3. Conclusion, or Fucking Up

The Young-Girl’s laughter rings with the desolation of nightclubs.
—TIQQUN, Preliminary Materials for a Theory of the Young-Girl

Well . . . I mean . . .
—THE BÉCASSINES FROM GILLES CHÂTELET, To Live and Think Like Pigs

Of Medusas, Vampires, and Nymphs

In her video Tahrîk (Diacritics, 2018), Lebanese artist Nesrine Khodr reads aloud off wrinkled paper she holds in her hand. In preparation for the piece, she compiled sections from three texts—Preliminary Materials (part of the chapter “The Young-Girl as Phenomenon”), Hélène Cixous’s “The Laugh of the Medusa” (1975/1976), and Iman Mersal’s “On Motherhood and Violence” (2015). All are in Modern Standard Arabic (or MSA, also called Fus’ha), the first two in translation. MSA is the transnational version of Arabic used in formal written communication and in television news and radio reports across the Arab world. Everyday spoken communication occurs using regional Arabic dialects that often differ considerably from each other and from MSA. Khodr’s video addresses one of the challenges of MSA: short vowels are not written, and the reader must thus add them based on her knowledge of the language. A mistake might result in a grammatical error or semantic confusion. Alternatively, it could simply be “sonorically dissonant to the learned ear,” explains
the artist.\textsuperscript{1} Khodr courts such mistakes in \textit{Tahrik}. She begins by reading aloud to an unseen but audible audience that corrects her errors when they occur. She then starts fucking up on purpose, and soon the audience participates in a gloriously uncontrolled vowel fest that “becomes like a free composition.”\textsuperscript{2} We hear iterated versions of the same word but with different vowels, from both her and her listeners. The through line of the text turns into an unhinged melisma. She concludes the piece by articulating the vowels correctly, in a sober denouement.

Khodr chose the three texts because of their “disruptive nature,” she explains.\textsuperscript{3} \textit{Preliminary Materials}, which hadn’t, to her knowledge, been previously translated into Arabic, attracted her because of the “way the text was written in addition to its content, the subversive tone, the layout of the text, the form in which this content was presented, the way it was composed of fragments.”\textsuperscript{4} In the terms we’ve used throughout this book, Khodr responds to a call from within the text itself, and that call is primarily formal and affective. Her response is to vocalize. She then elicits additional oral responses from others—the audience outside of the camera’s visual reach, who participate in a collective improvisation of freewheeling vowel iteration. Khodr’s particular performance of outlouding gives a unique frame to the notion of the Young-Girl as a charged interface between written and spoken modes of communication, an idea developed in the previous chapter, and to the “unseemly, confused stammering” of Châtelet’s Bécassines and Naomi Wolf’s vocal fryers.\textsuperscript{5}

At roughly the nine-minute mark of the almost-sixteen-minute video, Khodr abruptly breathes in, stops speaking, and smiles broad-

\begin{itemize}
\item[1.] Nesrine Khodr, email correspondence, June 10, 2020.
\item[2.] Khodr.
\item[3.] Nesrine Khodr, email correspondence, January 31, 2019.
\item[4.] Khodr.
\item[5.] Châtelet, \textit{To Live and Think Like Pigs}, 102; Wolf, “Young Women, Give Up the Vocal Fry.”
\end{itemize}
ly, her gaze continuously fixed on the paper. A sonic disruption, someone in the audience knocking something over perhaps, temporarily throws her off her game. The paper trembles; she looks like she’s playfully stifling a laugh, and when she returns to speaking, she has a joyful, vibratory energy. This moment of bodily irruption—which appears unplanned in a performance of straight-faced decorum, one that was filmed in a single take—recalls Cixous’s “The Laugh of the Medusa.” This is an essay full of references to sound. The medusal laugh is a demand for *écriture féminine* as an irruptive and disruptive embodied practice of writing that retains the musicality of the mother’s tongue. Khodr’s silent smile is not what Cixous had in mind, and Tiqqun’s text would most certainly have turned the French feminist to stone. However, the wide opening of Khodr’s mouth transducing the force of laughter into a vocal vibe of pleasure—the jubilation of fucking up, the jubilation of vowels gone rogue in surround sound—would likely have made Cixous smile in response. Khodr’s almost laughter is laughter I can feel. “One incants laughter, in the same way one incants the name of a god, in the hope that, through repetition, laughter can magically be brought into the present of the incantator,” writes philosopher Anca Parvulescu.

