

Bachelor Thesis

Metamodern Affect in Alexandra Kleeman's novel *You Too Can Have A Body Like Mine* (2015)

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Introduction

“Let’s just say it, it’s over. The postmodern moment has passed, even if its discursive strategies and its ideological critique continue to live on - as do those of modernism - in our contemporary twenty-first century world.” (Hutcheon 166, 181). Literary theoretician Linda Hutcheon has been one of the most prominent scholars working on defining the postmodern in the 1980s and 90s. Yet, in the epilogue of the second edition of her highly influential introduction to the field of postmodernism, she challenges readers to find and name the time succeeding Postmodernism (2002). Other cultural theoreticians agree that, in contemporary times, the question of modernity’s aftermath is no longer topical. In leaving the ivory tower of academic discourse to pervade popular culture, postmodernism has become an empty descriptor, becoming “too broad - too inclusive, too all-embracing - to function effectively as critical or descriptive terms” (Rudrum intro xii).

If postmodernism really is over, or at least in its last dying breaths, this begs the question: What is the new discourse? What are its characteristics, to which societal and cultural changes does it respond, and what is the significance of moving on to a new framework? As human beings, we have a tendency to invent new heuristic labels that helps us make sense of changing times. One such label is metamodernism. The cultural historian Timotheus Vermeulen and cultural philosopher Robin van den Akker designate it as a “newly dominant cultural logic” (*Metamodernism: Period, Structure of Feeling, and Cultural Logic* 41), situated “oscillating between modern enthusiasm and postmodern irony” (“Notes” 1). In the space of global capitalism and connectivity, but also unprecedented times of crisis, metamodernism responds to an influx of cultural sensibilities and their ordering to a spatial and temporal history, a new-found obsession in representing and re-exploring realism, and the re-assignment of narratives of postmodern deconstruction towards narratives of reconstruction and rebuilding. In their seminal work “Notes on Metamodernism”, Vermeulen and van den Akker trace metamodernism in the cultural disciplines of architecture, art

and film. They expand on their initial ideas in their later book *Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect and Depth after Postmodernism* (2017), co-edited with literary scholar Alison Gibbons, and structure their framework by designating three axes of logic: historicity, affect, and depth. These three axes directly negate three constitutive features of postmodernism as defined by Fredric Jameson: the “weakening of historicity”, a “new depthlessness” and the “waning of affect” (*Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*). This thesis delves deeper into the framework of metamodernism, as formulated by Vermeulen and van den Akker, and analyses a case study: the novel *You Too Can Have a Body Like Mine* (2015) by American author Alexandra Kleeman.

In an unnamed American city, A shares an apartment with her friend B. The novel’s landscape is populated with ever-repeating suburban landscapes and soulless shopping malls. Occasionally, she meets with her boyfriend C to binge-watch a never-ending stream of commercials or to engage in intercourse while porn plays on his TV, as he is “thickening the moment by laying fantasy upon reality upon fantasy” (61). Outside of a job as a proofreader, A spends her day secluded in her room or in the company of B, who gradually changes her appearance to resemble A. The only enrichment in A’s life comes through the phenomenon known as the ‘Disappearing Dad Disorder’, where father figures of suburban families disappear and are found, months later, in a state of acute amnesia. Additionally, the mysterious graffiti left behind following the evanescence of her neighbours reads: “He who sits next to me, may we eat as one” (17). Reviews on the author’s website contextualise the book within a contemporary society marked by distinct crises, but also remark on the distinctive sensible quality of the narrative. The author herself described wanting to “create a character who loses herself in another identity” (interview with VICE).

Kleeman’s novel appears to respond to precisely the characteristics designated by Vermeulen and van den Akker as metamodern. Pertinent aspects of the novel refer to the driving forces of our modern times, a newly designated materiality and the purpose of our individual

bodies. In her introduction to literary metamodernism, Gibbons presents the contemporary affective turn as supporting the metamodern structure of feeling (47). Pursuantly, the thesis actively relies on a principal axis: affect. In the introduction of the Affect Theory Reader, the authors provide the definition that

Affect arises in the midst of inbetween-ness: in the capacities to act and be acted upon ... and accumulates across both relatedness and interruptions in relatedness, becoming a palimpsest of force-encounters traversing the ebbs and swells of intensities that pass between “bodies” (bodies defined not by an outer skin-envelope or other surface boundary but by their potential to reciprocate or co-participate in the passages of affect). (Seighworth and Gregg 1-2)

Using this framework in a literary analysis requires a focus on the representation of emotions and experiences, and their potential to affect bodies. This can be done in two manners: within the narrative of the literary work, or circulating within the bodies of the reading audience. In this thesis, the narrative of the novel stands in focus. Therefore, framing the scope of the thesis is the following question: How does Alexandra Kleeman’s *You Too Can Have a Body Like Mine* (2015) explore the affective relationships between individuals and broader socio-cultural contexts, and therefore contribute to a metamodern structure of feeling? Through three sub-questions, which will be further introduced in the relevant chapters, the thesis will be structured further. The first chapter on narratives of persuasion and consumption situates the novel in a capitalist society, in which intricate entanglements of recent and past cultural sensibilities rise to the surface. The second chapter is focused on an aspect intimately in dialogue with affect: Postirony - a mode of expression that combines elements of both irony and sincerity, and which is sorted by van den Akker under the new paradigm of Metamodernism. The third and final chapter completes the puzzle of this thesis. Its main focus is the preface to the novel, which is assumed to provide an intertextual dimension that is central to the novel’s understanding and its classification as metamodern.

The research of this thesis takes as its point of departure the assumption that Kleeman's *You Too Can Have a Body Like Mine* contributes to the "newly dominant cultural logic" (41) of Metamodernism in the understanding of van den Akker, Gibbons, and Vermeulen. Furthermore, the research will be able to illuminate how literary strategies function to create specific structures of feeling. The next chapter will review the main literature used throughout the thesis, and is followed by a chapter on the theoretical framework and method.

Literature review

This thesis makes use of various academic sources that trace the heuristic label of Metamodernism. While van den Akker and Vermeulen are well-known for their conceptualisation, their "Notes on Metamodernism" (2010) did not coin the term. They rather drew inspiration from an earlier usage of the term in 1970, which they revised. Following their conceptualisation, the thesis considers texts by these authors as well as those they have edited with others, with an orientation towards metamodernism's application in the literary discipline. These texts include their seminal 2010 article, and the co-edited book *Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect and Depth after Postmodernism* (2017) and article "Metamodernism: Period, Structure of Feeling, and Cultural Logic - A Case Study of Contemporary Autofiction" (2019), with Alison Gibbons. As the later published sources do not seem to refrain from Vermeulen and van den Akker's initially conceived concept, their label does not appear to require fundamental changes. Therefore, metamodernism stands in confidently for a newly dominant cultural logic/structure of feeling that can be conceptualised along the axes of historicity, affect and depth. In this definition, the authors take inspiration from two scholars, the cultural scholar Raymond Williams with his 'structures of feeling' (1970s) and the postmodern theorist and literary critic Fredric Jameson. While both scholars' theories could contribute to this thesis, Jameson's theories have been incorporate further, through his *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991). The authors intend

the research on metamodernism to be collaborative, interdisciplinary, open-ended, and situated within the critical and materialist tradition in the Global North. This context implicates multiple other academic frameworks. One of them that is considered in this thesis is that of Jean Baudrillard, a French sociologist, through his *Selected Writings* (1988), edited by Mark Poster. Baudrillard and Jameson have been influential scholars associated with postmodernism, and the interdisciplinary perspective that their theories bring to the thesis enable the author to adopt Vermeulen and van den Akker's theory of the open-ended and multidisciplinary nature of metamodernism in the framework of the thesis.

