

LOVE WITH STRANGER

#monumentalperformance@sowhat?

I'm first introduced to Marjorie Cameron Parsons Kimmel in July 2009, as I nurse a broken heart in a room at PS1 in New York City and watch too many Kenneth Anger films at once.¹

I follow strict red hair, a beak nose, a loose robe and white wrists. The position of the projector makes her slightly larger than life size, between store mannequin and Amazonian. Even so, I think she is a man. A twink man. Proto the 'boys with tits' fad of 1990s high fashion (the definitive sting of gay-mafia-behind-the-scenes). I'm stunned by her performance.

On screen - she has the presence of platinum: no dents, no cracks. She towers over the stray-acting and narcissism of the other players. Yes, she is witchy. Yes, she is campy. No, she is not Kate Bush performing Heathcliff and Catherine of Wuthering Heights in 1980s simulations of 'spooky'. She strikes deeper and stronger than the white-woman-does-bitch-witch girliness so connected to women of my generation (*Hole*, *Seven Year Bitch*, *Bikini Kill*, *Alanis*, *Spice Girls*, *Gaga*). Cameron offers a dare. She's not ironic, she's upfront.

This is me, performing for you, but I am not flirting with you. I am looking at you look at me, and I am using this to undo what I've seen before with Bette Davis and Monroe.

I need to know about this. Why Do I Not Know About This. An ultimate dis, I feel left out of something important, while no one is there to tell me what I have so completely missed. Save the indifferent credits:

6.8/10 Stars on IMDB (1954) *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome*²

Dir.: Kenneth Anger

Stars: Samson de Brier (Shiva), Marjorie Cameron (Kali)

LA STUFF: AS IF, AS IS

Online in 2009, I use her search-engine-results as bio. Unfixed identity: ACTRESS, OCCULTIST, POET, ARTIST, MUSE, WHORE, WIFE, WITCH, PSYCHIC. Neon-text-on-black-background websites, MySpace pages with her face as teenage avatar. UFO NAZIS, Christian Science expats. A small wiki:

B. 1922 Belle Plains, IA; D. 1995 Hollywood, CA.

I learn of:

- Cameron's marriage to rocket scientist Jack Parsons.
- Her Occult workings under Aleister Crowley.
- In 1947 L. Ron Hubbard as scribe in a sex magick ritual between herself and Jack Parsons to invoke the force Babalon.³
- Conspiracy theories surrounding Jack's death in 1951 – blown up in their garage while she runs errands in Pasadena.
- In 1957 how her drawing becomes the subject of an obscenity trial for artist Wallace Berman.
- How Cameron is considered to be the Whore of Babalon.
- How,
Whore of Babalon =
In the Crowley Tarot Deck, 'The Whore' - associated with Leo – lust, freedom of expression, art, party, liberty – The 5th House =
Whore of Babylon (from Revelations 17) =
The Hindu Goddess Kali =
A force supreme, beyond time, primordial and destructive, Mother Earth.

Jack Parsons on Babalon:

invincible as a naked blade.⁴

Cameron's life online is of immediate web lore and fiery grandeur. And, she is inexorably tied to Los Angeles. Her relation to the city's history feels like a Forrest Gump, she somehow graces each mysterious and epic twist of LA. LA, the ultimate and final shutdown to manifest destiny, which in defense curls and crashes like the skateboard wipeout called 'The Scorpion.' The legs hit the back of head.

Los Angeles: no place left to go but crazy.

BEYOND

Cameron moves beyond your status-quo ephemeral LA weirdo-cunt. Adventure and character pale in light of the independent visionary strength of her artwork and poetry. Valuable for its own achievement. And for its influence: her work inspired younger artists synonymous with Los Angeles art - Wallace Berman, Kenneth Anger, George Herms.

Even so (and although the web has claimed her), in summer 2009 she lies underrepresented. Her actual paintings, poems, writings are rarely sourced on the sites devoted to her lore, myth, rep.

FOUNDATION

The lone website that does so is her foundation, *The Cameron Parsons Foundation*, and I'm impressed that it exists. The 'About' lists her books, exhibitions, works. However, there are lists but little evidence – just a few pictures, and none of her writing is accessible. The site mentions her *Magickal Diaries* have been published in 2008, but: they are not on Amazon. I write to 'Info': *I would like to see these diaries*. Through this email, I meet Scott Hobbs. He in part runs her foundation. He is also the yoga instructor to the most famous riot band of my generation. He owns two Scottie dogs. He wears a necklace with the silver words *Let It Go*. A year and a half later we are at a fancy pre-Oscar party together and Mrs. Murdoch asks, "How did you meet?" We have to say, online. *We met online*.

I'm living in Los Angeles as an art student when I first become interested in Cameron. Scott becomes the closest thing I have to a dad in the city, and when my best friend Orlando gets unjustly thrown in jail, I call Scott first. Through him I meet Aya, a Beat poet often associated with Cameron. There is a closeness with Aya and with Scott, as equally profound as it is sudden.

LOVE WITH STRANGER

Cameron haunts me, from 2009 until now. Not your average haunt, but a presence. Immortality and knowing through art - what later I start calling *Love With Stranger*, after Walter Hopps; his lips pursed over an awaiting-awaiting-awaiting art crowd somewhere on the west side of Los Angeles, "Art offers the possibility of Love With Strangers."⁵

LIKE A PHARMAKOS

I decide I have to write about her: a *katharsis* from the haunting.

She has passed from the place of exile to the place of heroine, like Sappho, or like Joan of Arc. This is how she appears to me over time – as the Hellenic Pharmakos, the scapegoat ritually exiled to banish evil at moments of crisis and then exhumed to epic stardom. Joan, signaling through the flames. Sappho's leap from Leukas.⁶

FAMOUS

In late 2011 she is the subject of a longish biography, *Wormwood Star*.⁷ She is a full page in the catalog for the Getty's art-in-LA-retrospective *Pacific Standard Time*.⁸ Her presence online has shifted: the first image result is

Fairy Queen, a drawing of ink on parchment. For two days, I write at the Getty Research Institute. Her drawing *Peyote Vision* is reproduced and displayed two floors above me. I listen to her hoarse voice on my iPod explain how she never received proper credit. At the Getty she is credited: Marjorie Cameron. After yoga class on South La Brea, Scott is telling his students about her: *we worked very hard for her*. Here she is. He turns to the full page of her work in the catalog. She is moving into the last phase of the Pharmakos: veneration.

2007 GENIUS IN THE PICKS

In Scott's living room, there are two drawings of angels by Cameron that he has restored and framed. The shapes bleed from the center of the page outward. At first, what is supreme is the line quality. The separation of the angel body to the paper is made with a long, harsh, beautiful line. As if she were evoking them, not drawing/describing. Then, the figures move and a psychic pain comes through looking intently at the shapes, and the way their bodies surge and twist, curling under their robes, spirit-struggling against their iconic grace and now object-hood.

In October 2009, Orlando returns to LA from New York with a stolen catalog of Cameron's work.⁹ Orlando is the best thief I know: he is seamless, but more importantly the items he gets are Destiny. Like a vintage Andy Warhol postcard from a suburban sex shop. Early on in our friendship, he gives me Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*. His copy: a pulp paperback of loose pages bound with a satin blue ribbon. This made it impossible to read, and the book fell apart on the floor, his notes in the margin: *Orlando Furioso*.

The stolen catalog is from a small solo show of her work at the Nicole Klagsbrun Gallery in 2007. The show is recommended by Artforum's PICKS. This is her first solo show since she shunned the art world post the Ferus obscenity trial in 1957. Scott tells me: *Cameron did not want to show her work in galleries after the vice squad deemed obscene and seized her drawing Peyote Vision from a solo show by Wallace Berman at the Ferus Gallery in 1957*. The drawing, placed on the floor, was part of a larger piece by Berman. *Peyote Vision's* sure, unyielding lines depict a woman in sexual ecstasy; a beast like man lifts her to him. Her tongue rejoices and licks the air.

In the small PICK¹⁰, Cameron is called an excellent draftsman. She has "the casual virtuosity of a nineteenth-century academic painter." Her work is termed "hallucinatory," "dark." A token of Aleister Crowley's occult mysticism. She is called a siren. Her drawings are "like the siren." She comes before 'Goth' artists, like Cameron Jamie and Chloe Piene. She worked in series: *Slaves, Pluto Transiting The Twelfth House...*

