PART II

IMPOSITION

INTIMATE INTERVENTIONS

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THREE HANGERS-ON

CHRIS KRAUS'S PARASITICAL FEMINISM

In many cases, the man can commit acts with woman's complicity that degrade her without tarnishing his lofty image. . . . Officially the man renounces her, those are the rules of the game. . . . When one speaks to these women of dignity, honor, loyalty, and all the lofty virile virtues, one should not be surprised if they refuse to "go along." They particularly snigger when virtuous males reproach them for being calculating, actresses, liars: they know well that no other way is open to them. . . . The woman has been assigned the role of parasite.—**SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR, *THE SECOND SEX***

The title of Chris Kraus's 1997 cult novel, *I Love Dick*, rings out as an admission of shame and a badge of defiance: I am attached to and titillated by a patriarchy that oppresses me. It is a performative study of the female abasement and complicity that attends heterosexual desire—a problematic that radical feminist thought has long explored in terms of the maligned "female parasite." Panned by early critics, the book has since become a full-blown cultural juggernaut, embraced by a new generation of internet-savvy feminists and reappraised by critics as a feminist classic that arrived "20 years early."[1] "Critics don't seem to like Chris Kraus' 'novels' much," observed Joan Hawkins in her afterword to the book's 2006 reissue. "I say 'novels' (in quotes) because I'm not entirely sure Kraus' works belong in the generic category of 'novel.' Rather . . . Kraus' prose works constitute 'some new kind of literary form,' a new genre, 'something in between cultural criticism and fiction.'"[2] In a 1998 review for *Bookforum*, David Rimanelli memorably described it as "a book not so much written as secreted," a frank character-

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ization of a work that viscerally enacts the very abjection that it sets out to critique.[3] In *I Love Dick*, Kraus chronicles the romantic obsession of her protagonist, "Chris Kraus," with "Dick," a character later identified as the British cultural theorist Dick Hebdige.[4] Dick is an academic colleague of Chris's husband, "Sylvère," an influential French theorist and downtown cult figure presumably based on Kraus's then-real-life husband, Sylvère Lotringer. (The conflation of real and fictional and the ambiguities it produces is encapsulated in this confusion over names; to minimize this confusion, I use first names to refer to the characters—as the book does—and last names to refer to the writers and public figures.) After only a single meeting, which Dick describes as "genial but not particularly intimate or remarkable," Chris makes Dick into an idol, an object of worship, a figure to whom she confesses both her intellectual rapacity and her feminist shame at being Sylvère's frequent "plus-one," his perceived "hanger-on."[5] In over two hundred letters written to Dick, she rewrites him, transforming him from a real, unique person into a faceless, patriarchal screen (as in "every Tom, Dick, and Harry") onto which she projects her sexual fantasies, personal anxieties, and critical interventions.

Where the first half of this book examines the redistributive potential of the parasite, this chapter initiates the second half's exploration of parasitism as an emblematic site of feminist politics. The chapter reads *I Love Dick* and its critical reception to theorize a particular type of parasitism as a manic mode of feminist performativity. It pursues a comparative analysis of the compromised utility of a parasitical feminism by reading the novel alongside the French conceptual artist Sophie Calle's epistolary art project *Take Care of Yourself* (2007). Both works mobilize the genre of epistolary exchange, and both model practices of feverish accumulation, producing hundreds of love letters that feed on and ultimately destabilize the male lovers—the ostensible hosts of these works—who have jilted them, making these men unwitting symbols of heteropatriarchy. Calle and Kraus are not the first writers or artists to marshal epistolary and diaristic practices, often seen as feminized literary forms (at least in the European tradition), to challenge the role played by heterosexual love and romance in the abjection of women.[6] Their works draw on conventions within feminist art practice established by works such as Carolee Schneemann's *Interior Scroll* (1975), Adrian Piper's *Calling Cards* (1986), and Tracey Emin's *Love Poem* (1996), which use an autobiographical epistolary address to raise questions of sexual and racial abjection.[7] In Calle's and Kraus's projects, correspondence represents a kind of ludic back and forth in which gendered opponents feed on each other in a dynamically

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unstable game (though this play remains unidirectional in these works, as the overtures are unreciprocated). These correspondences recall a question posed by Judith Butler: "Can the exchange of speech or writing be the occasion for a disruption of the social ontology of positionality?"[8] In these works, women's desire (both real and performed) to "literalize," to put into letters their social revenge takes on a decidedly literary character; reading and writing become conditions of possibility for turning the "law of the father" against itself, letter by letter.

What is particularly ingenious about *I Love Dick* is that it is underwritten by the very poststructural stakes by which Hebdige, as a Birmingham school cultural critic, made his name: an openness to experimentation and radical transgression that is articulated through his work on symbolic resistance and punk subcultural style.[9] In a dynamic that echoes that between Byrne and Hendricks, Kraus calls Dick's intellectual bluff, showing that this self-proclaimed "subcultural transgressor" and theorist of power is himself unable or unwilling to play along when he is the one being transgressed. In his refusals to respond to Kraus's letters and his rumored attempts to block the book's publication, it seems that Dick would prefer to see his position as outside of the structures of power that his scholarship theorizes. Elizabeth Gumport writes of Hebdige's response to the release of *I Love Dick*:

> Shortly after *I Love Dick* was released, *New York* magazine reported that Hebdige had attempted to block publication of the book on grounds that it invaded his privacy. "I don't like reading bad reviews," he said, "and this book reads like a bad review of my presence in the world . . . If someone's writing gets read because it exploits a recognizable figure, then it really is a despicable exercise." Kraus defended her project on the grounds it "explod[ed] the 'right of privacy' that serves patriarchy so well." Hebdige scoffed: "A feminist issue? Tell her to take it up with Princess Diana."[10]

Hebdige thus responds to Kraus's transgression by dismissing the value of her contribution in terms strikingly similar to those Hendricks uses to dismiss Byrne. He refuses to countenance Kraus's work as a critical intervention on its own merits, characterizing it as an unoriginal "review" of him. As Kraus counters, Hebdige invokes privacy as an alibi against women's right to a public discourse about misogyny's specific interpersonal guises and manifestations. Hebdige's attempt to legally block the book's publication for invasion of privacy operates similarly to Amazon's nondisclosure agreement with Ubermorgen, as both are attempts by hosts to use their power to prevent their exposure.

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Dick was a ready-made allegory for British cultural studies' early exclusion of women. Hebdige was criticized by feminist Birmingham school scholars like Angela McRobbie for framing subcultural style as a predominantly male phenomenon, ignoring its gender ambiguities and the extent to which it is informed by "patriarchal meanings."[11] Kraus's parasitism of Hebdige can in turn be read as allegorizing what Stuart Hall called the "ruptural" intervention of feminism on male-dominated British cultural studies in the early 1970s.[12] Hall recalls the intrusion of feminism into Birmingham's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies having witnessed male cultural studies pioneers struggle to account for the blind spots of their own internalized sexism. Pioneering feminist cultural studies scholars have also published important reflections on this moment, but Hall's recollection is worth quoting at length:[13]

> As the thief in the night, [feminism] broke in; interrupted, made an unseemly noise, seized the time, crapped on the table of cultural studies. . . . Because of the growing importance of feminist work and the early beginnings of the feminist movement outside in the very early 1970s, many of us in the Centre—mainly, of course, men—thought it was time there was good feminist work in cultural studies. And we indeed tried to buy it in, to import it, to attract good feminist scholars. As you might expect, many of the women in cultural studies weren't terribly interested in this benign project. We were opening the door to feminist studies, being good, transformed men. And yet, when it broke in through the window, every single unsuspected resistance rose to the surface—fully installed patriarchal power, which believed it had disavowed itself. There are no leaders here, we used to say; we are all graduate students and members of staff together, learning how to practice cultural studies. You can decide whatever you want to decide, etc. And yet, when it came to the question of the reading list . . . Now that's where I really discovered about the gendered nature of power. Long, long after I was able to pronounce the words, I encountered the reality of Foucault's profound insight into the individual reciprocity of knowledge and power. Talking about giving up power is a radically different experience from being silenced.[14]

Hall captures firsthand the men's rush to immunize themselves against claims of sexism. The men's "good-natured" self-justifications in response to challenges to their positions demonstrate how power is disavowed not on a systemic or institutional level but on a personal level and, further, how propriety is employed as a shield for this disavowal.

