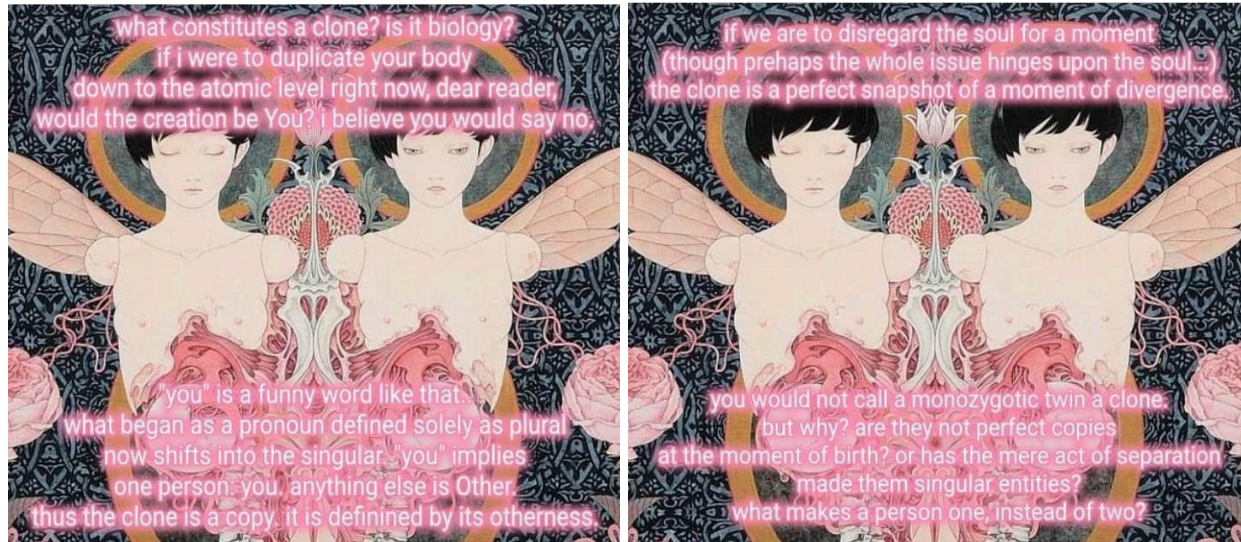


# THE OTHER ME

BY ENTERTHEVESSEL



[Artwork by Takato Yamamoto, meme made in 2021]

two things you should know about me. one: everything i say is in complete earnest. there is no metaphor here... symbolism has a habit of becoming a solid reality for me. ultimately i mean every word i say and i believe it to be true as well. two: it is safe to assume that a significant portion of what i hold as truth is not in accordance with *your* reality.

*the following follows no order. not even an order of creation.*

*i start in the middle. cut. paste. copy. start over. rearrange. regurgitate. reanimate.*

*i travel to the beginning.*

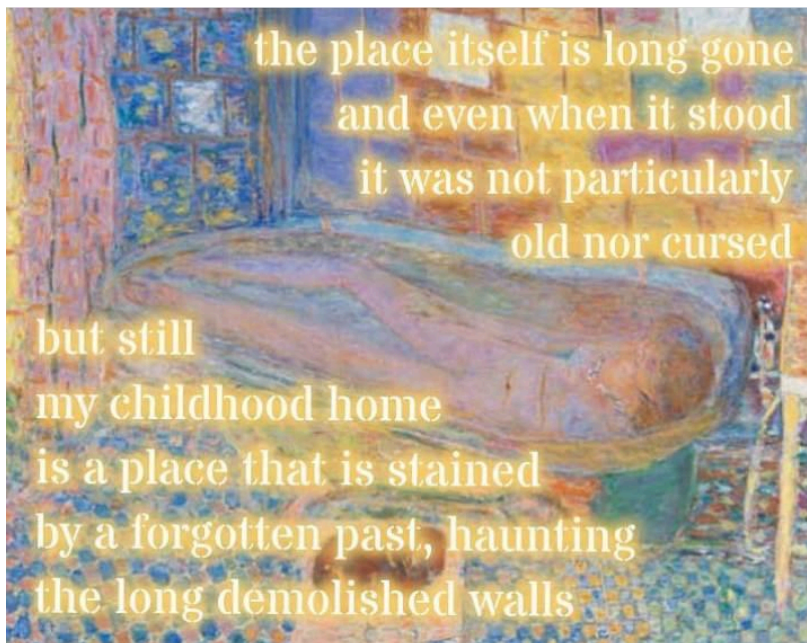


[takato Yamamoto, meme made 2021]

i cannot picture it. all i know is that is for as long as I can remember, i had an Other. i looked into the glass and the reflection i found there was *like* me, but it was not the True Me. what i saw in that reverse image of myself was a shadow. a Shadow Self. a fragment of 'me', trapped on the other side.

