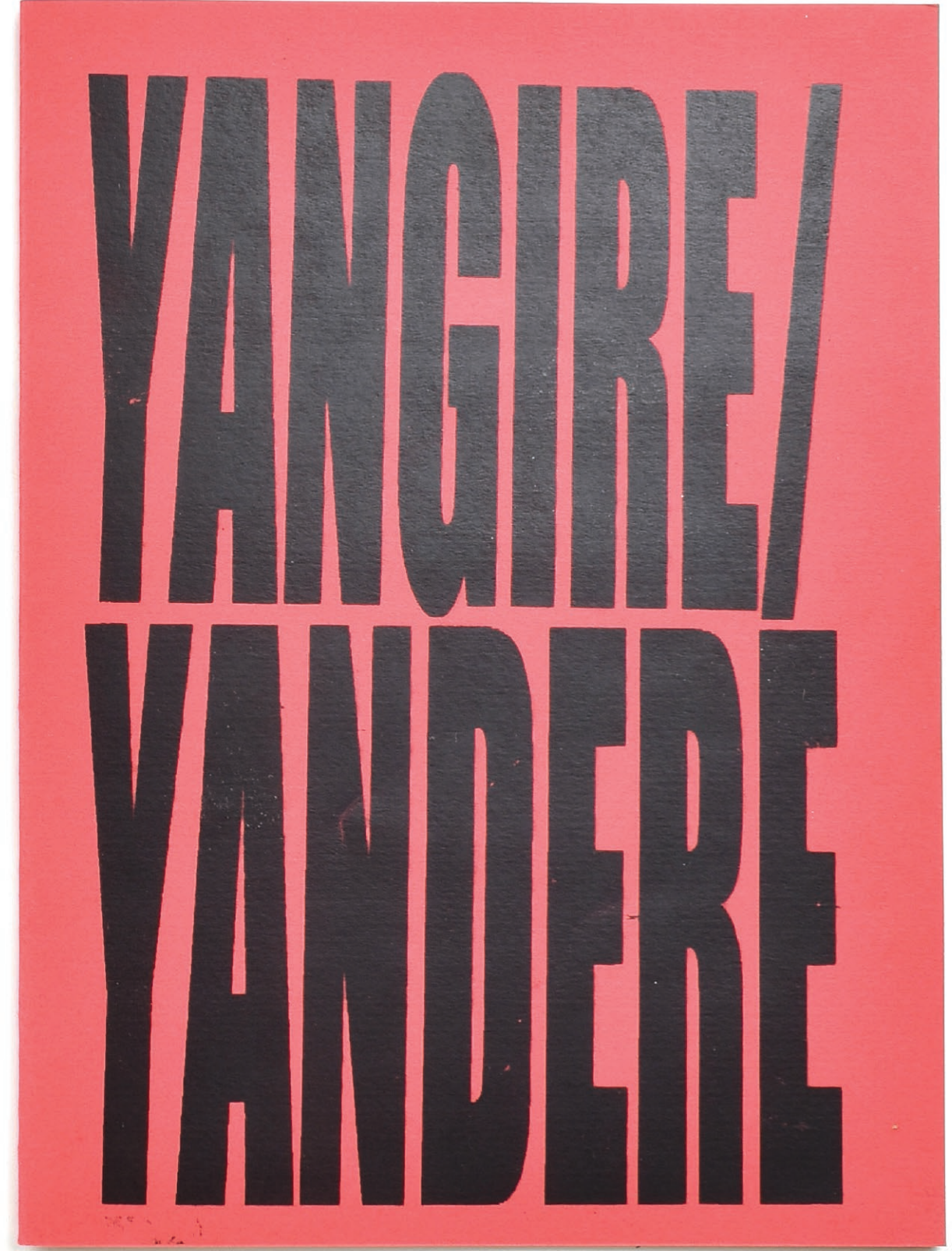
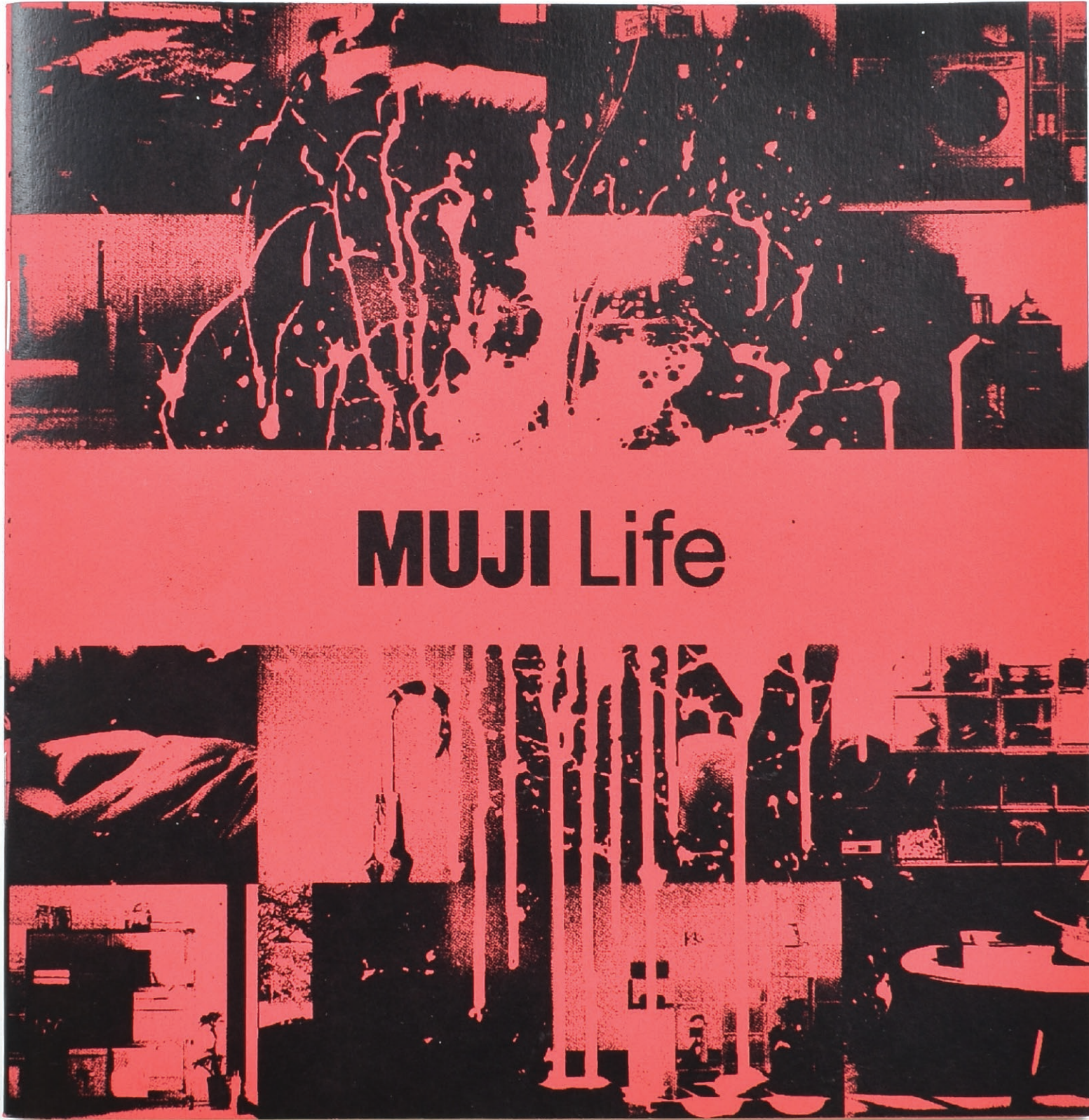


