

**The\* Capsule**

\*Delfinas'

My Capsule is one hundred percent handcrafted.

I am once more amazed at the power of procedural memory as my fingertips type these words: my fingers know exactly where to press, even as the layers of superglue mixed with prickled blood between my fingertips and the computer keys don't allow for actual physical contact between the two. The desired letters appear on screen. Perhaps the superglue is not too bad a mediator after all.<sup>1</sup> Especially my thumb, index, and middle fingers of both hands feel--and look like--they might not recuperate (I know they will... The center of my thumbnail, though, seems to have gained some irreparable indent). Working with scissors and needles and exacto knives can be dangerous. Fortunately, only I know how much hurt and bleed was necessary to bring the Capsule into existence. Only I know how much hurt and bleed I can push through in the process of creation.

At its core, the Capsule is held together by a skeleton of the same curved wires that at one point held together previous and precarious versions of myself. These Delfinas include an ambitious push-over (grey push-up, 32D), a dreamer performer (flowered light-blue, 32C), as well as a nightowl (strapless blue, 32C). Those bras have been inhabited by Delfinas that transpired out of fear, translated out of need, always transgressed out of nature. Delfinas that, likely unconsciously, lived in contradictions.<sup>2</sup> I have had many laughs in those bras (my teenage cries used to happen mostly at bedtime, and I have *never* been the kind to allow bras into bed). Not only laughs but also excitements and exams and kisses and caresses and treasures and trespassings. It makes sense, then, that I hold the

<sup>1</sup> As a subject I came and come into existence through mediation. The utilization of signifiers to denote positions and relationships mediates my experience of such positions and relationships — not only in retroactive narrative, but also in my present experience. My experience of subjectivity then is, at its core, one of employment and processing of signs to describe experiences: a mediated (and thus distorted) experience.

<sup>2</sup> The sense of self is built gradually. In this process of construction, the ego ideal and the ideal ego function as bricks (Fink). The ego ideal, external versions of myself that I internalize, is built out of my own reflections and other people's projections on me. The ideal ego, the elevated image of myself that I have in my psyche, takes the form of my own projections and other people's reflections. What a game of mirrors (*one day, I want to live in a house with a front door that opens into a beautiful living room with only mirrors as walls, and walk through the room smiling at myself!*)

As I mature, the needs that were once communicated with baby cries increase in complexity and specificity. The specificity of the needs that I both require and am supposed to fulfill increase and, in parallel, so do the specificity of the signs that are attached to such needs. The acquisition of more and more complex signs gradually and eventually reveals to me that there are signifiers attached to me that reside in contradiction. The foundational aspect of living in this "flow of projections and reflections ricocheting off us" (Maggie Nelson) is that the self cannot be signed as cohesive: the projections and reflections — mediated through signifiers— will necessarily come into contradiction with one another.\*\*\*\*

\*\*\*\*\* Inhabiting contradiction is especially evident to those perceived as holders of a quality called "femaleness." The specificity of the signifiers attached to it does not contradict their vastness; rather, it exposes the inherent contradiction characteristic of any list that is too large to be exclusive (be smart/be stupid; be saintly/de devilish, be pure/be game; dominate/subordinate). I inhabit a body that is meant to receive yet ought to be locked, that is inherently dirty yet ought to be continuously cleaned, that is made for others yet I ought to control.

ambitious push-over and the dreamer performer and the nightowl dearly. Perhaps that is the reason why those wires never made it to the trash, even though I am an avid anti-hoarder and I decided more than four years ago that I was never wearing wired bras again. Somehow these always remained in the drawer, carefully folded under all the socks I knew I would never get to because I always do my laundry in time so I don't have to wear the ones with holes. I very recently discovered that the current Delfina finally feels like she can't put those on with a straight face anymore. It's gone, the innocence of a push-up bra is gone.<sup>3</sup> So, in their naiveté, these are people that I love yet don't miss. They're gone.<sup>4</sup>

So what to do with them? Throwing them (the bras/the selves) to the trash seemed unnecessarily aggressive, given that I did not regret any of it (I only look like I do today because yesterday I looked like I did). Keeping them in the drawer, for another four years, seemed unnecessarily futile and perceptibly masochistic ("I wish these weren't imbued with so much *meaning!* for goodness sake" would continue to fill my mind every time I realized It was time for laundry). So I took the bras out of the drawer and placed them in our dinner table and told myself that something would come out of that. Those wires and the lost selves they had contained had to be re-signed. I had to give them some semblance of life again.<sup>5</sup>

