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MOBIA

WINTER 2020



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Many thanks to Logan Center for the Arts and Alpha Delt fraternity for offering us shoot locations this year. Thank you to Akira, Cynthia's Consignment Store, Silver Umbrella, and Encore for providing us the clothes and looks for this year's issue. Finally thank you to Hyde Park Florist and Cornell Florist for providing your flawed and fabulous flowers.

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Fashion lives in the paradigm of aesthetics. Within this box of conventions and norms that make up what we think construct fashion, there exist two poles: the beautiful and the ugly. When taking these two concepts to their limits we venture into a space of unknown tensions; beauty and ugliness give way to the sublime and grotesque, and these very well may be equivalent. Our theme this issue explores this twilight of aesthetics; the uncanny that arises when pursuing the Sublime and the Grotesque.

“Ugliness is more fun than beauty.” In many ways, this quote from Umberto Eco was the starting point for our theme this issue. When thinking of fashion, the discourse tends heavily to the beautiful, but in truth it is the ugly that excites and provokes the medium forward. The conventionally beautiful is much less interesting than that which lurks on the outskirts of the fashion mainstream. Fashion is becoming more democratic, more weird, more unnerving, and MODA should embrace this.

The Sublime is the yards of fuchsia taffeta that cascaded down the serene frames of Valentino models, it is their eyelashes that have been transformed into flower petals. The Grotesque is the dysmorphia of the Rick Owens cyclops collection, the clashing of ideals and the breakdown of human nature. Together, they embody the Too Much, the Too Far—they are the transgressions of our norms, the perversions of our most dearly-held values.

We took inspiration from Kant, from the dead flowers of the fall, and from that which keeps us up at night. This issue we are celebrating that which makes fashion horrible and delightful. In short, make it nasty.

















Discovering the Sublime & the Grotesque From Plato's Atlantis to the 2019 Met Gala Reflection on the Then and Now

By **Natasha Enriquez**

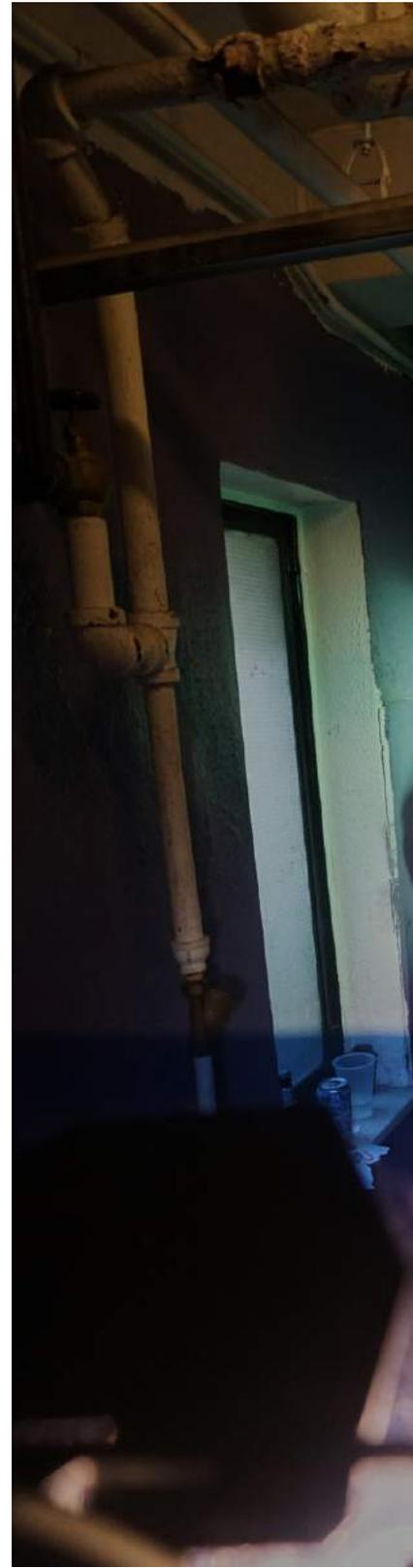
It's been almost ten long years since Alexander McQueen first unveiled his unknowingly final masterpiece, Plato's Atlantis, a show so sensational that the company lives-treaming his show crashed, unable to handle the millions of worldwide viewers. McQueen's ode to the sinister, the warped, the grotesque was, in truth, a complete upheaval of fashion up until then. What the audience saw on their screens, themselves far removed from the runway and the runway far removed from reality, was unlike anything they'd ever seen: aliens had conquered earth, and now they conquered the runway.

These humanoids had the bare bones of any average model, but the detailing efforts of McQueen quickly annihilated this idea. Sporting reptilian skin, footwear in an unearthly silhouettes, cocoon-like hair, and faces with expressionless features save for cold eyes and nothing more, these were the models who walked down the stage. Perhaps horrifying, but definitely entrancing, no one could look away from the forms taking the stage. In a hypnotic state, McQueen left his audience to indulge in the disturbing sensation of the show. This was the familiar distorted, sending shivers down the spine of both fear and awe.

McQueen's ability to take such a successful leap into the grotesque came not only from the designers dedicated devotees rather, it was a reflection of a time when people could look at the dark and semi-sinister with detachment, with fear only of what they were seeing and with no connection to what they were living. Nowadays, it's hard to feel such detachment from the art we take in, and a show so focused on a heated topic of melting ice caps and society going under might not feel as indulgent and well perceived now as it did ten years ago, especially in a realm that in general treads lightly on controversial topics.

Ten years later, society has consistently grown cloudier and cloudier. The Me Too Movement, climate change, and gun violence--to name but a few--has shown us that the sinister may live amongst us, and society continues to try to find ways to cope and overcome. Now, the sinister that we once found so entrancing mimics the reality we live in. But, this is not to say the fashion world has turned its back on society--it copes with the world in its own ionic way.

