

The Anthropology of the Setup: A Conversation with Chris Kraus

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Credit: John Kelsey

Chris Kraus is an American novelist, art critic, and editor at Semiotext(e). Renowned for bringing the works of key European philosophers such as Baudrillard, Deleuze, Guattari, Franco 'Bifo' Berardi, and Peter Sloterdijk into English language translation. Semiotext(e) is an independent publisher of philosophy, fiction, and genre-crossing texts of creative nonfiction. Kraus's long association with the press has included editing the influential Native Agents series

of fiction titles, and the current Active Agents series. Of the Native Agents series, Kraus has said:

I started the Native Agents series for Semiotext(e) in 1990, when Semiotext(e) was well-known for publishing French theory, with the idea of transferring some of French theory's legitimacy to some friends in New York, all of them women, who could best be described as post-New York School writers. ("The New Universal")

Before coming to writing, Kraus was a filmmaker and performer. She made many experimental films in the 1980s and 1990s, shorts such as *How to Shoot a Crime* (1987) and the feature-length *Gravity and Grace* (1996). In Kraus's own words, her films were "experimental, DIY, personal, poetic, abject" (7) and did not gain traction in the visual art and film communities at the time of their making. This experience became central to Kraus's early fiction. The problem of *feeling* absolutely tuned in to the contemporary moment (at times, unbearably so) yet being received as out of step with what is considered "of the moment" artistically, is fundamental to the problem of living a meaningful life explored in Kraus's first three novels. The vicious game of policing the zeitgeist and its winners and losers is depicted in *Torpor* (2006), when the protagonist's husband, Jerome, joins his fellow artists and critics in playing rounds of "Who's Peaked?" where they "enjoyed infinitely parsing different categories of fame" (166). While the men play the game, the female protagonist, Sylvie, meets a Romanian poet on a DAAD scholarship identical to the one held by Sylvie's husband. Focalizing through Sylvie, the narrator observes that the Romanian woman is "[c]onscientious and intelligent, she is a good-girl academic: the kind of woman Jerome dislikes most.... Jerome dislikes most of his female colleagues because they take their work so seriously, and he despises academe" (164–65). This distinctly female sin of taking one's work too seriously is explored in Kraus's reworking of her film practice in the novels. Ironically, Kraus's developing success as a writer has brought renewed attention to her filmic works, and they are regularly shown in art galleries and bars when Kraus makes an appearance as a writer or critic. (This occurred in Melbourne when Kraus attended the Contemporary Women's Writing Conference.) Sometimes still referred to as a filmmaker, Kraus says of the films and their exhibition decades after their production:

These films have nothing to do with me now. Their exhibition comes too late to feel like a vindication. Nevertheless it is a pleasure – an abstract affirmation of a practice I'm no longer involved in but will never recant . . . emotional science, the giddy revenge of the ageless un-gendered young woman" (9).

The rising recognition of Kraus's importance as a writer keeps the films in circulation, creating the unique environment in which her work is received.

Kraus's first novel, *I Love Dick*, was published by Semiotext(e) in 1997. Since then Kraus has published three more novels, *Aliens & Anorexia* (2000), *Torpor*

(2006), and *Summer of Hate* (2012). Kraus has also released two collections of art criticism, *Video Green: Los Angeles Art and The Triumph of Nothingness* (2004) and *Where Art Belongs* (2011). Her other publications include the edited collection, *Hatred of Capitalism* (2001), and the short works *Kelly Lake Store and Other Stories* (2012) and *Lost Properties* (2014). Kraus has garnered considerably more recognition for her work in the art world than in the literary field. She received the 2007 Frank Maher Award in Art Criticism and a Warhol Foundation Arts Writer's grant in 2010. Her important and influential work as a publisher of avant-garde and experimental writers – many women among them – and her body of work in fiction remain largely unexamined by scholars of contemporary literature or women's writing.

