CONTINENT: The video-essay you’ve recorded yourself reading for continent, “Ever Since the World Began,” is a compelling entrance into your new book multi-media book, Love Dog (Success and Failure), because it speaks to the very form of the book itself: vacillating and finding the long way around the question of love by using different genres and media. In your discussion of the face, one of the themes of Love Dog, I think there is something to be said about the surfaces media create and how you constantly manipulate them in your work. This seems important for thinking also about your book LACONIA: 1,200 Tweets on Film; a book on film written in tweets, interposing already three sets of expectations and pushing the boundaries of each medium’s faciality, it’s surface tension. In Love Dog, is there another kind of facial interaction? Perhaps the discursive faces of approaching love as topic and love as method? If so, how did/do these intersect for you, do/did they drive the creation of this book?

MASHA TUPITSYN: With LACONIA and Love Dog, I wanted to pay homage to the work modernism has done on subjective time and chronological time by carrying that experiment over into the digital economy. Because LACONIA is a time-based work of cultural criticism that employs the aphorism to look at 21st century American culture, it is also an archival work of cultural mourning and memory. And in Love Dog, which is also a work about mourning as it relates to love, I wanted to think with all my senses, and to reflect that in the writing itself by using a multi-media form. LACONIA tackled the sound bite and the promotional image—the everyday language of consumer culture—which often wants to communicate ideological agendas through the repetition of a single image or reductive phrase. I had always been interested in the approaches of artists like Barbara Kruger and Jenny Holzer and essayistic, typographical like filmmakers Chris Marker and Godard. In both cases, I felt it was important to try to compose a book in which deep—critical—thinking happens in so-called immediate, informal, and disposable contexts. That is, in places where you are either not supposed to be serious or are not required to take things seriously. To me the most intervention is needed in every day instances of culture and representation. In order to do that,
I had to utilize and interrogate the very structures I was critiquing. In other words, the writing had to materialize in that live, digital, public space. It couldn’t simply happen at home on a piece of paper or in a word document on my computer that no one could see until it was finished. It had to unfold in real time, amidst everything else. And it had to literally be surrounded by the cultural landscape I wanted to assess. In both LACONIA and Love Dog, I wanted to know how and if we can get away from what we cannot get away from? From which there is no respite. Given this, I don’t think hypertexts can really be called hypertexts anymore. Hypertexts are simply the world today. This is not only the way we read the world now. It is the way the world reads.

Likewise, interfaciality, as you put it, works on a number of levels for me, both on and off the page. There is my relation to epistemological and phenomenological surfaces—the screen, the body, the face, the voice, gender; the official story. Then there is the way this dovetails formally, and to which the digital adds yet another dimension. It’s also where sound comes into Love Dog (giving the book a sound; giving tonality to the book’s ideas and feelings). As Anne Carson pointed out in her essay “The Gender of Sound,” the two are connected, and of course so are love and gender. In “Ever Since This World Began,” I wanted to think about the phenomenology of the voice, which is why I visualize the sonic in the book and why in my writing about faces, I look at the tonal aspects (the things a face voices and a voice faces) of a face. This was standard to do when images and faces were “silent” in the silent era. Those images/faces were extraordinarily audible. The greatest screen face, to me, is still Falconetti’s in Dreyer’s The Passion of Joan of Arc. We can hear her face—even though there is no actual sound on screen of her speaking. The internet is a similarly “silent” space where actual voices are lacking. So intertextuality goes with interfaciality.

I’ve also talked a lot about how categorization worked when it came to the reception of my first book, Beauty Talk & Monsters. How despite the fact that Beauty Talk is a text that crisscrosses form and content in a variety of ways, not pinpointing its exact genre—choosing one genre over another—only made things worse. Fiction was the category people were most adverse to me using, even though of course there is a lot of fiction in the book. Part of how fiction works in Beauty Talk is in the reader not knowing exactly where the fiction resides. In Godard’s 1967 film, Weekend, for example, everything matters. Everything is political, whether it’s real or imaginary, film or reality. In Weekend, life is not a game and neither is the game a game. The game is really life. Either everything is important or nothing is. But many people want clear answers and demarcations so that they can decide what is important and what is not important. My use of the “I,” subjective criticism, made everything “real” in Beauty Talk. But fiction is in the construction. It is in the blending. This is why I perforate the movie screen and connect the onscreen and the offscreen; the official story and the backstory. Although I don’t think there is a difference between onscreen and offscreen anymore. Nor is there a dialectic. It’s all screen all the time now.

