

Embarrassing Subjects, Undisplayable Objects

Of Impossible Encounters Between *Trans* and *Cis*
That Have Nonetheless Taken Place

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“The collector is often the only one to perceive the relationships he [sic] establishes between the objects he [sic] seeks and acquires. The others, the visitors, are doomed to remain outside, on the other side of the window.”

Philippe Dagen¹

1 Philippe Dagen, “Le Joyeux Méli-Mélo des Cabinets de Curiosités,” *Le Monde*, August 2, 2019, p. 13. My translation.



Figure 1 The author and the author's father.

The photographs are low-resolution because they were taken carelessly. The ambition to capture the objects was quickly deflated by how embarrassing they were, by the certainty that no one else would find them meaningful. And that, in any case, to justify their display would necessitate the telling of too intimate a story. A T-girl's story.

A what? A T-girl's story.

The photographs were taken on the fly, right before the objects were disposed of, either because a house was to be made vacant, or because one's parents were about to visit.

Hide every sign that could point to the T-girl.

Parents snoop. They rummage through. Like lovers. Parents are the only lovers we actually know.

The photographs are grainy, ugly, and badly lit, because the photographer could not be completely convinced it was worth taking them. All she knew is that they incarnated an intimacy that she would like to believe actually took place. Even though no one other than the ones involved – the T-girl and her lover – would ever learn about it. Certainly nobody from the circle of the straight man who comes over to fuck the T-girl and warns her not to contact him because he has a girlfriend, or a wife, or a non-embarrassing life, because he is actually straight, because he doesn't normally do this, because it's his work phone—almost immediately after coming.

She is lucky if he says yes when she asks him if he wants to rinse his dick in the sink. A few more seconds to enjoy his presence. A chance to look at him from the back, furtively, as she would her father. Is this not what it would look like to watch him, the father, making love to her mother? His pasty ass mooning her, the T-girl-to-be, denouncing the hopelessness of her ever being underneath him, flashing the fact that she, the T-girl already in gestation, is barred from entering the scene as anything other than a snoop herself.

The photo above captures just that. Her six-year-old self tries to penetrate the frame. Will she make it? She holds a green-colored toy—she remembers how breakable it was—and extends her little arms toward the father's naked body. It's a kind of offering, though not of the object she holds. The father is looking away, washing his penis. The father is unfazed, not a bashful bone in his body.

The mother snaps the picture. The father's pasty ass, untouchable, untannable, impenetrable, for anyone to see.

The T-girl could understand her lovers' insistence on effacing their encounter. Were there traces of her nocturnal thoughts as a child about her own father's ass as he lay on the mother's body, she would have tried to efface those too, and with desperation. She could understand the lovers' insistence to all but undo what had been nonetheless done if she gave it enough thought. But she is too busy nursing the pain of being effaced right after being desired, of being fucked by men who must have, then, been plugging their nose while fucking her, overcome by her stench once they were finished. She—she is never finished. She can't even start.

With the men who come over the T-girl gets to take up that maternal position—squashed underneath the father, obstructed from the view of whoever might walk in to steal their own glance. It doesn't last long. Maybe eight or twelve minutes. And as soon as she checks her phone after letting the lover out his photographs are no longer there, neither are his words. His profile image is gone, too. She is a liability. The T-girl's lovers can't afford to carry this embarrassing history around. Yet when she finally lays in bed to try to fall asleep, and fail, once they are all gone, it is precisely that very history that she will consult to jack herself off to sleep. If not by revisiting their exchanged messages and photographs, then her memories. They haven't effaced those. In the event that they have left something behind, she will open the shoebox where she has stored it and stare at the object, basking in its heterosexual aura. A phone charger (always a Samsung somehow), a candy wrapper, a chewing gum, an empty plastic bottle. She is then sure that she isn't crazy. She is a little less unmoored. Despite their best efforts to make her disappear – post-coitus/post-mortem – it is undeniable that they have been here. They have been inside her.

It strikes her that they sometimes forget to flush when they poop. As if to suggest that her home is the place where they go to deposit

their trash, to get rid of things. They come to her to get rid of her. The T-girl as a shithole.

In *La Mort Propagande*, Hervé Guibert speaks about a period in his life where he started photographing dejections. "Diarrheas, defecations, splashes, brutal shit on the white enamel of the toilet bowl, smashed little squirts (...)" (Guibert 2009, 25).² He would even number them: defecation 1, defecation 2...refusing to flush the toilet so that the feces would accumulate, piling up like arabesques on top of one another. He recounts kneeling by the toilet bowl as if by an altar, astonished at the fact that so much shit belonged to him. She confesses it pains her to flush these men's shit. She delays it as much as possible. They prove something.