The lack of scholarly engagement with Kraus's work is probably of little surprise to the readers of *Contemporary Women's Writing*, given that the association for which the journal is named seeks to encourage the development of high-quality scholarship on the work of women like her. Kraus herself makes a wry comment on the continued lack of attention from literary scholars in her most recent novel, *Summer of Hate* (2012) where she writes of her avatar Catt:

She saw no boundaries between feeling and thought, sex and philosophy, hence her writing was read almost exclusively in the art world where she attracted a small core of devoted fans, Asperger's boys, girls who had been hospitalised for mental illness, assistant professors who would not be receiving their tenure, lap-dancers, cutters and whores. (16)

This playful depiction of the outsider status of Kraus's readers is just one example of the invigorating and at times excoriating timbre of her writing. Kraus's deft use of what she describes, in our conversation, as "a public 'I', that looks out towards the world" gives her novels an undeniable charge. The complex and flexible perspective of her narrators, who deftly move between subjective and philosophical accounts of the experiences of her characters, marks Kraus's work out as unique in contemporary literature. Reviewing *Summer of Hate* in the *Los Angeles Review of Books*, Victoria Patterson writes that Kraus's habit of "displacing genre and categorization, stumping traditional narratives of female identity" in her works has resulted in her "opening the path for experimental women writers." Her voice is distinct in contemporary fiction, and while it generates its fair share of fans (Sheila Heti, Kate Zambreno, and Tavi Gevinson), few have been able to copy the revelatory effects of Kraus's writing.

Writing of the experience of "coming late" to *I Love Dick* in 2015 and her heckling by men as she read the ambiguously titled novel on the subway, Leslie Jamison writes, "I knew I was holding white-hot text in my hands, written by a woman who had theorised what these guys were doing – with me, with their dick jokes – even before they'd done it." For Jamison, writing in the *New Yorker*, the central drama driving Kraus's fiction is that of "a female consciousness struggling to live a meaningful life." The meaning of that life, in all Kraus's works, centers

on self-determination and having one's thoughts, experiences, and work taken seriously. Kraus's ability to depict this struggle within a complex social, economic, ideological, and political context makes her one of the few fiction writers able to explicate the contemporary moment to readers without simplification. As she explains in our conversation, an attention to "the setup," how people negotiate a relationship with power, is central to her sensibility. Moreover, it was this focus on the working of "the setup," as well as her position as an influential publisher, that made Kraus an excellent keynote speaker for the Contemporary Women's Writing Association conference in Melbourne in 2014.

In setting the topic of the Fifth Biennial International Conference of the Contemporary Women's Writing Association, Contemporary Women's Writing and Environments, we wanted to capture several key issues driving women's creative practice in the contemporary moment. The important work of ecocriticism was one, including how women writers are responding to the inevitability of climate change in their work. We wanted to juxtapose this interest in the climate and physical environment with an opportunity to discuss recent debates about the status of women's writing, inspired by organizations such as VIDA and, in Australia, the Stella Count. These organizations have renewed the discussion around the status of women's writing by producing statistics on the reviewing of women's writing in the literary press, the representation of women's writing in major literary awards, and through activism addressing gender bias in the literary field. The statistics they produce on reviewing have been particularly effective in reinvigorating discussion about the publication and reception of writing by women. However, they have also raised the more difficult ontological question of whether there is *such a thing* as women's writing. Is writing produced by women the same thing as women's writing? The public discussion sparked by the VIDA count has shown that this question is a pressing one for many writers and many young women who are developing their practice as writers. Kraus's work, particularly *I Love Dick*, has become a touchstone for a generation of feminist writers and critics who seek to understand the cultural milieu in which the statistics that VIDA collects emerge. Many of these writers and critics confront this ontological question in a context where the status of "men" and "women" is being productively destabilized by trans friends, colleagues, and lovers. The relationship between the sexed body and writing seems as fresh and as urgent a question as it was for Woolf and the first generation of feminist literary critics, yet the analysis they developed cannot quite account for the experience of contemporary women writers. Kraus's interest in power in her fiction does not offer answers to these questions, but nuanced observations and reflections from within the belly of the beast.

Her observational style has inevitably made the question of the status of the autobiographical central to any discussion of her work. Jamison writes,

As a writer – especially as a woman who has written “personal” material – I’m grateful to Kraus for deploying the materials of her life in rigorous and compelling ways; for holding vulnerability “at some remove” in the face of those determined to read any act of self-disclosure as narcissistic or self-pitying. But as a reader, Kraus makes me confront my own hunger for autobiographical access; it makes me aware of how much I crave a sense of the true story beneath her written narratives, even as I respect the ways they refuse to deliver any kind of one-to-one correspondence between lived and constructed experience.

It is with this point that we began our conversation. While it is clear that Kraus’s works are fiction and that she has no interest in the pact of truthfulness about the self and life that binds readers to narrators of memoir, there is no denying that the alchemy her writing works on real life is a considerable part of its appeal and its force. For many readers, her novels are hard to put down because they pay a critical, inventive, and detailed attention to the most perplexing and confounding aspects of the real world: intimate relationships, the personal struggle with social norms and social bonds, and the uncanny and seemingly ineffable ways in which history and power structures shape the everyday.

