



AN ISSUE OF COOL

FROSTY
MIDDLE SCHOOL

COLD HARD SCIENCE

THE **WARM NOBILITY** OF THE PUNKS

A TASTY & CHILLED SALAD

PHOTOGRAPHS OF **EXPENSIVE ICE**

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KRONOS TO EARTH, ABOUT THE COVER PHOTO

"This is a shot I took on a photowalk a couple of months ago - the car caught my eye. It's a bit of history, my own too — cars from around the time that this one was made were still running around frequently when I was an urchin — and I wanted to get a record of it. A light rain started while I was taking the picture, but I think that actually helped the shot!"

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All Mefites were kept hydrated during the production of this issue.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

When summer rolls around, cool becomes a personal obsession. This is especially true when I'm working on the magazine, in my office with the west windows. I rig elaborate fans and cardboard channels; I swaddle my head with ridiculous ice pack and towel turbans.

Now, as an exercise in magical thinking, the issue is a failure. It did not feel any cooler working on it, though Essexjan's salad (pg. 18) helped. But Springload's introduction to supercooling (pg. 10) only seemed to emphasize the heat — how could I be comfortable at 308° kelvin?

We also have four takes on figurative cools. Cortex's essay takes on cool as lived by middle schoolers (pg. 4), Potomac Avenue writes about three noble punk albums (pg. 14), I ask an artist about icy emptiness (pg. 20), and the more oblique meditation on social networking by Afroblanco (pg. 8). Hopefully those readers in the Southern Hemisphere will appreciate a less literal take as they trudge through winter into spring.

Honestly, while I think the pieces we've run in this issue are as strong as any other issue, this is the first one that's smaller than prior. Whether "cool" was too nebulous or whether the upcoming games issue has overshadowed this one is unclear, but we are all really looking forward to the games issue, which will make this one look like the proverbial pre-mushroom Mario.

Chill to the next episode.

[+]

[KlangKlangston](#) (Josh Steichmann)



A close-up photograph of several fish, likely trout or salmon, being grilled on wooden skewers. The fish are arranged vertically, with their heads pointing downwards. They are coated in a light-colored seasoning, possibly salt or a dry rub. The background is dark and out of focus, with a hint of a red object at the top. The overall lighting is warm, highlighting the texture of the fish and the skewers.

COMMENT

By cortex (Josh Millard)

I pull my hand back at the last moment. I hate myself immediately for doing that.

For my first year and a half of middle school, I got on the bus most days wearing one of two or three pairs of sweatpants and one of a handful of T-shirts, picked out on a whim, most of the time from off of the floor where I had left them days earlier. My shoes were budget Velcros from Volume Shoe Source. My hair was short, barber-cut, greasy and unbrushed. My apathy about personal presentation bordered on antipathy: To the extent that I cared at all about the idea of dressing for others' sake, it was a kind of seething, visceral rejection of what struck me as a lot of time and energy and money wasted on falseness and superficiality.

I was content to wear those same sweatpants, those same shirts, those same cheap Velcro shoes every day, to save myself the effort of being choosy about clothes or bothering with my hair, so that I could spend that time on books and video games instead, so that I could roll out of bed just in time to put on whatever was in reach and slurp down a bowl of cereal and get to the bus stop. It was simple. It was efficient. Given how little I was enjoying middle school, I felt like there was some sort of justice in refusing to reward the institution with any more effort than was strictly required.

In grade school, I had been a distractible, ebullient kid with no fashion sense but a good sense of humor; I huddled under bushes with friends and argued over who had what cybernetic ability; I made jokes in class; I shot around the blacktop during recess, lining up for games of wallball or doing cherry drops off the high bar or losing games of king of the hill on the balance beam.

I lurked at the periphery of drama, more commentator than participant when a girl chased a boy or vice versa, taking in the spectacle of my friends and classmates coauthoring simulacra of adult narratives in small klatches by the tire swings or on the kickball court or under the monkey bars. I was fascinated by the soap operatics, but also disquieted on a gut level that this was turning into something different from what I had always thought of the playground as being — something less fun, something with higher stakes.

But in the fifth grade, I was deeply uncool and it didn't particularly matter; a few people might care, but they were too busy making friends or enemies of each other to worry about the bulk of the kids just being kids.

It's middle-school commencement; we're eighth-graders for maybe another two hours. We're all lined up in a broad hallway in Franklin High School, a couple hundred 13- and 14-year-old boys and girls dressed up for our parents, for posterity, boys in dress shirts and even ties, or in less formal, more stylish things, girls in dresses or skirts or slacks. No uniform, no real uniformity even, but everyone on the same page: Dress nice. Not like a schoolkid. Dress like a young adult. Dress like you're growing up.

I'm in a white button-down long-sleeve shirt and black trousers, what I have come to think of as my Band Concert clothes, what I'd put on three times a year for a seasonal recital with 60 other kids in a middle-school gym. I don't like the outfit, not when I'm dutifully plowing through the second clarinet part for some holiday medley and not when I'm lined up in this high-school hallway with the rest of the eighth-grade student body. The collar chokes me, the shirt tucked in looks ridiculous to me, the pants feel too airy compared to the jeans I've taken to wearing. I untuck the shirt at my first opportunity and let the tails hang out, a minimal rebellion against the formality of the situation.

