

1994

Analogue

Susan Daitch

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.uiowa.edu/iowareview>

Part of the [Creative Writing Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Daitch, Susan. "Analogue." *The Iowa Review* 24.2 (1994): 73-79. Web.
Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0021-065X.4687>

This Contents is brought to you for free and open access by Iowa Research Online. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Iowa Review by an authorized administrator of Iowa Research Online. For more information, please contact lib-ir@uiowa.edu.

Analogue · Susan Daitch

I EXPECTED HER LETTERS TO BE CONFESSIONS. They lay in a thick pile next to my coffee. There was no one else in the room, cigarettes fell from a pack onto the floor, falling into a shape which resembled a stick man, and I said to him, you'll do as well as anyone: listen to this. You have to pay attention when somebody writes in this way with this kind of urgency. I read her impressions out loud to him. I used a skeptical tone of voice, exaggerated, supercilious, even speaking in different accents; sometimes lapsing into Inspector Clouseau French, sometimes a kind of Ian Fleming style Russian, but I had the suspicion or at least indulged in the impression, that my mute companion believed every word.

Dear Edgar,

Last night an incubus slept beside me. Had you been here you would have said I suffered from *un cauchemar* again, or pointing to the couch, you would say that narrow berth would give anyone bad dreams. You would tell me I was only afraid to fall off it, but this time I'm sure the incubus has stayed with me all day and will reappear at night. The incubus was a familiar woman, she looked a little like me and even a little like you, *une cauche-mère*. When I woke I photographed the couch, pillows and blankets scattered all over. One hears of photographs of phantoms, they register on the film, even though you thought the camera was aimed at an empty space. Click. What you could have sworn was a bare corner, or just a ceiling, is revealed to contain, when the film comes back from the lab, a dusty shadow. You look closely at the picture, hold it up to your nose, someone slightly familiar begins to be apparent, but it's not yourself you see reflected in the pane. So I aimed the camera wherever there was available light, whether dead space or clutter. We'll see who turns up when the film comes back. I'll send you the pictures, even if nothing appears.

I've heard echoes of past parties, whispers of old arguments, the creakings of faltering, unfinished sentences, syllables boomeranging around as if caught in an echo chamber. I turn around quickly and try to catch her, but she is just half a second quicker than I am. I might see a shadow against a wall, and I'm sure the shadow isn't mine. I might see a foot hurry around a corner or a hand dangle from a ledge. What, I keep asking myself, what

does this counterfeit want from me? One day I actually saw her standing in a tower, and I yelled up at her, but all I heard in response were echoes. I'm sure she's someone we know or have at least seen before.

Here's proof. Her presence reminds me of the following scene in *Duck Soup*: Chico Marx, while running from Groucho, shatters a mirror. Stepping into the space behind the glass he pretends to be Groucho's reflected self. Groucho hops. Chico hops. Groucho jigs. Chico jigs. There is a room behind the mirror, not a supporting wall, as is usually the case. Is the furnished space identical to the room in which Groucho cakewalks? If not, why doesn't Groucho appear to notice? Groucho drops his hat. Chico drops his hat. They change places. The gag continues in silence. For me the question remains: why was a mirror, frangible and deceptive, used to separate two rooms instead of plaster, sheetrock, and building studs?

Why am I explaining this to you? You never liked to spend much time here so I wouldn't be surprised if you don't really remember these rooms. The ceilings are probably higher than you give them credit for, and what you consider the representations of my personality: the combs, lipsticks, glasses, and ashtrays don't loom as large as you think. The shoes and books on the floor you were sure were gunning for you when you tripped on them are still in place.

Yours,
Anne

Dear Anne, I wrote, let me tell you a story, a distraction. Once on a long train journey I began to talk to a woman who was sitting opposite me. It was night, but she was wearing a black hat with a veil drawn across it. She called herself Fac Totem, and she was running away.

I don't feel like myself, she said.

Who does?

