

## TRISH SALAH

diagnostic detour

I

Of course, as much as anyone

I want

If not to quell pessimism, to still the rumors of pathology.

Which is not to say I believe myself to be

Without borders, across the board, against, leaning through—

*Like lips a gloss: a solution to the sexes*

There is this whole aesthetic approach, within the diagnostic

And with out, as if queer isn't also theory

Some one else wrote down?

We've been saying this, others said this, for a very long time.

But for my part I both had and wanted

a diagnosis.

An older and more beautiful diagnosis, the kind you could bring home to  
mamma

More, one from even before Freud, the science of the mythic past,  
and how it keeps coming up.

## II

Before there was the whole suicide thing. I don't know how to talk it.  
Not to diminish that

The melodrama of the lyric—  
Harbouring *intent*, its irrelevance.

To tears, the world.

“And then, when I thought it was done.”  
Again. Diminishes.

“I told my family”

                    Again.                    Diminishes.  
Talking it.  
                    Again, and thereafter

### III

When I was seventeen, trying to decide between  
Montreal or London, which city could fold into my body  
Fold my body into *desire*

I traveled looking for one,  
or more, discovering:  
in sex shops, libraries,  
in stripper girls, support groups.

I can't deny the opportunism, the neediness of that.  
(After the first one, I didn't have the guts to go back.)

## IV

for a long while tarrying in another cut I had  
two fantasies: one, that a diagnosis, from you  
an older and more beautiful—  
like to motherlove, buttressed against  
the kind of mirror you look up to

two, a profession, a certain recognition from the man on the street,  
and me, streetwalking, 'cause you know,  
from the books and the movies...  
I flattered myself, I would be good at it.

(that I didn't, that I wasn't, could have something to do with my  
diagnosis, how I got one, and lost it again, between his failed suicide  
and her successes, or the fantasy—  
dispersed sentiment will sediment after all: yield to a class or its role  
in the formation of psychological types, sociological tropes. what  
didn't turn me into an explanation.

but if there were voices in my head what they would say is that there's  
still this whole untapped line of what gets called "politics.")

## V

At the end of my intake interview, at the Montreal General, Doctor Abdullah asked me something, I don't remember, about the length of my hair, manic fuchsia tendrils, my lace up pants, and eighteen skull boots, the scorpion crawling my arm a year later, being unstuck in time, I don't remember. And I said something half defensive and art school smart about subcultures and semiotics, about how queer was the new punk, again—

In 1991 I thought that might be clever

He didn't bother to conceal the condescension, mumbling "Borderline." his answer "Borderline." to a question "Borderline." I'd not asked:

You don't need to be psychiatry smart to know what he meant, that the word wasn't incidental, and wouldn't be.

It would be a while before I got that diagnosis.

## VI

When I had my surgery I went blonde.  
Even newly arab as I was—  
I tried to think of Farah, the Lebanese Angel  
one of Charlie's  
I needed to think about that, my feminist commitments  
My blonde commitments, the improbability  
Of looking what is called good looking  
Anyplace glossy, or a white girl with a gun,  
I could glean  
A short skirt, a voice, like the voice of girls on tv or at the mall  
When I had the surgery, I went to the mall  
I needed new clothes  
For my sugery, [sic] my surgery  
I needed to differentiate  
Internalized sexism as a woman  
From being the bearer of the male gaze  
From lesbian desire in a patriarchal economy  
Of desire  
I needed to not be a woman  
To be a woman  
With a gun  
Without reference to changing my sex  
To the patriarchy  
My gender  
My symbolic capital  
The queer chic  
You get the picture.

Electrolysis hurts.  
Some days I worry about losing my hair.  
My job,

My girlfriend.

*post script*

As femme I tried to say, blonde is no witness to whiteness,  
I tried to say, it is a quickening streak.

Hunger and its competence, I tried to pitch, against the body politic

As a femme, like anyone being fucked over,  
It can be tricky to see where your blows land.