

**ON STUFFED NOTES & OTHER
TIMES LIES POWER
IN MUCUS & JUNK &
BLACK MOLD**

**A POWER THAT CANNOT
ESCAPE THAT GROWS LIKE
FECES LIKE THE ONES THAT
ARE IN THE CLOGGED PIPES
THAT ARE NOT LEAVING YOUR
HOUSE THAT ARE HIDDEN & IN
DISGUISE & ARE ONLY THERE
BECAUSE YOU KNOW BECAUSE
YOUR TOILET IS NOT FLUSHING
NO MORE BECAUSE SHIT IS
HITTING THE FAN**

Dear Reader,

*Tomorrow looks nothing like yesterday
and forever will never. Galore is a bore.
Sometimes life leads to the demonization
of its own ...*

Life.

*Just these four letters create equation
in the semiotics of vowel after dingo.
Gratification gets lost in another vocation.
Say: Fuck the system. Eat your heart out.
Gut your dungee. Shit is hitting the fan.
Five days ago I thought I had it all under
control, but now I realize, life just ain't
for fucking ever you know? I guess all I'm
trying to say is jelloweegel fudilly
chumpely djaahza.*

Damn!

*Just take a drink and relax.
Life's too sheezly to be weezhly.*

Yours,

D.

**WHAT DOES THE MONEY
MACHINE EAT? IT EATS
YOUTH, SPONTANEITY, LIFE,
BEAUTY, AND, ABOVE ALL,
IT EATS CREATIVITY.
IT EATS QUALITY AND IT
SHITS QUANTITY.**

WILLIAM S. BURROUGHS

THE DOORKNOB

The tale of Alice in Wonderland tells the story of a young girl who gets lost inside her own imagination as everything around her starts becoming alive, taking on human characteristics. The editors of Lewis Carroll's original *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Charles Frey and John Griffin, describe Alice as "engaged in a romance quest for her own identity and growth, trying to find some understanding of logic, rules, the games people play, authority, time, and death." The events that Alice undertakes in the story correlate with the steps children face when aging from childhood towards adolescence and incorporate struggles and explorations of thematics like curiosity, identity and logic. In the story, she generally gives herself good advice, though she very seldom follows it. In 1951 Walt Disney Productions made an animation film of the original novel, introducing the story to an even wider range after broadcasting it on national television.

It became one of Alice's most well known adaptations and is today considered one of Disney's great classics.

Alice :
I simply must get through!

Doorknob :
Sorry, you're much too big.
Simply impassible.

Alice :
You mean impossible?

Doorknob :
No, impassible.
Nothing's impossible.

A similar thing happened in 1989 with the premiere of *The Little Mermaid*, which with its success became the start of the *Golden Age of Disney*. At first hand the movie appears as an innocent musical for children, yet it seems an unlikely coincidence to have been released in the same year as the fall of the Berlin Wall. The main figure in Ariel is a mermaid, who desires to be part of the human world, a world that could be interpreted as a representation of the consumption-based and utopian, capitalist West. The promotion of capitalism is especially implied by Ariel's collection of treasures found on the bottom of the ocean. As she shows her gems from the human world, she re-enforces them with her singing:

**“I've got whozits and
whatzits galore...”**

But who cares, no big deal, I want more!”

This could be seen as (un)intentional promotion for the desire of consumption, which we know to be a fundamental aspect of the ideology of the capitalist system. It seems one does not need to look far when reading George Orwell’s *Animal Farm*, to see how politically charged an apparently innocent narrative can be. In *Animal Farm* the Russian Revolution and proceeding events are portrayed through the guise of an innocent story, about animals on a farm. In TS Eliot’s essay *Hamlet and his problems*, Eliot criticizes Shakespeare’s play on Hamlet as an artistic failure. He claims Shakespeare didn’t provoke his readers to feel what Prince Hamlet must have felt through the devices of characters, symbols and objects, but merely explained these emotions

