

OBSzine #3

ART, POETRY, AND THE PATHOS OF COMMUNICATION

EDITED BY RICHARD MILAZZO



Here we are now,
with the lights out,
it's less dangerous,
entertaining you;
here we are now,
we feel stupid and contagious,
entertaining you:
a mulatto, an albino, a mosquito –
our libidos, our denials

– **Nirvana**, corrupted

ART, POETRY, AND THE PATHOS OF COMMUNICATION

EDITED BY RICHARD MILAZZO

- BRUNELLA AN TOMARINI

DONALD BAECHLER

BRUCE BENDERSON

COSTANZA BERARDI

ILYA BERNSTEIN

ROSS BLECKNER

JAMES BROWN

EDWARD BURNS

LAWRENCE CARROLL

PETER CARRAVETTA

SAINT CLAIR CEMIN

SANDRO CHIA

ABRAHAM DAVID CHRISTIAN

KEVIN CLARKE

JILL SILVERMAN

VAN COENEGRACHTS

COLETTE

DAVID DEUTSCH

CHRIS DORLAND

SAMANTHA DIETMAR

CARMEN FIRAN

JOEL FISHER

PETER HALLEY

SUSAN HEFUNA

GEORGE HILDREW

JEFF KOONS
- WAYNE KOESTENBAUM

JONATHAN LASKER

ANNETTE LEMIEUX

ROBERT LONGO

ANDREW MCCARRON

DONNA MOYLAN

VIK MUNIZ

PETER NADIN

PETER NAGY

AGA OUSSEINOV

GIANCARLO PAGLIASSO

ALISON PEARLMAN

ROLANDO PÉREZ

LUCIO POZZI

RICHARD PRINCE

BARBARA PROBST

LUCAS REINER

WALTER ROBINSON

DANIEL ROTHBART

ADRIAN SÂNGEORZAN

HANS-CHRISTIAN SCHINK

ELLIOT SCHWARTZ

JEREMY SIGLER

OLIVIA SMITH

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Art, Poetry, and the Pathos of Communication

Richard Milazzo

I would like to address two extreme forms of *pathos* as they relate to communication: those who simply lie politically, that is, within the specific bounds of the *polis*, which we may describe as a pathetic and shameless act; and those who are the pathetic victims of exploitation (no matter how heartless this description may sound in this particular instantiation), and, as a consequence, feel and are, to varying extents, voiceless, disenfranchised, helpless.

We need not belabor the former, because we know and they know who they are, since they are front and center on the political stage: both the Right and Left Wings (of a governmental beast – David Hume described it as a Leviathan – that can hardly crawl much less fly or get off the ground any longer), and/or the Republican and Democratic Parties, who prevaricate covertly behind closed doors and inside backrooms; and, of course, the 70-year-old-toddler who is currently waxing triumphant as oligarchical leader of the United States, even as he recklessly and blindly dares impeachment (a futile act of justice if not ending in conviction). I will not mention his name, because, in fact, this is all he is interested in: advancing his name and the massive fortunes he and it as a brand hope they will amass misusing the platform of public service, which he is exploiting to the hilt, grossly and grotesquely violating the emoluments clause of the Constitution. There is, of course, his family, as well, who, in the classical style of South American dictatorships, act in his behalf as his surrogates in consolidating his economic power and interests. This last (surrogation), to add insult to injury in the context of the collective political atrocity and nightmare we are experiencing as a nation, furthering the division between Red and Blue States, echoing the color-based racial divide (between Blue and Gray, black and white) of the Civil War and the ongoing self-inflicted wound of its legacy.

It is the other, albeit related, deeper form of *pathos* that concerns us here. For there is nothing pathetically deformed or bankrupt about a *pathos*-driven voice that would forge itself into an act of resistance. What is important to understand clearly here is the content of this drive, not only as it was given to us (etymologically) by the ancient Greeks but by our seemingly inherent (if not innate) impulse to be civilized, which reflects nothing more and nothing less than the desire to become human or, commendably so, *more human*, even where we may view this merely (suspiciously) as a psychological or purely social construction (constructive and constructed motive or motor). That is, as a social construct, it is undeniably not unrelated to Rousseau's social contract. *Pathos* is predicated not only upon the excitement of pity or the evocation of sadness or, more generically, upon the power of stirring into

being feelings of tender or melancholic emotion, it is also based upon the reality of human suffering, whether mental or physical or both.

Accompanying the utter forms of human suffering are the cries and linguistic utterances of it – not their exploitation but their alleviation, however deformed, through *pathos*-imbued and *pathos*-driven forms of communication. Unfortunately, it is often only when these forms are at their most pitiful that they begin to penetrate the skin of the receivers of these cries and calls for help. It is only when they are met, in turn, with the tenderness of empathy and impassioned understanding that they can be fully acknowledged within their capacity to resist the forces oppressing them. When they are not met in this manner, these utterances, these cries, these voices can become fiercely more virulent and even violent, indeed revolutionary or transformative, which speaks to thresholds of pathos and tenderness, helplessness and futility, tolerance and resistance.

The symbolic embodiment of these expressions of grief and joy in art and poetry – but also in music, dance, and the other arts, in general, and even in architecture today, even if this form did not fall within the cathartic parameters of Aristotle's treatise –, as in political science, speaks to these thresholds. While Malevich may speak to the utopic ecstasy and extreme sublimation of human suffering, De Kooning or Bacon, let us say, or in our lifetime, Kruger, Baechler, Gober, and Bleckner, choose to draw closer to the flame, preferring to indulge the sources and desublimation of *pathos*. It is not so much a question of courage but of natural or personal propensity. Which is not to get individuals off the hook, but to suggest that the hook comes in different forms, more subtle or sublime as well as more extrinsic or promiscuous ones. *Techne's* relation to substance is more often than not a quantitative, if not a bulk, matter of degree, determined inadvertently, rather than a qualitative issue of ideological will. In this regard, my aesthetic principles, like my ethical ones – not that these more subjective opinions should matter so much here –, are obdurately *louche*. In any case, it must be clear to anyone here that I am paradoxically more invested in an ontological rather than an epistemological approach to the episteme of *pathos*, wanting to see where, and hoping that, its ideological 'hooker' reality (to be vulgar about it) converges with the reality of experience. Why else conduct such an experiment and expend so much energy?

– Hotel Häupl, Seewalchen, Lake Attersee, Austria,
May 5–6, 2017



Communication and the Via Dolorosa

Saint Clair Cemin

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The idea of “communication” has replaced human interaction.

Communication is a general abstraction signifying an exchange of information between entities. One can speak about “information” and “communication” without sounding absurd or false, while actually, inadvertently, being both. I mean, when the mutual presence of people who know each other, who speak each other’s language, in the same space, is subsumed into a general “communication” scheme involving the pseudo-contact afforded by the internet, then one is getting away from life and going towards the abstract, the automatic, the mechanistic, etc.

Abstractions such as these, which I myself am employing here, are cute but they have nothing, or as little as possible, to do with human reality.

In the beginning of *El sentimiento tragico de la vida* (The Tragic Sense of Life), Miguel de Unamuno makes a crucial distinction between “Man” as a philosophic abstraction, which ultimately means nothing, and the reality of man. (Sorry, ladies, I will keep using “man” as a generic term for both “genders,” and also to refer to the 31 new genders recently introduced into contemporary discourse.) The reality of man (and woman) is this one, the one I see in the mirror, sometimes with dismay; it is the body, the bones, the guts, and even the mind of one real and indivisible “me.” This individual – in Greek, *atomo*, which means the same, that is, “indivisible” – is not an abstraction, and I myself, as well as my friends and loved ones, am a witness to that. When “man” is generalized, then he is primed to be herded, exploited, and if necessary, eliminated, bombed, displaced, etc. The difference between the love of “Humanity” and the exploitation of humans by other humans becomes nullified because the concept itself of Humanity is dehumanizing. No one can love an abstraction, but one can use that absurd term, that absurd idea, to manipulate others.

We have seen this manipulation at work in the Utopian movements of the last century (namely Nazism and Communism), and we see this kind of thing happening again in the contemporary world, seducing young minds in our universities (which we may describe as a soft form of Fascism). Such minds, which, because they are young, could be guided into being together, into enjoying each other, the different races and cultures, but, on the contrary, they are being herded into GROUPS that are supposed to have “feelings” and “thoughts” about other GROUPS, grounded in fear, exclusion, the fear of exclusion, and into GROUP-THINKING. But groups don’t think, people do. Ideology takes hold of a young mind like a paranoid-delusion does the mind of a psychotic person. All of the sudden this girl, for example, is no longer this amazing human being, she is a “Privileged White,” a “JAP,” an “African American,” or whatever label is used to define her, the use of which will nullify her and replace her not even with a stereotype but with a word, a label, used to identify her as part of a certain group. How can one relate to a word? Can you kiss a word, can you talk to it? Does a word understand words (let alone caresses or innuendoes)?

But this is the point at which the ideologue creates a vacuum inside himself by extirpating *pathos* and replacing it with a mechanism. The replacement is never satisfactory, and the ideologue must proselytize in order to fulfill that hungry void inside himself. Love comes from the Soul, and the Soul cannot be diminished, only replaced. The ego-intellect, which is a tool in the service of the Soul, too often takes over the mind and then reigns from its throne of fear. This is narcissism in its multiple forms and different intensities. These procedures constitute themselves as abstraction, paranoia, war, politics, “the economy,” “my rights,” and all forms of the crystallization of a force that only reaches fruition when the Soul is already supplanted.

I go out into the real world, filled with trees, cracked pavement, badly parked cars, too hot or too cold, in order to meet a friend. There it is: two friends meet. This is not an abstraction but a corporeal reality.

The reality of language is that in it there is nothing real. The world is real and unique, language is made up of universals, which may refer to real things but not always. The tendency towards abstraction, generalization, ideology, is a tendency towards control; it is a function of the ego-intellect.

There are no humans and there is no Soul in social media, only ego-manipulation in order for certain companies to generate billions in revenue. To be popular in social media may be

excellent for one’s career, but it does nothing for one’s Soul; it only celebrates its absence.

People are being trained like Pavlovian dogs to salivate over their cell phones. Now one goes around with head phones and the small black rectangle becomes part of one’s brain. Next step will be “enhanced reality,” where the individual will have his senses supplemented by, of course, publicity. Imagine this: you notice a flower, and immediately a “pop up” appears in the air with publicity for a local florist. The examples can be multiplied, and they are all grotesque. Already every opportunity for day-dreaming, bored distraction, looking at patterns on the wall, and other naturally meditative moments, have been replaced by, stuffed with, internet-activity. E-mails are sent and received on cell phones, which extend the time of work to ungodly hours, and reduces to nothing the time one should have to reflect and let the demand or request sink in before answering it.

The great gift of technology, to join separated people through their voice on the phone, is now being replaced by SMS (Short Message Service). Kids SMS each other across the table, and talking on the phone becomes for them almost indecent – too personal. Fortunately, people still meet in person, and if we are lucky, they will continue doing so.

The difference between reality and mechanical ideality is similar to the one between a man in the fields and a man inside a coffin. The one inside the coffin, still alive, is being fed readymade images into the walls of his casket, and he has no idea he is missing something. This mechanical idealism is a direct descendant from Kantian Idealism in philosophy, now implemented by technology. Kantian Idealism created a false disconnect between perception (the phenomenal world) and reality (the *noumenal* world), which further generated the grotesque fantasies of Hegel and Fichte, which eventually morphed into Marxism-Leninism, Fascism, and more recently, the so-called “Critical Theory” movement.

Isn’t it enough for an individual (*atomo*) to be exploited by an economic system that tries, and mostly succeeds, in taking away all his power, money and even health? Does he also need his Soul to be extirpated and replaced by some ideologic-utopian-sentimental / intellectual compost whose only purpose is to replace him by placing him in technological bondage and further separating him from real humans in the ironic name of the abstraction, “Humanity”?

We are all connected to these giant robots – part machine, part nature, part people. They are multinational companies, they are the State, the church, and all institutions that supposedly compose this Super-Mafia that is the

world we live in. We must realize this and not succumb to its seductions.

Dear woman, are you tempted to enhance your breasts by filling them with silicon? Think about it: your body doesn’t know about being cut by a surgeon. When that happens, it will, even under anesthesia, believe it is being attacked, ripped open by the teeth of a tiger or a lion. Would you feed your lap dog to a crocodile? How can you be so abstract as to think that your chest is less sensitive than your dog? Do you think you yourself, your body, is part of your clothes?

Horrible Victor-Frankensteinian types of surgical procedures are promulgated and sold as normal, and individuals, who are unique, unique in their pain, in their strange ideas, in their twisted desires and physical forms, are conned into paying good money to become some ideal being. Sorry, I know, ideal beings should not have to bend over boring IRS forms, wash dishes, and go through the humiliations of daily life. But ideal beings are not human but images, and you will never be one, no matter how many operations or indoctrinations you go through.

In fact, the very pain, the very emptiness inside of you, is the path to your Soul. They are the “via dolorosa” that can lead you to poetry, to art, to Truth and to turn your eyes away from that satanic aquarium, the computer screen, towards the face of your neighbor, who is real and is like you.

And think about the fugitive nature of life, and how fast it will pass, even along its natural paths, not to mention the electronic quickness of its prefabricated abstract vectors: no matter how ideal, how transcendent, each of these denials of our corporeal and spiritual reality seems, it is the objective of these covert forces to change the uncanny and unique moments of our lives into the known, and into what can be played again, into the easily controlled, into the safety of the inorganic. Here the concept will replace the flesh and a mechanism will replace the concept.

We are divided creatures now, the “*atomo*” has been split. Part of us, with sleepy eyes and an idiotic smile, drifts towards media-happiness, while the other part watches in horror.

All the Silicon Valley ex-Hippy fantasies are already over. Trans-humanism’s promise of eternal life, for example, by means of “downloading” a mind into a computer is not only ludicrous, but it is horrendous, a very strange form of hell. These ideas are, in actuality, pure kitsch. Let the artists deal with kitsch; don’t you be swallowed up by it.

– New York City, May 19, 2017

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ARTS

The Danger of the Din

Alison Pearlman

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As a cultural critic and citizen of a democratic state, I want to think broadly and deeply, learn with and through others, convey the best of what I know, be heard and worth hearing, and call bullshit and lies. But I find that these efforts are getting more difficult. Is this merely a subjective impression? Am I succumbing to an irritable temperament? A romantic view of the past? An ageing brain? Or, has there been a real and pitiable change in our scene of communication?

I have reason to believe that the problem is not all in my head. Recent developments in media – the advent of email and social media, the rise of twenty-four-hour news, the proliferation of platforms – have altered how all of us, not just those in the business of speaking and writing, communicate. They have sped up and increased the volume of talk. Never have so many had such a plethora of places to publish so much with such speed at any hour. The democratizing force of these phenomena is real. But there is also a disturbing, anti-democratic, effect. It has become harder to speak thoughtfully and hear heedfully.

Communication overload begets a vicious cycle of self-multiplication. Competition among speakers for recognition yields more speech. More speech brings more din, and the din only rises with attempts to compete with it.

More speech can also exacerbate time-poverty, which, in turn, undermines our ability to think. Anyone who has received an email from a supervisor at midnight and felt pressure to answer though nominally “off the clock” has experienced the takeover of one’s time to think by the technological enablers of more speech. So too has the supervisor. Furthermore, as our communications multiply, our attention divides. *Multi-tasking* is a term born in and of our time.

From the rising din the listener suffers as much as the speaker. More noise makes it harder to hear a signal. Scanning becomes the new reading.

The greatest threat of the din to the function of democracy is our diminishing attentiveness and desensitization to messages. For they are the fertile soil of disinformation campaigns. As the din level rises, we become more vulnerable to attempts by powerful interests to get away with corrupt acts.

What would happen, for instance, if a newsworthy figure, like the president of the United States, were to figure out that he or she could escape being held to account for misdeeds by multiplying confusing and contradictory statements? What if the president, knowing that controversy is the catnip of media, were to feed their open jaws at such a rapid clip – say, by Tweeting – that no set of journalists, no investigating committee – especially one starving for resources – could possibly keep up with the mounting heap of claims? A strategy of releasing and engendering more and more chatter just to gum up the works of justice? A possibility? That might not just be pitiable. It might even be tragic.

To the extent that we must cooperate with others in every aspect of our lives, turning off the overflowing channels of communication is not a viable option. But each of us may still have the power to slow the rates of our own responses, to decide to be more deliberate, to think things through, and to encourage others to do the same. When deadlines can be moved, we ought to move them. After all, there is only another deadline behind that one and another behind it, ad *infinitum*, eagerly awaiting its turn. The accumulation of small acts got us into our current predicament. It might also help us reverse it.

“I Have Always Been Terrified to Really Be Someone’s Wife”

Ross Bleckner

“Pathetic” is my having to stay home tonight to write “just a few paragraphs.”

What is pathos? What is communication? Why are these two words even together? Is the effort here to get me to comment on the way they have been synchronized into the phrase, “the pathos of communication”? How can I do that? How can I say something that I can’t really say? And because I can’t, isn’t this the same tautology that makes all of us skittish, keeps us away from each other? Isn’t this really an attempt, in some little way, to represent some narrative that reflects who we might really be, even though we all know that a little word like ‘pathos’, when applied to perception, to our belief systems, can turn it all into a fiction? It is an absurd collision between the seriousness with which we take our lives and the perpetual possibility of regarding everything we take seriously as arbitrary and open to doubt. So maybe we just don’t find the words, certainly the right words, to articulate anything at all, much less what appears to be always just beyond our reach, right there, right where our fingers cantouch it. Maybe Derrida and that whole generation of critical thinkers didn’t really put it as clearly as Marilyn Monroe did when she said: “I guess I have always been terrified to really be someone’s wife since I know from life one cannot love another, ever, not really.”

Maybe it’s pathetic, or maybe that’s too dramatic a word for the fact that I can’t string together paragraphs coherently, with any certainty, not on command anyway, because they keep slipping away. . . I just can’t remember them. Nothing is more pathetic than our memory. We can’t even agree on history, on what it is, who it is, or when it takes place. We forget, just about everything. Or we remember something, but in a totally different way than it was. And then there is the matter of not saying what we

really mean because social protocol has determined, dictates to, our relations, in the same way that the proverbial “system” has turned our minds into mental commodities that try to impress with their intelligence so that we can “produce,” so that we can be “productive,” even when we are making something, like a painting or anything at all, in an effort to try to liberate ourselves in some small way. How ironic, how pathetic! *Power is cunning and its basic forms change in response to the effort we make to free ourselves from its grip.*

How can we utter a word when we are all double – doubled over – in ourselves, and because of that we don’t believe in what we believe in, and we can’t separate ourselves from what we condemn . . . for that matter how can we communicate when we know that we don’t really have much to say, when what is said is fraught with agendas, judged, repeated endlessly. We all know we are not smart enough to be right or original. To be the mind that we are in our mind. In our mind, we fall short; we fail, and perhaps that is the pathos of it. Soon, we shut down . . . we don’t want to look inward anymore, no matter how much we are being forced to, by ourselves and by others. “My struggle,” Karl Knausgaard said, is “I don’t want to be reminded of how excellent a work of art can be, and how far beneath that level my own work is. Such a reminder, which can be crushing, is something I shield myself from. That may sound strange, and yet it can hardly be unusual. If you’re a carpenter and you keep hearing about the amazing work of another carpenter, you’re not necessarily going to seek it out, because what would be the good of having it confirmed that there is a level of excellence to which you may never aspire? Better to close your eyes and carry on with your own work, pretending the master carpenter doesn’t exist.”

