

aloof, as many of Kushner's are. It is another thing for them to be so relentlessly cynical as to have no real past — no fond memories, no nostalgias or desires — and still, despite all that, to have the palpable quality of someone with a rich interior life.

This spy, who goes by Sadie Smith, is tasked with infiltrating a commune of eco-activists in southwestern France. The commune, Le Moulin, is not merely idyllic. It is as much made of clay, muscle, and grain — earnest, honest things — as it is of emails, rental cars, clingy suit trousers, and adultery. These are the conditions under which Sadie thrives: bureaucratic, unashamed. Kushner nails her dry, apathetic tone, which cuts through the activists' idealistic pretensions, straight to their infighting, horniness, alcoholism, and envy. Perhaps filtering this novel about revolutionary agenda through her unsympathetic perspective reflects the tempered tolerance this era has for brazen idealism.

Either way, Sadie Smith is compelling. The extent to which she insulates herself from those around her and, to an extent, from us, is offset by her keenness to analyze others and to convey the bleak complexity of the "real Europe" they live in: not "baby macaroons colored pale pink and mint green... The real Europe is a borderless network of supply and transport... Truck ruts and panties snagged on a bush: that's 'Europe.'"

The thing is, Sadie is actually less hardened than she first lets on, and as the plot reaches a head, her armor begins to crack. Her weakness — Bruno Lacombe, the commune's cultish elder — is the novel's enigmatic core. A veteran of the May '68 demonstrations, he has since retreated to a cave system like some neo-Neanderthal, or "Thal," as he amiably

puts it. We never meet Bruno, only hear from him via a fantastic string of emails (I'd happily read an entire treatise by this man) in which he spouts his Thal theories: "Neanderthals were prone to depression... addiction too, and especially smoking." His arguments might not be watertight — so what? — but they have the thin, thrilling logic that characterizes conspiracy theories; you know it's not true, but part of you wants to believe it. The intrigue of *Creation Lake* is that a part of Sadie — supposedly immune to these sorts of ideas — wants to believe as well. — **MAGNUS RENA**

CALLA HENKEL **SCRAP**

Abrams, 2024
320 pages

Esther Ray, art world burn-out, is back. That is, at a buzzy gallery dinner in NYC. She's left the city to take up crafting in rural North Carolina which we're to learn is because the art world does have some hard lines — you can't torch the studio of a pedophilic painter and stick around to brag about it. When the book opens all we know is that Esther is wearing her only button-up shirt and she wants everyone to know she's doing better: "I wanted to tell old friends about my house and barn-converted-studio in the mountains and hint at our baby plans." Ambitions she describes as "simple and mildly selfish." Dinner is bleak. She's seated next to a publicist and a billionaire, Naomi Duncan, who sets the book's tightly wound plot in motion. Naomi wants Esther to turn 12 years of photographs, receipts, plane tickets, and bank statements into scrapbooks for her husband's 60th birthday: "Money is no object." Esther doesn't consider

it until, back in Asheville, she's greeted by an empty closet and a printed break-up card. The engagement is off but the mortgage is not. She has no choice but to sign an NDA and start scrapbooking. Heartbreak and resentment gas this thriller's engine as a truckload of the billionaire's paper excrement is dumped at Esther's preciously bucolic studio.

Esther gets drunk at La Caverna, complains about the prices at Citarella, spends thousands of dollars on painting supplies at the Golden Eagle. She abhors wealth. She loves money. She fucks a hierarchically polyamorous butch. She fucks Sarah with dyed blue armpit hair, Lisa from the zero-waste brewery, Franzi who loves gothic romance novels. She lists the ways she could kill herself ("5. Jump off cliff on Sheldon Trail (fun?) [...] 12. Drinking to death (also fun)"). She believes in craft, in process. She burns down a couple buildings. She's passionate about justice. She is a True Crime fanatic. Her ex calls the genre "catnip for underestimated white women, snuff porn for moms." Henkel winks at her own adherence to the conventions of a mass-market thriller, a form which keeps her otherwise niche art world reflections unconventionally intelligible. Speed and specificity don't always get along, but the author is an artist who writes. Her work explores performance, labor, documentation, and photography. You can tell she's been to a lot of gallery dinners. She knows how this shit works. The prose is meant to be downed like the bottles of wine Esther finishes with concerning regularity, but *Scrap* is not exactly zero to 60 in three-point-five. It's 92 pages of set-up, then once the plot hits full throttle, it's a fine-tuned supersonic speed machine with a sunroof top and... you get the picture. — **MAX BATTLE**

