Smart Art and Theoretical Fictions
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Arthur and Marilouise Kroker, Editors

Chris Kraus
Aliens and Anorexia
Semiotext(e)
Native Agents Series
236 pp., U.S. $10 paper (published 2000)

Chris Kraus
I Love Dick
Semiotext(e)
Native Agents Series

Chris Kraus and Sarah Gavlak (editors)
Chance: A Philosophical Rave in the Desert
Smart Art Press
45 pp., U.S. $10 paper (published April 1997)

Critics don't seem to like Chris Kraus much. At least they often don't like her "novels." I say "novels" (in quotes) because, unlike other reviewers, I'm not entirely sure Kraus's works belong in the generic category of "novel." Rather, as Sylvère Lotringer has noted, Kraus's prose works constitute "some new kind of literary form," a new genre, "something in between cultural criticism and fiction" (Dick, 271, 27). Kraus herself has called an early manifestation of this genre-bending "Lonely Girl Phenomenology" (Dick, 135). I prefer to call it theoretical fiction.

By "theoretical fiction" I don't mean books which are merely informed by theory or which seem to lend themselves to a certain kind of theoretical read-- Sartre's Nausea, for example, or the nouveaux romans of Robbe-Grillet. Rather, I mean the kind of books in which theory becomes an intrinsic part of the "plot," a mover and shaker in the fictional universe created by the author. Books like Steven Shaviro's Doom Patrols, in which various poststructural theories function as characters, and Kraus's "novels," where debates over Baudrillard and Deleuze and meditations on the Kierkegaardian Third Remove form an intrinsic part of the narrative, where theory and criticism themselves are occasionally "fictionalized."

Given Kraus's background, the active presence of theory in her art makes sense. Kraus and her husband, Sylvère Lotringer, are the editors at Semiotext(e), the small press that's largely responsible for introducing Anglo-American readers to the work of Baudrillard, Virilio, Guattari, and Deleuze. But the house also publishes literature--raw experimental poetry and prose by writers like Kathy Acker, Lynne Tillman, Cookie Mueller, and David Rattray. These are autobiographical works—or as Michelle Tea prefers to call them "first person fiction"--written by "people who take their lives and twist it into art" (Stark 2000). Works that consciously blur the line between art and life, between fiction and theory.

Although theory plays such a key role in Kraus's books, theoretical discussion is often erased from or severely truncated in reviews of Kraus's work. I Love Dick, her first book, is generally described as the story of Kraus's unrequited love for cultural critic Dick Hebdige. Aliens and Anorexia is represented as both the account of the failed reception of Kraus's film Gravity and Grace and a kind of intellectual group biography. "Kraus tries to get over herself and her cinematic mishap by interweaving the account of her flop with the life stories of other earnest visionaries who died with puny places in the canon," one reviewer writes (Lieberman 2000). Actually, Aliens and Anorexia is as much about love and sex as I Love Dick is. The eroto-infatuation arc it describes involves someone Kraus "met" on the L.A. Telepersonal Chatline the night she went on live as "Karen, a submissive woman who wants to play with a dominant guy who knows what he's doing and why he's doing it" (Aliens, 92). While Chris's fictionalized relationship with "Gavin Brice" is far more erotic than her relationship with "Dick," it involves frank fantasies of S & M, and its role, like theory's, is attenuated in reviews.

"Who gets to speak and why...?" Kraus writes, "is the only question" (Dick, 196). I would modify that as follows: who gets to speak, who gets to speak about what, and why are the only questions. Certainly they're the questions which even favorable critiques of Kraus's work have led me to ask. Why are Kraus's "novels" mainly inscribed within a genre she has termed "the Dumb Cunt's tale" (Dick, 9)? Why do even art reviewers tend to edit, censor, filter out certain key aspects of her work? I can't answer these questions in the course of this review article. What I can do is try to redress the balance a little, and talk about the aspects of Kraus's art which I believe have been overlooked.

I Love Dick

Let's start with "the Dumb Cunt's tale." I Love Dick is divided into two parts, Part One: Scenes from a Marriage and Part Two: Every Letter is a Love Letter. Scenes from a Marriage lays out the parameters of the love story—the unifying emotional and narrative device of the book. It reads, Giovanni Intra writes, "like Madame Bovary..."
as if Emma had written it." Certainly, *Madame Bovary* is the literary analogue that Chris and her husband Sylvere use. In one memorable segment, Sylvere writes to "Dick" about his wife, "Emma," and signs himself "Charles." "Dear Dick, This is Charles Bovary" (*Dick*, 104-107). Chris joins in the conceit when she tells the reader, in an expositional aside, that "sex with Charles did not replace Dick for Emma" (*Dick*, 107). But *Madame Bovary* isn't the only literary reference. "I'm thrown into this weird position," Chris tells Dick in her first letter to him. "Reactive--like Charlotte Stant to Sylvere's Maggie Verver, if we were living in the Henry James novel--*The Golden Bowl*" (*Dick*, 9). And when he's not thinking of Flaubert, Sylvere refers to Chris's infatuation with Dick as the 90s equivalent of a Marivaux comedy. But since much of the plot is driven by letters, written by a couple who are attempting to seduce a third party into some kind of love-art project, the book also bears a slight resemblance to *Liaisons Dangereuses*. Like *LD*, *I Love Dick* is self-reflexive as hell, as Sylvere and Chris continually critique and comment upon each other's prose, arguments, and plot-lines. Like *LD*, *I Love Dick* establishes a fictional territory where adolescent obsession and middle-aged perversion overlap and intersect, a territory where the relationship between "always for the first time" and a sort of jaded "here we go again" can be explored (in one letter Chris even refers to herself and Sylvere as "libertines," a term that invokes both Laclos and Sade). And, as in *LD*, where the relationship between Valmont and the Marquise de Merteuil is the literary analogue that Chris and her readers, *I Love Dick* is between the two people who initially seem to have grown a little too used to one another. As one perceptive critic observes, the reader-voyeur ultimately cares less about whether Chris sleeps with Dick than whether she stays with Sylvere (*D'Adesky* 1998).

The literary references are fun. "Sylvere and Chris were among the five most well-read people they each knew," Chris confides to us at one point (*Dick*, 15), and for anyone who likes to read literature, *I Love Dick* is a good read. But the literary references should also cue us to the subcultural subtext she and Dick both share: she's reminded of all the fuzzy one-time fucks she's had with men who're out the door before her eyes are open. "What do you do with a Kerouac?" she asks, quoting a poem by Barbara Barg. "But go back and back to the sack with Jack/ How do you know when Jack has come?/ You look on your pillow and Jack is gone" (*Dick*, 4). Sylvere, "a European intellectual, who teaches Proust, is skilled in the analysis of love's minutiae" (*Dick*, 7). He buys Chris's interpretation of the evening, and for the next four days the two do little else but talk about Dick.
The couple starts collaborating on *billets doux* to Dick. At first they just share the letters with each other, but as the pile grows to 50 then 80 then 180 pages, they begin discussing some kind of Sophie Calle-like art piece, in which they would present the manuscript to Dick. Perhaps hang the letters on the cactus and shrubs in front of his house and videotape his reaction. Perhaps Sylvère should read from the letters during his Critical Studies Seminar when he visits Dick's school in March. "It seems to be a step towards the kind of confrontational performing art that you're encouraging," he writes in one of his darker notes to Dick (Dick, 27). When Chris finally does give the letters to Dick, "things get pretty weird" (Dick, 163). But by that time, the letters have become an art form in and of themselves, a means to something that has almost nothing to do with Dick. "Think of language as a signifying chain," Chris writes, referencing Lacan (Dick, 242). And here you can literally see the signifying chain at work, as Chris's letters to Dick open up to include essays on Kitaj, schizophrenia, Hannah Wilke, the Adirondacks, Eleanor Antin, and Guatemalan politics. "Dear Dick," she writes at one point, "I guess in a sense I've killed you. You've become Dear Diary..." (Dick, 81).

