

Lili Reynaud-Dewar:
My Epidemic (Teaching
Bjarne Melgaard's Class)

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Epidemics and Their Metaphors by Amy Kazzymerchyk

I am often compelled to purchase a book based on its title alone. For the first weeks, months and sometimes years in my possession, I lean the book against the wall, cover facing me, next to two or three other books. I like to see how the meaning of a title expands when placed beside others, and will reorder them from time to time.

A book that has stayed with me for a number of years is Susan Sontag's *AIDS and Its Metaphors* (1989). I have displayed it alongside titles such as Maurice Blanchot's *The Writing of the Disaster* (1995), Julia Kristeva's *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* (1992), Sara Ahmed's *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004), Jacques Lacan's *Seminar Book VI: Desire and its Interpretation* (1958-59), Michel Foucault's *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (1961/1964), Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1977/1987), Brian Doherty's *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (1976/2000), and Sontag's *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003). These titles contribute to my ongoing reflection on the confrontation of illness, vision and visibility, the white walls of institutions and aesthetics.

Over the years that I have displayed *AIDS and Its Metaphors* I have thought about what the metaphors of AIDS may be, as Sontag had witnessed them, and as I have experienced them. Most recently I recalled its title at a talk given by Geoffrey Farmer, who explained the ritual gesture of the bell at the entrance to his exhibition *How Do I Fit This Ghost in My Mouth?* at the Vancouver Art Gallery.ⁱ The bell is inscribed with 'January 9, 1996', the date that Cuban-American artist Félix González-Torres died of an AIDS-related illness. It is struck every time a visitor enters or exits, as a reminder of the toll AIDS has taken on queer and visual arts cultures, and the resonance that González-Torres' life and work bears on Farmer and his art practice.ⁱⁱ

The echo of Farmer's bell finally motivated me to read *AIDS and Its Metaphors*. Following from her previous essay *Illness as Metaphor* (1978) Sontag reminds us that there are no metaphoric or symbolic interpretations of illnesses such as AIDS.ⁱⁱⁱ Western medical science, religion, psychology and governments have, in various ways, articulated spiritual and psychological metaphors about an ill person's constitution; moral and punitive metaphors in an ill person's actions; and militaristic metaphors of an epidemic's transmission.^{iv} Sontag refutes this reasoning, citing the ideological and scientific paradigm shifts that have inspired

Lili Reynaud-Dewar is a 2015 Audain Visual Artist in Residence, which is co-presented by SFU Galleries and SFU's School for the Contemporary Arts. Her residency and exhibition are supported by the Institut français and the Consulat Général de France à Vancouver.

then disputed these metaphors, as evidence of their fallacy. She emphasizes that an illness is a biological mutation that produces biological signals. There are no metaphors for illnesses or for the bodies and subjectivities of the ill, and therefore thinking about them figuratively impedes medical attention.^v

Thinking with Sontag is destabilizing, as there are occasions when layers of meaning and value unfold around encounters with AIDS. We don't just experience an epidemic as a biological mutation, but as a social and ideological infection. AIDS influences intimate relations, institutions of law and finance, policies on citizenship and immigration, health care, social space and collective culture. A person may feel safe from biological transmission of the virus because she does not identify with at-risk behaviour. However, she cannot protect herself from ideological contagion, which, at the very least, elicits her fear of infection and shapes her social relations.

If we refuse metaphors of a specific illness, can we consider the metaphors of epidemics? Or if we resist metaphors, can we observe allegories? If the notion of a grand allegory is still too suspicious, are there minor ones contained within the discourse of epidemiology that prove generative for thinking through the endurance of epidemics and their reverberations?

In her ongoing project *My Epidemic*, Lili Reynaud-Dewar teases out the material and figurative language of AIDS and its impact on bodies and culture. She applies the clinical language of biological epidemiology to artistic, intellectual and social life. Though metaphors have been used to work against the wellbeing of those infected, Reynaud-Dewar explores how activists and artists have used clinical language figuratively, to strategically resist institutions that confine metaphors to punishment.

The possessive *My* in the exhibition's title, acknowledges the first person accounts of individuals who put their bodies on the frontlines of protest, healthcare, literature and art. It also acknowledges *her* possession of the epidemic, along with all the epidemics (ideological, aesthetic, political) she has lived through and been formed by. It is a gesture of empathy and solidarity.

