

Against Deadly Comfort

A manifesto of Iris Complex

Sep 23, 2026 · @Cedieu

I first saw deadly comfort in my father and my mother, long before I had a name for it.

My father came to the United States from Haiti by boat, with an elementary school education. He found work, and he worked for the rest of his life. He came home, ate, watched his movies, saw his friends, and took care of his children. He was dutiful. But I don't believe he ever got to discover who he was in the world he had been brought into. That wasn't because he failed. It was because no one taught him how, and no one challenged him to try.

My mother has spent her life caring for children, her own and other people's. She served in the military and saw parts of the world, but by duty more than by choice. Somewhere along the way, her dreams became her children's dreams. When I was young, she put me into activity after activity. I met people from every walk of life and began to learn who I might be. She gave me what she never gave herself. She turns seventy next year, and I am one of the few people in her life who challenges her to keep discovering new parts of herself.

I see it in myself too. I carry more than I have written. I think best while driving or in the shower, and the weight of what waits on the page can stop me before I begin. Deadly comfort does not only happen to other people.

A stranger in Toronto once told me I have an eye for beauty in unusual places. I have held on to that. It is the Iris in Iris Complex. The Complex is the human soul, in all its complexity. What follows is what the institution believes, what it commits to, and what it refuses.

Iris Complex Believes

1. People are resilient, adaptable, and fragile, all at once.
2. The greatest danger to a life is rarely hardship. It is deadly comfort: the acceptance of circumstance as identity.
3. Deadly comfort often looks noble. It often looks like duty.
4. It takes two forms: the life never begun, and the life abandoned the moment it stopped paying out.
5. Too many people stop being students of life when their forced schooling ends.
6. People have outsourced trust in their own direct experience. Deadly comfort fills the space where self-trust should be.
7. The opposite of deadly comfort is trusting yourself enough to begin, and refusing to give up on yourself when progress is slow.
8. At any age or stage, a person still has a self left to discover.

9. A first visit is never enough.

Iris Complex Commits

10. To help people discover who they are, at any age or stage.
11. To give its audience a new perspective on a situation, whether strange or familiar.
12. To show rather than explain, and to trust its audience to reach their own conclusions.
13. To open every screening with live dance and music, because some things must be witnessed in the room.
14. To use engineered extremes, in fantasy and under pressure, so that truths we avoid can be faced.
15. To hold research equal to the art.
16. To keep the Sabbath, a sign between God and man.
17. To retain final say over its own work, and to give its residents complete agency over theirs.
18. To grow, and to measure every decision against growth.

Iris Complex Refuses

19. Tidy endings. An ending must be earned and true, and resolution is not the same as honesty.
20. Shock for its own sake. Boldness must come from the work itself.
21. False hope.
22. Partnership with those who profit from war or the suffering of others.
23. Remaining where the money is good and the growth is gone.
24. It will not tell the audience the truth and do business on a lie. It does not deal in deception, on screen or across a table.

No one challenged my father. Iris Complex exists so that no one else is lost to circumstance. Be brave and go DISCOVER YOURSELF.