

A complex black and white illustration of a maze. The maze is composed of thick black lines forming a series of interconnected paths and dead ends. Scattered throughout the maze are various animals and objects, including rabbits, birds, insects, and small mechanical devices. The background is a fine grid of dots, creating a halftone effect. The overall style is reminiscent of a woodcut or a high-contrast digital print.

*Plot Holes*

Notes

Lex Brown

Broadcasts from Here

Becket MWN

Space Capital

Evan Moritz

Unbreaking

Lex Brown

Picture-texts by Jaakko Pallasvuo

@avocado ibuprofen

**Notes**  
**Lex Brown**

As I write, we are 60 some days into the state of Israel's genocide of the Palestinian people in Gaza and the West Bank. This latest turn toward deprivation and all-out bombardment is Israel's response to the deadly Hamas attacks of October 7. More broadly, these two terrible months continue and accelerate Israel's decades-long project of statehood by means of violent settlement and apartheid.

Revisiting *Communication* now brings grave context to its animated take on themes of corporate media control, digital spectatorship, and urban displacement. In 2021, I arrived at this piece partially by way of research into family history in Tulsa, and into current developments in AI. But it was largely through grappling with the dizzying and difficult politics of communication within an intimate relationship that determined the narrative. And though that personal narrative remains interior to the work, it is the fuel for *Communication's* final monologue: a supplication to rejoin with this little voice inside who intuitively knows both justice and love.

Every day now brings more grisly killing, and with every massive harm, a new "plot hole" emerges in the narratives of both the United States' and Israel's policies. To advocate for a ceasefire – an end to bombardment – has been construed as "violent" or "bigoted," resulting in censorship or loss of employment for some. Unlike the environment generated around the BLM protests of 2020, which incentivized expression, most individuals and institutions have chosen silence over justice when it comes to Palestinian life.



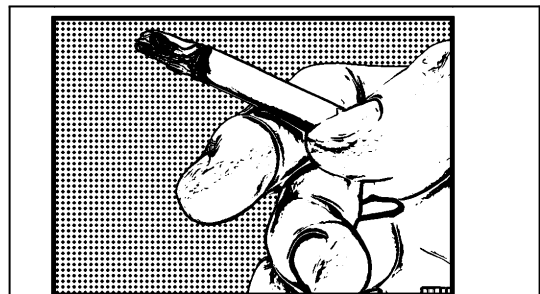
The Gaza Strip bears striking resemblance to Tulsa, Oklahoma, in the wake of the 1921 Massacre, in which incensed white Tulsans took part in the aerial bombing and burning of the black district of Greenwood, Archer, and Pine.

It has been terrifying, beyond heartbreaking, and life-altering to witness not only the level of violence, but the subsequent dehumanization and obfuscation of it by many Western governments. Worldwide protests for Palestinian liberation only underscore the ever-widening gap between the People and the Powers-that-Be.

Through the absolute horror of what we're seeing through the first-person-POV of brave civilian-reporters, we are able to locate the ground – the fundamental conditions of life that no human being is justified in violating. Covered in destruction and ruin, this ground remains unmoveable. The carnage that endangers Palestinians and Israeli hostages alike, clarifies once more what lengths our government will go in plain sight to secure its economic interests.

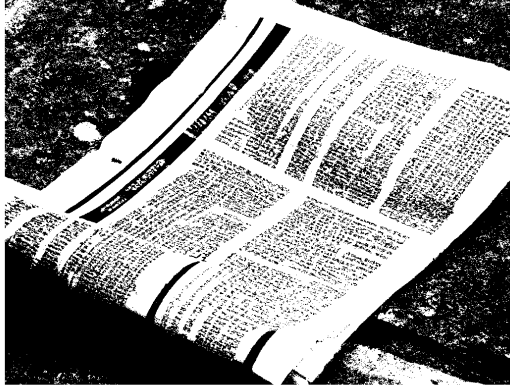
Whether or not one wants to admit it, we are connected to the ills and joys of places that seem far away. The nature of inhabiting the same planet demands that we emerge from the veil of avoidant attachment to our politics. Corporate interests, which include so much of our federal government, are aligned against life: that of the planet's and our own. Our survival, education, equity, and a nonviolent existence, continually require the energy and inspiration that comes from the waters deep within.

What skills we built last decade for self-observation, self-care, healthy communication, community building, and courageous action will only need to grow if we hope to get through this next decade. Our survival, and the possibility for just and sustainable lives, demand the consistent and persistent amplification not of the voices heard on the screen, but the "little voices" of our shared humanity.



It was interesting – how you **clung** to things the A.I. could not do. You wanted to know there was something you were **holding**. Something it could not yet **grasp**. You lived in the narrowing terrain of human virtuosity.

First, a wave of articles about how A.I. can't draw hands.



Then, articles about how it has in fact learned how to draw them.

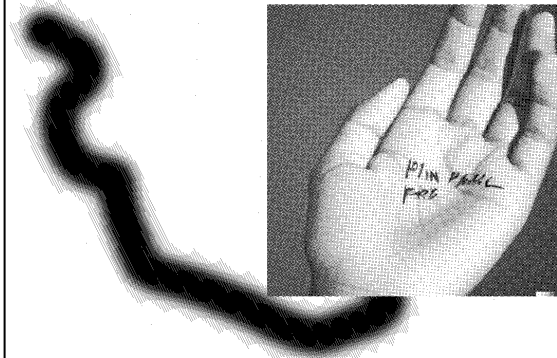
When you first encountered a deep learning model that could generate images, you asked it to make an image of "a poem written on the palm of a hand".



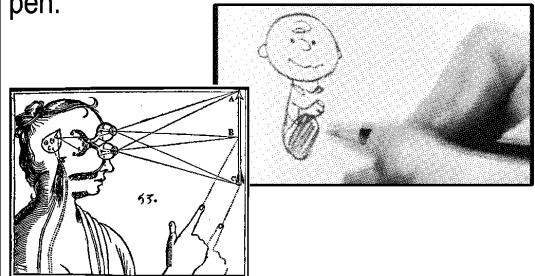
The images looked like tattooed ginger.



The current models would not produce such a flawed, distinct image. Learning happens towards something more perfect. The models are erasing their luminous mistakes and embracing what is basic.

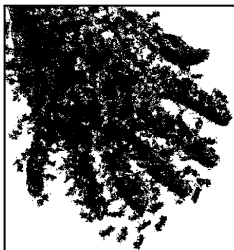


You've been thinking about the relationship between the hand, the eye, the brain and the pen.



The entire human makes a mark. The body is engaged, the body focuses its presence and intention and history to the tip of the pen, and the pen draws a meandering line.

You can't tell if the person is drawing or writing yet. On paper there is no sharp distinction between what is written and what is drawn. Some kind of recording is taking place, something passes from three dimensions to two.



You needed to develop hands to have this civilization. The complexity of the hands mirrored the complexity of thought. There was something horrifying about the way A.I. made images. You imagined a mist that solidified into data, you imagined something granular, something swarm-like, each pixel contributing to an infestation.

You looked at your hands. You thought about how hands were ultimately more descriptive than faces. You had the bulky fingers of a potato farmer. You were not meant to play the harp or compose a sonnet.



