

POST- DEPRIVITY

A Vision of the Future by SUPERVERT

Post-Depravity

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DIGITAL EDITION

Post-Depravity

A Vision of the Future
by Superver 32C Inc.

Dedicated

To Those Who Are Biologically Unable to Conceive

STOP Underground tunnels radiate outward from the black glass skyscraper at the center of the complex. Helvetica letters the size of billboards have been stencilled on the walls to mark the various departments: Neurology, Radiology, Morgue... Occasionally these waymarks are vandalized by a cynical nocturnist armed with a Sharpie. The Psychiatric ICU becomes the Psychiatric I [Heart] U. Sardonic jokes are written on the walls of remote passageways. "Rape Kit: One Size Fits All." The tunnels make it possible to wheel patients from one facility to another without braving the outside, but they also create pockets of darkness where healthcare practitioners surrender to the urges they suppress in the white corridors above. Decadent sonographers shoot dope by the machines that vend bottles of Ethos water. Wanton phlebotomists fuck in the recesses beneath stairs. Depressive temps try the doorknob that opens onto the autopsy suites for the simple reason that a cadaver is something to see, like the view along a scenic highway. At one neglected terminus of this subterranean complex, beyond the mail room and the freight elevators, in a corridor where the custodial crew abandons unwanted furniture, lies the locked door of the S&M R&D Lab. Across the white steel the moniker "Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex" has been scrawled in red lipstick. Kat peers at the graffiti. "Why doesn't somebody erase it?" – Murasaki shrugs, a smile leaking through her mouth like pus from an infected wound.

DR Artwork by patients with spinal cord and brain injuries is on display in the exhibit area. These neurologically impaired illustrators have created brazen eroticizations that cause the superimposed figures of the Noguchi sculpture at the end of the gallery to resemble a ménage à trois. Kat pauses before a collage made of clippings from pornography and an anatomy textbook. The artist has taken an image of a man licking a boot, cut out the footwear, and replaced it with an internal organ. "There is also," Kat remarks, "an anthology of patient writings." – "Perhaps it contains the first great literary work of medical fetishism." Murasaki pulls at an eyelash as though trying to untangle semen from it. – "Do you believe," asks Kat, "that Dr Malenkov suffers from this futuropathy? What if he is actually a prophet?" – "To believe that you can predict the future can't be anything other than mental illness." – "Is he really responsible for the Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex vlogs?" – Murasaki draws Kat by the arm toward the portrait of a pediatrician with three penises. She shares the hypersexuality of the assault victim who, having suffered a frontal lobe injury, has lost all inhibitions. "Have you ever had a head wound?" Kat is about to ask, but stops herself. If Murasaki were reminded that bruising her brain would liberate her from conventional morality, she would doubtless bash her head against the poured concrete benches in the plaza.

FRANCIS They pause on the landing in the empty stairwell. The metal windows overlooking the plaza section off bits of darkness so that the night resembles a tray of tissue cultures. Murasaki descends three steps then looks over her shoulder like a woman about to be taken from behind. Withdrawing the penlight from the pocket of his white coat, Ben Saïd passes the beam over her figure. – “You say they study Dr Malenkov,” she resumes, unfastening the top button of her uniform. – “Yes. There has been some discussion about the relationship between his futuropathy and Post-Prophetic Stress Disorder. This is the complex of feelings that occur when a prediction fails to come true.” – “How can they know he’s distressed if no one sees him?” – “They make inferences. It’s a process similar to the Freudian method, excavating latent meanings from the white papers and vlogs he posts as Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex.” – “How can we be sure that he is Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex?” – “He’s Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex, all right.” – “Is he dangerous?” – “I don’t know that Dr Malenkov is capable of hurting anyone, but his reclusiveness itself may be a kind of violence. It leaves an abyss for us to throw our fantasies into.” – Ben Saïd focuses the beam on Murasaki’s pelvis. Holding his gaze, she lifts the skirt of her white uniform. Her panties are black like the night beyond the windows.

MALENKOV Murasaki parts her lips, crooked teeth breaking the uniformity of the smile into individual components, misfits, overlaps, fangs. She is listening less to Ben Saïd than to the simulcast of the lecture echoing from a monitor mounted to the wall opposite the elevators: "Asymmetry, awkwardness, arrested movement... an ambiguous language of the unconscious, articulated through the bodies of women..." Polite applause drifts through the speakers. "Unless," Ben Saïd is saying, "new forms of life demand new forms of language, some combination of existing words can accurately describe the future. This is what unites the prophet with the poet. His vehicle is the mot juste." – Murasaki touches a finger to each temple. The migraine begins as a throb, like a pulse, before expanding to fill her head. She is fond of pain but cannot find the way to collaborate with this. It is like being hit by a blunt object from inside. She is no longer listening at all. "Do you know the famous sonnet," Ben Saïd continues, "that draws correspondences between colors and vowels? When he returned from the lecture tour of Asia, Dr Malenkov confessed that he fantasized about something similar, except replacing vowels with symptoms. In this way, victims of encephalopathy or toxoplasmosis would become art objects, their pathologies emitting colors which the diagnostician could appreciate for their aesthetic qualities. 'Imagine,' he said, 'a gynecologic cancer so beautiful that you couldn't even bear the idea of curing it.'"

IS On the tiled floor is a grimy copy of a journal devoted to pediatric gynecology. The cover is adorned with a terminally ill schoolgirl smiling through pink metal braces. An anonymous female voice emanates from the handicapped and wheelchair-accessible toilet stall at the far end of the restroom. "Right," a woman is discoursing into a mobile phone. "Dr Malenkov is no longer a real doctor. He is the subject of a case study about a new form of mental illness. Futuropathy..." Kat urinates, wipes herself, and looks at the folded tissue. Menstrual blood causes it to resemble a wound dressing. She picks up the journal and rubs the tissue across the face of the little girl. "After he fingers you," she says aloud, "he'll wipe it on your face and laugh." – "Excuse me?" – There is a pause like a moment of silence for the dead. – "The irony," the voice resumes, "is that using Dr Malenkov to define a disorder puts them in the position of having to make prognoses. They end up making predictions about the mental state that results when predictions fail to come true." – Kat opens her handbag. Inside is a wallet, a makeup kit, French cigarettes, a bottle of pink pills, and a book titled *Die Eigenrealität der Zeichen*. Tucked in the pack of cigarettes is a razor blade. Digging around, Kat locates a tampon. Printed on the wrapper are the words "Have a Happy Period."

A The vitrines in the corridor display the architectural models created for the renovations. “Where are we in all this?” asks Kat. The wrist that emerges from her sleeve, gesturing to the facsimile skyscraper, bears a self-inflicted wound. – “Does it matter?” Murasaki turns away from the polystyrene mock-ups, offering Kat a glimpse of the inscrutable mien with which she would commit a deliberate violation of patient rights. “The strike shows no signs of ending. The work is permanently stalled. Half the facility is a disaster area.” – Kat recognizes the Psychiatric ICU. She can recall the tall, cadaverous woman in a white smock entering to administer her first dose of Damagil. In retrospect, it seems strange that a pill whose side effects include suicidal ideation should be prescribed to someone who had just made an elliptical laceration in the hollow of her left clavicle. – “‘The sexuality of the future,’” Murasaki is saying, reading aloud from Dr Malenkov’s white paper, “‘will be increasingly abnormal. Thus it stands to reason that the way to apprehend it – to anticipate it – is through the deliberate cultivation of abnormal or even pathological means. We can see the future through the webcam of depravity.’ You know what turns me on lately? Intubating people. I love that moment when the IV needle gains access to a vein and you know you’re in, or when the epidural syringe gives a little and you think, Aaaaaahhh, there it is.”

NEUROSURGEON Murasaki pauses on the Hippocratic Bridge, an elevated walkway connecting the skyscraper to an adjoining tower. It gives her pleasure to survey the hospital after visiting hours. It is like peering into the repressed side of a person's mind. The gloom is populated with a thriving nightlife. Internists self-medicate in unused exam rooms. Promiscuous nurses offer themselves to surgeons in desolate operating theaters. Radiologists experiment with medical imaging machines, performing pointless scans of their flaccid genitalia. Taking a printout from her uniform pocket, Murasaki rereads the line "A woman finds the idea of rape appealing because it suggests that she is irresistible." She looks at her reflection in the glass wall of the enclosed bridge. The contrast between her eyeliner and skin transmits the same jolt she experienced the first time she saw an interracial couple in Tokyo. I would like to be raped, she thinks. I would like to be raped by a muscular black. He would grab me, pull my hair, choke me, assault me with hands like cudgels. I would like to be raped on video so that Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex can see it... She drops the printout, presses her forehead against the glass, and reaches into her panties. Grinding the paper into the floor, her stiletto heel causes a tear where the endnote declares "Proceeds generated by hits during the month of March will be donated to the Make-a-Wish Foundation."

WHO Ben Saïd, parked on the granite bench at the far end of the exhibit area, looks up from his phone. A woman enters the field of view. The visible signs of her radical mastectomy cause Ben Saïd to recall the “unibreast” of Harry Harlow’s lab monkey – “redundancy in the surrogate mother’s system was avoided by reducing the number of breasts from two to one.” She pauses to look at a drawing in the exhibit of artwork by patients with spinal cord and brain injuries. The work, titled “My Speech Pathologist,” shows a doctor whose face has been replaced by a gaping vagina. It causes Ben Saïd to think of Dr Malenkov – hostility toward the human face, futurology, self-imposed quarantine. “Dr Malenkov,” Ben Saïd types into his phone, “never leaves the premises. Why should he? It is a world unto itself. You can eat here, sleep, have affairs, get your teeth cleaned. The real question is the extent to which he is able to utilize these conveniences to deepen, seemingly deliberately, his psychosis. Does he diminish his range in space in a conscious effort to expand his range in time? If so, he must realize the implications of this vicious logic in which spatial restriction is tethered to temporal projection. One can imagine him engaging in BDSM games – having himself bound, gagged, and tied to a chair – in the deranged belief that this will maximize his visions of the future.”

HAS Ben Saïd leads Kat through the atrium to a table at the cafe. Night transforms the high glass walls into a black perimeter. "His early experiments are legendary. Please sit." Placing her book on the marble tabletop, Kat studies Ben Saïd's face – the dark eyes framed by black brows, skin the color of an ACE bandage, a small scratch wending across the chin. It is a handsome face except for the relative absence of movement or emotion. He has the bearing of an autistic child. "There was a brilliant experiment," Ben Saïd continues, "on time perception in sadomasochistic relationships. Dr Malenkov used a stopwatch to measure the duration of beatings and whippings. Afterward he asked participants to estimate the length of these abusive sex acts. There were significant discrepancies between the objective measures and subjective estimates." – Kat fingers the scabs on her forearm. The red lines run perpendicular to the blue veins. Together they form crosshairs. "What happened to him, then?" – "The crisis occurred during a lecture tour in Asia. He flew from city to city but never left the airports. When he returned, he claimed that travel had become superfluous because everyplace has become the same. The real frontier, Dr Malenkov said, is inside, in the head." Ben Saïd touches a finger to his temple. "He approached the board about starting a department for the study of psychogynecology. He vowed that anything wrong with a vagina is really mental."

BECOME The rain sluices off the glass ceiling of the atrium, blotting out the light. The outside world is as gray as a moral ambiguity. Ben Saïd watches as Kat withdraws a black tube from her handbag and fixes her lipstick. The average woman applies twelve makeup products a day to her skin. These contain roughly 168 different chemicals. "His predictions," Ben Saïd is saying, "lack a moral dimension. The prophets of old were Jeremiahs. They came not to describe the future but to denounce the evil ways of the present. Dr Malenkov is the opposite. He places no value judgements on his predictions. He does not say, 'Beware! The neurosciences will dispense with your moral certainties.' He simply describes what will happen. 'The neurosciences will lead to a future in which perversions can be swapped from head to head like game cartridges.'" – "He leaves it to us to decide." Kat tilts her head to drink from a bottle of Ethos water. The gesture bares her throat to Ben Saïd. He imagines knotting a stocking around it and choking her. Her eyes would widen. Her lips would part. She would resemble one of the drawings of female hysterics in Charcot's *Lectures on the Diseases of the Nervous System*. – Kat stares for a moment at the red stain her lipstick leaves on the empty bottle. "Do you think they really recycle this stuff?" – "That's the law." – "It doesn't mean they do it."

A Murasaki closes the door, lowers the lights, and lies down on the exam table. The pain throbs like a pulse in her head. She shuts her eyes against the sound-muffling ceiling tiles. White screens flare into view. Dr Malenkov courts madness, abuses drugs, advocates perversion, flirts with violence, makes himself an outcast. He is a *médecin maudit*, a charismatic figure exiled to the fringes of healthcare thanks to the demented genius of his visions. But is he dangerous? There are rumors that he deliberately induced brain damage in a young patient, a cheerleader undergoing surgery for a traumatic head injury, to test whether there is a relationship between time perception and sexual promiscuity. And yet, Murasaki thinks, it would be a crime to suppress Dr Malenkov's visionary faculty through isolation, restraints, medication, force feeding, electroshock. – A speculum opens in Murasaki's head and crushes brain cells against the dura mater. Groping for the dispenser on the wall, she squirts antibacterial gel onto her fingertips. It has the texture of vaginal mucus. Arousal can dull the migraine. She pushes her hand into the front of her uniform. The cool sting of the gel causes the nipple to stiffen. Her father, she remembers, used to make love like a coroner. She often felt, as he lay with his face near her groin, that he was performing an autopsy on her vulva in an effort to determine the cause of its "little death."

PROPHET The simulated patient facility is an ersatz clinic where medical students practice their diagnostic skills on “standardized patients.” Glass doors open onto a lobby illuminated by screensavers that cause random fragments of language, definitions drawn from a medical dictionary, to animate across the workstations lining one wall. “Hymenoplasty – noun. Surgical reconstruction of the membrane that protects the opening of the vagina.” Beyond the registration desk is a series of exam rooms. Cameras mounted to the ceiling in glass hemispheres record the interactions between students and “patients,” actors and actresses trained to portray disorders ranging from schizophrenia to human papillomavirus. Kat is one of these performers, not because she has theatrical ambitions but because feigning illness is a way to rework the breakdown she suffered in Switzerland. She can dress her wounds with symptoms that afflict other people, strangers with ruptured spleens, brain tumors, extrauterine pregnancies. The line between reality and dream disappears like a dissolvable stitch. The students, male and female alike, find Kat pretty but vulnerable. They note her straight blonde hair, willowy figure, and skin pale as a patient in need of a blood transfusion. Little do they realize that she lies before them on the exam table ruminating about Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex. She can hear his voice intoning that “sexual fetishists are doomed, like the terminally ill. But if the fate of one is to die, the fate of the other is to repeat.”

OR Lying on an exam table in the simulated patient facility, Kat identifies with the cadaver Murasaki had shown her in the gross lab. It had been opened using an incision that ran from the point of the chin to the top of the breastbone. The flayed skin was spread to the side like the neckline of a low-cut blouse. Death has become a repetitive thought, thought, thought... Kat eyes the camera in the glass hemisphere attached to the ceiling. Dr Malenkov must leave the S&M R&D Lab from time to time. Do the surveillance cameras never capture him? She emails the question to Ben Saïd. "The security guards," he replies, "nap or do crosswords in old newspapers. Have you ever thought about what it is like to stare at screens in which nothing happens? The surveillance cameras induce apathy, desensitization, paralysis. They do not protect their purviews so much as they deaden their viewers. By the time something happens – a junky doctor shoots up, a janitor assaults a nurse on the Hippocratic Bridge, the S&M R&D Lab door opens to reveal a madman measuring the blood flow to his own penis – nobody cares anymore." A medical student enters the exam room. He admires Kat's skin, white as breast milk, and notes the self-inflicted cuts visible on her forearms. The simulation only requires her to complain of pelvic pain, but the cuts are unquestionably real.

A They saunter through the exhibit of artwork by patients with spinal cord and brain injuries, pausing before a portrait of a nurse. On close inspection, it is possible to see that the figure is made up of the phrase “crush my testicles” repeated over and over in tiny handwritten letters. Kat tugs at a sleeve in an effort to conceal the self-inflicted gash that crosses her wrist. “Have you ever had sex with Ben Saïd?” – “Who haven’t I fucked?” – “What was it like?” – “He likes to wear women’s underwear.” – “I imagine he performs a sex act the same way he leads grand rounds.” – Murasaki recalls Ben Saïd’s penis, long and thin as a rectal thermometer. He once choked her with IV tubing from the crash cart. When he ejaculated, it was with the expression of a man giving a urine sample. “Yes, he is deadpan.” – Kat reads the placard giving the history of the patient who created the portrait. Evidently he had suffered a freak injury while participating in a study of nerve activation in the spinal cord during sexual arousal. Perhaps he was a victim of one of Dr Malenkov’s “accidents?” She thinks of the white paper comparing the frequency of sadomasochistic impulses inside and outside the hospital. Dr Malenkov found that, though the impulses were no more prevalent among healthcare practitioners, their intimate knowledge of the human body enabled them to do new sorts of things. Neosadism.

MADMAN Ben Saïd draws the applicator brush across his toenails, smoothing on a polish the pearly color of semen. His transvestism is not the novel type of degeneracy foreseen by Dr Malenkov, yet he can still hear his former colleague from the Montreal Neurological Institute proclaiming that “heterosexuality is like a repressed memory. We keep acting it out when we should be trying to overcome it.” There had been no professional reason for Ben Saïd to attend the cheerleader’s sigmoidoscopy. It had merely roused him to know that, while discussing her cancerous lesion with the colorectal surgeon, a bra and panties excited the skin beneath his scrubs. Back in his office, he can still see the patient lying on her left front, right knee propped on a pillow, while air was pumped into her rectum. Gripping his penis like a transducer, he submits her to an ultrasound – the plastic cone deforming the anal canal... Ben Saïd ejaculates with the sound of a man blowing his nose. The computer beeps. Gasping, he dismisses the alert he had set up to remind him of the workgroup on research consent forms. He removes the tissues from between his toes and leans over the steel desk to wipe the semen from the glass on its surface. The reflection that looks up at him, with the platinum wig and smudged red lipstick, could belong to a haggard socialite in the wee hours after a drunken benefit.

STOP “You intimidate me,” the director of the gross lab admits. – Men, thinks Murasaki, are like high heels. They’re easy to walk on once you get the hang of it. Reaching across the marble table, she places her hand atop his. There is a study, he remembers, demonstrating that more bacteria are carried by the hands of women than by those of men. He feels as though he touched her rectum before sitting down to espresso. – Murasaki rubs his knuckles. “Don’t be silly.” – He is not attractive. His skin is thin like wax paper. His balding head is the shape of an enlarged prostate gland. Her attentiveness disorients him. He struggles to reconcile two contradictory propositions: I am old; this beautiful Japanese is flirting with me; ergo... – “What is Dr Malenkov like?” – “Brilliant. Eccentric. In person he can seem ascetic, monkish, even asexual. It is hard to understand how this abstract fellow produces such astonishing theses.” – “Do you think he is celibate?” – “No. What some people might take for celibacy is a form of remoteness. His sexuality has become so unusual that it has turned its back on them.” The lab director pauses, holding Murasaki’s gaze so fixedly that she wonders if gross-lab gore has afflicted him with the thousand-mile stare of post-traumatic stress. But then his inky pupils emit the truth. He is not staring. He is struggling to prevent his eyes from sinking to her décolletage.

DR "I had to tell a woman that her baby died," Murasaki continues. "Years later I ran into her getting a manicure. She told me the perfume I wore that day always reminds her of the death of her baby. It was Chanel No. 5." When Murasaki laughs, the director of the gross lab notes that her bite is crooked, as though she fellated too many men during the development of her adult teeth. He withdraws a tube of antibacterial gel from his lab coat and rubs his hands together. At the next table a couple debates whether, from the vantage point of insurance, child abuse can be considered a pre-existing medical condition. – "What does Dr Malenkov look like?" – The laboratory director twists in the chair, adopting the posture of a man whose testicle, rotating on the spermatic cord, has cut off the flow of blood to the sweetmeats. "Average height. Thin. He doesn't eat much." – "How does he dress?" – "Black trousers, button-down shirts, a white coat. He is neglectful of his appearance but clean, a compulsive hand-washer." – "How would you describe his face?" – Mentally he makes an inventory of the places Murasaki must adorn with perfume: behind the ear lobes, the inner wrists and elbows, the base of the throat, the cleavage, behind the knees. These are places she must like to be kissed. But because he knows them from cadavers, he associates their smell with formalin.

MALENKOV With its natural light, ficus trees, and imitation Danish Modern furniture, the Well-Being Lounge resembles one of the nouveau riche interiors that location scouts select for pornographic films. Murasaki lowers herself onto the chaise longue and lifts the skirt of her white uniform. A bruise the shape of a man's hand darkens her right thigh. Taking Kat's hand, she fits it into the mottled blue contusion and presses with her palm against the back of Kat's knuckles. The gesture is a standing invitation to cause harm. – Kat feels like a child trying on an adult glove. The complex of future pain and pleasure is too big for her. "I don't understand why neosadism is any different than regular old sadism." – Murasaki's eyes shine like the skin over an infected wound. "In one of his vlogs, Dr Malenkov explains that it is not just a matter of hurting or being hurt. It is 'neo' – a search for something new." – "New ways to hurt yourself?" – "New ways to hurt others too." – A warm glow filters through the skylights. Kat sinks into the chaise. "Patients recovering in rooms with natural light," she observes, "use half as much pain medication as patients in interior rooms." – Murasaki makes the face of a woman who has just felt the rupture of a breast implant. "Nature? To me the sun is for cancer, water is for drowning, and trees are for crushing people trapped in cars."

ISSUES At the podium, Ben Saïd advances the slide. “The design of an operating room,” he tells the darkened lecture hall, “obeys laws as rigorous as those for a medieval church. The outside world must not come in. Windows are sealed off. Walls are painted white. The ceiling provides the light. The floor is polished. Unshadowed, white, clean, artificial, the space treats germs and bacteria as forms of medical sacrilege.” – Ben Saïd’s voice glides down Kat’s spine like a draft. The slide becomes the white screen of Dr Malenkov’s vlogs. She can hear his barbiturate voice speculating about modular genitalia. You can swap them around at will... Long, thin penis for anal sex... Thick, girthy penis for vaginal... Custom-made penises with bumps or spikes for rough sex... “Patients,” Ben Saïd continues, “are like artworks mounted for display. Sheets cover their bodies and frame their wounds.” He advances to a slide showing a hymenorrhaphy. Magnified on the screen, the pudendal cleft takes on a monumental character. Kat reads the caption, “Suturing of a tear in the hymen caused by sexual assault,” and chokes. After he fingered me, he wiped it on my face and laughed. – “People become patients,” Ben Saïd finishes, “in a space where powerful ideas about pathology focus on them. Once discharged, they never quite become ‘normal’ again. Doubts about their health linger, and the hospital keeps their patient records as a white, antiseptic hell would keep their souls.”

PREDICTIONS Reaching for a paper on the floor of the darkened radiology lounge, Kat's thighs emerge from the knee-length skirt. Murasaki watches, aware that Kat wears the same underwear day after day, sometimes fails to wear panties at all, and generally treats her beauty with the negligence that patients display toward bed sheets. Kat looks at the paper, the first page of the study "Agonal Sequences in 24 Filmed Hangings." Noting the title, Murasaki nods toward Ben Saïd's back. "The evidence of genital excitement is sometimes observed upon the bodies of those dying by hanging." She touches three fingers to her neck as though checking the lymph nodes then begins to strangle herself, opening her mouth like a patient saying "aaah." – Ben Saïd, not bothering to hide the pinkish negligee beneath his white coat, turns to the girls. "Found it. This is the vlog where he uses the term 'post-depravity' for the first time." He settles into the orange banquette. The video begins. It shows a white surface, presumably the wall in Dr Malenkov's office. The voice that emerges from the speaker is unmodulated. It is not caught up in rapture or surprise. It does not promise marvels. It is the voice of the anatomist indicating the organs of the cadaver. "Here is the future," it declares, implying that the future can be revealed through a process not unlike dissection. In consequence, the future already seems a little dead.

ABOUT “Why,” asks Murasaki, “does Dr Malenkov post videos if he only shows a white wall? He could just make recordings of his voice.” – Kat slumps against the orange banquette as though suffering from the muscle-wasting caused by prolonged bed rest. “I think he restricts himself to a white wall in order to invite us to project our own visions.” – Ben Saïd imagines his tongue daubing like a surgical sponge at the menstrual blood in Kat’s vagina. “Do you know about the experiment Dr Malenkov conducted to see if you can tell the difference between sadists and masochists just by looking at them? Students in the S&M R&D Lab recruited participants from sex clubs, dungeons, and dominatrixes. Based on their responses to a psychological profile, the participants were divided into two groups – “ Murasaki looks at him with the distaste that patients express toward hospital meals. “The distinction is not so black and white.” – “Hold on. The participants were photographed and their faces were shown to neurotypicals recruited from the medical school. While the expectation was that there would be morphological differences in the physiognomy of sadists and masochists, Dr Malenkov drew a more startling conclusion from his research. Imagine, he said, the extremes that sexual behavior could reach if people did not have faces at all. You can see this in the way people lose inhibitions when they put on masks. The face itself is a moral limit.”

THE Ben Saïd runs a hand over his cheek. His skin is the color of an ACE bandage. It tans without burning, looks good in gold jewelry, and moves him to choose blood-red lipsticks. He left Tunisia less to learn medical imaging in France than to give free reign to the transvestitism he could not express in El Kef. "This helps to explain," he says, stroking the pinkish negligee visible inside his white coat, "Dr Malenkov's assertion that 'the face is the heterosexuality of the body.'" – "That sounds like poetry to me." Pale as a blood donor, Kat stares at the floor of the radiology lounge. – "Yes, but it is also the secret link between post-depravity and Dr Malenkov's antipathy toward the human countenance. It makes even more sense when you flip it around: 'heterosexuality is the face of –'" Murasaki stands up. "Let's stop talking about faces. I would rather talk about other parts of the body. The armpit or the ass..." She crosses the lounge. Her uniform is its own type of white screen. It is easy to cast images onto it: Murasaki pushes antipsychotic tablets into Kat's rectum; Kat excretes them into Murasaki's mouth; Murasaki chews the pills and spits them back into the mouth of Kat, who swallows them... Murasaki powers off the wall-mounted screen. "I am in the mood to be cruel," she declares. "I'll go find a patient who needs a pelvic exam."

SEXUALITY Kat is scanning the printout of Dr Malenkov's white paper. "Even if my predictions are accurate," she reads, "it does not mean people will be any less confused about sexuality. They will recognize that certain postures, positions, or behaviors have been foreseen, but they will still not understand why they do what they do or what they really want when they do it. The outward forms of sexuality will continue to move in the direction of deviance, but the inner future of sex will remain fixed and therefore hopeless. Misunderstanding, compulsion, estrangement, anomie..." The present shudders away. Kat fingers the reddish seams that upheave across the flesh of her wrists. The razor blade provides a relief far more tangible than the prescription for Damagil.

– As Kat stares into space, Ben Saïd scans her with the eyes of a child molester: cleavage so shallow that Kat is sometimes asked to enact adolescent pathologies in the simulated patient facility, pale legs glowing in black hosiery like the bones in an x-ray. Touching her clitoris would be like closing the eyelids of a patient who dies on the operating table. "Well," says Ben Saïd, wiggling his fingers like a gynecologist checking the fit of a non-latex glove. "Did you see Dr Malenkov's vlog about the invention of colorized semen? Imagine green ejaculate... Kaleidoscopic facials... Rapists who force themselves on you in the name of art." – "You make it sound so refined."

OF Kat looks at him from far away, her features forming an overlay on his memory of a patient – victim of la maladie de l’emmuré vivant – at the Montreal Neurological Institute. The face, Ben Saïd thinks, is not just a display like a computer screen. It is also a perimeter, an enclosure, an isolation unit. He lays his palms on the steel desk. They remind Kat of the gynecologist, the wiry black hair on the backs of his hands visible through condom-colored gloves. How long since your last pap smear? Have you ever had a bladder infection? Are you sexually active? How many partners have you had? Are they men, women, or both? Do you feel any pain during intercourse? – “I have been thinking,” interrupts Ben Saïd, “about the relationship between futurism and nihilism.” He gestures, raising an index finger that simultaneously points forward and nowhere. “Dr Malenkov’s predictions are in fact refutations in time and space, negations of the here and the now. They say less about the future than about the destructive bent of his futurology. In that sense, it was almost inevitable that he become a recluse.” – The present shudders back into focus. Points of white light reflect off the clear polish coating Ben Saïd’s fingernails. “I need a cigarette.” Standing up, Kat straightens the narrow black skirt over her bony hips. It is the skirt with the zipper that resembles the zipper on a body bag.

THE "A prediction," types Ben Saïd, "points not just forward in time but outward to 'reality.' It posits, from inside the realm of language, that something will occur outside. A king will be assassinated or a war will be waged. Dr Malenkov's predictions retain that referentiality – but for how long? If they cease to acknowledge the outside world, if they refer only to other signs or, even worse, to themselves, his psychosis will become unmanageable. 'I predict that a prediction will occur. I predict that a prediction will be predictive...' That's madness." The nurse interrupts to announce the next patient, a 42-year-old man presenting with fever and a painful swelling in the right side of the scrotum. Thinking of the ultrasonography and then his own scrotum, which is pleasantly nestled inside panties that match the brassiere underneath his white coat, Ben Saïd decides to make the patient wait while he masturbates. "And yet," he finishes typing, "if Dr Malenkov's predictions end up coming true, in retrospect he will not have seemed ill at all. This is the paradox: the diagnosis depends on the prediction that the patient's predictions will miscarry." It takes an hour for Ben Saïd to don a platinum wig, daub his mouth with red lipstick, wind a pair of stockings around his throat, and... The delay prolongs the patient's discomfort. This passive sadism, collaborating with the pain already inside the patient's body, galvanizes Ben Saïd's climax.

FUTURE There is a restroom outside the simulated patient facility. Murasaki follows Kat inside and enters a stall without bothering to lock it. Arching her thighs across the toilet seat, she taps at her clitoris with the movement a nurse uses to raise a vein. – Kat inspects her face in the mirror. She wishes the neurosurgeon had not been so proud of himself, gifting her the offspring of his article on the brain-stimulation experiment for which she had volunteered. This was her: “Scene from childhood (2 milliamps, right amygdala). Vision of a bald man dressed in black, coming toward her from behind; associated with a feeling of imminent death; she is pale, with piloerection. She is reliving an experience of anesthesia by face mask during a tonsillectomy at the age of 14 years.” – In the toilet, the metal door becomes the screen of a pornographic theater. Murasaki sees her father standing over her. He says, “When you get bigger, I’ll put it inside you.” She is a little girl and she puts things in her vagina because she wants to get bigger. Then the oriental face and jet black hair metamorphose into the anonymous complexion of Dr Malenkov – but all Murasaki can conjure up is a face like a ghost image, a white silhouette on a white wall. The lubrication on her fingertips has the texture of lymph. – Kat hears a moan echo off the tiles. “You ok in there?”

BUT Lying on the stretcher, the patient can hear the beeping of a cardiac monitor and the muffled sounds of a child crying. He stares at his toes as Kat insists to Murasaki that the “webcam of depravity” is a distancing mechanism. “It enables Dr Malenkov to be disengaged. He doesn’t feel any responsibility for the things he predicts. He sees the future like a masturbator sees a camwhore. Ben Saïd says that one symptom of this futuroopathy is a flattening of affect, a deadening of response.” – “Desensitization,” Murasaki affirms, breasts spilling from the décolletage of her uniform like gore from a dehisced wound. “White screens as the expression of Dr Malenkov’s emotional detachment.” Fixing the patient with her eyes, she whispers a few words to Kat. The beeping stops. The child continues to cry. – “You can’t do that.” Kat doesn’t bother to whisper. – “I don’t see why, if I can stick a catheter into his urethra, I can’t also jerk him off.” – Kat folds her arms over her chest. It is a defensive gesture, obscuring her breasts, and also a refusal, since she does not want to lend a hand to Murasaki’s violation of patient rights. – “Male patients like it. Half of them would volunteer for a craniotomy if you promised them a handjob during the procedure.” A smile forms on Murasaki’s face. It looks like a scab has been pulled off her mouth. The patient wiggles his toes. Yes.

INTERACTS A nurse struts down the runway bisecting the exhibit area. She is wearing a uniform made of Perspex. Overhead is a banner declaring "Suicide-Prevention Fashion Show." – "There were warning signs," says Ben Saïd, noting that the transparent uniform reveals black underthings not dissimilar from the ones lurking beneath his white coat. "An aversion to appearing in photographs or to having his lectures recorded. Toward the end Dr Malenkov would talk with real horror about the human face. He felt that every configuration of facial musculature, every expression of emotion, had been overdetermined by modeling, marketing, and mass media." – Dispassionate and analytical, Murasaki watches the runway with eyes that could debride a wound. She is wondering if transparent uniforms might speed up recovery times. She likes the thought of eroticizing the ER but tries not to be so helpful to her patients, whom she prefers to see suffer. "Now tell me about the facial repression experiments." – "His test subjects would lock their heads into these vice-like contraptions. Cameras would feed their image to a video monitor for realtime feedback. Dr Malenkov repurposed an old ECT device to administer shocks to any participant whose face exhibited mobility during foreplay or orgasm. But rather than learn to subdue their facial expressions, the subjects only came to enjoy the shocks. Eventually you could make them emote like porn stars just by zapping them." – "I would have liked to volunteer for those experiments."

WITH At the end of the runway the model pivots to reveal a black g-string beneath the transparent uniform. Her ass, thinks Ben Saïd, has the delightful shape of an upside-down heart. He sees himself spreading the buttocks with his hands, praying that the thing he wants to do with his tongue isn't undermined by the sight of a squamous carcinoma of the anus. "Dr Malenkov," he continues, "began to show up at his classes wearing a stocking over his head, like a bank robber. Eventually he decided to lecture via video conference, speaking into the microphone while pointing the camera at a white wall in the S&M R&D Lab. Sometimes a shadow would flicker across the wall, rousing students to debate the meaning of these apparitions. Were they deliberate messages transmitted by the increasingly cryptic Dr Malenkov? Or were they epiphenomena, shadows cast by trivial gestures such as the picking up of a water glass? Finally he was relieved of his teaching duties." Murasaki, noting Ben Saïd's attentiveness to the model nurse, abandons them to each other. She is imagining Dr Malenkov carrying an experiment in facial repression too far. He would attempt to replace a human face with a screen – not to interact with it but to reduce it to a white plane. The patient would hemorrhage to death while a Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex vlog played across the front of his head.

NO Kat stares at herself in the mirror of the bathroom outside the simulated patient facility. Her hair is damp and her eyes are puffy. An oblong hole in the granite counter opens onto the wastebin. Lying atop wet brown towelettes is a discarded sheet of blue paper, a flyer announcing the lecture “Execution by Lethal Injection: Is It a Medical Procedure?” A face, white as aspirin, peers at her from the mirror. It is as though Kat has lost herself in the minimalism of Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex, her face becoming a white screen to accompany the conversation playing back in her mind. Murasaki: “You don’t have any perversions? How can you not have any perversions?” Kat: “Perversions are something you do. I only have things that have been done to me. Memories...” Murasaki: “We’ll have to get you some perversions of your own.” It was then that Murasaki shared her obsession, showing Kat the vlog captioned “Introduction to Post-Depravity.” – The present shudders back into focus. Kat locks herself into a stall, bunches up her sleeve, and withdraws a razor blade from the pack of French cigarettes in her handbag. She lets it drop like a guillotine onto her forearm. For a moment there is no effect but then a bright seam of red wells up. The blood gathers, rolls down Kat’s wrist, and drops into the heel of the black pump that dangles from her foot.