MUJI Life



**YANGIRE/
VANDERE**



MUJI Life



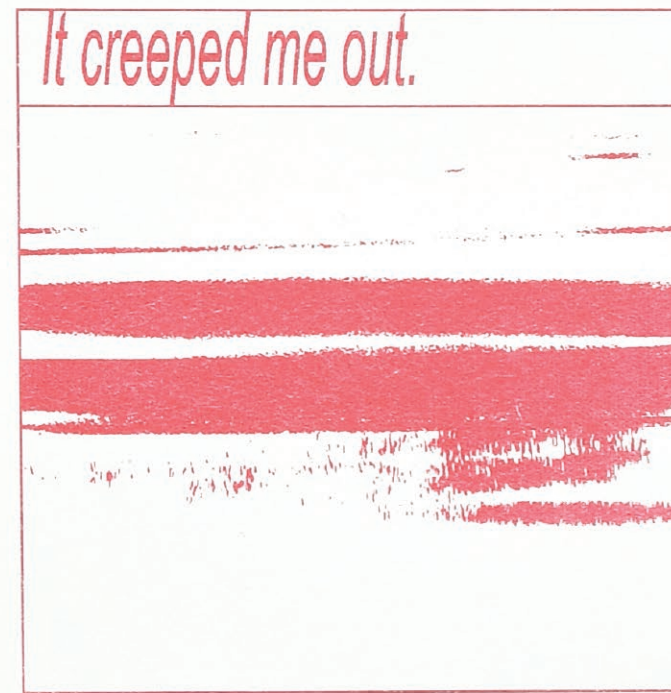
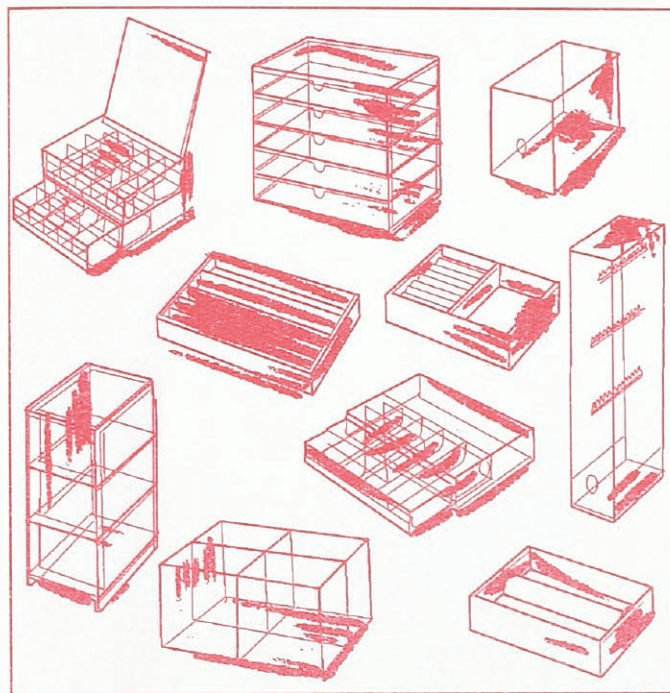
Hetamoé

MUJI LIFE

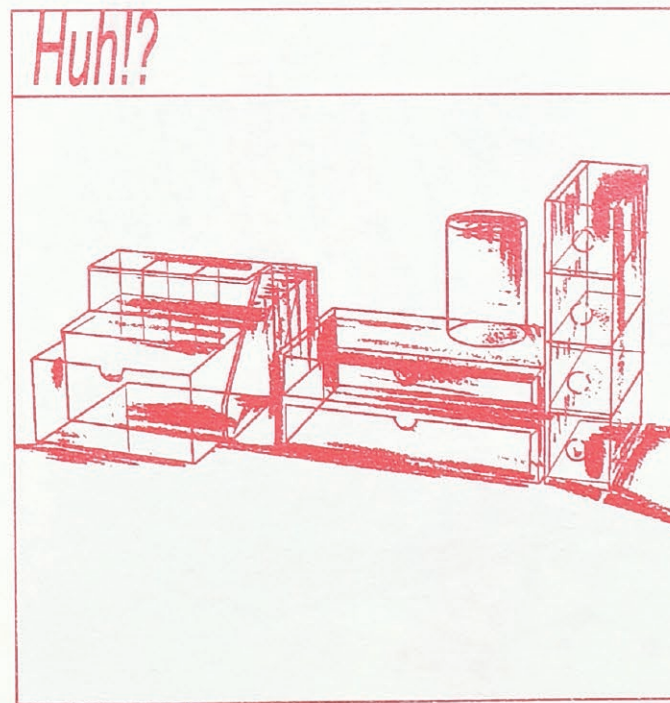
Made at the invitation of Feira Marta
for HOUSE OF PSYCHOTIC WOMEN
at Adamastor Studios, in September 2015.



What did you think of the segment that unveiled my secrets?



It creeped me out.



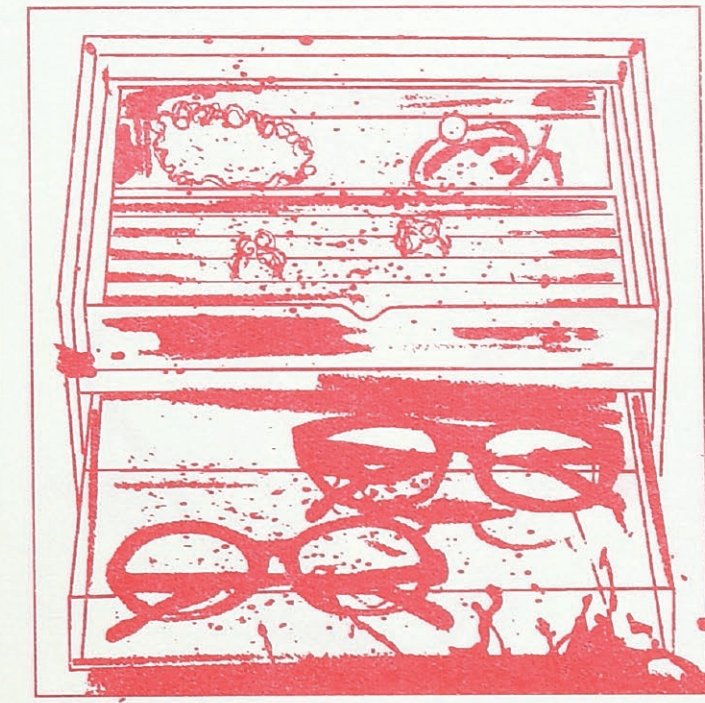
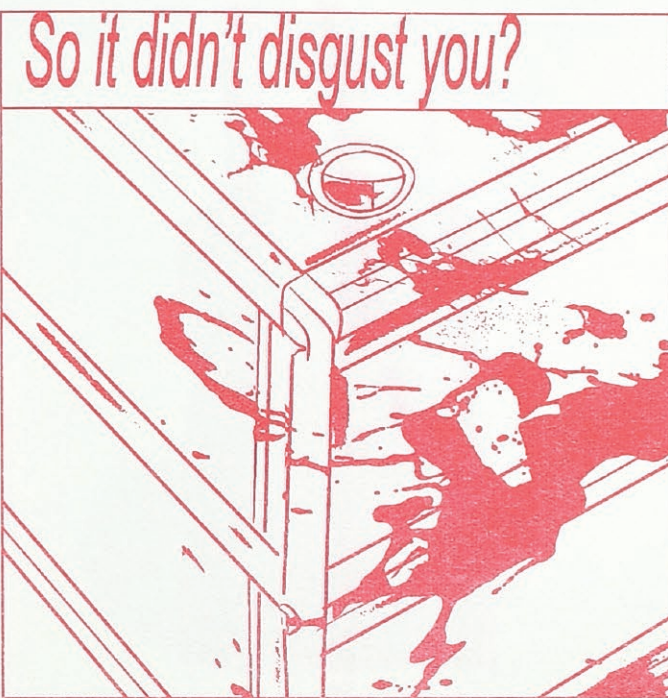
Huh!?

