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## A Screenplay with Critical Preface: 5150 Tarot Canyon

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A SCREENPLAY WITH CRITICAL PREFACE:

5150 TAROT CANYON<sup>i</sup>

JACOB B. PHILLIPS

Master's Program in Creative Writing

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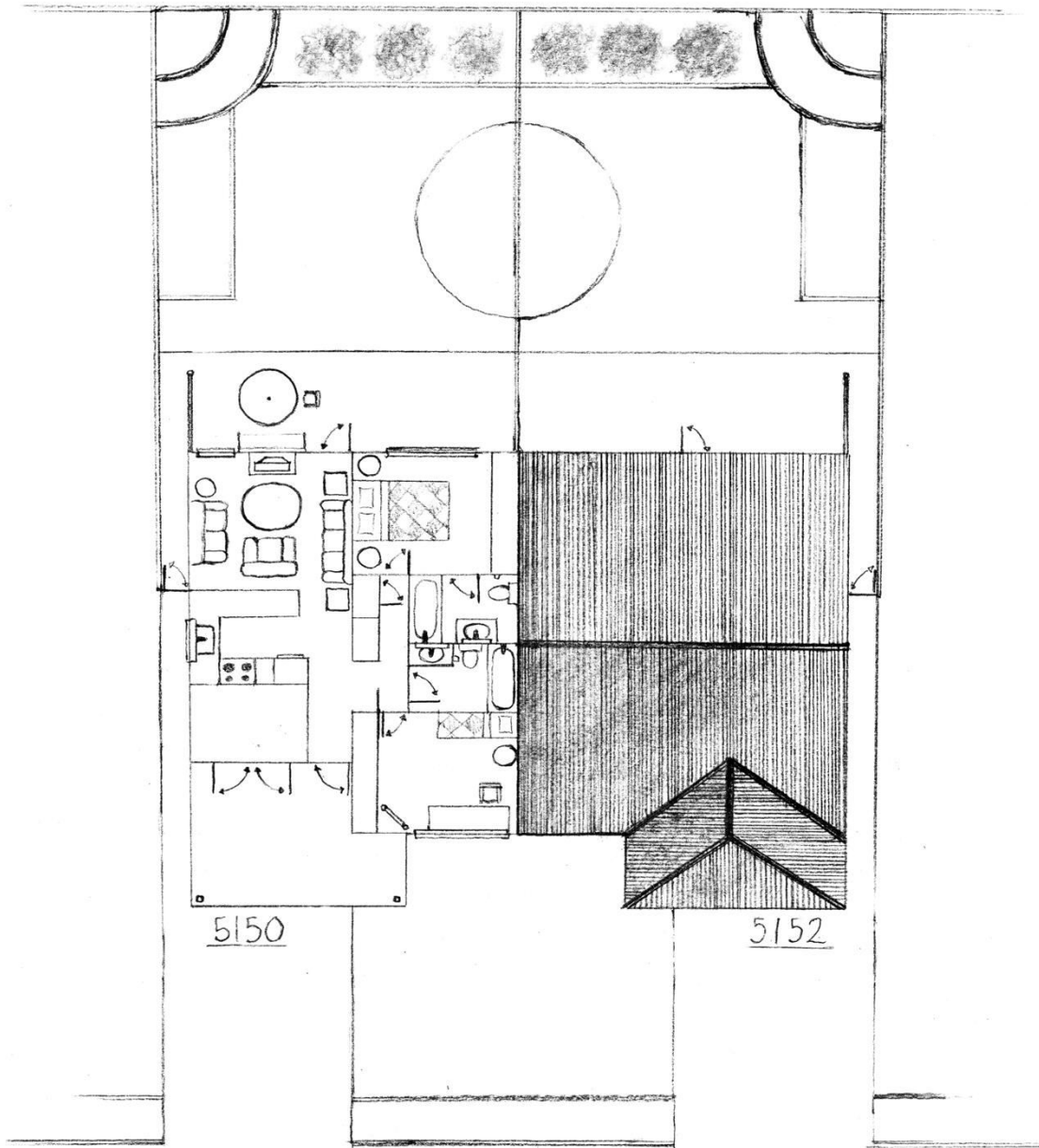
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Roberto Avant-Mier, Ph.D.

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Stephen L. Crites, Jr., Ph.D.  
Dean of the Graduate School

To the borderline—and beyond it.



*Tarot Canyon*

No wonder it's impossible to find your way around;  
add up all these wrong angles and you get one big  
distortion in the house as a whole.<sup>ii</sup>

A SCREENPLAY WITH CRITICAL PREFACE:

5150 TAROT CANYON<sup>i</sup>

by

JACOB B. PHILLIPS, B.A.

THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at El Paso

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

Department of Creative Writing

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

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## CRITICAL PREFACE

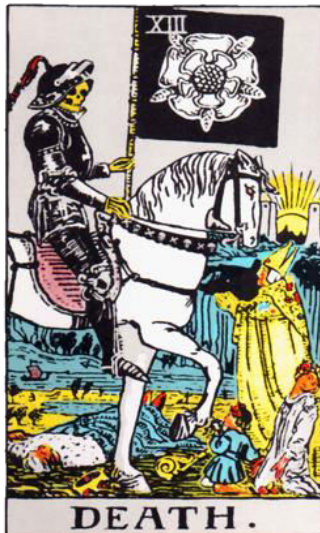
*Like all writers, he measured the achievements of others of others by what they had accomplished, asking of them that they measure him by what he envisaged or planned.<sup>iii</sup>*

Jorge Luis Borges  
“*The Secret Miracle*”

### Introduction

In this thesis, I wanted to write—to imagine, to design—a film about you, the person on the other side of this page. X, I call you, a variable signifying hidden quantities, secrets we keep, identities we parse and suppress to function as our situation demands. In telling your story, I tried to tell what happened when all stories became the same story; a story of learning to live with it, live through it, live without killing the thing in you that makes life worth living—that, to me, is the beating heart of this and every story—that’s what I came here to find.

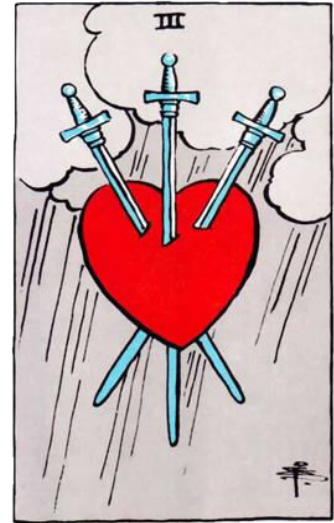
In Tarot, a standard three card spread is used to divine details of situation<sup>1</sup>, task<sup>2</sup>, and solution<sup>3</sup>—in other words, the basic components of narrative—I invoke them here to outline those of my thesis.



**1. Life in a Dying World:** we begin at the end of everything, 2020, in the mind and work of our main character, X, groping for an ‘in’ to their story, seeming to repeat yet really stripping down, falling apart, getting lost. Twenty something and afraid, X left a deadend job, spent savings, and came out to this desert borderland/borderline world in pursuit of a dream, the only one they’ve ever really had, art[school]; now, six weeks deep into high stress, heavy deadlines, barely able to hold it all together, it’s like the art that led X here is disappearing.



2. **The Making:** of art, of self, meaning, love—I feel like it all comes from the same point inside. I want this work to live in and for that original unity, thus: imagining the act of making in a way that brings to life its inspirations, its horizons; allowing the work we consume as much play as that we create; approaching a new kind of journey in a new kind of way, as part of a generative continuum, alive in everything, everywhere, all at once—until genres blur, mediums converge, and conventions come undone. Here, art is the real magic.



3. **Enter the Dream:** do theses have solutions? I'm not sure—god knows they have problems—mine, for instance, runs something like; how do you learn to dream [again] in a world of nightmares? That, as they say, is the question, the quest, puzzle, and paradox just beneath and beyond every word X or I—or U, for that matter—write. My goal is less to solve this riddle, than bring it to life like nothing I've ever seen before, and that means tapping into art's greatest strength; estrangement, to make in a way that makes us feel, makes us real again.

## Outline & Sources

The overall thrust of my story is simple: self-discovery via [pseudo]self-destruction—all masks fall away and what seems like a breakdown is revealed to be a breakthrough—into what? Into art. Into magic. Of course, all this is easier said than done, so let's take a [run-on] sentence or two to sort out the logistics: X is in a two-year degree program—that's four semesters—dividing our story (broadly) into four quarters, or layers, each of which might be said to introduce (line by line, scene by scene) a new set of colors, [over]tones, tropes to the mix. The first three of these represent rising action, in Freytag terms, and the fourth, resolution—or, as I think of it, metamorphosis—in any case, it's those first three I focus on here since it's from them that this story's climax and conclusion must arise.

To visualize the dramatic structure of—excuse me, I'm going to have to ask you to put that arc away, thank you—now, as I was saying; to visualize the dramatic structure of the whole, imagine an hourglass. Observe how the sand changes: first, almost still, then, sifting a little, bit by bit, here and there, before beginning to converge, all at once, into what must feel like the finest of all possible points—however, pay close attention, that feeling's false—what seems to be the end, what feels like the point of no return, turns out to be only the door, the window, the mirror, through which we enter another world, an other world, both strange and strangely familiar.

### **Layer I. Art**

**Essence:** loss of self in art—a big part of this story is learning to live with a love that isn't effortless or easy and doesn't always love you back; in this case, it's love of language, of art. When we love something it becomes a part of our identity, so much so that when it stops feeling like it's ours, we don't feel like ourselves. For an artist today, to lose your sense of self, individuality, intuition, is to lose your sole excuse for existing differently from others; it is a hollow, barren, silent grief—in

short, the last thing anyone can afford right now, especially the unproven, with deadlines oncoming and [always, always, always] bills to pay. This is the first major divergence between X's outer and inner selves, others follow.

**Content:** we begin, again, where so much of this film takes place; inside the mind and work of our main character, X. At first, they seem to be simply telling us their story, but—as this repeats, changes, dissipates—it's soon obvious either X doesn't really have a story to tell or, if they do, isn't sure what it is anymore; the next scene, the workshop scene, lets us know that no one else is either.

Fact is, X is your average panicked twenty something who decides to change their life, only this one rushed headlong and heartfirst into a pandemic. Now, unmoored from all social interaction—having lost the privacy and freedom of the only inner world that meant anything to them, art—X must face the challenge of keeping up the game; meeting deadlines, proving they can be the sort of professional among professionals so late a change of vocation belies.

Before you make any money as an artist, you're just a mistake—or that's how you're treated by outsiders—insiders treat you like an amateur; similar disdain, slightly different direction. The archetypal artist's journey tells the story of a passionate but reckless ingenue/wannabe artist who must learn the discipline of tradition from a wise but stern master. Realistic or otherwise—I think otherwise—that's just not the case today, as I understand it. With very few exceptions, nearly all the young artists I've known have been incredibly disciplined, highly educated, virtually destitute, and frantically attempting to brand themselves a good investment to superiors who weren't really paying much attention in the first place. It's an incredibly isolating thing to try to convince others (or yourself) that you can (or must) follow a different path, especially without support beyond the strength of conviction: here you've made this great big gamble with your life,

don't have much if anything to show for it yet, and can't rationalize it beyond a feeling—by ordinary standards, there is no excuse for decisions like this, hence the guilt, hence the internal pressure to make good.

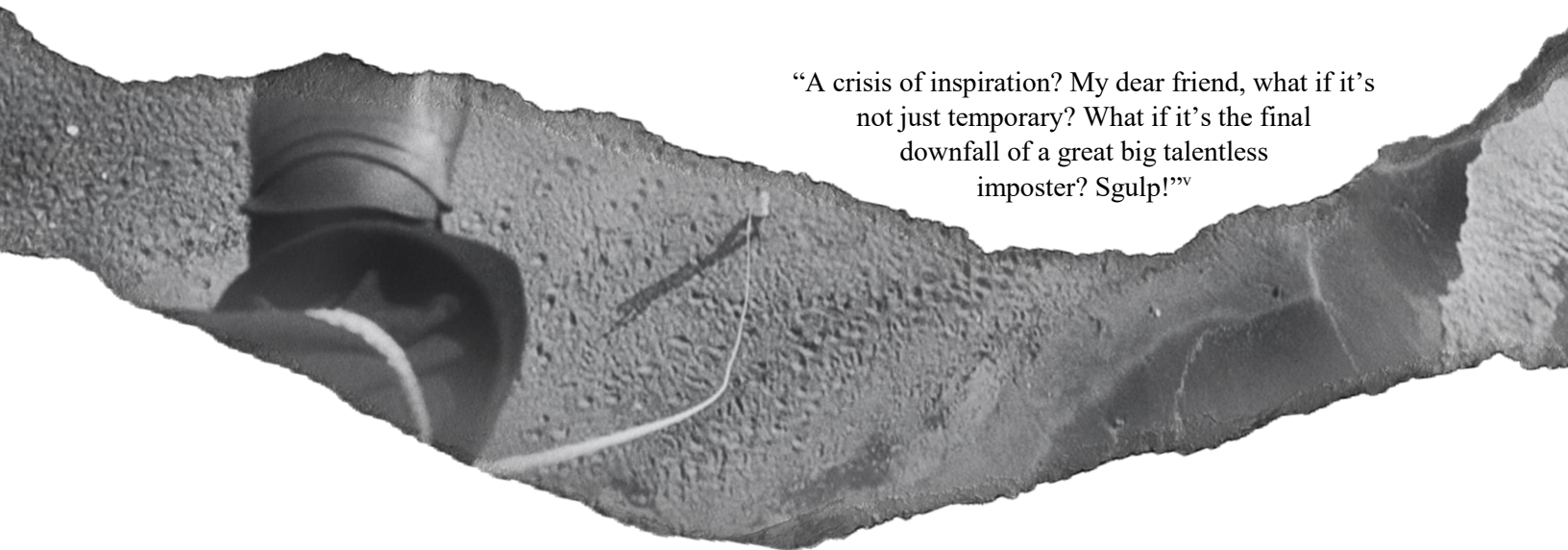
X lives with and cares for a grandmother who is less than half there, she's a grotesque kind of a sybil figure, drifting in and out of consciousness in front of Fox News, occasionally throwing out a muddled oracle and, overall, only vaguely aware of X as an individual beyond the child she remembers, somewhat incoherently. Beyond her, X has a small army of feral cats who live in the alley outback—and who the landlord hates—and a pitiful little garden; imagine a prison block, but with weeds. And that's it. This first section introduces X, their place in the program and struggle to keep it, as well as their job, which they fail to keep when the university instigates a relatively standard round of pandemic layoffs. Thus, by the end of our first act—early November 2020—X is out of work (with no jobs on the horizon likely to keep fossil grandma exposure free), utterly lost creatively, and nervously groping for some means to keep everything together.

The genres evoked—then successively subverted—might be summarized: 'Metafiction' or 'Artist's Journey' (nothing's being successfully written or created at this point), 'Coming of Age' (that ship has sailed, rather dismally too), and 'Education Story' (No one here, X included, seems likely to learn anything—and I can't blame them).

**Reference:** *8½* (1963) by Federico Fellini.<sup>iv</sup> *Otto e mezzo* (originally titled *The Beautiful Confusion*) remains, in my opinion, among the most brilliant explorations of creativity and the creative ever committed to celluloid. Here I should probably confess—it's director, [the inimitable, incomparable, idiosyncratic, ingenious, utterly insane] Federico Fellini, has been a dear favorite since before I even knew what the word 'celluloid' meant—so, I may be a bit biased. But I doubt it.

Part of the reason I'm such a Fellini fan—and it's abundantly evident throughout this film—lies in his deeply intuitive, organic, ambient approach to story. In my opinion, this is what makes his work inimitable: he has no fixed methodologies, no categorical imperatives, no ideological blinders limiting his vision, no generalized rules to simplify decisions. Instead, he faces each film on its own terms, only a shifting instinct to guide him, resulting in idiosyncrasy, yes, but fluid, subconscious idiosyncrasy, something infinitely closer to the texture of human experience than the asphyxiating formula of self-conscious dogma. This ambience is, I believe, essential to the making of art about art.

In any case, my purpose in this first layer is to introduce A. the world I'm working in, B. the character I'm working with, and C. the reason those two aren't working out together—all of which are aptly summed up by Fellini's protagonist, director Guido Anselmi, in his elevator soliloquy:



“A crisis of inspiration? My dear friend, what if it's not just temporary? What if it's the final downfall of a great big talentless imposter? Sgulp!”<sup>v</sup>

## **Layer II. Body**

**Essence:** loss of self in body—this layer introduces a second, more substantial loss of identity, the kind you can only experience when attempting to become what people want from you physically.

Essentially, all the disorientation X was previously experiencing is now going to begin to manifest itself in more embodied (and alarming) ways.

Academia is so filled with discussion of the body in fiction that we sometimes lose sight of the condition of that entity in fact. In fact, if the last few decades have taught us anything, it's that the body just isn't enough. Bodies without documentation, without money, without name, lineage, this or that means of privilege or excuse, have lost all exchange value and, like it or not,<sup>vi</sup> exchange value is the pitiless arbiter of our treatment in the world today.

In his groundbreaking look at *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (2013) French economist Thomas Piketty asserts that—economically, at any rate—the world we live in now is far more congruent to the blasé structural corruption of Balzac's or the entrenched fiscal anxiety of Austen's than those of more superficially familiar twentieth century authors.<sup>vii</sup> In other words, anyone who came of age over the past few decades has little to no experience in a functional economy. Instead, we watched as the rules changed after every new collapse, moving from post-employment, to gig-based, to 24/7 content-mill.

Frankly, people of my generation are less judgmental of casual online sexwork not because they're any more understanding or empathetic, but rather because that labor model—autocommodification, branding, plus self-sale—forms the core of our socio-economic reality. There's a reason those terms are now used interchangeably across the arts, sexwork, and socials. It's bleak, but the writing's on the wall; at a certain age, you could be the great unknown genius and you'd still be able to make more, quicker selling pictures to strangers online than trying to break even on your life's work—there's something really horrific about that, something about our relationship with the body, something which I try to develop as a source of tension, rushing us further into what, for now, seems a spiral.

**Content:** unable to secure much (if any) income for intellectual efforts, X does exactly what countless other internet savvy, twenty somethings, desperate for low-risk, quick-cash did during pandemic; online sexwork. (“No free feet pics!”) For those who don’t know or can’t picture what that means, let me clarify: online sexwork isn’t actually sex—it can be, but usually isn’t, and especially wasn’t during late 2020, human intimacy as a whole pretty much falling off by that point. For the most part, running an onlyfans during that time entailed a very weird, post-modern kind of performance art: your medium is your body, your audience the camera, a version of yourself, and a thousand faceless comments.

You know, there are times when making art can feel a bit like taking your clothes off in front of a crowd: a matter of public intimacy, open vulnerability, putting yourself out there in ways that can’t be disguised as anything other than what they are. While often rough, it can occasionally feel liberating to be revealed; to know that, whatever happens, you are the one who took the risk to both be and be seen as you really are and no one else can take that honesty, that bravery away from you. Cameras, however, are a different beast; people in a crowd can be coarse, cruel, but crowds are nothing to cameras. Cameras are mirrors. Cameras are us—everything inside us—amplified, exacerbated.

If the thought of performing sex acts to a mirror seems like something you couldn’t attempt either sober or often, then you’re beginning to understand the latent sense of horror I try to explore here. It’s the elimination of privacy without the compensation of human connection. What might at first seem liberating, rapidly grades from *Belle de Jour* (1968) into *Repulsion* (1965). Old body issues crop up anew as we live in it, and try to make our living from it, longer and, of course, X’s autoerotic education is paralleled here with the mortification of nursing our all but postmortem grandma. At the beginning of this section, she’s ill; by the end, dead. Meanwhile, the garden seems

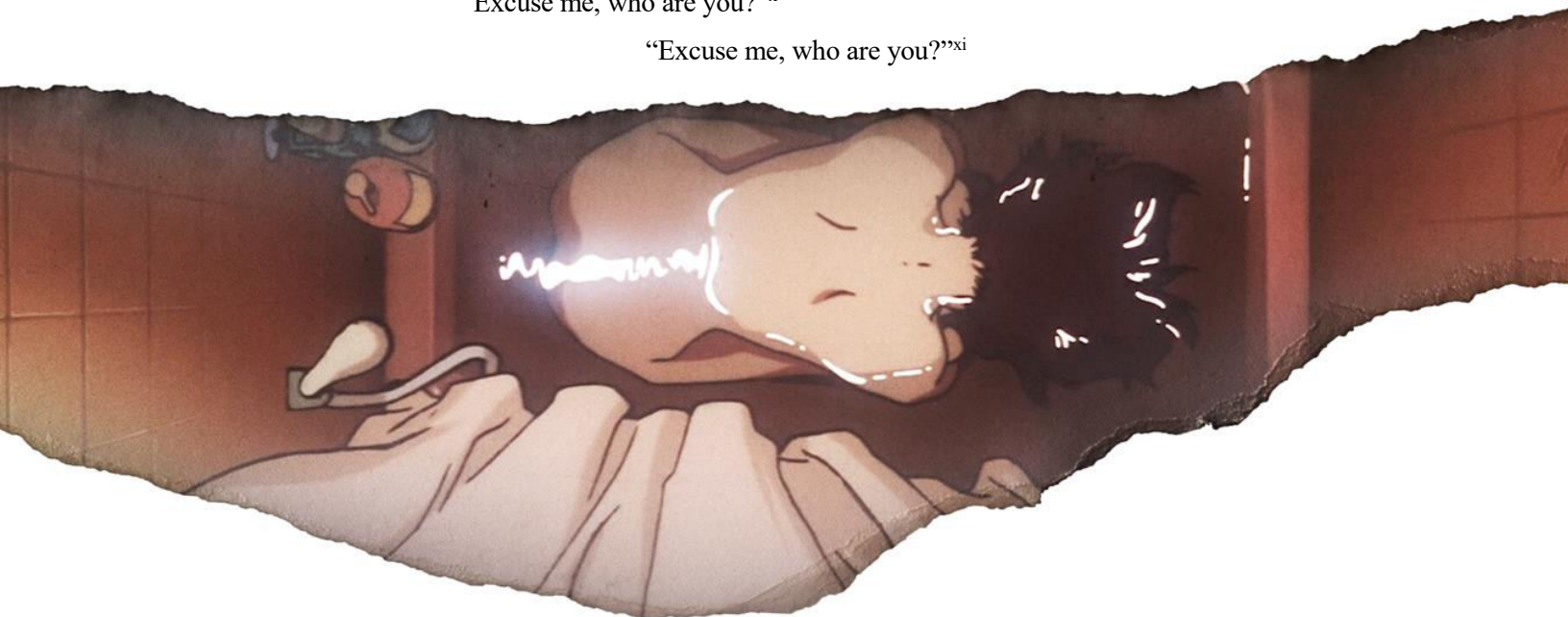
to be taking on a life all its own. The genres evoked here primarily amount to a combination of ‘Psych’ and ‘Body Horror’ presented with an eye to the tension of ‘Mystery’ and ‘Thriller’ stories; it’s murky and getting murkier.

**Reference:** *Perfect Blue* (1997) by Satoshi Kon.<sup>viii</sup> This is easily among the most disturbing films I’ve ever seen—disturbing in a way that very few works of art ever manage to become—disturbingly familiar. Its horror is not a horror of ghosts, gore, or jumpscars. No, not even King’s uncanny valley. If anything, it’s a Borgesian horror—the kind that lurks in mirrors, echoes, and infinity—reimagined for a new millennium. Mima Kirigoe is a twenty-one-year-old micro celebrity, famous as a singer, who now wants to act; to do this, however, she must shed her spotless pop-idol image, the same one her fans have come to love. Problems begin as this public persona seems to take on a life of its own, one directly opposed to her. This is accompanied by the introduction of a stalker character—every internet personality’s greatest fear— one which I plan to explore with my Walking Sam character later on. For now, though, the heart of this reference lies in the disorientating reality of the online avatar, as Mima puts it:

“Excuse me, who are you?”<sup>ix</sup>

“Excuse me, who are you?”<sup>x</sup>

“Excuse me, who are you?”<sup>xi</sup>





### **Layer III. World**

**Essence:** loss of world—they say all you have to do to drive a character insane is destroy their sense of either self or world. The first two phases took care of X's self, now it's time to end their world. Only, in character driven stories such as this, the world—in some strange essential way—becomes an extension of character; one cannot fall apart without the other and, when they do, it's almost impossible to figure out which started it. What does all that mean in terms of story? Simple; when everything begins to swim, neither we nor X can tell whether they're distorting their world or their world is distorting them. The distortion, on the other hand, is beyond question.

Now, I have a confession to make: this is not madness—it's gotta look and feel like it could be to both us and X—but it's not. I say this for a variety of reasons, all amounting to the fact that simply driving X mad would feel like taking the easy way out, something I couldn't forgive myself in this story. Instead, I want to use the basic situation of madness, the disruption of reality, as a kind of misdirection distracting us from what is really underway; the introduction of a new one. In terms of precedent, *Juliet of the Spirits* (1965) and *A Matter of Life and Death* (1946) are both excellent examples of films which use the isolated and [questionable] mentality of their main character as a bridge between realism and magic as I attempt to.

**Content:** classes are now in person again. Meanwhile, as far as X is concerned, exhaustion, fear, and loneliness have crept in—and, along with them, a stranger, a Walking Sam (possibly X's double) always at a distance, but never far away. X can't be sure, but it's almost like someone's started stalking them. X tries to ignore it, tries to focus, to grow—but things aren't coming together—instead X's world seems to be falling apart, opening up. Grandma gone, X, now alone, enters the heart and heat of vision: shadows on the horizon, movements round the house at night,

voices in the wind, sleep paralysis, waking dreams, walking nightmares—can't be sure if these are X's hallucinations or spirits of this magic place speaking to X, trying to make X listen.

**Reference:** *Spirited Away* (2001) by Hayao Miyazaki.<sup>xii</sup> “Kamikakushi” is a traditional Japanese term—now commonly translated “Spirited Away” thanks, in large part, to this film—literally meaning to be hidden by kami (spirits) without anyone noticing. Building upon previous efforts—*My Neighbor Totoro* (1988) and *Princess Mononoke* (1997)—director Hayao Miyazaki wanted this project to take on the vast world of Japanese folklore, bringing it crashing into the modern age.

In my project, I attempt something similar, only the mythologies I'm interested in exploring aren't quite so restricted; being anything from the ancient indigenous lore of the desert southwest (Kachina,<sup>xiii</sup> Darkwatchers)<sup>xiv</sup> to more modern variations on these figures (La Llorona)<sup>xv</sup> as well as broader legendary figures (El Duende)<sup>xvi</sup> including urban (the Jackalope,<sup>xvii</sup> for instance). Some of the more original mythic beings/elements rupturing into X's story/world include:

**The Walking Sam:** I start with this because, although based on an urban legend of the same name,<sup>xviii</sup> I tried to shade that original concept with the more realist tints of the archetypal stalker and doppelganger; a passive, but increasingly omnipresent question mark slowly causing X (and us) to see[k] them everywhere.

**The Garden:** this is X's answer to the control they feel pressing down on them from outside, they've created a space to watch things grow; a place for life that parallels the inner one X can't repress anymore.

**The Being of the Wind:** this creature I imagine as a kind of Quetzalcoatl made up of a thousand childhood drawings scaled one atop another, feather shredded newspapers, litter from the streets, with a switchblade mane, hypodermic fangs, and [gods]eyes of yarn—all billowing out over the desert in a neverending breeze.

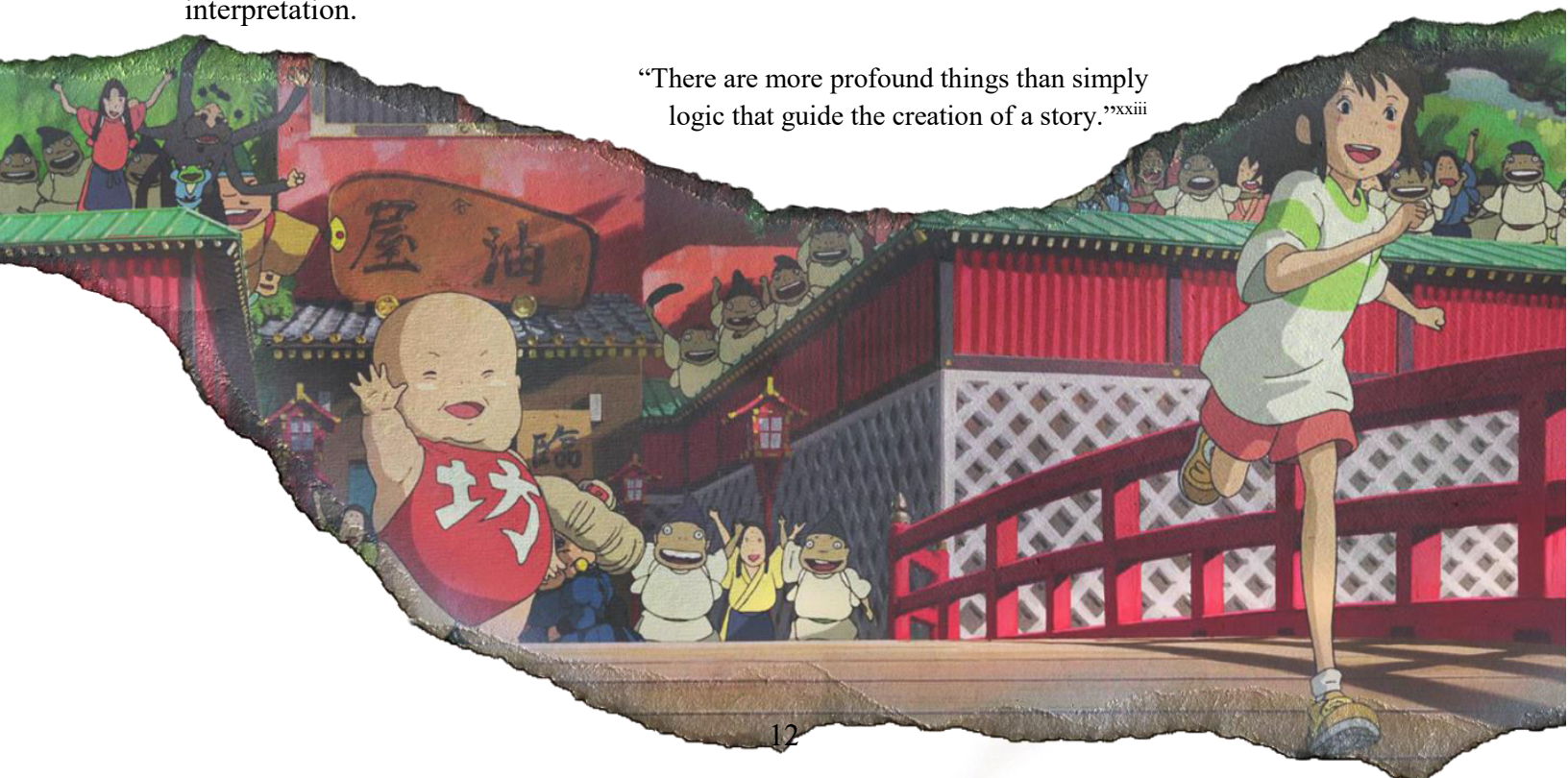
**La Vidente:** this creature is a kind of collective consciousness, thousand years of history hidden in the mountains; petroglyphs spiraling, circling, staring out through a thousand eyespots watching, remembering.

**Roaches:** okay, no, these are not technically mythic creatures, however, I think they ought to be since the unexpected encounter can utterly unstring just about everyone I know. Luckily, they are a fantastic sort of herald to the real mythos of the desert—mortality—now more pertinent, more universal than ever.

**Death:** this is less a mythic being than a whole category of mythic beings populating mankind’s ideas of the desert through the ages—from the colorful Calaveras<sup>xix</sup> to the gaunt Shakyamuni,<sup>xx</sup> petrified Desert Fathers<sup>xxi</sup> to Santa Muerte<sup>xxii</sup>—the desert is the underworld, the otherworld, the cusp of transformation.

Note: this is a soft, not hard, magic system—like that of Miyazaki as opposed to, say, J. R. R. Tolkien—not everything will, can, or should be explained; instead, magic exists in the story as a kind of atmospheric extension of character with blanks designed to expand, not limit, interpretation.

“There are more profound things than simply logic that guide the creation of a story.”<sup>xxiii</sup>



#### **Layer IV. Metamorphosis**

**Essence:** transmutation. Basically, the steps we just walked through, the layers of loss—self in art, self in body, X’s very world—must each pass, with us, *Through the Looking Glass*<sup>xxiv</sup> into phases of discovery; beginning with world, ending with self and, in self, art. This is the molten heart of X’s story, our story, the part of the prism where breakdown refracts into breakthrough; everything X thought was important has fallen away, and what they’re left with—what they thought would be the end—turns out to be only the door to who they really are.

**Content:** bluntly, this is the part where X finally discovers their intuition—and about fucking time. Before, each tremor of this—the sense of loss, sense of panic, sense of anxiety, hurt, and fear—was systematically repressed, ignored, or denied; leading to regular responses, reactions in X’s world and body. Here, the two finally achieve a kind of direct connection—X has at last entered the dream—and, from that connection, develops a new kind of harmony, a sense of trust.

On that note, another confession; up until a few weeks ago, I had absolutely no idea how (or whether) I could pull this off.<sup>xxv</sup> I knew—in a vague, half-dreamy way—what I hoped would happen when I first fell into this project: but as I looked at what I’d written so far, then at how little time I had left to write the rest, it dawned on me that I was probably going to have to cut my losses, tidy up my mess as best I could, and let this one go.

To be clear, there was a way I could do this: Delta—a prosepoem/story/dreamscape I wrote in X’s voice around the same miraculous week I pulled together the prologue—it’s dark, it’s deep, in some ways a mirror to the opening and, in others, a door to somewhere beyond/beneath. In short, if I had to end it all, Delta would certainly do. In terms of narrative, it picks up exactly where act III. left off—X alone, house under siege, night closing in—and also finally brings back X’s

individual poetic voice (which we really haven't encountered at any length since act I.) with a vengeance.

However, as I began to adapt Delta into an ending for the story as written, all the threads it couldn't tie together, all the problems it wouldn't solve—all the promise I didn't fulfill—became clearer and clearer and clearer to me. These ranged from the highly technical—X is in a two year degree program, meaning four semesters, if the first three acts each correlate roughly to a semester, does X just not make it to the end—to the more profound: up till now, X has been mostly passive, more acted upon than acting, living victim of a monstrous world, and while that's something I can understand in the context of this story, as well as life in general, I gotta admit I wanted more for X.

All things considered, just slapping Delta on the end of act III. so I could finish the damn thing seemed likely to leave me with little more than an interesting, semi-innovative house-horror film drenched—for no obvious reason—in art. Granted, that sounds a lot like something I'd usually love—I mean, just look at *Suspiria* (1977)—however, as with X, I'd started out wanting so much more for this project.

About a year ago—right after finishing my sample text and right before submitting my proposal—I couldn't, for the life of me, shut up about it. I was so excited—finally, I felt like I was making something I'd never seen before, but wanted to—and wherever I went, whatever I was doing, I somehow found myself going on and on and on about it to anyone who asked. I remember at one point sitting in my doctor's office chatting with the nurse; she'd come in for vitals but, somehow, we got started on my thesis—and films, and stories, and what they were vs. what they could be, what they should be—and partway through it all she stopped and said:

“Actually, last night my kids and I saw this really amazing one—I can’t remember the title but—”

“Everythingeverywhereallatonce?”

“Yes! God! I don’t know the last time I cried in a movie theater, but that film made me feel things! Have you—?”

“No—not yet—but everyone I talk to about this keeps bringing it up so now I’ve got to.”

“You really do.”

Well, that night, I did—and loved every frame. Year later, pacing my room, kicking myself for not knowing how to help this project become what it could’ve been, one of the many people I’d nagged/guilted/forced into watching that “silly movie” texted me an article about how it’s officially become the most awarded film of all time.<sup>xxvi</sup> And I took a moment just to smile and think how great it was to see brilliant, weird, wonderful stories thriving—even if mine wasn’t.

So many moments in that movie simply took my breath away: from the editing tour de force of the multiverse montage, to the unforgettable, dildo-wielding<sup>xxvii</sup> entrance of Jobu Tupaki, whose name Evelyn manages to butcher throughout, though never the same way twice, the hollow bagel and its inverse the all-seeing google eye, the laughing rocks, and of course that false ending—pure genius! You know, in hindsight, I really feel that moment opened the door to otherwise inaccessible dimensions of the story, as well as Evelyn’s character; sure, she considers herself a fighter, but it’s only once she learns this quality, like every quality, can be as much a weakness as a strength, that she opens up her minds[google]eye to other ways of being, of fighting, of feeling—and then it hits me.