ONE Ben Saïd takes to watching Kat from the observation theater of the simulated patient facility. Two different camera angles show Kat recreating symptoms of mastalgia for the medical student in the exam room. She gestures and poses, breasts flat as defibrillator paddles, feigning discomfort the way a stripper feigns arousal. What makes her such an excellent “standardized” patient, he realizes, is her passivity. She does not act or plan. She merely lets herself go, and the sense of doom inside her does the rest. The thought causes Ben Saïd to recall, as the radiologist in him estimates her breast density classification, the libertine in Sade who “wishes to depucelate a girl destined to be married the following day.” Is this rakehell, aroused by the prospect of an event lying in the future, a harbinger of Dr Malenkov’s psychotic amalgam of sex and prophecy? Just what is the role of time in this perversion? Can the future event be replaced by other desiderata? He wishes to sodomize a girl destined to undergo a lumpectomy, he wishes to fuck a girl slated for chemotherapy, he wishes to assault a girl doomed to exsanguinate in the back of a speeding ambulance... Kat, chilled by the perpetually defective climate control system, gathers the sleeveless cotton gown at the front. She would fuck the way a cadaver would stiffen – passively but in a way that would afford no concessions to the pleasure of the molester.

STOP As the medical student performs a pelvic exam on Kat, Ben Saïd watches from the observation room. She undresses in order to perform a role in the simulated patient facility. He dresses up in the privacy of his office in order to feel like his “real” self. A platinum wig covering his black hair, he masturbates and engages in little games with Korean whores – transvestitism, breath play, pseudo-clinical psychodramas that realize the sexual compulsions latent in his interactions with actual patients, women with vaginal carcinomas or lumps in their breasts. He likes to threaten the whores with radical mastectomies. “I cut off your tits, bitch.” Then they strangle him while he rubs a lubricated hand on his penis, ejaculating with the sound of a drunk choking on his own vomit. – Ben Saïd withdraws a phone from the pocket of his white coat. The soundtrack to one of Dr Malenkov’s vlogs has begun to play in his head. Typing with his thumbs, he titles a note “Post-depravity from a statistical point of view.” He transcribes the prediction verbatim: “In the future, the perversions will be evenly distributed.” He imagines graphs and plots, necrophilia vectors, charts showing the reach of neosadism, the futuropathy of Dr Malenkov mapped onto an infographic showing the five stages of puberty (female). He looks up at the grid of monitors. There is Kat staring at the floor like a patient who receives a fatal diagnosis.

DR Ben Saïd finds the note he had written on a stray scrap of defibrillator paper. "It is a hygienic future that prophets like to announce. Things will be cleaner, healthier, more efficient. As for those apocalyptic types, they only fill the future with fire and brimstone in order to cleanse the present of its filth. What we lack are cloacal visionaries, oracles of the vile and unclean. In its obsession with deviant behavior, Dr Malenkov's futurology at least has the virtue of..." A knock at the door interrupts. "Ah, the future has arrived." The whore, a tiny Korean, wears a lightweight shift translucent as the skin over a blister. Entering the office, she treads softly on slippers reminiscent of the shoe covers worn in the operating room. Ben Saïd checks his lipstick, fixes his platinum wig, then reclines across the desk, legs apart. "I will pretend that I am unable to urinate. You check for a distended bladder. Tell me about prostatitis. Insert a finger into my rectum. Gauge my prostate. Place a foley catheter into my penis. You remember how to do that? Some urine will leak out." – The whore studies him with eyes like vomit sacks. "Then what?" – "Empty it into your mouth. Kiss me. Spit it back into my mouth." – Her eyes fall on the defibrillator paper on the desk. It is more than just a note. It is a prescription for the next hour of degeneracy.

MALENKOV Idly fondling a black stocking, Ben Saïd dictates a note about Dr Malenkov into the voice transcription software on his computer: "...measured the semen quality of terminally ill patients. He took samples before the patients were given prognoses, showing these doomed souls whatever pornography would prompt them to masturbate into specimen jars. Once he had subjected the samples to the usual methods of semen analysis, he accompanied the attending physicians as they handed out the bad news. His task at that moment was to convince the patients, in spite of their having only weeks or months to live, to continue donating sperm for his research. He would tout the importance of their contributions to science or, at the limit, offer to have it collected by 'nurses' who were really Korean prostitutes in white uniforms. With particularly uncooperative patients he would threaten to withhold pain medications..." A shadow darkens the frosted glass in the door of Ben Saïd's office. "Ah, Miss Harlow. Do you ever use voice transcription? Yesterday I recommended that a patient stick to a 'bland diet' and the software recorded 'plan to die.'" – "You must find that amusing." – Watching Kat turn to close the door, it occurs to Ben Saïd that the slit in her skirt provides an access point, an invitation to sodomy. Fucking her would be like participating in a clinical trial. You would never be sure whether you were getting the drug or the placebo.

IS Kat attends to the murmur in the atrium – the espresso machine, a rickety printer, footsteps, announcements over a distant PA, an anesthesiologist declaring, “No, I will not drug your roommate so you can have sex with her.” Murasaki runs a fingertip over her collarbone, aware that the same gesture serves to clear her clavicle of the semen deposited by an ardent titty fuck. “Tokyo is the world’s most fetish-friendly city. I grew up masturbating with my father’s ties. I started by rubbing off on them but quickly realized I preferred to tie myself up.” – “One thing I don’t understand,” Kat admits, “is why Dr Malenkov believes ‘neosadism’ is different than regular old sadism.” – “Sadists are like people who believe the earth is flat. They’re ignorant, crude, satisfied just to beat somebody with a whip. One lesson of post-depravity is to reinvent pleasure or, in the case of neosadism, the infliction of pain. Did you know that we now have dozens of different scales for assessing patient discomfort? I might use the Wong-Baker FACES Scale to fine-tune the tortures I inflict. Or I might invent entirely new torments through the use of technologies that were unknown to the Marquis de Sade.” As Murasaki speaks, the rain courses over the glass tiles of the atrium ceiling. The sky is as gray as a bench in the autopsy suites. Overhead a banner proclaims, “March is Brain Injury Awareness Month.”

A Murasaki sets out to discover which patient has the largest penis. She fabricates reasons to look for skin blemishes in the inguinal area. She helps other nurses with the insertion of catheters. Eventually she takes Kat to see the winner, a cancer-ridden Canadian with an uncorrectable bowel obstruction. “We need to check for swelling.” Lifting the sheet, Murasaki reveals the penis lying flaccid against the medial surface of the thigh. It resembles the arm of a newborn: the size, the mottled purple color, the smell of sweat, urine, and pus that undercuts the Chanel No. 5 wafting from Murasaki’s décolletage. “What do you think Dr Malenkov’s penis looks like?” – The present shudders away. Kat sees a penis – not the invisible and spiritually fulfilling organ of romance movies; not the long, stiff focal point of porn; an ugly, gangly dick, brown and hard as a coprolite, the blunt weapon of a child abuser. – “I imagine,” Murasaki answers her own question, “it is white, abstract, anonymous, a head without a face. He doesn’t fuck you with it. His erection is like the screen of his vlogs. You just gaze at it while he fills your head with strange ideas.” Murasaki takes the patient’s penis in her hand, weighing it. He twitches. She locks eyes with Kat. “Should we give him a handjob?” The patient looks at Kat too, a vulgar smile forming beneath the digestive juices draining through his nasogastric tube.

DEVIANT At the nurses' station a Vietnamese doctor is screaming, "I cannot take this many patients! You fuck me over!" Ben Saïd leads Kat along the corridor, its baseboards scuffed by the wheels of innumerable gurneys. The stench of patients – unwashed bodies, stagnant bedpans, infected wounds – lurks beneath the ammonia vapor of all-purpose cleaner. "The reclusiveness," Ben Saïd is saying, "the vlogs with their blank screens, the white papers, the hostility toward the human face, the obsession with asocial forms of sexuality – it all suggests that Dr Malenkov has confined himself to the S&M R&D Lab. Is an irrational fear of people a side effect of his futuropathy? Or is he deliberately using isolation as a technique to derange the senses? Dr Malenkov must be aware, as we all were at the Montreal Neurological Institute, of the Hebb experiments. These showed how rapidly solitary confinement and sensory deprivation can cause volunteers to experience various forms of derangement – paranoia, intrusive thoughts, uncontrollable hallucinations. Dr Malenkov's predictions may be nothing more than delusions caused by lack of human contact." – Kat looks at him with a face like a birth control patch. "Does he not engage in weird sexual behaviors?" – "He might. But their very weirdness undermines their potential to provide a meaningful connection with others." – Ben Saïd gazes at Kat. Her pale hands should circle his throat. Her fingers should close like inviolable decisions around his windpipe. He likes that.

EX A pink Xerox outside the All Faith Chapel announces a lecture on the use of restraints in psychiatric units. Ben Saïd holds the door for Kat. With prominent cheekbones, long blonde hair, and a straight black dress, she is a natural beauty – except, he thinks, that there is something derelict about her, a faint smell of pussy. “We do not know what Dr Malenkov does with his body,” Ben Saïd is saying. “Perhaps he harbors a strange relationship to the pornographic films being shot in the disused operating room.” – Settling into a pew, Kat twists a pink tissue into small, pill-sized pellets. “What pornographic films?” – “You don’t know about those? Well, it may also be that Dr Malenkov’s visions offer such potent experiences that they make behavioral correlates unnecessary. That would be the most futural thing – a new type of degeneracy characterized by the fact that we no longer need human victims to act out our basest desires. We can go straight to the nerves themselves. Post-depravity, the moment when normality becomes coextensive with perversity, is followed by neural deviance, intense pleasures experienced not through the violation of others but through the manipulation of synaptic pathways.” – The present shudders away. Fee-fi-fo-fum, thinks Kat. Now I’m borrowed. Now I’m numb. She looks at Ben Saïd with a face like a broken hymen. “I am taking Damagil.” – “Ah, my favorite antipsychotic. Its side effects include suicidal ideation.”

MACHINA Ben Saïd looks at Kat's hands folded in her lap. Her wrists are pale, thin, and delicate. He wants to feel the carpal bones, delicate as porcelain, and the pulse gently throbbing in the radial artery. He imagines the scars that a razor blade has etched into the skin of her forearms. How would she rate the last item – Loss of Interest in Sex – on the Beck Depression Inventory? "We made up a fake syndrome," he continues. "If I encountered a patient whose symptoms I could not bring to a diagnosis, I would nod my head sagely and say, 'Hm, yes, of course, a classic case of Hieronymus Bosch Syndrome.' Not once did a patient recognize the painter's name." Ben Saïd offers the smile of a man who has just ejaculated into the hair of a kneeling woman. – Exhaling, Kat aches for a cigarette. "How do we know that you're not doing the same thing with Dr Malenkov's futuropathy?" – "Isn't every syndrome a work of fiction? The question is not whether somebody made it up, but whether it is useful for indicating a course of treatment." – "I don't see anyone trying to cure Dr Malenkov." – "Ah, but he does not want to be cured. You can't force care on a patient who repudiates it." – Observing the white calves that emerge from Kat's straight black dress, Ben Saïd resolves to toss his semen into the pathological waste receptacle between her legs.

STOP “Delusions of the future,” Ben Saïd continues, “are not an uncommon feature of mental disorder. For example, the paranoiac deludes himself that personal harm is imminent. What distinguishes Dr Malenkov’s futuropathy is not any given delusion of the future but, more profoundly, the meta-delusion that his delusions have predictive value. He genuinely seems to believe that self-derangement will enable him to glimpse the future of fetishism, sodomy, incest.” – Kat takes a sip from the bottle of Ethos water and gathers her lips as though kissing another woman for the first time. “Murasaki doesn’t believe that she was molested. She thinks it was the other way around. She molested her father.” – “When a child’s body is stimulated through sexual contact, it will sometimes react by having an orgasm. Over time this can cause her to identify orgasm with abuse and to confuse the roles of perpetrator and victim. ‘Je suis la plaie et le couteau.’ Did you ever experience unwanted sexual contact, Miss Harlow?” – Kat avoids his gaze like a disrobing patient. She leans forward in the pew and folds her hands in her lap as though guarding against the possibility of sexual assault. She twists a pink tissue into small, pill-sized pellets. Each little ball resembles a Damagil. “Have you noticed,” she asks, “that this place is always empty? It should be called the No Faith Chapel.” – “Sometimes,” he leans closer, “people sneak in here to fuck.”

KAT Kat returns to the exam room in the simulated patient facility to fetch her book. It is lying face up on a corner of the stainless steel sink. Red Helvetica letters are visible against the white cover. Ben Saïd follows her, prolonging his comparison of Dr Malenkov to a quantum particle. "We know his position in time but not in space." But to be alone with Ben Saïd in the narrow room is discomfiting. His intentions are as inscrutable as the signature on a prescription pad. Kat picks up the book, *Die Eigenrealität der Zeichen*, and straightens her skirt. The stocking on her right leg, terminating just beneath the hem, reveals a circlet of pale thigh. The other she has let slip beneath the knee, a negligence that causes Ben Saïd to imagine removing her stockings, knotting them around his throat, and choking himself as he gazes into the biological waste container between her thighs. "You're very pretty, Kat." – She looks up at the camera in the glass hemisphere attached to the ceiling. Is anybody in the observation theater? – Tracking her glance, Ben Saïd notes the sprinkler that protrudes from the sound-muffling tiles. "What would you say if I asked you to tie one end of your stockings around my throat and the other end around that sprinkler head?" – "I'd say you're crazy. You want to kill yourself?" – "We have to follow our desires to their logical conclusions, Kat."

HARLOW Vitrines have been installed in the exhibit area opposite the glass doors that, if they were not locked for security reasons, would open onto an interior plaza. A student curator is using the display cases to present a selection of foreign objects recovered from the bodies of patients. The objects are categorized according to the types of patients – children, retards, lunatics, perverts – who swallow or penetrate themselves with this motley assortment of coins, bolts, pens, forks, batteries, toys, razor blades. Placards and diagnostic images give the history of these otherwise mundane items. “Radiograph of a child shows a fish hook that she inserted into the vagina.” Ben Saïd inspects an item that appears to be a cast of the anal canal. Grooves in the solid mass resemble rectal mucosal folds. The placard describes how the object was taken from the body of a 24-year-old man who experienced abdominal discomfort after injecting a masonry adhesive into his rectum with a glue gun. Looking up, it occurs to Ben Saïd that the cast is not dissimilar in appearance from the Noguchi sculpture that stands at one end of the exhibit area. He watches Murasaki bend over the pedestal, the slit in her uniform parting toward the gluteal cleft. She takes a postcard for the conference on pediatric gynecology. “Why would Dr Malenkov attend this?” – “To do research about the role that pedophilia plays in time-based perversions.” – “Psychogynecology.” – “Parthenotherapy too.”

IS The black glass skyscraper stands at the center of the complex. Half the ground floor is occupied by the exhibit area, a cavernous space with stone floor and high ceilings. Etched onto the wall in gold letters is a proclamation by Maximilian Bense, the founder. "Our mission: to ensure that the sick have the future they deserve." Beneath this bromide is a series of vitrines which a medical student is using to display foreign objects recovered from the bodies of patients. "The notion of a 'foreign' object," Ben Saïd discourses, "makes certain assumptions about the internal and the external – about space. But if we consider it from the viewpoint of the fourth dimension, foreign objects become foreign moments, hiccups in the smooth flow of duration. You can see how Dr Malenkov's quantum theory of time coincides with his futurography. A fragment of the future penetrating the present is not so different from a light bulb inserted into a vulva." Ben Saïd gestures to fragments of blue glass in the vitrine. A placard describes how a mentally disturbed woman removed a lightbulb from a refrigerator and inserted it into her vagina. When it shattered, she presented to the ER with internal lacerations. Not listening, Murasaki thinks of Dr Malenkov's vlog on the perversions that will be made possible by facial transplant surgery. The face is not a natural part of the body. It is a foreign object embedded in the head.

RECOVERING Ben Saïd joins Kat in the stairwell while she smokes. He is not a homosexual but he cross-dresses. He is not a smoker but he takes pleasure in the presence of a female with a cigarette. It reminds him of Lucy Lee, the Korean dominatrix who blows smoke into his mouth to choke him. "Dr Malenkov," Ben Saïd is saying, "was intrigued by the safe words with which submissives and dominants regulate their psychodramas. Because safe words are fragments of language intended to be used in future moments of dire extremity, they unite time and pain in a unique way. This inspired a series of experiments in the S&M R&D Lab..." Kat stops listening, thinking of her own experience and the way that nothing she said in protest meant anything at all. "My favorite," Ben Saïd continues, "was a sadomasochistic Stroop test: it used paradoxical, 'dangerous' safe words like 'more' and 'I like it' and 'you hit like a girl.'" A female cry tears into the stairwell. It sounds very near, as though it were just on the other side of a sheet hanging between the beds in a non-private room. The voice is young and clear, with a pure, warm, musical tone that contradicts the violence of the cry. It could be the exclamation of a girl being stabbed, and it fades in a rapid decrescendo. "I don't even hear that sort of thing anymore."

FROM Ben Saïd fingers the cut on his chin, aware that the result of a careless shave makes cunnilingus with hookers inadvisable. "Have you ever used a safe word, Miss Harlow?" – Kat looks at him with a face like a suicide note. "No." – "Have you ever faked an orgasm?" – Kat assumes the guilty mien of a patient who is noncompliant with her medications. Death has become a repetitive thought, thought, thought... "I've been having weird dreams at night." – "Well, what do you think about at bedtime? Do you focus on happy thoughts?" – Kat looks down at her phone. There is a text message from Murasaki: "I'm giving patients handjobs for Brain Injury Awareness Month." Kat types a reply. Words pour out of her like drainage from a wound. The numbers in her address book, thinks Ben Saïd, must belong to psychologists and pill pushers. The last calls on his own phone were to Korean escort agencies. – Kat hits send. "Sometimes I think about Dr Malenkov. Did going to Asia have anything to do with his madness? Did something happen there?" – "All we know is that, by refusing to leave the airports, he transformed the trip into a topological adventure. Contemporary airport design ensured that Tokyo and Kuala Lumpur were reduced to a common denominator of espresso bars, flight gates, monorails, and adjoining hotel chains. When he returned, he indicated he would not be leaving New York again 'for the foreseeable future.'"

A "If the renovations get under way again," Ben Saïd is saying, "this will be the new MRI suite." Kat steps past a box of face shields. A leaking pipe leaves a gray-yellow stain on the wall. The smell is identical to a septic abdomen. The unpainted interior reminds Kat of the white screens of Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex's vlogs. The MRI suite becomes the stage on which she is to play out her role in his futuropathy. "This will be the procedure area." Ben Saïd opens the door onto a derelict room. The possessiveness with which he surveys the space causes Kat to envision Ben Saïd concealing a camera to record his patients undressing. He has the same thought, except that it is followed by the observation that fucking Kat would be like acting in a patient safety video. She would be passive, fake, benign. The best way to fuck a girl like that is to do some violence to her. The juice would pour from her cunt like blood from a ruptured artery. – He continues the tour but, in his imagination, Ben Saïd instructs Kat to lower her dress. She turns her back to him, unfastens the zipper that runs up its rear, and lets the cotton shift slide gradually over the bare skin of her shoulders. Watching without moving, he takes in the underdeveloped bust and the incisions that cross Kat's arms like exclamation points.

NERVOUS The surgeon opens the peritoneum and blood comes gushing out. Blood fills his non-latex gloves. Blood runs up and down the inside of his arm. Watching, Murasaki's body responds with visible signs of arousal. Heartbeat increases. Respiration deepens. Mouth reddens. Nipples stiffen like scar tissue. She licks her lips. Her panties are wet, irrigated indirectly by the torn hepatic vein of the languishing patient. – The assistant holds up a pint of blood. "Would you like to run this through the patient? Or should I just squirt it at you?" – "Let's call it." The surgeon discards his gloves and pulls down his mask so that it dangles from his neck. "COD is severe internal bleed caused by blunt abdominal trauma. Final score: Morgue 1, ER 0." – Murasaki sneaks off with a pint of blood to the unrenovated area. Beneath graffiti that says "Cancer LOL" and "Rape Kit: One Size Fits All," she removes her uniform and empties the bag over her body. Blood splashes across her breasts, runs onto her stomach, veers over a hip, leaks into her groin, moistens the black triangle of pubic hair, wets the inside of both thighs, and forms an irregular puddle on the floor. I should record this, Murasaki thinks. I should send it to Dr Malenkov. I should make videos for Dr Malenkov. The blood spreads across the floor, soaking x-rays that spill from a manila envelope trampled by the striking workers.

BREAKDOWN The corridor joining the series of operating rooms has been ransacked by overtaxed surgeons. Pools of water, surfaces gleaming with opalescent films of soap, gather around the scrub sinks. Sponges and brushes litter the floor. A disheveled figure in blue scrubs sleeps on a stray gurney. Making her way to the ICU, Murasaki finds the twelve-year-old who had nearly bled to death in a car accident. On admission her aorta resembled a blown tire. A green graph on a polished aluminum clipboard is hooked to the foot of the bed. It is quiet except for the distant beeping of an IV infusion pump. Withdrawing a phone from her uniform, Murasaki records the bruises darkening the girl's lips with congested blood. She pans down, as though making a record of the wounds. A fresh surgical incision runs from the left areola to the downy hairs barely visible around the navel. The legs are apart, the knees softened by a slight flexing, the left one askew, the right resting to one side of the bed. There is a sparse growth of long, slightly pigmented, downy hair along the labia. The hair does not spread to the medial surface of the thighs. In her mind, Murasaki can hear the soundtrack from one of Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex's vlogs. "Neosadism," his barbiturate voice intones, "is not just a new form of sadism. It is a form of sadism that renews."

STOP Ben Saïd motions Murasaki into his office. "Bright red blood per rectum?" he laughs into the phone. He holds up an index finger indicating that Murasaki should wait. She imitates the gesture, lowers her mouth over her finger, moves her head up and down, then offers a lewd smile.

– Ben Saïd puts down the receiver. "This pediatrician was calling about the x-rays on a six-year-old who supposedly fell down some stairs. I had to tell him there were old rib fractures on the chest x-ray. The little girl is probably being abused." – "Lucky her." – "You think?" – "We should use her x-rays to construct a series of abuse scenarios that we can reenact. We'll do it in the corridor outside the S&M R&D Lab. Maybe Dr Malenkov will watch through the peephole in that white steel door." – Ben Saïd pushes the x-rays across the sheet of glass atop his steel desk. Murasaki studies them, the fractured bones giving structure to the psychodrama that forms in her mind. – Ben Saïd folds his hands together as though in need of a single large fist. "It occurs to me that one can imagine a prophet who molests a child because he envisions the woman she will become." – "And it occurs to me," parrots Murasaki, "that one can imagine a prophet who molests a child because he foresees the damage it will do to her." – "Mmm, neosadistic."

KAT There are no windows in Ben Saïd's office. He has taken the bulbs out of the fluorescent fixtures mounted to the ceiling, preferring only the illumination cast by a computer screen and the central pane of frosted glass in the door. At the edge of the gloom it is possible to see a white coat hanging from a hook. A black garter emerges from the right pocket. "Tell me more," says Murasaki, "about the *Manifesto for the Future of Fucking*." – "There's not much to know." Ben Saïd stares at a postcard tacked to the wall. On its front is a crude drawing, the outline of a head from which the facial features have been erased. "Before Dr Malenkov was relieved of his teaching duties, his students would see him in possession of a moleskin notebook. From time to time he would read a few lines aloud. It is known, for example, that experiments in the S&M R&D Lab led him to formulate the Sexual Oddball Effect well before his psychosis took hold." – Murasaki unspools the garter belt from the pocket of the white coat. Fixing Ben Saïd with her gaze, she holds it in the air and emits the smile she reserves for children who have lain still while she places an intravenous line in their wee blue veins. "You're incorrigible, doctor." – "Ah yes. My fetish is a terminal illness from which I do not want to recover."

TAKES “When people believe that the world is about to end,” Ben Saïd is saying, “they lose their inhibitions. They drink, dance, participate in orgies. When the future is taken away from them, they willingly renounce their conceptions of normal and abnormal. To put it another way, normality depends on a certain confidence in the future.” – Murasaki lifts an interoffice envelope from Ben Saïd’s desk. It contains close-up photographs of vulvar abnormalities: the Batwing Deformity, an asymmetrical enlargement of the labia minora; the River Deformity, a flap-like duplication of the labia minora; labial hypertrophy, double clitoris, vaginal atresia. With their relentless portrayal of physical disfigurement, the photos could form a dossier against the notion of psychogynecology. “So what happens when Dr Malenkov predicts a future of increasingly bizarre proportions?” – “That is the paradox. The fact that he promises a future reinforces our sense of normality, and yet the future that he describes is anything but normal. About all we can say is that it is post-depraved.” – Murasaki sets down the interoffice envelope and picks up the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. Opening it at random, she runs a finger along the gutter between the pages with the same attentiveness as she would press a finger between the lips of Kat’s vagina. “Let’s tear pages out of the DSM, crumple them up, and stuff them into my ass. Then you’ll fuck me and ejaculate on the madness.”

A They turn on a vlog – the white wall, the dispassionate voice, a shadow that crosses the screen and galvanizes their attention. Dr Malenkov speculates about a day when technology will promise sexual pleasures that inspire people to mutilate themselves. They will pull out their eyes to replace them with prosthetics that can see through clothes. They will amputate hands because robotic arms can perform repetitive masturbatory movements without tiring. “One can imagine erotomaniacs who kill themselves because they despair that the human body is ill equipped for fucking.” When the vlog finishes, Ben Saïd remarks that his interest in Dr Malenkov is clinical. “I don’t care whether his predictions are plausible. I see them as symptoms of an emergent form of psychosis.” – “I see them,” Murasaki ripostes, “as commands.” She unfastens her uniform. She is not wearing a bra. Slipping off his negligee, Ben Saïd squeezes into the dress and buttons the front over his black chest hair. It smells of Chanel No. 5. A few drops of tepid pre-cum leak from the tip of his penis like the trickle of cerebrospinal fluid that seeps from a patient’s incision after a lumbar puncture. “Want to play a game?” asks Murasaki. In her voice is the equanimity of a bureaucrat who authorizes the use of torture for the purposes of extracting a confession. “Let’s free-associate.” – “Sex?” – “Pain.” – “Kiss?” – “Bite.” – “Woman?” – “Victim.” – “Penis?” – “Club.” – “Vagina?” – “Wound.” – “Love?” – “Hate.” – “Rape?” – “Pleasure.”

JOB Ben Saïd ejaculates with the face of a man holding his breath. Murasaki takes his penis in one hand, the glans leaking like a suppurating wound, and begins to masturbate herself. – “Let me do it.” He tries to push his hand beneath hers. – Murasaki looks at him with the expression she turns on a patient who claims a pill is too large to swallow. “I’ll come more quickly if I do it.” She parts her labia with her fingers. Images dart through her mind: the taste of her father’s semen... physician-assisted suicide... crushed testicles... white screens... Her body stiffens then relaxes. She exhales, mouth open like a patient saying “aaah.” After a moment she asks Ben Saïd if he has ever been inside the S&M R&D Lab. – “No.” He puts the negligee back on. “By the time I came from Montreal, Dr Malenkov was no longer soliciting test subjects.” He thinks of the experiment whose purpose was to explore neosadistic acts of microscopic duration. The shortest interval of time that a human can perceive is about eighty milliseconds. What happens when a volunteer is subject to an intense burst of pain that lasts for only sixty milliseconds? – “Do you think we can break in?” – “It’s a steel-reinforced door.” – “I’ll fuck any janitor who offers up a passkey.” – “I doubt one exists.” – “Why is that?” – “Come now. Dr Malenkov does things in there that you can’t unsee.”

AS In the library, they leaf through the coffee-table book featuring color photographs of patients who have suffered from hideous examples of malpractice. Ben Saïd pauses on the portrait of a woman diagnosed with breast cancer on her thirtieth birthday. "She suffered," the caption declares, "twenty-four days of radiation overdoses. A linear accelerator with a missing filter burned a hole in her chest, leaving a wound so painful that this mother of three young children considered suicide." Ben Saïd cannot help but wonder whether this was a deliberate act of neosadism on the part of a sexually disturbed technician. It is common enough to derive pleasure from beating or whipping a woman. What happens when you give a sadist new kinds of opportunities for the infliction of pain? Ben Saïd has often found enjoyment in describing to a patient how her life depends on her willingness to submit to treatments that ravage her body. Radiation can cause soft-tissue contraction. Lumpectomies leave scars. "Would you like to do that to my tits?" asks Murasaki. "You can slap them, punch them, cut them. We will take pictures and slide them underneath the door of the S&M R&D Lab for Dr Malenkov." A flash of light catches Ben Saïd's attention. Standing over the xerox, a student librarian is copying an article on the psychological effects of false-positive mammograms. The machine casts white bursts of light across her thorax.

AN Impromptu sexual encounters can be arranged in the armchairs that furnish a remote corner of the medical library. Murasaki occupies a recliner like a patient positioning herself for a gynecological exam. Waiting, she flicks through the photos on her phone. Many of the images, which she urges her lovers to take, show Murasaki naked, bound, or performing a sex act. She keeps the ones of her body that focus on bruised loins, contusions shaped like hands, abrasions left by bondage ropes. She saves the photos that show her stomping on small animals with a stiletto heel or gagging as she attempts to deep-throat the long, fat penis of a cancer-ridden Canadian who suffers from an uncorrectable bowel obstruction. (Tears well in her eyes as saliva and bile course down the shaft of the wound-colored phallus.) But images that look “normal,” like traditional nudes or amateur porn, she deletes. Pressing the icon that trashes an image of her breasts soaked with sperm the color of pus, she tells herself that Dr Malenkov is right to uphold a quantum theory of time. If the dullest moments of her sex life can be expunged from the record, it stands to reason that time is perforated by gaps, lapses, breaches. – Holding the phone aloft, Murasaki snaps a photo of herself. It shows her staring into the camera in an expressionless way as though she wants to be violated by a machine.

ACTRESS Ben Saïd is sitting in the chair at his steel desk. Kat enters and closes the door behind her. She is thinking of the night she lay curled in the fetal position atop the nylons strewn across her bed. Ben Saïd slides a photograph across the desk. "This was taken without Dr Malenkov's knowledge shortly before the lecture tour in Asia." The photograph shows an anonymous personage sitting motionless, elbows and forearms resting on a desktop. The head is turned forty-five degrees to the right, just enough to reveal the cheek, the temple, the edge of the jaw, the outline of the ear. The left hand is spread out flat on scattered sheets of paper. The right hand, grasping a black pen, is held above an interrupted text for what appears to be a moment of reflection. – "What," asks Kat, "was he writing?" – "It could have been anything, even the *Manifesto for the Future of Fucking.*" – "Did he ever finish it?" – "He appears to have abandoned the manifesto in favor of this alter ego, Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex." – "You think he ever will?" – Without answering, Ben Saïd eyes the vented slit at the rear of Kat's skirt. Because it forms an analogue with both the vagina and the wound, the slit is rich, polysemic, suggestive. The swatch of nylon spanning the slit becomes a hymen or a defensive gesture, an arm raised to ward off a rapist.

IN Undressing Kat, Ben Saïd muses, would be like removing the sheet from a cadaver. She would lie there completely still, leaving you not to interact with her but to itemize the various parts of her body: straight blonde hair, bony shoulders, breasts fit for a training bra, ribs poking through skin white as aspirin, willowy legs, arms crisscrossed with self-inflicted cuts. "Listen to this thesis proposal." Ben Saïd ruffles the sheets of a manuscript. "'I will link predictions culled from white papers and vlogs,'" he reads, "'to specific traits in the personality of Dr Malenkov, aka Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex. I will indicate the pathological motives that drive him to offer these predictions, and I will demonstrate how they satisfy his own personal obsessions.'" – "I would like to read that. After all, what is Dr Malenkov's motive for predicting the future?" – "Motive? That's like asking a psychotic his motive for hearing voices." – As Kat straightens her skirt, Ben Saïd points a penlight at the silk shantung. She has let one of her stockings slip beneath the knee, a negligence he deciphers to mean that she does not mind having the clothes pulled off her. – Self-conscious, Kat directs her eyes to a postcard tacked to the wall. It is for the conference on pediatric gynecology. "I was twelve when I was molested," she blurts out. "After he fingered me, he wiped it on my face and laughed."

A The green-yellow light in the corridor suffuses the central pane of frosted glass in the office door. Inside, Ben Saïd is seated behind his steel desk. A platinum wig slants across his cranium, red lipstick mars his mouth, and black stockings are wrapped around his throat. He pulls at the legs in order to compress his windpipe. When he loses consciousness, he ceases to strain and the hosiery loosens. Later he comes to, wipes the ejaculate from his chair with an anti-skid shoe cover, tosses it into the waste bin, and returns to the manuscript lying on his desk. In a small, close, irregular handwriting with sporadic erasures and mistakes, he composes a note about Dr Malenkov's interest in the potential of electronic sensors to capture feeling on one body and replay it on another. "Sensations could even be superimposed. In one sex act you could be the man and the woman, the adult and the child, the human and the animal. The vagina can become a mouth. Coitus will be sodomy. Pleasure will be pain. Of course, this raises the question of how Dr Malenkov uses technology to pursue his own derangement." Ben Saïd lifts the pen to his lips. He can hear the yowling of a patient in the Psychiatric ICU down the corridor. The head case is raging against an unnecessary rectal exam he claims to have suffered in the emergency room where Murasaki works.

SIMULATED Murasaki slips an archival disk beneath the white steel door of the S&M R&D Lab. It contains the video of the twelve-year-old in the ER: the child's face, surgical incision, inguinal area. Afterward she watches with eyes the color of dried blood as the medical students emerge from a lecture hall. They look so naive, with their enthusiasm for cancers of the brain and disorders of the spinal cord. They babble about the vagus nerve and the Ramsey Sedation Scale, but soon they will be bored by it all. Callous and desensitized, they will invent unorthodox pastimes in "employees only" lounges. Some will experiment with medications, others with sexual debaucheries, while a few will develop such hostility toward their patients that they will find surreptitious ways to harm them. It is these soured clinicians who discover the vlogs of Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex. His vision of the post-depraved future justifies their worst inclinations, authorizes their dissipations, galvanizes the darkest part of their imaginations. For Murasaki, however, this is not enough. Her fixation is to make contact with the neurosurgeon manqué. Dr Malenkov uses video to communicate with us, she reasons, so I will use video to communicate with him. His vlogs offer words but not images, so I will give him images but not words. One day the two may be spliced together, his narcotic monologues and my displays of x-rated degeneracy.

PATIENT Bored, the girls explore the empty corridors left behind by the unfinished renovations. Kat passes beneath an exposed lightbulb, the planes of her face shallow as a training bra. The sight of a random graffito reminds her of Dr Malenkov's latest vlog. Brain implants, he declared, will be reverse-engineered, modified not to control but to elicit deviant urges. This will give rise to an underground economy in which perversions are swapped like video game cartridges. For the sake of novelty, otherwise "normal" individuals will try out brain implants that enable them to experience incest, bestiality, necrophilia. – Murasaki finds a power drill and plugs it into an outlet. Unable to resist the lure of pointless destruction, she bores a hole in the wall. "Aieeee." – Kat checks her phone. "Somebody is feeding *120 Days of Sodom* into that account you told me to follow. Listen to this. 'He performs four operations upon the young man: a gallstone removal, a trepanning, the excision of a fistula in the eye, of one in the anus.' Next. 'He knows just enough about surgery to botch all four operations; then he abandons the patient, giving him no further help and watching him expire.'" – "We should try that." Murasaki pushes a finger into the hole she drilled. "Would you like to lobotomize me?" She points the drill to her head. It grabs a few strands of black hair and twists them rapidly around the spinning bit.

