



WILDER VOICE

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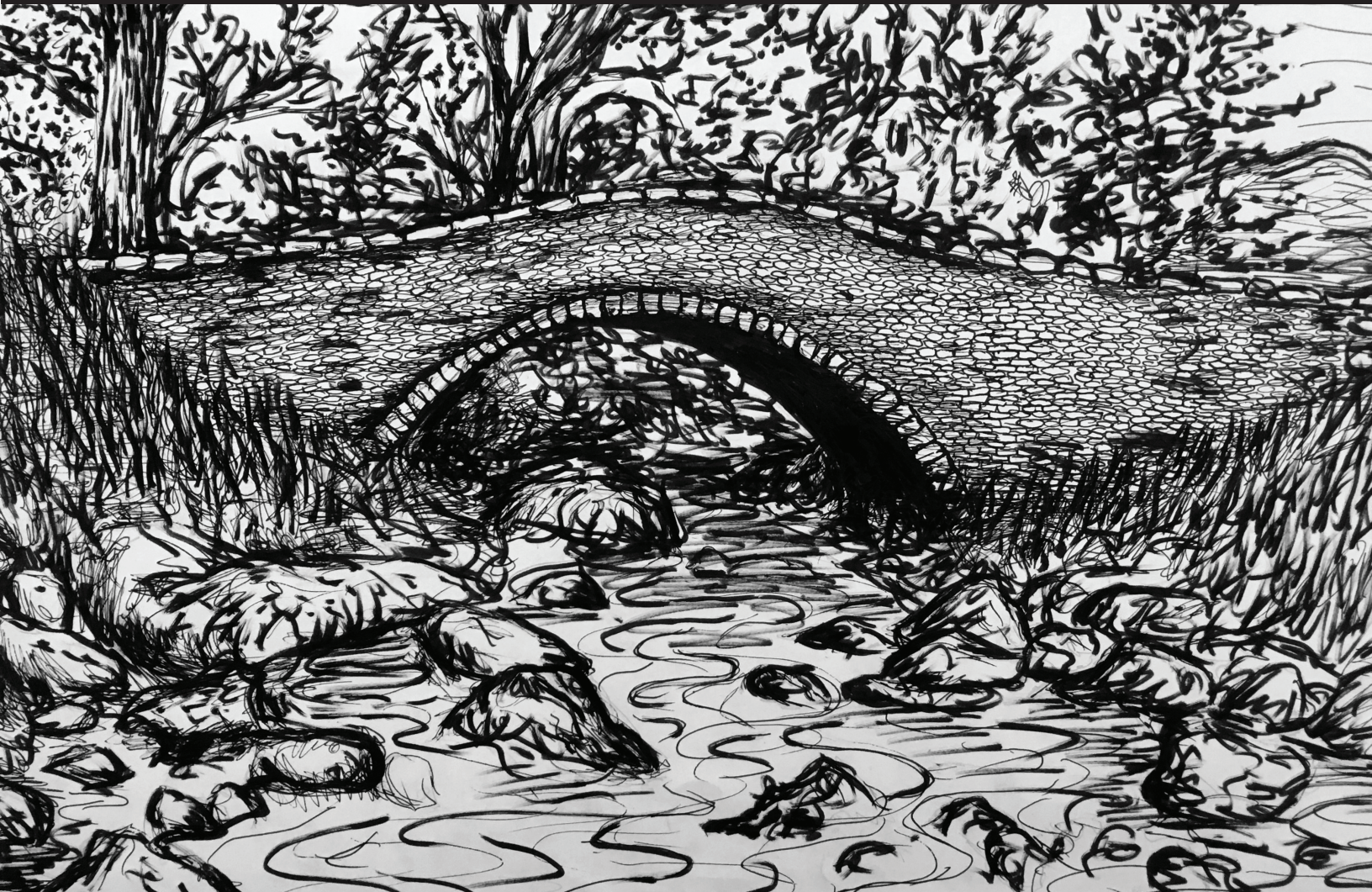
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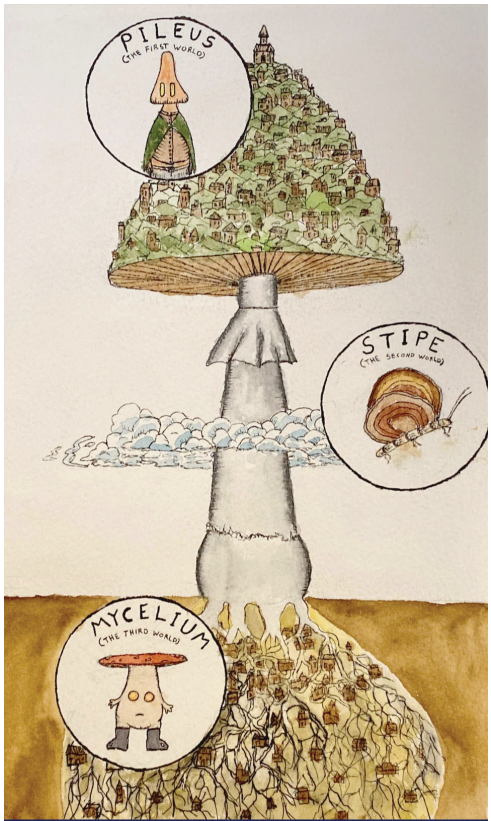
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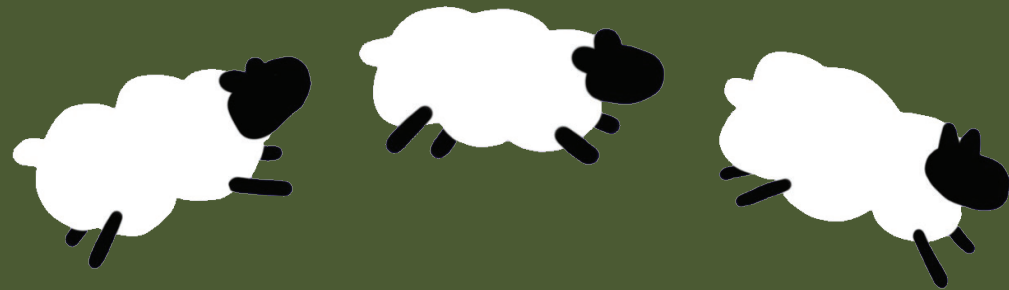
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Goliath

by Will Young

A shepherd sits at the top of a hill, more or less at peace with the swimming liquor of self that grows and shrinks inside of them. They would like, they think, to hold a man's soul in their mouth, if only for a second, to internalize and document it, to ask a question when they already know the answer. To release it like an endangered predator with a healed wound.

The shepherd is standing in a kitchen now, peeling apart clusters of bok choy to find the specks of dirt within. The water is warm. The air is cold. Four hands, Four arms, they believe that they could sink or swim and come out just as waterlogged, either way. They are watching someone: watching someone stirring soup, the empty melody of a trumpet's song spilling out of his lips like uncooked rice. They are watching someone, and he is watching them back: eyes that look like goldfish, that are always darting to the edges of the pond. There's something I want to say,

but I can't say it.

This is what it is to be a shepherd:
You hold everything too close, and nothing you hold knows it's being held.
The distance between your chest and the organs within is as far as an approaching rainstorm: Too far and not far enough.



"I Am the Omlette" by Lee Cocco

Summer of Healing

by Gillian Sutliff

While Oberlin did its best to navigate the unfamiliar territory of COVID-19, many juniors were not happy with the idea of a summer semester, or four straight semesters of college. Personally, I immediately started looking for loopholes. My first solution was to try to lighten my workload over the summer so that I would have more free time to relax and feel rested for senior year. I finally transferred some AP credits from high school, so I could take only three classes, and considered pass/no pass grades to take some pressure off myself. When I got back to school in spring 2021 and started hearing people saying they would just take the whole summer off (with quite some defiance in their voices, I would say), I could not imagine why they weren’t just trying to lighten their loads, like I was. Little did I know that I would not be able to stick to my plan and would have to take the summer off entirely, as the next couple months took rapid twists and turns that I would never have predicted.

My spring semester started sucking fairly quickly. I had a pretty terrible breakup that I struggled with for a long time, made worse by the fact that a week after the break-up, I became concussed. I would not recommend being heartbroken and concussed at the same time. After missing nearly two weeks of class and realizing that the healing process was much slower than I could’ve ever imagined, I had to drop a class, and was scared I would have to drop another one later in the semester. Thankfully, my teachers were understanding and flexible with my deadlines so that I could catch up, but unfortunately, it made my summer plans for a light semester impossible. I vaguely realized this, but had so many other worries that I didn’t think much about what the summer would look like.

After twice-weekly student health appointments, the Oberlin doctor referred me to a neurologist. It was over a month past my concussion date.

I was prescribed something to help me sleep, and Topiramate to treat migraines. While these meds did help with what they were prescribed for, they had other devastating consequences to my health. For example, Topiramate can change your sense of taste and I no longer enjoyed



“Butterfly” by Ila Astin

Summer of Healing continued

sweet things, such as soda. I started noticing a change in my weight, and I attributed this to the medication limiting my sweet tooth habits. I was not worried, until I started feeling full after eating half a sandwich (and that was all I had to eat that day) or the one time I had a decently sized meal and puked from it two hours later. It didn't make much sense to me what was going on with my body, so I didn't really talk about it. I was scared, but I didn't want to overreact. I was also so busy trying to catch up and keep up with my classes after my concussion that I didn't have time to worry too much about my eating. Some friends noticed that I was losing weight, particularly in my face, but I wore a lot of baggy clothes that hid the worst of it. It didn't help that popular culture teaches young women that losing weight after a breakup is considered a "glow-up." This weight loss seemed normal enough for other people, so why should I worry? Plus, didn't I deserve to have an external glow up, even if I felt awful?

During the worst of my concussion, the therapist I was working with suggested that I take the summer off. It made sense to me: I was playing catch up all semester with my classes, still wasn't feeling better about my breakup, and was having all this weird eating trouble. However, I was still considering enrolling in the summer semester, or at least taking a remote class to try and make up for my dropped class. I felt like I needed to do something to stay on track with my education; doing nothing would feel like halting my life. But by the time I got home for the summer, it became obvious to my parents that I could not return to Oberlin for the summer semester because I could not take care of myself. I was twenty years old, but my weight was back to what it was before high school.

In this context began my summer of healing. First came the physical healing. In the month of May, I had at least six doctors appointments. I went to my primary care physician who started blind weighing me. She told me that I was dangerously close to being institutionalized if I didn't turn things around and start eating. She said there was no way that my body should have dropped weight that quickly and that the only reason I was still getting my period was because of my birth control; my body was not healthy enough to sustain my cycle. She would continue weighing me every two weeks, with my goal being to gain weight back. I went to a nutritionist, who made me a meal plan with bigger meals than I've ever eaten in my life. I went to a therapist who specialized in eating disorders. I was very lucky that I got to see her because it was she who

determined that I did not actually have an eating disorder, but rather that the medication I was on was causing the problem. She said that Topiramate is actually what she uses for people who have binge eating disorders, because it suppresses your appetite so much that you can't really binge. She also said that the combination with the other medicine was pretty dangerous, highlighting that it could have made the effects a lot worse. She took me off Topiramate that day. Immediately, my appetite came back. I was able to eat three times a day. My normal taste came back, although I still had a lot less tolerance for sweet things than previously. It was a relief to be hungry again.

