

(Dis)Alienating. Implicating. Aesthetics in Love

Kerstin Stakemeier

Abstract: The essay is dedicated to understanding aesthetics as a materialist practice committed to disalienation by way of what and who figures as obscene within modern life. It confronts the modern aesthetic subject and its origination in Early Romanticism, with Peter Gorsen’s proposition of a “hermaphroditic eros,” with Kay Gabriel’s “enthusiastic mutuality,” with Michael Löwy’s inquiries into “Romantic Anticapitalism,” and with Frantz Fanon’s insistence on “disalienation.” All to argue that in disalienation aesthetics becomes a work of love without possession.

Keywords: *Disalienation; Love; Romantic Anticapitalism; Peter Gorsen; Frantz Fanon*

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Dedication

Such a change requires more than argumentation; it requires an *illegal intelligence* that does not renounce happiness in its degenerate form, its asociality, but rather endures its deformation, its social unfitness, and uses it as an instrument of effective influence on the socially functioning forms of pleasure in consumption.¹

This is a quote published in 1969, written by someone who brushed off the enthusiasms for sexual liberation surrounding him as merely expanded consumerisms.² He insisted that the reproductive binaries, the males and females of stately sex, should *not* be liberated. The debordering of their consumptive habits invited an expanded brutalism of conforming sexes, a liberation ready for the taking by those socially fit to take. He did not feel that *repression* should be replaced by realization if the subject remained the same. He wrote in Frankfurt. He had studied with Adorno. He, the committedly hermaphroditic male, wrote for an obscene hedonism. And he, Peter Gorsen, authored a “Sexual Aesthetics”³ to challenge (art’s) modern *Sittlichkeit* (ethical life), to initiate an aesthetic political practice of self-illegalization. He read psychoanalysis, but was more involved in sexual science, as he deemed the criminological sense of pathology that invaded individual privacy more relevant for ways of making sense against the nation state than the psychoanalytic narratives of said privacy. To Gorsen, “illegal intelligence” needed a systemic, not an individual transgression, a sense not just of being transgressive, but more importantly a sense of being transgressed. He was close with the sexologist Hans Giese, who, arguing against §175, “stressed the damages done by criminalizing sexual behavior: homosexuals were reduced to playacting, to seeming rather than being, for most of their lives.”⁴ For Gorsen, following such stately criminalizations led to understanding sexuality’s social and aesthetic materiality, its transgressed life, and the *illegal intelligence* that could originate from it. In the late 1950s, he

and his love Hanel Koeck helped the Vienna Actionists to be *unsittlich* for a moment, before those men's actions defaulted into art.⁵ Peter Gorsen died in 2017. Hanel Koeck survived her love.

I have been attached to his writings and their praxis for the last twenty years. I love his words for replacing introspection with desecration, and my love for *illegal intelligence* originates again and again in his excessively figural, overcharged, clandestine, and radical wordings. Over the last year I have started to translate his words, figure by figure, from German into English, to rededicate them. I started to bring co-translators into his texts, a composer, an artist, a poet, to enhance Gorsen's redistribution beyond my sense of him. Offering his writings an out from being German by annotating Gorsen's sexual aesthetics, producing liner notes for them, frames and digressive additions, offering them ready for the taking for more current obscenities and pathologies, to position Gorsen within reach of non-Germanophone conditions. Within reach of current systemic transgressions. That he studied with Adorno shows. In his writings, German is not just the first language, it is also the last. His translation needs another language's life. And I am translating Gorsen with others to introduce a horizon into his writings that he was lacking: *disalienation*, the reorganization of senses against their systemic transgression.

Disalienation first unfolded in French psychiatry as a commitment to cure the social relations that made individual alienation mandatory for a modern sense of self, starting from the asylums holding those whose individual alienation had reached the point of deindividuation.⁶ Gorsen wrote his PhD in Frankfurt at that time, the 1950s, grappling with the pitfalls of the very philosophy of life which disalienation's main proponents also leaned on in their work.⁷ Gorsen also read the same Lacan as they did. The early one on paranoia.⁸ Only. And Koeck was regularly traveling through the region of Saint-Alban-sur-Limagnole in Occitania, where François Tosquelles, Frantz Fanon, Lucien Bonnafé, and others worked on disalienations.⁹ In Hegel's *Phenomenology*, alienation had made an early appearance as the character of experience itself, "wherein the immediate, the inexperienced [...] becomes alienated, and from this alienation returns to itself, and hereby now represents itself in its reality and truth, as being the property of consciousness."¹⁰ What Gorsen shared with the psychiatrists working out of Saint-Alban was the unwavering commitment to mess with those properties. But while the latter's practices of disalienation intended to undo the properties of alienation by communizing them, Gorsen and Koeck aimed at personally disgracing them.

Koeck was traveling through Occitania en route to Pierre Molinier, the artist out of Bordeaux in the Gironde, whose work had been consequentially *unsittlich*, aesthetic illegal intelligence, since 1951.¹¹ Gorsen, Koeck, and Molinier decided in the 1960s that only Koeck should visit Molinier in person. Gorsen would write.¹² The three consciously partitioned their respective media of aesthetic *Unsittlichkeit*; for sexual aesthetics are personal. Koeck and Molinier's shared

praxis was one of self-portraiture, doubles and singles. As her sister. As sisters. As his man. As hers. A making of their sexes in which Koeck wanted “to find the voluptuous difference between a woman and a transvestite man” in her photograph as in his.¹³ This is love.

It is the love I am aiming for in this text, a love I want to approximate to its disalienation, to its communization. This text is proposing that our love needs to progress by implication, that it needs to be *unsittlich*, that it needs its disalienation out of its romantic properties: I am proposing an implicated love, and aesthetic materialism of obscene sense/s. As Nat Raha and Mijke van der Drift realize in their *Trans Femme Futures*, “love can manifest touch when it is prohibited or denied.”¹⁴ Giese had insisted that sex too was firstly interpersonal contact and not a reproductive faculty.¹⁵ And Gorsen, Koeck, and Molinier were giving this interpersonal contact a form that was decidedly *unsittlich*, non-reproductive, sexually materialist in the most literal of ways: a practice of speculative love, of being implicated in a love of *illegal intelligence*. Sexual communizations. Natalie Diaz wrote their *Postcolonial Love Poem*:

The alphabet of my Love’s hand in the dark,
A gesture I can read. A desire-text.
She enters me—I am her scriptorium.¹⁶

Those who are entering us, touching us, are also those who are making our sexes. Love always had some sex. When George Herbert wrote about love’s meat in the seventeenth century, about love’s metabolisms outside of reproduction, in his scriptorium, his partner was god:

Love bade me welcome. Yet my soul drew back
Guilty of dust and sin.
But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack
From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning,
If I lacked any thing.

