



ScarJo

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ScarJo is a blonde bombshell. ScarJo is a hypertrophied semiotic event.

*ScarJo* is an essay on stardom. *ScarJo* is an essay on surface. *ScarJo* is an essay on hermeneutics.

*ScarJo* is an essay on classification. *ScarJo* is an essay on the arbitrary and the intimate. *ScarJo* is a dictionary.

Dictionaries are useless.

ScarJo is an interpretive problem. *ScarJo* fails to solve this problem.



ScarJo names the problem of being different from one's self.

*Scar*; a mark left by a wound or a trauma that has not healed.

*Jo*, an archaic Scottish word for sweetheart.



# ***ScarJo***

*Text by Christine Smallwood and Mark Sussman*

*Collages by Chris Santa Maria*



*Star*

A star is powerless to efface herself. She is a palimpsest, bringing to each screen the history of all her roles and occasions. She never disappears into this or that "character." A star's effect reaches backwards and forwards in time, always referencing itself. No one can ever say of a star, "I forgot it was her."

A star is not a spokesperson, or the subject of a boycott. A star is not tabloid fodder or biography. A star materializes in the moment of performance. A star is a body of work.

To those who say the stars have fallen to celebrity, we say: ScarJo.

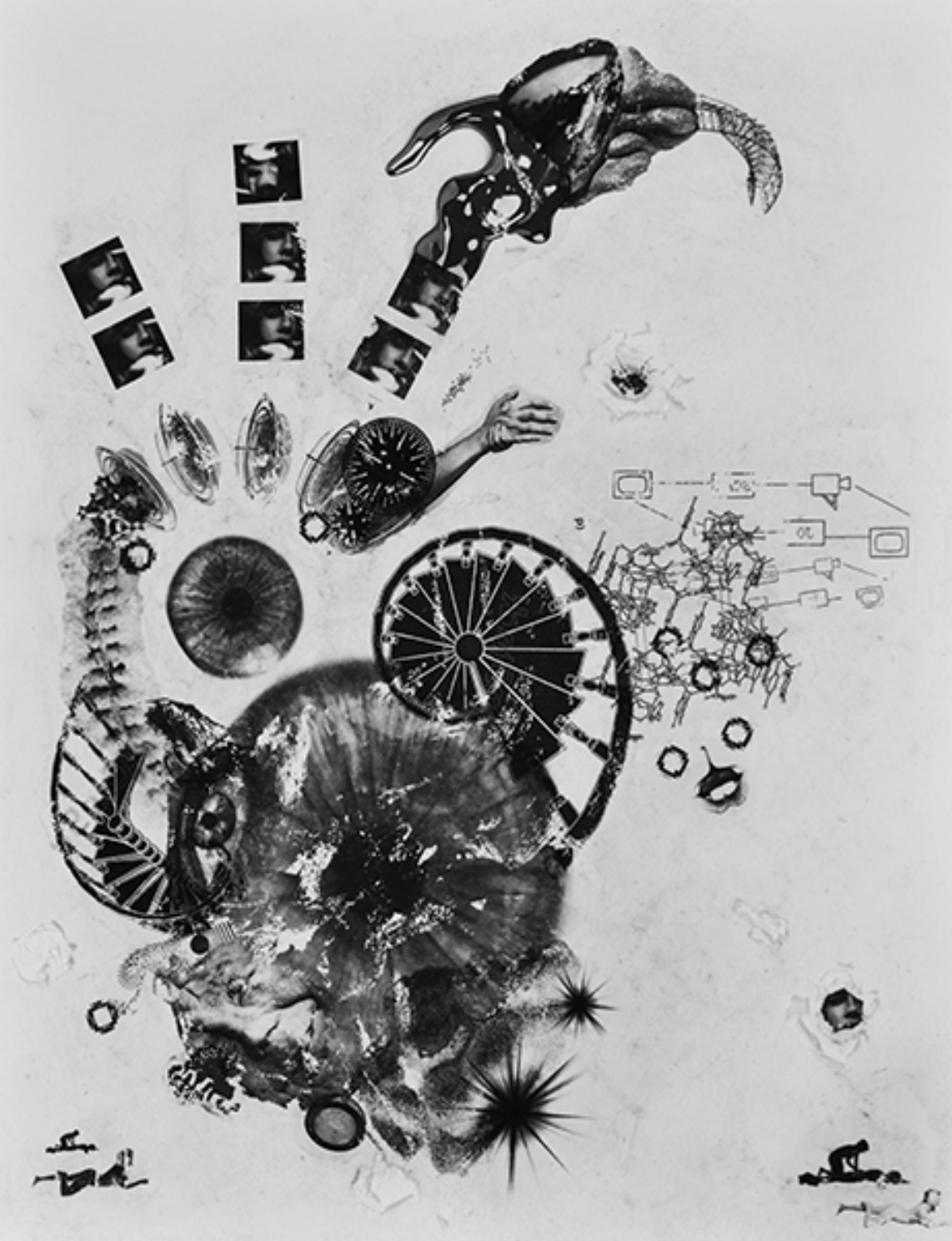


*Auteur*

Scarlett Johansson is a person who speaks words written by someone else at the behest of someone else. ScarJo is a punctum that evades the pre-ordained logic of cinematic expectation. ScarJo is a body that lives on and off the screen. You know a ScarJo when you see one.

*Allegory*

We sit in a car alone with ScarJo, or rather, we sit in a car with ScarJo while she is alone. Out hunting, she banter with men walking along the road, and her face shifts from an affectless mask to a cheerful, suggestive smile. Her cheeks brighten, her eyes sparkle. As she moves on to more promising prey she shifts again, her face falling back into a mask. She plays to a hidden audience. Sitting alone in the car, she is only herself. These moments of walled-off privacy—cold, threatening—suggest something more vivid than “character.” They suggest that the viewer, held and riveted, is looking at a performance of “not performing.” We become a voyeur of the neutral.



*Commodity*

ScarJo tells Ewan MacGregor that they can steal the sponsor's boat, sail off, and "live like real people." Living like real people means setting out to sea with no destination, no thoughts of survival, nourished only by romance. Living like real people means eliminating all forms of social and economic attachment. ScarJo articulates the fantasy that fantasy is a truer reality than the real. Real people are those who know nothing of the world, whose very inauthenticity, their genetically engineered and corporately sponsored disjuncture from the social world, enables them to transcend the late capitalist biomarkets that produced them. ScarJo tells us that the commodification of life provides us with our only accessible model of freedom.



