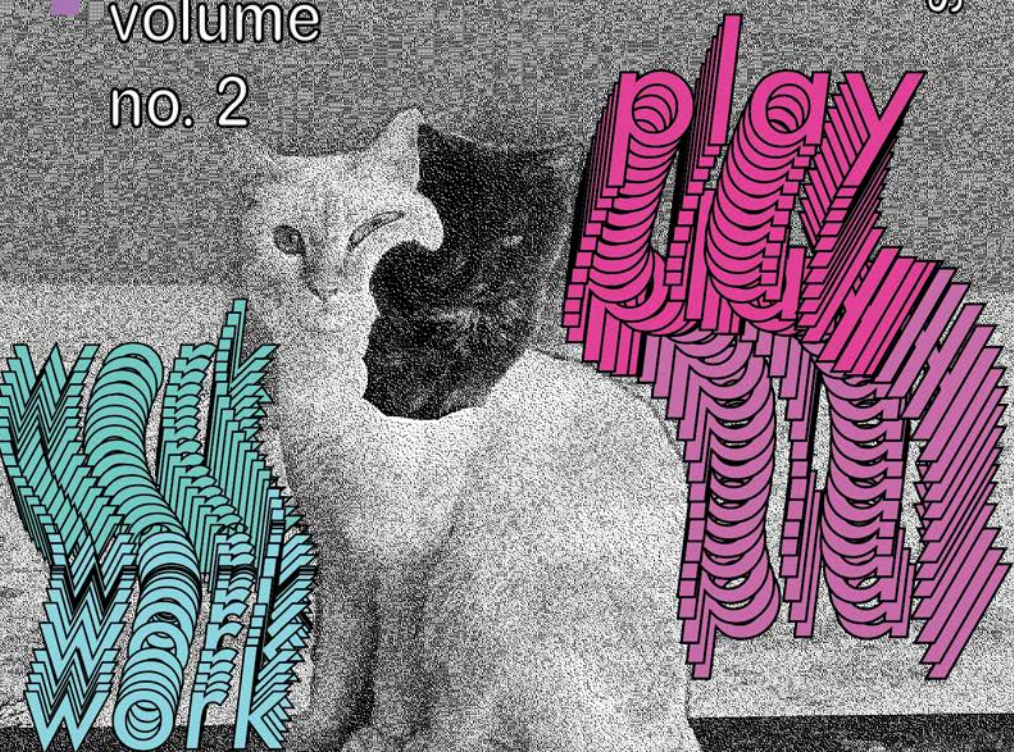


post-x

volume
no. 2

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a zine by Future Cafe

Table of Contents

1	Introduction Livia Miller and Jack Demchak
2	Poems: “a safe place” and “and the clothes touched his red carpet” Naa Asheley Ashitey
4	<i>Polka-dots</i> Jack Demchak
5	Art Samantha Koretsky
6	<i>Next Draft</i> Audrey Scott
9	Words Jack Vogel
12	<i>simply vibing</i> Louise Gagnon
14	<i>Plastic Ecologies (Apocalypse Museum no. 3)</i> Livia Miller
15	<i>Boring New World</i> Echo Lyu

Post-X is a zine from Future Café

ccct.uchicago.edu/future-cafe

Introduction

The first issue of *Post-X*, a whole wild lifetime of a year ago, came from a desire to imagine a utopian future into existence at a time when narratives about future possibilities felt not just dark but profoundly inaccessible. Gathering the work of our peers thinking about the future felt like necessary work to bring into being the very possibility of a future, of a time after, a time post-x.

In this second issue, we curated contributions around the topic of work and play, boredom and pleasure. Often two sides of the same coin, the future of work and the future of play both feel like generative starting points for thinking about what the future might feel like.

Do the constantly evolving escapist pleasures mean that boredom is disappearing, or just changing? Will we ever reach a moment where you never have to scroll all the way through your Netflix home page to find something new—and would we even want that to happen?

Presented in this zine is a collection of work from University of Chicago undergraduate students, creative writing, analytical thinking, and visual arts of all kinds created during a lost year of remote learning and existential confusion. The future exists, and we are bringing ourselves into the utopia.

This zine would not exist without the patience, guidance, and enthusiasm of Anna Searle Jones, associate director of the Chicago Center for Contemporary Theory (3CT). We are endlessly grateful for everything she does and everything her work makes possible.

