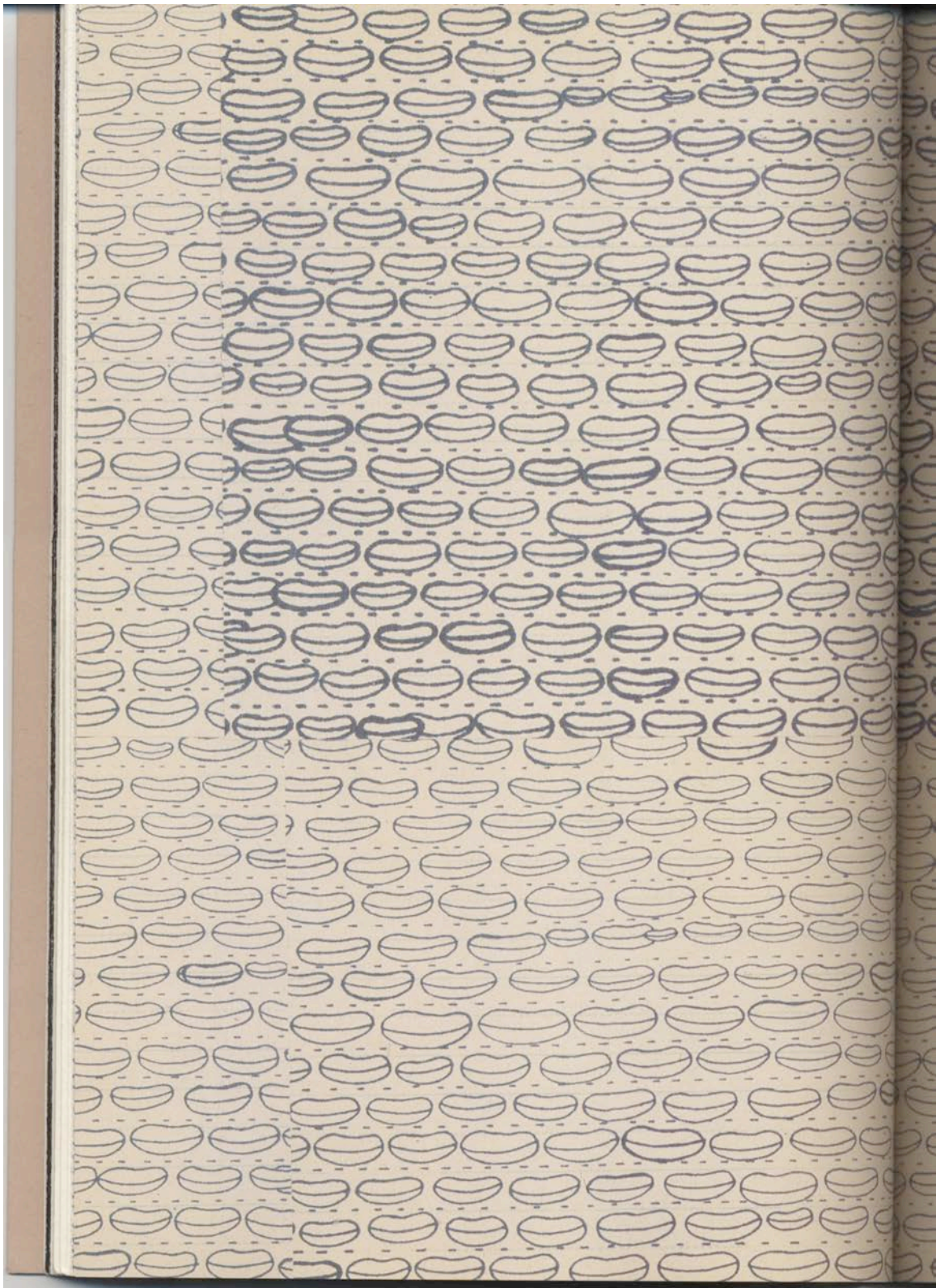


BLUBBER



## Unmoored Beauty

*Beth Coleman*

### MAP OF THE GAME BOARD

The game board is flat surface that should not be read in the way of metaphor. No depth or secret revealing should be added to the marks. Stay with the flatness of flat and we will have less difficulty with the blackness of black or the great white when they arrive. (Following a Cartesian grid, depth must be added for narrative meaning, and quickly to follow context, subtext, and various Dickensian moments of ague, heart ache and debtors prison.) No, it's not depth, but literal surface: wig A rests alongside lips B and above the single beady eyeball C. The maps of medieval cities represented a flat universe of winding and intertwining relations. Flatness, always foreshortened, represents a multitude of events and directions. In order to give the painting an allegorical reading—narrative depth—you have to be able to say with authority what is the scale and on what axis does it hang, and that's always a determination made blindly. Once we get stuck in a scale-appropriate schema (depth, perspective, narrative) the magic, the flexibility of space is normalized. We may have gained in dimension, but flattened possibility. Staying with the surface, we move to a holographic playing field where wig A might very well be in light-year relations to eyeball B, with centuries of displaced space between both marks and those loose lips. You have to build the space to enter it. (Patience, we're trying to keep it together here.) It is meaning made by index—a series, a list, pieces—but not synecdoche. The parts don't represent a whole (whale). There is no reconstructed woman behind every flipped wig. An unleashed tongue is an unmoored beauty.

1.

RULE ONE:

You never catch up on sleep. Sleep eventually catches up with you. The homeostasis is put in order by a wide loop. Noise is reduced to a deep murmur, and then the world around you disappears.

Varèse had already for years been sleeping with the radio and any other transmitting devices on— toaster, electric razor, coat hangers all peeking through the windows of his Varick Street house. The house used to be a New York stop on the Underground Railroad to Canada when extradition was still the law. Now it was a transmitting station directed toward soothing a tireless imagination. Channeling the sound of the city at night, Varèse cooled the distinct to the bustle of an overall. One could say, he was just trying to keep his head on his shoulders, each vertebra picking up and vibrating the motion. All of the pieces, moving randomly and all at once, were instrumentalized, chained by a singular will into a sequence of repetition and its self-differing. Out of chaos a cosmos. The harnessed sound became the gentle roar of a tide continuously breaking. Ebb becomes another aspect of flow and Edgard Varèse could sleep.

