

Recently, i was teased by a friend of mine because a book i was reading 'looked' boring. Have things gone so far, has actual content become so enmeshed with style that the old adage, 'don't judge a book by its cover', actually has to be applied to a book?

We have been raised in the privileged sectors of Empire at the beginning of the end of history. We've been well fed, well educated, and have had every opportunity possible to succeed. We've been raised with a sense of ambition and have been relatively successful in most aspects of our lives. We have rather good jobs where we get to use our creativity, intelligent and beautiful friends, have traveled extensively and yet, for some reason, there is still something missing. There has always been something missing. Slightly under the surface of each of our possibilities seems to lie an inescapable sense of boredom. We've always felt it. Despite the fact that we've all lived lives that seem to be ideal in many respects, this feeling of boredom is almost constantly present and when it's not, there is always the sense that it will quickly return.



There is the possibility that we've grown up in a way in which we developed unrealistic expectations about our future. That we've taken the billboards literally and simply feel jaded that we haven't felt the complete and utter contentment that is supposed to come with the new apartment, new car, or new can of soda.







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We try to stave off this feeling through various means. Nothing surprising here: alcohol, music, film, you know the list. Each serves simultaneously to mark our individuality and our inclusion within a certain group or strata of the population. Nearly without exception, they all end up being nothing but transient diversions, devoid of any possibility of providing anything but the most ephemeral contentment. 'The opium of the people in the present world is perhaps not so much religion as it is accepted boredom. Such a world is at the mercy, it must be known, of those who provide at least the semblance of an escape from boredom. Human life aspires to the passions, and again encounters its exigencies'.¹ This is seemingly the principle around which modern society organizes itself. Anything and everything is done in order to deliver us from this boredom. Yet the law of the market requires that this deliverance is only temporary. The customer must always come back. Moments of satisfaction are always fleeting. The feeling of boredom always returns.

In order to escape this, longer afterparties, more drinks, stronger drugs, until what?

Some may find salvation in oblivion but far from most. Most of us realize that this will end one day. One day we'll settle for an okay job, partner, and a few kids. The thought seems terrifying. Just a few decades ago, these years were thought of as an awkward liminal phrase. Chris Marker observed in his film Sans Soleil that no one will ever claim that being twenty is the best age to be. Now it is seemingly the age around which the rest of our culture orbits. Being twenty-two has never been seen as more desirable and nearly everyone seems frightened to grow up.

What I have thought or represented, I have not thought or represented alone. I am writing in a stuffy flat in east London; the traffic outside of my window is incessant. The weight of this world is overwhelming. My thought is constantly oscillating between hope and despair, often within the same day, while writing this, often by the sentence. Any meaningful change in the way this culture operates is unimaginable yet the possibility of this change is the only thought that keeps me going. My hatred of this world is at times so intense yet, admittedly, I do little that could be considered productive in trying to change it. Why this is I honestly don't know. Perhaps a fear of failure and of an encounter with my own impotence lies at the heart of my behavior or maybe it is just that this culture is so ingrained in us as to appear insurmountable. Either way, if I were to act, I honestly would have no idea where to begin. Every attempt at a radical transformation of society has ultimately failed and in the current mood no one can say the word 'revolution' without sounding like an idealistic and naïve moron.

- **nothing**
- **surprising**
- **here**
- **alcohol**
- **music**
- **film**
- **you**
- **know**
- **the**
- **list**



