

**LAST YEAR
AT BETTY
AND BOB'S**
An Adventure

Sher Doruff

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Fig. 1. Hieronymus Bosch, *Ship of Fools* (1490–1500)

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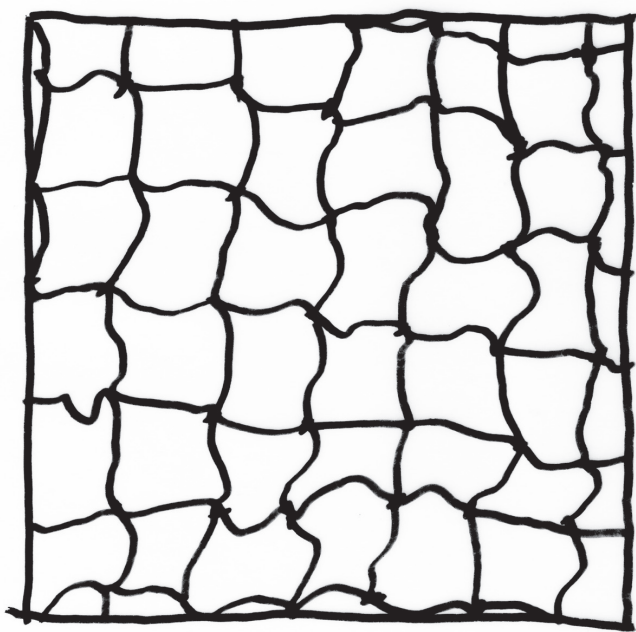
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Much of what comes to pass in the Betty and Bob worldings is inspired by the conversations, intra-actions with students, artists, friends, scholars, and colleagues I know well, in passing, or not at all. In every day and every night dreamy goings-on, worlds flicker with coalescing, with contradiction. The beautiful, unsettled noise around me is fodder for the bettys and bobs to come.



part 1

TAPPING

* * *

Netting

Delicate neon signage snaked a parabolic path over the archway entrance. The fluorescent blue script read: *The Arcades Project*. Once through the Romanesque passageway, the interior sphere of the brick and mortar high-rise was straight out of *Blade Runner*. The cavernous central vestibule had the excavated feeling of a gaping hole. Seventy vertiginous meters overhead, a filthy skylight dribbled patches of bright to the atrium below. Like other vertical shopping complexes of this type, boutiques, service centers, and dining establishments lined the stacked walkways of browsing floors. Unlike other malls, this place was un-littered with potted palms, fast food kiosks, and inflatable kiddie castles. Bob craned his neck to see a riot of drab looming up, down, and sideways.

A gaudy arabesque of rusting iron railing decorated the perimeter of each floor. The only means of transport between floors required scrambling. Huge sways of gritty cargo netting draped from the balustrades of each landing. Rope ladders of various widths dangled between the bannisters. An entrepreneurial climbing center had scattered colorful bolt-on handholds along the large structural pillars and southwest wall for patrons preferring even more precarious ascents and descents. Rappelling from the top floor for a speedy departure was an option.

Gazing upwards from the central commons tended to upset Bob's gastric juices. The pukey sensation only lasted a few seconds. He closed his eyes momentarily to regain his equilibrium.

Shopping or dining in *The Arcades Project* or TAP, as it was called by patrons and critics alike, required guts, patience, agility and, most importantly, commitment. All emphasis was on the "getting there" rather than the "got." The effect of all that hemp netting was unnerving. It stifled the air. Coagulated fluidity.

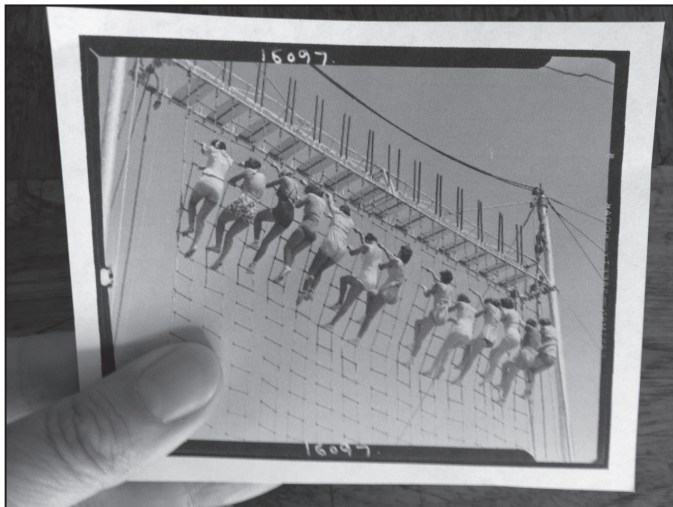
During the 90° "netting" transits, visitors carried personals and purchases on their backs, tied around their waists or in small bags held between their molars. A single industrial elevator, reserved for the transportation of commodities only, purred and clanked as the building's ubiquitous soundtrack. The monotony of its rattle as products moved with little effort from supplier to vendor amidst the stench of human sweat was reminiscent of assembly line reek in ancient Fordist factories. In the four corners of this formidable deco-cum-gothic interior shaft, Bob watched with mantra-like concentration the mechanical transport of heavy boxes and crates of consumables as his fellow bipeds enacted a sardonic politics of verticality.

This was TAP's wacko marketing plan.

Advertised as *the* antidote to online shopping and accelerated lifestyles, "netting" at TAP had become a spectacular symbol of resistance to mindless consumerism, a bio-friendly alternative to heedless consumption. TAP was a flâneur mecca, flaunting perusal and barter over buying and selling; soft voyeurism over hard commerce. The retailers assembled here were necessarily quirky. Mom and pop establishments, antique stores, craft boutiques,

tailoring services, shoe repair shops, and soda fountains found their place among the bespoke app makers, solar cell service centers, and kinky lingerie shops. Franchise establishments were prohibited. Curiosity cabinets had been the rage for the past six months. Entrepreneurial merchants enthusiastically hoofed one-off a.k.a. “unique” items as a balm for a surplus saturated public. Vision enhancing devices such as magnifying lenses, kaleidoscopes, diffractive pince-nez, scalable (1×200) monacles, night vision goggles, were peddled as must-have Idler Implements for the window watcher’s toolbox.

For a tide had turned. Even outside TAP’s fortress exterior, on chic-encrusted high street, value and its objects were in a far from equilibrium state.



The Society of the Spectral

Bob had come to the TAP to lunch with the ladies at Walter's, a fourth-floor slowfood joint that boasted the best pea shoot salads in town. As advertised, heart-pumping exhilaration upon arrival would intensify the epicurean experience. Bob reached the balustrade of the restaurant damp with expectation, his taste buds aroused and ready.

The ladies in question were a feral feminist artist group he'd associated with for decades. They called themselves *The Bettys*. As yet the only male member, he often functioned as querulous pet and scapegoat. He'd long enjoyed the lively irreverent conversation from this cadre of distinctive voices, a mix of generations, ethnic backgrounds, skillsets, and interests. He was demurely proud of his long-term acceptance in their sect.

Bob had survived The Bettys' lesbian separatist phase as a mute cross-dresser, sneaking chameleon-like into women-only festivals and public toilets, fastidiously covering his prominent adam's apple with a turtleneck dickey. The Bettys felt a rush of subversive naughtiness during that time, disobeying their own strident political rulebook by harboring straight male flesh in their perfectly idiomatic, crudely graffitied Volkswagen bus.

Though Bob's performance-artist temperament helped to assuage his acceptance in this particular flock of agitators, his sex betrayed him on numerous occasions. The details of these anecdotes remain undisclosed. Lady Luck on their side, the Bs + Bob soldiered on unscathed through the turbulent waters of second-wave feminist politics.

That was then. As the teeming walls of TAP attest, women had long since taken the reins of attitude between their teeth with the diligence of worker ants. The Bettys' carpe diem tactics seized the opportunity this location offered. Hip to the prog politics of TAP's "un-management," they embraced a cheerleader role in perpetuating the unfathomable by upending the phrase once pejoratively associated with the hunting/gathering habits of the second sex. Having done what they do, a large banner, black capital letters on a commie-red cloth, hangs like an altarpiece from the upper esplanade of the Arcade:

SHOP TIL YOU DROP

The Bettys played their role in setting the ironic yet zealously affirmative tone that had come to exemplify this strange place. Like their Situationist ancestors, they were inclined to display their worldview on posters, graffiti, banners, and street art. Ritually lunching every year on the anniversary of the STYD banner installation, they discussed the pervasive long-term effects of their whimsy; the palpable change in consumer habits, the heartbreaking collateral damage. And each year, as they amassed to celebrate, the getting there proved perilously s-l-o-w-e-r. But that was the thrill of it. The risk. The high stakes of political counterpoint. The manifestation of the mani-

festo. As the years rolled by, these annual displays of self-congratulation always included the scouting of dining options on more easily accessible floors.



They lunched heartily, savoring the fresh vegetables, lubricants, and animated conversation. On this occasion Bob sat between Yellow Betty the younger and White Betty the elder who, dressed in a sweat-drenched pink jogging outfit, exclaimed during the prosecco toast that this was most definitely her final appearance at TAP. "I can't get it up anymore," she roared, while dusting her kale and carrot salad with marinated sesame seeds. Sitting across the table from Bob were Violet, Orange, and Red Betty respectively.

Dangles, Bangles, and Dinner

Leaning across the table in rapt attention, Bob jostled the utensils in his peripersonal space. On his right arm he wore seven layers of brightly colored bakelite bracelets, his recurring fashion statement at Betty happenings. Though a poised and gesturally articulate man, managing this dangly obtrusive presence while dining was a feat he'd yet to master. Absorbed in a Red Betty anecdote about her younger brother's target practice on wild bunnies, he toppled his wine glass. A smooth Pinot Noir with a cranberry aftertaste trickled from the table to the floor.

"Shit. Sorry about that. I, I didn't notice the ... damn, well anyway ..." Bob sopped up the spilled wine with a napkin. "Please go on, you were talking about the gauge of the gun ..." "It's OK Betty Bob, the wine, there's more, ha, Bettys, BBs, hadn't thought of that ... yeah, the gauge of those pellets, I remember this factoid and I have no idea why. 4.4 mm." Red Betty demonstrated the size of the pellet by mapping a tiny space between her thumb and index finger. "On the big side for BBs," she said. "On the tiny side for rabbit shit," Yellow Betty added. "My little bro never killed an animal but he sure did serve out some pain to more than a few. There was this one gray bunny, we called him Harvey coz he would just appear and disappear. Poof! Like that. My brother would draw a bead on

him from behind some bush or other and then Poof! he was gone. I saw this with my own eyes more than once. I told my brother, "Bobby," I said, "this is a sign." I told him the rabbits were sentient beings and he should shoot at beer bottles or coke cans, something with a logo on it but not bunnies and toads. He was never very good at listening to advice when he was ten. A real brat he was then. Anyway ..."

On a roll, RB took a dramatically timed sip from her wine glass and continued. "... one fine spring day, Harvey hopped into the yard and up on to the porch where Bobby was playing checkers with himself. He was unarmed coz his pet Daisy Red Ryder BB Repeater rifle was propped in a corner of the toolshed out back. Harvey hopped right on to his boots and sat there all Buddha-like. It was crazy. My brother didn't move a muscle. Couldn't. The wind stopped ... dead silence ... and then, after maybe two minutes, ten minutes, Poof! as usual, Harvey vanished. Presto! Just like in a magician's trick but for real you know what I mean ...?"

Bob was attentive as he traced a dribble of red wine on the white tablecloth with his pinky. "Wow. Impressive. You sure?" He cynically added, "Was there a puff of smoke?"

Red Betty hesitated a moment, ignoring his incredulity. "We've talked about this many times since, me and Bobby, and we both remember it almost the same. He talks about the weight of the rabbit on his feet. Heavy. I couldn't feel that, the cement-like plop of this rabbit presence, but I looked into Harvey's eyes, riveted. Yeah, riveted to my seat. I swear I had one of those epiphanic moments. You know, like seeing god or all of a sudden understanding something that's not supposed to be understandable. Like love or death or intuition." "Or prehension." White Betty sullenly piped in.

Bob's skepticism was percolating like his grandmother's coffeepot. "Yeah, OK ... and what exactly did it feel like, this, uh, spiritual moment? This revelation?"

Red Betty let out a long breath as her lips flubbered.

"It felt like Nothing escaping."

Bam-ba-lam

Bob oscillated between two tags. At The Bettys' inception he made the obvious choice of the nom de guerre "Black Betty" but it stuck like a lump in his throat. Long since released from the gender ruse, he was a borderline cis male. Handsome, impeccably tailored in peculiarly artful layers of mismatch. His appearance was an ongoing performance. The others casually referred to him as Betty Bob. This twist had a certain twang to it they all thought hilarious, but he felt the accented nick simultaneously marginalized his gender *and* mocked his ancestral past. He took this jibe in relative good humor but the ongoing debate over his inclusion in "The Palette" still irked him. Indeed, black as a color sits outside the chromatic spectrum. It's either All or Nothing, void or unity. An art school graduate, he knew just enough about the additive and subtractive color systems to be disoriented by the contradictory functions of black and white.

Back in the day when The Bettys first initiated their color tags, Bob could have chosen Green as his identifier, a central component in the spectrum, but it required a bold commitment to a political affiliation that had not yet captured his interest. Blue, his favorite color, was appropriated by a Betty now missing in action; disappeared. Her history with the group was vaguely lit though she had in-

spired a percentile bump in global veganism several years back. Something about an earworm jingle she'd penned for an ad campaign. This feat was considered a triumph in an off year for The Bettys. Though they held hope for Blue's return, like a super athlete's numbered jersey, the color was retired in her memory. Cyan and Magenta Betty joined to complete the subtractive diagram. Through the years, numerous interns had dibs on the in-betweens. Turquoise. Pink. Chartreuse. Mauve. Vermillion. Sienna. They all concurred that subjective specificity across the visible spectrum yields plenty, an infinite perceptual divisibility between hues. A recent recruit insisted on breaking The Bettys' own boundaries by going Infrared. Her request was in equal parts annoying and exhilarating, a mutational gesture bursting with a prescience that insured the group's survival in the long term. They were auditioning an Ultraviolet. Perhaps a post-millennial Gen Z would venture into the outer reaches of the electromagnetic spectrum, breaching the constraints of color altogether, going Radio, X-Ray, Micro, Gamma.

Bob, the reluctant Black Betty, had thoroughly researched the secondary historical connotations his name carried – musket, liquor bottle, bullwhip, woman, prostitute, prison wagon – allusions carved into folklore by Lead Belly's chain gang work song. (Jump steady Black Betty bam-ba-lam. Whoa Black Betty bam-ba-lam.) An object of serious anthropological study, this immortalized "Black Betty" was indefinitely writ. No hermeneutic consensus had been struck on her account. Thus, both his formal and informal tags, "Black Betty" and "Betty Bob" unremittingly referred to a troubled *disposif*.

He could work this angle surely. Race. Alterity. Inequality. Bias. Hatred. Enslavement. Life experience had primed him slick for nuanced argument. He had a gift for persuasive oratory when dressed for the occasion. Left to his

own imaginings however, his thoughts usually wandered into abstract, flighty terrain. A sober if dreamy man, Bob preferred plumbing the physics of light and metaphysics of color to unfurling the polemics of decolonial relations between black, brown, red, yellow, and white. The rainbow flag was too literal for his taste. Even as he tended to his philosophical tendencies, there was little escape from the magnetic pull of his fugitive legend. The Bettys urged him to get his priorities in order.

At home, a wall near his bed hosted a material witness of his existential dilemmas. Here hung a hand-painted "Black is Beautiful" poster he'd inherited from his great-grandmother of the extinct Panther tribe. The brilliant simplicity of its message haunted him. Holding its fading, fragile countenance nakedly in his hands had overtaxed his sensations so he'd carefully covered the dog-eared construction paper in two full rolls of kitchen plastic wrap. The unwavering calligraphy of the three adamant words refracted through the bundle of transparent layers, now nearly unreadable, obscured and buried beneath strata of light.

Manifest Epitaph

Following the lively reunion meal The Bettys hugged, high-fived, and mentally prepared for their departure with one minute of huddled silent concentration. This custom had been Blue Betty's initiative, an impulsive semi-terrified gesture concluding their first celebratory TAP meal many years past. The surviving Bettys continued the tradition, partially in Blue's honor, partially because it was a damn good idea to take a deep breath before committing one's body to the task. Team sport had got this ritual right.

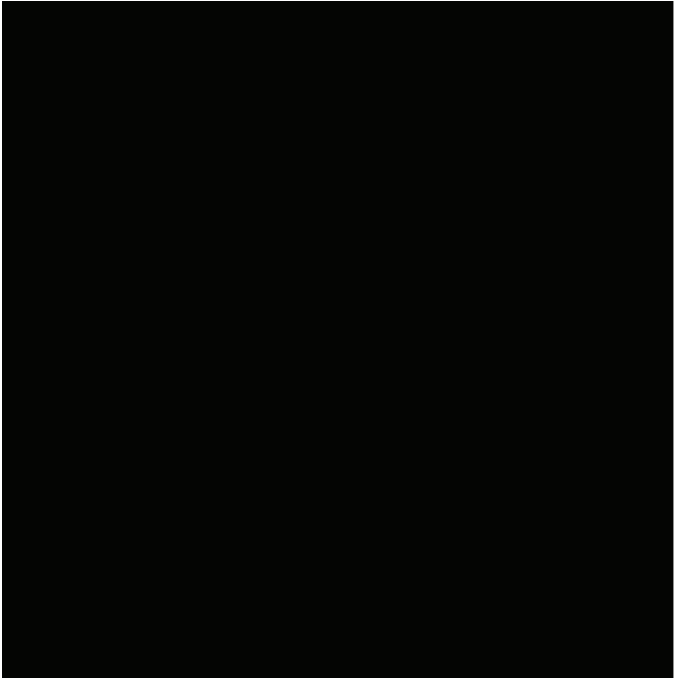
As any seasoned sailor will tell you, rope descents can be deceptively difficult, especially on cargo net constructions that flex on every foot and handhold. Gravity's insistence, an obstacle on the way up, is just as hostile on the way down. Many opt to rappel at TAP as it's a quick descent and the pelvic harness has its unquestionably kinky allure. Single rope journeys require another type of skill. Legs wrapped around a wobbly strand of hemp or a swath of aerial silk, one foot threaded to support the body's ascent and slow its descent, this procedure is popular with firemen, pole dancers, acrobats, and young boys.

Negotiating the knotted, fluctuating instability of the communal, Netting is more dangerous in its unpredict-

ability. It requires a certain spidery, athletic finesse but, more importantly, it demands a versatile response-ability to contingent conditions. The Netting is always otherwise, like the Nasdaq or the weather on K2. Networking techniques are often hard won. Trust functions instrumentally. Red, Violet, Yellow, Orange, Black Betty, and the in-betweens have always preferred this, some would say, more challenging, collaborative route.

In their farewell huddle, OB broke the solemn mood with a hearty, horribly clichéd “You go grrls!” They groaned then whooped in unison as they began their return to ground level, butt-skimming the waist high railing, one leg secured on the safe side, the other dangling the void. Carefully finding toeholds on the unstable rope, they hoisted their aging bodies over the barrier. Affable Red Betty was, as always, wearing her rat mask and infectious pos attitude. In one enthusiastic move, following a bravada wave to Yellow Betty carefully descending to her right, her left foot missed a notch in the netting. Having elected to wear her new stilettos, thinking the heel would hook securely around the hemp thongs like a boot in a stirrup, she had neglected to factor in the slick danger of her stylish footwear’s polished soles.