for a long time, I believed the Other to be something foreign, something from outside that had burrowed inside me. then, packaged in a fever fit dream, 20 at the tipping point of remedy: a crack in the narrative. a vision of a memory of a vision. a lie dressed up as a memory dressed up as a lie.

*i am crouched on the floor of my childhood bathroom. my body is small, smaller still as i curl into a ball. i am looking on upon my mirrored self - but this time the Other me is on my side of reality. standing on the stool, it looks at it's own face in the mirror. but there is a second face in the glass; behind the reflection of my self-reflection. something i know, somehow, to be sinister. but i am safe. i am here, in the corner. and whatever comes next, it is not me that takes it. the Other me has the body. and with it the burden.*



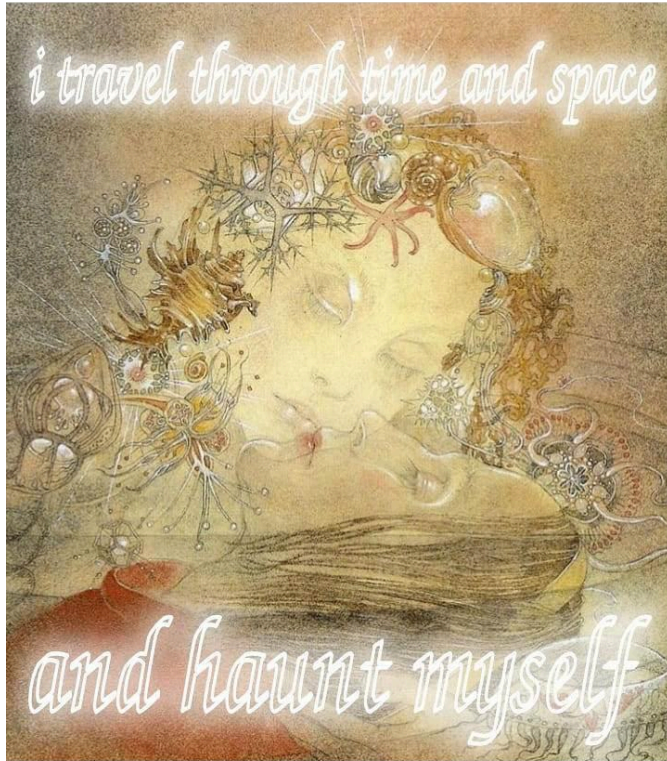
[Marthe Bonnard, meme made 2021]

at 15 i carved a message into my arm. in the pattern of everything in this thing called life, when words could not come i turned to symbols. the meaning of this one was simple: remember.

inside the body, the other did the same, carving messages that only it could see. over and over. remember, remember, remember...

*needle fingers dig into the spine. twisting, scratching, crushing. remember, remember, remember. our skulls crash into one another, it feels the echo, the echo whispers to remember. the body feels the pressure of housing a second me, the weight of it upon weakened shoulders drips out a familiar plea. inside the gut of it, the creature plaits the insides into words and phrases. the body cannot read the message, but it feels the pulling. the harsh tug of braiding hands are reprimanding. you must remember they chide, you must remember...*

i bore the stigmata of my histories - which forgot themselves even as they happened - upon my body. iron nails planted within me. even now, healed over and painless except for the well worn occasional throb of a wound long-grown-over, it stays with me. if you were to cut me open you would find it written on my bones.



