

Scrolling you, and the cold descriptors

March 2015

Dear AR, I'm reading your blog again; haven't done for months. I am thinking about the ways the life is performed and edited in different contexts; how we blog the body and biography, and make it artifice: which made me think of you.

And now I'm scrolling you. Down. Up. From 2012-2015. I'm unrolling you like a spool, or a parchment, made of ink. You cannibalize Marguerite Duras, Ana Mendieta, Yoko Ono and Ellen Cantor, and now this text is going to cannibalize you. I mean it in an affectionate way, for our sisters help us write.

This text is going to scroll, like *Tumblr*. A letter to you, and a letter to life-writing. Remember when Carolee Schneeman pulled that *Interior Scroll* from her vagina and read the poem aloud? Is that what you're doing?

In her book of poems Mercury, Ariana Reines writes with the 'I', just like she does online, when she talks about her mother, and Madonna, La Isla Bonita: 'this is the first video i ever saw in my life, at 376 essex street in salem'. But IRL confession, this is not. She performs confession not as candid vulnerable exposure, but as a matter of poetic artifice and feminist trickery.

Hannah Wilke made herself similarly visible in the S.O.S self-portraits, but the gaze is so fake, the poses so constructed: she works herSELF into an object of performance. As Chris Kraus indicates in the epistolary novel *I Love Dick*: '[she] started using the impossibility of her life, her artwork, and career as material... As if Hannah Wilke was not brilliantly feeding back her audience's prejudice and fear, inviting them to join her for a naked lunch.'

Ariana, as character and poet, is just as powerful 'naked'. She pulls the strings and generates verbal material out of bodily desire. The three spare words of 'I love you' take up one whole page on page 113 in the long fragmented epic 'Save The World'. Three morphemes make a confession (or a cliché), but here it is contextualised by the book we are reading: a blank arena of inscription, where sex, body and emotion is drawn from, and then shot to pieces – to make way for the written performance. The confessional 'I' is a conceit, a phonetic flimsy thing. Disappointing the Ariana-desiring reader, on the following page Reines the poet emerge: 'A woman writing poems / Produces effects / Cold descriptors'.

I find your scatological poetry anything but cold, but I love the brutality of this statement, as it takes a hammer to the girlish emotion of the preceding page, and the raw onslaught of dirty confessions before that, in which Reines writes: 'I don't want to watch / Sometimes I watch / When I do watch / I hate myself for watching.' The poetry isn't itself raw, for the poetry isn't real; there is no 'raw truth' to be displayed when twisted, fragmented and performed by its writer.

It's like you said of your first book *The Cow*: 'THE COW sounds raw but it is not. It is meant to sound like an emergency, and to exceed and exacerbate itself, just like the body.' So there's meaning and intention there, even when the writing is *sounding* like a bodily, biographical

upheaval of unedited syntax. It couldn't be any more determined. Sound is noise, raucous textual noise, but 'to sound' is also to appear, to look and to perform.

16 October 2014. It's no surprise you're a performance artist, too. I'm scrolling the photographs of your performance with Jim Fletcher, the live mediated by the digital gap. Post in more ways than one. You remove your clothes and wrestle with one another in mortal combat, before facing him head on with your right hand down your black leggings. It is overwhelmingly physical despite its documentary inertness.

And it makes me think of the contradictory confessions you perform in your verbal documents, faking the doe-eyed Lolita: 'I do not care for panties but I put my hand in them.'

Dear A, I'm looking at 26 June 2013: unedited poem i forgot i wrote maybe 2 years ago. I wonder if there's rawness in its unediting, or its typo'd title, with schoolgirl dotted i's. You begin by talking to yourself, like you would in a diary, or like I'm talking to you, writer to writer. 'Ariana / Give it Up / Just because not everyone is famous / Is beautiful intelligent or in any other way superior like Julianne / Moore...'

The poem unfolds to be an apology, to friend and lover: a way of sounding out the raw, but disguising it in collaged language. This forgotten, unpublished text is now a blog post, a confession and a poem in one. It is public even if not quite published. I wonder if it feels more urgent now it's online, as if the hastily uploaded, immaterial copy is a reaching out, to those close ones it was written for. And those strangers like me.

Poetry infects blog, and blog infects poetry. 15 May 2014. I see your reflection in your *Mercury* book, the silver copy, not my non-shiny blue one. It's an author portrait, but also a selfie performance, with you in a black bikini all blurred, as authentic as S.O.S Hannah. It's an image of a writer exposed, flirting with public visibility, and an image of a writer we try and get close to but can't. You are literally buried by the text's formal artifice. Just like in your poems.

'When I looked at your cock your imagination died.' *The third book of Mercury and so nearly your author portrait* ('so i decided i'd just snap the WHEN I LOOKED AT YOUR COCK MY IMAGINATION DIED spread from mercury and be done with it...'), *opens with a selfie, of you chatting on firefox. Mascara leaks down your face. You're looking at someone through the webcam, which sets the stage for the opening line of the poem-cum-email: 'ariana / all I can think is the sex... When you start fucking I want to be on speaker phone and jerking off... I want you to talk fucking dirty and disgusting to them and to kiss them.'*

Who is speaking, I don't know: it could be a pimp, pornographer, performance artist or boyfriend.

But it's Reines's poetry. She's just writing with a mask on: role-playing language like in the bedroom. For the abject in Reines's poems is not only found in content, where the female body is cast aside, a dirty unclean object: it is also found in the poem's formal textures. She performs the abject encounter in a syntax that is as cold and didactic as stage directions. The return of the 'cold descriptors'.

Dear A, but your writing feels warm and intimate online, as if it's coming from the body – fresh and sticky – not the cold describing mind of the poet. I'm reading what you wrote, longer form than usual, in response to Hurricane Sandy: 'for some reason,' you conjecture, 'because my guts are boiling and I am menstruating I am doing a thing I used to make much of, but haven't done in so long: writing something big directly into the internet. Writing while not thinking because I am yielding completely to the burning blood and I am fusing with it...'

Your syntax spirals, as you pen your thoughts as fast as the body bleeds. The blog becomes a stage for naked writing. It is a space of exposure, but also a space of fiction, where the private is performed and twisted in public. To unthinkingly write is a pose, a pose that is radical insofar as it's a paradox. The girl poet confessing her heart and body might look and feel like a personal document, but as a writer's text it is also public resistance.

And if blog is the medium of intimacy, it is also just another tactic; an artificial rereading of self and affect, boxed and catalogued into mediated units. Stanzas, effectively.

I'm scrolling you, reading you.

But maybe it's not you at all.

Later, I turn to my boring blue copy of *Mercury*. I'm sure I catch a glimpse of you, but then turn the page and you're gone.

Alice Butler