This conversation took place in Melbourne in early July 2014, at the end of Chris Kraus’s visit to Monash University as a Visiting Scholar in the School of Languages, Literatures, Cultures and Linguistics. While in Melbourne, Chris presented a keynote lecture at the Fifth International Contemporary Women’s Writing Association Conference addressing the topic of Women’s Writing and Environments.

AP: Your approach of “transcription” in your work extends beyond your own life to biography and characterization, and the consistent way you draw on the lives of other people in your work. For example, *Aliens & Anorexia* is on the one hand a biography of Simone Weil where you’re bringing an interpretation to her life and work. In that novel you make visible a version of her life and work to your reader, and you do the same thing in *Torpor* with the activist Jennifer Harbury. And you do it again in *Summer of Hate* but it’s with the character of Paul who’s not a public figure.

CK: Exactly. It was consciously biographical.

AP: This aspect of your work seems to occupy an interesting space between characterization, in the more mundane creative writing sense, a kind of biography. I wanted to know whether you see your fiction or the fictional world you’re creating as a way of bringing real life people and a sensibility about their work to people’s attention?

CK: Absolutely. If the first-person narrator of a book is an autobiographical “I,” wouldn’t you want the other characters to be drawn biographically? That is,

to examine the facts of other's lives as closely as you examine your own. Writing about Paul Thek and Simone Weil – or about artists I know, in *Where Art Belongs* – is like doing a psychobiography. It's funny, the title you gave for our workshop – "Writing The Encounter" – had a 70s swinger ring to it. But writing about others is like that – you are trying to stage an encounter between yourself and the subject. How close can you get to their mindset? It's an empathic projection, more than an examination. What would it like to be that person? How would you see things? How would they feel?

AP: It's a very specific encounter you create with this approach of seeking an empathetic dialogue with the subject. The reader is a witness to that encounter, we witness the writer Chris Kraus's unique sensibility coming into contact with and seeking some engagement with a specific person. And you are also staging an encounter for the reader with that material.

CK: I was very inspired by reading Ernst Pawel's Kafka biography, *The Nightmare of Reason: A Life of Franz Kafka*, a long time ago. He was so intimate with Kafka, he understood him so well, he could observe when Kafka was being an idiot – or being contradictory – without losing respect. Geoff Dyer stages a different kind of encounter with DH Lawrence in *Out of Sheer Rage*, but that's much more about Dyer's own process, achieving some state of grace through this contrived struggle with Lawrence.

AP: Maybe we could talk about the range of real life people, of characters that you have staged those encounters with in your novels. Let's begin with Simone Weil, for example, who is a philosopher, an important thinker, an important figure. Maybe we could talk briefly about why you chose her.

CK: I read her in French while I was living a hibernatory domestic life in the Southern Adirondacks. I took French reading lessons with our Quebecois neighbor, Mrs. Jensen, and we read Simone Weil together. At the time I felt Weil was speaking straight to me. I was sad a lot of the time, and that sadness that runs through her books – a radical empathy – went straight into my veins.

AP: And so could we then contrast your depiction of Weil with Jennifer Harbury and the way she appears in *I Love Dick* as a person who you want to document, you're documenting her career as an activist . . .

CK: Right. I mean, I just felt like I understood Jennifer Harbury. I knew her. There was a part of myself that was her, that could have done that: I'd certainly known people like her before. I don't think I could write about someone without feeling that deep connection – you know, I could have been him or her, or vice versa. It's a matter of trying to enact the other person.

AP: What we see in the response to your work is precisely this kind of reaction, I think. What you stage in your writing is a certain kind of visceral, empathetic, intelligent, and emotion-driven response to someone's work and what

they're doing. And the fans of your work see this. It might be why you have a lot of younger people as fans of your work, for they respond to you in that way.

CK: Yeah, well, that's wonderful. I mean, what more could one want?

AP: That triangulation is very interesting and unique, as we see you encountering, but you're also modeling a way of reading.

CK: That's how I read Kathy Acker when I arrived in New York. Before knowing anyone in the art world, I read her self-published books. They were all over the East Village. And that writing, like Weil's, I felt like *she was speaking to me*.

AP: These two examples show you engaging with people that have some form of public presence. But then in *Summer of Hate* and *Torpor* you bring this approach to everyday people, people's private lives. Could you talk a little bit about that process of bringing everybody people – the inhabitants of Thurman and their little family histories, but also the person upon whom the character Paul is based – and bringing their kind of life experience into a book?

