

• all shows start from bedrooms •



I know this show started from a bedroom. In a different way, thought, than the fallacious sentence I can't keep my typing fingers away from: all shows start from bedrooms.

The word for bedroom, across different languages, contemplates an enclosed space, a sleeping quarter, or, as in the English case, the room of the bed not to say the room for the bed.

I wrote a text for a show Jana did in 2024 at Milky Way Gallery, New York. The text centered not a bed but a mattress — a more constitutive element of a bed (and therefore of a bedroom, in English at least) than the bed frame itself. Jana needed a mattress and, as I was moving and wouldn't be needing mine anymore, I was giving her mine. The text went on about the back-and-forth of this mattress, its deformations and logistics, to contour the surfaces her show dwelled on: horizontal surfaces composed of mostly glass plates, held up by wire structures, cardboard boxes, and other found materials.

Back to the sentence I accuse fallacious, "all shows start from bedrooms:" still fresh in my mind, because I wrote about it recently, is a work by the artist Carolyn Lazard. Called Carolyn Working, from 2020, it is a thin tip pen outline drawing of Carolyn Lazard in bed, between the covers, on their MacBook. It depicts the work of contemporary artists, or of workers in general, into which The Domestic Worker Photographer Network

also enquires — on the often problematic though thin line between the precarity of art work and the precarity of contemporary work in general.

"Contemporary" is a placeholder for late/financial/cognitive/surveillance/consumer capitalism, neoliberal, post-industrial/modern/colonial/digital society, whose invisible, precarious labour the photographic-archival project by the Werker Collective, The Domestic Worker Photographer Network, tries and gather, relying on contributions from migrant workers, artists, gardeners, dishwashers, teachers, etc.

The photographs, collected through an online community, were edited into a calendar called 365 Days of Invisible Work. The publication includes an email exchange between Marina Vishmidt and Lisa Jeschke, published under the title Work Breaks Us, We Break Work. In a message written by Vishmidt on 28 May 2017 at 21:01, she notes that many workers chose to send images of their beds:

The bed as a site of relaxation becomes a site of labour, and hence of measure (see July 23). Yet, at the same time, its unmoderated character is retained and maybe even curated. The home in general can be thought about as this kind of excessive or obsessional workplace, at least for 'creatives' if not for house-workers (whether we see that as a division of tasks, labour markets, or figures of class division), where there's nobody to monitor how fiercely or laxly you've internalized capitalist discipline — or, rather, competition, with now invisible and always lower-waged others (see December 10).

In reviews of Carolyn Lazard's exhibition SYNC, that the drawing Carolyn Working was made by their partner is mentioned. This information upholds the position from which

I am wanting to read Lazard's work. It is not the name of the partner that is mentioned, but their role: partner — a gesture that opens a gaze into the bedroom's otherwise gazelessness, hence its recurrence in the archive of silent labor and in the French word for bedroom, chambre.

Though my repository on the bedroom is more literary-based than visual, it is a visual work that gets mentioned first. Yet, Lazard's work points precisely to why I care more for the bedroom as articulated in literature, and why I, therefore, begin this paragraph with "though my repository on the bedroom is more literary-based than visual, it is a visual work that gets mentioned first." The literary, more easily, organises the gaze Lazard establishes through the detail that the work was made by their partner.

Visual arts' addresses of the bedroom often operate on another register: rather than setting the gaze from within it, it explodes it. Take Tracey Emin's My Bed or Félix González-Torres' bed billboards. Both operate by blowing up the opaque-intimate-vulnerable space of the bed into the public gaze.

My repository on the bedroom attends to pieces that remain within its opaqueness, as a space of invention and freedom, exempt but equally permeable to social templates, constructs, and imperatives. Such double-sidedness is exercised in the Covid-19 pandemic-ridden essays by Jen Calleja, Goblinhood: Goblin as a Mode. One of its chapters opens with the poem "Grot," which, dense enough to require a few visits to the dictionary, introduces the book's position between the self-indulgent disobedience of the goblin mode and its social production — how the domestic structure itself ushers in the social performances from which the goblin mode retreats, for example, etc:

I'd finally hedged the vines of the duvet yet / wake washed-up on a bed of soil / leather mushrooms sprouting from my leather jacket / denim toadstools spreading across my jeans / phosphorescent spores emit in heartbeat puffs / from my fingertips / I tawt I taw a pudgy tat with eyes of green but failed / to clock the landslide from the never-ending rain / roll over onto a mud path to Old Raw Gill / a waterfall long lacking its cascade / soon hear water prosperous, blink at a sparkling screen / a portal right out of here.

The odd description, "my repository on the bedroom," I cannot mention without mentioning its foundation: Kathy Acker. Acker wrote extensively about the bed, for whom, as for all the above-mentioned references, it is a space of precarity: work, death, illness, exhaustion. At the beginning of Chris Kraus's biography of Acker, After Kathy Acker, both the tone and the space of Acker's life and literature are set, and the bedroom is presented through its contingency:

New York City, 1971:

The bed, rarely made, floats in a room painted orange with big violet stars.

She spends most of her days and nights in the bed, sleeping and writing. Her hair is cut short. Twice, unable to do anything with it, she shaves it all off.

The inside of the closet is violet, matching the stars. The room could be anywhere, really, although in actual fact it's on the sixth floor of a building in Washington Heights, Upper Manhattan, straddling the corner of Broadway and 163rd Street. There are gates on the two skinny windows, facing north onto 163rd. Even in 1971, the old prewar building, with its large corniced lobby, has seen better days.