If Chris has metaphorically "killed" Dick by turning him into "Dear Diary," Dick--when he finally writes back--erases Chris. Despite the fact that he appears to have had sex with her at least twice and has shared several lengthy conversations ("long distance bills fill the gaps left in my diaries," she writes at one point, Dick, 239), he continually maintains that he doesn't know her and that her obsession with him is based solely on "two genital not particularly intimate or remarkable meetings spread out over a period of years" (Dick, 273). At the close of the book, as almost every reviewer notes, Dick finally responds to Chris, he responds to Sylvère's initial letter to him, in language which illustrates--as d'Adesky notes--that he's "mostly concerned with salvaging his damaged relationship with Sylvère." If this is the case, however, I don't mean that it's simply another illustration of Eve Sedgwick's arguments in *Between Men*. Sylvère and Chris are too theoretically savvy to unproblematically present text/language as a transparency through which the real might be read. It's never clear if the style of Sylvère's letter is dictated by her feelings for Dick or by her awareness that the "form dictates" certain expressions of sentiment (Dick, 55). What is clear is that "the real" is not exactly what interests Chris. "The game is real," she tells Dick in her first letter, "or even better than, reality, and better than what it's all about" (Dick, 11). Sylvère thinks Chris's evocation of the hyper-real here is "too literary, too Baudrillardian." But Chris
"Better than," she writes, "means stepping out into complete intensity" (Dick, 11). And it’s that intensity which Chris craves.

"Lived experience," Felix Guattari writes in Chaosophy, "does not mean sensible qualities. It means intensification" (Dick, 241). And while Kraus doesn’t quote Guattari until late in the text, his presence is already felt here—in the first letter. In fact, what’s interesting is Chris’s idea that you can somehow use Baudrillard’s notion of the hyper-real, the simulacrum, to get to Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of intensification. And that perhaps is the theoretical drive behind the entire project, as the letters and the simulacrum of a passion which receives little encouragement emerge as the truest and best way outside the virtual gridlock and into Deleuzian rematerialization of experience.

Given that Sylvere and Chris’s stated goals—"the desire to fictionalize life" and the desire to play a game that’s "better than reality"—are to surpass the real and, as Jim Morrisson says, "break on through to the other side," it’s curious that the aspect of I Love Dick that is most frequently discussed in reviews is its connection to the banal, its status as a roman a clef. New York magazine revealed that the "Dick" of the book is Dick Hebdige, and rumor had it that Hebdige tried to threaten to sue Kraus for invasion of privacy. Later, he changed his mind when she promised not to use his surname in the text. As a result of this publicity, there has been much attention has been focused on Dick, who—as d’Adesky notes—remains "a mystery man" in the text itself (d’Adesky, 1998). The fact that he doesn’t return messages, Chris points out, turns his answeringphone, and to some extent the man himself, "into a blank screen onto which we can project our fantasies" (Dick, 12). Elsewhere she has called Dick "every Dick...Uber Dick...a transitional object" (Intra, 1997).

Certainly he is Virtual Dick. It’s difficult to know whether certain things that Kraus describes in the book ever really happened. And Dick’s works, which at times are named and quoted in the book, are fictionalized (that is, real works are given fictitious titles and some of the quotes attributed to Hebdige appear to have been written by other people). This may have been done to further blur the real Dick’s identity and so avoid a lawsuit. The net effect, though, is curious, since the camouflage of Dick’s work continually refers back to Kraus and Lotringer themselves. In a postscript to one of Sylvere’s letters, Chris asks Dick to send a copy of his 1988 book Ministry of Fear (Dick, 27); the "real" book is Hebdige’s Hiding in the Light. The title comes from Orwell, she says later (Dick, 133) but it also refers to a 1943 novel by Graham Greene (the first "book" of which happens to be called "The Unhappy Man"). It may be something of a hyper-textual stretch, but the links between Graham Greene, the author of spy novels, and the titles of the Semiotext(e) series which Lotringer and Kraus edit—Foreign Agents, Native Agents—read like an inside joke to me. Less oblique is the reference Kraus makes to "Dick’s" Aliens and Anorexia. "And then in Aliens and Anorexia you wrote about your own personal experience, being slightly anorexic," she writes. Then she quotes from "Dick’s" work:

"If I’m not touched it becomes impossible to eat. Intersubjectivity occurs at the moment of orgasm: when things break down. If I’m not touched my skin feels like the flip side of a magnet. It’s only after sex sometimes that I can eat a little." (Dick, 134).

Later she quotes again from "Dick’s book."

"Anorexia is an active stance. The creation of an involuted body. How to abstract oneself from food fluxes and the mechanical sign of the meal? Synchronicity shudders faster than the speed of light around the world. Distant memories of food: strawberry shortcake, mashed potatoes..." (Dick, 134).

"This’s one of the most incredible things I’ve read in years," she says (Dick, 135).

Dick Hebdige hasn’t written a book called Aliens and Anorexia, but Chris Kraus has. And I don’t know if Hebdige is slightly anorexic, but Kraus has written that she is. In Aliens, she quotes from her L.A. Diary: "If I’m not touched it becomes impossible to eat, it’s only after sex sometimes, that I can eat a little. When I’m not touched, my skin feels like the flip side of a magnet" (Aliens, 147-148). And later, "anorexia is not evasion of a social-gender role; it’s not regression. It is an active stance: the rejection of the cynicism that this culture hands us through its food, the creation of an involuted body...Synchronicity shudders faster than the speed of light around the world. Strawberry shortcake, mashed potatoes..." (Aliens, 163). The observations about food fluxes and the "mechanical sign of the meal" are a paraphrase of Deleuze—whom she quotes in Aliens (163). The stuff about intersubjectivity appears to have been written specifically for Dick.

"Intersubjectivity occurs at the moment of orgasm," Kraus writes, "when things break down." But intersubjectivity in the text occurs in and through intertextuality, when distinctions between original and citation become blurred. The lines in Aliens and Anorexia are printed without quotes, and they aren't attributed to
"Dick." Given the context, it's hard to say who is quoting from whom, who is incorporating whose work, who is feeding on whom. My guess is that Kraus attributes her own language to "Dick" in I Love Dick—and in that way acknowledges what she explicitly states elsewhere in the text. It is through her love for Dick that she begins to write, through her passion for him that she finds her own voice. And in that sense he can be seen as an "author" of her work. But this doubling up of language and self-referentiality is also an elaborate part of the "game"--a reminder that even (or perhaps "especially") critical texts are unstable, are signifying chains which feed off themselves. Even critical texts can be/should be seen as "fiction."