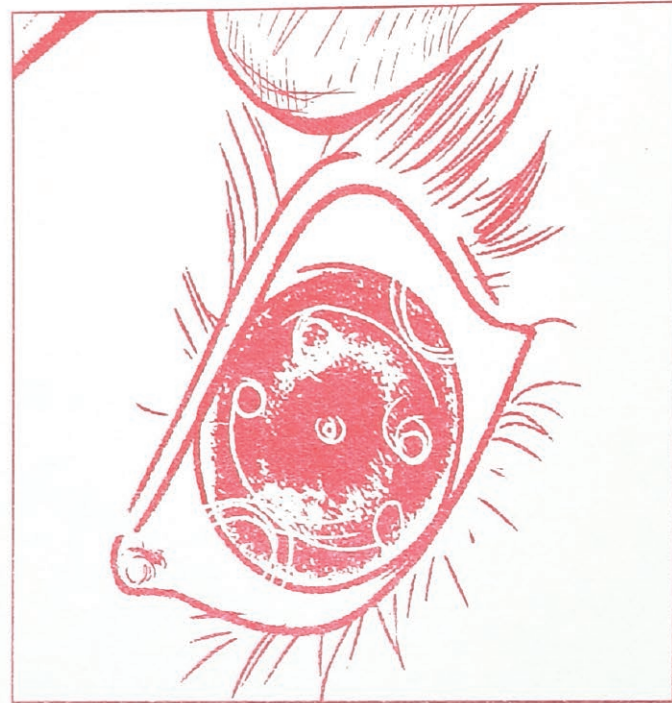


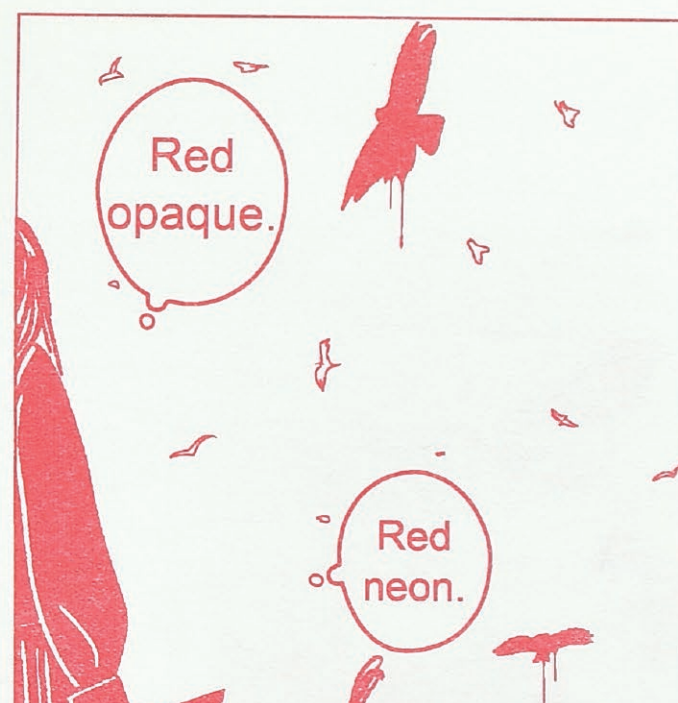
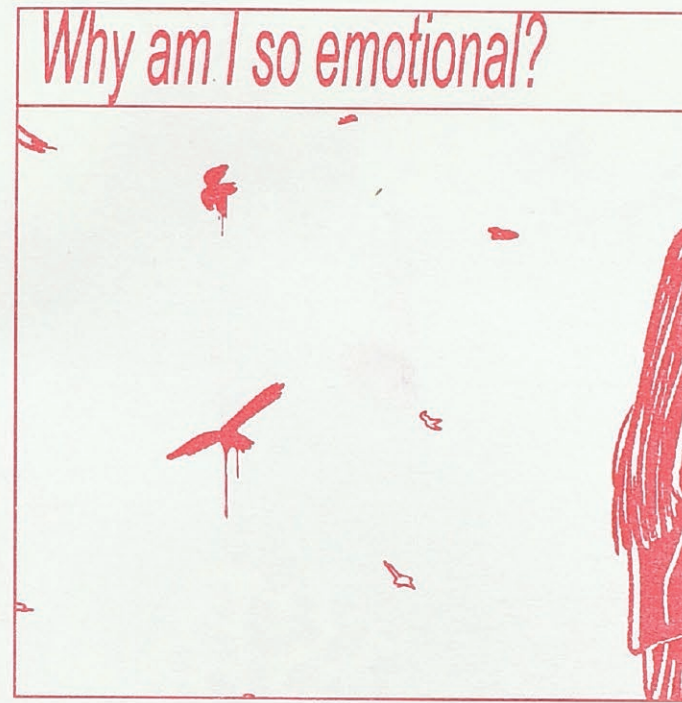
Does it hurt?

