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“I / BELIEVE IN RUIN”: TRANCE, AFFECT, AND DISORIENTATION

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
English

by
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May 2021

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ABSTRACT

In thirty-four numbered entries, *The Pink Trance Notebooks* (2015) assemble Wayne Koestenbaum's daily observations, musings, and obsessive attachments that explore the possibilities and dangers of inhabiting a disoriented trance-state. To uncover the politics of trance at the heart of Koestenbaum's *Notebooks*, I turn to theories of affect that work well with Koestenbaum's experimental and innovative poetics. I argue that Koestenbaum's mode of writing illustrates a drive toward an all-encompassing, inclusionary, and empowering exploration of how to make and how to obscure meaning and knowledge. The three main chapters that comprise this project approach trance poetics from a different conceptual angle. Each section does, however, intend to build upon one another, recognizing the unified nature of trance poetics across epistemic lines. The first, "Today [...] Died," maps Koestenbaum's treatment of the universal weight of death. The second, "Disgust, Shame, Identity," attempts to recognize, after death, the arrangement of the self around and its affective reactions about its own being and its proximities. The final, "Bewildering Dreams," investigates how trance bewilders dreams, and how dreams bewilder attachments in the context of trance poetics. Through close readings of *The Pink Trance Notebooks* and theoretical analyses, "I / believe in ruin": Trance, Affect, and Disorientation" attempts to show how Koestenbaum's trance poetics disorient the attachments between self and world through their capacity to make and confuse the conceptual proximities that are based on the constant wandering of his fractured, floating attentions.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In thirty-four numbered entries, *The Pink Trance Notebooks* (2015) assemble Wayne Koestenbaum's daily observations, musings, and obsessive attachments. They present an untethered yet exacting poetic consciousness that is, in the words of Sara Ahmed, "directed toward something" and also "embodied, sensitive, and situated" (Ahmed 27). For Koestenbaum, trance refers to an affectively charged state of consciousness. The *Notebooks* explore the possibilities and dangers of inhabiting a disoriented trace-state. To uncover the politics of trance at the heart of Koestenbaum's *Notebooks*, I turn below to theories of affect that work well with Koestenbaum's experimental and innovative poetics. I am interested in the ways that Koestenbaum's entries trace the disorientations of a queer self that is unwilling to remain still by constantly turning toward and away from various objects. This process, Koestenbaum's work suggests, may ultimately generate new and exciting condition of being.

Perhaps best known for his work as a cultural critic and essayist, Wayne Koestenbaum is also a prolific novelist, painter and poet. His intellectual career has spanned nearly three decades with his first major publication of *Double Talk: The Erotics of Male Literary Collaboration* being in 1989. In 1993 he published *The Queen's Throat: Opera, Homosexuality, and the Mystery of Desire*—a book that explores his intense love for opera and investigates the sociological relationship between gay men and opera and its importance, as José Muñoz highlights, to the closeted gay man preceding the

Stonewall rebellion (31). In *Disidentifications*, Muñoz writes on *The Queen's Throat* that Koestenbaum “exposes the encoded message’s universalizing and exclusionary machinations and recircuits its workings to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications” (31). Following Muñoz’s diagnosis, Koestenbaum’s mode of writing in *The Pink Trance Notebooks* illustrates a drive toward an all-encompassing, inclusionary, and empowering exploration of how to make and how to obscure meaning and knowledge.

As the first volume of Koestenbaum’s trance collections, *The Pink Trance Notebooks* set the tone for conducting a poetics of wandering and excitement. They are the product of a year’s writing that abandoned traditional journaling for more abstract, dream-like transcriptions. The entries catalog the mental generations of an overworked mind let free to absorb the noise and delirium of its own agitation. And the fragmentary nature of Koestenbaum’s verse recognizes this restlessness in short, staccato lines that flutter, build, and dissipate all in a few breaths. And this style allows swift transitions to take place where, for example, comedic energy can shift directly into more heady musings (177):

will eating an apple be
perceived as asocial
behavior?

movement is
aphrodisiacal and non-
movement is stultifying

confessing my invisibility
and waiting for them to
correct me and say “you’re
not invisible” —

For a committed reader, Koestenbaum's approach to trance poetics is one that values the fluctuation of topics, moods, and theoretical tactics. This emphasis on transient observation leaves open, then, the possibility for always negotiating the rhythms and contexts of the speaker's proximity to any epistemic awareness.

