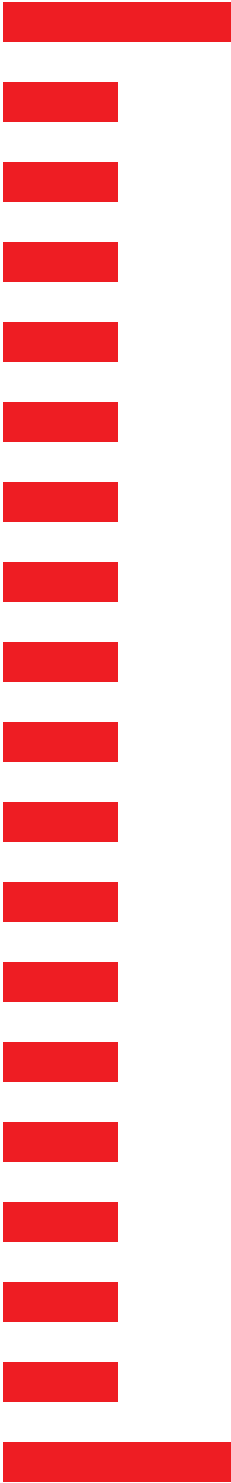


Sympathy  
for the 90s,  
Part II:  
Björk vs.  
Madonna  
  
by Lise  
Haller  
Baggesen



This parasitic zine has been produced for the release of the second issue of Generous, a Milwaukee-born and -based publication co-founded and edited by Khine Hline, aryn kresol, and Nate Pyper. Part I of this text can be found in the first issue.

For more information including stockists and release dates, visit [instagram.com/readgenerous](https://www.instagram.com/readgenerous).

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Dear Young-girl,

Where were we? The 90s, right? And my claim that the 90s, if nothing else, acknowledged the experienced *interior* of the young-girl like no decade before it. This is a big claim to make, and perhaps one that is hard to irrefutably prove, but I *feel* this to be true; and since I was a young-girl in the 90s—like you are perhaps one now—this *feeling* must be a bearing witness.

You see, for a long time—what felt like a very long time—there was Madonna. Madonna this and Madonna that, but Madonna was only skin deep.

And then one day there was a fountain of blood in the shape of a girl who sang to us about human behavior and human emotion, and from then on we were all little birds on the brim, hypnotized by the whirl. There was definitely, definitely, definitely no logic to Björk's sudden rise to fame, and *that* was such a welcome change from Madonna's pop chart dominatrix.

To listen to Madonna was to subjugate yourself to her musical governance. Her sub/dom-themed “sex” era videos undoubtedly inspired many a wet dream; Björk, on the other hand, could make grown men cry. I know, because I've seen it.

The 90s were the era of the remix and the mix-tape. In the artist's residency I attended at the time—an international hothouse of blonde ambition and (equally

ambitious) diaspora—they were passed around like love letters and diplomatic treaties, a demonstration of your sensitive sass as well as your cultural cache.

I made one for my painting professor (!) by way of a parting gift. It was titled “Björk vs Madonna,” and contained state-of-the-art remixes from their recent catalogues on either side, pitting Madonna’s business sexual maverick against Björk’s playful cyborg goddess.

Every time I take a walk down memory lane, something is missing; last time it was that Polaroid, and this time it is this mix-tape. This, that, and a little catalogue from a painting exhibition (my first), aptly titled “Close Encounters of the Kind.”

In this xeroxed pamphlet from 1998, I quote an interview with Björk in which she muses on guitars vs synthesizers. She says something along the lines of (and this is just one of those things which fell off the event horizon of the internet a long time ago, so I’m ad-libbing):

We don’t want guitars do we? Guitars are earthbound, rock-and-roll, the oldest story ever told. But we don’t want to be earthbound, do we? We want to get lost! We want to get lost, and we want to get fucked!

This idea of getting lost and getting fucked, in some ways corresponds with Tiqqun’s idea of “fucking in the absolute.” Getting fucked in the absolute, or better yet: getting lost in the absolute, at that point deep in the 90s, seemed like a great escape. But I am not so sure if this unsolicited piece of advice from the halcyon days of Girl Power holds up as an exit strategy in the overheated political climate change of 2016.

[...]

