

from A Book of Poems on Beauty

Anne Lesley Selcer

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The aesthetic is additive.
Although it flattens, it is
an enunciation born of imitation,
its fact affirms its original object.
It is an act of love;
like love, it's stupid.

At bus stops we imitate the poor in chic high boots
and fringe haircuts, absorptive and infinite, looking on
with wet eyes.

We live in the imaginary
because we are rich.

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There was a beautiful fight scene.
It was in slow motion.
The father was shirtless and so was the son.
They were outdoors in the sun of the dying day.
It was green and late summer.
His jaw is opened.
“There is blood on your hands.”
The father stops to slick a strand of hair
from the son's eyes.

This action is a production of what.
The world, foreshortened into a moment.
History, telescoped:
Garlic, onion, a big boat of human smells,
a deed,
a property,
a beautiful girl,
a city, a governor, a business booming.

The son could win
by ducking and dancing
were not the father the mother's lover.

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at the Hunting Lodge at Amaliensburg

The windows projected the outdoor scene onto indoor mirrors, thus multiplying both settings. The mirrors were decorated with silver embossed leaves. When the king arrived, the windows were opened and the sun tinted them into a golden glitter. This symbolized the king's alchemical ability to turn silver into gold.

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When I was a beautiful girl
the fireflies signified:

I was trapped in amber.
In a sudden Midwest rain.

I sat on the curb with kids.
In rips and scuffs.
Eyes shining, like a collection of commodities.

I held fast like an Indian.
In Indiana, alone at night.
“The things you wear for protection
are subject to reidentification,
prepared for sale.”

Stunned still.
A moth, caught in a jar.
The ethics of the ‘I’ ignored.

When I was a beautiful girl,
in a system of ons and offs,
in the silent language of lighthouses,
in an inconsequential, feminine swarm,
the fireflies signified:

One unrolling bolt of icecream silk. Grape sized globes of lapis lazuli and goldvein grouped and reposing the corners. A fountain or a chandelier. A set of gold combs scalloped in black pearl. A stretched suede book with a knock as soft as a little girl's. Hautly arched whalebone stilettos. Fat, well behaved chairs. Paintings on every inch of ceiling. Tiny crystal pots containing notions of mashed lime, birdbath water, temporin and pearl. A leather cup of heron quills. Two rocaille tiaras. A Zouave jacket woven from crushed leaves and gold. The extended family of an orchid. A bracelet made of tombstone. A wig culled from Reykvíkingur towheads. A lunar astrolabe. A millefiori flower bed. A set of handwritten encyclopedias. A comprehensive book of cloud typology. A slice of wedding cake crystallized into chalcedony. A Cherry Plum, Clematis and Honeysuckle cure. The finest and smallest typewriter. Porcelain nails in a bell china box. Flowers floating in a cabinet vivarium. A perfume of Fiji nectars.

She was trapped in amber.
In a sudden Midwest rain.

She sat on the curb with kids.
In rips and scuffs.
Eyes shining, like a collection of commodities.

She held fast like an Indian.
In Indiana, alone at night.
“The things you wear for protection
are subject to reidentification,
prepared for sale.”

Stunned still.
A moth, caught in a jar.
The ethics of the ‘I’ ignored.

When she was a beautiful girl
the fireflies signified:
Beauty is a terrible place.

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I thought that people were, believe.
He said: When I was a child, adults were ugly.
Wait, you mean your selfishness is your sex speaking as it should?
The lack of unity here is not so much compositional as political
but not so much intentional as hysterical.
Not so much formed as recuperated.
Doing the best we can.
She said: Your lack of beauty is hard to understand.
Half speech here perpetuates the long division problem.
Beat the competition, believe.
The only thing left to purchase is this rare and desirable face,
culled in a garden of multiples.
Multiply it.
Here in the garden of disbelief, of perpetual and protracted morning.

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In a system of ons and offs.
In the silent language of lighthouses.
In an inconsequential, feminine swarm.

