

Letters to the Editors

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Journal by Anna M. Szaffarski.

Letters from the Editors: Tiziana La Melia "Would you rather have a peach or a painting of a peach?", Pg 6.



I went to visit a gym that is not 500 metres from my house to inquire about membership. It's owned by Madonna, and there are pictures of her tiny body and alien face everywhere. Her glitzy bra is protruding over every outfit; a different bra, a different corset, but there is a definite and peculiar hierarchy in her dressing. Bra always on top. Now, is it just plain burlesque tradition or is it a commentary on the suppression of women's intimates by the patriarchal system? Hmm, maybe don't over think it. I switch my attention to the trainings program, and scan for the type of classes I might find strenuous but would induce as little embarrassment as possible. Madonna is doing something Latin in a soundless video that is playing above the lounge chairs near the entrance. I don't want to shake my booty. Nobody wants to see my bra.

I decide I'm going to join the gym anyways. There's been a general tension growing on the left side of my body, and figure if I don't do something about it might petrify. The thought of late night visits to the sauna is seductive, along with the machines that promise to jiggle my muscles...ehem... along with everything else, while I do exercises carefully outlined by a trainer, who is supposed to gently judge you by placing goals that you did not

ask for on a usb stick. You plug it into the machines, and your fat percentage is solicited. Thank you. The gym is for women only, however, I am suspicious when they send a well built man to give me the tour. He smiles and speaks gently, Do you have children?

No, I blush, debating if I should indulge in the fantasy that he's actually flirting with me.

Oh, He steps aside, *then the daycare program will not interest you*. He walks away kicking up dirt in my face.

As a single woman with no children, I guess it would be irresponsible for me not to join a gym, right? Not to strive for perfect complexion and hard abs. Women with families are gasping for air let alone an hour to go out for a jog, or join a yoga class. It's my moral responsibility to shake my booty, buy lacy bras and wear them on top of my winter jacket. As a woman with no 'significant' other, it's my prerogative to be vain and think about myself. Unlike so many struggling people out there, I do not lack 'me' time. On the contrary, I am in great abundance of 'me' time. Me me me me.

I notice unfortunately that my appearance is not directly proportionate to the amount of 'me' time I have. Nor is my tan, intelligence, my eloquence or my list of hobbies. 'Me' time is going wasted, and it's a travesty that must be remedied.

So, I signed up for a French class, in hopes of becoming a more rounded person. I can't just have a great bod, I need to be able to exhibit my wealth of 'me' in an *assortment* of ways. I'll travel to Paris to buy baguettes or perhaps one day become a Canadian politician or at least get a part-time job at an embassy filing papers for passport renewals. This is 'me' time well spent.

Upon arriving to my first class, I am asked to introduce myself. Oh so subtly, I shake my shoulders and pucker my lips, and here we go on the path to being more French, sophisticated and worldly. My tense lips let out a undefined whistle, because I can't actually speak French. The years of childhood language classes are far behind me, but I push on through the hour, partitioning my brain between a) concentrating on inserting the 'Est-ce que's" in the right place and b) thoughts on how the new 'me' will be perceived in time.

It is evident quite that my grace is not directly proportional to my 'me' time. Instead it seems that my self-absorption is most definitely in direct correlation to my inability to understand the world around me.

After our warm up of who-are-you's and what-do-you do's, the French instructor, Michél, or Michèl, not sure which one, hands out an attendance form. And as we scramble to understand the simple task of jotting down our phone numbers he goes on an extra-curricular tangent of anecdotes, *en français*. We are delighted to see his eyebrows lift with a life of their own and his lips pucker just as they should. I squint my eyes and imagine Godard's superstar Jean-Paul Belmondo. Everything he says seems so cool, and there are no questions, only rhetorical questions; questions that have already been answered by Derrida, Foucault or proud bosom-bearing Liberty herself. It doesn't seem to matter that I do not understand a word of what this man is saying, I am so starved for the interpretative dance that is a romantic language that I am mesmerized by it and by the fantasy that I may one day join.