FACILITY Dirty x-rays, trampled by the construction workers now on strike, spill out of the manila envelopes littering the floor. Slipping off her flats, Murasaki steps barefoot across cranial x-rays. "It's like crushing human skulls." – Kat stares at the gray-yellow stain expanding on the ceiling tiles. The walls are the color of pus-soaked gauze. The future, Dr Malenkov contends, is the present in an advanced state of decay: heterosexuality decomposing, monogamy rotten, procreation superannuated, normality in decline. The very architecture has an uncanny way of embodying post-depravity. New behaviors emerge in the ruins where perverts indulge the urges they suppress in white corridors and sterile rooms. "Have you ever been in a working MRI suite?" asks Murasaki. "You have to take the metal out of your pockets. The magnet is so powerful it can tear a bangle off your wrist." She smiles – less a smiling person than the carrier of a smile, as some people are carriers of disease. "It would be exciting to be handcuffed to a superconducting magnet. The force could be increased until the cuffs amputate your hands at the wrist. Or what if a metallic dildo, one of those bullet-shaped things, was inside your vagina? The magnet could be positioned above your head." – A frown the width of a suture forms between Kat's eyes. "To draw the dildo all the way up into your brain, you mean?" – "We could film it."

STOP Bare fluorescent bulbs cast a wan glow on the gray-yellow stain marring the unfinished MRI suite. An illustration, a median sagittal section of the female pelvis, hangs on one wall. Above it a nocturnist afflicted with recurring ennui has graffitied the words “Special Offer! Genital Mutilation!” Removing her clothes, Kat stands in the center of the room feeling ill at ease. This began innocently enough – “I would like you to pose for some photographs” – but Kat senses that it has become an audition for a psychodrama involving Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex. She remains still, soles of her feet cool against the tiles, as Murasaki circles her with a gaze unforgiving as makeup remover: blonde hair, bony shoulders, flat chest, ribs like a comb, angular hips, willowy legs, arms crisscrossed with self-lacerations. Murasaki runs her fingertips over the mesh of goosebumps that spans Kat’s buttocks, touches her breasts as though looking for lumps, caresses the reddish scars that upheave across the white skin of her wrists. “You have such pretty nipples, Kat. They’re like cherry cough drops.” Murasaki lifts her phone, snaps a picture, then turns the screen toward Kat. – “You’ve cut off my head.” – “Do you want anyone to know it’s you?” – “Who’s going to see it?” – Murasaki wonders if she should turn off the lights to record an illicit act in the dark, a black document to oppose to the white vlogs of Dr Malenkov.

AT An image flickers across Kat's mind – an illustration of the lactiferous tubes, injected with blue wax, in a deceased woman who was lactating at the time of her death. "Can I put my clothes back on?" – "If you ask me, I'll say no." – Kat gathers a cotton shift the hue of dried bone from the floor. Turning away from Murasaki, she lifts the long blonde hair from her neck. "Zip me?" – "No." Murasaki watches as Kat points her elbows and brings her fingers together behind her back like a captive whose hands are shackled. She manages to fasten the exposed zipper that runs up the rear of the garment. When she finishes, Murasaki hands her a printout. "Naked," it says, "we will rub a fine black powder onto our skin. We will enter a white room and engage in a sexual perversion. The grappling of our bodies will mark the floor, walls, and ceiling with silhouettes, tracings, shadow drawings. On consecutive days we will perform a different perversion in each room. At the end of the exercise, the marks will be photographed, measured, and analyzed. An interoffice envelope containing images, a video, and a report will be inserted beneath the door of Dr Malenkov's lab." – Kat peers into Murasaki's face for more information. "What's the point of this?" – Murasaki's eyes are cool as the steel touch of a stethoscope. "The point? Have you seen the vlog on architecture and perversion?"

THE Separating the unrenovated area from the rest of the hospital is a construction zone enclosed by a plywood barricade. Parked in the shadows is a gurney atop which a man and woman writhe like epileptics. The woman, Kat realizes, is struggling. She slaps at the man as he forces apart her legs. “He’s raping her.” – A smile forms on Murasaki’s face. It sits there like a malignant tumor. “Yes.” – The woman emits a shriek. Her voice is young and clear, with a pure, warm, musical tone that contradicts the violence of the cry. Kat screeches too. The rapist leaps from the gurney, the white coat almost stripped from his back by the victim, and dashes off. The woman grasps for her torn underpants and vomits onto the concrete floor. Only then does Kat realize that other faces lurk in the dark, disembodied countenances floating above anonymous loose-fitting scrubs. They had been watching the rape like the gallery audience at a demonstration of a new surgical technique. – “How come they don’t call security?” – Shrugging, Murasaki pushes forward her breasts as though signaling to the rapist. “At least no one joined in.” – They watch as the victim straightens herself. Grimy trails of mascara and teardrops line her cheeks. Her blonde hair glistens with her attacker’s saliva. Getting up, she hobbles on a broken heel toward the atrium. “I wish,” sighs Murasaki, “that we had thought to record it for Dr Malenkov.”

HOSPITAL Ben Saïd lies on the orange banquette while the whore, a tiny Korean, knots the white bondage ropes around his ankles and wrists. His body strains against the nurse's uniform and pushes black chest hairs through the gaps that yawn between its buttons. A platinum wig slants across his forehead. Lipstick the color of fresh blood smudges beneath the white adhesive tape with which the whore seals his mouth. Once Ben Saïd can no longer move his lips to speak or his hands to write, his mind begins to race. Random thoughts... Prosthetic limbs as fetish objects... Psychological profiles of sperm donors... Statistics on rape victims who voluntarily continue to sleep with their assailants... It is exhilarating to act out these compulsions born in El Kef with this petite victim of human trafficking. The whore rubs her groin against Ben Saïd's panties and wraps her fingers around his throat. The brain is deprived of oxygen. Random thoughts give way to white screens. Dr Malenkov was no longer able to practice at the Montreal Neurological Institute after the scandal with the cheerleader whose occipital lobe he damaged irreparably. It did not help that on the wall of his office was a map of the brain which he had commissioned. The brain stem was an erect penis. The temporal lobe was made of seminal fluid. The reticular formation was a figure taken from an illustration of the five stages of puberty (female).

KAT "There is a theory," Ben Saïd resumes, "that discrete events serve as the fundamental units of perceived time. Dr Malenkov was curious whether this could be manipulated so that sexual events or, more to the point, deviant ones could become the primary units by means of which time is perceived. To that end, he devised an experiment in the S&M R&D Lab. Volunteers were split into two groups. The first group endured a single act of prolonged torture. The other group endured a rapid series of brief tortures. The Wong-Baker FACES Scale was used to compare pain thresholds across the two groups, so that the first group was maintained at a certain level of pain and the other group was brought up and down from the same threshold. Afterward the participants were asked to estimate how long their psychodramas lasted. Those undergoing multiple tortures estimated the sessions to last longer than those undergoing a single extended torture. In other words, duration was proportional to the density of pain events occurring in a finite period of time." – Murasaki looks up with a face clinical but obscene like an anatomical diagram of the genitalia. "Did this reinforce his quantum theory of time?" – "Doubtless." – "I would like to reenact that experiment." – "Yes, of course." Ben Saïd thinks of the twelve-year-old girl from the car crash whom Murasaki has continued to abuse. "Your libido," he observes, "is a biohazard."

MEETS Ben Saïd hands her the transcript of Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex's vlog. "Sadism," Murasaki reads, "must be considered in relationship to other concepts of the period, such as neurosis, socialism, alienation, the death of God – Freud, Marx, Kafka, Nietzsche. The important role of blasphemy in Sade demonstrates that, for him, cruelty was inseparable from organized religion." – The hem of Murasaki's white uniform scrunches up as she leans forward on the orange banquette. Ben Saïd peers into the darkness between her legs. Nurses say that Murasaki's thighs resemble the ambulance doors in the emergency room. They bang open at any hour of the day or night. – "For Sade," she continues, "cruelty was a distortion of practices derived from the church, such as flagellation. For this reason it retained a latent redeeming quality, a capacity to indict society by subjecting it to parody. When sadism is detached, however, it becomes sovereign, irredeemable, dangerous." Murasaki looks up, eyes the color of dried blood. – "Right." Ben Saïd can make out the lines beneath her finger. "Suppose I deliberately miscalculate a radiation dosage." An image enters his mind: a patient, deaf, struggling to see, unable to swallow, burned, teeth falling out, ulcers in his mouth and throat, nauseated, in severe pain and finally unable to breathe. "No one would consider it an act of defiance against a healthcare system gone awry. No one would consider it a savage parody of corrupt medical practices."

MAROUEN Murasaki runs a finger along the neckline of her uniform. There is a film of dried semen on her skin. It feels like the sticky residue that EKG leads leave on a patient's chest. "Do you think there is any relationship between neosadism and futuropathy?" – Ben Saïd picks at the tiny scab that covers the razor cut on his chin. "Yes and no. Whereas neosadism is a second-order perversion, a mutation of traditional sadism, futuropathy is an emergent disorder; whereas the primary reference point of sadism is sensation, in the sense that the sadist cross-wires pleasure and pain, the primary reference of futuropathy is time, in that the futuropath cross-wires the present and the future." – As he speaks, Murasaki half reads the closed captioning that accompanies the news broadcast: "A New York hospital treating a man for tongue cancer failed to detect a miscalculation that caused a linear accelerator to blast his brain stem and neck with errant beams of radiation – not once, but on three consecutive days." – The scab comes off between Ben Saïd's fingers. A dribblet of bright red blood forms on his chin. "On the other hand, futuropathy and neosadism occupy the same historical situation. The invention of the one and the reinvention of the other must say something about our time." – "Mm, yes, it must." Agreeing, Murasaki daubs the blood from his chin with a finger which she promptly puts into her mouth.

BEN “We have to invent new forms of cruelty,” Murasaki declares, “in order to counteract the progress we have made in the management of pain.” Watching her hands as she enthuses over Dr Malenkov’s vlog on neosadism, Ben Saïd remembers a patient from the Montreal Neurological Institute. Suffering from coprolalia as well as prelingual deafness, the young man would compulsively express the most obscene curses in sign language. He particularly liked to sign “cunt” and would punch the air with a fist shaped like a vagina. “Have you had any sign that Dr Malenkov has received the videos you slip underneath the door of the S&M R&D Lab?” – Murasaki’s teeth graze her lower lip, biting it in a way that says, “Here, wouldn’t you like to bite it too?” “No. I need to do something more extreme.” – “You’re already abusing patients.” – She shoots him a carcinogenic glance. A dark image gathers in his mind. It divides and grows, forming a tumor of malignant possibilities. “I don’t like safe words, doctor.” Murasaki unfastens the top button of her white uniform. Ben Saïd watches the brushed cotton garment part over her shoulders. Her black hair and bare neck are visible through the central pane of frosted glass in the office door. She holds open the front of the uniform the way a retractor holds open a wound. His eyes, photographic, do not move from her chest. Cooper’s ligaments suspend the breasts.

SAÏD On the marble surface of the cafe table is a demitasse of espresso, a white napkin which Kat has used to tamp her lipstick, and a book. Red Helvetica letters spell out the book's title, *Die Eigenrealität der Zeichen*. It is not easy to read but it helps Kat to understand what sometimes happens when she reenacts pelvic pain for a medical student. The pain becomes real, the simulated patient facility becomes the clinic in Switzerland where she underwent her breakdown, the student becomes a bald man clad in black... She shivers, glad to see Ben Saïd approach. The conversation turns to futurology and blasphemy. "The 'god-damn' in Dr Malenkov's screen name announces that there is nothing religious about his x-rays of the future. His vision is grounded not in spiritual enlightenment but in derangement of the senses." – "What does Dr Malenkov do to derange himself?" – "What does anyone do? But drugs or perversions are only physical means to mental ends. Dr Malenkov has reached a point where the visions have taken over. Prophecy has become psychedelia – vivid, elaborate, obscene. The physical threatens to disappear, like the image track in his vlogs, while the mind feeds on itself: a prediction posits an extraordinary pleasure; the pleasure can't be realized in the present; the present is less pleasurable than the prediction; da capo..." – Getting up, Kat notices a red spot marring her skirt. "Oh drat. I got my period."

AND Alone in the observation theater, Murasaki watches the video feed from the exam room where Kat simulates bacterial vaginosis. While Kat describes the milky discharge that soils her underthings, Murasaki pictures herself entering the simulation. She would kiss Kat on the mouth, bend over the exam table, and invite the student – a handsome boy with a chin prominent as the hoof of a pony – to lift her skirt. The rest of his class might join in, an orgy of aspiring clinicians performing for the camera in the glass hemisphere attached to the ceiling. In his predictions, Murasaki wonders, why does Dr Malenkov seldom write about group sex? Doubtless he would not repudiate its place in the future, but he does not seem to have a feel for it. His future is populated not by gregarious forms of deviance but by isolated entities engaged in fetishistic practices to which, he predicts, no one will continue to attribute any particular deviance. But is that because the practices themselves will have become normal? Or because Dr Malenkov is incapable of visualizing a society that would judge them? Murasaki closes her eyes and reaches a hand into her white uniform. She imagines what Dr Malenkov smells like – dry, stale but not unpleasant, like the smell that wafts up from an old lab notebook when the pages are riffled. Shuddering, she penetrates herself with a finger like a surgeon inserting a laparoscope into an incision.

MURASAKI The elevator doors open to reveal a woman and her daughter. The lace trim on the little girl's pink shift attaches to the dress like gauze to a burn victim. Stepping in, Kat realizes that the child's face is at about the same height from the floor as the hem of her skirt. She wonders whether the child can smell her underpants. – Murasaki moves her hips from side to side as though wriggling out of a corset. "This is what I'm thinking." She ignores the mother and daughter with the same cultivated apathy she turns toward patients who feign toothaches in an effort to obtain narcotics. "We remove our clothes. We get down on our hands and knees. Together our backs form an operating table. A female patient is placed across us. Her head is shaved. The surgeon performs a craniotomy. Afterward we clean the blood from the floor with our tongues. We record it and push a copy of the video under the door of the S&M R&D Lab for Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex." – The mother puts her arm protectively around the shoulders of the little girl. "Pedophilia," Dr Malenkov has said, "transmits a corruption to the sexuality of the future." Kat touches the little girl's blonde curls. "You have such pretty hair." One hazel eye returns the friendly smile that Kat offers. The other is lost beneath the violaceous folds of a tumor mass.

KIHARA "The requirements for clinical trials are less stringent in Asia," says the endocrinologist into his phone. "We are using the residents of third-world countries as guinea pigs." The elevator doors open and his voice trails off into the corridor. The doors close. Kat smiles for no reason. Murasaki is Asian. Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex flares into mind. He predicts that one day women will wear chastity belts not to ensure fidelity but to express contempt for conventional intercourse. – "You have a lash." – Kat closes her eyes as Murasaki touches a fingertip to the bone of her left cheek. Murasaki clears the lash, traces her fingers down the sides of Kat's face, crosses her clavicle, and lays her hands flat against Kat's thorax. "You have such small breasts, Kat. Like a child." – Kat feels as though a section of her skull has been removed. Her brain flinches in the light. She sees a penis – not the invisible and spiritually fulfilling organ of romance movies; not the long, stiff focal point of porn; an ugly, gangly dick, brown and hard as a coprolite, the blunt weapon of a child abuser. – "I am in the mood to be cruel," Murasaki continues. She pulls the red emergency button. The elevator comes to a halt. She thrusts her mouth against Kat. The alarm bell resounds in the shaft. From a distance the custodial crew can hear a female voice cry "Don't... Stop..."

STOP Ben Saïd sits at his desk. Black chest hair sprouts from the neck of a pinkish negligee. He is reading a journal article documenting “unexpected pornography-seeking behavior” in an online clinical dermatology atlas. Visitors to the atlas were being referred not by medical but by fetish websites. Search logs revealed that the most requested image showed the effects of dermatitis on the prepubertal vulva. This reminds Ben Saïd of Dr Malenkov’s effort to establish a practice dedicated to parthenotherapy. He wanted to see if the mental health of adult males could be improved through exposure to adolescent females. The idea was that the girls would form a powerful appeal to embrace something outside oneself. And if it disturbed or corrupted the young ladies, then their memories could be erased with the new drugs... The computer emits a beep. On the screen is an alert stating “Video chat invitation from Lucy Lee.” When Ben Saïd accepts the chat, the screen is filled with the image of a Korean dominatrix. She has long black tresses and a skin-tight PVC bodysuit. Blowing smoke from a lit cigarette into the camera, she stares at Ben Saïd with unrestrained menace. “You sissy. You’ve been playing with yourself again.” As Ben Saïd starts to apologize, knowing all the while that his punishment will be to choke himself in front of her, a thought flickers through his mind. Lucy Lee and sadism. Murasaki and neosadism.

BEN Kat and Murasaki rest beside each other on the orange banquette. Kat studies the German book with the white cover and red Helvetica letters while Murasaki sexts with her father in Japanese. Across the lounge Ben Saïd reads a case study titled “Autoerotic Nonlethal Filmed Hangings.” Finishing, he navigates to the site of Dr Malenkov. The functionalist design, with its white backgrounds, black type, and embedded vlogs, is that of a lab report. Browsing a list of topics that includes neologisms such as anti-vagina, neosadism, parthenotherapy, post-depravity, and psychogynecology, Ben Saïd is struck by the language that symptomizes his former colleague’s psychosis. From a temporal point of view, Dr Malenkov’s vlogs are ruptures in time, fragments of the future embedded in the present like foreign objects lodged in a body. But they can also be seen from a semiotic vantage point. They assume that future states can be described by exotic combinations of existing words – prose poems. Hence the prophet’s affinity with... “Why,” asks Murasaki, “do you think Dr Malenkov came to believe in a quantum theory of time?” – “He’s a surgeon. He assumes anything can be cut up and put back together, though not necessarily in the ‘proper’ order.” – The empty screens of Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex’s vlogs shimmer behind the whites of Murasaki’s eyes. “That reminds me of the creep who steals penises from cadavers and grafts them onto different parts of his body.”

SAÏD As Ben Saïd ejaculates, a pearl of saliva hangs at his lip. The drool causes him to resemble a dental patient who has received a numb shot in the gums. Dismounting, he gathers the pinkish negligee around his shoulders. Ben Saïd is not androgynous in appearance. His chest hair is black and bristly. His skin is the color of an ACE bandage. He is solidly built like one of the recruits in the insurgent training camp outside El Kef. He is a juxtaposition of contrasts: the physique of a terrorist in the nightclothes of a fille de joie. – Murasaki sits up, buttocks slippery against the pleather surface of the orange banquette. Spreading her legs, she touches herself as though performing a lesson in female anatomy: the mons, the labia, the clitoris, the introitus. "I don't understand Dr Malenkov's concept of an 'anti-vagina.'" Her fingers form an impromptu speculum. "Isn't the opposite of a vagina a penis?" – "The anti-vagina is a position in what Dr Malenkov calls V space, the theoretical range of possible genitalia. He predicts that advances in cosmetic surgery will enable women of the future to realize these anti-vaginas in their own flesh." – Murasaki looks at Ben Saïd with eyes like bacteria. To be beheld by her is to be transformed into a vector for the transmission of her dirty thoughts. She withdraws her fingers and pushes them into Ben Saïd's face. "Inhale." – "Ah, yes..."

IS “Maybe Dr Malenkov is creeped out by your fandom.” Kat’s voice barely conceals an undertone of reproach. Murasaki leans against the railing of the surgical waiting area and surveys the atrium. A muscular black pushes a floor-waxing machine. The Latina from housekeeping picks up shattered glassware from the granite floor. A cheerleader limps toward the espresso bar with an aluminum crutch. A virologist races past with the desperate tempo of a woman searching for a bathroom because she feels semen leaking into her panties. These, thinks Murasaki, are the players in the sexuality of the future. They are slaves, invalids, neurotypicals. They are to be no more esteemed than animals bred for slaughter. They will submit to post-depravity the way that cancer patients submit to end-of-life care. It is easy to predict their future. It consists of victimization and death. – Turning to Kat, Murasaki runs the back of her knuckles along a cheekbone. “You’re so pretty. Do you know that I’d let my father fuck you then I’d eat his cum out of your pussy?” Kat’s face turns as pink as a positive result on a pregnancy test. She looks away, grateful to spot Ben Saïd crossing the atrium beneath them. “Dermatologists,” he is telling his companion, a widow philanthropist, “have the happiest patients. Nobody gives a damn if you cure their hypertension, but they’ll think you’re a genius if you get rid of their zits.”

A The walls of the Hippocratic Bridge connecting the towers are made of thick glass. Murasaki points to an endocrinologist disappearing into an elevator. "I held his cock while he peed with it." The hospital grows quiet after visiting hours, but a furtive nightlife thrives in its recesses: residents shoot dope in unused resus rooms and bored nocturnists give each other blowjobs in the ammonia haze that poisons the toilets. – "Why," asks Kat, "do you think Dr Malenkov chose to put a blasphemy in his screen name?" – "'God-damn,' you mean?" – "He is very deliberate about his language, like a poet." – "I don't know. It just sounds nice. Don't you like to swear when you're getting fucked?" – She pushes Kat against the glass wall. A black barrette festooned with blue and white stones pulls the hair back from Kat's face. Her eyes are closed and the halogen spotlight directly overhead casts a shadow of her eyelashes, lengthened with mascara, onto the skin underneath. Murasaki kisses her. – "Can anyone see us up here?" – "I hope so." – Murasaki opens Kat's blouse. The saliva on the side of her tongue, extending toward Kat's nipple, reflects dazzling points of light. These are echoed by the whitish dots, Montgomery glands, that form a circle around the areola. Below them in the atrium a paramedic positions defibrillator paddles over a woman's chest. He compresses a button and the woman flops like a fat chicken trying to fly.

RADIOLOGIST Murasaki leads Kat to the gallery overlooking a disused operating room. The walls form a square lined with gray ceramic tiles. Attached to the ceiling are two stainless steel drums that cast light toward the operating table at the center of the room. A lone figure in blue scrubs attends to a female “patient” on the table. He threatens her, hits her breasts with a reflex hammer, throttles her by the neck with hands clad in non-latex gloves. Squinting, Kat makes out a point of red light – the recording indicator on a video camera – in the shadows on the opposite side of the gallery. “They’re shooting a porno.” The girl’s body is shaking and her breath makes a gurgling sound. The “surgeon” pulls her hair and menaces her with a vaginal retractor, which he lubricates by forcing it into her mouth. There can be no mistake. This is the moment the girl breaks. Her expression flattens. Her eyes go blank. She appears to be dissociating. She resembles a patient succumbing to the effects of anesthesia. “We should do this.” The camera pans to a round piece of padding with a hole in its center. Normally its purpose is to stabilize the head during a neurosurgical procedure but now it frames the girl’s drawn face. “We could slip the video into the S&M R&D Lab for Dr Malenkov.” Murasaki’s pupils dilate as the girl’s legs are forced apart.

FROM Opening the door to the All Faith Chapel, Ben Saïd spots Kat alone on a pew. If bored nocturnists copulate beneath the faux stained glass, he thinks, it is not to extract pleasure from blasphemy. That was a perversion dear to Sade: "He has her go to communion and fucks her in the mouth when she returns." Nocturnists copulate in the All Faith Chapel only because it is empty. "Miss Harlow," Ben Saïd interrupts, sliding into the pew. He looks at Kat in a way that causes her to feel he has placed a hand on her thigh. "Contemplating the latest vlog of Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex?" A memory shudders away as Ben Saïd summarizes the renegade prophet's most recent transmission. Research intended to slow or "reverse" the aging process will have unintended consequences for sexual pathology... Centenarians will look and feel like eighteen-year-olds... There will be no senior citizens... No gerontophilia... The ultra-rich will pay for such intensive anti-aging treatments that they will physically revert to childhood... Their jaundiced libidos will inhabit adolescent bodies... Society will get used to the sight of "children" committing deviant acts... Desensitization... Nobody will bother about a "child" being molested... "Probably rape fantasy acted out by moneyed geezers." – Kat exhales. It all sounds so far-fetched. What she can remember about her own experience is how suddenly the gusset of her underwear had ended up inside her vulva.

TUNISIA “A man was beating a woman in the OR,” Kat finishes. “They were shooting a video.” – Ben Saïd nods in tacit approval of the pornographic use of hospital facilities. “Porn is, from a medical perspective, dangerous work, exposing people to an inordinate number of human pathogens. Of course medicine is, from a pornographic perspective, stimulating work. We expose patients to the pathogens of our own lusts.” – Kat stares at her feet. The toe of her flats is adorned with a buckle the shape of a vaginal retractor. “Dr Malenkov claims that, in the future, pornography will no longer form a category separate from sex.” – “Indeed. The function of pornography, I think, was to serve as an incubator for the exotic forms of sexuality. Perversions were consigned to pornography much the same as cell cultures are preserved in a petri dish. But now that perversion has escaped the laboratory, there no longer seems to be a *raison d’être* for pornography. Titillation? That is no reason for being. There are so many ways to titillate oneself. Personally I find the clichés of pornography less stimulating than the ‘off-label’ use of a sigmoidoscope.” Ben Saïd regards Kat with the eyes of a coroner. The various parts of her anatomy are items to be assessed. Her vagina, he thinks, must be snug as the finger cuff on a pulse oximeter. “The man in the OR – you didn’t see him without a surgical mask?”

STOP Murasaki stares at her reflection in the glass-fronted cabinets. Her breasts shake as she moves up and down on the director of the gross lab, his spindly pelvis jabbing her like the bony midriff of her father. He manages to ejaculate the way geriatric patients manage to push out a bowel movement. She stands up and touches her breasts as though examining them for cysts. "Can I spend an hour or two alone in the gross lab?" – "To do what?" – "I just want to make a little movie." – The director sits up on the hard bench. He understands. She wants a film of herself cavorting in the lab so that she can use it in her campaign to break through to Dr Malenkov. "I don't know," he grumbles. The blank screens of Dr Malenkov's vlogs whitewash the corrupt nature of his vision... His followers are seduced by the promise of freedom, but his visions are deterministic projections of his own sexual pathologies... Vatic delusions backed by manic rationalizations... "If you find other people's compulsions liberating, I don't know what to say." – Murasaki listens with blank eyes. It is the expressionless look of a nurse forced to attend a mandatory lecture on hand washing the morning after a nightshift. She pulls a clot of semen from her black pubes. It has the slithery texture of hand sanitizer. She flicks it onto the blue sheet covering a cadaver. "Well, can I?"

MURASAKI A black bag lies atop each stainless steel table. Underneath is an orange biohazard bucket festering with scraps of human skin, fat, connective tissue, and the occasional digit. A continuous stream of cool air sweeps through the gross lab, less a sign of the overdriven HVAC equipment than of a futile effort to prevent stagnation. It smells like a cross between mold and shoe polish. Unzipping a body bag and stripping it from the partially dissected cadaver, Murasaki thinks of an experiment Dr Malenkov conducted in the S&M R&D Lab. Male participants were shown a snuff film while their physiological arousal levels were recorded using skin conductance response. The snuff film depicted a young female tied to a white surface. A rapist whose face is never seen strangles her to death for the purposes of sexual gratification. Afterward, participants were asked to rate their conviction in the authenticity of the film on a scale from one (fiction) to ten (non-fiction). As expected, participants with higher levels of arousal believed more strongly in the film's documentary quality. – Murasaki props her phone on the abdomen of an adjacent body and presses the record button. She lifts the skirt of her white uniform. She is not wearing underpants. She positions herself over the hand of the cadaver. Its wrist has been flayed open. She pulls on an exposed tendon and its finger flexes against the black triangle of her mons.

IS Murasaki wriggles into panties that resemble a surgical mask. “What is he like?” – The director of the gross lab covers himself with a blue sheet. He is ashamed of his increasing resemblance to the bodies dissected by his students. He knows that Murasaki only sleeps with him for information. His memories of Dr Malenkov are the coin with which he pays for half-hearted fucks during which Murasaki sends and receives text messages on her phone. “Doctors,” he begins, “tend to be egomaniacs, saviors, heroes in their own minds. Dr Malenkov has none of that. He doesn’t like to speak about himself or his research.” – “But he does publish.” – “He doesn’t do this in an effort to draw attention to himself. To the contrary, he publishes out of a sense of duty toward the research itself. Attention, even celebrity, is not a goal but a sacrifice he is willing to make in order to give life to his ideas. In retrospect, it is not at all surprising that he would withdraw from his colleagues and students in order to work under this pseudonym.” – “Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex.” – “Yes. Are you all right?” – Murasaki presses the tips of her fingers to her temples. Her biceps push her breasts together. “I get headaches.” – “You must like that.” He has seen the bruises shaped like men’s hands on her arms, thighs, and throat. – “No, it’s not pleasure-pain, it’s pain-pain.”

AN The library occupies an entire floor of the black glass skyscraper, but the surfeit of books and periodicals has required that shelving be erected before the windows, blotting out New York. Ben Saïd is describing how Dr Malenkov's research in Montreal led him to develop the notion of pornolepsy, "seizures induced by the contemplation of fucking." These episodes of sensory disturbance are like epileptic fits except that they can be triggered by pornography, public sex acts, or unintended exposure to other forms of coitus. The symptoms include convulsions, loss of consciousness, and eventual catalepsy. Risks include choking, falling, contusions, concussions, broken bones, and increased vulnerability to sexual assault... Kat stops listening. The present shudders away. The Damagil is causing creepy dreams. Kat is lost in the tunnels beneath the hospital. A gray paint coats the walls, which are perforated by little nooks covered with glass. Stencilled on the glass are red Helvetica letters that spell out IN CASE OF EMERGENCY. Detached genitalia, flaccid penises resting against pillow-shaped testicles, are mounted like animal trophies inside. The glass can be smashed in order to remove the phalli, but in the event of what type of emergency Kat's unconscious does not say. – Flash. The xerox machine casts white bursts of light across the décolletage of a student librarian. Ben Saïd is gathering up a printout, a bibliographic citation for a paper titled "Études sur la pendaïson." – "I have something to show you."

ER The video shows an abandoned space in the unrenovated wing. A thirty-ish Asian female stands in a white room beside a carton of disposable scalpels. She wears a black micro-miniskirt, snug angora sweater, vertically striped stockings, and black pumps. The shoes have a glossy leather upper, open toes, one-inch platform soles, and stiletto heels that narrow to tiny squares. A white kitten is in the woman's hands. A smile fills her lips the way blood saturates a tampon. She sets the animal on the tiled floor and proceeds to stomp on it with the points of her heels. "That's Murasaki." Ben Saïd uses the same perfunctory tone of voice with which he would deliver a diagnosis of upper rectal cancer. "How does that make you feel?" – "Like I want a cigarette." Kat's eyes, dark as contusions against her pale skin, invoke the research showing that women have more nightmares than men. "Where did you get it?" – "Wherever." – "Does Murasaki know you have it?" – "No. Were you aware that she does this sort of thing?" – Kat had recognized the pumps with the unmistakable reptile embossed print circling the platforms. "I think it may be a symbolic gesture. She is trying to get a message through to Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex." – "What is she trying to say?" – The video, halted on the final frame, is fixed on the blood smeared by Murasaki's feet across the white tiles.

NURSE Murasaki gestures to the patient. "After the resus he developed this coagulopathy. He has been bleeding from the mouth and nose all day. He's so unstable we might stop dialyzing him." – "Will he die?" – "I hope so. You smell nice. Is that Chanel No. 5?" – Kat considers the patient. Thin red tributaries cross his cheeks. His eyes have begun to bleed. Some part of her envies him for the devotion with which strangers attend to him. "Depression," she recalls reading in a work of existential psychology, "is the inability to construct a future. It occurs more in the dimension of time than in space. But focusing on a point in time outside the depression gives the sufferer a perspective that can break its chains." Perhaps, Kat thinks, this is why she has allowed herself to be drawn into the circle of Dr Malenkov's admirers. By offering a vision of the future, however depraved, he extracts her from the psychological state that Damagil scarcely seems to affect. – Murasaki pats the sheet. "Lie down." – Kat lowers herself to the mattress. A bland heat emanates from the patient's body. Holding up her phone, Murasaki records a video. It begins with the "Please Do Not Sit on the Bed" sign tacked to the wall and pans down to Kat lying beside the dying man. It is a psychodrama staged for a *deus ex machina*. "Hold him," Murasaki urges her. "Give him a last kiss."

FROM The slit in Kat's skirt forms an analogue with the self-inflicted lacerations crisscrossing her arms. Just as Dr Malenkov uses white screens to announce his visions of the future, so does Kat use razor blades to embody her inheritance from the past. To harm herself is to agree publicly with a history of abuse that took place in secret. – Murasaki yawns, stretching and pushing forward her breasts in an inadvertent simulation of the posture she had adopted for the endocrinologist who masturbated onto them in the unused wet lab. She can recall his face as he ejaculated. It was that of a man being electrocuted. (2,000 volts at 5 amps... Muscles contract to a state of absolute rigidity... Heart seizes up... Blood boils...) Multicolored papers tacked to the bulletin board cause an irruption of color in the otherwise antiseptic lounge. There is a blue flyer announcing a lecture, "Execution by Lethal Injection: Is It a Medical Procedure?" Like an accuser Murasaki points a finger at it. "I am against capital punishment." – "You are?" – "Yes, because I am in favor of torture. We should do away with these 'humane' methods of execution and bring back the most gruesome medieval torments. The rack, the iron maiden..." – "Why in the world did you ever become a nurse?" – With a fingernail Murasaki scratches a red line in the skin above Kat's collarbone. It is a promise in the form of an incision.

JAPAN “I don’t like to wait.” Murasaki squirts antibacterial gel into the palm of her hand. She rubs it between fingertips and thumb, contemplating the gel’s resemblance to seminal fluid. “Anything Dr Malenkov predicts I’m willing to do here and now.” – “You must be frustrated that he doesn’t acknowledge your attempts to communicate.” – “Let’s do an experiment. Each of us will masturbate a hundred men onto our faces. We’ll scrape the gook into beakers and send it for semen analysis. It will be interesting to see if one of us inspires higher aggregate sperm counts.” – The idea fills Kat’s eyes with spermicide. “Where will we do this?” – “The simulated patient facility. We’ll each take an exam room and the men can line up in the lobby for their turn to be jerked off.” – “It won’t be easy getting IRB approval for an experiment that involves sexual relations with multiple partners.” – “Who said we need IRB approval?” – Kat looks at the row of monitors displaying the video feeds from the exam rooms. She can see Murasaki on her knees, a sort of inverted funnel around her neck like the contraption a veterinarian puts on a dog. The sperm of a hundred coworkers – residents, nocturnists, male nurses, mammography techs, janitors – drains into the funnel. “Bukkake for Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex,” she murmurs, baptizing the idea with a title less appropriate for a scientific experiment than for a pornographic video from Japan.

STOP The vlog finishes. Slouched on the orange banquette, Kat watches as Murasaki crosses the room. She has lengthened the slit in the skirt of her white uniform. It is as though she is making it easier for the garment to be torn open from the rear. – “It is our business to make prognoses,” Ben Saïd is saying. “Should anyone be surprised if the prognosticatory faculty sometimes frees itself of disease states to make predictions that are no longer attached to sickly or wounded bodies? Of course, this transforms prognostication itself into a disease state: futuropathy.” – Bending over the computer, Murasaki googles up a pornographic video. A young woman is masturbating a man onto her augmented breasts. The moment he ejaculates, he seizes her head and batters it against the wall. She appears to fall unconscious. – “God, I’m getting wet.” Murasaki’s eyes shine like a speculum light. – Ben Saïd watches the man urinate onto the prostrate starlet. “To furnish a prognosis about the cancer proliferating in a patient’s vulva is one thing. For Dr Malenkov to give up the practice of medicine and remove himself from society in order to focus on depravity is quite another.” – Murasaki unfastens the buttons of her uniform. It’s like peeling away Dr Malenkov’s screens. She sees herself standing naked before the webcam of depravity. “One of you spank me.” She reaches into her panties. The wetness is a bioadhesive. She can’t tear her hand away.