CK: Well, I always knew *Torpor* would be like a prequel to *I Love Dick*, kind of a preface to the absurd situation of a couple writing love letters to a third party. How could that happen? What is that marriage?

During those years, we lived in the Adirondacks, and I was not doing much. Sylvere used to say, "You'll look back on this as a good time in your life – eventually things will change and you'll miss having the chance to be so alone and receptive." And this turned out to be true. Because it was a very fortunate time to be in that area. I became friendly with the librarian at the closest small-city library in Glens Falls, Christine McDonald. She'd moved up there from New York, and felt she was there for a reason: witnessing the end of a certain kind of rural American culture. There was no cable TV. There was an independent, subsistence culture of trapping and wood selling and trading, small farming, and seasonal work, here and there. I met people who'd been to Albany once or twice in their lives, and never to New York City, which was just over four hours away. I joined the local Historical Society. History, and to them "history" was still more a matter of family stories than things written down. The strange stasis of that area, I realized, told *everything* about the couple's situation: why they would flee New York and seek out such a thing?

AP: So there's a different kind of ethics at play in engaging with and inhabiting the lives of everyday people and bringing them into your fiction that is distinct to engaging with those public figures. Could you speak briefly about whether you have ever had an ethical concern around bringing everyday people, private people, into your novels? Or do you just kind of trust your gut that you're doing them justice?

CK: Nothing in *Torpor* belittles the local characters. There's nothing beyond the personal narratives that they tell about themselves. You'd go and buy wood

from an old timer, and he'd stand in front of his cabin declaiming his history in a practically Homeric way. My writing just fed back things I heard. And for a couple of years, I taught video workshops at the local school where we'd make local histories, and I heard a lot of stories that way. In *I Love Dick*, of course, the book is set in the cultural world, and anyone who cares to know, knows who the characters are. They're public figures, on a small scale. My ethic was always to change the name if I was going to say something less than flattering. Sadly, I antagonized a few people for life by writing about them this way.

AP: Right, yes. There's always that risk in writing from real life, that people are either going to wish they got the credit for the thing that you masked or wished you made them less identifiable.

CK: Yes, and that's a problem of fiction in general. Unless it's totally plot-driven genre fiction, there will always be some reflection of the writer's experience, her friends and acquaintances.

AP: We're coming back to this question of why the transfiction space that you're seeking to articulate has trouble getting clear definition. Partly it's because we're now in this cultural moment that's hypersensitive about privacy, celebrity, and identity in the sense that people feel increased ownership over their identities.

CK: Yes, people become so protective of their own little personal brands, right? I feel like I've become a lot more circumspect in the last several years than when I began writing. Maybe it's because at the beginning, there was nothing to lose. But I also think maybe the culture has changed, somewhat. In *Lost Properties*, there's a middle section where I kind of take the piss out of some recent CalArts grads "archiving" their summer vacation. It seemed like a big risk to publish that, even though I didn't say anything about them that they probably won't say themselves in a couple of years. Hedi [El Kholti] asked, "Are you sure you want to say this? Are you sure you don't want to tone it down?" And I already *had*. Everyone has become so *nice* . . . (i.e., cautious). I think it would be good to try and push those boundaries back in the future, especially with art writing. Things go dead when you're so circumspect.

AP: In many interviews you juxtapose your work against memoir, yet your work is so closely related to the real world. This proximity to the real world produces a particular kind of charge, in an aesthetic and ethical sense, in your writing: it gives your writing a specific kind of the feeling and magnetism. Could you talk a little about the approach of transcription that seems to define your work?

CK: That term, transcription, or transfiction – like a lot of good ideas, it started out as a scam. I was editing Ann Rower's *If You're a Girl* as one of the debut titles for Semiotext(e)'s Native Agents, and we wanted to legitimize her writing, make it seem serious, in the context of Semiotext(e)'s French theory list. Sylvere

[Lotringer] interviewed her, and she coined the term *transfiction*, to describe what she does, wanting to win over the reader, cracking a joke, making a pun.

But as an idea, it's totally right, and it guided me when I began writing. Ann Rower describes the way that – even when *transcribing a tape* – it's impossible to avoid little slips, intrusions of one's own subjectivity.

All fiction uses material from life, however selected or filtered. It's true, my novels have hewn very close to real life. Another big influence was the writing of Christopher Isherwood. He was highly regarded among people at the St. Marks Poetry Project, where I worked in the 1980s.