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The symbolic place Hebdige is made to occupy is as if fated by the misfortune of the punning endowment afforded by his first name. But while Hebdige's real-world persona is essential to the success of Kraus's conceptual gesture, *I Love Dick* is ultimately not about Dick Hebdige, any more than it is about any other specific man of his social standing; rather it is about the patriarchal symbolic capital he both represents and benefits from. Kraus's decision to violate the condition of privacy presumed by interpersonal intimacy or familiarity in order to make a feminist statement about the routine sexual humiliation of young women prefigures similar post-digital-era accounts such as those associated with the Me Too movement and call-out culture, which have brought into the mainstream this kind of public exposure and real-name truth-telling about power dynamics under patriarchy and white supremacy. Many have debated the ethics of these tactics of public exposure, while others have pointed out how normative ethical approaches to this question continually position the targeted individual's comfort and privacy as the paramount considerations.

In the case of the Me Too movement, such acts of public exposure buck intense pressure to continue doing what women have been doing forever: internalizing and dissociating their shame by not talking about a sexual culture that is, as the blogger Katie Anthony has put it, "fucking awful and ordinary."[15] Rather than silently accepting her abjection, Kraus hyperbolizes and publicizes it. By manically embracing and performing her social role as a "romantically dependent" woman, the protagonist of *I Love Dick* reappropriates as a tactical model the figure of the parasitical woman, long reviled in nineteenth- and twentieth-century radical Western feminist history and criticism. In this way Kraus follows Simone de Beauvoir's call in *The Second Sex* to take up, to intensify the role of the parasite to which woman has been consigned. For Beauvoir, woman (who is, for her, French, white, bourgeois, and heterosexual) is locked into a degraded role by a patriarchal order that makes her dependent upon it and then punishes her for it. She can either fight this structural role and lose, or she can accept it and play it to her advantage: "those are the rules of the game." In Beauvoir's framing, woman's parasitical social position constitutes a kind of loophole; woman's lack of self-determination can allow her to evade culpability. "There is, however, an advantage that woman can gain from her very inferiority," she writes. "Since she is from the start less favored by fortune than man, she does not feel that she is to blame a priori for what befalls him; it is not her duty to make amends for social injustice, and she is not asked to do so."[16] These works explore how women's secondary status might allow them to sidestep their sup-

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posed ethical and moral responsibility to a patriarchal system on which they depend but in which they hold no stake of ownership (akin to the woman who may run the house but whose name does not appear on the deed)—an alibi that feminists might turn to tactical or reparative ends.

Exemplifying the deep historical interlocking of femininity and complicity, the female parasite consolidates feminist anxieties about the romantically and financially dependent woman whose identity performance as heterosexual and/or bourgeois makes her complicit with patriarchal structures and relations (such as marriage and domestic life). Rather than fleeing charges of overattachment, Kraus embraces the compulsiveness and overintimacy with which the so-called dependent woman has already been charged. (In this way *I Love Dick* can be read as part of a longer history of feminist guerrilla tactics that might include the Irish suffragette Mary Maloney, the original femme troll, who followed Winston Churchill around for a week ringing a dinner bell whenever he tried to speak publicly.)[17] Kraus's performance of her real identity traffics a parasitical representational politics that is at once subversive and reactionary. As Amber Jamilla Musser has argued of female masochism, femininity functions here as a screen for the problem of complicity as "a product of [woman's] relative powerlessness in a patriarchally ordered world."[18] This chapter likewise attempts to theorize complicity as a tool for fashioning modes of feminist agency in patriarchal spaces where women cannot set the terms of engagement.

DEAR DICK

I first began writing about *I Love Dick* in 2004, when it was an unlikely object of academic inquiry. When Kraus's book was first published, it horrified many readers, including many feminists who read it as a confessional memoir and found troubling its gleeful self-abasement and reckless exhibitionism.[19] In two articles, published in 2011 and 2012, I argued that this reading of the novel as a straightforward autobiography failed to register the feminist value of its ambivalent address, which I contended should instead be read as a performance.[20] Around that time the book appeared at last to find its core readership in millennial feminists (generally middle class and urban-dwelling). In the intervening years there have been public acknowledgments of its influence by the writers Sheila Heti, Heidi Julavits, and Ariana Reines and celebrities like Lena Dunham, and discussions of it have circulated virally via feminist fanzines, Instagram, and Tumblr. The book has become a rallying cry for young feminists, who seem to read it as empowering—not

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as a story of reveling in abjection but as a story of refusing to play the silent counterpart in a coercive script.[21] Loosely adapted as an Amazon original series in 2016, the book has now been absorbed into the cultural zeitgeist (if for only a niche population).[22] In the wake of its television debut, the novel *I Love Dick* was widely revisited and positively reviewed in venues such as the *New Yorker* and the *London Review of Books*.

This dramatic shift in critics' appraisal of the book since it was reissued in 2006 is largely thanks to a new willingness to acknowledge it as having innovated a hybrid genre combining memoir with fiction. The performance studies scholar Barbara Browning sums it up well: "*I Love Dick* is only interesting . . . if one recognizes it as a work of fiction. That is, if you read it simply as a compulsive, stalkerish, neurotic confessional narrative, it's 'interesting' in a kind of vulgar way, but it really gets theoretically interesting when Kraus is pushing you to contemplate the performance of academic rock stardom, and the fictional construction of erotic and intellectual cathexis."[23] Within this double frame *I Love Dick* becomes recognizable not as mere autobiography but as a performance of autobiography. The scandal of the novel remains its insistence on itself as real. "But Dick, I know that as you read this, you'll know these things are true," Chris writes in one letter. "You understand the game is real, or even better than, reality, and better than is what it's all about. . . . Better than means stepping out into complete intensity."[24] The performative excess of her insistence places the narrative's content in tension with its form (i.e., its generic packaging as fiction). Kraus rides the line between fiction and nonfiction, unflinchingly (some say heedlessly) using real names and real historical circumstances.

While Hawkins calls this genre "theoretical fiction" and others call it "autofiction," I argue it is best read as performance art, a medium defined by its capacity to hold as one the ambiguous imbrication of life and art, real and performed bodies. Indeed Kraus writes admiringly about performance art in *I Love Dick*, calling the performance artist Hannah Wilke "a model for everything I hope to do."[25] Applying critical reading methods in performance studies to Kraus's text, Browning elsewhere observes this about Kraus's mode of address: "If one of the goals of performance art is to make audiences aware of their own complicity in the event, this confessional mode of performative fiction, often incorporating direct address, similarly puts a demand on a reader to contemplate his or her own performative force in the encounter on the page. But another part of the implicit contract with the reader/listener is his or her acceptance of the possible unreliability of the narrator."[26] Browning follows the performance theorist Richard Schechner in her

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insistence that the character Chris Kraus is not Chris Kraus and yet not not Chris Kraus.[27] *I Love Dick*'s claim to be real (which cannot be ignored even if it cannot be taken as fact) is explicitly lodged as doing feminist work because it aspires to say something about actual bodies, events, consequences: "Why does everybody think that women are debasing themselves when we expose the conditions of our own debasement?" Chris writes in another letter. "Why do women always have to come off clean?"[28]