MURASAKI Aroused, Murasaki pushes Kat backward onto the orange banquette. The bright light overhead causes the polish on her fingernails to shine as she reveals Kat's breast. The nipple disappears into her mouth and a shadow of her head crosses Kat's cleavage like a premonition of death. Watching, Ben Saïd thinks of the vlog. The blank screen had filled his mind with a procession of white things: white walls, white blood cells, white ropes used in bondage psychodramas, white mice shivering in withdrawal from the cocaine to which they have been addicted in the course of certain experiments. Mesmerizing but dispassionate as an in vitro fertilization, the voice of Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex had reverberated in the radiology lounge. The burgeoning of facial transplant surgery, he predicted, will give rise to new forms of perversion: couples who swap features, fetishists who collect mug shots made of real flesh, bukkake enthusiasts who pass around a slice of human face, spattering both front and back with gobs of ejaculate the texture of liquid soap. Ben Saïd realizes that Kat is studying him. His skin is the color of an ACE bandage. His eyes are like discarded tampons, red-brown as old blood. A scab on his chin hints at incompetence with his hands. She watches as he takes lipstick from the pocket of his white coat, smudges his lips, and begins to masturbate with the emotionless bearing of an autistic child.

IS Kat taps a fingernail on the glass. The architectural models showing the proposed renovations are displayed in increasingly neglected vitrines in the corridor. Since the work halted, the construction zone has become a palimpsest of graffiti scrawled by disenchanting nocturnists, body fluids spilled by adulterers in white lab coats, and drug paraphernalia tossed aside by self-medicating clinicians. – “Miss Harlow,” a voice interrupts. “Looking for Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex?” Ben Saïd approaches from behind. The slit dividing the rear of Kat’s skirt forms an extension in fabric of the gluteal cleft. She turns to him with eyes like crushed pills. “His psychosis does not progress,” Ben Saïd continues. “It doesn’t get any better and it doesn’t get any worse. You know what I think? Hell is to be stuck in the present with a vision of the future.” He pauses near enough to Kat that it violates her sense of personal space. There is a female smell, dirty underwear or a sanitary napkin, that focuses his attention on her pelvis. “You know where the infusion room is supposed to be built?” Ben Saïd gestures to the vitrine. “Murasaki has something to show you down there.” – The scent brings out a fiendishness in his demeanor that causes Kat to believe the rumor about Ben Saïd liking to tit-fuck women who have undergone a mastectomy, berating them all the while for the missing breast that denies him his pleasure.

OBSESSED Kat kneels to pick up a manila envelope from the floor. In her hand it feels disagreeably damp, like sweaty underwear. Inside is a document called the Female Sexual Function Index. "Over the past four weeks," she reads aloud, "how often did you become lubricated during sexual activity?" – In reply Murasaki's face secretes a smile. "Go on." – "Over the past four weeks, how often did you experience discomfort or pain during vaginal penetration?" – "I always want to experience pain during vaginal penetration." Murasaki thinks of the vlog in which Dr Malenkov first articulated the notion of neosadism. It was inspiring to hear him describe how, in the future, beings engineered for the purposes of sexual gratification will be no more cherished than animals bred for slaughter. "Fuck the clone then throw it out." – Kat touches a hand to the side of her neck, a gesture identical to the one required to feel for a carotid pulse. "Ben Saïd says you have something to show me." – "Yes. Come." – Further down the corridor, past crates of sound-muffling ceiling tiles abandoned by the striking workers, an unchecked leak causes an increasingly large pool to accumulate on the floor. It smells like a septic abdomen and blockades the infusion room. Padding through the water, Murasaki leads Kat to a closed door. It sounds like the animal lab inside. Behind the door some attempt at human speech fails behind a muzzle or gag. Mmmwwuhm.

WITH The blueprint indicates that the windowless space is to be one of three infusion rooms in the chemotherapy facility. It will feature tranquil lighting, flat-screen televisions, and an espresso machine. Children under twelve years of age will not be permitted. Standing in the open doorway, Kat peers into the gloom. The dim illumination from the corridor shows wires dangling from unfinished sockets. The ceiling is open, the sound-muffling tiles still in the packages stacked in the corridor. Bound to a chair in the center of the room is a young man. The lower half of his face is concealed beneath black tape. Because his mouth is unable to play its usual role in the expression of fear, the emotion concentrates in his eyes: the upper and lower eyelids contract, the pupils dilate, the saccades increase in rapidity and range. "This is Justin," explains Murasaki. In her voice is the inorganic cool of the alcohol swab. "He used to be a male cheerleader for the basketball team at some big university. When he graduated, he became a pharmaceutical rep. Don't you hate pharma reps?" – Rapid heart rate; increased blood pressure; tightening of muscles; sharpened or redirected senses; dilation of the pupils; increased sweating. – "What are you going to do with him?" – "He is going to help us reach Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex." Murasaki stares off into the future, eyes inscrutable like the biomarkers of an unknown disease.

DR The exhibit area has been transformed into a ballroom for the black-tie fundraiser. Doctors and high-net-worth donors sip pinot blanc at the bar before the Noguchi sculpture. The clinking of stem glasses punctuates fragments of conversation: "Bursting aneurysms to the Brandenburg Concerto... We have to de-link ourselves from the pharmaceuticals..." Ben Saïd surveys the guests with equanimity, as though reading their death certificates. "Alcohol is not a visionary drug," he is saying. "People may lose inhibitions when they drink, but they do not lose cognitive limits. For that one needs psychedelics or nootropics. Indeed, it is one of Dr Malenkov's theses that 'smart drugs' will enable us to bring greater insight to our sexual pathologies. Post-depravity is not just the moment when normality and abnormality become coextensive. It is also an advanced state of enlightenment about the blackest mandates issued by the libido." – Kat touches a pinky to the corner of her eye to clear a lash. "What if somebody discovers that Justin down there?" – "Pharmaceutical reps are marginal figures, like drug addicts and prostitutes. They inhabit the borders of healthcare. They're young. They travel. Somewhere Justin has a family who figures he's on a bender with his college buddies." – "Why does Murasaki do these things?" – "You're talking about a woman who seduced her own father." – "Dr Malenkov is a father figure?" – "She wants to get behind those white screens with which he surrounds himself."

MALENKOV Amid the smartly dressed clinicians and their affluent patrons, the superimposed figures of the Noguchi behind the bar resemble a mutation along the lines of conjoined twins. Taped to the sculpture's base is a blue flyer advertising the lecture "Execution by Lethal Injection: Is It a Medical Procedure?" Kat thinks of the infusion room and asks, "Just how is Murasaki going to use this Justin to communicate with Dr Malenkov?" – "I expect that she will try to make a display of him." Ben Saïd holds up his palm in the manner of a surgeon requesting a scalpel. "The other day she texted me 'Sade was not sadistic enough.' Perhaps that suggests the direction of her thinking." He pauses. "You have a run." – Dismayed, Kat inspects her sheer black nylons. Running along her calf is a line of unraveled stitches, an inadvertent parallel of the self-inflicted razor cuts that mark her arms. That's why she wears a gown with long sleeves. – "I rather believe," continues Ben Saïd, "that the end result will be something like a *reductio ad absurdum*. Dr Malenkov predicts a post-depraved world. Murasaki will use Justin as a clinical trial of post-depravity. She will do horrible things to him and exhibit these to Dr Malenkov in the hope of causing him to acknowledge her." – Kat can't listen. How well, she is wondering, can the acid body of a woman stain a gown at the armpits?

AND Murasaki and Ben Saïd watch as the paramedics lift the stretcher from each end. Its undercarriage drops down like the legs of an ironing board and the stretcher becomes a narrow gurney that disappears through the doors of the emergency room. "When I started working in the ER," Murasaki remarks, "I was amazed to see how many patients come in because of their vaginas. There are miscarriages, ingrown hairs that cause build-ups of pus, herpes lesions so big it's impossible to urinate without a foley catheter." – "What about traumatic injuries?" – "Yesterday there was a little girl who deflowered herself with a foreign object, a nine-volt battery." – "Have you thought about electrocuting Justin?" – Murasaki's eyes turn on like a call light. "I've been thinking about torturing Justin while showing him videos of his loved ones' faces. The idea is to see if he would learn to distrust them, hate them, want to kill them." – "A facial repression experiment." – "Yes," Murasaki pouts, "but we'd have to set Justin free." – "Perhaps you should do a psychogynecology experiment instead." – "Justin doesn't have a vagina." – "That's precisely the psychological problem." – A few seconds of webcam video replay in Ben Saïd's mind. Murasaki places a white mouse from the animal lab on the unfinished floor in front of Justin. As it shivers in withdrawal from the cocaine to which it had been addicted, Murasaki stomps it with the stiletto heel of a black pump.

HIS Armed with Sharpies and abandoned cans of black paint, bored nocturnists have scrawled prescriptions for ennui on the walls: "Cancer LOL... Rape Kit: One Size Fits All... I'm live-tweeting my lobotomy..." Boxes of sound-muffling ceiling tiles are stacked at the end of a corridor left unfinished by the striking workers. A broken pipe causes an increasingly stagnant pool of water to expand on the floor. The future, Dr Malenkov has declared, is the present in an advanced state of decay. Prophets herald its newness, but the future is also a complex of ruins. Tomorrow's sexual behavior is the wreckage of today's. Yawning, Murasaki pushes forward her thorax as though inviting some cancer-ridden voluptuary to masturbate onto her breasts. She unlocks the infusion room. The air smells like a septic abdomen. The hair on Justin's skin stands erect and the superficial muscles shiver. She wants not just to harm but to make a display of him. Kneeling on the floor, Murasaki injects a vasodilator into the side of Justin's penis. In fifteen minutes, he will have an erection stiff as an IV pole. It would be fun, she guesses, to give Justin an overdose. Blood fails to drain from the penis, tissue is damaged, and the resulting priapism is extremely painful. She looks at the webcam perched on the crate across from her patient. "All right, Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex, I'm ready for my close-up."

VISION The book lies on the marble table in the corner of the atrium. The cover is white except for the Helvetica typography. The author's name is black. The title, *Die Eigenrealität der Zeichen*, is red. Now that she has seen what took place in the disused operating room, Kat studies in a new way the razor cut that wends across Ben Saïd's chin. "Do you think Dr Malenkov practices the perversions that he predicts?" – "Before his lecture tour in Asia, there were rumors. In any case, it is not what he does with his body that matters. It is what he does with his brain. He is reconceiving sexuality." His voice trails off as Ben Saïd realizes that Kat isn't listening. She is given up to dark thoughts behind eyes like empty bottles of Tylenol. He is tiring of her moods. A procedure flashes through his mind. He is aspirating a breast lump while calling Kat a bitch, a cunt, a whore. Setting the small paper cup of espresso on the tabletop, he reads the title of the white book. "Where did you learn to read German?" – "Switzerland." The word invokes the clinic where Kat experienced the vision of a bald man dressed in black. – "What is it about?" – "Signs." Kat adjusts a bra strap. The brief flash of white that appears in the neckline of her cotton shift reminds Ben Saïd of the gauze covering a female patient's lumpectomy.

OF “Have you watched Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex’s vlog on the future of architecture?” – “No.” Kat crosses her legs as though to restrict access to her groin. Because Ben Saïd’s face displays a relative lack of movement or emotion, his eyes take on the sicko fanaticism of a man who stares inappropriately at children. – “He looks at the subject from two vantage points. On one hand, there is the influence of architecture on perversion. For example, we know that secluded spaces give rise to all sorts of deviant activity. We have areas like that here in the hospital: isolation units, the disused operating room, the stalled renovations. On the other hand, there is the influence of perversion on architecture. For example, Dr Malenkov envisions housing options for unconventional family units – the family with two mommies has two kitchens, the incestuous family occupies a single room – and furniture designed to facilitate child abuse. These ‘pedo-amenities’ would embody his dictum that ‘pedophilia transmits a corruption to the sexuality of the future.’ They would also restrain their young occupants. Deprived of mobility, their bodies could be considered as distinct bits of anatomy – an armpit, say, or the mons pubis – which can be fetishized, touched, maltreated.” – Not far away, in the locked infusion room, Justin is bound to a chair facing a webcam. His immobility mirrors the spatial restriction of Dr Malenkov who, so far as anyone knows, never leaves the premises.

POST– Ben Saïd smiles. Kat smiles too, not because she is happy about anything but because she becomes a vector for the transmission of his leer. She does not realize that he is imagining himself penetrating her with the air of a man urinating into a specimen cup. “It was clearly a case of Hieronymus Bosch Syndrome,” he continues. “I couldn’t do anything but offer the patient some obecalp.” – “Obecalp?” – “That’s ‘placebo’ backwards.” – “You deceived the patient.” – “No. I offered an imaginary drug for a factitious ailment. Once again I can’t help but recall Dr Malenkov’s proposal for a department of psychogynecology.” The present shudders away. Ben Saïd has the hands of a gynecologist. Kat can see him enter the exam room, wash his hands at the steel sink, and tear open a package of non-latex gloves. Matted beneath the taut material, the hair on the backs of his hands is black and wiry as pubic hair. A gloved finger spreads the lips of her vagina, the muscles of her thighs contract, the speculum penetrates her... “It gets to the point,” Ben Saïd is saying, “where I wonder if doctors might not be replaced some day by novelists. Don’t you agree?” The blue-white lights go dim. Kat removes her feet from the metal stirrups. The exam room vibrates away. “I’m sorry. I was just remembering that this week’s newsletter contains a review of the art in my gynecologist’s office.”

DEPRAVITY The label on the bottle of Damagil warns of side effects that include dizziness, drowsiness, headache, nausea, and sexual dysfunction. There is no mention of bad dreams or an irresistible desire to cut oneself. Kat touches a fingertip to a red scab on her wrist as Ben Saïd reads aloud from Dr Malenkov's white paper. "To predict the future of sex, it is necessary to predict the future of sex organs. While formerly it was possible to anticipate the development of an individual genital – for example, the way a vagina evolved over the course of puberty – advances in medical technology have made it possible to reinvent the pudenda. The range of all possible female genitalia is called V space. Any given vagina lies on a vector in this space: a deformity moves it toward the periphery, while an enhancement (such as the cosmetic improvement offered by a labiaplasty) moves it toward the center. An anti-vagina is one which lies on the same vector as the original but on the opposite side of the average." – Kat bites her lip as though reminding herself of the way she had been sexually assaulted as a preteen. "Could you map other parts of the body into V space?" – "A fascinating question. It might well transform other body parts into sex organs. It is not difficult to imagine the face as a sort of hymen." – "I suppose Dr Malenkov would want to break it."

STOP While the video buffers, Kat inspects the thermostat by the door of the observation room. She is unable to decipher the series of button presses that prevent the climate control system from chilling the place to a temperature more appropriate for the autopsy suites. The vlog begins – the white screen, the narcotic voice. Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex reviews evidence suggesting that the availability of child pornography actually decreases the rate of sex crimes against children. He predicts that simulated child pornography will be legalized in an effort to prevent real children from being victimized. When the video concludes, Murasaki peers at Kat. A straight, unwaisted dress outlines the figure that enables her to portray adolescent pathologies in the simulated patient facility. “Would you be willing to act in faux kiddy-porn films?” – Kat puts a fist to her mouth, knuckles in her teeth. She knows she would feign along. She will submit to post-depravity the way that a cancer patient submits to end-of-life care. “I don’t understand,” she says, “why Dr Malenkov is so interested in the sexuality of children.” – Murasaki yawns, crooked bite affirming that the development of her adult teeth had been undermined by a precocious love of fellatio, and thinks of Justin in the infusion room. It is a little dull to torture him without being hurt in return. Perhaps she will untie him just to see what he does to her.

MURASAKI The exhibit area has been transformed into a makeshift cinema for the Neuro Film Festival. A poster declares the intent to “raise awareness about neurological disorders such as epilepsy, multiple sclerosis, Alzheimer’s, and Parkinson’s disease.” The film casts a flickering light across the Noguchi sculpture. A voiceover explains how damage to the amygdala can impair the ability of patients to recognize faces. The screen becomes a vlog and Kat can hear the barbiturate voice of Dr Malenkov declaring that “the face is the heterosexuality of the body.” Did he simply mean that the face is normative? Or was there some deeper notion connecting the facial repression experiments to post-depravity? The present shudders away and Kat sees people without faces engaging in extraordinary acts of degeneracy. It’s a dream, strangers and perverts and a sense of passivity before it all, as though sexual violence has acquired the inevitability of time itself. In the future, it’s kink or be kinked. “God, this is dull,” Murasaki exclaims. She undoes two buttons at the top of her uniform. She is not wearing a bra. Her breasts spill from the improvised décolletage the way brain tissue exudes from the skull after a traumatic injury. She has been pressuring Kat to perform in the torture-porn video for which Justin has been abducted. “I love your hair.” She touches the chignon at the back of Kat’s neck. “Shall we go down to the infusion room?”

COUNTERS Kat's face, usually colorless as aspirin, reflects the lurid yellow light cast by the bare bulbs in the infusion room. She examines Justin, his slumping body making the fetters that bind him to a wooden chair unnecessary. He has become more than just a casualty in Murasaki's neosadistic scheme. Justin is a counterbalance to Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex: he is present, vulnerable, corporal, like a patient, whereas Dr Malenkov is an abstract voice and a white screen. – "We assume," Ben Saïd is saying, "that the prophet intends his language to represent something – the future. But what if it doesn't? What if language itself is the goal? The prophet is like a doctor who gives a diagnosis not because it is plausible but because he likes the sound of certain words. 'Vulvodynia' strikes him as a sort of poetry. Perhaps he even takes to coining neologisms along the lines of 'psychogynecology.' Of course, in a doctor that is madness." – Murasaki pouts. "Well, this is real." She makes a small incision on Justin's cheek with a disposable scalpel. He lurches backward and flicks his head to the side, blood falling on the pink button-down he has worn since the morning he arrived. Kat, who can't bear to watch, looks down at the book in her hands. The cover is white and the red Helvetica letters of the title, *Die Eigenrealität der Zeichen*, resemble the cuts on her pallid arms.

THE Kat can recall standing in the gallery that overlooks the disused operating room. The same square space, its walls lined with gray ceramic tiles, is visible in the video now playing on the wall-mounted display in Ben Saïd's office. Flanked by a nurse and an assistant, a figure in blue scrubs leans over a male patient with a trepan. – "Where did you get it?" – Ben Saïd shrugs. "They shoot a lot of pornos down there." – The "surgeon" places the trepan against the skull, just above an eye socket, and bears down. The patient flails. The surgeon moves the trepan to the same spot above the other eye and removes a button of bone the size of a cock ring. "Hans," he can be heard to say, "come here. Give me a blowjob." The assistant kneels in front of the surgeon as the nurse flushes the holes in the patient's skull, exposing the frontal lobes to the white light cast by two stainless steel drums above the operating table. – Kat withdraws on the orange banquette like a child pulling covers over her head. "I don't want to see any more." – "You have to see this." Ben Saïd scrubs the video forward a minute. Panning, the camera shows the nurse planting a foot on the patient's chest. She is wearing an open-toed pump. A reptile embossed print decorates the platform underneath the instep. – "Did she make this for Dr Malenkov?"

VLOGS Ben Saïd suggests that Murasaki learned to influence people by appealing to their most deviant instincts. Early on she discovered that her developing anatomy was able to rouse some incestuous or pedophilic compulsion lying dormant in her father's sexuality. Now it has become second nature to discover the worst in everyone, and she assumes that the way to appeal to the patently degenerate libido of Dr Malenkov is through a series of neosadistic displays. Pausing, Ben Saïd recalls a voiceover from one of the documentaries playing at the Neuro Film Festival in the exhibit area. "The great majority of transvestites," it said, "do not suffer from temporal lobe epilepsy." Ben Saïd envisions a pornographic film staffed by epileptics, grand mal seizures capping their double-penetration scenes. "Ah," he sighs, an inner eye on the muscle spasms of concupiscent starlets, "never before has the human mind been exposed so relentlessly to such extreme deviance. It is as though we are utilizing pornography to refashion the sensorium. The futuropathy of Dr Malenkov may be no more than an attempt to renew perversity before the very concept loses its meaning." Kat nods in agreement, tracing the tip of her outstretched pinky across her face – the chin, the right half of the mouth (the lower lip from the middle to the corner, then the upper lip back to the middle), the rim of the right nostril, the bridge of the nose, the superciliary arch.

OF Ben Saïd lets Kat read the document lying on the glass surface of his desk in the same spirit as he allows a patient to catch sight of the female underthings beneath his white coat. She touches an unpainted nail to the page, scanning the small, close, irregular handwriting with sporadic erasures and mistakes. "A photograph," says the line under her finger, "drags the present into the future, but the white screen invites the future to inscribe itself in our present. It is like the green screen in film production. Artists will find it easy to insert their own images into the vlogs retroactively. They will illustrate Dr Malenkov's most outlandish predictions, such as the unique forms of deviance that will be inflicted on clones." Kat looks up. The psychological pressures that propel her to impersonate illnesses in the simulated patient facility also cause her to empathize with the human replicas victimized in Dr Malenkov's visions of impending degeneracy. She slides her finger down the page, pausing before a line that begins in mid-sentence, "his already fractured identity (Dr Malenkov, Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex). Cloning, the multiplication of bodies in space, externalizes a process of interior fragmentation aggravated by the deliberate pursuit of derangement." It occurs to Ben Saïd as he watches Kat that her cotton shift, like a paper gown, would be easy to tear off. Her vagina must be snug as a blood-pressure cuff.

DR Screams from the Psychiatric ICU reverberate in the corridor outside Ben Saïd's office. A patient is hallucinating about a foreign object being inserted into his urethra. "But you have such a big penis," the nurse teases as she pushes him on a stretcher. "It won't hurt if I just stick a little fork into it." – "What I don't understand," Kat admits, "is the difference between neural deviance and exocortical perversion." – Ben Saïd looks at her with a face like a death mask. "Ah yes. Bear in mind that Dr Malenkov is a specialist. Neural deviance is the deliberate manipulation of synaptic pathways in order to induce novel forms of pleasure. For example, one might tamper with the nerves to engender sexual excitement at the sight of normally disgusting stimuli: pus, armpit odor, a woman eating a cockroach. Exocortical perversions, in contrast, are those which can be extended beyond a single brain – embedded in external types of memory or swapped from head to head like game cartridges." – Kat withdraws a pack of French cigarettes from her handbag. The sleeve of her dress inches away from the wrist. A reddish incision runs perpendicular to the blue veins. Ben Saïd extends a hand toward Kat as though to touch the scab but she moves her arm away. He redirects his gesture to the paper lying on his steel desk, a printout of the study "Three Nonlethal Ligature Strangulations Filmed by an Autoerotic Practitioner."

MALENKOV Ben Saïd skims the preprint in the library. “A new type of perceptual disorder,” it states, “was identified in patients who treated pornographic images as if they were real.” He pauses to watch the student librarian shelve a book. As she reaches, her pink tee lifts to reveal the bare skin over the sacrum. The flesh fades into a blank screen. Dr Malenkov’s futuropathy is not without parallel to this new perceptual disorder. In each case, it is a matter of mistaking signs – obscene videos or prophetic visions – for realities. Each is also a representation of sex. It is entirely possible that the vlogs of Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex will become screenplays for the blue movies of the future – porn stars, their genitalia surgically enhanced to resemble stuffed animals or brightly colored toys, acting out scenarios based on the Creepy Simulation Paradox. “Touch my fur breasts... Fuck my blue pussy hard...” Interrupting is a noise like the paper sheet being torn from an exam table. The student librarian freezes – head down, hands in the air, fingers apart. Lying on the floor is a periodical. She looks up at Ben Saïd, a tooth catching her lower lip in a way that he interprets to mean, “Now that I have your attention...” If only, he thinks, she would do to me what I would like to do to her. There are sexual desires for which participants do not yet exist.

WITH “In Montreal there was never any doubt that Dr Malenkov was a brilliant neurosurgeon. It was his megalomania that caused people to criticize him. ‘Of course I play God,’ he would retort. ‘Who do you think my patients want screwing around inside their brains – the garbage man?’” Ben Saïd holds the door for Murasaki, who steps into the empty lab. The fluorescent bulbs cast a yellow-green light on the sinks, gas jets, and shelves of glassware. The animal surgical area at the far end resembles a miniature operating room. “This is where they found the dead monkey. It had been molested per rectum.” – A smile leaks through Murasaki’s face like pus through a wound dressing. – “Since the incident, they’ve installed surveillance cameras.” – “The future through the webcam of depravity.” She thinks of the camera in the infusion room. She can see herself donning a strap-on and penetrating Justin with no more feeling than she brings to the administration of a barium enema. She can see herself crouching over Justin in the posture she would use to squat over a dirty toilet – a facial repression experiment that reduces his head to a bedpan. She is not a neurosurgeon. She does not play God. She operates on the body, not the brain, in the theater of neosadism. – “What did you actually do to the monkey?” – The white of her eyes becomes a screen. “Would you like to see the video?”

RECORDINGS Murasaki switches off the lights in the radiology lounge. Illumination from the corridor saturates the frosted glass pane in the door. The glow reminds Kat of the doctor in Switzerland who assessed her before the brain-stimulation experiment for which she had volunteered. Asking her to gaze into the distance, he had pointed a penlight into each of her eyes. Afterward she could not help but associate bright light in a dark room with a feeling of imminent death and the vision of the bald man dressed in black. – Murasaki starts the video. The white screen empties Kat’s mind, preparing her for the oracles of lunatic sexuality announced by the barbiturate narration. Neurological pioneers, Dr Malenkov predicts, will find ways to transfer human minds to inorganic materials. This will result in “neural immortality.” The brains of the worst perverts can be embedded in non-biological devices. Fetishists will be clenched for eternity on the objects of their obsessive desires. Given an infinite amount of time, the Law of Diminishing Kicks will ensure that every conceivable sexual practice – “no matter how heinous or absurd” – will be attempted. There will arise exocortical perversions, unspeakable behaviors that formerly human brains will cause to occur between automata or machines. “In the future our Marquis de Sades will live forever.” When the vlog concludes, the white frame gives way to a replay button and recommendations for other videos by Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex.

OF Kat slumps into the orange banquette as though a lead blanket has been laid across her chest. “The vlogs deprive me of some basic freedom. I feel like a patient in an ambulance. Dr Malenkov is rushing me to post-depravity.” – Protruding from the hem of her black dress, Kat’s bare knees remind Ben Saïd of the med-school truism that a lab report should resemble a skirt: long enough to cover the subject, short enough to be enjoyable. “He offers no judgements.” As he speaks, Ben Saïd moves his hand – palm up, fingers curled, the gesture of a plastic surgeon weighing a new brand of breast implant. “But how can we object to pedophilia when Dr Malenkov predicts that prescription drugs will enable children to erase any memory of having been abused?” – Murasaki makes the face of a patient discovering blood in her urine. “I wouldn’t like that. Half the fun of being molested is replaying it in your mind.” Kat’s expression flattens. Lifting herself from the banquette, she crosses the lounge and exits into the corridor. “After I finger her,” Murasaki comments, “I will wipe it on her face and laugh.” In her voice is the irony she cannot restrain when lying to a patient about how long he has to live. Unhearing, Kat goes for a nap in an empty exam room at the simulated patient facility. Wrinkling her straight, unwaisted dress, she dreams of white screens.

HERSELF The hospital stationery is covered with a small, close, irregular handwriting with sporadic erasures and mistakes. Murasaki touches it deliberately, as though to declare her disrespect for personal boundaries. Ben Saïd stares at her lacquered fingernails, which she places at the beginning of each line that she scans. "The mind of Dr Malenkov," she reads, "was so full of strange visions that neurosurgery became a vicarious attempt to cope with his own brain. The damaged ganglia of his patients were surrogates for his own troubled intelligence. The repairs he performed so brilliantly stood in stark contrast to his inability to reconcile his worsening psychosis with the world. As a result, he abandoned the operating room to conceal himself behind these white screens. They form an isolation unit where his futuropathic phantasms are able to proliferate without control." – As she reads, Ben Saïd thinks of the infusion room. Inside Justin is bound to a chair. His arms are fastened behind him and his ankles are attached to the chair's legs. Adhesive tape holds a wad of gauze in his mouth. There is a webcam that enables Murasaki to surveil Justin from a remote location. She can also record her interactions with him – a necessary point in her plan to contact Dr Malenkov. "How do you feel about Justin?" he asks. – "He's a patient. I don't feel anything about him." Murasaki looks at Ben Saïd with a face like an unfilled prescription.

ENGAGING Ben Saïd locks the door as Murasaki settles onto the orange banquette. “We are bombarded with representations of bestiality, fisting, vampirism, urolagnia, amputee fetishism. Sex crimes have made sex itself obsolete.” – Murasaki undoes the button at the neck of her uniform. “Yes, except that it has all been decriminalized. Post-depravity.” – Ben Saïd pulls up the vlog of Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex. The screen glows like the pane of frosted glass in the door, which is suffused with light from the corridor. A voice tranquil as a morphine drip describes a future in which cloning technology makes new forms of sadism inevitable. – Ben Saïd turns to Murasaki. Her uniform extends the white screen of the vlog. Silent desires play a pornographic film across its surface. “Can I put on your uniform?” – “Yes.” Murasaki unfastens the buttons. She is not wearing a bra. The garment slides off her shoulders and skims over her bare skin as it falls. Slipping off his scrubs, Ben Saïd squeezes into the dress. It smells of Chanel No. 5. His rectilinear physique does not conform to the bust darts or the elastic that gives shape to the back. But the brushed cotton excites his skin and he is soon masturbating with the squeezing motions of a hand inflating a blood-pressure cuff. – Bored, Murasaki watches the end of the vlog. “Clones,” it declares, “will be the new blacks in the slave trade of lust.”

IN Ben Saïd ejaculates with a flinch like a child receiving a tetanus shot. Cupping Justin's chin in her hand, Murasaki smears sperm across his parted lips. It falls in clots onto the collar of the pink button-down he has worn since being tied up. She picks the rest from her mons. It feels like antibacterial gel. "Did you choose," she addresses him, "to be a pharmaceutical rep?" In response Justin only coughs up blood. "You see? He has no excuse." – Ben Saïd is deleting emails from his phone. "I was dictating a patient note," he says distractedly, "and the voice transcription software fucked up 'MRI.' The note came out, 'The immoral eye shows a brain tumor.'" – "What should we do to him next?" – Ben Saïd gestures to the webcam. "Something neurosurgical might rouse Dr Malenkov. A lobotomy..." An image enters their minds. A power drill bores a hole the size of a cock ring into Justin's skull. – Murasaki gestures as though dismissing a subordinate. She hasn't climaxed. Ben Saïd's penis, long and thin as a rectal thermometer, is good for anal sex but for vaginal she needs something with more girth, like a blunt object. "Let's untie him." Murasaki undoes the fetters but Justin only sits there, a human illustration of learned helplessness. She leans her hand against his face. Her thumb pushes down on the lower lash line and her finger pushes upward on the lid. "Helloo? Koonniichiiwaa?"

DEBAUCHERY Ben Saïd steps into the underground tunnel connecting the buildings. White tile covers the walls. Hissing, knocking pipes form veins and arteries attached to the ceiling. Set at intervals along the way, bare bulbs cast a sickly light on stray wheelchairs beached beside broken vending machines. Further down, near the morgue, the tunnel walls turn gray and a red line on the floor leads with inevitability toward the dead. Thinking, Ben Saïd fingers the razor cut that wends like an EKG tracing across his chin. What is Dr Malenkov's comportment toward his delusions? Is he tormented by them? A man who feels harassed by his visions of the future retains some underlying sanity. But a man who enjoys his delusions, who collaborates with his own psychosis, is like a patient who exults in an inoperable wound or malignant growth. There is no point trying to cure him. "We all have to follow our desires to their logical conclusions," Ben Saïd mutters. Kat, clad in a black dress with a high neckline and long sleeves, emerges from a stairwell. Her breasts are flat as defibrillator paddles. Her hip bones jut out at angles from her pelvis. She seems ready to play a role in Dr Malenkov's futuropathy comparable to the vaginitis she knows how to perform in the simulated patient facility. Brooding, she fails to notice Ben Saïd and continues with an even gait in the direction of the autopsy suites.

STOP Ben Saïd reviews the video capture in his office. Justin inhabits a chair like a patient gassed for the extraction of a tooth. Murasaki holds up the nailgun before the webcam. Compressing her lips, she pushes the power tool into Justin's groin. His body lurches forward against its restraints with the same violence Ben Saïd has seen in a monkey who, as the result of a neurosurgical experiment, exhibited a permanent aggressive rage. According to Murasaki, the puncture wounds – one at the left pubis, another through the shaft of the penis – bled relatively little. There was disappointment in her voice. Finishing with the video, Ben Saïd reaches into his white coat to adjust a bra strap. The softness of lingerie contrasts with but does not compensate for the hardness of spirit that enables him to watch the torments of Justin with a clinician's eye. Dr Malenkov interests Ben Saïd not because he cares about the future but because he feels fate has put him in position to chart a new illness, futuropathy. Similarly, he sees in Murasaki the vanguard of an emergent pathology: neosadism. – Ben Saïd rewinds the video to watch it again. He sees different details this time, such as the way Murasaki's face turns cold as an ice pack. It all but forms the counterpoint to Dr Malenkov's dictum that "'normal' sexual behavior is like a faked smile." There is nothing fake about her resolve to inflict pain.

MURASAKI A gray-yellow stain expands on the wall of the unfinished MRI suite, water damage caused by a leak that the striking workers refuse to repair. In the corner lies an abandoned box of face shields that no one has yet thought to vandalize. Murasaki describes Justin's injury. "It's just a puncture wound at the left pubis and another through the shaft of the penis." She bats her lashes, a gesture that says "What, me, neosadistic?" Kat lights a cigarette, grateful that the smoke represses the vague smell of sepsis in the air. "Why did you do that to him?" – "I found a nailgun in the corridor." Her perfunctory tone suggests that the outcome ought to be self-evident. A smile spreads like cancer across her face. "The hard part was getting the nail out. I had to use pliers." – Kat nods, the movement of her head offering an empathy (yes, it is always hard to get the nail out) that she does not feel. Drawing on the cigarette, Kat thinks about the role that pedophilia seems to play in the futuropathy of Dr Malenkov. "To molest a girl is to transform her future into your past." Does her interest in the deranged futurist have anything to do with her own... She can't bring herself to verbalize it. Some nocturnist has graffitied "we are voluntary prisoners of institutional architecture" above the floorplan tacked to the wall behind the face shields.

TORTURES The infusion room is quiet. The stalled renovations have not detracted from the tranquility of the windowless space, designed to serve as an oasis of mood lighting and flat-screen televisions for the wasted recipients of chemotherapy. Kat watches as Murasaki replaces Justin's fetters, tying a white cord in intricate knots around his abdomen. In her mind she can hear Ben Saïd's reaction to a recent vlog. "The escalation of his futuropathy caused Dr Malenkov to give patients increasingly surreal diagnoses, things with preposterous names like 'cognitive vulvodynia' and 'venereal disease of the amygdala.' These led to unnecessary and sometimes reckless surgical procedures – lobotomies intended, he claimed, to destroy the brain regions that process sexual inhibitions, frigidity, repressed memories of child abuse. There was the cheerleader in Montreal..." Finishing a knot, Murasaki pauses to examine her captive. A thin mold of black hair has spread from his cheekbones to his neck. His complexion has gone from pink to white. His eyes have all the life of pustules. "Faces," she declares, "are like television networks. There are too many channels and none of them are interesting." She wedges an adult diaper into Justin's mouth and covers it with adhesive tape. He groans. Mmmwwuhm. – "We should clean him up," Kat suggests. – Murasaki looks at Justin with an eye that has seen one too many necrotic pressure sores to care. "You do it. I shouldn't get anywhere near him with a razor blade."

