

Formalism & Kindness

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Volume One: Face to Face

The Pop Passion Play

This is a review of Steve Earle's very fine book of stories by someone who thinks pop songs are the greatest achievement of our time. Suddenly I was in Puebla, Mexico without having finished this review. Puebla is thick with radios and dogs, both very loud, plus more cars moving faster on fewer working parts, belching a powerful gray exhaust whose diesel tang put me in mind of Rome and London. I came here with my two-year-old and his mother. Our hostess lives in what is little more than a pile of rocks, and has a maid. Everything the two-year-old touches might kill him. Last night the streets sounded like a slaughterhouse, and I imagined that all of Mexico was a vast graveyard of dogs. I was told I could have Vicodin, cheap, simply by asking, but in fact no one in Puebla has ever heard of Vicodin. Not even codeine is sold here, and so I tried Catalfan, which only made me dizzy and thoughtless.

Several of Steve Earle's short stories concern addicts on the far side of recognizing their troubles, and while they are still blind to it, the nasty trajectory of their addiction is made obvious to the reader. I didn't like these stories. They required a kind of cold, even superior, attitude from the narrator who was (symptomatically) third person. In his totally awesome pop songs, Earle

rarely resorts to the third person, and never strays away from a pervasive, transforming empathy with his subjects. Two “druggy” stories in this collection recast the characters as emblems of something that troubles the narrator, and these lost my interest. Mind you, a third, “A Eulogy of Sorts” (which tells the story of a dead addict the narrator knew from buying coke and Dilaudid) is a real gem--haunting, no false notes, hard and clear as glass. Notably, it’s told in the first person, so the narrator has nowhere to hide from his own problems.

I notice in Puebla, maybe all over Mexico, there’s a pervasive fake-o-rama realist aesthetic. For instance, the dead Jesus in the great Cathedral has gaping wounds and bright red blood, while the horror and serenity on his face is rendered in broad, cartoonish strokes. He’s also got a hairpiece that would shame Milton Berle. This is not kitsch; Jesus displays no irony nor lack of refinement. Big ideas are embedded in him, and they seem to require big, clear gestures. It’s like when Steve Earle (in “I Feel Alright”) grunts “huhn” after reminding the listener that “some of you would live through me, lock me up, and throw away the key.” A cocaine dealer’s taunt, this largely emblematic grunt is one of pop music’s greatest moments. By “emblematic,” I mean this grunt sounds nothing like a grunt one would hear in life, but rather signals to

us the enormous pride and disdain that lies behind the urge toward such a grunt, a pride and disdain so overreaching that no real grunt could ever contain it. Such gestures are impossible within the style of prose Earle has chosen for his fiction. His stories are natural seeming and familiar, like those of Richard Ford, Tobias Wolfe, or Paul Russel. They are mimetic, aping remembered experiences sufficiently well to “ring true,” rendering voices artfully enough to make written dialogue read like real speech. Pop songs, on the other hand, thrive on the cartoon gesture, the well put cliché delivered with true feeling. No one really talks the way they do. Say the words to a beloved pop song out loud; they are embarrassing, simple, unreal. I cry when Milo Ackerman of *The Descendents* sings “Sitting there with your mouth full of beer, your eyes are glazed, your face is red. Who’s going to pick you up and use you for tonight? Not me. Not me. Not me. Not me. Not me.” Or Steve Earle: “I’ll be going over yonder, where no ghost can follow me.”

Pop songs are an exacting form composed of simple predictable parts more like a villanelle or haiku than like the mimetic illusion of most contemporary fiction. As with the classical haiku of, say, Basho, pop songs limit themselves to a handful of traditional subjects and deploy familiar, almost canonical imagery within a strictly limited structure whose power derives from

fidelity to the form. Why is “Road Runner” so powerful? Because it is “Sister Ray.” Yesterday in Puebla, looking at Jesus amidst swarms of Catholic children genuflecting to the completely lifeless, unrealistic doll with the same vivid excitement and understanding provoked by their favorite Mexican wrestlers (another surpassing example of fake-o-rama realism) I knew that pop cannot function as a reproduction of remembered realities, but only as an arrangement of simple emblems of greater things, symbols that remind the listener to feel something that is too enormous for mimicry, too unreproducible to ever be rendered mimetically in art. A guitar’s burst of sound is transcendence; a scream is sexual ecstasy; a tonal resolution is resignation and giving up.

Written prose of the sort practiced by Steve Earle (or, say, John Updike or Raymond Carver) proposes the opposite: the work of art claims a kind of equivalence with past experience; it wants to coexist with memory, not just function as a portal into realities too great to be art. It is remarkable that Earle--a genius of the pop song form--should have the considerable talent he has in the mimetic form of short prose. His stories court the same successes and failures one is used to enduring in most contemporary fiction. A character in one story excites us because he sounds like someone we once met; another disappoints because her voice echoes movies,

rather than any person we've overheard. A conversation in a Hanoi hotel room quickens our interest by recalling and naming exotic things succinctly and authoritatively. These are not minor accomplishments. Prose of this sort is difficult, and, if publishers or readers are to be believed, success in this form is the pinnacle achievement of prose writing today.

But the power of pop songs begs me to ask 'what is the point?' Who needs mimetic art? Why can't written prose generate the delirium and transcendence of pop? Everything in Puebla is made of sugar and the television is constantly on. Only the rich eat very little. The poor are gluttons. I've never seen such clean children. Mimetic art is an aberration, a brief glitch between the baroque and pop. In the church of Santa Maria, in Tonantzintla, gilded Aztec cherubs cluster among absurdly bright purple and red poppies surrounding a pale Jesus whose wounds are made of ripped, painted cloth and whose hair is thick and real. The cherubs are chocolate brown, frowning, puzzled--drowning in the gold ornament that covers the walls and arched ceiling. They were carved in wood 450 years ago by enslaved Indios, descendants of the Aztec they resemble, and their flattened faces, their broad empty eyes--imprisoned on these church walls, imprisoned as emblem, as art that cannot die--say more than any realistic account of Spanish conquest ever could.

Which is not to say I don't thoroughly admire Steve Earle's book. He is a deliberate, talented prose writer. His stories burned images into my mind: driving through the desert at night, "leaving the lights off, he set the car in motion down the black asphalt, deeper into the desert, further out of control;" the compulsive pleasures of the addict "conditioned like some space-race laboratory monkey to keep pushing that button, too far gone to give a fuck whether I received a banana-flavored pellet or a 110-volt shock." His pacing is tight, cinematic, collapsing vast stretches of time through unhesitating jump-cuts. He has an ear for American voices, though a sometimes-wooden touch with foreign sounds. And he takes risks, experimenting with subject matter and structures that lie outside the safe realm of what he has known well in life. But here in Puebla, these virtues are lost amidst the din of the radio's crazy baroque hectoring, its broadcast of the awesome sounds of pop music.

So Many Dark Gifts

One burden artists carry now is the fact that art can be almost anything. It's not clear what work the artist might be doing, or be asked to do, next. The artist is, by turns, an educator, a designer, a decorator, a party planner, a day-care attendant, or a real estate developer (if he can be), and few artists resist this formless bloating of their vocation, so eager are they to have work. Artists are to blame, of course. The arts long ago gave up the medium-based specificity that made it clear what was and was not "art." Previously, if you were not painting or sculpting (or etc.) at a certain level of proficiency, you were not an artist. There were theater artists and writers, too; but, again, their competence within the medium defined them as artists. Later, sensibility replaced medium as the category's *sine qua non*—now art is anything done by an artist, artistically—and art evolved to offer its services inside nearly every sector of the economy. "The artist" became a ubiquitous, fungible resource, like water or money, available to somehow improve everything.

In comparison to this norm, Valentijn Goethals is a relatively focused, medium-specific artist. He has several media—radio waves; obsolete home-entertainment equipment; printing; book design; woodworking; music; and something he calls "architectural interfer-

ence,” chief among them. Wherever you place him, he turns to these things. Put him in a desert and he’ll find an empty radio frequency.

Currently he’s in an obsolete welding factory in a former industrial area of Ghent, Belgium, with seven friends and collaborators—Tim Bryon, Tomas Lootens, Kobe Vandenberghe, Mathieu Serruys, Pauwel De Buck, Stephen Verstraete, and Valentijn’s brother, Olivier Goethals, who is an architect. I’ll call them the 019 collective, though that’s not a name they use themselves (see below). As you might expect, they built a fabulous, large wooden room inside the building, and a sound studio that sometimes broadcasts micro-radio (low-wattage signals in empty FM bands that reach a half-kilometer or so). Valentijn’s old TV sets, which he has used as stage equipment for a hardcore noise band, as elements of sculpture, and as display devices for various electronic signals, are lined up on heavy steel shelves in the building’s storage space. A flag flies on the building, not Valentijn’s design, but typical of his 2-D graphic interests. Every month or few weeks the collective asks a new artist to design a flag for them. The building is called 019 because it is the 19th project released under Valentijn’s record label and publishing house (with Tim Bryon and Tomas Lootens), Smoke & Dust. This book is Smoke & Dust 025.

Valentijn is, as I say, a relatively focused young artist. Others his age, and older, do many more various things. When I asked him what he calls himself, whether he is an “artist,” a “designer,” a carpenter, a musician, or what have you, he told me that it’s not always easy to find the right word. Which means he’s an artist. Carpenters don’t have any trouble answering the question. This is fairly usual for his peers, too. They hesitate to label what they do, or themselves. They hesitate to say a lot of things. Valentijn is friendly and welcoming, but he doesn’t talk much about, for instance, the categories and questions I’ve begun my essay with.

Which isn’t to say Valentijn does not think seriously about these things. When he learned that a book, “a real book,” as he calls it, would be made about his work, he was both grateful and perplexed. “I’m 28-years old,” he said. “I’m not sure there’s enough to make a whole book about.” Quantity was not the issue. Like many of his peers, Valentijn has done more work in ten years than many people do in a lifetime. The question was, in the “real” economy where a “real” book circulates, what constitutes “enough?” What must a book deliver to justify the resources consumed by its production and movement through the world? These are the serious questions of an ethical, thinking person.

That's the "perplexed" side. On the "grateful" side was Valentijn's immediate interest in making something that would be useful for others. "What could other people learn from what I'm doing?" he asked, albeit skeptically, maybe rhetorically.

The answer is plenty. More than "enough." Valentijn's work—and the round-robin of gifts and punishments it has elicited from the world around him—sit at the center of struggles that are crucial for artists in any democratic, neo-liberal economy. This is especially so for artists in European countries, where a history of support for the arts has recently given way to broad suspicion, triggering the demand that, to justify public support, artists must function as measurable engines of economic growth.

The American academic, Richard Florida, has made a career of providing the necessary measures to justify this investment, though it's not in artists, per se, but in something Florida invented, that he calls "the creative class." Florida proposed this new class in his 2004 book, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, as a way to argue that major cities need to embrace "the three Ts—technology, talent, and tolerance" to attract the "creative class" that will guarantee future prosperity in the new "creative economy." In Richard Florida's terms, Valentijn Goethals is "a creative," and the city

of Ghent has done precisely the right thing by giving him and his colleagues a disused building, on loan, for five years—a dark gift that has not so much strings attached, as it has vast, nearly invisible webs of effects and, probably, obligations streaming from it. Florida’s ill-defined but poetically powerful category is interesting for the enemies it has gathered. Left-leaning critics in the arts, such as Martha Rosler, and right-wing pundits of urbanism, for instance Joel Kotkin, have joined in attacking Florida’s work.

Valentijn does not attack it, not that I’m aware of, anyway. 019 considers it. Here’s their “about” description: “While urban development projects are changing the appearance and functions in the area of the Old Docks, 019 is an experiment in how architectural interference models this process.” However much 019 fits or does not fit into Florida’s narrative, Valentijn is without doubt an artist, a category that no one, left or right, has yet captured in their metrics. Let me do some of what I’m paid for here, and provide a specific, useful definition of “the artist,” one that I believe cuts clearly enough for us to argue about, and is historically situated in our time. Along these lines, I accept the general drift toward sensibility as the measure of art or of being “an artist,” and so I’ll propose aspects of sensibility as our metric, as follows:

(1) The artist tends to generate problems rather than providing solutions. Enlisted in an inquiry, an artist will generally deepen and complicate the entanglement of the various things at issue, rather than loosen or in any way clear up these entanglements. If an artist tells you she is “sorting things out,” you can be sure the resulting divisions will raise more questions than they answer.

(2) An artist tends to stimulate more work, rather than ever relieving us of the need to work. She does so by actively creating new entanglements or problems that are left unsolved, or simply by stimulating us to work in response to or in the spirit of the work that she has begun.

(3) Situating this version of “the artist” historically in our time, let me add that the artist is the one living most completely in what literary critic and writer Timothy Morton has termed “the Ecological Thought.” She is the one most actively and eagerly engaged in “the mesh” that Morton sees teeming all around us; she is the one most thoroughly refusing any idealized images of an alien “outside” or “other,” whether paradisiacal or pariah; she accepts the here-ness of all things, the fact, as Morton puts it, that “there is no ‘background’ any more; it’s all foreground.” The artist is awake always to the unique and shifting secrets that every

objective “thing” in this crowded foreground of things—including both those things we used to call “persons” and those vast, unscalable things Morton terms “hyperobjects” (global warming and “the sum of all the whirring machinery of capitalism” are two of his examples)—harbors in its multi-faceted shadows. The artist celebrates the richness of this always partially hidden world, its abundance, its complexity, its ineluctable, completely incomplete presence, and does not shed a bright light upon it so much as lead or accompany us eagerly through its shifting facets of darkness. A suitably occult practice for these very occult times.

Valentijn is a bit of an occultist himself, being interested in the things we can’t see, such as radio waves or the building he has built his room inside of. In the university library in Leuven he placed obsolete old TV sets on vitrines and fed audio signals into them, the sorts of analog signals that, if channeled through your headphones would produce the beautiful music you love to hear. He fed this stream of electronic pulses, instead, into the cable inputs of the various TV sets, causing their screens to produce eerie, shifting, silent ghosts, each one unique to the particular television set, the make and model, and (despite their shared audio source) different from the others. In this way he is occult, also in his preference for gift giving, that most occult of relationships.

I don't mean that Valentijn works only in a gift economy. Indeed not. He happily earns wages as a designer, musician, label owner, and as an artist. I only mean that the deeper he goes into his art practice—the more completely removed from the default infrastructure of commerce that comes along with his other “creative class” gigs—the more he warms to the gift economy operating in the arts. He doesn't push the question of getting paid for his art. This gift economy is also his inheritance from the punk DIY music scene he grew up in. So at home is he in these occult exchanges that when I last tried to buy a record from his record label and publishing house (Smoke & Dust #020, “The Destruction of the Grand Mosque of Athens”), he told me the record, in a limited edition of 200, could only be given or received as a gift. Which I gratefully accepted, while also insisting that he pay me money—a living wage—for this essay. Which he happily did. (I solve the problem Richard Florida poses by always asking a living wage for my art, which is writing. No one needs to calculate my beneficial influence on the city or its economy; they only need to decide if they will pay me fairly for my work.)

We meet Valentijn, age 28, at a point when he can either profitably go forward as a productive member of “the creative class,” resist that path by joining the fight against it, or simply continue with the risks and

confusions of being an artist. Plenty of artists have chosen option #2, Martha Rosler for one. (More about them later.) Valentijn chose #3, and it is the quality of his choices as an artist—positioned at the epicenter of battles he gives little protracted thought to—that interest and inspire me, especially the habit he calls “architectural interference.”

Architectural interference is something he seems to do almost as a pre-condition of work. Generally speaking, it is building a preferred thing inside of whatever he has been given. Here are two examples. At the Werkplaats Typografie in Arnhem, the Netherlands, where Valentijn was a student, he and Ine Meganck built a small radio broadcasting studio inside a crawl space above the kitchen. The studio itself—tiny, cramped, with room for two people (crouching)—was an improvement of course, but not much of one. The real improvement—the site of their provision of a preferred thing inside of what was given—was in the radio waves. The transmitter they installed filled some empty FM bandwidths with a new local signal, so that now this abandoned real estate—the government-regulated radio waves—would be filled with the generous gifts that the students at the Werkplaats chose to broadcast, usually in the wee hours before dawn. Their fugitive, occasional radio signal, blossoming like a night flower in the immediate vicinity of the

Werkplaats, carried more dark gifts, passing in the night. Building out the preferred space, the studio and the bandwidths it floods, is architectural interference.

019, the ex-welding factory the city of Ghent gifted to Valentijn and his friends for five years, sits in the old manufacturing district along a part of the harbor called the Handelsdok. This building is enviable, the sort of mid-20th century industrial structure that artists repurpose as galleries, studios, or event space in cities all across the Western world. But it's not as nice as what the 019 collective could make. And so they built their simple, sturdy wooden room inside of this great poured concrete shell. The room sits at an angle to the rectangular shop, creating five spaces—its own interior, and four smaller spaces, where its walls triangulate the corners of this part of the building. When I say “sturdy,” I mean very sturdy. While many artists tend toward the temporary—building “pop-ups” from cheap, light materials that give their work the aura of nomadism—Valentijn, and the 019 collective, build more permanent structures. Why scrimp? They build the best structure they can because this is the pre-condition of work. Make the best you can inside what you've been given.

These rooms within rooms, these improvements, this colonizing of marginal space, is obviously a kind of

occupation. But is it also a living? The work is good enough. The carpentry, for example, is artisan quality. Valentijn and his brother could make a good living in construction. But in the context of art—the way it’s positioned today by the gift-giving municipalities tasked with supporting it—the high quality of the work also presents a problem. Valentijn has given back too much when it was not asked of him. In fact, the nomadic lightness of other artists is exactly what the market prefers. Easy in, easy out. Capital finds the reversible investments of the pop-up far better suited to its restless agenda of expansion and exchange than the awkwardly slow, intractable presence of something like the well-crafted wooden room the 019 collective built in the middle of the disused factory that the city loaned to them and their friends—temporarily.

Bik Van der Pol, the Dutch artist-duo comprised of Liesbeth Bik and Jos van der Pol, have navigated similar dynamics for almost 30 years in Rotterdam. In the late ‘80s they helped found an artist-run space called Duende, in a disused building the city granted to them. In a 2011 interview, the two recalled their ensuing decades-long relationship with the city government in fond, playful terms, less struggle and more a dance. But, like Martha Rosler, Bik Van der Pol met Richard Florida’s rise by fighting it. In their work, they foreground that struggle and the nearly-in-

visible web of relationships the city's gifts ensnared them in. Working as artists they in effect also became cleaners, night watchmen, neighborhood police, social workers, and real estate developers—gentrifiers, to use Bik's own characterization—but also activists. Illuminated by activists like Bik Van der Pol or Rosler, these webs can appear as frightening labyrinths, riddled with threat and unfairness.

Valentijn still sees the city of Ghent benignly, rather like a bemused uncle that will provide 019 what they need if they ask nicely. And for the most part it does. But why? Valentijn's stance isn't political so much as artistic, an instinct he has about keeping the ball in play. I'm not sure how to characterize his amiability—the agreeableness of smart people working in difficult situations—but it's not stupid. In this case, enjoying the devilish bargains of a gentrifying city while giving back far more than has been asked of him, is kind of a game of chicken—see who blinks first. I believe it's a deliberate choice to remain an artist amidst external pressures that are sharply aimed against art. Give me your dormant real estate with all of its hidden strings, and I'll give you back my art ...

Here's another way to think about it: If the artist has become, like money, a kind of currency—a fungible resource that can be brought into the service of

almost anything—then she has to be a sham currency, a fiat currency that might, tomorrow, turn out to be completely worthless. Therein lies the potency of art. The relationships the artist makes are the opposite of the relationships made by money. Art’s exchange creates obligations that will never be satisfied. When the artist’s value is guaranteed, measurable, she becomes only money, and that is the death of art.

Bik Van der Pol’s experience (they got moved out of one building and then found another) brought them to similar, delusional strategies. Liesbeth Bik recalls, “before, in the old building, we were constantly harassed by the city council telling us, ‘you have to leave.’ And we were always making plans, always trouble-shooting. So that meant a lot of wasted time, a huge waste of energy. So when we finally arrived at the new building [1994], we decided to do it all differently. Despite the contract that could force us to leave within two weeks notice, we acted as if it could also be one-hundred years before we would have to leave. We acted as if we were never going to leave, or at least not be bothered by this or any other piece of paper telling us to go.”

It’s a beguiling move, a kind of trump card in a game that’s probably rigged against them. Like denial in any human relationship, the end-result might be disas-

trous (who could know?), but it certainly kept the game going. As an artistic choice it is older cousin to Valentijn's benign occupation in Ghent.

Martha Rosler, decades deeper into the same game, writing and working in New York, has taken a different approach. Rosler not only shares the promiscuous profile of the contemporary artist, she in some ways modeled it for an admiring generation of young students. She writes works of scholarship, runs garage sales, keeps and circulates a library, organizes neighborhoods, makes collages, movies, and videos, and conducts her public life as an artist. She designed an urban garden for Vienna, "as an artist." And the work is superb, especially the scholarship and writing, such as her 2013 book from e-Flux (adapted from a 2010 lecture), *Culture Class: Art, Creativity, Urbanism*, attacking the shoddy work of Richard Florida.

To judge by Rosler's essay, and a handful of other potent critiques of Florida, taking him apart is like shooting fish in a barrel. His scholarship is lousy. The most convincing attacks come from better scholars inside Florida's field, sociologists like Ann Markusen or Sharon Zukin, who point out that "the creative class" is an unspecific fiction that actually does not correlate, statistically, to the economic benefits Florida claims for it. But despite his abysmal failure at

sociology, Florida still has the ears of the mayors and governors and CEOs who determine governmental policy.

It's disturbing to see Rosler and the rest of our team win the day in sociology while Richard Florida goes marching on, unsullied and indifferent, guiding scores of cities around the world into his narrative, the rise of the creative class. So, what to make of this strategy—choice #2—of taking on political battles shaped by Florida's hostile assumptions? We're in bad shape, I think, when the best artists wielding their competent sociology consistently lose to Richard Florida. It is painful to admit, but while Florida may be the lesser scholar he appears to be the better artist.

Matthew Stadler

Apparently government policy is not shaped by good scholarship but by art—what's now termed “strong stories”—in this case the masterfully told narratives of Richard Florida. However satisfying it is to win intellectual battles, artists risk losing the city if they compromise their instincts as artists in favor of scoring debate points. I'm completely unsure how to fight these battles myself, and I'm painfully aware of their importance. Which is maybe why I am so beguiled by the choice many younger artists have made to act as if these battles are not the point. I believe art is powerful.

They act as if that's true.

Among the things that Valentijn does not say much about is Richard Florida. He prefers talking about the next flag for 019, making a great poster, or getting a long-admired film-maker to visit and show movies while someone's friend's band plays. Again, this is not from lack of intelligence, caring, or savvy. It is a choice about how to express such things, an artistic choice—a matter of style—just as carefully considered as Martha Rosler's choice to be super-smart in public. I'm 55-years old, much more Rosler's peer than Valentijn's, and I am accustomed to...what? Speaking truth to power. I cringe at the phrase, but that is precisely what I believe in. So now I have to ask myself, what is this odd new way of speaking that I hear all around me?

It's the sound of artists working as artists. I include them all, from activists to occultists. My concern is how these artists can keep working as artists. It helps to be nimble and quick on your feet. It helps to be angry, even if you smile. It helps to smile. One example Rosler sites deserves to be revisited here, the story of Richard Serra and his sculpture "Tilted Arc."

In 1981, on a public commission, Serra provided a 4-meter high, 50-meter long curving piece of corten

steel to bisect a busy public plaza next to New York's City Hall. Typical of a public commission, the city hoped Serra would provide an amenity—something pleasant to lean against or see—and potentially a landmark. But Serra had been asked for a piece of art, and that's what he delivered.

“Tilted Arc” was not universally liked. While its function as art, as an integral part of Serra's long and well-respected career, was unassailable, a local judge expressed his disappointment that it did not also provide the social amenities he'd hoped for. The artist was not interested in the amenities, and the object he designed made that clear. “Tilted Arc,” like Valentin Goethals's contributions to the city where he lives, was art that would stay art. Art asserts difference, specificity, and in the public sphere, such assertions can be fiercely challenged. The city announced that Serra must either alter the piece or they would remove it. Serra sued them to prevent it and lost. On the day when the heavy equipment arrived to cut “Tilted Arc” into pieces and take it away, Serra told the New York Daily News “I don't care what they do with it. They can turn it into bullets.” Here is an artist at the top of his game.

Within the atmosphere of amiability and of truly friendly cooperation that marks Valentin's work lies

this same insistence on art in the midst of politics. It's curious to see it there, amidst all the agreeableness that animates Valentijn and his peers. We don't live in a time of cowboy heroes, like Serra; yet the same puzzles face the working artist today.

The show for which this book is a catalogue took place in a beautiful building in Waregem, Belgium. Valentijn was excited when he saw the spaces available for exhibiting work. But, as it ended up, he was given the corridor, which was nice...but the rooms Valentijn was not given were nicer. So he called his brother and together they built the better rooms, in exact replica, inside the corridor. They built what they preferred inside of what was given. No, it wasn't temporary or "mock." Yes, later they'll have to figure out how to take it out again, but that's not Valentijn's concern now. He's excited about building the room with his brother.

The notes on my wall, which have guided this essay, conclude: "Help Valentijn learn and win." Not that I know what he could win, nor even know what game he's in, but that's my goal here. I think he's doing precisely what he should do. I hope the professed supporters of his work pay him a living wage. But that's not his problem. The best help I found—for Valentijn and for the rest of us—is something Liesbeth

Bik said, looking back at her several decades of work. “Just never be afraid,” she said. “Do your work, deal with everything. And don’t be afraid. It helps to be fearless.”

The Table and the Network (for Sam Gould)

“In a dark time, the eye begins to see.”

—Theodore Roethke

Prologue

Sam Gould wrote to ask, “In what ways does the street enter into our home life? Or...what are some incidents which have dissolved the walls between your home and the outside world?” As often with Sam, his questions put the spotlight on hidden drivers in the work I care about most. This intersection of the street—by which I understand Sam to mean public space and specifically the public space of activism—and home life—the domestic world of family and private living—is the ground of our most important political challenges.

For better or worse, public space, including the space of activism, is dominated by the market, which often smuggles itself into the driver’s seat wearing the cloak of mass democracy. Public life encloses us in a single system using two complementary vocabularies—the market in which we shop, and the democracy in which we vote. It’s something bigger than a “system”—a metabolism, maybe; or, as Lisa Robertson speculates,

an element on the order of air, water, earth, or fire. She describes, “a network so thorough that it cannot be called a system any longer, because a system has closure, and a discrete partitioning of components, and this situation seems to have replaced weather itself, to become an unanswerably constant element, in the ancient sense of the word element...Capital as universal hormone.”

In this element we are instrumentalized, always. That is, we have no identity or agency outside of our function as consumer or voter—chooser. We are always choosing, picking one over the other, sorting, selecting and expelling. Where there is no (or little) money, we construct ersatz markets, capitalize our tastes, and dispense other coins—“likes” on Facebook, pledges to Kickstarter, tips to underpaid workers, charity to the poor, decency to strangers—if we choose to. To lack these things (money, Facebook, spare change, or correct discernment) is to become invisible and disappear. Our identity gathers and becomes legible only in our function as choosers.

This is a very particular kind of space—or metabolism—a jungle of constant contention and ceaseless campaigning, and it floods the world, stopping only at the boundary of the private home. There, inside the home—protected by property rights and swaddled in

the archaic rhetoric of “the family”—those of us who can afford it, pay to indulge our useless, non-instrumentalized experience as persons. In the home we are fully human, or can be.

If activism is ever going to express human values, it must begin at home where we still practice, recognize, and honor human being. It’s possible we can extend this space of recognition—of human rights—gradually into the public space of activism by how we treat people. Or, it may be that the public life of the street comes rushing into our homes uninvited, forcing us to either buy better locks and fences, or to ask how our homes can displace the market and come to constitute public space. In the last four years I pursued two projects that explicitly confronted these questions without my knowing it. This essay inspects them both to answer Sam, whose questions daylighted some of the hidden streams that shaped my work.

The Table

The house I used to own in Portland, Oregon, sits across from a small park. The homeless who lived part-time in the park were a fairly stable crew, so I and my son, then eleven, got to know some of them pretty well. Do homeless people like to have their anonymity

protected in an essay? Can anonymity ever really help them? I don't live there anymore, so I can't ask. I'll call these four Scotty, Eve, Mark, and Sue.

Scotty, Eve, Mark, and Sue were all friendly people, sociable to different degrees, and their homelessness ran the full spectrum. For instance, it took me awhile to realize that Eve, Scotty's girl friend, wasn't actually homeless, per se. She had an apartment in the new social housing flats built behind our backyard. But Scotty, a one-legged vet with a big personality, was not allowed in her building. The fact that I saw them living together in the park, barbecuing off make-shift grills, sleeping in the back of Eve's car, was not because they couldn't hold down an apartment. Scotty and Eve loved each other. They wanted to be together, and that meant living in the park.

Mark and Sue were a little more like my stereotype of homeless. They collected cans and bottles for refund and camped on some neighbor's porch. Sometimes they stayed in the make-shift tent-cities next to the freeway. They would have camped in our park if the police allowed them to. Their social lives, and maybe their economic lives, were solidly located in and around the park. It was home. I saw more of them than I saw of my house-owning neighbors. And not just in a public nuisance sort of way. They, alone, greeted me when I

biked down our block, coming home from work. They alone saw what went on around my house when I was away, and would tell me what was going down. They alone got to know my son, and would say hello to him. My son, also friendly, said hello back. He would dutifully listen to Scotty's impassioned recommendations of certain books, mostly sci-fi, that my son "had to read."

Scotty loved books and writing. I'm a writer, so that gave us something to talk about. But Scotty's personality and mine were way out of balance; I became exhausted or felt trapped whenever he started in on almost any subject. I marvelled at Eve, a sane and intelligent woman, who just smiled and laughed when Scotty got going. He was a very funny man, and very smart. On our block, he effectively ran the place, using his wits and charisma. I don't know anything about the violence these people suffered or hid, but in our park, among the group that gathered there regularly, the days were shaped by camaraderie and fellow-feeling, presided over by Scotty's alpha personality.

Like I say, these were my neighbors and, as neighbors go, their virtues outweighed their faults. It was especially nice that my kid had a chance to grow up knowing the humanity and decency of homeless people. The only recurring problems came every few days or nights,

when the police needed to clear out the park or stop a man from drinking or pissing or shitting, and there would be conflict. It was routine, I soon discovered. Everyone involved knew their part. Depending on the day or the drunk, there might be resistance, screaming, a fight, and/or jail. But soon enough the regulars would all be back in the park again and the cycle would resume. Except for the violence and degradation inflicted on the homeless, it was probably hardest on me and the other house-owning neighbors who weren't comfortable with conflict.

Matthew Stadler

I talked to the police about it, asking naive questions about alternative ways to “engage” the fact of these people living among us. I called them “my neighbors,” which confused Officer Garrison, who called them “gentlemen.” “The gentlemen drinking in the park eventually urinate, and it’s just as likely to be on your fence or somewhere your kid plays as anywhere.” Police always call the dehumanized targets of their categorical practice “gentlemen.” It makes me angry. I despise the police. Not the individuals. Not Officer Garrison. I despise the role we have together scripted for Officer Garrison, which he carries out faithfully, because he shares our belief in the rule of law. This is important. The path forward will oppose the police by upholding the rule of law.

My friend Dennis lived at our house back then, and he also had problems with police. He had problems with male authority, generally. Both of us identified more with, say, Eve or Sue than we did with Officer Garrison. Dennis was in Portland to study “process work,” a particular approach to interpersonal psychology (more accurately, post-Jungian psychology) that regards individual actions as aspects of a group process. In any group process there are roles each of us play, or fail to play. The school’s founder, Arnie Mindell, holds that each one of us is capable of playing many roles, and the more consciously we can embody and inspect these roles, the better everyone’s chances of evolving, of progressing in life. One role, for example, is the provocateur, the trickster, the holy fool.

Scotty was a trickster. Like raven, like the yurodivy, like the fool in the King’s court, Scotty constantly played edges and poked holes through them. It wasn’t malicious or affectionate or goal-directed in any way I could discern; it was simply that thing that Scotty did. In a conversation you could practically feel him fingering the edges of everything—of your mood, of his persuasion, of what might be true or relevant or false or deceitful, of integrity or withdrawal—and skillfully, constantly, his intelligence would dart out in a joke or a sudden laugh, a sharp phrase, or an ambiguous piece of observation, and poke holes in whatever you

thought you were knitting together. It was exhausting. He held many people in his thrall, and he pissed off others. He annoyed the hell out of Officer Garrison, a man who was duty bound to enforce the integrity of boundaries. Garrison and his brothers in blue took out their frustration by harrasing and humiliating Scotty, or somebody like him. It didn't matter who. This was a tired old drama that kept playing on and on in our park, and everywhere around us.

Scotty didn't let it get him down. He'd seen worse, I gathered. Officer Garrison was actually a decent man and a good cop. His humiliations of Scotty were by-the-book and his harrasment was pro forma. A drunk fool needs to be arrested, and for that he needs to be cuffed, etc. I was the problem. Witnessing this I could not accept my inability to change it. I had no idea what to do. I lacked most of the skills needed—social work skills, police training skills, urban design skills—and my strong suits, empathy and pascifism, weren't helping anyone. They made it difficult for me to live among my neighbors.

That all changed one night when I had a dinner party on my porch. Like I say, my house faced the park, and along the side facing it we built a wrap-around, covered porch, nearly as big as the house itself. All summer, and into the fall, we'd have dinners out there.

We showed movies on the porch. We lived outside as much as we could, enjoying the intimate, special access we had to the park. The trees that shaded our porch reached over the narrow street to touch the branches of the bigger trees in the park. It was an enviable lot to own. Our porch sat high, so we spent these summer evenings like bon vivants on a cruise ship, gazing out over our bucolic domain.

We could sit 18 or 20 people at the big table on my porch. The parties were noisy and fun. No one complained. Scotty and his crew were the only ones the noise reached, and they weren't complainers. One evening, late, maybe near to midnight, the party had dwindled to a dozen or so. I saw Scotty's wheelchair parked on the sidewalk, and was surprised to see it was empty. Then Scotty came lurching up the steep stairs, dragging his one-legged self up by the railing, and maneuvered into an empty chair at the end of the table. "Anybody got a smoke I could bum," he asked, ingratiatingly.

I stared at him in disbelief, as two nearby smokers leaned forward with their packs. Jesus. Leave it to Scotty to find the unlocked door. Smokers get to bum cigarettes. That's what smokers do. It's a bond that runs across all boundaries or difference. I was drunk, and maybe I had learned from Eve. So, I thought, why

fight this guy? He was a marvel. The cigarettes were just his opening gambit. He listened brightly and soon heard the subject was poetry. He asked if we'd read Hart Crane. (Yes, Hart Crane, not Stephen Crane.) And then he recited poems of Hart Crane that he had memorized. At least it sounded that way. He sussed out the party and he made it his own. I'd had more than my fill of Scotty; he was much less charming to me than he was to my guests. So, as I often did at the tail-ends of those evenings, I went inside to bed and fell asleep. When I woke the next morning the porch was empty (and relatively clean), the guests were gone, and Scotty was asleep on the parking strip.

Eve was with him. She sat in the grass with his head in her lap and jostled him awake. I decided it was a good idea to let Eve hear what I had to say to Scotty. It wasn't pleasant, but I wanted someone sane to witness that it was not unpleasant either. "Scotty," I began. "I'm very impressed by your boldness coming to the party on my porch last night. And I must say, you were a delight to many of the people there. It's great that you and my friends can enjoy each other that way." Eve looked surprised but not surprised. Clearly she did not know what Scotty had done; but just as clearly, she could have predicted it. "But don't ever come up onto my porch uninvited again. This is my house. My porch. It's private. Even my friends come over when they are

invited. They don't just haul themselves up the stairs and claim a seat at my dinner table, and you can't do that either."

Scotty had all sorts of charming reasons and sincere apologies, and he promised (truthfully, as it turned out) that he would follow my rule now that I'd made it clear. "You know I just love poetry," he protested. "And man, I needed a cigarette [his trump card]. I'd been trying to fall asleep but that smoke just kept drifting off your porch in big clouds, and I finally couldn't stop myself...." This was the small bit of truth the holy fool plants so that nothing can be resolved easily. Indeed: Who had put a party outside, practically in the park, anyway? I had. And who did I think was out there already? Nobody? No. I knew the park was shared, was even home to some, including Scotty. But I wanted my private yacht to sail deep into the public waters. And I put my porch and my party just about as far out into the park as I legally could. Why should I be surprised when Scotty dragged himself up the stairs and took a chair and asked for a cigarette?

Scotty poked a hole in some assumed boundaries—the property rights that I had come to rely upon—and exposed the deeper rule of law that I actually want to live by: the rules of the table. The rules of the table, as I understand them, are the opposite of the market. The

two are mutually exclusive. In one, to be at the table is to be equal and all have basic rights that are never questioned. In the other, the market, nothing is ours until we own it, until we buy ownership of it; more, to own it deprives others of that same right. To make a claim is also to expel. The history of mass democracy is the history of promising a mixture of these two—and the end result is always the market. Some make claims and others are expelled. The rule of law—the table—becomes a domestic luxury that we only ever enjoy at home with friends, if we can afford to. Let’s call this rule of law “human decency.”

Matthew Stadler

Scotty and his friends could never afford it. They couldn’t afford anything. They’d been expelled from the market by their poverty, which was also their criminality. The fact they were living, breathing creatures at all was a kind of crime. Carrying a full bladder, they were crimes waiting to happen. Waking up hungry or thirsty or needing to shit, they woke up into a crime spree. Getting sleepy at the ends of long days, they fell asleep into criminal violations—vagrancy, trespass—for which they would be woken and arrested. In a very real sense, their bodies had been criminalized. They carried criminality around with them wherever they went, regardless of what they were doing. Scotty made that clear by hauling himself up my stairs and acting as if he had an inherent right to his humanity.

This is not a story about how amazing Scotty was, the holy fool who woke me up to injustice. Scotty was not actually someone to admire. He could be a complete prick, not only to me and people like me, who might have deserved it, but to Eve and those who genuinely loved him. But he had the right to be a prick, if that's how he chose to live. Every one of us does. And Scotty had his role, the part he played in a social process that I've come to believe most of civil society is stuck in.

In the social process I'm essaying here, Scotty's attempt to claim a seat at my table forced me to become clearer about tables and networks. All of us deserve a table, but I didn't want Scotty at mine. I wanted the street to have many tables. I wanted domestic space—all the rights and pleasures we enjoy as human beings at home—to flourish also in the street, to reach into the park. But I forgot that other people were already staking domestic claims there. Since the people making those claims—Scotty, Mark, Sue—were homeless, I could always ask the police to arrest them for spoling the pleasure of my table. But I don't like the police. Instead of calling the cops I decided to build a second table, accessible to the street, but located on my property—so that the rights of those using it would be protected, just like mine were, by the fact that I owned property. I invited Eve, Scotty, Mark, Sue...anyone and everyone...to use this table. Then they could leave me alone. They

would have their table, so I could have mine.