One of the central and overt questions Koestenbaum explores is a theoretical one insofar as it asks where, in writing and thinking, intense investigation and analysis converges with obliviousness and detachment. That is, the liminal verse that floats through the pages of the *Notebooks* encourages the self to find contentment in both acquiring and destroying knowledge. Perhaps flippant at times, the speaker conditions their notetaking as having the distinct capacity to pick up and put down again and again. This skill appears in many forms throughout, but it is often characterized by the untethered wandering of the mind and its prioritization of mixing observation with intellectual memory (18–19):

I wrote
down every word the
drunk jock muttered

like a
Sicilian folksong sung
in French translation by
Tino Rossi, 1920

or blueberry
pancakes soaked in bourbon

or
a bowl of indelible
toffee suckers

While progressing alongside the speaker of trance, it is common to witness a return to and recontextualization of previous moments, allusions, or themes. These returns are satisfying because they are often subtle, yet they produce, to some extent, a reward for attentiveness as they give the reader a chance to settle into a version of a narrative or plot. This is to say, the comforts of reading *The Pink Trance Notebooks* are not recognized in their ability to construct a linear narrative, however, these progressions of the speaker and their attachments do ultimately generate a version of trust in the reader.

One of the main focal points of Koestenbaum's intense transcriptions is celebrity and the fascination with public mythos. This means for the reader an encounter with various historical and contemporary figures of film, music, literature, art, etc., every few pages. And these confrontations with celebrity are often merged with the speaker's own sensationalizing of public images, creating fantasy out of particular paintings, performances, and so on. With a constant eye toward celebrity, the speaker makes possible, in varied ways, a foundational manipulation of the reader's idea of public persona: "Nostalgic for H.D., for Mina / Loy, for Samantha in / *Bewitched*, for *Amahl / and the Night Visitors*— / a performance interrupted / by necking sophomores" (40); "I shocked the James / Taylor lookalike with / my badly timed hard-on" (41); "and yet it seems Rilkean / to mention this wish, / this non-wish, this / phantasmal chip" (159); "a famous / Balthus painting of / Delphine Seyrig? / of Pasolini / interviewing / Carol Channing" (168). I intentionally selected these examples for their close proximity to one another to emphasize the relation between the punctuated pointillism of Koestenbaum's public memory that unfolds one atop another. This incredulous sprawling of culture and

stardom never ceases, characterizing the *Notebooks* as a form that memorializes, but does not banalize the connection between celebrity and internal, personal monologues.

Finally, a central concern for the *Notebooks* is an attempt, at the granular level, to deconstruct the role that a sentence plays in the advancement and thwarting of expectation. In their entirety, the *Notebooks* function as an experimental twisting of syntactical timing and control. Linguistically, Koestenbaum pushes trance in so many directions that instability is a standard feature in as much as sentence-level structure is a matter not of safety but of volatility: “write a fashion poem / tomorrow while smoking grass— / use words as bow ties / syntax a baby I know / how to pamper, / syntax a baby / I know how to / miscarry—” (141). If trance prepares words for collapse and inevitable distortion, syntax, then, is the essential vehicle by which the flow of daily observation is transformed, cherished, or discarded.

The next three sections that comprise this project approach trance poetics from a different conceptual angle. Each section does, however, intend to build upon one another, recognizing the unified nature of trance poetics across epistemic lines. The second section, “Today [...] Died” maps Koestenbaum’s treatment of the universal weight of death. The section calls attention to the imminence of death as being ever present and always permeating the mind’s extension into the world. To live a life moment to moment is to recognize in one’s particular attachments the universality of death, meaning the opportunities of a pure event is always saturated with peoples’ dying and their removal from your field of affective individuality. This is to say, the first section is interested in articulating how the present moment unfolds around death and how trance enables a view

of the present as it begins to spread from the past to the future. Death is a vehicle for treating and attempting to grasp what happens when space and time converge around the speaker and writer of trance. In an exploration of how trance envisions the linguistic

The third section, “Disgust, Shame, Identity” attempts to recognize, after death, the arrangement of the self around and its affective reactions about its own being and its proximities. This section serves as a middle ground between thinking about the ever-present ideation of death in the context of trance and the third section which deals with, at least in this context, deaths opposite, dreams. And this intermediary section reaches in both directions as the identified subject reaches forward and backward, both temporally and spatially in an effort to project oneself onward despite being ashamed of progress and failure.

The fourth section, “Bewildering Dreams” investigates how trance bewilders dreams, and how dreams bewilder attachments in the context of trance poetics. This section is future leaning in as much as dreams realize an alternate reality that is separate from death’s presence and identity’s embedded past. Further, this section aims to balance out the discussion of death by speaking of dreams’ periperformative position within trance poetics. The main objective being to locate the nexus of thought, corporeal relationality, and affective energy as they develop from a somatic-linguistic agency.

The notion of trance draws out aspects of Koestenbaum’s work that resist certainty and self-knowledge and create in the fold of subjectivity a disorienting way forward. I build on the work of Sara Ahmed, Nathan Snaza, Jonathan Flatley, and others to recognize and articulate the characterization of trance as “transport”: a “state of self-

forgetfulness, absence, flight”—a condition of “not knowing who or where” one is. In a sense, it is a commitment to material and temporal fluidity that enacts and extends what Nathan Snaza calls “bewilderment”: “an affective condition of disorientation that happens when disciplined attention fails and we become aware of the more-than-human literacy situation that swirls around us and in us” (9). The logics of trance project a somatic and linguistic drive that gathers momentum to “make fractal the self that falls into trance, the selves that turn to language as an exit strategy and as a technique for widening the aperture of what we can say and know” (Olidort). Further, the disjunctions that trance generates are essentially those of refusal insofar as they offer “a different kind of attunement, a different orientation to the world” that disrupts the statist “drive toward unity, unification, universality” (Snaza 83).

