Impossible to Write Alone:

Expanded I and Absent Addressee in Chris Kraus's *I Love Dick*

Arianna Corradi

Thesis submitted to the faculty of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

In

English

Su Fang Ng

Bonnie Zare

Thomas Gardner

May 5, 2022

Blacksburg, Virginia

Keywords: Absent Addressee, Chris Kraus, Epistolary Novel, Case Study, Letters, Stalking.

Copyright © 2022 Arianna Corradi

Unless otherwise stated

Impossible to Write Alone: Expanded I and Absent Addressee in Chris Kraus's I Love Dick

Arianna Corradi

ABSTRACT

Although Chris Kraus's *I Love Dick* has been largely read as autofictional or autotheoretical, I argue that its formal characteristics and innovations can be better understood by looking at seventeenth- and eighteenth-century precedents in the amatory epistolary genre. By examining the formal constraints that belong to the epistolary medium Kraus employed—requirements such as the "I" of the writer, the "you" of the receiver, and a desire for exchange—I show how she deploys epistolary tropes such as the woman in love as natural writer of letters, and the assumed truthful nature of such letters. These epistolary affordances and the ways in which *I Love Dick* uses and in part revises them allow Kraus to blur the line between reality and fiction, but more importantly allow her to achieve an expansion of the "I" of the writer through what I call her stalking method of writing. It is precisely in the process of writing and in the concomitant minimizing and objectifying of the "you" of the receiver that the expansion of the "I" occurs.

Impossible to Write Alone: Expanded I and Absent Addressee in Chris Kraus's I Love Dick

Arianna Corradi

GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

Chris Kraus's first novel *I Love Dick* was published by Semiotext(e)'s Native Agent series in 1997, but it was upon its second edition in 2006, and after a television adaptation by Jill Soloway in 2017, that the novel found a larger audience. Since then, critics have mainly discussed *I Love Dick* in relation to the genre of autotheory and autofiction, and called it the urtext for a certain kind of North American female writing that relies heavily on real, personal experiences that undergo varying degrees of fictionalization. While these are valuable interpretations, my research aims to correct an oversight in the current discourse around *I Love Dick*. By situating the novel within the tradition of love letter writing in the female voice, I show how *I Love Dick* employs and revises the affordances of the epistolary medium in general, and of the amatory epistolary genre in particular. Through a close analysis both of *I Love Dick* and of other lesser-known essays and interviews, as well as an analysis of Kraus's precedents, both in the Native Agent's series that she edited in the 1990s and in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century amatory epistolary fiction, I reveal paradoxes that ultimately make *I Love Dick* a complex and ambiguous novel that defies simple categorizations.

Acknowledgments

Gratitude goes to my thesis director Su Fang Ng for her clear-sighted and unsparing advice, and to my readers Tom Gardner and Bonnie Zare for their generous and inquisitive comments.

Thanks to the professors with whom I have been able to develop some of my thoughts about epistolarity, desire, Semiotext(e), autotheory, and autofiction—Gena Chandler-Smith, Katharine Cleland, Matthew Vollmer, Silas Cassinelli, and Bonnie Zare respectively; thanks to Carolyn Commer for her memorable thesis statement advice, pithily framed as: "if you had a question, what would it be?" and to Derek Mueller's insights into writing as a "technology of distance." Thanks to my colleague Collen Young for his inspired comments and painstaking proofreading.

Thanks to Chris Kraus for granting me a last-minute interview on 22 March 2022 and for checking the transcript that is included here as an Epilogue.

This work was written between Fall 2021 and Spring 2022 often at Mill Mountain, Blacksburg over double espressos and water without ice. But it owes its existence to my all-knowing friend Valentina Bin who introduced me to *I Love Dick* in 2016, and to my longtime theorist Joseph Bedford—whom Mary Eagleton would humorously call the "husband without whom this book would not have been possible."

This thesis is dedicated to L.D. *perché chi scappa vince*.

Table of Contents

Introduction: ……………………………………………………………………………………1

Chapter 1: The Expanded I and Stalking as Writing Method …………………………………… 8

1. "Don't worry. I'll tail you": Chris Kraus's Stalking Method ……………………………….... 8

2. "Anyone can be it": The Theory of the Expanded I ………………………………………... 21

Chapter 2: Amatory Epistolary Fiction and the Transgressive Nature of Women Writing Love ……... 33

3. "When the form's in place, everything within it can be pure feeling": the Form of Amatory Epistolary Fiction …………………………………………………………………………… 33

4. "Letters written in reality": the Transgressive Nature of Female Desire in Epistolary Fiction ….. 44

Chapter 3: The Tension between the Fictional and the Real …………………………………… 55

5. "All is fiction": Kraus's Move towards Fiction ………………………………………… 55

6. "The realest thing": *I Love Dick*'s Move towards the Case Study ………………………… 60

Chapter 4: The Vanishing Addressee: Present Absence and Desire for Exchange …………….... 73

7. "Someone to write to": the Addressee as Present Absence ……………………………… 73

8. "A new erotic activity: writing to you, Dick": Writing and Desire for Exchange …………... 84

Conclusion: "Impossible to Write Alone" …………………………………………………... 87

Epilogue: an Interview with Chris Kraus ……………………………………………………... 89

Works Cited ………………………………………………………………………………… 99

Introduction

What is at stake in form? Does the form carry a fate with it? In epistolary novels, or fiction written in the form of letters, to what extent does the device of the letter determine the message? As a commentator put it, in epistolary novels the form exerts a pressure on meaning (Altman 189). In particular, the structure of love letters, with their distanced sender and receiver, foregrounds the ethical implications of love and desire. Chris Kraus's novel *I Love Dick* is one such case in which the form of the love letter facilitates desire, yet it also brings with it ethical quandaries. How does the form of letter writing implicate writer and addressee in an ethical relationship that becomes bound up with the letter writer's ambition to transform desire?

American writer, art critic, and editor Chris Kraus (b.1955) published *I Love Dick* with Semiotext(e) in 1997. Before 1997, Kraus was not a writer but an experimental filmmaker, a career which culminated and ended with her feature film *Gravity & Grace* (1996). *I Love Dick* was known only within the "art world and some corners of academia," like Semiotext(e), as Elaine Blair explains in her extensive 2016 *New Yorker* article about Kraus's personal life and work titled "Chris Kraus, Female Antihero." The novel went out of print and was issued again by Semiotext(e) in 2006, but it reached a considerably wider audience in 2017, once Jill Soloway and Sarah Gubbins's homonymous television adaptation, *I Love Dick*, began streaming on Amazon in May 2017.[1]

[1] The film fostered fresh conversations about both the novel and the film's merits and shortcomings. The failings of the novel and the achievements of the film are discussed by Kristina Deffenbacher in "Alternative Gazes, Aesthetics, and Affects in I Love Dick" (2019), while others have subtly questioned the film adaptation and rediscovered the novel, like Ana Fazekaš in "I Love Dick: A Pop-Cultural Investigation of Desire and the Female Gaze" (2018).

I Love Dick records the unfolding of the relationship between the character "Chris Kraus," her husband "Sylvère Lotringer," and his colleague "Dick" (Hebdige),[2] whom Chris falls in love with and writes to. All the letters in *I Love Dick* have the same addressee, Dick, and overall follow a chronological order, from December 1994 to September 1995. The book is organized into two parts, Part I "Scenes from a Marriage," and Part II "Every Letter Is a Love Letter." Each part presents different time spans and locations. In Part I, the letters are written mostly from Crestline, California, and cover a period of frenetic writing that takes place over about two months and in which both Chris and Sylvère partake. The letters in Part II span instead a period of roughly half a year, are less frequent and much longer than in Part I, and are written mainly during Chris's drive across the US after she leaves Sylvère, and before and after her meetings with Dick. The letters are delivered and eventually read by Dick, who will send a response, although effectively only to Sylvère, at the end of the novel.

Despite the numerous reviews of the novel in popular newspapers and magazines, scholarly interest in Chris Kraus has been remarkably scarce, especially on Kraus as a writer. Indeed, some view her as an artist, a performer, and therefore interpret *I Love Dick* as "performance art" or as a "performance of an autobiography" (Fisher, *The Play in The System* 119), especially in relation to the conceptual artist Sophie Calle.[3] Scholar and performer Barbara Browning similarly refers to *I Love Dick* as being in the "confessional mode of performative fiction" (49), while scholar Anneleen Masschelein named *I Love Dick* as "performance art within the medium of writing" (162). These interpretations are valuable, since

[2] Since in *I Love Dick* Kraus uses the names of actual people, in what follows I use their first names to refer to the characters in the novel, and their last name to refer to the real people behind the characters.

[3] Anna Watkins Fisher discusses the similarity of their work in 2012 in the article "Manic Impositions: The Parasitical Art of Chris Kraus and Sophie Calle" pointing specifically to Calle's 2007 Venice Biennale Exhibition and book project *Take Care of Yourself.* In 2020 in *The Play in the System*, Fisher remarks on how Kraus's *I Love Dick* "resembles [Calle's 1983] *The Address Book*" (127), an artwork that Fisher describes as being an "uncanny precursor to *I Love Dick*" (128).

performance is an important part of Kraus's background. That said, since *I Love Dick* is Kraus's first book and the book that made her a writer, framing *I Love Dick* by foregrounding Kraus's previous career as an artist and a film marker can preclude an interpretation of the more literary aspects of the novel.

Other scholars view *I Love Dick* as a work of theory or theoretical fiction because of its intertextuality, name dropping, and the numerous references to other philosophers and theorists.[4] For example, in a chapter devoted to *I Love Dick* in his *Authorship's Wake: Writing After the Death of the Author* (2020), Philip Sayers focuses on Kraus's achievement of "the status of author" (158) but also of "theorist" (163). By foregrounding Kraus's role as a theorist, Sayers is in agreement with McKenzie Wark's claim that Kraus turns high theory (theory that talks "about difference, or the minor, or the margins . . . from the point of view of some universal abstract spokesmodel") into "*low theory, perhaps*" (Wark, "I Love Dick"), a reversal achieved by making theory personal and embodied. The fact that Chris and Sylvère write together has been theorized in terms of "coupled relationality" (Jagose and Wallace, "Autotheory in the Coupled Voice" 120-123), while another take on Kraus as a theorist is Lauren Fournier's monograph *Autotheory as Feminist Citational Practice in Art, Writing, and Criticism* which offers a more substantial reflection on Kraus's first novel, specifically framed around an inquiry into the genre of autotheory (221-260).[5]

Those who treat *I Love Dick* primarily as a work of autofiction that blends fiction and memoir, such as scholars Rachel Sykes or Alex Kitnick, call Kraus a "foremother" to a lineage

---

[4] Hawkins defines theoretical fiction as follows: "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. . . 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" (Hawkins 263-276).

[5] Autotheory, as Fournier explains in 2018 in the article "Sick Women, Sad Girls, and Selfie Theory: Autotheory As Contemporary Feminist Practice," is a term associated with *I Love Dick* as well as Maggie Nelson's *The Argonauts* (644).

of contemporary North American writers, such as Lena Dunham, Sheila Heti, and Emily Gould (Sykes 163), and *I Love Dick* an "urtext" of the genre of autofiction (Kitnick 58). Critics who prefer to emphasize its autobiographical aspects, have referred to *I Love Dick* as a confessional memoir, or simply as autobiographical.[6] Similarly, in *You Must Make Your Death Public*, a 2015 collection of text and media on the work of Chris Kraus edited by Mira Mattar following a 2013 symposium at the Royal College of Art, London, a focus on candor, confession, and disclosure in Kraus's style of writing is evident, especially in Karolin Meunier's "Speaking Candour" (75-86), and David Morris's "Kraus Uncut: Semitext(e), Disclosure And Not Knowing" (107-118).

I Love Dick has thus spawned a variety of interpretations, yet surprisingly few of them engage simply with its literary character. Such an obsessive focus on the autobiographical, theoretical, or performative aspects of the novel has prevented a discussion of *I Love Dick* as, primarily, a novel: one written in the epistolary mode. There are exceptions, such as when Rachel Sykes concurs that the novel is "largely epistolary in form" (164) and that on the surface it is indeed "a conventional epistolary novel of marriage and infidelity that sees Kraus abandon both husband and lover for intellectual self-actualization" (165). But Sykes's focus is on the practice of oversharing in first-person narrative, and her mention of the epistolary nature of the novel is tangential. Another exception is Elizabeth Gumport's article for *n+1*, in which the form of the letter is acknowledged as "the foundation of *I Love Dick,*" and in which Gumport notes that Chris writes letters "in full knowledge of the fact that letter-writing has long been considered a female occupation" ("Female Trouble"). David Morris also mentions the epistolary form of *I Love Dick* while connecting it to the Semiotext(e) archive, when noting that

[6] Claire Marie Healy calls it a confessional memoir, in her interview "Chris Kraus, Author of *I Love Dick*, on Seeking Utopias in Art" (*Anothermag*, 8 Nov. 2018), while Elaine Blair refers to *I Love Dick* as autobiographical in her article "Chris Kraus, Female Antihero" (42-47).

I Love Dick "is a novel constructed around letters, personal letters, letters really exchanged – the book is simultaneously a performance of a correspondence, a fiction, a work of theory, and an archive of real life correspondence which also happens to exist as a collection of letters in a real life archive" (110). Apart from these mentions, however, *I Love Dick*'s epistolary form has been overshadowed by attention to other autofictional or autotheoretical aspects.

My research addresses a gap in this literature on Chris Kraus, and argues for a study of Kraus specifically as a writer, rather than a performance artist or a theorist. By focusing on *I Love Dick* as autofiction or autotheory, scholars have not engaged in what is most obvious, and indeed also most unique about Kraus's first novel, namely the fact that *I Love Dick* is made up of letters, and that it is self-consciously epistolary—in one of the novel's self-referential moves, it explicitly calls itself an "epistolary novel" (*I Love Dick* 115).

I argue that much of *I Love Dick*'s concerns and characteristics, such as the form of the unanswered letter written in a passionate yet reflective mode by an abandoned woman in love, are part of the rules of the genre Kraus worked within. Based on previous critical work on epistolarity, especially the work of Janet Altman and Liz Stanley, my approach involves focusing upon the letter as a formal device. In doing so, I employ the concept of *epistolarity* as a frame for reading and interpreting *I Love Dick*.[7] Paying attention to the formal features of the novel, the mechanism that structure exchange, the function of distance, time, and movement among others, allows me to interpret what happens when these epistolary features are employed, revisited, worked against, or even discarded in *I Love Dick*.

---

[7] The form of the letter has been studied most famously by Janet Altman who, in her 1982 seminal monograph *Epistolarity : Approaches to a Form,* employed what she names "epistolarity" as a "frame for reading" and interpreting epistolary discourse. She defined the concept of epistolarity as "the pressure exerted by form on meaning" (189), or "the use of the letter's formal properties to create meaning" (4).

In Chapter 1, "The Expanded I and Stalking as Writing Method," I argue that the kind of method *I Love Dick* employs by writing to an addressee contributes towards the creation of an "Expanded I," an outsider, amateurish, and antiacademic first-person voice which Kraus theorizes in a lesser-known essay she wrote in 2001, "Ecceity, Smash and Grab, the Expanded I and Moment." I connect this expansion, which I claim is inherent to stalking, to appropriation, performance, and to the desire of becoming other. There are certain influential precedents that Kraus claims to have taken inspiration from, such as the New York School of poetry, and the authors whom Kraus published in the early 1990s while an editor of Semiotext(e)'s series Native Agents. But there are older precedents that Kraus is less explicit about, which I locate in the amatory epistolary tradition and that I argue give Kraus the means to expand the "I" of the writer against invisibility and erasure.

Chapter 2, "Amatory Epistolary Fiction and the Transgressive Nature of Women Writing Love," therefore introduces epistolary discourse and its formal constraints, as well as certain tropes that belong to the amatory epistolary tradition in particular. In the first part of the chapter, I argue that the "Expanded I" Kraus seeks to achieve as a writer is made possible by the very affordances of the epistolary medium, and that in *I Love Dick* Kraus uses the constraints of epistolary fiction to her advantage. The second part of the chapter continues the analysis of two key tropes that belong to epistolary fiction: the stereotype of "Epistolary Woman," and the pretense of letters being real, private documents that give the reader a privileged access to the writer's interiority.

The confessional and personal nature inherent to real letters stands in opposition to invention and fictionalization. Chapter 3, "The Tension between the Personal and the Real," examines the shift that takes place between these two positions by following Kraus's own

changing views with regards to the confessional and the fictional nature of *I Love Dick*. In the first part of the chapter, I discuss what is at stake in the shift in Kraus's own interpretation of *I Love Dick,* a shift that moves away from the confessional and towards the fictional, while in the second part of the chapter I describe *I Love Dick*'s own metafictional reframing of its genre, away from being a fictitious game, and towards the case study. At various points in my research I encounter paradoxes that cannot be resolved, such as Kraus's shifting position around matters of truth and fiction.

However, the main paradox tackled in Chapter 4, "The Vanishing Addressee: Present Absence and Desire for Exchange" is the fact that Kraus relies on the epistolary affordance of the addressee as someone to write to in order to start writing her letters and expand her "I," and yet her addressee is for the most part absent, unresponsive, unavailable, or when available, ambiguous. Chapter 4 examines precisely what I call the *present absence* of the addressee as a ghostly role, and the fact that for the "I" of the writing subject to expand, the "you" has to be placed in an objectified, asymmetrical, and distant position.

Ultimately, Kraus's project aimed at achieving an "Expanded I" as a writer—an expansion facilitated by stalking as a method of writing, by her obsessive pursuit of Dick, and by her sending hundreds of letters to Dick—can be achieved in practice only because the "you" of the addressee accepts the letters, but does not respond, at least not directly to her, and does not do so immediately. In the interview with Chris Kraus included in the Epilogue, Kraus herself describes this absent presence as precisely what "evokes the writing" (Personal interview).

Chapter 1: The Expanded I and Stalking as Writing Method

Section 1. "Don't worry. I'll tail you": Chris Kraus's Stalking Method

Chris Kraus's 1997 autobiographical novel *I Love Dick* has seen a revival of interest in recent years. In naming real names, it has been lauded for anticipating the #MeToo Movement and call-out culture that emerged in the mid-2010s. In her 2021 *Autotheory as Feminist Practice in Art, Writing, and Criticism*, Lauren Fournier deems Kraus's disclosures of the "bad behaviour of men" and her "calling out of specific people" (163, 224) such as Richard Schechner, Félix Guattari, and David Rattray, as "prescient of what would come to be known as the #MeToo Movement" (222). Similarly, in her 2020 book *The Play in the System,* Anna Watkins Fisher views *I Love Dick* as a work that "prefigures similar post-digital-era accounts such as those associated with the Me Too movement and call-out culture" (117).

Examining *I Love Dick* as a "prophetic anticipation" of the #MeToo movement (Fournier 163) because of its practice of naming "the real names of men" (Fisher 137) can indeed help explain why, upon its second edition in 2006, the novel has found a new reading public. When Kraus was writing *I Love Dick* she did not position herself a feminist author, but even if she resists labelling *I Love Dick* a "feminist" work,[8] her new core readers, Fisher argues, are "millennial feminists" who identify as "generally middle class and urban-dwelling" (118).

---

[8] In a 2017 interview with Rachel Cooke, when asked whether she saw herself as a "feminist writer," Kraus clarifes her position and priorities as follows: "I didn't see myself as a feminist, capital "F", when I was writing *I Love Dick*. I thought of myself as a gendered person – a woman – who was writing a book. Those issues of cultural presence, who gets to speak, are important to me. But class is as significant as gender in *I Love Dick*. Class is the secret undiscussed subject right now" (Cooke, "Who Hasn't Had an Affair?"). With regards to class, see her 2017 interview with the magazine *Sleek*, in which Kraus reflects on the effect of her readership on the book: "It wouldn't be a mainstream book if it wasn't being read in other ways than I originally intended it. The political aspects of the book are overlooked in favor of its lifestyle aspects. There is nothing better than a coming of age story, right? And so it's being read as a coming-of-age story of a middle-aged woman finding her own joy, overcoming the patriarchy, etc" (Jeni Fulton, "The Revival of Chris Kraus").

Fournier attributes the recent success of the novel to a change in readers' attitudes towards privacy, specifically due to the current "postinternet age of widespread disclosure made possible by social media" (*Autotheory* 224). Kraus notes that the positive reception of *I Love Dick*'s second edition in 2006 can be attributed to a change in readers' attitude towards genre; as she put it, "internet culture was collapsing the boundaries between professional and amateur writing and criticism" ("The New Universal" 90). Similarly, in emphasizing the performative aspect of *I Love Dick*, Fisher attributes the recent "dramatic shift in critics' appraisal" (*Play* 119) to a change in the understanding of *I Love Dick*'s genre, and argues that readers now champion feminist representations "that are more confessional, amateur, and performative in character" (248 n21). In her view, the understanding has shifted away from the merely confessional autobiography, and towards a "performance of autobiography" (*Play* 119), or what Barbara Browning also calls *I Love Dick*'s "confessional mode of performative fiction" ("The Performative Novel" 49).

While the terms afforded by a culture of public disclosure can explain *I Love Dick*'s success among a new millennial readership, they carry with them certain limitations. Some limitations are inherent to the moralizing that is implied by a too simplistic good-versus-bad opposition. For example, Fournier treats *I Love Dick* as an instance of a feminist politics of disclosure and approves of Kraus's stalking because it calls out the "bad behaviour of men" (*Autotheory* 163), while at the same time she disapproves of Kraus's stalking because stalking makes Kraus a "bad feminist" (252). Such narrowly moral terms run the risk of being self-contradictory, as in the case of Fournier's argument. Allocating blame within a narrow good-versus-bad opposition is also shortsighted; *I Love Dick* is more nuanced than Fournier's

analysis may acknowledge. In fact, in its very premise, *I Love Dick* rests on ambivalence and paradoxes which I chart in this and the following chapters.

One exchange in particular will serve to illustrate the level of complexity I am pointing at. This exchange revolves around the word "No," into which Kraus invests far more meanings than the cultural context of the time would suggest. It takes place in Part II, after Chris leaves Sylvère and travels on her own across the country. It is during one of these trips that Chris meets with Dick in LA. The exchange is one of the few instances in the novel where the two characters are alone and a real-time dialogue takes place between them, even if the letter in which Chris recalls these events is written in retrospect. Chris recalls that "On the phone you'd said, 'I won't say no' when I asked you what you thought [about spending time together]" (ILD 157), and then she decides to fly to LA to visit him: "I was going to your house, if not by invitation, at least with your consent" (144). Once together, after a long evening spent talking, she asks Dick, "Look, it's getting late. What do you want to do?" and he answers, "I'm a gentleman . . . I would hate to be inhospitable. . ." followed by, "Ah, then...Do you want to share my bed? I won't say no" (159). But Chris is not satisfied by the way his consent is expressed by Dick, and probes again: "Do you want us to have sex or don't you?" to which Dick answers with another double negative: "I'm not uncomfortable with the idea" (159). Since "this neutrality was not erotic," Chris makes another final attempt at eliciting a positive answer, but Dick repeats: "I'm not...uncomfortable...with the...idea" (159). Finally, Chris reflects and summarizes her rules as follows; "This is how I understood the rules: If you want something very badly it's okay to keep pursuing it until the other person tells you No. You said: *I won't say no*" (159), a position which is summarized elsewhere with: "At that time in your life, you said, you were experimenting with never saying No" (145).

