

Everyone Alive Wants Answers

A young-Philip-Seymour-Hoffman-looking guy in a dark t-shirt. A few inches north of his solar plexus a beam of light is refracted into rainbow through the slender quadrilateral of a logo for a new cryptocurrency— the dark side of Bitcoin. He's leaning over a café counter, shoulders drawn toward his heart, and he takes my order in illegible penmanship before switching the music to LCD Soundsystem. I heard I'm blowing Marxism to pieces. I tell him I like his shirt, I mean I like this town's casual relationship with the future. We could talk about it if we weren't at work.

Mark Fisher says libido doesn't deal in organic wholes; I know the pornographic arts require mastery of surfaces, cut-ups, debasement of the codes that seal the self airtight to maintain homeostasis. What cybernetics tried to discover and replicate.

So the younger are happy to trade ghost money. Maybe they read substance into the flatness. Some days it chills me to feel known exclusively from two dimensions. But that's just pathos. I have a new mind now that assimilates lossiness, the magazine quality of desire, depthless rumors about the possibilities of skin on skin.

He's a nerd. Probably into H.P. Lovecraft. I haven't read "The Color Out of Space" even though a few years I totally said I had to gain someone's respect.

And I'm sitting in his café reading this card I got over the weekend which lists the effects of 2C-B (4-Bromo-2, 5-dimethoxyphenethylamine):

A psychedelic drug first synthesized in 1974 by Dr. Alexander Shulgin. At lower doses 2C-B produces a mild entactogenic effect, with few or no hallucinations. At higher doses 2C-B produces intense visual effects. Moving objects leave "trails." Surfaces may appear to be covered with geometric patterns and may appear to be moving or "breathing." Colors may appear from nowhere.

I want to talk to this man about the net worth of nothing. The epistemic value of no, omniscient narration, colors that appear from God-knows-where. How pop music taught me that nothing turns itself inside out. How in the world of things bound by open secrets, nowhere absorbs the autonomous horizons of the mind. If money appears as if by magic it should at least grow on trees, that's my opinion. I want to tell him.

Last weekend I met a man in a mauve belly shirt and acid wash jeans, long slim fingers, ugly skin. A manic pixie dream boy. He only had one name, that's what he told me. Come party he said and I replied I'm Emma Stamm and I don't want to join any party, I am tired of them.

He said the town he's from is so small that he swiped through all his Tinder matches in a single hour, that he had to expand the gender options, then — skipping half a conversational beat to hand me a postcard — he circled to pornography. He revealed a lot of the nothing at the peak of his dreams. A claw-foot bathtub with bubbles spilled over onto the warm lacquer floor, soundless as an anechoic chamber or sensory deprivation tank. A place of nothing-privilege where nobodies mind their own business. That's the party boy's fantasy.

And he fell silent as he produced another card. This one's about ketamine he told me, over-steady eyes like a sidewalk clairvoyant. One for nitrous oxide, another for cocaine. He said it was for safety and I replied that after so many parties I know how to stay nimble, how to be well. That I give equal attention to knowledge and its other, but it's hard to behave normally after a pure encounter with either one.

And now some of the cards live here, where normality is law, some are slipped between the journals in my bedroom. I took so many. I don't know if they're souvenirs or notes of affection or ... ? For some, personal integration means learning everything there is to learn about oneself, for others it's an article of faith.

Emma Stamm