

WALLS

OCTOBER 2015

RISK 1/2





ISSN 2292-7204

RISK 1/2

VOLUME III - THEME 2 - OCTOBER 2015

PRODUCTION

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On The Cover

ALISON SNOWBALL

For The Vault

Pennies, plastic coin rollers, elastic bands, wire, spray paint
4"h x 2"l x 2"h each
2012

Alison is no less than four nouns,
three adjectives, and one place.



LICENSING



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KAPSULA Magazine is an imprint of:

**KAPSULA
PRESS**

44 Hedges Boulevard
Toronto, Ontario
M9B 3C4

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PROLOGUE

We thought the risk was in the unknown—where there are no established rules or guidelines to organize behavior. The threat of the unknown shapes perceived risk, determining where we see the potential for catastrophe. It may be, however, that the real threat lies in knowing; the only thing riskier than stepping outside of the box is remaining within it. Fixed truths do more harm than good, a reality that postmodern, postcolonial, and post-structuralist scholarships have highlighted for decades. When disruptions to the hegemony are revealed as the building blocks for new orders of knowledge, we're tasked with staging yet another escape. We thought we were standing outside the box, but its borders have simply moved. These "post" frameworks can prove equally as limiting as the structures they were meant to dismantle.

It's one thing to make the choice to move away from the new (post-) order. It's quite another deciding where to go. Four walls, four corners, and infinite space in between. Moving away from popular, critical discourse does not mean moving backward, but the best direction remains unclear. It has been argued that two negatives make a positive, but it can't possibly be that simple. Maybe we will push the boundary further, challenging the assumed adaptability of theory after modernism. Maybe we will design a new model, a proposal, distinct from historical precedent. In any case, there are multiple decisions at hand, and risk around every corner.

There exists inherent conflict in opting out of the "beaten path." Perhaps we have reached some consensus that older theoretical frameworks are lacking, not only in their glaring oversights toward particular social groups, but also in their inability to adapt to organic social developments. Theory may provide a model for reality, but it must be malleable to accommodate unstoppable, inevitable growth. We've rallied to work against rigidity in contemporary scholarship and art making alike, but it's apparent that, after making the opportunity for mass escape, everyone ran in different directions. Now, out here, there is more room than ever for critique between opposing views.

We like to think there's nothing wrong with hosting a conflict. Especially when, in the heat of combat, previously established knowledges are re-formed. Regardless of your position, my position, or her position, one thing is crystal clear: the original box, its center, has been caught in the crossfire. After turning its walls to glass, making transparent all its dirty little secrets, it wasn't so hard to shatter its perimeter. We're all attacking at different angles, but this much is true: as long as we hold the freedom to disagree we hold the capacity for taking the necessary risks in knowledge building. A vocal opposition poses a threat, but only one of a functional democracy—preferable to the alternative, we think. There's just nothing sexier than freedom of speech (didn't Benjamin Franklin say that?).

AROUND EVERY CORNER

nettime's_risk_manager

To: nettime-l@kein.org

<nettime> [RISKS] Risks Digest 29.03 [excerpted]

[excerpted @ nettime -- mod (tb)]

RISKS-LIST: Risks-Forum Digest Wednesday 14 October 2015 Volume 29 : Issue 03

ACM FORUM ON RISKS TO THE PUBLIC IN COMPUTERS AND RELATED SYSTEMS (comp.risks)
Peter G. Neumann, moderator, chmn ACM Committee on Computers and Public Policy

***** See last item for further information, disclaimers, caveats, etc. *****

This issue is archived at <<http://www.risks.org>> as

<<http://catless.ncl.ac.uk/Risks/29.03.html>>

The current issue can be found at

<<http://www.csl.sri.com/users/risko/risks.txt>>

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(comp.risks)

<...>

Date: Mon, 12 Oct 2015 18:43:44 -0400

From: Rebecca Mercuri <notable@mindspring.com>

Subject: Voting Machines and the VW Emission Controversy

Upon hearing the news reports about the VW emission controversy, I immediately thought of electronic voting machines and the warnings that



CHARGING FOR HOT SAUCE IS A SIN

in progress

Story 1

A collection of documentary texts by jon henry

It's a weird feeling to lie in a hot tub on a winter night: half the body submerged in 102-degree water, while your exposed nipples tighten to diamonds from the arctic temperatures. Yet, it's also enlivening as I experience these two extreme binaries—my body cut into two, my belly button becoming an odd, unfamiliar hole filled with ice. I might also feel alive because I'm getting an underwater blowjob from a daddy, making out with a twink, ramming a middle-aged straight guy, and being fingered by a friend. An onlooker—like one of those sorority girls across the hedge at JMU—could easily dismiss this as some faggoty hedonistic orgy.