We're waiting to file into the Franklin auditorium, where our families are already finding their seats and checking the film in their cameras and the batteries in their camcorders. By whatever chance of grouping, I am standing near a friend of mine and two other boys who are far cooler than I am. My friend is cooler than I am as well, but he is a social bridge here; we have known each other since I moved to town at 7, played together as grade-schoolers, sat next to each other as clarinetists through years of band rehearsal. The friends of my friend are at least friendly to me, in this context where we are all nervy and waiting and contemplating an end to middle school and the next year as freshmen scattered to the various high schools in the area.

And so we stand around, joking and watching our classmates and pretending not to be nervous, and I am elated by this sudden social miracle, this extension, however temporary, of the borderlines of cool to annex me into this small group. We talk about music I don't listen to, movies I haven't seen, clothes I don't wear, and I nod along with all of it and make the occasional safe wry comment that doesn't reveal my ignorance of the details.

The salutatorian walks by, a girl I have a tremendous secret crush on, whip-smart and beautiful and beyond all that a girl who never seems to notice how uncool I am, a girl who laughs at my bad puns in history class not out of politeness, but because she actually gets them. She's a poised, olive-skinned figure in a simple straight white gown, some elegant ghost of a Gatsby party. My heart races.

One of the guys I'm standing with makes some shitty remark to her as she passes. I say nothing, and watch her disappear into the auditorium to get ready for her speech.

There was a day in the seventh grade when, out of class for a minute with a hall pass, I ran into a new kid in the hall. He was a transfer student, confused about where he was supposed to be going. I gave him directions, then ran into him again a couple more times in the next few days. He was friendly enough; I considered him a safe bet for social interactions on the strength of having helped him out and his not having treated me badly in response. Safe bets were hard to come by.

Later, in the cafeteria, an older girl cut in line ahead of me. Whether I muttered "bitch" soundlessly under my breath or just thought about it, I can no longer remember; what I do remember is being bothered by the unfairness of people cutting in line, and the taboo thrill of trying to use curses to balance the scales, if only in some small, symbolic way.

What I remember is bragging to this new kid, this friendly, lost-in-the-halls compatriot, that I had called this girl a bitch for cutting in line. I remember him challenging me on it, asking, did I really do that? And what girl? I remember suddenly regretting my brag, not wanting it to grow beyond a moment of discreetly shared bluster, a little slice of coolness-for-two that no one else needed to know about.

He asked, "What girl?" I nodded in the general direction of her table. He pointed: "Who, that one?" I don't remember whether I even looked. Looking seemed like a good way to attract bad attention. What if she was looking back?

What I remember is this new kid going over to their table and trading up, selling me out for credit with these kids. They were the rebel kids, the specific stratum of middle-school cool distribution that dressed older than everyone else, cared less than everyone else, took less shit than anyone else. The new kid bought in to that circle with my stupid brag, and starting that day I was a target on the blacktop, those half-dozen grunge-styling kids taking whatever opportunity they could to make me uncomfortable, to get in my face. To notice and mock my sweatpants, my Velcros, my mussed hair.

One day I decided that I could disappear by giving myself a makeover. I wore jeans. I wore a different shirt, something clean and a little more grown-up. I combed my hair. I wore a knockoff Starter jacket, Minnesota Vikings purple, that my aunt had given me. I did my best to not be me. I made an unstudied cargo-cult effort to build up a moat of Cool, or at least of Less-Uncool — to flip some switch that would tell people to leave me alone, to play the game however much I loathed it if it would save me grief.

It didn't work. The new taunt was that I was dressing up for her, for the girl I had called a bitch, that I wanted her to be my girlfriend. That became the game, worse somehow than even the generic mockery had been. I remember being confronted with hot-and-cold barbs and questions from the group of them, choked up with confusion and embarrassment near double doors into the school, wanting to find some way to just take it all back and knowing that wasn't going to work. I was an easy target.

I spent most of the rest of that year killing recess time reading in the library, or using the practice closet in the band room, or doing anything else that kept me out of sight. They were older kids, mostly. She was an older kid. The next year would be better; they'd have gone on to high school.

But I kept brushing my hair; I kept thinking a little more about my clothing. I kept trying to build that moat, to play the game, to find some compromise between wanting to be myself and wanting to be left alone. The sweatpants went out of commission — the mottled gray baggy ones, the bright red felt ones with the white piping down the sides that looked like a marching-band uniform. I stopped wearing my favorite shirt, an oversize Redskins V-neck. I got shoes with laces.

At one point, in what felt at the time like an unbelievable coup, I got a pair of Reebok Pumps cheap. Then I found out that nobody gave a shit whether I had Pumps; that was so two years ago. But at least they weren't Velcro.

We're sitting in the Franklin High School auditorium, lights dimmed throughout except for the bright washes and spots lighting up the stage's assemblage of faculty in their academic gowns and hats, the stacks of middle-school diplomas on a card table, the podium from which the girl in the white dress has given her salutatory speech, telling us that we are moving on, growing up, proceeding along the path toward the adventure of adulthood.

In the dark, my friend and I and his friends sit in the front row of the leftmost column of seats, watching while our classmates walk one at a time across the stage to take their paper and shake the hands of the principal and vice principal.

We joke and cheer and bullshit and wait for our own section to queue up.

Our front-row seats put us along the path all the kids take as they exit the stage and return to their seats; when friends of the other guys come past, they lean forward, right hands extended, to deliver victory-lap fives. I lean forward with them, give some skin along with them. It feels like a pose, but it's a pose that has me making contact with cool kids, a pose that hasn't gotten me mocked all day by guys from whom I'd ordinarily expect mostly mockery.

