

Title: Dear Hannah: We have fucked around and found out

Date: SS, 2026

Artists: Sue Goyette and Tegan Zimmerman

Methodology/materiality: Quilt (text and other assorted mediums, assemblage, décollage, stitched together, spit and vinegar, other unknown and/or unnamed fluids, resin). Vulnerability. Two full moons and the summer Solstice. A Karass of Pollinating Thinkers and Doers. And returning to Dr. Hannah McGregor's keynote "Fucking Around and Finding Out as a Feminist Method" (McGregor 2025) to actually fuck around and find out. The same pair of olive green linen pants that eventually achieved that softness we are all after; the fabric of our days.

And what material do women use to shear experience into the ephemeral, the unbelievable, the weariness, the violence of how things really are?

Is there an intimate (inherent?) relation between violence and women's bodies as texts? That's where my question about medium came from and comes in. I see now that we are making our quilt, that we are patchworking layers together. Each textblock functions as one of the fabric squares.... Is this what Hannah McGregor means by fucking around and finding out as a feminist method? I nearly failed sewing in home economics.

I've been reading about Tracey Emin, after seeing her show at the Tate, and was struck by something she said in an interview about visiting Louise Bourgeois in her home. How there were these vivid pink watercolours on the floor but what she was most taken with were Louise's hands, the strength and look of them. In a video, speaking of the visit, Tracey's face is radiant, remembering them. I went on to read how they worked together on sixteen paintings/drawings for a show called *Do Not Abandon Me* (2011). Louise painted all sixteen pretty quickly and it took Tracey two years to work out how and what she wanted to contribute. Here's medium being both the condition, the environment she was thinking in, and the means, the agency she was after, what it takes to join the shared frequency the work was asking them to think in. Tracey eventually drew and wrote on Louise's paintings which would be the medium noted on the work and now I'm thinking of that title—*Do Not Abandon Me*—and how temporally fluid it is, how it chimes another of medium's definitions: the ability to receive communication from the deceased or what's past. I have an old dictionary that I sometimes open to see words in company with each other and there is a medium in between meditative and medley. I'm intrigued by how that company works with the cohesion of the definitions for medium. And how they all describe aspects of a creative practice. Here's when something stirs or shimmers in a beguiling and compelling way. For example, the question, *What does medium mean to you?* can now be considered instrumental. And here's when words get porous and begin to relate and attend to each other like trees rather than syntax/fences. Here's when things get interesting. "The only access we have to our volcanic unconscious and to the profound motives of our actions and reactions," said Louise, "is through shocks of our encounters with specific people." What or who "shocks" you may be worth noting.

I sewed the arm to the neck of the blouse I had to make in grade eleven and I think about how quickly I processed and reconfigured my face so that it was okay and not a truly fucked-up thing to do. My body knowing something and then doing with that knowing. Fucking around and finding out as a method was closer to the ground when I was younger and has also now become, for me, a source of the kind of praxis that stitches research/reading/art and the radiance art-making brings to the gathering. I'm wondering about the ways the unspeakable requires hands to move as a way of processing, embodying, and relaying experience. In the way that Elaine Scarry (2001) tells us that beauty invites reiteration as in a recalling, a retelling, perhaps art reframes something closer to our hearts that may not be beautiful but is vital. How some events/experiences are bigger than we can contain and we heft them around until we find a way of putting them down, of considering them. And I'm pausing here to look up what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank had to say about the chapter they didn't include in their *Silvan Tomkins Reader* (1995) because I still think about it. How Tomkin considered the face as the primary site of the affects and how our hands read and care for our faces for tiredness, for the burn of shame, for tears. That first knowing, before we reconfigure or reassemble, the raising of a hand to a cheek, a forehead. What are our hands to do with the reading they do, the comprehension they arrive at but carry it to something: a pen, a needle, a loom, the seam ripper? Do you think this carrying over is where and how the feminism of the method asserts itself?