An awareness of literary metamodernism is established through chapters written by Alison Gibbons and Lee Konstantinou in the 2017 *Metamodernism* book. Gibbons is a Reader in Contemporary Stylistics at Sheffield Hallam University. Her contributions to the book support the thesis' theoretical framework in its orientation around affect studies. Konstantinou, an Associate Professor of English at the University of Maryland, introduces a concept in his chapter that is in intimate conversation with affect. This concept, postirony, responds to the tension between sincere engagement and irony that echoes from the postmodern past.

Graham Allen's *Intertextuality* (2000), part of the New Critical Idiom series, provides an introductory guide to critical contemporary terminology. Allen, a lecturer on literary theory at the University College Cork is an established literary critic, who provides a comprehensive introduction to intertextuality in his book. He traces its origins, and links it to key theories and movements in literary studies. His chapters on structuralist approaches and postmodern intertextuality are of particular relevance to this thesis.

The preface of Kleeman's novel includes a passage from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's book *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980, 1987). While its significance to the novel and the thesis' analysis will be explained in later paragraphs, their conceptualisations, as articulated in their work, are considered to correspond neatly with the framework of metamodernism. Furthermore, Deleuze,

drawing from his philosophical background, and Guattari, with a foundation in psychoanalysis, have been laying foundational groundwork that would become incredibly influential in the field of affect studies, that stands in close connection to the overarching frame of this thesis.

Theoretical framework and method

Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker's seminal article "Notes on Metamodernism" (2010) and book *Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect and Depth after Postmodernism*, coedited with Alison Gibbons (2017), provides the framework through which this thesis will consider Kleeman's novel, and supports an investigation into the characteristics associated with the metamodern structure of feeling. The main research question guiding this study, as previously introduced, is: How does Alexandra Kleeman's *You Too Can Have A Body Like Mine* (2015) explore the affective relationships between individuals and broader socio-cultural contexts, and therefore contribute to a metamodern structure of feeling? This research question is both pertinent to the novel and aligns with the discourse surrounding metamodernism.

In their subchapter on literary metamodernism, the authors argue that metamodernism has gained critical recognition as a way to describe the sensibility of contemporary literature (47-8). They also note that autofiction, a genre that has become increasingly prominent since the beginning of the new millennium, aligns with the definition of metamodernism (48). Based on its definition, it seems to resonate with Kleeman's novel, as autofiction is a genre in which its novels' narrator or protagonist adopts the author's name, or more broadly merges autobiographical sentiments with fiction in a novel (48-9). In Kleeman's novel, most of the characters are referred to by their first name initials, and the main character, A, shares her initial with the author. While the thesis acknowledges this connection, it avoids basing its arguments solely on this aspect. Thus, the thesis can discuss the postmodern oscillation within the novel without solely relying on the framework of autofiction, as the novel's multi-layered nature provides abundant material for analysis.

Throughout the thesis, various theoretical frameworks are employed to analyse the novel in different chapters. As this work is the first, to the author's knowledge, to consider Kleeman's novel as part of the metamodernist tradition, there are no primary sources explicitly categorising the novel within this framework. Furthermore, the thesis does not claim to offer a full investigation of the novel. However, the consideration of affect in the following chapters attempts to produce sufficient evidence to consider the novel as part of the metamodernist tradition. While the immediate method of engaging with the novel is close reading, this method is framed and directed by the themes of the research question. The research question consists of multiple elements: an investigation of affective relationships between individuals, between broader socio-cultural context, and, which cannot be overlooked, whether the novel actually incorporates those elements. Organising the thesis into three chapters allows for an in-depth exploration of these elements and offers a comprehensive overview, which enables the author to establish points of connection and comparison.

The first chapter addresses the socio-cultural contexts that allow for affect to circulate between bodies. Vermeulen and van den Akker's "critical operationalisation of the concept of metamodernism" (41, 43) emphasises the need to contextualise metamodernism within the material conditions of contemporary Western capitalist societies. In alignment with this perspective, the first chapter examines the advertising spots that appear in the novel. It stands under the sub-research question of: How do the advertising spots contribute narratives of consumption and persuasion, and how do they relate to the supposed embeddedness of metamodernism in a global, capitalist consumer society? To answer this question, the narratives of the advertising spots will be investigated as to whether they are situated within the narratives of capitalist consumer societies. This is achieved by setting them in relation to the conceptualisation of postmodern scholars Jameson and Baudrillard. In this consideration, the first chapter will, thus, contribute a building block in the space of a broader socio-cultural context.

The second chapter explores the affective relationships between individuals and “participates in a broader effort to map the cultural dominant that succeeds postmodernism” (Konstantinou 88) through the frame of postirony. According to Vermeulen, it is one of the artistic practices under consideration within the metamodern framework (18), and moves beyond the problems created by irony in contemporary life and culture. This chapter investigates the presence of postirony in the novel and its effects, emphasising its intimate connection with affect and its role as a new “emotional ground tone” succeeding postmodernism (Gibbons 85). As postirony is assumed to rise to the surface in relation to the transformation of character A, the theme of identity receives special attention.

Finally, the third chapter acts as a connective instance between the results of the investigation of the first two chapters, and their alignment to the metamodernism framework. This is achieved by putting the main focus on the preface of the novel, which is believed to possess an intertextual dimension that is central to understanding the novel and to classify it as metamodern. The novel’s preface consists of two quotations, one from Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus*, and another from the Gospel of Thomas. An insight into the concept of intertextuality is provided through the scholarly introduction guide to intertextuality by literary theorist and scholar Graham Allen. The chapter focuses mainly on Deleuze and Guattari’s quote, and addresses the overarching sub-question: In what ways does their quote contribute meaning to the novel? This question pertains directly to the rhizomatic and open-ended nature of the metamodernism framework, described in Vermeulen and van den Akker’s original 2010 “Notes on Metamodernism”. By examining excerpts from the novel in relation to Deleuze and Guattari’s theories, the chapter traces the theme of becoming and its affective aftermath.

