

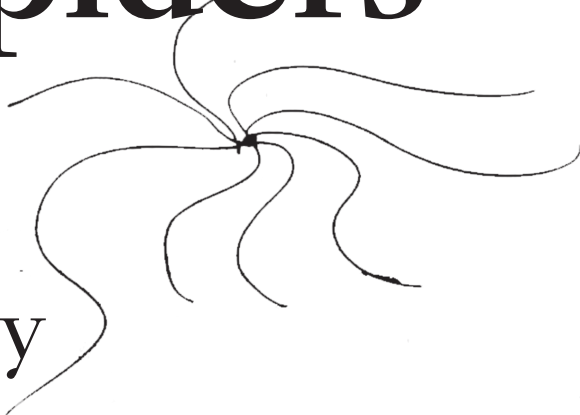
philosophy
for spiders on the
low theory of
kathy acker
mckenzie
wark

Philosophy for Spiders

BUY

philosophy for spiders

on the
low theory
of Kathy Acker



McKenzie Wark

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DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS Durham and London 2021

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Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper ∞

Project editor: Jessica Ryan

Designed by Aimee C. Harrison

Typeset in Portrait Text, Helvetica Neue, and SangBleu Kingdom
by Copperline Book Services

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Wark, McKenzie, [date] author.

Title: Philosophy for spiders : on the low theory of Kathy Acker /
McKenzie Wark.

Description: Durham : Duke University Press, 2021. | Includes
bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2021004441 (print)

LCCN 2021004442 (ebook)

ISBN 9781478013754 (hardcover)

ISBN 9781478014683 (paperback)

ISBN 9781478021988 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Acker, Kathy, 1948–1997—Criticism and interpretation.

| Wark, McKenzie, 1961– | Experimental fiction, American—History

and criticism. | Feminist fiction, American—History and criticism. |

Postmodernism (Literature)—United States. | Feminist literary criticism. |

Gender identity in literature. | Sex role in literature. |

BISAC: LITERARY CRITICISM / LGBTQ | SOCIAL SCIENCE / LGBTQ

Studies / Transgender Studies

Classification: LCC PS3551.C44 Z95 2021 (print)

LCC PS3551.C44 (ebook) | DDC 813/.54—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2021004441>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2021004442>

Cover photograph: © Kathy Brew

Drawings of spiders on title page and part openers by Kathy Acker.

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In memoriam:

Kato Trieu

And: dedicated to all the Janeys,
Janeys everywhere.

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Whoever wrote this story said that history is philosophy,
therefore, sexual history is the philosophy of religion.

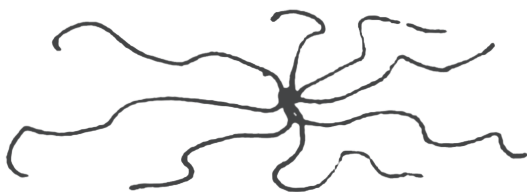
—KATHY ACKER (*PUSSY*, *KING OF THE PIRATES*, 99)

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the city of memory

Part I



I've arrived at the conclusion that there's a profound
connection between ex-boyfriends and clichés.

—KATHY ACKER (ACKER PAPERS, 22.06)

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The First Resort

When Kathy Acker checked in there, I knew something had changed.

It's a quiet place, empty and calm. A place where nothing ever happens. Like a resort hotel in the off-season. The décor is classy but generic, a banal, high-end nonplace. Kathy took me by the hand and led me through the big portal doors.

This was unexpected. Why was Kathy leading me to this place that is so familiar to me, from my own recurring dream? I have been coming here in dreams as long I can remember. It is always quiet and still, the light cool and mute. There seem to be staff keeping it running but you never see them. There appear to be other guests, but they have just walked around a corner. Or you hear laughter from the elevator as it arrives, but when it opens it is empty. And yet there's nothing either weird or eerie about it.

It always looks the same but sometimes it is on a cliff overlooking the sea and sometimes it is in the woods or by a lake. It always feels partly familiar to me in the dream, and partly not. It is a place to go so you can temporarily not exist. A vacation from life. A nonplace for nonlife.

That is why it is so strange that Kathy took me by the hand and brought me to this place, in my dream. I was surprised that she knew about it.

McKenzie: "But how do you know?"

Kathy: "It is the place the dead make for the living. It is always here."

She showed me what it is for, this resort from life and nonlife alike. She showed me that the dead make it for us. The dead make a place without

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qualities. They make the space of dreams itself. The dead don't want us to be like them. They have nothing to give us that has any features or qualities. They just make this place for us, this generic nonplace, and leave us alone.

Kathy knew all about this. She came back in a dream to remind me that I have been here too. She came back to remind me why one comes here. Maybe we all visit this place but forget all about it. The hard part is to go back and still remember what it is for.

This is how it has always been for us moderns. The dead refuse to tell us anything. And so we feel like they have finally left us alone. Which can make us go crazy. Kathy knew where to find them.

Actually that's not true. Nobody knows. She was one of the ones who knew where to find their absence. She found the place they had left. That they left for us. You can come here and be in their absence and come back.

Let's go.

Bestiary

Content warning: This book contains the language of sex, violence, sexual violence, and spiders.

Form warning: This book has elements of memoir and criticism but is neither.

I wanted to write about what I learned from Kathy in person and what I learned from reading Acker's texts, based on who I could become (in part) through knowing her both ways.

I didn't know her person for long at all. There are many others who can write with a lot more understanding about who she was. Nor am I a specialist in her writing or even in the kind of writing she wrote. I haven't dug deep in her archive, nor interviewed people around her. I make no claim that anything to do with Kathy Acker is my private property. I will note

in passing that we shared a dislike for both writers and scholars who treat some body, or some body of work, as if they owned it.

The bourgeois writer is an acquisitive animal. A creature of power, ownership, and control. What it writes it owns; that which writes is the kind of being that can own. Kathy was a different beast—or beasts.

Martine Sciolino: “A kleptoparasite is a spider that appropriates another’s web and eats the prey entrapped there. In a sense, the deliberate, overt plagiarisms of Kathy Acker are klepto-parasitical—*Great Expectations*, *Don Quixote*, *The Story of O*, Acker steals these and other narrative webs, but it is not easy to tell what victims are coiled in these already woven fictions. Because Acker always recounts her own life story as if it, too, were a stolen text—and because this *auto*-plagiarism always involves the victimization of the teller—the knots in these stolen, intersecting webs are unraveled to reveal an insect within, whose form mirrors that of the spider unwrapping it.”¹

This is not an *interpretation* of the life or work of Kathy Acker.² As if she was something over which I had claims that would be verifiable facsimiles or likenesses of her essence. Rather: She made texts. She lived and wrote in a particular way, the living and writing being a connected kind of *praxis*, the warp and weft of the same act of transforming things. The form of the praxis makes the texts in their own distinctive way. Here is a text made out of her texts, using a different praxis.

I learned a lot from Kathy as a human and Acker as a writer, and about four of the grand obsessions of our times: love and money, sex and death. She made a sort of gift toward me, and I’m returning it, after a fashion.

Here is a little about what that gift was: A body that writes is a body that fucks. There are peculiar asymmetries of the ways bodies may fuck: dom and sub, top and bottom, penetrator and penetrated, writer and reader, butch and femme, male and female, trans and cis, and so on. These differences find their way into and out of the way bodies write. A body that fucks with fucking can be a body that fucks with gender and a body that fucks with gender can be a body that writes where the writing fucks with gender and a writer embodied as fucking with gender can be a writer who fucks with genre, that most nucleated family of forms.

Patrick Greaney: “Baudelaire writes of the ‘immense intellectual profundity in popular expressions, holes dug by generations of ants.’ Clichés are burrowed through with subterranean passages that poets can explore and exploit in their battle against the truths that these clichés are supposed to support. But to do this, poets must enter into enemy territory and repeat the locutions that they undermine. In this repetition, poets burrow into language, but they, too, are dug into, penetrated by the very language that they want to overcome or keep at a distance.”³

Kathy wrote prose, as I do, although she wrote much more interesting prose, better prose, and with different methods. Like the poets, she entered and was entered, fucked and was fucked, with language.

Tom McCarthy: “As a schoolchild, I had to learn collective nouns for animals. Jellyfish, for some reason, get two of these: bloom and smack. Open, morphing, endlessly penetrating or being penetrated by the scenes around them, Acker’s bodies channel and act as hubs or mainstays in a world of viscerally networked continuity—like jellyfish quivering as pulse signals reach them through a viscous sea. Or rather (lest we start getting holistic), they both anchor this world and serve as its disjecta: more smack than bloom.”⁴

What follows is in two parts. The first is about Kathy, as a body that fucks. The second is about Acker, as a body that writes. The first part is how I began a lesson with her about fucking, back in the nineties. The second part is how I began a lesson with her texts about what is between acts of writing, thirty years later. At a time when I was in transit between acts of genders.

Comrades, contemporaries, cunts: I come neither to critique Acker nor to blurb her. What makes her books enduring is the other books you can make out of them, and their difference from each other. This book is its own evidence of this concept.⁵

Let’s not devote too much time on which writing her writing digests. I don’t much care to give her a lineage of great forebears. Nor cast her by the lights of some master theorist. There’s something not only bourgeois but also patriarchal about writing having to have owners and these own-

ers having to have illustrious fathers, even if those fathers are sometimes mothers.

Vanessa Place: “Consider the phrase ‘artist’s shit.’ Consider the mimetic effect of such excrescence, pace Piero Manzoni, who literally put his shit in ninety 30-gram cans and sold it for its weight in gold. Consider its metamorphosis, given that what’s left of this shit is now worth more than its weight in gold, so that Manzoni could have been said to have shit gold bricks. Consider its lament, à la Erykah Badu, who says: ‘Keep in mind I’m an artist and I’m sensitive about my shit.’ Consider how Kathy Acker could be part Quixote or some such shit. As I have noted elsewhere, citation is always castration: the author’s lack of authority made manifest by the phallus, presence of another authority. What better way to play the gendered part. I like this.”⁶

Kathy died when she was fifty. I turn fifty-seven as I write this. I wanted to write about her for the longest time. Somehow it never quite seemed like the moment. I had to live not only up ’til her age when she passed but past it, before I could start.

Reading Kathy again helped me to transition: I came out as trans in the midst of reading and writing about her. I wanted to escape masculinity, but I didn’t know where to. Kathy just seemed intuitively to be the writer to hold my hand through that.

I told Matias Viegner, the executor of the Kathy Acker estate, that I was probably writing a book about her, and he said, “Well of course you are.”

Woolloomooloo

We first met at the Ariel Bookstore on Oxford Street, in Sydney, in June 1995. Kathy read, I don’t remember what. Mythical characters were involved. It was a launch event for an issue of *21C* magazine.⁷

Noel King: “Leathered from top to toe, she told how the initial contact between her and *21C*’s editor, Ashley Crawford, came via email. They began a correspondence, he seemed a nice and interesting guy and here they

finally were in person. At this point a separatist sister interjected that obviously these virtual forms of communication could be very misleading. Without missing a beat Acker said 'I still like the object in the flesh,' and went on with the launch."⁸

I was also a *21C* writer, so you could say it was Ashley Crawford who brought us together. She liked to write for Ash because he had a light hand cutting copy.