Quilts Before Marriage? "Mary said that a girl did not consider herself ready for marriage until she had three such quilts, made by her own hands" (Atwood 2011, 160). Mary never started her marriage quilt...did we want to try? What kinds of materials might we use? Scraps. Leftovers. Second-hands. Hand-me-downs. Gently used. Pre-loved. Unloved. Tiny flaws in the stitches. Sinew. Marrow. You say let's go to Mary-le-bone. To see the Virgin Mary and watch the executions. You say Margery Kempe will be there and maybe Julian of Norwich too, if they can coax her out. A Holy Trinity? Nah, they're not really into threesomes. Julian, that "creature unlettered," (Julian of Norwich 1670) locked herself in and Margery, that "white-clad creature" (Kempe 2005, np) spread herself thick and thin. Heretics, the two of them. They took their cut-offs, off-cuts, and hand-outs. They took their clothes off. Out-of-hand these sisters, sirens, spiritualists. Spiralling. Writing and writhing: their lives in secret little corners. Bone on bone. Grace and Mary + Margery and Julian + Tracey and Louise. Sheets, quilts, bodies: hung, for all, to see.

I find myself circling back to this idea of holy trinities: Mary-le-bone / Margery Kempe / Julian of Norwich. This past year, mine would be: Tracey Emin / Patti Smith / Richard Siken. If this were a quilt, could these be the metallic thread that occasionally appears to enliven the whole shebang?

Hung, for all to see. And confessional as in *I want you to get off of me*. The interiority executing an exodus, a bow, a farewell. The departure that we call art. Maybe not departure. (Haha, as if, right?) The reckoning we call art. Or the quilt we call experience reframed. It's not the woman saying *bicycle* every time she sees one on Broadway Market, it's her voice, sparrow-pure, lifting above and carrying on beyond her. Consider the report of the derailed freight train that destroyed Poe's gravestone as maybe art theory. Now consider the mahogany pen holder made from a splint of his coffin. Art moves like a derailment making its own course, like water, or fire, like spilled ink or a voice aloft. (*Bicycle, bicycle, bicycle: that meditative medley around the medium.*) Would you say art can then craft life? I read about Poe in a small bookstore in that slot of time reading a book that will be returned to its shelf permits. This time, of course, is self-imposed. A private clock (or metronome or vitality) that keeps me moving. And what is that particular brief and voracious scanning? Kin to appetite and appraising, kin to recharging? Later, a bee at the Chelsea Flower Show will reiterate the feeling. The sipping and the mapping. Tracey's quilt, *The Last of the Gold* (2002), breaks that clock. The gold began as the fabric of her late mother's drapes, quilted above and below in the way memory moves before it is worn out, or sewn into, as it's becoming something else. Transformed yet still haunting a window, still absorbing all its darkness and all its light.

A medium of expression: the body lives between materiality and discursivity. Let's pretend that the body is a metaphor. And in terms of temporality: as a patchwork of sorts, where each square is not quite the other. It is the other, yet, it is not the same. That's when the body's fabric bends linear time and breaks it. Folded up and over unto itself, like a cheap plastic chair. But we've lost the metaphorical, if *Μεταφορά* still means to carry across, to carry over. We don't know how to write the body. "I suppose the body to be nothing but a statue or machine made of earth" writes Descartes in his *Treatise on Man* ([1667] 2024, 13). We've lost the body haven't we? What's so tempting and extraordinary about that infamous bed is that there are bodies everywhere and not a body to be found. Is this what Derrida meant by the power "to see without being seen" (Derrida 1994, 8)? We find ourselves crying out *habeas corpus*. Embarrassed at our own defilement, our own blindness. A visual-verbal soiling then shame. A vulgar laugh hidden inside, at first surprising but then we quickly understand: this is what it means to embrace the hysterical. Catherine Clément tells us she embodies the "madwoman who names, who names the mother; she is also the laugh that [...] keeps a wide gash bleeding in [...] man's breast. [...] All laughter is allied with the monstrous" because it disrupts a seemingly impenetrable or orderly masculine body-image (Cixous and Clément 1986, 33).

