

The Porcelain Chronicle

ISSUE I | WINTER MMXXI | FREE

M COOMBES | L MAY | G STEAD

STONER PATHOLOGY

MY aunt and uncle are the type of eccentric conservatives that call things sexy. Inanimate objects – sexy. Food – sexy. You better believe your 14 year old niece, too skinny but with a fat arse and bouncing tits – sexy. Moby's Porcelain – well, she's sexy too.

THEIR house is all white now. Architectural extensions and furniture 'pieces' have transformed the building into an antiseptic environment fit for a stoner pathologist. It's fucking clean, but here and there you might spot something that doesn't quite fit with the conservative veneer. There's a cauldron of hot wax and a woman pushing 60 (sexy) waxing her own brazilian. The door's wide open.

MOBY's Porcelain should've prepared me for this, when its flacid sex appeal breathed bleach through the thick, damp viscera of 90's lockwoods and 20th century house plants and sterilised the sex out of everything stripping it bare to something sexy.

No fucking. Just a porcelain doll.



SPROUTS

I REMEMBER her black synthetic trousers with the white stripe up the sides and how she'd wear them with a brown singlet until the last minute, until enough of the guests had arrived that she could disappear and come back and dazzle them all with her dress and her earrings and her hair still the same, the same messy hair that sat atop the last outfit, that now looked different, sophisticated, undone.

I REMEMBER when the song changed and a table of eyes were for a moment locked on me as a cracker topped with tangled sprouts and salmon arrived all warm and someone said Go on, eat it, eat it all, they said to me. I remember the looks dispersed and conversations resumed once I'd stopped chewing and my Adam's apple had reset itself in my neck. I remember thinking this is how things are gonna be now, and resolving to wait fifteen minutes before forcing myself to throw up in the bathroom upstairs.

I REMEMBER she was not my mother and this was not my house. My mother and I were living there because we had nowhere else to go, and she was my mother's best friend in the whole world. I remember how my mother hated her. I remember watching her in black synthetic trousers, and watching her entertain guests in her beautiful dress and how she never relaxed

the whole night. I remember thinking of the cruelest thing I could possibly say to her and my heart racing as I waited for the right moment to say it.

I REMEMBER she'd touch my arm and say mean things about my hair or my clothes, and she'd ask if I masturbated and whether I was a boy or a girl. I said I didn't know and I remember my body burning and how I'd run to school to burn it more and how I'd pass out in class and give my lunch away because I cried once when I put it in the bin. My mother had assembled that lunch for me because she cared about me and she wanted me to eat it because she cared about me and it mattered to her that I eat it so I couldn't throw it away again.

I REMEMBER my pigtails that night and my new black shoes that my mum bought me at St Lukes on late night Thursday. She got KFC and I wasn't hungry. I remember I loved my mum so much and more than once I called her a fucking bitch, and I love her now more than ever 'cause I love her more every day.

I REMEMBER all the guests leaving happy into the night because the playlist she'd made had welcomed them in, built them up, and gradually brought them down, and I remember the last song on that playlist was Moby's Porcelain.

THE HISTORY BOOKS WILL REMEMBER NORMAN COOK

I'M sorry, but it's true. Have you ever heard of a little track called *Praise You*? Exactly. In fact, the reason the history books will remember Norman Cook is all to do with American filmmaker, photographer, musician, and actor Spike Jonze.

BUT, before I break it down for you, I know we live in a low-trust society now and you'll all be drooling and screaming 'BUT WHERE ARE THE CITATIONS' and acting like you're in the middle of a flamewar with some fourteen year-old Wikipedia administrator. So if you're a major nerd who needs reassurance from the mainstream media go hit up the two articles I got all this information from: one is a feature in *Empire* magazine ('Jonze-ing For His Next Hit') and the other was a piece in culture section of the *Los Angeles Times* but I can't remember the date. I'm sure you'll find it on the microfiche in the public library if your tinfoil hat doesn't make your brain overheat first.

