite, and I knew the naked man at Dolores Park was not myth. To outsiders San Franciscans are transgenders performing in the Castro, hipsters in grunge tanks in the Mission, the starving artist in community housing in the Tenderloin, but San Franciscans are those who¹⁰⁰ have shown the city their ugly.¹⁰¹

*Is that not what we all wish for? To
be free of the unsaid thoughts, the
stored secrets, the hidden desires.*

⁹⁹ Maggie Nelson, *Bluets*

¹⁰⁰ I struggle to turn myself inside out for you.

¹⁰¹ Can a city be anything to outsiders? They have not made the city, they do not know the ache of it, and they have not lived its streets. San Francisco belongs to the ones that understand the wanting, and for that reason I gave myself over to it.

Figure 124.

Exposure.

Figure 125.¹⁰²

¹⁰² Can I show you my ugly?

Figure 126.

It was one o'clock and those taking advantage of the new twenty-four-hour policy at the library had claimed their spots for the evening. The future bitcoin writer walked by the Circulation desk to fill up their water bottle, but instead of heading straight back to their study table, they veered toward me. This was a somewhat regular interruption during my overnight shifts. Last week the future bitcoin writer talked to me about movies—they had spent the weekend watching indie classics. At the counter, the future bitcoin writer rested on their elbows and addressed the granite, “So, what are you working on?”

Figure 127.

I am projecting onto you.
I don't know what I gain from this.
All I know is thinking of you reminds me
of what I wanted.

**Wanting to want the wanted.
Needing to want more.**

Figure 128.

Five years in the city wasn't enough.

Either way, c.c. and I can both attest, the wanting never stops.

Figure 129.

When my family sold our house on Springmill Ponds just a few months before I would move to San Francisco, we relocated to a small third story apartment in a still-being-constructed complex on the edge of Noblesville, Indiana.

Most of my friends lived in Springmill, so when I drove through the neighborhood I passed my old house. I parked in the lot by the communal swimming pool and cut through what used to be my front lawn, opened the side gate, and stood on the cement patio beside our sunroom. I stood in the warm night air, aware mosquitoes were eating my ankles, and looked out at the murky retention pond. Its black surface giving way to house lights and the familiar sky of stars.

Figure 130.

This is an encapsulation¹⁰³ of the psyche.

¹⁰³ of all the things I don't know how to say.

Figure 131.

Photograph: profile, in shadow, against Ocean Beach's skyline. The sun leaves feathered strokes of pink.¹⁰⁴ It is magic hour. We, the people of the city, clustered in the evenings on the beach with its cold winds carrying the next day's fog, to celebrate the sun disappearing. It is customary, and there is a morbidity, an honoring, taking place. Now those evenings overpower my memories, like my mind is asking me to recognize that I should have known then to count my days.

¹⁰⁴ Sand dollars filled my pockets. I was on the hunt for the perfect one—strong, whole, well-bleached—but I loved the ones that were cleanly broken down the middle. I could stare at the fine details otherwise undiscoverable; and yet, I never kept one. Not one fragmented dollar.

Figure 132.

“I had been wandering through the house¹⁰⁵ every now and again ever since I’d left it at age fourteen. A quarter century had passed, and I still wasn’t out of it,¹⁰⁶ in my dreams.”¹⁰⁷

Figure 133.

Perhaps I have always been drawn to hazy regions compounded of shadows and musk. Perhaps my childhood spent dwindling away cloudy spring rains, shifting autumns, and overcast winters ingrained itself on me. Perhaps I need that shrouding, the mist that wraps around the body, encasing it, hiding it, distorting objects into something beautifully wet and dank and shadowed, just like the haze of a Michigan winter sky—the fuzzy, greyish quality—that presses down on the land, compresses it, until it is an exterior representation, illumed.

¹⁰⁵ There was once a little girl that wandered the hallways and storage rooms of churches—unknown and barefoot. She wanted to see every square foot, know every angle, like it might somehow reveal what she was taught in Sunday school.

¹⁰⁶ The spaces: to shake oneself free of the crooks and the crannies.

¹⁰⁷ Rebecca Solnit, *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*

Figure 134.

Ladies do not seek attention.

Figure 135.

What do you want

[from me]?

Figure 136.

I am sitting next to the future bitcoin writer.
Not really, but the resemblance is striking.
The future bitcoin writer is in France, not
flight DL29. I struggle to register this when
I look at the passenger in the aisle seat. He
doesn't have their wheat-stalk hair—it's brown
with streaks of grey at the temple—and he
doesn't have their eyes, but his face...
it's their face.

Every time he talks, I pause and frown to
reorient myself. He isn't that similar, really.
His chin is weaker, he has shaving irritation, and
he missed a spot. A part of me wishes this man—
a stranger on a business trip to Atlanta—was the
future bitcoin writer. I don't know what would
come of the conversation we might've had
other than acknowledgment. *I left too.*

Figure 137.

Confess more.

Figure 138.

Half-way through my first year in San Francisco, a friend called from Indiana University. That weekend she attended a frat party where she was approached by a group of our high school's ex-football team. Over watery beers the boys said they would've "gotten on that sooner" if they would've known we were going to become hot.

We were a body.

Knowing this wasn't enough.^{108*}[^]

¹⁰⁸ It never would be. If there is one thing I have learned about men, it is that my value is determined bodily. Any other value I may hold is decided later, if at all. I am refused the right to my own desires but made a symbol for the desires of others. Why can I not return the favor? Why can I not place my desires on you?

* “[A] feminism that totally abjures the political critique of desire is a feminism with little to say about the injustices of exclusion and misrecognition suffered by the women who arguably need feminism the most” (Amia Srinivasan, *The Right to Sex*).

[^] Steve would agree.

Figure 139.¹⁰⁹

Figure 140.

“No matter how dispassionate or large a vision of the world a woman formulates, whenever it includes her own experience and emotion, the telescope’s turned back on her.”¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ How do I reconcile this and the wanting? How do I make space for both to exist at once?

¹¹⁰ Chris Kraus, *I Love Dick*

Figure 141.

“You need to break her spirit,” my aunt said when I was around the age of five. My aunt believed my parents would lose control of me otherwise.

Independently-minded is how I was described.

I was known for wandering off into the forest and wading through marshes, one time in a pair of brand-new khakis. I’d hang upside down from tree branches in cotton dresses without care that the faded pink of my *Little Mermaid* underwear was on display. I’d offer candy to relatives I liked and would refuse those who’d made me angry. I’d beg my sister to push me on our rope swing only to snap at her when the wood plank pinched my inner thigh.

er asked my aunt why she said this to my

parents—we don’t get on—but I think it’s because I remind her of herself¹¹¹—before teen pregnancy, before her ex-husband burned down their house for the insurance money, before that first heartbreak. I wonder if she worried I’d develop the same tendency as her, to walk into situations braced for the inevitable moment of hurt.^{112*}

¹¹¹ This is the aunt I don’t talk to. Sometimes I feel guilt for not including her in my life. Despite her rude remarks and reminders I was “going to hell,” I think my aunt was really concerned with what she deemed to be her own sins. She used to compete in horse shows and twirl the baton. She had dark hair and nice hips and that small nose I always envied on women. She had opportunity. But then, she got pregnant at seventeen and found herself locked into a marriage with a man I know as Bob Sr. and it became about Bob Sr.’s opportunities

¹¹² When I learned to expect this from others, I’d lost my virginity to a guy I’d known for barely twelve hours. I was still drunk wearing a slutty Santa custom for a holiday party the previous night. The guy wished me a good morning and told me I needed to leave before his girlfriend arrived at 10am.

* If I was being honest, I would say I learned this much earlier than that moment at nineteen lying in a stranger’s bed with crushed curls and falsies still clinging to my eyelids.

Figure 142.

*How do you unlearn something you didn't
know was a lesson?*¹¹³

¹¹³ be thin, they said & i shrank my body / be beautiful, they said & i pulled my skin / be small, they said & i hid my bulk / be quiet, they said & i silenced my voice / be kind, they said & i stretched my mouth / wide / finally they see / canines bared in a snarl (@ccmoon.writes, December 5, 2019).

Figure 143.¹¹⁴



*This should be cut to make space for
an excerpt on leaving the city.*

Figure 144.

“If I can’t make you fall in love
with me for who I am, maybe I can
interest you with what I
understand.”¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ “Look to the ‘uppermost surface,’ [...] to the entrenched behaviors that you can’t seem to stop doing even though they’re taking you no place new. Then trace it back, seek how it came to be patterned in the first place. There was a need. You developed behaviors to meet that need in the environment of the time” (Jessica Adore, Dec. 2, 2021).

¹¹⁵ Chris Kraus, *I Love Dick*

Figure 145.

They took my photo. I didn't say they could,¹¹⁶
but they did. Me with my ass arched in the air—
taking and not apologizing for it.
That was how it was with us.
I was his spectacle. And in return, they let me take.

Figure 146.

The right women don't get piercings in random
places on their bodies. They don't wear a lot of
make-up or color their hair unnatural shades. They
don't go to parties or drink alcohol or dance in any
way that could be considered obscene. They don't
wear underwear that doesn't cover their bottom.^{117*}

I refused the body I saw in my bedroom mirror.

¹¹⁶ It was not his place to bring others to bear witness.

¹¹⁷ For a while, I followed these rules. I was so much taller and bigger than the girls in my classes. Breasts that came too fast. Hips that sat too wide. Thighs that stood too full.

*“Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled.” (Titus 2:3-5).

Figure 147.

Ladies should be soft.

Figure 148.

This one...
it's been five years, but I still cannot say
what this one did.

Figure 149.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ I no longer fear what could be done to me.

Figure 150.