A Wires dangle from outlets which the striking electricians fail to repair. They remind Kat of the electrodes sprouting from monkeys in the animal lab. Half their skulls have been replaced by Plexiglas hemispheres that enable scientists to tinker with their brains. Their suffering advances neurology, then neurology gives rise to a new form of degeneracy envisioned by Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex – neural deviants wantonly altering synaptic pathways in order to trigger desires the likes of which have never been natural to man. – Taking a washcloth, Kat daubs at Justin’s forehead. He is not dirty but there is something about him that recalls meat left too long in a freezer. She shaves him and holds the webcam to his face. The close-up connects him to the radiology lounge, where Murasaki crouches on the orange banquette. Ben Saïd is behind her, penetrating her rectum with the air of a man performing a spinal tap. Justin looms on the wall-mounted display. His cheeks are sunken. The dark patches underneath his eyes reproduce the gray-yellow water stains marring the corridor outside the infusion room. Suddenly Murasaki knows what Dr Malenkov would do with Justin. The burgeoning of facial transplant surgery, he predicted, will give rise to new forms of perversion. “Oooohh,” she gasps. Murasaki is in the posture of a drunk hanging onto a toilet. The motions of the abdomen during orgasm are similar to those caused by vomiting.

PHARMACEUTICAL Kat lies on an exam table at the simulated patient facility – hands at her sides, head on a pillow, knees gently bent so that her feet rest on the table. A white sheet covers her legs and the sleeveless cotton gown is scrunched up beneath her breasts. The present shudders away. Ben Saïd had shown her a snapshot of Dr Malenkov taken before his lecture tour in Asia. One hand lay flat against the papers scattered across his desktop. The other raised a black pen as though the flow of words had been interrupted by a moment of indecision or doubt. The visible portion of the face formed a profile perdu. Shivering on the exam table, Kat tries to complete the image but can only muster up a standard face, an anonymous shape like the identikit portrait of a murderer in the newspaper. – The student returns to the room and washes his hands. Pressing his fingers to her midriff, he asks her questions suggesting he will diagnose a hernia. He is not yet experienced enough to be mindful of the statistics showing that children who have been sexually abused become adults who are prone to nausea and abdominal pain. He does, however, notice the self-inflicted lacerations lining Kat's arms. These remind him of a paper about Munchausen Syndrome. It made the point that patients who self-harm or who simulate injuries undermine the social contract between doctor and patient.

REP “The future,” Ben Saïd is saying, “comes in fragments. This might well provide the rationale for Dr Malenkov’s derangement of the senses. The poet’s method is a subjective way to mirror the quanta of futurity contained in predictions.” He watches as Murasaki injects a semen-colored substance, the “milk of amnesia,” into an intravenous line tethered to Justin’s arm. “Dr Malenkov,” he continues, “may not have abandoned the *Manifesto for the Future of Fucking*. He may simply have been making a point about the relationship between prophecy and fragmentation.” Not bothering to attach instruments that monitor vital functions, Murasaki squirts the remaining drug into the neck of her unbuttoned uniform. As she smears the fluid into the skin over the internal mammary lymph nodes, Ben Saïd recalls the pleasure he experiences when informing a woman about the burning, ulceration, discoloration, and soft-tissue contraction that can disfigure her breasts as a result of radiation. More than once he has found a patient willing to let him ejaculate on a damaged bosom as a way of assuaging her ruined sense of sex appeal. – Murasaki licks the drug from a fingertip. “It tastes like garlic.” – They wheel the gurney bearing Justin into the corridor. The exposed wires, open ceiling, and unpainted walls form a still-life inside the infusion room. A wet smell like sepsis infects the air. The webcam records the now empty chair. Murasaki covers Justin with a white sheet.

TO Ben Saïd steers the gurney past the brackish puddle in the corridor. Nocturnists stricken with ennui have graffitied "Cancer LOL" on the wall. "It is rare," Ben Saïd is saying, "to find a lump in the breast of an adolescent, so I asked the patient to allow me to document her case rather thoroughly. I have a wonderful video of the biopsy. She had these little bump tits..." – Murasaki interrupts with a dictum from Dr Malenkov. "To molest a girl is to increase the predictability of her sexual future." – "Of course. This particular patient died of radiation-induced sarcoma. But there is another way to look at it." – Pausing near the unfinished MRI suite, Murasaki removes her flats to don black pumps. She runs her fingers down the side of her calf, highlighting the reptile-embossed platforms and the points of the heels which taper to tiny squares. As she walks, the shoes resound in the corridor like a ticking clock. – "You can conceive a child," Ben Saïd continues, "by fertilizing it in vitro. You can't molest a child in the same way. That still requires a human interaction. Ironically, pedophilia can serve as a refuge for our very humanity." They bang through the double swinging doors of the disused operating room. The stainless steel drums attached to the ceiling cast a white light on the figure in blue scrubs. His assistant adjusts the camera balanced atop a black tripod.

DEATH White but soiled panties lie in a heap around Kat's left foot. Her right leg is cantilevered over a ceramic toilet in the bathroom outside the simulated patient facility. Holding a tampon in the same fingers she uses to write, Kat aims toward the small of her back and pushes the applicator into the vaginal canal. As she positions the soft cotton plug, she thinks of the paper documenting one of Dr Malenkov's early experiments. He had required subjects to watch traumatic video of sexual assaults. Some were told to keep still while they watched the footage and others were hypnotized so that they were unable to move. A final group was free to do as it liked. Afterward the subjects kept a diary documenting intrusive thoughts and images associated with the videos. These showed that spatial restriction intensified the trauma simulation, perhaps due to associations with being trapped or frozen in terror. – Removing the applicator, Kat notices a daub of blood marring her unpainted fingernail. The white string hangs like the end of a suture between her thighs. This interest in spatial restriction, it seems to her, foreshadowed Dr Malenkov's self-confinement to the premises. The image of Justin bound to a chair in the infusion room flares through her mind. He is the antipode of the subjects in Dr Malenkov's experiment. They were immobilized while watching traumatic videos. Justin is immobilized so that his trauma can be videoed.

BEFORE Murasaki bends over the operating table, skirt hiked up. A hand grips her shoulder from behind. A point of red light, the recording indicator on the camera, marks the location of the black tripod in the disused theater. Murasaki rotates her pelvis against Hans as the “surgeon” disconnects Justin’s face from the carotid artery. Ben Saïd leans over the patient, peering as though he has lost a contact lens. He watches the scalpel saw through sensory nerves and subcutaneous tissue. Is it Dr Malenkov’s madness, he asks himself, to believe that he can predict the future? Or is he influencing it, guiding us toward a future of his own design? If so, if he is shaping the time to come, is it a future in the image of his madness? That’s a tautology – a futuropathic future, a future that deludes itself about its own futurity... The surgeon frees the facial flap and lifts it in his hands. The front of Justin’s head offers a meaty tangle of fat, mucosa, ligaments, muscles. The eyeballs, white orbs protruding from a surface that resembles scrambled eggs mixed with ketchup, invoke another of Dr Malenkov’s prophecies. One of his vlogs argues that transplant surgeries will become so safe and simple that the human body will achieve an astonishing degree of modularity. Organs, for example, can be loaned rather than donated. “Why not rent out your eyes at night? You don’t need them to dream.”

A Kat is lying in an exam room at the simulated patient facility. Her posture produces tiny creases in her straight, unwaisted dress – in the armpits, underneath the breasts, at the top of the thighs. She drifts off with snatches of conversation in her head, “There are issues about vaccinating children, so we’re going with non-children.” She can see a mattress on the floor. She removes her dress and lies down. A man steps onto the mattress and it tilts crazily toward his black shoes. “Start masturbating,” he says, pressing the button on a stopwatch. She reaches between her legs but her vagina is missing. There is just a smooth triangle of flesh like the groin of a Barbie doll. The clock is ticking. She can’t breathe. Tick, tick... When she wakes up, Kat senses that the dream reenacts the anesthesia by face mask that she experienced during a tonsillectomy at the age of fourteen. Taking a sip from the bottle of Ethos water, she washes down a little pink pill then checks her phone. Ben Saïd has emailed her a link about a study that subjected transcripts of flirting couples to an algorithmic analysis: “women use more ‘I’ and less ‘we’; men use more ‘we’ and ‘you.’” Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex has posted a white paper about orgies and antibiotic resistance. The future, she thinks, is full of crazy fucking but nobody seems to love each other.

WEBCAM The skin of the neck has been pared into two flaps with square edges. They resemble the pull tabs on a box of tampons. Tugging, the “surgeon” stretches Justin’s flesh across Murasaki’s face. It feels warm and wet, like a washcloth. A rivulet of blood runs behind her ear into a small puddle on the tiled floor. Ben Saïd watches as Murasaki sticks out her tongue through Justin’s face. Her crooked teeth are visible. This parody of a facial transplant is geared toward an invisible spectator. It is only too easy to imagine Dr Malenkov reviewing this snuff film in the S&M R&D Lab. “The missionary position,” he would observe, “united humanity in a great chain of being. In dispensing with reproduction, perversion breaks this chain. Post-depravity is the way that an entire form of life pursues its destruction through sex.” The surgeon flips a purple erection from his blue scrubs. Hans takes the camera from the tripod and zooms in. The surgeon pushes his cock through Justin’s face into Murasaki’s mouth. She makes the sound of a patient whose throat is being suctioned. The facial flap slides around. Justin’s nose lies across her cheek. His forehead covers one of her eyes. The surgeon rotates it back into place, turning it like a dial around his cock. A spot of moisture appears on his surgical mask. He must be drooling or his tongue must be hanging out.

STOP The walls of the disused operating room form a square lined with gray ceramic tiles. Attached to the ceiling are two stainless steel drums that cast light on the “surgeon” kneeling over Murasaki. He grips her black hair as he removes his cock from her mouth through Justin’s face. When he climaxes, it is not violent or passionate. It is not a heart attack, a traumatic wound, an aneurysm bursting to the tune of the Brandenburg Concerto. It happens in slow motion – the eyes hard, staring, with the sheen of self-preserving irony acquired in dissection labs; the cock immobile, poised over the facial flap and the nose flattened against Murasaki’s cheek; the ejaculate emerging in a viscous lump the color of a tumor mass, not spurting or streaming but falling out in a single gob, as though it had been chilled. With two fingertips, Murasaki massages the semen into Justin’s cheek. Her vagina leaks like a ruptured artery. Watching, Ben Saïd is tempted to type a note. Is it really the face that is exhausted? Or is it Dr Malenkov? The less he interacts with the world at large, the more abstract he becomes. Ben Saïd’s own recollections of his former colleague are undercut by the minimalist vlogs with their narcotic narration. Dr Malenkov has all but disappeared into a white screen, leaving an afterglow of the depraved future to linger in the poisoned eyes of his adoring public.

MURASAKI Hans is already above Murasaki, knees on either side of her head, holding the video camera with one hand and beating off with the other. His penis resembles a thumb in a splint, small but stiff. The skin is purple-blue like the splotches caused by asphyxiation. He grips it at the base, thumb and forefinger forming a tourniquet or cock ring, and ejaculates quickly. Looping her fingers like retractors into the corners of Justin's mouth, Murasaki pulls it open wide and catches a few drops of the clear, thin semen on her tongue. It tastes like mushrooms. Images veer through her head: abnormal heart rhythms, the webcam of depravity, the research showing elevated rates of psychosis in adults who were sexually abused during early adolescence. Standing to the side, Ben Saïd returns to the case study formulating in his mind. Dr Malenkov, he repeats to himself, is a 45-year-old white male. He trained as a neurosurgeon but became known for his work on perverse sexuality. He began to exhibit symptoms of mental derangement during a lecture tour in Asia. On his return, he gradually withdrew from social life and styled himself a prophet, posting white papers and vlogs about a future state he calls "post-depravity." He was relieved of his teaching duties when it was revealed that he... "Ok," says Hans, gesturing to Ben Saïd with the point of red light on the camera. "Your turn."

TORTURES Murasaki gags. Ben Saïd’s penis is long and thin as a rectal thermometer. The irony is not lost on him as he squashes Justin’s face between his pubic bone and Murasaki’s nose. He is a man wearing a woman’s undergarments. Murasaki is a woman wearing a man’s face. Perhaps he should stretch the facial flap across her buttocks and fuck her in the ass through Justin’s mouth. But suddenly he has a vision of a breathing tube bubbling with the frothy pink fluid produced by a pulmonary edema. Ejaculating, his eyes fall on the box of isolation gowns stored in the corner of the disused operating room. The gray ceramic tiles lining the walls form a blank surface like the white screen of the vlogs. What makes Ben Saïd skeptical about Dr Malenkov is his conviction that there is little left to predict. It is not just mad to believe that you are a prophet. It is mad to believe that there is a future. To have the slightest hope for more than the next six minutes is a symptom of a fundamental inability to fathom the apocalyptic potentials of the present. Perhaps “post-depravity” is only a way of saying that we can do what we want today because there will be no tomorrow. – Murasaki spits up into the underside of Justin’s face. Sperm and a little stomach acid. That’s it, thinks Ben Saïd. He’s a vomit sack. Voilà.

KAT In the observation theater of the simulated patient facility, Kat replays the video of her last encounter. She watches from the vantage point of the camera as the student enters, takes her history, and asks about the self-inflicted cuts on her forearms. She sees herself redirect his attention to her pelvis, at which point he questions her about discharge, bleeding, sexual history. "Have you ever," he continues, "inserted a foreign object into your vagina?" – "A foreign object?" – "A vibrator." – "No." – "A vegetable." – "No." – "A common object... A hairbrush..." – "Of course not." – Lying on the exam table, a sleeveless cotton gown scrunched up beneath her breasts, she recalls the foreign objects on display in the exhibit area – pens, forks, nine-volt batteries, razor blades extracted from the orifices of deranged patients. "Visions of the future," Ben Saïd had commented, "are foreign bodies in the mind of Dr Malenkov." Then again, thinks Kat, his visions may be nothing more than projections of his own lusts. When he speaks about V space, noting that there are limits to the size, shape, color, and texture of the human vagina, is it so he can justify an unwholesome interest in the third of the five stages of puberty (female)? Kat can recall her girlfriend from the simulated patient facility, a specialist in the symptoms of human papillomavirus, remarking that "Dr Malenkov is just an older man angry at young girls for their sexual inaccessibility."

TO Drawing the applicator brush across a nail, Murasaki applies a polish the pearly color of semen. The white rectangles at her fingertips mirror the blank visuals of Dr Malenkov's vlog, as though she is publicizing her commitment to the illicit sexuality of the future: post-depravity, neosadism, clone incest, sentient fuck machines, neural deviance. But it is exhibitionism mixed with cruelty and pridefulness that causes her to invite Kat to the darkened radiology lounge. Perched on the edge of the orange banquette, Kat scrubs back and forth in the footage from the disused operating room. She sees the surgeon deglove the face and Ben Saïd ejaculate with the pained expression of a man passing a kidney stone. "Bukkake for Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex," Kat murmurs. She watches Ben Saïd address the camera: "In cloning Dr Malenkov sees a technology that can cause a single face to be distributed across a number of bodies. They become a grid of televisions tuned to the same channel. Conversely, allotransplantation opens up the prospect of a single body that can host a number of faces. It transforms the head into a screen for the broadcast of faces. And then there is the more radical prospect of a body without a face – a white screen." Ben Saïd gestures to the body on the gurney. Murasaki pours Ethos water over the meaty tangle of fat, mucosa, and ligaments where Justin's countenance used to be.

DEATH The All Faith Chapel is empty but it smells of semen. A forgotten bra hangs limply over the back of a pew. Kat twists a pink tissue into little pellets that resemble antipsychotic pills. She closes her eyes. Her heart is a cancer hospice where some feeling has just died. Fee-fi-fo-fum. The snuff film from the disused operating room horrified her but it also confirmed her sense of doom. She looks upon Justin the way a terminally ill patient might look on another who has submitted to physician-assisted suicide. Also the footage reminded her of the training films that had taught her to portray various ailments – including certain sexual pathologies of adolescence – in the simulated patient facility. It was preparing her for a new role, the female lead in a drama about desire and oblivion. Post-depravity: the moment when perversity and normality become coextensive. – Kat opens her eyes. The faux stained glass is abstract, like the screen of Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex’s vlogs. She can hear his narcotic voice. It is that of the hypnotherapist commencing a regression. “The future,” he declares, “is getting shorter. The further we move into it, the closer we get to the end.” Kat stands to leave. A black pen and a guestbook lie on a counter by the door. It has become the custom for those who fuck in the chapel to leave obscene drawings and remarks.

ON The director of the gross lab watches as Murasaki lifts herself from his pelvis, disengaging her vagina from his genitalia with the dispassionate air of a technician turning off a life-support system. Standing up, she pulls a clot of semen from her pubic hair. It resembles the antibacterial gel which he keeps in a tube in the pocket of his white coat. "Thank you," she says, flicking the semen onto the floor. He understands what she refers to – not this lurching fuck on a lab bench but the body which, without asking questions, he had disposed of. – "You're still preoccupied with Dr Malenkov," he states. – Murasaki fixes him with a gaze invasive as a prostate exam. Ignoring the faint smell of formalin in his hair, she had fantasized about her father while moving up and down on his spindly frame. She is not unaware that men his age experience heart attacks in the arms of a woman like her. Their skin turns gray. Perspiration coats their brow. One side of their face droops. Their speech slurs. A final spasm wracks their body. They ejaculate like criminals being executed, gasping and cursing before lapsing into post-coital rigor mortis. – "Has it occurred to you that his work may be self-defeating? The future might well hear his predictions and say, 'No, we refuse to let ourselves be like that.'" – "I'm already like that," Murasaki ripostes, voice like a lethal injection.

VIDEO Kat settles onto the chaise longue beside the ficus tree. Her skin feels greasy, her hair oily, her nails dirty. To have such a sordid dream was like lying on the sheets of a bed where a patient has died. (The simulated patient facility became the gross lab. She lay naked on a slab while a student prepared to dissect her. Death has become a repetitive thought, thought, thought.) “We don’t do this enough,” Kat offers, glad to turn her face to the sunlight filtering through the glass ceiling of the Well-Being Lounge. – “Do what?” Murasaki is typing “Of course pornography is a form of violence against women. That’s why I like it” into a text message. – “Come here for sun, air, quiet. Simple pleasures.” – Murasaki hits send. “Simple pleasures? To me, it is a simple pleasure to be pissed on or gagged with my own panties. What I need are complex pleasures.” Murasaki has spoken about taking immunosuppressants and going on a fuck spree to see what weird infections she can pick up. Complex pleasures are dark, elaborate, mad. – “Are you going to submit the video to Dr Malenkov?” – “I put it in an interoffice envelope and pushed it beneath the door of the S&M R&D Lab.” – “What if a janitor finds it?” – Murasaki looks up from her phone. “So what?” In her eyes is the defiance of a patient who signs out against medical advice.

STOP Murasaki is skimming the headlines of a Japanese newspaper on her phone: "Rising Number of People Dying Alone in Tokyo." Kat lies on the chaise like a patient who has expired in her sleep. Spilling through the glass ceiling, the last rays of sunset focus on her with the bright glare of a speculum light. "Have you had any sign that Dr Malenkov has received the videos you slip underneath the door of the S&M R&D Lab?" – Murasaki peers at Kat. "No." Her mouth twists into a strange shape as though the lips have been replaced by a bit of tendon from the leg. "The thing I don't like about psychogynecology," Murasaki insists, "is that I would rather touch a patient's vagina than explore her mental problems." – "Touching her vagina is what causes mental problems." If, Kat wonders, "anything wrong with the vagina is really mental," should gynecologists treat men too? The narcotic voice begins to murmur in her mind, describing a future deviant who approaches cosmetic surgeons with the mad desire to transform his face into the head of a penis: permanently remove the hair, seal up the eyes and nose, transform the mouth into a little opening for urine and semen. "It's much easier," Murasaki comments, "to transform a face into a vagina." – "How so?" – "Just hit someone in the forehead with a hatchet." – "Ugh." – "But the face is like a hymen. You can break it."

THESE The lecture hall is illuminated by the slide showing the posterior wall and fornix of the vagina. "Radiation in the pelvic region," Ben Saïd declares from the podium, "can destroy ovarian function and result in scar tissue." Kat takes a seat among the students in the last row. The slide touches her like a pap smear. In the dim light cast by an image of the pudendal cleft she can make out the first page of the doctoral thesis concerning Dr Malenkov. "The white wall," it says, "serves as a substitute for the face in the pseudonymous vlogs." For Kat, the substitution desexualizes the face – no leering, drooling, or committing rape with the eyes. "Is it the result of Dr Malenkov's preference to inhabit the space outside the lens? Or does this white wall contend that the face should be unphotogenic, expressionless, inscrutable? Furthermore, is facial repression a symptom of Dr Malenkov's futuropathy?" For Murasaki, Dr Malenkov's restraint in regard to the face is an effort not to exhaust the sexual possibilities of anonymity. "We are in too great a hurry to get to know each other. We become intimate so quickly that we are unable to know what it's like to fuck each other as strangers." Kat tries to remember the Japanese expression Murasaki mentioned, something along the lines of "muen shakai," a no-relationship society. Ben Saïd flips to the next slide. A carcinoma lights up the hall.

SNUFF Makeup does to Murasaki's lips what vasocongestion does to the vaginal walls. They are darker, moister, more pronounced. "Come, Daddy," she says, reclining on the exam table. Her vagina gapes open like the drain at the bottom of a urinal. The endocrinologist plunges in. He has a flat, muscular, heavy body that weighs on her like a lead apron. His white coat flaps against her knees. Bored, she reaches for her phone and reads her email over his shoulder. Kat has cc'd her on a note asking whether it is possible to copyright a prediction. "Not if it's true," Ben Saïd replies to all, "because the future belongs to everyone." Yet Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex claims privileged access to it, and there are others to whom the future cannot belong, such as the old man in the ER with the skin so thin over his bones that it resembles cellophane wrapped around a chicken breast. Switching off her phone, Murasaki stares at the gray-yellow stain expanding on the ceiling tiles. Kat likes to cut herself. Murasaki would like to cut her too. With a disposable scalpel she would make incisions in Kat's abdomen. The incisions would spell out "S&M R&D." – The endocrinologist ejaculates with the face of a man whose head is being pushed under water. Murasaki can smell the semen he sprays across her mons. It is reminiscent of Lysol mold and mildew remover.

FILMS During the day, the oversized screen attached to one wall of the radiology lounge is used to display educational material to patients. After hours, it is used to view pornography, videos drawn from Ben Saïd’s library of prophylactic mastectomies, and the vlogs of Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex. Playing across it now is an amateur film centered on a man whose fetish is to be punched in the genitalia. “Aha,” says Ben Saïd as Murasaki enters. “Should I fast-forward to the scene where he gets a patient from the Psychiatric ICU to pulp his testicles?” – “That’s kid stuff.” A hint of Chanel No. 5 emanates from Murasaki’s brushed cotton uniform but her skin smells of semen. – “Do you think that Justin experienced any pain?” – “Not enough. Next time we won’t use a sedative.” There is a pause like the moment that bad news sets in. They watch as the man kneels before a toilet, lifts the lid, and places his scrotum on the ceramic rim. Holding his penis out of the way with a hand, he rams the lid closed on his testicles. A female in stockings and black pumps steps onto the seat and bears down. The man flails and vomits. “A fetishist,” Dr Malenkov has said, “is like a man who yearns to die. He aligns his will with his fate and throws himself into the unknown. Fetishes are to sex what suicides are to death.”

ELICIT “Another of the experiments,” Ben Saïd is saying, “that Dr Malenkov performed in the S&M R&D Lab. He enlisted dominatrixes to inflict a standardized set of sexual tortures on 24 ‘volunteers.’ During the scenarios, he asked the subjects once a minute to rate their pain on a scale of 0-10. Afterward he quizzed them on the total amount of pain they experienced. What puzzled Dr Malenkov about the results was the fact that total pain was disconnected from duration of pain. Participants tortured for only a few minutes often reported worse pain totals than those enduring hours-long psychodramas. How could this be? What he determined after a few more rounds of abuse was that total pain levels were reducible to a formula: (worst pain + concluding pain) ÷ 2. Victims only remembered the worst moment and the end, not all the awful moments in-between.” – Murasaki smiles, mouth opening like a wound held apart by surgical clamps. “Could we apply this to other forms of abuse?” – “Of course. If you sexually assault someone, you should finish gently, professing love. The victim would then remember the assault through the lens of endearment which you place at the end.” – Murasaki looks up at the oversized screen attached to the wall of the radiology lounge. She can see a video of her girlhood playing across it. Her father beats her for seducing him then cries “Daddy loves you” over and over.

NO Seeing Kat enter the radiology lounge, Murasaki and Ben Saïd fall silent. Evidently they were speaking about her. Kat feels like one of the dramatis personae described by the study of horror films: “sexual female characters are less likely to survive and have significantly longer death scenes.” The actress in her senses that it is a diversionary tactic when Ben Saïd launches into a monologue on a well-worn theme. “As I was saying, Dr Malenkov’s refusal to leave the airports was clearly a warning sign of his incipient futuropathy. It was as though he was giving up on the dimension of space in order to obsess over time.” – Getting up from the orange banquette, Murasaki pulls at her uniform like an aide straightening a bedsheet. “I want somebody to play a game with me in the ER.” She takes Kat’s hand. A fine network of capillaries is visible beneath the wan skin of the wrist. “Blood-transmitted-infection roulette.” Murasaki lifts a finger to her mouth, kisses the tip, then touches it to Kat’s inner elbow above the median cubital vein. “Whenever a junky comes in, we draw blood, then prick ourselves with the same needle. The loser is whoever gets HIV or Hep C first. Would you like to play?” – Kat looks at her pale arm. There is already a scar, the result of a self-inflicted razor cut, at the spot Murasaki has marked with a kiss.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT They stare into the white screen of the vlog as Dr Malenkov, voice like an intravenous drip, describes the impact that new forms of phalloplasty will have on sexual fetishism. Biting her lower lip with a crooked tooth, Murasaki files her nails with an emery board. Kat slumps into the orange banquette. Tiny creases in the fabric of her straight, unwaisted dress outline the figure that enables her to replicate adolescent pathologies in the simulated patient facility. Ben Saïd asks if the two have heard about Dr Malenkov's investigation into the nature of time perception during sexual assault. "He formulated an experiment in which subjects pledged to count off the seconds during a rape to occur at a random moment. Subsequently Dr Malenkov timed the rapes with a stopwatch. The resulting paper is an underground classic in the literature of time perception. It includes a graph showing that the more traumatic the rape, the longer the victim's estimate of the time that passed. Just as slow motion requires a camera to shoot more than the usual frames per second, the victim's mental clock went faster and faster as the assault increased in violence." – "It must have been difficult," Kat observes, "to recruit volunteers." – "That women would subject themselves to these assaults says something about the fanaticism which Dr Malenkov inspired in his students." – "I would totally do that." Murasaki points the emery board at Kat like a knife. "Would you?"

FROM Murasaki lies on the table in the center of the disused operating room. The walls form a square lined with gray ceramic tiles. Murasaki's hands have been tied to the table legs with bondage rope. A tear in her uniform runs from the neckline to the navel, exposing her breasts to the light cast by two stainless steel drums attached to the ceiling. The skin is white but the abuse has caused splotches as red as the stickers the label machine prints for patients who need labs drawn. An assistant balances a video camera atop a black tripod, pointing it at the lone figure in blue scrubs as he pinches up flesh from Murasaki's left breast and mashes it with a reflex hammer. Her mind goes blank and bright like a projector with no input signal. It is a vlog playing inside of her, the barbiturate voice of Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex describing the S&M R&D Lab experiments intended to probe the limits of safe words... Whack... But the blows interfere with Murasaki's focus. Her mind skips. She sees a couple who agree on a safe word, but while they have sex the dominant goes insane. The safe word loses its prearranged meaning and becomes an incitement. Each time it is invoked, the dom only bears down harder... Whack... Hans glances at the stopwatch. "How much time do you think has passed?" – "Kimochi ii... Don't... Stop..."

DR "He was working on the *Manifesto for the Future of Fucking*. Before the lecture tour in Asia, he had me image a female student while she masturbated in the MRI." Ben Saïd pushes a grid of twelve scans across the glass surface topping his steel desk. Each shows a gray shape like a snail curled in a shell. "These different slices are taken at a single moment of time. They form a snapshot of the brain at the instant of orgasm." An alert surfaces on the screen of Ben Saïd's computer. "Video chat invitation from Lucy Lee." Turning from Kat, he speaks to the Korean dominatrix with whom he has been planning an elaborate act of erotic asphyxiation. Staring into the webcam, the dominatrix runs a brush through her long black tresses, a gesture signaling that her client is subordinate even to trivialities such as hair care. Meanwhile Ben Saïd grows visibly excited as he enthuses about cardiac inhibition, interruption to cerebral blood flow, occlusion of vessels in the neck. Listening, Kat wonders if he might break out into Latin when he ejaculates: *fornix, vulva cerebri, oh baby...* She closes her eyes against the dominatrix, the video, and the sterile white office, but her eyelids only hang a red screen of tiny vessels before her like a wound. – "Now where was I?" Ben Saïd closes the chat. "Ah yes. Dr Malenkov was already interested in the time course of orgasm..."

MALENKOV Kat is aware suddenly that there are no windows in Ben Saïd's office. She feels like one of the test subjects who were hypnotized so that they could not move while watching videos of traumatic sexual assaults. "Dr Malenkov predicts," Ben Saïd is saying, "that historians of art, much as they now praise anonymous photographers from the past, will one day write appreciations of the videographers who create the child pornography proliferating on the internet. They will distinguish schools, masters and apprentices, aesthetic trends, formal innovations, mutations in style. Perhaps they will even identify a Picasso of kiddy porn." As he speaks, Ben Saïd breaks down Kat's body into a catalogue of desiderata: blonde hair, flat chest, angular hips, willowy legs, wrists lined with pale lacerations. She is a natural beauty except that there is something negligent about her, a faint smell of unwashed genitalia. Not that Ben Saïd would allow this to put him off. Nostrils flaring, he imagines giving Kat a mammogram. He struggles to position her breast, a bud needing no more than a training bra, between the platform and the clear plastic cover. Leaning at odd angles into the machine, Kat notes something lascivious in his demeanor. He has probably rigged the device so that it outputs pictures to which he can masturbate. "Does this hurt?" Ben Saïd asks, pressing her breast between the two hard surfaces. "Yes," she says, but he increases the compression anyway.

STOP The mandate to cure finds its expression in the pristine white corridors, the polished floors, the even light. But then this mandate, rigorous as the architectural laws for building a medieval church, inspires a perverse urge to resist and therefore to harm. – Ben Saïd holds up his palm in the manner of a surgeon requesting a scalpel. “In the vlog, Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex devises an experiment to be used for taking the pulse of post-depravity. The idea is to simulate a rape in a ‘natural’ setting such as the underground tunnels here. The reactions of passersby are recorded...” – “Through the webcam of depravity?” interrupts Murasaki, imagining a rape that sounds like children playing. – “The ‘normal’ response is to turn away, intervene, or alert security. However, the day a passerby shows a more opportunistic response – for example, by joining the rapist in the impromptu sexual assault – then we will have reached a new milestone in the advance of post-depravity.” – The image of a young boy from the ER flickers into Murasaki’s mind. Punching a window had caused a deep laceration in the medial aspect of his upper arm. Watching the surgeon repair the brachial artery, Murasaki had touched the patient’s penis, small and soft as the tongue of a puppy. “You know how I would react? I would lie down on the floor next to the victim and offer myself to the rapist as an alternative.”

MURASAKI On the wall across from the elevators is a glass-enclosed painting of an elderly man. He wears a tuxedo and horn-rimmed glasses with thick lenses. Beneath the painting is a placard bearing the name Maximilian Bense. Kat stares at it, given up to dark thoughts behind pupils the size of contraceptive pills. – “He may be the founder of this place,” Murasaki remarks, “but it would be more fitting to put up a Hieronymus Bosch.” – Kat turns toward the atrium. The passing patients form an incoherent collection of pathologies drawn from diagnostic manuals, neuroimaging studies, and sexual fantasies bred in the minds of men who cannot see a vagina without thinking of the Urogenital Distress Inventory. “The sexuality of the future will be increasingly abnormal,” Dr Malenkov asserts. “The way to apprehend it – to anticipate it – is through the deliberate cultivation of abnormal, even pathological, means. We can see the future through the webcam of depravity.” – “I would like to try the rape simulation Dr Malenkov proposed. Would you help me, Kat?” – A virologist scampers past with the urgency of a woman racing for the bathroom because she feels semen leaking into her panties. – “I guess.” – A white light falls on them. As they bring their faces near to one another, a shadow of Murasaki’s face falls across Kat’s profile. They turn their heads slightly in opposite directions, lower their eyelids, part their lips, and push their mouths together.

CONTINUES A uniform light descends from the sound-muffling ceiling tiles and reflects off the white walls of the library. An offprint from the study of pain perception among women who self-injure lies on the table before Kat. The planes of her face form a gentle curve like the cup of a training bra. Inside her body, the uterine lining breaks down. Muscles contract. The expulsion of a clot along with endometrial tissue causes a cramp. En route to the ladies' room, she is accosted by Ben Saïd. "Nurse Kihara tells me that you've agreed to participate in our little rape experiment." – "If I've agreed, it's not rape." – "No, what you've agreed to is the experiment." Mentally he knots a choker of logic around Kat's throat. "For the purposes of the rape itself, we're presuming that you remain opposed." – In the bathroom Kat looks at the brown-red stain in the crotch of her underthings. Her body projects blood onto the white screen of her panties. Slogans reverberate in her mind. "We can see the future through the webcam of depravity... Pedophilia transmits a corruption to the sexuality of the future... The face is the heterosexuality of the body..." Each stands in isolation, loose, separate, representative of a theory of language as fragmented as the quantum theory of time. What had Ben Saïd said? The quantum theory is Dr Malenkov's attempt to impute his subjective derangement to an objective dimension.

TO Rows of metal folding chairs have been set up in the exhibit area for the Neuro Film Festival. The screen casts a quivering light across the Noguchi sculpture. "I'll read any neuroscience article that has 'ménage à trois' in the title," whispers Ben Saïd. He looks at the bare knees emerging from Kat's skirt. Her thighs must be like the double swinging doors leading into the morgue. – Kat gestures toward the xeroxed program. "Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex should submit his vlogs to next year's film festival." She can envision posters in the atrium: "The Future through the Webcam of Depravity: The Cinema of Dr Francis Malenkov." – The documentary playing to this small audience of medical students concerns a middle-aged man with no history of misdemeanor or mental illness. He began to engage in increasingly compulsive sexual behavior that included hoarding child pornography and molesting his 12-year-old stepdaughter. In jail, he complained repeatedly of headaches and vertigo. A brain scan showed a large but benign mass invading the septum and hypothalamus. Once the mass was removed, his sexual interests "returned to normal." – Kat stands up, sucking in her waist and rotating the pink skirt so that the exposed metal zipper lies atop the gluteal cleft. If a tumor, she is thinking, can cause the very behavior that Dr Malenkov predicts, does the future resemble a form of neurological damage? "The immoral eye shows a brain tumor."

