

## Wrinkle in the Binky – By Nicole Brunel

*Baby Wave* is taking the world by storm.

*Baby Wave* started in Calgary, but *Baby Wavers* are crawling everywhere, so it will probably be a huge cultural phenomenon soon and then die.

*Baby Wave* is a sub-genre of apartment rock, which is just music you make in your apartment because you don't have a garage.

*Baby Wave* uses instruments that need little or no amps, and can be recorded straight into a laptop, making the thinnest guitar sound and with programmed drums, recorded so that you won't wake up the neighbor's baby.

*Baby Wave* "the term" was born fairly recently, but *Baby Wave* "the feeling" has been gestating for a while. My first band ever was named Womb Baby, which is classic baby wave anti-humor (it's redundant), so I would include Womb Baby as a proto-baby wave band (fetus wave?). At the time of this band I had no grasp over song writing so I would just mashup old songs like "Life on Mars" and "Across the Universe" to make a "new" song. This is not the *Baby Wave* sound, but admitting to having done this is embarrassing, and embarrassment is *Baby Wave*. *Baby Wave* is averse to most braggers or bragging.

Say that a man has been hunting. He must not come home and announce like a braggart, 'I have killed a big one in the bush!' He must first sit down in silence until I or someone else comes up to his fire and asks, 'What did you see today?' He replies quietly, 'Ah, I'm no good for hunting. I saw nothing at all... maybe just a tiny one.' Then I smile to myself because I know he has killed something big.

Guago explains "insulting the meat" (Lee 57)

Although *Baby Wave* was first culturally recognized as a musical genre, its true origin is comedy. *Baby Wave* bands find humor in taking lyrics, riffs, and song structures from hardcore punk and make them weaker, dumber, and more annoying. Songs of only cooing, gurgling, and crying<sup>1</sup>, drums programmed by drawing a baby bottle, baby diapers for band merchandise. *Baby Wave* humor, as I use it, isn't about making fun of babies or dumbness or weakness, it is an embodiment of these characteristics for the purpose of resisting a bro-dominated music culture that only values male virtuosity and female hetero-sexiness (which is determined by intersectional qualities such as race, gender, age, able-bodiedness, body-size, etc.). The baby, as a pre-sexual amature, represents someone outside of this binary gender system.

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<sup>1</sup> A song by a self-identified *Baby Wave* band: <https://imhughman.bandcamp.com/track/eeee-doot-doo-2>

Examples of Baby Wave in popular culture:

1. *Devo* – As far as I know every Baby-Waver loves or has at some point loved this band:



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4sanz7mcUOk>

2. *50 Cent* – Includes hugging and birthdays in raps:



“You can find me in the club, bottle full of bub’...  
So come give me a hug...  
...It’s your birthday”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dWu-MCaljrs>

3. *Josh Cellars Wines* - Is not afraid to use his love for his dad as a marketing strategy:



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Rszi0IMLhs>

4. *Death Stranding* - Highly anticipated video game by Hideo Kojima (release date TBA), featuring *The Walking Dead* star Norman Reedus. Appears to be set in a futuristic, baby wave dystopia:



The first cinematic trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i2nuHEGhwiw>

5. Arby's condiments:



6. Binky take-over of 2018 haute couture<sup>2</sup>:



*Viktor & Rolf*



*Maison Margiela*



*Preen by Thornton Bregazzi*

7. The most Baby Wave part of the *Tao Te Ching*:

“Other people are excited,  
as though they were at a parade.  
I alone don’t care,  
I alone am expressionless,  
Like an infant before it can smile.

Other people have what they need;  
I alone possess nothing.  
I alone drift about,  
Like someone without a home.  
I am like an idiot, my mind so empty.

Other people are bright;  
I alone am dark.  
Other people are sharp;  
I alone am dull.  
Other people have purpose;  
I alone don’t know.  
I drift like a wave on the ocean,  
I blow as aimless as the wind.

I am different from ordinary people.  
I drink from the Great Mother’s breasts.”

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<sup>2</sup> A binky is a small child’s beloved stuffed animal, blanket, or toy.

According to Henri Bergson's theory of laughter, a comic person (by which he means someone who is laughed *at* not *with*) has a sort of "rigidity" or "inelasticity":

A man, running along the street, stumbles and falls; the passers-by burst out laughing...it is not his sudden change of attitude that raises a laugh, but rather the involuntary element in this change - his clumsiness, in fact. He should have altered his pace or avoided the obstacle. Instead of that, through lack of elasticity, through absentmindedness and a kind of physical obstinacy, as a result, in fact, of rigidity or of momentum, the muscles continued to perform the same movement when the circumstances of the case called for something else. That is the reason of the man's fall, and also of the people's laughter. (8-9)

This rigid man could also be the metaphorical father of Baby Wave; he the dad who resists change to safeguard his dominion over the babies shall thus trip upon the binky.