Yet, for me, it's art, politics and liberation.

I spent the past week organizing this piece. I placed open calls on Grindr, Adam4Adam, and Craigslist. I worked with

a gallerist—the hot tub owner—to secure a time and space for the happening. I was fairly conscious handing out invites for the orgy. I wasn't basing my selection exactly on my own pleasure, but also on the potential for sharing knowledge with the other participants. I wanted to ensure the piece was made up of folks from various generations, races, classes, educational backgrounds, body types, etc.

I brought together bodies that normally never meet or socialize because of the social boundaries; sadly, these boundaries are reinforced in dominant gay culture.

Do I call this art? Do I just call it life?
Is it a performance or a happening (is there a difference)?
How do I document it? Why do I need to document it?
Is it porn? Is it resistance? Is it queer? Is it overly academic?

Whenever I pass that hot-tub house, I remember that evening. I remember the surge of feelings: pleasure, fear, surprise, anxiety, delight, pain, and hope. This is yet another nexus point in my ever-developing sexual cartography.

I can now triangulate it with other points like that alley blowjob in SF, Frat gangbang in RVA, romantic rooftop make out sessions with my partner in our apartment building, trespassing into the neighbor's pool with my high school crush, sucking off a hiker on the Appalachian Trail, jerking off someone in a NYU library, cuddling in a cow field, making out against a DC club's mirrored wall, holding hands in the Arabian Desert, various cinderblock dorm room hook-ups, Valentines Weekend Sex on VA Beach, and so on.

What does it mean to curate bodies? Why are there generational, racial, and class barriers amongst the gays? Why do we replicate oppressions when committed to social justice?

Bill slides into Me as I slide into Jamie. Tommy kisses Me as Ryan rubs Tommy's dick and relates a story from his youth—the last time he was in an orgy. The water

laps over the hot tub's edges, forever lost to us in the dark, transforming instantly into ice. I hope the feelings, the moment, and the people won't end. And yet I know it will. There will be the 'money shot,' the moment of toe-curling pleasure, emptiness, happiness, and the gradual growing lust for more. This moment might merge with another in my ever-expanding lucid sexual memory.

I remember feeling companionship, pleasure, noticing the colours, glances, sounds, and even the weather surrounding these encounters. Luckily—praise Cher—I haven't acquired a physical memory of these gatherings, as we always play with rubbers, preventing The Virus from spreading. It may create a wall of distance between my brothers and me. But that wall is microscopic when compared to the six-foot earthen, steel, and wooden boundaries between so many of those fallen: all the lost knowledge, dreams, desires, and love. There's been nothing like it since the destruction of the queer by European fascists. We haven't re-performed that night: now, Tommy lives with Bill, Ryan's in a Home, Bob's tub broke, and I'm here.

I hope. I fantasize. I glimmer. I desire. I love. I devour. I aspire. I cry. I eat. I create. I mediate. I converse. I despair. I smile. I liberate. I resist. I push. I drag. I pull. I fall. I gather. I build. I live.



2 ————— *Daisy Chain*

It was a common pastime during my elementary school years to spend afternoon recess collecting daisies, tying them together, and circling them around buildings. Every afternoon, we'd wrap them up and hide them in a tree so that older students wouldn't know. It takes a child's nimble fingers to tie a daisy stem around a daisy's head.

I'm not sure when we stopped.

In college, I continually got written up for 'daisy chaining' extension cords together. I never seemed to have a cord long enough or with enough plugs. My studio had a long line of surge protectors circling out from the single outlet like a spider's web.