Affect in socio-cultural contexts: narratives of consumption and persuasion

This thesis revolves around affect as its central axis, exploring the representation of emotions and their potential impact on bodies. This first chapter provides the first building block in this investigation. In “You Too Can Have A Body Like Mine”, the novel that this thesis considers, specific narratives appear that open up an examination of modern materiality within the context of metamodernism, as defined by Vermeulen and van den Akker. These narratives primarily revolve around persuasion and consumption, provided through multiple commercial spots featured in the novel. While the novel mentions various products, this chapter highlights two: the snack cake “Kandy Kake” and self-care products. The commercials, in line with affect theory, emphasise a dynamic between action and being acted upon. To further situate the excerpts of the novel that are analysed in this frame, as contributing to the metamodern discussion, they are set to Vermeulen’s assertion that metamodernism “emerges from, and reacts to, the postmodern as much as it ... corresponds to today’s stage of global capitalism” (5). Vermeulen and van den Akker constantly reiterate the shift from postmodern capitalism to global capitalism as a defining characteristic of metamodernism. They, however, do not outline this sentiment further, which presents a challenge of sorting narratives of capitalism to the metamodernism framework, due to the absence of detailing what exactly the exact shift between postmodernism and metamodernism entails in the space - except for the very brief categorisation of a global network, that is also marked by various crises as it is “intertwined with social and economic tendencies” (Utopia 56). The authors only give a timeframe of the shift from late to global capitalism, namely “around, or after, the turn of the millennium” (56). The novel itself avoids situating itself within a specific timeline. It is rather left to the audience to assume its temporal situatedness. The novel’s recognisable landscape of shopping malls and its suburban environment, however, enables readers to relate the novel’s events to their own contemporary society. Furthermore, the novel does not explicitly mention global networks of capitalism but it does reference a capitalist consumer culture that is highlighted in the following

paragraphs. Hinting at the intricate entanglements of recent and past cultural sensibilities, this chapter incorporates conceptualisations of (post)modern theoreticians in the space of capitalism through Baudrillard and Jameson. In considering the advertisements it is important to emphasise that they are presented through the perspective of character A.

Kandy Kakes and the company's cartoon cat mascot Kandy Kat are featured multiple times in the adverts described by A, which combine animation and live-action. Kandy Kat, a two-dimensional cartoon figure, constantly pursues the snack cakes which are depicted as three-dimensional objects, which creates a recurring joke of their fundamental incompatibility (21). Despite constantly teetering on the edge of starvation, Kandy Kat cannot stop the futile chase after the Kandy Kakes. The constant craving and denial is, therefore, a pertinent theme. It makes the Kat's life terrible, but at the same time, it makes him more himself (112). Other scenes reinforce a connection between the product and identity, in which Kandy Kat is depicted as severely emaciated while encountering the Kakes. His craving for them lives through his body: he has visible ribs, sagging skin and stark bones and tendons in his arm, while his cartoon eyes reflect his intense desire by way of delight, disbelief and crippling hunger (21). This affect is shifted onto A, who, after observing his desperate, frantic and vain attempts wants "so badly for him to just take one of those revolting Kakes and shove it all the way into his belly, anything, anything to anchor his body a little bit" (21-3). These excerpts from the Kandy Kake campaigns reveal the high desirability and life-sustaining nature of the product, as well as its connection to real life that is established through the depicted three-dimensionality of the cakes. The constant struggle between Kat and Kakes - consumption versus being consumed and pursuit versus being pursued - highlights the effectiveness of the advertisement in creating a false sense of need. As apparent by these excerpts, the commercials respond to a capitalist consumer society that is emblematic of the Global North. The intentional process of monopolistic corporations that shape demand through media advertising is evident in the advertising campaigns, especially in their desire to manipulate consumer preferences

to create false needs (Benhabib and Bisin 1, 2, 20, 28). The Kandy Kake advertising spots invite every viewer to actively participate in the hunt for Kandy Kakes while underscoring that they are made for these audiences to be consumed, as they are located in the same three-dimensional space as the Kakes. Audiences are and always will be, in an advantaged position to Kandy Kat.

Conversely, the beauty product commercials do not use such strategies to evoke a sense of need for universal human consumption but rather reinforce gender-specific consumption strategies by exploiting the narrative of perceived insecurities. The commercials create a narrative that portrays these insecurities as problems in need of fixing and concurrently offer consumer products that have the ability to do so. One such commercial advertises a new edible beauty cream: unlike other creams that merely address surface-level flaws, this cream targets signs of aging and damage from both inside and outside, ensuring that threats to your beauty have no place to hide. A woman who “is already so beautiful that it’s hard to see what she could possibly need” from the beauty cream scoops out a spoonful and savours it by closing her eyes and smiling in the warm glow of her beautiful living room. The voice-over implores the viewer to “Trust TruBeauty. We know that true beauty begins on the inside” (83-4). In another commercial from the same brand, a woman uses a citrus-based facial scrub. She begins scratching at her face and discovers that her skin peels off like old paper. Underneath is a prettier face described as being exactly like hers only younger and wearing better makeup. Rather than stopping at this transformation, she continues peeling, revealing an even prettier face. After two more peelings, her human likeness completely vanishes, replaced by images of the seashore and a forest illuminated by sunlight (7). Eventually, the famous actress spokesperson of the company is revealed, who discusses the hydrating effects and natural ingredients, and emphasises the idea of self-transformation and the resulting self-love. The commercial concludes with the words “TRUBEAUTY. TRUSKIN. YOUR REAL SKIN IS WITHIN” (7). The narrative used in both commercials evokes elements of persuasion. Above all is again the creation of false needs to make the product desirable for consumption for every member

of the target audience: even if flaws are not visible, they need to be addressed. This sentiment evokes the desire to improve constantly. Furthermore, both commercials suggest that beauty (a highly individualistic concept) is not only about external appearances but also about improving one's overall well-being and radiance while also implying that physical beauty is related to the elevation of the consumer's entire life and surroundings. The products create a sense of hope that one can transform not just their appearance but also their overall quality of life.

The manipulation of consumer preferences, as mentioned with the Kandy Kakes, appears in this space as well. The creation of perceived insecurities that can be fixed by the advertised products is achieved in the commercials themselves. As soon as the insecurity is presented to the audience, a solution to them is already there, that can be used by purchasing the advertised product. The second beauty commercial with its emblematic peeling takes on an even more significant meaning. In this space, viewers can insert themselves for identification. The necessary stripping of outer layers to come to an inner essence that is not human-like at all, but rather references a three-dimensional physical locale that is regarded by the overwhelming majority of the audience as peaceful and relaxing imagery, offers a space for the audience member to locate their own desired self. Whether it is anchored to the relaxing imagery or the famous company's spokesperson, the identity of the audience member is of less importance. Thus, even though individuality and authenticity are undermined in this space, viewers have the feeling that they can express and define their identities by using branded products (Hancock 172-3), as they have the illusion of choosing their ideal selves. They also have the illusion of achieving happiness and confidence with the usage of beauty products, which is replicated across many individuals.