Another kid's name gets called. He walks across the stage stiffly, determined and too quickly, conspicuously square in a tucked plaid shirt and trousers and with his hair combed down—and that's that kid's whole middle-school experience in a nutshell. He is a withdrawn, unliked, uncool kid, treated universally with disdain for as long as I can recall. He treats this walk across the stage like he has treated school: like something to just get through and get over with.

In three years as classmates, I never have a real conversation with him, never learn his actual story — I hear rumors that his parents are dead, that that's why he's so gloomy and weird — but I know him very well as someone who has the same caginess in his way of being that I feel inside myself, of a kid who is on the bottom rung of the ladder and knows it as well as anyone, who gets reminded daily that he's social fodder that other people can trade against for a little cachet or an easy group laugh.

When this kid comes down off the stage and heads along the return path, my friend and his friends lean forward with a hand out. I'm surprised at that, but it's not the first time I've been surprised this afternoon. I don't hesitate to lean forward as well, to hold my hand out, to smile at the kid, to think to myself in that moment that here we are, both of us lonely survivors of this whole strained mess of an adolescence.

Both of us being so used to keeping our heads down and our eyes peeled for the latest bit of incoming casual cruelty from our peers, both of us having a stroke of luck on this last day, recipients somehow of the kind of decency and human kindness that had so consistently been absent from the average school day, week after month after year.

And as he passes us, his own hand held out in what seems like as much surprise as I'm feeling myself, my friend and his cool friends pull their hands back at the last moment. And without knowing why I'm doing it, I follow their lead.

I pull my hand back at the last moment. I hate myself immediately for doing that. MFm

MeTa Bits

A list of news and notes
culled from MetaTalk in July



- There was a small shout-out to the thoughtful comments in a thread on autism, aspergers and empathy.
- Back in the '70s, there was a conceptual art piece titled Meta Filter. Yes, you read that right.
- A strange coincidence occurred with a comment. Were there others?
- Matt got into a fight with gravity, guess who won? Now guess who told him stories to pass the time as he mended.
- It's that time of the year, where MetaFilter celebrates its anniversary. This time, a very special domain was acquired for all to share their memories.
- Discussion about the three minute edit window continued.
- Want to be part of an accountability check-in group? Go here.
- Mefites talked about and linked to their shiny new Google+ accounts. Join the circle!
- Willamette Week interviewed Matt Haughey and the MeFi podcast interviewed Dom the intern.
- Metacupla asked for a guidepost in a stroll down the memory lane of the site.
- The data sorting hat appeared suddenly, offering to tell Mefites just how many words they've written on the site.
- Looking for weekly cooking menus? So was The Dutchman!
- Loquacious propositioned MeTa for a separate sex category in AskMe, not that there's anything wrong with that.
- The MeFiSwap deadline arrived and Mefites showed off their track lists and CD covers. MFm

Why I Won't Be Quitting Facebook on "Quit Facebook Day"

by Afroblanco

Oh Facebook,
what you give me:
people whom I knew
but couldn't recognize,
and social anxieties I never even knew
existed.

Oh Facebook,
just the other day I logged on
and saw that somebody I didn't know
liked my comment on another friend's status
and my immediate reflex
was to check my security settings
to make sure nothing had changed.

Oh Facebook,
through which I know now
that all of those people I knew in high school
are still alive and doing things
(when, in fact, I thought they had all
disappeared).

Oh Facebook,
you have invented entirely new forms of narcissism —
although, amongst online communities
you are hardly alone.

Oh Facebook,
how free you are...
and, in many ways,
how I wish that you weren't.



Jessamyn

THE SCIENCE

BY SPRINGLOAD (MARTIN GUSTAFSSON)

Low-temperature physicists don't use the scales of Celsius and Fahrenheit, partly because they don't convey the extra effort it takes to cool things from -270°C (-454°F) down to -273°C (-459.4°F). You have to switch to kelvins to notice that those temperatures differ by a factor of twenty, and that -274°C is a temperature too low to even exist. 0 K (-459.67°F) is as low as temperatures go, and the closer you get, the harder it becomes to cool down further. For the benefit of American readers, all temperatures are given in Fahrenheit in addition to kelvin. To go from kelvin to Celsius, just add the number 273.15.

The inside of a dilution refrigerator, capable of reaching down to 20mK (0.04 degF above absolute zero).

IT'S EASY TO cool things to 77 K (-321°F). You just pour yourself a cup of liquid nitrogen and toss in whatever you want to freeze. The nitrogen will keep boiling in the cup, and if you spill some on the floor, the droplets move quickly like water on a hot stove. You can dip your fingers in it, and even put some in your cupped hand for a short while, protected by the cushion of gas that forms as the nitrogen boils off. As the liquid turns into gas, it wants to expand almost a thousand times, so you shouldn't gargle it even though that looks cool, because if you swallow even the smallest amount you will blow up like a balloon.

Already at this temperature, chemistry has almost ceased to happen. Plastics and organic matter become hard and brittle but metals remain as sturdy as ever, in spite of what the Terminator II movie may have led you to believe. A few rare substances get superconducting already up at this relatively high temperature, and then you can levitate magnets on top of them. This trick is quite popular with undergraduates visiting the lab. They also like to play with nitrogen in a cup, making frozen bubbles and foam, and cooling and crushing whatever soft objects they brought with them. When the students are gone and all the nitrogen has boiled off, we are usually left with a sludge of coffee, wash-up liquid, and a hundred tiny pieces of banana and pencil eraser.