The experiment "with never saying No" on Dick's part may be troublesome for readers today, those whom Fisher and later Fournier identify as "millennial feminists" (*Play* 118; *Autotheory* 224), and may have been uncomfortable also for readers at the time of *I Love Dick*'s publication in 1997, because since the Canadian Federation of Students popularized the phrase in the early 1990s, "No means No" and clarity in interpreting consent have been a part of public discourse.[9] Therefore, experimenting with "never saying No" complicates any attempts to establish consent.

Anne-Christine D'Adesky was the first reviewer to mention the breadth of the issue of consent in a review of *I Love Dick* titled "Stalking Theory" in the weekly *The Nation* in 1998. By asking en passant whether Kraus's "literary rape" is indeed *only* fictional and theoretical (D'Adesky 32), her article—and its very title "stalking theory"—reflects two possible interpretations. On the one hand, calling *I Love Dick* "stalking theory" means that the novel offers a theory about stalking, specifically about a woman stalking a man. On the other hand, it means that, by its very presence, the novel is an act of stalking the male-dominated, academic world to which Dick and others belong. "Dick" itself is a word that allows various readings: one being simply the capitalized proper name of a specific man (OED, s.v., "dick," 1), often "used as a generic name for a man or boy, esp. one considered ordinary or unexceptional" (OED 1a), the other being various slang denotations. Among these, "dick" can denote "penis" (OED 4a), "sexual intercourse with a man; men as a source of sexual gratification" (OED 4b), or refer to a "stupid, annoying, or detestable person (esp. a male); one whose behaviour is considered

[9] Moreover, a similar motto entered public discourse in the previous decade, when the slogan "Just Say No," made popular by First Lady Nancy Reagan's 1980s campaign against drug and alcohol abuse, would also be taken up in education designed to discourage premarital sex.

knowingly obnoxious, provocative, or disruptive" (OED 6), the kind of man who, as later Dick himself puts it, "still do[es] ruin women's lives" (ILD 172).[10]

Because of the ambivalence of the title "Stalking Theory," D'Adesky's overall positive review raises "uncomfortable questions" (32) about victimhood at a time, June 1998, when the news were covering the political sex scandal between President Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinsky. These "uncomfortable questions," D'Adesky claims, should make us "reconsider whom we're willing to cast as victims and why" (32), and are succinctly encapsulated in the exchange between Chris and Dick excerpted above, in which the mechanisms of consent are shown in their intractability.

What is certain from Chris's recollection of this dialogue is that while Chris asks for consent multiple times, and while her requests evolve from generally amicable to specifically sexual—from asking for consent to visit Dick in LA and spend time together, to consent to stay overnight, to share his bed, and finally to have sex with him—the kind of answers she receives do not evolve. Dick's modality of consenting remains coherent, but it involves consenting (saying Yes) by not saying No, a paradox signaled by his use of a double negative at every given opportunity. Double negatives (*not un*comfortable, wo*n't* say *no, never* saying *no*) are a strategy that semantically cancels out an opposition by turning the statement into a positive, but that rhetorically performs Dick's intention to show no engagement in the unfolding of the relationship.[11]

---

[10] Because *I Love Dick* operates on these two levels, the specific and the general, Kraus would drop Dick's surname in order to respect his privacy, but she did not drop his name; *I Love Dick* relies on Dick/dick representing more than the man, as Kraus recalls in an interview with Blair: "I changed everything short of the first name, which I needed for the title" (Blair 42-47).

[11] The rhetorical ambivalence of Dick's position is matched by Chris's own opacity when recollecting a phone call with Dick. She writes, "I think our telephone call went well last night, despite the ambiguous archness of your question: 'And you only want to talk, right?' I can't remember what I answered, the answer just flowed out, but I think we understood that we were talking about the same thing" (ILD 131). The fact Chris does not remember her answer, and that she *thinks* the two of them were on the same page, clearly leaves room for arguing quite the opposite.

Dick's resolution to withdraw is not new, however. From the beginning of the novel, Dick's presence as a generous overnight host is followed by his unexplained disappearance, as the narrator remarks: "But when Chris and Sylvère wake up on the sofabed the next morning, Dick is gone" (ILD 21). Days later, when Dick calls, his answers (taped and transcribed) are marked "(Inaudible)" multiple times in the transcript (46-49). By taking no part and remaining neutral throughout the novel, Dick plays a role characterized by silences, absence, and blank spaces. "Blank," in particular, is an adjective that is used twice with regards to Dick. The first time is when Dick is introduced, and the narrator calls him "Dick ____" (19), an underscore that in public readings Kraus reads as "Dick blank,"[12] and which signals the empty space left after Dick's real surname (Hebdige) is deleted before publication (Blair 42-47). The second time is when Sylvère and Chris write to Dick that "The fact that you don't return messages turns your answerphone into a blank screen onto which we can project our fantasies" (ILD 29), thus linking Dick with the blankness of a projection screen, an extended metaphor that works on the basis that Chris is introduced as an "experimental filmmaker" (19) unable to complete her film (80).[13] There is another man in *I Love Dick* whose name is substituted by an underscore, possibly to protect his privacy: "Liza'd do the physical part of sex, I'd do the verbal. Together we incarnated the cyborgian split projected on all females by this culture. We even offered____his choice of venue: the Gramercy Park Hotel or the Chelsea. But____ never answered" (52). Like Dick, this nameless man gives her no answer.

---

[12] For example, in the Louisiana Channel video interview with Anette Dina Sørensen, titled "Chris Kraus Interview : On I Love Dick" (00:20).

[13] When in *Torpor*, the prequel to *I Love Dick*, the narrator writes that Jerome "was a blank screen on which she [Sylvie] could project anything . . . she loved an image of Jerome that no one else could see" (*Torpor* 160-161), the image of the man as a blank screen returns again as a host to the materialization of the woman's projection and fantasies.

Given Dick's resolution not to engage in the relationship in general, and in letter writing in particular, I propose to frame Chris's approach as stalking, not simply because her way of pursuing Dick is at times unambiguously stalking—for example when she writes: "Today I phoned your colleague Marvin Dietrichson, to find out what you did today. What you said in seminar. What you were wearing. I'm finding new ways to be close to you" (75)—but because Chris's pursuit of writing is. I propose to use the concept of stalking beyond an inquiry into an alleged violation of consent—which as I have shown is difficult to establish given Dick's rhetorical ambivalence—and beyond the labelling of Kraus as a "bad feminist" (Fournier, *Autotheory* 252). Instead, I intend to employ stalking in order to interpret Chris's *writing* method in its obsessive unidirectionality, in her "want[ing] something very badly" (ILD 160), as she puts it.

The primary denotation of the verb "to stalk" relates to the field of hunting, meaning "to pursue (game) by stealthy approach" (OED, s.v. "stalk," 3a), while its recent meaning of harassing obsessively entered common usage only in the 1990s. Beyond "one who stalks game" (OED 3), the OED Draft Addition to "stalker" is dated 1997 and defined as: "a person who pursues another, esp. as part of an investigation or with criminal intent; spec. one who follows or harasses someone (often a public figure) with whom he or she has become obsessed." Given the hunter/prey denotation, a subject/object binary is inherent in the concept of stalking. Because it names a hunter/prey relation, calling Chris's writing and her pursuing of Dick "stalking" allows us to foreground the imbalance between the prolific "I" of the writer, who writes obsessively and embodies the position of the subject, and the "you" of a receiver who hardly writes and who, as Anna Watkins Fisher argues in the article "Parasitical Politics and Epistolary Games," is "transform[ed] from subject to object, from writer to reader, from critic to critique." Indeed,

when Sylvère explains to Dick "these letters included you, both as yourself and as some sort of *object* of, you know, seduction or desire or fascination or something" (ILD 48; my emphasis), the position of the addressee as object is established. This object position comes up again in the penultimate page of *I Love Dick*, when Dick himself reiterates in his letter that he has been the "unwitting object" of their "obsessive attention" and their "bizarre game" (260).

But Chris's stalking game starts on the very first page of *I Love Dick*, in a description of a car chase that hints forebodingly at how her pursuit of Dick will play out in the novel, and in which the subject/object relationship is established:

> Chris wants to separate herself from her coupleness, so she sells Sylvère on the thrill of riding in Dick's magnificent vintage Thunderbird convertible. . . . Dick gives her copious, concerned directions. 'Don't worry,' she interrupts, flashing hair and smiles, 'I'll tail you.' And she does. Slightly buzzed and keeping the accelerator of her pickup truck steady, she's reminded of a performance she did called *Car Chase* at the St. Mark's Poetry Project in New York when she was 23. She and her friend Liza Martin had tailed the steelily good-looking driver of a Porsche all the way through Connecticut on Highway 95. Finally he'd pulled over to a rest stop, but when Liza and Chris got out he drove off. The performance ended with Liza accidentally-but-really stabbing Chris' hand onstage with a kitchen knife. . . . Dick's Thunderbird was always somewhere in her line of sight, the two vehicles strung invisibly together across the concrete riverbed of highway, like John Donne's eyeballs. And this time Chris was alone. (ILD 19-20)

Chris is the subject of most of these sentences: she wants, she sells, she interrupts, she tails, she remembers, and becomes an object only when she becomes a victim, that is when her hand is stabbed. From her active, powerful agency, the pledge "I'll tail you," as well as her following

Dick's Ford T-Bird with her pickup truck, are all equivalents of pursuing, following, and stalking—especially given the hunting images that the prey (the bird in T-bird), the chase, and the "pickup" truck establish, and given the romantic, erotic images that are implied and sealed by the passing allusion to the metaphysical poet John Donne.[14]

The term "stalking" itself appears various times in *I Love Dick*. The first time is when Dick accuses Chris, by saying "you stalk me, invade me with your games" (ILD 163). The econd time is again used by Dick when he remarks "I've never been stalked before," and then by Chris, when she rebuts, "But was it stalking? Loving you was like a kind of truth-drug because you knew everything" (235). Chris's questioning the appropriateness of Dick's use of the word stalking is a rebuttal that actually turns the tables: she shifts the focus from alleged stalking to "loving you," (235) and from the negative connotation of harassment to the positive connotations of knowledge and the desire to know the truth. Therefore, by requalifying what stalking means, Chris gives up the position and the responsibilities of the stalker and takes on instead the figurative position of a drug addict, a dependent position which implies she has no control over Dick, over her addiction to loving Dick, or her addiction to the "truth-drug" (235) that he represents, a submissive position which I return to at the end of this chapter.

Finally, "stalking" is employed one last time in reference to scholarship, when Chris wonders: "And isn't scholarship just a stalking of the dead by people who're too stoned or scared to chase live bait?" (242). Her question is in reference to the writer David Rattray setting out in 1957 to translate Antonin Artaud, who died in 1948. Rattray started his research by reading all the books that Artaud took out of the library—which could be done because, at the time, the

---

[14] Donne's poem "The Ecstasy" seems to be what is hinted at here, particularly the lines: "Our eye-beams twisted, and did thread / Our eyes upon one double string" (7-8). Since in *I Love Dick* we have "two vehicles" (ILD 20) on the highway instead of two lovers holding hands on a bed, which is what Donne envisaged, the effect that is achieved is one of irony, confirmed by the reference to John Donne's "eyeballs" instead of "eye-beams," a choice that self-consciously brings down what would otherwise be a high cultural reference.

Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris held and disclosed that record. This kind of obsessive research is what Chris refers to as "stalking of the dead" (242).

David Rattray, by stalking the dead Artaud, "decided to *become* him" to better translate his poems (ILD 242; my emphasis), and took amphetamine and other drugs in order to, as Rattray himself puts it, "speed myself up" (Rattray 310). Chris seems to be identifying with the process of *becoming* that Rattray experienced in researching and translating Artaud. Her willingness to become like Dick comes across for example when she naively declares, "Oh Dick, I want to be an intellectual like you" (ILD 226), and elsewhere when she expresses her envy more seriously: "You moved out to the desert on your own to clear the junk out of your life. You're skeptical of irony. You are trying to find some way of living you believe in. I envy this" (181). In one of the first letters Chris and Sylvère write to Dick, she asks him to mail her a copy of his book, because, she explains, "if we're going to write for you we should get more familiar with your style. *Love, Chris*" (42). Becoming familiar with Dick's style is another example of the process of becoming (familiar with) Artaud which Rattray experienced in order to translate him.

Chris's *becoming* Dick in *I Love Dick* can also take on a more forceful aspect. In an interview for *The Observer* Kraus recalls that, after Hebdige threatened to sue her, she decided to change Dick's appearance in the novel, his personal details and even, she explains, "the title of his book. When I was citing a 'book' by Dick Hebdige, I was citing my own writing, writing that would be in my next book" (Miller, "The Novelist as Performance Artist"). This form of erasure, the blurring of the distinction between Kraus's words and the words of another, means that while Dick's identity is maintained, "his" writing is actually hers.

If in Chris's view chasing "live bait" is opposed and preferable to chasing "dead" people (ILD 242), and if Chris implies that by stalking Dick she is not "scared" of the risks that she

claims are involved in stalking her contemporaries, it is curious that Chris ends up killing her "live bait" Dick nonetheless, when she herself suggests, around December 22, 1994: "'Dear Dick . . . I guess in a sense I've killed you. You've become Dear Diary" (90). Her "in a sense" killing Dick is evidenced in the progressive vanishing of Dick's name from the novel, from 250 times in Part I, to 53 in Part II. This decrease is due to the fact that in Part I the letters are short and frequent, while in Part II they become much longer and less frequent.[15] When Sylvère reflects about Chris's infatuation as follows, "Even though Dick's rejected her, she's managed to cover all the bases: She doesn't need him to respond for her love to go on" (205), it becomes clear that by "in a sense" killing her contemporary and by not needing him to respond, Chris achieves a removal of Dick from a subject position, and reduces his function to that of a "perfect listener" (91), a particular role of present absence which I explore in detail in Chapter 4.

Stalking in general, and tailing, chasing, and "killing" in particular, involve and reinforce a determined unidirectionality, an imbalance of agency between a dominant and a subjugated position. In the medium of letter writing, stalking pursued so strategically produces a kind of writing that, not needing Dick's reciprocation for Chris's obsession to thrive, is not only unidirectional but also safely referential. When letters and voice messages receive no answer, they can only refer back to themselves; they become self-referential because their addressee is absent, silent, a "blank screen" (29).

The referentiality of Chris's stalking method in her letter writing, while allowing Chris to write profusely, causes a failure in communication, which is epitomized by Chris when she admits, "I feel so sorry we were never able to communicate, Dick" (91), and also by Dick, when

[15] Moreover, in Part II, the "Dear Dick," which opens every letter throughout *I Love Dick*, occasionally becomes "DD" (between letters dated February 2 and June 21, 1995). DD reflects the vanishing of the person, and arguably it could create a confusion as to whether DD stands for Dear Dick or for Dear Diary. However, in a public reading, when Kraus reads "DD" she also adds, as an aside, "for Dear Dick" ("Changing Lives" 1:52).

he misspells Chris's name a couple of times in his letter (260). Moreover, Dick explicitly points to such failure when he declares that their relationship was only the projection of *her* fantasy. The morning after their date, for example, he complains, "But you don't know me! We've had two or three evenings! Talked on the phone once or twice! And you project this shit all over me . . . " (163).

The line "you don't know me" reminds us of an impasse at the heart of the novel; Chris cannot know Dick unless Dick writes back, returns calls, or shows that he wants to be known. While we can only speculate about Dick's absences and unwillingness in the novel, we can analyze Chris's writing in *I Love Dick* to see to what point she intends to get to know him, or give him a chance to write back as an equal correspondent. Notably, outside *I Love Dick*, Kraus gave Hebdige an opportunity to write back and reinsert himself in the novel in the form of an introduction, as she explained in an interview with *The Observer*: "Before the book came out, I said, 'Dick, would you like to write the introduction? If you do that, everyone will think it's a joke that we cooked up together.' And he was like, 'If you even think of doing such a thing, it proves you don't know me'" (Miller, "The Novelist as Performance Artist"). Notably, the same line that Dick speaks in *I Love Dick*, "But you don't know me!" (163), is here attributed by Kraus to Hebdige, in a merging that emphasized the continuity between, and the identity of, the character "Dick ___" and Dick Hebdige.

In the last chapter of *I Love Dick*, a final question frames the failure of communication between Chris and Dick as a matter of intensity. The narrator writes, ironically: "She wanted a response, and fast . . . Perhaps the only reason Dick had never written back was she'd failed to express her feelings for him forcefully?" (ILD 258). The failure of course lies precisely in the fact that she *did* express her feelings forcefully—as the images of chasing, stalking, and "in a

sense" killing indicate, and as the hundreds of letters she sent to him prove. Stalking as a writing method used to forcefully express one's feelings to another person is in conflict with the ideal of exchange on which any epistolary discourse relies. Such expectation of exchange, which Janet Altman calls "epistolary pact" (89), is a crucial feature of epistolarity, on which Chapter 2 will return. An epistolary pact relies on the assumption that for an exchange to take place between two correspondents both parties alternate between the roles of sender and receiver, thus engaging in what Liz Stanley calls "reciprocal turn-taking," which she describes as what happens when "each addressee, when replying, becom[es] the author and signatory" (136). When the ideal of reciprocity on which a correspondence rests is threatened by the prerogatives of stalking as a writing method, a fatal imbalance between the "I" of the writer and the "you" of the receiver occurs. Because in *I Love Dick* the "I" of the writer becomes prolific and grows a kind of "parasitic growth" (ILD 42), the addressee withdraws from writing, and the presence of the addressee is felt only as addressed, as a "you."[16]

By writing a novel about becoming a writer, Kraus actually wrote her first book and indeed became a writer, achieving what Fisher calls "cultural prominence" (*Play* 136).[17] Because of the stalking method used in the letters, Kraus produced a novel in which the "I" of the writer grew and, due to her fame and the frequent interviews in the late 2010s, kept on growing.[18] The

---

[16] For a discussion on the role of the woman as parasite, I refer to Anna Watkins Fisher who argued for the parasite as feminist practice in her article "Manic Impositions: The Parasitical Art of Chris Kraus and Sophie Calle" as well as in her book *Play in the System* (113-142).

[17] After *I Love Dick*, Kraus published *Aliens and Anorexia* (2000) and *Torpor* (2006), both as a prequel to *I Love Dick*, while her nonfiction work includes *Video Green: Los Angeles Art and the Triumph of Nothingness* (2004); *LA Artland: Contemporary Art from Los Angeles* (2005); *Where Art Belongs* (2011); and a collection of essays, *Social Practices* (2018). In 2012, Kraus published her fourth novel, *Summer of Hate*, and in 2017, a biography, *After Kathy Acker: A Biography*.

[18] While Kraus has talked about her work and about *I Love Dick* extensively from her perspective, a knowledge of Dick's role in the novel cannot be gained from Hebdige, who has always refused to be interviewed. Notably, when Elaine Blair was writing the *New Yorker* article "Female Antihero" in 2016, she notes that "In response to my request for an interview about his relationship with Kraus and Lotringer, Hebdige, who is now a professor emeritus at the University of California, Santa Barbara, wrote, 'I really have no comment to offer either on them or the book'" (Blair 42-27).

growth of the first person, or its "expansion," as the next chapter argues, is self-conscious, strategic, and inspired by certain twentieth-century precedents which Kraus held as exemplary in the years before she started to write.

Section 2. "Anyone can be it": The Theory of the Expanded I

In 2001, Chris Kraus published a short essay titled "Ecceity, Smash and Grab, the Expanded I and Moment," laying out a perspective on the first-person narrator that I argue strives to frame the voice she was trying to achieve in *I Love Dick*. Written four years after the publication of *I Love Dick*, her essay advocates for a certain kind of first person in writing, an outsider, antiacademic first person. It agrees with philosophers and theorists such as Deleuze and Guattari who extol the "intensities and becoming" of lived experience ("Ecceity" 303). The connection of lived experience and intensities was established in *I Love Dick* when Chris refers to the "game" of her letter writing as not just "real" but better than reality, and concluding that "*better than* means stepping out into complete intensity" (ILD 28). While embracing Deleuze and Guattari's ideas of intensities and becoming, in "Ecceity" Kraus takes issue with their avoiding "referencing themselves" (305), and their evading the question "who is speaking, and to whom?" (305). They also ignored traditions outside of academe that Kraus praises, in particular the "American antiacademic tradition" of the New York School of poets, who favored live speech, performance, and the conversational mode (304).[19]

The title of the essay itself, "Ecceity, Smash and Grab, the Expanded I and Moment," as Kraus explains, makes reference to Deleuze's concept of *ecceity* which she defines as "a moment fractured into the thousands variances and textures that compose it" (303), as an "inclusivity of

[19] The New York School is a group which Kraus lists as including Frank O'Hara, Lew Welch, Paul Blackburn, Ted Berrigan, Ron Padgett, Alice Notley, Bernadette Mayer, and Anne Waldman ("Ecceity" 303).

everything" (304), an inclusivity that requires a "public" and "impersonal I" (305), such as the one used by the New York School of poets, in order to entertain Deleuze and Guattari's "dream of becoming everything" (305).

Kraus's essay is included as a supplement in the volume *French Theory in America,* which comprises fifteen papers and three supplements, edited by Sylvère Lotringer and Sande Cohen. Unlike the other two supplements, and unlike the eight papers that make up the second part of the volume titled "French Theory In America," her essay has no footnotes or citations. By writing without citations, that is in a non-academic way, Kraus seems to align herself with the style of the French writers featured in the volume's first part, "Some views from France"—such as Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva, Francoise Gaillard, Jean Beaudrillard and Gilles Deleuze—whose essays do not offer citations or footnotes. However, behind the non-academic format of Kraus's supplemental essay there is more than a simple matter of style.

With regards to the supplementarity of the essay, since "Ecceity" is added to a volume edited by Kraus's then husband Sylvère Lotringer, the irony of Kraus's essay being *additional* matter is not lost on readers who recall that a few years earlier Kraus refers to herself in *I Love Dick* precisely as a supplement of sorts, an additional "Plus-One" added to her husband's surname: "'Who's Chris Kraus?' she screamed. 'She's no one!' . . . In ten years, she'd erased herself" (ILD 116). Therefore, when Kraus in her essay advocates for an "Expanded I," as the title of the essay announces, or when in *I Love Dick* she writes about "finding the 1st Person" (44), I see this expansion as responding to a particular kind of erasure, the one experienced by the non-academic wife of a prominent French academic man.

Kraus would later examine this kind of erasure in *Torpor*, published in 2006. Like *I Love Dick*, *Torpor* narrates the end of the relationship between a non-academic wife married to a

French intellectual. In this novel, Kraus describes erasure in terms of invisibility. For example, in the company of other French theorists gathered in Félix Guattari's loft, Kraus writes, "Sylvie practiced her invisibility. She didn't speak a word of French, and Jerome was too impatient with the conversation in the loft to translate" (*Torpor* 103). If the opposite of invisibility and erasure is a foray into visibility, public discourse, and a "visible career" (ILD 211), the issue with visibility is that the kind of visibility available to women is of a particular kind, as Kraus remarks in a 2006 interview with Denise Frimer: "Why did there seem to be no place in this world for a woman, unless that place was sexualized?" (Frimer).

