Stories for...
Reading in Bed

by Donna Marcus Duke

1.

Gilles Deleuze is reading *Men's Health* in his bed. Lying parallel in her own twin bed, his wife peruses a Farrow & Ball paint catalogue for a new colour for their bedroom. Separated by a wooden side table, they are the picture of a cosy passionless marriage. But Deleuze is anxious, for an article in this magazine details a desire he's been too scared to tell his wife about: male chastity. "It's unbelievably sensual, plunging me into an open-ended plateau phase," the article describes, "taking my penis out of the equation has made my sex life better, I've gotten creative and discovered new ways to experience pleasure."[1]

Lately, Deleuze has found chastity deeply compelling. He, like the anonymous contributor to *Men's Health*, wants to experience this plateau state. He and his collaborator Felix Guattari had spent years writing about plateaus which they described as "continuous, self-vibrating regions of intensities whose development avoids any orientation toward a culmination point or external end."[2] This man's experience of wearing a cock cage felt totally coherent, Deleuze thought, to this state his philosophy yearned for. How could forced chastity operate as a way of embodying his philosophy? How might the withholding of erotic satisfaction and its ensuing state of sensual intensity produce a more sensitive way of engaging in the world? Was becoming a little locked sissy pig slut the answer all along? There was only one way to find out.

Deleuze had been cheating on his wife with George Bataille every month for years. Ever since his wife stopped fucking him, Bataille had served as a guru of transgression, leading Deleuze to experience a plethora of kinks in the privacy of Bataille's rundown basement flat — a place that'd come to feel like a refuge amidst the otherwise pristine affluent suburb in which they both lived. Upon his latest visit, Bataille had agreed to lock Deleuze for the week — on the condition he'd beg and send him photos upon demand. "The need to go astray, to be destroyed, is an extremely private, distant, passionate, turbulent truth," Bataille had whispered into Deleuze's

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1 Abby Moss, "Men Explain Why Wearing a Chastity Cage Turns Them on", *Men's Health* (21st June 2021), https://www.menshealth.com/sex-women/a36789418/male-chastity-cages/

2 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), p.22

ear as the tight claws of the cage ensnared around his cock and balls.[3]

Now, reading *Men's Health*, Deleuze fondles his caged clit-dick beneath his pyjama bottoms, thinking of Bataille, how he's owned, and he couldn't wait to embody his philosophy, and how Bataille would shove his monster cock in him and how he would be just a vessel for Bataille's cum, a bowl, a hole, a gaping cavern, a body-without-organs.

"What about *Nancy's Blushes*?" asks Deleuze's wife, pointing at the truest pink on the paint catalogue. Fantasy interrupted, the fact of his quotidian life overcomes Deleuze — how had his revolutionary early years of sexual experimentation and radical politics arrived at such a mundane and safe reality of browsing swatches in bed with his wife? The lives of academics are supposed to be boring, he'd tell himself, an excuse he often gave in public regarding his propensity to the secrecy guarding his private life. In many ways this was true, but Deleuze also has something to hide, something that would be worthless without its ability to be concealed. Oh how his monthly excursions with Bataille saved him.

Deleuze shifts his gaze out the window. Between the slits of the blind's half-drawn slats, he makes out the barely perceptible form of the little free library, spot lit by a street lamp at the end of his front porch. Like many other conscientious members of the intellectual elite that made up his part of town, installing a public bookcase in his property gave him a highly visible form of self-gratification which was cleverly disguised as book aid.[4] Following the utopian dreams of neighbourhood community, he imagined how his own porch might become an iteration of Clegg & Guttmann's *Open Public Libraries* — an art project he'd read about from the 90s and 00s where public bookcases filled with anarchist manuals were placed amongst German cities to literally enrich communities in need.