**Sometimes
I feel sick
with myself
when I read
this text.**

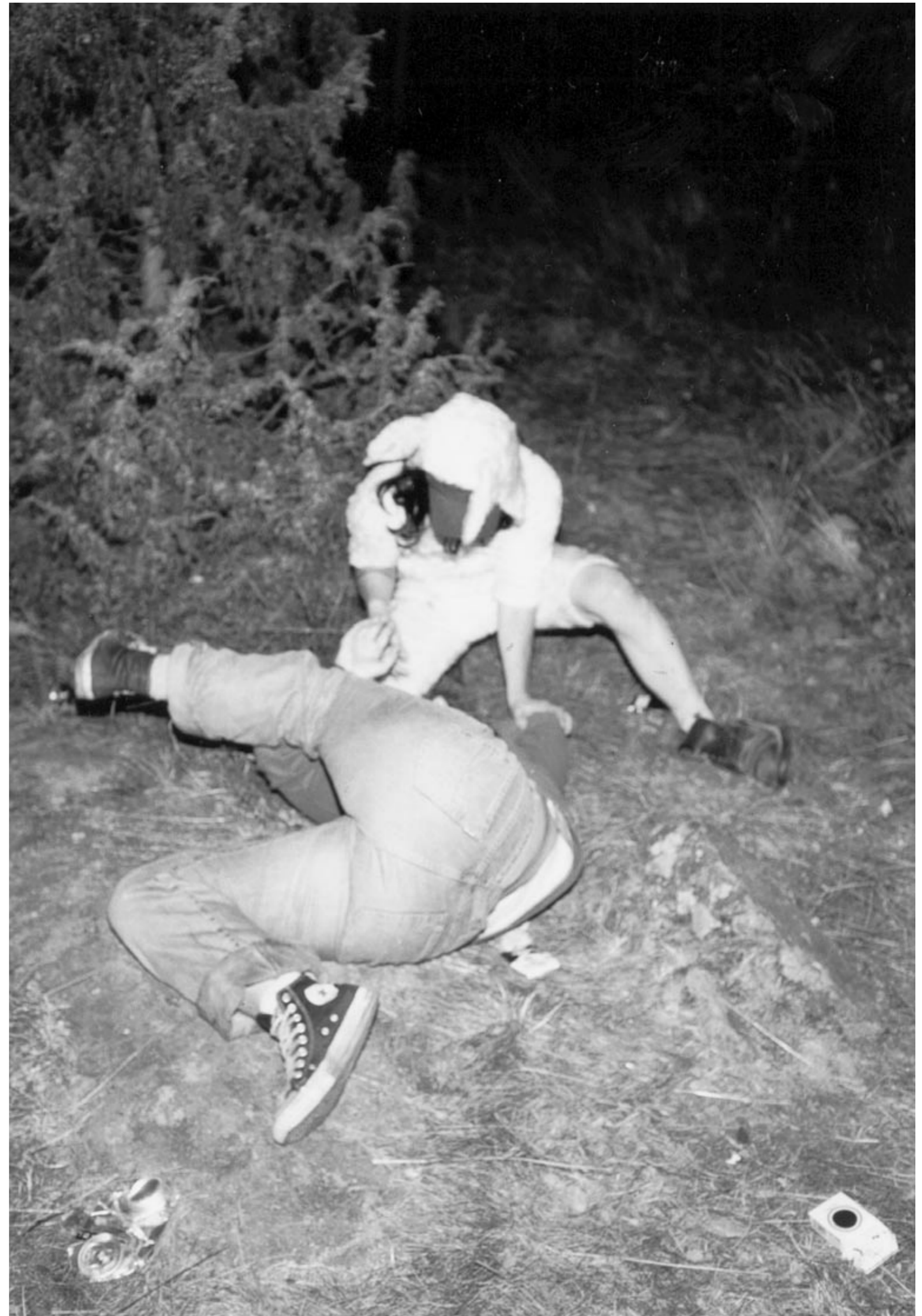


What am I complaining about really? Moreover, if I actually am onto something, if this feeling of boredom is something built in to the functioning of late capitalism, surely the fact that I recognize this should lead me to develop the means for overcoming these feelings, at least on a personal level. This, I think, has happened to a large degree. I do recognize that the economy relies on the dissatisfaction of the consumer. If the consumer did not feel a certain lack, there would be little for the advertisement to speak to. It's an economy that feeds of this lack, feeds of a certain level of misery and insecurity and instead of doing anything to alleviate these problems, all it does is exacerbate them. Coming to this realization allows one to distance oneself from this world to a degree but perhaps never completely. As much as I hate to admit it, I do sometimes get drawn into the world presented in lifestyle magazines. I'm still partially seduced by the girl in the fashion spread and dream that one day she could be mine if only I were to try a bit harder to keep up with the latest developments in the fashion or music world, if only I moved back to New York and started a fashion band, etc.