Most recently, Pierre and Bob were circling around my bed, moaning, stroking, and slobbering. This happening was the culmination of months of online, individual meetings between one and the other. We finally realized it might just be more efficient and pleasurable to just meet in person, together, the three of us.

I plucked their flowers from an online garden and worked to tie them together.

Our coming together might be aesthetically uninteresting as we don't deviate along the age spectrum. Yet, our socio-economics are despairingly different. Bob is the foreman at a local factory. Pierre is the CFO of a local multi-national. I'm a debt-ridden graduate student. We had never met before in real life: our social scenes take us to different places, expensive sushi bars versus chain restaurants versus home-cooked ramen. Coincidentally, our cock sizes decrease as our economic privilege increases.

Our desire for bacchanalian pleasures ties us together.

Once a week, we gather at my house. I can barely hear Pierre's hybrid Lexus pull up next to my rusty late 1980s hand-hand-hand-me Bronco. I can't help but to hear Bob's pickup, as it turns the corner and double parks us in.

It started as a mutual circle jerk.

Next, we were sucking each other off.

Next, we were taking turns topping each other.

Next, I was in the center as Bob penetrated me, as I penetrated Pierre. Now, we just double-team Pierre.

It's like some Marxist uprising playing out in the body politics. Pierre's becomes the central point of aggression. Both of us penetrate his ends. Bob usually takes his hole as I ram his mouth. Pierre is never satisfied: constantly consuming our cocks, cum, dildos, fingers, and fists. He continually wants more and more for his pleasure. We bring in friends from our school, factory, and local bar.

Pierre still wants more: two-three-four-five-six-seven-twelve at a time isn't enough.

Always more. Bob and I break sweats as we labour away on Pierre. We still reach our own ecstasies.

Yet, it always feels minuscule next to Pierre's bombastic moans, withering, and more moans.

Excess can appear so appealing.

The other night, Bob showed up two hours earlier than our scheduled rendezvous with Pierre.

He wanted to play, just the two of us, naked, together, under the sheets. It wasn't love, no, he just wanted to play on "the same level." Flip fucking each other. We played rock-paper-scissors to see who bottomed first. For the next two hours, it was an ecstasy of new positions, mutual pleasure, desire, and exchange. We ended in a loop: mouths on each others cock: swallowing down the other's load.

Then Pierre walks in—not knowing we were shooting. He strips. Demands cock. We oblige and begin another two hours of the same. We are tired and empty.

My first long relationship in college was with the manager
at a local fast-food restaurant near campus. It began
innocently, over smoothies; I wanted more cherries.
It ended six months later at finals. He couldn't understand
why I didn't have more time for him during my exams.
I couldn't understand why he didn't want to go to college.

We were both too young: too young to understand
the social and economic constructions; too naive to fully
grasp the implications; too ill-informed to know
that most relationships across socio-economic lines fail;
too frail to engage in meaningful dialogue.
Yet, madly in love (whatever that means).

Bob tells me that he isn't looking for love, just pleasure.
I couldn't agree more. What is love?
My parents spoke of love.
My friends speak of love.
But I've never see its power last for long.
My friends didn't marry for love: they wanted cheaper rent,
health insurance, rights to their child.
Love seems to be some hetero mirage.

I was baby-sitting for my friend Mary, a divorcée.
Her daughter and I were in the local park, Hillendale.
She was collecting dandelions in an old Easter basket.
I was tasked to tie them together. She wanted to make
a chain to wear. We made some jewelry but she had too
many brightly covered dandelions to wear. We made a
long rope, and left them along a wooded trail:
Andy Goldsworthy would be proud.

Yesterday, I saw their rotted ruin as I walked the trail,
following a boy deeper into the woods. Earlier I had
witnessed him rubbing the jeans outline of his cock
atop the picnic table where I had tied those chains together.
I stepped over the now-rotten chain, and followed him
into the thicket.

3 ————— *Firsts*

It was an evening of firsts.

It was the first time that Albert experienced a threesome and a black cock. It was the first time that Chad had sex with a card-carrying Republican or Libertarian. It was the first time I had sex to Fox News, not just the video but also the audio.