She slipped one meter, then twenty.



Red Betty's Black/Whiteout

It took approximately 2.02 seconds for Red Betty to break apart on the cold marble floor of TAP's interior vestibule. She dropped silently, her scream resounding internally, throughout the soft tissue of her imperceptibly accelerating body. A lot can happen in 2.02 seconds at an average falling speed of 71 kph/40 mph. The accumulated light and dark of her fifty-two years flashed in stroboscopic flurry.

"Bets, get in here and do the dishes."

"Sis, you seen my BB gun?"

"Mmmm, I love you darling."

"Don't stop ..."

"Happy New Year!"

"Help me!"

"God, no!"

"Congratulations ma'am, it's a ..."

"Harvey!"

Blackout.

Whiteout.

Umwelt Ticks

It's doubtful any pair of eyes saw the tick from 286 to 287 as Red Betty's statistical moment was calculated.

The Arcades Project hosted a real-time line item on the dynamic Umwelt that is the Worldometers homepage. On this stroboscopic seizure-inducing multi-ticker array of faux coordinates and unadulterated portent, TAP held its place as a near static, three-digit antidote to the ruthless advance of advance. Nestled alongside the global update of births and deaths, military expenditure, energy consumed and forests lost, TAP's digital counter recorded the on-site demise of its patrons. Accumulating at a creep, TAP's incrementally slow pace was nonetheless chilling, a reminder of desperate conviction clamoring for air in the throes of an anthropocene death spiral.

The mesmerizing Worldometer beat of environmental and demographic data appeals to news junkies with entangled interests: a longing for homeostasis on the one hand and a desire for an exhilarating far from equilibrium rush on the other. TAP ticker watchers are harder to pigeonhole. Catastrophe addicts, conspiracy theorists, rubberneckers, anti-consumerists, rock climbers, rock stars, queers, artists, Betty groupies, greenies, vegans, economists, socialists, stockbrokers, fifth-wave femi-

nists, neo-futurists, eulogy hobbyists, undercommoners, gamblers – the gamut. TAP's own website hosted "In Memoriam" pages of dropped shoppers, those who risked their lives for an untenable cause, for the transcendental displacement of capitalist hegemony everywhere. Here, martyr videos of the desperate and the doomed were posted alongside photo archives of the accidentally dropped ones, those for whom conviction proved fatal. This digital graveyard proliferated with affirming life images uploaded by family and friends. Many offered eulogistic banalities. "May she rest in peace" was by far the most common and the most "unliked." Red Betty, when once a living, breathing eulogist herself, preferred more creative adages. Her "RIP & DIFFRACT" gif went viral upon her passing.

She'd been an avid Worldometer observer, hypnotized by the insistence of the counter's progress. The tockless tick, tick, tick, tick, tick. She had no idea what exactly to do with this barrage of accumulating data. She'd tweeted "Whoa horsey, slow the fuck down. I wanna smell what remains of the roadkill" to hysterical confusion among her followers at #popupworld. As her color boldly announced, her leftwing leanings literally left her a misplaced contemporary on a planet where the horizontal political spectrum no longer held traction, left and right convolving into a meaningless ideological stalemate. The once well-defined, color-coded political spectrum had dissipated, exemplified by the co-opting of Revolutionary Red by neoliberal political parties. Resistance would require encryption.

Once upon a time as a younger activist, RB's political response to governmental and institutional horrors was straightforward though admittedly ineffective. She collectivized, marched, threw stones (sometimes), resisted arrest (always), spent a day or two in lock-up, then got

bailed. At candlelit rallies she cried together with friends over a slew of injustices: the gross indecency of the distribution of wealth, dominant nation warmongering atrocities, genocide, gender violence, vivisection, and the stubborn persistence of racial hegemony. Micro-political activists cut from the same cloth as Red Betty threw their bodies into the polemic. Resistance was a tactilely felt force. Two days before her fall she'd tweeted: "I feel failure in my fingertips every time I click the submit button on Avaaz petitions" #popupworld.

ShazDada Blog Bits

Arts and Politics journalist ShazDada's remarks on the drop of Red Betty. First published in Dada's blog, Situations.

20 April - On Falling, Failing, and Flying

It must be said today that as a community we are again confronted with expressing an unambiguous feeling of loss in the face of ambiguous success and fulfillment. Deeply saddened by the passing of Red Betty of the notorious art propagandists *The Bettys*, we nonetheless, according to her own wishes, joyfully observe her adventurous life. Red Betty consistently walked the talk, inspiring generations of ethically vibrant artists, activists, theorists, and precarity workers of all stripes, patterns, and colors. We have The Bettys to thank for the anti-neoconsumerist approach to daily shopping and of course the twisted *Shop Til You Drop* slogan among other memorable idioms. "Cleavage Rules" is my personal favorite. When Red Betty dropped to her demise at TAP on 15 April she was, like so many courageous and vigilant predecessors, *cleaving* her artmaking to her life and death.

Until her untimely passing, Red Betty had been an aggressive advocate of the non-monetary exchange of services

and goods. Her strong teeth and broad back had carried more than her body weight in perishables and necessary toiletries over the years. While the others have opted to play and pay with J-coins, she chose for barter only and the ingenious scrutiny of what she referred to as the “really free” market. Living healthfully off conspicuous urban food waste, she’d convened a band of rat-masked activists, daily foraging for ample spoils in a gluttonous city. Well fed and well read, her tireless advocacy of a better way had given her iconic status in an urban field fast approaching 22,000,000 inhabitants. Her drop will surely have an effect on the art of dissidence.

I interviewed Red several years ago when Blue Betty first went missing. She was articulate, funny, concerned, and unassuming, exuding, like her color, a very powerful aura. Perhaps more than any other Betty, she helped to construct the TAP project as a singular actualization of aesthetic resistance. She made a difference. Arguably, the transactional agency of placemaking that occurs in that arcade is of the profoundest sort [[hyperlink to interview](#)]. So it is with sadness and muted celebration that I extend my “RIP & DIFFRACT” to Red Betty, her friends, family, colleagues, comrades, and many admirers.



RIP RGB

The air in their shared warehouse studio was thick with imploding drama. They all felt it but were reluctant to name it. RED. Gone. BLUE missing. GREEN empty. Left without the foundational RGB they were conceptually, scientifically, politically, and philosophically bereft. Voided. Limp.

Thoroughly shaken by Red Betty's sudden departure, the gaping sinkholes in The Bettys' ROYGBV spectrum signaled the imminent collapse of their project. A sense of urgency prevailed in desperate defiance of any tendency to retreat into a sullen depression, a despairing bardo. Collectively they needed to get back in the saddle. Mottled crew that they now were, unable to address the issue of their insolvency directly, they opted instead for a refreshing dip into the chaosmos. They partied. Hard.

Waking Finnegan

“Fuck, I’m messed up. Can’t handle red wine anymore, not to mention whiskey. Neat.” “Partying ain’t what it used to be, but I still gotta say that being touched by the dark waters of a single malt feels real good right now.” “Crank up that tune sweetie, I adore Sonic Youth. Perfect music for an imperfect moment.” “Don’t ya miss her ... Red, I mean? Fuck, I do. She had the best style of us all. Knew how to wear stilettos like a catwalker.” “Uuhh, well, hmmm, maybe not ... you know ... anyway, there’s no justice in this goddamn world.” “You got a smoke on you?” “Nope.” “... crudités?” “Justice to come baby, a justice to come.” “... and then this skinny dude with a plastic pen protector in his pocket, no joke, started writing equations on the kitchen tile and ...” “Did you see the racist tweet that went viral yesterday?” “Nope, I’m off Twitter.” “Speaking of rats, have there been any more updates on that woman with the neon scratch? Her name is Betty right, or Bette or Beet, anyway, friggin’ weird that one.” “But hey, everybody, y’all listen up. Personally, and maybe this is just me but (clears throat) I don’t think we oughta go to TAP for awhile. We should lay low, you know what I mean? Reconsider our assertions.” “Fuck no, that’s the worst thing we could do for Red, abandon her project like scared little girls.” “We gotta go back tomorrow in style. Walk through the archway with quiet dignity. Climb that

Netting like ants up a vine." "Im-me-di-ate!" "Hey, let's barter her ratty mask for twenty vegan dinners for the homeless at Slushy's. She'd like that." "Sounds patronizing to me." "Yeah, me too." "Fuck this shit." "Let's not enter a polemical pit tonight folks. OK? It's time to get wasted on fond memories. Celebrate Red's leaving, cry over Red lost. It's not, I repeat NOT, the moment for politically correct fisticuffs. We got plenty of time for that tomorrow." "Okidoki, White is right as always bam ba lam." "Say that again without irony Betty Bob, pleeeze, for Red's sake ..." "Okidoki, White is right as always bam-ba-lam."

Baconing

Impulsively, amidst the after-party chaos of their eulogistic bash, the surviving Bettys began redesigning their studio space after Francis Bacon's catastrophe-style atelier. Creating a material shitstorm felt like the right thing to do. There was no discussion. This was a moment when years of embattled collective negotiation paid dividends in collective intuition. Spontaneously fastidious, they began fashioning their workspace from hoarder photos of garbage heap rooms. "Shock inertia before it grabs a stranglehold," YB kept muttering.

Following the dead painter's lead, they played with a cacophony of perceptual triggers and dissociation mechanisms. This technique would surely horse-jump them towards an indeterminate creative intensity, help to alleviate their alarming sense of loss and despair, the affective noise of hyper-stimulated precarity. Orange Betty pointed out that wading through mountains of accumulated debris could backfire on their delicate emotional states but her listless argument was overruled.

They went wild. Playing in a vibrational field of non-attachment, flush with the simultaneity of destruction and creation, they wrestled tumult to a fever pitch. "Imme-di-ate!" White Betty chanted. "Diagram goddamn

it!" "Bacon it!" "Or Vega-bacon it!" A tactical pro by now at whipping vitality into motion, WB enthusiastically shouted motivational aphorisms through a hand rolled cardboard megaphone. "Infinite entanglement!" she shouted as she slipped on a slime heap of newsprint, vinyl shards, and coffee grounds majestically laid out in a logarithmic spiral by VB. Her hipbone flinched in surprise as she hit the concrete floor. Blacks, blues, and yellows colonized her haunches.

Soon they were knee-deep in debris and images: images of images, junk, tools, objets trouvés, boxes, and assorted detritus. The central convivial table in the 200 sq.m. warehouse loft was strewn with books, magazines, poster scraps, tools (markers, pens, brushes, tablets, tweezers, screwdrivers, spray paint cans, tape, glue, arduino boards, raspberry pis, wires, transistors, alligator clips) potato chips, donut holes, kale crackers, and displaced dust. Every bare centimeter in the high-ceilinged drafty workspace was soon covered with things and representations of things. Articulated gibberish. One had to wade through an assault on the senses to carve out a still point in the mess. "Do you feel satisfied yet?" CB tentatively whispered to VB as they watched Infrared Betty swipe snow angels in a pile of shredded Cosmology magazine pages mingled with copious clippings from Anne Carson's *Autobiography of Red* and Maggie Nelson's *Bluets*. Forging a butterfly pattern in a riot of spectral effervescence technically unavailable to human perception, this mélange of language and Hubble photos, of chaosmos and chiasmus, rendered an invisible universe carnivalesque, a Fellini cosmos in a Wes Anderson palette. IRB sang "Come fly with me through *The Verse*, through *The Verse*" to no one in particular.

Attuned to a sighing collective exhaustion, The Bettys caught their breath as they surveyed the scene. The words

“Impressive” and “OMG” filled thought bubbles floating over the silence. Even by their own rigorous standards, they’d outdone themselves. For a kairotic moment they felt relieved, marginally content. And then, as if on cue, an unmistakable twinge, an undeniable tendency towards conceptual catharsis infected the semblance of closure. Slowly, they reassembled around the kitchen table. Philosophical conversation usually worked on their metabolisms like a psychedelic drug. “Let’s talk Color girls,” White Betty slurred as she massaged the ache in her hip. “How bout we sleep on it first,” whined MB.

Dic Cur Hiccup

Long a Betty tradition, close reading sessions on topics of shared interest were as comforting as food prepared together. They called these conversations *dic cur hiccup* after Leibniz's advice (*dic cur hic*) to say what's up, what's happening now. Fragments of feminist, queer, and decolonial theory convolved with continental philosophies and approaches to artistic practice. Often, without formally beginning, disparate banter slowly dribbled into a kind of coherence. Provocations and questions littered with anecdotes and nonsensical tangents settled into focused concentration.

The morning after Red's bash, profuse amounts of coffee and green tea were consumed from stained jelly jars as they tried to rectify their hang-overs with caffeine. At the crack of dawn teetotaler Ochre Betty pulled Wittgenstein's *Remarks on Colour* from the library rubble. She printed out Part I pages 2–14 for the group's perusal. Amidst the cacophonous distraction of their "Baconing," The Bettys struggled with the text at hand. One hour into the discussion Ludwig's proposition 52 was generating animated argument:

52. White as a colour of substances (in the sense in which we say snow is white) is lighter than any other substance-colour; black darker.

Here colour is a darkening, and if all such is removed from the substance, white remains, and for this reason we can call it "colourless".

Cyan Betty: What bullshit is this? What are we even talking about when we talk about substances? And a substance color? Passé dogdoo ...

Violet Betty: Not so fast CB, there's more to this. He's challenging Newton's optics for one.

Turquoise Betty: I dunno.

Brown Betty: Do you think he means materiality? You know, a coming to matter? And anyway ... only white remains ... I'm not buying that.

Yellow Betty: Light needs matter to be seen, right?

White Betty: Personally, I don't get it either. Is he saying that white is colorless in uhh, essence? Or that essence is singularly colorless? I don't know how to think this and I have the most at stake here since, well, you know, I am the superject White Betty ... but then, aah, hmm, maybe this can help in terms of rethinking identity politics? I'm kinda confused Or is he saying all substance is white with variable degrees of darkening? That I could live with. Or ... no ... shit ... it's still confusing, objectionable.

Magenta Betty: Well, it's easier to grasp if we think about uhm, appearances, right, the experience of color? I don't know, I never studied philosophy, but anyway, a rose is a rose is a rose is sometimes red. Snow, when a dog hasn't pissed on it looks white. Isn't that what he means?

Black Betty: Can I simply comment here that Ludwig is referencing Goethe's theory of lightness and darkness and the perception of color.

Orange Betty: Fine. But there's more going on here. And – just asking for some clarity – are we talkin' primary, secondary, tertiary RYB colors like the painters some of us used to be or have we entirely marched over to the RGB camp of the media wonks or the CMY of you folks into print? I swear I cannot keep these systems straight in my head though I know I'm always in the back seat, you know, being orange.

Yellow Betty: Hey OB, you've always been paranoid. Think of it this way, if you're in RYB-land your sittin' in Blue's sidecar. I'm riding behind you with Purple Violet over there. Red was always already fucked in this world coz she had no Green to hold her hand.

Violet Betty: (clearing throat) We're not talking about pigments OB. We're talking about light and photons and RGB and fucking CMY.

White Betty: Hang on darlings. Seems to me we're not talking science. Let's get back to the text. That's our task here after all.

Turquoise Betty: Yeah ladies, can we stop making this about us please!

Brown Betty: (head dangling) I'm sorry, can we deal with this at another session? I can't think straight today.

Vermillion Betty: (chuckles) I can think queer today.

Magenta Betty: Oh snap!

White Betty: OK, obviously this isn't the right moment for serious discussion. Let's skip that bit for now. One last try. (rifling through the book) I'm randomly pointing to a page ... (finger drops on paragraph) Bingo. (reading aloud):

68. When we're asked "What do the words 'red', 'blue', 'black', 'white' mean?" we can, of course, immediately point to things which have these colours, — but our ability to explain the meanings of these words goes no further! For the rest, we have either no idea at all of their use, or a very rough and to some extent false one.

White Betty: We can all agree with that, right?

Brown Betty: (murmuring) In principle I want to question anything he says.

White Betty: But this goes straight to the heart of our problematics. Our tags, our (coughs) I know this is contentious but ... our post-identity politics. The work we make. No?

Vermillion Betty: In principle I want to scream.

Violet Betty: The limits of language. That's the point, right? And actually, I think that's a cool concept. You know, what we can't say. What we can't know.

Orange Betty: But ...

Black Betty: (excited) But ... sorry ... I'm just riffing ... backing up ... if color is a darkening like he says in 52 then he's playing his language games in the subtractive field. White is originating. He's taking a side, flipped to a specific color model, to a belief system.

Yellow Betty: Huh?

Black Betty: It's all predicated on the experience of color through a western prism. That's just too goddamn shallow. Take the Oglala Sioux for instance. Black Elk saw white, sorrel, black, and buckskin horses dancing in the

sky led by great bay horse. The wild dancing brought forth all the colors of the earth.

Cyan Betty: Beware of cultural misappropriation. Mr. BB.

Magenta Betty: (sifting through loose images on the table) Hey, check this out, a photo of lanky Ronald Reagan ripped in half. It's hilarious. "Where's the rest of me?" "Where's the rest of me?"

Brown Betty: (undistracted) Betty Bob has a point. Can you say more about this?

Black Betty: You know, this theory I'm working on about different systems of color, additive and subtractive. Not to mention the RYB model I grew up with mixing tempera paint in little pots. But there's so much more to tell. Like the Navaho, for instance, believe that color precedes light. What are we gonna do with that?

Cyan Betty: Look BB, I get the significance of this but you're always soooo opaque.

Black Betty: Yes, yes that's part of it you see ...

Brown Betty: I'll look for a blackboard and chalk. Must be something around here ... you could draw it ...

Violet Betty: (glaring at Black Betty) Can we not talk about your pet project now and focus on the text please.

Black Betty: (demurring) Yeah OK, sorry ... it's just ...

White Betty: (sighing) maybe later Betty Bob. We're interested.

Orange Betty: But hey, with Ludwig, are we really talking language games here or are we enmeshed in something other? I always think analytic perspectives carve out suffocating systems. I just, uhh, I just instinctively prefer the process thinkers, not the logicians.

Cyan Betty: And for the record, sorry I got to interject, can we also talk about Pink or Beige or Gray for fuck's sake? Don't y'all get sick of the primaries, secondaries, and complementaries after awhile?

Brown Betty: You got that right.

Yellow Betty: I'm always caught in a limbo between models. Not to take this personally you understand, sorry.

Mauve Betty: (screaming from the kitchen) Oh my god, you gotta see this!

And so it went...

As a coda to the loud, heated, vega-baconed discussion, Violet Betty recited a passage from Derek Jarman's *Chroma* to sober the escalating din:

Red is a moment in time. Blue constant. Red is quickly spent. An explosion of intensity. It hums itself. Disappears like fiery sparks into the gathering shadow.

"Voilà," she concluded.

Whoa Black Bessie

A black man and a Betty, Bob was often off-balance. He took his politics and his philosophy seriously as did the other Bs, but he was an exception to their rule in oh so many ways.

Both—neither.

And ... and ...

He'd bonded with Red and missed her. She'd been his link to collaboration, to mixing it up with others. He felt the scissor cut of the sever, the cleave, now that she was dust in the wind. He was on his own, no matter how crazy comfortable the Betty gatherings felt.