Non-fiction, on the other hand, was more tolerated as a moniker. Unlike Love Dog, Beauty Talk wasn’t explicitly or tangibly (what is tangible is a question in all these books) working with digital forms or within this digital economy, so some people resisted the book’s hypertextuality or intertextuality because they couldn’t see its other forms, if that makes sense. It was a problem of invisibility; of how to make something appear (this is where Nietzsche, big presence in Love Dog, comes in—the nature of appearances). Something people don’t necessarily want to see. Some readers couldn’t see the way forms were interfacing in that book. On the surface, Beauty Talk was simply a text about media culture—the domination of entertainment as a mode of being and knowing—and most readers could only see that one side of the book. But as Godard puts it in
Last night I watched the second part ("Night") of Claire Denis’ film on Jacques Rivette, The Nightwatchman (Le veilleur, 1990). In it was the following statement by Rivette on his first film, Paris Belongs to Us. When I heard it I realized that it is the perfect epigram for my book Screen to Screen because the dialectic described has vanished, leaving us with no off, just constant screen.
Wim Wenders’ documentary about the future of cinema, *Room 666*, “Films are made, images are made, when there’s no one looking. That’s what the invisible is, that which we don’t see. That’s what the incredible is, that which we don’t see. And cinema shows you that which we don’t see, the incredible.” We are living in the aftermath of narrative and temporal collapse, which means we don’t read or feel in the same way. I began to use digital forms in my writing because I don’t see us as traditional book people anymore. I would add that power also resides in the invisible, in the things we make invisible by making them visible. Or it did for a long time. The new face of power is quickly becoming so-called transparency, which is even more corrupt because even though we now live in a behind-the-scenes culture, and see and know how the mechanisms of power and corruption operate, we still don’t change. The world still doesn’t change.

Finally, another important thing that Godard says in *Room 666* that relates to *Love Dog* is: “I’m here in front of the camera, and yet in my body and in my head, I’m behind it. My world is the imaginary and the imaginary is a journey between forwards and backwards.” This idea of visible/invisible, foresight and hindsight, backwards and forwards is an important dialectic in relation to time and the idea of the destinal. This is why I wanted *Love Dog* to travel, literally, figuratively, and discursively. You have to be open to not knowing. To epistemological, geographical, chronological, and emotional aporias. In *Love Dog* my story is both visible and invisible to me. Sometimes I could see where I was going. Other times I was completely in the dark existentially. Truth procedure, which love is, as bell hooks and Badiou tell us, requires expedition and openness to possibility. Unless you want a story you already know, but that is not truth procedure. So I tried to create this backwards and forwards journey in the book—this sense of travel and motion, hope and doubt—by jumping between forms, media, time; traveling to different places, texts, and emotional registers. The book’s “Time-Jump series,” which mostly takes the form of music—songs—but also a series of “green” videos that I shot, is the most obvious tribute to this idea of subjective and chronological time.

Your work aligns with writers that play with the form of their language, or have assumed the role of performance artist at some point: Kathy Acker, Chris Kraus, Avital Ronell, and Anne Carson to name a few representing varied approaches that show up in *Love Dog*. At the risk of ossifying the work, or missing the point—as these experimental modes of writing stack-up in piles of published works, do they approach a genre?

As I noted in my book *Life As We Show It*, in *Chelsea Girls* the poet Eileen Myles points out, “You can’t get money without a category.” More importantly, you can’t get a category—or respect, rank—without a clear genre. This makes genre and gender an obvious pair. The two words are even linked etymologically and both genre and gender concern taxonomies of legitimacy—of
In the only writing class I ever took, my teacher, a New York poet, assigned Kathy Acker’s very short novella, Florida, for us to read. Florida is part of Acker’s Literal Madness trilogy of novels. I was 19.

I’d been reading Acker’s books for years, but had never heard of Florida. I think it changed my life, or held the change that held my writing. That made it possible. That is, it somehow unearthed and summoned what I wanted to do with/in my writing in the form of cadence.