So, Spike Jonze made the music video for *Praise You* and I guarantee you remember it. Actually, before I get ahead of myself, I'm sure the nerds will be champing at the bit to tell me that actually Francis Ford Coppola's son also made the music video and you're right, of course, but it's also pretty obvious that his influence was quite limited on set and the creative direction really belongs to Spike. The video is set outside a cinema in Los Angeles and it was filmed 'guerilla' style (this was the height of flashmob era, and so on). A fictional local dance troupe did a dorky dance while genuinely puzzled real-life onlookers staggered past them. Iconic stuff, and every wedding I've ever been to has blasted that song and then everyone tries to reenact the dance routine

from the music video but *no one actually knows it or is good enough to do it*. It would be like being able to recount any lines after "I coulda been somebody" from *On The Waterfront* – leave it to the artists.

Now, Norman Cook had hair in the 1990s, but it was thinning. Moby was also bald. I can see you eyeballing your phone to get Face ID to let you into Google image search so don't worry, I will acknowledge that Norman Cook still has hair today and that's because he actually had plugs. Anyway. Both Cook and Moby were chart-topping DJs. Both Cook and Moby understood that music could be electronic and still sound nice. Both Cook and Moby won Brit Awards.

BUT unbeknownst to either of them, Spike Jonze had figured out that only one of them could be remembered by the history books. Literally try to name any of Julius Caesar's friends and you will understand the significance of this realisation. Spike is a major history buff and in his semi-retirement after *Where the Wild Things Are* he claims, in interviews, to spend most of his time watching documentaries about the Second World War. He's really into all those things about secret Nazi bunkers, and what happened on the Eastern Front, and the quirky under-reported individuals in small towns who found inventive ways to support the war effort.

So Spike *gets it*. He knows that history needs to look back on one of these two bald guys when we're trying to explain music at the turn of the millennium. It's 1999, right, and Spike has just got back from the desert where he's been shooting *Three Kings* with George Clooney and Ice Cube and he sits down in front of the fireplace at the lodge on

his Montana ranch and listens to two albums in full. The first is *Play* by Moby, and the second is *You've Come a Long Way, Baby* by Fatboy Slim. That's a total of 2 hours, 4 minutes and 37 seconds of Spike's life and that's all he needs to determine the course of history.

Now get this – Fatboy's album is sixty-two minutes long, Moby's is sixty-two minutes and thirty-seven seconds. No word of a lie. Almost identical albums, but of course Moby wastes time. This fucking guy, Moby. He's in the colosseum, before none other than the Emperor Spikelius Jonze, and instead of *getting his gladiator* on he bloats that album out and wastes thirty-seven whole seconds of recorded music. I don't know if this is what swung it for Jonze – nobody can know what really happened on that ranch twenty years ago – but you'd be seething, right?

ANYWAY, you can imagine it. Jonze is sitting in his media room and maybe the History Channel's still projecting away but he's muted the black and white footage of Winston, Franklin, Joseph and the boys at the Yalta Conference. The Dolby 5.1's done its job and the last sound hanging in the air is that little mechanical whirr as the CD player farewells Norman Cook's magnum opus. And Jonze picks up the phone, and he calls Hollywood, and he calls the record labels and their A&R men, and he calls the History Channel and it's game over for Moby. The history books, Jonze sends spittle flying as he yells down his cordless phone, will remember Norman Cook.

CHANGELING

MR and Mrs Jackson (slang names) are ready for their guests and they have argued and Mr Jackson has thrown things across the room. Mrs Jackson didn't cry because she doesn't cry anymore. Child Jackson's best friend is here and has been here for five nights straight and just last week they caught her in the liquor cabinet stealing little bits from each bottle to concoct a truly lethal hybrid drink type

thing that'd leave the kid blind and this blindness would be the only sign anything'd happened, the individual volumes were so miniscule. Mr Jackson hates the kid but Mrs Jackson admires her makeshift insolence. Here's the kind of thing she says, she says YOU'RE ALL BOURGEOIS DOGFUCKERS GOD DAMN I HATE YOU. She says she lives for art but can't name a single artist she likes. Mr and

Mrs Jackson think this is the funniest thing in the world. Mr and Mrs Jackson can each name a million artists they're sort of keen on but not really. Child Jackson and his best friend come upstairs reeking of sweat and grey mildew cigarettes. Then the guests arrive and Mr Jackson crosses his arms and says shitty things under his breath all night. The bourgeois dogfucker.