We hide our bodies in our art.

What if Tracey's bed is a welcome to our bodies? What if it offers itself as kinship? What if it is where our bodies remember and acknowledge how they/we wreak their/our sacred and animal havoc? What if we haven't lost the body but have continued to be involved in the fiery and crucial reclamation and inclusion of our bodies long redacted (as in *Treatise on Man*)?

The Latin word *animus* is a faux ami, for me. My mind always conjures animality first then spirit. Platonic punishment is to be re-embodied as a woman. Devoid of logic. Another opportunity to fulfill that tripartite wish, gone? Too bad for us. Maybe that's why women's art discloses the thrill of divinity in carnality: Cindy Sherman's photograph, *Madonna (Self-Portrait)* (1975)!

My body: my hands to my face as if reading it. My hand on this keyboard coding and decoding the interiority, the illegible, the almost, the becoming. My body, of late, has become a reliable portal to healing and understanding myself. I sometimes feel a return to animal for how it knows so much more before my thinking does or before my thinking tries to know or reiterates or cajoles or reformulates.

Why I Never Became a Dancer (1995) is a six-ish minute film in Tracey's show at the Tate. The narrative first, the sex she started having at thirteen—the adventure and learning of it, she says—her young body and their older ones and, eventually, the 1978 British Disco Dancing Championship where she tried to groove her way out of Margate. Images of Margate accompany this telling, its shore, its rollercoaster. Midway through her dance, which was going so well she imagined winning, the men in the audience that she had sex with started calling her a slag. *Slag, slag, slag*, she says in the video (each an axe into whatever it was that was running with the confidence of a river) not only interrupting her groove but making her, she tells us, cry. The video shifts then to an empty white room, a boombox, a balcony and the pulse of "You Make Me Feel (Mighty Real)" by Sylvester and there's Tracey dancing her way back to adventure. Dancing her way back to her body. Shane, she calls out, Eddy, Tony, Doug, Richard, this one's for you. The original was filmed on a Super 8 which makes her dancing look choppy. Audrey Wollen in Art Forum says "maybe we can only access such heights of feelings—such triumph—in fragments" (2021). A strip of fabric then, iridescent and singular, that calls the eye, my eyes, to behold it. Calls all of us sitting on the floor in the Tate, who can't help but move along, sitting up a little straighter with her righteous call out. Here's another species of carrying over. Metaphorical and deeply physical. A literal dance on the move. Her body then mine, bent under the weight of it then exerting itself forward and not only upright, but deeply in the groove.

Is this what Donna Haraway envisioned when she wrote, “It is an imagination of a feminist speaking in tongues to strike fear into the circuits of the supersavers of the new right. It means both building and destroying machines, identities, categories, relationships, space stories. Though both are bound in the spiral dance, I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess” (Haraway 1991, 181)? Dancing without bodies. Is that what feminism as a method is? Carrying over through travelling, unravelling, scrapping, suturing, scraping, needling, eyeing, stretching? An unstable object of study? From Philomela’s tapestry of unspeakable violence to Artemisia Gentileschi’s propensity for chiaroscuro and self-referentiality—*Susanna and the Elders* (1610) or truth by thumbscrews. Consider Kathleen Gilje’s x-ray of the underpainting (1998). Restoration. Making nothing into something. la paperson’s “queer cyborg as a sculptor of assemblage” who “splices one machine to another, de-links apparatuses from/ to one another, places machines to work in making new machines, disassembles and rolls the machine” (as quoted in McGregor 2025). Stitching and allusion are critical to our project too; trying not to get too hung up; choosing between undertaking a feminist machine method instead of a feminist hand method. I’m thinking about Alison Holt’s freehand machine embroidery—soft, undulating, quaint British countryside, the result of rapid needling-piercing—she calls the technique painting with stitches. Figureless, yet, someone is dancing, surely.