My Epidemic accumulates the *my* of subjects speaking through poetry, fiction, theory and criticism in the gallery. Their quotations are printed on fabric curtains that obscure the white institutional walls, suggesting a private room.

Reynaud-Dewar reads texts in an analogous manner to how I read book titles: she selects quotations across genres, subjects and languages. Through translation, editing and composition she makes visible the transmission of political and cultural values that have infected every aspect of our lives, from women's reproductive rights to racialized violence. The curtains envelop the gallery in a suspended timeline of perspectives on sexuality, procreation and death.

The quotations on the curtains infect each other in the gallery, and they in turn infect the students in the seminar and visitors who read and speak them. The white cushions are impressed with the bodies of people who have committed time to further reading. The design and typography of the books' covers have been re-imagined by SCA seminar students and printed out as posters. Each student has contributed their own *my* to the exhibition, as visitors have via their own reading and interpretation. These are examples of discursive transmissions that bleed into a polyphonic, collective *our*.

My Epidemic emerged in 2015 as a series of artworks, exhibitions, seminars and a publication associated with Reynaud-Dewar's earlier exhibitions *Vivre Avec Ça?! and Live Through That?! (2014)*, and *I Am Intact And I Don't Care (2013)*.^{vi} These works took up the life and work of Guillaume Dustan (1965–2005), a French writer and a controversial figure within Paris's queer scene whose books include *Dans ma chambre/In my room (1996)* and *Nicolas Pages (1999)*. *In my room* is an intimate and explicit account of his sexual and emotional relationships set within his apartment, the apartments of his lovers, and the shared nest of gay nightclubs and social sex rooms. In these installations, the formal language of the *room* occupies the public gallery with affects of the private realm, such as curtains, small beds and men's pajamas. In these installations the spilled ink of Dustan's personal life soaks the blank pages of the bed sheets, or a disembodied voice reading from his books emanates from speakers in the bed frames. This iteration reflects on the tension between the intimacy and politics of the singular body and the social body—between the maker's body, the body of work, and its reader.

Reynaud-Dewar's reading of Dustan's life and work expanded to address the public tension between himself and French ACT UP activist Didier Lestrade around conflicting personal and collective politics regarding social sex culture and bare-backing. Dustan challenged ACT UP France's regulation of queer sexual culture, and supported radical queer autonomy against state management, communal

surveillance and moral control of queer bodies and health. Reynaud-Dewar scripted a libretto about their turmoil titled *My Epidemic (small modest bad blood opera)* and presented it in “All the World’s Futures” at the 56th Venice Biennale in 2015. Parallel to her installation she hosted a seminar with her students from the Haute École d’art et design, in which she expanded the representation of authors from one to six. The group read aloud from Leo Bersani’s “Sociability and Cruising” (2002), Douglas Crimp’s “De-Moralizing Representation of AIDS” (1994), Tim Dean’s *Unlimited Intimacy: Reflections on the Subculture of Barebacking* (2009), Samuel R. Delany’s *Three, Two, One, Contact: Times Square Red* (1999), Guillaume Dustan’s *Dans ma chambre/In My Room* (1996/98), and Scott O’Hara’s *Rarely Pure and Never Simple* (1999).

While producing *small modest bad blood opera*, Reynaud-Dewar discovered a similar artwork produced for the 54th Venice Biennale in 2011. A Norwegian artist had conceived of a project that addressed the AIDS epidemic as a way of entering a discussion on the production of identity, collective action and artistic production that was organized as a series of classes culminating in a collaboratively produced exhibition. The artist was Bjarne Melgaard and his seminar was titled “Beyond Death: Viral Discontents and Contemporary Notions about AIDS.” In the weeks leading up to the Biennale, students at the Università luav di Venezia read texts and produced their own writing and artwork that became part of Melgaard’s installation *Baton Sinister*, commissioned by the Office for Contemporary Art, Norway, as part of their national representation. A catalogue of his project, which included the seminar’s syllabus, was produced by the Haugar Art Museum.^{vii}

The alignment of Melgaard and Reynaud-Dewar’s projects, which sees production methodologies, formal strategies, and installation vocabularies echoed consciously and unconsciously across time and space, is an example of “virality” within contemporary art. Artists’ identities and their practices are infected by influences they encounter personally or through text, image, audio and video documents.

We tend to acknowledge these synchronicities as either coincidence or plagiarism, but I think, and I believe Reynaud-Dewar would agree, that these are productive moments in which contagious ideas are spread through artists’ referencing and translating each other.

