

HOW DEEP IT GOES

I loved Shulie for writing
that giving birth
is like “shitting a pumpkin”

and that childhood
is a “supervised nightmare.”
It was easy for me to decide

I didn’t want kids. Reared
on Andrea Dworkin, it was also easy
to rule out intercourse:

*can an occupied people—
physically occupied inside,
internally invaded—be free?*

When Dworkin died in 2005,
an anchor on Fox made a crude joke
and Cathy Young called her a ‘*sad ghost*’

that feminism needs to exorcise.
Some of us knew Dworkin
was onto something,

but Shulamith Firestone knew
we’d probably shut it down:
Feminists have to question

*not just all of Western culture,
but the organization of culture itself,
and further, even the very organization*

*of nature. Many women give up in despair:
if that's how deep it goes
they don't want to know...*

which leads me to women
who want children, which leads me
to women who get three months

parental leave and that's it.
I'm talking about the U.S. in 2015,
but what about China

where foot binding was legal until 1912,
which leads me to human history.
Plato wasn't down with women's rights

*as such a shift could alter the household
and the state. And Aristotle
thought women's work had no value.*

The Enlightenment was not so enlightened
when it came to women,
which leads me to searching for historical blips

of female equality—
Spartan women got some glory
if their sons were warriors.

Those moms could own land
and take care of estates.
In third century BCE, Stoics

believed that men and women
should wear the same clothing,
enter marriage, not as a biological

imperative, but as equals.
Stoics had a good eight-hundred-year run
until, deemed pagan by Christians,

all their schools were shut down.
Quakers believed women and men
were spiritually one and the same.

Margaret Fell, in 1668, wrote
“Women’s Speaking Justified,”
arguing for a female ministry.

In 1782, before the word feminism
came into being, Mary Wollstonecraft
pled her case in *A Vindication*

of the Rights of Woman—
that marriage should be between
two partners, not a father-husband

and a vain child-wife who sacrifices her life
to “libertine notions of beauty.”
Which leads me to New Zealand in 1893,

the first of many countries
to give women the right to vote.
The ERA put up a good, yet losing, fight.

Birth control, 1975 declared
International Women’s Year—
which leads me to Rush’s feminazi.

Phyllis Schlafly. The Moral Majority.
The post-feminist label.
Rape as genocide—

500,000 women, in 1994, in Rwanda.
Dworkin again: *can those without
a biologically based physical integrity*

have self-respect?
Which leads me to Rousseau
and his “natural law,”

that certain men (white)
are superior to women
and all people of other races

because men are “rational animals,”
which leads me to men
and their rational wars,

which leads me to the animal kingdom—
the lion that kills the cubs
of his predecessor,

the male seed beetle with his barbed penis,
gangs of bottled-nosed dolphins
kidnapping females—

which leads me back to Shulie’s despair.
*It’s a good thing women are long-term thinkers,
because it’s going to take a while*

until feminism is no longer a theory, but a reality,
says reluctant feminist Nancy Hopkins
cancer researcher at MIT,

which leads me to plastic surgery
or *The Death of Feminism*
which leads me to Pink’s “Stupid Girls”

which leads me to fashion
and Madonna and Naomi Wolf,
which leads me to heterosexist privilege

which leads me to *Queer Futurity*
and José Esteban Muñoz
who dismisses the fight for same-sex marriage—

who would want to be part
of such a corrupt system?—
which leads me to women

in combat—why would women
want to shoot anybody else,
as they are so often victims of violence

themselves?—which leads me
to something like Female Futurity.
Should women dismiss

the fight for political representation
since it's all a sham? Should
women stop paying their taxes?

Should they eschew money
entirely and trade in
their lipsticks

and bras, their heels,
their hair dye?
Which leads me to the phrase

“having it both ways,”
a phrase I hate
as men always have it both ways

all ways, actually, always, actually,
which leads me to the false binaries
of gender which one would think

make feminism obsolete.
Pop androgyny pretty much died
with Annie Lenox and Grace Jones.

I remember kids dressing up
as Boy George
for Halloween in 1983

which brings me back
to Shulie’s pumpkins
and a time of the Culture Club’s

beloved innocence.
(“I prefer a nice cup of tea to sex,”
said The Boy.) My unproven theory—

mainstream androgyny died
with AIDS. Gender-bending
was OK until it was labeled gay,

until HIV, until toddlers
with drawn-on eyebrows
scared their parents,

which leads me to polysexuality,
the trans world, cissexual
assumption, and though not

mainstream, pansexuality,
which Shulie thought was coming
and may be coming still

which leads me back to homophobia,
xenophobia, anorexia, mania,
which leads me to schizophrenia

from which Shulie suffered,
which leads me to her delusion—
people hiding behind masks

made of their very own faces,
which sounds poetic and apt to me—
which leads me

to mascara which leads me
to Louis Sass's definition
of the schizophrenic

as one who is *acutely aware*
of the inauthenticities and compromises
of normal social existence—

which leads me to John Keats
and his “negative capability,”
which leads me to, of all people,

F. Scott Fitzgerald
who, rephrasing Keats, wrote
The test of a first-rate intelligence

is the ability to hold two opposing ideas
in mind at the same time
and still retain the ability to function

which leads me—
If that's how deep it goes
do you want to know?—to you.