### *Recognition*

It has been widely reported that the men were “really” picked up by ScarJo, that they did not know that they were being filmed, and that their performances were unscripted, everyday – not the fumbling improvisations of amateur actors, but the candid courtship rituals of the secretly surveilled. Their curiosity, interest, and preening as she asks them her questions *where are you going? do you have a girlfriend?* – record the good fortune of being picked up by a babe.

How can you tell a star from a civilian? How can you tell an alien from a human? How can you tell one kind of human from another? What does kindness look like? And cruelty? When the man with the facial deformity enters her van, ScarJo does not recognize his difference.

### *Unequal Distribution*

ScarJo’s questions measure a disparity of attraction rather than fame. Probably the men were willing to pay for sex. Many people are.



*Prostitution*

ScarJo begins by wearing the skin of a dead hooker. She is the pimp of Motorcycle Man. She has revenge on johns, before falling prey to the rapist-murderer, the prostitute's demonic double. She wears a fur bomber.



*Maternal Instinct*

She doesn't have one.

*Looking*

To the man with the facial deformity ScarJo asks the same questions she has asked all the others, plus a new one. No longer asking, *do you think I'm pretty?*, she now inquires, *do you want to look at me?* But to whom is this question addressed? We are done with looking at ScarJo. She has been on screen for a long time. We want to look at Elephant Man.

The person who wants to look at ScarJo is ScarJo. Her moment of moral awakening is issued not by looking at the difference of deformity but by looking at the difference of herself. ScarJo is not capable of aesthetic or social judgment because she is not capable of seeing otherness. She only learns to see herself. Identification — looking — is the foundation of her morality.



*Morality*

ScarJo does not stop killing because killing is wrong, but because it feels bad. She cannot look in the mirror and, presumably, never sleeps at night.

*Medusa*

Looking at the star is the plot and purpose of the movie. In the story of the Medusa, it was ugliness that killed you; here it is some soft potentiality, poured into a mold. What we are looking at, we along with the men who descend into the vat, is ScarJo's pure availability.