Underlying the analysis of the commercials was its relation to the discourses of modern capitalism, as introduced at the beginning of the chapter. Established postmodern scholars such as Baudrillard and Jameson observe shifts in consumer and advertising culture that is emblematic of a decline of real feelings, which are replaced by surface intensities. Their discourses relate to the

collapse of boundaries between the real and the perceived real (or hyper-real in Baudrillardian terms). Individuals lose the capacity to distinguish between the two, and a simulation of affect (Baudrillard's simulacrum), takes the place of real affect in a manner so complete that no one can recognise the differences any longer. In the capitalist landscape, media events and media-induced feelings become just as real as real events and real emotions. The terms "authenticity" and "reality" thus lose their meanings. While these narratives seem to especially pertain to the series of beauty advertisements, the first example of the Kandy Kakes also establish a correlation with the aforementioned discourses. In the space of media-induced feelings, audience members can find enjoyment in observing the Kat's futile struggles as they actually possess the ability to acquire and consume the Kakes. This is, again, replicated across many individuals, with the leading outcome of desiring the consumption of the Kakes. Character A, however, strays from this to an extent. Her response to the Kandy Kake commercials, which rise to the surface multiple times throughout the novel betrays her intimate engagement and sympathy with Kandy Kat. The narrative of persuasive desire for something to anchor herself on, relates to a newfound sincerity and dynamic of being acted upon, perhaps paving the way for a new affective engagement.

In the investigation of the general socio-cultural context in which the novel is situated, the challenge of differentiating between postmodernism and metamodernism becomes apparent. While the actual setting of the novel (an unnamed American city) is never revealed and remains ambiguous, the socio-cultural content evokes a distinct capitalist core substance that is recognisable to readers and embodies a pervasive emptiness that is reminiscent of postmodern sensibilities. However, the intricate entanglement of recent and past cultural sensibilities is heavily implied. The following chapter will move on to the context of individual bodies and their affective relationships.

Affect between individuals: postirony

In the ongoing investigation of the novel's metamodern nature, it appears as a necessity to analyse an aspect that is intimately in dialogue with affect. Described as moving beyond the prevailing postmodern sentiment of irony, postirony refers to a specific attitude or mode of expression that combines elements of both irony and sincerity. In Chapter One, Vermeulen and van den Akker sort postirony as an artistic practice under the consideration of the new paradigm of Metamodernism (18). As a concept, Konstantinou's chapter further situates and delineates postirony under four significant tendencies in contemporary fiction. Generally, postirony acknowledges the inherent irony and self-awareness of postmodernism but seeks to move beyond its detached and cynical position. Investigating the presence of postirony in this chapter continues the ongoing exploration of a metamodern structure of feeling in the novel. The previous chapter provided an insight into the progression of postmodern discourses for the considerations of metamodernism in the space of capitalism. This chapter will continue to follow the trend of reinventing and revising previous cultural sentiments, but now from an angle that takes into account literary strategies that create specific structures of feeling.

The introduction chapter briefly noted some reviews on the author's website, and, that in a Vice interview, the author described her desire to "create a character who loses herself in another identity". The connection to postirony is enabled through two key themes of the novel that directly respond to this desire of the author. These are tied to a transformation of character A that is traced through the novel. She goes from constant questioning and overthinking about herself and the people around her, to being forced to let go of her past. The instances that enable and initiate this transformation are assumed to take on the role of postmodern irony, which corresponds to Konstantinou's view that postirony depends on "irony's prevailing power" (90). What will become apparent through the following paragraphs is that the transformation A experiences throughout the

novel is closely aligned with a transformation from a certain naivety to navigating the tension between irony and earnestness, sentiments associated with postirony.

A's constant questioning and overthinking are imparted most evidently in her relationship with her boyfriend C, which is delineated in the first and second chapters of the novel. From their interactions, their relationship seems to be marked by tensions and kind of a disillusioned realism. While A recognises that their "pairing was coincidental or, at best, lucky" she still expresses the wish for C to agree with her worldview at least once (33-4). Right from the beginning of the novel, C is revealed to have a chronic misunderstanding of A (5). Nevertheless, C is described to possess the ability to instantly normalise things for A as he acts as magnifying glass through which she can see the world with utmost clarity (37). Despite their conflicting worldviews, A considers C's contentment with his life as a buffer of harmony in their relationship. She recalls that when she is on the verge of an emotional breakdown, she only needs to take a look at him and his perfectly ordinary grin to make her feel as though she had completely misinterpreted her own situation. She describes that that whatever feeling she was experiencing "would hollow itself out so that all I felt was that I no longer knew what I felt" (28). While considering these textual excerpts, the relationship between A and C seems quite contrary to being filled with love or even mutual respect between them, rather, a sense of disappointment or disenchantment seems to pervade their relationship. C makes A aware of her flaws, contradictions or limitations in her worldview in taking on the role of expressing things without overthinking, idealisation, embellishment or without trying to find a deeper meaning and understanding A. C is focused on the ordinary and mundane aspects of everyday life, and his presence in A's life reveals a gap or incongruity (something that is central to postmodern irony) between what she experiences and the way things really are, in C's perspective. Therefore, disillusioned realism arises as a defining term of their relationship.

The second instance, and therefore key theme, arises in the presence of a newly-founded church entitled the "New Christian Church of the Conjoined Eater". In the first introductions to the

church, it seems to vehemently reject consumer society and its complexities (132). The church is referenced by other people as a cult and is eventually associated with the cause behind the Disappearing Dad Disorder, mentioned in the introduction, as people are kidnapped and manipulated to follow the cult's ideology. Under the motto "HE WHO SITS NEXT TO ME, MAY WE EAT AS ONE" (20), the cult encourages the dissolution of self-identities and the boundaries between members. Their clothing responds to this desire: they dress their members under white sheets that they are only allowed to take off in their private space in the presence of their partner as it helps to "erode (the) memory of (their) own particular face, which was unviewable within the Church owing to the lack of mirrors" (201). When A joins the cult, she is confronted by the ideology of the Church to let its members move towards 'Brightness', being in a 'pure' state. To achieve this, members have to replace the memories of their past, the "corrupted" time (221). In this space, A is suddenly confronted with her feelings of constant alienation and isolation (which will be explored further in the next chapter), while also being unable to let go of her past and her connections to other people, like her roommate B, and C. She has severe problems with fitting into the Church and constantly ponders if other members struggle with similar issues, wondering "if they felt their thin, glassy skin go opaque when they remembered the people of their past" (240). The visceral language used in this scene conjures an intimate connection with affect. While social interactions of A with other people has always been described as uncomfortable in earlier parts of the novel, she now cannot escape her previous, "corrupted", life. This leads her to be eventually kicked out of the higher levels of the Church.