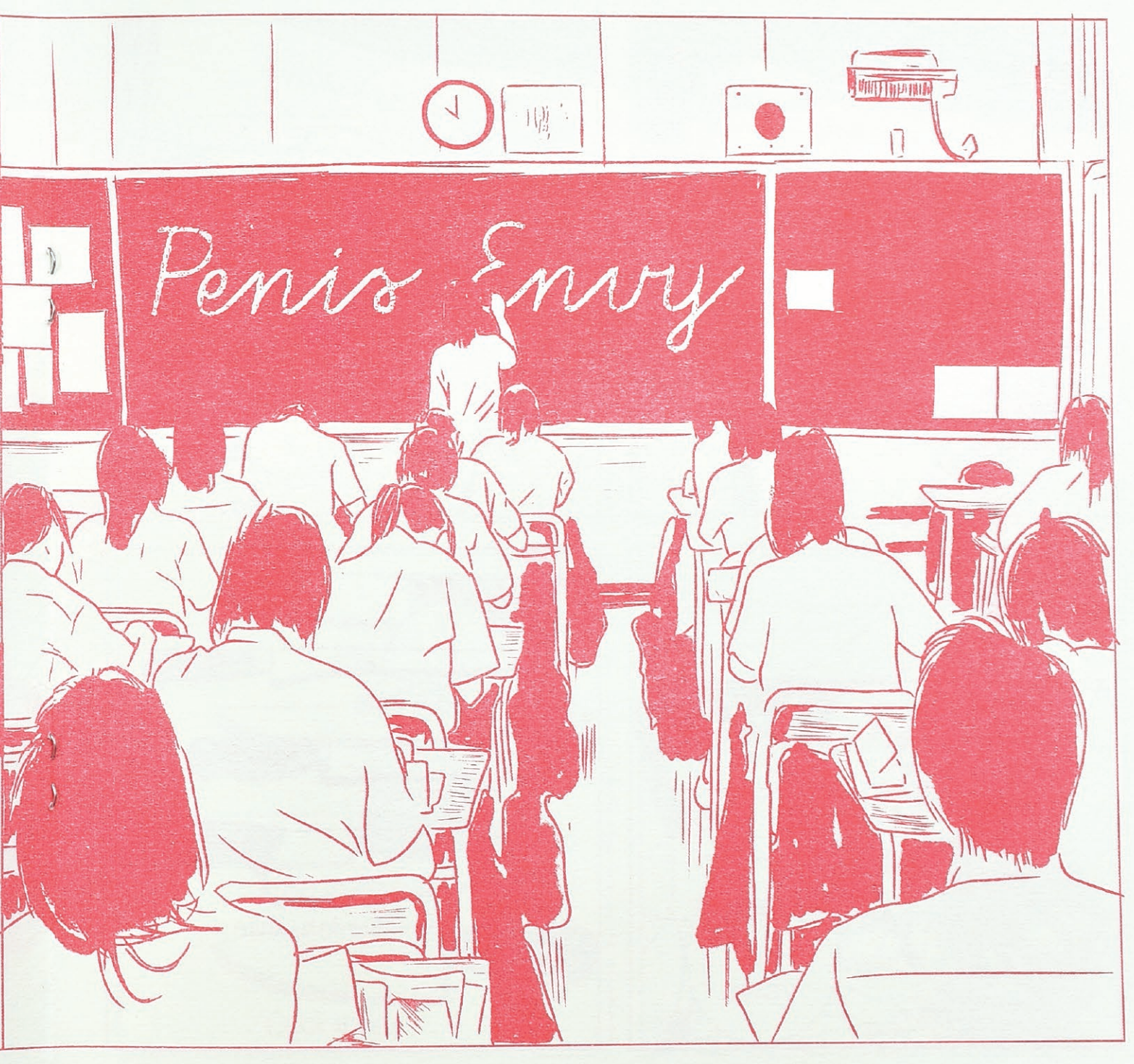


It magnificently creeped me out.