We are also immensely grateful to Professor Shannon Lee Dawdy in the department of Anthropology, co-director of 3CT, and founder of Future Café, who recognized the rich possibilities of bringing students together to collectively, cooperatively, and radically imagine other possible worlds. She continues to provide essential leadership and inspiration to the Future Café project.

Livia Miller and Jack Demchak, June 2021

Poems Naa Asheley Ashitey

a safe place

the sour smell of fallen magnolias
and the whispers of the dead pine
at the end of the autumn equinox.

at the end of the road lays that
patch of grass next to the
broken pavement that is replaced
more often than my prescription of prozac that I take
every day at 4pm under
that tall black tree
that protects that
broken pavement more than
anything or anyone in this place.

I kiss that black tree and
lay on the wooden bench beneath it
and observe that broken pavement,
the way that yesterday's rain covers
her like a warm blanket
and I lick the remaining white powder
of prozac along my lips, jealous
of the way this black tree,
the storm from the night before —

jealous of what nature has chosen to protect

and the clothes touched his red carpet

The first time we met, you were sitting on your red carpet
And my body longed to lay with you on your red carpet.
Walled off by technology should have been my first warning
about the dangerous boy who sat on that red carpet.
Heartbreak would never be saved or cured by abuse and hate
And yet your gilded soul looked so pure on that red carpet.
My body stopped belonging to me the moment I took
Of my bra and gave myself to you and your red carpet.
I wanted to have a place in someone's heart when he left,
Not to be your toy who helped make stains on your red carpet.
The first time you made me watch, I held back my gag.
You didn't like girls who would make stains along your red carpet.
Masturbation, damnation and immoral persuasion
Were the stains that mocked me on my own god damn red carpet.
Stability returned when I learned to turn you away,
So now I can confidently say, fuck your red carpet.

Polka-dots Jack Demchak

Characters:

Almost Boy: Small. But not pocket sized. Itty bitty. Could fit in a bread box, however, if it really wanted to. Seafoam color. If it had rusted. Sort of like if you put the Statue of Liberty in the fridge and forget about it. Behind the almond milk and the soy sauce and those leftovers who no one claims. Spoilt. Scratchy. Scaley. "Skin" flaking off bits and chunks. Mom was a fisherman's daughter. Descendent of the *Tsaritsa's* favorite merchant she said. No one ever cared to argue. The other parent was a local river god. Or Devil. Or Thing That Crawled From Out Underneath. Those who see the Almost Boy yelp and look away. Grab the edges of their skirts and hurry off. They don't care that it has no tongue. They only care that it can still scream. That it has scales that can never fully grow in. Webbed feet and hands with holes poking through from misuse and misplaced trust. Limbs bending at awkward angles. But the face of a child. Ish. Didn't really even do anything wrong. Yet. Almost Boy. Bloated fish that has a recognizable face with almost legs. His mom used to call him a Living Psalm. Curiosity often gets the better of him.

Mom: Doing her best. Loves her daughter.

Daughter: Innocent. Toddler age.

The curtain parts to reveal a dock. The sky painted on the back wall is the wrong color. It is swirling and unhealthily green. A mom and her young daughter are sitting on the dock, their legs dangling over. Mom has a fishing rod out and seems to be trying to teach her daughter how to fish. Mom is in a large, tan sun hat with a ridiculous brim.

Daughter is in a cutesy polka-dot dress. They are smiling and laughing. It is a beautiful day.

Mom pats all around her legs with one hand as if searching for something in her pockets that she cannot find. She hands the daughter the fishing rod and leaves the dock, and thus heads offstage. This is a bad decision.

Daughter absentmindedly swings her chubby little legs back and forth as they hang over the dock. The Monster/Almost boy, who has been swimming and lurking beneath the surface of the water, pulls her under by the leg soundlessly and very suddenly. There is no sound or splash of water.

Blackout. We hear the sounds of someone getting out of the water.

Lights up.

Mom returns, now wearing sunglasses, her head is down as she types on her phone, her huge sun hat obscuring her face from the audience. She sits down next to Daughter, who is really The Monster/Almost Boy wearing her polka-dot dress. It is holding the fishing rod and kicking its feet back and forth over the edge of the dock. It appears happy.