Guibert adored these "marvels" like "divine and intoxicating relics, mass wine accentuated by degeneration" (26). He is fascinated by his own detritus: the uncontrollable mucus and plasma that shoot out of the anus, plopping against the water, leaving their mark as stain and odor. Guibert claims that the first gesture as a child that his parents remember is of himself eating his own feces, having been found by his mother in his baby carriage "nauseous, satiated, belching, happy" (28).

Guibert's mother, who used to warn him that if he didn't learn how to take care of his own shoes, he would have to wear his sister's high heels to school, also told him not to touch his anus: "it's not clean, we touch our mouth after" (38). His father took care of his penis, whose foreskin Guibert couldn't pull back. The father used an inflating bulb, like the one the T-girl uses to douche before taking anal, to clean out the pus that accumulated in little Guibert's gland.

In my family myths it was always my sister who woke up in the middle of the night to smear her shit all over the hallway walls.

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All Guibert translations are mine.

Where was my own shit growing up? Although I remember very clearly taking a lot of pleasure from the act of pooping as a child, being happy when overcome by the need to defecate, my interest has always been in the waste of others. In the unwanted bits they leave behind. The crumbs I can feast on when no one is looking. The necessarily heterosexual waste of men.

“Cross-dressing remains one of the last spaces where human beings can still dream,” explains Luana Muniz, Brazilian trans woman and iconic madam in the documentary *Rainha da Lapa* (2019). Muniz envisions this declining ability to dream, pointedly, as a site. And, as such, one that anyone can presumably occupy. Which roughly corresponds to how Lacanian psychoanalysis thinks of what we may call gender. Gender as a position. This is evident in the interactions between the T-girl, a contemporary formation of *trans* who uses digital and sartorial technology to engage in ephemeral trans practices, and the heterosexually identified men who desire them.

Trying to craft some stable definition for the T-girl is beside the point of this essay, and antithetical to her very ethos. Although she shares characteristics with other formations of *trans*, she lacks, for instance, the necessary class, racial and temporal dimensions of the Latin American *travesti*. She also lacks the high stark contrast of feminine and heteronormatively masculine roles played by *jananas* as well as their association with extreme poverty in the Indian context (Nagar 2023).

The T-girl is closer to what in France is referred to as *travesti(e)*, or the originally pejorative word, *trav*—a term that nowadays is often clustered with trans in hook-up apps in the French context by men who look for “trav/trans” interchangeably, and those who insist on the imagined fundamental difference between *travs* and *trans*.

Here the latter presumably commits to her trans-ness in everyday life through surgical and hormonal procedures and the first “only dresses.” Indeed, a T-girl is someone who dresses. Someone who dresses for the occasion. For, indeed, each time she accesses a straight man not in the name of non-consensual violence *is* an occasion.

A brief reference to a particular formation of trans that Camila Sosa Villada calls “crows” in *Las Malas* comes perhaps closer to what T-girlhood is, or does, in relation to other trans configurations easier to imagine, depict, and defend. In the novel, set in the Argentinian city of Córdoba, the crows appear as subjects who become visibly travesti-like only when it suits them: for short amounts of time and in specific conditions before retreating back to their normative-seeming lives read as boys. The travesti sex workers in the book look at the crows with a mixture of contempt and jealousy for their material privileges and reversible transitions, although the narrator also shows empathy for the singularity of their predicament. Through the figure of the crow trans appears as a host of nuanced possibilities shaped by each subject’s singular relationship to time, money, labor, and animality (Sosa Villada 2022).

The T-girl is, then, unable to be “a woman without interruption” (Portero 2023, 124). The T-girl is “trans in other ways” (Rey 2023, 1). She allows us to get acquainted with the diversity of trans, helping to protect trans studies from its blind spots, constrictive scripts, cozy equivocations, and seductive binaries, irrespective of its oppositional discourses (Amin 2022). Writing the T-girl to life and displaying objects of her trans-cis encounters is one way of challenging “the coloniality of gender,” so often reiterated through the very forces presumably invested in its debunking (Cuevas Parra 2023, 6).

Suffice it to say that the T-girl makes good use of interstices—spatial, linguistic, bodily – in order to—in the most Lacanian sense of the word – enjoy. The T-girl enjoys sex because she can’t enjoy

love. This essay is about a fundamental reason why the T-girl cannot enjoy love. Because her lovers want her to disappear as soon as they are finished enjoying her themselves. Who is she to complain if her own being, or T-girlhood itself, is contingent on her disappearance?