through dialog. According to Eliot it is therefore unclear what Prince Hamlet is truly feeling. Text messaging applications like Whatsapp and Facebook have given a rise to the use of *emojis* in order to express feelings more easily. This direct communication is the perfect example of the objective correlative TS Eliot was missing in Hamlet. Some emojis are now considered as sole emotions rather than mere illustrations of an intended act. The eyes emoji (a pair of eyes, glancing slightly to the left on most platforms) for instance, has become a phenomenon also known as the *pervy eyes* or *shifty eyes*, and is often used to indicate approval of an attractive photo posted online, or to convey a deceitful act (according to Emojipedia). Along with the eyes emoji, for instance the *hair-flip* emoji and the *painting-nails* emoji, have also become representations of sheer confidence, exuding pettiness and glamour and can be used as a form of

expression, without actually having to perform the represented act. Language is a prototype of construction and is always evolving. When verbalizing one's thoughts or feelings, some sort of transformation takes place, a previously amorphous concept takes shape which once formalized, becomes negotiable. This transformation can be recognized as a form of translation, and something is always lost in translation. Perhaps emoji users have found a way to express oneself easier by usage of images that convey emotional triggers, which become a more direct form of translation, where less is lost. Michel Serres questioned in conversation with Bruno Latour why "philosophy continues to speak this telegraphic language consisting only of verbs and substantives without any prepositions, without any declensions or pronouns, when without them we can express neither relations nor subjects nor objects?" He goes on; "In this new

language, which is very close to everyday language, you will also see a whole new process of abstraction.”¹ In today’s new language, abstraction is taken even further by introducing a new type of visual character; the emoji. Another rising star in today’s new language is the *meme*. The standard internet meme is an image captioned with heavy type, superimposed on top of the image “for humorous effect” (according to Wikipedia). The sentences that are thus part of the image create some kind of strange loop or self-reference, where they play with the tacit knowledge that the viewer carries with him or herself. It is in this tacit knowledge that one can find a feeling of relation, with mostly no-one specifically, as the meme’s creator almost always remains anonymous due to the fast transmission it goes through once it goes *viral*, but the meme works because the original image scenario implied is recognizable to the big crowd. The image

is used in a way that one no longer thinks of the original scenario, but of the remainder of the commonly held reference the image originates from; the tacit knowledge, which is that I know that you know that I know *that* particular part of the used image, which enables the joke that follows.² Rightfully using a reference everyone knows is a crucial point in defining the success of a particular meme. If for instance a sentence would be based on a film that no one has seen, its mention would never be able to achieve the same immediate impact. A meme can tap into a collective memory and transform the outcome of a commonly held starting point to different ends. For instance, *Condescending Wonka* is a wide spread meme that is basically constructed as a coloring page for one could say slightly patronizing and sarcastic meme messages. It is a series featuring an image of Gene Wilder as Willy Wonka in the 1971 *Willy Wonka and the Cho-*

colate Factory. The image originates from a scene in the musical, where Willy Wonka asks the children visiting the factory if they would like to see a new candy he is working on called ***The Everlasting Gobstopper.*** The particular image was introduced into the meme culture in 2011 and served the “You must be new here” phrase, commonly used to call attention to incoming noobs in discussion forums or social networking sites. After that, Wonka quickly became an image of intended condensation, being posted with captions like:

“Oh, you just graduated? You must know everything.”

“Immigrants are stealing our jobs? Tell me more about how you’ve always wanted to be a taxi driver.”

“You constantly change lanes in bumper-to-bumper traffic? You must get to your destination so much faster than anyone else.”

“Criminals don’t follow gun laws? Good point, let’s get rid of all the laws criminals don’t follow.”

“So you had your picture taken with hooters girls? I bet they all want you.”

“Oh, you’re a model? Who’s your agency? Instagram?”

“Oh, so it’s so hard being a broke college student? The blues must sound so good through your 300 dollar headphones.”
“Please, tell me more.”

