

illustrated by Beyza Durmuş

ZEA ASIS



essays on dressing up and consumption

STRANGE INTIMACIES

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**STRANGE
INTIMACIES**

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To you,

*who may feel alone
during this strange time
and perhaps even before then*

“

*My new life was all about fumbling for
keys in the dark.*

—Deborah Levy

*Our inclination, our nature, is to
communicate the beautiful and the
fragrant however we can. To make of
the world a bouquet. Or a vase.*

—Ross Gay

”

*Essays on
dressing up and
consumption*

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Pre-loved

“Suffused with light, she sprang into existence. Rid of cares and wrinkles, what she had dreamed of herself was there – a beautiful woman. Just for a second...there looked at her, framed in the scrolloping mahogany, a grey-white, mysteriously smiling, charming girl, the core of herself, the soul of herself; and it was not vanity only, not only self-love that made her think it good, tender, and true.”

—Virginia Woolf, *The New Dress*

The world is not a solid continent of facts sprinkled by a few lakes of uncertainties, but a vast ocean of uncertainties speckled by a few islands of calibrated and stabilized forms.

—Bruno Latour

If Saturday afternoons had a certain texture to them, it would be this: thick, rich, sun-warmed. Like honey. It was the kind of Saturday afternoon allocated to siestas and long, aimless walks in the mall. And yet on this particular Saturday afternoon, I booked an appointment to visit the showroom of an online vintage store I discovered on Instagram. In a kind of stupor, my boyfriend and I drove along EDSA, skins pricked by the afternoon heat while we listened to the Bawal Clan on the car stereo.



Our route started from Cubao all the way to Makati, moving deeper and deeper into narrow passageways,

past streets named after Spanish women like daughters of the town's el jefe: *Asuncion. Fatima. Lourdes. Carmela*—fittingly, the word *calle* is a feminine noun for road in Spanish—before we turned to *Teresa* Street. Markers of the city district were gradually replaced by the quotidian stamp of Filipino middle-class suburbia: iron gates and potted plants and galloping children. We were looking for the *Florentina* building. These days, it's uncommon to name a building after a person, let alone a Spanish name, unless that person was a multi-billionaire or a historical figure. *Florentina*. Condominiums now had more grandiose names.

In this part of town, a building named *Florentina* is a welcomed relic of the past. Back when tenants had close relationships with their brokers who visited often and offered chocolate cake or indoor plants to those they treated like their own children. Maybe *Florentina* was a wealthy 80-year-old spinster who owned various properties in the surrounding district, but had a special relationship with her namesake building and so was known endearingly among the tenants as Doña *Flor*. Reasonably, creative millennials living in the city who wanted to move away from their parents chose to settle here. Aging, earth-colored buildings adjacent to city districts named after grandmothers like *Florentina* usually had relatively cheap rent to all but make up for its dim and uninviting facade. And despite the dingy and gloomy hallways, the units were spacious enough and had windows for sunlight to stream in. For hopeful 20-somethings whose art was their religion and the financial struggle they considered a necessary rite of passage, space and sun was a good bargain for their starting salaries.

The owner of the store texted me to come up to the penthouse unit. Wrought iron doors barred our entrance to the staircase that led to the final floor. After a few moments, a tan Filipina wearing a black slip dress, who I presumed was the owner of the thrift store, was making an art-house production of the sound of her flip flops and the jangle of her keys. Her hair was still dripping wet; she had sunken, deep-set eyes and full lips.

As we made our way up the steps, a sudden, bursting light flashed across our vision. When our eyes adjusted to the assault, we found ourselves on a bare and wind-swept brick terrace. On the left was an ornate glass table with a clean ashtray; behind it a wooden glass door that led to the unit itself. Around six Ionic Greek-like columns stained with grime fortified the edge of the terrace. On the far end was a closed-off area of shelves stacked with kitchen condiments and a sink. An outdoor kitchen, perhaps.

Before she led us to the showroom, we had a cigarette outside. She told me her name was Maria and that this was her full-time job. There was a sulky coolness to her demeanor, briefly punctured by childlike retorts when she would press on about something I shared. We talked about our jobs and side hustles. About pop-ups and music. She modeled for a few local fashion brands and starred in videos for rap artists. She went to fashion school originally to learn how to design clothes but realized she was better at handling the affairs of merchandising.

When I walked through the wooden glass door behind the table, I found four racks of clothes displayed unassumingly in the two corners of the room. A brass-bound wooden chest. A half-body mirror. A gray sheepskin carpet. This was the showroom. I surmised that the whole penthouse was divided into three sections—the left hand side seemed to be their bedroom. A mattress was strewn on the floor and a man, who I later found out was her boyfriend, was playing Xbox.

No formalities or introductions were exchanged. I stepped inside to peruse the clothes in the racks, which were organized by: 1) outerwear, 2) dresses, 3) tops, 4) skirts and trousers. The slow *cling-cling* of one metal hanger colliding with another metal hanger as I indulged in the sheer pleasure of flipping through hangers as mindfully as a picture book and finding one that held my gaze: an electric blue with a delicate lapel collar, a round neck with black-and-white illusionist pattern, an orange knit cardigan. Maria stood by as I went through the garments and occasionally ambled outside to pick up a conversation with my boyfriend.

She told me that if I saw anything I liked, I could enter the bedroom and try them on. When I snuck into the room with clothes in hand, I noticed two things—that it was bare and well-lit and in a moment of acute self-consciousness agonized that it was equal parts exhilarating and draining to be setting clothes aside on the floor, considering the intimacy of such an encounter, as in a curious experience of not only witnessing a showroom, but a person's private space.

*THESE CLOTHES
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It was almost inappropriate to be stripping to my underwear. It resembled walking into the dark ice-cold cinema mid-film or reading an abrupt introduction to a short story. Here I was witnessing the story of these two lovers on their usual Saturday afternoon as I discriminated against one piece of clothing from another. Yet the more important coupling here was between me and the clothing. These facts released a kind of kinetic flush on the surface of my skin that led me to think: These clothes *had lives*. Or more appropriately, they *were lived in*. Conjuring an album of faces and bodies.

CONJURING AN ALBUM OF
FACES AND BODIES.

I went to the Underground Gallery in Makati Cinema Square for an exhibit by Isha Naguiat. The gallery was a small, 20 square-meter studio space at the top floor of a 40-year-old retail mall leased by money changers, gun clubs, and crystal shops. The artist constructed different pieces of clothing that hung in the air like fresh laundry on a hill, albeit plastered on organza frames: a baby dress, a baptismal gown, pink lingerie. A particular construction that caught my eye was of two t-shirts made of white organza bound at the bottom like conjoined twins, aptly named *Gemini*. The fabrics accreted into a shimmer, where the studio lights hit them.

Their forms were quivering between emergence or submersion.

In Platonic practice, Western philosophical tradition neglected the corporeal, the material, and the sensual in favor of the abstraction and prioritization of the mental, rational, and spiritual. Given these lapses in philosophy, how then is our clothing related to our experience of self and the world?

Let us consider the **clothed** body, as opposed to the ~~naked~~ body. Being clothed, Descartes presumed, is the mark of a distinctively human form of consciousness, of being a “person.” Naguiat’s garments implied the presence of a persistent selfhood in changing dimensions, as in the selection of garments constructed that implied a timeline in a course of a life. Joanne Entwistle, a sociologist and author of the book *The Fashioned Body*, said that dress constitutes a “marginal space” and ambiguously marks the boundary between the body and social world.

Moreover, there exists an intimate relationship between the human body and the fabric that adorns us. In his book *Discourse on Inequality*, the Genevan philosopher Rousseau delved into this complexity through the terms *amour de soi* and *amour propre*, the former being the mode of self-love associated with instincts for self-preservation (clothing to adapt to our environment); the latter being self-esteem or vanity (clothing to please ourselves for being seen by others).

I looked at the garments and felt the intimacy of the organza fabric on my skin. Or perhaps the fabric as my skin—subject to corporeal alterations and degenerations. An epidermis that one sheds depending on the exigencies of the present and the vacillations of my own identity.

Floating,

these

fabrics

as

skin

bear

with lightness

the strain

of

constantly

shifting

selves.