“These are the things that are hard to say.”¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ Katherine Angel, *Unmastered*

Figure 151.¹²⁰

¹²⁰ N/A

Figure 152.

Forgive me, father

Figure 153.

By my second year in the city, San Francisco and I had become bonded. Maybe it was the forever delayed MUNI or the nights filled with cocaine laced joints, but San Francisco and I were of one body. When I couldn't sleep and it was late I'd grab my headphones and wander through Presidio Heights, Pacific Heights, sometimes even ending up in Nob Hill—staring at the wealthy homes with the BMWs and manicured shrubs that are, for some Reason, always shaped like mini-stacked balls.¹²¹ The streetlights were less frequent in these areas because what was there to fear behind those white painted iron wrought fences? I preferred this. The darkness that came with it. I was nothing but city brick and cracked cement.

¹²¹ At fourteen my sister locked me in a Victoria's Secret changing room. My boobs were spilling over the sides of the A cup I wore, and she was tired of me pretending I could deny them space.

Figure 154.

“All experience, in matters of philosophical discovery, teaches us that, in such discovery, it is the unforeseen upon which we must calculate most largely.”¹²²

¹²² Edgar Allan Poe

Figure 155.

Fuck this.

Figure 156.

What I know: that the wanting is what I've been chasing as much as what I've been escaping.

What I know: that my wanting for the city was so great I had to give it shape.

What I know: that I had to follow the wanting to dark places—my dark places—if I was to accept it.

Figure 157.

I'm starting to believe this is obsession.
That *thing*.¹²³ That thing which is so hard to say.

¹²³ The decisions made between acts of power.

Figure 158.

@ccmoon.writes wrote: “i used to wonder if i would know the difference between that *thing* and everything else.”

Figure 159.

I’m still trying to understand how to be woman enough, but I don’t think any woman knows. If we did, we wouldn’t be telling every gritty, nasty detail hoping somewhere along the way something might stick.

Figure 160.¹²⁴

Figure 161.

I wish you would listen.

¹²⁴ The future bitcoin writer lives in Germany now working as a professor and writing articles on philosophical investigations into utopia. I do not know them or their up-cycled fashion designer partner or their friends in Spain they visited one spring soon after moving to Germany and leaving the city long behind them. (I do not think this city could ever leave me).

Figure 162.

My exposure to women fell under the pastoral: wheat fields of Kansas; pressed white aprons; midi-skirts, silk blouses, and strings of pearls; Jackie and her tweed blazers.¹²⁵ Pastors at the churches I attended as a kid preached about the duty of a woman to her husband and family and watching my mom seemed to act as reinforcement to their teachings. Perhaps this is why I didn't understand what appeared to be disconnected jumps in her career.¹²⁶ She worked as a sales representative for Pampered Chief, a substitute teacher in the East Lansing school district, a project manager for a painting company, and a leadership coach out of Grand Rapids driving three hours each day to her office. She drove me to gymnastics, ballet, piano, and the majority of my baseball and soccer practices. She led a reading group at my elementary school, baked cupcakes and cookies for class parties, hosted playdates, and prepared five course dinners for co-workers my dad occasionally brought home. To *be* a women looked like freshly dusted baseboards, red lacquered nails, jars of homemade strawberry jam, and pantries stocked with gingerbread house toppings.

(I wanted a life that looked different from what I saw.)

¹²⁵ But I wanted Marilyn in the black turtleneck.

¹²⁶ I still don't think I understand her choices.

Figure 163.¹²⁷

¹²⁷ _____ is more woman than I'll ever be.

Figure 164.

Confess, my dear.^{128*}

¹²⁸ I was told by an old professor confessional writing is “very American.” We were in a workshop and my piece was up for critique. I listened as the professor dug into my use of the first person, how “memoir” always struck them as “narcissistic,” and how my interest in nonfiction must stem from my being American because Americans are always talking about ourselves. Americans do talk a lot about themselves, but calling confessional writing American ignores the long history associated with it, starting with *The Pillow Book of Sei Shōnagon*, which could be considered one of the earliest published texts of female confessional writing, or the numerous women writers in France and Germany heavily engaged in nonfiction writing mimicking intensely private diaries in the 1960s-70s.

Was it all *very* American?

* If you can't handle the I, then that's all you had to say.

Figure 165.

*Go back to earlier comment from me.
Are you saying pleasure is an unknown for
women? If you're going to claim this, then
this requires more exposition.*

“[A]nd it surprised me, even in myself, how
much we prefer ugly scenarios to the pure
unknown.”¹²⁹

Figure 166.

I finished Chris Kraus’ *I Love Dick* in the span of three days in spite of Google searching almost every female artist she referenced. Kraus questioned why it wasn’t okay to express her desires, why her dream to become a different type of artist made her emotional, why her letters to Dick made her wanton—*undesirable*. The action of speaking her thoughts out loud did exactly that: made her undesirable. I want¹³⁰ to be one of these women. I want to be unwilling to be silenced.

Why silence yourself?

¹²⁹ Rebecca Solnit, *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*

¹³⁰ Wanting. Wanting more. Wanting this. Wanting the world

Figure 167.

Do you understand?

Figure 168.


Ladies do not argue



Figure 169.

What is this doing here?

Women were reduced to mythology in the past—medieval forest nymphs and fairies; enchantresses draped in gauze flowing down the pale skin of their backs; faye beautiful to watch, but too fast for any mortal man to catch—and we have once again fallen into the mythologizing. *Wild women*. The feminists of the two-thousands have lauded this term, and now we drown in metaphors of fire and witches, shapeshifting and transformation. There are groups dedicated to pussy power and goddess work. Women became warriors. Mermaids. Goddesses. We wear shirts saying, “I’m a unicorn,” and dye our hair a frosty pink. We are no longer of this realm because this world could not handle us. We cannot let alone the image of the caged bird, therefore caging our thoughts to the same narrative. If anything, we’ve repressed ourselves. Women dictate what is woman enough.



What does that mean to be writing those images while critiquing them?

Figure 170.

Confess, my child.

Figure 171.

“I don’t remember his face but every man who touched me made one gesture that never quite came to an end; I can feel the forearm of one across my belly as he swam up behind me in a lake, the rough kiss of another on my palm, and sometimes I think there might be some device like the X-ray machines they use to look at your feet in the shoe stores that would make these indelible impressions visible, a series of marks,¹³¹ the opposite of bruises, across and around me, and I went through the world dressed in those experiences, we all do.”¹³²

¹³¹ How many things do you think can mark us? There are days when I look at my skin as if it is not mine.

¹³² Rebecca Solnit, *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*

Figure 172.

In the end, I had to leave the city.
I spent my last few weeks walking
everywhere to fill myself with the
carry it with me. To wrap up the
wanting—be so full that I'd burst—
make it into energy, somehow, I
could transfer to where I would move
to next. I wanted to capture it—fuse it
to me—and make it become something
bodily so I could own it and sit with it
in the quiet moments late at night.¹³³

Figure 173.

All I have are the thoughts.
Did the future bitcoin writer struggle
to leave this city too? Do they understand
this longing?

¹³³ West Palm Beach wasn't for me and yet I was going—leaving my hearts home for blinding sun.

Figure 174.

I forget to take a step back. I forget my desires might be the unfurling. The lick of standing on a cliff edge when a gush of wind threatens you.

Figure 175.

I fight it because I don't know what else to do.¹³⁴

Figure 176.

I fight it because everyone tells me not to.¹³⁵

¹³⁴ The seeping cracks.

¹³⁵ Just as I strain to explain the need to be in San Francisco, and nowhere else.

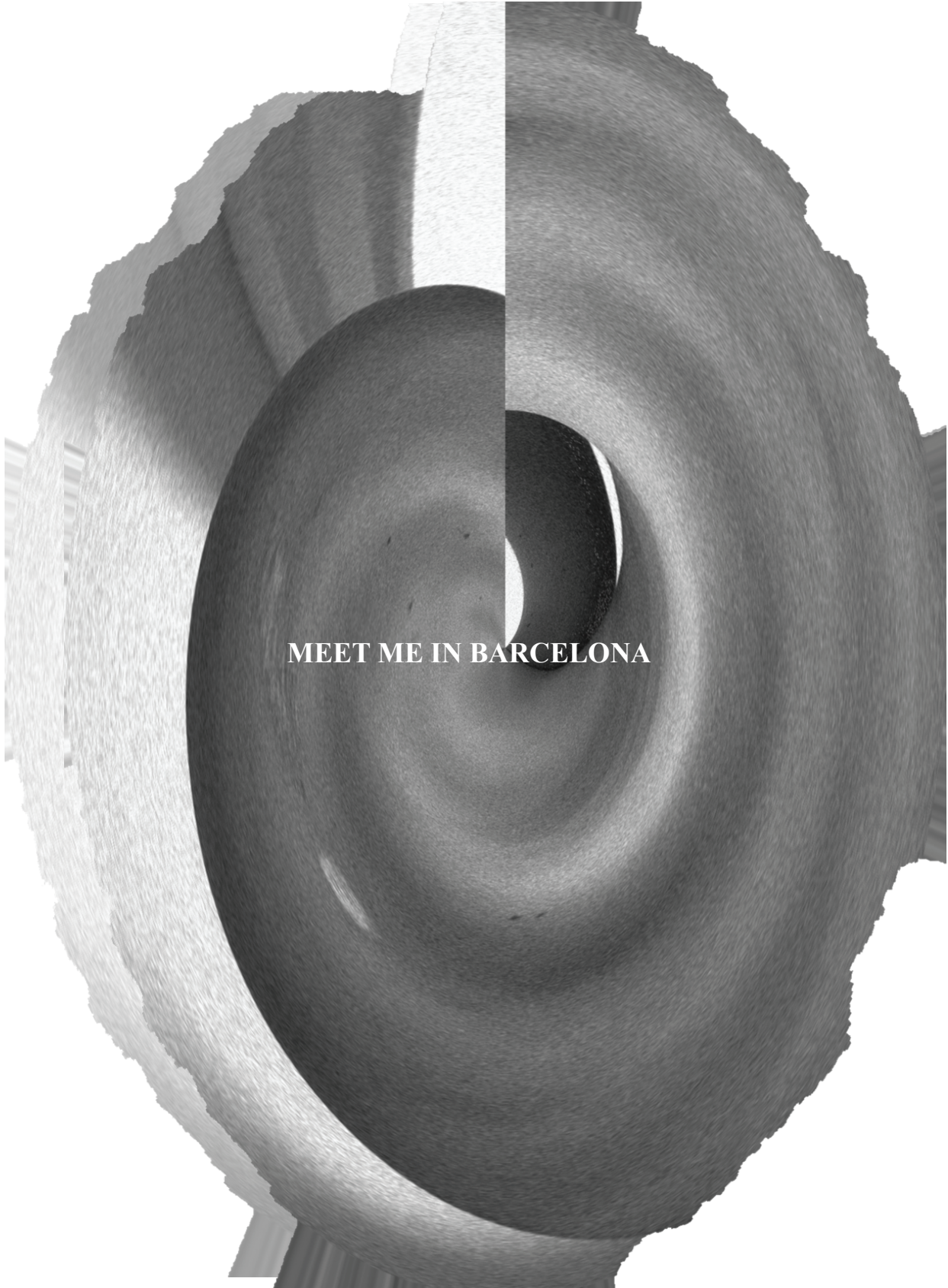
Figure 177.