"I have this funny feeling," Bob whispered to IRB. He'd fallen hard for them since they'd joined the group. It wasn't their toned bod (he told himself) or their enthusiasm for all things cosmopolitical that grabbed him. "I've got a sinking feeling my concerns ... my art ... is wanking bullshit like Yellow always says." IRB nodded. Bob couldn't tell if it was a nod of agreement with his doubts or an empathetic gesture. He suspected his infatuation with IRB might have something to do with their uncanny likeness to his boyhood heroine, Bessie Coleman. But he might be projecting. The remembered warmth of his grandmother's stories flooded his dreaming with the thrill of adventure,



the twinkle of starlight in a pitchblack sky, the waning blue of the vanishing point on an ocean's horizon. This was the stuff of his future perfects, his will have beens.

Next to the cellophaned Panther poster on his bedroom wall he'd pinned up several photos of the aviator that he'd cut from a tattered second hand book he'd found in a Strand dustpile. His grandmother had told him bedtime stories of Bessie's barnstorming exploits, her bravery, her remarkable resistance to racial profiling. "She was the first woman of African-American descent to earn an aviation pilot's license, Bobby. She had to go all the way to Paris France to do it coz there was no way she was getting into a pilot's school in the US of A with two strikes against her, that being black and female as she was." "Did

she fly around the world Grandma?" he remembered asking. "No Bobby, she died before that was possible. You're maybe thinking of Amelia, but she didn't make it either. Anyway, Bessie died in a senseless way, falling from an old plane she'd bought herself, a tuna fish can with wings. A real aerial acrobat she was. A daredevil flying loop-de-loops. Anyway, she didn't have her seatbelt on when her dodgy plane went belly up mid-air, a wrench in the gear-box they said. Sounds like a bad joke but that's the truth of it. She dropped 2000 feet they say."

As a kid, Bob would often dream of Bessie falling through the Floridian air. She always wafted like a skydiver or an angel, seeing things through her goggles no one else had seen, feeling things, remembering things, as if she had all the time in the world to float on a future. This dream always included a bright yellow single propeller plane trailing a metallic banner, fluttering in the sky like a giant water moccasin waving through prairie grass.

After the revolution, more of the same

part 2

MASHING

* * *

A colour is eternal. It haunts time, like a spirit. It comes and goes. But where it comes, it is the same colour. It neither survives nor does it live. It appears when it is wanted.

– A.N. Whitehead, *Science in the Modern World*

Although a monster Geryon could be charming in company.

– Anne Carson, *Autobiography of Red*

Blue on Red

Email to self, email to self!

I.e., best way to have a true blue conversation and store it indefinitely. I have no fuckin' clue who I think I'm addressing, probably my demons. In any case, it feels good to ramble with words rather than hauling my big ass from point to point to connect life dots.

Logged on to a library computer as I tend to do on our monthly sweep for vermin. Bob and I always bring the fellows we catch here to the Uni-3 lab coz we feel they've consumed a formidable education. Our little joke that generally makes the whitecoats cheerily add a few units to our wages.

Anyway, I found out that Red fell, found out she passed. Saw it on *Buzzfeed* of all places. Checked the *NYT* obit and sure enough The Bettys had a nice bit in there that linked to ShazDada's eulogy. The official family entry was a big nothin' list of survivors. Missed the point of her. The Bs retired her color, just like they did for me.

Crap, this is unexpected. Or maybe not. Red was reckless for sure. As reckless as I am stupid. I was sure she'd only notched up five of her nine lives though. Can't believe I actually fondled that red cape last week in a nostalgic fit

for the good ole days. She lent it to me for a wild party way back when. Said it would be queer for me to dress in her color, abandon my quiet blue self for a moment of fiery presence. I remember wondering if I'd actually come off as a fuckin' flyin' purple people eater when our colors merged? Decided that would be OK if it happened but it didn't really.

I was red but fake. Synthetic red, phony red. I remember sitting in a corner observing the swingers. They reveled in my lurking participation. Brought me wine and olives in lieu of other succulents. Even as they tried to seduce me into their artiness I insisted on – how did Adrian Piper say it? – something about isolating consciousness from sensory input, to the aversion of the objective gaze. But I didn't quite manage like Piper did that night at Max's. I also never confessed to Red that I was an awkward coward even protected by super-shero duds. Red for a day. Blue, blue, sad blue always otherwise.

Just watched the *YouTube* video of Sheb Wooley singin' that song I danced to as a little kid. The one that made me wanna be in a rock and roll band when I grew up. Cutesy monster that one. Probably responsible for a generation of baby boomers having rock and roll wet dreams Shit, I hate the digressions I inevitably take sitting at this f***ing portal. My mind was on Red, my heart was with Red and I end up tapping my boot to purple prose. Been accused of that by the way, when I was a student at Uni-5. Failed creative writing twice. Excessive drivel production they told me.

Find another field.

I did.

Advertising, ha.

Cut that drivel to the bone.

Back to Red B. I remember meeting her for the first time at FOOD. We were both into GM-C's holey architecture and Carol's cooking. Red was vegetarian of course, later vegan. I was into Matta-Bones dinners. I made a chicken leg necklace from one such occasion. We argued about that and I think we had a kind of love-hate relationship. I wish I still carried that bangle around in my safeguard box. But yeah, I admired her like hell. Marxist, feminist rabble-rouser that she was. We had a knockdown once while forking chunky soup over Betty Friedan's refusal to let the lezzies in. Betty F was squarish but effective I thought. Red dissed and hissed her homophobic views. Red was into Angela. I was dancing in the middle of the road.

I loved the way Red laughed. She'd let out a howl when something touched her unexpectedly. An unadulterated whoop. Yeah, she was ballsy and in-your-face but had a bite like a kitty after two glasses of cheap wine and potato stew. She wore her dark hair long and pulled back with a rubber band so she had unobstructed sightlines at all times (and ugly split ends I might add). I remember her big feet, her size 11 shoe. That memory struck me when I read she slipped from the TAP netting. Seems so unlikely such a big foot would lose its grip. But there you go. If ShazDada would interview me again and ask what I recall most vividly about Red I'd have to say Well, I'd have to recount all my sexy dreams that involved reds rolling around on white sheets with blues and the purple haze that spewed from that damp melting like an aura, like a goddamn bird on the wing. And believe me, there is no allusion in any way to political compromise here. This is pure desire goin' on. I admit it's an unorthodox way of eulogizing a friend but those wet dreams have stayed with me They speak to Red's energy, her sexual playfulness (and she was hot).

Now I also gotta state here that she was a bona fide activist with a sometimes debilitating reticence to join whatever bandwagon. I remember the anguished story she recounted at a Betty party. I could probably tell this to Shaz as RB told it. She was carrying a cherry bomb in a mob (née multitude née resistance fighters) set to burn a campus ROTC building in an agitated era. After twenty minutes of escalating "Fuck the Pigs" chanting to get the revolutionary juices boiling, the air in her activist balloon burst and she split the scene. Walking off the campus she ex-cor-i-a-ted herself. Was she a coward? Why did she crave a more articulate political discourse than "Fuck the Pigs" for carrying out violent action? She respected the Panthers' anti-cop refrain but doubted whether the jargon translated to anti-war protest. It did, it didn't. I think I will, I think I won't. I think I will I think I won't. She had a tendency to overthink everything, see what I mean. She'd been a committed pacifist. Studied the Quakers, Gandhi, MLK. She was devastated by the escalation of the war and felt a need to explore other approaches. Even considered procuring a gun. She said the army building burned without her contribution that day. Her sparks weren't required. Honestly, I think she had the chops to survive any dystopian scenario but then again, she didn't did she?

Bluesy Bob is off in the stacks. I can hear him grunting. He brought his volcanic sex toy along this time. His darling Vesuvius, his Mount Saint Helen's. Gross I say, but I can't deny him his holey perversity as long as it don't hurt anybody.

The library gigs are always the best evening of our monthly trappings meaning we don't do much rat catching work and rather enjoy the peaceful surroundings of the books and the comfy chairs and of course the network link to other worlds. Burroughs used to talk about portals

of entry in art works. Blue Bob's got his own portal goin' on. I got mine. This smudgy public keyboard with every kind of crumb in the key cracks, and the dark surface of its dated low-res monitor are all I need to transport from complicated bare life to a complex pixelated reality. The librarians, Mrs. Beverly and Mr. T. Zhang, are counting sheep at home under their down duvets in these early hours. They aren't around to kindly suggest we evacuate these public premises.

Took a poop break. I like the toilets here, the marble floors. Feeling much better now.

Where was I? Oh yeah ...

Each month when I sit down at the computer screen I like to research a prominent Betty among other necessities. Had a go already at quite a few.

Bette Davis,
Betty Shabazz,
Betty Friedan (check),
Betty White,
Betty Ford,
Betty Hill,
Betty Crocker,
Betty Danko,
Betty Saar (check),
Betty Catroux,
Betty Grable,
Betty Berzon,
Betty Hawley Kelso,
Bettie Page,
Betty Everett,
Betty Cooper,
Betty Boop (check>black esther jones or white helen kane?),
Betty Ting,
Betty Rubble,

Aunt Betty (the ubiquitous),
Betty Blue.

True, Blue Betty the rat catcher, that's me, will never have a Wikipedia page. I'll get my anonymous tick on the Worldometer when I pass. Maybe. If I have ID on me. But for now I've got no place to store a paper archive or for that matter a digital archive though I lifted a thumb drive for that purpose should I ever find a port. And then there's my tumblr account. So I try to keep the info in my head for some purpose sometime. Memorize and recite the litany of namesakes. All of 'em are mostly very old or long dead. Gotta wonder if the name will have a comeback or if it's hopelessly antiquarian?

Anyway, today I stumbled on Betty Parsons. Never heard of her before. A gallerist and painter. Found this snip from a 1977 interview:

INTERVIEWER: Do you feel the feminist movement should deal with the problems of getting along with men, and not be separate.

PARSONS: I think the whole point of life, as dear old Shakespeare said, "Their going hence, even as their coming hither: Ripeness is all."

INTERVIEWER: Ripeness?

PARSONS: To be integrated, to be ripe, to go on. We're all part of everything.

Ripeness, eh? Will ponder that as I pinch my luxuriant love handles. Seems like she liked Spaniels. Probably purebred as she had money. Now our Billy, he's no hot-de-trot pedigree but he's a champ most of the time. On library nights we keep him in the toilet area so he doesn't pick up the scent of *Rattus norvegicus*. If we do catch any here we want 'em, as I said, alive, for their exchange value at the

lab. The Infectious Disease unit pays ten a head. The rats are never pathogen free, SPF as the whitecoats call it, but these guys tend to harbor fewer parasites than the street and subway dudes. But anyway, lookin' into Betty Parsons made me think of Betye Saar again. She was younger than Betty P but I doubt they knew each other. Doubt Betty would have been interested in showing Betye, know what I mean. AbEx'ers had their own thing going in those days. Relational color, shape, non-objecthood. A complicated subject-object sublimity. Says here that Betty P supported Agnes Martin besides all the name-brand male painters of the day. Betye, rather, loves the emotional histories of second hand objects. I get that, understand the urge and wish I could lug around all the stuff I'd like to. I touch, fondle, and move on. I'm what they call, well what some folks call, *haptic*. Here's a nice bit from Betye:

I am a mixed media collage, assemblage, and installation artist. The concepts of passage, crossroads, death, and rebirth have been underlying elements in much of my work. My art continues to move in a creative spiral. Much of my current work is about issues of race and gender; a return to my concerns of 1972 and *The Liberation of Aunt Jemima*. Mystery and beauty remain constant forces behind my creative energy. This is the energy that spins the spiral. — Betye Saar

Mystery, beauty, spirals ... I can never bring myself to admit those are my touchstone as well. Seems ridiculously beyond the scope of a blue PC such as myself.

"Alas poor Yorick of infinite jest.

How now, a ratty rat!"

"But sir what's in a name at best"

"A rose is a rose is a brat."

... Betye ... just read this ... her granddaughter interviewed her about lightness, darkness, race, and death.

SA: Your new *Black White* show [...] is about the dichotomy of lightness and darkness and the racial undertones [*sic*] language that pertains to color. Does the concept of lightness and darkness in death relate to that?

BS: In Western culture, death is depicted as black. But in African culture, death is represented with the color white. Bones are white.

Now this touches on something I think about a lot these days. I wonder if Betty Bob knows her, Betye? Probably. If I recall it well, he was just beginning to develop his own color theory based on some kind of new calculus that exploded additive and subtractive color dynamics. I've always been dismal at physics so I could never follow his logics. He was a bit too smart for me and too well dressed though he said he loved blue. But I have no say in The Bettys any more. I abandoned them. I'm in perpetual hiding even though I'm totally exposed on the streets. The **PC** cloak grants me invisibility. No one looks at me. Ever. Kinda like Piper's enforced invisibility. But different.

[Went to check on Bob Blue. He's in full slumber mode, fetal position, dick in hand.]

So I'm still at the terminal. Using the pre-dawn hours to drift away. every now and then I catch my own jowly reflection and I gasp a little. Who's that sad sack? I mean, that old rumpled broad there, caught in the gap between a Wikipedia page and the flat infinity of the monitor? The blue overcoat, **PC** standard issue, hangs heavy on my white white bones these days. (Maybe it's the snack stash in the pockets, maybe the tiny pieces of polished glass I can't seem to throw away that weigh me down, bend my shoulders in a sad arc of drudging onward til the end. Maybe it's these damn heavy boots. (Aside to self – that acronym for Pest Control we gotta wear is a real kicker somebody didn't see comin').

I don't hear Bob snoring any more. Probably still crumpled in Dewey D aisles 610 thru 615. 'Bout time Billy's fed and it's his turn. My fingers are sore from all this typing. I'm gonna get callouses on the tips and then I can play the uke again without pain. Whoopee! If I had a uke.

Footnote

Monster Mash

Well I saw the thing comin' out of the sky
It had the one long horn, one big eye
I commenced to shakin' and I said "ooh-eee"
It looks like a purple people eater to me

It was a one eyed, one horned, flyin' purple people eater
One eyed, one horned, flyin' purple people eater
A one eyed, one horned, flyin' purple people eater
Sure looks strange to me

Well he came down to earth and he lit in a tree
I said Mr. Purple People Eater, don't eat me
I heard him say in a voice so gruff
I wouldn't eat you cuz you're so tough

– Sheb Wooley, *Flyin Purple People Eater* (1958)

Red on Blue

Transcript of an early ShazDada radio interview with Red Betty.

SD: Hey there, Red, thanks for chatting with me today. It's been a minute. Nice cape grllll! So, what's up?

RB: Nice to be here Shaz. [pause] Yeah, I'm good. Real good. Been working out, muscling up my quads, hamstrings, and biceps so I can climb small mountains and cargo netting without complaint. I practice every other day on the climbing wall they're building over at TAP. It's coming along. All these colorful little pimples on the gray face of those dirty walls. When I practice I like to put a copy of *Das Kapital* in my backpack for the added weight of the ascent. I don't read German so it's entirely symbolic and well, genealogical I like to think.

SD: Are you a Marxist?

RB: No. Well, not really. M and E's brand of capitalism isn't relevant nowadays to my mind but I remain reverential. You gotta admit they had foresight and some useful definitions. There are a number of more pertinent books I refer to but they don't pack the same emblematic punch if you know what I mean.

SD: Actually, I'm not at all schooled in Marx so I don't really know what you mean. Can you be more specific?

RB: Oh my, we're gonna get into this alternative economies stuff right off the bat, are we? I was hoping we'd talk about music or food or film or shoes. You know, sometimes I get so weary of revolution. I'm getting older ...

SD: Aren't we all.

RB: ... and hoisting my bod up a vertical plane takes a lot out of me. Sure it's exhilarating. Scary. When I reach whatever pinnacle I realize my own limit. The surface, the material, the space I'm negotiating has no limit, it's a wealth of infinities. And yeah, ok, so is my body but you know, when it's exhausted it's

SD: Exhausted. Point taken. Let's talk about shoes for a minute then. I take it those aren't authentic Christian Louboutin's you're wearing. Or are they? Fess up. [both laugh]

RB: OK, good, now we're on to something. You know, the first time I ever saw a pair of black heels with red soles they were on fuckin Hanoi Jane Fonda's politically complicated feet. She was on some, uh, late night talk show. I went bonkers. There was my soul shoe, so to speak, on a well-meaning elitist. Now, I'm not usually a mimic artist but in this instance I was motivated to copy. A bottle of Gloss Cherry Red Krylon is never far away in my house. I tagged a pair of my mom's old stilettos with what I like to think of as a red tongue that sticks out whenever I cross my legs or climb the TAP net.

SD: So how exactly is fashionable styling incorporated into your ethos?

RB: [pause] You're not quite Terry Gross yet but you do ask to-the-point questions Shaz. [both laugh]

RB: Yeah, the fashion industry is an aesthetico-politico conundrum I put on and take off regularly. Of course I cannot support the commodity fetish of 600 unit stilettos. But I can support an attention to personal presentation and styling choices. I'm especially keen on those that flaunt the bleeding edge of respectability. Now this might seem like an odd association, as you'd probably expect me to quote RuPaul, but I was reading Elena Ferrante's *My Brilliant Friend* last month and my heart pounded in sync with Lila's slow, quiet, falling in love with making beautiful shoes. Mind you she wasn't making five-inch heels in post-war Naples, but her rebelliousness was channeled through welts and uppers or we could say toeboxes, counters, vamps, and heels. I mention this because popstar fashion examples are so clichéd. The fashionista tactics of celebrity miss the tactility of material, color, fold. A falling in love with fabric and idiosyncrasy in the presentation of self. I've got this passage bookmarked in the ebook of the Neopolitan novels. Just a sec, I'll find it on my phone. [pause] Here it is.

Once she showed me the designs for shoes that she wanted to make with her brother, both men's and women's. They were beautiful designs, drawn on graph paper, rich in precisely colored details, as if she had had a chance to examine shoes like that close up in some world parallel to ours and then had fixed them on paper. In reality she had invented them in their entirety and in every part, as she had done in elementary school when she drew princesses, so that, although they were normal shoes, they didn't resemble any that were seen in the neighborhood, or even those of the actresses in the photo novels.

SD: Reminds me of line in a song I once heard, can't recall the band, but it went, let me try and sing it 🎵🎵🎵:

That Vogue magazine that you buy is a flagrant luxury if you ask me, You don't look like anybody else I've seen or even read about.

RB: Yeah, exactly, like that. That's what I'm up for.

SD: Do you think you're the most fashion-conscious Betty?

RB: Definitely not dear. Orange, Brown, and Mauve Betty carry off much bolder statements. White B sticks with matching jogging outfits which is either hilarious, sad, or rad, depending on your perspective. Now, Black Betty Bob is the one with real talent. He's got it. The attention he pays to layering his wardrobe, his excessive accessories, every single fuckin' day, is breathtaking. He's the more-than of personal appearance. Blue, she's another story altogether though. I can't quite figure her out. She makes sure to have a bluish trapping, some bluey thingie, at all times but she's not particularly creative about her wardrobe.

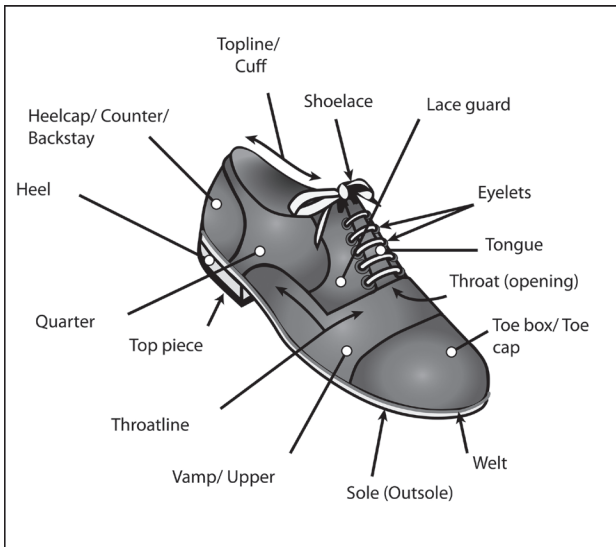
SD: Can you say a bit more about her? I've always been curious as she's quite different from the rest of you.