What if—stay with me now—what if the ending I’d roughed out wasn’t really, but only looked like it was? What if I didn’t have to give up the metamorphosis I’d wanted for X and their story? What if this was it? Neck of the hourglass, heart of the labyrinth. Quick as thought, I grab my phone and leave the house: I can’t sit down to hash this out—gotta walk, gotta type, keep that

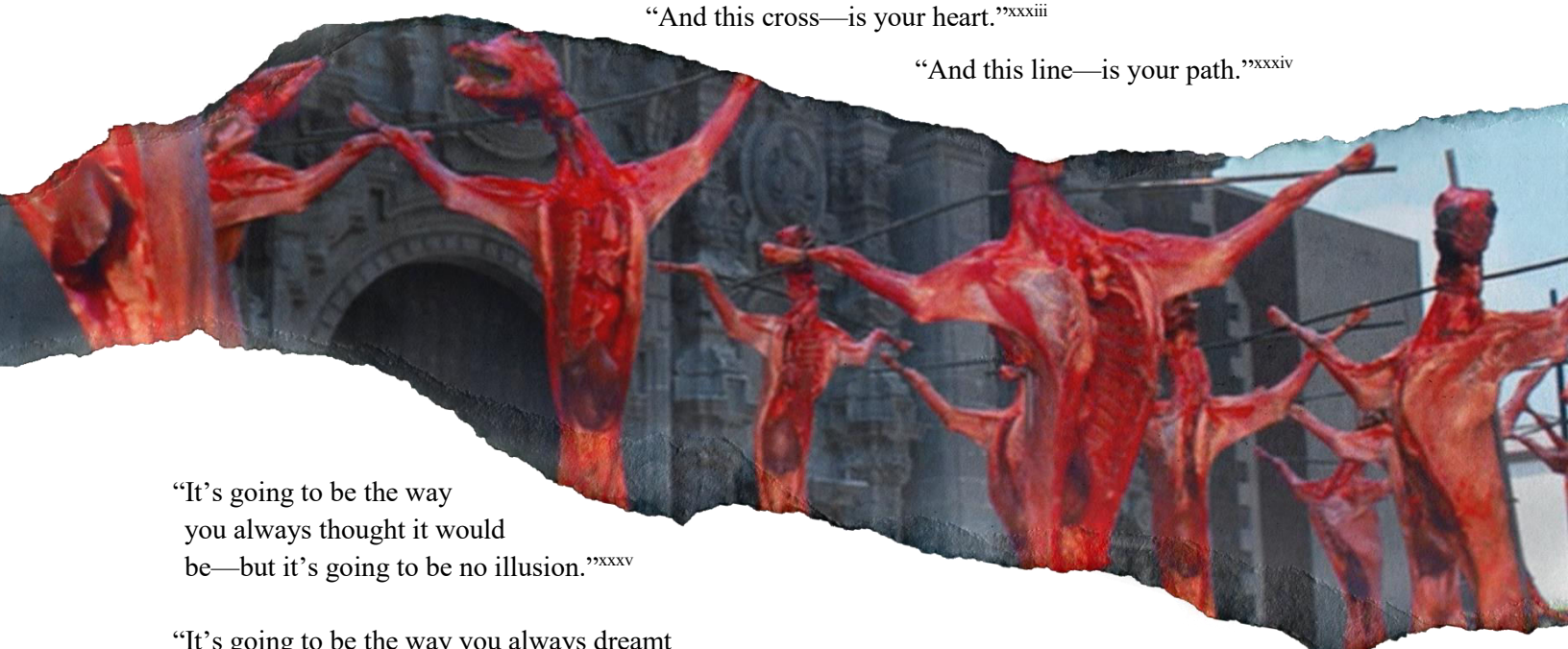
blood flowing, brain working—and so it was stumbling through an arroyo around dawn that I ended up plotting the final layer or phase of this film. I don't have a word for it, but the movement I feel combines culmination (growing together) and crescendo (bursting out)—every strand, every possibility must first twine, then branch—here, imagine: bolting lightning, burning fuse, a story in full blaze/bloom, in a sense, in essence, Delta.

They say stories live or die by the last act; mine/yours/X's must do both.<sup>xxviii</sup> Thus, what we're concerned with here isn't really an ending so much as a rite of passage, a means of transformation, guiding us from one world, or way of being, into another, changed. But every rite has its sacrifice<sup>xxix</sup>—Hans Andersen's little *Mermaid* lost her tongue to get those legs and every step felt “as if she were treading on sharp knives and spikes”<sup>xxx</sup>—to wear the *Red Shoes*<sup>xxxi</sup> is to dance a dream and destroy yourself:

“And this curve—is your smile.”<sup>xxxii</sup>

“And this cross—is your heart.”<sup>xxxiii</sup>

“And this line—is your path.”<sup>xxxiv</sup>



“It's going to be the way  
you always thought it would  
be—but it's going to be no illusion.”<sup>xxxv</sup>

“It's going to be the way you always dreamt  
about it, but it's going to be really happening to you.”<sup>xxxvi</sup>

**Reference:** *The Holy Mountain* (1974) by Alejandro Jodorowsky isn't my only—and perhaps not even my primary—influence for this section. A more comprehensive list would include several others by the same director<sup>xxxvii</sup>—not to mention our inevitable trinity<sup>xxxviii</sup>—as well as Pier Paolo Pasolini,<sup>xxxix</sup> David Lynch,<sup>xl</sup> Stanley Kubrick,<sup>xli</sup> Jaromil Jireš,<sup>xlii</sup> Jim Jarmusch,<sup>xliii</sup> Guillermo del Toro,<sup>xliv</sup> Henry Selick,<sup>xlv</sup> and, of course, a number of literary sources too.<sup>xlvi</sup> In fact, my initial notesapp synopsis of this grand finale, typed out between hanging cliffs and some truly egregious spelling errors, ran as follows: “bprges<sup>xlvii</sup> in wonderland;<sup>xlviii</sup> darkly poetic, adult journey/rite—beksendvfdsky<sup>xlix</sup> meets beard sly<sup>l</sup> running river 2 delta + delta 2 see—what?? the other side?” I didn't know. Wasn't sure at the time. Wasn't till I'd climbed and crested this *Mountain* of a film that I fully perceived the ultimate layer, element, dimension latent-in—yet missing-from—my own.

This is a story about the making of art and the unmaking of self; meaning its center must consist of both those actions—creation and destruction—in terms of art, in terms of identity, in terms of narrative. The only way I know how to visualize the implicit mechanics of this process is by looking through the metaphorical kaleidoscope: story elements which have long been in place must suddenly start to move/mix/merge, becoming—at confluence/climax/core—something new, yet inevitable. This story began beneath the weight of an overwhelming reality beyond X's (or anyone's) control; it must end enveloped by an equal but opposite surreality.

Antonin Artaud, French poet and surrealist, conceptualized a school of performance known as *The Theatre of Cruelty*,<sup>li</sup> ritualistic, primal, viscerally embodied, disturbingly dreamlike—the idea arose from his sense that “our longstanding habit of seeking diversions has made us forget the very nature of true theatre which upsets all our preconceptions,”<sup>lii</sup> Artaud argued, “in the anguished, catastrophic times we live in, we feel an urgent need for theatre that is not



overshadowed by events, but arouses deep echoes within us.”<sup>liii</sup> Jodorowsky identifies Artaud as his greatest influence,<sup>liv</sup> and nowhere is this more evident than in his *Holy Mountain*, where the mythologies of Roland Barthes<sup>lv</sup> meet those of Joseph Campbell<sup>lvi</sup> in an unforgettable epic of aesthetic estrangement;<sup>lvii</sup> every idea, every image, every moment and meaning is expanded to its utmost limit, then beyond. Watching, I felt I was in the presence of someone who began their story where/how I needed to end mine: in an ocean of imagery, thought, beauty, letting it wash over, wave after wave, drifting. In the end, I suppose that’s what X’s story is really about, learning to let yourself get lost in it all, to feel without being overwhelmed or afraid anymore. Stories will happen how they happen—twisting, changing partway through—yours might not be what you want it to be, but maybe that’s the point, maybe, an invitation.

Everything in X’s world amounts to one big..? Their journey is about learning not just to live with that but see its beauty. It’s okay not to understand, it’s okay not to know what happens next—in fact, true creativity begins where not-knowing meets wanting-to—something rather like that spirit of wonder cited by [Platonic] Socrates as the origin of wisdom.<sup>lviii</sup> Consciously or subconsciously, this idea permeates every dimension, every decision, every detail of my project. We begin in fear; at the heart of this, we find uncertainty; beyond/beneath that—half dead but still lingering—lies the taproot of intuition. The beginning (the prologue) and very end (kamikaze, literally “spirit wind”) of my story act as funnels first out-of, then back into its so-called real world—meaning the world outside X’s inner one. Their imagery is rich, dense, disorienting: modeled on that river of Heraclitus,<sup>lix</sup> neverending stream of consciousness no one can wade through twice, first because the waters have changed, are changing, will change—then, because, so are we.

Native to Rome, Janus represents the twofaced deity of transformation, duality, thresholds. The many beings, objects, spaces, and times under his protection include twins, mirrors, coins, doors, crossroads, sunrise and sunset, year-in, year-out, the beginning, the end. In short, Janus embodies the magic of the borderline: neither side of the binary, the hybrid, the confluence defines it, instead, the point of contact/collision between two (or more) worlds creates a new one whose complexities extend/expand far beyond the sum of its component parts. Fusion is the process that powers our sun, syncretism that which forms our culture[s]—I believe in mixing, I believe in the power of the in-between, the beauty of the gradient. This applies not only to transitional spaces, but transitional times as well; between states, at the borderline, the crossroads, you are pure potential—you could be anything—and everything’s a borderline, everything a cross, an X.

But we aren’t raised to regard this as a good thing; in general, to exist beyond tradition, definition, certainty is to exist beyond security, acceptance, future. I approach my work from the perspective of someone who can’t believe in security, acceptance, or future on those terms, someone who wants to see the world change for the better while they’re still here, someone with a sneaking suspicion that what sets us apart can also, somehow, bring us together again. I take risks in my work because I feel like that’s what art is for, because I feel like this isn’t the time/place for safety/stasis, but change—and yet, at the end of the day, I walk home alone feeling like I never will, not really, like I’d do anything to know how to be human, keep friends, stay present, create a life I want to wake up to. Perhaps contradictions like this qualify as a kind of contact-zone<sup>lx</sup> in and of themselves, a living division we carry inside us. Maybe the friction this creates is where art comes from in the first place, a kind of need to balance the imbalance within/without.

Toward the end of his life, Borges admitted he only ever found Buenos Aires in his work after giving up its most obvious attributes—tango bars, knife fights—in favor of subjects and

settings which, on the surface, have nothing to do with that place: mazes, mirrors, masks.<sup>lxi</sup> Over the course of a five-decade career, Fellini crafted a cinescape so utterly individual, it became (rather ironically) national.<sup>lxii</sup> To discover his America, Whitman had to make it big enough to take on/in the whole world. To discover his *Amerika*, Kafka had to stay in Europe. I'd like to think my fixation with divisions/connections/interstices—places/points where two or more things converge, whether physically or emotionally, aesthetically or structurally—is part of a deeper journey on my part, down/into/across the borderline.

I'd even argue that this applies to my mixing of media, breaking of molds, formalized modes and techniques. Because, if we're being honest, media doesn't really have [m]any borders, boundaries, limits anymore—beyond funding, of course—and our encounters with it are more mixed than they've ever been. Our lives are defined by its consumption, our careers by “optics” and “engagement.” I will never outlive the four different email addresses I now have going, I will never be totally offline,<sup>lxiii</sup> because there is no logging out of this timeline. No matter how it makes me feel, social networking is the young artist's lifeblood. Can't find a patron? No one can. Found a patreon. An etsy account. An onlyfans. Start a podcast. YouTube how to TikTok. Remember to clear more storage space off your phone. Why are half your iCloud albums showing up blank all of a sudden? Are you out of storage there too? How can they just delete your memories like that? How much does more cost? Let's see, per month that comes to—the bus stops with a jolt. You hadn't noticed how much time passed. You close the notes app as you get up, turn off your Janis Joplin album as you make your way down the isle, open iBooks as you wave goodbye to the bus driver and, by the time you hit the pavement, Virginia Woolf is back from the dead, telling you all about the trials, tribulations, and triumphs of the art life. Someone is blaring Bad Bunny from god

knows where, sounds like the parking garage across the street—honestly, it’s not so bad—got a long walk ahead of you, but the night is beautiful:

Wednesday, February 4<sup>th</sup>, 1920: the mornings from 12:00 to 1:00 I spend rereading *The Voyage Out*. I’ve not read it since July 1913... What to make of it, Heaven knows. The failures are ghastly enough to make my cheeks burn—and then a turn of the sentence, a direct look ahead of me, makes them burn in a different way. On the whole, I like the young woman’s mind considerably—how gallantly she takes her fences!<sup>lxiv</sup>

## Form & Theory

Form? Hybrid screenplay. Why hybrid? Everything's hybrid. At least, everything I do/love. Alright. Well, why screenplay? Two reasons. First is positive: because screenplay is the D.N.A. of film and film is as close as I can get to the language of my imagination. Next, negative: whether I like it or not—and, to be clear, I don't—words never come first [or easy] in my work. And prose? The kind you'd find in novels? That comes dead last. Given enough time (and caffeine) I can reverse engineer something with a passing resemblance to your standard novelist's sentence patter[n]—but all that's needed to do so is a good ear, a strong imagination, and an overdeveloped inferiority complex. In any case, experience has taught me such an inorganic, roundabout approach to art is A. unsustainable in the longrun and B. unreliable under pressure—two insurmountable objections when considering a thesis. So, where does that leave us?

Well, lemme put it like this; my work is in words but my creative background is in other areas, a trait shared by all four filmmakers cited as primary influences for this project, each began their artlives in some space beyond text—Fellini staging puppet shows, Miyazaki drawing comics, Kon painting, Jodorowsky a mime—I think these nonverbal creative origins developed in them a less conventional, less formulaic sense of narrative movement and direction, one which set their work apart for the better. Although not fully conscious of this when I began my project and identified its sources, I now consider the unique approaches of these films/filmmakers to the dynamics of story the strongest impetus behind my own. I always knew I wanted to bring to life the story of an artist today, but now I know, to do that, I have to make something bigger than any one medium, any single tradition. That's why I'm doing what I'm doing the way I'm doing it, because I believe all art, all making comes from the same place—each must find its own voice,

but all comes from the same point inside ourselves—I need to make a work, a world living in, through, and for that original unity. But how? One word:



It was my desire not to be a specialist in one branch of art, but an artist. My aim is the Merz composite artwork that embraces all branches of art in an artistic unity. Merz stands for freedom from all fetters for the sake of artistic creation. Merz is as tolerant as possible toward its materials. Merz art strives for immediate expression by shortening the path from intuition to visual manifestation of the artwork.<sup>lxv</sup>

Coined by German artist Kurt Schwitters upon his rejection by local representatives of the Dadaists,<sup>lxvi</sup> Merz embodies a form of art beyond forms, as it were, made by merging traditionally separate medias into a new, hybrid whole. If the artist's story can be told at all, I feel this philosophy must pervade and direct its telling and, to my mind, film represents the space with the most potential to do that. Of course, I am not actually making a film—for now, at any rate—instead, I'm using this thesis as a space to imagine, to design one. Admittedly, my screenwriting vocabulary is nowhere near as vast as my visual grammar—I've seen and studied far more movies than formal screenplays—rules, however, can be learned; what can't be is the instinct for when/where/how they should be broken, and that's what I've focused on developing here.

Whereas character and world come down to understanding who and where I've been and am, a sense of design relies on knowing what I want—to see, to feel, to create—and, again, for the first time in ages, I really, really do. A story of art—at its core, an attempt at connection—in a time of unparalleled global isolation, 2020-2021. Moreover, I try to tell this story of art, through art; to have the very essence of my tale—learning to dream [again] in a world of nightmares—become

one where each work created, hell, each work consumed, comes alive in new and exciting ways. Experiments with montage, redrafting, damaged film, double exposure, the incorporation of ambient soundscapes, music, performance, dance, voiceover, pre-lap and post-lap all play a role in the text as written.

I get so frustrated when artists' stories are reduced, across mediums, to an opportunity to position their private lives, professional reputations, and/or mental illness as the primary origin and impetus of their work. Like, where is the love of art? And not just a scene of someone staring at a painting or writing out a story. No. Make me feel it, make me live and feel the love of making, the inspiration. Make me partake in the vision, imagination.

We're so good at getting people to viscerally share in nightmares through film, really drawing them in, but make very little effort to parallel this with an equally creative, novel approach to engaging people in the dreaming, the wonder and magic of art. That's what I want to do here. That's why the piece I've created shifts, tonally, from post-coming-of-age/realist/education story (with a hint of psych horror/mystery) to an out-and-out magic, almost mythic adventure, with the art/poetry itself playing a direct and vital role in the telling (and showing) of my story. I don't want this film just to love and live art, but to guide, even seduce others into doing so as well; I feel every film, every work of art should, but this one especially so.

One of the less conventional ways I involve art in the telling of my artist's story is through the [literal] inclusion of other artists' voices, such as Sylvia Plath (reading her poem *Lady Lazarus*),<sup>lxvii</sup> Louise Bogan (reading her poem *The Alchemist*),<sup>lxviii</sup> T. S. Eliot (reading from his *Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*),<sup>lxix</sup> Jorge Luis Borges (reading from his *This Craft of Verse* lectures),<sup>lxx</sup> Martha Graham (reading from her essay *An Athlete of God*),<sup>lxxi</sup> and Francis Bacon

(speaking in various interview fragments)<sup>lxxii</sup>—though I can already tell this’ll earn me few friends in the licensing department.

Other kinds of art[ists] comes in too—dancing, singing, painting—indeed, I feel telling X’s story means incorporating those worlds, allowing them to share with us the magic, the inspiration they shared with X. After all, no artist is an island. Each included here helps tell, helps guide this story of someone trying to fall back in love with life and creativity. Essentially, I’m trying to use art in film the way most of us do in life; not merely as a world to explore, but a compass pointing our way back home when lost.

Another signature artistic element to my story’s telling is the inclusion of X’s own work, mostly a kind of poetry, all written in a distinctive voice and style, second-person as first-person prosepoem monologues. Why the second-person? Because:

1. It helps establish a unique aesthetic vision for X, keeps the character from becoming a faceless, shadowgraph allegory for all artists, with no ideas, ideals, or tastes of their own.
2. Second-person demands audience involvement and, when used as first-person, empathy.
3. Second-person occupies a less charted, less performative territory in terms of style and cadence than first-person prose.
4. Second-person prose has formed some of the most engaging reading/listening I’ve ever come across—even more so if confined to short bursts, as I plan to keep it.
5. I believe second-person prose comes closer to the texture of the subject-less internal monologue that we all experience in reflexive thought than first-person. Indeed, “I” only comes into the equation for myself when “I” have an audience, the value and nature of that variable being dependent on the composition and character of said audience.



## Appendices & Afterthoughts

**On Character:** “behind this story there is another one.”<sup>lxxiii</sup> In hindsight, I can tell that the muddle of emotion and desire I call X began with Emma, Mrs. *Bovary*.<sup>lxxiv</sup> We first met in highschool, and I hated her in ways I’d only ever hated myself. Few years later, few layers deeper, we met again. At the time, I was neckdeep in an honors thesis all about the heroines of Jane Austen—these, by the way, divide rather neatly into two categories: the active (Lizzy Bennet, Emma Woodhouse, Catherine Morland, Marianne Dashwood);<sup>lxxv</sup> and the passive (Anne Eliot, Fanny Price, Elinor Dashwood).<sup>lxxvi</sup> Heroines of the former type inevitably overstep, go too far, make a mistake, realize this tendency of theirs has probably ruined their only chance at a happily ever after—then get it anyway. The latter sort, by contrast, usually refrain, hold back, let go, realize this tendency of theirs has probably ruined their only chance at a happily ever after—then, also, get it anyway. In every case, we are dealing with a heroine who leans decidedly one way or the other. Emma Bovary does not—or, rather, she does—plunging headlong and heartfirst into every decision she makes then, just as suddenly, ricocheting to the other extreme; she is, as the old song sings, *All or Nothing at All*.<sup>lxxvii</sup>

Emma’s tragedy, as I relate to it, lies in the deepseated conviction that life, for her, must be lived at second hand, meaning, to get what she wants, she must be seen as someone/something she’s really not: the perfect wife, the perfect mistress, the perfect mother, the perfect woman, the perfect heroine, the perfect doll. Her true status? Dreamer in a sleeping world, seer in the *Country of the Blind*,<sup>lxxviii</sup> she knows there’s better out there—and wants it desperately—those around her, however, not only fail to perceive this, but lack perhaps the very sensory apparatus necessary to do so. The truest, realest part of Emma lives where no one will ever see it, beneath a mask, a smile,

a sentence she doesn't mean, an action begun and given up partway through, without language, without witness, alone.

From the very first read, I felt that book was a horror story—which is telling because horror is precisely the genre of film where I find Emma's closest emotional counterparts—specifically, the niche-subgenre now trending under the tagline “feminine rage”: *Gone Girl* (2014), *Girl Interrupted* (1999), *Promising Young Woman* (2020), *Lady Macbeth* (2016), *Pearl* (2022), *I, Tonya* (2017), *Jennifer's Body* (2009), *Rosemary's Baby* (1968), *Stepford Wives* (1975), *Dangerous liaisons* (1988), *Fatal attraction* (1987), *Repulsion* (1965), *Hereditary* (2018), *Midsommar* (2019), *Blackswan* (2010). Another distinctive feature these films share: a Caucasian, cisgender, [more or less] heterosexual protagonist. This frustrates me—and a lot of other people my age—because it really isn't necessary. These are all incredibly written, deeply complex, often totally original characters—must they also always be straight and white? If you haven't guessed by now, I doubt it. In fact, my decision to place a blank, a variable, an X at the heart of this story derives from a desire to-make/to-open a space for others bringing histories and dimensions I can't to the role.

Now, I do think there are some nuances here to keep in mind—Eco and the Walking Sam, for instance, must both form imperfect mirrors of X, near doubles, in order to maintain/amplify the reflection theme, however, this is something one can do just as easily with three women as three men—in any case, note, X's “rage” will always be queer. White? God I hope not. The key to X's background, in my opinion, comes down to a dissociative family somewhere far, far away; the important part of their status is stranger, outsider, dreamer and, in the context of the borderland, that could mean anyone from anywhere else.

**On World:** setting entails plot—at least, that’s how it ought to feel—and this, I think, might be the richest I’ve ever known. Murals in the streets, fossils in the mountains, lonesome upallnight gas station, motel, stripmall parkinglots, the many colored houses under many colored skies, more satellites than stars here, roaches crawling up the walls as the latest plague bulletin blares from one house and MOTOMAMI<sup>(motomami-motomami)</sup> comes booming out of another further down the street, the washing hungout sunrise, the neverending wind, dust everywhere, running through and through your skin, your clothes, the calm of love, guitar strummed idly just around the corner, the tension of fear, in line at walmart behind a man with guns at his belt, scouting out exits, cover, just in case—I mean, listen, I don’t know much, but I know this place, rich idiosyncratic, syncretic desert borderland, borderline world I’ve been visiting on and off all my life, I understand its magic, its ugly and beauty, and I know, I just know, if I do my part (and can get the help, the guidance I clearly need) it can become a true world of art; vast and dreaming as any by Fellini or Miyazaki, or, for that matter, Kafka, Kahlo, Borges, Beardsley.

**On Language:** this, like art, originates from an impetus to connection. Unfortunately, much of this story is centered around what happens once that connection fails or, worse, becomes warped into a kind of performance you aren’t sure how long you can keep up. Surrounded by brilliant multilingual professionals, an increasingly incoherent X begins to question their right to language, to story at all.

In one of his lesser-known films, *Toby Dammit* (1968),<sup>lxxxix</sup> Fellini explores the subtle ways in which language can abstract us—from our world, our self—as profoundly as it usually connects us. The main character, Toby—think Richard Burton meets James Dean—comes to Italy (deep into their latest bender) on business.<sup>lxxx</sup> For its original audio, Fellini orchestrated a steady medley of French, German, Spanish, and Italian running throughout the length of this feature, interrupted

only occasionally by confused English exclamations from Toby. The sense of linguistic isolation combines seamlessly with an established mental and creative separation to create one of the most haunting portrayals of the artist as ‘other’ I have ever seen, one which now serves as a partial guide to X’s linguistic breakdown.

**On Education:** however much I love story or language, I, like X, never learned very much very quickly from words on a page compared with either pictures on a page or words in my ear. For some reason, sonic and visual cues seem to be more readily, rapidly, and carefully assimilated and processed by brains like X’s and mine than other sorts of stimuli. Oddly, this does not mean we can’t read very much, very closely, or even remember very well what we’ve read; rather, it simply means we must work harder and more creatively to access the parts of our brains that code long term memory and keep us focused on the mechanical process of reading diligently.

For a while, when I was young—until about first grade, I’d say—teachers would often assume I was either rude, stupid, or apathetic. From the comfort of hindsight, I generously concede those points. I was, however, something else as well—A.D.H.D.—something they not only hadn’t thought of, but didn’t really believe existed, and, if it did, shouldn’t be their problem, which was exactly how they regarded me, as a problem. Ironic, really, since (as I understood it) classrooms are where problems are supposed to find their answers.

In reality—and that, by the way, is about as problematic as it gets—different brains function on different frequencies, through different modes and means, toward different ends; the majority will always cluster around an average, a common denominator, while, far away from all this, float the outliers. These, though unique, are nonetheless worthy of being taught for all that, and yet they often spend most of their lives convinced they always have to do a little more, work a little harder than others, push just beyond their limits, simply to earn a spot in the room. When

education's reduced to the survival of the fittest, it isn't education anymore, it's just life—and that's gonna be brutal enough on outliers without any help. Ultimately, what I want us to question here is this: why is it that we act as if those who manage to clear all the hurdles of modern life and education—and pull together the money to pay for it—are somehow more deserving or able to tell better stories than those who can't?

## What Makes a Source?

- Eighth century Durga head dug up outside Ghazni.
- Dreamjournals and insomnia. “I always feel you’re trying to do too much at once with your work.”
- Seven years in nightworld you don’t know what to do with.
- “You need to learn to make a choice.” Eye-slit shot in *Chien Andalou* (1929).
- Knife edge imagined writing every scene, every line, every character. “So, you’re cancer rising.”
- Tumor scraped out at sixteen—half there, half gone—lying empty on the operating table.
- “But your moon is cusp—basically, it could go either way.” Three-minute mark in *Jig of Life* (1985).
- Body you don’t love. Life you’ve done wrong. Trying anyway. Kintsugi.
- Devilsnare. El chamico. Tolohuaxihuitl. Collected, like Georgia’s, from desert seeds.
- One-sided reunion of Anne Elliot and Frederick Wentworth.
- “Where’d all the flowers come from?” Lone stag at Yupkoyvi, staring you down.
- Bhutanese temple—heart of campus—Bardo wilderness across the walls.
- Ammonite spiral picked up in the mountains. Godseyes, alley cats, and a garden.
- “What’s next for you?” All those keys to homes that don’t exist anymore.
- How you turned them into windchimes. How the landlord made you take them down.
- How you tried to find them again. How they’d been lost. How you are too.
- How some Indian mantras are so old their language is forgotten; their closest analogue, birdsong.
- “To me, you’re not a writer—you’re an artist.”
- Then there’s the wind—the wind, the wind, the wind, the wind—shaking the house as you type.

A book is not an isolated being: it is a relationship, an axis of innumerable relationships.<sup>lxxxix</sup>

## L'Envoi

About a year ago, the U.N. came out with a statement that we, humans of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, suffer from a “broken perception of risk” which has culminated in the “spiral of self-destruction” we call home.<sup>lxxxii</sup> I can’t help feeling the current situation derives, at least in part, from that modern tendency first noted by Wilde,<sup>lxxxiii</sup> to live for, by, and through a comfortable fiction in preference to any number of decidedly uncomfortable and increasingly urgent facts. Fact is, judged in relation to cause and effect, there is very little sense of urgency in the world today. Anxiety? Of course. Fear? Naturally. But the firm, fixed conviction ending, not in reaction, but lasting revolution—that’s fiction. Wish I could think the artworld was any different in this respect but, fact is, it ain’t. Artists constitute our most powerful catalyst toward mass empathy and understanding, forming the last living link between the tenses of what was, is, and could be. Now, more than ever before, artists and art are all we have left to keep us human, to reify a world dying, in fact, from our deeply virulent relationship with fiction.

When the pandemic hit, the two primary ingredients we use to manufacture dramatic tension, action and interaction, dissipated—most of us were alone most of the time, in contact with fewer people than ever, just waiting, on pause, on hold, on standby—and yet, for many, the tension of those months, now years, never lifted. To me, this suggests our understanding of art and life have, yet again, drifted away from actual, lived experience and into the inertia of aesthetic convention, which is why I’ve worked so hard to flout as much of that as I possibly could in this project.

See, I believe any scene, any brushstroke, any sentence that ends the conversation defeats the purpose of art—and that is? Hard to verbalize. But if I had to, I’d say: to be evocative, suggestive—a conduit for and between many things—without becoming firmly conclusive, fixed,

inert. To be always moving; that's the quality that captivates me in art—from Bacon's paintings, to Fellini's films or Graham's dances—and that, I think, is what I'm looking for, what I'm working toward here: not a thesis, but a dust devil, taking up all the refuse, all the litter left by a life lived for twenty something years and whirling it around until, suddenly, through the magic of art, plastic bags become butterflies, bottle caps flowers, broken glass constellations cast across an asphalt sky by a God with eyes of yarn and hands like mine. That's what I want, what I came here to create—used to think I could, now I know—I don't feel like a writer cause I'm not, no, not really. I'm a maker. Something deeper, darker, more fundamental. Don't need pen, paper, power, control—just a moment—this'll do as well as any. There. Ready?



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<sup>i</sup> My title is a portmanteau address combining the call-code for an involuntary psychiatric hold (5150), the solitaire of the wayward eccentric (Tarot), and the desert's open veins (Canyon); this approach was inspired by titling trends popular among painters in the twentieth century. Francis Bacon's 1962 *Studies for a Crucifixion*, for instance, aren't meant to actually show us a crucifixion, so much as make us look for one in what's been painted. The relationship, this connection or gap, between title and piece is designed to be questioned; if anything, it forms the door, the idea through which we enter whatever feeling, ambiance the work explores/inhabits. Here, however, the formulation of the title also happened to mark and direct the conception of the ensuing work; *5150 Tarot Canyon* isn't just a place, it's a state of being.

<sup>ii</sup> My first epigraph comes from Eleanor Lance in *The Haunting* (1963), Robert Wise's adaptation of Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959).

<sup>iii</sup> My second comes from Jorge Luis Borges's short *The Secret Miracle*, originally published in *Sur*, February 1943. The full quotation runs as follows: "aside from a few friendships and many habits, the problematic exercise of literature constituted his life. Like all writers, he measured the achievements of others by what they had accomplished, asking of them that they measure him by what he envisaged or planned."

<sup>iv</sup> Other films by Fellini serving as sources for this project include: just about all of them—except, perhaps, the ½.

<sup>v</sup> This line comes hard and fast some 53 minutes [41 seconds] into the film.

<sup>vi</sup> We don't—for the record—like, at all.

<sup>vii</sup> Although mentioned in the introduction, this idea is only really discussed at length around part two (titled *The Dynamics of the Capital/Income Ratio*), section six (titled *The Capital-Labor Split in the Twenty-First Century*), subsection five (titled *The Return on Capital in Historical Perspective*) of the text (titled *Capitol in the Twenty-First Century*), published in 2013 (year of our lord, forever and ever, amen).

<sup>viii</sup> Other films by Kon serving as sources for this project include: once again, all of them—only in Kon's case that covers barely four films and a miniseries before his life was cut tragically short by cancer about a decade out from a *Perfect Blue* debut. Specifically, I love the play with memory in *Millennium Actress* (2001), dreams in *Paprika* (2006), and magic realism in *Tokyo Godfathers* (2003).

<sup>ix</sup> If you've seen *Perfect Blue*, you'll recognize Mima's first and only line of dialogue from her debut speaking role on the [aptly titled] show *Double Bind*. Later this comes up again, when she logs onto her Pop-Idol homepage, Mima's Room—a fansite she does not run—and finds a recording of her voice rehearsing the line again and again and again and again and...

<sup>x</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xi</sup> Ibid—listen—you hear that? Like a frog croaking. Odd.

<sup>xii</sup> Other films by Miyazaki serving as sources for this project include—do I even have to say it? Yes, all of them, okay? When I like an artist, I like them. In Miyazaki, one thing I especially love is his handling of wind—a force of nature no one can visit the borderland without getting to know intimately.

<sup>xiii</sup> Kachina: in the legends of the Pueblo peoples, this is a spirit (really, a genre of spirit) associated with the invocation of rain. Hence, kachina dances, kachina dolls. Today, these spirits appear across nearly every tourist trap, pitstop, and gas station in the southwest, often in highly unorthodox, inauthentic forms, so much so the number and variety of modern katsinam far outstrips the original pantheon of sacred figures. It is this kitsch kachina that I'd be vivifying here, not the sacred forms so much as the commodified versions we live with, move among, today—that's where I want to inject magic.

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<sup>xiv</sup> Darkwatchers: first reported by Spanish settlers of the desert southwest, these were tall still figures seen silhouetted on a dim horizon, simply watching people passby as night fell.

<sup>xv</sup> La Llorona: go ask Chavela.

<sup>xvi</sup> El Duende: this is a traditional imp-like figure with a history stretching back into Ibero-Celtic lore. It also happens to be the term Spanish poet Federico García Lorca employed as a euphemism for irrational inspiration. Mine will be a desert Duende, skeletal, strange.

<sup>xvii</sup> The Jackalope: imagine a jackrabbit. Now, imagine an antelope. Next, imagine you're a taxidermist with too much time on your hands, bills to pay, and a wife you don't love anymore. Voilà, the jackalope.

<sup>xviii</sup> The Walking Sam: originally, this Lakota legend concerned a tall, lean man who haunts suicides, waiting to guide their souls to the other side. Recently, it's become a big feature of slenderman-esque horror—which I've never liked—especially since it tends to cast this being as a murderer, throwing away the very fact that made this figure so interesting in the first place; its odd passivity, seeking out those who hurt themselves, to guide them where they've gotta go. Honestly, I know it's supposed to be ominous and scary, but it sounds weirdly sweet. And I sound like I need to get out more.

<sup>xix</sup> Calaveras: the manycolored skulls of Día de Muertos, with equally colorful origins in indigenous decapitation rituals and ceremonies—funny how so many child-centric holidays began, in some way, with human sacrifice; you think that means something?

<sup>xx</sup> The Fasting Shakyamuni: this is an attitude/type of Buddhist sculpture depicting the Gautama Buddha as a gaunt, almost skeletal ascetic—although that part of Buddhist lore was universal, this artform is very specific to the desert regions of the Himalayas, across India, to Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Tibet. In some ways, at some points, X comes to embody this being.

<sup>xxi</sup> The Desert Fathers: these were the Egyptian ascetic monks and saints who, after the [alleged] apostles, formed the earliest—and, some might argue, most insufferably neurotic (vide *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, circa 450)—backbone of the Christian church. The much-tempted St. Anthony was among their number.

<sup>xxii</sup> Santa Muerte: skeletal patron of sexwork and death—hell of a combo—this folk saint has long been a favorite of the border region (as well as myself) and will play a vital (haha) role in X's story.

<sup>xxiii</sup> An aphorism coined by Hayao Miyazaki—acclaimed creator of *My Neighbor Totoro* (1988), *Kiki's Delivery Service* (1989), and *Spirited Away* (2001)—during an interview with Tom Mes, published by *Midnight Eye* on January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2002.

<sup>xxiv</sup> O' leave me my [absurd and unnecessary] allusions.

<sup>xxv</sup> It's still up for debate whether I did.

<sup>xxvi</sup> This is from a March 9<sup>th</sup>, 2023 IGN article, *Everything Everywhere All at Once Passes Return of the King as Most-Awarded Movie Ever*, written by Michaela Zee and Joshdu.

<sup>xxvii</sup> This scene cued an unexpected flashback for me. Picture it: Austin, Texas, mid 2016—after a flurry of mass-shootings, our N.R.A. sponsored state gov decides to legalize AK47s on campus—overnight, the “Cocks Not Glocks” movement is born, bringing truckloads of truly gargantuan sex toys onto campus, where they are still very much illegal, and handing them out like candy. I am, at this point, partway through a double major (English & Philosophy) with honors, working at the university research library, and in the throes of the worst depressive episode of my life. Sleepless for days, I no longer know what to expect when I go outside and I don't care. However, as I reach the commons—usual traffic spot on my walk (run) to work—gotta admit, I was not at all prepared for the heaving, roaring mass of dildo and gun swinging protesters, cops, and reporters. A smarter person would've turned back, found another route. But I've always been more late than smart. In the end, exhausted, battered by god knows what forces of good or evil, I make it to work only fifteen minutes past the hour. Just one problem; it's my day off.

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xxviii “A sort of walking miracle,” as Sylvia might say.

xxix “If you seek happiness and beauty at the same time, you will find neither the one nor the other, for the latter is only attained by sacrifice. Art, like the God of the Israelites, feasts on holocausts.” Gustave Flaubert in a letter to Louise Colet dated August 21, 1853.

xxx *The mermaid* (1837) is a famous short—you could even say “little”—story by Hans Christian Andersen.

xxxi *The Red Shoes* (1845) is yet another famous short story by Hans Christian Andersen, one which—along with the life and journals of Vaslav Nijinsky—inspired the brilliant 1948 Powell and Pressburger film of the same name as well as a 1993 Kate Bush song and album, also of the same name, also brilliant.

xxxii Some breathtaking lyrics from the aforesaid Kate Bush song.

xxxiii Ibid.

xxxiv Ibid.

xxxv Ibid.

xxxvi Ibid—how I love that word!

xxxvii *El Topo* (1970) & *Santa Sangre* (1989).

xxxviii Fellini, Kon, and Miyazaki form, in imagination, the three fates of my film: cutting its reels—one magnifying/looking glass between them, an all-seeing ‘I’—curious and observant on some overbudget & offschedule astral plane. Miyazaki commutes.

xxxix *Arabian Nights* (1974) & *Salò* (1975)

xl *Eraserhead* (1977) & *Mulholland Drive* (2001)

xli *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999)

xliv *Valerie & Her Week of Wonders* (1970)

xlvi *Dead Man* (1995)

xlvii *Pan’s Labyrinth* (2006)

xlviii *Coraline* (2009)

xlvi These include *Demian* (1905) and *Steppenwolf* (1927) by Hermann Hesse, *The Trial* (1915) by Franz Kafka, *The Master and Margarita* (1967) by Mikhail Bulgakov, Federico Fellini’s *Book of Dreams* (1965-1990), Satoshi Kon’s *Opus* (1995-1996), some shorts from Gabriel García Márquez, some plays by Federico García Lorca, nearly half the collected works of Nikolai Gogol, a ton of ghost stories—M. R. James, E. F. Benson, the usual suspects—and many, many others whose influence is so ephemeral, tangential, minute that I hesitate to even mention them by name. For the Mindfuck sequence specifically, my influences include: the *Bardo Thödol* (circa 1350) as composed by Padmasambhava, revealed to Karma Lingpa, and translated by Lāma Kazi Dawa-Samdub (1920), Chögyam Trungpa and Francesca Fremantle (1975), and again by Gyurme Dorje (2005); the poetry of Sufi mystics Attār of Nishapur (circa 1150) as [beautifully] translated by Sholeh Wolpé in *The Conference of the Birds* (2021), Omar Khayyam (also circa 1150) as [beautifully if only allegedly] translated by Edward Fitzgerald in the *Rubáiyát*, and Jalāl al-Dīn Rumi (circa 1250) as [beautifully if EXTREMELY LOOSELY] translated by Coleman Barks in *The Essential Rumi* (1995); Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* (1855-1892), Allen Ginsberg’s *Howl* (1955), and Rainer Maria Rilke’s *Letters to a Young Poet* (1929) form the remainder of this scene’s literary heritage.