WHAT PEOPLE TALK ABOUT WHEN THEY TALK ABOUT PORCELAIN BY MOBY

I DON'T know what people talk about when they talk about *Porcelain* by Moby. In fact, I don't know if people talk about *Porcelain* by Moby at all. I remember years ago, Moby appeared on MTV's *Cribs*. That was the television show that granted celebrities a platform to float around their increasingly identical, sun-drenched stucco mini-mansions. The hosts would pivot and pause to show off the contents of double-door refrigerators, soulless games rooms heavy with purple velvet pool tables and framed eBay sports memorabilia and, with a wink, the room inevitably described as the one "where the magic happens". It was the early thousands, and it seemed like some gaudy love-child of Richie Rich and *The Sopranos* had taught rappers, pop stars, and ball players how to play *The Sims* with their own houses and maximalism was firmly in.

MOBY'S appearance, however, was something exceptional. A quiet, awkward DJ led MTV's cameras through an East Village apartment just large enough to play the part of a forgotten wardrobe or scullery in another *Cribs* home. While MTV's editors surely fretted over what to leave on the cutting room floor in order to craft ten-minute segments, I suspect Moby posed the opposite challenge. Two rooms, a galley kitchen and a bathroom from another century ensured the cameras were barely warm before they'd got what they needed. As an eighth floor walkup, the approach to the residence didn't even merit the usual tilting, zooming establishing shots the *Cribs* formula repeated ad nauseam. It was ersatz *Cribs*, with every piece of nutrition extracted and exhausted to fortify the segment. Shots repeat, close-ups hold for several beats longer than they should and every second of Moby's dialogue is retained, especially the ones where he trails off, looks like he's going say something else, but decides not to. Records, books and clothes lay against the walls and the floors, an affront to the hours of minimum-wage cleaning, nannying and personal assistance the show normally fetishized.

WHAT'S in the fridge, Moby? Certainly not rows of identical sports performance drinks or expensive alcohol. No, it's a leaking bottle of balsamic vinegar, a tub of butter, a half-eaten bagel Moby's planning to finish later. At least, that's what it looked like. The economics of the kitchen space meant the

refrigerator door couldn't open the whole way, nor could Moby and the cameras comfortably cohabit the cramped space once the balsamic vinegar, butter and bagel were exposed. Warming up to the cameras, Moby took them up a ladder to his roof. Fairy lights, a wooden table, two chairs and a view of the sides of other buildings. It's the sort of thing you pay an extra hundred dollars a night for on AirBnB now. Tentatively, Moby extended his arm in the style of the rappers and ball players in the segments either side of his and surveyed the perch atop his castle.

I COULD never tell if Moby's smile was wry and knowing, or simply one of bashful confusion, and this is part of why I don't know what people talk about when they talk about *Porcelain* by Moby, or when they talk about Moby at all. I've never figured it out and it annoys me that I haven't. Was MTV *Cribs* a machine self-aware and critical enough to use Moby as a contrapuntal bulwark against the maximal performances of wealth and poor taste the show otherwise championed? To read Moby's smile as earnest and hesitant would suggest so, but such self-reflexivity seems a slim prospect if a glint of triumph is understood instead. Perhaps Moby knew the lure of a chart-topping DJ would be too powerful a draw for MTV *Cribs* to resist, or perhaps the unit director and producers misinterpreted Moby's Manhattan address as an Uptown palace in the age before Google Maps, or maybe the show's production was one of mindless automation that meant sentient eyes were only laid upon the content at the point of its transmission, at ten in the evening on America's once-premier music channel.