In both the space of the Church and her relationship with C, A is observed to seek distance from the worldview presented to her, even though she does not do so consciously. Her desperate attempts to relate to other people are filled with tension, as she embraces others' private concerns that form an escape from A's present life. She is in a constant in-between space that she herself recognises to be highly affective: "Emotions infiltrated me like toxins in the air supply, passing

through my body and corroding the things inside” (130). The author’s desire to “create a character who loses herself in another identity” that constituted the chapter responds, in the space of postirony, to Konstantinou’s category of the “Postironic Bildungsroman”. As he establishes, those books, “in one form or another, represent moves from naiveté through irony to cynicism to postirony” (96), a transformation that A undergoes throughout the novel. The reader is associated with this transformation, as they are confronted by A’s continuous stream of consciousness in the novel. This enables them to take on the position to consider and then reject postmodern irony in agreement with A’s inner monologue. The next chapter will dive deeper into the narratives of alienation and disconnection and provide the final building block in the considerations of this thesis.

Affect in socio-cultural contexts and between individuals:

intertextuality and becoming

The third and final chapter concludes the puzzle of this thesis by establishing connections between the various aspects discussed in the preceding chapters: the affective relationships between both individuals and the broader socio-cultural contexts. Believed to possess an intertextual dimension that is central to the understanding of the novel and its classification as metamodern, the preface to the novel enables this analysis. The chapter is structured in the following manner: it will briefly outline the concept of intertextuality, which situates the quote of Deleuze and Guattari in relation to the novel. A direct focus on Deleuze and Guattari’s quote follows after the detour to intertextuality, which is considered together with excerpts from the novel. Towards the end of the chapter, a brief consideration is given to the second quote of the preface.

In general, intertextuality in this chapter provides a meaningful insight into postmodern discourses and their progression into metamodern discourses. Intertextuality has been theorised by many scholars with the common understanding that a text can only ever be understood in relation to other texts. Every work is interlinked with the preceding tradition and the context in which it is

produced. Some even suggest that the idea of intertextuality is “crucial to understanding literary studies today” (Allen I). Coincidentally, intertextuality, “as a narrative strategy and a subject of literature analysis ..., is sometimes considered a vital component of postmodern text, relentlessly indicating postmodernism” (Radchenko 275). This argumentation is based on the conceptualisation of postmodernism as an era of constant reproduction that replaces authentic production, and loses any access to reality (Allen 177-8). According to the postmodern voice of Fredric Jameson, who was already introduced in the second chapter, “depth is replaced by surface, or by multiple surfaces (what is often called intertextuality is in that sense no longer a matter of depth)” (Jameson, through Allen 178). Even though the interplay between intertextuality and postmodernism is a fascinating topic, a full consideration would, by far, exceed this thesis. With this said, intertextuality in the preface also paves the path for considering metamodern sentiments. Categorising the preface under the term of intertextuality aligns with the ideas of French theorist and critic Gérard Genette, who took a structuralist approach to intertextual studies and developed multiple concepts in this space. His concept of paratextuality, which supposedly helps to frame and constitute the text, and therefore controls its reception for the readers, combines epitext with peritext (Allen 100). The interview fragment that has contributed to the framework of the second chapter can be related to the instance of the epitext, while the preface is associated with the peritext in Genette’s terminology. Yet, besides Genette’s sorting, the quotes used as the preface also work as an intertextual dimension in relation to the distinctive sensible quality of Kleeman’s novel. The following analysis will illuminate this relationship.

The first part of the novel’s preface features the following quote:

It could be said that the orchid imitates the wasp, reproducing its image in a signifying fashion (mimesis, mimicry, lure, etc.) ... At the same time, something else entirely is going on: not imitation at all but a capture of code, surplus value of code, an increase in valence, a veritable becoming, a becoming-wasp of the orchid and a becoming-orchid of the wasp.

- DELEUZE AND GUATTARI, *A Thousand Plateaus*

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's philosophical work "A Thousand Plateaus" (1980) rejects traditional hierarchical thinking in favour of a rhizomatic approach, in which reality is not structured in a linear, hierarchical manner. The authors introduce the concept of the rhizome, a root-like structure that grows horizontally without a fixed centre. It stands in contrast to the Western-prevalent philosophical model of the tree. Their rhizomatic approach has already been mentioned once in this thesis, namely through "Notes on Metamodernism", in which the metamodern sensibility is described as rhizomatic rather than linear. Furthermore, Deleuze is referenced as heavily influencing contemporary Affect Theory in Alison Gibbons' introduction to *Metamodern Affect*, which connects to the rise of affect to have occurred in parallel with the demise of postmodernism (84). Jameson's conceptualisations in the space of capitalist societies and the elimination of depth that were mentioned previously are relevant in this context as well in providing socio-cultural context. In the era of postmodernism that is highly dependent on its removed access to reality, a sense of emptiness pervades society that leaves no room for an expression of emotion and feelings.

In the consideration of the relationships between individuals, the previous chapter mentioned postirony. While Deleuze and Guattari do not explicitly discuss postirony, there are certain resonances between their work and the broader metamodernist framework. The rejection of rigid categorisations and hierarchical structures aligns with the metamodernist stance, which seeks to move beyond the limitations of both modernist and postmodernist thinking. Recalling the second chapter, postirony embodies a simultaneous engagement with both irony and earnestness, navigating the tension between them. Deleuze and Guattari's concept of becoming that is expressed in the quote, and their emphasis on deterritorialisation can be seen as resonating with that notion of postirony. The idea of becoming suggests a continuous process of change and transformation, which aligns with the metamodern oscillation between ironic detachment and sincere commitment. The

deterritorialisation of fixed identities (such as the orchid and the wasp in the excerpt) allows for the exploration of multiple subjectivities and correlates with the preservation of “postmodernism’s critical insights while overcoming its disturbing dimensions” (Konstantinou 88). It is important to note, however, that while there are connections between Deleuze and Guattari’s ideas and the concept of postirony, they are distinct and separate frameworks.

Outside of the concept of postirony, the idea of becoming suggesting a continuous process of change and transformation, is deeply aligned with the novel’s focus on the relationship of characters A and B. They live together as roommates and they share a lot of visual similarities. B’s only markers of difference at the beginning of the novel are her thinner frame and her long hair. A recognises her similarity as well as her differences with B, while in the constant fear of being conflated with each other by other people who do not have access to their inner life but only something that can be seen on the outside. Their relationship as roommates is strained and distant. Those feelings are particularly perpetuated by A, while B becomes more and more isolated. A’s stream of consciousness betrays her alienation from other members of society, a detachment from ordinary everyday life. B, on the other hand, struggles with her self-worth and issues of identity in her obsession with A. Eventually, B cuts off her hair and gifts it to A. This triggers feelings of disgust and abjection, that is supported by A’s expression of inner turmoil and consternation with the newly created outer likeness with B. Hair, the almost only marker of difference between A and B evolves into something with an agency as B reflects that “that hair was making me feel un-myself. I think it was muffling my thoughts. That’s why I cut it off. And gave it to you. ... Now you have a part of me forever” (12). It only loses its agency after being separated from a living being, while A is horrified by the prospect that “Hair like this could choke a person” (12). The boundaries between A and B slowly blur as the novel continues. B believes that A seeks distance from her, and subsequently seeks more connection. In the few days before A joins the cult of the Conjoined Eaters, A drifts off to a more and more dissociative and alienated state in B’s company, not

