

private browsing

(the ahistoric vacuum)

ivan cheng

A cat is never on the side of power  
- Chris Marker

A private browser doesn't save cookies, nor record history.

A video viewed before but now there's no trace. The sand dune shifts.

Ghostwriting is the dance of names around a structurally sound, linguistic pillar.

(Yes, it is) Garfield framed on the wall, a smiling poster of a ginger cat with lasagne in paw. The ghostwriter looks into Garfield's drawn eyes, considering the daily strip. A strip seems to always reveal the same thing. Tired and erect at a sushi train while a Cocteau Twins song plays on loop, the ghostwriter is not hungry. If Garfield was accompanying him, the cat mouth would be the dark tunnel into which the sushi train would lose passengers. The ghostwriter would clap at the feat, smiling, distracted. Garfield in real life as dimensional terrifying moving image, a fat cat losing voice and getting trapped in thoroughfares. Sustained engagement with fictional characters and fictional history is conceivable only in fixed durations. Sustained engagement with a loop.

Are there lasagne trains? A slowly moving, heated conveyor belt with varieties of lasagne punctuated by soup bowls and warm breadsticks would pass muster in health regulations and offer dizzying pleasure. It's an acceptable trade of a single hefty plate portion for countless smaller ones. Lasagne formally relates to sushi with the layering of elements to register as a known gestalt. Both sushi and lasagne have surely suffered crueler perversions to their form. They serve as sustenance, they are to be distributed, they are like articles of writing, like the thought of an other that takes up space and upon digestion seems to cease doing so. Gluten, protein and roughage clawing through the clogged bowel. Digestion is post-production.

The restaurant conveyor belt allows transactions without the anxiety of ordering off a menu. It presents smaller portion sizes with unending quantity, and a version of communal experience. It transforms waiting into a game of holding out for something you desire rather than ordering something you think you want and having it come to you on legs, a dish to pounce on. What comes? Whether sushi or lasagne, there's some author at work. Someone has prepared it, filled it with something, and it's coming now or soon, or it's already here and did-I-want-it-I-chose-it. Filled with content and predictable style, it's an oozing calzone, the syndicated comic strip, the space reserved for Garfield filled with variations of content and language.

(Yes) thinks the ghostwriter, that's what the song is called that keeps playing – *My Truth*. It's on loop. The vocals are processed, hovering somewhat intelligible, hazy filter resisting being understood. Vocalist Liz Fraser spoke to the British gay magazine *BOYZ* in 1995: *We have had people on the Internet who have written translations and they obviously have a natural talent for writing. Their interpretations are so beautiful that sometimes I have preferred what they have written to what I actually sang, it has been much more eloquent. Those people are not so precious about us [Cocteau Twins] and just enjoyed using their talent and it is lovely to witness. But some people are very... It seems that some people are convinced they know us better than we know ourselves, and that we ought to listen to them. They want to steer us and they are very precious about us and they do not want other people to have us. If you really love something, then you have to let it go and endorse everything about it that attracted you to it in the first place. It's just like a love affair or any relationship: you have to treat it in the same way or you'll just suffocate and destroy it in the end if you don't.*

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Desiring longevity. Value systems based on assumptions and analysis. Rolling histories – layered elements into a known gestalt. What do we give our time to, and in what space? Private browsing is limiting historical visibility. When the Cocteau Twins performed, Liz Fraser would begin with her arms across her face to go to a place where she was untouchable.

Ghostwriting is mediated role play. Ghostwriting is a vocational choice, it is burdened with the complexity of the service industry. Ghostwriting is being a member of the police or fire squadron, it's a committed, implicated, play. Does service ever end? Can service ever end?

Burning professionalism at odds with expressive desire.  
Desire for expression.

An actor's character is an identity of sand sifting through the hands of film editors and then the critical public. Does the role ever end? Sand signifying time. Take a sip from the mug shaped like a camera lens. Take a sip through a straw from an hourglass emptied of content. (The hourglass figure) The ghostwriter is an actor who writes roles for others, an artist who uses other artists in their work.

What do we want to be known in relation to?  
A clutch of fandoms, fans coming together like theorists  
like an actor cast as muse, like a logbook of studio visits  
Fans empowered to make wind, hot air shifts dunes  
Hot air moves mounds. The other side of the fan  
sucks in, sucks hard, a gentle vacuum.

Plunged into an 'ahistoric vacuum' is how Monique Wittig locates those who have lost sight of the material cause for their oppression. In *The Straight Mind*, Wittig seems to survive in astounding clarity, perceived now as a document of her time. She is clear as a bell, peeling, but how well is she heard now? Coming to read it, I cry out – it's vital! But Wittig is a woman in the dunes. Like with the Cocteau Twins, fans find the intention clear but the untranslatable lyrics are surrounded by other sounds, their oeuvre also sitting alongside other records in collections. The text becomes a jar of sand from the desert, at risk of being cherished but put aside and thought of like a tourist's memory. Nostalgia. Romanticisation. Dancing around a pole, floating around a pillar, tethered by language. (Who's looking at your history?)

The ghostwriter and I meet to have absinthe. The waiter hasn't heard of it and doesn't think they have it. We frown and order tequila instead, which arrives with cookies, and the ghostwriter tells me about a reading group he had been to earlier in the day, a group of men sprawled around a lavender scent vaporiser calling themselves 'Young Feminines', a dedication to Kristeva and Clement's *The Feminine and the Sacred*. I tell him over a cookie that I haven't read it, and he tells me the meeting was spent fiddling with their penises, tucking them from side to side, fiddling with the foreskin and swiping at the glans as they discussed a text talking about modernism and dust. Their bodies present, genitals present and stimulated so as to never forget their position or privilege.

The waiter comes again, with another platter of cookies and another round. *My Truth* by the Cocteau Twins is playing. I ask the ghostwriter about his relationship to performing intellect in social settings and he rolls his eyes at me. "Dust is composed of the same material as the first layers of the human epidermis. We only really see layers of dead matter as we look at one another. We're physically shedding and renewing, and it's problematic to fix your expressive method". He sees intellect and reference as a "bendy tool, only whipped out when the client requests it". A service industry. I frown and ask about the separation of professional and personal – the ghostwriter expresses and fills the briefs of his employers, but how does he express when at liberty? He tells me that my fundamental mistake is seeing his profession before his person, I tell him that I'm desiring accountability and libidinal expression at the moment, I find that more challenging and exciting. He says that a reading group is just a group of people who have chosen to come together, to read the same thing and then engage in discourse. He says it's like a gallery opening where people see the same thing and engage in discourse. It's just bodies bodies bodies and time.

The ghostwriter is slippery and I'm not sure why I want to grasp him. I don't know how to disagree with such an open statement. I don't know how to digest the sexuality oozing from his 'Young Feminine' scenario. My bowel feels clogged. It's hard to remember that we're shedding and renewing when you feel clogged, a lasagne train at full capacity, squelching and groaning as it steams around the bend. There's a section in the Wittig text which refers to the interpretation of pornography as a particularly violent example of abstract discourse serving to materially oppress individuals. Discourse domination. Walls thrown up, browsed over, becoming hazy because *you are on the wrong level of analysis, you are confusing discourse and reality, your discourse is naïve, you misunderstand this or that science*. But who is Wittig locating here? How is this body even able to register additional domination when already systematically subsumed?

The ghostwriter has the same privilege as an actor – an attentive audience suspends their disbelief for an agreed duration. Try to disregard style as a factor. Eat the cookie. Style and expression are the origin of your material oppression. Continued performance is the proposed exit. Purr and wave your tail. Take distance.