A guest, I answered, worthy to be here:
Love said, You shall be he.
I the unkind, ungrateful? Ah my dear,
I cannot look on thee.
Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,
Who made the eyes but I?

Truth Lord, but I have marred them: let my shame
Go where it doth deserve.
And know you not, says Love, who bore the blame?
My dear, then I will serve.
You must sit down, says Love, and taste my meat:
So I did sit and eat.¹⁷

The *Unsittlichkeit* was a given. Meat that he was. The question remained whether aesthetics would serve for its elevation or its desecration.

Amongst Gorsen, Koeck, and Molinier it is desecration that is mutually served. Guilt is welcomed. And embraced. Authored. Implicated. Gorsen tried distributing the sense and the senses of this praxis of illegal sexuation, of these aesthetics of *Unsittlichkeit*, this materialist dedication to a non-reproductive love, in his writings not just on Molinier. He wrote a whole art history of *Sexualästhetik* and one of the psychiatric surroundings of (its) pathologization, and more. But Koeck, Molinier, and he remained singular. Together. They were making something out of the properties of their alienation. An exemplarily illegally intelligent love. This is why I wrote that disalienation is what was lacking. Because the disalienation tried in and out of Saint-Alban, east of Bourdeaux, was only ever in the plural. Disalienation only ever is. Disalienation is never an individual achievement. It is invariably in communion with other unstable properties. In Saint-Alban, a state of exception (the psychiatric hospital) was turned into a temporary communion of disalienations. Test cases within an unfree set-up. Gorsen's *illegal intelligence* too acted within perpetual states of exception. But his institutionalization existed in the singular. I want to understand this singular in its possible plural and seek out its already existing plurals. We are test cases. All of us.

Disalienation

Disalienation is lacking, not only in Gorsen. It is lacking in German. In those instances where it has been translated, *Ententfremdung* tends to be mistaken for its less Marxist and more *weltanschauliches* other: Romantic Anticapitalism.¹⁸ A term Georg Lukács coined in 1931, not least to disown his own pre-Marxist writings before 1918.¹⁹ However, even for him, the term never fully figured as a mere (self-)debasement. Its most prominent custodian, Michael Löwy, identified Romantic Anticapitalism's core in "the nostalgia for pre-capitalist societies and a cultural critique of capitalism."²⁰ Which positions it within an unbridgeable distance to disalienation's radically materialist commitment to understanding the lives of alienation itself as the only working materials of disalienation. But both Lukács and Löwy register Romantic Anticapitalism as a *Weltanschauung* pertinent to alienated life, and as such it isn't out at last: it is itself disalienation's working material. While Romantic Anticapitalism projects a past becoming a future, disalienation's commitment to the very present in which all times materially concatenate includes these very pasts. It is in this sense that disalienation returns all properties to the status of loot, dissociating their reified separation.²¹ There is a sense of origin in disalienation too, in that it is a practice of reorigination, an anti-systemic transgression. While Romantic Anticapitalism's incessant need for origins gives way to an "obvious

incoherence,” its more anarchic versions also offer, as Andrew Hemingway puts it when quoting Löwy, “ambiguity, ideological hermaphroditism (and a) surprising tendency to move from one extreme to the other.”²² That does sound a lot like Gorsen, his “hermaphroditic eros”²³ the formulation of a radical lever, not a radical program. A lever Gorsen, like Lukács, positioned against the reification of all living needs into their economization, Romantic Anticapitalisms in need of disalienation.

Gorsen thinks of reifications and of their transgressions as forms of obscene love. I think of practices of disalienation and their communizations as forms of implicated love. Like Adorno, Gorsen was struck by and stuck in the (early) Romanticism that grounded the idealisms of the modern artist and lover in solitude, in an alienation premised on full self-ownership. A qualifier that both treated as a tragedy, an ineluctable malaise of modern man. And it surely is. Albeit far more literally than Frankfurt acknowledged. Alienation comes with a dedication that can hardly be treated as a formality. Alienation’s public life, its art-making and love-seeking modes of public maladies, is not least a romantic privilege granted to those with full citizenship, those with maturity, those uncriminalized, those uninstitutionalized, those unfeminized, and, lastly, those at all legalized. Bearers of stately sexes. Alienation’s rise is not by chance attached to the histories of European nation-making. In his early *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, Karl Marx relays alienation as the reality of labor’s national estrangement, as “labor’s realization is its objectification. Under these economic conditions this realization of labor appears as loss of realization for the workers; objectification as loss of the object and bondage to it; appropriation as estrangement, as alienation.”²⁴ With *Vergegenständlichung*, the German version of objectification here is much closer to the English reification, and it is the questionable ability to externalize this reification that distinguishes Marx’s worker from the colonial histories not only of enslavement but of labor’s racialized sexuation more generally. The conversion of loot into properties alienates its subject. Saidiya Hartman spells out its ubiquity:

So what does it mean to think about accumulation, whether original or “primitive,” in relation to looting or rioting, which is nothing more than a bare-bones descriptor of the radical, critical imaginings of the wretched and the dispossessed? [...] We don’t call accumulation looting or theft because we have other language for it: the historical conditions for the reproduction of capitalism.²⁵