Later, when I began writing seriously, I reread his work and was moved to discover his project of rewriting his earlier works toward a point of greater truth and transparency, after he began practicing Hinduism and became more openly gay. In his 20s, his early novels were veiled autobiographies anyway, and he reworked the material in them much later in a more direct way. This seemed magnificent. And in no way makes him a 'memoirist.' Rather, he's a great fiction writer.

AP: It seems to me that one of the key distinctions from memoir of this space that you're charting is that the writing self is not the center. As you say in your interview with Sheila Heti for *The Believer*, it's not about the emotional catharsis or personal transformation of the writer, yet the writer's sensibility is very important to this process of transcription.

CK: Yes – I always thought the point would be to create a public "I," that looks out toward the world. There's a persistent lag in the culture, that continues to view female writing in this tradition as memoir. Emily Gould's wonderful novel *Friendship* came out this season, and has been mostly reviewed and discussed in the context of her personal life, as if it were a memoir. Because her characters inhabit roughly the same terrain as Lena Dunham's *Girls*, her book becomes a flashpoint for everything people mindlessly elevate, envy, and then despise. Her contemporary Choire Sicha wrote a different but similar book that came out last season, same milieu, called *A Very Recent History*. Both books are very a *clef*, and yet Choire's was received much more generously, on its own terms, as a novel. It's hard to believe this disparity still persists. Both writers are in their early 30s; surely, we should be over this by now . . .

AP: Reviewers and commentators are also talking about a kind of sensibility that is universal and accessible to the reader, whereas it sounds as if what you're seeing in the review of Emily Gould's work is this sense that it's still personal, that the work is about Emily Gould, and there is not some kind of universally accessible sensibility in the novel.

CK: Yes. It's as if there's a hard shell around the male narrator and a soft, gelatinous membrane around a female narrator. People love to pick at and prod and pierce this membrane, but they respect the male narrator's shell. I don't know why this persists. It's very confusing.

AP: You have been talking about this for a long time in your fiction and in public: you've been talking about the outward-facing female "I" since you started writing and talking about writing, as well as in the work you did with the Native Agents series. Yet there seems to be a lot of difficulty getting traction for this idea in the literary culture. The work of women writers still runs up against the problem of reception.

CK: Yes, it still does. In a sense, maybe it's worse. Mary McCarthy wrote extremely autobiographical fiction, with her husbands and lovers and colleagues wholly identifiable, but she was not attacked in quite the same way. Although she had to leave Wellfleet, Massachusetts, after publishing *A Charmed Life*, it was such a wicked parody of her circle there –

AP: But she was punished in the local sense, by her community, but not in the cultural sense. The reception of her work did not punish her for that transgression even if her community did. Are you suggesting it's worse now, so that Mary McCarthy could draw from life but still be treated as a novelist without this excessive attention to the personal in the reception of her work?

CK: Yes, I don't understand how that happened. But, I think in the mid-20th century, there was this phenomenon of the "exceptional woman" – de Beauvoir, Simone Weil, and McCarthy all got to be them. No wonder McCarthy resented the women's movement! As public intellectuals, these few brilliant women were given the same hard shell of respect accorded the men. But now the idea of the "public intellectual" is a joke. We enjoy greater equality, but there's no longer that "exceptional" space for a few individuals to slip through.

During the discussion after my talk about Kathy Acker and Ken Wark's email correspondence [*I'm Very Into You*, Semiotext(e) 2015] somebody asked why I thought Acker would have objected to publishing them, if she were alive – because, you know, wasn't her work *totally personal*? Well, no. It was not. Her books were highly composed, hugely different from personal documents.

AP: I think the other thing we can triangulate with this is the rise of celebrity culture around authors themselves and the need for authors to participate in a kind of celebrity culture that is in proximity to the confessional. I am thinking here of the phenomena of the writers festival where writers go along to be in front of their readers and be interviewed. And the desire in those spaces is "I want to hear something from the real life of the author."

CK: I mean, yeah, to a really disgusting degree. Each season, profile after profile appears about the four or five writers whose books are being the most heavily promoted. They're repellent to read, but I feel bad for the writers. There must be some who enjoy it, but I think for most people in the end it's embarrassing, even personally damaging.

AP: There's an interesting constellation of things that make this space that you've been articulating for some time through your work and in conversation the work of people like Ann Rower, as well, there are things overshadowing

that space that make it very difficult for it to actually get some clear edges as a practice, because there's celebrity culture blurring the boundaries on one side and confessional culture on the other. And this is further complicated by the persistent problems around gender and what female writers are seen to be doing.

