



On the Ferocity of confined freedom

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Badland

Afriel oversaw what he thought was the pending transfer of a substantial nightly fee. One facial recognition in the banking app and rich digits would be added to his name by dawn. Included in the offer was an Uber ride comforting his path to the residence of his eagerly licentious customer.

an interior snapped out of *Less Than Zero*, reeking of chemical debauchery and costly decay. Afriel settled for a glass of Chardonnay but could have probably considered leaving upon noticing the man injecting himself on the marble kitchen counter. Comfortably seated in Wegner's 'Papa Bear' armchair, hours of meaningless conversation went by, succoured by the man's druggy admiration for Afriel's distanced behaviour and his boyish attitude: observant, seemingly uncorrupted by the follies of depravity and adulthood. Now and then Afriel would add some blank statement, allowing him to continue expanding in repetitive and incoherent ramblings, meanwhile keeping himself visually entertained by the thick pages of the Chanel catalogues scattered across the coffee table, next to the bonk, the stacks of Malboro, the G and the needle, various powders and American Express cards. The man's admiration became increasingly verbalised, his behaviour bordering on obsequious while simultaneously demanding of physicality, of consummation and of climax. Afriel knew that a finishing signature to this transaction was unavoidable and wanted to take an early leave. His client wanted to be dominated; conversation alone would not suffice. Gathering his strength and all the mollified frustration he could retrieve, Afriel ordered the man to get on his knees, pushed his foot against the man's throat, uncreatively belittled him with some canonical insults and slapped him across the face, twice. So aroused was the man that his pupils got darker and bigger, his legs began shaking, his body stretching and exposing itself in various sexual positions, throwing over a nearby vase and breathing heavily. "I'm fine, all good, all good, all good." *And just like that*, panting at the soles of Afriel's Nike Jordans, the man overdosed himself into an unconscious state and all that was left to do was to check his pulse, which, thankfully, was still palpable. It took a while to realise how all of this might seem if the man didn't wake up the following day. The Uber, the recent bank transfer, the drugs,

Normally, Afriel would not accept money offers for such dissolute endeavors, because he had the privilege of deeming all sums offered to him on Grindr as too modest for consideration. It must have been a mixture of apathy, unwarranted greed, and the thirst to finally experience something — anything — again, which made him break his quarantine, delay the algebra homework due tomorrow, put on his North Face jacket, loop his surgical mask around both ears and step into the car. He was finally slamming the door and throwing the dice, drifting away from witnessing the image of himself be denigrated to the digitalised computer grid, the little video call box he so much dreaded.

Lurking behind the half-open entrance was a lanky, shadowy figure; afraid of Afriel's arrival, submissive, grotesquely polite, wearing a harness and some jocks. The man's facial features were suggestive of the genre of wealthy gentlemen that love to sublimely put him in his place at the golf club or at family dinners, a connotation which would soon prove useful, stirring up the frustration required to put him down. He'd been hosting sex parties for two days prior to this and it showed. The living room looked like

I'm fine
all good
all good
all good

the Grindr thread; in the context of a homicidal investigation, these were unfavourable circumstances, synchronised towards the boy who just turned old enough to be legally imprisoned. Was he to call an ambulance? No. Afriel was supposed to quarantine, the man insisted on secrecy;

The Will to Live becomes the Drive to death

it was too much of a gamble, his body probably just needed to sleep it off. Afiel's apotropaic faculties failing, there was nothing left to do other than to wash the wineglass, gently, wipe his fingerprints off the bottle, carefully and use the seam of his T-shirt to press doorknobs on his way out, quietly. After months of abstinence from life, Afiel had experienced the spectacle of death. Afiel went to sleep, the money never arrived, and the following morning the man blocked Afiel's WhatsApp contact, which could only amount to the awaited confirmation of his resurrection.

In a place and time where the mere notion of physicality incites pathology, Freudian Eros and Thanatos¹ converge, the will to live becomes the drive to death, the risk one takes to part ways with the omnipotent pledge of health, of security and of community. As Theodor Adorno argued: "Exuberant health is always, as such, sickness also. Its antidote is a sickness aware of what it is, a curbing of life itself."²

In the name of lived experience, it is precisely anomy that becomes escapism, and the gateway to reinvigorating desire assumes the task of redefining the private as contractual, confined and secretive. Cunningham ostentatiously accredited Oscar Wilde for acknowledging the libidinous guise under which power infused all facets of Victorian bourgeoisie, turning a purely mythical quote into a cultural trope of the 90s: "Everything is about sex except for sex. Sex is about power."³ Restrictions help generate different kinds of liberties, which, in turn, create new libid-

inous economies. The pausing of public society allows for the emergence of crossovers, clashes of ageism, shifts in responsibility, marginal spaces where power dynamics fluctuate. Since the fey roles of the employed individual are subsumed by a performativity no longer negligible, exposed by the obtrusive absurdity of the average Zoom meeting, the working individual assumes an array of self-conscious theatricalism. During childhood, liberation is fuelled by the comfort of the domestic, one is both free and obligated by privacy and intimacy to (re)invent oneself. Perhaps then, for most people, the reinstatement of domesticity can be understood as a secondary childhood, reappointing them to their designated spaces where they can play independent of accountability, allowing for the polarisation of their extended self.

Sexuality as such has been argued by Foucault to have a history of verbalised secrecy, of making desire public but never descriptive, of roaming around what led to the act but never directly achieving admission.⁴ Under pandemic-driven confinement, the confessional becomes internalised, penetrated by the public presence within, freedom assumes its purest form: ferocity. While responsibility towards the Other is at the heart of all restrictive policies, confinement results in exactly the opposite. The stranger becomes more objectified than ever before. Does this lead to the derivative Self manifested in lechery becoming a coward, as de Beauvoir argued of de Sade's biographical legacy?⁵ Afiel had the choice of making the call, involving the state, confiding in the community responsible for all the defection of an active life and yet, the value system of gravity disappeared, rendering a minor crime such as breaking his quarantine equal to negligence potentially responsible for life and death.

Drifting away from the alluring comfort of alienation, euphoric was the sensation of infinite possibilities, stirred up by the anonymity of their sordid exchange and the unlawfulness of their mutual dependency: the antihero and his reflection.

¹ Sigmund Freud. (1920) *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Ed. James Strachey. New York/London: W.W.Norton & Company

² Theodor Adorno. (1951) *Minima Moralia*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag.

³ <https://quoteinvestigator.com/2018/06/05/sex-power/> (accessed 16/03/2021)

⁴ Michael Foucault. (1976) *The History of Sexuality. Volume 1: An Introduction*. Translated by Robert Hurley (1978). New York: Vintage Books Edition, Random House Inc.

⁵ Simone de Beauvoir. (1955) 'Must We Burn Sade?' In: *The Marquis de Sade, 120 Days of Sodom and Other Writings*. Ed. Austryn Wainhouse & Richard Seaver. New York: Grove Weidenfeld.



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