CRAIG WILLSE

PROVIDENCE

Union Sq. & Co, 2024
320 pages

Providence opens at a wealthy small liberal arts school where Dr. Mark Lausson is teaching *The Talented Mr. Ripley* as a part of his "Death and Sex in American Literature" class. Suddenly a sort of hot, but not super hot, sophomore named Tyler raises his hand and says something sort of insightful, but not super insightful. Sexual and emotional obsession ensues which, as the first line of the book pronounces, "completely destroys" Mark's life. The Ripley references and parallels run through the thriller in a way that is fun and doesn't diminish the story's originality. A key difference between Willse's debut novel and Highsmith's classic is the use of shame. Commonly diagnosed as a sociopath, Tom Ripley is incapable of feeling shame, whereas Mark is consumed by it. — **ADAM ELI**

JANE DELYNN

IN THRALL

Semiotext(e), 2024 (1982)
312 pages

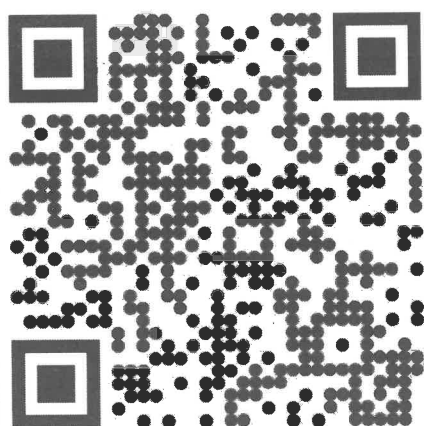
In Thrall is set inside a Jewish Manhattanite girlhood, pre-Stonewall 1960s. Lynn, Jane DeLynn's so-called "tragic heroine" — precocious, droll, and miserably high-strung — sets off on a lesbian affair with her senior-year English teacher. A tale as old as time! This one is canonical, Colm Tóibín points out in an unskippable foreword, for its rejection of the coyness that's long plagued the sapphic novel: Lynn isn't Therese, stealing glances at Carol from across

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—Sasha Frere-Jones, *The Nation*



the shop floor. Nor is she Fanny Price, lowkey begging Mary Crawford to rehearse with her lines from a love scene. Lynn is neither a loner nor a loser. In first-person you can apprehend, she lays her desire out flat, sticks pins in it, goes at it with a comb and a magnifying glass.

This book isn't didactic. The question of the age gap (16 to 37), of the abuse of authority, is only invoked in the nagging spirit of the pair's many other debates: if Hamlet might have suffered the Madonna-Whore complex, the use in buying solid wood stuff over veneer, whether youth is cruel, whether age is stupid... Miss Maxfeld asks Lynn why she skipped her graduation: "Were your parents afraid I'd molest you in front of the whole auditorium?" Verbs like that both betray and make light of the lovers' incessant brush-ups with shame—as close as DeLynn gets to moralizing. "If I had any guts," says Lynn, who loves and hates that she's gay in turn, "I'd jump out the window right now, instead of waiting for the inevitable day when I'd molest some young girl and get arrested."

Like any bildungsroman worth its salt, *In Thrall* is frank about the wicked world its protagonist must stomach; in starring the voice of a fatalistic, ambitious teenage lesbian, it could've altogether been a gloomy read. DeLynn's writing, though, is truly funny, marked by the wisdom of a real student of life. She's compared to J.D. Salinger, Jane Austen, Marcel Proust, even Euripides. Her Lynn, most of all, makes you think of Sean DeLear and his 1979 diaries: a neutral portrait of queer want before it's been understood, counting all its pitfalls and its joys, tied up with the inevitability of its articulation, sometime, someplace. The book isn't didactic: It's about didacticism, with the reader bearing witness to a real-time schooling in sex, high culture, life underground—and English literature, of course. —MORGAN BECKER