The transmission of ideas is a form of epidemic, and the virality of discourses produces our personal and collective identity, cultural production and collective action. This of course includes the refusal to act responsibly, create productively, or participate collectively.

In the case of *My Epidemic (Teaching Bjarne Melgaard’s Class)*, the *Baton Sinister* catalogue was one of the means by which Reynaud-Dewar’s practice became contaminated by his ideas. As a result, my own practice has also been infected. The stack of books that represents Melgaard’s syllabus has sat on my desk for weeks now and I’ve started arranging their titles as I would my own books.

Through this process I am reminded that the scope of Melgaard’s syllabus extends beyond the discourse of AIDS, or more accurately, that the discourse of AIDS extends beyond the discourse of AIDS.

To fully grasp how the ideological virality of epidemics impacts political, juridical, linguistic and social production we have to think about correlative conditions. The syllabus and the quotes that Reynaud-Dewar has excerpted from it articulate relations and contingencies: within collective action, between The Black Panthers and ACT UP; within biopolitics, between the pro-choice movement and bareback subculture; and within kinship structures, between queer marriage and family advocates and skeptics. However, correlations can also be interpreted inversely. The epidemic at the centre of Reynaud-Dewar’s work could be read as reproduction rights, systemic racism or sexual pathology, with AIDS assuming the relative, contingent position.

In *Teaching Bjarne Melgaard’s Class*, Reynaud-Dewar performs Bjarne Melgaard. She wears a finely tailored suit in his approximate size (much too big for her), identical VANS sneakers, a haircut approximating his G.I. short crop, and a ball cap from one of his installations. She has studied how to perform Bjarne Melgaard by looking at images and videos of how he performs himself, much like how we watch videotaped lectures and adopt speakers’ ideas into our own thinking and producing. Reynaud-Dewar is not being Bjarne Melgaard; she is embodying how his artistic and pedagogical practice has infected her own. In teaching, she performs the reading of his texts and thinking through their correlations in an analogous way to how Melgaard might have read and connected them. In dancing, she performs thinking physically, conscious of how her body is

Endnotes

being formed by the gallery and the university. Is Reynaud-Dewar's performance an example of quotation, appropriation or impersonation? What is the difference between these enactments and our judgment of them? Where does Melgaard end and Reynaud-Dewar begin? Some of the most superficial differences are obvious, like their bodies, age, nationality, or the mediums they work in. But there might be less visible or mutable traits they share, like an illness, childhood trauma, sexual desire or artistic influence. These qualities are no less a part of who they are, yet they are not legible to viewers. In this way we can think of them as viral-invisible, intelligent, diffuse.

If there is a way to think through the endurance of epidemics and their reverberations in resistance to institutions that confine metaphors to punishment, it might be to consider the ways in which we identify our resemblance rather than difference; to acknowledge the ways in which identity is interpreted by ideological paradigms, which rise in popular favour to invariably fall into disrepute. We circulate profusely. Perhaps to speak about an epidemic in an art gallery is to acknowledge our collective possession of it by making the invisible visible, through gestures of empathy and solidarity.

- i *How Do I Fit This Ghost in My Mouth?* May 30 – September 7, 2015. Curated by Daina Augaitis, Chief Curator/Associate Director with Diana Freundl, Assistant Curator.
- ii While staring at the cover of Sontag's *AIDS and Its Metaphors*, I've also reflected on presenting Terry Haines installation *Bloodstorm* (2009) at VIVO Media Arts Centre in 2010. The nine-channel video work is a meditation on Indigenous, queer and HIV+ bloodlines. The complexity of Haines' body of work was a topic we barely skimmed the surface of; and this was Haines's last living exhibition before his death on March 2, 2013. The title was also with me during Sarah Schulman's lecture *Witness to a Lost Generation* at the Western Front in 2012. I wondered what impact AIDS has had on gentrification in Vancouver and why it is never brought into public discourse around neo-liberalism and development. Scanning the room, I also wondered why there were so few prominent social housing, right to the city and anti-poverty activists (who do not work directly with queer communities) in the audience.
- iii Susan Sontag, *AIDS and Its Metaphors* (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 103–104, 109–115.
- iv *Ibid.*, 94–100, 113.
- v *Ibid.*, 102.
- vi *Live Through That?! at the Logan Centre for the Arts, Chicago* (2014); Emanuel Layr, Vienna (2014); Outpost, Norwich, UK (2014); Index, Stockholm (2014); New Museum, NY (2014). *Vivre Avec Ça?! at Kamel Mennour, Paris* (2014). *I Am Intact And I Don't Care at 21 er Raume Belvedere, Vienna* (2013); CLEARING, Brooklyn, NY (2013); Lyon Biennial (2013); Frieze Projects, London (2013).
- vii Bjarne Melgaard, *Baton Sinister* (Tønsberg, Norway: Haugar Art Museum, 2012).