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<sup>xlvii</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, architect of *Labyrinths* (1962).

<sup>xlviii</sup> *Alice in Wonderland* (1865) by Lewis Carroll.

<sup>xliv</sup> Zdzisław Beksiński, Polish anti-establishment painter, photographer, and sculptor popularly known today as “the nightmare artist.”

<sup>l</sup> Aubrey Beardsley, famous fin-de-siècle illustrator of Oscar Wilde’s *Salomé*, published in Paris and banned in Britain, both in 1896.

<sup>li</sup> Antonin Artaud first formulated his *Theatre of Cruelty* in an essay of the same name, published in his collection *The Theatre and its Double* (1938).

<sup>lii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>liii</sup> Ibid—okay, now it’s getting on my nerves.

<sup>liv</sup> This was stated in a November 12<sup>th</sup>, 2013 interview Jodorowsky did with Erik Morse for *Frieze*.

<sup>lv</sup> See *Mythologies* (1957) by Roland Barthes.

<sup>lvi</sup> See *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949) by Joseph Campbell.

<sup>lvii</sup> Estrangement is an aesthetic concept first coined by Viktor Shklovsky in his essay *Art as Device* (1917).

<sup>lviii</sup> “Wonder is the beginning of wisdom,” also translated, “Philosophy begins in wonder.” I specify Platonic here because the historic Socrates notoriously never wrote anything down—a conscious objector, thought it weakened memory, my mom’s the same way—so we might not even be discussing Socratic thought at all here, but rather those of Plato behind a Socrates shaped mask. Anyway, the claim is made by a character named Socrates in Plato’s *Theaetetus* (circa 300 BCE).

<sup>lix</sup> “No man ever steps in the same river twice.” Perhaps the most famous of the hundred or so surviving fragments of Heraclitus’s only work, *On Nature* (circa 500 BCE). Of the others, my favorite translates to something like “it/everything flows.”

<sup>lx</sup> Mary Louise Pratt introduced this term/concept in her keynote address to the Modern Language Association, *Arts of the Contact Zone* (1991).

<sup>lxi</sup> Jorge Luis Borges tells the story of this discovery in the latter half of his essay on *The Argentine Writer and Tradition*, published in *Labyrinths* (1962).

<sup>lxii</sup> Much to the ire of every Italian I’ve met, by the way.

<sup>lxiii</sup> Someone please explain to me why, in the middle of the desert, not a single T-Mobile bar to speak of, I’m somehow getting unsolicited blue alerts from Tyler, Texas—600 miles away—all because our joke of a governor thinks I should? Like, here I am unable to download my compass app, update my google map, running low on water, but god forbid a cop gets shot on the other side of the state and I don’t hear about it.

<sup>lxiv</sup> From Virginia Woolf’s *Writer’s Diary*—kept from 1918 to 1941—only published posthumously in 1954.

<sup>lxv</sup> This quote comes from the founder of Merz art himself, German artist Kurt Schwitters, in the article that started the very movement, “Merz”, published in the *Ararat*, December 1920.

<sup>lxvi</sup> Pretty wild considering what the Dadaist movement was founded for.

<sup>lxvii</sup> See *Lady Lazarus* (1965) by Sylvia Plath.

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lxxviii See *The Alchemist* (1923) by Louise Bogan.

lxxix See *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* (1915) by T. S. Eliot.

lxxx In the fall of 1967, Jorge Luis Borges gave a series of six short lectures, known collectively as *This Craft of Verse*, at Harvard University. Recordings of all six are freely available online as I type this and I highly encourage everyone to check them out. If they take them down, come find me—I gotta bootleg & will hook you up no problem.

lxxxi See *An Athlete of God* (1953) by Martha Graham.

lxxxii Here, I'm referring specifically to Francis Bacon's 1963 interview with art critic and friend David Sylvester.

lxxxiii The first line of Nikolai Gogol's story *Fyodorovich Shponka and His Aunt* (1832).

lxxxiv See *Madame Bovary* (1857) by Gustave Flaubert; greatest novel of the nineteenth century and, possibly, all time.

lxxxv From *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), *Emma* (1815), *Northanger Abbey* (1818), *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) respectively.

lxxxvi From *Persuasion* (1818), *Mansfield Park* (1814), *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) respectively.

lxxxvii First performed by Frank Sinatra, best performed by Billie Holiday, *All or Nothing at All* was composed by Arthur Altman and written by Jack Lawrence in 1939.

lxxxviii The brilliant title tale of H. G. Wells's collection *The Country of the Blind and Other Stories* (1911).

lxxxix *Toby Dammit* represents Fellini's contribution to the omnibus film *Spirits of the Dead* (1968) a highly eclectic tribute to the work of American writer Edgar Allen Poe. The initial list of filmmakers announced to be cocreating this project included Orson Welles, Claude Chabrol, Joseph Losey, and Luchino Visconti—all of whom bailed rather disastrously in production and preproduction, leaving Louis Malle (+ Bardot), Roger Vadim (+ Barbarella), and good ol' Fellini to clean up the mess.

lxxx The Though, exactly what business remains unclear to all parties.

lxxxii Genius observation from Jorge Luis Borges's *Note on (toward) Bernard Shaw*, published in *Labyrinths* (1962).

lxxxiii These quotes come from a press release titled *Humanity's broken risk perception is reversing global progress in a 'spiral of self-destruction', finds new U.N. report* published by the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction on April 26<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

lxxxiiii This is a reference to Oscar Wilde's doctrine that "Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life" first stated in his 1889 essay *The Decay of Lying*.



5150

TAROT CANYON

A Screenplay/Dreamplay - Jacob Phillips

## PROLOGUE

### 1. OPENING MONTAGE - PHASE I. GREEN APOCALYPSE

Visuals correspond to the V.O.

X (V.O.)

(steady)

Came out to this desert in the middle of a monsoon. / For days, all it did was rain / and rain / and rain / and rain. / End of July to early August, every morning woke up clear skied, then these sudden downpours, / cloudbursts, / stones washing from the mountains into the city. / The house flooded / back doormat floating helpless in a muddy puddle / and for a moment your grandmother reverted to someone you never really got to know just long enough to explain this is because the homes around here slant streetward. / Three seconds and she was back to zombieland. / Jarring. / In the end, a few wet weeks was all it took to turn the red planet green, nightshade and sage far as eye could see. / Then, just like that, / it all went red again. / Everything died. / Actually, / let's start there.

1. Begin screen black then, softly, the sound of wind—this will continue relentless throughout—flashing from black to lightning/thunderclap on “Monsoon”.
2. Pan across sidewalk chalk garden (Bosch meets Basquiat) as, drop by drop, rain begins to erase it.
3. Leaves of desert plants bob beneath drops of increasing density/intensity.
4. Close up of layers of mudplaster running off rock & adobe retaining walls, tumbling pebbles, exposing holes in desert architecture.
5. Through a rainstreaked window, we see X rush out to close umbrella as hailstones suddenly start pelting.
6. Local cityscape from above, lit by a broken dawn, then obscured by converging shadows & thunder.

7. Thunder/lighting flash transition to shot looking up into a bursting cloud from below.
8. Pan across run off of dirty water increasing as it rushes downhill along the curb, picking up more and more sand and stones along the way.
9. Traffic chaos of the floods, rocks rush past cars & pedestrians in waist high water, reporters cars pull up eventually obscuring shot.
10. close up of water seeping in beneath backdoor and floating doormat.
11. Gradually zoom in as gnarled hand gently touches, taps, and holds a young arm.
12. Abrupt breaking news bulletin on FOX News—the typical thinly disguised, thickly insinuated hatespeech.
13. Back to gnarled hand, now starts hitting young arm until given the remote—then volume of broadcast increases as younger arm lifts and leaves shot.
14. Pan across gradually greening desert, stilling on “nightshade and sage far as eye could see.”
15. Close up on our chalk art again, this time all but obliterated as rain stops.
16. Back to green desert, this time camera still as skies clear and entire landscape gradually goes red/dead again, like breathing.
17. Pan along curb where—asphalt now dry—sand and litter gradually billow into a small dust devil we follow as it whirls into night & darkness.
18. Blackscreen broken abruptly/briefly by old fashioned damaged film flare/sunburst—on “actually”—then back to black.
19. Blackscreen.



## 2. OPENING MONTAGE - PHASE II. PLAGUEYEAR

Visuals correspond to the V.O.

X (V.O.)

(tired)

Came out to this desert in the  
middle of a pandemic. / Bodycount  
so high / supply killed demand. /  
No one cared anymore / or they  
did / just never enough to stop  
it. / Masks became normal. / Fear  
too. / And lies. / Your grandmother  
believes them. / Your parents  
don't. / Whenever they meet there's  
a thunderclap; infinitely earnest  
and absolutely useless. / And  
you? / You believe nothing,  
almost / except, of course, the  
worst / that you learn to expect. /  
But this isn't right either / so  
let's try again / after all, that's  
what you came here for, isn't  
it? / A new start? / Another  
chance? / Yes.

1. Transition from black to plane take off—thundering engine blast.
2. MSNBC news segment, body bags & freezer trucks glimpsed between plane seats on cracked iphone screen.
3. Pan down isle to show just how few seats are actually occupied.
4. Pan across FOX news segment—economic charts & graphics fringed by ascending bodycounts—echoed across a succession of airport television monitors.
5. Pass by woman crying into phone, head against a great glass window; through which we see desert, feel wind, purple cloudburst in distance.
6. P.O.V. trekking airport terminal; people few and scattered, all masked.
7. Select close ups of vacant glances from the crowd.
8. Look up to see plane fly over seemingly infinite line of police cars/equipment idling just outside airport.

9. Car radio screen/dial playing usual Trump rally bullshit with stale air freshener tree/cactus dangling just above it; perhaps include brief bit of dialogue—"What number?" "5150"—etc.
10. Closeup of grandmother looking half dead, oxygen mask on, eyes obscured by glasses glare, in which is reflected the same Fox news host from earlier, same graphics and everything, only with a different headline, "CRISIS AT THE BORDER", and a higher bodycount.
11. Pan across shelf of dusty family pictures.
12. X's silhouette lying in bed in darkened room listening to an argument through the walls, heatlightning flash reveals X in childhood in exactly the same position.
13. Close up of X, grown up again, but still in dark & bed, staring at ceiling, almost expressionless.
14. Roving view of intricate plaster texture of ceiling as ambient sounds of argument & fearmongering news broadcast grade together in background.
15. Low resolution iphone footage of conditions within migrant facilities, bodies crammed together, holding up hands toward the camera.
16. Low resolution iphone footage of cops driving through wall of protesters outside of migrant facility.
17. Clear footage of flowers and wreaths slowly dying at the muddy base of a chainlink fence.
18. Blackscreen.
19. Fade into sunrise in the suburbs, deer wandering into city from the mountains, ribs protruding, eyes hungry.
20. Close up of wildflowers from below—silverleaf nightshade against a solid blue sky—grown up through cracks in the concrete, swaying slightly in the wind, suddenly nuzzled/obscured by nose of foraging deer.
21. Transition to flutter of butterfly wings, the monarchs migrating over city, camera follows, flying with them, looking down at first then turning toward blinding light of rising sun.
22. Blackscreen.

3. OPENING MONTAGE - PHASE III. 20 SOMETHING

Visuals correspond to the V.O.

X (V.O.)

(hoarse)

Came out to this desert in the  
middle of your life. / See, the  
issue was, you didn't really like  
it anymore. / Felt wasted, /  
empty. / Wanted to make a new  
one. / Wanted to try again / to  
change. / And this was how you did  
—only / nope. / Still not it. /  
Okay. Calm down. / Breathe deep.  
In. / Hold. Hold. Hold. / Out. /  
Now, one more go. / ready?

1. Abrupt cut to bare feet in bathroom, then clothes drop.
2. X's hand hugging their side in front of mirror.
3. Empty bottles crowded alongside other recycling on corner of kitchen[ette] counter.
4. Close up of mouth—young but not—corners slightly creased, strained, discontented.
5. Bath faucet suddenly turned on hot and high.
6. Jammed drawer yanked open.
7. Lighter blazes a joint into life.
8. Back of head & neck relaxing in cloud of smoke & steam.
9. Water circling the drain.
10. Forehead to knees.
11. Close up of water droplets on soft skin.
12. Ridge of spine still, then heaving.
13. Drone shot flying out of city, toward the desert.
14. Wind chimes blowing softly synced to slow exhale.
15. Closed eyes opening.
16. Sudden cut to black.

#### 4. OPENING MONTAGE - PHASE IV. BOTTOM FUCKING LINE

Visuals correspond to the V.O.

X (V.O.)

(weak, then strong)

Came out to this desert because  
that's what you'd become. / And the  
first thing you did once you got  
here was plant a garden because  
that's what you wanted to be. / Not  
quite there yet but / day by day /  
word by word / thought by thought /  
you get closer, closer, closer—got  
it? / Good. / Now, keep going.

1. From dark to sunrise over desert.
2. Shadows retreating across green/red mountains.
3. Hand grabbing hold of rock.
- 4.-6. Series of shots of X working away up the mountainside early in the morning.
7. Zoom down/in toward X on mountain top from behind; then, at last second—on “got it?”—X turns to look directly into camera & sunrise, the first full human face we see in film (television pundits, as everyone knows without being told, do not qualify as human).
8. Blazing closeup of sun in its full intensity.
9. Sudden cut to black, still save for sound of wind.

#### 5. OPENING MONTAGE - PHASE V. TITLE

Blank white screen with blinking 'I' cursor; title, “To Build a Garden”, typed thoughtfully, hesitantly across frame, then rapidly backspaced and replaced by “Vanishing Poi”, which is rapidly backspaced in turn. Pause. Blank for a moment—cursor blinking idly as ever—then, eventually, “5150 Tarot Canyon”. Pause after, cursor blinks three more times.

END OF PROLOGUE

ACT I.

1. ACT[/SEMESTER] I. TITLE CARD - TAROT SPREAD/DRAWING

An elderly hand, unsteady yet practiced, spreads a line of tarot cards facedown across the table, then hovers in pause. Finally, a victim is selected and upturned, revealing "THE TOWER"—Rider-Waite deck customized with act number ("ACT I.") across top of card and arcana title (in this case, "THE TOWER") at bottom. Then, a new voice comes in.

PROFESSOR (PRE-LAP)

So—

2. INT. WRITER'S WORKSHOP/ZOOM SCREEN[S] - AFTERNOON-EVENING

PROFESSOR & various STUDENTS workshop the piece X just performed for us via zoom. The ghost of a tight/vacant smile faintly reflected across surface of screen throughout, accompanied by sounds of intermittent typing.

INTERCUT INDIVIDUAL ZOOM CAMS/WINDOWS

PROFESSOR (CONT.)

(formal enthusiasm,  
repressed exhaustion)

Thoughts?

STUDENT 1.

(unrepressed exhaustion,  
struggling for coherence)

UMMMMMmmmmmmMMMMmm—

STUDENT 2.

(sincere attempt at  
insincere enthusiasm)

I love the way it starts—

STUDENT 1.

(still struggling, now  
gesturing with eyes shut)

Your words—they're so—

STUDENT 2.

(apologetic)

I'm just not really sure why?

STUDENT 1.

(still struggling,  
gesturing, eyes shut)

Soooo—

STUDENT 3.  
(clipped, barely  
controlled distain)  
I was a bit lost to be honest.

STUDENT 4.  
(total apathy)  
Same.

STUDENT 3.  
(mounting frustration)  
Like, what is it? Is it a poem? Is  
it a story? Or—

STUDENT 1.  
(hesitant but hopeful)  
Experimental?

STUDENT 4.  
(monotone nonsequitur)  
Your characters.

STUDENT 3.  
(still venting)  
I mean—why the second person?

PROFESSOR  
(warning)  
Careful: no questioning the author.

STUDENT 4.  
(monotone nonsequitur)  
They don't have names.

STUDENT 3.  
(visibly frustrated)  
That doesn't even fit the prompt.

STUDENT 1.  
(struggling again)  
Aaannnnnnnddddddd—

STUDENT 4.  
(monotone nonsequitur)  
It bothers me.

STUDENT 1.  
(more confidently)  
Interesting.

STUDENT 2.  
(clearly put off by  
overall response)  
Well, I liked it.

STUDENT 1.  
(smiling, relieved)  
Yeah.

STUDENT 2.  
(absently, as if  
remembering)  
Except the parts where it repeats—

STUDENT 1.  
(beaming)  
Interesting!

STUDENT 2.  
(suddenly unsure)  
Does that make sense?

PROFESSOR  
(intrigued without being  
interested)  
Eco, you've been awfully quiet...

ECO—20 something, oddly like X, yet somehow not, more put together, stable, focused, assured—has been struggling to follow the conversation since English is not his native language. Startled by this mention of his name, he quickly begins explaining himself while still on mute.

PROFESSOR (CONT'D)  
(speaking louder, for no  
obvious reason)  
We can't hear you, I think your—

ECO palms his forehead and turns his mic on.

ECO  
(apologetic)  
Ay, sorry. I want to speak, but my  
ingles—es very—

ECO scrunches face and gestures to indicate 'so/so'

PROFESSOR  
(cutting in, patronizing)  
Don't be sorry. whatever language  
is comfortable to you—

ECO  
(hesitant, then eloquent,  
then hesitant again)  
Okay. Bueno. Creo que hay algo,  
como un sueño, una magia, en casi  
todas tus piezas, pero falta aquí,  
¿no?

(MORE)

ECO (CONT'D)

Y mientras puedo entender por qué las personas critican ese tipo de cosas, es una de tus grandes fortalezas como escritor y mi parte favorita de su trabajo. Deberías desarrollarlo. Te distingue. It—stands you apart—makes you different.

As ECO continues, a faintly reflected hand reaches past faintly reflected mouth to wipe at unseen eyes as quickly as possible while trying to maintain expression/keep typing.

ECO (CONT'D)

Entonces, todo lo demás aquí es bueno, pero realmente no está progresando. En su lugar, todo parece estar rompiendo. Si. Es como verte a aprender a dejar de confiar en ti mismo, y eso hace que sea difícil de leer. Aún así, al final, cuando dices "Keep going" Quiero y eso significa—

PROFESSOR

(cutting in)

I'm so sorry, but that's time. Anyone else?

Confused silence/baffled expression from ECO, tightening of lines around faintly reflected mouth on screen.

PROFESSOR (CONT'D)

Well, alrighty then.

PROFESSOR lifts small dry erase board into view, uncapping marker and writing out the words "SHOW" and "TELL" in capital letters, then underlining and circling both as repeatedly and randomly as possible while they continue.

PROFESSOR (CONT'D)

First, thank you all so much for another wonderful workshop. This piece is an excellent illustration of the importance of showing vs. telling. You keep telling us: "came out to this desert, came out to this desert" but you never really show us—see what I mean?

PROFESSOR cocks head at question, gives a very earnest look, and continues without waiting for an answer.



PROFESSOR (CONT'D)  
You repeat, but don't advance.  
Remember: every story must end at a  
different point from where it  
started—okay?

Again the perfunctory headtilt, followed by a headlong rush  
into further variations on the same theme.

PROFESSOR (CONT'D)  
A work of art has to transform in  
order to feel transformative.  
Something to think about for next  
time. Alright, let's see—

PROFESSOR sets dry erase board down, then squints at corner  
of screen to see class actually ended several proverbs ago.

PROFESSOR (CONT'D)  
Damn. Quick, before you go,  
orientation: tomorrow, Tuesday,  
5:00 P.M., McGuffin Hall, room 237.  
Be there. Oh, and be sure to wear a  
ma—

Zoom screen suddenly goes black—computer forcibly shut down—  
faintly reflected smile now gone too, just a blank mouth,  
lips drawn tight in dark monitor. There is a moment, a  
stillness, a pause—sound of wind rattling house—then *WORKING  
FOR THE KNIFE* & OPENING CREDITS MONTAGE begins.

3. INT./EXT. *WORKING FOR THE KNIFE* & OPENING CREDITS SEQUENCE  
- EVENING-NIGHT

View of X's room—a cleverly staged/concealed chaos—from  
above, X on bed with computer on lap & head in hands, falls  
back onto bed a frustrated groan at first notes of  
MITSKI's *Working for the Knife*.

MITSKI (V.O.)  
I CRY / AT THE START / OF EVERY  
MOVIE

Quick cuts: feet swinging onto ground viewed from beneath  
bed, drawstring bag fished out from pile of clothes on floor,  
then tossed onto bed and yanked open

MITSKI (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
I GUESS / CAUSE I WISH / I WAS  
MAKING THINGS TOO







X (CONT'D)

(muttering)

Course, not like he does it on purpose—still, if he forgot the fucking stacks again—swear to God...

INT. FRONT DESK OF CAMPUS RESEARCH LIBRARY & ARCHIVES [AGAIN]

We—X & camera—round corner at a march, stride up to counter, and clang bell loudly three times. The slick black shoes crossed on desk jolt off mid snore with a sound somewhere between a snort and a fart—whatever it was somehow ends in a cough.

X looks like they suddenly feel an intense regret, but it's unclear for what: awakening the old guard so abruptly, having to almost certainly lock up the creepy stacks, or the prospect of another night up drinking this horrible drink X hates for roughly minimum wage.

UHAUL JOE, clearly a bit embarrassed as he collects himself, falls into the sort of smalltalk all adults of a certain age fall into now.

UHAUL JOE

Don't know how much longer the school will keep open with all this.

He's referencing the news report piling up bodies in the background.

X

(eyes averted)

Thought it was closed already.

UHAUL JOE snorts out a laugh & turns to X.

UHAUL JOE

Where do you think you are?

X

(surprised, concerned)

Wait—you think they'd close the tower?

UHAUL JOE

Closed everything else and it's still bad—don't know what choice they've got—if they don't...

X & old JOE share a look, then move on to other topics.

X  
(aiming for nonchalance)  
So, done the stacks yet?

UHAUL JOE scratches head.

UHAUL JOE  
(bit abashed)  
You know, it's funny, I think so  
but I can't remember

X  
(aside, frustrated)  
Which means I'll have to...

X (CONT'D)  
(aloud, generous)  
Don't worry about it—go home, it's  
late and you're tired—besides gotta  
be back early anyway, I'll handle  
it tonight.

UHAUL JOE  
(smiling a tired smile)  
Thanks kid—owe you one.

X, back to us, waves this off as UHAUL JOE hands them key then exits, X turns toward camera, away from light, smile dissipates, we/camera zoom to end on close-up of key in the palm of X's left hand.

5. INT. IVORY TOWER - BADLY LIT BATHROOM - NIGHT X WASHING FACE, TRYING TO WAKE UP.

X  
Hate hate haaaate this fucking job.

X glances up at reflection/camera.

X (CONT'D)  
Fuck. Pull yourself together.

X straightens up and stretches, still muttering to self.

X (CONT'D)  
Know what? Listen to something.  
Yeah...

X pulls out phone, unlocks it—passcode 5150, lockscreen Britney Spears 2007, newly bald, wearing hoodie, star of David, pearl necklace and an expression that says “fuck around and find out”, cigarette in one hand, a redbull in the other, truly *A Hero of Our Time*—we go through X’s library as, muttering, they search for a good distraction.

X (CONT'D)

That’s it. Fucking—breathe.

We pass a motley crew: Alanis Morissette and Allen Ginsberg, Billie Holiday and Björk, Lana del Rey rubbing shoulders with Langston Hughes and Lauryn Hill, as Kate Bush keeps company with Nine Inch Nails and The Notorious B.I.G.—at last we reach it, mother herself, Ms. Plath. X sighs in familiar contentment.

X (CONT'D)

Now, let’s get this over with.

6. INT. IVORY TOWER - SYLVIA PLATH'S *LADY LAZARUS* - VAST DARKENED STACKS/ARCHIVES - NIGHT

A door (very creaky) is opened onto darkness, a flashlight beam gleams out across floor. Finally:

SYLVIA PLATH (V.O.)

LADY LAZARUS

Go through the stacks—turn out all lights & lock up each room—remember what that was like? Having to work your way deeper and deeper to get to all the rooms. The random noises, light switches never where you’d expect them, as if in a different spot each time. Labyrinth. Mylar book covers reflect what little light there is in the room, and when you move this makes it seem as though something or someone was moving through the stacks with you, semi obscured by the bookshelves and shadows, trying to stay out of sight. If you were working tired—and, let’s be honest, you almost always were—you often had to suppress the feeling that you’d just seen something or someone.

Also, it wasn’t all just books, there were lots of random corners just piled with junk, dismembered camera equipment from the edwardian era, victorian replicas of neoclassical replicas of classical sculpture, stacks of film canisters, katsina masks and dolls.

Also, also—possibly—the stairwells (which were always locked) connected to the roof so they had this constant wind moaning through them at all times. Oh, and the creaky padded elevator between each floor—what the fuck was that?

Anyway, use what you can from that and pull the rest from imagination. The atmosphere here is ambient horror, tempered by the presence of good and familiar ghosts—kindly Dickens, wise Austen, wild Whitman—back to back along the shelves, and the half calming, half unnerving tone in Plath's voice as she reads.

The key to this sequence lies less in the visual content of its component shots—all glimpses/glances of darkened library interiors—than in the movement that ties them all together; every shot in motion, but that motion must gradually shift from a walk (with X) to a glide (beyond) as we slowly leave our protagonist/antagonist behind to slip further and further into darkness, feeling for the heart of this strange labyrinth.

Toward sequence climax—starting around “Dying is an art”, let's say—INTERCUT this journey through the archives with increasingly dynamic, visually parallel shots of vacant spaces around the world at the height of pandemic (think: earth post-comet, post-apocalypse, post-human) until darkened halls and hollow streets begin to grade together in the mindseye.

SYLVIA PLATH (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I HAVE DONE IT AGAIN.  
ONE YEAR IN EVERY TEN  
I MANAGE IT—

A SORT OF WALKING MIRACLE, MY SKIN  
BRIGHT AS A NAZI LAMPSHADE,  
MY RIGHT FOOT

A PAPERWEIGHT,  
MY FACE A FEATURELESS, FINE  
JEW LINEN.

PEEL OFF THE NAPKIN  
O MY ENEMY.  
DO I TERRIFY? YES, YES, HERR  
PROFESSOR, IT IS I.

CAN YOU DENY THE NOSE, THE EYE  
PITS, THE FULL SET OF TEETH?  
THE SOUR BREATH  
WILL VANISH IN A DAY.

SOON, SOON THE FLESH  
THE GRAVE CAVE ATE WILL BE  
AT HOME ON ME

AND I A SMILING WOMAN. I AM ONLY  
THIRTY.

(MORE)



SYLVIA PLATH (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
AND LIKE THE CAT I HAVE NINE TIMES  
TO DIE.

THIS IS NUMBER THREE.  
WHAT A TRASH  
TO ANNIHILATE EACH DECADE.

WHAT A MILLION FILAMENTS. THE  
PEANUT-CRUNCHING CROWD SHOVES IN TO  
SEE

THEM UNWRAP ME HAND AND FOOT—  
THE BIG STRIP TEASE.  
GENTLEMEN, LADIES

THESE ARE MY HANDS  
MY KNEES.  
I MAY BE SKIN AND BONE, I MAY BE  
JAPANESE.

NEVERTHELESS, I AM THE SAME,  
IDENTICAL WOMAN.  
THE FIRST TIME IT HAPPENED I WAS  
TEN.  
IT WAS AN ACCIDENT.

THE SECOND TIME I MEANT  
TO LAST IT OUT AND NOT COME BACK AT  
ALL.  
I ROCKED SHUT

AS A SEASHELL.  
THEY HAD TO CALL AND CALL  
AND PICK THE WORMS OFF ME LIKE  
STICKY PEARLS.

DYING  
IS AN ART, LIKE EVERYTHING ELSE.  
I DO IT EXCEPTIONALLY WELL.

I DO IT SO IT FEELS LIKE HELL.  
I DO IT SO IT FEELS REAL.  
I GUESS YOU COULD SAY I'VE A CALL.

IT'S EASY ENOUGH TO DO IT IN A  
CELL. IT'S EASY ENOUGH TO DO IT AND  
STAY PUT. IT'S THE THEATRICAL

COMEBACK IN BROAD DAY  
TO THE SAME PLACE, THE SAME FACE,  
THE SAME BRUTE  
AMUSED SHOUT:

'A MIRACLE!'

(MORE)

SYLVIA PLATH (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
THAT KNOCKS ME OUT.  
THERE IS A CHARGE

FOR THE EYEING OF MY SCARS, THERE  
IS A CHARGE  
FOR THE HEARING OF MY HEART—  
IT REALLY GOES.

AND THERE IS A CHARGE, A VERY LARGE  
CHARGE  
FOR A WORD OR A TOUCH  
OR A BIT OF BLOOD

OR A PIECE OF MY HAIR OR MY  
CLOTHES.  
SO, SO, HERR DOKTOR.  
SO, HERR ENEMY.

I AM YOUR OPUS,  
I AM YOUR VALUABLE,  
THE PURE GOLD BABY

THAT MELTS TO A SHRIEK.  
I TURN AND BURN.  
DO NOT THINK I UNDERESTIMATE YOUR  
GREAT CONCERN.

ASH, ASH—  
YOU POKE AND STIR.  
FLESH, BONE, THERE IS NOTHING THERE  
—

A CAKE OF SOAP,  
A WEDDING RING,  
A GOLD FILLING.

HERR GOD, HERR LUCIFER  
BEWARE  
BEWARE.

OUT OF THE ASH  
I RISE WITH MY RED HAIR  
AND I EAT MEN LIKE AIR.

Here, in Heart of Darkness, in the center of empty street/hall (overlay EXT. & INT. shots) a being awaits us. A WALKING SAM? X's Doppelganger? Some murder angel? Can't say. But something, hard to tell what just yet (looks like Francis Bacon's wet nightmare) has been waiting, and, by the end—just as we reach "and I eat men like air"—it turns to face us with its blinding 'I's in one great white flash (parallel framing to turning shot ending OPENING MONTAGE - PHASE IV. BOTTOM FUCKING LINE).

7. INT. IVORY TOWER - FRONT DESK OF CAMPUS RESEARCH LIBRARY & ARCHIVES [AGAIN] - NIGHT [STILL]

Camera flash, as it turns out.

UHAUL JOE  
(surprised, exasperated)  
Shit! I hate this damn phone. Huh.

Old guard—now back for next shift—has apparently taken x's picture as they sleep. X must have fallen asleep on duty. Odd.

X  
(Confused, coming-to)  
The fuck—what—what time is it?

X checks phone.

X (CONT'D)  
Sonofa—

8. EXT. EMPTY CITY - EL DUENDE & VERDE LUNA - NIGHT (CIRCA 4/5:00 A.M.)

Rushing through a dead city—dead dark, dead quiet, dead empty—shaken by the echo of X's running feet as they wind their way back through concrete canyons to bus stop, where X arrives only in time to see bus in distance, departed.

X slumps shoulders, drops bag, and plops down on curb exhausted. Panting, X looks around—all is vacancy, blank shops lining blank sidewalks lining blank streets, over which loom long rows of lonesome streetlights, humming softly with heads downcast, contemplative—then up, at the great blank sky. No stars. Several satellites. Slowly, X lays back—stretching out across sidewalk— and breathes more steadily.

Shot: X prone at foot of bus stop bench, looking up, searching for stars. Linger like this for a long moment. Wind picks up. Then, in that sound, the ghost of another rises; strumming of a guitar.

X lifts head to look down the street.

Gorgeous—if oddly unsettling—in sombrero & calaveras colors, an esqueleto marionette, EL DUENDE, glides into view at the end of the street on the first notes of VERDE LUNA.

Then his accompaniment, a melancholy mariachi band—eyes obscured by sombreros and shadows—round corner and darkness behind, playing and dancing as if asleep, as if a dream.

While the singer appears to be the Mariachi manipulating the puppet, the puppet appears to be the only one alive, dancing and posing, performing the song to the empty street as passionately as to a full crowd.

EL DUENDE  
(singing; voice deep, dark,  
drunken)  
VERDE ES MI COLOR  
COLOR DE VERDE LUNA ES MI  
PASIÓN  
PROFUNDIDAD DEL MAR LLEVO EN  
MI SER  
LA LUZ DE LOS LUCEROS ES MI  
AMOR  
LA LUNA ES MI RIVAL

VERDE, VERDE LUNA A MI ME  
LLAMAN  
DE REFLEJO CRUEL IMAGINARIO  
TU, TU BESOS FUE LA VERDE  
FLAMA  
VERDE LUNA TU TIENES MAL  
FARIO

FRAGUA DE FORJAR  
AMORES DE TORMENTA VERDE MAR  
QUE LLEVA A LA PLAYA DEL  
PLACER  
BUSCANDO LA ESMERALDA DE UN  
QUERER  
QUE ROJA VERDE ES

VERDE, VERDE LUNA A MI ME  
LLAMAN  
DE REFLEJO CRUEL IMAGINARIO  
TU, TU BESOS FUE LA VERDE  
FLAMA  
VERDE LUNA TU TIENES MAL  
FARIO

EL DUENDE  
(singing; voice deep, dark  
drunken)  
GREEN IS MY COLOR  
GREEN MOON COLORED IS MY  
PASSION  
DEPTH OF THE SEA I CARRY IN  
MY BEING  
THE LIGHT OF THE STARS IS MY  
LOVE  
THE MOON IS MY RIVAL

GREEN, GREEN MOON THEY CALL  
ME  
CRUEL IMAGINARY REFLECTION  
YOU, YOUR KISSES WERE THE  
GREEN FLAME  
GREEN MOON, YOU HAVE/ARE BAD  
LUCK

FORGE OF FORGES  
SEA GREEN STORM LOVES  
THAT LEADS TO THE BEACH OF  
PLEASURE  
LOOKING FOR THE EMERALD OF A  
WANT  
THAT IS RED GREEN

GREEN, GREEN MOON THEY CALL  
ME  
CRUEL IMAGINARY REFLECTION  
YOU, YOUR KISSES WERE THE  
GREEN FLAME,  
GREEN MOON YOU HAVE/ARE BAD  
LUCK

NOTE ON SONG: *VERDE LUNA*, is, as far as I can tell, a fairly old song (at least two centuries) with many drastically different versions in terms of lyrics & composition—the one I'm working with/from is a very, very stripped-down rendition performed by Cuban singer GRACIELA PÁRRAGA sometime in the early 1940s.

Visitors pass with the song—dancing away, down the street, into the dark. X is alone again—stillness apart from wind—still lying on sidewalk, waiting for the bus, though now with head turned toward street/camera/audience instead of sky. We linger for another long moment...

9. INT./EXT. ON BUS - ART SEQUENCE - DAWN-DAY

X alone in back of bus again, notepad out and empty, composing poem—maybe—or trying to. Perhaps we see X reflected in window—through which empty desert and sunrise glide by—staring, damaged, eraser-less mechanical pencil in hand, at the blank page resting in their lap, a false start or two, then furiously rubbing tired eyes, fighting tears of exhaustion, of rage. At last, giving up; turning to look out window—desolate—past us, directly into emptiness, openness, searching, hoping, fearing.

Find a new/creative way to bring this worried vacancy to life.

Shot: X looking through window—camera outside bus, looking in—reflected on window surface the beautiful Georgia O'Keeffe desertscape, sensual as it is sensory, a living painting.

X (V.O.)  
(eyes open, searching)  
Twenty something, out of options  
and time; closed your eyes

X shuts eyes. Sets jaw. Tries to stop tears. Comes close, but not close enough. Watercolor sky streams from O'Keeffe—smooth into something coiling, kinetic, Van Gogh.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(eyes closed)  
and woke up here; lost on the dark  
side of an empty page. Can't  
explain

A curved, shifting kind of motion sends a ripple of life through reflected landscape/dreamscape/artscape, like something churning just beneath the surface.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(eyes closed)  
your art—God knows, you've tried

Paintstreak sky develops *Kwaidan* (1964) eyes—first, one, then another—as it glides past, till crowded with them, staring with them.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(eyes closed)  
It's a kind of moving,

Across these, drop a tear—first, one, then another—till eyes/skies bleed/blotch into one another.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(eyes closed)  
dreaming.