CHARLIE ENGMAN

HELLO CHAOS, A LOVE STORY: THE DISORDER OF SEEING AND BEING SEEN

Mack, 2024
182 pages

Reading *Hello Chaos, a Love Story* feels like catching up on juicy group chat gossip (Mickey Mouse fucked himself!?) while traversing a heap of memes and cursed objects posted by a Hello Kitty superfan armed with Baudrillardian rhetoric. Reminiscent of Marshall McLuhan's *The Medium is the Massage* (1967), Charlie Engman's ebullient marriage of text and image confronts readers with crippling conclusions about how we allow images to dictate our desires and actions. (At one point, I tried tapping on some text because it was blue and underlined.) Engman, however, is allegorical rather than didactic. His analysis of image culture and consumer capitalism is told through the reimagining of a classic tale: Lonely fag hag (Hello Kitty) falls for unavailable, gay narcissist (Mickey Mouse).

As fun and quippy as it is pithy, Engman's writing will hit a nerve for anyone who has worn a brand ironically, posted a selfie, or questioned their own desire to be seen. Like looking into a mirror and noticing something new about your face, *Hello Chaos* merges reading and seeing to make way for startling discoveries about the very present metaphysical and ecological crisis we currently inhabit. Happy looking!
—CANDYSTORE

ANNA UDDENBERG

PREMIUM ECONOMY

Distanz, 2024
220 pages

I really didn't want to like Anna Uddenberg when I first saw her work. I didn't go to her *Continental Breakfast* on the Upper East Side (Meredith Rosen Gallery, 2023). I saw it like the majority of people on Instagram and Tiktok (currently half a billion streams and counting). I was suspicious of everything I was looking at because Uddenberg's figures are presented in this sexual, submissive, and tantalizing way, but they are completely unattainable. You can look, but you can't touch, and definitely can't catch feelings. The work feels hostile and transactional like a strip club, and for a moment I felt like a frustrated patron, a mark. But for someone to feel turned off by Uddenberg's girls (sometimes live performers activating furniture-like forms; sometimes fiber-glass, foam, and resin femmes) it's potentially a sign of impatience or an inability to see her work objectively (if objectivity is a delusion, then at least an attempt to see beyond our worst biases).

With that being said, Uddenberg's work is incredibly sexy. The evolution this monograph traces, from performance and sculpture made between 2009 and 2023, is in a way predictable. But that by no means implies that her work isn't dense and complex. In the essay "Chains of Desire," Caroline Busta astutely demonstrates the mechanics of Uddenberg's practice while also linking it to the canon of minimalist sculpture (specifically Robert Morris). Inspired by Busta's meditation on the mesmerizing alienation in the DNA of Uddenberg's

work, distilling feedback systems that merge subject and object, I became transfixed by the contradiction that its friction comes from its perfection.

Especially in the later works included in the book, itself a formidable object designed by Office Ben Ganz, Uddenberg's project feels maximized, every component purposeful in its perceived function. The way she engages negative space within her forms, I'm reminded of Cosima von Bonin's *Hetero* and *Fence* (corner version), both 2020. I'm also left considering the cultural anxieties of hive-mindedness and the way negative space demands one to project something of themselves to fill the void. There's a clinical humor to the virality these works activate, a sterile hostility. With the book organized reverse chronologically, it's palpable that Uddenberg is evolving alongside a growing cultural anxiety of objects becoming sentient, her optical mad-libbing an expressiveness as response to the sheer amount of circulation experienced.
—ISAIAH DAVIS

