

Kakaesque Journal vol. 1

Jacqueline Ross

Origin Story for Franz Kaka

He met her in the alley and handed her a napkin. He told her they had some important business to attend to.

What kind of business? she asked, her eyes dumb like lozenges. She unfolded the napkin and saw that it held a map: a rectangle with a hundred arrows leading this way and that.

He asked her what she would do with a million dollars.

I never ever want to be ri—she started, but her imagination betrayed her: already, on her tongue, the taste of a ripe peach in winter, the soft spray of one of those shower heads that reproduced the feeling of rain. He touched her arm lightly and pointed at a concrete fortress way up on the hill. They would break in under the new moon, he said. They would break in tonight.

She hesitated. The last time she'd done anything illegal, she'd been thirteen smoking pot with her granny in a garage. She was fourtee—I mean, forty, now—and he was either twenty, or twelve. She felt an adrenaline in her body that she hadn't felt in years.

But no one makes it in there, she said, full of doubt. He countered by telling her a story about freedom. Something about leading a full and authentic life.

They packed some sesame snaps for the journey and headed out on the dirt path towards the castle. The trail was dark and full of owls. On her phone, she received a text message alerting her to the presence of the aurora borealis, but though she craned and craned and craned her neck, she never saw it.

An hour had passed when they realized they'd been circling the castle for days.

I thought you had a map! she cried, realizing to her horror that the map in their possession was impossibly cryptic, or worse—that it resembled conceptual art. She excused herself around the far side of a tree trunk to cry, while her friend took an insouciant piss on the opposite side, so used, as he was, to aimlessness and dead ends.

They were so busy relieving themselves they never even heard the artist approach, freshly drunk on free wine tapped from the castle cellar.

Oye! he slurred. Which way to town? I promised to fetch one more painting and install it for His Highness before sunrise!

They approached him cautiously and circled, shark-like. You've just come from The Castle? they said in unison.

The artist grinned and gestured sloppily in the direction from which he'd come. There, in the peat moss, there appeared a small door.

The two friends leapt towards it, but not before the artist had managed to fall, laughing, to the ground, grabbing hold of the woman's right ankle and coiling his big body around it. I'm just so...tired, he giggled deliriously while she cursed, dragging her heavy appendage through the ferns. I have to get to town, I have to finish the installation, I have to, to finish it, tonight...he stuttered.

They pushed open the door and found themselves in a brightly-lit room smelling strongly of wet paint, its walls a fresh coat of gallery white. A couple of workmen in spacesuits or scrubs bumped around carrying long fluorescent tube lights.

Ta-da! the artist said, his cheeks brightening or else already flushed from drink. Welcome to my castle!

The two of them frowned. *Your* castle?

The artist got up from the ground and spun around the room, serenading a host of colourful abstract canvasses. He retrieved a hammer from a trolley and tapped an impossibly long nail into the wall, then retrieved a painting from a box and hung it up proudly, stepping back to admire his rather childish creation.

You told me there'd be treasure, the woman whispered to her friend. You told me we'd be rich.

At least there's art here, he whispered back. I've heard this stuff's valuable.

She pawed at the bare walls with her clammy hands in desperation, looking for some hidden door that would reveal to her the real castle, the one full of jewels. But the gallery chamber was sealed tight like a tomb, windowless and subterranean, with no way to go but back. A trap, she thought briefly, pondering the legacy of her short life, while outside, the imperceptible sun was likely beginning to rise.

Her friend put his arm around her shoulders and did his best to console her. Come on, he said, maybe no one makes it into the castle. You said so yourself—it probably doesn't even exist...

She looked at him, dumbfounded, her eyes lozenge-like, unblinking. She'd just about had it with him and his existential bullshit. His lack of perseverance and deep lack of faith.

To demonstrate, she took a hammer to the wall, and, to her great delight, uncovered a secret tunnel behind it. She dove triumphantly into the hole with a stolen bottle of Veuve Clicquot.

Franz, she called back, as the gallery guests were just beginning to arrive, sunlight streaming in through the open door.

Franz Kaka, she said, You're so full of shit!

Jacquelyn Ross, 2017

Aryen Hoekstra

Sunk costs

It was delivered in the middle of the night.

I arrived the next morning to find it sitting across from me, all slick of surface. It was perched atop an MDF pedestal that was painted to fool me into thinking it might have been mahogany. A long stainless steel faucet stretched itself out to sparkle under the bright fluorescents. I'll admit that I knew its unconventional placement was a bit awkward, and that Kevin would object. I knew that it would always be a point of conversation and would probably distract from whatever other objects found their way into the basement. But as I thought about it more I decided that there's really nothing wrong with a "conversation piece," and that if it stayed I'd be fine with it. There was something oddly compelling about its *sinkiness*. Whatever it was, its presence seemed to elicit some sort of connection to the city outside of the basement, leaving Wade Ave through its copper pipes, traversing pumping stations and water mains, and rushing me back out to Lake Ontario. Tluck ... tlock.