Jonathan Flatley outlines another useful way to think through the productions of trance. In *Affective Mapping*, Flatley is interested in the development of the affective aspects, in conjunction with the cognitive, of maps that guide us through spatial environments. “Our sense of our environments,” Flatley writes, are made “through purposive activity in the world, and we always bring with us a range of intentions, beliefs, desires, moods, and affective attachments to this activity” (77). Additionally, the emotions we attribute to these environments are often confused, disrupted, and in constant need of revision—a necessary aspect of living and navigating for Flatley. In asking what aesthetic practices are able to help this mapping, Flatley locates his concerns as stemming from a representation of an affective life that is achieved through self-estrangement. Next to Ahmed’s becoming oblique and Snaza’s bewilderment, self-

estrangement offers another way to think through trance insofar as it means seeing “oneself in relation to one’s affective environment in its historicity, in relation to the relevant social-political anchors or landmarks in that environment” (Flatley 80).

Attributed to a kind of self-distancing wherein one sees themselves from the outside, Flatley conditions his definition to include estrangement, defamiliarization: “making one’s emotional life [...] appear weird, surprising, unusual, and thus capable of a new kind of recognition, interest, and analysis” (80).

Much like he writes on Barthes’s *A Lover’s Discourse*, Koestenbaum’s own *Notebooks* explore the tender, exciting, and organic “grain” of living: “the ‘friction’ or ‘fringe’ of contact between music and language, where the vocalizing body expresses not the message but the message’s transport” (xi). *The Pink Trance Notebooks* exemplify what it means to negotiate how the self is able to arrange its affective desires and intellectual investigations as a form of improvisatory wandering. Through trance’s intense elliptical nature, Koestenbaum experimentally complicates poetic expression and allows its substance to endure past generating static, grounded answers and commits to adventurous questioning “of finding other paths, perhaps those that do not clear a common ground, where we can respond with joy to what goes astray” (Ahmed 178). The failure is then in being unable to adhere to normalized approaches to knowledge and to recognize that strangeness should not be eradicated but embraced as an opportunity to gather and to support one another. For Ahmed, a queer phenomenology is an orientation “toward queer” that recognizes other possibilities of “dwelling in the world,” such as Koestenbaum’s identifying “as the sifter who doesn’t know whether his labor is

worthless, whether it's a futile gesture to try to sift the worthless from the worthwhile particles" (Olidort). This project then prioritizes investigating the unregulated acts of trance poetics and recognizing its capacity to extract and estrange the lines between politics and art, culture and individual, poetry and interpellation.

Koestenbaum's work breaks down trance as it folds out of the somatic-linguistic mind, both temporally and spatially, and intersects with the world. The upfront heuristic anchor is Deleuze's transcendent conceptualization of "repetition for itself," wherein the dimensions of the present are synthesized in the repetition of instants. "The present does not have to go outside itself in order to pass from past to future," writes Deleuze, "rather, the living present goes from the past to the future which it constitutes in time, which is to say also from the particular to the general: from the particulars which it envelops by contraction to the general which it develops in the field of its expectation (the difference produced in the mind is generality itself in so far as it forms a living rule for the future)" (*Difference and Repetition* 71). Deleuze's contextualizing here is important in as much as it directly relates to each individual aspect, and section, of Koestenbaum's poetics of trance:

Trance, for my purposes, is this state of self-forgetfulness, absence, flight. It's a state of not knowing who or where I am. Call it *dissociation*, combined with intense physical groundedness, and absorption in the minutiae of physical sensation. Transport. My "trance" isn't necessarily different from the state of rapture or tumbling-into-language that many poets and writers feel, in the heat of composition. It's a state of letting my mind be filled to the brim with words and phrases—and, at the same time, letting my consciousness float *away* from itself, fall away, keep rolling down the hill like a tumbleweed or a round object with tremendous momentum and *will to fall*. But the object—the mind—itself doesn't have this "will." The mind surrenders to language's will. And language isn't a unified thing, either. (Olidort)

From the continuous present, the past and future are imprinted onto the self, a self whose affective memory is constantly swayed by attachment to surrounding, feels death, feels disgust, and dreams through one world into another that constantly avoids unification.

