

ONE IMPERATIVE

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These women would never sleep with me

She sits there. Looking. Looking at you, at me, at us, but at the same time just looking. There is no indication that we even matter, that we are even there.

We look at her sitting there. And see that she is looking at us. But we can only see her looking with one eye. So we will never know if she is looking only at us, or if her other eye is seeing something else, someone else, someone that we will never know of.

This is something that we will always remain blind to.

And it is this blind that interests us. Perhaps the question is not so much what lies beneath the blind, behind the blind, of what remains blind to us, nor is it a question of what is in front of the blind, but rather what the blind itself is.

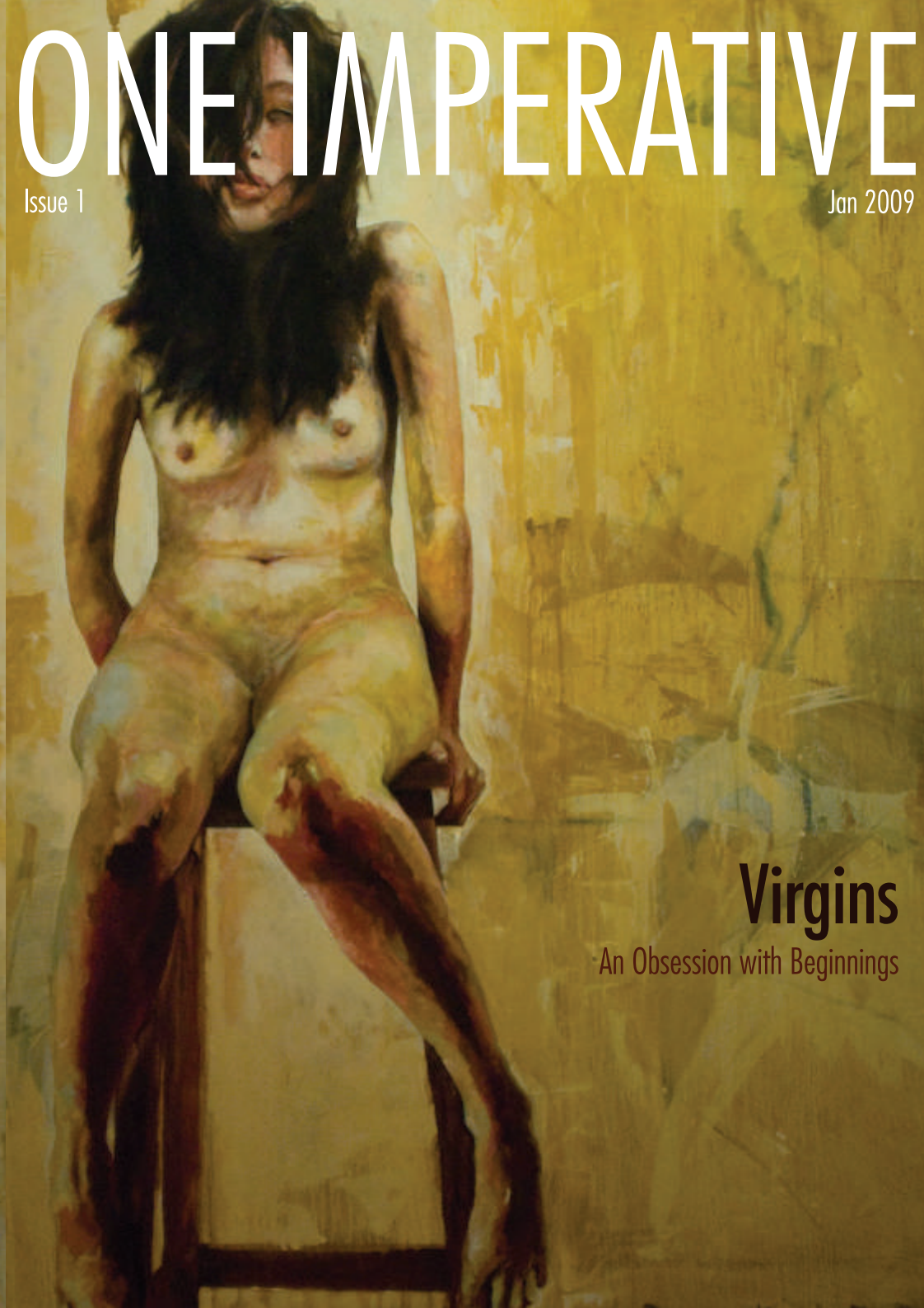
After all, is not the hymen another shield, another veil, another blind, one that only appears to be broken, split, ruptured, only to reveal that one is within folds, layers, all of which reveal and unveil and hide at the same time – like the splitting of the veil in the temple, all that is revealed is that the secret of God remains; an unknown, an unknowable, which can only be sometimes glimpsed.

Perhaps all that we can say in the end is that we see. And that she sees.

What is seen is the very possibility of seeing itself.

- *Jeremy Fernando*

Cover painting | Nigel Heng
| *These Women I Would Never Sleep With*
| 2008
| Oil and Acrylic



Virgins

An Obsession with Beginnings

THE FIRST TIME

OR

BY JEREMY FERNANDO

I WANT TO MAKE

SURE IT'S

YOUR LAST

AN OBSESSION WITH BEGINNINGS.

And the fantasy of the original: along with the aura that comes with it: the aura that surrounds the first, the beginning, and the power that comes along with it, the power of credibility, of authority, of being the source.

This is why correction fluid has become indispensable in our stationary drawers – this desperate attempt to over-write a word, a line, a smudge – as if by putting a layer over it, we can over it up, erase it completely, as if that banishing it from sight will equate to banishing its memory, banishing it from memory.

This is a denial that all experiences are literally written on our bodies, which is also why, tattoos have been traditionally frowned upon unless administered by the particular society the person lives in (in the form of tribal marks): in this case one has to have a particular set of tattoos which indicate that one is part of the tribe. So it is not as if the person is free to choose: the wrong set of marks would forever brand the person as an outsider, an outcast. This is the case when prisoners get marked by the state – they are literally branded for life. This is due to the fact that tattoos are a literal, ‘this is what I have gone through’ – symbolic of a particular passage, or trial, that the person has gone through. In the case of personal tattoos – that is when the person has made a free choice to mark themselves with a particular phrase, design or image – it is an indication that ‘this symbol means

something to me’ and even more blatantly, ‘this is what I have gone through whilst you were not in my life’. It is the absolute singularity of the tattoo that truly terrifies: it is a marking, a recording, a remembering of an experience, a thought, an event that is only known (and perhaps experienced) by the person wearing the tattoo: it is accessible to no one else. All any other can know is the representation of the event, the image on the person: and all that this image reveals – and remains a constant reminder to – is the fact that there is a secret you will never be privy to.