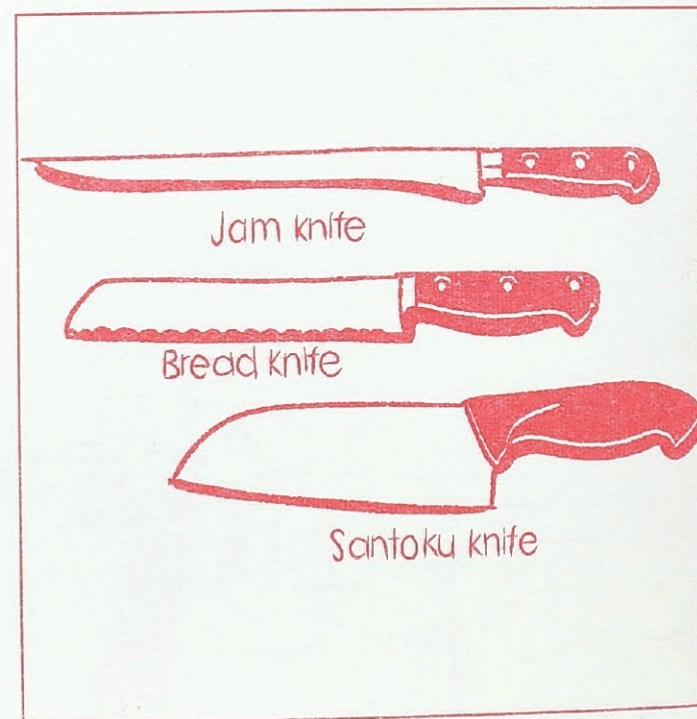








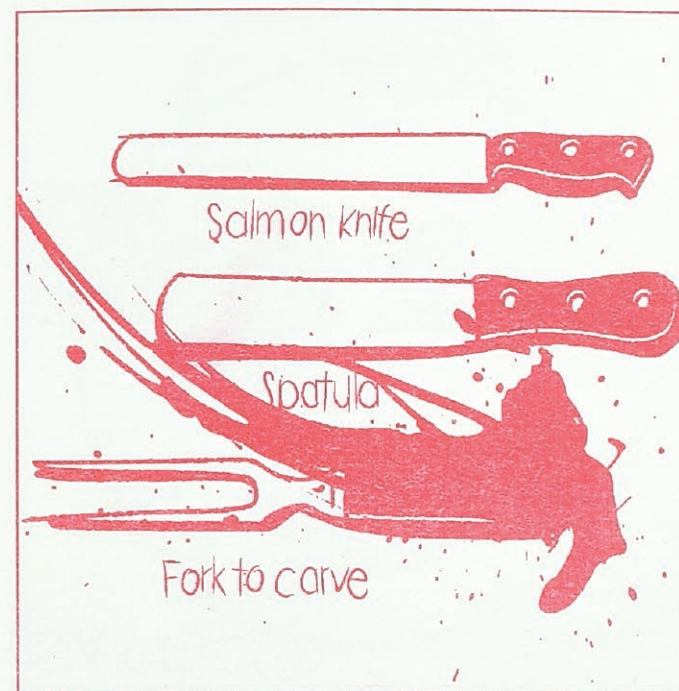
Kitchen axe



Jam knife

Bread knife

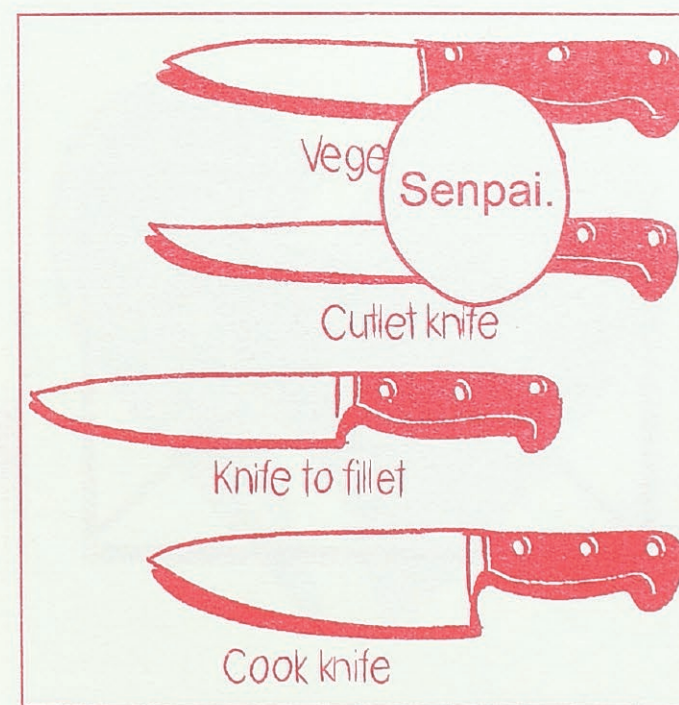
Santoku knife



Salmon knife

Spatula

Fork to carve



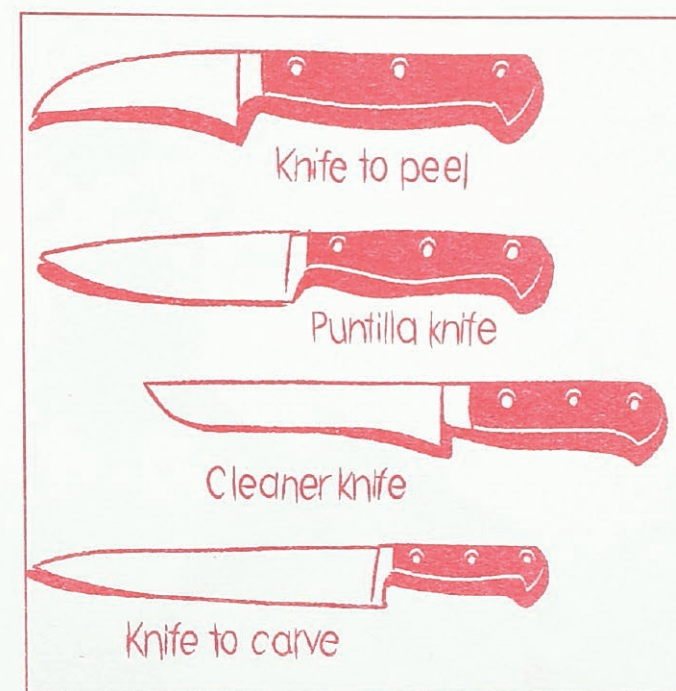
Vege

Senpai.

Cutlet knife

Knife to fillet

Cook knife



Knife to peel

Puntilla knife

Cleaner knife

Knife to carve



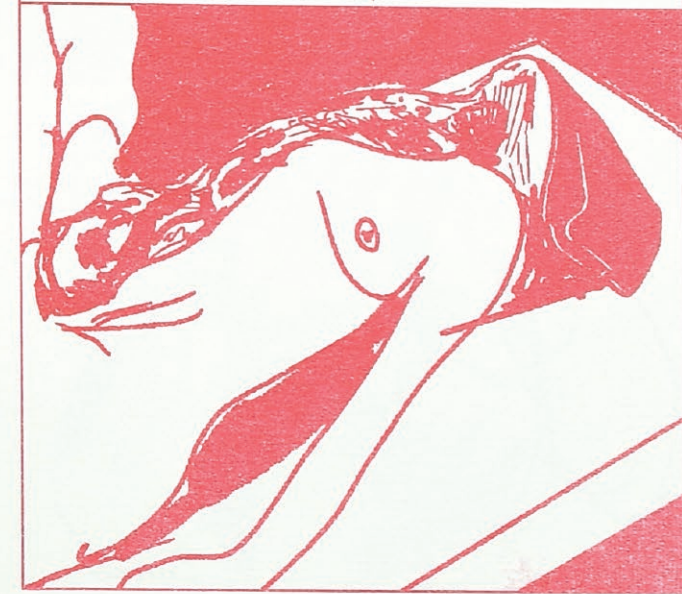
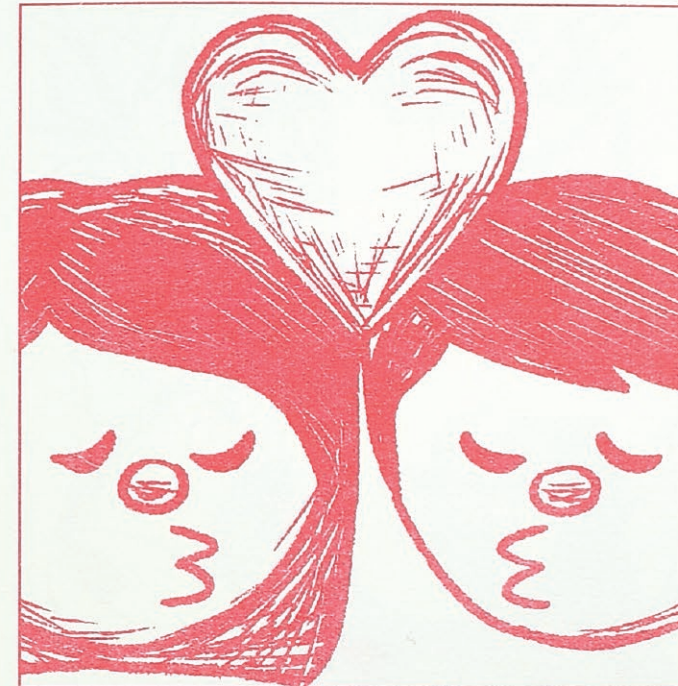
What-
ever
you do,

don't
go
away.

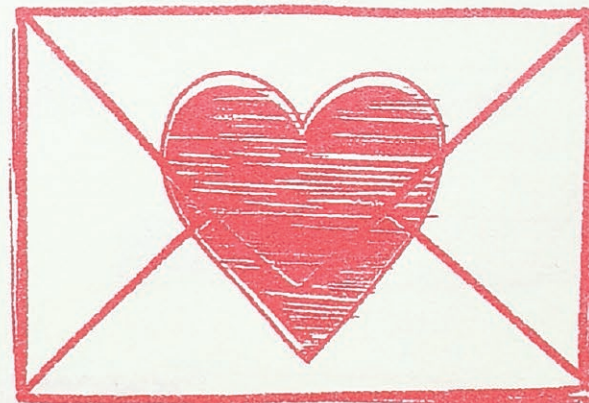
I wish you only saw me.



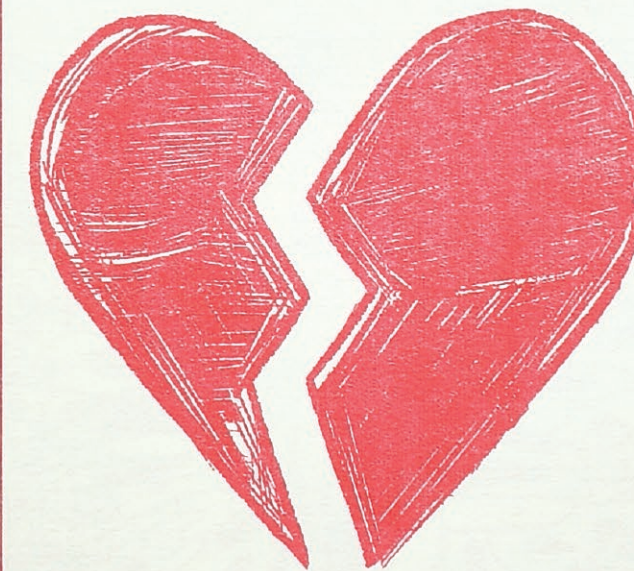
And even if I die,



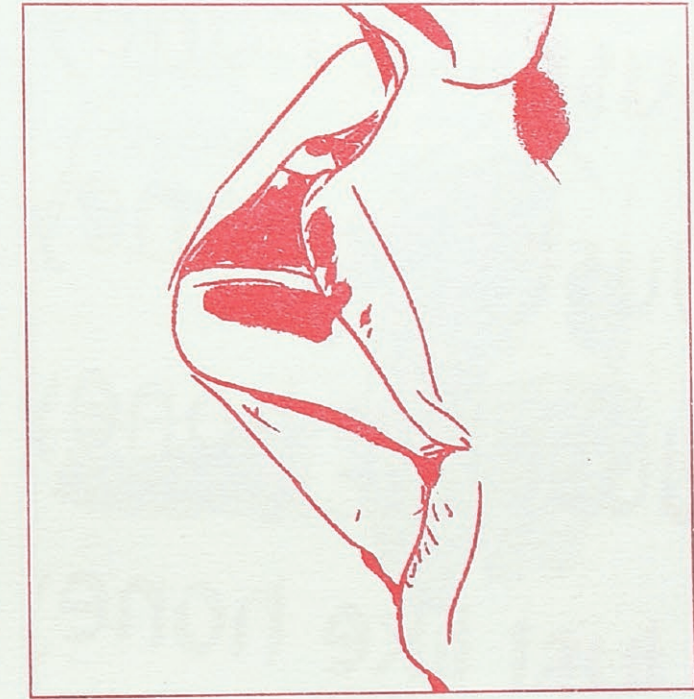
Other people are...irrelevant.



