



Nightcrawling *More Life*

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*Nightcrawling, aka:
More Life*

Oscar yi Hou

*I carry on through the first night, deferring to
no Angel, texts from Mother, border-door cop,
bodega man—speeding, shedding feathers—
defenestrated, but in flight, at the edge of
something, suspending any fall. To phase past
the shatter and the splat. What we're calling
life—more life—is but the pursuit of the drip
of liveness, with all the dirt, specks of rust it
carries—*

*—I'm someplace where feeling is foremost,
bodies are pumped, heads drained. I hear
techno, electro, pulsing at a beckoning velocity.
Something oceanic, a sweeping briny mist on
the verge of the earth: of sweat, feverish and
balmy. Another warehouse. Through haze I see
the throng blur; the people's vapors condense
into dew on the grimy window, warping the
light show. Oh—but I am the throng—and the
vapors too—*

The pretense of any thought or inquiry seems crazy, suspicious at minimum. But to be in the thick of it, to be *here*, could be a practice in itself. Some exercise in refusing the fluff separations we make between artist, subject, ground, milieu. Besides, artistic production is always-already primed by the social; it's discursive, one social practice embedded in some world among many. To think otherwise is a kind of Cartesian arrogance. It presupposes the artist as some supreme rational being, observing the world from a cool, abstracted distance. But *to see is always to see from somewhere, is it not?* You can project infinite sightlines from the eye, but they'll always lead back to one point, one body, invariably in some place and time. We

can't elude the alleged embarrassment of our embodied situation. We may move on at some point, but we can't avoid the fact that we've been here 12 hours, one weekend among many, rolling ourselves along.

Such is the phenomenological description of existence—that our embodiment is the fount of being, through which we *plunge into the thickness of the world*. It's how we open ourselves to life, to this warehouse, to the rabble of people, sights, sounds, skin. To grasp at this is libido itself; to cast one's sightlines outward. To be in the world. And inherently we are primed for the rabble to grasp back; for others to trace those same sightlines back to us. Our inclination to be solicited, stirred, to be desired—you know, the erotics of life.

*—These nights, when I rain, no longer do
I pool—I slip, dripping, slick with sweat, a
formless flock of swallows winging the vague
shape of a man, dry-mouthed and agape,
hand foot and mouth in dogged chase, of this
aforementioned drip, the drip of More Life,
a sweet thing. The albatross took off a while
back, drafted by Saint Peter's list. It all began
when we cut at Heaven's gate—*

*—the flock's all here. Hark! The Angels
of Anesthesia, GABA-Agonist, Stimulant,
Hallucinogen, Empathogen. See how we cling,
to this beat—a sign of life skirting around its
negation, tonight's gambit. Everyone I want to
see I see, in this warm trench I find myself in,
crystalline. I am right here, limpid, sweating
alongside you. It is clear as day. Lucid as
night. It's perfect. What are you smiling about?*

To catch a smile. *How can I speak of another "I" than my own?* The "problem" of intersubjectivity—the scene of one subjectivity failing to ever truly know the other—is never neatly resolved within the phenomenological tradition. Two souls trying to grasp into the other, via dialogue, sex, or some other discursive maneuver, forever failing. It's an ancient tableau, this tryst. *I cannot open up the other, trace back the other's origins, solve the riddle. Where does the other come from?*

Roland Barthes

Who cares? It's only under the rubric of knowledge by which we set ourselves up to fail in these encounters with the Other. The work is *to feel*, not *to know*. To let *Opacity be a celebration, not a terror*. Surfaces are maps in their own right. Here, under heavy sonics, spatiotemporal distortion, and pharmacological interventions, the lacuna of the Other is no failure, no abyss in need of crossing, but an opening, the gate through which we smell, touch, greet, see, slip, rub against one another. This relational field can offer something diffuse and pleasurable, yet beyond the base fantasy of sex and its possibility. It is the ambient delight of wanting things and being wanted, to chat, whisper, or be rendered wordless; of always going someplace but having nowhere in particular to be; the exuberant ground against which life moves. Here we are, ebbing, in the dense overflow of time, motion, sense, contact.

Édouard Glissant

*—I'm coming up. I'm told I was always already
here. Seeing double, hearing everything,
untzes on untzes thudding against the roots of
my molars. Cool stalactite nose-drip. Flitting
shadows on the cave wall. Springing forth
from this conceit alone—I am master over
my body. All but a few lines, powders, keys to*

*the circadian blues. You tell me: To ache now
is to capitulate, to renege, to give in to the
countervailing rhetoric of Life—*

*Sure—but I need a second, some air. I'm
airless. In my amble to the stalls I see dilated
eyes treading no ground, nor water, but some
other firmament I cannot yet see. Our piss
reeks of acid, searing Red Bull, splaying as it
crosses the other. It goes forth and multiplies.
Oh, I am so happy to be here with you—*

*—I am so young, yes. And you've called me
beautiful twice already. Empty the blue bag.
Onto his palm. The meat of his thumb. Lick
it up. Salted into my gums, rubbed like rump
steak, slipping in this sea of chest and sweat;
this narcotic carousel, slanted against this
thing we call pleasure—the nom de guerre of
More Life, worshipped as a sign of horizon.
The arc of life is long, you say. All benders lean
toward the sun—*

*Where is everyone? Scattered to the winds. Our
flag in the gale. In the blue light, front-left in
the crowd, there she is. Maypole, dripping in
an eddy of her own making, centrifugally sweet,
it beads away on her skin, her hair flickering in
riposte. As if there were no one else, no thing of
burden, a pure liveness, and freedom still—*

Is it time to redose? So seductive, narcotic time holds the
promise of hedonic sovereignty, of that ceaseless play
for pleasure, the sunrise forever deferred. For Bataille,
the servile worker regains his sovereignty after imbibing
the *miraculous*: a glass of wine after his factory shift.
*It's not much, but at least the glass of wine gives him, for
a brief moment, the miraculous sensation of having the
world at his disposal. It's in this sovereign present that the
possibility of life opens up without limit, that is, life beyond
the logic of capital. Pleasure may be temporary. It is also
transformative.*

Georges Bataille

*—Adrift again. Now I am the pretty lamb, the
dumbstruck lemming. I've done too much, too
little. All blur no edge—I recess, I relent, I
fade; a door unlocks, an olive branch, an acrid
tincture, neon Gatorade, a shimmering acrylic
with a mound of white perched at its tip. To
this enterprise of life; I glisten, I am fed, I jolt
awake on the promontory, I am the crucible?
No, I am the hero!—*

There's an inclination within theory to valorize queer
time, in its refusal of linear, straight time as an axis of
heterosexism. Queerness may refuse the magic trick that
extracts profit from time; the pressure to breed future
wage-laborers; or the perpetual reproduction of bourgeois
family values. And in lieu of this, queers may spend their
time “unproductively,” opting to maximize pleasure, artistic
production, non-traditional relations, general jouissance.
Queer time is considered the marginal domain of the *ravers*,
club kids, *HIV-positive barebackers*, *rent boys*, *sex workers*,
homeless people, *drug dealers*, and the *unemployed*.