All of this is a hangover of the Enlightenment: and specifically in the belief in transcendental Truths and origins. It is this hang-up with the power that comes along with being the origin, the first, the author that lends itself to the societal obsession with virginity, with virgins. It is for this reason that everyone wants to be a virginal experience, the virginal experience – as if in order to be special one has to be the first. In effect, what is being said is the obscene ‘I want to be the first to write myself on your body’: which really translates to ‘if I’m not the first to do anything with you, then it is not meaningful at all’.

But as always, the thing that we fear most almost always gives us hope. Just like tattoos, experiences are always added on. More crucially, they are not added on like Lego building blocks (one more piece to an already present structure) but are always already constantly re-constructed. In some way, this is how memory works: we are not actually looking back to a past whenever we remember something – what occurs is a reconstruction of an event (that has happened previously) but in this re-writing, we actually bring it into the present precisely by re-remembering it, by bringing it to life again. Hence an additional tattoo is not merely one more in a collection of other tattoos, but a reconstitution of the entire surface of your body: your body is literally being (re)written again. And likewise, another experience is the re-writing of your life-story once again.

The fact that every experience is a reconstitution of the entire realm of experiences, a restructuring of one's entire memory, does not make any first-experience any less important. But neither does it elevate virginity into the realm of the sacred (make no mistake, there is a religiosity at play here: the obsession with virginity and its link with the Virgin Mary cannot be denied). In fact, this obsession probably has an obscene link with the primordial 'yes' that was uttered to Gabriel: perhaps there is always a harboring of a secret obsession that all virgins will utter 'yes'. The operating logic in this instance is that without experience, one does not have a mind of one's own: we see this operating in the Law as well (persons

below some arbitrary age are deemed minors who are not responsible – and hence cannot be held accountable – for their own actions).

The obsession with beginnings: a manifestation of the wish for a 'yes' to every request: which translates brutally to a desire of dominance over another. This is the legacy of the Enlightenment – the spectre of the logos – that continues to haunt us.

In many ways, the poster-boy of the Enlightenment is the Marquis de Sade. This is because de Sade is the one who takes Immanuel Kant to the extremes: by applying the imperative to every situation, de Sade demonstrates the fact that a reliance on a single truth – one that is decided a priori – is the effacement of the singularity of every situation. This is the problem that Jacques Lacan points out in *Kant avec Sade* – in such a case, there is no other that is responded to, as no matter what the situation is, the method is always the same: whilst this doesn't necessarily mean that the resulting response is exactly the same, it does subsume the situation under the same conception, the same category. In this manner, the will of the other is not taken into account; in effect the will of the other – and the other her/ him self – is effaced. This is why in a sadistic relationality, it is unimportant whether the sadist is beating the victim or vice-versa: what is crucial is that it is the sadist that is telling the victim precisely what to do. For instance, in de Sade's *Philosophy of the Boudoir*, it is not so much that Eugenie is liberated, but the fact that Dolmance, Madame

De Saint-Ange and Le Chevalier de Mirvel, choose to train her into a libertine, and more precisely to mold her, transform her, into the libertine of their desires. In fact, there is no negotiation between the sadist and her/ his victim: it is merely the manifestation of the will of the sadist over the other. And since the other is effaced, there might as well not be any other: it is the sadist projecting her/ him self onto her/ his victim.

Sadism and the effacement of the will of the Other. Literally a logic of 'I not only want to write myself into your existence, but I want to write my existence into you: I want to make you into my existence, I want to make you into me'.

The obsession with virginity or the wish to wipe out everyone else. □

CURT

by Lim Lee Ching

Waiting and baiting on the narrowing perch,
The centre holds them still.
A trunk, a branch – of streets and lanes,
Of skinny legs and weathered shoulders.

Desire will not feed the hungry.
The calm day light belies the ruffled nights,
The night masked the day
Of fight, of fright,
And frenzied feeding against stained walls.

No one knew when the armed men arrived.
All heard the sprays of delight,
Some muffled glee and much flight.
Lead and ladder reached the heights.
The sprays of resolution,
The sprays of anger and hatred and petty delight.

The descent followed shortly after.
Everyone a little death.

Desire will not teach the ignorant.
Who will teach their young
Of fight and flight?
In the evening, more returned
To wait and bait on their trembling perch.

To prevent the rain from falling, do this:

Find an onion, as big as your hand, with a flat base so that it will stand on its own. Cut a hole in the top, as wide as your index finger. Next find a chili, large and red. Push the fat end of the chili into the hole in the onion. The tip of the chili should point upwards, towards the sky. Four of these charms are needed in all. One must be placed at each corner of the patch of open ground to be warded against rain. The chilies and onions may be prepared by anyone who knows how. But (and this is the crucial bit) to give the charms their power, they must be placed by a virgin.

Let's be clear on what we're dealing with here. This is ritual. An honest-to-goodness circle (or 'oblong' to be pedantic) of power. This is domestic abjuration, kampong sorcery – practical and benign. The belief in the magic of the mundane. The transmogrification of the natural into the supernatural through ceremony and belief. This is the stuff of the occult, the pagan, an antiquated rite, a throwback to the bomoh shamanism of Southeast Asia. A world in which faith, not empiricism, forms the basis for logic. Where communities demonstrated their desires to the greater world around them through the acting out of old stories, in which every member was simultaneously audience and spectator, witness and participant. It is not surprising then that my first encounter with this ritual in modern-day Singapore was through the auspices of Theatre.

I was a member of a youth theatre group. We were putting on an outdoor performance for children, in which I wore a latex mask and played a pig ("Hamlet"). For a week in June, from about mid-morning to mid-day, we wanted clear skies. And so chilies and onions were brought, a few quick whispers were exchanged for surreptitious nods of confirmation, and finally one of the younger actresses was nominated as our ritual virgin.

Now, this last step was more challenging than it may seem. Consider that we were a troupe of 16-25 year-old actors, a profession whose members may typically be classified as people who are comfortable with our bodies, expressive with our emotions, chronically insecure and desperately seeking affirmation. To my knowledge, no actress has ever qualified for chili-and-onion duty two years in a row.

It worked. For a week in June, the sun burned down with merciless fury. The sweat pouring down my brow soon dissolved the flimsy costume glue attaching the pig mask to my face. In one show, it fell off completely in the middle of a scene. A child, no more than five, stood up and cried "It's a person!" despondently, his faith in make-believe lost forever.