THIS is the heart of the matter. People don't talk about *Porcelain* by Moby, or talk about any Moby song (except, perhaps *Natural Blues*) because it is not possible to be confident what Moby, or his songs, mean. Every track on 1999's *Play* is a wry smile in a cramped kitchen and it's a lot easier to repeat that wry smile than reveal one's ignorance by attempting to talk about a Moby song. I was asked if I wanted to write a piece about *Porcelain* by Moby and I was thrown into a reverie and began to talk with passion about the sensation of freedom evoked in lines like bird of prey / fly-ing high. Well, that's not Moby - that's another bald(ing) DJ who goes by the moniker Fatboy Slim, and the song's called *Sunset*. *Porcelain*'s that other song, and it sounds

even better than Fatboy Slim's radio-friendly single about birds and nuclear weapons. As my misapprehension about *Porcelain* was politely corrected, fissures formed and healed in the depths of my memorial reserves. *Porcelain* slowly unspooled and two songs, and two realities, came into view before me. I couldn't help but think that this is exactly the reason people don't talk about Moby's songs - and especially not *Porcelain*.

This is goodbye... Is it Moby exhaling this line, or is it a sample? Is it Moby's anguish or has it been artificially infused into the singer of some rocksteady B-side from fifty years ago? Of course, it doesn't matter, but it's yet another question I'll never have an answer to. If I begin to think about it I'll just end up on Moby's rooftop in the year 2002, worrying about whether the balsamic vinegar is going to drip into the margarine the shelf below it. We don't talk about *Porcelain* or the other timeless singles released by Moby because we don't need to talk about these things. In the same way that a rising tide lifts all boats, a track from *Play* or the other Moby albums that people pretend to know about draws listeners into a common confusion. To play *Porcelain* in a communal setting is to see people hum and mouth the song's lyrics and warped synth sounds for the first seventy seconds or so, before disappearing into wistful looks, memories of intermediate school, and their own wry smiles. This is a remarkable feat and *Porcelain* is in rare company in its ability to forge it. Weezer's *Island in the Sun* and Groove Armada's *At the River* achieve similar affective unanimity, a state that opens with clarity and certainty and closes with doubt and unease about the decisions we made in years seven and eight.

I DON'T know what people talk about when they talk about *Porcelain* by Moby, but I do think that the reason for this has something to do with MTV's *Cribs*. *Tell the truth, tell me, Porcelain's* bridge urges and, surely not for the last time, I wonder whether it is Moby, an anguished sample or the listener's own voice that melodically prepares us for the return to the chorus. Obviously, it doesn't matter because we don't talk about *Porcelain* or any other Moby song anyway, and in this restless conclusion I can only see Moby's knowing smirk in the ruddy light of his pre-war East Village walkup.



THE MOBY UNCERTAINTY PRINCIPLE

REMEMBERING Moby in the decades after *Porcelain* is a recurring theme where the recovery of sensuousness from the abstractions of late capitalism is concerned. First in film and then in music itself. The agitation and paranoia of *The Bourne Identity* ends with its protagonist escaping to the paradise of Mykonos, cue Moby. Two other films, both released in 2006, push that film's agitation and paranoia even further, channeling post-cinematic affect through the memory of Moby: *Miami Vice* and *Southland Tales*. All three films are agitated and paranoid because they are concerned with the way that global trade and surveillance networks distribute human subjectivity across a totalising now-time. The people in these films never sleep because time is always active, and they are never in one location because they are always scattered across computer monitors and boats and fire escapes and fields and phone lines. The totality of time in these films is the total obliteration of space and matter. What appears as things regroup, however, is Moby.

Miami Vice, like *The Bourne Identity*, remembers Moby after *Porcelain*. There is a scene where two of the characters decide to stop advancing the plot. They go to kill time together over the horizon. When the plot is not being advanced the ground stabilises beneath their feet, and then when everything becomes concrete they realise they are present, together. When they kill time they coexist in space and when they coexist in space they remember Moby. Moby plays in this scene. Moby is the soundtrack to the rejection of telics. To remember Moby is to reclaim space with someone you care about and to act toward no greater end or purpose than just being together. What remembering Moby does is reveal the late capitalist uncertainty principle: to become attuned to the velocity of global trade and surveillance networks

is to forfeit knowledge of our positioning in space, just as to claim certainty over our position in space is to forfeit knowledge of network velocity. This is what they hope for in *Miami Vice*: that in making one another concrete, in experiencing one another as flesh, they can stop time. And it almost works.