Kraus calls the writing of the New York School not only impersonal, public, and open to anyone but specifically "antiacademic" (304) and, as we have seen, she writes about this topic in a non-academic way. By putting theory into practice, by celebrating and also embodying the anti-academic, Kraus occupies a position that Fisher calls "amateurish" ("Parasitical Politics and Epistolary Games"). That the author of *I Love Dick* and "Ecceity" writes as an *amateur* should not come as a surprise; in *I Love Dick*, Sylvère succinctly frames her being an amateur when he writes that "[Chris is] writing without any destination or authority, unlike Dick, who's off to give another talk in Amsterdam and never writes unless he's asked to; unlike me, about to give my *Evil* lecture, collect my check and go home" (ILD 206). An amateur, from the Latin *amare* meaning "to love," is indeed the nonprofessional who pursues something without destination, without being asked or paid, and does so out of love and not out of gain. The opposition between Kraus's amateurish writing and professional writers comes across again in the interview with Denise Frimer, where Kraus states: "Female intellectuals of the more professional sort have always been quite circumspect, never bringing any sign of their physical being into the text" (Frimer).

In 2001, through the amateurish, nonprofessional and outsider writing that she upholds in "Ecceity," Kraus aligns herself with the poets of the New York School. But she already favored such alignment when she spoke with Giovanni Intra in 1997; when asked about her writing *I Love Dick*, Kraus remarked that what drove her on "was trying to figure out why there was no position in the culture for female *outsiders*" of which she considered herself one (Intra; my emphasis).[20] Therefore, Kraus's overriding concern with the outsider position of non-academic writers was already there in 1997, in *I Love Dick*. But before that, it was there behind the editorial choices she made at Semiotext(e)'s Native Agents series which, in an interview with Henry Schwarz and Anne Balsamo in 1996, she called an "amateur operation" as opposed to a curated series: "'Inclusiveness' isn't really an issue because the series isn't curatorial: I don't go *looking* for books. It's an amateur operation. I publish what feels right out of what comes our way" (Schwarz 214).

Under her editorship in the Native Agents series, which Kraus started in 1989, voices outside academia become synonyms with voices who speak in the first person, as Semiotext(e)'s website announces; the series was started as an "an 'antidote' to Semiotext(e)'s male-dominated, primarily French Foreign Agents series, to explore American voices and issues of subjectivity, with an emphasis on women and queer experience." As Kraus noted in the interview with Intra, she started the Native Agents series in order "to publish the kind of writing that I liked—and that writing was entirely in the first person. . . . There's a tradition of American poetry that champions and celebrates this—New York School, the Poetry Project and all of its successors." From 1989 to 1997, the year *I Love Dick* was released, Kraus's role as co-editor for the Native Agents imprint involved her in selecting and editing writing that spoke to her interest in the first

[20] It should be noted here that Kraus considers herself an amateur not just because she is a non-academic writer of theory in the context of academic theorists and philosophers, but also as a visual artist and experimental filmmaker she still remains outside the academy, given that she did not receive an MFA (Gumport n+1).

person.[21] These authors also shaped her own way of writing. When the occasion of writing arose, an occasion which *I Love Dick* is a record of, Kraus put into practice ideas about the expanded "I" which she most likely started developing while publishing Rower's "transfictions" in 1990 (Rower 269), and Rattray's "poetic autobiography" in 1992 (Rattray 395). The fact that these authors appear multiple times in *I Love Dick* itself indicates their influence on Kraus.

The connection between her writing and the Native Agents' publications is further established by Kraus in a 2014 piece titled "The New Universal" in which she recalls her co-editorship at a time when Semiotext(e) published French theory, "with the idea of transferring some of French theory's legitimacy to some friends in New York, all of them women, who could best be described as post-New York School writers" ("The New Universal" 84). Given that Kraus calls Native Agents's authors "post-New York School writers," and that *I Love Dick* itself was published in by Native Agents when Kraus was still a co-editor of the series—a fact that makes *I Love Dick* a self-published book[22]—in "The New Universal" Kraus includes herself in the category of a post-New York School writer.

There is an important exception to Kraus's 2014 claim that they were "all of them women" ("The New Universal" 84). A year earlier, in her 2013 remarks at the event *David Rattray: A Recognition*, she explained that while David Rattray, whose work she edited and published in the Native Agent Series in 1992, "certainly wasn't a woman," he was writing "in the first-person, in this very high first-person that was a witness of culture," and she qualified the

[21] The nine books published by Native Agents before *I Love Dick (1997)* are listed on the publisher's page as follows: Ann Rower, *If You're a Girl* (1990); Cookie Mueller, *Walking Through Clear Water in a Pool Painted Black* (1990); Eileen Myles, *Not Me* (1991); Kathy Acker and Sylvère Lotringer, *Hannibal Lecter, My Father* (1991); Lynne Tillman, *The Madame Realism Complex* (1992); David Rattray, *How I Became One of the Invisible* (1992); Deran Ludd, *Sick Burn Cut* (1992); Barbara Barg, *The Origin of the Species* (1994); Eldon Garnet, *Reading Brooke Shields* (1995); Eileen Myles and Liz Kotz, *The New Fuck You* (1995).

[22] With regards to Fisher's argument that Kraus was "parasitical" on her then-husband's press, Kraus clarifies: "I became a co-editor of Semiotext(e) 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" (qtd. in Fisher *Play in the System,* 139).

Native Agents series more tentatively as "supposed to be mostly first-person, mostly women" (Rattray 37). Therefore, if in 2013 her claim about the first person seems to involve the "I" more as literary device and a general "witness," in 2014 her claim seems to foreground an "I" that is a witness not of culture, but specifically of gender and sexuality. François Cusset's remark in *French Theory* in 2008 that Native Agents was a series that published "political autofictions and collections of lesbian short stories" (Cusset 74) while being simplistic is not far from Kraus's 2014 claim in "The New Universal" that Native Agents published authors who were "all of them women," and is not far from the Semiotext(e) website's current emphasis on "women and queer experience." Kraus's 2014 erasure of David Rattray seems unwarranted given the importance he had, as disclosed when the narrator in *I Love Dick* tells us that Chris "thought about David all the time" and felt that he was "pushing her to understand infatuation" (ILD 23), as well as by the fact that Rattray acts as the first addressee in Chris's writing, a crucial role which Chapter 4 will return to.[23]

Kraus's concern for outsiders in "Ecceity" can then be traced back to *I Love Dick* in 1997, and yet, despite there being strong similarities, even repetitions, between how Kraus frames the issue of being an outsider in 1997 and in 2001, there is a shift in her method. This change is all the more striking for the continuities among the texts. First, a brief look at the continuity of concern across texts will better show the striking departures. In *I Love Dick*, Kraus's third person narrator admits, "Because she does not express herself in theoretical language, no one expects too much from her . . . " (ILD 21), and then in "Ecceity," we find the

---

[23] Kraus describes her friendship with David Rattray as follows: "David was very important to me at that moment, because somehow his book with Semiotext(e), his subsequent illness and sudden death all dovetailed with the end of shooting *Gravity & Grace* the film and starting to write. So all of those events were bound up together. And retrospectively, when we were working together on his book the entire year before its publication, he'd often monologue on the phone to me for over an hour. It was as if I was receiving some transmission of information that I was going to need later to become a writer" (Personal interview. 22 March 2022).

same concept expressed as follows: "because these [New York School] poets rejected a certain kind of theoretical language, people just assumed that they were dumb" ("Ecceity" 304). Moreover, the same concept returns again in *Torpor*, when the narrator explains, "During all these torpid years, Sylvie behaved like someone permanently stoned. Pretending to be dumber than she was, she kept Jerome amused with brilliant, childish topics" (*Torpor* 161), thus consolidating across these texts the role of a "dumb" persona.

However, upon closer examination, we find a change in how the same concerns are expressed. The quotation from "Ecceity" ("because these [New York School] poets rejected a certain kind of theoretical language, people just assumed that they were dumb" ("Ecceity" 304) appears in *I Love Dick* as well, but in a different format: "'Because we rejected a certain kind of critical language, people just assumed that we were dumb,' the genius Alice Notley said when I visited her in Paris" (ILD 207). Such discrepancy indicates that if in 1997 Kraus's first person identifies with Notley's view by citing her, by 2001 Kraus uses Notley's words without quotation, thus fully identifying with them. The latter is a case of what in academia one would call plagiarism, but that outside academia I propose to refer to as appropriation, a becoming without attribution.

Another example of such expansion of the "I" through appropriation is when in "Ecceity" Kraus traces the origin of the New York School first person to the Provencal poets, the Troubadours. She finds that "It's no coincidence that Paul Blackburn, an influential figure within the New York school, undertook to translate them" ("Ecceity" 306). Paul Blackburn is mentioned once in *I Love Dick*, when the narrator describes how Chris and others "stayed up late reading Paul Blackburn's translations of the Troubadour poems out loud" (ILD 113), followed by a few lines from a poem by Aimerac de Beleno which appears in Blackburn's anthology (*Proensa: An*

Anthology of Troubadour Poetry 232). The epigraph to Part II of *I Love Dick* includes the following poem:

> *Love has led me to a point*
>
> *where I now live badly*
>
> *'cause I'm dying of desire*
>
> *I therefore can't feel sorry for myself*
>
> *and —*
>
> —Anonymous, 14th-century French Provençal (ILD 121).

This poem is repeated a second time in the novel (237), not as an epigraph but within the main body text. In its second appearance, it is anticipated, as well as followed, by the sentence, "My hand was wet from holding the telephone so tightly" (237), which describes Chris on the phone with Dick. There is a change in how the poem itself appears the second time; the final word is no longer "and" but "AND—", but more importantly the poem does not include an attribution.

Curiously, this poem is not part of Blackburn's anthology. Perhaps Chris identifies with this 14th-century poet just as elsewhere she identifies with Alice Notley, blurring the distinction between herself and the words of another. If this is the case then signing the poem "Anonymous" might be an example of the kind of open, impersonal, public "I" that she describes in "Ecceity," an "I" so open that "anybody can be it" (305), a public "I" that can expand over centuries.[24]

Appropriating someone else's identity—even if this identity can never be established or claimed, as it is the case with the Anonymous Troubadour poet—is, if not plagiarism, certainly not academic, but belongs instead to the realm of the performative and the poetic. The

[24] The poem is followed a couple of pages later by a reflection about a discussion of schizophrenia and the author Felix Guattari's writing on that subject. Chris writes: "Here's a passage that I found three weeks ago when I started writing this and now it's August and I can't find the citation, and anyhow it's my translation, i.e., a cross between what he wrote and what I wanted him to say" (239). This meta commentary about her way of writing could apply to the appropriation of the Troubadour poet as well.

Troubadour poets sang their poems and were indeed performers, something Kraus remarks upon when claiming that the whole of *I Love Dick* "was a troubadour poem – an effort to engage and seduce [Dick]" (Frimer). In "Ecceity," when Kraus talks about transcription in reference to the New York School of poets, it is a "transcription of the human voice, a tracing" ("Ecceity" 304), a poetics "based upon transcription" (303), objectivity, precision, and on what the poet John Ashbery called "the experience of experience, a transcription of attention" (qtd. in "Ecceity" 308). These remarks foreground the importance of performance in poetry as well as acting in general, and point to Kraus's involvement with poetry and performance, especially with the St. Mark's Poetry Project, is recounted at different moments in *I Love Dick* , and topless dancing is one of the kinds of performances that Chris recalls frequently.

But Kraus has a background in performance that goes back to her studies in New York City in the 1970s. As she recalls in a 2006 interview with Selah Saterstrom, while writing the letters that form *I Love Dick* she relied on what she had learned in acting and film: "the use of montage, speaking through masks or personas, a very high slapstick routine of *shifting* identities" (Saterstrom; my emphasis). Similarly, in 1997 Kraus defined the first person as alive and shifting when she noted: "And yet it was not an introspective, psychoanalytic 'I.' It was an 'I' that was totally alive, because it was shifting" (Intra). Elsewhere, Kraus notes again that "things are constantly shifting. There's a whole tradition that believes writing is more an active transcription than sheer invention" (Frimer), thus referring to the tradition of the New York School of poets, and the post New York school of writers among whom Kraus positions herself ("The New Universal" 85-94). The type of expanded "I" that plays a part and then shifts and plays another part through a different mask or persona belongs indeed to acting**.** Performance is a form in which the performer is at once the actor but also the character, and what is performed is both

real, in the sense that it is embodied in real time in front of the audience, and fictional, in the sense of being scripted, staged, and played.

But there is another kind of performance that should be mentioned at this point, if only to trouble the role of the stalker that I attributed to Chris at the beginning of this chapter. Kraus theorizes sadomasochism as performance in 2000 in “Emotional Technologies,” an essay previously published in *Artext#68* as “Sleeping With The Alien.” Sadomasochism, defined as the sexual play between the roles of dominant and submissive (Herron 200), is praised in Kraus’s essay for being “emotionally high-tech,” because it is “the most time-efficient method of creating context and complicity between highly mobile units” (“Emotional” 85). As a performance, Kraus claims that S/m is not unlike what the Polish Theater Lab developed under the direction of Jerzy Grotowski: exercises called “plastiques” that leave no “margin for improvisation” (93). Kraus points to the scripted nature of S/m and to the fact that there are only two parts and a limited set of lines and signals: “character is completely preordained and circumscribed. You are only either top or bottom. There isn’t any room for innovation in these roles” (86).

This kind of performance is very different from the American experimental theater Kraus had been trained in (86), which I discussed above as a way to take on multiple parts, shifting identities, improvise, and as a way to expand the “I.” Indeed, the American version of improvisation and freedom of expression and movement stands at the opposite end of a routine that is “preordained” (93). But what Kraus deems liberating in S/m is that she can give up the dominant role of the stalker and take on the submissive role willingly and consensually. Through S/m Kraus can detach herself from the traditional heterosexual romance that ends badly—the woman in love who is inevitably seduced and then left waiting—by reappropriating and

reframing it as a performance in which the two players agree to play set roles, and therefore can play like actors with a certain detachment which Kraus finds liberating.

Considering S/m allows us to interpret those scenes in *I Love Dick* in which Chris's behavior is not in line with the stalker method, scenes in which she is abject and submissive and thus, as Chapter 2 will discuss, she aligns with the victim role of the Epistolary Woman. It is in these scenes, which take place when flirting with Dick or engaged in sex, or even in direct dialogue with him, that Chris performs acts of submission. For example, Chris writes that while on the phone with Dick she was not able to talk: "When you called on Sunday night, I was writing a description of your face. I couldn't talk, and hung up on the bottom end of the romantic equation with beating heart and sweaty palms" (ILD 27). Similarly, when she is with Dick over dinner or in his bedroom, while initially she declares, "I was talking, you were listening" (155), she then achieves the opposite of empowerment or expansion: she makes herself small, "small and Pekinese," and becomes "scared to talk" (161), while Dick is summoned to tell her what to do, within the role play set up by Chris's willful, repeated request "I want to be your lapdog . . . Will you let me be your lapdog?" (161). In these instances, it is Dick's presence as a sexual partner that prompts a shift in Chris's behavior, away from the figure of a stalker who chases and tails Dick, and towards that of a small, quiet lapdog.

This chapter argued that stalking as a writing method allows Kraus to stage a first-person voice that in theory is active, dominant, and that grows or expands through mobility and visibility, while in practice allowing space for a performance of willed submission. The theoretical expansion of the first person in Kraus's work is indebted to her reading of specific authors in the Native Agents series that Kraus edited in the early 1990s, as well as to her own knowledge of performative practice, and to precedents that Kraus identifies in the New York

School of poets. But there are other precedents that affect our understanding of the "I" in letter writing and of the consequences such expansion bears on the "you" of the receiver. These precedents go back to seventeenth- and eighteenth-century epistolary fiction—specifically amatory epistolary fiction, or novels made of love letters. While a survey of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century epistolary novels is beyond the scope of this research, situating *I Love Dick* within this tradition will help to illustrate ways in which the novel is reliant on formal constraints and tropes that belong to the epistolary genre. In particular, I argue that *I Love Dick* is shaped by tropes derived from epistolary novels written in the female voice in this period when novels made of allegedly authentic letters, apparently written by women who were deranged by passion, were extremely popular.

Chapter 2: Amatory Epistolary Fiction and the Transgressive Nature of Women Writing Love

Section 3. “When the form’s in place, everything within it can be pure feeling” : the Form of Amatory Epistolary Fiction

Even if Chris and Sylvère call their writing project “some kind of new literary form” (ILD 258), they are aware that by writing letters they have entered into an established form, the epistolary genre. When asked how the project is going, Chris states that the writing “it’s turned into an epistolary novel, really” (115).[25] They are also aware that the form rests on certain prerequisites. For example, with particular attention to form, Sylvère muses, “didn’t the form dictate that Chris end up in Dick’s arms?” (67), and then, “*Dick would never answer. The form would never be fulfilled*” (68). These remarks point to the fact that the form of amatory epistolary fiction “dictates” certain outcomes, such as seduction, and rely on certain requirements, such as reciprocation. In this chapter, I will examine these and other expectations in order to argue that *I Love Dick* makes a formalist claim to the epistolary tradition by aligning its own form in relation to the epistolary and by employing the following epistolary constraints: the use of a first-person narrator (the “I” being the writer of the letter), the presence of a specific addressee (the “you” to whom the letter is addressed), and the expectation that a letter should be answered (and that the “I” and the “you” enter an “epistolary pact”). The second half of the chapter will examine the trope of sincerity and transparency in the epistolary medium

[25] I should note here that despite the fact that *I Love Dick* calls itself an “epistolary novel,” and despite the numerous literary references present in the novel, there are no references to epistolary novels, nor evidence of direct inspiration from any epistolary novels. There is however a passing reference to libertines, as in “this couple of cynical rapacious libertines'' (ILD 37), a line that Joan Hawkins sees as a call to Choderlos de Laclos’s epistolary novel *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, and that Hawkins uses to establish a persuasive parallelisms between the love triangle in Laclos’s epistolary novel and *I Love Dick* (264-265).

and the *pretense* of sincerity at the core of epistolary novels, and connect it to the myth of so-called Epistolary Woman and to the transgressive nature of epistolary female desire.

It is commonly accepted that epistolary fiction plays an important role in "the rise of the novel," after Ian Watts's 1957 monograph on the topic, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding*. Indeed, epistolary fiction flowered in the seventeenth century, in part due to the popularity of seventeenth-century French translations and paraphrases of the twelfth-century correspondence of Abelard and Heloise as well as the success of the French *Portuguese Letters* (Kauffman 84-85). In *I Love Dick*, Chris and Sylvère concur with the accepted view that the epistolary genre leads to the rise the novel, when the narrator explains: "Eventually they would subtitle this [epistolary project] *Does the Epistolary Genre Mark the Advent of the Bourgeois Novel?"* (ILD 68). This question refers to a conversation that takes place when one of Dick's guests comments on Chris's writing an "epistolary novel" with: "'Ah, that's so bourgeois.' 'Huh?' 'Didn't Habermas say once that the epistolary genre marked the advent of the bourgeois novel?' . . . But still she [Chris] wondered to herself: . . . didn't Lukács say it first?" (115). Chris is not questioning whether the epistolary genre marks the advent of the bourgeois novel; her point is about what scholar "sa[id] it first;" therefore she takes the relation as a given.[26]

Because epistolary novels, as opposed to the "bourgeois novel" that followed, are constructed mainly or uniquely as a collection of letters all written in the first person, the letters can be arranged in three ways. They can account for a one-sided correspondence, such as

[26] The extent to which the epistolary genre marks the rise of the novel is indeed a matter of debate. In Joe Bray's monograph *The Epistolary Novel: Representations of Consciousness,* he argues that access to consciousness, such as the access afforded by the third-person narrator employing free indirect speech—a device that allows the narrator to enter the mind of a character and give access to their consciousness, and which Jane Austen is considered to be the first to have mastered—is a quality that the epistolary form can also convey (1-28). Pointing especially at examples in Richardson's *Clarissa*, Bray argues that first-person narration can use free indirect speech as well, since the "I" can be both a "narrating self," or a voice who narrates, and an "experiencing self," or focalizer, who sees and experiences (Bray 1-28).

Ovid's first fifteen epistles in the *Heroides,* also known as *Epistulae Heroidum* or *Letters of Heroines*, the *Portuguese Letters* (1669), Samuel Richardson's *Pamela: Or, Virtue Rewarded* (1740), Marie Riccoboni's *Lettres de Mistriss Fanni Butlerd* (1757), or Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *The Sorrow of Young Werther* (1774); they can form a correspondence between at least two characters who read and answer one another's letters, such as Aphra Behn's incestuous *Love-Letters between a Nobleman and His Sister* (1683-1697); or they can record a correspondence between multiple characters, most famously in Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa, or, the History of a Young Lady* (1748), and Choderlos de Laclos's *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* (1782). Whereas in correspondences with more than one character the letters tend to be signed by their authors to signal who the "I" of the speaker in each letter is, in one-sided correspondence the "I" of the speaker does not change and therefore the letters can be simply dated to signal the passing of time.

I Love Dick adopts the use of a first-person voice and presents each letter as signed, but it plays with the form in two major ways. One is the fact that in Part I there is not just a first-person *singular* writer, an "I," but at times also a first-person *plural* voice, a "we," as Chris and Sylvère sometimes compose together and even sign some letters as "*Chris and Sylvère*" (44, 56, 69, 74) or even with a pseudonym such as "*Charles and Emma Bovary"* (106). The presence of a double sender is of interest because it marks a difference from the novel of adultery in which the heroine normally keeps her affairs secret from her husband, as is the case for example in Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1857), where Emma Bovary's love letters to her lover Rodolphe and then to Léon are discovered by her unsuspecting husband Charles only at the end of the novel.

In *I Love Dick*, there is no secrecy between Chris and Sylvère—with the exception of the "secret fax," which Chris composes but does not send (66). It is Sylvère who encourages Chris to write a letter to Dick, as the narrator explains: "So on Friday morning, Sylvère finally suggests that Chris write Dick a letter. Since she's embarrassed she asks him if he wants to write one too. Sylvère agrees" (25). Sylvère indeed composes the first letter speaking of his own "desire to be closer" to Dick, and to "fictionalize life a bit" (26). In *I Love Dick*, the awareness that co-signing love letters is unusual emerges when the narrator naively asks: "Do married couples usually collaborate on *billets doux*?"—billets doux being an antiquated term for love letters (25). Sylvère is certainly engaged in the game of writing: in Part I, he signs on his own 14 times, and co-signs with Chris 4 times, while Chris signs on her own 26 times. His engagement ceases the moment they visit Dick on 22 January, 1994 when Chris actually hands the letters to Dick (115).

A second way in which *I Love Dick* pushes against the first-person constraint of the epistolary discourse is by framing the first-person letters with a third-person narration. This device shows that Kraus has not simply gathered the letters she wrote to Hebdige—which is what Ellen Hunt implies when writing that Kraus's one-sided correspondence appears "more or less exactly as she wrote it in the throes of her thrall to Hebdige" ("Chris Kraus: I Love Dick was written 'in a delirium'"). The device of a third-person voice is used to recount scenes as if from above. It affords a certain detachment as well as a pretense of objectivity, for example in the opening scene where the characters are introduced in a way that resembles a movie script: "Chris Kraus, a 39-year-old experimental filmmaker and Sylvère Lotringer, a 56-year-old college professor from New York, have dinner with Dick ____, a friendly acquaintance of Sylvère's, at a sushi bar in Pasadena" (ILD 19). At the same time, the third-person narrator can

access the characters' interiority as well as their future, like an all-knowing narrator who is even able to give proleptic remarks, such as: "Months later, parts of Chris' story would turn out to be remarkably prophetic" (79). In this instance, the narrator's anticipation of what is to come gives the reader information which Chris, the writer of the letters, would not be aware of at the time of writing.