The ritual worked. And so, we continued to use it, year after year. Unscientific, perhaps. But, in our minds, proven.

CHILI IN THE ONION: *MYTHS AND THE VIRGINITY CONDITION*

BRENDON FERNANDEZ

Among those outside of the theatre scene (“normal people”), not so many know of it anymore. When the Reigning Lee alluded to it in an impromptu F1 interview, most Singnetizens were quick to hop on roflcopters, proclaiming the incident another mee siam mai hum moment. Who could blame them? After confusing molluscs with condiments, any food-related comment was bound to be suspect. Chilies and onions to stop the rain?

But he forgot the most important part. The virgin! The trigger, the primer, the catalyst for the transformation of vegetable carving into weather totem. Or so I thought. What I eventually found was that while the chili and onion rain-proof charm is relatively well-established in our folklore, it seems no one else had ever heard tell of a virgin being involved. This story almost ended there: No virgin connection, no article.

Then I realised my mistake. We’re talking about myths here. My mind was still confined by the language of representative sample sizes and statistical variation, in which the beliefs and practices of my little youth theatre group would have to be justified against those of the majority. Statistically, our unique “virgin condition” would register as deviant, an aberration, negligibly represented, and ultimately as irrelevant as a Singaporean opposition party.

But myths don’t work that way.

1. When he was asked by ITV’s Martin Brundle if he was expecting rain during Singapore’s inaugural F1 Grand Prix, Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong replied “All our people put up chilies and onions to prevent the rain from coming down.”

2. In his 2006 National Day Rally speech, Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong attempted a locally-themed witticism, with disastrous results. PM Lee (or his speechwriter) was probably going for the phrase “mee siam mai hiam”, which means “one order of mee siam (a local dish of vermicelli in light gravy), no chili”. What he said was “mee siam mai hum”, which means “one order of mee siam, no cockles”. Mee siam is traditionally served with salted soy beans, dried bean curd, half a boiled egg, tamarind, and garnished with spring onions and Chinese chives. It has never, ever been served with cockles. If this footnote makes no sense to you whatsoever, don’t fret. Go to YouTube.com and enter “mee siam mai hum” in the search field. Enjoy

CHILI IN THE ONION: *MYTHS AND THE VIRGINITY CONDITION*

BRENDON FERNANDEZ

At some point in the history of our little youth theatre group, whilst in the process of passing on the chili and onion ritual to the next generation of actors, someone had chosen to introduce the virginity condition. From that point on, the myth became less about the rain, or chilies and onions, and more about us. We had an excuse to ask for and share intimate details, and were bound to protect each others' secrets lest our own be revealed. We were compelled to pass on the myth to new members, because as we matured we were no longer able to perform the ritual ourselves. The virginity condition modified the original chili-and-onion myth, giving it a new, intensely personal dimension, a social relevance within the group dynamic, and from that point forward, the guarantee of its own perpetuation, all in one fell swoop.

In myths then, the virginity condition functions as a “mythology augments.” First, it localises the myth that it modifies. You have to admit, the idea that you can use kitchen spices to prevent rain, or the belief that unicorns exist, or that the son of God once walked amongst us, or the promise that the faithful will receive palatial rewards in the afterlife, are, on their own, kind of wack. But add (respectively) the virgin as ritual activator, the virgin as chaste and worthy rider, the sinless virgin as Mother of God, or the 72 virgin Houri as a reward for the faithful (male) in Paradise, and suddenly we find that we have a reference point for these heretofore trippy concepts. Virginity is the most human of magics, at once familiar and sacred. We recognize it as a special state of being. It is a state of latent potential, of power. It is the condition (at least in the female) of purity, the state of treasured abundance, of having something precious, delicate and transient that, once lost, is lost forever. Our holy texts, our rituals and our folklore have elevated virginity to the realm of mythology, where it occupies a unique position as the only state that each and every one of us is born into, and thus guaranteed to experience, however fleetingly. From the moment we knew we had it, we were thinking of ways to lose it..

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Second, because virginity is a condition that is increasingly difficult for a given number of people to satisfy as time goes by, any myth that is augmented by the virginity condition must at some point be shared with new people outside the original number, or it will die out. This dovetails perfectly with the nature of myths themselves. It is through the passing on of myths to a new generation of believers and practitioners that myths attain their status as artifacts of “tradition,” “custom” and “culture” within the shared consciousness of the communities that perpetuate them. In other words, for myths to survive we must share them with our children, and if the myths in question happen to contain the virginity condition, then our children are the only ones who can practise them on our behalf.

THE END

Of course, all of this is just idle conjecture.

Someone in the youth theatre group may just have wanted to identify the actresses who weren't virgins anymore, as those who would be more likely to put out on a date.

CHILI IN THE ONION: *MYTHS AND THE VIRGINITY CONDITION*

BRENDON FERNANDEZ

Sartre and the Perennial Virgin

At the heart of existentialism, lies the claim that 'existence precedes essence'. It was born as a response to the metaphysical theory that identifies essence as key to existence. This famous dictum has been attributed largely to the French philosopher Jean Paul Sartre - it is the idea that the self ought to refrain from identifying with a singular essence and instead, exist within a constant awareness of future possibilities, that is, a self that is continually 'becoming'. A useful way for us to understand this idea would be to link it to the concept of virginity. Taken as a noun in its literal sense, a virgin refers to a man or woman who has not engaged in sexual intercourse. Used as an adjective – metaphorically – virginity suggests not having experienced something before. For example, I might say, if it is my first attempt at sky diving, that it is a “virgin” experience; a new or initial experience. We also often hear people talk about “born again virgins.” What they are referring to is someone who has 'lost' their virginity (by engaging in sexual intercourse) deciding to, from the point of that decision, to abstain from further sex. This makes them a 'reborn' virgin. Obviously this is not truly the case, and we should understand this phrase symbolically rather than literally. I want to suggest here, that we link the Sartrean notion of 'becoming' with this sense of virginity. When Sartre suggests that existence precede essence, he means that the self ought to be in a constant state of concurrently losing and regaining its virginity; the perpetual act of being 'reborn' a virgin. This he seems to suggest, is the authentic way for a person to live.

To better understand the link we must look at some of the foundations of Sartre's thinking. We begin by discussing the differences between being-in-itself and being-for-itself. Then, I'll try to show how the being-for-itself experiences negation and a sense of lack, which together with its existence within temporality (or time), affects its quest for freedom and authenticity.