recognising her as her weak companion anymore that she wants to take care of, but as someone that attempts to take over her body (157). A feels completely disconnected from her own body, wondering what has happened to the “me that used to be inside it” (159). In this dissociative state, A consumes the hair that B has cut off, as she has already been contaminated with B’s presence and she feels as if she could not anything to escape the situation anymore (161). A, in particular, is described as being disconnected from her own body, in the scene with B, and later while she is in the cult. Her involvement leads to extreme body changes as a result of coerced dieting (daily meals exist purely out of Kandy Kakes, a food introduced in earlier chapters). This physical transformation leads A to further extend her inability to recognise herself. In one of the last scenes of the novel, A and Chris, a supermarket employee watch an episode of a television show. The recording shows a very emaciated human body: “It was the color of natural wax, pale and creamy. It had shadows in places, strewn through its smoothness. Then I saw. Those were ribs. That was the jut of a hip bone. It was a whole human body: female, naked, holding its arms out as though waiting for an embrace” (273-4). After realizing that it is A’s own body, recorded just a little while before watching, she pleads with Chris: “I need to eat something right away. ...I look like people who are about to die” (275).

The narratives of alienation and becoming are used, throughout the book, as a powerful tool to express and explore complex issues of identity, society, and the human condition. The second part of the preface, a quote from a text that is associated with the Bible Canon, adds to the quite extensive analysis of Deleuze and Guattari’s quote in relation to the novel, and seeks specific relation to the scene in which A consumes B’s hair as she perceives her attempts to separate herself from B as fruitless, giving up her own identity. The quote metaphorically refers to the transformation of a lion into a human being and vice versa, although the exact meaning is left to the reader’s interpretation.

In the context of an affective analysis in which the accumulation of force-encounters passed between bodies (across relatedness and interruptions of relatedness) gains importance, the above-mentioned scenes respond to a pertinent theme: the potential of alienation and obscurity as a powerful tool in an exploration of the human condition in contemporary times. In the depiction of the novel's characters who are struggling to find meaning and connection in a society that seems increasingly disconnected and hollow, alienation is emblematic of Western aesthetics that are associated with a trend of social and physical disconnectedness as a result of global connectivity. This analysis of the last chapter, therefore, offered an exploration of a particular cultural sensibility.

Conclusion

This thesis considered the 2015 novel *You Too Can Have a Body Like Mine* by American author Alexandra Kleeman. The research undertaken in this novel was framed by an exploration of the affective relationships between individuals and broader-socio cultural contexts which could not only situate the novel within a new literary tradition but under an entirely new cultural label. Metamodernism, a heuristic label that is currently under increasingly scholarly attention, has been considered in this thesis through the conceptualisation of Timotheus Vermeulen, Robin van den Akker and Alison Gibbons as an overarching theoretical framework. This thesis has chosen to follow an approach that is closely aligned with the application of metamodernism in the literary discipline. It fixates on a new cultural shift towards the power of emotion and incorporates a new sensibility attuned to emergent crises of contemporary society. Nevertheless, metamodernism is also situated in a space of oscillation between a modern enthusiasm and the era of postmodern deconstruction.

The first chapter of the thesis introduced the socio-cultural context of the novel. It appears that the novel incorporates very postmodern tendencies (as visible through its capitalist undertones). The second chapter in its consideration of the relationship between individuals highlighted the role

of irony in the novel, which also originates from postmodernism. The third chapter arose from an intertextual dimension that contributes significant meaning to the novel. Intertextuality is in close relation to postmodernism's nature of constant reproduction. From this very limited first look towards the novel, it could possibly be assumed that the novel is postmodern in nature. However, the thesis relies on one principal axis that influenced its entire analytical framework: affect. This stands in stark contrast to the aforementioned postmodern tendencies, which are continuously revised through the only character in the novel that has an intimate connection to the reader. A, in her constant stream of consciousness, is observed to take critical distance from the narratives that are presented to her in everyday life, and readers are implicated in this distancing. This implication speaks of the constant emotional engagement that the reader experiences through A and paves the way for the reemergence of affect in the grand scheme of the novel.

This thesis merely presents a point of departure for continued research in the area of literary metamodernism and affect, and in its consideration of Kleeman's novel. The analysis has been very confined to particular aspects of the novel and does not intend to imply that it manages to conduct an analysis on the full scope of the novel. Moreover, by regarding Kleeman's novel as part of the only gradually emerging concept of metamodernism that seeks to define contemporary cultural shifts, it can only serve as a catalyst for generating new discourses that are always subject to reassessment and reimagining.

Appendix A

Material Chapter One

“The TV was showing another commercial for Kandy Kakes. This commercial was one of the newer series of ads that mixed animated and live-action components. In this new series, Kandy Kat would successfully chase down or otherwise achieve contact with the snack cakes, but the cakes were pictured as live-action, three-dimensional objects while the cat was always a flat cartoon. The gag each time was that no matter how hard he tried, Kandy Kat could never put a Kandy Kake down his throat: the two types of matter were fundamentally incompatible. This went along with an advertising campaign centred around the point that Kandy Kakes were made of Real Stuff. Maybe not natural stuff, but genuine three-dimensional material from our physical universe that was similar to us in ways that it might not be to bodies from a cartoon world. In this commercial, Kandy Kat walks wobbily through a cartoon landscape full of dancing trees. The trees are shaking their middles and singing the Kandy Kakes jingle, as little birds play bells and maracas in their branches. You can see every rib on Kandy Kat’s brownish body as he wobble-skips through the woods, having what appears to be a pleasant day. He looks fairly carefree, oblivious to his hunger and to the words being chanted all around him by the living trees—when suddenly he happens upon a plate of Kandy Kakes sitting in a clearing in the middle of the forest, three-dimensional and super-real among the painted foliage, glowing with a sparkly light that is not real, not cartoon, but something in between. In rapid sequence, he spasms through shock, surprise, delight, disbelief, delight again, and then crippling hunger. His ribs throb. And when he reaches out for the platter, you actually see his emaciation in motion: the skin sags a little off the forearm, the bones and tendons of the arm show starkly with a little drop shadow under them to heighten the effect. His eyes grow larger and whiter in their huge cartoon sockets. At this moment, I want so badly for him to just take one of those revolting Kakes and shove it all the way into his belly, anything, anything to anchor his body a little