Art is not insular, and fashion as an art form has responded



esque: Gala, A



to the murky waters. We no longer see ghastly (and this is meant in the best way) spectacles of monster humanoids, we see instead a turn to the grand. Fashion has become a shield from the storm, turning to salient and provocative pieces like the ones seen at the 2019 Met Gala. Through endeavors like Camp, designers try to inspire the masses with emotion and excitement in their pieces. Here is the presence of sublime, the familiar assemblage of high fashion heightened to new means.

There's something electric in the sublime, in the grandeur of outfits and of the spectacle that was the 2019 Met Gala Met. It is entrancing to see the great lengths the designers have gone for their pieces; In a sense, the sublime is so tantalizing because of the fact that it is the familiar heightened, something just ever out of grasp but not so far abstracted that we can never fully comprehend it.

What better playground for the age of sublime than events like the Met Gala, dedicated fully to the enjoyment of greatness. A notable example: the feathery, baroque ensemble of Lana Del Rey, Jared Leto and the curator himself, Alessandro Michele.

What makes this heavenly wardrobe tro so great is the building of layers that when added all together, makes an ethereal picture from mere human forms. Gucci gives an ode to the gauzy and gilded, but places it in stark contrast with the subtler creme background. This contrast physically breaks the barrier, as the texturalized layer of gold is added upon the foundation of subtle. In this trio we find the familiar, saintly profiles of soft whites, soft hair, but with a touch of the incomprehensible. Del Rey sports Galilean binoculars with human resembling appendages, physically ripping out the humane and placing it an extremity. The physical boundaries of a familiar human profile are broken again, the gold heart worn on the outside with swords piercing in but sticking out. And finally to complete the look, a manifestation of plumage that seems to be almost sprouting from Del Rey's crown.

Although pleasing and tantalizing to look at, fashion assemblages like that of the Leto, Lana and Alessandro reflect our current obsession with escaping the real. Fashion has and always will be a form of solace, and it is in its hold that we respond to the tumults of society around us.

Ironic Fashion in the Digital Age

BY IAN RESNICK



Our contemporary fashion dogma is difficult to define or observe. With the rapid commodification of 20th century aesthetics, now more than ever we are surrounded by the eclectic. On any given morning walking across the quad, tiptoeing around puddles of rainwater and mines of mud to preserve your poorly-chosen suede boots, you may see: velour tracksuits, leather biker jackets, wide-legged Japanese trousers, all-black tech-wear, boot-cut jeans. The internet has afforded us an unprecedented amount of cultural awareness and personal expression, which is why the trends of today resemble those of yesterday and the day before that and the day before that. Yet, the one thing that has tied this era together, riding in the slipstream of wireless networking, the war on terror, and the “Me Too” movement, is the supposed rise of ironic fashion. Headlines flash across our devices touting the latest logo-tee or “dad shoe” to fly out of a luxury fashion house. The internet-conscious consumer is assaulted by mindless logos, utility vests, fanny packs, and oversized sweatshirts. Quotation marks haunt me in my dreams. Fashion publications hail this as a tale of Armageddon, labeling it as a realization of unfounded irony. But is this really that unprecedented?

Ironic fashion is actually nothing new, this era being not a rise but a resurgence, and to understand it, we need to look first to its origin—Camp. Camp has remained an ethereal and elusive term in our contemporary cultural dialogue. A few years ago to ask someone what “Camp” means would engender rapid stammering, red cheeks, and confusion. The Met Gala’s Celebration of Camp injected new life and clarity into the discourse, and brought Susan Sontag’s Notes on ‘Camp’ into prominence. Sontag defines Camp as a sensibility, one which is difficult to explain but almost a “love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration”. It is not beauty but stylization, not fashion but an aesthetic lifestyle. The uniform of Camp originated in exaggerated silhouettes, feathers, clashing patterns and colors. Sontag writes: “Camp sees everything in quotation marks. It’s not a lamp, but a ‘lamp’; not a woman, but a ‘woman.’ To perceive Camp in objects and persons is to understand Being-as-Playing-Role.” An eerily prophetic statement, foretelling the design ethos of an entire brand which sells white t-shirts and air-quotes for 300 dollars. Camp can be seen as a form of societal detachment and critique, almost identical to our current state of fashionable parody, and equally so to those that preceded it.

The Camp aesthetic was only amplified with the rise of television in the American home. Advertising has accompanied television programming since its introduction in the 50s, and was only further perfected through the 70s and 80s. Infomercials, product demonstrations,

and smear ads quickly filled the walls of American family rooms with colorful lights and didactic voices. A memorable and original brand name, logo, and jingle became necessities to remain relevant within such dwindling air time, and the soup of incessant advertisement became inescapable. Such tangible representation of consumer culture was quickly assimilated into the Camp aesthetic, as designers growing up within the TV era sought a mode of escape from the odious drone of the consumerist bullhorn. This was no more apparent than within 90s high fashion, in which brands like Moschnio lead a wave of ironic commentary. Fast food brands, cigarette and alcohol companies were among the industries tapped for inspiration and satirization. This is where we see the early makings of ironic fashion which closer resemble our current era. There formed a recognition of the prominence of branding and its symbolism within our capitalist culture, as well as a desire to utilize the iconography of such a culture against itself.

