

THE WIG

SICILY

## What happened to summer?

As we slowly make our way to the office, to the studio, to school or to our 15, 13, or 12 inch brushed aluminium cubicle, a question appears: have things cooled down already?

Arguably "The Wig", a practice first introduced by philosopher Michel de Certeau in his groundbreaking book *The Practice of Everyday Life*, has also cooled down. Firstly, because it is dated.<sup>1</sup> It's almost 40 years old. Secondly because of what it stands for. The term, a literal translation of the French "la perruque" (*the wig* in English) broadly refers to anything done under the guise of work, but is in fact not work, or not necessarily the work one is "supposed" to be doing. Practicing "The Wig" can be as simple as writing personal emails during office hours, using the photocopier to print private invitations, or using someone's *time* for your own time, for your own enjoyment. "The worker who engages in the wig" writes De Certeau "actually diverts time", which "differs from pilfering in that nothing of material value is stolen". This tactic had become so ubiquitous that it quickly spread to all other spheres of society, including the arts and culture.

With the distance of time, "The Wig" along with De Certeau's other "tactics" – the individualisation of mass culture, the appropriation and alterations of things, language and rituals – seems less an individual observation and more one single item in a general or generalized series. It is a member of a genre, and the genre itself seems weirdly, even unpleasantly, arbitrary.

Why do we keep returning to this tactic then? Perhaps we're looking for a "concurrency" between the old and the new: we are hoping to intuit the dimensions of The Wig's evolution, or, we are checking the range of our own political possibilities against The Wig's established repertoire.

The moment when isolated responses begin to look like collective actions has been caught by "The Wig's" comic timing; adepts around the world know its diversion of time holds the risk that it's no longer novel or a perky rerouting, but is actually rather old, a nauseating group clowning; no longer a stinging rebuke, but a kind of melancholy, and sometimes even a loony assertion of yesteryear. The risk of getting caught in this is real. Robert Darnton, the historian of the French Revolution, once wrote that the best entry point into an alien culture is through its jokes, especially those which no longer seem funny. Darnton wrote a whole book about the pre-Revolutionary period in France from an analysis of a mock-trial of cats' and their very real execution. That hilarious prank came to reflect something more untenable and cruel a few decades later.<sup>2</sup> The good in basic camaraderie and innocent laughter can quickly turn sour and become deadly poison. "The Wig" claims there is still much to be heard and felt, and against the exhausting rhythm of work, it hopes to survive as a very useful, bad joke.

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1 Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1984

2 Edmund White, "Bad Jokes", *Parkett* Vol. 34, 1992

## The Word *Wig* is a picture of things

"The Wig" produces visible and invisible worlds simultaneously, lines them up side by side, sometimes pushes them together. No lines just break off. What you see first, if you see the invisible first, or not at all depends on your biography. Money too is something visible and invisible. We can hold a coin in our hands and barely touch its value.<sup>3</sup> The confusion exists in ancient usage – created by the Greeks – giving birth to a "flawed category" to fit the many nuances of moneyed situations into a binary terminology of remarkable and unremarkable.<sup>4</sup> Trying to untangle them feels like stumbling about in the fog on another planet. The thing is, thought moves faster and in many directions. Money and labor also move in many directions. The time spent at the Xerox machine, unexpectedly or not, provides an occasion to observe these movements, to meditate on their connection to phenomena of accountability and perception. "The Wig" makes clear that concepts of visible and invisible are objects of scrutiny. As an interface between two worlds, it is aware of a turmoil in their categorization and has an interest (conditioned by economic experience) in the valuing of both.

Artists have long been practitioners or users of "The Wig," as surface cleaners, or educated, tricksters who conjure the real world in the polished exterior of the "real world". "The Wig" underscores the fact that art too straddles the visible and invisible, that it relies on economies we know and can identify, but also, often, emerges from those almost diametrically opposite economies of friendship -- that is: support outside of a one-to-one relationship (of give and take) and through "the militant preservation of what we got, in common dispossession, which is the only possible form of possession, of having in excess of anyone who has", writes Fred Moten and Stefano Harney.<sup>5</sup> What does having too much of not having enough mean exactly? What is this illusion, deception and trickery? The art of deception beguiles, tricks and disassembles, perhaps even critiques. Isn't the best artist the one that does the most deceiving? And what about the one that shares the most? "The Wig" then, in a moment -- for a moment -- is cut free, it transcends the costume to become the self. It is a tactic freed from, or free of any obligation to reality as a necessary deception, but also not fully able to propose another wholly pungent or lucrative philosophy of being, of looking, of sharing. Perhaps it just makes plain the quotidian and by now repulsive artistic illusion that life cannot be stained with the dirt of everyday life.

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3 "Money is the external common medium and faculty for transforming appearance into reality and reality into appearance". Karl Marx, "The Power of Money", *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* was first published by the Institute of Marxism-Leninism in Moscow in the language of the original: Marx/Engels, *Gesamtausgabe*, Abt. 1, Bd. 3, 1932.

4 Anne Carson, *Economy of The Unlost*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1999

5 Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, *All Incomplete*, Minor Compositions, 2021

## **Nobody wants to be a doormat or a fool<sup>6</sup>**

De Certeau brilliantly insists upon a double negative when he is referring to the value of diverting time. He says, "nothing of material value is stolen". The French "rien de valeur n'est volé" is more explicitly, or less ambiguously a double negative (though often, there are particular kinds of precision that follow from what some might dismiss as mistranslation). The surplus that is produced in the workplace, whether generated in excess of care, solidarity, culture or enjoyment is treated here as something close to nothing. A no-thing that feels more like a command to nothingness than an imperative to versatility and capacity for creativity. Assuming that "The Wig" is a badge of entry, it places its user somewhere between a prophet and pilferer, between a thwarted attempt at what they think others want them to be and make, and a complicated balance between masochism, gullibility and paranoia.<sup>7</sup> The kind that makes workers produce something of purposefully no interest, that can be hidden in plain sight, or something for which the right words or useful shortcuts aren't possible or simply missing. At the heart of this production is a certain indiscretion towards logistics, transformation and language. Taken together as a contemporary phenomena, and in their long, braided historical trajectories, the *means* of "The Wig's" production can lead us to a different understanding of what is extracted from labor today.

## **Excess manifests itself in so far as violence wins over reason**

*In the domain of our life, excess manifests itself in so far as violence wins over reason. Work demands the sort of conduct where effort is in a constant ratio with productive efficiency. It demands rational behaviour where the wild impulses worked out on feast days and usually in games are frowned upon. If we were unable to repress these impulses we should not be able to work, but work introduces the very reason for repressing them. These impulses confer an immediate satisfaction on those who yield to them. Work, on the other hand, promises to those who overcome them a reward later on whose value cannot be disputed except from the point of view of the present moment. From the earliest times work has produced a relaxation of tension thanks to which people cease to respond to the immediate urge impelled by the violence of desire. No doubt it is arbitrary always to contrast the detachment fundamental to work with tumultuous urges whose necessity is not constant. Once begun, however, work does make it impossible to respond to these immediate solicitations which could make us indifferent to the promised desirable results. Most of the time work is the concern of people acting*

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6 Adrian Piper, On becoming a warrior, originally commissioned and composed for the "Revelations" column of *O, The Oprah Magazine* in June 2001

7 Charles Wright, *The Wig: a Mirror*, Manor Books, New York, 1966



*collectively and during the time reserved for work the collective has to oppose those contagious impulses to excess in which nothing is left but the immediate surrender to excess, to violence, that is. Hence the human collective, partly dedicated to work, is defined by taboos without which it would not have become the world of work that it essentially is.*<sup>8</sup>

## **Abundance**

*Yet I feel forced to decide if poor really means brittle hands dust and candy-stained mouths a neighbor girl's teeth convenience store shelves Hamburger Helper a dog's matted fur a van seat pulled to the living room floor those children playing in the carcass of a car mice on the floor-board my sweeping chill hantavirus the ripe smell a horse chewed ripped its backbone exposed the swarms of do-gooders their goodly photos the heat the cold the drunks we pass waving dollar bills again tonight a bang on the door the stories no one here can stop the urge to tell them I am buried in. But a friend asserts that anyone asserting that poverty isn't about money has never been stomach-sick over how to spend their last 3\$ comma on milk or gas or half for both with two children in the backseat watching. I agree to let meanings and arguments with my head thrust into punctuation of poverty here, breathe.*<sup>9</sup>

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8 Georges Bataille, *Erotism : death & sensuality*, (L'Érotisme, Edition de Minuit, Paris, 1957), City Lights Books, San Francisco, 1986

9 Layli Long Soldier, "Wahpanica" in *Whereas*, Graywolf Press, Minneapolis, 2017





Ich liebe  
Pralinen von...  
Mein...





\* sex tape! as invention

the world & yourself & the  
image of yourself.

copyright the idea of  
a sex tape.

what was the greatest invention.

ask Megan  
about this  
again

impoverishment in the name of improvement, to invoke the universal law of the usufruct of man. In this context, continuous improvement, as it emerged with decolonization and particularly with the defeat of national capitalism in the 1970s, is the continuous crisis of speciation in the surround of the general antagonism. This is the contradiction Robinson constantly invoked and analyzed with the kind of profound and solemn optimism that comes from being with, and being of service to, your friends.

### 3.

At the end of the movie *Devil in a Blue Dress*, which is based on the Walter Mosley novel of the same name, and which Robinson delighted in teaching us how to read and see, what comes sharply into relief is the persistent life – which survives under the rule of speciation; which surrounds the speciation that would envelop it; which violates the speciation by which it is infused; which anticipates the speciation that would be its end – of a neighborhood of neat lawns, small family houses, and the Black people who live in them. The movie’s last line simultaneously belies and acknowledges speciation’s permanent crisis. “Is it wrong to be friends with someone you know has done bad things?” asks the movie’s protagonist, Easy Rawlins. All you got is your friends, replies Deacon Odell. That’s right. That’s all. Tomorrow the cops could come back, or the bank, bringing the violence of speciation, against which there is just this constant and general economy of friendship – not the improvement that will have been given in one-to-one relation but the militant preservation of what you (understood as we) got, in common dispossession, which is the only possible form of possession, of having in excess of anyone who has. Neither the globalization of possession-by-improvement nor the achievement of being exceptional is possible. We live (in) the brutality of their failure, which is a failure in and as derivation. Moreover, the sovereign declension (given, in a variation of Silva’s grammar as God: Patriarch – Possessive Individual – Citizen) is a derivative – a rigid, reified, securitized understanding of difference. Meanwhile, in the scene it constantly sets on Easy’s porch, in Joppy’s bar, at John’s Place (the illegal club above Hattie Mae’s grocery store), *Devil in a Blue Dress* keeps reminding us that the task at hand is, as Manolo Callahan would say, to renew our habits of assembly, which implies a turn, a step away from the derivative. We ain’t studying the failure, just like Easy ain’t studying no job. We ain’t trying to enter the declension that instigates what it implies: the (necessarily failed) separation, speciation, and racialization – the enclosure and settlement – of the earth. The play, as Callahan and Nahum Chandler teach us, is to desediment, to exfoliate, to renew the earthly and inseparable assembly, the habitual jam, by way of and in the differentiation of what will be neither regulated nor understood. All we got is us in this continual giving

away of all. And, as Robinson also took great care to teach us in his critical admiration of Easy's friend Mouse, who is always about to blow somebody's nose off, all depends upon our readiness to defend it.

#### 4.

Here is the famous passage on slavery in *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* where the “not yet” – its phase as mere “natural human existence” – of the universal appears as a tainted and unnecessary remedy:

If we hold firmly to the view that the human being in and for himself is free, we thereby condemn slavery. But if someone is a slave, his own will is responsible, just as the responsibility lies with the will of a people if that people is subjugated... Slavery occurs in the transitional phase between natural human existence and the truly ethical condition; it occurs in a world where a wrong is still right. Here, the wrong *is valid*, so that the position it occupies is a necessary one.<sup>7</sup>

This “not yet” of the universal, of global history, is subsequently reinforced when Hegel says, “The same determination [absolute right] entitles civilized nations to regard and treat as barbarians other nations which are less advanced than they are in the substantial moments of the state.”<sup>8</sup> But before then, Hegel immediately turns from the first passage and towards the subject of “taking possession” and the “use of the thing.” This “natural entity” – the thing – exists only for its owner, for “since this realized externality is the use or employment to which I subject it, it follows that *the whole use* or employment of it is *the thing in its entirety*.”<sup>9</sup> But then Hegel reaches a problem, just after paradoxically asserting the necessary rectitude of the necessary wrong of slavery in progressive history.

If the whole extent of the use of a thing were mine, but the abstract ownership were supposed to be someone else's, the thing as mine would be wholly penetrated by my will... while it would at the same time contain something impenetrable by me, i.e. the will, in fact the empty will, of someone else.<sup>10</sup>

He calls this a relationship of “absolute contradiction” and then introduces the Roman idea of “*usufructus*.”<sup>11</sup> In theory, Hegel is addressing feudal property rights, with their shared ownership. But it is he in “natural human existence” who has failed, as Hegel says in his previous consideration of slavery, to take “possession of himself and become his own property.” Usufruct demands

this natural entity be “subordinated to its useful aspect.” Hegel speaks of Roman and feudal property, but his concern is world history, this (necessarily European) world where a wrong is still right. His concern is with how to become one’s own property and with the usufruct that initiates and confounds this project. Improvement is granted and haunted by an illusory and impenetrably empty will.

## 5.

The moment you say it is mine because I worked on it and improved it, or you say that I am me because I worked on myself and improved myself, you start a war. And by misattributing the initiation of this war to nature, you then codify this war as the (anti)social contract.

It is said that the (anti)social contract and the public sphere it creates is a reaction to feudalism and absolutism. But this is only half the story, and an inaccurate half at that. Perhaps it’s better to think of the (anti)social contract as emerging, as Angela Mitropoulos says, not in opposition to absolutism but as the democratization of sovereignty. Even that might have had an inadvertently anarchic quality, as every man considered himself a king. But the (anti) social contract not only reacts to, while also reflecting, absolutism, making every home/castle/hovel a hall of mirrors, it also emerges as a way to explain and justify the violence of European man. Everyone from Adam Ferguson to Immanuel Kant tries to explain why the Africans, Asians, and indigenous people being exterminated and enslaved are so much less warlike than Europeans. The Crusades misled Europeans into believing their brutality was part of humanity rather than an exception, even as religious war gave them a taste for blood that they could not ignore. So the (anti)social contract emerges less to confront absolutism than to contain the obvious historical exceptionalism of European savagery. Clearly the world could not be ordered around good and evil without some dire consequences for Europe. Those who conceive of the (anti)social contract mistake the wars it instigates: wars of sovereigns against contractors, and of contractors against each other, and of contractors against those whom Bryan Wagner describes as “being subject to exchange without being a party to exchange,” the ones who are not one who are innumerable and un(ac)countable even in having been accumulated, even in having been financialized.<sup>12</sup> Perhaps, in this regard, it would be even better to think of the (anti)social contract as emerging against a history of revolt: the peasant revolts that buried European feudalism, and which Robinson understands as “the socialist exchange” comprising Marxism’s anthropological (under)ground, is the revolt of nature, prosecuted by those who are made to stand in for nature, having been philosophically relegated to some essentially paradoxical state of



nature by the ones who seek to engineer nature's subordination to and within the socioecological disaster of improvement.

This is to say, again, that the political half of the story, in which the social contract is understood as improvement rather than its ge(n)ocidal imposition, is wrong and incomplete. The (anti)social contract is not only a political theory but also an economic practice: the practice of the juridical regulation and antisocialization of exchange in the imposition of improvement. In particular, the social contract specified the individuation of its parties. Individuals now must be formed in order to enter into contract. And the economic contract emerges not in exchange but from the idea that ownership derives from improvement. As a result, it is not simply the individual, but rather the individual capable of self-improvement, who must and can enter into the contract. The self-improving individual can also be thought of as the self-accumulating individual: not possessive (this is stasis without movement), not acquiring (this still bears the trace of anarchic exchange), but self-accumulating – that is, property-gathering in order to put property to work, including and most especially the properties of the self that can be deployed and improved while being posited as eternal and absolute. “Properties of the self” is not a pun here. Properties that can be accumulated and put to work include race, religion, and gender but also class, standing, trust, thrift, reliability, and punctuality. These can all be used to improve where to improve is to own, and own more, and thus set in motion further accumulation of self, others, and nature that all might be put to work.



Maybe it can be stated this way: ownership emerges in Europe as usufruct, in the improvement of land that grants and justifies it. It is extended and diffused throughout the regime the social contract defines in the self-ownership that will have taken its completed form in the individual – that brutal, brittle crystallization of an always and necessarily incomplete melding of subject and object. Ceaselessly at work in the task of making everything, including himself, subject to being put to work, the European is the usufruct of man. Man's endless improvement, in which necessity is enforced as an absolute contingency, is fixed in European thought as the vicious grasping of its objects, including itself. The historical unfolding of this fixation on fixing, the murderous interplay of capture and improvement, is given in and as *self-improvement-in-self-accumulation's* violence towards whatever shows up at the rendezvous of differentiation, incompleteness, and affection. The constantly changing activity of what appears to what appears as the self as the continual undoing of the very idea of the self and its eternally prospective completion-in-improvement can only be met, from the self's myopic and impossible perspective, with a nasty combination of regulation and accumulation. The one who accumulates does so at the expense of what it takes to be its others – women, slaves, peasants, beasts, the earth itself. Thus, the social contract, as a contract between the improving and accumulating ones, is inscribed upon the flesh of those who cannot be, and in any case refuse to be, a party to antisocial exchange under the terms of the (anti)social contract. Meanwhile, as much as the contractors are united in a strategy to subject to usufruct whatever cannot or will not be a (numerable, individuated) party to antisocial exchange, they are also dedicated to killing each other, to war in and as their beloved public carried out in the name of the improvement of that public and its problems – that is, its denizens. The self-accumulating individual's war, his total mobilization against the innumerable and against his fellows under the sign of ownership as improvement, carried out in order to prevent the recrudescence of the natural, renders irredeemable the very premise of the (anti)social contract.

And every subcontract within the (anti)social contract must result in improvement. It's not a matter of both parties being satisfied with what they have exchanged. Such a contract was not just badly made but at odds with the desired identity of the contractors. And here we can put it the other way around: the social contract is conceived by the political theorists also as a contract amongst those capable of self-improvement, or what they called progress, and this is why it was essentially destructive of the notions of exchange encountered amongst feudal rebels (Robinson's *An Anthropology of Marxism* is instructive here) or of exchange encountered amongst Africans who would rather move elsewhere than enter into conflict to gain improvement (Robinson's *Black Marxism* is instructive here).<sup>13</sup> Ferguson and Kant both say war is about improvement of the European race. And Robinson teaches us that this is carried out as a violent

intra-European racialization of difference, a continually barbaric festival in which incursion and the instantiation of improvement as militarily enforced externalities produce Europe, and then the globe, as dead and deadly bodies politic, monsters whose mechanized, drone-like simulations of spirit regulate the social with the kind of latex affability and latent menace commonly associated with police commissioners and university provosts. Antisocial sociability is the basis of the social contract. In the end, improvement is war, which is why the public sphere is war, and why the private – in its anti- and ante-individual impurity, as refuge even under constant pressure – is a porch.

The (anti)social contract is haunted by the economic contract, which is not a contract of exchange like one might find in friendship, but a contract based on the claim to ownership of oneself, others, and nature that is always tied to what more one can make of, which is to say accumulate in and through, oneself, others, and nature. In other words, the expanding universe of ownership took a contractual form that was not limited, as is sometimes supposed, to free individuals – that is, to the European subject imagined by the European theorist; it is a contractual form, rather, that requires broad-spectrum contact as the material ground of its exclusive and exclusionary network. What makes it truly dangerous is that it could never get free of that from which it wished to distinguish itself; what is truly dangerous to it is that what is forced to grant its exception can refuse the contract to which it is a third (or an innumerable or a non-)party. Exchange, on the other hand, is a practice that prevents accumulation at, and as the elimination of, its source – the self-improving individual. Instead, exchange, given in and as the differential and differentiating entanglement of social life, even under the most powerful forms of constraint and regulation, is about a social optimum.

## 6.

George Clinton teaches us this:

I'm always waiting to see what dance they're gonna do, because dance is always changing. But I trust the fact that funk affects the booty. So when I see somebody doing some type of dance, I always try to figure out what groove does it take to make the booty move like that? I'm really a bootyologist. I don't just look at it cause it looks good, but how can I make sure with my music, the booty is at its optimum?<sup>14</sup>

And Jacques Derrida teaches us to ask:

When will we be ready for an experience of freedom and equality that is capable of respectfully experiencing that friendship, which would at last be just, just beyond the law, and measured up against its measurelessness?<sup>15</sup>

It's just that we could only learn these lessons from them in having learned first from Robinson that the social optimum derives from social wealth, stepping out only to step back in all good, optimally, even under absolute duress, as the preservation in friendship of the socio-ontological totality. Like him, we look forward to getting back to the optimum we never left.

## The Icing on the Cake

I am the girl who sits by the fire whether or not it's cold. The three kids at the next table are clearly siblings, stealing gleefully from each other's plates. They have similar haircuts and their eyebrows are noticeably thin. They are young and their teeth are tiny squares. One kid is having a birthday and a large cupcake with a lit candle approaches. There is oohing and clapping, then high-spirited bad singing. After the silent beat of the child's wish they all blow because everyone wants in unison to wish that the wish would have a shot at coming true.

Draw a storyboard of this scene.