bit. But when his hand finally reaches the plate and grabs for a Kandy Kake, none of the Kakes will budge. It's hard to describe. It looks like Kandy Kat's hand is touching them through the glow, but they aren't affected at all. It's not like they're a photo, but more like they're impossibly heavy so he'll need something else to move them. So Kandy Kat runs out of the frame and gets a comically large fork and he aims it at the plate and stabs down, but the fork seems to just pass through them as though they're made of nothing, and Kandy Kat stabs more slowly and then picks the fork up and looks at it, confused. Then he runs back out of the frame and returns with an ax, which just does the same thing—nothing—no matter how many times he hacks away at the plate. Meanwhile the forest is getting pretty torn up. And when he runs back out of the frame and comes back he's got tons of dynamite, which he sets up all around the Kakes and detonates in a huge explosion that turns all the trees and birds black, with little white eyes blinking in stunned disbelief. The platter of Kakes glows more handsomely than ever against this scorched background, and finally Kandy Kat just yanks his mouth open with his two hands, painfully wide with a cracking sound, and jumps mouth-first onto the plate and the Kakes, trapping their glow inside his mouth as he lies on the forest floor. His mouth is kind of suctioned to the ground now, and he struggles, very carefully, to close it, drawing the lips together, biting into the soil to prevent any precious morsel from being left behind, and he closes slowly on a mouthful of dirt and plate and Kakes. He stands up, shaking, his mouth full. There are big bite marks in the cartoon soil where his teeth have gouged away at the earth. And—tentatively—he bites down. It doesn't even make a sound. Confusion shows on his face, and he bites again, and again, more rapidly: nothing. Then, stretching his throat out to the appropriate width, he tries to swallow the plate whole, again and again, nothing. Finally, disheartened, he spits out the plate, the Kakes perfect and intact, still with that weird magical glow on everything, though now the glow has something smug about it. Kandy Kat looks toward the screen and his eyes have a new wetness to them. KANDY KAKES, the screen reads. REAL STUFF. REAL GOOD.” (21-23)

“Maybe Kandy Kat survived like that, from images of eating and images of food. Light consuming light, the desire for sustenance a type of sustenance in itself. Even if he was always paused on the narrow edge of starvation, what he was doing in pursuit of Kandy Kakes sustained him. They made his life terrible, but at the same time they made him more himself.” (112)

“THERE’S A COMMERCIAL ON TV where a woman using this new citrus-based facial scrub begins to scratch at the side of her face, discovering that it has edges, shriveled and curling slightly like old paper. Eyeing the camera, she grasps these edges and lifts up on them until she is peeling the whole surface of her face off with a filmy sound like plastic wrap unsticking from itself. Underneath is another face exactly like hers, but prettier. It’s younger and wearing better makeup. You’d think that she might want to stop here and start being happy with herself the way she newly is. But she doesn’t stop: instead, she clutches at the side of her face and begins to peel again, and this time the face underneath is even prettier and she’s smiling wildly at the camera, she’s so pleased. And she peels again, but this time what’s underneath is a video of the seashore crashing against a sandy beach, and her hand peels it all off again, and we stare into a deciduous forest filtered through by little blades of light and sunshine. Then she turns straight toward the camera and peels her face off from the opposite direction, and the face that’s underneath belongs to the company’s famous actress spokesperson. It’s been her voice all along telling us about the hydrating effects and natural ingredients, the way you’ll love yourself remade. She doesn’t ask what happened to the other woman, the woman who came before her. She smiles beautifully with her hard white teeth. Words appear on the screen: TRUBEAUTY. TRUSKIN. YOUR REAL SKIN IS WITHIN.” (7)

“BACK IN MY BEDROOM, THE television was telling me about a new edible beauty cream. A beautiful woman with black hair is smiling at a midsize jar that she holds in her hands, turning it slightly from right to left as if to admire its label. The woman is already so beautiful that

it's hard to see what she could possibly need inside that jar. Nevertheless she is so excited to open it up, the smile on her face just gets larger and larger as she unscrews the lid, tilts the jar delicately toward her, and then gasps in surprise. A white dove is struggling its way out of the smallish jar, straining its neck against the rim, trying to use its neck and beak as a lever to wrench its downy white breast through the opening. It tries to unfurl a wing, but it's still too much trapped within the jar, so it looks left and right and then pecks at the parts of the jar that are within its reach. In terms of its experience as an animal, the dove is obviously distressed. Its black beady eyes are still, but its head jerks back and forth, back and forth. As a part of the commercial, however, the dove looks elegant and soft, its feathers fluffy as it twists around, trying to free its wings. The jar topples over and the dove kind of spills out, taking flight gracefully. As it flies, the voice-over tells us what sorts of things are in TruBeauty's new interior-exterior skin-perfecting cream. Some of the things are vitamins, antioxidants, moisturizers. The dove is looking great with its wings flapping in slow motion and therefore appearing extra glamorous. When it completes one lap around the room, it circles back toward the beautiful woman, her mouth open in amazement, and it heads straight for her mouth, full throttle. The impact makes a soft thwack sound, and then it's just the back half of the dove that's visible sticking out of her mouth and trying hard to wriggle its whole body inside. The voice-over speaks: Most beauty creams stop at the epidermal level, treating only those minor flaws and imperfections that are the easiest to reach. Competing treatments only go skin deep. As it forces itself down her throat, she tilts her chin up gracefully and you can see some muscles at the sides of her neck clenching and releasing, working to help the dove get itself swallowed. When the last claw-tipped foot goes down, she tilts her chin low and smiles radiantly for the camera. Only one beauty cream attacks signs of aging and damage from the inside and out, making sure that threats to your beauty have no place to hide. The beautiful woman dips a spoon into the now dove-free jar of cream and lifts out a creamy mouthful. She dabs a little on her face, and brings the rest of the spoonful to her lips, thrusting it inside luxuriantly. It looks like yogurt, but it's not. She licks the

front and then the back, and then she reclines, closing her eyes and smiling in the sunny glow of her beautiful living room. And the voice-over says: Trust TruBeauty. We know that true beauty begins on the inside.” (83-84)

Appendix B

Material Chapter Two

“Whenever I had something nice to say about her or something mean, C would just shrug his shoulders and say I only thought that because we were too much alike. He had a chronic misunderstanding of me. B was fragile and sick and needed to be nursed. She looked underfed, she touched objects like someone who owned nothing in the world. Sympathy for her transported me out of myself, away from my own problems. She was cut to my shape and size like a trapdoor: similar enough to make that fantasy a form of escape.” (5)

“C was suited to his life and to the historical period within which his life unfolded. He didn’t long to return to a simpler time, or to destroy the current time, or to build a better future. He was a happy camper. This was one of the things that made our relationship work so well: he always assumed I was happy, too, even when I wasn’t. With C, I could sit there and cycle through hurt, anger, sadness, ambivalence, acceptance, all without disturbing the comfortable rapport between us. As a result, he called me easygoing. And at times when the inner corners of my eyes burned and I knew I was about to spill, I had only to look over at him and his utterly normal grin to feel like I had grossly misread my own situation. Then whatever feeling I was feeling would hollow itself out so that all I felt was that I no longer knew what I felt. “What you’re describing is called ‘satori,’” C would tell me with confidence. “It’s the Buddhist term for happiness, specifically for becoming unburdened. It’s like what we’d call peace. You should learn to embrace it, not think it to death”.