He had filled the framework with an electronic currency that fed back what it had been told in pointed, distinct fragments. Drawing from “nature,” it did not reproduce fantasy or even beauty, but a heightened reality. The machine channeling form was a brick house. She’s a brick house, welcoming the noise. “You’re in my hut now,” the house said. Le Corbusier wondered what kind of structure would hold dynamic architecture. Varèse said ragtime and tape.

Charlie Parker came to see Varèse one day in his small house packed with noisemakers. Parker was hungry for knowledge. He’d heard that Varèse might feed the furnace. (Parker had not been sleeping very well and the fury was located in knowledge.) The older man felt himself overcome at the meeting, rendered speechless by his lost way. He could not say this obsession. They both could have used the relief of a bloodletting. Varèse could hear it pounding in his ears but nothing would come out. Despite himself, despite his garbled tongue, despite his clenched psyche the older man left Parker with an infection of noise. It worked its way through like melancholy to the bone. Until it’s a litany, can’t find it can’t find it can’t find it. Assault break.

RULE TWO: AGENCY, ATTITUDE ADJUSTMENT, A-JOINMENT. [THE EVENT OF LIGHT ON WATER] IN HOLOGRAPHIC SPACE

Ellen abutting, rowing across a black lake, enjambling over the corners. Black on black is technically unreadable. Loose lips sink ships. The page was full of flowering butts of lips. Speech, one would think, comes from the inside of the mouth. The stature of the mouth is defined though by its lips—the pink, the dimpled underside and the tan, the taupe, the brown exterior. Murmur. One murmurs in braiding hair or speaking, except with the first there will be rows of flat, shiny plaits at the end and with the other there's only air. For some it is volunteer work, a form of national pride to speak, and for the rest, in need of rest, it is conscripted. In either case, volunteer or drafted, the self-imposed strictness of the regime allows for a greater liberty of action.

The marks on the paintings are literal. Wigs, heads, tongues, eyeballs, that are like punctuation or the mechanics of grammar. (Who ain't a slave?) The allegorical figure is suffused with the delusion of presence. The metaphor leads into all kinds of trouble. Distrust the deep reading and stick with the razzledazzle of the "bleak and the 'blique."

Entering into the public, in order to keep one's head on one's shoulders, she (*elle*, boat, house: all the objects on which we excuse ourselves are in the feminine) breaks into pieces. In order to enter, the mark has to draw back, hold itself in pieces, slip under the call for a full-figure, an answer, a story. "Friction is built between the printed and the drawn, the cut of the machine and the hand," says Ellen Gallagher. Diecut, what a word. "We vanish to appear," says Scamp a/k/a 2000 a/k/a Two-Face. The pieces must resist showing up all together—it has to disappear to appear. The materials are literal: the paper is itself, not a blank page to be written on or a symbol of absence, white inscription, black gaps (oh, that's leading the witness, just a little). No. The paper is a lined and ruled field.