Calling it looting would rematerialize what was capitalized though. And because it was and is lived as being looted for many and as accumulating for some, the alienation Marx introduces figures also as a counter-intuitive privilege: The privilege of the laborer to experience an estrangement from the object that keeps said laborer from also experiencing themselves becoming its material. From making

them loot. As Frantz Fanon stated early on in *Black Skin, White Masks*: “the Black’s alienation is not an individual question.”²⁶ Fanon’s book’s original title had been *Essay on the Disalienation of the Black*.²⁷ He brought it with him to Saint-Alban in 1953. Fanon sees alienation on a sliding and self-perpetuating scale: From the white man’s source of tragic individuation to the Black man’s lawful deindividuation, “bourgeois society is a closed society where it’s not good to be alive, where the air is rotten and ideas and people are putrefying. And I believe that a man who takes a stand against this living death is in a way a revolutionary.”²⁸ Gorsen’s “illegal intelligence” was such a stance, an obscene love directed against the living death, undercutting the Romantic origins of his *Weltanschauung* with adapting what was reified to not “renounce happiness in its degenerate form, its asociality, but rather endures its deformation, its social unfitness.” Fanon would find disalienation lacking. In *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), he stepped out of its psychiatric practice and into its anti-colonial violence. His commitment to undoing accumulated properties resounds in Black Lives Matter Chicago’s recent definition of active reparations: “Our Future Has Been Looted, LOOT BACK.”²⁹ Gorsen found *Sexual Aesthetics* lacking when the 1980s ended and he found self-transgressions fully reified. He stepped into privacy. His commitment to aesthetically undoing *sittliche* sexes resounds in the currents of *Transgender Marxism* today.³⁰ Heavily. Even if Gorsen’s own formulations sound as if his words hardly escaped the 1950s:

The art [of sexual aesthetics] [...] questions its hard-won autonomy from the natural world, rebelling against the very exceptionality of aesthetic existence that critically distinguishes it from what is merely aesthetically present. [...] This is where the phenomenological competence of sexual aesthetics begins, which does not presuppose the state of sensual arousal and aesthetic pleasure as opposites, as incompatible, but considers an ambiguous, unambiguous sexual relationship between the aesthetic observer and the aesthetic object to be a constitutive moment of art’s enjoyment. Sexuality and aesthetics are not mutually exclusive [...]. The act that violates shame (in this regard) is the ugly, appearing in the form of the obscene [...]. Ambiguity is a direct view of what instills shame in us.³¹

But reading Kay Gabriel’s “Gender as Accumulation Strategy”³² in 2020 made me sense dedications missing in my writing, needs located between, the I, its communions, sex/es, and pleasure. Like Gorsen. And not. Gabriel’s essay never sounds private, even if in this early version gender abolitionism³³ is declined, in a comradely manner, in favor of a shared struggle for “bodily autonomy” amidst the “aesthetic and sensuous qualities of gender.”³⁴ Abolition might follow. But it does not take the lead in an “enthusiastic mutuality”³⁵ against “gendered abjection.” Publicly bending “gendered *signification*”³⁶ toward “intense dimension(s) of disalienation.”³⁷ The essay Gabriel writes is committed to the conversion of the stately two-gender model, into “class struggle” as “trans liberation.”³⁸ The

binary gender model does not hold. Gorsen would agree. It only holds alienation. Which is where he sees shame's breeding ground, in the properties of *sittliche* reproduction. Gabriel calls her illegal intelligence disalienation: hers is not an individual capacity, but a communal practice, a communal pleasure. It is engaging an implicated love.

In 2024, Gabriel published a revised version of her essay in Emma Heaney's *Feminism Against Cisness*,³⁹ and here gender abolition re-enters the horizon as a futurity that grants the disalienating practices of embodiment in trans liberation its "totalizing [...] standpoint."⁴⁰ Gabriel quotes Lukács, whose *Weltanschauung* here returns as a necessary lever for something like a Romantic Anticapitalism of disalienation, a poetics in a radical vein. Like Gorsen, Gabriel breaks into the continuity of gender in its alienation, opening the cracks and gaps for "a series of high-stakes and pleasures."⁴¹ "Considered this way," Gabriel quotes Oren Gozlan, "gender can function as a transitional object or fetish."⁴² One that Gabriel puts to work for ambitious narcissistic pleasures, for expanding aesthetics of disalienation. One that Simone White sees putting her to work.

if i keep looking at the word *independent* i can see it surrounded by practices of sex work
it is always pussy that gives me value and this, fact of undeniable facticity,
must also enter my estimation of the state of my own excess, the forms my life takes
have berserk intensity.
dissolute facticity⁴³

In Gorsen, then, happiness/pleasure/*Glück* already falls prey to its (in)voluntary narcissism, in White's poem it is overpowered by the narcissism of others, of its consumers, and her consummation. Reification is never far. Depending where you reside. In "Gender as Accumulation Strategy," Gabriel lets "disalienation" figure as what is organizing, sharing her version of *Glück*'s narcissism. Generously.

The reason disalienation first surfaced in psychiatric writings in the late 1940s in France was not least that in French, unlike German, unlike English, the old and the new meaning of the word *aliéner* coexisted continuously: the psychic alienation of an individual by senses, and the social alienation of a person by properties.⁴⁴ In *désaliéner*, the two lives of alienation, the social and the individual, help each other *out*. Institutional psychiatry's dedication to "cure the institution"⁴⁵ introduced disalienation as a practical, a communal horizon of institutionally alienated life. A communion that was forced into being by its medical alienation, thriving to disalienate. The word was dubbed into English in 1967, when its anticolonial reason, spelled out in Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* in 1952,⁴⁶ was translated. In English, the word is still mostly identified with Fanon, for he not only stated but demonstrated "that the black man's alienation is not an individual question. [Because] beside phylogeny and ontogeny stands sociogeny."⁴⁷

Disalienation is not a psychiatric question [alone]. It is one of anti-colonial sentiment, an obscene love that undoes properties, returns them to the status of loot. Ours too. Gabriel's too. She too writes for the communization of disalienation, for the gender autonomization into abolition of her not unromantic lever subject, trans liberation. Besides Sigmund Freud, the psychoanalyst who unwittingly identified love with marriage,⁴⁸ oedipal phylogeny, with state-sanctioned ontogeny, stands Frantz Fanon, the psychiatrist who first worked in France as a psychiatrist of disalienation, and then in Algeria, before exiting the psychiatric institution because institutional coloniality needed a more than medical shock therapy.⁴⁹ With Fanon, the political meaning of disalienation came to precede the psychiatric one. And with Gabriel its sexual meaning replaces Fanon's psychiatric subject and Gorsen's sexologist one with its psychoanalytic sister. Gabriel publicizes her subject's privacy, pushing for her disalienation. She is implicating everyone in its love, its narcissism of autonomization.