Besides the politically charged language used in memes, also its subsequent visuals say a lot to the expression of oneself in a time of now. Every generation is forced to construct and therefore reconstruct it’s political beliefs and takes things in its surroundings as reference points, but also as materials “to work upon”. The expression of these political beliefs need a canvas that creates a surface for the message. Protest signs will be made out of cardboard, graffiti slogans will be blagged on buildings and merchandise will be worn on t-shirts, caps and badges. An interesting thing

happens with the politicization of today's generation turning digital, now that the political message has no physical canvas anymore. As a result we see how this generation is constructing new political beliefs out of all kinds of stuff, stuff which may have seemed initially non-political. Willy Wonka, Kanye and random cats, walking under the name *Lolcats*,³ start to embody critiques or ideologies of the digital masses, being universally distributed as if they were the political posters of yesterday. This merging of politically charged messages and the intentional laugh that these images bring along create another level of entry and enhance their accessibility. All of a sudden, politics and humor can go hand in hand and speaking out doesn't have to require an intellectually charged message, which creates, especially for a young generation, perhaps a less intimidating stage. Though jokes are by virtue of their disruption of an existing or-

der of “sense-making” very unwelcome guests in an age of austerity. The joke is an open source weapon of the public. The court’s jester, in medieval times, was juggling with this incredibly dangerous political weapon. Employed by the king, the jester was free to say whatever he wanted, but unfree to say it to anyone else than the king himself. The jester was free to speak, yet imprisoned in his serfdom to the monarch.⁴ Now we see that with the rise of concepts like fake news and celebrities exposing their unfiltered thoughts on Twitter it seems the borders between the joke as entertainment and the joke as a means of attack are becoming blurred. The king becomes the jester himself, throwing dust in his own eyes.

NOTES

- 1** Michel Serres in conversation with Bruno Latour, extract from *Conversations on Science, Culture and Time*, trans. Roxanna Lapidus (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995)
- 2** Metahaven, “Can jokes bring down governments: Memes, Design, Politics”, 2013
- 3** A lolcat is an image macro of one or more cats. The image’s text is often idiosyncratic and grammatically incorrect, and is known as *lolpeak*. (Source Wikipedia)
- 4** *Fools Are Everywhere, The Court Jester Around the World*, Beatrice K. Otto, 2007

THE MIRROR

**“Magic mirror on
the wall, who is the
fairest one of all?”**

The Evil Queen in Snow white and the seven dwarfs

Surface, representing no particular meaning or message, is the precondition for virtual capital, projected revenue and speculative value.⁵ Reality and consciousness are not merely reflected but also produced by surface. Communicative surface, or screens, are classified by their capacity to open up doorways to virtual worlds. Facing these doorways, screens, and all sorts of smooth surfaces, we find in their reflection a reinterpretation of our day to day lives. The mirror functions as a surface, reflecting with information overload defect, our daily interactions. Most phones already track ones daily steps and sends reminders not to forget to board a flight. A phone is no longer just a phone, as it also allows you access to your mailbox, web browser, agenda, alarm clock, camera and many more unthinkable applications. Phones have the capacity to open up worlds in worlds. They have completely surpassed their function as a dedicated machine

that was designed to perform one task and have been transformed into machines appropriating the functions of other machines, like for instance, a wristwatch. Everything is now compressed into one piece of hard- and software, creating the ultimate gadget, that follows every step and click you make. The phone has become our personal assistant, our second brain, our third hand. Yet the accumulation of the information overload registered by phones also creates a zone of mutual mass surveillance, which goes in hand with the urban networks of control, such as CCTV, GPS tracking and face-recognition software. Information registered by our devices becomes so private it debatably trespasses our privacy rights. On top of that image spam is arranging what we are exposed to today on our many screens. It is our message to the future. Tight abs, firm butts and porcelain smiles initiate our ideological state of being, our picture-perfect self.

