

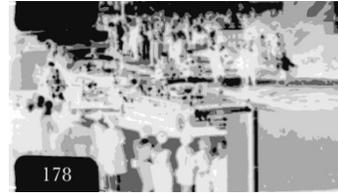
MOST FAMOUS SHORT FILM OF ALL TIME  
EPISODE 4: FIRST EMAIL (SNOWSHOVEL)



177  
STRESS PREVENTION

FLASHBULB

FRI  
12 DEC  
2014



178  
OF COURSE I'M OK

FLASHBULB

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At lunchtime, Human Resources sends out an email. They will offer a stress prevention workshop.

I keep looking for a solution. I look for the method by which I could find a solution. I look for anything at all. Something would be better than nothing.

Dinnertime approaches. Coworkers go home.

On their way out the door, the last ones ask me: “Why are you still here?” The question is common, at least for this hour, but it is frustrating. The phrase that comes to mind: *I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream*. It’s the title of a story. I have no body, and I’m a blob in the org chart. I don’t say any of this aloud.

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“Are you OK?” asks the last one out. My political capital will be -4 if my boss hears that a coworker suspects I’m *not* OK.

“Of course,” I say, channeling what I hope is mysterious, charismatic intensity toward my brow, that they may recognize and accept their non-knowledge of me.

“You look sad.”

“I’m really good at melancholy,” I say, brightening. “It’s, like, my favorite emotion!”

Why am I here? For no reason at all. For no purpose. Simplicity is Agile Principle #10. I need to reach a goal, and I shouldn’t want to lift any more fingers than necessary.

It is almost cold enough to snow. It is 6:43 p.m. and darkness is complete.

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## Flyleaf — Transsexual Trauma Story

An observation about the normals: They— The great yawning “they” of the non-transsexual Roman Vulcans deep inside the mountain who forge the clockwork mechanisms by which they allow the world to run, they whose interconnected arms and legs make up “the system”— They can give us hormones, perform surgeries that we want, and change our documents. They can use our names and gender pronouns.

(I said “normals.” I forgot I am supposed to say “cis.”)

Yet the thing that is taught to transsexuals is this: We must prove our gender distress and earn our transition through the manifest depth of our suffering. We are asked to tell our life stories to conform to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual. We have to describe our past dysfunction and swear that we will be functional in the future if we are helped in this specific way.

Our trauma story has to be monolithic and ironclad. We have to get good at telling it, and as a result we will receive the boon of hormones and surgery, and then, poof, the vulcanized trauma story must instantly go away. Since they already helped us and can’t help us anymore, they don’t want to hear about pain. It is uncomfortable, therefore

uninteresting. Further, sharing pain is ungrateful and impermissible. We promised them we’d become functional, and deleting the pain-story in our Teddy Ruxpin voice-box is our end of the bargain.

There is more: In addition to “looking good” by their standards, we are expected to deliver a unique, inspirational TED Talk that derives from our own experience. Our motivational speech is supposed to have grown out of nowhere like a giant beanstalk that overnight ascended to heaven. We are expected to pull that version of the story out of our pocket on command so we can inspire “thought leaders.” Our trauma story must elicit a happy-cry from everyone else.

It also has to justify the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual’s pre-2013 conception of gender identity disorder and reaffirm everyone’s current place in the great hierarchy of gendered being.

After we tell that story, we need to fold it along its preexisting fold lines and put it back in our pocket. We can’t make too much noise because, the more time we spend being professionally queer, the less they will pay us for our actual jobs. If we ever produce any other story related to gender, especially without being asked to do so, we discomfort the normals, and they will mark us as permanent queers because they won’t be able to see us as anything else, and then they won’t hire us to do anything at all. And if we don’t ever want to give happy-cry TED

Talks, we had better hide our previous gender transitions altogether so as not to be marked as unwilling, ungrateful, untrustworthy, noncompliant. We begin to walk through walls like ghosts: unnoticed by most, unremarkable except to those who have been sensitized to us.

Or, if not a TED Talk, they want a Künstlerroman, a tale of the artist's private struggle in obscurity to discover his own genius. Why does there have to be a novel about art? Why is no one looking at the art? Why is no one looking at the person? Why is the situation most valued as a tragic struggle between misunderstood forces? Can't the astronaut go to the moon and can't the landlubbers watch the livestream without worrying about what they feel when they watch it? No, they can't. They want to feel something new when they turn on the TV.

After all this, they will ask: Why is the book transgender? Why can't it just be a regular book for regular people?

Oh my god. Oh my god. They. Asked. For. It. To. Be. A. Transgender. Book. Now they are unhappy with the results of the narrative they asked us to produce because it is sprouting roots sideways and is no longer under their control.

The current Diagnostic and Statistical Manual doesn't describe specularium, either. Let us speculate about why that is.\*

That is why I practice different ways of telling a story and why I fight with myself about it. The art of the lie, no? How much truth is socially constructed! The social-truthier you are, the higher you ascend, and the private-truthier you are, the farther down the pile you descend.

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\* Neither did older versions of the DSM mention it. The mystery deepens.