Albert was in town for work. He had been here for three months living out of a hotel—no sex, no friends, no major social life. He just worked and went to the gym. What a fine gym body—one could trace the toned muscles. Albert hoped to have a sexcapade before he left town for Ohio. I agreed to come over and help celebrate the end of his contract.

After school, on my way home, I followed up with Albert to see if he was still interested. He was excited and looking forward to a bunch of cock. I joked about a threesome being able to fill his urges. This joke led to the confession that, by the queer age of twenty-seven, Albert still hadn't had a threesome.

Chad and I had had plenty of threesomes, but never in a hotel. We have been infrequently snuggling together as a peer support network. Chad and I are yet to have sex together, even though we drink, smoke, party, dance, study, and organize together. We're always playing in groups.

Albert was visibly nervous upon our arrival. We retired to his bed for some casual chat. It was at this moment that I noticed the TV. It was locked into the Fox News Channel. I confessed that I hadn't watched that channel in years and never understood it, but maybe it's because I'm a faggot. A smile appeared across Albert's nervous face...again, he confessed, but this time to the ultimate sin of being a gay Republican. After a bit of political debate and necessary clothing removal, we were at it.

Chad slowly lowered his cock into Albert's mouth. I was already munching away at Albert's hole. I noticed him tense up and starting talking. Tonight, he was losing his 'virginity' to both group play and experience with black penis. Chad winked at me and rammed it down his throat. The game was afoot. Still, Fox News was on, and Albert claimed it was to provide audio cover over his moans. Yet, I suspect, it was a sort-of lullaby, a comfort in normalcy.

The first time can be scary. It can be unnerving. It can be liberating. It can be revealing. It reveals your pleasures and desires, but also the lies; the lies that will fog up our lens; the lies that restrict relationships, hope, and liberation. I wonder, what will Albert remember from that night? Will he vote less Republican? Or, dismiss the evening with a label: "Once, I had sex with a Black guy."

RAWNAST

Last call came early. It was Tuesday night; maybe we should be asleep by 1:15 am, instead of drinking at the local gay bar. My two mates—one gay and one straight—headed back home to a fridge full of PBR. Along the mile walk home, we discussed art, performance, landscape, and identity.

Also along the way, we met Clayton. He had been bar-hopping and asked to join our pilgrimage. He seemed like a showman: dropping his post-tax income, cock length, and female sexual conquests.

I wondered if he might want to hook up.

It isn't too often that a random dude will invite himself over to some other random dude's home, especially a queer house. We were on edge, yet this happens fairly often—especially at college—where a straight boy will create a casual opportunity to explore his sexuality. His mannerisms and language conveyed a similar exploratory motive, not malice.

Parker and I agreed we might intervene into the situation, as facilitators.

Clayton had other plans. He drank more than twelve beers that evening. He grabbed my junk more and said "I'm going to cum on your face," for more than twenty, monotonous minutes. There was no cum. There was no sex. But there was spooning, cuddling, and snuggling; I'm unsure about the differences.

Parker and I thought we'd be the interventionists, facilitate his exploration or coming to terms/out. Guides on his sexual identity journey. Clayton has his own interventionist plans, however. He wanted beer. He wanted attention. He wanted new sales clients.

He wanted to cum on our faces.

He wanted to snuggle.

We fooled around for a bit. I left him and Parker on the floor at 4am and crawled into bed.

I awoke with arms around me. I whisper, "Is that you Parker?" Yes. We touch each other under the sheets, releasing months of sexual tension, fondling, exploring our bodies with our hands. It reminds me of ceramics: kneading clay and pulling a pot. We work for what feels like days. Ultimately, there is a release. After the moans and the mopping up, Parker shouts: "WHERE THE WHITE WOMEN AT!!!" as he flicks on the light.

I realize it isn't Parker, but Clayton. He goes downstairs, pulls on his shoes, shouts with a smile: "Thanks for the beer" as he walks out the front door.

I see Parker, half asleep on the couch.

I see Clayton's belt on the floor.
It's a reversible black and brown leather belt.

I wonder if he'll be back.



5

Mennonites in a Hot Tub

COMING SOON

1

You look good.
Like gold.
Sparkles.