The attendance sheet arrives before me, which forces my eyes to refocus. I mouth the digits in German, which is the only way I can remember them, and after scribbling them down, lift my head back towards the Frenchman. Belmondo had disappeared, and everything seemed much harsher in the fluorescent lights blasting into my re-dilated pupils. There were French politicians names written on the white board. I sensed something knocking on the sound and blast-proof doors of my 'me' time. And Michél/èl, where was he? He was standing in the middle of the room looking awfully sarcastic, his chin and arm raised while he slowly dragging a line with his finger across his neck. It was the gestural beheading of an anonymous victim but also of my baguettes and bra-top corsets. 'Me' time all of a sudden seemed a bit ridiculous.

When I said that my grace was not directly proportional to my 'me' time but my self-absorption is most definitely in direct correlation to my inability to understand the world around me, I was referring to how lost I was in the French class and how it made me self-involved and self-conscious. But it was apparent then that my rampant narcissism is blotting out more than Michél/èl.

I am a coward. Not because I want to get into shape or learn French but because of a writers' block that I am currently experiencing that prevents me from writing about anything else. The writers' block is facilitated by the Frenchman's finger sarcastically running across his throat, by the newspapers of late and the various political campaigns.

I am a coward because I am afraid of naming the kind of things that concern me in the world. Not because I might awaken them, or endanger myself. Let me be very clear, I do not personally feel in danger of anything. Instead, I am afraid of doing a subject of importance a disservice, of revealing my confusion, ignorance, or even worse, of being accused of hijacking or exploiting something for my own artistic gain. Yes, I am faced with a problem granted only to the privileged: silence stemming from my insecurity of ownership or authority on the issues that trouble me.

I am reminded of an assistant Prof from my studies in Vancouver. He was the kind of guy who would always ask provocative questions that made everybody uneasy at lectures. He was the kind of guy who voiced his frustration with art students who would address every little thread in their grandmother's quilt to discuss identity, yet fail to address anything that was going on in the world. I have to admit, that I found him extremely annoying. He was always persecuting someone else of not doing enough. But there was something in what he said that I couldn't ignore. And even though his criticisms were not directly pointed at me, they stung and the welts lingered.

If this particular artist lives up to his own expectations or not, I am not sure. So few artists do, and if they do, they seemingly often have some sort of 'identity' connection to their cause, a sort of confidence of ownership. Is that not true? So where does that leave the rest of us? How do we avoid indifference with our own concerns? In what manner is it appropriate to engage politics in our work without overstepping our authority?

Comedy and fiction lend a hand. The strength in these mediums is to point at things we all notice but find uncomfortable, so that we can acknowledge something without feeling like we have to find answers. We can gracefully hide our opinions in the seams of sarcasm, and in the archways of anecdotes that frame seemingly banal things—things that are more naturally connected to our everyday lives: gym memberships, French classes, relationships and

the condition of the artist. We hope that one day someone will look back and place it more directly in context, so that we don't have to. We are left with these mediums because for the privileged and liberal-minded, anything too direct seems didactic, overbearing, narrow or manipulative. Is this not true? Or is it only true for the world I circulate in?

So, fiction and comedy keeps everyone feeling intelligent but generally unbothered. But what do you do when you've got a writer's block and all of the clever ways of weaving metaphors have left you? Without their filter you might get a bit over sensitive like I have recently become, finding news headlines increasingly disturbing, and fiction unable to remedy the issue. I realized this after feeling nauseous while watching Halloween prank videos depicting people carrying plastic machetes wearing gowns covered in ketchup. Post-apocalyptic fantasies that are running rampant in half the films and series out these days, seem to ignite everything in society except for a feeling of empathy, instead encouraging an ultimate (and dramatic) surrender of intellectual responsibility (pointed out to me recently by a friend) and an embrace for self-pity. Fiction and comedy are increasingly difficult to differentiate from real politics and issues as reality television personas run for the American presidency, and everyone ranging from politicians, artists, comedians and radical extremists have YouTube Channels and use many of the same camera techniques. And the art world is handing us fewer role models than ever. It might be a poor source of authority, but coincidentally today an article about the last Artissima art fair seemed to only add to the despair when it reported that according to a collection of dealers and curators, art is shifting towards subjective relationships to objects and away from conceptualism; in other words: towards 'me' time with the painting, sculpture, body etc.