RB: Well, for one thing, she's got a paying gig at an advertising firm. We all HATE that as it's the epitome of capitalist malevolence. Aside from stockbroking of course which trumps all wickedness. But she's got a convincing rejoinder about it. She thinks she can do some good with the persuasive power that's given her. Insider activism – that argument. You know she's responsible for that AWFUL vegan food chain jingle, but she claims it boosted vegan dietary trends by 22% or something like that. So what can I say about that? In her own stupid way she's decreasing cow-fart methane production in this country. Honestly, it's more than I can say about my own effectiveness. Bartering and eating rough, my activist interests have not really caught on outside TAP.

SD: Is Blue Betty pleased with her success?

RB: No, not at all. She thinks of herself as an aspiring poet, but making a living, paying the rent, throws a chokehold around her desires. She's really pragmatic. Comes from a working-class Irish Catholic family with a lot of kids. Grew up with an intractable work ethic. I think she feels guilty when she writes for her own pleasure. She dislikes the jingle factory and has confessed to me that she sucks at it. She's unhappy, squandering her potential, and I hope she won't mind my saying this publically. I actually think she could be a good, maybe great poet or librettist. Got a knack for internal rhyme and rhythm she can't access in jingle construction, no matter how politically correct. She reminds me a bit of Eileen Myles, you know, and I think that's a big compliment to her potential.

SD: Let's take a little break and come back for a new round.



RB: So I tried to look up this passage from CAConrad's *Book of Frank* in the john. But shit, I couldn't find it. I'll send it to you later if you're interested. I didn't know we were gonna talk about Blue so much or I would have made sure to bring it with me. I think it says everything about our relationship. Blue likes this passage too but it scares her. Unlike me, she has a vivid fear of guns and falling. But anyway, I'm really sorry I don't have it handy. You into poetry?

SD: A little. I've read the usual suspects. Bits of Dickenson, love Ginsberg's *Howl*, Olson and Merrill long ago. Some Rich, Lorde, Baraka. Oh, and Patty Smith natch. No Myles though or CAConrad. Never heard of them.

RB: Myles is in the scene for sure. Read at punk dives. Lived a block from me apparently in pre-snobby downtown. Anyway, we must have shopped at the same bodega. Ha. I just remembered breaking a fresh jar of Hellmann's on the sidewalk right there. It left a stain in the concrete for years. I called it "The REAL Mayonnaise Spill." [laughs]

SD: What's in REAL mayonnaise that would cause it to irreparably stain concrete? That's kinda scary.

RD: That can be our question of the day.

SD: No, no, I've got one more before we close this out. Since you mention that bodega. I know you survive now by a barter system which I'm guessing would prohibit you from purchasing that jar of Hellmann's at your corner shop now. I really want to know more about your approach to queer economies.

RB: Honestly, there's no easy answer to this. All I can tell you is I do my best to walk the anti-capitalist talk but it certainly doesn't do Carlos, the owner of the bodega any



good, if I try and barter every damn roll of toilet paper for a service or decoupage ashtray – just kidding – but you get the gist here. For a barter economy to work you need an all-in community and a fairly sophisticated, dynamic system of value measurement. That's why it sort of works at TAP and the farmer's market but essentially nowhere else that I know of in the city. I think there's relational potential in J-coins but that's a far more complex topic.

SD: Obviously there's much more to unpack on the issue of barter but I want to ask a more personal question. How did you get interested in this as an artist?

RB: Uh huh, yeah, well, one of my first activist artworks was back when I was in college. I was poor, really poor,

up the wazzoo in student loans. I couldn't afford the food plan, so I shoplifted my groceries for two years. Come to think of it, it resonates with the rough eating I do now as part of my work. I think out of a sense of guilt, or righteousness, I decided back then to aestheticize my stealing skills. I took up a Robin Hood ethic mixed with a budding conceptualist nihilism. I spearheaded what I called the Silver Spoon campaign. Replaced shoplifted cans of wax beans and peas and such with my tag, silver spray painted plastic spoons. Only from the supermarchés mind you, the Krogers, Gristedes and Monoprixs, Albert Heijns. I left an ironic spoon there on the shelf for a housewife or stocker to find. I guess I thought I'd instantiate a pang of guilt or wake a consciousness. Ha. [laughs]. I donated all the canned proceeds to the Red Cross of course.

SD: Let me get this straight. You shoplifted cans of vegetables and left in their shelfspace a silver plastic spoon? Nothing else? No message, no political declaration? No manifesto?

RB: Nope. I felt it was more of an art statement if the political gesture remained symbolic, unsaid. It's pretty clear isn't it?

SD: Well, not really ... it's kind of ambiguous or obtuse ... to me. How long did you do this?

RB: Maybe six months, not long. I never got caught. But I sucked at self-promotion so it remained a quiet initiative. Known only to me and the people who picked up the spoons. There was no attendant media blitz. I mention it because there was an exchange going on there. I didn't just rip off the food. I gave something back though its value is of course debatable. I'd still argue the affective charge was worth far more than the relatively nourishment free vacuum-packed Green Giant cut beans. [both laugh]

SD: So we have some insight into the origins of Red Betty's alter-economy.

RB: I prefer queer.

SD: OK then. This is an auspicious beginning to a longer conversation. One more quickie, you and Blue, were you lovers?

RB: Well, hmm, how to answer that? You know we Bettys tend towards the polyamorous. Nothin' newsworthy in that revelation. Between me and Blue, we had a purple moment, sure. Our temperaments didn't sync as well as our genitalia did though.

SD: Thanks for dropping by Red. We'll have to leave it there for now.

Addendum

Frankly

CAConrad, excerpt from *The Book of Frank* (26):

Frank's sister grew long blue feathers

she said it was worse than cutting teeth

she spent a month screaming in the cave
pushing them out

Frank would lie in bed at night
touching his own back

crying

praying it wouldn't come to him

but the day his sister flew to the house
he stood by the window in awe
giant blue spread coming across the lake

he heard the hunter's shot before she did

Black on Blue

I hardly knew her. We were young then. She was quiet, mostly, not as annoying as the rest of us. I guess we thought it suited her, given she was an aspiring poet while we were all into rowdiness, performance art, punk. I went with her to slams a few times when she was feeling adventurous. She rarely revved up with the rest of the crowd keeping her eyes on the filthy floor, fastidiously avoiding the dog shit piles saying to me, “yum, my little adventure.” People roared for Patti but Blue liked the lesser knowns. She preferred the monthly open readings of work in progress at the church. The Wednesday Night series was pretty good most of the time.

There was a sadness in Blue that I couldn't access. Not sure any one could, maybe Red, maybe mama bear White. Blue wore her disorientation, maybe it was grief, or fear, literally on her sleeve. She had a 2x2 patch of cerulean blue that she safety-pinned to every garment. Usually on her left sleeve but sometimes over a nipple, on her crotch, on a navy blue beret. Red had this extroverted cape but Blue was discreet. That's what I remember.

Oh yeah, another thing. She got a job. A real job, not the waitron thing we all did to pay the rent. She joined the enemy though she fiercely defended this move as sub-

versive activism. "Fucking Mad Ave bullshit" I told her. I didn't buy her proposition at all. I said it to her face, said she was a sellout. She cried and I felt terrible for a millisecond cuz we all have needs and desires complicated by nature and nurture issues. But I mean, come on. This was extreme. I remember that when she regained a bit of composure I continued in a milder but nonetheless agitated tone. I accused her of selling out because she could. Because her white privilege gave her the option to rent a one bedroom in a highrise with a doorman (has there ever been a woman in one of those uniforms? I've never seen one). She stood up for herself though. Snarled at my generic politics. Said she knew what she had to do and anyway, she was a sucky poet so she needed to find an authentic way to voice her voice. "You ever listen to those Stan Freberg radio commercials? They're the most brilliant thing ever. Ever!" she screamed at me. "If I could do that I'd die happy. *Omaha!* Listen to that and tell me all advertising is a sellout. Pity the poor gypsy since Salada came along ... OK, dicey racial profiling now but brilliant in '61... Today the pits, tomorrow the wrinkles. Prunes, Bob, prunes! I mean it's great, it's, it's ... powerful!" I recall this passionate exertion exhausted her. She sat down to catch her breath. After a minute I asked her if she thought she was as funny as Freberg? Silently she went over to the record collection, a motley assortment of dusty LPs and 45s. She rifled through the discs and easily found what she was looking for. Put the needle down in a groove that spat out a dry Sgt. Joe Friday interrogation:

"11:45am. I saw a little girl in a blue hood. I stopped to question her. Pardon me ma'am. Could I talk to you for just a minute ma'am?" "What about?" "Nothing much, just wanna ask you a few questions ma'am. What's your name ma'am?" "Little Blue Ridin' Hood." "Where you going ma'am?" "Grandma's house." "Yes ma'am. Whaydaya got in the basket?" "What ya tryin to say? I got something in the basket I shouldn't have?" "No ma'am I didn't say that." "Then why ya askin me

all these questions for?" "Just routine ma'am, we just wanna get the facts. May I have a look in that basket ma'am?" "Be my guest." "Let's see ... sawed off shotgun, knife, bludgeon, box of dum dum bullets ... nothing suspicious here. All right ma'am, we might want to talk to you later so don't leave the woods."

Was she being funny with me? Pointing out a comic irony? A prophecy? I couldn't figure it out then and still can't. Now, that basket coulda been shoulda been Red's handbag. Our for real Red Riding Robin Hood but anyway ... basta. The Freberg nugget ended that conversation. That was the last time I saw Blue. She went deep into the woods.



Infrared on Black

I'm one of the few GenTel Bettys. The founders, the primaries, all hail from pre-CRISPR generations. Right now, only UVB and me are the tweaked ones. I transduced from a proto-Betty to the real thing a while ago, but don't ask me how they measure this. I think Red's fall left a hole at end of the spectrum that only I could fill. Gamma Betty, the intern, is also Gen Z GenTel (or GenTelZ as we fondly self-identify), so our numbers are growing in the group. Honestly, I'm not at all clear what difference it makes to anything though the old ones are always claiming the world has gone, how does White Betty say it – "to hell in a handbasket" – and that we, the young ones, are only borderline authentic. It's a form of tribal intolerance as far as I can tell, but they insist it's their ethical resistance to eugenic practices. Which, OK, is a fair point. Black Betty Bob remarked that he grew up in world that considered genetic design racially motivated. He has a hard time fully accepting a GMO ethos. He always reminds me the "crispy critters" epithet is a racial slur I should be more cognizant of.

I'm very fond of him, Bob. He's helped me understand certain tensions. The Bettys' predisposition against genomic tinkering is deep-seated though malleable. They try to be open and non-judgmental, roll with the times, but an

implicit wariness roils beneath the surface. The primary Bettys, oh how they insist they don't judge CRISPR offspring. "No blame," Orange Betty always says and follows it with "namaste." UVB and I doubt their sincerity but we all do, we Bettys, manage to have a laugh together.

I can't speak for other designer-DNA babies but I can say with certainty that my parents, both control freaks, engineered my code with vigor. They admitted as much. My mother, born in Port-au-Prince, is a professor of microbiology at Uni-3. Her interest in toying with chromosomal strings is pretty straightforward. She could so she did. My dad is another story altogether. He's a manicurist. He likes to stress the man in the curist. He's hyper-concerned with ornamental details and the healing potential of beautification. I guess both my parents are in their ways. My dad's background is Māori. He has traces of *tā moko* on his cheeks. Thrilling little spirals. They met over a manicure in NZ when my mother had a research fellowship in Wellington. She blissed out over those spirals as my dad painted tiny roses on her ring fingers.

They haven't told me exactly which gene clusters they messed with. They, my progenitors, said it was better I didn't know. Like in the old days when schools would redact IQ scores. But of course I know, I'm the one in my body. My parents swear they only meant to tinker with health-related tendencies. Wanted to save me from Aunt Fabiola's breast cancer. They're not as transparent as they think they are. They've left me wondering if my non-binary inclination is *au naturel*, engineered, or simply trendy. I've decided to insist on a genderqueer pronoun in any case. It's what we feel.

Betty Bob is always taking photos. He says I'm a great model, "unperturbed by my own beauty" is how he puts it. He tends to take gauzy, out-of-focus black-and-white

shots so I see myself through his eyes as form in motion. But I see him in all his hot heat and I love what I see.

My chosen pseudonym is a giveaway to my condition, so no spoiler alerts here. I get so tired of seeing everything in this fucked-up world all the time. No off button anywhere. Even in the dark. There's no respite. Others need special hardware for this trick. Me, I have the gift of unobtrusive night vision and it's a mixed blessing. I'm told by neurotypicals that evening darkness brings a very necessary escape from the visible spectrum of reflected reality but I can find little solace in a midnight sky.

But that's only half the story of my schizo vision. My nights are a concert of greens. My daytime is an unremitting symphony of red. I'm told my vision is measured in the near infrared spectrum but sometimes, and I can't control this, it goes all thermally. Meaning, I see heat. Technically that capacity is in the far infrared spectrum. My mutated rods and cones respond to light in a manner comparable to Kodak's obsolete Aerochrome III film. Lucky me.

Sorry, back to Bob. He always tries his best to share my worldview, shoots with analog film when he can get his hands on the stuff. It's dis/continued, hard to find. He prefers Kodak HIE black and white for his work but sometimes plays with color infrared to capture a range of hues similar to my day vision. Even though we know the values are impossible to measure and replicate, I guess it makes us feel like we can share sensations of redness, of blueness, of other-than-green. When he develops the images they're often glitchy or fogged as the shelf dates are way over. He uses color filters and has an uncanny sense of exposure time. That's a cool detail about infrared film, there's no ASA, the instructions say "speed inapplicable."

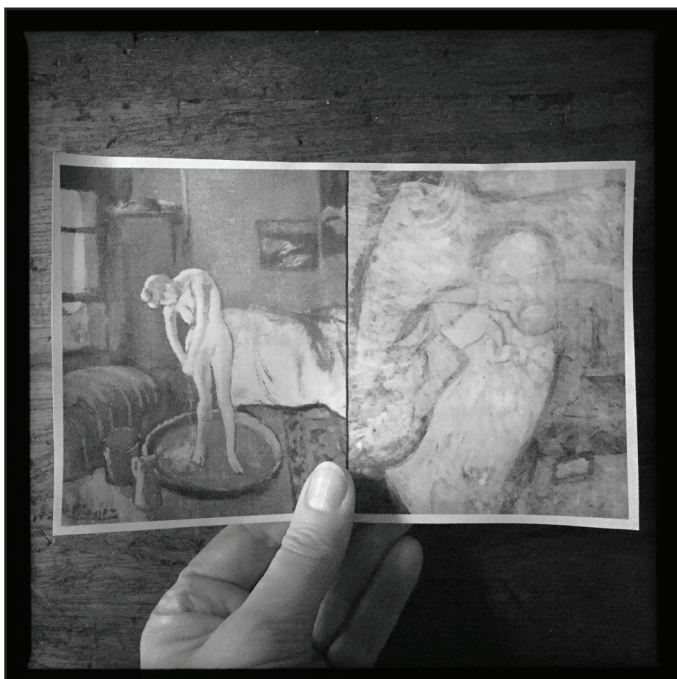
Think about that, uh, a minute. In any case its fragile exposure process is all about light and temperature.

Bob's curious if my vision behaves like the finicky film but how am I supposed to answer that? He says shooting with celluloid film helps him better understand the impossibility of deciphering appearances in my world. The always-on rosey glow of my trees, the beet red of my pastoral landscapes. He tells me he's anxious about the film supply drying up and the inevitable switch to entirely digital processes. Photoshopped infrared images are anathema to him.

He's earnest though, Bob, he really wants toprehend my prehensions. His phrasing not mine. Sometimes he calls this desire a process of transindividuation. He says he wants to *feel* what I feel when I see the world. I admire that intensity. When we make love we sometimes wear blindfolds, each of us, so we field our feeling in monochrome. We even cut ping pong balls in half and made Ganzfeld glasses to get the sensation of a total white field as well as a black. The sex is haptic and olfactory and aural and tasty.

For me, imposed blindness is a relief. For him, well, he says he likes it but I'm not convinced. I do think it effects his conflicted sexuality. The repression he submits his heteronormative preferences to when they pop up. He's been slow to feel comfortable with fluidity, though I consider him a true pioneer in that regard. I don't think he even realizes how outside the box he was with identity politics in the paleolithic era of feminist and gender activism. In any case, enforcing an absence of light can be numbing if obligatory. He reassured me the constraint is liberating, unleashing erotic vivid fantasies that satisfy in unexpected ways. Always the smart one, he showed me images from an infrared analysis of Picasso's Blue Room

he'd flirted with a few nights ago when he went down on me. He admitted identifying with the bow-tied man lurking beneath the naked female figure. I responded badly to that remark, telling him it felt sexist and he should maybe better keep his orgasmic fantasies to himself.



He's loquacious enough on his own. And elegant. He stopped wearing all shades of green because he knows there's too much red in my life already. He's always experimenting with complementary colors that will freshen my palette. Surprise me. He puts purple food coloring in the broccoli soup, that sort of thing. Yesterday, inspired by the Picasso, he wore a blue bow-tie with yellow polka dots. For me it was bright yellow with swimming aqua

spheroids. No matter what he wears, his skin always looks dazzling, glows.

But I want to say one more thing about the photos he takes for me. When he shoots black and white infrared film the results are, how can I put it, a solace for my overwrought sensations. As the near IR spectrum reflects off the green of leaves it glistens a smooth white. Details are bleached clean. Objects have brilliant auras when the light's just right and the exposure a tad long. As the lightwaves are absorbed by a blue, blue sky, it's rendered a deep black. The contrast is magical. This inverse worlding as Bob calls it, reveals the intensity of my everyday. It's what my dreams look like. I often wish I could retrofit my retrofit and turn off the color gene entirely leaving me the glorious wash of a monochrome, near-infrared spectrum. Dump the far-infrared thermal entirely.

Honestly, I don't know what my parental units were thinking.