The poetic self that engages with trance dwells simultaneously in absorption and reflection, recognizing themselves in both the inputs of experience and the output of consciousness.¹And it is this phenomenological consciousness that believes in “ruin,” that is “strangely ruined / by the collapse of / [its] voice” (Koestenbaum 1) as it is acknowledged in the unsettled attachments of “a becoming that is at once interior and exterior, as that which is given, or as that which gives what is given its new angle” (Ahmed 162). The “voice” of trance, then, is materially observed in the production of its “somatic-semantic” responses to “nearby stimuli, mental noise, memories, associations, ambient sounds” (Olidort). Or, said otherwise, this process of self-forgetfulness is a form of “ruin” and “collapse” insofar as it affectively initiates, as Ahmed describes, “the becoming oblique of the world” (162). That is, Koestenbaum’s trance poetics disorient the attachments between self and world through their capacity to make and confuse the conceptual proximities that are based on the constant wandering of his fractured, floating attentions.

CHAPTER TWO

TODAY [...] DIED

Koestenbaum's mentions of death are often brief, unemotional, e.g.: "Van Cliburn died / yesterday—he described / adolescence as 'hell'" (13); "today's the / anniversary of / Pearl Harbor" (14); "Jean Harris, who / murdered the Diet Doctor, / died today—" (31); "Deanna Durbin died today, / 91 years old" (60); "Taylor Mead died, 88" (60); "Virginia Johnson / (of Masters and Johnson) died / today—" (125); etc. The lack of emotional content that these few examples show is unsurprising in the context of trance writing for several reasons. The first of which is in death becoming only language on the page, becoming stripped of its relation to consciousness ("letting my consciousness float *away* from itself"). Floating away, as Koestenbaum describes his composition of trance seems to articulate well this detachment to any emotional reaction to death. The second reason is due to the universality and ever-presence of death that trance poetics appears to deliver as just another position for consciousness: death is always permeating our proximities, it is daily. Death's relation to the untethered psyche is less emotionally charged and more prepared for death than a mind who wishes to repress or avoid thinking about the possibility of death.

Trance may not give death the space to carry its normal, existential weight, but to punctuate daily notebooks with notions of death means to call, at least to some extent, the reader's wandering attention to death's imminence and its impact on consciousness. The next two scenes I discuss shed light on trance's relationship to death and conscious awareness that is constantly flirting with somatic-semantic destruction. In the first, the

speaker models the affective tie between death, language, and expectation. The speaker thinks that a phone call means something, however their assumption quickly shifts once they recognize that no linguistic message can confirm their inclination: “I thought / the phone call meant / my mother had died, / but he left no / message, and if she’d / died, wouldn’t he / have left a message / saying ‘she died?’” (33). This dynamic moment also feels devoid of much emotion, even as the death of their mother is possible. The speaker, rather, uses death’s potential as a way to deconstruct the linguistic behavior of the person who calls. No message equals no death, if no words solidify and confirm the death of a family member, then it is likely her death did not happen. However, the confidence of the speaker in this moment seems to be garnered from their rationally driven reasoning, an affective turning away from emotion. And this separation seems a symptom of trance’s dealing with death’s imminence is to detach, “disassociate” from its emotional weight. The mind of the speaker here, as Koestenbaum articulates, “surrenders to language’s will” and allows for an arrangement toward language to become the focal point of confronting death’s imminence.

Similarly, the next scene exemplifies the mode of managing death through detached linguistic conditions. Below, trance prioritizes the suppression of emotion as it relates to death and welcomes the opportunity to enable an approach to writing and speaking about death that prioritizes clarity over sensitivity. Altogether distant, linguistic content breaks itself to put forward an epistemological theory of dealing with death: “literature / will always be a good / vehicle for discussing / death—I can warm / up for the real deaths by / saying ‘my stepfather / died’ because stepfather / was just a word” (198).

Here, to “warm up” signifies an allocation of emotion that waits, builds up to a release of actual death. But what separate the “real deaths” from the simply signified, fictional deaths? Isn’t the potential death of the mother only real once it is spoken, made tangible in a message? How is any death mentioned in the notebooks not a real death? It seems that Koestenbaum troubles a universal notion of what it exactly means to die temporally. That is, trance allows the consideration of death’s energy as not being toward the end of time, but rather as being a linguistic exercise to dismiss and recalibrate the weight of dying as artificial and simply ordinary. “[Warming] up” then is a loose promise for the future: when the time comes, the speaker’s emotional capacity will be ready for a death that is presumably off the page and non-literary.