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Before we were filled with Content, we sought to be filled with Sensation

beauty is a particular unit of duration
this day is a palace, each hour a room,
is a form of sadness

is a deferral of the movement of time

the evening dawning on the housetops,
the sky an impossible screen

is an object
an hour of the eyes

is circular,
is complete
decorated with silver embossed leaves

moves out of a warm, general indisputability
into a contraction which is form

exists as a cold, hard public specificity
a positive presence in a market of exchange

is posterior to perception
silver to gold

is the inferior or the primary currency
the king has this alchemical ability

there are one hundred ways to ornament a note.

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PART TWO

It is not that lyricism is over it's that the old model of the individual is over,

and that's an economic thing.

My country was an emporium.

I tried to move into the light but there was no light.

Coin tossers, coin sorters, coin collectors, change machines.

Instead of house numbers, each house had a name.

A mother touches every single thing.

Sasha Grey: an essay on subjectivity

It was to be an essay on subjectivity. It kept breaking into disorganized notations in thin black notebooks which I often lost on busses and trains as I took my daughter around the city. It was an anti-confessional. It triangulated various writers. It would solve the problem of several assignments.

“By sitting down to do the writing, I’ve already shown up. I’m already there,” said L.R.

“I kind of stand on assembling identity as a way to find knowledge,” E.M. wrote.

“Some people cannot afford to lose their ‘I,’” A.R. explained in a radio interview.

I wanted to tell A.R. that maternity is counter to the rationalization of the body, that as a site, it perhaps is the only place that is.

My essay was to be pamphlet length and experimental. A section of horse jumps would bleed into the names of Japanese street fashions. I would incorporate Celeste Oliquiagua’s theories on the early presentation of the commodity in the Parisian Glass Palace.

“What’s watching you in the Young-Girl’s eyes is the spectacle,” writes the T. collective, and in light of their Theory of the Young Girl, I was considering the possibility that my life had been a series of aesthetic corrections to my mother’s.

I’d been reconsidering feminist performance art. That the entire concept of an ‘I,’ was invented as a marketing tool. My essay was to start, “I hate subjectivity. All I wanted my whole life was to be considered public.”

A private beach
A private meeting
A private room; a private patient
A very private person
a deliberate system of a mixed economy developed incrementally

became dominant

gradually spread

Variants of include:

[privately](#) private private
privately private Private
[property](#) rights. private property
rules defining private property,

"set apart, belonging to oneself" "to separate, deprive," "one's own, individual,"
"before." "not open to the public" "not holding public office" "one below the rank
of a non-commissioned officer"
is from 1570s is from 1785
first recorded 1844 is from 1952.

One's private feelings.

(In beauty's cold pink and silver rooms,
gold necklaces of meaning slipped through my female fingers...)

Meaning is sex.
There is no other.

I was born in Sacramento, CA. I never allowed myself to become a negative product of that environment.

These (peaches and other food) today
have no taste (á-nosta).

I began college in 2005, balancing school and work seven days a week.
Around this time I began thinking about pornography
as a career opportunity.

It reveals how the senses are entangled with history.
Its disappearance is a double absence.

My selfless service
My innocence and purpose

I was not sexually abused. I am not on drugs. The acts I perform are always consensual.

By providing the mark
where society starts
my personal limits
make collective meaning.

I am a woman who strongly believes in what she does.

I hope to inspire people from all walks of life.
And to collaborate with innovative individuals (bohemians welcome).

A mark held in a negotiated distance from its replacement is money
A mark circulating in a parametered economy is a word.
It is a disenfranchised, lower-to-middle class neighborhood.

This is not what I preach or believe.

A Soliloquy

They are like a fervor
They are a lipstick, a slouch
They are coming to visit to pass the afternoon
They are waiting for someone else
They are waiting for something else
The women are waiting
Shaped like a dandelion gone to seed.
There is a headscarf, a wrinkled mouth,
Several kinds of stockings and boots.
There is a cadging around the point, a strategy,
A saving up, an evening's preparations.
And it will never come to a point, a terrible July.

A mother goes into the store
A mother carries bags
There is nothing in them
But the materials to make
A very first day on her sewing machine.

Now, the day is not visible anymore,
Not a sand painting in a glass jar.
Prosody replaces her,
A terrible July.
Undersides cheapen to normal size
And the simplicity of the primary enters forth.