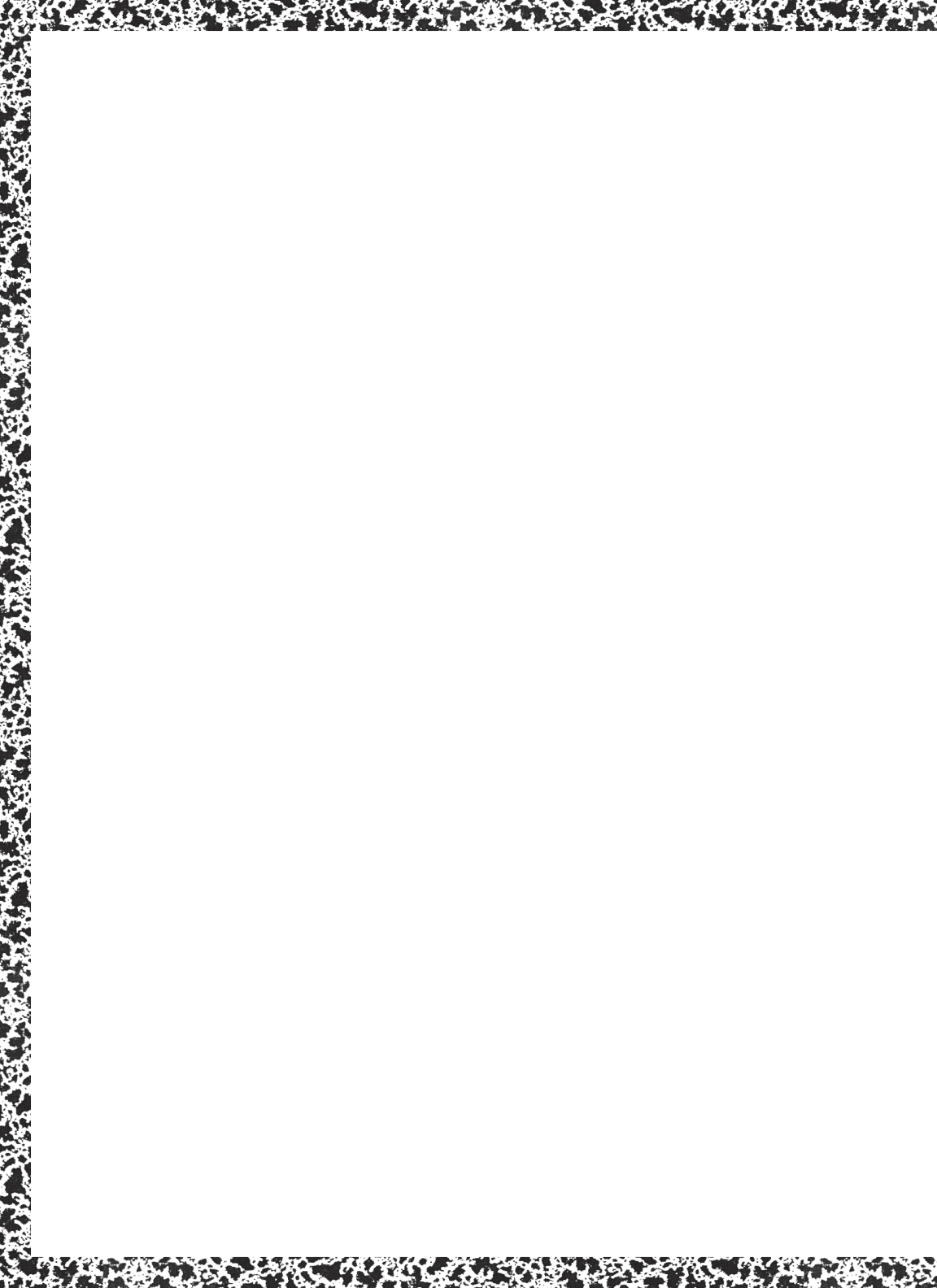
At the back of the catalog, other series include *Fossil, Lion's Path*, and

drawings of her daughter, Crystal. Each series works as a quiet rule to a given force.

Scott looks through her last diary, yet to be archived. Half empty, it holds the beginning of a new series. Uncompleted before her death. This is what is meant by *The Magickal Diaries*, which I first saw listed on *The Cameron Parsons Foundation* website. Series, Meditations, Exercises. Drawings and poetry interwoven. Sketchbooks.

The contents of the sketchbooks are not afterthoughts or leftovers: they move if you stare long enough, and they do what most of the Occult-ish contemporary work does not: an actual tie to the underworld, instead of teenage borrowing or pastiche. They are traces not only of "virtuoso sketching," but also of a determined practice and calling. A ritualistic lineage - serious&sublime like Yeats. They are consecrated talismans. Or, at least I am unable to shake this.

Cameron drew maps for the Navy during the Second World War. During this time, she met Churchill. Scott tells me that she went by 'Candy' while in the Navy, she hated the name Marjorie. She would wear no underwear: crouch, and the institution would gasp. Her technical prowess was of the kind found in top-animation-students-cum-military-agents. Mixed with - and set on - undoing repression (sexual, social, patriarchal) at a time when this was freakishly transgressive, brave: not hip.



INTERNATIONAL BITCH

AND SO?

Why when I mention her to collectors, gallerists, etc., do they shrug and look askance? Why, when I go to REDCAT to see the historical exhibition *The Experimental Impulse*¹¹, does it seem awkward to want to include her among the rest, those accepted as part of the discourse?

1. There lingers the easy narrative that the vice squad seize of *Peyote Vision* solidified her scorn for the gallery system and warranted a self-exile *from the discourse*. But - history is full of artists who hate this and are cajoled despite. Pollock pissing in Guggenheim's fireplace, Velasquez undoing Divine Right in *Las Meninas*, Deitch's Street Art Rebels ...

2. When I talk to collector Diana Zlotnick, she says, "LA is very macho. It's not easy for women here." I think: is this true? If a question *now*, it would have definitely been an everyday affirmation *then*. I remember what Aya says: "Women were writing in the shadow of men." and "None of her writing is like *men*. Where you can't say that about a lot of women writers at the time."¹² Granted, being a woman artist in the 50s is not easy. Even harder is being an artist in the 50s and making your position 'Woman.' You stand out in the wrong way, and so you are more easily shut down. The position of neutrality: a luxurious and dangerous privilege.

3. In *Approaching Artaud*, Susan Sontag describes Antonin Artaud as "on the edge of representation" because his madness is both pique and block to understanding his work.¹³ He is celebrated because of madness, but this madness does not allow a clear reading of the work; nor can this madness be institutionalized and co-opted into secular culture. He is against the Surrealist duality of rational/irrational. Madness, extreme and uncommunicative, explains Sontag, cannot, will not, ever be part of the secular society in which Artaud hopes to found his Bayreuth. An irreducible contradiction.¹⁴

In Hollywood there is a transient, Irish, who calls me Platinum. Platti for short. Sometimes he calls me Meg. When I first meet him, he calls out: *Hey Are You An Artist? Because I'm An Artist Too, Takes One To Know One*. Around his neck hangs a string with a four-leaf clover in glass, and two teeth. I bring him art supplies over the summer. He draws black dragons swirling. He lives below my apartment, and I hear him whaling at night. Yelling Sometimes Friendly Sometimes Mean Always Loud. I don't see him for two weeks. And then I go online, and there it is: Irish walked across the 134 Freeway on Halloween and was hit by oncoming cars. Each time I walk home, I can only see him: triumphant, moving through the possibility of white lights.

During her lifetime, Cameron apparently held the deep belief that a child would be born with Jack Parsons' soul. She attempted to organize this in the desert, and then in the Catalina Islands, and then through her daughter.

She believed that her granddaughter was Jack. Her drawings and poems (as talismans) belie the psychic journeys she took to make them, they offer the same kind of outside-but-and-so-illumination as Artaud's writings: mad, but admired for this madness. But still mad. The Occult seals the gap between art and life.

My friend Patrick Dyer explains how: The Pure Will of Crowley's Law "Do What Thou Wilt" cries that "one must ride the beast of one's own pure will – with all its passional force and multiple jaws that gnash and coo and wail at once. To never act following reflection or with eyes cast to the future, but to be animated by that beast's bucking and stampeding – to submit to this 'abomination' with all limbs flailing, voice loud and incoherent."¹⁵

This life path surges beyond customary lines drawn, there is no expected
a) OK b) NOT OK.

INTERNATIONAL BITCH

Another reason for her lack of recognition is that she is not totally hip. Filmmaker Curtis Harrington notes in a 1980s interview: Cameron's work is not 'Pop,' her era was.¹⁶

But - *Cameron is a muse*, and this is very pop. A muse inspires and becomes lauded as a goddess. In *Sexual Personae*, Camille Paglia explains the show business goddess: "Judy Garland inspired mob hysteria among male homosexuals. Media reports speak of uncanny shrieking, mass assaults on the stage, blinding showers of bouquets. These were orgiastic eunuch rites at the shrine of the goddess."¹⁷

Pop Art does Popular Culture. Cameron - as muse, as persona - provides an icon to those searching for a dark star. In Pop Era California, her musehood precedes her work, and in this way trumps it. Or at least Cameron as Whore of Babalon/Witchy Poetess Woman is an image Pop can digest and draw from, more so than mad woman drawings, paintings, poetry. Mary Woronov if as 'Whip Girl' to the Velvet Underground she was truly invoking and drawing sorcery circles. Crowley on a Beatles album, Kenneth Anger as Occult astrologer to The Rolling Stones. *Bad*, Occult-As-Pop transforms into a 'been there, done that.' Synonymous with a teen-Goth cinched in a Skull&Bones belt buckle: they have 'been through something' and they are 'here to let you know.'

In another interview about Cameron, Paul Mathison (once Pan in *Inauguration of The Pleasure Dome*) calls her an "International Bitch." He looks off camera and feigns despair: "I am very familiar with these...*International Bitches*."¹⁸

Kenneth Anger:

Suddenly Cameron blew in unannounced, flowing red hair, green eyes – this was before contacts... these were real emerald green eyes that also could turn into sea-mist gray according to her mood, and flaming Scott red hair not dyed, not from Revlon or something like that, it was natural red hair, and suddenly Anaïs Nin SHRUNK! From being 5'4" tall, to being 4" tall and there was this little shrunken creature, which was Anaïs Nin in front of the Majesty of Cameron... And Cameron said, Here I am, I am the Scarlet Woman. And I said, Thank You, I've been waiting to meet you for at least a thousand years.¹⁹

More: Wallace Berman makes her cover girl for the first issue of his art zine *Semina*.²⁰ And when the infamous drawing *Peyote Vision* is included in the Ferus show, it rests almost as prop, laid out on the floor of his altar, at the foot. Cameron: "On the cover of the first issue of *Semina* appeared my picture. And underneath it he had *number One*."²¹ Curtis Harrington dolls her up as Grecian magician in his short film, *Wormwood Star*²² – and, even though it features her paintings and a studio, *she* clearly stars/leads as live painting.

I ask Aya if a muse has to be a woman, if it can be a man?

A: ...Like who?

M: Well, I thought Neal Cassady...

A: More like a sidekick. I didn't get that impression. But, I don't think so.

M: So it has to be a woman. Can it be a dandy?

A: I don't think so. Not at all... When I was young my power was beauty, that's a given when you're young. So I have that, but I was conflicted about using it. Because, to me I was half invisible because of that. They didn't care about the rest of me. At least at that time, I don't know if you are more equal or what now, but it was a detriment to me.

M: You couldn't be both.

A: They just didn't give a damn if you were both.