“It is as though in the way places stay with you and that you long for them they become deities.”^{136*}

¹³⁶ Rebecca Solnit, *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*
* Steve would be red.

Figure 178.

Tell me about the wanting.



MEET ME IN BARCELONA

Figure 179.

“i can’t live without adventure that’s the truth. i choose the serpent over the fruit.”^{137*}

¹³⁷ Kristina Taylor, *Floral Moans*, “forget adam”

* Today, I looked in the mirror and thought my skin doesn’t look so tired—the usual crease of my forehead wasn’t so apparent under the LED bulbs—but I couldn’t help but be drawn to the red rims of my lower lids, the burst blood vessel at the top inner corner of my left eyelid, and the ever-expanding trail of moles down my left side cheek. I am convinced these moles on my cheek are growing, marring my skin, the flesh of my face, even more. I care about the light pink dots that seem to develop overnight—littering my shoulders, my arms, my legs, my feet, my ass, the inner crease of my thighs. My skin is hell bent on being marked. When I try to remove the old ones, new ones form.

Figure 180.

Desire is a one-way street.
It has an ugly quality¹³⁸—a stubbornness,
an unhealthy tendency to follow dead ends.

**Because it is easier to pretend
that we do not desire more.**

Figure 181.¹³⁹

¹³⁸ A list of examples: the market for customized sexbots; the men in Japan dating Rinko contributing to the 36% of single Japanese men who don't want a romantic partner; the nearly 1 million users on porn recovery sites unable to get turned on by videos with tags like "fucked hard screaming" or "punish fucked Latina."

¹³⁹ I sit at Crux off Main Street. This is where I go when writing and it is here that I start writing this section. It's been two years since I left San Francisco to West Palm Beach—two years of numbly staring out at the sea waiting for it to swallow me whole. When I can't take it anymore and the stickiness settles in, I've found myself in London, Lancaster, D.C., Nashville, Marrakesh, Essaouira, Milan, Phoenix, East Lansing...anywhere that gets me far away from the sprawling concrete, transplanted palm trees, and all this white—so much white you would think the land had been bleached. I haven't had a place of my own since the city. My belongings are stuffed in the garages and closets of family. I live out of suitcases. My writing is the only thing that grounds me.

Figure 182.

I was leaving West Palm Beach again
in October—back to England, the closest
place I considered to home since watching
the Golden Gate Bridge disappear in the
back of a shuttle.

The anticipation of leaving made my
writing furious. I came to the page eagerly
and left it at the end of each day wanting
more.

Figure 183.¹⁴⁰

¹⁴⁰ I was here, always here, but I had no voice to speak. I was shut down and shut up. But then you came and I had so much to say. So, I wrote and gave name to the thoughts I could not speak.

Figure 184.

What does it mean that I like being sprawled
out and bare for your examination?¹⁴¹

¹⁴¹ What does it say that I'd go back to it still?

Figure 185.

Ladies are quiet.

Figure 186.

I was told my body is my temple. I am to care
for it like I would care for God.¹⁴²

Figure 187.

In high school I had to get a biopsy done on two moles. One was a rather wonky droplet centered on my chest. The other was a halo mole—a rare anomaly which the body tries to remove by concentrating an immune system attack on the mutant cells.¹⁴³ It forms a white ring around the mole. The dissolving stitches tinted my skin¹⁴⁴ a blue-green I've come to associate with powdery gloves and overhead lights refracting in mirrors. The one on my chest is no longer noticeable, but the halo mole was a large spot directly on the spine. The white ring of it still decorates my skin.

¹⁴² I joke how future lovers can play connect the dots along my skin.

¹⁴³ Perhaps it is the marks I bear that make me desire being marked. I want the physical reminder. A time stamp of imprints, meshings, mergings, and skin graphing. Proof of contact.

¹⁴⁴ Cone shaped fragments of me are scattered in labs across the country. I am used to the process of piecing myself back together—versed in it—and sometimes I am thankful for this knowledge. Women are not encouraged to view ourselves as whole. We are under construction. We need \$250 haircuts, waxing, fake eyelashes, and overdrawn lips. We could always use a tuck, a pinch, a lift. Is it any wonder we are made to feel less? I have come to believe women aren't viewed as whole because we need the space—the potential buoyancy—to mold ourselves. Sometimes an extra joint is required. Sometimes we must shrink. We are like spiders flattening ourselves until we can fit into the crevices and cracks. The places necessary for survival. Building and rebuilding our webs. Repairing the broken bits. Replacing the lost bits. We must allow for the shedding.

Figure 188.

“Sometimes it would be nice, I think—it would be a relief—to be certain. To be so sure, to have such sharp edges. To know where one began and ended.”¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁵ Katherine Angel, *Unmastered*

Figure 189.

I used to question whether I'd be comfortable
enough to let anyone touch me after him. I
thought I'd be too jittery to let someone put
their lips on mine. To drag their hand down
my arm. To hold me in place with two fingers.
To bruise the spot below my hip.
But the photographer brought a different
discomfort—of wanting the brutal and the soft.

Figure 190.^{146*}

¹⁴⁸ The first time a dermatologist saw the halo mole on my back it was because the mole was shrinking, something I didn't know moles could do, and the white ring around it was growing. My family and I were concerned it could be mutating. (It should be noted all moles are mutated skin cells). The dermatologist explained it was the body's natural way of attempting to replace the mutant skin cells with normal cells and, if given enough time, a pigment-less spot will take the halo mole's place. (Most dermatologists will tell you the pigment will eventually return). As my halo mole was situated directly on the spine, the dermatologist felt it best to just remove the mole and leave the white ring to reduce tissue damage and scarring. (Some would say I removed an angel's kiss).

* Now this mark is overshadowed. Above it rests a scar a half inch wide and two inches long—a cluster of moles turned abnormal. People ask about it sometimes, and I shrug it off. How do you explain that your body turned against you?

Figure 191.

I'd met the photographer before.
They wouldn't remember,
I doubt it.

Figure 192.

Give me something I can sink my teeth into.

Figure 193.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁷ I want someone who will face the Bone Woman.

Figure 194.

I bruise easily. I have a tendency to cut up my knees on pavement and poolside walls. I was born with a birthmark about the size of an apricot on my left bicep. It was strawberry red and puffy. My parents asked the doctor what could be done, and he reprimanded them. I was not deformed, only branded by birth. Marked at conception.

Figure 195.

I must manage expectations.

Figure 196.

I can't remember the exact moment it started—
me imagining the photographer.
Perhaps it was a quick whiff of heat—
an arid snarl curling up the nose.¹⁴⁸
I imagined trailing my fingers¹⁴⁹ atop the
photographer's shoulders. Them cupping my ass.
Me biting their bottom lip.

¹⁴⁸ There is something to be said about the temporary.

¹⁴⁹ Would you have let me?

Figure 197.

CONFESS.¹⁵⁰

¹⁵⁰ I will tell you what I tell no one. I will tell you it all.

Figure 198.

“An old witch from Ranchos told me that *La Que Sabe* knew everything about women, that *La Que Sabe* had created women from a wrinkle¹⁵¹ on the sole of her divine foot: This is why women are knowing creatures; they are made, in essence, of the skin of the sole,¹⁵² which feels everything.”¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ Sell me something new.

¹⁵² But what of man's rib?

¹⁵³ Clarissa Estes, *Women Who Run with the Wolves*

Figure 199.

How do I explain trembling¹⁵⁴ at
the photographer's presence?

¹⁵⁴ I do not tremble for just anything. When a chunk of my foot was cut out, I did not tremble at the long needle stuck along the joint of my big toe or the blood on the gauze or the flesh the doctor held up for my examination. When I hung over the chain link fence along the edge of the Grand Canyon, I did not tremble at the gust of wind that caught up my hair or the slight wobble to the posts or the rattle of pebbles tumbling over the lip. When I went to a plastic surgeon to get the mole on my chest removed, I did not tremble at the sight of the doctor cutting into my skin or the way the flesh opened so generously or the tug of thread sealing the wound. When I had my first kiss at a sleazy club with sticky floors, I did not tremble as they tilted back my chin or fisted my shirt or nudged their leg slightly between my thighs.