Ultimately the conceptual payoff of the project depends on Kraus's reader allowing for both frames of her narrative, reading it as both real and fictional. The constitutive undecidability of performance lends the author-character amalgam Kraus-Chris a double cover against the pitfalls to which feminists are particularly vulnerable, including narrative overdetermination and theoretical delegitimation. The narrative technique by which Chris insists on the material trace of her body pushes against the generic limits of the novel form, enacting in writing what Rebecca Schneider has called the "explosive literality" of the work of feminist body artists like Wilke, Karen Finley, and Annie Sprinkle.[29] Browning suggests that Kraus's "confessional mode of performative fiction" was likely informed by her close proximity to and occasional participation in precisely this burgeoning scene of 1980s downtown performance art.[30]

Kraus and her character Chris use the genre of correspondence rather than her body as the medium for her performance. In *I Love Dick*, Chris turns to the letter form to avenge her sense of personal and sexual abjection. With the force of Chris's pen, the proper name Dick becomes dick, the phallus; he is thrust into the Symbolic. Now an abstraction, he is made to stand for the very idea of men, occupying the structural position of Man in Chris's litany of disappointments in the spheres of love, sex, and art. Chris graphically recounts her humiliations, from Dick's refusal to get romantically involved with her to the "insults, slights, and condescension" that she endured as the self-described "failed filmmaker" wife of a successful, tenured academic and public figure. He gets top billing; she is his perpetual "plus one." Sylvère (like Lotringer, a longtime Columbia University French professor) is an avant-garde philosopher. Known for his kinky sexual and critical appetite, he plays dominant-submissive to her submissive-dominant, academic host to her abject professional parasitical supplementarity. She has a place in the worlds of art and academia only insofar as he provides it. "Sylvère's fans were mostly young white men drawn to the more 'transgressive' elements of modernism, the heroic sciences of human sacrifice and torture as legitimized by Georges Bataille," writes Chris. She notes that they were of-

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ten rude to her, and she responded by "milking money from Sylvère's growing reputation, setting ever-higher fees [for his professional appearances on his behalf]." Chris's claimed outsiderness is complicated by her status as a very well connected (if still parasitical) "hanger-on." A self-described financial and emotional drain on her husband's resources, she is emotive excess, spilling over the boundaries of institutional permissiveness granted to Sylvère with his subversive Ivy League deconstructive critical cachet. This emotional excess seems deliberately performed, as when Chris writes to Dick, "And I wonder if there'll ever be a possibility of reconciling youth and age, or the anorexic open wound I used to be with the money-hustling hag I've become." She swears her love for Dick, concluding her daily letters to him with affirmations of his sexual power, critical majesty, and patriarchal omnipotence. Her shrill performance of sincerity hits some hilariously deadpan notes. She signs off in one entry, "I keep you in my heart, it keeps me going," and in another, "Knowing you's like knowing Jesus. There are billions of us and only one of you so I don't expect much from you personally. . . . I'm touched by you and fulfilled just by believing."[31]

Chris's "love letters" to Dick constitute an act of public exhibitionism. In this sense the project recalls Derrida's reflections on the postcard as an open letter, a mode of intimate exchange that remains unsealed and can thus be read at any moment.[32] The letters taunt Dick, mocking him for being forced to watch from the sidelines ("You, poor Dick, do not deserve to be exposed to such a masturbatory passion") while inviting him to participate in his own spectacularization by writing the introduction for the letters' publication. "It [the introduction] could read something like this," Sylvère (who has agreed to play the role of co-conspirator) suggests in one letter. "I believe these letters will interest the reader as a cultural document. Obviously they manifest the alienation of the postmodern intellectual in its most diseased form. I really feel sorry for such a parasitic growth, that feeds upon itself." The letters, both personal and impersonal, are received as irritants, like spam or junk mail. In their address to Dick, they insist on being read because they are personal rather than anonymous, even as they make him anonymous, make him stand in for any man. The letters make him into the parasitical appendage—make him, ultimately, an appendix to her book. *I Love Dick* concludes with the letter that Dick eventually sends to Sylvère, in which he misspells Chris's first name: "I found the situation initially perplexing, then disturbing, and my major regret now is that I didn't find the courage at the time to communicate to you and Kris [*sic*] how uncomfortable I felt being the unwitting object of what you described to me over the phone be-

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fore Christmas as some kind of bizarre game."[33] Dick's missive, directed to Sylvère and intended to remain between the two men, recalls Gayle Rubin's account of the transacting of women in homosocial kinship networks.[34] By excluding her from this conversation about her work, Dick attempts to write Chris out of her own story.

In the larger economy of the book's publication and publicity, Kraus's correspondence continues to stalk Dick, assigning him in the public record of her "open book" the role of reluctant art object. Dick is given no choice but to hold the position Kraus has given him. Her subterfuge turns Dick's own logic (the logic of the dick, of patriarchy) against him. She insists on the excess produced by the system's supposedly supplementary parts—namely, feminine affect—that cannot be taken into the court record; she uses the "nonserious" mediums of love letters and diary entries because they are unlikely weapons, inadmissible evidence. Kraus's work perverts the normative meaning of the letter, which is typically a private exchange between two entities, for the letters in *I Love Dick* are one-way projections, serialized and bound. They render Dick impotent, not only through the manic intensity of their proliferation but also, finally, through their legitimacy once circulated as a published book.

Despite the lengths to which Chris goes to perform the wretchedness of her own unflattering female self-portrait, the joke always appears to be on Dick, and as the letters mount, the project's conceptual chorus sings louder and louder: "Dick, you're so vain. I bet you think this book is about you." On his own, though, Dick is mostly a token of exchange, first between Chris and Sylvère and then between Kraus and her reader, for the book guarantees that the letters written "to his address" are intercepted by the reader. As "Dear Dick" replaces "Dear Diary," the form of the letter becomes a means of transforming Dick from subject to object, writer to text, critic to critique.

FEMINIST VIRALITY

Love can be the becoming which appropriates the other for itself by consuming it, introjecting it into itself, to the point where the other disappears.—LUCE IRIGARAY, *ELEMENTAL PASSIONS*

Throughout the pages of *I Love Dick*, Kraus acknowledges her debt to Sophie Calle, the French artist widely credited with having set the gold standard in the genre of "breakup art" with works such as *No Sex Last Night* (1996) and *Exquisite Pain* (2004).[35] Many of Calle's works begin from flirtatious collabo-

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rations with various boyish artists, intellectual studs, and theoretical father figures: *Suite vénitienne* (1980) with Jean Baudrillard; *Appointment with Sigmund Freud* (1998), a project about the archetypal father figure; *Psychological Assessment* (2003), a collaboration with Damien Hirst, which originated in Calle's request that Hirst send her a love letter; and her creative entanglement with the U.S. writer Paul Auster, out of which grew a whole series of performance-based projects, including *Gotham Handbook* (1994), *The Chromatic Diet* (1997), and *Days under the Sign of B, C, & W* (1998). Calle thus made her career on explorations of the conceptual politics of romantic art practices and on one-way investigatory performances.

In 2007 Calle upped the ante on these methods with her much-praised Venice Biennale exhibition and subsequent book project, *Take Care of Yourself* (*Prenez soin de vous*). Both exhibition and book showcase the abundance of the return on Calle's missive to 107 women professionals: she requested that these women read and analyze, according to their particular occupational skill sets, a breakup email that she claims to have received. Calle writes, "I received an email telling me it was over. I didn't know how to respond. It was almost as if it hadn't been meant for me. It ended with the words, 'Take care of yourself.' And so I did."[36] And so they did—over a hundred women, chosen for their professional skills and distinctions. The lexicometrist produces an extended literary and linguistic analysis of the email, noting the overwhelming dissymmetry in sentence structures with *I* to *you* pronouns (a ratio of 4 to 1). The proofreader rips the email apart, citing "clumsy sentence openings" and "long, ill-constructed sentences." The cartoonist literally makes him into a caricature of himself. The press agent turns him into "yesterday's news."