From the perspective of image spam, people are improvable, or in Hegelian terms, perfectible. Image spam invites you to participate in “the dream team of hyper-capitalism”⁶ which is from its perspective just a mouse-click away. One of the main problems of image spam is that it seems to be addressed personally to *you* as an individual, whilst actually it is generally distributed to the masses, creating algorithms based on your recent browsing history. Thus the information overload of image spam is creating confusion between our physical selves and our virtual alter egos. It is a confusion comparable to the defect pilots have experienced during free fall, which has been known to trigger confusion between the pilots’ self and the aircraft, a result of losing orientation due to the loss of a stable horizon. While falling, people may sense themselves as being things, while things may sense that they are people. Traditional modes of seeing

and feeling are shattered. Any sense of balance is disrupted. Perspectives are twisted and multiplied.⁷ Have we become like Narcissus, caught by the spell of our digital reflection? What he has seen in the pond, he does not understand, and the same error both seduces and deceives his eyes. Like him we have become obsessed by our virtual echo, where we lured in by the screen, remain in an eternal state of falling, confused by what is really us and what is thus a mere reflection of our virtual persona.

“Fool why try to catch a fleeting image in vain? What you search for is nowhere. Turn it away, what you love is lost. What you perceive is the shadow of reflected form, nothing of you is in it!”

Capitalism has created the constructible self, like most superstars have shown us we can (with money), portray ourselves like glamorous objects rather than subjects. Andy Warhol had alongside his desire of fame a desire to be nothing of a human, nothing but an image, a surface, a thing of absolute narcissism. Perhaps Warhol himself was in an everlasting state of falling. But what happens to identification at this point of flattening oneself to just a surface? According to Hito Steyerl "If identification is to go anywhere, it has to be with its material aspect of the image, with the image as thing, not as representation. And then, it perhaps ceases to be identification, and instead becomes participation."⁸ Should we as identities rather be objectified or subjectified? How can one hold up an autonomous identity without losing oneself in the objecthood of its own existence? In terms of emancipation, traditionally, becoming a subject carries with

it the promise of autonomy, sovereignty and of agency. To be a subject was good, to be an object was bad. But being a subject can be tricky, as a subject seems to be always already subjected. Even though you would say that the position of a particular subject suggests that it has a certain control over the status it portrays, in reality this particular subject is still often subjected to power relations. So should we not, like Warhol wished, become an object for a change? Just a surface, a thing, an object without a subject. Of course becoming an object without a subject is not simple. If we listen to John Berger in his BBC series *Ways of Seeing* we learn that the objectification of women especially, already occurred long before the rise of television and it's Victoria's Secret models. "You painted a naked woman because you enjoyed looking at her," wrote Berger, "Put a mirror in her hand and you called the painting 'Vanity,' thus morally condemning the

woman whose nakedness you had depicted for you own pleasure.”⁹ In *Ways of Seeing*’s final episode, Berger discusses how the goddesses of art became the models of contemporary advertising, and suddenly it was no longer only men looking at images of women lustfully. Advertising tells us that buying a product will transform us by showing pictures of those who have already been transformed by it - these are people we should aspire to be like or be with. According to Berger an image of an underwear model is desired by men and envied by women. “This state of being envied is what constitutes glamour, and publicity is the process of manufacturing glamour,” Berger says. “Glamour is supposed to go deeper than looks, but it depends upon them, utterly”.¹⁰ To grow up a woman in a Western patriarchal society is to be constantly analysing and critiquing your own appearance, constantly struggling with the reality of your body and the ideals

with which you have been presented, measuring yourself up – not for your own pleasure but for the eyes of men. Take for instance the moment in the first season of *Sex and the City*, when Carrie reveals that she’s performing a version of herself for the recognition from her big love Mr Big, terrified he will see the real her and his desire will dissipate. “You should see me around him,” she explains to Miranda. “I’m not like me. I’m, like, Together Carrie. I wear little outfits: Sexy Carrie and Casual Carrie. Sometimes I catch myself actually posing. It’s just – it’s exhausting.”¹¹

NOTES

- 5** Metahaven, "White Night Before A Manifesto", 2008
- 6** As Hito Steyerl puts it in "The wretched of the Screen" e-flux journal, 2012
- 7** Hito Steyerl, "the Wretched of the Screen", e-flux journal, 2012
- 8** Hito Steyerl, "A Thing Like You and Me" written for the forthcoming catalogue for Hito Steyerl's solo exhibition at the Henie Onstad Art Centre in Norway, 2010
- 9** John Berger in Was of Seeing, episode 2, on BBC, 1972
- 10** Ibid.
- 11** Carrie Bradshaw in Sex & the City, Season 1, Episode 11

