



**Current  
Issue**

## This is Not About Puppies (Though, I do Apologize to Those Who are Tired of Pet Stories on the Internet)

**Archives**

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I put the puppies out to play. At least, that's what I hope they'll do. I don't know why I hope. Whenever I want to work, they want to play. Thing is, this time, I want them to play outside, without me, so that I can work inside, without them. Any minute now, they'll want back in so they can be on me, playing with me when I want to work. They are puppies, after all. No matter. I put them outside.

I click on the URL of the first of two sites, Mady Schutzman's *Joker Runs Wild*. Without reading too closely, I start to point-and-click on highlighted links. I want to get a sense of the layout and how lost I could become. I can play this game--this game of being played. I give myself over to the technology and the many hands that created this site and its substance. I can be played the fool by this joker. Linearity and total comprehension be damned! I'll figure out this language, this message, when I want to.

The puppies have been quiet for way too long. From experience, I have learned that non-sleeping, sustained silence means trouble in puppy language. I decide to leave my digital playmate--player--for a moment to check on the pups. But first, I want to see the video bit that I've summoned with one of my errant clicks. Rather than watching a floating, spinning, hugely-pixelated, animated clown head, I'll get to audience a recorded live exercise-"real" bodies co-present in an improvised performance. Just as the segment begins, the pups start a ruckus. I click on the pause button and head for the backyard door.

Roxy, our seven-month-old completely deaf dalmatian, is darting maniacally, trying to escape Fanny, our fourteen-month-old hound mix. Roxy has something in her

mouth. I wave my arms over my head and move my hips in a circular motion trying to get Roxy's attention, while I call out "Fanny! FAN-ny!" Because they each make brief eye contact with me, I know that Roxy saw me and Fanny heard me. But they continue on, far less ridiculously than I.

I start to chase. Having figured out that the object in Roxy's mouth is a very small ceramic pot, I fear that she will bite or drop it and cut herself. I'm inwardly frantic and furious. Outwardly, I've put on what I think is an inviting smile. Everyone knows that a pup won't come to a frantically furious human. Evidently, a pup won't come to an inwardly frantic-furious human with a toothy, taunted grimace meant to be an inviting smile either. Fortunately, I know how to play this game.

I feign disinterest and the pups creep closer. Fanny, the more obedient of the two, responds appropriately to my "Hi, Fan" by closing the distance and rubbing her side on my leg. When I reach down to pet Fanny, Roxy interprets my movement as an attempted lunge for the pot in her mouth. At the moment of her launch out of my space, she unintentionally drops the pot then tries to recover it. But I beat her to it. I deftly grab the two pieces of the now-broken pot, violently shake them at Roxy, and gutturally exclaim, "NOOOOOO! No! No! No! NO!"

Back inside. All of us. Before heading to the office, I quickly scan the other rooms, looking for anything that Roxy might try to eat. Looks good. I set myself in front of the computer, though not entirely having left the backyard scene behind me. I click the play button on the Quick Time Player and watch the box. I can't quite make out the words. I turn up the volume on my speakers and soon realize that part of my problem hearing has to do with the thundering heartbeat of fear and rage still pulsating in my inner ears. I take a couple of cleansing breaths and watch Exercise #4 twice, in full. I'm much better able to focus now, and I've become very interested in learning more from this site.

Except the pups are rabble-rousing about the house and I'm no longer in the mood to let the links lead me where they may. I want to read Schutzman's site from start to finish--an impossible task if I want to experience every element of this site in the spirit of this site. And I do. But I try to impose linearity all the same. It seems to be working. I move from pages "Prologue" to "Reference," backtracking when the links attempt to seduce me deeper into the maze. I watch all of the exercise footage more than once. I'm jealous of the seeming closeness among the performers. I envy their play.

Several hours have passed. I close my ISP and tiptoe into the living room to check on the pups. Sleeping, finally, they share the couch. My heart swells at the sight. Angels, they are. I inch closer and the old wooden floor betrays me. Awakened by

the creak, Fanny Lou raises her head and stretches a bit. Her movement wakes Roxy Brown, who--upon seeing me--leaps from the couch and dives toward me. Fanny follows calmly. Again, I let them outside--this time, to do their "business." Both run at full speed around the side of the house. Sometimes they need privacy.

When they don't return in a minute, I feel my lower lip start to jut out in my "You better not be . . ." expression. When Roxy comes bounding around the corner into my sight, I realize my lip was right to be suspicious. There she is, with another very small ceramic pot in her mouth. (Where are they coming from?!) "Roxy Brown!" I yell, clenching my fists like they do in the movies. Instead of running from me and my display of frustrated rage, she drops the pot and gallops to me, tail and tongue wagging. For the first time since adopting this pup, I insert her name into a 1950s tune by The Coasters. I look down at her looking up at me and sing softly, "Roxy Brown, Roxy Brown/ She's a clown, that Roxy Brown."