It seems as though reading the "real" Dick Hebdige's work enables Kraus to find a way of talking about art, a way that makes sense to her. "You write about art so well," she tells him in I Love Dick (131). But she does, too. "I'd chosen film and theater," she writes at one point, "two artforms built entirely on collisions, that only reach their meanings through collisions" (Dick, 137). And that reliance on montage serves her well in her writings on art. Interesting juxtapositions and allusions combine with a tremendous eye for detail and for the political to make us think differently about specific pieces of art criticism/history. I particularly like language and self-referentiality is also an elaborate subject Position/s

Hebdige's work enables Kraus to find a way of writing about art, a way that makes sense to her. "You write about art so well," she tells Dick in the middle of a long piece on schizophrenia, "but the compromises of my life made it impossible to inhabit a position. And 'who' 'am' 'I'? Embracing you & failure's changed all that cause now I know I'm no one. And there's a lot to say..." (Dick, 228). The book begins with a third person narrative in which Chris refers to herself as "Chris." And throughout the Scenes from a Marriage segment of the book, she periodically reverts to that third person narrative stance. It's only in the second half of the book that she settles into the first person pronoun. "There's a difference between now and fifteen years ago," she writes, "I don't think I was able, ever, to write any of those notebooks then in the 1st Person. I had to find these ciphers for myself because whenever I tried writing in the 1st Person it sounded like some other person, or else the treatest most neurotic parts of myself that I wanted so badly to get beyond. Now I can't stop writing in the 1st Person, it feels like it's the last chance I'll ever have to figure some of this stuff out" (Dick, 136). And then, later, "in order to write 1st Person narrative there needs to be a fixed self or persona and by refusing to believe in this I was merging with the fragmented reality of the time. But now I think okay, that's right, there's no fixed point of self but it exists & by writing you can somehow chart that movement. That maybe 1st Person writing's just as fragmentary as more a-personal collage, it's just more serious: bringing change & fragmentation closer, bringing it down to where you really are" (Dick, 137).

Kraus's struggle to find a subject position out of which to write is graphically represented on the cover and title page of the book. "I LOVE "DICK,"" the cover proclaims. By the frontispiece, however—the page just before the section entitled Scenes from a Marriage—the "I" has displaced "Dick" as the dominant term. "I LOVE DICK," "I kept asking myself why I kept reading," one graduate student confided after a seminar discussion of I Love Dick. "That's why."
Opening the book, he pointed to the outsized "I." Women students told me that they were rationing pages toward the end of the book, prolonging the reading experience and trying to defer the end. Like the male student quoted above, they didn’t care about Dick, but they cared a lot about Kraus’s process of inserting herself into the narrative, her process of finding a voice.

Aliens and Anorexia

If I Love Dick is mainly about building/finding subjectivity—discovering a subject position from which to write in the 1st person—Aliens and Anorexia is very much about tearing subjectivity down. "If the 'I' is the only thing we truly own, we must destroy it," Kraus writes, quoting Simone Weil. "Use the 'I' to break down the 'I' " (Aliens, 27). So it makes sense that the romantic trope that Kraus uses in this book is not the adolescent infatuation she deconstructs and ironizes in I Love Dick, but an adult S&M relationship that begins when Kraus calls the L.A. Telepersonals Chatline, looking for phone sex. "Makes sense" because one of the effects of S&M violence is to suspend the "crippling effects of rationality" which is associated with the "I," the ego (see Lotringer 1988, 16). "That he had the power to wrench those sounds from her--that she had granted him that power--astonished him, made him reverent and tender. She was disintegrating for him," one author writes on the subject (Trachtenberg 2000, 103). And disintegration, the breaking down of boundaries, is what’s at stake here.

As in Dick, the romance in Aliens unfolds across, through, and within texts. "Gavin Brice" is in Africa; Chris is in L.A. The rules of their relationship are that she sends him sexual narratives via e-mail. If he likes them, he phones and "finishes the tale." Here, as in Dick, the relationship between language and desire is made explicit, as language both creates and satisfies sexual need.

But language and narrative here don’t just serve as masturbatory aids. Rather, as Kraus suggests, there is some fundamental connection between the erotic and language, between pornography and "literature." Or perhaps it’s just that porn is narrative in its purest form. At any rate, it occurs to Chris that by sending e-mails and receiving phone calls "it might be possible to learn something about narrative" (Aliens, 94). And about style. "The spaces in between the nexus-points of Fuck can be pure play," she writes (Aliens, 94-95). In her e-mail messages to Gavin, the "spaces in between" are spaces of intellectual play, spaces where literature, philosophy, theory and art are directly addressed and brought to bear on the matter at hand. She begins reading Joseph Conrad because Gavin likes his work, and breaks her own theoretical meditations down into the kind of language that Gavin prefers to read.

But while these "spaces in between" seem to offer the possibility to move beyond fantasy toward a kind of re-materialization (once again, I’m reminded of the Deleuzian ideas Kraus evokes in Dick ), to move from virtual sex to "real" sex, words " all fail the magic prize" (Violent Femmes, Add it Up ). When Chris suggests breaking out of the confines imposed by a textual relationship and asks to meet Gavin at some neutral place, he begins pulling away. He doesn’t call, doesn’t even e-mail. The next time she phones the chatline and leaves her signature come-on, Gavin leaves a message in her box. But he doesn’t recognize her "line;" he doesn’t even recognize her voice. He thinks he’s contacting a stranger. Once again, Chris is humiliated in front of the reader, erased, removed from the story.

One reason that narrative is so important to Chris in this book is that her movie Gravity and Grace doesn’t seem to have one. "Gravity and Grace was an experimental 16 mm film about hope, despair, religious feeling and conviction," Kraus writes. "Driven harder by philosophy than plot or character," it was "just...unappealing" (Aliens, 3, 4). Based on Simone Weil’s Gravity and Grace, the film is about the breaking down of barriers, the rupture of a certain kind of ego, the search for God transposed onto encounters with extraterrestrials. In the six months following its completion, the film was rejected by every major film festival "from Sundance to Australia to Turin" (Aliens, 4). In January, 1996, Kraus took it to the European Film Market in Berlin, as part of the American Independents group. When it failed to find a distributor there, she began to write a book about its failure. That’s when she "met" Gavin Brice, a successful filmmaker/producer. And the relationship between the S&M narratives she shares with him, narrative in general, and art form a crucial nexus in the text.

Like Dick, however, Aliens is always more complex than it seems. It’s not just narrative—the gift for spinning words into appealing stories—that’s the issue here. Like Dick, Aliens is informed by questions of voice. But while Dick explores voice as textuality and subjectivity (how do you find your "voice" as an author; in which "person" do you write), Aliens is much more concerned with what Barthes calls the "grain" of the voice, its texture, as it is mediated by technology (Barthes 1985). "Was it possible to mourn the absence of a voice?" Chris asks. "A voice that wasn’t even whole, but digitally dismantled, reconstructed" (Aliens, 170). The answer of course is yes. And just in case we have our doubts, Chris
finds a literary analogue to help us make the leap. "She phones him at the same time as he, in space and time," she writes, quoting Marguerite Duras' *Le Navire Night*. "They are speaking. Speaking...They never stop describing. And at the moment she speaks, she sees herself. He tells her, putting the phone down (sic) your heart...He says his entire body's following the rhythm of her voice. She says she knows. That she can see because she's listening" (quoted in *Aliens* 170).