Based on the 1948 film noir Key Largo, starring Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall, Florida, like the rest of the collection (the second novel in the trilogy is My Death My Life by Pier Paolo Pasolini; Pasolini would later become one of my favorite filmmakers), is about movies in many ways, and is written into, as, and from the interstice that lives between cinema and life, life and cinema, as well as the hybrid made by the two. An interstice that would eventually become all my work. The line in everything for me.

After reading Florida*, I wrote a story for the class called “The Drive” that was an answer song. Everyone loved it, even the bankers who wanted to be writers. “The Drive” had the same rhythm, the same tone—a tone which is also straddling and transgressing a fine line, on a border. For me, everything that is remarkable about Florida has to do with cadence—the answers, the ideas, the form, the style, the sexual politic, the story—is in this cadence, and as Nietzsche pointed out, cadence is everything. Cadence makes a person.

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sorting through what and who is valuable. So the words share common prejudices. The things one does not want to read is often synonymous with who one doesn’t want to read about. Therefore a break-up of or with genre is maybe the genre or anti-genre that could be said to link these writers. Avital Ronell breaks up with philosophical tradition and modes of inquiry. Like Nietzsche, she revalues methods of evaluation, testing out things you are not supposed to use philosophy to test (and, by the same token, testing philosophy in ways it’s not supposed to be tested), like drugs and stupidity—where philosophy fails and we fail philosophy. And Chris Kraus does something similar in her experimental fiction, using different forms to put female subjectivity “to the test,” so to speak. All these female writers and thinkers have tried to destabilize the systems that have been set up in (and against) writing.

Thus missing the mark with genre, even intentionally, means that we have missed the point in some sense as writers and thinkers. And that to me is a good thing, however difficult. We’ve started at the wrong point and gone somewhere else instead. We’ve acknowledged that writing and thinking are also about failure, and that failure is always embedded in the act of writing and in our reasons for writing. So that missing the point is also the point. Derrida insisted: “We must invent a name for those ‘critical’ inventions which belong to literature while deforming its limits.” But how can you give something that resists and deforms, a name? Wouldn’t the name also be deformed? Isn’t this why the aforementioned writers get hyphenated descriptors like ficto-criticism? Do we need a proper name to be able to read something carefully? I don’t think so. I don’t need it as a reader. I’ve always taken a work on its own terms. But for most people, if you don’t have an address, people don’t know how to find you. A lot of time, they won’t even know how to look. And in some cases, they’ll think you’re not even worth finding. You are not on the map because you have to literally make the map in order to exist. In her essay, “The Gender of Sound” Carson asks, “Why is female sound bad to hear?” I think for the same reason something uncategorizable (pedagogically, creatively, racially, and sexually)—Other—is hard to read.

We’re also curious to hear know how you see the significance of ‘performance’ (and why the label sticks to the shoes of these authors like toilet paper) in describing this kind of writing work?

I think I responded to the parenthetical portion of this question in my previous answer. As far as how performance relates to Love Dog, in Acker’s Don Quixote, which is another big presence in the book, she writes, “there is no other reality than anthropomorphism.” In Don Quixote, the dog is human and the human is dog. Which brings us to the title of Love Dog and the totemic function of the dog in the book: giving human things animal characteristics and animal things human characteristics. Rather than investing all our human love ideals into dogs, which we do constantly as a culture of dog lovers, I wanted to put the dog into love. It is the difference between the consumption of love as a patriarchal institution or status position and the essence of a type of radical and liberatory relation that would benefit humans in their bonds with other humans. So the dog in Love Dog is not simply the book’s cover or performative affect, so to speak. Love has always needed the dog, which is why the dog is the very embodiment of belief in love. Recall Argos The Great Dog and Odysseus. Argos is the only one who remembers and recognizes the ragged and old Odysseus even after his 20-year absence. So love is the high ideal and the dog, both common and dependable, is the bridge between the sacred and the profane. The dog is the house of love. And because Love Dog is a digital project, it seemed impossible to think about the post-human, technology, the virtual, or difference (which Badiou says is essential to love in In Praise of Love) without thinking about animal-being and being-animal. Instead of simply “performing” these ideas and characteristics as literary affects, I’m interested in being-becoming. Which means the book’s tropes, leitmotifs, series, and even its titles are in service of that truth procedure. In other words, I actually want to live this way, not just write this way. And, more importantly, I want to live this way not just think this way. So Love Dog became both my totem animal and my autobiographical animal. This made the book organic, anthropomorphic—beyond literary.