Mom looks over and realizes what's next to her is not her Daughter, and the two look at each other for a second before the mom lets out a brief shriek before running off. She looks back over her shoulder once.

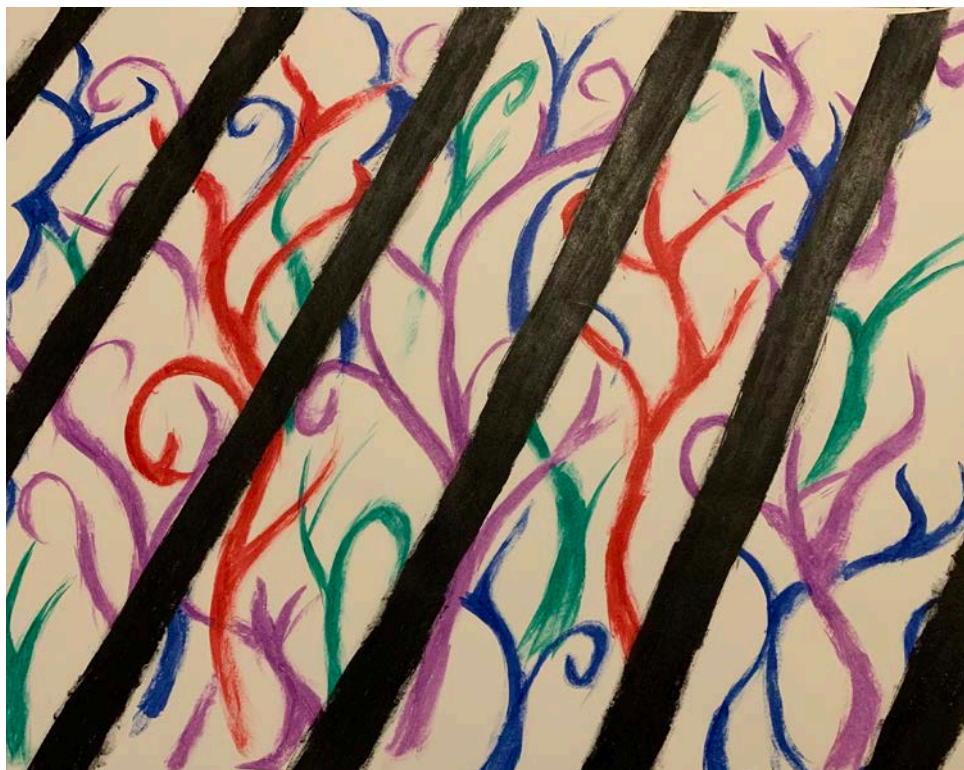
Monster/Almost Boy tries to scuttle after her, though it has trouble moving quickly on land.

Monster/Almost Boy: (chokingly, the sounds barely resonating. A lot of over swallowing)
Mmmm..aahhhh...ahhhhh...mmm...mm.

Monster/Almost Boy begins to hit himself atop the head with the fishing rod, as if in punishment. It begins to whimper, and, on all fours and appearing disheveled, it turns its head and looks towards the audience. The polka-dot dress is revealed to be stained around the bottom edges near the ankles slightly red. The dress is wet and clings to its forms. It is a beautiful day. With the Monster/Almost Boy still staring with wide eyes, the curtain drops.

END.

Art Samantha Koretsky



Next Draft Audrey Scott

When I first began acting, it was a hobby: a fun, elementary school extracurricular so I could have something to do every Saturday—a class to go to when my friends were learning piano or tennis or soccer, all endeavors I had tried and disliked. I technically worked for the first time in a student film and a Space Center Houston commercial, but it wouldn't be until my dad submitted my headshot to a Disney ad on Craigslist that my weekends of fun childish games and monologue memorizations morphed into a tangible career.

I was initially going to be a photo model for Disney's *Secretariat*, then I was going to be a featured extra, then, at the encouragement of director Randall Wallace, I was told to say to my scene partner Scott Glenn a simple, five word sentence: "Are we gonna race em?" I did it without question, and my dad was soon hounded with paperwork as he tried to call my mom. Speaking, actually having a real line, had ramifications: as *Secretariat* was a SAG production, I was now eligible for union membership. If I worked again in California, or any other union state, I'd be a must-join. I signed my papers two years later, on the set of Ernest Borgnine's last film, and would join AFTRA following a small appearance on *Parks and Recreation*. Those clips from before may seem inconsequential, but they changed the course of my childhood for good.