She had worked as a cleaner for a woman who called herself Madame Sélavy. Sélavy spoke several languages, sometimes all at once. On her first day Sélavy told her to wait in *le couloir* while she dressed. Fac Totem thought she meant the cooler, and although she misunderstood, she was indeed, in a kind of prison. Weeks passed, and as she swept and polished parts of Sélavy's house she couldn't find a door that led out of the building, and she sometimes thought she was fading into the house itself, she spent so much time touching its painted, tiled, mirrored, veneered, and stone-faced

surfaces. Sélavy would often appear from behind a corner to check on her, or she would think she saw her in the distance, and so would try to clean with a little more energy. One night as she entered a back room which bracketed the structure like a parenthesis, she found a mannequin leaning against a staircase. It wasn't wearing any clothes; its face was featureless and painted over. She threw it on the floor.

One more thing to clean!

As she said those words, features began to color the dummy's face. It began to speak and at first she thought the voice came from a wall or column. She dressed the dummy in her clothes, and it took over her job, like a kind of golem. No one noticed the difference. The artificial worker labored harder than any human could, it worked so hard that Sélavy became exhausted just thinking up tasks, not realizing who was in fact executing her orders. Meanwhile, though half-naked having surrendered her clothes, Fac Totem was free to roam from room to room, looking, not cleaning. Stuck in a cornice she found a wedge of folded papers which she couldn't unfold, so tightly were they jammed together. The object seemed like something personal and organic, like a severed body part. She dropped it. In another room she discovered bicycle wheels, a bridal gown, and a bottle rack.

One night while holding the mannequin by the hand, they were discovered. When Sélavy saw the girl and her double she looked back and forth at the two of them, frantically searching for mirrors which she knew weren't in the room. She threatened the two with expulsion to a No Man's Land of urinals and constantly dripping taps. If Fac didn't pull the plug on her substitute there were going to be problems in the future.

Get rid of it.

The *sosie* pleaded with her. As Fac hesitated, Sélavy grabbed the double around the neck, and she crumbled to the floor in a heap. The girl was, naturally, forced to return to work. New cleaning tasks, twice as demanding as before, were assigned, so one night when she was sure the other woman was asleep, she stuffed her pockets with cash found behind a painting, and ran away.

I was just a stranger on a train, but I asked if she would join me in the café car for a cup of coffee, thinking that was the least I could do, but she said, no thanks. She must have gotten off the train at the next station because I never saw her again.

Your shadows, doubles, and ghosts can take many forms.

Edgar

Dear Fac T. Finder,

Don't send me moral tales, please. Allegories can't explain the sightings I've described to you, as if these echos could be reduced to a game a child might play while sitting in a waiting room. Fac Totem's story, as you told it, reminds me of *Find the Things* or *What's Wrong with this Picture?* Rose Sélavy's chambers are now full of objects left behind by an exile: the Duchampian wedge, the nude descending the staircase, the *Bride Stripped Bare*. I found these things right off the bat, but felt no more victory than if I had suddenly dropped a book which happened to fall open to a sought after page.

Love,

Anne

Inside the envelope were pictures of the house. It was a building I knew well, and all the pictures were empty. She imagined a girl on a tricycle pedaling down a long corridor as if being chased, but I found no afterimages, no configurations of light and shadow which could have been construed as a human figure. At least, I told my cigarette companion, that's how the pictures appeared at first glance.

I didn't write back for a long time, but her letters continued pursuing me, a shadow I couldn't detach.

Dear Edgar,

I'm afraid to leave the house. I wander around it for days. If I go outside, this thing will follow me. If it walks out of a store without paying for a magazine or grabs someone's wallet, for example, I might be the one to be arrested, so I never open an outside door or lean out a window. As long as I can maintain my prison I'm safe, but this procedure has its drawbacks. I am getting sick of ordering pizza and Chinese food to be delivered to the side door. Sometimes I feel as if I'm running in circles, and my twin is right behind me, never catching up, never allowing me to turn around fast enough so that we collide. I saw her on a bridge that connects two halves of the building. I don't think you quite understand some of what I've been writing to you. The incubus isn't invisible, I can't wrap her in bandages, a kind of feminized Claude Raines, please, sometimes I don't think you're

really listening. What is similar, and I'm sure of this, are bad intentions. As Claude Raines became *The Invisible Man*, he grew increasingly violent. Sometimes I'm afraid my incubus is corroding me, as bits of the house erode and others seem to appear. Perhaps I'm becoming part her and part myself. You wouldn't recognize the site as it looks now, half what it was, half what it might have become.