Disalienation, the making of sociogenic communion, marks alienation as a colonial sentiment, a colonizing sentiment. Alienation denotes the making of a modern, a colonial, a capitalist and capitalizing subject and its society. Reification is its effect, loot becoming accumulation, sex becoming gender: it designates the deadening of its matters into the capital of its own making. And so Gabriel too, decapitalizing sex, reaches for "intense dimension(s) of disalienation,"⁵⁰ for the unmaking of its subject, its racialized gendering and the abjections following into it. Gabriel's words for pleasure's disalienation are totality, autonomy, universalism,⁵¹ mine are rather obscenity, fantasy,⁵² and love, but here is to total agreement that the properties of alienation and its stately reproduction within the two-gender model have to come undone. And Gorsen's illegal intelligence, his hermaphroditic eros, with the help of Fanon and Gabriel, transitions into an organized communal looting of colonial alienation.

Reprise: The sexual liberation of the alienated sexes is a threat not a promise, it is where phylogeny and ontogeny join their plots in horror. Disalienation, in Gabriel's as much as in Gorsen's sense, needs an illegal intelligence implicated into the sociogeny of every body's sex. One has to start somewhere and "before it can adopt a positive voice, freedom requires an effort at disalienation."⁵³ Rededications. Also of Fanon.⁵⁴ In Adorno and Gorsen there is no disalienation. There is only critique: critique and mimesis (Adorno), critique and transgression (Gorsen). Adorno's and Gorsen's critical faculties were carrying their potential disalienations only in the shape of mythic reconciliations and illegal obscenities. The critique of alienation is its internal revision, a stabilizing move that lastly readjusts properties.⁵⁵ Centering on not loving the freedom of alienation demands an illegal intelligence geared at practical disalienation. An expropriation. Communal obscenities. One limb at a time. An implicated love. As Verity Spott assesses: "Just this, just remember this, baby, it isn't a transition it's a fucking apocalypse."⁵⁶

Dissociation

In need of love, “*I told them that my pronouns were ‘you.’*”⁵⁷

Proposing to rededicate a praxis of critique to its own disalienation, I follow Gabriel and Gorsen into a need to trivialize romantic love into its obscene communization. Which demands that I too share my location. To cultivate a practical sense of where my double alienation intersects most sharply, where my sociogeny anchors. I can of course also write *for* disalienation, gesturing to (heroically) hand me over while retaining control over my text. Weaponizing my alienation. A worthwhile, a functional, temporary workaround. But illegal intelligence and bodily autonomy are practical needs to lead (our) lives into disalienation, to mark the unrelenting need for the presence of disalienation in all our sense and senses, in all our times, in all our places. Disalienations demand sociogenic accountabilities, a *Lebensarbeit* (life-work, as per Lu Märten⁵⁸) of expropriating alienations. Again, this is love. It shall be. And it is aesthetics. Its (very) materialist kind. It is bound to the sensuous qualities of our lives, our languages, our labors, and our *Glück*. This is implicating love into rededications, like that of Gorsen. A love that is *unsittlich* like that of Gabriel too. A love that is not private, that wants to make its narcissism something to share.

Fantasy is not the opposite of substance
hate can be the work of love
sick is the write off of love
the soul sick gets exposure, the antidote to love
wet lapses
this shit was never clean
it was bleached
liberals love to speak of being in it together but I don't
wanna be anywhere near most of the people I know
now⁵⁹

MYSTI lets in every body's alienation. He builds us into his obscenity, all of us. *Bildung* is the sociogeny of my double alienation and illegal intelligence has been and remains my passphrase into its rededication as an educator. I am bound to rededicate what built into my *Bildungsweg*. Romanticism, Jena Romanticism more specifically. Offering up some nationally reproductive *Bildung* for its use to disalienation. Again, Romantic Anticapitalism is not the excluded other, it is the sentimental lever. And to rededicate *Frankfurt*, be that Gorsen or his elders, a repurposing of the romantic subject, modern art's (still) most universal template, the “hysteric male”⁶⁰ and (his) “Madame Lucifer” for transitions is needed,⁶¹ because “the androgynous image of the human and the artist [...] a primal form of the artist and the philosopher—has been strongly narcissistically

influenced since the Romantic period.”⁶² Gorsen too sees “Transformers”⁶³ of the phylogenetic sexes, sees his hermaphroditic self that way: as a narcissistic proponent of *Unsittlichkeit*. The critique of alienation, in its lack of communizing of its own properties, in its lack of making itself wildly (un)popular, in its lack of dissociating its privilege to legal sex, legal labor, legal passage, gets caught in narcissistic traps. However negative. Think Rainer Werner Fassbinder’s *In a Year with Thirteen Moons* (1978), think Ulrike Ottinger’s *Ticket of No Return* (1979). Narcissism is not an ethical failure, it is a political one.⁶⁴ One of sex. It is what Gabriel aims to make up for. Good. I again want to propose a name for the rededication of this phylogenetic misery toward its sociogenetic disalienation: Our Implicated Love.