THE problem is that to remember Moby is to concede that there is a fundamental discontinuity between the one that remembers and that which is remembered. Space can be made concrete through the rejection of time, but without time we are all made ghosts. We slip through one another's fingers as we fall through rocks and water and history. We try to regroup but we return to the beach alone, decades later. Moby is a light that shines from forever ago: I remember we were together, and we must've disappeared a while. Maybe that was enough.

Southland Tales remembers Moby after *Porcelain*, but it also cannot forget Moby after *Porcelain*. Moby is everywhere in *Southland Tales*. World War 3 has come and gone and the Patriot Act, forged two years after Moby's *Porcelain*, never went away. A company is using ocean currents to generate energy, but the affected tides have slowed the Earth's rotation. Spatially *Southland Tales* is more angular than its post-*Porcelain* colleagues because its now-time is sovereign. Instead of spatial ellipsis fragmenting the bodies of the protagonists, *Southland Tales* is a hypersaturation of recordings across a flat screen that appears as God's eye: a security monitor. It is chaotic because it is too consistent, too comprehensive.

SONICALLY *Southland Tales* is always rising and sinking, like Moby's *Porcelain*. The formula goes that when the world collapses Moby plays, and the world is always collapsing. The way it turns just makes it collapse more with the tides. The film is liquid: 'the ocean,' says The Rock's Boxer Santaros, 'is in control'. It is the film most saturated with continuity, and it is also the most unstable. *The Bourne Identity* and *Miami Vice* are both space-sick because the characters cannot adjust to the demands of now-time. *Southland Tales* is time-sick because space is fighting back. The ocean is in control and its soundtrack is Moby after *Porcelain*.

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JOUR D'ÉTÉ

THE FIRST time I heard *Porcelain* by Moby was an early summer's day. One of those ones where the sun is high, bright and full of promise, but there's still a bit of dew on the ground tucked under shrubs and at the base of the fence. Sweat prickles at the nape of my neck, but nowhere else. The heat isn't yet oppressive, as it will turn in the months to come. I don't really need my sunglasses on but I don't like squinting. And I think they look cool anyway. We're hosting a barbecue at ours and it's all laughter, the crack of beer cans opening and meat being abused by the grill. This was years ago now, so it's all meat I guess. Nothing plant-based on that Weber. The radio's hanging out the kitchen window and it's on one of those 'middle of the road' stations – and why not – and then *Porcelain* by Moby comes on. And I thought well, it doesn't get much better than this does it?

EVERYBODY always asks you where you were the first time you heard *Porcelain* by Moby, but nobody ever asks you where you were the second time you heard it.

THE SECOND time I hear *Porcelain* by Moby, I am driving on the Interstate in a five year-old red Toyota Camry with busted aircon. The sun hangs low on the horizon, dancing through the brown dust rising off the road. I can't open the windows for the dust and it feels like we're breathing old water. There wasn't any paracetamol in the glovebox. The kids – all three – in the back, fussing and shouting and sulking. My head throbs. Why am I doing this? My pits are drenched. And where am I going? I have \$240 cash in my wallet and I can sell the Camry, or so I keep saying to myself like a mantra.

THE SECOND time I hear it, President Bush and Prime Minister Blair are invading Iraq.



Television consists of a shot of a hulking, grey plane with a big fat belly. It either takes off from one desert, in Arizona or wherever those young men in combat fatigues assemble to face their fates, or it touches down in an almost identical desert in... where? Saudi Arabia? Kuwait? One of the good guys anyway. I decide to pretend it's the same plane every time. Just the one, droning back and forth between deserts, tinted cockpit windows disguising the fatigue and distress of the two schmucks rostered onto this endless service to hell. If only Saddam could figure it out – get that one plane out of the sky and you're golden.

THE SECOND time I hear it, my coffee has gone cold but I don't know how to ask for a refill from the server when I have a full mug. Will she be okay with it, does it happen all the time? Maybe I just need to drink it all quickly and then ask. Or I could pour it into the planter on the window sill. No, she'll see that – the diner isn't very busy. Actually I'd also like some pancakes, so I'll have to call her over anyway. I thought that if I asked the lawyer to meet me here that maybe he would pay for breakfast. It was a good plan, but he didn't show up. Not a great sign, I suppose. I push the button again on the front of my phone to see if there are any messages. Of course there aren't.