To Deleuze's great disappointment, the little free library he'd put at the end of his garden was seldom used, and certainly not as a technology of radical community enrichment as he'd once hoped. The anarchist books he had placed in the library box to get the project going had been slowly replaced by an inane assortment of publications that reflected the sanitised, safe and normative desires that always arise when objects and ideas circulate in public — biographies of politicians, bland cookery books, an unwanted Charles Dickens novel if he was lucky. The cipher of public domain cleanses content of any disruptive, provocative material. As the books accrued, Deleuze saw how the little public library was reflecting the most conservative facets of his community, a technology that merely reproduced the underlying power structures that the virtuous romance of community so smugly veils.[5]

As his wife left to brush her teeth, Deleuze turned to look at the chart she'd left on the bedside table — that darting pink hue stared back at him, shimmering that exact shade of the cock cage he fondled between his digits beneath the sheets. This pink, *Nancy's Blushes*, held both the aspirational middle-class domesticity of freshly painted bedroom walls and the utter whoreishness of his desire to be a locked up sissy cum mug. Lost in the colour's blooming possibility, Deleuze wondered — *how beautiful it would be to fill the little library with the most wonderful pornographic publications, cock cage manuals and hardcore erotic stories! Maybe then he could touch the counterpublic of chastity subs, launching a movement of a thousand cockcage pigs!*

His staring produced two eyes, a nose and pert lips on the pink tile — a face had emerged! It was the academic Nancy Fraser, Deleuze's previous mistress! Oh and how she used to blush! Was he going mad? Was he hallucinating? Perhaps this was the kind of intensified sensitivity to the world produced by forced chastity that the Men's Health article was talking about. It's working!

"Deleuze darling," the Nancy Fraser Farrow & Ball panel began, "your free public porno library could never work. Counterpublics function as spaces of withdrawal and regroupment and as bases and training grounds for agitational activities directed toward wider publics. It is precisely their hidden, fugitive status, unseen from the general public, that allows them the possibility to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs amidst a hostile world."[6] As she blows him a kiss, her

3 Georges Bataille, *Guilty* (1944)

4 Jane Schmidt and Jordan Hale, "Little Free Libraries: Interrogating the impact of the branded book exchange", *Journal of Radical Librarianship*, Vol 3 (2017)

5 Miranda Jones, *Against the Romance of Community* (2002)

6 Nancy Fraser, *Justice Interruptus* (1997), p.81-2

features disintegrate back to blush.

Deleuze knows this power of fugitivity. For years he'd been growing his nails to the point where they curled over the rounds of his fingertips. This was his first strange obsession. When a young homosexual once asked him why, he responded saying that on the one hand, he lacked protective whorls on his fingertips which made touch an actually intense experience, but more importantly, he believed they gave him the chance of being imperceptible. When hiding them in his pockets whilst in public, he had the knowledge of a personal deviation that he could keep to himself. In their hiddenness they became charged, and this pleased Deleuze greatly. Lifting the cover, he stares down at his little girly clit-dick, that pathetic nub squished beneath bars of pink plastic — how it had started to become like his nails.

Jolting back towards the window, Deleuze pulls his covers up to his chin, his long nails just protruding over the duvet, his coddled chub firmly hidden. His wife had returned and he daren't risk revealing his cage to her. But the rush of him knowing and her not hummed. Prevented from getting hard, arousal simmered, bristling up beneath his skin like the pushing of a bruise. His phone buzzed. He raced to the bathroom before his wife could hardly return to the paints. Bataille demands his little sissy pig to send piccies of her trapped groin thumb.

2.

In *Dust Paintings*, Newby considers the visual culture and phenomenology of masturbation. At the foundational layer of each work lies a UV print of layered pornography. To produce this base image, Newby digitally layers multiple pornographic images harvested both from vintage magazines and contemporary online forums. Due to the amount of layering, none of the images are individually perceptible and the maximalism produces a hazy pastel plane. A final image of archival porn is printed using Crisco as the print medium and dust collected from beneath beds as the pigment.