However, death is not simply a future problem—its extension is always a present one as the past moves through the present and into the future. Death’s contingency, then, on being “just a word” aligns with Deleuze’s theorizing how death is a pure form that avoids the constraints of being “a material state,” he says, “on the contrary, having renounced all matter, it corresponds to a pure form—the empty form of time” (112). The reflections of being in a present situation are always in conversation with death because death cannot be “reduced to negation, neither to the negative of opposition nor to the negative of limitation.” That is, death is not the limitation of matter on human life nor is it the opposition between matter and immortal life. Rather, says Deleuze, death is the “last form of the problematic, the source of problems and questions, the sign of their persistence over and above every response, the ‘Where?’ and ‘When?’ which designate this (non)-being where every affirmation is nourished” (112). It is important to

characterize the force and energy of death as a characteristic of living a life that floats away from consciousness, that removes itself from becoming a subject or object. Or, as Deleuze calls it, a life of “pure immanence,” wherein, between one’s life and death, “there is a moment that is only that of a life playing with death. The life of the individual gives way to an impersonal and yet singular life that releases pure event freed from the accidents of internal and external life, that is, from the subjectivity and objectivity of what happens” (*Pure Immanence* 28). Koestenbaum’s representation of death contains the numerous accounts of being between one event and another, caught up in how trance conditions the mind to accept the outcomes of being a somatic-linguistic agent. And in this way, the exigencies of death are lost on the subject of trance: “peach / shard to a jogger, epitome of / the death drive, a debate I’m not / part of / I decided not to / keep up with the death drive” (360). What does it mean to make a decision like this in the context of baring the weight of a life unconcerned with the pressures of dying? It seems one answer to this can be opening oneself to the opportunities of not caring about outcome or perfection.

That is, trance’s living unfolds constantly around death and the presence of death’s daily contact and context. This is to say, trance treats death as ordinary, as a normal somatic-linguistic reality that necessitates attachment and detachment over and over. Without death, wandering and sifting would not be possible, and Koestenbaum acknowledges through a floating away from consciousness the unavoidable nature of dying; even if the self is absent, death is never far away or distant.

And the pressures of death can be felt, of course, in relation to the AIDS epidemic. As Lauren Berlant notes, AIDS made apparent that the concept of an epidemic is “not a neutral description; it’s inevitably part of an argument about classification, causality, responsibility, degeneracy, and the imaginable and pragmatic logics of cure” (103). And while Koestenbaum only mentions AIDS a handful of brief times in the *Notebooks*² its presence is felt, especially as it relates death’s general imminence. In *My 1980s and Other Essays*, Koestenbaum writes on his experience with AIDS in greater depth. One moment in particular contextualizes further the relationship between death and trance as he justifies his writing style:

I write this way not merely because I enjoy being irreverent or atypical but because when AIDS hit in the early 1980s I decided not to waste my maybe-very-short life writing what I didn’t want to write or obeying rules that in the grand scheme of things (death) didn’t exist. The imminence of nothingness was the only rule I would obey. (16)

Writing for Koestenbaum, then, is in and of itself a capacious mode of living that denies death any kind of weight that is beyond ordinary. The threat of AIDS, at least in this context, catalyzes and paves the way for trance poetics to be made and to carry an irreverence for dying that does not allow it to be an inhibiting force. Koestenbaum makes this wryly apparent in the *Notebooks* in as much as queer space is not hindered by its proximity to death: “without a gay bar I’m / dead—” (68). Trance poetics, at its core, both recognizes death’s ever-presence and dismisses it as nothing more than nearby.

Subjective lingering and failure can never divorce from one other, and in the instances of trance we find exactly how Halberstam conceptualizes, at the close of *The Queer Art of Failure*, this relationship: “To live is to fail, to bungle, to disappoint, and

ultimately to die; rather than searching for ways around death and disappointment, the queer art of failure involves the acceptance of the finite, the embrace of the absurd, the silly, and the hopelessly goofy” (186–187). To experiment with life under these parameters is a justification for how trance enables identity to welcome non-normative realities, that say, via Halberstam, “rather than resisting endings and limits, let us instead revel in and cleave to all of our own inevitable fantastic failures” (187). Failure and death’s convergence in the *Notebooks* ground a sense of how relationships build and collapse, too, insofar as trance’s tone can only be dismissive toward death: “—hoodie / on prematurely aged hunk / with a fit of shyness, / non-responsive despite my / death confession (perhaps / my tone toward death / was offputtingly flippant?)” (257). The speaker’s question here illuminates how discussing death is a chance to be off-putting and the reasons to being flippant are justified in that it is simply one way to accept death’s ever-presence.

CHAPTER THREE

DISGUST, SHAME, IDENTITY

It is clear from the outset of the *Notebooks* Koestenbaum's sense of unease with the derivation of his project. From the second page, a highlight of how affectively jarring his undertaking: "disgust—wishing / to throw this book / away before I / even begin writing it—" (2). In one way, "disgust" is *The Pink Trance Notebook's* consistent affective catalyst in as much as it is the tie between what is felt and how any feeling is consciously perceived, reacted to, and documented.³ If Koestenbaum's aim is to be the sifter, then what he makes apparent here is just how necessarily disgusting the process of sifting is. In another way, disgust is the barrier that leads to desiring the book never begin, defining a refusal—for language and thought to be thrown away, to never be conceived. In reality though, these two dimensions of disgust are complex in the ways they balance one another out. That is, they consist of, contain, and make each other possible. Reading further, disgust recognizably operates as an undertone for observation and offers itself as a heuristically productive device. It is often the angle from which the world is viewed, a kind a default mode of judgement, of affective reaction that is available despite the situation or knowing the reason for its availability: "it shouldn't have / provoked disgust, / but it did" (27).