I decided to make a network—two tables. The logistics were simple. Dennis, my housemate who also had construction skills, marked off about 100 sq. ft. of our backyard, lopping off a big rectangle adjacent to the park. He built a high fence behind it so that we would not have to pay attention to whatever went on in there. Then he found an old picnic table that we installed on this plot. It was open to the street, faced the park, and had enough room for a small garden. My son helped me write a sign that said, more or less: “This table is for anyone who wants to use it. Please treat others who use it as you wish t be treated, and don’t do anything to stop them from enjoying it as much as you do.” We posted this on the fence next to the table and added a few shelves beside it. I put some books and card decks on the shelves.

Secessioning this rectangle was pretty labor-intensive, and Dennis needed some help to dig out the rough lawn, smooth the dirt, and install the tall fence we required. He hired Mark and Sue. And so, when the table was launched, most people called it “Mark and Sue’s table.” And Mark and Sue enjoyed reinforcing this perception, even while they welcomed Scotty, who took command of the table as if he alone had hewn it from the wilderness. Other homeless dudes in

the neighborhood started to show up. The table was a magnet. For one thing, you could drink all you wanted there and the cops couldn't bust you. Maybe that was the only thing. Anyhow, it was something. It was a table—and every one who sat there treated each other with respect.

I was relieved. I continued with my dinner parties, while Scotty entertained at the picnic table. It was summer, and life at both tables was vigorous and animated. The fence was high enough that we were able to carry on without much pressure to conform to external norms. The cops became involved occasionally, obeying the dictates of noise and nuisance complaints. They'd show up for what, in the past, had been a routine shake-down of homeless drunks, then resign themselves to the indignity of treating Scotty, et. al., as regular property owners. Officer Garrison lectured me about the folly I had built. "These guys aren't stable," he confided, redundantly. "Something awful will happen; that's inevitable. If it's on your property, you'll pay the price."

I must admit to feeling, well, glee the first time that Officer Garrison explained the logic to me. Simply by putting the picnic table on my private property I forwarded the rights I enjoyed as a property-owner to any guests who spent their time there. They would

have to break other laws, the same laws that applied to me and my home-owning neighbors, for the police to have cause to arrest them. And when they did (say, assault someone or rape someone or use illegal drugs) I, as the property owner, would have to take responsibility for hosting the crime. This was the “inevitable” trouble Officer Garrison kept warning me of.

Maybe foolishly, I didn’t share his pessimism. I knew these people. (Well, I knew Scotty, Eve, Mark and Sue.) And they were much better behaved than most of the invited guests on my porch. They cared about the neighborhood, and did more to show that than any of my house-owning neighbors. Plus, they regarded the table as a gift, a privilege. I couldn’t imagine any of them putting that privilege at risk by breaking laws there.

Interlude

A table—unlike a store or a television or a political convention or the street as it is configured in most cities—puts us face to face with difference. We can’t hide from it. The table puts us in close proximity with equal claims, so that we cannot pretend we don’t care what’s happening to our neighbors. The table guarantees that whatever we allow will soon enough come

around to afflict (or benefit) us, too. A table is the space of egalitarian, human being together—of human decency. Notably, almost all of us know the table as a domestic space. It is the family table, the dinner table. It's where we break bread with family and friends—or with strangers who are invited. Settling into his chair at the end of my table, Scotty announced that I had to treat him like family, or an invited guest. It was a big claim, and I blanched at it. Flopping out of his wheel chair at the bottom of my stairs he was one thing, probably a trespasser, and I could have called the cops on him. Arriving at the top, as a guest in my home, accepting a cigarette from my friend, he was another. The table is inclusive. There was no protocol of expulsion.

Increasingly we are all, all of us, always at the bottom of the stairs. The legs we use to climb them are money or our instrumental power as choosers. We have no inherent right to anything—a job, a home, our presence in the street, friendship, our liberty. All of that is won by campaigns, usually marketing campaigns. This tendency reaches its apotheosis in tools like Facebook and Kickstarter where we accept the reconfiguration of even the most basic parts of our personal lives as a market process with winners and losers.

I keep casting the alternative—human decency—as

“the rule of the table,” to remind myself that the alternative is never strange nor rare nor “utopian” at all. Treating people humanely is something we do every day—it is how we behave at the table with our family. How is such mundane behavior in any way unrealistic or “utopian?” Only in the market does this behavior suddenly become an aberration. The provocation I’m trying to make, first for myself and then for others, is to ask why not act this way toward everyone? Or, when we cannot treat them decently, why not leave them alone? Send them to their table, return to ours, and rely on the network. Maybe the market is the problem. The market, with its insatiable hunger for choosing, for selecting and making useful, can’t leave anything alone, least of all the “wasted” time and potential of the homeless.

Matthew Stadler

The urgency of Sam’s question, for me, starts here. How can we bring the human decency we know and enjoy with family and friends from the table into the street? For me it began by trying to provide a table to those who lacked one.

The picnic table existed in a potent liminal space. Open to the street, bordering the park, yet part of my back yard, it conveyed private rights into an effectively public space. Drinking was one right, but so was sleeping, loitering, joking, being weird—all of the useless,

indefensible things we enjoy in the privacy of our homes. Eve put a box there and filled it each day with dumpster-dive finds: good produce, canned foods, bread, and other necessities that friends can give to friends, but which the market only circulates within strictly defined regulations. Scotty and Sue planted flowers. Nearly all of the men pissed against the fence. I considered putting a portable toilet out there, but I didn't want to give junkies some hidden spot to shoot up in. (Officer Garrison complained that if I was going to give them a chance to fill their bladders drinking I was obliged to also provide the means for relieving their bladders. It was a clever argument. But I phoned the city and said they needed to put toilets in the park. In the end, no one ever provided toilets.)

Men pissed on my fence and into my yard. They shit in hedges where it stank until someone covered it with dirt and lime. (A liminal space, indeed.) Whatever success we'd had opening the table to the street, I was foolish to think any fence could be high enough to close the boundary with my house. The table became an open channel through which all the pathologies of the park began to circulate, powerfully, into my home. The yelling kept Dennis awake at night. Some nights he'd lie in bed, listening to an unseen person weep in the darkness. The police were angry with me. They couldn't throw me in jail, but now I had battles.

The men at the table carried a reservoir of violence and injury with them, and it colored every encounter they had. Even pleasantries, those small nothings I routinely recited to my home-owning neighbors in lieu of intimacy, became freighted with ambivalence and threat when I exchanged them with the men at the picnic table. I understood a little more clearly why the police fell into such a structured, unfeeling routine when they dealt with the homeless. I could not exempt myself from the pathology that shaped their days—every violent, frightening, uncertain day in the lives of the people who claimed the table.

Matthew Stadler

I wanted to imagine multi-culturalism as this pleasant potluck or some kind of big crafts party, like my progressive education had taught me it would be. But it wasn't that at all. I'm not saying that homeless people are violent, but they live in violence. The homeless are precisely the same demographic as those of us who own homes; that is, we start out the same. But to be homeless is to live in the ceaseless metabolism of an element, capital as universal hormone, from which our homes sometimes give us protection. To be homeless is to live in violence, and naturally one's behaviors adjust. Just as those parts of the body exposed to direct flame will blister and, ultimately turn to ash, so the homeless, because they are exposed mercislessly to the police, will make visible the inher-

ent violence and lawlessness of the market—the police being the market’s purest expression, a sorting engine of unparalleled brutality and indifference.

There was a lot of yelling. Scotty disappeared for long stretches. Sue broke her leg and she and Mark were gone for most of a month. Some of the local homeless (all the ones I knew or recognized) sought me out away from the table, to ask for some work, to just say hello, to establish their prior connection to me, our family association, regardless of the table. I recognized fewer and fewer of the men sitting there. Increasingly, it was only men, and all of them violent. Vladimir, a docile sweet camper from two blocks away, stood by my porch in tears and said he was too scared to sit at the table now. I had no idea what to do to help him.

In process work, Dennis tells me, there are not only the roles, primary and secondary, which are present and coming into presence; there are also “ghost roles,” the roles which are integral to the process but which no one will own up to. In most social processes, especially frightening or violent ones, there are ghost roles, like my role at the picnic table, or that of the police. Process work aims to bring these ghosts into presence, articulate and embodied, so that they can be dealt with. But key elements of this social process stubbornly stayed as ghosts. The future of our picnic table looked bleak.

One morning Dennis and I tore the table down. We uprooted the fence and moved it to the property line. I told anyone who asked me that the insurance company had refused to insure my house if I didn't "secure the property." It was plausible. I suspect that if the insurance company knew about the table they very well might have done that. But in fact it was an excuse. I could not live with the violence of these men so near to my home, the home that I was making with my son. I found it unbearable, and I didn't have the skills or willingness to change it. I aim to have clear-eyed empathy as much as possible; and, to be clear, my empathy could not overcome my fear.

Matthew Stadler

More patient, more confident—more skilled—people provide these kinds of services for the dispossessed every day, and they manage to make it last: soup kitchens, food banks, shelters staffed by people with the skills and strength of character that I lacked; process work even has an "applied" branch, called "world work," that brings its teachings directly into communities in conflict. How they succeed, and whether people like me can also succeed at extending the human decency of the home into public space—displacing the market's instrumentalizing imperative with something like respect and dignity—remains as the most pressing political question I know. Of course it is crucial that activists working within the market structure of

public politics still fight and contend to secure legal rights for those who lack them. But, ultimately it is the common, everyday human decency of the table that must redefine public space.

I could at least keep the integrity of my table, and look again at the bridges I built connecting it to others. I needed a safe home for my kid, and for myself. And so I turned my focus back inside the house and wondered how to find safe passage to brethren tables. I began to feel, eerily, like a new Dark Ages had come (for me, anyway), as I turned my back on my nearest neighbors. So what could I do that I was capable of doing well?

The Network

In the first Dark Ages, monks retreated to isolated places to continue the work which they couldn't pursue in secular life. In the elegant metaphor, they kept the light of learning burning in a sheltered place, during long centuries of great storms and ferocious winds. And by travelling, by carrying learning in the sturdy lantern of printed books, slowly they knit together the fabric that would bring light again to the world. And so we entered the Enlightenment. I knew that friends and strangers in every part of the

world were doing something like this now. A friend in California, a curator who had access to the most progressive institutions and power, now only spoke to me about the people he invited to “Gay Ass Gulch” (a bucolic stretch of hills near Ukiah that he owned) and the incredible structures they built there, the music they played, the gatherings, the land-art and food and friendships which, I could hear in his excited reports, now constituted the heart of his political interests.

Another friend had bought a disused church into which he piled all of the sound and recording equipment that had come his way over a career in music. Friends arriving from far away could stay in this church and play music, to record, to have festivals, to sleep, also to print and produce new books, to share meals, and buy and sell and circulate all of this new work back again into the world.

I remembered a book I made with another friend, Lisa Robertson. She kept a library and a big kitchen table in the old farm house where she lived cheaply, in the-middle-of-nowhere, France. Packing my suitcase full of books and spending a week with her at her big table (and many weeks thereafter writing together online), Lisa and I were able to make *Revolution: A Reader*, the product of a rich friendship and her savvy maintenance of a domestic space of produc-

tion. I thought of Sam Gould, who is raising a family with Laura Baldwin in Minneapolis, and occupies his home as a similar liminal space of public art/political projects. Everywhere I looked, I saw this shift into domestic space—expressly because “the home” so robustly hosts basic human decency, the rule of law—the table—and uniquely resists the corrosive effects of the market.

In the first Dark Ages, the printing press and the book, more than any other technologies, cast light into the darkness. But today we have other networks. After shutting down the picnic table, I invited three friends to stay at my house for a weekend and write code. We would make a simple blogging software that any house or back-yard or table could use—a set of templates that would make public and visible the many domestic spaces that our colleagues near and far had begun using. In the same way monks had used monasteries and books and travel long ago, we would connect digitally. We called this network “snegren.org.”

“Snegren” is the name of an island off the coast of Holland, invented by the late American writer, Guy Davenport. It cannot be found on maps, only in Davenport’s stories. He calls it “a hump of old red sandstone in the cold North Sea.” Snegren is sometimes home to the Dutch philosopher, Adrian Van Hoovendaal

(another Davenport invention). It is also the Dutch word for nowhere, *nergens*, written backwards. Like Samuel Butler's *erehwon*, *snegren* was a utopia. But, it was a very plain, mundane, and domestic utopia.

Davenport used *snegren* to propose a far-reaching domesticity as the site of our greatest political aspirations. In Davenport's story, "The Death of Picasso," Van Hoovendaal lives for a summer on *Snegren* with a troubled boy named Sander, whose parents have entrusted him to Adrian's care. Together the two build tables and chairs, practice Bach and Corelli on song flutes, wander the island collecting plants and flotsam, and they build a house. "Plain as a shoe box," Van Hoovendaal writes, the house "is little more than a roof, chimney, and windows." The house on *Snegren* was typical Davenport — a modest, quotidian utopia that channeled culture and society back through a domestic space freed from the tyranny of the market (and, notably, freed of the family). *Snegren* assembles at the blurred, overlapping peripheries of institutions. It is the place where the humanity of private life is given articulation and legibility as a public space.

The software we were making would let colleagues—known and as-yet-unknown to us—become legible to one another (and the world) by gathering them in a single web presence. The home page was a world map,

with each point-of-light clickable. The clicks opened up to a generous web presence for each member. Importantly, the very simple tool we were designing was also a tool of exchange. It was equipped not only to convey pictures and video and sound files and text, offering a window onto the life inside. It also received texts, comments, replies, and money. We equipped snegren to shape a new economy, one that opened up to the space of the market—with the faith that this opening would enable snegren to displace the market, rather than being displaced by it.

We must remain optimistic, if only because it's impossible to live in any other way. No fences are high enough to filter out the pathologies we are part of. We cannot create any "place apart." And so our network must rely on openness and boldness. We have to reclaim what is ours, that is our common humanity. If human decency has become the jealously hoarded privilege of the property-owning family, then we have to storm that citadel and pry decency loose to make it everyone's. We can't simply replicate the nuclear family and claim their privilege via the exclusionary model of coupling and child-rearing. The family and all its jealously held virtues need to be torn apart and pillaged, its riches put back to use on behalf of the larger human family, on behalf of friendship and of enemies, of a base-line of respect that is not bound by blood or kinship. The

imperative is to assert the virtues of domesticity in service of an attack against the market.

Is there reason for hope? I may never know. I lost my house. My family broke apart. The software was never completed. And I now live alone, far away from my son, and write, a truly dark time for me indeed. I try to keep a good table and welcome whomever I can. And I look to my near neighbors with more experienced eyes. I'm in Rotterdam, the Netherlands, now, and the true character of multi-culturalism is starkly evident here. Conflict is visible and robust. Here, the contending parties have not yet had their integrity pulled apart by the same degree of lawlessness and brutality that prevails in America. There's anger here, plenty of it, and conflict; but the contending parties are articulate and all still standing on two feet. There is decency.

Sam's questions offer me a potent link back into a discourse I care about deeply, and within which I hope experiments like the two I have described here—the table and the network—will thrive and grow to reach me. I can only promise to do everything I can, given who I am and what capacities I have, to help.

DINNER FOR 80

(Matthew Stadler and Lisa Robertson)

In Plato's Symposium guests gather at a feast in order to discuss the nature of love. This will be our model for a sustained, twelve-installment experiment for 80. We will explore the cultural ritual of the shared meal as a model for social exchange, sustainable conviviality, the agency of the commodious rather than the reiterated critique of the commodity—collective pleasure in short. What can the table receive? What gets mixed together? What sustains us? What can love mean now, and what can food mean?

This class asks the pragmatic question of how to have a proper dinner for eighty people. Befitting the art school that is hosting it, the class looks to paintings, film, literature, and other arts for instruction. A series of practical problems will be addressed by the group as a whole (with the help of guest experts), and the inquiry concludes with an attempt to carry out the dinner properly.

Class convenes two times a week for three-hour meetings over six weeks. The class meetings will support conversation as well as lectures and visual presentations. Students will also be expected to complete reading, viewing, and critical reflection during the hours outside of class. One evening per

week, optional off-site gatherings with food and drink will be offered for informal conversation and practical instruction in the arts. Credit will be given for attendance at the final dinner, proper conduct there, and for clean-up.

We will invite some special guests to our table (one each week, and then the lot of them to our final dinner): Jimella Lucas (Ocean View, WA, founder of The Ark); Stacy Doris (author, *The Cake Part*); Michael Hebb (founder of *Ripe and One Pot*); Cedric, Nathan, and Jim Bomford, Donato Mancini; and, Gerry Shikatani.

Week One: Making the Invitation
(guest: Michael Hebb)

Spirited Away; Hayo Miyazaki
The Symposium; Plato
Lucy Orta and Jorge Orta
Nicholas Bourriaud; Relational Aesthetics

Week Two: Building a Table; Choosing a Site
(guests: Cedric, Nathan and Jim Bomford)

An Anecdoted Topology of Chance; Daniel Spoerri
Gins and Arakawa; Architectural Body

Bernard Cache; Earth Moves
Vitruvius; On Architecture

Week Three: Shopping; The Menu
(guest: Jimella Lucas)

The Pantropheon by Alexis Soyer
Apples and Pears; Guy Davenport
Pica; Donato Mancini
The Gleaners and I, Agnes Varda
“The Huckleberry”, Thoreau

Week Four: Cooking; Table Service
(guest: Gerry Shikatani)

Rirkrit Tirvanija
Andrea Zittel

Week Five: Table Manners; Table Talk
(guest: Stacy Doris)

Stacy Doris, The Cake Part
Mary Duncan, Purity and Danger
Peter Greenaway, The Cook, the Thief, etc
Huizinga; Homo Ludens

Week Six: The Dinner; Clean-up and Thank You
(guest: Donato Mancini)

Gertrude Stein: The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas;
A Novel of Thank You

Roger Shattuck: The Banquet Years

Dwelling Portably ('zine by Bert and Holly Davis)

Formalism and Kindness

Fate is kind.

— Agnes Martin

Can there be kindness without end? “I am endlessly kind,” says Victor Baton, the narrator of Emmanuel Bove’s wistful 1923 novel, *My Friends*. “But the people I have known have never appreciated this fact.” Victor is an appealing enough fellow, a World War I veteran living on a meager pension in Left Bank Paris, but his friendships never go as he hopes. His kindnesses are typically repaid, in kind, and then his friends withdraw and Victor is alone again. It is as though by paying him a kindness they settle their debts and everyone is returned to a zero balance. What his friends do not appreciate is the very endlessness of Victor’s kindness. It looms before them like some kind of permanent obligation, a debt that can never be settled.

Like paper money, kindness endlessly produced leads to economic collapse, a complete devaluation of the currency.

To treat someone “kindly” begins with “kin” and “kind,” meaning family-born or child, and so the extension of these affections beyond blood relation

still carries the implication of a broad, universalizing relatedness. Kindness can be “paid” or “owed” to anyone. The economy of kindness is humanism — recognizing all people as of a kind.

In The Cooley Gallery at Reed College, Lucien Samaha sat at a desk with 91 of his photographs pinned to the walls. Visitors were encouraged to pick a photo they liked and bring it to him at the desk, where Samaha would print out a new copy to be pinned on the wall in place of the old photo. Visitors could then take the original, as a gift, together with a letter from Samaha asking them to send back a picture of their own showing Samaha’s photo in some place outside the gallery. When he got that, Samaha would send a reply telling the “back story” of the original photo.

These exchanges were codified in a written document and performed faithfully by Samaha hundreds of times during his month-long residency. Every new visitor to the gallery found the same virginal setting, the same photos on the wall, the same host and procedures — the same show —and so Samaha became the sole repository of the whole history of exchanges. Like a good madam, he did not spoil the mood by sharing loose gossip about previous clients, nor leave traces of the prior exchanges, nor was his repeated conviviality ever false or impersonal. He entered into

each exchange whole-heartedly. Within this form, the exchange of kindness appeared inexhaustible.

Kindness, commonly understood, is personal. It is predicated on inclusion in the class of “persons,” those to whom we can feel “kindly.” To extend kindness to non-persons — say, to animals or the environment or to future generations — we personify them, imagining them as essentially like ourselves, within that class of things that are “in kind” with all human being. The terms of such an exchange oblige us to assess their eligibility for inclusion in a class, the class of persons; kindness is predicated on this assessment.

By contrast, “whatever being,” as described by the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben, is a loving relationship without regard to “kind” or kinship. Agamben theorizes “whatever being” as a set of affinities that are not based in identification, not based on predicates. Agamben: “In this conception, such-and-such being is reclaimed from its having this or that property, which identified it as belonging to this or that set (the reds, the French, the Muslims) — and it is reclaimed not for another class nor for the simple generic absence of any belongings, but for its being-such, for belonging itself.” In “whatever being” (as with unconditional love) the particulars of the beloved seem to rupture and bleed into the sheer intensity of loving,

as though the charged site of our affections had given way to the pleasure of loving itself. The “whatever” in question, Agamben says, “relates to singularity not in its indifference with respect to a common property (to a concept, for example: being red, being French, being Muslim) but only in its being, such as it is.”

As Victor Baton observes in *My Friends*, “There were no birds and no new bulbs; nevertheless it was spring.” This is spring, such as it is. Neither loved more nor less for its birds and bulbs, simply loved the way each new spring is loved. “Love,” says Agamben, “is never directed toward this or that property of the loved one (being blond, being small, being tender, being lame), but neither does it neglect those properties in favor of an insipid generality (universal love).” The beloved is a singularity, the occasion for our loving, while also being of no consequence. “Singularity,” Agamben concludes, “is thus freed from the false dilemma that obliges knowledge to choose between the ineffability of the individual and the intelligibility of the universal.”

“Whatever being” offers a space of endless loving. One need not calculate predicates nor balance what has been paid or owed. But this is love, not kindness. And love has its problems, as Victor realizes when faced with the insularity of lovers in the spring: “Lovers are

rude and selfish,” he reminds us. That is to say, they are two. Where lovers channel the endlessness of their affection into the hall of mirrors that is their union, kindness falls like sunshine upon the multitude. Samaha managed the promiscuousness of kindness by formally separating his exchanges into a discrete series — he made a theater to enact the intense binary of lovers serially, without end. But is that enough? Or, could kindness attain the endlessness of love, of “whatever being,” without mimicking the selfishness of lovers?

Victor Baton: “Although I had some matches, I preferred to ask a passer-by for a light...The impression that I was playing a part in the crowd put me in a good humor.”

In the other half of The Cooley Gallery at Reed College, behind an intervening wall, Hadley Howes and Maxwell Stephens installed a video and sculpture piece that included mirrors, two body-sized stereo speakers, and a song called “Gloomy Sunday” (also known as “the Hungarian suicide song”). This darkened room was lit principally by a great wall-sized video of the Reed College lawn and a sidewalk on which Hadley and Maxwell took turns standing and lying down in poses borrowed from the iconic image from Kent State University in 1970, where four students were shot and

killed by National Guardsmen. The projector beam was interrupted by two small mirrors of translucent plexi, cut precisely to match the shapes of the lying and standing bodies, so that the projected landscape was punctured by two body-shaped voids.

The mirrors, quite small and placed near to the projector, sparkled with the images they had stolen from the beam, the two bodies, which they bounced back into the twilight corner of the room and cast on the tall speakers, one standing and one lying down. And so, on one wall a sunny college campus occupied by two shadows — two mirror-emptied voids (into and out of which Hadley and Maxwell would step, switching places) — while in the darkness: mirrors, the machinery of projection, displaced bodies, and a very sad song.

As in Samaha's half of the gallery, exchange was at issue in Hadley and Maxwell's piece — exchange of light; exchange of places; exchange of figure and ground; exchange of histories — but the *modus operandi* here was withdraw, much more so than giving. In a central gesture, Hadley and Maxwell had even withdrawn the key figure of the Kent State image — the third student who, crouching between the standing observer and the fallen, slain student, wails in grief, carrying the burden of our feelings, our horrified objection to

this violence. In the Cooley Gallery recreation she is missing (leaving room for someone, anyone, to take her place).

Amidst this banquet of withdraw, the song, “Gloomy Sunday,” was really the only thing that Hadley and Maxwell had to give, and it was unbearably sad. So sad that Lucien Samaha, who would be sitting every day for a month in the adjacent space, asked that the wall be sealed and a door be put in, so that he would not be driven mad. Through withdraw this space of endless kindness was opened to anyone, without predicates — but it was neither easy nor uplifting to enter in.

Can there be kindness in withdraw?

Agamben suggests that “whatever being” is enabled by its capacity “to not-be; it is capable of its own impotence.” He gives the example of Glenn Gould who “plays, so to speak, with his potential to not-play.” So too, Bartleby, Agamben reminds us, enacts his capacity to not-be with the well-known interdiction that he “would prefer not to.” To perform one’s own withdraw creates a space of being that is not-being. In such a space love without predicates, or “whatever being,” is possible.

Gould provides the most visceral and useful example,

for it is possible to hear in his performance (even through the intervening medium of recordings and across the vast passage of time) the quality of his attention to what he is doing and not doing, the brief, crowded caesuras within which Gould is listening to the music that he is a part of. Even as he actively creates music, Gould carves out a space of absence, an active performance of withdraw, which is the space of listening. Listening is the paradigmatic performance of not-being.

Listening was deeply at issue at The Cooley Gallery at Reed College, not least in the demanding quietude of “Gloomy Sunday.” In a formal echo of their strategies with the Kent State image, Hadley and Maxwell forsook the numerous “original” recordings of the song and instead swapped themselves in, Maxwell playing guitar and Hadley singing. The volume was set very low, which only added to the song’s unbearable sadness, as this meditation on suicide and hopelessness played so near the threshold of hearing that it seemed that it might itself die if the listeners ceased trying hard enough to hear it. Like most quiet things, it beckoned our best listening.

In the next room, Samaha’s ability as a listener was continually in evidence. He cheerfully received each conversation with equanimity and interest. He

showed that rare skill, a kind of listening that resembles passivity but is in fact an active interest without purpose, a kind of ambient curiosity. It was perhaps exactly this attentiveness that made “Gloomy Sunday” such an unbearable intrusion. Samaha had made a meticulously tended space of listening that could not bear the weight of “Gloomy Sunday,” whispering its doomed maunderings. To listen well was the engine of his kindness.

The painter Agnes Martin took listening — this simultaneous performance of being and “not-being” — one important step further: She linked it to formalism, through a working method that she called “perception.” The linkage is complex, but worth following. “Perceiving,” Martin writes, “is the same as receiving and it is the same as responding. Perception means all of them.” To perceive requires “going on in an impersonal way without personal considerations” so that “perception makes room for the work,” the work of art. She advised young artists to “say to yourselves: I am going to work in order to see myself and free myself.” Paradoxically, through perception, the recognition of the self in the work is not a moment of identification but of disappearance into something greater. “Work is a function in which we seem to be identified. But in reality work is a part of the process of life in which we cannot perceive the beginning or end of

our function... We cannot therefore identify ourselves with our work ... In the sum total of the outward being of all living things our work is insignificant, infinitesimal and insignificant. This must be realized” Martin calls such a realization, perversely, “the holiday state of mind,” which she esteems as “the most efficacious for artists. ‘Free and easy wandering,’ it is called by the Chinese sage Chuang Tzu. It is really awareness of perfection within the mind.”

Martin regards “perfection” as an ideal or truth that is nascent in the particular experience of persons. “Moments of perfection,” she writes, “are indescribable, but a few things can be said about them. At such times we are suddenly very happy and we wonder why life ever seemed so troublesome. In an instant we can see the road ahead free from all difficulties and we think that we will never lose it again. All this and a great deal more in barely a moment, and then it is gone... All such moments are stored in the mind.”

The function of art work is “the renewal of memories of moments of perfection,” and this requires both hopelessness and discipline. “Perfection,” she writes, “cannot be represented ... The work is so far from perfection because we ourselves are so far from perfection.” But this impossibility drives us to give up hope, and in giving up we come into being in the work.

“Going on without resistance or notions is called discipline. Going on where hope and desire have been left behind is discipline...not caring or striving is discipline...There is no way out,” Martin concludes, with evident pleasure. “You may as well go ahead with as little resistance as possible — and eat everything on your plate.”

Surrendering to the discipline of perception brings perfection back to us, in art. “With more accurate obedience,” Martin writes, “we become rapidly more aware of the sublime: of beauty and happiness in life. We become more devoted to life... The artist tries to live in a way that will make greater awareness of the sublimity of reality possible.” But obedience — also described by Martin as “a path,” “a road,” or “fate” — is not submission to authority; rather, it is living within fate, within form. It is formalism.

“It is generally believed,” Martin writes, “that those in authority are on top and those in obedience below... [but] authority and obedience exist at the same time in each of us... We are all in a state of obedient authority at all times, it is a sublime state and it is in fact a state of positive freedom... Any response to art is obedience.” Paradoxically, coming into fate through obedience is not a matter of striving but of ease. Formalism aligns our habits with fate so that being, such as it is, can

blossom in a space freed of predicates. Through form, one relaxes into ease, into perception, into what Martin calls “being with joy.”

Victor Baton is not so lucky. Having exhausted a handful of friendships in his quartier, he encounters a stranger, a wealthy man named M. Lacaze, who treats him kindly and offers him a job. Victor feels compelled to accept — he obeys the authority of M. Lacaze, as a kind of payment of his debt. But Victor finds no compulsion within himself. Acceptance is a struggle. He lacks authority within himself, and so he becomes subservient to the authority of another, and this subservience motivates his kindness.

In *My Friends*, this crucial rupture in Victor is a matter of class. The parasitic operations of wage-labor have fractured the integrity of what Agnes Martin calls “obedient authority” in Victor and redistributed authority externally across a matrix of class that leaves him (indeed all of the working class poor) alienated from himself, from his own fate, his forms, and his ability to find the memory of perfection within. This capacity has been shattered by a lifetime of want and habit; and until, or unless, Victor reaches a kind of praxis he is doomed to expend his endless kindness in obedience to authority that is not his own. In Martin’s terms, Victor has been diverted from his fate by the

inability to find a discipline, a form, inside himself. He knows only struggle, never ease.

Agamben remarks that ease “is the proper name for...the coming to itself of each singularity, its being whatever — in other words, such as it is.” Remarkably like Martin, Agamben sees that our alignment with this fuller space of being follows from a habit of attentiveness freed from predicates (freed from this or that desired quality that obscures being, such as it is). Ease, he continues “is not so much the place of love, but rather love as the experience of taking-place in a whatever singularity.” Ease (or in Martin’s terms, perception) is a function or a process, not a thing or static state.

Begging the question of necessary intervening changes in the political fate of those robbed of this kind of ease — and these are crucial questions — Hadley and Maxwell’s process offers the prospect of a similar, deliberate ease (though its is never clear who can enjoy it). This ease begins in their relaxation into form, a predisposition to accept whatever form suggests without insisting on their predicated meanings. Predicated meanings are stripped away, as the subject that triggered the work gives way to formal abstraction. And so, for example, two figures — the slain and the standing students of Kent State — become, through

a series of substitutions (Hadley and Maxwell enacting the photo, the mirror's removal of their image, the transfer of the image to the two columns) two forms — the horizontal and vertical columns, speakers producing sound — and, ultimately, two ideas. Viewers entering “Gloomy Sunday,” with its surfeit of withdraw, are needed to complete its circuitry. We do not stand outside the piece as consumers or critics; rather, our presence is an essential instrument in the machinery of its thinking. Is this ease? For the artists, yes. Their formalism (like the formalized relationships codified within Lucian Samaha's project) aligns the work with potentials and meanings they could not possibly force or conjure alone.

Martin calls such a process (such a formalism) fate; and, she affirms, “Fate is kind.” Fate, as Martin understands it, is much like the Buddha's “divine abode” of “sympathetic joy.” (Martin was herself a devotee of Chan Buddhism, the Chinese equivalent of Zen.) It is active, a way of being, not a static emotional state, a discipline that withdraws the self to make room for other potentials within being. “Sympathetic joy” is also called “loving kindness,” or “kindness among friends.”

Formalism, as Martin understood it, permits kindness without end. It is difficult to grant a more active verb

to the role formalism plays without undoing the very liberation it allows. Were formalism to take a causal role — say, “granting” us kindness, or “enabling” kindness — the space of not-being might collapse under the weight of the verb’s determinism. Formalism merely and instrumentally permits the endlessness of this process. To attend rigorously to form, to be obedient, is to create that space of ease, that space of not-being, where kindness can flourish.

Victor Baton: “I only asked to be allowed to love, to be like everybody else. It was not much to ask.” We who are endlessly kind must find our forms. Here is the Karaniya Metta Sutta, the sutra of loving-kindness, believed to be words of the Buddha:

This is what should be done
 By one who is skilled in goodness,
 And who knows the path of peace:
 ...Wishing: In gladness and in safety,
 May all beings be at ease.
 Whatever living beings there may be;
 Whether they are weak or strong, omitting none,
 The great or the mighty, medium, short or small,
 The seen and the unseen,
 Those living near and far away,
 Those born and to-be-born —
 May all beings be at ease!

Let none deceive another,
Or despise any being in any state.
Let none through anger or ill-will
Wish harm upon another.
Even as a mother protects with her life
Her child, her only child,
So with a boundless heart
Should one cherish all living beings;
Radiating kindness over the entire world.
Spreading upwards to the skies,
And downwards to the depths;
Outwards and unbounded,
Freed from hatred and ill-will.
Whether standing or walking, seated or lying down
Free from drowsiness,
One should sustain this recollection.
This is said to be the sublime abiding.
By not holding to fixed views,
The pure-hearted one, having clarity of vision,
Being freed from all sense desires,
Is not born again into this world.

Butt Hole

On the dinner table, a white ceramic elephant with a tiny butt hole, a Jeffrey Mitchell. It's a warm July evening; my hosts are casual, the dinner impromptu. Next to this fist-sized elephant: a stack of plates, glasses, flatware, a scattering of books; hard to say if it's art or some practical thing, an implement for dinner. The elephant's smooth, round rear regards me, a tiny hole placed exactly where it should be. I smile at it, as I would at a stranger's blank face.

Since when do I smile at butt holes? Probably it's art. Faced with François Boucher's *L'Odalisque*, my eyes always alight on the butt. There is the woman's face, of course, but eclipsed by a second face — a silent, nonjudgmental face that has no stake in pleasing me: Her butt lies in its folds like a bed. At dinner the elephant's butt is also silent, lacking in opinions. Surely it is art. A tureen or cream pitcher would not have a hole there. The elephant fits my hand and wants to be held. The butt hole wants a thumb, and I slide mine over it.

Jeffrey Mitchell casts, glazes, draws, paints, fires, saws, builds, cuts, tapes, glues, and assembles, so it is odd to introduce his work through the figure of the butt hole. Very little in his work is strictly figurative. His elephants quote de Brunhoff's Babar as much or

more than they refer to real elephants; owls are twin swoops pivoting on twin circles; even the letters of the alphabet are bulky cut-out shapes that reference home-craft or childhood as much as they spell out, for example, “hello HELLO.” There is plaster, piling up in abundance; wooden structures clad in paper; ceramics, useful and otherwise; drawing, often done quickly and over the surface of something equally rich. Much of Jeffrey’s art says “hello HELLO.” The butt hole welcomes me without speaking, an invitation: the door has been left open.

Matthew Stadler

These butt holes offer a clue, a moment of engagement, offered to me without being directed at me, that is unique to Jeffrey Mitchell’s art. They are gestural, calligraphic, not realistic so much as simply the residue of a passing action — a modest swoop of the pencil, tracing a neat circle; the insertion of a point, just so far, a tiny piercing; the turning of a finger or hand in clay. The butt holes tend toward a kind of clean formalism, like the “O” in “ommm.” They are intimate with the hand.

Like the “O” in “ommm” they are also serene, calming, and empty. When I smile back the stakes are low. Contrarily, a person’s face makes me nervous, and my eyes dart away. A face in art pressures me doubly, presenting two problems: the puzzle of the face and its opinion; and the second puzzle of art and its meanings.

At dinner, with my friends and this ceramic elephant, I'm at ease.

My smile is difficult to read. Giorgio Agamben calls the face “at once the irreparable being-exposed of humans and the very opening in which they hide and stay hidden.” I look across the dinner table, laughing. Hidden in plain sight. Bathed in the gaze of others, my face nevertheless betrays nothing specific about me. As Agamben puts it, “What the face exposes and reveals is not something that could be formulated...nor is it a secret doomed to remain forever incommunicable. The face's revelation is revelation of language itself.” The face reveals that we are being (what Agamben calls “opening”) even while it conceals how or what we are being. This unresolvable tension is the face's unceasing burden — “It is only opening, only communicability. To walk in the light of the face is to be this opening — and to suffer it, and to endure it.” Agamben adds that “art can give a face to an inanimate object, to a still nature, and that is why the witches, when accused by the inquisitors of kissing Satan's anus during the Sabbath, argued that even there there was a face.”

The butt is a second face, animate, but one that holds still while the primary face is mobile. The butt has nothing to say. Its passivity has been widely noted, and propositions to the contrary (such as William

Burroughs's chatty talking asshole in *Naked Lunch*) can be deeply unsettling. The hole is also an opening, certainly; but not in the sense Agamben means. "Opening," in Agamben's understanding, is the revelation of one being within the space of others, a revelation, always, of language. The face — the site of language — "is only opening." The butt hole's reticence masks its revelations. "The face," Agamben claims, "is the only location of community, the only possible city." So, I wonder, what kind of community could butt holes make?

Matthew Stadler

The dining room is full of art, much of it Jeffrey's. The day's last sun slips from the trees. By the window, paper cut-out letters saying "ABCDEFGHILOV-EYOU"; a lamp made of wood and rice paper, shaped like an elephant (its butt hole is large, fist-sized); on the wall several drawings, one of an elephant odalisque, like Babar with his head cocked, looking back over his great round butt, the tiny hole a perfect little circle. My host serves steak, bloody on white plates. Red wine splashes in a glass.

Jeffrey Mitchell's art is abundant. In 1990 he filled a room of the Seattle Art Museum with an army of plaster bunnies, like rows of ceramic soldiers in the tomb of the Chinese Emperor. When the show closed he gave the bunnies to friends, and for years after small platoons of crumbling bunnies gathered in dining

rooms and vestibules in scores of houses all across the city. His 1992 installation, “My Spirit,” at The New Museum, filled a wall with scores of intertwining figures: a vast altar of plaster elephants, colored lights, bunnies, and butts, so densely assembled that the figures became a tangled nest of abstraction, like some sort of 3-D version of “all-over” painting (Pollock with lumpy plaster, and a sunnier mind). Smaller, desktop altars spill over with ornament, figures erupting everywhere, exuberant, contrarian, like the butt-kissing apes in the margins of illuminated manuscripts.

