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Essay

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(Get) READY/ UNREADY (With Me)

In fashion, beauty, and other society matters, the night is marketed in binary: snooze or booze, alone or together, healing or falling apart. To become the night, then, is to prepare for it – displacing desire for appearances and experiences onto products, rituals, and the face as a medium. Either you're in or you're out.

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Karla Black, *Compact Mirror*, 2021, dimensions variable

Essay

The thing is that every Friday night, anything can happen to you, or nothing.

You know what happens during the day. Every day, the day comes to you on an assembly line. Every day is the same – mechanized time, ritualized time, unavailable time.

The night is still young. A dark, empty space – a sudden rush of air, a choice –

OUT

*There will be time, there will be time
To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet*
– T.S. Eliot, “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” (1915)

To leave; to leave yourself, the familiar contours, the cloisters and coffers; to leave it up to chance. To prepare a face to meet some face, some person or possibility; to aim yourself in the direction of discrete or interlocking ends. To end up on a bathroom floor, in the hospital, in love. To want it; to approach it; to make the attempt.

To show your face. To wash your face. To feel it in your hands; to feel that beauty is the catalyst for desire (reactions can occur in the absence of catalysts, but are far less efficient); to feel that beauty is an equation, a practice, a sacrifice; to choose; to do the math, the difference between observable time (a few milliseconds) and millions of years; to desire a reaction, to get one; to make it happen now; to bet on the night like a spectator, a speculator; to bet your stock goes up; to bet tonight is worth it.

To believe in yourself. To believe what it says on the label. To emulsify a matrix suspension of peptides and lipids, to smooth everything out. To begin with ablution, then addition, accretion. To feel the soft erosion of your constructive drive – the gnawing, contrapuntal lure of the *other* – like a geothermal spring bubbling up below.

To reinforce the skin barrier like a sedimentary wall. To know that skin is like clay: malleable, like a symbol. To build on it, with it; to build it out into an architecture, an idea with curb appeal; to build upon yourself the shape of the night, a form you can wear, a form you can live in.

To apply, in pearly drops, a liquid from a German doctor that works like a filter, reconstituting itself across your face like nacre, an iridescence, a wet sheet. To drape yourself in the warmth of its promise – tonight, your face is *photo-ready* – you step into the image and it is made perfect.

To understand yourself. To understand color theory, to color-correct. To place pink blush over your nose in a horizontal line, to shorten your midface; to recreate your top lip in the same place but higher, higher and more rounded; to blur the harsh edges. To project an image of softness and proportion. To read your face like a blueprint, or a

document; to illuminate it like a manuscript; to render it legible in the dark. To taxonomize; to subdivide; to arrange your features in hierarchy, to know which to pull forward and which to push back into shadow – into the night, which is calling, waiting . . .

To know what all this says about you. To be disgusted by your vanity, your myopic materiality. To be distracted moments later.

To attract the right kind of attention. *To win friends and influence people.* To attract, to the tip of your nose and the inner corner of each eye, a beam of light. To resolve to live, *tonight, tonight*; to set the image with a finely milled, skin-colored powder.

To feel the night press in against you. To practice your face in the mirror. To owe it to yourself. To notice, in your image, an absence of body – a blank; an incongruity; a vague, suspicious two-dimensionality. To search through labels for a solution to your problem: You just don’t have the time.

To lose your resolution. To need a fix. To cover it up. To hide your hair, which is dirty and flat, under a plastic jewel-encrusted baseball cap, or a Russian fur hat. To go and wish you’d stayed home.

IN

Out there it’s still tonight, not yesterday, and you’re not having fun, you’re listening to the sound of it through your phone.

You really ought to free yourself. Now, finally, you can free yourself of everything. At night, you can take the day off. You can rest; you can soften. Now is the time to penetrate the surface; to solve what lies beneath the face of things. Submerge yourself, emerge renewed. You have the time to go under. Perhaps this will be the only time. You ought to make the most of it.

You are working on yourself. You are opening up. Gently, you are pulling back the layers.

You are cautious, calculating. You are calculating the return on your investments: the returns of invested capital, invested time. Left on for twenty minutes, a cleansing balm becomes a regenerative mask. Over time, things go deeper.