The phenomenological aspect of disgust, too, is intertwined with that of shame. The relationship or divide between the self and world are instrumentally on display with these two affective states. These notebooks are filled with being and becoming ashamed

of oneself, with the world, or both. As Sedgwick writes in *Touching Feeling*, “shame and identity remain in very dynamic relation to one another, at once deconstituting and foundational, because shame is both peculiarly contagious and peculiarly individuating” (36). The inclination to feel shame, to be affected by a sense of disgust is the primary way of sifting, and without it, identity would hold less of a stake in what it means to explore, to be aware. Sedgwick goes on to say that shame’s strangest, but also most conceptually viable feature, “is the way bad treatment of someone else, bad treatment *by* someone else, someone else’s embarrassment, stigma, debility, bad smell, or strange behavior, seemingly having nothing to do with me, can so readily flood me [...] with this sensation whose very suffusiveness seems to delineate my precise, individual outlines in the most isolating way imaginable” (37). In this way, shame is able to make the observant self both individual and relational, and for Koestenbaum, its all-encompassing nature is one that serves both the beginning and autotelic end of trance: “my shame is one-size- / fits-all, like a white / parka from Target” (31).

The relation between shame and disgust is an overlapping one, one that highlights the dualism of affective materiality wherein a reaction is embodied by the self and the external world it witnesses. Shame and disgust’s primary functions are to turn down, to refuse something. By sociological accounts, if someone is disgusted by someone, they will turn them away, ashamed by their behavior, manor, etc. The various roles that shame and disgust inhabit are phenomenologically dense insofar as they, as Tompkins writes, operate “only after interest or enjoyment has been activated, and inhibits one or the other or both. The innate activator of shame is the incomplete reduction of interest of joy” (39,

shame 135). The implication here for Koestenbaum is that the attentions of trance in some capacity create interest out of shame and disgust and explore their intricate capacities to reduce yet stimulate.

Further, as wandering as these notebooks are, there exist moments of hyper-focus that attenuate the need for a strict, reactive binary to agency. Sedgwick refers to this as a consumer-like reification where any middle ground is lost, where choices narrow to simple acceptance or refusal: to buy or not to buy. It is not a mistake, then, that Koestenbaum compares “shame” to a product from a huge consumer conglomerate in a moment that reads as a humorous stab at what mainstream marketing symbolizes. These dramatized extremes of reifying existence, says Sedgwick, limit the “middle ranges of agency that offer space for effectual creativity and change” (13). Trance is able to occupy a middle ground for agency, offering a phenomenological duality that is at once thrown back by and enthralled by shame.⁴ And it is the heuristic of shame and disgust that catalyzes an intense interest in the world, an interest that at times is flippant and at others obsessive.

In “Trance Notebook #17 [*the lake and the kink*],” we witness a moment of trance’s obsessive hyper-focus with disgust. Spanning three and a half pages and fourteen stanzas, it begins: “disgusted by / filial piety and night’s likeness / to day / disgusted by the lake and / the kink / by the arm and / the fossil and my / capacity to love fossils / by a smile / covering his jealousy like / a condom over Zeus” (177–178). The coverage of this episode varies in content from the above, lighter whimsicality, to a heavier existentialism: “by mother’s oscillation from / life to death and her semi- / permanent position on that /

threshold” (178). This departure in tone attributes an affective drifting to existence and recognizes the density of disgust. Then, only to be followed by the stanza: “by her rectum’s / appearance in / my litanies” (179). The immediate shift back here realizes the relationality between the speaker and their mother in a more upfront, offensive way. In contrasting images, Koestenbaum imagines the breadth of disgust and its capacity for more than just refusal or acceptance. That is, the language here envelopes into a strangeness that simply cannot sit quietly on a binary line, it must waiver and “oscillate,” it must make distant and divert typical connections.

As this episode nears its end, the speaker becomes further entrenched in their own production of shame, in a disgust that is individuating insofar as it is semantically theirs and as it intertwines and builds: “disgusted by / my imitation of / Auden and her teeth’s / participation / by my / Auden imitation’s / resemblance to a lesion” (179). This two-tiered structure functions by proximity to the speaker’s “imitation” and to its compounding likeness, a likeness which is particularly displeasing and decidedly corporeal. The speaker’s unsettled disposition toward their capacity to simulate Auden reflects what Koestenbaum writes in his *My 1980s and Other Essays*:

I spent the summer of 1983 writing fifty sonnets. My stylistic model was Auden’s sequence *In Time of War*: I loved his phrase “Anxiety / Receives them like a grand hotel.” I put together a manuscript called, unadventurously, “Fifty Sonnets.” It never got published as a book. In one of the sonnets, I rhymed “Callas” and “callous.” (9)

The affective displeasure seen in *The Pink Trance Notebooks* distills a function of how the mind and body simultaneously react to shame and disgust. And the relation of the corporeal to the semantic is expressed further in Koestenbaum’s situating of it in *My*

1980s. In a sense, this reflection on his personal history gives a greater context to what we see in the *Notebooks*. His tone, however, is less self-critical, save for the slight hint of shame in the sonnets being unpublished and unadventurous.