The mother, standing, is put on trial: Accused of art crafting life. The one claims we need symmetry, uniformity, chronos, in other words immaculate, clean, rectitude, sickeningly-sweet patterns, but then the other argues for the messy, ugly, complicated, wet, stained, soiled, sick, slutty, misshapen, lumpy, bad, bad, bad pieces. It means borrowing from Christine de Pisan’s *The City of Ladies* (1405) and Julia Kristeva’s *Stabat Mater* (1977). Pisan was accused of plagiarism. Kristeva called it “intertextuality.” You said, “No one is in trouble,” Hannah, but new geometries are risky. We’re making our lives out of scraps, afterall. It’s forgivable. All these corridors, errors, and detours. Connecting into the potential of us writing-reading-exploring together is hard! And letting the method live inside the object is even harder. In the pursuit of decolonial desires, McGregor encourages us “to create new assemblages...of rebellion, whimsy, or nonsense.” Spare parts (synecdoche and metaphor for our missing bodies?). All these imperfect trajectories. Errantry. Ungovernable. Estrangement. Uncanny. Fragments of everyday objects—Livia Marin’s *Nomad Patterns* (2012) come to mind. Marking time by neither the moon nor the hand but by broken pieces....

Accusation: imitation: lacking a thesis, therefore no structure (whispering, wondering where are our monuments?) “What had our mothers been doing?” Virginia Woolf asked ([1929] 2001, 25). But what she meant, and didn’t say, is how do you organize and evaluate the anonymous? In their reimaginings of Black women’s lives and voices, another trio, Alice Walker, Saidiya Hartman and NourbeSe Philip reconfigure the archive (official government-law-house); they take up the question of our inability to separate violence from intimacy, medium and mode. They ask: how do you articulate what is not said, who is not speaking? How do you uncover the body differently? Their narratives go beyond/against the official/Master record to reanimate quilts, stones, songs, saints, leaves, ceramics, gardens, bones, beds, #metoo. Métis artist Jaime Black-Morsette hung red dresses: to honor and remember MMIWG2S+, she articulated a communal refusal to be forgotten or to be silenced. These are just some of the “practices that respond to the conditions of social crises, struggle and upheaval by publishing differently” (Thoburn and Thurston, as quoted in McGregor 2025). Amongst her (re)visions, Walker (1983) told Woolf to get out of her room and go into her mothers’ gardens. Really throw wild

flowers
on Aphra Behn’s,
Phillis Wheatley’s,
and Rita Joe’s
tomb.

Pandora's Box is the last of the premarital quilts: maenads are loose, deceptive, sneaky, surreptitious, gossips who must be tamed-contained (tomb-wombs). Witnesses say the body was bent in ways it did not want but had to go. A bad shape, a "misfit": "Push, push, push, no amount of pushing will get you in" (Ahmed, quoted in McGregor). But this one had to get through. Pushed inside-out its thick black thread becoming borders, hard edges, curated petal shapes. Enclosed. Yoked. Bound. A public display of rage and grief concealed in a bright golden array of circles and nuzzling sungrazing stars. Closing remarks: Who is guilty now? Who is sorry now?

In the film *My Dinner with Andre* (Malle 1981), Wallace says, "When I was ten years old, all I thought about was art, now I'm thirty-six and all I think about is money." As a child I checked the quantity and quality of my grandmother's candy to determine the length of my visit. I measured time and value in sugar. A soft yellow banana equated to thirty minutes. A fudge baby, an hour. A gummy bear, maybe fifteen minutes. A mint and I turned around and walked out the door. A transaction was made good. Art has always been inseparable from oikonomos and violence. Kara Walker's haunting, giant sugar installation of a Mammy-sphinx called *A Subtlety or the Marvelous Sugar Baby* (2014) cements this connection. Isn't that why the poets must be banished from the Republic's polis? Subversive voices: criticized/cut/excised/exiled. Budget balancing. Policing. NDAs. It's an art to be artless.