Does "birthday cupcake" suggest a budget or a festive surplus? How big is large? Are the surrounding tables paying attention or passively penetrated by the family's sound? Is it sunny out? What are the genders and races of these children and their muffin-delivering adults? How big or cropped is their hair? Are they all dressed alike, or do generations shift? Are there presents on the table? Are these the right questions? What is it about icing that links it to joy, to empire and excess and the sovereign tongue? Seriously, what is it?

(LOEFFLER 2017)

## On Becoming a Warrior<sup>1</sup>

For most of my adult life I have worked two full-time jobs, because choosing between them is not an option for me. In my day job I am a philosophy professor, and I moonlight as an artist. The two fields are very different. Academic philosophers teach, do research, serve on committees, and give talks. Artists who teach do all this, and also produce, document, market, exhibit, and sell their work. But the two jobs are alike in that the more success you have in either, the harder it becomes to manage the workload without assistance. Successfully managing both at once without assistance is physically impossible.

Only one employer ever seriously recruited me to do both at once – by promising me the funding assistance to carry it off. I accepted gladly. But the more success I achieved, the less funding I got. Each time I applied for it, my employer offered a different, courteous reason for rejecting my application. Finally I was doing both jobs full time but being paid only for one. I protested, discussed, and conferred. Meanwhile my health, my productivity, and my personal and professional relationships deteriorated. I couldn't do my work, so I couldn't get a job elsewhere. I was stuck.

Nobody wants to be a doormat or a fool. But being suspicious and mistrustful, or automatically assuming that another is "out to get me" would damage my spirit even more. When others thwart my expectations or best interests, I try hard to find the balance between masochism and gullibility on the one hand and paranoia on the other.

Ever since I made a serious commitment to yoga and meditation several decades ago, one goal of my inner work has been to see clearly, feel compassion, and act appropriately. Seeing clearly means not deceiving myself, and not

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<sup>1</sup> © Adrian Piper Research Archive 2006

allowing myself to be deceived about reality. When someone I have trusted acts unjustly, that reality is painful to acknowledge. And when I am the target of that injustice, seeing the person clearly is even harder. It threatens my faith in my perceptions, in myself, and in human nature. I often flinch, and escape into self-deception: I make excuses for the person, undermine the authority of my own experience through self-doubt, or suppress the whole incident (I tend toward the doormat/fool extreme).

I try to avoid this type of denial by following a "three-strikes-and-you're-out" rule (I usually need more than three). The first time I witness the behavior I ask myself: Did I really see what I think I saw? Am I jumping to unfounded conclusions? Are there other interpretations of the person's action I'm overlooking? Am I being oversensitive? Thinking about these questions helps me monitor my own impulses. It also prevents me from making premature judgments that may only cause me unnecessary pain. Because I know all too well how easy it is to let plates drop when you're juggling a lot of them and each one is full, I was reluctant to charge my similarly overworked employer with deliberate malice toward me.

The second time I experience the injustice I ask myself: What am I doing to contribute to this situation? How am I enabling or inviting this behavior? These questions help me experiment with the situation by changing my own behavior. If this stops the other's unjust behavior, I learn what kind of further work I need to do on myself. So I rewrote my applications for funding, and provided more information, and explored alternative funding possibilities, and deferred my applications until different higher-ups could review them, and sought advice from knowledgeable others.

But sometimes my efforts are not enough, and the person acts unjustly toward me a third time. Then the question is: Is the behavior intentional? Dialogue can reveal when hurtful actions are rooted either in misunderstanding or miscommunication – or in an intention to inflict harm. Then the challenge is to acknowledge that with full awareness; to let into my mind the frightening reality

that the other person is deliberately trying to thwart or harm me – without allowing it to turn me into a demoralized, corrupt or cowardly person; or, even worse, into a self-pitying victim. I find this challenge difficult because I don't want to believe anyone is out to get me. But the reality is that some people do inflict harm knowingly and deliberately.

Can I see such people and their actions clearly without dehumanizing them – and thereby dehumanizing myself? Can I see them clearly without demonizing them – and thereby poisoning myself? Can I see them for what they are without poisoning my perception of everyone else (the paranoia extreme)? Most important, can I see them clearly enough to actually understand and feel compassion for them, and for the pain and fear and rage and despair that ultimately motivates all human injustice? To succeed is to protect my center and my equanimity. To fail is to sink to their level.

I knew I was dealing with such people after I submitted an application for funding that quoted the application guidelines themselves – and was again rejected. Reason? The application guidelines were wrong. In that moment I experienced strike three. I saw the intent to undermine my work whether my application was "correct" or not, whether the guidelines were correct or not, whether they had been correctly applied or not, and whether the excuse for rejecting my application made sense or not. And I saw the fears, resentments, self-dislike, and personal disappointments that motivated this. My employer had struck out.

But the ultimate challenge was still to come: what to do about it. How should I respond to someone who is causing me pain intentionally, or out of indifference to my wellbeing? This is where the real balancing act begins. How much punishment should I, or anyone be willing to take for the sake of continuing a relationship? How much punishment would I inflict on myself by ending it? Or by trying to improve it? And at what point is it appropriate, and not sheer paranoia, to take out the big guns and wage a war of self-defense?



When my employer struck out, I saw clearly the imminent threat to my work, my health, and my life – to my *self*. In that moment my will to live and create surged up with uncontrollable force. Some would call this anger, but it was much more than that. I became live electrical current, awake to the reality that I am a warrior, not a victim; and that I believe in my self and my work enough to fight to the death for them. I learned that there is *nothing* more empowering or liberating than fighting against injustice for what I most deeply believe in – with the law, my artwork, my intellect, and every ounce of energy I had. I fought that war; and, with my employer's descent into overtly malicious and illegal tactics, won it. That victory gave me the freedom to let it go. Now I feel gratitude every day for the luxury of having protected my integrity without being forced to sacrifice my life.

## First Things

Every day a friend across the ocean wakes up to suicidal thoughts. Another friend takes a drink to eat clean and another eats a candy bar in bed before washing the sheets, doing laundry naked to ensure soft sleeps. Another friend chants before going out to her analogy lab. Another hires retired people to walk her dogs so that she can get to her trainer. Others, desperate, rush harsh. Many people's kids climb in. Many pets assert the dominion of their drives. There's stretching and the taking of medicine. There's accounting and anxious text checking. There's scanning for bossy emails and preconceptions. Lists get made. For some, there is breakfast. Once spring rolls around there is running before the heat and catching the first shift sitting outside the punk bakery to smoke, drink coffee, and "break each other's balls" before work does what work does. I asked them about this phrase once and sparked a debate about whether it is properly "break" or "bust." Whatever, Professor, they laughed, yanking your chain, busting your balls, don't take it so serious!

Some people sleep in. Other people wake at the sun. Some people walk into the house and see only the order in it. Some people serve other people. Some use the quiet time to do the best things quiet time allows. Some people waste it, which is not the opposite of using it well. When I was little I had a task: to make coffee for the adults, measuring out the Maxwell House, setting the breakfast table. Then I'd leave for school and my early teachers would let me into the teachers' lounge. A little troll doll kid overhearing Allende, Planned Parenthood, and MLK. A confused and sunny face taking in the voices and the concept of concepts, before the day.

(DAVIS 2010; EIGEN 2004; HEJINIAN [1980] 2002; JACOBUS 1995; PEREC [1974] 2008)



**Sarah Rapson**  
***Ode To Psyche***

A painting is a shadow of the wall it hangs from. A shadow is not always behind you. During occasional lifetimes the light is behind you and the shadow is in front of you. A painting is a shadow in front of the wall it hangs from. During occasional exhibitions a wall has more than one front and more than one behind.

When the light is off the painting is off.

A film is not the shadow of the man nor the shadow of the wall behind him it is a history of that man and a history of that wall behind him. A painting is also a history. A painting is a history of the man who stood in front of it and the man who stood behind it. During occasional lifetimes a painting is also a history of the wall behind it. During occasional exhibitions a painting is also a history of the wall it hangs from.

When the light is off the film is off.

Down in the basement down on the couch down in the alley down on the fire escape down in the subway down on the street this is no place for a painting. This is a place for a film.

A ghost is a good metaphor for many things including a painting and a film and a wig is a good metaphor for many things including a painting and a film. There is nothing that is a good metaphor for a ghost and there is nothing that is a good metaphor for a wig. There has never been a ghost it is just that part of the history of the man and the history of the wall behind him which can not be filmed and can not be painted and will not remain behind you. There is a thing in the room with you if the painting is good and the film is good it is not a ghost it might be a song.

A man in a wig is down in the basement down on the couch down in the alley down on the fire escape down in the subway down on the street. This is a man from a film this a man in a film.

It is just a painting. It is just a film. Sarah Rapson made a painting and made a film made an exhibition. It is just a painting. It is just a film. It is just a wall. It is just an exhibition.

\* *Ode To Psyche*, a three volume catalogue printed by the Secession for this exhibition, may be found in the Secession shop.



Fellowship  
by Franz Kafka

We are five friends, one day we came out of a house one after the other, first one came and placed himself beside the gate, then the second came, or rather he glided through the gate like a little ball of quicksilver, and placed himself near the first one, then came the third, then the fourth, then the fifth. Finally we all stood in a row. People began to notice us, they pointed at us and said: Those five just came out of that house. Since then we have been living together, it would be a peaceful life if it weren't for a sixth one continually trying to interfere. He doesn't do us any harm, but he annoys us, and that is harm enough; why does he intrude when he is not wanted? We don't know him and don't want him to join us. There was a time, of course, when the five of us did not know one another, either, and it could be said that we still don't know one another, but what is possible and can be tolerated by the five of us is not possible and cannot be tolerated with this sixth one. In any case, we are five and don't want to be six. And what is the point of this continual being together anyhow? It is also pointless for the five of us, but here we are together and will remain together; a new combination, however, we do not want, just because of our experiences. But how is one to make all this clear to the sixth one? Long explanations would almost amount to accepting him in our circle, so we prefer not to explain and not to accept him. No matter how he pouts his lips we push him away with our elbows, but however much we push him away, back he comes.

# Introduction: Invisible, They “Open the City”

Let’s win over the women and the rest will follow.<sup>1</sup>

— Frantz Fanon

But anger expressed and translated into action in the service of our vision and our future is a liberating and strengthening act of clarification, for it is in the painful process of this translation that we identify who are our allies with whom we have grave differences, and who are our genuine enemies.<sup>2</sup>

— Audre Lorde

In January 2018, racialized women<sup>3</sup> who worked at the Gare du Nord railway station won a 45-day strike against their employer, the cleaning company Onet, the subcontractor for the SNCF.<sup>4</sup> These workers, who are part of a racialized and overwhelmingly female workforce, labor in so-called ‘unskilled industries’. They therefore work for low wages, under conditions dangerous to their health, and most often on a part-time, early-morning, or graveyard-shift basis, when offices, hospitals, universities, shopping malls, airports, and train stations are empty, and after hotel customers have left. Billions of women take care of cleaning the world every day, tirelessly. Without their work, millions of employees and agents of capital, the state, the army, and cultural, artistic, and scientific institutions could not use their offices, eat in their cafeterias, hold their meetings, or make their decisions in clean spaces where wastebaskets, tables, chairs, armchairs,

floors, toilets, and restaurants have been cleaned and made available to them. This work, indispensable to the functioning of any society, must remain invisible. We must not be aware that the world we move around in is cleaned by racialized and overexploited women. On the one hand, this work has been considered what women must do (without complaint) for centuries; women's caring and cleaning work is free labor. On the other hand, capitalism inevitably creates invisible work and disposable lives. The cleaning industry is an industry that is dangerous to one's health: everywhere and for everyone who works in it. It is on these precarious lives, these endangered lives, these worn-out bodies, that the comfortable life of the middle class and the world of the powerful ultimately rests.

The workers' victory at the Gare du Nord was significant because it highlighted the existence of an industry in which race, feminization, exploitation, endangered health, invisibility, under-qualification, low wages, sexual- and gender-based violence and harassment are combined. Yet, in January 2018, on the front page of the media in France and elsewhere, appeared a petition signed by a group of 100 women, including Catherine Millet, Ingrid Caven, and Catherine Deneuve, denouncing "man-hating" within feminism.<sup>5</sup> The statement provoked debates and controversies, petitions and counter-petitions. The signatories denounced the #Balancetonporc<sup>6</sup> and #MeToo campaigns in which women call out men who have sexually harassed them. The petition accuses these movements of constituting a "campaign of denunciation," and of "summary judgment" since some men were "sanctioned in the course of their work, forced to quit, etc., when all they did was touch a knee, try to steal a kiss, talk about 'intimate' things at a business dinner or send a message with sexual connotation when the attraction was not reciprocated." They refer to a "wave of purification." That this letter garnered such attention is not surprising. The comfortable

## INTRODUCTION: INVISIBLE, THEY “OPEN THE CITY”

life of bourgeois women around the world is possible because millions of exploited and racialized women maintain this comfort by making their clothes, cleaning their homes and the offices where they work, taking care of their children, and by taking care of the sexual needs of their husbands, brothers, and partners. They thus have all the time in the world to sit around discussing the merits (or lack thereof) of being “bothered” in the metro or of aspiring to become a CEO. Certainly, men also benefit from the North/South division, and other men are put in the position of maintaining it. But looking at the role of women from the Global South in this world order, and in the international division of labour, highlights how their struggle challenges racial capitalism and heteropatriarchy.



tivity such as “just sitting” in the countryside into a highly productive way of competing with other ethnic groups for land control.

### The Productivity of “Just Sitting”

If people do not choose to use the west coast in the rainy season because roads are too wet, they are not pushed to go west until tourists begin camping at northern and eastern sites. The influx of tourists has affected how Aborigines use the countryside in two main ways: (1) it causes them to spend more time in the northwest during the dry season, and (2) it provides them with a view of Anglo life that motivates the community to “defend” sections of the Cox Peninsula by camping on them year-round. Most Anglos (*bedagut*) are described as dangerous devils whose peculiar manner of acting is harmful to the physical and mythic life of the countryside. While Belyuen Aborigines acknowledge that they prefer camping on the open beach to camping in the hot inland or along mangrove-enclosed beaches, they say non-Aborigines do not prefer but rather are unable to use anything but beaches and them in a certain way. Women draw these conclusions from watching Anglos come and go from the Cox Peninsula.

During the dry season, the days are breezy and warm and the nights clear and brisk. The humidity that visits the landscape throughout the wet and buildup evaporates taking with it many mosquitoes and sandflies. During these months, tourists flock into northern towns enroute to see spectacular landscapes such as Katherine Gorge and the Kakadu escarpment. Some tourists staying in Darwin drive around or take a ferry across the Darwin Harbour. Though the scenery is less stunning than Kakadu, from Mandorah they can explore sites on the northern and eastern coasts; and they can sit, drink, and watch a corroboree show at night with the Darwin skyline in the background. Although Belyuen women and men take advantage of the tourist presence to sell craft items and foods, women avoid camping or socializing alongside non-Aborigines (other than at the Mandorah Wharf, but Belyuen use of it drops dramatically during the dry season). Because of Aborigines' unease and non-Aborigines' concentration on the north and east coasts, Belyuen families move to the western region of the Cox Peninsula during the dry season (see Table V). But no one successfully avoids all interaction with non-Aboriginal tourists. Nor does anyone choose to. Even when no Anglos are initially at a campground, they may appear later in the day. Anglo boaters regularly take advantage of the supposedly remote area by stripping off their suits, bathing, or swimming nude even if an Aboriginal group is nearby. Other Anglos drive small high-powered boats across the Darwin Harbour and travel up the six crocodile

infested creeks, described earlier. These sights are sources of humor, disbelief, and disgust for nearby Aborigines engaged in fishing, crabbing, or quietly resting on a beach.

While non-Aborigines perform such socially and personally dangerous acts, women note that they “panic” when traveling in the inland forests or mangroves. Bathers and skiers’ over-enthusiasm (“they like themselves,” “they are prideful”) in one environment changes in another to panic and hysteria. From Belyuen people’s experience, non-Aborigines in mangroves, jungles, or wetlands swamps act hysterical, frightened by the surroundings (“they got no *meru*,” “they have no control,” literally “they have no ass”). These kinds of activities are seen as loud, disturbing, and essentially inappropriate ways of acting. But while such activity can interfere with the timing of a foraging trip, causing people to alter where they go, it also provides the social fodder which women use to construct ethnic identities. When Belyuen women note that Anglo-Australians want all the best places (beaches and red cliff regions), they also note that although Anglos take the good places they do not enliven them or maintain their “sweetness” (economic productivity and mythic life). Instead, by their “silliness” country is ruined; it returns into itself and refuses to produce. Smelling the sweat of foolhardy people, the country refuses to give its fatness and all people suffer. One thing older Aboriginal women do as they sit on the north and east coasts is look across the harbor at Darwin. They discuss with their children what the Darwin countryside once looked like, the pollution that now exists, and the danger the future holds for the Cox Peninsula if Anglos move there. In doing so, women discursively foreground differences between how Anglos and Aborigines behave and then use such differences to urge their families to maintain control of the countryside.

Belyuen Aborigines have several methods for resisting Anglo encroachment. Often, they maintain outstations throughout the year in regions favored by Anglos. Those without jobs stay and mind a camp, supplied by others with cars and money. More important than what camp members collect from the surrounding countryside (though they do regularly hunt, fish, and collect) is their physical presence. Families expend great effort to maintain year-round camps on the north coast and at red cliff and beach regions on the west coast, but do not maintain year-round outstations at Bagadjet and Binbinya since Anglos do not visit these areas. The Kenbi Corroboree Crew stays at Madpil on the east coast to “block” squatters such as those discovered recently at Bitbinbiyirrk. This is an effective way of using prejudice to one’s advantage. For, just as Belyuen Aborigines are reluctant to camp near non-Aborigines, so non-Aborigines fear and rarely approach black camps. It should be noted, however, that most Aboriginal outstations are located near estuarine creeks not only to block

Anglo-Australians, but also because they provide a good source of fish and other desirable products.

Another method Belyuen people use to slow the advance of the white weekend camper is to keep areas “closed-up.” They do not maintain the infrastructures that allow easy access to camping grounds. Infrastructures include roads, cleared camping areas, shelter, and storage sites for equipment. The term infrastructure itself sounds very modern for the practice of hunter-gatherers. But Belyuen Aborigines have kept areas clear, maintained paths, and left dug-outs and chipping equipment at sites for quite a long time. Furthermore, the paths noted in myth, enacted in ceremonial and everyday narratives, and traveled on daily by foraging groups provide an integrated and functioning network which Aborigines use to increase their output by decreasing the need to re-invent the landscape every time they return to a camping ground. But whereas in the past, keeping a place “open” by regular visits meant decreasing one’s overall labor, now it often means inviting the visits of unwanted strangers who then block the use of an area or steal equipment stored there. Because of these risks, Belyuen Aborigines leave roads in disrepair and areas only partially cleared. Some non-Aborigines see this behavior as indicative of Aboriginal laziness, of their inability to develop the countryside, or of their secrecy and trickery.

## DISCUSSION

In this essay I have described several dimensions of the hunting, fishing, and collecting activities of Belyuen Australian Aborigines—the constraints on their practices and the meanings and uses they draw from them. Constraints include what social, historical, and cultural environments and what political-economic and ecological costs and benefits motivate the timing and place of foraging trips. Meanings Belyuen persons draw from their foraging practices range from group rights and responsibilities for places to the creation of individual self-identity and worth.

The political advantages people gain from manipulating the local ideology of land-use differ according to what audience they address. From a local vantage, the discursive and nondiscursive acts associated with foraging trips create the necessary conditions for people’s economic well-being: a healthy productive landscape and a functioning social group. In a local arena, then, Belyuen Aborigines can effectively manipulate the meaningfulness of foraging for political purposes. How a site “reacts to” a group (how much foods it provides) is an important measure of what rights a group has over the site. The group which attends to the day-to-day health of the countryside by visiting and foraging on it accrues significant cultural

Planned Failure:

George Schuyler, Ella Baker, and the Young Negroes' Cooperative League

“After ecstasy what?”

—*Splay Anthem*, Nathaniel Mackey

**May Things Fall Apart**

A kind of mourning attends assessments of social movements today. Everyone from Deborah Gould to David Scott has been eyeing a growing “sense of a stalled present,” “a tragic out-of-jointness,” a sense that Marxist progressive time has failed so often to deliver those progressive times—especially at the times they felt closer than ever—that teleology writ-large has become obsolete.<sup>1</sup>

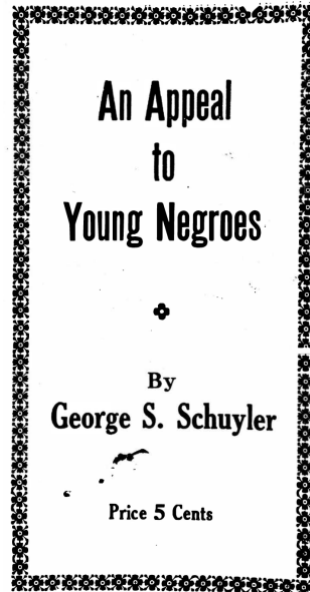
But there is a lament lurking beneath this, far less recognized yet often charging it: unlike the Marxist movements of yesteryears, roughly prior to '68, not only fail to deliver: they fail to last. As political theorists Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams put it, “whereas that period saw mass mobilisation, general strikes, militant labour and radical women’s organisations all achieving real and lasting successes, today is defined by their absence,” the absence, that is, of “lasting successes.”<sup>2</sup> Following a preeminent queue, Williams and Srnicek take weary note that activists of the global north evince a growing “preference” for the “transient” and the “small scale,” at the expense of those two words—“lasting” and “success,” so commonly thought together one might think they were synonymous.<sup>3</sup> What social movements come into view when these are not made synonymous and when success does not depend on schemas of duration? What kind of social? What kind of movement? And if political transience charges a collective mourning, what kind of affects?