But gaining weight was a lot more complicated than just being hungry and eating more. While I felt like I was eating so much, it wasn't sticking. By mid-June, I had managed to gain about two pounds back, and I was ecstatic about it. I went off to the beach for a week with friends, and while I was there, I thought about my weight. We ate like kings—massive, protein-heavy meals, and we drank a lot. But we were also at the beach, running around, swimming, biking, and playing beach games. It was the most activity I had done in months, as I hadn't been allowed to exercise with my concussion, and then I wasn't allowed to exercise for fear that I would lose more weight. When I got home from the beach, I was actually at the lightest weight I had ever been. I cried; I was terrified, because I had to go weigh in at the doctors in a day or two, and I thought she would tell me that I had to go into care. This didn't end up happening. However, for the rest of the summer, I always left on trips with a fear of the number on the scale that would be waiting for me when I came home.

Although it was still a long road back to being a healthy weight, once my problem was understood and being treated, I started feeling guilty about my upcoming idleness. I could barely believe that I would have five months to do "nothing." As my friends began their summer semester at Oberlin, I was disappointed that I was not there. Partly these were feelings of missing out that stemmed from the fact that it looked fun; the summer semester restrictions seemed to be looser than the spring's and lots of outdoor partying was happening. But I also felt like I had failed to be a team player in some way. Even with all my resistance to the spring-summer plan, by not attending in the summer, I was shut out of a bonding experience with my community. Most of my grade was continuing their school life without me,





Summer of Healing continued

and I was left behind. I was concerned that I was slacking academically, too. As someone who was always very school-focused, it was weird that I would graduate late and was not seizing the summer to continue my studies.

But even worse was the guilt that came when I was around my friends from home. There were so many questions. The worst was, “What are you doing this summer?” I had to relive my semester over and over to explain why I wasn’t doing anything. People meant well—they just didn’t know (I had found it hard to update people during the spring.) I felt vulnerable telling them—like I was this sick, injured thing. Meanwhile, many of them were accomplishing amazing goals. My friends had full summers ahead of them. Some of them had internships with prestigious corporations, like Facebook, Pfizer, and Microsoft. Others were completing EMT training or prepping for grad school tests. Everyone had something, even just taking a class or two, and I was there with nothing. On top of this, most of them had suffered through a full year of school, whereas I only had one semester. How was everyone so energetic and put together? How could they keep accomplishing things? It wasn’t that I was shocked they could, but more surprised that I couldn’t. Why did I deserve a break? Just because I lost a couple pounds? Just because I’d had a rough semester? When did I become that girl that fell apart as soon as things went a little bit wrong?

I had fallen apart, but that didn’t mean I needed to stay that way. Every day that summer, I woke up and tried to piece myself back together, bit by bit. I saw friends as often as I could and called those who were away. I traveled to see friends who weren’t in New York, making it all the way to San Francisco. I stayed at friends’ houses, traveled with my parents, and saw family that I hadn’t seen since before the pandemic. Every adventure that I set off on made me feel more like myself and remember the small joys I had lost along the way. Look at all these places in the world that I get to see. Look at all the people I have in my life. Look at the ocean, look at the trees, look at the different cities, and understand how much exists for me to experience. I hadn’t realized how trapped I felt in Oberlin in the spring until I got out in the world again. By entering the world again, I was able to release some of my guilt about not being at school in the summer.

And I used the time to critically reflect on myself. As I was trying to make myself happy and healthy again, I attempted to understand how things had gone so wrong. I still don’t know if I have all the answers, but I think

I now know how to better protect myself from the worst of those feelings. How to protect myself from the voice that says that I’m not hungry. How to protect myself by asking for help sooner, so I don’t have to halt my life to heal again. At one point in my reflection, I finally understood some breakup advice that my therapist gave me in the spring: In your life, there are circles of people around you. The closest and smallest circle is where most people’s parents, best friends, and partners are. I had a hard time dealing with the fact that my ex would no longer be in this most important circle in my life, that he would possibly fade into an outer circle of friends or acquaintances. I think it kind of scared us both, as we tried to keep close after our breakup. But in my healing summer, after numerous harsh fights, we stopped talking. It not only helped me get him out of that inner circle in my mind, but out of all the circles. When I realized that I didn’t care anymore that he wasn’t in my circles, I was so relieved I almost danced around my room. And if that had been the only thing the summer gave me, it would have been enough.

But that wasn’t the only thing last summer gave me. I gained a lot of new understanding of myself and got to focus on what makes me happy. Understanding where and how I can find joy will be useful information to keep in my twenties as I move further into adulthood. The small, daily things can have a huge, positive impact on my mood. It turns out that for me, traveling is a pretty good way to move past most of my worries. Food can be a source of joy. Feeling strong and healthy in my body is so much more important than I ever realized before. And giving love and friendship freely is one of the best things. With the knowledge I gained this summer, I felt renewed coming back to Oberlin and ready to face whatever comes next.

Ursie Steals Flowers

by Monte Montero

The sun beams down on a group of friends—the tallest of us with their backpack drooping over hunched shoulders, others fanning themselves with their hands. As we make our way home, one of us veers off to a nearby bush. Ursie, who carries a compact knife looped into a keyring, stands with her back to us as she slashes some flowers. Against the backdrop of construction, a failed attempt at beautification falls into her hands.

The rest of us murmur amongst ourselves, watching Ursie fumble with the longer flowers out of the corners of our eyes. “We don’t know who that is,” I joke. But, really, I do. I know how she walks by the convenience store and justifies yet another monstera purchase. How she looks at me and says, “only \$15!” I’ve seen her bring another plant home, dragging a pot half her size into a house with no extra space. I know how she treats them like children, but buys them like cheap candy.

She trots up to us with stolen flowers in her hands, their round purple buds bouncing and bobbing as she makes her getaway. She smiles proudly, holding up star-shaped petals orbiting a center stem. At home, she adds the stolen flowers to our forest of plants—some brought from New York, others impulse purchases from the past few weeks.

“These make a nice center piece on the dining room table,” she says, clutching the flowers like a carnival prize.

I roll my eyes as she places them in a vase. I walk back to my room, counting the plants occupying our kitchen, lining each and every window, covering my own dresser. She’s heard my lecture before, so I don’t bother repeating it, and I let her position the flowers.

Her fingers are accustomed to running through stems—sometimes until one in the morning, on the dimly lit front porch covered in piles of loose soil. Once, I walked by to hear her singing something to herself as she held a new plant, gently patting dirt off its roots.

The flowers droop a week after she’s placed them. They no longer fill the vase the way they used to. Buds are falling onto the dining room table like crumbs, and I’ve resorted to picking off the dead leaves when I’m bored. I’d be lying if I said I didn’t look at them fondly while eating dinner, in between interventions for the resident plant hoarder.

She actually kept those flowers and dried them, perhaps to give to us later, when our living room would be overtaken by something other than plants—like new people. Since then, I’ve let her hold us as tightly as she wants between stolen stems. Especially when I, behind the leaves, am smiling too.



Art by Vincent Zhu

The Dark

by Shannon Schulz

I remember the first time I was in the dark. We were sitting in your room, so close our knees were touching, and I could feel your breath on my face. The floor was cold. The ghost of a ray of moonlight from the crack in the window caught on the tears that silently rolled down your face. It was too late, I thought, too late to still be up. But I didn't move. I kept my eyes on the wood paneling beneath us. When you got up, I said nothing. I wanted to understand, but I knew that it was too late. I heard the door shut. As your footsteps trailed down the hallway I laid down and looked up at the ceiling, at the glow in the dark stars my father helped me glue there. Weeks ago, they had been so bright, it was hard to sleep at night. Now, they were so dim you might say that they weren't there anymore. I could go and buy new ones, I thought. But I knew that I wouldn't.

The second time, it was her. We stood in the kitchen, the animosity between us turning the warm spring day unbearably hot. I could feel the burn of her eyes on my back, but she wasn't really looking at me. She hissed, and the words shattered like glass on my back. I spun around, reaching for anything, searching for something to throw back. When my words hit the air, they evaporated in the heat, fading away like water on the hood of a hot car. I didn't move my legs, but my mind slipped out the door. I wasn't there anymore.

The next time I was in a hole. I laid in the middle of my bed, in the early morning. I wanted nothing more than to sink into the sheets and never come out, but the surface of the bed was hard, too hard for me to stay. But I couldn't get up. I thought about everything that I had to do today, and tomorrow, and the next day. I tried to find a reason, any reason, to keep going. And I couldn't find one. But I couldn't find a reason to stop, either. I thought about the past. I mourned for the people who only exist in my memories. They didn't leave, but I couldn't recognize them anymore. I wanted to shut my eyes. I let the



I think I'm losing it, I tell them. I tell them this every day. They look at me, eyes from all around the room, sizing me up, not sure what to make of me. They never believe me. I walk home alone, letting the air fill my nose and lungs, eyes fixed on some spot on the horizon I walk towards, but will never meet. When I get home I lock all the windows and all the doors. If someone sneaks up behind me, I won't be able to see it coming.

I remember the last time I was in the dark. You were on the couch, reclining your head so far back in your father's old, green, chair that I couldn't see your face. If I could, I wouldn't have looked at it. I sat on the floor, in the space where the rug ends and the tile starts. The ceramic felt cool under my thin shorts. Cool, like the air between us. I was supposed to stay here tonight, but I knew that I couldn't. I listened to the bright plastic voice of the woman on the TV trying to sell a blender. I tried to remember that I was still a person, I tried to remember that I was alive because of myself and not because of you. I knew your mind better than I knew my own, so when you started to speak I heard what you were going to say before the sounds registered as words in my brain. You told me that you loved him. I shut my eyes. I wanted it to be me.

“Okay,” I said. You looked at me then, waiting for me to say something, anything, else. I didn't.

I'll see you in Paris

An Ode to Creature Partnerships and Platonic Love Affairs

by Ava Fisherman

The summer before senior year of high school, I asked my older brother what the kids at his college were like. “Um,” he sighed, probably while spinning a frisbee on his fingertips or wrestling with our idiot dog. “I don’t know, Ava... I guess at Oberlin everyone was the weird kid in their high school.” This is, of course, a broad and wobbly projection, but it is often how I imagine many of us view ourselves here.

It was the summer before senior year of high school. That was the summer I first read *Just Kids* by Patti Smith, so naturally all I really wanted was to find a mega-creative soulmate with whom to make art and have lots of sex in a decrepit studio apartment (until he turns out to be gay, and then we’re just intensely close platonic life partners, which is fine, sort of). On top of numerous other pulls at the time, Oberlin seemed a likely place at which I’d find such a partner.

After my first fall semester at Oberlin, I was, like nearly every other freshman, cripplingly depressed. I hadn’t made a scrap of art all semester, and being able to paint portraits, draw comics, and write shitty poetry was critical to my sense of self. Living for the first time outside of my tiny hometown with my life-long friends and mentors, I began to believe that I had absolutely nothing of worth to contribute to what seemed a continuous froth of creativity issuing from the Oberlin student body. True, my self-confidence had never been very high, but competing for air time with my self-loathing had always been a sense of creativity-backed arrogance, a voice that seemed genuinely to believe I had a right and reason to put my work and self into the world. This slow-burning ego, which kept me focused and moving forward all throughout high school, weakened in the face of meeting so many young people with talents similar to and more advanced than my own. I realized I had built my entire structure of self-worth and confidence on my ability to produce, to impress. The moment I thought my abilities weren’t enough, the facade creaked and cracked, and a sudden understanding of my own fragility reduced whatever small amount of self-love remained to dust.

The good news is that all it took for me to realize that I had a massive superiority complex based entirely on my ability to produce art and music was going to a \$1,000,000/year liberal arts school filled with every other self-deprecated semi-over-achieving queer weirdo the universe has blasted out of her starry womb.