Sincerely and Truly,
Anne

Dear Anne,

It's alright to see a woman on a bridge, but you're supposed to see a man on the tower.

Do you believe in the sentience of inert things? Maybe that's the problem. You think gypsum board and steel are going to turn and say, "Have a Nice Day!" or "Please come again!" Will marble tell you to keep your feet off its face and glass tell you to stop staring. The corners and windows take on personalities, but they aren't your friends. Are you turning everything around you into a massive memento mori? I don't have to walk those corridors, I can remember the sounds of footfalls down the passages. Benjamin felt he could read Baudelaire and never set foot in Paris. Enjoy your slice and pretend you're in Rome.

Best,
Edgar

It wasn't a very nice letter. I hoped it would at least make her angry at me and never write again. Somewhere in the distance I heard a recording of "I Put a Spell on You." I ignored the sound and began where I left off, prying the moulding and wainscoting from a room on the ground floor. Crenellations on the exterior will be the next to go. Once they're off, I plan to paint in their shadows so there'll be a record of what used to occupy each space. I read that a fire broke out in one wing, and in those rooms I've erected model flames constructed from a heat resistant plastic. Soon there may be no space remaining inside. For every removal, a residue is left over. The rate of accretion might eventually outweigh the removals, and I can imagine rooms in which no space remains.

Dear Edge Gare,

PRISONHOUSE	
ROUGH-HOUSE	
NUTHOUSE → (SHIP OF FOOLS) →	HOUSEBOAT
HOUSE ARREST	
HOUSE SALAD	HAUSSMANN
HOUSEBREAK	HOUSE MUSIC
HALFWAY HOUSE	OUT HOUSE
JOHN HOUSEMAN	IN HOUSE
WAREHOUSE	OPEN HOUSE
HOUSEFLY	HOUSE BOUND
HOUSEBOY/MAID/MOTHER/DRESS	FULL HOUSE
SAFE HOUSE	HOUSE OF MIRRORS
HOUSING	HOUSE BROKEN
HOUSEHOLD	HOUSE OF COMMONS
HOUSE OF CARDS	HOW'S EVERYTHING
HOUSEPARTY	ACID HOUSE
A.E. HOUSEMAN	ANIMAL HOUSE
HOUSEKEEPER	PENTHOUSE
HOUSE OF THE RISING SUN	DOG HOUSE
FUNHOUSE	HOUSEPLANT

How is memory like a house which is constantly being constructed and torn down at the same time? What parts have been sandblasted away? Which pasted back together with Krazy Glue and Elmer's?

Yours,
Anne

This morning my companion was gone. I was sure I had left him on the table last night. I could remember turning his arms and legs as I read him Anne's last disturbing letter. You see something uncanny, and it may be nothing other than the familiar, briefly forgotten, then re-emerging in what seems to be another form. I could buy more cigarettes but didn't move. I searched the building all day, looking for anything small and white, like a figure, but not a person. In the evening I ordered out, Chinese food. The delivery boy arrived twenty minutes later. I asked him if he had seen anyone

around the building. As he pocketed my change he told me that he had seen a man who looked just like me, and the man had waved to him from the tower. I told him that wasn't possible. I had been in the cellar for the past hour. The delivery boy was sure. The man who looked like me had waved and turned off a light. He assumed the man was descending to open the door. How can that be possible, I asked, there is no light in the tower. He shrugged, indicating that he had to be on his way, there were other deliveries. I cradled the bag of noodles and chicken in oyster sauce as if I were prepared to eat my words too, then asked if I could have one of his cigarettes. He gave me one, and I told him I would pay him for the rest of his pack if he would give it to me. In fact, I would pay double. I might not be able to get out for some time to come. He looked at me strangely, then handed me half a pack. I gave him several large bills folded into my back pocket. From the door I watched him ride away. Before he reached the street, he stopped his bicycle and turned to look upward, as if seeing a light on in the upper stories of the building which I knew to be dark. I quickly leaned out the door to try to see what he might have been staring at, but the rest of the building was dark.