One answer arises from the black cooperative movement during the decade that saw more black cooperatives established than at any other time in American history: George Schuyler and Ella Baker’s Young Negroes’ Cooperative League, launched in upper Harlem in 1930.<sup>4</sup> This may seem like an unlikely pair around an unlikely affair, considering Schuyler is mostly remembered for his loud “race to the right” from the 1940s onwards, and Baker for her quiet but seismic organizational efforts on the left during the Civil Rights Movement, and neither is commonly remembered for work on cooperatives, economies whose makers equally own and democratically distribute the collective surplus. But Schuyler, the most widely known black journalist at the time, had been writing about cooperatives since 1923 in what can only be called a prolonged fever. In 1931 Baker, who had been conducting workshops around the country on how to organize buying clubs, received

a scholarship to enroll at the Cooperative Institute of Brookwood Labor College.<sup>5</sup> Throughout the 1930s and early 40s, while offering lectures in Harlem on consumer education and assisting various cooperatives like the grocer Harlem's Own and even a bank in Jamaica, she would establish cooperative economics as what she called her "expertise."<sup>6</sup>

Baker and Schuyler hoped their organization would eventually inspire much more than co-ops, however: a "cooperative commonwealth," stretching from the US to the "West Indies."<sup>8</sup> The term "cooperative commonwealth" was introduced by late nineteenth century labor republicans to name "a condition in which all workers exercised joint ownership and control over industrial enterprises."<sup>9</sup> Some economists define it today as a "a system of cooperatives" designed to "replace" a capitalist market.<sup>10</sup> But for blacks of the 1930s it had an additional meaning, that increasingly irresistible idea of a black metropolis, something Baker would again help develop in 1969, this time in North Carolina under the name of Soul City: "a total town," "a total community."<sup>11</sup> For Baker, cooperatives augur "the day when the soil and all of its resources will be reclaimed by its rightful owners—the working masses of the world."<sup>13</sup>

But Baker and Schuyler's commonwealth would be different from their predecessors, like the one W. E. B. Du Bois hoped to build through his Negro Cooperative Guild (born in 1918, vanished in 1920), or even the earlier and longer lasting Colored Farmers Alliance and Cooperative Union (1886 to the late 1890s). Theirs would be different because theirs was meant to self-destruct, never meant to last. The scholarly emphasis on affiliations between leftist artists, like Schuyler and Baker, and lasting organizations, like local communist and socialist parties, has left the vernacular activism in the black cooperative movement underemphasized, if not undertow. When we suspend the criteria of longevity, along with its metaphors (orderliness, formalization, rationality, institutionalism, and so on), we are better able to see Schuyler and Baker's novel orientation toward the making of a mass movement.



This was nowhere more evident than in the inaugurating manifesto, “An Appeal to Young Negroes” (1930), which they disseminated to prospective members.<sup>16</sup> It announced plans for a membership of 5,000 within a year, each of whom would help launch a “cooperative wholesale,” a “cooperative bank,” a production plant “where we shall start to produce some of the many commodities we consume,” a “cooperative housing department,” and a “permanent cooperative college.”<sup>17</sup> For them economic autonomy spelled protection against all manner of racial violence, from arbitrary incarceration to sexual assault. In this “ultra-democratic” group, black women “stand on equal footing with men,” and “complete power resides in the hands of the rank and file who can remove any official at any time, even the National Director.” Could any plan have been bolder than these?

One certainly was. From the letters recipients of the flyer sent to Schuyler’s office at the *Pittsburgh Courier*, the boldest part of the manifesto concerned the term “young.” The part of the “Appeal” that elicited the greatest surprise was, no kidding, “the much discussed age limit,” as Schuyler acknowledged.<sup>19</sup> It was not the incredible projected size of the commonwealth itself, but the bizarrely impractical membership requirement that brought the most controversy. “If you have reached your 16<sup>th</sup> but not your 36<sup>th</sup> Birthday, you are eligible to join,” Schuyler wrote and suggestively placed in the very last paragraph of the “Appeal.” Only Schuyler signed his name as its author, but he certainly thought through this part with Baker. Indeed, Baker told one reporter interested in the situation, “The officers now serving are only nominal and these include Mr.

Schuyler himself,” his leadership being “temporarily assumed.”<sup>20</sup> To be sure, they allowed exceptions “by two-thirds vote...”<sup>21</sup> But if only a super majority could vote to exempt a member, then this bylaw loosening the age restriction equally doubled down on it. Furthermore, as Baker emphasized, retention was not the point.

Mandating not only an age-limit but also a maximum age was tantamount to instating a date of expiry, a moment when one’s membership would come to a prescribed end. If this weren’t surprising enough, Schuyler himself was already thirty-five in 1931 (Baker, twenty-seven). One comical byline in Schuyler’s own paper could scarcely repress its disbelief: “Founder of Y. N. C. L. Plans to Retire As Soon As Program Is Definitely Launched.”<sup>22</sup> The organization was set to lose its founder just as it disembarked, giving its leadership and organizational coherence about the same permanence as an etching on water. In letters Schuyler received, members and observers apparently wrestled with the question, how did the age-limit define the duration of the league as a whole and the larger commonwealth Schuyler and Baker intended to plot?<sup>23</sup> But for us today the more important question is what kind of philosophy of radical activism does this mandate betray?

To proffer an answer, I deploy a concept I call *planned failure*, the performative codification of strategic anarchy. Planned failure designates the intended demise of the original plan. It assumes that to maintain the structure of a movement’s organization, which is made up of not only social arrangements, but also the constitution of its political subjects, is necessarily to reinforce the very problems one sought to escape: the distribution of property according to hierarchies of class, race, and gender. In the context of cooperatives, planned failure begins with the insight that, as Marx wrote, “the cooperative factories run by workers themselves are, within the old form, the first examples of the emergence of a new form, even though they naturally reproduce in all cases, in their present organization, all the defects of the existing system, and must reproduce them.”<sup>24</sup> This alternative political practice does not seek to transcend these defects so much as disassemble them until they cease to cohere. In planned failure, freedom and its foils, possibilities and their hindrances, are tensed, present tensed, into a seriality of ecstatic, choreographed, gestures.

As an echolalia of subtleties, planned failure is too gestural to be regarded as open dialogue, organized chaos, or a commitment to contingent action, the last still comprising the veritable lodestar of democratic politics and radical socialist strategy.<sup>27</sup> Nor should it be conflated with the capitalist imperative of planned obsolescence and reinvention. Its plunge into the present not only rebuffs the “re” in the idea of reinvention. It rebuffs invention. If anything, its aim is to hear out and sound out the very mother of invention: necessity. Consider it the necessity of countering an always

exclusive progressive line of history. Consider it the wild undercurrent of what Baker called “group-centered leadership,” a horizontality of social arrangements that would be practiced by a long series of black and brown insurgencies, from the autonomous movements in Argentina following the 2001 recession to Black Lives Matter following the death of Michael Brown.<sup>28</sup>

Planned failure inverts the perspective of policymakers ventriloquized by Moten and Harney in *The Undercommons*. Policymakers, they say, are fixed on being fixed, yet always in “need [of] hope,” capital’s cynosure. These policycrats “keep making plans and plans fail as a matter of policy. Plans must fail because planners must fail.”<sup>29</sup> Those who devise the failure of their own plans inhabit that failure. Sure, this desire for institutional collapse, for a serial construction and deconstruction, for splintered and rhizomic forms of power over constituted and centralized ones, for the always-irregular, makes for a counterintuitive activism, but its affects are ecstasies.

Planned failure is an ecstatic makeup (and breakup), a mode of being out of body while never more in it. If ec-static means to literally be outside oneself, beside oneself, by way of some passionate feeling, then, to echo Judith Butler, it can also mean a people living utterly “beside themselves” with “rage,” “grief,” and let us add, glee.<sup>30</sup> To be *beside oneself* renders planned failure too counterintuitive for the recent reappraisals of social movement failure. Deeper than a readiness to alter one’s plans according to an evolving historical landscape, planned failure is a frenzy, being out of one’s wits with fear and delight. It lacks the rationality that undergirds what, for instance, Vaughn Raspberry has called “the right to fail,” the right “to preserve the experimental spirit and the assumption of failure as a precondition of new knowledge.”<sup>31</sup> Planned failure is preset self-negation, an ungovernable generativity encoded in and against the initial form. On its deepest level, planned failure names the synchronized operation, the co-operation, of two affective drives: a love for the world thus a desire for its preservation, and the sense that the world must come to end for the world to have a chance, for property to be dismantled and for shared freedom to be born.

What gives this form of political engagement the salience that progress has lost in cultural studies today is that it actively escapes the erroneous opposition between optimism and pessimism, between believing in some possibility of redress (from reparation to relief) or inhabiting the melancholy of its permanent loss. A motley of scholars ever more mindful of an “abiding negativity” in minoritized lives, mindful, too, of our slave ships and our fugitivities, of “the ways the hold cannot and does not hold even as the hold remains,” has been asking in a way, how do we live and plan for a day that will never come?<sup>32</sup> Schuyler and Baker ask, how do we live and plan for a day that must not, a day opposed to and unforeseeable by that life and plan? This is a day incompatible with



the structures of hope or despair. For above all, planned failure is a metacritical commentary on the study of black activism, whose outcomes have led many of us down Escher-stairs of despair. By reversing the terms through which we have come to understand black social movements as failed plans, planned failure unsettles prevailing conceptions of what it means to succeed at anticapitalist resistance and the metrics of measurements commonly employed to assess that success. Planned failure characterizes a broad logic of comic—even ecstatic—political activism in Schuyler and Baker’s collaboration, their poetics that alight on the page and the pavement.

### **Schuyler Was an Anarchist, Baker was Close**

Schuyler helped launch their cooperative society not on the articulation of desires, but on a rethinking of successful resistance. To continue the cooperative project of unraveling blackness from property, Schuyler suggested that redefining failure was even more important than clarifying the principles of cooperative economics. The manifesto he wrote begins as an indictment of the black public sphere writ large. “Young Negroes!... The old Negroes have failed!...The old Negroes have failed!” he shouts over and over. He explains that by “old” he means both an age and a stature, namely those who have reached political prominence, like “Drs. Du Bois and Monroe Trotter.”<sup>33</sup> He then releases a litany of attacks on a panorama of contemporary black leaders: “They have supplied no program capable of emancipating the Negro masses from subserviency, insecurity, insult, debauchery, crime, disease and death.” Their “policy” devolved into “constant conciliation and compromise,” he continues, a mistake he expects “young negroes” to avoid. Schuyler’s indictment equates the project of protecting blacks from premature death to the contours of the black public sphere itself. Then he condemns both as a failure.

His readers might well have wondered, if every luminary from Du Bois to Trotter has managed to falter, is success impossible? Schuyler charged the “oldsters” with capitulating to capitalism, but if all the “past and present leadership,” which by implication must include himself, has failed at creating the conditions for emancipation, has “mouthed cooperation and practiced destructive individualism,” was Schuyler suggesting that the leadership should have viewed failure as inevitable? Apparently their problem wasn’t that failure occurred, but that they sought to avoid it. Given the form of Schuyler’s manifesto, a call not only to the young but to failure itself, a call to the young by recourse to failure, given the fact that the phrase “the old Negroes have failed” is so intense and incantatory it threatens to materialize off the page, failure emerges not as something to sidestep or overcome but to celebrate and embody.

## THE LINK BETWEEN TABOOS AND DEATH

*The contrast between the world of work or reason and that of violence*

In the section which follows, whose subject is eroticism at white heat (the blind moment when eroticism attains its ultimate intensity), I shall consider systematically the relationship between those two irreconcilables already mentioned, taboo and transgression.

Man belongs in any case to both of these worlds and between them willy-nilly his life is torn. The world of work and reason is the basis of human life but work does not absorb us completely and if reason gives the orders our obedience is never unlimited. Man has built up the rational world by his own efforts, but there remains within him an undercurrent of violence. Nature herself is violent, and however reasonable we may grow we may be mastered anew by a violence no longer that of nature but that of a rational being who tries to obey but who succumbs to stirrings within himself which he cannot bring to heel.

There is in nature and there subsists in man a movement which always exceeds the bounds, that can never be anything but partially reduced to order. We are generally unable to grasp it. Indeed it is by definition that which can never be grasped, but we are conscious of being in its power: the universe that bears us along answers no purpose that reason defines, and if we try to make it answer to God, all we are doing is associating irrationally the infinite excess in the presence of which our reason exists with our reason itself. But through the excess in him, that God whom we should like to shape into an intelligible concept never

ceases, exceeding this concept, to exceed the limits of reason.

In the domain of our life excess manifests itself in so far as violence wins over reason. Work demands the sort of conduct where effort is in a constant ratio with productive efficiency. It demands rational behaviour where the wild impulses worked out on feast days and usually in games are frowned upon. If we were unable to repress these impulses we should not be able to work, but work introduces the very reason for repressing them. These impulses confer an immediate satisfaction on those who yield to them. Work, on the other hand, promises to those who overcome them a reward later on whose value cannot be disputed except from the point of view of the present moment. From the earliest times<sup>1</sup> work has produced a relaxation of tension thanks to which men cease to respond to the immediate urge impelled by the violence of desire. No doubt it is arbitrary always to contrast the detachment fundamental to work with tumultuous urges whose necessity is not constant. Once begun, however, work does make it impossible to respond to these immediate solicitations which could make us indifferent to the promised desirable results. Most of the time work is the concern of men acting collectively and during the time reserved for work the collective has to oppose those contagious impulses to excess in which nothing is left but the immediate surrender to excess, to violence, that is. Hence the human collective, partly dedicated to work, is defined by taboos without which it would not have become the world of work that it essentially is.

*The main function of all taboos is to combat violence*

What prevents us from seeing this decisive articulation of human life in its simplicity is the capricious way these taboos are promulgated. They have often had a superficially

<sup>1</sup> Work made man what he is. The first traces of man are the stone tools he left behind him. According to recent research it seems as though Australopithecus, still far from the highly developed form which we exemplify, left tools of this sort; Australopithecus lived about a million years before us (while Neanderthal man, whose burial places are the earliest known to us, lived only some few thousand years ago).

insignificant air. The significance of taboos if we take them as a whole, particularly if we take into consideration those which we do not fail religiously to observe, is none the less reducible to a simple element. I will formulate this without demonstrating the truth of it immediately (that I will do systematically later and my generalisation will be seen to be a sound one). Violence is what the world of work excludes with its taboos; in my field of enquiry this implies at the same time sexual reproduction and death.

Only later on shall I be able to establish the profound unity of these apparent opposites, birth and death. However, even at this stage their external connections stand revealed in the universe of sadism, there for anyone who thinks about eroticism to ponder on. De Sade—or his ideas—generally horrifies even those who affect to admire him and have not realised through their own experience this tormenting fact: the urge towards love, pushed to its limit, is an urge toward death. This link ought not to sound paradoxical. The excess from which reproduction proceeds and the excess we call death can each only be understood with the help of the other. But it is clear from the outset that the two primary taboos affect, firstly, death, and secondly, sexual functions.

### *Prehistoric evidence of taboos connected with death*

“Thou shalt not kill”; “Thou shalt not perform the carnal act except in wedlock”. Such are the two fundamental commandments found in the Bible and we still observe them.

The first of these prohibitions is the consequence of the human attitude towards the dead.

Let me return to the earliest days of our species, when our destiny was at stake. Even before man presented the appearance that he does today, Neanderthal man, whom pre-historians call ‘homo faber’, was making various stone instruments, often very elaborately, with the aid of which he hewed stone—or wood. This kind of man living a hundred thousand years before ourselves was already like us but still more like the anthropoid. Although he held himself erect like

us his legs were still a little bent; when he walked he leaned more on the ball of the foot than on the outer edge. His neck was not as flexible as ours (although certain men have conserved certain of his simian characteristics). He had a low forehead and a jutting brow. We only know the bones of this rudimentary man; we cannot know the exact appearance of his face; not even if his expression was already a human one. All we know is that he worked and cut himself away from violence.

If we look at his life as a whole, he remained inside the realm of violence. (We have not yet entirely abandoned it ourselves). But he escaped its power to some extent. He worked. We have the evidence of his technical skill left by numerous and various stone tools. This skill was remarkable enough in that if he had not given it his considered attention, going back on and perfecting his first idea, he could not have achieved results that were constant and in the long run greatly improved. His tools are in any case not the only proof of an incipient opposition to violence; the burial places left by Neanderthal man bear witness to this also.

Besides work, death was recognized by this man as terrifying and overwhelming, and indeed as supernatural. Prehistory assigns Neanderthal man to the Middle Paleolithic era; as early as Lower Paleolithic, apparently some hundreds of thousands of years before, fairly similar human beings existed who left traces of their work just as Neanderthal man did: the heaps of bones of these earlier men that have been found encourage us to think that death had begun to disturb them, since they paid some attention to skulls at least. But burial of the dead, still a religious practice for humanity at the present time, appears towards the end of the Middle Paleolithic, a little while before the disappearance of Neanderthal man and the arrival of a man exactly like ourselves whom prehistorians, keeping the name 'homo faber' for the earlier type, call 'homo sapiens'.

The custom of burial is the sign of a taboo similar to ours concerning the dead and death. In a vague form at least the

taboo must have arisen before this custom. We can even admit that in one sense, so imperceptibly that no proof could have remained, and doubtless unnoticed by those who lived at the time, the birth of this taboo coincided with the beginnings of work. The essential difference is that between a man's dead body and other objects such as stones. Today the perception of this difference is still characteristic of a human being as opposed to an animal; what we call death is in the first place the consciousness we have of it. We perceive the transition from the living state to the corpse, that is, to the tormenting object that the corpse of one man is for another. For each man who regards it with awe, the corpse is the image of his own destiny. It bears witness to a violence which destroys not one man alone but all men in the end. The taboo which lays hold on the others at the sight of a corpse is the distance they put between themselves and violence, by which they cut themselves off from violence. The picture of violence which we must attribute to primitive man in particular must necessarily be understood as opposed to the rhythm of work regulated by rational factors. Lévy-Bruhl's mistake has long been recognized; he denied primitive man a rational mode of thought and conceded him only the uncertain and indistinct images that result from participation.<sup>1</sup> Work is obviously no less ancient than man himself, and though work is not always foreign to animals, human work as distinct from animal work is never foreign to reason. It supposes that a fundamental identity is accepted between itself and the wrought object, and it supposes the difference, resulting from the work, between its substance and the developed tool. Similarly it implies awareness of the use of the tool, of the chain of cause and effect in which it is about to become involved. The laws which govern the acquired skills which give rise to tools or which are served by

<sup>1</sup> Lévy-Bruhl's descriptions are none the less correct and of indubitable interest. If, as Cassirer did, he had talked about 'mythical thought' and not 'primitive thought', he would not have encountered the same difficulties. 'Mythical thought' may be contemporary with rational thought, though it does not originate in the latter.

them are laws of reason from the outset. These laws regulate the changes which work conceives and effects. No doubt a primitive man could not have made them explicit; his language made him aware of the objects it named for him, but was inadequate to deal with the naming process itself. A workman today, the best part of the time would not be in a position to formulate them; nevertheless he observes them faithfully. Primitive man as Lévy-Bruhl describes him may have thought irrationally some of the time that a thing simultaneously is and is not, or that it can be what it is and something else at the same time. Reason did not dominate his entire thinking, but it did when it was a question of work. So much so that a primitive man could imagine, without formulating it, a world of work or reason to which another world of violence was opposed.<sup>1</sup> Certainly death is like disorder in that it differs from the orderly arrangements of work. Primitive man may have thought that the ordering of work belonged to him, while the disorder of death was beyond him, making nonsense of his efforts. The movement of work, the operations of reason were of use to him, while disorder, the movement of violence, brought ruin on the very creature whom useful works serve. Man, identifying himself with work which reduced everything to order, thus cut himself off from violence which tended in the opposite direction.

*The horror of the corpse as a symbol of violence and as a threat of the contagiousness of violence*

Violence, and death signifying violence, have a double meaning. On the one hand the horror of death drives us off, for we prefer life; on the other an element at once solemn and terrifying fascinates us and disturbs us profoundly. I shall return to this ambiguity. I can only point out in the first place the essential aspect of

<sup>1</sup> The expressions 'profane world' (= world of work or reason) and 'sacred world' (= world of violence) are none the less of great antiquity. *Profane* and *sacred*, though, are words from the vocabulary of irrationalism.

recoil in the face of violence which is expressed by taboos associated with death.

A man's dead body must always have been a source of interest to those whose companion he was while he lived, and we must believe that as a victim of violence those nearest to him were careful to preserve him from further violence. Burial no doubt signified from the earliest times, as far as those who buried the body were concerned, their wish to save the dead from the voracity of animals. But even if that wish had been the determining factor in the inauguration of this custom, we cannot say that it was the most important; awe of the dead in all likelihood predominated for a long time over the sentiments which a milder civilization developed. Death was a sign of violence brought into a world which it could destroy. Although motionless, the dead man had a part in the violence which had struck him down; anything which came too near him was threatened by the destruction which had brought him low. Death presented such a contrast between an unfamiliar region and the everyday world that the only mode of thought in tune with it was bound to conflict with the mode of thought governed by work. Symbolical or mythical thought, erroneously labelled 'primitive' by Lévy-Bruhl, is the only kind appropriate to violence whose essence is to break the bounds of rational thought implicit in work. According to this way of thinking, the violence which by striking at the dead man dislocates the ordered course of things does not cease to be dangerous once the victim is dead. It constitutes a supernatural peril which can be 'caught' from the dead body. Death is a danger for those left behind. If they have to bury the corpse it is less in order to keep it safe than to keep themselves safe from its contagion. Often the idea of contagion is connected with the body's decomposition where formidable aggressive forces are seen at work. The corpse will rot; this biological disorder, like the newly dead body a symbol of destiny, is threatening in itself. We no longer believe in contagious magic, but which of us could be sure of not quailing at the sight



of a dead body crawling with maggots? Ancient peoples took the drying up of the bones to be the proof that the threat of violence arising at the time of death had passed over. More often than not the dead man himself held in the clutch of violence, as the survivors see it, is part and parcel of his own disorder, and his whitened bones are what at last betoken the pacification of his spirit.