Of course, Helene wasn’t the only thing that turned this around for me, but she is what I remember most of that period. We’d gone in and out of each other’s circles in the fall, being on the same floor of Dascomb, in the same PAL

group, freshman seminar, and Fiction Writing 101 class. In the first draft of this essay, written in February 2020, I described our first encounter as such:

She was the only one late to day one of orientation. Fifteen minutes in, the classroom door swung open and in she strode. She was tall, neither thick nor thin. Pieces of silver and gold hung from her wrists, her neck, her ears; silver and gold seemed to glint in her eyes as she plopped down into the only open chair, surveying the rest of us without any apparent interest. Her voice was loud and clear as she introduced herself. The girl next to her complimented her pants, which were covered in a pattern of yellow daisies. She smiled wide with lips like cherry taffy.

Months later she would tell me in her offhand way that she’d been high that first day, that she was late because she couldn’t find her way through the fluorescent maze of classrooms, her head fuzzy, swinging side to side like a pendulum. I laughed at her, shaking my head, remembering like a secret the impression she’d made on me that day. Never before have I been able to recall with such clarity my first time seeing someone. But of course I remember her; she’s my creative soulmate.

“Creative Soulmates”... (barf).

Those were the only words we could find for what we were to one another, despite the glitter-vomit wording. Somehow, in those late fall and early winter months, we became inseparable. There was this sense of tangi-

ble awe between us at how we fit together like puzzle pieces, and we spoke of it often, which was a gratifying agreement. We were both harboring pretty acute depressions at the time... but you know that trust exercise you did in dance class or summer camp, where you sit facing each other, clasp wrists, and use one another’s arms to pull both of you up to standing? It was like that.

All the same, I didn’t trust her at first. For the first few months I learned not to keep my evenings reserved for our tentative plans. I found her voice to be too loud in the group that Juuled outside of Dascomb, thought her commitment to people that I found to be unabashed social climbers indicated an untrustworthiness that I should be wary of subjecting myself to. I remember her standing on the picnic table outside the dorm, pulling lazily from a handle of vodka and singing “La Vie en Rose” while a dozen other freshmen flocked around her knees, staring up at her silhouette against the night sky with glittering eyes as she swayed to her own voice. I am happy to paint the sound of her clear, loud laughter, the scent of her burnt-sugar-and-rose perfume, her wide pink smile and her streaks of cheek and daring. But she became endearing to me when I saw that she was goofy, that she was tired, that she made weird sounds and bad jokes and learned before everyone else how little being huge and loud actually mattered.



“Cardinal” by Lee Cocco



“Bluejay” by Lee Cocco

I’ll see you in Paris continued

That spring, we threw ourselves headlong into the creation of a mini zine called TrashTalk, regarding it with a sense of fond and confused devotion, as though it was some neurotic three-legged cat we’d decided to take in off the street and raise as our own. The zine itself was nonsensical and ridiculous, with weekly themes like, “Ancient Love” and “Milk”. We spent hours in Wilder crafting “word associations from the editors,” and absurd, unfunny jokes that we ourselves ended up finding genuinely amusing, simply because of how stupid they were. Because we were that serious about our non-seriousness, we wrote the following mission statement:

Our mission is to produce a homemade publication for weirdo creatives. TrashTalk Zine’s unique, ever-changing content is crafted with the idea that art and creation are undefinable. We seek to capture the world through our eyes, with silliness, absurdity, and earnest appreciation. TrashTalk is meant to be enjoyed and questioned. Things represented in the zine remind us that the world can and should be taken in whatever measure of seriousness and appreciation that a person genuinely feels for it. It is a labor of love; for each other, art, the world, and our community.

I read this now and think of Patti and Robert existing in their own universe together, how in Just Kids she describes experiencing a fundamentally youthful mixture of possibility, self-made meaning, and immortality within their relationship. I recognize that sense of self-belief and resolve. By holding each other accountable to a weekly project, Helene and I were telling ourselves and each other that it was acceptable—right, even—to spend hours of our time creating something that wouldn’t matter to anyone but us. Devoting that time to the non-serious ingrained us with a sense of personal consequence, an empowered self-assurance that said, “Yes, this is

ridiculous. But I like it, and I like you, and we’re going to do it anyway.”

Despite the supposed emphasis on collaborative engagement, Oberlin is a breeding ground for a very specific type of emotional masochism—the idea that true creative “greatness” is the result of a single person’s virtuosity and genius. We’re like starved, over-cafeinated little rats, scurrying around Wilder Bowl and squealing around the cigarettes hanging from our lips about how we’re wrecked, overworked, dehydrated, and life just sucks... but then again, it’s pretty awesome. True authenticity is so coveted here that those who aren’t 90-100% okay with themselves end up spending more time crafting a guise of innate confidence, rather than learning to actually love themselves. Soon after arriving at Oberlin, I became viscerally aware of the social hierarchies, of which I claimed in a show of spite and arrogance I wanted no part in, and looked down in distaste at all the climbers. Helene, meanwhile, strode into college at the social acme. She appeared to not care in the least what other people thought of her; an indifference which is, naturally, the ultimate quality of those at the top.

And so I kept my distance, sensing an inherent dissonance of organic clout between us...until one night.

It was the unwaveringly magical Halloween splitchers. We’d both drunk too much and were sad and wild and laughing. I was pining over a douche in a flight suit, and she bore witness to my woeful staring. She grabbed my hand, her eyes wide and fiery, and we stumbled up onto the stage into the pool of other sweaty, pumping bodies to dance and girate. “This is so weird!” I yelled, inches from her face.

“I know!” She cried, her eyelids thick with glitter. “Let’s not care!” We clasped hands so as not to lose each other in the pulsing fray. And for some reason, we just stayed like that—sad, semi-fo-

cused, and pinned to each other.

Working on TrashTalk with Helene was the first time I’d collaborated closely and consistently with another person. We both self-identified as people for whom creative collaboration doesn’t really work (an assumption from a lack of experience, at least on my part,) which made the ease of our collaboration even more of an indicator of what felt to be an almost spiritual connection between us. I was mind-blown that we worked so well together, drawing crude comics and confiding our mutual fear of Bloody Mary late into the night.

But this shows me even more that we appeared in each other’s lives precisely because we needed each other at that moment. We needed someone to give to and someone to receive from, someone to force us to stay honest and up-to-date in our creative work. But just as important as having each other as muses was the fact that we became muses ourselves. On Valentine’s Day we sat across from each other on her bed and drew portraits of each other while listening to Crosby, Stills, and Nash. How necessary it was, to feel seen and considered, chosen by another person. It wouldn’t have been enough for one of us to sit and the other to draw. We both needed to feel that ourselves and our art-making were consequential to another’s experience.

In a 1985 letter to Pat Parker, responding to the poet’s plea for advice on getting serious about her writing, Audre Lorde wrote,

Don’t lose your sense of urgency on the one hand, on the other, don’t be too hard on yourself— or expect too much.

Beware the terror of not producing.

Beware the urge to justify your decision.

Watch out for the kitchen sink and the plumbing and that painting that always needed being done. But remember the body needs to create too.



I'll see you in Paris continued

This quote alone represents for me everything that makes having a creative collaborator and confidant so wonderful, so necessary. It must have taken a lot of trust between the two for Parker to have been able to openly ask Lorde for advice without fear of feeling talked down to, and for Lorde to provide that advice without fear of sounding preachy to a talented writer who had thus far received less critical success in their field than Lorde herself. The advice itself is also representative of what a good collaborative partner can provide—a kind but strong push to work hard while also taking care of the physical and mental self. Lorde pays respect to the fact that Parker is an artist by reminding her that art can be both a threat and a necessity to her survival. Then there is the baseline validation that giving and asking for advice provides to both writers. To know one another through a lens of creation and art, and to keep in consistent contact legitimizes each person's pursuit of their art. In keeping up this communication, in being emotionally vulnerable with one another, Parker and Lorde are endorsing each other's pursuits, demonstrating belief and a vital attention to the consequence of their art and existence.

Cathy Park Hong, a word-welding Korean American poet and author, attended Oberlin in the '90s. You can imagine my pleasure and shock when, in doing research for this piece, I stumbled upon a reference to an essay telling the autobiographical story of female artist friends at Oberlin; the relative energy is frighteningly real. Hong's essay "An Education" is about her three-person friendship with two other uber-creative, like-minded, mega-driven, high-powered young artists

at Oberlin. One of my favorite scenes in the essay is of Hong and her friend Erin painting alone together for the first time. Hong's insecurity melts away and the two fall into that transcendental state of co-creation, each inhabiting and strengthening the sphere of the other's creative focus. I felt it resembled my own experience of working alongside Helene in our preferred room on the second floor of Wilder, the one with puke-brown carpet and a radiator whose constant sputtering was reminiscent of a dying animal's final wheeze.

But even though Hong's friends motivated, validated, and encouraged one another in their creative pursuits, their relationships were not consistently beneficial. The codependence they exercised with each other over the years set a wobbly groundwork of distrust and jealousy that ultimately destroyed parts of their relationships.

I think it is often in creative friendships that a particular sort of harm is difficult to define. An immense amount of generosity is required of close collaborators, and because of that demand, a creative, interdependent friendship between two artists can pose serious dangers to the individuals' well being depending on the ex. Perhaps with a romantic relationship it is easier to know what is expected of the other person to provide and request. With something less defined—but at times just as intense—we have more difficulty knowing how much we can ask of and how much we can give to each other.

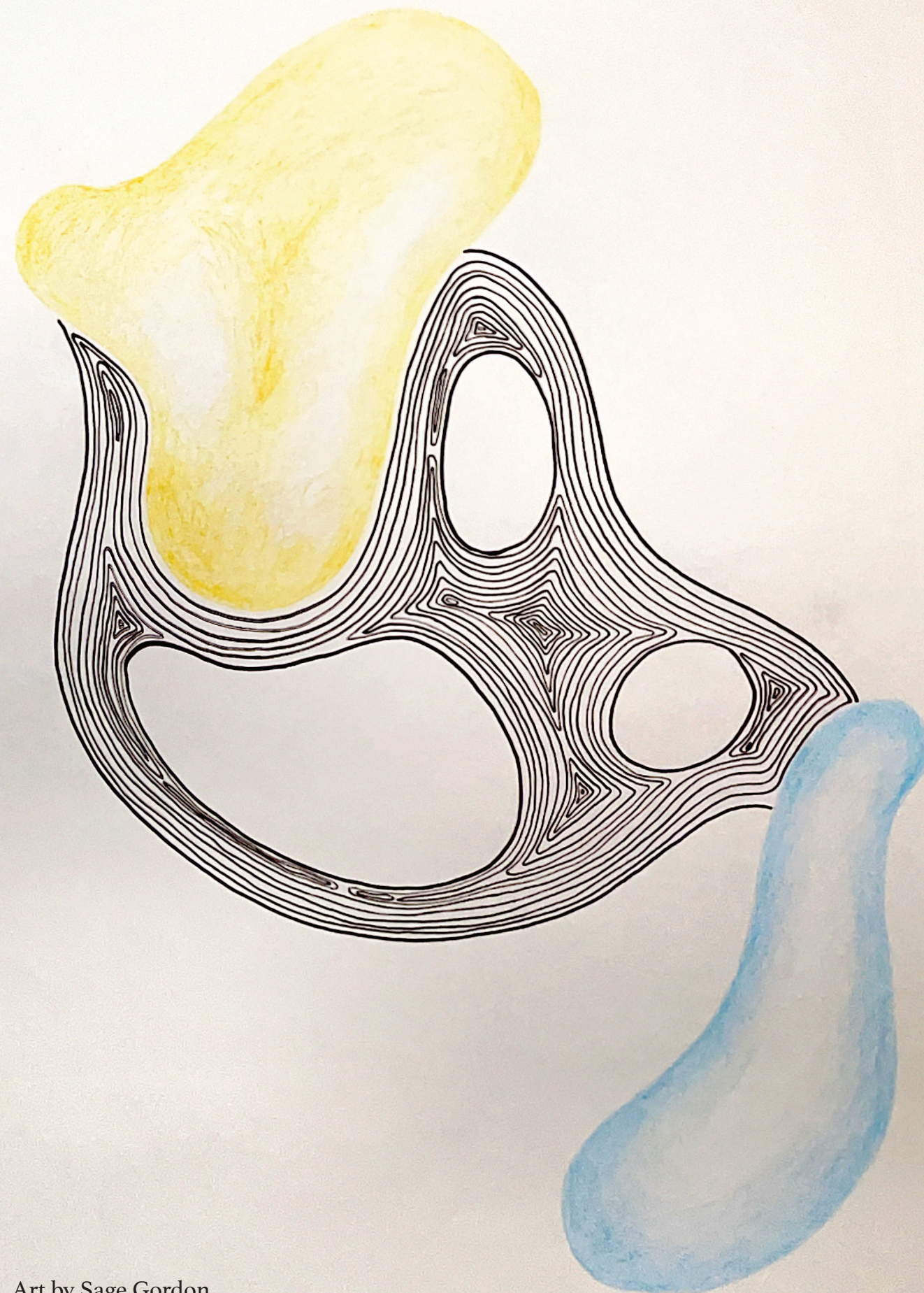
Helene and I didn't have very long. Spring came, COVID hit, and to my great shock, she transferred to Bard Berlin. We saw each other once between leaving school and her leaving the country, sitting six feet apart on the rocky shore of