There was dinner after Kathy's reading, at the restaurant near the Wharf Theater, in The Rocks. Justine Ettler sat next to Kathy, I think. Justine appeared to all the world as quick and glamorous. She was the author of *The River Ophelia*, probably the only Australian fiction that showed what you could do with it if you had read Kathy Acker. A sensational book that drowned in the swamp of marketing and media that typecast it as "grunge."

Surprising that Kathy talked to me. Perhaps it was the fluke of sitting close together. When she finally turned toward me, it was as if we were alone at that long candlelit table. The others fell away. I have no memory of them.

Then we were in my car together. (Which car was it? Did I have the little red one by now?) I drove Kathy back to Morgan's, her hotel on Victoria street in Kings Cross. I stopped in the loading zone out front. The car idling. It was not quite parked, pulled over as if for a quick drop-off. She asked me what the hell I thought I was doing. I had no idea. Impatience. "Well, are you coming in or not?"

All I remember of the hotel room is the color of sage and her stack of books. Maybe five books. "That's what I've been working on," Kathy said. I only remember the top book on the stack: Stevenson's *Treasure Island*. She was not quite done making *Pussy*, *King of the Pirates*.

There was not a lot of ceremony. We ended up naked on the futon. I told her that sometimes I don't want to actually fuck. That I just wasn't in that kind of relation to my body where I would want to fuck her. I don't know why I was so candid about this. She seemed to invite a kind of sexual frankness. At least in me. She was not at all bothered.

She was older than me: forty-eight to my thirty-four. This was an older woman's body, as is the one I have now. I was curious about this aging body. About the state of this flesh. This flesh liked being close to that flesh, of her.

This flesh wanted to learn about that flesh, starting with what made it feel what. A finger runs around cunt lips. Touching her clit, which reacts as if electrified, so finger backing off, redirecting attention to the multiple piercings in this labia. I had never seen this before. Touching them gently, touching the metal to move the flesh. Seems this is good. She touched my cock but I pushed her hand away. Felt more like doing the exploring. We were starting at the peripheries of each other's nervy surfaces.

Dodie Bellamy: "We sit in the living room on his boxy green sofa and Matias tells me that even though Kathy slept with many women she really wasn't a lesbian, and even though she was into s&m that wasn't her thing, not really. What really mattered to Kathy was to be fucked really well."¹⁰

Arranged crouching before cunt and licking, especially where piercings enter flesh. Hint of vanilla. Wiry hairs, crinkly skin. Licking outer lips, inner lips, poking tongue entering into the opening just a little. Then quietly edging closer to clit.

Kathy relaxed back into herself, arching, releasing, breathing rising and rising, not too hard and fast, then exhale and release, a little wave cresting just as another surges. Licking sinking into the rhythm, the rise and fall. Raft and ocean. Sailors adrift. And since I didn't come and she never stopped coming, I came in the same way that she did. "This was a fine perversion," Kathy said.

She pulled me up for air. We kissed again. Bodies pressing, my cock pressed into the curve of her hip. I felt cum leaking from it. I had been up on a crest the whole time, a slow-motion time. Flushed all over, heart slowing. Electric tremble and treble tapering down.

Felt the need to explain myself: "Sometimes . . . sometimes I just don't feel like fucking. I just feel, I don't know, like aroused, but all over. Not in my dick so much as everywhere, everywhere else, even," I said. "For me, every

area of my skin is an orifice. Any part of your body could do anything to mine,” Kathy said. She had a great way of describing such things.

Amy Scholder: “What cannot be overestimated is the pleasure Kathy took in writing porn, finding exactly the right cadence and rhythm, using language, pushing limits, turning on. Still, sexuality is a site of confusion—and it’s within that confusion that her female characters come alive, expressing who they are and what they want.”¹¹

She was tired, lagged, out of sorts. I asked if I should stay. She wanted me to stay. I didn’t sleep for a while, just watched her breathing, watching the carp tattoo anime across her shoulder blades. Woke nesting her head in my hands.

Upon waking, she was up, showered, dressed. She wore the same pink leather bustier as the night before. I remember it coming off, her softs unleashed from its form. Over that, she wore something low cut and patterned, maybe animal print, in black and white to show off the pink leather. Bare legs and boots.

She wanted to eat at Morgan’s as it would go on the hotel tab which was covered. Breakfast was subdued. Like we had just met. A first conversation sober is indeed a first conversation.

I remember the café-restaurant at Morgan’s. It faced the Victoria street scene. Inside, it was steeply terraced. The servers teetering down the staircase up the middle while balancing plates and trays. But we all went there quite often in those days, as it was open late, so I don’t know if I remember it with Kathy or just remember it.

The next few days are a Sydney haze. I became her guide to the city, this city whose twisty ways I knew and she did not.

The only thing I can remember, or think I can remember, that we saw together, is the graffiti, not far from Whitlam Square, that said, “One cannot commit evil in evil,” signed “Genet.” Which another writer had changed to “Genetalia.” Yet another hand added “Et Alia.” Now I’m looking for that building on Google Maps: corner of Liverpool and Hargrave, two-story and darkly painted, it’s still there: the spray-paint thread is not.

The night after we met. Dinner again. Then I dropped Kathy off at Morgan's, but did not come in. Did not occur to me that she wanted my company to continue into the night again. I thought very little of myself. But she took it to mean I thought even less of her. The common language that divided us.

And she was mad at me for missing her big performance at Artspace in Woolloomooloo. The show was sold out. A review later called it a mix of "blood, grunge and gynaecology."¹² Which is not particularly helpful, and doesn't address the galvanic effect that her performances could have on people. Apart from the very low-key reading at Ariel I never saw her read.

Eileen Myles: "Each of us had to read for 8 or 10 minutes and Kathy would read for 21. And miraculously she didn't kill the room. I'd watch her going on and on same fucking story. I think how can she do this. Deadly. But she was okay. More than that. People were riveted. I mean her work was so artificial and ritualized, all on the outside, I thought. Constructed for the performance of Kathy and she made that corpse walk night after night."¹³

Pam Brown:

the day after
the very long reading,
at the very cool venue,
we, the audience, *were*
those sluts, those girls—
rats in our hair
vampires in our anus
blood, piss, shit,
spit, bones, vomit—
Kathy Acker's
drunken girls,
she meant *us*,
that's the way she read
to us¹⁴

I missed it because I had to teach my class. She did not think this was a good enough reason. I was starting to discover that Kathy rarely thought any reason was good enough reason for not giving her what she wanted. I met up with Kathy after the show.

So it went on for a few days, in Sydney. Kathy was avoiding people who were fans of her image but who did not know her work. She even avoided some who knew her work well.¹⁵

That I was neither ignorant of her work nor a fan seemed the right ratio of appreciation and ambivalence.

We gossiped a lot about various people unknown to each other, although actually I had read or read about some of the people whose bodily functions and emotional habits she dished.

Something happened between us. Some third thing in between. The third flesh.

I drove her to the airport. And then she left.

Spider_cat

Kathy and I exchanged email addresses. This was not quite a thing people did much yet in 1995. Of the eighteen million American households whose computer had a modem, eight million hadn't used it. There were about twelve million email users in America then, less than five percent of the population. People received an average of five emails a day and sent three.¹⁶

I had a computer in my office out at Macquarie University and another one at home. I think the home modem was still 1200 baud and connected to the phone line with the same singsong mating ritual sound as fax machines. For internet access, both my office computer and home computer connected to the same server at the Office of Computer Services at Macquarie University.

Actually, there were two servers, and they were called laurel and hardy, which might give you some idea of the sensibility of the people who ran them. This is why my email address read mwark at laurel dot ocs dot mq dot edu dot au. Domains within domains. This all seems rather quaint now. The materiality of writing in the era of networked computation.¹⁷

I taught myself enough Unix programming to use the university's computers, from my office or home. The email reader I used was called Pine, and I still think it was the best email reader ever. Faster and easier than this corporate-designed spyware we have to use now.

In Pine, it was easy to save an email message as an ASCII text file, and then to add it to a file that collected them all. The command for joining a file to another file was *cat*, short for concatenate. I still put *cat* in the name of my merged files. This file I'm working on now is called *spider_cat*.

At home, I had one of those dark gray Apple PowerBook 100 series laptops with a monochrome screen. The first to put the trackball below the keyboard. It lived on my coffee table, near the home fax machine, answering machine, and the base for the cordless phone. The TV sat on a milk crate on the other side of the coffee table, atop the VCR, DVD, and Sega. I could camp out on the decrepit, hand-me-down black leather sofa that sat on the floor without its feet and live in one or other simulated world.

Mostly, I wrote to Kathy lying on this sofa, drinking stovetop espresso in the morning or a glass of Hunter Valley white at night. The laptop would be in my lap, only it got hot as fuck, so I put a pillow in between. I wrote to her first, then did other stuff, then came back to see if she had replied. I would hang out in forums on The Well, which attracted mostly Bay Area hippies. Or, I became various characters on LambdaMOO, a text-only adventure playground with six genders.¹⁸ Then more email with Kathy.

Rosie Cross: "Her rapid-fire style made her a natural-born net-surfer, and when she took to the internet, she found an alternative venue for her anarchistic impulses, and a place that provoked her interests in unpredictable and shifting realities. She also found trouble."¹⁹

Her early emails to me were from an America Online account. She got kicked off AOL for asking if there were any dykes in the MTV chatroom. America Online disabled her interface software remotely, modifying her computer without informing her, but kept billing her for the account. She felt that this was some sort of rape.

Later, I learned that Kathy may have played on LambdaMOO too. What if our text-only avatars had met there, or even hot-tubbed together?

Stranger things happened. Nineties cyberculture was like experimental performance art going on around the planet, around the clock. It was a world thousands were already making for themselves, but not the millions, let alone billions, who would populate it by the second decade of the twenty-first century.

Nobody knew how to live in these worlds yet. Neither had anybody figured out how to make money off the seething ocean of desires stirring there. Certainly nobody knew how to write emails to someone they had laughed and loved and fucked and wandered and drunk and gossiped with for a few days, and who was gone but whose sense memory lingered, like sweat and leather.

Later, the emails I saved ended up as a book, called *I'm Very into You*.²⁰ Then our nineties cyberculture conversations got ingested and digested by twenty-first-century corporate (anti)social media, which operate on difference principles. I'm addressed throughout in a name I no longer use. The book got the perfect review in *Bookforum*. David Velasco: "slim, perfect, evil."²¹

They say never read the comments, but then they only say that in the comments.