Visions falling apart, blending together—think Pollock, but with a motion from within, not without—a kind of melting/melding medley.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(eyes closed)  
The rest, if it comes at all

Landscape lost in the running colors, the ambient sounds, of art gone amiss, asprawl, awry—then utterly obliterated in window reflection by passing truck/18 wheeler, sounding horn of course. X opens eyes involuntarily as truck passes due to the sudden sound + light change but, in its wake, the art is gone, the landscape empty as it was at first.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(eyes open, searching)  
you can't say.

X sees only the usual desert, now artless and hollow as ever—no painting, no imagination, just vacancy in X's eyes. X inhales shakily, fixes the scene in with a determined look, then tries again. The next phase of this shot—and, yes, this is all one fucking shot—must slowly (ever so slowly) smoothly (ever so smoothly) zoom in until, by the final "nightmare", it's just X's eyes (still seen staring through window, searching the desert)

in frame; the gag is, as the monologue progresses, filmstock will become more and more damaged until, at last, achieving total visual incoherence, every artist's dream, every artist's nightmare.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(eyes open, searching)

X  
(eyes open, searching, in  
a low, broken whisper)  
Came out to this desert in the  
middle—

FIRST BURST OF FILM DAMAGE.

X (CONT'D)  
(eyes open, searching, in  
a low, broken whisper)  
of fucking nowhere and now you

MORE FILM DAMAGE.

X (CONT'D)  
(eyes open, searching, in  
a low, broken whisper)  
don't know, can't imagine—

EVEN MORE FILM DAMAGE.

X (CONT'D)  
(eyes open, searching, in  
a low, broken whisper)  
why or what the fuck

I WANT THIS FILM SO FUCKING DAMAGED.

X (CONT'D)  
(eyes open, searching, in  
a low, broken whisper)  
you're doing here or where

I'M TALKING MOLD DAMAGE—

X (CONT'D)  
(eyes open, searching, in  
a low, broken whisper)  
you're going next, can't see

WATER DAMAGE—

X (CONT'D)  
(eyes open, searching, in  
a low, broken whisper)  
a future anymore, can't imagine

RUST DAMAGE—

X (CONT'D)  
(eyes open, searching, in  
a low, broken whisper)  
a life beyond this, can't dream

ALL OF IT—

X (CONT'D)  
(eyes open, searching, in  
a low, broken whisper)  
just nightmare

ALL AT ONCE—

X (CONT'D)  
(eyes open, searching, in  
a low, broken whisper)  
nightmare

UNTIL THE IMAGE IS UNRECOGNIZABLE.

X (CONT'D)  
(eyes open, searching, in  
a low, broken whisper)  
nightmare.

Good. Now, from this kinetic, opalescent chaos—imagine white noise, radio static, visualized—a new voice:

PROFESSOR (PRE-LAP)  
So, this is what your standard two-  
year degree plan should look like.

10. INT. MCGUFFIN HALL, ROOM 237 - ORIENTATION - DAY (6:00 P.M.)

X's eyes—visually placed where they would've been at the end of the last shot had the film not been damaged—looking glassy and absolutely horrified but trying to suppress it.

PROFESSOR (CONT'D)  
Any questions?

PROFESSOR, masked, professional & perfunctory as ever, standing before a powerpoint slide showing the hypothetical schedule for a hypothetical student under hypothetically ideal circumstances; in other words, a vast, incomprehensible, vaguely terrifying muddle of acronyms, arrows, and asterisks, all in different colors.

Shot of students all lined up at long conference table, wide eyed and duly stunned behind their many different masks. ECO at center. X off to the side & behind a few people suggesting a late arrival.

PROFESSOR (CONT'D)  
Well, in that case, I think we're  
done here. If you come up with any  
questions later on, you know where  
to find me. I wish you all a  
restful and safe weeke—

11. INT. MCGUFFIN HALL - BATHROOM - DAY (6:05 P.M.)

Someone violently throwing up in closed stall, presumably X, but camera pans to show X enter bathroom just after another student, STUDENT 1.

X  
(unsure how to be so nose  
y in polite way)  
(MORE)



X (CONT'D)

Hey, hate to bother you, but, um,  
you mentioned something about  
campus shutting down before the  
meeting and I was wondering, you  
know, like, how you know—

STUDENT 1. turns to X. Mysterious stall occupant vomits  
again. Loudly.

X (CONT'D)

Not that I doubt you or anything,  
it's just—

Retching gets louder, eyes wander in that direction.

STUDENT 1.

(suppressed amusement)  
No, you're fine, totally get it;  
girlfriend's an intern at the  
dean's office and she had to write  
a bunch of emails bout it this  
morning.

Moan from stall.

X

(gutted at response but  
grateful for any) )  
Oh, okay, great! Thanks so much!

Retching begins again, louder than ever.

STUDENT 1.

(suppressed amusement)  
No problem!

Deafening toilet flush at transition.

12. EXT. MCGUFFIN HALL - BENCHES OUTSIDE ENTRANCE - DAY  
(6:10-20 P.M.) GOLDEN HOUR TO DUSK

X's phone screen, open to X's email, being repeatedly swiped  
to reload by a nervous thumb. X's inbox mostly 'important'  
missives from Office of Student Affairs beginning DO NOT  
REPLY TO THIS EMAIL from long before arrival at campus where  
X never has any signal, hence the loading issues.

X

(impatient)  
Come on, come on, come on.

View of X, in profile hunched over phone on bench just  
outside McGuffin hall, IVORY TOWER in background.

X (CONT'D)  
(scared and desperate)  
Fuck, just, please.

X's phone screen again, and this time it listens to X. The email loads, first one; a notice of dismissal. Phone screen cuts to black, & X's reflection, gutted, eyes shut tight, trying to hold it in.

View of X, tiny figure on bench, curling into self beneath huge brutalist walls of McGuffin Hall.

X (CONT'D)  
(very quietly)  
Okay. Pull it together. Breathe.  
You're not doing this. Not here.  
Not now.

Close up of X, curled against wall left, trying to gather self, not get caught up in fear—not knowing what to do or where to go next, how to stay here or what else is left, ding-ding, now entering uncharted territory—on right side of frame, in background, the courtyard just outside entrance to McGuffin Hall. Voting posters everywhere—don't forget, it's election night, Nov 2020, tension thick, heavy, universal—rattled by wind. Also, litter. Gotta feel a little like a prison yard, few dead plants thrown in for perfunctory decoration. Then (around "Breathe") small group of students—including STUDENT 1. and ECO—exit hall together talking and laughing. ECO notices X immediately, says something to the girl beside him, STUDENT 1. overhears conversation, turns, and says something to them, they say something back, then (by X's "here") STUDENT 1. shouts:

STUDENT 1.  
Hey! You—with the jacket!

X turns, codeswitches like an old pro, and smiling:

X  
(wry tone)  
Hey, longtime no see.

STUDENT 1.—amused but a little taken aback at this sudden humor from a near stranger—smirks quizzically, then tosses head back in loud laugh.

STUDENT 1.  
(catching breath,  
regaining composure)  
Sorry, gimme a sec, it's just—you  
know, that was really funny—whew,  
okay.

(MORE)

STUDENT 1. (CONT'D)

So, I know you don't really know us  
that well, but we're all super  
fucking stressed, about to get  
absolutely shitwrecked, and wanted  
to know if you wanna come?

X's turn to laugh. This is just what X needed. From where  
they sit, X smiles up at STUDENT 1. through mask, then eyes  
shift to something beyond.

View over STUDENT 1.'s shoulder—ECO's looking at us/X,  
unreadable.

X again—we can feel smile drop behind mask, then something  
else rises—slowly more mischievous/manic than ever. Then,  
shifting eyes back to STUDENT 1.:

X  
(beaming)  
Love to.

Return to view of ECO over STUDENT 1.'s shoulder—slow zoom.  
Haunting intro FLORENCE + THE MACHINE's *MY LOVE* begins. As  
beat drops, ECO quickly turns away to kick at litter blown by  
wind across pavement. Finally, brief glance back—near end, at  
vocal lift, before lyrics begin.

13. INT./EXT. *MY LOVE* - [UNDEAD] DRAG PERFORMANCE & A DREAM  
SEQUENCE - NIGHT

Another slow zoom. UNDEAD DRAG QUEEN, in disheveled but  
classic flamenco get up, back to us, face set gaunt in  
profile—obscured by shadow, but haloed by light—arms  
outstretched miming the end of that same vocal lift.

INTERCUT DRAG SHOW & X/ECO INTERACTION

Brief glimpse of X in crowd, face in shifting shadows,  
looking around as if lost.

FLORENCE + THE MACHINE (V.O.)  
I WAS ALWAYS ABLE TO WRITE MY WAY  
OUT

UNDEAD DRAG QUEEN begins small, quiet, intimate with a close  
up—hair, makeup, costuming & lighting all horrendous,  
cadaverous, vaguely terrifying—yet somehow it works, the  
vibe, the otherworldliness of art, hangs thick in the air.

FLORENCE + THE MACHINE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
SONG ALWAYS MADE SENSE TO ME

Close up of hand sifting/feeling through crowd, till grabbed, at the wrist, by another.

FLORENCE + THE MACHINE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
NOW I FIND THAT WHEN I LOOK DOWN

UNDEAD DRAG QUEEN miming the actions with the unnerving aplomb of a true tragic muse.

FLORENCE + THE MACHINE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
EVERY PAGE IS EMPTY

X turning around to see who's just grabbed them.

FLORENCE + THE MACHINE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
THERE IS NOTHING TO DESCRIBE

UNDEAD DRAG QUEEN now joined by backing motley chorus of other UNDEAD QUEENS, miming the "oooo"s that come in here.

FLORENCE + THE MACHINE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
EXCEPT THE MOON

ECO's face, half hidden by shadows and crowd and mask; tilts head, signaling X (& us) to follow.

FLORENCE + THE MACHINE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
SET RIGHT AGAINST A WORRIED SKY

Horror meets camp as UNDEAD DRAG QUEEN turns to gesture/pose toward what has to be the shittiest moon prop imaginable, raised in background by CHORUS OF UNDEAD QUEENS, who look like they could topple over each other at any minute.

FLORENCE + THE MACHINE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
I PRAY THE TREES WILL GET THEIR  
LEAVES SOON

X being rushed/led through crowd.

FLORENCE + THE MACHINE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
SO TELL ME WHERE TO PUT MY LOVE

UNDEAD DRAG QUEEN bursts into chorus—so powerful, almost angry, threatening, frightening—dance of CHORUS OF UNDEAD QUEENS must also be something ominous here. Circling, hunched over—think Nijinsky's *Sacre* (1913) with a flamenco flare.

FLORENCE + THE MACHINE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
DO I WAIT FOR TIME TO DO WHAT IT  
DOES?

X pulled into corner laughing, "what the fuck", then X slammed hard against wall, mask ripped off—X's expression unreadable, maybe shock, maybe satisfaction, hint of fear.

FLORENCE + THE MACHINE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
I DON'T KNOW WHERE TO PUT MY LOVE

UNDEAD DRAG QUEEN in middle of CHORUS OF UNDEAD QUEENS with arms out, fists clenched & shaking like a vengeful ghost, in flashes of strobe-lighting.

FLORENCE + THE MACHINE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
AND WHEN IT CAME, IT WAS STRANGER  
THAN I HAD EVER IMAGINED

Two shadows moving—first together, then apart—making out; pan to X breaking kiss to search ECO's eyes.

FLORENCE + THE MACHINE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
NO CRACKING OPENED UP HEAVEN

Close up of hand of UNDEAD DRAG QUEEN, long, gaunt, discolored. Fingers shift on "cracking" to reveal her heavily made-up eye peeking between them.

FLORENCE + THE MACHINE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
BUT QUIET AND STILL

ECO's face, mostly in shadow, breathing heavy, hungry.

FLORENCE + THE MACHINE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(MY FRIENDS ARE GETTING ILL)

CHORUS OF UNDEAD QUEENS, all shapes and sizes, all parodies of the 'tragic manner' but in different senses, and each selling this line a different way. Completely over the top.

FLORENCE + THE MACHINE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
SO TELL ME WHERE TO PUT MY LOVE

X & ECO making out & struggling to find way in dark, pulling at each other's hair, clothes etc.

FLORENCE + THE MACHINE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
DO I WAIT FOR TIME TO DO WHAT IT  
DOES?

ECO & X stumbling through dark & crowded club, into alley out back.

FLORENCE + THE MACHINE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
I DON'T KNOW WHERE TO PUT MY LOVE

UNDEAD DRAG QUEEN at center of CHORUS OF UNDEAD QUEENS,  
wailing, stomping, pulling hair with an abandon suggestive of  
an aspiring Ophelia.

FLORENCE + THE MACHINE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
SO TELL ME WHERE TO PUT MY LOVE

ECO reaching car, then turning laughing as X catches up for a  
drunken kiss.

FLORENCE + THE MACHINE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
DO I WAIT FOR TIME TO DO WHAT IT  
DOES?

UNDEAD DRAG QUEEN still in middle of CHORUS OF UNDEAD QUEENS,  
now looking genuinely panicked as she looks over shoulder  
asking audience/camera her unanswerable question.

FLORENCE + THE MACHINE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
I DON'T KNOW WHERE TO PUT MY LOVE

View from inside car, ECO falling back (toward camera) across  
backseat of car, X crawling in on top.

FLORENCE + THE MACHINE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
MY ARMS EMPTY, THE SKIES EMPTY

UNDEAD DRAG QUEEN now crumpled on floor in middle of CHORUS  
OF UNDEAD QUEENS—who are not ominous anymore but instead on  
knees, with arms around each other, swaying from side to side—  
in a scene, again, reminiscent of *Sacre*.

FLORENCE + THE MACHINE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
THE BILLBOARDS EMPTY

Twin profiles, X & ECO, silhouetted in darkness, foreheads  
pressed together, kiss gentle

FLORENCE + THE MACHINE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
My arms empty, the skies empty

UNDEAD DRAG QUEEN rises, slowly building along with song as  
CHORUS OF UNDEAD QUEENS continues to sway, this time heads  
tossed back ecstatic instead of bent forward mournful—imagine  
Graham.

FLORENCE + THE MACHINE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
THE BUILDINGS EMPTY

Suddenly, kiss becomes more intense: ECO bites X's bottom lip  
—hard, painful—X lets out a sharp gasp and pulls away.

FLORENCE + THE MACHINE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
SO TELL ME WHERE TO PUT MY LOVE

UNDEAD DRAG QUEEN lunges directly at camera with the inquiry, angry, passionate, frightening again—strobe flashes—circle CHORUS OF UNDEAD QUEENS now upright, legs spread, menacing, aggressive again.

FLORENCE + THE MACHINE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
DO I WAIT FOR TIME TO DO WHAT IT  
DOES?

X, wiping hand over mouth, to pull it away dark, bloody, then looking down at ECO, surprised and hurt.

FLORENCE + THE MACHINE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
I DON'T KNOW WHERE TO PUT MY LOVE

Now we're looking down at ECO too, face almost entirely obscured by darkness, and something about what we see suggests the horrifying realization that this it isn't really ECO at all.

FLORENCE + THE MACHINE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
HAH!

UNDEAD DRAG QUEEN flashes a high fightstyle kick right at camera in a bolt of strobe lightning.

FLORENCE + THE MACHINE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
SO TELL ME WHERE TO PUT MY LOVE

Back in car, X quickly looks around, to find the car is moving quickly, silently through an unfamiliar landscape, lights glaring into total darkness.

FLORENCE + THE MACHINE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
DO I WAIT FOR TIME TO DO WHAT IT  
DOES?

View through window, shadowscape/dreamscape of desert, outlines of strange creatures pass, coyote, jackalope, etc.

FLORENCE + THE MACHINE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
I DON'T KNOW WHERE TO PUT MY LOVE

X, now panicking, trying at door, but can't handle/lock set, unmoving, as WALKING SAM, face still obscured, sits up behind X.

FLORENCE + THE MACHINE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
MY ARMS EMPTY, THE SKIES EMPTY  
THE BILLBOARDS EMPTY

Just before the grand finale; UNDEAD DRAG QUEEN rising up—lifted by CHORUS OF UNDEAD QUEENS—arms outstretched, head thrown back, reaching out for something just beyond self.

FLORENCE + THE MACHINE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
MY ARMS EMPTY, THE SKIES EMPTY  
THE BUILDINGS EMPTY

Over shoulder of Walking Sam, we see X terrified, then, landscape outside falls away as car suddenly plunges over edge into total darkness, slow motion fall. Then, on final "Empty", shock of impact cuts to X abruptly coming to with a gasp.

X, looking the worse for ware, glances around at unfamiliar landscape. X entirely, inexplicably alone, in the middle of nowhere—John Atkinson Grimshaw meets the desert southwest—as eerie *MY LOVE* outro sounds. Naturally I'll throw in some wind too because why the fuck not.

14. INT. 5150 TAROT CANYON - MAIN (VIRTUALLY ONLY) ROOM -  
DARKNESS-DAWN

One scene, one shot; Tarkovsky's revenge. Door opens. We're just behind X, looking over their shoulder. In the room, we can hear snoring of grandmother asleep in her armchair, drowned out by sound of TV playing cable news, as usual, on far wall. Election results are being discussed, disputed, denied ad nauseam. X walks forward, turns tv off, then turns back to enter kitchenette. After a brief shuffling sound, X reappears in frame carrying several bowls on one arm with the skill of a former waiter, and walks to back door on far wall, standing just to the right of television, which is positioned center frame.

The moment backdoor opens, a small carpet of cat ears pop up along lower mesh of screen door. Opening this reveals a small herd of feral cats, not at all willing to get close to humans, but even less willing to pass up an easy meal. They scatter, briefly, as X goes into backyard careful not to spill anything, then close ranks behind.

X (O.S.)  
(tired & hoarse but still  
gentle)  
There ya' go, guys—hey! Don't be  
rude...

X comes back into view, seen through frame of backdoor, leaning down to pick up & turn on hose, brushing hair out of face. X turns and walks into middle of garden, almost [but not quite] leaving our POV through back door. X waters for a while, cats closer to door eating like their life depends on it. Then X's knees suddenly buckle & X is kneeling in the dirt. Our view lingers on this—X kneeling in garden hair blowing in wind around dawn—as a voiceover begins.



ANONYMOUS RECORDING (V.O.)  
(grainy & automated)  
Hello, you have reached the state  
university mental health hotline.  
Please hold, a representative will  
be with you shortly.

Grainy recording of Vivaldi's *SPRING* begins to play.

Our view of X, semiobsured on knees in backyard, remains unchanged. Shot continuous—lasting minute at most—the bulk of which will be spent watching X kneeling in wind & wondering if they're really gonna play the entire fucking recording of Vivaldi's Spring. Keynote: desolation + apathy. At last, film stutters, sound warps, and the reel rolls itself out.

END OF ACT I.

ACT II.

1. ACT[/SEMESTER] II. TITLE CARD - TAROT SPREAD/DRAWING

A young hand, unpracticed yet steady, spreads a line of tarot cards facedown across the table, then hovers in pause.

JORGE LUIS BORGES (PRE-LAP)

At the outset, I would like to give  
you fair warning of what to expect-

Finally, a victim is selected and upturned, revealing "THE MOON"-Rider-Waite deck customized with act number ("ACT II.") across top of card and arcana title (in this case, "THE MOON") at bottom.

2. EXT. MIDDLE OF NOWHERE/DESERT - JORGE LUIS BORGES'S 'THE RIDDLE' - WAKING LA VIDENTE - HIGHNOON

Audio here comes from the first in JORGE LUIS BORGES'S 1967-8 *THIS CRAFT OF VERSE* Lectures, The Riddle of Poetry.

JORGE LUIS BORGES (V.O.)

or rather, of what not to expect-  
from me.

Stationary shot: desertscape, barren, heatripped horizon-match-cut blazing sun to Tarot moon from last shot-steady hum of cicadas.

JORGE LUIS BORGES (V.O.) (CONT'D)

The truth is that I have no  
revelations to offer.

Another shot; same landscape, new perspective. Stones, overgrown-some red/brown, some grey/black-first smooth, featureless, then marked with strange signs/symbols.

JORGE LUIS BORGES (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I have spent my life reading,  
analyzing,

Countless petroglyphs, spiraling, circling, staring out through a thousand eyespots, a thousand years, watching, reflecting; a kind of collective consciousness, the living memory of these mountains. This is LA VIDENTE, the Seer.

JORGE LUIS BORGES (V.O.) (CONT'D)

writing (or trying my hand at  
writing), and enjoying-

Closeup of petroglyph depicting an isolated, almost hypnotic spiral.

JORGE LUIS BORGES (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
this is the most important thing of  
all—"Drinking in" poetry,

Another petroglyph, this time a horizontal zigzag we follow to its snakehead, swallowing a crescent moon.

JORGE LUIS BORGES (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
and I have come to no final  
conclusion about it.

Another petroglyph, now a group scene, a ceremony of some sort, with monster/priest/god in the middle; antlers branching from head like trees.

JORGE LUIS BORGES (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
Indeed, every time I am faced with  
a blank page, I feel that I have to  
rediscover literature for myself.  
The past is of no avail whatever to  
me.

More petroglyphs: a hunting scene, we move through this via QUICK CUT closeups of the human participants.

JORGE LUIS BORGES (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
Whenever I have dipped into books  
of aesthetics, I have had an  
uncomfortable feeling that I was  
reading the works of astronomers  
who never looked at the stars.

Same series of petroglyphs: this time our QUICK CUT closeups focus on the animals hunted and killed.

JORGE LUIS BORGES (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
I mean that they were writing about  
poetry as if poetry were a task,  
and not what it really is. We go on  
to poetry; we go on to life. Life  
is, I am sure, made of poetry.  
Poetry is not alien—poetry is, as  
we shall see, lurking round the  
corner.

Now, we begin to move through this living memory; at each standing stone, a new story, a new vision or point of view opens itself up to us, quantity and quality of the designs developing as we get deeper into the labyrinth. Cicadas louder, more insistent and, beneath them, something like sobbing—faint but fast growing louder.

JORGE LUIS BORGES (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
It may spring on us at any moment.

At last, rounding a curve, we see it. Semi-dismembered, possibly sacrificed, half-rotted body of a deer, all but buried beneath a heaving skin of iridescent flies. Roaches cluster in the shadow of its corpse. Sounds of cicadas and sobbing now blur together into a kind of deafening Shepard tone, perpetually rising to climax-

THERAPIST (PRE-LAP)  
(half question, half  
proposition)  
Why don't we start...

Gazing into a single, clouded, mirrorlike, dead eye. Think: ambient/dreamlike horror—as in *Marketa Lazarova* (1967) or *Shining* (1980)—nonviolent, but everheavy with the possibility of violence.

### 3. INT. THERAPY - ZOOM SESSION - MIDDAY

Extreme closeup of X's eye—framed to align with Deer's eye in previous shot—smizing like mad, with a minute image of therapist's face in zoom window reflected across retina.

THERAPIST (O.S.)  
...with you telling me a bit about  
yourself.

Eye widens—ever so slightly—then rapid, nervous blinking followed by sudden glance away, breaking therapist's reflection. Overlay with roar of plane taking off as in OPENING SEQUENCE PHASE II. and *Cabiria* (1957).

### 4. ART SEQUENCE - THE KNOT

Blackscreen; faint ear-ringing carried over from last scene/shot.

X (V.O.)  
One notebook, mostly empty.  
Scattered thoughts, impressions,  
memories. Hungry stars. Blank  
skies. The weight of day on day,  
year after year. Every call. Every  
email. Every interview.

The first half of this sequence is a kind of gathering of ingredients—things put-in, things given-up—for something you love: at each item listed, a ribbon, a river, a current of color comes streaming into view from some new point just beyond our frame. The color palate is bruised: red/purple/blue/grey—rich, dark.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
Everytime they told you what to do,  
and you did it, only to end up  
wondering why.

By “everytime” these separate veins begin to braid, twist, and twine together—like tendons—running toward a common end, centerframe, finally meeting there at “why”.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
You give so much away, put so much  
into everything—hoping, somehow,  
eventually, it'll all make sense,  
add up to a life worth more than  
the sum of moment and emotion—but  
you don't know. Maybe that's not  
how it works. Maybe the more you  
pull together,

Seamlessly, the cords/roots knot together in center, gradually forming a gordian chaos of shifting coils and colors; one which—by “Maybe”(1)—pulses like the newformed embryo of some future living being, a confluence, a star nursery, swarming nucleus.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
the more things fall apart. What if  
all you're doing here is making  
something that'll hurt you in the  
end? What if this is what you need?

Beating to the ominous echo of a muffled heart, it goes on gathering, growing, building; Risset rhythm, Shephard tone; threatening to burst/birth, come open until—

##### 5. INT. 5150 TAROT CANYON - X'S ROOM - NIGHT

X suddenly awakens in pool of sweat, gasping. Pan across plaster ridged landscape of ceiling, headlights crossing wall as X attempts to calm breathing amidst sounds of wind rattling house. Then, once things settle and wind dies down, we/X notice that the echoing heartbeat of the last scene/dream actually came from a faint but steady pounding on the wall; expression swiftly returning to guilt/fear, X immediately jolts up and out of frame.

6. INT. 5150 TAROT CANYON - GRANDMA'S ROOM - NIGHT

X  
(softly)  
I'll be right here, okay?

X, back to us, carefully closing GRANDMA'S bathroom door to give her some privacy—we hear the sound of her coughing/retching in the background. X hunkers down onto carpet to untangle GRANDMA'S oxygen tube beside door, through which a thin line of light shines out into the unlit room. X works away at the knots, then glances up to see a photograph of them in childhood. Decades later, X's expression is unchanged: scared, exhausted, unhappy. X registers this in a long half-shadowed look, only interrupted by the roar of a sudden toilet flush and a revival of coughing/wall-pounding from dear old GRAM.

7. INT. 5150 TAROT CANYON - MAIN ROOM - NIGHT

This scene begins with a series of moonlit closeups—studies of religious knickknacks crowding the walls of 5150 MAIN ROOM—the audio: wind rattling the windows, winding through the air vents, and possibly, somewhere beneath that, a quiet sobbing.

Closeup 1: A gentle hand, gently painted, stigmata open, like a mouth, like a story, like an eye.

Closeup 2: Tearstained Mater Dolorosa, Lady of the Seven Sorrows; her long tapering fingers cup a Tarot daggered heart, haloed by thorns.

Closeup 3: Crucifix slim and dark against the great white blank of wall.

View of wall in its entirety, clustered with crosses and Christian knickknacks of every imaginable size, scale, and description—all shuttering slightly as wind rattles walls—surrounding X, head in hands, breathing low, centerframe. Then, as we look, the wind calms and another sound comes in: a muffled sort of shifting, sliding, movement somewhere outside house. X's gaze jolts up to meet camera.

8. INT./EXT. 5150 TAROT CANYON - MAIN ROOM INTO BACKYARD - NIGHT

X's POV: backdoor opening from the inside; view of a world deceased, garden in the inexplicable moonlight.

X gazes steadily into the night, glancing up to note a sky as empty as ever, only an odd glow and some satellites.

Then, a sudden movement: litter shifting and gliding, eerily animate in breeze, this performance becomes significantly more unsettling as more and more bits of trash join in the dance, winding here and there directionless before dying down as abruptly as it began, a piece of crumpled paper fluttering to the threshold at X's feet.

X bends down, picks it up, finds: anonymous torso of a centerfold dismembered/torn from some celebrity and/or porn magazine. X, feeling it between their fingers, turns this over to reveal fragments of ad text, bold, black "I" then, beneath, in a different font, "cu" (broken words) which cues abrupt cut to black just as paper appears to be blown out of X's hands by sudden gust—layer audio here with sharp sound; either stab or gasp or both.

Long pause, then X's voice comes in.

X  
(hoarse, determined  
whisper)  
three, two, one—

#### 9. INT./EXT. 'ACTION' SEQUENCE - VARIOUS LOCATIONS/TIMES

MCKEESQUE FIGURE  
(shouting)  
ACTION! Every. Story. Needs.  
Action.

Spotlight flashes us into a TED talk by some MCKEESQUE FIGURE ranting on the significance of action to story, pacing the stage; this spiel will continue throughout the sequence as ironic/somber accompaniment to the interstices of inertia and emptiness that defined life mid-pandemic.

MCKEESQUE FIGURE (V.O.)  
Mediocre writers always try to  
write stories where nothing really  
happens.

Camera pans across aisles of supermarket—all empty, shelves too—before finally discovering a lone figure at the end of one, back to us, kneeling down to get a better look at something.

MCKEESQUE FIGURE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
Well, guess what?

View over shoulder of lone figure; we see a roach on it's back struggling to right itself. Then store loudspeaker coughs, startling lone figure, who turns their head to reveal X, masked and on-edge.

MCKEESQUE FIGURE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

You can't.

X, back to us, exits store, swinging prescription bag up to prompt rather defective automatic doors, which open for X and then close, leaving us/camera inside.

MCKEESQUE FIGURE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Life isn't like that

X alone in back of bus (again), looking out window (again), this time in the oppressive glare and dusty shadows of late afternoon. Sky haunted by incongruous daytime moon.

MCKEESQUE FIGURE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

And, thank God, art's not either.

View out of window, faintly shadowed by X's blank reflection: Empty town. Cars with windows tinted too dark to see anyone locked in motionless traffic or parked on side of road. Sidewalks totally abandoned to heat of the day before a shop filled with faceless (yet oddly human) mannequins in seemingly endless front window display.

MCKEESQUE FIGURE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Any idea where it comes from?

Tarot Canyon street, windless, still as death apart from ambulance and small crowd in front of house a few doors down from 5150. As X enters (frame left) on their way home, ambulance (frame right) starts its sirens up and drives off. Leaving X and motley crew of onlookers—UPS guy, kid in gold skates with a bent baseball bat, and haggard looking hooker (is that our UNDEAD DRAGQUEEN?)—staring after it from opposite ends of the frame.

MCKEESQUE FIGURE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

it comes from people

X at table with grandma as television news drones away in background; images of 1/6. Behind them, in a shadowy corner, sits a cardboard box and a mini-Christmas-tree, either half-takedown or half-setup. Slow zoom in on X and GRANDMA. Neither are eating. Both seem only half there, though in different ways. Whistler's Mother. American Beauty. The audio of muffled voices introduced by television/news stays with us from this point on in the sequence, slowly building.

MCKEESQUE FIGURE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

it comes from relationships

View of X's room in the dark—messy as usual—headlights cross the walls as X masterbates furiously beneath covers.



MCKEESQUE FIGURE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
it comes from being together,

Eerie view of garden in the moonlight, plants swaying  
rhythmic in a silent breeze—slow zoom out—with possible  
figure in the shadows of the alleyway just beyond chainlink  
and certainty.

MCKEESQUE FIGURE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
living together

Series of paper scraps [notecards, typed essays, journal  
pages cut, torn, and taped together, scribbled over,  
highlighted, circled, crossed out] being slowly  
arranged/rearranged into a tenuous line across the floor by  
an unsure hand.

META MOMENT: the scraps X toys with here must be the building  
block's of the story we are watching unfold—fragment about  
the desert, a memo about art stories, medical diagram of  
lungs X has drawn a tree onto, dismembered centerfold picked  
up in garden earlier, cover ripped from Kafka's *Metamorphosis*  
(1915) crowded with scribbled & distorted lines from the *Lady  
of Shalott* (1833) (eg. "half sick, sick, sick of shadows"),  
X's own poetry pieces (scrawled across just about anything  
you can imagine) actively exploring, exploding narrative, a  
shifting collage of all the ingredients at work before our  
eyes—think 8.5 (1963).

MCKEESQUE FIGURE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
without that,

X looking down at us/scraps, haggard after another all-  
nighter, registering the hopelessness of gleaning any kind of  
continuity from this dismembered body of passing thoughts,  
impressions, feelings.

MCKEESQUE FIGURE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
there are no stories.

X's room again—still messy—X kneeling on floor in front of  
bed, studying notes spread out before them. Behind them, on  
top of bed, X's laptop plays YouTube video of MCKEESQUE TED  
talk, now dissolving into the inevitable applause cut off by  
an unexpected ad:

CRYPTOBRO (YOUTUBE AD)  
(half-shouting  
insufferable motivational  
speaker style)  
HEY YOU! I USED TO BE LIKE YOU:  
ALONE—

X turns to bed and immediately shuts laptop, then is suddenly struck by the sound of muffled/distant voices which has been building in the background of this sequence for a while now. Trying to figure out where it's coming from, X eventually approaches wall, puts ear to it, sounds rising like an argument, becoming more and more audible along with a ringing in the ear, ominous build, somehow insidious, as we/camera zoom in on X attempting to make out what's being said, half-mouthing words. In the main room, GRANDMA begins coughing; X's eyes waver, conflicted, but X is determined to figure out what's being said even as the coughing begins to get worse. We/Camera slowly glide past X's face in closeup, over their shoulder to see the scraps X had left scattered on the floor hesitantly moving/rearranging themselves.

STUDENT 2. (PRE-LAP)  
Wait—hold up—question.

10. INT. ZOOM CLASS - WAKING KAM!KAZE - 5150 TAROT CANYON - X'S ROOM - NIGHT

PROFESSOR  
Shoot.

PROFESSOR's zoom window.

STUDENT 2.  
So, I'm pretty sure there's a word for it but, like, is all this really happening or is it just, you know, in their head?

STUDENT 2's zoom window.

PROFESSOR (O.C.)  
An unreliable narrator?

Green [web]camera-I, Hal-like, staring.

STUDENT 2. (O.C.)  
Yep, that's the one.

X in bed and closeup, hand to mouth idly toying with the cut on their lower lip: computer lies open on their chest, the brightness of the screen (facing X not us) should be the only light-source in this shot.

PROFESSOR (O.C.)  
Good question. But aren't all narrators unreliable?

Shot continues with a slow zoom-out/draw-back revealing we/camera are watching X from across their unlit, messy room; their expression unreadable, gradually surrounded by a pool of teaming shadows.

PROFESSOR (O.C.) (CONT'D)  
And, besides, this story operates  
in a mode we call magic realism.

Create a username page, cursor-I blinking expectant. We pause. We hesitate. At last, the name "KAM!KAZE" is typed and entered, followed by a sudden cut to black.

11. INT./EXT. ANONYMOUS HOOKUP SEQUENCE - NIGHT

PROFESSOR (POST-LAP)  
(faintly echoing, as if  
spoken in a large room)  
Meaning: reality itself is  
unreliable.

Blackscreen. Softly, with the echo of PROFESSOR's words, the sound of breathing comes in; rhythmic, deep. This continues steady for a time, then builds, increasing in volume and intensity, until we hear a car drive by; as it passes light fans out across an anonymous ceiling as breathing continues rhythmic/twined, forming the percussion of this scene. Now, in the darkness again, a voice.

X (V.O.)  
(so soft, almost a  
whisper)  
Never thought you could

V.O. for this scene must be audibly independent from rhythmic breathing, though both should feel somehow linked; at once vulnerable/raw yet restrained/heldback. The time elapsing between each line should give the impression that the speaker is struggling for breath.

From this point on in the scene, each line of V.O. will cue an extremely brief VISUAL BURST; these should all be jarring, unstable, subliminal moments/images which flare up then, almost immediately, cut back to black—audibly beating to the rhythm of a slowed and pitched down heart, like muffled thunder, and each accompanied by an irregular flurry of offkey strings (the so-called 'crazy violin' endemic to horror).

Other strains of this scene's soundscape, however, must fade-in, bit by bit, then continuously build: an altercation in another room (somewhere between the sound of love and the sound of hurt), whitenoise/radiostatic, and (of course) the ringing in our ears.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
thought you could open like this

VISUAL BURST 1. GRANDMA's half-dissected medical slide (a foreshadowing of later events/imagery). This should hardly be more than 10-20 frames; slide pops into place, settles, then-wham-gone.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
and still be human

VISUAL BURST 2. tangle limbs & shadows. This is less static than the previous VISUAL BURST, but just as brief; we see only unclear, shifting, coiling bodies in the dark.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
like them you never thought

VISUAL BURST 3. moonlit chaos of roaches/flies swarming around the deadeye of a rotting deer. This should be a little longer than the last two VISUAL BURSTS—long enough, at least, to realize (barely) what we're looking at—but much more dynamic, insidious.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
but you are

VISUAL BURST 4. X's back, covered in fresh scratches/scars, heaving in dark & shower. This should be as long as VISUAL BURST 3., but no longer—1 or 2 sobs at most.

Again, the key here is to allow the image flashed on screen to contribute to the overall ambiance of this scene in a way that suggests/embodies X's (now fairly muddled) psyche; imagine each of these bursts as a blink, disturbing glimpses at the world bleeding through X's eyelids as they lay.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
here you are

VISUAL BURST 5. veiled figure—[imperfect] echo of our UNDEAD DRAGQUEEN—in the distance of a dark, empty, windswept street; behind, the moon rises full, impossibly large. We/camera rush toward her in a shaky, unsteady thrust; this must be the most dynamic VISUAL BURST, though not necessarily the longest.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
let's place this moment

No visuals/screenblack; in the background, soundscape rises to climax then (at "moment") a sudden cut to the absolute stillness of NIGHTWORLD.

12. EXT. NIGHTWORLD / EMPTY STREETS - BETWEEN 3-5 AM

X (POST-LAP)

here.

An empty street in the middle of the night; lit only by a distant, beat-up looking church sign announcing "NO ESTÁS SOLO" dim, flickering.

X enters frame; footsteps sounding as they walk past where we/camera lie at ground level, down the middle of the street. Behind them, in what is now the foreground, a smattering of litter—an empty Starbucks cup, an unused condom, half-a-page from the obituary section—flutters into view; it's hard to tell whether they're moved by some imperceptible breeze, or something else. X pauses at the sound.

One of the pieces moves again, suddenly flopping after X a few feet; this time apparently of its own volition. X glances back sharply at trash/us/camera, face masked & obscured by shadow. Gaze held till a great gust rises and comes rushing, from somewhere behind X, to billow us into the next shot.