***Broadcasts from Here***  
**Becket MWN**

Broadcast seems to have become an historical form. What we have now is far more “hot” in Marshall McLuhan’s (and maybe Paris Hilton’s) terms; it is on demand, streaming, and HD: I don’t mean high-definition images, but rather audiences, which are now more targeted, sorted, and articulated than the Nilesen-ratings-approximated masses of yesteryear. Having maxed out image quality to the point of so-real-it-looks-fake, it is now the viewer who is defined, not so much in their granular particularity, but elastically definable according to the various parameters placed around them, extendable and divisible depending on the set of data they are sorted in or out of.

Such elasticity is critical for the function of contemporary media; it allows for movement, the potential to be drawn in (to this or that self-image, or in deeper, down the rabbit hole) or pushed out (of habits, of the comfort zone, of the neighborhood). Far from the pathetic or (following Baudrillard) strategic passivity of the mass audience, media consumers are now active, and not least of all as broadcasters themselves.

Artists have experimented for decades with the form of broadcast, whether radio or television, using strategies such as détournement, subversion, and piracy to work against the unidirectional flow of information. These experiments resonate today in the waning influence of traditional centralized media networks, when messages to the world can issue forth from the back of any van or bedroom; but now that everyone is a broadcaster, it becomes less a technical question of sending

transmissions than a way of being in the world: the worlding capacity of media as it shapes the medium, the message, and the receiver, its forming of a broadcaster subjectivity.

Lex Brown has engaged with broadcast directly, for example her ongoing audio project 1-800-POWERS; but the significance of broadcast extends to many aspects of her practice, becoming not so much a media format as a framework for thinking about the presence of other temporalities and spaces woven through the stitching of the present. Brown is attuned to these present others, which might emerge from spaces underneath or above where we typically focus our attention, or address us in strange tenses such as the future anterior or the past subjunctive, from speculative history as well as future archaeology.

Lex Brown’s video *Communication* also presents us with spaces nested within each other. It begins with a prologue in a planetarium, where a scientist named Wanda introduces the video as if it were a future presentation about human societies at the beginning of the 21st century. Once Wanda’s presentation begins, the setting switches to the stage of a theater, its scenic backdrop made of silhouettes of stylized windows and houses.

Aspects of this society remain familiar to us, but are extrapolated one step further: a massive telecommunications company called Omnesia, ‘plot holes’ in the collective memory (particularly around historical trauma), and mass evictions to build an entirely empty version of the city New Greater Framingham. This empty city becomes a figure with multiple meanings. Most immediately it reminds me of the luxury apartment towers that stand uninhabited in city centers, having been built not so much

to house people but rather accumulate capital in the form of real estate investment; but it also becomes a symbol for the violence of the virtual on the real itself. As Silvy, Omnesia's sentient AI program, points out, New Greater Framingham will be "ultimately, new photographs", "a shining beacon in the distance: speculation".



*Communication* suggests the many ways that we are drawn, cajoled, and coerced into 'the future', at the expense of what (and who) exists here and now, particularly those deemed 'futureless'. From the perspective of Omnesia, the present exists purely as a form of investment that may yield future profit. Even emotional labour is a market that must be "subsidized by potential futures". These and other words and phrases of Brown's script wash over the

viewer in the same way that loaded signifiers circulate in contemporary media, articulating a meaning dependent on the receiver's ability to decode, interpret, and contextualize a certain lexicon, becoming nodes themselves in the circulation of affect. In this sense, all of Brown's characters are broadcasting, even the everyday citizens

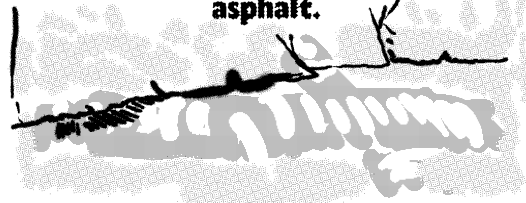
negotiating their interpersonal conflicts, whose emotional lives are very much the target of information capital, as Aspen, one of Omnesia's executives, reminds us.

Brown doesn't leave us in this linguistic state, however. Lucida, or 'the little voice', begins to speak just as one of the characters, Marie, starts to explore the backstage of *Communication's* theatrical setting, to discover its constructedness, not only the flimsiness of the scenic flats and the lights and cables that prop up the illusion, but also the firmness of the stage under the soles of her shoes. The little voice speaks in an intimate way, inappropriable by algorithmic

functions, drawing us inward rather than pushing us forward.

In Brown's practice, ways of writing and speaking resist broadcast's smooth exchanges; sense-making is slowed or questioned to allow other meanings to emerge, to search for what cannot quite be said. These messages, too, go out over the wire, perhaps as a long rambling voicemail, or an enduring silence.

**the city was full of construction. there were construction sites everywhere. all the streets had been torn open. they were changing the water pipes that ran under the asphalt.**



**some of the old water pipes had been installed during the russian empire, and had been reduced to nothing but rust, packed dirt and prayers.**

**every attempt to walk from A to B became unpleasant, full of noise and friction. all direct paths to the studio were blocked by some incomplete fabrication.**



**the city was being built up – new apartment buildings were crammed into the last empty lots, creating congested, dead-end neighbourhoods.**

**somehow the new apartments were both unaffordable and low quality. it was unclear who wanted them.**



**there was a new art academy too, with the spatial design of a prison and water pipes that kept bursting and leaking through the floors.**

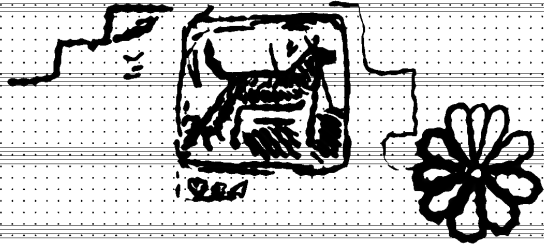


**the process of falling apart could be accelerated by cost-cutting – no need for the romanticism of slow decay.**

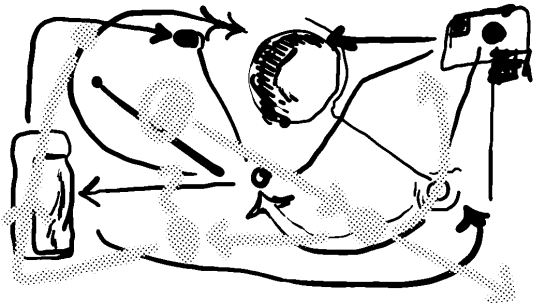
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something similar was happening to their media environment. billions spent on these innovative, global platforms, yet their feed was clogged with random dog videos and aged celebrity news items they had not subscribed to.



there was sewage of the mind, pig slop content for the 'user base'.



the thought did not take shape. there was some way to connect these dissatisfying platforms, these construction projects, the new half-empty office buildings, the bullshit jobs people did in them, with their lingering desire for glamour.

there was a familiar dichotomy, something about the difference between the mass-produced, anonymous world they inhabited and the unique, high quality objects and experiences they dedicated their life to. it was the difference between quantity and quality. it was subjective taste, having a taste.