Praxis: becoming the practice. What is perfection if not imperfection? My body is a risk. What if my body is out of practice and the reach and risk is how I regroove? What if art is the dancehall, the disco ball, the DJ? What if the feeling of this being hard is more of a *you are here* on an unmapping? As in, at the beginning, where risk feels its riskiest? I aim to work deep in my hours, far from the clock and phone. The silence I wait for is sonically rich and ultra cosmological. Here's where the frequencies of all things thrum, here's where failure swerves to become free of the binary that holds success at the other end, staring down hard at it. Part of this practice is the patience needed for this circulation to become a groove. When this groove begins to vibrate, to play, it sends itself further afield and everything becomes part of an enterprise that thinks and breathes and sinks and swims. Like a shark. Or a murmuration, startled into being by the bird that sees the hawk first, the whole orchestration of its shape directed then by the few birds around each bird. Manifesting meaning then as it moves or something meaningful that can't quite explain itself. Yet. Or ever but can be stepped into, encountered and absorbed somehow. Being on the brink of becoming, always. A Deleuzian shimmer. A frequency or event. I can barely commit to these words trying to describe this. Forgive me. It resists voice or ink. It is pure intuition à la Bergson (these two are the birds flying closest to me right now that I'm using for direction). When I encounter art I find myself tracking how the artist may have passed through this space. I've noted how some durational practitioners have developed the ability to subsist in what Giambattista Vico calls the ligamen: the hidden link between the source and the target of a metaphor, (from the Latin *ligare*, meaning *to bind*) long enough for the experience to become its own species and its own genius/genus (as cited in Geary 2012). An ecosystem of a telling and a showing that flourishes into being. Imagine what coursed through Kara Walker's body when the ideas for *A Subtlety, or the Marvelous Sugar Baby* began to shift from this to that orchestrally and in every direction. When the ideas beyond her began to organize like starlings. And how this enterprise, this species of ideas then moved into public space where it initiated the "achievement of intimacy," that Ted Cohen writes of when encountering a metaphor (1978). The participatory connection between viewer and the work that is intimate for how it first arrives in the viewer's body with all of its ideas forging immediate and new understanding and impact. Rage and grief not concealed but on the move. Staying with sugar, I'm thinking of Felix Gonzales-Torres's *"Untitled" (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)* (1991), the sculpture he made when his partner died of AIDS that consisted of one hundred and seventy-five pounds of candy, the ideal weight of a healthy male, and how it instigates that intimacy when visitors, leaning in to help themselves to the candy, actively participate in the loss (how the candy lasts, sugaring the tongue and the complexity of that!), the ongoing losing and how the candies are replenished every day to sustain that specific weight. This site of creative labour, the risk and the carrying of this to that curdles immediately, dissipates, at the thought of public and of transaction while it is still finding its way into becoming and becoming relational. Perhaps its arrival to that, haunted by this, and our encounter with it is when metaphor shifts and uproots, perhaps here is when everything teems with the possibility of being on the move.

Artists' Statement

Inspired by Hannah McGregor's keynote address at Atlantis' 50th anniversary conference, *Revolution and Resurgence: Celebrating Feminist Publishing*, the authors have stated that they want to challenge traditional publishing models by reclaiming goodness. The focus on process, McGregor's "fucking around as a feminist method and finding out" becomes the central concept, to the extent that the distinction between form and content is frequently brought into question. This textual quilt, affectionately and playfully titled "Dear Hannah" brings together various mediums, including a wide range of artistic forms and references, most of which pertain to women's practices, including the ways in which women have experimented with and documented their lives and voices. As a non-linear piece, readers are invited to reflect on its composition via organic connections, unexpected pairings, flirtations and revelations, coincidences and confessions, detours, disruptions, and diversions; for instance, in one moment we are in the cell of the medieval mystic Julian of Norwich and in the next, we are in bed with Tracey Emin. In their feminist commitment to make space for the unspoken and the unspeakable, however, these temporal-spatial shifts and pauses and to trust the process—breath—becomes necessary.