The idea of being able to see because one is listening is a loaded one in *Aliens*. While Chris initially suggests that *Gravity and Grace* failed because it lacks a well-told "story," she also worries that the film failed because of some essential lack of vision on her part. "The idea of 'movie' was a mesh of words and voices and emotions which I'd just assumed that Dennis [the Director of Photography] would know how to translate," she writes. "I'd never thought of movies visually before; I could hardly tell the difference between a two-shot and a closeup" (*Aliens*, 103). As if to underscore this, she quotes Sylvère. " 'Why,' Sylvère asks me to this day, 'would anyone with so little visual imagination as you ever want to be a filmmaker?' " (*Aliens*, 106).

For Rhonda Lieberman, who reviewed *Aliens* for The Village Voice, this passage--and Chris's lack of visual sense--provides a clear rationale for Chris's failure as a filmmaker. "Given Kraus's description of her filmmaking approach," Lieberman writes, "it's no big surprise that G&G [Gravity and Grace] tanks" (*Aliens* 2000, I). For Kraus, however, the issue's not so clear. What she's pursuing is the idea of "movie," not just making a film. And so everything about the medium as we know it is up for grabs. "Can movies start with images?" she asks (*Aliens*, 19). And for Kraus this is not a rhetorical question.

The artistic *problematique* posed by the text, then, is the degree to which narrative and formal convention can and should dictate "art." "I showed the movie to John Hanhardt, who was then the film and video curator at the Whitney," Kraus writes. "He invited me to his office to explain why I'd never be an artist. John said although he found my work 'intelligent' and 'courageous,' it lacked beauty, criticality and narrative resolution...And it confused me, wondering why intelligence and courage were considered negative attributes in female filmmaking" (*Aliens*, 162-163). Or why perhaps "beauty, criticality, and narrative resolution" should trump "intelligence and courage" in the art-film game (where the jackpot has never been particularly large). When Lieberman caustically comments that "Kraus tries to get over herself and her cinematic mishap by interweaving the account of her flop with the life stories of other earnest visionaries who died with puny places in the canon," she ignores the fact that all the artists and "visionaries" described in the book are people who struggled mightily with the issue of "beauty" and its essential link to art. The project (or unwitting result) of the book is not, as Lieberman asserts, to suck us "into an intellectual time warp, one that revives an embarrassing '80s moment that fetishized 'transgressive martyrs' and glorified hysteria as a site of resistance to patriarchy" (Lieberman 2000, 1). Rather the book asks us to go back and revisit one of the dominant tenets of all the avant-garde, anti-Art movements of the 20th century: namely that art and beauty aren't necessarily synonymous terms and that in the technologized sphere of the 20th century there may even be something a little politically suspect about mandating an aesthetically pleasing art. An art in which "beauty, criticality, and narrative resolution" trumps "intelligence and courage."

As though to emphasize the importance of this intellectual project, Kraus frames her frame story with descriptions of the milleniall countdown:

Countdown on the millennium (sic) clock at 34th Street and 7th Avenue in Manhattan, a grid of twitching light-dots advancing into numbers, ringed by brightly-colored logos its sponsors burned into the plastichrome--TCBY Yogurt, Roy Rogers, Staples, and Kentucky Fried Chicken--neo-medieval message from our sponsors, instructing us that time is fluid but Capital is here to stay-- 468 days, 11 hours, 43 minutes, 16 seconds to go

(*Aliens*, n.p. before p. 1)

Given the context, the clock invokes a mood less of anticipation than of panic. There's the sense that time is running out. And that sense is reflected in other sections of the book, as well, as Kraus tells us that Sylvère Lotringer wants to get his mother's World War II story before she dies, and as loved ones do die before Kraus has a chance to say goodbye. All of these encounters are mediated by technology--the clock keeps track of the days--time running out; bad news comes via e-mail, phone, and fax--machines which frequently garble and lose things; the stories of Holocaust survivors and deportees are tape recorded and preserved--machines marking time and transmitting/ preserving/ garbling/ losing/ reconfiguring voice and image. I'm reminded of Baudrillard's description of the clock at Beaubourg.

The perfect symbol of the end of the century is the numerical clock at the Beaubourg in Paris. There, the race against time was measured in millions of seconds. The Beaubourg clock
illustrates the reversal of time characteristic of our contemporary modernity. Time is no longer counted from its point of origin, as a progressive succession. It is rather subtracted from the end (5,4,3,2,1,0). It is like a bomb with delayed effect. The end of time is no longer the symbolic completion of history, but the mark of a possible fatigue, of a regressive countdown. We are no longer living according to a projected vision of progress or production. The final illusion of history has disappeared since history is now encapsulated in a numerical countdown (just as the final illusion of humankind disappears when man is encapsulated in genetic computations). Counting the seconds from now to the end means that the end is near, that one has already gone beyond the end. (Baudrillard 1998, 1).

In a sense this marks a kind of reversal of the historical logic of progress and time that is played out in I Love Dick. In that earlier book Chris plays the Violent Femmes' song "Add it Up" as she waits for Dick in a motel. It's an appropriate choice. The first lines of the song--"why can't I get just one kiss?"--make the perfect ironic commentary on Chris's relationship with her on-again, off-again maybe-beau. But "add it up" could work as a kind of coda to the book as a whole, as well--could serve as an appropriate summation to the book's trajectory of progress (things develop, subject positions emerge, relationships evolve). In Aliens, on the other hand, the mood is much more one of "subtract it down," as Chris literally works against the clock to break herself--and history--down. "Countdown," she writes in the filmscript for Gravity and Grace (which is included in its entirety at the end of the book). "Ticking of a time bomb. The world explodes" (Aliens, 178).

The Body

As in I Love Dick, a book which used Baudrillard's vision of the hyper-real to get to Deleuze's vision of rematerialization, here Kraus invokes a sense of Baudrillardian skepticism in order to work toward Deleuzian intensification. As Arthur Kroker notes in The Possessed Individual:

Deleuze and Guattari want to recover the possibility of rematerialization of experience: a rhizomatic network of experience where events vanish into a decoded world of immateriality, only to instantly reappear in their opposite sign form in an endless chain of 'lines' of flight and interruption... [they] struggle to revive a liquid materialism, one which preserves the honour of the 'doubling.' That is, their theorization of doublings, signification/subjectification, recuperates the legacy of naturalism in hyper-modern form (120).

I believe Kraus is attempting much the same thing here. References to the clock, to technologies of time, to the loss and possible end of history, and to the relevance of art in such a world are intercut with references to a reconfigured somatic body, which for Kraus becomes a kind of cipher. This is not the somatic body as Freud reads it--a signifier of past trauma and a repository of historical memory. Kraus's body lives firmly in the present and its symptoms can be read as ciphers for the political realities of late capitalism, a (re)materialized way to track power's ebbs and flows. In I Love Dick, she tells "Dick":

1988 was the year when Seven Days, a magazine about real estate and restaurants swept New York and ending up living in the park no longer seemed impossible. Famous-Artist dinner party talk about former colleagues seen scavenging in dumpsters. Money rewrote mythology and the lives of people I'd admired now seemed like cautionary tales. Paul Thek died of AIDS in 1986 and David Wojnarowicz was dying and there was all this academic shit out there about The Body as if it were a thing apart. And in the midst of this you wrote the most amazing thing about the need to bring things DOWN:

"The biological," you wrote (quoting Emanuel Levinas), "with the notion of inevitability it implies, becomes more than an object of spiritual life. It becomes its heart. The mysterious urgings of the blood...lose the character of problems to be solved by a sovereignly free Self. Because the self is made of just these elements. Our essences no longer lie in freedom but in a kind of chaining. To be truly oneself means accepting this ineluctable original chain that is unique to our bodies, and above all in accepting this chaining" (Dick 133-134).