I'm Very into You

5.0 out of 5 stars | Not your Mother's Kathy Acker Book (I hate writing headlines)
T. Porges | November 18, 2017 | Verified Purchase

This is more Ken Wark's book than Kathy Acker's, but it's a labor of love and makes an interesting companion volume to Chris Kraus's Acker biography. You probably won't be buying this if you aren't a bit obsessed with Acker or are a Wark reader/completionist. If you're either of those people, you don't need an introduction and you'll be quite happy with this book. As a kind of flirtation text, it compares neatly with *_Swoon_*, by Nada Gordon and Gary Sullivan (totally different writers, yes?).

Comment | One person found this review helpful | Report abuse

5.0 out of 5 stars | great book, must read for acker fans!

Tina | June 30, 2015 | Verified Purchase

Fantastic book. Interesting perspective on queer issues juxtaposed to the early possibilities of online communication.

Comment | One person found this review helpful | Report abuse

5.0 out of 5 stars | IM VERY INTO THIS BOOK RIGHT NOW

alyanna del rosario | June 16, 2015 | Verified Purchase

this book is meant to make you feel awkward because you haven't read something so light and delightful before. This book is so light and flirty and i totally recommend this book for people who are tired for those cliché, campy, romance novels. this book is a breath of fresh air.

Comment | 2 people found this review helpful | Report abuse

4.0 out of 5 stars | The Olsen twins star in this great tale of halloween adventure

Joseph Jambroni | April 27, 2015

The Olsen twins star in this great tale of Halloween adventure. Their family is going through some tuff financial troubles and may lose their house so they turn to the only member of the family with any money—a cruel aunt. Upon arrival they are immediately dismissed—but the young twins' presence frightens the mean aunt because she was once a twin herself and she did something very horrible to her own twin. See—their cruel aunt is a witch and used a spell to make her twin vanish and now it's up to Mary Kate and Ashley to uncover the plot and save someone they have never met. They find help with a little person and a grave digger and set off around the town trying to learn more about their evil aunt's witches coven. Great for all families with younger children and worth many watches.

Comment | 24 people found this helpful | Report abuse

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4.0 out of 5 stars | An Interesting, Energetic Read Studded With Sharp Peaks
ninalex | April 27, 2015

I picked this book up at my local bookstore on a whim. I didn't know anything about Acker or Wark beforehand, so I suppose you could say I was unburdened by negative bias towards the authors. The foreword by Acker's friend and executor (in the will sense), Matias Viegner, was a nice little piece of lit in and of itself. I love this phrase: "In the exchange between Acker and Wark, we see the reciprocal machinery of introjection and projection." I actually reread Viegner's foreword after I finished the book, as I found it infinitely more insightful and readable than the epilogue—whose author seems unbecomingly proud of his feeble punning when he coins the term 'e-pistolary'—(Get it?! They're emails!)—and I didn't want to end on a low note.

The format is interesting and effective. At times, Kathy and Ken maintain multiple email chains, so there is this layering and expansion of conversational threads over time, of tangents and interpretations, that provide the perfect spacial/structural expression to two smart people's neural networks connecting and firing. As a reader, you get to observe the pair negotiate the boundaries of their newfound intimacy in an ultimately pretty staid, but intellectually charged courting ritual. They cover a lot of ground, from Portishead to Pasolini, and if nothing else will leave a reader with lots of Wikipedia-ing to do.

To paraphrase Viegner less eloquently, it's like watching brainy people flirt. What's interesting is that even when the conversation turns prurient (fisting, anyone?), it reads like a red herring: what emerges at the core is two (pretty polite) people isolated by their own intellect, clearly thrilled at the opportunity for self-disclosure and the emergence of a common "territory" over which to commune. (The sex stuff is often just oblique provocation.) Ken and Kathy are both thoughtful and well-mannered, sensitive to not "trespass" on the other ("Write me your vertigo, it will be safe with me," Ken replies gently after Kathy apologizes for her emotional overspill)—because intimacy has not yet bred contempt. Despite the inclination to write them off on the basis of the reductive reputations that precede/succeed them (punks, obscurantists, whatever), there is a familiar and rather endearing humanity at play here.

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San Francisco, 1995

So I was going to see Kathy in San Francisco. There was some bother changing tickets, but with that sorted, we could have more time together. I knew nothing about San Francisco. These were landscapes I knew only from Hitchcock's *Vertigo*.

DUKE

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PRESS

September 14, 1995: It's a fourteen-hour flight from Sydney to San Francisco. The cab from the airport seemed like something from a seventies movie. Eventually I arrived at the address she gave me, in Cole Valley.

Twenty-odd years later, I took another cab to her address: 929 Clayton St., Cole Valley. The cab now had a flat screen in the back. Her house is as I remember it, but was it this color? I remember a lighter blue. It is a wooden row house on a steep hill. Out front I saw the empty space where Kathy had parked her motorcycles. One had a blue tarp over it.

We were awkward with each other at first. I said I wanted to go out and get some tea and milk, as she had neither. These turned out to be difficult commodities to acquire in Cole Valley. There was plenty of soy milk and all sorts of newly fashionable herbal tea that wasn't actual tea.

I walked down the same steep street, retracing my steps, my crip feet complaining more than they did back then. Using psychogeographic principles, I found the little cluster of shops again, around the corner of Cole and Carl. I even bought tea again.

Kathy made tea for me. She had drawn a bath. I was left alone to soak in the tub with a cuppa. Restoring the animal body.

The kitchen filled with sunlight in the morning, warming the wooden floors. There was a small room with no windows and white shag carpet. That room was dark and there was a phone and answering machine on the floor. Kathy never answered it. The phone rang at all hours, mostly with urgent-sounding messages from Germans.

There was an office-cum-library space with a wooden desk. An off-white Apple computer sat on it. The keyboard had a long, tangled spiral cord, so she could sit back in the armchair with the keyboard on her lap. There was a wine glass on the desk, stained red. Bookshelves everywhere, the books arranged alphabetically by author, in double rows. She had what looked like a yoga mat, on which she did what she called calisthenics.

Her bedroom had a mattress on the floor and all her stuffed animals, including a tarantula, Woofie the wolf, and Ratski the rat, were arranged on

the pillows, just as she described them in her email. Actually I had forgotten their names. I looked it up. I remember colors, moods, the steam rising from my tea in the sunlight, Kathy's anxious attention, her voice. That's about all.

Lynne Tillman: "The memories I have of Kathy seem, like most memories, somewhat vague and dream-like, with some images, some pieces of the past solid as rocks, as if they were facts."²²

The Concept of the Body

The Chinese logicians came up with this puzzle: a horse has five legs. There are the four legs that one can observe on the horse, plus the *concept* of the leg. That makes five. Language messes with flesh; logic messes with language.

Joseph Needham: "The writings of the logicians always had an undercurrent of the wish to 'épater le bourgeois' (cf. the paradoxes below), as here in the statement that quadrupeds have five legs each, which was doubtless made to draw attention to the unchanging universal 'quadruped as such.'"²³

There is no such thing as a couple fucking. A body fucks another body, but it also fucks the concept of the body. A concept of a body is a gender.

If the bodies that fuck are the same gender, then the two bodies that fuck are three bodies: the two bodies that one can observe, plus masculinity. Or: the two bodies one can observe, plus femininity.

Actually, when two bodies of the same gender fuck, there are four bodies. The two bodies one can observe, plus the concept of those bodies, its gender, plus the gender they are not, as each gender makes no sense without the one that it is not. Language has digital bits that bodies don't.

If the bodies are of different genders, then there are also four bodies. The two bodies that one can observe plus the concept of each of those bodies, its gender. So it seems that when two bodies fuck, there are always four bodies, fucking.

Only maybe it's more. Let's say there are two bodies we can observe. Then there is the concept of each of those bodies, its gender, if the gender is different. But in each case, the gender of the body that is the gender it is not is not the gender of the other body, its concept. The concept of each body is its gender, and also the gender it is not.

It is not the case that the concept of one body is the negation of the concept of the other body. Each body has its own concept, its own gender, and also its own nongender which does not correspond to the concept of the other body.

This all assumes that the concept of the body, its gender, corresponds to the body that one can observe, and that it does not change. Neither are a given. A body might change its concept, its gender, even during the act of fucking. Or maybe the concept of the body is an unknown gender, or flickers between known concepts in an unknown way.

In short, every fuck is an orgy. Even every hand job.

Which of the fifty-one gender options now on Facebook would Kathy choose, if she had to? Maybe Kathy was sometimes what one might call trans-masculine. There was her body, which one could observe. And there was its concept, which changed from time to time, even instant to instant. Sometimes its concept was masculine.

It was more the concept of the boy than of the man. Kathy was a boy sometimes. She could be masculine but not the father. The boy is not the father, that's what makes the concept of the boy the concept of the boy. The boy has not yet become the father, and can become something else, such as a sailor. Part of her was like a boy who would never grow up.

I wanted to become someone else too, but I had yet to learn my sexuality.

It's hard to pull off masculinity if you are small, and Kathy was small. I know. Even though I am taller, I'm still small. Kathy took elements of her look from bull dykes, which they probably took from the working-class men of postwar factory towns.

It freaked Marx out a bit that women factory workers looked like horny-handed boys. He had a moment of gender panic about such a body, its concept, its gender. But maybe even in factory work, there was a new possibility for the body: women and men subordinated to the same machines is not really progress, but it is different to women subordinated to men. Maybe the concept of technology is another gender, and another erotics. Victorian do-gooders had issues with this, and Marx himself was not immune to a certain Victorian prurience.

Amy Wendling: "If, unlike these reformers, we interpret the laboring, actively sexual female body as a positive rather than a negative monstrosity, we might even conclude that industrialization has conditioned certain aspects of women's liberation. . . . A girl at work is not, necessarily, a rough, foul-mouthed boy. She might simply be a rough, foul-mouthed girl, or, better still, a rough and foul-mouthed hybrid creature whose very existence challenges the rigid norms of Victorian gender."²⁴

And if where we are now is, as Kathy thought, some kind of post-capitalism, imagine the fun to be had despite its norms or concepts. The machine-body becomes the information-body. Kathy's short hair, leather jackets, motorcycles: it was and wasn't an act. Sometimes it was a way to visualize a concept of the body, its gender. If you thought that was weird, then it was an act for you. If you thought it just was, she just *was* a body that could be rather than mean.

Body and Body: Flesh

After a restorative cup of tea and a bath I felt a lot more human. I felt like I could start to edge my way into a problem I had thought about but only abstractly. How could I be in her space, her habitat? It was clearly something that made her nervous. Both of us lived more or less alone at the time. I felt like minimizing the amount of space my body took up. I felt like competing for the prize of the best houseguest ever.

Kathy wanted to be accommodating. She wanted—needed—to know my needs. But my needs were few. I just wanted to be with her. To fit in to whatever she usually did. Oh, and I wanted us to fuck again, and soon.