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repetition  
sailors  
scabbing  
scarification  
scarring  
skin  
skin graph (composite)  
tongues  
undercut not overlaid  
white dwarf  
wigs

**BLUBBER**

A prepubescent scene of sadism

Kiss my ass, bitch.

5-

#### BLUBBER

"Blubber is a thick layer of fat that lies under the skin and over the muscles of whales," Linda said. "And uh...it protects them and keeps them warm even in cold water. Blubber is very important. Removing the blubber from a whale is a job done by men called flensers. They peel off the blubber with long knives and uh...cut it into strips." Linda held up a picture. "This is what blubber looks like," she said.

Wendy passed a note to Caroline. Caroline read it, then turned around in her seat and passed it to me. I unfolded it. It said: *Blubber is a good name for her!*

#### FAT

Extra stuff with the consistency of a bursting persimmon. Each cell plumps, causing the overall pattern of the skin to pucker and pout. The plumping hot dog offers us a beautiful picture of plentitude, the extra little umph. Autonomy +



#### THOSE SAILORS

Those sailors with their tattoos and queer behavior. Those pants, the buttons encircling the fly like little skulls. "Each one kills the thing he loves," Jeanne Moreau sings in *Querelle* about those buttfaced, multi-orificed dudes. The pecking order is clearly established and consented to before service begins. Volunteer or drafted, the strictness of the regime allows for a greater liberty of action. Up on the deck, the intoxication of the free wind loosened the boys up as the ship moved along. When we came up, he was doing some strange dance, but as soon as he saw us he stopped.

MOBY DICK

Who ain't a slave? Tell me that.

MOBY DICK

"What d'ye see?" cried Ahab, flattening his face to the sky.

"Nothing, nothing, sir!" was the sound hailing down the reply.

"T'gallant sails! — stunsails! aloft and aloft, and on both sides!"

All sail being set, he now cast loose the life-line, reserved for swaying him to the main royal-mast head; and in a few moments they were hoisting him thither, when, while but two thirds of the way aloft, and while peering ahead through the horizontal vacancy between the main-top-sail and top-gallant-sail he raised a gull-like cry in the air, "There she blows! — there she blows! A hump like a snow-hill! It is Moby Dick!"

9.

#### BLUBBER/FUGITIVE FORM

It all starts with paper. This is the base upon which the paintings are built up. Even if you can't see it, the start is a creaking, mechanical one. In Ellen's printing process, "uniformity ages the mark." Restraint in the face of deluge. The lines run across the soft blank paper, solid cerulean marks interspersed with dotted lines in an ordered fashion. The solid lines mark the height of the capital, the dotted ones, the lowercase. This is an archival simulacra of grade school penmanship paper, an unmarked mark of test and trial and enclosure and framing. The paper pushing through cutout sections on the surface is the real, regular and acidic stuff (nonarchival). Printed with curvy blue lines, with tan and pink over dubs layered on top, these salacious cutouts are criminal minded. "It's a fugitive form that will age, slip, and shift with the piece."

Fugitive form describes the perversion of materiality throughout. It is a perversion of the symbolic and the representative. Gesture is stolen away from the subject of sentiment and returned to an intrinsically suspicious and auto-affective. The diecut rubber tongues, lips, eyes, and wigs are constrained, repetitive, blank. Diecut and deceit become homonyms. The handmade is embossed in plastic ink. Each sign is intrinsically repeatable. It needs to be taxed—run through the mill—before it appears. We are invited into a cosmology homely as canned food and common as paper. Some are volunteers and some conscripted in a channeling of order: restraint handles excess. Blubber is a rigorous state of fat. A keloid is a hypertrophic scar. We learn that the space must be created by which one enters, over and over. Witness, the pieces are cut through, breaking and staining the canvas. If the whale had exploded, here's a picture of the deluge, this time.

When you're stripped down to the bare bones [of your lips], post-explosion, the struggle with frame and framework is articulated in a heightened fashion. The relationship between order and explosion plays out by way of material form in a space overrun with flipped wigs, black bottoms, and pink strips. Currency, certainly, but also counterfeit.