The main questions to be answered are:

1. What exactly is this 'born again virgin' philosophy?
2. Is it the most authentic way of living?

by Anu Selva

In order to evaluate the authenticity of the 'born-again-virgin' philosophy, we must first consider what Sartre means by 'person'. To explain his conception of personhood, he creates two groups. The first group is what he terms being-in-itself. Being-in-itself is a description of object-hood. It is that which is part of the material world and is neither active nor passive. It simply is. It cannot be anything that it is not, in the same sense that a book cannot become a mug, and consequently we may say it does not possess possibility.

Ilham Diman writes in his book *Free Will*, that, "the being-in-itself is what it is by virtue of the properties it possesses, including its causal properties. These give it a positive being." What Dilman means by positive, is a mode of being given to us by something external and that is fixed in the sense that it does not will anything for itself. The being-in-itself succumbs to externalities acting upon it and has no control, choice or opinion on what happens to it. Sartre, in *Being and Nothingness*, relates this kind of being to something he calls facticity.

Facticity is a term that was first used by Martin Heidegger. It refers to aspects of 'our 'world' that we have no control over. These would include things like race, gender, environment, family background and even chance. These elements, though a large influence on our existence and our futures, were not freely chosen. Heidegger refers to the involuntary push into this situation as 'throwness'.

Facticity is also described in *Being and Nothingness* as "the coefficient of adversity of things." Gary Cox points out in *Sartre: a guide for the perplexed*, that this coefficient refers to "the world around a person in so far as it presents a constant resistance to his actions and projects – difficulties, obstacles, entanglements, snags, distances, heaviness, instability, fragility, complexity, and so on." In summary, facticity is that which is unchangeable – be it circumstance or physical attributes.

Sartre's second group, is the being-for-itself (for-itself for short). The for-itself is transcendent; it is the facet of the human being that goes beyond the physical and material, including, the above-mentioned resistance, or facticity.

Dilman explains, "...man is capable of thinking, appraisal and judgment about his surroundings and the situations in which he acts, about himself and his actions, about his past and the future. He is therefore capable of making choices, forming intentions and projects, and so of determining the direction of his life."

For-itself is characterized by consciousness and in order to count as for-itself, one must embrace freedom and create one's own meaning. The for-itself also possesses reflexivity, it reflects on itself and its situation. Because it has no fixed essence, it also experiences possibility because it can become something that it is not.

The idea that we can become something that we are not brings us to the concept of negation. Alfred Stern says in his book *Sartre: His Philosophy and Existential Psychoanalysis* that for Sartre, to negate is to deny. For-itself must deny to itself that its essence is fixed and must realize that it may choose to be something that it is not at present. Sartre writes that the for-itself "... Is a being which is not what it is and which is what it is not." This means that being-for-itself by denying what it is can become what it is not. We may say that such a being is always reinventing itself.

Sartre says that a person is both facticity (being-in-itself) and transcendence (being-for-itself). But how is this possible given that they seem so different? Mary Warnock in *The Philosophy of Sartre*, attempts to explain how we can be both facticity and transcendence. She argues that facticity is the platform upon which we build our free choices. What does this mean? We know we are part of the natural world and embody characteristics that we did not actively choose. This acceptance is the acceptance of ourselves as being-in-itself. According to Warnock, Sartre does not say that there are no such things as physical limitations but rather even though there are some things limited by physical constraints, it is only when we acknowledge these constraints that we can choose to live with them in way or another; that is, make free choices based on our facticity.

As I mentioned earlier, in working towards these projected desires/self-created lacks, the self aims to mesh facticity with transcendence in the attempt to engage in this process authentically. Sartre refers to this as the “desire to be God” and claims it is the rudimentary project of man's existence. He writes, “It is as if the world, man, and man-in-the-world express an abortive attempt to become God. It is as if the in-itself and the for-itself reveal themselves in a state of disintegration with respect to an ideal synthesis. Not that the integration has ever taken place, but precisely on the contrary because it is permanently suggested and permanently impossible ... the idea of God is contradictory and we lose ourselves in vain: man is a useless passion.”

Gary Cox aims to clarify this point when he writes, “By choosing itself as a particular kind of lack it (for-itself) hopes to make sense of its being by overcoming that lack; as though in a final act of complete overcoming it could establish an ultimate *raison d'être* for its otherwise contingent being.” He goes on to say that this desire for a determinate self is not actually achievable without destroying the self. We conclude then, that in order to be authentic, the desire to overcome the lack cannot ever be fulfilled, and the self must be in constant search for virgin experience.

We've begun to touch on what the self needs to do in order to embrace freedom and exist authentically. A look at temporality and some of the problems with Sartre's conception of freedom might offer deeper insight as to whether the born-again-virgin philosophy is an ideal model to adhere to.

Sartre's notion of temporality is largely based on Heidegger's. Temporality refers to the situatedness of the self within time – exactly how does the for -itself engage and exist within the past, present and future? Heidegger argued that *Dasein* (the indeterminate self) exists temporally, in the sense that it is neither here nor there; its meaning and position are never fixed. Cox explains temporality like this, “ ... an object in motion never occupies an exact location ... if it occupied an exact location at any particular moment as it moved then it would be at rest. Therefore an object in motion must be neither here nor there.” He goes on to point out that though this example is spatial in nature, the general idea applies to the concept of temporality.

It is evident that Sartre draws from Heideggarean ideas – the for-itself can be said to experience the past, present and future simultaneously. He writes, “the for-itself...can and must at the same time fulfill these three requirements, (1) to not be what it is, (2) to be what it is not, (3) to be what it is not and to not be what it is – within a unity of a perpetual referring. Here we are dealing with three ekstastic dimensions; the meaning of the ekstasis is distance from self ... the for-itself is a being which must simultaneously exist in all its dimensions.” What Sartre is arguing here is that there aren't technically separate ekstasies (or temporal dimensions); they should be looked at as unified. The for itself continually leaves the present for the future, never coinciding with the present or what is present in the future.

In light of virgin experience, there is no real moment of 'losing one's virginity' or 'regaining' it. Now that we have come this far in our analysis, it seems more correct to say that the concept of born again virginity is actually moot for someone who wants to exist authentically, because there isn't actually a moment of losing or regaining – virgin experience is perpetual and never ending - a flight of the self from the self, towards the self.

Cox points out that a useful way to understand Sartrean freedom is to consider the relationship between past and future. He writes, “certainly it is Sartre's view of temporality, his view of the for-itself as essentially temporal, which renders plausible his view of the for-itself as necessarily free ... the freedom of the for-itself consists in the opening up of the possibilities of being. That is, the for-itself perpetually discovers itself in a world of possibilities which it realizes by virtue of its being a temporal surpassing towards the future.”