Jack Halberstam

—We take our leave. Riding the motions; going
underwater. Sifting through the throng. I spy a
red flag, cornering me: Are you lost? he asks.
No, never. I look beyond. There's a collapse.
You don't want to see this business of oblivion.
A sad thing, wilting. Fetch the stretchers...
subtract the presence... carry the negation—

But to be liberated from the center is not emancipation
in itself; even on its edge, one cannot fully escape life's
dystopias. There's no absolute reprieve from negation.
Still, we can look out for each other, engage in a mutualism
of care. But wherever we may go, we carry our burdens:
conflicts, addictions, dramas. Indeed, even at the rave,
sometimes most acutely, the queer subject might find
themselves squarely within the overlapping crosshairs of the
necropolitical. The queer rhetoric of total freedom, while
life-affirming in intent, can also connive life's negation. In
pursuing liberty to its limit, the pleasure principle and death
drive begin to coincide: the downward spiral, the bends.
After all, oblivion is its own kind of freedom.

Still, there's always that cloying whiff of utopia, with such
collectivized jouissance. The feeling of being far from
our contemporary disaster. Famously, in *Cruising Utopia*,
Muñoz theorizes queerness as located in the future, a sort
of prophecy yet to come, in his refusal of the *quagmire of
the present*. Muñoz is fond of metaphors of conveyance.
By mining the *then and there*, we must then be transported
away, be propelled onward; we must vacate the *here and
now*, cross the river, fly toward futurity, to the fuzzy warm
illumination of the queer horizon.

José Esteban Muñoz

For Muñoz, queerness is always temporally oriented
elsewhere, and taking ecstasy with one another, as a kind of
collective *ek-stasis*, is to *step-out* from the present, to peer
into some projected utopia—that dusty dream of partying-
as-politics. His ecstasy is but a means to some utopian end;
to egress, to heed the glowing EXIT sign and *step-out* of
the warehouse. But isn't the practice of ecstasy instead to
step-into life? Into affect, sense, contact, relation; to *step-
into* those around us—in other words, the phenomena of our
embodied existence? Into this sticky zone—the thickness
of this present where life is most dense. Here, immanent is
both the dream of life and the dream-killer, and since it's
both, it's neither. *Every intensification is good, if it is in
your entire blood*. Our orientation is toward here, toward
one another.

Rainer Maria Rilke

Besides, I just don't want to leave this *quagmire of the
present*. Not yet. The mud is warm, I'm always-already
here, so is everyone else, and haven't we only just arrived?
Stepping out, even for a cigarette, would not feel good.
Here, it's *now-time*, nowhere but here, no *topia* either
way—only life, more of it.

Walter Benjamin

—Do we not deserve heaven? Is the ripest of
fruit not closest to rot?

Look. The day cracks open. You can hear it.
The sky: a plate smashed against tomorrow's
light. Some promised glint; each beat another
break. The light dribbling through. Until at
long last. Tomorrow splays open, soaks the
room in yellow, feathering our edges—

And now, all blunted and diffuse, the light drags, caught in
the thick air.

*The club was the fucking
was the mix was my lip*

Juliana Huxtable

Friday

It's happening again

10:04PM

I can't focus

10:04PM

I ended my social media 'break' to post a flyer, and here I am days later checking Instagram hourly for... what?

10:05PM

This restlessness always seems to come back to me. I had maybe two or three weeks of getting beyond it, in bed by 11 every night and up by 7:30

10:07PM

I've been cleansing, yet again. No sugar, carbs, legumes, alcohol, caffeine (for the most part), drugs I consider toxic or that require snorting. I was clear-headed and transparent, but I've restarted the mix for the 5th time today

10:24PM

I'm in an obsessive spiral, over both the mix and the boy. Or at least the thing the boy activates. The first 2 run-throughs of the mix, I failed the task at hand, which was to write about fucking him, or someone. Instead I looked at lingerie sets on some cursed super e-com site that my functionally accelerationist friend linked me to

10:26PM

I spent 2 hours sifting through swimwear. Micro-skorts, specifically. Each one was a casting opportunity for who I could be on a dance floor in THEE club, how I would move, in what way the architecture of the barely-there skorts would choreograph my suggestions, stage the peeling of my fruits, gripping on the slips in on and around - ultimately quite practical!

11:02PM

When I was in Berlin, the only fashion that concerned me was organized around dancefloor fantasies and sticky vinyl-cushioned benches in clubs upon which beautiful eccentrics would fill me with powders, pills, and extremities. I would use each of these fast fashion skorts until they fell apart, as I was wont to do

11:13PM

How would it feel to move in this iteration of the artfully just-not-nude?

11:13PM

Whatever feeling I used to get when he would spit in my mouth has evolved into a need for a crunchy, blown-out low end, like a speed freak's bedroom machine techno from 1992 Seattle or 2022 Minneapolis. Dissatisfaction transmuted into a transactional exchange with music as object of desire and service provider

11:31PM

That low end dragged the shame of a speedy facefuck out onto the DANCE FLOOR. I already knew my tongue would be out, b-parts bouncing, were I to purchase and wear one of these micro-skorts from one of the 30 tabs I had open

11:33PM

Saturday

I closed all the fucking tabs.

12:41AM

I feel animated and satiated by the staging, by the erotics of the could-be, ultimately turned off by the enslavement of my time

12:42AM

The mix was the ambit of value over any and everything that happened as it was playing and, for what it was worth, my wanting machines seemed determined to imagine away from the purchase button. My sweet little anarchist wanting machines.... "Girl," they implored me, "not this," and immediately interjected with sensations

12:44AM

I needd to be on the floor. It's Friday. I will buy no micro-skorts today (although perhaps will at another time, when I am in need of a new Josephine). The baker's search begins

12:57AM

Starting the mix over again. Trying some breathing exercises.