I like to read this as a phenomenological depiction of masturbation, where the final image, clarified at the point of orgasm, stands as the apex upon the layers of digital, physical and mental images that led you to climax. The final image's affect is dependent on the genealogy of images that precede it, both in the instance of the wank and in the context of development of sexual subcultures. In the climax of masturbation, there is an act of communion between you and the erotic image that confirms the queer sexual archive that produced the orgasm. In the act of masturbation, the archive of eros' existence is sustained by your practices of desire.

The clandestine archive of queer desire enlivens in the wank, an act that serves as the embodied juncture between desire and media, present and past, the bed and beyond.

Wanks serve as the successful, embodied transference of information within the counterpublic. The consumption of images through counterpublic distributions of pornography accrues as the foundation through which the embodied erotic knowledge of those subcultures are carried. That is to say, it's not just the fact of counterpublic distribution, but the embodied confirmation of those images as erotically valuable units of information at the moment of orgasm. To climax is to ascent, to know, to perpetuate the sexual cultures held within the images you come to. Wanks are a way of keeping the sexual culture going even in the most antagonistic, isolating of circumstances, an instance of transubstantiation that makes your body the vessel of a tradition of desire.

The archive of queer sex is not just in the banks of images we find in vintage magazines and porn websites, it is the learnt practices

of fucking and wanking, where the images fuck you to the point of full erotic understanding. If "information is transmitted through the physical communion of sex", as Paul Morris understands, then the erotic information of the masturbatory image is uniquely transferred at the moment when the image has fucked you to completion.[7] We come to know the erotic images we climax to more deeply than those we merely see — to find some physical communion with the image is to feel an understanding of the histories, bodies and technologies that have come to construct it. Which is also to say: wanks are not as isolated as they may seem, for they mark your contribution to the continuation of a collectively produced sexual culture.

If Bataille understands the erotic as a glimpse into the continuation between one being and another, then in the process of masturbation, we might find the continuation between our body and the image, with all the visual, material and erotic histories it archives. This is why, for Newby, it is important to materialise the image of pornography through the body (dust from beneath beds) and the technologies that facilitate its erotic expansion (Crisco). In this way, Newby's combination of vintage pornography with contemporary erotic imagery serves not as a nostalgia or a desire for return, but rather a recognition of dependence, a recognition that the fabric of erotic pasts come to inform and develop contemporary subcultural erotic practices.

Similarly, we might think of Newby's interest in Crisco — which features as an adhesive medium both the 'dust paintings' and *Untitled (Window Display)* not as nostalgic for a previous sex culture, but that it is an example of how technology and popular material culture produce new desires. In Crisco's case, a household item, found at the back of cupboards in everyday family homes, was subverted to produce the far reaching deviancy of handballing. He's attracted to how the mundane, or the common, can come to acquire a perverse use in the right hands. If we are to note that fisting only became more widely practiced amongst sexual subcultures after the 20th century technological advancements that made the manufacturing of more viscous lubricants like Crisco possible, then we might ask how contemporary advancements in technology are impacting sexual practices in the 21st century.

Newby's work *Untitled (Chastity Painting)* — a diptych made from a chastity device's lock set into a wall and its respective key hidden under a panel of layered gesso — references the recent uptick in chastity fetish practices, especially amongst gay men. I speak anecdotally, but cock cages have never seemed more popular. Whilst writing this, references to 'Locktober' (the commitment to wearing a cock cage for the month of October) have been inescapable on my side of social media. At nude beaches and in sex clubs, cock cages have become an increasingly common sight. Even my housemate has started (and is obsessed!). But why now? What is it about this moment of contemporary culture that has meant chastity has become fetishised?

We might see chastity as the counterpoint to gooning — the sexual practice whereby the edging of masturbation takes place over prolonged duration whilst consuming the maximum amount of pornography, often being displayed on multiple screens at once. Gooning has become possible because of the algorithmic, multiscreen, digital nature of daily life, where an excess of free pornographic imagery is optimised for your specific desires by algorithms. With websites like Twitter hosting a constant stream of freely made user generated content, new masses of pornographic content are constantly being produced for consumption. Access to erotic stimuli and orgasm has become immediate, pervasive and, some might say, cheap.