WIGS

- a. flowing beauty
- b. freedom wig
- c. heavenly love afro
- d. freedom puffs
- e. brown glam beauty afro
- f. capless cowboy
- g. hysterical nurse bob

11.

DALIAH, THE SLEEPER

There was one woman in our office who was a sleeper. She was on the sloppy side, her hair uncombed, little puffs at the nape of the neck. She swelled beyond the utilitarian streamline of corporate comportment. On closer inspection of Daliah one could see the seams of her clothes around the hip and bosom strained and shiny. People like myself assume we are in the process of starving to death. So we go from plate to plate, looking for satisfaction. One meal might work for a while, but eventually it gets worn out. This eternal dissatisfaction with the thing itself, what I put in my mouth in this case, is a milder form of sleep disorder. That little double-chin on the supple throat of Daliah indicated that she slept like a fucking fat baby. She'd roll into a cubicle at 11 a.m. like a smoker getting a midmorning puff. She's come out thirty minutes later scratchy and woozy. Slept. The men followed her down the halls like hounds after Venus. Nose wide open, blind... She did nothing and she was feared and hated and worshipped for it. Other women were called skinny and uptight, held in comparison to the sleeping Delilah.

Daliah woke up one day and looked around to see she had become the shop pet. She had a bow in her hair. There was a special corner devoted to her bedding and cushions. With a water dish. An observatory had been constructed so those interested could watch her sleep. Daliah figured it was time to find a new game.

From then on she was the other sister, the one for whom a seat doesn't get saved on the family outing in advance of the broken heart. Changing disguises in each place she went she found a way to blend with the machinery. It was a camouflage of type. High noon with a bit of shade. To enter a room was to already be there. If she could catch entry on the tail end of a crowd it made her job easier. It was some very quiet gaming business — a shift in cadence. Endjamming going on. Enjambment to make it go over; to slip onto the next line with a quickness (I'm in here, you're out there. Take me now).

HOW TO HAVE FUN WITH BLUBBER

- h. Hold your nose when she walks by.
- i. Trip her.
- j. Push her.
- k. Shove her.
- l. Pinch her.
- m. Make her say, *I am Blubber, the smelly whale of class 206.*

Pop

14

#### COME AGAIN SELECTOR

In Dancehall culture the DJ calls, "come again." And the Selector must rewind the track, so it all happens again. The rewind cuts off the beat even as it restarts it. The point is not to begin again. Rather, it's to continue in a heightened fashion. The start and the finish are tagged as random assignments. The game begins when you start and it's over when you finish, but other players enter and leave the field continuously. You must understand repetition in terms of pure pleasure to cotton to repetition as a figure of black culture.

#### REPETITION COMPULSION (ANXIETY)

"The outstanding fact of the late twentieth-century European culture," Snead writes, "is its ongoing reconciliation with black culture."

The ability to make distinctions both within culture and between cultures is a sign of objectivity and historicity. It is upon this idea of objectivity — that which allows perfect perspective, a map of perfect scale and representation — that James Snead, by way of Hegel, based his understanding of a culture that defines black culture in its absence. To enter, the lady disappears. "It is the effort to master *absence* by reducing the metaphor within the absolute *parousia* of sense that is the precondition [of presence]." Sense is expansive and fat; it is we who are the starvation artists.



RAZZLEDAZZLE HISTORY OF INVISIBLE MEN

The preacher's text was about the blackness of darkness. The old man gave them the razzledazzle. Black is the shiniest, brightest color you can find, he said. It's that beacon of a red-pimple on the tip of the nose, catching the eye and arousing the appetite. Black is fat. In a blizzard of black, it looks white like a great white whale.

SECRETING REPETITION

Coin of the realm, currency, coinage. The "bling bling" of fluid exchange. Game theory would allow that randomness and repetition are crucial to any act of free will. (We're about as objective as obsession.) The mechanism is driven by what escapes the eye. But its effects, like a fat girl, stick out.

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PURGATORY/MURMUR

"If you make the least bit of noise," replied Samuel. "I will send you to hell."

*The Life of Samuel Comstock, the Terrible Whaleman*, by his brother, William Comstock. Another version of the whale-ship globe narrative. p.liii

When one is overly tired the least bit of noise is enough to raise a hellacious fury. If hell has no fury like a woman scorned (if you must insist on seeing sperm on the unleashed tongue), then women must have more noise in their systems. They're fatter. The aerial shot of hell, aquatic and ecstatic, murmurs.

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