Other than for show, we don't use liquid nitrogen on its own as much as you may think, simply because it's a bit too hot. Since it's cheap and abundant, we use it to pre-cool vessels and equipment, so we don't waste too much liquid helium, the next step down on the temperature ladder. It's not quite as straight-forward to use as liquid nitrogen, because it's not as cheap and doesn't have the same cooling capacity. You have to insulate it well and not expose it to too much light. Still, if you dip something in liquid helium, it's quickly going to cool down to 4.2 K (-452°F). We do that quite a lot, either to just test something quickly, or as a starting point for cooling things further.

A neat thing about 4.2 K is that several metals are superconducting at this temperature. That means they have no resistance to electrical current, and in contrast with the ceramics that superconduct in liquid nitrogen, you can actually fashion these metals into proper wire. This is

OF THE SUPERCOOL

useful for making electromagnets, which are tightly wound coils of wire producing magnetic fields when electrical currents are passed through them. With normal metal wire, the coil gets too hot and burns too much power before you get to any impressive magnetic field. Superconducting wire, on the other hand, doesn't merely have very low resistance, but no resistance whatsoever. You can conveniently flow a hundred amperes through the wire, and once you are happy with the magnetic field, you put a superconducting short-circuit across the coil. Then you can remove the power supply if you like, and the current just keeps flowing endlessly through the coil, which then works like a permanent magnet with enough power to rip buttons out of your pants.

Helium cryostats used to be made out of glass, and the senior Russian physicists working in the lab had glassblowing as a mandatory subject of their schooling. Nowadays, all research cryostats are built from stainless steel, but we keep a glass cryostat for teaching purposes, where you can see the helium through double vacuum walls and a layer of liquid nitrogen (which is there to protect the helium from heat radiation).

Helium doesn't bend light as much as water, so it can be a bit difficult to spot the surface of the liquid. The visibility increases a lot when you attach a pump to the vessel to remove the helium gas that boils away — as you pump on it bubbles are formed all throughout the helium bath. At the same time the liquid gets colder and colder, because there is almost no gas above it that can push back atoms trying to escape up through the surface. The fastest atoms in the liquid are the ones capable of breaking loose and leaving through the pump and those are exactly the ones we want to get rid of. We want to keep only the slow atoms, because slow means cold, and cooling stuff is what we do.

After a while of pumping, the bubbling becomes

more intense and then, in an instant, it stops entirely. This happens at 2.2 K (-455.8°F), when helium goes superfluid and starts behaving as a quantum mechanical unity. The superfluid helium climbs over walls and moves freely through capillaries that are too narrow for any liquid or gas to pass through. It's a phenomenon that cannot be explained in any sensible everyday way, and is the cause of some headache, since the vessels we use don't have to be just "gas tight" or "helium tight" but "superfluid helium tight," which is another level of tightness altogether, especially since seals and joints tend to shift under thermal stress.

The reason it stops bubbling, by the way, is that the heat conductance of superfluid helium is enormous. For there to be a bubble at some point in the fluid, that part must be slightly warmer than the rest, and superfluid helium just transfers heat too well for that to happen. That's why they use it to cool the magnets in the Large Hadron Collider — it moves swiftly through the system and cools a magnet as well as if it had been cast right into a giant copper heatsink.

Now, you can get to 1.3 K (-457.3°F) with the pumping method, but that's a hard stop, and still not cool enough to do really cool experiments. To go further down, we must turn from helium-4 to its more exotic sibling, helium-3.

Helium-4 is the regular balloon-style helium, and it comes out of natural gas wells as a by-product. Helium-3 is the lighter isotope (same number of protons but one less neutron), and does not come from wells but from hydrogen bombs. This adds a political slant to its production and consumption. The handful of countries able to produce it don't give out statistics on the amounts, since that would reveal the size of their nuclear stockpiles. When both Russia and the U.S. suddenly stopped their exports a few years ago, it caused quite a stir in the world of cryogenics.

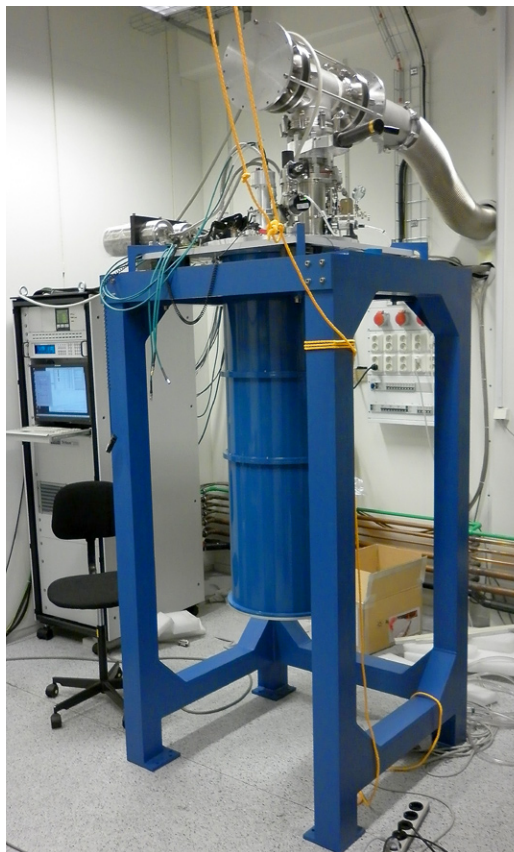


Yes, that's a floating magnet

Before that, we used to pay about USD200 for a litre of gas at normal atmospheric pressure. Overnight, the price went up by a factor of 20, and nobody is really sure what amounts are available and from where.

