

## I. On Bletology

*CARLOTTA is handed a peach*

ANDREW: How does it work?

CARLOTTA: Ether waves.

CECILY: I've forgotten what it's called.

CARLOTTA: "Bletology"

ANDREW: Can you use *any* fruit?

CARLOTTA: Peaches are the most sensitive. Bananas speckle too easily. They tend to attract stray particles. For the novice, I usually recommend pears, because of the pronounced stems.

If only a peach could tell us what we needed to know—its stem somehow indicative of our future path. To wit, there are all kinds of beliefs (and throngs of believers who animate them), but this particular belief system comes by way of an early James Ivory film, *Savages* (1972), which episodically chronicles the goings-on of a group of forest-dwellers who, in happening upon an English manor, become civilized upper-crustians. By film's end they've devolved again and return to the woods. Carlotta, who plays the hostess in this brutal send-up of English social mores, entrances her guests with a divination session. Looking at the peach she makes a series of pronouncements (see below). The gathered crowd's flirtation with the future is a near-silent sacred moment.

Whether it's a peach or an icon, people's connection to the sacred has been a central part of artistic practice for many thousands of years—well before that Modern notion of "artist" coalesced into a coherent identity category. Because the history of the sacred in art is broad, I feel at liberty to likewise make a few broad strokes.

Sacred images implicate some sort of imperative, and in a very real sense the image is that imperative's (or set of imperatives') incarnation—and in some systems of belief, its pale imitation.

[I'm thinking about that previous sentence and how many words begin with "im-" or "in-"; those prefixes involve negation and reversal, both integral to most sacred practices.]

For some, discounting such systems of belief, each a particularized pathway to the sacred, is a knee-jerk reaction. The divine is as immaterial as Carlotta's pseudo-scientific ether waves, and that's (non)evidence enough. Resting on empiricism, these adjudications of the sacred forget that sometimes everyday activities such as a dancing, driving, or *gasp*, making art, provide space for the sacred to enter.

This is why sometimes I find sacred things like conceptual art – which is usually positioned in critical literature as about as removed from the sacred as it could possibly be. Michael Craig-Martin’s *An Oak Tree* (1973) for example, ask its viewer to believe that a glass of water is, in fact, an oak tree. There is no better artistic litmus test.

I get this, and for me the challenge of belief is integral to my early art historical education. I was asked to believe on the first day of my high school art history class that the people positioned below Christ in Matthias Grunewald’s *Isenheim Altarpiece* were his friends and family, instead of a crowd of callous rubberneckers. As a Jewish kid, I just could not understand why they weren’t trying to help him down (I hadn’t yet been told about the Romans and their pointy sticks just off-stage).

Although I reserve the right to change my mind in the future, today I’m not really the kind of person who would describe himself as spiritual—but if I was, I would no doubt be just as likely to discover the world’s mysteries in a peach as I would a painting, a glass of water, or near anything else.

*CARLOTTA examines peach*

CARLOTTA: Duplicity, bale, remorse, glandular imbalance, obscurity, ziggurats, an illegible missive, a soiled kimono, explosions at the mill, laughter behind one’s back, misinternment, fly paper, rubber sheets... rubber sheets, trench warfare, tunnel vision, abasement, laudanum, pitchblende, worthless endearments, trick cigars, ink irradiator, ant farms, signals through the flames, webbed fingers, travail, weevils in the tea, trouble down the line, things best forgotten, a punctured thumb, cheap emotions, faded carpets...

## II.

### **On Mickey (en Español)**

In a crowded bear bar in Austin, my DJ partner pulls the Toni Basil record out of its sleeve. We have been anticipating this moment for a few weeks now. We agree, via a slight nod, that the time is right. Our near-silent joy (in the midst of a persistent thumping beat that, sure, okay, we’re responsible for) is inversely proportional to the high squee we let out when the blessed record arrived in the mail last month.

Of course, this particular song’s charm is that it begins exactly like its English-language counterpart:

“Hey Mickey!”

The shift is not subtle: the bears suddenly step up their dance-game, rejuvenated by the sudden appearance of a campy chestnut. Considering that we just threw some Maya Angelou poetry over a remix of Tears for Fears’ “Shout”, they’re probably pretty stoked that we stopped with the esoteric shit.

As the men on the dancefloor begin to mouth familiar words, they all suddenly come up short together—their lyrics immediately out of sync with the precise combination of phonemes blasting through the bar's totally decent speaker system.

When exactly did Toni Basil sing, “Oh Mickey, ¿Cómo estás? ¿Cómo estás? ¡Me gustas más!”?

I love this moment because for a half-second the dancefloor is divided in two... not a hard boundary line, mind you, the division is more diffuse and imprecise. Some on the dancefloor are perplexed, and others immediately get it. Invigorated by the uncanny familiar, these latter bears dance a fiercer dance. It's why, after all, they're here: to flirt, to gaze, to dance. Perchance *cantar*. And yes, some even pick up the words, having grown up with Spanish lessons (at home or at school, no matter), and they sing out loudly.

*Oh Mickey,  
¿Cómo estás?  
¿Cómo estás?  
¡Me gustas más!*

Their energy is our energy. Rah rah! We feel like we could be the cheerleaders from Toni Basil's English-language music video.

“Go, bears, goooooo!” we'd cheer.

“Gimmie a B!” we'd scream.

“Go! Fuck! Win!” we'd yell.

That this Toni Basil song is really just a rejiggering (and regendering) of the UK band Racey's syncopated song “Kitty” is on no one's mind right now.

But when that record comes in the mail, it will be...

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