1:13AM

The point is to write about him, or any of them

1:13AM

The problem is that, at the moment, it's hard to access the initial encounter(s) without processing them through the reality of what they gave after. Each was a gift I handed over. I'm sacrificing myself to ignite an economy where I'm the only one generating excess (poor poor baby)

1:14AM

To the psychologizing eye, I'm depleting myself... but I guess the point of a gift is its unreturnability

1:15AM

But (and please believe me here) it's not the unrequitedness that is clouding my recollections. What I can't get past is what happens right after. It's something in the impossibility of a pouring-over, of sitting in it together after

1:17AM

The exchange ends and he recoils into some role

1:17AM

The mystic guide who subtly encouraged the entanglement of flesh and magic is now an astrologer is now actually a psychiatrist looming in the corner, dangling his "types" over the just-gifted like an infant's swinging car-seat mobile. Was it that he was another Pisces man or just a cluster B type (maybe he had borderline personality disorder???) unable to empathize enough to push the fantasy further

1:19AM

I was infatuated and then he was blowing another line of coke with a rolled \$10 in one hand and my cum-soaked breast in the other

1:21AM

I only read the first 45 pages of the popular book on the somatically-centered nature of how trauma is stored in the body, then was distracted by a remembrance of the VHS tapes from my childhood where I would turn on my UV light and disco ball to play Ultimate Dance Party

2:44AM

My brother and sister were dressed in brightly colored clothes and I was Downtown Julie Brown, the merger of discourse and dance, in the glimmer of video spotlight

2:45AM

I recently saw my friend do something between DJing and a live set for what she was calling her "jazz album." The time signatures stuck with me, or at least the pursuit of unconventional time signatures in music made for dancing. My body could follow them intuitively, soloing the transitions betwixt and between

3:09AM

Anyway, my 2 hours spent on the demonic site felt very much unmusical, even though the window shopping (which may lead to real shopping) did ignite my wanting machines

3:34AM

There were another 2 play-throughs (of the mix) spent in a febrile bouncy trot from my studio to my apartment to make lunch and back.

3:48AM

I was possessed by the mix - which
was perfect, a qualitative prerequisite to
downloading any mix

3:49AM

It took me to intoxicated places. It was
hypnosis out of sanity, which sobriety was
substratum of

3:50AM

A corner of my mouth twitched into a
grimace as my mind drifted to the time he
was in my bed.

4:22AM

The club was the fucking was the mix was
my lip

4:24AM

*Notes Toward
Disappearance*

Jesús Hilario-Reyes

1.

Fog machines are famously named *Chauvet DJ Hurricane 1200, 1600, 1800*, or *Hurricane Bubble Haze*. Fog or haze, hissing as it accumulates, becomes a material form of darkness. Even outside the confines of night, fog is filling—the edges of one’s body soften into their surroundings, rendering individuals less legible as distinctions dissolve into a shared perceptual field. And, in this slippage, an image of enmeshment emerges. Where light defines the apparent limits of our bodies, fog unsettles those edges, creating the conditions for disidentification and collective embodiment. Darkness holds an expansive potential.

2.

Ralph Ellison

I know; I have been boomeranged across my head so much that I now can see the darkness of lightness. And I love light. Perhaps you'll think it strange that an invisible man should need light, desire light, love light. But maybe it is exactly because I am invisible. Light confirms my reality, gives birth to my form. A beautiful girl once told me of a recurring nightmare in which she lay in the center of a large dark room and felt her face expand until it filled the whole room, becoming a formless mass while her eyes ran in bilious jelly up the chimney. And so it is with me. Without light I am not only invisible, but formless as well; and to be unaware of one's form is to live a death. I myself, after existing some twenty years, did not become alive until I discovered my invisibility.

3.

From the perspective of the DJ booth, I witness a mass of bodies in motion. The darkness renders the individual dancer indistinguishable, until momentarily caught in the sweep of a spotlight or laser. For Ellison’s *Invisible Man*, light affords form to the subject, affirming one’s reality. But, from my position, light operates as a carceral force, producing the subject through acts of visibility. A jawline, a shoulder, a wrist comes into focus, but never the whole body. These flashes of legibility are just as quickly subsumed into the blurred collectivity of the crowd.

Similarly, the darkness in Ellison's text marks an expansion of the self into its immediate surroundings, a dissolution he describes as fearful—even nonconsensual. But, from my perspective, darkness instead becomes a vehicle for disidentification. As the parameters of the individual loosen, they open toward a communal embodiment.

4.

All these expressions³⁷ shed light on a single process: *depersonalization by assimilation to space*, i.e., what mimicry achieves morphologically in certain animal species. The magical hold (one can truly call it so without doing violence to the language) of night and obscurity, the *fear of the dark*, probably also has its roots in the peril in which it puts the opposition between the organism and the milieu. Minkowski's analyses are invaluable here: darkness is not the mere absence of light; there is something positive about it. While light space is eliminated by the materiality of objects, darkness is "filled," it touches the individual directly, envelops him, penetrates him, and even passes through him: hence "the ego is *permeable* for darkness while it is not so for light"; the feeling of mystery that one experiences at night would not come from anything else. Minkowski likewise comes to speak of *dark space* and almost of a lack of distinction between the milieu and the organism: "Dark space envelops me on all sides and penetrates me much deeper than light space, the distinction between inside and outside and consequently the sense organs as well, insofar as they are designed for external perception, here play only a totally modest role."³⁸

This assimilation to space is necessarily accompanied by a decline in the feeling of personality and life. It should be noted in any case that in mimetic species the phenomenon is never carried out except in a single direction:³⁹ the animal mimics the plant, leaf, flower, or thorn, and disassembles or ceases to perform its functions in relation to others. *Life takes a step backwards*.

5.

Could there be an erotic pleasure in this entanglement with ambiance? Entwined into a mass, moving together as a single entity composed of many parts—one can envision communal embodiment this way. This might also describe the experience of the individual feeling themselves expanding into the collective. In both instances, transformation occurs through a loosening of individual boundaries and a partial dissolution of the self—in other words, through the erotic.

6.

Murmurations—the collective movement of large flocks of birds, most famously starlings—assemble individual organisms into fluid, shape-shifting formations. The flock's density and coordination at once confound predators and provide safety in numbers. A similar phenomenon occurs in mangrove forests, where arboreal species construct edge-worlds between tropical shorelines and the open sea. Their exposed root systems intertwine into vast rhizomatic networks that become ecosystems.