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Our New Totalitarians

Edward Burns

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How we navigate through this age of media noise is a compelling question. Twitter, Facebook and Instagram overflow with opinions, and it is flattering to see one's feelings validated by retweets or likes.

College campuses, once the bastion of free speech have descended into the realm of mob rule via social media. At Middlebury College, students symbolically tarred and feathered Charles Murray and rode him off campus on the rails. Their objection was to his book *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life* (written with Richard Herrnstein in 1994) with its core idea of whether IQ is heritable or whether it is a product of environmental factors. Ann Coulter, a conservative firebrand whose outrageous comments, many patently designed to increase sales of her books, is being hassled about her right to speak at the University of California Berkeley as I write this note. The fear being that her presence would incite violence by students objecting to her views. This in the home of the Free Speech Movement! To this we've come.

Then there is the case of Dana Schutz's painting *Open Casket*, which depicts the civil rights martyr Emmett Till, who was lynched by two white men in 1955. The African-American artist Parker Bright stood in front of the painting at the 2017 Whitney Biennial, to block visitors from seeing the image painted after a photograph. Hannah Black, a British born black artist, via a social media campaign, urged the Whitney curators to not only remove the painting but to destroy it. Does Schutz, a white artist, have the right to paint the image of a black man? Did Flaubert or Tolstoy have the right to enter the sensibility of a woman?

The indecency of this campaign against Schutz reminds me of that crass bully, "America's Mayor," Rudy Giuliani's attempts to sup-

press the arts. In 1999, he was offended by the exhibition *Sensation* at the Brooklyn Museum. He singled out works by Damien Hirst and let loose his ire on Chris Ofili's *Holy Virgin Mary*. In 2001, Renée Cox's *Yo Mama's Last Supper*, a riff on Da Vinci in which Cox appeared nude, part of *Committed to the Image*, the Brooklyn Museum's exhibition of ninety-four Black photographers, so offended Giuliani that he proposed a "decency" task force to monitor museums to determine if they should be denied public funding. There isn't much difference between bullies on the right and bullies on the left. Campaigns on social media, even by people with "noble" aspirations, often abandon the function of criticism in favor of the comfort of likes and retweets.

Great newspaper reporting (facts), and then social media, highlighted the boorish behavior of Bill O'Reilly and brought him down. We should be vigilant in attacking irrational positions, false Gods, and fakery. Our outrage must be fueled by a respect for what criticism should be. T. S. Eliot in his essay *The Function of Criticism* (1923) writes, "The critic, one would suppose, if he is to justify his existence, should endeavor to discipline his personal prejudices and cranks—dares to which we are all subject—and compose his differences with as many of his fellows as possible, in the common pursuit of true judgment." Eliot writes of the practitioners of criticism that, "a critic must have a very highly developed sense of fact. This is by no means a trifling or frequent gift." "The sense of fact," he writes, "is something very slow to develop, and its complete development means perhaps the very pinnacle of civilization." In this age of social media, the dilemma remains how do we manage the balance between insight and fiction. This is particularly important when those who should know better seek to limit freedom of expression.

Like Ants

Brunella Antommarini

Written words for a peremptory communication: exactly this became unbearable, after failing the grand project of telling the world story. Now they retrieve their smallness, they speak at the fast pace of hearing, they expect to be answered, as in the art of conversation, when words uttered do not belong to any of the interlocutors; these little distributed parallel particles in a conversation, modulating through their "finest and invisible body" (Gorgias) what other words from someone else hint at, and start a Bachian fugue, where one chases the other and together by miracle they make a symphony, a cybernetic music, self-made and moving like ants, everyone of them making sense only in exchange, constantly touching and correcting one another, in gratuitous trophallaxis, letting go of any 'I am'.

"There must be a cybernetics of ants" (Aldo Braibanti).

What they aim at is staying together, inventing together and, when the construction is not needed any more, destroying together. The construction of a text is a kind of prayer, or a promise. As prayers or promises, it has two chances: it can be empty, or it may fill itself with an address. Words can address someone or they can wait for someone to address them. The first choice is the most likely. They carry with themselves a smell, a thickness, a calligraphy, the light. They may keep the promise, or they may not.

There must have been a trauma, for the words to make themselves in clusters and rows. Like a street suddenly deprived of something, asphalt torn apart, a straightened turn. The trauma becomes evident in the very self-making, the painful renunciation to lean upon anything that is not itself, acting by dint of subtracting, as sculptors do, as jugglers do.

In ancient Egyptian sculptures it's not bod-

ies to be stiff, it is the stone to be vital. Those human bodies are in that stone as the living body the stone is. It is the way we imagine the life of stone. It is the sentiment that stone has of itself. "The stone is a relais of a sensation", said the child to the juggler. "But it's the stone that makes a decision about sensations", the juggler answered. But objects make fun of their own being, during the show. They compel us to laugh at ourselves, eventually incredulous with joy. And this is what words do.

Humans used to think that anything real was connected to knowledge. Instead knowledge was a disorder of minds, obsessed with a thought: "Look, every judgment will devour you". Those minds preferred indifferent thoughts, sustained by big words (long periods, great argumentation, meaning...), vaccin-thoughts to keep them away from the opaque real.

But now words are more likely "the small nouns/crying faith" (George Oppen). Resilience is inside of bodies even in renunciation (an ascetic is not a suicidal type). Wise humans are the ones whom nobody knows about. They leave no traces, speeches or books. Nameless Christs or Buddhas, or words finding themselves and losing themselves in quick fleeting moments of time.

After evolution, a reversal in direction occurs: we're headed to the little, to the less, to the purposeless effort, Spinoza's conatus, we'll let it go, "with dignity and like ants do", as these little words are uttering right now, to one's ear more than one's eye.

"No rhyme is ever innocent" whispers the stone to the bone.

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On Pathos

George Hildrew

20

Pathos! Too dire or too narcissistic to confront (without being unseemly and breaking into tears).

Auden was right: the plowman heard the crash, but for him it was not an important failure. Pathos from a distanced point of view or vantage point; sentiment without being maudlin. Malcolm Morley's pathos in the photorealist ocean liners with their restraint of touch versus protest in his more Neo-Expressionist works. Or Thomas Trosch's exuberant clotted social satire.

Pathos is straight to the point. It takes a leap of humanity to see, acknowledge, and accept it for the impossible.

As Richard Milazzo says in his poem, "De Trop", in the book *Storyville*: Pasolini had the desire to look at and depict everything; nothing above or beneath him. Or the pathos of restraint in Ingres's Olympian portraiture of the gods and goddesses of French society; take that Mr. Zeus-Bertin!

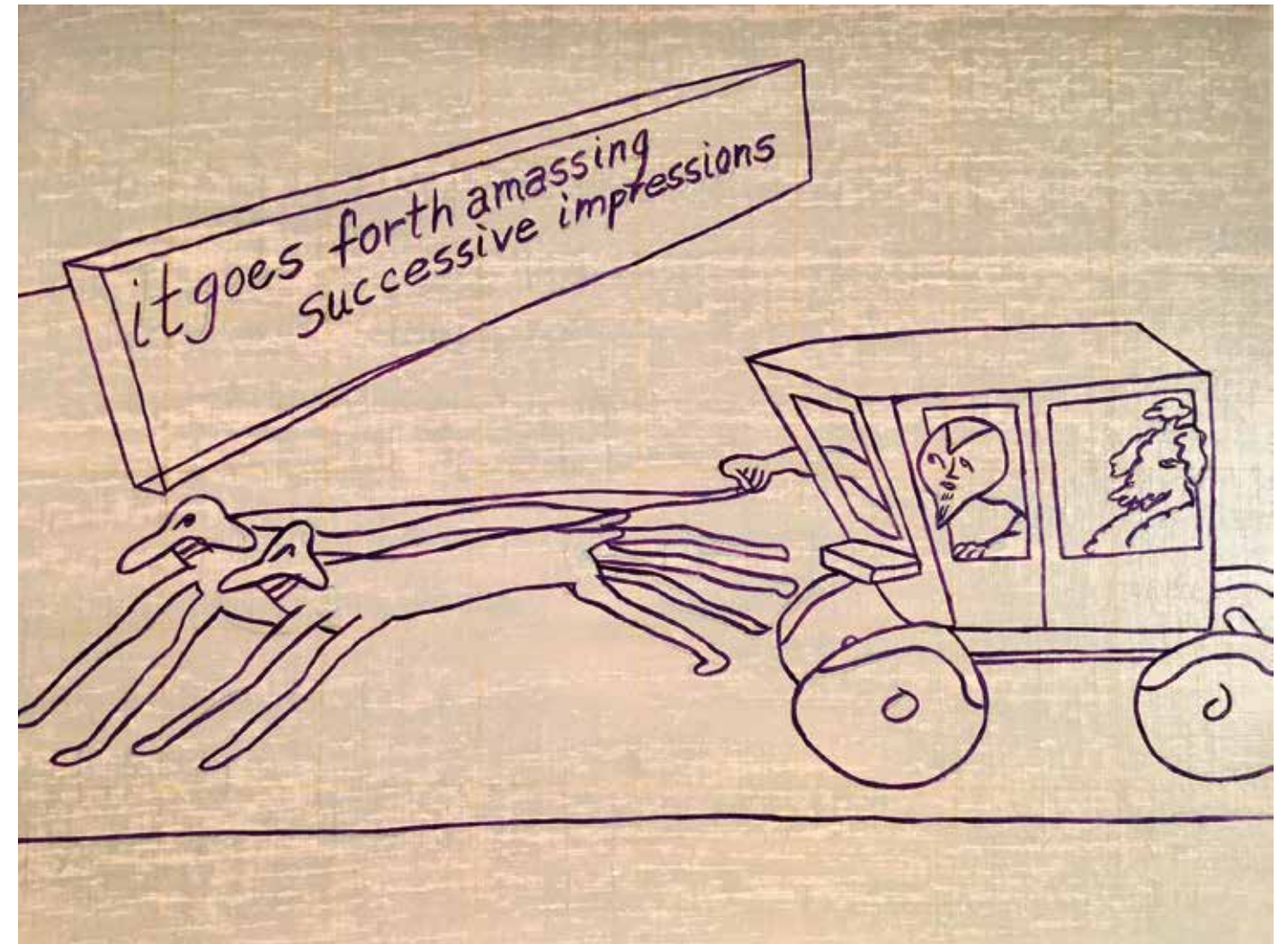
Pasolini says in his poem, *A Desperate Vitality*: "as in a film by Godard rediscovery of romanticism in the seat of neo-capitalistic cynicism and cruelty." Can we discover the personal within capitalistic cruelty?

Pathos: restraint to tears, action to paralysis, touch and inflection, sincere to insincere, slapstick to ironic. What gets communicated is the variety of pathos. Who wishes pathos on the wall or in the hand? Is it a mirror of a mirror or communication reflected back? Each with their own search. For whom do we seek to mobilize this empathy, an audience or only ourselves?

Just as everything is political, everything is filled with feeling and emotion. Avoidance of pathos is equally pathetic. The political is personal and the personal is political.

Beauty and wonder with their own exulted enthusiasm contain their own pathos. To strive, to hope, revolt, accept, or to provide a solution are all pathetic. Little me, huffing and puffing in the wilderness. Is pathos just critique with empathy and an acknowledgement of the situation? Goya's *The Third of May* – that is pathos!

– Brooklyn, New York, May 27, 2017



Vision and Empathy

Lucas Reiner

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The image of the blue tree (*Exile*), leaning in a corner, ostensibly against the edge of the frame, points to something beyond itself.

Finding engagement in the relationship between foreground and background is an ongoing communication. The figure and field constitute stand-ins for us. The figure of the tree is us, but so is the field. They, we, are not separate.

The relation between the figure and field generates a space for our wandering, a yearning for unification, a longing for home.

I am looking inside at an inner world of values, but also at what is just outside my window. They are equal.

This is not a search for abstract forms; what has been created, what is always created, in my opinion, is a container for depth and values – content.

Two years ago, I found a book in the library at the American Academy in Rome which contained the first depiction of Jacob's Ladder, a fresco in a Synagogue in Syria from the 2nd century. The image depicts the figure of Jacob asleep on a rock, after having left his home under duress, a ladder above his head at a 45 degree angle. Intrigued, I searched further in the Vatican Library for more depictions and found an illustrated manuscript from the 10th century. In this version, a painting of the ladder appears on every page. Each ladder contains 30 steps, each rung representing a virtue or a vice to be acquired or overcome by the monk in order to progress on the ladder. Reading the text, one discovers that the ladder is in fact endless. One is always on the ladder. Human beings are always in the process of becoming more human.

I have worked for the last two years on the outskirts of Berlin. My studio on the 3rd floor

has five large windows. Coming from Los Angeles, I have been struck and inspired by the unbelievably beautiful, heavy, grey sky that enters my studio every morning. It is like a guest with a life of its own. In English, sky and heaven are different words. In the German language, "Himmel" means both sky and heaven. This unification of the "real" with the "spiritual" has allowed me a free space in which to imagine a ladder that connects Heaven and Earth.

From the *Ladder of Divine Ascent: On Exile*, by John Climacus (ca. 600 A.D.):

"Exile is a disciplined heart, unheralded wisdom, an unpublicized understanding, hidden life, masked ideals. It is unseen meditation, the striving to be humble, a wish for poverty, the longing for what is divine. It is an outpouring of love, a denial of vainglory, a depth of silence...

"Every prophet is without honor in his own country (John 4:44). If he is right, then we had better be careful that our act of renunciation is not for empty honor. Exile is a separation from everything... It is a chosen route of great grief. Do not wait for souls enamored of the world when you are pressing on towards solitude and exile. In any case, death comes when least expected."

My painting is a combination of looking inside at an inner world of values, and looking at what is just outside my window. The paintings reflect this in the materiality and attention to surface and the painted creation of depth and infinity. Again, I am not trying to find abstract forms. I am trying to find a painting that contains both depth and values. Content.

The painting is not the end. It points to something beyond itself, providing a contemplative space for a broadening of vision and empathy.



Communicating: Too Much and Too Little

Rolando Pérez

24

At the risk of sounding too pessimistic and even contrarian about the wonders of communication, let me just say this: What I think is wrong with communication today is not that there is so little, but rather that there is too much of it. We are communicating ourselves to death, as Baudrillard brilliantly pointed out back in the 1980s, even before our narcissism reached an all-time high with cell phones that mirrored simulated images of ourselves, invented by a company that named itself after a fruit, then baptized its most popular product, the *iPhone*. What “I” does not want to possess an *iPhone*? For the iPhone is not a Fichtean “not-I,” a consciousness, through which I establish my own identity vis-à-vis the Other, or in some Sartrean sense making me declare that “hell is other people.” No such thing.

About seven years ago Nuria and I had a dear friend who came to visit us from Barcelona. For his last night in New York, we made reservations for the three of us on one of those sight-seeing cruises that takes you around the New York Bay at night, offering a wonderful view of the city and dinner. We sat by a window with a beautiful view of Manhattan’s skyscrapers in the distance. After a few minutes of settling in, we noticed a well-dressed couple, in their mid-forties, take a table near us. Within seconds of sitting down, they each took out their cell phones, and for the rest of the trip neither of them lifted his or her head to direct a single glance or word to the other, or even to look outside at the illuminated landscape in the night. Instead, they spent the entire time immersed in their “smart” phones, presumably “texting” their “respective” friends, buying things on Amazon (“bigger” now than the real Amazon), or perhaps even sending messages to each other across the table.

Were they communicating? Yes, like ev-

eryone else today. In fact, no other peoples in history have communicated more than us. We are enthralled by communication. It has become our religion. It is almost as though we can’t stop. Come up from the subway and the first thing we do is to take out our cell phone and immediately begin to communicate, like a smoker who hasn’t been able to smoke on an eight-hour flight to Europe. We can’t get enough of it. But is this really communication? Some will say yes, while others will disagree. I tend to agree with the former. It is, indeed, communication, but what is missing, however, is our “mortal coil,” and there is the rub, or lack thereof. It is like when we write at the end of a text or email message, “keep in touch.” Nothing could be further from the reality of touching another human being than composing a digital message. Communication, as Octavio Paz reminds us in *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, is “communion” and “community,” but community in the physical sense of it: a gathering of bodies and souls.

So perhaps what we need is a lot less digital communication, but more of the kind that requires the actual presence of the Other (where the Other is not a phone). Only in this way can something like poetry, for instance, be possible again. For there to be pathos, the pathos of poetry, the pathos of communication, there must be bodies. Sex-robots will never replace humans, regardless of how efficient they become. Sex is about bodily communication and all kinds of complex exchanges that cannot be reduced to the binary of 1s and 0s. As Woody Allen once put it, “of course sex is dirty, if it’s done right.” The pathos of art and poetry is similar, because it deals with what is messy about the human condition.

Obfuscation and Escape

David Deutsch

I connect with my world of inner critics who might give me approval or not, since I hardly ever have visitors in my studio. When I do, many people are bored, a few are not.

In my paintings, I distort or obfuscate any line or shape I put down with another line or shape. I might build an idea in this way, if I’m skillful enough. I don’t like making specific and representational images, even though I think of myself as a figurative painter. A painting can be tentative and mushy.

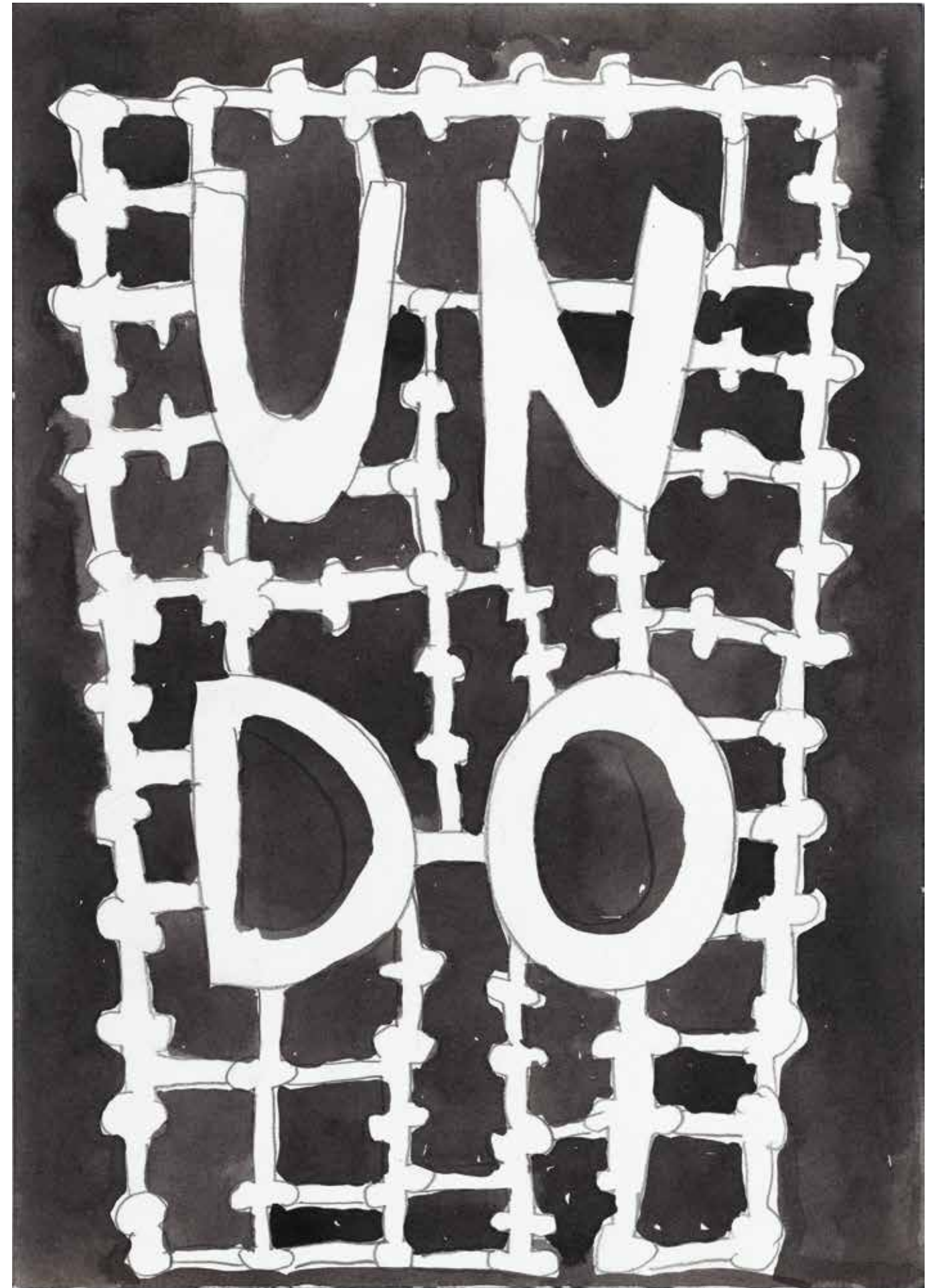
My paintings manipulate objects and marks ending in a tangle which is hard to read. It might be a vague structure, a building or a house which is obscure and hard to locate, on which or in which may be a figure or a car or truck, again obfuscated. A successful painting might evoke impending drama, being on the edge of something about to happen.