I'll keep chasing you.



Because I really, really, really...

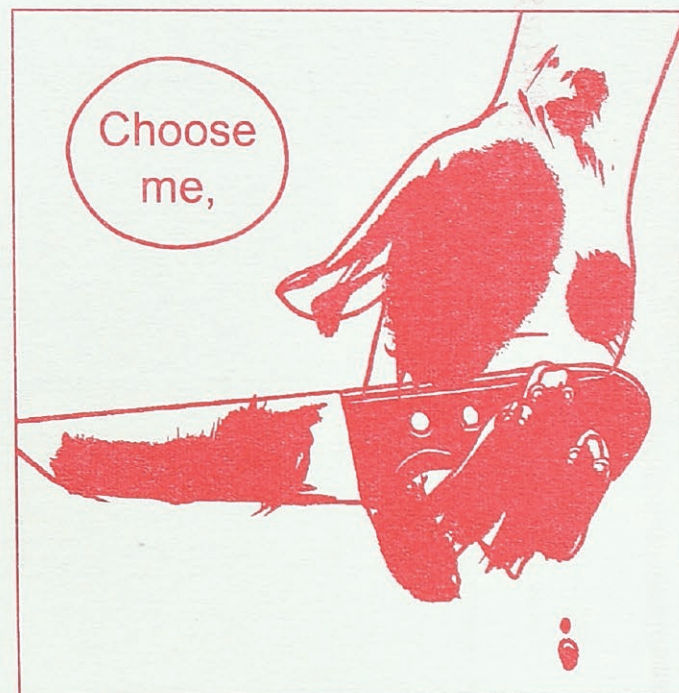




Just like honey
Just like honey
Just like honey
Just like honey



tell me
i'm cute



or die.



Clube do Inferno

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**YANGIRE/
YANDERE**

The following essay was written by Hetamoé as a companion piece for the mini-comic zine *Muji Life* in September, 2015.

Y*angire* and *yandere* are character tropes originated in the Japanese subculture known as *otaku*, grosso modo equivalent to Western's "geek" or "nerd" cultures. More precisely, they have blossomed within the male-oriented aesthetics of *moé* manga, anime and fandom, whose primary leitmotif is a love for little sister-type cuteness. Both the *yangire* and the *yandere* are portmanteau words sharing the common prefix "yan", from "yandeiru", meaning that something or someone is or has fallen sick. The "gire" in "yangire" borrows from "kire", meaning "slice", while the "dere" in "yandere" takes after "daredere", an onomatopoeic word meaning "lovestruck". The final half of the word is thus what separates the *yangire* and the *yandere* in terms of motivations: the first is driven by the compulsion to slice and carve; the second by feelings of love. To cut a long story short (pun intended), the *yangire* translates into an outwardly cute, loving and adorable character prone to snapping into a bloodthirsty psycho when irritated, frightened or otherwise stressed. Conversely, the *yandere* is an outwardly cute, loving and adorable character that will turn to different shades of brutal, obsessive and plain old deranged over their romantic crush. The *yandere* is, simply put, the crazy overprotective stalker in sheep's cloth-

ing, one who will hesitate at nothing (kidnaping, blackmailing, torture, assassination, you name it!) to get their special person's attention and remove whatever obstacles stand in their way... Even if it means, in extreme cases, "protecting" said special person by killing them.

The *yangire* and *yandere* fit broadly into the umbrella archetype of split personality tropes, and though their "Mr. Hyde" halves may be more or less pervasive, they are usually rendered as violent mood swings and sudden outbursts of murderous rage triggered by berserk buttons (more often than not, physically transforming the characters' appearance by uncutifying their cute features). The occasional male *yangire* and *yandere* do exist in Japanese media, but unsurprisingly, these characters are almost always gendered female, endorsing a long tradition of uncontrollable emotional excesses by hysterical women. Yuno Gasai, from the series *Mirai Nikki* ("Future Diary", animated in 2011 *d'après* Sakae Esuno's manga), has become the ultimate *yandere* poster child, originating the widespread internet meme Yandere Trance or Ecstatic Yandere Pose (also known as Mirai Nikki Yandere Face or Yuno Face). FIGURE 1 Yuno is a cute, pink-haired girl in love with the male protagonist Yukiteru "Yukkii" Amano, a young boy forced to take part in a deadly battle royale, who she swears to protect by any means necessary – usually involving aggressive stalking and carnage.

At the end of the first episode, after Yukiteru, terrified out of his wits, learns of the dreadful fate awaiting him, he is reassured by a crazy-eyed blushing Yuno saying “Don’t worry, Yukkii... I will (ahn~) protect you.” The feverish vocal performance by actress Tomosa Murata, not short on erotic undertones, along with the dramatic hand pose and eerie lighting turned this scene into an exploitable image with hundreds of parodic variations, in which characters from all kinds of shows are “yanderized” by fans using Yuno’s girlish face as a template. FIGURE 2

Furthermore, because both types are anchored in *moé* worlds densely populated by pubescent girls doing cute things, the feminization of the *yangire* and *yandere*’s affective dispositions is also infantilized. For that reason, they become a sort of over-the-top *Enfant Terrible* (a trope defined by children with homicidal tendencies), addressing the paradoxical anxiety that extreme displays of cuteness are, at some level, disturbing, unnatural and deceptive (a not-quite-human effect echoing Masahiro Mori’s “uncanny valley”). As argued by Sianne Ngai in *Ugly Feelings*, such marking of subjects as emotionally anomalous, whether by deficit or surplus, is in fact a long-running means of othering those perceived to be outside white, male, hetero-cis, adult and/or abled privilege. Ngai’s concept of “animatedness”, *i.e.* the state of “being moved” (which she traces back to

rudimentary animation technologies), effectively pinpoints the ideologically “ambiguous interplay between agitated things and deactivated persons” or “the passionate and the mechanical” (Ngai 2007, 91), which we often find in tropes of demonic possession of female bodies within the horror genre. In *House of Psychotic Women*, a semiautobiographical book on representations of female neurosis in horror and exploitation films, the author Kier-La Janisse compares her own experience of mental disorder with cinema’s most notorious teen-girl-possessed-by-the-devil: “I felt like Regan in *The Exorcist*, emitting these crude and venomous insults while simultaneously feeling that the words were coming from somebody else” (Janisse 2012, 136). Similarly, the *yangire* and *yandere* are, among *moé*’s repertoire of stock characters, those who are most “possessed” by an emotional defectiveness, haunted by a sense of ventriloquism and manipulation of their voices and bodies as they alternate between innocence and monstrosity.