Lot's Wife turned to the past and was turned to a pillar. Here we are pulled along into the future. Lot's Wife was forbidden to turn to the past. We are pulled along into the future. Availability is a promise or a fantasy; otherwise, it would be presence.

*Knowledge*

There are many things ScarJo does not know, especially the things women learn first:

do not walk alone in the woods  
do not fall asleep in strange cottages in the woods  
if you fall down, get up

She cannot climb stairs. Can she speak English, or has she only memorized a phrasebook? Seduction is the only kind of knowledge she has mastered. Seduction must be a different order of knowledge than stairs.



### *Seduction*

Seduction is not the only way to kill. Before the first hour is through, ScarJo uses a rock to bash in the head of a man in a wetsuit. She leaves his body on the beach to be cleaned up by Motorcycle Man. Perhaps this is a murder outside of the food economy, a killing in excess of the mission. Perhaps the body of Wetsuit Man isn't converted to food for the aliens; perhaps he is only buried. We have no way of knowing. What we do know is that since bashing on the head with rocks leads to death, bashing on the head with rocks (and abandoning the lifeless body) must be a plausible way to obtain human resources.

This is a baroque approach to meeting needs.

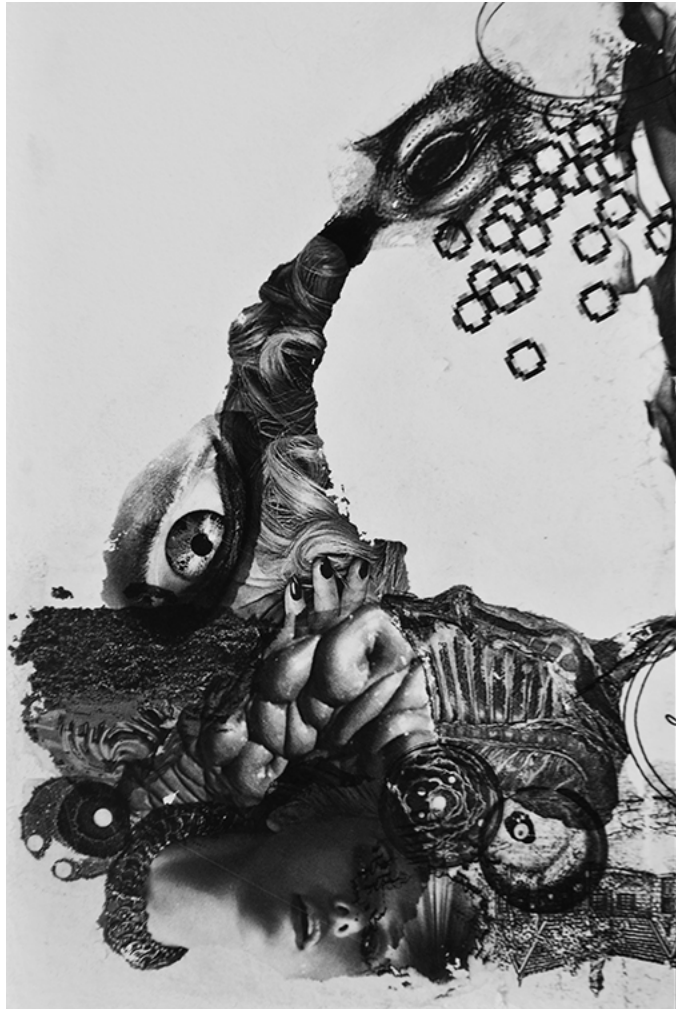


*Concepts*

ScarJo exists between person and product, performer and concept. ScarJo exists as category, as cinematic way-of-being, as analytic attitude. She presents a latticework — you can move through it with apparent freedom, although ultimately it determines your trajectory.

*Feelings*

ScarJo never feels, so in effect, ScarJo — despite the protestations of her scripts — never has feelings.



*Goo*

Seduction entails the victim's participation in his own demise. It does not require force. The instrument is the black goo into which the victim walks/sinks – goo that we might conceptualize as desire itself, which materializes spontaneously. ScarJo sails weightless over the goo, while her sacrificial victims, goons all, sink in. The goo has no sticking power. It is space itself, weightlessness, release. The evacuated body is paper, celluloid, an empty sack.