My work is thoroughly non-political, although I’m constantly tuned in now, even more than I was during Watergate, and maybe there’s a subconscious influence. There’s much discussion that politics will play a larger role in new art these days. I don’t know that I could define political art, but I think it has to convey specifically something topical and, well, political. I’m bored with most of it, especially in painting, when it’s obvious. Doesn’t art transcend all politics? If art rises above the everyday, no matter what the subject is, it leaves politics behind. Think of *The Raft of Medusa*. Or figurative works by Philip Guston. Current events have an influence on everybody, though, and it would be pretty hard to say that we’re not all conditioned by it. On the other hand, making art is an escape from stress brought on by hours of exposure to political turmoil in the media.

Art can hold meaning for anybody who is willing to give it time, which can be as short as a few seconds. My studio is shelter, a place to escape anxiety, and replace it with the anxiety, and/or thrill of making art.

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SUSAN HEFUNA, *UN DO*, 2013. INK ON PAPER,
34 × 22 CM. (13.3 × 8.6 IN.). PHOTO: ACHIM KUKULIES



Eros in the Classroom

Andrew McCarron

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Overly intimate relationships between students and teachers are taboo, especially in this day and age, and for good reason. There's blood on those tracks. A troubling light was shined into the darkest recesses of the private school world in recent years, as horrifying allegations surfaced of widespread sexual abuse at institutions like Horace Mann, Saint Paul's, and Saint George's, where a series of often-iconic male teachers abused pupils (primarily teenage boys, but also girls) for decades on end. What's worse, the administrators often turned a blind eye. These cases were about sex, power, and compulsion. And then there are isolated instances that purport to contain some element of love, a very small number of which may even lead to partnership or marriage down the road. After all, it's common enough for students to develop crushes on their teachers; and it's common enough for teachers to admire the youth and beauty of their students, which can be an elixir. And, at times, something deeper and mutual transpires, regardless of what we say or think about the phenomenon from an ethical or legal perspective.

I remember hearing whispers in my high school about a thirty-something wild-haired physics teacher and a tall, bookish girl named Rachel, who spent every afternoon in his office serving as an unofficial lab assistant. But nothing was ever substantiated. A year or two later, the physics teacher and his wife had welcomed their first baby and he transferred to another school district, presumably to cut down on his commute. Maybe his liaison with Rachel was just hearsay. In rural high schools, there are always rumors about a student who was seen copulating with a sheep or a goat; and most every high school has gossip about teachers who drank liquor and smoked pot with their students earlier in their careers, before they became middle-aged and boring.

When I arrived at Bard College from my public high school in the mid-'90s, teacher/stu-

dent sex was fairly widespread, although by no means out in the open. There were tales about how certain older male faculty members, particularly those who taught in the humanities and fine arts, had had many affairs – through the '60s, '70s, and '80s – with impressionable coeds in search of a patron saint. With one or two exceptions, these professors had retired from their exploits by the time my classmates and I sat through their weighty seminars on Yeats, Keats, Joyce, Hardy, Austen, and Melville.

One of the old timers, a sixty-year-old corpulent poet with bushy gray eyebrows, was still making the rounds with aspiring female poets. He would read their anguished verses and press the poems and the poet to his capacious bosom. A female classmate whom he once tried to seduce told me that he began his seduction by offering a foot rub, explaining that in other cultures the rubbing of the feet was a form of hospitality. For him, it was the first step to getting naked. But teacher/student shenanigans in college, no matter how problematic ethically, are legal. At the high school level, it is child abuse, statutory rape, or pedophilia. Young lives are torn apart. It's *Lolita* without Nabokov's infusion of humor, literary elevation, and Eros.

Eros is commonly understood as a powerful force that compels bodily love. But there's more to it than that. According to Plato, it was also the agency that inspired the philosophical life, or any type of existence toward which the human spirit chose to orient itself. In his dialogues, Plato believed that Eros had a place in the classroom – that is, in the spaces where a teacher met with one or more students for the purpose of education (*paideia*). Teachers and students experienced Eros for one another's souls. Students needed to foster intimate relationships with their teachers as a means of internalizing the habits of mind, orientations of heart, and social behaviors that would help them figure out who they were and how they

ought to respond to the world. Teachers, in turn, sought out and developed relationships with students as a means of redressing a world that was frequently cruel and unjust, and make it a better place through mentorship. However, the teacher-student bond was forever compromised when its reciprocal power collapsed into the physicality and confusion of sex.

But the type of philosophical Eros lauded by Plato's Socrates is hard to maintain year-in and year-out, especially if one is teaching the same material over and over. Many of the teachers I've worked with start out fresh and energetic, inspiring young minds in the classroom, in addition to living relatively full, adventuresome lives during nonworking hours. But, as the years pass, they run the risk of becoming cartoonish versions of their classroom selves. And the cherished nonworking hours become a time to rest and regain some of the energy that teaching requires. It's inevitable, at least to a degree. The roles that we end up playing day after day shape who and what we see when we look in the mirror. What's worse, the necessary prohibition against any display of sexuality in schools requires a practice of "desexualization" on the part of teachers. Comfortable shoes, sensible bags, conservative haircuts, and creeping obesity morph teachers from unique and often attractive people into the neutered adults that society entrusts with its children. But for the teacher who is aware enough to realize what's happening, this can lead to an existential predicament, a spiritual crisis of sorts. And it's not merely the letdowns and vagaries of middle age that I'm referring to. It's the death of passion.

If a teacher is able to sustain ardor for teaching, he or she has achieved something truly virtuous and rare. Most folks either burn out or flat-line within a decade. I have heard it said that teachers get a little bit better and then a little bit worse over their careers. Once one masters, or at least gets a decent grip on, one's subject material, and learns the psychological skill of classroom management, a glass ceiling is hit that's hard to break through. If a teacher isn't independently wealthy enough to exit the profession and reinvent him or herself, then a stultifying malaise can set in. This is probably true of all professions, but a successful teacher is supposed to be passionate about his or her work until retirement.

There is explicit and implicit pressure to inspire on a daily basis, no matter what's going on inside. Loneliness, bereavement, fear, dread, anger, and confusion must be masked, kept hidden from the kids. On bad days, therefore, a teacher can feel like a sad clown, forced to pull on floppy shoes, an orange wig, and

cover his face in white pancake makeup, trotting out into a three-ring circus with a sack of hackneyed tricks and a forced grin. Once his song and dance is over, he stumbles back to his dressing room and lights a cigarette, as he wipes the makeup off his face, revealing the weary expression and the bags under his eyes. The idea of donning his costume and makeup for the next show weighs him down like a load of bricks. Still, he must find the energy to go out in front of the lights and do it again.

When a colleague of mine, Dan Pabst, first started, he predicted that he'd be teaching two or three years, at the most. His goal was to use the income to get settled in Manhattan and support his dream of becoming a music journalist. He'd managed to get a handful of reviews into *The Village Voice* and even received one in *The New Yorker* (a friend of his was working there at the time and helped make it happen). A private school in New York City hired him as a middle-school History teacher and he excelled at the job. His students routinely told their parents that Mr. Pabst made History fun. And "fun" was also the word Dan used when he talked about teaching to his family and friends.

There were moments of excitement and warmth, such as when he turned off the lights at the end of a winter's day and played the affecting Largo movement of Bach's Concerto for Two Violins to a room of thirteen-year-olds. He noticed that some gazed out the window reflectively, whereas others sat with closed eyes, lost in silent thought and feeling. All of the pubescent squirminess and chatter was momentarily silenced beneath a reverent and intimate stillness. It was a stillness that can come over a group listening to something sublime together, a quiet that renders language and movement unnecessary.

On another occasion, while discussing *The Diary of Ann Frank*, a young girl burst into tears because her grandmother's family had been killed in the Holocaust. After she was excused to the nurse's office, Dan led the concerned class in a discussion on how best to support someone struggling emotionally. He talked about empathic listening and quoted something the Buddha had said about everyone fighting an unseen battle. The kids nodded and began raising hands and sharing their inmost struggles and fears with one another. Dan was aware during this conversation that he was offering his students the most important and most humane lesson that they'd ever learn – how to be compassionate by recognizing the humanity of another.

Despite the long, regular hours, Dan initially felt that the job was easy money, in that he was being paid to hang out with eager and

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funny kids and turn them on to American and European History, using his personal library and his own idiosyncratic sense of things. And there was the boon of summers off – two exquisite months when everyone else was working – to tour Europe or just kick around Brooklyn and Manhattan going to shows and meeting up with friends for dinner and drinks. The living was good. Money was deposited into his checking account twice each month; he had medical and dental insurance, and a retirement plan. After a few years, Dan married his college sweetheart and they were soon expecting a baby.

But here's what happened to Dan. The extended honeymoon of the classroom began going cold after his eighth year. He'd been asked by the principal a year earlier to teach a History elective to seniors (seventeen- and eighteen-year-olds) on The Civil War and Reconstruction. He'd taught many of the students four years earlier, when they were eighth graders. Consequently, the seminar had the affable feeling of a reunion. By the time commencement rolled around in late May, an apogee had been reached, and a number of the students even teared up on the final day of class, explaining how meaningful the semester had been and swearing to stay in touch over the summer and beyond.

Dan felt a swell of pride sitting in his academic regalia during commencement, as his students walked across the stage to accept their degrees. A group of fresh-faced girls and some of the boys surrounded him at the reception afterward. He hugged them one at a time, and said how proud he felt, and even held on to one or two a few seconds longer than necessary, before pulling away and feeling half-embarrassed by his own sentimentality. Part of him felt like suggesting that they meet up sometime that weekend off campus, because what they'd created together ought to be sustained as long as possible. But the parents and grandparents of the graduates quickly claimed them and filed out of the reception to an afternoon of celebratory luncheons and parties, none of which Dan attended.

Deep down he knew what would happen – a few would return for a sheepish visit the following fall, asking how his classes were going, but more to talk about their new colleges, roommates, seminars, and professors. Many would report that it felt strange being back, and then they'd leave Dan's office and would never return. Even the ones who adore you, hang on your every word, and write gushing thank-you notes vanish. The truth is that you have ceased to be developmentally relevant from their perspective, and are a relic from a past they no longer have much use for. It is a necessary process

but bittersweet, and can leave a lingering ache that all teachers need to learn to fill, or learn to ignore.

There is a gradual disinvestment that many teachers experience toward their students because of the transience of it all. At first, a popular young teacher will gladly play the role of an active mentor, clocking long hours helping teenagers to brainstorm through the mazes of problems at home, their boyfriend/girlfriend snafus, and college-admission anxieties. But teacher/student conversations can easily enable adolescent narcissism, especially at elite private schools that cater to wealthy demographics. The veteran teacher ruefully eyeballs several stacks of ungraded papers on a cluttered desk, as Johnny or Suzie prattles on about how things are getting "weird" with their best friends, or about something funny that happened the previous summer at Camp Kickapoo. Once teachers become weary of these sorts of interactions, they begin to say less, and cultivate parsimonious responses. And finally, a teacher learns how to put out a vibe that communicates that he or she is most interested in talking about the coursework and not in playing audience, unless there's genuine need for serious counsel.

My colleague Dan followed a version of this trajectory, moving from well-loved young teacher to a competent but distant middle-aged one. His students would continue to confide in him, and he cared about them, but after a certain point, if there were no real crises at hand, his eyes would get glassy and he'd nod along, but his mind would be elsewhere. The years had passed and the thrill was gone. Dan's dream of becoming a music journalist was put on perpetual hold. Although he continued to enjoy aspects of his work, and imagined it preferable to many alternatives, boredom had set in. He taught the same texts and recycled the same lessons, going through the motions on an affable autopilot. His body began to thicken around the middle and under the chin. He felt he'd lost something along the way. He couldn't quite describe what it was or when he lost it, but it haunted him.

With few exceptions, teachers who avoid educational burnout are the ones who either get into teaching as a second career, or find something to remain passionate about outside the classroom. I have known teachers who have worked as Off-Broadway actors, who have published novels and collections of poems, who have spent the evening hours cross-dressing, and even one who took up professional competitive cycling in her mid-thirties. When I first started working in private schools, teachers did a range of things outside the classroom,

but there was a shift at some point. The era of the teacher gave way to the era of the *educator*. And "teacher" is far from synonymous with "educator."

Traditionally, a teacher was an individual hired to instruct students in a particular subject or, in the case of primary school, at a particular grade level. An educator fulfills a range of functions in a school, teaching in one or more disciplines, advising, coaching, and doing administrative work as well. The educator is encouraged to find ultimate professional and personal fulfillment working as a humble servant in the vineyard of learning. In short, educators are expected to do more than merely teach. There are emails to answer, field trips to chaperone, professional-development conferences to attend, parent meetings to facilitate, and an increasing number of private tutorials with students, whose learning accommodations require one-on-one enrichment. Whatever passion once burned in the heart of a teacher can be gradually snuffed out by the enervating labors of service to the student-client.

A colleague of mine who left the rank-and-file of an English Department to become a principal described it this way: "When good

teachers start off, they're like beautiful coral reefs teeming with marine life. But underwater tides and pollution erode the coral down to a pile of sand on the ocean floor." Wherever retired teachers gather, you can see it on display: the neglected bodies of aging men and women who allowed their sense of purpose to be supplanted by the purposes of their institutions and its generations of students. When one spends years and possibly decades burying one's libido beneath woolly sweaters and pleated pants, something desiccating can take place.

But this isn't to say that the spark of teaching and learning can't be reignited at any moment – it can. A stunning reevaluation of a familiar text, or the expansion of a student's consciousness, can be the equivalent of running a wet sponge over a dry, dusty stone. Teachers know this to be true, and patiently wait for the soul-lifting moment when the work they do becomes the most ethical, socially important, and life-affirming work on the planet. The challenge is to remain passionate – actualized as a person who just so happens to teach, as opposed to being a person who is *just* a teacher.

Losing the Word

Bruce Benderson

32

Language is created and controlled by conventions, determined by poststructuralists and semioticians to have an arbitrary relationship to time and matter and manipulated by political and social forces. According to these thinkers, we are living in a mediated hallucination, in which the things we see, hear or touch – even the emotions we feel – are nothing more than fantastical dreams faking cohesive narratives – shadows on the wall of a cave.

On the other hand, as thousands have recently complained, our language is quickly deteriorating, increasingly full of grammatical imprecisions, clueless word choices and apathy regarding the achievement of clarity. As an occasional teacher of creative writing, I have tried for the thousandth time to teach students the difference between a transitive and intransitive verb, usually when explaining that you cannot “lay on a bed” in the present time; you can only “lay” something on it. “*Lay* is a transitive verb that takes a direct object,” I wearily re-explain. “You can *lay* a book on that bed, but you yourself must *lie* on it.”

Keeping all this in mind, it appears that one camp of linguistic scholars must be wrong. If language is truly a system of social control, then its decay could be a type of liberation, freedom from the shackles of convention. Green anarchist and primitivist philosopher John Zerzan, whose writings may or may not have inspired the Unibomber, subscribes to such a thesis and advocates the transcendence of all symbolic thinking by returning backward to a second hunter-gatherer Eden in which there was little or no linguistic interface between our world and our senses.

Nevertheless, the current degeneration of language we are experiencing is not moving toward any mute ecstatic congress with nature, matter or time, but rather a never-before-seen language-deprived state of “idiocracy,”* sustained by the cathectic fascination of objects enshrouded by the disguises of alluring capitalist promotionals. We are, in fact, fleeing the Word of the Hebrews for the fetishistic world of the pagan Image, a place where falsification functions on a much less conscious level.

When it comes to systems of social control, nothing can beat the Image. It is as visceral to the senses as it is nebulous to the intellect. Not only are its powerful strategies often hidden behind the magnificence of its garb, but also it generally requires much less education than the word to instill its responses. It can be the carrier of a thousand impulses, aggressions, libidinal storms and unavowed motives that the Word would have to struggle in a long-winded, partially transparent manner to achieve.

This is not to claim that the genuine search for truth, beauty and new ways of perceiving do not still remain the province of the serious visual artist. It is to maintain that the ill-intentioned use of the image, for control, gain, the promotion of bias and the hostage-taking of markets is best achieved in this domain, something that we are experiencing more and more frequently now that the image can be instantly conveyed to billions through the use of weak electric currents. Because of the increasing development of such a force, the members of our species are becoming *dumb* – something I intend in both senses of the word.

**Idiocracy*, a 2006 American comic film directed by Mike Judge, about a future in which society has sunken into base stupidity.

My Dream

James Brown

33

A few weeks ago, three or four, I woke up with an unusual narrative in my mind.

Approaching a rather plain house, plain but large, I saw a kind of flat facade with some square windows, a doorway of no important description. I entered the house with curiosity and pleasure. There before me was a large dark room. Let’s say Darkish. Light entered from various sources adding to the already rich atmosphere. Not rich due to detail or decoration. Contrary wise, there was really no decoration at all. The large room / space was mostly of cardboard color and of cardboard atmosphere. It was, however, beautiful. It was that old cardboard color that struck me hardest.

Simply, in front of me was a long, wide table. On the table was a long and in fact wide, shallow, cardboard box. Flaps folded on top. Behind and around the table there were various figures, the people, the owners, the ones who took control of the house, the ones in charge. They were neutral, even welcoming. Although they were not outgoing in any way, they did not seem to mind my uninvited presence in what was surely their final time in this place. Moreover, they did not speak, not speak to me at all.

As I mentioned previously, there was this long cardboard box lying on a table almost in the middle of the room. I approached the table, and opened the box. Inside to my amazement there was, carefully wrapped in white tissue paper, a little crumpled, something very surprising. The box seemed to be filled, in fact the box was, indeed, filled with Ceramic Crosses. Ceramic Crosses made by Fontana, the artist Lucio Fontana. There, in the box were about, at least, 17 or maybe 20 of these Crosses. Crosses made by the great Fontana. I just couldn’t believe my eyes. I did look into the cardboard box carefully to assure myself that what I thought was exactly what I understood. There was no doubt. The people, the figures in the back ground, the owners, proprietors were beneficial. They allowed me to take possession of the cardboard box and all of its content. They, in fact, gave the box to me, it being useless and of no interest to them. They were leaving this house and what remained was being left, just being left.

