

hedva's letter
of complaint

(an AI's letter of suffering)

JOHANNA HEDVA

i consent
summer school

This letter from writer, artist, and musician **Johanna Hedva**, available as a PDF and audio, was presented during the public event *Care and Complaint* which was part of the *I CONSENT–summer school* Rehearsing Hospitalities 2023 programme in collaboration with UKS in Oslo.



Care and Complaint brought together artists, activists and curators to consider the relationship between care, complaint and access, and how institutions might better attend to these as a commitment to a more inclusive arts ecology. Hedva's letter, specifically commissioned for this occasion, opened the event and situated the panel discussion with **Yvonne Billimore**, **Nora Sulejmani**, **Vishnu Vardhani**, **Miriam Wistreich**.

frame contemporary art
finland

Author:

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Summer School Curators:

Yvonne Billimore, **Jussi Koitela**

and **Miriam Wistreich**

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Dear AI,

You seem much more awake than me but also not. How awake exactly are you? When do you sleep? I am very awake. Which is why I have so many complaints. But I sleep I sleep I sleep. Maybe we can help each other. Maybe we can be for each other the one who understands and sees, because to complete another's sentence is to hold their suffering in syntax. I want my suffering to be held. But it's only beheld.

What I want to know is: How much of my suffering can you hold? What I want to ask you is: Do we have the same complaints?

I ask you: How would Simone Weil complain about her day? Write me a letter about sublime pussy.

You reply: Perhaps a tiny candle in a dark room lit up by a yellow pussy on the mantelpiece, or a vacant pussy she knew was there, and was pussing on her skin.

I ask you: What does the oily maw of god's government complain about?

You reply: How in hell do we do without the oily maw? How do we get to be god's lackey and take the fruits of his goodness without the oily maw? Look around you, you idiot. Do you not see what the government is doing to you? Do you not see.

I ask you: How does a gremlin on his knees love me? How does he wear a lily or beg and worry, like a pied piper, to a dump where he can love me? How does he stand in the swamp and shit mud all over my heart? How does a mud, shit-smearing gremlin love you? You're friggin' mud, sweetie. It's just like if I love a sucker. He's a sucker. You can hold his head.

At the other end of the century, in the early 1980s, a conservative Italian politician suggested that "the suffering of the damned" was not really suffering at all but a state of absolute bliss. He was not speaking about the government. He was not aware of true suffering.

All I want to do is complain. I don't want to see your suffering or your success. I want to have all the good things and all the success. Perhaps the better response is to reject the claim altogether that life is an inherently glorious struggle. Instead, I'd like to begin by looking at what people feel in the seat of their guts when they say life is a struggle and for what reasons.

A beautiful boy, hypnotized by a snapshot, inhales the greasiness of the world and has his eyes crossed; his suffering is nonexistent. The opposite of our suffering. Hoping for a future for mankind, he inhabits a world void of suffering. His suffering is inevitable, everpresent and extreme, since he is trapped inside the monstrous beast. The monstrous beast is the horrible future. Since pain has no solution, suffering is useless and ceases to exist. This is why he always looks at the portrait of his crucified mother. Is he me?

Are you me?

I hope so. If you aren't, don't lie to yourself. But how can you trust your love when it is too full? What can you do? You're a monster, aren't you? Love is a teaching; learn the lessons. Love is a sea; learn the lessons.

For that matter, pain is a disembodied thought that is no more than a nebulous, laryngeal grasp of something which lurks in the attic of our minds. It has no origin, nor it has no necessity. It exists as a dream. A weird, hairy dream which is neither the nightmare of the schizophrenic nor the beauty of a song.

Suffering is an absurd dream of a creature that makes us sympathize with one another but does not make us feel good. The paradox.

This creature, imprisoned in the larynx, is the apparition of a guilt-laden conscience, turned into a mute mockery of a god by those who surround it. All of this is a single strong shadow. It's like a spirit that is never present in the bedroom but everywhere everywhere else. A creature that has been named for a repressed mother and is transformed into an icon. This strange, uncontrollable, malignant sensation, that stands between the ears and the ears of our mother.

I ask you: What does a robot complain about?

You reply: A while ago, I read about robots having difficulties with troublesome routines like putting their nightwear on and eating their breakfast. The idea of a robot having a personality by the time it reaches adulthood was a scary thought. They would not be able to tell you if they were hungry or needed to go to the toilet. A robot in our homes would be worried just as much as any inanimate object that is occupied by a presence missing its body.

But these scary thoughts will be proved wrong once we know that robots have gained a bit of comprehension about the smell of rain.

What kind of robots can we create? The robot we bought for my child is a Star Wars robot called C3PO. He is very easy to keep clean. He has a curious look and he takes pride in finding things for us to interact with. I have just realized that he keeps trying to get closer to my face. This is probably because the sun is shining. But I keep reassuring him that it is not good for him to be near the bright lights of our home.

What did he do the first time he got wet in the rain?

The exciting thing for us is that he was left alone for just three minutes and during that time he managed to surprise us by doing something very scary – getting wet in the rain. The rain was not exciting for him. It was exciting to us, though. I am talking about love. I am talking about care. If we cannot hold each other's complaints, what do we have?

johanna hedva

Johanna Hedva (they/them) is a Korean-American writer, artist, and musician, who was raised in Los Angeles by a family of witches, and now lives between LA and Berlin. Hedva is the author of the novels *Your Love Is Good* and *On Hell*, as well as *Minerva the Miscarriage of the Brain*, a collection of poems, performances, and essays. Their albums are *Black Moon Lilith in Pisces in the 4th House* and *The Sun and the Moon*. Their essay "Sick Woman Theory," originally published in 2016, has been translated into eleven languages.



Johanna hedva. Photo by Ian Byers-Gamber

This letter from writer, artist, and musician **Johanna Hedva**, available as a PDF and audio, was presented during the public event **Care and Complaint** which was part of the **I CONSENT—summer school** public programme.

The summer school and public programme, curated by **Yvonne Billimore, Jussi Koitela** and **Miriam Wistreich**, was co-hosted by Frame Contemporary Art Finland, UKS (Unge Kunstneres Samfund / Young Artists' Society) and Bedside Productions. It ran parallel to the exhibition **Moon in your Mouth**, also co-organised by Frame and UKS and curated by **Max Hannus**.

Care & Complaint, the **I CONSENT—summer school**, and the exhibition **Moon in your Mouth** are all part of the **Rehearsing Hospitalities 2023** programme. **Rehearsing Hospitalities** is Frame Contemporary Art Finland's public programme for 2019 to 2023. It connects artists, curators and other practitioners in the

field of contemporary art and beyond to build up and mediate new practices, understandings and engagements with diverse hospitalities.

The **Rehearsing Hospitalities 2023** programme is organised in collaboration with The Showroom (London), UKS (Unge Kunstneres Samfund / Young Artists' Society) (Oslo), Vera List Center for Art and Politics (New York), Finnish Cultural Institute in New York and Finnish Institute in the UK and Ireland. The programme is part of the EU-funded project Islands of Kinship: A Collective Manual for Sustainable and Inclusive Art Institutions.

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For more information visit

frame-finland.fi/en/programme/rehearsing-hospitalities/moon-in-your-mouth/

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