I begin to wonder: Aren't pre-owned clothes the discarded veneer of their past owners? They are given away once they judge that these clothes no longer fit the *amour de soi* and *amour propre* of their lives. These clothes (made of cotton, wool, polyester, velvet, etc.) become empty vessels that are buried in landfills, recycled and torn to become part of another whole, or remain virginal. When I was in the dressing room of that penthouse unit, one word ran in my head at that moment: *untraceable*, a word commonly or uncommonly used—depending on your line of work—to refer to history and the lack thereof. As consumers of pre-loved clothes, we are complicit in the erasure of these histories and contrive a new one better-fitting of ourselves.

These garments take on a symbolic role. If I *bought this blazer, maybe people will take me more seriously*. Even oppressive to some who discover that they have to move one, two, three sizes up. But preloved garments sold in a thrift shop are evidence of the other side of this process. Sometimes it is transcendence: If I sell these clothes, I will make room in my closet for new ones that more accurately represent the “me” now. Or maybe they are in new stages of their lives, in a different country caught in a different climate. In a different headspace caught in a different body. Sometimes the reasons are financial, a student raising money for her tuition or a cash-poor millennial just wanting to earn an extra buck to sustain her soy-latte lifestyle.

1. There is beauty in the accrue-ment of the discarded.

2. I don't want to romanticize the idea of finding lost things. But just like the law of conservation of matter, *matter is neither created nor destroyed*. Things that are thrown away still exist, even as they are forgotten. They exist and assume new forms and bear their exact characteristics. It is nature saying that things are worth a second life. Even a third, fourth, fifth and so on.

3. There is a domestic and tragically human tenor to the word pre-loved. Even more so as they seem to only apply to objects—the arbitrariness of its etymology. We don't describe someone as a pre-loved woman, a pre-loved man. Perhaps, we already perform within those assumptions. A redundant signifier. Or maybe there are other ways to describe us and in the plane of material things (as in our possessions and not our bodies), their personification is a way of providing evidence to our attachment.

4. Jenny Odell's *The Bureau of Suspended Objects (B.S.O.)*, an ongoing archival exhibit, aims to photographically archive as many discarded or about-to-be discarded objects. “It stems from the assumption that we are estranged even from those objects closest to us, or that their inner workings and past lives are too often experienced as opaque and inaccessible.” As such, Odell said, they “research how to ‘read’ and understand an object on its own terms—to understand why and how it came into being in an attempt to document the objects’ origins, materials, use, and previous/possible lives.”

5. Understanding the changing symbolic role(s) of dress is understanding the accumulation and dispersal of emotional weight. I gave away all the hand-me-down clothes from my sister when I turned 20. They were bursting from a mold-infested paperboard carton. Sisterly sentimentality was part of the wholesale losses made when the once-impressionable adolescent develops her own way of thinking and judgments about the world. Maybe we were different people to begin with and there was already a different version of myself waiting further in the future: A hollow mannequin of incongruous attributes existing before its time and to be filled in by a substance that only holds a modicum of the past self.

6. Fondness peters out to estrangement. And so its own recursive cycle begins.

7. There is an image of a millennial young woman: She is a master at the art of thrifting, educated in navigating online resale sites, seamlessly conducting try-on hauls, and perfecting the angle of her wide smile when she gets her hands on what is universally known as a “precious find,” the diamond in the rough, the needle in the haystack, the Dior in a mountain of the nameless and unbranded. She is the director and producer of lookbooks and adept in the arrangement of her own *mise-en-scène*. The audience is usually enamored, maybe envious. And if they—also young millennial women—feel a deep association, will in turn become her faithful and highly affectionate followers. This is the dream material: To be seen, through the 1920 x 1080 scope of a rectangular lens. Project this image of a free-wheelin’ millennial woman high on the inexpensive luxuries of her own life, whose wants and desires are relatable to every woman, but whose providence is exclusive only to the few. She may be characterized as totally self-involved but a shamelessly real, peerlessly fashionable, and charming young woman.

8. Did this young woman exist? Aren’t we all just victims of appearances? An amalgamation of carefully considered items of purchase; parted lips and wet face, hair slicked back. Rosy, active, skin blue-ish in polaroid prints, barely there. Upper-class, languorous, half-obscured by the light, and absent of any conspicuous work.

9. Emily Weiss, the founder of Glossier, said that “what’s very motivating to us is this idea of every single woman being an influencer.” Maybe this is what it is: a simulacrum.

10. In a visual art project entitled *Primer*, Jenny Odell collects moments extracted from YouTube makeup tutorials, in which the person applies “eye primer” or eyeshadow. Initially she went in search of those moments where the eye is held open—a kind of vulgar, low-res invitation to one’s soul—but became more fixated on the closeups of the delicate, filmy skin of the eyelid. “Here, its fragility is visibly palpated by the (often manicured) finger: a moment where the softness of the human is translated by the softness of digital video,” Odell said.

11. There is a certain brand of vlogger, an inexact and outdated title, for what I think is a most often feverish and artistic endeavor. Indulge me: they are more like visual essays. Those that I adore are often sincere and literary in a way that hints at greater concepts of ontology and brims with aching interiority. My favorite of which is a try-on haul that flows like a cinematic piece. She is hanging her clothes in a North London backyard. There is a softness to it, a silken exterior. The camera bursting with sunlight. A close-up of her eyelids, ears, cheeks, lower back. Who else can depict the ritual of fitting thrifted clothes the way they do? Mood-boarding narratives for clothes that at first glance would have only their castoff status, retail pariahs, as their unifying feature.

12. Dressing up is the adoption of the habit of covert day-dreaming.

13. Perhaps this is my dream. Not to be a Youtube star per se, but to behave in such a way that my projects, interests, and pursuits are worthy of an audience. In this dream I see her as a jumble of sense impressions, often in the color and shape of clothes.

14. Aspects of myself (who I am, who I am not, who I may be becoming) continue to be negotiated and renegotiated through the visual, embodied representation of dress. Often, I am surprised by how some ideas, possibilities, ambivalences and anxieties with which I may find difficult to grapple, much less resolve, in a verbal or conscious manner are articulated by what I wear on a normal day or by the decision to add color to my appearance for a specific occasion. I am buoyed by my piece of satin lavender skirt to announce the “I” that is myself, the “I” that exists in the world.

15. It is a peculiar kind of nostalgia—yearning for a life lived by garments once owned. But it lends a kind of perpetuity to things. Even as they sit in between the shapeless, gray fog of the past and the warm late-afternoon alfresco of what lies ahead.

I have been in the city for seven years now. The jeepney smoke and sewer smell rising from manholes intersperse with the third-wave coffee aroma wafting to the streets. A gradual overhaul of my wardrobe came as I earned a degree and got my first job as a writer.

Now at 23, I have turned to the repose of neutral palettes and silk bias cut midi skirts. In fact, before the start of quarantine, I wore slip skirts three to four times a week. I have one in pearl, topaz, onyx, sage, almost like they were my own collection of gems bringing with them their own energies. It brings me surprising moments of comfort when I sit and cross my legs; a softness in between my chafing thighs or feel a cold breeze hike up my calves on brisk days during my walks in Rufino Street in Makati.

I know now that there is a certain grace to be found in the not-scrambling, the dressing appropriately, *preparedly*, so your body and in turn, moments inhabited, are not fractured by inappropriate sweating or meek apologies. I like that I can take my blazers off on work days that turn into spontaneous nights of drinking with coworkers. The convenience of slip skirts having an understated sensuality fit for long hours in the office when paired with a colorblock sweater or trading cocktails with a friend I've reconnected with at a speak-easy when worn with a lace cami top. A collarbone revealing itself. Elbows grazing against each other.

The Monday after I left the showroom, I visited the alterations shop near-by my office to get the only purchase I made tailored to my body (for certain concessions are made by a garment with a previous life). The waistband of my Anne Klein wool trousers, in the shade of sesame, now greet the recesses of my hips with a cadence, while the length of them brush my toes with soft kisses.