THE SECOND TIME I hear it, I'm using a tatty list of 'leads' and a beige phone with strange grey patterns forming around the holes in the mouthpiece to call people and ask if they are happy with their current health

insurance provider. They all are. Every single person. It seems impossible and, of course, it is completely untrue. They'd all rather eat wasps than remain on the line with me. That's fine, because I know something they don't. Iraq's army has collapsed, and the Marines are bearing down on Baghdad. I move my mouse and click the refresh button to see what else the Drudge Report has to tell me about the oil fields and the greed.

THE SECOND time I hear it, I collect three trash bags full of my clothes from out the front of the house. That's nearly everything. This is goodbye. Honestly it might not be so bad. Lots of people end up having a fresh start, I should really try to look on the bright side. But then I lose it. Like, I absolutely and completely lose it. I've pushed the Weber into the back of the car and slammed the red boot down but it doesn't fit and now the hinge or maybe it's a hydraulic joist or maybe it's a catch I don't know but it's fucked, and that's just one more goddamn thing and how am I ever going to sell this goddamn Camry. I wake and I'm going out of my mind. I've crashed the Weber through the lounge window and I'm halfway down the street. Glovebox. Still no paracetamol.

THE SECOND time I hear it, I am living in a motel on the edge of town, two miles from the closest McDonald's. I have to be careful where I eat my Quarter Pounder combo because the room has a patina of indeterminate organic matter across its surfaces.

THE SECOND time I hear it, it turns out there weren't any WMDs to start with.

THE SECOND time I hear it, I understand what it means to be dying all the time in my dreams.

THE SECOND time I hear it, I haven't yet forgotten the first time, but I will.



SUNDAY DRIVE I

WINTER's night driving west. A few years back we were attempting at match-making two wildly unsuitable friends. One, a glamorous neurotic princess, the other a muscular neurotic nerd. We thought neurosis the ultimate in poignant compatibility. Not so. It was raining, and dark, and cold, the visibility sucked and he was only on a restricted licence and the road churned intestinally around the damp bush. We hooked into some beers. Nasty of us in retrospect, I often feel guilty for having left the driver out of getting into the vibe. That vibe was bad though.

SPRING's day driving north. When I was younger the north seemed tremendously oppressive, and the drive in the back of the Corolla, its safe speed bell complaining continuously — ring ding ring ding — as Mum pushed the shitty engine to go over 100, felt as if the sky and earth were closing in on me until I was extruded out onto a beach somewhere. Sweating from fear, not the heat, I'd clamber out spinning and gasping for air. Sometimes I would be crying too, having sung my 'songs of death' to achieve hysterical catharsis. I'd be scolded for such behaviour, but it was the 90s and one did not wear their children's peculiar actions as badges of neurodivergent honour.

SUMMER's evening driving south. Havelock North is the Satanic capital of the world, and it greets me with a warm, dry embrace. It smells scorched, it looks scorched, the sheep are scorching in the sun and the roast lamb comes out of the oven scorched too. I love it. There is nothing damp about it.

THE GENTLE SUBLIME

A SECOND-ORDER apprehension of the sublime brought about by the experience of something which cannot harm the subject and in fact pleases her on an aesthetic or emotional level, but which nevertheless stirs in her a pinch of melancholy and leads to the reminder of her own insignificance, which paradoxically affirms her place in the world, warming her body while tickling her spine.

ONE of Desert Mother Syncretica's finest entries in the *Apophthegmata Patrum* details how the only way to preserve the moment as a memory is to immediately cut it out of your heart, she says, like it was going to kill you.

THE gentle sublime is often erroneously conflated with *ennui*.





SUNDAY DRIVE II

PROBABLY the least interesting thing, I mean the least interesting way to put it, is the way my friend did when he put it like this. He said you start with an object, any object, and you map it in relation to another one, a marker of any description. What you do then is you track the moving object in relation to that marker, and then you're dealing with movement in space, and that's what time is. We, not him, but we were driving back from up north and it was dark. There's this whole stretch where you can't see anything on either side and there's nothing but the road. Eventually there are signs and posts and you know you're moving. She said back there it's like we're the road and the night in stillness is everything else. When the signs and posts reappear you go from being nowhere to hurtling into a nowhere that's someplace else.