*The taboo on murder*

The taboo relating to the corpse does not always appear intelligible. In '*Totem and Taboo*' Freud, because of his superficial knowledge of ethnographical data, nowadays much less vague, thought that the taboo generally countered the desire to touch. The desire to touch the dead was doubtless no greater in former times than it is today. The taboo does not necessarily anticipate the desire; in the presence of a corpse horror is immediate and inevitable and practically impossible to resist. The violence attendant upon a man's death is only likely to tempt men in one direction: it may tend to be embodied in us against another living person; the desire to kill may take hold of us. The taboo on murder is a special aspect of the universal taboo on violence.

In the eyes of primitive man violence is always the cause of death. It may have acted through magical means, but someone is always responsible, someone is always a murderer. The two aspects of the taboo are interrelated. We must run away from death and hide from the forces that have been unleashed. Other forces like those which have overpowered the dead man and are temporarily in possession of him must not be loosed in ourselves.

As a rule the community brought into being by work considers itself essentially apart from the violence implied by the death of one of its members. Faced by such a death the body politic feels that a taboo is in force. But that is only true for the members of the community. Within it the taboo has full force. Without, where strangers are concerned, the taboo is still felt but it can be violated. The community is

made up of those whom the common effort unites, cut off from violence by work during the hours devoted to work. Outside this given time, outside its own limits, the community can revert to violence, it can resort to murder in war against another community.

In given circumstances, during a given time, the murder of members of a given tribe is permissible, necessary even. Yet the wildest hecatombs, in spite of the irresponsibility of their instigators, never entirely remove the malediction falling on murder. The Bible commands 'Thou shalt not kill', and this sometimes makes us smile, but we deceive ourselves in regarding the Bible as unimportant. Once the obstacle is overthrown what outlasts the transgression is a flouted taboo. The bloodiest of murderers cannot ignore the curse upon him, for the curse is the condition of his achievement. Transgression piled upon transgression will never abolish the taboo, just as though the taboo were never anything but the means of cursing gloriously whatever it forbids.

In the foregoing proposition there is a basic truth: taboos founded on terror are not only there to be obeyed. There is always another side to the matter. It is always a temptation to knock down a barrier; the forbidden action takes on a significance it lacks before fear widens the gap between us and it and invests it with an aura of excitement. "There is nothing", writes de Sade, "that can set bounds to licentiousness . . . The best way of enlarging and multiplying one's desires is to try to limit them".<sup>1</sup> Nothing can set bounds to licentiousness . . . or rather, generally speaking, there is nothing that can conquer violence.

<sup>1</sup> Introduction to 'Les Cent Vingt Journées de Sodome'.





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when shania twain says "let's go girls" i could kick a door down



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Jean Cocteau, in 1939, wearing a 1988 suit from Comme des Garçon's Homme Plus line. Superimposition of 1988 photograph by Shinji Mori on 1939 photograph by Gisèle Freund. From *Sixth Sense 1*.



May 1988

When I think about the possibility today of what used to be called an art movement I think about what Andy Warhol called "Business Art." You could take his remarks on the subject as flattery of the collecting class or as a send-up of the art world, but I think there's a lot more to it. I think Andy saw that art was losing large areas of its former purview. Even though art had more value on paper than ever before, it had less clout. It was less about vision and cultural leadership and more about perceived worth. As much as Andy Warhol was a creature of the art world (and of fine-art auctions), he never rejected the commercial-art world he came from. He had a big, heroically inclusive concept of art, and in a lot of ways he was the only Pop artist who lived up to Pop's platform.

You could say that Business Art had to happen. (Presuming the world were to continue.) But the actual appearance of Business Art still seems radical and Dada-like in its deep and mysterious pizzazz.

I think what Andy Warhol saw in Business Art was power, not just collecting-class power but the kind of power that comes from a positivist, ambitious approach. I think he saw Business Art as a means of escape from the tragic tradition of art declaring itself dead again and again. Business Art subverts that tragedy through deus ex machina surprise tactics. It is about escapism, about taking the easy way out, but so was some great art of the past. Art before Andy wasn't all the dangerous leap that we sometimes expect of art that's like art, art that buys into the tragic idea of art history.

Art like something else is easier and can often be passed off as useful and therefore harmless. It is unlikely to compete directly with social, religious, or political mores, lessening the likelihood that it will be quashed.

At a time when the artist for art's sake has become an estheticized stunt person, more and more of the stuff that turns me on has a label, not a signature.

Art circulated as business materials often reaches the broadest audience and is able to escape the immediate clutches of the usual art-detention forces such as magazines, galleries, universities, foundations, and intelligence agents. Its cover is its denial of purist ambition. It is in service.

By serving commerce, commercial art is able to attain a corporate, communal "I." An I like the I of the Order of Assassins, or the Knights Templar, or the Ras Tafari. The corporate artist is immune to assassination, literal or figurative, whether by ideological enemies, rival artists, or dealers and collectors with a vested interest.

Legally, a corporation has a personal nature, but at the same time a corporation is noncorporeal. Legal persons are immortal, at least temporarily. Mortal persons, on the other hand, are always on their way to becoming estates and inheritances. The personal artist may prove to be more valuable dead than alive. The corporate artist never dies, but is amalgamated. The corporate subjectivity is anonymous and pure.

The corporate I is superior to "we."

We is a euphemism.

We is ex cathedra. I is divine.

"Pure subjectivity is the starting point of human feelings such as pity, friendship, love, passion and sympathy."  
—Yohji Yamamoto.

*Sixth Sense* is the publication of Comme des Garçons Co., Ltd., the extraordinary Japanese fashion house of Rei Kawakubo. Comme des Garçons is a perfect art company. The clothing it manufactures and markets is

like art in every respect except being art. And now it has created one of the great art magazines of our time, except that it's not really an art magazine, it's a clothing catalogue. *Sixth Sense* has everything that an art magazine must have, and it is more beautiful than other art magazines, but it has something more. It has an excuse for being that grants it a certain immunity.

*Sixth Sense* also has decoration and design. Here is an excerpt from an unsigned introduction to the magazine:

In the beginning, decoration was born of the free imagination. However, in the flow of time called history it has always been reduced to an empty shell: the African's tattoo; magnificent cathedrals in the Middle Ages; the Rococo of court life; elegant Art Déco in the early 20th century.

20th century fashion has sought simplicity by stripping and destroying form itself. The original meaning of decoration can now be rediscovered and freed of association with static images from the past. Sequins glint under the sun, frills dance like butterflies, a diamond-like crystal swings at the hem.

Here is a magazine with an I, where almost none has even a we. The I is plural. In the current issue, which is the first, the I is Kawakubo, Yohji Yamamoto, André Kertész, Eileen Gray, Jean Cocteau, Dziga Vertov, and others—first-person collaboration beyond the grave and beyond copyright.

Vertov writes: "I am eye, I am a mechanical eye. I, a machine, am showing you a world, the likes of which only I can see."

Ads are the real commie art. They take it to the people as well as to the collector.

Original art made for the collector is, in Zen terms, the sound of one wing (usually the left) flapping. As vision if not as commodity, it soars on that wing above commerce, just as heaven is said to be above the earth. In the name of or at least in the interests of the people, it soars to the extraterrestrial realms of value, conferring objectivity on the ephemeral, seizing the future by its shadow and mounting it.

Fashion, design, advertising all lurk below among the masses. Have you noticed how beautiful they have become? Perhaps the gods will return.





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*There is a huge gap in the art world  
between the haves and the have-nots.  
You are either making big bucks or you  
are just a schlepper of some sort for  
twelve dollars an hour or less.*

## **ART MOVER**

Eric Beull

I have wanted to be an artist since 1985, when I was a sophomore at a large midwestern college and I took a painting course. I had never painted, drawn, or done anything artis-



tic before then—except sometimes try to play a guitar—and I only started because I could not think of anything else to do in school. But I liked it from the beginning. It's one of the few things that ever really interested me. That and girls. [Laughs]

I guess I never seriously thought that I would become famous as a painter. And now, after being in New York City for ten years, and seeing how the art world works, I know for sure that fame will not happen.

The New York art world is a lot like *Peyton Place*, if you know what I mean. There are a few major players and, in a way, they decide who is hot and which artist they can push on the viewing public. It has a lot to do with money. The bigger the money behind the artist, the more famous the artist will become. And by money I mean what gallery is representing the artist and which collector has bought the artist's work. Fame happens to only a handful of people. And there is a huge gap in the art world between the haves and the have-nots. You are either making big bucks or you are just a schlepper of some sort for twelve bucks an hour or less.

For a while, I thought I could teach art. I thought I could be a college professor and have a decent life, with plenty of time do my own work. But after my three years in an M.F.A. program, I believe that the art school system is one big lie. The teachers, for the most part, are third-rate hacks, usually past their prime both as teachers and artists. The chance of a young person getting a job is very slim and I gave up on the idea of teaching a long time ago. Although it is a good way to meet young girls if you're a dirty old man.

So I am an art mover.

I get up around seven in the morning most days, sometimes slightly hungover from lack of sleep or beer, and then I get in a truck and drive around for eleven or twelve hours, sometimes more in the busy seasons, carrying big crates of art from the homes of rich people or warehouses to museums or other warehouses. The best is to drive to the Hamptons because it takes all day and you usually only do three stops, and two of those involve a milkshake at the Candy Kitchen in Bridgehampton and then the beach.

But this doesn't happen too often. Usually, we just drive to certain parts of Manhattan. We go to the same places a lot—Sotheby's, Christie's, museums, galleries, framers, and some private dealers.

And warehouses. That's something that I bet people don't know: the vast majority of the world's art—including a lot of what you see in books and think of as being really famous—is just boxed up in warehouses. Look at the Museum of Modern Art, only like five percent of their collection is shown. The rest is in crates. Sometimes it reminds me of the final scene in *Citizen Kane*.

My fellow art movers are mostly artists. A few are musicians and a few are just normal guys. I like working with other artists. There is a core group of us who have been with our company for at least three years. We talk about art, usually in the negative, like how crappy a show is that we see, or else we gossip about the art world. But actually, lately, we mostly talk about the job and the stupidity of it. None of us have had any major success, although some have had one-person shows and there's a guy I know who shows with a really good gallery in the city. But so what, the market sucks right now. Nobody is buying anything except blue chip, established stuff. I mean, this guy, he's still working on the trucks. As for the rest of us, most of us realize that we will never be able to support ourselves as artists, even though everyone wishes they could.

I have moved all the big-name white male artists of this century, and I would say that most of the art that we move, if we art movers see it, we don't like. It all seems very old, very stale. Most artists, once they become successful, just seem to repeat themselves. And speaking for myself as a mover, not as an artist, it pisses me off when I break my back for something that was made with no sense of craft, or is needlessly heavy, or is too big and full of self-importance. I always like art that is small and light, even if it is crappy.

A lot of the time we do not even know what it is we are moving because it's already in a crate when we arrive. But sometimes, very rarely, you see something great. Like you go to Si Newhouse's place on the East Side and see a Lucian Freud painting in the living room which I thought was really impressive. And then—with the crates—who knows what's in there. I was once escorted by police from the airport to the Metropolitan Museum, so whatever was in those crates must have been worth something to someone.

Of course, basically everything we move is worth a lot of money. All of our private clients—you know, the individual art collectors—are rich. Very, very rich. It's hard to say what the average rich person's



collection is like. Usually the more money one has, the better the art, but of course, there are always exceptions. One of the first things I did on this job was to move the entire collection of a rich idiot who made his money in shopping malls. There was a lot of kinetic sculpture, including a giant fake rock made of fiberglass, mounted on a concrete slab in the backyard. If you flipped a switch in the kitchen, the rock moved back and forth on the slab. Talk about stupid. And this rock could have paid my salary for six months. And the rich idiot wore those polyester golf pants with no belt loops. And we found a dildo in his bedroom.

Then there was this guy who had this very large suburban house full of taxidermy animals, like elephant feet and big-game heads on the wall. The whole house was filled with them and it was very odd. What made it even odder was that the house seemed like it had not been lived in for the last five years. It was really dusty and dirty. The guy'd moved to Montana, I think. But it didn't matter where he was—we carried all of his dead animals out to our temperature-controlled truck, which took them back to our warehouse, where they are now stored in a climate-controlled room for an indeterminate amount of time.

Collectors are weird. Very weird. I once went to pick up an installation piece that consisted of a long wooden table and a canoe. And inside the canoe were dried up pieces of bread that the artist had chewed up and spit out. I think this was supposed to be some sort of Zen activity that was supposed to, you know, comment on consumption in a capitalistic society, or something stupid like that. Anyway, the whole canoe was filled with these hard, mouth-sized pieces of bread and when we arrived the collector had these two Japanese teenage girls counting all the pieces. How could it possibly matter if there were two thousand six hundred or two thousand five hundred and seventy-five pieces of this dried, chewed-up bread? It was so absurd. The final count was like three thousand two hundred and sixty-three or something, which I wrote down on the paperwork. I wonder if the people at the museum counted the pieces when it arrived.

The collector of this bread did help us get the table into the too-small elevator, which was very nice. Most people just close the door on you—and that's one of the worst things about this job—art movers are treated like any other service person. Which means that we're

treated like crap. For starters, we have to go into buildings through the back entrances. Next time you are on the Upper East Side try going into a doorman building with a package. See what happens. Or try going into Joan Rivers' pad to pick up some jewelry and watch the house maid look at you like you are insane when you ask to use the bathroom. That is the thing about the really rich—you are always dealing with the assistants, the secretaries, the maid, the doorman. They are the ones who will never give you a tip, either. Why should they? It's not their Monet you just moved. However, when you do see the rich goofball with the sexy wife or girlfriend, he will probably give you a tip because he wants to show off in front of her. Especially if she is new.

And then, after the service entrances, you have to ride in the service elevators. These are some of the scariest places in the world, if you ask me. New York is full of old ones that are operated by cables. And the high-rise types are like being inside wind tunnels—try riding in one with too much weight. We had to lift this thousand-pound marble slab into the elevator of the U.N. apartment building because it was too long to go straight in. It took about six of us to lift it. Then, while it was leaning against the elevator wall and we were underneath it, the car started to drop erratically because of the weight. We got stuck in there for almost an hour. The whole time was spent thinking we were going to die, telling stupid jokes about disaster movies and trying not to shit in our pants. This was done for this bachelor type who had nothing but Hawaiian shirts in his closet. Family money from aluminum, I think.

The service entrances and elevators make you realize that you are part of the lower class, and I guess in that the architects have succeeded in some perverse way. I mean, you feel like a service person when you are in them—you know where you are and why you're there. It's very humiliating—as is being treated like shit by the owners and the doormen and everyone else—but it makes a certain amount of sense, architecturally. I just wish I could make every architect who designed a small elevator or a dangerous service entrance come on the truck with us for one day, so I could show them what idiots they are. I have a real distaste for architects now. Look at all the ugly buildings in New York City and remember: they are worse on the inside.

It is funny how my view of certain artists—and of the art world

in general—has gone down the toilet from doing this job. I guess that I think there are just too many people making art. And most of the art just isn't very interesting. It's depressing. So I am trying to find another job right now. I really do not want to work in the art world in any capacity anymore because it does not pay enough money and because I'm just kind of sick of it.

But, you know, I have a studio at home and whenever I get the chance, I try to work. So I guess I haven't completely lost my interest in art. I don't get much time to do it, maybe once a week or so, and I have not actually painted in two years, but I have been doing these drawings that are really small. I still do it because I like the activity of making something. Although, I suppose I could do something else and be a lot more satisfied.

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mental picture is as vivid as ever, of one who was, through so many years, my ideal child-friend.

I have had scores of child-friends, since your time: but they have been quite a different thing.

However, I did not begin this letter to say all that. What I want to ask is — would you have any objection to the original M.S. book of "Alice's Adventures" (which I suppose you still possess) being published in fac-simile? The idea of doing so occurred to me only the other day — If, on consideration, you come to the conclusion that you would rather not have it done, there is an end of the matter. If, however, you give a favorable reply,



I would be much obliged if you would lend it me (registered post I should think would be safest) that I may consider the possibilities. I have not seen it for about 20 years: so am by no means sure that the illustrations may not prove to be so awfully bad, that to reproduce them would be absurd.

There can be no doubt that I should incur the charge of gross egotism in publishing it. But I don't care for that in the least: knowing that I have no such motive: only I think, considering the extraordinary popularity the books have had (we have sold more than 120,000 of the two) there must be many who would like to see the original form.

Always your friend, C. L. Dodgson

## 4

# Art in the System of Proletarian Culture

### *Methodology*

The question of proletarian art is a question of a particular system of art, subordinated to the general system of proletarian culture. And the question of proletarian artistic *practice* is a question of how such a practice, in all of its elements, would coincide organically with the methods of ‘social building’ applied by the proletariat.

If we analyze the various aspects of artistic creation, we will see that there are four problems in the practice of art: 1) artistic technique, 2) collaboration in art, 3) ideology of artists, 4) art and everyday life.

We will have to examine all of these spheres in the subsequent pages. The more specific question of so-called ‘depictiveness’ in art will be discussed separately.

### *Technique*

At a time when the entire capitalist society is being built on the highest, latest advancements of its technical achievements – the techniques of mass production (industry, radio, transportation, newspapers, scientific laboratories, etc.) – bourgeois art continues to remain principally craft-oriented

and is forced, because of this, to isolate itself from the social practice of humanity in the realm of pure aesthetics. Even in the so-called artistic industry, where the bourgeois artist is supposed to come into contact with material production, he continues to hold onto his craft skills: taking an already produced object, he decorates it using the method of 'sketching', and brings the aesthetic devices of the studio into the factory. The painter, the poet, the musician and others are all craftsmen: bourgeois society cannot imagine any other kind of art. Bourgeois society believes that the engagement with art, and artistic creation, means creating craft products, using craft instruments and devices. The solitary master is the only type of artist in capitalist society – the specialist in 'pure art', who works outside the immediately utilitarian practice, as the latter is based on machine technique. This is the origin of the illusion that art is an end in itself; from here originate its bourgeois fetishes.

The first task of the working class in art is the eradication of the historically relative boundary between artistic technique and general social technique.

In order to accomplish this, before anything else, it is necessary to change radically the classification of the arts and their place in the cultural whole. Bourgeois aesthetics unified all types of art into a single group, differentiating them based on purely formal features. Poetry appeared in the same category as music, theatre, painting (i.e., easel art), then there were the so-called applied arts ('embellishment', fashion); all of these together were juxtaposed against the rest of human activity, as the artistic against the non-artistic. Meanwhile, when objectively analyzing the different types of art, it turns out that each one of them has something in common with the corresponding types of utilitarian practice. It is this

commonality, namely the organizable *material* in a given art that should become the basis of artistic classification.

The painter is someone who knows how to master paints, the poet – how to master speech, the film director – how to master human actions, and so on. Only this kind of approach can help find a bridge between art and life in the broad sense of the word. Then it would be necessary to view the art of painting as a special branch of paint production, the art of speech – a branch of literary production, and so on. From this angle, theatre would appear as a stage form of organization of human action, chamber music – a ‘spectacular’ form of organization of acoustic material, and so on. Consequently, any utilitarian production includes in itself a special realm of artistic labour; this was never directly acknowledged or applied until now. Poetry and journalism, theatre and street performance, painting a wall and painting a painting – these were considered not only unrelated; but even opposed to one another (‘I am not a publicist’, the bourgeois prose writer would say arrogantly; ‘I am not a wall painter’, the bourgeois painter would declare with the same arrogance).

Proletarian monism<sup>1</sup> must break away from this kind of opposition; on the contrary, art must be seen as the highest type, as the maximally qualified organization in every given sphere of its application, in every given realm of general ‘social building’ (as we recall, the word ‘art’ is derived from the word ‘skill’).

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1. Proletarian monism was coined by the philosopher and a founding member of the Bolshevik Party, Alexander Bogdanov, and refers to the notion that collective labour is the origin of all ‘elements of experience’ which human subjects possess and organize, and is opposed to ‘bourgeois dualism’ (eds).



Bourgeois art 'knew' a narrow series of devices and forms (painting, verse, sonata, play, statue, palace, etc.); all other technical devices and material forms were considered to be either 'low' and 'peripheral' (parties, feuilletons, posters, etc.) or non-aesthetic (newspaper articles, sport, objects, etc.). The tasks of artistic creation were divided in a similar fashion: there were 'high', 'spiritual' and 'low' (utilitarian) tasks. The bourgeoisie recognized only a few forms of creation as 'real', 'authentic' art – namely, those that were not directly connected with social practice, that stood above life 'untarnished', as it were, by its 'dirty' toil (see, for example, Pushkin's poems 'The Poet' and 'The Rabble'). The working class must put an end to such aesthetic gourmandism, investing artistic labour in all kinds of toil, and use purposeful techniques to organize the necessary forms that society needs.

*The fetishism of aesthetic devices, forms and tasks must be eradicated.*

And this concerns first of all art's materials. Bourgeois artists had an exclusively specialized, traditional selection of materials considered to be 'worthy' of art. Painters worked with oil paints and watercolours, ignoring the enormous, unencompassable richness that the colour surfaces of the bodies of nature have to offer. Sculptors preferred bronze and marble, while the artistic trades favoured crystal, silk, velvet and other luxury materials. Only these materials appeared to be 'beautiful' and aesthetic to the traditional bourgeois consciousness. And poetry was ruled by a special set of 'poetic' words and expressions (such as 'stallion', 'bliss', 'rapture', 'languid', etc.).