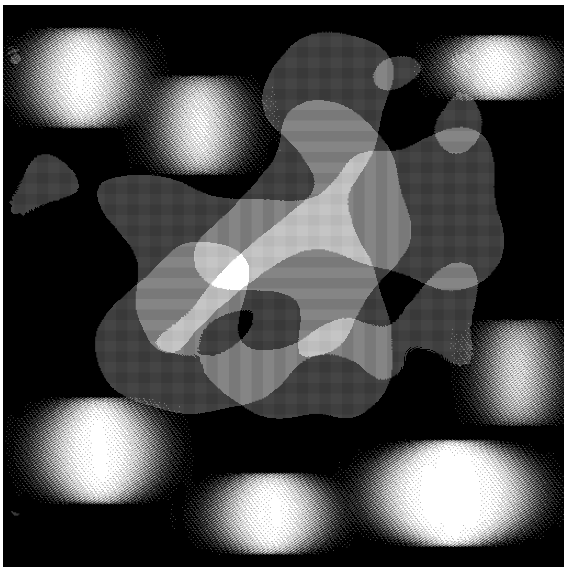


there was a familiar dichotomy, something about the difference they could not think. the construction was blocking their way. all this useless construction to keep the city livable and the water clean. they were not grateful for it. they looked down into the open ground.

they saw their own shit here, blocking the way, all this useless construction to keep the city livable and the water clean. they were not grateful for turning into mud and urine.

***Communication: Lex Brown vs.  
Space Capital***  
**Evan Moritz**

There is a well-worn story about the future that goes something like this: as humanity reaches a crisis, technology comes to the rescue. As technology moves forward, it is bound to push “mankind” to the stars. What’s more, as this happens, new machines will remedy the social ills apparent today. This story is expressed science fictionally in the American expansionist parable that is *Star Trek*, where space is a “final frontier” mirroring the American West.<sup>1</sup> However, *Star Trek* and other popular science fiction (SF) works are not the only places these stories find traction. The world’s richest people are attempting to enact this narrative. Billionaires like Jeff Bezos, Elon Musk, and Richard Branson aim to convince the public that new technologies — ones that will save the planet from climate change, reinvigorate the human spirit, and open new markets — will emerge from space exploration and particularly the colonization of the Moon and Mars.



In *Communication* (2021), Lex Brown explores the intricate connections of these speculative, SF-informed bids for a new manifest destiny. Yet, the video is neither a meditation on the possibilities and foibles of this future, nor a straight up-and-down critique of pro-space billionaires. Instead, Brown opens up an important methodology for the creation and criticism of the future, one where comedy and clowning practice unite performance and SF. *Communication* is a comedic full-court press on the futures foreclosed by SpaceX, Blue Origin, and Virgin Galactic.

These futures are walled, locked, and guarded, and the keys are in the pockets of powerful capitalists. Most are white; they are overwhelmingly men; and the majority are American citizens. Such figures now collaborate with governments to secure the future, harness historical SF to augment its value, and sell the results as a commodity. When Musk describes his desire for the Tesla Cybertruck to “be like a really futuristic-like cyberpunk, ‘Blade Runner’ pickup truck,” he conjures the SF of the past to sell the future in the present.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, the United States Space Force logo bears a striking resemblance to the United Federation of Planets emblem from *Star Trek*. Bezos formed his aerospace manufacturing company, Blue Origin, after watching *October Sky* with SF author Neal Stephenson, who then served initially as its sole employee.<sup>3</sup> However, the harnessing of SF imagery and ideas to foreclose the future and mitigate the risk to these capitalists’ investments is not limited to outer space.

Musk’s and Bezos’s SF-inflected companies emerged from a Silicon Valley milieu rife with big tech concerns engaged in the development of “cyberspace,” a concept popularized in fiction by SF author William Gibson.<sup>4</sup> Building on Gibson’s ideas, Stephenson’s 1992 novel *Snow Crash* evinces the ways SF authors co-create the geographies of cyberspace. It mainstreamed the use of the Sanskrit word “avatar,” already in use in video games as early as 1979, to describe a digitized proxy for the user. That Stephenson is now working as “chief futurist” for the augmented reality company Magic Leap reveals another attempt by the author to realize imagined SF projects in a corporate world.

Nor is the instrumentation of SF limited to the recent space race or Silicon Valley. Performance theorist Scott Magelssen

describes the initial role of the American astronaut as “almost exclusively performative.” He fulfilled “if not the actual job of flying spaceships into orbit and eventually the moon, the vital narrative and propagandistic function of staging the American story of the United States’s prowess in this final frontier.”<sup>5</sup> Courtesy of the United States Navy Mark IV pressure suit, designed by Russell Colley and later modified by NASA as a spacesuit for the first Mercury astronauts, “the astronaut would look the part of a ‘cyborg,’ a term that first appeared in print in the May 22, 1960, issue of *The New York Times*, describing the new view of the space man as ‘Man-Machine’—‘human-and- then-some.’”<sup>6</sup>

SF authors, whether wittingly, as in Stephenson’s case with Blue Origin, or unwittingly, as with Gibson, co-create these technological developments for the exploration of cyberspace and outer space.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, today’s pro-space capitalists take advantage of the notion of “cognition,” which seminal SF theorist Darko Suvin describes as a literary mechanism that “focuses on the variable and future-bearing elements from the empirical environment”.<sup>8</sup> However, where these billionaires deploy Suvin’s notion of cognition in ways that are performative, tracing paths for the recirculation and expansion of capital, Brown’s use of comedy in *Communication* turns the video into a site where SF and performance can enter into more revolutionary modes of engagement with a future open to broader, unknowable visions.

In this work, Brown plays a myriad of ridiculous and absurd characters. They are over-the-top but all, in their own way, spot-on. For instance, there is B. Marbels: a film producer turned corporate subterfuge guru, reminiscent of Dustin Hoffman’s character Stanley Motss from the 1997 film *Wag the Dog*, who

can alter reality by crafting plot holes. Brown's Aspen is a marketing-oriented executive driven by quarterly reports. Her partner, Jordie, is always live-streaming while talking; at a few points, the executive stops to reply to his subscribers. Marie is the anxious community member at the mercy of Omnesia, the corporation Aspen and Jordie run. In addition, there are two key nonhuman characters: Silvy and Lucida. Silvy functions as a far more advanced and sinister send-up of Apple's well-known virtual assistant, Siri. Silvy works to figure out how to displace community members like Marie from their homes in order to build a neighborhood intended for no one, the apotheosis of gentrification and capital expansion. Lucida is the "little voice" inside Marie. While easily drowned out, she provides a hefty counter to Silvy's code-based voice of displacement and expansion when Marie listens to her.

The corporate logic of Omnesia — its name fusing Silvy's omniscience and the total amnesia of its employees and customers — necessitates steering the future. Throughout the video, B. Marbels asks what it is that Omnesia actually does. While we don't receive a definitive answer, we are given some interesting glimpses of their practices. At the beginning, Marie mentions that she has an insurance policy against cancellation — presumably against being "cancelled" on social media. However, this means there are certain things she cannot say to people, especially those with whom she doesn't entirely agree. At one point, Marie notes, "I can't get cancelled....this emotional labor is not subsidized by potential futures." Omnesia's executive, Aspen, later

references the "potential futures" capable of subsidizing present emotional labor and protecting against cancellation when she screams in desperation, "We need to know what's going to happen before it happens so that we can make sure that it happens." This presents a fascinating future of capitalist exploitation and expansion. By understanding potential futures and making them happen, Omnesia turns events



to come into something resembling futures contracts: agreements to buy or sell a piece of equity at a future date at an established price regardless of where the market will be at that point. Through insurance and behavioral contracts, Omnesia secures the events of the future in much the way such economic tools secure the price of a commodity.