For Sartre, all human beings are necessarily free. He writes, “... my freedom is ... not a quality added on or a property of my nature. It is very exactly the stuff of my being.” And again he writes, “... we are not free to cease being free” and “... freedom ... is ours as a pure factual necessity ... one which I am not able not to experience.” Sartre says that there is no question that one is free. We can say then that one has freedom by default. The interest for Sartre is in whether we embrace our freedom or flee from it.

Let's for a moment go back to the analogy of the 'born again virgin'. We'll consider it literally to start with. Facticity in the case of the born again virgin, is that he/she has engaged in sexual intercourse. This is not something that can change in so far as we cannot go back in time to undo the virgin act of sex which took place. What Warnock argues in lieu of Sartre is that one can embrace the loss of virginity and choose freely how to interpret and deal with it. The loss of virginity therefore becomes a condition for reinventing the self rather than an impediment. Sartre writes, "There is freedom only in situation and there is situation only through freedom". Alfred Stern bolsters this argument by saying, "Nobody can escape from a jail in which he has not been imprisoned...we are only free with respect to, and in spite of, a given situation"; the given situation in this case being the loss of virginity. However, we should not limit the scope of this argument to only virginity in the literal sense; it should merely be an example that can be applied to show that any mode of being can be transcended and the self can be 'reborn'.

Apart from the acknowledgement of one's facticity, another condition necessary for the process of reinvention is the acknowledgement of a lack. Cox says, "Every situation is understood not in terms of what is but in terms of what it lacks, and what every situation lacks is precisely the for-itself." By this he means that the for-itself makes of the lack, whatever it wants to – it interprets and engages it based on its own desires, expectations and determinations.

To further illustrate this suggestion, Sartre offers the example of the crescent moon. He writes, "For example, if I say that the moon is not full and that one quarter is lacking, I base this judgment on full intuition of the crescent moon ... In order for this in-itself to be grasped as the crescent moon, it is necessary that a human reality surpass the given towards the project of the realized totality – here the disk of the full moon – and return toward the given to constitute it as the crescent moon." He then goes on to say, "It is the full moon which confers on the crescent moon its being as crescent; what is not determines what is. It is in the being of the existing, as the correlate of a human transcendence, to lead outside itself to the being which it is not – as to its meaning." Sartre means that the lack felt by the for-itself is a lack of itself. It is, at any given time, what it is. But also, what it is lacking. The for-itself must go beyond its current mode of existing ("lead outside itself") to fulfill this lack. As Cox writes, "The lack that the for -itself has to be is revealed by desire and the fact that desire per se can never be satisfied." The for-itself has to ensure this constant state of lack through the correct awareness of what desire entails. When speaking of the satisfaction of desires, he suggests that the achievement of any desire is "immediately surpassed" by another, extended desire. In this way, the lack is never fulfilled. He writes, "As the negation of being it (the for-itself) must surpass any particular obtained object of desire towards a further unobtained object of desire." Again at this point, let's stop to make the connection to virgin experience. Sartre's position then seems to suggest that the for-itself, ought to never be fully satisfied with achieving any desire and as such constantly engage in the cycle of desiring, achieving the intended and desiring further. This cyclical existence means the for-itself is constantly engaging in virgin experience; remaking the 'old' self in lieu of a never experienced before encounter with the next intended or further extended 'object of desire'.

In embracing our freedom, we must be able to choose a course of action. Our motives, which, we shall assume, are freely formed, help us pick the virgin experience to undertake. Mary Warnock argues that a motive must include thoughts about the future. The ability to conceive of alternate future outcomes, a range of virgin possibilities, is essential to our capacity for freedom. If we do not conceive of alternative future outcomes, there is a strong likelihood that we will be unaware or forget that we are free to be constantly reborn, to keep inventing ourselves.

Sartre writes, "For a human being, to be is to choose himself; nothing comes to him from without or from within himself that he can receive or accept (or better: that he has to receive or accept). He is wholly and helplessly at the mercy of the unendurable necessity to make himself be ... This freedom ... is the being of man, that is to say his non-being." Freedom, is clearly, choice. And this could well include a radical change in one's values and consequently, projects.

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I don't think this necessarily poses a problem for our task here. While it may be true that unobstructed free choice is not possible, I showed earlier, that choice can exist even within the constraints of facticity. Moreover, what we need to take away from this is not a fool proof guide to being authentic but more an intuitive sense of what it means to exercise freedom in the quest to live fully.

In fact, the Sartrean perception of authenticity is one that we cannot define certainly. No where in his writings does he actually give a precise explanation of what it is to be authentic, we only come to an understanding of it through the suggestions he makes for the best way of 'being'.

In War Diaries, Sartre argues with the example of Paul, the soldier claiming to be a "civilian in disguise," that authenticity is taking responsibility for one's choices. In not accepting his choice to be a soldier and convincing himself and others that he is a civilian in disguise, Paul has not responsibly embraced his choice; he is attempting to escape the "being-in situation." When one makes a choice, invents oneself, throws oneself in the face of a virgin experience, one must take responsibility for this way of being. Sartre writes, " to be authentic is to realize fully one's being-in situation, whatever this situation may happen to be, with profound awareness that, through the authentic realization of the being-in situation, one brings to plenary existence the situation on the one hand and the human reality on the other. This presupposes a patient study of what the situation requires, and then a way of throwing oneself into it and determining oneself to 'be-for' this situation."

Sartre's point here is that Paul should embrace his choice to be a soldier and be the best soldier he can be. This does not mean that Paul should 'act' at being a soldier, adopt what he believes to be soldierly behavior and mannerisms. Instead he should avoid sidestepping responsibility for his choice, avoid making excuses as to why he is not engaging with his choice to be a soldier (that is, suggesting he is a civilian in disguise) and start embracing his 'being-in' situation consciously and with a desire to not make excuses and not regret his choice.

The problem with Sartre's philosophy, some may argue, is that the notion of constantly being reborn a virgin means one does not have to take ownership over any mode of being, any role or choice. In fact, the opposite is true: being authentic means taking full responsibility for the fact that we are free to reinvent ourselves. The example of Paul, as well others that Sartre raises in *Being and Nothingness* clearly indicate that a self in denial, a self not wanting to react to situation or making excuses for choices they have made in an attempt to circumvent responsibility are guilty of bad faith, (the self attempting to deceive itself).