Figure 200.

Confess, my child.

Figure 200.1

[INSERT PHOTO]

Figure 201.

“The youthful naïve nature begins to understand that if there is a secret something, if there is a shadow something, if there is a forbidden something, it needs to be looked into.”¹⁵⁵

Figure 202.¹⁵⁶

I kept my distance after that first queasy
turn¹⁵⁷ of the stomach—
the dry mouth.

¹⁵⁵ Clarissa Estes, *Women Who Run with the Wolves*

¹⁵⁶ Claw marks down your back. Nails in your ass. Fucking claim me.

¹⁵⁷ I needed to know I was safe.

Figure 203.

I've tried many ways to exhaust you¹⁵⁸
from my system.

**I've cultivated physical exhaustion and yet,
and yet, and yet....**

Figure 204.¹⁵⁹

I struggle the most with writing this section.
It is too easy to get caught up¹⁶⁰ in my
longing—I can't stay on point. I can't make
the cracks make sense.

¹⁵⁸ Dear God, bring me peace. I am tired of trying to outrun you.

¹⁵⁹ March 23, 2020 c.c. quarantined in her 534 square foot apartment with the ease of lingerie dance parties, moonbathing, and late afternoon cocktails.

¹⁶⁰ I've learned to not miss your touch when you disappear (which you did before any pandemic ever swept our world). When I think I might have succeeded, your fingers filter into my dreams. You lying in bed with your arms around my waist. You sitting on my kitchen stool by the laundry room door, hands clasped. You hesitantly touching my lower back in the kitchen. For a while, each time I had these dreams, I'd wake to a message from you. I used to debate if it was God's work or the universe. (I have always been torn between wondering if you are a blessing or a lesson). These dreams rarely brought comfort.

Figure 205.

Give more.

Figure 206.¹⁶¹

The first night I came home with the photographer, I had spent the morning starving out a hangover. Walking into work I didn't know if they would remember our conversation from the previous night: me four beers and two shots in and them in that yellow jacket. I kept adjusting my clothes. The photographer walked in while I was commenting on the window display. I feigned interest in the plastic cling, but they paused and leaned back, head tilted.

I didn't know what to do with them.

Halfway through the shift the photographer was headed to drop off the deposits and asked if I wanted a coffee.¹⁶²

"We're gonna go together, so I need you to sign off in the back."

We took the photographer's car. When I buckled the seatbelt, it tightened. I pulled at the strap.

"What? You don't like being restrained?"

I clasped my phone a little tighter.

"I'm not going to answer that."

This made the photographer laugh.

¹⁶¹ "The skin is a soft clock...we can make time run backwards" (Steven Connor, "Mortification").

¹⁶² As we stood in the line to pay for the store's coffee order, I studied the display, the snacks, the flip flops of the girls in front of us, and I began to convince myself to stay away from this. We were almost back to the store when the photographer asked if I'd meant what I said. "You remember then?" They turned into the parking lot. "Yeah, do you?" "I do." They swung the car into an open spot. I ran a hand through my hair and opened the door. I spotted the quirk at the corner of their lips. "I couldn't believe it was you." I ducked my head and tried to play it off as if I was checking the road before crossing. "How late do you work tonight?" "Nine." "Perfect, I close. We can meet for a drink after." We were at the doors. They grabbed the handle and leaned toward me. "Do you want to?" "Yes," I breathed.

Figure 207.

Ladies should not confess secrets.

Figure 209.

When nine o'clock finally came, I pushed down
the rolled edges of my shorts and announced
I was heading out. The photographer raised
their eyebrows. They were closing the registers.
An associate checked my bag, and I waved goodbye.¹⁶³
I made myself sit in the car outside Whole Foods.
I checked my messages, my email, the news.
I was in the middle of an article on
immigration policy when the photographer texted.
They told me to drive to their car.
I confessed I hadn't left the parking lot.¹⁶⁴
The knock on my car window startled me.
The photographer asked why I'd stayed.
I shrugged my shoulders and slammed the door shut.^{165*}
The photographer put their hand on my waist. Then,
they kissed me.

¹⁶³ I didn't leave until three in the morning. The photographer said I could stay, but something about how comfortable I was while they skimmed their fingers over my skin convinced me I needed to leave.

¹⁶⁴ The truth is I knew if I'd left the parking lot I would never come back. I knew I would run away from them—not really them—but how else can I explain?

¹⁶⁵ Even when we were forbade to touch, we found each other. I risked curfew in a pandemic to see them.

* “Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourself to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control” (1 Corinthians 7:3-9).

Cut: I am what the preachers of my childhood warned you about.



Figure 210.

“Am I not an earthly woman? And all the while the breath is in my body I may complain me, for my belief is I do none offence though I love an earthly man; and I take God to my record [...] I beseech the High Father of Heaven to have mercy upon my soul, and upon mine innumerable pains that I suffered may be alleageance of part of my sins.”¹⁶⁶

This is not about love.

¹⁶⁶ Sir Thomas Malory, *Le Morte D'Arthur*

Figure 211.

I sit on the warm tile of my apartment.
The photographer sends texts about what
it would be like to lie in the morning sun
coming through my windows—windows
they've yet to see. They dangle coming
to visit each time we chat.
Even if the photographer wasn't sitting in
a room in the Marriot—put up by the
army—to assist with enforcing Miami's
10:00 PM pandemic curfew, even if the
photographer was still within fingertip reach,
there is something deep and ugly that tells me
this is all I have of them.

[W o r d s.]

It makes the writing needy and filled with
longing. It makes these feelings take over the
text until this whole section becomes a dedication
to the photographer and the pleasure I felt when
I was with them and the pleasure I'm afraid I will
lose.

Figure 212.

“Body of a woman, white hills, white thighs,
/ you look like a world, lying in
surrender.”¹⁶⁷*

¹⁶⁷ Cuerpo de mujer, blancas colinas, muslos blancos, / te pareces al mundo en tu actitud de entrega.
* Pablo Neruda, *Twenty Love Poems and A Song of Despair*

Figure 213.

You are no lady.

Figure 214.

A favorite game of mine as a kid was to count the scars on my body. I liked listing them off—recounting where each one came from—and stroking the shiny paleness of their bodies.¹⁶⁸ I fondled them with delicacy and admiration. I thought them beautiful.

Do you not hide your scars?

¹⁶⁸ To heal a scar, you must follow these steps. First, you must tend the wound thoroughly with Epsom salts. Don't be skint with the Neosporin. When the skin has sealed, moisturize regularly with a shea cocoa butter blend. Next, you must apply scar ointment—there are many—because you are a woman and all women know any marks on the body are something to ascribe shame. After some time, you will run out of your tube of ointment. This is when you move on to the third step. The third step is to buy rosehip oil and prickly pear oil. The rosehip is for cell turnover and redness. The prickly pear is for the high concentration of vitamin E and to promote collagen. Apply two to three drops of oil to your pointer and index finger. Gently massage the oil into the scar. Do this daily, twice a day, for best results. Make sure to check on the progression of your scar's healing. If anyone comments on the scar, let them know it is right on track and you are happy. It is very important to emphasize you are happy, otherwise you will be met with a thin-lipped expression. The fourth step is to bare your scar. For this, you will be lauded as brave.

Figure 215.¹⁶⁹

[INSERT PHOTO]

¹⁶⁹ (I am tired of surviving in the cracks.)

Figure 216.

The photographer and I met in the park.
I sat under the awning reading a book
with my feet on the bench when they
approached.
They straddled the wooden plank, their hands in
their coat pockets. They were looking at the
cement patio, and maybe I'm wrong, but
they fidgeted. I put my feet on the ground and
stuffed the book in my bag.
I made the photographer pull me toward them,
loop their arm around me.
We drank from cans and talked about their day.
I leaned my head against the photographer's side,
my back on the bench. I held their forearm
across my chest, my right hand playing with
their left.
We talked about random things, the type of
things people who don't know each talk about.
Sometimes I can still feel the weight of their arm.
When we fucked in their car, nothing was enough.¹⁷⁰

¹⁷⁰ "I want the you no one else can see, the you so close the third person never need apply" (Maggie Nelson, *The Argonauts*).

Figure 217.

Can you hear me?

I hear you.

Figure 218.

“perhaps / i don’t deserve / nice things
/ cause i am paying / for sins i don’t /
remember”¹⁷¹

¹⁷¹ rupi kaur, *Milk and Honey*

Figure 219.¹⁷²

¹⁷² *Be a lady!*

Figure 220.

Beg me for it.

Figure 221.

Ladies do not¹⁷³ beg.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷³ I do not close the blinds anymore when I cannot take wearing clothes. Laid out on a mat in chiffon and cotton thongs, my skin soaks in the sun I'm refused in this confinement. Sometimes I pretend you are with me—a hand at the periphery of my side. Gusts from the central air mimic your breath.

¹⁷⁴ i was not told to kneel when i pray so do not expect me to worship from the ground...these knees were for hooking on tree limbs in an effort to go higher, these knees were for crawling into the small spaces, the depths, the unseen and forgotten. these knees were for moments of meditation and desperation hidden from the eyes of others. i was not told to kneel when i pray so do not expect me to kneel for you (@ccmoon.writes, February 10, 2021).

Figure 222.

As a kid, I would lean over the rail of the second story deck of our house. I perched atop. Climbed over. Hung out till the bare minimum of fingers and toes held me in place.

Figure 223.

*Please forgive me, forgive me, forgive me,
for*

G

I

V

E

me.