Losing helium-3 to the atmosphere is frowned upon, so we keep it in closed systems and think twice before opening valves that say “No,” “Think!” or “Don’t.” The pumping trick we did with helium-4 still works though: we can pump a pot of helium-3 to a little below 0.3 K (-459.1°F), but the real benefit comes when you mix the two helium varieties together and pump them around in a complicated system of heat-exchangers and pre-cooling stages. That’s a “dilution fridge,” a serious and expensive piece of research equipment. It typically has a vacuum chamber sitting in a big bath of liquid helium-4, and inside that chamber hangs the sophisticated cooling unit that gets down to 10-20mK (-459.652 to -459.634°F . See the problem with this?).

Cooling one of the big dilution fridges around here boils off helium equivalent to roughly ten thousand party balloons. In a year, that sums up to a Goodyear blimp, and there are several fridges like that in the lab. For a long time, all this gas was allowed to escape into the air, rising



A modern dilution fridge, which does not dip into liquid helium but has an internal cooler that goes to 3K instead.

steadily through the atmosphere never to see the surface of earth again. These days, we collect it in an enormous plastic bag and turn it to liquid again in an even more expensive machine that sprawls over two floors in the basement.

To go further down in temperature, you need to hang an additional magnetic cooling stage from the coldest part of the dilution fridge, but hardly anyone seems to think it’s worth the trouble. Laser cooling can get to lower temperatures still, but then you just have a little cloud of atoms sitting still in the middle of a light beam. You can’t use that to cool things, like erasers, bananas, and quantum mechanical electronic circuits.

The quantum circuits can be sheets of carbon a single atom thick, parts of a quantum computer, transistors sensitive to a millionth of an electron charge, or probes for sound that is as quiet as quantum law permits. They are the reasons we go through all the trouble of pumping and cooling, because they all rely on weak and precious physical effects that would be drowned in noise if the temperature were even a degree above absolute zero. We respect their need for chill and quiet, and they sometimes return the favour by springing to life and revealing something new about the workings of the world. MFM



250 liters of liquid helium, in a tank on wheels that gets moved between the different refrigerators.



-jf- (James Fiedler)





GOT MY OWN PRIVATE SUN

MOMENTS OF PUNK NOBILITY

BY POTOMAC AVENUE
(PETER HEYNEMAN)

IN 2001, I got into a public debate about rock and roll, the extended details of which are probably too nerdy to recount here, but the upshot is I found myself defending rock and roll against a cadre of classical scholars. We were talking about a line from “Beginning to See The Light” where Lou Reed bleats, “There’s a lot of problems in this Tiiime. But WHOOO none of them are mine!”

And this girl, this conservative girl, the kind who loved words with capitalized definite articles like The Good and The True, a girl with a brown bun and scared brown eyes and way too much self-discipline and restraint, asked the philosophy and music professors arrayed at the small table onstage, “What is Noble about this music? I can see why it’s fun,” she added, a nun addressing ass-to-mouth porn, “but this song is just so arrogant. Is this what we’re supposed to emulate: a sense of being better than everyone?”

But, but, but: Isn’t this the definition of nobility? You in your lumpy tweed-skirts, what do you know about being held apart from the polis? I didn’t say the second sentence. I did say: “That’s exactly it — it’s not being better than everyone, it’s being disconnected, free, because you’re so despised for being different. Even Chuck Berry” — I referred to another song on our discussion playlist, “Cool Breeze,” — “has this thing, this quality. What was noble about the 1950s if not Chuck Berry?” One of my favorite professors, a Hispanic ex-garage rock bassist from Southern Texas cut in with “The Korean War?” I gave him a withering smirk and the conversation went completely off the rails. From that moment on, for the rest of my 20s, whenever I heard, or was struck by, a line from punk rock, the genre VU’s swinging grooves arguably (inarguably) engendered, a line that contained the same sort of joyous disconnect from the common man, I filed it in my head as more evidence that these were the songs of the secret gentry, the oppressed Übermensch flicking his scepter at the mob conducting their surge as they overwhelm his throne. Here are three.

“People Say,” The Go-Betweens (’78 ‘til ’79: The Lost Album)

“People say I’m mad to want you, people say I’m mad to need you, people say I’m mad to love you.” And then, in his dry Melbournian Dylan drawl... “Baaaabe.” It’s a pretty straightforward song, choppy garage organ and tap-tapping Velvets beat. But the recording is so ragged one hears the scores of two chord 4-track composers that came after — sparking from New Zealand to Glasgow to Northampton to Bellingham. The idea that amateurishness equals authenticity wasn’t born on this track, but the idea that it equals rhetorical power was brand new.

“The clouds lie on their backs — and rain on everyone. But you always stay dry, you got your own private sun.” Probably he’s singing to himself — the you of the song has “got to improve.” But, just as probably, the sun is a parenthesis — a bridge between what “people say” and what the singer says is true about the beloved. She or he is a god, beyond approach, designed for worship, not something so disgustingly common as being someone’s boy- or girlfriend. Like in another exquisite Go-Betweens tune, ‘8 Pictures’ (“I shot you with my camera. Caught you doing things with him ... and you can’t complain, and you can’t cry, ‘cause cameras never lie”), the stalker and the stalkee are ennobled by the pursuit, as long as nobody sullies it by actually making physical contact or contacting the authorities. Our love is diseased, distant, perfect. And everybody knows.