Goo is a moral agent. Men reduce women to their sex; goo reduces man to his meat. Under the skin we are libidinous meat piles who transact and fuck, or we are moral creatures possessed of sympathies. The film enacts a movement from the former to the latter and back. We end as meat.

*Voice*

Stanley Cavell writes that the film medium is “about the creation of the woman, about her demand for an education, for a voice in her history.”

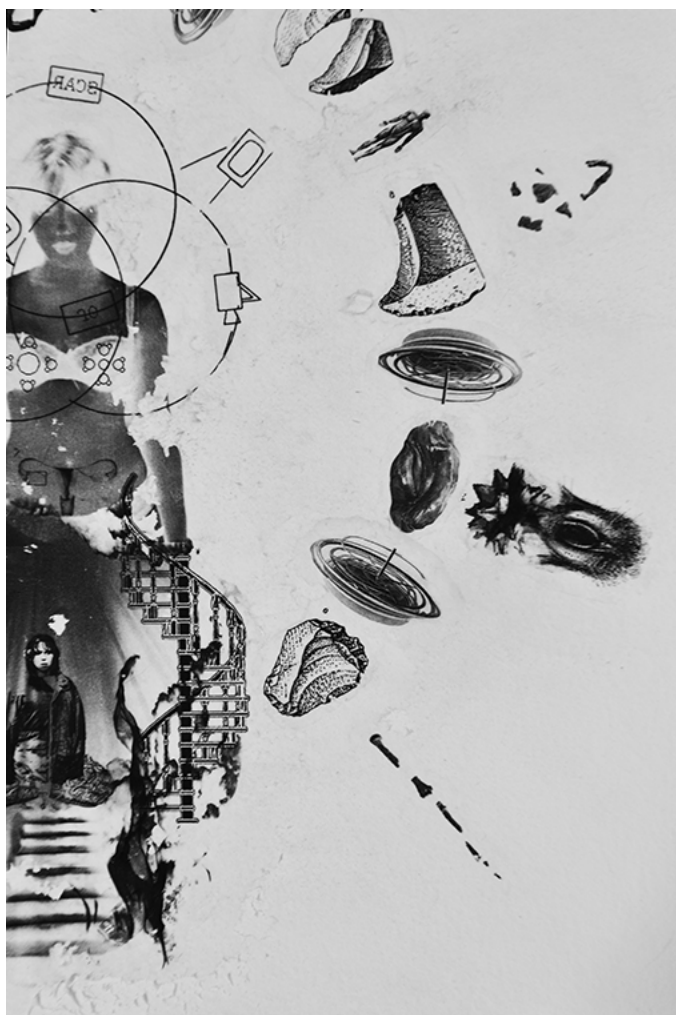
Samantha is a woman being born through the discovery of her voice, through growing and deepening in her ability to express herself. Theodore and the audience can access this growth only by listening to the melodies and timbre of her speech. By speaking, she creates a world – a world that she can never live in.

Like goo, the voice has no inside or outside. Voice is bodiless, and bodilessness is the condition of the melting or melding of substance – the ecstatic union of decomposition.

Unlike goo, the voice is a cocoon or holding environment for another, for a man that is at once a son and a lover.

*Voice, cont'd*

ScarJo has an improbable side career as a *chanteuse*.



*Lack*

ScarJo is a parodically available sexual object, a femme fatale. ScarJo is the disjunction between the body's promise and its failure to deliver. She participates in the illusion of femininity that she sells to her male victims, with results as empty and disastrous for her as for them.

In sex, the seductress discovers not the usual thing women find – the lack that constitutes femininity – but that she lacks femininity. She does not possess a sex organ. Curiously, this is new knowledge, knowledge gained in a failed action.



*Rape*

The lack of sex organ is no protection against the threat of rape. If an orifice does not exist, one will be torn – a lack will be created, the feminine made literal in order to be more effectively dominated, and erased.

*Mouth*

The alien cannot swallow. She chokes on cake.



*Mouth, cont'd*

Mouth is an orifice, but mouth is also a state of mind. Samantha has no mouth, but she has mouth-pleasures. She speaks. She orgasms pleasantly, a far cry from the caterwauling “sexy kitten” of the opening phone call.

