



(SEMANTIC)

drift

a zine by iso



literally: adverb.

1: in a literal sense or manner: such as

a: in a way that uses the ordinary or primary meaning of a term or expression

b: used to emphasize the truth and accuracy of a statement or description

c: with exact equivalence; with the meaning of each individual word given exactly

d: in a completely accurate way

2: in effect : FIGURATIVELY

-used in an exaggerated way to emphasize a statement or description that is not literally true or possible

the neurodivergent urge to think you (l) can solve any problem by just explaining things more and better and more and better is **literally** killing me

LANGUAGE
IS A
BARRIER
TO
COMMUNIC
ATION



"Behold! a man!" - Diogenes, probably

this is not (your) Plato's cave

we use words and a hundred, a thousand, different not-words that are conscious or subconscious (gestures, expressions, tone, posture), perceptible or imperceptible (the chemistry of our sweat, the activation of our mirror neurons), all in an effort to convey an abstraction of a concept that exists in our mindseye* to a fellow being in the hope that our bid for connection will be correctly interpreted and acted-upon.

and we call this communication.

but the thing about words is that they are and are not. words are sounds, or shapes, that are intended to evoke concepts or objects in our own mindseye. they exist in the space between us. when I make a sound and you hear the sound and we each recognize that it belongs to the same object, we have shared an understanding.

and we call this language.

but language is also itself, and not. it is so heavily dependent on the context in which we learn it, not just the shape or the sounds that call the meaning but the apprehension of the thing we are attempting to describe. our ability to perceive informs how much we understand. our culture, its values, here too matter. those values shape our attention, and our attention molds our ability to perceive. do we share a language that seeks to define concepts and objects in isolation? to think a thing one whole thing and say that this collection has a name and is a being**? - or do we share a language in which concepts and objects are understood in relationship to one another, a buffet of associations across linear space and time? can our language imagine future potentialities? can it dream?

*a necessary note on ableism: so many of our metaphors for perception rely on visual referents, which implies the capacity for vision. language is a structural example of how some abilities, and the people who possess them, are more highly valued in a given culture

all of these pieces make up (compose and create, yes, both; so much of everything, I'm learning, is "yes, and") our capacity to share understanding. every effort we make in that direction changes our next experience of the attempt: every translation an opportunity in which language fractures, fragments, refracts, reforms. evolves. so we use language to communicate, but language is imprecise, words are sloppy, and we katamari all of our experiences of that messiness forward as we continue to learn and experience and attach new information and try, and try, and try, to understand and be understood.

no wonder our shit is so hard. our communication takes place in the most liminal of spaces - between the ephemeral substance of your thoughts and feelings, and the chemical messages of your bodymind of which even you may be unaware, translated into more concrete messengers of voice and ink and all those not-word pieces of how your body moves in and takes up space, and mine.

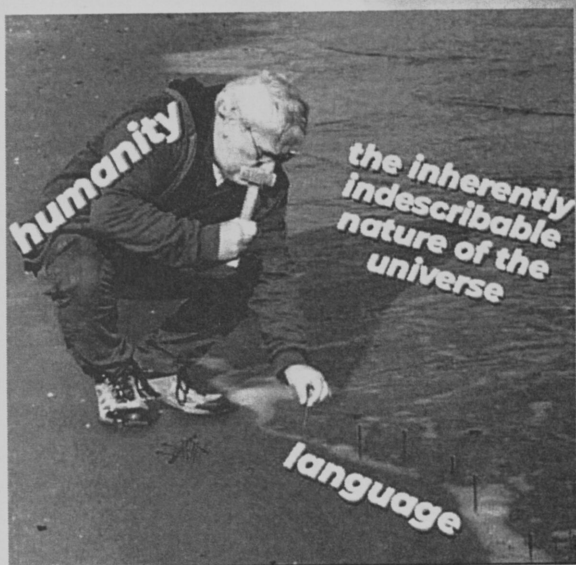
no wonder communication shares a root with community.
with communion.
this is holy stuff.

and in the face of the sacred, the divine, in the presence of that which makes perfect, is a surrender. an absolution. a practice:



all we can do is the best we can
with what we have.

approach each other with
flexibility, trust, and love.



"THE LIMITS OF LANGUAGE ARE
THE LIMITS OF MY WORLD"

- WITTGENSTEIN 1.0

I invoke Wittgenstein 2.0: not that language demarcates the limitations of the world, but that the world itself is limitless, and it is our language that limits our ability to communicate meaningfully about those phenomenon which exist but which are beyond us. this is magic, and faith, and soulstuff. this is setting our sail not upon the visible horizon but upon the existential astral sea. we have many wordshapes and vocalizations that attempt to describe the isolating experience of subjectivity, that all amount to the same thing: "do you see what I see? do feel as I feel?"