The T-girl doesn't last long. Might this be why she is so invested in repetition? She is a recidivist of her symptom, which is itself defined as that which repeats. But which formation of trans, or cis, isn't? We could think of cross-dressing as the enabling gesture, one of the "devalued *saberes*" for such an impossible encounter to happen: a subject who is otherwise seen as a man cloaks themselves in enough feminine material signs (wig, make-up, heels, voice) so that the other sees them as a woman, which she might as well always already have been, although certainly not for the other who must authenticate her she-ness (Cuevas Parra 2023, 12). There is, of course, a lot more happening in this scene. To reduce the trans subject's act to cross-dressing would be to dismiss that subject's internal life. That is, it would mistake her for there where the other's gaze places her. As if that gaze, the one that telegraphs "man" when it sinks its tentacles on the subject in question, were the real arbiter of what things are and what they mean. The T-girl isn't a boy who becomes a girl only when she dresses like one. But inasmuch as her very girlhood depends on her heterosexual male lovers' gaze, she might as well be a boy when outside his field of vision. A boy, or even nothing. Which is why so much distress emerges when they abandon her, and so much investment in the objects they may leave behind, considering the men's own investment in making all traces of their encounter disappear—threatening the very certainty that their gaze has indeed once anointed the T-girl as a girl.

When a heterosexually identified man walks into a private room to have sex with a T-girl, a variety of contradictions are at work. Some of the codes produced by the public gaze, the gaze outside the scene of sex that unfolds precisely because no one (else) is looking, are relied upon, and – enjoyed. Others are placed in suspension, disavowed, or re-signified. By this I mean the fact that the body

taking up the feminine position either lacks or exceeds what one has come to associate with such a material presentation. The T-girl has a penis, and a 5'o'clock shadow, maybe even stubble, but the straight man also comes in knowing exactly what to do to maintain his own masculine position. That is, he abides by a set of ancestral givens, considering the man who comes after him, and the one who comes after that (the T-girl is, in the most Douglas Crimp sense of the word, promiscuous), will all effectively behave according to a similar narrative (Crimp, 1987).³ These men will, as if by design, place the T-girl in a certain position, that *of woman*, with all of the events coded to follow from that: a tacit understanding of who will initiate touch, who shall enjoy the scene more than the other, who is supposed to enjoy despite, or instead of, the other, who should decide which limbs go where, and when the scene should come to a close. And, significantly, not only when the scene should come to a close, but that it should be effaced from history once it ends.

The motif here, whose regularity is so undeniable we could refer to it as masculine one, can involve the immediate erasure of app conversations that led up to the encounter, the blocking of the T-girl's number, or a verbalized warning such as, "Don't contact me, please," or, "You're discrete, right?" It is, in fact, difficult to say which sentence is more violent, the parting words aimed to efface the trans-cis encounter from having taken place, or the one that tends to initiate it, where the man tells the T-girl that *he*, unlike any other men who contact her, is *actually* straight *but...* promptly placing her in the feminine position whilst robbing her from being authenticated as an *actual* woman. Is she a boy or a girl, after all? Only *he* can decide.⁴

3 Given that her ability to conjure up the encounter between herself and a straight man will always proceed an ontological certainty that such an encounter would be impossible, how could the T-girl, wielding a possibility of enjoyment as crucial as it is belated, *not* be promiscuous?

4 Jacques Lacan's theory of the mirror stage goes much beyond its reductive version which often circulates. It is crucial to remember that the baby's tethering to their image in the mirror is reliant on the ratification of a *other* (i.e. the caretaker). The child turns to the other to authenticate the relationship between the reflected image and the baby, which is thus not a "natural" one. It is the look of the other, and their emotional investment in the scene, that seals the deal. Our image doesn't mean much unless the Big other, the parent as that agency, *connects* us to it (Lacan 1949).

The straight man who takes part in the encounter will have most likely entered into conversation with the T-girl already marking the relationship as a traceless one by sending her photos of himself that are either automatically deleted once she opens them or that he will swiftly delete, often before she has even had a chance to see them. Nothing should be kept from this encounter, except perhaps his ejaculate inside of her. At times the man will also demand to restrict their conversation to a hookup app, refusing to move to WhatsApp in order to never reveal his phone number—all whilst expecting the T-girl to host the encounter, and thus share where she lives.