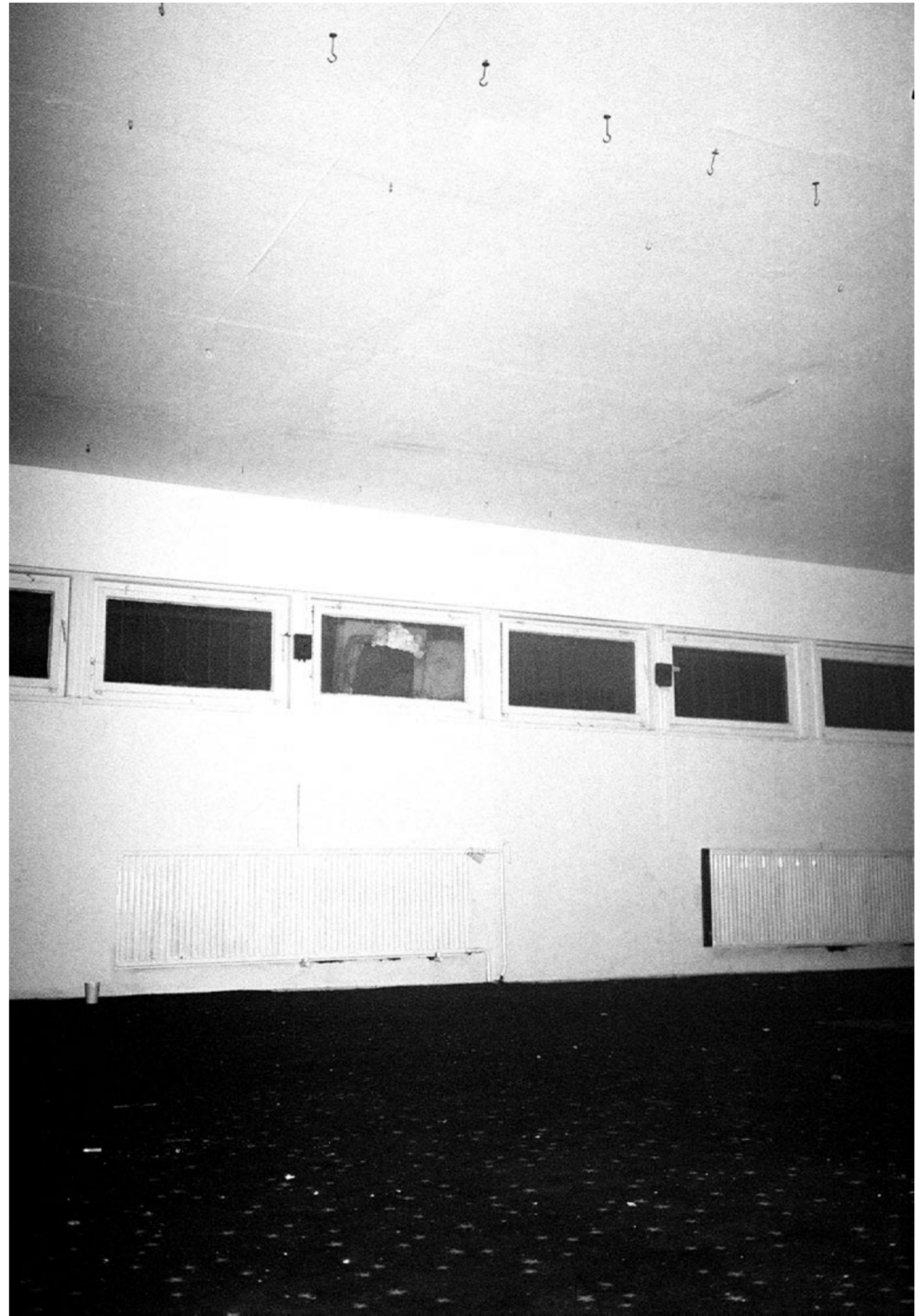
"For anyone not already hardened by the emptiness of life, there is in this world, which seems to have at its disposal limitless resources, a confusion remedied only by a kind of lazily accepted general imbecility. Even poverty seems at the very least less incurable than this stupid distress. A beggar whose broken voice cries out a song one can barely hear in the rear of a courtyard seems at times to have lost less in the game of life than the human matter arranged in buses and trains during rush hour.... The opium of the people in the present world is perhaps not so much religion as it is accepted boredom. Such a world is at the mercy, it must be known, of those who provide at least the semblance of an escape from boredom. Human life aspires to the passions, and again encounters its exigencies".²



**We live as lost children,
our adventures incomplete.³**







We're a generation that has given up any hope of global change. History is over. Liberal capitalism is spreading across the surface of the globe and is the only game in town.