What follows is a series of dynamic shots, or movements, lost in labyrinth of night & city: this scene should echo our earlier glide thru the library stacks—tho this time our sonic accompaniment will be only the wind, first subtle then growing—as we/camera move behind X's 'I's, seeing NIGHTWORLD as X sees it; infinitely beautiful, unnervingly hollow.

Exploring a world of wandering moments—think Italian 50s-60s main-character lost in the wonder of a dormant city: *La Strada* (1954), *Le Notti di Cabiria* (1957), *La Dolce Vita* (1960), *l'Avventura* (1960), *Io la Conoscevo Bene* (1965), etc. —allow narrative to lose itself, for now, in the curiosity that comes with seeing things in ways we aren't used to. An element of adventure too.

All is vacancy here—empty shops lining empty sidewalks lining empty streets, over which loom long rows of lonesome looking streetlights, humming softly with heads downcast, contemplative.

Heatlightning rumbles shadowgraphs of distant horizon.

An out-of-order trafficlight blinks bright and rhythmic across an empty intersection; from a powerline directly above this dangles a pair of red shoes (sneakers), laces tied together, dancing on the wind.

Murals—Calaveras, Our Lady, GuadaMuerte—watching, waiting.

Stray cats appearing randomly at considerable heights looking out over this terraced city, guardians of its windswept emptiness.

Deer, thin as shadows, coming down from the mountains into the city.

Windchimes in the dark.

Eerily human mannequins outside of restaurants.

Mounds of blankets covering unseen but ever-present bodies of sleeping homeless.

Strange bloodcurdling screams of wandering Vixen—disturbingly human.

Windrush snaking through concrete canyons.

Buddhist prayer flags and hungout laundry flapping in the gaps between buildings.

Opossums, Raccoons, maybe a jackalope and (of course) roaches.

Then something changes; the steps, they don't sound like before. A distinct shift from the curiosity of wonder to the tension of fear. X takes notice; it's almost as if they're being followed. X turns back again. Nothing but the asphalt bla\_k glittering with broken glass like stars. X fingers the key in their pocket and continues walking a little faster this time. The other steps speed up too, though not quite in sync with X's.

X starts running. We start running. So does it—whatever it is. Impossible to tell exactly what's happening. Play with the mystery of silhouettes in the dark. Was that a person we just saw rushing after us? Where did it go? Where are we? It's all closing in on us now. Mountains enormous and suddenly ominous; like they're moving, bodies shifting in the dark.

Then, in an unsteady blur, hope—5150 TAROT CANYON—a light left on just outside, we/X/camera rush for it; opening the door to a liquid darkness and quickly slamming ourselves inside just as everything teeters on an earsplitting climax.

13. INT./EXT. *O VIS AETERNITATIS* SEQUENCE - NONDESCRIPT OFFICE + 5150 TAROT CANYON - MIDMORNING INTO EVENING

This scene is set to SEQUENTIA's rendition of *O VIS AETERNITATIS* (trans. *O POWER WITHIN ETERNITY*) by HILDEGARD VON BINGEN and INTERCUT between 5150 TAROT CANYON and a NONDESCRIPT OFFICE.

We begin in 5150 TAROT CANYON.

X'S ROOM: sudden, blinding cut to wall of [dusty] sunlight glaring at us through [closed] Venetian blinds, X sits up in bed coming into view in foreground--this time of year the sun shines straight through their bedroom window from midmorning to sundown, rendering any sleep impossible during the day. As they sit, X reaches a hand up/out to block the light--echo of dead-rising intro from *Persona* (1966). Sounds of coughing coming from another room--along with some indistinct conversation, marked by occasional laughter, perhaps television or radio or..?

We see X's face, shadowed by outstretched hand, the rest of the room prison-barred by light slipping in between the [already quite thin] blinds. X's face is dazed by fear and exhaustion. They bring their hand back to their mouth, their expression contorts.

PROFESSOR (O.C.)

I like this.

We see X's hand, outstretched again and haloed by window light, streak of blood across their palm; their cut has opened up again.

INTERCUT to NONDESCRIPT OFFICE.

PROFESSOR (O.C.) (CONT'D)

I like this a lot.

X sitting masked and cramped in some anonymous back-office.

PROFESSOR (CONT'D)

Yes. I really, really like it.

PROFESSOR, effectively concealed by papers held up to their face and an absurdly large desk; all we/X/camera see is a corrugated brow and receding hairline.

X

(muttered aside)

However...

X, seeing where this is going, quietly fills in the blank under mask & breath.

PROFESSOR

However,

PROFESSOR sets papers down, then slides them across desk to where X is sitting.

PROFESSOR (O.C.) (CONT'D)

I don't see where it's going.

X stares at their manuscript, flinching slightly above their mask.

INTERCUT to 5150 TAROT CANYON.

PROFESSOR (O.C.) (CONT'D)

Do you?

BATHROOM: transition on roar of toilet flush, then the sink starts running. X bobs up shirtless, face wet, in frame of mirror, staring blankly at the question & themselves.

X

(in an odd, very quiet  
voice)

Sometimes

X leans in to murmur this to the face in mirror, eyes slit, fingers tracing busted lip.

X (O.C.) (CONT'D)

(in an odd, very quiet  
voice)

-you scare me.

GRANDMA'S ROOM: photo from X's childhood we saw earlier, only this time the glass is cracked.

INTERCUT to NONDESCRIPT OFFICE.

X (CONT'D)

(half attempting  
professionalism)

No. Not right now. A work in  
progress, really.

X fidgeting, hand to brow; their head's been killing them lately, can't say why.

PROFESSOR, one eyebrow cocked, nods with a grumble of understanding, then suddenly leans forward.

PROFESSOR

Do you mind my asking-what made you  
come here in the first place?



Impossible to tell exactly how this question should be taken.

X  
(in an odd, very quiet  
voice)  
I'm sorry?

X shrinks in on themselves in the office chair; feeling  
guilty, outed, incredulous.

INTERCUT to 5150 TAROT CANYON.

PROFESSOR (O.C.)  
(rephrasing)  
I mean—what were you hoping to get  
from a program like this?

MAIN ROOM: closeup of familiar, youngish, practiced hands  
anxiously flipping through bundle of mail addressed to 5150  
TAROT CANYON—almost entirely bills—before stopping with a  
sigh of relief on Grandma's social security.

WEATHERMAN  
few hours, once that wind picks up,  
the dust'll really start rollin'  
in. Back to you, Hal.

Closeup of the television against the crucified wall; X turns  
it on, mid-weather-report.

THE GARDEN, soft in midmorning light, watched over by  
incongruous daytime moon steady just above the mountains.  
Wind now ominously soft/still.

X  
(joking)  
What do you want?

A fairly hefty, only nominally feral cat comes waddling over  
for its breakfast.

INTERCUT to NONDESCRIPT OFFICE

X (CONT'D)  
I want to write—to create—more than  
anything else in the world.

X, aiming for confidence, achieves only cliché and—what's  
worse—realizes it the second the words leave their mouth.

PROFESSOR  
(unsatisfied)  
Hmm.

PROFESSOR scratches chin and looks disappointed.

INTERCUT to 5150 TAROT CANYON

PROFESSOR (O.C.) (CONT'D)  
Have you submitted anything-  
competitions stuff like that?

X'S ROOM: the floor, where the scraps of X's story (including dismembered centerfold) are still scattered, X walks through them as question meets its mark.

X (O.C.)  
A few, yeah.

X opens laptop and turns it on, the startup music sounds.

PROFESSOR (O.C.)  
And? No response?

X yanks blanket off their bed and tosses it into the corner of the room their webcam won't see.

INTERCUT to NONDESCRIPT OFFICE

X  
Not yet.

Back to X in office hours, very quiet now.

PROFESSOR  
(sighing, changing topic)  
Well, overall-as I said-I really  
like what you've done here.

PROFESSOR falling back into their habitual stride.

INTERCUT to 5150 TAROT CANYON.

PROFESSOR (O.C.) (CONT'D)  
The workshop scenes especially

X'S ROOM: on floor and hands/knees gathering story scraps into plastic bag.

PROFESSOR (O.C.) (CONT'D)  
Am I right in reading this as a  
satire of modern life?

OUTSIDE HOUSE: Lid of outdoor trashbin lifted and a full plastic bag tossed in.

INTERCUT to NONDESCRIPT OFFICE

X

Yes?

X, half-stunned by realization that their story might really be condensed into that and nothing more.

PROFESSOR

In that case, I think there are some things you could work on. First and foremost,

Professor leans forward and takes back manuscript, pulling pen from god knows where and immediately starts to make notes.

INTERCUT to 5150 TAROT CANYON

OUTSIDE GRANDMA'S ROOM: X knocks on GRANDMA'S door.

X

(voice raised but gentle)  
Hey, time to wake up.

X pauses, listens, then sighs, shrugs, and walks away.

PROFESSOR (O.C.)

A lot of this stuff

BATHROOM: X walks in, turns on shower.

PROFESSOR (O.C.) (CONT'D)

grandma,

VISUAL BURST 1. closeup of GRANDMA'S oxygen chord, knotted, X steps over it unconscious; this must only be a split second, long enough to say the word and no longer.

PROFESSOR (O.C.) (CONT'D)

magic,

VISUAL BURST 2. A young hand gathers up tarot cards scattered face down on the table.

PROFESSOR (O.C.) (CONT'D)

the wind,

VISUAL BURST 3. Makeshift windchimes—old housekeys tied to the pines that tower up in back of garden—sound in breeze.

PROFESSOR (O.C.) (CONT'D)

you're gonna have to cut.

BATHROOM: X on their phone, waiting for the water to warm up.

X (O.C.)

Why?

X's account, notifications, messages—the usual muddle of hate-speech, scammers, and single emoji requests.

PROFESSOR (O.C.)

It's distracting from the deeper meaning of what you've written.

The last of these, "☹" (FOOT EMOJI), X deems doable enough, so X decides to oblige; swiping open their camera app and trying to imagine what a sexy foot pose would look like.

X (O.C.)

But what if it's not?

GRANDMA'S ROOM: GRANDMA's feet, discolored, ancient—we/camera pan up slowly to GRANDMA's face, discolored, ancient, unnaturally still; her oxygen apparatus has come loose in the night. As we watch, it's impossible to tell whether she's living or dead.

INTERCUT to NONDESCRIPT OFFICE

PROFESSOR

Elaborate.

PROFESSOR, unexpectedly interested, hands folded together.

X

(suddenly uncertain)

Not really sure how.

X's head starts aching again; can't say what they mean.

INTERCUT to 5150 TAROT CANYON

PROFESSOR (O.C.)

(breaking in to guide things back to their notes)

Well—

THE STREET: still in sunlight.

X (O.C.)

(unwilling to give up the question at hand)

But—to me—

A sudden violent gust of wind sends houses all shuttering.

X (O.C.) (CONT'D)  
this is the story of someone who's  
been distracted their whole life

BATHROOM: X in shower, nodules of their spine prominent; X has gradually become more and more emaciated over the course of their story, and it's only now that we're realizing just how skeletal they've grown.

X (O.C.) (CONT'D)  
and they're just now realizing it.

GARDEN: view of mountains from GARDEN, wall of dust tumbling in/over, flooding down toward us/camera.

PROFESSOR (O.C.)  
You're asking a lot from this  
story.

MAIN ROOM: crucifix falls off wall as house shutters in another gust.

X (O.C.)  
What if it only feels that way

MAIN ROOM: windows rattling in their cases, dust gathering on the sill—outside world disappears in a rusty haze.

X (O.C.) (CONT'D)  
because you've never seen anything  
like it before?

BATHROOM: Panning down X's body to hit pool of blood/dust colored water in bath/basin of shower.

INTERCUT to NONDESCRIPT OFFICE

PROFESSOR  
(trying to broach an ugly  
truth tactfully)  
My worry is that it's all a bit—too  
much.

PROFESSOR leaned forward again, trying to reach this strange and rather frustrating student.

X  
(in a humorous, bantering  
tone that tapers off  
toward the end)  
I'm afraid...

X shrugs out this admission.

INTERCUT to 5150 TAROT CANYON

X (O.C.) (CONT'D)  
(very raw, very real)  
it'll never be enough.

MAIN ROOM: X, still dripping, comes out of shower in old jacket to see what's going on, and finds only a yellow wall of dust behind every window, sand pouring in through each crack, the taste of chalk bitter on their tongue.

INTERCUT to NONDESCRIPT OFFICE

PROFESSOR (O.C.)  
You know, I get the sense that  
you're running from something

X suddenly looks up sharply across desk to where PROFESSOR is sitting.

PROFESSOR (CONT'D)  
I don't know what it is

PROFESSOR looks away and lifts hands, conceding this point while avoiding eye contact

INTERCUT to 5150 TAROT CANYON

PROFESSOR (O.C.) (CONT'D)  
but it's catching up to you.

EXT. view of FRONT DOOR, it opens, X looking out into storm as we/camera retreat, gliding back and back until both X and house blur, shift, and disappear in the haze of dust as *O VIS AETERNITATIS* comes to an end.

14. INT. HOSPITAL LABYRINTH - MISE EN ABYME - TIMING UNCLEAR

X (V.O.)  
Thought experiment.

Whitescreen—really a whitewall—only sound (besides X's V.O.) a faint/steady/growing ringing in our ears.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
An artist enters a gallery,

X, masked, sits on floor, hugging knees, cracked iphone charging beside them, staring directly at camera/us. The wall behind X stretches vast, barren. Ear ringing continues.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
but doesn't see the work,

Nurse—glasses glare concealing eyes, mask on concealing mouth—sits statue-like behind front desk, staring at computer. On whitewall above/behind her, a large flatscreen TV broadcasts Fox News; anchor visibly angry/virulent—face red, swollen, veins prominent in both neck/forehead—seems to shout but, again, all we hear is the ringing in our ears. Background a low-budget graphic crossing the American flag with guns, headline screaming usual NRA autofellatio freedom fuckall. Bodycount in corner still ticking away, though now much higher than before.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
only infinite and unsuccessful  
variations of their own.

Crowd in E.R. waiting room—standing up, sitting down—all on phones, all looking down/averting eyes, all masked though in many different ways, all somehow mournful, scared, ashamed.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
Always in progress, never complete

End of life station; fifty ipads ducttaped to music stands, huddled in the corner next to rack of folded up wheelchairs.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
epicenter of their being; around  
which everything curves, contracts,  
distorts.

We approach doubledoors of E.R. on a glide, entering just as nurse—wearing yellow dishwashing gloves and a paint mask with her scrubs—exits, ripping off mask, on "distorts".

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
They consider themselves objective,  
but never live beyond the limits of  
their own particular perspective,  
their own peculiar vision, prison,  
prism.

We move down staring white halls, only color the irregularly equipped (and exhausted looking) nurses bustling by.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
This sometimes changes, one thing  
growing out of another in constant,  
shifting metamorphosis.

We turn into another hall, this time eerily empty, still; our glide slows.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
But the condition, its isolation,  
is terminal.

From a side door, a new body is wheeled out into hall beneath its sheet. En route to morgue, we follow.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
Life tapers to a point, a line, a  
path

Continue down hall, gradually focusing on one of the back wheels of Charon's cart; its loose, wobbling (soundlessly) even as it rolls. A roach suddenly scuttles past it, we follow.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
-but all roads run together. Here,  
every window becomes a mirror-

Roach hurriedly turns down yet another hall, empty again, but longer than the others. Blazing white-no windows, no doors-sterile. At the end, hanging on the wall, a clock ticks; for some reason, this is audible. Passing our roach guide, we move down hall as in a river, a current, a dream, gliding toward the waiting clock; its ticking slowing, reverb increasing.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
flawed, echoing.

As ear-ringing reaches its deafening climax, florescent lights stutter, like the the power is about to go out. We're hardly halfway down hall-which seems to lengthen as we move-when lights flicker again, and sudden cut to black plunges us into darkness.

15. INT. LOW BUDGET CLASSROOM - MEDICAL SCHOOL IN PLAGUE TIMES

We hear the sound of a click and an old-fashioned medical slide appears on screen showing a body (eyes covered by a black bar) open chest partially dissected.

INSTRUCTOR  
Can anyone tell me what this is?

The image is tapped with a pointer and we/camera pull out to reveal an instructor at the head of a dark & crowded classroom.

INSTRUCTOR (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
Anyone?



Audience of adults sitting uncomfortably in child sized desks and makeshift masks stare blankly at screen. Between and slightly above them glares the ray of the projector, flecks of dust floating idly through.

INSTRUCTOR (CONT'D)

This is the respiratory system of woman aged 80 or so with double pneumonia brought on by COVID 19. As you'll see here,

Instructor indicating with pointer.

INSTRUCTOR (O.S.) (CONT'D)

She appears to have been suffering from a series of smoking related respirator ailments, most notably emphysema, prior to infection.

Slide change to closeup of branching bruised/blackened lungs—image takes up whole screen.

16. INT./EXT. 5150 TAROT CANYON - X'S CAMSHOW + GARDEN - NIGHT

INSTRUCTOR (POST-LAP)

Every body tells a story.

MATCH-CUT to grainy webcam closeup of hand slowly running a finger up center of chest in the dark, nail leaving a little light line exactly where a knife would make its incision. The hand reaches mouth; note healed scar on lower lip.

INSTRUCTOR (POST-LAP) (CONT'D)

You have to learn to listen.

Mouth bites nails/chews on fingers in an absentminded, oddly childish way; then the body begins to sway—breathing heavy, rhythmic—as, all at once, hand and mouth become somehow obscene.

Then power goes out; sudden cut to black + gasp. Pause. Wind seems to be rattling the house a little harder than usual. Realization. We hear a low laugh along with some shuffling. Iphone flashlight appears, first glaring around room to reveal all crosses have been taken down—their ghosts still haunting walls where they hung—then turning bright & blinding right at us.

From X's POV, we stumble into the backyard—only thin ray of light to guide us—immediately waking small tribe of sleeping cats.

X  
(words slightly slurred)  
Shit—sorry, guys—forgot.

From backalley, through the chainlink, we watch X—wrapped in oversized jacket and not much else—turn their light to the wall, searching for fusebox, then make a passing grab at cat bowl which is rapidly blowing away. X misses, and bowl rolls directly toward us/camera before finally being caught by X about ten feet away. X looks up to note with awe an enormous moon in sky. Then a sound, shifts their focus to the alleyway, where we/camera have been waiting. All at once, the wind fades, world slows, and camera rises, revealing itself to be the POV of something very much alive. At full height, it stops—X staring, frozen with fear (isolated audio of heartbeat + reverb here) stares directly at it/camera—then X beats a sudden retreat inside, locking all doors, closing all blinds, as we watch behind the eyes of our WALKING SAM.

Unexpected return of wind (layered with sounds of indistinct whispers) batters house in gusts—sudden, strong, sustained—sending walls shuddering, lights flickering inside as if about go out again, before entire screen cuts to black.

END OF ACT II.

ACT III.

1. ACT[/SEMESTER] III. TITLE CARD - TAROT SPREAD/DRAWING

A clutter of Tarot cards scattered facedown on table. Inexplicable breeze ripples their scales; intensifying until, at last, one flips over to face us centerframe. Upside down, "THE MAGICIAN" introduces our penultimate act. As before, this is a Rider-Waite deck customized with act number ("ACT III.") across top of card and arcana title (in this case, "THE MAGICIAN") at bottom.

2. EXT. CALLING THE MONSOON - FEDERICO GARCÍA LORCA'S *CAPRICCIO* - A POETRY/MAGIC SEQUENCE - MIDDLE OF NIGHT & CITY

This scene is set to FEDERICO GARCÍA LORCA's *CAPRICHIO* (1922) read in the low, drunken androgynous whisper-half-sweet, half-acid-of EL DUENDE.

EL DUENDE (V.O.)  
DETRÁS DE CADA ESPEJO

EL DUENDE (V.O.)  
BEHIND EACH MIRROR

Blackscreen.

EL DUENDE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
HAY UNA ESTRELLA MUERTA

EL DUENDE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
IS A DEAD STAR

Streetlights come flickering on with a hum, one after another, like spotlights, revealing—in middle of night and city and road—the silhouette of our UNDEAD DRAGQUEEN, gaunt, unmistakable, back to us, wearing the same druidesque-flamenco, motheaten nightgown/ballgown getup she met us in.

EL DUENDE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
Y UN ARCO IRIS NIÑO  
QUE DUERME.

EL DUENDE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
AND A BABY RAINBOW  
SLEEPING

UNDEAD DRAGQUEEN in deep dark closeup, looks back at us over her shoulder, then glances down demurely. Nightwind rustles her veil and a few loose strands of thin, wiry hair.

EL DUENDE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
DETRÁS DE CADA ESPEJO  
HAY UNA CALMA ETERNA

EL DUENDE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
BEHIND EACH MIRROR  
IS A BLANK FOREVER

Here, she whirls around at full length to face us/camera—though still in ample shadow—for her performance, a dance, something expressive, sensitive, think *Pina* (2011), at least, initially. Wind picks up with her movements.

EL DUENDE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
Y UN NIDO DE SILENCIOS  
QUE NO HAN VOLADO.

EL DUENDE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
AND A NEST OF SILENCES  
TOO YOUNG TO FLY

Our other UNDEAD QUEENS come creeping, hunched, out of shadows behind lead UNDEAD DRAGQUEEN. Wind a little faster, billowing litter.

EL DUENDE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
EL ESPEJO ES LA MOMIA  
DEL MANANTIAL, SE CIERRA  
COMO CONCHA DE LUZ  
POR LA NOCHE.

EL DUENDE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
THE MIRROR IS THE WELLSPRING  
BECOME MUMMY, CLOSES  
LIKE A SHELL OF LIGHT  
AT SUNSET

Other UNDEAD QUEENS surround lead UNDEAD DRAGQUEEN as she dances; wind whining and keening as they close in, thunder rumbles in the distance, dance style becoming more jerky, erratic, violent. As before, echos of *Sacre* must occupy the knife-edge between humorous and haunting.

EL DUENDE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
EL ESPEJO  
ES LA MADRE-ROCÍO,  
EL LIBRO QUE DISECA  
LOS CREPÚSCULOS, EL ECO HECHO  
CARNE.

EL DUENDE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
THE MIRROR  
IS THE MOTHER DEW,  
THE BOOK OF DESICCATED  
TWILIGHTS, THE ECHO BECOME  
FLESH.

Camera closes in on UNDEAD DRAGQUEEN along with the rest, wind raging, sounds ominous, as the dance becomes more and more wild, disturbed. End this scene with camera approaching so close to UNDEAD DRAGQUEEN in night/shadows that she melts into dark with nothing but a gasp and half-rotted smile as EL DUENDE concludes.

### 3. INT. BUS - THUNDERSTORM - AFTER DARK

Sudden thunder-clap/lightning-flash reveals X alone in back of rattling bus again, hunched over, doing something to their hand—impossible to say what just yet—rain streaks the windows and sounds on the roof.

Close-up of hand (X's) beautifully doodled red-ink mandala centerpalm, a pen carefully details it's outer edges.

X's eyes focused, brow smooth.

Back to close-up of hand: X at work when a sudden jolt/thunderclap from bus/storm breaks.

X  
(muttering)  
Fuck.

X's eyes frustrated, brow contracted.

Close-up of hand mandala, bends sinister smear across the center. Pen tip, sharp, hovers over this, unsure. Then, deliberately, X places it to the center of palm/design/smear.

X's eyes unreadable.

Close-up of hand: pen pressing down now, attempting to pierce skin—blood-colored ink clouds out into grooves of X's hand.

X's eyes: screwed up tight, almost shut, but still watching. We hear them breathing; beneath their mask, between gritted teeth.

X's Hand: bus suddenly jolts again and tip disappears—unclear if it breaks skin or simply breaks off—red comes pouring out over everything. Hissing intake of breath, pen drops, one hand covers the other.

#### 4. INT. MCGUFFIN HALL - BATHROOM - NO WINDOWS/TIMING UNCLEAR

MATCH-CUT close-up of hands being vigorously washed in bathroom sink—red ink circling the drain—pan up to X's face in mirror, looking down at their hands with all the barely repressed frustration and shame of a suddenly awakened Lady Macbeth; jaw clenched beneath mask, tears brimming just behind their eyelids.

In the background, anonymous retching comes from one of the stalls; X seems to be the only thing different, worse, and viscerally aware of this.

#### 5. INT. MCGUFFIN HALL - LABYRINTH - NO WINDOWS/TIMING UNCLEAR

X walks (and we follow) through a setting I want to feel like a liminal space simulator: from the barf-colored carpeting to the low tiled ceilings, humming florescent lights, whitewalls punctuated by identical looking doors to rooms numbered in no logical sequence, the occasional corner with the same avant-garde arm-chair, the same avant-garde side-table, and the same avant-garde ficus all made (presumably) from the same avant-garde plastic, no windows, no people, no signs of life, just these never-ending, empty halls.

X

(under their breath)

Thought you'd change and you did  
only not the way you thought you'd  
change and you did only not the way  
you thought you'd change and you  
did only not the way you thought  
you'd change and you did only not  
the way—

X navigates this labyrinth with uncanny precision, as if the more insane their world becomes the more powerful their intuition grows. Frustratedly muttering a line that's been giving them trouble over and over again like a mantra, X winds through these halls at a clipped pace, at last reaching the door of their classroom; room 237.

6. INT. CLASSROOM INTO 5150 TAROT CANYON - NIGHT

We/camera are in the dark, at the far end of the room, when the door opens flooding that side with light.

Now, we/camera stand with X who, reaching for the lightswitch, finds only a small, black, & fractured touchscreen that doesn't seem to work.

Shrugging, X walks to desk (frontrow, center) and sets their bag down, then glances up at this vast, dark, empty class/lecture-room, row after row of desks receding into liquid shadow.

Slowly, X begins unpacking their stuff when a sound catches their ear. X may have misheard, but it sounded like a sliding, shuffling from far end of the room.

X stops what they're doing and looks back up into darkness; now that they focus on it, something seems to be moving back there.

X ventures into dark; we/camera watch them slowly approaching the far end of the room, moving to reveal, briefly, the silhouette of someone watching them.

X bumps into irregularly arranged desk, cursing, then glances up and sees figure sitting in darkness at end of the room. A vague, somehow muffled sound comes from that side, like someone crying or trying not to cry.

X

(softly)

Are you okay—do you need help?

X comes closer, reaching out, trying to reassure this stranger in the dark. Just as things are at their darkest, X and this stranger are at their closest, and sounds we've been hearing are at their strongest/strangest—the lights flash on with a gasp (X's).

An anatomical model, half dismembered/dissected, staring back at us/X/camera with unnervingly human eyes.

STUDENT 1. (O.C.)

No way.

X, hand on chest, trying to pull self together as familiar voice calls out.

STUDENT 1. (CONT'D)

Do you see this?

In doorway of classroom, STUDENT 1. turns to person behind them, ECO, gesturing at X. ECO darts glances from one to the other, genuinely not recognizing X, then shrugs and starts putting his stuff down.

STUDENT 1. (O.C.) (CONT'D)

Long time no see, buddy! Remember?

We hear STUDENT 1. dissolve into manic guffaws as we watch X's half smile slowly fade at the realization that ECO does not recognize them—like, at all—cue barely repressed wave of selfdoubt and shame. X laughs a silent, humiliated little laugh and walks toward ECO and STUDENT 1.

X

(hollow smile)

Yeah, I remember—listen, I gotta go do something real quick.

X picks up their bag, gives STUDENT 1. a little half hug, nods at ECO, and just keeps walking: out of classroom, down hall, fighting tears; not here, not now.

At this point, I'd like a SETTING SHIFT—à la *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004)—two totally distinct settings bleeding into one another as the mentality of the main character begins to swim. So, think of this moment like a bridge, a conduit connecting one world to another.

X walks down hall: the lights behind going out one by one with a bang as they're passed, the darkness catching up & X too wrapped up in emotion to notice. At last, just as it's closing in, X crosses the threshold into another room (presumably BATHROOM again) closes the door, leans back against it, covers face, trying and failing not to cry. By now, we/camera should be in close-up on X's unsteady hands.

Once the first burst of X's tears subsides, both X and us notice something, a sound mingling with X's heavy breathing—it sounds like the news.

Switch to X's POV: dark finger silhouettes move, revealing in their interstices a view of 5150 TAROT CANYON main room, TV blaring.

Close-up of X, slumped against door, slowly uncovering face, bewildered—X hasn't turned the television on since GRANDMA died—this isn't the first time something odd has happened since X has been alone, but it's by far the most concrete.

X approaches television and unplugs it. Then sets their bag down, and goes into their own room, passing through corridor that leads to GRANDMA's room. As X/we/camera pass, GRANDMA's door is open, GRANDMA's silhouette in bed & dark; X/we/camera do a double take to find door closed—exactly as X left it.

X reenters their own room, pacing, more nervous than usual; it's then that they hear again the muttering from some indefinite location, combined now with a distant coughing, the sounds somehow seem to be growing.

X hurries back into main room, grabs their bag, and rushes out backdoor into garden.

7. EXT. 5150 TAROT CANYON - GARDEN - NIGHT

X stumbles out into thick, dark, wet night. Garden by now overgrown, halfwild, a tangle of shifting shadow, cat's eyes gleaming Cheshire in darkness.

X has pulled their phone out and is rapidly thumbing through messages looking for someone who is online now and in the area. X puts phone to ear and we hear it ring once, then STRANGER picks up.

STRANGER (OVER PHONE)

What's up?

X (O.C.)

(quiet)

Hey—just saw your message—and was wondering if maybe you wanted to come over?

STRANGER (OVER PHONE)

Tonight?

X (O.C.)

(quiet)

Now?



As phonecall progresses, we/camera pan up past X, past garden, to enormous moon, watching, waiting, low in the sky. Deep, ironic laugh on the other end of the line concludes the conversation/scene.

8. EXT. AFTER CLASS, AFTER RAIN - CAMPUS IN THE DARK - AROUND 9:00[-ISH] AT NIGHT

Ripple across its surface reveals the moon from previous scene/shot to be merely a reflection in dark puddle.

The ripples keep coming; coinciding to the rhythm of slow approaching footsteps until, at last, a shoe comes down and breaks reflection/moon/illusion.

We follow this (now still) shoe up leg, then body, to face-X's, masked-staring, concerned, confused; their eyes reflect nothing but a great white streak in the night.

ECO (O.C.)  
Está cayendo.

X turns, startled.

ECO stands there in the dark, maybe five feet away, then suddenly palms face.

ECO (CONT'D)  
Ay, sorry-I forget-you speak only English, yes?

X hesitates, then droops head and nods with a chuckle, embarrassed/amused by their own limitations.

X  
(humorous/honest)  
Sometimes not even that.

Behind X, THE TOWER bristles with scaffolding like mold, vast clockface covered by enormous tarp; above this the moon, disproportionately large.

ECO walks up beside X, gesturing at foundations.

ECO  
They are constructing a stadium-  
that is where the parking lot will  
be.

X, beside ECO in moonlight, leans in to see where he's pointing.

X  
(murmuring softly, dryly)  
So that's what all those remote  
learning fees were for.

ECO chuckles, then looks at X, his expression hard to read in  
dark.

ECO  
Listen, I am sorry for before, I  
did not remember. But now—

ECO gestures to complete the sentence and X wonders at how-  
much/how-little has changed since they last met.

X  
It's fine—no worries.

ECO and X begin walking together.

ECO  
Hey, I have a question for you.

ECO hits the 'y' in "you" with a sound somewhere between 'ch'  
and 'j'—X finds this inexplicably endearing.

X  
(tilting their head a bit)  
Alright.

ECO  
You know, English—it's not my  
language—can you understand what  
I'm saying?

X  
In class?

ECO  
Yes, in class.

X  
Yeah, no, your English is fine.

ECO  
You think so? Really?

X  
Yes. Really. You know, the first  
semester I could tell you struggled  
sometimes. Now, it's like you're a  
different person—it's remarkable,  
admirable. Always wanted to learn  
but...

X shrugs a shrug that could mean anything as ECO cuts back in.

ECO  
But do you think people can tell it  
is not my mother tongue?

X  
I mean, you have an accent but  
that's—

ECO  
Ay—this is what I feared!

X  
An accent?

ECO  
Yes—no accent—I don't want an  
accent.

X  
(breathless, incredulous)  
But then you'd sound like everyone  
else.

ECO  
(humorous)  
Exactly!

Chuckling, ECO leans over and bumps shoulders with X, who glances sharply at ECO over their mask but, in the shadows of night and city, the only thing X can make out is the gleam of ECO's bright white smile. Once again, X can't tell whether ECO is joking or serious.

9. EXT. EMPTY CITY - FRONT OF PARKING GARAGE - NIGHTWORLD

X & ECO walk on together in silence and mirrory, dripping dark until they reach entrance of the parking garage where ECO has parked his car. X embarrassingly aware they actually passed X's turn several blocks ago without saying anything and now must backtrack (and quickly) if they want to catch bus.

X  
(abruptly breaking  
silence)  
This was nice, thank you.

ECO  
(surprised)  
Where are you going?

X has been backing away, half waving.

X  
(with explanatory  
gestures)  
I take the bus.

ECO  
I can give you a ride.

X  
No, thanks—appreciate it, though.

ECO gives X a look they don't know how to read through the dark.

ECO  
Take care of yourself.

X smiles and gives a little salute, then turns to walk away.

ECO (CONT'D)  
Hey!

X turns back.

X  
(inexplicably guilty)  
What?

ECO  
(speaking slow, serious,  
and pointing at X)  
You are strange, but you are not a  
stranger—remember.

X greets this with a curious look then a laugh. ECO turns away with a wave and X immediately jolts into a dead sprint as they round corner.

10. EXT. EMPTY CITY - WAITING FOR THE BUS - NIGHTWORLD

Roving shots of stars viewed from inside concrete canyons; sound of X running through wet city streets, panting.

We/X round corner to find bus pulling away from curb; we/x run harder, calling out, then slip/fall with a yelp and a wet thud just as bus drives off down street—echo of last bus stop scene.

While lying there, X groans then begins to laugh hoarsely, wiping the tears from their eyes with a sigh.

X turns their head toward the street, to see a scrap of paper—suspiciously like X's dismembered centerfold—billow up toward them.

X makes a sudden lunge at this litter, grabs it, then suddenly feels it torn from their fingers as if pulled away. It swirls off then, capriciously, it approaches X again. To X, it almost looks like dancing.

Camera follows scrap as it settles down in foreground, X lying on sidewalk reaching out for it idly in middle ground while, behind them in background, sits our old friend, UNDEAD DRAGQUEEN, wearing a veil, almost completely concealed in shadow of covered busstop bench.

UNDEAD DRAGQUEEN  
(low, modulated contralto)  
Está jugando contigo.

X's whole body jolts with a gasp at this sudden voice then relaxes just as quickly with a laugh.

X  
(smiling, breathless)  
Shit, sorry, give me a second, this  
has gotta stop happening to me.

X turns to face where she sits rigid in dark/background.

UNDEAD DRAGQUEEN  
No hablas español.

No question in her tone, though perhaps a little disdain.

From where they lay, X raises hands in a shrug—half whimsical, half apologetic—final shot of *La Dolce Vita* (1960).

We watch them together like this—her in her shadows, X prone on sidewalk—both looking out into the street, strangely comfortable in silence. Then, from night/distance, there comes a vague rumble like water running/rushing, though still faint.

UNDEAD DRAGQUEEN (CONT'D)  
(French with thick, yet  
impossible to  
place/pinpoint accent)  
Voilà.

X glances back, unsure they heard right.

X  
Sorry?

Suddenly, all at once, like cannon fire, a rush of every piece of litter imaginable barrels through the street in a sustained gale-force wind; blocking X, UNDEAD DRAGQUEEN, and other side of the street from view.

Then, just as abruptly, it's gone—and so is UNDEAD DRAGQUEEN—X uncovers their eyes to find world still again. They sit there in shock for a second then the impossible mess of it all sinks in and upwells as laughter.

X (CONT'D)  
(giggling, hysterical)  
You're crazy—they told you grad  
school did this—but did you listen?

Then, round the corner, headlights flash.

X (CONT'D)  
(irrepressibly amused)  
What now?

A car—a nice car—pulls up, rolls windows down; it's ECO.

X (CONT'D)  
(humorous aside)  
Of course.

X (CONT'D)  
(humorous aloud)  
Hi there.

ECO, staring at X half-up half-down on muddy sidewalk, litter sticking to them.

ECO  
Are you—okay?

X, unable to speak for laughing, greets this with another shrug, even more whimsically apologetic than before.

11. EXT. TAROT CANYON STREET - FRONT OF [BY NOW FAIRLY FAMILIAR] HOUSE NUMBER 5150 - NIGHT

X  
Yep, right here.

Car pulls up to curb in front of 5150 TAROT CANYON

X (CONT'D)  
Thanks, again.

X is already half out of car when eco grabs their [left] hand; cue hiss of pain.

ECO keeps hold of X's hand, opening it revealing what looks like a splinter in center of X's palm.

ECO  
What happened?

X  
(frustrated, embarrassed,  
dismissive)  
It's stupid—playing around with a  
pen, accidentally stabbed myself—  
shit happens, you know?

ECO's face is in shadow, but steadiness of their gaze at X's hand suddenly makes X extremely selfconscious; X half-tries to pull away but ECO's grip steady. They stay like this for a moment. Then, out of the dark:

ECO  
When can I see you again?

X  
We have class every week?

ECO  
Too long.

X suddenly jerks hand away, surprising all concerned.

X  
(relenting just as  
randomly)  
Listen, I tell you what, gimme your  
number and we'll talk—how does that  
sound?

ECO considers then nods. X takes out their phone, promptly drops it onto sidewalk, and curses. ECO starts chuckling. X too.

X (CONT'D)  
(trying to sound serious)  
It's really not funny; this thing's  
only got a few more cracks till it  
all falls apart.