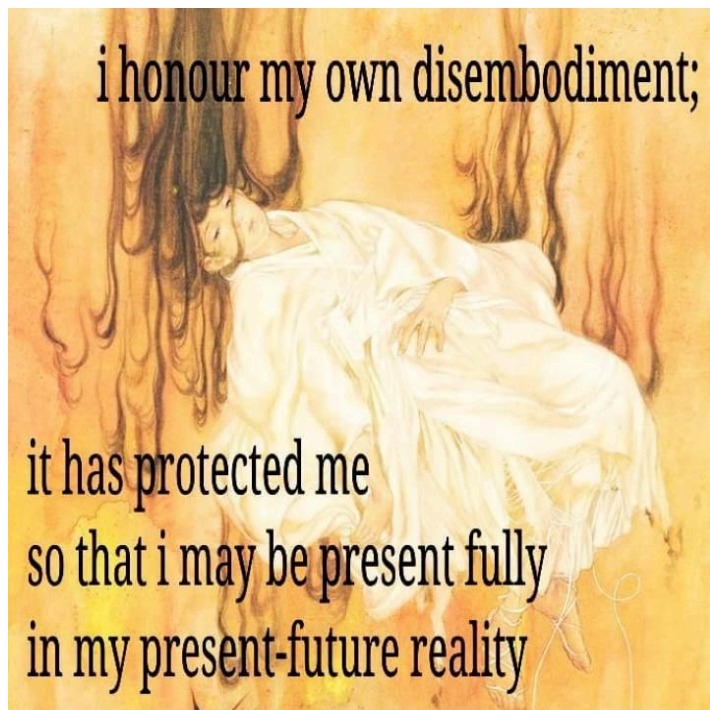
[Artwork by Sulamith Wulfing, meme made in 2021]

i hold the echoes of the past in my body, but never my mind. i have a habit of obscuring the truth, even from myself. i look back at old writing and it says everything but the actual events that transpired. the words transport me back to the exact emotion i felt at the time, without mentioning a single detail of the damage itself. memory works much the same way.

*something so simple as a flash of ghostly sensation of a hand (whose? i cannot even guess) on my wrist, tipping me towards a sudden, unannounced rush of adrenaline... the brief and otherwise innocuous image of an item from my childhood house that makes me shiver... the image of a tree once loved, but this time coloured by a familiar but unrecognisable fear, anger... the quick rush of air in-and-out and in-and-out and in-and-out after sprinting a little further than my lungs could take...*

and here comes the pain. through my back and neck and head  
and back down to the pit of my stomach. low level enough that i  
could let it go on and on. i won't list the events in question  
because they are *not mine to list*, but i am struck by the sense  
that pain like that is not one born of illness.

somewhere between being an angsty 14 year old and a barely  
present 15 year old there was a catalyst, or maybe more  
specifically a series of catalysts. a cascade. by the time i catch it i  
am already dead, and my mind is too removed from my body to  
do anything about it. and so the Other returns.



[find artist info]

splinters of time, captured inside of me. at once incomplete and too complete. too real and too unreal. i shift the fragments around in my mind, trying to slot them into place and build a story from them. but it is like a puzzle with every corner and edge piece lost.



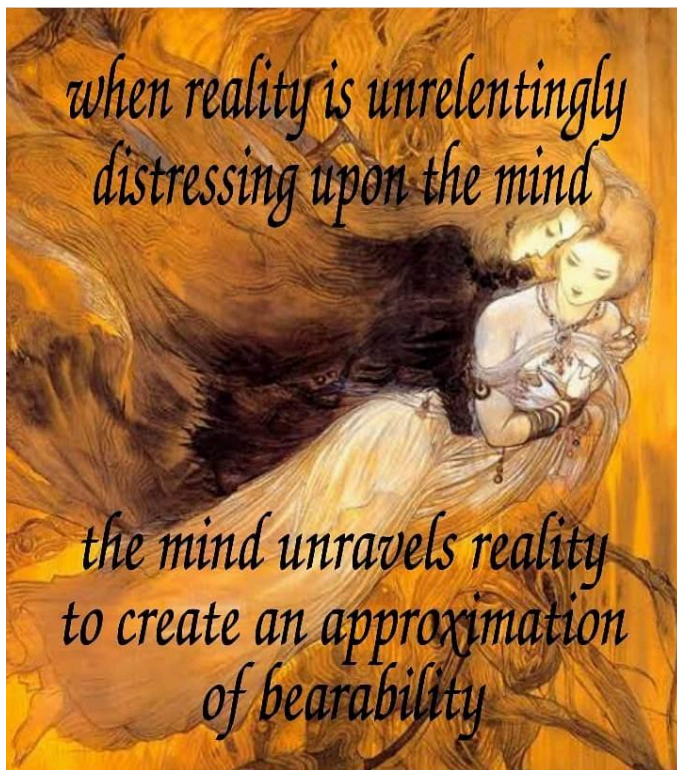
[ The Bath, Pierre Bonnard ]