Analyzing the portrait on the back cover of the 2006 Semiotex(e) edition of the novel can help qualify the device of the third-person narrator in relation to the fate of the characters. This portrait is taken by Daniel Marlos, a photographer whom Kraus would write about in 2002 in a piece included in *Video Green* and titled "Torpor Los Angeles: Daniel Marlos" (187-191). It portrays Chris Kraus playing with three small dolls arranged in front of her around a white and turquoise convertible toy car (Figure 1).

Image removed for copyright reasons

Figure 1.

In the foreground, a female doll in a white dress turns her back to a male doll wearing a black suit, a bowtie, and a white flower in his lapel, who is standing behind her and behind the car. Between them on top of the car there is a larger topless male doll which Kraus calls the "big hulk. . . the interloper, the third party Dick" (Personal interview). These props, which Kraus recalls were bought "in the toy district in downtown LA" just before the photo shoot, were meant to be a joke: "I bought whatever I could find that seemed to be funny" (Personal interview).

This photograph is about the relationship between the dolls that Kraus is handling. On the one hand, the dolls quite literally represent what takes place between the characters in the novel: Chris, turning her back to her husband, while the muscular man between them stands for an alpha-male kind of masculinity, and the car symbolizes mobility and distance, a point I will return to below. But the photograph also points to the fact that the characters in *I Love Dick* are stereotypes, much like these dolls, in so far as they play a part that involves roles, for example when Chris says that "it would've been totally in character not to call" (ILD 36), or later Sylvère mentions that Dick is playing into "his role" (59). On the other hand, the photograph foregrounds the fact that Kraus's role is external to the staged action. She is in the background like a puppet master whose role is to move the characters and tell their story, a role that Kraus emphasizes when, as I argue in the next chapter, she frames the novel as fictional. Ultimately, the third-person narrator is a key story-telling device in *I Love Dick* that frames the letters and the narrative with hindsight, detachment, and objectivity.

So far I illustrated the use of the first-person narrator in *I Love Dick,* which takes the form of both a first-person singular and a first-person plural, and of a third-person narrator employed to frame the letters. A second formal constraint in epistolary discourse is that the

letter form requires the presence of an addressee, a "you." The presence of an addressee is what distinguishes the epistolary genre from other first-person forms, such as "memoir and diary writing, where there is no reified addressee" (Altman 117). Indeed, diary and memoir are both written in the first person, but Altman claims that they are *formally* different from the epistolary mode, because of the motivation involved in letter writing, in writing *to* an addressee.

Altman calls this motivation "desire for exchange" (89) and argues that without such a desire, "the writing does not differ significantly from a journal, even if it assumes the outer form of the letter" (89). When scholars call *I Love Dick* in part a diary (Sykes 165), they forgo the basic distinction that Altman claims characterizes the uniqueness of epistolary discourse. Even when Chris declares, "Dear Dick you became Dear Diary" (ILD 90), the text which is written for Dick and eventually given to him is directed and addressed. Therefore, *I Love Dick* is an epistolary novel not only because it clearly assumes the form of letters, but because it relies on Chris's obsessive desire for connection, exchange, and reciprocation, a desire that is made explicit by the ultimatum: "[Chris] wanted a response, and fast" (258). Elsewhere, Chris admits that given the fact that exchange (Dick answering her letters) is unlikely, she desires recognition: "Even if this love for you could never be returned I wanted recognition" (153). Recognition implies an acknowledgement of the other that Dick never gives and that in fact he fully withdraws the very moment he writes to Chris, by offering her a xerox of a letter, by not writing to her directly, and by misspelling her name.

In epistolary communication there is an expectation of exchange between the letter writer and the addressee, what Altman calls an "epistolary pact," or "the call for response from a specific reader within the correspondent's world" (89). In *I Love Dick*, it's because of the epistolary pact that Sylvère assumes Dick's answer is required to "fulfill" the form. Without

Dick's answers, "*The form would never be fulfilled*" (ILD 68). A pact is a promise. First Dick promises to read Chris's letters (115) in January 1995, and after Sylvère solicits "his compassion" (258) in September 1995, he eventually "promised he'd write Chris a letter" (259). Despite the delay, his promises mean he has entered more or less willingly the epistolary pact. Calls for response are frequent throughout the novel, and the importance of response (which in *I Love Dick* can be to a letter, but also to a phone call, a fax, or a voice message) is assumed in order to maintain communication. As Chris notes: "If he doesn't call today I think I'll have to disengage. Because, you know, I'll lose respect. We've done *so much*. All he has to do is call" (57). The concept of expected reciprocity and of balanced contribution represents the rules of the unspoken epistolary pact.

Since the beginning, however, the possibility that Dick would not respond is always there, as when Sylvère writes to Dick: "The fact that you don't return messages turns your answerphone into a blank screen onto which we can project our fantasies" (29), or when the third-person narrator observes: "Sylvère suggested writing until Dick returned their calls … they might be writing forever" (36). The possibility, even likelihood, that Dick will never answer is also expressed by Chris herself when she reflects on the debasing, dependent position she puts herself in, having "projected a total fantasy onto an unsuspecting person and then actually asked him to respond!" (60). While the epistolary pact is thus recognized as fundamental in *I Love Dick* in order to establish a correspondence, the possibility that a pact can be broken is always acknowledged as an issue of form, with regards to what the form "dictates," and how the form can be "fulfilled," issues that Chapter 4 will address in more detail.

A third constraint beside the presence of the first-person narrator and its desire for exchange, and the presence of an addressee and of an epistolary pact between addressee and sender, is that the epistolary medium in general and the love letters in particular relies on the fact that the correspondents in an epistolary exchange need to be physically apart. Distance or separation is indeed one of the reasons why two letter writers need to write to one another, as opposed to entertaining a face-to-face conversation. Sometimes distance can be signaled by the remoteness of the addressee, by the inaccessibility or seclusion of the writer, but I argue that it can also be embodied by movement.

In *I Love Dick*, the distance between sender and receiver is marked geographically and existentially at the very beginning of the novel by the fact that Dick lives alone in the "Antelope Valley desert, some 30 miles away" (ILD 19) from the sushi bar where he meets Chris and Sylvère.[27] Distance is not just about location, but also about the propensity of a character to shorten or to increase distance. Dick embodies distance by living in a remote, lonely place. This comes across when Chris writes: "we were amazed by where you lived. It was an existential dream, a Zen metaphor for everything you'd said about yourself… living, 'all alone,' you kept repeating, at the end of a dead-end road on the edge of town opposite a cemetery" (158). Yet what characterizes Dick is also the fact that he does not move; he is a stable receiver, located at an address, connected to a landline, able to receive and ignore calls and voice messages on his answering machine, and he is also connected to a fax—a "deserted fax" (34).

[27] I should note that the Antelope Valley desert is not 30 miles away from Pasadena, but 80 miles. I explain this inconsistency in relation to the fact that before publication Kraus had to change Dick's identifying details. Kraus confirms that indeed "I could be specific about where we lived, but I could not be specific about where he lived, so I changed everything concerning the Dick character, personal appearance, where he lived, where he was coming from. I changed all of the identifying details " and that "this was pre-internet, and that information was not two clicks away, so maybe I just got it wrong!" (Personal interview. 22 March 2022).

In contrast, Chris is mobile. She is often driving alone, and her pickup truck is a symbol of mobility and independence. Her constant movement—her moving between homes, her driving across the country, her walking and getting lost in the woods, or her flying between New York to LA—creates, extends, and then collapses the distance between her and Dick. In Part II especially she locates herself geographically during her driving across the US: her spatial position is meticulously presented at the top of every letter, or described in the letters themselves, often mentioning the hotel or motel or room she writes from.[28]

Chris's mobile role in *I Love Dick* differs from the role of other female letter writers who tend to stay put, such as the legendary abandoned women in Ovid's *Heroides* who write love letters to their absent husbands and lament their departure, or Mariana, the nun in the convent in the *Portuguese Letters*, or the maidservant bound to the house of her employer in Richardson's *Pamela* (1740).[29] In *I Love Dick*, by taking on the role of the mobile lover, Chris takes on a role that in the epistolary tradition has been a male prerogative. In love poetry as well, such as in John Donne's "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" (120), the male lover is the one who says "I must go" (22) and his lover's soul is "the fixed foot" of the compass, who "makes no show / To move" (27-28). Goethe's 1774 epistolary novel *The Sorrow of Young Werther* only confirms this trend with Werther opening his first letter with "How happy I am to be away!" (25).

[28] While most of the December 1994 letters in part one are stamped Crestline, California, where Chris and Sylvère live together, once Chris starts driving on her own the location on her letters follows her journey: Flagstaff, Arizona; Santa Rosa, New Mexico; Shawnee, Oklahoma; Brinkley, Arkansas; Frankville, Pennsylvania; Thurman, New York. Once in Thurman, her other home, most of the letters are stamped from Thurman, but as Chris starts moving again in February 1995, she flies across the country this time and the letters are stamped as follows; New York City; Fillmore, California; Pasadena, California; New York City; Thurman, New York; Pear Blossom, Antelope Valley; Thurman, New York; East Village; El Paso; Eagle Rock, Los Angeles.

[29] The first letter in the *Heroides,* from Penelope to Ulysses, famously starts with: "These words your Penelope sends to you, O Ulysses, slow of return that you are; writing back is pointless: come yourself!" (1-2).

I suggest that there are a number of parallelisms between *Werther* and *I Love Dick,* parallelisms particularly evident when read in light of Roland Barthes's analysis of Werther's role in his 1977 book *A Lover's Discourse*, which focuses on the subject/object relationship between the two lovers. Barthes notes that in *Werther*, "the loved object [Charlotte] does not move; it is the amorous subject [Werther] who, at a certain moment, departs" (*A Lover's Discourse* 13). This dynamic of loved object/amorous subject has purchase also in *I Love Dick*. Dick is the loved object who does not move, and whose role is to remain remote and silent, while Chris is shifting, moving, and talking a great deal. Barthes' qualification of the love object or addressee as without color, "quite insipid . . . a colorless object" (31) is not unlike the blankness of Dick in *I Love Dick*. Barthes's positioning of such addressee "in the center of the stage and there adored, idolized, taken to task, covered with discourse" (*A Lover's Discourse* 31) works in a similar way to Dick being a screen on which Chris's fantasy can be projected.

Because in *Werther* the love object who does not move is female, "a hen . . . around which circles a slightly mad cock" (*A Lover's Discourse* 31), it is evident that in *I Love Dick* the mobile, active role played by Chris is the same as that of Werther, only the gender is swapped. The traditional role of the male pursuer circling around the female love object represented in *Werther* is thus taken over in *I Love Dick* by a female pursuer. Chris's stalking Dick, and the declarative title of the novel, is what makes *I Love Dick* unusual, in the way a woman stalking a man is more unusual than vice versa, a fact that D'Adesky's first review of *I Love Dick* did not fail to remark upon and call "new territory" (D'Adesky 30).

So far I discussed the major formal constraints and the expectations they create in the genre of epistolary fiction; the need of a first-person narrator, of an addressee, of a pact between them, and the need of a distance between them which in *I Love Dick* is increased by

Chris's mobility. I showed how *I Love Dick* relies on these affordances and how it uses and pushes against those constraints. In what follows, I examine the trope of letters as authentic and reliable ways to access the writer's interiority, and the trope of Epistolary Woman, which sees woman as a natural writer of letters and as writing love as a victim. The belief that letters give access to a person's interiority is what made the fiction of seductive letters written in the female voice so scandalous and consequential in the eighteenth century, and what ultimately led to the censorship of the genre as the century came to an end. The rest of this chapter will examine the relationship between the female voice writing love and the assumption of sincerity behind women's expression of desire.

Section 4. "Letters written in reality" : the Transgressive Nature of Female Desire in Epistolary Fiction

An important trope that characterizes epistolary discourse is what Toni Bowers calls the "governing pretence" of epistolary novels, or the fact that *fictional* letters are meant to be treated as *real*, private documents, exchanged "among correspondents who do not expect their communications ever to become public" (*Epistolary Fiction* 401). This pretense is a feature that bears effects on our understanding of what *I Love Dick* achieves by relying on the tension between fact and fiction that belongs to the very epistolary medium.

It was indeed customary for writers and publishers of epistolary novels in the seventeenth and eighteenth century to write a prologue in which the authenticity of so-called

found letters would be testified.[30] This worked well when marketing epistolary novels to a reading public who "disliked fiction," as Linda Kauffman claims (*Discourses of Desire* 99), but was fond of personal correspondence and of the "myth of transparency" (Steward xv).[31] In 1757, for example, in reference to Riccoboni's newly published *Lettres de Mistriss Fanni Butlerd,* which pretended to be a French translation of an English proto-text, Melchior Grimm, a commentator, announces the authenticity of the letters as follows: "These are the letters from a woman to her lover, which never existed in English. They were very much *written in reality*, not for the public but for a cherished lover" (Grimm qtd. in Kaplan 13; my emphasis).[32]

The conceit of letters "written in reality" and not for publication relies certainly on readers' voyeuristic desires, but it also rests on the assumption that private letters are "potentially reliable windows into a writer's true self" (Bower 405). As Elizabeth Cook illustrates in *Epistolary Bodies*, in the seventeenth and eighteenth century letters were indeed considered a transparent and sincere medium to the point that they were even employed, for example, in factual and scientific accounts of experiments (Cook 16). However, letters were also known to be the "most playful and potentially deceptive of forms" (16) because while letters may look authentic, they may also be easily fabricated to deceive. Cook argues that during the seventeenth century there is no perceived difference "between 'real' and 'fictional'

---

[30] In *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, Goethe frames the collection of letters as an editorial endeavor, rather than fiction: "I have diligently collected everything I have been able to discover concerning the story of poor Werther, and here present it to you in the knowledge that you will be grateful for it" (23). Choderlos de Laclos frames *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* with two fictional forewords that contradict one another. The first is a "publisher's foreword" that warns the reader that "despite the editor's comments in his preface, we cannot guarantee the authenticity of these letters" (3). The second is the "editor's preface," in which he explains how he "was commissioned to collate these letters by the persons into whose possession they had come" (4) but was not allowed to improve on the writing, because these letters are "a collection of letters written by ordinary people" (5), thus authentic.

[31] In reference to Fanni Butlerd's declaration that her style is transparent and true, Joan Hinde Steward claims in the introduction: "Le mythe de la transparence, un des rêve du dix-huitième siècle" (Steward xv).

[32] This is Kaplan's translation of the original French: "Ce sont les lettres d'une femme à son amant, qui n'ont jamais existé en anglais. Elles ont été écrites très réellement, non pour le public mais pour un amant chéri…" (Kaplan 13).

letters" (17) and the question of whether a letter-narrative is fact or fiction "has little pertinence" (19).[33]

The ideal of reliability, transparency, and sincerity was still in place by 1796, when Mary Hays wrote *Memoirs of Emma Courtney,* an autobiographical novel that blends the mode of the philosophical essay with the epistolary mode. In *Memoirs*, despite the fictionalization that the material undergoes, sincerity remains at the core of her project.[34] This is evident in how *Memoirs* stresses the "value and importance of unequivocal sincerity" (7). Indeed, in one of her letters, Emma begs her addressee Augustus, an evasive "inflexible, impenetrable, man" (104), as follows: "Write to me, *be ingenuous*; I desire, I call for, truth!" (83). And later, in another letter she says, "Let us walk together into the palace of Truth, where. . . every one [is] compelled by an irresistible, controulling (*sic*), power, to reveal his inmost sentiments!" (90-91). Here the "palace of Truth," arguably a metaphor for the place of letter writing in eighteenth-century society, compels a writer, through genre and audience expectations, to reveal the truth.

Letters written in reality allow the writer to write the truth, which for Hays is the truth of her desire, the "desire of being loved" (79). The heroine confesses her desire to her addressee at a time when this confession would have been a scandalous move, since proper women were not meant to declare their partiality to men and press them into starting a correspondence. Beyond allowing the writer to write the truth, they also call for an answer, for understanding.

---

[33] Similarly, in *Extravagant Narratives* McArthur convenes that in the seventeenth century the "view of fact and fiction [was] radically different from ours, involving much less concern with distinguishing the two" (McArthur 100). Literary genres therefore were not categorized based on their being authentic or fictional, and readers knew that "real and fictional letters were judged according to the same standards" (100).

[34] In the process of fictionalization of the memoir, Mary Hays becomes Emma Courtney, her actual mentor and friend William Godwin becomes the philosopher Mr. Francis, and her unrequited love William Frend becomes Augustus Harley (xiv). In the novel, we have the inclusion of real letters that Hays sent William Godwin during her 1794-95 infatuation with William Frend, and the likely verbatim inclusion of "long, passionate letters to Frend, explaining her desire for him" which scholar Eleanor Ty suggests are included without changes (xiv).

While society and mores have changed since the eighteenth century, there are many overlaps between Hay's *Memoirs* and Kraus's *I Love Dick*. In a sense, in *I Love Dick* Chris is pressing Dick into starting a correspondence and is eventually rejected. Written exactly two hundred years apart, Dick's blankness and unresponsiveness recalls Hay's evasive, "impenetrable" Augustus (104). Moreover, the desire for truth and understanding in Hay's heroine is not unlike what Chris frames poignantly as monstrosity: "Female monsters. . . study facts. Even if rejection makes them feel like the girl who's not invited to the party, they have to understand the reason why. . . . I aim to be a female monster too" (ILD 218).

The connection between letter writing, writing and seeking the truth, and the scandalous, transgressive nature of women's "desire of being loved" (Hays 79) in letters written by women or written in the female voice has characterized epistolary fiction since the genre flourished in the seventeenth century. The medieval letters of Abelard and Heloise circulated in early modern print: their correspondence appeared first in Latin in 1616 and then in a French paraphrase in 1687, thus becoming accessible to a larger public.[35] Heloise's letters, emotional and "filled with explicit sexual longing" (Bowers 403), establish for the first time an "equation" between writing and "sexual freedom, transgression, and seduction" (Kauffman 64), an equation that was exploited in 1669 in the influential *Portuguese Letters*.

The *Portuguese Letters* started a fashion, called *à la portugaise*, for letter writing "at the height of passion in a moment of disorder and distress" (Kauffman 95).[36] This fashion for

[35] Between these publications, the *Portuguese Letters* appeared in 1669. Linda Kauffman notes the differences in the perception of Heloise between 1616 and 1687, which changed from that of "learned medieval philosopher who acted on high ethical principles" into "a fictional *grande amoureuse*" completely in Abelard's power (85).

[36] Some of the works that Kauffman identifies as explicitly indebted to the *Portuguese Letters*, some in their titles more than in their structure, beyond Aphra Behn's incestuous *Love-Letters between a Nobleman and His Sister* (1683-1697), are Mary de la Riviere Mandley's *Letters Written by Mrs. Manley. To Which is Added a Letter from a Supposed Nun in Portugal, to a Gentleman in France, in Imitation of the Nun's Five Letters in Print* (1696); Eliza Haywood's Love in Excess (1719); *Letters from a Lady of Quality to a Chevalier* (1721); Mrs. Jane Barker's *A Patchwork Screen for the Ladies; or, Love and Virtue* (1723) and *Mrs. mary Davys's Familiar Letters betwixt a Gentleman and a Lady*, in *The Works of Mrs Davys* (1725).

transgressive, passionate letters faded by the end of the eighteenth century in response to a change in the expectations of the reading public, a change that as Barbara Maria Zaczek claims follows the rise of a bourgeois model of domesticity, frugality, and moral standards (*Censored Sentiments* 22). The fading of the fashion for transgressive letters at the end of the eighteenth century thus signals a shift away from sex and towards sentiment, which in *I Love Dick* Chris frames as "*The Advent of the Bourgeois Novel*" (ILD 68). But in 1796, the *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* still sets up a female writing subject constructed around what Janet Todd calls a notion "of female significance based merely on self-consciousness, desire . . . and self-expressiveness" (*The Sign of Angellica* 237).

Self-consciousness and self-expressiveness are present in the *Portuguese Letters*, when the nun Mariana reflects on her condition and with the benefit of hindsight concludes: "I discovered that it was not so much you as my own passion to which I was attached", and that "the violence of my own desire seduced me" (342). What seduced her was her *own* experience of desire, mediated by her writing, and not the French soldier's letters, or even his desire for her—he becomes a pretext, a textual creation who, as MacArthur puts it, "has merely provided an excuse for the expression of passion" (*Extravagant Narratives* 94). Mariana's desire then is dangerous because it is produced by the "act of writing," and as Kauffman argues writing letters does not just convey or proclaim desire, but augments desire (*Discourses* 105). Seduction therefore does not proceed from the nun's lover, but it is fostered by the woman's own writing and her taking on the position of a writing subject that utters "I."

I should note that whether the writing that fuels such desire should be real or fictional is irrelevant to the intensity of the desire. In Mary Hays, the concept of writing the truth and being "ingenious" were linked, as shown in the quotation: "Write to me, *be ingenuous*; I desire, I call

for, truth!” (*Memoirs* 83). But in the *Portuguese Letters*, when Mariana calls her grief *ingénieuse*, which is translated as “imaginative” (339), her imaginative/ingenious grief is more fictional—*ingénieuse*, Kauffman notes, means gifted, clever, inspired (*Discourses* 108). Moreover, Mariana says that it is her grief (and not herself) that can give no poignant enough name to the separation that took place between her and her lover. Thus her grief becomes an agent, a subject that has the ability to name, an aspect which Kauffman claims testifies to the artificial, fictional nature of the nun’s writing grief. In the third letter, Mariana points to her despair as literary, existing only in the writing, not in reality: “My despair exists only in my letters!” (351).

Moreover, since in Mariana’s letters her desire is independent, and is “thoroughly removed from exterior scenes and action” (Kauffman 106), rejection, distance, and the withdrawal of the addressee do not register as a fact that causes the letter writer to stop writing. In amatory epistolary novels then, as Altman observes with reference to the *Portuguese Letters*, “the ‘event’ is the writing . . . the vicissitudes are internal and may often result from the experience of writing itself” (128). It is the absence, distance, or reticence of the addressee (Mariana’s nameless French soldier, Emma’s Augustus, Heloise’s Abelard) that fuels even more “memory and retrospective recital” (Kauffman 106), a point to which Chapter 4 will return to.

In the *Portuguese Letters* only Mariana’s letters are included, and her lover’s replies are deemed inadequate when summarized by Mariana as follows: “you write me cold letters filled with repetitions, with half the paper *blank*, and they show plainly that you are anxious only to be finished” (345; my emphasis). The blankness mentioned in the *Portuguese Letters* returns in a similar way in Hay’s *Memoirs*: Emma’s letters to Augustus go unanswered and, when answered, his short reply appears to her “vague, obscure, enigmatical” (*Memoirs* 88). His

reticence makes Emma's infatuation for him increase, it makes Emma's insistence obsessive, thus making *Memoirs* a scandalous novel, because as I mentioned women were not supposed to press men into a correspondence. Finally, the blankness related to the addressee returns again in *I Love Dick* where, as discussed in Chapter 1, Dick is called a "blank screen," his utterances inaudible. Similarly, "Dick____" does not have a surname in *I Love Dick*, in the way that in the *Portuguese Letters* Mariana's French lover does not have a name.