Some critics have argued that authenticity isn't achievable practically – that it is solely an intellectual project; that we can only assess our mode of being, be aware that we ought to exist as an amalgamation of being-in and being-for-itself, reflect and posit, but not actually ever attain authenticity. Some others have argued that desiring to be authentic is not even possible in Sartrean philosophy because if we are free by default, then we are authentic by default. Any attempt to become authentic and actually achieve it would be to objectify the self.

If we were to take this to be true, if authenticity is not anything we can actually acquire, it may seem pointless to adhere to this notion of constantly seeking out virgin existence. However, it may not be necessary that authenticity be a final goal to be grasped at the end; it could well be a goal that one works towards, where the process, the quest for authenticity, is what is more authentic than achieving the goal. If this is the case, then the impetus for recreating the self, constantly rebirthing the virginal self, is indeed substantial, at least because it allows us to exercise our freedom, explore potential and possibilities, reflect and recreate in a way that gives meaning and direction to our existence.

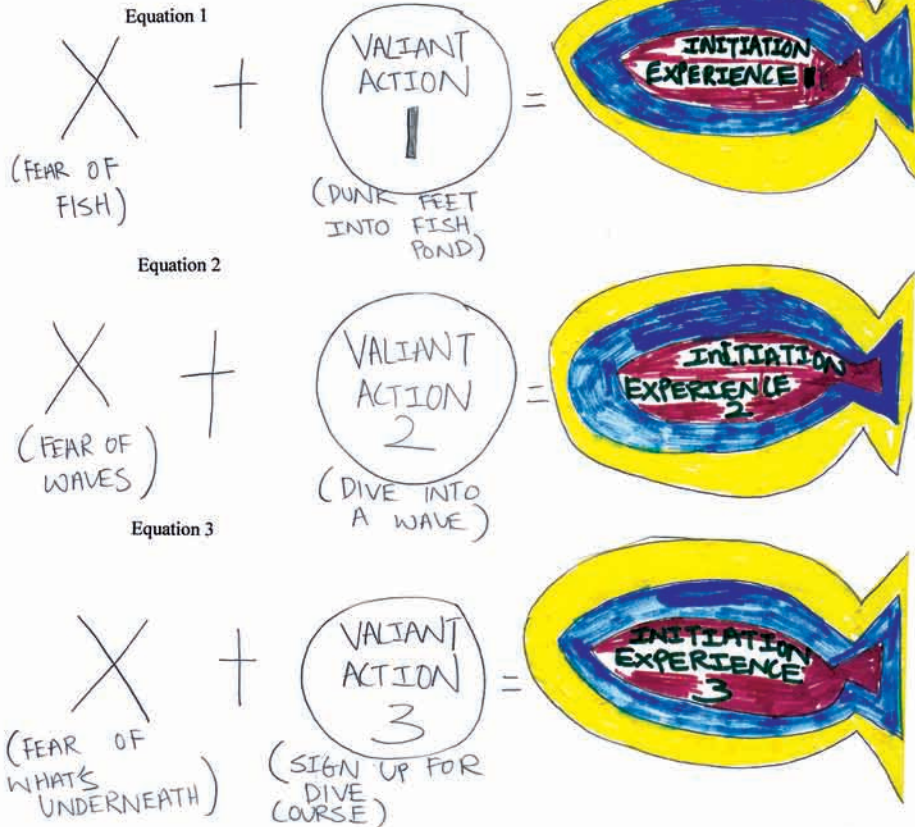
the end

Life is all about experiencing. When you get into a routine and no longer know what fresh means, you start living in a stale world and wonder why your life is starting to stink.

Everything in life is layered with challenges, challenges that we either run from or take on. Taking on a challenge leads us to an experience of initiation, we are no longer virgins but are faced with the next layer and become virgins yet again. So we need to focus on penetrating new layers of challenges lest we risk the danger of getting stuck in the staleness of born again virginity.

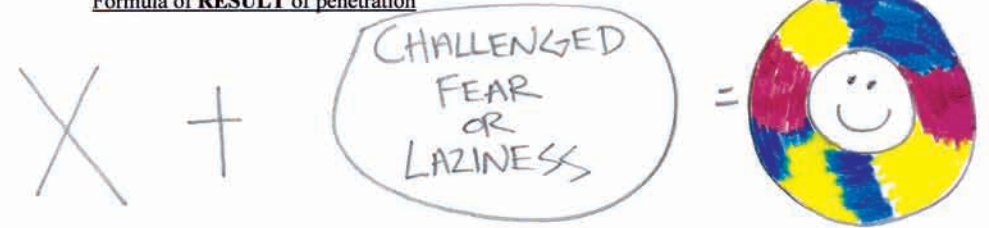
A fish has many layers..... so I've learnt. I was an aquatic virgin. Disney's 1989 documentary "The Little Mermaid" opened my eyes to the beauty of the ocean and I wanted to go under the sea but I was afraid of fish and the ocean. Hence, my challenge had 3 layers. 3 layers that took more than 10 years to penetrate, but I did it by facing my fears.

Formula for Aquatic Penetration



HENCE

Formula of RESULT of penetration



BUT

Don't worry, if you want to stay a virgin all your life, a.k.a live in staleness, muskiness and stagnancy it's easy, just follow either formula.

Virgin Formula 1



Virgin Formula 2



We don't want to live our lives in black and white. Any challenge is difficult but the colour of victory is vibrant. No amount of Rexona can cover the staleness of your canvas, but if we allow ourselves to devirginize ourselves, we can make our canvas look pretty instead of smelling bad.

Experienced Virginity

*A reflection on the creative processes of the
performer-creator in physical theatre practice.*
- Jocelyn Chua

“Every night should be your first.”

I recall an email sent by a fellow theatre practitioner some years ago, discussing how a performer should always execute every show – including rehearsals – with total freshness and 100% commitment, as if she has never before performed the said show. What was just as enlightening was the notion of the “second-day dip” which I encountered as an actress in a school production during my earlier theatre endeavours. A performance tends to suffer an infamous dip in energy on the second day of its run, with the cast having somewhat overcome the excitement - and unknown - of the opening night, thus lacking the initial adrenaline rush needed to power the following evening’s presentation. One realises the constant assertion for the theatre performer to approach every show as if it is your first, with full knowledge of the dramatic material on hand while not entirely fixing what happens next, or what to expect from your audiences each time. The performer is required to at once possess a fresh and un-premeditated state of being throughout her delivery while having thoroughly rehearsed and so being completely knowing of her next action, line or stage direction from one moment into the next. She is required to be virginal, new and uninitiated in her approach and yet possessing the necessary experience or background preparations in order to enter this state of creative virginity. With this, I find the concept of an experienced virginity a truly fit description of the skilled theatre performer’s persona in contemporary theatre practice. This paradox of simultaneous awareness and its seeming lack is especially manifest in the creative processes I will seek to highlight throughout this discussion on the performer-creator’s craft in physical theatre making.¹