And what has been taken out of the Romantic Jena boys, out of Friedrich Schlegel and out of Novalis and out of Johann Gottlieb Fichte, is mostly what not just Walter Benjamin⁶⁵ and Adorno loved in them, is not their narcissism, but its more subdued form: that notion called *critique*. A mode they positioned as a perpetual, a mutual reflexivity, between *the* subject and *his* object. In Europe. A move others have rightfully identified as installing the proto automatic subject, a romantic body of appropriation.⁶⁶ Claus Träger did so in the GDR. Again, others have beautifully identified it as the colonial land grab of a “biogenetic élan vital.”⁶⁷ Sylvia Wynter did so in the US. But critique as a form of perpetual self-legitimization (read narcissism) through externalized reification (read looting), however, remains ecstatically popular in post-post-Adornian and unendingly Benjaminian thought. In the early 1970s, collaborators of Gorsen in Frankfurt tried to position the Jena boys *against* the idea of enlightenment in marking their critique as orphic, following their descent, not just into geohistory, but into the (yet unnamed) unconscious, insisting that they were not just descending to further furnish their interiorities.⁶⁸ Critique is sidelined here, as it is love that takes over this “orphic narcis.”⁶⁹ Critique is rededicated to become love. It is sublated to become love. Critique was only ever its brace to start with. This orphic narcis, he dissociates. Descending into his own make-up, he finds himself transgressed by others, mimetically subjugated by the figures and matters populating him. Critique here gives way to “a primary, fundamental disturbance, namely, ‘dissociation’.”⁷⁰ His narcissism dissociated into love. If that isn’t romantic. But while clinically being arrested as a “primary disturbance of thought (that) might be described as a loosening of associations ... [in which] the associations lose their continuity,”⁷¹ the attachment of dissociation to love as to disalienation I am suggesting here registers their opening to non-individual continuities, fantasies in and out of action. This dissociative quality of love becomes what, in the early 1970s, for a gang of heretic Frankfurt students, positions the Jena boys on the other side of enlightenment: the descent into the unconscious is not directed toward finding the dead mother, or any dead woman that needs to be left there, to ultimately emerge from it manly. There is a quite generous rendition of Orpheus’s

actions. Whatever helps. This orphic descent, however, is also unending in the sensing of an other within his own make-up. Here again is love. Not a love that finds and acquires a perfectly external other to make *her mine*, but a love that registers that I was never fully mine to begin with. That the others were always already there. That they made me. “Here it is no longer about an ego ideal that is as ‘autonomous’ as possible, but about opening up to the point of communicating with the unconscious, [...] ‘sympoetizing’ and ‘symliving’.”⁷² And this is not romantic anymore. Romantic Anticapitalism’s origin realizes original dissociation. It turns toward a fantasy of disalienation: not out of individual capacity but out of attended reorigination, not an alienation, but a dissociation.

We tell ourselves stories in order to live, but what if these stories are too pulpy? The word ‘dissociation’ is increasingly used to describe episodes in which feeling doesn’t feel like feeling, in which it can’t sufficiently get across the effects of personhood on the one hand and reality on the other. In 1845, fifty years prior to the proper invention of dissociation as a distinct pathology, the psychiatrist Jean-Étienne-Dominique Esquirol paraphrases one of his patient’s experiences of the world like this: “Objects do not come to me, they do not identify themselves with my being; a thick cloud, a veil changes the hue and aspect of objects.” Which is a lot. In its melodrama, it also resembles a kind of too-much-ness that sounds like ordinary life in a world in which social relations appear as a quality of things, though often out of focus (racial capitalism).⁷³

That patient spoke some decades after the Jena boys. But the objects kept coming. And the dissociations kept being externalized. Contemporary rededications are in order, and Maxi Wallenhorst offers them: dissociation as trans poetics, not an individual capacity, but a communal, a communizing practice. An implicated love. I want to direct this relation onto the origins of romantic love, of critical aesthetics, to reoriginate, to rededicate the relation of alienation and dissociation. To change their sex. Our sex. Ultimately, the Jena boys did identify their wives down there far too much, demonizing those living and romanticizing those dead.⁷⁴ And where narcissism descends only into its property’s origins dissociating the other, rather than himself, it generates a purged, a “disenchanted Romanticism.”⁷⁵ “If narcissism illustrates the replicating moment of all thought, it also enacts the tendency of thought to immobilize its object.”⁷⁶ Making *him* forever. The Jena boys’ narcissism has been taken on as fateful. And it was. And it is. But not (primarily) for them. They immobilize those who do not own their alienation. Cannot own it. But it is looted for Romantic narcissism. Only with Gorsen’s “illegal intelligence,” only with Gabriel’s “enthusiastic mutuality,” and only with Fanon’s “disalienation” does dissociation enter the orphic narcis. As Love. It is no longer what he spreads. As his alienation. His descent becomes his systemic unmaking. He becomes implied, dissociated into disalienations.

This is “love the ordainer.”⁷⁷ Love the uneven. “The adaptation of a way of being, which, being transitory, refabricates itself, has to be refabricated, yielded.”⁷⁸ Reoriginated. It is the harmonization of how the Jena boys are used as narcissistic icons that replicates them as misogynistic colonizers.⁷⁹ An aesthetic of critique that is self-serving by default. A materialist aesthetics, that, like Adorno’s, lastly defaults into *Sittlichkeit*, because it misidentifies alienation as the tragedy of the romantic subject, instead of finding disalienation in its dissociation, like Gorsen, like Fanon, like Gabriel. Letting critique slide into the love of what dissociates us, the question is no longer that of how to originate our own properties within those of the Jena boys, but one of how the sense that indeed “masculinity and femininity [...] (are) the most dangerous obstacles to humanity”⁸⁰ materializes today, vis-à-vis a sex that is racialized into proprietary genders, perpetually refiguring structural transgression.

As early as 1963, Gorsen had written a series of entries for Armand Mergen’s *Sexualforschung—Stichwort und Bild*, an updated version of the *Bilder-Lexikon der Erotik* that had been published in 1938 by the Institut für Sexualforschung, Vienna. Again, a criminological more than a psychoanalytical frame. A lexicon of illegal sex. Not a lexicon of transgressions. A lexicon of stately measures. (*Un*) *Sittlichkeiten*. Gorsen’s essay, “Kunst (moderne, bildende),” at a good fifty pages long, lays out the basic features of a materialist aesthetics that captures modern art along the lines of the *Unsittlichkeit* of the forms of sex figuring in it. It is not a legitimizing lineage of great “erotic” art that Gorsen is after, but rather an ungoverned field of aesthetic manifestations that become legible through their understanding as “illegal intelligence.” An *unsittliche* aesthetic that is materially unfit for critique. One fit for “intense dimension(s) of disalienation.”⁸¹

Implication

Every body’s sense/s of dissociation needs rededications. Organizing dissociative unevenness in transitioning into disalienations. In which institution ever. Literally. “The orphic narcis anticipates this relation between origin [*Herkunft*] and future [*Zukunft*] (as advent [*als Herkunft*]).”⁸² But this only amounts to a process of disalienation, to a process of love, where our narcissisms become the materials of our disalienations. A Romantic Anticapitalism of *reorigination*. So, my contentions with the Jena boys culminate in their romantic infinity loop hero, the “backward looking prophet”⁸³ and his angelic return in Benjamin and Adorno, which has been happily replicated since: *he* is unbearably *sittlich*. To rededicate the orphic narcis, to sense transgression as dissociation, to communize it to hold, breaking critique’s properties of alienation into disalienation’s *Glück*, the replication of this angel’s saving has to end. Descend, yes. Emerge, no.