Take care of yourself. In jilting her, her ex-lover leaves her with a polite imperative to do as he asks one final time. Yet in appropriating his parting words, it is Calle herself who has the last word. *Take Care of Yourself* highlights the arrogance of that parting line, announces itself as a critique of the Western patriarchal tradition that paradoxically offers the door to freedom as a trap. How can one exercise one's freedom if to do so means obeying an imperative? Calle, like Kraus, attempts to negotiate what appears to be the coercive hospitality of a patriarchal injunction to be independent. In both Dick's and the letter-writing ex's desires to rid themselves of Chris's and Calle's attachments, the men disavow that they are the ones who set the terms.

Grand in size and ambition, *Take Care of Yourself* is a massive effort that matches the frantic multiplication of *I Love Dick*. Barbara Cassin notes Calle's use of seriality as a formal technique: "To create a series oneself via oth-

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FIGURE 3.1 Installation view, "Sophie Calle." Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, 2009–10. Source: Sophie Calle and Paula Cooper Gallery.

ers, the others making up a series themselves to the extent that they have an identity trait—you'll all be women reacting to his way of leaving me . . . you're all laid out in this notebook. . . . In the case of me barbara, it's in the role of a philologist to fill in the sophie series. You want to be used up this way, you want that? Yes I want."[37]

The viewer's encounter with Calle's ex is signified by the very sign of multiplication: in the place of its absent referent (the ex) is the signature *X*.[38] Calle outsources to these women a task of interpretative labor that they mass-produce, alchemizing the host text (the original breakup email) into an intermedial army of feminist re-representations (figure 3.1): photographic portraits of Calle's sister-readers, each holding the email, their accompanying textual analyses personalized in a diverse lexicon of styles (handwritten, digitized, animated), as well as filmed performances of some of them singing or citing the text. Calle welds together a network of diverse media—film, performance, painting, sculpture, text, and photography—into a sophisticated conceptual weapon that she turns on X's crude and informal original text. The massive art book that archives the exhibition, exceptional for its sheer size (424 pages), is the product of skilled and networked creative mass production.

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Calle thus masterminds in *Take Care of Yourself* a viral and networked feminist aesthetic, which is uncannily mirrored in the way that *I Love Dick* emerged as a viral meme on the social media platforms Instagram and Tumblr. The Tumblr account "Selfies with *I Love Dick* by Chris Kraus," maintained by the writer and blogger Emily Gould, features hundreds of selfies of young feminists holding up the book, including a photoshopped image of Lisa Simpson with her head in the book (figures 3.2 and 3.3). Feminist social media's embrace of *I Love Dick* cannot be overstated; the logics of the internet are central to its legibility as a feminist act. Today it's a cliché to observe that the digital has exploded the public-private distinction, bringing information that was formerly confined to the private sphere into the public forum. Digital-savvy, twenty-something feminists have sought to appropriate social media to feminist ends (with debatable results), anticipating practices now associated with the Me Too movement and call-out culture. Some have posted dating interactions they've had with real men on Tumblr accounts; others, like Marie Calloway, have (like Kraus) published intimate descriptions of private interactions with noted public figures; and many feminists of color have leveraged the public nature of social media to denounce individuals whose actions would otherwise go unchecked.[39]

While the male figures Dick and X are ostensibly at the core of these projects, they begin to look insignificant as they become buried under Kraus's proliferating sentiments and Calle's multiplicity of interpersonal mediations. Calle writes, "I asked 107 women . . . to analyze it, comment on it, dance it, sing it. Dissect it. Exhaust it. . . . Answer it for me."[40] And just as Calle's triangulated dissections undo X, Kraus's words ultimately pick Dick apart. Both men become details that recede into the background of the vast expanses of the projects' more striking conceptual and aesthetic fields; with so much else to take in, they are soon forgotten.[41] These works of viral proliferation have the effect of burying the men alive. As Joan Hawkins observes of Chris's early collaboration with Sylvère in the book, "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. . . . 'Dear Dick,' she writes at one point, 'I guess in a sense I've killed you. You've become Dear Diary.'"[42] Similarly Calle admits in an interview, "After one month I felt better. . . . The project had replaced the man."[43] Dick and X are thus perfect hosts, supplying the very structures that threaten them, feeding the artists' discursive attacks against them, growing these women's projects until the hosts are emptied of substance and the artists are lauded as never more original. Kraus and Calle

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FIGURES 3.2 AND 3.3 “Selfies with *I Love Dick* by Chris Kraus” Tumblr account. Source: ildselfies.tumblr.com.

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exploit the strategic supplementarity of the parasite in relation to her host to operate a feminist remapping of the structural dynamics of gendered territoriality: the parasite comes to overwhelm the terrain of its host.

Of all of Calle's work, *I Love Dick* most closely resembles not *Take Care of Yourself* but *The Address Book* (1983), an early work that experimented with invading the privacy of a real man—a project with which Kraus and Lotringer would have been familiar. Having found an address book on the street, Calle photocopies its contents before anonymously returning it to its owner, whom she dubs "Pierre D."[44] Calle then interviews all of the people whose addresses appeared in the book, constructing an exhaustively researched, speculative portrait of its owner.[45] Yve-Alain Bois writes, "Each morning the newspaper published an interview along with a related photograph, not necessarily taken by Calle (that of an artwork Pierre D. was said to like, for example). The fact that the piece kept building for a whole month, day after day, added to the mystery. . . . Three weeks after the final entry appeared, *Libération* published, in the same half-page format, the furious response of Pierre D. (who signed his real name, Pierre Baudry)."[46]

Baudry, a documentary filmmaker, had been in Norway the whole time, and it was only upon his return that he discovered the exposure of "so many facts of his life and traits of his character—including his repugnance toward any form of publicity."[47] In discussing the work, Calle notes how the deniability afforded by her status as an artist served as an effective cover until it was revealed that her target was a real person:

> There was a huge discussion because the journalists wanted to know why, as an artist, I was allowed to do something in the newspaper that they were not allowed to do: intrude into someone's life. Many people liked it because they thought it was a fiction, but when the guy answered and gave his name, proving that he really existed, it became evident that it was not a fiction, and the same people started to really dislike it because of the outrage. Then others, who didn't like it initially because they thought it wasn't risky enough, started to like it. It was a complete mess![48]

According to Calle, Baudry retaliated by publishing a headless nude photograph of her, but this attempt at what would today be called revenge porn was defanged by the fact that she had already published *The Striptease*, a project that featured a topless photograph of her working as a stripper in Pigalle.[49] Calle said later, "He is still resentful. He has let me know."[50] But despite the one-sidedness of her feelings, Calle professed in later interviews to have fallen in love with Pierre D: "I lost control. . . . I completely fell in

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love with that man, I changed my life for him. . . . I went to live in his neighborhood, only saw his friends, went to eat in the places he liked to go. . . . When he came back he hated me and I really felt rejected, but at the same time it's better than real love, because all this was completely fake."[51] Calle's and Kraus's projects' claim to being about love is reflected in this process of narcissistic deterritorialization, which Roland Barthes equates with love: "It is my desire I desire, and the loved being is no more than its tool. I rejoice at the thought of such a great cause, which leaves far behind it the person whom I have made into its pretext."[52]

The Address Book is an uncanny precursor to *I Love Dick*, both in life and art. It was reported that Baudry threatened to sue for invasion of privacy (Calle said in 2011 that she had nearly been sued twice), much as Hebdige is said to have tried to block the publication of *I Love Dick* and reportedly threatened to sue Kraus on similar grounds.[53] Some argue that this attempt to keep private life out of the public eye is a patriarchal gesture, one aimed at protecting men by delegitimizing women's experiences and concerns (certainly, privacy is deployed to serve whiteness in much the same way). Elizabeth Gumport writes of *I Love Dick*:

> What the pretense of privacy often does is protect us from reality. It is called on to conceal the fact that there are two realities: the world as it is lived in by men, and the world of women, which has historically been exiled from political and philosophical consideration. It has been regarded as beneath such consideration, its truths narrowly and inescapably personal—rather than universal—and therefore inevitably trivial. Hence Hebdige's invocation of Princess Diana. . . . Placing domestic and intimate relationships outside the boundaries of legitimate public interest in this way condemns them permanently to the status of intractable nature, or "frivolous gossip," discouraging intervention and thereby preserving invisible practices of domination.[54]

Just as Hendricks questioned and dismissed Byrne's work, relegating it to a student project or a bad imitation, Hebdige refused to acknowledge the critical and artistic legitimacy of Kraus's work. He implied that the book's only interest lay in its trafficking of his celebrity, in its attempt to cash in on a personal relationship, rather than as a legitimate exploration of the dynamics of that relationship (and the relationship between men and women, between patriarchy and feminism). Like Hendricks, Hebdige refuses to regard Kraus as an artist. Instead he insists on treating her as a mere documentarian, classifying her work not as fiction or literature but as autobiography.