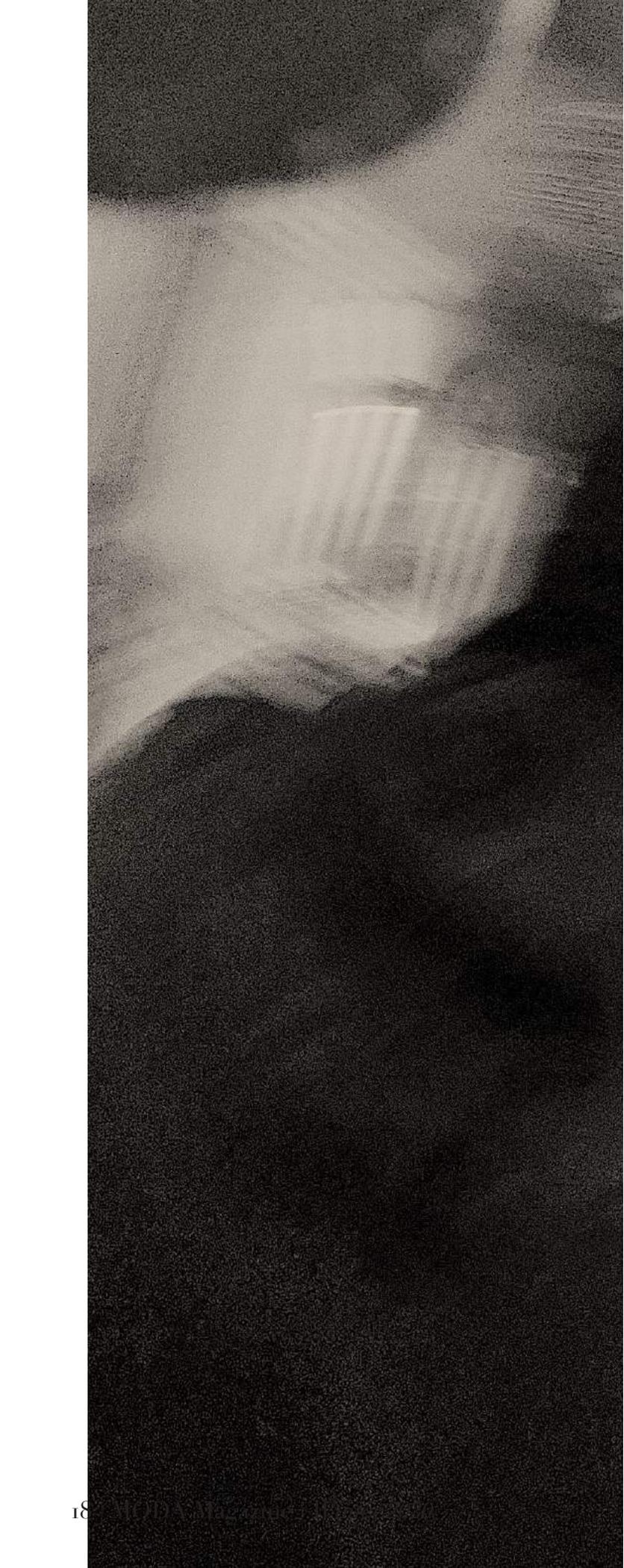
What makes our current era of fashion unique is not its ironic backbone, but rather in its representation and response to such a sensibility. This is irony in the social media age, a uniquely contemporary mode of media which brings with it its own opportunities for societal criticism. Social media is incredibly democratic in comparison to other modes like TV, movies, and printed media. The user simultaneously functions as the consumer, the producer, and the advertiser. They determine what they see and what others see. This new ideology of media

has also altered our understanding of parody and irony. No longer does one need to be a prominent artist, director, writer, or musician to have their voice heard. Rather, with a few swipes and taps, a cultural critic is born. Couple this cultural mindset with the recent and rapid fusing of streetwear and high fashion, and irony as social performance has never been more immediate or attainable. Previous forms of Camp and ironic fashion required a level of brazenness, as irony in fashion was abound with grandeur and exhibitionsim. While brands like Vetements, Balenciaga, and Raf Simons realize irony through exaggerated silhouettes and cultural references which is more akin to early ironic fashion, more and more the uniform of irony has crept towards logo t-shirts, hoodies, and chunky sneakers. This accessibility brings its own sets of positives and negatives. On the one hand, fashion has graduated from personal expression to a vehicle for societal critique for the masses. On the other, young kids with pop-socket iPhones and bursting bank accounts are exposed to this form of high fashion at an early and naive age, misconstruing its purpose as a representation of wealth and prestige. There is a form of “post-irony” or “meta-irony” here. Designers create simplistic items to critique our commodification of branding and logos, yet consumers gravitate towards these items for their accessibility and brand notoriety. The intent is misunderstood, and a brand driven originally by parody becomes the thing it sought to critique in the first place. It is cultural

feeding cultural critique. Once more, a design ideology originally used to oppose capitalism has now become the face of such a society, as prices for t-shirts and hoodies mindlessly skyrocket in a sea of consumerist desire.

Do designers like Virgil Abloh and others recognize the paradoxical nature of their design ethos? Perhaps they aim to play off of this backwardness? Regardless, the current state of ironic fashion feels negligent of the past, and negligent of truth. We are a face-value-swipe right, swipe left-culture. We seem to be ignorant of deeper intent or motivation, or at least disinterested in such a thing. What this fashion era demonstrates is not novelty, but rather misinformed repurposing, indicative of the turbulent and disjointed state of the world we exist in today.





DO NOT GO
GENTLE
INTO THAT

one more time.
white billows on an obsidian windowpane,
a rhythmic array of strokes, icy needle
inscribed upon supple flesh, surveyed in exacti-
tude, tempo, measure,
magnitude, resonate as the cleaved shards fall.
do not go gentle into that good night.

one more time.
a rendering in grayscale upon chipped glass,
a shaggy heart that seeks only monochrome,
a duet in solitude.,
error, avarice, vice, folly,
a stately figure clad in matte black,
boots caked by dry brine,
rooted into cracked tile,
a crisp pitch fold lined to the buckle,
a charcoal knit hugging its torso
pressed against its throat,
hidden behind a chequered noose,
tassels streaming down like a decorated soldier,
burrowing into the lifeless trench, feasting upon
tissue,
until washed out and away by foreign powers.
sarcophagus.