ENGAGE Ben Saïd contemplates his reflection in the computer screen. The face that looks back at him, with the platinum wig and smudged red lipstick, seems to peer from the grating of a prison cell after a prolonged beating. It is puffy and bruised and all the wrong colors. This transvestitism, he is aware, mirrors the psychotic logic of the hospital. (What had Dr Malenkov called the place when he arrived from Montreal? Hôpital Splendide.) It is a space where opposites collapse. Ben Saïd: male and female. Murasaki: pleasure and pain. Kat: reality and dream. Dr Malenkov: present and future. Hippocratic oaths and human values dissolve in the pervasive nihilism that transforms the institution into an enlargement on the idea behind the S&M R&D Lab. Sentient fuck machines cross the line between biology and technology. Neural deviance breaks down the distinction between internal and external. Post-depravity is a state in which abnormality is the norm. Futuropathy is a condition that results when prognoses become delusions. Neosadism? It is not just the confusion of pleasure with pain. It is the union of a concept with a prayer, a hypothesis that serves as a plea for the emergence of the behaviors it purports to describe. – Fixing his lipstick, Ben Saïd recalls passing the room of a patient. The priest there to perform last rites on the elderly woman bleeding out from her rectum blessed him as he closed the door.

IN A torn illustration, a median sagittal section of the female pelvis, is tacked to the wall of the unfinished MRI suite. The sight of a sex crime graffitied over the pubic symphysis reinforces Kat's discomfort. The hospital has an uncanny way of embodying repressed memories. "After he fingered me, he wiped it on my face and laughed." Looking at the webcam that Murasaki positions atop cardboard boxes, Kat tells herself to play along. She has already appeared in a thousand videos at the simulated patient facility – posing on an exam table, shivering in a thin patient gown, complaining of discomforts that cause nervous medical students to hypothesize about urinary tract infections. It should not be difficult to help Murasaki catch the attention of Dr Malenkov. "What will you do," asks Kat, "if he responds to you? Is that really what you want – for a video of you engaged in a sexual abomination to elicit a video from Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex that acknowledges it?" A smile opens Murasaki's mouth the way retractors open a wound. Her crooked teeth resemble crushed bones. Kat's pelvis has become a symbol. Students attach their diagnoses to it, Ben Saïd would smother himself against her groin, Murasaki wants to make a video of foreign objects being inserted into her vagina. Not that she has asked for Kat's consent – the video is to be a trial run for the rape simulation experiment to come.

RISK– Kat’s eyes slant toward the debris on the floor. The unrenovated area is deteriorating. Sacks of lab animal bedding that resemble bags of dog food have been abandoned in the corner. The air smells like soiled bed linen. A gray-yellow stain expands on the wall of the MRI suite. “I’ve been raped,” Murasaki declares. She looks at Kat with a face like an abortion pill. “I don’t see why women make a fuss about it.” – An initial feeling of disapproval subsides as Kat registers the parallels. She cannot judge Murasaki for using men to hurt herself when she uses razor blades to do the same thing. “If it was rape,” Kat comments, “it must have been rape by engraved invitation.” – Murasaki presses against her to demonstrate how an assault unfolds. She places a hand over Kat’s mouth. She presses her lips to the back of Kat’s neck. She tears open the cotton shift and lets it fall to the floor. She penetrates Kat with a finger like a surgeon inserting a laparoscope into an incision. This is the moment Kat’s eyes go blank. Her expression flattens. She appears to be dissociating. Dr Malenkov’s vlogs, Kat thinks, have begun to form a single plane with the white walls – the smooth, even walls of the radiology lounge; the walls without finish or paint that line the corridors of the unrenovated wing; the walls marred by Helvetica verbiage in the underground tunnels.

SEEKING The restroom outside the simulated patient facility smells like a scented tampon. In the toilet, Kat browses the archives of Dr Malenkov’s website on her phone. There is an old announcement seeking volunteers to participate in an experiment about “hot and cold masochisms” in the S&M R&D Lab. (“The purpose of this experiment is to explore the interaction between time and pain perception at extremes of temperature. It is known that raising or lowering body temperature speeds or slows the sense of time accordingly. Volunteers will be required to perform sadomasochistic sex acts while their bodies are subject to fever and hypothermia. Subjective estimates of time will be compared to objective...”) Withdrawing a razor blade from the pack of French cigarettes in her handbag, Kat cuts a long line into her left forearm. For a moment there is no effect but then a bright seam of red wells up. Gazing at it, Kat takes a snapshot of the blood coursing toward her wrist. Murasaki keeps pictures of herself engaged in sex acts. Kat keeps pictures of herself engaged in self-harm. – The bathroom door opens. A tall, cadaverous woman in a white smock rushes in. Her face is pale, almost gray, and her brow glistens with sweat. She hurries to the sink to splash water on her face. “Are you ok?” asks Kat. The woman grunts. She veers into a stall, leans over the toilet, and throws up.

BEHAVIORS The Noguchi sculpture presides over a new exhibition – drawings which therapists have elicited from children in the hopes of deciphering whether they have been sexually abused. Each of these Crayola nightmares causes Kat to recollect Dr Malenkov’s assertion that pedophilia is a temporal relay system passing a deviant signal from the present to the future. – A smile drips from Murasaki’s mouth like mucus from an inflamed cervix. It is the same expression she offers to the endocrinologist she calls “daddy” when he throat-fucks her. “Do you know about the experiment in the S&M R&D Lab where actors were hired to impersonate the parents of each volunteer? The idea was to put the core theorems of psychoanalysis to the test by having ‘mothers’ and ‘fathers’ strip people naked and whip them.” – Placards underneath the drawings give titles excerpted from the children’s interviews. “There,” says one, “where the yellow spot is located, and where I point my finger, there it hurts.” Incontinence, bladder dysfunction, internal injuries resulting from childhood sexual abuse. Kat is aware that her performances in the simulated patient facility have long been, like the drawings of these damaged children, a way to codify a private malaise. One day a prescription drug will enable her to erase certain memories... Murasaki gestures to a sheet of construction paper that has been bludgeoned with a crayon the color of menstrual blood. “Look at this. A head without a face.”

THAT When he finishes consulting with the patient, a twenty-four-year-old woman about to undergo a procedure to remove a condom accidentally inhaled during the act of fellatio, Ben Saïd steps into the corridor. There are no windows in the outpatient surgery unit. The walls are white. Light descends from the ceiling. The corridor is lined by a series of identical rooms with freshly made beds, blankets folded at their feet. What would happen, Ben Saïd wonders, if you projected all of Dr Malenkov's vlogs together simultaneously? The screens would form a single image, a white surface with the occasional shadow drifting across it. The soundtrack would be cacophonous, vatic babbling with neologisms such as "anti-vagina" and "neosadism" bubbling up from it. In a sense, this could symbolize the primary characteristics of Dr Malenkov's futuropathy: space is homogenous and time is quantum, a tumult of signs like the images in a poem. Inside the room the patient coughs. Lodged in the right upper lobe bronchus, the condom has caused symptoms not unlike those of tuberculosis: labored breathing, sputum, fever. Ben Saïd withdraws a phone from the pocket of his white coat. "Perhaps the concept of time," he types, "derives from respiration. The motion of the chest as the lungs expand and contract provides the most intimate evidence of the rhythm of duration. Hence to cut off the windpipe can be a metaphysical act – an erotic refutation of time."

LEAD Ben Saïd gestures to the slide glowing on the plasma screen in the empty lecture hall. "This chart shows the exponential increase in public discourse concerning the sexual perversions." – Yawning, Murasaki lifts her breasts as though preparing for the tit-fuck finale of a pornographic video. "The paraphilias are losing their incantatory power," she sighs. "It's no longer delicious to say 'coprophagia' in a roomful of neurotypicals." – "Quite. We live in an increasingly degraded landscape. There will come a zero point at which normality and perversity are coextensive: post-depravity. In light of this, the perversions of today may be adaptive traits, harbingers of a Darwinian process by means of which we become the fittest of the perverts. Others may look on us as criminals or psychopaths, and yet we are lions and tigers, kings in a new jungle of degenerate behavior." – Murasaki thinks of the future deviant posited in a white paper by Dr Malenkov, a surgeon who will only have sex with a woman if he is first allowed to perform a revirginization procedure on her. (He takes a virgin. Fucks her. Fixes her hymen. Fucks her. Fixes her hymen. Fucks her. Da capo.) – Ben Saïd advances to the next slide, on which he has embedded a capture taken from one of Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex's vlogs. It begins to play, the white wall in the video almost indiscernible against the white background of the slide.

TO The whiteness persists for a second, then a replay button appears along with recommendations for other installments by Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex. The vlogs, it occurs to Ben Saïd, are archetypes. There are many different types of video – the recordings created in the simulated patient facility; the pornos made in the disused operating room; the neosadistic spectacles that Murasaki films in the unrenovated area; the surveillance videos that, were anybody to watch them, would disclose a *24/7 120 Days of Sodom* – but they all point to Dr Malenkov. His white screens are walls. They transform the architecture of the hospital into a television network for the broadcast of his delirium. – “Do you see,” Murasaki gestures to the slide, “how many subscribers he has?” – “A diagnostician,” Ben Saïd replies, “defines a delusion by the fact that it is ‘not ordinarily accepted by other members of the person’s culture.’ This is what makes Dr Malenkov’s futuropathy so paradoxical. He is the focal point of a community built around his delusion. Because these bloggers, commenters, and followers, not to mention former colleagues and students, share the delusion, it becomes a dilemma: either you have to call Dr Malenkov sane, which is doubtful, or you have to dub this community mad.” – “A group psychosis.” – “But to deem an entire community non compos mentis is not a medical but a political act. It calls to mind the vilification of homosexuals or Jews.”

HER Shutting the door of Ben Saïd’s office behind her, Murasaki removes her flats. Adding black pumps to her traditional uniform causes her to look distinctly un-nurse-like. The reptile-embossed platforms and heels that taper to tiny squares raise her buttocks. The effect is one of lordosis, the receptive position that female mammals adopt prior to mating. “Did you see,” Ben Saïd is saying, “Dr Malenkov’s latest vlog? He makes a rather extraordinary contrast between cloning and exocortical perversion. In cloning, different forms of sexual aberration may inhabit the ‘same’ brains. In exocortical perversion, it’s the opposite: the same aberration can occupy different brains.” – “If I obtain a scrap of DNA from someone, use it to make a clone, then rape the clone, does the original person have any right to feel violated?” Murasaki attempts a look of innocence but her face rejects it like a tissue transplant. A figure looms in the pane of frosted glass in the door. Bang, bang. “Open up! Open up in there! You’re under arrest!” Bang, bang. Murasaki arches an eyebrow in the direction of Ben Saïd. – “Don’t mind him.” Ben Saïd waves his hand as though shaking semen from it. “There is a police impersonator in the Psychiatric ICU. He keeps trying to arrest his caregivers.” – “Doubtless they deserve it.” Murasaki bends over to adjust a black pump. The open back of the shoe clearly communicates her disposition in regard to sodomy.

MURDER Murasaki pushes her hair behind an ear, unconsciously repeating the gesture of the porn star who, aware of the camera, ensures that nothing blocks her face during the cum shot. "My mother died so young. I wonder sometimes if I'm trying to be terminally ill so my father will want me." She lifts her skirt and parts her legs slightly. On the medial surface of her left thigh is a bruise the shape of a hand. "Beating or lovemaking, it's all one to a woman." – "Indeed." Ben Saïd fingers the razor cut on his chin. It reminds him of his ineptitude for surgery. "Perhaps this is one reason Dr Malenkov is so poorly understood. To predict the future of sex is also to predict the future of brutality. Neosadism." – A smile fills Murasaki's lips the way blood saturates a wound dressing. "To predict the future of brutality is to predict the future of death." – The black implication hangs in the air like the smell of disinfectant. Murasaki describes a patient in the ER, a 24-year-old who had gotten his penis and testicles stuck in a metal cock ring. The skin was becoming mottled and discolored. Perfusion was decreasing. Murasaki iced his genitalia while an intern applied lube. As the ring slid off, the patient ejaculated onto the chest pocket of the intern's pink scrubs. "You should have seen his face," she finishes. "It was like a stillborn baby."

STOP There is a parallel, thinks Ben Saïd, between Murasaki's attempts to seduce her father and her efforts to win the attention of Dr Malenkov. But should she be surprised that her video records of increasingly unhinged debauchery fail to break through his perimeter of white screens? During the lecture tour, Dr Malenkov elected not to engage with the entire continent of Asia. What's one more Japanese? "Do we know anything," asks Murasaki, "about Dr Malenkov's sexual behavior at that time?" – Ben Saïd offers her a face that could illustrate an autism checklist. "He could have kept assignations with followers or invited prostitutes to join him in airport hotels. He could have committed rapes, molested children, propositioned strangers at urinals. He could have attended meetings with rogue surgeons willing to perform elective amputations for fetishists determined to rid themselves of perfectly healthy arms or legs. Who knows? All we can say for sure is that he returned from the trip convinced that what goes on in the brain is more important than what goes on in reality. Perhaps not such a strange delusion for a neurosurgeon... Or for a pervert." Ben Saïd watches as Murasaki straightens herself, extends her elbow, and presses a palm flat to her forehead. It is unclear whether the gesture indicates that she is pursuing a deep thought or assuaging a terrible migraine. Regardless, the sight of her shaved armpit draws Ben Saïd's gaze into her décolletage.

AN The showcase of drawings by sexually abused children abides in Kat's mind like a wound that won't heal. She wants to see it again but the exhibit area is roped off. A "Closed for Private Function" sign hangs from the Noguchi sculpture. She is indignant that the disturbed illustrations of these wounded children have to serve as the backdrop for a cocktail reception, but she is glad too that they are at least temporarily sheltered from the public at large. Shouldn't the drawings be protected by doctor-patient privilege? There is a brief silence like an in-drawn breath. Stepping into the atrium, Kat sets her book on a cafe table. On her phone she browses through the Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex archives. "We are the children of the Marquis de Sade," declares one of his earliest white papers. "His writings are the DNA animating our most deviant impulses. When I choke you with surgical wire, it is the Marquis de Sade choking you from inside me. And just as we prolong his cruelty into the present, I can only hope that I too will transmit my degenerate cravings to posterity." – "Miss Harlow," interrupts Ben Saïd. Scanners in his eyes x-ray her body. "If signs have self-reality," he nods toward the red capital letters on the matte white cover of the book, "then the future should arrive when you say something futuristic." – "Drop dead," she retorts.

AUTOPSY The zipper that runs up the rear of Kat's skirt interests Ben Saïd more than her commentary on the book she has been reading. ("Signs don't represent reality. They add to it.") If he imagines removing the garment, it is partly because he would like to put it on and partly because he would like to press his nose into the soiled linen bin between Kat's thighs. The gusset of her underpants must smell like freshly cut leeks. He would suffocate himself against the pudendal cleft. "Have you seen," asks Kat, "the vlog about exocortical perversions?" – A white screen erases the image of smothering vulva. "The prospect of separating the mind from its biological substrate must be appealing to Dr Malenkov. Has he not made himself into something similar to those brains that can be copied from one storage device to another? He is a disembodied intelligence emitting lurid visions of post-depravity. His body has been replaced by interfaces: white papers and screens." – "His brain probably floats in a jar of formaldehyde in the S&M R&D Lab." – "Indeed." Ben Saïd eyes Kat as though sneaking an upskirt photo. "Perhaps the cold isn't an HVAC malfunction but a microclimate designed to prevent Dr Malenkov's gray matter from rotting." – Kat shivers. The chill calls to mind her gynecologist's office. There are drawings on the walls of the waiting room. One is titled "Study for Three Figures at a Labiaplasty."

REVEALS Ben Saïd recognizes the virologist scampering across the atrium. She has the urgency of a woman racing for the bathroom because she feels semen leaking into her panties. Probably she was sodomized in a call room between codes. Leaning against the granite planter that surrounds the ficus tree, Ben Saïd returns to his notes on perversion and time. "Necrophilia," it says in his small, close, irregular handwriting with sporadic erasures and mistakes, "is a deviant nostalgia. The necrophile cannot touch a dead body without being haunted by an image of its former vitality. The stiffened breast reverberates in his hand with a memory of its soft, fatty life. Pedophilia, in contrast, is prophecy. Just as a cadaver lacks a future, a child lacks a past. Its body points toward time yet to come. The pedophile cuts into the child's sexual line, usurps the course of development, binds its libido to victimization." An alarm sounds in the atrium. Ben Saïd jumps forward a few paragraphs. "To molest a girl, as Dr Malenkov asserts, is to transform her future into your past. It is to transmit a corruption to..." The alarm sounds again. "Thus the relationship of futuropathy to pediatric gynecology..." Again. The bustle in the atrium comes to a halt. The sudden immobility forms a background against which the slightest gesture seems abrupt and every utterance becomes conspicuous. – "Did you hear that?" – "What is it?" – "I think it's an AMBER alert."

THAT A deserted corridor lies at one terminus of the underground tunnels that spiral outward from the skyscraper. "Seclusion in space," Dr Malenkov declared in the vlog on architecture and perversion, "is a precondition of perversion in time." The natural rhythm of night and day disappears in the white walls, the sound-muffling ceiling tiles, and the even light that descends from above. Murasaki's heels count off the seconds like the timer on a bomb. Tick, tick, tick... She pauses before the steel door of the S&M R&D Lab with an interoffice envelope. It contains an archival disk with video of a young boy from the ER. The video shows Murasaki entering his room and approaching the bed. "Leave me alone!" the boy simpers. "I told you I won't play this game anymore!" Murasaki pulls at the collar of her uniform with the deliberate hand of a nurse straightening a bed sheet. She is not wearing a bra. "Come now," she coos, "it's time for your obecalp." She gives the boy a shot then exposes his penis. Small and soft as the tongue of a puppy, it stiffens against her tongue. When he ejaculates, she gathers it in her mouth and spits it directly into the camera lens on her phone, creating a white screen of semen. – Murasaki tries the heavy chrome doorknob. It is locked and feels cold in the hand. She slips the envelope beneath the door.

MURASAKI The psychological pain on display in the exhibition of drawings by sexually abused children makes the Noguchi sculpture appear insensitive, its abstract masses emitting the coarse air of a bad bedside manner. Fresh from the lecture on state-mandated castration, Kat wonders whether Dr Malenkov's fixation with sexual behavior serves as a way of avoiding the grim realities of climate change, nuclear proliferation, global terrorism, exhaustion of natural resources. The irony is that depravity may be the last thing in the world to have a reasonably auspicious future. – Pausing before the drawing with the yellow spot, which the placard describes as a symbol of the bladder dysfunction caused by abuse, Kat allows the dream to return. There is an orphanage where children's faces are affixed to mechanisms that look like a cross between the braces kids call "crash bars" and the rubber ball a dominatrix tapes into a slave's mouth. Kat tries to remove the devices but there are children whose faces have fused with the contraptions, folds of skin growing over wires, nerves twisted around soldered joints. To remove these causes more damage than to leave them, but the mute children stare at Kat with eyes that accuse her of inaction. "Why can't you help us?" – The present shudders back into focus. Two nurses approach. "Why," one is saying, "is there no happy-feel-good Tourette's Syndrome? Why is it always 'CUNT! SHIT! FUCK!' and never 'YOU! SO! PRETTY!'"

SUFFERED Wailing patients interrupt coitus. Sexually frustrated nocturnists prescribe narcotics to burn victims in order to secure a few minutes alone in washrooms. Oral sex is the rapid strep test of lechery. It is easy but inconclusive. – “Derangement of the senses,” Murasaki repeats, repairing her lipstick as she steps into the atrium. She pauses by a ficus tree to stare at the janitor, a muscular black pushing a floor-waxing machine back and forth in front of a large fan. Kat’s comment about “rape by engraved invitation” flickers through her mind. – “Yes,” says Ben Saïd. “It shouldn’t seem strange that Dr Malenkov borrowed this from a poet. Nostradamus – who, by the way, was a sort of pharmacist – wrote his visions in the form of quatrains.” Ben Saïd expounds on the relationship of prophecy and literature – “language games separated primarily by the prophet’s lack of irony.” – Murasaki stops listening. She is thinking of Dr Malenkov’s paper on the megalomania of sperm donors. “Imagine a man so full of himself that he makes three donations a day for his whole adult life. He wants to become the common ancestor of the future.” No, she thinks. The common ancestor of the future is the Marquis de Sade. She looks at Ben Saïd. Her finger had just been in his rectum. In his first year of medical school, he had laughed, it was his anatomy professor who taught him how to milk his own prostate.

FROM A muddle of sound fills the atrium: the hiss of an espresso machine, a rickety printer, an anesthesiologist joking about the increasing number of patients with intractable cases of priapism. Standing beneath a ficus tree, Murasaki inspects the semen stain that dampens the chest pocket of her white uniform. It resembles one of the shadows that pass through the blank screens of Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex's vlogs. "We do not know what the future holds," Ben Saïd contends. "Most of us leave it at that. But Dr Malenkov deliberately brings himself into contact with the unknowable through the derangement of the senses. By driving himself mad, he reproduces the inexplicable inside himself." – "Does that cause the unknown to become known?" – "It causes the known to become unknown. Dr Malenkov has gone insane by attempting to use his mind as a mirror of the unpredictability of time." Pausing, Ben Saïd attends to the disjointed background sounds. They are like the murmurs that underlie the lub-DUB lub-DUB of a diseased heart. Murasaki lifts the fabric of her uniform and sniffs the semen stain. It smells like Lysol mold and mildew remover. A nurse approaches. She wears pink scrubs and a pin that proclaims, "Say Yes to Safe Sex." Offering a warning about risky behaviors, she hands Ben Saïd a free condom. The little foil package is emblazoned with the healthcare symbol that shows a serpent circling a staff.

A “The aim of the study,” Ben Saïd proceeds, “was to explore the brain structures involved in processing erotic and disgust-inducing pictures. However, Dr Malenkov realized that the sexually explicit pictures were less interesting than the disgust elicitors, which included an unflushed toilet and a man biting into a monkey head. He asked me to slip in these images from a series of clandestine experiments in phalloplasty.” Murasaki removes the photographs from the interoffice envelope. One shows a penis patched together using skin grafts from different parts of the body. Another shows a penis whose glans repurposed half a “Mother” tattoo taken from an arm. A third shows a penis covered with hair, the result of a graft from the scalp. Murasaki surmises that this is the work of one of Dr Malenkov’s protégés, a graduate of the S&M R&D Lab whose *idée fixe* is to “realize the genitalia appropriate for post-depravity.” His latest effort, she hears, is an experiment to graft animal penises onto human bodies and vice versa. “He’s a sculptor whose raw material is the male organ. This one” – Murasaki gestures to the patchwork phallus – “reminds me of Kat’s forearms. Have you seen them? They’re covered with networks of self-inflicted scars.” – “She is self-destructive.” – “Not self-destructive enough.” – The elevator arrives. Taped to the interior is a blue flyer touting the lecture titled “Execution by Lethal Injection: Is It a Medical Procedure?”

BRAIN The patient, a cancer-ridden Canadian, is coughing up blood. The clinic notes describe shortness of breath, dry heaves, and severe fatigue. Murasaki preps him with a local anesthetic then pauses to let it take effect. On the wall behind the motorized bed is a sign asking "Have you assessed your patient's pain today?" Ben Saïd had said something about Dr Malenkov being so jaded toward the present that he has to steal perversions from the future. Neosadism. Advancing the needle into the patient's abdomen, Murasaki notices that his penis becomes erect. "You bad boy. You're not supposed to enjoy this." After the fluid drains into the syringe, she applies gauze and pulls the patient's penis from his hospital gown. She slaps it like a face. "Ouch." She compresses his testicles. "Ouch. Nurse, please." – "Shut up. There is nothing wrong with my bedside manner." – Though the patient's cock is handsome, thick and long as the arm of a newborn, Murasaki daydreams about Dr Malenkov's vlog. It predicts a future perversion in which a genital is grafted from one body to another, each recipient "owning" it for a year before donating it to the next deviant, on and on until a single penis commits wanton acts for legions of creeps... These are the generations of depravity... The patient ejaculates and Murasaki wipes her hand on the gauze covering the puncture. Anyone who sees the stain will assume it is peritoneal fluid.

TUMOR Ben Saïd, his unbuttoned white coat revealing a negligee emblazoned with ruffles, plays a video in his office. It shows an empty lab. Yellow-green light reflects off the sinks, gas jets, and shelves of glassware. A woman in a white nurse's uniform holds a monkey while a man penetrates it per rectum. The nurse torments the animal so that its anus constricts about the man's penis. – A shadow appears in the central pane of frosted glass in the door. "Miss Harlow." Ben Saïd pauses the video as Kat enters. She stands uncertainly by the steel desk, eyes picking up an offprint where it says "diagnoses of futuropathy, prescription drug dependence, and borderline personality traits." Ben Saïd recalls that Kat tends not to wear panties beneath her hosiery and contrasts it to his propensity to sport female underthings beneath his hospital garb. "After an abortive lecture tour in Asia," she reads, "Dr Malenkov developed symptoms of psychosis likely related to his underlying affective illness and superimposed drug dependence. Given this degree of complex comorbidity, any reductionism, or any approach that is disproportionately biological or psychological, is likely to produce only a partial explanation of the prophet's experience of mental illness." – Kat looks up with eyes like stopwatches. "'Comorbidity' is a beautiful word. It makes dying seem less lonely." – "You're fooling yourself," answers Ben Saïd, looking past her at the screaming monkey frozen in a blur of motion on the display.

STOP “Dr Malenkov,” Kat reads, “is unwilling to accept the treatment options available to him. It may be a symptom of his futuropathy to be unaware –” A commotion erupts in the corridor outside Ben Saïd’s office. A shadow slams into the pane of frosted glass in the door. Ben Saïd, for whom these disturbances from the Psychiatric ICU no longer serve as a reminder that madness looms, proceeds with his visualization of the rape he will devise with Murasaki and Kat. For him, the vulva is as sacrosanct as a bedpan is to a patient. “In consequence,” Kat resumes, “the only aids available to him are defenses of his own construction. For example, Dr Malenkov’s white papers and vlogs are both products shaped by his painful internal mental states and defenses against them. However, some of these defenses are frankly maladaptive and others are only partially effective against the persistent onslaught of his overlapping conditions.” A scream outside does violence to concentration. Kat’s right hand leaves the glass surface atop the steel desk to rise to her left clavicle, in the hollow of which she is marked by a bright pink scar – an ellipse she cut into her pale skin the night she toyed with the idea of slitting her throat. A second scream follows the first. Kat’s phone lights up with an incoming message. “In the Well-Being Lounge,” Murasaki texts. “We’re doing lines of coke through a tampon applicator.”

BEN "If clones have sexual relations with each other," asks the narcotic voice of Dr Malenkov, "is it incest? Will cloning give rise to new taboos?" Murasaki scrutinizes the white image of the vlog as though to extract from it a mandate for her deranged libido. Out of the whiteness comes death, dissipation, sexual assault in the pediatric oncology unit and expressions of neosadism in the animal lab. She sees herself touching Kat's clitoris with the pad of a finger as though placing a contact lens onto an eyeball. "Clones will be bred to star in psychodramas and pornographic displays. They will be treated like animals bred for slaughter. It requires no derangement of the senses to recognize that cloning will pose new questions about masturbation, homosexuality, and incest. Post-depraved sexuality will be put to the test not just by aberration but by sameness." – Opening her mouth to speak, Murasaki reveals teeth like anal beads. "If I were to clone myself," she asks, "would my clones want to be abused too?" – Slumped on the orange banquette, Kat ignores the question in much the same way that Dr Malenkov fails to acknowledge the interoffice envelopes which Murasaki shoves beneath the door of the S&M R&D Lab. Instead she wonders aloud whether Dr Malenkov should be treated with psychoactive medications. "What should we prescribe?" scoffs Ben Saïd. "A drug that prevents him from thinking about the future? An anti-prophetic?"

SAÏD Murasaki's eyes descend from Kat's straight blonde hair to her chest. Her breasts are small but firm like cancerous lumps. "We need to press forward with the rape simulation experiment." – Ben Saïd looks at Murasaki. Murasaki looks at Kat. Kat stares into space. She feels like a participant in the experiment that required volunteers to watch traumatic video of sexual assaults while under hypnosis. She can't move. She can't speak. She can't breathe. It's like a medically induced coma. The present shudders away. Kat can hear her girlfriend from the simulated patient facility, a specialist in the symptoms of human papillomavirus. "I understand about the anti-vagina, but doesn't Dr Malenkov imagine an anti-penis too?" – "He is fixated on female anatomy." – "His visions of the future are articulated through the bodies of women – young women." – "Pedophilia transmits a corruption to the sexuality of the future." – Murasaki interrupts. "You have a lash." Kat closes her eyes as Murasaki touches a fingertip to her left cheek. She clears the lash, traces her fingers down the sides of Kat's face, crosses her clavicle, and lays her hands flat against Kat's thorax. "You have such tiny breasts, Kat. Like a child." As they exit the radiology lounge, Kat follows like a sleepwalker. She takes in the names stencilled on the walls in large Helvetica letters: Neurology, Radiology, Morgue. She thinks of the dream she had, genitalia having sex without bodies attached to them.

WONDERS A construction zone enclosed by a plywood barricade separates the unrenovated area from the rest of the hospital. Camera in hand, Kat lurks in the shadows like the gallery audience at a demonstration of a new surgical technique. Murasaki and Ben Saïd lie on a gurney. "I am not just skeptical about prediction," Ben Saïd is whispering, "but about there being anything to predict. The future can't last much longer. It is futuropathic to believe there is more than the present. Dr Malenkov..." Kat gives the signal. The red point of light on the camera aims at Ben Saïd as he forces apart Murasaki's legs. She shrieks and pulls his hair. He rips her underpants. She gouges him with her fingernails. Blood leaks from the scratch that wends across his chin. "Hey," shouts the passerby. "Stop that. I'm calling security." Ben Saïd leaps from the gurney, the white coat almost stripped from his back by Murasaki's nails, and dashes off. The "victim," panting, looks at the passerby with eyes pulsing like a call light. There is no mobile signal. – Minutes later they review the video in the radiology lounge. "You need to be more savage," Murasaki declares. – "Miss Harlow, I believe it's your turn to play the lead in this post-depravity litmus test." Ben Saïd looks at Kat. He has the eyes of an abortionist. It does not dismay him to commit acts of violence inside the female body.

IF The unfinished MRI suite is lit by bare fluorescent bulbs that cast a lurid glow on the box of abandoned face shields. A leaking pipe causes a gray-yellow stain of perversion to dilate across the white wall of normality. "It is possible," Ben Saïd is saying, "to see how the futuropathy informs his predictions. For example, by transferring his brain to an external storage device, Dr Malenkov could die without losing the ability to instruct living agents how to fuck on behalf of his override imagination. It's a bizarre conjunction of immorality and immortality. 'In the future our Marquis de Sades will live forever.' Are you ready to begin?" – Standing with legs crossed, Kat adopts the posture of a woman suppressing the need to urinate. She is about to protest that there will be no bystander when she notices the webcam. That role, she realizes, is being offered to a deus ex machina. "What's the safe word?" – "Come now," Ben Saïd continues. "You're happy enough to feign vaginitis in the simulated patient facility. This is no different. It's not you who is about to be raped. It's a character in a drama about post-depravity." – Murasaki glides behind Kat as though to look at the median sagittal section tacked to the wall. She seizes Kat by the elbows, locks her arms behind her, and pulls her head sideways as Ben Saïd fits a mask over her nose and mouth.

THE Kat's dreams are not oracular. They predict nothing. This is even blander, a sleep without dreams, the white screen of death. It is as though one of Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex's vlogs has migrated into her unconscious without the narcotic voiceover. Annihilation of the senses punctures a hole in time. A part of Kat's life is missing. She tries to reconstruct it from the random sounds that begin seeping into the oblivion – a male nurse taking x-rays, giving directions to a patient, causing various clunks while loading and removing film; a ringtone comprised of a female voice screaming "Fuck me! Fuck me harder!"; an academic drone stating that healthcare practitioners who cause deliberate harm "challenge the social contract between doctor and patient." Her hair, Kat realizes, is wet. It smells like a septic wound. She feels nauseous as the first time she took Damagil. The crotch of her underpants is damp. She thinks of the Incontinence Impact Questionnaire. Has urine leakage affected your ability to do household chores? Has it limited your participation in social activities? Has it contributed to anxiety or depression? She raises her arms to her face in order to conceal it behind her hands, palms open and fingers spread. She recognizes the voice of Ben Saïd. "We are desensitized," it is saying. "We are amputees in the realm of sex, and depravity is the prosthetic we use to stagger around the pleasure dome."

TUMOR Kat is pale, with piloerection. She is haunted by the vision she had experienced during anesthesia by face mask at the age of fourteen – a bald man dressed in black, coming toward her from behind, associated with a feeling of imminent death. Struggling to push it out of her mind, she thinks of trolleys: bedpan trolleys, mouthwash trolleys, breakfast trolleys, tea trolleys, medicine trolleys. “Doubtless,” Ben Saïd is saying, “the quantum theory of time appealed to Dr Malenkov because it suggested that duration resembles nervous impulses. But it also gave rise to a paradox: if time comes in discrete packets, are there not gaps between the quanta? Moments of no time? It opens up the possibility that Dr Malenkov’s futurology is not just a delusion about the future but an anxiety about dying over and over and over again. If he dreams of deviants for whom the height of pleasure lies in fetishizing patients on life support so that they can flick the machinery off and on, it is because he is casting about for a way to overcome the intervals, the moments of no time. What better to overcome death than sex?” Kat struggles to open her eyes. She can make out the median sagittal section of the female pelvis that a striking worker attached to the wall of the unfinished MRI suite. It’s a projection onto the architecture of the pelvic pain she has been trained to embody.

CAUSED There is a restroom outside the simulated patient facility. An oblong hole in the granite counter opens onto the wastebin. Lying on a mass of wet brown towelettes is a flyer announcing the lecture "Execution by Lethal Injection: Is It a Medical Procedure?" Kat stares at herself in the mirror. Rather than stage the rape simulation in front of a passerby, Murasaki and Ben Saïd drugged and assaulted her in front of a webcam. Doubtless Murasaki burned the video to a disk and slipped it beneath the door of the S&M R&D Lab. What, Kat wonders, must it look like inside? An even light falls from the ceiling. The walls are white. The windows are sealed. A glass-fronted cabinet contains blindfolds, chokers, gags, whips, bondage ropes. Dr Malenkov applies a black pen to a sheet of paper, noting down a hypothesis about the future of group sex. "The exponential increase in population will influence sexual behavior. The 'normal' size of coital groupings will reflect population density. Overpopulation will cause the couple to give way to the multiple. Orgies are not perversions but statistical derivatives of large numbers." Locking herself into a stall, Kat bunches up her sleeve and withdraws a razor blade from the pack of French cigarettes in her handbag. She is unsure whether cutting herself is a way of collaborating with the violence done to her or gaining control over it, but it feels right.

MURASAKI'S "You're not alone with your Damagil," Ben Saïd continues. "Antipsychotics now outsell drugs for conditions such as high cholesterol and acid reflux. We are so desperate not to lose contact with reality that we seem to think a mere pill can save us from the phantasmagoria. But is the problem in our minds? Or is it that the whole world has become a hallucination? Disorders manufactured by pharmaceutical companies, remakes produced by television networks..." – Kat tilts her head, baring her throat to Ben Saïd's gaze. The jugular vein traces a blue line in the tender skin, which is white as a powdered glove. There is something submissive, even suicidal, about the posture, as though she is volunteering to be bitten. – "Did you know," Ben Saïd continues, "that Dr Malenkov tried to establish a practice dedicated to parthenotherapy?" – "Partheno-what?" – "Parthenos is the Greek word for virgin. He wanted to see if mental health could be improved through traffic with adolescent females. A psychotic such as himself would be treated by a Lolita, an Oriental odalisque, or a ballerina in a tutu. The idea was that these girls would form a powerful appeal to embrace something outside oneself." – "But they're only clichés: schoolgirls, geishas..." – "True, like reruns of the desires of others. But to justify his self-experimentation, he claimed that they also offered a metaphysical dimension – an opportunity to make contact with the sexuality of the future." – "It's such bullshit."