The proletarian artist must aspire to organize any kind of material creatively, be it noise in music, street words in poetry, iron or aluminium in art, or circus stunts in theatre.

*The fetishism of aesthetic materials must be eradicated.*

All of this will be possible only if artistic technique breaks away from its current backwardness, if it rises to the level of the technique of material production, and if the proletariat eliminates the insularity of the aesthetic instruments of labour. Individualism in bourgeois society does not allow for even the consideration of machine technique or scientific-laboratory technique in art. It would violate the 'freedom' of creation, according to bourgeois aesthetics. Meanwhile, the question of instruments is a social question: the brush, the violin, etc., are the monopolized and fetishized instruments of creation only in an individualistic society. This restriction does not apply to the proletariat, the class of conscious-collective producers. In its hands the machine, the printing press in polygraphy and textile printing, electricity, radio, motor transportation, lighting technology, etc., can become versatile but incomparably more powerful instruments of artistic labour. Thus, the revolutionary task of proletarian art is the mastery of all kinds of advanced technique with its instruments, with its division of labour, with its tendency to collectivize, and with its methods of planning. A unique 'electrification' of art, engineerism in artistic labour – this is the formal purpose of contemporary proletarian practice.

*The fetishism of aesthetic instruments must be eradicated.*

Only such technical tendencies can turn art into the creation of real life, and allow the artist to become a real and equal collaborator in the task of 'social building'. Drawing on a technique common to the other realms of life, the artist is governed by the idea of purposefulness, processing materials not for the interest of subjective tastes, but according to the objective tasks of production.

Bourgeois art was, of course, not devoid of the idea of purposefulness, but there purposefulness was employed on purely aesthetic grounds – a work of art had to be purposeful only for auditory or visual contemplation. The focus was on the so-called purposeful harmony of forms, on compositional purposefulness; the product of art had to ‘please’, i.e., it had to satisfy the subjective, fetishistic, formally cultivated taste. The purposeful meant ‘beautiful’, and ‘beautiful’ meant anything that impressed the consumer.

Proletarian art must be built on the principle of the objective – in this case, corresponding with class – and universal purposefulness, which includes technical, social and ideological purposefulness, and which subordinates to itself the processing of materials (constructiveness, economy, consideration of properties) as well as the organization of forms (liquidation of external decorations, old stylizations, illusoriness, traditional clichés), up-to-dateness and adjustment to everyday life.

The question of proletarian artistic technique is the question of socio-technical monism in art.

### *Collaboration in Art*

So far, Marxist thought has not attempted to approach art, the system of artistic creation, as a special realm of socially necessary labour. Unfortunately, the principled differentiation between ‘labour’ and ‘creation’, understood as something purposeful from the bourgeois perspective, continues to dominate Marxist theory and criticism. In reality, such a differentiation exists only to the extent that it is called forth by the class division of a society, where the initiatory-organizational functions are assumed by the bourgeoisie, and its agent the intelligentsia (so called ‘creation’), while the implementa-

tional and partly organizational functions are placed on the shoulders of the exploited classes (so called 'labour').

Proletarian science cannot operate with such a historically relative and fetishized differentiation. From the proletarian, i.e., monist, perspective, any realm of public activity is a form of social-labour activity and must be regarded as such.

Only when we analyse the activity of artists socially and economically – and not psychologically, philosophically or formally – will its true nature, its real, objectively demonstrable properties in a given historical period be clear to us.

If we look at bourgeois art from this perspective, it will become obvious that it is wholly subordinated to the entire structure of capitalism. Just as the capitalist economy is an exchange economy, and capitalist production is private production for the market – so too the bourgeois art 'economy' is an exchange economy and bourgeois artistic production is production for the market, i.e., commodity artistic production on the basis of craft technique. In the late Middle Ages, artists worked exclusively on commission, knew their customers and were governed by his special needs; with the victory of exchange relations, the artist became gradually disconnected from the customer, from his own guild, and in developed capitalist society he has completely and finally turned into an independent commodity producer working for the market – an impersonal, blind, unfamiliar market. So-called easelism is that very materialized commodity, bourgeois artistic production in the form of a product. Any easelist work (painting, piano concerts, etc.) is a commodity-form of art. The artist, who is also a commodity producer, has to make products that would intrinsically have their own exchange value and could circulate in the market, while remaining at the same time the products of individual, craft labour. It is obvious that neither the objects

of material everyday life nor the various applications of artistic labour to the objects of material everyday life (decoration, for example) could be such products, since material everyday life in capitalist society is built on mechanized mass production. This is why easel art emerged in bourgeois society and became its central and commanding realm of creative work. The evolution of artistic forms under capitalism took place only in easel art: architecture was repeating the earlier styles; applied art was doing the same, while fresco painting degenerated.

The economy of bourgeois art did not only individualize the forms of artistic production, but also put them outside of the social process of production, treated them as specialisms, and turned them into pure aesthetic forms. Artistic labour existed as 'decoration', 'luxury' or 'entertainment', and its products were used in the hours of leisure, when one would leave the sphere of 'social building'. Through art one was supposed to forget reality, experience 'pure' enjoyment, attain the highest spiritual pleasure; art provided the 'beauty' that life lacked.

The proletariat will inevitably arrive at the socialization of artistic labour, the eradication of private ownership of not only products (this is only an immediate result), but also of the instruments and means of artistic production. The tendencies of proletarian artistic production, already evident in our day, will be a natural form of artistic production – working directly for the collective consumer and subordinated, in whole or in part, to the entire system of social production.

This means, first of all, that proletarian artistic collectives must enter into and collaborate with the collectives and unions of various branches of production, the materials of which will be shaped by the corresponding forms of art. So, for instance, agitation-theatre joins the state agitation apparatus as an organ of education; the theatre of mass and other

everyday life activities is linked to the institutes of physical culture, communal organizations, etc.; poets join journal and newspaper unions and through them connect with linguistic societies; industrial artists work by assignment in the organizational system of industrial centres, and so on.

Within such a structure of artistic labour, individual artists become the collaborators of engineers, scientists, and administrators, organizing a common product, while being guided not by personal impulses, but the objective needs of social production, and carrying out the assignments of the class through its organizational centres.

Art, as a direct and consciously, methodically employed instrument of 'life-building' – this is the formula for the existence of proletarian art.

### *Ideology of Artists*

The economy of bourgeois art determined both the methods and ideology of creative work in capitalist society.

The solitary artist, who worked for the undefined market, could control only his personal skills in his creative work; in his imagination, art was a means of expressing the creative impulses of an independent personality; 'freely' chosen devices, a personally transmittable tradition, individual inventiveness – these were the sources of his activity. The artist proceeded from himself and only himself. He created objects as he wished, prompted by his subjective taste, his 'intuition', 'inspiration'. He was the master, but he did not know and did not understand the nature, social and technical laws of his mastery, and evaluated his creative work as something either above or below consciousness, as a purely emotional, spontaneous phenomenon.

In other words, the artistic ideology of bourgeois society became the justification of its artistic practice, turning transient artistic forms into the constant and 'eternal' property of every art. So, for example, up till now, bourgeois art history is, with a few minor exceptions, the history of artists (heroes, generals of aesthetics) and not the history of artistic devices (artistic production). Up to this day, art, as something irrational, is positioned in opposition to science, as that which kills, that is 'dry' and rational.

Since every art has a technique, bourgeois art could not do without a certain methodology, without the elementary scientific application of technical devices. It developed a series of 'domestic' disciplines, aesthetic pseudo-sciences, which were literally just ancillary theories, examining the object not scientifically, but from the point of view of a given artistic direction (for example, Impressionist colour theory; the teaching of perspective; musical scales, etc.). The artist was not subordinate to the demands of exact knowledge, but rather science subserviently justified the narrowly specialized practice of the artist. The artist employed not the achievements of social experience, but his personal, professional, relative experience, which nonetheless was elevated to the only 'true' criterion – the absolute. Society and nature in these theories were examined and evaluated from the viewpoint of art. Instead of socializing aesthetics, scientists aestheticized the social milieu.

The spontaneity of bourgeois art is clearly impossible within the system of proletarian culture – a conscious and planned culture. Just as the working class, in its politico-economic activities and in its production programme, subordinates practice to exact scientific formulation (Marxism, scientific organization of labour, etc.), the artistic practice of the proletariat must be built in the same way. The normalization

of the processes of artistic creation, their rationalization and the conscious determination of both tasks and methods of 'art-building' – this is the artistic politics of the proletariat.

The scientific organization of artistic labour and production is naturally divided into two spheres: artistic education and artistic production.

Contemporary artistic educational institutions produce semi-literate specialists, who, for example, do not study perspective from the point of view of analytical and descriptive geometry, i.e., from an elementary-scientific point of view, but rather from the viewer's point of view; or they do not study gesture from the point of view of the teaching on reflex, but from the perspective of stage performance; and so on. In painting schools they study colour not with textbooks of physics but books on aesthetics ('combination of white and black', 'harmony' of colours, etc.); in poetry classes they study the 'laws' of rhythm and other formal elements of poetry with almost no connection to real linguistic material ('right' or 'wrong' rhythm, etc.); in music schools they study everything but the production of instruments, i.e., the most basic thing in music production.

I could present many more examples.

The most telling, perhaps, is the education programme for architects. The focal point of this programme in the contemporary academies of the arts is the history of styles, while technique is viewed as something ancillary, as a means of constructing a predetermined form based on the study of 'styles'. Architects are taught to decorate, rather than build.

The working class must transform these educational establishments into polytechnic institutes where art would be studied based on scientific methods, the laboratories of which would be constructed on the basis of a common technology of



materials, while the methods of work would be subordinated to the technical demands of modernity.

The chemical technologist is no less important for the art of painting, than its constructor – the painter; the building engineer must replace the architect-stylizer; the musician must become in the first place an inventor not of sound combinations but of sound machines; the film director must collaborate with the instructor of physical culture and the psycho-technician, while the poet must collaborate with the linguist.

Such a revolution of methods will not only create a new type of artist, but also a new type of artistic education for all non-artists.

The bourgeois system of education was in all its branches partial, specialized. The young generation was raised in a one-sided way, incapable of either a balanced and plastic resistance to the reactions of the milieu, or an independent choice of profession. The artist was either discovered through tortuous trials, or the path was predetermined for the younger generation (family tradition, family environment).

The initial task of proletarian education is to prepare such human material, which would, first of all, be capable of evolving further in the desired direction, while simultaneously resisting the hostile 'reactions of the milieu', and, second, be maximally socialized. All of these issues are resolved through the monistic and class-based education of people. But such an education is impossible if it does not include, as an essential component, the artistic formulation of activities for children and youth, as art is the type of creation that extends the possibilities of an individual in a collective in the fullest, most harmonious way.

Bourgeois methods of artistic creation are so individualistic, so cut off from the social practices and everyday needs that they cannot be useful for the education of a socially active person. Built on contemplative formalism, on aestheticism, these methods are incapable of organically entering the general system of education. When in bourgeois society children are taught different arts, it is presented as an additional, 'enjoyable', 'higher' and 'extra-curricular' privilege, disconnected from the future socio-utilitarian activity of the person. The child is taught to sing because 'it is pleasant to know how to sing', or because 'he has a voice', or because 'there is beauty in singing'. Usually, everything comes down to tradition: 'it is a custom'. The bourgeoisie does not even suspect that the human voice needs to be generally organized for any kind of function (conversation, speech, report, etc.), that such an organization is unattainable without artistic formulation.

And indeed.

Artists organize everything that people organize at every step of their activity. Colour, sound, word, etc., constitute (in their spatial and temporal forms) the object of every person's activity. Every person must know how to walk, how to talk, how to arrange around him the world of things with their qualitative properties, and so on. But the preparation for such form-organizing practices in bourgeois society is the monopoly of the caste of art specialists. Other mortals are deprived of such means of artistic organization. Moreover, complete disharmony is the distinctive feature of the members of bourgeois society.

The task of the proletariat is to destroy this boundary between artists, as monopolists of some kind of 'beauty', and society as a whole – to make the methods of art education the

methods of general education aimed at the cultivation of a socially harmonized personality.

The current bourgeois methods of artistic creation are completely useless for the solution of the proposed task. So, for example, Dalcroze eurhythmics,<sup>2</sup> which is essentially necessary not just for dancers and actors but everyone, rests not on the study of a person's real, material rhythms in their concrete variability, but on the aestheticized, ossified fundament of abstract musical forms. Even contemporary biomechanics would rather formulate stage performance, than organize a person's real, effective orientation in a material environment. The bourgeois actor knows how 'to show' movement aesthetically on stage, but he moves just as helplessly off stage as all non-actors. Instead of teaching organization of materials in their technical, everyday application, the depictive arts teach the aesthetic treatment of watercolours. Poetry exists for declamation, and not for the organization of common speech. And so on, and so forth. In short, bourgeois art organizes the materials of life outside their practical application; it organizes them not for action, but for contemplation, for passive, static consumption that can only contribute indirectly to the organization of life.

Only after the socialization and technicization of the methods of artistic creation is it possible to introduce those methods into the system of proletarian pedagogy, where they will become an instrument for educating a person who is consciously organizing both the forms of his activity and the forms of the material environment. This means that actor training programmes must be reinvented so that theatre instructors can teach people how to walk in the street,

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2. Dalcroze eurhythmics, which was developed in the late nineteenth century, is a form of musical training through physical movement (eds).

organize holidays, make speeches, behave in given situations. There should be a similar reorganization in poetic training so that instructors of the artistic word could teach the writing of articles, reports, etc. The entire field of art must be revolutionized so that artistic creation could become a means for organizing any sphere of life, not in the sense of decoration but purposive formulation – to an extent necessary for and according to the capabilities of the regular member of society, i.e., within the limits of individual practice (the rest will be formulated by professional artists).

In bourgeois society there are occasionally those who, within given bourgeois forms, introduce aesthetic moments into the practice of life. They are often called people ‘with taste’ and ‘pedigree’, who have ‘style’, a sense of form. But these people are, first of all, solitaires, and second, they are individualists both in their taste and in their style. They follow the general methods of bourgeois art: the principle of ‘decoration’, ostentatious effects, stylization through historical forms that are alien to modernity. They do not fuse their own instincts of form organically with the forms of reality, but try to impose on reality their subjective needs, which brings about a conflict between ‘dream’ and ‘reality’ which is especially common for these individuals (Oscar Wilde is the most acute expression of this).

The working class, which is going to carry out the conscious fusion of the aesthetic with the practical, the formal with the purposeful, will take a different path – the path of objective purposefulness of the formal organization of life, the path of holistic relation and holistic direction of all concrete elements of reality. To achieve the full sensation of reality, to become fully aware not only of the purpose of activity and the technique of its achievement, but also the form, the concrete

realization of reality – all of this means reaching such a state of socio-aesthetic monism where every phenomenon, every object is both constructed and perceived as a live, practicable organism ('construction', as opposed to the bourgeois 'composition'), i.e., is built and perceived collectively.

Only in this way – and no other way – is it possible to achieve in society the concrete monism of world perception and practice – that which is commonly called 'joy', 'creative fulfilment', 'harmony' of life, 'beauty'.

### *Art and Everyday Life*

Any life, including social existence, is mutable, fluid, susceptible to evolution. Its activities continuously evolve in this or that direction – and consequently, the productive forces of society evolve in similar fashion. However, life activities in general and the productive forces of mankind in particular must be somehow stabilised – otherwise there would be a complete disorganization, 'absolute' anarchy.

Everyday life is a form-generating force in the development of social being. Everyday life is a system of more or less stable skeletal forms into which social existence is condensed at any given moment.

In bourgeois society everyday life was formed spontaneously, unconsciously; it ossified into static and conservative forms: established models, etiquette, a tradition of tastes, habits, norms, and manners. Bourgeois society did not generate any specialist organizers and creators of everyday life, organizers who would push everyday life along the path of social development, consciously and systematically change the *forms* of being, based on the tendencies of its *moving forces*. Moreover, bourgeois science decisively rejected the very possibility of

humanity's conscious impact on such phenomena as forms of language, types of behaviour, means of material everyday life arrangement, etc. All of these could have been organized by artists, as artists are the conscious inventors of forms. But as I have already shown, artistic creation in bourgeois society is removed from the sphere of social practice, from the general system of production, and, therefore, from the system of production of the means of consumption that make up the elements of everyday life.

Nevertheless, everyday life in bourgeois society kept evolving, but the evolution was rather spontaneous, unconscious, with jolts, hectic expenditure of huge reserves of energy, inevitably prolonged periods of the overcoming of rigid traditions. The engine of everyday life was mainly technical progress. But the organizers of technique never engaged with the task of forming everyday life; they were resolving purely technical problems, while everyday life was restructured to fit in with the technical reorganization, i.e., it was restructured obliquely, accidentally, without any system. From here you have what is typical of the bourgeoisie – either extreme individualization of the forms of everyday life, or their conversion into fixed models.

What is more, technical progress, while changing the material forms of everyday life, was leaving social tastes and the sphere of pure consumption in a relatively backward state, due to the fact new material forms were being perverted in a reactionary manner, being covered with traditional decorations, chased out of private residences, declared 'anti-aesthetic', and so on. It is curious, for example, that in contemporary America – a model for other countries in the sphere of technique – there is a desperate pull towards archaism in everyday life, towards a stylization after the exhausted European forms of the

Post-Impressionists, etc. Train stations, automobiles, factories were once considered to be 'vulgar' in capitalist society; they used to cover them with 'antique' shrouds, to kill their formal independence. The new technique has begun to win over the social-everyday archaism only after a long interval of time, breaking the forms of everyday life, reorganizing tastes, and creating its *own* aesthetic. This marks the advent of the next phase: the newly emerged forms gain a foothold, become habitual, ossified, and they need to be overcome anew through a destructive, anarchic, method-blind struggle against the 'customary'.

The other organizer of everyday life was art. But as long as it was merely added to everyday life, only decorating it or leading away from it, as long as the easelist, depictive forms merely (illusorily) supplemented everyday life, the organizing role of the artist was either extremely weak and indirect or reactionary. Instead of revolutionizing the forms, the artist archaized (stylization) and sanctified (naturalism) them. He placed an aureole of 'beauty' on everything that had already ossified, instilled love for anything expired or already existing, taught the 'statics' of taste. In cases when art advanced new forms, they triumphed, only after a mutually devastating struggle between different advocates of 'taste', and therefore, they only triumphed partially. The whole history of art over the last hundred years has been a rabid hounding of innovators and misunderstanding and discord between producers and consumers of artistic values. Yet, even after winning, the new artistic tendencies, limited by the narrow field of easelism, could not substantially influence the whole structure of everyday life. Everyday life evolved outside of art, outside of the conscious creation of forms.



The working class, monistically organizing social existence, will be consciously, systematically and continuously changing the forms of everyday life. Proletarian everyday life, which is tightly connected with the evolution of production, is fluid in its tendencies; its focus is not on any tradition but on the maximal fitness, maximal purposefulness of forms, their flexibility and mobility (plasticity). To the extent that the proletariat will master its own activities, to the extent that its organizational actions will spread across all the realms of life – the proletariat will have to move from spontaneity to a normalized change of everyday life. And that is possible only in one case: if artists desist from decorating or depicting everyday life and start *building* it. The complete fusion of artistic forms with the forms of everyday life, the complete immersion of art into life, the creation of a maximally organized and purposive and endlessly creatable being will bring not only harmony to life, the most joyful and fullest deployment of all social activities, but it will also destroy the very concept of everyday life. Everyday life understood as something static, ossified, will cease to exist, as *the forms of being* (as they appear in everyday life today) will change constantly with the change of the productive forces.

The creation of forms will merge with practical creation, and this will put an end to the enormous expenditure of energy; the skeletal chains that were stopping social evolution will crumble, and the tempo of social development will be unprecedented in pace.

To build everyday life means to take equal part in social production – mainly, in the production of the means of so-called productive consumption, which includes transportation, construction facilities, clothes, utensils, practical literature, and so on.

The entrance of the artist into production as an engineer-constructor is significant not only for the organization of everyday life, but for technical development as well. The history of technique shows that its progress was drastically slowed down by the conservatism of skeletal, material forms of the technical product. The engineer-inventors, who are mostly weak in the sphere of formal creation, always had to proceed from existing forms in any technical innovation; the forms evolved slowly, with difficulty under the pressure of technical tasks. A good illustration of this is the history of the automobile: we know that the first automobiles were ordinary carriages fitted with engines; the elements of the new form were created only over time, whereas before that the technical projects were weak and almost did not progress beyond what the old form could offer. The artist-engineer, who invents forms of objects on the basis of organic collaboration with the inventor-technologists, will liquidate the formal-technical conservative energy and free technical development from the regime of the model.

But that is not enough. The problem of socialist production, which has to be solved by the proletariat, is a problem of complete coordination between production and consumption. Until now such a coordination was viewed from a purely quantitative standpoint. More specifically, capitalists spoke about the correlation between the quantity of production and the quantity of demand. Meanwhile, the quantity of labour (value) is the only economic category in a commodity economy (exchange value); in a natural economy, and therefore in the socialist economy, it is the quality of labour (use value) that will be taken into account. In other words, the producers in a socialist society will have to orient their activity towards how their products will function in society – they will have to care

about the life of their products after production, about their qualitative meaning for the consumers.

But the quality of labour is nothing other than the methods of products' formation. The quality of a product is its form, its construction. Socialist production, therefore, has to coordinate the form of products with the forms of their practical-utilitarian use.<sup>3</sup> And this is precisely the task of artistic production – a task that can be carried out only by engineer-artists who simultaneously create the forms of 'everyday life' and the forms of the products they produce.