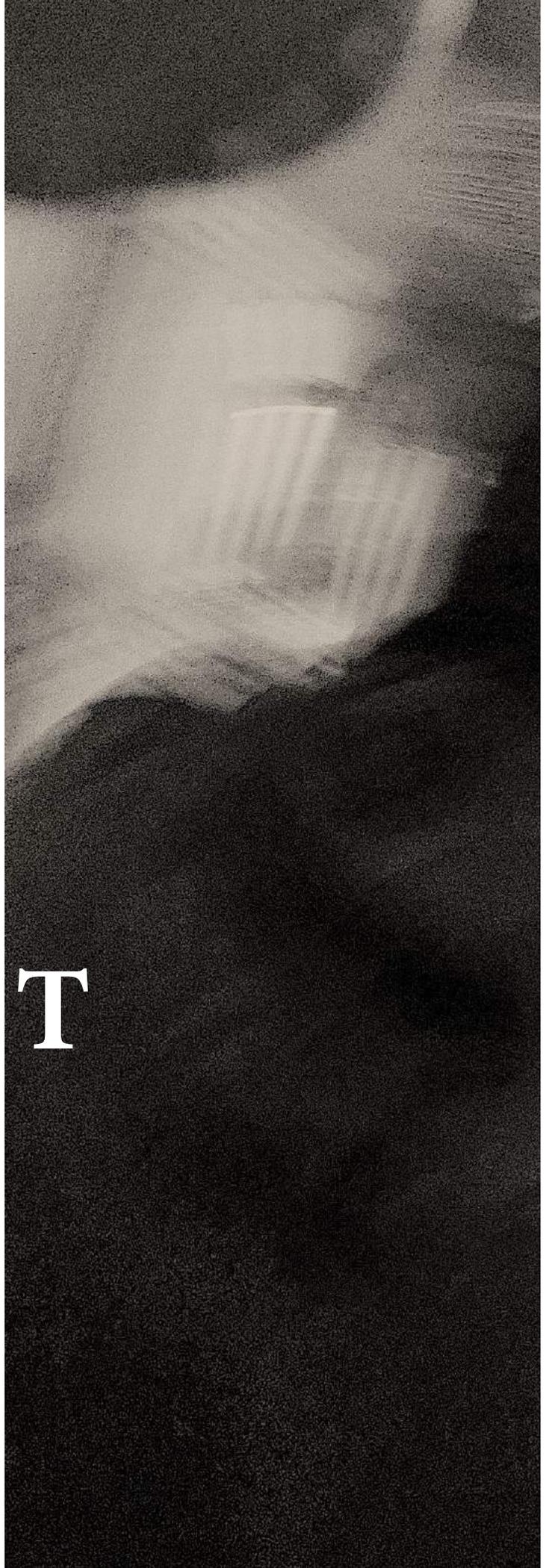
one more time.
looming shade wrapped its head,
dripping with viscous corrupted ichor,
out peeked a fascist grin,
that fucking bastard.
a silver chord connected to its nape,
descending from plutonian moonbeam,
it hummed with harmonic oscillation,
blind eyes blazed like meteors,
firmly sentenced by gravitas,
it did not know the color of the sky.

one more time.
it grasped that blight sliver,
the threaded milk of paradise,
interlaced with palm and climbed,
pools of crimson dripped from higher.
gleaming, the stained fiber,
a heartstring torn, a futile knot,
cleaved fair skin, an ugly struggle.
the panther's pisan roar,
alas! the mercurial tendril wavers and snaps

one more time.
rage, rage against the dying of the light.

GOOD NIGHT

PERSONIFICATION BY PRESTON LEE





Little Girl, Big House

By Selma Chab

There is a girl. She smiles sweetly, if not uncomfortably, at the camera poised in front of her. Adorned in an intricate dress, she silently schemes; waiting for the moment she can leave her station and traipse around the garden like a little hooligan. Her angel-faced mask remains eternally.

She changes. Barely facing the camera, her smile is close-mouthed to conceal the metal lining crisscrossing her teeth. She despises dresses because of the way they hitch on her too-long legs, fearing the attention that comes from wandering gazes. The girl is hyper-aware of her growth. She is scared of the commitments and responsibilities that accompany a double digit age.

The little girl is quite shy around the big scary adults. Her family loves to boast appearances, and they frequently host lavish social events. She is passed around like wine into foreign lips, desperately wriggling from their grasps. It's a familiar routine. She still knows this house as her home. She still knows life; a stranger to death. The bright flowers behind her mask the stench of decay. Her grandmother, likely socializing inside, would pass away unexpectedly that year. Her great-uncles and great-aunts, indulging in tagine and kebabs, collapsed like ancient cedars. The house will always be full for her. She's the only one who remembers their faces, their scents, the heaving of their still-breathing chests. She doesn't want to leave this forever-place. She is its complacent prisoner, trapped in infinite stillness.

I visited the house years after the image was taken. The flowers were the same. They told a beautiful lie, like sweet nothings whispered on the fleeting wind, like the promise of forever. I wanted to rip them from the dirt, I wanted to make them feel as I did: Uprooted.

Climbing up the tiled stairs, sun beating down on my back, the terracotta denizen slumbered; a picturesque facade hiding the overwhelming grief trapped inside. I had venerated it— its memory— like a god. Reality felt empty. The house was stuck in time, and I, a mere interloper, was left to wander a place I could no longer call home. In summer's golden heat, I wept upon the corpse of my youth—shocked by the realization of my own death.









Anti Heroes and Belonging

By Christopher Atos

The fashion world is a very different place than our own. A quick glance at a GQ and Vogue magazine is enough evidence; models are confident, beautiful, and debonaire; clothes are bespoke and perfectly fit; and cover art is vibrant, expressive, and utopian. If our world can at times be gritty, problematic, and despondent, then the fashion world is just too perfect. But a few fashion houses such as Alexander McQueen, Rick Owens, and Enfants Riches Déprimés ground the fashion industry. McQueen is no stranger to horrifying fashion shows; one can easily reference VOSS, which displayed women in medical head bandages strutting around a holding cell, all until a glass case in the center stage shatters to reveal a nude model on a breathing tube. Rick Owens' ready-to-wear Fall 2019 collection had models wearing mutant-like makeup pump down the runway in deconstructed precarious dresses and pitch black contacts. Enfants Riches Déprimés offers something less abstract: for \$7,000, one could purchase a cashmere noose designed by the founder Henri Levy himself.