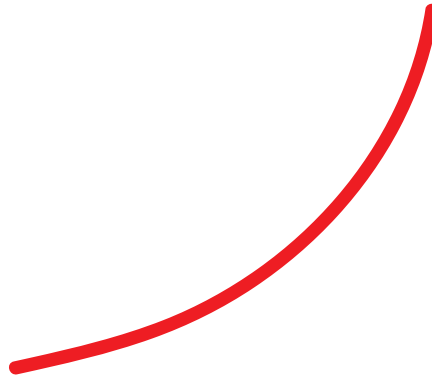
Figure 224.

The worst part of the pandemic is this longing. This longing marks my days with the pleasure of passing time because the length of time only increases the distance—and as the distance increases this longing increases and as this longing increases the pleasure from the distance increases until this longing and the pleasure of this longing has become large enough to fill me up, fill the 534 square foot apartment...the entire warehouse district, the entire city...and instead of wondering about transference and if there's enough hand sanitizer and the bodies filling hospital beds in tents on the campus where I work and the city where I live, I am filled with this longing—a longing so big, so grandiose, so all-consuming that I don't have any space left to fill, I don't have any space left to wonder if I will ever be without this longing.

I don't ever want to be without this longing.

*Consider Richard Siken and how else you
might capture emotions.*

Figure 225.



“Meet you in the parking lot?”
The photographer cocked an eyebrow at me
and reached for a shoe.
“You’d wait?”
They grabbed at their belt buckle and
I finished knotting my blouse.
“I’d wait.”^{175*}

¹⁷⁵ In Miami I waited months for the photographer’s touch. I sprawled on cushions in cheap satin and wore kimonos in the unforgiving afternoon light, but the distance between our bodies only grew wider, deeper, gaping like the fissures in the crust of my bread loaves where I sliced too far.

*What does the waiting entail? Answer this question first.

Figure 226.

Another marred dimple was carved out
of my flesh. For a mole the size of a grain
of rice standing on end, a gash in need of
four stiches was left on my right side calf.

Halfway through healing the two middle
sutures popped. The skin around them
had been purple-black and raised. My body
was refusing the thread. A hard, craggy
zigzag remains and a red-black hue—
about a pea in diameter—colors it still.

*c.c. is there not value in the missing bits?
What does it mean to be allowed the chance
of reconstruction?*

Figure 227.

“-firm-smooth ness and which i will / again
and again and again”¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁶ e.e. cummings, *Selected Poems*

Figure 228.

See I'm trying to understand
why a woman in her pleasure is
dangerous because I was taught
a woman in her pleasure is fraught
with danger.

*Sure, but is that really what you're trying to
understand? It seems that you are trying to
make sense of the things denied.*

Figure 229.

I used to have such conviction about who I
was. Now I look at myself and see a body
I do not know.

Figure. 230.

I could say this pandemic has kept us
separated, but that would be a lie. Before masks
spread around the world, before I was confined
to my apartment in the warehouse district, before
talks of MRNA, vaccines, and cures, me and the
photographer were breaking from each other—
they were part of an exoskeleton I hadn't fully
shaken¹⁷⁷ off.

It was a subtle shedding. So subtle it still allowed
me to love the photographer and believe in the tendrils,
the faint imprints of them, defined by my lack of need
for them. What I did need—what I craved—was the
photographer's touch. Not the touch of them now,
but the touch of them then. I craved the grounding.

¹⁷⁷ Naively she had thought you were the reason she was in Miami.

Figure 231.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁸ I was once told by a dermatologist that I'm 'not good at healing.' Meaning that unlike other people who may come out from injuries with healthy scars—defined as smooth and flat—I am prone to hyperpigmentation or the loss of pigment, stretching, and the slight divot in the skin. Not good at healing. It isn't that my body can't heal. It works hard to do so and the marks littering my surface are signs of that struggle. And, while some people may have bodies all too eager to forget—to pretend the breach in tissue and sinew never happened—my body honors these moments of fluidity. It is not frightened by the merging. It does not care to hide or forget because this body knows what it is to tend the cracks. The seeping cracks.

Figure 232.

Sometimes, after we had sex, the photographer would ask what I was thinking.^{179*} I couldn't say it though. I couldn't say how I wanted to trace their tattoos until their patterns became muscle memory. How I wanted to know the distinct taste of them as I trailed my tongue from their pierced nipple, the dip of their abdomen, the tauntness of their belly button, the dimpled scar scattered at their waistline. How I wanted to imprint their scent—guava, mixed with a subtle spice like burnt cinnamon and pine, and soap still fresh from the shower. How I wanted to stare at the panels of their face—the flat slope of their nose with its slight swell to the sides, the hollow of their cheeks, the sharp angles of their jaw, the smooth expanse of forehead, the slight quirk to their mouth in the same spot as the kiss Wendy admired in the 2003 Peter Pan. How I wanted to study the length of their hands, the strength and straightness of their fingers, and how they dwarfed my own crooked digits. How I wanted to memorize the shape of their bottom lip, the twinge to their saliva from the metal ball on their tongue. How I wanted to know what it would be like to wrap my legs so tight around their waist the weight of them leaves me fused somewhere between their chest and the bed. How I wanted to wake to their fingers tracing the swell of thigh. How I wanted to crawl into them, burrow into them.¹⁸⁰ How I wanted them to let me. I couldn't tell them of my wanting.¹⁸¹ My desperation.

Is it desperate? And if it is what does this desperation facilitate?

¹⁷⁹ Months of silence drives me to write.

* “If women have failed to make ‘universal’ art because we’re trapped within the ‘personal,’ why not universalize the ‘personal’ and make it the subject of our art?” (Chis Kraus, *I Love Dick*).

¹⁸⁰ My pride wouldn't let me grab your face and beg.

¹⁸¹ What I couldn't say was, “you give me goosebumps.” (I was once told to go after what gives you goosebumps.)

Figure 233.

“Everyone is simply hungry for the chance to speak.”¹⁸²

Figure 234.¹⁸³

¹⁸² Leslie Jamison, *The Empathy Exams*

¹⁸³ Tell it all.

Figure 235.^{184*}[^]

¹⁸³ Three months of quarantine. Three months of socially distanced grocery shopping following arrows taped to the floor as if we were boardgame pieces. Three months of work from the kitchen table, the single chair in my apartment, the floor in the sun in my underwear. Three months of virtual happy hours and cheering over the phone. Three months of which I wasn't supposed to see anyone (except maybe the pharmacist and grocery clerk and maybe a neighbor or two in the stairwell).

* 192,000 deaths and counting.

[^] I am privileged to be surviving this unscathed—no illness, no unemployment, no eviction, no tear gassed eyes, no arrests. I think of how I could be using the time better, but mostly I sit by my open window so I can feel the sun, the wind, the rain. For the first time, a sparrow's song can be heard from the garden know there are no car engines to drown it out.

Figure 236.

I wonder what it is you want and then
I wonder why I am fixated on your wants.

Figure 237.¹⁸⁵

The photographer wrapped themselves
around my thighs. I couldn't see their face.¹⁸⁶
They watched as one finger slide in making
my back arch.

Figure 238.

Does this have a purpose?

¹⁸⁵ Fuck it. Fuck it all.

¹⁸⁶ No one had done this before. Previous partners had bargained oral sex as if it was generous of them to place their head between my thighs. Not one of them had spread my legs to look, truly look, and see the flesh they wanted to take.

Figure 239.

I can't count how many times I've tried to write the photographer out of my system. As if the words will, eventually exhaust every last ounce of them from my being¹⁸⁷ like one would drain pasta or rehydrated beans. If only they would disappear down the kitchen drain too.

Figure 240.

Where did the tradition of silent women take root? I'm not sure it matters.¹⁸⁸ The skill of being silent was taught to me though as a *tool* for protection and discretion. It is difficult to detangle myself from this tradition. It is difficult for me to find the words.

¹⁸⁷ The fissures, the fissures, the f i s s u r e s s s s .
¹⁸⁸ "There are, however, many stories of women—particularly saints—blinding themselves in order to maintain their chastity, to prove that they 'only have eyes' for God or Christ. Consider, for example, the legend of Saint Lucy, patron saint of the blind, whose name means 'clear, radiant, understandable' (Maggie Nelson, *Bluets*).

Figure 241.

“i should’ve known then to count my days.”¹⁸⁹

Figure 242.

Confess

¹⁸⁹ @ccmoon.writes posted on January of 2019.

Figure 243.

I told the photographer I like them too much.
They didn't say anything but reached their
hand for my leg making my thigh fall open to
them.

Figure 244.

Maybe none of this has to do with pleasure or
the body or longing. Maybe this is a question
of being and all the ways we are and all the
ways we become and all the ways we are
hindered from this and let ourselves be
hindered from this.

Figure 245.¹⁹⁰

¹⁹⁰ She finds it hard to claim her body. For many years she was told her body was God's body. Then she learned of the ways her body was sought to be used. Then she learned the ways to dull her body, slowly. She knows this lack of ownership is not sustainable, but she does not know what to do about it.

Figure 246.

Forgive me father for I have sinned.

Figure 247.

“Do not seek the because.”¹⁹¹

Figure ____.¹⁹²

¹⁹¹ Anais Nin

¹⁹² When I came back from England—right before I moved my things out of storage and into an apartment in Miami—I housesat for my parents. Maybe the second or third morning I woke to see a small object floating in their pool. It was a small bunny likely just kicked out of its burrow struggling to keep its head above the water. I fished it out with the pool net, wrapped a dishtowel around its small body, and held it in my lap so it wouldn't get too cold fresh out of the water. I haven't figured out yet which version of the bunny I am. Am I about to drown in the water or have I been dragged out—too exhausted to flee from the hands warming my overexerted body not yet sure if this is true kindness or a trick.

Figure 250.

It was 8:00 pm and I sat on the ripped PVC of the bench shoved against the café's window, my feet propped so I could lean against the painted brick. A journal balanced on my right leg.

I'd told the photographer to meet here if they wanted to send me off. I'd be leaving West Palm Beach tomorrow afternoon.