2

How have you been? ----- Good, Busy with work.

Same, grad school is going well, busy. -----
----- Where are you again.
Harrisonburg, VA... You should come down and visit! -----
----- Yes!
☺ -----
----- Get the dirty slut down from New York for the southern men

3

i dunno how else to say this so ill be honest, I thought alot about it and I really think
were looking for different thigns, like I make really offensive jokes and tahts not
something I can change, Im looking for someone a bit younger who is like at the same
level of experience I am, like ur really sweet and cute I just dont think it would work
romantically...if i FB unfriend u dont take it personally, I do it like once a week
to people who I have never met just so its less awkward

4

Boi: hmmm.....well u live by urself dont ya?
Me: i do :)
Boi: sweet....got plenty of beer? no 420 right? i think u said u dont 420
Me: i dont 420. i do have beer n vodka
Boi: u think u could let me borrow some cash to get sum 420 that way i can smoke
and drink and hang with you? im sure we could think of a few fun things we can
do ;)
Me: i dont have any cash...

5

I'm just looking to cuddle. My heat is out. No Sex...well, unless it gets cold

I've never been one for math, though I do like finding variables: those x-s and y-s: unknowns and knowns. Coincidentally, the same chromosomal markers that dictate male or female are marked by x and y; their combinations produce me. I remain unknown. What do I do with this x and y? The DNA hasn't given me the blue print for my daily interactions, iterations, implementations, inflections, and inspirations. I am always in pursuit of what this x and y combination means. It refers to limits and possibilities at once, performance and meaning. These minuscule microscopic chemicals expand into language, social constructions, and the subsequent expectations. The results leave me wanting more — wanting more from society, institutions, and myself.

I continually find myself—just like my old math teacher—taking a thick red marker to the socially imposed boundaries of gender: crossing them out, explaining, circling, correcting, and expanding them. One sticking point in particular has been pronouns: the grammatical replacement for my name. These pronouns replace identities, stand in for the known and become the unknown. Conversely, they lump me in with other 'men' and highlight my gender: not my name, politics, expression, or lifestyle.

The new gender-inclusive/neutral constructions of Xe, Xhe, Xeir call to me. They perform as grammatical drag: standing in for my identity and name. They leave a space for expansion, experimentation, and deviation, a space that doesn't exist in between (European) language binaries. They speak to my ongoing pursuit and exploration of (male) genders.

They mark the trajectory points for my sojourn.
They titillate like the insignia on an imagined treasure map.

Over the years I've adopted these pronouns; they subconsciously appear in bios and dating profiles. I'm slowly renaming myself from Jon to Xon. Can it not be the same pronunciation?

The X is unknown yet provocative, glimmering with hints and teases towards its real modality; it has become a signifier for my pursuit towards desire.

MARTIN LUTHER PARADIGM

MIKLOS LEGRADY

There are some who say that the contemporary art system is as corrupt as the Catholic Church at the time of Martin Luther—a corruption that went so deep, the Protestant Reformation rendered the Church asunder. If you do not think so, if you write no crisis in art criticism, if you have cannot see the institutional contradictions, the unimpressive offerings of the gallery, and the break-down of the academic education system, then you are part of the problem and not part of the solution. You are not innocent. There's nothing worse than discovering we're the hypocrites, that we have been the ones in denial...

To understand the contemporary requires a major paradigm shift as well as a rigorous bracing of our intellectual apparatus. It means leaving our historically established comfort zone, renouncing our gods: Duchamp. Benjamin. Rorty. This article is my third this year that observes the failure of semiotic analyses and the corruption of art theory. The writing followed my own shocking discoveries of self-destructive structures in the art system that prove capable of corrupting contemporary theory, production, and practice. Theory can shape reality, for better or worse.

It seems that by rules of logic and grammar, the brightest and most intelligent minds in art's education, production, and propagation do not understand

their own field, the subject of fine art, nor can they agree on its purpose and meaning. In this, there lies an apt comparison with religious studies that take for granted supernatural forces no one has ever seen and cannot be quantized. In the 21st century, it feels like academic, editorial, and curatorial forces have disoriented the cultural ecology.