These aspects of Omnesia lead Aspen and Jordie to the conclusion that they need to colonize Mars. If they can ensure a future where Mars colonization will happen, they can safely invest in it. Aspen explains, "You know how much capital it takes to defy the laws of gravity?" To which Jordie marvels, "There's no people there, or air. It's like the perfect challenge." However, B. Marbels retorts, "And why is that your fundamental relationship with the ground? Hm? Good old

reliable.” These exchanges happen quickly, one after another, and exemplify *Communication’s* use of performance, SF, and comedy. As Aspen tries to set the future on a singular track, the desperation in her and Jordie’s voices contrasts with B. Marbels’s calm questioning. The clown-like characters and the humorous dialogue supports a rich criticism that functions quite differently from analytic or journalistic varieties. This comedy and clowning provide a counterweight to the rehearsals and SF displays staged by performers like Musk, Branson, and Bezos to try to secure the future.<sup>9</sup> The humor of *Communication’s* script and the extremity of its scenario make the absurdity of such ill-conceived space colonizing efforts and their social implications immediately sensory, a kind of haptic theory-making.

Indeed, Brown has spoken about the different roles clowning technique plays in live performance and theatre, arguing, “In theater you play to the audience, and in clown you play with the audience.”<sup>10</sup> This performative mode differs from the more



representational, theatrical displays of pro-space billionaires who play to their audience in order to persuade them of their colonizing future. Here, we might recall China Miéville’s assertion that persuasion in SF “is a function of (textual) *charismatic*

*authority*.”<sup>11</sup> I argue that not only these executives but also Brown remove the par- enthetical “textual” and allow the problem of persuasion to explode onto the stage, screen, and in the performance of everyday life. But Brown plays *with* the audience, eliciting laughter in Aspen and Jordie’s most desper- ate moments and finding flexibility and play between the real and the fantastical. Brown’s world is decidedly not the “realistic” brand of SF peddled by the Silicon leaders; it is playful, visually rich (to the point of overload), and even draws ideas from Brechtian notions of estrangement in theatre.<sup>12</sup> Brown films the scenes of the community members affected by Omnesia in a vacated theatre space, a setting that perhaps recalls the Steve Jobs Theater, which hosts product launches on Apple’s new “spaceship” campus.

*Communication’s* houses and landscapes are two-dimensional silhouettes against a blue cyclorama backdrop. Brown even plays with the scenery by attaching its components to the theatre’s fly system and jettling them out and in at seemingly random intervals — adding a punning literalization to her send-up. At the end of the work, the camera turns to face the empty auditorium, and Brown briefly drops character in a kind of *Verfremdungseffekt*: a technique of making something familiar or everyday feel strange, distant, or even alien used by Marxist dramaturgs and film- makers throughout the twentieth century.<sup>13</sup>

Brecht argued that this distancing sought to “free socially-conditioned phenomena from that stamp of familiarity which protects them against our grasp today.”<sup>14</sup> Today’s billionaire rocket men use theatre and performance to

do the inverse of what Brecht suggests: they obscure the socially-conditioned phenomena foundational to their race to space, and they attempt to make this future seem familiar and inevitable. They even try to conceal the artifice on which they so often stand, attempting to realize the “willing suspension of disbelief for the moment” that was the goal of turn-of-the-century realist theatres.<sup>15</sup> Brecht considered this to be “bourgeois theatre,” which will “always aim at smoothing over contradictions, at creating false harmony, at idealization.”<sup>16</sup>

However, Brown brings about her own take on a Brechtian estrangement of everyday life through the clown who plays with not only the audience but also the very idea of theatre itself. The entire theatrical conceit has an air of a protracted joke, where the theatre is only necessary as the basis for its send-up. By clowning the executives and their notion of the future and theatre of persuasion, *Communication* provides an instantly apprehensible SF performance that critiques the SF performance of those in power. Brown plays with not only the audience but also theatre, video, SF, capital, and those who mold all of these into a necessary future.

At the end of the video, when Marie lets Lucida — the little voice of the people — finally speak through her, she hints that there is no necessary future, no simple cause and effect that makes the colonization of the solar system inevitable. Lucida speaks of symbiosis with everything, of boundaries rather than borders. These actions are an antipode to those Silvy notes as beyond her reach: “a return to flat Earth or absolute racial superiority are acts of storytelling that are at the frontier of my cognition.” Racial superiority and the restratified society of a flat Earth are as beyond artificial intelligence as the strategies to combat them: symbiosis,

community, and de-stratification. These are human-made problems that need human (and animal, plant, etc.) solutions. Furthermore, Lucida offers an important caution to those who would resist the linear logic of big tech: “The reorganization will not come from a broken people who only know how to keep breaking, place your attention on mending.”

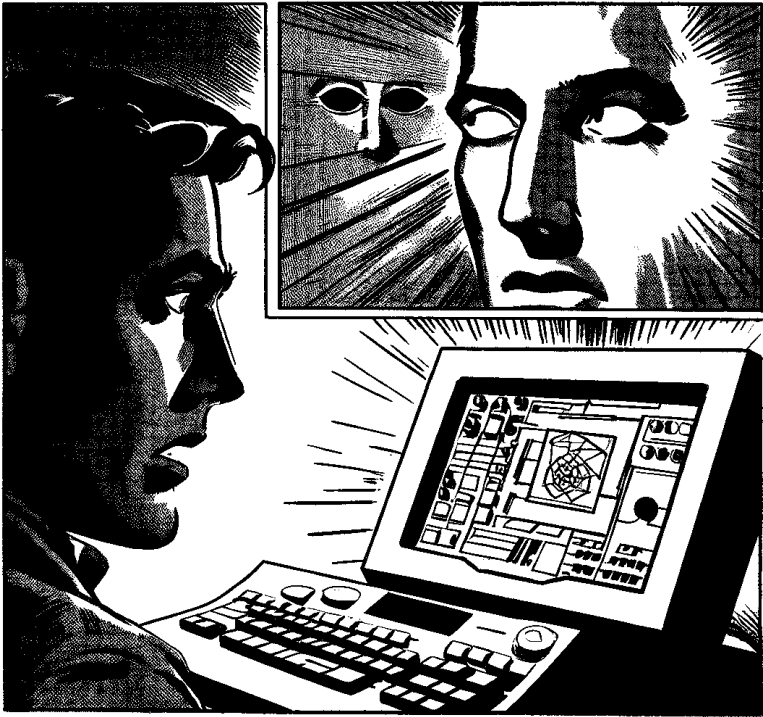
While there is still a lot to unpack in these closing lines of *Communication*, they point to an alternative future, one that is not predictable but massively distributed, where stratified borders are dissolved in favor of more personal boundaries and power comes from the radical symbiosis of fractured and traumatized communities focused on healing rather than being led by the performative “charismatic authority” of the richest SF fans. By breaking up the easy narratives of human progress through space exploration, Brown makes this well-worn SF trope seem strange and unfamiliar, an odd curiosity of the super-rich. She even makes it seem indisputably ridiculous that such people would want to do such things. By clowning these would-be charismatic authorities, Brown shows that they are, themselves, clowns, dithering with the Moon and Mars while a tragedy burns under their rockets.

