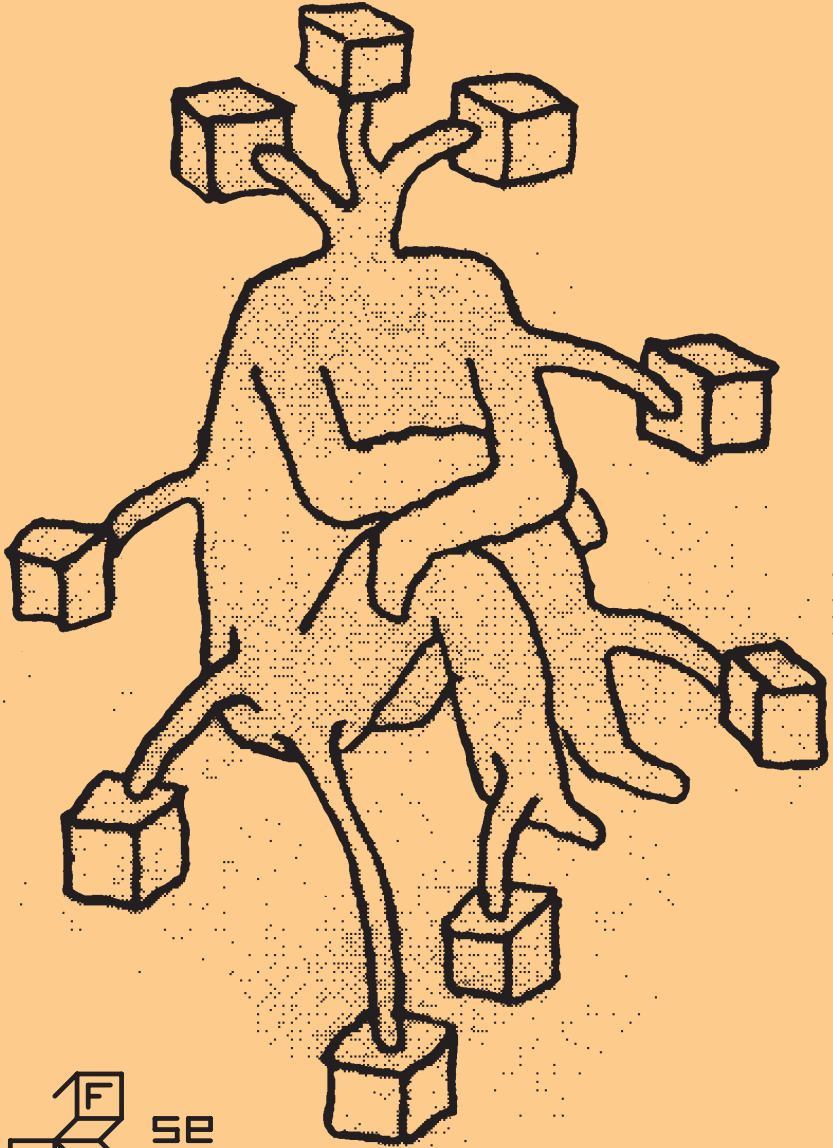


Federica
Bueti

What does
she want?



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What Does She Want?

The end is not an apocalypse, but a simple split. Subject and object have set off on different trajectories hoping that they won't see each other ever again. While the object declares its independence, the subject looks for a new body, for new meanings, but then she chokes on her old self-image, her usual words: self, other, other than oneself, self-care. Although she has been dreaming of autonomy and self-detachment, she finds it hard to digest the fact that she has been left to herself. She longs for a new relationship with the object. She feels a deep connection with it, a desire for a new engagement. But, the object has disappeared into a cloud of black smoke. Inside, the atmosphere is heavy and the air is stiff, she is having a hard time breathing as the story repeats itself, all over

again: objects and subjects adrift. Object and subject miss each other. The object runs away, the subject chases after it; the subject wants to be like a thing to meet the object on its own terms. There is poetry in a crane, she says. Bodies are like cranes, they always stand somewhere in the middle of the city. Humans live in a world where there is no poetry, only misery and private property. She would like to end private property, end capitalism, end the critique of the neoliberal commodification of subjectivities, end her appetite for bodies too, but she will need to begin from somewhere.