In these examples, collective embodiment serves as a generative force; murmurations and the mangrove derive their resilience from entanglement. Yet there is a corresponding danger: the drift toward totality.

7.

We are thus dealing with a *luxury* and even a dangerous luxury, for there are cases in which mimicry causes the creature to go from bad to worse: geometer-moth caterpillars simulate shoots of shrubbery so well that gardeners cut them with their pruning shears.²⁸ The case of the *Phyllia* is even sadder: they browse among themselves, taking each other for real leaves,²⁹ in such a way that one might accept the idea of a sort of collective masochism leading to mutual homophagy, the simulation of the leaf being a *provocation* to cannibalism in this kind of totem feast.

Roger Cailliois

8.

Ellison's assertion on *living a death* resonates differently here. Life and death occupy a shared threshold—death names not annihilation but dissolution: the temporary surrender of the individuated self to another form.

9.

The *magical* hold of night can be meticulously orchestrated. Installed in clubs, rave spaces, and concert halls, the fog machine becomes the necessary means for making light *embodied*.

An often-overlooked perspective is that of the lighting technician looking out into the crowd, typically next to the DJ booth or at the opposite end. An unspoken back-to-back, in which the technician learns to read, predict, and adapt to the DJ's habits to enrapture the crowd—and it is precisely in this play that bodies are rendered at different scales of visibility. The technician choreographs the *embodying and disembodying* potential of darkness. Between these two poles, the boundaries of the individual are temporarily suspended. Here, the disappearing figure testifies to the engulfing capacities of fog and darkness by which the self dissolves into the surrounding mass of bodies, perhaps a kind of living death—long appreciated as one of dance music's liberatory potentials.

10.

An oncoming horizon, or being synonymous *to* one

A hurricane of bodies—enmeshed—contorting toward an

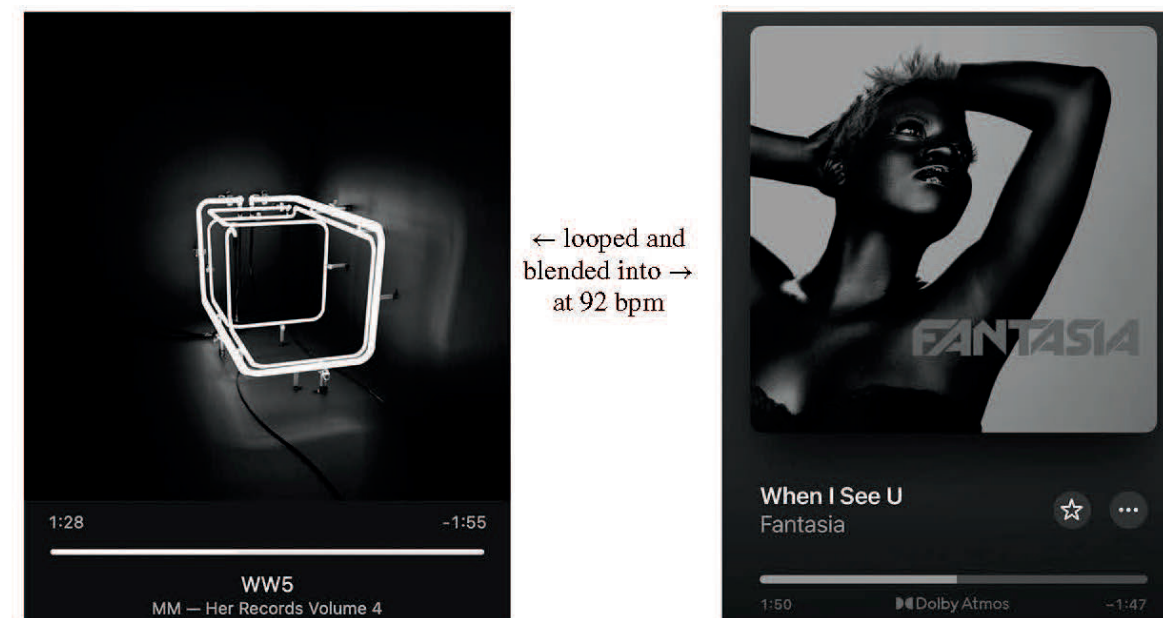
Ungovernance—the floor is beautiful like that because of the violence

Always and almost at the end—Toiling the grounds demonic

Coming in and out of focus—The mass is never still

Its vitality is based on the fact that it must remain mobile

11.



12.

Fred Moten

but give it seizures, animate it, let it quicken, loose its tongues. That's what happens below the history of churches—in fallenness, a club arises. Disorder is our service, our antidote and anteroom, our vestibule without a story. We can't survive intact. We can only survive if we're not intact. Our danger and saving power is an always open door. Our venue is mutual infusion, the holy of holies in the wall, glory in a kind of open chastity, where the explicit body reveals itself demure in disappearance. Unenforced, slid, venereally unnatural and convivial, we claim slur against drill and document. Confirmation of the flesh is queer and evangelical. Our host is the para-site St. Basil's rejected, a sustenance of brown commonality in anecclesiastical reformation. *Wildness* serves *Revolt* with grace and style; it reveals the urge to revel that is devotion's drive. To fuse the relation of devotion, revelry, and revolt is to be welcomed into the temple. The alternative chapel is dispersed as soul. Are you experienced? Have you ever been experienced? Have you ever been welcomed? Well,

13.

Moten's meditation on intactness culminates in a striking proposition: *our venue is mutual infusion*. Mutual infusion evokes entanglement as the condition for collective sociality; liberation cannot be achieved individually but emerges through our imbrication with one another. The collective is a prerequisite for another way of feeling, of inhabiting space.

14.

My time with Denise (Ferreira da Silva) was really important in broadening this critique for me. Particularly in this essay, you should read if you haven't, "Blacklight," but in all her work, she does this move of dismantling and examining value that I think is necessary to study. Like, why not assume that far beyond our physical conditions of existence, at the subatomic level, we are entangled with everything else in the universe? To the point where, and here I'm sort of borrowing her formulation, there is no distinction between everything, everyone, and us, between anything that has happened or what is happening. And that means no sequentiality, and therefore, functions of the state and its legal borders, all that becomes inconsequential.