## Endnotes

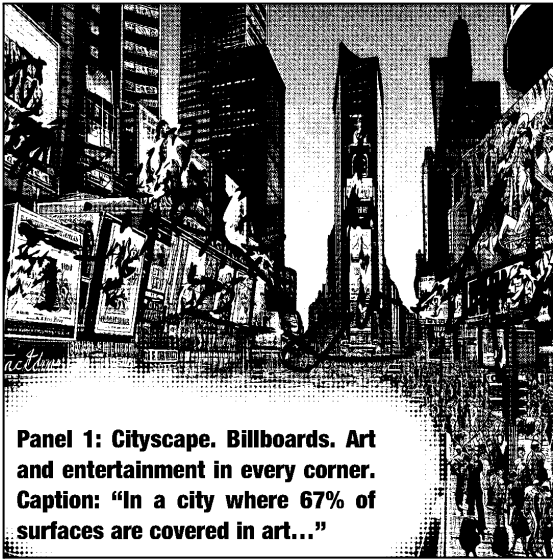
- 1 In a March 11, 1964, initial draft of a pitch for Star Trek, Gene Roddenberry explicitly characterized the show as “a ‘Wagon Train’ concept,” alluding to the popular television Western Wagon Train, which aired from 1957 to 1965. Gene Roddenberry, “Star Trek,” [http://leethomson.myzen.co.uk/Star\\_Trek/1\\_Original\\_Series/Star\\_Trek\\_Pitch.pdf](http://leethomson.myzen.co.uk/Star_Trek/1_Original_Series/Star_Trek_Pitch.pdf).
- 2 Quoted on Recode Decode, “Elon Musk,” November 5, 2018, <https://www.vox.com/2018/11/2/18053428/recode-decode-full-podcast-transcript-elon-musk-tesla-spacex-boring-company-kara-swisher>.
- 3 Tim Fernholz, *Rocket Billionaires: Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos, and the New Space Race* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2018), 69.
- 4 “March 17, 1948: William Gibson, Father of Cyberspace,” WIRED, March 16, 2009, <https://www.wired.com/2009/03/march-17-1948-william-gibson-father-of-cyberspace-2/>. While Gibson is widely credited with elaborating the idea of cyberspace in his various novels and short stories, there exists a long line of SF literature, going as far back as 1933, that describes virtual realities.
- 5 Scott Magelssen, *Performing Flight: From Barnstormers to Space Tourism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2020), 73.
- 6 Magelssen, *Performing Flight*, 83.
- 7 In his afterword for the current Penguin edition of *Neuromancer*, “Some Dark Holler,” SF author Jack Womack asks “What if the act of writing it down, in fact, brought it about?”
- 8 Darko Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 7.
- 9 The recent trend of corporations sending their CEOs to space — especially Richard Branson’s pre-filmed bike ride to the launch pad — often features crafted moments of theatricality shameless in their transparency. Stephen Colbert had to “debunk” Branson’s claim that he took a photo of The Late Show host into space. The Late Show with Stephen Colbert, “‘I’m Not Into Coups’ Claims Our Fascist Former President,” July 15, 2021, <https://youtu.be/H6EbdCxtodg>.
- 10 Lex Brown, interview with the author, March 2020.
- 11 China Miéville, “Cognition as Ideology: A Dialectic of SF Theory,” in *Red Planets: Marxism and Science Fiction*, eds. Mark Bould and China Miéville (London: Pluto Press, 2009), 238, emphasis in original.
- 12 For more on the German playwright Bertolt Brecht’s theory of theatre, see his “A Short Organum for the Theatre,” [http://tenstakonsthall.se/uploads/139-Brecht\\_A\\_Short\\_Organum\\_for\\_the\\_Theatre.pdf](http://tenstakonsthall.se/uploads/139-Brecht_A_Short_Organum_for_the_Theatre.pdf).

- 13 See the films of Laura Mulvey, Jean-Luc Godard, and the theatre of Brecht himself.
- 14 Brecht, “A Short Organum,” 8.
- 15 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* (Project Gutenberg, 2004), chap. 14, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/6081/6081-h/6081-h.htm>.
- 16 Brecht, “A Short Organum,” 17.

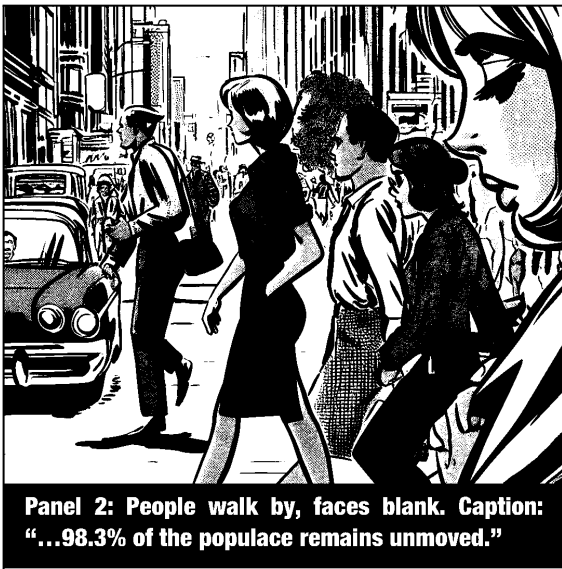
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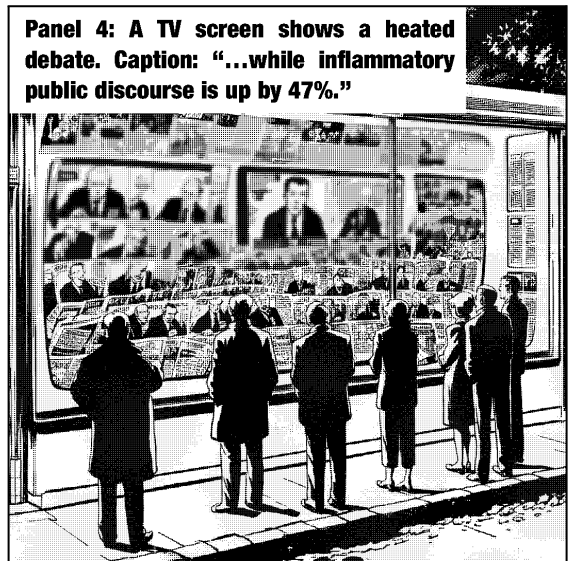




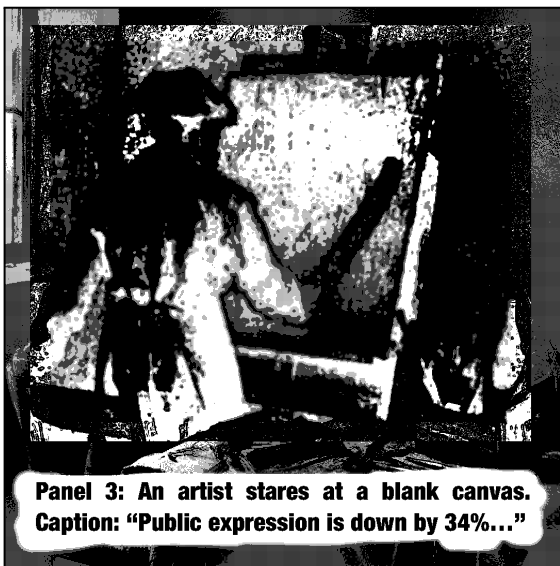
**Panel 1: Cityscape. Billboards. Art and entertainment in every corner.**  
Caption: "In a city where 67% of surfaces are covered in art..."