the Hudson, waves clapping softly against the stones beneath us. I realized that even after our intense platonic love affair, I still looked up to her, and felt now the diminutive smallness of being left behind, waving in the rearview as she set off without me. But before we parted for real, she told me, "One sec." I waited on the steps of her brother's apartment as she dashed upstairs, reappearing moments later clutching an envelope the color of corn and covered in her tall, narrow scrawl. We wrapped our arms around each other one last time and she pressed it into my hands. With a final look we turned from each other and ran, her up the stairs and me to the car.

I read the letter leaning against the trunk while pumping gas, halfway home, and wept. I felt that each word she had written was one I could have written right back, and it would have meant the same. Whatever flame of smallness that I'd still held blew out. It was as though she'd cut a cord, and her inertia became my own, powering me forward in the opposite direction. We loved each other equally, and I felt now no sense of loss, at last able to trust as truth that we'd come into each other's lives when we each needed the other most.

The last line of her letter is filled with that perpetual immortality of youth and creation, of eye-rolling and elbowing, irony and arrogance; an epilogue that keeps our private world safe, if for now hidden. It told me then and tells me now that we are still moving, leaving tracks that swirl and twist like morning mist, lines on a globe that will cross again.

"I'll see you again in Paris."



Art by Sage Gordon



Last march

by Milo Projansky Ono

my mother and I swam through the city in matching fur coats. At night the coats looked like perfectly tousled black birds, their drooping dead wings dusting the street. The blue-grey street was so cold that my heel bones froze. My heels hammered out each step, each step a signal sent through my skeleton to my teeth, told them to clench, told my jaws to huddle close for warmth. My mother handed me a warm package: dinner. We ate dark basil between rough slices of rye, kissed together by melted swiss.

Tell me about how you miss the neverending green of the country, the soft blades of grass that should be called feathers instead of blades.

My mother took sharp bites of her sandwich, head down against the wind, shoulders tucked.

Tell me about the pomegranates you ate, the red, hand-ripped carcasses you sucked dry then threw out into the field.

I have never seen my mother's feet bare.

It began to snow as we approached the massive oak, a landmark that means home is around the corner. White pieces clung to my hair and coat. Snow poured into my shoes. The tree's disappearing limbs—still outstretched—did not bow.

Shaved Beauties Volume II

by Saffron Forsberg

At some point, I will lie down
Somewhere
And remember being Saved:
Twenty In Little Tokyo; part of
Something otherwise

Sealed.
It was small and earlier tonight.
The moment cracks hot-sugar-rung-ear
As it happens and I nudge
The ruddy children of myself

To the cold plum of Los Angeles
To receive snatches of
Nighttimes distilled:
We adrift parcels learning to speak
Just enough to ask
For vials of disinfectant
At the sex store on Sherman.

Hot-Faced Night-Spring—
I love sitting at the table
When everything has closed.
I find Ohio's hand so she can't apologize.
I've never been so beautiful as her parking lots
Nor felt so ugly.
However hard I've tried.
I fold her into myself and say Oh
I'm sorry about

That—my Dear-Life-Grip,
My Favorite half-truths,
My hot little head high, my hand
On her leg when I slip in our currents;
Mean little cunt!
With her worrying sinew and her bad teeth
—I grab for Ohio on occasion, flushed and Chosen—all
I've ever scrounged for. No need to explain
I've taken to telling men on the street
—My favorite mothers
Are those I want
Behind chainlink and Saran wrap.
I find in them. We hold. We
Clean each other's dogfight ears and
succumb To remembrance, say:

I, too, have licked hard so many Julys: smelled the spite Of
urine, caught myself in boyish lies and stagnate Water—but
never, perhaps, so densely as
The one wherein I became Beautiful. I don't gather it yet —I
fall for anything true; talk to strangers; Fuck
with carcasses.
I fathom myself only unrelenting;
In search and Awash; awake and pissed
And Saved.

Remember childhood sleeplessness?
Of course. I give away everything I can.
When I cry, I am so angry.



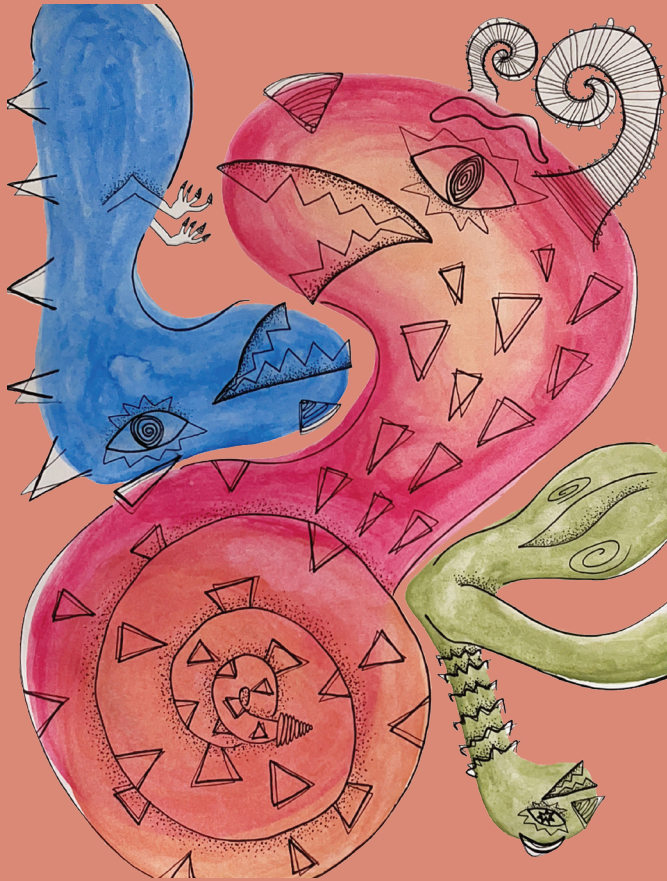


On Repulsions

by Juli Freedman

I coddle my repulsions.
It’s a horse and buggy crime of the time, Feeling betrothed to hysterics.
Prescribed smart-asses and hippy-dippys for infestation.
I am told I am infested for what feels like a thousand-times every day. Leprosy, Scabies, Stigmata,
Diaper Rash, Heart of Coal? No just Vulgarly. And Neurosis
When I am very pretty I assume my stomach acid has melted my IUD through my asshole and now
I have
P R E G N A N C Y G L O O O W!
But when I am rotten, and I have to tug at the rot,
you walk like you are attached to an IV.
Ache and Strut, Ache and Strut, they were once watching a pirated movie, Ache and Strut, begging for
maternity. Slobbering.

“A Day at the Dentist” by Sage Gordon



And On Celibacy

by Juli Freedman

“Still Life” by Siona Henze



Even when the past few weeks feel like intestines through the woodchipper
Abstinence is carried by dryer sheets humidity which brings me to tears of awe.

Yesterday I felt godly, I thought I took someone’s breath away,
But it was a stutter.

Today desire feels like a word written by water.

but when never spoken to, never speaking to
a sincerity evaporates everything else that ends when sleep.

not every dirty dog can thrash
the sweet ones have nightmares
the sweet ones, the sweet stuff, is around me.



When You Give a Student a Killer Notebook

by Emery Haze

Article Note: this piece is largely based on the 2006 anime, not the manga; many examples that could be provided are omitted in the interest of not spoiling Death Note for potential viewers

Article TW: murder

Death Note TW: strong language, occasional violence, semi-frequent on-screen death with blood but no extreme gore; rated TV-14 except for last two episodes, which are rated TV-MA for violence

What would you do if you found a Death Note, a notebook that could kill anyone whose name is written in it? For high school student Light Yagami, the answer is “kill all criminals and become God of the new world.” The world quickly realizes that someone or something is coordinating these deaths, and the Internet dubs Light “Kira” after the English word “killer.” Many online support him, viewing him as a god making the world safe for the good and exacting vengeance on the bad. However, the world’s greatest detective, L, denounces Kira as a mass murderer and desires to execute him. With the entire world watching—some encouraging Light, others encouraging L—the two geniuses, both viewing themselves as justice, become engrossed in catching each other, knowing the first to have his true name and face revealed to the other will die.

My father and I found the Death Note anime on Netflix while browsing for a new show to watch. After reading the blurb, we decided to give it a go, and I was obsessed from the beginning. 37 episodes later, I was stunned by the intellectualism woven into the mystery, and I was mulling over a moral question: how would I use the Death Note, and what does my choice say about me?

Unlike most series, where the protagonist is the “good guy” and the antagonist is the “bad guy,” Death Note flips the script and gives us a mass murderer with a god complex as our protagonist, and a detective pursuing the murderer as the antagonist. Similarly, when the Death Note manga first came out in Japan in December 2003, it

was one of the first to tell a story from a villain’s perspective in a way that made their actions reasonable to the average person. Yes, Light is killing countless people, but he’s only killing murderers and rapists, people the world is arguably better off without. Furthermore, Light doesn’t have a stereotypical villain origin story: he’s Japan’s top student, living in a well-off family with the police chief for a father. Nothing extraordinary happened to Light to make him hate the world. He only got the Death Note because he happened to find it where Ryuk the shinigami (God of Death) dropped it, and he only used it to purge criminals because he was bored and viewed the world as rotten. To him, the Death Note was a way to change the world for the better, and he saw himself as the only one capable of enacting such change. To make the situation even more interesting, Ryuk shared his boredom; that’s why he smuggled an extra Death Note past the Shinigami King and dropped it in the human world. However, as Ryuk explains, he didn’t choose Light to receive the Death Note—he dropped it at random—and he’s not on Light’s side or L’s. His only interest is entertainment. So to him, the fall of Kira would be just as entertaining as worldwide Kira rule. His opinion on whether or not Light is actually making the world less evil is left ambiguous, and seeing as he’s the impartial party with minimal interest in humans, it adds a new element of interest to the series. When humans consume media, we instinctively form opinions based on our human perspective, especially when that media is about humans. We bring our moral biases to the table. If Ryuk were to decide that Light is making the world more or less rotten, it would pit our morals against his, and possibly invoke the dilemma of agreeing with a God of Death.