The bedroom is spacious and shabby. When they arrived in New York, they scavenged for furniture in a friend's basement. There's a black,

red, and white Navajo rug, a commode and two nightstands, a wood breakfast table and two matching chairs.

• Break •

I interrupted the text at the above break and sent it to Jana, as we speak about and think about the show. I sent her an email and, in reply, she referred to a catalogue by Nora Schultz she had been reading, published in the context of Schultz's exhibition at Secession in Vienna in 2019. According to Jana's account, Schultz herself was not in the space before the show opened; she had to instruct the personnel and curators on what to do — what Schultz calls work from a distance, hinting at the mechanical definition of work:

Work being measured in Joule is the transference of energy through a force along a distance. Work is being done when a body, through a force, gets moved or shaped, and therefore is a unit of process.

There's a part in the quote from Vishmidt's correspondence that I had ignored. I considered deleting it from the text and substituting it with ellipsis-filled brackets so as not to leave traces of my negligence — the part that speaks of the bed as a site of labour and, therefore, of measurement. Jana's email quoting Schultz, does not let me escape from it.

The essay *Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia* by the sociologist Roger Callois circulated widely in surrealist circles in the 1930s. It draws on visual similarity in animals and their environments, and the now-outdated psychiatric diagnosis of psychasthenia, what today might be classified as obsessive-compulsive disorder

or anxiety, to consider "like producing like" (which Jen Calleja's poem might describe). To dwell on the dissolution of the boundary between organism and environment, Callois begins from the question of distinction:

From whatever side one approaches things, the ultimate problem turns out in the final analysis to be that of distinction: distinctions between the real and the imaginary, between waking and sleeping [...]. Among distinctions, there is assuredly none more clear-cut than that between the organism and its surroundings.

Measurement as a tool of distinction defines the bedroom, even though the units of measurement differ: the most immediate here is spatial; Vishmidt's is temporal and labor-oriented, while Schultz's concerns energy. Acker, in Kraus' account in the above-mentioned book *After Kathy Acker*, writes in bed, under the covers, while Leonard Neufeld, her partner at the time, is awake, and she writes in the apartment's back room when he sleeps. The neighbour downstairs complains about the typewriter noise as Acker keeps up with her score recorded in her notebook, making meet the three notions of measurement we are working with:

2 to 4 SENTENCES
EVERY DAY

The German word for bedroom, *Schlafzimmer*, literally means "sleep room." It entails, by extension, darkness. If the bedroom is approached through its contingency in opposing practices such as rest, work, and sleep, and traced through different languages (while leaving aside, for instance, the Chinese word, which centers the body rather than the space), I return to Callois for what brought him into this text in the first place: darkness as a condition in which the distinction between body and environment

becomes indiscernible. Call to mind the familiar movement of waking in the middle of the night, in darkness, and carefully moving your arm to measure the limits of your body in the space around you.

Darkness is not the mere absence of light; there is something positive about it. While light space is eliminated by the materiality of objects, darkness is 'filled,' it touches the individual directly, envelops him, penetrates him, and even passes through him: hence 'the ego is permeable for darkness while it is not so for light'; the feeling of mystery that one experiences at night would not come from anything else. Minkowski likewise comes to speak of dark space and almost of a lack of distinction between the milieu and the organism.

• Break •

Jana invited me to write a text in conversation with the show that, during my writing process, was titled *double room*. As already a site of our collaboration, we took the circumstance to make public a project we've been working on together for more than two years. It has taken different formats over this period to become the book we present here today, *Dog-ears*. *Dog-ears* began at a collective reading of Clarice Lispector's *The Passion According to G.H.*, whose narrative unravels from an encounter with a cockroach in a room. The cockroach becomes indistinguishable from G.H, the room loses solidity and body, language, objects, and self anguish from a sense of lost boundaries.

Though the plot of Lispector's arguably plotless novel fits so perfectly with where this text has arrived, what mobilised our project was not it, but a minute observation on folds in books — a dog-ear. We wrote thirty texts

deriving from inward movements: as in a bookmark, in language, reality, or some everyday object.

One of the texts loops as perfectly as *The Passion According to G.H.*'s synopsis to the last quote by Callois, left hanging — imagine it creeping diagonally from the upper corner of a page:

but the blue LED light of the air conditioning infiltrates everything, from this small blue dot, not having to seem like a material carrier in the dark, everything is touched, raising things, just slightly, into visibility, being spotted, spreading out, covering all objects, enveloping all things, even you, peacefully slumbering wrapped tight in your waffle pique bathrobe, washed one too many times too hot, not covering your wrists, the blue light dot continuing to shine timidly, only concerned with itself, going in circles as if this motion would lead somewhere other than around, the glow creeping under my closed eyes, drawing unknown forms on the inside of my eyelids, corroding the eyelids slowly, as if it were enjoying it, with my eyelids full of holes, I try to sleep, the sound of blinking a soft hinge closing and opening again. My dotted vision blurs dot

• End •

All Shows Start from Bedrooms was written by Vinicius Maffei for Jana Pressler's exhibition *double room* at Bladr in Copenhagen, and was read and distributed at its opening on 12 March 2026, on which occasion the book co-authored by Jana Pressler and Vinicius Maffei, *Dog-Ears*, was also released.