I'm reminded of Orlando getting underwear as a gift from a lover: he did not like it. "I have problems with objectification," he sighs and slingshots the

bright blue panties across his apartment. *Really?*

Why? Because if you are a muse there is little room, and you have to be cunning with how you work that room. Orlando comes home and tells me over supper that Marilyn Monroe would study her face in the mirror for hours and hours to memorize what it could do. If you are the subject, you need to have total control. Each facial muscle must be remembered, because sometimes this is all you have to subvert the person seemingly possessing you to their own ends.

Object?

BUT: For her husband, Jack Parsons, Cameron becomes what the second wave feminists deplore: a woman created to complete a man, an invoked elemental mate, The Scarlet Woman, Crowley's *Whore of Babalon*. Cameron could be placed with those that have "been made into a 'fantasy' of the 'speculum' providing a material support of male narcissism."²³ A narrow version of herself.

Jack Parsons:

And I saw my life as Giles de Retz, wherein I attempted to raise Jehanne Darc to be Queen of the Witchcraft, and failed through her stupidity, and again my pride. And I saw myself in Francis Hepburne, Earl Bothwell, manipulating Gellis Duncan, that was an unworthy instrument. And again as Count Cagliostro, failing because I failed to comprehend the nature of women in my Seraphina.²⁴

Jack sees her as the force Babalon, and so to relive love after his death, she must relive the image he imparted for her. I conceive of Cameron learning, re-learning, practicing magick until mastery, an eternal love letter to Jack. Lovers love to please the other.

(DEPENDENCY)

In Fall 2008, my friend Rachal Bradley and I go see Kenneth Anger at REDCAT.²⁵ He shows a new film funded by (and created for) the Austrian film festival, *Donaufestival*. In a punk move for the better, he provides his funders with a homoerotic film of the Hitler Youth. Riffing on Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will*²⁶, he calls it *Ich Will!*²⁷ – 'I want!' To describe his process, he lifts one lion-like arm to the audience. His hand claws the air and then back again, an interpretation of the Z-formation snap. He explains: *You take it from them and you throw it back in their face. You TAKE it from them and*

you *THROW* it back in their face.

Rachal and I are mesmerized. Finally, our slogan.

At a rehash of a Michael Asher critique at the Cirrus Gallery²⁸ (with Michael Asher not present), a slew of ex-students-cum-artists/curators/critics discuss entitlement and dependency. Behind me is a very California-looking intellectual holding a beautiful tote bag with the fluorescent orange capital letters BOOKFORUM. He has the face of some kind of arched-nose statue, and a perfect open-lip overbite to match. The discussion has moved into: *Is it not hypocritical to be teaching Marxist modes of production and materialization while at the same time charging students an exorbitant amount of money for something Marx thought should be a free?* The intellectual shifts in his seat, he says: *Dependency is not a negative thing. We are part of the institution, and so dependent upon it. Dependency does not preclude critique.*

Cameron works with and depends on her muse image in order to practice a form of change and subversion. But this does not disallow her own autonomy and power. Dependency does not preclude critique.

Was Cameron the Whore Of Babalon?

Aya: That is the question of the century.²⁹

In Luce Irigaray's 1977 essay *This Sex Which Is Not One* she presents the escape of mimesis, the form of resistance where women imperfectly imitate stereotypes about themselves so as to show up these stereotypes and undermine them.³⁰ With Kenneth, with Curtis, with Wallace, Cameron camps herself up to the point of voguing: the witchy muse comes apart at the seams. One dimensionality broken offers the possibility of a multi-faceted existence. *She takes it from them and she throws it back in their face*, while still doing what camp does best: sincere and open commentary.

How? Performances-on-screen offer their own form of subversion from prescription, and so an emptying out. And, in life.

Scott knew Cameron when she was older, living in West Hollywood at Genesee Ave and Santa Monica Blvd. Long white hair, no longer vixen, she would play seamlessly the role society allows for older women: crones. She pumps this out as eccentric *carte-blanche*. The local TV station would interview her on Halloween: *You think I'm a witch? SO be it.* Long white hair, cackle, leather thigh-high boots, wrinkled face. She would walk down Genesee and spook people on purpose, shaming and teasing vinyl and cardboard witch costumes with her own appearance as Imagined Witch Incarnate. She would walk into sex shops in her hood, pick up a cat-o'-nine-tails and whip whip whip the air until all the customers would leave.

OWning

One more reason for her lack of recognition could be hoarding. Why would/should you share your muse?

I am in the aisles of Home Depot. I get a phone call from a boy on whom I have waged war.

He says: I am going to trace Cameron's drawing, and then I am going to put it in an art show. And you can't do anything about it.

Which one? I ask.

He says: The only one that is famous.

Peyote Vision?

He says: What?

Okay. You can't do that, I say. That is my research. The only way you know about her, is because of *me*.

Between all the wood and power tools, I feel like I need a weapon. Instead, I go out into the parking lot and I start to cry. I call my friend Dan Finsel and he says, "Margaret, *The Pen Is Mightier Than The Sword*."

Cameron makes you want to hold onto her and not divulge. I feel this deeply. I know this is why I am annoyed. Part of me would like to think I am unnerved at the boy because he is doing what everyone has done to her work, cut and paste, trace and steal. At the end of Cameron's life, these parasitic acts became what Artaud calls 'flies.'³¹ Lots of flies.

I go home and listen to an interview where Cameron describes how *Peyote Vision* has been taken from her, as a prop from the muse.

In 1981,³²

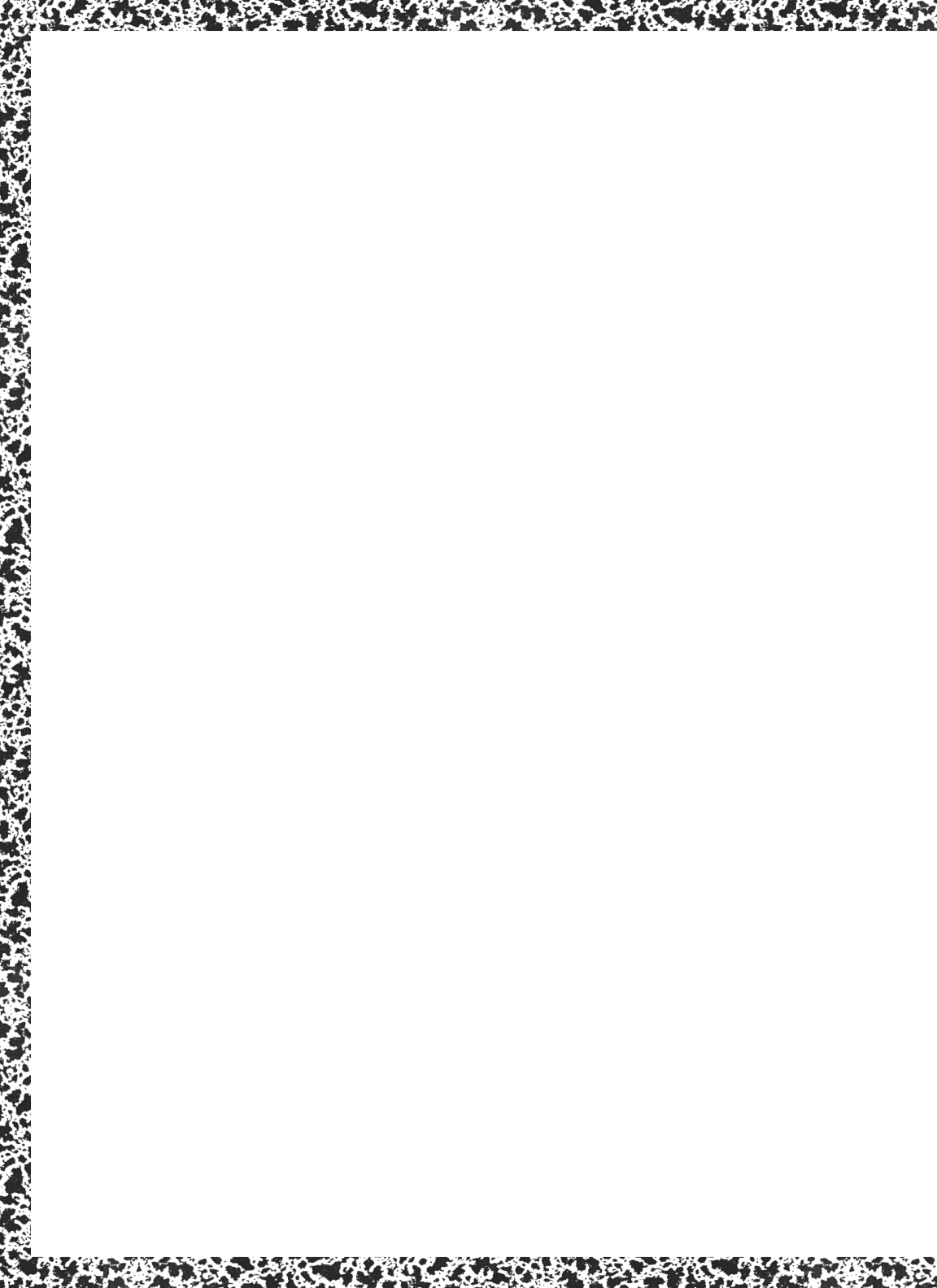
the Los Angeles County Museum [LACMA] had a retrospective of the 60s and it was being picketed by the Los Angeles women's groups because there were no women represented in the group show. At the same time, I had people coming to me and congratulating me for being in the LA County Museum show. So, I went down to see what was ticking. And I walked in, and there was my drawing, big as light. It was represented 4 or 5 times in the one exhibit of Wally's work, never explaining that it was my work. I called up a lot of people, I called up the curator of the museum. I was put on hold, I used to joke and say for two weeks. I called KPFK, I called everybody I could think of to speak for me, and nobody wanted to stick their neck out.³³

Cameron goes on to describe how her drawing is rarely given due credit in other circumstances. She feels irked. Cameron on what happened after the seize of her drawing by the vice squad in 1957:

As a consequence, out of that came a book called *The Last Time I Saw Ferus*, which described the whole bust and everything that went down and brought in all the people that were related to it, but there was just one little paragraph saying, the drawing incidentally was made by a woman. They did mention my name, but it was a 3-4 line paragraph when actually the whole book was about the Ferus Gallery and how it had gone down. And nobody wanted to give my drawing credit for having done it.³⁴

Cameron is right, there is little mention of her in comparison to the generous photo spread showing movie-star-looking men artists. Of course, I am on Cameron's side. This is unfair. I imagine the possibility that Wallace Berman didn't want to share his muse. A possible scenario. But – do I believe it? From the 3-4 line paragraph she speaks of:

The drawing had not been done by Berman, but by a close friend, the mysterious poetess Cameron.³⁵



LOVE SPELLS

October 11, 2011

Orlando is in the hospital. The doctor is hot. His mother texts: *cuando te viejo?* Orlando is OK. I cannot move, but tremble. Not because Orlando lies in bed sick. But because: it's my birthday and at 7AM I ran into Kenneth Anger. Orlando: *Did you ask him about Cameron?* Orlando's boyfriend Brody squints. Orlando and Brody look at me. I look weird. I feel like the sick one.