Contrary to bored and pampered Light, L grew up in an English orphanage whose sole purpose was to rear stellar detectives. Aided by Watari, whose exact role in L’s life is slowly revealed over the series, L rose to fame solving the

When You Give a Student a Killer Notebook continued

Art by Henley Childress

world's most elusive cases. However, he only took on cases in which he had a personal interest, which sowed seeds of resentment among people who didn't pick and choose whom they would help get justice. He's as strange as he is brilliant, with a penchant for eating and playing with sweets (stacking sugar cubes before he eats them, etc.) and sitting in an odd squat he claims strengthens his deductive abilities. While Light is elegant and polished, L has messy hair, dark-ringed eyes, and plain, saggy clothes. When the eccentric detective takes on the Kira case, his initial moves allow him to hone in on Light as a suspect, although he lacks solid proof (for how could he predict the existence of shinigami and their Death Notes?). As a result, L asks Light's father to invite Light to join them on the Kira Task Force, and Light agrees. Now pursuing himself under L's supervision, Light is privy to information such as a copycat Kira and L's real face, all the while aware that L still suspects him and is constantly testing to see if he's Kira. But, for all his cleverness, Light still lacks L's real name, so he cannot kill L with the Death Note. At the same time, L is still unaware of shinigami and the Death Note's existence, so he cannot convict Light. His suspicion of his crisp counterpart seems to wax and wane, but his growing sense of friendship with him does not. L even goes so far as to tell Light he is his first real friend, which understandably throws Light for a loop. Many viewers think L's claim of friendship is genuine, while others think it was merely a strategy to unnerve Light. The vicious cycle can't be described as cat-and-mouse, for both are cats ready to kill the other for their own sense of justice and to prevent the other from killing them first.

Neither Light nor L are particularly moral, but Light acts like he is. When a copycat Kira arises and

kills people just to prove their power to the real Kira rather than to get rid of criminals, Light is disgusted. However, over the course of the series, it becomes apparent that Light's "only kill criminals" agenda is really a "kill anyone who jeopardizes my standing as Kira plus criminals" agenda. He even contemplates killing his own family on more than one occasion to protect himself. On the other hand, L shows no qualms about using harsh, sometimes illegal methods to solve the Kira case, and he doesn't put on a moral mask.

The final "character" that deserves analysis is the Death Note itself. In most stories, the link between the normal world and supernatural world is a conscious character: wizard-borns in Harry Potter, the demigods in Percy Jackson, and so on. However, in Death Note, the inanimate Death Note is the link. This is special because when the link is an inanimate object rather than a conscious character, it requires a much different dynamic in terms of introducing and then navigating the normal and supernatural worlds. When the link is a conscious character, the supernatural world often finds the normal character because of a conscious choice from this normal character. In Harry Potter, we see this when Harry receives his numerous Hogwarts letters; in Percy Jackson, we see this when one of Percy's field trip chaperones turns into a Fury and Mr. Brenner gives him a magical sword-pen to defeat her with. There was no way around their introduction to the supernatural, and they had to choose how to react to the letters and the Fury, respectively. In Death Note, the Death Note was a notebook on the ground—it would've been easy to not see, or to see and ignore. It's pure chance that a character would see the notebook, pick it up, test it, and use it as Light did. Thus, the events of Death Note spawned from a series of chance

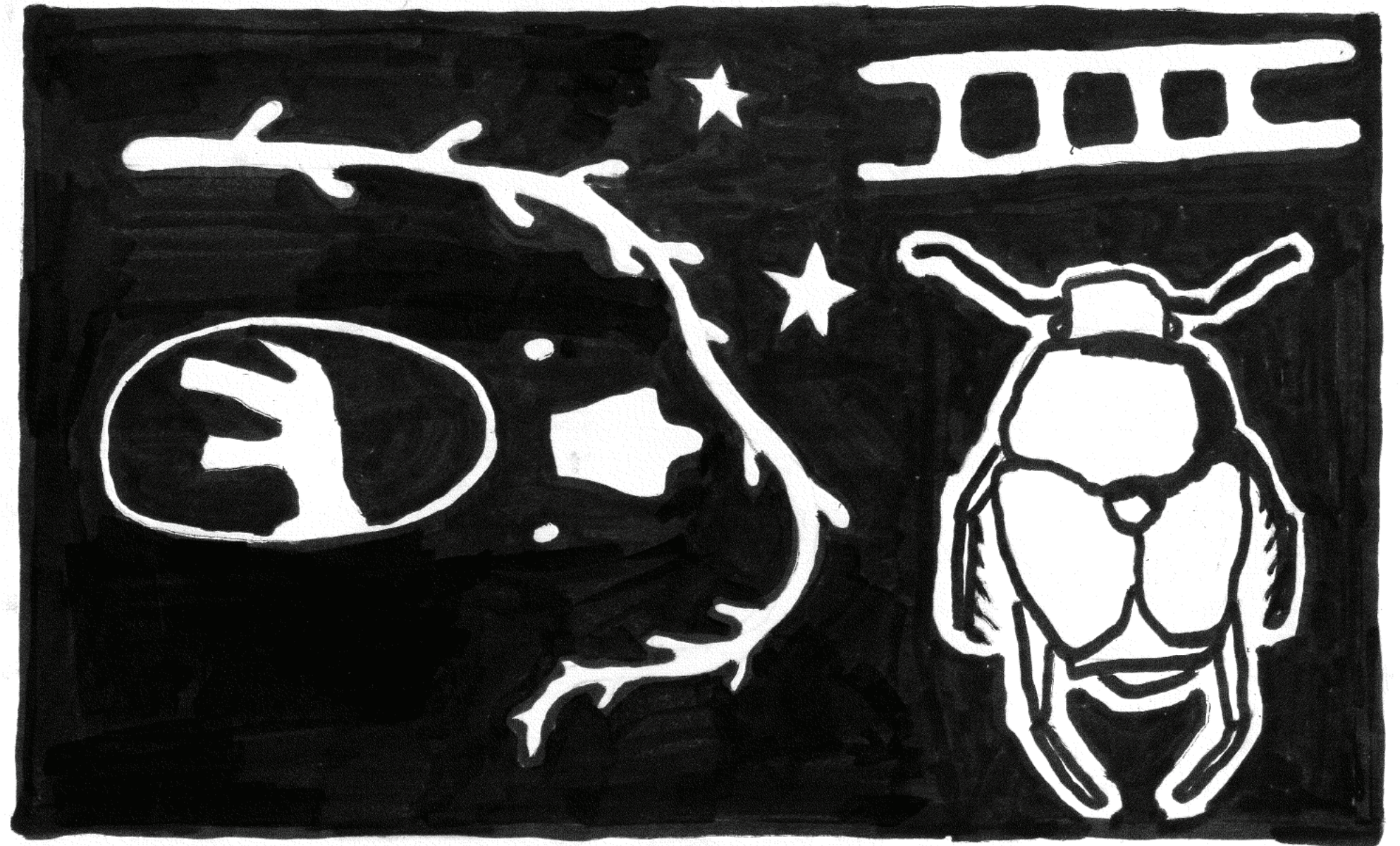
encounters. Furthermore, the Death Note grants normal people access to the supernatural; they don't need to be wizards or demigods. There are no Chosen Ones, only people who happen upon the inanimate link at the right time, and who possess the personality characteristics to make use of the link in certain ways. It requires characters that can be their own guide, rather than being the reason a guide comes to them. This is why Light is comparatively more complex than Percy and

Harry. He's not just older; he has to be smarter and more vicious, since his Death Note can be taken away from him, whereas Percy's god-blood and Harry's magic cannot. Finally, stories like Percy Jackson and Harry Potter are driven by the concept of the Chosen One and their allies fighting a supernatural enemy because there's nothing normal worth fighting for. Meanwhile, in Death Note, we have an inanimate link (the Death Note) connecting a normal character (Light)

with a supernatural character (Ryuk) that is neither ally nor enemy to the normal character. Furthermore, rather than being the direct supernatural enemy to fight (such as Voldemort in Harry Potter and the various monsters in Percy Jackson), the Death Note was used by a normal character to create the conditions where they would fight with other normal characters. Death Note has a plot driven by chance events and the unusual personalities of its normal characters, rather than

supernatural events happening until they're no longer ignorable and the normal characters' primary qualities being what makes them supernatural.

Despite its amazing characters and lore, Death Note is not free of issues. Nearly all the female characters in Death Note are portrayed as dumb and/or easy to emotionally manipulate, and the sexist Light often twists this to his advantage. Seeing as mangaka (manga author) Tsugumi Ohba's iden-





Art by Henley Childress

When You Give a Student a Killer Notebook continued

tity is unknown, we cannot be sure if the women are designed like this in the interest of Light's storyline, or because Ohba holds such sexist views of women and believes Light is in the right.

Yes, you read that right. Tsugumi Ohba is merely the alias for Death Note's mysterious author. There are many unconfirmed theories, with the most popular being that Tsugumi Ohba is really Hiroshi Gamo, a gag manga artist the Death Note manga occasionally references (for example, Light attends a seminar called Gamo Seminar.) Even Takeshi Obata, who drew three of the four projects Ohba wrote (including Death Note), is unaware of their true identity—all three projects were completed remotely. Ohba's gender is unknown, although articles written in English constantly use he/him pronouns. The fact that one of the greatest supernatural mysteries to come out of Japan is written by a human whose own identity is a mystery adds to Death Note's power. Who knows—maybe Death Note was written by a rebellious shinigami, or a former Death Note owner.

Ohba's mysterious identity is not Death Note's only strange effect on the real world. The internationally popular series has been banned in China, Russia, Taiwan, and parts of the United States for more than its profanity and violence. From its debut to the modern day, people in the United States, Russia, Belgium, and China have created their own Death Notes or bought copies online, and written in names of family members, classmates, school staff, friends, and criminals. These people are among the few who buy Death Notes for trouble rather than merch or cosplay

reasons (I have one myself for merch reasons.) Some of the most disturbing examples are in 2014 Collierville, Tennessee, when an elementary schooler created a hit list in a rudimentary Death Note; in 2008 Gadsden, Alabama, when two sixth-grade boys' shared Death Note was deemed a terrorist threat by authorities; and in 2007 Forest, Brussels, Belgium, when "I am Kira" was found on a note next to a dismembered corpse (two of the four suspects eventually confessed in 2010). While they were all fans of the series, some of the people who wrote in Death Notes were merely depressed and angry, while others seemed to want to become Kira-like vigilantes. The notion of a Death Note is powerful: if no one knows it exists, then one could kill almost anyone they wish with no evidence or repercussions apart from its impact on the mind. Is this proof that anyone is capable of murder when handed such a weapon?

Death Note is fascinating because it's more than exceptional characters and mystery-based plotlines accented by the supernatural Death Notes and shinigami. It forces its viewers to reckon with how much they agree with Light and L, and what the series' effect on the real world means. Are there some people this world would be better off without? If you had a Death Note, would you use it to purge the world of criminals, to kill a few select people, or would you get rid of it as soon as possible? Is Light a mass murderer when most of his victims already face the death sentence? Did L go too far in his methods to catch Kira, or did he do what was necessary to catch a supernatural mass murderer? What are the moral implications of the genius-farm orphanage L grew up in?