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This is a misogynist framing that disavows the intellectual labor that its creation required. “People acted when I wrote the book,” Kraus has said, “as if it had just appeared on my pillow because I slept with Dick—like I didn’t have to do anything at all.”[55]

In all of these projects, the male hosts minimize the roles of the parasitical female creators that target them: Hendricks dismisses Byrne’s work as imitation, as a student project that she must justify to him; Baudry attempts to punish Calle by transforming her into a disembodied sexual image; and Hebdige classifies Kraus’s task as simply recording information rather than creating art. Hebdige’s rejection of her piece as art, a study worthy of critical examination, is an attempt to eject the parasite, to expunge it from its host’s body. Shortly after its publication in 1997, Hebdige made his only known public comments about the book in an interview with *New York* magazine: he said that the book was “beneath contempt,” a sentiment the interviewer would characterize as “a surprisingly earnest complaint coming from a semiotician of popular culture.”[56] Dick’s attempts to exclude her from the artistic conversation is equally clear at the end of the book in his response to the project, which he addresses to Sylvère, merely sending Chris (whose name he misspells) a photocopy of the letter.

While the hosts attempt to minimize or exclude their female parasites, the artists make their male hosts into oversized projections. We find in Deleuze and Guattari’s reading of Kafka’s letters to his “father figure” the basis for such a parasitical tactic of feminist viral or manic proliferation in response to the overwhelming presence of the male figure. In *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, Deleuze and Guattari describe “the interest of the letter” as lying in “a particular sliding effect” by which Kafka moves from a classic Oedipal conflict, “where the beloved father is hated, accused, and declared to be guilty, to a much more perverse Oedipus.” “The letters are a rhizome, a network, a spider’s web,” they write. “There is a vampirism in the letters, a vampirism that is specifically epistolary.”[57] Like Calle’s multiple crowdsourced replies to X and Kraus’s unfettered stream of letters to Dick, which hyperbolize and reduce them from complex individuals to mere symbols, to occupiers of particular structural positions, Kafka’s letters dramatize and allegorize the father to the point of rendering him unrecognizable as an individual entity.[58] Deleuze and Guattari describe Kafka’s reproach to his father as “a reproach that is so strong that it becomes unattributable to any particular persons and unlimited . . . and passes through a series of paranoid interpretations.” They propose that Kafka’s hyperbolic inflation of the overpowering image of the father figure paradoxically creates a “way out”:

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> The goal is to obtain a blowup of the "photo," an exaggeration of it to the point of absurdity. The photo of the father, expanded beyond all bounds, will be projected onto the geographic, historical, and political map of the world in order to reach vast regions of it . . . an Oedipalization of the universe. . . . Beyond that, to the degree that one enlarges Oedipus, this sort of microscopic enlargement shows up the father for what he is; it gives him a molecular agitation in which an entirely different sort of combat is being played out. One might say that in projecting the photo of the father onto the map of the world, Kafka unblocks the impasse that is specific to the photo and invents a way out of this impasse.[59]

By re-presenting the father of the classic Oedipal narrative in these outsized terms, Kafka produces the father as an outsized caricature of patriarchy, whose exaggerated pores are distended into pixelated openings primed for infestation. In *I Love Dick*, this infestation gains entry by means of love letters that operate like spam—fired off in rapid succession, hitting random targets. As Deleuze and Guattari note, the epistolary genre itself has a vampiristic—or, in my terms, parasitical—quality. By obsessing over Dick and X, by making them the unwilling muses and patrons of their artworks, Kraus and Calle shield themselves behind Kafkaesque blown-up images of their hosts, which serve as cover, allowing the parasites to grow unnoticed until it is too late for their hosts.

FEMINIZED PARASITES

Complicity is like a girl's name.—CHRIS KRAUS, *I LOVE DICK*

In the history of Western art and literature, femininity is often figured as an alien threat to an otherwise healthy patriarch, one that gradually weakens him through her dependence. In the 1969 novel *The Estate*, Isaac Bashevis Singer's narrator observes, "He had seen women ruin men. They wove a net about a man, entangled him with duties, ensnared him with parasitic children, and finally destroyed him."[60] Parasitism is a misogynist trope that portrays femininity as smothering and overly reliant: the "clingy" mistress, the idle "trophy wife," the "kept woman," the "plus one," the "hanger-on" who "makes it [her] profession to dine at another's table."[61] (Though the parasitical feminine is typically deployed as a descriptor of bourgeois womanhood, it need not be biologically female.) Such pejoratives denigrate and disavow the labor of the feminine (femme or feminized) companion—usually labor

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that is invisible, reproductive, affective. Typically the feminized parasite is figured (as it is in botany) as a form of suffocating dependency that femininity poses to masculinity.[62] The gendering of the parasite is described by J. Hillis Miller in his influential essay "The Critic as Host," his retort to attacks casting deconstruction as a parasitical mode of criticism. Miller writes that the parasite "suggests the image of 'the obvious or univocal reading' as the mighty, masculine oak or ash rooted in the solid ground, endangered by the insidious twining around it of ivy. English or maybe poison, somehow feminine, secondary, defective, or dependent, a clinging vine, able to live in no other way but by drawing the life sap of its host."[63] It is the femininity attached to this image of clinging that interests me; in his epigraph to this essay, Miller further highlights the feminine nature of clinging, citing the French proverb "Je meurs où je m'attache," which translates literally as "I die where I cling/I am attached"—effectively "'Til death do us part." A poetic symbol of feminine devotion and fidelity, this image can be traced back to Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and the Book of Psalms, and it also appears as an Elizabethan homily on marriage in Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors*:

> Thou art an elm, my husband; I a vine,
> whose weakness married to thy stronger state
> makes me with thy strength to communicate.
> If aught possess thee from me, it is dross,
> usurping ivy, brier, or idle moss,
> who, all for want of pruning, with intrusion
> infect thy sap, and live on thy confusion.[64]

The feminine, then, is historically framed, even defined as that which is parasitical, which can survive only at the pleasure of another. But this image has been put not just to misogynist ends. Feminists have also long employed the language of *female parasites* to critique certain women's investment in maintaining the patriarchal, bourgeois, and white supremacist status quo for its material benefits. Parasitism became shorthand for the problem complicity with patriarchal structures poses for radical feminists, from Victorian suffragettes to lesbian separatists. As early as 1792 Mary Wollstonecraft employed the imagery of the ivy and the tree, writing, "It might be proper, in order to make a man and his wife one, that she should rely entirely on his understanding . . . the graceful ivy, clasping the oak that supported it."[65] (Wollstonecraft's use of the image was not negative but used to symbolize the complementarity of the masculine and feminine.) But by the early twentieth century, the parasite is consistently invoked as a negative dependency

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on a patriarchal capitalism. In 1911 the suffragist Olive Schreiner compared women's dependence on men to "the most deadly microbe."[66] In 1912 Rosa Luxemburg warned that bourgeois women, complicit consumers of what their husbands extort from the proletariat, are "parasites of the parasites of the social body."[67] In 1949 Simone de Beauvoir called women "clinging," "dead weight," "parasite[s] sucking out the living strength of another organism."[68] In 1970 Germaine Greer famously urged "feminine parasites" to stop "cajoling and manipulating" and instead to claim "the masculine virtues of magnanimity and generosity and courage," and Gloria Steinem called them "dependent creatures."[69]

Parasitism, as it was eventually absorbed into the U.S. and European feminist mainstream, captures an early strand of radical feminist thought arguing for a kind of feminist separatism. These feminists saw certain women as capitulating to the patriarchal norms of heterosexual domestic life, marriage, and child rearing in exchange for the protection and rewards of bourgeois privilege, a dynamic encapsulated by the figure of the housewife.[70] "For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house," Audre Lorde famously argued, concluding, "This fact is only threatening to those women who still define the master's house as their only source of support."[71] In her landmark 1970 manifesto, "The Dialectic of Sex," Shulamith Firestone writes, "Unless revolution uproots the basic social organization, the biological family—the vinculum through which the psychology of power can always be smuggled—the tapeworm of exploitation will never be annihilated."[72] The militant lesbian feminist Valerie Solanas equated married women with men "and other degenerates."[73] In various radical feminist critiques, wage labor, the annihilation of the nuclear family, and sexual autonomy have been seen as liberating women from the tyranny of dependence.