That seduction originates in the act of writing is also a theme of Riccoboni's *Lettres de Mistriss Fanni Butlerd* (1757), a novel which includes only Fanni's side of her correspondence with Mylord Charles Alfred. As Joan Hinde Stewart notes in the introduction, in this novel "la séduction s'opère moins par les lettres qu'elle reçoit que par celles qu'elle écrit" (xvi). Seduction is out of control because it does not depend on the lover's action and proceeds instead from the woman's own writing. Therefore, what is transgressive and dangerous in these early amatory epistolary novels is that seduction does not come from the male lover, who is relegated to the role of an object of desire more or less absent—and in the *Lettres de Mistriss Fanni Butlerd*, made absent by Riccoboni's decision to publish only Fanni's side of the correspondence. Seduction is fostered by the woman's own writing and by her taking the position of a writing subject that desires to be loved.

So far I traced the origins of the trope of sincerity and truth telling, the transgression of a woman writing publicly about her "desire of being loved," as Mary Hays put it in her *Memoirs*, and how the very act of writing increases desire. In what follows, I examine one last trope in letter writing, the role of the Epistolary Woman, or the female letter writer in love.

Since Ovid's *Heroides*, the epistolary form has been linked to a particular kind of femininity. Joan DeJean claims that it was the various seventeenth-century French translations

of the *Heroides* that made it a "central model for epistolary fictions of women seduced and abandoned" (*Fictions of Sappho* 78). Similarly, Susan Lee Carrell argues that the *Heroides* is the precedent of epistolary fiction precisely because it "unites for the first time the psychological situation of the woman in love and abandoned, with the epistolary form" (24; my translation). In the epistolary novels that followed the translations of the *Heroides*, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century readers could find stories about love and sex, and "a close-up view of the otherwise secret thoughts, feelings, and desires of women" (Bowers 406), but the rejected woman writing about her feelings had already become a type.

While letters can be of any kind, the "familiar letter" is where feminine presence is most notable, as Thomas O. Beebee argues in *Epistolary Fiction in Europe, 1500-1850*. The familiar letter he notes, "gradually became a literary genre at which women were conceded to excel, as long as they restricted themselves to certain literary and cultural stereotypes" (105). For women, letter writing was understood as being a private exchange taking place in a small familial circle, in contrasts to the wider public exchanges of social and political letters that were often intended for publication in magazines and journals—the so-called Republic of Letters.

When private exchange is limited not just to letters but specifically to love letters, addresser and addressee become cast in the most private terms. Such limitations affected the kinds of voice that women could adopt in their writing. As Barbara Zaczek remarks in *Censored Sentiments*, "(g)ranting women access to the epistolary domain allows their voices to speak *only from within* a relationship, confining them to their societal and familial roles" (56; my emphasis). Beebee's literary and cultural stereotype refers precisely to this positioning of the possibilities of female expression within the protocols and assumptions surrounding letter writing.

Katharine Jensen, in *Writing Love: Letters, Women, and the Novel in France, 1605-1776,* calls this seventeenth-century dominant view of desirable femininity "Epistolary Woman." This myth had two main effects. The first is that while women were excelling in letter writing, their writing was deemed unskilled and unartful. Aristocratic women in the first half of the seventeenth-century were often viewed as "natural writers of letters" (Jensen 5), as biologically suited to letter writing because of their supposed spontaneity. For example, readers of the *Portuguese Letters* in 1669 believed the letters signed by the nun Mariana to be authentic, written "quite artlessly and with an absence of rhetoric which could result only from their being what they were said to be" (Day 36), that is five *real* letters written by a woman. The supposed unedited overflow of the spontaneous emotions they experienced marks female letter writers as emotional, not rational, a fact encapsulated by Choderlos de Laclos's claim that woman's *dereaisonnement* (the opposite of reasoning) is "the reason why women's love-letters are so much better than ours" (Laclos 133).

The second effect of the cultural myth of "Epistolary Woman" is that a female letter writer writing familial letters and love letters is "naturally writing love as a victim" (Jensen 11), thus turning masochism into an inherently female situation (Jensen 43-57), one that could accommodate the paradoxes of being happy to be betrayed, and the aspiration of love as suffering. For example, in the *Portuguese Letters*, Mariana's fourth letter declares: "you made me understand that I must submit to your will in everything. And yet I do not regret having adored you . . . I am even glad to have been betrayed by you" (355). Her posture is one of absolute subjection, even to the point of betrayal.

The trope of Epistolary Woman can be seen both in the reality of letter writing, in the form of letter writing manuals women referred to for their daily communication, and also in

fiction. As Jensen takes pains to uncover in *Writing Love*, there were various French aristocratic writers who in seventeenth-century France fought against the masochistic stereotype of Epistolary Woman, but it is telling that their novels did not inspire imitations in the way the *Portuguese Letters* did, and did not have as much influence as other novels did, particularly novels written by men ventriloquizing this particular kind of female voice (Jensen 157). Among the notable novels by male authors deploying this particular kind of female voice to reproduce the myth of Epistolary Woman in their fiction include Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740), and *Clarissa* (1748); John Cleland's *Fanny Hill* (1748); Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes* (1721); Jean-Jacques Rousseau *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse* (1761); Choderlos de Laclos's *Les Liaisons dangereuses* (1782) and some scholars now include the *Portuguese Letters* in this group, even if for a long time their origin has been controversial.[37]

The controversy around the *Portuguese Letters* hinged not only on whether the author of the letter was indeed a real nun named Mariana, but on whether a male author could have written those letters at all. The debate became concerned, on the one hand, with the natural, artless capacity of women to write passionate letters from their "réalité vécue," their real, unmediated, lived experience (Roger Duchêne 114). On the other hand, the debate was concerned with establishing the rhetorical capacity of a male author to imitate this kind of essentially feminine writing.[38] Another higher-level issue, beyond the one that questions whether intimate language is gendered, is whether the authentic language of love can be faked.

---

[37] The long controversy concerned with the text's authorship, which some scholars now agree is by Gabriel Joseph de Lavergne Guilleragues, is described by Linda Kuffman in *Discourses of Desire* (93 n1), and by Elizabeth MacArthur in *Extravagant Narratives* (100-116).

[38] Clearly, there is a paradox at work here, since if a supposedly feminine, natural and "unselfconscious emotional writing can be imitated" (Jensen 21), then there is nothing unselfconscious about it in the first place; it may thus be assumed that the artificial, fictive, and rhetorical aspects of letter writing can be performed equally by men and women writers.

As we have seen, seventeenth-century readers would have rather believed it could not, and editors and publishers reassured them of that myth.

So far I illustrated the major epistolary formal constraints available to Kraus, and how *I Love Dick* engages with the form of epistolary discourse and particularly with its tropes, namely the myth of transparency, and the stereotype of the "Epistolary Woman." The next chapter considers how Kraus, by structuring her novel using letters written in reality, situates herself on the continuum between truth and fiction.

Chapter 3: The Tension between the Fictional and the Real

Section 5. “All is fiction”: Kraus’s Move towards Fiction

The myth that letters are a reliable window into one’s self has been a feature of letter writing since the seventeenth century. As the previous chapter showed, epistolary novels exploited this feature at a time when the reading public wanted to read letters “written in reality,” and editors wanted to assure them that was the case. *I Love Dick*, like epistolary fiction in general, relies on the pretense that letters are a transparent and sincere medium of communication.

When in *I Love Dick* Chris calls her letters “the realest thing I’ve ever done” (153), it is because through letter writing, through writing to someone, she believes that something real and truthful has been achieved. Moreover, the choice of the verb “done” instead of “written” attests to the experiential reality of letter writing as action; the letters are something Chris did, something she lived through. The first book Kraus published in the Native Agents series, Ann Rower’s *If You’re A Girl* (1990), describes precisely the merging of writing and living that Kraus seems to have adopted for her own practice. In one of her stories, Rower reflects on the difference between “doing” and “writing” by having the character Vito react to Ann’s idea of carving a pumpkin (and putting it on her window just so that she can write about her neighbor’s reaction) by saying: “You know, Ann, you don’t have to do it. You just have to write about it” (*If You’re A Girl* 47). But Ann rebuts, “But you do. I even lit it” (47). For Rower there is no difference between doing something and writing about it, and her faithful writing goes so far as to require certain events to take place in order for her writing to be a truthful transcript of reality, or as she calls it, a “transfiction” (269).

In *If You’re A Girl*, Rower defines transfiction in reference to her “transcribed tapes” (268), a point that resonates with Kraus’s own interest in transcription. In the very title of

"Ecceity, Smash and Grab, the Expanded I and Moment," Kraus mentions "Smash and Grab" as a mode of expansion, citing directly from Rower's definition of transfiction. Given the importance of this idea for Kraus, I quote Rower's passage in full:

> I set some of the faithfully transcribed conversations, like jewels, in a totally fictional, made-up context. It's the opposite of TV docudrama, where the situation is real and the dialogue is made up. . . . (I) liked the new spin of this tense recombination of fiction and transcription which I called, jokingly, "transfiction" . . . it's the tension between two different drives, towards fidelity and freedom. . . This kind of tampering seemed dangerous, like injecting cyanide in the grapes or putting LSD in the Chicago water supply, and I liked that feeling. It captures the essence of writing. It may be the words of the gods, or of humanity, but it's always you who's ripping them off. Plato was right to banish poets from his Republic for making things up. There is always something criminal about writing: it's like B & E – breaking and entering – what the British call smash and grab. Especially fiction: duping. There is something toxic and poisonous in lies: zap, you are transfixed. Can I help it if I wanna put back the lie in Li(t)erature, as in Li(f)e? Go ahead Plato, make my day (270).

Here Rower acknowledges the "tension" between two drives, the drive to remain faithful to transcriptions and the drive to write freely and fictionalize, and calls the "tampering" between the two drives dangerous (toxic, and poisonous for the public). Writing faithfully means transcribing real events and conversation as they are, entering and stealing from reality's repositories, whether god's or humans', and "ripping them off" through "smash and grab." This implies that, as a writer, if you take illegally what does not belong to you, you are a criminal. But there is something illegal also and perhaps more obviously in the lies, the fictionalization, the

duping that the writer builds around a true story. Rower works both drives, the drive to stay faithful and the drive to fictionalize, with the "real story," no matter how upset the real people behind Rower's characters may be.[39]

Rower's transfiction and the "tension" between "fidelity and freedom" (270) in her writing resonates with Kraus's own framing of her work between fidelity as transcription (or as we will see, case study) on the one hand, and the freedom of the fictional, on the other. With regards to fictionalization, when in 2006 Kraus was asked whether her writing is fictional, she offered the following answer: "It's all fiction. As soon as you write something down, it's fiction. . . as soon as something gets written down, it's no longer 'true,' because there are always 100 other things that are equally 'true'" (Frimer). In this interview, the word "true" is bracketed with uncertainty, as something that is always contextual and provisional. Such bracketing devices are not unusual, and they can be found in *I Love Dick* as well. For example, after Chris and Dick meet alone, face to face, she writes: "I got back to New York on Tuesday night after spending those five days in LA 'with' you" (ILD 169) putting the word "with" in inverted commas in the same way as earlier in Part I, Chris writes: "After all, Dick's been 'with' us for the past two hours" (70). Another instance is when Chris refers to "The night after our 'date' with you in the Antelope Valley" (36). The bracketing of "with" in inverted commas in these two instances, similarly to the bracketing of "true" in the 2006 interviews, signals an awareness of the limits of language to signify precisely, or to express the same meaning to both Chris and Dick.[40]

---

[39] A case in point is one of the stories in *If You Are A Girl* called "Trick or Treat," in which the narrator recounts events that took place at a bar. One of the men involved later visits the narrator at her home after he read the story "Trick or Treat" and confronts her: "How could you write such a piece of shit?" (125). In his view, the events she recounted were not told right and he is mad at her, but he calms down as he learns that the story was "just an exercise" written for school. He then explains his anger by saying, "I thought this was the *real story* you were writing about me" (131; my emphasis).

[40] Such self-awareness was there when Sylvère wrote to Dick admitting that "there's no way of communicating with you in writing because texts, as we all know, feed upon themselves, become a game. The only way left is face to face" (ILD 73), thus proposing the reality, actuality of a meeting as the only way out of the self-referential nature of writing.

Treating truth and reality as synonymous is a move that Chris herself performs in *I Love Dick* in reference to her letter being "too literary, too Baudrillardian" (ILD 28) when she writes: "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" (28; emphasis added). Here knowing things to be true and understanding them to be real are considered the same, and are put in opposition to what is "too literary" (28). The claim that the letters are a language game, that language feeds on itself, and that straightforward words like "with" or "date" can be put in inverted commas, allow the author to refuse assuming responsibility for the truth behind her so-called all-fictional writing, and for the real consequences of her writing. The author's refusal of responsibility would be less of an issue in the case of a text that is clearly fictional, but it becomes a problem in the case of *I Love Dick* because of its uncertain status, and because the real Dick Hebdige threatened to sue Chris Kraus over the use of his identity in the book.[41]

The "it's all fiction" stance is a strategic position to hold when handling autobiographical material, because such stance can shield Kraus from critiques that deride her work as mere oversharing, as an exhibition of the confessional, of private vicissitudes delivered without mediation or literary skill. Arguably, since 2006 is also the year *I Love Dick* was reissued, Kraus may have decided to start reframing the way in which she talked about the book, no longer as a confessional work based in reality and as "the realest thing I've ever done" (153), but as a fictional work. This shift may be due to her awareness of the debasing connotations of the

---

[41] On November 17 1997, the *New York Magazine* featured an article titled "See Dick Sue" where Dick Hebdige comes out as the unwitting character behind Dick. He has not "taken too kindly to [*I Love Dick*'s] publication," the article states, and he has taken legal action, to which "Kraus responded by dropping the character's last name and placing him at a different school" (Zembla 20).

personal, which she described in 2008 in an essay titled "Suck," a piece about the homonymous magazine founded in 1969.[42]

In this essay, Kraus approves of the fact that *"Suck*'s authors [in the 1970s] viewed disclosure not as personal narcissism but as a means of escaping the limits of the 'self'" whereas by the 2000s "the 'personal' has become so debased by its confessional-therapeutic connotations that numerous artists choose to anonymize their productions" (*Where Art Belongs* 82-83). Once *I Love Dick* became more popular in the middle of the 2010s, Kraus seems to become one of the artists who anonymize their work. She seems to start to anonymize her work in hindsight, as it is evident in those interviews and essays in which she reframes *I Love Dick* as less personal and instead more fictional, more performative. She achieves such reframing of *I Love Dick*, which as we have seen is based on actual letters sent to actual people, by calling the novel "not a memoir" ("*I Love Dick* happened in real life"), and in an interview with Jeni Fulton by calling herself a "fabulator," whose stories end up having nothing to do with the actual people, but "everything to do with your own desires and sadness" ("The Revival of Chris Kraus").[43]

Possibly because in 1997, as Kraus recalls in the interview with Elle Hunt, people acted "as if [*I Love Dick*] had just appeared on my pillow because I slept with Dick – like I didn't have to do anything at all" (Hunt), she then fictionalizes her book in response. She does so to show that indeed it did not just appear, but was crafted by a writer and was not just *secreted* by a woman, which is what a 1998 Bookforum reviewer claimed when writing: "Chris Kraus' 'novel' is a book not so much written as secreted" (Rimanelli 7). In this review, the word *secreted* signals in physical, bodily terms that the writer who wrote the book has not authored or written a

[42] "Suck" appeared initially in *Artforum* and was then republished by Semiotext(e) in 2011 under the title "May '69" in Kraus's collection of essays *Where Art Belongs*.
[43] Ironically, in *I Love Dick* the narrator describes "bad art" exactly as art that "offers a transparency into the hopes and desires of the person who made it" (21).

book but, as the reviewer continues, vomited it. Rimanelli's book review appears also on the back cover of the 2006 edition, possibly chosen by the editors, or by Kraus herself in her role as editor, with a hint of irony.[44] Since in *I Love Dick* Chris refers to her letters as "a timebomb or a cesspool or a manuscript" (155), Kraus preempts that kind of criticism by appropriating the very terms of abuse that critics assign to her writing. Terms like overflow, outlet, and secretion are all bodily images that, as Chris notes, deny female writers "access to the apersonal" and keep women on the bodily side of a cartesian mind/body divide (197).[45] Since *secretion* in relation to female anatomy carries the denotation of vaginal discharge occurring during sexual arousal and ovulation, Rimanelli's critique of *I Love Dick* as "a book not so much written as secreted" (7) not only frames the work as a product of the body and not the intellect, but as a product of a sexualized, aroused female body.

Kraus's reframing of her work during the 2000s away from reality, truth and the personal and towards the fictional is especially interesting because of another shift that takes place in the novel itself as Chris offers her own metafictional analysis of the genre of her letters. Chris's reframing in *I Love Dick* works in the opposite direction from Kraus's: the novel starts referring to its own genre as a game, a fantasy, a fiction, but then moves towards reality, in particular towards the objectivity of the report and the case study, as the next section explains.

Section 6. "The realest thing": *I Love Dick*'s Move towards the Case Study

For Dick the letters he receives remain from beginning to end a "bizarre game" (ILD 260) in which he does not want to be involved, as he declares to Chris: "this was your game, your agenda, now it's yours to deal with" (163). For Chris, however, the nature of her project, and the

[44] Rimanelli's surname on the back cover of *I Love Dick* appears as "Riminelli" however.

[45] In *I Love Dick*, Kraus seems to be using the words "apersonal" and "impersonal" as synonyms, both antonyms of personal.

genre of the writing, changes. From the beginning, she emphasizes the fictional, imaginative orientation of the text as a projection of a fantasy, in moments such as these, when the text becomes a "totally fictitious romance," a "fictional liaison" (29), "80% of [which] was a fantasy" (163). At the same time, Chris is aware of the fact that her writing is a game, but that her "game is real' (28). When she recalls their night together, Chris explains that she was "trying to legitimize the 'game'" by telling Dick about case studies (153). She defines her infatuation as one such case study: "I meant every word I wrote you in those letters. But at the same time I started seeing it as a chance to finally learn something about romance, infatuation. Because you reminded me of so many people I'd loved back in New Zealand. 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" (153). Chris reiterates a concept that we saw before in Ann Rower's case when Ann claims that she cannot just write about something, she has to do it; similarly, Chris deems it possible to align writing (about infatuation) and doing something (being infatuated).

Chris attempts to highlight the reality of such a fantasy by referring to the physical presence of the letters in their reality: "180 pages of love letters that I'd written with my husband and then given to you" (155). Moreover, the reality of the game, meaning that the game becomes less of a fantasy world and more like the real world, is foregrounded when the narrator tells us that "now Sylvère can't avoid the *reality* of this anymore. This is not another coffee-game they've invented" (67; my emphasis). Sylvère's personal understanding of the letter writing process which he initiated when he suggested that Chris should write to Dick, moves away from what seemed an innocent, inconsequential game or creative project, not meant to be shared with

Dick—"clearly these letters were unsendable" (43), the reader is told early in the process—towards letters that get printed, and are actually handed to Dick.[46]

The scene in which on Sunday 22 January Chris hands Dick the letters, which are referred to as "a Xerox of my first 120 letters" (238) or as "a xerox of the letters—90 pages, single-spaced" (114) takes place during a dinner at Dick's place.[47] The moment Chris hands Dick the letters, Sylvère is described as "speechless" (115), a fact that signals an important shift in *I Love Dick*. The dynamic changes from Chris and Sylvère playing their game of writing "unsendable" letters together (43), to Chris leaving Sylvère on 30 January, 1995.[48] This is a transition away from the often used first-person plural of Chris and Sylvère as co-writers or accomplices in the writing of letters—which as I mentioned earlier was initiated by Sylvère—to the first-person singular of Chris traveling across the US on her own, and carrying on writing to Dick. This latter period lasts from February 1995, the beginning of Part II, to September 1995 if we consider Dick's final letter (or January 1996, if we consider Chris's letter on page 141, or even March 1997, if we consider Chris's diary entry on page 206). In leaving Sylvère behind, Chris asserts her independent agency.

In order to underline the "reality" of the game and of the writing, a writing that becomes consequential, Chris proposes to write her letters in the mode of the report, or the case study. The case study for Chris is, as she puts it, "a chance to finally learn something about romance,

---

[46] "Project" is used often in *I Love Dick* to discuss the nature of the writing Chris and Sylvère undertake, as a collaborative project, or an art piece: "a Calle Art piece. You know, like Sophie Calle?" (49). But soon the project takes the form of a book, and then of a novel, as when Ann Rower tells Chris that the letters are "a great project, more perverse than just having an affair" and that they would make "a good book" (60), and later when Dick asks how the project is going and Chris answers that it has turned into "an epistolary novel" (115).

[47] Later, in a letter dated January 17, 1996 in which Chris recounts the events of February 23, 1995, the letters are referred to as "the 180 pages of love letters that I'd written with my husband and then given you" (155).

[48] The shift from the plural to the singular is signaled by the clear division of *I Love Dick* in two parts, Part I, titled "Scenes from a Marriage" spanning from 4 December, 1994 to 30 January, 1995, to Part II, "Every Letter is a Love Letter." But it is also signaled by Chris taking the initiative to compose a secret fax, a secret that seems to point to a shift from shared game to Chris's own game.

infatuation" (153). A case study is clearly meant to be a nonfictional, objective analysis of a given situation over time. The OED defines it as "a particular instance or case that may be analysed or used as an example to illustrate a thesis or principle" (OED, s.v. "case," C2 b). It is important to note that for Kraus a case study is not simply a matter of form, but of process, and that the case study is inherently political because it takes on social problems. During an event in 2017, Kraus refuses to be lumped in with the current online "female lives … becoming public" which the interviewer misnames "case studies" ("Chris Kraus : Changing Lives" 13:15). Kraus differentiates her work from the practice of "spilling and spilling and spilling on social media . . . that does not necessarily mean that that is a case study, it's just endless verbiage" which lacks a "conceptual agenda" (12:30- 14:17).[49] She argues instead that actual case studies, like art, involve "some parameters, and some form, and some rigor" (14:17). Kraus's view of rigor comes from the fact that for her a case study is a method of observation, especially one that allows some detachment as well as full access to the material researched (9:30-11:22): it was the fact of experiencing an adolescent infatuation at the age of 39 that allowed her the "distance of age" (10:25). In *I Love Dick* this distance is mentioned in reference to Søren Kierkegaard's remark that "no actress can play 14-year-old Juliette until she's at least 32. Because acting is art, and art involves reaching through some distance" (ILD 30). Kraus therefore implies that the immediacy of social media and the requirement that what is posted is immediate and new, does not allow distance, and therefore cannot be a case study, nor art.

In *I Love Dick*, Kraus takes as her model a specific case study published in 1987 by the sociologist Henry J. Frundt about the Guatemala Coca-Cola bottling plant, titled *Refreshing Pauses: Coca-Cola and Human Rights in Guatemala*. Chris read Frundt's book just before

[49] Having a conceptual agenda for Kraus is important because "capitalism is nothing if not conceptual" (16:40) and therefore it is only through conceptual gestures in art that it is possible to take on social problems.

meeting Dick in December 1994, after her trip to Guatemala the previous month. She tells Dick in what way case studies and the writing of her letters are related: “I started having this idea [about writing a case study] when I read Frundt’s book . . . He recorded everything. The only way to understand the large is through the small. It’s like American first-person fiction” (ILD 154). Here the kind of objective, impersonal “I” that a reporter uses in writing a case study, and the impersonal I that the New York school poets constructed in their work, converge in Kraus’s attempt to analyze her own life as a case study and ground her approach to her fantasy as if it were a case study. She continues, “The more particular the information, the more likely it will be a paradigm . . . By recording every single memo, phone call, letter, meeting that took place around the strike . . .” (ILD 155). The same method described here is at work in *I Love Dick* in its inclusion of calls’ transcripts, dialogues, sent and unsent faxes and letters, and notes from diaries.