Memory glitches: The sunlight in her kitchen. The white shag carpet in the room with the telephone answering machine. The bookcases, the wooden floor. Back when she was writing *After Kathy Acker*, Chris Kraus messaged me to ask if I remembered a white sofa. I don't remember any sofa at all. I don't recall much about a living room. I remember the bath, the kitchen, mostly the bedroom. Probably the rooms in which we spent the most time.

There was lots of fucking. That I remember, although it all merges together. I remember who I was starting to be with Kathy. I was starting to be her girlfriend. That concept.

She wanted to know what I wanted. She wanted to give. She could be fragile in her sense of whether anyone loved her or cared for her. She wanted to give and to have tangible proof of that offer returning. She wanted to be vulnerable but became defensive about it, looking for who or what might take advantage.

Avital Ronell: "It was a gift, but Kathy had ways of testing your friendship. The Greeks had a word for it, *basamos*, which links testing to torture. It is not the case that we know when or whether we're being tested (because if you *know* you're being tested, this awareness may collapse the premise of the test)."²⁵

She was particularly wary on this score of men, and where friendship, love, and lust might get confused. I did not particularly want to be her man. Sure, I fucked her. When she wanted me to. Everyone ought to know how to top: ethics.

Not for the first time, I would fuck this woman's body and imagine her body was my body, that I was in her place. Imagining her body as my body, I opened all my senses to it. I fucked her body with my dick but her body fucked mine through the eyes, ears, through all the senses. I wanted its particular qualities to come into me and come in me.

Kathy wanted to know why I was fucking her if it was not entirely what I wanted. She was suspicious, even. How can what a body wants be what another body wants? She had philosophical questions. I could only describe things.

I didn't want to fuck her because the thing I really wanted was to be the one who was fucked. Is that all? To Kathy this was just a question of differential fuck mechanics. This was San Francisco. You want to be fucked? We have the technology! Kathy had her own tool box. She took from it a leather strap-on harness and laid out before me a selection of dicks. This array of would later be one of the harder endowments for her literary executor to grant onward.

Matias Viegner: "The box of dildos and vibrators confounded me, intimate and irrepressibly sad. Kathy's love toys, honored in her life as sex and the body were honored in her work. Finally I left them on the street, deciding they'd end up in the right place by chance."²⁶

Now I wonder where they are in the world.

Dildocentrism

She lined them up and we looked at them. Mostly plain black, symmetrical, none with that fake man-dick look. I chose the big one. She hesitated. She offered the next biggest, and that seemed like a better idea—start with something a bit less ambitious.

Sitting on the edge of the bed, Kathy inserted the biggest one in her cunt, then with much care held it in place while strapping the smaller one over it. She stood, arched her back, shifted her weight from leg to leg. Touched her still impressively large dick. Smiled at me. The sight got me so hot: trembling, palpitating. This tiny human; this big silicone dick. She had left on the pink leather brassiere, giving the whole ensemble an intentional, fuckware look.

I put a condom on the dildo, and the lube. We always used condoms. Hers was hardly the first body to fuck me, but was the first that was female (or was it?) in concept. Cowgirl style. Kathy on her back, me on top, facing her; I was in charge of her taking charge of me.

This body that I call mine fucked myself with her dick. It was one with a pronounced head on it. I felt it pop through the first ring of ass. My hands aiming it at the second. These hands deciding not to take it slow, this ass

deciding to go for enough sensation to overload the nerves, to put enough information about to shock the body out of its concept, its gender. Maybe these bodies could have other concepts, or none at all.

This was new territory, this dick-technics, this pirate-sex. I did not have to worry about someone keeping an erection, getting bored, or coming too quickly—those concerns that bring you back to yourself too much. This body could play with that dick how it wanted for a while. Its inanimate, inhuman quality was a new sensation. Pushing down hard, in an instant it was everywhere inside, touching from inside, touching inside ass but also inside liver and spleen and legs and arms, insisting in the nerve-ways.

“Are you OK? Are you OK?” I had blacked out for a few seconds. Seemed like an age had gone by, a hole poked into time: widening a gap in the web of time.

Kathy was still there, under this body. I came back to me. Her (his) cock was still inside him (her), opening me up. But I was back. I smiled. I was hoping for a beatific smile, but probably just looked dopey. Looming over her (him), silicone dick in my ass, my legs spread around her (his) sun.

The dick in my ass was, at its base, back to back with an even bigger one in her (his) cunt. I felt for the connection. It felt like one dick, pointing into both of us. It was a thing, an object, a technique, a toy. Something of neither body. But it was also an extension of both their bodies. It was me and not me; you and not you. It was your dick fucking me; it was my dick fucking you. He (her) fucks him (her) while her (him) fucks her (him).

Kathy had her own roller-coaster; her being rose and fell, rose and fell, coming and coming, higher this time or lower this time. ’Til she glid to the end. With my ass I pressed the base of her cock in me onto her cock in her, but also very gently onto her super-sensitive clit. I could sort of feel how to move to move her. My own dick wasn’t hard at all. It felt like an extra-neous appendage. I didn’t touch it. I came just from the movement of cock in ass. Giving up a surprisingly big squirt for me onto her belly.

It felt, if only for a time, like all the concepts of the body, of its gender. Mostly I was Kathy’s girl, her dick inside me, open to her. But she was my

girl as well. Open to me. This is on the assumption, and—what can I say? The concept speaks through me—that the girl is the one who wants to open to another.

Bodies fucking can open and close to each other all sorts of ways, and can flip from open to closed, or can be both closed to each other or open to each other, or there can be more than two. You don't have to think this is what it is about, it is just what I think it is about. And maybe it's what Kathy was writing about, but that's for later.

Ideology fucks us all with its habitual concepts. Ideology hails you like a cop in the street: "Hey you!" Or it insinuates quietly in your ear: "Hey . . . you . . ." ²⁷ Ideology plays cute before it plays rough. It's cheaper.

When you fuck me, I told her, I feel like a girl. "Well, it is easier to penetrate the male body with dicks than with feelings," Kathy said.

Kathy's Girl, In and Out

Once that cock had been in my ass, I felt like I knew who I could be around Kathy. I was her girl. I aligned myself with Kathy's needs and wants. I was attentive to moods, desires. That Kathy was getting comfortable with me being around seemed to crystalize when Kathy would want to stay in and would just ignore me and write. I kept to myself at those times. A little self-consciously, I wrote in my own notebook. Which I wish I still had, as in that writing I described Kathy writing.

Kathy sat cross-legged on the wooden floor, wearing just a tank top and panties. Back against the wall. Sunlight falling. Spiral-bound notebook in lap. Look of complete concentration. Those neat printed characters on the page, one by one. Writing each letter with care in that fifties private-school-girl hand.

One hand on the pen; other hand in the underpants. Both twitching in rhythm. In a heightened state, just rolling along, not coming too hard. Cycles of micro-orgasm giving a rhythm to the calligraphy, and even to the text itself. Until done. An aesthetics in the form of the rolling, cumulative, nonpunctual orgasm.

As Kathy's girl I was open to whatever experience Kathy wanted to open me toward. We went out for long rides on her motorcycle. Was it the Yamaha Virago? I felt exposed, up on the back of the bike, holding tight, leaning with the machine, the wind spooling by, and at night the cold San Francisco air.

Gary Indiana: "[Kathy] drove the bike in this firm and definite pattern, zooming right through the sorry details of the street as if she was headed for better times, better places, better people—well, I understood that bike was the closest she could get to a feeling of freedom. I couldn't see her face but I knew she was happy, and for ten minutes so was I."²⁸

We would stop for gas and other bikers would engage in biker-talk. The fraternity of the road. I thought back to the time I was Edward's girl, careening about in his open-topped sports car. Giving one's body over to another's control, confident they can handle a body's machinery.

Further Outings

She took me to a strip club. Was it the famous Mitchell Brothers, on 895 O'Farrell Street, the place where the lap dance was invented? One of her students was performing so we came to see her, but Kathy liked all of these girls who did some variety of sex-work and lived their own lives on the proceeds. "I learn a lot from them. I'm very staid compared to them," Kathy said.

The stage had seats around three sides. We were close to the stage. One or two other women performed before the one we came to see, who stood out as a different kind of beauty. I felt what Kathy saw in her.

I felt awkward in that place, neither one thing nor another. I did not want to be the client, but I wasn't one of the women. I wanted to be this dancer. To see her was a kind of pain, of impossibility. I could see and feel in her body that her pain was not mine and not for me, or anyone. She did her three songs. Last I saw she was leading some john to another room for a private lap dance.

Kathy took me to Zuni Café on Market Street, her favorite restaurant, which chef Judy Rodgers had made famous. She took me blindfolded. Led me to her bike, wobbly on the sloping street. A thrilling ride—my liver and spleen felt like they were going to explode out of me from pure sensation. She parked the bike and put the lock on. Reminded me to remind her to take the lock off before we rode away again, as she had damaged the other bike by forgetting it.

Zuni Café was not too fazed by the blindfolded diner. This was San Francisco, and this was Kathy Acker, and she was a regular. She ordered for me, fed me. We did not say much, the whole evening mostly silent, solemn, ceremonial. Just opening this mouth, when told to. Surprise of flavors. Taste of salty-oily roast chicken, crackling skin. Acute awareness of exposure to unseen gazes.

On the way back I forgot all about the bike lock, but Kathy remembered. We zoomed off, me on the back, hands locked around, feel and smell of leather intensified by the blindfold, by the sensory orgy of the meal. Whole body aching in anticipation.

Kathy always asked, always wanted to know what I wanted. As if it wasn't clear: "I want you to fuck me, right now." Blindfold still on, getting the shoes off was a struggle, but soon I was naked on the low bed, apart from a T-shirt. I didn't want to displace the blindfold. Waiting: time a drugged pupil, dilating. And then: Kathy. I could sense, by smell, sound, by the disturbance in the air. On my back, Kathy on her knees. She drew me up onto her cock and fucked me, slowly, one ring at a time.

Jonathan Kemp: "Over sushi she told me she'd been having sex with gay boys but was bored because all they wanted was her to fuck them with a strap-on. At a night of readings of Acker's work in London recently, I bumped into an old flat-mate who tells me one of his friends used to get fucked by her, and now I feel an odd kind of jealousy as another echo is heard, another connection made."²⁹

I had not brought much by way of clothing with me, as I had thought San Francisco would be warmer than it is. I started wearing Kathy's clothes. I am taller but about the same size across the shoulders and hips, so I could get into some of her things. When we went out I wore jackets and sweaters of hers, a little short in the sleeve. She had some curious garments. Some seemed to have been cut not for humans at all but for some alien species.