“Retard Canard,” Born Ruffians (Say It, 2010)

“Honesty’s annoying most of the time. It’s better entertainment if you keep on lying.” Jungle drums, Canadian origin and Afrobeat ripoffs aside, these kids have much more in common with Reed’s dirty American heroin scumbag than Les Vampires de Le Ralph Lauren Weekend Collection. Lead singer Luke Lalonde has more disaffection in his uplifted pinkie on this track than most Metropolitan wannabes can cram into a whole album of wry upper-middle fingers to the world. “I don’t want to start a flame in your heart. I just want to set the world on fi-yah!”

What’s that? An Ink Spots reference? Indeed, the chorus is an inversion of that slick and polished pre-doo wop group’s most spooky video game soundtrack song that goes the other direction: “I’ve lost all ambition for worldly acclaim, I just want to be the one you love...” So instead Luke is all fuck that, gimme gimme gimme. Gimme the Prize! Who else was it that brought the pain rather than the comfort, the sword rather than the peace? Of course, Jesus wanted earthwide healing rather than glory, but you get the idea.

“It’s scary, to realize you’re not a member of the human raaaace. But you’re still running anyway. Retard canard, trying to fly far from home. It’s scary to realize you’re always alone but you’re still flying anyway.” The still-ugly duckling returns to the swan prom, unmated for life, to dump pig blood bombs on the pristine white backs of

those slow-dancin’ fools. Pathetic, sure. But still above, always above, even while burning out and fading away.

“I’m Gonna Punch You In The Face,” The Child Molesters (Bloodstains Across California, 1978)

The balance between sweet pop melody and harsh blues reality has always been the punk rock fifth column, even before the Ramones invented the harsh beauty of the distorted wall of guitars that everyone now associates with it. In 1978 a bunch of California surfer jerks wrote this novelty song as an ultimate expression of what I’m going to dub Noble Rage (cf. Nerd Rage, Posehn et al., 2006). As it sparkles with delightful, almost classical major-key guitar scales the singer goes “I’m gonna punch you in the face ... I can’t wait ... I’m really gonna show you who’s the boss ... when I make your face a total loss!” He’s growling, but it’s rip-roaringly joyful, not angry.

The same effect appears in the Angry Samoans’ “Lights Out,” only with self- rather than other-mutilation (“There’s nothing more you can leave behind/ So forget about seeing, get into your mind/ Everything looks better when the world is black/ Grab a fork, make the first attack/ Don’t worry much, just let it rip/ today your eyeballs do the lights out trip.”) Either way, it’s not a credible threat as much as it is a double subversion of violence and non-violence at the same time. Hooray for mindless bloody retaliation! Suicide can’t stop me! I’m scary, not scared. Korean War? More like Klinger in a dress! In this final stage of Nobility, tragedy, sin, death, hatred, everything gets subsumed in the pit of comedy and spit out as Fun (No, fun!). It’s fun to fight and suffer and die! Here let me show you — SSSSLAP!!

Coda

Years later, I ran into the aforementioned naïve conservative girl at a homecoming party at my old school. She was skinnier, married, a mom. We shared a stolen bottle of champagne on the cafeteria porch overlooking the soccer fields. Her life and work in the suburbs meant she drove many hours a day in a mini-van, her iPod plugged into the stereo-system pumping out indie rock panaceas that her kids were too young to appreciate — Death Cab, Ra Ra Riot, John Vanderslice — all the sad dudes mourning this emotional blankness in her.

She remembered our debate, and said that even though she always thought my argument was bullshit, my vehemence convinced her that rock music’s redemptive qualities might still be somewhat open to debate. More importantly I think she understood not just that I was wrong, but that I was epically fucking wrong, and that was kind of OK, kind of the point. Because then she grew up a little, and then she grew up a lot, and got lost in the corridors of mistakes called adulthood, where instead of staring into the sun all the time you have to fall on your ass to be reminded of its existence. MFM



dirt dirt



Cool Summer Salad

by [essexjan](#)

I first made this a few years ago as a twist on a classic Greek salad, when I was visiting my fiancé in Ohio (he has since died). I'm not keen on English cucumbers, which traditionally go in a Greek salad, but I wanted something that had the crunch and refreshingness of cucumber, and watermelon worked very well and added a touch of sweetness. Also, in rural Ohio it's difficult to find English cucumbers in the supermarkets, but watermelon is everywhere. We first ate this sitting on the porch of his farmhouse, on a warm summer evening.

For the salad:

4 cups seedless watermelon, cut into bite-sized chunks
2 cups feta cheese, diced the same size as the melon
2 packs of washed arugula (rocket) (approx. 8-10 oz)
A large handful of fresh mint leaves, finely chopped



For the dressing:

¼ cup lemon juice (approx. 2 lemons)
1 teaspoon of honey (optional — add if you like things sweet)
1 teaspoon chopped garlic (or ½ teaspoon garlic granules)
½ teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon pepper
½ cup extra virgin olive oil

Method:

Mix all the salad ingredients together in a large bowl. Chill in the fridge.

Just before serving, mix all the ingredients for the vinaigrette dressing in a jug or bowl and whisk until it emulsifies and becomes creamy.

Pour the dressing over the salad and toss gently to make sure the arugula leaves are coated.

It's easy to add a twist to this salad, as long as the basic proportions of sweet/crunch/salt/fragrance/pepper are maintained to keep the balance.

So for sweet/crunch — you can use melon of any kind, apple, water chestnut, cucumber, etc.

For salt — feta, olives, anchovies (ugh), blue cheese, roasted salted macadamias

For fragrance — mint, cilantro, parsley: light leafy herbs, not something overpowering like oregano or thyme. Basil can be used in very small quantities.