Like in the 90s, in 2016 you can still swim in the Amsterdam canals or light a bonfire in a public park in the merry month of May in the middle of the day because it is your birthday and the weather is nice and you have all agreed to BYOB. (I don’t think you can pull that off in the US. After all, the worst thing that could happen in Amsterdam would be that a cop would ride by on his bike and tell you to put out your fire. The worst thing that could happen in the US was that a cop would ride by in his car and open fire.) Even so, some may tell you that Brexit was bound to happen because the EU was getting “too regulated”—but nobody in Europe, and least of all the Brits, are really afraid of *government* or *regulation*. In fact they are probably more afraid of no regulation, the idea that someone could walk right across the border and be nothing like yourself: The Multi-cultural Society. That fear will make people do crazy things like “take their country back.”

When Brexit happened, the only thing I wanted to listen to was the original young-girl Kate Bush singing “Oh England, my Lionheart, oh England my Lionheart, Oh England My Lionheart, Oh England my Lionheart, I don’t want to go...”

There was that sinking feeling; of not exactly closing our eyes and thinking of England, but instead watching in disbelief as the votes started trickling in. Like a train derailing in slow motion, it was impossible to look away.

When the poll was finally called as the sun rose on the British Empire, it was about midnight, here in the Midwest, and it dawned on me that I hadn’t seen it coming. At all. I didn’t think people, a people, the British, could really be that stupid, that lost, that fucked, that easily lead by populism, nationalism, and xenophobia. What would this mean for the elections here in the US in November?

The next morning, to ease my sense of foreboding, I called my sister who (coincidentally, I presume) is also married to a Brit, like I am. She told me she had cried over the vote. She expressed it in ways which you would normally reserve for your friends’ marriages: “I know it wasn’t easy, and I was also skeptical at times, but this is one of those unions where you should really stay together for the kids’ sake!”

If we parse it down in terms of demographics, the kids were overwhelmingly in favor of staying within the union, whereas the

older voters, those old enough to have voted for Britain to join the European Union, were in favor of leaving. Trouble was that the older generation, who perhaps had learned by experience the importance of voting, came out in far stronger numbers than the younger electorate—who in turn stayed at home, or in some cases voted in favor of leaving in order to “send a signal.” So you can say the younger generation allowed themselves to get lost and get fucked, because they were not paying attention.

My sister and I talked about this and about how we had come around from Euro-skepticism ourselves, and when. For me it was when I moved from Denmark to the Netherlands in 1992. That summer Denmark won the European Football Championship, and we had a referendum rejecting the Maastricht treaty, a state of the nation which our minister of foreign affairs paraphrased as, “if you can’t join them, beat them.”

When I moved “to Europe,” I discovered that’s where I had been all along. That the European Union, even as a compromised governmental body, was an embodiment of the postwar dream; and then we had a brutal wake-up call.

Because the Europe of the mid-90s is a long time ago in a faraway place to your young-mind—and because a lot more genocide has happened since then—you may need a reminder, but here is what the Encyclopedia Britannica has to say about it:

### Srebrenica massacre

The slaying of more than 7,000 Bosniak (Bosnian Muslim) boys and men, perpetrated by Bosnian Serb forces in Srebrenica, a town in eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina, in July 1995. In addition to the killings, more than 20,000 civilians were expelled from the area—a process known as ethnic cleansing. The massacre, which was the worst episode of mass murder within Europe since World War II, helped galvanize the West to press for a cease-fire that ended three years of warfare on Bosnia's territory (see Bosnian conflict).

This awakening was particularly brutal in the Netherlands because it happened on their watch; Dutchbat soldiers stationed as UN peacekeeping troops were not paying attention, and thus failed to prevent the town's capture and the subsequent massacre.

To think about what it really, *really*, meant to have a war, to have ethnic cleansing on European soil less than half a century after the last ethnic cleansing on European soil—even as Tony Blair dangled his Britpop arm candy at eye level and *deep house*

happened all around us—was scary. I reached the conclusion that the EU was perhaps not *the* reason, but surely *a* reason the whole continent did not start boiling over again, only a few years after the cold war ended with the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Srebrenica was allowed to happen because we weren't paying attention in Europe in the 90s, and similarly I think the Brexit was allowed to happen because nobody was paying attention. So I guess what I am saying is that you better keep paying attention, because otherwise somebody else will. And they might get the idea to "make their country great again," or to "take their country back." From you.