X hands phone to ECO, who sees it and laughs outright.

X (CONT'D)  
(a little put out)  
Just shut up and type.

ECO keeps laughing as he finishes typing his info in.

ECO

There.

ECO hands phone back to X.

X

Thanks.

X puts phone back in their pocket, shutting car door as they do so, then glances up again at ECO unsure how to end this or if they really want to.

X (CONT'D)

See you next week?

ECO

Sooner.

X

We'll see.

ECO

(smile gleaming again)

We will.

ECO starts car and drives down street; X watches as they disappear, light breeze rises. Faced with the emotional gradient of home, X glances down at their palm. Slowly, X turns and walks toward their door; as they go, BACON's voice comes in.

FRANCIS BACON (PRE-LAP)

All art has now become completely a game by which man distracts himself

Here is the close-up we end on: an open palm, sore in center, carefully cradled by X's other hand as they walk into us/camera/dark.

12. INT. 5150 TAROT CANYON - FRANCIS BACON'S 'THE GAME' - MAIN ROOM & BATHROOM - AFTER DARK, DURING STORM

Audio for this scene comes from two distinct media sources:

A. X's phone, playing a recording of FRANCIS BACON's 1963 interview with David Sylvester beside X on edge of bathroom sink.

B. THOMAS NEWMAN's *MENTAL BOY*—though it only comes in partway through scene to help bridge us into the next.



FRANCIS BACON (PRE-LAP)  
-you may say it has always been  
like that, but now it is entirely a  
game-I think that is the way things  
have changed.

Blackscreen. Sounds of house rattled by gusts of wind & rain-  
sudden lightning flash on "changed" reveals roach on wall,  
fading back to black just as quickly.

FRANCIS BACON (V.O.)  
Now, it is going to become much  
more difficult for the artist,

Pan through these shadows until we see, across darkened room,  
X in full-length profile framed by light & door of bathroom,  
hunched over, doing something to their hand (yet again).  
Note: when we/camera find X in this shot, we/camera should be  
at a distance, across the room, in shadow; the only light, in  
bathroom, should position X in isolation, a box of (not too  
bright) light surrounded by thick, almost liquid darkness.

FRANCIS BACON (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
because he must really deepen the  
game to be any good at all,

Closeup of X's hand above bathroom sink-positioning should  
echo previous shots of hand/palm throughout this act/semester  
-lacking tweezers, X uses an old switchblade to dig out  
whatever's in there. Judging by the look of things, X has  
been working away at it for a while now.

FRANCIS BACON (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
and return the onlooker to life  
more violently.

Surprise, surprise: X only manages to make things worse. Full  
length again, we watch as X gasps and drops switchblade-cue  
*MENTAL BOY* just as X inflicts the wound & BACON comes to an  
end on "violently"-X quickly runs bloody hand under hot  
water.

X  
(panicked, muttering)  
Fuck fuck fuck holy fucking shit

X pulls hand out from water to check the damage.

X (O.C./V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(in a strange still,  
whisper, overlapping the  
end of muttered curses)  
Wake up.

Closeup of hand, freshcut gash in center, as water dissipates and blood comes welling back up: X's "wake up" sounds strange, incongruous—as if coming from another person—just at the end of shot, once blood pools in palm again.

Startled by this voice, X's gaze jerks up to mirror as *MENTAL BOY* shifts—around the 33 second mark—from ambient distortion to haunting lullaby.

Helpless/horrified, unable to trust self, mind, body; X stares into their reflection in mirror/camera/us, clutching bleeding hand to their stomach.

Then, very gradually, as they stare, holding back tears of shame, disgust; X's expression fades to something less definite. We/mirror/camera watch as X lets go of their wounded hand, leaving a smear of blood across their stomach, and slowly (very slowly) reaches out with it toward their reflection (in mirror/camera/us). Blood running down their wrist as hand approaches, covering us/camera in darkness, concluding both song & scene.

13. INT./EXT. HEROIN SEQUENCE - MAKEOUT SESSION + A DREAM SEQUENCE - TURNING HOUSE INTO ARTHOUSE - NIGHT & DAY

This scene is set to LANA DEL REY's *HEROIN*.

X's eye opens—abrupt yet simple, a calm awakening—as song begins; X is in their room, in the dark, the wind/storm has ceased, all is still.

LANA DEL REY (V.O.)  
TOPANGA'S HOT TONIGHT, THE CITY BY  
THE BAY

X sits up in bed & silhouette—echoing wakeup act/semester II scene 13.

LANA DEL REY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
HAS MOVIE STARS AND LIQUOR STORES  
AND SOFT DECAY

X looks down at hand, now bandaged.

LANA DEL REY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
THE RUMBLING FROM DISTANT SHORES  
SENDS ME TO SLEEP

Close-up of X's barefeet, viewed from beneath bed, as they touch floor.

LANA DEL REY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
BUT THE FACTS OF LIFE CAN SOMETIMES  
MAKE IT HARD TO DREAM

Close-up of barefeet (X's) walking through house in  
dark/changing shadow.

LANA DEL REY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
LIFE ROCKED ME LIKE MÖTLEY  
GRABBED ME BY THE RIBBONS IN MY  
HAIR

View of Garden in strange stillness of the night—plants sway  
rhythmic, inexplicable as if underwater—the WALKING SAM  
figure in the alleyway is still there, center-frame, waiting  
just beyond chainlink and certainty.

LANA DEL REY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
LIFE ROCKED ME ULTRA SOFTLY  
LIKE THE HEAVY METAL THAT YOU WEAR

MATCH-CUT to X standing center-garden—swaying slightly in  
baggy sweatpants, old t-shirt, and moonlight—the house  
hunches low behind them.

LANA DEL REY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
I'M FLYING TO THE MOON AGAIN,  
DREAMING ABOUT HEROIN

View of X, back to us, in foreground, facing WALKING SAM, in  
background, alleyway, and shadows—as the chorus begins, X's  
feet lift off ground along with all the litter blown into  
garden.

LANA DEL REY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
HOW IT GAVE YOU EVERYTHING AND TOOK  
YOUR LIFE AWAY

X's POV: WALKING SAM character—still in dark, but suddenly  
nonthreatening—getting smaller and smaller, watching as X  
rises above neighborhood.

LANA DEL REY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
I PUT YOU ON AN AEROPLANE, DESTINED  
FOR A FOREIGN LAND

WALKING SAM's POV: X floating up into dark backlit by  
absolutely massive moon, the biggest it's been so far.

LANA DEL REY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
I HOPED THAT YOU'D COME BACK AGAIN  
AND TELL ME EVERYTHING'S OKAY...

X's POV: by now getting rather high above garden, house, street, X reaches out/down to them + WALKING SAM character with bandaged hand until a sudden gust—on the run that follows "okay"—billows X/us/camera off into night sky.

INT. ECO'S PLACE - TYPICAL [RICH] STUDENT'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

LANA DEL REY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
TOPANGA'S HOT TODAY, MANSON'S IN  
THE AIR

Night sky of last shot turns out to be only the reflection of stars in the drink X nurses in their bandaged hand.

LANA DEL REY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
AND ALL MY FRIENDS HAVE GONE, CAUSE  
THEY STILL FEEL HIM HERE

Out of place at a party, X watches ECO—who stands beside them on balcony—laughing and joking in rapid & colloquial Spanish with a group of friends X doesn't know.

LANA DEL REY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
I WANNA LEAVE, I'LL PROBABLY STAY  
ANOTHER YEAR

X turns to look out over city—glittering dark & distant in X's eyes—split down the middle, like X feels.

LANA DEL REY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
IT'S HARD TO LEAVE WHEN ABSOLUTELY  
NOTHING'S CLEAR

X turns back to find ECO isn't there anymore. All at once, X feels the full intensity of their separation from other people—like they will never be truly human the way others are—and just has to get alone as fast as possible.

LANA DEL REY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
LIFE ROCKED ME LIKE MÖTLEY  
BAD BEGINNING TO MY NEW YEAR

X, back to us (foreground), moving hurriedly through sea of bodies toward door on far side of the room (background).

LANA DEL REY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
LIFE ROCKED ME ULTRA SOFTLY

X's face as they move through shifting light/shadows/crowd, fighting tears above their mask.

LANA DEL REY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
LIKE THE HEAVY METAL THAT YOU HEAR

X's bandaged hand grabbed—echo (no pun intended) of  
act/semester I scene 13.

LANA DEL REY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
I'M FLYING TO THE MOON AGAIN,

X & ECO burst into dark of ECO's room, making out.

LANA DEL REY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
DREAMING ABOUT HEROIN

Knocking things down.

LANA DEL REY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
HOW IT GAVE YOU EVERYTHING AND TOOK  
YOUR LIFE AWAY

Tearing at each others clothes.

LANA DEL REY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
I PUT YOU ON THE AEROPLANE,  
DESTINED FOR A FOREIGN LAND

Falling together onto mattress on floor.

LANA DEL REY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
I THOUGHT THAT YOU'D COME BACK  
AGAIN

ECO in closeup & dark, still & panting above us/X/camera,  
around his neck dangles a gold chain/medallion.

LANA DEL REY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
TO TELL ME EVERYTHING'S OKAY...

X in closeup & dark, still & panting with a look almost of  
fear up at ECO/us. On the run that follows "okay", ECO closes  
the gap between them with a kiss, X closes their eyes, and  
everything begins to float up into dark/shadow.

INT./EXT. Blackscreen.

LANA DEL REY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(IT'S FUCKIN HOT, HOT)

Out of this black, two members of our CHORUS OF UNDEAD QUEENS  
come lunging out at us, one at a time, from different sides  
of the screen, miming the words.

LANA DEL REY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
WINTER IN THE CITY

Camera swerves to look up, above them, at our our o.g. UNDEAD DRAGQUEEN towering high, arms upraised, moon massive behind her, miming the words in wind.

INT. 5150 TAROT CANYON - NIGHT

LANA DEL REY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
SOMETHING BOUT THIS WEATHER MADE  
THESE KIDS GO CRAZY

Lightning flash reveals "THE MAGICIAN" lying upside down on sidetable in the dark, starting in closeup, then pulling out to room & dark.

INT. 5150 TAROT CANYON - DAY

LANA DEL REY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(IT'S HOT)  
EVEN FOR FEBRUARY

Viewed from above: box is tossed onto center of floor, then kicked over—pouring out X's childhood drawings, paintings, art supplies.

LANA DEL REY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
SOMETHIN BOUT THIS SUN HAS MADE  
THESE KIDS GET SCARY

X, in closeup, writing/drawing on walls.

LANA DEL REY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
WRITING IN BLOOD ON THE WALLS AND  
SHIT

We/camera pan to reveal X well on their way to turning house into a living canvas.

LANA DEL REY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
LIKE, OH MY GOD, JUMPING OFF FROM  
THE WALLS INTO THE DOCKS AND SHIT

Close up on X's hands, bandages still in place, making a godseye.

EXT. 5150 TAROT CANYON - GARDEN - DAY

LANA DEL REY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
I'D BE LYIN' IF I SAID I WASN'T  
SICK OF IT

X, on ladder, hanging GRANDMA's old real estate keys on pines towering along backwall of garden, against the alleyway.

LANA DEL REY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
BABY (BABY), COME ON (COME ON),  
COME ON (COME ON)

Camera/we turn over to look up at big blue sky as great white cloud comes floating across screen.

INT./EXT. RIDING THE WIND SHOT

LANA DEL REY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
I'M FLYING TO THE MOON AGAIN,

This final repetition of the chorus is to be one continuous & dynamic shot. To begin, we find ourselves moving through clouds—first pure white, then colors change—breaking to reveal that we/camera are rushing into the city on the crest of a midnight wind.

LANA DEL REY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
DREAMING ABOUT MARZIPAN

We wind through a labyrinth of empty, sleeping streets—

LANA DEL REY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
TAKING ALL MY MEDICINE

Turning this way and that, down alleys and byways, until—

LANA DEL REY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
TO TAKE MY THOUGHTS AWAY

At last, we reach it; 5150 Tarot canyon. A human silhouette, dark and familiar WALKING SAM, watches from the alleyway as we pass.

LANA DEL REY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
I'M GETTING ON THAT AEROPLANE,

Moving down into garden—past sleeping cats, strange plants—to (then thru) lit back window.

LANA DEL REY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
LEAVING MY OLD MAN AGAIN

Where we find X, back to us, is hunched over kitchen[ette] counter (MAIN ROOM) surrounded by family photos.

LANA DEL REY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
I HOPE THAT I COME BACK ONE DAY

We/camera glide up + over their shoulder to find X is actually cutting themselves out of the pictures.

LANA DEL REY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
TO TELL YOU THAT I REALLY  
CHANGED...

Here we/camera zooms into the absence X is cutting out to reveal—on the run following "changed"—another behind it and another behind that and so on, layer after layer, shifting into a vertiginous rush through a life made up of absences, identities that never existed.

LANA DEL REY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(IT'S HOT, HOT)

Sunflares in film stock—first one, then another, each on "hot"—transition us from the last shot to this next.

EXT. MOUNTAINS - DAY/NIGHT, NIGHT/DAY

LANA DEL REY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
SOMETHING BOUT THIS CITY  
DON'T KNOW WHAT IT IS, IT MAKES MY  
HEAD GET CRAZY

Timelapse of city viewed from mountains; day into night and night into day, faster and faster.

LANA DEL REY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
MAKES ME FEEL LIKE I CAN CHANGE

We/camera pull back to reveal X and ECO shoulder to shoulder on cliffside, back to us, looking out over city/world as it shivers and twists through time.

INT./EXT. ACCOUNT SETTINGS PAGE

LANA DEL REY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
ALL OF MY EVIL WAYS AND SHIT

Account setting page, a window covers screen asking if we're sure we want to delete our account.

INT. 5150 TAROT CANYON - FLOOR OF X'S ROOM - DAY

LANA DEL REY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
I'D BE LYING IF I SAID I WASN'T  
SICK OF IT.

X's old story scraps back out on floor; we/camera pull out to reveal these have multiplied & complicated drastically.

PROFESSOR (PRE-LAP)  
Well,

We pause for a moment to admire mosaic chaos across floor.



14. INT./EXT. OFFICE HOURS + HOUSE UNDER SEIGE - T. S.  
ELIOT'S 'THE LOVE SONG' - MANY TIMES, MANY PLACES - ALL  
INTERCUT

This scene is intercut between NONDESCRIPT OFFICE, 5150 TAROT  
CANYON, and various moments with ECO.

Begin in NONDESCRIPT OFFICE, X is attending PROFESSOR's  
office hours again.

PROFESSOR (O.C.)  
(searching for a nice way  
to put it)  
I'd be lying if I said I-

X masked and uncomfortable (deja-vu) in office chair.

PROFESSOR (CONT'D)  
(settling, with major  
reservations)  
thought this could work?

PROFESSOR, towering over desk in highback chair, places large  
hand on X's manuscript, facedown on table.

X stares down at this with a look of blank despair/shock  
above mask, then cut to black.

INTERCUT to ECO'S ROOM - NIGHT

Blackscreen.

X  
(voice hollow)  
Why

Sound of a car driving by; light fans out across anonymous  
ceiling—just as X breathes out "why"—then it all goes dark  
again.

ECO (O.C.)  
(soft)  
Because. I miss my family.

X's face against ECO's side (background) watching as small  
gold medallion on ECO's chest (foreground) rises and falls  
slightly with each breath. ECO's hand cups X's head toying  
with X's hair.

X  
(voice hollow)  
No, not why that, why this?

X gently reaches up to touch ECO's medallion.

ECO chuckles—chest rising up and down, shaking medallion—then ruffles X's hair.

INTERCUT to NONDESCRIPT OFFICE - DAY

PROFESSOR  
(giving it a little, very  
little, thought)  
Well, first and foremost

PROFESSOR at other end of desk, holds up hand (left) to count the issues.

PROFESSOR (O.C.) (CONT'D)  
(abruptly, with an  
exasperated sigh)  
There's voiceover.

We view professor's hand—thumb raised for problem numero uno—from behind (in foreground) with X, incredulous at far end of the desk (in background).

INTERCUT to 5150 TAROT CANYON - EVENING

T. S. ELIOT (V.O.)  
LET US GO THEN, YOU AND I,  
WHEN THE EVENING IS SPREAD OUT  
AGAINST THE SKY  
LIKE A PATIENT ETHERIZED UPON A  
TABLE

X lies in tears on floor of main room, staring up at ceiling; beside them, cracked old iphone plays T. S. ELIOT's reading of *THE LOVE SONG OF J. ALFRED PRUFROCK* (1910).

PROFESSOR (O.C.)  
A piece of advice I always give  
students,

T. S. ELIOT (V.O.)  
LET US GO, THROUGH CERTAIN HALF-  
DESERTED STREETS,

X (in background, initial focus) wipes eyes and turns on side to face phone (in foreground, final focus).

PROFESSOR (O.C.)  
Just avoid it.

T. S. ELIOT (V.O.)  
THE MUTTERING RETREATS  
OF RESTLESS NIGHTS IN ONE-NIGHT  
CHEAP HOTELS  
(MORE)

T. S. ELIOT (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
AND SAWDUST RESTAURANTS WITH  
OYSTER-SHELLS

Reaching out to where phone lies beside them, X is about to turn it off when they suddenly hesitate.

PROFESSOR (O.C.)  
It's all part of that showing vs.  
telling issue we've already talked  
about.

T. S. ELIOT (V.O.)  
STREETS THAT FOLLOW LIKE A TEDIOUS  
ARGUMENT  
OF INSIDIOUS INTENT  
TO LEAD YOU TO AN OVERWHELMING  
QUESTION...

Pulling back their arm, X tucks it under their head and goes on listening.

INTERCUT to NONDESCRIPT OFFICE - DAY

PROFESSOR  
Remember?

PROFESSOR looks at X/us/camera, expectant without putting too much faith in X's faculties.

X, sitting very still on the far end of desk, stares back at PROFESSOR, no response. We hear clock ticking in background. Gradually, as this drones on, there rumbles up another sound, then all at once it roars over us, a plane taking off.

INTERCUT to AIRPORT - MORNING

Busy airport interior, midmorning. On loudspeaker, flights are being announced. On television monitors, the bodies, the body count. Not much has changed from our last visit, except there are more people and less masks. We are in the area just inside the entrance and just outside TSA checkpoint.

We/camera are being jolted/jostled/jumbled in a loud and emotional crowd (of say 5 to 7 people) mostly speaking Spanglish.

From center of this, ECO breaks through, smiling, patting and hugging people, then approaching us/camera/X.

X stands a little apart from the rest, looking lost as usual. X is unsure of their position both here and in ECO's life as a whole, X is also unsure whether they have the right to any.

ECO pulls X in for a long, tight hug, then pulls away, holding them by the shoulders, looking fond and inexplicably amused.

ECO  
(on impulse)  
Turn around.

X  
(taken with double  
entendre)  
Like three times or..?

ECO  
(rolling eyes)  
Like this.

ECO usually likes this kind of silliness in X, but doesn't have the time to waste right now and turns X manually.

X  
(laughing a little)  
Watch you just leave me like this.

ECO  
I might.

ECO is smiling as he takes off his medallion behind X.

ECO (CONT'D)  
Okay, ready.

X turns back to face ECO, who holds up medallion.

It's small, maybe the size of a quarter, turning back and fourth on its chain.

On one side, X recognizes the Virgin but the other shows a figure X hasn't seen before. Veiled like the virgin, a skeleton stares back at them, expectant. Sounds of crowd fade as she dangles; in their place arises a faint ringing in our ears.

INTERCUT to NONDESCRIPT OFFICE - DAY

X  
(emotionless)  
What else?

Finally responding, X's gaze is fixed, unreadable, direct on PROFESSOR/camera/us.

Ringling in our ears (still faint) carries over unbroken from previous shot.

PROFESSOR  
(falling back into stride)  
Then, of course, there's the music

PROFESSOR puts hand back up to count problem number two.

INTERCUT to 5150 TAROT CANYON - DUSK

Music comes in: 01 GHOSTS I by NINE INCH NAILS.

PROFESSOR (O.C.) (CONT'D)  
You have to understand,

T. S. ELIOT (V.O.)  
DO I DARE DISTURB THE UNIVERSE?

X still lying on floor but no longer crying.

PROFESSOR (O.C.)  
that isn't really our purview.

T. S. ELIOT (V.O.)  
IN A MINUTE THERE IS TIME  
FOR DECISIONS AND REVISIONS WHICH A  
MINUTE WILL REVERSE.

In X's bandaged hand, close to their heart, ECO's medallion;  
X thumbs Santa Muerte absentmindedly.

T. S. ELIOT (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
FOR I HAVE KNOWN THEM ALL ALREADY,  
KNOWN THEM ALL:  
HAVE KNOWN THE EVENINGS, MORNINGS,  
AFTERNOONS,

Wall, half covered in drawings, X suddenly sits up in  
silhouette against this.

PROFESSOR (O.C.)  
Even if it were, there's licensing

T. S. ELIOT (V.O.)  
I HAVE MEASURED OUT MY LIFE WITH  
COFFEE SPOONS;

A drawer is opened by bandaged hand, inside we/camera/X find  
the switchblade.

INTERCUT to NONDESCRIPT OFFICE - DAY

PROFESSOR  
(doubtful)  
you do know what licensing is,  
don't you?

PROFESSOR interrupts self to ask X this question as 01 GHOSTS I (& ear ringing) continues to build.

X stares at PROFESSOR without responding.

PROFESSOR (CONT'D)  
(big breath)  
Well-

PROFESSOR, taking X's silence as a 'no' begins to explain.

INTERCUT to 5150 TAROT CANYON - TWILIGHT

T. S. ELIOT (V.O.)  
I HAVE SEEN THE MOMENT OF MY  
GREATNESS FLICKER,

X full length profile in bathroom, doing something to their hand again.

T. S. ELIOT (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
AND I HAVE SEEN THE ETERNAL FOOTMAN  
HOLD MY COAT, AND SNICKER,

Steadily, methodically, X uses switchblade to work away at bandages of wounded hand over sink.

T. S. ELIOT (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
AND IN SHORT, I WAS AFRAID.

X's face/eyes unreadable in closeup.

INTERCUT to NONDESCRIPT OFFICE - DAY

PROFESSOR (O.C.)  
But above and beyond all that,

MATCH-CUT to X's face/eyes unreadable in closeup, PROFESSOR reflected miniature in X's gaze.

PROFESSOR (CONT'D)  
there just isn't really a story  
here.

PROFESSOR in chair; behind them, our UNDEAD DRAGQUEEN stands impossibly tall and gaunt, in veil and corner, one especially cadaveresque hand on PROFESSOR's shoulder.

01 GHOSTS I (& ear ringing) continues to build.

INTERCUT to 5150 TAROT CANYON - SUNSET into DARK

PROFESSOR (O.C.) (CONT'D)  
You have all these bits and pieces

T. S. ELIOT (V.O.)  
AND THIS, AND SO MUCH MORE?  
IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO SAY JUST WHAT I  
MEAN.

X's Scraps, scattered across floor in the darkening room.

PROFESSOR (O.C.)  
And, yes, some of them are  
beautiful

T. S. ELIOT (V.O.)  
BUT AS IF A MAGIC LANTERN THREW THE  
NERVES IN PATTERNS ON A SCREEN

Bodies glimpsed moving/shifting/hiding among mountains/hills  
in shadows behind house.

PROFESSOR (O.C.)  
But no amount of beautiful  
fragments can ever make up for the  
lack of...

T. S. ELIOT (V.O.)  
I HAVE HEARD THE MERMAIDS SINGING,  
EACH TO EACH.

GRANDMA in her old armchair & dark, eyes obscured by glasses  
glare, oxygen mask on and running, making her seem like some  
strange alien being.

PROFESSOR (O.C.)  
I don't know what to call it; a  
thread, a heart.

X  
(under their breath)  
An offering?

T. S. ELIOT (V.O.)  
I DO NOT THINK THAT THEY WILL SING  
TO ME.

X's hand, held to their naked bloodstained chest.

PROFESSOR (O.C.)  
some essential thing to tie it all  
together

T. S. ELIOT (V.O.)  
I HAVE SEEN THEM RIDING SEAWARD ON  
THE WAVES

Sunset over desert, shadowgraph silhouettes of kachina dancers bob up, one after another. These bring the sound of a heart/drumbeat into background of this scene that joins 01 GHOSTS I & ear ringing in constant build.

PROFESSOR (O.C.)  
How many semesters do you have  
after this?

T.S. ELIOT (V.O.)  
COMBING THE WHITE HAIR OF THE WAVES  
BLOWN BACK

X, a lone figure, nude, seen staring out window (back to us) in darkened room.

PROFESSOR (O.C.)  
See, that worries me.

T.S. ELIOT (V.O.)  
WHEN THE WIND BLOWS THE WATER WHITE  
AND BLACK.

MATCH-CUT to WALKING SAM, lone figure in alleyway & dark; X's mirror, X's double.

PROFESSOR (O.C.)  
(hesitant, choosing words  
carefully)  
I'm going to tell you

T. S. ELIOT (V.O.)  
WE HAVE LINGERED IN THE CHAMBERS OF  
THE SEA

Mutilated deer carcass, rotting on X's bed, buzzing with flies, swarming with roaches.

PROFESSOR (O.C.)  
what I wish someone had told me at  
your age.

T. S. ELIOT (V.O.)  
BY SEA-GIRLS WREATHED WITH SEAWEED  
RED AND BROWN

EL DUENDE & MARIACHI BAND, as if glimpsed by us/X through window, stand waiting outside in the middle of dark street before house.

PROFESSOR (O.C.)  
You gotta want it.



T. S. ELIOT (V.O.)  
TILL HUMAN VOICES WAKE US,

Pan up to moon rising above them; bigger, fuller, closer,  
more ominous than ever.

PROFESSOR  
Gotta want it bad enough.

T. S. ELIOT (V.O.)  
AND WE DROWN.

View of X's bathroom mirror, empty: we slowly back away from  
it—taking in bloody sink, switchblade dripping on edge—until,  
just after last line of both PROFESSOR & ELIOT, at climax of  
music/audio, mirror suddenly/inexplicably cracks & shot cuts  
almost immediately to black/silence.

X  
(in low, hoarse whisper,  
oddly like wind)  
How bad does it have to get before  
it's enough?

Blackscreen. We linger on this for a while, then a text-  
message from ECO pops up, frame-left.

ECO (TEXT MESSAGES)  
3:45 AM - "what is this"  
3:46 AM - "kamikaze"  
3:50 AM - "?"

On the right half of screen, X's side, the typing ellipsis  
appears, anxiously blinking its "... " for nearly a minute  
before going away. We (& ECO, probably) wait 20, maybe 30  
seconds to see if it'll ever pop back up, but it never does.

END OF ACT III.

ACT IV.

1. ACT[/SEMESTER] IV. TITLE CARD - TAROT SPREAD/DRAWING

Continuation of previous act introduction shot—ACT III. SCENE 1.—clutter of cards facedown on table, save "THE MAGICIAN" which faces us, upsidedown, centerframe. Gentle breeze still plays with the edges of cards, until a sudden rush—sharp and strong—flips all cards over, off table, revealing beneath, a triangle scratched/carved into surface (likely by X's switchblade). Soon as we get a glimpse of this, cut.

2. INT./EXT. DELTA - POETRY SEQUENCE - NIGHT/DAY

X (V.O.)  
(in low, hoarse whisper)  
They came with the dark—hollow and  
hungry as the wind

View of 5150 after dark, from across the street, no lights are on, but we can see a black silhouette in the window inside X's room; at "hollow", a wind blows litter down the street, silhouette doesn't move.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(in low, hoarse whisper)  
you waited

Shot of clock ticking on vast white wall.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(in low, hoarse whisper)  
And waited

Shot continues: fade a few hours later.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(in low, hoarse whisper)  
And waited

Shot continues: fade to a few hours later.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(in low, hoarse whisper)  
glass in hand

Shot changes but ticking continues: we see X's hands in closeup—one bandaged, one not—nursing an empty glass, single finger nervously taps time.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(in low, hoarse whisper)  
heart open rotting on the kitchen  
table

X sitting small and still against wall that once came alive  
with art, but it's all been erased/painted over.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(in low, hoarse whisper)  
your eyes where God's were before  
the landlord made you take them  
down

Twin blanks on a great white wall, sunbleached ghosts of two  
godsees.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(in low, hoarse whisper)  
Things began like this.

Blackscreen. We hear a knock.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(in low, hoarse whisper)  
A doubt.

Shot continues: dark/door opens to find X (our doubt) framed  
by doorway and, in foreground, silhouettes of two figures,  
back to us.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(in low, hoarse whisper)  
A glance.

Shot continues: these two MASKED STRANGERS exchange a look, X  
watching from doorway between them.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(in low, hoarse whisper)  
A question never quite asked, never  
quite answered.

Shot ends with X turning to lead the two inside.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(in low, hoarse whisper)  
Then, through the usual masks,

All walk into 5150 main room, things have been cleaned up  
drastically.

MASKED STRANGER A  
Think we'll set up in the bedroom  
first.

STRANGERS spotting out good locations, X walks to window to  
look out into backyard.

X (V.O.)  
(in low, hoarse whisper)  
Came here to find yourself.

Figures in the dark outside, watching/waiting.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(in low, hoarse whisper)  
Came here thinking you could  
change.

Closeup of X's gaze, expression unreadable.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(in low, hoarse whisper)  
Now you have, you wish you hadn't  
and can't say why.

FIGURES OUTSIDE POV: X framed by window of little house, a  
prisoner.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(in low, hoarse whisper)  
It's too late. Gone too far.

Heatlightning over the mountains.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(in low, hoarse whisper)  
Kiteline cut. From floating world,  
fall.

Famous shot from 8 1/2 (1963), either use actual fragment or  
recreate.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(in low, hoarse whisper)  
Down. Down. Down. Deep into—

Clouds shift; we're a drop of rain rushing toward  
desert/city.

MASKED STRANGER B  
Anything to drink around here?

MASKED STRANGER B bobs up/into frame to ask us/camera this  
over kitchenette counter.

X  
Always.

X (V.O.)  
(in low, hoarse whisper)  
No hesitation. Voice of a stranger,  
almost. But not yet.

X tosses this over shoulder as they stare out window into the dark.

MASKED STRANGER A  
Sure about this?

X (V.O.)  
(in low, hoarse whisper)  
You aren't. You nod anyway. Don't  
have a choice. Or don't feel like  
you do. Again the question.

MASKED STRANGER A crowding up close to X/us.

MASKED STRANGER A  
Nervous?

X (V.O.)  
(in low, hoarse whisper)  
Laughter. Then a pause. Whatever  
happens, don't cry, don't.

X laughs, runs a hand over their face trying to keep themselves together in corner/shadows.

MASKED STRANGER B  
Hey.

X (V.O.)  
(in low, hoarse whisper)  
Hand at your center, the small of  
your back, mouth whispering slow  
motion against the shell of your  
ear.

MASKED STRANGER B close now.

MASKED STRANGER B  
Feel like flying?

X (V.O.)  
(in low, hoarse whisper)  
For once, you're sincere.

X turns to MASKED STRANGER/us/camera and, unexpectedly, smiles.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(in low, hoarse whisper)  
Rubberburns familiar.

Closeup of tourniquet tied tight, hiss of breath between teeth.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(in low, hoarse whisper)  
Rubberburns familiar.

Closeup of syringe emptying.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(in low, hoarse whisper)  
The duende hits.

Closeup of pupil dilating.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(in low, hoarse whisper)  
Before you know what's happening—  
you're in the room, on the bed,  
together, apart—around you, above  
you,

Slow motion—eerily like floating—blurred Lynchian chaos of bodies.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(in low, hoarse whisper)  
a liquid darkness, through which  
you watch them move, shadows in the  
water you were always so afraid of.  
Then the blade.

Above us, the images have now lost nearly all semblance of humanity, just shadows meeting/merging shifting, then (on "blade") a sudden glint.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(in low, hoarse whisper)  
First cut's painless—razor to wrist  
—nothing you haven't felt before.  
Next one's worse, slitting  
forehead, eyelid—you're opening all  
over now, like a story, like a  
scream. The third—quick, cold—  
kills.

Slowly pan away from struggle on bed—which we never explicitly see—to focus on shadows across wall, two figures gouge and strike again and again as one beneath them first fights then begins slipping under.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(in low, hoarse whisper)  
Here, the picture changes.

For this transition, I need some sort of damage in/of the film stock itself, perhaps the reel runs out and we have only black.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(in low, hoarse whisper)  
The first time?

Lightning flashes the ocean greyblack beneath stormy sky.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(in low, hoarse whisper)  
You don't wanna talk about it.

Another thunderclap: blood drips down onto floor—viewed from beneath X's bed—a corpse-like foot hits the ground.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(in low, hoarse whisper)  
You don't wanna say.

X in mutilated silhouette slowly sits up in bed, dark/shadows renders X almost impossible to make out distinctly.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(in low, hoarse whisper)  
It's complicated.

Two bloody feet walking unsteadily across floor to bathroom, then door closes. We/camera glide back to watch day & night shift rapidly in mainroom.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(in low, hoarse whisper)  
You were young—

MATCH-CUT to X coming out of bathroom as we first met them, running over to GRANDMA's chair, then giving her old head a kiss before they rush out through front door.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(in low, hoarse whisper)  
younger than—

MATCH-CUT to X emerging as early teenager in a nondescript green suburb, as they reach curb passing car—red corvette—pulls up beside them and X turns as if spoken-to. Briefly, we see X not quite (but almost) smile, then all is obscured by tree as we/camera glide to reorient ourselves.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(in low, hoarse whisper)  
and you didn't, couldn't possibly

MATCH-CUT to X in childhood standing (on beach) staring (in profile) out into vast grey ocean mirrored by a vast grey sky; wind coming in off the water.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(in low, hoarse whisper)  
understand.

Childhood X's gaze in closeup, strange movements of the ocean reflect in their eyes; their expression is one of fear but also fascination and perhaps...

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(in low, hoarse whisper)  
And suddenly it's happening again--  
all around you, all at once--dark  
and deep and always moving, moving,  
moving.

Lightning flash and we're in the water.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(in low, hoarse whisper)  
Can't touch bottom, can't reach  
shore--gotta move with it--and the  
waves come in so fast, so high over  
your head they leave skies bruised  
dark as they are.

X is in the water with us, grading between ages everytime they come up for air.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(in low, hoarse whisper)  
Then, from somewhere beneath you,  
something rises--and you want it to  
stop, want to forget--but wanting is  
never enough.

X sees something move through the water beneath them, then suddenly gets pulled under; wave promptly envelops us/camera as well.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(in low, hoarse whisper)  
Below the surface, it's always the  
first time.

Blackscreen. Gale gone silent. Only sound now ringing in our ears.



X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(in low, hoarse whisper)  
Always.

A bubble passes up toward the surface.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(in low, hoarse whisper)  
All your memories are here—all your  
world is now—changing.

Blackscreen.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(in low, hoarse whisper)  
But something's gone wrong. Dream  
ripples. Words give way.

Here, again, I need some sort of damage in/of the film stock  
itself—or, perhaps, use opening eye transition here instead.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(in low, hoarse whisper)  
The offering—the operation—it's  
failed.

X's POV: we/X/camera open our eyes to find ourselves looking  
up at X's ceiling as masked crowd—NURSES from hospital,  
friends, family, classmates, everyone/anyone from X's life,  
or at least from the version of their life X is willing to  
acknowledge—palpably disappointed/shocked, leaning over  
X/us/camera.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(in low, hoarse whisper)  
Slowly, off come the masks—friends,  
family, teachers, strangers—hadn't  
expected much, but they weren't  
expecting this. No.

Shot continues X's POV: Slowly the non medical figures in  
this crowd take off their masks and exchange looks above us,  
refusing to meet our/X's/camera's eyes.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(in low, hoarse whisper)  
Stepping back, the surgeons stare  
at what used to be y-o-u, but can't  
bring themselves to say what's just  
been broken.

Shot continues X's POV: SURGEONS/NURSES now do the same, then  
follow the rest of crowd out of frame as we stare up at  
ceiling.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(in low, hoarse whisper)  
Nothing's there / never was /  
besides a hurting / beyond the  
fear.

A sequence of four distinct shots/angles of X's dismembered  
corpse on bed, empty of all insides like a carcass in the  
desert.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(in low, hoarse whisper)  
you didn't exist.

Shot of desert, wind billows scrap into air, dismembered  
centerfold, then subsides, scrap slowly drifting to ground.

X (O.C.)  
(in low, hoarse whisper)  
Room empties. Doors all close.  
Stillness—a kind of death, a form  
of love—settles over everything.

Everyone fading out of room as X lies there, inert, staring  
like sacrificial deer from LA VIDENTE.

X (O.C.) (CONT'D)  
(in low, hoarse whisper)  
Then, from where you used to be, a  
rust-colored cloud blooms across  
the bedsheet; darkwaters, rootlets,  
histories all come welling up,  
flooding the room, floating the  
bed, drifting your broken story off  
the page. Come back. Come back.  
Come. Come here to find—what? Came  
here thinking—what? Rewrite.  
Recollect. Reassemble. Revive.

Shot continues to, essentially, bring to life the imagery in  
this voice over; flooding room, drifting everything out/off,  
through door—or maybe even wall if we want to get [Salvador]  
Dalí about it—into black by "Revive."

X (V.O.)  
(voice faint/hoarse, but  
thick with realization)  
There is no ending.

Blackscreen. linger on this until it starts to seem like that  
really is the ending.

3. INT. MCGUFFIN HALL - CLASSROOM - WORKSHOP, IN PERSON -  
TIMING UNCLEAR

Sudden series of quick-cut shots showing the reactions of each of X's classmates. Nearly all blankly shocked, uncomfortable-uncertain what to say or how they should take something like this-except ECO, who we see last & longest. ECO's expression is clearly one of disappointment more than anything else, tinged with a degree of confused concern.