One notable example of the *yangire* and *yandere*’s connection to puppeteering is the beginning of *Elfen Lied*, adapted to anime in 2004 from Lynn Okamoto’s manga. FIGURE 3 Centering on the interactions between human beings and the mutant species *diclonii*, whose appearance is similar to people except for two horns on their heads, *Elfen Lied*’s opening sequence became notorious for its use of graphic

violence and “blood piñatas” (characters deployed for the purpose of being reduced to a bloody pulp). As the main character, the *diclonii*-known as Lucy – who, incidentally, is a cute pink-haired girl like *Mirai Nikki*’s Yuno–, makes her escape out of an experimentation facility, she uses her invisible telekinetic tentacle-arms to horribly mutilate and kill her captors, leaving a blood bath in her wake. ^{FIGURE 4} During this sequence, Lucy becomes both puppeteer and puppet, pulling the strings with unseen hands while rendered mechanical and dehumanized by her unstoppable advance. The memorable contrast between Lucy’s naked body and the full metal mask engulfing her face (which symbolically inhibits her voice, making her silent during the whole sequence), reinforces the automatized quality of the *diclonii*’s desensitization. Eventually, Lucy is shot in the head, causing her to develop the alternate persona Nyu, an extremely cute, innocent and clumsy feral child, who is taken in by a young man and woman and named after the only word she produces (“nyu~”). ^{FIGURE 5} Needless to say, this split between Lucy-the-person-of-mass-destruction and Nyu-the-ingénue goes on to become one of the series’ central plot points. But the opening sequence remains especially effective in its representation of the *yangire* and *yandere*’s ambiguous agency: at once the most aggressively innervated and most possessed of *moé*’s character types.

Ultimately, if as Ngai points out “cuteness is an aesthetization of powerlessness” (Ngai 2012, 64), the *yangire* and *yandere* may be perceived as a revenge of the “cutified” subject, sadistically lashing out against their master’s sadism. It is no wonder, then, that the *yangire* and *yandere*’s behavior is so often justified by past trauma, making them sufferers of physical and psychological abuse, in a circular victim-becomes-perpetrator logic. This is the case in both *Mirai Nikki* and *Elfen Lied*, as Yuno was physically harmed and starved by her parents after failing to live up to their expectations, and the *diclonii*’s propensity towards violence is hinted to be the result of abuse by humans. The experience of abjection, *i.e.* of being cast off and reduced to a state of helplessness, pitifulness and despair, is in fact pivotal in the portrayal and development of many of these characters, such as the iconic *yangire* Rena Ryuuguu from the best-selling media franchise *Higurashi no Naku Koro ni* (“When the Cicadas Cry”). ^{FIGURE 6} Scarred by her parents’ traumatic divorce, Rena (who is a sweet and friendly girl except when she isn’t) suffers from acute maternal and self-abjection, a trait reflected in both her fascination with the town’s illegal garbage dumping site, where she passes her time “treasure-hunting” for cute things; and her cutting herself to remove the maternal blood she hallucinates is filled with maggots. ^{FIGURE 7} The same is true for *yandere* characters, whose murderous love stems in many cases from an extreme desire for bodily and spiritual connectedness. In

yandere genealogy, this obsession can be traced back to the Sada Abe Incident of 1936, a high-profile lust murderess that captured Japan's public imagination and fueled the artistic movement known as *ero guro nonsense* (shortened to *ero guro* or *guro*). Sada Abe was a prostitute who erotically strangled her lover to death, castrated his corpse and carried the genitalia in her handbag around the streets of Tokyo for days until her arrest. When asked why she did it, she replied that "I loved him so much I couldn't stand it, so I decided that I wanted him all to myself" (PW, 163). FIGURE 8

As the interrogation and investigation advanced, relevant details about Abe's life came to light, including her being a victim of acquaintance rape, which sentenced girls at an early age to the marginality of unmarried women perceived as "damaged goods". This, in turn, precipitated a series of troubling events, from growing into a runaway misfit to being forced into prostitution by her father, and the ensuing misery of her days as a sex worker: maltreatment by pimps, contracting syphilis, financial desperation, imprisonment in geisha houses, and eventually becoming a fugitive prostitute. As discussed by Christine Marran in *Poison Woman*, despite these revelations, coeval discourses on Abe were essentially naturalized and cautionary, framing her crime as driven by instinctual and primal bodily desires (repeatedly described as infantile, insect-like, regressive) and warning



FIGURE 1 Yuno Gasai in Yandere Trance or Ecstatic Yandere Pose.



FIGURE 2 Fan art depicting characters from popular shows (Touhou Project, Nichijou, Naruto, Yu-Gi-Oh!) in Yuno's yandere pose.



FIGURE 3 The diclonii Lucy from Elfen Lied. The right side of her head shows the metal helmet worn during the series' opening sequence.

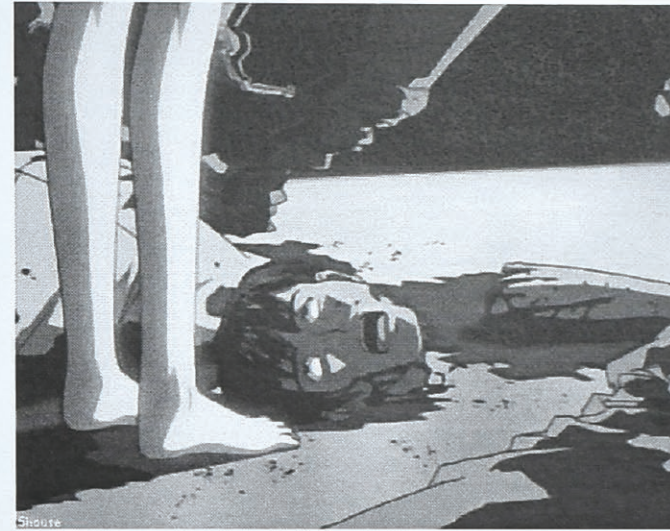


FIGURE 4 The severed head and torso of a guard lying at Lucy's feet during her escape.



FIGURE 5 Nyu is distinguished from Lucy by her "tarime", i.e. huge, soft drooping eyes typical of ingénue moé characters.



FIGURE 6 Rena Ryuuguu, holding her trademark cleaver or "nata" (a Japanese gardening tool). Cute, or is she?

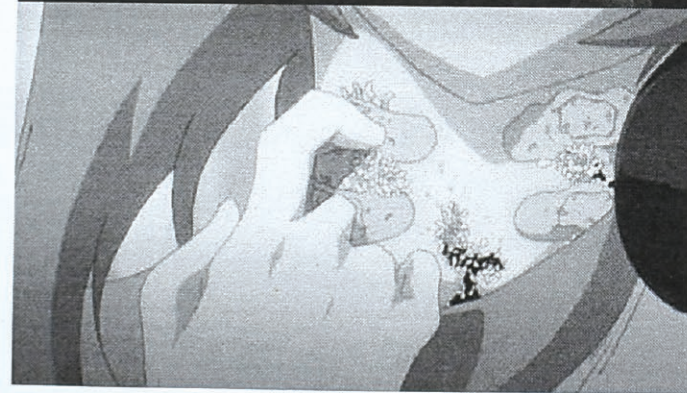


FIGURE 7 Above, the town's trash heap; below, Rena hallucinations of maggots in her blood.



FIGURE 8 Sada Abe shortly after her arrest in 1936, at the Takanawa Police Station in Tokyo.



FIGURE 9 Akira Kogami, co-hostess of "Lucky Channel", posing in her idol attire.



FIGURE 10 Akira insulting Minoru and being generally rude during an episode of "Lucky Channel".



FIGURE 11 Above, Minoru goes berserk over Akira's outrageous abuse; below, the ruins of "Lucky Channel"'s set.