Within this excessive visual culture where orgasm has become so readily available through the surplus of erotic images, gooning is one logical conclusion, but so might be chastity. In the orgasm's cheapening, and thus in its loss of tension, perhaps chastity becomes a way of regaining the erotics of withholding. In the forced withholding of the possibility of orgasm through the technology of the cock cage, perhaps a greater and longer lasting erotic pleasure is found in the suspension of immediate pleasure. Periods of forced chastity — with their reportedly heightened states of sensitivity and delirium — might allow us to engage in the world differently. The logics of chastity fetishes, where the denial of immediate pleasures might endear a greater sensitivity, presentness and pleasure to the

7 Paul Morris and Susanna Paasonen, "Risk and Utopia: A Dialogue on Pornography" *GLQ*; 20 (3): p.215–239, (1 June 2014)

world, might serve as an allegorical tonic to a world of increased visual excess. In withholding immediate satisfaction, might we know and enjoy the world better? Might we become more creative in our interaction with excess rather than mere insatiable consumption?

There is also another aspect at play here — chastity, as the counterpoint to gooning, recuperates the other into sexual practice. Gooning is largely a singular act done in relation to the machine, requiring only the mediation of others in order to achieve gratification. Chastity on the other hand requires the power of a literal other, an individual who physically can hold the key. Chastity, then, puts you back in reciprocal personal relation. Whilst on the surface chastity may seem like the denial of erotics, it functions instead as the constant imposition of the erotic into daily life — for whenever you wear the locked cage your sexual relation to the key holder persists.

3.

Rippling like a prune clutched between fingers, Deleuze's chub pinged on Bataille's phone. The beauty of the internet, how information can so quickly and invisibly be transmitted, a magical transference, it seemed to Bataille. Bypassing public view, the end-to-end encryption of Telegram was just another perfect device for a counterpublic to share their erotic knowledge without the bother of the public domain's normative pressures.

Bataille had been jostling his magnificent member for hours, oscillating his attention between his laptop, his phone and his curated spread of vintage porn mags: Bataille believed in the vitality of excess. Awaiting the right moment, Bataille saved his summoning of Deleuze's cock cage for the most delicious bite of the banquet — that boy clit was the parson's nose, a stubby giblet above the arse of a roasted bird. He knew that such a crowning jewel would mark the apex of his fortitudinous wank, thus was wary of the need for precision. Unlike his ex-wife Audre Lorde, Bataille felt the connective erotic power of the pornographic image, especially those sent live. As his good friend Kevin Killian once told him, the pornographic "differs from other forms of representation in that it has some kind of chemical effect on the reader. I get hard, I can't contain myself," and in this chemical impact, an erotic connection was transferred.[8]

Bataille beheld his prized private possession, that glistening squib, and was shot with a rupturing libidinal serge. Reaching peak delirium of masturbation, a dazzling white daze conflated hours — no, years! — of erotic images. Bataille does not know himself apart from this pornographic aether, sheer continuity between himself and the physical, digital and mental images he consumed. Bliss! To commune, through wanking, with the histories of desires — personal, imagined, distant, far — that make up these images. This great intensity! This sublimation of image and body! This connection with the great archive of deviant desire! Once he said that "In bed next to a girl he loves, he forgets that he does not know why he is himself instead of the body he touches," but lo! Here!

