



LET ME

Outside of her studio, one of my mentors from graduate school told me that she didn't consider me a friend. She dragged on a cigarette. She was suspicious of art world relationships, dismayed in being unable to tell anymore what motivated those in her social circle to engage with her. I replied. I spoke alongside some of the experiences she had recounted. But when I spoke, I said 'we,' referring to my partner and I navigating our field together. She chastened me, pointing to my partnership's *a priori* standing in relation to whatever relation she and I might have, and in so doing, she characterized how embedded each teacher, student, colleague, friend, lover in her life had shown themselves to be. 'We' are covered in the residue of other, prior 'we's.

The presumptuousness of 'we,' in part, idealizes a network of power relations in such a way that what is shared is emphasized over what forms of domination underlie this first person plural. If there is any justice in the word, it's that it renders visible the point from which such a claim of selfhood issues. The curtain is pulled back, revealing the man, or the thing, or the thing that Jennifer discovered on a sidewalk, melting. And unlike the wily 'I'—a mode of self-identification that always doubles, fractures, and then disappears from apprehension wherein one speaks about oneself, and is, as evidenced by the position from where one speaks, more than the one that is spoken about—the invisible author-manager is rendered visible through its 'we,' located at least in relation to, well, me. My tacit participation is the price for seeing power.

To whom do I address this request, which is to say: to whom do I submit? Who allows permission for my work to be realized? I've often thought that my mother was the capital F Father in the household of my childhood, so when I say that we supplicate to our fathers, they may be incarnated as sky gods, art historical canons, formal conventions of artistic mediums, compulsory social regulations, roles, deterministic inevitabilities, course descriptions, prejudices, Foucault (ouch), laws, and mothers. I want to work into these problems of control. I want to measure the difficulty in disclosing the powers accreted onto my position, and the perhaps more difficult admission of who I answer to, and for what reasons that dynamic may, on occasion, perform as 'we.'

BE

It's not queer enough to 'be' anymore, everyone's 'becoming,' and the last seven people who told me they are queer are practicing heterosexuals, so this is all going really well. It seems like loss to attempt to function without referents, shortcuts, distractions, repressions, denials, tidy explanations, categorization.... What remains? The apparent nothing is an eschatological lie that incites fears of scarcity and panic, and from behind it charges a pulsing more that holds together all the excesses unrecognized under the Law. There is no outside of power, no escape from the system, but *being* apart from reductions demonstrates that there is more here than was explicated by patriarchal assessment.

It has *been* violent, so much so that pondering underlying symbolic violence may pause in the path of violence that sweeps over bodies and landscapes and flooding waters and relationships and federal governments and their nations and Floridian dance clubs. With considerable tenderness, I understand how times like these precipitate a reinforcement of held notions, known quantities. You hold what you know in the absence of what you've lost. These attachments are fraught, however: that piece you still have becomes your concept upon which your project is constructed, usually dialectically, so that the consequence of content is produced and then commodified for consumption. An alternative formula for another violence, no? Lurking among these stages of production is a nagging compulsion to identify in compliance with those forces who permit you to be known as something. A chain reaction catches 'you' up as a known quantity held onto in times like these.

This spurious enterprise of knowing and being known as capitalist exchange toward the setting of values is not art making. Rather, be with the violence. Take it into you and through you. If you accept the inescapability of this place, then be in it. Learn to be in its most violent forms, in times like these. If I am to be, let me be a wraith. Say the words that destroy the ghost town of your own pretenses.

AN OBJECT THAT

She was never a subject. He was never a subject if he was dark skinned or had sex with other men or failed fabulously at masculinity or was not physically able or lacked class or economic status. They were not a subject if their gender wasn't legible within an imposed binary. The cruel twist of this transcendence to subjecthood even for the portion of men who were granted it was that its promises were bankrupt, and if he was a subject, he was in fact not agential and liberated, but rather subjected, submitting to the interpellating ideology that produced him as, well, him.

She was never a subject, ergo she is an object? At least a hysteric, clattering around in caverns and swamps, "trailing sequins and incense." Some would think her deranged for giving up a project that had been working for her, that is, if they were able to think her. An object, in psychoanalytic terms, can be disappointment, denial, rejection materialized (ouch). But fine. Wittig called for her readers to vacate the category of 'woman,' to be other than even the othered position contrived in contrast to a subject. Not 'she' but 'it.' After 'it.' A quaking position of undoing, unthinking. It was queer momentarily before language coopted, subsumed, and used the term as capital. I find it resists naming. One approaches that quake after they have looked past meanings that occurred easily because they were considered beautiful. Others never trusted easy answers or good looks, maybe because we never had either. We are shadows cast by nothing, casting spells, demonic outliers who see that the Law always broke itself in order to appear to protect its subjects, see the extent to which our minds have been colonized and even subversive forms of labor and production have been capitalized, see ahead of ourselves without obstruction.

Lately I've noticed the bas-relief included in the facades of buildings throughout Chicago's loop, including on the exterior of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago's Maclean Building on Michigan. So often, the figures are proudly nude and of serene countenance. Man, they really have their shit together. Only their fronts are rendered visible, how they wrap around to their buttocks and neck napes and heels obscured by the planes of the buildings they adorn. Elegant, impassive, perhaps cruel in their

disinterest, solipsism objectified. They hold the secret that a gorgon's stare didn't turn her/its/dark purple's antagonists to stone, but rather, starting at the tearful eyes, the gorgon turns her/its/dark purple's self to stone.

SCREAMS

Finally, eventually, dark purple. My mother imagines fire, but it's just repetition around the rim of a hollow. When your underwear has been slid down your legs, bunched and forced into your mouth, this is what builds. Starting at the tearful throat, I've stopped being haunted not only because I am a ghost now, but because I've stopped needing the pain of too-big memories and feelings not fitting into the places where I had been made to live. Doubt, I say. Doubt positivistically, as I asked of James. Doubt the sources of your pain and your fear. Name the violence and deduce the residue of your own entanglements, embeddedness. Break the law. Destroy, she said. The hopes that you'll be treated as a person preoccupy too much of you when an enormous quantity of caring is required in times like these. A care that is not determined by subjecthood, personhood, or the criteria of either. Rather, you and I might be abyssal. I want to quake and hold this place together. Please don't use tricks. Don't leave anything out. Start with the excess, a language of utter undoing, and a curiosity with what you are that you haven't yet been allowed to be. Rest in the radicality of unsanctioned action. The most abhorrent trait of these imbricated systems of control are the policed apertures through which love is seemingly withheld. See ahead of yourselves without obstruction: see not only that you are loved but that you are able to participate in love that can hold your horror and exhaustion and malaise and melancholy. When you risk really making art, you make love. Mostly, annotating the fears of that very possibility is preferable, like easy good looks. But I see that you have something there in your stare and in your utterances that relates to power in a way that undoes, cuts perception.

Now scream.

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