FIGURE 12 Screenshot of Yandere Simulator. With the tagline "Don't Let Senpai Notice You" (a play on the popular internet meme I Hope Senpai Will Notice Me), the main character's goal is not romancing her love interest but stalking and sabotaging his love life from the shadows. In the situation above, she has the option to drag and hide the bodies of her rivals after cutting them down.



FIGURE 13 An example of romantic discourse in shoujo manga with a "yandere-ish" tone.

towards the dangers of unregulated sexual maturation in females. This reflected and consolidated the rooted archetype of the *dokufu*, or "poison woman", that Abe came to embody in the twentieth century, aligning female criminality with the potential for havoc in every woman's libido. Though Abe herself recognized that her actions were to some extent motivated by gender and class-based disempowerment – using murder and mutilation in an attempt to gain sexual equality with man –, pre-war writings depoliticize her claims by pinning them on innate psychosexual deviancy and (ab)using her to validate an agenda of gender oppression. In a surprising turn of events, however, post-war popular culture changed this stance, refashioning Abe into an icon of freedom, female self-assertion and emancipation recurrent in Japanese pulp fiction and 70s cinema. Yet, according to Marran, such a shift has less to do with women's struggle and more to do with the emergence of the "male masochist" as a new counter-discourse of masculinity, "through which masculine totalitarian politic and cultural values are explored and critiqued" (Marran 2007, 136).

The *yangire* and *yandere* tropes inherit this male masochism and the grotesque tone of *ero guro* works, combining otherwise benign *moé* characters with the negatively-charged female transgressiveness of "poison women". As a result, they have an inherently sensationalistic and shock-based

quality, which sets apart manga and anime such as *Mirai Nikki* and *Elfen Lied* from deeper, more considerate and complete portraits of insanity and depression in series like *Neon Genesis Evangelion*. By turning psychopathological women into distorted caricatures, the *yangire* and *yandere* “poison women” – now “poison girls” – maintain harmful myths about femalehood and mental illness that are more revealing of (hegemonic) male fears than anything else. Still, if we momentarily move beyond the issue of bad representation (a move Ngai suggests in respect to “animatedness”), we may unlock issues of affect, agency and power unique to the aesthetics of grotesquerie and crudeness. One such case is Akira Kogami from the quintessential *moé* anime *Lucky Star* (2007), based on Kagami Yoshimizu’s four-panel comic strip manga. Akira is a 14-year-old idol who, along with her male assistant Minoru, co-hosts “Lucky Channel”, a short infomercial at the end of every episode of *Lucky Star* that (supposedly) promotes the main show’s characters. She has pink hair (see a pattern?), wears a sailor suit with oversized sleeves and exhibits an energetic, cute-on-steroids persona that is, in reality, a cover-up for the hardboiled misanthrope lurking underneath, not above resorting to verbal and physical abuse to enforce her will.

FIGURE 9 As episodes go by the joke is that, despite her assistant’s best efforts, Akira’s toxic personality invariably diverts “Lucky Channel” away from its original purpose as a fan corner, instead turning it into a self-contained black comedy

of the duo’s increasingly abusive and violent work relationship. Mind you: in typical “poison girl” fashion, the violence is almost strictly female-on-male. FIGURE 10

“Lucky Channel” is separated from the actual show not only by breaking the fourth wall but also by its dark, innervated and cynical tone, contrasting with *Lucky Star*’s cheerfulness and laid-back slice of life pace. Additionally, Akira’s “yangireness” is openly framed as a labor issue, not-so-subtly presenting her neurosis as a result of early enrolment at age three into the highly competitive *tarento* (tv personalities) industry. Among other gritty details, we learn her parents are divorced and her mother takes charge over Akira’s money, allegedly using it to buy herself branded goods while giving her daughter a puny allowance. Akira is hence represented as a slave to the wage, bitter over the pressure and expectations from an exploitative industry, family and public alike, yet obsessed with career advancement, power, and prestige. Like a reverse-Regan, her body is possessed by a labor intensive cute persona, who easily crumbles into unladylike and unchildlike poses and gestures (*e.g.* crotch-scratching, chain-smoking), squinty eyes, and hoarse voice. Moreover, because Akira perceives her being relegated to the other side of the “wall” as a status inequality, she is overcome by the green-eyed monster of envy, an emotion that as proposed by Ngai is historically feminized and proletarianized

(with the infamous concept of “penis envy” in the eye of the storm). She becomes petty and paranoid, resenting the protagonists for their popularity and bullying her subordinate Minoru – who plays a minor role in the main show and whose mobility irritates her the most – in remarkably cruel and antagonistic ways, ranging from verbal humiliation to escalating forms of physical aggression (including an ash-tray thrown right at his face). Akira’s own repeated attempts at entering the main show are, however, constantly frustrated. At various occasions, she abruptly falls ill, is given a karaoke room instead of a concert hall, or is stopped short in her song, seemingly barred from a fictional world inhabited by either high school students or workers unaffected by work’s toll on the body and soul of the workforce. In the end, Akira’s poisonousness brings upon the destruction of “Lucky Channel” itself. After being sent on a life-threatening mission to collect drinking water from the springs of Mount Fuji, which Akira ends up spitting for not being sufficiently cool, Minoru, pushed beyond his breaking point, goes on a kicking and screaming rampage that completely destroys the segment’s set. FIGURE 11

The *yangire* and *yandere* potentially embody this pernicious circle of abuse in a transgressive, but not necessarily progressive, way, aiming for outright negativity rather than realism or better representation. They express in a crude,

straightforward way our fear of the repressed (whether the psychological or social-economical repressed), resembling Jung’s principle of “enantiodromia”: that extremes psychically transmogrify into their shadow opposites. The cuter and more domesticated the girl, then, the darker and wilder her poison. The same can be applied to the shakespearean saying that there is a method to madness, making the reverse – a madness to method –, just as true. (In doubt, take a stroll down your nearest Ikea or Muji store, where the sheer superabundance of orderliness and utilitarianism is enough to drive anyone crazy). The video game *Yandere Simulator*, presently being developed and described as “a stealth game about stalking a boy and secretly eliminating any girl who seems interested in him, while maintaining the image of an innocent schoolgirl”, tackles with this procedural aspect of the *yangire* and *yandere*’s disruptiveness.

FIGURE 12 In it, the main character, Yandere-chan, uses a large collection of “rational” processes to eliminate rivals, from all-out slaughter to staging accidents to social sabotage, while dealing with practical concerns such as disposing of corpses, cleaning up blood or destroying evidence. After all, what assures us that our own reasoning, our order, isn’t crooked? Yuno Gasai said it herself: “I’m crazy? What’s crazy is another world where I can’t be with you”. Such dangling on the thin line between normalcy and madness is valid for many products of women’s culture, such as *shoujo manga* (Japanese girls’ comics), whose over-sentimental

dialogues and displays of romantic love, if taken out of context, could easily pass for *yandere* scenarios of possessiveness, stalking and obsession. FIGURE 13

The *yangire* and *yandere* are, in essence, luridly bimodal characters whose affective work can, despite this “excessive” readability, become remarkably opaque, appealing to both radical and reactionary understandings. Between their extreme oppositions – cuteness and horror, reason and madness, passionate and mechanical, controlling or being controlled... – lies a gap in which reverberate visions of the feminine, the infantile, the masculine, class and trauma. Above all, both tropes address the everlasting conflict between Eros and Thanatos, the drives towards life-love and death, in a concentrate way that probes into our deep-seated, dysphoric feelings of suspicion towards anything that is exceedingly *nice*.

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YANGIRE
YANGIRE