8 Kevin Killian, "Sex Writing and the New Narrative", *Writers Who Love Too Much: New Narrative Writing 1977-1997* (2017)

The images have taken the tyranny of isolation and stole him to the realm of deviation's archive of desire! Shaking at the precipice of an infinite line of human want! A glimpse into the afterlife, in this union, between his body — here! now! — and the bodies his masturbation confirms! He is in communion with Deleuze's cock clit on his phone, the furry tiff on his laptop, the 70s leather dyke zine spread on his mattress, the memories of Deleuze's curled nails grasping onto his dirty mattress as his cock juddered through Deleuze's deflated cheeks, the screams! The moans! The mountain of human defilement across history, space and time! UNTIL —

He squirts across the headboard. The channelling severed. The image of Deleuze's cock cage imprinted on his retina. That unified feeling with the archive of sex dissipates, leaving his body discontinuous once again, individuated on his waxy sheets, the oiled texture against his skin a reminder that he hasn't washed them in weeks. He sops off the cum that landed beneath his eye and over his belly with a sock he locates on the floor with a searching, jittering hand, tossing the sock back beneath the bed upon reaching its maximal liquid retention. It plods amidst accumulated dirt — dispelled flecks of skin, sperm and residual sweat that had, over years of wanking and fucking, garnered the integrity of grey matter on the uncleaned floor beneath the mattress. Its own archive of pleasure, of a sort, a burial ground for erotic activity scarcely remembered but for this gathered detritus of dust.

Lying back dishevelled after hours of masturbation, Bataille was smitten with the devastating exhaustion of a mystic's return to the material world. There was a mourning here — this petit mort, this fleeting orgasm, an apex of pleasure but also the marker of an end, a destroyer of that fragile plateau state only glimpsed through masturbation. Bataille had started to fear ejaculation as the harbinger of isolation — for wanking and its temporary state of mystical connection felt ruined by its ending.

Erotic attachment to a mental image remained as long as he kept wanking to it. Long after lovers had left, he'd held onto the mental images of his unions, wanting to re-enliven the archive of his personal erotic life through the act of masturbation. Wanking acts in these moments like a type of necromancy, where a dead erotic past might be imaginatively revived to the extent that it impacts the body though the reality of ejaculation. The erotic charge of those mental images, and the attachments he places upon them, disappears at masturbation's ritual end. This petit mort of masturbation might not so much be his own personal death, but the return to the dead of the conjured erotic history, and Bataille's realisation of his residual solitude.

Bataille's phone lights; Deleuze sent another message: "Did you cum master? 🥺👉👈" accompanied another mirror selfie taken from his newly marbled bathroom that his wife had so carefully renovated. Under his lifted button-down, Deleuze's cock cage peeped out over the loosened slack of his pyjama bottoms with the curiosity of a mouse. His face held a kind, whimpering smile, the sort of pathetic expression that made Bataille rampant with thoughts of defilement. In those wetted eyes was a giddy excitement, a spectre of erotic connection with the world, a gaze that offered an earnest reverence for the cage and its provider. That cage, that beautiful pathetic little cage, thought Bataille. A persisting connector between him and Deleuze — one that remained beyond orgasm, breaching the remits of his dank bedroom's walls whilst remaining perfectly imperceptible. A secret, fugitive knowledge they shared, one that conquered the bleakness of post-orgasm catharsis.

For Jacob
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Stories For...Reading in Bed by Donna Marcus Duke accompanies the solo exhibition *Reading in Bed* by Louis Blue Newby at Ehrlich Steinberg from November 8 to December 20 2025.

Donna Marcus Duke (she/they) is a Nobel Prize-winning writer, performer, and curator based in London, UK. She currently holds a Visiting Scholarship in Life Writing at the University of Oxford and works as a Curatorial Researcher at Del Vaz Projects in Los Angeles, CA. Their writing and criticism on queer and trans art culture and politics have been featured in the likes of Frieze, Numero Art, I-D, AnOther, Vogue Italia, Dazed and 3:AM, whilst their essays and fiction have appeared in various independent collections and have been published by Pilot Press, Sticky Fingers Publishing, Bittersweet Review, Worms and UCL Press, among others. They have lectured and hosted talks at the University of Oxford, the Royal College of Art and Goldsmiths University. They are currently developing their debut novel, *Cult Trans*, which explores the role of faith and spirituality in contemporary trans discourse.