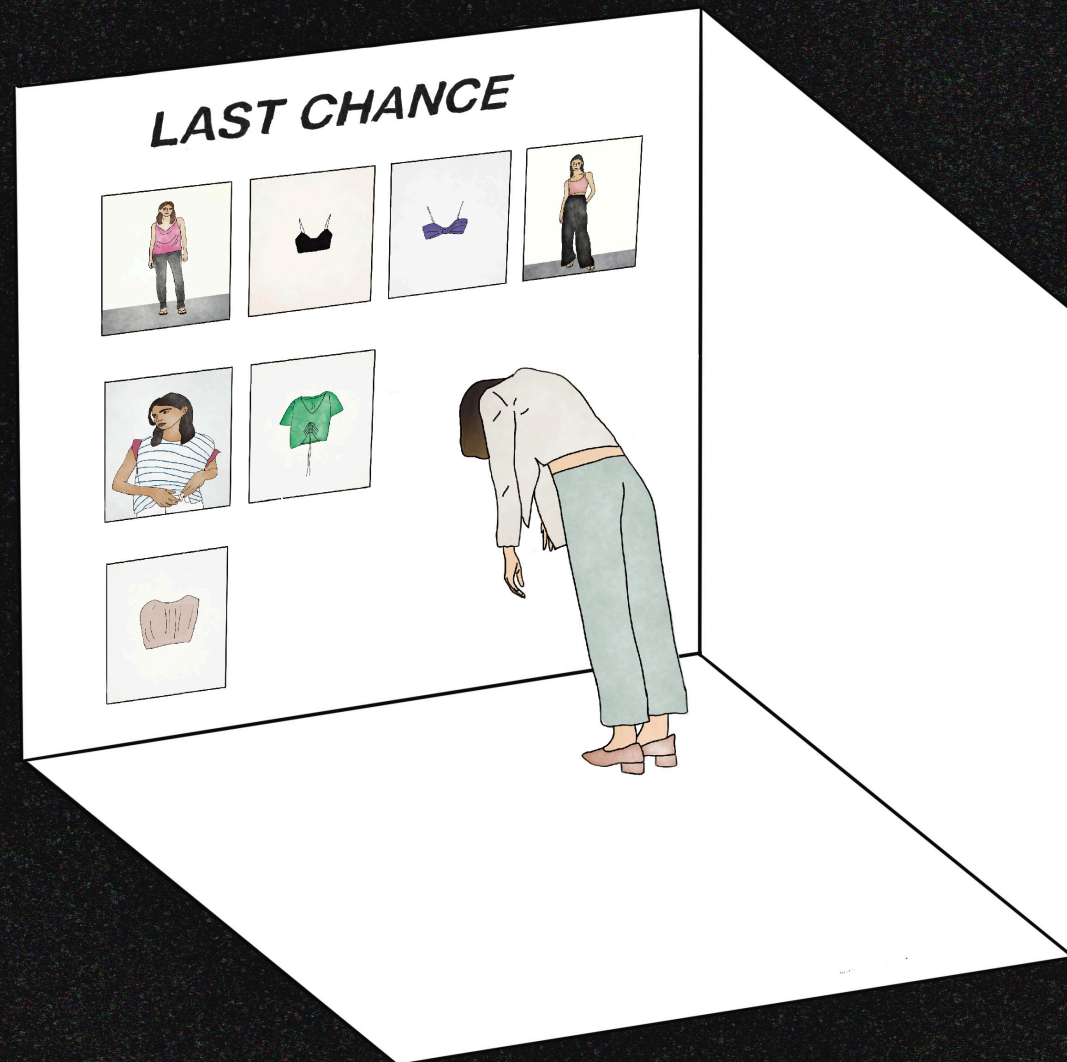
The accumulation and dispersion of garments in my closet memorialize shifts in thinking, moments of comfort and belongingness, the whirl of the city and the lightheadedness of weekends that turn abruptly into weekdays, the magic hour of dusk revealing its patchwork of spilling traffic and pastel-haired yuppies and very-much-alive 40-year-old retail malls, a whole palette of taste that took me years to acquire—the way my body and mind searched and, at times, formed vivid definition. ♦

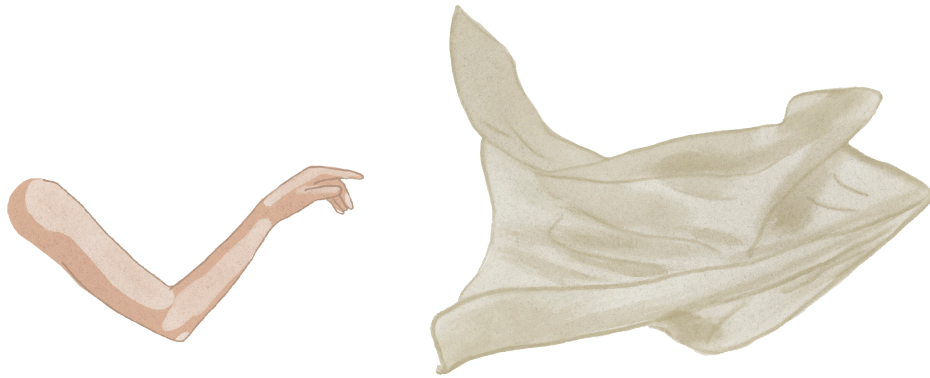
Strange intimacy

There is a kind of desperation that's come over me these past few months. A kind that manifests itself in such a way that despite my entry level salary as a creative in Manila, the act of consumption has occupied my everyday routines. My waking hours are spent browsing through retail apps, filling my carts with the things I wish to acquire. It begins the way it usually does: I open the app (either lured by a push notification or fortified by the hubris of pay-day), look at what's new (if the app in question has that feature), check the brands I follow to see if they have new pieces I may have overlooked, revisit the hand-written list of every single garment in my closet, swipe and make mental notes of clothes that would complement my existing ones. Then, if I like something, I put it on my cart, not to purchase it right away, but to let it sit for a day unless it's declared as low in stock, then there is a sense of urgency to it. Once a purchase is made, or once I'm satisfied with the contents of my cart, I repeat the same process on a different retail or beauty app.

"At that period in my life, I had no personal defenses. I felt like a cellophane wrapper on a pack of cigarettes. I felt like I had absolutely no secrets from the world and I couldn't pretend in my life to be strong. Or to be happy."

—Joni Mitchell, Rolling Stone Interview, 1979





My personal email, primarily a place for dialogue among friends concerning my personal projects as well as for any subscriptions to newsletters and news publications, contains evidence of my online purchases—receipts as an ongoing personal exhibit of my banal necessities, homeware acquisitions, and indulgences. These indulgences, or what I would simply mark as “impulse buys” are practically useless items given the current state of things, but serve as hope-manifestations for when I am finally allowed to revive what is the unrestrained habit of luxuriating in clothes and make-up and thus reorienting myself to the curious task of transforming the self.

Part of the thrill is the elaborate decision-making ritual that comes with it. Differentiating between putting clothes straight away in my cart and letting it perch on my “Wishlist” or “Obsessions” list (there are many iterations to this section on the app depending on the brand) is an exercise of free association and mental synthesis. Usually I discriminate among clothes depending on the response they elicit in me. When I do a mental “ooh” and click on the photo, I know it’s worthy of being in my cart. On the other hand, when I hover over it, examine it before I elicit any verbal response, I know I will have to hit the Bookmark or Heart icon to ponder it for later. These quick nano-second micro-decisions happen in every app I open, and it is an almost eerie practice, how acquainted I am to it like it’s second nature (even if there is nothing earthly about the swipe-click-swipe-click maneuver of my hands).

Pirijan Ketheswaran, a software engineer and artist, likens this interaction as a conversation, “People tap and click Graphical User Interfaces to share their feelings, get things done, express their creativity, or just to kill time—many of the same things that might happen in a conversation between actual people.”

According to him, we have these daily conversations with a website or app’s Graphic User Interface or simply GUI, a term I learned in elementary school computer class. It’s hardly a surprise that one of the buzzwords going around UX/UI design now to describe a certain standard to your design is whether or not it is Capital I *Intuitive*. It’s the north star of all product designers. Calling a GUI intuitive refers to the interaction process between a specific user and your interface and the degree to which the user is interacting with the design without *consciously* thinking about how to do it. If we run with the analogy of a memorable conversation, then an intuitive design would be you at the bar drinking a french, after-dinner cocktail with a bunch of friends exchanging thick, gossamer threads of conversation.