Dodie Bellamy: "On a shelf above our heads are stacked four large packing boxes. The bottom one is labeled in black marker 'Acker's Clothes' in Kathy's handwriting. Once we get the boxes on the floor, we start to rummage through them. Matias pulls out a black mass of fabric. It's a dress, but it only has one sleeve and a sort of diagonal band stretching from where the missing armpit would be. We examine piece after piece and ponder what part of the body it was meant to cover."³⁰

At her apartment, I tried on all sorts of things that felt sexy or elegant to wear. All I remember is the feel of quality fabric and construction, shaping me, drawing energy out and into new shapes. A bustier that conjured imaginary breasts. Something rigid that flared, causing hips to angle out from this (still) skinny ass. Kathy fucked me while I wore her clothes. Concepts of gender, redistributed. As if one could have some dick from the other and the other of that other could have some tits: corporeal communism.

Transitive

A horse really has only four legs. The fifth is superfluous. The concept of the horse's leg is either immanent to each of its legs or is just an artifact of language. Likewise, the body does not need its concept, its gender, as another body. The question remains as to whether the concept is immanent to the body or is a thing of language, or maybe a thing of language that became a thing of the body, its ideology.

Kathy went off to the gym by herself sometimes. Working out is maybe one way to expel the concept from the body, at least for a bit. "Bodybuilding rejects ordinary language," Kathy said. Her muscles hid their sculpting under skin.

Kathy also told me about cruising girls at the gym. I don't know if Kathy picked any up in the brief time we were together. Would not have bothered me. I was her girl (who also fucked her sometimes) but it wasn't a romantic relation where we became each other's property.

To fuck is sometimes used as a transitive verb: he fucked her; she fucked him; they fucked each other. The object comes after the verb; the verb performs an action on it. Maybe gender is transitive in another sense. Between any two bodies is a difference. Maybe that difference is gender even when it is not, actually, gender. It's what top and bottom imply, a difference. Maybe the genders could be transitive verbs, and can be applied in any situation where part of a person acts on another through that gender as an action: Kathy manned me.

I wanted her to man me. Or, in metaphors: to install herself on top and inside. To take the handlebars, to straddle and ride. To pilot, to cruise, to fly me, to drive me. She was better at it than I was.

And I knew a little about how to be the girl. When you are manned, sometimes you end up girling. A girl appears as a performance for another. A girl is a margin that appears around her own withdrawn center.

These days, people talk about toxic masculinity. Toxin, from *toxion*, neuter of *toxikos*, archery. *Toxion pharmakon*: poison arrows. *Pharmakon*: poison and cure.³¹ Only it's more of an algorithm than an ambiguity. A procedure. A beginning; an end. An injected drug and its drugging. The male body is penetrated by the arrow of masculinity, a concept, but a nontransitive concept, in that it refuses to be penetrated as it is the one that penetrates.

And so, in just a few days, I became Kathy's girl. Because I wanted to be, and Kathy wanted to be what I wanted. Kathy was willing to be anything I wanted. That to her (him) was a kind of love. The kind where to love is to say: this can be anything you want, anything at all. So long as the gift comes back, and as something else.

Kathy also wanted to be wanted, totally, suddenly. Would make any demonstration of that willingness to lose her will. But yet also resisted this impulse. Was quick to reprove anyone who did not grant themselves to this granting of them to them.

Riding on the back of Kathy's bike was thrilling but cold. I was entirely in her hands. I loved to feel her control of the machine, that other gender.

We went to Cliff House on Point Lobos. Walked around the ruins of the abandoned Sutro Baths. We went to the Musée Mécanique. I had forgotten all about this, until I found a piece of paper in the prepress copy of *Pussy, King of the Pirates* that Kathy gave me. It was a small, faded sheet of thermal paper. This is what it said:

"Mouth of Truth tells you that: You're full of vitality and enjoy physical pleasures. You enjoy excellent health although you often abuse it. Beware of trying to be too clever. You know how to enjoy your many relationships with the opposite sex while still maintaining your independence. You keep making mistakes which jeopardize your future. Your capricious and inconstant nature will make it difficult for you to get on with life. Life: 6/10, Love: 7/10, Luck: 8/10, Health: 4/10, Sex: 8/10."

The smell, the touch of this yellowing thermal paper is what brought back the memory of Cliff House, of the water, cold, and sun, and an amusement hall full of vintage attractions. From Bay Area friends on Facebook I learned that this was the Musée Mécanique, and that it still existed, only not in the same location.

Back in San Francisco thirty years later, I had limited time and so had to make a decision: should I go to the old location, to Cliff House, or try to find the fortune telling machine at the place to which the Musée Mécanique had moved. I went looking for the machine, out on Pier 45.

The machine took some finding. The attendant had no idea. I found all sorts of dead media. Mechanical dioramas that became animated for a quarter. Antediluvian peepshow cinema that worked by cranked handle. Machines for pleasuring hand and eye.

No luck. I texted Kato, who, a few weeks earlier, had done some scouting—a thing we did for each other. I followed his directions. Hidden in the back was my fortune.

It gives its name in Italian: BOCCA DELLA VERITÀ. It's an off-white, plastic, shoulder-width disk with a face and open mouth. Put in two quarters, insinuate your hand in the mouth, and it pretends to read your palm. Red LEDs flash and plinky electronic sounds play. Your fortune extrudes from a slot at the bottom.

The original Bocca della Verità is a massive marble disk that can be found in Rome. Nobody knows what it is. Maybe it was just a drain cover for the Temple of Hercules.

In the movie *Roman Holiday*, Gregory Peck and Audrey Hepburn scoot around Rome on his two-wheeler. Greg is giving Audrey a hard time because he knows she is an actual princess pretending not to be. He tells her if you put your hand in the mouth of the Bocca della Verità and you are not a truthful person, it cuts off your hand. He puts his hand in. He screams and contorts, she shrieks in horror, then he reveals that he was just kidding. A dick move. A handy lie.

He is a liar who lies about challenging the gods to harm him for his dishonesty, only to show that they don't really seem to care at all. She is a liar who fakes being a normal girl just to have some adventures away from public duties. He knows they are both liars; she does not know he is one too. Asymmetry of gender.

So much memory is external to the body now. The holes in the past, my past, the past I imagine makes me me, are easily filled with information, from the internet. Inhuman memory: The Bocca della Verità machine is still made by an Italian company, DPS Promatic. They also make weighing scales and recording devices for weather stations. The model at Musée Mécanique is the Mini, first made in 1993. The shell is fiberglass, not plastic. DPS Promatic insists that they are the makers of the original, and that all the other companies make copies.

I put my hand in the plastic mouth a few times. None of the fortunes I received seemed as interesting as the one I got when I was with Kathy that day. You will have to suffer deception and unhappiness in love several times during your life. You are determined on changes: you've thought about it for a long time and you think it's time to bring it about. You could

become entirely dominated by your partner: beware of this. And so on. Ideology tries on its concepts for a body in the second person: hey you.

New York, 1995

Why did Kathy and I not fly from San Francisco to New York together? No memory. The internet remembered for me. I went to Montreal first: September 17 to 24. To talk about cyberfeminism, and other things.³² It comes back to me now as lonely and cold.

Then I flew to New York to meet her, where we could be together for a longer stretch of time. I had been to New York once or twice, but had more of an image of it from Hitchcock movies than from wandering in it.

In San Francisco, I was Kathy's girl; in New York, I was her top. Or rather, sometimes I tried to be. Something like that. Maybe boy and girl, top and bottom, aren't the right concepts. We had different concepts.

We did not speak the same language because we both spoke English, which is not so much a language as a mongrel tongue left as a scar on the world, by one invasion after another, all the way back to 1066.

In New York, we stayed at the Gramercy Park Hotel, 2 Lexington Avenue. "The Gramercy reminds me of what I wanted childhood to be like," Kathy said. Edmund Wilson had lived there with Mary McCarthy. Later it had a downtown vibe, but more literary than the Chelsea Hotel. This was before the inevitable Ian Schrager renovation. It was a bit on the seedy side. The room had some weird dark-colored wallpaper that immediately made me think of the hotel room in which Oscar Wilde died.

Not everything Kathy ever said to me was—strictly speaking—true. Particularly when we got to New York. It was as if we were inside a Kathy Acker book, written on flesh and city.

Chris Kraus: "Walking around New York City with McKenzie Wark, Acker stopped next to the carriages outside the Plaza Hotel and said, 'We had our honeymoon at the Plaza Hotel. Jews had theirs at the Plaza, WASPS at the Sherry-Netherland.' Wark was Australian, fourteen years

younger than she was, but . . . sensed that ‘there was something dreamlike about the New York she was showing me. Like a fable.’ In fact, she and Bob Acker had left for San Diego right away. A rare family photo shows her in a white dress and veil, smiling, and cutting a cake next to her tall, handsome husband.”³³

There are whole websites devoted to movie locations. The Plaza Hotel is in *The Great Gatsby* and countless movies. Let’s just mention Hitchcock’s *North by Northwest*. Oh, and in *Home Alone 2*, Macaulay Culkin meets Donald Trump in the lobby. The Sherry-Netherland has a more discreet presence—itself a Waspy attribute—in imaginary New York, although it appears in the movie *New York Stories*. I knew nothing about New York at the time. Anything Kathy told me could be true to me, was true to me. She showed me the New York of myth.

We wandered from Central Park toward the East River, to Sutton Place. Sutton Place, she told me, was her childhood home. In the psychogeography of New York, it is certainly a place from which a Kathy Acker should hail. It is in countless movies, from *How to Marry a Millionaire* to *Black Caesar*. Lou Reed has a song that mentions *not* walking there. It’s in *Catcher in the Rye*; it’s in *Great Expectations* and *My Life My Death* by Pier Paolo Pasolini—by Kathy Acker—and some of her other books.³⁴

She was indeed from the Upper East Side—from 400 East 57th Street, a nineteen-story Art Deco pile built in 1931.³⁵ Some would locate this in the Sutton Place “district,” but to me, wandering about there now, it seems to have a different ambience, and that it always did. On Sutton Place the buildings are older and smaller, and there are some elegant piles from the very start of the twentieth century, built when being a millionaire was still a thing. In Kathy’s day it would have smelled like old money over there. At a time when most artists and writers downplayed their bourgeois origins, maybe Kathy gave herself an upgrade.

Sarah Schulman: “To be a German Jew of that generation was to feel entitled and endangered. She was born Karen Alexander, from the kind of family known to New York Jews as ‘Our Crowd’—her family, the Alexanders, along with the Loebes, Ochs, et cetera were the best educated, wealthiest, and most sophisticated Jews in the world. Kathy came from a tiny ethnic group responsible for originating the most influential theo-

ries of twentieth century: Marxism, psychoanalysis, the theory of relativity, postmodernism. And therein lay her problem. For emotionally, Kathy was average. She had no family. She was an abandoned, traumatized person. Artistically and intellectually, she was exceptional. Inherent in her supremacy was a certain kind of expectation.”³⁶

There is a Kathy who was an Oedipus, secretly of more noble blood, gone out into a world of writing, wherein to fuck-marry-kill all the veiled ghosts of ancestry.