As a now eight-year member of the Screen Actors Guild, unions have been at the forefront of my growth. At the age of nine, when I was a union must-join, I became a member

of AFL-CIO, the largest federation of unions in the country. As a young performer, SAG-AFTRA—now merged—ensured I was treated fairly, including in pay: due to union regulation, I couldn't be paid less than another performer due to age. The union ensured I continued my education while working, setting strict mandates that productions had to follow to safeguard my learning. Additionally, the Union ensured I always had a parent with me, with the "sight-and-sound" rule being one of the most crucial protections for child performers, particularly with the industry penchant for inappropriate behavior. If I felt unsafe during a stunt, and refused to participate, I couldn't be fired for it: a rule that became very relevant when I was asked to be a part of a four-wheeler crash. If I wasn't paid for my work, the Union enabled and aided me in the struggle with producers to get my paycheck—without the union, I'd be left stranded without clear recourse or immediate legal aid. Thanks to the union, I still get residual payments from projects I did ten years ago—as streaming and new distribution take precedence over DVD sales, production companies encounter new flows of profit, of which I am entitled a small fraction of due to my labor. Now, though I don't act as prolifically, I serve on the National Young Performers Committee, using my own experience to provide a voice for child and teen actors. I seek to protect the regulations that protected me, and foster new ones—or revise ineffective ones—that could make the work environment better and safer for generations of young performers to follow.

This protection, this solidarity, is what a union means to me. It's a collective power I want every worker, particularly those at risk of exploitation, to have access to.

We live in a world of instant gratification. Consumer freedom is available at the press of a button, a keystroke, and a phone call. In the quickest time possible, a car and chauffeur, a meal, and the week's groceries can be delivered to your doorstep. This new-age gig economy, though, comes at a cost: what was meant to be a digital platform "side gig" has now morphed into a full-time lifestyle, a change simultaneously ignored and encouraged by big-name companies. In this digital platform gig economy, there's no job security, or benefits, or, sometimes, livable wage. With modern life so hinged on the service of the gig worker, why should they be deprived of the rights of other American laborers?

Collective power was created to stop the same instability and long hours that afflict gig work. All it takes is a company to lower a worker's take-home percentage, a lull in consumer activity, or an account deactivation for someone's livelihood to vanish. It's not like employee protections are in place—because, legally, these workers aren't employees. They're "independent contractors," further separating them from the revenue stream cultivated by their efforts.

These independent contractors aren't even guaranteed a livable wage: some digital platforms boast guaranteed pay per assignment or hour, but these often come with

stringent stipulations that aren't accessible to many workers. Though a worker may be enticed by a promise of freedom in a capitalistic machination and twenty dollars an hour, the strings attached are plenty, and requirements for these guaranteed paydays—often simply called "promotions," in the meaning of a limited-time offer rather than a permanent elevation of position, and can thus be cancelled at any time—are high.

Unions are built to tackle these problems—they've handled those of a similar vein since the dawn of the industrial age. However, a 2019 mandate by the National Labor Relations Board makes it so many digital platform gig workers cannot unionize—because they are independent contractors and not employees.

Something has to change, and gig workers know that: despite ineligibility for unionization, many gig workers across the nation have gone on strike to protest unfair conditions. Though companies can, and sometimes do, listen, such as when Uber promised a commitment to "continue working to improve the experience for and with drivers" in response to a strike in May of 2019, there's no legal bargaining entity that can enter the ring with powerful corporations when it comes to gig work.

It's unsurprising that companies utilize the "independent contractor" label to undermine efforts to unionize: in a capitalist system, labor is a bought and sold commodity, so companies want as much of it for as little as possible, often resulting in conditions

that unions were created to prevent, such as low wages, long hours, and unsafe or unfair workplaces. It's not only digital platforms that are anti-union, though: many companies hold "captive audience" meetings denouncing unionization votes, and, recently, an airline company came under fire for releasing posters saying "Union dues cost around \$700 a year. A new video game system with the latest hits sounds like fun. Put your money towards that instead of paying dues to the union."