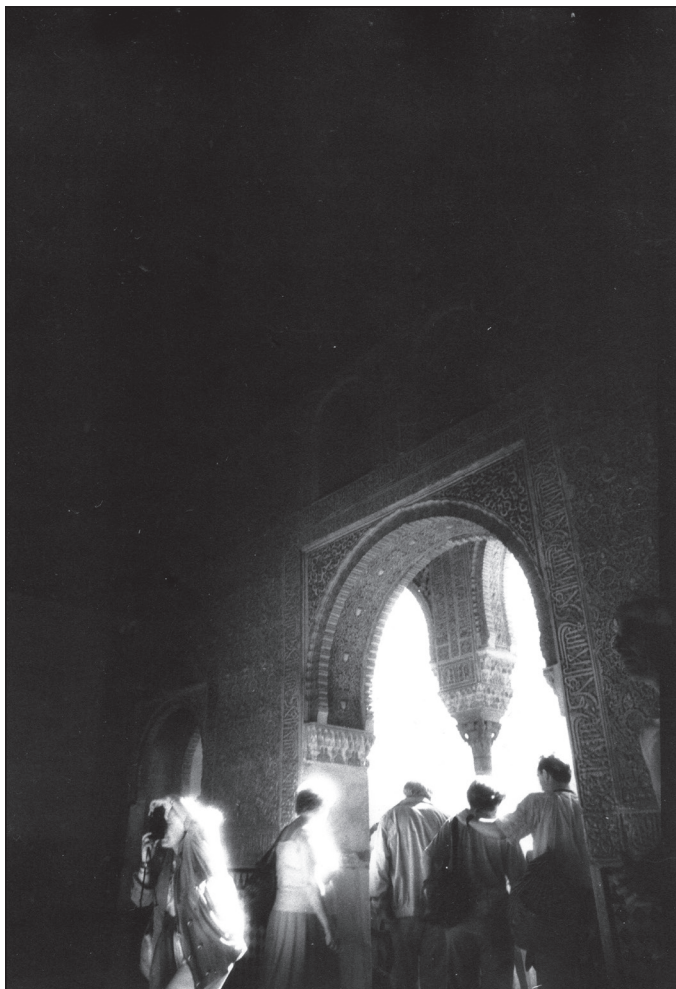
Bob's obsession with contrast, with lightness and darkness, is a fetish I can embrace. I find his obsession with monsters strange though. I can't yet wrap my head around the Grendel and Geryon thing. I probe but don't get much response.



We took a trip to Spain last fall. Loved sleepy Granada. Visited the Alhambra. We share concerns with the damage wrought by neoliberal tourism but travel anyway. Bob brought his old Leica with a fanny pack of filters

and a light-sealed changing bag he uses for loading and unloading film canisters. The process is tedious and couldn't be more different from the split-second impulse of the selfie. He prefers analog flow to the digital sample. It's a generational thing I guess. Indicates the gobs of cultural space-time between what remains of the boomers and emergent GenTelZ's. He took an image I like of an unknown guy shooting us, his camera lens a black hole against the glowing archways. There's a reciprocity captured in that encounter I find strangely dangerous and charmed. I have often wondered why taking a photo is called shooting?

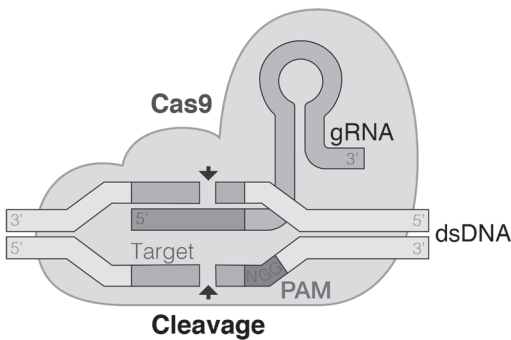
BB also got a wonderful exposure of a semi-crouching woman in snap mode. The postural resemblance of concentrated assertion reminded me so much of White Betty that we gave her a print. She framed it and hung it over her refrigerator.



CRISPR on Wikipedia

CRISPR, /'krɪspər/, is a family of DNA sequences in bacteria that contains snippets of DNA from viruses that have attacked the bacterium. These snippets are used by the bacterium to detect and destroy DNA from further attacks by similar viruses. These sequences play a key role in a bacterial defence system, and form the basis of a genome editing technology known as CRISPR/Cas9 that allows permanent modification of genes within organisms.

CRISPR is an abbreviation of *Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats*. The name was minted at a time when the origin and use of the interspacing subsequences were not known. – *Wikipedia*



Cyan on Red

Were we light, I would be cast as Red's shadow.

Were she able, she would insist hers was a life.
Singular, impersonal.

Red on Infrared

When Infrared joined The Bettys, it was left to Red to give the inaugurating speech. She wore her rat mask as was her custom on these occasions. It went like this.

It's my distinct honor and pleasure to say a few words tonight on the auspicious actual occasion of Infrared's induction to the world of Betty. I have long awaited an expanded field of the visible spectrum. And tonight folks, we celebrate it! Hip hip! [crowd shouts "Hoorah!"]

My own hue, and I speak for myself here as I know many of you are quite comfortable occupying a niche code ... but my personal relation to the dynamic HSB of redness has been under siege for some time. My wavelengths are long and have given me time to ride the paradox of a vibrant slowness. With Violet's short spurty activity over there, hey Vi, we're bookends so to speak with an infinite shelving space between us. While we've all been obsessed by how we see what we see, I have gradually tended towards what we can't see. Been lured by transducing nonconscious forces to felt experience.

Now we, the Bettys, are breaching something dangerous, something exciting. The near-infrared spectrum is troubled by its usefulness. It's primarily tapped, yeah TAPPED, by armies and surveillance companies as a weapon. But we Bettys resolve to explore the EM stratum outside our own placeholders. NOT and I emphasize this, NOT as a colonizing gesture because we all know that's a fucked-up opera-

tional modality, a phallic fantasy. And, just to be clear, this embrace is also not necessarily an inclusionary gesture coz that's also a dubious privileged negotiation but well, you know, what I'm trying to say is that we beings limited to the visible spectrum feel the Micro, the Radio, the X-ray as potential fields of enchantment. And we hope they feel us as maybe, perhaps, interesting as well. But I'm digressing into stupidly contentious metaphorical territory and that's not the deal tonight.

"Quit while you're ahead Red!" someone yelled from the crowd.

Yeah, OK, right. [clears throat, pulls notes from a cape pocket] Tonight we fold into our spectral diversity what's previously been off our charts. We embrace an expanded spectral field. We embrace an expanded genetic motility. We variegate our clustered palindromic repeats. Our boomers and GenTelZ. We open the closet of our logics. We don't really know what the fuck we're doing and that's the thrill of it ladies, gents, LGBTQIA+, we're experimenting, we're failing, we're soaring, we're falling. We're certainly not flatlining. Yet.

Infrared Betty will trouble our fixedness. They will show us the vivid intensities of light that destabilizes our every perception. If we Bettys ever inaugurate a brave enough Green one, remember that for our Infrared Betty she may look as red as my cape one moment, pink as WB's track suit another. Shout out to White Betty over there at the bar. Or possibly as blue as Blue once was. And that is something to think about my dears, as we go forward.

Resist and persist.

[The crowd whoops, snaps and applauds.]

part 3

BAPPING

* * *

Everybody knows in a way the difference between the night and the day. She did and she did not. He did but what difference does that make [...]

And then everybody knew it was true. She the mother fell out of a window on the cement floor and then knew no more than anybody what had happened before [...]

There is no further guess. Everybody knows, and they need not say. That is why everybody talks and nobody says, because everybody sees, and everybody says they do. Not by and by, there are no secrets about what everybody knows and still they do complain [...]

I feel I do not know anything if I cry.

Slowly they could see their way.

Everybody proposes that nobody knows even if everybody knows.

There is no difference between knows and grows.

Gradually they changed the garden [...]

– Gertrude Stein, *Blood on the Dining Room Floor*

How to Tender

Just beneath the neon signage of the arcade archway, a bas-relief ornament sits at the pinnacle inflexion. The architect chose the Roman god Janus, a clean-shaven androgen as the building's guardian. The concrete relief is relatively inconspicuous, bookended by ornate dragon-heads breathing hot fire. An arcade voyeur tends to follow the Janus gaze and notice the flamethrowers, missing the punchline of the central figure.



Janus god of beginnings, middles, endings.
 Janus god of doorways and passages.
 Janus old breaching new in one rupturing clock-tick.
 Janus the transitional.

Janus the non-binary.

The relevance of this icon, embedded in the armature two centuries earlier, has never been lost on The Bettys. A wide-angle peripheral gaze, often described as duplicitous, stares northeast and southwest from a conjoined visage. Dissensus *and* consensus announce themselves, bilaterally peering at the terrifyingly mythic and nothing much else. A monster doomed to stare down another monster in perpetuity.

Here was a symbol waiting to be pirated.



The aftermath of Red's plunge left the ladies in a queasy predicament. Venture capitalists and hard-core anti-capitalists alike were parading through the now infamous atrium with little flags on sticks and fatigue jackets covered with political buttons. This space was the place for the ostentatious demonstration of beliefs. One-on-one battles erupted with uncomfortable frequency. When the blare of soapbox grandstanding drowned out the purr of the commodity elevator the Bettys felt it was time to investigate change, offer a refreshed profile, produce a gimmick.

They hastily rechristened TAP to BAP. The acronym, for anyone interested, stood for the *Betty Arcada Projekto*. Brown Betty had been working on dethroning English as the lingua franca for years, so the mashup was unanimously agreed upon though several Bs thought it not radical enough. It unnecessarily clings to the Roman alphabet, they argued. Alternatives in Arabic, Cherokee, Hanzi, Hangui, Ethiopic, Sanskrit, Hebrew, Greek, Armenian, Kana, Cyrillic were proffered. A committee was es-

established to review the issue and recommend an egalitarian linguistic solution. In the meantime, BAP it would be.

The stale Arcada air was rife with urgency and the need for a clearly stated mission. The stakeholders, such as they were, wished to eliminate any compromising authorship claims with Benjamin's estate. The Bettys, the shop owners, and the clientele all grappled over designs that suggested a facelift without forfeiting the heritage. Notoriety had brought *Shop Til You Drop* unexpected surplus value. The old banner was vacuumed, washed, and rehung. An LED ticker display would be added to the visual ambiance of the atrium.

RENOVATION W/O GENTRIFICATION



Now at a pinnacle of hype, with more eyeballs on the Worldometer than ever before, BAP was designated an exemplary ethical marketplace by progressive organizations throughout the declining West. In this Arcada, in this stripped-down mall, it was said, is the eye of the coming storm. The still point of a destructive force set to mitigate all semblance of customary consumption.

BAP retained its four distinguishing TAP features:

1. the Netting transport model
2. a thriving barter system
3. J-coin exchange
4. the climbing wall

The skylight was scrubbed clean. Shimmering tracks of sunlight now swamped the atrium, the bannisters, the shop fronts. The grungy cargo net was replaced with a

newer, sturdier hemp type. The graying hand and footholds on the climbing surfaces were colorfully repainted. Resembling the Jerusalem temple that JC cleansed of money-traders on a few occasions, this place, this mecca mall, aspired to be a corrective to the nagging problem of P-R-O-F-I-T.

How to say it?

Sounds like prophet.

How to think it?



How to accede to growth without appropriation? Without greed? "And without a goddamn moral imperative," as WB shouted whenever she felt The Bettys were inching too close to the intractable. They noted that Noam Chomsky always spelled this word out – P-R-O-F-I-T – as a parent might a curse word in front of children. Children of course, always snicker at this gesture.

In Red's time, TAP featured barter and variations on gift economies. Buyers and sellers, givers and takers. The BAP era required stimulating the pragmatic exchange of a quasi-currency. The Arcada's unique collective netting system demanded such an option. Object exchange was often too perilous. The bitcoin, corrupt from the get go, was rejected by The Bettys. Capitalist desire was in its DNA. Precious metals still held an iron grip on free-market transaction, but Red Betty's astute proclamation

held sway at BAP: “All the gold on planet earth, creatively expressed from a billion bursting supernovas, could be poured into a single Hollywood swimming pool. Such is the limit of gold’s profundity.” Never letting a statement go uncontested, UVB had commented that in the vast “out there” gold and other metals were created every time neutron stars collide, so perhaps gold – a.k.a. Au a.k.a. shining dawn – should be granted its cosmic potential.

Discussions of applicable tendering models were fierce. The J-coin emerged as the alt-economy of choice for the adventurous few if not the anxious many. The Bettys coined their term and minted their quasi-currency concept. It grew legs. Fandom. Weightless, it made its way up and down the Netting with ease. Drenched with very real sweat and spit as ancient coins and bills once literally were, its value unexpectedly soared. Here was a crypto-currency juiced with “effort” as material equivalency. Currently 2.78 to the US dollar, 2.05 to the Euro, 1.75 to the Yuan, 1.05 to the Rupee and .25 to Gold, the J-coin or Jani was having a moment. No bullion bank could rival the exponential confidence in this tender, especially among GenTelZ.

Cha Ching! Bada Bing! Bap Ping!

RB's fall engendered dozens of how-to videos on YouTube.

- How to climb the Netting without killing yourself and others.
- How to transfer J-coin currency.
- How to barter a/effectively.
- How to measure monetary and material equivalence.
- How to Betty.

How to Betty, made by an eleven-year-old girl self-named Micro Betty had 846,293 hits and counting. She'd called dibs on that portion of the EM frequency spectrum, promising to be a force when she grew up. Truth told, she was a force already. The Bettys were rocking. Once again, as the clock tocked, they partied.



Each New Years Eve, BAP hosted a gala, their annual Jani event. This year White Betty, emptied champagne glass in hand, toasted Numa Pompilius, the emperor who instigated this commemoration of birth and death, old and new. "My dearest peeps," she exclaimed, "the second Roman king was a politician whose brain wasn't entirely fermented. This dude reformed the Roman calendar around

700 BC. He's the guy that moved the beginning of the year from the first of March to the first of January. Now that's getting something done."

Curses and laughter resounded in the atrium.

"Thusly and with much consternation and revision," she continued with a sarcastic slur, "a great chunk of the planet took on a twelve-month, 365-day configuration that turned out to be way more complicated than anyone expected. Ha!"

More grunts and hoots from the gathering.

"The whole enterprise was fraught with superstition, convulsed with fashionable deities and questionable counting skills. Nothing much has changed in the three millennia hence. Long live the New Year folks! Long may it waver." The DJ scratched the Chipmunks' "Auld Lang Syne" with Otis Redding's "Sitting on the Dock of the Bay" and the rockets red glared throughout the city. "Wasting time" was the beloved earworm of the night.

Later that evening, a fully inebriated White Betty grabbed the mic again to pontificate. "Aha, test, test, pizza, pizza, (tapping the mic) it's working right (she said to no one in particular) but, besides the calendar thingie, Nununu Pompous ordered animal sacrifice, probably little lambies and spry little goats at the temple of the god of boundaries, limits, and glorious walls. That would be Terminus ... Yeah, that's right folks, Terminus, god of lim ... i ... tay ... shunzz. Whadowe wanna make of that? A paradox? A pair a docks? On the bay?" She snickered but the joke fell flat. Fishing a 3D-printed J-coin out of her track suit pocket she said "How 'bout it. Let's flip on it. Heads its up the ass. Tails its up the ass. But hey, walls and shit, maybe it's not as clear cut awful as it seems. Constraints can

be useful, no? If they make you do stuff. Make you climb them.” Stumbling, eyes unfocused, she swayed a bit but continued to spit out what she wanted to say. “What we got here folks is a sweet ghostly ou-ro-bor-os.” The word ouroboros didn’t come out quite right, sounding something like “or bore us” which completed a perfect speech act for the few who were actually listening to her.

Brown Betty was at White’s elbow now. Helping her stand steady as she concluded her addled thoughts. “Jani January, she’s kinda cool, hangin’ on our wall up there over the bee-u-ti-ful archway. A kindly Cerberus guarding the gate. That’s Cerberus the three-headed dog, keeper of the dead, not ouroboros. They’re different ... maybe. You get that right? Anyway happy happy y’all.”

The DJ pumped up the grind, shaking the subwoofers, and whatever WB was trying to convey was either unheard or quickly forgotten.



Janus, the god of transitions, famously faces in two directions, a witness to their future-past coming and going. The present unreconciled. Derrida's ghost. Benjamin's "Angelus Novus." The acquiescent angel of history with her back to the unknown, her cross-eyed gaze towards the ruinous calamity of human stupidity. Bedroom walls, kitchen walls, office walls collapsed and crumbled before her. Border walls however were well maintained. The legacy of Terminus encrypted in a pragmatic concept that continues to intrigue. Endings satisfied. Beginnings enfranchised.

For poor Janus, a sleight of hand occurred. They flip-flopped in the course of herstory from a trusted porter to a double-dealer. Janus the two-faced deceitful hypocrite slowly took cultural precedence over the figure of the attentive doorkeeper.

Such is the fate of the concierge.

To Sanction Cleavage

Etymologically “Janus words” (contronyms, or auto-antonyms) indicate a category in English for dualistic, conflicting terms, auto-antonyms. “Cleave” and “sanction” are examples commonly cited in dictionaries. We could add “weather,” “fix,” “bolt,” “left,” “fast,” and “screen” to spice things up. “To cleave” is a particularly provocative. The free online Oxford dictionary provides definitions:

cleave^t

VERB (cloven, cleft, cleaved, or clove)

[with object]

1. Split or sever (something), especially along a natural line or grain: *“Their legs were like those of men but their feet were cloven like calves’ feet and shone like burning brass.”*

1.1. Split (a molecule) by breaking a particular chemical bond: *“These are the properties expected of mutants lacking an enzyme that cleaves joint molecules.”*

1.2 Biology [no object] (of a cell) divide: *“The egg cleaves to form a mulberry-shaped cluster of cells.”*

1.3 Make a way through (something) forcefully, as if by splitting it apart: "they watched a coot cleave the smooth water" [no object] "an unstoppable warrior clove through their ranks."

cleave^a (cloven, cleft, cleaved, or clove)

To "cleave to" or **cleave**^a as the second definition goes, means to stick firmly to something; to adhere closely; cling to; remain faithful to; cleave to one's principles or beliefs.

1. Stick fast to: "*Rose's mouth was dry, her tongue cleaving to the roof of her mouth.*"

1.1 Adhere strongly to (a particular pursuit or belief): "*Nobody gets points for being virtuous and cleaving to fidelity when there are no opportunities to do otherwise.*"

1.2 Become very strongly involved with or emotionally attached to (someone): "*Only on that basis can the relationship be one in which he genuinely cleaves to her and becomes one with her.*"

Then there's the Janus verb "sanction."

sanction

VERB

[with object]

1. Give official permission or approval for (an action): "*The scheme was sanctioned by the court.*"

2. Impose a sanction or penalty on: "*They had to be punished or sanctioned, so this is the sanction that the judge came up with.*"

A coin, minted or otherwise, is often used to illustrate the cleavage of a thing, its unitary double-sidedness.

A coin is often used as a means to sanction, to give and to take.

BAD Partying

As BAP incentivized, vertigo ruled. Up and down were now fashionable political vectors for progressives, fascists, and neoliberals alike. Left and right, markers of the timeworn horizontal political spectrum were displaced by this 90° tilt. Poli-ethical POV's were measured in percentages rather than ideological positions. The Roller Coaster model was precarity carnivalized, racing through obvious hegemonic peaks and dips, elations and depressions. Distinctions between owners and the owned crystallized in the dizzying parabolic arcs.

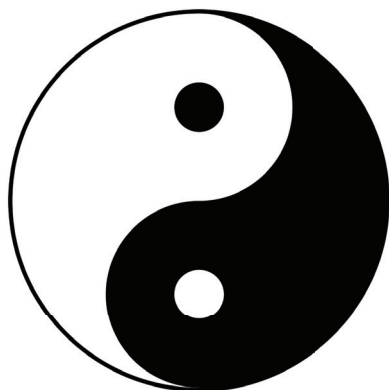
The Bettys saw this gradient disruption as a temporary glitch. Post-millennial activists, fed up with 2D political spectra, horizontal *and* vertical, would surely seek a multidimensional schema, a non-Euclidean launching pad, a posthuman soup of dis/oriented value logics. They would invent, must invent, a *nouveau milieu*, unimpeded by spatial and temporal border formations. IRB touted it as a high-intensity, "speed-inapplicable" cosmopolitics.