This isn't quite the Body Without Organs, which Deleuze and Guattari describe (what remains when you take everything else away). Although I should say here that frequently in Kraus's own writing about the body, the Body Without Organs is precisely the thing she's working towards. But it does come very close to describing what Deleuze and Guattari call a "motor program of experimentation" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 151). As Steven Shaviro describes it, "a program is a kind of work on the body, an actual physical and conceptual transformation, and not just an interpretation. It arises out of and ruptures, a given social context: it produces effects" (Shaviro 1993, 207). Shaviro is speaking specifically here of the kind of conscious work and reconfiguration that Andy Warhol did on his own body and also the way that he reimagined and repositioned the physical body of the actor in his films. But "motor program of
experimentation" can be read politically to refer to the historical emergence of specific diseases and transmutations of the body, as well; diseases and transmutation which arise out of and rupture specific social contexts: thalidomide babies, AIDS, radiation sickness.

The "Chris" of both *I Love Dick* and *Aliens and Anorexia* suffers from two chronic illnesses of the digestive/intestinal tract: Crohn's Disease and anorexia. Throughout the books, these two diseases periodically surface as signifying practices, commentary which clues us how to read the "plot." In *I Love Dick*, for example, Chris becomes ill after hearing about Dick's response (given to a friend) to her letter-art project. "One afternoon," Kraus writes,

Sylvere called his friend Marvin Dietrichson in L.A. to try and get a read on Dick's reaction. And yes, before the Christmas break, Marvin'd run into Dick in the school ball and said: 'I heard you saw Sylvere and Chris--How'd it go?' 'I don't know,' Marvin recalled Dick saying, 'it was some strange scene.' Some strange scene. When Chris heard this her stomach contracted and she vomited. (*Dick* 101)

Later in the book, she describes coming down with three different rashes after a particularly upsetting exchange with Dick. For "Dick," news about Chris's physical state constitutes "emotional blackmail." But for Chris it is both a reliable barometer of her emotional state and a powerful conveyor of information. "The somatic body won't be denied," she writes, "it's like a freeway" (*Dick*, 242).

It's important to note here that somatic disease in Kraus's work is "a physical and conceptual transformation, and not just an interpretation", a symptom of some covered or hidden psychic trauma. Illness and physical symptoms here "arise out of and rupture specific social contexts," and in that sense they are as sociopolitical as they are personal. "To be truly oneself," she quotes, "means accepting this ineluctable original chain that is unique to our bodies, and above all in accepting this chaining" (*Dick* 133-134). As Chris's illnesses show, there's nothing necessarily attractive or romantic about this chaining "that is unique to our bodies." It is profoundly anti-romantic, what's left when all the metaphysical hyperbole about the connection to nature or the Great Chain of Being is drained away.

This is particularly true of the descriptions of Crohn's disease, a chronic condition which Chris has to ward off throughout the two books. Crohn's Disease is a hereditary chronic inflammation of the small intestine. Like any chronic ailment, Kraus writes, "its triggers can be physical, psychic or environmental. For Chris the trigger was despair, which she saw as very different from depression. Despair was being backed into a corner without a single move. Despair began with a contracting swelling of the small intestine which in turn created an obstruction which in turn caused vomiting beyond bide" (*Dick*, 102). In its worst stages, it causes malnutrition and dehydration; the sufferer has to be hospitalized, rehydrated, given intravenous drugs. Several times during the course of the two books, Chris sees warning signs, the early symptoms of a flare-up or attack of the illness, and tells "Sylvere, Sylvalium" who has become an expert in derailing the disease. "All it took to stop the roller coaster," she writes, "was to calm Chris down and make her sleep. Cups of tea with liquid opium, fluffy dogs, and stories" (*Dick*, 102). It's interesting that narrative plays a central role here. The "stories" don't necessarily have to be happy ones--in fact in *Dick*, Sylvere holds off the disease by telling Chris a story that's so sad they both cry--the narratives just have to be engrossing and well-told to have the required tranquilizing effect.

Crohn's Disease appears here as an accurate barometer of Chris's personal emotional state, but it also functions as a powerful conveyor of information. How does one tell the difference between depression and despair? Read the body. Anorexia, on the other hand, functions solely as a social stethoscope. In *Alien and Anorexia*, Kraus rehearses many of the accepted psychological readings/explanations of the disease--reluctance to mature, refusal of sexuality, desire to exert control-- and rejects them all. "No one considers," she writes, "that eating might be more or less than what it seems. At best, [in the literature] the anorexic is blocked in an infantile struggle to attain a separation from her mother. At worst, she is passive-aggressively shunning the 'female' state and role. At any rate, all these readings deny the possibility of a psychic-intellectual equation between a culture's food and the entire social order. Anorexia is a malady experienced by girls, and it's still impossible to imagine girls moving outside themselves and acting through culture. All these texts are based on the belief that a well-adjusted, boundaried sense of self is the only worthy female goal" (*Alien*, 141).

For Chris, food is profoundly social and political. She stops eating meat because of a bloody roast that appears on the table the night she has a political quarrel with her husband and some of his friends. She goes to an expensive takeout place in L.A. hoping she'll find something to tempt her, but she is alienated by both the prices and the
"canned," artificial appearance of the food. The food she craves is food that has some connection to the land and to the people who prepare/consume it. Freshly picked red lettuce from the garden, dressed in vinaigrette that she has prepared. Real cheese, like the kind she and Sylvère had on a country farm in France—a place so rural that the woman had to ask Sylvère to slow his rapid fire Parisian French down to a rhythm she could follow. It's not just that such food tastes better or is better for you; it's that such food exists outside the profound cynicism which capitalism sends ricocheting throughout the food chain. Anorexia, Kraus writes, "is not evasion of a social-gender role; it's not regression. It is an active stance: the rejection of the cynicism that this culture hands us through its food, the creation of an involuted body" (Aliens 163). If this sounds Deleuzian, it should. She even quotes Deleuze to help us make the connection. "The philosopher Gilles Deleuze got anorexia right," she observes, "[his wife was one] by noting that it isn't anything to do with 'lack.' 'Anorexia,' he told his girlfriend and collaborator Claire Parnet, 'is a matter of food fluxes. The question is how to escape predetermination, the mechanical sign of the meal.' " (Aliens 163).

It's interesting that Kraus's discussion of Deleuze occurs immediately after the conversation she has with John Hanhardt about the necessary components of art ("beauty, criticality, and narrative resolution" vs. "intelligent and courageous"). And it occurs shortly before another reference to the millennial clock. "Millennial countdown: 377 days to go" (Aliens 163). Which brings us to the second crucial nexus in Aliens and Anorexia: aliens, art, and food—the constellation from which the book derives its title.

Ulrike Meinhof Speaking to the Inhabitants of Earth

"In [the play] Andy Warhol's Last Love," Kraus writes, Eva Buchmiller, a young woman with long hair in a short black slip sits in front of a bookcase at a table. She is channeling the voice of the dead Ulrike Meinhof through a set of headphones...This is Ulrike Meinhof speaking to the inhabitants of earth. You must make your death public...In this play, Andy Warhol and Ulrike Meinhof, two cultural icons who might seem to literally oppose each other, come together—They are a dialectical synthesis transposed to psychic states" (Aliens 1-2).