I sometimes think Jeffrey’s art illuminates the days, the way that the kissing apes illuminated the prayer books of Medieval women. The day drives by and at the end of the day the day is gone and the room is full of art. Jeffrey isn’t compulsive, so much as he is attentive. He’s keen and likes to use his hands. His art is not easy, so much as he is at ease. How else to explain the ease I feel in its regard?

While Jeffrey’s work is not strictly figurative, the figure is never absent. Mostly there are elephants. Why elephants? “Yes elephants,” Jeffrey tells me. “I’d have to say that I had no reason in mind when I started working with the elephant. I adore the Babar book illustrations, and the Belly on Ganesh gives me a tug, the sexy and vital convex opposite to the crucified Jesus’s concave core. I’ve been asked the question so

many times and I still claim to not really know why. It couldn't be as simplistic as the trunk looks like a dick and the ears balls, could it? LOL, I cringe, so I claim I don't know or I say that it's a self portrait, and I do think it is a self portrait. I know nothing really about elephants but I hear that they are very smart, loyal and compassionate. I like that. Sorry I can't come up with more."

Now it's dark out. My host lights candles. He's also writing for this catalog. I ask if I can write about our dinner, and he says fine. We talk about Jeffrey and Prince and dance music. Later I meet other friends also writing for the catalog. Do our friendships diminish its value or the standing of Jeffrey's work? No, without question. They shed light on one kind of value; art is sometimes a matter of friendship. Which is not to say that Jeffrey makes his art for this or that friend, per se; rather, art is friendship, generally. Making is a way of being with others. If Jeffrey's friends had money he'd be rich. My host pours some liquor and we toast Jeffrey and his art, clinking the small, sturdy glasses. We clink the elephants's white ceramic rear. Maybe this is the kind of community butt holes make.

Pull Tabs

There are 14 taverns in White Center. They've all got pull-tabs, but only the Locker Room lets you dump the spent tabs on the floor. A dozen men sit at the Locker Room's horseshoe bar drinking canned beer and talking to Rick, the owner. The floor is ankle-deep in used pull-tabs, all of them losers. Winning tabs get handed to Rick, who pays them off with cash from the till. "Everyone wins a lot here," Rick says. His face is hard to read. The more I lose, the more welcome I feel. I spend \$30, losing all but three—enough to cover my two beers. It's five o'clock, and dark outside. I go to Chubby and Tubby, cash a check for \$40, then lose it all on tabs.

Pull-tabs are thumb-sized slats of cardboard with a trio of figures printed inside a serrated tab. A dollar buys you two. Pulling the tab reveals the figures; the right combo pays off anywhere from one to five hundred dollars. The tabs come in bins, five to six thousand in a bin, with four or five hundred winners among them. The winners are listed on a big sign, called a flare. Each time a winner gets pulled, the bartender crosses it off the flare. Over 6 billion tabs are sold each year in Washington, the biggest market in the country. Every tavern, bowling alley, and bingo hall I've ever been to has them.

Rick keeps a dozen or so bets running at a time. I play them all—Grand Casino, Cow Tippin', Mars Rocks, Tail Gaters, Thunder Buck, Show Me the Money, Murphy's Law, Cherries, Saltin' of Slime. In Cherries I get three cherries in a row, which is how I win my three bucks. Saltin' of Slime turns up a gallery of cartoon slugs, all of them different. Cow Tippin' has cows, yokel farmers, and outhouses. Thunder Buck is cartoon heads of presidents, symbols from U.S. currency. I ask Rick, "Who makes all this stuff up?"

"I think it's the pull-tab factory," he says.

The biggest pull-tab factory in the world is in Lynnwood. I drive there on a Saturday morning. The sun has burned through fog and glints off cars, blinding me, and I get lost. I pass Lake Serene Ridge and Fender Drive. The factory, Trade Products, is on Lincoln Way. I stop for directions at a drive-through coffee stand where two women buying lattes tell me they've never heard of Trade Products, or Lincoln Way—they just moved here. They're jogging, wearing stretch nylon, looking very fit. I buy coffee then drive around and find the pull-tab factory near Highway 99.

Trade Products makes over 3 billion pull-tabs a year. The tabs are legal tender, so the factory keeps its

garbage sealed. Because it's Saturday, no one answers when I knock. The building is enormous, faceless. It's a glorified shed, big as a football field. The windows are glazed, reflecting mountains, which are very beautiful this morning, white with fresh snow. I crawl under the dumpster. It's huge, sealed like a space capsule, but garbage has spilled from its mouth. The ground is filthy and stinks like vinegar—print chemicals—and I get dizzy. Ink capsules, print sheets, shrink-wrap, beer cans, spilled crystals... I have to lie on my belly because the dumpster sits low to the ground. Neighbors packing their car with fishing gear yell at me. I slide further under the dumpster. In a pile of broken glass I find a Red Hot 7, a pull-tab, a one-dollar winner.

It takes four and a half minutes to walk around the building. A tropical plant is dying in the foyer. Trade Products has its own fleet of trucks. Barbed wire fences keep the neighbors out. A pick-up truck in the dirt lot of O'Finnigan's Tavern has backed over the fence. I climb across the crushed barbed wire and get some beer at O'Finnigan's. It's 11:00 a.m. I'm the only customer. They've got pull-tabs and I buy \$15 of Road Again.

Road Again is a Trade Products game featuring mattresses, street signs, lost sneakers, sharks with briefcases, and various roadkill. A row of three dead frogs wins me one dollar. I pocket the dollar and talk

to the bartender. “Everyone wins a lot here,” she tells me. “We paid out more than \$1,000 last night.” O’Finnigan’s has a dozen bins, plus cheap “theme tabs,” a dime a tab, which can be special-ordered from the factory. “We’ve got Cougars and Huskies,” she tells me. I wish the bar wasn’t empty. Alone, I scribble notes on napkins and ask the bartender a lot of questions, until she avoids me. The TV shows football. They’re giving away a Harley; maybe it’s a biker bar. I drink another beer, but no bikers, no one, comes in. O’Finnigan’s doesn’t play Red Hot 7s, so I can’t cash the winner I found.

Matthew Stadler

Cary Telefson of the State Gambling Commission says \$332 million dollars are paid out to tab players each year in Washington. It’s a weekday, and now I’m at my office. Cary phones me from her car. “Just a second,” she says through static. “I’m merging onto the freeway.” I wait while she swears, and then sighs. “Okay, Minnesota has the biggest dollar market for tabs, but Washington’s actually number one for volume.”

It’s too nice a day to be inside. “What’s the average return?” I ask.

“By law it’s a 65 percent return on all pull-tab bins, minimum.”

I realize I'm not a very lucky tab player, not even making the legal minimum. "Where are you?" I ask. We've never met. Cary works in Olympia.

"Where am I now? Near Tacoma. I'm headed north." She's driving to Sea-Tac to fly home for Thanksgiving.

"So, where do you think they get the ideas for all those pictures?"

Cary laughs at my question and says I should visit Trade Products. "They could tell you." I don't tell her I've already been there.

On Thanksgiving I call my family and say I'm sick. The weather is lousy. I go to work, but no one's there. I can't concentrate. I play tabs down the street at a bar—research. The bar is crowded, full of strangers, and I win on dollar on Ja Makin' Me Money. A drunk next to me plays Drop Zone and wins \$100. I ask him about pull-tabs, but he's incoherent. The bartender tells me they pay out \$600 on an average night. I don't see Red Hot 7s and I'm broke in about 20 minutes. The simplicity of the game is starting to wear on me—the money, the tabs, my bad luck, the beer. On the wall, a sign for Gamblers Anonymous lists a phone number, and I call.

I go to Gamblers Anonymous on Tuesday. I'm sworn to secrecy, but you can imagine the scene—a church basement, folding chairs in a circle, coffee, and cookies. I tell them my name is Dave K, and that I've got a problem with slots. I can't drive past a casino without stopping. I steal from my wife. I'm lying, which gives me a jolt of energy, a great contrast to the lassitude of the pull-tabs. I could feel close to these people. They've got problems with slots too; the guy beside me says it's a disease with no cure.

Matthew Stadler

We take turns reading a yellow pamphlet out loud. My page says, "What are some characteristics of a person who is a compulsive gambler? 1. Inability and unwillingness to accept reality. Hence the escape into the dream world of gambling." Reading out loud I realize that, in fact I have this problem, and—ambushed by this moment of true feeling—I confess it to the group. "That's what attracts me, the escape from reality."

Pull-tabs are legal because the state has an easy time regulating them. Cary Telefson says slots and video poker, to name two, are too easy to fix or chat on, so they're illegal. Pull-tabs also have a low-tech appeal. It's like eating peanuts—you just sit at the bar and pop them open, making a lot of trash and losing money. Pull-tabs leave residue, which is more satisfying than a video machine.

I drive to Roxbury Lanes and play tabs at a sterile Formica counter. I ask the woman for a beer, but she's only selling tabs. "My name's Dave," I say, giving her \$15 for Oodles of Noodles. "Do people win here a lot?" She shrugs and looks past me. A dozen kids bowling scream and bicker by their lane. The woman is surprised to hear Washington has the biggest pull-tab market in the country. "Who do you think makes up all that stuff for the games?" I ask.

She thinks my question is rhetorical and answers, "I don't know. Who?"

I phone Stuart Entertainment, a multi-national pull-tab company in Iowa. Tim Stuart, the CEO, answers the phone. "The games are kind of a mirror of society," Tim tells me. "They mirror what's going on."

"What's going on?"

"It's 8:00 here," Tim says. "I've really got to go." Tim is meeting friends for a hunting trip. He tells me to call Deborah Shore at Trade Products in Lynnwood. "They're the biggest producer in the country"

"Okay," I answer. "I think I've heard of them." I'm early for Gamblers Anonymous (which by now I'm calling GA), so I stop at the Kort Hause Tavern. I buy

a burger and beer then play Rush Hour and Cherry Master until I'm broke. I hit seven winners, so losing all my money takes a while, and I miss the meeting. That's okay, since now I'm lying to the bartender, which feels just as good as lying at GA. "I've never played pull-tabs before," I tell her. "Do people win a lot here?"

"Oh, yeah. That's what keeps them coming back."

"I find it really exciting, thrilling even, pulling the tabs open."

"Oh yeah." She gives me a free beer, a schooner, now that I'm broke.

I drive 40 miles north on Highway 99, into Everett, playing pull-tabs at a dozen taverns. Trade Products is a dark silhouette behind me. The day has drained out the edge of the sky. The mountains fade, black against the flat horizon. It's wrong to drink and drive. I tell people lies and ask questions about pull-tabs. I'm looking for Red Hot 7s. Life seems more interesting driving around. Every tavern is the same. I don't like the men I meet. At each stop one of them plays a winning pull-tab—\$25, \$75, \$200—and I think "Why don't they buy us all a round of drinks?" At Cheers on Pacific Highway the players leave spent tabs in piles

on the floor, I like the residue, so I stay and watch basketball on TV.

Page three of the Gamblers Anonymous pamphlet asks, What is the dream world of the compulsive gambler?... When compulsive gamblers succeed, they gamble to dream still greater dreams. When failing, they gamble in reckless desperation and the depths of their misery are fathomless as their dream world comes crashing down. Sadly, they will struggle back, dream more dreams and of course suffer more misery. No one can convince them that their great scheme will not someday come true. They believe they will, for without this dream world, life for them would not be tolerable.

Deborah Shore at Trade Products returns my call. She tells me I can't visit the factory—"There's nothing to see."

Disappointed, I ask, "But who makes up all that stuff for the games?"

Shore sighs. Then she's all business: "A lot of ideas come from tavern owners, or players like yourself. People will tell us, 'I'd love to see a ticket with tools or airplanes,' for example. Or it'll be seasonal. Right now we're working on Kris-Kross Kringle and Winter

Wonderland. Then there's fads, like cigars or motorcycles. We might do peace symbols, or a Star Wars theme."

"But who actually makes the choices? I mean, is there a meeting, like with people?"

My question, or my tone, gives her pause. "There's a design team. Sometimes we just tell the art department you know, 'Cigars.'" It's late. We both should be going home. This is all she'll give me.

"But Deborah, is there anything you avoid?"

"We'll avoid current events like the OJ trial. We would never do the OJ trial"

I want to ask one more question—"Do you like the fantasy of it, the fantasy and escape?"—but Shore hangs up before I can ask it.

At the Locker Room, I escape into my dream world: I win \$150 on a tab. I'm drinking Lucky Beer in cans and making up details for that Highway 99 scene. I buy drinks for everyone at the bar—that's about \$20 for a dozen beers, plus a huge tip for Rick. I wonder how I'm going to lose the rest in one night. Rick warms up to me. "What's that you're writing?"

“An article about pull-tabs.” Rick laughs. He thinks I’m a liar. Rick has Red Hot 7s, and I cash my soiled dollar winner. I buy \$50 of Show Me the Money, and lose all but five. “Do people win here a lot?” I ask, drunk, rhetorical.

“Rick wins here a lot,” the guy beside me says. I buy another \$50 of tabs, and lose all of it. This guy beside me seems so interesting.

“My name’s Dave,” I say.

“Larry.”

I buy Larry some pull-tabs. The floor is thick with them. Larry’s tabs are all losers. He’s drunk and inarticulate. “Ever win much here?” I ask.

“Oh yeah.”

His face is hard and flat, out-of-focus. I want to peel it back like a tab. “Yeah,” I tell him, “me too.”

Butt Hole

On the dinner table, a white ceramic elephant with a tiny butt hole, a Jeffrey Mitchell. It’s a warm July

evening; my hosts are casual, the dinner impromptu. Next to this fist-sized elephant: a stack of plates, glasses, flatware, a scattering of books; hard to say if it's art or some practical thing, an implement for dinner. The elephant's smooth, round rear regards me, a tiny hole placed exactly where it should be. I smile at it, as I would at a stranger's blank face.

Since when do I smile at butt holes? Probably it's art. Faced with François Boucher's *L'Odalisque*, my eyes always alight on the butt. There is the woman's face, of course, but eclipsed by a second face — a silent, nonjudgmental face that has no stake in pleasing me: Her butt lies in its folds like a bed. At dinner the elephant's butt is also silent, lacking in opinions. Surely it is art. A tureen or cream pitcher would not have a hole there. The elephant fits my hand and wants to be held. The butt hole wants a thumb, and I slide mine over it.

Jeffrey Mitchell casts, glazes, draws, paints, fires, saws, builds, cuts, tapes, glues, and assembles, so it is odd to introduce his work through the figure of the butt hole. Very little in his work is strictly figurative. His elephants quote de Brunhoff's Babar as much or more than they refer to real elephants; owls are twin swoops pivoting on twin circles; even the letters of the alphabet are bulky cut-out shapes that reference

home-craft or childhood as much as they spell out, for example, “hello HELLO.” There is plaster, piling up in abundance; wooden structures clad in paper; ceramics, useful and otherwise; drawing, often done quickly and over the surface of something equally rich. Much of Jeffry’s art says “hello HELLO.” The butt hole welcomes me without speaking, an invitation: the door has been left open.

These butt holes offer a clue, a moment of engagement, offered to me without being directed at me, that is unique to Jeffry Mitchell’s art. They are gestural, calligraphic, not realistic so much as simply the residue of a passing action — a modest swoop of the pencil, tracing a neat circle; the insertion of a point, just so far, a tiny piercing; the turning of a finger or hand in clay. The butt holes tend toward a kind of clean formalism, like the “O” in “ommm.” They are intimate with the hand.

Like the “O” in “ommm” they are also serene, calming, and empty. When I smile back the stakes are low. Contrarily, a person’s face makes me nervous, and my eyes dart away. A face in art pressures me doubly, presenting two problems: the puzzle of the face and its opinion; and the second puzzle of art and its meanings. At dinner, with my friends and this ceramic elephant, I’m at ease.

My smile is difficult to read. Giorgio Agamben calls the face “at once the irreparable being-exposed of humans and the very opening in which they hide and stay hidden.” I look across the dinner table, laughing. Hidden in plain sight. Bathed in the gaze of others, my face nevertheless betrays nothing specific about me. As Agamben puts it, “What the face exposes and reveals is not something that could be formulated...nor is it a secret doomed to remain forever incommunicable. The face’s revelation is revelation of language itself.” The face reveals that we are being (what Agamben calls “opening”) even while it conceals how or what we are being. This unresolvable tension is the face’s unceasing burden — “It is only opening, only communicability. To walk in the light of the face is to be this opening — and to suffer it, and to endure it.” Agamben adds that “art can give a face to an inanimate object, to a still nature, and that is why the witches, when accused by the inquisitors of kissing Satan’s anus during the Sabbath, argued that even there there was a face.”

The butt is a second face, animate, but one that holds still while the primary face is mobile. The butt has nothing to say. Its passivity has been widely noted, and propositions to the contrary (such as William Burroughs’s chatty talking asshole in *Naked Lunch*) can be deeply unsettling. The hole is also an opening,

certainly; but not in the sense Agamben means. “Opening,” in Agamben’s understanding, is the revelation of one being within the space of others, a revelation, always, of language. The face — the site of language — “is only opening.” The butt hole’s reticence masks its revelations. “The face,” Agamben claims, “is the only location of community, the only possible city.” So, I wonder, what kind of community could butt holes make?

The dining room is full of art, much of it Jeffrey’s. The day’s last sun slips from the trees. By the window, paper cut-out letters saying “ABCDEFGHILOV-EYOU”; a lamp made of wood and rice paper, shaped like an elephant (its butt hole is large, fist-sized); on the wall several drawings, one of an elephant odalisque, like Babar with his head cocked, looking back over his great round butt, the tiny hole a perfect little circle. My host serves steak, bloody on white plates. Red wine splashes in a glass.

Jeffrey Mitchell’s art is abundant. In 1990 he filled a room of the Seattle Art Museum with an army of plaster bunnies, like rows of ceramic soldiers in the tomb of the Chinese Emperor. When the show closed he gave the bunnies to friends, and for years after small platoons of crumbling bunnies gathered in dining rooms and vestibules in scores of houses all across

the city. His 1992 installation, “My Spirit,” at The New Museum, filled a wall with scores of intertwining figures: a vast altar of plaster elephants, colored lights, bunnies, and butts, so densely assembled that the figures became a tangled nest of abstraction, like some sort of 3-D version of “all-over” painting (Pollock with lumpy plaster, and a sunnier mind). Smaller, desktop altars spill over with ornament, figures erupting everywhere, exuberant, contrarian, like the butt-kissing apes in the margins of illuminated manuscripts.

I sometimes think Jeffrey’s art illuminates the days, the way that the kissing apes illuminated the prayer books of Medieval women. The day drives by and at the end of the day the day is gone and the room is full of art. Jeffrey isn’t compulsive, so much as he is attentive. He’s keen and likes to use his hands. His art is not easy, so much as he is at ease. How else to explain the ease I feel in its regard?

While Jeffrey’s work is not strictly figurative, the figure is never absent. Mostly there are elephants. Why elephants? “Yes elephants,” Jeffrey tells me. “I’d have to say that I had no reason in mind when I started working with the elephant. I adore the Babar book illustrations, and the Belly on Ganesh gives me a tug, the sexy and vital convex opposite to the crucified Jesus’s concave core. I’ve been asked the question so

many times and I still claim to not really know why. It couldn't be as simplistic as the trunk looks like a dick and the ears balls, could it ? LOL, I cringe , so I claim I don't know or I say that it's a self portrait, and I do think it is a self portrait. I know nothing really about elephants but I hear that they are very smart, loyal and compassionate. I like that. Sorry I can't come up with more."

Now it's dark out. My host lights candles. He's also writing for this catalog. I ask if I can write about our dinner, and he says fine. We talk about Jeffry and Prince and dance music. Later I meet other friends also writing for the catalog. Do our friendships diminish its value or the standing of Jeffry's work? No, without question. They shed light on one kind of value; art is sometimes a matter of friendship. Which is not to say that Jeffry makes his art for this or that friend, per se; rather, art is friendship, generally. Making is a way of being with others. If Jeffry's friends had money he'd be rich. My host pours some liquor and we toast Jeffry and his art, clinking the small, sturdy glasses. We clink the elephants's white ceramic rear. Maybe this is the kind of community butt holes make.

"[In the early 70s] the overwhelming feeling was one of possibility. Who knew what this could become? We were making it up as we went along."
Anne Pecke

"Small Talk and Sitting Around"
 In the 1950s, Seattle artists had no grants to think about, no community programs to pursue, and only two gallery owners to schmooze. They didn't serve on peer panels, perform in the schools, or do any of the myriad tasks that make up a life in the arts today. One could apply for a Guggenheim, Carnegie, Mellon, or Rockefeller Fellowship (a few hundred artists across the country received them; three in Seattle in the '50s), there might be dinner or tea with Zoe Dusanne (her home on Lakeview Boulevard—later bulldozed to make room for the new freeway—was one of the city's two contemporary art galleries), or a morning might be spent with Dr. Fuller, the director of the art museum, impressing him with new work or degrading him with one's poverty, drinks at Van's was about as social as the city got. "The life of an artist," playwright Maria Irene Fornes paints out, "is so mundane. It's really nothing, just small talk and sitting around. But then one day you look up and someone has rewritten it all as history."

It's a bitter-sweet pleasure to look at Seattle circa 1955. The city was overcrowded, cheap, its cultural scene made up of equal parts bars, restaurants, and living rooms. Both Nomura, who runs the Northwest Craft Center, was born here and ran a small Japanese import shop on Capitol Hill by his friend Scott Hutton. "Mark Tobey used to come in and buy his brushes," Nomura recalls. "A lot of the painters did it, was just a much smaller studio than Nomura's peculiar store was stocked with an eclectic mix of beautiful things, and sported a famously loose pebble floor. ("Women wore those awful polka-dot high-heels back then, so we had a lot of dislodged rocks," she says.) A hodgepodge of unusual friends crossed paths here: painters (Tobey, Morris Graves, William Ivy Head, Peter, Paul Hirsch, Richard Gilkey, Kenneth Callahan),



art critics (Margaret Callahan, John Voorhees), and writers (Carolyn Klarr), plus some miscellaneous oddballs with the time and inclination to loaf and chat over an early cocktail or cards. "People weren't 'we'd go to Van's. Richard White was so busy there. Later he had the Richard White Gallery, the rich white gallery." He always added us the sautéed mushrooms under glass. Sometimes a show would be in town. I remember seeing Judy Garland at the Civic Arena. Everyone was there." Nomura pauses, then smiles. "Of course you'd always see everyone, I mean eventually, there weren't that many places to go."

Scholar John Kriedler calls this bygone the Ford era, under the direction of a little-recognized visionary named Mac Lowry, began a \$400-million program of investment in symphonies and theaters in mid-sized cities across America. This investment was what Kriedler calls "high leverage funding." The money was given in big short-term grants, to build the budgets and programming of pre-existing groups. When the grants ran out, the Ford strategy went, arts groups would be obliged to cultivate increased local funding to keep themselves afloat. These "seed grants" would leverage permanent investment from local sources.

Significant Ford money only reached Seattle in the '70s, but its philosophy got here in the early '50s. The strategy of leveraging investment in a fledgling arts economy had an enormous influence, and that approach was imitated all across the country. Kriedler reports that "between only a few foundations had entered the realm of art



philanthropy in the pre-Ford era, a virtual cascade of foundations, corporations, and governmental agencies now became active, and many of them, knowingly or unknowingly, emulated Ford's approach to institutional advancement and high-leverage funding. The evolution of this new and highly pluralistic funding system," Kriedler points out, "had no precedent in the U.S. or any other nation."

The 1962 World's Fair

While Ford initiatives began seeping into other local economies, Seattle was preoccupied with plans of its own. In 1967, three businessmen and a journalist hatched the idea of a Seattle World's Fair, a hot-house blossom of art and culture that promised to attract tourist dollars. A \$7.5 million city bond was issued, matched by another \$7.5 million from the state and then plumped by business investment and a lot into life in the spirit of 1962. The Fair was a leveraged investment Mac Lowry would have been proud of. The initial bond issue forced the state's marching bands, which triggered business investment, putting everyone on the line for the Fair's success. No World's Fair in history had made money, but this one, proportionally timed, left \$1 million in the bank. In the wake of the Fair, Seattle had 74 acres of empty theaters and exhibition halls and a million bucks to invest.

"Everything changed that year," Ruth Nomura recalls. "It was all a lot of fun. I had a job wearing a kimono and all that. I remember that since Mr. Jeffrey, he put on Aida. We spent a day at the Fair together, with Jo-

"It was kind of like sports teams now. We just weren't a real city unless we had a decent theater."
Peter Donnelly

frey and Gerald Arpino. All of these people were brought in, as a part of the show I guess. And you know they changed the liquor laws for the Fair so that you could drink on Sundays. They didn't want the bars to lose out not making money on Sundays."

The Fair was a powerful collaboration of government and business that formed a template for a great deal of the city's future thinking about the arts. Linking art to tourism was just one step in a broader march toward a viable "arts economy." In the sensibility about the city's "arts sector," Proud boomers could measure Seattle's artistic growth by counting new buildings, new organizations, and increased audience size. The timing put Seattle right in step with the rest of America. Catalyzed by Ford (aided by Terry Guthrie's bold founding of a world-class theater in Minneapolis in 1963), mid-sized cities across the country were beginning to covet and cultivate exactly the sort of cultural non-profits the Fair's legacy made possible. As Peter Donnelly, head of Seattle's Corporate Council for the Arts, recalls, "It was kind of like other cities had and wanted the same. We just weren't a real city unless we had a decent theater."

Building an Arts Economy in the '60s

Peter Donnelly arrived here in 1964, as a theater management intern sent by Mac Lowry and the Ford Foundation to help the new Seattle Rep develop its administrative and funding structure. "I thought it was just like a free trip to Seattle," Donnelly says. "I had no idea what it would turn into..." With no management training ("I'd studied to be a director, and had worked as a stage manager and actor, and as a head one at that"), Donnelly became general manager of the Rep within a year of arriving. "I got a radical education in theater management," he recalls.

continued on next page

ARTS continued from previous page

"There was a debt from the first year of operations, and some disappointment about the programming. But we had a healthy subscriber base, around 12,000, and big community activism in support of the thing. I was astounded that there could be an expectation of city help for a theater, or an expectation of private patrons."

Donnelly learned quickly. He tried everything from mass mailings ("we had to put all the postage on by hand"), to special patron parties ("for \$100 you got to have finger sandwiches and champagne, that sort of thing; of course, if you wanted to serve wine or any cheese, someone had to be invited up to Vancouver to get it"), to courting a handful of major donors ("Bagley Wright lent the theater money from time to time. He'd carry notes for the payroll when the budget got tight"). Within a few years of arriving, Donnelly and the Rep's board had cultivated a broad mix of private and public supporters. They'd also attracted money from corporate community members that would emerge as key funders in the city's arts building boom of the 1990s.

Donnelly was part of a wave of young talent that fueled the creation of arts nonprofits around the country. Discounted labor, John Krielder says, powered the explosion of the arts during the Ford era. "It was the sheer number of middle and educated youth that provided the main fuel," he writes in his essay "Leverage Lost." The fuel came cheap. Passionate about the arts, these founders and staff

were willing to work for little or nothing. This pool of discounted labor, together with the success of Ford's high leverage funding, created a subsidized arts economy which, Krielder believes, was necessarily headed for collapse—a kind of bubble economy of the arts. In the 1960s and '70s, the bubble was still expanding.

"Putting Things Together"

With nearly all of the new arts money going directly to a handful of large presenting organizations (the Rep, the Symphony, the Art Museum, the new ACT Theater, and others), the climate of work for individual artists in the city was little changed from the late '30s. Organizational expansion created a few new jobs, principally in theater, but the city still lacked any granting programs for painters, writers, sculptors, and others whose networks of support were still largely social, personal, and unplanned.

One young artist, Anne Focke, graduated from the U.W. in 1967 and took on a full-time job at the art museum. "There were two of us in the education department," she recalled in a conversation last spring. "The staff met every morning in the cafeteria to show an exhibition at the Northwest Craft Center, a drafty old shed on the Seattle Center grounds. The gallery director was Ruth Nomura. "It's hard to say what my work was then," Focke allows. "It was studied."

"They were odd," Ruth Nomura says, of them were cubes and geometric shapes. "I remember the show was in the summer, and it all looked very colorful."

Focke's circle of friends was much like Nomura's from a decade earlier—a perpetually mishmash of artists and acquaintances, rich and poor, old and young, wo-

ven together by parties and long, aimless afternoons. Her art making existed in that unremarkable space of small talk and sitting around, and there was little where else it could go.

Anne Focke is a remarkable thinker, a habitually conscious observer of patterns and of moods. It's hard for her to say what her work was back then, but she's partly because object making had already become secondary to other, more difficult-to-describe interests. In a 1974 essay, Focke wrote, "[T]hree or four years ago, I began to realize that the work I found most challenging most exciting, had to do with putting situations together—providing people/artists a chance to get some work done not possible in any other way or space. I began to sense a certain rightness about some ways of 'putting things together.... I began to experience a sense of the forms I was creating, with and the patterns I was creating."

Focke is a visionary who, I believe, has quite deliberately kept out of sight. Her work over the last 30 years left a trail of residue that, as we shall see here, permanently altered this city—probably this country too. If this story had a hero she would be it.

Inventing a Marketable Seattle

In 1971 Seattle created an arts commission. (In 1960 there were a dozen municipalities in America; by 1980 there were over 3,000.) Lobbied by the Rep and others, the commission had a mandate to invent arts commissions in America; by 1980 there were over 3,000.) Lobbied by the Rep and others, the commission had a mandate to present, channel, sustain support to large presenting organizations, and a secondary desire to grant grants to individual artists. The mandate was consistent with Ford-era priorities, and even in 1972, when the city increased their discretionary grant fund from

\$25,000 to \$375,000, the arts commission functioned primarily as a source of additional money for the large not-for-profits. Nevertheless, talk of other pragmatic ways in the air, and Anne Focke was hired as the arts commission's first full-time staffer.

"The overwhelming feeling," Focke recalls, "was one of possibility. Who knew it was up as we went along. We started to think about the various ways one could choose who to fund: an open application, a juried or invited competition or direct selection, just choosing. At that point it was wide open." In addition to distributing these funds, the arts commission took charge of an innovative program dreamed up by artists Chris Kirk, Judy Wheat, and Robert Maki. With Alice Rooney at Allied Arts (the city's oldest arts advocacy group), founded in 1952 as the Beer and Culture Society, they proposed "One Percent for the Arts." Almost unprecedented in the country, the program would direct one percent of all the city's capital project funds to the arts mission, to fund public art. It was passed in law in 1973, and Focke became the first director of the program. "I was invited to figure out what 'One Percent for the Arts' meant, and how to make it real, how to implement it. I thought of it very simply. You had this ordinance, One Percent, and you had this money—now how did you make the one fit onto the other? It was like being dropped into a foreign land. I was not a temple."

The early '70s were heady, anomalous times. Despite a collapsing local economy, then-Mayor Wes Uhlman made room for ever-expanding projects in public art funding. He owed the arts community a big debt for their campaign support (spearheaded by Allied Arts and its president, Paul

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Stop Ignoring Me!

It seems every concert I go to these days, you're there, up in the front. And though we only met once before, I usually think it's a good idea to say "Hi." And it never is because you never give any sort of reply whatsoever. The first time this happened being my shy self, I just let it go, thinking, "Oh, it's a no big deal — she probably didn't hear me, and it's not like I know her..." Well, by now, it's a constant irritant, so you go to most of my favorite shows — and a friend of mine who you know better, the Pier, just tell me to stop bugging you, or anything... You know who you are.

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THE NEW DIGITAL WORKFORCE

Myths and Realities of Working in High-Tech

WHAT: A panel discussion sponsored by The Washington Alliance of Technology Workers and the Center for Labor Studies at the University of Washington

WHERE: Tuesday, October 13, 1998. 7pm-9:30pm.

WHERE: Kane Hall, Room 120, University of Washington, Seattle.

In the popular imagination, the digital workforce means 35-year-old millionaires, piles of stock options, and lavish benefits. But for thousands employed in Puget Sound's booming high-tech economy, a full-time job means one more indignity: a temporary agency, less pay, no job security, daily 9:00-5:00 middle-class wages, and often less than minimum wage. As technology increasingly changes the way we work, we need to be looking at what kind of jobs we are creating. What benefits and workplace rights should workers be concerned about? What's the employer/employee relationship? This forum, to be followed by audience Q&A, will examine these and other questions among "hard" tech.

How has increased dependence on a "flexible" workforce changed the employer/employee relationship? This forum, to be followed by audience Q&A, will examine these and other questions among "hard" tech.

PANEL PARTICIPANTS

Executive Secretary, King County Labor Council, AFL-CIO

Shelita Knight

President, Creative Assets

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Attorney-at-Law, Schwartz, Campbell, and Bernard

Wolfe Lee

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Moderated by: Margaret Levy

Chair, Center for Labor Studies, University of Washington

FOR MORE INFORMATION: Call WASH TECH at (206) 726-8550 or visit www.washtech.org

This event is sponsored by:

Seattle Workers' Alliance, Washington Workers' Center

Business, International, Technical, & Professional (BIT) Union in the National Workers Union

The Labor Education Center of Evergreen St. College



McQ (1974) is vintage John Wayne, and vintage Seattle. The city looks puzzled, drugged, like an old alcoholic who's been awakened by the sweepstakes prize crew in the middle of sleeping off an all-day drunk.

Schell). And, he sincerely liked art. Uhlman routinely got shot-in-the-dark items into the budget, despite their having little or no coin-licen to create a summer arts festival: Festival '71.

"A group of people wanted Claes Oldenburg to design a poster for Festival '71," Focke remembers. "So the Contemporary Art Council, a collectors group at the museum, pooled some money to pay for it. Oldenburg drew an enormous sea-green faucet, gushing water. C. David Hughbanks was in charge of the festival since he worked at the Seattle Center, and the item was in their budget. I was asked to put together a show of visual art, and they gave me \$5,000. That was a lot of money then. There really was no directive, except that this was supposed to be an alternative to Seafair, an arts alternative."

TruthCo made a giant inflatable version of the Oldenburg faucet, electronic music was played on the city's four Moog synthe-

sizers, there was performance from the new Empty Space Theater, conceptual art, movies, and a weird light show. (That summer I'd gotten my first job, age 12, working for lunch money as a "troll" at the North-west Craft Center. I remember gazing out the big windows at the spectacle, while Ruth Nomura and her friends, chatted and drank in the office—I presumed this festival later the annual summer event got renamed "Bumbershoot," and Anne Focke became its first director.)

Seattle's arts economy in the mid-'70s was at once typical (a half-dozen steadily expanding theater and music not-for-profits, a new arts commission, provisional experiments in public art) and peculiar (the crawled along at ground level like an impossible-to-kill blackberry vine; a spirit of cooperation kept any stratification of rich and poor arts groups from calcifying into separate, hostile camps; the university's youth culture became a focus for many odd in this instance they're like clouds of gnats that obscure the view. Instead of summon-

ing them, let's consider one of the best documents of that time: the 1974 John Wayne movie *McQ*.

McQ was one of the Mayor Uhlman's early successes at luring Hollywood to the Northwest. After Elvis came in 1962, we'd gone a long time without a star, and Wayne arrived for a few weeks in the summer of '73. In *McQ* he plays a tough Seattle cop who busts a corrupt ring of drug-smuggling cops. He lives on a boat in Fremont, drinks coffee, and spits on radical hippies who like to taunt "the pigs." It's vintage Wayne, and vintage Seattle. The city looks puzzled, drugged, like an old alcoholic awakened by a sweepstakes prize crew in the middle of sleeping off an all-day drunk. Seattle's streets are mostly empty, and the passer-by gawking, poorly coated. It gives some glimpse of the city's peculiar transition from its old, frumpy comfort to a new, self-conscious styling. In the '70s the city invented its marketable cultural self.

Corporate Council for the Arts

Among the many civic changes of that time, the Chamber of Commerce dumped Seattle's decades-old nickname of the "Queen City" and debated "The Emerald Ashes," a green phoenix rising out of the gray ashes of the past. The Emerald City would have been America's most livable city. It would have a vibrant civic life, a world-class symphony, and one of America's most respected regional theaters. It boasted a broad community of support, the legacy of the Fair and the Ford era. The most promising new engine for channeling this civic pride into actual capital investment was kick-started in 1969 by millionaire businessman Ned Skinner. Skinner founded the United Arts Fund, a sort of United Way for the arts that slowly grew, eventually becoming the

Corporate Council for the Arts (CCA), run by Peter Donnelly.

CCA is a handout conduit set up to channel local business donations to a select tier of arts groups in the city. They promote the stabilization of the arts infrastructure by the sustained giving of unrestricted operating money to a few dozen well-managed groups. Among these are the Symphony, the Opera, and the Rep. CCA's sustained support more modest projects. CCA's discretionary funding (now called Arts Puff) goes to smaller groups with a full-time professional management staff and at least three years of continuous operation, at an average grant of \$6,100. Revenue from CCA's one-third ownership of KING-FM is targeted to support music.

Arts groups were wary of the CCA project when it began as the United Arts Council back in 1969. Donnelly was still at the Rep then, and he recalls, "All of us on the arts side, the managers of the arts groups, were very skeptical about this program. The idea was, we'd all stop soliciting corporations on our own, and let the fund take care of that. Ralph Burgard had come from New York, kind of Johnny Appleseed; these united arts funds across the country, and Ned Skinner, here in Seattle, really liked what Burgard had to say. Ned was very important, very big. If Ned Skinner asked you to lunch, you went. He was an every important corporate board in town—Boeing, Ma Bell, and Safeco, the three biggest in town. Well, Ned invited all of us to hear Burgard. Of course we all agreed. It changed momentum."

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THE STRANGER OCTOBER 8, 1990

ARTS continued from previous page

spending all of our time perfecting that." In 1973, while Focke was in the "A Percent for the Arts" strategy, working with the arts commission, directing Bamber's shoot, and conceiving and directing "The Choice of Her Perfecting Anything." Over the next year she gradually shed her other duties to focus on the arts.

and/or gallery was opened in April 1974 in the first floor of the Odd Fellows Hall on Capitol Hill. People sometimes assumed that we started and/or because we were angry about the failures of other institutions," Focke recalls, "but I've never even felt that. It was simply the thought that, yes, all of this is fine, but wouldn't this other idea be great, and yes it would, and let's do it." A

group calling themselves the Seattle Six-year Services-Focke, Bert Garner, Ken Laback, Bob Trephe, and Don Scott—decided to formalize their collaborations by renting a shared space and discovering what patterns of work that gave rise to "it" was needed. "First was a couple hundred dollars, and no one got paid and we were opened in April '74 with a big bang. The show was a music studio in the back, put up a bunch of walls, and rented out three middle-size spaces, generally for exhibitions, performances, and whatever. I came up with the name 'auditor'—openness and discrimination." Focke was and/or's director, but the programming was determined by the interactions of its members. Focke's shifting structure became the center of her work.