If we regard virginity as a state of being uncultivated, unprocessed, pure, natural and unsullied, then the performer-creator-as-virgin entails the need to be in a psychosomatically pure, unsullied and natural state when exploring potential performance material for the stage. In particular, when employing improvisation as the key creative technique in devising a stage performance, one is often called on to “not think too much” or to drop all planned meanings in one’s actions, both mind and body taking that initial leap of impulse to come up with an improvised movement, sound or gesture. In fact, one could argue that almost every form of artistic creation involves this manner of improvisation, from the playwright filling a blank page, the musician striking that first chord, to the painter shaping images from scratch. In *The Paper Canoe*, Eugenio Barba (1936-), founder and director of Odin Teatret, Denmark, and director of the International School of Theatre Anthropology lends some light to this creative process by drawing on Arthur Koestler’s *The Sleepwalkers: A History of Man’s Changing Vision of the Universe*. Koestler shows how “every creative act – in science, in art or in religion – is accomplished through a preliminary regression to a more primitive level... a process of negation or disintegration which prepares the leap towards the result. Koestler calls this moment a creative ‘pre-condition’... a moment which seems to negate all that which characterizes the search for results... one loses control of the meaning of one’s own action.” In other words, “[t]he performer, the director, the researcher, the artist, all often ask themselves: ‘what is the meaning of what I am doing?’ But at the moment of the negation of the action, or of the creative ‘pre-condition’... it is not yet the meaning of what one is doing that is essential, but rather the precision of the action which prepares the void in which an unexpected meaning can be captured.” Barba’s pointer for the performer-creator to aspire towards this “pre-expressive level” is “[b]y forgetting what they want their actions to say, and what these actions must represent.” But how does one forget? How does one replicate that moment’s lost of control in the meaning of one’s own actions? How do I, as a theatre performer, consistently return to the virginity of a pre-cognitive state when devising material for a performance?

1. One can argue that all theatre is physical since the performer’s bodily presence is often the audience’s most direct experience of a play although perhaps in varying degrees across different productions. I am interested specifically in theatre that is formed of a more movement-driven approach than a text-based or psychologically driven approach. This is not to say the performer forfeits psychological or emotional engagement in favour of corporeal expression but rather that mind and body are inseparable. By focusing on physical training and expression, one is also engaging in mental processes. Creative techniques such as improvising with movement instead of text or characterisation through actions form some of the aspects in physical theatre practice.



The performer must undergo some form of preparation, in order to gain the necessary experience that would somehow invite the mind-body's entry into a state of non-predictive awareness – an emptiness or neutrality of the body that isn't so much ignorance but in fact filled or charged with expressive potential – a presence without foreknowledge but with a certain internalised well of possibilities, ready to act, to create, to deliver within the moment. (It is interesting to note with a biblical analogy that the Virgin Mary conceived Jesus by the Holy Spirit, an act of God akin to the conception of an artistic work by an act of inspiration – the artist or conceiver/creator remains virginal, pure, unknowing in the moment of creative conception, just as Barba explains that it is the precision of the action, the plain doing of it alone that is essential to pave the void or virgin territory in which meaning or artistic realisations later emerge. Meaning comes after the fact of that transition from the unknown into something new. It is no surprise that an artistic project is often labelled as one's "baby" and the period of materialising one's work often borrows gestation metaphors like "the fruits of one's labour," "giving birth to a concept," "a budding or ripening process." In that sense, theatre performance is also akin to a spiritual act – the immaculate conception of sacred forces at work in a given time and space.) The performer's so-called experience here, her preparation towards this virginal pre-expressive level, involves an ironic reductive process best epitomized by Jacques Copeau's (1879-1949) actor training philosophy under Le Vieux-Colombier in Paris. For the French dramatist, actor and producer, "an essential task in the training of the creative actor was to rediscover the child's instinct for play... achieved not through accretion and the addition of skills and techniques, but through a process of 'shedding' and stripping away, thereby removing socialised impediments to spontaneous play." Copeau emphasizes a physical training that would work at undoing all preconceived ideas and accumulated habits within the performer in order for her to re-acquire a childlike instinct for play and creativity – a virginal persona accessed specifically through movement preparation. This principle echoed a wider cultural movement in the West known as 'primitivism' whereby artists desired a return to simplicity or an unconscious creative impulse instead of relying on classical traditions in art making. It is the yearning for a purer existence, an ideal of the 'noble savage' uncorrupted by the structures of a modern industrialized society – in Copeau's case, the need to purify French theatre of its nineteenth-century performance gimmicks in order to return theatre to its imagined past.

Building on Copeau's legacy, Jacques Lecoq (1921-1999) developed the neutral mask as a teaching tool to prepare or 'purify' the actor towards an

experienced virginity in dramatic performance. Founder of the Ecole Internationale de Theatre Jacques Lecoq in Paris, Lecoq's pedagogy is an attempt "to return [the performer] to the precognitive state, freeing him to gather a new set of sensory impressions in a neutralised state of naiveté." Wearing a neutral mask that is designed to be void of any overt facial expressions, the student is encouraged to explore a physical relationship with her surroundings through an economy of movement, uninhibited by social habits, experience, anticipation, or predetermined ideas. The 'waking up' exercise, for example is employed to invite the student "to respond with an alive and alert neutrality – a kind of 'innocence' where the student experiences the world as if for the first time... essential[ing] the rhythms, patterns and textures of, for example, rubber, steel, glue, earth, air, a snake, an eagle, a tiger or a bee." Physical exercises are employed to direct attention towards the whole body of the mask wearer such that when the neutral mask is finally discarded in actual performance, the actor has a total body awareness that is ready to deliver onstage. Such movement training prepares the performer-creator to become an experienced virgin, where experience is internalised within the body and readily unleashed in the void of a creative pre-consciousness – what Lecoq's pedagogy terms as *disponibilité*, "a situation of balance which can draw upon an extensive range of possible movement and action which has been internalised in the preparatory work." This creative neutrality "engenders a state in which [performers] are ready to go into play, but not programmed to operate in a predetermined way. The 'waking up' exercise often used by Lecoq and others in neutral mask work indicates the desired condition: it's rather as if the whole body were 'full of eyes within' and they are all opening to an unfamiliar world." One can criticise this quest for neutrality or a pre-conscious innocence as a disagreeable approach in theatre making, somewhat obscuring the idea of 'difference', of bodies being sites uniquely inscribed by historical, social, cultural contexts and individual dispositions, in favour of an effacing universalism that perhaps overlooks or lends bias to certain human traits. However, Lecoq's concept of neutrality serves more as practical strategy than ideological dogma within a whole range of improvisation exercises the performer can potentially employ when devising a theatre performance.