The "dialectical synthesis" of Warhol and Meinhof—of pop art and revolutionary politics, of art as commodity and art as weapon—becomes a kind of trope for an impulse that runs throughout Kraus's work. It's not that she fetishizes "transgressive martyrs" and glorifies "hysteria," as Lieberman claims (Lieberman 2000, 1). But she is interested in artists who try to carve out an oppositional stance within the dominant culture, who attempt to position themselves as class-traitors and 'Alien,' and who pursue collective enterprises within a market-economy that lionizes the loner-artist and individual genius. In a sense, she's interested in art that can't be sold, but which still has a kind of recognized "value" (art that's shown in installation-exhibits and workshops, but not bought by collectors, for example). This is less an attempt "to get over herself and her cinematic mishap...to redeem herself"—as Lieberman maintains—than it is to write an alternative history of art (Lieberman 2000, 1). One which "reads" art history in the same way that Derrida taught us to read texts, by looking at gaps and slippages—the spaces in-between recognized signifiers (in this case, icons of the art/theory world). To this end, she attempts to recuperate not only potentially-hip renegade artists like Paul Thek, the Squat Theater, and Ken Kobland, but "old-fashioned" figures like Simone Weil, whose Gravity and Grace haunts Kraus's work.

Aliens and anorexia are, Lieberman maintains, "the two reigning metaphors" of Kraus's most recent "novel" (Lieberman 2000, 2). Perhaps "hyperlinks" would be a better word here—since they function more as a conduit to parallel, cultural sites than as an illustrative analogy. In fact, Kraus is suspicious of analogies, which she sees as always already mired in dominant ideology. "I have to keep reminding myself that [Paul] Thek was not a parable," she writes, "he was a person. Because after all to see him as a martyr is to play into art history's hand" (Aliens 70). So aliens and anorexia aren't really meant to function as metaphors or analogies here. Rather, each represents a kind of process—a discursive configuration—that intersects with and runs parallel to other discursive configurations, and links to other cultural sites.

One of the parallel cultural sites they always connect to is (Art). If anorexia for Kraus "is an active stance: the rejection of the cynicism that this culture hands us through its food," the production of experimental art is similarly an active stance: the rejection of the cynicism that this culture hands us through its Culture. And just as discourses surrounding anorexia can and frequently do engage deep-seated social anxieties and contradictions surrounding the gendered Other (the alien), so discourses surrounding experimental art can and frequently do engage deep-seated social anxieties and contradictions surrounding the raced and ethnicized Other
In "Kike Art," for example, Kraus writes: "Kitaj has followed Arnold Schoenberg in proclaiming 'I have long since resolved to be a Jew...I regard that as more important than my art.' And his work's been called a lot of things that Jews are called: 'abstruse, pretentious,' 'shallow, fake, and narcissistic,' 'hermetic, dry, and bookish,' 'difficult, obscure, slick, and grade f'" (Dick, 190). This is reminiscent, of course, of Hitler's "Degenerate Art" Show, in which avant-garde and experimental art was labelled "Jewish Art" ("Kike Art") and displayed in a manner deliberately designed to deride and "racialize" the pieces (see Stephanie Barron, 1991).

But the connection between food and art--two commodities whose prestige value in Capitalist culture frequently surpasses their use value--is also significant here. Paul Thek, the artist that Kraus discusses at length in *Aliens*, preceded Damien Hirst in the practice of "meat art." Initially making wax replicas of human and animal meat encased in glass, Thek went on to use his own body and the bodies of others in installation pieces which consistently highlighted death and decay (in reading about Thek, I found myself thinking of Peter Greenaway's *Zed and Two Noughts*, a 1985 film which is similarly concerned with the intersection between aesthetics and rotting meat. Thek's work, however, is less chilly than many find Greenaway's work to be. And less pristine).

At the moment when Thek began to make a perverse sort of name for himself as the "meat man," the moment when his meat pieces became a kind of "signature" art, he began experimenting with other forms of installation and performance art, and he began to engage in truly collaborative co-operative projects. His short-lived Artists Co-op was an attempt to make something like real group art. Kraus describes one of the installation pieces that the Co-op made:

Unlike many other collaborations of that era [1971], *Pyramid/A Work in Progress* is extraordinary because it is a collaboration between equals rather than the vision of one person enacted by his drones. But it's difficult to grasp the boundaries where the obsessions/dreams of every individual leave off. The objects are autonomous and yet *Pyramid/A Work in Progress* is nothing like a group show. It's more like a group mind" (*Aliens*, S6).

To do the piece, sponsored by the Stockholm Museum, the 8 Co-Op members worked and lived together, often inhabiting parts of the museum. What they created was something like an "exploded Stations of the Cross," with: "a catacomb and tunnel, a salvaged sink, old bathtubs, some balsam pines... fast food containers, a scale model of a house, a washing line with laundry hung to dry, a kitchen table cleared and lit for the arrival of visitors..." In much the same way that "Chris" wants to hang her love letters to Dick on the cactus and bushes in front of Dick's house and film his reaction, there are, in *Pyramid*, "letters, postcards, drawings nailed to the trees." "Two "signature" works by Thek--~Fisherman~ and his famous dead hippie-- lie underneath part of the structure, recontextualized and buried. "Museum visitors were recast as actors," Kraus writes, "walking along a dirt-packed route towards the 'temple of time,' a huge pyramid, past a shack called the 'confessional'..."To be inside the room was to become part of the procession. Because many of the Artist's Co-Op members were also visual artists, they contributed objects out of their own image-banks. Ann Wilson installed a breathtaking sculpture called *Stag in the Boat* (*Aliens* 55-56).

What I find interesting here is not just the installation itself, but the fact that Thek came to it via his meat and death pieces. "Everything," he once wrote, "can be beautiful and ugly simultaneously. We accept our thing-ness intellectually, but the emotional acceptance of it can be a joy" (*Aliens* 47). Certainly, some of his early work—like *Birthday Cake*, a four tiered pyramid of human flesh adorned with pink birthday candles—asks us to think about flesh, food, and mortality differently than we've ever thought about them before. And his installation work, which frequently stows previously exhibited pieces under tables and features them in crates, similarly posits interesting links between art, decay (in one part of *Pyramid* an "old" crated piece has sprouted flowers) and food/eating/consumption. There is here a radical refusal of the notion that art can be a finished product with a discrete value, a radical insistence that all art—not just Thek's—be read as part of a process (in Amsterdam, for example, he "borrowed" several of Van Gogh's paintings and hung them up as part of his installation, much to the consternation of the museum and the press). If Simone Weil believed that we must use the "I" to break down the "I," Thek seemed to believe that is only by breaking down—or at least subsuming—the "I" that we can find a true "we," that we can design group projects that represent true "collaboration between equals rather than the vision of one person enacted by his drones" (*Aliens* 56).

If this has a quasi-religious tone, it should. In the last years of his life, Paul Thek wished to join a Carthusian monastery in Vermont. He wrote to the brothers in Vermont: "I came to a kind of reawakening only rather late in life and have felt like a fish out of water ever since...I already spend far more time alone than any of you do and I
have no sharing community to return to when my aloneness becomes too great...Perhaps my own creative work might be continued there? (Aliens 75)

But while Aliens and Anorexia spends a lot of time exploring the connections between spirituality and art, between what Simone Weil might call Gravity and Grace, Kraus's take on religion is resolutely secular. "Among people who reject the mystical state," she writes, "the only yardstick for measuring the will-to-decreate is sadomasochism" (Aliens 48).