[...]

Situated like it is, as a stadium in a corn field, you can see the downtown skyline from every rooftop in Chicago. The Trump Tower features heavily in this vista as seen from my house on the North Side and it really bugs me. It bugs me because it is not as ugly as it should be, not as much of an architectural monstrosity as it could be. The Trump Tower was built around the time my family moved to Chicago, and I used to follow its construction with interest (we didn't have those where I came from). I saw Donald Trump as an amusing architect. His golden skyscraper in Las Vegas was a scream, and there was definitely, definitely, definitely, no logic behind it. Now he wants to build a wall.

While I will happily compare Hillary to Madonna, comparisons between Trump and Björk would feel gratuitous, even for his erratic, and all too human behaviour, or his sudden and unlikely ascent. In fact the analogy to Björk, in this context, must surely be Bernie Sanders, whose resignation from the presidential bid could be summed up in her lyric from “Hunter”:

*I thought I could organize  
freedom/  
How Scandinavian of me!*

In terms of Girl Power, Trump is as toxic as Britney Spears, but since she is a terra incognita on my musical mind-map of the 90’s, instead I’ll compare him to another 90s band, the big beat “Firestarter” Prodigy. Not for their signature hairstyle choices—although like Trump’s peroxide- and aerosol-fueled comb-over, Prodigy frontman Keith Flint’s inverted Mohawk cannot be unseen—but for their insistence that they have the right to do and say whatever the fuck they want.

After gaining a loyal following with the temper tantrum “kiddie rave” of their early releases, Prodigy entered the international stage with their breakthrough album *The Fat Of The Land*. It opens with the endearingly catchy party anthem “Smack My Bitch Up.” The lyrics read like a mantra, repeating the phrase “change my pitch up/ smack my bitch up” ad nauseam; Jonas Åkerlund’s accompanying video makes a fine point of visualizing just what that might look

like—a GoPro meditation on hedonist bigotry and misogyny, for your viewing pleasure. The track was pulled from heavy rotation on several radio stations due to criticism from NOW (National Organization for Women) who stated the lyrics to be a “dangerous and offensive message advocating violence against women.” Prodigy’s founding member Liam Hewlett retorted that their lyrics were just being misinterpreted. Sulk,

The band hereafter faced a string of similar misunderstandings, culminating in an onstage standoff at the Reading Music Festival in 1998 when the Beastie Boys requested the song be pulled from the set as they feared it might trigger those who’ve suffered domestic abuse. In response to the Beastie Boys’ plea, Maxim, Prodigy’s hypeboy, introduced the song with: “They didn’t want us to play this fucking tune. But the way things go, I do what the fuck I want.”

Sound familiar?

Perhaps Donald Trump, whose supporters have taken to greeting him by chanting “Lock Her Up!” should have considered playing “Smack My Bitch Up” as his signature anthem when taking stage at the 2016 Republican National Convention?

Since the RNC, Trump has insinuated that Hillary has got more coming than simply being “locked up.” At a rally in August he threatened members of the NRA by insinuating that Hillary, if elected, would take away their second amendment rights and told them “If she gets to pick her judges, nothing you can do,

folks!” As the crowd began to boo, he quickly added: “Although the Second Amendment people—maybe there is, I don’t know.”

His publicity team immediately came to his defense, saying that his words had been misconstrued—he didn’t really mean to insinuate that the assassination of a political opponent was a viable option in a modern democracy—he was just exercising his right to say whatever the fuck he wants.

To which I will say with the Beastie’s Ad-Rock, who commented after the Reading incident: “From where I’m from, it isn’t cool.”

On that note, and with one of the best Girl Power (r)ally cries to come out of the 90s, I would like to give the final word to the Beastie Boys with their Sure Shot:

*I want to say a little something that's long overdue/  
The disrespect for women has got to be through/  
To all the mothers and the sisters and the wives and friends/  
I want to offer my love and respect till the end/*

So what I what to say to you dear young-girl, and to the American electorate which you represent, is this: don’t get lost, don’t get fucked.

And don’t forget to vote!