I scooted back and picked at the fraying strings of my shorts. I lifted the espresso, but then put it down. I saw them walking up in a baseball hat and joggers. I pretended to be writing.

The photographer slid onto the bench, shoulders slouched forward, and threw me a smile. I scooted to the edge of the bench. It was uncomfortable but I didn't move. Despite their repeated, "I can't stay long," they didn't move either.

We sat for over an hour in the humidity talking about inconsequential things. At one point, the photographer picked up my pen and laughed.

They leaned over and signed their name across my thigh.¹⁹³

"You can get it tattooed there."

There meaning England. I was finally going back and I wished there was some way I could bring them with me. They felt fundamental—an essential.

I threw out the espresso as we walked me to my car.¹⁹⁴

I'd parked in the back-right corner under a row of oak trees. The photographer sighed and looked at their feet.

"Well have fun over *there*, and make sure to go out and party and, you know, let loose."

They made a gesture with their shoulders and reached for my hand.

When they kissed me, I made myself stay still, convinced they would leave.

¹⁹³ Later that night I propped my leg on the bathtub and snapped a photo of the blue ink.

¹⁹⁴ I want to write this into my skin.

Figure 251.

It is not fair to make demands of you.

Figure 252.

“I have blotted out, like a thick cloud, your transgression, And like a cloud, your sins. Return to Me, for I have redeemed you.”¹⁹⁵

Figure 253.

“Be not ashamed, woman.”¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁵ Isaiah 44:22 NKJV

¹⁹⁶ Walt Whitman

Figure 254.

- 1) a droplet above the middle of my breasts.
- 2) a pea-sized mark on the spine encircled in pigment-less skin. Right above, a two-inch horizontal incision about a half inch tall.
- 3) a dark splotch on the upper left ass cheek.
- 4) a pale dot in the middle of the knee cap.
- 5) three or four faded lines along the side of the right calf.
- 6) the fresh blackish purple blot, still angry and tender.
- 7) a dented sort of mar at the junction of ankle and foot.
- 8) a thin line that shines in the light across the metatarsal bones.
- 9) a raised bump on the underside of the left big toe. Another raised bump on the inner side of my second toe. A sliver-like spot on the center of the bottom of my foot.
- 10) a splotch of lighter skin on my left forearm.

Figure 255.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁷ Give a clean narrative: beginning, middle, and end.

Figure 256.¹⁹⁸

Speak, my child.

Figure 257.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁸ But my body is made of incomplete sentences.

¹⁹⁹ I doubt I touch you.

Figure 258.

SPEAK.

Figure 260.

I just want to be honest.²⁰³

Figure 261.²⁰⁴

²⁰³ “Stop me, my ancient history, as you always have, / before I poison my own sleep with the wanderlust” (Brenda Shaughnessy, *Arachnolescence*).

²⁰⁴ When the protests turned to riots in Miami, the photographer texted me to make sure I was okay. They knew I lived close by to the corner he was now being asked to assist with to de-escalate. Cop cars blazed and the *pop pop* could be heard from my window.

Figure 262.

When I was in England I had the same dream about the photographer and me. I would be sitting in a windowsill or along a stone wall in Barcelona reading or writing in a stripped purple dress when the photographer would walk up with a duffle bag draped over their shoulder. They would wrap their arms around me and I would breathe them in again.

Figure 263.

There have been times when I did not want my body to be seen. First, when I was eleven and people were beginning to mistake me for fifteen because of hips too wide and breasts too large for someone who was a child. Again, in middle school—big and awkward next to the petite girls in my classes. And then, after them—the one that took. I did not want my body to be a body of consequence. I did not want a body that would be noticed simply for what it represents.

Figure 264.

“It often happens that we count our days, as if the act of measurement made us some kind of promise. But really this is like hoisting a harness onto an invisible horse.”²⁰⁵

Figure 265.

There was a time when the photographer told me I better come back.

²⁰⁵ Maggie Nelson, *Bluets*

Figure 266.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁶ CRACK.

Figure 267.

I've heard if you are to find where the problems began you have to go to the beginning, and so the beginning is where I dwell.

Figure 268.

It was four months before I saw the
photographer again, but I refused to write
of it. I am trying to speak of something
more.

Figure 269.

This is a becoming.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁷ May 24, 2022 @ccmoon.writes ended.

Figure 270.

s e

e

p

[i n

g]

cracks²⁰⁸

²⁰⁸ listen to me.

Figure 271.

I wanted pleasure to be a gateway,
a simple step over a threshold to
something I'd been told not to cross
(as if anything could be that easy).
Each time I searched for that gateway,
my body was made unrecognizable. It
is the cracks, the process²⁰⁹ of remolding—
expansion, contraction—at times ecstatic,
at times melancholic. I keep trying to make
space.

²⁰⁹ What would Steve say?

Figure 272.

I still do not know how to say
these *things*.

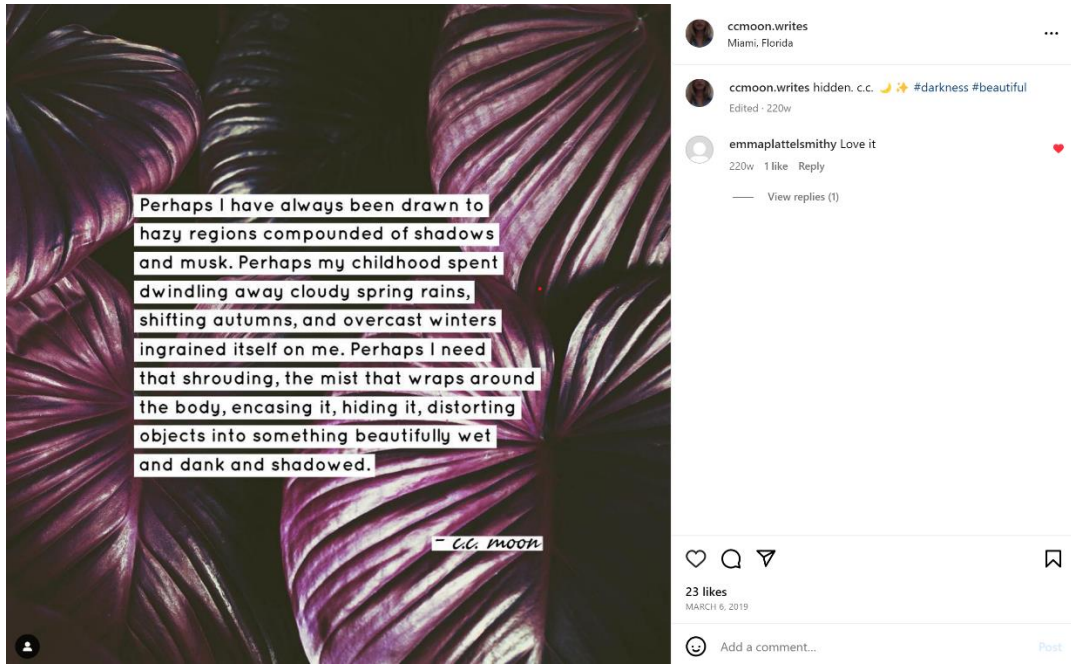
I wonder, sometimes,
if the words are already written
on my skin.

Figure 273.

How many Hail Marys Father?

Appendix

Appendix A:



Perhaps I have always been drawn to hazy regions compounded of shadows and musk. Perhaps my childhood spent dwindling away cloudy spring rains, shifting autumns, and overcast winters ingrained itself on me. Perhaps I need that shrouding, the mist that wraps around the body, encasing it, hiding it, distorting objects into something beautifully wet and dank and shadowed.

- C.C. MOON

ccmoon.writes
Miami, Florida

ccmoon.writes hidden. c.c. 🌧️🌟 #darkness #beautiful
Edited · 220w

emmaplattelsmithy Love it
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Appendix B:



ccmoon.writes
Miami, Florida

ccmoon.writes friday nights spent in bed are for cool kids only 🌟 #coolkids #fridaymood
168w

16 likes
MARCH 6, 2020

Add a comment... Post

Appendix C:

This is a partial excerpt of my creative work dated November 19th, 2018.

4. N/A

Saying I was drunk isn't a good enough excuse for you. If I was honest, I wasn't that drunk. Yet, somewhere in the celebrating, somewhere in toasting to a friend, somewhere in-between being out and being reckless, I spotted you. You wore a grey hoodie and a buzz cut with a lit cigarette hanging from your fingertips.

"Come dance!" You stalled, but I looked back and said, "Are you coming or not?" You didn't need further encouragement as your friend shoved you in the shoulder. I laughed and continued down Polk Street.

When we walked into Vertigo, I headed straight for the floor. I didn't need liquid courage. Not to use you for the night. To fuck you and never call.

I wanted it dirty, and you looked like you had promise. You hadn't followed me though. I circled back and found you sipping a screwdriver. I frowned. Perhaps I should've known then.

"Come on, let's dance!" I yelled over the dated rap music and grabbed your hand. You weren't the best dancer—it was more of a swinging sway—but I had your attention. You didn't let another guy come near me the rest of the night.

At last call we rounded up your friend from the bar and crammed everyone into two cars headed back to my apartment. We drank. Some smoked. I came onto you. Your friend did a valiant job of giving you time to make your move, but as it neared three in the morning and you hadn't kissed me I suggested you stay the night. It was a proposition you seemed keen on, but it was your friend who ushered the remaining company out the door. I knew I should feel some remorse for concluding what was meant as a girls' night in such a way, but I couldn't bring myself to care. I flicked my hand out to you and walked us to my room.

You were eager enough, but when I pulled you on top I wasn't expecting you to black.

I didn't sleep as you snored next to me.