You'd find that most designers are fashion forward. We are all too used to Versace's uncompromising black and gold and Moschino's shameless flamboyance. APC's minimalism and Undercover's streetwear proliferate a big part of any magazine's online "Fashion" section. So in a sense, they abide by convention - the ideas they put forward are familiar but still bold, and come from the idea that life is intrinsically beautiful.

But they are innocent of the nihilism that stubbornly sticks to all of our lifestyles whether we like it or not. In this sense, grotesque designers are the antiheroes of the fashion industry. In a world so obsessed with being flawless, it seems that people such as McQueen and Levy are always there to bring you back to reality and remind you that life is not all beautiful. Their brand instead clashes with ideas of social justice, rape, depression, and suicide in the pragmatic, yet still flawed world we live in.

The grotesque demeanor of some avant garde fashion houses therefore comes as a harsh realization to many. Critics have jeered at many of the designers for expressing insensitivity; that's understandable. After all, it is hard to move past the complications that come with weaving a stomach wrenchingly expensive noose; materializing depression can strike a controversial note, and finding art in pieces conceived from suicide is a difficult, if not untasteful, task. Despite this, it is necessary to accept that the real world, in both its greatness and horror, has a place in the fashion industry.

Ignoring the dreary side of fashion is an easy and understandable task to undertake; it's much easier on the mind to stare at the silhouettes of the Diors's and Louis Vuittons of the world. But grotesque fashion will always be the chip on the industry's utopian shoulder, and it is strong evidence that when it comes to fashion, there is a belonging for everything.



Beautifully Ugly: The Power of Throwing Out the Rulebook

By Elizabeth Winkler

The first time I saw “dad sneakers” outside of the 1980s, I shuddered. They were chunky, garish, sock-covered and animal-patterned, the discarded pieces of other projects lumped together into shoes with several-hundred-dollar price tags. Why would anyone spend money on them? High-fashion brands – Balenciaga, Dior, Gucci, Maison Margiela, Dolce & Gabbana – designed increasingly grotesque silhouettes, and Fila, Adidas, Nike, Skechers, Calvin Klein, along with most fast-fashion labels, made more affordable versions to add to the craze.

Celebrities and influencers bought the styles as fast as couture brands could

create them, and dad sneakers were suddenly “in.” Despite the objective ugliness of the style, everyday people started purchasing them. I thought of those people as sheep, never imagining that I might one day be one of them. I believed that they were brainwashed by the prestige these styles had gained and the “beauty” bestowed by style-icons’ approval, that they were so enamored of the “trendiness” of the trend that they were no longer able to see it for what it really was: overpriced, ugly shoes.

As people have embraced the style, new definitions of what is “fashionable” have emerged. Dad sneakers can be an added edge of “cool” to a business-casual outfit, a socially-

acceptable alternative to heels, or a go-to casual staple turning jeans and a tshirt into today's definition of chic. The idea that a woman can wear sneakers on a date or to the office and be viewed as professional (in some industries, at least) was unthinkable even a few years ago.

The woman of the past wore ballet flats or heels to the office – gritting her teeth at blisters and shortened Achilles tendons – because it was the norm. That was what was accepted as business-formal. She wore them on a date – dreading the walk from the restaurant to the car, smiling through a twisted ankle and cramped toes – because it was the norm. The messages she received from advertisements and social media, from her mother, grandmother, siblings, and friends told her, overwhelmingly, that heels were the sexy, flirty, dressed-up option.

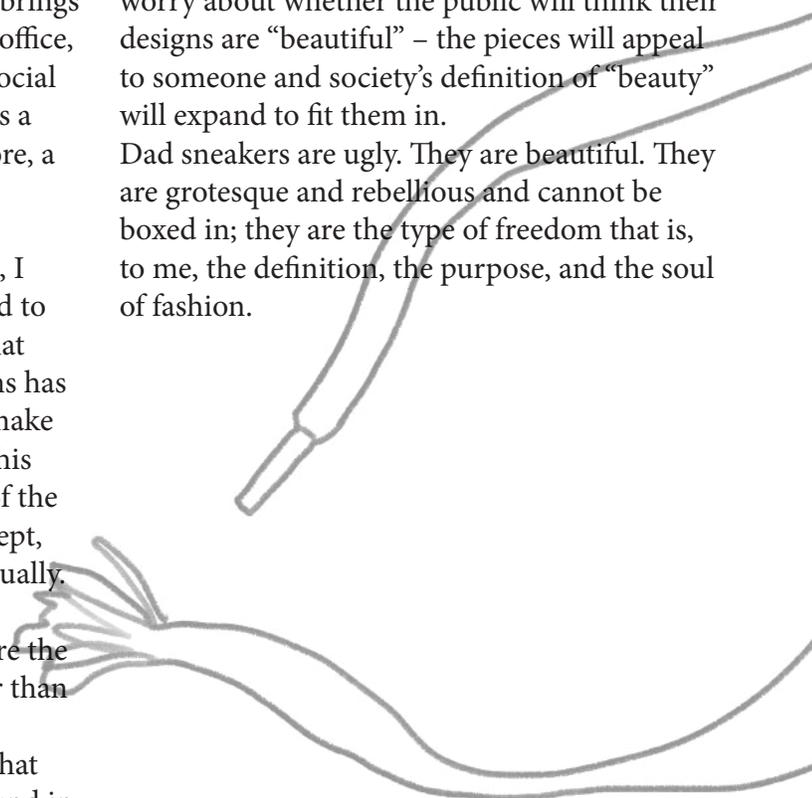
The way people have started wearing dad sneakers scraps this “beauty is pain” norm. Your office shoes can be high-end and low-heel. Your date shoes can be sexy and comfortable. Wearing sneakers as a sophisticated shoe brings a woman's mobility on a night out, in the office, any place she might previously have felt social pressure to wear heels, to the same level as a man's. The rise of dad sneakers is, at its core, a feminist movement.