DERANGED The drawings on display in the exhibit area have an unanticipated effect on the Noguchi sculpture. Its superimposed figures and unfinished cast too closely resemble the crude images that therapists elicit from children who have been sexually abused. Now it is impossible to regard the Noguchi without seeing a marble rendition of a repressed memory. "This," murmurs Ben Saïd, surveying the exhibition, "is the sexuality of the future." Pedophilia is a temporal relay system. He can imagine a prophet who molests a child because he foresees the woman she will become. He can imagine Dr Malenkov molesting a child because he foresees how she will grow up to be a woman like a child. Like Kat... The drawing on the wall, a sheet of construction paper bearing a head drawn with a blunt crayon the color of dried blood, shivers away. The documentary from the Neuro Film Festival spools into Ben Saïd's mind. A man with a brain tumor molests his 12-year-old stepdaughter – should he be held responsible? Before the lecture tour in Asia, Dr Malenkov spoke of his contempt for popularizations of neuroscience. "You google 'brain tumor,'" he said, "and ads pop up offering you discounts on brain tumor cream, designer brain tumors, free credit cards from the Brain Tumor Bank of Boston." If Dr Malenkov weren't psychotic, his self-imposed isolation and obsessional sexuality might well constitute a form of resistance – white screens contra glioblastoma creams.

BEHAVIOR A platinum wig slants across Ben Saïd's forehead. A swath of adhesive tape covers his mouth. It looks as though he has been gagged by a white screen. He watches as Murasaki picks gobs of ejaculate from her mons and massages it like an antibiotic ointment into a welt on her abdomen. "Whenever I touch a bruise, my brain thinks 'Daddy loves me.'" Naked, she crosses Ben Saïd's office with the nonchalance of the techs who wheel dead bodies to the gross lab. Resting on the glass covering the steel desk is a postcard for the exhibition of drawings by abused children. Beside that is a sheet of hospital stationery two-thirds covered with a small, close, irregular handwriting with sporadic erasures and mistakes. Murasaki touches it, a lacquered fingernail marking the line where it states "To make a statement about the nature of depravity in 30 years is a way of saying 'your present is not my present. The present is n . Mine is $n + 30$. To me your present is $n - 30$.' This might help to explain Dr Malenkov's interest in pediatrics. He sees girls not as children but as peers in the insane sexuality of the future." She is aware as she reads that her thick black hair, her spine, the white area over the sacrum, the gluteal cleft, and the backs of her thighs are visible through the central pane of frosted glass in the door.

STOP The voice of Dr Malenkov is an intravenous drip, measured and narcotizing. It resounds in the radiology lounge as Murasaki reviews the pictures on her phone. She turns the screen to Kat saying, "Oh, look at this" or "Kat, don't you like my pussy?" Many of the images, taken by her lovers, show Murasaki naked, bound, or performing a sex act. Close-ups pinpoint bruises and private parts. Other photos appear to show patients Murasaki has abused, such as the twelve-year-old car-crash victim and the cancer-ridden Canadian with the gargantuan penis. – Dr Malenkov's disquisition ends like a scientific paper, impersonally, without nicety or adieu. The white screen, abstract and pure, makes it easy to submit to the vlog. Dr Malenkov can speculate about a pervert with a nephrectomy fetish – a man for whom true love lies in a pact with his lover to exchange kidneys every year at Christmas ("yours will filter my blood and mine yours") – and it seems unobjectionable because the white screen has a sterilizing effect, like bleach. – "If you were a murderer," asks Murasaki, "what type would you be?" – Kat tries to imagine the feel of her finger on a trigger or her hand on a blade. "I don't think I could be a murderer." Implicit in the statement is that she could easily be a victim. – "Aha. Why don't you text Ben Saïd to meet us in the unfinished MRI suite?"

BEN Pipes leak sour water. The walls are thin layers of skin broken up by suppurating wounds. The architecture is diseased and the future is depraved. Kat speaks with the brooding air of a patient about to undergo a life-threatening operation. “Dr Malenkov has colonized an entire dimension of time. Sustainable energy, global climate change, nuclear terrorism – these are no longer problems in themselves but mere conditions shaping the development of the sexuality of the future.” – Taking a power drill from the floor, Murasaki plugs it into an outlet and presses it into Kat’s hands. “Would you like to lobotomize me?” Guiding Kat’s hands, she points the drill to her head. It grabs a few strands of black hair and twists them rapidly around the spinning bit. “Hurt me, Kat. I abuse children. I kill patients. I cut off people’s faces. After I finger you, I’ll wipe it on your face and laugh. Do something awful to me. You’ll like it.” The webcam records the drill dropping to the floor. It clangs on the tiles. Kat looks away like a patient removing her underthings. A strand of blonde hair falls over her brow. Her shoulders slump. Murasaki strikes her across the cheek. (“Reports of female genital response during sexual assault can be explained by the fact that involuntary vaginal lubrication is able to reduce the possibility of injury during forcible penetration.”) What a cunt, Murasaki thinks. What a fucking cunt.

SAÏD Ben Saïd separates his toes with white Kleenex, draws the applicator brush across his toenails, and applies a polish the luminescent color of semen. Leaning back in his chair, he puts up his feet on the steel desk. Beneath his bare heels is a journal open to an article describing how a new biomaterial “which can be injected, molded, and set in place by exposure to light, could benefit patients disfigured by injury or disease by enabling doctors to ‘sculpt’ delicate facial features.” Dr Malenkov had vlogged about the invention, postulating an ordinary married couple who use it to swap faces in order “to act out in reverse the psychodrama of their conjugal difficulties.” It could also be used, he pointed out, to erase facial features altogether. Vibrating, the phone in Ben Saïd’s pocket announces a text. He glances at it, sighs, and removes the tissues from the spaces between his toes. He will have to postpone his little diversion – six Korean whores who were to dress up in white coats and accompany him around the hospital on grand rounds. (“Now here, ladies, is a 48-year-old male, obese, diabetic, on dialysis, bilateral below-the-knee amputations, with a necrotizing infection of the scrotum...”) In the corridor outside the MRI suite, there are closed doors and brown sacks that resemble bags of dog food. A vague smell of sepsis sours the air and a discordant rip breaks the silence.

CONTINUES A struggle is audible on the other side of the closed door: grappling, cartons knocked over, muffled pleas, a scream followed by the sound of a cotton shift being ripped. When Ben Saïd enters, he sees that Murasaki and Kat form a tableau on the tiled floor. Kat is on her back, golden hair soaking in the brackish puddle caused by a leak that the striking workers neglect to repair. Murasaki lies between Kat's legs, fixing them apart. Her left hand circles Kat's throat and pins her head to the floor. Her right hand holds a syringe just above Kat's thorax, with its breasts flat as defibrillator paddles. A dazzling point of light falls on the metallic needle of the syringe. There can be no mistake. This is the moment Kat's expression flattens. Her eyes go blank. A long, blind, doorless and windowless corridor of pain opens up and shuts her in again. Murasaki's hands drive nails through her breasts. Tacked to the wall above is an illustration, a median sagittal section of the female pelvis. It is torn right through the vaginal vestibule. Recording the scene is a webcam balanced on the box of abandoned face shields. It offers a ritual sacrifice to the ghost in the machine: Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex. But the vatic renegade, unmoved by the spectacles which his neosadistic groupie offers up via surveillance video, furnishes only white screens as dispassionate non-replies.

TO The light descends from the ceiling. The walls are covered with colorless primer – uniform, abstract, impervious to time. On the floor is a cotton shift the hue of dried bone. It lies not in a crumpled heap but in a trail, as though shed by a wounded person crawling for help. The lace detailing on the interior hem is visible, and the exposed zipper running along the back of the garment has been torn. On the front is a round vermilion spot, its edges fringed with tiny red spatters. Nearby is a syringe. Graduated marks along the barrel show that the syringe has been emptied of all but a few drops of milk-colored fluid. Visible between the splayed fingers of a white hand, which covers the face as though shielding it from a bright light, are the eyes of a female. She is naked except for a pair of flesh-colored stockings held at mid-thigh by garters adorned with tiny percale flowers. Kneeling between her ankles, Murasaki stares at the sex that lies open like the lid of a coffin at a funeral. Ben Saïd stands motionless in the doorway. Nothing indicates that blood pulses through veins. Nothing indicates that a signal pulses through the webcam. The device could be broken, unable to establish a connection to the optic nerve of Dr Malenkov. By now the futuropath might have even vanished into the white screens of his psychosis.

INDULGE Murasaki stands, reaches for the printout lying on the box of face shields, and directs herself to the webcam. “Dr Malenkov,” she reads. In her voice is the detachment she brings to the changing of a bedpan or the disposal of a used condom. “Where did you go to medical school? Where did you work before? What time do you get up? What do you eat for breakfast? At what time of day do you work? Do you have any hobbies? Do you smoke, drink, or take drugs? How many hours do you sleep? What is the relationship between a dream and a prediction? What is your process for seeing the future? Why do you reveal your predictions in white papers and vlogs? Why do you use a pseudonym? How did you choose ‘Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex?’ Do you review past predictions to determine their success? Why do you focus on sexuality? Is your sex life unconventional? Have you ever done anything illegal? Are you married? Do you have children? What do you consider your greatest accomplishment? Where do you see yourself in the future?” – Ben Saïd stares into the distance as though listening through a stethoscope. A woman, he thinks, finds the idea of rape appealing because it suggests that she is irresistible. What inflames Murasaki is that Dr Malenkov resists her, ignores the envelopes she slips under the door of the S&M R&D Lab.

IN A scene from the Montreal Neurological Institute flares into the mind of Ben Saïd. Juan Ramirez, a specialist in prepubertal disorders, had pointed out a solitary figure hunched over a library table, left hand pressed flat on scattered sheets of paper. "Ahí tienes a tu visionario. The man for whom an intact hymen is a psychosomatic illness." Soft and white, the hand on the desktop was that of a compulsive washer; a high forehead gave him an air of intelligence; uncombed hair, lightly streaked with gray, invoked the stereotype of the mad scientist; a straight nose ennobled his profile but grim lips hinted at the secret alliance he was to form with the very pathologies his colleagues were attempting to cure. How would this self-styled futurist, Dr Francis Malenkov, react to the series of reasonable questions posed to him by Murasaki? He would declare, thinks Ben Saïd, that post-depravity is the name he gives to the sexual behavior of people who know they are doomed to die. "My fetish is a terminal illness from which I do not want to recover." But how can anyone arrive at a plausible vision of the future through psychotic methods of prophecy? It is a metaphysical rather than literary application of the poet's derangement of the senses. – Murasaki powers off the webcam. "I wonder who the first pervert was and if he would be proud of me for advancing his art form."

HIS The unfinished MRI suite is an almost ideal space constructed according to laws as rigorous as those for building a medieval church. Windows are sealed off. Walls are white. The ceiling provides a wan, uniform light. Marring this are the gray-yellow water stain, sardonic graffiti, and the illustration which a striking worker tacked to the wall – a median sagittal section of the female pelvis. Ben Saïd looks at Kat. Light brown hairs form an equilateral triangle over the mons. The skin extending across the abdomen and thorax is as white as one of the screens in the deranged vlogs of Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex. A pool of blood gathers darkly in the shallow dip between the breasts. A rivulet runs from the sternum to the clavicle and falls, drop by drop, at long intervals, onto the tiled floor. Lying in close proximity to the bare shoulder is a translucent mass, a surgical glove turned inside out. “Am I to throat-fuck you through Kat’s face?” – Murasaki yawns, raising her arms and pushing forward her thorax in a posture familiar to the nocturnists who have been invited to masturbate onto her bosom. – This, thinks Ben Saïd, is the point to which time pushes desire. It is the Law of Diminishing Kicks: all the pleasures of the past well up against the present, pressing for new forms of gratification. Perversion becomes the vomitorium of lust, offering renewal through degradation.

OWN Ben Saïd leans over Kat, peering as though he has lost a contact lens. “They don’t get rid of Dr Malenkov because, while he studies the future, they study him.” – Murasaki follows the scalpel with the webcam as Ben Saïd disconnects the carotid artery from Kat’s face. “He still draws a salary? We pay him to be psychotic?” – Interrupting is a sound like the gush of air in the throat when the lungs inhale too quickly under the effect of pain. A silhouette looms behind the pane of frosted glass, reinforced with wire mesh, in the metal door. Crouched by the brown sacks of lab animal bedding in the corridor is a figure – a bald man dressed in black. Murasaki points the webcam at him, then pans across the objects strewn on the tiles: the syringe with the graduated marks along the barrel; the surgical glove turned inside out; the torn cotton shift; the face that is starting to resemble a cover separated from a book. White shadows slip across the floor. – Inept at surgery, Ben Saïd saws through sensory nerves and subcutaneous tissue until the facial flap comes free in his hands. – “You put it on.” – The webcam records how Ben Saïd’s head, larger than Kat’s, causes her face to stretch. It pulls the skin so taut that the strain tears at the corners of the lips and props open the mouth in the form of a silent scream.

PERVERSIONS The webcam feeds their image onto the wall-mounted display. It is a simulcast in which the camera does not move, the lens does not zoom, and the frame does not cut from one angle to another. The lack of dynamism mirrors the emotionless bearing of the players. In order not to orgasm too quickly, Ben Saïd allows his mind to wander. Distraction fractures the linear relationship between fucking and time... Members of a radical pro-life group have threatened to firebomb the office of a colleague in gynecology... A study shows that median distress scores were significantly greater among psychoanalysts who imagined their patients committing suicide, as opposed to those who have actually lost their analysands... The two switch positions. Murasaki lies on her back on the tiled floor. She places Kat's face between her legs. With the air of a nurse giving a child a shot in the buttock, Ben Saïd penetrates Murasaki through Kat's mouth. Semiotically, it is a highly charged act. The vagina is a mouth. Coitus is sodomy. Pleasure is sadism. Reproduction is death. She is her. The future is now. Did Dr Malenkov abandon the *Manifesto for the Future of Fucking?* Beyond the last page with writing on it are blanks and white screens, terminal points where the future reasserts its unknowability by erasing the psychedelic oracles of the prophet. Ejaculating, Ben Saïd makes the face of a man spitting toothpaste into a sink.

STOP The room is silent. For a moment post-depravity is less the deranged forecast of Dr Malenkov than the lucidity that follows orgasm. Murasaki gathers sheets of white paper from the box of facial shields. An announcement reverberates in the distance: "Room 33 is in V-tach. Check patient stat." It casts an image into Ben Saïd's mind, a whomp of the fist on a chest. "Ah," he smirks, "the precordial thump. How often can you physically assault someone and be heralded as a hero for it afterward? If I ever get caught beating up a hooker, I'll try it as a defense. 'I thought my girlfriend was dying so I gave her a precordial thump... But she's missing teeth!... I aimed too high, is all...'" When they close the door of the unfinished MRI suite behind them, a dim shape skirts the puddle that accumulates on the floor beneath the gray-yellow water stain. It sniffs with short, swift, hissing sounds then sits up on its hind legs. Its snout is pale. Its teeth are small and sharp. It looks in every direction – the white walls, the graffiti, the torn illustration defaced by a striking worker. It scampers to the blood pooling on the tiled floor beside the bare shoulder. The body is lying in an abandoned, limp position, its legs apart. The sex lies open like an untended wound. The rat places its forelegs on the soft flesh.

BEN An AV tech wheels a flat-screen television on a cart into the radiology lounge. When he leaves, Murasaki lowers the lights and positions the television parallel to the oversized display already attached to the wall. The two screens face each other. On the television she reudies the recording of the rape simulation experiment. On the wall-mounted display she calls up a vlog. Mesmerizing but dispassionate as an in vitro fertilization, the voice of Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex reverberates in the lounge. The burgeoning of facial transplant surgery, he predicts, will give rise to post-depraved forms of pleasure-seeking. As he describes lovers who swap faces and fetishists who sift through pathological waste containers in search of ears, the television shows Kat lying on the floor of the unfinished MRI suite. She is on her back, blonde tresses soaking in a brackish puddle. Murasaki's left hand circles Kat's throat and pins her head to the floor. Her right hand holds a syringe just above Kat's chest. A dazzling point of light falls on the needle. The futuropathic monologue of Dr Malenkov becomes the soundtrack to Kat's final simulation. The murder becomes the image missing from the vlogs of Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex. Looking back and forth from one screen to the other, Murasaki opens her uniform and taps at a nipple with the same motion she uses to swell a vein to draw blood.

SAÏD A white porcelain sink is mounted on the wall. Glass-fronted cabinets line one side of the laboratory. Murasaki lies on the hard bench. She is detached, aware that this lurching fuck has a goal other than her own pleasure. The director of the gross lab has the same body as her father – soft but bony, a skeleton knocking around in an old blanket. When he finishes, he makes the face of a man suffering a cryptogenic stroke then stares at her crooked teeth. Her lips resemble forceps. – “Thank you,” she says. – He understands what she refers to. “What did this one die of?” – Murasaki pulls a clot of semen from her pubic hair. It is thin and slimy as antibacterial gel. “Hieronymus Bosch Syndrome.” – “I see.” The director of the gross lab fixes her with a gaze hard as surgical steel. “You remain preoccupied with a man who refuses to submit to peer review or social convention. He considers the disdain of his colleagues a sure sign of their inability to comprehend his work. Their censure becomes the undisputed evidence of his greatness.” He presses forward. “Dr Malenkov is delusional, mad, futuropathic. If we took his predictions at face value, we would be morally obliged to try to cure these imminent perversions in advance.” – “Why would we want to cure them? We need more perversions, better perversions, grander perversions.” Murasaki flicks the semen from her fingers into his face.

HANGS Rain sluices over the glass tiles of the atrium ceiling, blotting out the external world. "The Sexual Oddball Effect," Ben Saïd is saying. "Twelve volunteers replied to an announcement on Dr Malenkov's website. They viewed pornographic stimuli in a darkened room with their heads restrained by chin rests. Stimuli consisted of a series of 'normal' images – coitus, fellatio, and so forth – interrupted by 'oddball' images of deviant activity such as bestiality and amputee fetishism. On each trial, participants judged whether the oddball had been longer or shorter in duration than the preceding 'normal' stimulus. What Dr Malenkov discovered was that participants exaggerated the duration of the oddball. For him, this showed a direct correlation between depravity and time." – Murasaki yawns, lowering her arms and pushing forward her breasts. It is possible to see, in the widening gaps between the buttons of her uniform, that she declines to wear a bra. "The more perverse an act, the slower time goes." – "Yes." – A loud moan, like air expelled from the lungs by a stab wound, drowns out the hiss of the espresso machine. Muscles rigid, a woman tips over. After a moment she begins to writhe and shake. Her jaw is clenched and her face turns blue. "What do you think – pornolepsy?" As the woman convulses, her skirt scrunches up around her thighs to expose red panties trimmed with white lace and outfitted with a hole that allows access to the vulva.

HIMSELF A small crowd gathers in a circle around the woman lying on the atrium floor. A paramedic takes her pulse. Her head rests on a makeshift pillow, a folded white coat. She reminds Ben Saïd of the otherwise untreatable epileptics who would queue up for neurosurgery at the Montreal Neurological Institute. It would be just like Dr Malenkov to have convinced one of his patients to sport risqué underthings during a procedure, the hole in her panties mirroring the hole he would bore in her skull. Psychogynecology. – “The webcam of depravity,” Murasaki resumes, “plays back in slow motion.” Vice decelerates, semen clots in dead bodies, cool mist curls out of blue labia, fetishists explore the erotic potential of refrigerants, dry ice, absolute zero. – “Indeed.” Ben Saïd fingers the razor cut that wends like an EKG tracing across his chin. He wonders idly if his persistent ineptitude with a disposable razor expresses an unconscious hostility, a side effect of the years he has spent charting the progress of Dr Malenkov’s antipathy toward the human face. “The Sexual Oddball Effect,” he continues, “suggests that, in the stead of normal and abnormal behaviors, there are different rhythms of duration, speeds and slownesses, ‘little deaths’ conceived not as physical climaxes but as metaphysical events. Sexuality is no longer defined in moral terms. Any given behavior is not more or less wicked than another. It simply affects perception in a more or less elastic way.”

DURING “The more perverse an act, the slower time goes.” – “Yes.” – “When a man beats me or urinates into my face...” – “It alters the way you perceive the fourth dimension.” – Attached to the granite planter surrounding the ficus tree is a poster for “Syphilis: King of the Spirochetes.” The Montreal Neurological Institute flares into Ben Saïd’s mind. Crippled syphilitics stagger through the rec room in green cotton gowns, involuntary participants in Dr Malenkov’s research into the impact of *tabes dorsalis* on ejaculation latency times. “It is difficult,” he observes, “not to interpret the Sexual Oddball Effect in light of the futuropathy that has overtaken Dr Malenkov. Deviant imagery causes duration to dilate. Dr Malenkov’s predictions populate the future with deviance. Therefore his predictions must have a recursive effect, elongating his perception of time. The more he envisions a deviant future, the longer it will seem to take to arrive. No wonder he is mad.” He pauses. “The white screen of his vlogs may be nothing more than an extreme form of slow motion.” Rain draws a mottled shade over the glass ceiling of the atrium. A muscular black is pushing a floor-waxing machine back and forth in front of a large fan. Murasaki stares at him with eyes like call lights. She bends over to smooth the nylon of her thigh-highs, inviting the black to steal a glimpse of the soiled linen bin beneath the skirt of her uniform.

AN “The consequences for his ego would be dire,” Ben Saïd is saying, “if these visions of the future have dislodged his memories of the past. They already appear to have pushed his visible self from the frame of his vlogs. Has Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex shoved Dr Malenkov off stage?” – Murasaki shrugs. Her eyes do not turn away from Ben Saïd so much as they toss him aside like a used condom. “I fucked that janitor on the Hippocratic Bridge last night. It is wonderful to be taken by a large black man. It’s like a dark night fucking you.” – “Ah yes, and the stars are little sprinklings of pre-cum.” Ben Saïd runs a finger along the razor cut that zigzags across his chin like a surgical scar. He thinks of the vlog in which his former colleague from Montreal posits the Creepy Simulation Paradox: the more closely an automaton resembles a “real” human, the more it will inspire feelings people describe as “creepy” and “uncanny.” Designers will counteract these responses by outfitting their automata with playful abnormalities such as unnatural colors, eclectic materials, impossible deformities. But then these abnormalities will become focal points for new forms of sexual fetishism: blue vaginas, fur breasts, two heads. – Murasaki raises a hand to her mouth, tasting the end of her finger in a conscious attempt to invoke the urethral meatus of the black she had invited to assault her.

ACT The lacquered fingernails touch the hospital stationery covered with a small, close, irregular handwriting with sporadic erasures and mistakes. “Dr Malenkov occupies a paradoxical position,” Murasaki reads. “On one hand, he no longer socializes, teaches, or sees patients. On the other hand, he has the dilemma of every prophet: he has to say something, he has to have some relationship to language, otherwise he is nothing. He seems to have resolved the dilemma by manufacturing this alter ego, Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex, to whom he attributes his white papers and vlogs. These, however, do not allow for discourse, interaction, negotiation. They are one-way, like the arrow of time, and they may be as inscrutable as the future they purport to elucidate.” Watching her, Ben Saïd runs the backs of his knuckles along the pinkish negligee beneath his white coat. He is not homosexual but he wears female underthings the way some doctors sneak narcotics. He likes their tactility. About the camisole, for example, there is something suicidal: it invites a rough hand to do violence to it, rip it off, throw it on the floor, tear it, tie it around the neck and choke, strangle, suffocate. – Straightening, Murasaki notices that the eyes of Ben Saïd have disappeared into her décolletage. She undoes the buttons of her uniform. “My body is an ER,” she says. Her eyes are cool as alcohol swabs. “I take care of urgent complaints.”

OF Murasaki shakes the ejaculate from the back of her hand with the motion of a nurse shaking down a thermometer. She fucks Ben Saïd out of boredom, but it is boring just to fuck. She thinks of a future class of deviant projected by Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex. This type will want to be masturbated by the recipients of hand transplants. He will coerce patients to pleasure him in exchange for immunosuppressants, without which their bodies will reject their new anatomies. He will mix and match – white hands on black bodies, female hands on male wrists – in order to “undermine the dull naturalism of unaltered human physiognomy.” What would this novel degenerate do with Kat’s hands? Murasaki had pressed Kat’s face into the clear plastic cover of a case containing an archival disk, labeled with deliberate irony “Manifesto for the Future of Fucking.” She placed this into an interoffice envelope and shoved it beneath the door of the S&M R&D Lab in the hopes that Dr Malenkov would study the video of Kat making the leap from simulation to reality. – Getting up from the orange banquette, Murasaki crosses the darkened radiology lounge to the computer. “Should we re-watch that vlog?” A white wall fills the screen and a voice asks whether it is a form of abuse to transplant a child’s hand onto an adult arm and then cause the hand to touch your genitalia.

AUTOEROTIC The screen, fixed on the final frame of Dr Malenkov's vlog, emits a white glow in the tenebrous lounge. Murasaki pulls Ben Saïd's white coat around her bare shoulders. It lies open at the front, exposing her breasts. She touches them as though charting the progress of a fibrous mass. "Supposedly," Ben Saïd is saying, "advances in neuroscience will lead to a future without human brain disorders. But even if we remove the biological defects, people will still suffer from all manner of diseased thoughts: suicidal ideation, perverse sexual urges, neosadism. I rather think that the career of Dr Malenkov, with its arc from curing to causing brain damage, is exemplary in this regard. Evidently he came to feel that his patients were less important than their tumors. He saw that tumors were the source of radical possibilities, new forms of thought and behavior. It seemed wrong to extinguish these simply because they caused personal suffering. After all, what is the alternative? The platitudes of political correctness and consumer capitalism? Dr Malenkov decided he would rather be mad. That's the essence of his futuropathy. And of course he began to impose that decision on his patients, hence the cheerleader whose occipital lobe he damaged irreparably." Murasaki settles onto the orange banquette. Pressing against the white coat, her vulva leaves a stain that smells vaguely of leeks. "I like the thought of Dr Malenkov touching my brain. It is so intimate."

ASPHYXIATION Boxes of isolation gowns have been stacked at the base of the Noguchi sculpture. The custodial crew dismantles the exhibit of artwork by sexually abused children. The framed drawings are placed on a steel cart and the placards are gathered in an interoffice envelope. A “Do Not Touch” notice dangles from the granite wall. Murasaki taps her lips with a fingertip. It’s a gesture, Ben Saïd reflects, that could mean either “I’m thinking about something” or “put your penis here.” Her crooked bite attests to the immoderate amounts of fellatio she must have performed during the formation of her adult teeth. “The superimposed figures,” Murasaki nods toward the Noguchi, “remind me of a ménage à trois.” – “Aha. Perhaps it is the first installation in a museum of sexual perversions. A post-depraved world will need a place to illustrate the way depravities were construed in the past. Imagine a tableau showing a ‘cyberpredator’ when he arrives to meet what he believes is a drug-addicted mother pimping out her adolescent daughter.” Ben Saïd looks at Murasaki with the mien of an autistic child. “One thing Dr Malenkov fails to predict is that the future will doubtless harbor nostalgia for our still depraved world. It will view our moral outrages as quaint, our sexual taboos as cute. There will be fads for retro perversions, reenactments of statutory rape or celebrity sex-tape scandals designed to resurrect the glories of our prudery.”

STOP Murasaki settles onto the granite bench. The blue flyer taped to the base of the Noguchi sculpture touts the lecture "Execution by Lethal Injection: Is It a Medical Procedure?" Ben Saïd taps a tongue depressor in the palm of his hand. "The average clitoris," he is saying, "is about the size of a baby tooth. A large clit implies an anti-vagina lying on the opposite side of the average with a tiny clit. The same is true of the mons, hymen, introitus, and so forth. V space is the region defined by all the variations. It's a conceptual construct." – "Or an obsession?" – "Does it matter? By describing the limits of what a genital can be, Dr Malenkov sets a task for surgeons of the future. Will they not want to push at the limits? Imagine the most extraordinary sex organs – a vulva covered with little suction cups like a starfish, or labia made of synthetic materials that enable them to be battered without being damaged." – "The anti-vagina is the logical embodiment of psychogynecology." – "Exactly. It's a genital reconceived." – Taking the tongue depressor from his hand, Murasaki balances it between the bare knees that protrude from the hem of her uniform. She squeezes with her thighs until the white birch stick snaps in half. She turns to Ben Saïd with an expression suggesting that, if he were to place his head between her legs, she would break his neck.

THESE "It is difficult," says Ben Saïd into the voice transcription software, "to say why Murasaki is fixated on communicating with him. Does she believe that Dr Malenkov's vlogs have a secret meaning intended for her alone? It might explain certain aspects of her behavior, such as why she persists in wearing a uniform." The thought of a traditional nursing uniform causes Ben Saïd's patient note to devolve into a rumination on the merits of this uniquely female attire. "Scrubs, of course, are ugly – shapeless, wrinkly, unstimulating to the touch. They're like anti-skid shoe covers for our bodies, functional but not stylish. Scrubs are the sort of thing that ought to be worn by laborers, prisoners, monks, or the terminally celibate – people who hate sex. In contrast, a uniform has an inherent dynamic: buttons to undo, a hem that reveals the calves, elastic that gives shape to the buttocks, darts that delineate the breasts, a notched collar, décolletage. There is a reason that nurses' outfits are so frequently used in psychodramas and role play." Ben Saïd envisions himself putting on Murasaki's uniform, his black chest hair pushing through the gaps between its buttons. It smells of Chanel No. 5. The garment strains against his rectilinear build but the brushed cotton excites his skin. He takes out his penis, long and thin as a rectal thermometer, and masturbates with regular but forced breaths like a man attached to a mechanical ventilator.

DEATHS A shadow appears in the central pane of frosted glass in the door. Murasaki enters. The soft tissues around her right eye are yellow and purple. "It happened on the Hippocratic Bridge. It was like being fucked by a cannibal." Murasaki describes how the muscular black pinned her by the throat to the glass wall of the elevated walkway that connects the skyscraper to an adjoining tower. He pulled her hair, choked her, bruised her loins with a fist like a cudgel. "Do you think," she asks, "it might have been caught on a security camera?" A smile spurts from her mouth like blood from a stab wound. A surveillance video would enable her to offer up this black man in opposition to the white screens of her mentor in depravity. Ben Saïd shrugs. A smell of perfume and perspiration, Chanel No. 5 imbued with vaginal mucus, rouses him to imagine putting on her uniform. Beneath his white coat there are female underthings. Beneath these a morgue lies at the core of him, a place where passions are sealed in body bags. He has the emotional intelligence of an autistic child. "If Dr Malenkov self-medicates," Murasaki asks, "why don't we see signs of it?" – "In Montreal I had the opportunity to watch him perform a neurosurgery. Two drips were hanging from the stand beside the anesthetist. One went to the patient. The other disappeared underneath Dr Malenkov's gown." – "Morphine?"

DO Ben Saïd gestures to the web page, an online tabloid declaring that an image of the Virgin Mary has been discovered in a brain scan. "Evidently the Holy Virgin has decided to make her divine appearance in the upper tip of the cerebellum." He navigates to the vlog of Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex. "In Montreal," he resumes, "Dr Malenkov was not out womanizing and then bringing his experiences back to the lab. Quite the opposite. He thought so much about sex that, when it came time to engage in the physical activity, he brought strange ideas to it." – "How do you know?" – "Well, the sexual harassment complaints..." – "Why would anyone complain?" Murasaki lifts the skirt of her uniform. At the top of her sheer black hose, a bruise the shape of a man's hand disfigures her right thigh. – "How do you feel about Kat now?" – "Feel?" A smile fills her face like drainage in a wound dressing. "I don't feel anything. People die here all the time." – Ben Saïd pushes the play button. The video shows a white surface no different than the walls in the radiology lounge. They wait for the narcotic monologue of Dr Malenkov but there is no audio. Ben Saïd fiddles with the volume. Eventually the silence takes on cryptic meanings – technical problems, self-censorship, allegorical intent. The back of a white coat blocks the camera and the video comes to an abrupt end.

NOT “You think that’s perverse?” Ben Saïd responds. “Wait until you see normal thirty years from now. N + 30. We’re only babies in the realm of deviance. Maybe we aren’t even born yet, we’re just floating in the amniotic fluid of perversion.” Murasaki unfastens the buttons of her uniform. The front falls open. Her erect nipples are the color of scar tissue. The Suicide-Prevention Fashion Show flares into Ben Saïd’s mind. “You remember the nurse who modeled the Perspex uniform? She stole a vial of Demerol, three bottles of morphine, three bottles of Dilaudid, some vecuronium and a bunch of syringes from the outpatient surgical suite.” – “Vecuronium.” – “They found her body in a bathroom this morning. She was twenty-four.” – Murasaki can see her former colleague sprawled on the floor. Death throes caused her skirt to gather around her thighs, revealing gold lamé panties emblazoned with the phrase “Kiss My Boo-Boo.” “What if Dr Malenkov committed suicide? We might not even know it.” – “Indeed. An assistant could post his white papers and vlogs. When was the last time anybody saw him in person?” – Murasaki slips the uniform off her shoulders, letting it slide gradually over her bare skin. Ben Saïd presses it to his face. “Ah,” he exhales, “the human body is a haunted house, and its malodorous smells are the ghosts that drift from chamber to chamber, armpit to underwear.” – “I am in the mood to be cruel.”

FORM Adhesive tape binds the Korean whore to the orange banquette. Her moans die against the sound-muffling tiles that line the ceiling of the radiology lounge. Murasaki unwraps the syringe and drops the wrapper on the floor. Her manner is dispassionate. That they are both Asian does not cause Murasaki to feel empathy. The Korean, thinks the Japanese, is subhuman. "We are using the residents of third-world countries as guinea pigs." – Aroused, Ben Saïd runs his knuckles along the pinkish negligee visible inside his unbuttoned white coat. "Dr Malenkov speculates that one day we will use brain imaging to ensure that our patients feel precisely the kind of suffering we wish to inflict." – Murasaki adopts a reverent mien. "Our scanner, which art from Siemens, hallowed be thy coils." Her lips curl into a grin. Her teeth resemble broken toes. She pinches up flesh from the left breast and inserts the needle as though to aspirate a lump. Gray and clammy, the whore is just conscious enough to grimace. Each movement of the syringe produces a gasp, an audible sign of the pathos necessary to galvanize dead synapses of pleasure. Agonal respirations, a thready pulse... – "This is the form that neosadism will take when it intersects with neural deviance." The whore groans again. "Imagine the artistic possibilities. In the future, the neosadistic will inflict pain in order to create beautiful images, patterns of agony on brain scans framed in gold."

A At the simulated patient facility an actress who specializes in the symptoms of human papillomavirus remarks on the absence of Kat. "She has been preoccupied with Dr Malenkov," the actress continues. "Is it true that he was relieved of his teaching duties?" – Ben Saïd offers the condescending mien of a pharmacist declining a forged prescription. "Dr Malenkov began to show up at his classes wearing a stocking pulled over his head, like a bank robber. Rumors about self-medication were fueled by his avowal that doctors should make use of the poet's derangement of the senses. Then there was the manifesto about the future of sexuality." – "Manifesto?" – "Its language alone suggested that, for Dr Malenkov, medical terminology had become a private idiom expressing the most personal obsessions: psychogynecology, parthenotherapy, the S&M R&D Lab dedicated to longitudinal studies of neosadism." Ben Saïd wonders, as he goes on to speak about Dr Malenkov's quantum theory of time, if the actress would consider strangling him in an exam room. It is only too easy to imagine: the carotid arteries in the neck are compressed, the brain swells, the vagal nerve is pinched, a violent splash of ejaculate mars the pale skin on the back of her hands. "Anyway," the actress interrupts, "if you see Kat, could you give this to her?" She gestures to the registration desk. Lying there is the white book with red Helvetica letters, *Die Eigenrealität der Zeichen*.