Corporations, perhaps, should be afraid: the collective is a powerful thing. Take, for example, the... infamous government shutdown over the winter of 2018 and 2019. A key player in the ending of the shutdown wasn't a politician, or a celebrity, but rather one Sara Nelson, the President of the Association of Flight Attendants-CWA. Nelson stood as an advocate for a general strike, and was a figurehead for the airspace's resistance in the wake of the shutdown. When air traffic controllers began calling in sick en masse, the shutdown very soon came to an end. It was collective action that changed history.

If the National Labor Relations Board won't permit gig workers to unionize, another form of collective is necessary. A lobbyist association for gig workers could promote and advocate for laws that benefit those in the field, such as those like California's AB 5 that push workers towards an employee status versus an independent contractor. The proliferation of collective associations, like Rideshare Drivers United, can also

spearhead community advocacy and coordinated action to enact change.

We can all, in a sense, be a part of this collective power. We can understand the ramifications of our gig economy purchases, knowing its inner workings and the treatment of laborers at the other end of our phone screen. We can be sympathetic to and supportive of strikes, to demands for law changes, to other things that may slightly inconvenience consumers—because they're necessary for change in the workforce. We can call out anti-union sentiment when we see it, we can question the actions of the economic elite that hurt the working class, we can dismantle the systems that devalue the work of society-shaping labor.

The power of the collective is a mighty thing. There's no reason why it shouldn't be at the forefront of our relationship with our economy—the power to bring about change, to fight for it, to sacrifice for it, and to stand together to make it happen. We can take our power, as workers, back—we just can't do it alone.

Words Jack Vogel

Naptha: a hundred, sixty or thirty times

"I say, the soil was ours, on which the first blood was shed; there are those who say it was not."

Time naturally erodes our capacity for reverence via reduced availability to living histories. I don't have a grandfather with scars to conduit my reverence for Washington/the experiment. With this circumstance gone, Abraham adopts impassioned language ("blood of our forefathers")

High in the sky sits the kite
Buffeted savagely by the raging storm
It's steel string strains on its anchor
His voice is inaudible against the wind
But surely it's an entreaty to stay
He holds down his hat wet
A swell snaps the tightrope
A kite gets lost to the night
Our kite soon alight by a lightning strike
Our jester left without so much as a

I, with my youthful ego, think there is a somewhat simple solution

You are confused, I am the word.

It was the cunning of Hermès that tricked Prometheus into thinking that man did not already possess the fire that their true creator, he himself, had sought. It was only just an ember burgeoning. He had lacked patience like those before him and forgotten the dangers of disputes, of infighting.

Had only Hestia and Hephaestus claimed their proper place.

"Oh the heaviest of beings, the most serious of men I once was" said ducky to the fish "but with waters known flight soon found me."

"I know my proclivity lacks levity." Said the fish to ducky, "But unlike you I'm still young, each choice has the weight of weeks to come."





Each morning I awake to see a sun
One thousand and one

Things do not happen for a reason, but
one may make reason of the happenings

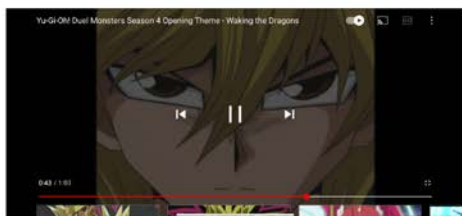
I close my eyes to open them
I open my eyes to close them

My face is less fallow
My breath is less shallow

That from which I once suffered
I suffer less

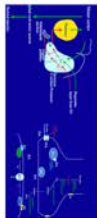


The clip at which we clomp keeps quickening
A billion brains : radio and written letters.
Pressing and fucking up the number
Chips and children drop and pile
Clambering clouds built in boxes.
Their clasp might be crazy/brazy
But it's bumping and bouncing still.
The video of a drop dripped in water
Have you seen it? Or a bullet through resin
We're tunnelling tubes this way and that
Inking black on that so austere white.
A billion brains and a billion brains build
To a hum - harmonium or horror?