Comedians who exhibit some signs of Baby Wave:

Key and Peele - masculine emotion and weakness. Maria Bamford – baby voices and mommy issues. Tom Green - *The Bum Bum Song*. Mitch Hedberg – [ducks](#). Joe Firestone and Aparna Nancherla – [ice cream zone](#).

Jokes are often funny because they are surprising. A surprise is something that breaks with normalcy or what is expected. It can cause something "known" to become unknown. Jokes require change and are anti-repetition; knowing a joke makes it less funny. A joke is anti-knowing; once it is understood it is not a surprise and it doesn't elicit as much or any laughter. Joking can thus reclaim not-knowing, as artist Edgar Arceneaux writes in *The Alchemy of Comedy... Stupid*, "when we laugh at a true absurdity, we simultaneously confess that we cannot make sense of it and that we accept it. It expresses our finite capacity and our ability to live with what we cannot understand" (20). In this way, joking is a useful tool for people who are "known" to be inferior. Philosopher Simon Critchley attests to humor's ability to disrupt what is known or normal in his book *On Humour*.

The extraordinary thing about humor is that it returns us to common sense; by distancing us from it, humor familiarizes us with a common world through the miniature strategies of defamiliarization. If humor recalls us to *sensus communis*, then it does this by momentarily pulling us out of common sense, where jokes function as moments of *dissensus communis* (18).

Critchley's statement reads ambiguously as to whether the joke ultimately reinforces or dismantles *sensus communis*. This is appropriate because jokes have the potential to do both. Many people, including jokers themselves, think joking means you're not being serious. But a joke is seriousness disguised by the pleasurable feeling that it gives the body. The joke as art is taking something so serious that you will destroy it if it's not good enough. Because most people consider joking to be unserious, harmless, powerless, joking has the potential to reclaim its unrecognition. If entertainment reinforces what is known and art questions it, Baby Wave music is an artful joke disguised as musical entertainment.

*Lyrics to “Baby Crazy” by Baby Wave band Hug Man:*

“I’m baby crazy  
Baby, I’m crazy

I wanna little boy to feed  
And dress up to look just like me  
I’m baby crazy, baby crazy, baby crazy, baby crazy

Fly your little kite and teach you all about this life  
You got those little brownie booties  
Mom’s got tickets to the movies  
I made you and I bathed you  
and I just can’t wait to raise you  
I got babies on my brainy and I’m feeling kinda crazy”

That song is from the album “How You Find That Goo?” which is what I google searched when I was trying to figure out how to chart my cervical mucus for [birth control](#). The lyrics of this song were written by a guy named Michael. I was mainly a live drummer for this band, except for [one song](#) where I improvised a cameo that went like this:

“Brothers sisters holding hands  
In our father’s fertile land  
Stilettos we are farming glam  
Holes for worms  
Worms  
I use plastic bag for murses<sup>3</sup>  
My whole family are nurses  
That doesn’t explain my curse  
My hole’s filled with wormies  
Wormies wormies wormies

The military industrial worm complex is at the door”

As with music, popular humor relies on certain social ideas to be deemed good/funny or bad/unfunny by an audience. Mainstream comedy relies a lot on jokes about monogamy and binary gender - jokes about wives nagging, girlfriend’s jealousy, women shopping, etc. – topics that are only funny if you relate to them. Jokes and laughter reveal much about the comic’s and audience’s politics. Baby Wave comes from a long tradition of “anti-humor” which is a style of humor that rejects what is accepted as humorous by attempting to make not-funny-stuff funny. This strategy makes anti-humor comparable to ideas of anti-art. In *Dada and Anti-Art*, Hans Richter writes that the “negative definitions of Dada arose from the rejection of what needed to be rejected. This rejection arose from a desire for intellectual and spiritual freedom...It drove

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<sup>3</sup> Man-purse

us to the fragmentation or destruction of all artistic forms, and to rebellion for rebellion's sake; to an anarchistic negation of all values, a self-exploding bubble, a raging *anti, anti, anti*, linked with an equally passionate *pro, pro, pro!* Thus we let sense escape into the realm of nonsense, although it never left that of the senses" (35).