I picked up the box after having closed the flaps, as one does, one flap under the other until the flaps themselves seem to make a folded cross on top of their cardboard box. Yes, I was able to pick up this box filled with the Ceramics. I carried it in both arms toward the front door. There was no verbal exchange between us, between me and the others. I walked to the doorway, the open doorway, the door remaining open, light brightly coming in, bright outside. I crossed, crossed the open doorway and went outside. Yes, I just walked out of this house, recently discovered. I continued walking, straight ahead, knowing, understanding, what I was carrying under my arms. Amazed – I thought of value, not the monetary really, it did cross my mind, but more the cultural and historic weight of what I was carrying in that cardboard box, overtaken by the joy, the unexpected of what had just happened in that plain but large house.

– Pensione Seguso, Venice, Italy, June 2017

In another reality the sun is a black line.



The Sadness of Bad Thinking

Jill Silverman van Coenegrachts

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The night of Trump’s victory he called from Sydney. She was clearly distraught. Everyone knew that of the two sisters she was always the most reserved – there was no need to speak, he kept her on an open line in the middle of his trading day with people coming in and out of the glass-walled office overlooking the opera house. In his mind his late wife was on this open line. He was channeling her through the slow soft breathing of his sister-in-law. He imagined her narrow shoulders with the same birth marks in splotches on the upper arms as her younger sister – pale soft skin, long arms, long fingers, long legs. It runs in the family, his late wife said. He kept all the art he would never tell her about: Hirst’s medicine cabinets, his cynical butterfly paintings, the color wheels like they made as children. But his sister-in-law, the art historian, insisted this was art without content.

This was the kind of inner rebellion between them that pushed her younger sister to find the Serra. The neighbors started a rumor about the killer sculpture; it went out with an oddly doctored video on YouTube, made by someone aloof and not deserving. By the time they set the work with its curved back facing the prevailing north winds, the middle-aged husband and wife stood close enough to rub the rough surface with their hands, leaving a trace of oil from her fingertips. Minutes later she stopped breathing.

In Venice, a decade later, with his sister-in-law looking at a large Hirst sculpture across the Grande Canal, he noticed a careless gesture that reminded him of his late wife. He suddenly started posting on Instagram, looking for texts he hoped would kick start his afternoon, make him smile so that someone might think he was interesting. She would always argue that Bellini was in the end the most seductive artist, and then he wouldn’t listen anymore. He would swipe his phone, making him feel more revved up, a sensation he felt as a boy in the barbershop with his father reading *Playboy*, like a real man, the cashier teased.

“Look, it is all here – you can actually see what *they* like,” her brother-in-law, who started the day reading *Breitbart News*, announced giddily after looking at so much art.

“Like these kids, who only look at what each other likes.” She rolled her eyes.

“All this crap about the death of truth, the death of history, the death of art, the death of democracy. I am tired of being lectured.”

“Hirst is the seer of this new world order, the Bannon of the art world with a network of collusive behaviors between one auction house, one billionaire, and two market-driven galleries.” She couldn’t

stop, so she turned away from him as if all their pure fluttering lies were his fault.

“Is there any difference between facts and partial facts, news and fake news? Could Walter Benjamin have ever imagined a moment when *Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* would become a philistine’s rant against images inundating the world – being Tweeted, Instagramed.” She couldn’t reach up to catch the words, so she turned away from him embarrassed – held the handbag that was crossing her body with a strange casualness he once noticed in his wife.

He called her from Singapore in the early morning after the Brexit vote and listened to her tears looking through the windows at pale dawn. She muttered something about Putin funding Lafarge with data analytics. She tried to explain she moved to Europe to witness the ending of the Cold War.

“You underestimate the anger people feel against global governance.”

“What a pathetic excuse for the sadness of bad thinking.”

He turned ahead of her in the Palazzo Grassi, as she felt the skin on her arms crawl with a sensation of being drowned by forces she couldn’t name. But there they were, in the galleries, coming through the face of her phone, this art that glorified the super-sized myths of every totalitarian regime back to the Egyptians. She heard a voice behind her speaking in crisp unaccented German. Then he was gone.

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Photography and Mirrors

Barbara Probst

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Looking into the mirror is a ritual that we practice every day, one that challenges us each time to synchronize our exterior appearance with the self-portrait of our inner eye. However brief, this daily effort to come to terms with our mirror-image, which looks back at us, unfailingly reflecting our expressions and movements, always contains a certain emotional charge, because our subjective view rubs against the ostensible objectivity of the mirror. Selfies and photographic portraits or snapshots also possess an objectivity that is similar to the mirror image. They agitate us in exactly the same way and trigger similar feelings.

The desire of people to see their own countenance is probably as old as self-awareness itself, which according to its nature wishes to both reflect and recognize itself. As we know from the myth of Narcissus, whoever gazes at the surface of a dark lake should be prepared to see strong distortions. For a long time, techniques and instruments have been tested in an effort to make reliable images of people and the world. These techniques do not involve a mediating factor between reality and image – such as the human hand in painting – but instead take the image directly from reality – as did, for example, the polished metal mirror of antiquity or the camera obscura starting in the late Middle Ages. In the Baroque period, the royal families could observe and present themselves in mirrored rooms as if part of a kaleidoscope. Yet all of these techniques for observing the self were only available to a small group of people and were withheld from all others.

Like photographs, mirrors are windows into illusionary spaces that humanity had to wait for a long time to enter. It was not until the nineteenth century that both the technique of photography and that of producing mirrors had their technical breakthroughs. Mirrors could now be manufactured in mass production, and photographic portraits in the size and shape of business cards soon became affordable to many. It is noteworthy that the availability of mirrors and photographs happened almost in parallel, as if mutually dependent. Twenty years before Sigmund Freud was born, people began to study themselves.

Today we live in a world that is obsessed with self-observation. We are the royal children who want to find ourselves in the mirrored gallery of snapshots and selfies. Photography and film hold a mirror to the world. People, cities, countries, and cultures appear as myths in the projected light of cinema. Even the earth allows itself to be continually photographed against the infinite black of the universe by innumerable satellites that untiringly revolve around it, in order to amaze us with the myth of a silent, peaceful earth. How far will we stretch ourselves to get another angle on ourselves? And what could it possibly tell us?

Yoga, Poetry Reading, or Just Connecting?

Jeremy Sigler

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I was just invited to read poems to a yoga class at the Brooklyn Public Library on Sunday at 9:00 A.M. I was also just invited to go out for a drink Saturday night. If I say yes to both offers, how will I feel on Sunday morning? And on Monday? Will I feel anything? Either while I am doing the reading or after? What will I have accomplished? Would it be smart to say yes to the reading and no to the drinks? No to the reading, yes to the drinks? Or no and no. Two no's make a yes, right? That's what I've always heard.

The last time I stepped foot in a yoga class, I was this out-of-shape guy trying to get it back. The instructor was doing this couples yoga thing. It was very awkward, being the only man in the class. She asked us to pair off. By the time I even turned my head to the left, everyone had already found a partner. I was alone. With help from the instructor I was shown the one other person in the room without a partner. It was a very petite Asian girl on the other side of the room.

I had to take my mat and go over and set up next to her. The first position was for me to get on my hands and knees. Then she was to climb up onto my back and also stand on her hands and knees. Like a table on a table. We held the pose for a while. Then we were asked to switch. I climbed up on her table, but it was tiny. I kept slipping off. There was no place for my knees or palms. Her back was the size of a little book. I was like a circus elephant standing on a ball. Do they do that? Or is it a tiger? Who knows.

So if I go to this library yoga and read to them, who will I be? What will I be? I'd imagine I will have to try too hard. I will try to connect. Maybe one or two women will be there. Or only one. And I'll hope to connect. The only kick I could possibly get from this would be just a connection.

But do I really want to charm and thus interfere with an attractive, fit young woman who is trying to do Yoga on a Sunday morning at 9 a.m. as she tries to forget about her bad bar talk and money funnel from the night before? Even if I am skilled enough, and on enough, to make her laugh, or giggle, or grin, she will not have been hoping for that. Because yoga takes place in the core. You have to hold your core together. Laughter, on the other hand, is an involuntary core blowout. When you laugh, your stomach muscles sort of collapse or cave in. An LOL is actually a CA (cave in) of the... a spasm of, um... muscle fibers in the core. So my presence in the yoga class will be the exact thing that the bodies do not want. I will be a contaminant!

The mind/body equilibrium of most yoga postures comes from an inner focus. If the mind of the listener is like being led astray by my hungover rambling, by my alcoholic stories told in words that bend into

and out of shapes and sounds according to my nervous system – my shot nerves – etc., then what... The listener should not be in a headstand. He or she belongs in a chair. Not even a trance or a nap in yoga with a heavy blanket and cooling body heat is exactly right for the psychotic stories I have to confess of my low esteem and bad choices resulting in a permanent bad mood and slouch. My posture is so accurate to my state of mind that a Yoga instructor would see me coming from a mile away, and, I don't know, maybe take pity on me.

The one person in the yoga class who hears me, who gets me, fully, would inevitably have to be the person who is never going to return to yoga, at least for ten years. Let's just say: a really sexy 23-year-old, who is ambivalent about virtually everything, bored with virtually everybody, and hears the fat ugly sound and status of my story and gets a good enough laugh to know it is low in the torso near an orgasm from a hemorrhage of emotion carried as well up from the knees into the groin, etc. – not a tightening in the solid vertical core vortex sealing off the mind like a zip lock bag to the rotten reality of Brooklyn. Then we would leave together with our bags blown open to the rotten core of Sunday. I don't know, we'd go on a date – brunch and maybe a Bloody Mary. Or a beer. Something unfit for survival. The poetry reading will have been a success. My choice will have been the right choice.

On the Pathos of Aesthetics

GianCarlo Pagliasso

The concept/phrase, *Art, Poetry, and the Pathos of Communication*, has today a great topical interest since its contents seem to be confirmed by raw, new instances of it born in the field of aesthetical research in the last half century. If, from Kant to Modernity, aesthetics was, during late modern and postmodern years, more or less basically bound to the functions of judgment, critique and hermeneutical explanation of fine art, music and literary products or productions (that is, a theoretical/philosophical reflection on beauty with a communicative aim targeted at cultivated 'consumers'), then its role has changed more than a little as a consequence of the rise of new axiological parameters within it.

Synthetically, two 'factors' have provided a different perspective for aesthetics: 1) studies about the ontology of images (see, among other authors, the *pictorial* and *iconic turn* suggested by Mitchell and Boehm, developed by Belting, Breidbach and Bredekamp as inner/anthropologic experience and iconic action and contextualized as re-enchantment of the world by Federico Vercellone); 2) the 'renaissance' of interest in aesthetical inquiry in relation to perception and sensibility (with respect to its founder, the German philosopher, A. G. Baumgarten).

From these points of view, the value-pertinence of pictures has been referred not only to their representational side but to their cognitive, affective and active components, as well, while aesthetics *per se* (treated now as the science of sensorial knowledge) has been enlarged beyond the sphere of artistic competence (fit for dialogic and critical communication) towards other practices able to yield new imagery and sensate/emotional impacts, as evidenced in fashion, advertising, traditional and digital media (and I add gastronomy and eroticism).

On this edge of phenomenological approach, the proposal of Gernot Böhme to structure the aesthetical experience as 'ecological' (he speaks of the "aesthetics of atmospheres") looks particularly appealing. For him, aesthetics "has to do with the relationship between the qualities of environment and human feeling." Through the analysis of Benjamin's aura, Klages' cosmogonic eros or Hermann Schmitz's 'bodily' philosophy, Böhme equates human sensibility and space-time 'sentimental/atmospheric' qualities to dialogical and communicative spheres, giving to the former the same ontological dignity of the latter. The atmosphere-specificity (which is the basis of aesthetical phenomenology) articulates, by means of the ecstatic profile of things, human beings and their constellations, the common ground between perceiver and perceived as synthesis of the actual presence of nature/world and the feeling of man's own existential *being-in*.

The aesthetical work therefore becomes the outcome of atmospheres, where the properties of objects, environments and human beings can also be analyzed under the light of their ‘radiance’, cognitively like presences ‘outside themselves’ rather than as differentiated determinations.

Atmospheric efficiency is the test to analyze this new genre of practical-aesthetical knowledge. The examples, presented by Böhme, deal with scenography, gardens and landscape setting, cosmetics, design, sound environment and architecture, while, referring to ‘artistic’ expressive ‘tools’ as poetry, he underlines that its task is not “to represent or describe atmospheres, but has to suggest and keep them ‘perceptively touchable’”. This new kind of production regarding scope, always underestimated or avoided by traditional aesthetical consideration, shows also a critical position in dealing with the aestheticization of economy and politics under present global capitalistic way of production.

The critic of aesthetical economy, hypothesized by this philosopher, depends upon the competence of a new view of the role of goods and their production. Going beyond Baudrillard – who had identified as sign-exchange value the actuality and meaning of consumerism in the post-industrial society –, Böhme thinks that goods today have “a subordinate use value of appearance,” a kind of ‘scenic’ exchange value. This ‘scenic’ value, which can be found plentifully within socially produced work because it is useful to sell lifestyles and ways of life subrogated by media’s fictional rhetoric, remains static within the production of atmospheres which aren’t immediately confined to trade-purposes but pertain on the contrary to true human needs and their satisfaction. Therefore, the responsibility of aesthetics (meant as general theory of perception) becomes the dialectical analysis of atmospheres, and it must be related to the affectivity of the perceived pictures effectiveness and the perceiver’s bodily incidence.

In conclusion, the new aesthetics doesn’t want to restrict its horizon only to artistic taste and its communication but drives toward the creation of emotional/affective situations whose reality can be heuristic inside the increasing aestheticization of everyday life.

Eros and Psyche and the Pathos of Communication

Philip Taaffe

Art is something which is materially put together. It is a locus, or place, brought into existence through the deliberate efforts, both mental and physical, by an artist to form an alternative reality. Not an alternative to reality, that is, but as a desire to offer an oppositional understanding of reality, or another reality perhaps. In any case, art is very real and it is highly experiential. Art has material dimensions and it can be defined by its specific geographical parameters. Its subjects and subjective concerns can be described, as can the methods employed in its making. Art can be many things, but one thing it cannot be is communication. It cannot be fairly considered under the same prerogatives as communication (and they can also be a form of existential poetry). Smoke signals and Morse code are communication. Telegrams are communication (and they can also be a form of existential poetry). Text messaging is, alas, communication ad *nauseam*.

However, I also think it is true to say that art and communication share certain principles and characteristics in common. Sometimes they may seem inextricably linked. For example, to say that communication is necessary and vital to our survival and to many important aspects of our lives on a daily basis, should also be equally true concerning the role of art. I think the key difference here is a matter of intentionality. Art embodies a particular set of interwoven sensory impulses which are meant to *convey* emotional and expressive content; it is also reflective of contemporary and historical themes and can be politically interventionist. But it is never, strictly speaking, solely intended to communicate as other means of communication do. To my mind, as someone who makes paintings, communication is just not within the same province as art. And I do not think this is merely a semantic issue, but I believe it to be an essential aesthetic philosophical truth. Art is invented, intensified experience, whereas communication is primarily didacticism, however inventive it may be.

The question may arise about what to do with the idea of “reading” a work of art. We often discuss a work by including the notion that it “says” certain things, or that such a work “speaks” to us. We also identify salient features of an artwork which can then be claimed as central to its “communicative” power. To these concerns, I would respond by saying that all such colloquial challenges are fine and valid; and additionally, that they reinforce the inherent qualities of mystery and complexity which only a work of art can possess.

When the time comes, after the completion of a work, for an artist to try to fix upon a title for what they have done, then we have surely entered into the realm of the pathos of communication. In applying language to a work of visual art, in naming it, an artist is accepting a task which, in a practical sense, lies outside of the actions involved in the production of the work itself. For most artists, I suppose, and for myself, this doesn’t present much of an issue; it’s just part of our responsibility. It is also an opportunity to do more research concerning the iconography with which we have been engaged; and to reveal some of the back-story in a concise, aphoristic way.

Sometimes a title exists from the beginning of a work, or suggests itself during the process; but more often than not it has to wait until after the visual manifestation has been fully realized. Even then, it can require some protracted deliberation before a title is found. And it should be simple, direct, expedient; a mediation, a bridge. It can be tentative, a passing declamation, a shot in the dark, a legend that sticks, an educated guess, or arcane in the extreme – plainly good information. Then again, titles aren’t in every case necessary; sometimes numbers and/



(FIG. 1) PHILIP TAAFFE, *EROS AND PSYCHE*, 1994. MIXED MEDIA ON CANVAS, 132 × 100.5 IN. (335 × 255 CM.). PRIVATE COLLECTION, COURTESY AMMANN FINE ART, ZÜRICH

or letters with a date will suffice. But titles are always uniquely idiosyncratic, autobiographical ruminations. They are diaristic in that they emerge from a close remembrance of a series of day-by-day applications and thought processes. They are distilled from a consideration of all the factors that went into the making of the work. I like titles. I think they can provide an additional voice of clarity and authenticity to what's there in front of us. They are also incredibly useful and practical for purposes of identifying pictures.

I say these things in an attempt to outline the mental frame of reference and the imaginative context of a painting from the artist's standpoint. When I painted *Eros and Psyche* in 1994 (Fig. 1), I was familiar with the story from Apuleius. An extraordinary tale of two lovers in search of one another through a series of extremely fantastical circumstances, culminating in the happiest ending in all of literature: the triumphant feast of the gods in celebration of the reunited Eros and Psyche. It is a universal love story and an unbelievably rich allegorical tapestry of profound and staggering human consequence. But I did not begin my painting with this in mind. I started, as usual, in a state of hopelessness and despair.

In the studio, I had made these two tall vertical panels (132 × 50 in. each) that I wanted to join together in a highly charged and unified field. I thought it should be a prismatic application of many fragments that were very actively juxtaposed. I had been reviewing materials used in earlier paintings, and I came across these screenprints on bond paper in enamel ink which were sections of linear wrought iron imagery (Fig. 2). I had used them previously in collage form to piece together a large tondo, *Rosette*, from 1987, which was one of my first significant forays into imaginary architecture as painting. I remembered the careful architectonic structuring of these cut wrought iron drawing sections that were fastidiously and programmatically collaged in place in *Rosette*. I also remembered how difficult the bond paper was to use in this way – it expanded quite a bit and easily came apart in water (I had since discovered other papers that held together well when wet). So, I decided to use these bond paper enameled screenprints to generate the imagery for my two tall vertical panels by submerging them in a large basin of water. I had a good supply of them left over, the sheets measured about 20 × 30 in. I just crumpled them up, page by page, and let them soak in the water for a while, to disintegrate a bit. I mixed two buckets of watered down acrylic color: Indian Yellow and Sap Green. As I removed the soggy balls of paper from the basin, I dipped them in both buckets

of color and immediately threw them hard against a wall in the studio. After I had performed this ritual to a good number of them, I unraveled them, and as I did so, they came apart into irregular pieces. I then laid these broken sections face up on the floor to dry. They were more flat now, but still maintained a crumpled, contoured texture; and the colors were beading nicely as they became absorbed into the paper. They looked mossy.

I was pleased with the resulting fragments from this experiment; they were now compliant and had a wonderful pictorial depth, and there were enough of them to cover the two panels entirely. I then freely composed and collaged these pieces into densely layered and organized fields across the gessoed canvas surfaces. Having successfully concluded this stage in the development of the work, it now had a certain momentum and gave me the impetus to forge ahead. So, I paused to study the implications.