Denise Ferreira
da Silva &
Yessenia Rojas

This type of thinking, for me, in my practice and for my life, is a really encouraging way to problematize limits. I am not in Palestine, but I am constantly thinking about, challenged, and moved by Palestine, and my friends who are there, and my friends in Lebanon, and my family in Cuba, and people I'll never meet who are suffering in ways I will never be able to understand.

15.

What emerges is a relation based on an ongoing commitment to one another, despite the forces raging to keep us apart. Frantz Fanon gestures toward this ethic in *The Wretched of the Earth* when he writes, "Henceforward, the interests of one will be the interests of all, for in concrete fact everyone will be discovered by the troops, everyone will be massacred—or everyone will be saved." What does it mean to be *saved*? What does salvation look like in this space? Have you ever been saved? Is it even about salvation?

16.

Amid the liberatory capacities of the aforementioned systems, under the united fantasy of the disco ball, clubs increasingly monetize belonging in a world that needs it now more than ever. Those carefully orchestrated atmospheres play into this capitalist calibration: the density of the fog, the choreography of light, the economics of admission, the margins required for profit. The conditions that produce the feeling of collective embodiment are themselves embedded within capitalist logics.

17.

Although I'm increasingly exhausted by the term *utopia*, its etymology proves to be useful here. Sir Thomas More coined the term in 1516, combining the Greek *ou* ("not" or "no") with *topos* ("place"), producing the literal meaning of "no place." This etymology feels generative. Collective embodiment, intensified through darkness and density, is not a destination but a "no place"—an impossible site.

But impossibility is itself a contested condition. The modern world has continually rendered Black life impossible. And Black communities have persistently made worlds within that impossibility. A maddening position. Moten's assertion that *we can't survive intact; we can only survive if we're not intact* names precisely this condition.

Darkness suspends the fantasy of intactness—eviscerates it, freaks it into obsolescence.

18.

I wonder whether these fleeting encounters can bind us together as tightly as static constructs like family history or land ownership can. I wonder whether belonging might emerge through blur rather than fixity—through a perpetual movement away from distinction and toward dissolution.

I am not seeking to establish a theory. I am asking whether this, too, might be a way of living together. Whether, in the temporary loss of ourselves to one another, there exists a kind of freedom where the blur becomes our saving grace.

Maybe Ellison's beautiful girl should go to the club, wake up a fierce *kundle*, or a sickening *shrundle* (or two), and mutate her fear of the dark into a hunger for it.

tour diary 26

hannah baer

Saturday i wake up in a hotel room which looks out on a parking lot where i can see the rental car and some other cars. i look at instagram and text david who is in a different hotel room which is really the dream i think, to be in a hotel and your friend is in the hotel too but in a different room. i make coffee with the nespresso machine in my room and then go downstairs and i get into david's bed and tell him i want to go to powell's. We walk there, stopping in different stores where there are black hoodies, little silver chains, vintage t-shirts, northern european candies. i buy different things for david because it seems like it makes him happy and i know it makes me happy. We go to powell's and i see my book in a tower with other books about gay people and life, like mckenzie's book and legacy russell's but also right next to faggots & their friends catty-corner from audre lorde, not to mention judith butler. I am pretty moved to see my work here and also like, "fuck i can't believe i have to write another book," something about having to compete, and there being so many books, just feeling that drop in the bucket feeling, a strange thing for something so effortful to amount to, a psychic once told me *you are a speck of dust of g-d's creation and your job is to make existence a little better for the other specks of dust* which would have been a good thing to remember in powell's but instead i worry that the next book won't be as good as the first book i already wrote that is in a big stack on a featured display, and bla bla bla, is there a tie between self-absorption and self-defeat.

The store is full of pacific northwestern touristy types, people who all look like they do not feel at home on the earth exactly, wearing hiking clothes and glasses and no makeup or hair product, wide-eyed and timid-seeming in their ergonomically soled shoes and practically layered outfits that permit for a full range of motion and moisture wicking under various hypothetical temperature and humidity conditions. I wasn't paying attention to them because I was thinking about myself.

I did come to the bookstore to get a book. That book is for kiki and is about the apocalypse, I'm not sure they'll like it but I think they might get something out of it. I don't think the book did well, it's not literature, maybe genre-bending in a "didn't pull it off" way, like a textbook. but I hope they like it. I like to get things for them; they're also trying to write about the apocalypse right now. I get the book and then I wander around the psychology section feeling depressed that there are more shelves for Jung than for Freud and no devoted psychoanalysis section despite there being shelves devoted to cognitive therapy and personality disorders and child psychology and and and.

David is also feeling emo in the bookstore, feeling his feelings about his book. "I don't know any of these contemporary poets," he says as we look at the shelf of contemporary poets. "Yes you do," I say, "you know who billy collins is." "No I don't," he says, and I show him a billy collins poem, evidently

about a dog. "Oh g-d," he says. I flip to another page and realized that the entire book of billy collins poems is poems about dogs. Woof. On the way out I say, "wait david you should get the new elizabeth gilbert book," which is a book about addiction and recovery and co-dependence. I buy him the book. It turns out it's a signed copy. The book has a bad title, forgettable, I think it's called all the way to the river and the cover is like the rainbow candy we bought at the fancy candy store we went to before the bookstore. It's weird to buy a book you won't like, but I guess he's doing research on how to write a book that will pay his rent, and someone who worked on that book actually reached out to him about his book because she liked his manuscript and met with him so it seemed auspicious. Then we go to the leather store where david worked as a teenager and we tell the teenager at the counter that david used to work there. The teenager responds as though we have told him it is overcast outside. We look at the sexy clothes and the nipple clamps and the alien cock dildos and then we leave to get ready to meet david's mom.

I waste time getting ready and decide to wear a black suit and black turtleneck because david told me to dress cunt for my talk. We meet Liz at a restaurant called nicholas which is also the name of a drug dealer we know, though we do not remark on this. I ask Liz about David as a child and we talk about books and how she likes to read, and we talk about ryan and how when we cannot get

ahold of david we both call ryan. Liz shows me a picture of david when he was an infant and, when david is in the bathroom, Liz asks if I could encourage david to hang out with his son, and I say no it's sensitive and Liz tells me I really should encourage him.

We drive to our reading and talk about Liz and then see her in the parking lot and watch her walk in a confused way, from our parked car, as we speak about her and their strange relationship and how david feels like she never got to have a life that was about anything besides her kids and he wishes that for her and then I say, "should we go get her," as we watch her wander aimlessly and he says yeah and we go. We walk to the chapel with her and maybe fifty people are there, an audience that doesn't laugh much I notice while david is reading which makes me nervous because i like when the audience laughs.

