

We are talking about haters, and not about enemies.

Love and hate are passing performances that are much ficker than the commitment required to denominate an enemy. In naming someone a friend, this is of course not the case, and the word friend has been stretched to cover such vast and dissimilar groups of people we know—and *to know* likewise becomes one of those fragmented, mediated, debatable forms of behavior—that it seems "friending" happens nearly without any friction or any requirement.

Oh, of course they're not *real* friends. Real friends are far fewer, though we can't exactly say how many they are. It always depends on what is at stake, and on how much depth we attribute to the realness of real things.

The same goes for love and hate, in the broad and superficial senses we are currently considering. For the sake of manners, we can love just about anything (your shirt, his apartment, their neighborhood, etc.) but we only hate where its force, even if intended facetiously, doesn't confront us head on (your boss, my stupid car, their attitude); things that can't object when we hate them. The target of these statements is thus not the loved or hated but the listener; which, within the signifying social networks that blanket our associations, can mean just about anybody.

The superficiality of this language is absorbed into the fabric of everyday culture. We talk a lot of shit, we repeat our jokes and conduct superstitious rituals we don't even admit to. We represent through our commonest and most microscopic gestures, affects that lace us together with the similarly-inclined. All over time, of course. This is the rich soil from which many of our beliefs and world views quietly spring, where solidarities and prejudices ferment, rotating constantly with the compost received from on high; the flags, the doctrines. Digging deep, it may eventually be very difficult to divide the state-level hate speech from that of the intra-community. But this inquiry already inflates out of our scope; because we are talking about haters, and not about enemies. In large-scale politics, while often utterly superficial, the performance is actually intended to be read as *real*, and so it's no fun.

Back to the individual level (in fact the only scale at which the word *hater* really functions), the promiscuous performances of hatred in speech and comportment are constantly bringing up novel ways to signify. On this level we should still be wary of a distinction between hater speech and hate speech proper, in which the statements themselves are intended to injure or threaten harm (a homophobic slur, or a noose hanging from a tree branch). That's another form of investment in *realness*, but it again shows a lack of imagination and interpretation of signs, and is definitely not fun.

Haters are fun. Even if they get flustered and upset, or abject with arrogance or spite, the game is still about using statements (verbal or other) to criticize or break someone down, and in so doing to get some profit, and they are therefore always subject to aesthetic judgments themselves. Instability is inherent to the term, and not only in its origins or definition. Though it isn't yet an established fixture of a mainstream lexicon, it is widely used, and apparently derives from the the expression "player hater" as popularized in hip-hop, a field with a notably steep turnover rate, both linguistically and career-wise. But further and perhaps owing to this is its flexible and liberal applicability, as an about-face response or as an ingredient in gossip or denigration; even after it's stated, the witnesses (just about anybody) aren't exactly certain *who* the hater is, the accuser or the accused. This also suggests the stakes in these cases are contained to communities where positions shift easily enough to believe that bad-mouthing, rumoring and aggressive posturing will have an effect on one's own position.

And this range of specificity is finally where we arrive at the photographs of haters Gusse has produced. Despite being composed of about a dozen mixed, standoffish alter egos photographed over several years, this club seems united by a particular approach to presenting themselves. Suddenly facing one of them, we have apparently wandered into his or her territory. Their common postures—on the edges of their seats, hands idle, spines straight and faces flat like cobras, and those disapproving, defiant expressions—plant them at once in their corner habitats, while signaling they

just might be about to spring up and wag a finger in your face. This oscillation of the moment—at rest or at ready—leaves us unsure about what point in time we have encountered the hater; immediately following their venomous outburst; just prior; or does their feedback come in some other form?

As much as their gestures resonate with one another, their contexts are each specific, and therefore we can imagine their grievances are unique. However, it's not easy to think of criticism expressed in ways other than verbally. Parody and mimicry can be acted out in body and production, rebukes can be coded into things, very much like hidden messages, or simply as the construction of an alternative to that which is (and living well is the best revenge, they say); but that falls a little short of hate. A hater's tools are words, remember, quick, efficient things, with the capacity to negate (*not*), which a material expression would be at pains to achieve (how to pin down the idea of the non-existence of something like virtue through the physical existence of something else? It becomes too philosophical). Objects charged with the personalities of those they serve do however prepare and support the conditions for hater utterances; they enhance rhetoric and charisma. In terms of the relation between constructing oneself and breaking down the other, one's paradigm is offered as a ready substitute for the one who has been called down. The hater's missiles are launched from a base.

The things we see arranged in these territories are of a particular type: they look kind of like art. Contemporary art, to put it generically—for the very reason that we vacillate about whether they are furnishings or fine art, and about the center-point that each possibility provides. These haters begin to resemble a league of disgruntled young artists in their tidy studios, or young collectors in their lofts; good makers or good shoppers? Hardly worth debating these days (if for instance we were obsessing over matters of skill), but for the question of what these pieces would *say*, humoring the idea for a minute that they could indeed talk. We note the near-absence of any windows, and the flatness of many of the pieces on the walls and floors, which in terms of pictorial illusion could be considered a denial, but which on the other hand convert every surface into a decorative continuity, welcoming the eye and our presence. Which signal are we meant to receive? But we also notice the edges of the backdrops; and underneath, the white slivers of apartment walls, the underlying spread of wood flooring. Seated, and in some cases with a drink or a piece of fruit sitting nearby, the haters could certainly hold out a while; but these are not exactly permanent places, living or production areas. We cannot tell for certain what they see when they look at us, or what exists outside of their corners, but if these are characters whose environments speak for them, then their statements have their limits.

In this case our indecision about what an object can say on their master's behalf is a blind alley, as these props were almost all made by Gusse for these photographs, and destroyed afterward. Before the game is up, it is still worth mentioning the foot in each picture pressing down one of these half-art-half-designer-furnishing pieces; are the haters dissatisfied with what they have made or bought, claiming their ownership, or indifferent to it? What is at stake for these people, that they would give themselves over to antagonism, despite that it might be for a passing moment? This question carries over to the actual people in the photographs, who are Gusse's close friends (some are my friends too). I know she probably picked each of them for some reason, and may or may not have been trying to match the surroundings to her intimate feelings for them; as a gesture in itself, this process of setting and fitting is apparently closer than simple "friending" or "liking."

But pretending to be outside the friend group, I see an ambivalence to Gusse's project and her simulation of charming arty things and jaded characters ready to denounce each other and present their own total paradigms. For instance, ambivalence might explain it contrarily: the objects are what are jaded, and the people are simply alienated. Ambivalence could also simultaneously thrust the whole thing into the realm of allegory, and reflect directly on the existence of this gathering of friends in the everyday competitive community of youth and art making. The realness of our surroundings is revealed as constructed; we begin to doubt our places in them; and perhaps the realness of our own characters that were used as the building blocks.

It is with this sense of ambivalence that we know the hater has affected us, without having yet said anything.