My Epidemic (Teaching Bjarne Melgaard's Class)

We swapped abortion stories. Nothing like having a good heart-to-heart talk with the son of a feminist, as Joan described him. I told the story of my first abortion. The stories, and there had been a lot of funny ones or so I remember thinking at the time. I used to tell them regularly, it was my abortion routine, but I never wrote any of it down. But I hadn't told them or even thought about them in so many years I wondered if I remember how to tell them or if they were funny anymore or if what used to be funny was the little shake of terror at the back of my voice, the experience of being so fresh and basically so unfunny.

Anne Rower, *If You're a Girl* (1990)

A couple is something that homosexuals do not like, something they almost never like; it is even what they hate or fear the most. The machine constructed for homosexuals by heterosexual society (and sometimes used by the libertines) is an anti-couple cruising machine. Under the guise of the perpetual drift and sway, it is a strange machine that nonetheless displays strong analogies with capitalist accumulation, in that it continuously projects onto the past, due to its mechanism of collection and seriality, just as it projects into the future due to its forward-looking mechanism through which the conqueror thinks of his next conquest immediately upon completing the first.

One can, of course, only retain of this machine its disjunctive and profoundly subversive action towards legitimate union and official fidelity. But it did not initially function according to that goal. It does not attack anything; it projects itself from a peril. If cruising plays leapfrog while conjugality plays kitty corner and house, they both originate in the same anxiety about solitude.

I know this cruising machine quite well. Or rather, it has known me well enough that I can verify that couples disrupt it. Cruising is best done alone. Capitalism might easily say this machine constitutes the sad destiny of gay people, without mentioning that it created this destiny itself: the couple or the troll, the choice is yours, it's just like work or vagrancy.

Guy Hocquenghem, *The Screwball Asses* (1973)

By organizing viral transmission as a purposeful activity, barebackers infer that a shared bodily substance—whether conceived in terms of blood, DNA, or HIV—represents the basis for community but also, more profoundly, kinship.

FANTASIES OF GENERATION

Bareback subculture's ideas about kinship have emerged at a historical moment when mainstream lesbian and gay politics has been focusing as never before on issues of marriage and family. The AIDS epidemic not only made gay sexuality more visible but also led to the promotion of a more socially conservative gay political agenda that centered on winning marriage and adoption rights for lesbian and gay couples. As homosexuality moved from the social margins into the mainstream, becoming by the mid-1990s what Andrew Sullivan proclaimed as "virtually normal", some queers invented bareback subculture to help keep their sex outside the pale bourgeois respectability. If part of the appeal of gay sex consists of its transgressiveness—whether real or imagined—then barebacking and bug chasing may represent a strategy for re-inforcing same sex eroticism within the sphere of transgression. In other words, if the prospect of same-sex marriage raises the specter of gay in-laws, then bareback subculture ensures that gay men will retain their status of outlaws—a status that carries considerable erotic appeal. As Scott O'Hara said in 1997, "I believe in exchanging body fluids, not wedding rings".

Tim Dean, *Unlimited Intimacy: Reflections on the Subculture of Barebacking* (2009)

Marriage is the legal ownership of women, the legal intercourse that is the foundation of male authority.

The principle that "the personal is the political" belongs to patriarchal law itself, originating there in a virtual synthesis of intimacy and state policy, the private and the public, the penis and the rule of men. The regulation of men in intercourse is a prime example. It is not enough to have power as a birthright; power must be kept over living human beings born to rebellion, arguably a human trait, certainly a human potential. The regulation of men in sex creates a seamless state of being, internal and external; experienced in the body as real and imposed on the world; in the body and in the world called "nature".

Andrea Dworkin, *Intercourse* (1987)

In reality, the decomposition of all social forms is a blessing. It is for us the ideal condition for a wild, massive experimentation with new arrangements, new fidelities. The famous “parental resignation” has imposed on us a confrontation that demands a precocious lucidity, and foreshadows lovely revolts to come. In the death of the couple we see the birth of troubling forms of collective affectivity, now that sex is all used up and masculinity and femininity parade around in such moth-eaten clothes, now that three decades of non-stop pornographic innovation have exhausted all the allure of transgression and liberation. We count on making that which is unconditional in relationships the armor of a political solidarity as impenetrable to state interference as a gipsy camp.