THE WISHBONE

Initially, we are all, walking talking minerals. “Soft tissue (gels and aerosols, muscle and nerve) reigned supreme until 5000 million years ago. At that point, some of the conglomerations of fleshy matter-energy that made up life underwent a sudden mineralization, and a new material for constructing living creatures emerged: bone. It is almost as if the mineral world that had served a substratum for the emergence of biological creatures was reasserting itself.” Mineralization names the creative agency by which bone was produced, and bones then “made new forms of movement control possible amongst animals, freeing them from many constraints and literally setting them into motion in order to conquer every available niche in the air, in water and on land.” In the long and slow time of evolution, then, mineral material appears as the mover and the shaker, the active power, and the human beings, with their much-lauded

capacity for self-directed action, appear as its product.¹² The theory of evolution by natural selection, first formulated in Darwin's book "On the Origin of Species" in 1859, explains the process by which organisms develop over time as a result of changes in both heritable and behavioral traits. These changes should allow organisms to adapt better to their environment and therefore enhance the chance of survival and reproduction. The theory is sometimes described as the "survival of the fittest", which as a term can be quite misleading, as "fitness" here, refers not necessarily to an organism's strength or athletic abilities, but rather to the ability to survive and reproduce. A psychological study on human evolution, published in a journal of Personality and Individual differences in October 2017¹³ claims that many people today have trouble finding a mate because of rapidly changing social technological advances that are evolving faster

**than humans are. According to Mene-
laos Apostolou, associate professor
of social sciences at the University
of Nicosia in Cyprus, “Nearly one in
two individuals faces considerable
difficulties in the domain of mating.”
Apostolou continues, “In most cases,
these difficulties are not due to so-
mething wrong or broken, but due to
people living in an environment which
is very different from the environment
they evolved to function in.” It sounds
like loneliness has become more
evident, as (pre)determined life-defi-
ning choices regarding ones “future”,
like marriage and having children,
have become less evident. According
to research like this it comes across
as if emancipation has led us to failing
evolution. Every generation needs to
deal with the problems of their times,
and in a nowadays so called “first
world” with its so called “first wor-
ld problems”, feelings of loneliness,
disappointment and dissatisfaction
have become today’s real life threats.**

The generation that doesn't need to worry so much about hunger, shelter, or education, merely replaces these concerns with fears of being pitied, disliked, or not even noticed at all. The generation I am speaking about here walks under the name of *The Millennials* and includes a range of children born between the years of 1985 en 1999. The concentration lays herby on Western European Citizens, raised in a middle class society. Known as a generation searching for happiness both in their private as well as in their professional life, they seem determined to look for sense, self realization and demand time for family and friends. It is generally these demands for self realization and free time which in numerous studies are referred to as being narcissistic and selfish tendencies of the generation. In this generation of Millennials three major influences are of significance regarding their stance towards the proportions of their own decision making today.

In the first place these Millennials are born and raised in a time of crisis and the collapse of political ideologies, secondly they are the legacy and result ideas of the previous generations of the *Baby Boomers* and *Generation X* and thirdly they became the first generation where the majority does not recall not having unlimited access to internet and therefore acts as natives in the digital world. As is the case for every entity, no one chooses the historical circumstances of their birth. In many ways millennials are perceived as being different from *Generation X* and the *Baby Boomers*, yet this does not under any circumstance define them as being any more (or less) evolved than their parents or grandparents; it is merely a consequence of the way their (grand) parents have charged and changed the world in ways that have produced people like these Millennials. Malcolm Harris underlines in his book *Kids these days, the making of millennials*

that “Capitalism changes lives for the same reason people breathe: it has to in order to stay alive. Lately, this system has started to hyperventilate: It is desperate to find anything that hasn’t yet been reengineered to maximize profit, and then it makes those changes as quickly as possible, the rate of change is visibly unsustainable. Profiteers call this process “disruption, while commentators generally call it “neoliberalism” or “late capitalism”. Millennials know it better as “the World” or “America” or “Everything” and everything sucks.”¹⁴