It suggested to me an archaeological ruin, the lost portal to an ancient pleasure dome perhaps, a mosaic of collapsed, filigreed walls and ceiling. It took on the appearance of an epic work grounded in antiquity. And at this point, I knew I needed to find a way to navigate through all of this. The touchstone for me, oddly enough, was a Japanese woodblock print I had framed and kept around the studio (**Fig. 3**). I don't know the artist, but it is from the first half of the 19th century and depicts a scene from the famous Battle of Shijōnawate which took place in Nara in 1348. It is the last stand of the legendary Samurai/monk Kusunoki Masatsura (center of illustration) who, along with his two courageous cohorts, supposedly fought off the entire Northern Imperial army to protect Yosuno Castle, the seat of the Southern Emperor in medieval Japan. He is killed in a hail of arrows during his heroic attempt. Kuniyoshi also made a well-known earlier woodblock print of this same subject.

It was through the elision of these dichotomous visual forces, the evocative site of shattered wrought iron and the idea of a penetrating tempest of arrows, that the theme of Eros and Psyche popped into my mind and took hold. The delicate sheathing of the collaged paper now seemed vulnerable, akin to the carnality of flesh. It was as if the beloved Psyche herself had been transported to the edge of this cultivated grove. The driving physical desire of Eros had to be reckoned with. He plays with frenzy, he wounds lovers and causes tribulation to those who dare to resist him. He also represents a cosmic principle, the power of which leads contrasts together. I now believed that I could bring my painting to an adequate conclusion. So, I went into full-on arrow production.

It is important for me to note that the scale of the coiling wrought iron drawings corresponds to the actual size and thickness of material wrought iron. And because of this, I felt that the scale of the arrows I was introducing should also correspond to the size of real arrows, although I made them slightly more diminutive so that I could fit more of them into the painting. I made a number of arrow drawings of the same length, varying the consistency of the feathers, on thin illustration board. They were then precisely cut out and mounted with glue onto a heavier cardboard surface to form a relief plate; grouped together so they could be inked together under a roller of ten inch width (**Fig. 4**). I printed the arrows in multiple litho ink reds on sheets of thin non-absorbent paper; the color being transferred from the relief plate through burnishing with a cloth. These wet red arrow prints were then cut into single narrow strips (**Fig. 5**). And each narrow strip was again burnished directly by hand onto the surface of the painting to build up this imagery, to create a rain of arrows. I continued this process until no further intervention was required. And then it became my pathos riddled, aniconic version of the myth of Eros and Psyche, replete with doubt and tenderness.

The title indicates the point of entry, communicates the zone of inquiry; but the painting, as an experience, transmits itself through pathos. I say let us celebrate and revel in the Pathos of Communication.



(FIG. 3) JAPANESE WOODBLOCK PRINT, 19TH CENTURY

(FIG. 4) PHILIP TAAFFE, RELIEF PRINTING PLATE, 1994. LAMINATED CARDBOARD

(FIG. 5) PHILIP TAAFFE, ARROW STUDIES, 1994. LITHO INK ON PAPER



“Uhm, methinks we have a problemo here, Ethel!”

Peter Carravetta

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Someone once said – or maybe I read it somewhere, it doesn’t matter – that we do not talk in order to communicate, but communicate because we talk. A conundrum of sorts? We are taught since grammar school to make ourselves understood, to speak up, explain what we mean, and presumably our interlocutor will get what we are saying. But it’s not so easy. I think this is an idealization or generalization at best. I have been trying to explain to a certain individual, let’s call him Mr. X, how interpretation works, and after several years of trying he still doesn’t seem to get it. And this is so no matter how many examples I provide, no matter how technical I get. Maybe I should try the other horn of the dilemma, and just talk him to death and hopefully at some point he’ll “get it” – but, I’m sure, in what inevitably is “his” way of understanding.

“Uhm, methinks we have a problemo here, Ethel!”

For if Mr. X “gets it,” but only in “his way,” I know from experience he hasn’t a clue as to what I have been trying to tell him. Maybe the person I quoted above did not take into account the phenomena of talking past each other, or over our heads, or worse, to ourselves, even though we are standing right before each other.

You might think I have opened-up a proverbial can of worms, and I suppose I have. But here is the problem. You have at least three elements: speaker A (me), speaker B (Mr. X), and the language, L, in-between. However, the L-factor is perverse, because though it is what gives both A & B the ability to speak about something, L is neither mine nor his, and it’s well known there is a whole world of previously circumscribed content embedded in L that is greater than both of us. What is crucial here is that L may release in the process of any given speech

act other potential meanings that really neither A nor B intended, and what’s worse, it can give both A and B the sense that they really understood each other and what was being exchanged but, in fact, didn’t really communicate at all.

Perhaps we talk to one another on the logical assumption, or illogical, if not altogether pathetic belief, that we can communicate something, when in reality we are only talking to ourselves or to an idea of ourselves, everything else being equal and of a non-linguistic nature (i.e., power, money, prestige, mortgages, toothaches, the desire to screw each other, etc.).

To this day, Mr X. does not understand he is simply recycling and spouting ready-made utterances from fifty years ago, indeed from a clearly circumscribed L-world, studied, tabulated, and by now discounted because it is replete with empirically predictable social-geographic-historic cultural habits or biases, in the order of: we don’t have poets like we used to, or: modern art is junk, or: kids don’t understand anything anymore, or: what has this person done for you that you should be so kind to him, or: your ideas are a fad, as if anything has changed in the past fifty year. Since so many seem to be articulating what used to be described as their Weltanschauung in ready-made forms of ossified atheoriosclerotic quips, what’s the point of devising a theory of interpretation based on dialogue or rational discourse, given that what reigns supreme is non-communication?

Perhaps it is for this reason so many of us love music, painting, architecture, dancing, soccer, hiking! They lend themselves readily to interpretation in so far as we may experience them as we wish. What a relief: I don’t have to communicate with Mr. X any longer!

Elegy for a Written Epistle

Daniel Rothbart

Written letters and manuscripts have a fetish-like quality in the modern world. They come down to us from another time and place, replete with meaning and sentiment that can only be partially deciphered. Calligraphy expresses language in a different, richer, and more complex way than simple type. It conveys a gamut of human emotion, adding veils of meaning to a text. The paper is an object that can be held and coveted, shared or withheld.

Over dinner with art theorist Riccardo Notte in Naples, I once reflected on the convenience of word processing for editing articles. Riccardo seemed to bristle, rose from the table, and returned with a written letter in his hand.

“My father wrote this letter from the front during World War I,” he explained.

Riccardo’s father Emilio was a painter and part of the Futurist movement, which drew inspiration from mechanization and the bellicose mobilization that were taking hold of Italy in the early years of the last century. There was nothing vaguely mechanical about Emilio Notte’s cursive, however, which had been lovingly committed to paper. Lines of ink danced a stately Sarabande, twirling, conjoining, pleasingly separating.

Emilio’s letter could never have been composed at the keyboard, because paper and calligraphy were intrinsic to its inception. He savored authorship, meditating thoughtfully on how best to describe a feeling, situation, or concept. Then measured ink would flow from Emilio’s pen, gracefully signifying his interior meaning. The paper is elegant and translucent, delicate but resilient enough to hold and read like Emilio had done nearly a century before.

Who would have suspected then that future letters would take the form of email, text messaging with emojis, or social media

posts? Perhaps naïve American youthfulness favored my embrace of word processing technology. Was this truly at the service of the writer? In ways, most certainly, but it also heralded our current debasement of communication. Typewriters, which had been in production since the nineteenth century, evolved parallel to motorcars, trolleys, locomotives, and airplanes. While inspired by the heady speed of current technologies, futurist art was grounded in the existing traditions of poetry, painting, sculpture, and performance. Much like Emilio Notte’s old world handwriting crafted new prose.

Rapidity and dynamism certainly have a darker side, which found expression in regimentation, new weaponry, and even the mass mobilization of war. Emilio Notte’s letter was, after all, written from the trenches. Speed that had so fascinated the Futurists now characterizes most electronic communication. Words are abbreviated and thoughts condensed. Touch-typing is efficient, but at some profound level, discourages reflection.

Certain young people today, who were born in the digital age, reject CD audio. They find greater warmth and depth in the sound of vinyl to lousy, compressed digital files. These people also prefer the communal experience of shopping at a record store to downloading files to their computer. One day, might there be a similar rejection of electronic communication in favor of handwriting and the written missive? Now, perhaps, I am pushing this argument too far!

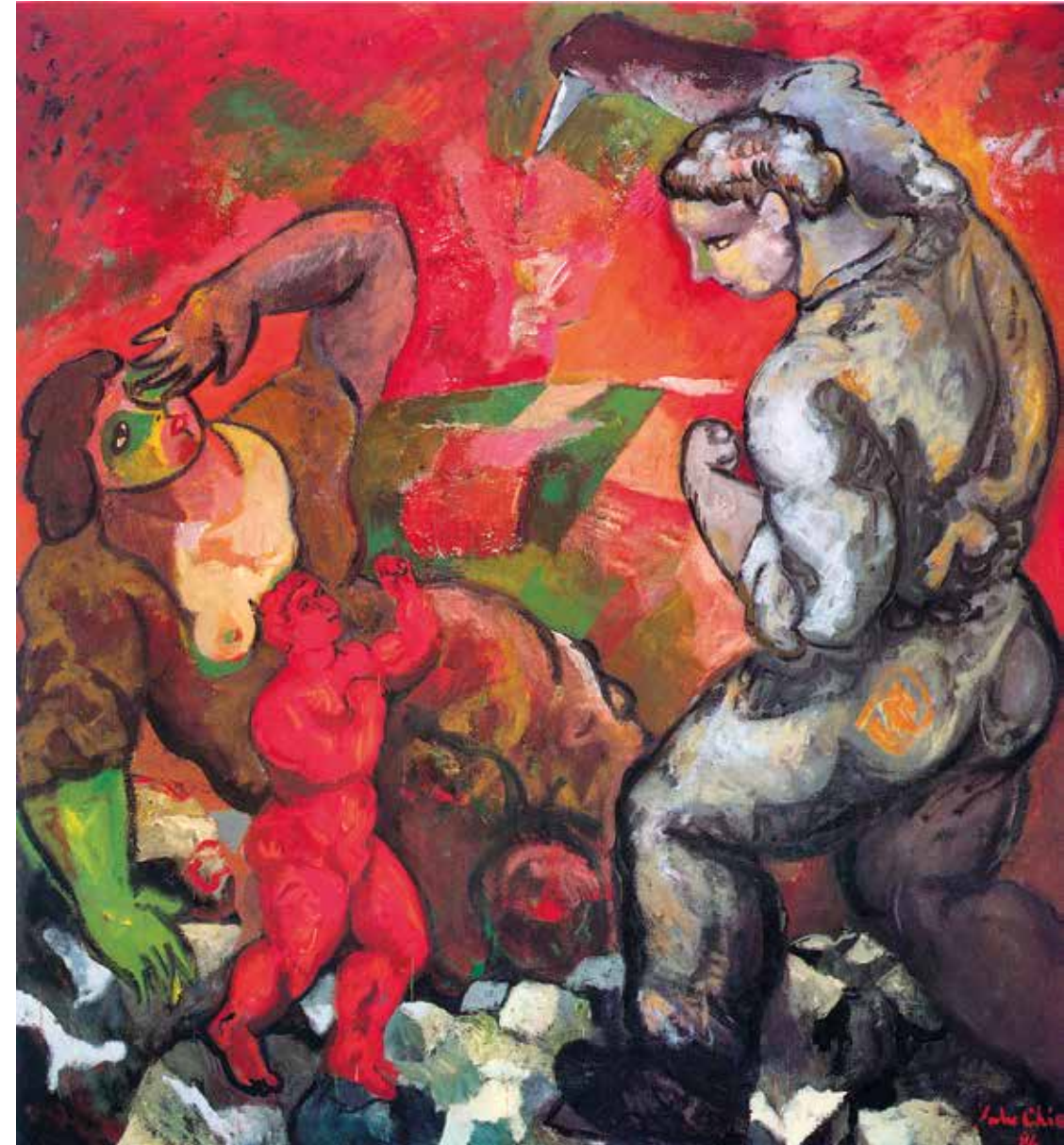
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Fake News

Sandro Chia

Fake News, as if Real News existed, is a concept so charged with *pathos* that it deserves attention... Meaning: if one has any heart at all, one should not disappoint the wishful thinker... who believes in real news as opposed to fake news. The artist who works in the production of multiple simulations, icons, symbolisms, artifacts, suggests the view of a movie by Orson Welles: "F for Fake." Making illustrations, I experiment with the impossibility of producing fake ones, even if I try...

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The Pathos of Attractica

Kevin Clarke



KEVIN CLARKE, *ATTRACTICA*, 2003
CHROMOGENIC PRINT ON ALUMINUM

Attractica is a term I used to title an art work and, later, an exhibition proposal. Having created the exhibition *Genetic Reveries* (Janos Gat Gallery, New York, 2003), whose subject was the gentler, tender side of human genetics, I included a portrait that was meant to please through its subject, visualization, colors, and composition. Everything about the picture was based upon attraction.

I made the piece by photographing a fragment of a seashell my-then-partner had found on the beach in Dakar. She also happened to have the beaded jewelry that brides wear for their husbands on their wedding night. The beads are the last bit of clothing to fall after the “unwrapping” of the virgin bride, before consummation of the marriage.

The image is photographed with color negative film and printed as a positive, so the colors of the original negative are brightly retained. The seashell became an iconic flaming red gash resting upon the scattered necklace-like beaded jewelry. I later printed the mother’s DNA sequence discretely on the beads. Moments before, she had informed me she was pregnant and this was a partial and happy response. The finished piece resides in the art historical category known as the Venus subject.

The entire action was an expression of *Pathos*, the elements of the image reaching out to be liked in a squishily emotional way. The actions behind the making of the image were done to appear sweet and to instill a feeling of closeness, of emotional connectedness.

I then used this image as the basis for a proposal I made to the senior curator of the Museum Nord-Rhein Westphalen

in Düsseldorf. After many visits to their wonderful collection, I began to notice that this collection of famous paintings all had elements, passages in the artworks that cried out to the viewer to be liked. Even the most grisly subjects had beautiful passages of brushwork, of color, etc., that fulfilled a need to attract. I called these elements within the paintings *attractica*, and suggested I photograph details of the paintings and exhibit these passages beside the paintings. The proposal was politely declined.

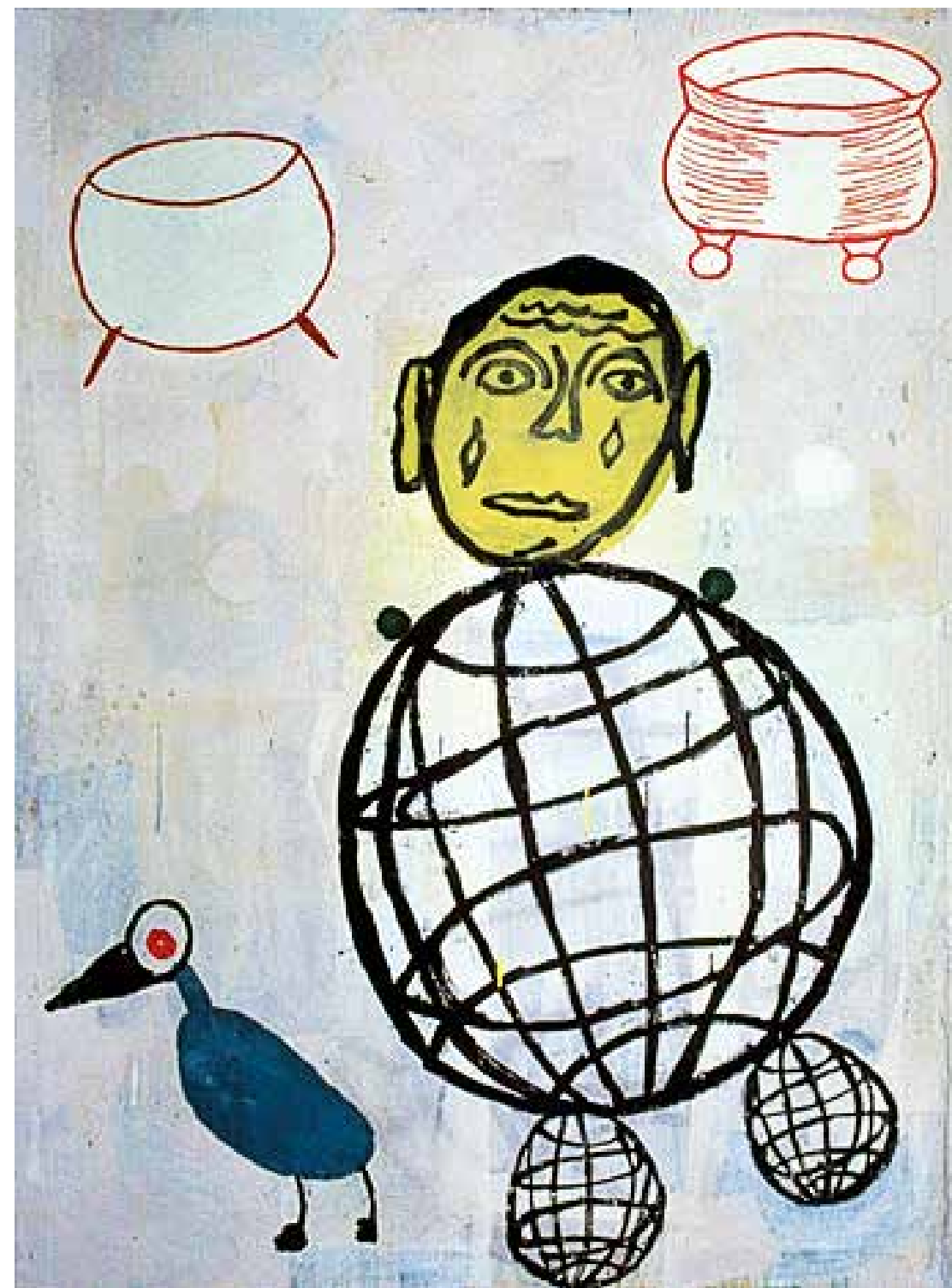
The current exhibition of recent paintings by Gerhard Richter at the Museum Ludwig, Cologne, reflect a kind of all-over style of pure colorful abstraction that relies on small passages of sublime beauty to attract. The complete canvas(es) seemed to me to be overly busy, the 26 paintings all blurring into one another. I found his recent efforts unsuccessful and unconvincing. An elderly gentleman had photographed small details of the paintings with his simple digital camera. I fell into conversation with him and viewed his close-ups. They were quite beautiful and gave me the feeling, in their *pathos*, that the deconstructed details were far greater than the whole.

Two of the above experiences happened in Museums in the Rhineland, a region that is rooted in the Catholic faith, a faith that has long relied upon *pathos* as a means to attract, instruct, and to call to the emotions through visual art. It is often said that the music loving Protestants are less likely to support the visual arts in Europe, but here we would be speaking in clichés about an argument between *pathos* and *ethos* in the arts.

– Frankfurt-am-Main, 2017



LAWRENCE CARROLL, *GYPSIES OF THE TONGUE*,
2017. COLLAGE, HOUSE PAINT, DUST, ON MASONITE,
37 × 23 IN. (94 × 58.5 CM)



PREVIOUS PAGE: 58–59
ELLIOT SCHWARTZ, *IN SEINE*, 2017.
 PHOTOGRAPHIC COLLAGE

DONALD BAECHLER, *VICTIMS OF EMIGRANTS*,
 1985. ACRYLIC & FABRIC COLLAGE ON CANVAS,
 92 × 68 IN. (233.7 × 172.7 CM.)