In a 1974 essay Focke described her vision of an organization "able to go in many directions at once, able to change course, open, undetermined yet patterned, informal and personal." She linked this impulse to the lessons of second-wave feminism: "I share a lot of the pleasure I was struggling after in my work appear in the feminist theories of the time. I remember an article by Donna Martin in the second issue of *Heresies* which had so much. I compiled a list of phrases she used which I'd seen recurring in my own work sensitive to flux, cycle, transitory, change as part of daily life, subjective, personal, immediate, evocative, unfinished quality, cost/pain, a constant interaction, and simultaneity." This makeshift organization formed the field of play, which Focke located her efforts to patterns of shared work at and/or. Creating an arts-in-shared work became, for Focke, a kind of artistic inquiry.

Like other non-profits, and/or had a board (mostly artists, mostly the people who used the place, people who were "laugh a lot"), they solicited members, charged admission to concerts and shows, received small donations, and held garage sales. "We didn't pursue any grants at all," Focke says, "not because of my plan, it just wasn't what got us started." By the second and third year they were small and from PONCHO, the city, and the state arts commission. Most of the money members came up with ideas for new work, programming, cleaning the toilets—everything. "It was interesting, though—the more we did, the better we got at it, and the work we did, the more we wanted to do the one user say of a wanted to spend on the other things, the clerical work, maintenance. We learned how to run our program,

well, and that made 'cooperative labor' kind of a waste of our time." and/or became a porous institution, deliberately structured to expand and collapse with the flow of traffic through it. One way it might be a storage facility, the next was a recording studio, then a performance space, a business's office, an emergency classroom, private living room, or nightclub. Flexibility, timeliness, and resiliency were and/or's vital qualities; they were made possible by an intelligent, often-changing division of the physical space, investment, and nurturing what anthropologist Lewis Hyde has called a "gift economy."

A Gift Economy

Hyde's book *The Gift* had a big impact on Focke's vision of arts organization, though only in the wake of and/or. Hyde makes a basic distinction between two kinds of economies: a capitalist economy in which wealth is generated by moving property out of circulation (as with savings, buildings, and such); and a gift economy in which wealth proliferates by keeping property in circulation, by habitually relinquishing oneself of property, so that it exchanges and accelerates. The two economies do not form separate, pure systems. Gifts become capital (a gift can spend grants on a new building), while spoils given prior from its value to become capital (corporations donate money). As gifts (corporations donate money), Focke observed in her writings from 1991, "both the market economy and the gift economies have positive qualities. When we give away the increase brought to us increases and nourish a part of ourselves through gifts, we preserve the vitality of the gift, which is a larger community and is not personal. When we profit on exchange or turn gifts into capital, we nourish a part of ourselves that is personal and separate from a larger community."

"How can we act," she asks, "with these thoughts as guides? Can we create an economy of the creative spirit?" The and/or answer can be seen as one attempt to answer this question. Many of the habits Hyde attributes to a gift economy were active at and/or. The exchange between artist and audience was flexible and porous. Curators (such as introductions and program pamphlets and posters) gave value to exchanges (such as talks, works-in-progress, changes) which had little value as commodities. Resources were shared without activation, freely given to whoever would use them. As at a good library, there was palpable excitement about exchanging the gallery of all its resources, getting them to working hands, and/or can be seen as a conscious effort to operate wisely inside

what has allowed us to take artistic risks. Because we've been fiscally conservative and spent a great deal of attention to the budgetary and managerial side, we're able to program extremely untried, unknown work without any hesitation. We're not slaves to our box office."

Mark Murphy

what Hyde called the "double economy" of most creative work. Smart and engaged with capitalist structures (and/or did business with foundations, artists, and audiences, and set up its own for-profit art handling service, ArtTech, to generate income), the gallery built and activated a kind of gift economy within that frame.

and/or was never "stable." It had a surplus of discounted labor, the gallery managed to amass an astonishing range of work with annual budgets that range from around \$20,000 to just over \$200,000. Programs were eclectic and wide-ranging. Some were active. Focke initiated a video series that included Nan June Park, Bill Viola, Joan Jonas, and Terry Fox, this ultimately evolved into the 811 Media Arts Center. Focke and David Mabler developed the Computer Based Soundwork: a program of concerts, visiting composers (music studio, founding Soundwork: a program of concerts, visiting composers (David Antin, George Mannes, Morton Subotnik), and access to the electric music made for local composers and musicians. Performance and new visual art were curated by Focke, Bert Garner, Noriko Ann, and a dozen others, and brought Laurie Anderson, Meredith Monk, Joan Ballester, Martin Puryear, Martha Butler, and many more, some for their first (or only) Seattle shows. These programs coalesced around a small group of artists including Mayana Peters, Barbara Tomash, Richard Andrew, Laura Millin, and Marcel Paul, who then formed CCA and ran various sites for their work.

An improvised granting program (Focke asked friends to donate small amounts, to grants from \$200 to \$700 to complete their work) blossomed into Artists Trust, now the state's largest provider of direct grants to artists. Focke was its "instigator" and first co-director. The gift economy that and/or activated was a rich and lasting one, and/or disappeared in 1984. "Increasingly," by the projects we'd begun as a group evolved into more demanding, steeper concerns," Focke recalls. "We learned our work, and people separated out into these groups. It seemed like a natural choice to do organizing for us to dissolve and/or and/or had the good fortune of growing and/or into the country, Linked to PCVA in Portland, Franklin Purnace, the Kichwa, and Creative Time in New York, L.I.C.A. in Los Angeles, A.D. Langston Street in San

Francisco. The two centers were partly a result of the Ford Foundation's initiative—the early proliferation of non-profits provided a model for us. More importantly, at the time there were fewer failures to find artists doing their own thing. More importantly, public funding agencies, especially the NEA, were now cultivating exactly this kind of work. NEA. "I remember this guy named David Ryan came into the gallery," Focke laughs, "and he said, 'Golly, you should be in the NEA Museum Program.' And I said, 'Museum Program? Could we?' They funded us the first time we applied, and that really made it clear there was support out there."

The NEA money not only helped leverage local funding and donations, it generated publicity and a network of national contacts which radically transformed the scope of Focke's thinking and work. They started putting me on panels, in Washington D.C., panels to allocate grant money, so I got to know a lot of other work and people

in its history in the '70s and '80s, the NEA. Mabler and I also loved actual encounters through new groups to include visual artists, institutional grants targeted at smaller artists, organizational life, and/or, and a very active network of artists' and/or—five or more artists—around the country thrown together for a few days to look at applications and act, and to dispense funds. These panels became forums for networking and camaraderie. They constituted a kind of old boys' network, made up of men and women of all races and backgrounds, yet at limited in scope and closed as any informal elite in community, possibility, and entitlement among this select tier of working artists, and from that core, most of the organizational and political activities of the '90s arts community was born.

Stabilize or Die

By the mid-'90s, America's non-profit arts community had begun to contract. In Seattle, the largest non-profit—those now included in the CCA sustained support included the most dire crises. Their sheer size magnified any problems posed by the shrinking pool of corporate, foundation, and government money. CCA's growth in the '90s was part of a unique rescue, having many of these organizations from decline. John Krielder traces the national crisis in non-profit funding back to basic flaws in Ford-era formula. The huge surge of young art grants that had powered the growth of non-profits 30 years earlier, Krielder argues, was becoming exhausted. As staff and programmers entered their 50s and 50s, they couldn't live much more "up" the difference. Most arts funding sources had already been leveraged to their limits.

"Seattle Mayor Charles Royce called for 'the new important' arts sector" of the city's economy. John Krielder, who founded the New City Theater here in the early '90s, remembers the result: "Money was getting tight, so Royce was pushing the whole idea of 'stabilization,' which involved identifying

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Brad Adkins: Big Red

This is a recording of Brad Adkins talking. His talk is captivating and well worth your time. Among his subjects are jellyfish, NASCAR, Marlon Brando, Britney Spears, B-Boys, magic tricks, and the cruelty of artifice. Brad is an orchestrator of the quotidian.

On the wall at Marriage Records is a dollar bill that Brad painted black. He wanted an expensive coffee, but only had a dollar, so he painted it black and swapped it to Curtis Knapp in exchange for the coffee. Now it hangs on the wall like any other painting. Is it still a dollar? Apparently not. Brad's interventions turn the everyday into art. Rather than make new things, Brad usually messes with old things, disabling their functions so that they float free of utility and become something else (as with the dollar, or an art lecture, or a set of Coke bottles into which Brad has been drilling holes, hundreds of tiny holes so that the bottles begin to resemble coral and have become useless).

At the end of the recording Brad describes a magic trick in which a man makes two of his fingers disappear. It's a trick, of course, so the payoff is when the fingers reappear, but Brad's story goes on: The magician whose trick this was, Ymir Yadid, lived off it until one terrible day when his fingers got severed

in a car accident. Now, Brad tells us, Yadid keeps his maimed “performing hand” in his pocket while he does the trick with the other hand. I believe this is a fair description of Brad’s method as well.

His wide-ranging talk and offhand, conversational voice lead listeners to imagine they’re seeing glimpses of him, the real Brad, hidden in plain sight — behind the screen of his interests. Britney Spears? B-Boys? The incredible

loneliness of Marlon Brando? Aren’t these all, in fact, aspects of Brad — his “real self” — hidden like fingers behind the decoy of his captivating talk? I don’t think so. I think Brad’s got his maimed hand in his pocket. What you’re looking at, what you’re listening to, is a diversionary trick, an artful kind of “fake hiding” performed while something more painful and lasting digs its way deeper into cloth. If you listen closely you can hear it.

“Big Red” was recorded in one sitting by Curtis Knapp (who can be heard talking with Brad) and only minimally edited. Christopher Buckingham played the marvelous piano interlude while Brad talked. Curtis says he asked Brad to record the piece “so that he could stop telling the same old stories and move on to new ones.”

Dennis Cooper: An Exacting Laxness

First a little background. From 1984 to 2000, Dennis Cooper published five novels known as the George Myles cycle. They all focused in one way or another on men enacting a fascination with teenage boys through violence, either real or imagined. Oddly (in light of the subject matter), these books managed to create a radically liberating politics. They did not discuss politics, per se; instead, Cooper made the page itself into a political space.

In Cooper's novels the page is not just a secondary record of thoughts, but a primary realm of action. It may be the only place his ideals can get worked out--the last shared space not delimited by laws and habits hostile to anarchism. Cooper is an anarchist. He is terminally suspicious of power. But he lives--we live--in a world so deeply matrixed by struggle and hierarchy that even something as simple as a dinner conversation inevitably sinks down the toilet of power and conflict. Hemmed in by this reality, an anarchist can either become a total asshole, or he can look for social spaces in which that dynamic is undone. Cooper finds his on the written page.

While reading--silent, solitary--we become available for ideal politics. Specifically, we allow a dissolution of

authority (as meanings are generated by both reader and writer) and enter relationships that dismantle our ability to simply dominate or submit. The conventions of fiction--that the author is not the sole agent of this world; that this space is independent of subjectivity even as it makes a home for our own; that the author is both present and absent at once--abet this transformation. The potential for ideal politics exists on any page, but few writers make it happen.

Paradoxically, Cooper does so by configuring a rigorously structured narrative, one that neither “triumphs” over conventions (as I believe the fictions of John Barth or Kathy Acker do--let it be said that Dennis Cooper doesn’t share my view of Barth or Acker) nor uncritically enacts them. He does not fight battles: Pressures and expectations are accommodated, and an exacting laxness prevails. His language is common, the stuff of the world outside the book, and never saddled with the surging ambition of lyricism. At the crucial level of the sentence, Cooper’s language constructs--over and over--an attenuated space in which the author never entirely succeeds nor completely fails to master meaning. Freed of mastery, readers relax into compromised positions. Cooper shows us the shapes that love takes when it forsakes power.

Seen in this light, the dynamics of Cooper’s central

drama--passive boys getting axed by inquisitive men--must be reconsidered. Typically, critics have identified Cooper with the murderous men (whom Cooper sometimes perversely names "Dennis"), thus objectifying the aimless teens. But that name--"Dennis"--is hung on the jerry-rigged frames of these characters: like Buster Keaton's expressionless face, it is a screen that will not speak. Behind it lies a vacancy, or some profound kind of terror, but never a dwelling place for the author. Cooper is elsewhere, with the boys. I don't mean he's an eternal adolescent or wants to figure boys out; I mean he's interested in the risks and intimacies of yielding, of passivity amid violence. His texts recline before the reader, splayed by our prying eyes, so that the author stands on the same verge as those boys, able to see and possibly understand forces that would pinion and eviscerate him, yet unwilling to take up weapons or struggle. What is real anarchism like in a world of power--that is, in the world where we live? It's like being a boy in a Dennis Cooper novel.

And now comes *My Loose Thread*, Cooper's first novel that's actually about kids. There is no "Dennis." The teens are positioned in relation to each other, not to a Godlike power. The speaker is a boy, Larry, in love with his own younger brother, Jim, and a lot of confusion and violence radiates out from this central

engine. Adults, more numerous than in the George Myles cycle, occupy a kind of mute horizon, surrounding the circumscribed space of Larry's actions like the padding that lines a mental patient's cell.

Power here is muffled and pervasive--smeared around--not neatly located in a murderous man. It bursts out at the most inopportune times, in flurries of violence or humiliation sometimes abetted by talk, sometimes defused by it. For Larry, neither the potential collectivity of talk nor the brutality inherent in love and family ever thoroughly obviates the other; both simply spiral forward, unceasing. The swarming multivalence of *My Loose Thread* has the interesting retroactive effect of exposing the strict, nearly geometric organization of power in Cooper's earlier books.

The George Myles cycle showed us a man, an artist, alone with himself, arranging power and its renunciation on the written page. *My Loose Thread* immerses us in a social world--it is the ocean to Cooper's earlier fishtank. Same water, same fish, but now no scientist.

Cooper's masterful command of conversation gives this book the sumptuous density and pleasure of a Jane Austen novel. Like Austen, Cooper has chosen a narrow social stratum and mastered its speech. He's able to map the vast canvas of his characters'

ambitions and frustrations simply through talk and its failure. He also shares Austen's gift for narrative elegance and concision.

This echo of Austen amplifies Cooper's unlikely similarity to one of his contemporaries, Alan Hollinghurst. In *The Spell*, Hollinghurst examined the privileged men of London's gay nightclubs through the nuances of their speech in an elegant narrative (like *My Loose Thread*, organized around the pastoral duality of town and country); his novel's ending is as surpassingly ambivalent as Cooper's. Both writers dwell on people too often dismissed as dumb or inarticulate and reveal their rich particularity. They humanize those we would dismiss, pursuing what is ultimately a radical political agenda.

Turning a Life into a Living
 (with Lisa Roberstson)

Dear Mmmtttjbw,

Returning from an afternoon visit to Courbet's painting *The Artist's Studio*, we walked across the Passerelle Solferino as dusk gathered and suddenly the light on the teak bridge planks changed the city into a familiar room where once we chatted together, sipped champagne cocktails, shared a cheerfully coloured pill, visited glass houses. We thought of your love of hotels. You were almost gnostic. We wore a pretentious coat. We wanted to use style to please you. We made style devour lucidity, turn cabins into bridges and bridges into cabins, think an impossible architecture. But it wasn't impossible. We made those cabins and we made their origins, and we called them tables or schools. We made the bridges then we camped on them and twitched in our sleep like dogs. We made rooms for reading or for bathing, on weak porches and in attics. In a way we were the anthropologists of rooms. We were anthropologists of fumbling. Then we went swimming.

How does the architect begin is what we asked, how does the astrologist begin, and the friend. And you responded that the architect begins in heartbreak.

This felt believable. We've kept believing in the school that doesn't exist. It only needs a table and some stray desires.

We wanted to be fearless. For you we want to be fearless was the formulation. Was that a style?

You were the one who made it his work to decorate borders by crossing them. Against the protocols of transparency you set tables. We argued and we ate. We collected and we annotated. Books were everywhere. Soup would spill. Usually the cheese stank. Afterwards the table would be left strewn with rinds and greasy napkins and the odour of meat, the candle wax pooling, nutshells and stains. We would just leave it that way because we knew that decay and its exaggeration needed to be part of anything.

By never talking about the body we were always talking about our bodies. You sang out to your kid as he bounced on it bellybench bellybench bellybench. We ate boiled flowers. All of this was part of architecture. We lay on our belly in your attic and read Ruskin in summer.

Did any of this prepare you to enter the degradation of conditions?

Love,
OSA

Dear OSA,

I am reading *Testimony*, a book described as a “memoir by Dmitri Shostakovich.” I say “described” because I am told Shostakovich may or may not have had much to do with its authorship, and the story it tells may or may not have much to do with his life, as he understood and lived it. Although his was a very public life (he appeared on the cover of *Time Magazine* at the height of WW II, dressed in his volunteer fire brigade uniform, getting ready to defend Leningrad against the Nazis) it is difficult to attach any of his public life firmly to his private biography, the life he understood himself to be living.

Composing and performing under Stalin for most of his creative life, Shostakovich was obliged to “author” a great deal of writing, public speech, and possibly also music, that was not his. He would say the words; he would sign the letters and declarations; he would author the composition— — but they came from others, from the State. The words were effectively Stalin’s. But Shostakovich, as an internationally celebrated Soviet composer, had to lend his face and body and voice and biography to the stories Stalin preferred.

Among other things, *Testimony* is a moving account of Shostakovich's pleasure in being a Soviet artist. However terrible the hardships (and in his life, as recounted in the book, they included famine, disease, and the constant threat of secret police action against him and every artist and composer he admired) Shostakovich brims with a genuine-seeming, wry appreciation of the special qualities a Soviet artist enjoys. They've got subject matter, for one. They've got a purpose. What they did mattered, intensely, at the highest levels of politics and culture, enough so that the cost of failure could be torture or death camps.

The book is actually very funny. The stories of colleagues negotiating freedom by trading secrets to police in public toilets, of enduring the almost random merry-go-round of praise and censure coming from Stalin, of mouthing platitudes in exchange for sheets of music paper to compose on, are grim, but leavened by his wry appreciation of human folly. "His" wry appreciation, I say, though, in fact, I don't know whose.

Who is the author of Dmitri Shostakovich's memoir? And who was the author of his life, as he lived it? And how did he manage to live inside his work under such intense pressure outside to shape him as a Soviet artist? I want art to matter. Right now, I think it does. The best evidence I have is how hard it has become to

live. Your letter to me is beautiful but it is also memorial, like something to be read at my funeral. It's all in the past tense, turning then on the question: Ddid all of that prepare us to "enter the degradation of conditions?"

Yes, I think it did. And that's what brought Shostakovich to mind. He lived a rich, long life in the degradation of conditions, and he managed to work. I like his attitude, and his life gives me a good perspective. This is better than Stalin, I tell myself. But who is writing my memoir?

Mmmmbdgdgey

Dear Mmmmmzbt Dew,

We're on a train near NY and it's stopped. There's grey snow melting in a gravel garbage-strewn ditch beside the tracks, and past the tracks a highway, four4 or six6 lanes, medium traffic moving smoothly. It's mild. Beside the tracks a low concrete brutalist building painted cream is entirely streaked with greenish vertical stains. There seems to be offices inside. The louvered blinds are bent, irregular. Generally the ugliness is monumental. A woman in the seat ahead of me discusses Uncle Joe's failed attempt to lose weight,

and Aunt Mary's cookie diet. I think that this whole thing is precisely the scene I've tried to leave for thirty-three³³ years, the reason I live in a shack in the middle of nowhere in France. But it's funny of course. The attempt to leave is funny, and so is the cookie diet, and so are the green stains. Naturally we've always been fleeing the present, which is why we need to write about it, why we need to transform the present, call it architecture or caesura or nilling. Now the woman is talking about her cousin who used to work on interesting chemicals at Dupont, and who now for three years has been working on extending lithium battery life.

My friend Peter said to me in the car on the way to the train this afternoon why do they call it late capital, since clearly it is just beginning. When I think that this landscape outside the stopped train is the beginning I realize that my romance feeling is the refusal of memory, or the attempt to master memory. It's pointless. A man in a white shirt and clipped dark hair comes out of the stained building to smoke a cigarette and check his cell. Now the woman in the seat ahead, her voice slightly squeaking, is talking about bridesmaids, and Harriet's daughter. The comedic clarity is almost classical. These nothing events that I abhor, they're what I am. The power system on the train has failed says an announcement and a man beside me

becomes angry, gets up and slams the toilet door then returns to his seat.

She passed out in Home Depot, and when she woke up, she couldn't find her kids, is the story now. She got too comfortable in her relationship. The more ornate the stories get, the more joyously the woman giggles. Trains speed past us periodically and the light dims.

Is this a scene you prefer to the Passerelle Solferino? Is this stopped present on Amtrak allegorical, like the paused scene in Courbet's image of his studio? I know how to make use of the crappy detritus because I have read Benjamin. But what if I've been faking it? I like the inhabitable fantasies you have built in your books and in your spaces, including the little studio you live in now. I liked the messy picnics. I like knowing that you are mixing your strong ginger vodka cocktail at 5 pm, just after swimming, and using the shaker you bought when Joe visited you. I do want to ritualize memory and I dislike that.

I recognize the life I believe myself to be living when I sense that this life is perceived by a friend. I don't know anything about Shostokovitch, but in that double life is friendship even possible? I think you are telling me that my purple description is not something that you recognize now. But we were both in those kitchens,

on those bridges. We did share the pill. Is friendship an agreement about a style of representing shared time? Now the darkening train has been stopped on the tracks for more than two hours. I'm paused in a banal passivity, waiting for the future, which will include countless comedies like this one. At very least, I hope I can still entertain you.

And I hope you're eating well.

love,
L

Dear L,

I'm clearly pushing back against something, but it isn't you. What then? This present tense is lovely (I have ridden that train, too, and got stuck when the power system failed) but so was O4SA's gorgeous past-tense evocation. I recognize myself and our lives in it, and it wasn't "purple." Friendship is an enchantment with styles of representation, an open heart, more so than an agreement about style, I think. I called it "memorial" not to mean shut away in the past, but because it evokes memory, brings the past into the present. But then, yes, I did tie it to my own funeral. So.

I'm angry that I'm writing this under deadline, and we should talk about that. Like you, I recognize the life

I believe myself to be living when I sense that this life is perceived by a friend. You have saved my life, many times now. I mean that literally. When our friendship is not with me – —materially, mentally, emotionally – —I can forget how I live. I hold your language in my head, and in my hand, to remind me. It’s powerful stuff, and it powerfully reminds me of a life I am kept from now, of borders I can’t cross, of places I am not welcome, rooms and tables where I will never rest or find pleasure. So, maybe that beckoned my morbid associations.

Matthew Stadler

I’m bedeviled both by endings and the impossibility of ending. Everything just seems to go on and on, becoming thinner and more dispersed but never stopping. It’s like some sort of reverse apocalypse – —no ending, ever. I am drawn to flirt with destruction, annihilation, to beckon an “end” that might be as crucial to “the life I believe myself to be living” as this ceaseless, ongoing productivity we are both caught in. So, yes, it’s getting clearer to me: maybe I’m pushing back against productivity – —or the framework that demands and organizes it – —which is no small thing. It’s a matter of life and death. And I’m angry. And your friendship means the world to me.

I’ve read that Shostakovich’s close friendships were intense and life-long. One was with Ivan Sollertinsky,

a Russian Jew who directed the Leningrad Philharmonic. Shostakovich dedicated one of his piano trios to him in 1943 (opus 67), a few months before Sollertinsky died in Siberia. The trio has a rich vein of klezmer music in it, which risked offending Stalin, alas no small thing. Shostakovich's friend and patron, Mikhail Tukhachensky, a powerful military leader, was killed by Stalin's secret police in 1937, just two months after Pravda condemned Shostakovich's opera "Lady MacBeth of Mtsensk," for "formalism." The unsigned review (usually an indication that Stalin himself had penned or dictated the words) warned the composer, "things may end very badly."

Shostakovich was not a brave or heroic man. After the Pravda threat and Tukhachensky's death he abandoned the symphony he'd been working on (the Fourth) and produced, instead, a stirring, glorious account of Soviet might, his Fifth Symphony, with the hand-written epigraph, "A Soviet artist's response to just criticism." It was a hit, easily his most popular work, and he was resuscitated as a new favorite of the Stalinist regime.

How does his life speak to me? More than a double-life, he seems like a man who has fled into a hall of mirrors so the assassins chasing him can never get a bead on his real body and shoot him. The cultural

economy he worked in was brutal and clear. He had to serve his masters or die. He never stood firm; he never fought battles, as did Soltzhenitzen, Brodsky, Anna Akmathova, or Nikolai Bukharin, the Trotskyist writer who endured three months of torture before agreeing to sign a confession that, when he was brought before the Great Leader to beg for his life, Bukharin retracted to Stalin's face.

Rather than fight, Shostakovich would offer whatever face he thought his attackers desired, concede defeat as quickly as possible, and return to his music — because his life was there. Or, one of his lives; he readily gave up the others — his biography, his public image, his measure in the eye of critics and contemporaries — to go on living in music. Shostakovich signed all the confessions and lived in music's capacity to outlast the system of production that had ensnared him, the Soviet cultural economy.

How is friendship possible in such a life? It's possible in music, in listening and playing, in the compositional tasks where Shostakovich sheltered the life that was his. His music was richly literary. His close friends were writers. He had a peevish distaste for other Soviet composers, especially Prokofiev. But writers were his drinking buddies, his confessors, his inspiration. He read and wrote and lived quietly with his wife and two

kids. And then, when necessary, he would put on his flat, affectless face, hide behind his thick glasses, and go out to perform “the Soviet artist” whenever it was asked of him, in order to survive.

We have no Stalin. Instead, we have the market, and once again you and I are writing for it. I’m telling you things you taught me. Or Susan Briante: “The market is a parasite that looks like a nest.” Our performance in the market swaps the vitality of the lives we are living for performance as producers of content as a commodity. You are part of my life; now I’m on deadline to turn those meanings into product. It can drain our writing of what it means and turn lived meaning into dead commodity. The market is no less brutal or indifferent to our lives than was its Soviet counterpart. Why should we perform our friendship on a deadline?

Of course it’s all voluntary. We are good market artists —and I mean this about myself, sincerely —always responsive to a just commission. Our commissioners are never dishonest, threatening, nor parasitical. Not at all. Their transactions have been generous and honest. They’re probably doing us a favour. We should be grateful there’s no Stalin and we can speak about these things openly. But the fact that we can talk about the market has not made us any more free. So, now I’m being an ungrateful jerk in public. And I think I should just erase this and write a sweet reply, but it’s too late for damage control. What would

Shostakovich do? He'd sign the thing and read it out loud in a monotone in public. A market artist's practical response to a just commission.

With love for you, much more so than anger at markets,
Matthew

Dear MMmttgw,

Why do I spell your name that way? Because when you did, when we started corresponding a million years ago, I was touched. You wanted all those extra consonants! So you took them. Why did I start as OSA? Maybe that was like Shostakovitch's thick glasses.

Pushing back is something I do understand, but so is withdrawing. Three years ago looking for cheap rent and some solitude, I went to live on the edge of fields near the crop-sprayers. I always keep trying to escape. I quit high school. I went as far west as I could when I was seventeen¹⁷ and lived in shacks. I started university at twenty-five²⁵. I quit that. I opened a bookstore. I closed it. I went freelance. That's when we met. You've helped me in this economy so thoroughly that a large part of my published work is there because of you. Yet, like you, I hate this economy more and

more. We're constrained to produce recognizable signs on deadline. The fees we're paid to do our work have not increased in twenty20 years; that is, if they exist now at all. We watch our friends who chose to work in academia have their labour and livelihoods devalued to the point of ridicule. We listen to our friends who are artists say the word market as if it is possible to make this condition relevant in a thought we'd wish to have. Now because of my dawdling and my bad scheduling we're way past this deadline, so I've passively forced you to comply. There are bigger reasons to be angry though.

All this moving I submit myself to --- is it escape, or nomadism in the current theoretical sense? I doubt it. It's exactly what the market constrains all of us to perform. A more and more thorough and metrical de-situation. And style, a topic I like to return too maybe too often --- what difference from the branding of one's own language? Refusal always feels ludicrously Romantic, as if it were possible to still believe in an outside, when there is no outside. Everything --- the weather, our immune systems, our syntax, our hormones --- is conditioned to collaborate with a network so thorough that it can't be called a system any longer, because a system has closure, and a discrete partitioning of components, and this situation seems to have replaced weather itself, to become

an unanswerably constant element, in the ancient sense of the word element — we have air, water, space, earth, fire — or simply the one element, capital. Capital as universal hormone. I have now used the word thorough many times. Conditioned is the wrong word too, since it suggests that there's a transitiveness to the world, that a distinction could be made between the decisive movement of abstract value towards unjust increase, and the propriety of bodies and the expressions of those bodies. No body's now different from the one element. There's no properness. Identity is the identification with the overriding element. I don't really want to use the word subjectivities, though that's the word that circulates in the seminars I teach. The question now is simply — what can each body do? Grow tumours, go into hiding? I tend to take my body into libraries when it is possible, in case ancient elements are maybe hiding there, and some kind of unquantifiable combustion or flux might suddenly transpire in the darkish stacks.

I think we both still believe that the unquantifiable combustion might happen, is already immanently sizzling in some interstice. Art and friendship might supply the infiniteisimal sites — but what if even those gnarliest, least answerable volatilities have been sucked into the one element? Is that what I've done by inviting you to correspond for this publication? Is there

anything left to write? The performance is awful in a certain way. But what if by staying with it we could say something that actually surprises us? I want to think that this writing's a possible frame for a clinamen. A new relationship to time can't be caused, and it can't be coaxed into being by a sentimental memorialism such as I am overly capable of reproducing. Here with my students I'm beginning to explore the idea of radical hospitality in a general economy. How can we give everything away, and expect nothing, in order to delight or to protect somebody, some bodies, strangers?. Can such a giving deregulate the one element? How is it possible to welcome somebody while refusing to shore up one's own identity? I know that when I have tried to welcome you, when you needed a place to withdraw to, it made me very afraid, because you were, dear old friend, in your extreme pain, suddenly and ultimately strange to me, and I was committed to being present for this terrible strangeness. It seemed I could only fail. I would rather go towards this fear, and failure, than towards anger. Is the friend the one who unexpectedly and unintentionally brings us to face our own fear and incapacity? I am a very fearful host. There's something about my relationship to writing in that statement, as well as my perception of love.

Yours, epicurean,
Lisa

Dear Lisa,

What a rich and welcome letter. I want to start with that image of strangeness, when I showed up at your door as a stranger, two decades into our friendship. I remember it so well. I had become strange to myself then, too. In terms of the “one element” you talk about – —and I think that is a better naming than the word “market” (implying primarily an economic condition) or “capital” (the same) or “alienation” (as if the problem was ours) – —events in my life then had suddenly left me exposed to the direct address of the one element. Your description, “a network so thorough it can’t be called a ‘system’ any longer, because a system has closure,” rings true.

I’ll define it this way – —the one element is whatever degrades the lives we know ourselves to be living, titrating them into disembodied fragments, alienates the fragments from us, and puts them into the service of ends we do not understand nor, often, even know. It is something like what Jacques Ellul called “technique” and it has exactly the totalizing properties you describe. This one element had turned to address me directly and claim dominion over my body; not just my productivity, my writing, my profitable interactions. And I refused to accede. Which is when I came to you, dear old friend. I was strange then because I was fleeing from my own body. I think you remember me hiding inside absurd layers of winter clothing,

behind a face of panic that must have looked impenetrable.

I've seen the same thing happen to homeless people and people without papers. Their abjectness is sometimes simply a determined effort to flee the site that is under attack, which is their own bodies. I have been through hard times, so I'm apt to exaggerate some of my own suffering; but I think it is legitimately the subject of our letters. My experience of attack legitimately opened a window onto the mundane violence of this one element, the blunt inhumanity of it, and I have had to speak of it ever since. We are right to inspect it, speak of it, to try and delineate and limit this one element so that we may write something else, by writing the lives that are ours.

The cocktails you mentioned in your second letter, that I drink everyday at 5 pm (or near enough), and the ten laps I swim every day at 3:30 pm (or near enough), and the piece of old Dutch cheese that I eat with dark grained bread every morning at 10 am (or near enough) are all part of the gradual process of reclaiming my body as my own, finding myself and my safety there. My knowledge of truth and of the life I live was repudiated, and I was asked to accept and live a story that is strange and horrifying to me: to live it in my body. I've literally had to strategize the reclaiming of

my body as home to the life I know myself to be living. I had been protected from this degree of violence by my good fortune, my economic privilege, and the white, male body I was born into. Such a body is generally not up for grabs. And always I had my productivity, my product and profitable relations, to offer. I could toss them into the ever-opened maw of the market, and live comfortably. I even had a house, and could offer it to others as a site of friendship. Many people are born into bodies stripped of this privilege, as you know and have shown me in myriad ways. To be born poor, or paperless, or black in America or female in Afghanistan (the list is as endless as the list of nations and cultures) can rob you of the body's sanctuary, simply as a condition of living.

Matthew Stadler

So, what does this have to do with the privilege we are enjoying now, the chance to write letters for pay, for colleagues we admire, in a project we have high hopes for? What kind of spoiled jerk would connect the inconvenience of a deadline to the suffering of homeless and impoverished people? Any comparison between the two is absurd, and I'm not suggesting it. I'm acknowledging, though, that the choices and exchanges we make in work are part of the same general metabolism that devours human life. Your apt image was "capital as universal hormone." Our negotiations with capital are where our choices feed this

metabolism, or not, or both. We're not tainted, like Nike paying children starvation wages to die sewing sneakers; we're just complicit. We live on the fat of this metabolism, and if our intelligence or our ethics are going to have any articulation in the lives of people around us, it will happen by us staying awake to the fact that this "one element" which dehumanizes and abuses the dispossessed is the same one element we find digesting our lives into "a living." You write in an old stone farmhouse beneath the crop-sprayers of big agriculture. I can be imprisoned if I publish the wrong thing. Our choices as writers are never in a world apart; but that is another fact you taught me long ago. I don't know how much of this story I've told you. In the months before I showed up as a stranger, my friend Dennis and I decided to build a table for some homeless dudes who lived in the park by my house. My reasons were self-serving. They were my neighbours (like a lot of homeless people, these four or five men, and two women, actually had a stable home (our park), yet the police claimed the right to arrest them in their home without cause) but I didn't want them in my hair. Their lives were too crazy for me. I liked them well enough and thought life would be easier without the daily spectacle of their random arrest or the impossible, and uncalled for, challenge of trying to change the way they lived. So, we built a sturdy picnic table, cleared out an ample margin of our backyard,

facing the park, and put up a sign saying anyone was welcome to use it. The sign also requested civility and a generous spirit of sharing, but we had no intention to (nor did we ever) monitor it nor organize the life there.

Since the table was mine, anyone sitting there could do whatever you'd normally, legally do at home. Which meant the homeless dudes could drink, sleep, read, picnic, play cards – —all the stuff that landed them in jail when they did it in the park. As with any other home, if they brawled, shot-up, sold drugs, or got too rowdy, the cops could come arrest them, or tell them to stop. I'd get in trouble: my house would go on the cops' radar as a crime site and I ran the risk of appearing complicit in crimes I had no intention of policing. But, like I say, I felt I knew these guys, and I trusted them.

The trust turned out to be well placed. Those at the table were better behaved than most of my property-owning neighbors. They were happy to have rights, and every minute of every day they acted that way. They'd get drunk and play cards and raise their tall-boys of horrible malt liquors to the frustrated cops who made a point of cruising slowly past the table every day, often pulling over to harass their old antagonists. I used to romanticize cops and criminals, seduced by

Genet's gorgeous prose, and thought Officer Garrison probably missed the intimacy of arresting Scotty and wrestling his heavy, drunk, one-legged body into jail every week or so. Maybe he did; but I don't romanticize cops any more. Officer Garrison's real frustration was Scotty's vitality, his joy. The poor and dispossessed are required to be miserable. Humanity is their crime — which is why their bodies are an offense — and now the cops had to witness the joy in their bodies every day without the power to throw what offended them in jail.

Scotty, especially, rubbed it in their faces. On Google Maps, you can see him sleeping on top of the table (go to 1420 North Emerson Street, Portland, OR, 97217, "street views," and look to your right), which he liked to do partly so his autonomous pleasure would bother Officer Garrison. He'd pretend to be asleep, and Garrison's frustrated shouts were answered only with silence and smug satisfaction. It's complicated, and not entirely healthy, and I was glad it was out of my hands. Scotty and his friends planted a little garden in the dirt by the table. They filled a box with dumpster-dive foods so anyone at the table could get some. They stocked a shelf with paperback sci-fi and detective fiction. I joined in that, too, donating some books I liked.

Was this an act of “radical hospitality?” If it was, it helped enormously that none of us brought the rhetoric and quickened metabolism that comes along with that swiftly circulating coin. It helped that I didn’t play host so much as I created the material circumstance in which others could host or be guests. I guess it was a “site” of radical hospitality, rather than an act of one. As an act – —and especially as the conscious act of an artist quickened by the ideas gathered behind this rhetoric – —the lives we are living are more swiftly subsumed by the professionalization and canon-building that seems to follow every brilliant artistic act like a lawyer trailing ambulances. Site or act, things ended badly, and I don’t have that home anymore.

To build a site enables human relations apart from the peculiar logic of the self or the fun-house mirror of art practice (or police work, or community activism, or whichever profession we cultivate to give shape and meaning to our actions) offers to the self. I like making a site, putting it somewhere, and getting out of the way. It’s partly a Shotakovichian skittishness, keeping my body out of the cross-hairs. But it’s also a hunch about possible stances in relation to the devouring one element. Maybe the point is to generally go slower. I think my professional prose is mostly a site and not an act. I fuss over its design, its shape, its internal circulation, its entrances and exits. I place it in the world and

let people have their way with it. I suppress or obscure my concern about its effects. It's functionality as an act in the world does not matter to me so much as its integrity as a site. I love to encounter a generous, easy host, but I am not one. I'm not fearful so much as I'm formal. I impose form between myself and the guests, both as manners, politeness, "formalities," and in my focus on site. This is true, both at home, in my life, and in my writing.

Regarding Mmghgdgd: I remember when I started signing emails that way. It followed after I let my signature also become an indecipherable idiosyncratic scrawl. The initial feeling was one of giddy power. A signature has legal standing, and yet no one can dictate your "correct" signature. It is a rare thing — a site of legal agency granted to anyone who can move a pen. I delighted in exercising my agency, experiencing it fully every time I filled the legal requirement of "my signature" with the automatic writing of the moment. Then I found the same impulse emerging as I finished emails. My name is a gesture, more so than a name. It's typing "M" followed by a crashing dance of the fingers across the middle of the keyboard. I'm always amazed to see how much consistency there is in the result.

A strange pleasure! But yes, the reason was simply that: It made me smile. However, our exchange has shown me it was also something else. Like Shostakovich's confusing performance of a public self, it was a

refusal to establish a clear, actionable self.