What do the scores of online support for Kira say about the human condition? What does it mean that numerous people in the real world have attempted to emulate Death Note?

I first watched Death Note in 2018, and what few answers I have to these questions are constantly changing. There are times when I'd give anything to have a Death Note, such as when white supremacists like Kyle Rittenhouse literally get away with murder. And at the same time, I know that killing someone—however terrible they are—is wrong, and doing so would destroy my mental health. However, regardless of how willing or unwilling I am to use a Death Note, the fact remains that I agree with Light's core beliefs: there are some people this rotten world would be better off without. And perhaps the most terrifying part of it is that I think most people in this political world of ours would also agree. This means that most people have the potential to become Kira, should they ever obtain a Death Note. It's just a matter of whether or not they're willing to step up as Light did, and kill the rotten themselves.

If you are willing to face the questions Death Note will raise in regards to your morals, it is the series for you. While critiqued for its aforementioned sexism and its unusual effect on the real world, the eerie lore around the Death Note and the maddening games L and Light play in pursuit of each other are still chillingly delightful. Let me assure you that this intellectually stimulating, supernatural psychological horror-mystery is worth your time.

Besides, it's only 37 episodes, so what have you got to lose? Your life?

Ten ways of looking at the Moon

by Shannon Schulz

I.
Among infinite galaxies,
The most comforting light
Was the glow of the Moon.

II.
I was of two minds,
Like the Moon,
With two faces.

III.
The Moon looked after the cold world. She listened, but never spoke.

IV.
My body and the Moon
Are one.
My body and the sky and the Moon Are one.

V.
I do not know which to prefer, The likeness of eternity,
Or the pull of an inevitable fate Which becomes a life
Or what comes after.

VI.
Dreams filled the mind of the wanderer With lost ideas
The shadow of truth
Hidden in sleep
The last sign
Of a longing for change.

VII.
Oh child,
Why do you stare at your feet,
And hope for the answer to grow From the ground?
Do you not see the Moon,
Shining above you?

VIII.
I know that I am lost,
In the formidable, inescapable, maze; But I know, too,
That the Moon has taught me
What I know.

IX.
When the Moon turns her head completely, It marks the end,
Of one of many cycles.

X.
At the sight of the Moon
Shining on a cloudless night,
Even the coldest of hearts,
Would feel.



“Sunflowers” by Siona Henze

Showstopper

by Paris Mercurio

Sylvia’s theatre school operated out of an old warehouse repurposed into several strangely-shaped studios. Her vocal lessons took place in a too dim, too warm, claustrophobic closet space. As for decor, Sylvia had a large, color-printed photo of the inside of her throat plastered to the back of the door, which she often pointed to, shouting, “That’s what healthy vocal cords look like!” Sylvia terrified everyone she encountered, students and parents alike. Only the particularly resilient lasted more than a year under her tutelage—it was common for students to drop out after the first few classes.

When I first met Sylvia, I was only eight years old, full of vibrant energy and eager to be seen. As a child, self-assurance was my defining trait: My love of attention and propensity for performance led my parents to place me in theatre classes at a young age. After my first year in Sylvia’s musical theatre class, they deemed her teaching style a bit too intense for an eight-year-old and sent me elsewhere. As the years passed, she lingered in the back of their minds. Her fierce, unyielding nature was compelling in its own way.

However, the version of me that returned to Sylvia six years later was entirely different. In the throes of awkward adolescence, my trademark confidence had been replaced with an unrelenting self-consciousness that directly affected my performances, contributed to my self-doubt, and created an endless cycle of insecurity. Because of this, I had a hard time in Sylvia’s class. I dreaded her intense scrutiny, her grating voice, and shouting critiques that I didn’t know how to take. I felt I was not a good actor because I could not be vulnerable—I was too self-conscious of my performance. It seemed impossible to find myself inside a character when I couldn’t even find myself outside one.

After a childhood in theatre, I was used to occupying rooms filled with impossibly loud voices and large personalities. Comparatively, Sylvia’s acting class had the creative energy of a standardized testing classroom. We filed in silently and waited for her direction, still as wax figures.

Sylvia had one golden rule of which she reminded us often: “Don’t be afraid to make a fool of yourself!” She certainly did not make it an easy rule to follow. Most of her students were far too afraid of her to open up at all. “You need to loosen up!” she’d holler as we visibly flinched at the sound of her voice.

In the winter of my freshman year, Sylvia called me about an audition for a new play at a regional theater nearby. Rehearsals were set to begin in less than two weeks, and they had cast everyone except for the lead role:

a thirteen-year-old Jewish girl named Holly.

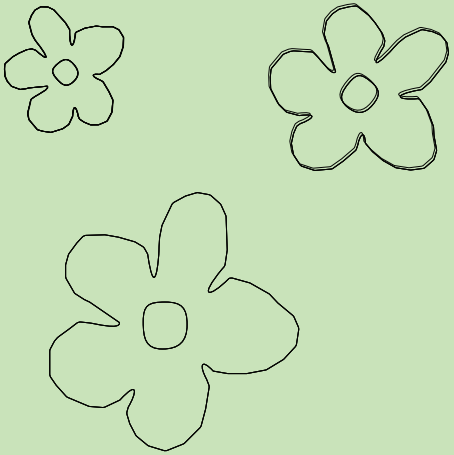
“The woman who read for Holly during the table read was too old to play her on stage, so they’re recasting last-minute,” Sylvia explained over the phone. “I’m friends with the director, and he asked me to send someone. I think you’d be great for it.”

I couldn’t imagine why Sylvia thought I would be great for the role. I’d only been in her class for a few months, and she hadn’t even seen me perform in front of an audience yet. I told my mother, and she nearly refused to bring me to the audition: a far drive, a long shot, a waste of time. I was inclined to agree with her, but my fear of facing Sylvia’s wrath overrode my self-doubt. I could imagine, all too vividly, her torrent of interrogation in the next week’s class: why hadn’t I gone to the audition? Why waste such a great opportunity? So we drove there anyway, if for no other reason than to say that we did. Soon, I found myself sitting in a waiting room full of girls who looked roughly like me—some taller, some with shorter or straighter hair, some noticeably younger—clutching the amateur headshot that my mother had taken in our backyard and printed at Staples the day before. I entered the theatre at my turn, where I trembled my way through a short monologue. It was a blur, and then it was over. A few days later, I got the call.

The only other teenager in the cast was named



Art by Nathaniel Coben



Evan, and he played my character’s love interest. As it turned out, he was one of Sylvia’s former students. My mother insisted that we carpool to rehearsals so we could get to know each other better, despite my protests and evident intimidation. Evan was a professional child actor, and I was terrified that he’d notice my inexperience the second he saw me. It was written all over me: I had no clue how I’d ended up there, I was unprepared, and it was only a matter of time before someone caught on.

Evan navigated our rehearsals calmly and casually, situating himself among our adult castmates like he truly belonged there. Though he had the smallest role in the play, he waltzed into rehearsals with his lines half-memorized, always making it clear that he had more important projects on his mind. Watching him, I felt even more out of place. It was my first professional show, and I still felt like the casting director had made some mistake by giving me the lead role. I felt an immense amount of pressure to prove myself to the rest of the cast and an obligation to work twice as hard as the actors who had already established themselves. If Evan shared even an ounce of my self-doubt, he certainly had me fooled.

“It’s just impostor syndrome,” my mom reassured me on the drive home

Showstopper continued

from a rehearsal. “You auditioned, and you got the role, so you’re obviously supposed to be there.”

“It’s not impostor syndrome, mom. I am an impostor. I have no idea what I’m doing.”

“Then just act like you do.”

Though I made a brief attempt at feigning confidence, I ultimately fell more naturally into the role of the eager newbie. Unless I was up on stage, I tried my best to be seen and not heard. I was fitted for hideous costume after hideous costume without voicing a single opinion. My lines were always memorized, though I wasn’t sure if I was delivering them believably. Deep down, I had the feeling that I was a bad actor—stuck in my head, far too concerned with how my performance was coming across. These thoughts only sent me spiraling deeper into self-consciousness. Confidence was a mysterious, ever-elusive force. It was an experience I could not access, a role I did not know how to play.

Still, on opening night, I found Sylvia in the front row. She sat there watching me, wearing a smile I had scarcely seen in our acting classes. She was proud.

As time went on, I learned to understand Sylvia better. Theatre was full of big personalities, and I learned that big personalities want smaller ones to balance them out or bend to their will. Big personalities wanted yes-men. I fell into that role quite naturally, and Sylvia appreciated me for it. By the end of my second year with her, we had reached the best relationship dynamic I could imagine having with her: she still terrified me, but in a way that I interpreted as fiercely loving. Despite the intimidation and oddities, I believed that she had my best interests in mind. So when Sylvia invited me to audition for her summer musical, I took the opportunity. I was simultaneously excited to participate in one of her mainstage productions—my parents had taken me to see her summer show back when I was eight years old, and I still vividly remembered its extravagance—and somewhat wary of what it would entail. Having Sylvia as a teacher was often trying enough, and I could only imagine how her directorial role would amplify that intensity.

Years ago, Sylvia had written an original musical based on Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* set in modern-day New York City, and she’d been trying, unsuccessfully, to have it produced off-Broadway ever since. During my sophomore year of high school, she announced that she would be retiring next year, and she had chosen to direct this show as her company’s final production. It would be her last hurrah,

her swan song. Disregarding the “youth” part of her youth theatre company and opting for professionalism, Sylvia chose to cast adult actors in the lead roles and college students as supporting characters. I was one of three younger students whom she’d cast as fairies.

Again, I found myself sticking out as the runt of a litter of older, more experienced actors. I kept to myself at first, content to just observe. Though I played a relatively minor role, I was also understudying the larger roles of Helena, the unrequited lover, and Titania, the fairy queen. It seemed highly unlikely that Sylvia would ever allow me to play either role onstage, even in the event of an emergency. We all bet that she’d cancel the show before she’d let a teenager perform as a lead actor, but I stood in for the actresses when they were absent from rehearsals. Sylvia did not seem to understand why it might be a bit weird for me, at sixteen years old, to act in romantic scenes alongside men who were five to seven years older. The actors seemed to feel similarly uncomfortable. The twenty-three-year-old actor playing Oberon, Titania’s love interest, refused to touch me.

“I don’t believe that you two are in love!” Sylvia paced back and forth in the black box theatre. “Where’s the spark, the tension?” Throughout rehearsals, I realized that the older cast members were just as intimidated by Sylvia as I was. I patiently listened to their frustrations and complaints during downtime until they decided I was cool enough to hang out with the big kids. Around my new friends, I began to feel mature for the first time in my life, yet I was surrounded by constant reminders of how young I really was. Still months away from getting my driver’s license, a few of my older castmates offered to drive me home from rehearsals. We would leave the theatre after midnight and go to the local bar, where I’d try not to feel out of place while timidly ordering french fries.

“Isn’t it past your bedtime?” the bartender once asked me. I turned bright red, sinking back into the safety of my crowd consisting of twenty-something friends. Even in places where I technically belonged, I couldn’t shake the acute sense that I didn’t quite fit. I was constantly hovering above the scene, fixated on my unconvincing performance of belonging.