His face was just below the horizon when I saw him, it was blue Hollywood light outside, and I was late. Franklin and Highland. Full moon in Aries. I was worried about you. Kenneth Anger was wearing orange. He has gorgeous hair.

Did you say anything about Cameron, Margaret?

OH MY GOD It's you, it's you, it's really really you! It's you! It's you! You're Kenneth Anger! *It's my birthday and you're Kenneth Anger!*

Kenneth Anger was right in front of me, but I could only see a recorded interview I know by heart.³⁶ It is Kenneth on Cameron. The back of his hand brushes his 'LUCIFER' tattoo. He explains that Cameron picked the font, because it looks like seahorses. He says, *Cameron loved the ocean*. She would hold his head under the waves at Venice, so he would understand the power of the moon. I want to tell Kenneth Anger I know this.

Instead I say, "I know Cameron." He looks at me sideways. "You *knew* her?"

I don't know what else to say. Kenneth tells me I have beautiful eyes, and I can no longer talk.

ANGER V. DEREN

In "Illuminating Lucifer," a 1974 essay for *Film Quarterly*³⁷, Carel Rowe explains that both Maya Deren and Kenneth Anger use the Occult and its attachment to ritual. For Deren, ritual "impose[s] an ideal order on the arbitrary order of art and the chaotic order of the world."³⁸ Her followers: Michael Snow, Hollis Frampton. When considering ritual, Kenneth Anger works beyond a structural framework. Each film is a precise invocation to call upon a primal force and unleash it onto the ether. "For Anger, making a movie is casting a spell."³⁹

From the *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome* DVD:

Lady Kali blesses the rights of the children of light
as Lord Shiva invokes the godhead with the formula
"Force and Fire."

Dedicated to the few; and to Aleister Crowley, and the crowned and conquering child.
Cameron: Lady Kali, The Scarlet Woman.⁴⁰

I do not understand Aleister Crowley or the Occult enough. A lifelong path, and one I cannot simply run over. I want to get it. I come across this from Crowley:

Every intentional act is a magickal act.⁴¹

LOVE SPELLS

Orlando and I are planning our 'wedding.' He has been reading Alejandro Jodorowski's *Psychomagic*,⁴² and has just returned from a cover peyote-vision-quest of Antonin Artaud's *Concerning a Journey to the Land of the Tarahumaras*.⁴³ He has a more specific taste and sense with spells, and so I try to learn from him. I repeat to myself: *Psychomagic is a healing process/therapy/psychotherapy*. As the mind takes in certain symbolic occurrences as fact, why not undo them with counter-symbolic acts? I sit on the concrete floor of his studio and listen to him talk. He carefully cuts out pictures from old porn magazines. For the wedding, he would like to do a love spell.

One love spell requires writing your name and then your lover's name on two strips of ribbon and then winding the two ribbon around a dove. The bound-dove is then strapped to your chest with more ribbon. Orlando drives to Lancaster to get the doves: 5 white, 5 black.

As Orlando explains such things to me, in daily life practicing exactness and elegant awareness, I come to think of Magick as a hyper version of J.L. Austin's *How To Do Things With Words*.⁴⁴ The solidification of the speech act 'I do' causes a lifelong contract: a promise, an assertion, an order.⁴⁵ It doesn't work though; thinking like this adds a crisp and collegial 101-staleness to the Unknown. Throwing a spell against the wall, you are not sure what will bounce back.

T.S. Eliot, *The Music Of Poetry*, 1942:

It is a commonplace to observe that the meaning of a poem may wholly escape paraphrase. It is not quite so commonplace to observe that the meaning of a poem may be something larger than its author's conscious purpose, and something remote from its origins.⁴⁶

When a boyfriend breaks up with me, Orlando instructs me to do the following love spell: Find a statuette of Saint Anthony, put him upside down surrounded by one thing I adored, one thing from the lover, and one thing abhorrent. And then: PRAY. Pray to Saint Anthony "everyday, punish Saint Anthony and threaten to keep him upside down until your boyfriend returns."

DO NOT turn Saint Anthony right-side up. Ever.

It takes me three full days to find a Saint Anthony figurine. I go to every botanica in Los Angeles. But, they are all out. As if I had been preceded by Penelope, or Psyche, or some West LA Tyrant with all of the Saint Anthony statuettes hung upside down in a line, in possible competition with the Santa-Claus-David house on 3rd and Murfield Rd.

The Saint Anthony I acquire is very large, with a wooden base the size of two outstretched palms. Orlando helps me get to work and we install him in the corner of my studio. Upside down and adorned with photographs, glitter, mixtapes, and sulfur. "That is a big Saint Anthony," says Orlando. It moves a bit, slides; I prop him firmly upside down. I pray to it everyday. One day, I find my Saint Anthony has been hurled across the floor, its head severed. I place him back in his spot. The next day, the same thing occurs – his serene and smiling face cracked down the middle, rosy cheeks glowing in some weird black mockery. It was not meant to be. The love spell provides a focus or truth, some physical manifestation of pain and futility. The statue/voodoo allows a control to take place, where no imposed structure can (by definition) happen: l-o-v-e. I maintain the spell works, even if roundabout. It is therapy, a teenage love cure.

IN THE AIR

Driving in the Valley on Halloween 2011, listening to the immanent possibility of solar storms destroying California in the year to come, I'm thinking revolution and the woman sitting on the beast with seven heads. Revolution: psychic, Occult, and political - around the corner. The sun-hazed box stores already look pilfered: it's too easy in Los Angeles to hallucinate Armageddon. In light of my own amateur and muddied absorption of the Occult and how to decipher "films as spell", I find Cameron's account surprisingly the most grounded. In an interview with Sandra Starr from 1988:

Mostly it [*Inauguration of The Pleasure Dome*] was a chance to express our repression. We were what I call the Freudian Generation. We were the children who suffered from the family scene undergoing such a big change. We were all, literally, abandoned children. This was our first opportunity to express it. I think we became

interested in psychology first. And psychology sort of released us, allowed us to talk about these things that had formerly been veiled in a literary context. We were able to be shocking.⁴⁷

In *Revelations*, The Whore of Babylon's forehead is etched with MOTHER OF ABOMINATIONS - of the vile, of the sinful, of the taboo. MOTHER OF TABOO.

Freudian Taboo: The forbidden in light of social organization and codes. Like, incest.

Freudian Unconscious: A reservoir of processes in the mind, outside the conscious mind.

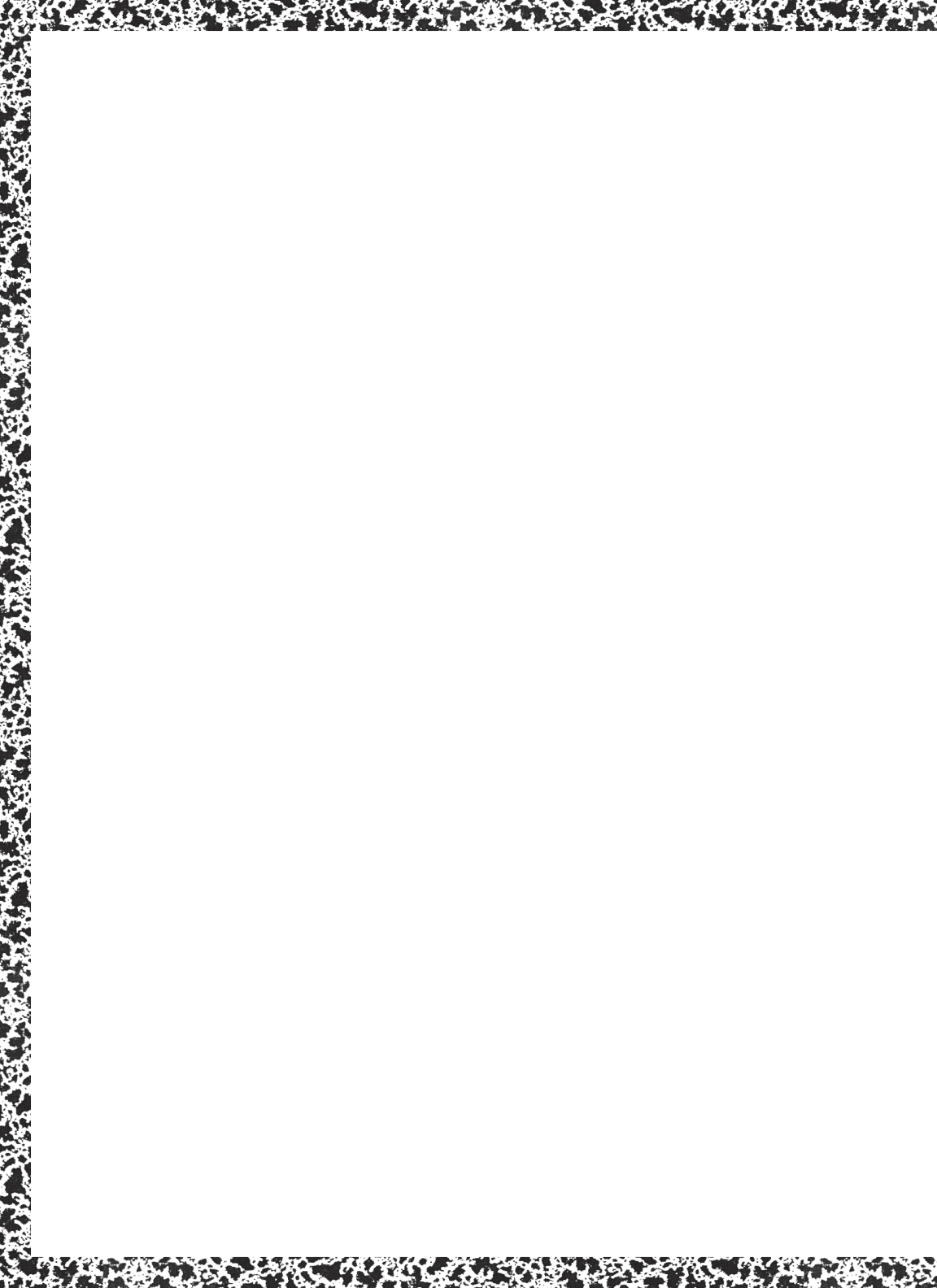
Freudian Repression: You can't deal with a desire, a thought, a fantasy, a taboo - and so you submerge it in the unconscious. The Repressed lingers - festers - only to rise to the top in slippages, meditation, random association, dream analysis.