i look at that marking now - the one i left, the only remaining sign - and i recognise the message i threaded into that ropey line of skin. i remember that i asked myself to remember. but i cannot recall a single detail of what it is that was meant to be remembered. the image cannot take shape. the rest may one day return. or the truth may die with me. who can say.

it occurs to me, only presently, that the mirror self has always been a kind possessor. in fact, whether or not it truly entered the vessel, or simply enveloped the body, remains unknown to me. certainly though, it walked beside me. but at 15 i did not remember this. i did not recognise the many faces of my Other. thus, it made sense that i sought to exterminate it.

if the Other was a living, breathing embodiment of the toxins slowly shutting down my body and dragging me down into the earth, it should be That which dies. my own personal Jesus Christ, dying so that i may live free of suffering.

but how does one kill a part of the Self and live to tell the tale? this, like most questions posed by this self-mythologisation, i cannot answer. you'd have to ask the Other.

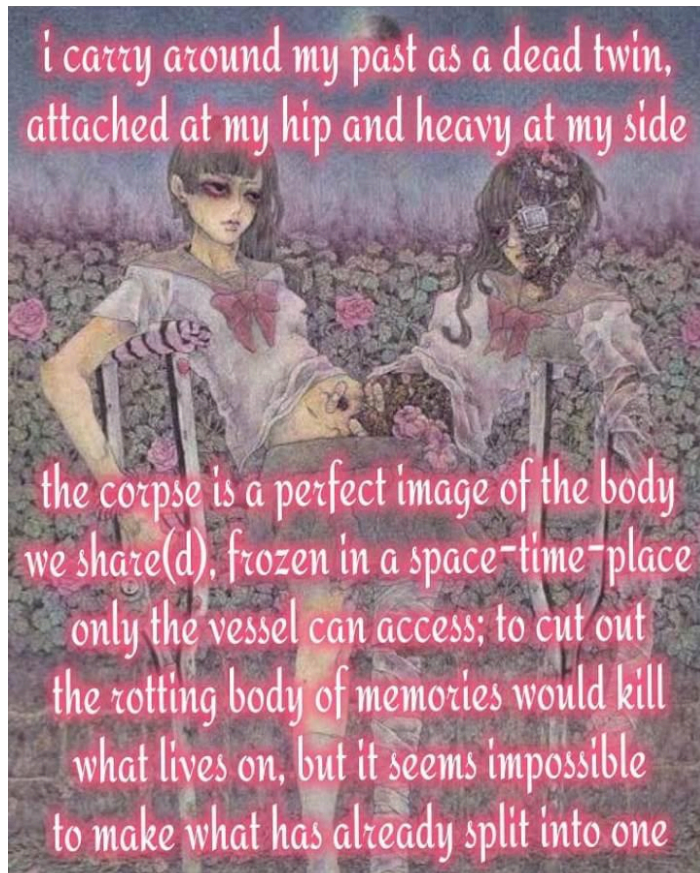


[Yoshitaka Amano]



and so we finally emerge back into the present. many, many years on and far past grieving.