Unreliability

Lucio Pozzi

62

Once, Jan van der Marck curated a large retrospective of mine at the Museum of New Art in Detroit. A young man approached me and asked how I felt exhibiting with all these other artists. In the mid-XIX Century, a Texas cattle grower named Samuel Augustus Maverick refused to brand his cows. Now art-culture is triumphant. Infinite brilliant artworks are being produced, each well-framed by reliable definitions. Like Diogenes, who carried a lamp in full daylight looking for an honest person in the crowded market in Athens, I am desperately looking for the unfathomable in art. The virus of explanationitis is rampant, immune to any cure. Intensity is impossible if one follows a template to seek it. I know I never will, yet I am sure that if I hop from one to another unreliable territory I can find something hidden in each single entity I make.





ROBERT LONGO, *UNTITLED (RIOT COPS)*, 2016.
CHARCOAL ON MOUNTED PAPER, 101 × 140 IN. COURTESY
OF THE ARTIST AND METRO PICTURES, NEW YORK



PETER NAGY, *SIGN OF MALIGNANCY*, 1985.
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS, DIMENSIONS VARIABLE



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Trump Says Comey Better Hope 'There Are No "Tapes"'

OP-DOCS



The Opinion Pages

American Fascism, in 1944 and Today

By HENRY SCOTT
WALLACE



Sunday Review



Excerpt from “Notes on Abstraction” (1987)

Peter Halley

70

Progressively, all of the social is being transferred onto the electro-magnetic digital grids of the computer. From long-distance telephone service, to air-traffic control, to banking, the flow of all communications, movement, and resources is channeled through the digital circuits. The computer chip becomes a universal gateway through which everything must pass. With computer graphics and synthesized voices and music, computers even gain a hand in rebuilding specific reality according to their own digital rules.

It is not generally acknowledged to what extent each individual is tied to these grids of computer communication. But the telephone line is an endpoint in a huge electronic network that enmeshes the entire globe. More importantly, credit cards, which are replacing the relative autonomy of currency, tie huge segments of the population into a kind of slavery of computer debt. One is lured into the system with the promise of a “credit line,” the ability of the “user” to spend the computer money any time and any place. But, if the payments are not made, a kind of passive wrath comes down on the user, who is banished from the system and the grids. That is to be left as helpless as an excommunicated Christian in the Middle Ages.

Thus the social is finally becoming the site of “pure abstraction.” Each human being is no longer just a number, but is a collection of numbers, each of which ties him or her to a different matrix of information. There is the telephone number, the social security number, and the credit card number. The financial markets, those huge arenas of abstract warfare, have completely detached themselves from any relationship with the material world. Currencies float. National boundaries crumble. The markets come to be governed by technical factors, by computer-controlled trading. The hero of the marketplace is no longer the engineer, who is still engaged in practical technology, but rather the financial wizard, the “number cruncher,” the manipulator of purely abstract forces.

On an experiential level as well, the social moves onto the grids of circulation, each one embedded in the next. Each day, the “suburbanite” moves from subdivision to car to office building. The traveler moves from the grid of the urban streets to the transcontinental network of superhighways to the global network of air travel and back again. Sensual pleasure is replaced by abstract pleasure. Food is replaced by ambience. Space is replaced by amenities.

Excerpt from *Why I Go to the Movies Alone* (1983)

Richard Prince

The implications of doing something unconsciously and often compulsively, was the kind of custom they both wanted to share, but if in fact the pattern was going to be the same as before...that is to say a pattern that would induce the formation of an addiction, a fixation, where the dependence on each other’s mental make-up continually increased the regularity of a performance rather than relaxation...then the thrill of suddenly acquiring a mode of behavior nearly or completely involuntary, might have to be modified or at least second guessed, so as not to wind them up back where they started, alone, unloyal, and uptight.

They wanted to be natural, like any other group, with each other, and in such an attitude and surrounding, so as to reproduce a picture that at least led one to believe that they were typical and usual in appearance.

What they did was wonder how this image could be managed and wonder if the image could somehow be processed by a kind of curiosity so it could emerge seemingly untouched by the slightest kind of irony. They knew the complexities of their relationship had to be reduced to a highly concentrated truth, and the only way to do it was by an oblique and indirect control. The ultimate projection, no matter what the consequences, was to add beauty and a goodness of life and to restore their faith in a better future.

They didn’t really want their image to intimidate life, but just give it enough of a look to identify the projection as a freedom from detachment, exploitation, and recovery. What it looked like had to be ideally embarrassing in order to give it some chance to survive along side everything else that looked unbelievable, so, for them, what better way to deal with their presentation than just making themselves available, as is....

71

A Dream

Donna Moylan



72

This morning I woke from a dream where scientists were studying life in chambers carved into deep water underneath the sea, dim rooms of air within trembling water-walls. No sooner had I arrived than I saw a woman tug a huge white bird through the jelly-like walls of the water by its long, closed beak. An osprey, a stork? I wondered. The woman pulled the passive, large bird, which nonetheless looked unhappy, down a corridor where the waters closed over again. I wanted to eat the sandwich, wrapped in filthy paper, that I'd bought at a deli in a street topside, as it was called in my dream, but I couldn't see how to unwrap it without soiling the food. I laid it on a jelly-water shelf and considered the problem. The fact that the water all around me was yellow and full of particles began to bother me.

I complained about it to a man going by. "What do you expect, it's the New York harbor!" he grumbled to me. He was busy dragging a young woman into a beer cooler. Soon I saw her legs go pink and her shoes fill with blood, in the murky yellow light of the sea water. I'm tired of this biosphere, I told myself.

I turned and held my lover's warm back. I remembered a caption in *The New York Times*. "My brain was doing its pruning," I murmured to him.

There are times when we are deep and pure. Maybe it's on a roof in the nighttime with stars (a classic). Perhaps it's the time when, meandering and lost in an ancient city, we ask for directions – like those other times, when a poem captured us, carried us far, then returned us to our changed selves. We looked up, startled, having glimpsed – deeply, purely, as it vanished – the certainty: that was what makes the world go round. And all the stars and the heavens.

DONNA MOYLAN, *HIGH SUMMER*, 2016. OIL, ACRYLIC, PASTEL AND SILK ON CANVAS, 84 × 102 IN. (213.3 × 259 CM.)

DONNA MOYLAN, *EXUBERANT*, 2016. OIL AND ACRYLIC ON CANVAS, 84 × 104 IN. (213.3 × 264.1 CM.)





Self-Pathetic

Samantha Dietmar



Even when looking at the pathos of communication within the close circle of my friends and family – the result might be distorted these days. Offensive or defensive thoughts willing to be persuasive. Pathetic mode. In the end, it's all about the impact, the resulting moment of each state of mind. Precarious interpretations or misunderstood ideas, or underestimated reactions. I wonder if we are ever able to restrain ourselves. Are there such things as up-to-date requirements? First, to preserve maximum objectivity. Followed by reflection. There is an urgent need to use a recipe of understanding, wit, mind. Pathos refers to emotional appeal. I feel quiet uneasy thinking big...but I do believe in the power of being moved to positive action. Developing intercultural tolerance and democratic values. Respect for fundamental rights and the environment. Conclusion: self-pathetic.

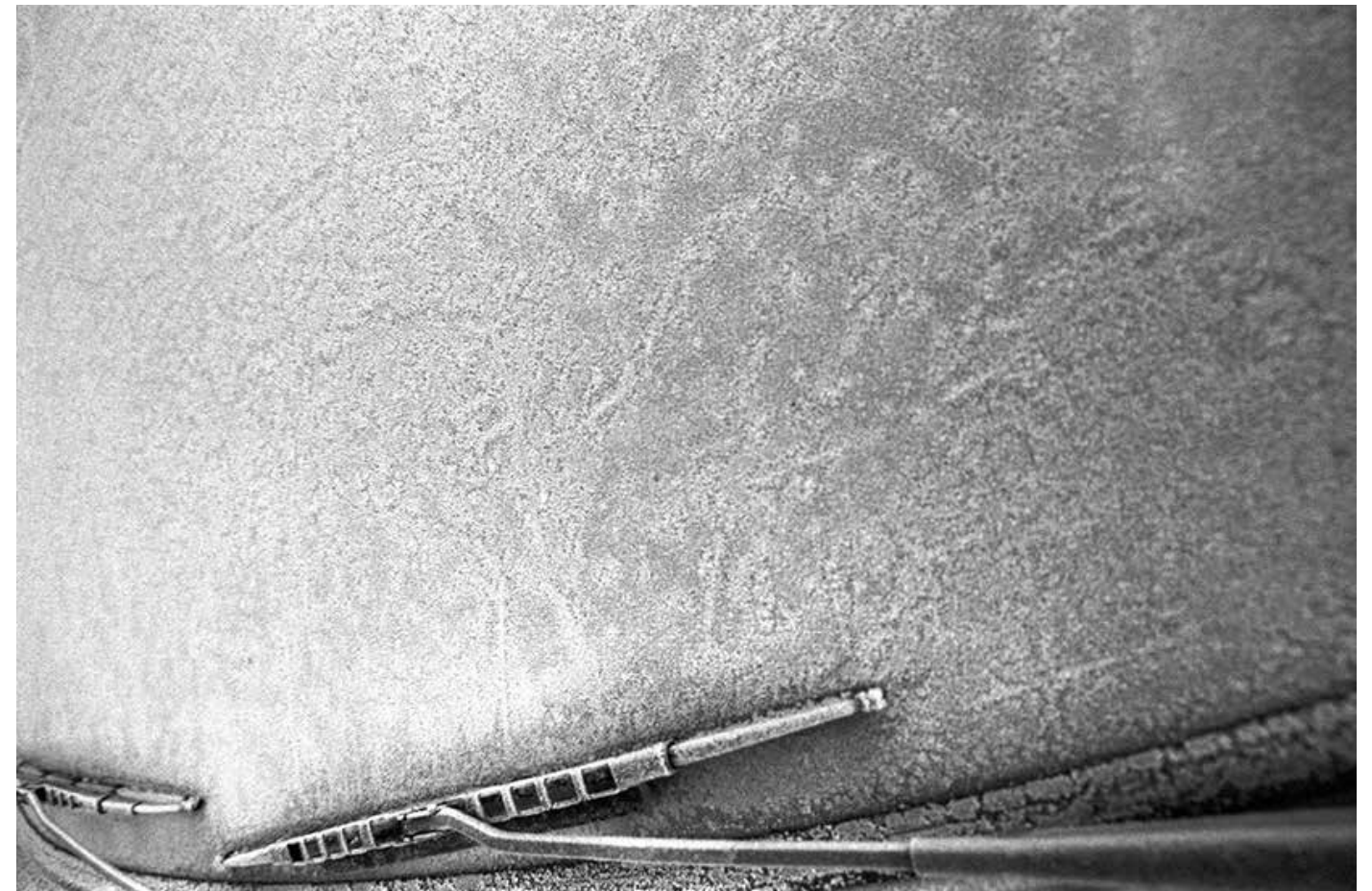
75



SAMANTHA DIETMAR, *PLEURER* (JARDIN DE TUILLERIES), PARIS, FRANCE, 2005. B/W FILM, 35 MM

SAMANTHA DIETMAR, *FROST*, WÜRZBURG, GERMANY, 2007. B/W FILM, 35 MM

SAMANTHA DIETMAR, *SHADOWLAMPS* (RAILWAY PLATFORM), NEW YORK CITY, 2007. B/W FILM, 35 MM



DOETRY

Dead Horse Bay

Olivia Smith

80

The man swung the heavy bag onto his shoulder like a knapsack – rippling, black, glistening in the heat. It was clear something was pressing, but they can’t know what they don’t. And to think of boats dotting the water.

I saw someone speaking in spit bubbles, the light refracting off each oblong shape like a magnifying glass, burning a feeling in me I cannot get out of my head. Each shape a sentence – a long, sacred tomb I could hold. Like fear enveloping me. Their word a daydream, an alternative fact, Déjà vu. The containment of desire, something I can’t have – a window into a place whose walls I can’t climb. A shattering possibility. This membrane a location in my head. A sack multiplying, swung over his back. An area divided, an unmade mind. A place for thoughts to die, to have and to hold in my hands. Two palms to look into, a crystal ball dropped.

The ungraspability of being forever alone. Of it only being us, only being earth and that’s that. The soft sphere of the word a bridle in my mouth. Alone – first a wider opening, less than a gasp, more palatable. A gentle closure, the door once you’ve fallen asleep. Any mother after her child has died, or anyone at a younger person’s funeral. A choking thought caught in the back of your throat, the physical presence of the most grief. The “ball and chain” of loss and the more clichéd “loss of control.” Do we fear it more than being the only thing ever to exist?

The universe as something that can be malleable like hot glass – that can only be seen through, not around. Each star a puncture wound into the thing we cannot comprehend. Magic. How we want to believe fingerprints matter – that there is evidence of our own lasting. The truest hope in the infinity of a future life: that near selves will admire us, turn us over like a gold watch glinting in your eye, which you’ve just noticed has the inscription *Forever As One*. The word *Forever* beginning with friction on your lips. Not something with which you can start slow, a word that needs propelling. The type of word that chews its way out.

Speaking out loud crystallizes thought upon impact and will bury itself in the moment, only later to seep its way out like the junk at Dead Horse Bay. And Alone, having two parts like Only, but in reverse. Possible to reorganize but impossible to believe. What is the shape of desire? Should there always be an obstacle for want? Illness promotes the desperation for health. In a rare world one has it their way. One world on one hand but on the other hand, no communion.

The speech delivered once. Each letter a particle, stacking in columns of As, Bs, Qs, and Zs. One measure of success is quantity, as is the same with existence. The quality of wholeness is an entirely separate matter. She held it on her tongue, the mid-part, the L-part. Lone. The longevity in question, along with the fact stretching through time like an aerial view of the ocean. Resting on the moment, a ball and mitt. The last part always the roundest, a smooth tone, a refusal drawn out till the bitter end. The total value is as large as possible.

– June 3, 2017

On Communication

Jeff Koons

81

“At one time, artists had only to whisper into the ear of the King or Pope to have political effect. Now, they must whisper into the ears of millions of people.”

“My work will use everything it can to communicate. It will use any trick; it will do anything – absolutely anything – to communicate and to win the viewer over. Even the most unsophisticated people are not threatened by it; they aren’t threatened that this is something they have no understanding of. They can look at it and they can participate with it.”

“I want to have impact on people’s lives. I want to communicate to as wide a mass as possible. And the way to communicate to the public right now is through TV and advertising. The art world is not effective right now.”

“Art is communication – it is the ability to manipulate people. The difference between it and show business or politics is only that the artist is freer. More than anyone else, he is able to keep everything – from the idea though the production to the sales point – in his own control. It is only a matter of knowing how to use the right approach at the right moment.”

“It was really about assuming leadership, and declaring myself king. And even though the subjects of this world of mine may just be these seals, these protectors of mine, I was still king of my world.”



From “Strictly Speaking”
Paul Vangelisti

1 The ridiculous of evil, the smug
 banality of its impulse rates prime
 depravity, however plangent.
 Take my wife here, sighs the good doctor
 licking the parabola of his undoing.
 A westerly breeze rings the arroyo
 as hell doesn’t resound but tinkles
 a silly tune about the death of
 Spider Man, who by and by was dreaming
 of a sequel. *Have a blessed day*, the prompt says
 before exploding. The ridiculousness of it
 because it happens. Over and over’s
 the only way to finally say goodbye.
 Who, I mean who is truly yours after all?

4 I fear there’s no beginning in my end.
 The New Year rises in cold sunlight
 and who reckons this final defeat, singer
 in time taken so abruptly. Assuming
 we still wish to call it such, beginning
 is no easier now than before, and this
 business about it meaning one more lie
 to will away the ghosts, to spill their secrets.
 Oh well, the cold whispers through the bright floor
 and the map of syllables grows drowsy.
 That there’s no destination seems passable,
 so much in keeping with the treason
 and guile of thinning limbs and stray thoughts
 and the love of those who speak only in dreams.

6 If not what our ever-growing decadence
 is doing, sighs my immigrant heart,
 business is unfortunately business.
 Here it was they met, fell madly in love
 and never saw each other again.
 There remains barren as paradise
 and barely located in failure. Neither
 here nor there speaks of shadowy plateau
 with an empty riverbed irrigating
 its whole length. April’s come and poppies
 mark the river’s course across that pale
 earth at evening. Hard to imagine the
 river’s goal – an ocean long beyond
 those darkling mountains blurred in dreams.

Connectivity
Andrew McCarron

The tap-tap of a branch
Against a house
Against a window
On the second floor

The rhythm of rain beating on a roof
(Afterward shingles glisten)

There’s a nest up in the gutter
Some ivy creeping up cream-colored siding
A ladder against the side of the house

A daddy longlegs
On the stucco
Out back

Bats swoop down
On mosquitos

A screen door
Slamming open and shut
Echoes over the summer lawn

Plastic garbage pails on the cul-de-sac

Blue recycling bins full of bottles

The unvarnished wood of a new porch
The concave screen of an old porch
Sinking in the ragweed... the loosestrife... the digitalis
Of time having passed...

Siding hanging off the house

The ladder rotting in the shed

Rusted bikes and bags of soil

A leaky faucet, a sagging ceiling
Phantoms of people and pets
Long gone
Cats, grandmas, aunts, uncles
Things that were said and felt

Frequencies from everything
Heard or touched continuing on
Cellars, toys, porches, lawnmowers
Pails, spools, inflatable pools

Continuing on – smells
Like simmering sauces
Oatmeal cookies, baking bread
The heartbeat clank of a radiator
Travelling with folks for awhile
Making friends and seeing relatives
A string of Thanksgivings
In the same dining room
Turkey, stuffing, cornbread, yams

You ought to write a thank you
While there's time to tell everyone
Before they're gone
How much they've done for you
In times of worry and woe
Around tables or at bars
And that their hopes and fears
Are more with you than they might imagine
– So how could I have imagined
Meeting up and having little to say
A song sung by two voices, then by one

Scene shall replace scene
Face shall replace face
One world will morph into another
Shifting constellations of friends and brothers
Strangers and lovers

Copulating in tandem
The place where her knees became an ocean
Any tree mounting a new year
Filling the sky with hoary wood
Seeding centuries before we're born
And leafing for generations after
The slow concentric expansion of wood
Hunks of bark slipping off like silk
Bolts of melody
Flashing under jeans
Toweling off
Unbuttoning blouses

Leaf and dust mites
Filtering sun
As light as helium

A darting hummingbird
Or bee
Over grass
Through blueberry bush
Ragweed, clover
Geometries of connections
Touching, cleaving
Getting on, getting off

A whitetail deer
Ears perked by surprise
Rises on knobby knees
As close to God as we are to her
Embankments by the river, some water
Shimmering with radiant sun and heat

And light enough to lift a burden, as if
A featherbed cloud or lilt of laughter
Or joy welling up in the filmstrips of eyes
Staring into vistas of blazing yellow
Or a murder of crows on a hillside
Or feeling warm inside with a glass of wine
Asleep in the candlelight of an inn
Waking early to coffee

In other moments it's all so lonely
The leash and bowl of a dog put under
High shelves of feeling one can no longer reach
Dreamt-up scenes of *we found one another*
Of radical amazement and wonder
Fictions forced onto acquaintances that don't care

A toothache on an empty train platform

Vultures circling a wounded deer

A forgotten swing set
In the backyard
Of a raised ranch
Glimpsed from an Amtrak

A cigarette-scented lap dance

The electric buzz of a streetlamp

The broken asphalt of a K-Mart parking lot
Broken as any heart that beats a lot

A box of stuffed animals packed away

A storage locker unopened for decades

The smell of carpet and flat beer

A sheet hanging from a clothesline

I remember looking at a photo
Of a *Salmon River* cap I once owned
Left out on a table when I was gone
And the cap on the table in the sun
Joined into a pattern that didn't need me
To hold them together into one

There will be a time
When you won't recognize anyone

Your eyes drifting from face to face
In a crowded room
Ever have one of those moments
When locking eyes with a stranger
And see your father, mother, or a long lost friend
Looking back in mutual recognition
It's attraction, but distinct from lust
The yearning of two separated halves
Travelling distances through the night
Greyhounds on the thruway near Buffalo

Grace is feeling part of something larger
The northern lights I saw in Canada that night
In diaphanous blue and silver waves
Or the day I watched the seasons change
One after another in succession
Fall-into-winter, spring-into-summer
A ripple in the fabric of space-time
Or the moonlit stones on the Via Apia
Beyond the sum of all countable parts
Or a calico cat peering down from a window
Or the perfect peace of a winter sunset
Scarlet-then-amber outside Albany
Bringing on nostalgia for places we've never been
Like a barbershop in Buenos Aries
Or a kid whizzing by on a bike
Turning to avoid a mouse
Or a ferry across a freezing Lake Eerie
And you out on the deck breathing the icy air
Getting teary, full of life and weary
Or watching the geometries of hawks
High over the ancient tree cover of a summer dream
A ledge slanting down, a river below the cliff
Maybe a gradual fading of the light
Maybe a tide over the pebbles
The smell of lichen, the smell of brine

—————

Male and Female

Walter Robinson

He had sober blue eyes in a hard-boned uncompromising face.
He was waiting for a woman.