There is a formal similarity between the epistolary discourse Kraus employs in *I Love Dick,* with its inclusion of her letters and diary entries, and the way Frank O’Hara wrote some of his poems. In “Ecceity” Kraus notes that “O’Hara’s poems read, polemically and self-consciously, like a set of bulletins, with time and place announced in the first lines and the titles” (305). Kraus does not call her letters bulletins, but evidently her use of the epistolary form in *I Love Dick*, and her attention to transcription and facts, embodies the form of O’Hara’s bulletins in the fact that they mark time and place.

The letters in *I Love Dick* allow Kraus a way of documenting life in its temporal and geographical aspects, like a case study. Time and space are repeatedly referred to as measurable units that appear in their numerical denotations. The novel is dotted with numbers: dates, time of day, year, the age of the characters, the length of phone calls, the movement across time zones,

highway numbers, and spatial distances between locations. The very form of the letter, always dated and located, offers itself as a bulletin, a time sensitive statement. For instance, a letter starts with: "December 18, 1994: 11:30 Central Standard Time / The American Motel ($25 a night)" (ILD 84). These numerical aspects and their prominence and recurrence in the novel indicate the objective terrain in which the letters were composed.

Kraus indeed conveys this objective reality by presenting the letters as *objects*; typed on a Toshiba laptop, printed out, and either posted, sent by FedEx, faxed, or given personally. Before it is even published as a book, the text has a presence, "a Xerox of my first 120 letters" (238). Not only the letters are collected and given as an object, but they are already a Xerox, a copy of the original, an aspect that will return at the end of the novel when Dick similarly presents Chris with a Xerox of a letter. Sent before e-mails became the preferred way of communication, Chris's letters were actual objects, documenting her case study.

The letters are organized as objects, or proofs. In Part I, most letters and transcripts are alphabetically and chronologically labeled, from A to N, and presented as "EXHIBITS." While exhibits can also be interpreted as exhibition (OED, s.v. "exhibit," 4d), and as objects put on public display, such as in a gallery (OED 4b), an "exhibit" in a law case is the name given to documentary evidence "produced in court and referred to and identified in written evidence" (OED 1b). In this sense, using this formal device to present her letters and transcripts turns both into the kind of evidence used in legal proceedings. Moreover, because of the way exhibits in a law case must be carefully handled so as to guarantee their authenticity, this means also that the authenticity of the letters is assumed. Therefore, in the case of the love letters and the transcripts in Part I, arranging them as exhibits serves to testify not just to their reality but also to their

transparency, as when Chris later declares to Dick: "I meant every word I wrote you in those letters" (153).

Chris ties her own story with the Guatemalan narrative in order to create a parallelism between her and the lawyer Jennifer Harbury who like Chris "was 39 years old" when she met and fell in love with Efraim Bamaca in 1990 in the Tajumulco combat zone (ILD 147). Harbury went to Law School "at a time when being a feminist meant refusing to be a co-dependent fuck-up" (147) but unlike other female corporate lawyers, Harbury took a job "defending immigrants in East Texas at a Legal Aid storefront" (148). Her position as an outsider aligns with what in Chapter 1 I presented as Chris's marginal place, even if the scale of Chris's problem is more mundane than Harbury's.[50]

It is indeed as if Chris reports on Guatemala (the large-scale event) to see in it parallels to her love for Dick (the small-scale, domestic event). Chris reports on this during the date because she sees her love as a microcosm of the Guatemalan situation. The narrative of the actual evening, with Dick cooking pasta and Chris not eating any food, is interwoven with the narrative about Harbury's hunger strike. This narrative is occasionally set off on the page typographically by the use of a fleuron every time we move from the present (dinner with Dick on February 23, 1995) to the past (Harbury meeting Bamaca in 1990). The following description succinctly establishes connections between Chris becoming Harbury, and Dick becoming Efraim Bamaca:

> And when she interviewed him [Bamaca] for her oral history book, that most self-erasing lefty genre, he turned the questions back to her and listened. They fell in love. When Jennifer left Tajumulco, Bamaca promised not to write. 'There's no such thing as a

[50] In a conversation with Anna Poletti, Kraus reflects on the alignment she feels with the characters she describes as an enactment: "I just felt like I understood Jennifer Harbury. I knew her. There was a part of myself that was her, that could have done that . . . I don't think I could write about someone without feeling that deep connection – you know, I could have been him or her, or vice versa. It's a matter of trying to enact the other person" (Poletti 128).

> fantasy relationship.' But then he did, notes smuggled from the highlands to a safehouse, mailed from Mexico. A year later they met again and married. (ILD 156).

There are various cues worth examining in this passage, such as the *self-erasing* nature of an interview that is meant to give voice to the interviewee (Bamaca) but that is turned on its head because the role of listener and speaker are inverted: he listens, she speaks (and we may say, she expands, and falls in love). Moreover, because the sentence "they fell in love" follows from "he turned the questions back to her and listened," a potential causality between them is hinted at: because he listened to her, she fell in love with him. This is what in *I Love Dick* happens to Chris, in love with the silent Dick, the "perfect listener" (91) who does not write.

Bamaca promises not to write because he believes there cannot be a "fantasy relationship" (156), a language that Chris echoes in the view of her writing as "totally fictitious romance," "80% of [which] was a fantasy" (163). However, despite his promise not to write, Bamaca does write and their affair ends in marriage. But then Bamaca disappears and for years it is unsure whether he is alive or not, leaving Harbury waiting.[51] This prolonged absence is comparable to Dick's profound reticence.

The two narratives are interwoven to suggest their interchangeability. The jumps between the two narratives come across when the shift from one narrative to the other is signaled typographically, but also when it follows abruptly from one line to the next, as when Dick asks Chris "why" she wants to sleep with him, just before an argument ensues between them:

> I just said, "I think we could have a good time together."
>
> "We were in love," Jennifer Harbury told the *New York Times* about her life with Efraim Bamaca. "We hardly ever fought–"

---

[51] Bamaca would disappear on March 12, 1992, and Harbury would go on a hunger strike at different times, but only "three years and ten days" after his disappearance, on March 22, 1995, information about Bamaca's death and CIA involvement emerged (ILD 166).

***

And then you said, "But you don't even know me" (ILD 158).

The voices of Harbury and Chris here follow one another as if to show that they are interchangeable, thus reinforcing the way in which Chris becomes Harbury. And yet, the idyllic love between Harbury and Bamaca, described as one where "we hardly ever fought" (158) is followed by the beginning of Chris and Dick's argument, which starts with Dick's complaint, "But you don't even know me."

The letter that starts with a narration of their date is dated 24 February, 1995 (the morning after) but is resumed on January 17, 1996. This delay, almost a year after the night with Dick that Chris recounts, is an aspect Chris herself comments on when she notes: "This letter's taken almost a year to write and therefore it's become a story" (144). I take this reference to mean that stories tend to be told in the past, and have a beginning, middle and end, whereas letters are written in real time. As MacArthur argues in reference to fiction, novels tend to offer a closure, a "stabilizing sense of inevitability" (*Extravagant Narratives* 25), that is not available in the epistolary form, which is always narrated in the present tense "without knowledge of the future" (8).

Moreover, writing with such a delay means that the writing is not done in real time. Indeed, one aspect of the case study is related to the willingness to provide what as I have shown above in relation to performance was a "transcription of the human voice" ("Ecceity" 305). During their date, Chris asks, "if the only material we have to work with in America is our own lives, shouldn't we be making case studies?" (ILD 155). The same concept is elaborated as follows: "Ann Rower says 'When you're writing in real time you have to revise a lot.' By this I think she means that every time you try and write the truth it changes. More happens.

Information constantly *expands*" (ILD 140; my emphasis). Letter writing happens in real time in the sense that more than other kinds of writing letters are necessitated by the moment, by an occasion, by the need to "announce the actual" ("Ecceity" 305) as it happens, and by the need to write another letter to cover what has happened since the previous letter because the passing of time means that more happens either in the mind of the writer or in the world; more has *expanded*. Information expands and therefore the "I" expands to contain it.

In line with transcribing and tracing as announcing "the actual" (Ecceity 305), in an interview with Leslie Jamison, Kraus reflects on her practice of diary writing as "a kind of report—or self-reporting. And if you report, you have to give details" (Jamison). Kraus's diary writing includes "direct observation," she says, which she then uses in her fictional work: "All four of my novels began, in some form, in diaries. I'd pull things out and expand" (Jamison). Again, the concept of expansion comes up as a crucial part in the writing process when working with the first person, as it moves from the personal into the fictional. Moreover, with regards to her biography *After Kathy Acker*, published with Semiotext(e) in 2018, Kraus said that she would transcribe Acker's diaries as a way to *become* her, or for the material to become hers: "Transcribing [Acker's diary] was a way of getting it inside my body. In the end, working with all of those elements became like working with my own material" (Jamison). In another conversation, Kraus reiterates the idea of internalizing Acker's writing, and notes that as she was working on the Acker book, "I internalised the sources for a long time, so I could just sit down and write as if it was my material" (Krass 6). Such transcription and internalizing is not dissimilar from the other instances of becoming (becoming Notley, becoming Dick) and appropriation that I have described so far. In *I Love Dick*, Chris reflects on the nature of reading and writing as follows: "How I like to dip into other people's books, to catch the rhythm of their

thinking, as I try to write my own. Writing around the edges of Philip K. Dick, Ann Rower, Marcel Proust, Eileen Myles and Alice Notley" (207). Writing around the edges of other authors as if to create an outline is an instance of what I argue is Kraus's becoming others through performance and transcription.

Expansion is used by Kraus as a writing strategy that works, as Chapter 1 discussed, by way of appropriation and stalking, by shifting one's identities through performance and *becoming* others. Kraus's strategy involves pushing against the "limit of the 'self'" (*Where Art Belongs* 82) through disclosure and truth-telling but, at the same time, through the use of a fictionalization that allows her to anonymize her personal self, and detach herself from the problems inherent to the confessional mode, as discussed in this section. Clearly there is a tension if not a contradiction in this project, the same tension that Rower identified between fidelity and freedom.

The tension is between what *I Love Dick* achieves by being a case study and telling the truth of the female experience in its specificity, and what Kraus claims that her writing does in 2006 in the interview with Denise Frimer, where the "all fiction" is upheld, and in *The Guardian* piece that Kraus wrote in May 2017 in which she calls *I Love Dick* "not a memoir" (Kraus, "Chris Kraus: '*I Love Dick* happened in real life"). This may be seen as an evolution in her thinking about *I Love Dick*, away from the case study and towards fiction, were it not for the fact that in the Jamison interview Kraus extols the importance of diary writing based on direct observation of facts, specificity, facts, truth, and the case study, at a time when, in 2017, Kraus was completing Kathy Acker's first authorized biography. When Jamison asks Kraus how she manages to stay specific in her writing, Kraus states: "I guess I'm really committed to telling the truth in writing. It's a corny idea, but I think that's what writing does. It tells the truth about

something. And that's the pleasure, relief, of reading it. You realize, I'm not alone. But to tell the truth about something, you have to come up with the facts. Like a deposition. I love reading legal writing" (Jamison). Both Kraus and Rower refer to criminal and legal matters in their discussions of writing and genre. Kraus refers to deposition (the giving of evidence under oath) and legal writing, presenting letters as exhibits (evidence in a legal proceedings), as well as witnessing.[52] Rower does so in terms of giving evidence from transcripts, evidence that has been taken (illegally) by smashing and grabbing. For both writers, what seems to be at stake in writing fiction and real stories is therefore a serious matter, one that could get the writer to court.

Kraus's upholding of truth and facts as crucial to writing in the Jamison interview above is in stark opposition to the 2006 "all fiction" claim, in which as I have shown Kraus saw "truth" as never achievable through writing because "as soon as something gets written down, it's no longer 'true,' because there are always 100 other things that are equally 'true'" (Frimer). Clearly, Kraus's position in her essays and interviews was shifting, but it was shifting strategically; such changes occurred at or around sensitive times, when *I Love Dick* was published in 1997, at the time of its second edition in 2006, and after the Amazon film series brought it out to a larger audience in 2017.

Both case studies and letters are understood to be truthful genres, the case study because of its observational approach to reality, and letters because of the myth of transparency that I described in Chapter 2. Since both letters and case study share the same assumptions around transparency, Chris's embedding of the style of the case study within the form of her epistolary novel, as well as the use of exhibits to show evidence, all serve the purpose of reinforcing the myth of transparency and objectivity.

[52] For example when Chris writes: "You were witnessing me become this very cerebral girl, the kind of girl that you and your entire generation vilified" (ILD 155) the act of witnessing and being a witness is foregrounded.

As with the contradictions that I exposed in Chapter 1, between stalking in theory and being submissive in practice, this chapter pointed to contradictory instances and offered an interpretation as to why Kraus's own theorization of *I Love Dick* has changed over time. In the next chapter, I discuss a final paradox that undergirds *I Love Dick*, that of the present absence of the addressee in its being necessary as well as its being unnecessary.

Chapter 4: The Vanishing Addressee: Present Absence and Desire for Exchange

Section 7. "Someone to write to": the Addressee as Present Absence

As we have seen, studying *I Love Dick* as an epistolary novel rather than as a diary or a piece of theoretical fiction, and situating it within the epistolary tradition, specifically the amatory, allows us to foreground certain epistolary constraints of which the addressee is one: in any epistolary situation, letters are written *for* someone and, by being addressed, they call for response because "desire for exchange" (Altman 89) is precisely what distinguishes the epistolary from other first-person forms. In what follows, I will show how Chris's desire for exchange is rushed, and how timing affects her requests for exchange.

In a 2017 interview with Ellen Hunt, Kraus notes that *I Love Dick* was written "in a delirium," a state of mental confusion and disorientation. The same point is repeated as late as February 2022, when Kraus refers to *I Love Dick* as a "giddy, delirious game" ("Hedi El Kholti" 117). Such "delirium" produces the hundreds of letters written to Dick in a short amount of time, and also the hundreds of questions that her letters ask. Overall, in *I Love Dick* I counted a total of 287 questions being asked, and almost none being answered, and those that are answered by Dick, as the excerpt in Chapter 1 illustrated, are answered with ambivalence and double negatives, thus producing only more questions. The self-referential nature of letter writing when the addressee does not reciprocate is referred to in *I Love Dick* as "a stuffy referential delirium" (30). Even a voice message Chris leaves on Dick's answer phone, since he does not answer, becomes proof that "delirium can get so referential" (173).

The association of letter-writing and delirium is an idea that Kraus had as early as 2005, when she wrote the introduction for the Barnes and Nobles Classics edition of Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*. In this introductory essay, her description of Emma Bovary is reminiscent in

various ways of Chris in *I Love Dick*; for example Kraus writes that "when the novelty of her affair with Leon begins to fade, Emma summons an imaginary Leon in a letter-writing delirium" (xiv). By foregrounding the importance of fantasy and the self-referential nature of Emma's feelings as being "in love with love" (xiv) and not with another person.

The connection between love letters and delirium is also present in *A Lover's Discourse*, where Barthes connects delirium to waiting for an imaginary loved one; "The being I am waiting for is not real. . . . And if the other does not come, I hallucinate the other: waiting is a delirium" (*A Lover's Discourse* 39). Barthes directly links waiting to love: "'Am I in love?—Yes, since I'm waiting.' The other never waits" (39). Waiting is also inherent to any epistolary exchange, since letter writing relies on distance between correspondents, as I have illustrated in Chapter 2, and on the obstacles that characterize mail delivery and the timing between sending and receiving.

The significance of timing is noted by Kraus when she says that today, as opposed to 1997, "we have email and it would have been over within two days" (Hunt). Kraus's remark reveals how the unavailability and ambivalence of the addressee guarantees an extended waiting time in which expansion in the writing can take place. The process and materiality of the writing that Chris was engaged in affected the length and scope of her "correspondence"—hundreds of physical letters gathered in a manuscript that she delivered by hand, and others later that she sent by courier. I read Kraus's remark as being chiefly about time, about the speed of email as opposed to the drawn-out time frame of letters sent by mail.[53] In an earlier interview, Kraus shares similar sentiments with regards to connectivity and writing, and even if she is talking about poetry her remark applies to her own writing as well:

---

[53] The difficulty of sending letters by mail is foregrounded in *I Love Dick* when the narrator explains: "Dick left Chris a message asking her address. He'd like to send his letter via FedEx. The next day Dick left Chris another message, saying that his houseguest had accidentally erased her message. 'This time I've instructed him not to touch the answering machine, so if you call back, I promise you, I'll get the message'" (259).

"It's the kind of writing that could no longer happen, because solitude, post-connectivity, is no longer the same" (Twemlow, "I Love Poets").

Indeed, by 2017, email and the etiquette around email communication value clarity and the speed of response. Arguably, had Chris sent Dick an email, or had she sent her manuscript as an attachment, Dick may have responded immediately, as opposed to sending a letter by courier. He may have also responded concisely, as the medium requires, or he may have not answered at all, decisively ending the correspondence. Kraus's point seems to be that, had her letters been emails or had she received an answer from Dick via email, this would have eliminated the wait. It would have also eliminated the "delirium" that such a prolonged wait caused, and arguably it would have also eliminated her writing. This may be the reason why Kraus pays special attention to timing in her work.

Waiting, timing, and Dick's unavailability are probed in *I Love Dick* with extreme specificity in an instance such as the following, where time is used by Chris to report objectively and obsessively about her one-sided relationship with Dick:

> On April 19 I called you at 10 p.m. and 1 a.m. from my apartment in the East Village. You weren't home. The next night I tried again three times between 11 p.m. New York Time and midnight. . . . The next day, April 20, a Thursday, . . . between 9:30 and 11:30 EST my time I tried your number four more times but hung up on your machine without leaving any message. . . . At 1:45 a.m. (10:45 p.m. for you) I tried again. This time your phone was busy. I sat and chainsmoked at my desk for 20 minutes. And when I called your number once again at 2:05 a.m. this time it rang and you picked up, I finally reached you. (ILD 230-231).

This scene is set before cell phones became widely affordable and the promise of constant connectivity highly desirable. But to put things into perspective, had Chris been calling a mobile number, she would have effectively left ten missed calls, an alarming number to the sensibility of any contemporary mobile phone user. Chris's obsessive dialing of Dick's landline shows how difficult reaching someone may be when they are not at home, or when they are on the phone and the line is busy. In the context of *I Love Dick*, however, it also shows how difficult it is to reach someone who may not want to be reached, and who does not take the initiative to call.

I Love Dick relies on Chris's desire for exchange, but as the examples above show, her desire is time-sensitive, rushed, obsessive, and demanding. When Chris asks Dick the question: "Did you read them? Did you read my letters?" and he replies with "Oh, I glanced through them. . . . Alone this morning in my bedroom. With all this rain, I found it very film Noir…" (238), it's important to note the timing of this exchange. Chris had given Dick "90 pages, single-spaced" (114) on 22 January night, and it is only the morning after that she asks him if he had read her letters (238). Another instance of the fact that Chris is not giving Dick any time to read her letters is when, heading to Antelope Valley to visit Dick on Thursday 23 February, Chris refers to sending two days prior a long letter to Dick comprising entries written from 1 February to 9 February (121-139), and expecting Dick to have received and read it before her arrival. Chris writes "But two days before I'd Fed-Ex'd *Every Letter Is A Love Letter*, . . . so I thought you'd know. You never read it" (144), again giving Dick hardly any time to read her letter. The kind of time-sensitive desire for recognition and exchange that Chris calls for is extremely demanding.

In her writing, Chris encourages an "epistolary pact" (Altman 89) by her numerous calls for response and her referring to her own letters as a "correspondence" (41)—such as when she writes to Dick that she intends to "get you involved in a kind of fax correspondence" (48) and

wants to "find a mechanism for involving you in the process" (64). It should be noted however that for a certain amount of time Dick doesn't even know that he is being written to, because the letters in which Chris proposes this kind of connection are given to him all at once, a month and a half after the beginning of the "correspondence." Therefore Dick occupies a crucial, "instrumental" and "generative" role as addressee (Altman 88) but he does so without knowing it.[54]

The absent addressee, which in Chapter 1 I presented as being a "blank" screen, not fully present, engaged, or responsive to start with, becomes more detached as the novel evolves; Dick disengages himself precisely when his letter reaches Chris. Sylvère's claim that, in the process of letter writing "In a sense Dick isn't necessary" (59), points precisely to the fact that Dick is both *necessary* as an addressee, and *unnecessary* as a present, responsive one. The addressee as necessary in epistolary discourse, as a pretext for the writer to start writing, is something that Kraus remarked upon in her 1997 *Artnet* interview when asked about *I Love Dick*: "Of course I really have Dick to thank for this, because *he* gave me *someone* to write to" (Intra; my emphasis). In this statement, Kraus doubles Dick into two separate entities: there is Dick Hebdige, the real man, and there is what he gave to her, someone to write to, which is what earlier I named the addressee as a function of epistolary discourse.

Kraus reiterated the concept of "writing to" in February 2022, when discussing Sylvère Lotringer's writing with Hedi El Kholti, also an editor at Semiotext(e), in a conversation occasioned by Lotringer's recent death and by the obituaries that followed it. In their conversation, Chris claims that she, Hedi and Sylvère "operate the same way. Someone asks

[54] I should note that while the letters are given to Dick a month and a half after the beginning of the writing, Dick is made aware of the existence of the "project" by Sylvère as early as 10 December, 1994, during a phone call in which he answers that he will think about the project and call back. Notably, Dick never calls back to confirm his "disposition to the project" (50).

you for something, and it becomes a prompt to write something you might otherwise not have written. Especially if it's someone you like, who you have a dialogue with. It's almost as if you're writing it for that person" ("Hedi El Kholti" 115). Given the fact that the letters in *I Love Dick* are written *for* Dick as Chris suggested when she wrote "if we're going to write for you" (ILD 42), and as Kraus remarked both in 1997 and in 2022, the role of the addressee emerges indeed as "generative" (Altman 88). The addressee is not only a necessary formal device in epistolary discourse, but a feature of all writing in general. One could say that all writing implies a reader and that all writing is relational.

The relationality at work behind any creative pursuit that involves writing for someone, and the writing of letters in particular, can be fruitfully compared to what Lewis Hyde in his 1986 book *The Gift* described as the dynamic of gift exchange. In what follows, I propose that there are similarities between the sending of a letter to someone and the giving of a gift. In *The Gift*, Hyde illustrates how the giving of a gift, as opposed to the sale of a commodity, "tends to establish a relationship" (xxxvi), which means that while shopping leaves us unencumbered, as any obligations towards the seller have been resolved with payment, a gift is different. Gifts that move us have a "bonding power" (86) and bring us closer; Hyde notes however that "what moves us" is the promise (or the fact) of transformation, friendship, and love" (89) not the object itself. That is why Hyde speaks of gift exchange as erotic, where eros stands for "the principle of attraction, union, involvement which binds together" (xxxvi) and is opposed to the logos and logic of the marketplace.

Following Hyde, we can view the epistolary exchange as a gift exchange and understand it as part of the larger erotic and transformative logic of gifting. In *I Love Dick*, Chris pays for dinner, then Dick "generously invites them both to spend the night at his home"

(19); then she leaves a thank you note, and Dick eventually calls back. When they meet again, Chris hands him her letters, and notes that he "was generous and kind. He took the 90 pages" and promises to read them; and finally, when Sylvère talks to Dick (206) and soliciting "his compassion" (258), Dick sends a letter. Clearly, all these steps involve a reciprocation, a response which if anything allows the plot of *I Love Dick* to move forward to the point when Chris and Dick meet, and then to the point when Chris is rejected.