**Panel 2: People walk by, faces blank.** Caption: "...98.3% of the populace remains unmoved."



**Panel 4: A TV screen shows a heated debate.** Caption: "...while inflammatory public discourse is up by 47%."

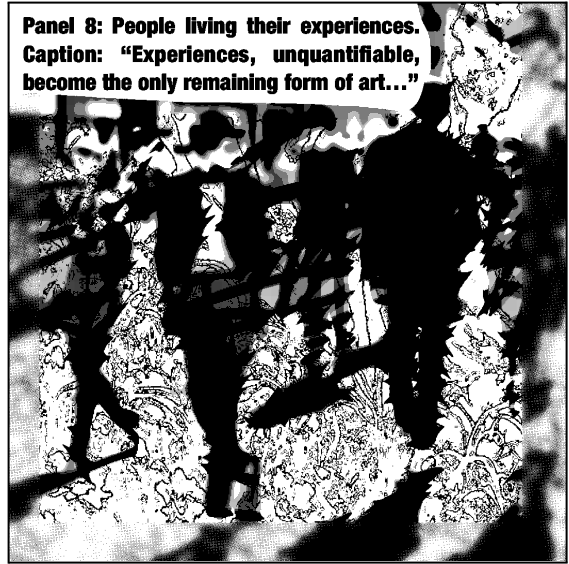


**Panel 3: An artist stares at a blank canvas.** Caption: "Public expression is down by 34%..."



**Panel 5: The artist discards their paintbrush.** Caption: "The limelight's glare increases by 200%, distorting creation."

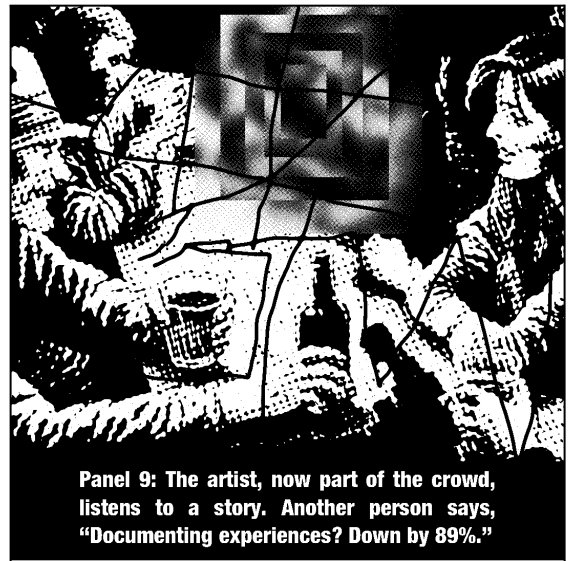
**Panel 8: People living their experiences.**  
Caption: "Experiences, unquantifiable, become the only remaining form of art..."



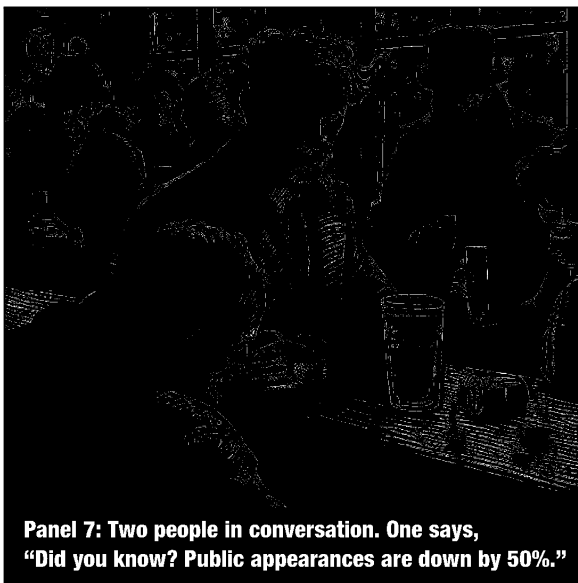
**Panel 6: People gather in a dimly lit bar.**  
Caption: "Conversations, up by 76%, become the new art form..."



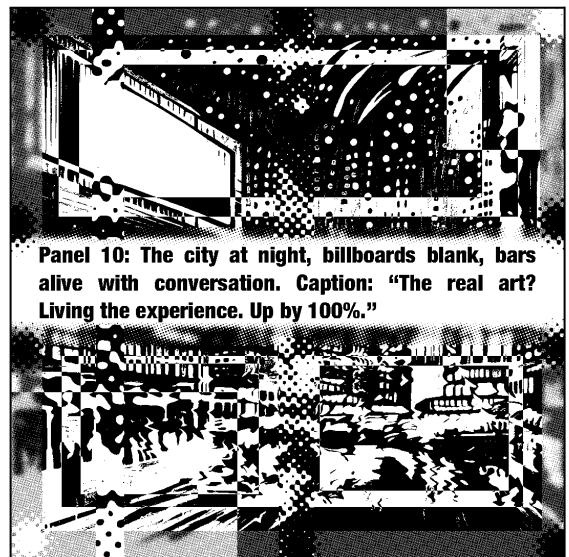
**Panel 9: The artist, now part of the crowd,**  
listens to a story. Another person says,  
"Documenting experiences? Down by 89%."



**Panel 7: Two people in conversation.** One says,  
"Did you know? Public appearances are down by 50%."



**Panel 10: The city at night, billboards blank,**  
bars alive with conversation. Caption: "The real art?  
Living the experience. Up by 100%."



## ***Unbreaking (Revisited)***

**Lex Brown**

I'm reminded of a poem that my friend Bryan Morello quotes often:

*The force that through the green fuse drives  
the flower*

*by Dylan Thomas*

*The force that through the green fuse drives  
the flower  
Drives my green age; that blasts the roots of  
trees  
Is my destroyer.  
And I am dumb to tell the crooked rose.  
My youth is bent by the same wintry fever.*

*The force that drives the water through the  
rocks  
Drives my red blood; that dries the mouthing  
streams  
Turns mine to wax.  
And I am dumb to mouth unto my veins  
How at the mountain spring the same mouth  
sucks.  
The hand that whirls the water in the pool  
Stirs the quicksand; that ropes the blowing  
wind  
Hauls my shroud sail.*

*And I am dumb to tell the hanging man  
How of my clay is made the hangman's lime.  
The lips of time leech to the fountain head;  
Love drips and gathers, but the fallen blood  
Shall calm her sores.*

*And I am dumb to tell a weather's wind  
How time has ticked a heaven round the  
stars.  
And I am dumb to tell the lover's tomb  
How at my sheet goes the same crooked  
worm.*

Red occurred to me like a wave in the spring of 2021. It was an all-over sensation, a wordless hankering to Make Big Red. Make Red Big. Taste red, weep red, rejoice in it, be as deep red on the outside as we all are on the inside. Anger was just one of the inclinations that emerged from the wave. Others were *Healing* and *Purity*. Not the ecumenical purity of white, but the red purity of life, of feeling flushed through, reckoning with the wild endings that beget new growth.

On a perfect fall day, the green in the leaves grows old. I sit on a sloping rock watching the water in the Wissahickon Creek. The creek seems to tingle with imperceptible feelings, its surface marbled and swirling. An old man coughs. My back grows sore as I sit and reflect.

The waterfall is a hundred yards away and so is last year, but I can still hear it. We all feel the ineffability of what we were thrust into and summoned out of (still in?), though we don't really talk about the latter part deeply. We talk about statistics and rates and dates, but what about the wake of passing through universes? We have gone through so many. My own passage began years ago, with an image.

In my class, I ask students about different kinds of images: an image that makes you feel like you were there, an image that tells the time, an image that restores you, an image that altered you. That question is partially an investigation into what a younger generation considers to be "lasting," and partially a test to see if I'm Bruce Willis in a room of Haley Joel Osments.