What of this project itself? It itself is a commodity. It itself is a product of the culture it despises. An anti-lifestyle magazine lifestyle magazine. While one can very rarely try to separate content from style, perhaps more today than during any other period does style effectively become the content. Yet is it possible to be read or viewed without succumbing to these forces? Does the high road lead anywhere but to obscurity?

But this isn't a period open to manifestos and this certainly isn't meant to be read as a call to arms. Things seem to be getting worse and worse nearly everywhere and yet there is seemingly less and less to do about it. This deterioration feels inevitable. Very few people seem optimistic about the future. Despite the ever-increasing speed of developments in technology and consumer products, the possibility of any sort of meaningful change or development seems impossible. 'Hidden in the cynicism of innovation is certainly the despair that nothing further will happen'.⁴ The person on a treadmill is perhaps the perfect metaphor for this culture, being in constant motion and putting in exorbitant effort yet remaining at a standstill. Imagining the end of humanity due to anything from environmental disaster to huge meteors striking the earth seem more plausible than a fundamental change in the functioning of the global economic system. One claim I will make is that what cannot be emphasized enough is that these feelings are illusory. 'Today's predominant form of ideological "closure" takes the precise form of a mental block which prevents us from imagining a fundamental social change, in the interests of an allegedly "realistic" and "mature" attitude'.⁵ Without sounding like the aforementioned naïve moron, the point of radical politics today should not be to press towards realizing some kind of utopian future immediately but perhaps first trying to imagine what this future could be without resorting to antiquated, discredited notions from the past. It means accepting and disseminating the notion that change is possible,

even if this future stays undefined. In a time in which anyone seriously mentioning the word 'revolution' or the overthrow of capitalism seems like a naïve anachronism from a not so distant, but long forgotten past, having the place of a global alternative open is incredibly important. 'It is more important than ever to hold this utopian place of the global alternative open, even if it remains empty, living on borrowed time, awaiting the content to fill it in'.⁶

At first, such a claim doesn't seem to amount to much, yet during an epoch in which the slogan 'There is no alternative' has been embraced by nearly everyone with power or influence and the majority of the population (whether they know it or not) it begins to become a bit more subversive. The first step towards any sort of change begins with the acknowledgement that change is possible. And this notion doesn't only apply to politics. It also applies to the way in which we live our everyday lives. In a society that is based on the complete passivity of the population in nearly all aspects of their lives, the key to any meaningful change is getting people to actively regain control of their lives. At times, the moments when we do feel alive, we catch a glimpse of what it is like to actively experience life. One has to maintain that these times, as innocuous and apolitical as they may appear to be, have an incredible revolutionary potential and should be seen as a truly radical answer to the banality of everyday life. It has been argued that spontaneous enjoyment is the most difficult thing to achieve in modern society. This being said, it is going to take a lot more than the search for a good time to change the world. Still, the recognition that any movement has to take joy into account is paramount. 'Those who speak of revolution and class struggle, with explicit reference to daily life, without understanding what is subversive about love and positive in the refusal of constraints, have a corpse in their mouths'.⁷

Since the development of consumer capitalism, the terrain of everyday life has been one of the most contested areas of battle. Unfortunately thus far it's been a slaughter. The battle has been almost entirely one sided. Yet despite what the sophists shout, all is not lost.