Retail apps or websites we interact with have their own GUIs for them to usher us seamlessly to make our purchases. Moreover, they function within, according to the digital studies professor John Cheney-Lippold in his book *We Are Data*, “a dynamic system of identity capture.”

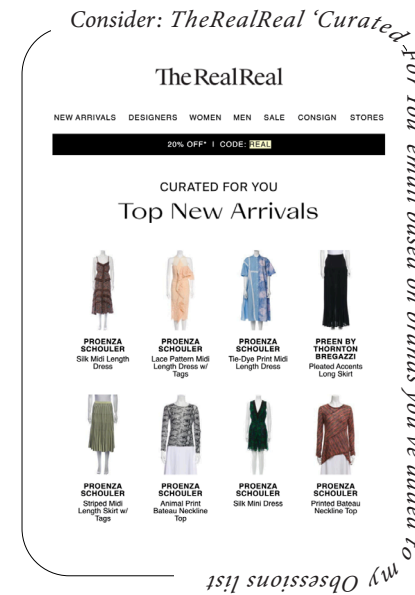


They take note of everything we do online, recording it into relational databases as data that will help them piece together our overall personality. Every interaction we make is recorded, stored, analyzed, synthesized, and coughed up sooner or later as a targeted ad, a list of recommendations, an unsolicited email.

I remember browsing through Farfetch, an online luxury retail platform, for pieces that were on sale. Finally, I settled on a Ganni animal-print midi dress but decided last minute not to continue with the purchase. Since then, I was seeing Ganni dresses all over the internet: beside blocks of text delivering the news and in between the stirring paragraphs of a personal essayist. There they were, the brown and black amorphous shapes of that dress like defects in my field of my vision. Granted, when brands I like indicate in their website that they use cookies, I take it gladly and with gusto. Almost as if to say, *Yes, track my identity as data, store it in your database and show me the algorithmic calculations of who you think I am.*

At some point, they probably thought, *Instead of merely projecting potential-buys on random websites and in-app as ads, why don't we utilize emails as a way to nurture a customer's buying cycle?* And for good reason: It is less artificial as users can opt-in to receive emails. Sometimes though, they lure you in their subscriber list in exchange for a promo or discount code, an immense crimson marquee that announces the matter-of-fact ways capitalism creeps into our lives. They send emails for every occasion: your birthday, recommendations to add to your to-buy list, the reverberations of a previous search, post-purchase receipts, post-post purchase niceties. It's a tactic to keep us engaged and that they maintain to be 'on-top-of-mind'.

Sometimes I am surprised by the ease and self-assurance these retails brands adopt in their phraseology. It is based on a spatial and syntactic formula that lends an air of familiarity and bareness. Their newsletters are exact and concise and pack a punch. There is enough negative space in the design for their products to stand out and take center-stage. Upon establishing this standard, brands are free to experiment more with their subjects and one-liners depending on their tone of voice, brand personality, and target audience.



My current work is primarily involved in community-building for a design platform. Once or twice I have had to plan an email campaign and work on the copy myself. I've had numerous conversations with my colleagues about certain considerations when it comes to writing the perfect email for your customer. It includes the principle of "personalization" as a common strategy. A quick search on Google surfaced this:

Addressing the reader by his or her first name and including a reader-specific piece of data in the email will go a long way towards making the reader feel like you understand his needs, desires and pain points and will be more open to reading about the solutions your company offers.

Brands do this to boost their "customer intimacy" metrics in which they combine detailed customer knowledge with operational flexibility so they can respond quickly to almost any need, from customizing a product to fulfilling special requests. What they hope to get out of it, of course, is a loyal customer base that feels valued and listened to.

One email subject I received from a local brand wrote, "You asked for this one =)" I did? "These just arrived for you." I didn't realize I asked? Here, I become acquainted with terms like "edit" in the context of retail stores. During the more print-centric era, the term referred more aptly to how a brick-and-mortar boutique edits its dress collections carefully. Usually at the end of the email is a call-to-action, "Shop our edit" or the more succinct no-frill, "Shop now".

I feel a strange comfort upon receiving these emails no matter how deeply profit-laced their intentions are. If the culture critics are right and we are at a time of great anxiety, it's only logical that even the most artificial hallmarks of intimacy produced by algorithms can stir and perhaps assuage in us some great, insatiable longing.

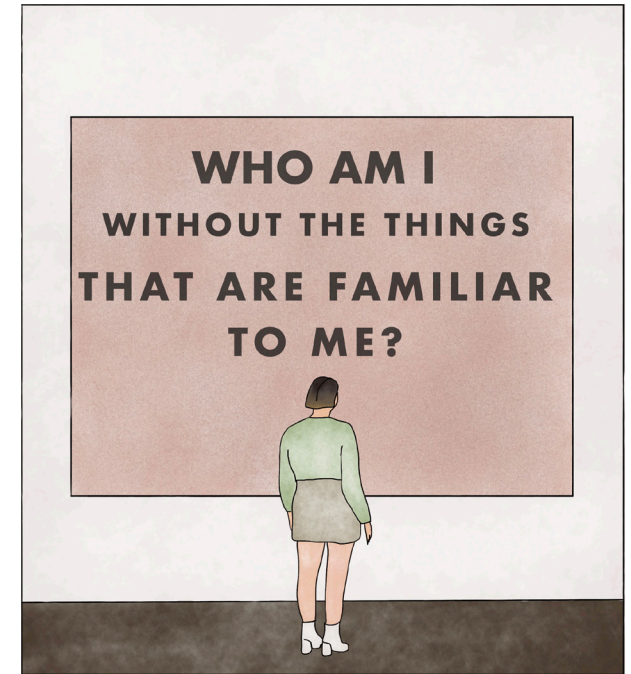
It can only be described as a panicky and frenzied attempt at filling in the hours that now seem less porous. If I don't fabricate reasons to look forward to the next hour, I might fall into the shit-puddle of my own despair. If I don't think quickly, generate more distractions, make the next purchase that will soothe a lumpish size of empty in my chest, the way I walked around the mall with the compulsion to shrink, minimize the space I occupy by folding my arms over my body and thinking just how claustrophobic it is that the world is closing in on me, then maybe I would be doing less of this desperate reaching. A reaching that I believe is only a symptom of a greater loneliness within from the perceived comfortlessness of the world without. The flurry of crowds, the unhurried incidences of proximity, the inattention to where our hands used to rest—they all once belonged to us; relinquished prematurely.

The Scottish psychiatrist R.D. Laing, perhaps the best-known psychiatrist associated with the existentialist tradition, offers the concept of "ontological insecurity". According to him an ontologically insecure person is:

"Precariously differentiated from the rest of the world, so that his identity and autonomy are always in question...If such a basis for living has not been reached, the ordinary circumstances of everyday life constitute a continual and deadly threat."

Siphoned from the world outside, the words of the author Jamaica Kincaid keep ringing in my ears:

"I am alive in the time of the dead, the time of the dead being the time in which to be alive is a form of being dead, we are dead right now for we cannot be all our ways that are ways of being alive that is familiar."



This is what it means to be ontologically insecure: To live life as if already dead, or in the cusp of it. It is a time we're forced to evaluate, "Who am I without the things that are familiar to me?" and grapple with the unsteadiness that comes from the drudging perpetual reconciliation of things that once were and how they ought to be now.

It is also staring straight ahead at an unfamiliar path and looking away; the feeling of being held hostage to time that unremittently moves forward, even as we ourselves have become amnesiacs—forgetful of the private exchanges we had with our future selves.

I admit that I rely on these emails to *tell* me what to buy. They take away the consumer's work of virtually 'going through the racks' and instead generate iterations of garments once viewed, purchased, or saved packaged and delivered to your inbox.

“When we limit identity to consumer choices, it makes us more knowable to others in this datafied form than we are to ourselves,” Horning posits. They become our Personal Curators, presenting purposefully selected items based on data gleaned from our interactions with their platform.

It serves as amusement for me, a kind of horse race, for how accurately an algorithm can tell me what garment I would be into, but in this the sweepstakes are in reverse. The money is only betted when the announcer has called out the horse that made it to the finish line first.