The Invisible Committee, *The Coming Insurrection* (2007)

Even proponents of abortion rights, while promoting the freedom of women to control their own bodies through reproductive choice, recurrently frame their political struggle, mirroring their anti-abortion foes, as a “fight for our children—for our daughters and our sons,” and thus as a fight for the future. What, in that case, would it signify not to be “fighting for the children”? How could one take on the other “side,” when taking any side at all necessarily constrains one to take the side of, by virtue of taking a side within, a political order that returns to the Child as the image of the future it intends? Impossibly, against all reason, my project stakes its claim to the very space that “politics” make unthinkable: the space outside the frame-work within which politics as we know it appears and so outside the conflict of visions that share as their pre-suppositions that the body politic must survive. Indeed at the heart of my polemical engagement with the cultural text of politics and the politics of cultural texts lies a simple provocation: that queerness names the side of those “not fighting for the children,” the side outside the consensus by which all politics confirms the absolute value of reproductive futurism.

Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004)

Two months ago I found out I have a serious disease that's so rare it hasn't earned one of those nicknames like the flu. Even if I could pronounce its very long Latin, the words would mean nothing. All you need to know is I'm being eaten alive by infections, and I'll be dead within months if I'm lucky.

The worst side effect is a gradual, total destruction of my skin. It peels and flakes away in sheets. If I didn't spend half of my days in a tanning salon, I'd look like the moon. I'd have itched myself to death by now if my fingers weren't swollen into very painful misshapen knobs.

When I was first diagnosed, my boyfriend said it didn't matter. But when there weren't enough porn DVDs in the world or a big enough increase in his allowance to give him an erection when we were in the same room, I cut him a final check and sent him on his way.

Now I buy prostitutes instead. It's obvious as soon as I undress they'll take no pleasure earning money from me. But they need the money just like I need to rub my husk against them. And I imagine they think that they've tasted worse and have been tasted by worse.

You don't know what it means to feel my chapped, disfigured lips and cock and hands saw away at something so downy. It's inexplicable. That's why it's hard for me to talk about the fact that my disease is so contagious a little peck on the cheek is enough to almost guarantee transmission.

In a few weeks, all the prostitutes I've hired will be the last boys on earth whom anyone would pay. Not long after I'm dead, they'll be dead. Some nights I fantasize about telling them what saints they are, but I don't. Still, there are times when I almost get the feeling they know.

Dennis Cooper, *Ugly Man: Stories* (2007)

The ultimate queer emancipation is the abolition of homosexuality and the eradication of the homosexual.

We queers are, it seems, destined to be the agents of both our salvation, and our supersession. By the act of gay emancipation, we sow the seeds of gay destruction. This, then, is the great paradox: queer liberation eradicates queers.

Peter Tatchell, "It's Just a Phase: Why Homosexuality is Doomed" (1996), in *Anti-Gay* (1999)

The Why-I-Love-Violence Speech

Benjamin Weissman, *dear dead person: short fiction* (1994)

But the system, as it must do to survive, counter-attacked by placing Black faces in high places, by cosmetic reform.

Black cops swelled inner city ranks.

Black legislators went to Washington and state capitals.

Black jurists ascended to previously lily-white benches.

To what avail, twenty, twenty-five years later?

Black cops enforce ruling class, white laws, passed by increasingly bourgeois Black legislators, decided by Black jurists who merely mimic the hoary precedents of white, ruling class privilege. The same legacy of oppression that demeaned and devalued the blood, sweat and tears of our fathers.

Huey knew we had to take the big step, the final, irrevocable, truly historic breach away from this system, to revolution.

We walked to the edge, tiptoed to the brink, and backed away.

Our people, the poor, everyday Black folks from whom we come, have been catching hell ever since.

Blinded by the illusion of reform, we believed things were getting better.

“We movin’ on up”... Yeah, Like the Jeffersons, actors reading lines.

Meanwhile, our streets are crammed with homeless, the jails are swelled with Black youth; our lives cheapen by the day, and all this system offers is an Iron Fist, or the 1990s illusion—“The Cosby Show”.