These texts differ in the degree of individual agency they ascribe to women's complicit status.[74] Schreiner advanced in her 1911 *Women and Labour* an excoriation of "feminine economic parasitism," the characteristic feminist belief of the period that "women were responsible for their own freedom," even if they were not necessarily materially able to realize it, and that their continued subordination was therefore attributable to them.[75] Beauvoir at times used rhetoric similar to Schreiner's, but in *The Second Sex* she described dependency as a structural role: "The woman has been assigned the role of parasite: all parasites are necessarily exploiters; she needs the male to acquire human dignity, to eat, to feel pleasure, to procreate; she uses the service of sex to ensure her benefits; and since she is trapped in this function, she is entirely an instrument of exploitation."[76] Generally, though, parasitism

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has been viewed in certain strands of feminist history and criticism as a contaminating lack of self-sufficiency, and the abiding concern with it speaks to how the liberal discourse of the rational, autonomous subject (woman as free agent) has underwritten twentieth-century feminist conceptions of power and agency. Such liberal feminist mandates of freedom, autonomy, and self-determination have been critiqued by scholars such as Gayatri Spivak, Saba Mahmood, and Linda Zerilli.[77]

Parasitism thus encapsulates a fundamental problem for twentieth- and twenty-first-century feminism and feminist theory: that women—and feminism—are constituted in relation to and in reaction to patriarchal structures. In her 2009 book *One-Dimensional Woman*, a treatise on the state of contemporary feminism, philosopher Nina Power observed, "Many of the tactics of feminism thus far—rewriting cultural histories, reclaiming the body, occupying 'male' positions—have had significant effects, but have not been able to touch the basis of the problem at hand."[78] When asked "What's 'wrong' with feminism today?" during a 1991 interview, Avital Ronell answered, "Feminism today has a parasitical, secondary territoriality. . . . If you respond to present conditions, you're subject to reactive, mimetic, and regressive posturings. So the problem is: how can you free yourself? How can you not be reactive to what already exists as powerful and dominating? How can you avoid a resentimental politics?"[79] Here Ronell seems to mean a "reactive" politics, but her choice of word also evokes the Nietzschean concept of ressentiment, which denotes a psychological state arising from feelings that cannot be acted upon and results in a symptomatic form of self-abasement. In *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche describes the moment of ressentiment as the one in which suffering crystallizes around a site of external blame, a figure upon which one can avenge, and thus displace, one's hurt. In *States of Injury*, Wendy Brown revisits Nietzsche's account to argue that ressentiment has effected a contemporary political identity that understands itself as mediated through notions of injury and redress rather than freedom, producing versions of "resistance" that are prefigured and conditioned by the very structures they purport to oppose. Brown contemporizes Nietzsche's notion by making it speak to the liberal subject of U.S. leftist politics of that time. She argues that liberalism contains from its very inception a generalized incitement to ressentiment as "the moralizing revenge of the powerless," or for Nietzsche, "the triumph of the weak as weak." "Ressentiment in this context is a triple achievement: it produces an affect (rage, righteousness) that overwhelms the hurt, it produces a culprit responsible for its hurt, and produces a site of revenge to displace the hurt (a place to inflict hurt as

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the sufferer has been hurt)," writes Brown. "Together these operations both ameliorate (in Nietzsche's terms, 'anesthetize') and externalize what is otherwise 'unendurable.'"[80] While both Nietzsche and Brown articulate ressentiment as a problem—Brown describes it as liberalism's "wounded attachment" to the trauma associated with systems of inequality—ressentiment finds a useful inflection in the metaphor of the parasite. Ressentiment mimics parasitical logic in that it facilitates a productive if counterintuitive move away from closure, suture, and healing. In her outline of a feminist tactics of a Nietzschean ressentiment, Beauvoir observes, "The tyranny wielded by the woman only manifests her dependence: she knows the success of the couple, its future, its happiness, and its justification, resides in the hands of the other; if she bitterly seeks to subjugate him to her will, it is because she is alienated to him. She makes a weapon of her weakness; but the fact is she is weak."[81] In *Sensational Flesh*, Amber Jamilla Musser ties Beauvoir's employment of the language of parasitism (which Musser characterizes as that of ressentiment) to Beauvoir's engagement with masochism, seeing both as a means of reflecting on women's internalization of their own complicity with "the paucity of choices" available to them ("as parasites who dwell on their own victimization"). Musser writes, "Masochism is born from female objectification under the male gaze and women's compliance with the dictates of patriarch." In her reading of female masochism in Pauline Réage's *The Story of O*, Musser locates potential "pockets of agency" in an aesthetics of complicity in precarious spaces prescripted by domination: "When O is framed as complicit with her objectification, complicity emerges as a mode of self-fashioning in which agency and aesthetics collide."[82]

Advising feminists as one would a friend trapped in a bad relationship, Ronell and Beauvoir ask how women might free themselves (Beauvoir: find "living strength of their own" and "the means to attack the world and wrest from it their own subsistence"), how they might move forward and beyond their structural dependence on patriarchy. They ask how wounded and attached women can recover, once and for all, and achieve a sense of wholeness and independence—a question that posits the space of feminism as outside of the patriarchal order. But to "treat" feminism's ressentiment as a malady that women must heal themselves from—to posit that women should take care of themselves—is, following Lauren Berlant, an engagement in a neoliberal feminist politics of cruel optimism. "Cruel optimism is the condition of maintaining an attachment to a significantly problematic object," she writes.[83]

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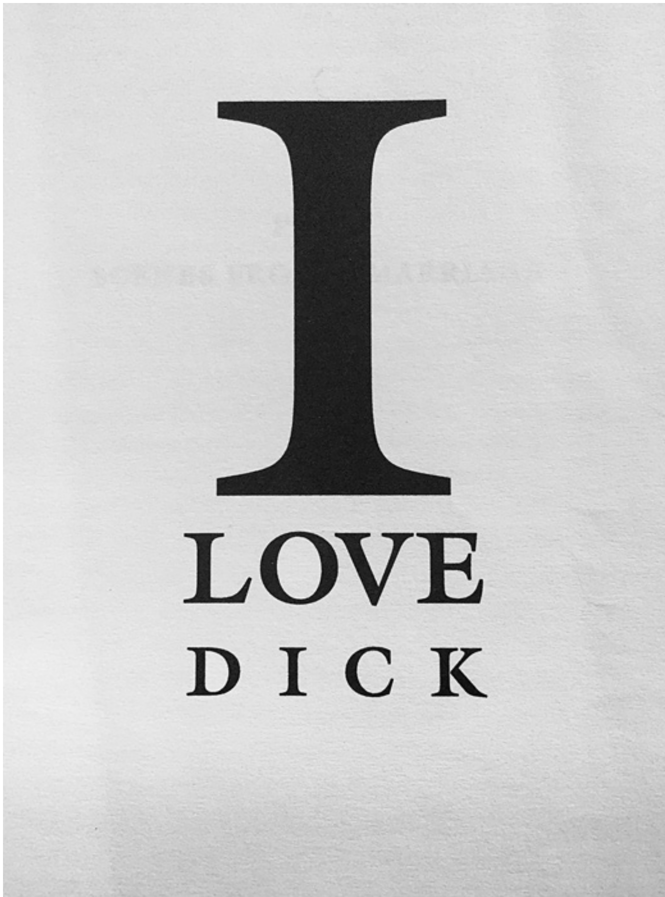

FIGURE 3.4 Title page of *I Love Dick*, Semiotext(e), 1997.