In order for a person to laugh at something that isn't funny, that person needs either a prior understanding of anti-humor or just someone charismatic enough to convince them of humor (without even understanding why). I told several fart jokes to my stand-up comedy class at Second City Toronto, and the teacher told me, as politely as they could, that most comedians start with fart jokes and then progress to different, better topics. My friend who was there with me got protective of me and patted my back (cute). I have been told countless times that toilet humor isn't funny and also that it is something that only male children enjoy. If I am to accept this information as truth, then it can be concluded that humor and binary gender are both intrinsic, objective, pre-determined.

In my view, the lesson to be drawn from anthropology is the humility of a certain cultural relativism, as a strategy aimed at combating the intolerance and racism of western ethnocentrism. Now is the same true of humor? Your sense of humour may not be the same as mine – let's hope it isn't for both of our sakes, as mine is extremely filthy – but does the study of humour lead us to embrace cultural relativism, that big bad bogeyman of western culture? Can we legislate for humour like philosopher kings, coming up with general laws about what is permitted and not permitted?... With the question of relativism, arguably the most intractable dilemma of humor can be broached: the universal *versus* the particular. Simon Critchley (Kataoka 17)

The notion of a "comedic relativism" is fundamental to understanding anti-humor. Non-binary gender identity can also be understood this way; anti-humor asserts that humor is not objective and anti-binary gender asserts that binary gender is not objective. Anti-humor practice and non-binary gender identity are commitments to the idea that gender and "sense" of humor are given or chosen, and are not innate. Comedic relativity is important politically because if it is true that humor depends on what is "known", then what is known is relative, and what is known can change.

Examples of Baby Wave anti-humor in the video and sculpture installation [Every Worm Deserves a Mansion](#):

1. One time I was taking a bath my mom said to me, did u fart And I said no and then she says, oh excuse me I thought you farted but... I guess not. So I said "farted butt"? I think you mean butt farted
2. I haaaate cooking but I loooove cookies. i alllways say "I don't use a saucer with my tea! I'm not from outer space!" GIVE me over that firggen tea tea cookie tho
3. Ever pooped in a thong? Doubles your profits.
4. What is your favorite band? My favorite band is KISS, I go to their concerts and I say hey you, do you like kiss? Well here comes the main act MWAH MWAH MWAH And then I say, well here comes the opening band, and I give them a big hug.
5. If you get butt pregnant do your mommy milkers go chocolate?

6. The cops are tryna test my farts, they're tryna listen to my farts, and now cops are tryna tell me what to do with my fingers, I cant even pick my own friggen nose without seein a commercial on my phone for Kleenex!
7. Always wipe your butt from front to back not back to face.
8. Crying is so cool and in right now, WAH WAH WAH
9. So many kitties I try to touch with my toe toe and they bite me
10. Socks are as funny as worms.....and they look the same.
11. My mom calls my poops her grandkids. It's not funny cause that makes me her crap!
12. Also, just the other day at nap time, I forgot what sleeping was and when I woke up I thought was dead.

The setting of *Every Worm Deserves a Mansion* was influenced by post-apocalyptic aesthetics (reused metal, rotten concrete, hot and mutant sand), as metaphor to my experience of gender. I've been watching a reality show called *Doomsday Preppers* which is made by National Geographic. This show follows people who are prepping for the end of society. Each person has a different opinion on which cataclysmic event will cause the end of the world but they all agree, one way or another "shit is going to hit the fan". It's kind of funny though because Nat Geo won't let them say "shit" so a lot of them keep saying "when IT hits the fan". I guess something bad could happen in a lot of scenarios of things hitting fans, like a hammer, or bowling ball, but these are more about the fan breaking and not so much about splatter blowing back in your face when you weren't expecting it. This censorship feels appropriate, because at the end of each segment the Nat Geo narrator will quickly disprove the prepper's apocalyptic narratives, banishing them back to the realm of conspiracy theorists, sucking the shit back through the fan. The preppers disagree in their disaster predictions, but they all share a distrust of authoritative narrators, a distrust of what is real, in that reality is connected to popular opinion. In the show, the preppers will occasionally divulge a traumatic reason for why they began prepping, a veteran who witnessed the breakdown of society during the Vietnam war, a firefighter who believes a cataclysmic volcanic eruption will make the air unbreathable similar to his experience as a first responder during 9/11. The shock of these events leads them to distrust normal life and of other people's opinions of what is real. I don't have my own disaster theory but I do share their distrust of reality, based on many experiences where I was unprepared for my reality to be shook. My interest in apocalypse and survivalism is not about stockpiling food and guns but instead it is stockpiling first-hand research, from losing trust in other people to tell me the truth (whether they know it or not). In my art research, I prepare for something that I don't know what it is, other than the next reality crisis. It's hard to know exactly what to research if your research is of hidden systems, so I began to examine tendencies that I had that I didn't understand, a big one being joke-making. I interpreted things I found funny to be clues about reality that I didn't consciously know weren't real. This is another similarity between my artwork and Dadaism. In *The Art of Cruelty: A Reckoning*, Maggie Nelson describes a similar artmaking goal and process in the history of avant-garde art, explaining that "...twentieth century art movements were veritably obsessed with diagnosing injustice and alienation...In short, the idea is that there's something wrong with us, from the get-go – be it the mark of original sin (or, conversely, as Nietzsche would have it, adherence to the 'slave morality' of Christianity), alienation from our labour, a fatal rift with Nature, being