We hit the clouds through the Brynderwyn Hills and couldn't see through the pitch black to the farmland below. The cat's eyes along the road and retroreflectors along the barriers all lit up gold, and the headlights burned the mist to a reddish brown. It felt like we were moving in slow motion or otherwise just covering a greater distance between points. It felt like we were underwater or in outer space. Or in heaven. She went to put music on but there was no coverage so what we had was what was cached in my phone. It was a handful of songs from Moby's *Play*. *Porcelain* came on with the strings so now we were sinking again. Sinking into a nowhere both here and someplace else.

THE thing about *Play* is that everybody had the CD. My burnt CD was different to the next CD although they both sounded similar. People who were picky about those sorts of things would listen to all the different *Plays* from across the world and say how the UK edition had a more detailed mix than the Australian one but how the US one was an all-rounder if you weren't willing to shell out for the Japanese print.

WHEN streaming *Play* there is no enduring CD that anyone can use to access *Play* that is sonically and materially distinct from every other *Play*. With streaming there is a single *Play* that appears everywhere, from the same place, and that holds what is now understood to be the universal value of *Play*. Nobody knows which mix of *Play* is the one they are streaming, but that is beside the point because there are no other *Plays*. This is *Play* stripped of all sonic and material difference. We are in the era of a *Play* singularity.

SOMETIMES I wonder whether the universal *Play* gets lonely. I wonder whether it is in one of those data centres beneath the snow covered forests in Northern Europe, and whether it gets cold. The universal *Play* sits there in the dark and sends its signals across the globe to anyone requesting *Play*, before having every trace of itself deleted from the receiver's device. The 52-hertz whale is described as the 'world's loneliest whale' because it calls at a frequency that other whales do not respond to, either because they cannot hear it, or because they actively ignore it. The universal *Play* is the loneliest *Play* of all. We know it only by its echoes.

ON this drive, however, the universal *Play* found a home. *Play* was tangible data in my phone; numbers represented in my File Manager and executable through music playing software. It had not yet been cleared from my cache and so we were floating into the blackened orange mist and *Porcelain* was there with us, sinking. We all fell into this nowhere together.

BREATHING PORCELAIN: MOBY'S RAPTURE

THEY call it rapture of the deep when a diver loses their mind down there. It's the pressure and then the hallucinations that's so dangerous. I've never been down that deep, but they say it also happens shallow and you don't notice it as much. I got shallow-water blackout once, it's when you just stop and you're floating there with your face in the water and nobody notices 'cause the water's so shallow and you're so quiet.

THE *Porcelain* video has Moby reflected in somebody's eye. I heard someone say the eye frames Moby like a space helmet, and someone else say it's like a diving suit. I think they're both conflating Moby's *Porcelain* video with the one for *No Surprises* from the year before. Moby's *Porcelain* evokes space travel and drowning because the reversed strings in the song feel like the slow-motion hyperventilation that is shallow-water blackout. You are hyperventilating as you quietly float there, breathing water.

Rapture of the deep is the saturation of oxygen, and the increase in pressure that comes with descending into an inconceivably vast space underwater. As space opens up, things close in, and as the heart speeds up, the world goes thick as syrup. I wonder if Moby's *Porcelain* also feels like rapture of the deep for the way the strings both rise and fall to a cool numb somewhere between tranquility and crushing depression. What is clear is that Moby's *Porcelain* is asking us to breathe water.

AN important thing to note is that the eye doesn't just reflect Moby. It reflects the cosmos, and a baby, and a flower. Moby's *Porcelain* sounds like breathing water, and the *Porcelain* video flattens time and matter into a thick sea of becoming. In the *Evangelion* series, the cockpits of the mecha are flooded with a liquid called LCL that the pilots have to learn to breathe. In *End of Evangelion* the world ends as everybody explodes into the LCL liquid that they were apparently made of all along. They say the LCL is the blood of Lilith, our angel ancestor, and that Lilith's blood is the substance from which we are all derived, and to which we all return. The baby is the key to Moby's *Porcelain* video because in Moby's *Porcelain* video the fields, the sky, and the cosmos are all made amniotic. There are no stars 'out there' since to see the stars is to be seen by them,

to breathe and drink and touch them. We are all different but we are all made of the same stuff. As Moby would later clarify of his quantum physics inspired mysticism, *we are all made of stars*. And all of us are amniotic.