Michael, my partner, is finally home. Before he sets down his satchel, I pronounce that it is now his turn to watch the pups. I say, a bit loudly, that "I've had it," and "it's your turn." I admit that they "let me do some work," but "I have much more to do" and "they're driving me crazy." My extended protests are unnecessary, though, as Michael seems happy to be wrestling with the pups and being slathered with their kisses. I head to my office this time, relatively confident that Michael will keep them away from me as I spend time with Heather Raike's *cosine*.

It's very different here than it is at *Joker*. At first, it's very loud. I turn down my speakers and find the lower-volume rather relaxing. "Sounds like wind," I think. I sit for a minute, watching what looks like be-winged CDs float around the screen. Then the pups start barking. Blood pressure rising, I start clicking. I stop at a text-filled page, start to read, and then stop. My eyes are tired and I'm getting a headache. I decide to return to *cosine* another day.

It's another day and I'm headed towards my office. I take a last look at the brown-spotted Roxy and the nearly-all-black Fanny. They're playing--alternately jumping on each others' backs, locking jaws on each others' necks, standing on their hind legs, chest-to-chest, in a battlers' embrace. They're doing a demonic box-step, each trying to establish dominance over the other. No one leads this dance for very long. And the tune is an old one. I've seen and heard it all before. I call for Michael and announce that "I'm going into my office to work on *cosine*." As if it's "mine" to "work" on. I don't know where that wording came from.

I move linearly, though multiple perspectives constitute the site. I learn that this site, like *Joker*, is a documentation of performance(s) past. Unlike *Joker*, this site loudly calls attention to its own mediation. It's highly animated--images moving in

suspension, screens/scenes fading in and out, music accompanying. It all puts me in a mood. A pleasant one, thankfully.

When I mentally note that I don't hear barking, I'm no longer lost in the moment. I lose the mood. More cleansing breaths . . . I'm back. I'm lost in thought about the familiarity of this site--not familiar because I was in the moment/mood of this site a minute before, but because I've been to sites like this one before. A jazzy site filled with theoretically dense text. Like other similar sites, this one is not easy to understand. Or, I can't help thinking at sites such as these, that I don't understand what the creators want me to understand. This site is especially challenging since I've never had a mind for math. Or, physics. Early childhood tests indicated that I'm no good at spatial relations. My palms are starting to sweat. How can I engage in this site with all this math talk?

I ride the wave of anxiety and try thinking beyond the math. I set myself ashore, on the sands purported to contain performance. It's what I know, performance. At least, I think I do. I think of *Joker* in relation to *cosine*. Both document performance, but in different ways. Both exhibit performance qualities--for example, interactivity (albeit asynchronous ) and I can experience neither in the same way twice. Yet, neither feels "present" to me the way live performance does. Perhaps that is because they are documentations of performance. They use the past tense. Still, they both are provocative texts that do more than merely document or record a live performance that once was. Nevertheless, they depend on that performance for their own (continual) existence.

These sites make clear the temporal components of any text. They depend upon a past, exist in a present, and point toward possible futures. As models for documenting performance, they do their job. Sound effects in both sites make me feel different than I do when I'm reading a journal essay that documents a performance. The movement within the sites does the same for me. Yet both sites remain so close to the live events. Though moving (more so than still) images give me a better sense of what happened in a performance, I remain outside of the scene. A kind of alienation, no doubt. Do the creators want the on-line audience to feel a yearning to be there with the performers, in the moment? Or, do they want the audience to feel compelled to create their own performance in their own spatio-dimension? Or, do sites like these serve to expand our notion of performance by mixing the domains of stage and screen? Or, do sites like these call attention to--or, enhance--distinct somatic engagements with live-co-present bodies "versus" digitally-mediated bodies? I think of these questions as I click back and forth between these sites.

The pups are restless. I hear the tapping of their toenails on the hardwood floor, the tinkly jingle of their tags. They're an eight-legged band. They're getting closer.

Closer. They're at my office door. I could pretend they're not there and go on with my clicking and thinking. But I don't. I close my ISP and open my office door. "Whadarya doin'?" I call to Michael, who is supposed to be watching the pups. "I'm working," he yells back. "Well, so was I!" I'm not really miffed, though. I could use a break from the screen. As I tumble around with the pups, I think about when I'll return to *Joker* and *cosine*.

Later tonight, I'm sure. And tomorrow. And the coming weekend. I think about the scene of my returns. There I am, trying to focus on the screen; there are Fanny and Roxy, trying to get my attention with their tomfoolery and dancing. The mere anticipation of their distractions frustrates me. Then I remember that I can lose myself in the moment of my interaction with technology (if the pups aren't too rowdy) any ole time I please (in the middle of the night, if I have to)! No such vast freedoms with live performance, now is there! I simultaneously stroke the pups' bellies as my thoughts remain consumed by theorizing the relationship between performance and technology:

Both are mediations constructed to communicate (aesthetically, in these cases).

Whether on stage/screen or off, I help construct the text and the experience.

Performer and audience, protagonist and antagonist. I play all the roles.

One can enhance the other. Can one diminish the other?

I'm thinking that performance and technology are very much like my pups. But really. This text is not about puppies.

### **Author Note**

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