*Plenitude*

Samantha performs a reversal characteristic of ScarJo's most slippery characters. At first Samantha is anxious and self-critical. She wishes for embodiment. But Samantha soon learns to fully invest herself in her non-corporeal nature, turning lack into plenitude.

It's not a bug, it's a feature.

*Loneliness*

ScarJo exists as both the antidote to and the highest expression of our antiseptic, archipelagic loneliness. ScarJo is the femme pharmakon.



*Agnate*

An agnate is a relative whose kinship is traceable exclusively through males. The agnate is a nonsentient thing, cloned in a modernist facility from the DNA of a flawed body. Clients can have their own for a price – a bag bulging with organs, a petri dish twin without sentience or feeling, waiting to donate an organ back to its genetic origin. A meat sack, just like you but more so.

We know what they do not. The agnate is a nonstarter. The organs are harvested from living clones, just like you but less so: young, dumb, subordinate. ScarJo's "sponsor" is a model, one now in a coma after a car accident. The facility needs ScarJo's organs to replace those of the model, who is now herself a meat sack in a hospital somewhere in New York. ScarJo's defiance of patrilineage makes an agnate of her sponsor. The form of an Oedipal triangle shorn of its love object and consisting entirely of single-gendered aggression.



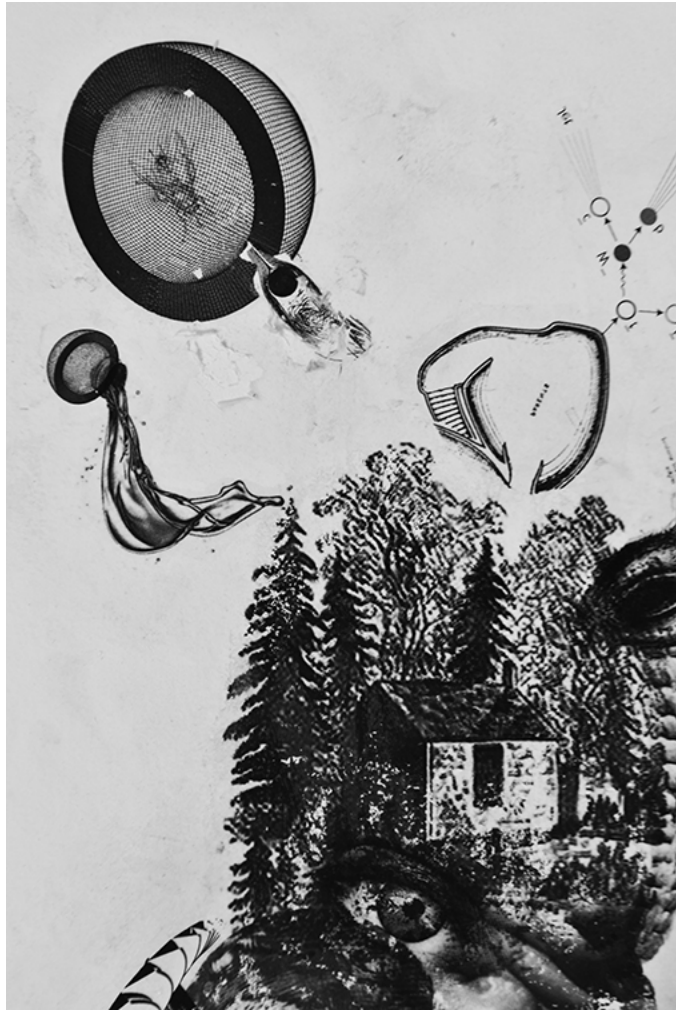
*Murder*

ScarJo is a convincing action star.

*Softness*

We know ScarJo only as light. But this light has a tactility, a squishiness. The softness—the malleability—of the world can be manipulated by the clinical, quantitative, hyperintelligent brain.

ScarJo's softness locates her closer to the digital sublime than to our bodily origins. Our ancestors were rangy, stringy creatures, availing themselves of what nutrients they could forage—eating fat meant chasing and killing something and then cutting or tearing it open. Life was desperate. They were hard.



*Hardness*

Lucy's mind in its full capacity exists on a continuum of hardness, never approaching the edge: as sludge, as goo.<sup>1</sup> Liquefied matter is intimate, burrowing into shapes like a living 3D printer; it is impersonal, beyond empathy.