Carpe-diem types, The Bettys decided to directly enter the fray. Envisaging a performative aesthetico-politico ecology they inaugurated a cap "P" party. This, they proclaimed, was the only way towards. They smelled their moment, primed to be the tenacious avant-garde of an

advent. Brown Betty, normally shy of public speaking, was elected spokesperson replacing the fallen Red and the often incoherent White. Brown B's modest yet thoroughly impassioned rhetoric was clarion clear.

They called their political party the BAD Party, imagining wildly intelligent BAD BAP rallies. They were convinced, most of them, that they were on to something. Brown B explained to the serious media that the acronym for BAD – *Betty Advent Demos* – was not as comedic as it appeared. She announced in public appearances – “BAD Party is down with an undercommons ethos.” Few understood the import of those words. Those that did were on board.

BAD Party needed a symbol. The prismatic rainbow was already taken. Appropriation of cultural and religious icons for political means had proved horrific in the past so they knew to tread carefully. They studied the yin-yang figure for its beautiful rendering of Chi's unified plurality. They studied the efficacy of Che's now entirely affect-free T-shirt image, emptied of all significance by its ubiquitous presence. If they were seeking a Chi/Che commodity-fetish item to stir engagement it would require a self-effacing cachet.

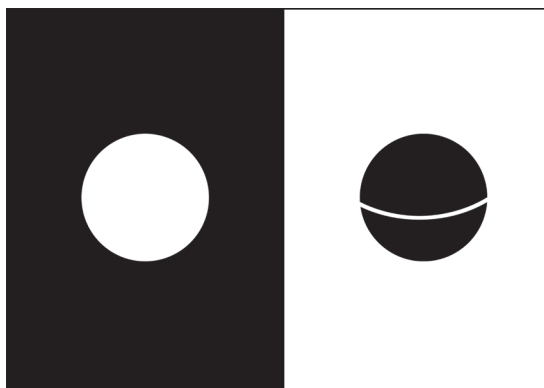




The design meetings were hilarious as predominantly silly ideas were discussed and tossed out. As these meetings grew raucous and uncomfortably weird, the graphic designer Bettys, and there were several, retreated to a corner to undertake the NO-LOGO challenge.

After weeks of disruptive prototyping and bickering, a graphic emerged. The design team felt it encompassed the mute generality of a corporate symbol while affirming a singular impulse. A Betty quality, captured in the cracks between force and form. There were objections. Infrared complained about the inference to binocular vision. They suggested that many species had non-ocular and multi-ocular views of the world so the proposed symbol was reductively anthropocentric. Their argument was overruled as ahead of its time. UVB objected on similar grounds adding that it was overall too cutsey, dismissing the seriousness of The Bettys' proposition. She was advised by Yellow and Violet to nourish her sense of humor. Betty Bob took a pass finding the entire project misguided.

The Bettys would flaunt a black and white banner with twin circular centers. "Eyeholes" Yellow B called them. A riff on a theme. Their symbol resembled a Goethe illustration or a pair of trippy Chanel spectacles, uniting all the colors of the visible and invisible spectrum in one bizarrely unsettling frame. This would be the Bettys' call to arms and legs and wings, their freak flag. A (w)hole and a cut. Their cleaving, haunted wink at a justice to come.



Tendencies

The Bettys were busy producing “How to BAP” manuals for BAD Party rallies. Indebted to Fluxus scores, they assembled redemptive tasks on notecards, copping a few from Ono and Brecht. Occupied with the concept of doing it from the middle they splayed in all directions.

Bob, as often the case, was riding another vector. When young he, like many hippies and lefties of his gen, read the Suzuki’s, D.T and Shunryu. John Cage famously helped make D.T’s translations popular among artists. Shunryu was too severe for Bob’s tempestuous lifestyle but he was struck by the very first sentence in *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind*:

Beginner’s mind – “In the beginner’s mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert’s there are few.”

Some small thoughts stick with one a lifetime and this was another one of those ideas Bob could never shake. Perhaps because it tapped a tendency so affectively. Perhaps it was a validation of amateurism he required to continue continuing. It’s not that he sucked at closure per se though admittedly, he did. He wasn’t even sure if he could distinguish a being in the middle from a beginning. Ontogenetic force is not exactly straightforward.

He was careful not to let this simple statement redress his many unfortunate leaps into unknown territory. His near drownings in tsunami turbulence. His stupid questions. His stammering answers. But it gave him some solace over the years when he met this thought with good meditative posture and breathing. He was down with beginner's mind even as it zigzagged its way to a detour.

He remembered sharing the studio with Cyan Betty on a rainy Saturday some time ago. He recalled their obtuse chitchat. An argument over grammatical articles. Over "as" and "thes." How to think of Red's singular adventure as "a life?" CB stated with muted conviction: "So Deleuze is the culprit behind *le milieu*, the becoming of the middle that's been so influential. He's the guy proposing, at his mortal end mind you, the Zed shape of the French nose, the zigzag of the fly's flight path, the zzz of Zen as a way to think/feel." "Yeah?" Bob responded dully. "But he fell, or jumped, didn't he? Straight down." "Uh, yeah, right" CB answered, adding, "But surely he immanently transcended."

Some Fluxus Scores

Tape Piece I

Stone Piece

Take the sound of the stone aging.

Yoko Ono, 1963

Fly Piece

Fly

Yoko Ono, 1963

Three Yellow Events, Fluxversion 1

3 yellow slides are projected on a screen.

Pause.

One yellow slide is projected and then the projector falls down on the floor as the slide is removed. After the projector is returned to its place, a red slide is projected.

George Brecht, 1961

Falling Event

1

Let something fall from a high place.

2

Let yourself fall from a high place using an elevator, parachute, rope or anything else, or using nothing.

Mieko Shiomi, 1963

RB's Dream Journal

28 June

Dreamt last night of a litigious case against white racial recidivism that went all the way to the World Supreme Court. The case argued for reparations of slavery and its aftermath in the US of A. To the surprise of nearly every world citizen, the court ruled that all American third-generation or older Caucasians must pay reparations commensurate with their income. A 10% tithe on white privilege. The monies from this tax would be directly recompensed to the ancestors of the enslaved.

30 June

Inspired by the aging, yet so fluid bodies moving together on a concrete floor, I moved with them. We then relocated to a sunny house somewhere and played together in the bathtub and on the king-size beds scattered throughout the space. Lilac petals were swept in bunches though they gave no scent. A tall, lanky man partnered with me. He accidentally pooped on a bed while preparing the space and I rushed upstairs for more petals and a pink t-shirt.

7 July

Traveling by train through a landscape I wasn't familiar with. The terrain was rugged. Maybe I was in Mongolia or Marfa. I was travelling with friends. They were seated in another car. The view at times was perilous as the train snaked and floated over mountain curves. In my coward heart I preferred the patches where I faced the sheer side of rock rather than the spectacular drop to the valley.

We disembarked in a small village. Walked its length and walked back to the train depot. Stuff happened but I can't recall it.

I was preparing to perform my latest sound piece the next evening. Lackadaisical, I didn't know if I even liked the work. Unusual for me, I was content to expose inferior work. The piece was monotonous, complex in a stupid way. Why had I verged from my desire to make a work on the relation between unbreakability and fragility? The sounds in my laptop were a slow drone of fragments at rest on a concrete floor. I thought, as I often did, to pull an all-nighter and make last-minute changes. I gathered junk food, ran into my brother DC and my mother. I so wanted to sit with them at the tourist bistro and catch up on life and death. I missed them. But I had this concert to attend to and was distraught in deciding how to spend my time that evening. Here perhaps was the unbreakable slamming the fragile that I thought to explore.

8 August

I was somewhere in Spain at an artist residency, this one skewed towards revolutionary practices. I was in the throes of a wager. In between giving up my long held pacifist resistance techniques or joining the Fantifas, the feminist radicals willing to use weapons as a force against fascists. I'd toed this line before and ultimately thrown my lot in with the peaceniks. I lunched with a small international cadre of women who subscribed to a viru-

lent brand of art activism. In spirit, I was in. In practice, I didn't know how far I could wield bloody tools.



9 August

I was at a sponsored meeting held in a small room at the public library. Modeled on AA meetings without the god stuff, these discussions were meant to caretake always fragile awareness. It's a group for those who find that doing the right thing is a not-so-simple moral imperative. It's for folks that need help overcoming bad habits, implicit racism.

A woman stood up to speak. She said, and here she could trust that she could reveal almost anything, she felt herself checking her language. As she spoke she began using hand gestures as whole words dropped from her speech. She mimed,

though I wasn't sure I got this right, that even the words she chose for friendliness, for support, were so overly considered that she mainly stuttered now. All the time. Her tongue was knotted up. She'd lost spontaneity of expression.

Most nodded. Some frowned. A resonant mumble of acknowledgement mmmhhhhh, mmmmhhhhh was heard. The woman continued saying that she was no longer sure how to be an ally as she'd found that often, alliance was an incorrect formulation of well-meaningness. She asked, with flailing arm gestures, for tips on how to present as a concerned person in the world. She wept.

The moderator suggested they break for snacks.

7 September

I'm wearing my rat mask as I tell a Walter Benjamin dream to young Walter himself. I told him that Walter found himself on top of a peak overlooking all the land. He saw other people standing on other peaks. One was suddenly struck with vertigo and fell. Like a virus, all the others were soon consumed with dizziness, plunging into the depths. He woke when the urge to drop hit him. Transfixed, the boy told me that the "Rat wissen," the practical advice of everyday experience told in a telling without closure was what he longed for.

19 September

I'm in my parent's bedroom. I climb on a chair so I can peak into the drawers of their dresser. The top one housed my father's watch, his coins, his bowties, his nail clippers, his wallet. Dad kept his favorite cufflinks in a tiny container the size of a squared off deck of cards. I cradle the soft, brown leather box in my hands. On its pliable top, the letters R.E.D. were engraved. For many years this little box was a mystery to me for it was nowhere RED, its supple inside and outside the color of a dog's whisker.



part 4

MAPPING

* * *

INTERVIEWER: *But why specifically Beowulf?*

GARDNER: [...] *Grendel is a monster, and living in the first person, because we're all in some sense monsters, trapped in our own language and habits of emotion. Grendel expresses feelings we all feel – enormous hostility, frustration, disbelief, and so on, so that the reader, projecting his own monster, projects a monster that is, for him, the perfect horror show.*

– Excerpt from *Paris Review* 75 (Spring 1979)



INTERVIEWER: *Well, the mythical Geryon has wings, and so does your incarnation. They're another marker of his difference. What attracted you to this story?*

CARSON: *His monstrosity. We all feel we're monsters most of the time.*

– Excerpt from Eleanor Wachtel, "Interview with Anne Carson," *Brick* 89 (Summer 2012)

What's Love Got to Do with It?

“Bob darling,” “what do ghosts have to do with it? Have to do with it?” IRB sang their question to Tina T’s melody while snacking on a vegan platter of greens and grains. “You’re obsessed as far as I can tell with the spectres of anthropomorphized monsters. I simply wonder about this crush you’ve got on wing-ed spooks and beasties. Is there maybe some redux to your color theory here? The “spectral spectrum” you used to call it. Or have you cold-turkeyed that addiction?”

Bob chewed on a celery stalk and answered after thoughtful mastication, “Regarding monsters. I dunno. Something I read a long time ago still haunts me. But, you know, regarding color, I got stuck in a surreal fantasy of what came perilously close to an essentialism of black and white. And that was not in the plan. I began thinking from the perspective of additive and subtractive physics, of light and matter, lightness and darkness through a relational lens. I got swept up in a nexus of speculative science and processual concrescence and emergent aesthetics and ... well, it’s all very seductive.” He smiled as he said this, aware of the obtuse jargon. He quickly became serious. “Anyway, I forgot something. Forgot a lot of things actually. Forgot it’s not all about western presuppositions. How could I fuckin’ lose sight of that?”

And, I forgot about metaphor. All those inescapable little allegories that anyone, really anyone would be bound to construe. Take the concepts of lightness and darkness ... but don't take 'em too far coz you're immediately hit with a tsunami of associations, a fucking mess of modes." He absently whirled a spiral in the hummus plate with his fork. "Holes and knots. Representational gaffs. Hyperbolic meanings. Appropriation. Language going all murky." "You looking for something scare-quote 'pure' my dear?" they asked with incredulity. "Well, uhm, hmm, no, course not, but I, it's just that all my practices, my research interests, are so charged these days. Every vector needs to be ethically considered. I get that, I do, but it's exhausting and I miss, yeah, feel drawn and quartered by every expressed and unexpressed implication, every metaphorical association. The impossibility of simply dreaming about color and making useless art and ... I have these fantasies now of sitting down at a wheel and endlessly throwing one pot. Kneading the same lump of clay over and over again. No glaze. No fire. I should stop this oh woe is me rant now. Sorry, it's going nowhere."

"But Betty Bob," they said swiping a sine-wave pattern through the hummus spiral with a carrot stick, "give yourself a break here. No one's asking you to suffocate your fascinations. Where's this fear of confrontation coming from? Of making mistakes? My god, look what my parents did to their darling fetus and yet ..." "Precisely," he interrupted, "and yet what? You happy over there with your red kale?" He looked them in the eye, hoping to see some physical indication of their wayward rods and cones. They took a long sip of water. "Yeah, I am."

But honestly, IRB wasn't sure. And wasn't that the point? They lived a temporally complex "now" and that's what counted. They were happy as far as they could measure happiness on a rudimentary scale of everyday existence.

IRB worried, though they hadn't the courage to confront Bob yet, that his present interest in monsters may possibly be piqued by their off-the-charts GenTel biology. Their flesh and blood, gristle, and bone that would be, could be fodder for his monster mash. Was he researching the ghosts of Grendel and Geryon through night-vision goggles? Did he expect IRB to be dragonwise gazing at scorched red earth? Did his rapt attention to these fabrications have anything to do with the "gift"? Their uncanny superpower? They wondered if he hoped to find tiny buds of red wings on their shoulder blades one morning?

Gift. Their associative motor was rumbling now just as Bob predicted. They recently looked up the etymology of the word "precarious." They do this from time to time when they overuse a term. Betty Bob's taste for nerdy genealogy had infected them. The OED staff put it this way:

The Latin word *precarius* means "given as a favour," or "depending on the favour of another person"; and the earliest meaning of the English word precarious relates to the idea of being given something – the right to occupy land, or to hold a particular position – "at the pleasure of" another person, who might simply choose to take it back at any time.

So back in the 17C, precarity was derived from uncertainties implicated in gifting. IRB brought it up over dessert crêpes.

"So this is gonna interest you," they said, "I know you love wordplay." "OK, whatcha got?" he queried. "So you know how we theorize precarity through labor and markets and inequality." "Yeah, course." "Well I looked up the etymology. Have you done that?" "No." "Turns out its earliest usage was related to the uncertain – i.e., precarious – nature of a gift from someone that could be taken away. Like land, or a position. How was it written ... 'at

the pleasure of' another person." Bob balked. "That's a whole other take on *jouissance*! It's as if it cycled through feudal inscrutability to material risk and back to commercial inscrutability." IRB smiled and took a sip of decaf espresso. Like Red before them, they liked inserting these liquid pauses into conversations for emphasis. Keep Bob waiting for the *coup de grâce*. They continued. "So like we do, we dis/continuously quantum leaped to the word 'vicarious'. *Vicarious – experience in the imagination through the feelings or actions of another person* – that's the definition. I'm not paraphrasing."

Bob wasn't sure where they were going with this. He checked his understanding with them. "So we're looking at precarious vicarity or vicarious precarity as dependent on a more than one. Right? Vicarity, if you take away its pejorative context, seems to me a mode of transindividuation. Precarity too, for that matter, but it's complicated with an economy of usurpation." Bob rattled on for a bit. IRB listened, feeling they had sown a seed of unknown genus.

The Thing Bifurcated Immediately Morphed

What does it mean, Bob asked himself, to cleave some thing asunder? To split something open while clinging to it? To foster distance and proximity in the swathe of a cut? In this question, he was sure, there was a riddle, perpetually undecidable. He sweetly cursed IRB for planting the Tina T earworm in his brain. The BIG question colored every tendril of cleaving.

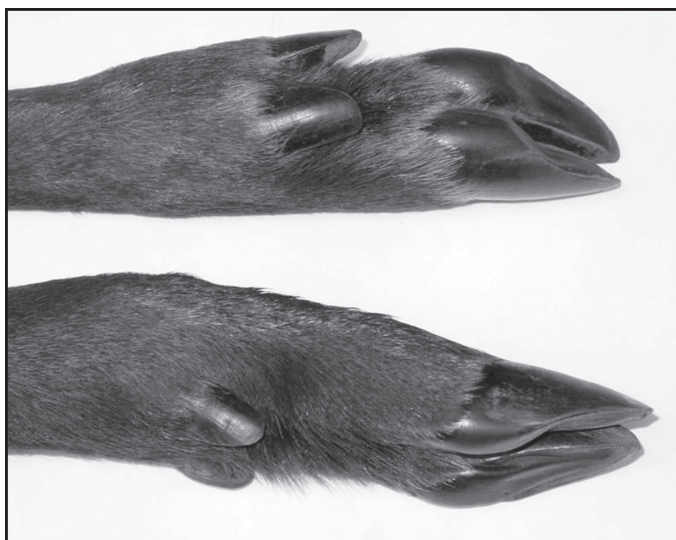
If one was “to cleave” as in doing as a verb does, what’s the past tense? How does cleaving clove? He looked it up and found different conjugations in different dictionaries. “To stick to” is to have *cleaved*, *clove*, and *clave* according to some. Like “Non-binary Infrared Betty *clave* (or *clove*) to their Bob.” To split a thing in two is to have *cleaved*, *cleft*, or *cloven*. Like “Infrared Betty’s affections were *cloven* in two, *cleft* inexorably apart.” This example frightened him.

Shaking off his inability to think clearly through the problem, he thought to give diagramming a try. He remembered he sucked at this as a kid.

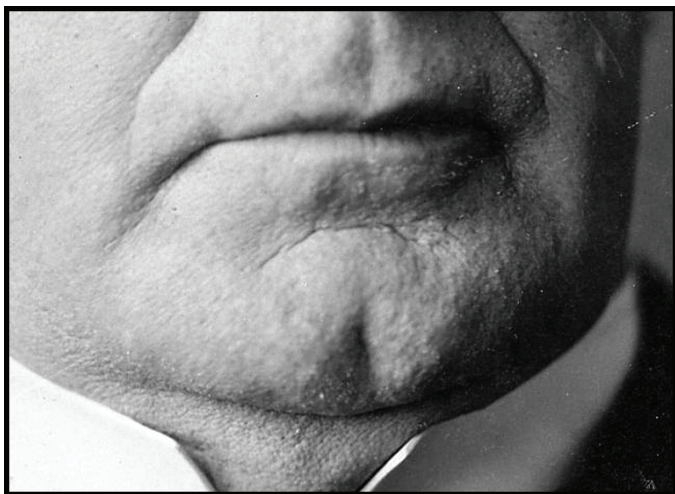


The drawing didn't satisfy in the way a Feynman diagram might. He needed squiggles. The all-important verb stands caught between a wall and a fence.

Now cloven the adjective is pretty unambiguous. Bob immediately conjures the cloven hoof of a deer, or Pan the goat-fucker piper or yeah, even the dancing Devil. And not to forget the auspiciously sexy facial cleft. He'd heard it said about Travolta a gazillion times. "What a fucking chin."