Beginning all over again? Like Southern Italian folk music, she thinks. The same rhythmic pattern repeated, the same movement: the palm of a

hand euphorically hitting the tambourine until it hurts, until it starts bleeding. Now, she is considering what is implied by inscribing a digital rhythm into the social body. The social body is bleeding...But, the object does not bleed. Does it? She is interrupted in her thoughts by the dark crystal spinning around itself on the screen in the darkened room in the exhibition hall. She has observed that communication between self and its other has been choppy since the object has been freed from its maker and the beholder, free from subjective interpretations, from political, economics, social forces, free from the tyranny of the aesthetic experience. But she wonders whether she will ever granted the luxury of being free, evacuated from her 'I', herself, perhaps one day free from her body. And, the object... Will the object ever come back to meet her? She longs for a connection.

She turns to art in a last desperate attempt to reconnect with the object, and if necessary to turn herself into a work of art. After all, what's the difference between a Jeff Koons polished stainless steel version of an inflatable Easter bunny and a pair of

nice fake boobs? She turns to art not because she hopes to find in the arts the remnant of objects, but she believes in art's possibility for encounters. Indeed, she had encountered many things in art exhibitions, included a version of herself she didn't even know of, a few lovers and her boyfriend. She has found appreciation in the arts (her boobs seems to be especially appreciated), but not the kind of recognition she is looking for. Or, maybe she has found them, but she keeps on looking for them in the wrong place. But, how to blame her? She is exhausted most of the time. She has been suffering insomnia since she first read an article by Object Oriented Ontology's proponent, Graham Harman, entitled 'Art without Relation' published in Art Review.

In his essay, Harman writes that "at issue is the independence of the artworks not only from their social and political surroundings, their physical settings or their commercial exchange value, but from any other object whatsoever"¹. While she approaches art as a relational space, Harman considers relations "no longer a liberating idea". He suggests that we

understand the reality of the object “free from all relation, deeper than all reciprocity. The object is a dark crystal veiled in a private vacuum: irreducible to its own pieces, and equally irreducible to its outward relations with other things”². She is clearly twice shaken because she had put so much trust in the possibility of a relationship between object and subject that she wouldn’t know how to deal with the insularity of the object. What about her self? On the other hand, she knows very well what the private vacuum is. She has plunged into it many times in awkward attempts to become impersonal, selfless, to be a body without a self. She liked the idea of turning herself into an object of knowledge, to inhabit the existential vacuum. She knows what the private vacuum is for, she generally drowns in it after her third glass of wine, when it becomes clear that all she wants is to get high by the beach and make the stars come down. Sometimes the private vacuum becomes a stage on which she dances, moving like a shiny thing among equally shiny things. She loves it. She is aware that it is in this private vacuum that her incommensurable being

becomes cultural capital. Yet, she does not want to become an object optimized for online circulation, although she sometimes is happy to be consumed.

Your eyes, lit up like shops to lure their trade/ or fireworks in the park on holidays, /insolently make use of borrowed power³.

But she had enough of the private vacuum. Being there generally leaves her confused. What is confusing is the feeling of emptiness, the hollowing out of her ‘inner’ life, while her head is crowded with all kinds of delirious thoughts, and feelings she does not know how to master and control. But, she does not need to be in control of her moods and feelings. After all, why would she be, when she can let someone else be in control? Yet, despite the fact that she is never really much in control of anything, but she is working hard on it, she is having problems with letting go. This is why she now goes to museums to take part in guided-meditations, yoga and work-out sessions: to restore a sense of the self that is also a way of reconnecting with the lost-object via a newly engagement with her mind and

soul. She goes to Yoga to gain a better understanding of her body, to breath. Breathing has become a political act – she says. She wants to breathe life into the private vacuum. But these days, she, despite having learnt all the techniques, finds breathing particularly difficult. No matter how much she digs into her skin, nothing much seems to come out of her deeper layers of existence; there seems to be no way to re-connect with the lost object. She wants a new body, a lighter one, but the sense of loss is so overwhelming that her old body, heavy and sick, is keeping her from moving on. The sense of loss feeds her sick body. The sick body feeds the sense of irreparable loss. And, it's fall.

Your vast mourning clouds /are the hearses of my dreams⁴.