X stares resolutely at the ground, face flushed and rigid, refusing to acknowledge ECO's reaction-or anyone else's, for that matter.

PROFESSOR quiet (I know, I'm shocked too) with the rest. Overall, PROFESSOR is simply embarrassed by the entire situation-convinced, in their heart of hearts, that exhibitions of this sort aren't (or shouldn't be) what writing (& especially writing school) is about. At last, PROFESSOR clears throat.

PROFESSOR

Well...

Darting a glance around the room, PROFESSOR gauges the damage. Then takes off glasses and sighs.

PROFESSOR (CONT'D)

(somber/serious,  
inevitably pedantic)

I want to just start by reminding everyone that our State University Mental-Health Hotline, S.U.M.H., remains open and available for all fully enrolled students, faculty, and staff, twenty-four se-

PROFESSOR goes on polishing their glasses, occasionally punctuating their remarks with a pointed look at this or that student-though, decidedly, not X. Note: PROFESSOR pronounces the acronym phonetically; "sum-huh".

4. EXT. MCGUFFIN HALL - ROSAS DANST ROSAS SEQUENCE -  
BENCHES OUTSIDE ENTRANCE - GOLDEN HOUR INTO BLAZING SUNSET

Wide-shot of X on bench outside MCGUFFIN HALL curled up, knees to chest, head in hands. We watch them like this-very small, very, very still-then we hear a it: a giggle, a gaggle of TIKTOK GIRLIES (4 total) come into frame, whispering and laughing under their breath, clearly wanting to film some sort of content but not knowing how to approach this weird figure on bench.

TIKTOK GIRLIES—21st century nymphs/maenads/yakshis communicating almost entirely by signs, head tilts, gestures and muffled laughter—go ahead with it anyway, one of them rushing out with a irrepressible smile to set up her phone in foreground, another starting up the music on theirs, then all rushing back into position on benches around X, who remains curled up & covered center frame.

What follows should be a tribute/homage performance of ANNE TERESA DE KEERSMAEKER's *ROSAS DANST ROSAS*, first choreographed in 1983, then filmed in Thierry de Mey in 1997, before going viral as dance challenge/trend around the time of the pandemic. The version I'd like to focus on here is abridged the performance filmed in 1997.

The chief element of this composition is simplicity—the movements here are those any/everyone sees/does while left waiting [in a lobby, at a station, or any other liminal space] just a little too long. What sets it apart, however, is the precision which with such natural movements are executed, all on a beat like a ticking clock, each of the dances seamlessly grading into and out of sync with one another.

Over the course of its nearly 8 minute runtime, the dance steadily goes on building, building, building—minimalist percussion behind it intensifying, complicating—into climax, into crescendo, into cut: X, in close-up, finally uncovers their face to stare directly through fourth wall, at sunset/camera/us, no longer sad, no longer scared, but determined, fixed, until a loud/piercing wolf-whistle snaps both X & us back into story.

STUDENT 1.

Yo! You got a ride tomorrow?

Using hands like a megaphone, STUDENT 1. shouts this about 100 feet from X/camera/us, across courtyard of MCGUFFIN HALL.

5. EXT. NIGHTWORLD - LOUISE BOGAN'S *THE ALCHEMIST* - WALKING TO THE BUS STOP - CITY AFTER DARK, VACANT AGAIN

X

(quiet, not sure they understood)

Crossing-over?

We follow STUDENT 1. & X (backs to us) walking side by side in darkness.

STUDENT 1.

(not registering X's confusion)

(MORE)

STUDENT 1. (CONT'D)  
Yep. All of us. A last semester  
sort of thing. You know, it's kinda  
weird he didn't tell you.

STUDENT 1. glances over at X who shrugs.

STUDENT 1. (CONT'D)  
I mean, he said he would.

X just keeps looking down, bowing head a bit at this last  
part.

STUDENT 1. (CONT'D)  
Hmm.

Glances over at X, then suddenly gets serious for a bit.

STUDENT 1. (CONT'D)  
Listen, I know the professor tends  
to talk about your stuff like, I  
don't know—

STUDENT 1. takes a second to find the right metaphor,  
prompting X's interest.

STUDENT 1. (CONT'D)  
kind of like a dumpster fire we  
could put out if we all work  
together—

STUDENT 1. comes up/out with this gem so unexpectedly X  
bursts into guffaw; STUDENT 1. can't help laughing too.

STUDENT 1. (CONT'D)  
(trying to regain  
composure)  
but, I wanted to tell you, I think  
I'm starting to get it.

X  
(touched, gratified)  
Thanks.

STUDENT 1.  
So, thesis?

X answers with a semi-hysterical little laugh and shrugs.

X  
(smiling apologetic)  
I've lost the fucking plot.

STUDENT 1.  
How do you mean?

X

(dazed by how bad it  
really is once said  
outloud)

Basically, prof says I don't have a  
story. And they're not wrong: here  
I've got all these images, all  
these ideas, emotions and they just  
go on bleeding into each other and  
out, again and again. No direction.  
No progression or development.  
Nothing to offer, really—and unless  
I manage to find something in the  
next few weeks..

One hand over their eyes, X uses the other to end this  
confession with an unexpectedly morbid gesture, surprising  
another laugh out of STUDENT 1.

loitering a little at a crossroads. X turns back, look  
questioning.

STUDENT 1.

(voice still amused)  
I go right here.

STUDENT 1. gesturing over shoulder.

X

(trying for a joke,  
missing)  
Yeah? Okay, cool. I go—wrong, I  
guess?

X mirrors STUDENT 1. gesturing in the opposite direction.

STUDENT 1.

(understanding)  
See ya next week.

STUDENT 1. waves, then turns to walk away.

X

(suddenly getting quiet)  
See ya.

X looks down, then does the same—until an earsplitting  
wolfwhistle. X whirls back around again.

STUDENT 1.

(shouting)  
P.S. Don't forget about tomorrow!  
Still got room for one more—think  
about it!

STUDENT 1. in distance, hands cupping mouth like megaphone.

X  
(half-shouting, half-  
laughing)  
I will!

X mirrors STUDENT 1.'s stance & delivery, then waves them off, watching as they round corner and disappear.

Alone now, X pulls out their phone and scrolls through it as they begin the inevitable walk to the bus stop. Wind picks up strangely as it runs through these empty canyons.

LOUISE BOGAN (V.O.)  
THE ALCHEMIST

A voice comes in—LOUISE BOGAN reading her poem *THE ALCHEMIST* (1923)—X places their phone back in their pocket, picking up the pace a bit to pass by us/camera.

LOUISE BOGAN (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
I BURNED MY LIFE, THAT I MIGHT FIND  
A PASSION WHOLLY OF THE MIND,

View of stars between shadowblack outlines of buildings, moving as if we are, gazing up as we do.

X  
(very quiet)  
Thought you'd change,

LOUISE BOGAN (V.O.)  
THOUGHT DIVORCED FROM EYE AND BONE,

X, in mask & close-up, looking down and murmuring to self as they walk.

X  
(very quiet)  
Did you?

LOUISE BOGAN (V.O.)  
ECSTASY COME TO BREATH ALONE.

X's feet, in shadow & close-up, walking rhythmic, steady.

LOUISE BOGAN (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
I BROKE MY LIFE, TO SEEK RELIEF  
FROM THE FLAWED LIGHT OF LOVE AND  
GRIEF.

Vixen, seen thru dark & distance, runs out into empty intersection, pausing—just a shadow in the streetlight—to look back at us, then scream her unforgettable scream. This echos in the emptiness.

LOUISE BOGAN (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
WITH MOUNTING BEAT THE UTTER FIRE  
CHARRED EXISTENCE AND DESIRE.

Shifting view of a mannequin—faceless, frozen—reaching out to us/world from behind unlit/chained shopfront window.

LOUISE BOGAN (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
IT DIED LOW, CEASED ITS SUDDEN  
THRESH.

X (back to us) walking down thin dark alleyway.

LOUISE BOGAN (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
I HAD FOUND UNMYSTERIOUS FLESH—  
NOT THE MIND'S AVID SUBSTANCE—STILL  
PASSIONATE BEYOND THE WILL.

Rounding corner at its mouth, X finds, at last, the bus stop; we follow as X crosses the street to reach it.

Tossing their bag down beside streetlamp, X runs a hand through their hair as they look down road the bus will come from, listening. Wind moans and groans and coils through empty streets.

Then, another sound comes—but not from where the bus will. It's too short, too small to firmly identify—a pebble accidentally kicked, a piece of litter inadvertently stepped on—but its reality is definite.

X casts an idle glance in the direction this sound came from—the alleyway they just left—only to find nothing there, at least, not at first glance. But something about that glance seemed off. X looks back.

There it is. Our WALKING SAM. Just beyond the light cast by the streetlamps, standing half-in, half-out of alley's mouth.

We watch as X realizes this, registering first surprise, then fear. But, all at once, those emotions give place to something new. From somewhere between curiosity and determination, X approaches, walking out slowly and firmly to meet this being, to reach them.

Then, all at once, burst of light, blare of horn; X turns to find Bus barreling down on them with a sickening thud.



6. INT./EXT. 5150 TAROT CANYON - X'S BEDROOM, MAINROOM,  
BATHROOM, GARDEN - A VISITOR - NIGHT

X suddenly awakens in pool of sweat, gasping. Pan across plaster ridged landscape of ceiling, headlights crossing wall as X attempts to calm breathing amidst sounds of wind rattling house. Then, once things settle and wind dies down, we/X notice a sound, rhythmic, moving, shifting/shuffling around the house outside.

X reaches up to chest, touching ECO's medallion, then turns and feels under pillow.

We watch from below/behind as X walks barefoot through dark, toward door, switchblade glinting in hand. Door opens to reveal a figure in that odd [semi]urban half-night glow, back to us, on front porch, hunching over as if looking for something they've dropped.

ECO  
(soft, apologetic)  
Holi.

Back to us/X/camera, ECO sifts gently through a garbagebag the wind has spilled across 5150's front porch—contents? Godseyes, books, X's story scraps, childhood drawings, old family photos, even older housekeys, all the bits and pieces X just doesn't know how to live with anymore.

X receives ECO's greeting in silence; arms crossed, expression unreadable.

X's POV: ECO, still kneeling over half-spilled garbage, toys idly with one of the many godseyes X made and, eventually, threw away.

ECO (CONT'D)  
This is proof,

X's POV: ECO waves it over his shoulder.

ECO (O.C.) (CONT'D)  
you are no writer

X continues silent, though their eyes hollow at the unexpected confirmation of their most virulent doubt.

ECO (CONT'D)  
I told you,

Shot begins with ECO in close-up and profile, glancing over his shoulder, back toward X.

ECO (CONT'D)  
you are an artist.

Shot continues with ECO, still in close-up & profile, turning away from X to look down again at godseye, carefully feeling its texture between his fingers.

ECO (CONT'D)  
(sighing)  
We talk about things.

Shot ends with ECO, still in close-up & profile, huffing out a silent little laugh, then gently tossing godseye back onto pile of trash it came from.

ECO (CONT'D)  
(very softly)  
You?

New shot, new angle: ECO, in focus & foreground, (facing us/camera/trash) runs a hand across some of the other stuff piled up there, noting bits from old magazines (including our dismembered centerfold), X's manuscripts, family pictures with X cut out etc.

ECO (CONT'D)  
(very softly)  
You change them.

Same shot, new focus: X, in background, seems to be taking all this with remarkable stoicism, but just after ECO concludes X's face suddenly scrunches up and they quickly go back inside leaving door open behind them.

X again inside unlit 5150 MAINROOM, in foreground/shadow, hands over their face; ECO enters—silhouetted by night, framed by door—in background, notices X's emotion and approaches, closing door behind, leaving everything in darkness.

From this, a voice:

ECO (CONT'D)  
(soft)  
Why didn't you tell me?

ECO is talking about KAM!KAZE, both know this but won't mention it by name: ECO needs X to open up—& later that's what ECO will help X do—but, for now, X only returns fire.

X  
(voice even quieter than  
ECO's)  
Where's everyone going tomorrow?

X turns on small lamp, leaving the majority of room unlit.  
Outside, the wind picks up.

ECO  
(tone & expression  
changing, suddenly  
defensive, on edge)  
That's different.

X  
(getting exasperated)  
Why?

X hurls this question hard and fast.

ECO sighs, turns away, runs hand across forehead, then turns  
back and half-gestures at X.

ECO  
(sad, soft little laugh)  
Mírate.

At this, ECO gives X such a sad/disappointed/embarrassed look  
that (for once) X needs absolutely NO translation to realize  
what's been said, and feels utterly gutted by it.

ECO (O.C.) (CONT'D)  
(trying to soften the boy)  
It is no place for you.

X looks like the wind's been knocked out of them. Speaking of  
wind, that's still building, whining, keening outside.

X  
(incredulous)  
And this?

X gestures at the rest of this godforsaken hellhouse. In the  
background, very quietly, the muffled voices have started up  
again.

ECO  
I don't know what do you want me to  
say?

ECO shrugs, just wanting to end the conversation as soon as  
possible.

X  
Neither d-

X fully reciprocates those feelings when:

ECO  
(cutting in)  
Shhh!

X shuts up, instantly alert; shocked by possibility that someone else might actually be able to hear these things too.

ECO (CONT'D)  
(dropping down to a near  
whisper)  
What is that sound?

X  
(shocked/relieved/scared,  
whispering back)  
You can hear it?

ECO  
(whispering)  
Yes. Where is it coming from? In  
here?

ECO gestures toward X's bedroom, but X shakes head pointing instead to bathroom, then passing ECO to lead the way.

As we step through the corridor leading into GRANDMA'S room, our WALKING SAM'S familiar figure appears in silhouette and doorway. X doesn't notice, but ECO does a double take.

ECO (CONT'D)  
(muttering)  
Algo esta mal.

ECO finds door at the end of hall closed, but feels almost certain it wasn't when they walked by a second ago.

X (O.C.)  
(calling out quietly)  
Come here.

ECO hesitates, then enters bathroom.

X (CONT'D)  
(more mouthed than spoken)  
Listen.

Brow corrugated, X is leaning their face against the right/far side of cracked mirror, gesturing for ECO to hurry and take the other.

The voices are muffled, but clearly coming from somewhere just beyond this point.

ECO  
(trying to think up an  
explanation)  
Do you have neighbors?

ECO whispers this as their face touches the glass.

X shakes head and sighs.

X  
(fragmentary, trying to  
listen)  
Airbnbs. Every house on this street  
—empty for months now—yet the  
voices...

X trails off, unsure how to end the sentence.

ECO nods, then glances down at sink to better focus attention. Gradually, as voices go on, a strange expression flits across ECO's face, something that could mean recognition, understanding.

ECO  
(unexpectedly  
somber/concerned)  
Can you understand what they are  
saying?

ECO's glance travels back up to X; more grave, tense, concentrated than before.

X  
Used to try but—they fade so easily  
—besides, couldn't be sure they  
were...

Eyes downcast, listening, X shrugs it off at first. But, as they try to explain why, X glances up at ECO, listening on the other side of the cracked mirror. X's POV: noting the lines of ECO's face, the play of expression—the smallness of the space between them, how much X has missed this kind of closeness—then, in background/shadows of MAINROOM beyond, X suddenly spots our WALKING SAM character. We see X's pupils suddenly dialate and then jolt out of frame as X rushes out, without a word/warning, to confront this being.

Only to feel it slip just out of reach as they get there, losing themselves in the half-dark. Then a rush from behind really does knock the wind out of X.

ECO  
(voice raised, panicked)  
Hey! Hey, I need you to—listen to  
me.

It's ECO, who's rushed in after X: grabbing X, pinning X's  
arms to their side, forcibly restraining them as if X  
couldn't be trusted, as if X really were crazy.

X  
(through gritted teeth)  
Let go!

X—shocked/horrified by the sudden combined sensations of pain  
& helplessness—struggles violently, which only makes it  
worse.

ECO  
(also through gritted  
teeth)  
No. Escúchame! Stop!

ECO holds X even tighter, trying to force them to calm down;  
this, predictably, backfires. Wind outside flairs up more  
violently than usual, rattling house & everything in it. X  
lets out an ugly, painful, strangely rising groan; genuinely  
feels like the life is being crushed out of them.

X  
(gasping, halting, pinched  
voice)  
Can't fucking breathe!

To his credit, once X says this, ECO lets go.

X stumbles to their knees in shadows beside GRANDMA's old  
chair, dry-heaving and coughing in an ugly broken way that  
reminds them painfully of her; they try to stop it, to  
control it, but can't this time.

Emotional whiplash sets in; ECO is suddenly gentle, kneeling  
down beside X, holding X, rubbing their back.

ECO  
You are okay. I need you to be  
okay. I need you to listen. I don't  
want you crossing over. This is  
very important—something is wrong—  
do you understand?

X is so overwrought by everything they just sit there, trying  
to breathe, taking it all in.

X  
(quietly)  
You know something you're not  
telling me.

After breathing has steadied more, X replies in a low clear voice and showing they know how to put two and two together.

ECO  
(exasperated)  
Ay.

ECO gestures faintly, but half-smiles in the dark.

It scares X, how everyone seems to be keeping something from them.

X  
(maintaining their point)  
You understand them, don't you?

Suddenly, entire house shifts with a shock/jolt/tremor, one strong enough to knock both X and ECO off balance. X rushes out to garden—scattering heard of feral cats as they go—to see what's happening. Could be an earthquake for all they know. ECO follows, then we/camera do.

Outside the wind howls, sending litter flying high through the air as plants twist, bend, and sway beneath dark, dust-filled clouds—but that's not what X & ECO are staring at. No, what stops them dead in their tracks is the entrance of our now gargantuan moon, fuller and closer than ever, rising across the sky, appearing almost to warp surface of the world as it goes.

#### 7. INT. CROSSING OVER - DARK CAR INTERIOR - NIGHT

Cut to dark & still interior of vehicle, what little light there is comes in blood red; as in hospital, the first & most important sound we hear is a faint but growing ear ringing.

Six bodies sit facing each other in backseats & silence—here, the sound of breathing apparatus, not unlike GRANDMA's, fades in—can't say why, but I'm getting major Trojan horse vibes from all this & I like that.

Even in shadow, we note X and ECO sitting across from one another—sound of a slow heart starts beating—X faces ECO, jaw set beneath mask; ECO is looking away/forward, into the dark.

Outside car, everything a liquid black; no people, no places. At last, a gloved official-looking hand emerges from this void and knocks slow, echoing three times on window as ear ringing & rest of audio becomes unbearable. Sudden cut to black.

8. EXT. NIGHTWORLD/OTHERWORLD/ARTWORLD - DANSE MACABRE, BODA IN THE BARDO - SONG & CHASE SEQUENCE - DEAD OF NIGHT

This scene is set to ROSALÍA's *QUE NO SALGA LA LUNA* (Cap.2: Boda)

ROSALÍA (V.O.)  
(¡VAMOS ALLÁ LA' GUAPA'!)

ROSALÍA (V.O.)  
(LET'S GO THERE THE PRETTY ONES!)

Blackscreen.

Then, a wild guitar flare bursts us into the opening shot of this scene: as we/camera suddenly find our selves hurtling backwards, out from the deep/dark soundhole/center of a classic guitarrón mexicano, which is currently being played (& played very well) by a guitarist of EL DUENDE's ensemble. That particular celebrity, by the way, is busy working the crowd, striking poses, tossing out EHECACHICHTLI or "wind whistles" (also called "death whistles") from an upturned sombrero, black with gold embroidery.

Meanwhile, we/camera have whirled around to find ourselves amidst (if slightly above) wild/teeming crowd-jostling, laughing, shouting-crammed into dark, narrow, winding streets.

Across the border & into the bardo; we now move through what could conscientiously and concisely be called a world of art.

Houses of many different colors, people of every different shade and background; creativity so vast and ubiquitous-graffitied across walls, tattooed across bodies, hung billowing from balcony to balcony, roof to roof-it's nearly overwhelming. Masks of all sorts, shapes, and sizes; medical, festive, ceremonial. Even those few faces without masks are made up so elaborately, so uniquely, it's impossible not to see them as living works of art-each made different, every outfit unique, individual-overall, human creativity in dense, verdant, suffocating bloom.

NOTE ON AESTHETICS: One of the things I think about when considering this scene is WERNER HERZOG's description of the Amazon in *Burden of Dreams* (1982); an existence so rich/full/vast/overwhelming that's its beauty felt obscene, its obscenity beautiful.



My theory is this: art/creativity, like all other forms of radiant energy, is neither inherently good nor invariably bad, it is essentially transformative and, as such, essentially disruptive. At its highest concentration, intensity, art will always be interpreted as threatening by those in search of stasis/the security of inertia. Thus, to the comfortable, to the insecure, an element of horror/discomfort/disgust is inseparable from deeply moving art; because it threatens change. However, to the exasperated, to the desperate, to those longing for nothing less than total metaphorphosis; those same elements of horror/anxiety take on the tones of possibility, excitement—chaos becomes beautiful because, in chaos, you can become/feel/do anything. I need this sequence to live directly on the knife edge of this dichotomy, now leaning one way, now another.

Anyway, resuming our opening shot—yes, that's still going on—a beautiful flamenco run (courtesy of ROSALÍA) soon brings us gliding, tilting into this crowd, rushing/sifting through to X & classmates lost in the chaos as festival, performance, rite begins; shot ends in close-up of X staring directly, fixedly at us/camera through crowd as everyone else's eyes dart around, taking it all in.

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
QUÉ SUERTE LA QUE YO TUVE

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
HOW LUCKY I WAS

MATCH-CUT to shadowy close-up of UNDEAD DRAGQUEEN—veiled in the style of ANTONIO CORRADINI, semi-translucent, wet yet somehow billowing, shifting, rippling to life with the slightest breeze/movement—as she begins her song.

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
EL DÍA QUE LA ENCONTRÉ

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
THE DAY I FOUND HER

X's POV: we spot a darkened, shadowy figure just beyond shifting crowd—almost certainly WALKING SAM.

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
LO HE SEÑALA'ÍTO A PUNTA DE  
NAVAJA  
PRIMA, SOBRE LA PARED

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
I WAS FOUND AT THE POINT OF A  
BLADE  
PERFECTLY AGAINST THE WALL

X starts toward us/camera/WALKING SAM through crowd.

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
LO HE SEÑALA'ÍTO A PUNTA DE  
NAVAJA  
PRIMA, SOBRE LA PARED

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
I WAS FOUND AT THE POINT OF A  
BLADE  
PERFECTLY AGAINST THE WALL

UNDEAD DRAGQUEEN again, this time we see she's performing for us/crowd/camera from balcony, and has now begun to descend the stairs.

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(EH)

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(EH)

X is grabbed by the arm and yanked back, through crowd, to be pressed against muraled wall.

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
COMO LAS HOJAS DE UN CUCHILLO  
BRILLABAN LOS SACAIS SUYO'  
CUANDO LE DI EL ANILLO

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
LIKE THE BLADE OF A KNIFE  
HER EYES SHONE WHEN I GAVE  
HER THE RING

UNDEAD DRAGQUEEN passes group of men laughing & showing-off their knives in the dark; smiles & blades glint at us strangely; UNDEAD DRAGQUEEN takes one in hand, kissing it suggestively through the veil; all the men guffaw.

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(BRILLABAN LOS SACAIS)  
(BRILLABAN LOS SACAIS)

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(WERE THE EYES SHINING)  
(WERE THE EYES SHINING)

CHORUS OF UNDEAD QUEENS pop up at top of balcony with these cries.

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
BRILLABAN LOS SACAIS

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
WERE THE EYES SHINING

X's POV: ECO holding X by shoulders, giving X/us/camera a look that says "don't"

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(BRILLABAN LOS SACAIS)  
(BRILLABAN LOS SACAIS)

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(WERE THE EYES SHINING)  
(WERE THE EYES SHINING)

ECO's POV: X shrugs it off in frustration, ECO reaches out to stroke X's cheek—calm them down—but X is in no mood for this and jerks away into crowd again.

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
QUE BRILLABAN SUS SACAIS  
(BRILLABAN LOS SACAIS)

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
WERE HER EYES SHINING  
(WERE THE EYES SHINING)

UNDEAD DRAGQUEEN & CHORUS OF UNDEAD QUEENS finish up lyrics here and we pan off to find strange figure being born up by the crowd far off down the street.

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
SI HAY ALGUIEN QUE AQUÍ SE  
OPONGA  
QUE NO LEVANTE LA VOZ

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
IF THERE'S SOMEONE WHO  
OBJECTS  
MAY THEY NOT RAISE THEIR  
VOICE

X trying to get away from it all, shifting through tightly packed bodies; they suddenly yank their mask off in frustration, then glance up at crowd/us/camera.

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(QUE NO LO ESCUCHE LA NOVIA)

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(LET THE BRIDE NOT HEAR THEM)

WALKING SAM seen again, shifting through crowd, rounding corner.

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(QUE NO SALGA LA LUNA QUE NO  
TIENE PA' QUÉ, NO TIENE PA'  
QUÉ, NO TIENE PA' QUÉ)

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(MAY THE MOON NOT COME OUT  
'CAUSE IT HAS NO REASON TO,  
'CAUSE IT DOESN'T HAVE A  
REASON, IT HAS NO REASON TO)

EL DUENDE (& CO) performing for crowd—taking the male backing vocals here—we/camera pan up above them to where clouds hide a massive lurking moon.

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
CON TUS OJITOS PRISMA, YO ME  
ALUMBRARÉ  
(QUE NO SALGA LA LUNA QUE NO  
TIENE PA' QUÉ, NO TIENE PA'  
QUÉ, NO TIENE PA' QUÉ)

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
WITH YOUR EYES SO PERFECT, I  
WILL LIGHT MYSELF UP  
(MAY THE MOON NOT COME OUT  
'CAUSE IT HAS NO REASON TO,  
'CAUSE IT DOESN'T HAVE A  
REASON, IT HAS NO REASON TO)

X pressing through crowd in pursuit—picking up pace, determined to get to the bottom of this—they rush past us.

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
CON TUS OJITOS PRISMA, YO ME  
ALUMBRARÉ  
(QUE NO SALGA LA LUNA QUE NO  
TIENE PA' QUÉ, NO TIENE PA'  
QUÉ, NO TIENE PA' QUÉ)

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
WITH YOUR EYES SO PERFECT, I  
WILL LIGHT MYSELF UP  
(MAY THE MOON NOT COME OUT  
'CAUSE IT HAS NO REASON TO,  
'CAUSE IT DOESN'T HAVE A  
REASON, IT HAS NO REASON TO)

Shot continues with ECO rushing from where X used to be, looking around for X, then darting in a direction different from the one X went. Then, suddenly, entire crowd is pushed as the CITIPATI come in spinning, dancing, shaking their [deaths]heads with a rattle between castanets and that of the Kodamas (forest spirits) in HIYAO MIYAZAKI's *Princess Mononoke* (1997).

NOTE: in Tibet, the CITIPATI are twin skeletal deities—benevolent or wrathful as the case may be—invoked during local Cham dance/festivals.

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
CON TUS OJITOS PRISMA, YO ME  
ALUMBRARÉ

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
WITH YOUR EYES SO PERFECT, I  
WILL LIGHT MYSELF UP

X rushing round corner to find themselves face to face with vast, densely packed street-bazar/openair-market in full midnight swing.

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
A VER, A VER, A VER  
ENSÉÑAME ESE  
¡CÓMO BRILLA!  
¡MADRE MÍA, QUÉ GUAPO!  
DIAMANTES, AHORA SÍ QUE...  
CON DIAMANTES, ME GUSTA

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
LET ME SEE, LET ME SEE, LET  
ME SEE  
SHOW ME THAT ONE  
HOW SPARKLY!  
OH MY GOD, HOW BEAUTIFUL!  
DIAMONDS, I DO...  
WITH DIAMONDS, I LIKE IT

UNDEAD DRAGQUEEN & CHORUS stop to do a little crowd work  
among the stalls, handling goods, chattering.

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
¡QUÉ BONITA ESTÁ MI NOVIA  
QUE SE MERECE UN TRONO!

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
HOW BEAUTIFUL MY BRIDE LOOKS!  
SHE DESERVES A THRONE!

X's POV: WALKING SAM seems to be picking up pace, getting  
away.

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(¡REINA!)  
CORONA'A DE BRILLANTES HECHAS  
CON PERLAS Y ORO

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(QUEEN!)  
CROWN SO BRILLIANT, WITH  
PEARLS AND WITH GOLD

X adjusts accordingly then jolts into a dead sprint.

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(HA)  
CORONA'A DE BRILLANTES HECHAS  
CON PERLAS Y ORO

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(HA)  
CROWN SO BRILLIANT, WITH  
PEARLS AND WITH GOLD

View of figure/sculpture/relic/saint carried above crowd,  
veil shifting with the movement, flashes of cold white bone;  
above/behind this the clouds shift revealing another glimpse  
of unnaturally close moon.

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(QUIERA O NO QUIERA, LO  
QUIERA ELLA O NO QUIERA)

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(WHETHER SHE WANTS IT OR NOT,  
WHETHER SHE DOES, SHE  
DOESN'T)

WALKING SAM ahead, climbs up ladder onto adobe roof.

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(VA A ESTAR CONMIGO Y HASTA  
QUE SE MUERA)  
ES LO QUE HAY

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(SHE'S GOING TO BE WITH ME  
UNTIL SHE DIES)  
IT IS WHAT IT IS

X pushing harder, hits this ladder on a jump, rushing up  
after.

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(CLAVÁ' DE PLATA)

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(SILVER BRACELET)

UNDEAD DRAGQUEEN raises arms above crowd—OTHER UNDEAD QUEENS behind, creating the thousand arm illusion, only here they each hold a different knife—as everyone lifts EHECACHICHTLI to their lips and (in sync with vocals burst) sounds its layered terrifying scream.

NOTE: Native to the northern highlands of Mesoamerica, these instruments were fairly rare and played only to initiate two sacred activities; war and human sacrifice. Visually, they're always carved in the form of a deathhead. Sonically, their call lies somewhere between a human scream and a high wind. Some scholars have suggested this combination is no accident, that the summoning of a great wind as the forerunner to death was, in fact, an invocation of the wind deity Ehecatl, a form or aspect of the feathered serpent. Known in modern parlance as the Aztec Death Whistle, they have since become a staple among tourist knickknacks/party favors, but their sound remains as unnerving as ever.

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
CLAVÁ' DE PLATA  
(VA)

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
SILVER BRACELET  
(VA)

ECO panicked, jostling through crowd, looking everywhere for X, all at once obscured by—

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
SIN DECIR NA', A MÍ M'A  
JURA'O QUE ELLA POR MÍ SE  
MATA

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
WITHOUT SAYING ANYTHING SHE'S  
SWORN TO ME THAT FOR ME SHE'D  
KILL HERSELF

A line of TSU'TIKI dancers—stepping to a steady beat, rattles shaking, writhing bodies between their teeth—marches across frame/foreground.

NOTE: the TSU'TIKI (snake dance) is a Hopi tradition originating in the indigenous American southwest—more specifically in the region between modern ARIZONA and NEW MEXICO—during which [rattle]snakes are (eventually) released in the four cardinal directions, in search of storms/rain.

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
SIN DECIR NA', A MÍ M'A  
JURA'O QUE ELLA POR MÍ SE  
MATA

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
WITHOUT SAYING ANYTHING SHE'S  
SWORN TO ME THAT FOR ME SHE'D  
KILL HERSELF

Veiled figure borne through crowd, teetering on her paso, people toss flowers at her, rosaries on her neck as she passes.

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
QUE TOMA, QUE TOMA, QUE TOMA,  
QUE TOMA TOMA, TOMA.

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
WHAT IT TAKES, WHAT IT TAKES,  
WHAT IT TAKES, DRINK, DRINK,  
DRINK.

DESERT FATHER/HOLYMAN  
(murmuring, rhythmic)  
Regardez la lune. La lune a  
l'air très étrange. On dirait  
une femme qui sort d'un  
tombeau. Elle ressemble à une  
femme morte. On dirait  
qu'elle cherche des morts.

DESERT FATHER/HOLYMAN  
(murmuring, rhythmic)  
Look at the moon. How strange  
the moon seems. She is like a  
woman rising from a tomb. She  
is like a dead woman. You  
would fancy she was looking  
for dead things.

Edge of adobe roof-lined with candles in paper bags—we see  
one set of feet rush by, disturbing none of the lights, then  
another, causing several to flicker out; in background and  
dark, a figure seated crosslegged mutters line from OSCAR  
WILDE's SALOMÉ as if it's a mantra.

ROSALÍA (V.O.)  
(A LA VIRGENCITA DE LA  
MERCED, UN REZO)  
(PENITENCIA PAGO QUE POR SUS  
BESOS)

ROSALÍA (V.O.)  
(TO THE VIRGIN MARY, SO  
MERCIFUL, ONE PRAYER)  
(THE FIRE WENT OUT BECAUSE OF  
YOUR KISSES)

Head of enormous papier-mâché QUETZALCOATL (foreshadowing THE  
BEING OF THE WIND) godseyed, snaking above crowd, trailing  
ribbons in wind, in a localized variation of the WŪ LŌNG  
dance. Here—as backing vocals burst-in/wash-over chanting—the  
EHECACHICHTLI calls out again with its layered scream.

NOTE: the WŪ LŌNG, or Dragon dance, is one you've probably  
already seen before, even if you don't know it by name.  
Originating in China, it features the parading of a giant,  
flexible dragon puppet during a larger street festival.

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
PENITENCIA PAGO QUE POR SUS  
BESOS

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
THE FIRE WENT OUT BECAUSE OF  
YOUR KISSES

View from streets up at night clouds above thin dark alleyway  
—moon peeking through—a figure jumps the gap, another  
follows, almost doesn't make it, curses, and continues.

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
SI HAY ALGUIEN QUE AQUÍ SE  
OPONGA  
QUE NO LEVANTE LA VOZ  
(SHH)

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
IF THERE'S SOMEONE WHO  
OBJECTS  
MAY THEY NOT RAISE THEIR  
VOICE  
(SHH)

In closeup, lighter suddenly lit and held up just above  
jostling hands of crowd, moving steadily toward some object.

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(QUE NO LO ESCUCHE LA NOVIA)

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(LET THE BRIDE NOT HEAR THEM)

MATCH-CUT to twin figures rushing over rooftops in dark.

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(QUE NO SALGA LA LUNA QUE NO  
TIENE PA' QUÉ, NO TIENE PA'  
QUÉ, NO TIENE PA' QUÉ)

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(MAY THE MOON NOT COME OUT  
'CAUSE IT HAS NO REASON TO,  
'CAUSE IT DOESN'T HAVE A  
REASON, IT HAS NO REASON TO)

Lighter arrives at its destination, our UNDEAD DRAGQUEEN bending down from where she is held above crowd, adjusting her veil, and lighting up; again, the EHECACHICHTLI call out with a layered scream.

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
CON TUS OJITOS PRISMA, YO ME  
ALUMBRARÉ  
(QUE NO SALGA LA LUNA QUE NO  
TIENE PA' QUÉ, NO TIENE PA'  
QUÉ, NO TIENE PA' QUÉ)

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
WITH YOUR EYES SO PERFECT, I  
WILL LIGHT MYSELF UP  
(MAY THE MOON NOT COME OUT  
'CAUSE IT HAS NO REASON TO,  
'CAUSE IT DOESN'T HAVE A  
REASON, IT HAS NO REASON TO)

In close-up, we see WALKING SAM rushing through dark, jumping, winding, turning with supernatural ease; MATCH-CUT to close-up of X panting, rushing, stumbling through the shadows behind.

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
CON TUS OJITOS PRISMA, YO ME  
ALUMBRARÉ  
(QUE NO SALGA LA LUNA QUE NO  
TIENE PA' QUÉ, NO TIENE PA'  
QUÉ, NO TIENE PA' QUÉ)

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
WITH YOUR EYES SO PERFECT, I  
WILL LIGHT MYSELF UP  
(MAY THE MOON NOT COME OUT  
'CAUSE IT HAS NO REASON TO,  
'CAUSE IT DOESN'T HAVE A  
REASON, IT HAS NO REASON TO)

SANTA MUERTE's POV: the veil is lifted, UNDEAD DRAGQUEEN closes in billowing smoke, fading us/shot into dark.

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
CON TUS OJITOS PRISMA,

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
WITH YOUR EYES SO PERFECT,

Mid-jump, X misses footing; a vague sense of surprise, then realization as ROSALÍA begins her final vocal run and we/X/camera fall back, back, back into a vast, dark gasp.

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
YO ME ALUMBRARÉ

ROSALÍA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
I WILL IGNITE

By now, all sights and sounds have faded out besides the song; just as last lyric ends, there's one last EHECACHICHTLI scream, fading/echoing/distant, then a resounding thud.

9. EXT. THE PROCESSION & THE OFFERING - OUT OF CITY, INTO LA  
VIDENTE - TWIN LABYRINTHS, ENDLESS NIGHT

We are in darkness and stillness.

After a while, there comes a shuffling sound; first soft/faint, then getting stronger, closer. This paces around us for a while, before settling and subsiding, only to be overtaken by another sound; heavy, rhythmic purring.

X jolts upright/awake at this—looking very much the worse for wear, nose/face covered in dried blood—horrified to register the unfamiliar labyrinth of low buildings and dark shadows surrounding them. An impossibly fat cat mews and rubs against X's side, one we recognize from X's garden.

NOTE: Around 1953, Fellini wrote & directed a segment for the portmanteau film *L'Amore in Città*. In it, a young man arrives at the tenement of a local matchmaker, asking some kids on the stoop if they know which part of the building she lives in; they say yes then immediately get up and lead the way. From that point on, whenever they pass another kid—and they pass many—walking down halls, going up stairs, the new one will ask the others where they're going, then quietly, join them. Thus, by the time our young man reaches his matchmaker's door, he's escorted by a small army of children who are in no way shy/reticent and who he doesn't know how to get rid of.