The following morning I found a lack where my ceramic gallerymate had been the day before. Sitting back at the desk I stared at the two pipes left exposed while I fiddled with a paper clip, squeezing the inner "U" shape with my thumb until I could bend it backwards and stand it upright. Kevin must have called Gino to have it moved, and now only the pipes — one hot, one cold — remained. I twisted the paper clip between my thumb and middle finger, flicking it with my index. Tluck ... tlock. A few flats of beer for that night's opening were still to be delivered, so I'd resigned myself to sitting and waiting all afternoon. My mind began to drift, speculating about what reception might await this inaugural show. A suite of works from an under appreciated painter from just outside the GTA. Maybe a painting show was too conservative for our first exhibition?

Maybe it should have been someone more international? Or, someone even more local who would draw a crowd. Someone that people *know*. No, this is good work I thought, and if *they* don't get it, they're fools. My middle finger slipped and the paper clip spun loose, skipping into the vacant space left by our dearly departed sink.

I stood to fetch the clip. A few short paces that I now know to have been. As I bent down to retrieve the mangled fastener, the pipes began to shake and in quick succession a THUMP WHOOP CLANG was unleashed, and my hands rushed to clasp the sides of my head, struggling to shield my eardrums from that godawful sound. It didn't matter though, as the sound was only the beginning. The patinated copper had shaken off the ties that bound it to the wall and jumped toward me with a rusted lurch. The two pipes criss-crossed to curl up around my limbs. Hot on one side, cold on the other. They spun me 'round so I was left constrained and immobile staring back at the empty desk. I could feel a pressure building in the pipes, but couldn't tell if they were constricting around me, or if my body was expanding between them. They pierced my skin, passing through flesh and bone in search of some biomechanical synthesis. I had no recourse but to give myself over. I felt water rushing through my circulatory system, which had already been transformed into some intricate network composed of copper and lead. I heard a knock at the door and attempted to call out, but water poured from where my mouth had been. Tluck ... tlock.

Hours later I regained consciousness and saw four flats of beer by the door, which must have been left for us when no response was heard. More time passed and at around 5:00pm another knock came and the the door pushed open with a firm "Hello?" Our first guest had arrived unfashionably early. A freelance writer demanding a glass of wine and an explanation, though I knew they rarely published anything. Tluck ... tlock. "The artist is interested in a differential space that exists in excess of language, a formlessness that might occur outside of the human," I gurgled. Bewilderment crawled across their face. Was my description too opaque I wondered, or was my recent transformation the culprit. They walked the room and finished their wine. "Thanks" they said, placing an empty glass in my basin before grabbing their bag. "Tell your friends" I bubbled back. A kind of stupid response that was probably more toilet than sink. A shitty start to our newest venture.

Aryen Hoekstra, 2017

Catherine Telford-Keogh

The Conglomerate

"Look, hon-knee-bun!" Hal sputtered enthusiastically pointing to the commercial on the screen. His supine pastel body, bereft of youth and vitality, was half-wedged between the wall and the side of the bed as if left to rot in that yellow room. Averting her eyes, Marlowe, a photographer for Modern Times Inc., artlessly held up his company

headshot slantwise so Hal could view it, which animated the real and imaginary communion.

Marlowe's eyes rotated toward the small flat screen affixed to the yellowing wall above the radiator. Its crenulated centre vibrated mechanically, filtering water, she surmised, from the showers of nearly 300 apartments above them. Her gaze was now locked on Hal's anthropomorphized portrait on the screen, frozen and propped up as if it were one of F.J. Gall's specimens.

"Ohh myyhh yess... My Gawd!" Marlowe replied with feigned excitement from the crack of her pursed lips, veiled in polyester. Hal smiled at her from the side of his mouth. Caught in this uncanny triad, Marlowe felt overexposed with reluctant empathy, she placed the photograph face up on the clunky brown hotel nightstand and recoiled to the other corner of the furrowed bed. She wrapped herself in the paisley polyester comforter wishing she had that kind of fervour for the cruel vicissitudes of this world.

A Cause

Thirteen years earlier, in July, The Conglomerate's nationwide mandate replaced Greeters with Customer Hosts to carry out an expanded repertoire of responsibilities in addition to embodying the guiding principles of corporate affect. Hal fully internalized the spirit of this new role, greeting each customer who entered those glass double doors with pleasant platitudes. Every shopper represented the attrition of his own life. He knew it was only a matter of time before his body, slackened and riddled with illness, would succumb to the pull of gravity and time.

In unquestionably the last stage before ineluctable cataclysm, the new administration sought to humanize The Conglomerate by designing a cute, inanimate, potato-like quasi-object, ready for hominoid transmutation, to be distributed in perpetuity as its logo. Although he was bleached and penniless from years of service, Hal's wizened characteristics and timeless expression, at least in his estimation, fit the objective template advertised by his employer.