Aliens

"This is Ulrike Meinhof speaking to the inhabitants of Earth: You must make your death public. As the rope was tightening around my neck, an Alien made love to me." Aliens recur throughout the book--both as what Lieberman calls "metaphors" and as fictional characters.

Everything seemed hopeless. It was a rainy afternoon, early November. Bach's Partita for Cello in B minor, performed by Ute Uge came on the radio. I pulled over to the shoulder of Springs Fireplace Road and wept. My skin became so porous that the tremor of the cello crept into my body like an Alien...How does anybody ever escape? There is a painting in the Frick of St. Francis of Assisi stricken to the ground after being visited by God. He is no longer the gentle saint of birds and animals. The man is totally deranged. Alien encounters are a phenomenon of marking--pins on the map of an emotional landscape that you'd been moving through but didn't realize had a shape. Despair's a maudlin ecstasy of baroque romanticism. You wait for signs (Aliens 22).

For the people who believe in them, Aliens are both frightening and reassuring presences in their lives. Aliens represent a strange combination of science and mysticism--techno-angels (there are those who believe that it was two Alien messengers who came to Abraham, foretold the birth of Isaac, and "cured" Sarah of her infertility). In popular culture, they function as a link to some of the anxieties of the era we're living through.

A year ago, I was teaching a course on panic culture, and one of the books we read for the class was Jodi Dean's Aliens in America. Reading Dean's book, I was struck by the fact that I've experienced every symptom that most abductees point to as evidence of their abduction. Like them, I've experienced missing time; I've found strange marks on my body which I can't explain; I've had illnesses mysteriously appear and disappear; I've had nightmares about painful medical procedures (although my tormentors are always earth-doctors, not little grays). Most of the students in the class similarly admitted to fitting the abductee profile--with one crucial difference, that we had no recollection of or belief in an abduction. As the X-Files has perhaps conclusively demonstrated, however, conspiracy theory and anxiety about aliens are the appropriate tropes for the time. Talking about her fictional Alien lover and alter-ego, Chris says: "Like me, the Alien is anorexic. Sometimes we talk about our malabsorption problems. Everything turns to shit. Food's uncontrollable. If only it were possible to circumvent the throat, the stomach and the small intestine and digest food just by seeing. After several weeks, the Alien decides that he will no longer make love to me because I'm 'not the One.' Aliens spend their lifetimes on this planet testing, searching. They get dewy-eyed, nostalgic about hometown virgins" (Aliens 48). This particular Alien has a weakness for women who use certain salon hair products and a strong antipathy to vaginal odors. He takes valium and heroin. What does one do with such a creature? When he goes through withdrawal, Chris makes him chicken soup.

Which brings us back to the ethnic and racial ramifications of the term "Alien", particularly in America. Alien-foreign, strange. The Jew as eternal, unassimilated alien. The Alien I remember from my childhood--the annual TV ads reminding aliens that they must register their whereabouts by a certain date, just in case the U.S. government needed to track them down. At a time when World War II was not such a distant memory, these ads had a chilling effect on me, on my family. Mashed potatoes. Strawberry shortcake. Memories of the yellow Star of David. The marking of the body to identify camp inmates and Jews.

When I was working on this section of this piece, I started thumbing through Toril Moi's discussion of Kristeva's work in Sexual/Textual Politics. And I found the following quote:

When Roland Barthes in 1970 sat down to write an enthusiastic review of one of Kristeva's early works, he chose to call it "L'etrangere," which translates approximately as 'the strange, or foreign, woman.' Though an obvious allusion to Kristeva's Bulgarian nationality (she first arrived in Paris in 1966), this title captures what Barthes saw as the unsettling impact of Kristeva's work. 'Julia Kristeva changes the place of things,' Barthes wrote, 'she always destroys the latest preconception...she subverts authority' (Moi 1985, 150).
I think a similar argument can be made about the "Alien" nature of Chris Kraus and the unsettling impact of her work. "She always destroys the latest preconception...she subverts authority."
Postscript on Chance

Given that Kraus writes so well and so much about art, it makes sense that the third book in her oeuvre would be an art catalogue. Chance: The Catalogue is the published record of excerpts from "Chance: 3 Days in the Desert," the event which brought Jean Baudrillard, D. J. Spooky, Chris Kraus, Sylvère Lotringer, the Chance Band and a host of others together at Whiskey Pete's, Stateline, Nevada, for three days in November 1996. Chance: The Event was organized by Kraus, and attracted over 500 people, "a cross-section of poststructuralist grad students, new-media utopians, L.A.-based artists, rave-scene aficionados, and jet-lagged Europeans," who gathered "under Baudrillard's imprimatur to explore cybernetic theories of empowerment, the lure of Vegas, and the catchall metaphor of Chance" (Bennahum 1997, 80). Part conference, part Happening, part lounge act, Chance: The Event is another example of Kraus's genre-invention. And Chance: The Catalogue certainly reflects that. It also does some genre bending of its own, as it challenges assumptions about what precisely an art catalogue is supposed to be. Filled with prose, poetry, interviews, photographs, drawings, diagrams, and film clips, the catalogue looks as much like an art journal as it does the historical record of a particular art show. The one part of the catalogue which attempts something of the encyclopedic archival function which most art catalogues take as their defining generic purpose (prints of most of the paintings in an exhibit, complete with a couple of erudite essays to introduce the material), contains lists of the works contained in each exhibition room, bios of the artists and bios of the writers. There are no pictures or photographs in this section at all. They simply let you plunge into the works themselves, without a curator/editor/commentator mediating the experience. In a sense, this feature along with the extremely low (for a catalogue) price tag, makes Chance: The Catalogue a uniquely generous work, in that it allows those of us who weren't able to attend the event to experience at least some of the intellectual stimulation we might have had while there. And since it's not dependent on the actual event itself to give it meaning, it can be experienced by anyone the same way that any good postmodern art publication can--as a compendium of interesting and often beautiful stuff.

The catalogue also mounts something of a challenge to conventional notions of "art." It begins with an excerpt from a story "Polyester as Porcelain," in which a blackjack dealer looks at her newly-epoxied nails and meditates on the hazards of working in a nail salon. Other texts include Ann Rower's "Blur" (part-memoir, part mini-essay on the women--Lee Krasner, Elaine de Kooning—who lived and worked at Green River); a poem by Diane di Prima; a gorgeous hypnotic prose riff--"Across the Morphic Fields"--by spinning master D.J. Spooky; theoretical essays on "chance" by Jeremy-Gilberte-Rolfe and Fred Dewey; and interviews with Rosanne Allucquere Stone and Jean Baudrillard. What emerges is an idea of "art" that's firmly grounded in the literary, the autobiographical and the theoretical. Or to put it another way, the catalogue creates a context in which autobiography and theory can be seen or revealed as art. The visual illustrations--photos, film stills, drawings--which accompany the texts, are both juxtapositions to and illuminations of the spoken/written word. But it's the written texts themselves that drive/dominates/organize the catalogue. For that reason, Chance: The Catalogue is reminiscent of the work of both Sophie Calle and DJ Spooky. It embodies and/or illustrates D.J. Spooky's assertion that writing is both illusive quotation and performance art ("DJing is writing, writing is DJing. The only difference may be found in the historical approach...," Frank Hartmann and Richard Pettauer, 1998). And it enacts the same kind of tension between text and image that marks Calle's Suite Venitienne (another work informed by Baudrillard's presence in the text).