There was a period of bra-stagnancy for a few weeks. "The project," as it [the bra adventure, the final for the class, my daily life] came to be called, became increasingly encroaching of mental space. *I NEED TO WORK ON MY PROJECT*, I would say to myself and Karen and my friends and strangers

<sup>3</sup> My awareness of gender as a routine accomplishment, instilled in every action of my life, and fundamentally interactional, is irreversible. Candace West and Don Zimmerman (1987) taught me this; I read that gender is structured by repeated evaluations by others, and thus becomes aspirational, as one expects to be assessed. They define placement in a sex category as "established and sustained by the socially required identificatory displays that proclaim one's membership in one or the other category" (127). If the main purpose of doing gender is to "bolster claims to membership in a sex category" (127), then I am pretty sure I don't want to claim membership to a group that can only wear push-up bras. My identificatory displays can't be *that* obvious... I'm not *that* boring...

<sup>4</sup> The realization of Loss, in my experience, is the realization of the Loss of someone I could have been. The Loss of the Potential Self. Perhaps that Loss is more obvious with the Loss of a lover (*We Could Have Been*), but the Loss of past selves is also inescapable if conscious change and growth are prized above all. I felt a semblance of that Loss when I realized I could not go back to smilingly wearing the wires around my ribs.

<sup>5</sup> Kristeva taught me that I had to re-sign Loss as the functional center of my creation. For Kristeva, the translation of Loss into signification is based upon the reanimation of a signifier that represents Loss. In other words, we have to try to replace the originally and subsequent Loss through translation into something beautiful, innovative or creative (an "artifice") which takes you beyond your psyche: "In the place of death and so as not to die of the other's death, I bring forth—or at least I rate highly—an artifice, an ideal, a "beyond" that my psyche produces in order to take up a position outside itself — ek-tasis" (99). Working around Loss is held in the creative power of bringing dynamism to what was static. A rebirth of the self then becomes possible by having an affirmative relationship to the void, to my lack and Loss.

"Re-signation" encapsulates the most effective and least painful relationship to Loss (always my goal). "Re-signation" is a re-assignment of signs, a re-signification of meaning. It is an active application of meaning; it encompasses activity, dynamism, and agency (as opposed to simple "resignation" to Loss as subjugation).

whenever I felt de-centered. *I will synthesize my broken limbs and then I'll know.* Demand for table space also increased (other pieces of myself joined the bras, including some socks with holes, socks with no semblance of a potential match, pieces of wood, a golden leaf I found on my way to work, the extra fabric from some pants I cut into shorts, the extra fabric from some long-sleeved shirt I cut into a short-sleeved shirt, endless scraps of paper with annotated thoughts that came in passing or in altered states of mind.) What to some may have looked like a pile of trash in the dining room, to me was an organized chaos of colors and textures that had once carried my essence. Whenever I found something in my pocket that did not fulfill an immediate need but also did not warrant elimination, it would go on the table (I got approval from Karen to take up most of the table “just for a little while... until the project is done.” Bless her patient heart.) My computer space was also greatly reduced during the duration of “the project”, as I started to record moments of vulnerability (brushing my teeth, shaving my head, brushing my teeth with a shaved head).<sup>6</sup> *Later I will synthesize my broken virtual and physical and spiritual and verbal limbs and everything will come together.*

Collecting and imagining future action was fun for a while, but eventually it led to more anxiety than inspiration. Imagining synthesis is not the same as synthesizing. The former is an act of observance, the latter requires deliberate action.<sup>7</sup> So I grabbed scissors and cut and cut and cut and glued and sewed and cut again. At first I decided that the bra cups would become a very useful hat for my newly shaven head. What better way to re-sign than to attribute utmost efficiency in light of (probably my last) Cambridge winter? I calculated the circumference of

<sup>6</sup> Strange video attached.