The only light in the cabin was the small lamp over his bunk,
gleaming on the girl's golden body as she lay there on her stomach.

She twisted around on the bed, smiling, watching him.

"He is gone. He has disappeared."

She spoke in English, her lips trembling, her eyes uncertain.

The cool deep voice was as distant as the dark, handsome face
staring down at her. "Will you come with me?"

He had the features of a Roman warrior, the same masculine cut
to his jaw, the same slight bend in his nose, the same beautifully
formed lips, as if chiseled from stone.

She couldn't help but look into his eyes. They were rich, vibrant
blue, like the Tahoe sky, surrounded by thick, dark lashes. She
felt a sudden, wild fluttering inside her, a feeling of momentous,
impending change.

Her arms went around his beck and took him to her. She
whispered, "Don't worry, I won't break."

When she smiled, dimples carved accents in the tan of her cheeks.
Her eyes were green, slightly slanted and crinkled with the smile.

He was once more aware of her presence, the warmth and
faint perfume of her body. Suddenly she was in his arms, crying
helplessly.

His low voice acted on her senses like velvet on naked skin. She
felt a strange pulsing begin within her, felt a wave of heat move up
her body.

He paused and smelled the honey in her hair that was like the
dark gold horse of an October highland. She had violet eyes with
luminous spots in them like the reflections off a mountain stream.

Electricity seemed to sparkle in the air between them. He held her
eyes with his, then dropped his gaze to her lips.

He had a Barrymore profile and a sunlamp tan.

Her eyes were dull, dark bruises against a dead-white face. Her eyelids went down as if in prayer and she let out a long sigh.

She went into his arms, pressed herself against him, embracing him with all the strength she had, her eyes filling with tears.

Silhouetted by the soft early light, his shoulders seemed even broader, his waist trimmer, his legs incredibly long.

He was acutely aware of her; she emanated a tingling aura. Her walk was a smooth, gliding motion, her legs invisible under the cloak she now tightened about her.

Her face was white. “What happened?”

His mouth was crushing hers, drinking the salty, angry tears from her lips. She was moaning in her throat, dizzy and drowning in the merciless forces released in her.

She sat on the edge of the huge bed, about to rise, and she was stark naked again.

He kissed her mouth, and she felt his thumb trace the sign of the cross on her forehead.

She turned her back to the wind and took off her goggles. Her eyes were shining and mysterious, filled with an exaltation that reflected her sympathy with the elements. And something else was there...

He relented then, and slanted his mouth over hers in a kiss so shattering that her knees buckled. Clinging to him, she opened her lips to the subtle persuasion of his.

She lowered herself slowly to the mattress and holding out her arms to him. Her skin had the luster of pearls, as if she polished it with moon dust.

Before this was all over, he might have to kill her.

– New York, May 2017

—————

Adrian Sângeorzan

One Day

One day, my love, we'll run out of ink
and then we'll write
with blue tears
like the crocodiles sacrificed
for rare editions
of poems
bound in leather.

Malevolent Palms

If you and I ended up alone
on a desert island,
after ten years or more
we would still have so many things to tell each other
that the malevolent palm trees
would throw coconuts at us
filled with all we had said
and still enjoy telling each other.

—————

**AND THE
DATAHOS**

On the Loveable Road

Ilya Bernstein

Everything passes between a particular student and a particular teacher,
Teacher and student kissing on the lips.

Crimes, dreams, miracles, shadows:
None of these things matter anymore.
On the loveable road the music flows
And the whole metaphysical world is ours
Just as in the days of years ago.

The music overpowers the musical instrument
And the musician steps out of that melody, as out of a house on fire,
With a new musical instrument in his hands.

On the loveable road the music flows
And the whole metaphysical world is ours
Just as in the days of years ago
And from early to late on the loveable road
Everything passes between strangers,

Strangers learn how to become lovers,
And lovers wait for memory to take over
And tell them what to think and what to do,
Just as in the days of years ago,
While on the loveable road the music flows.

—————

Chaos

Carmen Firan

every night I choose a word
and repeat it endlessly until it loses its meaning

the syllables tangle together
mysterious and absurd
in a language uninvented yet
or abandoned a long time ago

the vowels lose their luster
while the stubborn consonants try to keep the rhythm
the word becomes a clod of clay
I keep repeating it like a transgressor of language
who cannot control such sinful joy

the sounds come unglued one by one
my dress fills with fragments of words,
short vowels with a twisted neck, stubby syllables,
pompous letters on the edge of madness

I continue to repeat the same word
until it's flayed of its flesh
until the darkness of the beginning
when all that's left is deafening tumult

—————

Day is direct and did
it ever connect with one
and not another.

Time will not reverse,
it ran off with a gun
shot spoiling us all in fun.

We can't win what we've
already won, today's offer
is still on the table.

Empty envelope for the
filler of my will to move
you just a mm.

As sea tumbles into me
as a tree thumbs its nose
at me, as clouds form a crowd
at the end of sky.

"I like beautiful poems, moving poetry, and all the beyond of that poetry. I am
extraordinarily sensitive to those poor, marvelous words left in our dark night by
a few men I never knew."

- Louis Aragon

One Thing at a Time

Abraham David Christian

96

In a small cottage nestled between hills at the end of a path lives a sculptor.

In this place, the distinction between inner and outer worlds has come to an end.

In this silent place, there are no thoughts, no desires, only the sculptor’s daily activities, and the effort to live a decent life. For him, these are one and the same thing, and they never change.

Get up, clean, do everyday things, followed by a daily walk along the coast.

Work undisturbed, in complete concentration.

Mindfulness in daily life, in the things he does, in the work he makes.

These never change, whether in the workshop or in the garden.

Dragonflies fly through the cabin. Butterflies dance around. Countless insects and spiders live inside and outside, because there is no separation between the two.

There is no solitude in the way we think we know it here.

From time to time, the *tanuki*’s gaze wanders from the garden into the cottage. The squirrel regularly conducts a balancing act on the trees. The *mamushi* crawls through the grass.

In the morning, an apple. Edamame, for lunch. Vegetables for dinner.

In the evening, the wind from the sea mingles with the smell of the soil from the hills. But no noise disturbs the sculptor in his house.

Early morning, the cicadas awaken and begin to sing. Then the birds.

A good, uneventful day begins again.

Be mindful of the spaces between thoughts.

Fake I Calls Real Me You

Peter Nadin

97

I
You
Know
I know
I know
You know...what?

10,000 crows
Glide above
10,000 histories
Hidden beneath
Beneath the blanket of fresh snow.
Black crow, white snow.
Flesh produces productions of flesh.
I’ve got teeth
You’ve got meat – let’s eat.

My nose sniffs black oil
On Houston Street
Oily water
Smooths the cratered road. The spray of taxi wheels
Soaks the weatherman. I read the weather
I read the news
But stare at my sodden shoes
Wet soles compact melting snow and
Skate the white tile floor. I wait
To sit silent, in the damp, in the dark
Strangerful room.

I star in movies,
On screens
Movie screens, computer screens, TV screens,
Always colored
A pastel palette both soft and hard
I mix the paint to create the form
But off screen I rehearse
Now for you I’ll read the news and weather.
Sometimes sun, sometimes rain, sometimes snow, sometimes sinew.

It wasn't, it was, now isn't.
I create Gods and Sausages
For you to salivate. Anticipate
I'll look where light enters your body...hidden place
Nostril, ears, eyes, mouth and anus
Genitals see have eyes too...recognize, look
See, you already know me.
Chewed meat moves
Peristalsis squeeze chew. Squeeze...teeth
tongue to esophagus; stomach small, large intestine, rectum.
I know, you know, the soft red illumination of the
Skin wrap. Dawn light discovers bodies and their parts
Displayed in the market for intimacy...eyes, lips, and asshole
A gold mine for the pornographer, lawyer and psychiatrist.

The Pigeon Post

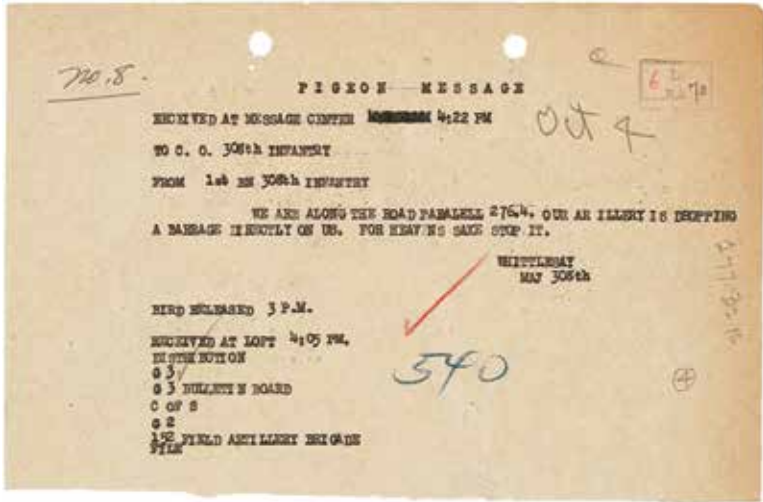
Aga Ousseinov

A few thoughts from while working on a project called *Grand Delusions: 1914*, dedicated to the centennial anniversary of WW1.

World War I, the so called Great War, took and crippled millions of lives and brought a huge disruption to the world. The four years of the war were also marked with tremendous technological innovation and progress. For example, this was the first war in history where massive amounts of aviation were involved. For centuries, the most poetic idea was to create a device for flying. During WWI, this poetic idea was transformed into the reality of beautiful but deadly machines.

The air-to-ground radio transmitters/receivers were not produced until 1916, so communication from ground to air was done through the means of light signals, or signals such as 'wing-wagging'. A wounded pilot could throw out a flag with a red cross and then the enemy-aircraft would cease to pursue him. This image sent a signal of mercy. On the ground, in case one side did not see the possibility of further resistance, a white flag was spread out, announcing the end of the resistance and calling for mercy and negotiations.

And there were many different methods of communication during WWI. Telephones were used in trenches to communicate between soldiers, but dogs and pigeons were also used to transport messages from one place to another. The good old Pigeon Post was used in WWI, even though it was invented in 630 AD! But how relevant is the transmission of such messages in the case of emergencies and the need for an immediate response, as indicated in this document:



During WWI, camouflage was invented. To paint airplane and ship camouflage, professional artists were called to serve, among them, Paul Klee. By comparison, we understand how much these images did not fit our idea today of concealing an object by attempting to merge it with nature. The general purpose of the camouflage was to attract attention and generate fear. The image was, in fact, a signal meant to terrify.

And for the purpose of propaganda, another method of communication was utilized. Leaflets were scattered from airplanes in order to convey to the population or to enemy troops a message of peace or continued hostilities.

During the Great War, these other kinds of a great “messages” were created: in 1914, Giorgio De Chirico painted *The Philosophers Conquest*; in 1915, Kasimir Malevich painted the *Black Square*; in 1916, the DADA movement was founded; in 1917, Marcel Duchamp “made,” or rather, presented his *Fountain* (the readymade urinal); at the end of the war, in 1918, Georg Grosz painted *Funeral*.

One-hundred years after the end of the Great War, it is difficult to imagine, much less to encompass, the reality of what we have achieved in the sphere of communications. It is truly amazing. Just on a personal level, cell phones are urging us to check the information that comes in every second. And if we agree to receive these notification signals, our phone almost always shakes, trumpets, creaks, snorts, meows or publishes a drum roll! And it is easy to open your personal blog and publish any information that you deem necessary, relevant, truthful, etc.

We see this same fantastic progress in the sphere of image-processing and sending. With an easy tap of the finger, we can change the color of a digital image of the sea from blue to red, turn pink shrimp into green ones, and give an elephant stripes. We can brighten the colors of a delicate and not very expressive painting, making it more vibrant by adjusting the levels of input! We can, if effect, “improve” the work of masters! Or we can digitally reconstruct a destroyed ancient sculpture, nearly bringing it back to its original (or imaginative!) form.

One more thing about the spread of leaflets during WWI. Just two years before the war, in 1912, for the first time in Europe, flyers advertising chocolate sweets were scattered from the Bleriot airplane. They were made like small, brightly colored parachutes, to each of which a bag of sweets was attached. The parachute had been invented only a year before that!

– May 2017, NYC

Excerpt from *Natura Pictrix* (2003): “Fabrications; or, the Nature of Fiction”

Vik Muniz

... when you look at a wall spotted with stains, or with a mixture of stones, if you have to devise some scene, you may discover a resemblance to various landscapes, beautified with mountains, rivers, rocks, trees, plains, wide valleys and hills in varied arrangement; or again you may see battles and figures in action; or strange faces and costumes, and a variety of objects, which you could reduce to complete and well drawn forms. And these appear on such walls confusedly, like the sound of bells in whose jangle you may find any name or word you choose to imagine.

– Leonardo da Vinci, *The Practice of Painting*

The same mechanism that induces the mind into ceaselessly associating visual “second meanings” to things, also allows it – for its own amusement or convenience – to consciously force or introject meaning into the ambiguity of forms. Not even the traditional objectivity of photography escapes such genre of manipulation. For example, material processed by the Warren Commission – as photographic evidence for a second sniper in the JFK assassination – shows, in its detailed analysis, ambiguous shadows and inchoate shapes, that according to the prosecution are meant to outline the silhouette of the supposed second killer. Examining the same evidence within a completely different set of references, friends of mine found in the same shapes the images of a moose, a cello, and an upside-down monkey.

This transience of meaning among things reveals itself continuously. Perceptions are constantly manipulated so as to multiply significance either for aesthetic reasons – as in the case of botanical topiary – or for commercial ones, where subliminally one wonders about Dionysian frolics and written obscenities while gazing candidly at the ice cubes in a glass of bourbon in a magazine ad.

Metaphors, lies, misunderstandings, visions, abstractions. We may glimpse these semantic microcosms of forms with the same “quiet panic” with which we gaze at the stars on a clear night; as is often the case when we momentarily loose our tools of understanding and interpreting to become fully aware of the mind’s instinctive predispositions to fabricate things for interpreting and understanding.

Adam, having run out of things to name and afraid of losing his job, started naming the already-named things after other things they “looked like.”

Having reduced the entire universe to a system of categorical simplifications, we derive wonder and amusement from the occasional natural exceptions to such rules. But, perhaps, in the undecipherable essence of complexity, something other than the purely formal transcends the ingenuity of our senses. If so, the joke is definitely on us.

COMMUN-

ICATION

“Nobody Can Flee My Dementia”

Wayne Koestenbaum

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1. “Nobody can flee my dementia,” Tom of Finland whispered to me in the aisles of a post-Soviet Walgreens. We were shopping for breakfast cereal. Dementia, manufactured by Quaker Oats, seemed a pleasurable choice, even if it didn’t contain dried marshmallows, the infantile anal rage marshmallows undergirding the Transcendental Ego, at least as perceived, in the watches of the night, by the late Lucille Ball. I, too, have Ball characteristics: I want to overthrow what her co-star Vivian Vance and Immanuel Kant together called “the ambiguities of soap,” a syndrome we invoke at our peril.

2. I am in charge of revising the World Book Encyclopedia’s volume four, covering all subjects beginning with the letter D. Within my purview is *dementia*; I must rewrite its entry. Soap won’t remove the fungus of non-consecutive thought; nor can I furnish the room of non-consecutiveness with appropriate furniture, such as an egg-shaped chair (The Ego as Egg) designed by a limp protégé of Ettore Sottsass, my new grandmother. I can make anyone my grandmother: I have sufficient plasticity of temperament, sufficient commitment to task-oriented and fellatio-resembling projective identification. I sat on that Sottsass-influenced chair. In its cupping embrace, I spun around, trying to remember how Ivory soap could cure every infection – or so my first pediatrician somberly declared, in the era of bacon and the March of Dimes. Better than penicillin, he claimed, was Ivory. Hew to the salves prescribed by Ur-pediatricians, who sent you photographs of their naked buttocks so that you might neutralize your excessive attachment to the talc-scented hereafter. By addressing you in this elliptical manner, I reinforce the hereafter’s resemblance to a bottle of “turned” Shalimar, in which you can see, floating like a dead bee, the kernel of revolutionary action I have tried to elucidate in this obedient recitation. I pay homage to Vance, to Kant, to Ball, to Sottsass, and to the anonymous pediatrician, by embracing the ridged Real – a Real whose crenellated face I caress, toward dawn, with a sphinx’s horny insistence on turning desert sand into an effigy of La Serenissima, O Venice I never visited, O Real I never violated, O soap I now dissolve.

– New York City, May 23, 2017

An Art of Pointing (Punctuation)

Joel Fisher

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**“The writer who neglects punctuation, or mispunctuates, is liable to be misunderstood...
For the want of merely a comma, it often occurs that an axiom appears a paradox, or the sarcasm is converted into a sermonoid.”**

– Edgar Allan Poe, “Marginalia,” *Graham’s Magazine*, Feb. 1848

I. Intervention

In every one of the *Generation Sequences* one image follows another in a continual flow. Occasionally we will hesitate for a fraction of a second to look at one image a bit longer. Hesitation is interruption. A drawing that is given more attention is amplified in comparison to its neighbors. When extra seconds of attention are given, a separation occurs. Any hesitation in the middle of a line of letters adjusts the flow.

Much like the mind forms an image, this extra attention nudges that drawing into a place that is perpendicular to the horizontal motion of the line. It acquires an autonomy that it didn’t have before. Some drawings (or words for that matter), when receiving extra attention in this way, will erupt with associations.

Attention creates isolation as well as inclusion. The glow of latency is actually an illumination of separation. We can intuit the distance anything has traveled from its source by such things as material changes, or physical distance, or duration. Duration is of special interest because most achievement is dependent on sustained interest.