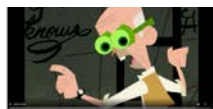
Enjoyment is an insufficient index for the element.
Happiness is an insufficient index for the element.
Zen is an insufficient index for the element.
Masochism is an insufficient index for the element.
Romanticism is an insufficient index for the element.
Yummy is an insufficient index for the element.
Dionysus is an insufficient index for the element.
Subservience is an insufficient index for the element.
Apollo is an insufficient index for the element.
Hal is an insufficient index for the element.
Alyosha is an insufficient index for the element.
Divine is an insufficient index for the element.
Lenin is an insufficient index for the element.
Zorba is an insufficient index for the element.
Sentimental is an insufficient index for the element.
Arousal is an insufficient index for the element.
Solipsism is an insufficient index for the element.
Dominance is an insufficient index for the element.
Smile is an insufficient index for the element.

Hysteria and fibromyalgia
 Meaningless unless it's algebra
 Something in saying akin to kin
 But ducky don't give a fucky
 The silly supermen seeking a good glow
 That has nothing to do with ducky
 The sensibility of silver
 Still nothing to do with ducky
 Regal refreshment
 A right to retirement
 Ducky don't give a fucky
 His feathers are affixed with skin
 Sufficient armament, for him



Draconian meconium
 Polonium pandemonium
 And yet unknown radium

Alas alas jibber and jaber
 kilter kanter, countered by count cantor
 jaberwalk talk
 romance realized
 Babble and bubble
 Toil and trouble
 Ritz rabble rattled cattle
 Riff raff golden calf
 Au musa mansa
 Keep it al
 Khwarizmi



Kapow

Close your eyes
 Open sesame

Fragrant beats, green ooohs, and high pitch hand holding don't talk like the jabberwock. Their tone is far more serious.

It's like Mary's room or deceptive differences in green – twenty five percent of the population have four colour perceiving cones, the rest have less. We see different greens. A fourth to a third is insane (33%). But five hundred to four ninety-nine is not so nutty (0.2%); not so noticeable. A fight, a kiss, and, a curry may all be fiery. The idealizing index and the object will never be the, but...

Oh poor Mary!

Is happy water drying on skin?



I'm left with paradox; how to tell you what to do, without claiming I'm smarter than you.

I have no desire for a future devoid of deference for the past. No such future will last. With the light of the future and the light of the past, the pain of boredom we overpass.

It's all about the origin, the primal sin The issues of Adam and Eve elaborated As I understand it Adam was alone He was in the garden, alone The animals and plants pleased him not So he got god to get him a thing which got him. This was when god removed the rib Eve was added around it Adam was instructed to instruct her By god as his Eve ate the forbidden fruit and shared it With Adam who had his bite Adam aghast ashamed unbalanced Asked after a fig leaf figured a finger "She she no not me" God gave them the boot Because original sin And with than we begin