As I acknowledged the rebellion inherent in exchanging heels for sneakers, I realized something shocking: I had started to appreciate the sneaker trend. Anything that upends harmful or restrictive social norms has a special place in my heart, and I had to make room for dad sneakers in that category. This appreciation forced me to stop thinking of the sneakers as a grotesque, amorphous concept, and to instead deal with each pair individually. This case-by-case approach has made it possible for me to delve deeper and admire the subtleties in the fashion movement rather than skate over the surface as I had previously.

Like the authentic “dad sneaker” that my father wore to take me to the playground in

the early 2000s, like the sneaker his father wore in the 1980s (when any self-respecting style icon would have turned up their nose at them), Balenciaga's styles lean more toward the truly grotesque. They are often bulbous, brightly colored, and combine materials like suede, plastic, and mesh that don't traditionally create “beauty” together. When one of their creations appeals to us, therefore, we must grapple with our own preconceived notions of beauty—often by expanding our definition of what can be “beautiful.” Gucci, on the other hand, embraces the potential for traditional beauty in the “ugliness” of the trend, creating clean lines and aesthetically pleasing color combinations.

Because the dad sneaker trend operates outside of what has been traditionally beautiful, designers can use their pieces to push fashion to new realms, as we see with Balenciaga and Gucci. The movement toys with (and, often, plunges into) the grotesque, the unfashionable-turned-fashionable, and this means that designers have free reign. They don't have to worry about whether the public will think their designs are “beautiful” – the pieces will appeal to someone and society's definition of “beauty” will expand to fit them in. Dad sneakers are ugly. They are beautiful. They are grotesque and rebellious and cannot be boxed in; they are the type of freedom that is, to me, the definition, the purpose, and the soul of fashion.



Slowing Down and Buying Less: A Case for Individuality

By Alex LaBossiere-Barrera

Many people have prized possessions. Between their family heirlooms and grandparents' gold watches and rings, real sentimental value seems inextricably tied to familial and historical influence. Mine is my grandfather's leather jacket, passed down to me by my mother. While this situation probably isn't as unique or exceptional as I might wish it was, I love it all the same. The leather is cracking, cuffs unravelling, and the sleeves are a little too short on me, but, weather permitting, I wear it almost every day.

The endowment effect finds that people place significantly more value on things they already own. Yet in a world of cheap fast fashion that seems only increasingly driven by people's propensity to consume, that concept is now challenged, as the idea of keeping and passing clothes down seems more and more foreign each day. Maybe this constant discount-driven consumption is a symptom of the very chronic nonfulfillment that drives people to buy even more. The fact of the matter is that we consume more than we can replace. The advent of fast fashion is no help to this-- Zara's supply chain allows it to change its designs in only two weeks' time. At this rate, we've skipped seasonal trends and made them bi-weekly. If what's on the racks at your local H&M seems to change by the week, it's because it quite literally does.

As a change of pace from the quickening and seemingly never ending timelines for fast fashion, there's value in taking another look at your closet. According to a survey done by Trunk Club, nearly thirty percent of the items in the average American's closet have never been worn or have gone untouched for over a year. Chances are, buying more won't change that. Buying less, however, just might.

Regardless, there's a case to be made for keeping things, especially as an alternative to buying more. It sounds almost comical, but the very concept of the "vintage aesthetic" seen so prominently today is based on the astounding fact that people are drastically more eager to go out and buy things that look old than hold on to anything for an extended period of time. Mainstream fashion's attitude toward distressed clothing, for instance, is such that you can pay to look like you've put the time into wearing something without actually having done so at all. Think about that-- as a collective body, we've become so wrapped up in what's new and cool that we now refuse to even allow ourselves the time to wear the clothing we just bought.

Then again, the ideal here is clear. Not only does buying less and holding onto things for longer do wonders environmentally (the textile and fashion industry is one of the highest polluting in the world), it also lets you define a style for yourself. Wear the old watch, the leather jacket, and that sweater that's been in your closet for the last eight years. Skip a trip to the mall and visit a secondhand store, or just take a look in your own closet.













Ugly

In 1997, guests at the Commes des Garçons collection entitled “Body Meets Dress, Dress Meets Body” were in for a shock: the thin, beautiful models they had expected to see were mutated into grotesque forms by stuffed mounds of fabric wrapping around their bodies. The “Lumps and Bumps” show, as the collection came to be known, is one of the most controversial runway shows of all time. CDG fans and fashion critics were violently split. Some decried the show as hideous and incomprehensible; others praised it as a fashion revolution. Fashion critic Suzy Menkes recalls feeling “rather uncomfortable” while watching the show; “at first look, it seemed like a disfigurement – as though these were cancerous cells protruding through the fabrics, which appeared, by contrast, as upbeat; even jolly.” However, there was one thing everyone could agree upon: it was ugly.

The real cause of the split opinions is not, as it often is, a question of what people find to be visually appealing, but rather a question of whether the ugliness was a good thing or a bad thing. For one side, the idea of purposefully making oneself ugly was absurd and pointless. For the other, however, it meant freedom.

“Fashion” and “beauty” are two words so deeply intertwined that they’re often used interchangeably. As

a traditionally feminine interest, fashion is often devalued as shallow and vain – nothing more than the pursuit of beauty, of becoming beautiful, through external trappings. The artistry of fashion is often assumed to be only aimed at the ultimate goal of attaining beauty, both in one’s clothing and in one’s body. You’d be hard pressed to find a single mainstream fashion magazine, blog, or website that doesn’t suggest clothing that will “flatter your figure” or “cover up tummy rolls.” But what is beauty? And what does it really mean?