WHICH BRINGS US BACK TO —

flexibility: noun.

- 1: the ability to bend easily or without breaking
- 2: yielding to influence
- 3: ability and readiness to adapt to new, different, or changing requirements

a. — to include adjustment of one's thinking or behavior

trust: noun.

- 1: firm belief in the reliability, truth, ability, or strength of someone or something.
- 2: confident expectation of something; hope.

verb.

1: to commit or place in one's care or keeping; entrust

love: . . . oh.

- a: here's where shit starts to get (real) (messy).
- b: yes, and:

— I love you.

BUT WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?!

look, if all the poets/ musicians/ artists/ philosophers/
mages/ sages/ priests/ saints/ scholars/ reincarnations of
the immortal divine/ seamstresses/ caregivers/ prophets/
ancestors/ Meat Loaf could not come up with a singular
unified Grand One True Definition - then it must be the
seeking, and not the finding, that is the pointpurpose.

but that is not the question you are (I am) asking.

FINE. WHAT DOES THAT MEAN FOR US?

that is a fine and vulnerable question.

we were strangers, once. then we were

friends.

lovers.

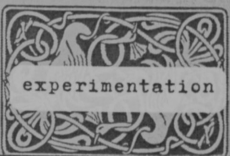
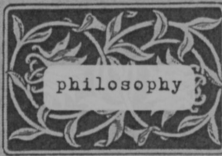
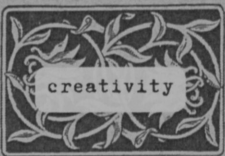
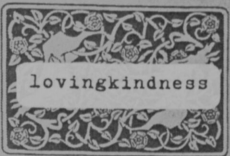
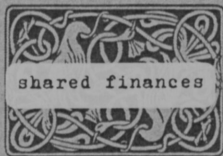
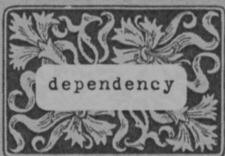
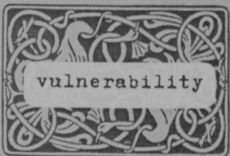
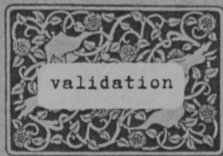
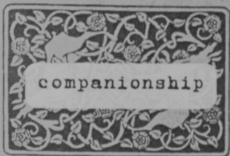
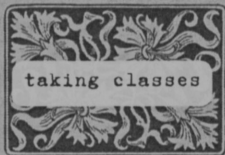
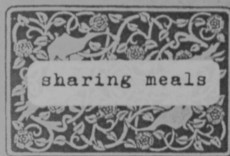
partners.

until -

(it is funny that the word for knowing is both an
intellectual act and an animal one in the euphemistic sense:
before we knew one another, we were strangers, so knowing is
a kind of intimacy, a familiarity, that can signify
[everything] or [nothing at all].)

one way to tell this story is to look at our taxonomies of
knowing/feeling/sharing love. which cards belong to the
category friend? lover? partner? family?

(we could not come to an agreement on which belonged to us,
our ontologies too complicated by our own histories, that
katamari ball of our bodies having kept the score.)



and of course there are more cards, always. this set is huge. it is [everything]. and all the different cards we draw together draw us together, or show us where the space between us lies so we can mind the gap, so long as it is not a raw and gaping gulf-wound with no safe metaphors by which to cross. the cards are not cards, they are points of connection, bright moments where - out of all the statistical improbabilities of [everything][everywhere][all at once] - we managed to exist in the same time and place. we trace them like prayers to create the shape of us, blindly feeling out the contour of a form we can only ever know by peering from the corners of our hearts, and by asking ourselves and (each) (other) these questions.

"am I ...?"

"are you ...?"

"are [we]?"

and we ask and we ask and we ask and the answers, sometimes, they change, or their meaning can shift. (drift.) what is true right now is that truth is a fiction we co-create, a temporal rift, a for-now self. "this too shall pass" is not just for grief but for joy, too. the big bang that started the universe and (our) constellations is flinging us all ever incrementally farther away from some far-distant singularity and what we share is a sliding-door moment of probability: here, and then not-here.

"I love you" today and tomorrow but Friday "I love you" will mean that we are "just" friends and not partners or family at all, passing ships in the long dark night of the soul.

no wonder why we despair when we cannot find common language to share understanding: we cannot confirm that we are not alone.