I want the Jena boys' unconscious to connect to psychoanalysis as in "Seduction Theory,"⁸⁴ not psychoanalysis as in the "Oedipus Complex."⁸⁵ Or, somehow sweeter. Love is an "idiom of optimistic misrecognition, like identity."⁸⁶ Love is, psychoanalytically speaking, an *overdetermination*: "to be overdetermined is to see oneself and one's objects of interest as the point of convergence of many forces."⁸⁷ Facing psychoanalysis as Romanticisms' scientifically posing return, or, in Jean-Luc Evard's words, facing psychoanalysis as "a chilled romanticism,"⁸⁸ Freud is not much less symptomatic than the Jena boys, not much less of a narcissist either, and surely not less in dire need of rededication. Jean Laplanche tried.⁸⁹ Lauren Berlant too. Gabriel still does. I call upon love as disalienation's *enthusiasm*, "a charged site at which particular data are assembled into a broad-spectrum comprehension greatly in excess of any individual part."⁹⁰ Descending into love. That "love has never been a popular movement"⁹¹ is unacceptable, because, really, that is all love could be. This is clear not only in James Baldwin's writing, but in that of bell hooks, June Jordan, Joy James, Audre Lorde, María Lugones... and it is a perpetual undercurrent in *The Undercommons* (2013).⁹² Anticolonial love never translates fully into Romantic parties of two. It translates out of it. June counts her blessings as every body's:

I will learn to love myself well enough to love you (whoever you are), well enough so that you will love me well enough so that we will know, exactly, where is the love.⁹³

Disalienation needs to be for all. Better sexes too. With Gorse I cherish that all aesthetics are about sex, and that sex is in all aesthetics, and that while none of our sexes shall be liberated all of them need to be disalienated. Our disalienation needs to be obscene, so much remains true, and what if not love can dissociate our alienation?

When the cops came for you they found me. *I told them that my pronouns were 'you'.* The other non-singular, the hailing cry, that is, not-I, the place where mandatory gender sensitivity training stops short, universal in singular address, slab of hirsute substance in a dress. As in: Fuck You.

[Said entirely without confidence]⁹⁴

NOTES

- 1 Peter Gorsen, *Das Bild Pygmalions* (rororo, 1969), 15.
- 2 I initially started to work around the themes discussed here for Rachel Haidu and Hannah Feldman, eds., *Touching Paper: Writing Towards Art, Love, and the Weather* (Duke University Press, 2026 (forthcoming)).
- 3 Peter Gorsen, *Sexualästhetik. Zur bürgerlichen Rezeption von Obszönität und Pornographie* (Gewidmet Hans Giese, 1972); Gorsen, *Sexualästhetik, Grenzformen der Sinnlichkeit im 20. Jahrhundert* (rororo, 1987).
- 4 See Dagmar Herzog, *Sex after Fascism: Memory and Morality in Twentieth-Century Germany* (Princeton University Press, 2005), 91. For an introductory history of sexual sciences in Germany and Austria and Giese's central role within this, see Volkmar Sigusch, *Geschichte der Sexualwissenschaft* (campus, 2008). For an overview beyond this scope, see Veronika Fuechtner, Douglas E. Haynes, and Ryan M. Jones, eds., *A Global History of Sexual Science 1880–1960* (University of California Press, 2018).
- 5 See Peter Gorsen, *Das Nachleben des Wiener Aktionismus: Interpretationen und Einlassungen seit 1969* (Ritter, 2008).
- 6 For an introduction to its history, see, for example, Elena Vogman, "Geo-Psychiatry: Media, Milieus, and Ecologies of Madness", *Grey Room* 97 (Fall 2024) and *Psychotherapy and Materialism: Essays by François Tosquelles and Jean Oury*, ed. Marlon Miguel and Elena Vogman (ICI Berlin Press, 2024).
- 7 Peter Gorsen, *Zur Phänomenologie des Bewusstseinsstroms: Bergson, Dilthey, Husserl, Schlegel und die lebensphilosophischen Antinomien* (H Bouvier, 1966).
- 8 Jacques Lacan, "Das Problem des Stils und die psychiatrische Auffassung von den paranoischen Formen der Erfahrung," in Jacques Lacan, *Über die paranoische Psychose in ihren Beziehungen zur Persönlichkeit und Frühe Schriften über die Paranoia*, ed. Peter Engelmann (Passagen, 2002).
- 9 See, for example, Lucien Bonnafé, *Désaliéner? Folie(s) et société(s)* (Presses Universitaires du Mirail, 1991) and the extensive catalogue *Francesc Tosquelles: Avant-Garde Psychiatry, Radical Politics, and Art*, ed. Carlos Guerra, Joana Masó, Edward Dioguardi, and Margarita Sánchez Urdaneta (The American Folk Art Museum, 2024).
- 10 G. W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, ed. Johannes Hoffmeister (de Gruyter, 1952), 22.
- 11 Jean-Luc Mercier, *Pierre Molinier* (Les presses du réel, 2010).
- 12 Peter Gorsen and Pierre Molinier, *Pierre Molinier, lui-même, Essai über den surrealistischen Hermaphroditen* (Berlin, 1972).
- 13 See Koeck quoted in Kerstin Stakemeier, *Entgrenzter Formalismus—Verfahren einer antimodernen Ästhetik*, (b_books, 2017), 173.
- 14 Nat Raha and Mijke van der Drift, eds., *Trans Femme Futures: Abolitionist Ethics for Transfeminist Worlds* (Pluto Press, 2024), 183.
- 15 See Herzog, *Sex after Fascism*, 92.
- 16 Natalie Diaz, *Postcolonial Love Poem* (Graywolf Press, 2020), 87.
- 17 George Herbert, Love (III), see: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44367/love-iii>. Lisa Robertson also refers to it, as Weil had her life-changing vision while reading this poem aloud; see Lisa Robertson, *Anemones: A Simone Weil Project* (If I Can't Dance, 2021), 37.
- 18 See Robert Sayre and Michael Löwy, "Figures of Romantic Anticapitalism," *New German Critique* 32 (Spring–Summer 1984): 42–92.
- 19 Andrew Hemingway, "Romantic Anticapitalism," in *The Routledge Companion to Marxisms in Art History*, ed. Tijen Tunalı and Brian Winkenweder (Routledge, 2025), 197.
- 20 Michael Löwy, "Marxism and Revolutionary Romanticism," *Telos* 49 (1981): 83.
- 21 The word "looting" was originally taken from the Hindi word *lūt* (booty, plunder) by British colonizers, signifying a distinguished, transgressive relation to property specific to the colonized people of the subcontinent. See Vicky Osterweil, *In Defense of Looting* (Bold Type Books, 2020), 3.
- 22 Hemingway, "Romantic Anticapitalism," 200.
- 23 Peter Gorsen, *Das Prinzip Obszön: Kunst, Pornographie und Gesellschaft* (rororo, 1969), 66–67.
- 24 Karl Marx, *Economic & Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (Progress Publishers, 1959), XXII, online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/labour.htm>.
- 25 Saidiya Hartman, Christina Sharpe, and Ronaldo Walcott, moderated by Vicky Osterweil, "Volume 3. Looting," in *Diversity of Aesthetics Volumes 1–3*, ed. Andreas Petrossians and Jose Rosales (Common Notions, 2025), 101.
- 26 Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (Grove Press, 2008), xv.
- 27 See Jean Khalfa, "Fanon, Revolutionary Psychiatrist," in *Franz Fanon: Alienation and Freedom*, ed. Jean Khalfa and Robert Young (Bloomsbury, 2018), 173.
- 28 Khalfa, "Fanon, Revolutionary Psychiatrist," 199.
- 29 Jarrod Shanahan and Zhandarka Kurti, "The Shifting Ground: A Conversation on the George Floyd Rebellion," *Ill Will* (September 20, 2020), <https://illwill.com/the-shifting-ground-a-conversation-on-the-george-floyd-rebellion>.
- 30 Juliana Gleeson Elle O'Rourke, *Transgender Marxism* (Pluto Press, 2021).
- 31 Gorsen, *Sexualästhetik*, 15–16.
- 32 Kay Gabriel, "Gender as Accumulation Strategy," *invert journal* 1 (March 2020). Sadly, the magazine no longer exists but the articles can be retrieved from <https://www.are.na/ana-meisel/invert-journal>.

