

**DAMIEN
&
THE LOVE GURU**

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Submissive Sculpture

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holding.

EVERYBODY IN THE WORLD NEEDS YOU JUST AS MUCH AS YOU NEED THEM

— Stacy Skolnik and Thomas Laprade

We're told, in the catechisms of modern self-help, that co-dependence is a sickness. But maybe the seam between love and leverage, freedom and fusion, isn't fixed—but trembles like a thread strung between towers. A few notes on interdependence and codependency:

1.

I sit inside a body that's not mine wondering if I'm sick or if I'm the sickness. This body breathes softly around me, its windows and doors blinking, the electrical wiring is a nervous system, its plumbing gurgles like a digestive tract down into its bowels, its arteries move heat through vents, 5G transmits from its larynx, it's got old bones behind the drywall. But what am I to it? Despite my landlord being relatively friendly, I'm not sure how necessary I am. I could be bacteria. Or maybe by not complaining about the mold or reporting him to the city means I'm the good bacteria—like the stuff we're trying to cultivate in our gut to regulate stress. This body will surely tolerate me until the next comes along and pays more in rent.

2.

Outside, down at the intersection, you can tell a great deal about a society by how its people behave at crosswalks—whether they wait for the signal when no cars are coming, whether they do it when others are watching, or if they wait even when they're alone. In Japan there's a reverence for order because the little walking guy with his throbbing red shadow of shame lives within. In Vietnam where there are fewer crossing signals, the little guy does not limit their imagination and people cross wherever they please. In New York it's best to jaywalk when everyone is looking so that they think you're the kind of person who has important places to be.

3.

The illusion of independence is of utmost importance in America. When my girlfriend briefly worked in Midtown she'd enjoy watching this guy dance down 5th Ave after work at the same time everyday. He wore a suit but he was graceful and wild dancing in and around everything in his path, always a new step to answer a new obstacle. Then she noticed a tour bus passing by at exactly the same time everyday. The tour guide would point out the dancer and tourists would light up at this spontaneous display of commuter freedom. She figured he was probably a dance student, so there could be worse jobs.

4.

In the 1950's the psychologist Harry Harlow's infamous monkey experiments took an infant rhesus monkey away from its mother and offered it two caged rooms: in one was a wire "mother" that dispensed food, and in the other a cloth "mother" that offered only warmth. The infant rhesus clung desperately to the cloth, crying not for nourishment but for intimacy. Just as astounding as this rote and twisted approximation of needs was the way in which Harlow designed the surrogate out of stark wire mesh with geometric plastic features and eyes of massive red reflective discs. Cold and alien, these surrogate mothers look like modernist specters, creatures plucked from Oskar Schlemmer's Triadic Ballet; gleaming, menacing, playful, and brutal. The monkey, like us, chooses comfort over sustenance, even in its haunted form. We do not simply need to live, we need to *belong*. And sometimes, we will belong even to the uncanny.

5.

The same longing entraps us in codependent relationships, particularly those marbled with abuse. First, the world outside is wide. Then, slowly, it shrinks. The abusive group, the narcissist, the cult, the ideology, the really cool job—whatever form it takes—redefines your perimeter. Soon, all meaning, all affirmation, comes from *within* this shrinking sphere. To leave is to vanish. To stay is to

disappear. The irony is sharp: the fear of being nothing outside drives you deeper inside. This is the same panic that clutches at a phone at 3 a.m., or elects a demagogue, or buys the shitty fast fashion not out of desire, but out of a terror of the void.

6.

Is it any wonder, then, that our entire society has begun to resemble a codependent relationship with itself? Loneliness is no longer a private affliction but a global architecture. We are so immersed in systems that define us that we fear we may not exist without them. And yet, within this oppressive matrix, we seek contact comfort. The cloth mother has become a vote, a trend, a job title, a god.

7.

Within constraint, we dance. And dance is an art born of boundaries. It is the exploration of freedom through limitation; the strict bar of the ballet studio, the gravity of the body, the scaffolding of rhythm and space. The ballet bar is a helping hand and when you grip it you hold the wall, the building, everybody in it, the city beyond it, and of course it will hold you to its rigid tradition. Rotate it ninety degrees, you're an exotic dancer on a pole, freed from the old language of pliés and arabesques, you're in a new arena of commodified seduction and performative power. One constraint becomes another, but the dance continues. Voguing is said to have its origins in queer prisoners who danced between one dimensional poses, striking each just as they found in them in the pages of Vogue magazines that circulated around their cells.

8.

When I visited Brussels in October I stayed in St Gilles Prison in what was probably a former halfway house, or office, or maybe even the warden's quarters. I could hear the prisoners across the street and I wondered if I could throw something over to them or if there was a tunnel connecting us below the cobblestones. My friend Ben, who is a conspiracy theorist, believes that because there's an important fiber optic cable that connects Wall Street in New York to the stock exchange in Chicago there must be a tunnel large enough for maintenance workers to walk underground, all the way from New York to Chicago. He also believes the tunnel is probably too important for "them" to let us know about it. If he's right about that tunnel then surely there's a similar, top secret underground tunnel connecting the UN in New York to the EU in Brussels. Or from my place to Stacy's basement to Nane's place? Though that would be far too important for "them" to let us know about. Believing lies like this might be a sign of some sort of pathological dependency issue. I don't care. I'd rather believe.

9.

Tonight's exhibition will be a ban on my body—
the plenty place where doors swing so naturally
open. Inside's a cocktail party, a map of beer,
a large peninsula with wide paths and depths of dirty.
A female mastiff admires herself in
the shine of 100 eyes, a building collapses
into the next page. There is nothing to guard
and you can have it. It's fall.
I've splayed my legs among
the nude brambles. That makes many of us.
Last night walking home the wind was cold and I wasn't
wearing a coat. Remember? Just my sweat-
shirt with the hood up obscuring my peripheral
vision. The wind blowing
makes sounds that could be anyone. I resist
the impulse to run. The sky unlocks.
Do you ever realize you're awake and get scared?