<sup>7</sup> Transforming the void in order to make it live is an act of agency. With the understanding of the polyvalence of signs, there is at least a minimal choice in the meaning and connotation attached to one's old traumas/selves. It is in this way that the agency and power that comes with an awareness of polyvalence is most evident: “Naming suffering, exalting it, dissecting it into its smallest components --- that is doubtless a way to curb mourning... by means of the polyvalence of sign and symbol, which unsettles naming and, by building up a plurality of connotations around the sign, affords the subject a chance to imagine the nonmeaning, or the true meaning, of the Thing” (pg. 97). Re-signation to traumas and to Loss is establishing a relationship with the Loss, because a relationship/interaction presumes that both parts have at least some form of agency.

my head and the degree to which each of the six cups (two breasts per bra-wearer) had to be overlapped so that it covered my whole head. My calculations must have been off because it the product started looking like a kippah.

And around the void my Capsule emerged.<sup>8</sup> A toy, an instrument, a spaceship, a planet (a transitional object?). The sound and the weight and the texture are very pleasant, I like to hold it and touch it and throw it and shake it. Out of and around all of my scraps and cuts, it/I formed. Now I am not sure if I hold it or if it holds me or if we just hold each other.

The Capsule is inhabited by hundreds (409 to be exact) of me's. Each of them gathered a tab at some point in the last three years; I can't tell which tab was collected by which of my past selves. The only moment of collection that comes to mind is a warm afternoon amidst plastic tables filled with empty cans, standing on grass for some kind of outdoor fancy big H event. The white tables were dirtied in their crevices; they looked sad, as anything --after they've been used and abandoned-- does. Or perhaps they were saddening because they revealed the ugliness of our privileged carelessness. I stayed for a couple hours after the event had ended to collect all can tabs I could find. I received multiple smiles from the cleaning staff for my seemingly serious care for the planet (I recycled all cans). That was a successful day.

There's also maybe a triple dozen not-me's in there (A couple of years ago, I very shortly dated a good natured but unexplainably boring girl. A couple of weeks in I told her I didn't want to continue dating. I evaded post-the-talk meet ups

<sup>8</sup> A ceramic vase comes into existence not just around but rather out of the void as its center. The empty space is the functional center of that which it is connected to, it works as the contrast that allows things to exist. With no central void there can be no vase. To “weave a hyper sign around and with the depressive void” (Kristeva, 99).

but she continued to urge that something needed to be delivered. She was relentless, I stood my ground. Eventually she dropped off a bag in front of my door. Can tabs only. I would like to say this made her less boring but somehow the opposite effect was induced. I am glad she's part of my capsule).<sup>9</sup>

If you shake and and pay attention and peep into the ship through one of its red eyes, you may see some other inhabitants in it. You have to look very closely to see them. They're distinguishable not only by their lack of metallic reflection but also by their shape. These are 35 beads that used to decorate the laces of my high school Converse sneakers. Meticulously arranged to appear non-chalant, the black, yellow and green plastic beads would embrace the crossed laces of my way-too-big Converse (probably a size 9.5 for my size 7 feet; I think my dad found them on sale one day and bought them for me "because the orange was so my style." He was so clueless and excited that I decided to take a break from my adolescent bitter honesty and told him they were a perfect fit.) The Delfinas that wore those beads and the Delfinas that collected the can tabs were not the same, but the appreciation of the smallest of amulets remained. It still remains.

The inadequacy of my object is what makes it so lovable. It barely reflects light back to me, and I am sure that one day the thread will break and tabs will fall out (I broke two and bent three sewing needles while trying to sew through the wires). The glitter will fade and the fabric will stain. My Capsule does not and cannot synthesize all parts and pieces of my past selves.

<sup>9</sup> I was inadequate even in my way of finishing things off with her. I guess it was my "flaws, symptoms, unconscious" (Fink) that she loved. I guess she was not inadequate enough... only in the Other's inadequacy, in their vulnerability and their limitedness do we find a place for ourselves, for our existence.

It is not comprehensible to you.<sup>10</sup> But it does reaffirm and resign all I have been: the central void supporting all that will come.

Even though you've taught me I should divest from a better future, I am hopeful.

<sup>10</sup> It can become exhausting to synthesize oneself. The need to be comprehensible to other people, so be socially intelligible is to seek for recognition. People do need points of anchorage, "quilting points," to rely on (Ruti).