The Thing Bifurcated Immediately Morphed



G-Teaming

Perhaps The Bettys had gotten it stupidly right in their own ambiguous fashion with that Birth of Feminism poster sanctioning conspicuous cleavage. They'd pasted that affiche on every filthy facade they could find in crazy crumbletown. There'd been fierce arguments over the political ramifications of that image but in the end, humor trumped ferocity. That was then.

Now, two monsters inhabited his pantheon. Here was his G-team, his tribe of ghostly spectres, his future past, his comic stars of sagacious terror. Red Geryon and Blue Grendel satisfied his Genus – *Monster*. He anticipated the arrival of Green. GenTelZ might yet join this menagerie. They fit the specs.

Unable to construct a clever koan to frame his quandary, he crafted protagonists. He wondered how his monsters might play with these Janus words?



Say Grendel was into sanctions. Seems plausible. Geryon was obsessed with cleaving. Inexplicably he wondered with a pang if IRB would ever ghost him on Twitter when they tired of his obsessions? He'd tear his heart out. What's love got to ...? He shook himself back to the problem at hand, embellishing a gedankenexperiment with definitions:

Monster cleavage =

Disruptive beings, some with cloven, articulated feet,
rending things asunder, smashing things together

Monster sanctions =

sinkholes between approval and penalty

Tending toward restraint, timidity IRB calls it, his bad jokes propel him into unforeseen terrain. Take his word-play on Janus and Genus. Funny? Nope. A spontaneous eruption of phonetic similarity? Sure. A rhyme. A rap. A pun (repeat 3x: vi-car-ious pre-car-ious). He'd argue that it leads to something not irrelevant if one rides the event. For instance, he has never ever intuitively understood taxonomic classification. In many ways, every fiber of his being rebels against this kind of science. He goes for the speculative, not the categorical. But from what he understands of zoology and biology, a Genus sits between a Species and a Tribe. That's an interesting point of view for his Ghostly monsters. Maybe like Cerberus and Orthrus they're gatekeepers, cleaving the cusp of identity, holding on tight to a cultural life preserver cloven/cleaved/cleft loose in a raging, encompassing sea. He thinks maybe it's a legitimate allusion to tentacular kinship that might lead him to sensational insights on Grendel's existential fall. That this in-between nomenclature might elucidate Geryon's queer transubstantiation. It might even help him puzzle out designer GenTelZ.



Grendel

Betty Bob fell for *Grendel* at Uni-8. Then embodying a vigorous curiosity with a beatific naivety, he devoured Gardner's version of the epic saga in one day, moving his read from the cafeteria, to the library to the shade of an exfoliating oak on the lawn of the music building. Absorbed in a thin book with a bright red cover and scratchy blue lettering, he was transfixed by the glimmers and obstacles to meaning. He clearly understood, as if for the first time, what he didn't understand. The dragon's worldview in Chapter Five was especially perplexing and especially lovely in all its hideous, inspiring unfolding. He, like protagonist Grendel, struggled to cognize the ever-so-apparent wisdom of the fire-spewing beast. As the story wrinkled its way to its conclusion at the chasm, the beleaguered, bloodied Grendel jumps, or falls, to his death. An event waiting for 174 pages to happen.

Now, re-reading *Grendel*, the old monster satisfies in inexplicable ways. Somewhere in his old art notebooks are sketches for a kinetic sculpture based on ANW's concept of duration. They were elaborate, definitely over-thought. His mentor suggested it wasn't necessary to build this room-sized work as he'd already actualized it on paper. The advice communicated the emerging aesthetic of conceptual art which was not Bob's just yet. Young and

eager to make things, he was disappointed to not materialize his plan. In hindsight, he realizes it may have simply been a crappy concept. Nonetheless, the ambiguous push/pull of this singular event has haunted his entire career. When to make and when not to make? When to let mistakes happen? When to pursue the accident? When to turn the page?

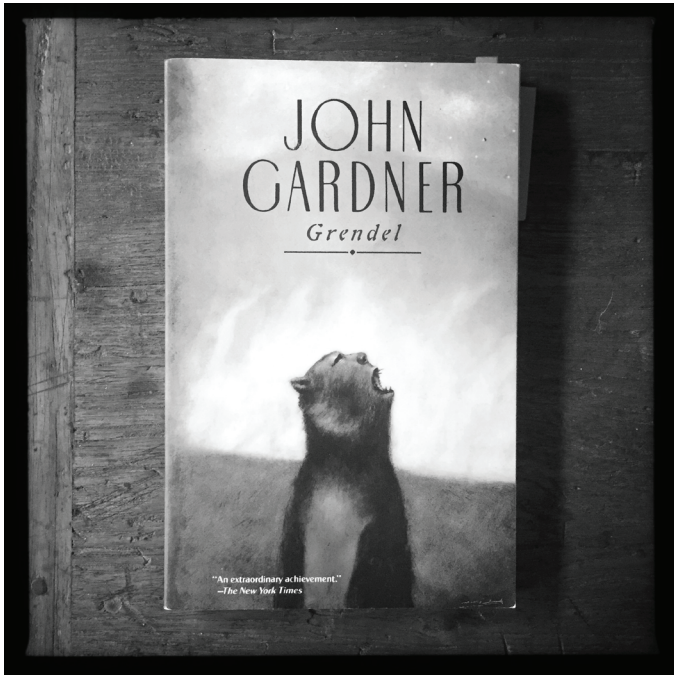
A sympatico mystery of that very year remains a recurring ripple in his memory pool. Why did he pluck *Process and Reality* from a bookstore shelf? Was he attracted to the title? He could not have had any reference to the author. To the content. Was this a random contingency of everyday life?

His thoughts return to the puzzle of the pubescent monster. Bob sees Gardner's empathetically resurrected Grendel as a mama's boy, a people hungry ogre first slain by Beowulf in Old English prose. The original does nothing for him.

Grendles heafod, þær guman druncon,
egeslic for eorlum ond þære idese mid,
wliteseon wrætlic; weras on sawon.
Beowulf mæpelode, bearn Ecgþeowes:
“Hwæt! we þe þas sælac, sunu Healfdenes,
leod Scyldinga, lustum brohton
tires to tacne, þe þu her to locast ...

What is clear is that Gardner's work ponders twelve stages of western philosophy allied chronologically or perhaps cyclically, to the zodiac. Bob turned to Isabelle Stengers's *Thinking with Whitehead* as her research helped him put the pieces of his own epistemological genealogy in perspective, turning him on to the fact that Grendel's dragon and the priest Ork gushed the philosopher verbatim. He hoped to better understand Gardner's brand of Sartrean

existentialism through the process philosophy disgorged from his wisest character.



Able to cut and paste at leisure from a pdf, Bob dumps whole passages from Chapter Five into his note app. In fact, the entire chapter is citable but that feels strange. Gardner did it after all. But enough is enough and he has no desire for mimesis.

Excerpting what catches his fancy, he downs another espresso and happily lounges in his past and future encounters with the inhuman. One thing that strikes him in the tête-à-tête, one gossipy monster to another, is the contrast between dragon's red hot heat and Grendel's anguished

blues. He boldfaces what he finds “important” and, as is his practice, jots refs in the middles and the margins.

Bob's Notebook/Section Grendel

The dragon smiled. Horrible, debauched, mouth limp and cracked, loose against the teeth as an ancient dog's. "Now you know how they feel when they see you, eh? Scared enough to pee in their pants! He he!"

(59) (See F. Fanon, BS,WM)

[...]

*After another long pause, he said: "Approach it this way. Let us take this jug." [...] "How does this jug differ from something animate?" he drew it back out of reach. "By organization. Exactly! This jug is an absolute democracy of atoms. It has importance, or thereness, so to speak, but no Expression, or loosely, **ah-ha!-ness**. **Importance** is primarily monistic in its reference to the universe. Limited to a finite individual occasion, importance ceases to be important. In some sense or other – we can skip the details – **importance is derived from the immanence of infinitude in the finite**. (check ANW MoFT chap1) Expression however, listen closely now, – **expression is founded on the finite occasion. It is the activity of finitude impressing itself on its environment.***

***Importance** passes from the world as one to the world as many, whereas expression is **a gift** from the world as many to the world as one. (ask IRB about this) The laws of nature are large average effects which reign **impersonally**. But there is nothing average*

about expression: it is essentially individual. Consider one molecule – (aah mr. Guattari I presume)

“A what?” I said.

The closed eyes squeezed tight. He let out a long, cross sigh of red-orange fire. (68–69) (look up Duchamp’s art coefficient-relation between the unexpressed but intended and the unintentionally expressed)

*“Put it this way,” he said. His voice had grown feeble, as if he were losing hope. “In the case of **vegetables**, we find **expressive bodily organizations** which lack any one center of experience with a higher complexity either of expressions received or of inborn data. Another democracy, but with qualifications, as we shall see. (starving ... look up ratatouille recipe and Steichen’s artichoke) An animal, on the other hand, is dominated by one or more centers of experience. If the dominant activity be severed from the rest of the body – if, for example, we cut off the head – the whole coordination collapses, and the animal dies. Whereas in the case of the **vegetable**, (or fruit ... find pomegranate image) the democracy can be subdivided into minor democracies which easily survive without much apparent loss of **functional expression**.” He paused. “You at least follow that?”*

“I think so.” (69, emphasis Bob)

>>> Cut the heart organ out of Gardner’s Whitehead >>>

“What God” Where? Life force you mean?

*The principle of process? God as the history of Chance?” (74) (Cage is so good here ... reread *Silence* and then jump to the mesostics for contrast)*

Foonote

Slam Dunks

10 October 1969 and/or 28 Rajab 1389

Frank Zappa releases his second solo album *Hot Rats* after the break up of the original Mothers of Invention. He dedicated the jazzy instrumentals to his newborn son Dweezil. Shot on infrared Kodak Aerochrome III film, the cover artwork shows Miss Christine of the GTO's (Girls

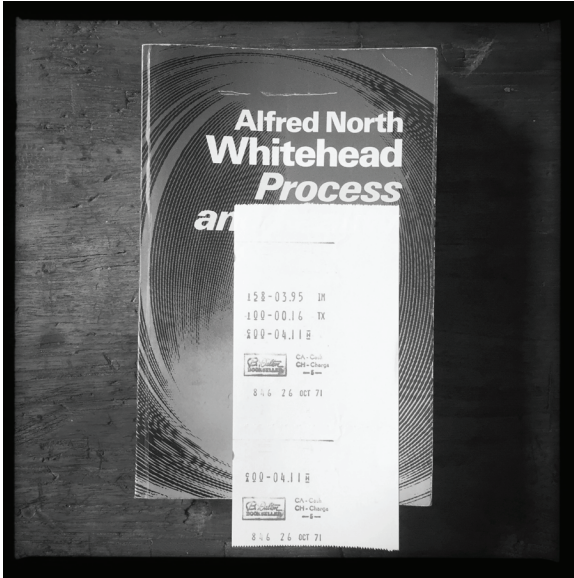


Together Outrageously, Betty progenitors) emerging from an empty swimming pool.

26 October 1971 and/or 6 Ramadan 1391

- Day 299 in the Gregorian calendar (300 in leap years)
- Luboš Kohoutek discovered in Hamburg-Bergedorf over thirty new minor planets including 1865 Cerberus.
- Ten days earlier, the Cambodian PM suspended the National Assembly announcing he would run the country by executive decree. Lon Nol said that “the sterile game of democracy” was hindering the Cambodian government’s fight against the communist forces of the Khmer Rouge and North Vietnamese.
- The top ten songs on the US charts were:
 1. Cher – “Gypsys, Tramps & Thieves”
 2. The Osmonds – “Yo-Yo”
 3. Rod Stewart – “Maggie Ma”y
 4. Carpenters – “Superstar”
 5. Isaac Hayes – “Theme from Shaft”
 6. John Lennon – “Imagine”
 7. Lee Michaels – “Do You Know What I Mean”
 8. Joan Baez – “The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down”
 9. Cat Stevens – “Peace Train”
 10. The Free Movement – “I’ve Found Someone of My Own”
- The most popular flicks included:
 1. Louis Malle’s *Le Souffle au Coeur*
 2. Roman Polanski’s *Macbeth*
 3. William Friedkin’s *French Connection*
 4. Gerry de Leon’s *Women in Cages*
- Bob bought Process and Reality at a B. Dalton’s for \$3.95 plus tax.

Slam Dunks



Geryon

Bob's Passagenwerk has many folders.

When in his youthful Homeric myth phase, Bob met Geryon in fragmented bits of Stesichorus's lyric poem *Geryoneis*. He was touched by the sensitivity with which Stesichorus depicted this three-headed monster as a hero, slain by the feckless Herakles.

Then Geryon rested his neck to one side
 As might a poppy when it mars
 The tenderness of its body shedding
 Suddenly all of its petals... (*Geryoneis*)

This tale, as pieced together and reinvented by the poet Anne Carson in *Autobiography of Red* became his hands-down favorite book for awhile. Until *Red Doc*, the sequel, which he liked even more. There's a line on the back cover he can't shake: "To live past the end of your myth is a perilous thing." He immediately thinks of child stars with zilch screen presence as adults, or Charlie Manson, or Françoise Sagan, or ... this is actually going to be a very long list. Red Betty exceeded herself by dying, her myth intact, all James Dean-like. All Kartini-like. Though, as with Geryon, she will be tinkered with. Bob figures she

won't mind the fabulations unless she's emulated by a limp-brained fascist or a paint company.

Certainly, he was attracted to Carson's Geryon and Gardner's Grendel. Mama's boys with undeveloped sexual prefs. The fly-boy was queer, in love with Herakles, the guy tasked by Eurystheus to steal his red cattle. According to the official Grecian myth guide, this was Heraklean labor number ten of twelve. Conducted somewhere near modern day Malaga, Herakles had to first dispatch Geryon's poor two-headed watchdog Orthrus and the noble herdsman before spearhead(s)ing Geryon himself. Bob was struck by the number of multi-headed dogs that populated his musings these days. Orthrus. Cerberus. Was struck by a multitude of Red. In any case, Herky was one cruel dude on a mission.

Copy-pasting ancient etchings and long passages of the novel slash poem into Notebook/Section Geryon, he could almost feel Carson's crazy translation gloriously transforming the myth. Geryon's monstrosity balancing the banal and the beautiful. Oh those cock-suckingly inconvenient wings! He could feel the red flow of bloody battle hemodynamically coursing through the poetry of a beating heart. Romantic, tiresome. Erotic, dull. Th-thump, th-thump. Red, red, red always.

He scratched a thought.

~~Read what can be read of red.~~

~~Read a lover.~~ RED a Lover. Read all over.

RED ALL OVER.

In this way, he was mourning RB. In this way he was loving IRB.

Geryon



Read All Over

“That’s an old joke right? What’s black and white and red all over?” IRB queried Bob. “Uh, yeah, I guess so. I wasn’t being jokey though, more philosophical regarding homophones. That’s phones as in phonetic not phobes as in fraidy cats by the way.” IRB laughed but needed to ask, “Is *homo* a genus in this case?” Bob admitted he was never sure when *homo* meant *human* and when it meant *the same*.

Sometimes it was difficult for IRB to parse the imaging of their near-infrared spectrum to anything vaguely normative. Even though Bob worked hard to stay woke to their differencing, his alertness caused other problems. They were never sure – like with the prefix *homo* – if and when he was pre-translating his perceptions to meet theirs. When was red really (his) red? When was it his green? This not-knowing kept them perpetually off-balance.

“Here’s a cool non-item,” Bob said swiping through the ebook.

Geryon took portraits of people through their footwear. The assistant head librarian’s sister, for instance, wore red converse sneakers.

It caught his attention because first of all, he loved his focus diverted to the sister of the assistant head librarian and secondly, he cherished a pair of reds he kept in the attic. Now he thought about cloven hoofs and IRB's articulated toe shoes and suddenly craved a fetish pair of scarlet tabi socks.

For his part, Bob hoped to connect Carson's Geryon in some uncreepy way with Red Betty's resolve. Her will to red, her well-read, her unwavering readiness. Hoped to keep the motor of her passion revved and running. He also hoped, according to his own burgeoning passion, to swipe right from red to infrared on the spectrum. Unfold a link between what he'd lost in a friend and what was becoming intimate in another. "Sure," he admitted to himself, "I want to ride that wavelength." Sexy aside, there was an undeniable lineage between his reddish Bettys. He'd follow it gladly.

Sharing the space of a summer morning, IRB fiddled with a design for a five-toe last for a women's size 11 while Bob copied an excerpt of a phone conversation between Herakles and Geryon. Herakles' excited report to G of a Freedom dream went like this:

*But that's not why I called Geryon
the reason I called is to tell you
about my dream I had a dream of you last night. Did you. Yes you
were this
old Indian guy standing on the back porch
and there was a pail of water there on the step with a drowned bird
in it –
big yellow bird really huge you know
floating with its **wings** out and you leaned over and said, Come on
now get out of there – **and you took it
by one wing and just flung it right up into the air whoosh it came
alive and then it was gone.***

Yellow? said Geryon and he was thinking Yellow! Yellow! Even in dreams

he doesn't know me at all! Yellow! (74, emphasis Bob)

Herakles reported an omen of death and rebirth, of pity and power. Ultimately – of freedom. But it meant nothing much at all to the young fop. The Heraklean compliment, his mythic vision of Geryon's potential rang hollow, a flaccid intrusion on the kid's earbud beats.

But oh, how hot the comment burned.

To get his color wrong! To see him Yellow!

"Shame on you my friend!" thought Geryon as he nodded to a dubstep remix.

As Bob discovered in *Red Doc*>, Herakles became Sad.

Geryon on Grendel

What a messed-up dude that guy Grendel was. Wrought terror by accident more than not.

He let his pubescent hormones rule his big hairy-ass body. His slaughter was so goddamn clumsy.

I hope I am never perceived as farcical.

Grendel on Geryon

I could take that sissy boy in a hot minute. Wrap my teeth around his skinny body and crunch his bones. Rip that red flesh from the mucous membranes. Suck his darling eyes from their sockets. Dangle his entrails as a slimy chain around my thick furry neck. Yum. Good for me.

What else can I do?

part 5

SMASHING

* * *

Awakening as a graduated process that goes on in the life of the individual as in the life of generations. Sleep its initial stage. A generation's experience of youth has much in common with the experience of dreams. Its historical configuration is a dream configuration. Every epoch has such a side turned toward dreams, the child's side. For the previous century, this appears very clearly in the arcades. [...] What follows here is an experiment [Versuch] in the technique of awakening.

– Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*

Proto-Gamma Betty's Witness

I don't know why they tasked me with this. Perhaps it's a mandatory initiation protocol. A form of hazing. Like the sorority *rite de passage*. I read about it in a *New Yorker* short story. It shocked me, that communal contract with cruelty. But I don't want to compare this assignment with that aberrant display of power.

This is my first time as spokesperson for The Bettys. It's an honor and a horror if I'm honest. I'm not at all sure I'm capable of this type of reportage as my languaging finds little comfort in urban and regional slang. I'm rarely funny. My jargon is archaically formal. My bad. I'm working on it.

I observed what occurred, so I have a perspective on the event the others do not. It was a by-chance being there. Almost a witnessing. Have you ever wished you'd turned left at a random moment rather than right? Realized your futures hang in the balance of every autonomic, nonconscious action as well as those oh-so-over-estimated pivotal choices? I carry the contours of these conundrums close to the bone. This I believe is why they've asked the impossible from me. To be the teller of the tale.



I was dining at Bappa Cuisine with non-Betty friends. BAP was brilliant that June morning. The sun poured through the skylight, bathing every surface with exaggerated contrast. All colors were brightly saturated when not obscured by bands of bright. Every shiny membrane was blindingly refractive, prismatically magical. The quinoa in my salad sparkled like I'd never seen before. We all remarked on the dancing light of this peculiarly amazing afternoon at the renovated BAP. The shine rendered the ubiquitous urban grit holding stone and mortar together invisible.