CK: Yes. Although I think one of the problems that people have reading my books is that they're so different from each other. They tend to attract different readerships. I was surprised when I went out with *Aliens & Anorexia* that the people who really liked *I Love Dick* were not the people who responded to *Aliens & Anorexia*. It was like a totally different readership. The same thing happened again with *Torpor*, and again with *Summer of Hate*.

AP: So that might bring us around to the second major question I had for us, which was about the establishment. Part of what we've tracked in our conversation so far is your movement as an author from the outside where you could just say what you wanted, feeling like no one cared anyway so you were free. And now, particularly because of the reception of your art criticism and the power that you've developed in your work with Semiotext(e), you're inside a kind of establishment.

I wanted to talk to you a little bit about the way you're tracking in your novels, in quite distinct case studies, individual people's relationship with what we might call the establishment. It manifests in quite different ways in each book. So you're partly tracking people's encounters with quite ephemeral but very powerful social systems of validation, particularly in the early books, such as *I Love Dick*. I think that's what people love particularly about that book. And then in *Torpor* we see a continuation . . .

CK: In Paris, the Felix group . . .

AP: Yes, yes. We see that continued with the addition of historical narrative as a kind of establishment, as a set of rules or set of expectations about how things play out, that individual characters are very troubled by. And Romania itself is presented in *Torpor* as a character in that narrative. And in *Summer of Hate* you turn your attention to the prison system and to the problem of the legal system in the United States and the cycle of debt it creates. So three very distinct books about three distinct systems. Is the establishment a useful term for this? How do you think of about that aspect of your work?

CK: It's the setup.

AP: The setup?

CK: Yeah. I had an assistant, Amy Stohl, who was a state college philosophy dropout and she was very clear about this, she'd say, "Oh, everyone is born into the setup." Everyone navigates it. I think anthropology would be just

as useful a word to describe my approach to writing as autobiography or biography. Each of the books looks at different anthropological set-ups – the East Village art world, the Parisian intellectual world, and in *Summer of Hate*, the American justice system in the southwest during the Bush era. Not that it's changed a great deal. In each case, I'm curious to know what are the rules? How do people exist within them? That's kind of a sensibility, right? How people relate to power, how they move through the setup, is so defining of character.

AP: Anthropology is a great way to think about it, you undertake observational descriptive work, but then it's offset by this empathetic form of characterization, so you're really following through the impact of the setup. That seems to be a big part of the project for you.

CK: Definitely. I mean, memoir implies the neoliberal illusion of the autonomous individual – as if one person's crises and traumas were his or hers alone. But I favor a more anthropological, sociographic outlook. A person is always navigating structures; they are what forms the person. You could say that defines my sensibility as a writer, but it's something that Hedi [El Kholti], Sylvere [Lotringer], and I share. You could say, it's the Semiotext(e) sensibility.

AP: You extend this sensibility to range of male characters, particularly in the latter novels *Torpor* and *Summer of Hate*. *Torpor* contains a very moving, observational and, to use your term, anthropological depiction of a Holocaust survivor. Could you talk a little about your interest in bringing this perspective to male characters in your recent work?

CK: Both *Torpor* and *Summer of Hate* show how historical circumstances play out in people's lives. In a sense, all of Semiotext(e)'s fiction list does this – the books are like psychic corollaries to the theory and activist works: *this* is what these forces yield in these people's lives. The historical trauma Jerome and Paul absorb is passed on to others . . . their families and intimate friends are contaminated by it, as well.

AP: Your decision to use male characters in this way suggests a response to a view of women's writing that says, "Well, women's writing is about humanizing women."

CK: Oh, yeah, yeah, that's a dreadful idea. After the first twelve or fourteen titles, I figured I was finished with editing *Native Agents* as a heavily female first-person series. We'd done what we set out to do, and it was fine. Hedi and I work closely together on the fiction list. While it's no longer exclusively female, neither does it posit the straight middle-class white male as the ultimate subject. We published Jarett Kobek's *Atta*, a psychobiography of Mohamed Atta; we published Veronica Gonzalez Pena's *The Sad Passions*, set in Mexico City across three generations. Most recently, we published Lodovico Pignatti Moran's *Nicola*,

Milan, about a straight guy stalking another straight guy around the edge of the art/fashion/branding creative international worlds. Reflecting the present, I think, gender is not the leading card.

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