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Cosima von Bonin, *The Faker*, 26.04.2024 – 06.07.2024

What is the Daffy formula? It is this:

“To be a Daffy, a character must first and foremost be like Daffy. Not only must they be congenitally selfish, devious, grandiose, and craven, but all of these characteristics must be magnified to grotesque proportions due to the pointed cruelty of the universe.”

Apparently there is a new sheriff and/or messiah in town. This obscure figure bearing the aforementioned characteristics is introduced to me jotted down on the notepad as “Duck. Black. Ill-tempered. Analog. Not a clue about anything. Friend. Better.”

Chuck Jones, one of the creators of the Looney Tunes antagonist Daffy Duck, once claimed in an interview that Daffy was actually a chicken in drag. Drag, why not a convenient way to defuse the ostentatious cruelty of the universe. Drag is the polar opposite of merely passing. Drag has to stand out, and it needs a stage of some kind; it is the crown and host of the delight in seeking attention! “As long as you can say I was adored once too, everything is in order.”

There’s no one who would rather be a Daffy than Cosima. Sadly, the requisite qualities are not sufficiently pronounced in her. But perhaps they do share the same demons. Daffy can—at any time—call upon his unfettered hubris, yet he remains highly driven nonetheless. *Backstage Talent Only* (2023, p. 196) reveals the severity with which this fame-seeker is affected by the somewhat devastating judgment, while its companion piece *Dämonenräumdienst* (Demon Clearing Service, 2023, p. 199) tops it all off with a mean example of a coping strategy.

In the panels of *Shit & Chanel*, we see Daffy’s struggle against falling into oblivion, disappearing behind the dark curtain in the eternal darkness of the backstage. Black ink used to be the enemy in the original cartoon. (Yet Daffy is not exactly the only cartoon hero who was actively threatened by his own cartoonist’s tools.) Daffy fights in vain. A grim fate. Elsewhere, however, he emerges from the equally black material background as a beautifully quilted, jet-black relief to mock a couple of rosy piggies hanging out lethargically in a cement mixer. Who is the demon now?

Given that she would rather chop off her own hand than actually produce her art herself, Queen Cosima gets up extremely early. The world needs to be ruled. Orders are issued from her bed to servants and court purveyors who are merely waiting to sew, quilt, appliqué, or cobble together art according to her ideas. Before this can ensue, though, higher powers have evoked the *Dämonenräumdienst*.

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Our anxious queen (insignia: a chunky necklace with a clonk-heavy sterling silver *Angsthase*—a scaredy-cat, only our German scaredy-cats are bunny-shaped—and an inherited Hermès Kelly bag on a cheap-ass belt) needs not only her artistic collaborators, her workshop manager, and her assistants, but an entourage of courtiers, yes-men and no-men, masters of ceremonies, walkers, dog-walkers, disappointment counselors, payroll clerks, innocent, potentially wooden toy boys and bodyguards, a legion of drag stars, but also toxic masculinity performers, who occasionally present her with sacred implements such as brass knuckles, inflatable morning stars, switchblades, Louisville Sluggers, or sand-filled blackjacks that make her feel instantly better. A balanced glam/butch level is guaranteed.

Material and (self-)medication. “Smart, independent, a drunk—I’m a lady.” Quite the noble concept of life! Cosima is ideally cast. Unhealthy though, regrettably. Irrevocably renouncing this option may result in an extremely harsh life. Anxiety and social phobia, the continuation of depression by other means. Endless detoxes with accompanying art therapy and confessions of your feelings in a group until you reach the point where all you have to do is tinker with the combination of pills that will make life more or less bearable. Once you have found it, you are even more dissatisfied because, for some unknown reason, you miss the friction caused by mood swings.

“I want my depression back. I am no longer interested in any-thing. I used to be a workhorse, always a drug-addicted animal, but an animal nonetheless.” An absence of depression is not the solution either. For all the medication, there ought to remain just enough of it to make art possible. A slight bad temper, bitchiness, a few residual demons, kept on a short leash. A finely tuned unease about the world. The desire to manipulate instead of being manipulated. A few Daffy traits are helpful in this situation, despite all the (apparent) futility of his efforts.

Cosima’s crustaceans and mollusks have lent themselves as manifestations of girlish attributes such as timidity, fearfulness, and vulnerability. Clam eyes peer anxiously from their shells, a lobster gets caught uneasily in the cement mixer of life (all signature pieces), and they had good reason to do so, given that their supposedly hard shells are made of velvet and plush. They were hiding behind cutie culture and probably drank in secret, the little shits.

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Despite their sewn-up appearance, the classic *Lappen* (rags) seemed neither particularly shy nor overly feminine to me. At best as feminine as a man's skirt. (Latest gender nuisance: straight women now wear men's skirts. Not to be confused with kilts!) The *Umkleidekabinen* (changing rooms) in the Church of Daffy, casually draped plaid fabric panels, speak to me more than those mindfulness tents created from gauze, threads, or other rather bridal-veil-like material that I have recently stumbled upon in work by other women artists. (Or am I merely imagining this because I'm developing a general hostility toward delicate gossamer fabrics?)

It is impossible to negotiate the feminine and masculine in Cosima's work without recourse to drag and a certain gay aesthetic; in fact, as our queen, she is indeed a drag queen herself, since queens, queen mums, alcoholic divas, ladies, *dames*, and other bombshell roles of femininity have long since been relegated to where non-biologism renders them bearable.

In terms of fabrics, velvet and shine prevail on the one hand, and plaid on the other—plaid seems to have a suggestive power that prompted Cosima in her younger years to buy a Burberry skirt especially for the purpose of hitchhiking from the Remscheid service station to Hamburg. It was intended to nip any trans-gressions in the bud. A manipulative impudence. A Daffy move, perhaps.

Back to Daffy. Ultimately, he is the redeemer who saves the day, who gives even the last floppy soft toys a backbone. After long battles, the Church of Daffy has become the *ne plus ultra* for the manipulator and self-promoter: his own church. In triumphant black epoxy resin with mineral components, he finally rests upon his rightful pedestal and preaches wearing a plaid loincloth. Adored by a mussel that in his presence solidified into safety glass, a material that's tough as nails. Just as well that Cosima has found someone who knows their way around epoxy resin.

Clara Drechsler, „Demon Clearing Service“ in »FEELINGS«, ed. by Katharina Dohm.  
Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2024.

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