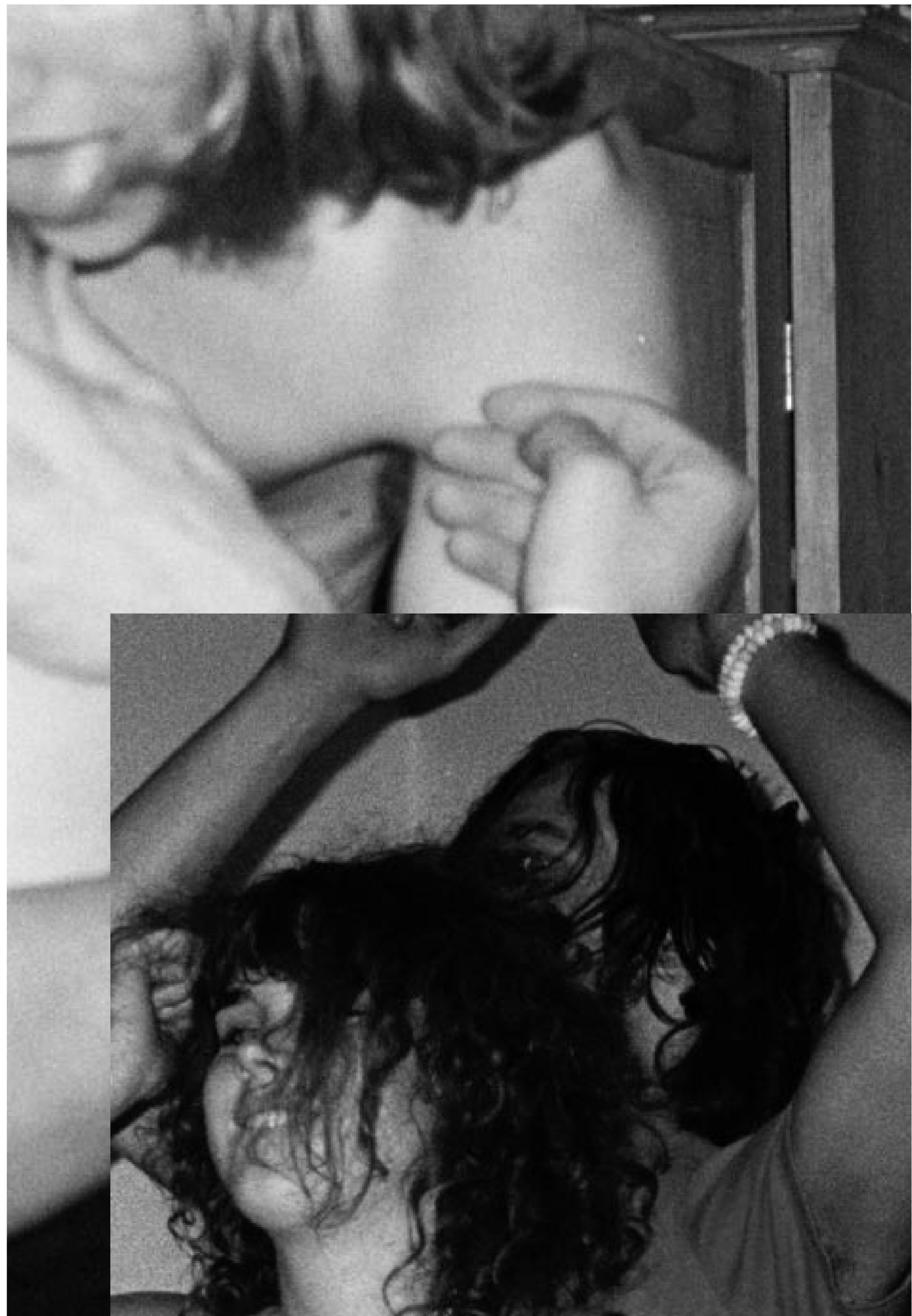
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