If we treat the letters that Chris gives to Dick as a gift, and accept Hyde's argument that the gift exchange is inherently erotic, then the title of Part II "Every Letter Is a Love Letter" opens up to further interpretation. This title suggests that epistolary exchanges are inherently erotic; in *every* act of letter writing, and therefore not only in the amatory genre, the sender enters into an erotic relationship with the receiver, whether the receiver likes it or not. Every receiver then is forced into a particular role, that of a willing or unwilling lover. This is why Hyde claims that, precisely because a gift exchange is erotic, "so many gifts must be refused" (95). Indeed, as Marcel Mauss noted in his famous 1924 *Essai sur le don*, the giving of a gift is marked by three obligations: "the obligation to give, the obligation to accept, and the obligation to reciprocate" (qtd. in Hyde xxxvii).

These obligations raise a question about Dick's acceptance of Chris's manuscript; Dick may have felt the kind of obligation to accept that Hyde argues we feel "when we accept something we don't really want" (65). This situation would indeed make Dick's failure to reciprocate what Hyde calls a "case of ingratitude" (115). Yet, Dick is in a position where he is receiving hundreds of letters all at once, as a manuscript, and answering is made impossible. Hyde argues that "giving a return gift is the final act of the labor of gratitude" and it also shows "the true acceptance of the original gift" (65). Therefore, the fact that Dick is placed in a

position where he cannot offer a return letter to her in a timely manner suggests that Chris herself plays a role in establishing the condition of non-reciprocation. Dick's lack of reply is not the only thing that breaks the epistolary pact and eventually the relationship; as we have seen, by not answering or returning her letters, Dick shows indeed that he has not fully accepted the original gift, and he is responsible for making their interaction fail. But Chris too is responsible for this failure, specifically by not allowing him to respond, and by making him "too unreal" to even be perceived as a receiver, as a commentator framed the absence of the addressee of the *Portuguese Letters* (Carrell 52).

In *I Love Dick*, the unreality of the addressee is given in ghostly terms. The function of the address as a catalyst for *starting* to write is expressed at the beginning of the novel when the narrator tells us that Chris, unable to stop thinking about Dick, writes a story about it—"the first story she's written in five years" (ILD 22). This is a story *about* Chris meeting Dick, not a letter to Dick, but it is addressed to someone nonetheless: "She addressed this story, intermittently, to David Rattray" (23), who died two years earlier. She was convinced that his ghost was with her the previous night "floating dense beside me, set someplace between my left ear and my shoulder, compressed like thought" (23). As I argued in Chapter 1, Rattray had an influence on Kraus: his collection of stories and essays, *How I Became One of the Invisible* was published by Semiotext(e)'s Native Agents series and, as the webpage of the MIT Press which has now acquired Semiotext(e) announces, it was "put together by Chris Kraus just before David Rattray's sudden death and published in 1992." Moreover, Kraus's 2000 novel *Aliens & Anorexia* is dedicated to "the memory of David Rattray."

Rattray as the ghostly addressee of the story Chris writes at the beginning of *I Love Dick* could not be more absent. This ghost seems to set the standard for the kind of absent,

phantomatic, unresponsive addressee that Chris needs in order to continue writing, the kind of addressee that she solicits Dick to become. The addressee as ghost is a concept that is not unique to *I Love Dick*; it has frequently been mentioned in epistolary discourse, maybe as a consequence of the necessary distance between correspondents in epistolary exchanges.[55] Given the motif of addressee as ghost, it should not come as a surprise then that in contemporary online dating and texting parlance the verb "to ghost" has taken on the meaning of the act of ignoring an interlocutor who is expecting an answer.

So far I showed the ways in which the addressee is a necessary relational feature in both epistolary and gift exchanges. But by establishing a condition of non-reciprocation in the exchange and positioning Dick as a ghostly addressee, Chris ultimately makes Dick absent because she needs him to be absent. Chris ensures Dick's unresponsiveness by what I call letter withholding; her letters are initially withheld and sent only when they are no longer letters that one could possibly respond to. Even her last letter, which is only 40 pages long, took her almost two months to write but, once sent, Chris "wanted a response, and fast" (258) within a week of Dick's receiving it. In this way, Dick vanishes as an addressee the very moment that he reads the letters and becomes the reader of a piece of writing that, while written for him, did not allow space at the outset for his presence as a real correspondent.

It may be argued that Dick is not absent or vanishing since his name is everywhere in the novel.[56] But mainly, one could argue, he is not absent because, as well as speaking with

---

[55] It will suffice to cite Kafka in his *Letters to Milena*, in which he writes that letter writing "is actually an intercourse with ghosts and by no means just with the ghost of the addressee but also with one's own ghost, which secretly evolves inside the letter one is writing or even in a whole series of letters where one letter corroborates another and can refer to it as a witness" (230). In *Madame Bovary*, Flaubert describes Emma's writing a letter to Leon as follows: "But while she wrote it was another man she saw, a phantom fashioned out of her most ardent memories, her finest readings, her strongest lusts. . . " (269). And in *A Lover's Discourse*, Roland Barthes argues that "there is always, in the discourse upon love, a person whom one addresses, though this person may have shifted to the condition of a phantom or a creature still to come. No one wants to speak of love unless it is for someone" (74)

[56] All the letters are addressed to him, and his name appears about 250 times in Part I, and about 53 in Part II.

Chris and meeting with her, he does eventually write back, as the last chapter signals in its title: "Dick Writes Back" (258), thus fulfilling his epistolary role. However, despite his writing back, his response is inadequate, and for two reasons. It is inadequate because he carelessly and inconsistently refers to Chris as both "Chris" and "Kris" (260), thus making Chris vanish. Moreover, his letter is addressed not to Chris/Kris, but to her husband, and what she holds in her hand is only a xerox of that letter, as if she is being cc'd, as we would say today, so that she is informed about the existence of this letter while not being addressed directly.

In fact, in the one-directional epistolary exchange that is *I Love Dick* Chris always occupies the role of the sender and is never a recipient, whereas Dick shifts his position from receiver to sender in the last chapter. Because his letter is the last event in the novel, Dick is given the last word and acquires presence. Even in this moment when she holds a letter from Dick—a moment in which Chris could be switching roles, and become addressed—the photocopy she is holding, in which Chris (Kris) is talked about but not addressed, is thus a kind of simulacrum of a reply, and, in reading this letter, Chris becomes a simulacrum of an addressee.

By opening Sylvère's envelope first and reading his letter, thus invading his privacy, Chris positions herself as an eavesdropper. Yet, the position of eavesdropper is unexpectedly repeated when she opens the letter addressed to her, as she discovers that the letter is the xerox of the letter that was addressed to Sylvère. At that point, she is a step further away from the original letter, in the way Kris is a step away from Chris. The act of spying into Sylvère's letter out of curiosity is a gesture that delays the opening of her own letter, postponing the moment the reader has been waiting for since the beginning of the novel: is Dick going to write and what will he say to her?

Through the stratagem of having two identical letters, one in an envelope addressed to Sylvère and the other to Chris, Dick does write back but he manages to say nothing *to* Chris. If one of Dick's complaints throughout the novel is that Chris does not even know him and that her letters are unwarranted and her love for him "groundless" (144), in the conclusion it is Dick who by carelessly misspelling her name shows that it is he who does not care to know her, despite all the letters she wrote to him. Communication in this epistolary exchange therefore did not achieve its aims, and it leaves us with a failed interaction—hundreds of letters sent, a marriage that ended, and two people who do not know each other. *I Love Dick* ends with Chris's rejection, but because she opened the envelopes in a cab on her way to the Independent Feature Market (258), and given the importance of cars in the novel, she remains mobile and active even in this final scene, in which she turns away from the correspondence. She has become present to herself through writing and now she can turn towards her own life without either Sylvère or Dick.[57] The narrator concludes the novel with Chris getting out of the car and of the story at the same time: "She gasped and breathed under the weight of it and got out of the cab and showed her film" (ILD 261).

[57] This ending has been criticized by scholars who dismiss the novel and its film adaptation as a mere "I"-centred hero's journey" (Deffenbacher 463), in which the main fault of Kraus's novel is the fact that the heroine is heterosexual and white.

Section 8. "A new erotic activity: writing to you, Dick": Writing and Desire for Exchange

I Love Dick is as much a book about becoming a writer as it is about infatuation and female heterosexual desire. Writing and desire are related when Chris's discovery of the power of her own writing, a power that comes from love, is described as: "A new erotic activity: writing to you, Dick" (ILD 111). After years spent being sober and asexual (80) Chris's reflects on her newfound sexuality as specifically heterosexual: "*My entire state of being's changed because I've become my sexuality: female, straight, wanting to love men, be fucked*" (202). Her emphasis on becoming means that by becoming one's heterosexuality, one can come out as heterosexual. But, how does one come out as heterosexual, a rather normative and assumed status, without shame? She continues by framing her question as follows: *"Is there a way of living with this like a gay person, proudly?*" (202).

In the 1980s and 1990s, with the rise of queer studies in academia in the US, being transgressive (or radical) and being heterosexual became a contradiction in terms, given how gay and lesbian studies and then queer studies define queerness as non-normative, and heterosexuality as inevitably normative.[58] Therefore, given the way that *I Love Dick*'s centre is heterosexuality, it does not come as a surprise that Chris's way of acknowledging her new found (hetero)sexuality is framed as shameful, and that she wonders how she can live with this "like a gay person, proudly" (ILD 202).

The issue of shame brings us back to "Ecceity," the essay in which Kraus mentions the New York School and to Frank O'Hara in particular. These references are of interest because many of the New York School poets were indeed gay, such as Frank O'Hara, James Schuyler, and John Ashbery, and their queerness has recently offered itself to queer readings of their

---

[58] Halperin famously defined queerness as "*whatever* is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant" (*Saint Foucault* 62).

oeuvre, such as in the work by Ryan D. Sullivan (2020), Terrell Scott Herring (2002), Siobhan Phillips (2019), and Catherine Imbriglio (1995). Therefore, as a closeted gay man in the 1950s, O'Hara's praising expansion, openness and impersonality may indeed have been a way to negotiate the fact that homosexuality was illegal at the time. Kraus's appropriating O'Hara's expansion of the "I" in "Ecceity," and her question in *I Love Dick* in 1997 about how one can be "living with this like a gay person, proudly" (ILD 202) seem therefore to link the shame of being gay in the 1950s, with the shame of *not* being gay in the 1990s—a point made by Diane Fuss among others.[59]

Beyond matters of sexuality, Kraus's references to the New York School are interesting for formal reasons as well, because of the overlap of her epistolary work in *I Love Dick*, with the fact that both O'Hara and Schuyler used epistolary conventions in their poems, especially dedications. This similarity points to the importance of the "specificity of the connection," as Phillips notes in the article "Intimacy, Epistolarity, and the Work of Queer Mourning in James Schuyler's Poetry" (59). Similarly, Sullivan argues that "writing for" in the case of O'Hara means addressing not the public or an ideal reader, but an actual reader: Sullivan argues that O'Hara "didn't write for an abstract public, nor was publication his main goal in writing. Instead, his poetry is woven into the social fabric of his life – many poems we have were saved because they were mailed to friends" (Sullivan 428). Moreover, Sullivan argues, "the basic criterion for a poem, for O'Hara, is love" meaning that without love there is no poem (427).

If as we have seen a letter exchange is inherently erotic, the lack of erotic reciprocation that turns Chris's love letters into a one-sided project makes her writing self-referential. What

---

[59] In 1991, Diane Fuss notes that "in the academy, some would say that it is 'in' to be 'out'" (*Inside/out* 5). With reference specifically to instances in which an identification with queerness is required for credibility in certain professions, Stephanie Fairyngton asks rhetorically: "is there a weird sort of reversal at work, in which some scholars of sexuality and gender worry about risking their legitimacy by coming out as straight?" (33).

Janet Altman refers to as a "desire for *exchange* with an addressee who is specifically *other*" (Altman 112 n 2) becomes in *I Love Dick* something more akin to what I rephrase as a *desire* for exchange, or non-exchange for the sake of desire, in which the emphasis is not on the other or on the relationship, but on one's own desire. While one of the achievements of *I Love Dick* is indeed its representation of heterosexual female desire through its unapologetic, even unfair, use of Dick, a recipient who could be said to represent all male lovers, such a focus on desire over exchange leads away from the potential of exchange inherent in the epistolary form, and towards what we might think of as the soliloquy. This is the paradoxical nature behind the letter writing that constitutes *I Love Dick*; Chris is addressing a real person, an other who is crucial to her creative process, and yet at a different moment within the same creative process, that real other has to be made absent, phantomatic, placed at a distance, even made fictional, or objectified.

Conclusion: "Impossible to write alone"

Few reviewers have shown an interest in the epistolary nature of *I Love Dick*, in the role of the addressee, and in the use of real people's names, as I hope I have shown. Scholar Anna Poletti inquired into Kraus's "ethical concern" (130) about using real people in her novels, and reports Kraus stating that "my ethic was always to change the name if I was going to say something less than flattering. Sadly, I antagonized a few people for life by writing about them this way" (Poletti 130). But it is another reviewer, artist Amy Croft, who asked a question about the objectification of the "you" in *I Love Dick* that to some extent has animated my own research into the epistolary tradition and the role of the absent addressee. I will quote her question in full: "was there not another way to explore the wholeness of intensities and desires for which female subjectivity should be appreciated and [to] critique the conditions which repress this, without it knowingly causing pain to another individual?" (Croft 193). Croft discloses her connection to Dick Hebdige when she admits: "through first-hand conversations with friends in common, I am aware [Dick] was completely devastated by the contents of Kraus's novel" (193). The parts in *I Love Dick* that may have devastated Hebdige and that he referred to as a "bad review of my presence in the world" (Zembla 20) can be found in passages that mention his drinking,[60] but also in passages that cast a shadow on the kind of academic and intellectual that Hebdige was at the time, such as this one where Chris recalls: "I told you all about the failure of my movie. Then you confessed how, over the past two years, you'd stopped reading" (255).

The answer that I would give to Amy Croft's question and the hypothesis which my research puts forward is that there was indeed no other way for the "I" of the writer to expand within the epistolary medium without using the "you" as nothing more than a catalyst. As Chris

[60] Such as "Two nights ago you'd narrowly escaped a DUI driving on Route 126 and you'd decided to stop drinking. 'I feel clearer now than I've ever felt before,' you said, after 36 hours of sobriety" (ILD 235); "You got drunk after the opening, spent the night at a motel" (252).

states in *I Love Dick*, it is “Impossible to write alone. The diary begins: Dear Dick” (97). Dick fulfills a function; in order to write at all, even in one’s diary, the writer—who may indeed be alone and isolated, as is the case with Chris as the novel progresses—is not alone because there is a “you,” an addressee, an other. Chris always writes *to,* which is what makes her writing possible. But at the same time, for her writing to expand, the addressee has to withdraw, which leaves the writer “writing into the absence” (Personal interview).

The evidence I gathered to support my argument lies in Kraus’s stalking method of writing, in her antiacademic approach to quotations as means to expand her “I,” and in the inherently erotic nature of epistolary discourse, all of which Kraus employs in *I Love Dick*. It also lies in the long history of epistolary novels written in the female voice, in which women’s desires and transgressions are frequently depicted as ending with rejection, solitude, confinement, and sometimes even death. While *I Love Dick* toys with abjection, rejection, erasure, and solitude, it avoids the consequences caused by the posture of submission and immobility which we have seen belong to the stereotype of the Epistolary Woman. Moreover, *I Love Dick* defends itself against the charge of unethical behavior by developing an ironic position of detachment and self-awareness, and by having the “I” of the writer constantly moving, growing, expanding.

While the novel ends with Chris holding in her hand the evidence of Dick’s final and unambiguous rejection, this ending also implies she achieved a self-realization and a newfound sense of sexual expression. As Kraus puts it elsewhere, “she’d started writing love letters to a man who didn’t love her. In L.A. she continues writing to this man, and then she just continues writing” (*Torpor* 280-281). Through her perseverance, Chris does not die in grief because of her

unrequited love. But in order not to die, she has to stalk, cause pain and, in a sense, "kill" her addressee.

Epilogue: An Interview with Chris Kraus

Last winter, I accompanied my academic husband to a drink reception and stationed myself near the canapés to make small talk with another Plus One, a big-eyed musician who had no interest in literature but asked me nonetheless to tell him what my research was about and patiently nodded while I gave him my well-rehearsed spiel about the epistolary nature of Kraus's *I Love Dick*. Once I finished, he asked me a question that never gets asked in graduate school, because it's more sophisticated to avoid asking it: "Okay" he said, "but why *this* book?" and then, seeing my blank face and lifting eyebrows, he rephrased the question as: "Why do you *like* this book?"

A possible answer, conveyed at the top of my voice as "because all my life I wrote letters to men who didn't respond!" would be authentic, but not quite accurate; some did write back. Another answer, which is the one I settled with, is formal: it is about the book's structure and how it functions. Studying *I Love Dick* over the years was like observing the gears of a strange clock that told a different time from other clocks—what they call a book ahead of its time.

When I started my Masters in 2020, I presented *I Love Dick* to my future thesis advisor but all I could do at the time was put it next to other epistolary or autofictional texts, and claim victoriously and naively: Similar! Or: Different! Then I settled on the absent addressee as the centerpiece of my research, but after reading "Ecceity," I had to take a step back and think about the Expanded I first: in other words, if the addressee was absent, what made him so? After examining numerous articles, interviews, and reviews about her work, it became clear that certain questions had not been asked—and they had not been asked because, like the big-eyed

musician's question, they are not sophisticated. They are about intention, and everybody knows that authorial intention is a fallacy. So when I had the pleasure of interviewing Chris Kraus, I asked her some of these unsophisticated and overly forensic questions.

Kraus addressed the matter of intention and writing process in our conversation when she pointed out that while *I Love Dick* is made of two parts, there is an invisible third part made up of the editing and arranging of the letters as well as the insertion of a third-person narration. This part of the work is indeed *invisible* because readers of fiction tend to take it for granted—this is what writers do; they edit, fictionalize and revise—and readers of memoirs and correspondences would rather forget about it.

Kraus brought up the invisible again when she talked about how memory works, and how something you believe that you read is actually a "phantom text" that does not exist. Ghosts returned in our conversation in the form of absence, the absence left behind when a person is gone or is unresponsive: "you are writing into the absence. . . . It's the absence that evokes the writing." By foregrounding absence as that which generates and facilitates writing, this remark contradicts and troubles the title of my research, "Impossible to write alone," and therefore aptly seals the series of paradoxes, complexities, and inconsistencies that I have been charting in these chapters.

Below is an excerpt of a conversation with Chris Kraus that took place on March 22, 2022. After some talk about anxiety nightmares, friends in London, and teaching, I proceeded to ask Kraus some questions.

[**AC**] In *I Love Dick*, you included a Troubadour poem and signed it *Anonymous*. I was not able to find the source of this poem. Can you help me with tracking down where this anonymous poem was published?

[**CK**] I thought it was a medieval French troubadour ballad, and I thought that I translated it either together with Sylvère or with a friend, but nobody has been able to find this poem, so maybe I just made it up!

[**AC**] That's what I thought! I am interested in this idea of making things up.

[**CK**] You know how sometimes you remember being really taken by something that you read years ago, and then you go back and you read it, and it's not what you thought at all. It's like over the years you fabulated this almost phantom text, based on whatever your mood and thought was when you were reading it, and you have a completely false memory. It happens all the time, at least to me.

[**AC**] You mentioned in an interview with Rachel Cooke that *I Love Dick* has been taken as a coming of age story, but the "secret undiscussed subject" in *I Love Dick* is class. Where is class in the novel?

[**CK**] It's all about insiders and outsiders. The Dick and Sylvère characters are those people who began as outsiders, folks from immigrant or working-class backgrounds, outsiders who became insiders through their early passion-education, and then eventually entered into the academy. The Chris character really did not have that experience, at least not at the time of the writing of the book. She had a similar kind of low middle-class outsider background, but she did not have any advanced degrees. She has been around the art world, but she had not really entered the mainstream artworld or academy. The people that she remembers and invokes, the people who are mentioned in the book, it's her remembering all these artists that she encountered over the

years, whose work has just disappeared, not been preserved, and forgotten. I think she talks about the number of artists that it takes for every one art star, how many thousands of people are working who are never widely exhibited. So it's a question of access, really.

[**AC**] I know you have sometimes co-signed projects you did with Sylvère, like the short film *How to Shoot a Crime*, or the edited volume *Hatred of Capitalism*. In *I Love Dick*, Sylvère is very much present in the first part. Did you ever consider having *I Love Dick* being a book "by Chris Kraus and Sylvère Lotringer"?

[**CK**] I didn't at the time, because the last part was so much about leaving the apartment with Sylvère and going away alone, and writing the subsequent text on my own. Also there was the third part, the invisible part, which was the making of the book, taking all of this material and putting it into a form, which I did in 1997. All those years I thought: I am writing a book, I am writing a book, I am writing a book. Although, retrospectively Sylvère's presence in the book is huge, some of the letters he did literally write.

[**AC**] How much did you edit his letters?

[**CK**] I edited everything to make it faster, funny and more readable. Once I began writing the book, I decided that the first part was going to have the third-person picaresque narrative style, where I was going to form these connections between the letters and form a linked chronology of events, and so whatever was going to advance that agenda, I would edit accordingly.

[**AC**] Is Dick's letter, at the very end, his letter?

[**CK**] I did not edit that, and yes that is his literal letter that I just reproduced.

[**AC**] David Morris's piece in *You Must Make Your Death Public* mentions that the letters you wrote originally to Dick are part of the Semiotext(e) archive, and that they exist "as a collection of letters in a real life archive." Is that correct?

[**CK**] It's probably true, yes.

[**AC**] Morris also mentions that they existed as letters "hanging from a cactus outside Dick's house."

[**CK**] No, that never happened!

[**AC**] In an interview with Ellen Hunt, you said that had the letter writing in *I Love Dick* happened via email it would have been over in two days. What did you mean by that?

[**CK**] Email is so instant, you can go back and forth fifteen times in ten minutes, so there would have been no need: if he didn't reply, I think I would have just stopped. If he didn't reply after five or six emails I would have just stopped, it would not have been this kind of seduction of letter writing. Because of course when you physically write a letter, you are really not just writing; it is not expedient communication, it's more expansive. You are partly writing to yourself, you are partly writing to a recipient, you are writing to the universe. It is not the same as writing an email.

[**AC**] In *I Love Dick* you withhold the letters and send them over a month later. Would you have done the same via email?

[**CK**] Oh gosh, I really don't know. I mean, we were far away. Think of how even long distance calls cost money, to call from NY to LA on the phone, so if communication was more instant it would have been completely different. Definitely there have been books of correspondence of early emails, and social media text messages, but what happened in this book, only happened in the analog years.

[**AC**] You also said in an interview that had Dick been there for breakfast the morning when Chris and Sylvère woke up on his sofa bed, then "there would have been no book."[61] I find this fascinating: the addressee has to be there, and at the same time he has not to be there.

[**CK**] That is very true, because you are writing into the absence. If there is a presence there is no need to write, you can just talk. It's the absence that evokes the writing.

[**AC**] This links to desire: you desire what you don't have, especially when you can't have it.

[**CK**] Definitely.