(28)

“Our pairing was coincidental or, at best, lucky. I wished that for once he’d just agree with me on any one thing about how I saw the world.” (33-4)

“C was good at handling me. He made things suddenly, instantaneously normal, just by explaining them. He was like a magnifying glass, I only had to look through him to see the world in crisp detail.” (37)

“Recall, BUT DO NOT THINK OF the Dark feelings of that (corrupted) time, which are now gone: feelings of loving them too much or not enough, never loving them the right amount, of wanting them to give you space and then feeling unloved, of saying you understood what they were saying when what they were saying only made you feel more confused and more alone. Remember: DO NOT REMEMBER your past. PERCEIVE your past as you would perceive a dark stone or flower resting at some distance from you. THEN CAST IT FROM YOU WITH FORCE. (...) your past should always be regarded as toxic” (221)

“I wondered if any of the others were having the same problems as me beneath their crisp white sheets, if they too were experiencing dizzying pulses of longing as they thought accidentally on their past lives with its warm bodies and delicious, treacherous food. If they felt their thin, glassy skin go opaque when they remembered the people of their past.” (240)

Appendix C

Material Chapter Three

“B and I looked alike, talked alike, that was fair enough. To strangers viewing us from a distance as we wove a confused path through the supermarket hand in hand, we might seem like the same person. But I was on the inside and I saw differences everywhere, even if they were only differences of scale. We looked young, but there was a lost, childish quality to how she slumped over whatever she was doing.” (5)

“I had been there only a few minutes when I heard a knocking at my door. Standing there was B with an excited look on her face, eyes big and wet, mouth drawn up at the corners. She looked like a person who had betrayed a secret. Her hands clutched something dark. Against her thin white fingers, it looked like a coil of chain or a greased-down railroad spike—something old and exacting, designed to keep a thing in place. “I was sleeping,” I said.” “Do you want this,” she responded. Her voice angled down as though it weren’t a question but a fact that she was only repeating. She thrust her hands forward slightly. “What is it?” I asked. What I saw in her grip as I looked closer was a two-foot-long cord of human hair: dark, thick, and braided. The braid traveled from her hands to mine, and then there was a sudden softness against my skin that I hadn’t prepared for. She had given it over the way you’d hand off a baby, supporting both ends with cupped hands, shifting it gently into my grasp. I was confused, I still didn’t understand what was happening, and I couldn’t tell whether the thing I saw in my hands was dense or light, dry or moist. In my hands the braid lay soft and motile, limp and invertebrate. I looked down. It hung heavy, but with an active tension, a nervous cord sagging slightly in its middle where there was nothing to support it. The hair had a sad look, naked and lonely, gleaming with oily light. It was tied off at both ends with two pink rubber bands. “It’s yours,” she said. “I mean, it’s yours now. I just did it.” “You did this . . . ,” I said, trailing off. “I did it for you,” B said, smiling the beautiful smile of a deaf child. “What I mean is, I

wanted to do it and I didn't know why until I thought of you. You always look so okay. You don't have pounds of hair hanging from the top of you. I'm already feeling better, clearer. My thoughts are louder." I looked at her head." "Hair had always been our way of telling ourselves apart. Mine went down to the shoulders, dark like hers, but finer and softer. Hers went feet farther, brushing the small of her back. B used to have Disney princess hair, hair with a life and directionality of its own, separate from the movements of its host body. She used to sling it over her shoulder and pet it like a cat, her face shrunken underneath. Now she stood in my doorway giving off a weird confidence, eyes blunt. With hair cropped to her shoulders, she reminded me of times when I had seen myself reflected in imperfect surfaces, in the windows of shops or cars. "I think you should keep this," I said. "You might need it," I said. I was struggling for something more to say. "But I don't want it," B replied. "That stuff was driving me crazy. It was like, you know, when you think that you're sick and there's something really wrong with you, like lupus or heart disease or chronic fatigue syndrome, and then you just realize that you're hung over. That hair was making me feel un-myself. "I think it was muffling my thoughts. That's why I cut it off. And gave it to you." She used the past tense to talk about what was happening as though it had already happened, as though I had already accepted her unwanted gift. "Now you have a part of me forever," she added. Someday I would think back on this moment in light of how badly it would turn out. I didn't know where to look, and I looked off to the side of her, down at the twist of hair I held in my hands, and then up at my body in the mirror to my left. Hair like this could choke a person." (10-12)

"She stood staring, gaping as though struggling to believe what she was seeing. It seemed to be her: the tiny mouth, sharp fingers, a voice like water falling on tin. These were parts of the old B, the one I knew. But the self-assurance, the way she leaned forward, extending a hand out toward me as though she thought she was helping, out and into my own space: this wasn't my frail friend.

When the pamphlets instructed me to discern duplicity, was this what they meant? I looked at her, at

the traces of varicolored eye shadow that clung to her eyelid. Errors were piling up in her. She needed sorting.” (157)

“But since C had disappeared, the fantasies that obsessed me were all the worst things I could imagine at any given time. In one fantasy I look over at the TV in the middle of having sex with C and I think I see our reflections—but then I see that it’s a video of the two of us. But as I watch longer, I see that it’s actually a video of C and someone else wearing a wig that looks just like my own hair, which starts to come off the head, revealing real hair beneath that also happens to be similar to mine, only blunter, darker. The hair on the wig is so familiar. This hair is soft and tangly, silky like a little girl’s. It even has the same cowlicks as my own, a small one at the front above the forehead and a deeper one on the back of the head. That’s when it hits me that it’s no wig, it’s my own actual hair. And then I wonder what’s happened to the me that used to be inside it.” (159)

“Outside my bedroom window the streetlights came on, spilling yellow light into the darkening blue. Breath quaked my body. I couldn’t do anything without driving the situation between me and B forward by notches, one step and then another. I heard the floorboards creak as she took another step toward me, contaminating my presence with her own. Everything she did seemed calculated to push me into the future.” (161)

“The camera angle changed, and there was a pale swipe on the screen, some shape moving in the blur, painfully white but stained by shadow. The blur convulsed and suddenly its edges were there, cutting the shape of a creature out from its background. A haunch collapsed inward, dark in the hollow and skinny like a dog. Above it a section that reminded me of moonlight passed through the gaps of a venetian blind, carving strokes of bright out from a dark room. The mass came into view, then blurred back out, the focus continually changing as if the cameraperson couldn’t decide whether it should be on-screen or off-. I looked hard at it. It was the color of natural wax, pale and creamy. It had shadows in places, strewn through its smoothness. Then I saw. Those were ribs. That was the jut of a hip bone. It was a whole human body: female, naked, holding its arms out as though

waiting for an embrace. “That’s my body,” I said to myself, and then I realized that I was starving.”

(273-4)

“Chris,” I said, “I need to eat something right away.” He looked at me sadly. He said nothing.

I had to push him harder. “Chris,” I said, “look at me. I look like people who are about to die.”

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