Your comparison to OSA is apt. Absenting my “real name” allowed me some liberty that my identity precluded. I’d like to be as nimble and graceful (and gorgeous) as OSA, but I have never managed to use it that way. This is, nevertheless, an urgent-seeming strategy. Yes, we need to offer a clear identity as safe harbour for the friendships that rely on us. But we are also in the “one element,” and are obliged to conduct a kind of scrambling to “make a living” without depleting our lives (that safe harbour we provide for friendship).

I was not surprised to see your first letter, satisfying our generous commissioners’ needs, came from OSA, addressed to Mmmtttjbw. And I am moved that our pursuit of the correspondence has gradually drawn us from that scrambled space toward the core of our friendship, arriving in the stable harbours we offer each other, the lives we fiercely protect and live, so that friendship can live. For that I thank you, and I thank the generous commissioners of our work.

Love, Matthew

Dear Matthew,

I think we need both sites and acts. I love Arendt’s

idea of the act as a political beginning— – that’s what I hope at best for my published words— – that they might mark or annotate or point towards possible beginnings. The words – —yours, mine, all the texts we love — move in the wild space between subjectivities, changing us both, old friend. Words host us.

Love,
Lisa

Floored: Petra Blaisse

What site is more sacred than the family home? Or more profane? Maybe “overloaded” is the correct term for this modest arrangement of parts that functions as a locus of social control and training. Home is the ground where we grow from the undisciplined, useless creatures we are born as, to become disciplined and effective consumers and citizens. The family home is our school, our hospice, our prison, our church, and our grave. Here we “grow up.” All the intelligence and design of the culture we’re born into is trained on this intimate site, housing a deceptively simple social formation of a few or maybe a dozen people, where parents model what children must become.

Some exemplary family homes are preserved as “house museums.” Like period rooms, the house museum is a distilled fiction, preserved as an ersatz-scientific specimen, an “authentic” creature captured from the wilds of time and put under glass so that future generations might inspect the original. “The original,” and “authenticity” are heritage preservation’s great mythological concepts—an awkward inheritance from the commodity culture of art, where a fixed and certifiable identity is a marketable thing. As in art museums, in the “house museum” we also look for “a real Rietveld,” say, or an “original Puiforcat,” but this

habit runs contrary to the ways that houses are actually lived in. The “house museum” is part art gallery and part peep-show, in both cases a staged, theatrical recreation of an idea of living.

In the Netherlands, one of the most important is the Huis Sonneveld. This well-preserved 1933 family home in Rotterdam sits beside its current owner, Het Nieuwe Instituut, and nearby the larger Boijmans Museum, fortuitously sited in the city’s “museum park,” which was all cow pastures when a well-to-do industrialist family, the Sonnevelds, had their house built there. It was designed by Brinkman and van der Vlugt, also architects of the nearby Van Nelle Factory, where Albertus Sonneveld was a director. Albertus and his wife, Gesin Grietje Bos, raised their daughters here in the big, light, modern house now regarded as a textbook example of the Dutch Nieuwe Bouwen style. In 1955, as empty nesters, they sold it and moved into a new apartment in the city center.

It has been a house museum since 2001. Under the stewardship of Het Nieuwe Instituut, it has also become the site of artistic interventions, two so far, by notable contemporary Dutch designers. This year it is Petra Blaisse and her firm Inside/Outside. Their intervention is a modest but stunningly important piece of work, both for Blaisse and for anyone interested in the

pathology of the family home.

The Nieuwe Bouwen—in which young Dutch architects, including Jaap Bakema and Mart Stam, learned from Frank Lloyd Wright how to bring a liberatory geometry and clarity to the claustrophobic forms that, in the 19th century, had trapped the family inside of dark, cluttered rooms—was an architecture of light, air, and space. It's clean, rectilinear geometry would become familiar to most of the world as a kind of “modernism,” and its underlying drivers were all hygienic. The Nieuwe Bouwen is a clear, forthright architecture, notable for its big windows, flat roofs, and well-proportioned geometric volumes. Rectitude and health are it's program throughout. In a country packed to the canals with quaintly leaning old houses that all seemed to be darkly collapsing into one another, the Nieuwe Bouwen promised to deliver a straight spine and good posture to the next generation of Dutch children, so they might grow tall and strong.

Huis Sonneveld carries out this far-reaching program with a modesty and grace that is beguiling. Its geometry is refined but never severe. The rooms are large, but the house doesn't feel especially big. It's never boastful. Doorways and ceiling heights, stairs and corridors—every frame for the human body, in its passage through space—are rectilinear, generous,

and balanced, always. One feels the back straighten and the head bob up attentively, upon entering these rooms. The good posture of its respectable owners was imposed not only by the architecture, but also by the modernist furniture the Sonneveld family famously filled their new house with. These tubular metal tables and straight-backed chairs, the frankly geometric divans and hard, rectilinear ottomans were not furniture for slouchers. Guests and family alike can only be imagined in postures of erect attention here. The surfaces are clean, the walls true, and everything around is flooded with light. If the Sonneveld children ever sat on the floor, surely they did so with their legs tucked neatly beneath them, in a posture of alertness and sobriety.

Into this house museum—this confluence of design and living— comes Petra Blaisse and *Inside/Outside*, to make their “artistic intervention.” The result deepens the rich estuary of design, living, and art within which the firm’s best work has always transpired.

Collaborating with large architectural firms, municipalities, and other clients that dwarf them in size and resources, *Inside/Outside* has always waded deep into the shifting, uncertain terrain where design, art, and living fruitfully mix. Because their collaborations are colored, if not completely determined, by the pragmat-

ic needs of their larger partners (or tailored to the hopes of private clients), Inside/Outside's work is almost always called "design." But from the very start, when Petra Blaisse founded the firm working alone to make gardens for a Dutch medium-security prison, the rigor, conceptual clarity, and restless curiosity of a superbly skilled artist have provided the quiet engine room of the firm's interventions. It is astonishing to see the steadily maturing capacities of this artist so powerfully and gracefully expressed in a gesture as modest and direct as what she has done at Huis Sonneveld.

Matthew Stadler

The strategy was simple. Blaisse said, "as soon as I left, after the first visit with this commission, I knew I had to put mirrors on the floor. It was clear immediately." In this bastion of "light, air, and space," Blaisse would double the light, air, and space—using mirrors. Her mirrors now cover the floors in the bigger public rooms where the family entertained. They also circle two groups of trees outside, like small reflecting ponds the trees grow from. And they continue into the upstairs family quarters, notably exempting the children's rooms. (Blaisse also removed the gauzy curtains that gave the first floor some privacy, so all the big windows are now exposed.)

I visited Huis Sonneveld with Blaisse on a sunny afternoon in January, and was immediately drawn upstairs

by my natural curiosity to look into the family's private quarters. The spectacle of mirrors beneath our feet is at first disorienting, and then disturbingly bright and festive, as though a temporary discotheque might lay claims to the place later. Treading atop our inverted twins, suspended in the mirror's doubled space and doubled light (when we ought to be touching ground), the body floods with feelings of disorientation and mild indecency. The mirrored house feels dangerous, even transgressive. By contrast, the children's rooms, which Blaisse left alone, are sober and reticent. They radiate a quiet privacy and discretion that kept me from looking into them for very long. Instead, I followed the long, mirrored hallway to the parents' spacious quarters.

Huis Sonneveld is a clever, efficient engine of social control. Open looking, it nevertheless hosts two completely separate circulation patterns, so that the family and the help need never see each other. More, the divisions between public space (first floor), family space (upper), and the heart of the house—the parent's private quarters, which in the bright wet Dutch air felt like a ship captain's command post—are as rigorous as they are subtle. No child could walk the long corridor to the parent's door innocently; and if they did, they might never find where, inside that sequence of nested interiors, the fascinating, private individual

they called “mother” or “father” was sequestered.

Children inhabit space robustly. They look under things. They lie on the floor, “space out,” notice the inessential, do nothing, and leave a trail. I certainly did that as a child, and standing in the Sonneveld parents’ dressing room, gazing into the tall vertical mirror—that personal panopticon before which the Sonneveld parents daily stood, inspecting their bodies in this most private moment of internalized discipline, instructed by the hard vertical glass what shape and posture would carry them rightly into the world, gauging and grooming their rectitude and presentability—I suddenly recalled the many times when I, as a child, would sneak into my parents bedroom to look at myself in their mirror. What a thrilling transgression! It led to nothing, but was palpably different from the many casual encounters I had with other lesser mirrors around the house.

In the parents’ dressing room at Huis Sonneveld, *Inside/Outside*’s intervention reveals its most disturbing and far-reaching aspect: The mirrors lie down. You see that fact clearly here, when faced with the painfully preserved vertical mirror that can never, ever relax. By contrast, the *Inside/Outside* mirrors recline, almost obscenely, into pointless complication on the floor where, casually and inadvertantly, they reveal the

incompleted parts of the original house's design—the unpainted under-sides of the wardrobe, the tiny filth hiding where cleaners could never find it, all of the gaps and fissures in Huis Sonneveld's virtuosic performance of the Nieuwe Bouwen's hygienic regime—all the things that children see. In doing so, the mirrors expose the rigorous control this regime necessarily imposed onto that dark, clotted, airless, and collapsing thing, the human body.

Blaisse's decision to exempt the children's bedroom from her powerful instrument of revelation is the key gesture that clarifies and expands the insights offered by the mirrors of *Inside/Outside*. Her deft intervention strikes at the heart of Huis Sonneveld—the parents' quarters—sparing the children, to reveal a pathology that so many of us still share, in all of our hopes and intentions to act as “good parents,” to become presentable in society—which is to make our children presentable (a mission that any healthy child could care about less).

One can well imagine the primal scene, the puzzled, mildly offended parent looking down at the spaced-out child (whether in the Sonneveld family home or in our own):

What are you doing on the floor?

Nothing.

Inside/Outside's mirrors restore a capacity of vision in the house that was lost as the children grew up and away, learning to direct their gazes and corral their messy bodies, their energies, inside the adult mandate for pure, responsible spectation. Children, even in so fastidious and hygienic a family as the Sonnevelds, are smutty, violate creatures. The family home is the site of their discipline, their learning to "grow up." And now, as a house museum, Huis Sonneveld redoubles its mission—now it functions as a kind of remedial school for adults who might have slipped back into infantile decadence. It provides us an object lesson in the internalization of middle-class discipline and hygiene.

Matthew Stadler

Blaisse says she intends to keep the traces of visitor's footsteps marking the floor-mirrors as they wander through the house. These "desire lines," the kind that urban planners always find marring their geometrical parks, reveal where the human body actually wishes to go—the human body, that inevitably transgressive, straying, impossible-to-train thing, in all of its useless, non-instrumentalized wanderings. Children's lives are little more than a chaos of desire lines, leading often to nothing, or none of our business. At Huis Sonneveld

we will begin to see, in *Inside/Outside*'s floor mirrors, the traces of our own desires, this capacity we have that never dies nor even diminishes as we grow older, but can only be driven deeper inside. By putting some mirrors on the floor, Petra Blaisse restores our vision onto the often disorienting pleasures of being human in space, and reveals the rigorous training and discipline that Nieuwe Bouwen design hoped to impose.

Why I Live by the City Dump

I live by the garbage dump in the ugliest city in Europe. The reasons why became clear as I read the legal definition of “buttocks”—“The area of the rear of the human body which lies between two imaginary lines running parallel to the ground when a person is standing...”

The architect, Elizabeth Diller, whose research gave me this legal definition, goes on to quote the law’s definitive mapping of the butt, the legal instrument through which the State of Florida prohibits the butt’s representation in public. As Diller observes, “unlike land law, where property lines protect the space of the private from transgressions of the public, the property lines that define the socially ‘decent’ body defend public space from transgressions of the privates(s).”

As often with legal rules, the crude ill-fit of the law’s language with the nuanced and vibrant thing that is my butt, struck me. My butt is never so neatly contained as the government’s strictly measurable rectangle of space. My butt is much bigger and less manageable than their law can describe. For example, my butt is an odor: dynamic, unmapable because ever-changing. My butt is also an idea whose power far exceeds

the narrow boundaries of its visibility. My butt is my permanent home address, and I park it next to the garbage dump in the ugliest city in Europe.

I am sitting on my butt right now, as I write this. So am I hiding? The only surveillance camera at the dump is old, poorly aimed, and records nothing. I can stare at it from where I sit without ever being seen. This camera is the state's lazy eye, a stroke victim, the stupid side of government, drooping from its light post. It is pleasant here by the dump, where everything is neglected.

Touchstones for Work
(coincidentally, also good tips for reading)

What matters is in front of your face.

We have all the time in the world.

Reach for the near-at-hand. Everything is there.
Always show up. Feed your body.

Listen.

Every person and every place is global. Horizontal,
not vertical. Keep your eyes level. Open stance. Relax.

Love your work.

— Matthew Stadler 1/24/2012

Volume Two: Collective Forms

Ghosttown:
The Radical Horizontality of Red76

Ghosttown was a mystical project in which a group of Portlanders conjured a shared narrative (what we call, aggregately, “the city”) by inviting others to enter a market of memories, dreams, and stories—as both producers and consumers. It featured a “store” where clothing and stories were exchanged; a potluck soup kitchen, stocked by its users; a mishmash of parties where music, movies, and recollections could be shared; a free newspaper that reported on the project; and, most importantly, a name that congealed all of this activity under the rubric of art—this was Ghosttown, a project by the art collective Red76. As art, Ghosttown fell squarely into the realm of what Nicolas Bourriaud called “relational art,” a form that is notoriously difficult to consume. One participates in relational art, giving as much as one takes. There is little to buy. Its materials are common (things like friendship, information, opinions, etc.) and rarely accrue market value. This art eludes critique in a number of ways, some of them deliberate, which has become a crisis for the critics of art.

As an economy, Ghosttown pointedly displaced the cool anonymity of money with the intractable intimacy of sharing and giving. Objects that are normally

stripped of their histories by the abrasive cleansing actions of money—"I bought it; it's mine now; what do I care where it came from"—here arrived tethered to the long, ropey strands of other people's lives. A pair of infant pants available at the Ghosttown store carried a label with a boy's name and the message "I pooped my pants." In what sense were these pants "free"? Only in the sense that one need not give money to take them away. This was the first interesting revelation of Ghosttown: It showed us that the absence of money does not make things "free." Indeed, the opposite is true. Money frees us from the feelings and needs of others; without it, we are condemned to the burden of other people. In Ghosttown one had to sit and talk and listen. Commerce was never easy.

Broader revelations about art opened up as Ghosttown fell apart into the rich chaos Red76 cultivated by failing to police anything, including themselves. While the collective has a shifting membership, anchored by founder Sam Gould's involvement in all its projects, this iteration principally featured Sam and an unusually skilled cartoonist and amateur historian named Khris Soden. Sam and Khris were psyched about everyone's contributions. When someone had no dish for the potluck, they still ate. Ditto at the store: You could get what you wanted with a promise, though no one would ever take your money. Sam said

Ghosttown was art, Khris said it wasn't. If only a few people showed up for an event it didn't matter. This ease with the malleability of form and the contingency of relationships—some would say “winging it”—had its material corollary in the disposable news circular and scattered detritus of the project: cardboard clothing tags; dinner sign-up sheets penned directly on sheetrock at the store; Xeroxed hand-scrawled flyers for the jukebox play lists. Red76 used whatever was abundant or near-at-hand. This deft material choice gave a hum of lightness and optimism to the whole project, a take-it-for-granted sense of abundance and possibility that disabled any programmatic readings of the work as a site of struggle, whether social, political, or artistic.

Matthew Stadler

Such ease can also be read as shallowness, or a failure to engage either politics or art history, a charge I have seen leveled at most of the art that interests me. But lack of depth is also this work's greatest accomplishment. Ghosttown was a rigorously attenuated enactment of surface, one that produced a particular political and aesthetic space quite unlike that which we arrive at through digging deeper. Red76 evacuated depth by becoming dauntingly present on the surface. This strange effect—in which old hierarchies of meaning, hallmarks of modernism such as irony, repression, revelation, and subtext, are rendered nonsensical—

marked every interaction. The face of Ghosttown wore a benign, foolish smile, bright eyes, the blank stare of the fully evolved hippie. Anyone who looked behind it or beyond it was missing the point. To stand in the warmth of this regard was to become, de facto, awesome.

The high-wire act of becoming the engine of such a redemptive gaze is ultimately much more than either a politics or an aesthetics; it is a metaphysics, a commitment to skate eternally on a surface of immediate presence because that is where we are, together, and it is really real and really really great here right now.

The ascendance of surface and complete unintelligibility of depth goes some way toward explaining why art practices, once comfortably confined by conceptual and formal boundaries—including, crucially, the authority of the artist (the better to channel the artist's meanings upward to the critics and curators who could view them from on high, or downward into the pleasing shadow land of the artist's psyche)—now spread ravenously outward, indifferent to biography or locale, staging themselves serially across a vast horizontal plain of interchangeable actors and opportunities: the museum, a storefront, your bedroom, online, a scrap of paper. All blossom as sites of meaning when the artist arrives, bringing his beaming face with him.

These actions leave little trace and have generated a corresponding crisis in the discourse around them, which is to say art criticism.

Writer Claire Bishop nicely described this crisis in her essay “The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents” (first published in *Artforum*, February, 2006). Awash in a sea of socially-based projects, similar to *Ghosttown*, about which critics were either silent or sharply divided, Bishop asked “is there ground on which the two sides can meet?” That ground, she suggests, is the proper domain of art criticism. But art criticism needs an artist to talk about. So, what to do with work that, as Bishop puts it, is “based on an ethics of authorial renunciation”?

One such project, praised by curator Maria Lind, is Istanbul-based Oda Projesi’s neighborhood picnics. Bishop describes the picnics as “reducing [Oda Projesi’s] authorial status to a minimum.” She compares their “aesthetic thinness” to the greater “conceptual density” of Thomas Hirschhorn’s collaborative “Bataille Monument” (2002), which he carried out in the Turkish communities of Kassel. Hirschhorn’s robust assertion of his own authorship, in part through bringing a raft of materials—texts, working documents, objects and evidence of Hirschhorn’s hand—into the mix, gave the work Bishop’s desired density.

Bishop is not alone in her preference for unambiguous authorship and the depth it can provide. Artists such as Hirschhorn, Phil Collins, or Artur Zmijewski (all praised in Bishop's essay) attend assiduously to the maintenance of their authority, providing texts and material evidence of their "hand" that assures the work a certain conceptual depth. More interesting, even collectives that implicitly or explicitly critique the notion of individual authorship (groups like 16Beaver, in New York, The Public School, or the Bruce High Quality Foundation) will assemble great heaps of textual materials—archives, catalogues, books, whole libraries—to restore depth to the thin surface of social interaction comprising the site of their work.

But Red76 or Learning to Love You More (a collaborative project of Harrell Fletcher and Miranda July), or One Pot (a ravenously expansive food and table project based in Seattle, Washington)—artists who, with the exception of Fletcher, have little or no formal training—tend not to add depth but, instead, obsessively broaden their reach. Critics compensate by restoring depth to the image of the artist and then enacting a shadow play of romantic heroism that concentrates meaning in the shell of these artists' sensibilities and inner lives, which are then targeted as sites of critique.

Criticism, here, is a step behind, searching for the

familiar game that art has offered up at least since the 19th century: the heroically authoring artist. The hunter needs its prey. In need of depth, Bishop scolds artists for losing interest in it. But rather than scolding the artist for evolving, maybe we could look to the new architecture of these practices to find models for the critic's continued relevance. Ghosttown was interesting because it failed to engage Bishop's dichotomy at all. While it did not assert broad authoring powers, nor was it "based on an ethics of authorial renunciation." Far more interesting, it was indifferent to that struggle.

Matthew Stadler

How to sort out the ambiguity of authorship in projects that enlist the creative energies of non-artists under the unifying banner of a single name? It is foolish to propose an equivalence between artists and the communities they work with, where no such equivalence exists. Authorship is never a fact; it is politics, a negotiation of power. And so, while it might be progressive politics to map this ecology as completely as possible and give names and credit to everyone involved, it is sometimes pragmatic to draw the line sharply and claim sole authorship. Neither of these strategies is any more virtuous than the other, but both presume that the drama of authorship is an interesting one, the consequences of which are at least desirable enough to fight over. In this they exist well

within the normative strategies of contemporary art, as Bishop understands it.

But there are other positions, including that of Red76 or the dead rock star who kept shifting the spelling of his name from Kurt to Kurdt to, beautifully, Curddt. These are not pseudonyms. They, and such related nominal acts as the “Museum of Jurassic Technology,” “Ethyl Eichelberger,” “Hakim Bey,” and “The MOST,” are more akin to drag acts, wherein the proposition is sufficient in itself, a moment when you become, as dramatist and drag actor Charles Ludlum said, “a living mockery of your own ideals,” adding, “if not, you’ve set your ideals too low.” (Oda Projesi is likely not among these; their name literally means “Project Room,” which is what the three founding artists, Özge Açıkkol, Güneş Savaş, and Seçil Yersel, shared.)

Such nominal propositions are unwieldy and do not yield clear narratives of authorship. They play out contingently in the realm that Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa called the *drama em gente*, the drama of people—that negotiated, decentered social space that, not coincidentally, is the very same one within which projects like Ghosttown are enacted. Red76 might arrive at the table where dinner has been served, bringing art to the potluck. But who’s dinner is it? The *drama em gente* has no single director. Similarly, a

poem might come from Pessoa, but its meanings wait on the reader. Further, the poem's authorship exists outside of Pessoa, a faith he enacted by giving different names (what he called "heteronyms") to different acts of authorship. Pessoa wrote under at least 70 heteronyms, including four separate major bodies of work he composed as Ricardo Reis, Alvaro de Campos, Fernando Pessoa, and "their master," Alberto Caeiro.

Pessoa's heteronyms destabilize the heroic drama of authorship. They are not pseudonyms (literally, "false names") but identify an autonomous, authoring mind. Heteronyms cannot be resolved the way pseudonyms can, as further evidence of the author's potency. When Marcel Duchamp reveals the "true" identity of Rose Sélavy, Duchamp's star rises. Not so with heteronyms. Heteronyms muddle the field with paradox. For Kurt Cobain to insist on "Curddt" was to oblige those who would venerate him to also obscure him beneath an error. Today's most interesting social practices employ the Pessoaan heteronym and abjure the pseudonym. And the heteronym renders Bishop's complaint irrelevant. The heteronym propagates itself by repetition, error, and profligate naming, while never constructing the architecture of concealment or revelation. It is not a liar so much as it is a lie. But art history prefers a liar to a lie.

Beyond that, Ghosttown opened a second rupture in the drama of authorship, one that stemmed from the everydayness of their exchanges. Their theater of redemptive good times thrived among the most common and widespread activities. And so, cooking and eating a meal, or swapping clothes, or sharing time at a movie or at a bar, became “their work.” The more ingenious Red76 got at integrating their art into the varied terrain of the social, the less and less obvious were any “ruptures” or “transformations” that could be easily accounted for and credited to them. The most perfect dinner party at Ghosttown would be the one that transpired without the host ever knowing it was an art project.

Yet Ghosttown was an art project, very much like earlier ones by Group Material (“The People’s Choice,” 1981) or more saliently, Harrell Fletcher, the Portland-based artist who brought neighborhood garage sales into a borrowed storefront and asked the people running them to write stories out on the price tags. What sort of claim should Red76 make for borrowing from a Harrell Fletcher project that, in the first place, was borrowed from Group Material and cobbled together out of the preexisting impulses and actions of his neighbors? This is not a question about ethics. The neighbors could care less. Artists and arts institutions, on the other hand, care deeply about authorship and

so this is a question about the terms of meaning and value in art. How do we trace the lineage of these ideas and locate them meaningfully in relation to others? Claire Bishop hopes that the artist will solve the problem by laying claim clearly to authorship. But, somehow, for some reason, artists disregard her needs.

Red76's general indifference to accountability or formalization poses a final affront to the needs of art discourse. Content to occupy the present properly, Ghosttown took little care to honor art history or make plans for its future. No doubt, the seductions of the art market will continue eliciting any trace of authorship—and its lucrative evidence locker of supporting materials—that it can from these practices. And so we will see gallery shows of artifacts: left-over signage, framed karaoke set lists, retroactively signed or editioned newsprint circulars. But I hope that the primacy of this residue will recede as artists become more confident of their own priorities and values. Certainly materials will proliferate; but their importance will be as the engine of an infinitely varied, sprawling horizontal terrain, rather than as a vault in which all meanings and value are stored.

The ascendance of the horizontal—and note the absurd paradox of this formulation—is a turn that completely changes the possibilities and conduct of

meaningful artistic practice. If we are witnessing a repudiation of depth and verticality as viable modes of thought or being, this marks an important shift in the history of art, a turn with enormous political and artistic implications. Ghosttown's indifference to struggle or the enactment of political and aesthetic depth suggests that this is, in fact, the new terrain we are faced with.

I Think I'm Dumb

In 1993 the Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas published his “Manifesto of Bigness” in a magazine called *Wiederhall*. They convened a conference in Rotterdam later that year to discuss “bliss” and some of Rem Koolhaas’s ideas. I was asked to comment on the Manifesto. In the talk I gave, I referred to some of the other conference talks - Bernard Cache’s discussion of vectors, Jeffrey Kipnis’s talk about artistic communities, and a few others - but mostly I tried to talk about the West in the US, where I think we have big architecture and big urban spaces.

Matthew Stadler

The title, of course, is Kurt Cobain’s trenchant revision of that tired old dictum of Descartes, and also a recipe for a certain kind of bliss. We enter this conference from so many directions, some of us astride vectors, that my instinct is to try and finesse a coherence out of it all. I would like to connect everything that has been said before me but alas I can’t. I’m a novelist and I’m primarily interested in particulars. I have an appetite for the specific and the concrete. And yet here I am, obviously and easily seduced by abstractions like bliss.

When Bernard Cache made the little curve on the screen with his color markers, I was delighted, I think by the elegance of his gesture, and yet abstraction

seems to be what we were all flying toward on the wings of his particular charms. A series of curves would not have been enough without his larger generalizations which encompass and make coherent the amazing diversity of his gestures. We might have thought he was dumb if he'd just given us the shapes and no theory, and that is interesting to me.

I propose to be dumb without being stupid. Mostly I want to tell you about the city where I live, specifically what it's like to live in the built environment of Seattle. And then, afterwards, I'll toss together a generalized conclusion, a little theory hovel for all of us to cower in, which maybe can connect my experience to some of what else is being said today.

I thought the Rem Koolhaas manifesto 'Bigness' was not only intriguing and infuriating, but also would likely be common-ground for everyone involved with the 'Bliss' conference. My notes on the manifesto were as follows: 'I live next to the biggest building in the world' which is true. It's about thirty miles from my home in Seattle. I'm not sure how they calculate its bigness, I think it's the cubic footage inside, but there are postcards all over Seattle and Everett, the city where this building is, saying that it's the biggest. It's part of Boeing's factory for making airplanes. It really is huge, and thirty miles isn't far from my house, because

the freeway goes there directly. Everett is actually a kind-of northern extension of Seattle, I mean it's hard to tell where one ends and the next one starts.

Nothing out there is very far in any case, whether it's thirty miles or a hundred miles or down the block, it's all pretty much the same. You just get in the car and go. Almost everything in Seattle is big. The buildings, for example, though they're not much larger than buildings in the average American downtown (comparable to let's say Philadelphia or Minneapolis) are truly big, by which I mean they're built for beyond the demands of their function. They have an imperative toward size, independent of anything else. Downtown we have the usual army of decorative glass boxes none of which are ever full but each of which begs to dominate our attention, We've also got, and I think you might know this from the famous Seattle Supersonics basketball logo, the Space Needle. It's a 200-meter tall restaurant that seats about 300 people. It looks like an old pie-plate/UFO on metal stilts. Our other landmark is the Kingdome, which does seat a lot more people, around 50,000, but like the Space Needle its primary assertion is one of brute size.

So I live in a place with big things and I find that these buildings are dumb. That is, they're mute. They don't say anything to me except maybe a monosyllable like

‘mm’ or ‘um.’ They’re simply there and nothing else, and there is no back-side to them either. A lot of you have probably been to Seattle and you must have seen the mountain. It’s Mt. Rainier but it’s called ‘the mountain’ and I don’t know how exactly it links to the built environment I’ve described, but I must say it is the most dumbfounding, most mute, biggest bigness I have seen. It hides in the clouds and when it emerges, the guest from NYC in the passenger seat will look and say: ‘What is that?’. You can only say ‘It’s the mountain’. There is nothing else to say. What can you say? And I find these buildings have the same effect on me. It’s an effect that I think Rem Koolhaas described well in his ‘Bigness’, in the 5th of the theorems he said were latent in the book *Delirious New York*. He wrote ‘together all these breaks - with scale, with architectural composition, with tradition - with ethics - imply the final, most radical break: Bigness is no longer part of any tissue. It exists; at most, it co exists. Its subtext is fuck context.’

I don’t take this to be an entirely negative statement. It describes very well my visceral experience standing among these big buildings. To stand there with them is itself neutral (rather like being blind or asleep). I didn’t resent or hate the sensation but nor did I get particularly enthusiastic about it. The buildings don’t beckon my judgment in that way, they simply inhabit me, or I

inhabit them. In any case there we are, me and these big buildings and there isn't much to say about it.

All of built space in Seattle is this way to me. It feels like material scattered around in space or like electronic information. The huge glass boxes downtown could easily be kicked over, like models pumped up with growth hormones, huge and brittle air. Walking down the hill from where I live to downtown is like walking over a scab. The interstate freeway, which I mentioned, has twelve lanes and cuts right through the middle of the city. It goes from Canada to Mexico. There are glass boxes, office clusters, 20-acre malls, sheds as large as hills and many, many houses which gather and subside along this interstate all the way from Vancouver to Portland - a near-continuous stretch of growth. There's a long pause through southern Oregon and somewhere in the middle of California it starts up again and you have a corridor of growth which ends in this spasm in San Diego.

It actually goes on for a while after that, helped by NAFTA, and crosses the border into Mexico. This coast-long corridor, I-5, feels to me like the native home of Bigness. It may not have reached the shameless exuberance of Singapore (which Rem Koolhaas described in his slide-talk) but I think bigness is thriving

ing and native here and it has a real effect on the materials and consciousness of cultural production (plus also the US West Coast is a model of much greater relevance to the mass-democratic, late-Capitalist West than the private fiefdom of Singapore, for obvious political and historical reasons). Singapore teaches a different lesson, but one to which I trust we'll also be attentive.

I know this West Coast milieu fairly well and I see some rich and elusive atmospheres billowing out from the scattered bigness there. I believe that place has given rise to a peculiar, dumb and lovely pattern of work that [as Rem K ponders in his manifesto] 'reconstructs the whole' and is doing something with the collective (it's hard to describe exactly what that is), plus it sheds some light on 'the real' (more elusive, but maybe some intelligence about the subject will leak out of what I tell you).

The most beguiling aspect of this cultural practice - this interlocking pattern of material circumstances and what I would call pools of consciousness are beautifully implied in that most West Coast of terms, 'spaced out'. I think bigness gives rise to a spaced-out culture.

Los Angeles (here's a biographical aside: my experi-

ence is anchored in Seattle, because I live there and I grew up there. I also lived in New York for eight years and in one other great world metropolis, Groningen, but LA and San Francisco are my main points of reference after Seattle because I spend time in those cities), Los Angeles is the extreme case, the case with the most luxurious and luxuriant blossoms of this culture. This culture is visible, for me, primarily in the form of books, live and recorded music, visual art, some theater, critical discourse, and buildings. My speculations are anchored in these particulars. The work which I see is probably readily available to most of you. Everyone knows some of the music from the Northwest. Most of the books, this being Holland, are also available here, and quite a bit of the visual art that's affected me is also shown here, sometimes sooner than in America. Gary Hill for example, who lives in Seattle, never had a museum show there until last year. He didn't have a gallery in Seattle as of four years ago, but he's been known and seen in Holland for quite some time.

Beyond the products of work, the spaced-out frame of mind might also be familiar to you, maybe because of going and visiting the U.S. West, maybe from living over here. Groningen seems supremely spaced-out to me, so this isn't at all unique to America. One could argue that Rome is nearly identical to Seattle in this respect, except for the fact that it has 3,000 years of

history and Seattle has none. In any case, on the American West Coast this spaced-out culture is not an exception, not a margin nor an aberration. It's just how things are. This centrality (and the consequent mindlessness around it - we don't theorize the air we breathe) is, I believe, unique to that place.

I'm here to praise the productivity, capacity, and elusiveness of the spaced-out culture of bigness. I'll describe it's material attributes and argue for some habits that can help it survive the coming onslaught of talk and manifestoes (like Rem Koolhaas 'Bigness'). In doing so I'll say a great deal more than I should. The culture I'm describing is dumb and shy. Dumb isn't the opposite of intelligent. Stupid is. Dumb is an extreme case of inarticulateness, the far opposite of articulate, and sometimes a very smart position to occupy. I think some of the practices and habits of this culture are dumb but rarely stupid.

These are some effects I've felt, living amidst bigness. I don't know if there are linkages, and if there are, what they are. I do know this is what it's like to live where I do. Big things don't have any size at all. All sense of scale is destroyed by their sheer expansiveness. They're neither big nor small. And it is only from a distance that their size is perceived. With Mt. Rainier, you have to be about 90 miles away in order to see it.

When you are on the mountain there is no mountain; it doesn't have a size. The downtown, also, is built to be seen from the ferry boat, motoring in from 10 miles away across the water.

The big built things (urban layout and infrastructure as well as buildings) seem infinitely expansive and dimensionless all at once, so that I lose my sense of direction a lot, both inside the buildings and outside. I always get lost in the big shopping malls, but it can happen anywhere. Curiously, when I lose my way in these places I don't get very anxious. There's a sedative kind of contentment about wandering disoriented in the maw of these monstrosities, a sort of maternal safety that we must all have felt once, in the dim Arcadian past, with our infant faces dwarfed beside the swollen breast and its nipple of warm milk. I may feel like I'm nowhere, but it's a fine place to be.

I often leave the house without dressing properly. My sense of a private space, of a home, doesn't end when I walk out my door into 'public space'. The border seems to have been dissolved, so that the front porch, then the sidewalk, the street, the shops near-by, downtown, the freeway, LA, are just extensions of my living room, corners to which I could wander, drowsy in my pajamas, to retrieve just about anything, and it's fine, in fact everyone seems to do that in Seattle. This

has something to do with reinventing the communal.

I'm sometimes unsure where things are exactly but I'm always confident they are there somewhere. Consequently, the yellow pages is the most useful and reassuring map I have of the city. A cartographic map is almost irrelevant, just a weird and useless picture. The yellow pages orient me, guiding me to what is there with greater ease and contentment than a 'real' map could. There are no direct routes (nor any indirect routes for that matter) to anywhere; everything is just 'an hour' from here and one simply goes there. In a smaller, compact city, for instance Amsterdam, I often feel like there is a way to get somewhere and I don't know it. I feel lost in Amsterdam (I don't know the way), whereas I never feel lost in Seattle - I just look in the phonebook; what else is there to know?

Nothing is either very far or very near. You'll notice when visiting, especially when visiting Los Angeles, everything is 'about an hour' away. The store, Santa Monica, Las Vegas, Mexico, it's all 'about an hour'. Driving is not an interruption, nor a means to get somewhere, it's more like being in another room of the house. Important socializing takes place there, business, romance, whole lives are lived. The car is part of your house. Consequently there's no distance between things, there is just time in the car. Far and

near have collapsed because these trips work like elevators; you get in, and when you get out, you're there (only yours is a very well-equipped and private elevator).

SO WHAT? Well, as promised, some general conditions of life will be made to follow from these experiences of mine. And remember, these are just words. Living amidst bigness brings on a feeling of dispersal - the location is no longer fixed, which leads to a failure to perceive scale or any fixed relation, which also nurtures a kind of multivalence (places which might have had a single identity and a single use elsewhere suddenly have many identities and uses); it leads to a blurring of hierarchy and boundaries; it leads to amiable forgetfulness, which is at once the greatest blessing and greatest curse of being spaced-out (and, I might add, this forgetfulness is due to slowness, not speed - life simply drifts amongst big structures, ideas billow and collapse); and bigness leads to a disturbance of trajectory or direction (which, like the size of a building, is only perceived from a distance, for example a critical distance).

These abstractions have become visible to me in certain ways. There rarely seems to be a single neighborhood which is the location of 'the cultural scene' like New York's SOHO district was or the East Village. Cities

on the West Coast of the U.S. do have that kind, but not that degree of urban specificity. Marketing mechanisms will often create a name to mask the reality of diffusion and dispersal (and then, by gum, sell real estate). They'll invite you to artsy Santa Monica, or to come buy a loft in bohemian Bell Town, in Seattle, but really these are attempts to create a location where none actually exists. The declaration is itself proof of the absence of what is being named.

My friend Larry is a curator in a museum in Berkeley and sometimes we'll go and look at artists, and Larry was in Los Angeles to visit Charles Ray, who is a fairly interesting LA artist, and I thought, great, let's go to the artists' neighborhood, to the lofts maybe downtown. We ended up on the endless freeway to the San Fernando valley, and out in these weird tract houses there was this nice two-story house where Charlie Ray lived next to some satanic Led Zeppelin fans, but I think he's moved now. Our next visit was in Santa Monica, several hours away, that is 'about an hour away' (but Larry isn't a very good driver), in a strip mall, in a gallery that was between a laundromat and a Thai restaurant. So, you never know where someone might live, or, if you are somewhere, you really don't know who might live there.

You never know where new work might happen.

Why was the art gallery stuck between the Thai restaurant and the laundromat? Very often these days, the laundromat is the gallery-performance space-bar-cafe-bookstore. To see what visual artists in Seattle are doing, you can't look in the yellow pages under 'gallery'. (Better to check the 'WEB-Crawler' under 'Art AND Seattle'.) You'll miss the bulk of work that's hanging in cafe's and in bookstores and laundromats. (Why have laundromats become popular for theater and visual art?) Sometimes, it's just in somebody's house. These places are dispersed and unpredictable. This condition is abetted by the fact there is no centralized critical apparatus. If you want to read about work, you don't pick up the daily newspaper, nor Seattle Magazine. You won't find much information about Seattle artists in any mainstream media there. You may find it, instead, in a xeroxed pile of pages that is stuck in a magazine rack at the tattooist, in a local store, in a laundromat, or webbed on the Internet or in a tabloid weekly (who knows which one it will be this week). Maybe it'll be in one of those xeroxed 'zines that come out whenever someone has money. This is a condition which is happening nearly everywhere, but it is epidemic in Seattle, and consequently there is not centralization to critical discourse.

As a result any hierarchy of cultural production falls apart in loose and sloppy ways. You can't really

know what is broadly ‘important’ because there’s no consensus or authority to make anything ‘broadly important’. There is no venue to sanctify it, and no critic to anoint it. The kind of hierarchy that still thrives in New York, for example (where there are still regular sightings of ‘the next big thing’) has entirely collapsed where I live. Consequently, for any cultural production form in Seattle to gain importance, it must be ‘discovered’ somewhere else (Gary Hill in Europe and Japan, ‘grunge’ music by English journalists, Raymond Carver by New York publishers and critics).