lost in a forest of simulations, being deformed by systems such as capitalism and patriarchy, Westernization, not enough Westernization, or simply 'an epistemological lack'... that requires forceful intervention to correct" and that "the goal of this art is for radical intellectuals to lead the masses along in the one true revolutionary direction" (4-5). Although my art process for *Every Worm Deserves a Mansion* does make the assumption something is wrong, the way I address this issue differs because of relativism. Every Worm was designed to communicate ideas through demonstration of my agency rather than through a potentially condescending or non-consensual enlistment.

The Baby Wave style jokes of Every Worm, were selected specifically as a critique of binary gender. Many people have told me that these jokes aren't funny and aren't about gender. I would say that they just aren't funny/about gender to *them* or to them *right now*. Like anti-humor, a non-binary person's gender can easily go unrecognized. Non-binary gender says what it isn't, not what it is and people have different ideas about what that term means to them. Some people use the term non-binary woman, non-binary femme, or non-binary woman-aligned to describe the experience of rejecting gender while living in a society that classifies them as a woman. Rejecting binary gender for me also includes the idea that feminine and masculine fashion is a social construct. Thus, a non-binary woman can seem like a woman when they are not, just as an anti-joke seems un-funny when it is not. Anti-gender and anti-humor are invisible where/when they are in a place/time that believes that binary gender and humor are objective. This invisibility is both a privilege and a burden, a weakness and a strength.

Art writer and theorist Miwon Kwon writes in her book *One Place After Another*, "Coherent communities are more susceptible to appropriation by the artist and arts institutions precisely because of the singularly clear definition of what their collective identity represents." Art writer and theorist Grant Kester disagrees with Kwon,

[Kwon] argues that politically coherent communities are more, rather than less, vulnerable to appropriation because they make use of collective identities (e.g., "union worker," "Chicano") that in her view simply replicate the oppressive categorization of other by the dominant social order. In the very act of claiming these identities, individual community members subject themselves to a form of epistemological violence that effectively compromises any future action on their part. But there is clearly a significant difference between, for example, the articulation of black identity by figures like Dhoruba Bin Wahad or bell hooks and by conservative politicians who use images of young black "superpredators" to mobilize white voters, or between the concept of La Raza and the stereotypes of Chicano gangs in a film like *Training Day*. It is the difference between naming and being named, and the profoundly different forms of political agency that each of these actions represents" (Kester 162).

This argument would benefit from a consideration of time scale. Yes, as Kester writes, naming yourself is an act of agency in the present, but Kwon is also correct; a self-appointed name can still lead to vulnerability in the future, as she writes, by appropriation. Names in the long term can also lead to misidentification as social conditions change. The problem with a name is that many people understand them to be fixed and unchanging, and this results in disagreements over the names inclusivity. So, like humor and gender, names are relative social constructs

widely believed to be objective. In terms of humor, music, and fashion, Baby Wave style is also vulnerable to appropriation. In Dick Hebdige's *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, Hebdige describes this as a cycle of resistance and diffusion as a style becomes "stripped of its unwholesome connotations...Subcultural deviance is simultaneously rendered 'explicable' and meaningless...fit for public consumption"(130). In gender, a current example of this issue is Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminists (TERFs) who will not accept an evolving definition of the category of "woman". The inflexibility of the name "woman" now inspires oppressive behaviour from the oppressed. This inflexibility is in part due to a lack of foresight. TERFs didn't think far enough ahead, to see that transgender is part of the gender freedom that they were fighting for, that equality for women ultimately means the destruction of their understanding of that category. If this is a case of invisible non-binarism at a large scale of time, an example of it at the small scale is a semi-recent visit that I had at my parent's house. My family thinks watching TV is a perfectly fine thing to do for a get-together and honestly, I appreciate that about them except for the impossibility of there being a show that everyone likes. During this particular visit, they were watching one called *Shitt's Creek* which I had never watched before and my mom was trying to fill me in on the story and she said "the son is Pansexual...". I guess I was in the right mood because during the two seconds after she completed this phrase I thought to myself this is the perfect time for me to "come out" to my whole family! And I said "Me too!" but in the one second before I said me too she had already gone on to finish saying "...I'd never heard of that before." My comment seemingly went unnoticed.