Now a blind girl sits at a sewing machine.
She is bravely making dinner
in a house in California.
She is doing laundry in the bathtub.
Composing prosody through chores.
She wants to be exchangeable

but she is not exchangeable.

This prosody
this long yawn of diurnality
it is exchangeable
but on the under market
of the commonplace
repeatable
in little towns with yellow suns and lapis skies
in skirts and standards,
common,
brave as day,
claiming form
which is radical
and brave
as a pitcher, a vase.

The Picture of Dorain Gray (at 16 frames per second)

The sunlight slipped over the polished leaves. In the grass, white daisies were tremulous.

The spray of lilac fell from his hand upon the gravel. A furry bee came and buzzed round it for a moment.

In the slanting beams that streamed through the open doorway the dust danced and was golden. The heavy scent of roses seemed to brood over everything.

Some large blue china jars and parrot-tulips were ranged on the mantelshelf, and through the small leaded panes of the window streamed the apricot-colored light of a summer day in London.

The sunset had smitten into scarlet gold the upper windows of the houses opposite. The panes glowed like plates of heated metal. The sky above was like a faded rose.

The tulip beds across the road flamed like throbbing rings of fire. A white dust, tremulous cloud of orris-root it seemed, hung in the panting air. The brightly-colored parasols danced like monstrous butterflies.

The darkness lifted, and, flushed with faint fires, the sky hollowed itself into a perfect pearl. Huge carts filled with nodding lilies rumbled slowly down the polished empty street.

The sky was pure opal now, and the roofs of the houses glistened like silver against it. From some chimney opposite a thin wreath of smoke was rising. It curled, a violet riband, through the nacre-coloured air.

...she said something like, "You own property. It's been bracketed, it creates meaning. Through the process of assigning value, the king's alchemical mirror, the whole world is cast into simulacra. It leads away the senses and leaves in their place concepts. Then the closest relation to the actual, beholdable world, is the picture."

Documents

1. *If it is true that in a capitalist society sexual identity became the carrier of specific work functions, then gender should not be considered a purely cultural reality, but should be treated as a specification of class relations.*
Silvia Federici, Caliban and the Witch

2. To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing in attempts to clarify my own position on the withdraw, on the basis that I have an infant who cannot be without me for 10 continuous days, of an invitation to participate in the special H_____ residency, themed on *Collectives*. My aesthetic position generally is not an identity based one, or at least one that performs its own culturally forced inversion or negativity. I maintain that I am carrying out a heightened rather than debased or impaired function. Yet, in my experience, this function is unsupported by the wider hyper-capitalist culture. My experiences include pre-birth and post-birth discrimination at work, a childcare arrangement that occludes my creative and intellectual life, and physical violence. I have been shocked by the reaction of other women to my position, and came to realize that assumptions and clichés about femininity ran so deep and were so peer policed and self policed, that I, in my refusal, was the exception.

One of the ways I have dealt with this is by, whenever time and energy has allowed, entering the same world I resided in before— that of the gallery, the literary event, the lecture, the conference, in exactly the same manner, except with a baby. Many of these situations have welcomed us generously, even if I have felt (maybe looked) like a clown with multiple personas, constantly in motion, in relation at all times intensely on two separate and unrelated levels—or if it has seemed that I am breaking a basic rule, bringing messiness, the body, immediacy, need, a self sans criticality, into sophisticated cultural situations (but without all that representing my aesthetic position).

It is with great sadness and astonishment that I feel eclipsed again. I understand the logistical situation and know that it is not a personal or specific thing, except that, on the other hand, it is. The collective I would have represented at the residency recognizes that, at least for a time, my child and I are dual and unable to be disconnected. We sanction a space for her, which is really sanctioning the co-existence of mothering and writing /artmaking/ engaged intellectual work. I wish that H_____ could have seen it that was too. I don't think this residency on collective artmaking should go forward without consideration of that. Collectives are powerful, if fleeting machinery against alienation and it just seems counter that I should be sitting alone feeling replaced during a 10 day organized discussion of them.