The juxtaposition between synthetic and natural keeps intruding—it won't go away. Sentences like the slipperiness between resonance and dissonance, symphony and cacophony keep forcing their way into and between existing layers—with every new block of meaning-made, another potential meaning is un-made. The reader too then is a witness and active participant in the piece's (and its writers') vulnerability: essentially, one has to be willing to fuck around and find out. They—we cannot stay there/here—we are making something (in the present tense). We are doing something, together. And what happens in this shared space that is both temporary and temporally fluid, meeting you when you meet it? That perhaps follows you? What is exchanged and activated, what hums along and gains momentum? What do we call this shared frequency and how do we continue to pollinate it together, moving from the singular to the albeit brief but new choir? And how do we gain/find/conjure up the courage to sing? Wait, is this a species of singing, of flying in a momentary formation? The hawk is, of course, yours to see first, the trust this offers is that we will rise to meet you as you fly. Here is when the abstract has escaped its pen to rile up its abstraction. This is also part of the praxis.

A response to neoliberalism, ecological crises, geopolitical conflicts, and misogyny, this quilt delights in play, whimsy, reassemblage, fury, futurity, faith, and hope. We see the embracing of spontaneity as being one way to reclaim and rename our original dignity, autonomy, and joy, a species of terroir thinking/being. Writing in the moment we saw sparks of connections and trails, shimmers. In the back and forth of meeting briefly then parting, precarious pathways began to pop-up. The desire for a collective pedagogy emerges; we wonder if this is how we begin to make feminist community? Can you distinguish where/when one voice ends and another begins? We began with a question: what does medium mean to you?

Works Cited

- Artnet. 2024. "Louise Bourgeois." www.artnet.com/artists/louise-bourgeois/.
- Atwood, Margaret. 2011. *Alias Grace: A Novel*. Knopf Doubleday.
- Cixous, Hélène, and Catherine Clément. 1986. *The Newly Born Woman*. Translated by Betsy Wing. University of Minnesota Press.
- Cohen, Ted. 1978. "Metaphor and the Cultivation of Intimacy." *Critical Inquiry* 5(1): 3–12.
- Derrida, Jacques. 1994. *Specters of Marx*. Routledge.
- Descartes, René. (1667) 2024. *Treatise on Man*. Harvard University Press.
- Geary, James. 2012. *I Is an Other: The Secret Life of Metaphor and How It Shapes the Way We See the World*. Harper Perennial.
- Haraway, Donna. 1991. "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century." In *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. Routledge.
- Julian of Norwich. 1670. *Revelations of Divine Love*. Christian Classics Ethereal Library, www.ccel.org/ccel/julian/revelations.i.ii.html.
- Kempe, Margery. 2005. *The Book of Margery Kempe*. Penguin Books Limited.
- Malle, Louis, dir. 1981. *My Dinner with Andre*. New Yorker Films.
- McGregor, Hannah. 2025. "Fucking Around and Finding out as a Feminist Method." Paper presented at *Revolution and Resurgence: Celebrating Feminist Publishing*, Mount Saint Vincent University, November 28-29, 2025.
- Scarry, Elaine. 2001. *On Beauty and Being Just*. Princeton University Press.
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky, and Adam Frank. 1995. *Silvan Tomkins Reader*. Duke University Press.
- Walker, Alice. 1983. *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Wollen, Audrey. 2021. "Teenage Waste Land: Audrey Wollen on Tracey Emin's Why I Never Became a Dancer." *ArtForum*. www.artforum.com/columns/audrey-wollen-on-tracey-emins-why-i-never-became-a-dancer-251411/.
- Woolf, Virginia. (1929) 2001. *A Room of One's Own*. Broadview Press.