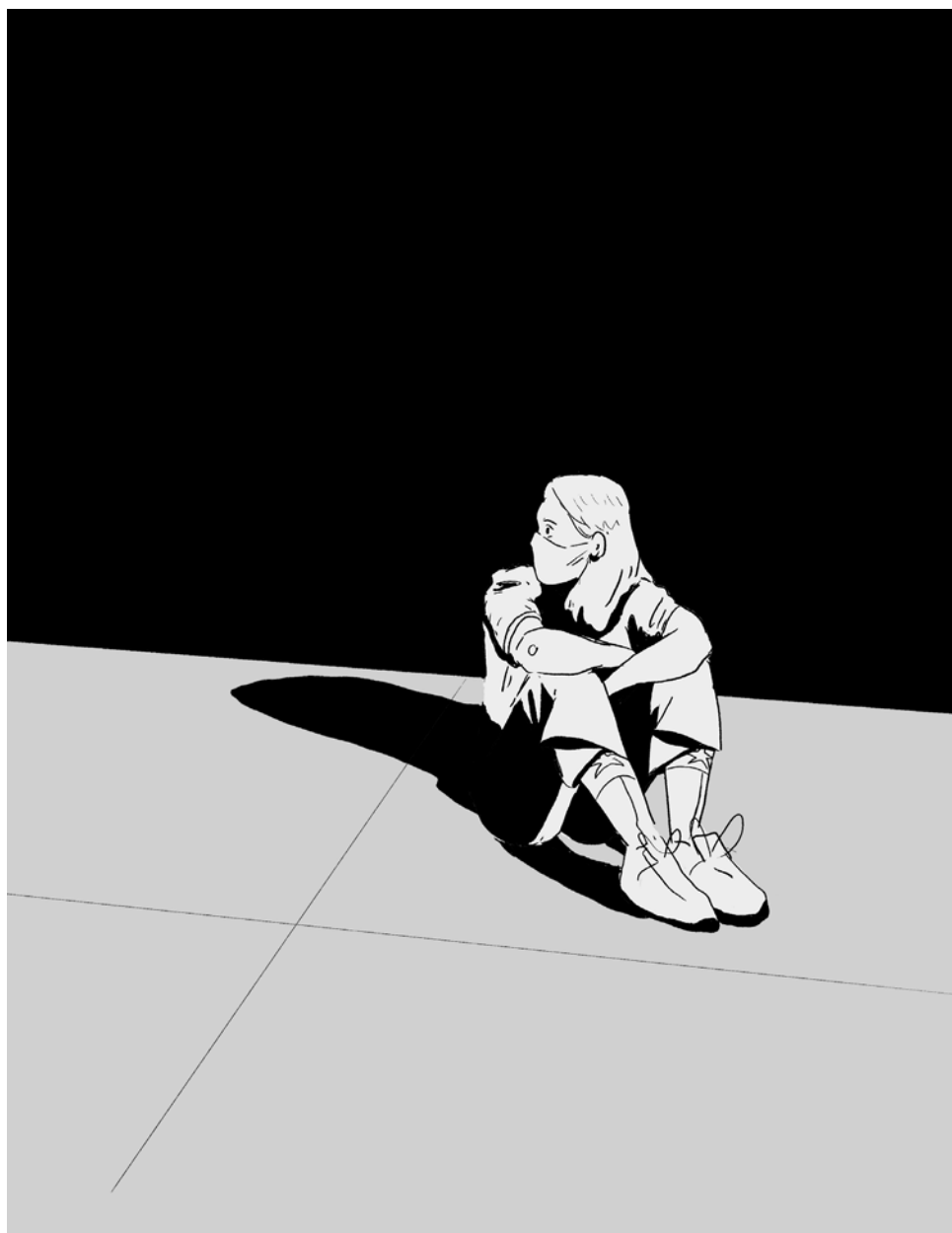
"As Possible Form That Peculiar Sort of Fire Which Ignites Them"

- Levin



simply vibing Louise Gagnon





Plastic Ecologies *(Apocalypse Museum no. 3)* *a sculpture by Livia Miller*



Boring New World *Echo Lyu*

Boredom will be central to future human experience, but in what form? This fictional writing is not just a dystopia story. In the future, people invent a neurobiological medication which ends the feeling of boredom. As a result, a boring new world emerges where boredom no longer troubles anyone, but everything grows unruly boring at the same time. Nonetheless, there is also a reversal. A group named the Boredomists intentionally produces boredom to rebel against the sterile world where boredom is officially abolished. What is boredom, now?

Boredom is ended.

In the future, boredom as a notorious trouble of modernity is finally resolved. Thanks to our remarkable medical neurobiology, a tiny pill can eradicate boredom.

The pill is named "Godot."

Tracing back its history, since the 21st century, boredom becomes a major problem tiring individuals, perturbing authoritative governments, and alerting capitalist CEOs. Why are people so easily bored? Firstly, work is irreversibly monotonous. Aggravated alienation is not only detrimental to physical health but also a central cause of modern boredom in the workplace. Work ceases to create meaningful value, and workers constantly fall into existential vacuum. Public life is buried in stale statistics and cliché decrees. Also, quick satisfaction for cheap desire through media deepens bore-

dom. Its fickle fulfillment of desire is the very twin to fast wearisomeness.

Surely, there have been various attempts to alleviate boredom. Self-help books teaching people to "discover small wonders in life" or similar inspirational nonsense. Markets advertise for regular consumptions on scheduled discount days to awake excitement. However, all those attempts cheat the diagnostic eyes rather than cures the social cause. Paradoxically, these measures actually intensify boredom.

Worse, humans are even bored of crises. Coronavirus used to affright everyone. In the future, countless climate, epidemic, political and financial crises haunt the globe that the commonplace news of crises only add informational boredom.

Boredom needs to be fixed. Because it is hard to coexist with increasing boredom, people hate work, life, ruling, and everything, thus destabilizing political and economic routine. Riots appear. Big companies and government urgently reach a consensus to eliminate boredom. They choose biomedical devices.