The activity of the artist-engineer will become a bridge from production to consumption, and therefore an organic, 'engineeresque' entrance of artists into production becomes, among other things, a necessary condition for the *economic* system of socialism, which is becoming more and more inevitable as we move towards it.

### *Depictiveness in Art*

The complete fusion of the social process of production with artistic creation is possible only to the extent to which society will be socialized. This development will attain a creative, artistic form only when humanity develops its productive forces collectively and in a planned way.

So long as society remains even partially unorganized, so long as it preserves at least some elements of spontaneity and unconsciousness in its development, artistic creation will be impossible within the boundaries of these elements, which means that this part of artistic creation will be realized outside of utilitarian 'building', and will be added to it as a supplement.

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3. This problem is already being addressed: the fight for the quality of production.

Regarding so-called 'applied' or decorative art, there is no need to prove that it serves as a supplement to reality: one 'decorates' only what is 'not beautiful' in itself, anything that is directly unsatisfying, i.e., not holistically organized.

However there is another, more widespread type of artistic supplement to reality, the so-called depictive arts (paintings, novels, films, etc.).

This kind of art, with the help of depictive fantasy, with the help of combinatorial ('compositional') activity, allows people to see, hear, feel in an organized way that which is not organized in their own lives, but which compels. Depictive art fulfils in the imagination those social needs that are not realized in reality.

Let me give a few examples.

The entire realm of artistic subjects can be roughly divided into the following groups: 1) depiction of nature, 2) depiction of objects, 3) depiction of the human being, 4) depiction of human activity.

Let's begin with the first one.

It is important to note, before anything else, that no agricultural epoch, i.e., no epoch of practical direct connection with nature, has ever created a single painting, a single literary landscape. Likewise, the peasant art of the subsequent epochs does not know what landscape painting is. Landscape painting appears and develops in art simultaneously with the appearance and development of the urban bourgeoisie, i.e., the class that tore itself away from the practical connection to nature. Since there was a need for such a connection, a pull towards nature, art satisfied this pull through depiction. So, for example, the first painting of the Italian Renaissance, in which the landscape played an important role, coincided in the time of its creation with the first picnics of city dwellers.

And the landscape of the Venetian Renaissance was significantly richer than in other cities because of swampy Venice – the Venetians were passionately drawn to the ‘*terra ferma*’ (mainland), a meadow in a forest was regarded as something very beautiful.

And later in France, where painters served the feudal aristocracy, a landowning class that had settled in the city, the landscape became idealized: their own nature seemed too ‘base’ and French artists derived their landscape compositions from the exotic and imaginary landscapes of the Italians. The pure landscape blossomed only in the epoch of capitalism, when society finally fenced itself off from nature and knew it only from ‘the country house’ life. Initially they depicted forests, fields, mountains, seas, rivers, but when factory production and multi-storey buildings chased the light and air out of the cities, the Impressionists appeared – the depictees of light and air. Landscape painting is dying in our epoch of urban tree planting and garden-city planning.

Next, the depiction of objects.

All epochs of natural and craft economies have almost no paintings depicting objects; people who created real material objects had no need of their pictorial reproduction. On the contrary, they gave people and nature specifically objectal features (Greek sculpture of the sixth century; Italian landscape painting of the fourteenth century, etc.). But starting with the epoch of mercantile capitalism, and wherever mercantile capitalism was in full bloom, we see the emergence of the *depiction* of objects. These depictions were made by bourgeois artists, meaning artists who belonged to a class that distanced itself from production, but which preserved an acute sense of objectal ownership (later this ownership instinct took a monetary form). The individualistic love of the object, the

compulsion to own it, to show it and to see it – found its expression in the works of painters.

The depiction of objects is revived once again only towards the end of the nineteenth century. With the creation of large industrial centres, the development of new techniques, and the emergence of technicism, the world of objects acquired a new aura (Americanism, the pull towards the most advanced material culture) in the eyes of the bourgeoisie (the novels of H. G. Wells). The bourgeoisie loved the object of art to the extent that it was able to sense the tendencies of technical development, which it had not yet really mastered (curiously, the most powerful painter of the object, Paul Cézanne, spent his entire life in a provincial semi-rural town). The artists of the twentieth century who consciously chose the path of technicism, on the contrary, abandoned the depiction of the object and took over the treatment of real materials.

I will mention cursorily some analogous facts concerning the depiction of the human being.

So, for example, in ancient Greece, sculptures of so-called beautiful bodies appeared when the Olympic games – an organization that produced harmoniously developed human beings – were stopped.

The nude body was depicted not in those epochs when it was a part of the common phenomenon of everyday life (for example, Egypt, Japan), but, on the contrary, when etiquette forbade open nudity (for example, the paintings of Rubens in France during Napoleon III, etc.), whereas the pull towards the erotic or sensual unfolding of life in general was very strong.

Portraiture reached its peak in the historical period when persons were maximally atomised, in the period of extreme individualism (the sixteenth century, or the end

of the nineteenth century); the artist's portrait gave people the opportunity to experience another, different personality, thereby satisfying the heightened interest in the life of another person – an interest that could not be satisfied in practice.

The same could be said about the depiction of everyday life in art: the more disorganized everyday life became, the more disharmonious or further from people it was, the more there was interest in it, and, hence, art focused more on the depiction of everyday life (Dutch genre painting, the Itinerants, etc.). It is understandable, therefore, that bourgeois artists frequently portrayed the so-called 'folk' or 'aristocratic' everyday life. The purely bourgeois depictions of everyday life have dominated for only a few decades in the nineteenth century – the epoch of the dissolution of everyday life, when the city had not yet collectivized masses of people (the artistic development of this period at a time that saw the triumph of Manchesterism is not coincidental). Artists harmonized in depiction that which was disorganized in the experience of the social layer that they were serving.

These facts bring us to conclusions that are extremely important for understanding the meaning of artistic creation.

Since art does not 'reflect' life, as it is commonly thought, but rather supplements it, since the artist harmonizes through one or another device what is not harmonized in reality – it means that any type of depictive art represents, in the very rationale of its social task, a rearrangement of reality, its transformation. It means that the role of the depictive artist is to take the elements of life and change them in his own way, bring them out of their usual everyday context in order to let us experience them anew. Thus, authentic naturalism, 'truthfulness' in art is a myth that has never been and will never be realized. 'Real' depictive art is a *contradictio in adjecto*, and so-called 'realism'



is merely a special mode of artistically changing reality – a mode, by the way, that is used unconsciously.

This is why charging art with the task of fixing reality (for example, the reflection of everyday life) is anti-scientific and practically ineffective. Although it is true that, in spontaneous societies, depictive art was a means for concrete cognition of reality, this type of cognition was both partial and subjectively distorting. As soon as technology created methods for exact description and measurement, they squeezed art out of its cognitive positions: photography and film have killed portrait, landscape and genre painting, while journalism has killed the literature of everyday life.

The proletariat must obviously know life not only abstractly (scientifically), but also concretely, in all its reality. But for the proletariat this is not a question of art, as some arbitrary beginning, but a question of the purposive, precise, scientifically planned organization of life. The reflection of everyday life is a problem that must be solved within the field of science (dialectical method) and technique: photography, cinematography, the phonograph, museum, literary protocols of everyday life – in other words, an objective fixing plus a dialectical montage of actual facts, instead of a subjective combination of made-up facts on which depictive art is constructed and without which it is unthinkable.

Regarding depictive art – its survival depends upon the survival of social disorganization. If, in a socialist society, unaccomplished goals will be technically prepared and scientifically analyzed, in a partially disorganized society there will always be groups demanding a concretization of tasks and their imagistic realization, even with the help of fantasy. Besides this, the disorganization and partial ossification of everyday life will generate the need to supplement the

everyday with forms of depiction. In other words, before the advent of socialism, the proletariat must use depictive art as a special class-organizing profession.

The bourgeoisie employed art unconsciously, without really understanding its supplemental social role. The proletariat, on the contrary, must consciously approach depictive art, having in mind its true nature. Instead of obfuscating the supplemental function of art, we must genuinely reveal it – otherwise, it would be an illusory withdrawal from reality, a harmful self-deception, a pseudo-life convenient for the bourgeoisie, but dangerous for the class of real builders. The working class must introduce into the task of art the conscious laying-bare of the organizing function through the very *form* of the works – a conscious utilitarianism.

Since the art of depiction supplements reality, it is necessary to make this supplement actively class-based. However, actively supplementing art is nothing other than agitational, propagandistic art: it propagandizes what the organizers desire, but what has not yet been realized.

Bourgeois depictive art was easel art; it rested on the self-sufficient fundament of individualistic forms and was intended for contemplation. Proletarian depictive art, as long as it is conceivable, must tightly connect with social practices and turn into an art of social impact, i.e., into an art that would seek to trigger specific, concrete acts. However, it would not suffice to connect the forms of proletarian art with ‘proletarian building’ only thematically. It is necessary for these forms to penetrate directly and materially into the workers’ everyday life, revolutionizing it from within. It is necessary not to take the workers’ everyday life onto the theatre stage, but to extend the theatre stage into everyday life. Instead of salon romance songs we need the emergence of songs for mass dissemina-

tion in everyday life. The proletarian artist must be the equal builder of everyday life and not a priest of art. It is necessary for him to be a model for every worker, so that the products of his labour and the methods of his activity are adopted everywhere.

Revealing the devices of artistic mastery, the liquidation of its fetishistic 'mystery', the transmission of devices from the artist-producer to the user – this is the only condition that will help to erase the centuries-long boundary between art and practice. Artistic products, existing in everyday life and evolving along with it, no longer stand out as 'unique' artefacts and are not conserved as absolutes. The obsolete object will be replaced by the new one; the fetishism of art will collapse, as the 'mystery' of artistic creativity will be revealed and understood henceforth as the highest form of mastery.

Naturally, this kind of revolution in artistic worldview revolutionizes the very consumption of artistic values. The work of art will be accepted not because it responds to the established formal tastes (bourgeois canons), but because it will be made masterfully in the given case and for the given task.

Such a revolution also necessarily brings about the destruction of museums as storehouses of 'eternal' individual values. Instead of museums there will be general scientific repositories with a historically necessary and a pertinent selection of examples. They will not admire and copy objects in museums, but conduct research.

\* \* \*

Whether art can survive in a socialist society is a separate question in relation to the general problem of depictive art. Based on what has already been said, it is possible to claim

## ART IN THE SYSTEM OF PROLETARIAN CULTURE

that in an organized, holistic social system depictive art, as a separate, specialized profession, will wither away. Unrealized social needs will be prepared technically and scientifically in a planned and conscious manner, not in a compensatory fantasy.

And yet, as absolute organization is practically unattainable, and as the elements of disorganization remain in the private lives of the members of socialist society, it is possible to think that depictive supplementation will remain under socialism as well, but it will transform into a purely personal, not fixed, form of self-exposure in social everyday life. In such artistically organized self-exposure and communication, the human personality will apparently compensate for its partial discontent. Depictive art will also be preserved in children's creation, repeating in the individual evolution the evolution of mankind. Both cases will be governed by the improvisational method of creation, made possible due to the harmonious upbringing of the personality in a collective.











STEERING  
THE  
CRAFT

4



*Exercises and Discussions on Story Writing  
for the Lone Navigator  
or the Mutinous Crew*

URSULA K. LE GUIN

THE EIGHTH MOUNTAIN PRESS  
ASTORIA, OREGON • 1998

## REPETITION

**A** GAIN I AM INCLINED TO FAULT JOURNALISTS AND SCHOOLTEACHERS, however well meaning, for declaring it a sin to say the same word twice, driving people to the thesaurus in desperate searches for farfetched substitutes.

Repetition can indeed be awkward when a word is emphasized for no reason: "He was studying in his study. The book he was studying was Plato." This kind of thing comes of not listening to one's writing (and from the long thinking-pauses that occur while writing, so that you've forgotten the last sentence when you start a new one.) Everybody does it. It's easy to fix in revision by finding a synonym or a different phrasing: "He was in his study, reading Plato and making notes," or whatever.

But to make a rule "never use the same word twice in one paragraph," or to state flatly that repetition is to be avoided, is to throw away one of the most valuable tools of narrative prose. Repetition of words, of phrases, of images; repetition of things said; near-repetition of events; echoes, reflections, variations:

from the grandmother telling a folktale to the most sophisticated novelist, all narrators use these devices, and the skillful use of them is a very great part of the power of prose.

Prose can't rhyme and chime and repeat a beat as poetry can, or if it does it had better be subtler about it than the first half of this sentence. The rhythms of prose — and repetition is the central means of achieving rhythm — are usually hidden or obscure, not obvious. They may be long and large, involving the whole shape of a story, the whole course of events in a novel: so large they're hard to see, like the shape of the mountains when you're driving on a mountain road. But the mountains are there.

E X A M P L E

9

**"The Thunder Badger" from Marsden, *Northern Paiute Language of Oregon*, a word-by-word translation, slightly adapted by U.K.L.**

He, the Thunder, when he is angry that the earth has dried up, that he has no moist earth, when he wants to make the earth moist, because the water has dried up:

He, the Thunder, the Rain Chief, lives on the surface of the clouds. He has frost; he, the Thunder Sorcerer, appears like a badger; the Rain Sorcerer, he, the Thunder. After he digs, he lifts up his head to the sky, then the clouds come; then the rain comes; then there is cursing of earth; the thunder comes; the lightning comes; evil is spoken.

He, the real badger, only he, white stripes on his nose, here on his back. He it is, only the badger, this kind. He, the Thunder Sorcerer, that does not like dried-up earth when he is digging, when he is scratching this way. Then raising his head to the sky, he makes the rain; then the clouds come.

"The Thunder Badger" is sacred or ritual narrative, an oral form that predates the distinction of prose from poetry. All such narration is completely fearless about repetition, using it openly and often, both to shape the story and to give the words their due majesty and power. This Paiute story isn't heavy-duty sacred, just ordinarily sacred. It should be told, like most stories, only in the winter. I apologize for retelling it out of season, but it really must be read aloud.

Folktales often repeat themselves exuberantly, both in the language and in the structure: consider "The Three Bears," with its cascade of European triads. (Things in Europe happen in threes, things in Native American folktales often happen in fours.) Stories written to read aloud to children use a lot of repetition. Kipling's *Just So Stories* (see Example Two) are a splendid example of repetition used as incantation, as a structural device, and to make you and the child laugh.

Repetition is often funny. The first time David Copperfield hears Mr. Micawber say, "Something is certain to turn up," it doesn't mean much to David or to us, but by the time we've heard Mr. Micawber, forever hopeful in his incompetence, say the same or nearly the same words throughout the long book, it is very funny. The reader waits for it, as for the inevitable and delightful repetition of a musical phrase in Haydn. But also, every time Mr. Micawber says it, it means more. It gathers weight. The darkness underneath the funniness grows always a little darker.

Structural repetition is the similarity of the events in a story, happenings that echo one another. It's hard to talk about or give an example of in a brief space, as it involves the whole of a story or novel. If you're familiar with *Jane Eyre*, you might reread the first chapter of it, and think about the rest of it as you do. (If you haven't read *Jane Eyre*, do; then you can think about it, possibly for the rest of your life.) The first chapter contains a good deal of "foreshadowing," the introduction of images and themes that will be repeated throughout the book. For example: we meet Jane as a shy, silent, self-respecting child, the outsider in an unloving household, who takes refuge in books, pictures, and nature. The older boy who bullies and abuses her goes too far at last, and she turns on him and fights back. Nobody takes her part, and she's locked in an upstairs room that she's been told is haunted. —

Well, grown-up Jane is going to be the shy outsider in another household, where she'll stand up against Mr. Rochester's bullying, finally be forced to rebel, and find herself utterly alone. And there's an upstairs room at Thornfield which is, indeed, "haunted." The first chapters of many great novels bring in an amazing amount of material that will be, in one way and another, with variations, repeated throughout.

The similarity of this incremental repetition of word, phrase, image, and event in prose to recapitulation and development in musical structure is real and deep.

## EXERCISE FOUR: PARTS 1 & 2

### AGAIN AND AGAIN AND AGAIN

I can't suggest "plots" for these; the nature of the exercise doesn't allow it.

#### ▲ **Part One:** Verbal Repetition

Write a paragraph of narrative (150 words) that includes at least three repetitions of a noun, verb, or adjective (a noticeable word, not an invisible one like "was," "said," "did").

This exercise can easily be done in a group as in-class writing. (If you read it aloud, don't tell people what the repeated word is; do they hear it?)

#### **Part Two:** Syntactic Repetition

Write a paragraph to a page of narrative (200–400 words) in which you deliberately repeat the *syntactical construction*, or the *exact rhythm*, of a phrase or sentence (or more than one) several times.

"Repeat the syntactical construction": if this isn't clear, let me give an example of what I'd like you to do:

*With her hands in her pockets, she walked to the door and faced the stranger. His eyes on her face, he stood there a moment and said nothing.*

Do you see how the second sentence exactly repeats the construction of the first one, even though all the words are different?

You can do the same thing with the rhythm:

*We always went to the mountain in summer. But I never knew what had happened to Bonny.*

The "But" is a swing-word connecting two sentences that are exactly alike in their rhythm. If you don't hear the sameness, say them aloud, chant them, and you will.

Deliberate, exact repetition of this kind is not a technique to use in story-writing; it's an exercise in awareness. It's highly technical, rather difficult, and can be quite satisfying. If you carry it on very long, of course, the prose gets monotonous. The fun is to keep that from happening as long as you can. This is best done by yourself, not in class; it calls for constant checking back and forth and revision while writing, and you don't want to hurry it.

## EXERCISE FOUR: PART 3

### **Part Three:** Structural Repetition

Write a short narrative (350–1000 words) in which something is said or done, and then something is said or done that echoes or repeats it, perhaps in a different context, or by different people, or on a different scale.

This can be a complete story, if you like, or a fragment of narrative.

Any two parts of this exercise, or all three, may be combined into one.

*In critiquing*, you might concentrate on the effectiveness of the repetitions and their obviousness or subtlety.

*To think or talk about after writing:* Were you comfortable at first with the idea of deliberately repeating words and constructions and events? Did you get more comfortable with it doing it? Did the exercise bring out any particular feeling-tone or subject matter or style in your work, and can you say what it was?

I'm not sure how free the nonfiction writer is to use structural repetition. To force unlike events into a repetitive pattern certainly would be cheating. But to seek for likeness, for pattern, in the events of a life surely is one of the memoirist's goals? All this is worth discussing and thinking about.

Look for examples of structural repetition in fiction and non-fiction (and if you have a group, share and recommend them). An awareness of how repetition and echoing contribute to the structure and the pattern of narrative can add greatly to your appreciation of a good story.

17



*We completed the voyage without succumbing*

*to the temptation of opening*

*the box of candy.*





## Journal of American Culture

the canonical “Do not fold, spindle, or mutilate” are lost in the mists of time.

“Do not fold, spindle, or mutilate.” Folding seems clear; you might fold a card to fit in an envelope, or a pocket. But you’re not supposed to crease these cards; that would jam the machine. Punch cards aren’t to be used in *your* ways, for *your* purposes, but for those of the company that issued them. “Spindle” is the word that most confuses people today. Spindling is an old filing system; a clerk would have a spindle, an upright spike, on his or her desk, and would impale each piece of paper on it as he or she finished with it. When the spindle was full, he’d run a piece of string through the holes, tie up the bundle, and ship it off to the archives. (The custom still survives in some restaurants; the cashier spindles the bills as customers pay.) But you shouldn’t spindle the cards: they are part of someone else’s system of paperwork, not your own; they demand special attention.

“Mutilate” is a lot stronger than the other words. It expresses an angry intention on the part of the mutilator. From the viewpoint of the punch card used, it suggests a fear: people might take out their frustrations on their punch cards. (Indeed, punch cards *were* mutilated. You could buy machines advertised to “recondition mutilated punch cards” [*Data Processing Annual* 45].) Why would people mutilate punch cards? Punch cards were the interface between the public and the billing system. Metaphorically, they were where the public meshed with the corporate world. They became symbolic of the whole system. Earlier, it had been the machines that were the focus of attention; in the 1960s the cards took center stage.

## THE GLEANERS

Today was disgusting. Not unlike yesterday, but today had a supremely fucking elevated vulgarity. Like pulverized livestock dripping with shit and sex. Disgusting stuff. Think Caroline Shneemann's *Meat Joy* performed in the jungles of the 1965 Siege of Plei Me, or behind the hanging blue tarps at The Cock on Avenue A.

A better man might be bothered by it all, and almost anybody is a better man than me, so fuck it. Cunt them all. Kick their muffs in. Smash their dicks into their throats.

Hi, I'm Darren. I'm driving around and listening to some tunes. I stink of cow intestines, fat and garbage and I'm covered in blood.

*Ain't know use in sitting wondering why, bitch.  
If you don't know by now  
Ain't know use to fuck and wonder why, babe  
It'll never do somehow  
When the rooster crows at the ass-crack of dawn  
Jiz through your window and I'll be done  
You're the reason I'm travellin on  
Don't cum twice it's alright*

I fucking love Bob Dylan but fuck him, right? That's what love is, right? Repeating death, over, over, over again, in bite-sized chunks of fuck, fuck, fuck again. Giving a little afterlife to the only thing that means anything to you. Right? Six inch death stab. Dig your death-prick into a warm cunt-grave and fuck the only thing you give a fuck about. Yeah, that's right. Oooh baby, that's right. Right there. Harder. Faster. Make art. Make cum. Make art cum. I love art. I love to see it. Naked on a gallery wall. To create it. But(t) fuck art. Right?