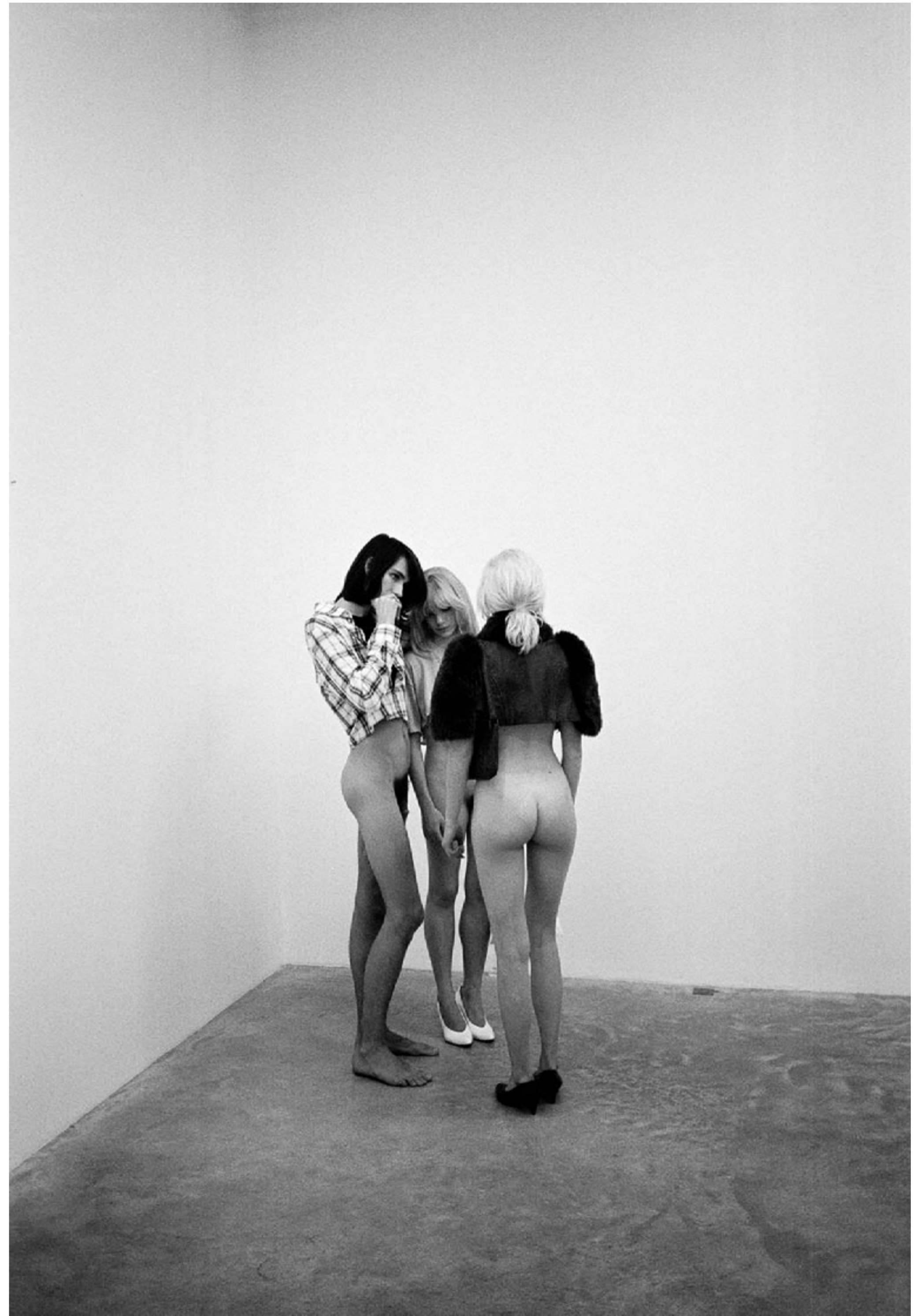
**Longer afterparties,
more drinks,
stronger drugs,
until what?**