Cameron's calls the cast: The Freudian Generation. The revelation of the Unconscious in the first half of the 20th century insists vital attention: not only is the mind split to a whole unknown parallel universe, but the at once abominable - the taboos - are called into dialog, summoned - abominations are laid bare. Cameron: "Mostly it [*Inauguration of The Pleasure Dome*] was a chance to express our repression."

'Dome' in *Inauguration of The Pleasure Dome* is taken from Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem *Kubla Kahn*.

I start to think: to put these ideas in the air by making a film feels way better than the alternative: 50s-carpeted-institutions-by-the-sea fostering a dialog on Freudian Repression and Expression. RE Esalen, Freud's Dora in batik floral print with tongue out ...

I would build that dome in air,
That sunny dome! those caves of ice!
And all who heard should see them there,
And all should cry, Beware! Beware!⁴⁸



FRAME ME RIGHT

Scholarly ignorance of the occult results from a largely justifiable contempt for the set of beliefs it represents.⁴⁹

This is the bad rep of Cameron: Eccentric Hippy. I visit my friend Phil. Phil is My Skeptic Visionary. Phil is not totally with it, but somehow totally on it. On the *D/S* issue about tweens: "Nobody knows what those tweens want – they're in The Cloud!" The kind of pithy wisdom you might get from a senile grandmother, or a loaded street kid.

"You want me to read what?" he says.

"The Thing On Cameron."

"What? Cameron? Who? She is just some eccentric Occult hippy in Los Angeles no one cares about. They're a dime a dozen there."

"She was in the Kenneth Anger movie. *Inauguration of The Pleasure Dome*."

"Oh ohhh, no, listen those movies are so sad, they are so bad, they are just very kitschy and camp and everyone knows it except him."

"*Fireworks*?"

"*Fireworks* is okay, but *Inauguration* is the worst."

BUT, I am not hurt. I walk home. I work out comebacks:

- 1) My friend Rachel McRae's take on Susan Sontag's *Notes On "Camp"*.⁵⁰ It's Political.
- 2) Yeats was an Occultist.

COMEBACK 1 RACHEL MCRAE'S "CAMP"

I am in a CalArts critique-seminar in Fall 2009, talking about homosexual art, boy-on-boy art. There has been an art show by three male students. Watercolors on the wall as if in a teenage bedroom. Camp v. Kitsch is coming up. Is it Camp? What is Camp? What is Kitsch? Is it Queer? Is it Bad to say Camp is Queer? Orlando and I crouch below a painting of testicles on a swing. My friend Rachel McRae is stewing in a corner between two multicolor kissing penises. I can see her getting ready to attack. No pouncing yet, she instead decides to write in a notebook. A young New Yorker recently moved to LA explains that John Cage Is Gay and that Camp Is Kitsch. Rachel is very smart, and is continuously yelling at people: "You did not read that! You are not an expert on Marcuse, OR on Foucault! You read ONE book! You Are NOT Educated! Get a LIFE!" I pray everyday: Thank YOU. For Rachel.

A beautiful, young, hot&ready redhead parts his lips to speak. I scrawl 'HOT' and double-underline on a pad for Orlando to see, too late - his eyes already long set on the fiery locks. We wait for the boy to speak, to hear the young voice. But instead, Rachel stops writing, interrupts the parting lips, and

directs her attention to the New Yorker: "I'm sorry, but you're wrong. Camp is very different from Kitsch. Kitsch empties a subject out and explodes it as a kind of hypercolor icon separate from any sense of community and is too dependent on the one producing the image to hold any autonomy. Camp with a capital C is an ACTIVIST format that preserves the autonomy of the players, even if they are acting as characters, and presents a framework within which a particular marginalized social group can unapologetically play out their dynamic, to its most extreme. The viewer may laugh at the behavior they see depicted on screen, but the players are never victims to this laugh; they are heroes. Those able to identify with the players laugh with recognition and pride at their ostentatious defiance and those unable to 'be down' laugh with discomfort. And, the whole while the filmmaker is acting not as a kind of ringmaster to the badly behaved, but as co-conspirator." Thank you. For Rachel.

Jeff Koons is Kitsch. John Waters is Camp. Jeff Koons is not part of the club he quotes. A study of Americana, vulgarity, fetish – his 'subject' is presented as bottled, packaged – from *Them*, by *Me*, signed JK. John Waters similarly deals in what you might also call Americana, vulgarity, and fetish. But – John Waters has no bottles, the vulgarity comes from within, spurts all over, and is worn like a heart on the sleeve. It slimes him, it slimes Divine. Camp is the slippery aesthetic. Does Kenneth mean it? Yes, and no. It Is Personal, And So Political. And also contradictory, as the personal can be. Camp does serious, activist, heartfelt, sincere AND ironic, vulgar, radical. All this from the underdog, "the marginalized social group" to the mainstream, while *owning it. Individual Struggle Becomes Class Struggle.*

STILL CAMP (!) ON CORRUPTION AND PURITY And ON THE SUPERIORITY OF CORRUPTION TO PURITY

Cameron, on events surrounding the filming of *Inauguration of The Pleasure Dome*:

We were the raggedy-ass kids. We had nothing except each other and a lot of balls, because we were sure that we were unique. I heard Maya Deren address a group of people at the Renaissance Club one night in the late fifties and she said, "You're all beautiful. Everybody in Hollywood is beautiful!" This is the one place in the world where beauty becomes anonymous.⁵¹

If beauty becomes anonymous, then it becomes corrupted. Hollywood "becomes the one place in the world where beauty becomes [corrupted]." Camp flirts with the corrupt. It complicates purity and its apparent hierarchy. It teases sacrosanct ideals. It teases the pure.

Kenneth On Cameron On Corruption And Purity:

Of course today there is nothing but profanity. And so, it's better that she's dead, the world has just become worse and worse ever since she's been gone. And, she despaired of it.

I would say, "How dare you live in a – I offered her several more better places to live, including Joshua Tree – I said WHY are you living in this polluted valley of Los Angeles? Look at the air!"

We were out in the summer, thick layers of pea soup SMOG. It covered the view. It was a sunny day, but you know, sitting behind all that crap.

She said, "Because I find it beautiful, because you haven't got to the level of initiation where you can appreciate Corruption as much as Purity. You are still in the illusion of Purity."

And I said, "WELL I prefer to remain there!"

And she said, "Unfortunately, you will – that's why we're out of sync, I'm on a level beyond you already."

And I said, "Well, you're talking with me."

"Yes, Corruption will talk to Purity. But, Corruption knows more than Purity because Purity thinks it is Pure, which is an illusion."⁵²

OLD WHORES Hollywood Babylon/Whore of Babalon

In his 1999 essay "Cross Gender/Cross Genre" Mike Kelley goes through the list of punks, glam rockers, hippies, surrealists, and feminists to reveal who started what, and how some of the marginalized subcultures that produce camp become swallowed by the conventional (and so possibly emptied of their initial intent of meaning and activism).⁵³ Largely about (crossing) gender and its flux in this process, Kelley's essay touches on other consumer sets of once-hidden Americana. For Kelley, "it is through Anger, whose interest in subcultural ritual led him to an interest in ritual magic, that Satanism, as another form of decadence, enters the pop music world."⁵⁴ Kelley also credits Anger with creating "the Bible of Camp"⁵⁵ – Anger's book series *Hollywood Babylon*, a thick pulp reveling in the dirty Hollywood glam of yore. If he wrote the Bible, then he *is* camp. In Spencer Kansa's book on Cameron, *The Whore of Babalon*. In someway then, Cameron is the progenitor of Hollywood Camp:

the at once arcane superiority of corrupted whores.

COMEBACK 2 Yeats Was An Occultist

I get a book, *The Birth of Modernism: Ezra Pound, T.S Eliot, W.B. Yeats, And The Occult*,⁵⁶ because it might be “an interesting way to frame the occult for the piece on Cameron.” This is something I begin to hear early on: *frame the Occult*. With performance theory, with the rise of the Subconscious – with Freud, with Marx, with The Accursed Share, with the Sexual Revolution, with Feminist Theory on the Witch, with Antonin Artaud, with Nazism and Noise Music, With Cameron’s life A-Z, With Genesis Breyer P-Orridge, and now, With The Rise of The Modernist Poets. Because singular (without name dropping) the Occult becomes too *The Craft*.

I am on YouTube watching Maja d’Aoust. She is the White Witch of LA. She is being put on the spot. The interviewer is making weird remarks like, “Oh, so you worship Satan and get naked a lot?” Maja looks like a Dove ad. The male voice: “Oh, really? So would you call yourself... An Occultist?” Maja deflects: “Well, Occult means hidden knowledge, and I study hidden knowledge, SO I guess you might consider me an...Occultist.”