[**AC**] I am interested in the connection between writing, becoming a writer, and desire as desire to write, and also in the erotic nature of the epistolary communication in general, as you say: every letter is a love letter.

[**CK**] I think that is very true. The way in life we are a slightly different version of ourselves with every person that we talk with. This is amplified in letter writing. So writing to someone becomes an expansion of yourself, you get to exercise that part of yourself that really only comes into being in relation to the other person.

[**AC**] With regards to sadomasochism, in your essay "Emotional Technologies," written three years after *I Love Dick*, you mention that sadomasochism is a high-tech strategy to create complicity between two entities, and mention how S/m is a performance, and it is not about love, it is not love. What is Chris's relation to S/m in *I Love Dick*?

[**CK**] Not very explicit. Maybe there was an implicit power dynamic, but it's quite different from the BDSM in "Emotional Technologies," which is on the table and consensual, in a benevolent way. There is definitely a power disparity in *I Love Dick*, based on longing and unrequited love

---

[61] This quote comes from the interview titled "Jenny Offill & Chris Kraus On Art Monsters, Humour and Feminism" (14:02).

but there was nothing formal about it. The BDSM in "Emotional Technologies" was about acknowledging power disparities and giving it a form. The requirement of the dominant in traditional BDSM is to be very active, not passive, and of course Dick's role is completely passive.

[**AC**] But his role is still powerful, in that it determines how the events play out. His being silent, deciding to not respond, it is still an act of power, isn't it?

[**CK**] It's a passive-aggressive way of exercising power, it's not turning it into a game, the way people do in BDSM.

[**AC**] Where else have you written about BDSM?

[**CK**] Only in *Video Green* and in a few other pieces. When I first moved to LA and I was writing for that magazine, *Artext*, in the early 2000s, that is the time I was most thinking about it and involved in it, and then I just kind of moved on and then I did not think about it after that.

[**AC**] In *I Love Dick*, Dick tells Chris that she looks like she is ready to "come out," and later Chris writes about her being heterosexual in a proud way, in the way a gay person would be. Then in "Ecceity" you wrote about the importannce of the New York school and about Frank O'Hara, who was gay. Can you say something about what it means to be proud and being heterosexual, as a woman?

[**CK**] With "ready to come out" she did not mean coming out as a lesbian, but she meant coming out as having a larger presence that included sexuality, which prior to then had not been a part of my presence. A lot of what the Chris character is doing within the book is how to own her own sexuality, and include that as part of her persona.

[**AC**] In the 1990s, were you reading anything about desire, maybe from a psychoanalytic perspective?

[**CK**] I could force myself to read Kristeva, because I had the language and I underlined all the appropriate passages. But really poetry, the New York School of poetry and the post-New York School of poetry was just full of desire. That genre of poetry actually is within a lineage that goes back to the Troubadour poets. The New York School poet Paul Blackburn, was a great translator of the Provencal poets, so I must have been reading his translation. Something I noticed when I wrote the Acker biography is that a generation later people think their subjects discovered some arcane literary work all by themselves, but the fact is that certain writers are in the air at different times. Everyone knew Paul Blackburn, he gave readings at the Poetry Project.

[**AC**] Did you read seventeenth- and eighteenth-century epistolary novels?

[**CK**] Sure. I did a literature BA in New Zealand and so I read a lot of them. As an actress, I was in a couple of eighteenth-century plays. Restoration comedy.

[**AC**] In my research, I talk about this tradition of amatory epistolary novels in which women are too much in love, they are Epistolary Women, they can only love as victims, they are seduced and abandoned, they are masochists and suffering a great deal, and their letter writing is a way to deal with the pain, to explain their love and their situation to themselves, and they become writers in the process. Some even declare that they are writing for themselves and not for their lovers; some fall in love with their own passion, not with their addressee, and say that their desire is what seduced them. In the amatory epistolary tradition, there are women publishing only their side of the correspondence, and they delete the man’s contribution even when it existed. They are using the man to publish a book, which on some level is what you did with *I Love Dick*.

[**CK**] Exactly. That sounds very accurate.

[**AC**] The fact that Hebdige has never agreed to talk about the book, his role in it, or about you and Sylvère, shows how real *I Love Dick* was for him, because it had real consequences. So, when in 2006 you said in the Denise Frimer interview that "it's all fiction," it seems that this view clashes with the fact that *I Love Dick* is based in reality. So, if "it's all fiction," how come fiction can have such real consequences? How do you see that?

[**CK**] I don't know, I don't think it was the book that caused these consequences for him. I had invited him to co-write an introduction with me, and that would have completely altered the way that people saw Dick's participation. It could have been a joke cooked up between us, where he would be a participant collaborator, not a victim. But he positioned himself as a victim, and then everyone else followed his lead, but it did not need to be that way.

[**AC**] Do you think that because of the changes in society in the last twenty years, social media and the #Me Too movement, things are different now?

[**CK**] Mary McCarthy was doing this in the 1950s, she was hilarious. Did you read *The Company She Keeps*? It's brilliant, she deals with all the people who she dated and married in her 20s, and it ends with her turning 30. She changed the names but the people are completely identifiable. No secrets there.

[**AC**] I am trying to resolve a knot. In my research, I note that you acknowledge the reality of *I Love Dick*, and then I note that you also play up the fictional. How do you see this shift? Did you play up the fictional aspects of the book to avoid the slur of the confessional?

[**CK**] Yes, I mean, for the same reasons that we just talked about. Look at Mary McCarthy, when did that come out, 1942? The new edition identifies the characters' names with the real persons. There is a huge tradition of this kind of writing that did not just begin in the 1990s and early

2000s. I really am against the invention of the genre "autofiction" because to me what they call "autofiction" is just literary fiction, as opposed to genre fiction which is a completely contrived set of characters and contrived plot. In literary fiction there is always a basis of truth, no matter whether it is closer to the surface or several times removed, there is always traces of the truth.

[**AC**] So you are against the label autofiction.

[**CK**] I am not crazy about the label autofiction. I don't really accept it.

[**AC**] It's suddenly become popular, like it never existed before…

[**CK**] …Semiotext(e), the journal, was publishing writing in this genre in the 1970s…. The San Francisco New Narrative, were doing the same thing, and the Post-New York School, and you can trace that back to very ancient writing, Japanese women courtesans of the Heian Court, and then of course Louis-Ferdinand Céline…

Works Cited

Altman, Janet G. *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form.* Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1982.

Barthes, Roland, and Richard Howard. *A Lover's Discourse : Fragments*. 1979. Hill and Wang, 2010.

Beebee, Thomas O. *Epistolary Fiction in Europe, 1500-1850.* Cambridge University Press, 1999.

Behn, Aphra. *Love-Letters between a Nobleman and His Sister*. Penguin Books, 1987.

Blackburn, Paul, translator. *Proensa : An Anthology of Troubadour Poetry*. Edited by George Economou, University of California Press, 1978.

Blair, Elaine. "Chris Kraus, Female Antihero." *New Yorker*, vol. 92, no. 38, 21 Nov. 2016, pp. 42-47. G*ale Literature Resource Center*, link.gale.com/apps/doc/A471148852/LitRC?u=viva_vpi&sid=bookmark-LitRC&xid=57c256ba. Accessed 28 Feb. 2022.

Bowers, Toni. "Epistolary Fiction". *The Oxford History of the Novel in English*. Keymer, Thomas, editor. First edition, Volume 1, *Prose Fiction in English from the Origins of Print to 1750*, Oxford University Press, 2018.

Bray, Joe. *The Epistolary Novel : Representations of Consciousness*. Routledge, 2003.

Browning, Barbara. "The Performative Novel." *TDR : The Drama Review*, vol. 62, no. 2, 2018, pp. 43–58., doi:10.1162/DRAM_a_00747.

Carrell, Susan Lee. *Le Soliloque De La Passion Féminine, Ou, Le Dialogue Illusoire : Étude D'une Formule Monophonique De La Littérature Épistolaire.* G. Narr, 1982.

"case, n.1." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, December 2021, www.oed.com/view/Entry/28393. Accessed 4 March 2022.

"Chris Kraus Interview : On I Love Dick." *Louisiana Channel*. August 2017. https://channel.louisiana.dk/video/chris-kraus-on-i-love-dick. Accessed 26 Feb.

"Chris Kraus : Changing Lives." *Louisiana Channel*. August 2017. https://channel.louisiana.dk/video/chris-kraus-changing-lives. Accessed 26 Feb. 2022.

Cleland, John, and Peter Wagner. *Fanny Hill, or, Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*. Penguin Books, 1985.

Cook, Elizabeth Heckendorn. *Epistolary Bodies : Gender and Genre in the Eighteenth-Century Republic of Letters.* Stanford University Press, 1996.

Cooke, Rachel. "Novelist Chris Kraus: Who hasn't had an affair?" *The Guardian*. 30 April 2017. https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/apr/30/chris-kraus-ive-never-had-much-talent-for-making-things-up-i-love-dick-interview Accessed 26 Feb. 2022.

Cusset François. *French Theory : How Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, & Co. Transformed the Intellectual Life of the United States*. Translated by Jeff Fort et al., University of Minnesota Press, 2008.

D'Adesky, Anne-Christine. "Stalking Theory." *Nation,* vol. 266, no. 20. 1 Jun 1998, pp. 30-31.

Day, Robert Adams. *Told in Letters: Epistolary Fiction Before Richardson.* University of Michigan Press, 1966.

Deffenbacher, Kristina. "Alternative Gazes, Aesthetics, and Affects in *I Love Dick* " *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, vol. 36, no. 6, Aug/Sep 2019, pp. 449-469., doi:10.1080/10509208.2019.1590174

DeJean, Joan E. *Fictions of Sappho, 1546-1937*. University of Chicago Press, 1989.

"dick, n.1." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, December 2021, www.oed.com/view/Entry/52255. Accessed 28 February 2022.

Donne, John, and John Carey. *John Donne*. Oxford University Press, 1990.

Duchêne, Roger. *Réalité vécue et art épistolaire*, vol. 1, Paris, Bordas, 1970.

"exhibit, n." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, December 2021, www.oed.com/view/Entry/66176. Accessed 4 March 2022.

Fairyington, Stephanie. "The New Post-Straight." *The Gay and Lesbian Review,* vol. 11, no. 6, 2004, pp. 33-34.

Fazekaš Ana. "*I Love Dick*: A Pop-Cultural Investigation of Desire and the Female Gaze." *Am Journal of Art and Media Studies*, vol. 17, no. 17, 2018, pp. 89–89., doi:10.25038/am.v0i17.273. Accessed 26 Feb. 2022.

Fisher, Anna Watkins. "Manic Impositions: The Parasitical Art of Chris Kraus and Sophie Calle." Women's Studies Quarterly 40, no. 1/2 (2012): 223-35. http://www.jstor.org/stable/23333446. Accessed 26 Feb. 2022.

—. "Parasitical Politics and Epistolary Games: The Art of Chris Kraus and Sophie Calle." *Le Texte étranger,* no. 8, Oct. 2011. http://dela.univ-paris8.fr/etranger/pages/8/fisher.html. Accessed 26 Feb. 2022.

—. *Play in the System*. Duke University Press, 2020.

Frimer, Denise. "Chris Kraus in conversation with Denise Frimer." *Brooklyn Rail,* Apr. 2006. https://brooklynrail.org/2006/04/art/chris-kraus-in-conversation-with-denise-frimer. Accessed 26 Feb. 2022.

Frundt, Henry J. *Refreshing Pauses : Coca-Cola and Human Rights in Guatemala*. Praeger, 1987.

Glass, Ira. "95: Monogamy." This American Life. Radio program. March 6, 1998. https://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/95/monogamy. Accessed 26. Feb. 2022.

Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von, and Michael Hulse. *The Sorrows of Young Werther*. Penguin Books, 1989.

Goldsmith, Elizabeth C, editor. *Writing the Female Voice : Essays on Epistolary Literature.* Northeastern University Press, 1989.

Gumport, Elizabeth. "Female Trouble." *n+1,* no. 13, Winter 2012. https://nplusonemag.com/issue-13/reviews/female-trouble/. Accessed 26 Feb. 2022.

Fournier, Lauren. *Autotheory As Feminist Practice in Art, Writing, and Criticism*. MIT Press, 2021.

Fournier, Lauren. "Sick Women, Sad Girls, and Selfie Theory: Autotheory As Contemporary Feminist Practice." *A/b: Auto/Biography Studies*, vol. 33, no. 3, 2018, pp. 643–662., doi:10.1080/08989575.2018.1499495. Accessed 26 Feb. 2022.

Fulton, Jeni. "The Revival of Chris Kraus and Her Radical Novel I Love Dick." *Sleek*, 5 May 2017. http://www.sleek-mag.com/2017/05/05/chris-kraus-interview-i-love-dick. Accessed 26 Feb. 2022.

Fuss, Diana. *Inside/out : Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*. Routledge, 1991.

Halperin, David M. *Saint Foucault : Towards a Gay Hagiography*. Oxford University Press, 1997.

Hawkins, Joan. 2006. "Afterward." *I Love Dick* by Chris Kraus, 1997. Semiotext(e), 2006. pp 263-77.

Hays, Mary, and Eleanor Rose Ty. *Memoirs of Emma Courtney.* 1st annotated ed., Oxford University Press, 1996.

Healy, Claire Marie. "Chris Kraus, Author of I Love Dick, on Seeking Utopias in Art." *Anothermag*, 8 Nov. 2018. https://www.anothermag.com/design-living/11308/chris-kraus-author-of-i-love-dick-on-seeking-utopias-in-art. Accessed 26 Feb. 2022.

"Hedi El Kholti and Chris Kraus on Sylvère Lotringer." *Artforum*. February 2022, Vol. 60, No. 6, pp. 114-118. https://www.artforum.com/print/202202/hedi-el-kholti-and-chris-kraus-on-sylvere-lotringer-87688. Accessed 26 Feb. 2022.

Herring, Terrell Scott. "Frank O'hara's Open Closet." *Pmla*, vol. 117, no. 3, 2002, pp. 414–427.

Herron, Mary Jane, and William G Herron. "Meanings of Sadism and Masochism." *Psychological Reports*, vol. 50, no. 1, 1982, pp. 199–202., doi:10.2466/pr0.1982.50.1.199.

Hunt, Ellen. "Chris Kraus: *I Love Dick* was written 'in a delirium.'" *The Guardian*, 29 May. 2017. https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/may/30/chris-kraus-i-love-dick-was-written-in-a-delirium. Accessed 26 Feb. 2022.

Hyde, Lewis. *The Gift : How the Creative Spirit Transforms the World*. Third Vintage Books edition, Third Vintage Books ed., Vintage Books, 2019.

Imbriglio, Catherine. "'Our Days Put on Such Reticence': The Rhetoric of the Closet in John Ashbery's 'Some Trees.'" *Contemporary Literature*, vol. 36, no. 2, University of

Wisconsin Press, 1995, pp. 249–88, https://doi.org/10.2307/1208902. Accessed 26 Feb. 2022.

Intra, Giovanni. "A Fusion of Gossip and Theory." *Artnet*, 13 Nov. 1997. http://www.artnet.com/magazine_pre2000/index/intra/intra11-13-97.asp. Accessed 26 Feb. 2022.

Jamison, Leslie. "This female consciousness: On Chris Kraus." *The New Yorker*, 9 Apr. 2015. https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/this-female-consciousness-on-chris-kraus. Accessed 26 Feb. 2022.

Jagose, Annamarie, and Lee Wallace. "Dicktation: Autotheory in the Coupled Voice." *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory*, vol. 76, no. 1, 2020, pp. 109–139. Project MUSE, doi:10.1353/arq.2020.0004.

"Jenny Offill & Chris Kraus On Art Monsters, Humour and Feminism." *Louisiana Channel*. August 2017. https://channel.louisiana.dk/video/jenny-offill-chris-kraus-on-art-monsters-humour-and-feminism. Accessed 26 Feb.

Jensen, Katharine Ann. *Writing Love: Letters, Women, and the Novel in France, 1605-1776*. Southern Illinois University Press, 1995.

Kafka, Franz. *Letters to Milena*. Translated by Philip Boehm, Second [American] paperback ed., Schocken Books, 2015.

Kaplan, Marijn S, and Riccoboni Marie Jeanne de Heurles Laboras de Mezìeres. *Marie Jeanne Riccoboni's Epistolary Feminism : Fact, Fiction, Voice*. Routledge, 2020. https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.vt.edu/10.4324/9781003047803

Kauffman, Linda S. *Discourses of Desire : Gender, Genre, and Epistolary Fictions.* Cornell University Press, 1986.

Kitnick, Alex. "I, Etcetera." *October*, vol. 166, 2018, pp. 45–62.

Krass, Jacqueline. "A Conversation with Chris Kraus." *Textual Practice*, vol. 32, no. 1, 2018, pp. 1–11.

Kraus, Chris. "Chris Kraus: '*I Love Dick* happened in real life, but it's not a memoir.'" *The Guardian*, 17 May 2016.https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/may/30/chris-kraus-i-love-dick-was-written-in-a-delirium. Accessed 26 Feb. 2022.

—. "Ecceity, Smash and Grab, the Expanded I and Moment." *French Theory in America.* Edited by Sylvère Lotringer and Sande Cohen. Routledge, 2001.

—. *I Love Dick*. 1997. Semiotext(e), 2006.

—. Introduction. *Madame Bovary,* by Gustave Flaubert. Barnes and Noble Classics, 2005, pp. xiii-xxviii.

—. "Emotional Technologies." *Video Green : Los Angeles Art and the Triumph of Nothingness*. Semiotext(e), 2004, pp. 85-103.

—. Personal interview. 22 March 2022.

—. "The New Universal." *Social Practices*. Semiotext(e), 2018, pp. 85-94.

—. *Torpor*. Semiotext(e), 2006.

—. "Torpor Los Angeles: Daniel Marlos." *Video Green : Los Angeles Art and the Triumph of Nothingness*. Semiotext(e), 2004, pp. 187-191.

—. *Where Art Belongs*. Semiotext(e), 2011.

Laclos, Choderlos de. *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*. Translated by Douglas Parmée, Oxford University Press, 2008.

Lotringer Sylvère, and Sande Cohen. *French Theory in America*. Routledge, 2001.

MacArthur, Elizabeth Jane. *Extravagant Narratives : Closure and Dynamics in the Epistolary Form*. Princeton University Press, 1990.

Masschelein, Anneleen. "Who's Peaked? Chris Kraus's Writing Performances as a Case Study for Twenty-First Century Writing Culture." *Artistic Research and Literature*, edited by Corina Caduff and Tan Wälchli, Brill, 2019, pp. 161–72. https://doi.org/10.30965/9783846763339_015

Meunier, Karolin. "Speaking Candour." *You Must Make Your Death Public. A Collection of Texts and Media on the Work of Chris Kraus*. Edited by Mira Mattar. Mute Books, 2015, pp. 75–86.

Miller, M.H. "The Novelist as Performance Artist: On Chris Kraus, the Art World's Favorite Fiction Writer." *The Observer*, 30 Oct. 2012.http://observer.com/2012/10/the-novelist-as-performance-artist-on-chris-kraus-the-art-worlds-favorite-fiction-writer/. Accessed 26 Feb. 2022.

Montesquieu, Charles de Secondat, and Antoine Adam. *Lettres Persanes*. Librairie Droz, 1965.

Morris, Davis. "Kraus Uncut. On Semiotext(e), Disclosure and Not-Knowing." *You Must Make Your Death Public. A Collection of Texts and Media on the Work of Chris Kraus*. Edited by Mira Mattar. Mute Books, 2015, pp. 107–118.

Ovid. *Heroides ; and, Amores*. Edited by Grant Showerman and G. P Goold, 2nd ed., Harvard University Press, 1977.

Phillips, Siobhan. “Intimacy, Epistolarity, and the Work of Queer Mourning in James Schuyler's Poetry.” *Journal of Modern Literature*, vol. 42, no. 3, 2019, pp. 55–73.

Poletti, A. “The Anthropology of the Setup: A Conversation with Chris Kraus.” *Contemporary Women's Writing*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2016, pp. 123–135.

Rattray, David. *How I Became One of the Invisible*. Semiotext(e), 2019.

Riccoboni Marie Jeanne de Heurles Laboras de Mezières, and Joan Hinde Stewart. *Lettres De Mistriss Fanni Butlerd*. Droz, 1979.

Richardson, Samuel. *Clarissa, or, the History of a Young Lady*. Edited by Angus Ross, Penguin Books, 1985.

Richardson, Samuel. *Pamela: Or, Virtue Rewarded*. Garland Pub, 1974.

Rimanelli, David. “I Love Dick.” Artforum International 36, no. 7, Spring 1998, p. 7.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Julie ou La Nouvelle Héloïse*. Garnier-Flammarion, 1967.

Rower, Ann. *If You're a Girl.* Semiotext(e), 1990.

Sayers, Philip. *Authorship's Wake: Writing After the Death of the Author*. 2018. University of Toronto, PhD dissertation.

Schwarz, H, and A Balsamo. “Under the Sign of Semiotext(e): The Story According to Sylvere Lotringer and Chris Kraus.” *Critique -Minneapolis Then Atlanta Then Washington-*, vol. 37, no. 3, 1996, pp. 205–221.

Soloway, Jill and Sarah Gobbins, directors. *I Love Dick.* Amazon Video, 2017.

“stalk, v.1.” *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, December 2021, www.oed.com/view/Entry/188824. Accessed 28 February 2022.

“stalker, n.” *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, December 2021, www.oed.com/view/Entry/188828. Accessed 28 February 2022.

Stanley, Liz. “The Epistolary Gift, the Editorial Third-Party, Counter-Epistolaria: Rethinking the Epistolarium.” *Life Writing*, vol. 8, no. 2, 2011, pp. 135–152., doi:10.1080/14484528.2011.559732.

Sullivan, Ryan D. “Not You: Frank O’hara and the Poetics of ‘Personism’.” *Textual Practice*, vol. 34, no. 3, 2020, pp. 419–436.

Sykes, Rachel. “‘Who Gets to Speak and Why?’ Oversharing in Contemporary North American Women's Writing.” *Signs*, vol. 43, no. 1, 2017, pp. 151–174.

The Portuguese Letters. Translated by Donald D. Ericson. Barreno, Maria Isabel, et al. *The Three Marias : New Portuguese Letters.* Bantam, 1976, pp. 339-362.

Todd, Janet. *The Sign of Angellica : Women, Writing, and Fiction, 1660-1800*. Columbia University Press, 1989.

Twemlow, Nick. “I Love Poets.” *Poetry*. 23 July 2013. https://www.poetryfoundation.org/harriet-books/2013/07/i-love-poets-an-interview-with-chris-kraus. Accessed 26. Feb. 2022.

Walsh, Joanna. “I Love Dick by Chris Kraus Review – a Cult Feminist Classic Makes Its UK Debut.” *The Guardian*, 11 Nov. 2015. www.theguardian.com/books/2015/nov/11/i-love-dick-chris-kraus-review. Accessed 26. Feb 2022.

Wark, McKenzie. “I Love Dick.” *Public Seminar*, 25 Aug. 2016. www.publicseminar.org/2016/08/ild/. Accessed 26 Feb. 2022.

Watt, Ian, and Ralph Ellison. *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding*. University of California Press, 1957.

Zaczek, Barbara Maria. *Censored Sentiments : Letters and Censorship in Epistolary Novels and Conduct Material.* University of Delaware Press, 1997.

Zembla, Nic. "See Dick Sue." *New York Magazine*, 17 Nov. 1997, pp. 20.