I am nervous as he reads, and emotional, i can hear the familiar sound of his deep voice, from talking on the phone or sending voice memos often piped through the speakers of my car, highs tinny, bass gravelly, striking sensitivity, mic close to the mouth, i wonder if people can hear him, he is describing experiences of profound pain and the room is in it with him, in the resonance. Then I get up there and do something, not exactly like anything i've done before it feels like, it feels serious, even when it's silly, and the audience complies, even when I have them read a letter out loud, call and response, a love letter, and it's

really long and slow, all of us washed in the chorus of voices, i pull back and let it rip and i think the people in the room have a really big feeling. I love when people have a really big feeling tbh. At the end people ask questions and it's really intense. One girl asks how to find spaces to connect with other people and another girl says she almost killed herself and then a stranger from her class texted her asking why she hadn't come to class and it meant so much to her. david and I try to tag team these questions and I notice, as I remark to him after while we are driving around, that I gave more bounded, "I am here you are there" type answers while he answered more from his direct experience (e.g. with the suicide question) and we kind of tore. People ask about how to write from experience and what is our *weltanschauung* and whether we believe in nonviolence and how we learned about buddhism and there's someone from my summer camp in the audience, and some parents, no kids. The questions after, 1:1, are intense too, a trans masc whisper-cries about how my book affected them and two girls come to talk to me about how they had a consciousness-raising group, and one kid tells me his parents worked at esalen and how lying on the floor reminded him of that place and then i say i'm going to esalen, and he says if I go to ask to meet dorothy, that's his godmother, and this strikes me as an exquisite coincidence. Then david and I wander around with tommy and benny and carmen and they try to get everything ready for the party and we go to the art building and see benny's studio and then tommy leaves

and david and I get hamburgers and drive by his childhood home and he points out all the houses on the block where his family lived and the house where he lived as a teenager and we see a brown teenage boy, dark bowl cut, through the window as we slowly drive by and david jokes what if i went in there and said, “what are you doing in my house?” We drive by david’s high school too, franklin, which is large and beautiful, and then we get back to campus and he shows me the trees where he says he released his grandmother from the earth, or where he tried to transmit something to her when she was dying of cancer, following which he received a call saying she had passed. Then we go to the party.

It’s like fab and also awkward, early in the night, stripper pole downstairs in a giant room, upstairs tightly packed on the balcony sweaty young people self-conscious dancing to jams. micaela aka mimi zima is making fun of the opening DJ for playing 150bpm at 10pm. She plays and david threatens to leave but then we get high and talk to these two very sweet young people corie and archie for a while and carmen and her friend lily, and a guy named michael who asks us if we know chris kraus and trevor paglen and I get the feeling of there being every kind of young person and therein every kind of person, like the way these people in their early 20s with their radical questions and experimental paths ahead of them are hyper-potentiated.

I love the party, it feels free and open and it’s also just people hanging out, nothing in particular,

pretty chill and loose. for some reason I feel very loving towards the space, maybe because I feel like a visitor maybe because i admire benny and it’s like her baby and i’m proud of her, and maybe because, well, I don’t know, “because because” as my dad would have said; it was lovely to be at a party, any party. Awkward—as david reminds me of people we know in nightlife who are generations older and the different feelings that cascade around their presence and age, and us being the weird older people—but tender too, like very sweet. We find a key that’s attached to a wall on a retractable cord and carmen does a bump of 3M off of that and we talk to the last few students and then david and I drive home and talk about what an unusual day it was. I lie in his bed at the hotel room again and we talk about if I will go out again, everyone is apparently going to a club called process.

Our Manias

John Arthur Peetz

Dancing Mania

In the wake of the Black Death, the plague that took the lives of some 50 million people in the Late Middle Ages, the curious phenomenon of mass hysteria spread across Europe. This psychogenic illness possessed the minds and bodies of the people left bereft by the disease, compelling them to dance fervently, collectively, in foamy screams and delirium, until the point of exhaustion and even death. The “dancing mania,” as it was known, was a social epidemic in which propagation occurred at the sight of its sufferers, resulting in circles of the afflicted, hand in hand, abandoning reason in favor of shared ecstatic ravings.

The most documented outbreak was the St. Vitus Dance, taking place in 1518 in Strasbourg. This iteration of the dancing plague is infamous not for its novelty, but because it became the subject of medical research later in the century. Physician, alchemist, and theologian Paracelsus sought to unfetter the mania from enchantment and demonology, situating it instead in the realm of empirical worldly causes. He coined the term chorea—from the Greek “choreia,” meaning dance—and designated three types to explain the various manifestations: *chorea imaginativa* (mania arising from the imagination), *chorea lasciva* (mania arising from sexual desire and struggle of the will), and *chorea naturalis* (mania arising from corporeal crisis).¹ This diagnostic trinity of mania is compelling as we seek to understand what it is that brings us to dance.

Our Mania

Chorea imaginativa finds its roots in passionate excitement wrought by imagination. These are motivations that create collective identifications, where ideology and the practice of psychoanalysis mobilize people to be with one another. For many, the reason for the party is to engage in a collective social project that offers safety and affinity; perhaps containment.

¹ Justus Hecker, *The Black Death and The Dancing Mania*, trans. Benjamin Guy Babington, ed. Henry Morley (London: Cassell & Company, 1888), 79.

The party for the chorea imaginativa serves as a social manifestation of collective intrapsychic processes: a place to be with those who agree upon the sociopolitical reasons that brought them there, i.e. queer solidarity, body fascism, and the crypto-political project of getting fucked up. A place to reestablish “us” versus “them” distinctions; to remake center and periphery or top and bottom dynamics. (Good luck with that).

The (tiresome) discourse around partying as a political project stems from chorea imaginativa. If rules that govern how one should be in space with others can be collectively agreed upon, the devotional adherence to making those rules an indicator of some political horizon or even revolution seems to follow suit. The dumb-dumb utopianism is inevitable and dangerously simplistic. I remember going to a party in college where a bad batch of MDMA temporarily caused a group of people to go blind. I had to walk a friend out as she tried to explain how her loss of sight had opened her heart to our greater affinities as historical actors. She later threw up in her own purse and tactfully zipped it closed. I cannot deny the party offers many opportunities to mobilize affect into something generative, but I can also count on getting cornered in a bathroom, talking about psychoanalysis while watching someone laboriously shave lines of whatever powder has seized the crowd that night.