NOTES

12 De Landa's account of the emergence of bones, from *Vibrant Matter*, Jane Bennet, 2010

13 Menelaos Apostolou, "Personality and Individual Differences" *Elsevier*, Volume 122, 2018

Malcolm Harris in "Kids these Days, The Making of Millennials", 2017

14 Malcolm Harris in "Kids these Days, The Making of Millennials", 2017

THE FYTRAP

In order to fully recognize the scope of these changes, we need to think about young people the way the industry and the government already do: as investments, as productive machinery, or in other words, as *human capital*. By means of stocking ones attributes like knowledge, habits, creativity and talent, one can embody the ability to perform labor, and with labor, produce economic value. “When students are working, what they’re working on is their own ability to work. Human capital’s rough paper analog is the résumé: a summary of past training for future labor. Human capital is the present value of a person’s future earnings, or a person’s imagined price at sale, if you could buy and sell free laborers- minus upkeep.”¹⁵ The word “capital” in the phrase insinuates the use of people as tools in a larger production process, *the Economy*. We can see a rise of competition on the labor market, as it seems difficult to change the

scopes of rights for workers, think minimum wage, long term contracts and the housing-crisis which seems to have become a global problem leading to escalating housing prices. The drive for success young people have to face now in order to create more potential once they are older, creates a situation wherein the more they succeed, the harder they have to work to keep up. Hard work pays off, up to a certain point of course. Jean M. Twenge, a psychologist at San Diego University, compares in her paper *The Age of Anxiety* published in 2000 the results of dozens of surveys that inquire school-children and college students to self-report their levels of anxiety. The results of this research showed that the amount of reported anxiety increased linearly over the time of question. With an almost full standard deviation, the growth was substantial. According to Twenge, "The birth cohort change in anxiety is so large that by the 1980s

normal child samples were scoring higher than child psychiatric patients from the 1950s."¹⁶ She notes that recent changes in the young adults sociocultural environments, like the concentration on production, competition, surveillance and achievement, have had more impact on their levels of anxiety than temporary historical events like the Great Depression, which hit America in the 1930s. The Yerkes-Dodson law is a model that maps the relationship between arousal and task performance. In the map, as arousal increases, so does with it performance, up to an inflection point where the arousal begins to overwhelm performance and a contrary movement occurs, where scores start to decline. Our hypercompetitive society pushes children's performance and scores up, unconsciously bringing along their level of anxiety with it, and anxiety is productive, that is, up to a certain limit where it starts to become counterproduc-

tive, affecting their hard worked for human capital and ultimately starts putting their successful futures at stake. The link between anxiety and performance is strong, but also other psychological maladies come to mind as we try to understand the intensive production of “capital” in children. *Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder* (ADHD) and *sluggish cognitive tempo* (SCT) are both increasingly diagnosed conditions that pose a danger to children’s ability of competing effectively. Students who seem unable to hold up the necessary attention inside of the school walls can be diagnosed with an attention disorder and given medication and certain testing allowances, like “extra time”, eventually to improve their performance in school. This is understandably derived from good intentions, but it is also undeniable that some kids are just better at sitting still and paying attention than others, and our culture has pathologized those who aren’t be-

cause pathologies can be treated.¹⁷ Because there is a market for *everything*, there is also a market for wandering young minds. The most popular medications for attention disorders are stimulants like Adderall, Ritalin and Concerta, which chemically boost a user's ability to concentrate and get to work. And with an impressive amount of children and young adults taking these medications, a thriving secondary market has flourished amongst (all sorts of) people who want to increase their performance. Getting ahold of these amphetamines - because that is literally what they are - is as easy as typing "how to get Ritalin" in your search engine, or asking the right kid in on the school yard. Of all the American children currently diagnosed with ADHD, over two-thirds receive medication, and the steady flow of these legitimately prescribed drugs, makes illicit use impossible to contain. But attention enhancing aids aren't the only pres-