Mel Freilicher: “Kathy was once approached by a distinguished looking gentleman who claimed she was a member of the prominent New York Lehman family. Clearly it’s not easy to live out a myth. In her work, Kathy was brilliantly in control of her own mythmaking tendency. To me, it’s an open question as to how confused Kathy herself was regarding being mythological Kathy, and how damaged by it.”³⁷

We walked east toward the East River, where Kathy found a little park with views of the water and the Queensboro Bridge. Sitting on a park bench, I sat in her lap and we kissed. It might have been Sutton Square, but the space does not quite feel right. My feet tire easily these days, so I did not revisit all the little green nooks along the island’s edge there. Nor was I up for the long walk back across the city. Kathy and I walked so far together.

Back by Central Park, Kathy asked if I wanted a carriage ride, but I declined. Not because it was corny. Like Tracy in the movie *Manhattan*, I might have gone for it for exactly that reason. I declined because it was cold.

Bridge and Tunnel

We had drinks with The Mekons. Not much said, more a serious Northern English style of getting trolleyed.

Kathy wanted to know: Did I want to meet Ira Silverberg? Did I want to meet Betsy Sussler? I should have said yes. I didn’t really know how to network with people, or who to network with. Kathy was surprised at my passivity, as was I.

I took Kathy to Lucky Cheng's, which was then in the East Village, at 24 1st Avenue at East 2nd Street. It was opened in 1993 by Hayne Suthon, an heiress with a Louisiana natural gas fortune behind her, with which to turn carbon into shine. She had style. Lucky Cheng's was in a former bathhouse and managed to hang on to a certain louche ambience. The rooms were dark, shades of ultramarine, carmine, and black, lit by nothing but the candles on the tables. The waitstaff were all trans women, mostly Asian, who presented themselves in a sleek, modern, futuristic style. Of course I adored them. Role models.

What I didn't know is that since I had last been there the clientele had changed. The Prince of Monaco had come, which brought a less downtown crowd. "It's a bit bridge and tunnel," Kathy said, meaning people from the outer boroughs, or worse—New Jersey. Actually, Lucky Cheng's had not quite reached its low point. It would later appear in the TV show *Sex and the City*, and after that it hosted bachelorette parties.

But still: I felt out of my depth. A feeling I'd had before. I'd had older boy-friends who had taste and style. With them I learned how to be decorative and obliging when out in their world, to prep them so they'd want to fuck me later. But this was a different situation, the roles less clear, and the city and its ways more foreign to me.

Topping (1)

In our room at the Gramercy, sometimes I was Kathy's girl. I wanted to watch her strap himself into her cocks. The leather harness was all black straps and shiny buckles. Its odor an appealing blend of leather, lube, and sweat. Kathy did not want my help with it, but she took her time. Choosing cocks. Inserting a cock in the harness, another in his cunt. Strapping on the harness without either falling back out again. Even after a few drinks Kathy was deft at this. I just lay back and admired her technique, his presence.

I have the pink leather bustier on again. The bustier smells like Kathy. It is rigid, creating cups for phantom tits. I feel the outside, where they would be. There's nothing there. No breasts, no me. Just a euphoria outside gender, that concept, but even closer to it. An intimacy with gender, the concept of the body. Intimacy is a distance within a closeness.

Having been fucked in the ass plenty, I know what I want. Kathy is in charge, but I am in charge of that being in charge. Kathy is in charge of another's desires. I'm on the sofa now. Kathy kneels before me. I spread my legs for him. He holds the larger black cock in one hand, gently massages herself under it with the other.

Holding that dick, pressing it against this ass, getting lube on my hand that I know I'll get on the sofa. Wondering just for a moment about all the other bodies that fucked in this room, all the combinations, all the ways they could do it, their concepts.

The cock is an inhuman black, in silicone, like some sort of matte anodized robot prosthesis. Only this is a problem, to do with that other concept of the body, its race. The bottom wants to be penetrated by an-other, brought low, but sometimes that other is a racialized other: black dick. I imagine robot black, but am I also thinking of human black? The white body brought low by the black one, the colonized one.

It is not a problem our two white bodies—Jewish white and antipodean white—are up for resolving. The theater of sex just plays out the concepts drilled into them. You know you know the ideologies. Think about them later.

Guy Hocquenghem: "What the young gay man says to the Arab is still an avowal of guilt: 'The bourgeoisie exploits you, my father exploits you, so fuck me!' Class struggle, class masochism. What hides beneath this artificial appropriation of the primitive? Sodomized, we are the only ones to shit backwards. But being the least proper does not imply that we are the least propertied."³⁸

Thinking about humans with robot dicks for an instant. Pressing it against the outer ass-ring. Kathy is looking straight at me, and there I am. I appear to myself in her look.

In our room at the Gramercy, sometimes I am not Kathy's girl. Sometimes I'm her man. She gives me the sign that it's time. I leave on my jacket and sunglasses. My jacket becomes his jacket: the man.

"Get on your knees," he orders. She gets on her knees. "Suck my dick." She unzips him, fingers trembling a little, fishes his dick out and puts in in her mouth. "Not like that." She tries again. "Not like that." She tries a different tack. "Stop."

"Stand up. Take all your clothes off." Kathy takes all her clothes off. "Go sit on the toilet." Kathy leaves the room. Having not done much of this before, I'm basically just copying attitude I vaguely remember from Pat Califia stories. I decide to let her wait for me for a moment.

Kathy is sitting naked on the toilet, looking expectantly at me. "Not like that. Put the seat up. Sit on the porcelain." She does. I take out his dick and piss on her breasts and belly. The piss mostly trickling down her body, over her pubes, into the toilet. I am conscious that this is a hotel room and I don't want to make too much mess, which is probably quite out of character. I get back into character. I get into him.

"Get in the shower." She gets in the shower. He turns on the cold water—hard. Kathy gasps under the chill. I see her left knee tremble a bit. "Go into the living room. Get down on all fours." She steps out of the shower, leaves the bathroom, tracking wet on across the carpet.

I look down and see that my dick is still out, just flopping around. He would not be trying to give commands with a limp dick wiggling, but I try not to think about that. I tuck it in and zip up.

Kathy is on all fours in the living room, prone on the carpet, over a puddle. He picks up the riding crop from the sofa, where she had left it this morning, strategically placed as a sign for what she wanted. He kneels behind her and teases her back with it. For a long time.

THWACK. Flesh flinches. "One." THWACK. Flesh flinches. "Two." THWACK. Flesh flinches. "Three." THWACK. Flesh flinches. "Four." THWACK. Flesh flinches. "Five." THWACK. Flesh flinches. "Six." THWACK. Flesh flinches. "Seven." THWACK. Flesh flinches. "Eight." THWACK. Flesh flinches. "Nine." THWACK. Flesh flinches. "Nine and a half." Flesh sighs, but doesn't say stop. THWACK. Flesh flinches. "Ten."

He unzips and take his dick out. It's not hard. Make her wait. With a little coaxing he gets it hard. He takes a condom from my jacket pocket. I at least had the foresight to put some in there. He struggles to get the packet open, ends up using his teeth. Anxious for a moment about going soft again, but I don't. He rolls the condom on.

He gets down behind her. He presses the tip of this dick against her cunt. It's wet. Very wet. He just leaves it there. Teasing. She makes whimpering sounds, trembles, twitches.

And then he fucks her hard. Holding her hips, thrusting away. Human fucking seems vaguely ridiculous sometimes. This was one of those times. My thighs are longer so I'm on a weird angle. He pushes her head down, her face to the worn carpet. She cries out, but doesn't ask me (him) to stop. He fucks her for a while. Who knows how long? Her cunt is doing its little staccato spasms. Then I come.

I don't remember what happened after, other than that I cleaned the pee that had splashed on the bathroom floor. Sometime later we are in bed together. Kathy says: "Thank you." That was the only time she said that.

Kate Zambreno: "There is something unthreatening about the confessions of a white, pretty girl and her sex life. Even if she takes revenge, by telling her story, it does not ultimately threaten the order of things. Fury, though, is another thing. Kathy's girls are passive and want to be fucked and want to be loved. Yet Kathy makes it threatening because she makes it grotesque. Her porn texts are too prickly to jack off to without feeling the threat of castration."³⁹

We didn't talk about it much. I made excuses for my lack of skill. I could never be anything like The German, about whom she had told me a few stories. His orders; his knife. Sounds like he was the man, not playing.

“We all exist in pain,” she said, but she doesn’t like to. Just a little is enough. Just like that, maybe a little more—next time. We never got to practice much. I wasn’t sure this was a part of myself I wanted to know much about.

It was a more extreme masculine I that was doing this, who was becoming a stranger to me. One that felt other than human, and not in a good way. I preferred to be *that girl* with Kathy, but I could be *this man* just a bit if she wanted me to. For her. I played the man because she made me feel like her girl and, as such, I wanted to be what she wanted. I played the man when Kathy wanted it, as a girl should.

Kathy understood love when it came with acts. Enacted on bodies. Even if it was an act it was still an action, in the world. She knew too much about words to put any faith in them at all. Nobody had yet figured out an emotional life where you have lost faith in language.

Ring

Last day together in New York. In Soho, already an open-air shopping mall. Late breakfast at Jerry’s, 101 Prince St. Kathy took me to her jeweler, Alex Streeter, at 152 Prince St. She had a few jewelers. She told me about the one who made her huge skull and skeleton ring. Almost the length of her finger, she’d had it made to neutralize the energy of the two rubies that became its eyes. The rubies were a gift from a Zen priest and were certainly conflict gems. Such a gift was charged with impossible challenge. The gems could hardly be thrown away or regifted or simply put aside. That Zen master perfected the cursed gift, but Kathy contained it.

Alex Streeter was a bit of jewelry legend. The rings Robert De Niro and Charlotte Rampling wear in *Angel Heart*, he made those. You can get knock-off copies of that design online for sixty bucks. Kathy bought me the fly ring that I still wear.

While working on this book, I lost it. Woke up and it was gone. I’d had some other version of the dream with which this text starts, but I don’t remember any of it. Panic of loss. I only had two rings. The one Christen gave me, which can’t come off over my bony knuckle. The one given by Kathy, which Christen tolerates. And which now was gone.

Kathy bought me the ring and I bought her shoes. The shoes were actually sexy black calf boots. But that isn't a ring. Although in a way giving footwear is a special act. The boot as double of my booty. Or: The boot as between the foot and the dirt and life of the world. I felt that she would rather I got her a ring too. But I couldn't afford it, and was too embarrassed to say so.

About money: I had a salary but no other money, and rent to pay. Kathy had money and owned her place, but only precarious teaching and performing income. We each thought the other was better off. Her money was running out, she said. Together, we were spending like there was no tomorrow. We went Dutch on the Gramercy Park Hotel bill. Put half each on plastic. I was paying that off for ages.

The last thing I remember is going to the movies. We saw Abel Ferrara's *The Addiction* at the Angelika at 18 W. Houston, near Broadway. Lili Taylor as an NYU grad student who becomes a vampire, or maybe a heroin addict, or maybe addicted to a certain knowledge of human abjection. A movie in which the vampire blames the victim for the victim's weakness.