This frustrated me when I first moved back from New York after ten years away. Nobody cares at all about quality in Seattle, I thought, there is no rigor or discernment. It was upsetting to be removed from the talk and critical dialogue which made events in New York always seem so momentous. But after three years back in Seattle, it became clear there was a lot going on which I didn’t notice at first because I was only attuned to the noise and hype of New York’s loud, constantly amplified cultural discourse. Which reminds me of another West Coast artist, John Cage (who began his collaborations with Merce Cunningham and his work with prepared piano when he was a teacher at the Cornish College of the Arts in Seattle, and then continued that work with Lou Harrison in Oakland before moving East). Cage was speaking in

a sizable auditorium without a microphone, much to the dismay of some people in the back, and one man yelled, 'Use the microphone, I can't hear you.' And Cage said, 'If you listen, you will hear me'. The multivalence I mentioned happens in part because the locations of work are multivalent. Beyond the laundromats, I want to plug a series of readings I help organize in Seattle, the Rendezvous Readings, which are these, well, parties really, where we invite writers we totally admire to come to Seattle and read at this party or whatever it is. It takes place in an ex-mausoleum that a theater director named John Kazanjin turned into a theater-bar-gallery-cabaret (the cabaret is where we have the readings) and this sort of arrangement is fairly usual, an organizational corollary to the hodgepodge of 'zines and other cheap xeroxed publications which circulate within a city (though usually you can get, say, LA or Groningen 'zines in Seattle or in New York - there's always a number of places to get 'zines, and usually they have a bundle of from elsewhere). These two facts - the dispersal places where work appears and the dispersal of commentary and dialogue about work - I think are the most powerful manifestations of the shift that interests me.

And last, critical discourse is getting plainer and dumber. I went to see Gary Hill talk about his work. He grew up in California and was a surfer. A lot of his new

work has to do with surfing. He was being interviewed by a poet named Robert Mitterthal who wanted to talk about some of the ways Gary Hill investigates language, the way language falls apart into gestures and sound, in a number of his videos, and after a long elaborate theory-laden question, Gary Hill answered with a slack-jawed, soundless empty mouth of air. He just stared at Mitterthal with his mouth open. Now that's truly dumb! A lot of art catalogues and curatorial essays are getting purposefully plainer and dumber. This kind of duh-brainy, anti-jargon can sound really brilliant (like it does in the book and art criticism of Dennis Cooper and in Dave Hickey's luminous essays, he lives in Los Vegas), but it also effectively refuses to engage with the hostile questions that a more elevated discourse dwells in. So, for instance, Hickey can go on and on about the great orange glow of the Sunset Strip (when discussing Barnett Newman), rather than having to dick around with color theory. (My talk today is another example). More importantly, this is reflected in the spaced-out style of discussion that surrounds new work.

To describe these off-hand habits as a 'style' does some violence to them, but typically one (maybe the only) question is: 'What's happening?' And this is an important and incisive question, as incisive as the more impressive ones (like Robert Mitterthal's) that

may be couched in an elevated vocabulary. ‘What’s happening?’ is a sufficiently dumb question to allow many kinds of responses and it focuses, tellingly I think, on action, on doing - the cultural dialogue and the manifestations of work are not articulated in critical language or in commentary so much as they just happen: they’re done; they are what’s happening.

Amidst bigness, there is a return to anonymity, too, people not signing work, or using proliferations of false identities, as well as a flourishing off-the-cuff, completely unprogrammatically collaborative spirit. Most ‘zines and performance-spaces are little more than the loosely organized ‘collaboration’ of a shifting group of writers and artists. Or as another example: Dodie Bellamy’s accumulations called ‘The Letters of Mina Haker’ - sort of a collaboration with her own demons - which make up her early fiction, and also her exchanges with Sam D’Allesandro (published under the title ‘Real’), or Kevin Killian’s occasional plays, drawingroom operas really, starring whichever writers/artists are hankering for a turn in the spotlight (or the bathroom light, as these evanescent dramas play as often in the same peculiar spaces I described earlier, as in ‘real’ theaters and museums). The plays mix Killian’s art/writing world with the high melodramas of Hollywood and US tabloids, plus a variety of academic theory-wars. The confounding multivalence

I spoke of before isn't, in these cases, just a feature of venues and critical organs, but of 'artists' and of the works of art themselves.

To connect this to some of the language used elsewhere in this conference (Jeffrey Kipnis') perhaps the situation I describe - wherein work is independent of any 'authoritative' critical dialogue, work is sufficient merely as activity - is an example of intensive coherence. The proximity of different properties does not answer to an extensive coherence (of any kind that might be brought to bear by critical dialogue or any set of delimiting or determining programs). This work, rather, emerges out of an almost organic proximity.

Which reminds me that such an intensive coherence is in danger of being crushed, or just not seen, because so many of our programs for inquiry here and now are critical programs, ones which move forward by building a grand and commanding distance which will then allow the imposition of an extensive coherence, of a scheme or system. We will seem to be reaching for exactly that - as if the only question worth asking is how to encompass this all? How can we connect the particular inflection of Bernard's vector to the exquisite surface that we've seen in Jan van de Pavert's video - where is the larger, more abstract extensive coherence? The spaced-out culture that I value is shy

and dumb about theory. It establishes connections simply through proximity, and proximity has already happened here today. The editors were wise to refrain from directing the participants toward a programmatic coherence. They simply gave us a word and a room (now a magazine). They asked us only to come and be in the same place. This leaves all of us with a much more confused residue, but a residue that is perhaps richer and more subtle in its material. Maybe it can help each of us move forward in whatever perverse direction we're drifting toward, and there are a lot of them. My experience, amidst the big, suggests that if we focus on proximity and situations in which work is simply allowed to exist in juxtaposition - arrangements made with some kind of tenderness - we can support the productivity and the robustness of this community, by which I mean anyone we happen to be with. I think in the midst of this march towards 'Bigness' with all of its talk of regimes and programs and teams that we should stay dumb, we should preserve the evasiveness which helps protect that which is shy and quiet, that which will not defend itself, that which will not bother to engage with the questions asked by a hostile paradigm. This delicate sub-fauna is native to the grove of giants outlined in Rem Koolhaas's text, but too many gardeners could be a problem.

The Regime of the Picturesque

In Portland I take my three-year-old on the commuter train past the Nike World Campus to an intersection of two highways. The train stops, and a path leads into the Tualatin Hills Nature Park—old second-growth woods, marshlands, a small field by the highway. Herons nest here; migratory birds use it in great numbers. My kid and I wander the woods, imagining solitude. The sleek train glides by, but we can't see it through the screen of trees. A week after our visit, the police find human remains, a skeleton, in the marsh. The nature park is “saturated with transient camps,” apparently the result of the commuter train and a chronic shortage of shelters downtown. While young Nike executives ride out to their wooded campus every morning and back to urban lofts at night, the homeless have been on a reverse commute.

Matthew Stadler

What kind of landscape is this, home to what manner of things? Why do poor people die in marshes preserved for birds? What is “nature” when designed by planners and preserved by law? What is a “world campus,” or, also nearby, an “industrial park?” The language itself is distressed, made to bridge vast distances connecting disparate things. The very ideas of “city” and “country” seem misshapen when laid over this terrain. The problem is art historical as much as it is political. Ideas such as “nature,” “country,” and “city” arrived

here not long ago as part of a conceptual apparatus transmitted largely through the medium of European landscape painting (a practice that itself developed in concert with Europe's long evolution from feudalism into capitalism). How could such nuanced ideas fail so miserably when laid over an essentially familiar terrain?

Their poor fit is general. Throughout the West of North America the late arrival of the European project triggered patterns of city building that both aspired to European ideals and lacked Europe's particular history. In many cases, this gave birth to fabulous, theatrical grotesqueries—drag queen cities preening before their loyal audiences. Further, it has motivated a widespread preoccupation with untenable ideals such as “native” and “natural,” essentially spiritual notions whose power can be traced directly to what I will call “the regime of the picturesque.” On such a stage, the European project has here played out its particular script. Baja to Vancouver is an artifact of that process.

Nature and city and countryside were recent dramas when they arrived in the North American West in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Their vitality and meanings had first emerged less than two hundred years earlier, as Europe's feudal economies withdrew and trade, directed through cities, became

the central engine of prosperity. During this period, called “early Capitalism,” those social relations, technologies, and ideologies that accelerated the swift transfer of goods and capital prospered. New ideas, such as the division and hierarchy between city and country or the existence of a kind of virginal terrain called “nature,” became robust and commonplace, while older notions that impeded trade became quaint or were forgotten.

The authority of these ideas—“city,” “country,” and “nature”—was deeply dependent on the European ideology of landscape, or “the regime of the picturesque.” This regime is best understood as a formula for seeing—a normative order and set of meanings the educated eye imposes on a terrain. During Europe’s broad shift into a wage-based trade economy (first of agriculture and, later, manufacturing), a newly mobile, moneyed class dealt with its anxiety about these changes, in part, by reimagining the whole drama through the medium of landscape representation. Their highly refined imagery of Edenic, preindustrial country life became a kind of gilding for the brutal realities of wage-labor, mechanization, and the eighteenth-century consolidation of land ownership under Britain’s proliferating enclosure laws. (This analysis is based on the work of John Barrell and Raymond Williams, among others.)

The Picturesque, as theorized at the time by William Gilpin, was just one iteration of this larger artistic practice. Others included rustic painting, neoclassical landscape painting (in the style of Claude Lorrain), and, later, Romantic painting. They share a common ideological function—conflating imperiled landscapes or sites of past economic violence (typically wilderness or rural lands) with the spiritually redemptive presence of beauty, sublimity, or the picturesque. (I'd like to wrest this last word away from its historically narrow use and make it into a lower-case umbrella for all these iterations.)

The West Coast had heretofore been innocent of these particular dramas. When Euro-American migration began in earnest, in the early nineteenth century, there was no agrarian past here (or none that survived the apocalypse of Europe's arrival), no evolution from feudalism into a market-based economy, no exodus of the poor from closed-off common lands into the cities, no pastoral tradition, no notion of the picturesque, nor any Romantic sensibility to invent the "country" as a kind of lost Eden to which one could escape, through art, from life in hellish cities.

There were no cities. The Tualatin Hills Nature Park and Nike World Campus, circa 1830, were marshlands, bordering on heavy stands of Douglas fir, populated by beavers and a nomadic hunting and gathering tribe called the Atfa'lati. The Atfa'lati calendar named

the “months” by saying where and how each would be spent: here a camas root field to be reaped in late spring; there a lake by which to harvest sagittaria root in midsummer; elsewhere, lowland encampments for sheltering in winter.

To Euro-American travelers, these encampments might have looked like small cities. Many were as cosmopolitan and densely populated as Europe’s. Long houses sat scattered amidst paths, usually beside riverbanks; in each, dozens lived, with and without family relation; strangers passed through amicably, able to trade in a common language and with a transferable currency (dentalium shells, called Haiqua). There was an especially big and busy cluster of a dozen encampments through a stretch of the Columbia River along what is now called Sauvies Island. Atfa’lati walked a few days over mountains to trade here with Chinook of the lower Columbia, Klikitat from the north, Shaha-la from the steep-sided gorge upriver, and others. Fur traders, explorers, and enterprising whites passed through and did business here too. Rick Rubin, in his exhaustive study of the Chinook, *Naked Against the Rain*, calls this island, circa 1780, “perhaps the most thickly settled land in all of America north of Mexico.” But was this a city? The Atfa’lati calendar provides a window on the conceptual strangeness of such European notions. Encampments, like the rest of the terrain over which indigenous tribes moved, were

not geographical so much as they were temporal—they marked one part of a cyclical sequence through time, rather than embodying qualities of place. Here is summer. Everything about the European city—its self-regard, its notions of native versus stranger, its weird fiction of permanence through time (and despite change) rooted only in the stability of an administrative apparatus that has conflated itself with a piece of land—was insensible to the coast’s indigenous cultures. City building, when the European project arrived on the Pacific Coast, would transpire on a terrain that had been thoroughly innocent of it.

The general banality of early West Coast landscape painting—its imitativeness and parroting of generic form—should not surprise us. Painters here had no society, only the picturesque conventions they had brought with them. Lacking cities, they painted dispatches from Eden. The problem wasn’t broadly American; during these same middle decades of the nineteenth century, the painters of the Hudson River school, including Sanford Gifford, Thomas Cole, and Frederic Church, pioneered what came to be known as American luminism. The advantages that helped catalyze their innovations expose, by contrast, the unique shape taken by the regime of the picturesque out West.

American luminism was concentrated in New York’s

Hudson River Valley, a terrain where two hundred years of Euro-American settlement had laid the base for both an agrarian countryside and growing financial and manufacturing centers (New York City being the largest and most important). Like their English predecessors, the school's leading figures were predominantly of a class that could move between city and country, occupying comfortable positions of ownership and leisure in both places. Thomas Cole's social advantages, for example, or Sanford Gifford's decades of travel throughout Europe and the Middle East, were aspects of a gentleman's life that posed a fair analogue to the circumstances from which most European artists grew. Embedded in a robust dialogue of city and country, deeply informed by contemporary European discussions, the society these men enjoyed helped to shape the landscapes they painted.

By contrast, the West Coast was home to only a narrow part of this social and economic web. The owning classes never really made the trip, except as tourists. Well into the late nineteenth century, Euro-American settlement brought an ocean of working men and industry to this terrain, and very little else. In Seattle, women were, famously, imported by boat in the 1860s, like missing, essential machine parts. Families began making the trip to Oregon much earlier (in the 1840s—the difference can still be felt in the social cast of its small cities), but the cultural

matrix of city and country was almost universally absent until the second half of the nineteenth century. Without any nuanced dialogue between these two ideals, the pressures that informed and gave meaning to landscape representation did not exist here. Painters lacked context, audience, colleagues, and patrons. Terrain was engaged so ferociously by industry, with its avalanche of workingmen, that it could hardly be enlisted in the pictorial dialogue of landscape painting with any subtlety or meaning.

At the same time, this unbridled expression of industry brought huge pressure to bear on the regime of the picturesque. Its mollifying powers were sorely needed, even as the absence of a social web (extending across classes to link city and countryside) crippled the engine that had usually powered its meanings. Severed from any meaningful discourse of high art, beauty and sublimity were conjured willy-nilly across the whole terrain, wherever circumstances coalesced to provide an occasion for such meanings—a grove of cedar cut to make an afternoon’s arcadian parterre; a log Parthenon erected as part of a trade fair lasting nine months; vistas hewn from thick woods to serve the clients of tram companies running tracks into surrounding wilderness for a season. These theatrical spaces were as brilliant and evanescent as the annual fireworks and flag waving that made up the bulk of America’s cultural claim on these new territories. Painters

painted scenes, yes; but their work was imitative and cursory, puny beside the real vigor of the unbridled picturesque now spilling across an undefined terrain. Settlers inscribed the first European geometries on Atfa'lati terrain in the late 1840s, about the time the U.S. government came into possession of these lands and offered them free to Euro-American settlers who promised to make them "productive" by harvesting trees, extracting minerals, or cultivating and farming crops. Rows were plowed, foundations set. Houses went up to host permanent settlement.

Matthew Stadler

By this time smallpox and malaria had decimated the Atfa'lati, reducing their numbers from an estimated five thousand in 1790 to fewer than one hundred in the 1840s. By 1855 the terrain once called cha-ke-pi was comprehensively mapped and divided by the U.S. government. Sixty-five remaining Atfa'lati were moved to a shared reservation seventy miles southwest, nearer to the coast. Within a generation all Atfa'lati had intermixed and within two the last living speaker of the language, Louis Kenoyer, died without having taught it to anyone.

The new settlers of the Tualatin Plain proceeded as if on a strangely empty stage. They saw little or no history, just raw material—a kind of vast, open-air factory to be set up and run. This anchorless, infinite potential had the curious double-effect of inviting the

most immoderate ambitions while also providing little or no cultural authority with which to carry them out. The task of civilizing the land, bringing it to full fruition within a visible grid of ownership, had to be carried out by fiat. What came to be called “cities” were simply those places cleared or flattened early enough to become drains through which remaining resources could pour onto ships and trains bound for distant ports. Only a massive deployment of the regime of the picturesque has kept us from leaving the frank brutality of this essentially industrial project naked and unadorned.

This regime has produced its deepest meanings where artists trained their attention on city building rather than on “nature.” In part, this is because city building, in the West, is home to the regime’s most robust expressions—merely to record its progress is to engage the picturesque in all of its double-valence. By “double-valence” I mean the capacity of the picturesque to at once register the brutality of things and attempt their appeasement through art. J. M. W. Turner provides a masterful example with his 1840 painting, *Slave Ship (Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying, Typhoon Coming On)*. Faced with this image, one has to suspect Turner of a deep political sophistication. The coming storm is glorious. Twin masts from the distant ship, sailless, penetrate the light. In tiny strokes, barely visible in the foreground, a handful of

helpless men thrash and drown. The painting depicts a widely reported incident from 1783 when the captain of a slaving ship, the *Zong*, threw his cargo of slaves overboard so that he could collect on an insurance policy for losses at sea. Turner has infused the scene with every seduction of his mature style: color saturation; minimal figurative work; an implied horizon floating in an overall field of light; the masts' sharp disruption of this field. He diminishes the horror of this history to a few agonizing strokes at the bottom and at the same time underlines it with the painting's title. In effect, Turner exposes the underlying program of Romantic landscape representation—refiguring sites of loss as occasions for ennobling apprehension of the sublime—by carrying it out in full view.

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On the West Coast this kind of double-valence pervaded the challenge of city building. One finds it in such mundane scenes as an early pear orchard bordered by dense curtains of old growth, cows grazing amidst massive stumps on the platted mud field of downtown Portland, or the course of a highway blasted through a mountain pass. On the West Coast there was no “nature,” properly speaking. That traditional site of the sublime required a city and a countryside from which a certain kind of traveler journeyed before, finally, reaching it. Euro-Americans arrived and found only terrain—vast and undifferentiated—which they treated as an economic storehouse. “Nature” here

was an artistic projection onto what was in essence a vast open-air factory floor. Where artists turned their energy away from such projections and toward cities and infrastructure, the regime of the picturesque achieved its most potent double-valence.

The photographs of Carleton Watkins (1829–1916) are among the most striking of these early breakthroughs. Watkins, who came from New York to California as a young man, turned an unsentimental eye on both terrain and industry, often within the same frame. His compositions are evenhanded; there is no drama of purity or violation. A hand-built mill straddles a vigorous freshet in a gorge that is marked by logging. No part of the scene announces its virtue or corruption. The gorge simply extends toward a vanishing point, marked by a long line of railroad tracks, laid on ties logged and milled here. Watkins recorded indigenous settlement in the same way. The tragedy in these photos is largely retrospective: the small numbers of Indians; their children looking sick or poorly fed; the presence, nearly always, of distracted whites setting up camp nearby.

Watkins's photographs suspend the worst impacts of the European project inside a diffuse, almost indifferent sort of formalism. They neither obscure nor condemn them. In painting of the time this effect was rare: America had no Turner. The Hudson River school

painter Albert Bierstadt, who traveled with Watkins and sketched many of the same scenes (to bring back to his massive Hudson Valley mansion where he rendered them on huge canvases), was incapable of such a frank regard. His dramatically rendered Western paintings are either divorced from the region's brutal particulars—the decimation of indigenous tribes by disease, the forced dispossession of those remaining, the industrial extraction of timber and minerals, etc.—or they engage them through an allegorical impulse so deep the events themselves become generic symbols, stripped of any specificity. There can be no dialogue between horror and its appeasement when the latter has completely erased the former.

Where Watkins relied on a kind of formalized distance to calibrate the double-valence of the picturesque, recent photography has often pursued the same effect through more pitched or heated juxtapositions. Stan Douglas's screen-sized portrait of the 100 block of West Hastings Street in Vancouver summons these kinds of charged pairings in the empty pools of streetlight fronting the block's shadowed facades. West Hastings (in Douglas's print poised like an aging starlet in the moment before her rediscovery by Hollywood) was home to a multitude of transients, among them scores of prostitutes who were picked up and taken to Piggy's Palace, a biker's club at a disused pig farm on the outskirts of Vancouver. In that hybrid landscape

of lost farms, new housing, and brightly lit highway malls, nearly sixty of these women were killed and buried. Their lives haunt the streetscape Douglas has sealed in the amber of Hollywood's cinematic conventions. Douglas's print summons cinema with such ease, its complicity in the alienating, essentially brutal economy he depicts comes as a kind of afterthought, an aura of glamour that is as repulsive as it is seductive. The aura isn't part of the discourse so much as it is a kind of glow around it, generated by the complete evacuation of depth, so that the stage-flat facades are made to hoard the entire sweep of this block's history in the surface of the film. Emptied of its population, the street has also served as the backdrop for any number of American movies filmed in Vancouver (to take advantage of lower labor costs and exchange rates). Captured this way, the image of West Hastings Street circles the globe for the pleasure consumers of commercial cinema. Douglas's print collapses these two economies into a third, historical one: the frank meat-rack of itinerant labor that first brought life to this street. The 100 Block of West Hastings Street conflates these histories in the poised present of the photograph.

This kind of rush to the surface is general throughout West Coast art practice. History has only barely begun here, the new European history, and its traces are indeed thin as film. It should not surprise us to

find artists constructing analogous surfaces on which history's illusionary depth can resolve into an infinitely thin repose.

This motion is the locus of meaning in Seattle photographer Glenn Rudolph's massive prints. Whatever else one sees in them—the flimsiness of settlement here, fantasy-besotted settlers enacting their made-up lives, the picturesque landscapes—one sees the vortex of the shutter drawing everything toward its own depthless logic. Rudolph opens the camera's eye (typically he shoots with a bulky 8 x 10) and the whole terrain—its weather, habitation, and history, all of it—comes swarming in. Like Douglas, Rudolph organizes this scrim of information around preexisting conventions, in his case painterly rather than cinematic.

Rudolph's compositions are eerily familiar to any student of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century painting. Caspar David Friedrich haunts them, as do Turner and Albert Pinkham Ryder. Notably, the landscape of his investigation is that indeterminate third space, neither city nor country, that was home to Piggy's Palace. The freshness and peril of settlement in these places is written in the perplexity and grim assertiveness of those Rudolph has caught living here. Stranded amidst dense development they appear, nevertheless, to be completely cast out into the wild. In fact they are in neither city nor country. Rudolph's prints show

the strange failure or irrelevance of these categories by documenting some of the lives that thrive in the space of their breakdown. They ring true because his subjects actually do live poised against a great and shallow, wrong backdrop. We have been posing for European portraits on this indifferent terrain for two hundred years now, alongside the trees and mountains and vistas of our picturesque imagination.

This broader condition comes sharply into focus in the paintings of Mike Brophy, who, unique among the artists in Baja to Vancouver, engages the regime of the picturesque by bringing its original tools to bear on contemporary terrains. He paints landscapes—and what amount to Renaissance oil portraits—of slash piles, timber, trees, and the men who cut them. “The forlorn and confused stumps in a painting like *New Found Land*,” essayist Charles D’Ambrosio writes in a monograph on Brophy’s work, “seem to have sat ... as a courtesan would, and so their facelessness is haunting. The implication is there, the hint of portraiture, the suggestion that someone is staring back at the painter.” The beauty of these stumps poses questions, not about logging or forest preservation, but about art and the dramas it enacts. How did this terrain become so beautiful and so tragic? Because of the way art depicts it.

In the wake of these paintings, one sees Brophy’s landscapes everywhere. The checkerboard of clear-

cut and thick forest begins to look less like chaos and more like an inexorable logic. Slash spills down into swollen creeks; power lines cut across highway vistas crowded with tourists seeking the immaculate view. History takes shape in the wanting narratives these glimpses suggest. And like these momentary tableaux, Brophy's canvases project an uncanny ambivalence, poised between ease and impatience. The painter has frozen this terrain in the formalities of portraiture so that, in that still moment, we can enjoy the luxury of art and its coherence. Yet he makes a point of executing his renderings with all the speed and impatience of the machine caught in his sights. His brush dances heavily across vast stretches of the canvas, making its claims with the greedy impatience of a logging show—this will be sky; this will be trees—and then it bears down like a drill. This unusual strategy is strangely analogous to the antivirtuosic power of seminal bands like Black Flag—all crash and burn within a completely appropriated formal rigor—and it puts us face to face with the beguiling ugliness of West Coast beauty, as hastily constructed by the regime of the picturesque.

Today Portland boasts a metropolitan plan that legislates the most far-reaching iteration of the regime of the picturesque of any North American city. The plan's reach is unusual, but its ambitions are, by now, familiar: while the region's farms remain predominantly industrial, land-use regulations favor

small family farms in the greenbelt around the city (statewide, migrant labor is still doomed to the same pauper's grave that swallowed whole generations in England); nearby wilderness presents a thin face of sublime majesty over the ravenous industrial apparatus of harvest and extraction. Tualatin Hills Nature Park and Nike's World Campus are expressions of this same regime. The creation of such landscapes accomplishes the same ends as did eighteenth-century landscape painting—at once registering a kind of ideal that, if it ever existed, has now been lost and making the terms of that loss more palatable by shrouding it in beauty.

This is not a cynical project. People need solace, even as we drive whole populations into their graves. At the Tualatin Hills Nature Park, manager Joan Andersen-Wells tells me that hundreds of volunteer hours are needed to keep the preserve from succumbing to invasive aliens. “The blackberries, English ivy, scotch broom, they're voracious. We try to preserve the native landscape and eradicate invaders, but the work is endless.” Beyond opportunistic plants, the park must also resist or deal with the intrusions of unwanted people. “We can have them arrested. The police have given us the power. A lot of these people prefer to be out here, they don't like the shelters. But we can't be a campground for transients; we're a nature park.”

This is the logic of the picturesque. Where Turner painted drowned slaves at the bottom of his canvas, we maintain marshes where poor people go to die. It is difficult to look upon such a spectacle with the calm or clarity of a Carleton Watkins, and yet we need such a penetrating regard now more than ever. Robert Adams, who shares Watkins's ability to subsume passion within a rigorous attention to form, has lately photographed the clear-cut forests of Oregon's Clatsop County (on some of the same hillsides that Brophy has recorded in paint). His prints show us the slash piles and snares of industrial logging. Rather than composing them to imply any kind of center, Adams lets the subject's twisting, broken geometry trail from corner to corner of the photograph, like some kind of industrially enacted Brice Marden painting. He does not cast these scenes in a drama of good and evil, but allows logging's violent geometry to establish dominion on the surface of the photo, suggesting a kind of catalog of all iterations of the forest. Seemingly despite his own moral revulsion to the waste of industrial logging, Adams renders its logic with the kind of astonishing double-valence we find in Robert Capa's photographs of the living and the dead in wartime; there is brutality, but there is also a sort of doomed grace and tenderness.

Adams, like Brophy and Rudolph, uncovers meaning on a landscape that can never be resolved as city

or country or nature. Whether in Brophy's clear-cut vistas and crowded scenic overlooks, Rudolph's patchwork landscape of manicured tract housing and parklands beneath power lines, or in the wreckage of a forest turned factory as depicted by Adams, none of these ideals can hold. Instead, we witness a kind of mongrel space marked by all of them.

In their short essay "Last Seen," Diana George and Charles Mudede call this mongrel space "public wilderness." Public wilderness, such as that which Mudede and George find along the margins of Seattle's Highway 99, exists in the interstices between what were once called "city," "country," and "nature." It is "a produced emptiness; a manufactured nothingness that crosses both the realms of the social and the natural ... the site of a contest between different uses of emptiness." This evacuated realm creates space for a population that is neither urban nor rural, nor strictly suburban, the workers and consumers of an economy based on undifferentiated terrain: illegals in cramped truck-farm housing; contract workers in townhouse rentals near the vast sheds of light industry; loggers commuting from leased condos to ever-shifting logging sites; families weathering jobless stretches in weekly-rate motels; prostitutes trapped on the pleasure strips of disused highways; the homeless riding commuter trains to marshes where they sleep and die. They wander through the terrain of their dispossession,

retracing the earlier motions of itinerant labor and also the nomadic lives of pre-European tribes. Theirs is a kind of transformational return.

This is the distilled residue of the regime of the picturesque. Why is so much effort and passion directed toward the erasure of these spaces? Why do we legislate their displacement by treasured emblems of urbanity and countryside and nature? And why, despite these efforts, do such unwanted spaces return and return? Insights about our future stand exposed on the constantly shifting surface of public wilderness. As the frank reality of life and death on such terrain begins to surface in the work of Glenn Rudolph, Mike Brophy, and others, we witness the full double-valence of our entanglement with this troubling regime.

A Living Mockery of Your Own Ideals

Institutions are collective entities that cloak their members in the trappings of power: a name, a logo, a Website, a schedule, an agenda, sometimes an income and a future. They are the magnets around which history forms. To veil ourselves in new collectivities is to conjure new histories. Institutions can be small or big, temporary or permanent, enabling or stultifying. Wherever they fall on these gray scales, they necessarily subsume persons in the embrace of a new entity, a new power.

Portland is full of them, a flowering of named groups that is perhaps a natural outgrowth of the D.I.Y. pleasures of the last few decades. The Lecture Series, Red76, The Charm Bracelet, Peripheral Produce, The Lab, PS What?, The Oregon Department of Kick Ass, Joanie4Jackie, Pacific Switchboard, The Organ, Learning to Love You More, the proposed Portland Center for Cultural Advancement. And before these, NANCO, The Donut Shop, and The Poop Parlor. Further, what now seem permanent or established -- PICA, PAM, PNCA -- were, to begin, just a small number of people making limited commitments. The more recent crop seems to have sprung from a kind of cash-poor exuberance, widespread in a city where the sludgy odor of bureaucratized arts money is regular-

ly cleared away by an evening or week or month of self-invented vitality. Some of them operate as registered businesses, some are nonprofits, some quite deliberately have no legal status at all. Most aspire to permanence -- to grow and supplement (or replace) existing institutions -- but others easily fall idle, languish and disappear.

Vanessa Renwick started her film production company, The Oregon Department of Kick Ass, in 1997. "I had no desire to work within any existing structures in Portland," she explained to me. "I was sick of working shit jobs and decided to make my own thing happen. The name came from someone telling me that that's what I was, so I thought, 'okay.'" While she keeps the organization "as loose as can be," Renwick works with every level of professional (industry operatives, government bureaucracies, friends, strangers, kids). She wants The Department of Kick Ass to last, so she got it a business license.

Where Renwick's business is 99% action and 1% plans, Sam Gould's Red76 Arts Group is weighted predominantly toward the future. Its website comprises a virtual map of great intentions under-girded by first steps toward some of the projects it has planned. Eight CDs have been produced and are available for sale; the first issue of Dis-Connect (a journal of art) has just

come out; and there are plans to publish books, launch a handful of socially-based conceptual art projects, and support a smorgasbord of related services. The Red76 site maps a cross-disciplinary infrastructure that, if it all happens, could help shape and distribute work across many genres (and several continents). “Red76 is extremely permanent,” Gould explained by e-mail. “I wasn’t happy with what I saw in the art world so I decided to try and change it and the ‘existing institutions’ are exactly what I wanted to change.”

By contrast, the small venue called PS What? dedicates its Web site not so much to future intentions, as to conjuring a glorified history. PS What? is little more than a shared house, but one that bills its parties as shows, projects films on its rather large exterior wall, and rotates the selection of art in its rooms. On the Web site the living room and basement become The L-Room Gallery and The Lounge, while the house itself gets dressed in the particulars of a modest past (built in 1895, one of a few remaining houses in what was once a working class neighborhood near PSU). Together with the protean act of naming -- this is not just a house, it is PS What? -- the Web site and its official history flaunt the trappings of a “serious” institution.

Christopher Buckingham of The Charm Bracelet speculates that PS What? might not be anything like

an institution, but rather just “a place for friends to get together and share something.” Yet the name and the declaration have meaning; they conjure institutional power by mimicking its finery.

Buckingham articulates an intriguing ambivalence about these masquerades, a kind of straddling of intention and offhandedness. Regarding The Charm Bracelet, he acknowledges that “yes, we made up a name for something that evolved into a collaboration. But,” he objects, “we don’t have a mission statement. I’m not sure what makes us seem like an institution.” As The Charm Bracelet, he and partner Brad Adkins have solicited and displayed 500 paintings, gathered (and will publish) several hundred stories, hosted social events at which thousands met, taught at elementary schools, and lectured. Yet they wince at the suggestion that this implies anything about the future. The Charm Bracelet exists only in its actions, not as a more permanent infrastructure. Their institutionalization is, in this way, strictly performative.

The projects that interest me are like this: robust in the moment of doing, empty when they fall idle. They make history by acting it out. “In the beginning Joanie-4Jackie was all about lying,” the founder of that film distribution network, Miranda July, told me. “When I had no one I said I had ten. When I had ten I said

twenty. But that's the thing about institutions. They imply membership, that you are something worth joining, that perhaps other people have already joined. Like the 'in crowd,' but formalized with the decision that this will go down in history."

This kind of performance is reminiscent of drag and all of its tender, doomed grandeur. Joanie4Jackie, The Lecture Series, The Oregon Department of Kick Ass, Learning to Love You More, PS What? The names announce both high ideals and complete failure, commanding an ambivalence that takes us far past the outmoded dualism of sincerity versus irony. Are the beery scholastics of The Lecture Series ironic? The question is absurd, like asking if Maria Callas really meant the tears she shed. Charles Ludlum, founder and principal of New York's Ridiculous Theater, said of drag's special illusion: "You are a living mockery of your own ideals. If not, you've set your ideals too low." Drag drives these impossible ideals on the fumes of pure belief. "Every night," Ludlum wrote of playing Maria Callas in his one-act Galas, "I had to go out there believing it would all end happily." This same spirit, I believe, pervades the best of Portland's new initiatives.

The Lecture Series, which appears to be a party in a big loft, but also features a jacketed emcee, sturdy

podium, logo, a secretary who keeps exacting minutes for the self-titled “steering committee,” and stated goals -- among them, to “create events that ‘kids,’ the kind of people who go to rock shows, etc., can enjoy, e.g., where beer will be available” -- wears its policies and protocols like a fabulous cloak of social ambition. The steering committee also talks about creating “a ‘brand’ that people can learn to trust and associate with certain aesthetic and other expectations.”

The Oregon Department of Kick Ass (besides working very hard) orbits around a perfect logo designed by Vanessa Renwick and Sean Tejeratchi. This bureaucratic seal, its title circling a bucking donkey, adorns the hooded sweatshirts Renwick gives out as partial payment to anyone who works with her. “It’s an organization that people want to be a part of,” she explained, “which they can be through the T-shirts or stickers.” Bereft of, say, any office or staff, business plan or advertisements, The Department is nevertheless constantly alive through the medium of its logo. “Sometimes I think about coming up with a logo for every state,” Renwick added, “and marketing the hell out of it, since it seems to have a broad appeal. But fuck that. Oregon is the only state that deserves the department, and I’ve got movies to make.”

The Charm Bracelet also relies on the pitch-perfect

design of its logos, benefiting from their considerable talent for simple forms and color choice. This is all the more important since performance, such as lecturing, sometimes reduces Adkins and Buckingham to a beguiling and very deep sort of discomfort, like that of a dog covered in its own shit. However winning this posture may be, their discomfort transfers the focus off themselves and onto the paraphernalia of their projects. In its latest incarnation, “YOU,” that means, primarily, some nifty buttons with the single word “YOU” on a brown sunburst over a light blue ground.

Because drag -- like institutionalization generally -- masks “real” individuals and replaces them with obvious constructions, it grants the practitioners a sort of autonomy that eludes most unadorned persons. Adkins and Buckingham are uncomfortable lecturing on behalf of The Charm Bracelet because then they become ensnared in the personal; the project starts to be all about them, when the point was to not be all about them. They stand exposed, like Enron accountants dragged from behind their logo-strewn desks to answer for the crimes of their corporation. The accountants don’t want to take the fall, while Adkins and Buckingham flinch at taking credit. As with Enron, part of the point of inventing this thing was to stay out of any spotlight, shedding, was it ego or culpability?

There is an obvious further echo of corporate life in these performative institutions: they have branding strategies. The Charm Bracelet's logos and posters and buttons, Renwick's T-shirts and stickers, The Lecture Series' preoccupation with maintaining a consistent look and cultivating a narrow audience. Artists and corporations, it seems, feel similar pressures. The need for cheap, viral propagation of images leads both groups to deploy graphically refined information and to curate their audience and associations so as to clarify, and then magnify, the meaning of their work.

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Miranda July explains that “these actions can help you pretend that what you have to say matters, until you begin to actually believe this.” For example, she remembers a time in high school when “my best friend and I made pamphlets containing directions for how to make us cum. It's not like we were going to give these to our boyfriends, or even had boyfriends. It was good because it was the exact opposite of reality. In reality there were no institutions that cared about whether anyone got us off. We were on our own.”

What possibilities does this sort of drag approach to institution building open up? Dedicated to performance, they waste little time on permanence. The practice harbors an intuition that the kinds of discourse framed or enabled by permanent institutions may no

longer be worth the cost -- that such a model facilitates one kind of art and it is increasingly irrelevant.

“The big institutions,” Renwick wrote me, “PICA, PAM: BORING STAID DEATH ROT. So out of touch with what is going on, even the galleries in this town. That whole system seems so over and out of touch with what I am interested in.”

Here is a provisional speculation as to why: Cash management is the first duty of any permanent arts institution. Beholden to their histories and futures, responsible for jobs, holdings and facilities, entities such as PICA, PAM or PNCA depend on a substantial flow of liquid capital to keep functioning. At PICA, the smallest of the three, around \$1.2 million must be drawn each year, and about 25% (\$313,625) of that will be spent securing new cash and managing its movement. While this river irrigates PICA's activities (\$909,050 for all programming expenses, of which \$200,000 goes to artists' fees), the institution will always have as its primary duty the management of cash.

But what kind of art moves enough cash? Money -- like wood or bronze or iron, or any other material engine -- has its own culture, its own tastes. In the age of money, permanent institutions become fluent in a

kind of placeless, globalized cultural production that is readable to both big funders (mostly government and foundation money) and colleagues elsewhere (the programmers and critics who support a show by hosting it or writing about it, or simply applauding it). Curators become less able to hear or see whatever doesn't read this way, including a lot of local particularity that is nontransferable. A curator might like the city, but she's got to find and promote art (whether it comes from here or Japan or elsewhere) that's fluent in the mongrel vocabulary of international art production. This pressure toward globally marketable art powers the inevitable drift of permanent institutions toward the generic -- away from relevance, into irrelevance.

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Among the great potentials of Portland's self-invented institutions is to irrigate new work by breaking the reliance on cash. The city is rich in all kinds of other capital -- intelligent audience and colleagues, a pool of labor, cheap rent, combustible ideas -- and the performative institutions circulate a great deal of it swiftly. What sort of art can arise outside of money's hegemony?