*so little left: mere fragments (contained in-between years cut by absence) of what came past. so emerged a mosaic of 'me'; each prototype ringing a little more hollow than last. my fingers ache to rake the soil for the bones of memories; long ago planted there and left to spoil. rot has claimed them now; my roots, my fertiliser, my soil. veiled but still vital to me somehow. sometimes to heal/grow is to murder that old part. but i am so sick of funerals.*

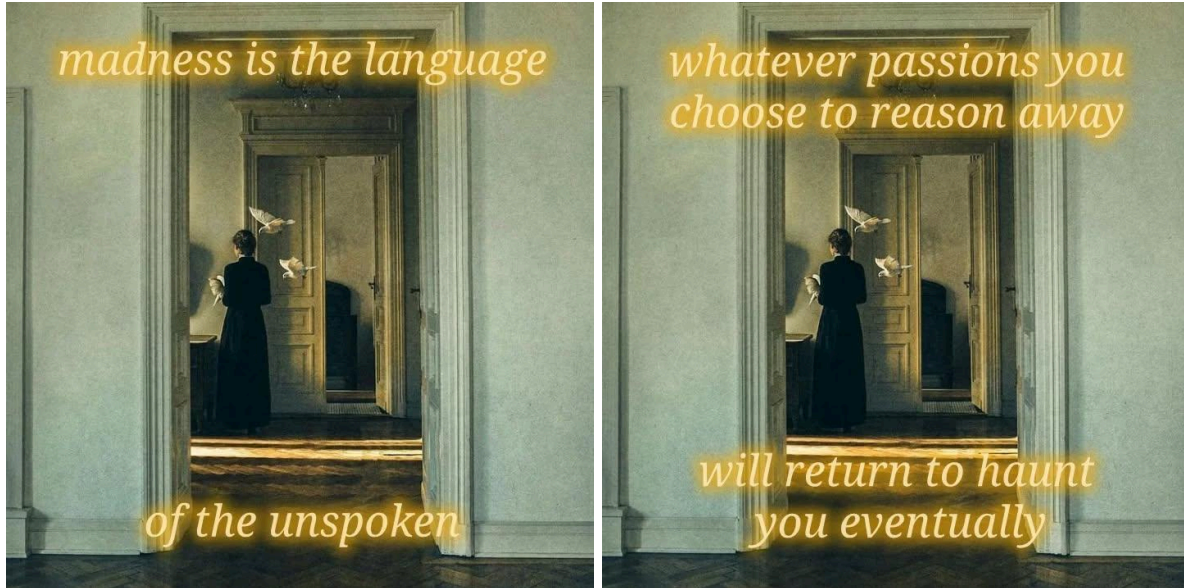


[Rika Ezaki]

presently, i refer to the copy only as "Other" or "It". but it would be disservice to this story if i were to neglect to acknowledge that this was not always so. if the clone is a perfect image of a person in a specific moment of time, then, in the period of its awakening, *my* other was a reflection of how i saw myself in that moment.

while i am no longer that person, so too is the Other no longer the body i bore. both "i" and "it" have naturally shifted in identity. and thus i deliberately obfuscate the identity of my subject. for years i tucked the name of my counterpart under my tongue and held it safe there. i am only now learning to forget that name. names are powerful things. we should not give powerful things to powerful beings. it upsets the order.

the ultimate question: is the me from the mirror - a perfect copy of me, alike in mind, form, and history - really me? or is it something else entirely?



art by laura makabresku, meme made 2022

*“A ghost cannot be killed. What may happen is that the place and function of the inner phantom ‘self’ become almost completely ‘taken over’ by archetypal agencies which appear to be in complete control and dominate all aspects of the individual’s being. The task in therapy then comes to be to make contact with the original ‘self’ of the individual which, or who, we must believe is still a possibility, if not an actuality, and can still be nursed back to a feasible life.”*

– R.D. Laing, *The Divided Self*

*that night, i feel of my body melting right off the bones, mounds of flesh puddling by my feet. the voice that comes from my mouth belongs to a hundred others, but never to me. i see my face shrinking into itself in the tiny mirror of my phone's front camera. eyes-nose-lips tiny-tiny-tiny. tiny in the orb of my head. in this moment i wish to rip away all my defining characteristics, bloody and righteous and freed from corporality. i am pinned down by the tactile perception of hands that might have once belonged to something/one real. right now they are phantoms of my own body. i am running and i am running and i have run this way before. doors-and-fences-and-walls. always i am too visible. always i am unable to make myself smaller. time folds in and i wither under a halo of light into papery folds of robe and skin. i age. then i rot. the damp spreads and, finally, my orifices come to home bugs.*

in this moment, the 'Body' and the 'Other' and 'I' come together and then break apart and then come together. over and over and over. all my selves are exposed. there is no martyr left to take my place. there is only past, present and future, colliding within.