Your products and their promises –

Hydration

Exfoliation

Clarification

Stimulation

Reduction

Control

You own these solutions, these chemical arrangements, their chemical outcomes. You are renovating, resurfacing. You are choosing your tools. A micro-vibrating silicone brush. A balancing toner on a cotton pad. Two different



Karla Black, *Compact Mirror*, 2021, dimensions variable

acids, one to apply to wet skin like a fresco. The subterranean current of the *other* —

The things other people must be doing, the things you’d rather be doing, rendered brilliant like a cut gem in the abstract, in the dark. The drugs that wake you up. The drugs that put you to sleep. The drugs that make you talk and talk and the drugs that lock you down inside yourself. The drugs that keep you moving all night and don’t feel like anything. A good drug disappears into you like a serum. It leaves a better you behind.

At this distance, you see it all — the possibilities suspended in a matrix — sketched out on a dance card, your suitors, the lurid productions of desire: the images that don’t belong to you, the ones you didn’t choose.

This is what belongs to you. Your skin is the meniscus between *in* and *out*, its cells defined at each turn by binary, by opposition and decision — to self-renew or to differentiate.

In here, you can recreate yourself. For this to work, you have to sleep. If you fall asleep now, you can sleep for eight hours. To sleep as efficiently as possible; to eliminate diversions, distractions, blue light. To suck out the impurities. To leave whatever you don’t like. To invest in yourself like a work in progress. *Do you really want to live forever?* You don’t have to go. With extreme prejudice, you can eliminate the evidence of damage — the sun, trauma, time. You can breach the labyrinth. You can tunnel deeper. You can dedicate yourself to the pursuit of a solution. You can solve the beauty equation. You can watch how-to videos on your phone. You can follow a trail, a silken informatic thread. You can locate a pattern over and over. You can learn and you can optimize. You can see how other people do it; you can adopt their rituals; you can buy the things they buy — array the objects — believe their promises.

How to erase fine lines. How to get clear skin. How to see through the surface. How to produce the image from the inside out. How to get *glass skin*. How to make your skin like a window, a network, a building material.

How to make your face like a different face. You could have just put on a different face. You could have always had a different face, a different night.

LINER NOTES

There exists an idea that you only have four hours to live. In the twenty-four-hour parcel of an available day — a word which, here, includes the night — you work for eight hours; sleep for eight hours; lose four to your commute, your friends, your family; and are left with four. The four-hour life — 4HL — is something of a catch-all for contemporaneity, defined as it is by the demarcation, the securitization, the purchase and sale of time.

Friday in the 4HL. You can really feel the pull of the weekend. The point of this framework is to establish how little time is yours. This is what differentiates the night, what imbues it with its weight, its urgency: tonight, the present night, the approaching night, the time in which — ostensibly — you are free to choose; to win back time, if only from yourself.

In the primordial sense, the night is time to be survived. You are more secure under the sun, in the world of lit surfaces. Now, every surface is illuminated. By streetlights, stoplights, light pollution, you know where the lines are drawn. You are safer and less free; more aware, more systematic, more productive. You know more than ever what your options are. You spend most of your time preparing.

Getting *ready*, getting *unready* — these are ritualized efficiency games. They are meant to make you make the most of your options. You *choose* from what’s been chosen for you. You *choose* and doubt your choice. You *choose* and end up in the same place either way.

You are watching your time. You are always optimizing. The inessential becomes crucial; you come to depend on products that, in alternating patterns, mimic and heighten and reverse nature. Whatever you choose, you tame it towards a particular end, sharpen it as a tool. You are always getting ready/unready; you are always expecting. You are always forcing a container — a rigid structure — around a fluid, dynamic thing.

You’re in or you’re out. To choose is to lose, but of course, you still try to win. *Night time, my time*, like the Sky Ferreira song; like her album cover, getting ready/unready in the shower.

Like products, songs about the night tend to be about its promises, its projections — the night as a romantic object: the seat of possibility, the seat of transformation. But it’s someone else’s world; someone else’s words, and you’re just living in them. *Time is never time at all* (“Tonight, Tonight,” The Smashing Pumpkins).

Really, the night is more like *nightcore*: a framework, an acceleration, a set of prescriptions. Existing songs are compressed, drawn through a series of digital spirals and tunnels and spit out faster, higher, tighter, smoother.

This is efficient music. It fits a shallow, bordered space. It makes the most of available time.

Its progenitors, Norwegian DJs on the internet, explain it simply, like this: *we are the core of the night, so you’ll dance all night long.* —

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TO
CHOOSE
IS TO
LOSE