The subject who takes up what, for now, we will agree to call the masculine position, the subject who wants to erase what he himself (co-) wrote, albeit in accordance with some ancestral script that largely pre-arranges the disposition of bodies and their movements (or lack thereof), takes the T-girl as a dreamlike figure, as Muniz poetically suggests. Things are suspended with/through her. He can be multiple contradicting things at once (straight but...) and, best of all, acts can be undone once the dream is over (they shared an encounter but...).

He will allow himself to make contact with her provided such an encounter be relegated to the dimension of the undisplayable as soon as the encounter is over, or before—effaced from history the way a dream that might as well have never manifested itself so long as the dreamer never gave an account of it to a friend, an analyst, or in writing. The T-girl is here akin to the dream in that, if the masculine other has his way, she is trapped in the register of fantasy, locked away in the same dimensions of thoughts which no one other than the subject himself has access to, until now, provided he is diligent about guarding the boundaries between dream and reality. Reality here being, what others can see. What can be authenticated by others. That is, what one can get in trouble for. That is, what can trigger embarrassment. That is, what can threaten the foundation on top of which the subject has built a

convincing carapace for his masculine position, turning it – the position, in its fickleness and latent promiscuity (anyone can take it up) – into a supposedly bounded thing, a displayable object, represented by his body.

The T-girl is thus dreamlike, and in many ways, then, a perfect other for this masculine subject, because it often is in her best interest as well to limit her own self to the domain of the dream. Slipping out into waking life as a (T-)girl would mean the other(s)' gaze would denude her. And what is the T-girl without her clothes? What is the naked T-girl but the death of the dream? What is the naked T-girl but the embarrassment of being caught red-handed begging for a desiring gaze whose proof has been effaced by its agent?

Straight men couldn't possibly desire her. The masculine subject's cis/systematic effacing of the traces of his gaze, and of their encounter, reify this muffled truth. He may also know what is at stake for her. It is a great arrangement for him if his secret is safe with her, contingent on the probability of her own embarrassment were others to find out she does what she does, she is what she does, or she does what she is...After all, T-girls tend to melt away once they go past the threshold of private space where dreaming is possible because from dreams we know we can wake up.

Even if we will eventually return, to dreaming, we know dreams to be exceptions. Conveniently for the man, no matter how much he frolics with his dream objects, such objects couldn't possibly ever account for what he is when the lights turn bright.

Of course, this psychic arrangement, is rather fallible—as most are. Not because the masculine subject might, despite his best efforts, for example, fall in love with the T-girl. This would be the subject

for another text, perhaps a science-fiction one, or magical realism, as Sosa Villada's novel. But because encounters do leave traces. Encounters with a T-girl as dream material, despite all the stealthing strategies, can leave a residue that denounces their manifestation. In a proverbial slip of the tongue, or an oneiric lapsus, the masculine subject can leave an object behind.

The masculine subject who didn't want to share his phone number (he wants to consciously decide when, where and if he will dream of/with the T-girl, although that's just not how dreams work), may leave one of his belongings at the crime scene. Material evidence that this impossible encounter has materialized.

This essay points to a selection of objects that straight-identified men forgot in my home as they rushed back into waking life and which I have kept in a sort of lost-and-found shoebox, an intimate archive of real objects tucked away in a world of far-fetched reverie. These objects allow us to choose careful inspection and analysis over the deceiving stasis of disavowal – of the products of our psychic, cultural, and "institutional rush to categorize" and to only consider, or give credence to, that which has been subjected to such forms of sorting and sense-making (Walker 2023, 10).

The "subjective retelling" of these trans-cis encounters via these embarrassing objects through writing and their belated display, also allow us to refute the T-girl's ontological alienation (Cuevas Parra 2023, 12). Not only hers but that of so many other forms of trans that escape language and binary imaginations, contesting the erasure of our being, our having been, and "subtract[ion] from social life [of] the materiality of the body and the memory that verifies its existence" (Cuevas Parra 2023, 3). For not being able to recount, to show, to offer up for recognition, one's strategies of living in a world unable to imagine us, although very willing to fuck us, is also a *cistemic* "severing of social bonds" (Cuevas Parra 2023, 9). It's also a destruction of the mere possibility of particular bodies, desires, encounters, that we – T-girl and her lovers – know exist and take shape in the disappearing banality of parallel worlds.

I use the word *cistemic* here in direct reference to Marquis Bey's concept of the *cistem*, a totalizing "way of the world" constructed and orchestrated for the maintenance of gender-binary ideological projects. The *cistem* guarantees its self-perpetuation through denial and obfuscation so that we are not able to see its *s/cistematicity*. The T-girl, her lovers, and their undisplayable objects attest to the constitutive penetrability of a cistem that touts itself as impenetrable, like its male bodies, for "we discovered it *had* an interstitial space" and traversed it, "how easily," a million times. (Bey 2022, XII).