In this book, we argue that the style of *Preliminary Materials*—its affective rhythms, aesthetic of fragmentation, iterative approach to rhetoric, and animating aural address—is a call demanding a response. One of these wide-ranging reactions, *Tahrïk* offers its own performance of call-and-response as a mise-en-abyme of the broader field of Young-Girl theories. This “re-versioning relay,” to borrow Charlotte Frost’s phrase for communication via LISTSERVs, begins as a series of corrections and then turns into pronunciation gone wild. When the audience stops disciplining Khodr’s voice and

commits to fucking up together, we hear a “sonorically dissonant” kind of music. Fucking up together is different from fucking someone over. This is as good a time as any to say that Jere on Goodreads gives Preliminary Materials four out of five stars. Jere pulls out the following quotation to support the rating: “It wasn’t until the Young-Girl appeared that one could concretely experience what it means to ‘fuck,’ that is, to fuck someone without fucking anyone in particular. Because to fuck a being that is so really abstract, so utterly interchangeable, is to fuck in the absolute.”

It is unclear if the reviewer means to praise this theory of fucking or if this is why Jere knocks off a star.

References to Preliminary Materials keep coming, and we worry we will fuck it all up either by neglecting to include them or failing to complete this book. We really feel Jodi Dean’s cranky complaint, in her book on blogging and communicative capitalism, that “to address its object in a timely fashion, the book has to be new, fresh, up-to-the-minute, fashion forward, bleeding edge. . . . The book is pushed to adopt, in other words, the entrepreneurial expectations of the venture capitalist, racing to be the first out of the block.”

One of these fresher references is from Paul B. Preciado (incidentally, whose book Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era was read, in part, at some YGRG events). Preciado briefly turns to Tiqqun in “On the Verge” (2020), an essay that gives a name to recent global protests against racism, police brutality, misogyny, sexual violence, and other forms of oppression: the name is “revolution.” In the essay’s introduction, Tiqqun’s insistence on including “Marais homos” and beurettes in the category of Young-Girl gets a parenthetical exclamation—“(how

10. Dean, Blog Theory, 2.
to even envision the displacement between these figures without falling into homophobia and racism!"\textsuperscript{12} Preciado’s essay does not present Tiqqun as clairaudient soothsayers who heard our current era way back in 1999, despite this tendency among responses to \textit{Preliminary Materials}. “Our Tiqqun friends” who held out no hope for the Young-Girl, Preciado writes, “did not predict that it would be precisely these groups—the young girls, the gays, the trans people, and the racialized denizens of the banlieue—that would lead the next revolution.”\textsuperscript{13} Understanding the Young-Girl as degendered, desexed, and deracinated likely means falling into homophobia and racism, and yet the fraught conceptual category Tiqqun participate in assembling has, for Preciado, held together, as something and not nothing, at least well enough to reemerge in summer 2020 in an essay about synchronized dissidence.

While fucking the rhetorical figure of the Young-Girl may be fucking no one in particular, as Tiqqun whimper, their theory at its best (and maybe against our better judgment, to add another parenthetical) might be made to describe a collective of the anyone-seriously-fucked-over. In calling this collective the Young-Girl, though, Tiqqun fail to reckon with the multifarious and uncategorizable power of the “somatopolitical alliance” their theory might have imagined if it weren’t so invested in girliness as an index of political failure.\textsuperscript{14} We might consider this work of imagining differently as the compositional and performative effort of Tiqqun’s more hopeful reader-listeners. We are reminded of McLuhan’s contention that the “sudden implosion” that produced the global village “alters the position of the Negro, the teen-ager, and some other groups. They can no longer be \textit{contained}, in the political sense of limited association. They are now \textit{involved} in our lives, as we in theirs, thanks to the electric media.”\textsuperscript{15} This (racist) attempt to cleave the “we” from

\textsuperscript{13} Preciado, “On the Verge,” 95.
\textsuperscript{14} Preciado, 101.
the “they,” a rhetorical move so familiar to readers of *Preliminary Materials*, can be heard as a delightfully botched warning: a new somatopolitical alliance has assembled, and they/we walk among them/us. Fuck you, McLuhan, but also, *bisous* (“thanks to the electric media,” Echo repeats with a smile).