Miranda July tells me "to this day Joanie4Jackie is financially supported to a large degree by two tape duplication companies who give me unusual prices.

My rehearsal space is essentially an ongoing donation to PICA from a local landlord. Sean Tejeratchi paid my rent for my first studio for about a year before I could do it myself. There's always been this economy here (maybe everywhere, I don't know) that really has to do with people simply giving to other people because they are able. I am just one of many instances of this."

In this economy, cash -- neither demon nor god -- is one kind of capital among many. "I wish I had a billion dollars," Renwick says. "Then each artist that works with me could get paid gobs of bucks. But on the other hand, I also like making things with no money at all." Can Stuart Horodner say "I also like to run PICA with no money at all?" The Oregon Department of Kick Ass enjoys an equanimity about capital that no permanent institution can afford.

Just Here to Help:
Global Art Production and Local Meanings

Kutlug Ataman is an artist whose production ranges from feature films to wordless video images projected onto tiny dolls' beds. Many of his video installations are portraits in which the subject is shown speaking to the camera, held by Ataman himself, in an intimate domestic setting, often the subject's own home. The portraits have been tremendously successful, both as art and in the market. *kutlug ataman's semiha b. unplugged* (which portrays a 94-year old Turkish opera diva) first brought Ataman to the attention of curators and critics in 1997; *The 4 Seasons of Veronica Read* (a 2002 portrait of a British flower bulb collector) has been shown in a dozen major museums and helped Ataman make the short list for Britain's coveted Turner Prize; *Stefan's Room* (a 2004 portrait of a German moth collector) quickly sold out its edition of five and is in major collections in Europe, the US, and Asia.

In 2002, Ataman began to experiment more deliberately with group portraits, still using the video interview approach. The most notable success was a large installation called *Küba*, which he made for the 2004 Carnegie International in Pittsburgh, and which won that year's Carnegie Prize.

Küba portrays forty people living in Istanbul's tiny, left-leaning neighborhood of the same name. On forty separate monitors, each subject speaks for fifteen or twenty minutes. Their monologues play on old, used television sets, typically scattered throughout a single large room. A variety of thrift store chairs sit in front of the televisions. Forty voices fill the air with a pleasant din, as viewers wander from one set to another, assembling what Ataman calls a "portrait of a kind of utopian community" for themselves.

Küba won the admiration of audiences and curators around the world, and by 2006, Ataman had a new commission from the Orange County Museum in California; Basis voor Actuele Kunst in Utrecht; Harris Gallery in London; and the Vancouver Art Gallery, to make what the artist called "a companion piece to Küba," to be titled Paradise. Ataman would assemble interviews with twenty-four people in Southern California to portray "a place that brands itself as paradise."

I encountered Paradise and Küba at the Vancouver Art Gallery last March, when I was asked to present a lecture discussing the two pieces in relation to the history of West Coast utopias. I was a typical piece of public programming—a native of the region whose historical research could stitch these two products of a

global art practice back into the fabric of the museum's "local context."

My lecture—and, indeed, Ataman's art—were meant to bridge a gap that marks arts institutions throughout the world, the gap between global art production and local meanings. Both sides of the gap are essential to these institutions. The commissioning or display of international artists confirms the power and relevance of the institution, while the production of local meanings insures their importance to the place where they work; often, it can insure a fair percentage of their funding. Cities and regions maintain these institutions as global nodes, the knots in a net that spans the earth, connecting local lives to a broader discourse.

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While artists, or even visiting lecturers, are not specifically instructed to bridge this gap—my hosts went to great lengths to encourage me to develop my presentation in any way that pleased me—everyone involved knows this is a desirable, even necessary strategy. Ataman, for one, may have approached the commissioning museums as an autonomous author of his own work, but he won their support, in part, by describing the light *_Paradise_* would shine on the meanings of California and Orange County.

Ataman is not alone. Many careers are advanced or sustained by applying an easily transferable, global mode of production to any one of countless locations around the world, anywhere that local will and funding has built the infrastructure to commission or host new art work. Artists as diverse in their strategies as Kutlug Ataman and Harrell Fletcher, Doug Aitken and Martha Rosler, all work this way. The globalized production of local meanings has arguably become a dominant mode. And so the sites of Münster, Germany, are reconfigured by dozens of itinerant artists every decade; the history of Charleston, South Carolina, becomes grist for a half-dozen mills with each return of Spoleto; artists take the past and locales of Santa Fe, New Mexico and transform them into SITE SantaFe; and this year, the industrial past of Trentino, Italy, draws the covetous attention of artists working toward Manifesta 7.

The names of artists will repeat. The valorized mode of global production is dominated by a relatively small guild of artists (a group of more than fifty but fewer than one hundred) who are sufficiently “branded” to sell in every market. In each locality, presenting institutions stand ready to stitch these artists into the fabric of the place. The localities promise more than just a new audience, a new collectors’ base, or numbers of bodies moving through turnstiles. “The

local” also looms as a great holding tank of dormant meanings, truths that await the arrival of the global artist. There is work to be done. And so “the local”—which can be found anywhere and everywhere on the globe—becomes idealized as a kind of passive receptacle, a treasure chest of meanings to be opened up by the enterprising explorer. The local becomes our new Orient.

Orientalism, as theorized by Edward Said and others, is a set of relationships marked by an imbalance of power that is the crossing point of divergent needs. In its central operation, a dominant narrator idealizes a passive subject to produce images that illustrate or embody possibilities the dominant narrator desires, but cannot tolerate in itself. In Said’s now canonical study, he argues that European travelers and scholars projected qualities of the sensual and irrational onto the dark people of the East and the New World. They cultivated a whole body of art and literature characterizing the identity of “the Orient” in these terms.

Orientalism is a concern of the dominant, narrating party—a kind of private conversation that only becomes a burden to the subject when Orientalist projections return to take their place in the subject’s imagination of itself. Paradoxically, with the current proliferation of globally produced images of “the local,” this process of reification has become the

responsibility of the presenting institution and guest speakers, such as myself. We are there to bridge the gap, to bring the art and its meanings back home. This is where Orientalism extracts its greatest costs.

Now this may all sound very sinister, but such commissions and programs are well intentioned and, often, superbly done. The commissioners of global art practices do not cultivate power imbalances or projections maliciously; they cultivate these imbalances to make new art possible. That is, in fact, their mission. If such a practice constitutes a kind of Orientalism—and I contend that it does—then Orientalism is not simply an unwanted by-product or an error, but the institutional mode itself. This is what institutionally driven art-making looks like. The case of Paradise is especially instructive because all of the parties involved—the artist most of all—were keenly aware of the hazards and complexities of Orientalism. Ataman had previously dealt with these issues brilliantly in his portraits. Yet the piece that resulted from this commission was, nevertheless, wrecked on precisely the shoals of these hazards.

The curators who worked with Ataman still characterize the piece as “deeply personal...really all about Kutlug’s own ideas and experience.” They insist on the piece’s autonomy from the place and the people

portrayed. The artist concurs, referring in interviews to “the mythology of Orange County, the image that the media broadcasts around the world” as his subject. And yet the work is made up of twenty-four conversations with actual people living in Southern California. Ataman, who conducted the conversations, turned them into monologues by assiduously excising himself from the footage, so that his questions, his presence, all the shaping force of his interests, were left on the cutting room floor.

In Paradise we encounter twenty-four lives stripped of their histories. The artist extracted their images and words to maroon them in sleek, flat-screen monitors feeding individual headphones, making the installation as quiet as a graveyard. (One monitor played into the room at a quiet volume.) When we listen, we listen alone to ghosts, unaware of what these people might have been thinking in life or what prompted them to speak to us. We’re only aware that they are talking about “Paradise” and California.

What they tell us is completely dispiriting, a cloud of narcissistic fantasies that condemn them to our skepticism and derision. To elicit and record a nine-year old boy’s enthusiasm about race cars, as Ataman does here, so that museum goers can reflect on the boy’s evident naiveté and materialism, is only cynical. This

is an ideology of the other lacking in sympathy or relevance, and fatally lacking in any demonstrated curiosity about the lives of its subjects, outside of their usefulness for the artist.

The strategies in *Paradise* resemble those in *Küba* closely enough that viewers are invited to read the two as a single installation, a diptych. The reality is something close to that: two autonomous works that the artist conceptualized as “companion pieces” and that he is content to pair in exhibitions. Yet the contrast between the work could not be starker. In *Küba*, the installation is animated, even suffused, with admiration and sympathy. The subjects’ voices matter enough to be heard; they are venerated by their audibility in the room, not hidden away inside the silent contraption of the installation. In *Küba*, the erasure of the artist’s questions does not leave its subjects stranded in a web of unexplained relations. These people assembled themselves long before Ataman arrived to document them. They are a self-defined community that has shared daily lives, stories, and a home, for years, if not decades. By contrast, the subjects of *Paradise* were assembled, temporarily, from across a terrain of nearly five hundred miles, in the service of the artist’s project alone.

Küba shows us that the Orientalist strategy is not

doomed to failure—it can also produce superb art. For, in Küba, Ataman was as much of an outsider, a professional observer with his own interests and agendas, as he was in Paradise. He possesses that critical resource that defines the Orientalist mode— an imbalance of power enabled by physical and/or ideological separation. With it, he hewed a complex piece of art that enabled divergent interests, not merely his own. In Paradise he wielded power to articulate only his own, narrow interests. The success or failure of these pieces did not turn on the question of the artist’s “native” insights into Turkey or conversely his “foreignness” in California. (Ataman, who has spent considerable time there, is no less a Californian than, say, Arnold Schwarzenegger.) It turned on Ataman’s use of unchecked power—which is to say his skill as an artist.

The dynamics of Orientalism can no longer be understood through the dichotomy of “foreign” and “native,” first described by Said. The very idea of the native, of the marginalized local, has become an idealized projection—a trap in which many lives and possibilities are held captive. To unpack it—to engage Orientalist strategies critically and productively—artists and institutions need to abjure talk of “the local” and speak instead of the ways that a purposefully organized imbalance of power can be used to enable

divergent interests. Here is the essential instrument of both Orientalism and of art-making: a creative imbalance of power. This is the tool that commissioning institutions engage when they bring global art production to bear on local meanings.

Looked at through this lens, the Orientalist mode emerges as a practice with great potential. Certainly, amidst the increasing call for globalized production of local meanings, it has growing relevance. Artists invited to work this way should be frank about their positions of power and skeptical of any self-justifications that summon “the local.” Artists should be aware that institutions and audiences will be predisposed toward such justifications and proactively disable the myths they rest on. For example, the very idea of “the local” or “native” can be made unintelligible, as in Oscar Tuazon and Eli Hansen’s site-specific installation for the Seattle Art Museum, partly composed of a cabin they built 2,000 miles away in the wilderness near Kodiak, Alaska. A critical practice of Orientalism could also literalize some of its operations, as in Olaf Breuning’s film *Home 2* (2007), which documents his journey through Papua New Guinea. Breuning wore bright blue contact lenses that turned him into a grotesque, completely obvious tourist and Orientalist. Or, as Ataman has done with *Küba*, the Orientalist mode can be suffused with enough sympathy and

human curiosity to make its problems well worth having.

It is important to remember that Orientalism does not lead to either good or bad art, nor does it oblige us to right or wrong human relations. It only restricts us to certain recurring relationships—an imbalance of power that can be used to enable divergent interests, or not—within which we try to make the best art we can, or try to maintain the most ethical relationship we can. Generosity, curiosity, sympathy, and frankness are invaluable assets here, as elsewhere.

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I think it is a mistake to idealize “the local” by privileging those who are born or have long resided in a particular place. It does them no service to summon their lives up as evidence in an argument that is not their own. Use them, yes, but don’t purport to be articulating their concerns. And it is unfair to burden them with the task of validating an art work by confirming that its insights or prejudices are somehow “true” to their “native” experience of the local. “Locals” are neither the subject nor the judges of these artworks, except in so far as they are equipped, without regard to locality, to be judges.

Finally, artists who deal with this mode by passing the power they have been granted along to “locals” (as

with, say, social practice projects enlisting local volunteers) fail to deal with Orientalism at all. They simply reinforce the idealization of “the local” as a privileged receptacle of meanings (that the artist’s interventions can then liberate and make visible), and they completely disguise the power imbalance that was the origin of the work by passing its completion on to others. This approach to social practice art does not critique Orientalism so much as it obscures it by shielding the artist’s power from any kind of public critique.

Within the institution, crucial discussions must be had about the terms of these commissions and the public programming that shapes the discourse around them. The dichotomies of “local” and “global” or “native” and “foreign” should be brought into the bright light of critique or abandoned altogether. If resources are to be embargoed for select populations (as seems to be the intent of “local” commissions and programming), the justification and guidelines should turn on the issue of disproportionate power—not home address or ethnicity. No matter who is commissioned to make new art, the resources that can make a difference are either difficult to measure (such as quickness of insight) or hard to come by (such as time spent on the ground). The debates that shape new commissions, as well as institutional commitments to home localities, can no longer rest on an idealization of “the local” nor a

contrast of local needs to “global” ones. Every locale is global. The institution and the city are at the centre of a connected, dynamic globe, always—never a remote or special space awaiting the arrival of art and insight from distant capitals, always the centre of a global discourse that returns and returns, as blood through a heart.

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Brown at the Edges: Portland

Wax, a new hiphop club in North Portland, is one block off the light rail's Yellow Line, which means that Wednesday evening freestyle dancing attracts kids from suburban Aloha, Hillsdale, and Beaverton--all riding in on the Blue Line--to mix with a somewhat smaller crowd from nearby. The best dancers one recent Wednesday were two Vietnamese guys from Gresham, an oft-derided sprawl of strip malls in the eastern part of the city, along the road to Boring. The Blue Line goes to Gresham too and it is peopled with Vietnamese, Lao, Hmong, Russian, and Latino Portlanders riding east and west to the hives of two-story, cookie-cutter row condos that sit back from the strip highways amidst stunted trees and planters and parking lots. Fewer of the recently arrived live near the city's center.

It is a paradox of most North American cities, and nowhere more so than in Portland, that the nominally urban downtown is home to a narrow elite, while the multitude that makes up the life and future of the city has been shunted to the periphery.

At the Beaverton Transit Center, Spanish is the common language and buses leave every few minutes for the polyglot strips of Beaverton, Hillsdale, and

the Tualatin Valley Highway (known, sublimely, as the “TV Highway”). Manila imports, Korean bulgoki, Dutch oliebollen, taco trucks, nail salons, phone cards, instant credit, barbecue, and prayer candles in a dozen languages rise like a slow tide to fill these endless, outdated strip malls.

Cars flood the landscape; currents of traffic swirl along wide highways. On foot, the terrain is strangely indifferent, like wilderness, and the slow pace reveals an astonishing ecosystem: Behind drainage ditches, patches of meadow and orchard border closely packed rows of gray and white condos; serpentine dikes of bark chips and shrubs shape the terrain; tiny shops, small as houses, are dwarfed to near invisibility by the gargantuan scale of their neighbors (Home Depot, Best Buy, Bi-Rite), whose signage alone could crush or entirely cover them; there are sudden stands of trees. The stores are odd, their survival miraculous, like that of small exotic mushrooms. One sells only prayer candles, another incense, spices, and lamb from New Zealand. Another has obsolete computer parts and a pile of comics on a back table. A grocer sells nagelkaas, a special farmers’ cheese impregnated with cloves, which he has had flown in from Holland. Along the TV Highway, at the end of a thick stand of condos, there is Ree’s Barbecue, like a warm cabin in the middle of a lonely wood.

Equipped only with the categories of the 20th century city, one is barely able to engage this plenitude. Is this the city? Here is the multitude, filling the tightly packed apartments and gray condos of Beaverton, the TV Highway, Gresham, and Troutdale--and Renton, Burien, or SeaTac--yet most city dwellers deride it as “the suburbs.”

North Portland is polyglot because it is cheap to live there. Houses that would cost \$300,000 to \$400,000 if they had risen two miles away, in the Northwest district of the city, go for half that or less in North Portland and so landlords can still rent cheap. There continues to be a mix of rich and poor, new and old, and different ethnic groups, which is entirely missing from the city’s more deliberately planned neighborhoods, such as downtown’s Pearl District.

In “the Pearl” the city has piggybacked its vision of urban livability onto a grid of disused warehouses and empty lots. As in other North American cities, urban living here seems to hinge on a notion of historical preservation that gets tricky when the past begins to run a little thin. What happened in the Pearl? There was a rail yard and then there were warehouses. The garbage dump might be older and richer in history than these ramshackle buildings, but warehouses suggest

artists and artists suggest a whole cycle of change that can imbue a city with the emblems of urbanity.

By the mid-'90s this cycle was started: Artists had begun to colonize the warehouses; lofts would be built out; cafes and shops would gather; and slowly the rich, who are the endpoint of all these revitalizations, would arrive to pay high prices for the residue of a brief history of productivity--that of early-20th-century industry and late-20th-century art.

Instead of waiting and enduring this often-predatory process, Portland developers stepped in and built a kind of pre-gentrified arts district, moving so swiftly that many of the artists and galleries had to be imposed retroactively.

The great success of the Pearl lies in the seamlessness with which designers wove these newly minted tokens of urbanity into the area's scant residue of history. The problem they faced was essentially a sales problem: How to signal the right things, the grit and brawn of industry plus the grossly enlarged abstract geometries of modern art, while making comfortable digs for an upscale clientele? The answer was largely decorative. History, just like the future, can be built.

Amidst the Pearl's remaining stock of two- and three-story brick warehouses, a loose survey of indus-

trial building types has risen. The nine-story Gregory (home to film director Gus Van Sant) replicates the step-backed art deco brick of New York's Terminal Sales Building; exposed steel beams wrap the Streetcar Lofts, beneath a great three-story retro neon sign reading "Go by Streetcar." The Brewery Blocks organize new curtain-glassed condos around the dead brick kiln of the brewery. Everywhere, brick, concrete, and raw stone are garlanded with bands of steel, burnished by the welder's flame. I-beams are the new belt-course.

The swiftness and coherence with which this alchemy was completed here distinguishes Portland from almost every other American city, thanks in large part to an unusual developer named Homer Williams. Williams (whose enthusiasm for the personal transport system, the Segway, has led to that company opening its first North American dealership here) is now spearheading an attempt to build a forest of Vancouver style, super-thin glass-and-steel condo towers at the south edge of downtown, on the banks of the Willamette River. A landmark funicular, the biggest and swiftest in North America, will carry residents up the steep hill to work at Oregon Health & Science University (OHSU). The Pearl carries its fictions lightly, never straining to convince. The whole is coherent, without seeming false. The tram that connects it to downtown and

Northwest perfectly evokes an earlier time, simply by being a tram. At the same time, it evokes Europe; the cars are made there, as are the city's light rail trains. Watching them slip across the long black expanse of the Steel Bridge one can't help but think of Rotterdam or Bonn.

The dream that has come true here is that of sleepwalkers lost in nostalgia for an image of the city that is as seductive as it is unreal. The city explodes outward even as planners legislate boundaries and concentrate its cultural institutions in the city center. It is the same in Paris as in Portland: Historic facades are preserved by law; customs become codified as tourist spectacles; bohemian life is conjured in every corner cafe and theater; and all the while the actual poor get pushed further and further into the overbuilt periphery.

On a recent Friday Elizabeth Leach opened her new art gallery in the Pearl. The rooms resemble a fabulous kind of archeological dig in which the bones of an actual warehouse have been brushed clean and tall white walls interposed, like great stiff drapery. The walls shape a series of 12-foot-high cubicle spaces, large linked tanks that, on this evening, were filled half-high with a sea of excited, drunk friends and colleagues. The space was designed by Randy Higgins of Edo.

Bob Frasca was there, the unassuming principal of Zimmer, Gunsel, and Frasca, an architectural firm that has shaped much of Portland's cityscape, from the imposing span of OHSU's V.A. Bridge to the twin glass spires of the city's convention center--a pair of absurd, luminous beacons that, for better or worse, now function as a trademark of the city's skyline. Frasca got his start fresh out of college, designing for the city planning office in the 1970s.

Also present, Camela Raymond, the young founder of the *Organ*, who has recently closed that lively, occasional journal of art in order to take on the real job she's been offered at *Portland Monthly*. This glossy lifestyle magazine, which has rushed to profitability in one short year, is now edited by Russ Rymer, a recent arrival who hopes to fill it with excellent prose.

Raymond hasn't had an office job in years and said she was too tired of sitting to leave Elizabeth Leach's standing-room-only party for the debut of filmmaker Matt McCormack's new collaboration with James Mercer, of the Shins, scheduled that same night at the Portland Art Museum. Shins fans filled the hall, a crowd that averaged about half the age of the well-to-do drunks at Leach's opening. A popular melodic four-piece, the Shins moved from New Mexico to Portland last summer, apparently drawn by whatever

it is that moves youth culture--cheap rents, relocated friends, a buzz of rumors circling the Internet like the rings around Saturn.

The mayor's office, under outgoing Mayor Vera Katz, has groomed those rumors and is assiduously courting what has come to be called "the young creative class," a potential economic engine that has its own needs and tastes. Focus groups were convened by the mayor's office, inviting Raymond and McCormick and their creative brethren to list their wants and needs so the city can satisfy them and keep the kids coming to town.

The whole operation was part politics, part anthropology, and part idealism. The mayor's office wants to create a habitat conducive to the lives and work of young creatives, both to win the city a new engine of prosperity and because it is the right thing to do. The kids were quizzed and sampled and observed and reports were produced. Developers are now at work strategizing ways the city can invigorate new housing without catalyzing the same cycle that got rushed to its logical endpoint in the Pearl.

Typical of Portland--which endeavors to give every partner some of what they want, rather than picking one winner who takes all--local developers have begun exploring new building types that could organize space

in ways commodious to young artists, yet repulsive to the rich. That way they can develop profitable buildings while nevertheless protecting residents from displacement. As an example, housing in the burgeoning East Burnside and Central Eastside Industrial districts might be built with big common areas, including shared bathrooms and communal kitchens-permanent features that would effectively repel the dreaded rich whose arrival is usually cast by the “creative class” as that of the devil in Eden.

Other solutions have included small grants from the mayor to help artists get something practical done--launch a website, hire an accountant, or advertise their wares. The grants average about \$750 and have been useful boosts for dozens of art/business projects in town. What the mayor hasn't done, and perhaps cannot do, is get the rich to buy more art and to buy more adventurously. There is a glut on the market and much of it is good.

The glut was evident at a recent celebration, dedicated to the outgoing mayor, housed in the cavernous box called Memorial Coliseum. This is the former home of Portland's major league sports team, the NBA Trailblazers (another “creative class” the city has always courted) who were given their own new stadium, a

lavish monstrosity subsidized by the city and provided rent-free to their owner, the Seattle billionaire Paul Allen. Allen's company, the Oregon Arena Corporation, has recently declared bankruptcy rather than pay the city some accumulated millions of taxes that were due as Allen's end of the bargain. Now Portland is left with a great carapace of a sports arena that must be filled whenever the Blazers are out of town.

At the Coliseum (one of the most beautiful international style buildings in town) curator Stephanie Snyder and artist Sam Gould presented videotaped testimonials about Portland: 40 or so artists said why they came here and what makes them stay or go. One, the enormously talented illustrator Zac Margolis, a Portland native, allowed that what could drive him away would be change. "Change makes me want to hide," he admitted. In another, transplanted Seattle writer Charles D'Ambrosio (who confessed in the course of his testimonial to being "an incredibly selfish shit") complained that the rain in Portland is inferior to the rain in Seattle. This is an exacting hair to split but D'Ambrosio, whose mind is sharp enough to split atoms, did it convincingly, while also praising his adopted home for being full of people generous enough to make up for his own selfishness.

Matt McCormick has been here 10 years. He moved

from Albuquerque after college, and now lives in a decommissioned fire station on the east bank of the Willamette. He has--besides an astonishing eye--the gift of tremendous patience. His camera is never searching, always waiting, usually focused on something just outside the door of his home: the surface of the river, bicyclists, the shadows of birds, boats, concrete grain towers, the neighborhood's peculiar light. McCormack uses this largely industrial neighborhood as his own private Cine Citta, Fellini's remarkable film set in Rome. Like Fellini, he is able to make entire worlds out of the remarkable plenitude floating past the still point he occupies. Seattle architect Jerry Garcia, who had driven to Portland for the screening, likens McCormack to a bird watcher.

The night ended with Garcia, Liz Leach, sculptor Amanda Wojick, architect Randy Higgins, and bon vivants Stephanie and Jonathan Snyder (she, the curator of Reed College's Cooley Gallery) dancing drunk to a Led Zeppelin cover band at the Candlelight Lounge, a smoky bar at the southern edge of downtown that contradicts every facile conclusion about race and vitality and urban mixing that the casual chronicler of Portland could have come to in the course of a few short years spent trying to understand this puzzling, and promising, city.

What Can Make this Building Beautiful: 5051 SW Western

My subject is a building in Beaverton, Oregon, home to Nike World Headquarters, Tektronix, Intel, and Linus Thorvalds's Open Source Development Lab (Thorvalds invented the open source operating system Linux; this is his HQ from the back, the way I usually see it because there's a Japanese toy store in a strip mall there). Once a suburb of Portland, Beaverton is now Oregon's most densely populated city (20% denser than Portland), its most diverse (for every one new immigrant moving to Portland, five move to the suburbs), and among its fastest growing. A familiar kind of place (every metropolis has one, or several), poorly planned (if at all), car-dependent, ugly, anomic, irrational (you name it), Beaverton is generally considered a problem whose best solution will be some kind of New Urbanist intervention (though I doubt it).

Matthew Stadler

The building that interests me, amidst scattered strip malls, huge industrial sheds, housing developments, and vast, knotted rivers of traffic, is 5051 Southwest Western. The address itself has a peculiar, enchanting kind of music. This abandoned car dealership, which became a real estate office, a travel agency, a farm equipment store, and then a portable exhibition design firm (servicing rock bands and business conventions) now

stands empty. Home to nothing, redolent of nowhere, it is a cul de sac of ghosts amidst rivers of traffic. So, what could make it beautiful?

The question interests me because this landscape, broadly speaking, is where I live, where many people live, and we need the experience of beauty (even if only as a political tool) to compel our resourcefulness and solve the landscape's many deficiencies. Beauty is an instrument of persuasion. Without it, we become dispirited and cynical and let valuable resources go to waste.

Just to be clear: this is not a criticism of architects who make ugly buildings nor a call for them to make more beautiful ones. Beauty is made by us, not by the object. This is a call for the culture that uses buildings to work harder to engage them and to, in essence, generate their beauty. I find more insight in Rem Koolhaas's *Generic City*, for example, than I'll ever find in the New Urbanism. I share Koolhaas's faith in the capacities of the human imagination. And so, for instance, I marvel at the way the poisonous, ruined castles of Europe became beautiful: Art and writing made them so, and now we are compelled to use, not squander, them.

Similarly huge imaginative shifts turned centuries of

hostility to the woods into a broad, secular worship of wilderness. The chronicles of early naturalists (and the art and writing that followed) shaped the logic and beauty of wilderness. Cities like Beaverton are now seeing the first naturalists of sprawl, intrepid urbanists making the trek into the wasteland, saddled with polemical agendas to decry the ugliness (James Howard Kunstler) or declare the beauty (Robert Bruegmann) of this burgeoning landscape.

I don't count myself among them. Beauty and ugliness do not inhere in landscapes. They are dynamic, perpetually reinvented aspects of use. Our task is not to condemn or defend this condition — which obtains from the very center of what we used to call “the city” to its most remote reaches — but to use it, to live in it fully and well. As John Cage puts it: “Our intention is to affirm this life, not bring order out of chaos or to suggest improvements in creation, but simply to wake up to the very life we are living, which is excellent once one gets one's mind and one's desires out of the way and lets it act of its own accord.”

5051 was an intelligent project. Knute Qvale, who got rich selling Volkswagens in California, saw the growing suburb of Beaverton as the best place to sell Volkswagens to drivers in Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and Montana. In 1963 he built his new headquarters,

Riviera Motors, Inc., in an empty field that had once been a swamp and now sat unused between forests, houses, and farms. Wanting the pleasures of both city and countryside (a duality that was the site's main attraction) he hired an architect (his brother, Ragnar Qvale, who later designed the Sahara Hotel in Las Vegas), and asked for atriums, fresh air, enclosed gardens, high ceilings, and a surfeit of natural light. Qvale's strategies were unoriginal, but the design is thoughtful and effective.

5051 SW Western is a smart answer to the problem of building in a hybrid context. And so its utter failure — within a few decades of being built — is strong evidence that architects cannot help us here. How did such a respectable, ambitious building go so completely to waste so swiftly?

The problem isn't isolated, but typical. It afflicts vast swaths of our built environment, innumerable projects that seem to veer sharply away from their well-researched good intentions into failure, disuse, or obsolescence, like failing aircraft. The gravity that pulls them down — this broader condition within which we build and try to live — has been theorized by German urbanist Thomas Sieverts as “the *zwischenstadt*,” which roughly translates as “in-between city.” (His 1994 book, of the same title, is available in English as *Cities Without Cities*.)

By *zwischenstadt* he means an environment that stands conceptually “in-between” essential polarities. And I must stress: what he describes is not “sprawl” as opposed to “the city,” not “the suburbs” as against “the center,” but all of it: the *zwischenstadt* is a logic that pervades every part of the human environment; it is the loom that makes the weave of the whole fabric, from here, “downtown,” to Bellevue, Issaquah, and beyond. It is counterposed not to “the city” but to the old logic of city, countryside, and nature, an equivalently all-encompassing logic that used to (in some places) organize the human environment.

In the *zwischenstadt*, everything that was once separated (city from countryside from nature) is now intermixed. Where we live is neither city nor countryside, but both at once; it has neither a clear local identity nor a generic global character, but is shaped by both forces at once; a place defined neither spatially nor temporally but in both ways. This last, though Sieverts leaves it undeveloped, is central. Consider a place where the regular measures of time and space are disturbed, a place where durations seem at once instantaneous and interminable, where locations are exceedingly specific and yet impossible to find, where spatial forms repeat endlessly and yet are neither navigable nor precisely reproduced. This is the spatial and temporal experience of the *zwischenstadt*, and

among its principal discomforts. Caught in this essential “in-betweeness,” the logic of a building’s use, its longevity, the terms by which it might be beautiful, are radically changed.

We have little trouble recognizing the beauty of this building, and that provides an interesting case. Designed in 1916 by George Foote Dunham, then of Portland, and built over six years when the First Church of Christ Scientist that commissioned it was flush with cash, it was sited in what Town Hall rightly calls “Seattle’s first suburb,” First Hill. In 1919, before this one was completed, Dunham designed a sanctuary for the Victoria, BC, congregation, and by 1926, Dunham had moved to Orlando, Florida, where he designed a sanctuary that is now on the National Register. You will find similar buildings in cities across the country.

As franchise architecture in a suburban context, Town Hall is cousin to 5051 SW Western. Yet at a point when economic arguments condemned it to demolition in the 1990s, a visionary group imagined its re-use as Town Hall. It was saved because its beauty was legible, its values and heritage evident to the eye. We don’t yet know how to read 5051 Southwest Western, and so we risk squandering it. “The zwischenstadt,” Sieverts says, “has more than enough of everything. The key to

its efficiencies is not redesign, compaction, or a rejection of strategies that have, for better or worse, come to dominate the landscape; rather the key is creative re-use.”

So, how to imagine use — that is, see beauty — in the *zwischenstadt*? Rather than Town Hall in this early-20th century suburban big box, the next step might be Town Hall in a disused retail strip in Renton. And why not? What are we able to see in this building that we don’t imagine there? Of course there are bad retail strips, poorly designed, with bad acoustics; but just as certainly there are good ones whose potential pleasures are masked from us by our presumptions about the physical form of the urban. Rather than begin the hard work of shifting our imaginations, of making beauty, we rail against ugliness and hire architects to replace the offensive strip mall with some kind of New Urbanist intervention, a bay-windowed continuous store-front that looks like Brooklyn, say, or an imitation of this building — to beckon our higher feelings by resembling what we’ve always thought urbanity looked like. Uncomfortable in the environment that’s grown around us, we ask architects and planners to remedy conditions that far exceed the limits of their profession, like hiring decorators to save a loveless marriage by rearranging the furniture.

The best, perhaps only, way to bring love back into the family, Sieverts suggests, is through better art and literature — art and literature that can articulate the logic of the *zwischenstadt*. “The reading of texts of modern literature, or the experience of certain pieces of non-classical music, possibly lead us further on than the futile attempts to create order with architecture.” No more nostalgic evocations of the center or laments about its dissolution, we must now articulate the story of the *zwischenstadt*. This isn’t a matter of well-intentioned naturalists giving voice to a mute other. This is new thinking; new hard work. Brought fully into our imaginations through better art and writing, the *zwischenstadt* must finally displace the city as “the subject of our politics.”

Now, this call, which is from Sieverts, is nearly unique among the voices discussing the new landscapes: To shift our imaginations and make this condition — this logic of in-between-ness, this perpetual flux — “the subject of our politics.” As Marx challenged mythologies of religious strife to reveal class conflict as the real subject of our struggles, Sieverts fixes our attention on the *zwischenstadt*. He shows little interest in the drama of the city. Nor does he valorize the landscapes that supercede it. Instead, he insists that we turn away from the tiresome polarity of the city and its enemies, to tell story of the *zwischenstadt*.

Sieverts gives the general background as follows: the old center has been drained of vitality and become a patch-work heritage site overlaid with shopping and cultural programs; the growing service industries have scattered into the region, drawn by attractive terms in competing municipalities (often called “edge cities”); what remains of manufacturing has also dispersed, concentrating where transport and favorable tax conditions conspire to make a home; housing, also liquefied by expanding infrastructure and ever-shifting micro-ecologies of local land values, environmental restrictions, and other inconsistently applied constraints, has spread out, too, and grows quite suddenly into new densities that rival or exceed those of the old center. The dynamism and inconsistency of this condition drives an ever-shifting, nomadic population to assemble and reassemble in scattered concentrations, knots in an endless net.

The *zwischenstadt*’s essential condition, its in-between-ness, evokes the logic of 5051 exactly — not the logic of the city nor of the country but of both; not the logic of the local nor of the global, but of both; not the logic of time nor of space but the logic of both. This in-between condition — collapsing all the once reliable polarities by which we’ve organized our built environment — compelled the decisions that shaped 5051, and it offers the best tool we have for engaging

these new landscapes.

Sievert's account also suggests something astonishing about the history of the west of North America. The *zwischenstadt*, as he describes it — this logic of in-between-ness — arrived here over 200 years ago, well in advance of cities. It shaped an economy and culture that impressed its embryo outlines on a terrain unmarked by any history of city or agriculture for around 75 years, before city builders arrived to retroactively impose their methodologies. The *zwischenstadt*'s current upwelling is not at all a final rupture in the city's long heroic drama, but a return of the repressed, a resurgence of a more deeply inscribed pattern. The *zwischenstadt* is our heritage.

But here a small voice (I believe it is Rem Koolhaas) says, "in spite of its absence, history is the major preoccupation, even industry, of the generic city." History, his excellent essay implies, is a burden erased by our new condition (a burden that we paradoxically cling to, like frightened young birds on a perch).

I don't agree that this new condition erases history, so much as it dislodges history from the clotted residue of the built environment (by destroying that environment over and over; by building with an eye toward use, not heritage; by promiscuously mixing "traditions"). Dislodged from the permanence of architecture, histo-

ry becomes putty in the hands of the living. We don't lack a past; we are at liberty to make the past that we need. To make the *zwischenstadt* the subject of our politics, means finding its history independent of the rise and fall of cities.

* * *

Europeans were drawn to explore this coast in the 18th century by rumors of a Northwest Passage that would forestall the need to sail around Cape Horn in South America. They never found it, but they did find sea otter furs. First contact occurred on September 4, 1741, when Swedes sailing on a Russian ship under the command of a Dane, Vitus Bering, encountered natives in the Aleutian Islands, in present-day Alaska.

Matthew Stadler

A small party rowed their expedition boat near to the shore: “We had scarcely dropped our anchor when we heard a loud shout from the rock to the south of us...A little later we saw two small boats paddling toward our vessel...Both men in their boats began, while still paddling, simultaneously to make an uninterrupted, long speech in a loud voice of which none of our interpreters could understand a word...We beckoned them over to us and, as we shouted to them the word ‘*nichi*,’ which occurs in Baron Lahontan’s description of North America and means ‘water’...” — and here,

a Swede under a Dane's command on a Russian ship is shouting a Frenchman's rendering of an Iroquois word (a tribe from the east coast of North America) at two uncomprehending Aleutians — "...One of them paddled very near to us...reached into his bosom, pulled out some iron- or lead-colored shiny earth, and with this he painted himself from the wings of the nose across the cheeks in the form of two pears, stuffed his nostrils full of grass... and then took from the sticks lying behind him on the skin of his boat one which was like a billiard cue of spruce wood and painted red, placed two falcon wings on it and tied them fast with whalebone, showed it to us and then with a laugh threw it toward our vessel into the water...On our part we tied two Chinese tobacco pipes and some glass beads to a piece of board with Chinese silk and tossed it to him." And so, in a flurry of poorly understood utterances, the first currents of global trade reached these shores.

The new economy got under way in 1778, when British Captain James Cook made landfall at Nootka, on present-day Vancouver Island. At Nootka, Cook found a savvy trading culture ready to supply otter fur in exchange for iron. Under the direction of a few leaders, including the Nootkan "Maquinna," and the Haida chief, "Cunneah," natives conducted trade with the British by organizing fur-suppliers — who were

myriad, spread up and down a fjord-riddled coastline of over 1000 miles — into a kind of cartel and then systematically jacking up the prices they charged.

Cook wrote in his journals “These were savvy traders who knew the value exactly of everything they exchanged.” Trade was already at the center of their relations, ownership the keystone of their rituals. This might be news to those who equate the profligate rituals of the native potlatch with a disinterest in property. But while the potlatch on its face suggests a distaste for possessions, looked at closely (as in George Bataille’s excellent *The Accursed Share*) it can be seen as a consummate demonstration of possession. The power to give away — to extravagantly exhaust a resource — is the ultimate privilege of ownership, an attitude also reflected in the mundanities that British traders encountered. “As we were looking at some stones and shells that we found on the beach, they snatched them hastily from us, and said in a savage manner that we ought to purchase those things before we took them. They even appeared angry that we should dare to touch any thing in their country unless we had procured a previous right to it by purchase. Their jealousy of the rights of property was excessive and extended to every object.”

While propertyless savages is clearly wrong, avaricious

capitalists is probably just as far off the mark. Both are projections of the European imagination, as with Rousseau's romantic dichotomy of noble savage and tragic, civilized man (a popular world view among England's patrician class, whose offspring were the officers on many of these expeditions).