What does she mean by Hidden Knowledge? Occult comes from Latin *occultus*: secret, concealed. Its wisdom “hidden from all but the initiates. Hence, human society is divided into the enlightened, the seekers, and the benighted.”⁵⁷ To become an Initiate, you must have experience with the divine that illuminates what was once obscured.

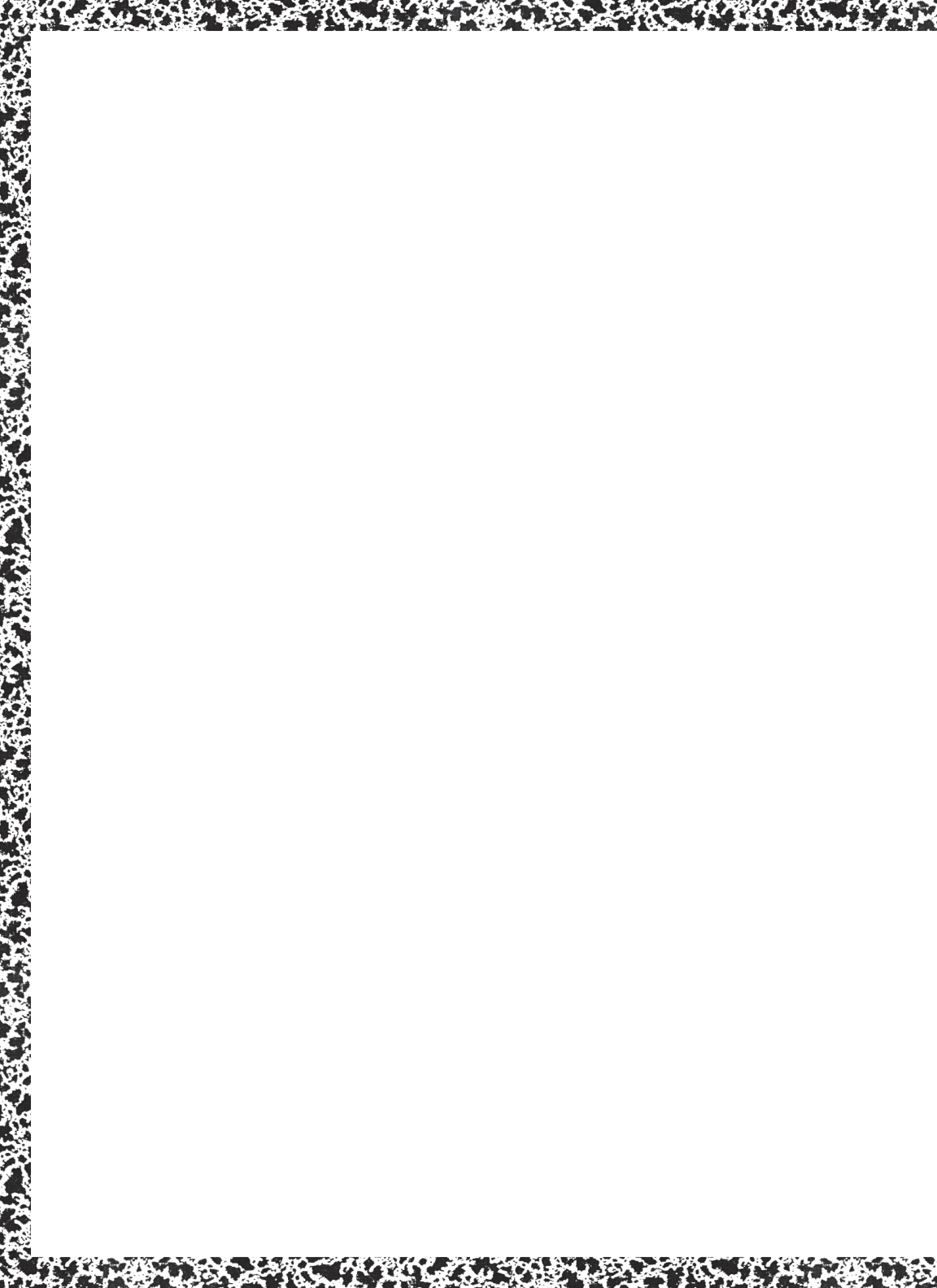
The modernist poets do not use the Occult as an aesthetic device.⁵⁸ Like Kenneth Anger, the work is a spell. They are Initiates: the connection is deep, intertwined, not parallel. Anger is not alone, nor Cameron. The idea that her paintings are talismans from journeys on the astral plane is not totally unprecedented, and completely eccentric. A continued tradition, a lineage. Yeats, Cameron, Anger.

To Phil, I can say: *Yeats did it, so can They. Yeats was part of the order of the Golden Dawn, to which Aleister Crowley belonged. Cameron and Anger follow Crowley. Do What Thou Wilt.*

On the walls of Aleister Crowley’s abbey in Cefalu:

Stab your demonic smile to my brain / Soak me in
Cognac, Cunt and Cocaine.⁵⁹

It seems a religion for Punk.



PART OF THE LANDSCAPE

COLLEGE OF THELEMA

In Fall 2010, I decide to call the College of Thelema in Los Angeles to see if they know about Cameron. The College of Thelema bases its curriculum on the teachings of Aleister Crowley.

They do not know about Cameron. But, they do know about Jack. *Oh yes we know him.* I hesitate: should I join *The College of Thelema*? It's a two-year 'journey.' I don't understand what they mean by the *Great Work*. The literature on the pamphlet is careful, special, an emphasis on freedom, will, spirituality, the new age and Horus. Equality, an undoing of the sexism found in Crowley, *The Order of The Golden Dawn*. I don't want spirituality to enter my life in this way. It's not my generation, I can't. I don't want to fall back into some stranger's arm in a trust exercise. I wonder: I should be invested in my magickal journey way more hardcore. *Why Am I Not Practicing The Ritual Of The Pentagram Every Morning?*

BENIGHTED HUSSIE

As I write about the Occult, I get frustrated. Toward the Society of the Golden Dawn, toward Crowley, I would probably stand as a kind of mid-city-benighted-hussie. I need those with first-hand knowledge. I talk to Patrick Dyer and Aya Tarlow.

Patrick Dyer is from Detroit. We meet when I am 22 and he is 19. His last name means *Of Black* or, *Of The Darkness*. We had a band called *Nine Inch Nailth*. I ask for his notes on Crowley:

(1999 to present):

Aleister Crowley (1875–1947) was a contemporary (somewhat) of Freud (1856-1939).

Aleister Crowley's idea of *Will* reminds of Freud's *Libido*. A force. Pure Will is not a will that can be known and tempered through personal development. It is power and chaotic; the very forces that created the universe as we know it: unknowably violent issuance of energy into nothing and condensed here in our mundane form, but present always in everything.

More from Patrick:

Crowley's central text is *The Book of the Law*. This text is summarized by:

*Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law.
Love is the law, Love under Will.*

You follow Will, regardless of purpose, you also bear your own witness. Do What Thou Wilt. Love should not be a result, it should be riding abomination.

“Find thou thyself in every star. Achieve thou every possibility,”
from The Book of Thoth.⁶⁰

AYA (Idell Rose Tarlow)

Aya was Cameron's confidante, and whenever the men quotient of Cameron's life is envisioned as overkill, Aya's name is mentioned as counter-point. “Yes,” Aya nods in interview, “yes the kohl would come off her eyes.”

Aya lives in Mount Shasta, CA. When I first hear of her, I envision some kind of nymph: her name, the location, a poetess. Aya, instead, has the energy of the song *California Über Alles*. Better than a nymph. Long into our meeting, she sits back in her chair at the fourth Thai restaurant we've been to and unexpectedly shrugs: “maybe you were a baby goat or a goat nymph in a past life.” Sacrificial goat. She orders more peanut sauce for me, and tells me I need to eat more.

Aya has rose-tinted glasses - she is very New Age, sharp, and beautiful. The way some people are skeptical of mysticism, Aya is skeptical of those who don't get mysticism. The language of the patriarchy annoys her, and she defiantly sheds and shows her irritability. She is for The Goddess. “You know,” she says, “I have to deal with all these Muggles.” “What's That?” “In Harry Potter, the non-magicians.”

Aya and I stay in a motel together: room number 130. Two Queens. She sits on the second bed, waits for it to bounce. She looks up. “This is okay.” The fan does not work. We sit, tired. We have been at a dance workshop in Berkeley. Aya offers me blueberries in the hotel plastic cup. I barely notice the light overhead going on-off-on-off. Aya stops: “What is that?” “I don't know, maybe it's motion sensed.” “Motion sensed?” I cleave myself from the chair. Wave an arm. Nothing. I feel a low pit in my stomach. “Yea, I don't know.” “Cameron, are you there?” The light stays on. We go to bed.

Aya as Beat Poet: When I was a teenager and read Kerouac while on the run in Mexico City, I thought: where are the women? They seemed left behind, reading tarot cards on the floor, not having fun.

But: here is Aya, talking to me about the language of the patriarchy and how her life as a woman is unexplainably different than my life as a woman. I'm offered a window into what Aya calls *The Women Who Were Left In The Shadows*: "You can't get past it if you still respect it as it was, and as it should be, and as its gonna be... It's not based on the same language. And so, Cameron went into the mystical part of it. And she didn't rely on it. None of her writing is like men's. Where you can't say that about a lot of women writers of that time."⁶¹

It is for this reason that Aya seems to have given up on Crowley. His language is that of the patriarchy:

So what did Crowley say? *The whole of the Law, so Love under Will*. So, utilizing that power of the visionary and all the rituals and everything that goes with it. I think his bottom line was power. You know. Power over the elements. Power over others. Which is the wrong use of magick. The right use of magick is birthing and flowering and bringing forth creativity for everybody not keeping it in a power thing.⁶²

We only spend two days together, but somehow it feels like the high point of my summer. Where some memories are like pins dropping. "Cameron was inspired by higher forces, visionary artists always go through something. They take drugs, they go into some kind of spiritual ecstasy, they paint in blood and tears. See there are no real words for this stuff."⁶³

ASSEMBLAGE AND WITCHCRAFT

WE ARE AS OLD AS MAN. A million years ago we sang the first cradle song. Against the first fear, our power. Against the first evil, our spells. Against the first illness, our remedies. We are the oldest religion in the world and the strongest. We were with the first man, and we shall be with the last.