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- 33 See Endnotes, "The Logic of Gender: On the Separation of Spheres and the Process of Abjection," *Endnotes 3: Gender, Race, Class and Other Misfortunes* (2013). For critical discussion on gender abolitionism, see Jules Joanne Gleeson, "The Call for Gender Abolition: From Materialist Lesbianism to Gay Communism," *Blind Field* (July 31, 2017), <https://blindfieldjournal.com/2017/07/31/the-call-for-gender-abolition-from-materialist-lesbianism-to-gay-communism/>.
- 34 Gabriel, "Gender as Accumulation Strategy," 22.
- 35 Gabriel, "Gender as Accumulation Strategy," 21.
- 36 Gabriel, "Gender as Accumulation Strategy," 21.
- 37 Gabriel, "Gender as Accumulation Strategy," 22.
- 38 Gabriel, "Gender as Accumulation Strategy," 22. "I argue that the project of trans liberation looks to the aesthetic and sensuous qualities of gender as a dimension of bodily autonomy, an intensive dimension of disalienation, and that this in turn discloses its totalising relationship to class struggle."
- 39 Kay Gabriel, "Two Senses of Gender Abolition: Gender as Accumulation Strategy," *Feminism Against Cisness*, ed. Emma Heaney (Duke, 2024).
- 40 Gabriel, "Two Senses," 138.
- 41 Gabriel, "Two Senses," 138.
- 42 Gabriel, "Two Senses," 143.
- 43 Simone White, *or, on being the other woman*, (Duke University Press 2022) 13.
- 44 On disalienation, see Camille Robcis, *Disalienation: Politics, Philosophy, and Radical Psychiatry in Postwar France* (University of Chicago Press, 2021).
- 45 In 2026, Divided Publishing will bring out an English language version of Joana Masó's *Francesc Tosquelles: Soigner les institutions* (Arachneen, 2021).
- 46 The book starts by declaring "The analysis we are undertaking is psychological. It remains, nevertheless, evident that for us the true disalienation of the black man implies a brutal awareness of the social and economic realities," and it ends with, "Before embarking on a positive voice, freedom needs to make an effort at disalienation." Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, xiv.
- 47 Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 4.
- 48 See Klaus Theweleit, *Objektwahl (All You Need is Love)* (Stroemfeld/Roter Stern, 1990).
- 49 For Fanon's work with electroshock therapy and insulin in Saint-Alban in July 1953, see François Tosquelles and Frantz Fanon, "Indications of Electroconvulsive Therapy within Institutional Therapies," in Khalfa and Young, *Frantz Fanon: Alienation*; for its political implications, see David Marriott, "Inventions of Existence: Sylvia Wynter, Frantz Fanon, Sociogeny, and 'the Damned'," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 11, no. 3 (Winter 2011): 45–89.
- 50 Gabriel, "Gender as Accumulation Strategy," 22.
- 51 Gabriel, "Two Senses," 138, 143, 152.
- 52 With Devin Fore, I am working on this complex under the title "Fantasies of the People." We started from a conference in March 2025; see <https://fantasyinitiative.humanities.princeton.edu/>.
- 53 Khalfa and Young, *Frantz Fanon: Alienation*, 180.
- 54 Keguro Macharia discusses Fanon's twisted relation to both homosexuality and heterosexual feminization in *Frottage: Frictions of Intimacy Across the Black Diaspora* (New York University Press, 2019), 31–60.
- 55 For a critical discussion of alienation's (Lacanian) psychoanalytic ineluctability, see Samo Tomšič, "From Narcissism to Alienation," in *The Labour of Enjoyment* (August Verlag, 2021), 99–171.
- 56 Verity Spott, "Against Transition—A Trans* Manifesto," in *Prayers Manifestos Bravery* (Pilot Press, 2018), 24.
- 57 Laurel Uziell, *T* (Materials, March 2020), unpaginated, emphasis in the original.
- 58 This concept is lifted from the work of the feminist publicist and materialist historian of artistic labor Lu Märten, who insists that art cannot be cut off from "the whole life-work of a human." See Lu Märten, "Die künstlerischen Momente der Arbeit in alter und neuer Zeit," *Formen für den Alltag: Schriften, Aufsätze, Vorträge* (Verlag der Kunst, 1982 [1903]), 14.
- 59 MYSTI, EVERYONE'S PERSONAL BECAME POLITICAL & LANGUAGE MEANT NOTHING (pub. by author, 2022), 32–33.
- 60 Christina von Braun, *Die schamlose Schönheit des Vergangenen* (neue kritik, 1999), 55.
- 61 And thus important books in a different key, oriented toward the necessary labor of surviving love, are intentionally missing here, like bell hooks's countless books on love's practice; most famously, *all about love* (William Morrow, 2001).
- 62 Gisela Dischner, "Gedanken-Spiele zum orphischen Narzißmus," in *Romantische Utopie, Utopische Romantik*, ed. Gisela Dischner and Richard Faber (Gerstenberg, 1979), 271.
- 63 Gorsen contributed a highly problematic and very timely essay to the exhibition catalogue for Jean-Christoph Ammann's *Transformer: Aspekte der Travestie* (Kunstmuseum Luzern, 1975).
- 64 The writings on narcissism contesting Freud's "On Narcissism" of 1914 are countless, and all are attempting to take sex out of Freud's hands. See, for example, and famously, Leo Bersani's chapter "Erotic Assumptions: Narcissism and Sublimation in Freud," in *The Culture of Redemption* (Harvard University Press, 1990), 29–46 or Caroline Rupprecht's "Reading Freud's 'On Narcissism'" in her *Subject of Delusions: Narcissism, Modernism, Gender* (Northwestern University Press, 2006), 27–56, or Julia Kristeva's classic "Narcissus: The New Insanity" in her *Tales of Love* (Columbia University Press, 1987), 103–21.
- 65 Walter Benjamin, *Der Begriff der Kunstkritik in der deutschen Romantik* (Suhrkamp, 2008 [1918/19]).
- 66 Claus Träger, *Geschichte und Romantik* (Akademie Verlag, 1984).