These are the objects that form the accidental archive of this traversing: a Mexican candy wrapper, a phone charger, a pair of black gloves, a white T-shirt, a work badge, a Crystal Meth pipe, an empty bottle of Coca-Cola, a paper receipt, a matchbox, and a chewing gum.

These objects are embarrassing because they denounce the awkwardness of language in accounting for desire. They make a mockery of things we hold dear, like identity. These objects escape us. They stick out. Their owners don't want them back – it would be too embarrassing to retrieve them. These objects catch us red-handed.

There is nothing special about these objects per se. but they illuminate the "potential for condensing entire sexual histories" (Dean 2009, 125). I call them embarrassing because they are uncomfortable. They fit nowhere and no one wants them. Their owners never cared to get them back. Their stories could never be corroborated because their stories are unsayable, unwritten, unfathomable. These objects are embarrassing because displaying them would cause the T-girl mortification, as she is, by design, undisplayable herself. Unless she wants to be the object of laughter and other kinds of brutality. Unless she wants to be exposed or sacrificed. Whereas what the T-girl wants is to be fucked—because she cannot be loved.

These objects are *embarrassing* as a potential translation for the French word *encombrant*, which holds helpful meanings such as, *cumbersome, bulky, troublesome*. Objects that are in the way, that make up a nuisance. Debris, waste, rubbish. Uncomfortable, unwanted, and difficult. Things to get rid of. Things we don't want to see. Shit. We can also think of the Portuguese expression, *mala sem alça*, too, which literally means a suitcase without a handle, and metaphorically means something inconvenient and thus unwanted. Something you can't easily hold, or transport. Something that has lost its function, or efficiency. Something that used to be valuable and is now a problem. Something broken, irritating, good-for-nothing.

The objects exist alongside other, less tangible, and durable, "material memories," which have been the subject of studies around barebacking, or the desire to have sex, mostly with strangers, without condoms so that fluids can be either exchanged, or transferred from one body, or many, to another (Cuevas Parra 2023, 3). This archive of ephemeral elements attesting to an encounter includes infections, diseases, and creampie, the ejaculate that fills the sexual orifice to the brim, corroborating the encounter not only happened but that lacks were filled (Semerene 2021). These substances can facilitate fantasies of longevity where we in the feminine position, too, can take something from them. We, who disappear from the world every time they disappear from our lives, might cling on to these temporary totems to assuage the "engulfing violence," of such regular abandonments (Cuevas Parra 2023, 3).

The T-girl's dream-world is thus a death-world, in line with Carolina Cuevas Parra's claim that the "modern/colonial gender system" is a necropolitical configuration of and for de-sensitivity, separation, and extraction of "bestialized, racialized, and feminized bodies," even if the T-girl's body grieves of a decidedly other kind of indifference and disposability than those produced by the Mexican narco-state's necrocontext of which Cuevas Parra speaks (Cuevas Parra 2023, 5). Framing these objects and displaying them at last, by

writing them into the public arena, is also an interrupting gesture of a necropolitical power otherwise maintained through cis-gender myths that feed on the disappearance of T-girlhood from the field of imagination and vision, all whilst nourishing it as a secret garden.

These communicable objects –sperm, urine, spit, feces, viruses – brand us as having been either inscribed or impregnated with what the other had to give and won't be able to get back. Although proof of the encounters could potentially exist in the form of video, those would necessarily feature either no faces for the sake of the straight man's discretion or paranoia, or just the T-girl's face, capturing only the most fungible, and forgettable, aspects of the men's presence: their penis. Such videos would then be reduced to displaying the scene of the encounter as its anonymous skeleton, disemboweled as mere patterns where the subjects "function as generic, illustrative human types, male and female" (Walker 2023, 2). It is then in these supposedly undisplayable objects that this testimonial latency becomes manifest, destabilizing the most ancient myths about sexual difference and gender praxes.

Objects deemed displayable tend to come from an always already determined archive. Not unlike philosophy's own objects, as Manon Garcia argues (Garcia 2023). These are objects necessarily produced by men. As the T-girls tend to host these men, it wouldn't be possible for her to leave anything behind. Apart from her own self, as the T-girl is the ultimate object the man leaves behind. Significantly, the T-girl is not supposed to take anything off during the encounters. For it is precisely what she keeps on – her sartoriality, her accoutrements – that renders her desirable.