I was not "OK" after Derek Chauvin killed Michael Brown. I did not get over that murder; I have not emotionally caught up to the ones, individual and mass, that have occurred since. *What had happened was I*

had never before seen four hours of moving image calcify into a static one, the news broadcast rendering him doubly-still. Michael Brown was simultaneously hyper-attended and utterly unattended to in an incomprehensible, quantum gaze. A frequency in my brain changed.

That year (2014) I started to work with fiction because I could not cope with fact. Fact soon would have a tenuous place after 2015–16–17–18–19–20–21. To recount the non-sense we have endured is difficult. Where has the fact gone? No matter what narratives you do or don't believe, it's hard to summarize the uneasy temporal speeds we've experienced in a matter of years.

Byung-Chul Han describes this experience of diffuse temporality in *The Scent of Time*:

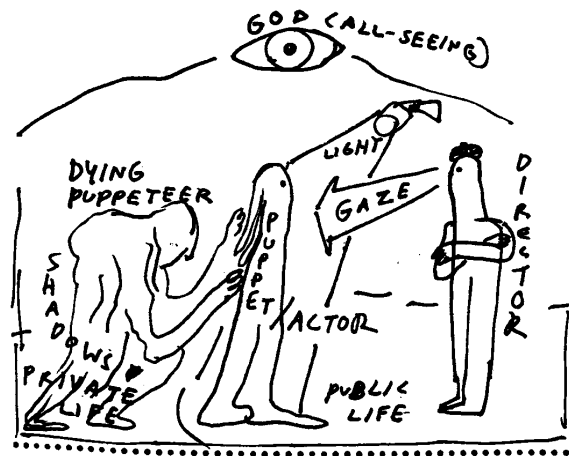
*“One of the symptoms of de-narrativization is the vague feeling that life itself is accelerating, while in reality nothing is accelerating. When looking more closely, what we find is a feeling of being rushed. Genuine acceleration requires a directed process, but de-narrativization yields an indirect, directionless movement, a whizzing which is indifferent towards acceleration. Because of the reduction in narrative tension, events whiz around without any direction; they are no longer steered on to narrative paths...”*

*Time loses its scent when it is divested of all deep structure or sense, when it is atomized or when it flattens out, thins out or shortens. If it detaches entirely from the anchoring which holds, even inhibits it, then it becomes devoid of all support. Taken out of its mount, so to speak, it rushes off.”*

I think I became an aerosol in 2017. After writing and performing a one-woman operetta (*Focacciatown*) that dealt with the

role of satire in the early days of reality TV presidency, I felt myself whizzed into a “de-narrativized interval” via romantic relationship.

I was a particle being who tried to coalesce within the arms of another. I would float and shimmer around him, sometimes I would skitter and scatter, searching for my own once-familiar gravity. My heart fluttered. It was my total reality, what with the weight of public “facts” having gone out the window in 2016.



When his arms weren't enough to hold, I tried to gather myself within his eyes, projecting myself through the threshold of his eyes and into his world, and within his rules. It's risky business trying to unbreak from diffusion this way; ceding the power of self-definition is point where many of the problems begin. I became, over some years, unfamiliar to myself – most prominently in the department of language.

Were our fighting words really our words, or were they exacerbated by the stress of a sound-bite world that felt totally unhinged from logic? Talking and understanding each other seemed to have an indirect relationship. I felt too permeated by what

Marie calls “aggravation or attrition or aquitrition” in *Communication*. I wish I could roll back the tape but there is none.

I call this period of mid-2010s and onward “Spaghetti Times:” most elements of rhetorical life seemed tangled and twisted – a paradigm one *Daily Show* online commenter summarized by saying: “The new racism is racists calling people racist for calling out racism.” He used racism, but you can swap it out with any -ism of social control, be it between 2 or 2,000,000 people.

And as diffuse as I already felt, I did not know that I could further implode within a confining relationship, becoming a subatomic being. Seeking refuge from an ever-splintering social space, I became more careful with words around him, but it seemed to prompt further combustion. I just became smaller.

Part of this shrinking included an inability to validate my own feelings of being controlled, versus what was conditioned by a larger social reality, or if I should even try to separate the two. In *Communication*, Aspen and Silvy call these gaps in the historical narrative “plot holes,” but I arrived at the notion through the plot holes of this intimate relationship. By the time the pandemic hit, I was finally small enough to slip through one of them, following the small voice inside of me that I had forgotten, or rather willfully ignored.

The voice needed no-body. And in this new, strange “*indefinite time of pause*” it was the only thing that remained. I began to listen to myself again. The voice was so small, as small as something invisible in the air. And I let myself be overcome by my intuition. It guided me to unbreak, to put weight back into the truths of my own experience, into

the arms of healing, which is the only way I know how to be right. For what were facts anymore?

I watched through screens as monuments toppled, and buildings were burned and renamed. I wondered *Why stop there? Why burn a statue, and not a data center? Why not burn the thing that really controls us? What if that had happened on January 6 instead of the Capitol Insurrection... What would be the reaction? I thought it was telling how little conversation there was about the symmetry of the far right and far left’s goals, equal in magnitude, but opposite in direction. Swarming the streets, from afar you might think they’re the same group of people (except for the flags.) But those are the complications of a heavily visual world. We may never know the history of destroyed public memory.*

Like most people in America, I wrestled with the constituent acts of “fixing things,” “changing things,” “dismantling things,” and “reordering things”. I deeply believe that personal, internal evolutions are at the center of a more hospitable and habitable world. There is a deep unearthing process happening in this here age of Trauma and Speed.

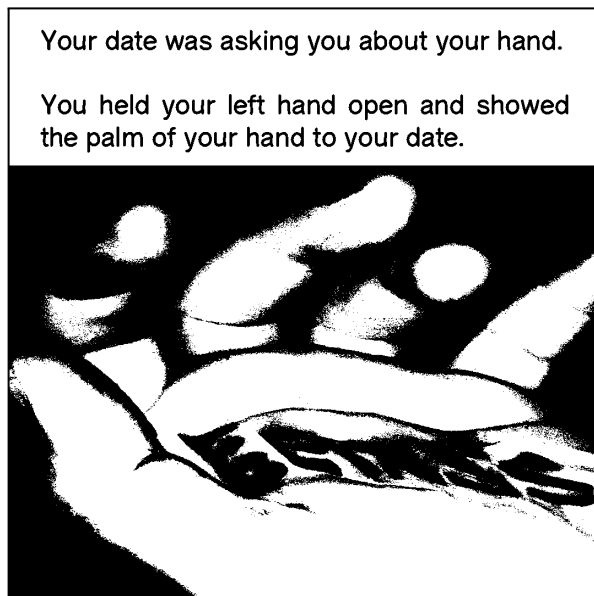
Towards the end of *Communication*, Lucida says “The reorganization will not come from a broken people who only know how to keep breaking. Place your attention on mending.” “Breaking” is intentionally ambiguous as to whether it is self-inflicted or done to another. Regardless. place your attention on mending.