For those who find themselves with chorea lasciva, the mania of desire, the world of sensation, and its various enhancements bring them together. Here, intoxication and sexual intimacy motivate the collective to reach beyond the limitations of their own flesh and mind to seek out communion or self-mastery. It is a mania inherently tied to consumption (or conversely, abstention), in which the goal is to achieve a rupture in puritanical mores to attain some greater feeling. In a 2013 essay in the *New York Review of Books*, Zadie Smith names this feeling “Joy,” and recounts how her use of first-generation amphetamine ecstasy brought on a “strange admixture of terror, pain, and delight,” as opposed to pleasure.² Smith writes:

² Zadie Smith, “Joy,” *The New York Review of Books*, 10 Jan. 2013, <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2013/01/10/joy/>

It included, in minor form, the great struggle that tends to precede joy—that the experiencing subject has somehow “entered” the emotion and disappeared. I “have” pleasure, it is a feeling I want to experience and own. [...] But on that dance floor I was joy, or some small piece of joy, with all these other hundreds of people who were also part of joy.

For some, the means is intoxicants. For others, sex. Two roads diverging in a bathroom stall. The act of dancing with others is an invitation for intimacy, for fucking, for the affirmation of being desired and consumed by another. These acts give us hope that we can achieve recognition of joy outside of those spaces in an egoless way. The desire to reach this recognition through complete sobriety seeks to attain id satisfaction through conscious means. Others seek to put the “T” in teleology. Many psychonauts and gonzo journalists have written with greater clarity on ego-death and altered states through drugs and sex, but suffice it to say, there is an unavoidable hero’s journey in our times at the party. It all gets very “physician, heal thyself,” as we LARP pharmacists for one another. In these iterations of chorea lasciva, the completion of social freedom is an inherently public and shared autonomy in which we practice a self-effacement centering on voluntary decreation of self.³ *Enter the Void* = consent to the void.

Finally, chorea naturalis, the mania resulting from corporeal conditions or crises, returns us to bodily needs. The body, as it ever was, is a site of contestation, and the body at the party is the theater of our manias. As the profound instrument of the space, the body finds itself an excellent stage here for its reformation and determination. Bodies that have been hacked, perfected, or subdued all find expression through dance among one another. The party serves as a forum where the body is considered by the public. hannah baer insightfully points out that a deleterious effect of the COVID pandemic was the lack of being seen, remarking: “Especially for trans

³ Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, trans. Emma Craufurd (London: Routledge, 2002), 33.

people, whose literal embodiment and presentation are often contested with violence, appearing in public—while being safe, sexualized, and messy and having our beauty reflected to us—is unspeakably vital.”⁴

To be seen and to experiment with being seen is vital to the function. A healthy party ecology involves a diversity of bodies, with both certainty and ambivalence in gender presentation. The economy of desire requires all morphological types and is subject to shift via the nature of its duration. Compliments from a partner or friend on your body, no matter how sincere, feel like SponCon, but acknowledgment or attention from a stranger feels miraculous and dangerous. An acknowledgment of the work of your own bodily self-determination from a place outside of yourself can be a touch of grace in opposition to the gravity of the world. A friend of mine was grinding on the back of some guy at a party, and when a break in the music occurred, he cooed in his ear, “The body keeps the score. [Pause] I don’t know what that means, actually. I just saw it somewhere.”

Manic Panic

Mania as defined and pathologized in the clinic is less interesting to me than it is as a socially and culturally constructed idea; something created idiomatically in relation to others. Take, for example, the cinematic archetype of the “manic pixie dream girl,” identified by film critic Nathan Rabin in a 2007 review of *Elizabethtown*. Rabin defines this character as a “bubbly, shallow cinematic character that exists solely in the fevered imaginations of sensitive writer-directors to teach broodingly soulful young men to embrace life and its infinite mysteries and adventures.”⁵ This mania is not beholden to a Cluster B personality disorder, hostile to solidarity; rather, it plays a role in developing social freedom, in finding oneself in others in the pursuit of common aims.⁶

⁴ hannah baer, “Dance Until the World Ends,” *Artforum* 60, no. 4 (Dec. 2021).

⁵ Nathan Rabin, “The Bataan Death March of Whimsy Case File #1: *Elizabethtown*,” *The A.V. Club*, 25 Jan. 2007.

⁶ Axel Honneth, “Wield the Word. Freedom,” interview by Vicenç Villatoro, CCCB (Centre

The MPDG may have originated as a critique of the lack of interiority given to a cinematic trope. But it could also give us insight into the vitality of the NPCs of our social spaces. Are these characters simply manic because we refuse to parse their sympathies and motivations in accordance with our own? Mania, in this sense, as a cinematic or literary genre, becomes a relational notion of those around us. In this way, it’s not centered on our limitations in understanding others’ freedoms; rather, it allows for the conditions of the possibility of forming and realizing one’s own intentions in solidarity. One person’s bad behavior or angelic interventions are given narrative importance in our own experience of the function. We can be the caretaker, the pusher, the provider, or the Horcrux in someone else’s disastrous crash-out. Their mania is a complementary reflection of our own intentions, which allows us to realize *our mania*.

As Donna Haraway says, we are looking for ways to stay with the Trouble of this age.⁷ The dancing mania of the Middle Ages most certainly developed as a reaction, in part, to the material and social conditions of the European peasants’ lives in the wake of the Black Death; the deprivation, famine, and economic brutalities of the Middle Ages are reasonable factors for the triggering of a mass psychogenic response. We, as well, live in troubled times, trying to collect together the pieces of our shattered world.

At the function, I will single-mindedly pursue discourse/yapping with as many people as can bear the burden of discussion. It’s not the most desirable archetype at a party, as people are shifting in and out of association and cognizance, but that is where I find myself. I have always needed to discuss my ideas with people in order to understand the contours of my own beliefs, to get a feel of their limitations and the frictions between my thoughts and the thoughts of others. It seems that all the manias that bring me to dance share a root in this need for interpersonal relation.

de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona), 26 Jan. 2015, <https://www.cccb.org/en/multimedia/videos/axel-honneth/210427>

⁷ Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 2.