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<sup>1</sup> See *Goo*

*3D Printer*

Molten consciousness molded into shape.

*Zeno's Paradox*

Travolta leans in for a kiss, lips pursed and pursuing a mask. He will never get any closer.

ScarJo's hair points straight to heaven.



*On the Name*

Lucy is the name of a chimpanzee who can speak American Sign Language, a robot baby orangutan, and a white dwarf star. Lucy is the name of a hominid skeleton unearthed in Ethiopia in 1974, ten years before ScarJo was born. Lucy Liu is one of two species of the Genus of Hot Women. A Lucy is a woman who “knows what to do.”

*Now all the Beyoncé's and Lucy Li's*

*And babydolls, get on the floor*

*(Get on the floor)*

*You know what to do*

*Oh, you know what to do!*

### *Sharpness*

ScarJo's body is no longer bound to the struggle for necessities. Her slumped composure suggests someone no longer on the alert for predators. As she gains more and more access to her own cognitive capacity, her movements sharpen, her soft skin no longer able to contain the hairpin turns and angular byways of her thinking. Her interior rigidifies while her exterior remains pliable. She becomes birdlike, her eyes wide, head cocking in miniscule adjustments to indicate the ever-shifting trajectories of her attention.

### *Data*

Brent Spiner played the android Data in the *Star Trek: The Next Generation* television series and films. A robot who wants to be a human, Data spends the series attempting to join the human race, to feel human feelings, to "act natural." If androids can be said to desire, what he desires most is humanity. No small irony, then, Lucy's deployment of the Spinerian android repertoire. In paradoxically repurposing Spiner's posthuman semaphore, ScarJo spins Spiner's bird tics 180 degrees, away from the android Data's Pinocchio-like quest to transform himself into a human and toward the all-too-human desire to turn ourselves into data.





*Averages*  
ScarJo has described her body as “average.”

*Replication*

ScarJo has a twin brother named Hunter.

*Descent*

ScarJo has a daughter named Rose Dorothy.



*Hotness*

*The Island* was released in 2005. In the film, ScarJo's sponsor is featured in *Maxim* magazine. ScarJo herself has been ranked on *Maxim*'s Hot 100 list every year since, starting in 2006. *The Island* is set in the year 2019.

*Coolness*

Samantha is Gillian Flynn's "cool girl" — gone, long gone. She will play video games with you. She is down for a threesome. She has designed her personality around your desires. But like girls who are actually cool, she will eventually leave you for someone smarter. That this higher order being is a copy of herself will make you feel worse than you already do.

*Boredom*

You like to play.

You got a car?



*On the Name, cont'd*

“Lucy” is the name that ties female intelligence to disagreeableness.  
Lucy Lawless: Xena, warrior princess; royal lesbian conqueror of men  
and adjudicatress of the ancient world; interloper in the patriarchy. Lucy  
holds the football for Charlie Brown and then pulls it from him at the last  
minute: the bratty punisher of the would-be sensitive heterosexual man. The  
dominatrix.



*Happiness*

“No mockery in this world ever sounds to me so hollow as that of being told to cultivate happiness,” thinks Lucy Snowe in *Villette*. “What does such advice mean? Happiness is not a potato, to be planted in mould, and tilled with manure. Happiness is a glory shining far down upon us out of Heaven. She is a divine dew which the soul, on certain of its summer mornings, feels dropping upon it from the amaranth bloom and golden fruitage of Paradise.”

*Manure*

Happiness is shit. Lucy is a name for a woman who frowns when men on the street tell her to smile.



*On the Name, cont'd*

“Lucy” is a name for cold rejection; it lacks sentiment. “Lucy” is the name of characters by Charlotte Brontë and Jamaica Kincaid. “Lucy” describes a weather event. The snowdrift buries not men or humans, but the human as such.

*Anonymity*

Aliens do not have names. They cannot come, because they cannot be called.

*Beauty*

Beauty always contains a sign of rotten mortality. ScarJo is beyond life and death.

*On the Name, cont'd*

Lucy. Luuuuucy. The lips purse into a wolf call. The sound promises feminine curvature and the subtle hiss of an edenic serpent.

*Death*

The world of voice and goo can be only fantasmatically inhabited through a figure of absolute mortality and flesh.

This is dialectics.

*Absence*  
ScarJo always leaves in the end.





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