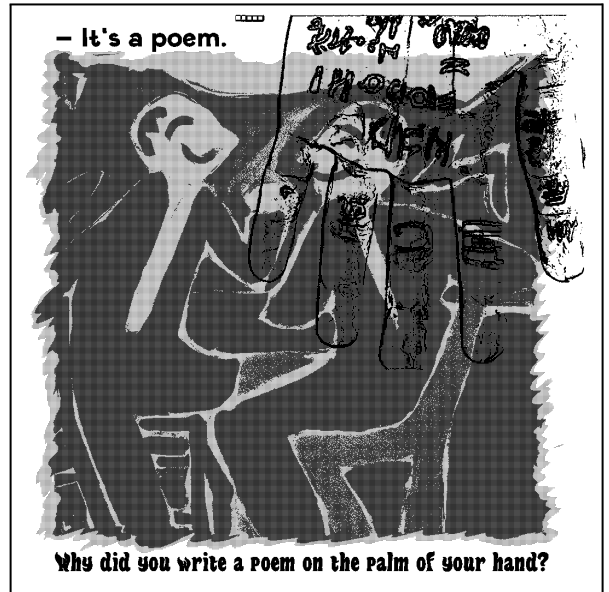
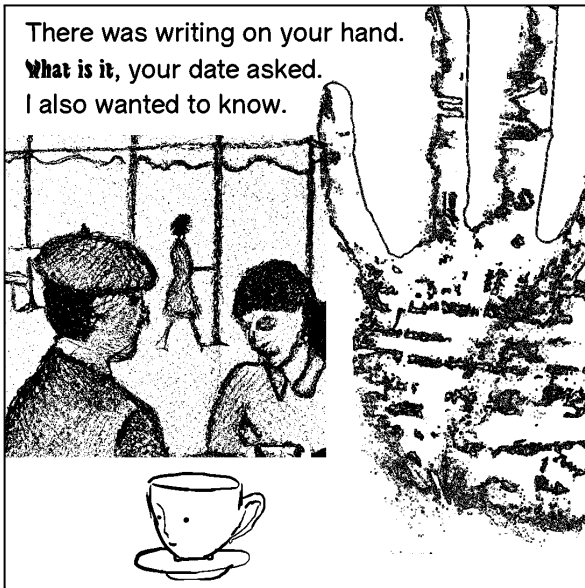
In beginning to more deeply heal, one confronts shame. Shame is an ancient minefield, forcing us to submerge traumas for another person to detonate or avoid. The minefield is a public risk that can be

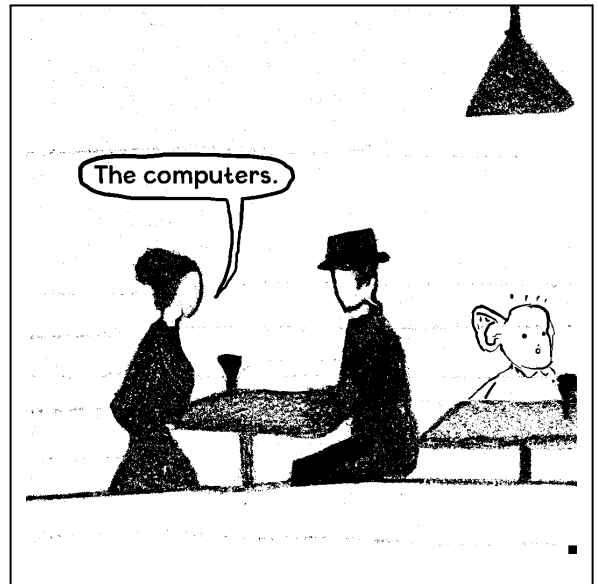
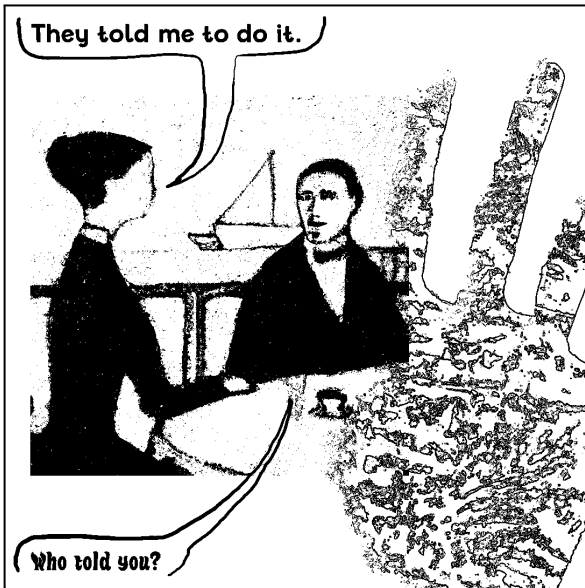
activated by any number of people, processes, or events, but it's sown with intimate dangers. Perhaps it is the same field on the edge of the city, not only Heartbreak, but the ancient ruins on top of which Heartbreak was built. The mines have to be uncovered from the shame that buries them, and deactivated before a new being, or new people, or new self, can step across.

Love happens in the midst of so many other things, not the least of which is politics and language. This writing is language for the memories of a particular time, to reconcile the blankness of a field left behind after an internal battle I can barely forget, because my heart's defense is to make me remember, make it a story, make it make sense.

*Originally written and distributed by Deli Gallery (New York, NY) for the solo exhibition Defense Mechanisms (2021)*



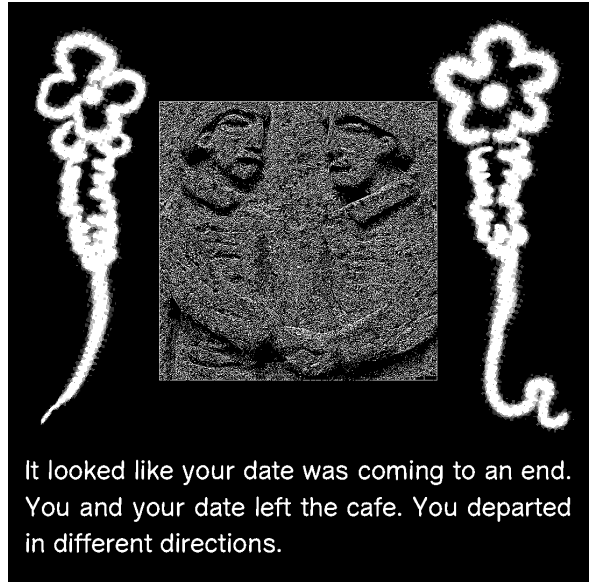






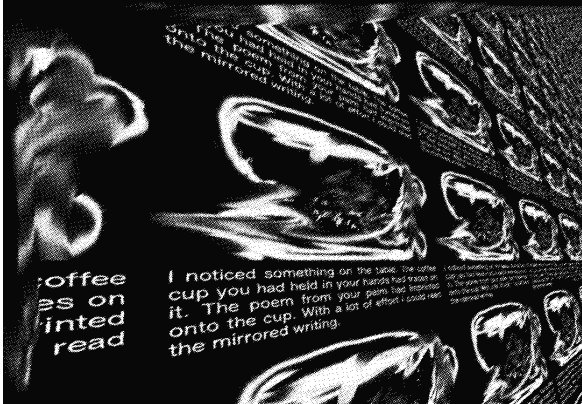


The same networked intelligence that told me that I should become a dentist, that I should run more, that I should adopt a rescue dog, that I was ugly, that I should eat more candy and play more video games, and feel more guilty about it, had told you to write this poem on your hand.. why? Why were you chosen?



It looked like your date was coming to an end. You and your date left the cafe. You departed in different directions.

I noticed something on the table. The coffee cup you had held in your hands had traces on it. The poem from your palm had imprinted onto the cup. With a lot of effort I could read the mirrored writing.



7

**Obsessed, bewildered**

**By the shipwreck  
Of the singular**

**We have chosen the meaning  
Of being numerous.**

Special thanks to Bel Ami and to all my  
friends in Los Angeles.

*Compiled by Lex Brown and printed by  
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