Their curations are faulty and for the most part reveal the system’s naive certainty that data alone suffices to make a self. Here is where I depart from Horning’s assertion. In reality, we are more than the sum of our interactions with GUIs. They reveal a bottlenecked version of ourselves that can only be described as poor waxwork.

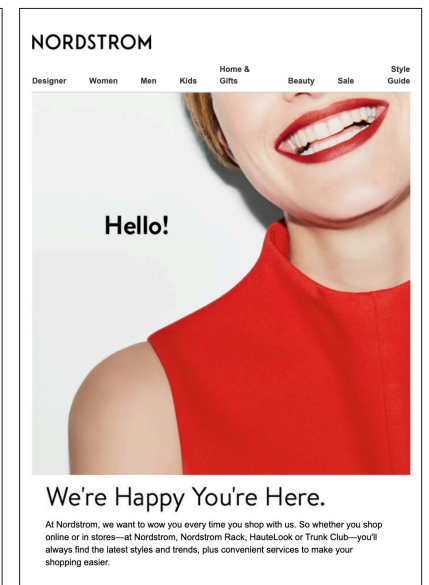
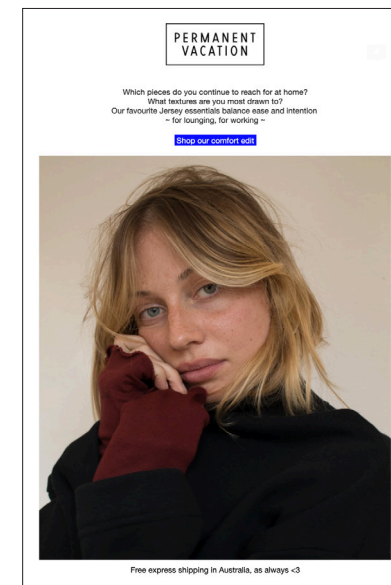
Perhaps on a regular day in a time similar to once-was, we’ll scoff at the seemingly baseless recommendations. But at a time when “we cannot be all our ways that are ways of being alive that is familiar,” a part of me feels grateful for the particular attention accorded to the version of myself that exists through these interactions. A self that is in some ways logical, predictable and in possession only of the reptilian faculty for breathing, body balance, and material consumption.



My journey through the internet has been pit stopped by numerous disillusionments. Even then, I still find an uncomplicated comfort and relief in receipts, email newsletters, messages of thanks from brands I love and actually believe in. It keeps me going, so much so that the temptation to consume is also a dopamine rush—a symbiotic relationship where I feed brands information about myself and they respond to this activity with the balminess of their “How you doin’?” the homely “We’re happy you’re here” and the sweeping “Your support means the world to us.”

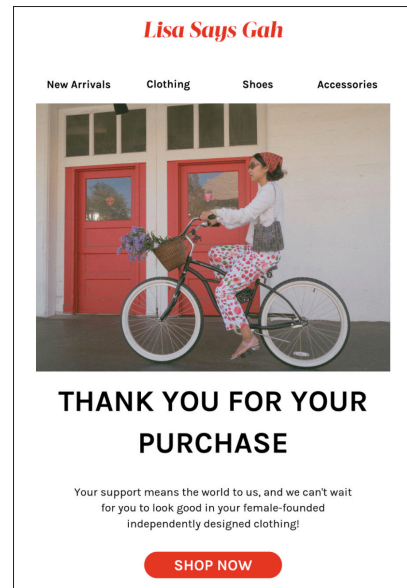
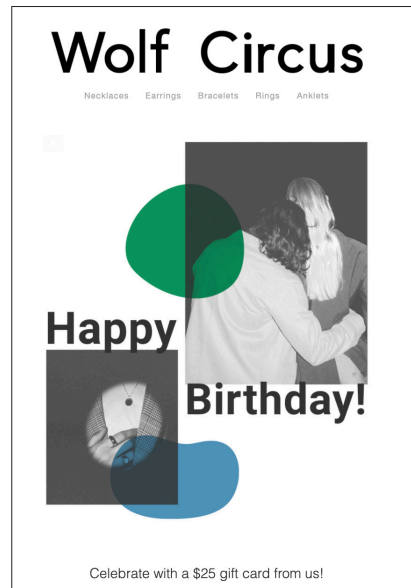
A feigned language of intimacy is mimicked by email newsletters. This may not be what real connection is at a time of advancing loneliness, but it is, among many manifestations, a half-desperate attempt at finding solace where there is none. We reach for platforms that present the self as essentially knowable based on the pattern of our purchasing habits and desires. *Here is someone who is at once familiar and reliable.*

So a part of me consents; the part that would normally be skeptical at these pronouncements and attempts at intimacy slacken. I let myself be aware of the cognitive dissonance. The more that I think about it, the more self-effacing I am in my own complicity.



Of course, it isn't always the case. Small retail brands often consist of only the founder and a few staff to help support the operations and because of that, they are much more hands-on and receptive to the feedback of the customers. And these days, buying from small brands is characterized as goodwill as they struggle to stay afloat. In a bygone world, brands held garage or sample sales and used the time to converse with customers casually, like being invited to a house-party, where the host was a friend of a friend. It was one of the encounters that baptized me into the religion of clothes.

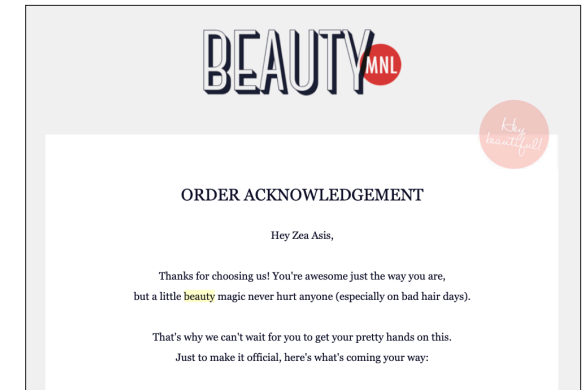
I try to dig deeper as to why that is. And I find that it's less about the reliable way these interactions dictate to me what I want, but the idea that I can, through time, develop a *friendship* with the platform. I say friendship, because all burgeoning relationships require repeated interaction and an exchange of facts about oneself to the other. This analogy extends to how, over time, the platform begins to know what I want and forms an algorithmic fragmentation of my identity through my habitual visits. The more time I invest in it, the more that it projects a version of me to myself, the way some friendships (perhaps all relationships) have worked in reality. More than the comfort, joy, and security these relationships bring, they can also validate and affirm and intensify our experiences with the world and with ourselves.



An acknowledgment receipt email from BeautyMNL big on flowery copy (Top)

A Happy Birthday email from Wolf Circus with a \$25 gift card I never used (Bottom Left)

An acknowledgment receipt from Lisa Says Gah! which weirdly has Shop Now button (Bottom Right)



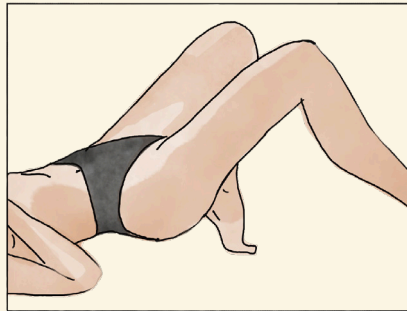
The women writers I have looked up to have always documented their everyday lives: Sylvia Plath, Susan Sontag, Virginia Woolf. For one, there is a whole space on the internet dedicated to listing down all of what Sylvia Plath wrote in her journals of what she ate. I keep thinking about the kind of people who would dedicate a portion of their days just combing through her day-to-day life—and to do what? Create some logic to her chaos?

Maybe they wanted to feel closer to her because the documentation of her sustenance was a window to her life and psyche. After all, the tone and cast of her life seeped through her prose, even as she was only describing what was on her dinner table. We know of the heady days of her relationship with Ted (*Ted is the first man who really has a love of food: he stalked in the door yesterday with a packet of little pink shrimp and four fresh trout. I made a nectar of shrimp newberg with essence of butter, cream, sherry and cheese, had it on rice, with the trout. 4/29/56*) and the minutiae of it years afterwards (*Woke to the same hostile silences. He did make coffee. 5/20/59*).