Calle and Kraus, if with different intensities and to different ends, reframe ressentiment not as a reaction, a form of weakness, but as a mode of feminist performativity. As Dick and X are erased, the women's engagements with them shift: "It's all about you" slowly turns into "It's all about me." This shift is visually represented on the title page of the 1997 Semiotext(e) edition of *I Love Dick*, which features a large, bold *I* that dominates the *Love Dick* below it, in smaller print (figure 3.4). In Calle's project, the designation X comes to represent the absent center, the male figures that haunt these projects, caught in significatory limbo. X represents Calle's conceptual ex, whose email to the artist invites the extended reading that he unwittingly agrees to host. When Dick invites Kraus and her husband to dine with him, he steps into the role of host, naïvely inviting in the parasite.

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Is it possible for Dick and X to answer these projects in an ethical fashion? Would it have made a difference if X had not signed his email in this way, or if Dick had responded earlier? It may be that Dick didn't respond because he doesn't want to be swallowed up by the Kraus machine—the instinct that helped Paul Auster avoid Calle's trap for him, refusing when she asks him to script a year of her time. What would an ethical response from Dick or X even look like? As Ronell asks in *The Telephone Book*, "What does it mean . . . to make oneself answerable to it in a situation whose gestural syntax already means yes, even if the affirmation should find itself followed by a question mark: Yes?" And, as she writes, "No matter how you cut it, on either side of the line, there is no such thing as a free call."[84] If to answer the call is to rise to meet its demand, to accept the imposition or pay the debt, we might say that Dick at first lets the phone ring unanswered, then finally takes it off the hook. We might ask whether these projects really leave room for Dick or X to answer—whether any answer might have been accepted or acceptable. Can the host welcome the parasite knowing that it is a parasite? Perhaps the inadequacy of the men's responses is inevitable; perhaps no response is answerable enough.

How to be answerable, to be personally accountable to one's own power is a difficult and resonant question, from which the feminist theorist of power herself is not immune. In 2018 Kraus publicly supported Ronell when she was accused of having used her power abusively by a former male graduate student, who filed charges of harassment against the philosopher.[85] She framed the student's "accusations [as] couched in the disingenuous sentiments of #MeToo" and characterized him as "an empowered and privileged actor . . . [who] feigned helplessness after the fact."[86] Kraus's defense of Ronell disparaged the movement that she helped inspire and engaged in victim-blaming that protected alleged toxic behavior of the very kind that *I Love Dick* empowered a generation of feminists to stand against. The episode exemplifies how compromised Kraus and Ronell (as well as other prominent figures I cite and rely on for my argument in this chapter) have become as they have grown ever more deeply embedded in academia and the art market. Other feminist and queer luminaries who signed the letter of support for Ronell (including Judith Butler) are also radical theorists who have made their careers spotlighting, contesting, and analyzing structural power but who in the process have accrued plenty of their own.[87] For many, Kraus's cultural prominence now exceeds that of Hebdige; she is far from the self-described "failed filmmaker" she claimed to be when she wrote *I Love Dick*. This development does not nullify the critical and feminist potency of the

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book, but it does demonstrate the historical and contextual contingency of radical authorship. While no one wants to admit their own implication in these systems, it is a reminder that no one is outside of this structural ecology; who inhabits the positions of the parasite and host is not a given.

FEMINIST ENDGAMES

While *I Love Dick* and *Take Care of Yourself* mirror and reinforce one other, their performances of parasitism also diverge in important ways. There would seem to be something altogether more unhinged about Kraus's "parasitical growth" than Calle's, which remains carefully calibrated to the conceptual boundaries of her coolly played representational game. Whereas for Calle parasitism represents a mask that can be taken off and put away, for Kraus it is not so easy to rid yourself of your attachments. Calle's relationship with X is indulged more in the realm of the symbolic, remaining an ongoing hypothetical in her collaborator's interpretations, but Kraus's relationships to Dick and Sylvère are more exposed, as shown by her willingness to name names of real men, both public figures. Kraus recounts telling Dick, "'Cause don't you see?' I said, 'It's more a project than a game. I meant every word I wrote you in those letters. . . . Don't you think it's possible to do something and simultaneously study it? If the project had a name it'd be *I Love Dick: A Case Study*.'"[88] Kraus's relationships with Dick and Sylvère make her a parasite in double measure. Lotringer's professional success feeds, clothes, houses, and affords Kraus's creative work and also helps ensure the book's publication by Semiotext(e), the press that he founded.

Meanwhile, Calle's previous work notwithstanding, one can never be sure that X is real. Calle plays the parasite, but one has the sense that it is just that: a piece of theater or a game with a finite duration.[89] One can visit the exhibition and grab dinner after. Perhaps Calle "takes care of herself" after all by modeling a parasitism that is not self-destructive. She puts far less of herself on the line in her project, instead enlisting others to speak on her behalf. Kraus's game, on the other hand, has no foreseeable end and no visible boundaries. For Kraus, there is little buffer between fact and fiction; deeper drives seem to be at work for her. Names are not changed to protect the innocent, leaving everyone who is naïve enough to let Kraus near looking somewhat guilty.

Calle and Kraus perform parasitical feminism to different ends. Kraus's performance manifests a certain resistance to resolution—a desire to have it continue on beyond the boundedness of the encounter, the page, the book—and, at the same time, a reckless disregard for survival. For Calle, the

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performance of the parasite is worn as a mask that leaves viewers wondering "Was she or wasn't she playing herself?" Calle's parasitism is a carefully elaborated game that endures to play again, whereas Kraus's performance takes on the inflection of an opening night that is mere minutes from a very real breakdown. Her parasitical performance would appear to signal a performance whose emotions (even as they are being rehearsed) the performer is still really experiencing. At the halfway mark of *I Love Dick*, Chris and Sylvère decide to separate. Her husband, who was once game, is no longer sure if the structure of their marriage can withstand the hacking blows dealt it by each letter to Dick. (Kraus and Lotringer have since divorced.) In the midst of this, Chris claims to have shown up unannounced to Dick's home and had sex with him, a claim Kraus has reiterated in interviews.[90] While unverified, if true these actions would have transgressed (at least within the diegetic frame of the novel) the rules of her epistolary game.