MORAL The hospital may have been designed for the purposes of medicine but it is difficult not to believe that the plans were influenced by Dr Malenkov's vlog on the relationship of architecture and perversion. There are secluded spaces that give rise to all sorts of deviant activity: isolation units, the disused operating room, the stalled renovations. "The facade is the heterosexuality of the building," the vlog concluded. "Look behind it and you find the pockets where the normal and the abnormal become coextensive." In the All Faith Chapel, Ben Saïd seats himself in the last pew. Two men are having sex before the altar. One is a doctor and the other a patient. The doctor undoes the tie at the back of the patient's gown. He squirts liquid soap into his hand and, balancing his thumb in the cleft above the patient's rectum, rubs his fingers along the perineum. It is rather dull. Ben Saïd takes a prayerbook from the shelf. It falls open to a condom wrapper that a bored nocturnist flattened between its pages. The little foil package is emblazoned with a serpent circling a staff. "Say Yes to Safe Sex." No. Sex should be like an act of suicide. It should aim at oblivion. Ben Saïd approaches the altar. A pair of underwear is lying on the floor. Ben Saïd picks them up and, grabbing the back of the patient's head, stuffs them into the man's mouth.

STOP Howling and shrieking, a female patient accuses her caregivers of administering unnecessary mammograms out of a desire to fondle her breasts. Ben Saïd, usually oblivious to the noise emanating from the Psychiatric ICU down the corridor from his office, smirks like a man who has just tricked a child into touching his penis. Not only has he performed a mammogram out of a desire to see a patient's tits, he has also succumbed to the temptation to offer a false-positive diagnosis. It's neosadism – a way to inflict pain without leaving incriminating marks on the patient's body. ("Women misdiagnosed with breast cancer remain as distressed as those who have actually had to undergo treatment.") Seating himself at his steel desk, Ben Saïd dons a platinum wig, smears red lipstick around his mouth, and wraps black stockings around his throat. He can compress his windpipe by pulling on the nylon legs. He navigates to the Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex channel and selects a vlog. The camera holds steady on the white wall, transforming the screen into something that resembles the curtain hanging between two hospital beds. Staring, Ben Saïd thinks of a woman's face at the moment she receives the bad news: the skin blanches, the upper lip rises, the brows draw together, the eyes go moist. A few drops of tepid precum leak from the tip of his penis like the tears elicited by a terminal diagnosis.

THEY Ben Saïd leafs through his notes while he waits. Space, for Dr Malenkov, is a continuum. His inability to leave the airports in Asia transformed the outside world into a vast interior, a labyrinth of departure gates, sky lounges, and hotels accessible by monorail. In contrast, time is a series of discrete units that can be combined and recombined, moved forward and backward like clips in the timeline of a video editor, until the gaps and juxtapositions inspire new... Interrupting is an assertive knock on the pane of frosted glass in the door of Ben Saïd's office. Lucy Lee stands in the corridor in dominatrix regalia. She blows smoke from a lit cigarette into her client's face then uses a white cord to bind his hands behind his back. "Beg and plead if you need to stop," she declares, touching a finger to the side of his neck as though feeling for a carotid pulse. She cuts off the blood flow to his brain by pressing against the veins beneath the jaw. When Ben Saïd faints, head narrowly missing a corner of the steel desk, she stares at him with the detachment of a eunuch. "Sissy." She rifles the desk for a prescription pad. Not finding one, she struts into the corridor and leaves the door open so that patients being escorted to the Psychiatric ICU can see the doctor lying on the floor with platinum wig and smudged lipstick.

SHOW The Hippocratic Bridge that connects the towers is desolate at night. Murasaki gazes at her reflection in the thick glass that makes up the walls. The hematoma surrounding her right eye has become a gradient of blue, purple, yellow. She likes it. The bruise has something aesthetic about it. Her body is the raw material of an artwork created by a rapist using his fist as a brush. She imagines squatting on a pedestal in the exhibit area in order to display the injuries to her vulva. "Here, inside the female genital tract, is where the monster creates his masterpiece." She surveys the atrium below. A banner publicizing the Make-a-Wish Foundation hangs from the steel struts that support the glass ceiling. The floor-waxing machine is parked by a ficus tree. A large fan chops up the air. A virologist scampers past with the urgency of a woman racing for the bathroom because she feels semen leaking into her panties. "It used to be," Murasaki can hear Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex proclaim, "that the missionary position united humanity in a great chain of being. But then we broke off into individual depravities." Like no-relationship societies: perversions require people but not bonds or connections. Sex is as quantum as Dr Malenkov's conception of time. A human being is a face transplant smiling and dissembling atop a body pursuing its most destructive desires to their logical conclusions.

OBSESSIVE The malfunctioning HVAC equipment causes a sustained chill. Murasaki shivers, thinking of the experiment on hot and cold masochisms then of the vlog titled "AI Meets Voluptas." "Fuck machines," murmurs the barbiturate voice of Dr Malenkov, "are already replacing humans in the bedroom. Will they also be used to reinvent deviance? For example, robots are unaffected by basic emotions such as repulsion. They are immune to fatigue, hunger, sleep deprivation, hot and cold. They can be engineered to take sexual perversion to extremes previously inaccessible to humans. Imagine a robot programmed to engage in prolonged sexual torture, alternating between the infliction of pain and the monitoring of vital signs, to produce a sustained state of ecstatic consciousness." The white door at the end of the Hippocratic Bridge swings open. Standing in the passageway, backlit by the bulbs in the distance, a dark figure emits a black glow like the veins in an angiogram of the penis. Murasaki's pulse quickens. Her muscles tense. Her pupils dilate. The upper lip rises, the brows draw together, and the lips stretch horizontally. Piloerection. Her mouth is covered by a hand like a sound-muffling ceiling tile. Her head hits the glass wall. A shoe falls off. The open-toed pump, notable for its reptile embossed platform and heel tapering to a tiny square, lies on the floor amid some garbage, a torn foil package emblazoned with the image of a serpent circling a staff.

DESIRES Murasaki wrestles a figure with thighs and chest muscles like oiled meat. He repeatedly bashes her head against the thick glass wall as though he wishes to induce the hypersexuality of the assault victim who, suffering a frontal lobe injury, loses every inhibition. Finally Murasaki slumps to the floor. Her body settles into the area that a forensics team will outline with chalk. Her uniform is ripped open. Blood and saliva mat her hair. She gasps for air like a patient undergoing an asthma attack. This is the moment when life and death become coextensive. Post-depravity. The vlogs of Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex are, in effect, a manual of sexual positions conceived by a madman. As her legs are forced apart, Murasaki manages to withdraw her phone from a pocket. Holding it aloft, she films the scene: the blue banner for the Make-a-Wish Foundation visible through the transparent walls; the v-shaped back of her muscular attacker; a blur of greasy thighs and heaving buttocks; her face, that of a prisoner after a prolonged beating; a hand closing like an inviolable decision around her throat; a petechial hemorrhage, pressure on the neck causing blood to leak from the capillaries into her eyes. The phone falls to the floor. The screen shatters. The figure ejaculates standing up, rising slightly on his toes, the muscles of his calves high and tight as the testicles of a greyhound.

PURSUED Knock, knock. A figure looms in the pane of frosted glass in the door. Opening, Ben Saïd sees a tall, cadaverous woman in a white smock. She works in the Psychiatric ICU. "I'm sorry about all the noise." – "Noise?" – "The howling." – "Ah, the howling. I don't even hear it anymore." He closes the door and returns to his computer, where a web browser is open to a discussion group dedicated to autoerotic asphyxiation. Beside him on the steel desk is a linguistic analysis of the narratives Dr Malenkov distributed in the S&M R&D Lab for an experiment on sexual aggression and time perception. The analysis demonstrates how the pain and pleasure variables can be manipulated. The rape narrative shows the victim being "forcefully crushed." Her reaction includes screaming, panic, and a "paroxysm of tears." The collusion narrative shows her "hungering for more" in a "paroxysm of bliss." Two different conclusions were used. In one, the victim "finds herself overcome with a violent pleasure, convulsing and groaning as waves of orgasm pound at her body." In the other, the victim "finds herself overcome with a violent suffering, convulsing and groaning as waves of pain pound at her body." The estimates of female subjects reading the narratives indicate that time appeared to speed up when the victim was in the orgasmic, no-pain condition. For male subjects, time quickened when the victim was portrayed as experiencing both pleasure and pain.

TO A post on the discussion group dedicated to autoerotic asphyxiation emphasizes the importance of the buddy system. "Doing it alone is dangerous." Ben Saïd is about to phone a Korean outcall agency when a man appears at the door in a uniform the color of surgical steel. A close-shaven head gives him the look of a chemotherapy patient. Ben Saïd suspects he is a police impersonator who has managed to escape from the Psychiatric ICU, but then the man asks about Murasaki. "Her body was found on the bridge between the skyscrapers." – Ben Saïd purses his lips like a mourner peering down at the body laid out in an open coffin. – "Are you aware of any next of kin?" – "She has a father." – "Do you know how to contact him?" – "No." – "Is there anyone who would want to harm Nurse Kihara?" – She wanted to harm herself. Ben Saïd thinks of Murasaki's desire to reenact experiments from the S&M R&D Lab. It would be difficult to describe how she planned to resurrect the trial in which Dr Malenkov hired actors resembling his volunteers' parents. His goal was to chart the self-reported amounts of pain and pleasure experienced by masochists flogged by impersonations of their mothers and fathers. "No, of course not." – The man notes the mask-like character of Ben Saïd's face. He must be hiding something. In the distance a PA announces, "Visiting hours are over."

THEIR Ben Saïd adjusts a bra strap. He is not homosexual but there is something indeterminate about him, like a unisex bathroom. Removing a photograph from the interoffice envelope, he holds it up to the light filtering through the pane of frosted glass. It shows a female body on the floor of the Hippocratic Bridge. She is lying on her back with her legs open. One knee is bent and the foot half-hidden in the crook of the other knee. The right arm rests like a severed limb on the white tiles. The back of the left hand covers the mouth. Ring, ring. Ignoring the telephone, Ben Saïd puts the photograph away and pulls up a vlog. "Could a machine," the narcotizing voice intones, "ever 'know better' than to obey a human order? If a human commands a robot to perform a sexual assault and the robot identifies the intended victim as a child, could it refuse the order?" The screen dissolves into kaleidoscopic static. Ben Saïd is on the Hippocratic Bridge looking down into the atrium. It's like peering into the repressed side of a person's mind. The gloom is populated with a thriving nightlife – mysterious figures, pornographers, rapists, killers, Dr Malenkov ensconced in white screens of deviance. – Ring, ring. Ben Saïd picks up. "What does the patient have to do to prepare for a mammogram? Tell her to try shutting her breast in the door of a fridge."

LOGICAL The vlog gives way to a replay button and recommendations for other videos by Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex. The white screens, it occurs to Ben Saïd, are blank canvases onto which Dr Malenkov projects his visions of the deviance to come. It would not be surprising to find that the *Manifesto for the Future of Fucking* was never anything more than the same – a moleskin notebook with unmarked pages, a delusion... A shadow darkens the pane of frosted glass in the door. "Ah, the future has arrived." The Korean whore, wearing a dress made of white muslin, enters the radiology lounge. Physically she is a composite of the dead women: thin with small breasts, like Kat; Asian with eyes large and round as ovaries, like Murasaki. Psychologically she will be more like Kat, acquiescent, yet her role in this psychodrama will be to reinterpret Murasaki's end. Using the photograph for reference, Ben Saïd poses her on the orange banquette. He parts her legs, bends one knee, and tucks the foot into the crook of the other knee. He places her right arm so that it extends along the banquette with the hand dangling over the edge. He positions the left arm so that the back of the hand covers the mouth. "Stay like that." As foreplay, he self-administers the Blanchard Transvestitism Scale. ("Have you ever masturbated while thinking of yourself wearing women's underwear, stockings, or a nightgown?")

CONCLUSIONS A scent like a tampon fills the radiology lounge. A coil of thick black hair is scattered over the pleather surface of the orange banquette. Ben Saïd stands alongside the Korean with his erection, long and thin as a rectal thermometer, emerging from the front of a pinkish negligee. A platinum wig slants across his cranium, red lipstick mars his mouth, and black stockings are wrapped around his throat. He pulls at the legs in order to compress his windpipe. He pushes his cock into the whore's mouth. She makes the sound of a child having her throat swabbed. Her body lies in the prone position in which Murasaki was found on the floor of the Hippocratic Bridge. Ben Saïd is not entirely sure why he feels the desire to reenact Murasaki's murder with this petite victim of human trafficking. He does not understand his own compulsions. To be self-aware about desire is like standing watch over a person determined to commit suicide. No matter how vigilant you are, you might not be able to change the outcome anyway. He thinks of Dr Malenkov's vlog about a future type of sexual deviant obsessed with patients who have undergone near-death experiences. That is what the white screens are: bright lights at the end of interminable tunnels. He begins to lose consciousness. The hosiery loosens. His head strikes the floor so that a pool of blood gathers on the tile.

STOP The Noguchi sculpture rears up like a projection from the subconscious. On the pedestal is a stack of postcards describing how to register for the conference on pediatric gynecology. Taking one, Ben Saïd pauses to join the handful of clinicians watching the reporter interview the hospital spokesperson. Yes, the nurse was raped. The cause of death appears to be strangulation but the autopsy results are pending. Have there been other incidents? "No comment." A witness, a cancer-ridden Canadian parked on a stretcher in the corridor beyond the Hippocratic Bridge, may have observed the perpetrator but medications make his testimony unreliable. Video from the security camera is being recovered. Murasaki, thinks Ben Saïd, doubtless realized the camera was there. She must have counted on it to record her final attempt to communicate with Dr Malenkov. He can envision the video. The camera does not move, the lens does not zoom, the frame does not cut from angle to angle. The body does not move either. Murasaki lies on her back with legs apart. One knee is bent and the foot half-hidden in the crook of the other knee. Her left hand, palm outward, covers the mouth. Her eyes are like stopped watches. She has become an object, evidence that to fully realize a sexual obsession is to arrive at the end of time. Oblivion. Death. The clinicians disperse and the reporter asks Ben Saïd if he knew the deceased.

DEATH In El Kef, Ben Saïd did not torment himself with questions about why he was driven to fondle the gusset of pink underpants. Pragmatic, he simply engineered a way to indulge his transvestism by applying to medical school in France. He is, he realizes, a loose collection of unrelated drives – a doctor who likes to be strangled; a radiologist trying to write a case study on a new form of psychosis; a heterosexual who likes to wear makeup and female underthings. Nothing adds up. He is less a synthesis than a juxtaposition, a collage of impulses and kinks. But when he contemplates his former colleague from the Montreal Neurological Institute, he cannot resist analyzing him. Does Dr Malenkov whip himself into states of mad erotic agitation? Or do his outré visions emerge from a sexuality as blunted as the emotional sensitivity of an ER doc? He is like a quantum particle. We know his position in space, insofar as he never leaves the premises, but not in time. – Limping across the atrium, a teenager pauses to lean against the granite planter circling a ficus tree. One of the bare legs protruding from her miniskirt terminates in a black orthopedic boot. She looks familiar, a data point from the report on cheerleader injuries. While x-raying her ankle, Ben Saïd had snatched upskirt photos of her crotch with his phone. Her resemblance to Kat made it seem natural to violate her.

STOP Shivering, Ben Saïd buttons his white coat over the pinkish negligee. Something is wrong with the HVAC. The hospital has been freezing cold. Architecture from the vantage point of neosadism: frigid speculums galvanize a thousand pelvic exams. His notes on Dr Malenkov lead nowhere. They repeat and contradict one another. He lacks the biographical detail and the documentary evidence to write the case study defining this new form of madness, futuropathy. Rather than sum up his knowledge, the notes have begun to fragment it, replace the memories of the perverse neurosurgeon whom he first encountered at the Montreal Neurological Institute with disconnected facts – the color of Dr Malenkov’s eyes, blue as a chux pad; the obsessional form taken by his diagnostics, with its psychogynecology and parthenotherapy; the personal reclusiveness which crystallized in the facial repression experiments, the white screens of the vlog, and the invention of the Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex persona; the way in which novel conceptions of sexual abnormality inspired fanatical admiration in a select number of students, assistants, and online followers; and, of course, the rapid onset of a final psychosis, a belief that the future can be grasped through a process not dissimilar to the poet’s derangement of the senses. It is as though the quantum theory of time asserts itself to make these elements of the case study irreconcilable, unable to be smoothed into the standard format required by the peer-reviewed journal.

THE Ben Saïd surveys the papers scattered across the sheet of glass atop his desk. He lifts one at random, a printout of a note he had dictated into the voice transcription software on his computer. "For example," it says, "when Dr Malenkov first arrived from Montreal, he conducted a series of experiments in which he measured the semen quality of terminally ill patients. He took samples before the patients were given prognoses, showing these doomed souls whatever pornography would prompt them to masturbate into specimen jars. Once he had subjected the samples to the usual methods of semen analysis, he accompanied the attending physicians as they handed out the bad news. His task at that moment was to convince the patients, in spite of their having only weeks or months to live, to continue donating sperm for his research. He would tout the importance of their contributions to science or, at the limit, offer to have it collected by 'nurses' who were really Korean prostitutes in white uniforms. With particularly uncooperative patients he would threaten to withhold pain medications. The semen he managed to collect would then be compared to the earlier samples. The idea was to determine whether an announcement of impending doom would impact semen quality. Would a mere prediction cause the morphology of a man's sperm to change?" Ben Saïd touches his fingers to the front of his throat. He is not checking for swollen lymph nodes.

FUTURE A cadaver lies like a side of beef on the stainless steel bench. A Y-shaped incision runs from the chest to the pubis. The skin and underlying tissues have been pulled back to reveal the rib cage and abdominal organs. "There was a little girl with holoprosencephaly," the pathologist rattles on. "She passed impacted feces the size of tangerines and the pediatrician thought sodomy must have occurred. A letter from me enabled the prosecutor to drop the charges." – Watching the assistant clip through the ribs, Ben Saïd thinks of the vlog about reincarnation fetishism. Advances in medical technology, Dr Malenkov declared, will give rise to a new perversion that involves fucking and killing a patient – for example, by garroting during the moment of climax – then resuscitating him and doing the same thing over and over. Fuck, kill, revive, da capo. "What killed the nurse?" Ben Saïd asks. – The pathologist emits the lurid grin of a man unashamed to be caught eating somebody's wife's pussy. "Shall we say... Hieronymus Bosch Syndrome?" He laughs. "You should see her brain. There was a glioblastoma sprouting from beneath the thalamus. It was compressing the amygdala. Did she have headaches?" When it is time to leave, the pathologist gives Ben Saïd a clear ziplock bag containing a pair of sheer black nylon stockings. "I thought you would like these. There's no blood." When the bag opens, the smell of Chanel No. 5 wafts out.

IS Ben Saïd presses a palm to his forehead as though taking his own temperature. On the reading table before him is an article linking pedophilia to neurological disease: “through disinhibition, these disorders may release a predisposition to sexual attraction for children.” It sounds like one of the demented oracles of Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex – the brain-damaged as the vanguard of post-depravity. To molest a girl is to transform her future into your past. So too the case study of a 57-year-old gay man who “began complaining of heterosexual orientation” after a stroke. Closing his eyes, Ben Saïd sees the white screen and hears the tranquilizer voice projecting a future in which deviants self-induce strokes for the purposes of libidinal variety. It’s the Law of Diminishing Kicks: bored of straight or gay, you strangle yourself in the hope of causing a sex-altering cerebral hypoxia. An image of Murasaki materializes on the white screen. “Choke me.” Her amygdala is compressed like a testicle in the fist of a dominatrix. It would be easy to argue that she was responsible for nothing. As with the pedophile and the stroke victim, it was a cerebral anomaly that authored her obsessions. Opening his eyes, Ben Saïd steps to the windows. The seamless cladding transforms the skyscraper into a glass prison. “When,” he mutters to himself, “did windows that don’t open become a feature of modern institutional architecture?”

REDUCED A sound is audible from outside. It could be a woman masturbating with a vibrator. It could be a man having a hole drilled into his skull. (“You may feel a tugging sensation as the skin is cut and pulled back to expose the bone. You will hear a drill sound as it bores through the skull.”) At the end of the corridor, Ben Saïd retrieves a document from the laser printer. Standing there, he contemplates the first paragraph of Dr Malenkov’s white paper. “An individual’s libidinal practice is subject to time,” the paper begins. “It follows a curve that, regardless of the pleasures it traverses, culminates in old age, debility, the cadaverous quality of an old man’s flesh. The psychological accompaniments are obvious: frustration, nostalgia, regret. Old people are museums of sex, and they turn to aberrant behaviors in a doomed effort to stave off the obsolescence of their musty desires.” Ben Saïd stands silently in the corridor, index finger idly tracing the razor cut that mars his rectangular chin. A sexual desire, he thinks, is like a suicide attempt – easy to botch, difficult to see through to a conclusion. He reaches into the pocket of his white coat. There is a penlight, a mobile phone, a prescription pad, and a ziplock bag containing a pair of sheer black nylon stockings. Withdrawing the phone, he navigates to the last text message that Murasaki sent. “Finger inside, why you outside?”

TO “The prophet of old,” types Ben Saïd, leaning against the planter that circles the ficus tree, “held that men were mad not to prepare for the apocalypse. But for Dr Malenkov, there are no end times. The apocalypse occurs when the endlessness of time allows men to reach the most advanced stages of their madness: post-depravity.” Pausing, Ben Saïd attends to the disjointed background sounds of the atrium – the sibillance of the espresso machine, a rickety printer, fragments of conversation, “things you can’t unsee.” The director of the gross lab approaches. He makes small talk about cadavers. “One of them has a soft ass.” – “Soft ass?” – “It’s supposed to feel like a football. If it starts feeling like this –” he pokes Ben Saïd in the arm – “it’s too soft. If the body has arteriosclerosis, you don’t get perfusion.” – “You monitor the cadavers?” – “I’m always poking at them. People think I’m playing around with them. Say, have you seen Nurse Kihara?” – Ben Saïd touches Murasaki’s underthings in the pocket of his white coat. In the autopsy suite she lay like a side of beef on the stainless steel table. The skin and underlying tissues had been flipped back to reveal the rib cage and abdominal organs. On the sole of her left foot was a barcode sticker. “The future,” Ben Saïd had commented to the pathologist, “is concealed in the barcode of depravity. Dr Malenkov only aims to scan it.”

THE At one neglected terminus of the underground tunnels that spiral outward from the skyscraper is a deserted corridor. The walls are covered with uniform white paint. An even light descends from the ceiling and reflects off the polished floor. It is impossible to say whether it is day or night. Ben Saïd stands outside the white steel door of the S&M R&D Lab. “Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex” has been smeared across it by an admirer armed with lipstick the color of fresh blood. He tries the doorknob, a heavy chrome that feels cold in the hand. It’s locked. “The immoral eye,” he remembers, “shows a brain tumor.” The glioblastoma deforming Murasaki’s brain must have influenced her obsession with Dr Malenkov. Her behavior – trying to appeal to the *médecin maudit* through an increasingly deranged series of perverse exhibitions – takes on the appearance, in retrospect, of a person unconsciously seeking a cure. But instead of the doctor salvaging the patient, the neurosurgeon removing the malignant growth, there were these pathologies attempting to communicate through the medium of sex – on his side, signs concerning degenerate behavior; on her side, degenerate behavior becoming signs. The white screen stood between them like a sheet hanging between the beds in a non-private room. – Ah well, thinks Ben Saïd. We all have to follow our desires to their logical conclusions. He fingers the black nylons in the pocket of his white coat.

VISIONS The lobby of the simulated patient facility is empty. An exit sign glows above the glass doors leading to the elevators. The building emits a deep infrastructural drone, a vital sign charting the decline of the increasingly precarious HVAC equipment. Lying on the registration desk is the book with the white cover and red Helvetica letters, *Die Eigenrealität der Zeichen*. Behind the locked door of an exam room is a tableau recorded by the camera in the glass hemisphere attached to the ceiling. One end of a black stocking is tied to the sprinkler that protrudes from the sound-muffling tiles. The other end is knotted around the neck of a body. Because the stocking is not crisp, like a rope, the indentation between the hyoid bone and the jaw is not sharply defined. The groove beneath the stocking is purplish in color with livid edges. The knot points upward at the front of the neck. Saliva drips from the corners of the mouth like pus from a wound. The pupils offer the same unblinking gaze as the security camera. They register the terminal climax of a man who, to the very end, could hear Dr Malenkov murmuring in his mind. His voice was that of the anatomist indicating the organs of a cadaver. "Here is the future," it would declare, but the dispassionate tone always made the future sound like a patient who had died on the operating table.

OF A faint smell of perfume, Chanel No. 5, pervades the room. The body wears a traditional nurse's uniform. The long tresses of a platinum wig conceal the marked flexure of the posterior portion of the neck. The head is pulled upward and backward by a sheer black stocking that has been tied in the form of a slip knot beneath the chin. The face, bluish-tan like a bruise, could be that of a haggard socialite in the wee hours after a drunken benefit. Red lipstick is smeared around the mouth. The same lipstick has been used to scrawl NO CODE across the forehead. A sheet of hospital stationery lies on the floor. Not a suicide note, it is a handwritten document describing Dr Malenkov's research into the semen quality of the terminally ill. It proposes a similar experiment investigating the quantity, motility, and morphology of sperm in those who die by autoerotic asphyxiation, particularly strangulation or hanging. The idea is to determine whether there are biomarkers that can be used to identify people for whom sex and death have become inextricable. The author requests that no one disturb "any specimens found on my person, on the floor, or on nearby surfaces." The specimens are to be collected by a "qualified professional" and subject to standard semen analysis. The results are to be placed into an interoffice envelope and pushed beneath the door of the S&M R&D Lab.

DR The janitor, a muscular black pushing a floor-waxing machine, opens the glass doors of the simulated patient facility. Student workstations line one wall of the empty lobby. Screensavers populate the gloom with fragments of language, definitions drawn from a medical dictionary. "Hematospermia – noun. Presence of blood in the semen." One of the exam rooms is locked. The janitor opens it with a pass key. Hanging from the sheer black stocking tied to a sprinkler is a body. Its immobility belies the struggle it underwent – suspension of breathing, resistance and excitement, violent efforts to breathe, clenching of hands, teeth biting tongue, great struggling, then unconsciousness, an anesthetic calm interrupted by involuntary spasms that caused the limbs to dance in the air. "The evidence of genital excitement is sometimes observed upon the bodies of those dying by hanging, but they are of no diagnostic significance as they are found in other forms of violent death." The janitor approaches the body, surprised to notice that the white nursing uniform camouflages a male with black chest hair and skin the color of an ACE bandage. Rifling the pockets, he finds a note scrawled on a prescription pad in a small, close, irregular handwriting with sporadic erasures and mistakes. "Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex," it says, "you are the deus ex machina of perversion. Your white screens are the logic that makes it possible to deduce oblivion from desire." The janitor calls security.

MALENKOV A grid of screens in the observation theater displays the video feeds. One is black as though to mark the place from which Ben Saïd's body has been removed. The others show the empty exam rooms with their steel sinks, paper sheets, jars of cotton balls. Unshadowed, white, clean, artificial, each room is a movie studio made to look like a clinic so that actors can perform monologues on disease for the abortionists and coroners of tomorrow. But these medical students, taking fake histories and manufacturing diagnoses, resent working through decision trees, insurance forms, and bedside-manner checklists. They talk in whispers about this radical figure, Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex. What is the meaning of his slogans? We see the future through the webcam of depravity... Pedophilia transmits a corruption to the sexuality of the future... The face is the heterosexuality of the body... In the future our Marquis de Sades will live forever... Is it true that Dr Malenkov is mad? That he never leaves a lab in the basement? That he devises bizarre experiments on the intersection of sadomasochism and time? That in Montreal he deliberately induced brain damage in a patient, a cheerleader undergoing surgery for a head injury, in an effort to determine whether time exerts a regulating effect on sexual promiscuity? – A yellow line of police tape crosses the glass doors. A printout is taped to the registration desk. "Today's simulations are cancelled."

AND Light from the corridor suffuses the central pane of frosted glass in the door. A postcard from the exhibition of drawings by abused children is tacked to the wall. Hospital stationery lies on the glass surface covering the gray steel desk. A lone paragraph appears in a small, close, irregular handwriting with sporadic erasures and mistakes. "Psychology," it states, "posits the past as the cause of sexual abnormalities. The visions of Dr Malenkov imply that it is not the past that spurs us but the future that draws us toward it. Our kinks foretell the apocalypse of normality. They are never caused by events in an individual's history. Rather, they are symptoms of the inexorable progress of post-depravity. We are not victims of repressed memories but of sexually deranging vectors. These, like any curves, can be extrapolated. In the future, the perversions will be evenly distributed." In a margin is a note indicating the direction in which the text might have continued. "Kat: psychological... Murasaki: neurological... Dr Malenkov: futuropathic." The rest of the paper is white, the same color as the walls in Ben Saïd's office, the uniform traditionally worn by nurses, the connective tissue in a mammogram, the mice shivering in cocaine withdrawal in the animal lab, the adhesive tape which Ben Saïd provided to Korean hookers for gagging him, gauze and sperm and the blank screens of the vlogs produced by Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex.

THESE A commotion erupts in the corridor. The patient, struggling against the restraints that bind her to a stretcher, tries to tear out the intravenous line taped to her inner elbow. She threatens to assault the male nurse wheeling her to the Psychiatric ICU. "If you touch me, I'll – I'll – I'll bite your balls off!" But sedatives deny the resident expert in phalloplasty, who subscribes to the feed of Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex's videos, the opportunity to experiment with severed testicles. The stretcher trundles past Ben Saïd's office. Behind the central pane of frosted glass in the door is a still life. Hanging on a hook is a spare white coat, a black garter belt emerging from the right pocket. The computer screen is dark. Tacked to the wall is a postcard from the exhibition of drawings by abused children. Lying on the glass covering the steel desk is a sheet of hospital stationery covered in a small, close, irregular handwriting with sporadic erasures and mistakes. "Is it futuropathy? Or Hieronymus Bosch Syndrome? The symptoms don't cohere. And if his predictions come true, then it is not the futurist but the future that is mad." – The door swings open. "It's so sad," says the Latina from housekeeping. "Dr Ben Saïd had so much potential." – The janitor, a muscular black pulling a floor-waxing machine, scoffs in reply. "Potential? That's just a French word that means you ain't done shit."

VISIONS The hospital was built in spurts without the benefit of an overall rational plan. Parts of it seem to embody Dr Malenkov's vlog on the relationship of architecture and perversion, demonstrating how seclusion in space gives rise to drug abuse, sexual assault, and murder. Other parts, in their dilapidation, embody his notion that the future is only the present in an advanced state of decay. In the unrenovated wing, the fluorescent bulbs that cast light from the ceiling have begun to flicker. A leaking pipe causes a gray-yellow stain to engulf the unpainted wall of the proposed MRI suite. The smell of soiled linen fills the air. Grime coats the sealed windows. A striking worker has tacked an illustration to the wall – a median sagittal section of the female pelvis, ripped through the genitalia. Disaffected nocturnists have scrawled obscene snatches of graffiti: "Cancer LOL" and "Rape Kit: One Size Fits All." Lying near a bloodstain on the floor is a mislaid printout marked with the black filth of footprints. It appears to be the transcript of a lecture or conversation. The first paragraph begins in medias res. "... post-depravity. When people believe that the world is about to end, they lose their inhibitions. They drink, dance, participate in orgies. When the future is taken away from them, they willingly renounce their conceptions of normal and abnormal. To put it another way, morality requires time, otherwise there are no consequences."

ARE The exhibit area occupies one half of the skyscraper's ground floor. It is a cavernous space with a stone floor, high ceilings, and glass doors that would open onto an interior plaza if they were not locked for security reasons. At one end is a lone granite bench on which no one sits. At the other end is the Noguchi sculpture, its superimposed figures evoking the zero point at which Dr Malenkov claims normality and perversity will become coextensive: post-depravity. Recent exhibitions in the space have included artwork by patients with spinal cord and brain injuries; a display of foreign objects recovered from various patient orifices; a Neuro Film Festival featuring segments on the relationship of brain damage to sexual perversity; drawings elicited by therapists from sexually abused children; and now engravings visualizing the representation of medicine in *120 Days of Sodom*. The cover of the brochure shows a man sodomizing a boy whose arms and legs have been amputated. Beneath is a quotation, "And the surgeon embuggers him steadily for a year." The artist's statement describes how the Marquis de Sade holds up a black mirror to medical practice. "Physicians become deviants such as the coprophagic doctor who gives enemas only in order to have them expelled into his mouth. Pharmaceuticals are repurposed as poisons, emetics are used for the gratification of unnatural urges, and overdoses are administered rather than cured. Surgical procedures are transformed into snuff films..."

DELUSIONS The simulcast of the lecture echoes from the monitor opposite the elevators. “Do his predictions really attempt to portray the future? Or are they just compulsions to repeat words and phrases such as ‘neoadism’ and ‘psychogynecology?’ It is conceivable that Dr Malenkov’s futuropathy is a disorder along the lines of echolalia or paraphasia. It has less to do with time than with language. Poetry.” The metal doors slide open. Standing inside is a bald man dressed in black. The doors close and the elevator descends to the tunnels that radiate outward from the skyscraper at the center of the complex. At a distance from the Psychiatric ICU, beyond the interminable corridors that taper off into autopsy suites and vending machines selling Ethos water, the tunnels become catacombs. A gray paint covers the walls, eliminating all sense of color. Pipes crisscross the ceiling, twisting and turning on one another as if in agony. Helvetica letters provide direction: “Morgue: Follow Red Line.” The line is a trail of blood along the middle of the passageway. It traces a complicated route past abrupt turns and a slight downward slope. Fluorescent bulbs in wire cages cause lurid patches of flickering green light to interrupt long tracts of shadow. Just before the double swinging doors that lead into the morgue, the red line on the floor ends abruptly. Inside cold water strikes a ceramic sink – drip, drip, drip. Death is a repetitive thought, thought, thought.

STOP Double swinging doors open onto the disused operating room. The ceramic tiles lining the walls form a blank surface like the white screen of the Dr God-Damn X-Ray Spex vlogs. Attached to the ceiling are two stainless steel drums that cast light toward the operating table at the center of the room. An assistant balances a video camera atop a black tripod, pointing it at the lone figure in blue scrubs who attends to a female strapped to the table. “Time to play God, Hans.” The “surgeon” places a trepan against the skull, just above the eye socket. The patient shudders as though undergoing an epileptic seizure. The surgeon moves the trepan to the same spot above the other eye and removes a button of bone the size of a cock ring. Taking a slightly curved metal retractor, he inserts it into one of the holes and levers the frontal lobe out of the way. He locates the hippocampus, which is shaped like a seahorse, and uses a vacuum to suck out all but an inconsequential stump. Repeating the procedure on the other side, he removes several tablespoons of neuronal tissue. For what purpose? It is difficult not to think of Dr Malenkov’s notion of exocortical perversions, deviant desires that can be transferred from one brain to another like game cartridges. But then the surgeon only drops the tissue onto the floor and grinds it beneath a shoe.