Perhaps if we extend this logic to our purchases and look at them through the lens of a devout reader assigning meaning to particularities, then maybe I can look at what I'm going through with less spite. The Internet is a record of our interactions, dissected ante-mortem. They can reveal the tone and cast of a life, particularly the tone and cast of mine: an undisguised loneliness amidst the strangeness and newness of my own surroundings.

(Today I received an email from Brand X showing me an embroidered midi dress with pearl beads that I liked. I bought it immediately and felt a unique sense of joy looking at the silvery figure in the mirror when I tried it on and found that it fit me perfectly. 4/30/2020)

Perhaps this is *my* attempt at bringing logic to chaos—the way that I reduce myself to merely a datafied image of lists, choices, and specifics. Maybe this is the lens through which we can look at existence now, the way to make sense of ourselves as our dreams are reduced to days, our vast, breathless moments demoted to the generality of hours.



It is the uncertainty of it all that feeds into my desperation. Thinking about the future, of how things *will be* again sends me on a trip down a funhouse mirror maze filled with disproportionate reflections and dead-ends. The experience of it is what convinces me that nothing else matters except the present.

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and
specifics.

Metrics and algorithms have never traditionally belonged to the conversations about my own thoughts and feelings. In fact, if I collect all of the memorable conversations I've had in the past, my heart feels like an open window that invites the cold amihan breeze to come inside, revealing to my body a weather perfect for flying kites and witnessing the native flowers bloom. I think about this feeling and know that it will be a while before this becomes possible again.

And yet, in my boxcar loneliness, I become aware of other things that open. The days are like the slow, opening mouths of white sampaguitas revealing their amber eyes. I am awash with time. ♦



NOTES

As you grow older, you begin to understand summer in a figurative sense. Visions of road trips to Urbiztondo beach in La Union; a long-weekend trip to a small northern town with coconut trees, motorbikes, and tanned half-naked locals walking barefoot by the side of the pavement.

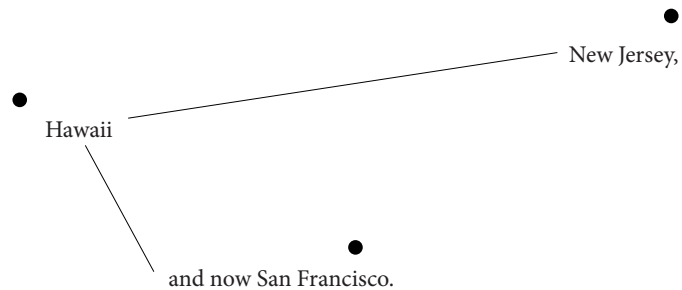
ON

There is no clear demarcation line of the seasons. It is only wet and dry. Our senses are tipped off by it first—when finally the prickling heat is furloughed by the cool, faint wind of a monsoon. You live in a place long enough, you become vulnerable to this particular sensory experience. Your body chafes, vexed by the sudden shift.

SPACE



I think about my sister, who has had to put down roots in



She taught me the beauty and elbow grease of making a home for yourself. How many times has her body had to acclimate? How many times has she had to endure the recursive emotional cleaving that comes with leaving a place to fit into a new one?

She knew about the characteristically Filipino mindset of getting to where you wanted to go and making something of yourself. Growing up, she had to learn the self-diminishing practice of depending on strangers to live. She got through college and medical school with multiple public and private scholarships and cultivated a relationship with her benefactors (our Auntie Tia from Munich and Uncle Sonny from Davao) by sending long emails of weepy confessionals seasoned with Bible verses, all the while subletting a condo with furniture bargained for cheap from the Paco Public Market. To a lower-middle class family in the province like ours, agency was not a decision nor something afforded by parents to their children. It was a requirement, an inevitability. There was no lineage of succession for a multi-billion tire business or a fail-safe contingency plan of sending us abroad. We were handed the fixture of our lives early on, broken furniture and all.

It is now July, a month after the start of the rainy season. We were told to expect scattered thunderstorms and hanging habagat—the violent dishevelment that comes with the weather. Similarly, my living arrangements are precarious at best. I live with my brother, his wife, and their 16-month old baby. *Live* is an inaccurate word—perhaps, *I linger*. The way a presence does. The past year, I kept showing up like a soft, transparent ghost at random hours of the day to pick up clean clothes, stay over for the night and for the next several days, be gone again. A good portion of it was spent sleeping over at my boyfriend's place in Cubao.

How long has it been? 121 days. 121 days since I set up a temporary camp in the bedroom that was designated to be mine but not really; when the city closed itself to strangers and wheezed out those that did not want to stay. Since then, it's been stripped to its elemental state, revealing the natural wear and tear of the systems that have controlled and defined us. I've given up certain routines: no more sleeping over at my boyfriend's house and no more daily excursions to my office in Makati. Instead, I wake up to my niece's cries at the early break of dawn and endure the brief punctures in privacy when, having napped in the middle of the day, I'd panic-wake to the twisting of my door knob and the jangle of keys at my brother's attempts to open my door to get fresh sheets from my drawer. The smell of fresh linen, for a moment, disconcerting.

*Live is an inaccurate
word—perhaps, I linger.
The way a presence does.*

WHERE

Where is your home? These incidents hung onto me and solidified into the belief that I was still a ghost even when I was exiled from my usual possessions. I clung to the naive assertion that if I had my shampoo and toothbrush, my bottles of moisturizer, and worn Steve Madden boots laid out, the space I inhabited would form a covenant with me and grant me certain rights. For example, I could then expect a level of privacy where sleep is considered sacred and for which I didn't have anyone knocking on my door or prying open drawers in my room during mid-afternoon siestas. That is to say, the place still didn't feel like it was mine.

As I crossed the threshold from college to the workforce and began life as an entry-level salary worker, I discovered that my time at university did more than expand my intellect: it expanded my sense of entitlement so much that, by the end, I had no ability to distinguish myself from the crowd of extremely wealthy people I encountered there.

After graduation, I was affronted by the inescapable facts of living. More specifically, the cost of living a free and independent life. When life's practicalities knock the romance out, and money, time, the sheer labor abase my passions into bills, bathroom cleaning, and cooked rice green with mold in the kitchen counter top: My first fall-back was my familial home. It was familiar, easy, perfunctory. I was not tethered to some age-old sense of filial piety, I simply lacked the financial resources to make it out on my own.

Living with family is no less comfortable than it is an escape from the unattractive bits that come with coming head-to-head with the notion of my own insufficiencies. I was still at a stage in my life where I wanted to buy good clothes, take taxis rather than public transit, and chew on certain luxuries that would have been impossible, or more accurately, unaffordable if I fully embraced independence. In some ways, it seemed like ripping off a page from the book of *How To Repudiate Your Own Life*. Maybe there was a part of me that did avoid it and yet I still dreamed of a space that I owned, with high-windows and artisanal furniture (If you prefer a more conservative version: A gloomy, windowless studio unit which is either a walk or a jeepney ride away from my office in Makati). But during these times, people are heading home instead of moving away from it. There is also the inescapable fact that the global health authorities have asked us to limit our interactions with people as much as we can; stay indoors, and as my mother always called to say, *save your money for things that matter*. Going through the rituals of moving to a new space is treacherous and seems remiss given everything.

HOME?

YOUR

Unlike me, my sister had no choice but to start early in life. There was nothing extravagant about her lifestyle. She lived within her means and so accustomed herself to the offerings of sale racks in boutiques and frequented Divisoria on early Sunday mornings (for which her haggling skills became a point of pride for my mother). She wanted and dreamed of beautiful things, but her illusions were curbed by an acute sense of reality. At least within a good portion of her early 20's, her idea of luxury was reified by Class-A Lacoste bags and fruity-flowery Victoria's Secret lotions.