Mumia Abu-Jamal, “Panther Daze Remembered” (1989), in *Still Black, Still Strong: Survivors of the War Against Black Revolutionaries* (1993)

To make the private into something public is an action that has terrific repercussions in the preinvented world. The government has the job of maintaining the day to day illusion of the ONE-TRIBE-NATION. Each public disclosure of a private reality becomes something of a magnet that can attract others with a similar frame of reference; thus each public disclosure of a fragment of private reality serves as a dismantling tool against the illusion of ONE-TRIBE-NATION; it lifts the curtain for a brief peek and reveals the probable existence of literally millions of tribes. The term "general public" disintegrates. What happens next is the possibility of an X-ray of Civilization, an examination of its foundations. To turn our private grief for the loss of friends, family, lovers and strangers into something public would serve as another powerful dismantling tool. It would dispel the notion that this virus has a sexual orientation or a moral code. It would nullify the belief that the government and medical community has done very much to ease the spread or advancement of this disease.

One of the first steps in making the private grief public is the ritual of memorials. I have loved the way memorials take the absence of a human being and make them somehow physical with the use of sound. I have attended a number of memorials in the last five years and at the last one I attended I found myself suddenly experiencing something akin to rage. I realized halfway through the event that I had witnessed a good number of the same people participating in other previous memorials. What made me angry was realizing that the memorial had little repercussions outside the room it was held in. A tv commercial for handwipes had a higher impact on the society at large. I got up and left because I didn't think I could control my urge to scream.

There is a tendency for people affected by this epidemic to police each other or prescribe what the most important gestures would be for dealing with this experience of loss. I resent that. At the same time, I worry that friends will slowly become professional pallbearers, waiting for each death, of their lovers, friends and neighbors, and polishing their funeral speeches; perfecting their rituals of death rather than a relatively simple ritual of life such as screaming in the streets. I worry because of the urgency of the situation, because of seeing death coming in from the edges of abstraction where those with the luxury of time have cast it. I imagine what it would be like if friends had a demonstration each time a lover, friend or stranger would die of AIDS. I imagine what it would be like if, each time a lover, friend or stranger died of this disease, their friends, lovers or neighbors would take the dead body and drive with it in a car a hundred miles an hour to Washington D.C. and blast through the gates of the White House and come to a screeching halt before the entrance and dump their lifeless form on the front steps.

David Wojnarowicz, "Postcards From America: X-rays From Hell" (1991), in *Close to the Knives* (1991)

In sex there is the suffering of those who can love, and the more terrifying despair of those who are loveless, empty, those who must "narcotize themselves before they touch any human being at all." These are the people who are the masters in a social and sexual master-slave hierarchy, and what characterizes them is that they "no longer have any way of knowing that any loveless touch is a violation, whether one is touching a woman or a man."

In the United States, the cost of maintaining racism has been a loss of self-knowledge (and thus love) for those who refuse to know what they have because others suffer. What they have includes a sense of superiority that substitutes for a real identity. Maintaining racism has required an emotional numbness, a proud and fatal incapacity to feel, because that is the cost of purposely maintaining ignorance: one must block life out—the world around one and one's own emotional possibilities.

Andrea Dworkin, *Intercourse* (1987)

This is where the question of taking back both violence and all the intense expressions of life stolen from us by biopolitical democracies has to be posed. We should start by getting rid of the tired idea that death always comes at the end, as the final moment of life. Death is everyday, it is the continuous diminution of our presence that occurs when we no longer have the strength to abandon ourselves to our inclinations. Each wrinkle and each illness is some taste we have betrayed, some infidelity to a form-of-life animating us. This is our real death, and its chief cause is our lack of strength, the isolation that prevents us from trading blows with power, which forbids us from letting go of ourselves without the assurance we will have to pay for it. Our bodies feel the need to gather together into war machines, for this alone makes it possible to live and to struggle.

Tiquun, *Introduction to Civil War* (2009)

Take off your clothes. Clothes imprison legs and mouths and red teeth still shudder want too much, taking off our clothes.

Why can't you ever once do something that's not allowable? I mean Goddamnit.

Hit me.

Do anything.

Do something.

Sow this hideousness opposition blood to everyone proud I want to knock Ken over with a green glass I want to hire a punk to beat up Pam I will poison your milk if you don't have your girlfriend.

Sex is public. The streets made themselves for us to walk naked down them. Take out your cock and piss over me.

Kathy Acker, "The Birth of the Poet" (1981), in *Hannibal Lecter, My Father* (1991)

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