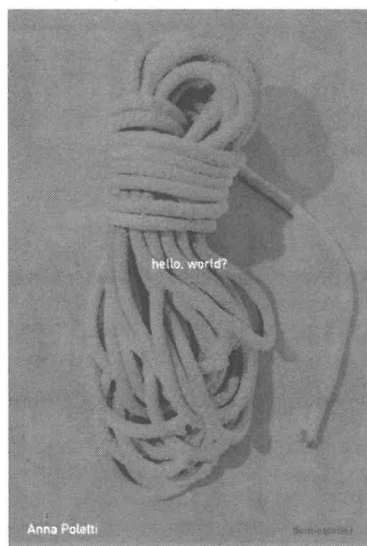
LEGACY RUSSELL

BLACK MEME: A HISTORY OF THE IMAGES THAT MAKE US

Verso, 2024
192 pages

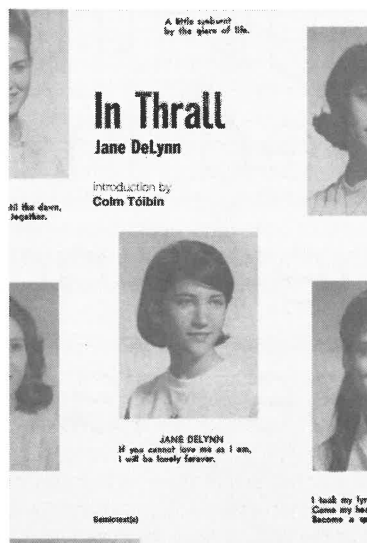
Black Meme, Legacy Russell's second book, delves into the violent, anti-Black history of visual media circulation. In concise, readable prose, she explores the connective threads between 19th-century lynching mementos and

NEW FROM SEMIOTEXT(E)



hello, world?
Anna Poletti

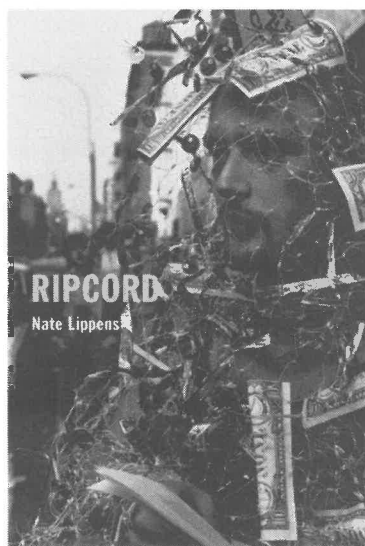
"*hello, world?* finds ways of engaging intimately with others that become experiments in the relation between the body and the body-politic under what we commonly call late capitalism and might wish to call late patriarchy. The violence of both call for forms of enactment, of selves in relation, that can provide some kind of figure for them, some way of figuring them out. The delight in this book is not just in how closely observed and felt these things are, but how closely thought as well."
—McKenzie Wark



IN THRALL
Jane DeLynn

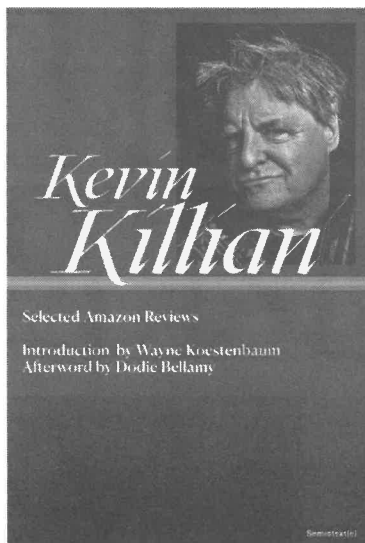
"Jane DeLynn's masterpiece, *In Thrall*, is a profile in courage and pure, willful sense and sensibility ... [a] mixture of dramatic intensity and comic brilliance."
—Colm Tóibín

"*In Thrall* is a dazzling novel ... Lynn is a character like Holden Caulfield is, or Bellow's Henderson, or Maria Wyeth in Didion's *Play It as It Lays*. This book is going to have a long, long life."
—Kate Braverman



RIPCORD
Nate Lippens

"*Ripcord* is an existential torch song; the always-lost beloved is life itself. Lippens is a poète maudit of ex-cons, junkies, and fuckups—of sizzling class anger and bad choices. He's beyond gritty, into snarling and flamboyant.... What a gift to encounter such intelligent homosexuality! Lippens shares the savage and droll improbabilities of queer desire—along with music, books, performance, and art—with a few eloquent friends. If I tell you I'm grateful for his voice in my head, I reveal myself as a loser in the best possible way."
—Robert Glück



SELECTED AMAZON REVIEWS
Kevin Killian

"After reading a bunch of these I thought, 'This is a work of genius.'"
—Gary Indiana

"When I think of Kevin's Amazon reviews, the enormity truly is how big his project was, how small Amazon, how disposable his literary friend ads were designed to be, and yet, by turning them out fast as light, he occupied Goliath and undid him. Kevin loved culture and was its constant undoing."
—Eileen Myles