"I've long perceived sisterhood as a secret inlet," Durga Chew-Bose once wrote. "A relationship whose shape is uniquely undisclosed." There was never a time when my sister and I couldn't be told apart. Eleven years lay between us. More than a decade of her believing to be the only daughter in the family, and then in her eleventh year, terrified or exhilarated by the prospect of another girl, one she would call sister. While she was off to college pursuing a degree, I was a prepubescent teenager who seemed far removed from our family's history—that the early 2000s were the happiest times came to me sporadically from visits to our family pediatrician and surprise calls from relatives who lived in small towns in Leyte and Cagayan de Oro. My sister met them all. They called her Darling. *Kamusta na si, Darling?* The years which I recall through group photographs of my father wearing biker shorts and mirrored sunglasses on a mountain hill in Davao del Sur; our mother wearing a gray silk double-breasted blazer with a matching pencil skirt. Even then, beautiful with her wavy soft mullet hair and large pearls.

*She wanted and dreamed
of beautiful things, but her
illusions were curbed by an
acute sense of reality.*

That I was not conscious of living through a golden time, lost to the many uncles and cousins that popped up every now and then, and that growing older, somehow having to appropriate these tales and strangers into the facts of my own life felt more myth than history (an inheritance of having been born a decade late)—all of these rightfully belonged to my sister and not to me. By essence of memories, scenes of a life that she actually lived through. That she, herself, is a character in these retellings, *of* the past that I was largely unbeknownst to, set precedence to many differences that came later on.

I became the sister who attended private school and was noticeably more *sosyal*; lacked warmth but was more trusting of strangers, whose own sense of style was often misconstrued as an arrogance over receiving *pas-alubongs* and not as a kind refusal to spend money on her. And she was Darling, the daughter everyone knew; whose charm and gingery laughter bended the air around her; who possessed a lionheart to claim space and by which in total has lived in

two countries,

four cities,

three different states.

I wasn't exactly a restless wanderer; in our family, it seemed encoded in us to leave our childhood home because situated as it was at a bend in the road of our village street, where our lives began was a dead-end. Escape was more necessity than virtue. I have, in my years of signing forms for courier services, alluded to my provincial home as my permanent residence—a single-story house in a small city in the northern section of the island of Mindanao, since I lacked the substantial forethought that is a consequence of a career and sense of self that can only be described to be in a constant state of deciduousness. My provincial home became the receiving end of tossed-out ephemera and extraneous documents. All the while, we kept moving, my sister and I—it was our family's only heirloom.

A whole decade can produce two different people, two different sisters. But we were both enthralled by the possibilities of Manila (and eventually for her: New Jersey, Honolulu and San Francisco). Concept stores, underground shows, art galleries—the endless possibility of art and creation in the city became the sole reason I could never go back. Just living in the midst of a high density of creatives made it feel reassuring to be someone who was still figuring it all out; reminiscent of what Eve Babitz wrote of L.A. when she felt “luxuriously involved in an unsolvable mystery.” While my sister, perhaps already a version of my future self, was transfixed by the economic upheaval, the promise of comfort and stability.

I added a real estate section to my private book of vocabularies: furnished, un-furnished, amenities, leases, association dues, brokers, contracts, post-dated checks, signings, viewings, amortization, transferral of ownership, eviction. Learning all these not only points to the Whorfian claim that vocabularies open up worlds and the senses—the vernacular of owning and claiming of space—but also as a set of complicated responsibilities. I knew about this world, briefly, as a college student: transitioning from gated dormitories with mean-spirited administrators to overcrowded condominiums and their hybrid assortment of security personnel. The sum of which pertains to a transitory lifestyle.

I see the homes that my friends and fellow creatives have cultivated—how they had the means to paint their own walls, cohabit with a few cats, buy rattan furniture and incense holders. How the fixtures implied a kind of finality on their end as opposed to the fleeting objects of being that characterized my darting from one space to another. I am reminded of SZA, moodily singing about the millennial ennui we're trying to detach ourselves from,

*How could it be? 20 something
All alone still, not a thing in my name
Ain't got nothin', runnin' from love
Only know fear
That's me, Ms. 20 Something
Ain't got nothin', runnin' from love
Wish you were here, oh*

I realized that the accumulation of home objects and furniture and the youthful ceremony that I've only witnessed in films—often of a character wearing paint-stained overalls and hauling furniture up the entrance of an Art Deco building or a charmingly dilapidated staircase—signified being on the cusp of *something*.

Being on the cusp of something implies a youthful zest, not the post-climax confusion of being tossed out like a stained mattress after a failed dream or a recent heartbreak. It is the illusion of becoming something, like maybe, *I want to be a writer*, so you try it out. Like you're meant to be someone. But you've never felt like you could be anyone. Now you feel like you could, and that's the high of it.

I was confined to a bedroom and heartsick for a place to call mine. I remember what the American sculptor Eva Hesse said in one of her letters to Sol Hewitt when she began suffering from creative block and self-doubt shortly after moving from New York to Germany with her husband and sculptor, Tom Doyle. “I fluctuate between working at the confusion and nonworking at the confusion.” One of the last few pieces (Untitled, 1969-1970) she worked on—before she succumbed to brain cancer at 34—made use of latex, rope, and string. To create Untitled, Hesse dipped two separate pieces of knotted rope into liquid latex. The rope then hardened, providing an underlying weblike structure for the sculpture’s gracefully arching loops and dense, twisted segments. In a note, she remarked about the piece, “hung irregularly tying knots as connections really letting it go as it will. Allowing it to determine more of the way it completes itself.”

When I was a sophomore in high school, I used to be enthralled at the microscopic images of human chromosomes my teacher showed us in Biology class. They looked like wooly ink blots in the shape of the letter X, which now I find resemble Eva’s Untitled (7 poles). Made of fiberglass, resin, polyester, polyethylene and aluminum wires, they looked to me like chromatids laid out and then hung in a deliberate manner. She transcended and defied Minimalism—the art movement known for its rigidity and discipline—by presenting a body of work that was an ode to the natural decay and mutability of objects, how the organic materials shaped the body and outcome of her pieces, not the other way around.

*I was
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to a
bedroom
and
heartsick
for a place
to call
mine.*

I can almost imagine Eva dipping rope in latex, weaving and side-stepping through her studio space, stretching and letting it free-fall, the dead-ends and entanglements subsuming her. Similarly, we reach a point when we can no longer tell ourselves apart from the chaos or non-chaos surrounding us. The way our bodies acclimate to weather, let space refashion our own temperaments.

The philosophy in Eva’s work nourishes me like a personal concoction of vegetable and fruit juices. She fashioned her own defiance from seemingly lifeless industrial materials. This is what helps revitalize my spirit: the alchemy.

And so, about a month ago, I emerged from this millennial malaise of rootlessness (out of an acceptance that circumstances would extend until next year and maybe even longer) and began to believe that even as this 10-square meter room was not mine in the language of contracts and leases, it still is an extension of who I am, the way the cotton of my clothes are, the way the keratin of my hair is. Everyday I wake up to it. I inhabit it the way I inhabit myself.

Interim

Witnessing a sculpture is engulfment in space. It demands that you pay attention to where you are at that exact moment. Some sculptors find themselves working with the gallery or museum space as their canvas. The English art historian Herbert Read said, “The peculiarity of sculpture is that it creates a three-dimensional object in space. It is space itself as a perceived quality that becomes the peculiar concern of the sculptor. We may say that for the painter space is a luxury; for the sculptor it is a necessity.”

On a Sunday afternoon, I was listening to a talk by the Scottish sculptor Karla Black in the Des Moines Art Center in Iowa. She spoke about how much her work was a testament to the inadequacy of language. This recalls moments of meeting people for the first time as I witness them scramble to describe themselves or justify their interests in a foreign language, peppered with sheepish assertions of *I'm not sure if I'm using the right word but*—A tacit understanding that describing oneself is a kind of brushup in itself, a feeling in the dark.

She makes use of the most elementary of materials: lipstick, body lotion, paste, gels, creams, eyeshadow, tissue, bath bombs from Lush—things you can grab from your bathroom cupboard or dresser.

Black's selection of materials draws from the psychoanalytical approach developed by Melanie Klein, who encouraged a 'play technique' for children in place of language to analyse a patient's direct experience with the physical, material world. The floor became an important site for creative acts. "We know material, color, form before we know any of the words of those things. Mental processes come from physical things," she said.

Predominantly light blue, pink, and pale yellow pastels, Black's sculptures bring to mind the clothes of the designer Vania Romoff. There is a clear visual connection with the usage of colors to imply rawness and its of-the-earth quality.