So, I've hit a writers' block. When we meet, I'll tell you the rest of my gym and French class stories. But today my metaphors, sarcasm and anecdotes are at a stand off. Perhaps the block is only here to wave a red flag to the many of the things that have been omitted from the issues of this journal, in the cowardly hope that when it's compiled, printed and found again, that someone might contextualize the things that I was afraid to, even if only to point out yet again how many things were not there.

Tiziana La Melia

Would you rather have a peach or a painting of a peach?

Act 2

- delete “a” before “glass”, capital G
 - delete “(either the animal or the object)” after “dolphin”
 - replace “The eyes of a chair” with “Upholstery buttons on a couch”
 - delete “A” before “A slab of butter”
 - delete “A” before “parrot” and delete “or a crow”
 - delete “A” before “curtain” and delete “blowing in the wind”
 - delete “A” before knife, capital K
 - delete “Open mic night poem”
 - delete “Recital”
 - delete “Crying”
 - delete “A” before snail, capital S
 - delete “Heavy” before rain, capital R and period
 - delete “s” after Gulls
 - change “Machinery.” to “Machine.”
 - change “Newspaper folding” to “Newspaper.”
 - delete “Siren”
 - delete “Chopping”
-
- delete “a typed” change to just “Note.”
 - delete “A” before lamp.
 - delete “A” before hat.
 - delete “Giggling” before baby, capital B
 - delete “Suburban teenager’s bedroom.”
 - delete “A” before spiral, capital S.
 - delete “A” before “A boy doodling on the guitar.” capital B
 - replace “Smile.” with “Grin.”
 - delete extra space before “Jewels.”
 - delete “Rustle” before “trees”, capital T
 - delete “A” before “faun.” capital F
 - delete “A” before “cat”, capital C, delete “ (smokey)”

Delete Act 3

Change Act 4 to Act 3

delete “Sign up for open mic night.” Act 2 - I simplified the list: (attached image to help you find it, but notes below are accurate)

delete “a” before “glass”, capital G
 delete “(either the animal or the object)” after “dolphin”
 replace “The eyes of a chair” with “Upholstery buttons on a couch”
 delete “A” before “A slab of butter”
 delete “A” before “parrot” and delete “or a crow”
 delete “A” before “curtain” and delete “blowing in the wind”
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 change “Machinery.” to “Machine.”
 change “Newspaper folding” to “Newspaper.”
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 delete extra space before “Jewels.”
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 delete “A” before “faun.” capital F
 delete “A” before “cat”, capital C, delete “(smokey).”

Delete Act 3

Change Act 4 to Act 3

delete “Sign up for open mic night.”

delete “tenants” before “building manager”

delete “were cutting” replace with “sawed holes in the wall”

delete “blossoms” after “cures”

delete “From slogans to the uplifting epigraphs written between birthday cards. And sometimes both, the gallery occupies a space for occasions. Birthday parties, fundraisers, a temple for contemplation, a place to gripe, the grit, of the moldy grout; a hex”.

delete “Black mold doesn’t absorb but emerges out of absorption. Black mold is common to a place.” before “Black mold is who we blame”

delete “Melancholy, longing, lazy and cheap ” between “to understand” and “the spit”

I think you should delete this part:

I write from a future where I describe myself contemplating the non reflective pond.

The farmer tells us the rotten apples we are gathering into our shirts at the bottom of the tree are bad to eat.

We apologize, not knowing that the area beyond the pond and the stinging nettles is private. Without a fence, I may have understood the groomed grass to be a sign of private property, but I wanted to transgress from zones, zone in, it all belonged to us, we felt free.

He then suggested we make compote. We apologized and thanked him and thought about what the farmer might feel. Artists, always taking.

I thought of my father, how he would tell someone wandering in the orchard the same thing, that the free falls were bad. But then, who cares, they are free. Take them.

He told us that le chevre come out at night. And then what? That it is very beautiful.

Mixed messages. Did he just want to give us permission?