Non-binary gender and anti-humor reveal the connection between futurity and invisibility. If a joke causes visible dissensus then an anti-joke (when unrecognized) causes invisible dissensus. The ability to hide from certain audiences also gives anti-humor and non-binary style the potential to be used as codes.

Indeed, is this not the experience of meeting a compatriot in an otherwise foreign environment, on vacation, at an art gallery or a public toilet or wherever, where the rapidity of one's intimacy is in proportion to both a common sense of humor and a common sense of humors exclusivity? We wear our cultural distinctiveness like an insulation layer against the surrounding alien environment. It warms us when all else is cold and unfamiliar (Critchley 18).

Baby Wave is a code for the invisible, sonically mal-gendered. It is futuristic in its commitment to a gender and humor that is not of this time and place. By this refusal of the idea of objective truth, it points to problems of visibility. It predicts its death by appropriation, and reclaims gendered invisibility as a tool of resistance. Most importantly, Baby Wave believes in relative realities and is trying to find the ones where baby doesn't need to wear a diaper.

## Epilogue

In Every Worm Deserves a Mansion I looked to jokes to tell me about gender but I also started noticing a pattern of jokes with numbers. For example I left this long, looping one in the video:

"I got in a fight the other day, well I said: Listen buddy, 2 Words, Thoser. mine.

Then they said Three words. gimme. mine. yummers.

So I said, Four words: thoser NOT yourmine yummers!

And the great yumyum battle was won!

2, 3, 4!

5, 6, 7, 8, I have a 9 inch dink if you count the butt hole.

10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5 moonar landing commencing 432ONE!"

The last sculpture I made for the installation also went in a mathematical direction:



Sculpture title: *Hyper Cube*

**Math Test:  
Which cube is the most hyper?**

**It's not 1D**

**It's not 2D**

**Not 3D**

**Not 4D**

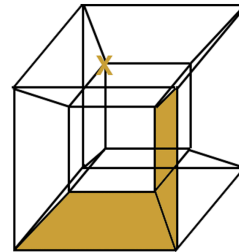
**5D**

**6D...**

**...80D**

**Eighty-D**

**The answer is ADD**



One time I wrote myself an artist bio that said “Nicole Brunel has 4 kidneys and the extra 2 tell her what to draw.” Retrospectively, I think this joke is actually kind of true. First of all, my kidneys really are non-binary and each have their own set of ureters. As a child I needed a lot of medical attention because of this and I had a lot of procedures and surgeries until I was 7. I remember thinking a lot about time while I was in the car on my way to these appointments that I dreaded. I’d look at clocks and concentrate on trying to stop them from moving. Around this time I remember beginning to lose faith in my family’s religion due largely in part to the fact that the notion of an eternal afterlife seemed horrifying. I’d have baby panic attacks just lying awake at night trying not to think about infinity. In “Theory as Liberatory Practice” bell hooks writes about the connection between theory and pain. As a child, hooks “found sanctuary in ‘theorizing’, making sense out of what was happening. I found a place where I could imagine possible futures, a place where life could be lived differently. This ‘lived’ experience of critical thinking, of reflection and analysis, became a place where pain can be understood and made to go away” (61). She describes this pain in terms of “everyday” experiences, “Theory emerges from the concrete, from...efforts to intervene critically in my life and the lives of others”(70). If I think about it that way, my kidneys gave me an early start to thinking about time, so they did tell me what to make art about.

Nowadays, if you were in a crowd and needed to point someone out, you might say that “girl” or “woman” over there, but how will we describe a person when all of these words are forgotten? You could say the person to the left of the wall, the person who arrived first, the one

who stood furthest away, etc. And in this future world, people will find ways to make these categories into hierarchies too and “the people sitting to the left of the wall” will need to start a movement to abolish left and right and “the people who arrive first” will sit still to abolish first and last. As with humor and gender, it is theorized that there is no one unique space-time in a relativistic universe. Long after the baby emancipation movement when Baby Wave is offensive for its use of “baby-face”, I predict the future of comedy to be space-time.

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