Jack Parsons, *Introduction to the Witchcraft*, 1947.⁶⁴

Artist George Herms outlines that Crowley and Yeats were the predecessors to the current O.T.O. in Southern California (Ordo Templi Orientis – the occult club associated with the teachings of Aleister Crowley). George has read Crowley's *Diary of a Drug Fiend* several times.⁶⁵ I've encountered him talking about Cameron on three occasions: in a recorded video interview; in Sandra Starr's collection of interviews in *Lost And Found: Four Decades of California*

Assemblage Art, and in person at a seminar at CalArts. He stresses five things:

- 1) His first clear memory of Cameron – his wife calls him to look at something in Cameron’s house. He walks away in respect: “I just took one glance and I knew it was none of my business. It was Cameron’s private inner sanctum. I don’t know whatever kind of research she did, but I knew immediately it was nothing for me.”
- 2) Cameron telling him he doesn’t always have to play the fool.
- 3) Magick is about power more than love, and this is why he stays away from it.
- 4) When Cameron kisses him on her deathbed, it is the kiss of an angel, and of a young girl, like “kissing an angel.”
- 5) Her power, her magick, is there in the work. And she would not use this power with regard to relationships, but she would use it in her work, *“the magick is there in the work.”*

This last phrase I use to assuage myself after The Possession Dreams.

(POSSESSION)

I have a series of dreams about Cameron, which always involve severe dream paralysis. I start to call these Possession Dreams.

Possession Dream No. 2, August 2011: I am flying and fucking at the same time. With a winged beast that has very human skin. No feathers. I can see very far. Suddenly, I am back in my room and standing next to my body: Jack and Cameron are there, using their Magickal names, Helarion and Belarion. They are teasing me, it feels like contempt. Cameron attempts to enter my body. In the logic of my dream, if I tell her *no* and shake my head, she can’t possess me – but I awake once more to sleep paralysis. Finally, I shake my head. I wake and think, maniacally, I hate the Occult and I believe what George Herms says: magick is too much about power, not enough about love. I hate the Occult, I hate the Occult, I hate the Occult. For five days after the dream, a small pain develops under my left breast and below my heart.

I place the dream on an interpret-my-dream website for others to mull. I write Orlando and tell him I fear for my own sanity. The results/comments come back from the dream chain:

Incubus, the demon – where the orgasm is like ice, not fire.

And – It’s common. The scientific explanation is your body misfired, turned REM off, while leaving on the paralyzed state needed for sleep.

ASTRO ZONE

In Fall 2011, I'm hanging out in a front yard with my friend Lauren, she's house sitting a cool house in Hollywood. *The piano inside once played by itself*, she tells me. Really? She reminds me how LA has this kind of thing that is its own thing, and that this thing is spooky: Occult? Part of the landscape: cell phones, cars, psychics, secret societies, the power of now. Scientology. Scott tells me that Cameron considered herself the inner head of Scientology, and that is why they left her alone.

We are a block south of the astrology mansion, which Lauren calls Astro Zone. This mansion is in the Hollywood Hills. This mansion is devoted to the Study of Astrology. This mansion is my dream come true – not the house, just the whole deal. Photographer Cynthia MacAdams brings me here for the first time. In the courtyard, a pool. Scott tells me not to go, he says the rooms smell like cat pee. Instead, they smell of pumpkin candles. At the Halloween party, Cynthia aside: "Cameron would come, I would pick her up. Oh, did you know Margaret is interested in Cameron?" She whispers to me: *Cameron was Taurus/Scorpio*.

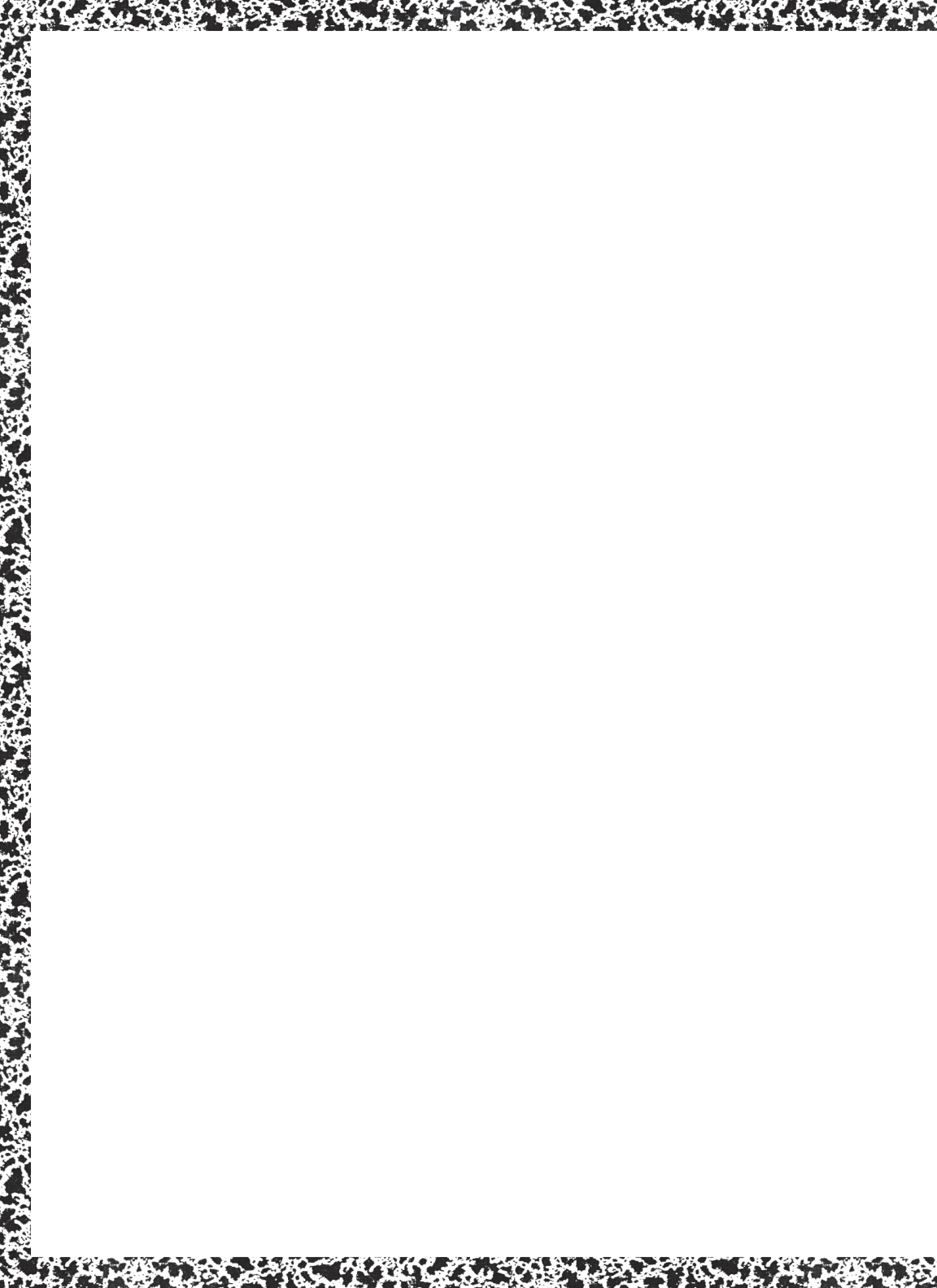
I can only think that this religion/spooky/Occult/new-age thing has deep roots in LA. Maybe it's the weather, or maybe it's the effect of building on ancient burial ground. Ghosts tug you into spirituality, a whole city playing out Spielberg's *Poltergeist*, acting out through spirit/body/yoga workshop.

Traipsing along, the religious zealots of inner America settled west. In *The Architecture of the Four Ecologies*, Reyner Banham relates how Venice Beach used to be called Iowa Beach.⁶⁶ When comparing San Francisco to Los Angeles, Banham suggests an important difference is the route to settlement. San Francisco is settled from the sea, from Cape Horn; Los Angeles, overland. "In one unnervingly true sense, Los Angeles is the Middle West raised to flash-point, the authoritarian dogmas of the Bible Belt and the perennial revolt against them colliding at critical mass under the palm trees."⁶⁷ And, Banham suggests that a God-fearing Midwestern wheat farmer is forever changed by the prospect of having to now farm citrus – fruit – experiencing a "sun-change that pervades moral postures, political attitudes, ethnic groupings, and individual psychologies."⁶⁸ Beige turns acid yellow, green, orange.

Cameron is from Iowa. She recalls her first experience with peyote, which "causes a revolution in the unconscious. Once these things have surfaced and become conscious, you have to adjust your life to it. You have to make tremendous alterations."⁶⁹

One evening, I tell Scott I might leave Los Angeles. He looks at me: "You know, Cameron would say: 'LA is the only place I can get away with doing

my shit!”



PINK MATRIX

Scott calls me. I can't talk for long as my scalp hurts from an overdosed bleach job. Scott is mildly upset. Scott rarely gets upset. He is an Aries/ Dragon. You can tell that when he does get upset, it will be emphatic and worthy – not *petty*.

He is saying, "I mean I knew her. That whole book is not her. He totally does not get her. I knew her." He is talking about a recently published book about Cameron. A bio. The bio is a little like the websites I first found in 2009, listing her as witchy woman, yellow Helvetica *ABRACADABRA* over her face. For Scott, Cameron should not be relegated into a hole of inane, witchy, objectification. Like Aya: "I knew a woman, not some Whore Of Babalon."

Scott does a good impression of Cameron, head back, mouth wide, fire eyes:

"You have no idea who the FUCK I am!"