There have been countless attempts to quantify what makes something beautiful (for example: symmetry, color theory, and the Golden Ratio). But beauty is not, and has never been, static. Standards of beauty fluctuate over time and across the world; no woman could be considered a true beauty during the Renaissance without short teeth and a receding hairline, and in ancient Greece women not lucky enough to have natural unibrows would draw them on with khol. The beauty of the natural world might follow certain Euclidean laws, but human beauty is always determined by those in power.

Every single beauty standard in our world today can be traced back to a historical or cultural cause. Pale skin, petite noses, and blue eyes are a direct result of European colonialism. Hairless armpits and



Fashion

By Rosie Albrecht

legs came from deliberate ad campaigns from razor companies to convince women that their body hair was shameful and needed to be removed. The majority of the most influential designers of the 20th century are white, rich, and often male (or, in the case of Coco Chanel, literally a Nazi). What we wear is inextricably tied to society's morals – good girls wear this, working women wear that, devoted housewives dress this way. Even in the elevated world of haute couture, no one is free from the web of contemporary aesthetics.

Unless they give up on beauty entirely. The past decade has seen a rise in body-positivity movements, to the point where many cosmetics or clothing corporations have adopted it as their premier marketing strategy. The movement can be summed up in three words: Everyone is beautiful. Platitudes like these build much of the foundation of body positivity. Everyone has their own beauty, everyone is special, everyone is beautiful. Except that they're not. Not everyone is beautiful, because "beautiful" has rules, and we don't get to make those rules. The cards are forever stacked against the disenfranchised; people of color, fat people, disabled people, and queer people will always be on the losing end of beauty. To the losers of beauty, fashion isn't meant to be an avenue of creativity and art, but a method of remaking ourselves in

the image of wealthy, skinny, white girls. To be beautiful, we must make ourselves as little like ourselves as possible. We cover ourselves up in shame, terrified of being ugly.

But why are we so afraid? Ugliness has no rules. Ugliness belongs to everyone. To embrace ugliness is to step outside of the Eurocentric, patriarchal world of restricted aesthetics and give it the finger as we strut away. The true message of body positivity shouldn't be that everyone is beautiful, but that everyone is ugly – and that's okay. In fact, it's more than okay.

What is ugly fashion? It's what we're told not to wear, how not to look. There is only one way to be beautiful, but there are a million ways to be ugly. We may like to imagine that it's possible for fashion to exist as a pure art form, as in the world of avant garde couture, but as long as the clothes we wear are connected to how we are perceived within a society dictated only by the powerful, fashion will always be tied to the political. However, aiming away from beauty altogether allows designers to cut the tether and float off into their own pure creativity.

In recent years, the mainstream fashion world has shifted towards styles traditionally considered ugly: platform crocs, dad sneakers, chunky glasses, and more. Last year, I was discussing the latest runway

shows with a friend, when she told me that she loved the dad sneaker trend because the orthopedic shoes that her disability required her to wear were finally fashionable. Embracing ugly fashion does so much more than allow for more creativity; it makes fashion as a whole more inclusive. Those of us on the losing end of beauty can thrive in a world that loves, not fears, ugliness.

Think back to your pre-puberty childhood. What were you wearing? In my childhood photos, I layer graphic t-shirts over long sleeves, corduroy mini-skirts over bootcut jeans, butterfly sew-on patches over tie-dyed bell-sleeved dresses. When I used my mom's makeup in dress-up games, I smeared hot pink over my cheeks and splattered my eyes with messy glitter. I hadn't let begun to internalize what was acceptably beautiful and what wasn't. There was no "pretty" or "ugly" in this world; there was only what I liked and what I didn't like.

Once I hit puberty, the cult of mainstream beauty pulled me in. My outfits dulled in color and tightened in shape. It was only after I started reading alternative fashion zines, after I discovered designers like Moschino, Manish Arora, and Meadham Kirchhoff that revelled in garish colors and unflattering silhouettes, after I bought my first tube of blue lipstick, that I rediscovered the joy and complete freedom of ugliness. In recent years, the fashion world has received a bountiful cornucopia of ugly fashion trends. The return of 80s power-shoulders, which morph and obscure the graceful female form; universally unflattering neons that look equally ugly on everyone; the comfy and utilitarian boilersuits and mom jeans that do the opposite of slimming down; and, of course, the smorgasboard of hideous footwear – dad sneakers, sock boots, and Balenciaga's infamous platform crocs. The internet has snatched these trends up with ravenous appetite. The more photoshopped and monolithic the digital world of beauty becomes, it seems, the hungrier we become for fashion that cannot be beautified or assimilated. We each have our own unique ugliness. Beauty can be lost, or taken from us, but ugliness is ours forever. The next time someone calls you – or anything you're wearing – ugly, thank them. It's not an insult – it's a compliment. And it's a sign that your outward appearance is finally, unapologetically, hideously, beautifully, entirely you.



FROM PARAGON TO PARODY



BY KEGAN WARD

HOW THE MET GALA MODIFIES OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE SUBLIME

Fashion, in its constant attempts to outdo itself, reaches absurd heights quickly, heights we often coax ourselves down from by embracing the polar opposite of a trend; the last decade's maximalism and bold styles become this decade's minimalism and soft aesthetics. But trends are not always mutually exclusive: consider the excessive distortion and adornment associated with sublime fashion—like pliant silhouettes, sheer material, and jewel embellishments. Sublime fashion might even, for these very same reasons, be gaudy. At what point does this surfeit become a parody of itself? How high and wide and bright do we go before we acknowledge that somewhere along the way our overstatement surpassed the sublime? When the sublime goes beyond the envisaged with no indication that it will ever come back down, the features which characterize its ethereal beauty can be quite grotesque.

Red carpets often blur the lines between art and high fashion with designers taking unbridled embellishment to places we have never seen before—and then surpassing that standard the next year. Celebrities, vying for the limited number of spots on the unlimited number of “red carpet's best dressed” lists, often soar past this metaphorical height with little abandon—and nowhere are they more extravagant than the Met Gala.