Yet the T-girl's sartoriality would be good for nothing were it not authenticated by the men to whom it is addressed. The T-girl isn't necessarily interested in admiring her image in the mirror, an image that would only denounce her seams, the embarrassing evidence of her impossibility to pass. The T-girl suffers from (lack of) acknowledgement most of all. The gaze is a great inventor of

forms, it can sculpt better than even hands, or words, although they often work together to found orifices and make protuberances disappear. As soon as the men, the agents of this all-powerful gaze, leave the T-girl goes back to her bitter insignificance. She goes back to waiting to be made sense of. She goes back to her original, embarrassing contours. These undisplayable objects, however, never change form. Although they look inanimate and even meaningless, I can tell their stories and no one else. That is my gift. I rely on men, their original keepers, and the objects rely on me.

In her work on jananas, Ila Nagar asks how thinking about these formations of trans, “who are a people with everyday lives” might “come into conversation with objects that hang in a museum” (Nagar 2023, p. 4). She juxtaposes the experience of being a janana with the experience of being in a museum interacting with an object as an attempt to decolonize, “un-gender,” and denationalize jananas and objects in museums alike. What Nagar means by decolonizing has to do with accommodating conflict and complexity, as well as recognizing “the possibility and the reality that worlds and worldviews existed and exist beyond the Euro-centric worlds and worldviews are not curiosities but lived experiences of everyday human beings” (p. 17).⁵ Museums don’t know T-girls exist. Not many people, let alone institutions, do. Museums couldn’t hold the objects the T-girl keeps the same way language couldn’t hold the very existence of the T-girl’s lovers. How do you call a man who desires, seeks, fucks a T-girl, and then buries her into oblivion? I claim we don’t have a word for these men because to name them would be embarrassing. Having a name for them would mean trading the disavowal of the excesses of desire vis-a-vis language for the truth of its actual practices.⁶

5 Decolonizing in the context of Nagar’s essay would also mean “recognizing the sheer effort it took for India to become an independent country” (Nagar 2023, 12).

6 Jananas’ male lovers are called *giriya*. Nagar tells us jananas use this term for any male person attracted to them, whether a boyfriend, or a client (Nagar 2023, 6).

I stress that T-girls are precisely people without everyday lives whose objects that account for the non-everydayness of their lives are undisplayable and would thus never be in a museum. T-girls are subjects without everyday lives because to be a person with an everyday life would cost them their lives. And T-girls want to act on their desire, but they also want to live. By *they* I mean *we*.

It seems that the psyche needs something to hold on to for the subject to keep her bearings. That is, some visible, if not tangible, evidence of desire. Particularly when this desire is enacted through interactions that leave no public imprint, that find no home in the structures that be, that remain outside the realm of the socially fathomable, for which there is no language, that – precisely – seem to live on and in the register of the dream.

Ultimately, we could link such evidence to the psychoanalytic notion of the object of desire, which is bound to never be found. It may just be then that part of the wish for visible, or material, if not embodied, evidence of these impossible encounters is an attempt from the part of the subject to convince herself that although the object that was ever so briefly found – brevity and the prematurity of the end are fundamental characteristics of the dream – has already/once again been lost, it has left something behind. Here we can think of the other who must authenticate claims of identity of the subject *from the beginning*—and this object that has been left behind a kind of embodied proxy of the other functioning as authenticator of the encounter. Which might just be precisely why many of these men make sure to leave, conveniently, such inconvenient objects behind, and why the T-girl holds on to them with such diligence.

Here I speak then of the condition of such objects, produced by this tension between she who relies on their existence, and their storage, and he who makes sure to never return to retrieve them – preemptively disavowing their acknowledgement. To what extent do these objects exist, then, if they are not witnessed by anything but a subject who herself is supposed to not exist – or is to exist as a figment of a dream?



Figure 2 Mexican candy wrapper.

I used to post two different kinds of personal ads: one unabashedly looking for sex and another looking for a serious relationship. He was one of the rare ones who claimed to be looking for a relationship. When he walked in, he said he had brought me a typical candy from Mexico, where he came from. I ate it right then and there, as we sat on my couch, and I tried to act coy. It was delicious. Only later

did I worry it might have been poisoned. He was in his late 20's and told me he had recently survived cancer. We never made love. A few days later he saw one of my ads where I looked just for sex and sent me a message saying I had lied to him and calling me a whore.