Biomedical neuroscience has been the leading fashion of human science within centuries. Compounded pills clear up various mental problems. Efficient. Easy. Regardless of one's cultural background or personal disposition. Max Weber showed that ascetic religion is used to reconcile one's boredom and work. As God's pow-

er fades, *homo sapiens* now approximate gods themselves through biomedicine. Rather than creating robots that swallow jobs and multiplying the unemployed to be mobs, approximating humans to robots is obviously more profitable. Scientists, government and business tycoons cooperate, and the pill—Godot—comes out.

Immediately, voracious discussions sweep the world. Does the invention of “Godot” mean a “Brave New World”? Is this medication ethical? Will governments utilize it to establish totalitarian control? Or is it at the convenience of capitalist exploitation since people will no longer feel bored of begrudged work? Some see “Godot” as “soma” in Huxley’s world, fearing that dystopian prophesy is actualizing. In opposition, others argue that “Godot” is the reverse of “soma” or suspicious drugs as it invigorates one’s mind instead of numbing it. Another viewpoint claims that the pill kindly helps humans. They quote Ivan in *The Brothers Karamazov*, who persuades Christ that lower esteem instead of higher demand is his true love to humans, for “Man is weak and cowardly.” Many have reaped some sweet benefits of neurobiological medicines from previous experience of mental breakdowns. They embrace “Godot” to ensure their endurance of life and work as it erases boredom. There are far-fetched arguments as well. One reports that China’s exported “Godot” to Africa indirectly decreases poverty as workers there voluntarily engage in monotonous work untiringly.

Concerning ethical problems over “Godot,” a global conference is hosted, gathering thousands of scientists, philosophers, politicians, etc. After a year of heated discussion, Boredom is included in the *38th Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-38). “Godot” is officially its legal medication. The Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) monitors to ensure that “Godot” is applied conservatively and upon a completely voluntary basis. There are hundreds of supplemental guidelines on the whitepaper.

Very soon humans celebrate their magical achievement: no one feels any boredom despite that everything is unprecedentedly boring.

The world becomes unboundedly boring in all aspects. Bullshit jobs proliferate. Nonsense paperwork swarms. Cement buildings crowd in the grey cities. Bureaucratic politics swells. Corporate production is forever dull. Life is but repetitive pastiche for which the search for its meaning largely diminishes.

But isn’t there revolution? Yes. A strange one.

Accompanying the mass application of “Godot,” another ideology spreads. Calling themselves the Boredomists, these rebellious people deliberately pursue boredom. They intentionally emphasize banality as if they absorb the greatest vitality of life from it. In contrast to eliminating boredom, they immerse themselves in boredom. They publish a pamphlet, “How To Be Bored.”

Its title page quotes Kierkegaard, in conspicuous font, "Those who bore themselves are the chosen ones, the nobility." Other typical slogans of the Boredomists include: "Boredom Is Freedom"; "Boredom Is The Supreme Privilege Of Our Time"; "Being Bored Is Our Active Fight Against Modernity"; "To Be Bored Is To Be Alive" and so on. They attract philosophers, artists and poets. Unlike their predecessors whose lifelong pursuit might be ridding the society of boredom, today they consider boredom as their ultimate destiny. One of their most famous Boredomist leaders, at the end of his life, concludes that "I am bored of my boredom." This reflection is immediately canonized as the highest form of boredom as one transcends oneself by actively engaging in boredom.

It is not a secret that the Boredomists are developing a neurobiological medication to efficiently bore clients. Rumors have named it "Sisyphus."

About Future Café

Post-X is a zine from Future Café, a student-led discussion series that provides the space to collectively imagine utopian possibilities and long-term futures. What is the role of imagination in shaping politics, the environment, and social life? How might radical futures be brought into being? Previous topics include the future of care, the sacred, speculative design, kinship, and human rights.

Future Café events are open to all undergraduate students at the University of Chicago. Learn more at ccct.uchicago.edu/future-cafe where you can also find the first issue of *Post-X*.

Future Café is an initiative of the Chicago Center for Contemporary Theory (3CT) as part of its Materializing the Future project, and Professor Shannon Lee Dawdy is its faculty advisor. 3CT is grateful to the Division of the Social Sciences at the University of Chicago for its ongoing support.

About *Post-X* vol. 2

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