As opening night approached, Sylvia’s veil of professionalism was wearing even thinner than her sanity. She had never been an easy director to work with, requiring full control over even the smallest musical, technical, and dramatic details. Still, her micromanagement began to reach new and intolerable levels. She was unwilling to compromise on her vision at any step of the process, despite how little sense her choices often made. When

actors asked her to clarify confusing parts of the script, Sylvia responded with offense, outraged and bewildered by the mere question. She frequently butted heads with the music director, fighting with him until he gave in to her demands. One day, the entire cast and crew sat silently as Sylvia engaged in a screaming match with her twenty-seven-year-old lead actress and former student. They eventually took it outside, but the walls were glass, so we could still see everything. Unsure of what to do, the rest of us sat quietly, trying not to stare at the pantomime.

As nightmarish

as it was, I still find it fascinating that Sylvia could be so unconditionally confident in her capabilities, to the point of delusion. Either she didn’t know how she came off to other people, or she just didn’t care. Maybe this makes a great actor: the ability to separate oneself from self-awareness entirely. I have always been the exact opposite, hyper-aware of the role I’m playing, hypervigilant of the reactions I elicit. I make fun of Sylvia for these qualities, and at the same time, I am cognizant of the fact that, in some respects, I envy them. I wish I could have that kind of freedom.

Two months into my first semester of college, I decided to give Sylvia a call. The prospect of reconnecting with her and possibly returning to the stage both nauseated and compelled me. I had been avoiding reaching out to her over the past year—it seemed impossible to talk to her without somehow revealing that I was no longer involved in theatre at all. It would come out, one way or another. I didn’t know how to tell her that her retirement had strangely initiated my own.

I hadn’t seen her in over a year. Though she announced her retirement the previous spring, Sylvia was still teaching the winter of my junior year of high school.



It was as if, though she knew she had to, she just couldn’t bring herself to give it up. She dug in her claws, determined to hold onto her business until the last possible moment. When she sold her studio, she kept teaching voice lessons out of her house. I drove there on brisk Tuesday nights to work on songs I hadn’t practiced once in the week since our last lesson. I wondered if she was beginning to sense my lack of investment. In the months following the closing of Sylvia’s last musical, my desire to perform started to dwindle. I began thinking about my future, and it was clear that theatre had no part in my plans. At some point along the way, it became something I did not out of love but out of obligation.

That obligation was not entirely self-imposed, either: every adult in my life, including my parents and Sylvia, expected me to continue with it. I had always done theatre, and although I did not consider myself particularly good at it, I wasn’t convinced that I was very good at anything else, either. In the months after Sylvia moved away, I took a “break” from theatre—though I had no concrete plans to return. Quitting seemed too harsh an action, too final. But as the months continued to pass, the truth of my non-decision became harder to ignore. Calling Sylvia would force me to reckon with that truth, which was part of the reason why it took me so long to

Showstopper continued

reach out. I worried that she'd be disappointed. I had not emerged from her tutelage as a self-assured performer. I hadn't even managed to get over the fear of making a fool of myself. I wondered if she'd think it was all a waste. I wondered if I thought so, too.

Through the phone, her voice was just as piercing as I remembered. She was excited to finally hear from me. She asked me if I was auditioning for any shows—did I need help choosing a cut of a song?—and whether I would be taking acting classes in college. I told her I was still figuring it all out.

"You have to really, really want it," she said, her voice settling into a tone I was not accustomed to. I was no longer her student; I was her friend. She was leveling with me, finally being real. "If you don't feel that way about it anymore, it just won't work." She wasn't disappointed; she wasn't even surprised. She was just being honest.

That was over two years ago, and it was the last time we spoke. I don't know why I haven't reached out since, but life just keeps going by. The version of

myself who was Sylvia's student is just a figment now, no more real to me than a character I used to play. Sylvia herself has become somewhat of a character to me, too. She lives in North Carolina now. When I imagine her life, I picture an idyllic scene: serene mornings drinking coffee on the back porch, listening to birds singing, endless lazy afternoons ahead of her, stretching out into the ever-present warmth of the fresh spring air. A stark contrast to the time we spent in that warehouse, all cramped spaces, ice-cold rooms and harsh noises. It's hard to imagine Sylvia so calm, with nothing to do, no one to direct. I wonder if she's different now, without theatre. I wonder if she misses it. I wonder if she's already found her way back to it, in some way or another. Sometimes I think about calling her again and asking these things.

"Come visit anytime," she said as our last phone call came to a close. "Keep in touch." I wonder if too much time has gone by. I wonder if the offer still stands.



"12 Women" by Siona Henze



Cartoons

by Juli Freedman

I started feeling my body again. Something I was able to celibate into myself. I hold myself in crowds. I etch cartoons into your back. There are parts of my torso that still feel like voids. Celibacy could not relinquish me from violence.

Is invasion a habit to forget? Is invasion an instinct?
Can invasion be bred out of you?

I worry that I have taken on the eyes of the invader
That there can be no gaze of mine without nasty
voyeurism, nastiness, guilt,

I used to be so adaptable to fantasy. I learn the history of the femme fatale. Those she seduces are her victims. They give her sexual reciprocation, but never romantic. That's when she kills. The early literature will never call the suitors the deceivers. I have felt deceived. I have felt thirsty for the kill.

There are tropes of sexy that feel so funny. When an old hag paints her face. A long red wig. A french maid costume. Pearls. Diamonds. Rose perfume. I used record myself speaking when I walked home after sex. As if I was recording a funny story. As if I was recording evidence.

Am I able to sacrifice steeping in rage for momentary kindness? It seems as though I am. But just expressing kindness. I am doing love play. Where is love in between idolatry and tending to wounds? There is an embarrassment accompanying all the tiny gory things I do in secret for you.

The only thing that is new, yours, only yours, are these nerves of obedience. I want you to shock me.





“Spaghettification” by Wiley Martinez



Untitled

by Will Young

we bought these avocados and we didn’t eat any of them,
the hard lines of our waste creating highways in the sand.

the bridge you cannot see is tied between the wings of two dimensional birds imaginary seagulls
with real appetites
things that destroy
each other; dogfights you can’t
look away from.
these automobiles
take us farther than we ever imagined. the arches of backs form Himalayan terrors
we just can’t wait to deflower.
touch is just a way of getting from point to point: a zipline with no confidence in its own safety.

tentatively, we put our feet in the snow; unsure of what we’ll see first
the flash or the after image.
the body or its absence.

the taste is still in my mouth, and it grows out of me like a cave of bats.

Hyperminimalist

by Kenji Anderson

“Am I going to be commercially successful? Am I going to be on the charts?” I used to care about it, and now I just don’t. I think that’s what allows me to be quite liberated when I make music.”
- Charli XCX

On August 2, 1992, Charlotte Emma Aitchison was born. Born in the digital age, she would begin using Myspace to post her own music in 2008. Two years later, she would sign to Asylum Records on a deal that would last for five albums, until 2022. You may know her as Charli XCX.

In 1992, American composer Philip Glass would have his opera, *Einstein On The Beach*, performed by the Brooklyn Academy of Music. First presented in 1976, the experimental, hypnotic piece lasts four-and-a-half hours with no intermission—audience members are encouraged to come and go in the theater as they please. The work is described as Glass’s “professional breakthrough,” and it marks a musical style that would define his professional career; he would be known for his contributions to minimalist music, a subgenre of classical music.

What does any of this have to do with Charli XCX? Just like Philip Glass, Charli XCX is known for contributions to a subgenre of a larger category of music; Philip Glass is to minimalism as Charli XCX is to hyperpop.

What are hyperpop and minimalism? Both are subgenres nestled under the bigger categorizations of pop music and classical music. Charli and Glass are leaders in their respective genres, but even they have shown dismay with the labels—Charli recently posted on her Instagram “rip hyperpop?” while Philip Glass said in past interviews that he doesn’t agree with the label minimalism in reference to his current work. Nevertheless, these musical distinctions exist, so to better understand the genres, let’s take a look at a few different songs.

To begin, what differentiates hyperpop from pop? To explore this question, let’s take a look at the 2021 quarantine anthem “drivers license” from none other than the Gen-Z queen herself, Olivia Rodrigo. This bop is marked by one specific feature that I obsess over: the use of a looped piano, coming out of the opening sound of a car signal. The source of the loop is recognizable: first car, then piano; and though repetitive, it is simple. The car turns on at the beginning of the song, and the loop carries its sense of motion as we drive through “red

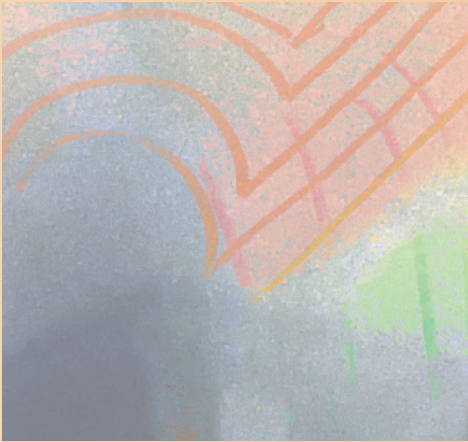
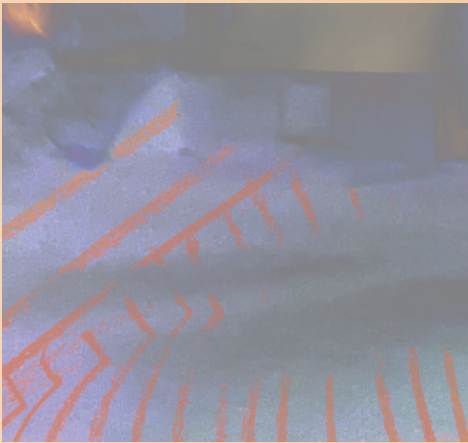
lights, stop signs” and images of first heartbreak.

In the song “Unlock It (Lock It)” (featuring Kim Petras and Jay Park), Charli uses a similar looping technique, but she stretches it to the nth degree. In “Unlock It,” the loop is not of a single note, but a revolving cycle of multiple pitches. Though they are busier than a looped single note, they still serve as a backdrop for the verses of the song and take on slight transformations during the chorus, as is the case in Rodrigo’s anthem. However, unlike in “drivers license,” the identity of what is looped is much more slippery in Charli’s song. What exactly is looped? I’ve settled on a synthesizer of some sort, but I’m not sure. Ultimately, the experience of listening is not one where the goal is identification, but the effect is something fantastical, almost otherworldly, and futuristic. Charli practices similar techniques as Rodrigo, but this time, they’re maximized: shinier, busier, and fantastical in identity—that’s hyperpop.

Repetition becomes a building block of maximalism for Charli. In her song “c2.0,” off of her quarantine album *how i’m feeling now*, repetition qualifies the entire song. The song opens with a percussive loop alongside a second loop with higher pitched material, similar to what we heard in “Unlock It.” When the voice enters singing, “Yeah, I’m next level, so legit with all my /clique, clique, clique, yeah,” the percussive loop drops out while the pitched loop remains. Upon the repeat of those same words, the percussive loop re-enters. The first half of the song uses and repeats only the lines of text written above, and the repetition carves out space for attention to be paid to the exchange of various other loops of synthesized material. The construction is busy but simple—you can hear the trading off and exchanging of various loops, until they drop out, leaving an auto tuned Charli repeating “clique” over and over.

After repeating the word “clique” more than 100 times, the music is disrupted by new material, ushered in with a self-proclamatory exclamation: “Charli!” As “clique” continues to be repeated, it turns nonsensical and its onomatopoeic qualities come forward—it too, becomes a loop. By transforming sung material into an instrumental-like loop, Charli levels the playing field, taking away the traditional pop prioritization on the vocal line. Charli blurs the traditional lines of vocal and instrumental material.