Kathy wore leather pants. I stroked her thigh while we watched vampires in one of the little narrow theaters down under the ground. It felt like the right movie to see down there in the innards of the city, the deep sound of the subway rubbing its way through the walls and into our bodies.

Noise

Back in Sydney. Back to work. Feeling the absence of Kathy. Kept apart by work, money, being answerable to different sovereignties.

We emailed again like we had from the start. I lost all but one of those emails. My NYU guest account got shut down.

Kathy called my cell phone sometimes. This was still a bit of a new thing, having a cell phone, and even more new to be calling people from the other side of the world. I'd be walking down Victoria Street, under the plane trees, and the phone would ring. I'd squat in some doorway and talk to Kathy while bevvies of drunk Scandinavian backpackers wove by.

She sent two gifts. She sent me a black silk camisole, with just a little lace. I still have it. It was the first time a woman gave me lingerie. I put it on at home and called her. We had phone sex a lot.

She sent me flowers. There was no occasion. I found the card that came with them not long ago. There's no date on it. The flowers came from Interflora. The card is in the handwriting of the Sydney-based Interflora agent, who would have received the instructions via fax. Kathy explained when I called her that Interflora wouldn't send the message for the card in English so she sent it in French and somewhere along the way it ended up with a typo. A little noise, that parasite, got in the transmission.

How it actually reads is:

“encore je te veuz,
et enedre tes jambes
pour moi et ce temps pour toujours . . . a”

What it was supposed to say was:

“encore je te veux,
et étendre tes jambes
pour moi en ce temps pour toujours . . . a”

Which might read as:

“I still want you,
and spread your legs
for me now for always . . . a”

Memory Is Redundant

Date: Mon, 12 Feb 1996 12:57:26 -0800
From: Acker@eworld.com
To: mwark@laurel.ocs.mq.edu.au
Subject: Re: another day in the saltmines

Just read this over breakfast: I too am returning from Zirma: my memory includes dirigibles flying in all directions, at window level; streets of shops

where tattoos are drawn on sailors' skin; underground trains crammed with obese women suffering from the humidity. My traveling companions, on the other hand, swear they saw only one dirigible hovering among the city's spires, only one tattoo artist arranging needles and inks and pierced patterns on his bench, only one fat woman fanning herself on a train's platform. Memory is redundant: it repeats signs so that the city can begin to exist.

Every time you dream I am fucking you, this is what happens. The city.⁴⁰

The Viewing Room

The last time I saw Kathy was in London, in July 1997. I wasn't sure how she felt about me at that point. I had failed to drop everything to be with her in San Francisco the year before, and I had failed to make a job materialize that would have brought her to Sydney, as she wanted. I could offer no such extravagant gifts.

Things had, I felt, ended in a disappointing but amicable dead end. "Just be my friend," Kathy said, early on, and I had promised I would. Being friends is more of an undertaking than being lovers.

She had decamped from San Francisco back to London, with all its difficult memories, to be with someone.

Charles Shaar Murray: "I met Kathy Acker at a dinner party in a Mexican restaurant in Soho. A little over 24 hours after that meeting, we discovered ourselves to be in love and resolved to spend the rest of our lives together. We spent most of the next five days almost continually in each other's company."⁴¹

I think she knew on some level that she had cancer; or maybe knowing and not knowing. She was already planning to return to San Francisco. I happened to be coming to London on some arts organization's tab, so we agreed to meet there, in a city where both of us were strangers.

It seems likely we had a meal somewhere, but I remember nothing about that. The part I remember starts with going to see a performance. What I

remember is that it was a one-man show about a gay man living with AIDS who expected to die soon. The performer had such presence, not just with his language and gesture and stories, but with his body.

The performance was in a lecture theater at a London teaching hospital. His only prop and light source was an overhead projector, of which he made brilliant use. The show was both cutting and moving at the same time, a portrait of the state, medicine, and technology as much as of this man's life.

That was the first part of the show. The second was very short. He told us that the lecture room in which he was performing was next door to a former viewing room. In the past, hospitals set aside such rooms for relatives to view the recently deceased. In a viewing room they could be arranged properly as a kind of tableau for relatives to pay their last respects. The performer asked us to wait five minutes. Then we were ushered into this viewing room.

The viewing room would have held maybe a dozen beds, a sort of ward for the dead. There was only one bed in it, and that bed was the only thing lit, the room being otherwise dark. The colors I remember are sienna, mahogany, and salamander. Or maybe those are feelings. In the bed was the performer, neatly arrayed, completely still. He was acting as his own corpse. This was the second part of the show.

Part of the point this made was that even in the late nineties, a gay man with AIDS could not count on his real friends, his family of choice, being able to be with him in hospital, or to have the right to see him in death. There was something dignified about the viewing room, the intentional staging of the dead one, and the performer turned this to his advantage. We strangers were in a place to see his future self where his friends might not.

In the viewing room, everyone was silent. The energetic buzz of premature after-show conversation dropped down to nothing. We all just stood around. Kathy was next to me. I wanted to hold her hand, or something, but I did not know if she would want me to, or if it would make her feel worse. We just stood in the audience, this audition for silence, being silent together. It was such a naked contrast to the animated quality of the first part of the show. Then we left.

The concept of the body is not its gender. The concept of the body is death.

Memory is a genre of fiction. For a long time, I have wanted to know what the performance was that Kathy and I saw on our last night together. I found out finally by asking on Facebook and tagging some people, who didn't know, but knew people, who knew people, who knew: *The Seven Sacraments of Nicholas Poussin*, by Neil Bartlett.

I ordered it from Amazon. Read it. Now I know it was performed at The Royal London Hospital in Whitechapel, from the first to the seventh of July. I had forgotten that most of it was about Poussin's paintings of the sacraments. Memory changed the ending. There is indeed a second half of the performance, but Bartlett sits in a chair opposite an empty bed, as if he were holding the hand of its occupant. The pillow is creased in the middle as if a head lay on it.

Neil Bartlett: "You will have noticed, those of you who were brought up with these words as I was, that I keep on remembering them wrong. I have erred, and said things, like I've lost my place. I have left out the words which I ought to have said, and I've put in some of those that I ought not to have put in, and I just can't help it."⁴²

Kathy didn't want to go out, so we took the tube to her place, getting off at Angel station. Her apartment lay alongside one of London's canals. I could see canal boats tied up there. Kathy often said she wanted to be a sailor, to take off into the rolling waves. She was a sailor in the ways that were available to her. Writing (fucking) was her sea. I imagined her pottering about on canal boats, where the city meets the rising tide.

Her address was 14 Duncan Terrace. I'm looking at it again on Google Maps. The red door is as I remember. I see that when Street View last cruised this block, it was for sale. On the other side of her street is not the canal, it's a strip of green parkway. There are waterways nearby, and if I zoom in on the satellite image I can see narrow boats pulled up along the banks. Looking at the satellite images, and playing with the Street View, triggers other memories, whether real ones or not I don't know.

I remember her flat as one of a row of identical brick Georgian terrace houses. Judging by the quality of motor parked there, quite a posh area

now. The brick grimy, the white-painted details shiny in moonlight. The famous writer Douglas Adams lived on the same block, Kathy said, but he could afford a whole townhouse. His lights were on. I caught a glimpse through the window of his bookshelves, in white wood.

In memory Kathy's place seems like a basement flat, but I don't know if that is a memory of architecture or of mood. Kathy rummaged around in the kitchen for wine, glasses, and an opener. I looked at the bookshelves. All her books seemed to be here, neatly arrayed in alphabetical order, in double rows, just like they had been in San Francisco. I got a little distracted looking at treasure I would like to read, like I did when I stayed with her that short while. When she was out at the gym I just rifled her books, stealing lines into my notebook. I was always careful to put them back in the right place.

Her library ended up at the University of Cologne. I spent a day there with them. Daniel Schulz, who has diligently catalogued them, showed me how to use the catalog on the computer and left me alone with them. I copied down notes she had left in them. In the back of one of her two copies of Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*, I found she had written this: "Every time you dream I am fucking you, you are building a city."

We sat at the table and drank wine. Kathy was a red drinker, but she opened white as she remembered that is what I like. I had the gut feeling that we would never see each other again. The show had maybe put us into that mood, the way it had staged both the life and the death of an artist. It went past the point where most things end. It got me thinking about my own life posthumously even though as far as I knew my health was fine. Kathy was not fine. This night at least she seemed to accept that death could be fairly close.

The one thing I remember us talking about is whether anyone would care about her writing when she was gone. I imagined her own books fitted into the alphabetical sequence that threaded through her bookshelves. Right near the front—not many slot in before *Acker*. In her own library, they would come after Abe, Abish, and Achebe.

I pointed out that most of her books were in print, which was already a good sign. I improvised some lit-crit about the trajectory of avant-garde

writing, as a series of careening but cumulative experiments, rolling, rising, roiling, and the way she had subsumed past experiments into her wake and made new ones. I don't know how convincing I was. I told Kathy she would be remembered, but the crucial question was not so much whether she would be remembered as by whom.

I hadn't counted on the internet keeping her interview with the Spice Girls permanently in circulation, but overall I think I was right, and that the answer I gave, while paltry, was sincere. She would find an enduring readership, but one that would not be driven by her media persona, nor be literary in the established sense. She would be treasured for a different kind of reading and writing, which maybe wouldn't be like her writing at all but would need her to have existed in order to exist. She would help make a place for us.

Leslie Dick: "I remember sitting with her on a sofa at a party and looking into her face, with its harsh make-up and amazing punk hair, peroxide blonde with brown burn marks on it as if it had been seared with a branding iron, and recognizing this spectacle as a mask she peered out from behind, or within, oddly like a little girl. Kathy Acker's readings, her self-presentation through clothes, hair, exposure of skin, tattoos, etc., her presence on the covers of her books, all worked explicitly to place her body as an obstacle, a threat and promise, mediating between reader and text."⁴³

Kathy and I embraced for one last time, in the doorway to her flat. I wandered off into the night. It was too late to catch the tube back to my hotel, so I wandered about, a little anxious as I did not know where I was, but expecting to find a cab or minicab or a bus route, somewhere. I remember now that this is when I found the canal and the narrow boats, bumping in the slurping water. The boats and Kathy are together in memory, and so their places are too.

New York, 2000

Three years later I emigrated to New York. Three years after that I got an email from Matias Viegner, who among other things is the executor of the Kathy Acker estate. He was coming to New York City and asked to

meet. I suggested the coffee shop in Chelsea frequented by Sandra Bernhard. Both Acker and Bernhard had written: "Without you I'm nothing."

Matias asked me what I thought about publishing my email correspondence with Kathy. I said I'd have to think about it. I knew that reading them again would be painful, but I also knew I still had the digital file, transferred, year after year, from one hard drive to another.