Figure 3 Cell phone charger

It is impossible to remember who the owner of this phone charger is considering how much of the verbal interactions between the T-girl and her lovers revolves around such devices. “Do you have a charger?” is often the first thing the men ask when they walk through the door, right before walking out. To their chagrin I only ever have an iPhone charger, and for some reason, they almost always own a Samsung. Significantly, whoever owned this charger actually thought to bring his own charger to the encounter—only to forget it there.



Figure 4 Black winter gloves

The only thing we could say about this image is that it pinpoints the time of the year when the encounter took place. It is quite remarkable that such items exist in this archive considering most of these photographs were taken during the time I lived in Los Angeles, where gloves are rarely needed even in winter. This is, of course, the kind of object anyone can leave behind anywhere. One of those things we put on and take off, those seem to be the first to be left behind and, perhaps, not expensive enough to merit a return. But although these are the photographed objects, there are many others that were left behind and never retrieved, but not photographed. Including an engagement ring.



Figure 5 White T-shirt

This item may also function as a clue as to what time of the year the encounter took place, considering it is very hot most of the time in the Los Angeles area. For the man to have left this generic white T-shirt behind it must mean he was wearing it underneath a dress shirt, or a sweater, as he would not have left shirtless. Its texture is akin to that of a cocoon, whose retrieval would indeed be of no interest once shedded.



Figure 6 Workplace badge

What I remember from this encounter is what the face from the photograph emanates when unobstructed. He was a very cordial man who loved to smile. One of the very few who does not treat the encounter as an opportunity to take as much as they possibly can from it. Not only in terms of the usages of the T-girl's body but the series of demands, as they often ask not just for a phone

charger, but for poppers, lotion, bath towels, or paper towels, promptly pulling dozens of sheets from the tissue box. This man, however, was serene and conscious of being an invited guest in my home. Unfortunately, he subsequently had to go through some bureaucratic process to make a new workplace badge, not without the anxiety of knowing the T-girl had his identity in her possession.



Figure 7 Crystal Meth pipe

They were two friends who arrived together. One was much hotter than the other. The hot one had a large forearm tattoo, wore a baseball cap, and described his job as a “procurement specialist,” looking for furniture for his friends. He was also having trouble being able to see his young child because the mother was fed up with his poor behavior, which may have had to do with his drug habit. His friend was a lot older and kept his work clothes on the whole time. His phone never stopped ringing. It was other T-girls hoping the guys would come over and share their Crystal Meth. As I didn’t smoke any I was quite appalled at their request to use it in my home, so I said: “I’d prefer not to,” and was quite proud of myself. To be able to say no for the first time. They readily obliged but then asked if I could keep the pipe so that they didn’t risk being caught by the police when they drove back home. They said they would come back later to fetch it. Apparently, I said yes. And, apparently, they preferred not to come back.



Figure 8 Coca-Cola bottle

They often arrive with a drink in their hand, which they never offer me. The color of the liquid inside the bottle rarely coincides with its label. Although the remnants pooled at the bottom look like the color of Coca-Cola, there is no guarantee that there was actually Coca-Cola inside the bottle.