Today marks the six-month anniversary of a game-changing performance we staged in the Gagwater lobby. Me and the other Gleaners had been planning it for weeks. At the time, they had two large Ed Ruscha works flanking the marble entrance to their Madison Ave location and I was eager to perform a fiendish *Motif In Light*. The other members of my performance group all had their own ideas of what this performance should be, which caused quite a bit of contention during the planning process, and ultimately proved to be the first crack in the unity of our little troupe.

The Gleaners have five primary members and we all have our distinctions and idiosyncrasies and we are all stone cold motherfuckers. Who's up?

Jamie H Christ, our youngest performer at 22, loves all things Art Povera, particularly the anarchic freedom of Jannis Kounellis. He was a feared and successful art-handler before finding his true calling as a Resistance artist. His skill at planting listening devises brought him to the attention of the Resistance where he successfully planted bugs in the offices or residences of Amy Cappalazzo, Julian Schnabel, Thelma Golden, Marc Payot and Emmanuel Perrotin. On his last day working as an art-handler, Jamie set fire to a 17 ft box-truck carrying the entirety of David Zwirner's Lisa Yuskavage show and rode the top like a surfboard as it crashed into the brick wall surrounding the old seminary on 10<sup>th</sup> ave. His brother, Andy, who was driving the vehicle, is still locked up in the seminary's on-site prison.

Josephine Bonaparte, 27, is a total stan of Marina Abramovic and her performance of *Balkan Baroque* using the bones of the cast Fox and Friends is credited with ending the years long "Fake News Siege". She emigrated from Haiti in the aftermath of the 2010 hurricane and settled in New Jersey. The only records of her existence come from a restraining order against her by Trech from Naughty By Nature in 2012. Otherwise she is a ghost. She once told me a story, after a long night of champagne, mollie and blow, about her work as a model for a series of XXX-rated paintings by William Bigaud, which were commissioned by then-President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. In the paintings, Josephine, barely a teen at the time, would pose in vividly obscene tableaux involving look-alikes of Bill and Hillary Clinton and other administration officials, most notably Zoe Baird and Kimba Wood. The fallout from the discovery of these paintings was whitewashed by the US media as "Nannygate", but it is widely believed to have been the root cause of the CIA backed paramilitary coup which sent President Aristide into exile. Not only do I believe the story is true, I also believe Josephine left out some of the more scandalous details.

Mitchel Hines, our sole septuagenarian member, was old school, into Cabaret Voltaire, not particularly concerned with conceptual purism as long as there was nihilism, disorder and an opportunity to howl his Huelsenbeck chants drunkenly through a megaphone. Mitchel had become quite famous as a Commander in a Blackwater Tactical Support Team, known for his love of art and brutality. In 2011, viral videos appeared of him dragging Quaddafi's mangled corpse down Al Jamahirriyah St chanting a famous quote from Tristan Tsara, "Dance, dance my beautiful insouciances! The world burns and you laugh, with forced laughter." The videos were ultimately used as evidence of Blackwater's involvement in the Arab Spring uprisings. Reportedly he stayed in Tripoli for

years after the coup, having been dishonourably discharged from Blackwater, living in the subterranean rubble of the old Finance Ministry, and founded a community of performers based around the tenets of the Dada Manifesto.

Ana, on the other hand, is obsessed with maintaining the conceptual spirit of the performances she recreates. It drives me crazy. She is excessively violent (which is perhaps her most charming feature besides her tits and ass), and has taken to solely recreating LaMonte Young performance scores. She alone has given me more pain than all of the collected betrayals, disappointments, beatings and big-time-ass-kickings of my 33 year life rolled up together like a fist and rocketed into my face.

We ultimately decided this particular performance in the Gagwater lobby would be a democratic menagerie of our personal predilections. A big mistake, it turns out, because the lack of a clearly articulated artistic focus will lead us down a fatal road of missteps, jealousy, violence and heartache.

The Gleaners are slick, you see? We are always dressed to the nines. Not because we are wealthy (far from it) but because we have a calculated tendency to seek out and attack professional art-advisors (primarily, although collectors and salespeople garner a fair amount of our attention). We stalk them, drug them, fuck them whenever possible, and always leave with part or all of their very expensive wardrobes. Just the other week Josphine brought us a luggage case filled with Hugo Boss suits that she took from the yacht of an advisor from Art Agency. We share our clothes and we share our beds and both the sex and threads are top-notch.

The performance at the Gagwater lobby was fated to be the moment when Ana met (and potentially fell in love with, but who knows with her) that son of a bitch salesman from Gagwater. That was the first day I ever doubted in her ability to be our leader, if that's what she is. After that, her performances became more frequent, sloppy and deadly, ultimately culminating in what is now called *The Red Auction* when she shot that bastard Bespoke Downs. Her final betrayal of that fucker Downs was largely seen by the other Gleaners as being an affirmation of her status as leader of the troupe, but not by me. I only saw weakness. Much like a banal, final act in a tired Tennessee Williams play, she's become predictable and dull. If it was strategy then it was botched and ineffective. If it was love then it was a petty bourgeois luxury. Either way, she quickly regained her footing by kidnapping three of the most high-profile art collectors through the manipulation of that other fool, Ray Diviner. She played that poor fucker like a fiddle. It truly was a masterclass on emotional

manipulation. That boy is mostly ego. Easy to toy with. The dumb fuck doesn't even know who his daddy is, even though everyone else in the art world does. Secret fucking trust-fund and the boy who would be king. The boy with the big gallery show. Opens tonight. His coronation. The day has already been long, and, as mentioned, quite disgusting, but the night is jailbait, and there is much work to do.

Let me walk youse guys through it. Starting from the break of dawn.

The white light from the mid-winter sunrise had yet to bless the large stone faces of the brownstones along Malcolm X Blvd. I was already up, dressed and downing my third cup of coffee before the sun rose. I was probably still drunk from last night, but I was dead-set on the day's objective. You see, the Gleaners had planned a performance for the after party of Diviner's Chattergun show. We planned on recreating some of Hermann Nitsch's *Orgien Mysterian Theater* with our three prized prisoners. We'd subject Mr Geffen, Mr Broad and Mr Dicaprio to an onslaught of sensory theatre designed to reduce the mechanisms of it's analysis to a purely material experience. *Music to noise. Language to scream. And spilling paint to opened entrails.* Our plan was to film the recreation of the performance, then have the film projected onto the walls of Bagatelle during the afterparty. Each projection was manipulated to be in the shape of large, hexagonal, "fly-eyes". It is a great plan.

We've only just wrapped up the first part, filming the performance with our three guests, and I am completely drenched in the byproduct of its essential elements. Blood, pork fat, sex, wine, saliva, you name it. The stains on my white lab coat could also serve as a 'pure painting', and potentially be included in a future exhibition (fingers crossed). The brutal celebration reached its orgiastic climax in a mix of crimson blood and the soft organs of livestock, accompanied by an assortment of hand drums, shouts and brass instruments, which provided a pulsating crescendo. Mr Geffen was the first to reach catharsis, followed by Mr Dicaprio then Mr Broad. I really don't give a fuck, but it does make for riveting viewing.

The other Gleaners are getting in position at the restaurant, securing the ceiling mounts for the projectors, synching up the footage, cueing the soundtrack (we decided on a live version of *I'm Sticking With You* where Moe Tucker's vocals are particularly child-like and pure). I imagine Ray Diviner is currently basking in the glow of his glorious installation, pressing the flesh with collectors and high-ranking government officials, completely oblivious to the perils of his immediate future.

You see, Ana's plan was to ambush Diviner and the Chattergun crew while they were feeling relaxed in the triumphant air of the afterparty. After a presumably

explosive entrance, she would “secure” the guests of honor and begin the viewing of our previously recorded version of Nitsch’s ‘action’.

I have other plans.

I imagine Ana waiting, perched in some dark corner or possibly posing as a hostess, and growing restless and impatient, as she waits for the Diviner party to arrive. But the party won’t arrive.

Hear that? That banging? That’s Ray Diviner, in the trunk of my car.

I turn up the volume on my Dylan Essentials playlist to cover the banging from the interior storage of my sedan.

“Look out! The cunts are coming through!

It’s all over now, baby blue!”

My plan was to spoon out his eyes and replace them with snow globes stolen from the MoMA gift shop. Imagine a plastic Frida Kahlo and *The Scream* swirling with glitter, jammed into his empty eye-sockets. Pretty good, right? Maybe I’d leave him in Ana’s apartment so that when she came home, late, having run the whole gauntlet of failure and disappointment, she’d open the door to find him hog-tied on the floor. And then she’d break.

But first, I had a stop to make. I’d need a hand with all of this and I know just the man.

I park my Saab 9000 on 58<sup>th</sup> street, grab a can of WD-40 and my phone and discreetly make my way down Park to 57<sup>th</sup> and ascend the marble stairs to the Consulate General to the Republic of Korea. There is no one at the reception desk, no guard, but when I press the call button for the elevator I swear I hear someone moaning from behind the wraparound desk. I don’t take it to the top floor. I get off one below and creep up the stairs. Stealth like. A fucking puma. I’m looking for someone. Can you guess who?

I spray the lubricant I brought into the hinges on the door to the top-floor stairwell. It drips down the hinge and the doorframe and I let it soak a bit before spraying some more. Smells so good. Like petrichor. The door opens noiselessly and I see him by the window, seated in his wheelchair with the scope of a sniper rifle pressed to his eye. His designer suit. The vintage Nikes. The stupid fucking make-up smeared across his nose. I crawl across the floor slowly, like a slug, and slide my body under a bench in what appears to be a waiting room. The window offers a perfect view across 57<sup>th</sup> street, specifically to the private viewing rooms of Phillips Auction House.

The brightly lit rooms of the auction house make for brightly lit targets. The unfortunate attempt by Marcus Dochantshi to create an inclusive and innervated vibe to the auction house ultimately created a sleek, perfectly framed, death-

trap. I squint my eyes and see a finely dressed woman in front of Barnett Newman's *Onement V, 1948*, gesturing to an well dressed man, all behind a large, crystal clean glass window. She is pointing out a minor condition issue, and he leans forward so that his eyes are an inch from the center of the painting, so that his head is perfectly bifurcated by a vertical green painted line.

I glance back at the man in the wheelchair. I admire his steady hand on the sniper rifle and the aim so tight it'd squeeze the jiz from a dust-mite's scrotum. Damn that bastard looks sharp. I hate the motherfucker, but enlisting him to my aide may just be my masterstroke. I see him draw a deep breath and hold it, moments away from pulling the trigger. I lean out from under the bench and rest my chin in my hands and look at him adoringly.

"Yo! Downs!"

"Motherfuck," he says, "Can't this wait a minute? The sublime is now, you know."

I roll myself out completely and brush myself off as I stand, even though I'm still wearing the white lab-coat and even though it's covered in dried blood and guts. He looks me up and down without moving the rifle from its 'ready' position.

"What's that," he says, "Alexander McQueen?"

"I got something you're gonna wanna see, Downs."

"Please, it's Bespoke. Beeee-spoke. But do give me a minute to finish my painting."

"Sure, of course," I say.

He returns his eye to the scope of the sniper rifle and takes another breath. He holds it and whispers, "The sublime...is...now," and squeezes the trigger, sending a high-velocity round out of the top floor window of the Consulate

General to the Republic Of Korea, across 57<sup>th</sup> street, through the large glass window of the Phillips Auction House viewing room, in and out of the head of the finely dressed man examining the painting, and into the center of Barnett Newman's *Onement V, 1948*. The man jolts forward and slides across the painting, leaving a smear of blood across its "zip".

Bespoke lowers the gun and leans his head out of the window for a better look. I hear the woman scream from across the street and it echoes around the thoroughfare.

"Not bad. Not bad at all."

He spins his wheelchair towards me moves into the light. I am finally face to face with a man who I have spent the last six months hating. He is handsome, but lacks that swagger that brought him fame. Being partially paralyzed from the waist down will do that to a man. He begins dismantling his sniper rifle and



packing it in a suitcase.

“You were saying? Something I’d want to see?”

“Yeah. A mutual friend. Well, a mutual interest. He’s in the trunk of my car.”

“Color me intrigued. Help me out here, brother.”

As I walk around him I glance out the window and get a good look at the large Newman painting with the blood streaked across its face and a smile creeps upon mine. I grab the handles on his wheelchair and push him towards the elevator.

“Altered Masterpieces. That’s what I call them. I’m an artist now. This is my thing, my series,” says the former art advisor turned artist, Bespoke Downs.

The elevator doors open and we enter. Bespoke presses the *B – Staff Only* button at the bottom of the panel. The doors slide closed without a sound. I introduce myself.

“I’m Darren Dingman,” I say, truthfully, “I believe you know my wife.”

“You’re wife? Oh. Ha. Your wife. Of course. *Hi, I’m Ana*, she says, Ha, of course, your wife...”

“That’s her.”

“Nice to meet you, Mr Dyingman,” Bespoke says mockingly. You know, Robert Irwin once noted that if you hold up in front of you a red square, on a sunny day, then take it away, your eye will see a green square. It’s how eyes work. Now imagine the same phenomena taking place in your heart. If the red square is love, then when it goes away, what’s the green square? Ana is a red square, Darren, but tell me, what’s the green square?”

The elevators open and I wheel him across an empty parking garage then up a ramp and on to Fifth Ave. I park him behind my Saab and pop the trunk. Bespoke leans in.

“Oh wow. That’s Ray Diviner. Chattergun’s new great white hope.”

“Sure is.”

“What are you going to do with him?”

“I’m going to gouge out his eyes, I think.”

“No. That won’t do. Not both eyes. Just the one. Dim the lights a bit.”

The man in my trunk moans but does not awaken. I slam the trunk hatch shut. I help Bespoke into the passenger side and stow his wheelchair in the back seats. He asks for his briefcase and I give it to him. As we drive away he begins reassembling his sniper rifle. “It’s all I got on me,” he explains, most likely a lie. We take the Westside highway and head south. The radio plays NPR and Terry Gross in interviewing Larry Gagosian. He is explaining to her that despite the abductions of two of his best selling artists, John Currin and Dan Colen, his new Mexico City location is still profitable due to the insurance policies he astutely

took out. Ms Gross in nonplussed.

“You know,” says Bespoke, “when I worked for Gagwater, he took out K&R policies on all of his artists, and on some of his salespeople.”

“K&R?” I ask.

“Kidnap and Ransom. He’s such a crafty business man.”

“Yeah, he’s a legend.”

We hear some pounding coming from the trunk. Our art star has come-to. Just as well, I think, we need to walk from here. I exit at 14<sup>th</sup> street and park on 8<sup>th</sup> Ave. I lift Downs onto his wheelchair and pop the trunk. The look in Diviner’s eyes is dazed, but undeniably filled with sheer terror. “Good day, sunshine,” I say. Bespoke pulls a small syringe out from his wrist bandana. “May I?”

“Go for it,” I say.

Bespoke gleefully jabs Diviner in the arm, causing his eyes to pop open as he springs upright.

“You. I know you. You’re Ana’s friend. From the bar uptown,” Diviner says.

“Ana’s husband,” I correct him.

“What the fuck is going on?”

I pull out a revolver that I’d tucked in my belt and point it at him.

“You’re gonna have a bad day, Ray. Get out. Now. Get the fuck out!”

I grab him by the ear and pull him violently to his feet. He screams but complies. “Bitch,” I say.

“Where to now, friends?” Bespoke inquires.

“The only way to get where we need to go. Down,” I say.

\* \* \*

We take the elevator down to L’exchange market. The only handicap accessible entrance with even a minimal chance of survival is at 8<sup>th</sup> Ave, as the underground market gets increasingly dangerous as you move east towards Brooklyn. The interior of the elevator is a shitty mock-up of a Kusama Infinity Room, with bulbs of light reflecting off of an inch of urine on the diamond plated steel floor. Ray Diviner is behind Bespoke Downs, pushing his chair, as I stand next to them, revolver in hand, silently laughing my ass off. Diviner is scared and submissive. Downs is downright giddy. The doors slide open and we

step out into the nihilistic marketplace.

The western end of the market is reminiscent of Times Square in the late seventies, or like the Bolivian La Paz market (if Bolivians were sadomasochistic mercenaries), and it's quite lovely. The marketplace begins with a rather high-end sex-trade, progresses to narcotics near Union Square, contraband by 1<sup>st</sup> ave and by the time you get to Brooklyn (assuming you survive the 1.5 mile tunnel under the East River) the market opens up to all sorts of illicit wares. I've never actually made it past the Morgan stop, which is best described as a GG Allen concert where all of the audience members are also GG Allen. The Gleaners headquarters is a ramshackle niche near the G train at Metropolitan Ave in an enclave of Resistance troupes know as The New Met Opera. I am taking my trio there to unveil my masterplan when the rest of the Gleaners return. It is just after midnight, and I imagine they'll return around 1 or 2am, dejected and disconsolate.

The whores at this end of the tunnel are fucking marvellous. So hot I can feel my dick jump and twitch inside my jeans. Tits bulging from tight lycra, ass cheeks exposed and enticing, heavily perfumed with hoop earrings. Fuck me. I want them all. They smile and beckon and I smile back and Bespoke nonchalantly rubs his cock and Ray Diviner does nothing at all. The pimps in this area are minor celebrities in their own right, and in fact, quite a few celebrities have taken on a second career here as pimps. Jarvis Cocker, Steve Buschemi, Rod Stewart and Arsenio Hall each have their own stables of top notch rent-a-puss. But even they don't have the popularity, stardom even, as the home grown pimps of L'Exchange. Friday nights will see this stretch of the tunnel as the most happening place in the city. Wall street types mix with politicians and gangsters while perusing the virtues of transsexual sex dolls. Nobody bats an eye at the revolver I am pointing at Ray Diviner's head (quite the opposite in fact, as one of the more famous prostitutes here, a waiflike them known as Le Kate Moss, smiles and says, "Wanna use that shooter on me, sweetie?").

I waste no time on small talk with the girls and urge Bespoke to focus on our business. The odour of perfume from the undoubtedly infected prostitutes gives way to the thick stench of pot smoke and freebasing as we near Union Square. Shouts of *Three for Ten* and *High Octane* bounce off of the tiled walls.

"Hold up," Bespoke says, "let's get lit, eh?"

I shrug and Diviner shrugs and almost instantly Bespoke is handed a blunt by one of the many dealers lining the tunnel.

"Waddup, Downs?" the dealer says as he and Bespoke bump fists casually. We walk and smoke and Diviner gets surprisingly chatty when high.

“Art, like drugs, is a low-level search for god,” he says.

“Oh this is fun,” says Downs. “Art, like wine, has a mercurial essence which makes its quality subject to an individual’s dubious taste. You try, Darren!”

“Art, like the promises of a woman, should be written on running water.”

The three of us laugh and pass the dutchie to the left hand side.

“So, you guys are definitely gonna kill me, eh?” Ray says, killing the vibe.

“Well, definitely gonna blind you,” I reply.

“Definitely going to partially blind you,” Bespoke corrects me.

“Nothing I can do to change your minds?”

“You’ve made your bed, Ray, and you know it.”

“By falling in love with the same woman you bastards also fell in love with?”

“Yes, but also by shamelessly monetizing your work. You see, strategy is a commodity, but execution is an art. We execute people like you, as an art. It’s quite simple really.”

“Do you suppose I’m unaware of my guilt? Existing to enrich the lives of the privileged elite is hardly what drew me to a life as an artist.”

“Well then, Ray Diviner,” Downs mocked, “What was it then. Was it love? Of art? Of women? Of a woman?”

“Fuck you, man,” Ray sneered back, “Yeah, maybe I loved her and maybe I just loved fucking her but you know what? You sorry ass motherfuckers did the same. Downs, we’ve all been laughing our asses off talking about your cripple ass. Just tonight, Ugo Rondinone was laughing, telling me about his sculpture of you at his upcoming Gladstone-Bloomberg Projects exhibition. And you, Darren? You’re a nobody. That girl, Ana, she was a fling for me, a job for Downs, but you, stupid motherfucker, you actually married her. She’s your fucking wife. What did you think, that you two would have a family? Move out? Get a little place out in Hackensack. Is that what you get for the money?”

Diviner broke out into uncontrollable laughter and continued pushing Bespoke Downs’ wheelchair, despite getting smacked in the head by the back of my right hand.

“The fuck you know about love, asshole.”

“Actually, Darren, I think Ray here has a point. It doesn’t seem like much of a marriage, with her running around with other dudes and stuff, you know? I’m not trying to sound all MAGA and shit, but you’re a bit of a cuck.” Downs must be trying to make me angry and it’s working.

“You wanna know about love? I’ll tell you about love. Love comes

straight from the asshole of the devil himself. It's as pure and hot as hell-fire. It wasn't until god got his meddling hands into it that things became all complicated and riddled with monogamy, jealousy, pride, flattery, vanity, and all that ugly shit. Think about it. Sexual desire is one of the few things we are hard-wired to feel, along with hunger, fatigue, and pissing and shitting. Tell me, is it a sin to get hungry? Do you do penance when you wake in the morning? So fuck all that noise. Yes, she is my wife. She is my wife because she is my soul-mate. Without her I am just a rough sketch of a man. When she sees me, when I see her, we only see a masterpiece, not a rudimentary line-drawing. Even though I'm still just a defective, piece-of-shit, half-done scribble, she sees a masterful Rembrandt etching. So our love for each other creates a universe, if only for one another, where we are perfect. Well, if not perfect, then priceless."

We had stopped walking minutes ago but just now realize it.

"Fucking right," says Downs.

"Fucking A," says Diviner.

"But I don't fucking know what I'm talking about. I just drifting through all this shit, anyway."

"Yet here we are."

"Yes, here we are."

"Wait, where are we?"