For pepper — arugula, baby spinach, watercress.

I like this made with cantaloupe too, and I leave the honey out of the vinaigrette, otherwise it's too sweet.

Enjoy! MFM



[Knigel Holmes knigel.com](http://KnigelHolmes.knigel.com)

This dessert breakfast, served in South Korea's Western style breakfast joint, mixes yoghurt, granola, and massive frozen berries. These berries are a great example of the size of everything at Butterfinger. Huge plates of food and a huge drain on the wallet. Butterfinger offers an insight as to how Koreans view Western morning consumption. A few of my Korean friends had the notion that most Canadians eat plate-fuls of pancakes drenched in maple syrup daily.

Iced Out

Seth Lower's missing diamonds

by klangklangston (Josh Steichmann)



Removal

AS A MARKET force, diamonds are a testament to the power of constructed cool: a moderately uncommon mineral sold as the purest expression of luxury and class, not least through the 64-year De Beers campaign “A Diamond Is Forever.”

Seth Lower is an artist working for a gray-market jewelry dealer, and his recent show, “Diamonds Are Forever,” deals with status, labor and the ineffable nature of cool.

He spoke with Josh Steichmann for MeFi Magazine.

What is it that you do? How do you spend your days? How does your job affect how you think about value?

I’m a product photographer and digital retoucher for a gray-market jewelry dealer. I photograph the merchandise, which consists mostly of watches and rings, but also includes big-ticket diamonds and antique jewelry. I edit everything in Photoshop, removing backgrounds, increasing contrast, subduing warm casts, and brushing out or clone-stamping any scratches, dirt or reflections. On the micro scale, every imperfection becomes very apparent, so I really have my work cut out for me. I spend my time eavesdropping and thinking about personal projects or things I need to prepare for, like this conversation. And I think about how much I want to quit. After all of this repetitive motion and close observation, I become very aware of topical imperfections in the outside world, and also watch ads, which make me cringe, and I’m far more aware of things on people’s wrists.

But in terms of how the job has affected my views on the industry or on depictions of value, I wouldn’t say it’s changed a lot. I still think it’s ridiculous. But the experience within the community has probably softened me toward buyers and sellers somewhat. I kind of vilified the luxury industry from the get-go, and was chuckling to myself the whole way to the interview, but after working in the community for so long, it’s hard to stay angry. It is sleazy, there’s no question, but what can I do? It’s like a problematic but relatively harmless uncle.

What makes something desirable to jewelry sellers — or to buyers? What do sellers think buyers want?

That’s a really fascinating series of questions, and trying to figure out the answers to them provides most of my interest in showing up week after week. I can tell you only one thing for sure, which is that with the exceptions of shitty customer service and dishonesty, the sellers know



Removal



Removal

exactly what buyers want. And I think everyone knows what buyers want: big shiny objects. But your first question is the one that gets me going, especially as it relates to my manager's critique of my images. Even after a year of doing the same thing over and over and over, my boss still feels he needs to remind me to take out the yellow or raise the contrast. He also likes things dark and symmetrical. I knew about the symmetry, but I'm just now learning about the darkness. I think it comes down to power and mystery and sex appeal, but how those things translate to levels and curves is always baffling.

Your work plays a lot with negation and annihilation. Is nihilism cool? Is retreat or removal cool? There are two pieces I think of specifically, the shots of your work equipment and your erasure of Rauschenberg's ring — a play on his erasure of de Kooning, but you leave the shadow instead of erasing the whole thing.

I think nihilism kind of sets itself up to fail when it comes to coolness. Or maybe it's only cool if you're not sincere about it. Retreat as a concept is cool as long as you're the one doing it. Retreats are never cool. Removal, I'm not sure; it depends what's being removed and how it's being done. I'd say the Art World, capital A, has a much more skeptical relationship with coolness. If something is cool, it certainly won't be for long, because that's not really a very good reason to get behind something. There are exceptions, but usually cool isn't the word for them. Commercial photography is the thing that tells us what's cool. How else would we know that socks with sandals are so unappealing? (I'm fully aware, by the way, that as I write this there's an American Apparel ad hanging above a taqueria somewhere to prove me wrong.) I think these are some of the differences I'm interested in thinking about with pictures like the one of the camera setup.

In that, I'm literally using the same equipment and files for both commercial and artistic purposes, so

what, if anything, is the difference? Maybe the difference is as slight as the removal of the product. By the way, the photo of the camera setup is one of several images that documents parts of the office that fall off of the security-camera grid. In other words, my workstations, the places where I create images of perfection, aren't visible to the eyes in the office. I didn't have to fudge that — it was built in. Two of these blind spots are my workstations, the camera setup and the computer desk, where you can see my antiquated 256 MB memory cards and bicycle helmet.

In terms of intentional negation of the job or industry within my work, it comes down to a difference of interests. I know too much about what happens behind the scenes to get excited about a well-polished watch image, so in reversing and denying the imagery that the company presents in order to sell an ideology, there's a subversion that allows me to look behind the scenes and become more self-reflexive about my role within the process, to have the aesthetic outcome next to the hiccup. Removal serves as a negation to my job there and also as a kind of psychoanalysis for the marketing machine. But I think —

or hope — that there's also something less tangible in the work as it relates to all of this, something closer to a subjective synthesis and further from just an overtly symbolic denial to the man. Because there is something below the surface of language within that situation, in its grotesqueness and infinite layering of artifice and decorum, and its cycles of desiring and obtaining or denying. The video was a way of cutting through some of that grounding by combining fragments of text that revel in bad jokes, distasteful anecdotes, moral ambiguity and tongue-in-cheek observations. And the voice shifts as well, so it's not just me telling my story, which was never really the plan. I always allow myself at least one lie with a project, because I'm not out to express some grand truths, even if it's somewhat based on personal experience. My question is always "Why would you assume I'm telling the truth?"