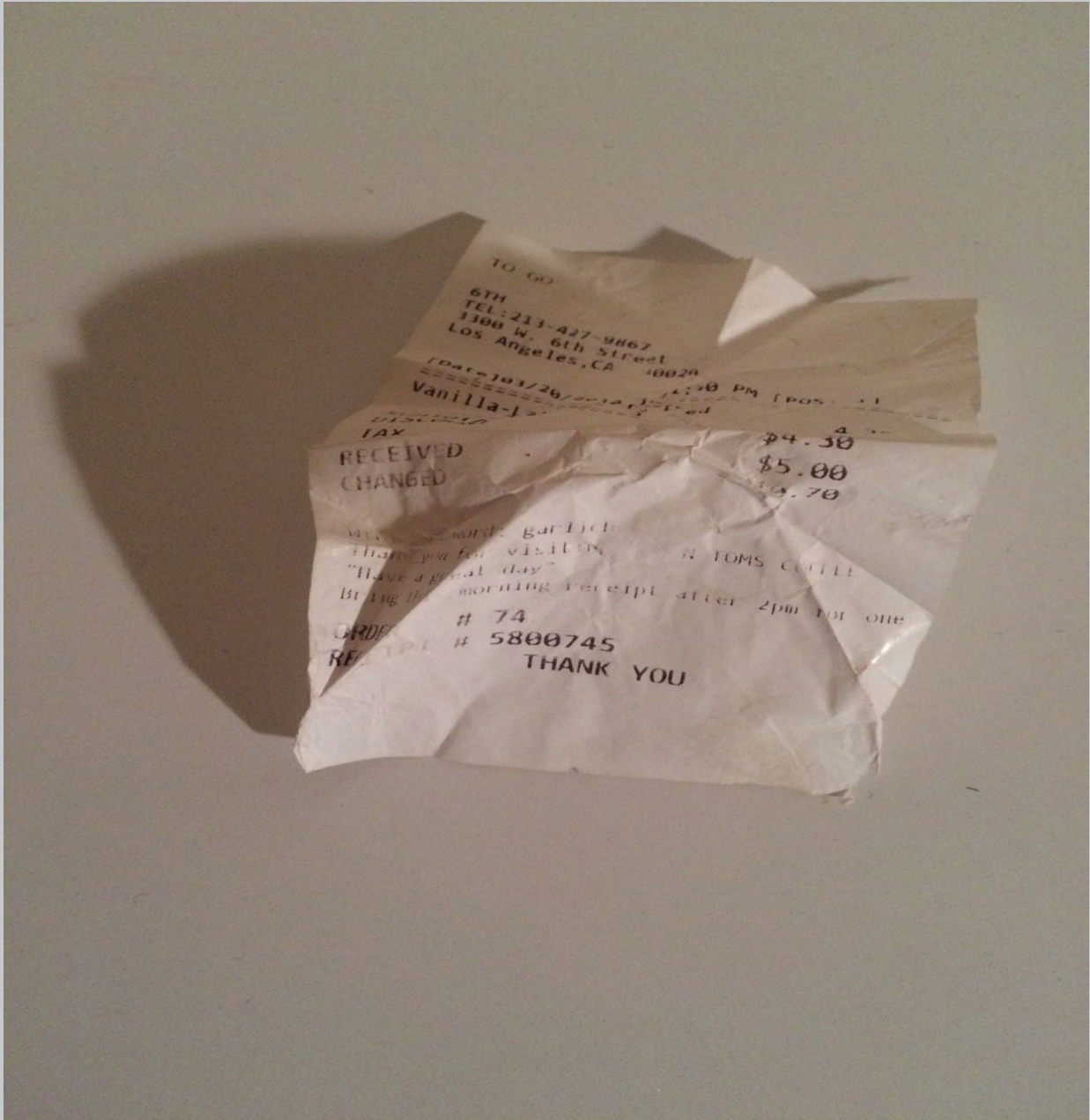


Figure 9 Receipt

This is a receipt from a purchase on March 20th, made in the Koreatown neighborhood of Los Angeles, at an intersection where there is a Karaoke place, a liquor store, and some shutdown storefronts. If the man drove from the place where he made the purchase of his Vanilla latte directly to my place at the time it would have taken him 21 minutes without traffic, a trajectory he wouldn't

repeat nowadays because the coffee chain located at 3300 W. 6th street, Tom N Toms, has closed.



Figure 10 Matches

The fact that so many of these men ask if they can smoke in the house, and act surprised when the answer is no, tells us something about the kinds of men who authorizes themselves to act on their

desire for T-girls, even if only to try to efface it immediately after. In waking life, I rarely come across smokers, let alone ones who would presume they could smoke indoors in someone's apartment. Although this is beyond the scope of this essay, I am suggesting a class dimension, or abyss, between the/this T-girl, who is supposed to be able to host, and thus afford her own (non-smoking) home, and her lovers that must be theorized.



Figure 11 Dried chewing gum

This is perhaps the most symbolic photographed object from the selection, given the short life span of a chewing gum, the violence to which it is submitted to be enjoyed, and the quick transformation of its form as a result of such enjoyment. Its sweetness so quickly gives way to a good-for-nothing dullness. Its exposure to air precipitating its dry uselessness. The risk of the chewing gum sticking to the body: to shoes, to fingers, to hair. For a while we think we won't be able to get rid of it. The chewing gum is pleasure and danger (KEEP AWAY FROM CHILDREN, like the matches), self-indulgence and weapon often used by cruel kids and adolescents. The chewing gum can also work as glue fixing cut-out images of celebrities to a teenager's bedroom walls as I once did to images from magazines meant to say: this is me, all of these amount to me.

All contributors called into the Un/Engendering research project were asked to think outside their respective specializations. Without their courage, openness, humility, and without the peer reviewers' generous attention, such an interdisciplinary project could have never taken place.

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We publish these articles as the museums consolidate into one nominal entity, het Wereldmuseum: since the articles were written between 2020 and 2023, they do not yet reflect the March 2023 name change.