Preciado’s “On the Verge” is occasioned by an urgent need to register the impact of COVID-19 on the revolutionary somatopolitical alliance forged before “our strategies for fighting were decollectivized and our voices fragmented” by global quarantine measures. Although the bulk of the essay was written in April 2020, when Preciado was most hopeless about the viability of face-to-face political protest, he offers an optimistic coda written on June 4, two days after a Parisian Black Lives Matter protest demanding accountability for the murder of Adama Traoré by three police officers during a 2016 arrest outside of Paris. In an article in the *New Yorker*, Traoré’s sister Assa Traoré attributes the broad participation in the march to the powerful reverberation between the fury over her brother’s murder and the outrage over the asphyxiation of African American George Floyd. “The two fights echo each other, so that we’re pulling back the curtain on France, in saying, ‘People of the whole word [sic], look what’s happening here.’” She demands that those listening to her become spokespeople forcing France to confront its colonial past and the toxic color-blindness of the *République*, calling herself a soldier leading a “machine of war.”

Assa Traoré is not what Tiqqun have in mind when they personify the “war machine” through the compliant commodified body of their Young-Girl. Indeed, Assa Traoré gives us the obverse of “the Young-Girl X, the Young-Girl Y, the Young-Girl Z” with her algo-

18. Collins.
rhythmic chant of “we fight for Adama, we fight for Ibrahima Bah, we fight for Gaye Camara . . . the list is too long!” (“On se bat pour X . . . la liste est trop longue”), transforming the serial oral-aural rhythms particular to the Young-Girl’s brutal generation into an iterative, energetic, ever-expanding care for the accruing victims of brutality around the world.20 Preciado notes that the Parisian activists were mostly younger than thirty years old.21 Although his essay does not mention Tiqqun after its introduction, the return to youth in the essay’s coda embraces the political potential of the market segment whose “Youthitude” was dispossessed and redistributed in the extractivist process of “Young-Girlist formatting.”22 The question is whether it is only capitalism responsible for such vampirism or if Preliminary Materials is political theory’s own Vlad Dracula. It is said that vampires can perform a kind of echolocation, and that they have hearts that beat, albeit slowly.23

It has been tempting to perform an auscultation on theories of the Young-Girl, including Tiqqun’s. To diagnose, once and for all, their misogyny or feminism. To listen for the arrhythmias at the center of fourth-wave feminism or capitalist oppression or mass consumption or neoliberalism. To determine who or what is fucking over the Young-Girl or whether someone’s fucking with us. Young-Girls in Echoland is not that book (and perhaps we’re fucked-up feminists). Our style of close listening cannot identify causes.

In “Close but Not Deep: Literary Ethics and the Descriptive Turn,” Heather Love critiques the analytical approach that con-

continues to dominate literary studies (and, we would add, all of the humanities), the hermeneutics of depth. She explains that “the ‘depth’ of ‘depth hermeneutics’ should be understood not only as the hidden structures or causes that suspicious critics reveal. Depth is also a dimension that critics attempt to produce in their readings, by attributing life, richness, warmth, and voice to texts.”24 While Love advocates reading closely but not deeply as a turn to “the thin and the dead,” our tactic has been to apprehend, in theories of the Young-Girl, a different kind of life, a different kind of voice, a noisy, pulsing animation born of the movement and confused transformation of ideas, facilitated by the very instability, ambiguity, and utter shittiness of the Young-Girl as a conceptual persona.25 This different kind of life is also a different aesthetic and calls out for a kind of theory that foregrounds its stylistic gestures, that is, its aesthetico-affective-political stance. The Young-Girl has become a pop theory phenomenon appealing to artists, poets, directors, actors, musicians, anarchists, and communists in part because it is stylish and invites others to be unabashedly stylish in response.

“Taking leave of all goodwill, he proposes in a vigorous style to mobilise thought.”26 This is Christine Goémé on Gilles Châtelet’s To Live and Think Like Pigs. Style, for Châtelet, is philosophy’s true and serious business, “an entirely integral part of thought qua thought experiment.” “Style is a discipline of breaking language out of itself, a martial art of metaphor.”27 The style of Preliminary Materials is more problematic but equally vigorous, mobilizing thought across time, space, medium, and political affiliation. Language is broken, but through less discipline, more teenage riot.

Preliminary Materials for a Theory of the Big-Eyed-Orphan, Preliminary Materials for a Theory of the Mass-Ornament,

27. Châtelet.
Well... I mean... fuck girlphobia.