

## Postscript 57

**STEFFANIE LING**  
**on AJAY KURIAN**



Looking out the window of a bus we were riding to a party in your town, I said, “I think I’m going to stop buying yogurt.” I turned away from a layering of overpasses, billboards and clouds, where something in the cityscape mingled with my thoughts to prompt a renouncement of yogurt, to get your reaction.

You were silent, but the closing of your book seemed to be your way of permitting this dull proclamation to evolve. “Well, sometimes I put a dollop in my soups,” I said, trying to justify the half full container sitting in my fridge, “I don’t actually like eating it that much.” The look in your eyes was utterly ok then with a specter of why am I with you? I’ve said even less remarkable things before, so I kissed you on the side of your limp mouth and turned to look out the window again, where a SUV drove up next to the bus obstructing my view.

The event of you packing little of everything you owned coincided with my acquisition of an e-cigarette. Before moving across the country, you said that we would both have burdens lifted from us — you would “finally have the chance to live super minimal” and I would quit smoking.

E-cigarettes are not effectively named because they still have “cigarette” in the name. As the latest talisman for smoking cessation, this misnomer fueled my unreasonable expectation that an e-cigarette would actually

be like a cigarette-cigarette. I tried it. The way it is held reminded me of how I hold a straw to draw a triple thick milkshake. When I smoked it in restaurants, I was a teenager smuggling a hard beverage, disguised as a Big Gulp, into the cinema.<sup>1</sup> I thought of it as everything else but a cigarette.

I confessed to you that I was willing to resign myself to simulation, but not substitute.<sup>2</sup> While the recently implemented ban in New York argues that the use of cigarettes and e-cigs in public places are equal violators of the Clean Indoor Air Act, this guilty-by-association logic undermines the commitments people make to do or undo their vices. I deny their sameness, but not to defy the conjecture of health officials.

You were so kind to indulge my choice to continue smoking by having one cigarette with me on the balcony of your, finally, minimal-as-Judd apartment. With my back to your decent view, I took a casual stance followed by a dramatic drag and asked, “Why can’t my apartment be minimal as yours?” The apartment is a triumph in image cessation, and it is settled that I require something to put my eyes and mouth on.

Allen Carr’s Easy Guide to Quitting Smoking states that first, one must accept that smoking is not a habit — it is a drug addition. Second, the only way to quite smoking is to never have a cigarette again.

This, you adapted for your own purposes. First, one must accept that images are not a habit — they are a drug addiction. Second, the only way to quit images is to never have an image again.<sup>3</sup>

The goal of living simpler, cleaner, is much more sinister than I thought. A recipe for a do-it yourself facemask calls for cinnamon, yogurt, banana and honey. I put too much cinnamon in, or not enough yogurt. Most retail body care products will instruct you to do a test patch on your arm before applying it to your face. This precaution assumes that your arm skin is the same as your chin, septum, bridge of nose, and cheek skin. Does this seem right to you? Without a warning label, and only a rustic mason jar to store the excess face mask, you either think you're getting back to something, or getting away with something by cheating manufacture. You're excited and apply the mashed banana, not enough yogurt, honey and too much cinnamon right onto your face without testing on your arm first, but the too much cinnamon part of this experiment sets your face under the yogurt on fire! What's used to clean up is the same stuff as the mess.

At the party, I don't know anyone. For conversation, I repeat the yogurt remark to some people I just met, "I think I'm going to stop buying yogurt." We exchange some anecdotes about yogurt, and share other things we'd like to abstain from. I lit a cigarette and offer one to another who identified as a smoker earlier.

He smiles and presents his e-cigarette. In the spirit of stopping, he offers me some of that. It could have been taken as condescending. I respectfully refused, which could have been taken as polite, but I just met him and don't feel quite comfortable smoking his e-cigarette.

## Notes

1 My complaint was met with the ‘cigalike’ model, which is an e-cigarette that is design to be held and appear like a combustible cigarette.

2 Why would a smoker switch to an e-cigarette if he or she must go outside to vape with cigarette smokers? Why would they switch if electronic cigarettes are being treated the same as combustible cigarettes?” Healy, Jason. “Letters: e-cig truths lost in political smoke” Philly.com, last modified March 20, 2014. Accessed May 8, 2014. [http://articles.philly.com/2014-03-20/news/48370649\\_1\\_electronic-cigarettes-smoker-tobacco](http://articles.philly.com/2014-03-20/news/48370649_1_electronic-cigarettes-smoker-tobacco)

3 Phrasing extracted from Shelia Heti’s “Why Go Out” which paraphrases Alan Carr’s Easy Guide to Quitting Smoking whose methods are applied to the possibility of quitting social gatherings. <http://www.sheilaheti.net/whygoout.html>

**STEFFANIE LING is an independent writer, curator at CSA Space and co-editor of the Bartleby Review, an occasional leaflet of short criticism in Vancouver.**