WE NEED TO TALK.

this zine is a perfect example of its topic. the first original draft wanted to educate, elocute, rail, and maybe whinge a little about how concept creep ruins everything. there were examples, like how sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild coined the term emotional labor to describe the unpaid effort female employees are often expected to make to project specific emotions for the comfort of their customers/superiors, and now it is colloquially used to talk about what we used to call the mental load (which was a separate concept popularized by French feminist Emma in her iconic comic "you should have asked") aka the domestic and relational labor women tend to be expected to provide their husbands and households. or like how gaslighting comes from a British play and very usefully came to describe a specific form of psychological manipulation and abuse and now laypeople will use it casually to describe an ordinary difference between how folks remember things.

this draft had information about logical fallacies, and social fallacies, and neuroscience, and wanted so badly to try to wordsmithsplain how fucking hard it is to live in a world where our survival depends on being connected to others and being connected to others is dependent on how well we can communicate and how well we can communicate is dependent on how easy we find it to share understanding -

and to lay out all the reasons that one simple thing is
SO. H A R D.

how can we talk about these specific things when the tendency of language is toward generalization and the tendency of energy is toward entropy and chaos? even the universe is leaving itself behind. why should language be different? why should family? atoms make up everything and they don't even touch.

...maybe we are -



- alone.

*this serves something in you,
being all the way out here.*

i like it. it's comfortable. it gives me space for everything i'm thinking, everything i'm feeling, the constant hum of energy and trains of thought. like that we are all ships of theseus, rebuilt plank by plank, until no one can say, least of all us, whether we are the same or a different person altogether. how do i know who i even am when who i am is shifting out from under itself, always, when i am not a me but at least three kobolds stacked up in a trenchcoat, a facsimile of a human, a copy, an imposter. the me that i am is a collection of experiences refracted through the unreliable prism of memory, introjections of others' voices, pieces of self constructed from relationships with parents, friends, teachers, peers - and so many more fictions, because by god did i read voraciously, a dozen stories a week, trying on so many different parts, and feeling such keen sympathy for monsters and villains and outcasts even while i cheered their downfall.

mhm. what else?

at the heart of conflict is "I am afraid that you don't value me." (why am i like this) belonging is a basic human emotional need - see @samdylanfinch on pillars of meaning - that offers limbic safety via mirroring, co-regulatory practices, scaffolds our sense of self. threats to our ego/perception of self are read as threats to our ability to belong (abandonment) or our worthiness (universal experiences of connection/transcendence). So: my conversations with Mom re: politics. "How do I get along with people who want me dead?" "Nobody wants you dead." "Okay but they're willing to vote for parties and politicians whose agenda includes marginalizing people like me to the point of not existing, so at the very least they don't care if I die? How is indifference better?" "That's not why anyone votes that way, that's not what they're thinking about at the booths." She's right, probably. They're thinking "these are my people and they will protect and defend me and mine. they are not with us they are against us." i am no different, brow/limbic; i just want to matter (why do i need their validation/why am i not enough/is anyone out there/somebody save me i think i may be drowning); pact vs intent in a culture of disposability. How do we discern when it's important to extend compassion & stay in relationship & continue to

influence-be influenced vs when it's important to draw a firm boundary and go
no contact vs how to navigate that in-between? ("you can be right or you can
have friends" was both "quit fucking policing my subject-verb agreement" and
a larger point about how it's more important to be in right relationship than
to use other people to feel better about our own intellectual superiority
(but when words both mean things and DO things how do i account for every
possible thing that my words might be doing when even i cannot hope to see
every consequence or twist of the knife in another's heart because we are
strangers to ourselves and to each other and the ends are never clear??)
spend so much time thinking about this. if this is about relationships, i
relationships are the lifeblood of our activism, how do we learn to navigat
them safely across differences in ways that reduce harm while affirmin
inherent worth and dignity? How do we do this without asking yet more work o
folk already shouldering multiple burdens of systemic oppression? (The
Justice Movement) positionality to locate the current self within broader
context - not just who we are but how our context informs our understandin
of self + needs; seeing the trees without losing sight of the forest - th
shift to redistribute wealth and power to create truly just systems canno
get lost in the trees of individual psychologies and eliminatin
microaggressions; everything, everywhere, all at once. the ethics o
emotional intelligence and responsibility, i.e. how we figure out what we ov
one another and how to approach that conversation from a place of compassi
and enough-ness instead of a zero-sum false scarcity; the politica
relationships including things like the role of amatanormativity :
compulsory cisheterosexuality, the compatibility of values of polyamory
relationship anarchy, what it takes to create and maintain intention
communities of mutual care and respect; how orientation and gender identi
do and don't figure in various relationship modalities, and what it means
be queer; ideas about justice and its pursuit, by way of conversations abo
marginalization and power; how to do self-care right, and create the kind
life I don't have to escape from; questions and noodling about how parent
reproduces (hah) some of my least favorite power dynamics in sometime
unavoidable ways and therefore, how to use my power to be a force for good
the lives of my children.