We survey the area. The narcotics exchange has given way to a more sinister black market. The rotten smell of overripe perfume, drugs and body odor has morphed into gun-bore cleaner and lubricant oil. Tables of glocks, knives, revolvers, semi-automatics, lugers, woodsmen, interspersed with rolls of duct tape, zip ties, balaclavas, jars of chloroform and trihalomethane and other euphoricants make for convenient one-stop-shopping for New York's busiest night-stalkers. Motorcycles gangs, Arabs, Somolians and Triad and Yakuza run this section of L'Exchange, and they do not suffer strangers, which is not a problem for Downs and myself, who regularly spend a small fortune here. Diviner, on the other hand, is catching a few eyes. He is known here. He would fetch a high ransom. We'd have to move quickly and keep our heads on a swivel. We're almost at Bedford Ave and the New Met Opera is only a half-mile from there. That half-mile though, is a gauntlet of some of the most dangerous motherfuckers on the planet, let alone in NYC.

As we pass the remaining stands of heavy weaponry, the lights flicker then go dark. Everything is black. Then a flash. A bang. Bright light. Somali pirates in a semi-circle. Darkness. Light again. Bloods, Crips, gangsters gathering. I pull a knife from behind my lab coat and point my gun in all directions. Arm straight. Taking aim in between flashes of light, darkness, light,

darkness. Enemies drawing closer. Fuck. I blast a round into the air. The darkness clears. Two rows of colorful Christmas lights burst to life throughout the tunnel. The crowd stops encroaching. Still I wave my gun furiously, aware of my five remaining bullets. I am the only one moving. Fuck. The approaching crowd parts and two men step forward from inside the menacing masses.

“Hahaha! Who the fuck are you fucking twats?” I say.

“Hey guys,” says Downs.

Two men, both with remarkably high cheekbones and dreamy eyes, with long braids cascading onto the padded shoulders of their over-sized blazers, confront us.

“Bespoke Downs”, they say in unison, “Baby, we thought you forgot our number.”

“Oh I get it,” says Diviner, “you guys think you’re Milli Vanilli.”

“Been a long time, Bespoke,” they say, “Since the orphanage.”

“Hi Jerome. Hey Landry. Heard you bitches were running security for Chattergun. Driving him around and shit. I’m sure you’re very proud,” Bespoke smirks.

In unison they open their blazers revealing golden NYPD badges pinned to a royal blue lining in their tailored sportcoats.

“New York’s proudest,” they say, “We’ve been investigating Mr Dingman for quite some time now. Your crew has really been kicking up some shit as of late.”

“The Gleaners, motherfuckers. Say the name,” I sneer as everyone rolls their eyes. Fuck them.

“Let’s walk, or roll, I guess. Shall we?” Says Vanilli, I think.

The crowd parts and the wanna-be pop-stars slash real-police escort us through the tunnel.

“We’ve been following you for a week now, Dingman. Knew you’d eventually head back here. Back to the New Met.”

“What the fuck? A week?” Diviner interjects, “You could’ve, you know, stopped them from kidnapping me.”

“Girl, you know that’s true,” Milli and Vanilli sing, “but nobody gives a shit about you, Ray. We want to talk to your girlfriend. Or is it *your* girl, Downs? Or maybe your *wife*, Darren?”

“Join the fucking club,” we all say together.

“Oh, fuck off. The Gleaners ain’t rats. And we certainly don’t work with the fucking pigs,” I say.

“So much loyalty to a woman who has betrayed you all,” Milli observes.

“Not so much loyalty. More like retribution, vengeance, revenge,” says Downs.

“We’re almost there. But this place is totally controlled by Resistance. I’ll be

hard-pressed to get Diviner and Downs through here, let alone you two freaks,” I say, “Unless you wanna start a riot, I’d suggest you fill us in on your plan.”

“You know all that you need to know, Darren, the grundle of the Gleaners. Do your thing. We’ll be watching,” the twins say.

Jerome and Landry start to sing in perfect harmony as they walk backwards into the darkness and out of sight. *Whatever you do, don’t put the blame on you. Blame it on the rain, yeah yeah...*

“That was weird.”

“The orphanage was a very weird place.”

\* \* \*

“Feast your eyes, boys, on the home of the Art World’s fiercest Resistance fighters, The New Met Opera.” I raise my arms like a Barnum and Bailey ringleader as we step into the transfer hub at the Metropolitan Ave station. I gesture towards the stairs. “This way for the Gleaners.” I point across the platform. “Over there you have the Loafing Oafs and the Scab-Exers. Down the way a bit and up the stairs you’ll find Robespierre Bonnard and the Vulliard Vultures. Deeper into the G-train tunnels is where David, Genna, Weiwei and the Killer River Crabs reside. We’d best keep clear of them.”

Truth be told I’m scared shitless of those ruthless bastards. David Hammons has been a wanted man ever since the snowballs he was selling showed significantly more than just trace amounts of Anthrax. Genna Rowlands has been a fugitive since that night at the Oscars when she pulled a reverse Carrie and dumped buckets of blood (from the drained bodies of production assistants) onto the celebrity audience, while simultaneously receiving a lifetime achievement award. Ai Wei Wei, of course, has been in and out of jail for two decades. Some jails Chinese. Some Russian. Some prisons in the UK and America as well. He spent five years in a Carmen Herrera designed *Estructura Encarcelamiento* prison-cell following the merger of Core Civic, America’s preeminent provider of quality corrections and detentions services, and Lisson Gallery. All three of them are living legends. They all fill me with dread.

“Follow me,” I say. “Downs, put that rifle together and keep it ready to shoot. These groups all have spotters watching the tunnels. If you see something stir, shoot it. It may be a rat, or it may be Resistance.”

“Same difference,” Ray remarks.

“To get to the Gleaners, we’ll have to pass the Acconci Youth. They look harmless but don’t underestimate them. Stay close and let me do the talking.”

Just then we all hear the sound of thumping of skateboard wheels rolling against hard concrete. We hear the tail of the skateboard snap, then silence for a heartbeat, then the sound of the wheels rolling faster along the platform; unmistakably the sound of an ollie. We look around but see nothing except flickering lights and filthy white subway tile.

“Guess the Acconci kids know we’re here. Fuck they’re annoying.”

We turn through the connecting tunnel with caution. It is too quiet for my liking. We stop in our tracks (in Bespoke’s case quite literally). Then comes a high-pitched noise. A rising tone of guitar feedback bounces off the tile walls. Volume rises and continues rising. Impossible to tell from which direction the noise was coming from. Then another deeper, lower toned feedback comes blaring from another indistinguishable direction. Then another. All rising in volume. I can clearly picture in my mind a Fender Tele leaning into a Twin Reverb, a Gibson 335 against a Marshall stack, a Ric against a Vox. We search around us frantically. Downs presses the scope of the sniper rifle against his eye and studiously scans the tunnels. The feedback changes to the strum of a chord. An E minor chord. In one down stroke, over and over. Oh fuck. Of course.

“Oh no,” says Bespoke Downs, “A Ragnar Kjartensson performance...”

Three women wearing sparkling gold dresses with guitars slung across their shoulders emerge from the shadows, each strumming an E minor chord, in down strokes, over and over. The echo off of the filthy white tile walls is disorienting. Following the women in the sparkling gold dresses, a group of youths come into view. Dressed in baggy clothes, flannels and Chuck Taylors, with filthy long colourful hair, are the famous Resistance group known as Acconci Youth, each one with a gun in hand. These feared performance artists gained national attention (and earned their moniker) when they live-streamed their performance of *Seed-Bed* backstage at the State of the Union address. They famously commit suicide by intentional overdosing on their 28<sup>th</sup> birthday. They are the Resistance version of spoiled brats. The Gleaners and the AY have a longstanding truce but I still need to proceed with caution as I’m breaking many agreements by bringing Downs and Diviner here.

“Hi, Thirsty,” I say to the tall, slender girl with unwashed blonde hair who steps forward from the group. She is the current leader of the Acconci Youth and calls herself Thirsty Moore. For obvious reasons, the leadership of the AY changes frequently.

“What’s up, Dingman? Who are your friends?” She asks, even though she



knows damn well who my 'friends' are.

"I'm Downs. Beeeepoke Downs. Nice to meet you!"

"They're nobody," I say, "Part of a project we are working on."

"A project, eh? Funny, Ana didn't mention anything about a new project. In fact, she's been looking for Mr Diviner. And just like that, here he is."

"Get out of the way, Thirsty, I'm bringing him to her."

The strumming of the E minor chord has changed to a muted chugging.

"Sure thing," she says but does not move.

"Hey baby," I hear behind me.

Oh fuck. It's Ana. She sounds pissed.

I know the tone of her voice and this is her *I'm being mockingly nice but you're a dead man once we're alone* voice. She smelled great, like a perfect mix of body odor, cigarettes, dried sex and saliva. She claims it is her tribute to Adrian Piper but I know better. I truly love and truly fear her.

Behind her stands Jamie H Christ and Mitchel Hines, both giggling like children and wearing the overly-broad-shouldered blazers once wore by Officers Milli and Vanilli. The blazers are riddled with holes and blood stained.

"What's up Hoss?" Jamie says.

Josephine Bonapart pushes her way through, looks Diviner straight in the eye, turns to Ana and smiles, grabs the handlebars to Bespoke Downs' wheelchair and flips him up into a wheelie. She spins him around and he is laughing his ass off. The motherfucker looks like the cat who sucked off the canary.

Mitchell Hines walks up to Ray Diviner and guides him gently forward, into the surrounding crowd.

"Let's talk, Darren. For real, baby."

Ana takes my hands and spins me around. She smiles, so lovely, and leads me to a utility closet set deeper into the tunnel. Inside we find one large, plush recliner and a small table lit only by boudoir-style lamp. Ana turns and flops down on the sofa, so lovely. She pulls me down beside her, partially on top of her, awkward and emasculating. I put my arm around her but instantly regret it. I thought it would be a power-move to establish dominance but that was not the case. She nestles her head into my chest and re-establishes dominance in her aggressively feminine way.

"Darren, my sweet, have you ever, like, done a dramaturgical analysis of our relationship? Of our love? I mean, like, in an Erving Goffman kind of way. How would he define our current, complicated, situation?"

"We all play-act, I suppose."

Ana smiles.

"The self and the masks," she sighs.

“The staging of everyday life.”

“I love you, Darren. I always have. *That* is the plot of our performance. That’s the way the script was written. Yes, I am performing. I’m just saying my lines. My script says I love you Darren. I always have. But if the theatre is life itself, if the stage is life, then the script is the closest thing we have to a soul”

“Fuck yes. I mean, totally, but then, like, from a symbolic interactionist perspective, a defensive reflex or like, some sort of impression management, could stimulate imaginary yet cohesive explanations to excuse such fucking horrible behaviour in order to escape your disapproval. Which is all I’ve ever tried to do.”

“I was about to close the deal. But you fucked it up, D. We were about to purchase, by proxy, of course, all of the works in Diviner’s show. We were about to be very rich, my love. We were planning to close the deal on the way to the after-party. I had buyers lined up for all of them and I planned to flip them in a week. Then you stepped in. Those buyers just happen to be the same group of collector’s who hired me to kill Diviner in the first place. They were all early patrons of his and were ready to see his auction prices rise. Now, if we kill Diviner, while Chattergun still owns the works, well, how does that help us? How does that advance our plot?”

Ana looks at me tenderly, with wide, questioning eyes. They are so dark, so black, they swallow up time like gravity. “Oh,” I say, “actually not a bad plan, baby.”

Our moment was mercifully cut short by the sharp boom of a gun-shot followed by the crackle of impact against a tiled wall, coming from the adjacent tunnel. “Fuck,” Ana says and jumps to her feet. We pop out of the utility closet to see Bespoke Downs blindfolded, his fucking white bandana tied around his eyes, and a sniper rifle raised and smoking from its barrel. He is surrounded by the three guitar playing women in gold sequin dresses, all strumming E-minor as per the Kjartensson performance, and the rag-tag Acconci Youth, each with a gun in their hands. Ray Diviner is duct-taped to a column about 50 yards down the platform.

“What the fuck, Downs!” I say.

“Oh, you’re still here,” Bespoke says nonchalantly. He raises the rifle and aims it (as well as a blindfolded man can) and says, “A simple line painted with a brush can lead to freedom and happiness.” He points the gun in my direction. He pulls the trigger.

**An excerpt from “To Dim The Lights”**

**By Bespoke Downs**

## Originally published in Vanity Fair Issue #945

The sunset lit the altostratus clouds above Weehawken New Jersey like orange-tinged Guipure Lace in a Valentino gown. It bounced off of the Hudson River like Tiffany diamonds. It kissed the crooked wooden pillars of the piers like a war had just ended, passionate, anonymous and hopeful. The sunset fell upon Chelsea, however, like a drunken whore. Like an eager fuck, strung-out, diseased and poor, the light licked the sleeves of my Saint Laurant one-button noir blazer and gripped its tailored sleeves and notch-lapels. Ana stood by, backlit and silhouetted. I rolled my wheelchair across the roof of Chattergun's 24<sup>th</sup> street space like a mad dog patrolling a junkyard. And at this point I had indeed gone quite mad. Ana leaned my wheelchair back as I fired two Barret REC7s with Remington 6.8mm slugs into the super horny sunset. I sang at the top of my lungs *Waaaallttzzzing Maaatiiilllidaaa! Waaaallttzzzing Maaaaatiilllidaaa!* and blasted more and more rounds into the sky. It was glorious and triumphant. Glorious because I looked amazing. Triumphant because of the scene unfolding in the large art gallery approximately 30ft below me.

It is true that Ray Diviner had been set-up from the beginning, both by his gallery and by his girlfriend, but also by a small group of collectors who had been early patrons of his. Unfortunately for many young artists of his generation, he had fallen victim to an increasingly popular pump-and-dump scheme by art collectors around the globe. This practice, of executing an artist right at the moment his market starts to buzz, artificially creating a peak, causing the price-points of his work to skyrocket, was generally used sparingly for the last 100 or so years, ever since Samuel Augustus Barnett had Modigliani poisoned with the Spanish Flu shortly before his first Whitechapel exhibition. But in the last 12 months alone we've lost two Turner prize winners, four ArtPrize winners and one MacArthur Fellow to this insidious but profitable crime. C'est la vive d'un artiste, baby. What was happening to Diviner, however, was all-together new, and was a definitive escalation of the practice.

Diviner pulled himself off of the polished stone floor of the very large exhibition space with every last bit of spirit he had. He was completely encircled by a dozen or so of New York's most powerful art dealers, some of their staff, and a handful of the aforementioned collectors who had been banking on his untimely death. He was covered in blood, which actually improved the appearance of his embarrassingly affordable Rag and Bones hemp twill one-button suit. He was on his hands and knees, recovering from a ferocious blow from the bejewelled fist

of Barbara Gladstone. Marianne Goodman actually borrowed a particularly cruel BVLGARI two-band bronze ring and laid into Diviner with a merciless right hook. Diviner let the stream of unsettlingly red blood flow freely from his mouth. Matthew Marks was dissatisfied with the damage his low-top Converse were doing so he, like a boss, kicked them off and broke Diviner's cheekbone with an exaggerated foot stomp. Give credit to Alex Logsdail, who got down on his knees to give Diviner an unmistakably British head-but, causing Diviner's sphenoid bone to collapse.

All throughout the punishment, the assembled group of collectors took their turns giving gut-kicks to Diviner's rib cage. He was in some seriously bad shape when LG picked him up by the collar of his blazer and rained down a world of punishment that astounded even Paula Cooper. But it was James Chattergun, the original, truly himself, who gripped Diviner's neck, wrapping his radial longitudinal crease against his throat, and crushed the young artist's windpipe. Chattergun held the lifeless body of the artist by the neck with an unnatural strength, high enough for all of the assembled dealers, collectors and gallery staff, then released his grip. Diviner collapsed to the ground and would never again make another painting.

I don't know for certain the exact moment the artist died, and it doesn't really matter.

There will be more.

Art, my friends, endures.

And high above the brutal scene, on the black-tar roof of the gallery, Ana arched her back against the silver moon as my twin machine guns lit up the drowsy, evening sky.



Giamma  
online



Angharad Williams  
We got more up the sleeve  
I bet you do

23:43

Kunstverein wig 23:44 ✓✓

Haus der kulturen der wig 23:44

Fuck that's a good one 23:44 ✓✓



Message



GIF



Q<sup>1</sup> W<sup>2</sup> E<sup>3</sup> R<sup>4</sup> T<sup>5</sup> Y<sup>6</sup> U<sup>7</sup> I<sup>8</sup> O<sup>9</sup> P<sup>0</sup>

A S D F G H J K L

in order to bequeath to our descendants the explanation, by its antecedents, of the essential event of their time, that event would already have to take shape before our eyes, and there would have to be no real duration. We transmit to future generations what interests us, what our attention centers upon and even sketches, in the light of our past evolution, but not what the future will have made interesting to them by the creation of a new interest, by a new direction communicated to their attention. In other words then, the historical origins of the present in its most important aspect, cannot be completely elucidated, for they would only be restored in their completeness if it had been possible for the past to be expressed by its contemporaries in terms of an indeterminate and therefore unforeseeable future.

Let us take a colour such as orange.<sup>3</sup> As we also know red and yellow, we can consider orange as yellow in one sense, red in another, and say that it is composed of yellow and red. But suppose that, orange being what it is, neither yellow nor red had yet appeared in the world: would orange still be composed of those two colours? Obviously not. The sensation of red and the sensation of yellow, involving as they do a whole nervous and cerebral mechanism at the same time as certain special dispositions of consciousness, are creations of life which have happened, but which could have not happened; and if there had never been, either on our planet or any other, beings undergoing these two sensations, the sensation of orange would have been a simple sensation; never would the sensations of yellow and red have figured in it either as components or as aspects. I realize that our habitual logic protests. It says: "If the sensations of yellow and red enter into the composition of the sensation of orange today, they entered into it always, even though there was a

time when neither one of them existed effectively: they were there virtually.” But that is because our ordinary logic is a logic of retrospection. It cannot help throwing present realities, reduced to possibilities or virtualities, back into the past, so that what is compounded now must, in its eyes, always have been so. It does not admit that a simple state can, in remaining what it is, become a compound state solely because evolution will have created new viewpoints from which to consider it, and by so doing, created multiple elements in which to analyze it ideally. Our logic will not believe that if these elements had sprung forth as realities they would not have existed before that as possibilities, the possibility of a thing never being (except where that thing is a purely mechanical arrangement of pre-existing elements) more than the mirage, in the indefinite past, of reality that has come into being. If this logic we are accustomed to pushes the reality that springs forth in the present back into the past in the form of a possible, it is precisely because it will not admit that anything does spring up, that something is created and that time is efficacious. It sees in a new form or quality only a rearrangement of the old—nothing absolutely new. For it, all multiplicity resolves itself into a definite number of unities. It does not accept the idea of an indistinct and even undivided multiplicity, purely intensive or qualitative, which, while remaining what it is, will comprise an indefinitely increasing number of elements, as the new points of view for considering it appear in the world. To be sure, it is not a question of giving up that logic or of revolting against it. But we must extend it, make it more supple, adapt it to a duration in which novelty is constantly springing forth and evolution is creative.

Such was the chosen course upon which I embarked. Many others opened up before me and around me from the centre in which I had put myself in order to recapture pure duration. But I kept to that one because I had chosen first of all to try out my method on the problem of liberty. In so doing I should be getting back into the flow of the inner life, of which philosophy seemed to me too often to retain only the hardened outer shell. Had not the novelist and moralist advanced farther in that direction than the philosopher? Perhaps; but it was only here and there, under the pressure of necessity, that they had broken through the barrier; no one had as yet bethought himself of setting out methodically “in search of time gone by” (“à la recherche du temps perdu”). Be that as it may, I gave only some bits of information on this subject in my first book and still restricted myself to certain allusions in the second, when I compared the plane of action—wherein the past is contracted into the present—with the dream plane, where, indivisible and indestructible, the whole of the past is deployed. But if it is the province of literature to undertake in this way the study of the soul in the concrete, upon individual examples, the duty of philosophy it seemed to me was to lay down the general conditions of the direct, immediate observation of oneself by oneself. This inner observation is warped by habits we have developed; the chief example of this warping is doubtless the one which created the problem of liberty—a pseudo-problem born of a confusion of duration with extension. But there are other pseudo-problems which seemed to have the same origin: our moods appear to us as though they could be separated, counted so to speak; certain of them, thus dissociated, have as it were an intensity which is measurable; for each and every one of these states we think we can substitute the words which designate them and which ever after will cover them



up; we then attribute to them the fixity, the discontinuity, the generality of the words themselves.

It is this covering that we must grasp in order to tear it off. But we shall grasp it only if we consider first its aspect and its structure, if, in addition, we understand its intended purpose. It is spatial by nature and has a social utility. Spatiality therefore, and in this quite special sense, sociability, are in this case the real causes of the relativity of our knowledge. Brushing aside this veil, we get back to the immediate and reach an absolute.

From these early reflections came conclusions which fortunately have become almost commonplace, but which, at the time, appeared daring. They required that psychology break with associationism, which was universally accepted, if not as a doctrine, at least as a method. They demanded still another break which at that time I only half saw. Beside associationism there was Kantianism, whose influence, often combined with that of the former, was no less powerful and wide-spread. Those who repudiated the positivism of a Comte, or the agnosticism of a Spencer dared not go so far as to question the Kantian conception of the relativity of knowledge. Kant had proved, so it was said, that our thought exerts itself upon a matter previously scattered in Space and Time, and thus prepared especially for man: the “thing in itself” escapes us; to comprehend it, we would need an intuitive faculty which we do not possess. On the contrary, from my analysis the result was that at least a part of reality, our person, can be grasped in its natural purity. Here, at any rate, the materials of our knowledge have not been created, or ground out of shape and reduced to powder, by some malicious genius who has afterwards thrown into some

PAXTON  
1910



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