On the basis of these physical theatre training processes embodying the idea of the creative precondition as the necessary void that precipitates inspiration in every performance, one can gather that in order to be a truly experienced theatre performer, one must above all else, be truly virginal.



Whimsical on a first note

Alice Tay

Almost unexpected on my virginal listen. Without warning, it loads me onto a film reel set on auto-rewind, and slowly flashes me glimpses I never imagine myself stepping back into.

Raw, precise and on the edge of the precipice. This album is.

The lyrics of the opening track, 'The Sky is Falling' caught me off guard. The combination of musical sensitivity and lyrics got me into an introspective mood. It's easy to like an album on a first listen, especially one with soothing melodies. But it's far less often that one feels as if she's going back into her monologues. Discomforting, almost disconcerting, at some points.

Sajid and the Lost Boys, hailing from New Delhi, comprises Sajid Akbar (singer-songwriter), Shekhu (guitars & ambient sounds), Mohit (tablas & percussion), Abhishek (bass), Anindo (keyboards) and Rajat (flute). Formed in 2006, the band has since garnered both critical acclaim and a following for their introspective and soulful tunes.

In *Kid Without Candy*, each track leaves a lingering aftertaste that grows deeper and richer with every note. Each song has its many different layers and tones that reflect the emotional complexities of the singer. The lyrics cut deep into the soul and the words reflect the intricate sensitivities of the singer's temperament. It's not so much the quality of Sajid's voice as the urge to uncover the stories behind his voice - his stories that seem to resonate across in a strangely familiar way.

My personal favourite is 'Mira'. The tune speaks of unrequited love and the constant reminder of feelings and snippets of memories for a special someone. The lyrics are uncomfortable, soothed perhaps by the acoustic guitar. It evokes a bittersweet feeling that stems from pain and solace and the constant need for self healing.

'Hold on' is one of the few songs with a more upbeat tempo. It speaks to me on a more personal level, where the journey of falling in love is at times more of a dilemma than bliss. The yearning to love and the fear of losing one's self is best expressed in the lines "Don't wanna love b'cause love spells weakness, never again do you get control."

'Late Afternoon Drive' has a certain worldly charm to it. The song is about moving with the flow of life and finding love the moment when you decide not to try. Begin

Kid Without Candy makes you re-open up your wounds and scars, and bear witness to your vulnerabilities. Perhaps, it's not about seeking reconciliation, but re-negotiating the fact that some pains can never heal, and perhaps will never heal. The worst wounds are often the firsts; each song mirrors your past and yet at the same time, allows you to re-look at yourself. And not a re-looking from just one's current situation, and context, but curiously from both time dimensions, almost as if there are two self's looking back on an event. Two different selves, both of whom (which?) are the same. Or wholly alien.

With each listen, you remember and forget different things. Monologues are never the same twice. And perhaps that's why life itself is always a continuity of the past, always virginal with every run.

Mellow and perfect for a solitary walk with one self. Almost surreal at some points, as if I woke up to a dream where I was chasing a certain impossible.

These are beautiful songs to keep.



a new, always.
virgins,
parcelling, iron y
graining

blurred event.uals
they are
liverish laughter
galliges gelächter.
eternal birthing
purifying vomit
a new, always.

defer:red times
gestundete zeiten: ingeborg.
the night be-nights
itself, themselves.
um-nachtet, ent-nachtet: unbearable lightness.

neuhaut. newskin. verschmiert, smeared moleskin.
gelüstete ge_zeiten. desired tides, times.
fallsüchtige mo_nu_mente. epileptic mo_nu_ments. gefälle,
greased word shells, gefettete worthülsen.

gegerbtes erstmals. tanned foremost at first.
umkränzte gewinde [crowned threads?]: re-floration.
virgins: image:less rest:less. legs closed.

scarless scarlets, two in one, it is the first time that counts,
gebrandete verneuerungen, surged denewals.

a new, always
a never

by Julia Hölzl

JEREMY FERNANDO

we are all **virgins**
we have also never been virgins

Whether this wiping out is possible or not is yet another question though. Since the recognition of virginity is based on signs (the most common one being the 'blood on the bed-sheets'), one must then consider the fact that there is no necessity of relationality between the signifier and the signified. If we are taking into account the hymen, then the fact is that it is a fragile membrane which can be ruptured in many ways: the fact that there are vaginal reconstruction surgeries widely available now further complicates the issue. Hence there is no actual way of being sure of whether one – or more precisely the other person – is a virgin or not: in fact all that one can base it on is faith. And it is this unknowability that makes us uncomfortable, and this discomfort results in the fetishization of virginity. And since fetishization is an act of abstraction, this suggests that virginity is now an empty signifier: it can mean both everything and nothing at exactly the same moment: it is everywhere precisely by being meaningless. And by being meaningless, it allows us to be 'anything you want it to be'.

And in this way virginity has captured our imagination.

Perhaps it is at this moment that we can reopen the register of the sacred. Since there is a ritual aspect to virginity, and the attestation to one's virginity is faith based, this suggests that it is a rite of passage of sorts. However if it is a rite where there is no phenomenological difference in the person before and after the rite, this suggests that the difference is beyond phenomenology itself, it is beyond any sensory experience. The convenient way would be to cast it as a psychological experience: however that still insists on it being a cognitive, or at least cognitizable, experience.

Whilst it would be foolish to claim that the rite of passage has no traces on oneself – this is clearly not true – the claim that it is cognitizable suggests that it is completely knowable and hence controllable: ultimately it is an anthropocentric gesture. If we allow ourselves a moment to acknowledge the potential unknowability when it comes to virginity (when we consider the fact that we can only recount events, and since they are based on memory, we can never rule out the fact that we may have forgotten something as we have no control over forgetting), then we might also consider the fact that the movement from virgin to non-virgin is ultimately an unknowable one.

The virgin and the non-virgin is precisely the same but different. Different in sameness. The rite of passage is one in which the person emerges different but exactly the same. And what is this but a moment of trans-figuration.

Perhaps then one might see the obsession of virginity in this light, or lack of light: the wish to wipe out everyone else precisely because one has no possibility of comprehending it in the first place: and not only the impossibility of comprehending virginity in another, but one's own virginity as well.

In this way we are all virgins: we have also never been virgins.