3. Dear C.,

Our project was left unfinished. I was set to do to the residency, but you went instead. I took my baby to daycare so we could meet and discuss this fact. We agreed to record one minute of sound through our respective video devices at the same time, three times per day. I have 10 days of one minute videos— three per day—that were supposed to go next to your 30 videos. We were going to look at, listen to three common slices of day while you were at the residency and I was here, taking care of my infant, trying to “write” while trying to get ready to teach my class, trying to cook each meal, breastfeed, keep things clean, organize all the paperwork for the social services I suddenly and unexpectedly needed, trying to so this to feel artmaking in the place of feeling exclusion. My own private exclusion. My own private life. My own decision. My choice. My own assignment to this work. My castle, my kingdom, my estate, my \$1550 apartment in San Francisco with a baby alone. My own private tragedy. My own dramatic narrative. My beautiful new life that in public translated to small talk and smiles. My presence alone at readings with a baby. Etc.

I think that something got thwarted when we met, or continued to meet, or got thwarted when you FB chatted me, or when her father called in the middle of the residency dinner, angry, threatening. I think certain people are taken out of the public realm. I think these privatized bodies are not privatized enough to function in a sociality of abstraction. I think that surfaces are what’s called for in such a sociality because under the regime of abstraction, people must bounce off of each other, not fold in, or collapse, merge, or melt. It is a pact against violence, so we can keep doing business. It’s a protection of resource. The surface of the excluded is not social because his energy is stolen, and otherwise occupied. The project is unfinished. I tried to liberate your videos and finish it myself. You wanted to go out to dinner. Here is a list of my videos. I wish I could write a few seconds clip of each into this letter.

Monday October 4

1806 tree

1807 ball

1809 cups

Tuesday October 5

1810 kettle

1815-1818 Back stoop; trees (1817 & 18 preferred)

1819 tea (memory ran out)

Wednesday October 6

1820 nursing (memory ran out);baby crayons

1822 climbing structure

1824-26 candle; toddler table, facebook (1826 memory ran out)

Thursday October 7 or Friday??

1827 camera phone

1828 camerphone

1829 C. at table at residency dinner

Notes:

I didn't finish the list and the notes are blank. A common descriptive theme is the memory of my camera running out. Let's make a nice metaphor with that and close the letter that way.

Or this way. Tonight I've tried to get rid of this tornadoey energy I've had for around a week now. I stopped with the daily notebooks because they just seemed to record these weathers after a while, a put theories to them. How can I put a theory to this feeling? I was trying to imagine Valencia Street today as a highly developed dirt road, like the one of a small town in Mexico. That we were all just out and about buying our fruits and things, like anywhere in the world. My theory is that distance is what renders power inaccurate (and cruel). I don't know why you chose not to finish. I suppose I thought I'd write to tell you my feeling about that. But there is no social structure for that kind of communication, and this writing is not private. No writing is private. Inside this economy is shaking. I'll use my money to tear holes. These facts are singular but they shouldn't stay alone. No metaphor has sufficient resource to explain what it feels like when bodies cross commodities. There is no where to stand anymore. Imagine a system that hates its source (and seeks to replace it with itself).

Best,
Anne lesley

Notes on the text:

The page titled “at the Hunting Lodge at Amaliensburg” is taken directly from a 2009 lecture by Dan Graham at the San Francisco Art Institute in which he referred to the pavilion built in 1734 by architect François de Cuvilliés.

The page which starts “One unrolling bolt...” was originally commissioned for the artist book *Aunt Maude’s Scrapbook*, a bookwork based on Nabakov’s *Pale Fire* published in 2006 by JRP Ringier. The piece appears there under the title “A Box of San Franciscos.”

The words used in “A private beach” were sourced from Wikipedia.

Most of the words used in “Sasha Grey” (which appears untitled, with the first line, “Meaning is sex.”) were sourced from the Myspace page of pornstar Sasha Grey, and from *The Senses Still* by C. Nadia Seremetakis.

The words used in “Dorian Grey (at 16 frames per second)” were sourced from *The Picture of Dorian Grey* by Oscar Wilde. It catalogues every place where the text pools into description. It is slowed to 16 frames per second after Andy Warhol’s *Screen Tests*.

The “Documents” are entirely fictional.