Just as Charli manipulates vocal material, Philip Glass utilizes repetition of harmony in a way that shifts how we



“Unhaunted House” by Becky Trigo

prioritize melody in music. In Philip Glass’s “Rubric,” a movement from his 1981 composition *Glassworks*, there is not much harmonic variation; instead, there is weight given to how the same harmonies transform in their presentation. In this way, “Rubric” is quite representative of what one would expect of minimalist music — it strips classical music down to a few elements.

If you were to hum the melody of “Rubric” from the beginning, you’d start with a four-note ascending repetition present in all the instruments (just like a loop!). After a tiresome repetition of the same run eight times, you’d run into a problem— while the harmony stays the

same, its presentation shifts: various instruments take different pitches of the chord and begin arpeggios in the harmony. Listeners hear a break from the unison as we move from eighth notes to eighth-note triplets, and the music begins to prioritize rhythm over a distinct melody. The arpeggios create a circular motion as the instruments rotate through the pitches, and the combination of instruments creates a dizzying cloud of sound. The music runs on shifts and variations on presentation of harmony. Its building blocks are loop-like repetition, and just like in Charli’s music, it holds its power in the tension and release of that repetition.

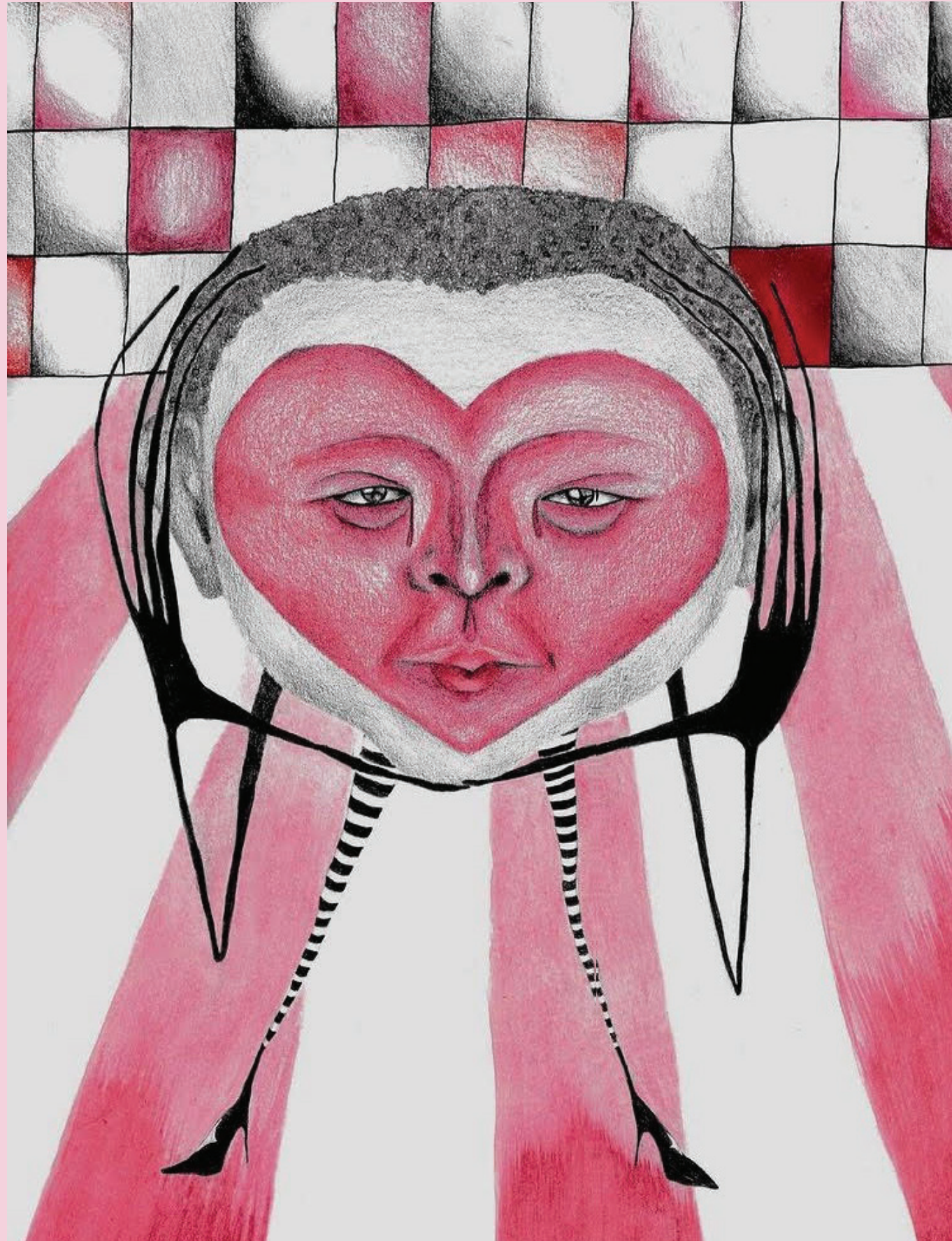
Hyperminimalist continued

In both of these excerpts—“c2.0” and “Rubric”—the musical ingredients are minimal, but the presentation is maximalist. Through the maximalist presentation of musical material, specifically marked by repetition, both Charli XCX and Philip Glass challenge our expectations of music—specifically an expectation that one element, such as lyrics or melody, should take precedence over another.

By definition and name, hyperpop and minimalism are framed as fundamentally different—hyperpop supposedly makes pop’s sparkle blindingly shinier, while minimalism strips classical music down to its most basic elements. The reality is that minimalism doesn’t exactly feel minimal at all, and hyperpop can still be broken down into simple elements. In “Unlock It,” Charli takes a pop technique of a loop and runs with it, while in “c2.0,” she elevates that technique until it becomes the song’s primary function—is that not what minimalism does with harmony and rhythm? The experience of these musics are quite similar—a busyness created by isolating and elevating key elements—but genre prevents them from being understood as similar. After listening to Philip Glass’s *Einstein on the Beach* on Spotify, Charli’s music certainly would not pop up as recommended listening, but why not?

In many ways, genre has served the artists of hyperpop and minimalism well. Charli and Glass have carved out roles as leaders in niche subgenres and have become musical icons because of it. Through popularity, they reach a larger audience. However, the goal of reaching a larger audience, usually promoted by labels marketing the music, points to the larger problem of genre: genre as a means of commodifying music.

Let’s open Spotify’s Minimalism playlist. The first thing you’ll notice is the cover: a beautiful, pure-white sphere sitting on a similarly pure-white table. The only thing darkening the table is the sphere’s shadow. Set against a lavender-to-white ombré background, the image exudes tranquility and order. And that’s



Art by Dalia Tomilchik



exactly the sort of music you’ll find on the playlist. You’ll find a meditative manifestation of Glass’s minimalism—his “Etude No. 2”—but nothing else of his. The playlist leaves out both his synthesizer-heavy work, and pieces with haunting vocals, such as movements of his opera *Einstein on the Beach*. While I laud the playlist for its variety of composers, it fails to highlight just how present the synthesizer and other electronics are in the tradition of minimalist music. It feels as though Spotify is trying to create a playlist that is nuanced enough but ultimately predictable, perhaps something that can be collapsed to the description “repetitive music that could be studied to,” rather than “minimalist music.” The playlist leaves gaps in understanding the genre fully; when revenue is the guiding hand for music, playlists are reduced to utility, and genre is collapsed to a few key traits.

I’d like to believe listeners are much more open to the unexpected than the industry gives us credit for. People are hungry for new music—something new that will make them feel understood and seen in ways they hadn’t before. Algorithm-based tools like streaming apps, Instagram, and Google searches are great ways to access music, but as platforms for discovery, their ulterior money-making motives are something to be wary of. However, so much discovery lies in our immediate surroundings: ask friends, family, and strangers what they’re listening to. Study up on the history of music in your region (the country music of my upbringing always deterred me from the genre, but as I get older and more nostalgic for home, I find myself more and more interested in it.) Check out live performances near you; there’s no better way to understand music (or be completely baffled by it) than by experiencing it live. Open your eyes and ears to your surroundings, then make use of Spotify as a resource: make your own playlists, where there’s space for Charli XCX, Philip Glass, and countless combinations of other artists to be heard side-by-side.

She Pays You Great Attention

by Saffron Forsberg

I.
Somehow, I am always in transit.
Three weeks before I am to turn
twenty-one My mother and I watch
Autumn Sonata: Bore our eyes into Ingrid
and Liv
Grimacing before piano, as we before
laptop. Their skin is like venison, abraded
And sensitive.
Yet, at once, somehow, it holds
That beautiful seventies
sheenlessness, Familiar and
only-sometimes.

Afterward, my mother plants herself
In conversation with the ashtray,
Speaking of death
With a blood-matted lambishness,
As though at once seventeen and ninety-seven;
A late-seventies Bergman in undereye
concealer. *He could be from anywhere.*
Doesn't it seem like he just came from
nowhere? I go to my small pink room and cry
until I fear I may vomit, at which point I stop.

II.
Somehow, I am always in transit.
My father's girlfriend speaks to me
About the desert. She, Marfa.
I, the eternal plasticity,
Psychedelia, of Southern California.
She will move my father closer to the
Gulf. She knows about quiet men
And how they need the instruction of
daylight Like morning children in the
shallows. *Don't I act like him?* I laugh at her
darkly. *You act like yourself,* she tells me.
She is kind and woman-firm, stoned
and honest: She is right in that I am
Restless, walking in the dark,
Thinking of every woman I've ever
known, And hearing Jan Oxenberg;
What would she have been like
If someone had paid attention to her? III.
Somehow, I am always in transit.
This morning on the airport tram,
A little girl with a name
Stared into me.
I'd say her name is yours.
But it's sort of out-of-style to
Address you in my poems, now
That I am so hair-wet comfortable
On the telepathy of your front
porch, Beer in my cheeks,
Watching the side of your face
Bloom awash in who you are becoming.

—Dear friend, I watch myself
now Only in the thoughtful,
Housecat faces of airport babies.
I think nothing of myself
In familiar cities;
Nondescript and human as feces.
I go alone

To a late-summer folk show,
where mini-skirted eleventh-graders Ask me
to buy them cranberry juice with rum. I buy
them Cape Cods christened
With perfect limes.
This-this is vodka, and not rum?
Says their ringleader.
Yes, I say with clarity, *and with a*
lime. I forget it scalds to be seventeen
and By-yourself;
To be ninety-seven and clutching
Oneself, ugly and in transit.

IV.
Somehow, I am always.
My brother's unwanted daughter
Will escape her frowning, blonde mother Shortly
after my birthday.
My mother will let her be neither dull,
Nor digestible. And when she is
Two months old, I will return to Texas, To
hold the thin china of her universal skull. Maybe
she will be our first blonde; Her
older sister is reedy and blue-eyed And of
another man.
Unlike my mother and I,
dark-lashed And penetrating.
I think of this soon-child fondly

And with a faith I cannot help;
The one that lends me
Great fondness for both the
fleeting, And for every field of
wheat,
For every bed that touches
My early-twenties.
For every womens' bathroom
In the Atlanta airport, hot
With the toughness of womanhood:
Mewing babies with exposed
genitals, And the attentive percussion
Of their mothers' shoes.
Soon-child will soon learn what we all
know: It is so brightly human to watch a
stranger Pencil in their eyebrows.
It is so brightly human to have
faith In every coming autumn.



Colophon

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Art by Henley Childress



About the Cover

Cover Art by Lee Cocco '24
"home" in oil pastels, 9"x12"

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