The 2019 Met Gala's theme was “camp,” defined by the host committee as “love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration... style at the expense of content.” However, they forgot to mention that this was the theme every year. For all it's celebrated fashion, the Met Gala is also inherently grotesque in its parodistic display of trends. Everything is pushed to, and beyond, its limits. Some years that is through exaggerated silhouettes, such as Lupita Nyong'o's extreme shoulder pads that extended above her own head at the 2019 Met Gala. Other years it is unseemly color choices, like Serena Williams' fluorescent yellow dress and neon green Nikes in 2019 or 3 Little Women's neon green crop tops worn for the 2001 “Jacqueline Kennedy” themed Met Gala. And every year it is exorbitant prices, with some pieces—like Rihanna's yellow, 25-foot Guo Pei cape from 2015—rumored to cost over \$500,000. Every Met Gala outdoes the next, building on itself until it seems as though it should topple, and yet our celebrations only become more vocal.

Diane Von Furstenberg's seven-butterfly hairpiece becomes Frances McDormand's vision-obscuring, cyan headdress which from certain angles is reminiscent, not of the graceful beauty it aims to evoke, but of an attack—of insects.

All of these outfits appear on multiple “bestdressed” lists for their over-the-top presentation and dedication to the theme. Yet, they break away from the mold of what we consider “sublime” and take shots at what it means to be beautiful or graceful—even at the most graceful event of the year. The loose and flowing contours become cumbersome; embellishments are cheapened by overuse. Ostentatious fallalery is not only accepted but celebrated; the same type of adornment which on any other day or at any other event would be deemed “busy” or “too much” is just enough for this event. For a short time, we elevate the grotesque to the level of sublime, drowned out by the lights of paparazzi. This begs the question: do we appreciate the fashion or appreciate its association with things we have been conditioned to like, such as wealth, excess, and fast-consumption media?

Fashion we celebrate as sublime is often over-exaggerated; it is stretched and pulled beyond its limits, distorted into something made only of composite parts of the sublime. Are these Frankenstein's monsters of fashion actually sublime or are they only parodistic replications of the emotions elicited by the sublime? Met Gala pieces would not elicit the same emotions if the setting were different; they might even bring about the opposite reaction. Modern fashion is not about the clothing, but rather about the event and the people. In a world of larger-than-life scenes, and even in the blank-white backdrops of studios, the environment can often outweigh the characteristics of the fashion itself. The more extravagant the event, the more extravagant the reaction to the fashion displayed within—even when it is antithetical to what would be accepted on a street or even a runway. Nonetheless, the most fashion-forward among us rally during Met Gala season to celebrate the trends we would never accept before and will not wear afterward—it is where we welcome in the ugly, or at least embrace its truer forms.

**I Burned
Your
Name in
Effigy**

By Sarah Eikenberry

I burned your name in effigy; it was a truly splendid affair. I lugged your loaded, heavy name to the top of a hill on a languid August day, dripping with nostalgia for a childhood I never had, just as the sun began to mellow its gaze. The wheat was golden all around me; the earth was warm and caked. And there, in the middle of the flaxen field so full with ancient flowers and barren long-lost memories, I lit the match and watched those letters burn. Oh, what a shallow, hallow satisfaction so full of disjoined honor and sycophantic pride, when I burned your name in effigy. I smelled of sweat and fire and I felt like God. And I swallowed in that whole entire scene, gulped it down like the freshest glass of water from the clearest, ice-wrought spring—I would not forget this bombastic rhapsody. Yes, I burnt your name in effigy, and I accidentally lit my soul on fire!

And I suppose it is quite fortunate that I didn't set the field ablaze, that I did not wreak havoc in my everlasting search to feel full again; but I felt marvelous all the same. The sky was turning crimson as the ashes reached the ground. The sun, its omnipotent glare and brassy stolid stare, had left the scene, leaving in its wake a glowing plaster-cast of light, the kind of light that makes the insects sing just ever so slightly louder—you can really hear them on nights like these, when I burn your name in effigy. And on top that grassy hill perched in that grassy field, I swear I could see all the world, and it revolved around me—without me. I thought, for a moment, that I was dead, that I had reached Nirvana—but that wasn't it, because I was still but flesh and blood, transfixed within a violet fury, atop a hill so grand and sane. I felt around me all those forms of light and life; they applauded my domain.

Yet I felt small in this great field, upon this

somber, rolling plain; I wondered if, suddenly, I was an intruder, or worse, inane. But the grasshoppers still sang, the crickets had joined them, it was a certain symphony of insects, ringing in my ears and cascading down through my bones; it was mildly electrifying. So I let the thought decay and burn down like the letters of your name. The last embers of the fire were dying down, and rising from them, like their final breaths, were lithe wisps of smoke, joining in the night sky and dancing to the songs of the endless, finite plain. They were the last vestiges of the act, of that savage, beautiful act, when I lit the match and watched the fire take your name. I looked upon those ashes, still glowing faintly with that raw, unbridled heat—with rapture in its purest form—and I looked upon the sky and the quiet stars beginning to appear; I looked up upon the brilliant world, at everything and nothing in particular, and I look my right hand and pressed it down upon that scorching earth—into that raw, unbridled heat. And oh, how the world did sing.

My heart rang out a violent tremor, my skin hissed, it harmonized with the insects hiding, watching, in the grass. My skin blistered, it burned with indignation, and it began to break into the heat, the blind, unblinking heat. And I inhaled loudly. I took in the smell of my burning flesh, and I took in the moment, as crisp as one ever was. Oh, what a vicious, thrashing exultation of life and death and barbecue! I stood, consecrated in the smell of my own human flesh, wafting up amongst the fading purple flowers and golden fields of hay, emanating through the cooling air of the coming twilight up on a country hill. Yes, what a dark and gruesome satisfaction, when I burned my hand in effigy.













DONT BE SCARED TO BE GROSS