cribed drugs children are exhibited to today. In 2000 *JAMA* published an article on the statistics of prescribed drug use amongst teenagers showing worrying results. Between 1991 and 1995 the number of preschoolers on antidepressants doubled, while the amount taking stimulants tripled.¹⁸ For teenagers, similar numbers developed. Remarkable is that over this short period, the percentage of a teenager's visit to a psychiatrist actually resulting in the prescription of a psychotropic drug increased ten times as much as visits overall. The question remains if this is a mere example of what doctors call "drug seeking behavior", or if there is more to it, if we can state the capital to blame, with its hyperventilating economy, which is hungry for youngsters to become inexhaustible production machines, and does not know its limits, up to the point of the destruction of its own workers.

**“Man (like a Fly) still
buzzes up and down
From cup to cup, and
sips on, till he drown
Himself in pleasure;
fears no stander by:
And how can Heav’n
love such a drunken
fly?”**

The drunken fly by John Blague

NOTES

15 Malcolm Harris in "Kids these Days, The Making of Millennials", 2017

16 Jean M. Twenge, "The Age of Anxiety? Birth Cohort Change in Anxiety and Neuroticism, 1952 - 1993," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol 79, No. 6, 2000

17 Malcolm Harris in "Kids these Days, The Making of Millennials", 2017

18 Cindy Parks Thomas, Peter Conrad, Rosemary Casler, and Elizabeth Goodman, "Trends in the Use of Psychotropic Medications Among Adolescents, 1994 to 2001," *Psychiatric Services*, Vol. 57, No 1, January 2006

SWEET NOTHINGS

All that is capital melts into love.¹⁹ But as the capital continues to exhaust its employees, is this thing called love not turning bitter sweet? Does love still abound? Although we often talk of love, it seems challenging to clarify what we really mean by the word. Love goes hardly undefined. Is love a decision? Or is love a feeling? Is love blind? Or universally aware? Is love sexual, or not? Is love self-sacrificial? Is love unconditional? Is love to be understood as *eros*, *agape*, *philia*, as none, or all of the above? Of course there is more to love than just intimate relations. Love as a feeling, an approach, a practice, an institution, is not something that is self-contained, but something that forges connections.²⁰ Understanding love merely as a personal matter means denying its responsibilities, as love assumes a social function, but also becomes a gateway to subjugation, exploitation and violence.²¹ Love becomes a phantom that hovers above

and beyond work. The unemployed member of a family is usually expected to babysit or take care of their sick relatives. Their occupation is to love, and this love does not come without work. Here love becomes a figure of total depletion, even a catholic figure of giving oneself away to the exhaustion and humiliating defeat.²² With depletion comes the idea of burden, what you love the most, is in a sense also the obstacle that keeps you from being totally free. Criticality doesn't happen in a neutral space; it happens in a vulnerable space, where care for others is always on the same plane with the idea of judgment of the world.²³ Contrary to what pop-culture might insinuate, our "hookup culture" is not as present as one might think it to be; kids are having less sex than they have at any time since the sexual revolution which started in the 1960s. According to an article in the journal *Pediatrics* ("Sexual Initiation, Contraceptive Use, and Pregnancy

Among Young Adolescents”) the average age of sexual initiation dropped from nineteen to seventeen between 1939 and 1979, to inflect and start rising again in the early 1990s and is now back up to eighteen.²⁴ According to CDC’s Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) of high schoolers, the average teen now graduates a virgin, a landmark shift that occurred between 1995 and 1997.²⁵ Several reasons are questionable when analyzing the results of the rise of age in terms of sexual initiation. If Millennials are generally taking less risks than past generations, perhaps they are also less willing to take a shot in the dark when it comes to unwanted pregnancy or sexually transmitted diseases, as other studies imply that the use of contraceptives under teens has increased markedly. Teenage birth- and abortion rate are down as well. Less “free time” probably contributes a lot to these numbers, as today’s kids are known to have packed schedules af-