Scott recounts how she desired to read her poetry at the Pink Pussycat Theatre in West Hollywood. I am struck: imagine the woman who caused the first obscenity trial in Los Angeles reading her poetry in the pink darkness of acceptable Hollywood-family-sex. Artaud in Jean Harlow's dressing room.

When I first meet Orlando he is living in the attic of a large house on Genesee Ave, a few blocks north of where Cameron lived. Orlando in the nice part of the street: above Sunset. Cameron in the dirty sex part: Santa Monica and Genesee.

There, at 7969 Santa Monica Blvd, lies the Pink Pussycat. But – it's now called Studs. Studs is a gay porn theatre. As the Pussycat, the theatre was a classy striptease nightclub. It opened in 1961. Everything inside was pink and burlesque. Now sleaze. From a current Yelp review:

OK, OK, so I use to go here a lot and... do things... (*clears throat*). This is a sleazy haunt, but when you're in the mood, there's nothing like it. I'm a slut, you say? Um, yeaah... I know... and your point iiiis...? ⁷⁰

Orlando and I visit. Even from the sidewalk, it smells like cum. Which is something I expect to make up, but instead it's true. It's strange, because our apartment building has the same smell: doused in ammonia and powdered air freshener.

The Pink Pussycat once housed the College Of Striptease. Curriculum: "The History and Theory of the Striptease," "The Psychology of Inhibitions," "Applied Sensual Communication," and "Dynamic Mammary, Navel and Rotation."⁷¹

From Time Magazine in 1961:⁷²

The entire faculty is Sally Marr, 52, mother of four-letter Comedian Lenny Bruce. With knowledgeability gained during her career as a tank nightclub comedienne, Professor Marr lectures her pupils: "Keep your eyes on the audience at all times. Learn how to look at one man and take your clothes off for him. Not too much bump and not too much grind — that's passé and went out with Minsky."⁷³

In 1962, Lenny Bruce is arrested in San Francisco on charges of obscenity for using the word 'cocksucker.' Five years after Allen Ginsberg's *Howl* and Wallace Berman (and Cameron's drawing) went through trials in California.

Howl is attacked for:

who let themselves be fucked in the ass by saintly motorcyclists, and screamed with joy

In Lenny Bruce's autobiography, *How To Talk Dirty And Influence People*,⁷⁴ he spends pages and pages on his obscenity trials. The first time I visit Astro Zone, they project and study Lenny Bruce's chart. He was a Libra. He wanted things to be fair. He was also a Rebel. With Mercury in the 10th house in Libra, he is nervous, sanguine: an over-intellectual. How did he die? The word heroin is whispered around the room, but I think:

Obscenity in California (Section 311.6 of the Penal Code)

"If merely disgusting or revolting, it cannot be obscene, because obscenity contemplates the arousal of sexual desires."

Lenny's Rant:

Christ I could never sit on a jury and put anybody away for looking. If I'm dressing and there's that chick across the way — that blue-eyed, pink-nippled, sweet high-ass from Oklahoma — I am going to look, and I am going to call my friends to look.

But, in our society, it's "Pull down the shade" — and charge two bucks to get in.

That's what repression does.

The obscenity law, when everything else boils away: Does it appeal to the prurient interest? *It must get you*

horny – that's what it means.

NO SUCH THING AS A PINK PUSSY

Peyote Vision was made, apparently, while Cameron was on peyote. *Peyote Vision* is also hot. The Woman is not looking at a man to undress for (as Sally Marr directs). If redone with a wink, and an arched knee, the drawing would have fit the menu insignia of the Pink Pussycat. But: it does not fit the Pussycat menu. It fits with Lenny Bruce, Henry Miller. Real sex, real threat, real rights. Undoing repression, sexual liberation.

I like to imagine a show at the Pink Pussycat. Lenny Bruce opens for a reading by Cameron. He would say: *There's this broad over here who's guna put a spell on you. She's guna lift the shade you've pulled, reddy?* Cameron would get up, kill the audience, and split their skulls like a comb.

Then: they would both be cuffed.

THERE IS NO JUSTICE, ONLY REVENGE

Orlando and I have not eaten for two days. We're sitting down to a meal, finally. The meal is not enough. Orlando is explaining to me that Wallace Berman was naive, he had no lawyers. That is why he was allowed to write on the blackboard in the courtroom:

There Is No Justice, Only Revenge.

The same judge that finds Wallace Berman guilty also finds Henry Miller guilty.

The details surrounding Wallace Berman's (and Cameron's) trial are hazy. There is the vague rumor that artist Ed Kienholz and then gallery director Walter Hopps called the cops on Berman: to garner the Oscar Wilde truism, Any Publicity is Good Publicity. I don't know. I ask Aya. But, she was not there, and so it seems a stretch. Somebody must know. Cameron only relates that they took her drawing because it was easy to take (small in size), compared to Wallace Berman's large cross with an attached image of male and female genitalia copulating. The cross would have been too heavy and controversial to drag to street. A photo op for Ferus: cops carry out cross. But still, there is no clear account.

Perhaps the repercussions have undone the initial event: Wallace and Cameron exiled/self-exiled. Two stars shot, replaced by a troupe of cunning machismo.

GIRL CULTURE GIRLS ARE EVERYTHING GIRLS

During my first meeting with Scott, what happens is a very formal interview. I find myself asking: Was Cameron a feminist? Is this just an automatic question ascribed to women, to women artists? In my ears rings Adrian Piper. *I am not a woman artist. I am an artist. I am not a woman philosopher, nor a black woman philosopher. I am a philosopher.*

My place with feminism is unpinned, post Riot Grrrl?

When Kurt Cobain died, I was 11. I was home sick from school, for a week. Unrelated. Unable to talk, I would stare at the ceiling, pee, and watch the one channel our television received, The News. There was his body being taken out of the mansion. Within a few days, reports of solidarity copycat killings. I watched more body bags from the Northwest Forest. I had no idea who Kurt Cobain was. I asked for a record. Listening to "Heart Shaped Box," I realized too late I had missed something. I had missed Riot Grrrl and one of its heroes. Ann Powers writes for Spin in 1997:

"What's a boy supposed to do?" No one asked this question more acutely than Kurt Cobain, who used his fame to engineer a new record deal for legendary feminist folk-punks the Raincoats, and, in the public side of his marriage to Courtney Love, strove to offer a model for true creative partnership between men and women.

My next teen years were not Riot Grrrl years, but Girl Power/Girl Culture years. This momentarily made feminism seem a sideline, a weak detail to a given reality:

No more waiting sweetly in the background for cultural crumbs or taking refuge in underground enclaves like Riot Grrrl. Girl Culture girls are Everything Girls; they want the world and they want it now...Newcomers such as Fiona Apple, Jewel, the Spice Girls, Lil' Kim, No Doubt's Gwen Stefani, and Erykah Badu have all reached platinum status this year.⁷⁵

Overwrought, as Scott pauses – his eyes green, dragon eyebrows: "I like the idea of a woman writing about Cameron. That is good, you can write about her being a feminist." Well? Scott mentions one thing that sticks:

1) She read a text called Woman and Superwoman on the radio in the 1980s.

I feel lost and somehow robbed of an ability to secure her as a feminist. She is not part of the Marxist, Woman House Feminists. She uses spells: every intentional act is a magickal act.

FREE WOMEN

From an interview in 1995, Cameron talks about a period in her life (mid 80s) where she attempted to “free women – the biggest nigger of them all.” Two other women helped her: Hedy and Cynthia. They were to all make a film about women, “since our talents seemed to represent that.”⁷⁶

Instead, they

ended up going in three different directions. Cynthia published *Emergence*, which was her first book about the emergence of women... Hedy directed *The BoomBoomRoom...* and began a long program of representing women in all of the existing material that showed the dilemma of women in the roles that they were cast into... So, it began to grow in momentum. What I did was that I recorded *Superwoman*. Which I read to Cynthia, and it is a doctrine that has been out of print since about 1913, 1914, and it was written by a man who called himself the Hierophant of Isis. And, I began releasing this tape.

[...]

Superwoman was given to me by a woman I had been associated with for many years named Aya Tarlow. She is a poet whom I met in San Francisco and we have been closely associated ever since the late 50s. She gave me Superwoman and wanted to know if I could do anything with it. So I recorded it. KPFK took it up and they began broadcasting it at night. It's almost a 3 hour tape.⁷⁷

Artaud would say of sound in 1938:

Music has an effect on snakes, not by means of the mental ideas it induces in them, but because snakes are elongated, coil up languorously on the ground, and touch the earth along almost the entire length of their bodies; thus the musical vibrations transmitted to earth affect these bodies as a very subtle and very long massage; well, I propose to treat the public like snakes.⁷⁸

Cameron's voice on this recording becomes a call to arms, hoarse and triumphant. She reads from chapters 1, 2, and 9 through 12.

The time is coming when woman will become conscious of herself as woman, and will then set free her Will, and when she does, there will be a most wonderful thing... it is the mission of woman to free her will and to attain consciousness so that she may use it consciously, and thus become the Alchemist of the Will, the Genatrix of all that she Wills...she is Awakening, and at last her Will will be set free, and then the Changing Order cometh swiftly.⁷⁹

MATRIX

Before hanging out with Aya, I spend the day in the Bancroft Library at UC Berkeley. I go through her archive, The Aya Tarlow Papers. Beat Era California; Light Shows; *Semina* 1-4.

I have come here to look at her proto-Goddess zine *Matrix: For She of The New Aeon*.⁸⁰ In 1970, Aya decided to print a publication of poetry, drawings. Cameron's drawings are in the first issue.

M: So, how did you choose the contributors to *Matrix*?

A: It was for She of The New Aeon. That was the reader. The one, the woman that could see into the future.

M: She of the New Aeon?

A: That was my vision. The name came to me. Everything came to me. And then I kept getting books like *SuperWoman* and all these esoteric books in my hand and I was very excited.

The layout feels like Barbara Kruger on acid – it's good. Looking through the proofs in the Bancroft Library, I find this from Aya:

MATRIX, *Isis Unveiled in a blinded world*.

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