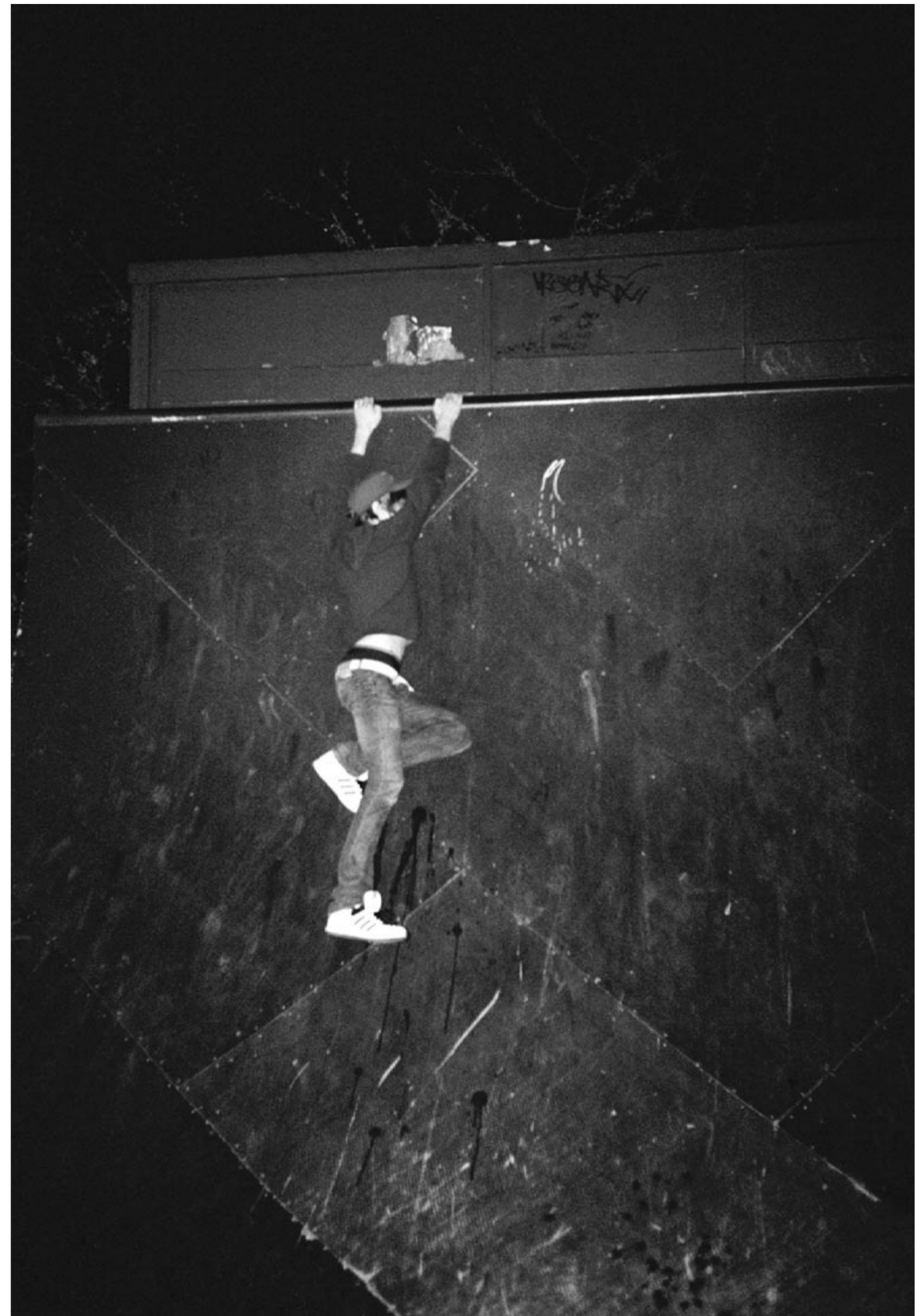



In a society that supposedly allows everything, being transgressive is increasingly difficult. Frayed, plasticized corpses are easily turned into popular, mainstream art. Two Russian teenagers pretending to be lesbians under the watchful eye of their former child psychologist turn advertiser manager do little more than raise a few eyebrows and provide the tabloids with an endless array of nipple shots.





We can reclaim our lives. This feeling that our lives are not what they could or should be. The key is tapping into this feeling of boredom. This deficiency that nearly everyone feels. Only then can the empty place of an alternative future begin to be filled.





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Footnotes:

- 1: Debord, Comments on Society of the Spectacle, p. 21-2.*
- 2: Georges Bataille, 'Popular Front in the Streets', Visions of Excess*
- 3: Debord in Howlings in Favour of Sade quoting Marcel Carné's film, The Evening Visitors'*
- 4: Lyotard, The Inhuman. USA: University of Minnesota Press, p. 211*
- 5: Butler, Laclau, Zizek, Contingency, Hegemony, Universality, London: Verso, 2000. p 324.*
- 6: Butler, Laclau, Zizek, Contingency, Hegemony, Universality, p. 325.*
- 7: Lyotard The Inhuman. p. 211*