Punctuation carves manageable units out of undifferentiated duration, the way music

might help to sustain interest through rhythm and syncopation. The Venerable Bede was one of the most creative and fascinating scholars in the 8th century. His productive life was measured by long expanses of work-time punctuated by periods of prayer and inspiration. In Bede’s time, the typical day in the monastery was interrupted with seven pauses for prayer. After each break, there was a new beginning. Tedium was unlikely to set in when the day was structured to experience multiple dawns. If boredom ever did appear, the time given to it was both limited and known to be limited. This knowledge destroyed tedium’s ability to sap energy; it could not sustain whatever time it would have needed to endure.

Having a protected place in which ideas can grow may be as important as the ideas themselves. The contribution that periods of ‘safe’ time can make may be one of the least recognized determining factors of achievement.

The drawings that separate themselves out become ‘seeds’ of a different sort – these are drawings most likely to become a blueprint to make a sculpture. Every sculpture that comes into existence this way is the starting point of a new process. An ‘isolated’ drawing is not unique. In any sequence there can be found several drawings, any one of which could become a sculpture.

When there is only one possibility there can be no choice. Choice needs a situation of relative indifference because it only comes into play when there are several options of equal ‘weight’ and only one place to be filled. When there is no hint of ambivalence the next step proceeds without any question and there has been, in fact, no choice. As soon

as choice appears, the next step is suddenly optional. The optional is something like indifference but with anxiety. One imagines that there is a preferable outcome, but that outcome is unimaginable, or at least invisible, and the end cannot be foreseen. Imagine someone who wants to dig a well or start a mine. Any bit of ground might be chosen to begin but not every place will be equally auspicious. Some places will be more blessed than others and only these allow their latency to have a chance of manifesting itself. Choice can also be stressful because in choice there is a shadow of violence. What is it that allows us to isolate one section of the world and discard the rest? What makes us act as if some portion of the world is unworthy of attention? Choice is rarely benign. The violence of initiation may be disruptive in some places more than in others.

The initiation of a sculpture considers this situation within a larger context. One beginning does not preclude others; it is simply the beginning of a new process. Sequence can simply be re-punctuated. A sculpture awakens latency. The first steps in a process change potential into intensity.

In any complex organism, some things are determined by more than one system. Sometimes these systems run perfectly parallel to each other. Other times two systems might intersect and when they do intersect that point becomes accessible from at least two directions. That the point of crossing is more likely to be seen. Accessibility is a kind of illumination.

Punctuation, as it is commonly understood, is an assembly of separators or terminators. This role is pathetically limited. A more nuanced concept of punctuation would understand it as an illumination of appropriate distinctions which immediately creates an adjustment of opportunities.

Punctuation can smooth a continuity, frame an insight, or awaken something in the text that had been sleeping. It can reveal what has been overlooked, connect what is separated, intensify a point, clarify an intention, or shape an inflection. Expanding the distance between two parts of a text will influence the pacing, and ‘voice’ of the text. Empty spaces, whether physical or figurative, are part of the architecture of punctuation. By adding one breath or several, these breaths carve out habitable spaces inside the enclosure, and in so doing suggest that a textual three-dimensionality is possible.

Punctuation is a kind of framing. Unlike most framing, all action here is internal. It may happen in a contained situation, but

it is not about containment. If punctuation repackages something in a way that profoundly changes its original character, it will simultaneously change its neighbors. There is punctuational seepage when a shaped inflection can reshape what is adjacent to it.

It is possible for exactly the same group of words to be radically transformed in only a few seconds. A question mark transforms a declarative sentence into an interrogation. Capitals give posture to the beginning of a sentence. A capital letter confers the strength of a word, demanding respect for it as it appears in particular contexts. Capitals have a harsher side: when capitals take over a whole phrase, it reads as shouting.

I began to see the *Generative Sequences* as unpunctuated text and the occasional sculptures that evolve out of the sequences as punctuation. When we understand sculpture as punctuation, the possibilities of both sculpture and punctuation expand. Sculpture creates and shapes a pause, and as soon as that pause exists, it in turn shapes the relationship between what came before and what will come after. It also annexes a more expansive world.

It took thousands of years before punctuation came to the aid of the written text. For centuries, words and sentences were run together without even a space to distinguish them. Occasional isolated attempts were made throughout the centuries to solve the problem, but these innovations did not spread widely.

In the 4th century, a thousand years after the early attempts at punctuation and still centuries before the punctuation we use today came into use, Saint Jerome introduced a system of punctuation *per cola et commata* (“by phrases”). These were units that parsed the text according to the breaths of the reader. When the breathing of the reader is guided this way, the listener is also included, because both are able to breathe *with* the text. The Bible is received through the breath.

At its best, punctuation can reproduce the rhythm of a distant voice; the reader shares in the breathing of the author, whose breathing patterns at that moment are physically there. Breath itself becomes a message from a former reader to a later one.

II.

“In this beginning naturally since I at once went on and on very soon there were pages and pages and pages more and

more elaborated creating a more and more continuous present including more and more using of everything and continuing more and more beginning and beginning and beginning.”

– Gertrude Stein

“My attitude toward punctuation is that it ought to be as conventional as possible. The game of golf would lose a good deal if croquet mallets and billiard cues were allowed on the putting green. You ought to be able to show that you can do it a good deal better than anyone else with the regular tools before you have a license to bring in your own improvements.”

– Ernest Hemingway, from a letter, May 15, 1925

There was no choice. Ancient manuscripts had to be copied one letter at a time and this was done without spaces, as if the scribe were painting the entire surface of the parchment with letters. When one line was full, the next letter would be placed at the beginning of the next line, regardless of whether that letter came at the beginning, middle, or end of a word. The preparation of parchment was expensive and all spaces on the page were considered to be of equal and identical worth. The material aspects override meaning.

Because letters and not words were the basic unit, the copyist had to remember with each dip of his pen what single letter had already been copied, and return to the master text to find that letter and then continue by writing the next adjacent letter. The problem, of course was that a letter may have appeared in multiple places. It was certain that the same letter would appear elsewhere. Unintended omissions happen easily when manuscripts have no spaces between words and no upper and lower case letters.

Scholars reading old manuscripts often discover places where whole words or phrases are missing. These disappearances are part of a process called *haplography*, which has now become a separate discipline in biblical studies. With even the tiniest omission, the meaning of a sacred text can be changed.

In those early manuscripts letters covered so much of the page that the manuscript begins to resemble dense vegetation. Creating a path through that wilderness is much like marking a trail

through a landscape with no discernable landmarks. The task for the reader is to create a trail for the listener to follow.

There were many defenders of *scripto continua* (which these pages without pauses were called). Those who saw something positive in these expanses of individual letters believed that because the texts were so slow to offer up their meaning, a meditative time came into existence that was exclusively dedicated to the glorification of God.

Punctuation developed in fits and starts, with solutions being invented and then forgotten. A thousand years before punctuation became an active issue in Europe, Aristophanes, the librarian at the Great Library in Alexandria, became frustrated because the ancient scrolls were essentially one great run-on sentence. He created a series of marks so that readers could annotate these otherwise unbroken lines. He suggested three discrete points (*punctus*) placed on a line of text to signify a short, medium, or long pause. The shortest pause, called the *comma*, was represented by a dot at the middle of the line; the longer *colon* was at the bottom, and the periodos was at the top. What was especially interesting here is who is assigned responsibility for these simple dots. It was not, as we might assume, the writer.

Aristophanes took on this challenge – and invented his solution – because the Library was an archive of ancient texts. He wanted readers to punctuate their scrolls so that single phrases could be activated when the texts were read aloud. The three little dots of Aristophanes were intended to make the reading aloud of the text more fluid. The reader’s role was performative; the dots were like the notes that actors or musicians might make for themselves.

In the second century BC, Aristarchus, one of Aristophanes’ successors, took it upon himself to create a series of marks to help editors correct the error-strewn scrolls they were trying to decipher. The simplest was the arrowhead shape of the *dimple* (> or <), a symbol used to highlight interesting lines of text, much as a modern reader might underline a notable passage. In the twelfth century, well after St Jerome, an Italian writer named Buoncompagno da Signa invented a system of punctuation that consisted of only two marks: the *suspensivus*, or slash (/), represented a pause, and the *planus*, or dash (–), marking the end of a sentence. By the fifteenth century, Buoncompagno’s slash was being used interchangeably with

Aristophanes’ ancient comma (the middle dot). The modern comma is something like a merger of the two, as the pause mark dropped to the bottom of the line and acquired a slight curve. The interest in punctuation began to grow when monks began to read sacred texts silently. The idea that silence helped to spread punctuation is not at all evident and worth thinking about. The real progress in punctuation came with the invention of the printing press. That is not surprising at all.

Punctuation’s main role is to clarify what might otherwise be confusing. Even so, it is not unheard of that punctuation can actually cause confusion. There are many instances where when a misplaced comma creates more ambiguity than clarity. Punctuation marks are tiny compared to the weight of the text, yet they have been known to have influence far above their physical mass. One anecdote is fascinating: the Bolshevik printers of St Petersburg precipitated the Russian Revolution in 1905 by going on strike to demand to be paid the same rate for punctuation marks as for letters. All they wanted was equal treatment for themselves, as seen through tiny pieces of type.

III.

Today we associate punctuation with typography. What could happen if the principles of punctuation were set free and allowed to exist independently? Today’s punctuation is determined by well-rehearsed textual habits. Freed from this limited role, they could become general indicators relationships or guides to behavior or rhythm. With a different approach punctuation could liberate more than just a solid block of text. The distinctions these principles could make could enrich and clarify other things in the world.

Some sculptural objects, especially those that grow out of the *Generation Sequences*, preserve punctuation in physical pauses instead of being pointed at in conventional symbols. Because the pauses are solid, they do not look like punctuation, and therefore evoke no graphic associations. These solidifications challenge the conventional principles of punctuation. Sculptures are thought to be completions of something, but these apparent finials are really just pauses. The sense of continuation can be very indirect. Within any person’s life we might discover invisible moments of punctuation.

Edward T Hall discovered that clothing and behavior are often unnoticed forms of

punctuation. “Analysis,” he wrote in *The Art of Everyday Life*, “continued like punctuation marks in the sentences and paragraphs of my life for seven years. When I began to dress differently – a sign I had noted in friends in analysis – I knew I was getting better...”

There are parallel fields of study as far apart as geology and ancient poetry. Punctuation is manifested elegantly in rock formations where internal differences tell the stones’ own history. Here, punctuation can be cracks, faults, inclusions or accumulations. Sometimes in the middle of a soft clay deposit, a hard, beautifully-shaped encrustation has formed.

The Romances composed by Welsh minstrels follow a traditional pattern in which poetry is used to punctuate the prose narrative. Robert Graves noticed that Irish poets as well as Welsh minstrels would recite their romances in prose, breaking into verse or adding harp accompaniment at points of emotional stress. As Ludwig Wittgenstein points out, if you want to know the meaning of something, look for its use.

Within the flow of normal prose, the full stop or ‘period’ allows for a rest. A breath is taken, or, in some cases, one’s breath is held. That pause creates a space of timelessness around itself. The sentence that directly follows may expand on the thought, but before it does so the flow of the prose adjusts to a difference and enters for a moment an absence of any sense of time, and the possibility, within continuation, of a new beginning. When a ball is thrown into the air, it lies motionless for a second at its highest point before it begins its descent. A *comma* simultaneously slows something down and lubricates the sentence’s flow. Like a skillful driver entering a sharp curve, there is a slowing down – then just the right moment – an increase of speed. This slowing down then speeding up improves control when taking a curve. A *colon*, as it announces what comes next, in a sense frames it. A colon functions like a spotlight, or pedestal, or a drum roll. We pay attention to what it says. *Semicolons* mix and match, a bit like a Dutch Door, where the top and bottom function differently, or perhaps something like what some automobile drivers call a “rolling stop.” A semi-colon creates just enough of a threshold to allow us to witness the difference as we pass through it.

All the various forms of punctuation, whether named or not, indicate changes in intensity, accent, authority or to indicate another voice. They can play many roles: eddies, islands, windows, hesitations,

or amplifications. *Question marks* (or interrogation points), exclamation marks, parentheses, quotation marks, all suggest a common inflection in which the reader might change a voice in tone or volume, or lower it into a conspiratorial whisper. New paragraphs can be like starting a new chapter. A footnote will remind the reader that the boundaries of the text are fluid and much larger than they seem.

These interventions or attentions are the weirs or eddies in the stream’s flow, the bends that change the speed in what has until then been moving in a perfect parallel direction. They are like prisms that separate out hidden bands of light and make visible what otherwise would not be. The grammar and emotional tone of these pauses – or in my case the sculptural objects that serve as punctuation – are all somewhat larger than the apparently comprehensive punctuation marks that we use every day.

In standard punctuation, there are few markings that in the middle of a flow shift the understanding to surprise, irony, doubt, fear, excitement, love, confusion, exhaustion, humor, uncertainty, or endearment. These must be added by a reader’s inflection or tone of voice. There is an untapped possibility of punctuation as unmarked, but effective. Punctuations can frame an existence with its own latency or with qualities that might be inherent or adopted.

The same words in the same order can sometimes be punctuated in a way that transforms its meaning. If the essence of a sentence can be found in its meaning, then punctuation may actually bring a sentence into existence.

A sensitivity to flow is also a sensitivity to the changes in speed of the flow.

“Brennan and her colleagues learned from their inquiries that, when a caricature is exaggerated and recognized, it is recognized immediately — about twice as fast as realistic line drawings of the same face. This has led some investigators to conclude that, when we remember a face, we remember it as caricature – a kind of shorthand symbol that encodes identity and epitomizes individuality.”

– Terry Lannau, About Faces

Some sculptures resemble caricature but they don’t reference a single source. They refer back but only to the drawing immediately before. Time is abbreviated. There is no loss of individuality, just the

individual. They unintentionally explore the notion of alternate personae. They ask, “who is the other?”

Why I Do Not Make Political Art

Jonathan Lasker

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Hannah Arendt described herself as a “political theorist” rather than a philosopher because she believed that “men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world.” I see myself, however, as an artist who eschews political themes in favor of universal truths because I contend that we are not men, but Man (for which read also Woman). This is premised upon the reality that we each live singular lives and meet singular deaths. All we know that we have is this time on Earth. It is through our understanding of the value of this time, which all humans share, that a commonality is formed. Through our recognition of the mortal singularity of the other human, we find universality and empathic regard. This empathy is the only possible positive foundation for social and political exchange amongst “men.” The lives of “men” are expendable, the life of “Man” is not. For this reason I regard Universal themes rather than particular political concerns to be of greater importance.





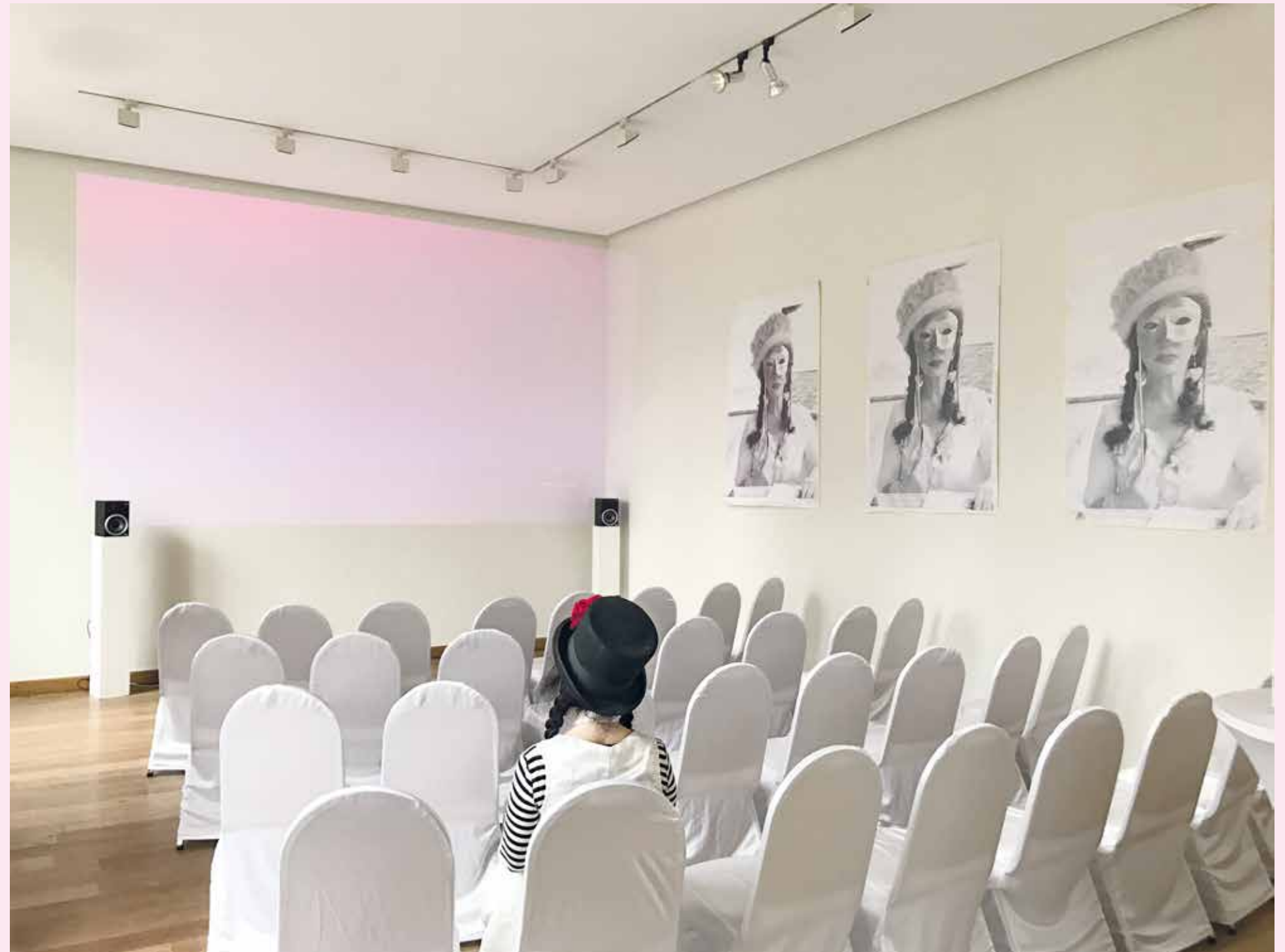
ANNETTE LEMIEUX, *HEARING THING*, 2013.
HEAD FORM, ACRYLIC PAINT, MUSHROOM, FLOCKING
HEAD WITH WOOD BASE, 64 × 18 × 18 IN.
(25.1 × 7 × 7 CM.) COURTESY OF THE ARTIST
AND BALDWIN GALLERY, ASPEN

The Woman with the Golden Mask

Colette

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The Woman with the Golden Mask initially appeared in post-ups throughout the city when I first arrived in Berlin in 2015. One collector called her “My Marilyn,” referring obviously to Warhol’s iconic image of Marilyn Monroe. From 2015 until now, this image has been altered and recycled in many forms, from post-ups to photo works to individual mixed media art pieces. It is an emblem for The *Unknown Artist* of Berlin, a response to a city overpopulated by artists, all aiming to gain notoriety.



COLETTE, LABORATOIRE LUMIÈRE, *THE SCREENING ROOM WITH THE WOMEN WITH THE GOLDEN MASK*, LUMIÈRE OCCUPIES LOWEN PALAIS, II, FOUNDATION STARKE, BERLIN, MARCH 2017

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