Black Betty, Infrared Betty, and Cyan Betty were ascending the southwest climbing wall. New vibrant handholds replaced the dingy crimps. The colorful wall objects brought a new sensibility to the atrium. Once the interior panorama, I remember this as a child, was so dismal, so dirty, so scary, I never wanted to return to that mall. Certainly it was exciting to watch my mother climb the Netting to purchase something or other essential to our livelihood but the building itself terrified me. I expected The Dragon to pop out from a pillar at any moment. Or worse.

On this day, the arcade was a radiant playground, an eye-popping pantone panoply. Little blisters and warts of the visible spectrum glimmered from the walls. If there was a present danger and a gruesome backstory of failed effort in the molecular composition of this place, it was masked that day by the splendor of the spectral. We all felt that heady mix of purpose and play that is BAP's *raison d'être*.

I watched he, she and they make their ways towards the atrium skylight. BB and IRB were wearing goggles, which was unusual. BB is expert. He's been climbing nets and walls and real rocks for decades. CB is also facile, unafraid

of the upside-down horizontal routes. The cliffhangers. IRB was talented enough. They'd coaxed them into training and though a reluctant acrophobe, Infrared B admitted the ascent was thrilling. This day they were chalked up and without harness so the climb was to be a milestone. The sunshine bode well. From my lazy, secure viewing point I was mesmerized by the delicate movement of all their tiny goatlike bodies on the sheer face of the dark wall.

Of course I couldn't hear the conversation between them, but I could see they were communicating. Could follow their fine skeletal motility, even at a significant distance. I could discern that BB was instructing IRB, pointing with his head and words towards the best holds. CB was acrobatically off on her own. Those that watched from ground level followed her daredevil movement but my eyes were focused on BB and Infrared. They had both been especially kind and welcoming to me, the intern, the Gen Z GenTel, the admittedly strange, nouvelle vague Betty. I liked them both immensely.

This day they were experimenting with color perception. They were almost always experimenting with the more-than of sensation. Fascinated by what is in excess of experience, that's how BB would put it. He was wearing red-filtered glasses. This would, the thinking went, equate his color vision with IRB's. The thing is, they could never be quite sure about spectral equivalence. They had long talks about this and often included me in the conversations as my "in-sight," we could say, on vision is uncommon. Any attempt to equivocate the perception of color is always approximate, even among typicals. As science and philosophy tell us, the intensity of the sunlight, the temperature in the space, the particulate in the air, the subject-object equation, all effect the subjective experience of color. For BB and IRB, attuning their cod-

ing, expanding their differential fields, is what they most enjoyed. IRB chose a yellow filter for her goggles that day. This would be fun they told me as we drank chai together before their adventure.

As the trio headed for the wall CB called the “plane of immanence,” Bob joked that he was happiest when surprised.

What transpired transpired in a split second. 2.86 seconds to be precise but the cliché feels appropriate. I can attest to this as my sense of chronological time is acute. IRB had reached a difficult juncture. Their left hip was awkwardly aligned with their right shoulder. Bob later told me that he called out a color code to assist their vertical navigation. This was the plan. His directives required an accurate, speedily applicable (their little joke) correspondence between visual and proprioceptive perception.

IRB had climbed high, drawing a bead on the steel rafters still thirty meters overhead. Three meters beneath them Bob could smell their excitement. Then the agitation, the fear. He saw their prototype toe shoe slip on the pinch. Spotting the nearest, best handhold from his vantage point he shouted “PINK” as their right hand searched for a landing site, a bubble anchored to the wall that would support their dangling weight. They saw, must have seen, a tumorous “chartreuse” sloper at 2 o'clock (aviator slang). Within right arm reach. IRB hesitated. The lapse (.386 seconds by my estimation) was long enough to lose balance entirely.

Infrared Betty's fall, like Red's before her, was short and long. A freeze frame of totality and nothingness. This is my best guess. I have imagined the word that rang in their ears as they fell backwards was “precarity.” But that is specious of course. It might have been “milk” or “tattoo” or “heavy.” It may have simply been “Help!” There

may have been no words at all. How are infinities measured really? When does heavy fade to light? Henri Bergson thought about it and though I find his assessment insufficient it's a beginning:

The distinction between the heavy and the light may seem to be as old-fashioned and as childish as that between the hot and the cold. But the very childishness of this distinction makes it a psychological reality. And not only do the heavy and the light impress our consciousness as generically different, but the various degrees of lightness and heaviness are so many species of these two genera.

— *Time and Free Will*

Bob later told me that Bessie Coleman probably had a more profound idea regarding this issue but we would never be privy to it.

That evening the BAP link on the Worldometer ticked up a notch.

321. Tick 322. Tock.

The RIP and DIFFRACT requiem once again blew up on Twitter as did "It was there a horse soon dancing."

The Emphasis Is Different

The dire consequences of non-normative living were wearing on The Bettys. Repetitive mourning cycles exhausted their spirits. Two Reds at the long, slow end of the spectrum's frequency range had perished. The Bs had no clue what to make of it all. Didn't bother trying to work out the efficacy of Redness. At least not yet. As the Bettys convulsed with, how did VB put it, fear and loathing, life went on.

Black Betty was inconsolable. Ensnared in the warehouse studio he'd drifted into what looked to the world like a meditative posture. Or perhaps, they couldn't know, a catatonic state. Cross-legged, sheltered behind infrared filtered goggles, his body was motionless save for the faint in/out of his breathing. Brown Betty occasionally put a make-up mirror beneath his nostrils to insure to herself he too hadn't passed. She'd heard of monks that died while meditating, their bodies resisting decomposition for months. The condensation on her tiny mirror was slight but visible. Like the Nepalese Buddha Boy he didn't move (as far as anyone could tell) to eat, piss, shit. His dreads not yet to his neck at the time of IRB's fall were now well past shoulder length.

ZappaZ

Cyan Betty drew the short stick for the task of sorting and packing the stuff IRB left in their studio cubicle. No Betty volunteered for this emotionally charged job so it fell to lots. All agreed that the result was cosmically appropriate. CB was RB's spectral shadow and by extension, IRB's sleuthy ghost.

Found amongst a variety of artifacts, toiletries and clippings were:

- three moldy tangerines and a half-eaten box of sesame crackers
- Red Betty's rat mask
- a college photo of Black B with unknown chums
- a wrinkled map of Andalusia
- twenty-five handmade marbles from a BAP boutique
- a box of color gel cutouts in an array of shapes and sizes plus a swatchbook, a color temperature calculator and a note from Bob that read "For your vicarious pleasure."

On their bookshelves CB found among others:

- a first edition of Gertrude Stein's *Blood on the Dining Room Floor*
- a paperback of Benjamin's *The Storyteller*

- three hardbound university textbooks on *Sensation and Perception*, *Photography by Infrared: Its Principles and Applications* and *Practical Gamma-ray Spectroscopy*
- James Merrill's *Changing Light at Sandover*
- Maggie Nelson's *Argonauts*
- Red Betty's signed copy of Angela Davis's *Blue Legacies and Black Feminism*
- a dog-eared copy of *Queen Bess, Daredevil Aviator*

In IRB's vinyl collection, CB found the ancient *Hot Rats* LP and made a connection she couldn't explain. Her mind maps often resembled unfurled twine so this wasn't unusual. She knew enough to know that IRB loved Zappa and the early Mothers though she personally couldn't understand what prompted such delight in a Gen Z. Then she saw the little rat stamp on the bottom right side of the cover and realized it had been a gift from Red to Infrared. Scanning the circular yellow label she was struck not only by its color but by the title of the third cut on Side One, "Son of Mr. Green Genes." It impressed her for its eerie resonance to The Bettys' current dilemma, abbreviated to a singsong "No Greens. Strange genes."

She dropped the needle on the platter and let the tune scratch it way to its upbeat conclusion. Searching for more information on a band she knew nothing about CB found the lyrics to the original "Mr. Green Genes" on the Uncle Meat album. In this dirgey ballad were clues that had not yet found a mystery to cleave to. Kinda brilliant she thought.



Eat your greens
Don't forget your beans & celery
Don't forget to bring

Your fake I.D.
Eat a bunch of these
MAGNIFICENT
With sauerkraut
MMMMMMMMMMMM
Sauerkraut
Eat a grape, a fig
A crumpet too ...
You'll pump 'em right through
Doo-wee-ooo

Eat your shoes
Don't forget the strings
And sox
Even eat the box
You bought 'em in
You can eat the truck
That brought 'em in
Garbage truck
MMMMMMMMMMMMMouldy
Garbage truck
Eat the truck & driver
And his gloves
NUTRITIOUSNESS
DELICIOUSNESS
WORTHLESSNESS



Thanks to CB's discovery, "Mr. Green Genes" and "Son of ..." made aural appearances at IRB's life celebration in the BAP atrium. Bettys with witchy tendencies hoped that acknowledging the relational forces between dead reds and unborn greens might set the conditions for alchemical success. It was considered a bizarre proposition, a dangerous symbiosis. They realized their concerns were

dining on a conceptual tectonic plate. Necessity was now urgency. Or, urgencies were now necessary. They hadn't yet figured out the proper semantic order. They did conclude they needed to straightaway sharpen their improvisatory skills.

ShazDada Blog Bits

Arts and Politics journalist ShazDada's remarks on the drop of Infrared Betty and other related events.

18 June

Am I the first journalist to recognize a pattern here? The fallen Betty – Red, famous, Infrared, less so – both charged in our collective memory with the significance of *potential*. Both, with their divergent generational attitudes, put the conditions in place for some “thing” important to occur. Something happened all right but it’s what didn’t happen, what hasn’t happened, that frustrating stigma of the future perfect tense – the will have been – that we feel so damn strongly.

I couldn’t write another elegy for a Betty. I went through all the notes and transcripts of past interviews filed in the **B** folder looking for any hint of what might be a worthwhile remark. Here, in an archival glut of B’ings, I stumbled on my last interview with the trans-special BetteB. Do y’all remember her ... the rattus caliente with the neon rainbow scar on her furry cheek? So here’s the thing. I bumped into a *Buzzfeed* post, filtered through a leak from her care team that seemed to indicate her morphological

transformation had slowed. They let an incipient little nugget out. She has grown Stelarcy ear-like formations on her arms that look like peculiar little wings. That's what the post said. No images, photoshopped or otherwise.

Maybe this isn't so startling but I began connecting dots, organizing clues not the least of which is the crispy palindromic name and the sheer resonance of BetteB's experience to just about everything Betty.

So what am I going for here? Dunno yet but I smell something, scents something ... more fruity than a gummy bear, more floral than a Proustian *primula vulgaris*, more putrid than a summer dumpster, more acrid than death.

To be continued ...

Poof!

When he wrangled his thoughts back to his breath he felt calm. But the churning mind inside his still body was difficult to tame. He had arrived at the apex of his earlier concerns. Were Blue and Red and beloved Infrared, the disappeared Betty modulators, were they immanent to light or darkness?

This question was important to him once. Less so now. Still, he wondered about the infra. Where (scratch), Who (irrelevant), How, how, how light is the spectrum? How heavy are his monsters?

He meditated on his favorite koans though they brought more irritation than solace. Any hint of a culturally appropriative activity, like sitting in *seiza*, would disturb his digestion. Now everything and nothing mattered. He could feel his beginnings middling.

One day Chao-chou fell down in the snow, and called out, "Help me up! Help me up!" A monk came and lay down beside him. Chao-chou got up and went away.

And ...

A monk asked when he was weighing some flax, "What is Buddha?"

Shunryo said: "This flax weighs three pounds."

His bespoke koan went like this:

Betty asked: "Does all color spring from lightness or darkness?" They answered: "Why do you ask this question?"

He came and went from slim threads of oxygen intake to tiny carbon dioxide expulsions. All muscle pain subsided as he focused attention. His former mantra – "beginners mind" – had migrated to a simpler "Poof!" recalling Red Betty's story of the disappearing rabbit. He'd been sarcastic with Red at that fateful dinner party way back when, as she waxed prolific on BB guns and magic. But the image of the ephemeral rabbit, Harvey the light, Harvey the heavy, had lingered.

He'd been flippant with Infrared that day on the wall. Intoxicated by the swell of sunlight in the magnificent atrium he left caution behind. Forgot momentarily that the primary hues exuded by the slopers, jugs, and crimps would transform beneath his goggles to colors he could not name. His irreverence for taxonomical clarity had killed his closest. He'd taken too much for granted. Been so very nonchalant. Enjoyed the thrill, pocketed the danger. He asked himself how it was possible that one who reified the experience of surprise as he did could be so devastated by it? Had he forced a false narrative on the one he most loved? Son of a bitch.

And yeah, so, there's also that. When it counted, he'd flinched. A rata-tat-tat shot from his throat as he stuttered "Ppppp ... ink" as he saw them slipping. In that irrevocable micro-moment, a repeating consonant ... five or ten thousand ppppp's stammered from his throat like an uzi spitting blanks. The precision to detail he'd exerted in everyday life had abandoned him when he needed it. He'd

failed them. Hugged his purple jug with chalky hands as IRB tumbled. Acknowledged the open hole of their gaping mouth as it soundlessly smalled to its vanishing point. Registered the thud at the height of his own panic.

Now, as grounded as possible in full lotus, he was all about in and out. Harvey heavy, Harvey light, Harvey heavy, Harvey light. The visions behind his eyelids were in luminous perfectly exposed high speed infrared black and white.

But there was more. There was always more. He hoped to quell his vacillating bouts of intention as he coped with intense desire. He was a shitty meditator even though he was fooling his clan.

Call it an urge. Call it yearning. His wish? He longed with every porous molecule to become room temperature through an organic process. That would be plus/minus 22° C. Deadly chill for a primate body temp but he had conviction on his side. His desire to radiate infrared wavelengths as a black body was his will to power. He would become a perfect absorber.

He would.

If not, then, Poof!

Black Body on Wikipedia

The term “black body” was first used by Gustav Kirchoff in 1860. In essence, all matter absorbs electromagnetic radiation to some degree and an object that absorbs all radiation falling on it (at all wavelengths and frequencies) is called a black body, i.e., a **perfect absorber**. When a black body is at a uniform temperature state, it emits back this absorbed energy, and it is termed as “black body radiation”. This is a type of radiation and has continuous frequency/intensity which depends only on the black body’s temperature, and the type of spectrum it generates is called the Planck spectrum. In this type of spectrum, spectral peaks at characteristic frequencies are shifted to higher values (shorter wavelengths) with increasing temperature values. **For instance, at room temperature most of the emission of the black body is in the infrared region of the electromagnetic spectrum.** (emphasis Bob)

White on White

Why the fuck I ever picked the white moniker I'll never understand. Seemed bright and pure back then. Like light. Like the most brilliant neutral pigment when squeezed out of a Windsor and Newton tube. Remembering the smell of oils alone brings back another era. Like Rauschenberg's still wet white paintings that once hung as set design in the Black Mountain College cafeteria while Olson recited on a ladder and Cage fiddled with a radio and Merce danced on the tables. I was there sitting in a corner next to Annie wishing us girls would dare to take the lead more. What was up with that wishing business? Wimps we were then. God, imagine a bobby-soxed wannabe artist in 501 denims. You know you had to sit in a hot bath in those days to get the shape to mold to your body. Nothin' like the pricey jeans these days with more holes than fabric. Naïve, full of hope was I. Loved the veggies we grew in the garden. And famous white, male artists aside, the relational subject/object discussion passed from philosophers to poets like Olson in the first half of 20C is now de rigueur theory as far as I can tell. It all feels redundant to me but then I'm a closet elitist. They tell me I spill my true allegiances when I've had a couple.

I know the others think I'm a nostalgic, marginally conservative fool at this point. I think they feel sorry for me

that I've got to promenade as White Betty. Having to take responsibility for every Caucasian obscenity ever is too much for one cracker to bear. At least my chosen attire is millennial pinkish, like white cotton washed with a red towel. In fact, that's the truth of it. My favorite white sweats got mixed up in a color load and I've been off-white ever since. Dirty white. I tried to do a switcheroo like Betty Bob and corner the Betty White trope while she burned popular. That didn't work out for obvious reasons. I always tell the girls they don't have a sense of humor but that's not really accurate. Most do though a couple are goddamned strident. Can't blame 'em though. Times are tough again. We waltzed through a couple decades where hope was still on the table. Seems to me it got chewed up, puked out. I try not to rely too much on my memories of different times and stay present to the present you know what I mean but it's fuckshit difficult. Don't get me started on what is was like to be a lezzie in the 60s when a girl like me didn't even know the name of the "condition." Thumbing through encyclopedias in the public library was no help at all lemme tell you in trying to figure out why my body was acting peculiarly at pajama parties.

But I want to say a little something about loss. Steer clear of politics and stick with life journey themes. Put delicate questions out there like whether or not we see white light or dark light as we depart? There's so much written about the last exhale but me, I wonder about that last blink, the color behind the eyelids? The Ganzfeld effect.

Only Betty Bob and I remember Blue at this point. Red is such a shero by now I doubt there's much truth left to her narrative. But that's OK. She's writ Shibuya Square large and deserves the attention. Losing Infra hurt bad. Their fall, like we used to say, as we always used animals for every cruel analogy, was "the straw that broke the camel's back." If a Betty tries to tell you they've moved on don't

believe 'em. We're all pretty desperate, finding religion in our own ways to compensate for ... to compensate for ... what exactly? Now that I say it I don't godforsaken know what I mean. Substitution? Is that it? Replacing a vibrant material presence with a vibrant immaterial presence? I know I'm saying this wrong and Orange and Vermillion would be up my shorts about it. But for fucks sake, we're all witches after all, working on different recipes towards a whole gamut of middles and ends. Some want peace, others revenge, some take it on the cheek others throw bricks and hot bottles. You know, just before Red fell she was contemplating getting a gun. She kept telling these stories about her brother Bobby's BB rifle. Privately she told me, coz she thought I'd understand given my diversified life experience and all that she was fed up waiting for something good to happen, for the tide to turn. She was ready, almost ready, to fight bloody. Ready, reddy, to "eat the truck and driver and his gloves." I had no fuckin' clue what that meant but I certainly understood her enraged desperation. Never got the chance to really talk with her about tactics. It all ended in a blip and a tick. During Infra's wake with that lament blasting, I understood. I think. Maybe. Finally made a connection to colonial cannibalization the younger ones talk about now, remembered something about the Brazilian surrealist, what was his name? Oswaldo, no, uhm, something like that. We grappled with that manifesto at Black Mountain.

But here we go. I try to stay on topic and spill my guts over Red and Infra and as always I tend to bend the end.

I think I've lost the ability to grieve.

Figures

- **pp. xiii, 22, 35, 63, 87, 95, 101, 104, 117, 118, 132, 139, 141, 152, 155, 157, 161, 165, 167** by author
- **p. 19** Untitled (women climbing rope ladders at circus), c.1940 | Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum, Joseph Janney Steimetz, Professional Photographers Collection, 4.2002.8492
- **p.45** Guerrilla Girls (United States of America, estab. 1985) Birth of Feminism poster from Portfolio compleat 1985-2012 2001 colour offset lithograph, 45.7 x 30.5cm Art Gallery of New South Wales Purchased 2014 © Guerrilla Girls, courtesy of guerrillagirls.com Photo:Felicity Jenkins, AGNSW 150.2014.66
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