We participate in a process governed by artists, curators, and critics who often have no critical consciousness, choosing to continuously repeat the commonplace. In conversations, articles, and lecture halls, we read about heated discussions by writers who never made art; archivists with no creative experience; artists, scholars, and historians who do not think about their position, failing to consider the implications and consequences of the quotations they apply to art history. This includes the Marxist school in particular, who remain unconcerned that Marxism denies the conditions necessary for artistic ingenuity and individuality. Whom shall we blame for yesterday's pain?

We can begin with Richard Rorty, 1980s Stuart Professor of Philosophy at Princeton, Kenan Professor of Humanities at the University of Virginia, and Professor of Comparative Literature at Stanford University. A recognized influence on deconstruction, he taught that a word only acquires meaning in relation to other

words and never from experience, sensation, or emotions. With such credibility, who would dare contradict him? Yet, he was mistaken—at least in part. A reality check reveals experience comes first, then language evolves to represent and communicate personal events in a social world. The consequences of Rorty's perspective haunt us still today in the conflict between individuals and the collective.

We can trace the conflict, not as far back as Nostradamus, but in a similar camp and closer to our time, to Marcel Duchamp and Walter Benjamin. Reading Benjamin's writing about 19th-century Paris in *The Arcades Project*, we can't help but fall for his genius, the beautiful language, and the brilliant words: "The harbour people are a bacillus culture, the porters and whores products of decomposition with a resemblance to human beings. But the palate itself is pink, which is the colour of shame here, of poverty. Hunchbacks wear it, and beggarwomen..." (Benjamin 2005, 232)

Benjamin was also a fervent Communist, who wrote "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," a prolific piece of modern writing. Susan Sontag, as Benjamin's apologist, downplayed his commitment to Marxism—but in "The Work of Art" and *Arcades*, the indoctrination becomes obvious. Arthur Koestler was another Communist writer who left the party disillusioned. In *The God That Failed*, he describes the 'sacrificium intellectus' and logical contradictions a Communist writer suffered. The emotional damage that grows from the conflicts essential to self-deception may well explain Benjamin's catastrophic failure of self-confidence and his consequent suicide in a moment of crisis.

"The Work of Art" reads, now, as Marxist propaganda—a tale of flawed assumptions, facts and fiction twisted to align with political theory. The reductions, contradictions, and leaps of faith are clear. A historian will remind us Communists looked on truth and accuracy as bourgeois fallacies, useful but disposable in

the effort to instruct the masses. Benjamin answered to the Soviet Writer's Committee and his work follows the party line. We cannot read Benjamin naively, so as to ignore the writer's political priorities. We confuse "The Work of Art" with today's academic scholarship or even objective research, when in fact the essay is a constrained political marketing tool denouncing individuality and promoting the rule of the working class. Steam engines once impressed us, but they belong in museums along with the political pretensions of that era, no matter how seductive; one must read Nostradamus with caution.

Benjamin writes: "When the age of mechanical reproduction separated art from its basis in cult, the semblance of its autonomy disappeared forever. From a photographic negative, for example, one can make any number of prints; to ask for the 'authentic' print makes no sense" (Benjamin 1969). Today, original photographs by Ansel Adams are those he printed from negatives he shot and developed. Most range between \$8,000 and \$50,000; Benjamin was wrong, at least from a market perspective. And yet for graduate and postgraduate students Benjamin is still required reading. His writing is the foundation of a school of political and pragmatic work that defines art as nothing more than political illustration. A strain of disingenuous thinking entered the art world and inspired much boring, disappointing artwork.

There runs a vein of corruption from Benjamin to Duchamp to Joseph Beuys into present day; they're all on record for professional dishonesty. For Benjamin, as a Marxist writer, truth was conveniently at the whim of the Soviet Writer's Committee. It's documented that Duchamp stole the idea of the urinal from artist Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, a milestone in art marketing. He's also on record for ravaging traditional Bourgeois notions, including their stolid honesty. Duchamp's grandchildren, felt, fat, and fur also played loosely with truth. Joseph Beuys admitted he made it all up, excusing his moral lapse on the grounds the art world needed myths.