Chance: The Catalogue, then, makes many of the same theoretical and generic moves that Kraus's "novels" do. And it foregrounds one of the major thematic elements which drive the "plots" of the other two books. Both I Love Dick and Aliens and Anorexia are about chance encounters. In them, Chris is forever being tempted to take the plunge, run the risk, gamble; and, in a perverse way, part of what makes the books so appealing is that even when she loses (the film flops, the man leaves) she seems to come out on top. I don't want to make this sound too much like Chris is the Moll Flanders of the millennium. As I've tried to show, the books are theoretical texts as much as they are "novels," and the reason the books are so rich and rewarding to read is that they unfold as theoretical fictions, books in which theory is an integral part of the "plot." So "chance" in Kraus's "novels" does not function the way it functions in a picaresque tale. Rather, chance can itself be read as a theoretically inflected concept, one which belongs very much to the late twentieth century. It is "outside the purview of the subject," as Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe tells us. It is "the place where the subject may be
seen to disappear" (Chance:The Catalogue, n.p.). In that sense it becomes the perfect metaphor for Kraus's theoretical and artistic project, as enacted throughout her prose works: "to use the 'I' to break down the 'I'" (Alien, 27). These are books in which "to take a chance" is both "an act of surrender," as Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe asserts, and "the search for a privileged relation," as Baudrillard maintains (Chance, no pagination).

And it is the tension between these two positions which animate the trajectory of both Alien and I Love Dick.

I don't just mean this in some vague, abstract way. Kraus writes that the books she's been working on were left for her by her friend Dan Asher when he moved out of her apartment. "Here Chris, you can keep this box," he rasped the morning that his plane was leaving and then I didn't see him for another twenty years... I missed him. Weeks passed before I got around to opening the box. And when I did, there was a set of photographs he took of Patti Smith, Keith Richards, Paul Verlaine. Some beads and feathers. And then a pile of books: the writings of the Dadaist Hugo Ball, some books in French by Antonin Artaud. Plon's first edition of Simone Weil's Gravity and Grace, in French, La Pesseur et la grace. The writings of Ulrike Meinhof, including Meinhof's screenplay translated into French as Le Foyer. I bought a dictionary and started reading. Though it hadn't yet occurred to me to be an artist, Dan's box contained everything I'd work on. And this took 15 years. (Aliens 35,36).

While everyone stumbles on their intellectual passions in similarly happenstance ways, I've seldom read a passage that describes the impact of chance on intellectual life written so beautifully and honestly. The fact that Dan Asher was a stranger Chris knew from a coffeehouse or a spa when she first took him in, ups the ante. Namakes the final encounter with the books seem at once more inevitable and more risky. Certainly the work she has done on those books evinces both "an act of surrender" to the texts themselves and "the search for a privileged relation" to them. It marks the need for the same kind of intensification which Guattari describes in Chaosophy. In both Alien and I Love Dick, Kraus uses Baudrillard to get to Deleuze and Guattari. I suppose you could maintain that she does that in Chance:The Catalogue too. For one thing there is something profoundly Deleuzian about the illusive scene in which DJ Spooky participates. Frankfurt's Mille Plateaux techno label, for example, was named after Deleuze and Guattari's Mille Plateaux; and label-boss Achim Szepanski has been explicit about the influence which Deleuze and Guattari's theory have had on his own cultural work. As Simon Reynolds puts it, "Influenced by A Thousand Plateaux, Szepanski conceived the strategy of context-based subversion that informs his labels" (Reynolds 1999, 363). And while DJ Spooky is more apt to reference Baudrillard and Derrida in his interviews and writing, he enacts a cultural nomadism which borrows heavily from Deleuze and Guattari's nomadology. He's also interested in "schizophrenia, the idea of inhabiting all these different personas" (quoted in Reynolds 1999, 372) and its peculiar relationship to late capitalism, an attitude which brings him very close to Szepanski and Mille Plateaux. Finally, Chance:The Catalogue is animated more by Deleuzian optimism than it is by Baudrillardian pessimism. This makes for a pleasant read, but it does leave the reader curious about how exactly Baudrillard ended up fitting into Chance:The Event. And it is perhaps telling that his presence, like his tone, is somewhat attenuated in the catalogue. In a brief interview with Sarah Gavlak, which I reproduce in its entirety here, Baudrillard appears as uncharacteristically nonloquacious, as though he were too tired or skeptical to speak. The interview comes near the end of the catalogue, and as with everything else in the catalogue, its exact relationship to Chance:The Event is unclear.

Q: What exactly is your favorite kind of nature or landscape?
A: Desert.
Q: Why is Los Angeles so seductive to you?
A: Because it is an urban desert as well as an ideal place for disappearance. Q: If, as you say, "seduction is destiny," then is chance a result of seduction?
A: Of course. Chance is not at all a matter of luck, but a search for a privileged relation. The gambler turns himself into a strange attractor.
Q: Would you consider seduction the spiritual manifestation of destiny and chance a more mechanical operation?
A: ????
Q: Are you afraid of being seduced?
A: Certainly not, until I'm proved wrong! (but the reverse is true too).
Q: Do you hate to lose?
A: I'm a bad loser.

In contrast to Baudrillard, Nick Kallos--in an interview which comes directly after Baudrillard's in the text--is loquacious as hell as he describes gambling the way someone else might describe a rave. "You can always tell from the moves they make, the way they work the tables. It's the rush from the crowd, the rush from the winning that's exciting. It's total insanity. It's no different than a drug addict or having an alcohol problem. You either control yourself or go down for the count"
"collisions," about a kind of verbal montage, in *I Love Dick,* it seems clear that she means us to take this juxtaposition seriously. But what do we do with a performer-gambler who seems so in tune with the signifying chain that is language and how do we read his juxtaposition with a philosopher who is rendered here, through terse pronouncements, as the master of the conversation endgame?

In part, Baudrillard's reduced role in the catalogue is a physical manifestation of Kraus's assertion that *Chance: The Event* was "a lot more than Baudrillard" (Bennahum 1997, 60). But it's also a reminder that a very real part of Kraus's (perhaps unconscious) theoretical project is to interrogate what we do with Baudrillard and how we use his work in an age which Foucault once said would be Deleuzian or it would not be. Perhaps the only pessimistic note in the catalogue is this very positioning of Baudrillard in a marginal space, near the end.

I began this essay calling for a re-examination of Kraus's work. And I planned to end it, by simply inviting you to go (back) to the texts. Since I first started writing, *The Front Table*--the publication of Chicago's Seminary Co-Op Bookstore--has published an intelligent and positive brief review of *Aliens and Anorexia* (August-September 2000, 83) I hope that other reviewers will also take a serious, critical look at Kraus's work; and rescue it from the cultural niche to which it's been too often consigned--Harlequin romances for smart chicks or, as Kraus herself puts it, the Dumb Cunt's tale. As I've tried to show, these are rich texts--rewarding to read and rewarding to teach. And they deserve more serious discussion than they've gotten.
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