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- 67 Sylvia Wynter, "The Ceremony Must Be Found: After Humanism," *boundary 2* 12, no. 3 (1984): 19–7.
- 68 Dischner, "Gedanken-Spiele," 289.
- 69 Dischner, "Gedanken-Spiele," 271.
- 70 Jean Laplanche and J. B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis* (Hogarth Press, 1988), 296.
- 71 Laplanche and Pontalis, *Language of Psychoanalysis*, 409.
- 72 Dischner, "Gedanken-Spiele," 272.
- 73 Maxi Wallenhorst, "Like a Real Veil, Like a Bad Analogy: Dissociative Style and Trans Aesthetics," *e-flux* 117 (April 2021), http://worker01.e-flux.com/pdf/article_385637.pdf.
- 74 See von Braun, *Die schamlose Schönheit*, 53–64; Gisela Dischner, *Madame Lucifer: Bürgerliche Vereinzelung und romantische Geselligkeit* Caroline Schelling, *gesch. Schlegel* (Traugott Bautz, 2011).
- 75 Hemingway, "Romantic Anticapitalism," 200.
- 76 Leo Bersani, *The Death of Stéphane Mallarmé* (Cambridge University Press, 1982), 9.
- 77 Emile Novis (Simone Weil), "What the Occitane Inspiration Consists of," in Robertson, *Anemones*, 76.
- 78 Dischner, "Gedanken-Spiele," 278.
- 79 See, for example, Peter Osborne's resurrections of the Jena boys: Peter Osborne, "Romantic Transdisciplinarity: Dossier I. Introduction," *Radical Philosophy* 196 (March/April 2016), https://www.radicalphilosophyarchive.com/issue-files/rp196_dossier_osborne_introduction37.pdf.
- 80 Friedrich Schlegel quoted in Dischner, *Lucifer*, xi.
- 81 Gabriel, "Gender as Accumulation Strategy," 22.
- 82 Dischner, "Gedanken-Spiele," 280.
- 83 Schlegel quoted in Dischner, "Gedanken-Spiele," 293.
- 84 See Jean Laplanche, "Sexuality and the Vital Order in Psychical Conflict," in Jean Laplanche, *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 25–47.
- 85 For its most indicative introduction, see Ilse Gubrich-Simits, ed., *Sigmund Freud, A Phylogenetic Fantasy* (Harvard University Press, 1987).
- 86 Lauren Berlant and Lee Edelman, *Sex or the Unbearable* (Duke University Press, 2013), 21.
- 87 Lauren Berlant, *Desire/Love* (punctum books, 2012), 78.
- 88 Jean-Luc Evard, "Technik der Metapher, Metapher der Technik," in Dietmar Kamper, *Macht und Ohnmacht der Phantasie* (Sammlung Luchterhand, 1986), 196.
- 89 Jean Laplanche, *New Foundations for Psychoanalysis* (UIT, 2016).
- 90 Jordy Rosenberg, *Critical Enthusiasm: Capital Accumulation and the Transformation of Religious Passion* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 9.
- 91 James Baldwin in the documentary *Meeting the Man: James Baldwin in Paris*, directed by Terence Dixon, United Kingdom and France, 1970, the snippet in question is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6xpE2-IGPy8>.
- 92 See, in addition to the previously quoted sources, Joy James, *In the Pursuit of Revolutionary Love: Precarity, Power, Communities* (Divided Publishing, 2002) and María Lugones, *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition against Multiple Oppressions* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2003).
- 93 June Jordan, "Where Is the Love?" (1980), in *Making Face, Making Soul / Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Women of Color*, ed. Gloria Anzaldita (Aunt Lute Books, 1990), 176.
- 94 Uziell, T, unpaginated.