It is clear, though, the affective shame that later develops out of and is made possible by this summer of writing. Further, the somatic-semantic bridge of “her teeth’s participation,” the relation to a bodily “lesion,” and now the personal history of Auden as a “stylistic model” makes available how Elspeth Probyn, writing after Deleuze, conceptualizes the production of shame and writing about shame. She writes,

Shame is produced out of the clashing of mind and body, resulting in new acts of subjectivity consubstantial with the words in which they are expressed. Deleuze’s idea of the subjective disposition allows us to understand something of the relationship between writer, experience, expression, affect, and its effects. Shame cannot be conceived of as an external object that could be dispassionately described, nor is it a purely personal feeling. Shame is subjective in the strong sense of bringing into being an entity or an idea through the specific explosion of mind, body, place, and history. (81)

There is a direct overlap here with Sedgwick insofar as the modalities and operations of shame and disgust are placed on a plane of self-making and self-disruption. Assembling identity against a binary split of mind vs. body and acceptance vs. refusal.

Phenomenologically speaking, shame turns the speaker, writer, and subject of trance toward and away from how one interacts after being affected—or, after their interest is affected by disgust and shame. What Probyn highlights and extends from Deleuze above is what I see happening through trance and through Koestenbaum’s trance writing on shame. The aforementioned “one-size fits all” description, after Probyn, reads as a direct metering of any affective connection as it is made in the space between externality and personal feeling. That is, the subjectivity of shame, as Probyn recognizes, and its capacity

to bring into being through an all-encompassing “explosion of mind, body, place, and history” defines its phenomenological density as “one-size fits all.” The emphasis I want to make here is that what Koestenbaum’s trance has the ability to do is express the role that affect, and specifically shame and disgust, plays in becoming a somatic-semantic agent that thinks, rejects, and finds interest in the world and its objects.

CHAPTER FOUR

BEWILDERING DREAMS

This third section follows closely the role that dreams play in *The Pink Trance Notebooks* and investigates in what ways dreams distort, communicate, and bewilder self-knowledge. Koestenbaum's treatment of dreams is expansive insofar as they weave throughout the entirety of the book and filter the world in ways that at times makes explicit and at others makes obscure. In this way, dreams operate similarly as shame and disgust in as much as they work against a binary of being able to determine where, when, and how the self is able to occupy the world.

Dreams establish trance as having the ability to accentuate what Sedgwick labels and defines as "periperformative," or, being "around the performative" insofar as they "allude to explicit performative utterances" and are not themselves performatives in the sense that Austin conditions the utterances as not describing "my doing," but it is my actually doing it (68). Sedgwick's periperformatives "explicitly refer to explicit performative utterances," though not themselves performatives, "they are *about* performatives" and the "cluster *around* performatives" (68). The significance of this designation, Sedgwick wants to say, is in the valuing of reintroducing the metaphor of space to what is often discussed temporally, e.g., by Derrida or Butler.⁵ Rather, Sedgwick writes,

The localness of the periperformative is lodged in the metaphors of space. Periperformative utterances aren't just about performative utterances in a referential sense: they cluster around them, they are near them or next to them or crowding against them; they are in the neighborhood of the performative. Like the neighborhoods in real estate ads, periperformative neighborhoods have

prestigious centers (the explicit performative utterance) but no very fixed circumferences; yet the prestige of the center extends unevenly, even unpredictably through the rest of the neighborhood. (68)

The periperformativity of dreams is highlighted in a few distinct ways. First, epistemologically, what is dreamt is never materially performed. In this way, the retelling of dreams is an act of adjacent recalling in as much as there is no material center from which it extends. Second, as Koestenbaum writes them, dreams recognize in their spatial logics a kind of self-defining and recreation of reality that deepens the question of what kind of knowledge is really valuable: real, or an imagined real. Third, the line between trance and dreams is a blurry one that distorts any kind of centrality and allows any representable, explicit action to be intricately woven throughout the rest of one's world view.