Benjamin and Duchamp condemn themselves in text, plainly visible on the printed page but ignored until now, when it's just too much to persist in denial. It's time to review this cultural blind spot shaped of the last three or four generations of writers and critics. The negative shock has to be balanced by the understanding that we cannot continue a practice based on self-destructive tendencies.

We have fetishized Duchamp in the same manner as Benjamin. Duchamp, whose work profoundly shapes the contemporary art world, hated ocular, pictorial art. Imagine if Mozart or Chopin hated auditory art, or Stravinsky hated melodic art, or Shakespeare hated the grammatical arts. Self-destructive beliefs lead to obvious self-destruction. In the academic world, especially that of contemporary art, it takes tremendous arrogance to think we can build our lives on a nihilistic platform and not suffer any consequences.

In Duchamp's time, the term "ready-made" meant an object produced in a factory as opposed to by an artisan. The factory object was still new so it had a cachet, was trendy and hot. Duchamp wrote that he did not understand the ready-made but knew that it was a great idea. We can now see that it allowed the artist to evade the work of making, it was a labour-saving device masquerading as cultural representation.

Jasper Johns, in a foreword titled "Marcel Duchamp, An Appreciation," writes that "In the 1920s Duchamp gave up, quit painting. He allowed, perhaps encouraged, the attendant mythology. One thought of his decision, his willing this stopping. Yet on one occasion, he said it was not like that. He spoke of breaking a leg. 'You don't mean to do it.' He declared that he wanted to kill art..." (Cabanne 1987, 109) Jasper Johns goes on to write how wonderful Duchamp's attitude was—but why wonderful? If you don't like art, why become an artist? It was the result of a trend-seeking nihilism that led Duchamp to quit art, to "break a leg." He was playing to the

gallery, got swept along and lost touch with his soul. The same consequence shadows contemporary art today. Seemingly, no one has considered the effects of a system grounded in such theory. No wonder students rebel. Duchamp's contradictions continue their toxic influence on today's art, as much as Marshall McLuhan's error in saying that art is anything you can get away with.

In 1617, Sir Dudley Carleton protested to Rubens that paintings the artist offered him were in fact the work of studio assistants. Rubens quickly replaced them—it would not do to acquire a reputation for passing off someone else's work as one's own. You cannot visit the National Ballet and hire Donna the Prima Donna to dance in your name, then expect a reputation as a great dancer—because an individual work is more important than public reception and popularity. Take the "ready-made" idea to a live performance by jazz musician Ornette Coleman, and drag in a "ready-made" musician off the street to play instead. The quality of the work changes.

And yet in the contemporary art world, Andrea Zittel's carpenters make furniture that she calls art and sells for six figures, because Duchamp, Rorty, and their ilk made the conditions possible. Something went wrong; our sense of collective responsibility reeks to high heaven, and logic has been replaced by a crude display of power. Martin Creed's "light on, light off" is a conceptual work grounded in the play of covert power imposed in the vacuum of ambiguity. And still, Creed had to donate his work to the British National Gallery simply to prop up his credibility, as they would not pay the U.S. \$190,000 price tag that another museum paid later on, which they paid on the grounds the work was now accredited by its presence in the National Gallery collection. Duchamp told us that good taste was the enemy of art: so welcome bad taste, art's new best friend.

The Stuckists, a group of contemporary painters based

in the UK, demonstrated against Creed. They're worth a glance, as they occupy the other side of disingenuity in art today. Their canvasses reveal technical competence but a lack of original vision. The Stuckists got their name in 1999, when Tracey Emin said to her then-boyfriend Billy Childish that Billy and his friends were "stuck, stuck, stuck," in **outmoded practices**. Originality in art will always **be a hallmark** (Duchamp be damned!), and therefore **being "stuck"** meant being a veritable loser in the **contemporary art circuit**. The group's adoption of **the name Stuckists** might serve as a metaphor for our theoretical 'blind spot,' adopting insult as reality. Meanwhile, Saatchi is selling Tracey Emin's **unmade bed** for \$2 million. I offer my own **unmade bed for sale** at \$1.9 million, a true saving of \$100,000—**nothing to sneer at** in these harsh economic times. And yet there have been few replies, all of them low-bidders.