The above is something like what I want to happen with X and the city cats in this scene—at least, initially—they become X's guides, X's guardians; leading X out of dark & winding streets/byways, into the desert, into the mountains.

Anyway, back to X: we walk slowly and silently through this dark, dead place—occasionally interrupted by an inquisitive mew, then another pilgrim is added to procession—X hand running idly along muraled/graffitied wall as we go.

At last, rounding a final corner, we find ourselves facing a vast asphalt parking lot—glittering black with broken glass like stars—and beyond this, the desert, the mountains, the horizon, silhouetted all at once by a distant burst of heatlightning.

From curb to dirt, X hesitates at the transition. Cats stop to turn glinting inquisitive eyes on them. X continues. We watch as the procession passes single file into the desert, panning up what at first seemed to be a the pole of a streetlight only to find great big plastic Jesus, lit up and crucified, yet somehow managing to hold up electric banner blinking "VAYA CON DIOS" & "GO WITH GOD" courtesy of "Nuestra Senora de la Noche".



The voyage out: focal shift from bleached and brittle bones-wearing, perhaps, a faded wedding ring-half-buried by desert sand/wind, to a shadow graph of our strange caravan passing in the distance, only slightly darker than the horizon. Isolated shadows of vast standing stones shaped like desiccated chortens, kurgans, ovoos; clustered mounds and ridges, the backs of sleeping monsters; the occasional jackalope; the odd rustling, whispering, impossible to place. Sighing, wind coils past, urging us foreword down this oddly clear trail.

A vinegaroon idles on a large boulder spiraled with fossils, then scuttles away as cat leaps into frame, then turns to look back at us/X, camera.

X, surrounded by cluster of cats, stares directly at us/camera; expression unreadable in the dark.

Before X, the mouth of LA VIDENTE—the seer, watcher, a living memory—stands open, expectant. Through the dim, her markings—like eyespots—gaze.

At last, X enters and, the moment they do, the mood changes; cats seemed comical at first, but now, in this place, amidst the howling of the wind, they're unnervingly vigilant shadows, twinkling eyes watching from the hills.

Viewed from above, X makes their way through this maze of densely clustered standing stones—many crowned by silent watchful guardians—slowly moving up/out to reveal its maze of twisted tangled trails, vein-like rootlets; by the end of this shot, as we/camera reach our full height, X should reach center/heart of the labyrinth. Think: Chicomoztoc, the seven caves and seven canyons; Mandala, an ingrown spiral leading from one way of being to another; Dante's concentric hells; Escher's impossible architecture; Yggdrasil, life in all its tangled branching chaos; the thousand and one nights, stories ever echoing, shifting, grading into...

X glances around this clearing/cliff-face; half-recognizing its altar, half-recollecting the mirrory eye of our rotting deer.

We watch from behind as, gradually, cautiously, X wanders out into the clearing here, approaching cliff-face/altar. Then—steadily, at a distance—we follow; gliding after X to find them staring out over landscape below. Now closing in, we see it too. X in silhouette (foreground) watches, at an immense distance, broken house and severed city sleeping fast in the valley. It's like this, thick in the eerie still of night, that X finally sees it.

The moon, impossibly close, monstrosly large, emerging from behind its clouds, appearing to pull and tear at the ground beneath it, heaving, breaking world up/apart. The ground beneath X's feet rumbles/trembles, wind now roaring gales.

X's face horrified, looking up over us/camera at moon—its light slowly climbing up X's body, Santa Muerte glinting on X's chest—when two shadowdark arms suddenly stretch out from behind X's slack shoulders like gaunt wings, glinting switchblade in hand. Swift as the wind, the sacrifice is made; WALKING SAM slitting X's throat and cutting shot in one & the same fluid motion.

10. INT. THE MINDFUCK SEQUENCE - PHASE I. THE LITTLE KIVA, ANTICHAMBER - SMALL/CIRCULAR ADOBE ROOM, NO WINDOWS/TIMING UNCLEAR

MATCH-CUT: X jolts awake—yet again—though, this time, more breathless and terrified than ever; grabbing at neck, gasping for air etc.

Setting: small, fire-lit, dirt-floored, windowless, circular adobe interior—walls crowded by designs of the same type/tenor as those of LA VIDENTE—at far side, a bone-beaded door to another room, also circular, but much larger, with a ladder at center leading up to a closed trapdoor.

We hear X's heartbeat, breath heaving, ringing in ears as X rapidly scans surroundings, trying to gauge their location, when they're eyes suddenly land on a HANNAH ARENDT quote they recognize—"every end in history necessarily contains a new beginning"—in the form of a lower back tattoo perched above a peeking thong.

X  
(faintly)  
What the fuck?

Owner of this—we'll call her G.W.T.L.B.T.—kneels beside where X is lying, and now casts an apathetic look at X over her shoulder, revealing ECO behind, not far away.

G.W.T.L.B.T. then turns back to glance at ECO, apathetic as ever, before rising and leaving room without a word.

X watches her go, then turns to find ECO kneeling close beside them.

ECO  
(soft)  
Moverse.

X cooperates as ECO guides X's head into his lap.

ECO (CONT'D)  
(soft)  
¿Bien?

ECO looks down at X more gently than X can remember anyone looking at them.

ECO (CONT'D)  
(soft)  
Holi.

ECO runs fingers through X's hair.

X  
(whispering)  
What's happening?

X, turns and buries their face into ECO as they strain to make any of this make sense, trying to sound as calm and collected as possible but clearly struggling.

ECO  
You were lost—but I found you.

X  
(dryly humorous)  
Still a bit lost, to be honest.

ECO  
(conceding this point,  
smiling at the humor)  
Yes. That is true. That is why you are here.

X  
(not following)  
I don't get it.

ECO  
These women, they can help you—me also—but you have to trust us. Can you do that?

There is a pause; X, returning ECO's gaze, all at once feels everything inside them well up to the surface.

X  
(confessing)  
You were right: I should never've crossed over—nothing makes sense anymore, I don't know what's going on, can't keep things together, apart, it all just keeps happening—I can't do this.

X is suddenly fighting tears again.

ECO  
(comforting)  
Shhh... Hey, listen. "Came here to  
find-what? Came here thinking-  
what?"

X  
(hollow mortified voice)  
I don't know-I didn't then-I never  
knew.

X baffled and humiliated at this sudden recollection of their  
own words; wondering what made them say this (or anything  
else) in the first place.

ECO  
No. Try again.

ECO takes up X's hand in his, begins tracing something onto  
X's palm over and over, again and again.

ECO (CONT'D)  
"Came here to find-what? Came here  
thinking-what?"

X  
I just wanted something different.  
I wanted to change. God, I feel so  
stupid.

ECO  
¿Y por qué?

X  
Thinking that it would just happen  
somehow.

ECO  
Did it not?

X  
(despondent, then abruptly  
half-annoyed)  
No, at least, not the way it was  
supposed to-I've become everything  
I was afraid of, feel like I've let  
everyone dow-okay, what the fuck  
are you doing?

ECO chuckles at X's change of tone & continues tracing little  
triangle around little scar in X's palm.

ECO  
Have you ever seen this?

Without any clear gesture, X somehow knows ECO is talking about the symbol he's shaping onto their hand.

X  
It's a fucking triangle.

Now X is the one who chuckles.

ECO  
(trying to stay serious,  
but smiling a little)  
No. It is not a fucking triangle.  
It is a delta. You know delta, yes?

X  
Means difference, right?

ECO  
Delta is change—listen—imagine a  
river.

ECO suddenly runs hand up X's forearm, then traces line back down vein to X's palm.

ECO (CONT'D)  
Delta is where it opens.

ECO lays a gentle finger on the scar in the center of X's palm.

X  
(very softly)  
The mouth.

X absentmindedly picking at their lip with other hand.

Here, G.W.T.L.B.T. reenters—still apathetic, vape in hand—interrupting the moment; both X & ECO look up at her inquisitively.

G.W.T.L.B.T.  
(vape-pen in mouth, no  
question in her tone)  
¿Listo?

ECO glances back down at X.

ECO  
(looking down at X)  
Ready?

X hesitates, darting a glance between them.

ECO (CONT'D)  
(glancing up, apologetic)  
Aún no, necesitamos unos minutos  
más.

G.W.T.L.B.T. rolls eyes and heaves out an exasperated sigh/  
vape-ring.

G.W.T.L.B.T.  
(tone lilting with sarcasm  
at the end)  
Vuelvo enseguida.

G.W.T.L.B.T. returns to distant room through vape-cloud.

X  
What's going to happen?

ECO  
You want to find your story, right?

X  
Sure, but—who are these people?

ECO  
They are here to help. We are all  
here to help.

X seems put off by the evasion, so ECO takes a new tac.

ECO (CONT'D)  
Hey. You trust me?

X nearly hesitates again, then half-smiles to self.

X  
You know, it's strange, I'm not  
scared. I don't understand. But I'm  
not afraid anymore.

ECO smiles, then calls out through door.

ECO  
¡Listo!

X turns to look through doorway.

X's POV: slow zoom toward door into other room, softly swaying strings of beads, shifting shadows, chanting, perhaps distantly a muffled sound oddly like whalesong emanating from somewhere deep in the earth; on ground/floor of other room rests an strange, impossibly large/wrinkled hand--then, this rises, gestures--as an odd, impossibly old/layered voice comes in.

ASA NISI MASA (O.C.)  
Apaga las luces.

ASA NISI MASA (O.C.)  
Turn out the lights.

Sudden cut to black.

NOTE: perhaps the best way to describe the voice[s] of ASA NISI MASA--mother of the mountains--is to state what it can't be: one, singular; two, a chorus speaking in perfect synchrony; three, a lead with some backup. No, what I want here is a shifting, changing fog of voices--all from X's past, yes--but multivalent, with no fixed or identifiable center, and always, always whispering in the background. Imagine you're helping set up a surprise party--the lights are out and your vision's never been much to brag about--you feel your way through the room as people go on whispering, sometimes to you, but always to eachother, coming in and out of sonic-focus, as it were; that's something like what I want here.

11. INT. THE MINDFUCK SEQUENCE - PHASE II. THE GREAT KIVA, CENTER OF THE EARTH, SANCTUM SANCTORUM ("HOLY OF HOLIES"), GARBHAGIYA ("WOMB CHAMBER") - LARGE/CIRCULAR ADOBE ROOM, NO WINDOWS/TIMING UNCLEAR

Briefly, we linger in darkness of last scene. Perhaps, from somewhere far above us, the sound of wind.

Then a lighter blazes into being in close-up and a steady hand; it's with this our true backing audio for this scene begins, MONGOLIAN THROAT SINGING.

NOTE: the specific MONGOLIAN THROAT SINGING reference track I use for this scene was recorded by a group called TENZIN RIVER. That said, I'm flexible on this since this track doesn't specify lyrical content or cultural context which, for me, this project, and specifically this moment, is fairly important. So, if I find a better track, one where those details are clear and the overall vibe coincides, I'll use that instead. Until then, however, this track approximates the atmosphere of this moment perfectly.

X (V.O.)  
All love comes from the same place,

ASA NISI MASA (O.C.)  
(low murmuring monotone)  
Has dormido lo suficiente; ha  
llegado el momento de que te  
desagas del peso de la  
existencia y la mente  
cíclica.

ASA NISI MASA (O.C.)  
(low murmuring monotone)  
You have slept long enough;  
the time has come for you to  
shed the weight of cyclic  
existence and mind.

Slowly a blade—X's switch—is passed through the flame, turned over, and passed thru again.

NOTE: the text ASA NISI MASA is reading/chanting is (mostly) verse excerpts from the *TIBETAN BOOK OF THE DEAD*—I adapted some, just to keep us focused. Who knows, I may even mix a little RILKE/WHITMAN in there—we'll see.

X (V.O.)  
just beneath the skin, just beyond  
the self.

ASA NISI MASA (O.C.)  
(low murmuring monotone)  
Quema el pasado y el futuro,  
el yo y la historia.

ASA NISI MASA (O.C.)  
(low murmuring monotone)  
Burn away past and future,  
self and story.

X, a small figure in a great darkness, taking off shirt with ECO's help before a low flickering fire in this strange, enormous, primordial room. X glancing up once it's off.

X (V.O.)  
Used to think you could. Now, you  
know.

ASA NISI MASA (O.C.)  
(low murmuring monotone)  
La entropía es inevitable, la  
vida, pero una muerte no  
reconocida, cada momento,  
cada emoción conduce aquí;

ASA NISI MASA (O.C.)  
(low murmuring monotone)  
Entropy is inevitable—life,  
but a dying unrecognized—  
every moment, every emotion  
leads here;

Roving view of ceiling: long strings of bells, bones, shells, and beads dangle from roof ribbed with massive tusks.

X (V.O.)  
They were right.

ASA NISI MASA (O.C.)  
(low murmuring monotone)  
el cuello del reloj de arena,

ASA NISI MASA (O.C.)  
(low murmuring monotone)  
the neck of the hourglass,

Viewed from above; slightly disturbed dirt patch in floor/corner.



G.W.T.L.B.T. kneels, carefully puts dishwashing gloves on over her frenchtips—perhaps muttering less than reverent thoughts about all this—then softly sifts surface with pink garden trowel; small, squat, spineless little cacti are revealed.

X (V.O.)

You don't feel like a poet because  
you aren't, not really.

ASA NISI MASA (O.C.) (low murmuring monotone) el lado oscuro de una página vacía.	ASA NISI MASA (O.C.) (low murmuring monotone) dark side of an empty page.
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Figures decorating wall—noteworthy chromatic inversion of those in LA VIDENTE, dark on light this time—ominous crowd around some hunted kill or sacrifice, seeming to move with the flickering firelight.

X (V.O.)

You're a maker; something deeper,  
darker, more fundamental.

ASA NISI MASA (O.C.) (low murmuring monotone) Todos los fenómenos son, en última instancia, desinteresados, vacíos, libres de elaboración conceptual.	ASA NISI MASA (O.C.) (low murmuring monotone) All phenomena are ultimately selfless, empty, free of conceptual elaboration.
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Branching antlered skull of sacrificed deer—hung with flower chains snake skins—watches over fire from high up on opposite wall; crescent moon dabbed red across its pale forehead.

X (V.O.)

Don't need pen, paper, power,  
control—just a moment

ASA NISI MASA (O.C.) (low murmuring monotone) En su dinámica se asemejan a una ilusión, un espejismo, un sueño o un espejo.	ASA NISI MASA (O.C.) (low murmuring monotone) In their dynamic they resemble an illusion, mirage, dream, or mirror.
---	---

X being painted by ECO with the RUNES OF HONORIUS—see *Kwaidan* (1964)—glancing up at us/camera on "just a moment".

X (V.O.)

this'll do as well as any.

ASA NISI MASA (O.C.)  
(low murmuring monotone)  
Un eco, un reflejo de la luna  
en el agua.

ASA NISI MASA (O.C.)  
(low murmuring monotone)  
An echo, a reflection of the  
moon in water.

The blindfold selected (rather haphazardly) by G.W.T.L.B.T.

X (V.O.)  
Eyes closed.

ASA NISI MASA (O.C.)  
(low murmuring monotone)  
Desgraciados los que se  
ahogan

ASA NISI MASA (O.C.)  
(low murmuring monotone)  
Unfortunate are those  
drowning

X shuts eyes in closeup.

X (V.O.)  
There.

ASA NISI MASA (O.C.)  
(low murmuring monotone)  
en tales profundidades,

ASA NISI MASA (O.C.)  
(low murmuring monotone)  
in such depths,

Through the dark, ECO approaches blindfold, in hand, to put  
on X/us/camera.

X (V.O.)  
Ready?

ASA NISI MASA (O.C.)  
(low murmuring monotone)  
aislado pero encarnando todo.

ASA NISI MASA (O.C.)  
(low murmuring monotone)  
isolated, yet embodying all.

Blackscreen.

X (V.O.)  
Focus.

ASA NISI MASA (O.C.)  
(low murmuring monotone)  
Miras en tu propia mente

ASA NISI MASA (O.C.)  
(low murmuring monotone)  
Look into your own mind

VISUAL BURST 1. 5150 TAROT CANYON, NIGHT, X's hands throw  
open a window.

X (V.O.)  
Feel it moving,

ASA NISI MASA (O.C.)  
(low murmuring monotone)  
miras dentro de tu propia  
mente y ves si es así o no.

ASA NISI MASA (O.C.)  
(low murmuring monotone)  
See whether it is like this  
or not.

Blackscreen.

X (V.O.)

shifting,

ASA NISI MASA (O.C.)  
(low murmuring monotone)  
Comprender abstracciones,

ASA NISI MASA (O.C.)  
(low murmuring monotone)  
Know abstractions,

VISUAL BURST 2. 5150 TAROT CANYON, NIGHT, X's hands unlock door from inside.

X (V.O.)

coiling—somewhere near

ASA NISI MASA (O.C.)  
(low murmuring monotone)  
las imágenes no son  
estrictamente indefinibles

ASA NISI MASA (O.C.)  
(low murmuring monotone)  
images are not strictly  
indefinable

Blackscreen

X (V.O.)

the nape of your neck,

ASA NISI MASA (O.C.)  
(low murmuring monotone)  
sino insustanciales en su  
movimiento

ASA NISI MASA (O.C.)  
(low murmuring monotone)  
but insubstantial in their  
motion

VISUAL BURST 3. 5150 TAROT CANYON, NIGHT, house viewed from across the street in the dark, everything open, lights all turned out, X waits in the doorway.

X (V.O.)

small of your back,

ASA NISI MASA (O.C.)  
(low murmuring monotone)  
Como una brisa por el aire.

ASA NISI MASA (O.C.)  
(low murmuring monotone)  
like a breeze through the  
air.

Blackscreen.

X (V.O.)

along the lines of your knuckles

ASA NISI MASA (O.C.)  
(low murmuring monotone)  
Todo lo extraño debe ser  
cortado

ASA NISI MASA (O.C.)  
(low murmuring monotone)  
Everything extraneous must be  
cut away

Closeup of ECO's hand brushing X's as X lies there in the dark.

X (V.O.)  
like teeth against tongue, this is.

ASA NISI MASA (O.C.)  
(low murmuring monotone)  
de adentro hacia afuera,  
horizontes

ASA NISI MASA (O.C.)  
(low murmuring monotone)  
from the inside out, horizons

Viewed from above: X lies blindfolded center screen, head in ECO's lap, while beyond them G.W.T.L.B.T. sprinkles a salt circle.

X (V.O.)  
Where magic comes from art comes  
from.

ASA NISI MASA  
(low murmuring monotone)  
desbordándose, mezclando un  
pensamiento

ASA NISI MASA  
(low murmuring monotone)  
spilling over, grading one  
thought

ASA NISI MASA chanting mountainous in dark & blanket at far end of the room, a desert owl vigilant beside her, watching us.

X (V.O.)  
God comes from the simple act of  
feeling, as intensely as possible;

ASA NISI MASA (O.C.)  
(low murmuring monotone)  
con otro. Debes encontrar

ASA NISI MASA (O.C.)  
(low murmuring monotone)  
into another. You must find

Dishwashing gloves tap X's chin in closeup, X opens, a glob of pale green goo is shoved in with precious little ceremony; X chews and swallows.

X (V.O.)  
just beneath the skin, just beyond  
words—

ASA NISI MASA (O.C.)  
(low murmuring monotone)  
Sentido en el proceso,  
dirección

ASA NISI MASA (O.C.)  
(low murmuring monotone)  
meaning in the process,  
direction

X's now cleansed blade is brought in, carried through dark by dishwashing gloves and handed to a pair of gentle hands, ECO's.

X (V.O.)  
and you do—or something in you  
does.

ASA NISI MASA (O.C.)  
(low murmuring monotone)  
en el ritual. Ofreciéndote a  
cuento e

ASA NISI MASA (O.C.)  
(low murmuring monotone)  
in the ritual. Offering self  
to story and

ECO bends down to press his lips to X's forehead.

X (V.O.)  
No more explanations.

ASA NISI MASA (O.C.)  
(low murmuring monotone)  
cuento para cambiar

ASA NISI MASA (O.C.)  
(low murmuring monotone)  
story to change the

Viewed from above: ECO traces a little line over the spot he  
kissed with his finger.

X (V.O.)  
No more guidance.

ASA NISI MASA (O.C.)  
(low murmuring monotone)  
el sueño concéntrico,

ASA NISI MASA (O.C.)  
(low murmuring monotone)  
dream concentric,

The VIRGIN glints at us through the dark, rising softly and  
steadily, on X's chest

X (V.O.)  
Fuck meaning.

ASA NISI MASA (O.C.)  
(low murmuring monotone)  
insidioso.

ASA NISI MASA (O.C.)  
(low murmuring monotone)  
insidious.

Viewed from above: ECO makes the incision, up and down,  
center of X's forehead—X's brow contracts in sudden painlines  
parallel to this mark.

X (V.O.)  
Make it—ambient, unsteady—as  
feeling.

ASA NISI MASA (O.C.)  
(low murmuring monotone)  
El tiempo es radial y el  
resplandor necesariamente  
inestable,

ASA NISI MASA (O.C.)  
(low murmuring monotone)  
Time, radial—radiance  
necessarily unstable—

X's hands claw into dirt floor.

X (V.O.)  
All comes from the same place;

ASA NISI MASA (O.C.)  
(low murmuring monotone)  
nada más allá de los límites  
del pasado y el futuro

ASA NISI MASA (O.C.)  
(low murmuring monotone)  
swim out beyond the bounds of  
past and future

ECO strokes the cut with his fingertips, now distinctly  
labial, like a closed mouth or [minds]eye.

X (V.O.)  
just beneath,

ASA NISI MASA (O.C.)  
(low murmuring monotone)  
hacia el centro, el origen  
desde el cual todo se  
desangra

ASA NISI MASA (O.C.)  
(low murmuring monotone)  
to the center, the origin  
from which all bleeds through

X forces their hands & breathing to relax.

X (V.O.)  
just beyond...

ASA NISI MASA (O.C.)  
(low murmuring monotone)  
hacia el otro lado

ASA NISI MASA (O.C.)  
(low murmuring monotone)  
to the other side.

At last, ECO works a finger in—X gasps, ears ringing with  
pain—sudden cut to black & silence.

NOTE: gore & obscenity share the dubious distinction of being  
ubiquitous taboos; they're everywhere yet we aren't supposed  
to see them. As two truly primal expressions of the human  
body in an age when that entity is less perceived than ever,  
I want to explore the way gore/obscenity might be depicted  
differently. This idea came to me in the midst of a  
documentary on the life and work of Georgia O'Keeffe; so many  
of her paintings explore the body through incredibly  
visceral, yet inherently roundabout ways. On some level, I  
want to see if I can't inverse her technique; instead of  
flowers as bodies, bodies as flowers. Mind you, I'm saying  
this as someone who's as disturbed by sudden gore/obscenity  
as anyone else, yet that very involuntary reaction seems to  
be telling me there's something here worth exploring.

12. EXT. EMPTY STAGE / STREET - DARKER THAN NIGHT

Blackscreen.

X  
(low, hoarse whisper)  
Three, two, one.

Lonesome looking streetlamp comes flickering into life (just after "one") revealing X, back to us (at first), alone in empty street surrounded by a dark somehow impenetrable yet teeming; overall, setting reminiscent of that in ACT III. scene 2.

The soundscape of this scene, however, is very different: combining the whistle of wind with NASA's 2022 data sonification of the Black Hole at the Center of the Perseus Galaxy Cluster.

A tarot card billows into view on the wind from somewhere in the dark, sailing right past X—who whirls around as it passes—to land not too far off on ground.

Card lying in foreground directly in front of us/camera; X in background staring at it (& by extension, us) suspiciously. Finally, X approaches.

X's POV: they get close enough to recognize "THE MAGICIAN" when card suddenly flutters off—away from X/us/camera—down street, into dark as breeze resumes.

X hesitates, then follows. Another streetlight hums into being. X stops, seeing card a few feet away.

X takes a few steps toward it, pretending to approach, then abruptly turns to go where the edge of street should be, somewhere just beyond the wall of darkness.

Another card blows in hard and fast, cutting X's cheek. X is shocked, but their inner rebel can't be ignored anymore.

X starts running in direction this card came from and, suddenly, they all come rushing in like hail, hitting X hard and fast, cutting their skin their clothes until, all at once, X finds themselves plummeting through the dark.

Abruptly, X's headlong fall takes them tearing/breaking through layer after layer of different scenery/worlds, until, at last, the desert floor rushes up to meet them. Shock of impact again cuts to X waking with a gasp.

### 13. INT. IVORY TOWER - LOBBY - NO WINDOWS/TIMING UNCLEAR

X jolts up from desk at work where they've—apparently—fallen asleep again. But something about this seems off, everything is empty, bare, even the bell that used to sit on desk has disappeared, leaving only an unbleached little shadow of itself on the faux-wood surface. Soon, other details, discrepancies drift to X's attention.

In distance X hears a floor polishing machine roaring away. X gets up and walks halls following sound; as they go X can't help but note newly polished floors, reflective as mirrors.

At last, rounding a corner, we find custodian at work, back to X/us/camera, jamming away to the walkman in their back pocket, shoutsinging KING HARVEST's *DANCING IN THE MOONLIGHT* so far off-key that it's almost unrecognizable.

X  
(suddenly realizing who  
they're watching)  
You can't be serious.

Shocked, yet somehow not at all surprised, X can't repress a light little giggle as UHAUL JOE swings around with floor polisher, eyes shut, really hitting those moves & missing those notes.

At this, UHAUL JOE happens to glance up & see X, hands on hips, trying not to laugh at end of the hall; letting out a startled yelp, UHAUL JOE accidentally sends floor polisher skidding sideways into wall--then pauses, with X, in suspense before bursting, also with X, into breathless waves of laughter.

14. INT. IVORY TOWER - DESCENT - NO WINDOWS/TIMING UNCLEAR

Cut to UHAUL JOE & X walking at a clipped pace, down winding, interchangeable halls--low ceilings, no windows, humming florescent lights--as we follow. UHAUL JOE pushes cart of cleaning supplies with one very garrulous wheel, squeaking constantly and screeching on turns.

X  
Wait, so--what happened?

Turn/screech. Squeaking. Squeaking. Squeaking.

UHAUL JOE  
(proud, suprised)  
They called me back!

Squeaking. Squeaking. Squeaking. Squeaking.

X  
(falling back into UHAUL  
JOE's vein of humor)  
Just couldn't live without you?

Turn/screech. Squeaking. Squeaking. Squeaking.



UHAUL JOE  
(huffing out a laugh)  
For half the pay and twice the work

Squeaking. Squeaking. Squeaking. Turn/screech.

UHAUL JOE (CONT'D)  
(reconsidering)  
-but, hey, it's a living.

Squeaking. Squeaking. Squeaking. Turn/screech.

X  
(doubtful)  
Is it really though?

X glances around at the unnerving bareness of this place as squeaking continues irrepressible.

UHAUL JOE  
Seen better, been worse-ain't so  
bad when all's said and done.

Turn/screech. Squeaking. Squeaking. Squeaking.

UHAUL JOE (CONT'D)  
Sure, for you, maybe. But me?

Squeaking. Squeaking. Squeaking. Turn/screech.

UHAUL JOE (CONT'D)  
I don't mind it-which reminds me,

UHAUL JOE comes to a sudden stop-squeaky wheel screams in agony-and starts rummaging through pockets.

X looks around again; recognizing with surprise the long, dark corridor beside them as that which leads to stacks. Then a thought wells up.

Turning to look at UHAUL JOE, X finds him now fishing through compartments of cleaning cart.

UHAUL JOE (O.C.) (CONT'D)  
There!

X sighs, knowing, exactly what's coming but still can't believe it.

UHAUL JOE (CONT'D)  
Hate to ask, kid, but this time

UHAUL JOE-smiling as he runs through a ring of keys, hundreds of them-approaches X/us.

UHAUL JOE (CONT'D)  
I really gotta insist.

Close-up of X's [left]hand as UHAUL JOE places key right over little scar in center, folds X's fingers over it, then pats it with his own; on 2nd pat, we cut to black.

15. INT. IVORY TOWER - STACKS/ARCHIVES - DARKNESS

UHAUL JOE (POST-LAP)  
See ya on the otherside.

Blackscreen. Then, from somewhere in the depths of this, distant voices—whispering, amused—suddenly, they disperse. The door creaks as it's opened, X's old iphone flashlight fanning out into the dark. We enter stacks, creepy as ever, only this time shelves are all empty.

X  
(very faintly whispering)  
Done it again... one year in every  
ten... a sort of walking miracle...  
million filaments... it was an  
accident... dying is an art, like  
everything else... there is a charge...  
your opus... valuable... melts to a  
shriek... beware... out of the ash...  
rise... air.

As X walks, they whisper fragments of SYLVIA PLATH's *LADY LAZARUS* (1965) like a kind of spell to give themselves courage against the strange sounds in the distance, quiet but growing louder the deeper we get—and what does heart of darkness hide?

The television: It's on fox news, as usual, and forms the only source of light/sound in stacks (though fairly extreme in both those areas). Before it, in her old chair, X recognizes GRANDMA's perennial ghostlike perm. As X runs toward her, they catch the sound of her oxygen mask/machine in place and pumping slow.

It's only as X walks around to view GRANDMA from the front that they realize what's made them so nervous. Covering mouth, shocked, sickened, GRANDMA sits with chest dissected, ribcage spread out in bloody wings, leaving her lungs exposed to the air and they strangely/impossibly continue expanding and contracting, though only faintly. I don't know how else to describe it besides saying that, right now, GRANDMA looks unnervingly like baby from *Eraserhead* (1977).

From distance & darkness, we watch X stand there between GRANDMA & television; suddenly, their knees buckle, X drops to the floor, and starts to cry, pressing hands to their face, muttering something over and over again; perhaps, I'm sorry.

When X finally opens their eyes, they find beside them, in oxygen machine chord, a knot. X sits up, reaches out, takes it in hand, this one's a hard one. Not that it's very big; it's just very compact, layered. As they untie, we hear it start to happen, the building is giving way. By the time X has finally got it figured out, entire TOWER shifts with a jolt, then everything starts floating/falling/rushing down into a dark & silent collapse.

16. INT./EXT. 5150 TAROT CANYON - MAIN ROOM, BATHROOM, GARDEN - MORNING THEN, INEXPLICABLY, ON THE OTHER SIDE, NIGHT

X wakes up to eerie calm of 5150 TAROT CANYON in morning light, finding self on floor of main room, surrounded by debris—bits from their stories, parts of house, clutter of religious knickknacks, and a chaos of Tarot cards—X's iphone lies shattered once and for all on floor a few feet away. All doors and windows are open, the wind blowing softly through room. Yet, beneath & beyond this, X hears the voices, louder/clearer than before.

Close up of drawer being opened, the switchblade—inexplicably in its rightful place—is taken up. X's POV as they approach bathroom, voices/whispers getting louder, more distinct, whistling through crack with a faint breeze.

Then walks to bathroom where voices/whispers and wind are coming through mirror with a hiss

New shot: X approaches mirror/camera/us, switchblade in hand, we watch as they open the knife, then glance up us/camera/reflection

In full length profile, we see X suddenly swing this back for a blow.

Blackscreen. We hear a thud. Suddenly, a ray of light shines through, sharp, thin, and growing/fracturing/multiplying as we watch—until, at last, X looks in.

Seeing only darkness, hearing only the wind—wild and strangely human—X stares for a long time. At last, they come to a decision and climb through—cutting hands and feet as they go—into the black, into nothing, into... where we/camera wait for them. Another fall, this time short, landing soft, wet, cool.

X's eyes adjust to the dark to reveal they have somehow fallen into their garden, in heart and heat of night, plants overgrown, palefaced devilsnare in bloom, all swaying, moving like a world underwater.

The cats come in close, brushing against X like fish around a reef, then something touches X's face. They look up. The moon is gone. In it's place, stretching from X into eternity, towers the BEING OF THE WIND.

This creature I imagine as a kind of Quetzalcoatl made up of a thousand childhood drawings scaled one atop another, feather shredded newspapers, litter from the streets, with a switchblade mane, hypodermic fangs, and [gods]eyes of yarn.

Conceptually, this creature is rooted in my desire to bring local lore/myth rushing into the modern age; to make magic somehow mundane and the mundane somehow magical. In terms of its appearance/aesthetic, I was heavily inspired by the MERZ art/collage movement, Alfie Bradley's *Knife Angel*, and the kinetic sculptures of U-ram Choe.

We end on a shot of this BEING towering over house-viewed from height and distance of LA VIDENTE—billowing out over desert & city, stretching far across the night sky, gently moving/shifting/coiling in a neverending breeze.

17. EXT. KAM!KAZE SEQUENCE - FLYING OVER CITY, DESERT - DAWN  
LIGHT WASHING OVER ALL, WORLD REPOPULATED

Our last official scene/shot is be both airborne and continuous.

X (V.O.)

Murals in the streets, fossils in the mountains, lonesome upallnight gas-station/motel/stripmall parkinglots—more satellites than stars here—roach on the wall in a washing-hungout sunrise; when it comes, this is how. Image on image running together—no connection, no plot—just a feeling. Sometimes not even that. What you didn't understand—what you were afraid to understand—is that there's nothing you can do about it.

Cut to our/X's POV, aerial, flying out over city on a desert wind; dawn breaks like a wave of light across manycolored homes, washing over/into its empty streets.

As city wakes, people crowd out into veins and arteries—  
repopulating our/X's once empty world. We curve and shift  
with the smooth/gliding unpredictability of the wind here.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)

In you, something is aching,  
needing to exist, something that  
can't while you do. Tried to stop  
it, to control it, but resistance  
only makes it stronger—and you  
don't really want control anyway—  
so, what then? Contingencies.  
Interstices. Manycolored homes  
under manycolored skies. Swim out  
far enough—into desert, into city,  
into bars and cars and  
conversations with strangers you  
always used to avoid—and disappear.  
'I's are lies we live behind to  
make it all make sense, but maybe  
it's not supposed to. Maybe.  
Mountains look like bodies, all  
huddled together. Canyons running  
out like roots, like veins. But  
inside, sunlight crested, they  
feel. Maybe. Like wombs, folds of  
skin and sea, shell of an ear being  
born—hear it? You think—maybe—it's  
just the wind.

Gradual change in our landscape as city gives way to desert  
beneath us, houses climbing into hills. Here and there we spy  
families of deer walking back up into the wilderness. As we  
go we fall in with a column of migrating butterflies.

X (V.O.) (CONT'D)

As a kid, this was how you imagined  
inspiration; some vast airwave  
surging across nameless plains—  
oceans of grass under deserts of  
sky all rushing together—to meet  
you. But it doesn't really work  
like that. Here, the wind doesn't  
just gust and go away, it lives, a  
neverending movement—shifting,  
coiling closer; now near the nape  
of your neck, now your center, the  
small of your back, winding between  
your fingers, hiding beneath your  
tongue—a whisper dancing with you  
and no direction—kamikaze.

Butterfly entourage eventually falls away as we reorient to face the west where, falling small and distant on horizon, we spot the smiling crescent of a daytime moon.

Suddenly, a violent gust envelopes us and the BEING OF THE WIND rushes past, snaking its way toward this horizon as poem concludes.

END OF ACT IV.

## EPILOGUE

### 1. BLACKSCREEN - MARTHA GRAHAM'S 'THE PRACTICE' - CLOSING CREDITS

MARTHA (V.O.)

I believe that we learn by practice.

Instead of a song for these, I want MARTHA. Both her voice and her message here belong in this story. They are, as they ought to be, its last word. The audio here is from her essay titled *An Athlete of God* (1953).

MARTHA (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Whether it means to learn to dance by practicing dancing or to learn to live by practicing living, the principles are the same. Practice means to perform, over and over again in the face of all obstacles, some act of vision, of faith, of desire. Practice is a means of inviting the perfection desired. I think the reason dance has held such an ageless magic for the world is that it has been the symbol of the performance of living. Many times I hear the phrase "the dance of life." It is close to me for a very simple and understandable reason. The instrument through which the dance speaks is also the instrument through which life is lived: the human body. It is the instrument by which all the primaries of experience are made manifest. It holds in its memory all matters of life and death and love. Dancing appears glamorous, easy, delightful. But the path to the paradise of that achievement is not easier than any other. There is fatigue so great that the body cries, even in its sleep. There are times of complete frustration; there are daily small deaths. Then I need all the comfort that practice has stored in my memory and a tenacity of faith.

(MORE)

MARTHA (V.O.) (CONT'D)

But it must be the kind of faith  
that Abraham had, wherein he  
"staggered not at the promise of  
God through unbelief." In a dancer  
there is a reverence for such  
forgotten things as the miracle of  
the small beautiful bones and their  
delicate strength. In a thinker  
there is a reverence for the beauty  
of the alert and directed and lucid  
mind. In all of us who perform  
there is an awareness of the smile  
which is part of the equipment, or  
gift, of the acrobat. We have all  
walked the high wire of  
circumstance at times. We recognize  
the gravity pull of the earth as he  
does. The smile is there because he  
is practicing living at that  
instant of danger. He does not  
choose to fall.

If there's more credits to roll after Martha concludes—  
and with all the visual/technical elements I've crammed in,  
there probably would be—throw on KING HARVEST'S *DANCING IN  
THE MOONLIGHT* & let's party our way out...

END OF 5150 TAROT CANYON



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## VITA

Jacob B. Phillips was born in Plano, Texas on September 19, 1994. After graduating from John Paul II High School in 2013, they attended the University of Texas at Austin where, in 2017, they received a BA degree in English. In the fall of 2020, they entered the Creative Writing MFA program at the University of Texas in El Paso—am I easier to think about like this? Some facts. Few dates. No feelings. Or is this not about me at all?