The first dream episode in *The Pink Trance Notebooks* demonstrates Sedgwick's alluring categorization and makes evident the unpredictable phenomenological distribution of consciousness: "dreamt that M ___ / stood behind me (ambush) / and pressed into my / rear end—as if she / were butt-fucking me— / and in the dream / her mental illness was / established as factual—" (12). The reference to performatives in this dream remove the action's weight, causing an imbalance between the stressed, strained, and awkward contact between bodies. This dream is corporeally dense as "M ___" and the speaker share space and as the speaker is acted upon. The crowding of flesh here highlights Sedgwick's conceptualization of the periperformative as a spatial metaphor that sends a ripple effect through the speaker's imaginary that is a remove from any functional centrality. That is, what this scene does is position a dream sequence as a

demonstrable window for viewing the rest of one's attachments as decentralized, for if imagined dream attachments can "[establish] as factual," then the parameters for what affects and gets affected alters slightly. This is to say, the periperformative threshold of dreams makes available how the mind works and writes when influenced by trance and language acts metaphorically similar to the episode directly following the dream retelling: "abstract lines serving / representational ends / lines *not knowing* / they're abstract / lines ending up / abstract because / they're so intently / concentrated on / capturing observed form" (13). This characterization, in its proximity to any dream formulation makes evident the factors of trance's capacity to distort what seems apparent—there exists no representation that is able to stand solely for itself.

The realization that dreams' daily obfuscation is such that once a dream account is over, the reader of trance can't simply return to taking what seems obvious for granted. In the following scene we get an articulation of a dream performance, of a detached rendering of existing in a moment of performativity: "dream: shame somersault: / soprano showed vagina / and then quickly / buttocks while bowing / either in Boston's / Symphony Hall or / Amsterdam's Concertgebouw / I'm there to witness it: surrounded / by failure like ermine—" (72–73). The role of witness here is important, a periperformative witness of on-stage shame that directly obscures the representation of real venues. The pressure placed on emergent modalities of failure, surprise, and downfall exacerbate the ties to imagined realities. That is, Koestenbaum renders the operative mode of dreams as being a catalyst for arranging the self around trajectories that are not arranged in normal ways. The exposure of the performer here bewilders both

themselves and the witness. Phenomenologically, the retelling of this dream performance arranges the selves around what becomes inescapable, “nude, she can’t / leave the auditorium— / she flips around, trying / to escape exposure / flipping / is a tactic we call / the ‘shame / somersault’—” (73–74). The expressions of living in approximate relation to dream logics and their runoffs are what makes possible the fundamental extraction of trance: bewilderment.

In *Animate Literacies*, one of Snaza’s main objectives is to theorize the ways in which literacy and the humanities’ attention to the modes of being human can incorporate the “wider networks of relations among entities and agencies” that are often articulated across energies that are not necessarily human (7). These modalities are included in what Snaza refers to as “the more-than-human literacy situation that swirls around us and in us,” an affective condition of “disorientation that happens when disciplined attention fails” (9). This condition is what Snaza names “bewilderment,” a condition that he insists offers a way to move past a singular, colonial, dehumanizing, etc., version of what, after Sylvia Wynter, is called “Man.”⁶ This is an institutionalized, disciplined, Western, and ultimately fictional politicization of what it means to be human. This is all to say, disrupting statist accounts and rigid formulations of assembling the self will allow for a fuller recognition of what the benefits are of disorienting the human and the literacies that materially support Man. Here is one of Snaza’s most compelling accounts of the opportunities and conditions of bewilderment:

Bewilderment produces anguish but also dreams and thinking, and all of this happens at a remove from any unified sense of self. Indeed, bewilderment as an affective experience may be best understood as any event where the self, always becoming in processual relation to myriad entanglements with nonhuman forces

and agencies, registers its emergence in and from a world in flux that always exceeds control. (81)

Trance and trance via dreams create exactly this “remove” and recognizes in the folds and in a delirium of reality a space for deregulated acts of self-recognition. Articulations, fabrications, and knowledge twist around one another, making appearances and evidence of a world feel as if it were a replication of presentation. In the void of extraction is room for daily living that is an operation of self-removal insofar as to make any kind of noticeable contribution is to make evident the lack of control anyone has.

NOTES

¹ This has in mind, too, Denise Riley's *Impersonal Passion: Language as Affect*. She writes, "language is impersonal: its working through and across us is indifferent to us, yet in the same blow it constitutes the fiber of the personal" (1).

² The primary references are considerably spread out through the *Notebooks* and can be found on pages 130, 142, 217, 237, 342, 359. Their contextualization is generally light and brief, e.g., "your book isn't AIDS-y / enough to qualify / for my blog" (142).

³ In some sense, this can be thought of in relation to how William's structures of feeling are "concerned with meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt" and are "affective elements of consciousness and relationships: not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought: practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and interrelating continuity" (132).

⁴ This duality of agency is helpful to think in terms of Teresa Brennan's diagnosis of the unconscious versus the unconscious ego: The conscious ego forecloses knowledge and assumptions that challenge its sense of intellectual superiority in its body; the unconscious ego censors similar knowledge by repressing it and keeping it unconscious" (138).

⁵ Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble*. "Secondly, performativity is not a singular act, but a representation and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body, understood in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration" (xv).

⁶ Wynter, Sylvia. "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, after Man, Its Overrepresentation—an Argument." *CR: New Centennial Review*, 2003, 257–337.

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