[INSERT PARAGRAPH]

5. FORTY-TWO

I'd went to dinner and ended up in a bar in the Mission. It was one of the only nights I spent in that district of the city. My apartment was on the other side of town, and the Filmore wasn't a reliable MUNI. I'd taken to wearing a midi-skirt of my grandmother's and was wearing it that night with my hair thrown in a ponytail. I'd went out as an attempt to bond with the bestie of one of my friends. We didn't quite mesh, but we were trying. Dinner had been a fiasco of her skating around the bill—her sister worked as the maître d'—and the bartender expected a better tip. She swore she knew a great spot for drinks, so I hopped into an Uber to some dive bar.

You moved in by chatting up her sister before you focused on me. Offering to buy my drinks and talking about your job—how you traveled between the east and west coast, how you were looking to make new friends, how everyone should go to New York. I smiled and let you believe I was impressed.

I didn't plan to crash at your place, but my new friend needed somewhere to sleep it off. The blurred early morning hours is what I regret.

I don't know why I followed you to your room. Why I carefully took off my earrings and laid them on top of my clutch. You wanted me, and I laughed. The next morning I woke to my phone. I forced myself to collect my hair back into its ponytail, place my earrings back in my ears, slip on my booties and round up my new friend before she was late to work.

You arranged an Uber, and we left the glamour of glass apartment complexes in the Financial District, through the Tenderloin, and headed to the Outer Richmond. The driver did not speak while my new friend nursed a hangover and directed him toward her flat. When we pulled up to my apartment, I thanked him, climbed the stairs, and fell into bed. I slept till midday.

When I woke again, I moved to the shower. My fingers and toes wrinkled, my skin rubbed an angry pink like a fresh sunburn. I even picked the underside of my nails clean.

I blame Clarissa Estes. It was too tempting for women after the 1992 publication to fall back on the label of *wild* when they broke societal expectations. The subsequent feminist ideals being circulated—to be a woman, one must embrace their *wild*—romanticized modern movements. We are drowning in metaphors of fire and witches, shapeshifting and transformations. There are social media pages dedicated to women *finding their wild* but living in a commune—while different—bears no weight on whether you have embraced the full capacities of womanhood.

This surge in feminist thought has been further watered down into a movement of selflove and body positivity. Because having breasts and hips is radical. Because being topless on the beach is scandalous. Because dancing at festivals in bralettes is saying *fuck you* to conformity.

We got stuck in the romanticizing. The word wild gave rise to women being described as warriors dancing by the flames to being barefoot mythic creatures, that it is as if Estes' words were lost. Estes' talks of how these characteristics have been part of womanhood from the beginning. Yet we cannot let alone the image of the caged bird, therefore caging our thoughts to the same narrative.

If anything, suburbia and mom blogs are not to blame for how we've repressed ourselves. It's other women. Women who told me these dreams I dream are too big—show too much—and I must manage expectations. I was taught to fear the person I wanted to be because that person could not exist.

Sometimes it is like weeping lava. You can't hide the fissures.

To ignore the persistent tug. The pull to jump naked from a cliff edge. To tie my shoes so tight I cut off circulation because I couldn't be slowed down. To tunnel in the fifteen-foot mound of snow. To climb the ice slicked tree. To throw back the flaming shot. To get up on that bench, that table, that chair, that stage, and dance.

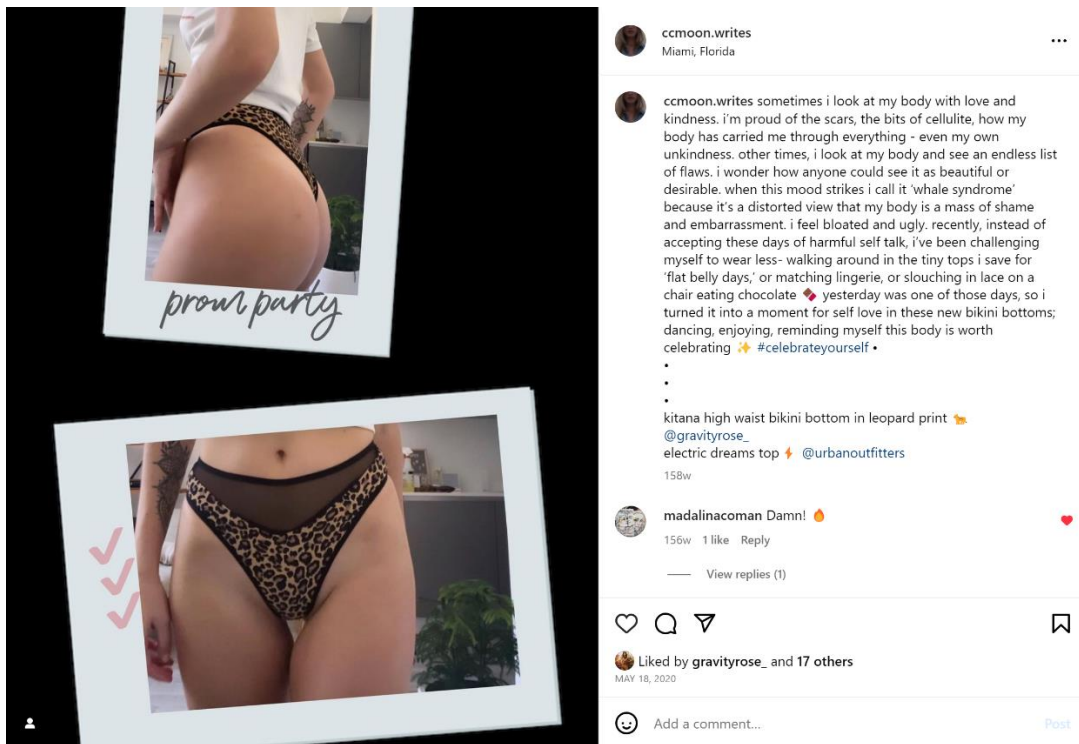
Until my thighs give out. Until my arches ache. Until tangy droplets of sweat have soaked the fabric between my breasts. Until my cheeks carry the same flush as my chest. Until not even the tequila can keep me going.

To wander off the path. To climb the fallen trunk. To take an unforgivingly large bite. To moan when my back pops. To drink from the bottle—my mouth around the whole rim. To stalk my house in my underwear. To skinny dip at noon in the pool because of the brutal, stifling heat. To run. Until I'm so free I'm flying.

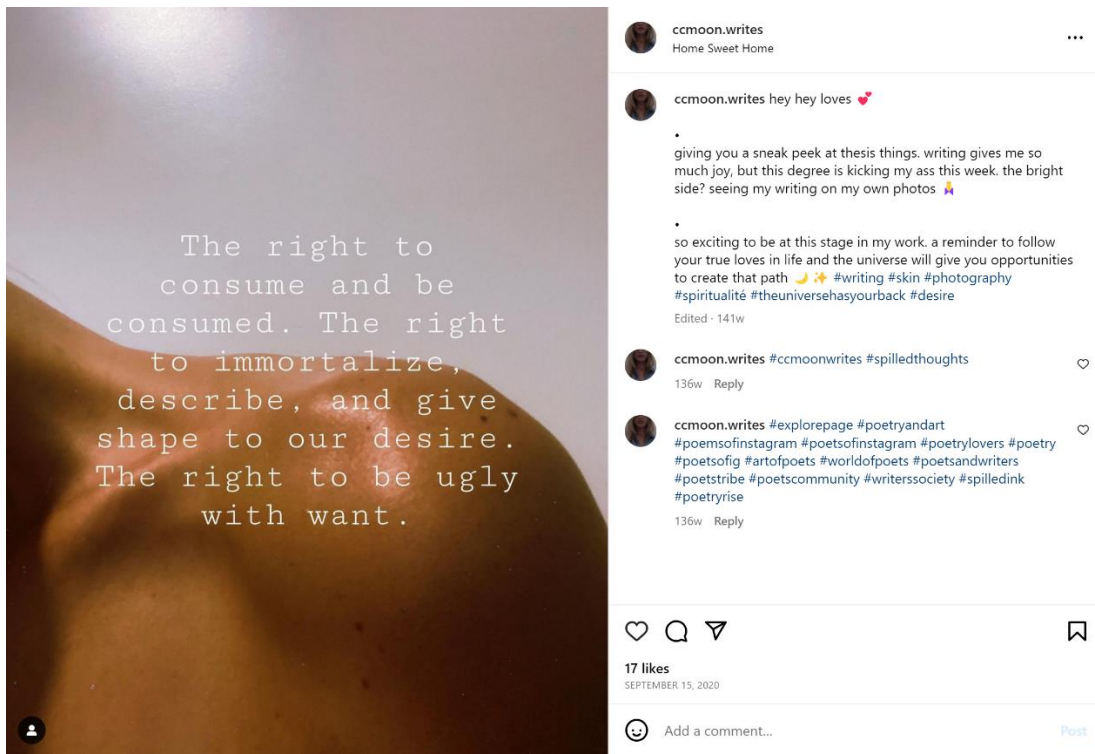
Appendix D:



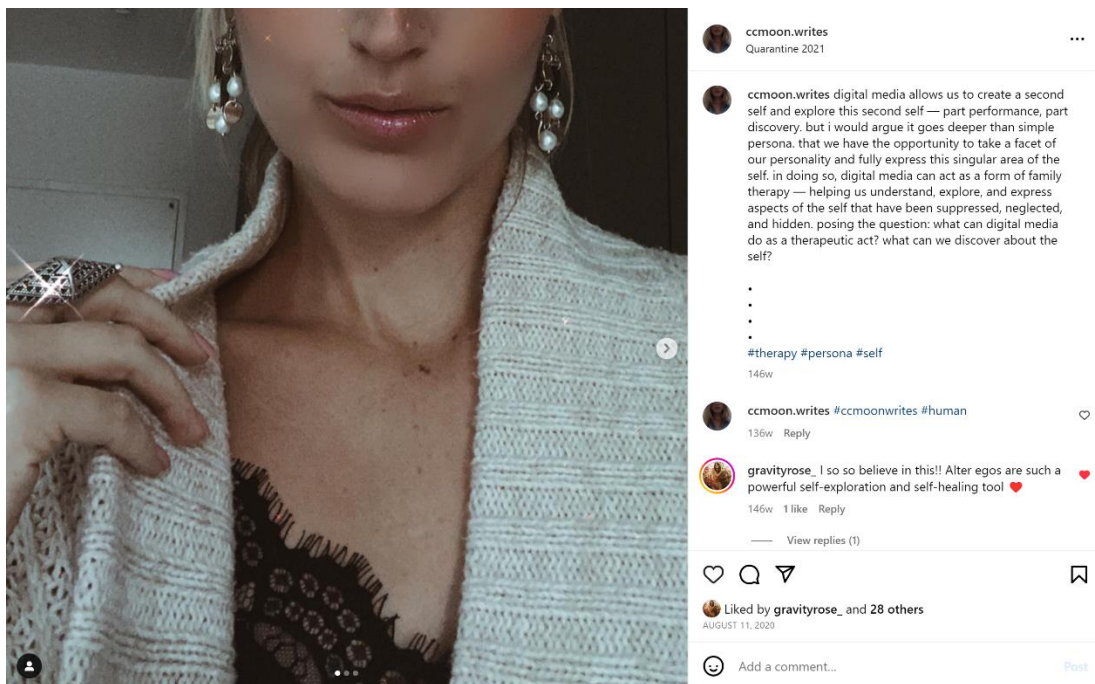
Appendix E:



Appendix F:



Appendix G:



Appendix H:



ccmoon.writes
Wynwood Arts District, Miami, Florida

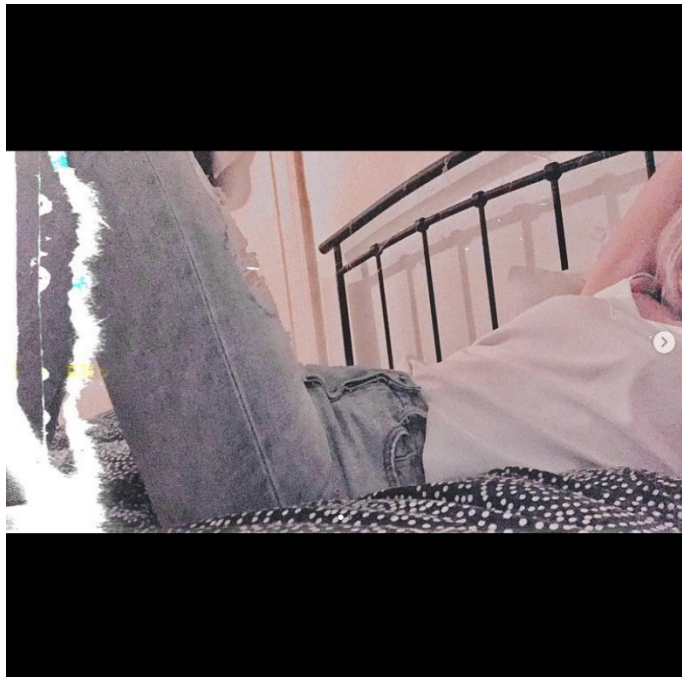
ccmoon.writes what do you want? c.c. 🌟🌟🌟
•
•
•
•
#cc_moon #want
205w

ccmoon.writes #fire #ccmoonwrites #fiesty
136w Reply

40 likes
JUNE 27, 2019

Add a comment... Post

Appendix I:



ccmoon.writes
Miami, Florida

ccmoon.writes a list of what i've buried / 1) a hermit crab named Thor purchased on a trip to Mackinac Island / just off from the basement window by the lilac bush / 2) celery sticks thoughtfully cut by my mother / hidden under the black-eyed susans / 3) two family dogs for who i cried the loss of / each marked with bright flowers / 4) earthworms dug up while planting seeds in the garden / receiving a kiss before being softly covered with cool soil / 5) a fear of rollerblading / after my shiny pink helmet cracked inches from a cement wall / 6) the hands of men i was told would want me / because i'm a child, a girl, a woman / 7) the whispers of disapproval from aunt L / who told my parents to tame me / 8) the catcalls of men / bored or lustful / entitled in their desire / 9) my voice / tired of arguing how it is wrong / 10) the names of the men who thought they owned me / because i was a girl, a woman

don't forget Oluwatoyin Salau assaulted and silenced. i'm tired of arguing why these situations are wrong, why women shouldn't be taught to expect it - that it is inevitable - but i won't bury my voice anymore. go sign this petition and consider how we can stop living in this messed up patriarchal world that places white men at the top for no reason other than their skin color and gender. <https://www.change.org/p/tallahassee-police-to-bring-her-justice>
Edited · 152w

Liked by gravityrose_ and 22 others
JUNE 30, 2020

Add a comment... Post

Appendix J:



ccmoon.writes
Miami Beach, Florida

ccmoon.writes a list of what i've buried / 1) a hermit crab named Thor purchased on a trip to Mackinac Island / just off from the basement window by the lilac bush / 2) celery sticks thoughtfully cut by my mother / hidden under the black-eyed susans / 3) two family dogs for who i cried the loss of / each marked with bright flowers / 4) earthworms dug up while planting seeds in the garden / receiving a kiss before being softly covered with cool soil / 5) a fear of rollerblading / after my shiny pink helmet cracked inches from a cement wall / 6) the whispers of disapproval from an aunt / who told my parents to tame me / 7) the catcalls of men / bored or lustful / entitled in their desire / 8) my voice / tired of arguing how it is wrong

reposting old stuff because this message resonated today
 ✨ been considering the way we morph & change based on experiences, people, & the myriad of voices in our lives. i was recently introduced to the concept of n+1 voices and i can't get over the thought of it—with the stimuli of this world (the ads, the media, books, movies, social media, etc.) how are we taking and grabbing from this bombardment? what sound bites are we holding onto? are we aware of how they lift us, weigh us, swallow us? trying to answer these questions honestly in a curated world isn't easy. sometimes it feels like what i tell myself is curated—surface when i need to unfold and furl and continue this process until a bloodied, muscled, sinewy mass is left, the tender parts of the soul. 🌟🌟 #Real #Eulorouth

12 likes
AUGUST 27, 2020

Add a comment... Post

Appendix K:



ccmoon.writes
Miami, Florida

ccmoon.writes Since I've lost you I've been akin to dandelion fluff—sometimes weightless and caught by wind without care, sometimes wetted down by rain and stuck to decayed leaves. I fling myself into work, but can't make myself stick. Eventually, I'll get carried away. c.c. 🌻 #dandelion #neonsigns

Edited · 237w

ccmoon.writes #poetry #prose #poetrycommunity #thoughts #writersofinstagram #bymeapoetry #writer #poetryofinstagram #life #love #lovepoem #lifelessons #loveandlight #loveislove #heartbreak #sadquotes #spilledink #art #photography #goddess #mood #quotes #quotesaboutlife #darling #sundayvibes

242w Reply

View replies (1)

34 likes
NOVEMBER 11, 2018

Add a comment... Post



ccmoon.writes
Miami, Florida

ccmoon.writes I'd never know what it was like to be so thoroughly fucked. My body ached. The bruises in full bloom. The soreness brought me back to you. c.c. 🍷
#bloom #lights
Edited · 236w

theshiddhaquotes ❤️❤️❤️
236w · 1 like · Reply

bedpostconfessions !!
237w · 1 like · Reply

♡ 🔍 🗑️

28 likes
DECEMBER 12, 2018

😊 Add a comment... Post



ccmoon.writes
Delray Beach, Florida

ccmoon.writes hello loves! how is everyone holding up with the holiday season? i wanted to take a moment and say THANK YOU for the likes, comments + support this year 🍷💎 it means the world!! ❤️ AND because you loves have been so wonderful, i thought i'd do a little something...comment below (or DM) with a topic you'd like me to write about 🍷 for a customized piece of writing!💎 if you would prefer to remain anonymous, please let me know as i don't want anyone to be uncomfortable being tagged in the future post. these will be my first posts for the new year!! c.c. 🍷💎 #thoughts #writing
Edited · 236w

♡ 🔍 🗑️

30 likes
DECEMBER 18, 2018

😊 Add a comment... Post



ccmoon.writes
Miami, Florida

ccmoon.writes happy new year loves! c.c. 🌟🌟 #newyear #2019 #poetrycommunity #ty
Edited · 234w

18 likes
JANUARY 1, 2019

Add a comment... [Post](#)

Appendix L:



ccmoon.writes
Miami Beach, Florida

ccmoon.writes I was a wolf trained to a leash I am still learning not to come when they call. 🌟🌟 · · · #cc_moon #wildwoman
214w

ccmoon.writes #ccmoonwrites #vintage
140w Reply

juzme67 🌟
211w 1 like Reply

38 likes
MAY 28, 2019

Add a comment... [Post](#)

Appendix M:



ccmoon.writes Miami, Florida

hey loves! prompt inspired by the #moon 🌙 sharing my draft here ✨

drawn to the edge
the limit of ego
jumping into soul.
leave me be
to sit in front of
the endless expanse.
let me contemplate
the dusty horizon
& wonder what it is
to sit in the center-
to be lost in the blue.

192w

ccmoon.writes #poetryandart #artistappreciation 140w Reply

melodieperrault 192w 1 like Reply

Like Comment Share

Liked by **melodieperrault** and 30 others
OCTOBER 24, 2019

Add a comment... Post

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