

## Mechanistic

Somewhere in Brooklyn, New York, she complacently pulled the condom off his tired looking foreskin. It didn't seem as though he was in any rush to do so. It had been over ten minutes since they both climaxed and she had no desire to stare at the pale flaccidity in a bag full of white gel substance. There was nothing sexying, endearing or sweet about her assistance in this act. She rolled it up without giving voice to what she was about to do. Once off, she tied it in a knot at the top so the fluid wouldn't leak out, and routinely placed it on her desk, looking like a miniature bean bag chair, to dispose of in the morning. An act of she'd done so many times with so many bodies. Taking a condom off in almost a routine, mechanistic fashion in some odd display of indifference. A performative function in an attempt to conceal the true malignancy in the complacency of it all.

She didn't know when she'd become responsible for another's bodily post-colloidal clean up. Perhaps its because with age it all started to feel very chore-like - the sex, the groans, the ground maintenance, the brief non-invested kissing. Having been years since anything in her life symbolized a conventional monogamous relationship, sex in its verb form had become something close to mechanistic. The "verbing" of sex, divorced from the scrutiny of other activities often associated with romance, segmented from all that perhaps was meant to come before and after this human act of lust. In its isolated state it had become little more than a form of partnered calisthenics, she thought, with the ephemeral, albeit positive, byproduct of momentary physical euphoria.

Mechanistic- not her words but his. Him, being in his mid-40s, used this word in a non-romantic way to describe how fucking has gotten to be as he's aged. Ironically, he always shared this information in moments that, in her mind, were their unspoken, unconventional non-explicit dates. Quasi-romantic until severed by his unsolicited personal reflections. She thought about the vacancy of his words a year ago when they had first started to meet. She thought how she wanted nothing to do with someone who's descriptors for sex was analogous to verbage found in a George Orwell read.

A friend of her's in California once described her view on relationships. She would advise "Babe its survival of the fittest out there." This friend was not alluding to the competitive nature of the human mating pool, but rather the more selfish need to thrive. She saw the instinctual need for others as making use of one another to stay afloat, to keep one's head right above the constant possibility of destitute, despair, isolation, and loneliness. She often thought about how there were some she would fall in love with on an undeniably deeper level, leaving her spellbound and dopamine savaged, while others are merely functional, getting her from point A-to-B. In an ideal world, this added and challenged each other's resilience, rather than causing destruction, albeit such sentiment was only in the hands of the individual to decide its course.

Such a belief was possibly the reason behind why the interesting, funny, intelligent artist- who never failed at providing the much needed mentally stimulating company- persisted in her life. The company he provided, that she often craved, seemingly validated the transactionary, mechanistic sexual exchange. A feral form of compensation for engaging in company, to keep her from feeling any resemblance of her innate aloneness. Sex, one of the oldest forms of currency the human species might have. The currency that often, unannounced or indirectly, gets exchanged for those brief moments of togetherness with another, however simulated or performed they might be.

She knew, it would be easy to ladden such a disenchanting personal philosophy with critique and value judgment. However, the vulnerability in her ruminations deflected any indignation around arguments of self respect and love. "Togetherness", she contemplated, is what people wanted, often and always. Far more desirable when one doesn't have it and other times feigned when they do. In such passionate movement toward another, there seemed to be the constant lack of acknowledgement that steady, invested, consistent togetherness could only be maintained for brief windows. And yet, the ebbs and flows of potential momentary merging- the visceral response the body has when being seen, felt, and carried by another- maintains the never ending pulsation towards another. The constant pull toward the ever fleeting, potentially painful, ideally transcendental- shared experience.

No matter how many times one had been hurt, broken, unrecognized or unfulfilled by another, it somehow does not dissuade humans from longing or seeking another just once more, possibly as a form of potential refuge from the daily demands of the physical reality. While the physical, individual realities can be just as creative and rich as that within the refuge often found in others, there is a perpetual falling into the monotonous gloom that transpires when one end up on their own for too long. It becomes forgotten that the embrace of another can reinvigorate anything that had become rot. The use of the other for the existential uplift, nudges one another of the omnipresent magic that exists. No one is unique and no one is alone in this need for the encounter of the intimate, as a reminder of our existence.

The morning after her semi-jaded, yet still alluringly romantic bedmate left her apartment, she ended up taking a walk in a Brooklyn neighborhood she rarely frequented. Rarely, due to it's over-exposure of the young- professional, highly-established lifestyle she lived on the periphery of. On sunny Saturdays while traipsing through the adult wonderland she would become what felt like a privileged audience member of the stereotypical scene of weekend coupledness, glistening the streets with escapades of late brunch, afternoon gelatos, WholeFoods domestication, and stroller-pushing dads. On first impression, a quick snapshot of the still-life only appeared to infer to her that very few hearts in such a climate had been broken, with even fewer sleepless nights endured. However, if she stayed for long enough, even in the idyllic scenery of urbanite togetherness, she took care to notice that this form of vowed commitment could also be mechanistic. Such display of impressions kept concealed what does not want to be revealed.

It was easier to perceive the longing of others on dreary overcast afternoon. Traipsing through the damp city streets, suddenly, everyone she encountered, passed or locked eyes would communicate their pain, struggles, and challenges. When moving through a city inhabited by millions- millions of strangers and for her, a stranger to their strangeness, this sudden reveal of complexity of one another humanness had the power to transform the impersonal to that of the personal once more. There became the piercingly warm realization that no one is immune from the pain of disconnect. No one is immune to the constant pull back toward togetherness. No one can ever feel entirely mechanistic as their core.