ter school in terms of soccer training, homework tutoring, band practice, boy scouts, girl scouts, you name it, they do it. Another cause to the decline of adolescents' sexual initiation could be related to a decline in sexual assault and abuse reported on children. On the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System measure, statistics show a falling rate on physical and sexual abuse by more than half between 1992 and 2010.²⁶ Although teenagers are having less sex at earlier age, this does not imply that teens are not sexually active at all. Relatively new sexual practices like *sexting* have emerged. As almost all teenagers now carry around smartphones with camera's it is not a complete surprise that children that are too busy to explore eachothers bodies start sending each other naked pictures of themselves. Studies confirm that some kids start sexting before they have actual sex, reversing the generally older generations' rela-

tionship with self-produced nudes. It seems understandable parents' discoveries and confrontations of these minors' sexual experimentations can be perceived as quite shocking as it sounds like there is potential here to reach common grounds with self-produced child porn. Though statistics indicate that fewer children are being sexually abused by adults, this does not necessarily mean that adults have also stopped the sexualization of young men and especially women. The fashion industry remains fixated on youth, young successful models often start working before the age of seventeen, sometimes forcefully dropping out of school, in order to focus on their professional modelling career. America's child beauty pageants exhibit that there is no minimum age for beauty. Age divisions in these beauty pageants will often have names such as *Baby Miss*, *Petite Miss*, *Little Miss* and more. Age divisions are generally broken as follows: 0–11 months, 12–

23 months, 1-3 years, 4-6 years, 7-9 years, 10-12 years, 13-15 years, and 16-18 years. Also pornography sites make unthinkable amounts of money off actors pretending to be kids. *Pornhub*, known as the largest pornography site on the internet, produces a yearly report that aggregates user behavior on the site. When looking into the metrics in their 2018 Review it shows that the term *teen* scores a seventh place on the website's "Most Searched for Terms" list, running up just after the terms *mom*, *japanese*, *step-mom*, *milf*, *hentai* and *lesbian*.²⁷ On the production end of online pornography, some similarities on earlier discussed labor trends are applicable once more. It seems in this industry amateurs have supplanted the professionals. Professional porn actors have to compete against so called *tube* sites, where users can upload their own clips, either self-produced or pirated and we know what kind of effect this dynamic has on wages.

Katrina Forrester describes in a piece for *The New Yorker* how the industry has changed; “Much online porn is amateur and unregulated. It’s hard to tell how much, because there’s little data, and even larger studio’s now ape the amateur aesthetic, but applicants for porn-shoot permits in Los Angeles County reportedly fell by ninety-five percent between 2012 and 2015. Now most films have low production values, and they are often unscripted. Sometimes you can hear the director’s voice; apparently, many viewers can make do without the old fictional tropes of doctors and nurses, schoolgirls, and so on - the porn industry itself having become the locus of fantasy. Where performers like Jenna Jameson had multi-film contracts with studio’s like Wicked or Vivid Entertainment, such deals are now rare, and most performers are independent contractors who get paid per sex act.”²⁸ Increased competition leads in the end to low-cost, rationalized labor.

Increased competition also means profit somewhere, and in the case of pornography this somewhere leads us to a company called *MindGeek*, a company that owns several porn sites including *RedTube*, *YouPorn* and *Pornhub*. MindGeek manages to produce and broadcast professional directed porn, as well as the amateur porn gathered from their tube sites, which basically means it broadcasts the professional porn as well as all the amateur stuff you can download illegally. David Auerbach describes this situation as being if “*Warner Brothers* also owned *the Pirate Bay*.” Basically it’s a no-lose proposition for management, and a no-win one for labor.²⁹ And how on earth are we supposed to tackle that? Because darling, sweet nothin’s for free...

**“So I put my faith in
something unknown
I’m living on such
sweet nothing
But I’m tired of hope
with nothing to hold
I’m living on such
sweet nothing”**

Calvin Harris ft. Florence Welch

NOTES

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