Derrida's **method of deconstruction** was to look past the irony and ambiguity to the layer that really threatens to collapse that system. He would have approved the notion that to be successful today an artist must be **avant-garde or even post-avant-garde**. It follows that where there's a territory there must be a script, a look, a model, a style: an orthodoxy that subverts, negates, and contradicts the avant-garde, pre or post. Arts producers graduate from similar post-secondary programs and therefore share the similar values, which are reflected in their association, production, and the systems created thereby. Surely a cultural blindness results from these group judgments.

I recently saw the work of photographer Anne Collier and have some criticisms for those whose photography illustrates art history. Eliminating the visual from visual art may satisfy the theoretical scholar, but the status of photography has, regrettably, plummeted from the valued position it occupied even twenty years ago. In comparison to Collier's images, Hal Morey's *Grand Central Station* is a work

of art and his personal vision; millions passed those sunbeams without a second glance as they rushed off to work. The grandeur of the photograph comes from the pictorial balance, the composition, Morey's play of light and shadow, the sensual and the aesthetic. Collier's work instead subscribes to the school of "cold photography," with the photograph as a record or document lacking an autonomous aesthetic modality. This paradigm of rejecting formal, ocular aesthetics was seen as an advanced development when it became popular three decades ago. Now we are shown photographs of book shelves and reproductions, supposedly "mining" art history. When content operates outside the materiality of the work, the work is boring.

Admittedly, boredom makes up an inescapable part of research and study; our ability to persevere and extract only the pertinent information is an admirable one. Our tolerance and capacity for boredom, and the selective processing of information, has extended into curatorial decisions. In the art system, when enough curators lean towards conceptual influences, the system becomes overextended with numerous Walter Maria rooms holding earth, or holding oil, or filled with water... and we as viewers are offered extensive installations of rubble. Academics have confused process and purpose, losing sight of the art, which was at some point replaced by descriptive methodology. This transference can be called an effect of confirmation bias. Not only are people more likely to interpret information to fit their pre-existing beliefs, but they're also more likely to go looking for such information.

In truth, the arts will never lose their fan base, even when hopelessly confused, because of the religions art history left behind. Humanity will always need something to believe in (preferably the same thing their neighbors believe). *The Emperor's New Clothes* (1837), by Hans Christian Anderson, is an idiom for these relational "truths" that bear meaning only in

their acceptance and adoption of a mass public. Human beings are herd creatures who seek the conformity of collective expression, a common agreement on the meaning of symbol, sign, and language. Our psychology is such that, under the pressure to conform, even those who do not believe (yet believe all the others do) will eventually 'get with the program' and turn into team players, even firm believers. Until some 300 years ago, "free thinker" referred to a dangerous radical, one defying church and state when the ruling class did the thinking for everyone else—when disagreement was settled at the stake or the executioner's block. Michel Foucault, in *The Archeology of Knowledge*, writes that in every society, the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized and distributed. Foucault's observation is not irrelevant in our consideration of the mercantile aspect of art. For example, salaries, sales, and grants are often directed to those who support common ideology and will return the favour rather than those instigating change. Within an academic system, standardization is as inevitable as an intellectual approach to art, in spite of being a contradiction in method and form, action and goal.

Traditionally, we know that music, painting, sculpture, and dance, among other historically formal media, are expressions from the unconscious or non-verbal mind. These are rarely shaped through intellectual functions but typically with feelings or intuition. In practice, a dancer works physically, a painter applies pigment mechanically, as does a sculptor with their material. When we engage the pragmatic consequence of materiality, the creative unconscious can take over otherwise conscious decision-making faculties. Consciousness and language seem too slow compared to sensory processes, suggesting a degree of complexity and sophistication in the unconscious mind that gets impeded by acute consciousness.

A bee's dance describes the flight from the hive to a field of flowers. This dance includes an hourly-changing sun-based orientation to the field, as well as the caloric value of that patch, all performed as a formal dance. The invisible or imperceptible content in a bee's dance leads to far reaching speculations on unconscious content in the artwork of the naked ape.

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