One fine fall, Freud wrote about the melancholic that she is fundamentally stuck. The melancholic, Freud writes, cannot let go of the object of love for, to let go of it would mean to let go of melancholia, that is to say to be a different person. Hence, the melancholic holds on to the lost object, preventing her from changing. The melancholic is stuck. She

is stuck. She feels melancholic twice: about the lost object and about the loss of sense of the self. Who am I? Where are you self, lost in the Internet? Even if she wanted, she would not be able to give up this sense of loss for she cannot afford to lose her melancholia – it would mean to lose her privilege, the last privilege of an impoverished middle-class longing for a different world. So, the melancholic clings to the object as much as to her sense of the self. She clings to the idea that there is something called 'self' that belongs to her: my-self, your-self, our-selves. She is moved by a sense of agency, ownership, and, at the very same time, she is driven in her words and deeds, by a feeling of total dispossession. Yet, it's not clear what she owns or what she has lost. A poet does not possess a poetics, the agent does not own agency. Melancholy does not belong to her in an exclusive way. She does not possess a well-rounded sense of the self. She was born in pieces, but sometimes she forgets.

There is a zone of non-being, an extraordinarily sterile and arid region, an utterly naked declivity where an authentic upheaval can be born⁵.

The sense of loss and dispossession that seems to animate the disenfranchised melancholic urban hipster is a fantasy that demands a continuous work of reparation and recuperation, when in fact there is nothing to be recuperated, but the sense of having lost something: a better time, a better place, the body, the self, the object. And, while people do lose their dwelling places, their affects and memories and their lives every day, she wonders whether her sense of loss is just another way of building a fortress around herself. What if melancholy was not a sickness but a way of tuning oneself into the world— an invisible, persistent élan that passes through all things? What if instead of clinging to representation, she surrendered the privilege of this work of representation, reparation and recuperation?

She could break free from this present condition. The urban hipster imagines going back to the woods in an attempt to recuperate the missing link and reconnect with the object. If he cannot go back, he brings the woods back into the city, turning his flat into a farm-house to grow

vegetable on the roof-top, and brew beer in the basement as his grand-grand-parents before him did. Indeed, her father does grow delicious vegetable on a small piece of land on a mountain overseeing the beach. She could move back to shithole where she grew up. She could find a way back into the rabbit hole, relocate in the private vacuum and get high by the beach, as she had done many times before alienated by the reality of the small village, but pleurably so. It has never been so bad, after all. The alienation that comes from this state of being in a private vacuum is something anyone would jealously guard. Yet, she is not interested in preserving the vacuum and that is why she has left that vacuum of the shithole. She had been propelled outside the shithole by a deep sense of alienation, and straight into the heart of the hipsterdom. So, why go back now?

The sense of alienation has transformed her. The sense of alienation has propelled her forward, to consider the pro and cons of an alienated life; to think of self-effacement as a possibility for liberation. She has started writing about

melancholy and has turned herself into a character on a written page. The character is now struggling to become something other than the pathologically melancholic character on this page. She is struggling to disentangle herself from the image of her melancholic self, and the scenario she has created for herself. She feels trapped in it –trapped in her own words, seduced by the character she has created, identifying with it to the point of being unable to move on. Now she is having a hard time finishing this text. As she tries to find a way out, to dis-identify with the character, she keeps reading and re-reading the beginning of this text. She looks at it with a bit of nostalgia, and jealously: She had a good start, she thinks. What's happened to her? Where has the force that propelled her gone? Who's the person who started writing this text, is it still her? Has she gone back to hide inside the black hole?

There is a risk in identifying with a character, whether in one's own writing or in real life. To see oneself reflected in an image (of one's own making) might make one experience life more intensely (as one, there and then, becomes the hero of one's own life story). Yet it might as well turn into a denial of life, that same life that we would like to intensify. By over-identifying with the image she finds of herself in the mirror of melancholia, the disenfranchised hipster might no longer recognize the power of melancholy as an *élan vital* that passes through all things. On the other hand, dis-identification might not be the answer either. She is starting to identify in melancholy that vital force that spurs her into action. After all, it is melancholy that motivated the writing of this text, the creation of her character, to begin with. She is me and I am her, and now the time has come to end this text.

1 Graham Harman, Art Without Relations, https://artreview.com/features/september_2014_graham_harman_relations/
2 Graham Harman, p.47, The Quadruple Object, (Alresford: John Hunt, 2011).
3 Charles Baudelaire, p. 32, Les Fleurs Du

Mal, translated by Richard Howard. (Boston: David R. Godine, 1982).
4 Benjamin, W., The Arcade Project, p.352, Benjamin quoting Charles Baudelaire from, Les Fleurs Du Mal. Translated by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin.(Cambridge, Massachusetts

and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999).
5 Fanon, F., p.10, Black Skin, White Masks,. Translated by Charles Lam Markmann, (London: Pluto Press, 1986).

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