I heard someone say the *Porcelain* video is like Martin Creed's *Work No. 2575*, which is a video of a blinking eye. I would respond that Moby did it first, and that if Moby didn't do it first Moby's video would still be better because if Moby added himself to Martin Creed's video that would be really weird and interesting. Because Moby came to it first, Martin Creed erased Moby from the *Porcelain* video a decade and a half late, domesticating what was a very strange video for fine arts display. Creed's 2006 'Body Docs' *Sick Film* and *Shit Film* perform precisely the same motion but through erasing the slapstick imagination and queer subtext of *Jackass*.

I THOUGHT the *Porcelain* video was like the inspirational images Vin Diesel used to post to social media. I worried for a minute that the connection I was making was their baldness, but it wasn't. It was the feathered edges of their faces, and feathering's long standing correlation with spiritualism. It is no secret that the twenty-first century has seen the return of new age music as a way of recentering listeners in the throes of capitalist velocity. To reject this totalising now-time is to see things regroup, to rediscover sensuousness and the expressivity of the world that never left us. As one Pitchfork article reads, *Forget the crystals, the mandalas, the inner sanctum: The much-maligned genre known as new age now appeals to many who once may have identified as punks*.

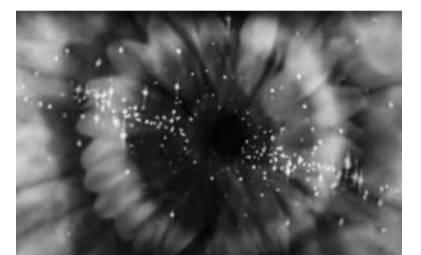
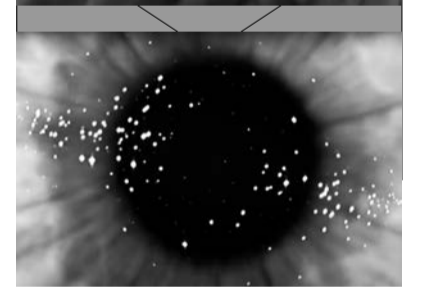
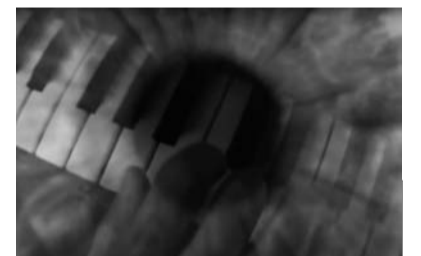
Before Moby pursued ambient music, he was a punk. Moby played in numerous hardcore punk bands in the 1980s and did lead vocals for Flipper when they played his hometown. The studio album Moby released before *Play* was called *Animal Rights*,



a hardcore punk album with a Mission of Burma cover.

WHEN Moby was a punk, he was concerned with a non-denominational god of vibes, and with the way that volume could thicken the space of the room. He was also less interested in the political impetus of noise, and more the way that repetition slows time. Moby's love for Flipper is telling, in that Flipper too sought to dissolve listener and performer alike into primordial goo. Flipper played slow and repetitive, and their lyrical preoccupation with violence, drug use, and spiritual nothingness always belied their desire to return us to the vibrational intensity of earthly being. Their mantra is *life is the only thing worth living for*.

THE problem with the twenty-first century musicians who have returned to the new age is that their agnosticism bypasses both the political engagements of post-industrial music and the radical immanence of Flipper. Their interest in healing is a temporary salve for the issues they address, and one that can only extend as far as the individual listener. Moby as a new age musician from the school of Flipper rejects both spiritual transcendentalism and individualistic centring. For Moby all is the same substance, and the rapture of the deep is breathing none other than life itself.



PORCELAIN
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