I suspect COVID left many people unprepared to enter into a world of fragmentation, divided by allegiances, political conflict, ecological eschatology, death, and loneliness. However, our shared manias do not actually separate us. They keep us bound in mutual fascination as they direct us toward something like collectivity, joy, or simply being seen in the body you created. Along the way, you may G out, or fuck the pain away, or trap someone in a bathroom stall talking about the Oedipus complex. You might even try to convince a gay guy to do a line of crushed estradiol. Dante thinks the path to Paradise begins in Hell, and then Sartre elaborates, “Hell is other people.”⁸ We are dancing down this path together. Bring a mania, be a maniac.

⁸ Jean-Paul Sartre, *No Exit and Three Other Plays*, trans. Stuart Gilbert (New York: Vintage International, 1989), 45.

School Play

Kay Gabriel

We were on a trail somewhere, nine or ten of us who normally found each other in enclosed, dim places. Ahead and behind us on the trail walked families with small children, seasoned types in expensive gear, school groups from the five boroughs, and white women in their middle 60s. We passed under big waxy rhododendron leaves and over torn chip bags whose speckled silver insides caught our attention.

We were all coming up on a mild psychedelic that gave us a speedy, stimulated walk, and as we passed these other crews of outdoor pleasure-seekers, our conversation crossed lines and mingled briefly with theirs. We overheard some of their names, like Shannon. We imagined they all had more of a claim to the trail than we did. In the context of the trail and the sun and the rhododendron leaves we felt a touch gremlin-like—the female gremlin, the glamourpuss.

Or think of Audrey in *Little Shop of Horrors* when she tells Seymour where she met her bad, bad boyfriend: “The gutter.”

“The gutter?” Seymour responds.

“The gutter,” she emphasizes.

In *Little Shop* it’s supposed to be the name of a bar, the kind of haunt that would attract a sex-driven, fragile glamourpuss like Audrey. No bar would call itself the Gutter, except one destined to be a narrative device in a camp classic and to frame a blonde’s fall from grace.

But that’s what bars do: they narrate. Saying Poor Boys or Marie’s Crisis or Olfe or Bar Le Stud sets expectations the same way genre does. Bar culture is very narrative. Club culture is something else. And warehouse culture? An exercise left to the reader to complete—a ban on graven images.

So we formed an animated and many-bodied gutter up a ridgeline of exposed bedrock on the northern spur of the Appalachians. Our gutter

stretched along lightly elevated paths and down ravine walls and split up the groupuscules of Shannon and women like her. We were talking gaily, feeling good about ourselves, and relishing too much getting in the way on a popular, crowded trail.

When we passed our travelers and said hello, they didn't so much smile as tighten their lips. We noticed sidelong glances, hands extended toward children. We locked eyes with each other and firmed up an intuition: Shannon and co. were experiencing us as gridlock and as trash. A familiar feeling to us, who sometimes endured a night out as standing in one line after another, or who felt herded around from, say, a big room with whooshing sounds to a small and fleshy one. In the big room we knew nobody and in the small one we were meat.

Still we got something out of their less than sympathetic stares, the way we did when we left our enclosed places mid-function for a snack and turned heads from drivers and pedestrians for looking wrong and a little dusty. Or when we then spaced out and left our bodega sandwiches on the counter or did something else airheaded 30 hours in. We got through our younger lives unable to avoid attention and now we thrilled to drive attention to ourselves. Up on the ridge we played our parts as nuisances and minor villains. We loved a show, we loved to see one and we loved to give one too.

Clubs encouraged shows, somebody in our number suggested, Even the worst lit ones. A night out has a narrative but it's not a short story. It's more like a play. Even the most minor interactions get a theatrical quality: advancing plot, developing character, reversing fortunes, teaching lessons.

Ew, somebody else said, Immersive theater.

That's a lot of glamour to extend to shady businesses, said a third.

Several of us worked at those venues, or had in the past, or had recently turned out of necessity from regular attendees into employees, which fed

our slight exhaustion and distaste—why we were up the mountain in the first place.

Not glamour, the first said, Objectively the interactions are theatrical. There's exhibition and display. There's a mood and there's special effects. Sound, lighting, main characters and would-be main characters, supporting characters, and show-stealers. There's a very big chorus.

Maybe it's more like a school play, said a fourth. The cast is everyone you know. Also, you know everybody's business.

Yes, we chorused, It's a school play. The cast is large, impossibly large. You could audition for the leading role and not get it. You could stage manage other flashy people. You could evade the principal's nasty eye. You could really show your nasty stuff. You could play the Nurse or the Fool.

Except there's no audience, the fourth added, Only actors who watch each other.

And the stage, that first theoretician said, The stage is everywhere: the platforms, the bleachers, the tables, the booths, the stalls, the offices, the labs, the library, the kitchen, the nursery, and the other secret places I haven't thought of yet.

We blushed—we liked the idea, which we felt both complimented our weekly habit and read us as deserved. Or was it the acid making us blush? We had paused at the top of the ridgeline. A view spread daintily below us, though some of us were still staring at the insides of the chip bags—a few of which lay around us up here, too.

And some weren't looking at anything—they were grumbling instead. Maybe a minority caucus, who felt that the school play theory of clubbing was too self-serious, too complimentary, still, to the profit-turning places where we gathered out of necessity, too indulgent toward ourselves and our indulgent tendencies.

The problem with the theory was the theorizing itself, one of them said, and argued that we'd ruin a fun thing by thinking about it too hard, and that there wasn't much more to it, really, than people getting fucked up together and having an experience, a social or a kinetic or a musical one, but they were vain New Yorky people and therefore they needed to milk it for meaning and deprive it of its context and turn it into hustle.

But that's why I said a school play, the originator of the idea objected, It's what we make together, it's only useful or meaningful or even comprehensible in context.

A few of us, now tired of the conversation, wandered to a corner of the overlook and rested before the way down. Some retirees came up behind us and sat near us, with weary expressions, snapping photos of each other and of the early-spring canopy coming in beneath our feet.

Where are you kids from, one of them asked. We told her.

Brooklyn, she said, with more surprise than we deserved.

I grew up in Brooklyn, she said, I moved up here when I had kids.

Where in Brooklyn, we asked.

Ridgewood, she said, Hated it. Nothing to do for fun.

Did she go to Gottscheer Hall, we wanted to know.

Oh, God, she said, That place.

What about her kids?

One of them's a schoolteacher, she said, She teaches preschool. My other daughter, well, she's finding her way. Right now she just likes to party.

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