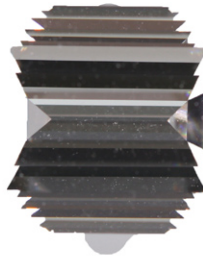
Blind Spot

The conscious negation is partly self-conscious and partly subconscious, because it started as a series of accidents that would punctuate long periods of monotonous editing (they came about because of misplayed keyboard shortcuts). For me, the conscious removal or reversal wasn't as subversive as collecting (storing, emailing) the accidents, which I had to do discreetly when the boss left the room. I liked the idea of holding onto the digital scraps. So the company gets to keep the polished part and I'll keep the souvenir of our time together, the dirty tent and a couple of nice shapes. It's a hard significance to translate into a show, because for me the accidental deletions were tiny gifts, or moments of sublime beauty, that happened just for me. That's where the sincere meaning exists, in recording that, and of course as soon as I put them in a show all of their sincerity morphs into something much more (and less) intentional.

About the "Erased Rauschenberg" ring, you're right if you're implying that my erasure is really not that much like the "Erased de Kooning," because you can still see a lot of the image, including the shadow. In terms of matching the same ethos of the original piece, there's no comparison — Rauschenberg's erasure was significant because it destroyed an original, unique piece, and a very important piece at that. I, on the other hand, still have the original file for the ring image, and the actual ring is unharmed, I didn't erase that. So it's just a cheeky one-off in that sense, but in another sense, it's a record of a strange overlap of practices, which is maybe interesting, and also an indication of how the question of originality has shifted with technology. I guess what I'm always hoping to do is to present something that can function as both a document and as an art piece. So I have this synchronous encounter of the ring showing up at work, and I have to do something with it, to change it. That's all. It's not too deep. But as a formalization of that encounter, I think it's at least more comfortably violent (self-aware) than simply showing an untouched photo.

How do emptiness and invisibility tie in? Also, were there any approaches you thought were more successful?

At first, I was happy with everything. Now, I guess I'm starting to have a sense of what it would feel like if I went through life doing nothing but removing things and being recognized for that. I guess I'm most excited about something that probably no one else thinks about after seeing the work, which is a small and fragile personal victory. I'm talking about the way that language was integrated between the video, the photos and the floor sculpture, and maybe the key card. The text provided the vehicle through which these issues of visibility were revealed, like comparisons between invisible communities within the building to parts of the office that fell off the grid. At its most successful, a few aspects of the show were



Erased Rauschenberg

linked by a single line of text, which would crawl across the TV and disappear. There were a few of those passing moments that were exciting to me, which were visible only briefly and served to underscore invisible connections for viewers.

Also, I think the video helped build a feeling that was almost as uncomfortable and weird as the office space itself, helped greatly by the darkly new-age song it plays on a loop. And even if the removals became trite, I still feel pleased that the abstraction they allowed, in a number of ways, bridged the gap between conceptual and formal processes, which is a thing I've never quite resolved. Right now, I'm really excited about people like Shannon Ebner and Manfred Pernice, if it's fair to mention those two together, because they both deal with formalism in cerebral and systematic ways, and because they keep a sense of mystery despite being involved in linguistic investigation. It's really hard to do that, and the more I talk about it, the less possible it becomes, kind of like being cool.

Do you wear any jewelry?

I don't have any jewelry in California. My parents have some in a junk drawer in Michigan, mood rings mostly, a chastity necklace and a pendant that says my name in Arabic. I think a lot of my current resistance to things like jewelry is due to the fact that I went completely overboard when I was younger. I was a flea-market regular and a genuine agate hound, and I had my own rock polisher, which I used often. I remember looking through a drawer of rings that my mom owned and being totally mesmerized. I think I wore a couple of them, secretly, but there was a lot of pressure in elementary school not to get into that sort of thing. I also used to wear an earring at the beginning of college, but I took it out after my metal band broke up. It was a simple silver hoop, the kind with the little ball, except I took the ball out because I thought it looked less intentional. I never liked watches, despite being given one as a gift at least once per year, and now that I have a phone on my person at all times, I don't really need one. I like my wrists the way they are.

What about your coworkers? What are they like? Are they cool?

It's safe to say that I'm the only one there who isn't interested in jewelry (except as a sociological phenomenon). A couple of staff members talk about being able to afford these things someday, or finding a man who'll buy it for them. They're really sweet and they make my job more bearable. Aside from the chest-beating of my boss, I actually like all of my coworkers. I'd say the other minions are the coolest in my book (the book that's written in Minion Pro). They know who they are. We have secret sighs that speak novels. MFM

More of Seth's work can be seen at sethlower.com.



a non e mouse (Steve Cook)

If you wait long enough, something will happen.

I tend to carry a camera wherever I go, and wait for 'a moment'. I've struggled with various approaches to portraiture for the past 20 years; and prefer the decisive moment over the artificial creation of the moment — this image reinforces that.

Part of a series I'm shooting on Bellingen (Australia), where I currently live. This is Clancy, he's 8. His father is an artist and mother is a midwife. They live on the Never Never river. Clancy goes to the local Steiner school. He's the archetypal 'kid'. A great character, but a hard one to photograph.