HOW DO I BE GOOD????

WOW THIS GOT INTENSE.

and it's lonely.



AND WHAT DO WE SAY WHEN WE
RUMINATE TOO LONG ON
STOCHASTIC/EXISTENTIAL ANGST?

~~"I would like to rage."~~



"I sit with my grief.

I mother it."

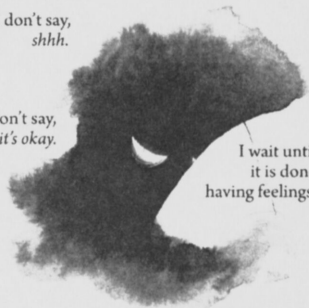
I hold its small,
hot hand.



I don't say,
shhh.

I don't say,
it's okay.

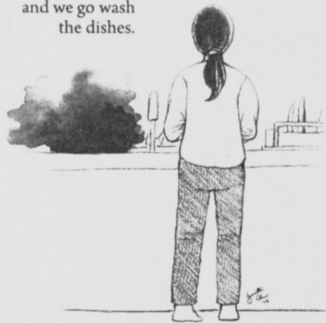
I wait until
it is done
having feelings.




Then we stand




and we go wash
the dishes.



Callista Buchen, from Taking Care; art by Jeanette Chan



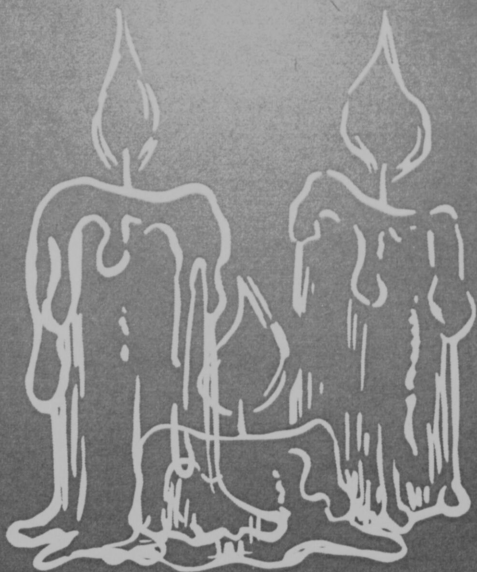
"here, all we get are a
few specks of time where
any of this actually
makes any sense."



*"then I will cherish these few
specks of time."*

which brings us here, to this roughdraft/heartcry/soulscream, about how (we are) (I am) always trying to find that overlap, the venn diagram of where you end and I begin and [we] exist. if [we] exist, then maybe (you are) (I am) not alone. we are each (an) other, but we have each other, and maybe I don't need to be afraid of the dark, because you have a light; maybe you don't need to be afraid of the cold, because I have a blanket. maybe we can share. maybe we can tell each other stories in the dark and the cold with our light and our blanket and our story will be about how togetherness makes anything possible. if we go on together, I know no time is a good time for goodbyes.

so idk. maybe we are alone ... but probably, we are not. after all, we got here together, reader. that's something.



Someone will probably love you for who you are, not just for who you labor to be. Maybe you're lost in your skin today. Maybe you're burning and wish you could tear it all off. Please don't. You are variously a marvel, an athlete, a wilderness, a source of warmth and a way to learn from fear.

— Stephanie Burt, "Prayer for Werewolves"

The trouble with you humans is that you are so concerned with staying afloat. Go ahead, **be gouged open by love**. Gulp that saltwater, sink beneath the waves. You're not a boat, you can go under and come up again, with those big old lungs of yours, those hard kicking legs.

And your heart, she said, that gargantuan ark, that floating hotel. Call it Unsinkable, though it is sinkable.

✦ ✦ ✦ embark, embark. ✦ ✦ ✦

There are enough ballrooms in you to dance with everyone you'll ever love.

— "On This the 100th Anniversary of the Sinking of the Titanic, We Reconsider the Buoyancy of the Human Heart"

Laura Lamb Brown-Lavoie

There's my temple!
Identity-seeker, sinner, stateless or not.

You are welcome!

We have no constraints on expression but space.
We have no code but to listen to poetry
between the silence and the surrender.

— Ma Theresa "Tet" Gustilo Gallardo, "There's My Temple!"

³ family means nobody gets left behind, or forgotten.
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