There was no question that Hal, in his utter desperation and depravity, sold his likeness to be immortalized and proliferated for better or worse, in this new cartoonish potato-form—now called *Gatty*. The democratic model of upward mobility saturated his fantasies of the good life, where Hal could languish in bed for years at the Holiday Inn on piles of damp laundry and money. And so, *Gatty* became The Face of The Conglomerate, whose sister company was best known for processing the gelatine sold to Kraft Foods.

Screen Time

Hal's friendly grimace and carefully moisturized head, groomed for showmanship, were pasted on that potato. Floating in an androgynous manner across a billowy blue skyscape within the Panasonic frame, the avatar lifted its cartoonish hands. And from

above appeared the logotype: *Softique Beauty Blackberry Bath Beads*—a prehistoric brew of organic chia seeds and black quinoa saturated in watermelon-scented oil—in cursive green, as if written by GAWD.

Marlowe stared lifelessly and wide-eyed at the small electric flat screen with a controlled terror that knows no escape. She clenched the pistachio colored shopping bags, heaped on the red striated and filled with Hal’s necessities, with her long middle toe. No grin, no grimace, utterly lifeless. Utterly. Stunned by the impact of *Gatty*, and with eyes heavy like barbells, she sloughed off the rancid polyester comforter and gathered her tongueless shoes with no laces.

Leaving Hal and his fossilized loins, probably for the last time, was not without its sensitivities, even if it was for the best. Marlowe fiercely tucked her Klein Blue Modern Times Inc. polo into her rubbery black slacks and prepared to join the waiting mass of strangers trudging in rainsoaked garbage. What remained were images, of *Gatty* and others, delaminated from history and restaged in positions where their contextual grounds inevitably come bubbling up, obliquely or directly. It was not the fact that Hal would persist forever and everywhere as *Gatty*, nothing exists without its attachments, but that it was the symbol of Marlowe’s own dissolved assurances of the liberatory promise of representation.

Catherine Telford-Keogh, 2017

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Thank you for your sharp eye Katie Bethune-Leamen.

Katie Lyle

I am convinced there is a movie where an animal plays the role of an artist. At dinner we brainstormed ideas and I made a list on my phone of people's suggestions. These include; Mickey Mouse painting on a steamboat, *Fantasia*, *Frog and Toad*, *Bojack Horseman*, *Franklin the Turtle*, and *Angelina Ballerina*. Nothing about this list is quite right and I keep imagining a movie where a gorilla makes big expressive, gestural paintings. When I get back to the city I look online and find Congo, a chimpanzee who learned to paint in 1952 after the scientist and British Surrealist painter Desmond Morris gave him a pencil and paper. At age two, Congo started painting and drawing, eventually producing over 400 “artworks”, in a style described on his Wikipedia page as being Lyrical Abstract Expressionism.

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In June, the gallery screened an interview with the abstract painter Agnes Martin from 1974. At the time of its filming, Martin had returned to painting after a seven year absence and had recently relocated from New York City to rural New Mexico. Watching her answer the interviewer's questions in the bright sunlight of the studio, she was characteristically absolute and self assured. For Martin, making paintings is about clearing her mind of all distractions, including ideas, in order to make space for inspiration. Her delivery is forceful but the language can feel over-bright, and I wonder if authenticity can be worked towards in this way anymore.

Interrupting her speech, Martin takes a tissue from the inside of her sweater sleeve and wipes around the corners of her small mouth. The gesture is intimate and perhaps unconscious. A few minutes later, she ducks her head and leans closer to the camera, again wiping her mouth gently around the edges with a folded napkin. The action makes me think about spit and saliva. The attention to her mouth is sweetly distracting, and the mannerism feels like a different view, a seam in the film where the inside is coming outside.

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I am a very good sleeper now. In grade seven, I was so scared of not falling asleep I would put myself to bed at 6:00 pm in anticipation of tossing and turning for hours. Sometimes, I would go to bed in the middle of watching a movie, to punish myself in exchange for sleep. I would give up something I wanted in order to get something in return, but of course it didn't work. The agreement between myself and my other self sounds silly but it repeats a pattern of negotiation. I am constantly rewarding myself for work, bartering studio time for TV time. It's how I talk myself into getting things done. The complexity of the conversation means that some part of me is an artist and another part oversees and watches out for her, like a narrator in a film.

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I have started imagining a house where only a certain number of people can sleep at once. Whenever someone goes to bed someone else wakes up because the house requires it, demands it. That same feeling is always there in the studio, something is getting used up, might be used up, that I can't get back. Inspiration can't be bought or even negotiated for. It has no exchange value. I can't give it to you or take it away. You can't buy or trade or sell enough to ever get it. Certainly advantages in life allow more time for thinking, and the privilege to focus and ignore other kinds of work and life demands.

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In the video, Martin's hands look fragile, she is 62, but looks older. She talks about eliminating all distractions from life and I think about the contracts we make with ourselves as artists and if distraction is still such a bad thing. I wonder if she slept well at night.

Katie Lyle, 2017