Sculpture is a three-dimensional art made by one of four basic processes: carving, modelling, casting, constructing.



One can posit that fashion is a wearable, and oftentimes, mass-produced type of sculpture. Romoff's drapes, knots, A-lined and tiered skirts—all in warm-toned silk and taffeta—collapse upon the body and extend naturally. There is an attractiveness to them, a sort of elemental provocation, like the clothes are meant to just merely *surround* the body, close enough but not really. A canopy shyness between skin and garment. It is sculpture further defined by the occupancy of a body.

I imagine myself wearing them. How my illusions take the form of the static disorderliness of an atelier. The chaos of pre-wrapped gifts before Christmas. Knowing that my sister would automatically reject the notion of a 20,000-peso prêt-à-porter ensemble from a local designer, because why pay an exorbitant amount for a piece of clothing when there are bills to pay? Future responsibilities that would benefit from money put away for savings? I was the sister stuck in an Edith Wharton novel: "*Her whole being dilated in an atmosphere of luxury. It was the background she required, the only climate she could breathe in.*"

That between the two of us, I utilized clothing as a way to take up space, and was wholly convinced that a person's unsolicited adoration of your outfit is a kind of reentry to the world. As if it is only ever when getting a stranger's nod that we become unsuspecting of the space we occupy: one time I attended an exclusive party at an art gallery and I felt so lonely I could scream. In the midst of eating hors d'oeuvres, reckless and dejected from social obscurity, a perky, half-drunk girl with a sequined bag came up to say that she liked what I was wearing. How clothing, a necessary skin, is a tacit invitation for value-judgment.

Around three weeks ago, I bought two plants whose names, at first, I did not commit to memory. Eventually, it seemed inconsiderate of me not to when long stalks of my *Homalomena rubescens*—I later learned—created swathes of shadow over me in the morning, as I woke lying on a mattress on my bedroom floor; creating heart-shaped patches above my eyes, over one knee. Then, there is my string of hearts overflowing the clay pot on my desk, making concentric rings over itself. At a glance, its leaves might look like matte plastic but upon touch reveals its beating warmth.

My *Alocasia reginula*, or what others might call the Black Magic Elephant's Ear, beguiles me with the depth of its color—Anahaw moss green—which disappears in the darkness, revealing in stark contrast its almost-neon spindly veins floating. I learned that dried flowers (preserved, sturdy) don't need direct sunlight, lest their colors fade. Bees and beetles (alive, pulsing) surprise me with their unexpected appearance—sometimes gasping for breath under my sheets, other times buzzing in anticipation outside the screen of my window at night. Mary Oliver once said,

*I heard the small kingdoms breathing
around me, the insects, and the birds
who do their work in the darkness.*

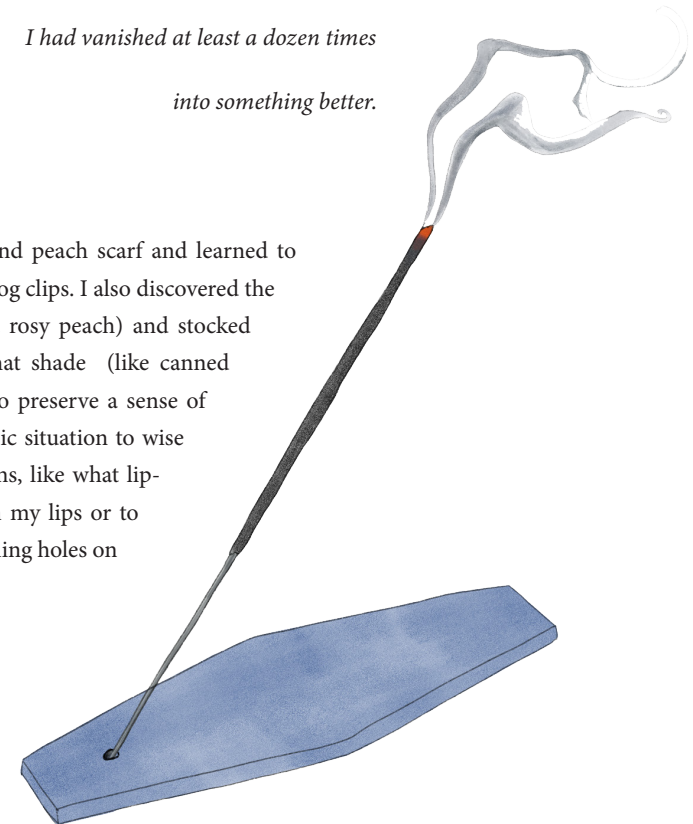
I turn my body into an apothecary filled with amber glass bottles and beeswax wrappers; of vials and flasks of oils and substances extracted from the wild. On a given day: I slather myself with honeycomb-patterned soap made of natural glycerin, cold-processed with lavender, oats, and honey. My cheeks are painted in a terracotta palette made from virgin coconut oil, kaolin clay, and oxides. I light a candle called St. Al in the evening. It brings in summer; with notes of sandalwood, clove flower and ylang-ylang, layered with undertones of frankincense. Slowly, as the braided cotton wick sustains the flame, my room smells like a shrine.

By morning

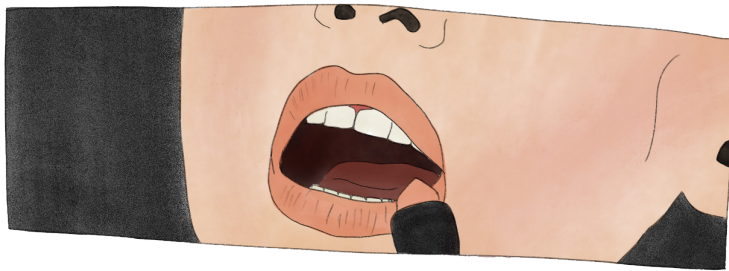
I had vanished at least a dozen times

into something better.

I purchased a second-hand peach scarf and learned to hang it on my wall with dog clips. I also discovered the right shade of lipstick (a rosy peach) and stocked upon all variations of that shade (like canned goods, but presumably, to preserve a sense of self). It took a catastrophic situation to wise up to frivolous realizations, like what lipstick shade looks best on my lips or to hang scarves without drilling holes on my bedroom wall.



I was lying in bed (as I find myself often doing these days) when I realized that I was no longer a solid ego-driven structure but someone possessed by my surroundings, a captive audience and part of the consequence to things unfolding. I collapse; extend naturally to things around me. No longer a ghost, I am merely a child touching and feeling things for the first time (the way I witness new leaves emerge from stems; the way my skin reacts to raw oils and butter). Laying in bed, a small thing like an uncomfortable cakey wax of lipstick on the outer curves of my lips can bring me back from reveries—A residue from a day's worth of looking presentable when all propriety seems superfluous within the confines of your own bedroom. They were mine: these slight and secret occurrences. And no matter how brief or seemingly inconsequential, they provided me with great comfort.



*I was no longer a solid
ego-driven structure
but someone possessed
by my surroundings*

I've reacquired the feeling of that time months after my sister had just left Manila for Honolulu. I was still in Malate attending De La Salle University, renting a unit with a few people at a condominium across Taft Avenue and for the first time was overcome with the feeling that I had lost some part of myself, a part I only knew about the moment I no longer had it. This was during the pre-holiday exodus when most students had left their units to go back to their family homes, including my roommates then. I was alone, clothes already packed for my trip to the province the next day. I picked up our bills from the mailbox to do last-minute payments when I found a postcard from her among the pile of envelopes. A thick sensation of card stock. It had an idyllic view of a Hawaiian beach: deep blue waters and white sand. A colorful Christmas Snowman stamp. At the back she wrote in her thin cursive, the H like column volutes,

*How have you been?
You know I'm always here for you.*

Love, Ate

The contours of our inlet disclosed in a way of a postcard. ♦



Zea Asis is a 23-year old Filipino writer based in Manila, where she is studying fashion design. Her works have been published in multiple online publications like Crybaby zine and The Nearness Project. She is currently a staff writer for Sunstroke Magazine.

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*Essays on
dressing up and
consumption*