When I was with Kathy back in San Francisco, she was putting together a box of her papers to send to Duke University, which was to archive them. She had also just received a letter back from the archivist, she told me. The letter included an object the archivist was returning, saying simply that it was probably something she did not want included with the papers. The object in question was a strip of acid. Kathy was not a big drug taker, but she hid drugs of various kinds in the apartment. And so the acid had found its way almost into the archive.

I thought of Umberto Eco's book *The Name of the Rose*, where the blind archivist Jorge is keeping the monastery's most banned and restricted book in a room out of view.⁴⁴ In the novel that book is Aristotle's second *Poetics*, on laughter, but I think it should have been Lucretius, whose elemental swerve is still the most dangerous writing from antiquity. Jorge has also protected the book from prying eyes by dabbing a poison on the corners. A curious monk who tries to read it will wet his finger with his tongue before touching the page to turn it, again and again, and die from the act of reading itself.

I imagined the tabs of acid being buried among Kathy's papers, and some curious researcher coming across them, touching them, maybe putting his, her, or their finger to lips, kissing their own finger, and not dying from reading this time but reading on, feeling forms dissolve, the contentment of selves explode, words morph, warp, twist, curl, split, shatter, merge, bend, shrink, blur, wave. What really belongs in the archive anyway? A lot of weird things end up there. Apparently one of the other things found, this time in Kathy's personal library, was her lipstick.⁴⁵

I wanted to be included in her archive. I wanted not to be forgotten. I thought she would forget me, and she did. Apart from the emails, I left

no trace in her archive. Or almost none. Sitting in the reading room of the Rubenstein library at Duke University, turning the pages of her class notes on William Burroughs. There, on the back of a page—my old Sydney phone number, in her hand. I left the reading room in tears.

Writers get to choose their own parents. All artists do. You get to be present in the viewing room of their work whether you are on the approved family list or not, and bed down there.

Critics who write about the writers they admire, love, value, esteem, or would have wanted to fuck, or actually fucked—mostly want to top them. The critique goes over a layer of fleshy text—over the top. Picture it in an overhead shot: the critic, back turned to you, face turned to the writer, the writer looks over the critics shoulder at you, with a cold eye that could mean anything at all. I wanted a way to write about Kathy that was switchy, but—now that we’re on intimate terms, let’s be candid—the critical theory here is bottom theory. Writing as the trace of the want to let go, to be the one who is othered.

Steven Shaviro: “My love for you is a lost opportunity, a missed encounter. The events that move me, that affect me, that relate me to you, are precisely the ones that I am unable to grasp. I can’t hold on to your life, or your love; I can only retain its passage, in the form of a scar. I was never able to possess the softness of your touch, the roughness with which you fucked me. Only the memory remains. Every line, every scar, concretizes your absence. For we suffer from reminiscences, and every reminiscence is a wound. You seeped into my body like a beautiful toxin.”⁴⁶

Oh, I found the fly ring. After that awful morning when I woke up and it was gone. It was in the bed. Must have taken it off in my sleep, during the dream in which I returned to the place the dead make for us, the dream I don’t remember. I rarely remember dreams. Just the dread left in their place, an absence in memory. And just as well, as, apart from the recurring one, they are monstrous.

Linda Stupart: “She has returned. She is in pieces. She grabs McKenzie Wark’s shoulders and he struggles against her, thrashing uncontrollably. For the first time we see Kathy’s face. . . . She is a dead thing . . . the flesh

on her face is rotting and oozing. . . . She is a ghoulish being, staring down at McKenzie Wark. . . . Kathy is thrashing wildly at all parts of McKenzie Wark's body. McKenzie Wark screams wildly. The two bodies make animal sounds. A close shot makes it clear that McKenzie Wark is lying limply on the ground with Kathy hunched over his form. Kathy Acker is doing something with the limp body, still ripping at it . . . teeth biting into male flesh his hair falling over her shoulders her bald grinning desiring skull."⁴⁷

I remember almost nothing; the internet remembers almost everything.
All that's left is the almost.

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Notes

Part I. The City of Memory

1. Martine Sciolino, "Confessions of a Kleptoparasite," *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 9, no. 3 (1989): 63.
2. On interpretation, see Alexander Galloway's contribution to *Excommunication* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).
3. Patrick Greaney, "Insinuation: Détournement as Gendered Repetition," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 110 (1) (2011): 75–88, 84.
4. Tom McCarthy, "Kathy Acker's Infidel Heteroglossia," in *Typewriters, Bombs, Jellyfish: Essays* (New York: New York Review Books, 2017), 257.
5. The three books I found most useful: Georgina Colby, *Kathy Acker: Writing the Impossible* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016); Chris Kraus, *After Kathy Acker* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2015); Douglas A. Martin, *Acker* (New York: Nightboat, 2017).
6. Vanessa Place, "Afterword," in *I'll Drown My Book: Conceptual Writing by Women*, ed. Caroline Bergvall et al. (Los Angeles: Les Figues Press, 2012), 445.
7. Ashley Crawford and Ray Edgar, eds., *Transit Lounge* (Melbourne: Craftsman's House, 1998).
8. Noel King, "Kathy Acker on the Loose," *Meanjin* 55, no. 2 (1996): 338.
9. Justine Ettler, *The River Ophelia* (Sydney: Picador Australia, 1995). The copy Justine gave Kathy is in Kathy's library in Cologne.
10. Dodie Bellamy, "Digging through Kathy Acker's Stuff," in *When the Sick Rule the World* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2015), 127.
11. Amy Scholder, "Editor's Note," in *Essential Acker*, ed. Amy Scholder and Dennis Cooper (New York: Grove Press, 2002), xiii.
12. Danielle Talbot, "Blood, Grunge and Literature," *The Age*, August 4, 1995.
13. Eileen Myles, *Inferno: A Poet's Novel* (New York: O/R Books, 2010), 156.
14. Pam Brown, "1995," in *Home by Dark* (Bristol: Shearsman Books, 2013), 34.
15. She told me she was a little afraid of Linda Dement, although they were collaborating at the time of Acker's death. See George Alexander, "Linda Dement's Eurydice," *Art Monthly*, April 2002.

16. Andrew Kohut et al., *Americans Going Online* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 1995).
17. Matthew Kirschenbaum, *Track Changes: A Literary History of Word Processing* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).
18. Fred Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); Julian Dibbell, *My Tiny Life: Crime and Passion in a Virtual World* (New York: Holt, 1999).
19. Rosie Cross, "Acker Online," in *Transit Lounge*, ed. Ashley Crawford and Ray Edgar (Melbourne: Craftsman's House, 1998), 51.
20. Kathy Acker and McKenzie Wark, *I'm Very into You: Correspondence 1995–1996* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2015).
21. David Velasco, "Natural's Not in It," review of *I'm Very into You: Correspondence 1995–1996* by Kathy Acker and McKenzie Wark, *Bookforum* 24, no. 4 (December 2017).
22. Lynne Tillman, "Selective Memory," *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 9, no. 3 (Fall 1989): 68.
23. Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilization in China*, Vol. 2. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 189.
24. Amy Wendling, *Karl Marx on Technology and Alienation* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 166–67.
25. Avital Ronell, "Kathy Goes to Hell," in *Lust for Life: On the Writings of Kathy Acker*, ed. Amy Scholder, Carla Harryman, and Avital Ronell (New York: Verso, 2006), 20.
26. Matias Viegner, *The Assassination of Kathy Acker*, Guillotine Series no. 13 (New York: Guillotine Series, 2018), 32–33.
27. Sianne Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).
28. Gary Indiana, *Rent Boy* (New York: High Risk Books, 1994), 91. The Sandy character is clearly a portrait of Kathy. See (IV 39).
29. Jonathan Kemp, "Kathy Acker's Houseboy," *Minor Literature[s]*, April 2019.
30. Bellamy, "Digging," 131.
31. Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).
32. McKenzie Wark, "The Virtual Sensoria," presented at ISEA95: Sixth International Symposium on Electronic Art, September 17–24, 1995, Montreal, Quebec.
33. Kraus, *After Kathy Acker*, 34.
34. GE 68, LM 256, EU 179.
35. Peter Wollen and Mel Freilicher both give Sutton Place as Acker's home address in their memorial pieces. Wollen places it on the Upper West Side, which connects Kathy to the psychogeography of the city in a different and interesting way.

36. Sarah Schulman, "Realizing They're Gone," in *Gentrification of the Mind* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 75.
37. Mel Freilicher, "One or Two Things That I Know About Kathy Acker," in *The Encyclopedia of Rebels* (San Diego, CA: City Works Press, 2013), 97.
38. Guy Hocquenghem, *The Screwball Asses* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2010), 11, 15. Kathy's library contained another of his books, *Love in Relief* (New York: Seahorse Press, 1986).
39. Kate Zambreno, "New York City, Summer 2013," *Icon*, ed. Amy Scholder (New York: Feminist Press at CUNY, 2014), 232.
40. Acker and Wark, *I'm Very into You*, 115. The détourned text is from Italo Calvino, "Cities and Signs 2," in *Invisible Cities* (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace, 1974), 19.
41. Charles Shaar Murray, "Kathy Acker Remembered," *Tha Kulcha*, accessed July 30, 2020, <http://charlesshaarmurray.com/journalism/tha-kulcha/kathy-acker-remembered/>.
42. Neil Bartlett and Robin Whitmore, *The Seven Sacraments of Nicholas Pous-sin* (London: Artangel, 1998), 43.
43. Leslie Dick, "Seventeen Paragraphs on Kathy Acker," in Scholder, Harry-man, and Ronell, *Lust for Life*, 112.
44. Umberto Eco, *The Name of the Rose* (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace, 1983). The edition Kathy had in her library.
45. Julian Brimmers, "Kathy Acker's Library," *Paris Review* 225 (Summer 2018).
46. Steven Shaviro, "Kathy Acker," in *Doom Patrols* (New York: Serpent's Tail, 1997), 83–84.
47. Linda Stupart, *Virus* (London: Arcadia Missa, 2016): 110.

Part II. Chapter 3. Third Philosophy

1. Since the source for this détournement is obscure and touches on my own previous research, I'll give it: Gianfranco Sanguinetti, *On Terrorism and the State* (London: B. M. Chronos, 1982), 57. Sanguinetti was the last member of the Situationist International.

2. See for example, Ayi Kwei Armah, *Why Are We So Blest?* (London: Heinemann, 1972); Cybrian Ekwensi, *Beautiful Feathers* (London: Heinemann, 1971); Yambo Ouologuem, *Bound to Violence* (London: Heinemann, 1971). The latter, interestingly, like Acker practiced détournement and was caught up in a scandal for plagiarizing a bit of Graham Greene. He explains his methods in Christopher Wise, ed., *A Yambo Ouologuem Reader: The Duty of Violence, a Black Ghostwriter's Letter to France, and the Thousand and One Bibles of Sex* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2008). About fifteen of the volumes of the Heinemann African Library series can still be found in the Kathy Acker library in Cologne.