"You have to pay for indulgence," Lotringer later said of the project in an interview, "it was a risky operation."[91] As if surgically to remove herself-as-appendage from her husband's overpowering career, Kraus's conceptual project hacks away at the relentlessly accommodating structure of patriarchy without considering what would happen to her if it collapsed. If the parasite is rejected by its hosts (Dick and Sylvère), who will bestow the intellectual nod of approval on which the project at times appears to depend—who will publish her manuscript, if not Semiotext(e), the press Lotringer founded in 1974? In other words, can the parasite survive without its host? What will happen when the bond is severed? Kraus's dedication to the project bespeaks the intensity of an artist willing to cut deeper and further than anyone expects her to go. Unlike Calle, who feeds at the surface of the skin, operating in the sphere of the conceptual, Kraus burrows ever deeper into the real until the accommodating structure finally gives way. Kraus writes in *I Love Dick*, "But Dick, I know that as you read this, you'll know these things are true. You understand the game is real, or even better than, reality, and better than is what it's all about. . . . It's not about giving a fuck, or seeing all the consequences looming and doing something anyway." She closes the letter, "Sylvère thinks he's that kind of anarchist. But he's not. I love you Dick."[92]

THE BRACKETED FEMININE

In May 2011, I received my own correspondence from Chris Kraus. An article I had published about *I Love Dick* had come to her attention.[93] "The concept you develop of parasitical feminism is provocative and fascinating,"

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she wrote. "I respect your right to discuss the book on your own terms but would like to bring a factual error to your attention." Kraus was uncomfortable with my claim that *I Love Dick* was framed by an infrastructural dependence on Lotringer for its publication by Semiotext(e). She objected to my suggestion that she was supplemental to and parasitical on, not Lotringer himself, but his press, where she was a coeditor. "*I Love Dick* was published by Semiotexte in 1997," she wrote. "I became a co-editor of Semiotexte in 1989 when I launched the Native Agents imprint. . . . Therefore, *I Love Dick* was self-published (abjection maybe of another kind) but not dependent on Sylvère's editorial decision."[94] She added in a subsequent email:

> I had already published books by Ann Rower, Cookie Mueller, Kathy Acker, Lynne Tillman and Barbara Barg in the Native Agents series. Sylvère and I saw the fiction books as an American analog to French theories of subjectivity (Deleuze Guattari Foucault) published in the Foreign Agents series—which, by the 90s, had already in our minds run its course—by that time, these theorists were being published by university presses in the US; Semiotexte had already done its job by introducing them. Our goal has always been to intervene intellectually at certain cultural moments. Semiotexte remains an amateur enterprise: our list is highly curated—we never do a book that we don't feel is vitally important. So when [*I Love Dick*] shaped up as a book, with the upstate NY essays, it seemed like a perfect fit for the series.[95]

Kraus's description of her role in the founding of the Native Agents series, and more generally her influence in the operations of Semiotext(e), was reiterated in an essay published by Elizabeth Gumport in the February 2012 issue of *n+1*. Gumport notes that Kraus established the Native Agents series as a feminist corrective to Lotringer's Foreign Agents series:

> Kraus—who had met Lotringer earlier that decade . . . suggested Semiotext(e) turn to face America directly and recover the original, unpardonably forgotten contribution the United States had made to intellectual life in the years after 1968, namely, feminism. This recovery took the form of the Native Agents series. . . .
>
> When the imprint was launched in 1990, with Kraus as editor, Foreign Agents had never published a book by someone who wasn't a white man. Semiotext(e) had "missed out" on the feminist movement entirely. "It happened," Lotringer told an interviewer, "and I wasn't aware of it." He hadn't published women, Kraus explained, "because the only women he

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knew writing theory were doing psychoanalytic theory, which he wasn't so interested in."[96]

Kraus insists that Semiotext(e)'s publication of *I Love Dick* was not a result of her being Sylvère's plus one but an independent action that she took on her own account ("self-published"). Yet Semiotext(e) made its name by supporting and sustaining a "boys only" theoretical network, and it is difficult to argue that the Native Agents series was not a compensatory measure for the publishing house's long-standing "bracketing of the feminine," formalized in the "silent e," in French the grammatical marker of the feminine (*e muet*).[97] This is a bracketing that Kraus nevertheless persisted in trying to unbracket in her exchange with me, in each of her emails writing the title of the press as "Semiotexte" rather than "Semiotext(e)." By pointing out in its title what I see to be a structural secondariness of the feminine, Semiotext(e) is performing a kind of institutional hospitality for Kraus, who holds a position much like that of the Native Agents series itself: a kind of integrated outsider, a feminist parasite on the masculinist Foreign Agent series. I do not mean to diminish Kraus's merits in any way; quite the contrary, the story of the Native Agents series further illustrates the persistently disavowed feminine supplementarity that *I Love Dick* so unflinchingly calls out.[98] But her initial defensiveness at being labeled a parasite off the page betrays a residual attachment to seeing herself as autonomous rather than dependent.

How exactly are we to understand Kraus and Lotringer's contract? Who is the contractual host and who is the parasite? In other words, where is the power in this host-parasite relation located? In 1989 (the year Kraus became a coeditor at Semiotext(e) and launched the Native Agents series) Kraus and Lotringer cowrote the foreword to their reprint of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's *Venus in Furs*. "Sacher-Masoch was an early feminist," they write playfully. "He supported 'women's studies' and celebrated them throughout the ages. . . . Masoch unconditionally supported women, urging them to be strong the way he wanted them to be."[99] Here Lotringer and Kraus point to the irony of Sacher-Masoch's contract (the S/M contract between the master and the slave, whom we might reframe in terms of the host and the parasite) as one that ultimately serves the masochist.

In her work on male masochism, Suzanne R. Stewart further elaborates this critique, writing of *Venus in Furs*, "It is here, before the signing and the writing [of the masochistic contract], where the question 'Am I a man or a slave?' is posed, that Severin finds his identity. . . . It will depend on the possibility or the promise that Severin can see himself being seen, on the con-

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dition that the passive phrase 'I am tortured by Wanda' means 'I can direct my own torture at the hand of Wanda.' Thus, the passive or masochistic subject-position must be just that: a subject-position in charge of its own destiny." Stewart reads in *Venus in Furs*' sadomasochistic contract, which passively constructs male masochism, a feminist problematic. Male masochism is always framed by the contract, "the letter of the law," which is always underwritten by patriarchal dominance. In effect, male masochism is a topping from the bottom; even when it is submissive, patriarchy still covertly exercises control by scripting the terms of its submission. In the novella it is Severin who determines his own submissive position—a prescripted vulnerability that, as Stewart notes, is subject to interruption and redirection. Although Wanda appears to take control of Severin, she still does not dominate him, for it is he who scripts their encounter.[100] The story of Wanda's dominance of Severin is just one narrative within the novella's larger narrative framework, where it serves as a story within a story, a scripted dialectics of power playing out within the larger metanarrative of gender relations in patriarchal society.

In much the same way, *I Love Dick* represents a contract between Kraus and Lotringer wherein she plays (emphasis on *plays*) the sadist to his masochist, as triangulated through Dick. But these dynamics do not appear to be fully transferable to their professional relationship. The limits of Chris's dominance, like the limits of Wanda's, become abruptly clear when one considers the legal contract that binds the two: although both their signatures appear under the foreword, Lotringer alone is credited on the copyright page of *Venus in Furs*, which reads only "Foreword © Sylvère Lotringer." (In getting the first word, Sylvère has the last word.) As such, it appears that it is only within the bounds of that which is labeled fiction—under the cover of "just playing," acting, performing—that woman is able to assume the role of self-determination, for the terms can be set by male editorial discretion.

Kraus has said that the art she likes most "doesn't try to make itself loveable."[101] Still, Chris's love for Dick always appears to be a performance that is intended primarily for Sylvère. Her anarchic parasitism, with its willful destructiveness (and unflinching rawness), allows Kraus to show up Lotringer's investment in the kinds of transgression that are valorized by the French theory published by Semiotext(e). By deconstructing Dick, Kraus pushes poststructural premises to their furthest conclusions. Kraus positions herself as the Thelma and Louise of deconstruction, as willing to drive feminism right off a cliff. By piercing and feeding on Dick and X, both Kraus and Calle swell with critical significance, bloated parasites who slowly dwarf their

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hosts. These projects reverse the idea that women's emotionality is a point of weakness by remapping affective and sexual attachments as para-sites—sites of the *para*, a prefix indicating "beside or alongside, wrongfully, harmfully, unfavorably, among," which, Miller notes, has come to mean "the boundary line, threshold, or margin, and at the same time beyond it . . . at once a permeable membrane connecting inside and outside [and] confusing them."[102] In the parasite, femininity's claimed dependency is transfigured, becoming something that pierces that boundary, creating a loophole, a backdoor, a tunnel to a possible outside. There is a space in performance for feminized subjects undetectably to change the game. But the opening offered by a parasitical feminism does not guarantee survival or even successful escape. Casualties are inevitable.

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