To Europeans, thus equipped, the details of the native economies must have been surprising. Native networks of trade were already extensive up and down the coast. Haida, Tshimshian and Tlingit organized fur trapping deep into the interior coastal mountains among other tribes. To the south, the Chinook directed an economy that moved food, horses, tools, textiles, and currencies across two mountain ranges and well into the Great Basin, a hinterland nearly equivalent in extent to that of post-gold rush San Francisco, a century later. The Chinook dealt goods from as far away as Guatemala and Montreal. Their busiest emporium, a long river island called Wapato, was among the most cosmopolitan places on earth, mixing French, British, and Métis, with Pacific Islanders, Chinese, and dozens of indigenous tribes from across the Western coast and interior. Historian Rick Ruben claims that Wapato was the most densely populated urban area in the Americas north of Mexico City in the 1780s and 1790s.

The main currency was dentalium, a thin, conical

shell found on Vancouver Island and north (a kind of central bank for the Nootka and Tlingit), as useless as is our paper money, and recognized across 2,000 miles of the Pacific coast. There was a common trade language (the Chinook Jargon) that became the lingua franca of the region for both native and white.

There was war and slavery and hierarchical power; but, within a stable, hereditary division between nobles, commoners, and slaves, the native economies were shaped by horizontal peer relationships (negotiated through trade and enticement more so than violence). Possessiveness went hand-in-hand with its opposite; advantage was secured through engagement and complicity (rather than isolation or withholding); interactions were marked by a schizophrenic-seeming alternation between enormous generosity and severe, almost cruel, depredations.

In these ways, the native economies anticipated a style of capitalism common today in such horizontally voracious companies as Amazon, Google or Microsoft, a form that cultural theorist Slavoj Žižek critiques as “frictionless capitalism.” Certainly the Tlingit capacity for simultaneous generosity and jealous possession would have been familiar to those of us who live with Microsoft. Žižek calls this diffuse, horizontal strategy of cooptation “the enemy of every true progressive

struggle today.” A fair criticism, but there can be no doubt it is an advanced and successful form of capitalism. It is plausible to say that 18th century European merchants sailed out of their nationalist, strife-torn mercantile past and into the future of global capitalism when they met these native tribes.

Europeans did not find an unmarked Eden of savages onto which they could later project cities. They found a highly developed trading culture ready to take its place in a global network moving iron, cloth and guns from Europe and the East Coast to this coast, to trade for otter furs to sell in China, to load the holds with tea, Chinese silks, and porcelain, to bring back for sale in Europe and the East. It is not so much that these native cultures anticipated the patterns and logic of the *zwischenstadt* as it is that global capital — the force that drives the shaping of the *zwischenstadt* today — arrived here, unencumbered by the chrysalis of social institutions that it left behind in Europe, and found ready partners in the region’s paradoxically dynamic native cultures.

If this was their culture, what did their settlements look like? The architecture of the shed was predominant. Buildings — usually housing between 20 and 50, comprising four to ten families (though the Tlingit had “apartment buildings” housing up to 400) — were

portable. The broad boards that constituted exterior cladding and roofs served as rafts whenever groups moved to the next settlement, which they did seasonally. The heavy support posts and beams stayed put, ready to be used by the next arriving group. As in the modern day *zwischenstadt*, these sheds were flexible and multi-use, usually built along strips, and similarly decorated with the come-hither blandishments of commerce. Transit between settlements was constant, following established highways on water and land.

ADD 101 EXAMPLE AND CROSS-CONTINENT SUPPLY LINE

Euro-American traders did not make towns. They arrived and departed with the seasons, occasionally making more permanent liaisons, even families, with natives, though this was the exception. When settlement finally began in the 1820s it took the form of organized franchising under the direction of North America's largest corporation, the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC).

No nation held jurisdiction here. National claims were first in dispute and then suspended by the 1818 Treaty of Ghent, in which America and England agreed to cohabitate without resolving claims. And so, business had its way, outside the reach of national laws. Men worked for the company, or if they worked

for themselves did so without any secure investment in land or infrastructure. Their economy was much like those of the temp worker today: repetitive, risky, nomadic, and radically fungible.

Settlement proceeded under terms dictated largely by HBC's Governor, George P. Simpson, who envisioned a network of forts, self-sufficient, interchangeable in form and function, through which HBC could shuttle its goods and employees. The logic and economy of resource extraction found its material form in this network of settlements.

The largest of the new emporia was Fort Vancouver, located on the lower Columbia River, across from the Chinook trading ground at Wapato (about 10 miles from what ultimately became Beaverton). As Fort Vancouver grew the area began to attract retirees from the HBC . And so, Euroamerican settlement came to the land Atfalati Indians had called Cha-Kepi (including the place we call 5051 SW Western) in 1841.

Cha-Kepi was a swampy expanse thick with beavers bordering on a great grassy plain and heavily forested hills and mountains. Atfalati moved unobstructed throughout this landscape, living cyclically in temporary sheds near the particular work of the season: gathering roots at the lake shore in fall; burning grass lands to keep them clear and fertile in summer; hunting

game from forest encampments in winter.

In 1841 white men arrived, notably with Indian wives and large mixed race, or Métis, families. Three families settled on Atfalati land, which the newcomers called the Tualatin Plain, and began to farm. The Tualatin Plain had been almost emptied of Atfalati by small pox and malaria epidemics, the first in the 1790s and the second, much more devastating, in the 1830s. From a stable pre-contact population estimated at 15,000, they were reduced to 600. Those who remained, survivors of an apocalypse, carried on the same culture and economy as before but in greatly reduced numbers. This is the story of change across the entire region: land was not taken by wars but by disease.

There is no record of animosity between remaining Atfalati and white newcomers. There was in fact a great deal of intermixing. As the families were ex-fur trappers and mixed-race, they knew a long history of cohabitation. And — notably unlike the American settlers who would soon come across the Oregon Trail to build cities — they had no utopian ambitions.

The next decade brought enormous changes that ushered in both city building and the confinement of Indians to reservations. First, by 1846, the US had established dominion (and land claims) coinciding with the promotion of an overland route from St.

Louis, the Oregon Trail, as a kind of path to Eden. From 13 whites who came to Oregon in 1840, migrations of 1,000 in 1843 and 9,000, in the four years after that, followed. These were families, mostly Northern European, looking for unspoiled land on which to build a perfect Methodist society. They would require farms, towns, and a city.

Families settled in the Willamette Valley, a vast fertile plain between mountain ranges, running south from Fort Vancouver and Wapato, where the Willamette River meets the Columbia. Dairy and wheat farms gathered around small settlements — Sweet Home, Salem, Eugene — and grew, and then came the call for the great city of Oregon. The wholesale imposition of this logic — the city with its urban entrepot surrounded by farms and ringed by ennobling wilderness — was swift and completed itself in less than 20 years. The unlikely city of Portland took its place at the center of a planned, rational universe.

The new story of Portland recast many surrounding players into supporting roles, which meant that the long history of “frictionless capitalism” that had arrived at some of its richest expressions during the early 1840s on the Tualatin Plain got refigured as a formless pre-history, an empty stage onto which, in the 1850s, agriculture strode to feed the mouths and

markets of the great city. This turning point also marked the birth of Beaverton. Incorporated in 1860, Beaverton was the terminus of a road that had been punched through imposing hills to connect the farms and produce of the Tualatin Plain to the river wharves of Portland. It was the mouth of a drain that would move produce and capital out of Tualatin and through the city. Beaverton performed this supporting role for the next century or so. In the story of the city, this interlude remains as a kind of golden age, a time when there was a central city and its nearby farms and all was right with the world.

But after WW II, Portland's largely Northern European population, around 300,000 (founded by New England bankers and past host to the largest Ku Klux Klan membership of any city outside the Deep South), took in a great influx of working class men, many black, returning from the war. And so, Portland's suburbs were invented. Beaverton was recast as a kind of neo-frontier, a second Eden where new pioneers — again, enterprising whites — could escape the noise and rabble.

A 1961 supplement to the daily Oregonian, headlined “Suburban Southwest Booms with Population, Industry,” tells it succinctly: “‘Over the hill,’ into the Tualatin Valley was attractive even a century ago to pioneers

retreating from the bustle of a growing waterfront city. There was room for fields and orchards, where wood was readily available, and the sunsets over the coast range beautiful...”

Pioneers were refigured as proto suburbanites, arriving in a pastoral Eden to escape from the bustling city. Today’s homebuyers become not so much neo-Pioneers, as minor gentry, inheritors of the patrimony embedded in the pastoral, with city and suburb now recast as “town” and “country.” “Many city dwellers have found that living in the country, where kids can build a tree-house, or perhaps keep a horse, or at least have lots of bicycle room, wasn’t too difficult. A few minutes more by fast highway took papa to town.”

By the 1980s, the stability of this fiction had begun to break down. The fugitive logic of the *zwischenstadt* was dissolving the story from within as entrepreneurs and global enterprises conspired to enact their own dramas on the terrain that Portland had reserved for its suburban pastorate. Alive with new business and industry, awash in traffic and carpeted with homes, Beaverton no longer looked the way it was supposed to, nor was it lived in by the right people. Over and over, other histories broke through to show their outlines. Beaverton became again transnational, nomadic, serial, a crossing place of the local and the

global.

Riviera Motors, Inc.. took its place as just one more in a centuries long series of local/global nodes to alight upon this fertile *zwischenstadt*. When the business moved on, as businesses do, the building became 5051 SW Western, a seasonal shed, awaiting the next nomadic family, of whatever origin or ultimate destination.

My concern, my hope, is to give it a history that is indifferent to the rise and fall of cities. With its own history, the *zwischenstadt* can become a subject in our imaginations, and in our politics. Further, such a history is the scaffold on which better art and literature can grow.

To make the *zwischenstadt* “the subject of our politics” suggests some mundane, if far-reaching, lessons for planners. Sieverts himself is a planner and his book offers an excellent pragmatic tool kit. Among his proposals are stronger regional authority; no pitting city against suburb; work to recognize the constructedness of nature and make creative provisions for that amenity everywhere; connect peripheral nodes directly; more robust communications systems, including wireless; re-use big box sheds and all else too (the *zwischenstadt* has more than enough of everything).

Make the car cost what it costs.

For the rest of us, however — and more critically — to make the *zwischenstadt* a subject means equipping our imaginations to find beauty and logic in this in-between condition. To begin we will need a better name. We should avoid reference to cities. That term is connected too firmly to a concentric ideal. Thus, a trenchant analysis like that of Rem Koolhaas becomes narrowed by the term “Generic City,” so that it seems to apply only to certain centered densities of conurbation, when in fact it addresses dispersed and multi-centered environments. A term like “Edge City” is doubly hobbled, implying a dense concentricity at an edge, neither of which reflect the logic of growth today. Sieverts gets the logic right, but his term is hobbled by its root in “city.” Also, its rendering in German — which Sieverts chose for the English edition of his work because of his misgivings about the terminology available in English — will never become common enough to displace city, country, or suburb. The best efforts I’ve seen use the broader term “space” instead of city, among them “serial space,” coined by Seattle writers Diana George and Charles Mudede to describe the terrain across which the Green River killer operated. George developed the term further by looking at other serial phenomena in that landscape and proposing a logic that could be usefully applied to other parts

of the built environment, including downtown. I look forward to hearing more about serial space, and less about sprawl, suburbia, Nerdistan, megalopolis, or any of their malignant cousins.

No more goading the public with florid denunciations of ugliness. No more nostalgia for imagined versions of a poorly-remembered childhood. No more screeds against the suburbs or against the center. No more center and no more edge.

Return Address: Beaverton

In July I received a piece of junk mail from CitiFinancial, a “check” made out to me for five-thousand dollars, which they invited me to cash. As with most of these solicitations the check was actually a loan written against the equity on my house, so that cashing it would be pretty much the same as taking out a second mortgage: I’d get the money and CitiFinancial would get a stake in my house. Ever since I bought a house, I’ve gotten scores of these letters. This one interested me because the return address, 3889 SW Hall Boulevard, was in Beaverton, Oregon, a suburb of Portland, where I live.

Like a lot of post-WW II suburbs, Beaverton has recently morphed into a densely built, poorly planned city of new immigrants. It is 20% more densely populated than Portland itself and considerably more diverse. Nevertheless, like most suburbs, Beaverton is dismissed as ugly, anomic “sprawl” by the proud city-dwellers near by. I spend a lot of time out there with a friend, the photographer Shawn Records, exploring the place and trying to make sense of it.

We are optimistic, sympathetic visitors, but Beaverton has been tough to get our heads around. I don’t own

a car, so, for me, the landscape is more like a wilderness than a city; I'm faced with vast pathless lots of cars, bordering on roiling rivers of traffic that must be forded at my own peril. The pleasures I seek — exotic foods, weird stores, strangers, public space — are rich and abundant, but mostly hidden from me. I look for the visual décor of, say, a Chinatown and miss the poorly-lit strip mall where a Japanese sea food store supplies an excellent sushi counter. I look for a narrow street with the usual dusty old bookstores and miss the antiquarian book dealer who has taken over a gas station that shut down rather than upgrade its unlined storage tanks. I look for a cobblestone square and miss the overgrown, disused parking lot skaters have repurposed as an obstacle course and general public commons. This city is amazing; so why is it so hard to look at? Trolling for any insight into the visual and spatial logic of the place, I took up CitiFinancial on their invitation to pay a visit.

3889 SW Hall Boulevard turned out to be within a few hundred yards of an area Shawn and I spend a lot of time in, a densely built “urban” implant of three six-story buildings organized around a light-rail stop and a circular pedestrian plaza called “The Round.” The Round has gone bankrupt (which management claims is just a tactic in a legal battle), and skeptics point to these financial difficulties as proof that Beaverton

isn't capable of supporting rail- and pedestrian-based density; i.e., it's not a real city. The Round is a mid-rise island in a low-rise sea of apartments and parking lots — a hope more than an accomplished reality — but there's plenty there to keep me and Shawn and our kids (ages 10, 8, and 5) occupied: the fountain, cafes on the plaza, and, in a neighboring strip mall, a nickel arcade, a Japanese toy store, and a fairly decent Mexican restaurant.

Odd that after several dozen trips to The Round, 3889 SW Hall should be so obscure to us. But we'd never gone off-island in that direction (north, as it turned out). Addresses in Beaverton tell me nothing. That's problem #1 for understanding the area's spatial logic. It is not a grid. Highway-size boulevards curve and braid their way through a tangled net of streets, some numbered, some named. Even natives in their cars have a tough time. Once you have an address it often doesn't identify a single building but a vast parking lot, host to numerous buildings. And within each of these, many separate storefronts.

Or, contrarily, one building will have many addresses. 3889 SW Hall turned out to be just one of a half-dozen designations that located a single, snaking two-story mall which had been built in 1979, wedged between SW Hall and a creek that eco-activists daylighted in

the 1970s. It was surprisingly pretty.

The mall was called “Beaver Creek Village,” for the creek that ran behind it. Unlike its sterile younger cousin across Hall Boulevard (a circa 1997 strip mall that was simply one linear deployment of identical architectural shells, like a series of drawers into which this or that retail outlet could be placed or removed) Beaver Creek Village was “architected,” fitted to its crooked site and designed with a sort of kinship to the eco-activist sensibility that had day-lighted the neighboring creek. Its pitched roofs were an extravagance that thriftier malls would do without. The roofline’s zigs and zags gave the mall some of the allure of a 1980s millionaire ski lodge. Approaching the entry from the parking lot, one could easily imagine a fireside and hot chocolate or lines of cocaine on a glittery mirror.

CitiFinancial was closed, but Shawn considered that good news, since it meant he could photograph without having to explain himself. One of the perils of exploring Beaverton is dealing with security guards. What do you say to them? “I’d like to understand the visual and spatial logic of this place because I like it and I need to find its beauty?” These things mean nothing to most security guards.

Enough of Beaverton is privatized to make critics compare it unfavorably with other cities, i.e., those

with more public space. Portland, for example, has Pioneer Court House Square, a former parking lot in the middle of downtown that was redesigned as a brick plaza in the 1970s; it is now touted as “the city’s living room.” This interesting metaphor implies that Portland’s many “bedroom” neighborhoods regularly release their sleepers to gather downtown, where the Portland “family” conducts the business of being together.

The reality, as in so many urban gathering places, is a heavily policed and contentious space. The terms of Pioneer Courthouse Square’s publicness, codified in a detailed set of regulations, are typical of urban space throughout the U.S.. Lacking custom, we use law. There are regulations governing acceptable use, limitations on speech, hours of operation, procedures for renting the square, and, most recently, a “sit/lie ordinance” that gives a privatized police force (hired and paid for by downtown merchants) the right to remove anyone they believe is loitering too long without purpose. Unlike, say, the Piazza Navarero in Rome, there are no ghosts here. The contest is entirely between partisans of the living, like some kind of rudderless ship, a catamaran whose two pontoons are aimed in contrary directions. The deeper currents of history that might render the squabbles of the living so inconsequential are not available to us.

The terms of public space in Beaverton are little different. Only the most inhospitable zones lack cops. So arriving at 3889 SW Hall on a Sunday turned out to be a good idea. We spent a while in the lobby where Shawn saw an interesting corner, which he tried to photograph. The original architect had put two oversized circular tinted windows amidst narrow slats of cheap pine coursing diagonally across the high exterior walls that looked a lot like the velour shirts I used to wear when the building was built. Near where Shawn set up his camera, this 1970s fabric ran head-long into an expensive renovation whose pitched roof of frosted glass rested on heavy horizontal beams of fir set in raw steel brackets. Behind this collision of styles CitiFinancial filled its floor-to-ceiling window with office plants and cheap Venetian blinds.

The ficus and white, dustless blinds made it clear that CitiFinancial was just passing through. There were no sops to permanence, as in traditional banks, just an affectless comfort with the cheap and temporary. To be fair, lintels or marble, the usual signifiers of permanence, would have been comical in this elaborate shed. (Which didn't stop other tenants from trying.) CitiFinancial had the good grace to not strain toward an illusion that only sleepwalkers would buy into.

Is that a problem? Capital is always just passing

through, at least when it is working properly, and its tendency to pool and collect in geographic centers has never been the most positive part of its effect on the landscape. CitiFinancial alit in a mall in Beaverton because its on the move, shark-like. It is what many critics call a “predatory lender,” i.e., one eager to move money into the pockets of people who can’t pay it back. This is what brought them to Beaverton, where the considerably higher percentage of new immigrants and a transient labor force (compared to the City of Portland) makes the target population passing through the mall that much richer in potential customers.

The building also defies traditional, I guess you could call them “norms” of architectural design. It literally lacks any perspective. Walking away from 3889 SW Hall Boulevard to see it better, we watched the building disappear into a fractured visual field of abbreviated facades and disjointed store fronts, an inconsequential, incoherent hodge-podge. There was no vantage point from which it could be seen as a single integrated thing. Oddly, it had to be walked through, physically engaged, to function that way.

3889, indeed most of Beaverton, runs counter to the logic of perspective, which has shaped normative approaches to architecture and town planning for nearly 500 years. The new landscape answers to a differ-

ent logic, one that forsakes the pleasures of the visual to pursue other virtues (haptic, emotional, temporal) in the blind space of the body moving through space. It is a profoundly privatizing design that has no time for imagining public places where individuals could stand together and agree upon a view. All one can do with 3889 is wander through it, like food passing through an intestine, pursuing our personal needs and pleasures. To exit the building is to never look back.

These are some of the social and economic complexities that underlie a general hostility to the landscapes we call “sprawl.” Beaverton is not a pretty place, nor a simple one. But its vitality, heterogeneity — all of its considerable cultural resources — are hidden from us by this reductive term.

Like wilderness, sprawl only reveals itself in the fine grain. But few of us have the patience to walk there, to pay close attention. It is an ugly and hostile environment, we say, without looking closely. But recall that wilderness was also once reviled as an ugly place, its fine grain hidden behind tales of a monolithic inhospitableness. Centuries of hostility to the woods only gave way to the broad secular worship of wilderness we know today after pioneering naturalists transformed it into art. Their journeys were hard and inhospitable, but through the alchemy of excellent writing and visual imagination, figures such as Goethe or, later,

John Audobon, helped us see and love the woods. Similarly, certain urban environments, such as the Greenwich Village streetscape of Jane Jacobs or the Parisian boulevards and alleyways of Baudelaire, have been made beautiful (that is, sensible) through great writing and art. The landscapes that defeat us now do not cry out for better planning, so much as better art.

Cities like Beaverton are now seeing the first naturalists of sprawl, intrepid urbanists who make the trek into the wasteland, saddled with polemical agendas to decry the ugliness (James Howard Kunstler) or declare the beauty (Robert Bruegmann) of this burgeoning landscape.

I do not count myself among them. Beauty and ugliness do not inhere in landscapes. They are dynamic, perpetually reinvented aspects of use. Use makes beauty. Our task is not to condemn or defend this condition — which obtains from the very center of what we used to call “the city” to its most remote reaches — but to use it, to live in it fully and well. As John Cage puts it: “Our intention is to affirm this life, not bring order out of chaos or to suggest improvements in creation, but simply to wake up to the very life we are living, which is excellent once one gets one’s mind and one’s desires out of the way and lets it act of its own accord.”

Where We Live Now: Introduction

The French historian Fernand Braudel makes the astonishing claim that any city “has to dominate an empire, however tiny, in order to exist at all.” For Braudel, a commonplace that we witness every day—the boastful preeminence of cities—serves as a categorical definition. Braudel got his definition from Marx, who put it even more sharply: “The antagonism between town and country begins with the transition from barbarism to civilization, from tribe to State, from locality to nation, and runs through the whole history of civilization to the present day.” For both Marx and Braudel, class division and domination are the origin, even the constitutive element, of urbanism.

Matthew Stadler

The city has always been a jealous hero, the lead actor in the story of the nation or the globe. Rome, London, New York, and, in every region, little sub-empires ... Cincinnati, Denver, Portland. All of them, despite their dynamism, geographical imprecision, and collective nature, stubbornly stride around history’s stage as if they were autonomously acting individuals. Their stories are of ascension through hardship to dominance. The city cannot live without boasting.

The boasts of cities fill whole libraries and Web sites, shape university programs, and drive an economy

whose boundaries are unknowable. From civic boosterism of the sort that every chamber of commerce and regional think tank turns out, to the more deeply considered global inquiries into the history and future of urban forms, our economic and cultural investment in the story of the city is immense. We care deeply, and are willing to spend tremendous cultural, political, and financial capital on the working out of this story.

Increasingly, that story is a tragedy. The tale turned up by think tanks and planners in every part of the globe, by pundits and aggrieved neighbors alike, is one of threats and struggle. Blighted downtowns become subsidized sites of high-end investment; the remnants of a dying farm economy become the treasured focus of advocacy groups pursuing costly, often divisive legislation to save farms. Wanting better lives for ourselves and our children, we place these twin ideals, the city and the country, at the center of our politics. And yet everywhere we turn, the glimmering image of the dense urban center ringed by green farms and countryside is erased by eruptions of growth (or, equally, neglect) that are so far beyond our ken that we can only paint them all with the same broad brush: that shapeless word, “sprawl.” This unspecific threat—this failure to find language—is the sharpest evidence we have of our helplessness. Sprawl has no autonomous history or ontology; it is a negation, the absence of

something else, the failure to build city or countryside. Sprawl is the disappearance of an idea. So how can we go on speaking of the city and the country, yet not remain fixed in the downward spiral of loss?

Raymond Williams believes the terminal expression of the story of city and country “is the system we now know as imperialism.” Charles Mudede sees that same global system come home to roost in the proliferating landscapes of sprawl. Observing the lively dereliction of strip highways, Mudede finds “a monstrous, zombie form of colonialism” that “looks from a distance much like a medieval or small city (an early form of colonialism) with an immediate urban shadow.” In Mudede’s landscape, the “rural idiocy” once decried by Marx takes up a new home address in the suburbs. The tragedy of city and country provides a stage for our struggles on which the curtain need never fall.

But the story of the city has other modes. It can be used as a battering ram to justify political change, or it can thrill us and quicken our attention, like celebrity gossip. Champions of urbanism, such as Lewis Mumford or Peter Hall, describe a city that resembles one vast, collective celebrity, a glittering hero whose every fortune and misfortune compels our deepest feelings. Consider, for example, the excited, voluminous reports of the new Asian mega-city. As with

celebrities, we measure the importance of our favorites against the puniness and offenses of lesser stars. We readily project our own fates, our failings and triumphs and potentials, and watch them play out in the fates of cities. These are the dominant modes by which we talk about the city.

While gossip is preferable to tragedy, neither mode offers us useful tools for living here now. Their stories can only delight or terrify us with dreams and memories that enchant exactly to the degree that they are in fact absent from the landscapes where we live. We need new language, new descriptions, and, in Thomas Sieverts's words, "a new subject for our politics." This book is an attempt to find them.

Where We Live Now has two purposes. First, to introduce the work of Thomas Sieverts in an acceptable English translation. Second, to make the case that indigenous settlement of North Pacific America (see the discussion below) ought to be studied as urban history, a suggestion that follows directly from Sieverts's observations. It is a simple proposal, but a far-reaching one. I believe it will help change the way we think and talk about cities. Along the way, I speculate about this story's meanings, what lessons we might learn from it, and what worlds lie hidden behind our failure to pursue it ... wild speculations, really, that no responsi-

ble historian would ever make. And that is because I am not a historian, but a writer, unconstrained by the niceties of that profession. And I am ready for change.

Change is long overdue. We struggle, as Thomas Sieverts points out, to accept the passing of the old city. Our love for the vibrant, preeminent urban center blinds us to new forms and paradoxically leads us to burden what remains of the old city with functions that compromise its historic role. “Revitalization” turns the center into a planned community of wealthy urbanites feeding an economy of shopping and cultural tourism. Meanwhile, the periphery turns into a battleground pitting development against nature. The city’s need (or at least its tendency) to expand outward becomes the enemy of farms and green space. How did these widely variable elements come to be fixed in such stark, irresolvable opposition? What common ground or common purpose can be found?

Where we live now is a dynamic, shifting landscape of all these things: nature, dense settlement, rich and poor, wild and planned. None of it resembles the old ideals of city and countryside, despite massive investments of money and law to force the construction or preservation of these ideals. The landscapes where we live are obstinate and ungainly, spoiling our ideals at every turn. So how can we live here and understand

it, as it is? How can we finally leave the long, divisive story of the city and the countryside behind us?

An answer lies nascent in Thomas Sieverts's text, which describes the hybridity, dynamism, and polycentricity of the landscapes where we live. As he puts it, "they have both urban and rural characteristics. Where we live lies between the singular, particular site as geographical/historical event and the sameness of all space in the global economy; between space as a field of immediate experience and space as a distance measured solely by time; between a still-surviving myth of the city and a countryside just as deeply rooted in our dreams." In every way, Sieverts says, this landscape is "in between;" that is, the once-solid polarities by which we had organized space and place have collapsed into an entirely new condition. "Following tradition," Sieverts goes on, "we still call this sort of development a 'city.' Or we designate it with such abstract concepts as 'conurbation,' 'metro region,' or 'urbanized countryside,' because we realize how inadequately we grasp these spaces with our concept 'city.'" Uneasy with any existing terms, Sieverts coined the term *Zwischenstadt*, which literally means "in-between city."

Among the many urban historians who have described these landscapes, Sieverts is neither the best known nor

the most influential. His neologism, *Zwischenstadt*, is used by European planners; but, despite retaining the original German in extant English and Japanese translations, *Zwischenstadt* has not been broadly adopted as a tool by planners elsewhere. Nor has it fueled the popular imagination the way that other terms, such as “edge city,” have.

Sieverts suffers from his place in-between, catering to neither planners nor the public, but making a middle ground that beckons both. His insistence that the professions of architecture and planning alone cannot solve the problems of the city does not lend itself to easy adoption by planners. Yet neither does he cede the task to strictly populist solutions. He insists on the value of a specialist discourse but argues that it cannot function apart from the realms of art and literature or the public imagination. As in the built environment itself, these once-solid divisions have collapsed.

All of this follows from Sieverts’s central assertion: that the middle ground, the new in-between condition, must be articulated. The popular imagination is the key to better urban planning. If this middle ground, where the work of planners and the popular imagination find a new common language, is neglected, then nothing will shift us away from the tragedy of the city and country and into frank engagement with the landscapes where we live.

Sieverts alone seems to grasp the radical nature of this shift. He is not content to help planners revise their understanding of the city, but insists that they rethink that starting place entirely. He acknowledges that while we mourn the passing of old forms, we must also dispense with them. He has no appetite for the tragedy of the city. That drama is done. The negation of the city is terrifying, yet Sieverts insists on nothing less. Better, he turns this negation into an affirmation of something else, a pattern of settlement at once more sustainable, more enduring, and more deeply inscribed.

The shortcoming of nearly every other account of the contemporary city is the unbreakable tether to Marx's history, to the city as an expression of agriculture and the emergence of markets, class division, and domination—the story of town and country. No matter the landscape, all our thoughts and analyses go back to that narrow model of urbanism. And any path forward is charted by the compass of those lost ideals, obliging us to navigate the future by moving either away from or back toward them.

But what if change does not happen this way? What if competing logics and contradictory stories persist, coexisting through time and space, like the radio signals that fill the ether, silent and unheard until we

tune them in? What other histories lie dormant in the night? This book attempts to recover one—the story of urban settlement in North Pacific America before the mid-nineteenth century arrival of Euro-American “city builders.” It is just one history, and there may be many more. (The discovery of polycentric urban settlement dating back 1,500 years, in Upper Xingu, in the Brazilian Amazon, was announced as this book went to press.) By looking for urbanism where Marx saw only tribes, we hope to recover a useful history of the landscapes where we live now.

“North Pacific America” is the name poet Richard Jensen gives to the west coast of North America, more or less from Sitka down to Brookings, and as far inland as a car can go in a day. His label is meant to replace old names like “the Northwest” (a geographical misnomer that stemmed from the Northwest Fur Company’s early-nineteenth-century monopoly on the region’s furs) or “Cascadia” (an ecological region defined by certain watersheds that are regularly and repeatedly contravened by roads, capital, people, and the crossways movement of nearly everything except fish). North Pacific America was a coherent cultural region, home to immense, complex trading networks (as many as 11 distinct language families that nevertheless shared central trade depots, a common trade

language, and a fiat currency that was recognized across thousands of miles), long before the arrival of Euro American travelers. The several dozen nations that lived here before the British and Americans (and for a long time, with them) shaped an in between landscape that was a predecessor to ours today.

Here we find an urban history rich with the interdependency of global and local forces; the shaping force of flows; the blurring of time and place; and the inextricable interpenetration of the built environment and nature, of town and country. This polycentric, dynamic landscape was home to a settled population of more than one hundred thousand. Because they lacked agriculture and other tropes of European urban life, these settlements have never been looked at as cities. But the new lens provided by Sieverts and Manuel Castells, among others, brings the history of where we live now, an urban history, into focus in these long-enduring patterns of indigenous settlement.

So, what good will this do? As Sieverts points out, the challenges we face cannot be solved by architects and urban planners alone. If we ask them to continue building our lost ideals of city and country, they can only extend the grim pleasure of our tragedy. Instead, we face the considerably harder work of shedding our ideals and learning new images and patterns. What we lack is imagination—the ability to articulate new

patterns—a problem that is better addressed through art and literature than through any catalog of acceptable urban design. History is the scaffold on which art and writing grow.

For the most part, artists and writers have had to choose a nostalgic mode or work against history. Accounts that run counter to the story of the city and the country either organize themselves as reactionary or remain incomprehensible. This is a hard position to work from. So long as we write or imagine against a history—against a shared story of how we came to be—we generate imitative work, a kind of negative image of that which we react against. Writing against history can never change the subject; it can only go on talking about the same thing, negatively.

This book traces a different history, a new history to work from. It follows this with the first fruits of the art and literature emerging from it, work that comes from a positive articulation of a common past. The power of this work, this shared story (as against the hard struggles of reactionary art that critiques and inevitably reinforces an oppressive history) is bracing. It is possible that it could also become liberating.

Tragedy is exhausting. Our spirits need something better. This book is not a work of scholarship—it is

a provocation, a call to historians and writers and artists to begin the hard work of showing us where we live now. History and art and literature matter. They are essential instruments for making a better future, a landscape where we all can live, eyes wide open, without tragedy and regret.

Losing You Might be the Best Thing Yet

Anyone interested in the city—in the close press of strangers, in surprise, class-mixing, cosmopolitanism—has long since left the bourgeois pleasure grounds of the center to explore the urban landscapes springing up in the margins of the metropolitan area. In Seattle, this is as easy as a bus ride to White Center, where Hispanic and Southeast Asian mix with the remaining Scots and Irish, then south into close-packed Des Moines (the state's fourth most densely populated city), then east through Tukwila and Renton, with its huge Sikh population, then north into Kirkland (home of the region's only Bollywood cinema) and Bellevue, where the Crossroads shopping center has made a bustling market square inside an old mall, a culinary and cultural entrepot that draws the east side's considerable Persian population to mix with Japanese, Korean, Anglo, and the area's upper-class South Indians who may want little to do with their Punjabi cousins in Renton.

What is this landscape? Neither city nor countryside, and starkly unlike what we've come to know as suburbs, this endless fabric of two and three story buildings—laced by highways, marbled with car parks, and swamped by traffic—carpets every inch of the metropolitan terrain that does not prevent it by law

or custom. It is a landscape shaped by indifference to older norms of city life such as pedestrian scale, historic preservation, permanence, or face-to-face exchange, and so it repels us—a baffling, ugly place, seemingly without pattern. Yet, this is where the virtues we’ve long called urban (including, increasingly, density) now reside, having fled the center long ago.

The pattern is even more pronounced in Vancouver B.C., San Francisco, and Los Angeles, larger, denser cities where the margins have become home to a globally mobile population whose patterns of settlement contradict our deepest myths about the city. No more the crowded, polyglot center surrounded by white bread suburbs: Now the world spreads out across a patchwork landscape.

This is often derided as “sprawl.” The term neatly homogenizes a terrain so varied and nuanced it cannot be understood without traversing it street by street, a task as daunting as was navigation of the dense forests that surrounded pioneer settlers 150 years ago. In differing eras, the woods and sprawl have repelled city builders in strikingly similar terms. Here is David Neely, assessing the forest near Kent in 1863: “This featureless wall of trees without pathway or welcoming hearth presses in on us from every side...”

Today's city dweller gazes out at sprawl from his Capitol Hill redoubt with a similar sense of alien threat. Like the pioneers, he sees only one way forward, which is to make a clearing in this new wilderness, carve out a space of civilization—another downtown or a New Urbanist village—and redeem an otherwise soulless place.

But huge imaginative shifts eventually turned pioneer hostility to the woods into a broad, secular worship of wilderness. Beginning with the detailed chronicles of early naturalists such as John Muir and John Audubon—and aided by a heaping dose of romantic projection—we came to grasp (and largely shape) the logic and beauty of the wilderness.

A similar turning point presents itself now, one as fraught with the risks of projection and misunderstanding. The first naturalists of sprawl are making their forays out of the old centralized city to bring back reports. They are urban historians and planners and social critics, almost all of them saddled with a polemical agenda, either to condemn or defend this burgeoning landscape.

Among the most visible are the new defenders of sprawl, chiefly Joel Kotkin (a restless compiler of lists and neologisms—he gave us “Nerdistan,” to describe

places like Redmond—and author of *The New Geography*) and Robert Bruegmann, whose popular history, *Sprawl*, finds the origins of that condition as far back as Rome. Bruegmann reminds us that the term “suburb” began with the Roman wall (urb) that delineated the city. Activities that could not be tolerated inside—tanning, rendering, undertaking—set up shop outside, at the base of the wall, the suburb.

As has happened ever after, the close press of strangers inside the city drove the rich to build villas beyond the walls, and the term “suburb” morphed to include them. For the next 2,000 years, Bruegmann’s history goes, cities grew whenever the rich found ways to move away from the poor and the poor chased after them so that the rich would be forced to move again. Thus, in the 20th century, the American city lost its wealthy and middle class to post-War suburbs, which the lower-middle classes then flooded, driving the wealthy further outward or back to the center where they have conjured the bourgeois paradise of our newly revitalized downtowns.

Bruegmann’s lively book is animated chiefly by this drama, which he renders as a tale of good versus evil, the evil being “urban elites” who decry any landscape polluted by the poor—first the inner city, now the suburbs—for its failure to be “livable” or in good

taste. His defense of sprawl is appealing to those of us who root for the underdog, but the dichotomies he relies on, especially the division between urban and suburban, ultimately render the book unsuited for any activity beyond cheerleading. So long as the mythology of the urban center persists, it really doesn't matter whom we cheer for.

Bruegmann's failure is common. Kotkin and, earlier, Joel Garreau (*Edge Cities*), James Howard Kunstler (*Geography of Nowhere*), Deyan Sudjic (*100 Mile City*), among many others, also managed to chart these shifts in human habitation without disrupting the primacy of the urban center. Highways proliferate, towns lose their shopping streets to box retail, farmlands become dense carpets of housing, light manufacturing and corporate headquarters string along ring roads reversing the commutes of workers buying cheap real estate in the first-generation suburbs—in short, a great diversity of changes transpire—and every analysis returns to the fate of the centralized city. The preoccupation afflicts everyone, from populist pundits like Kotkin to deeply informed observers of global urbanism like Rem Koolhaas. We cannot stop mourning the loss of the city, nor strategizing its return.

A handful of writers (principally social economists charged with understanding the effects of global capital

on settlement patterns, including David Harvey, Manuel Castells, and Saskia Sassen) no longer speak of the city, yet none offer an instrumental replacement. The city stubbornly remains with us as the subject of our politics, now locked in the final act of its tragedy: the disappearance.

Against this background, the contribution of German urban historian Thomas Sieverts, in his book *Cities Without Cities*, published in 2000, is uniquely far-reaching. This disarmingly compact text regards the built environment—from city center to suburb to ex-urb to rural reserve and protected wilderness—as a single totality, a field of effects shaped in common by forces indifferent to distinctions such as city, suburb, countryside, and nature. He calls this continuous field of development the *Zwischenstadt* (or in-between city), because it collapses a raft of once-solid polarities by standing “in-between,” as both city and countryside, centered and center-less, temporal and spatial, anchored to place and yet global in reach. More important, Sieverts seeks to make the *Zwischenstadt* “intelligible and legible” so that it can take on “an independent identity in the imagination of its occupants and as a subject for politics.”

Here is Sieverts’s unique contribution: to help politics fix on a real subject, no longer the dissolution of

cities but the shaping of the *Zwischenstadt* (just as Marx debunked myths of religious strife to expose the underlying dynamics of class as the proper subject of politics). “We must throw away a whole raft of rhetorical debris,” Sieverts warns, “in order to recreate access to the reality of the city.”

That debris includes common presumptions about the vitality of cities. First there is “urban-ness,” which Sieverts describes as a social phenomenon of “openness to the world, tolerance, intellectual agility, and curiosity.” Our perceptions of this attitude, he warns, are “based not so much on social and political qualities as on an idealized image of the bourgeois European city of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, recorded in travelogues and novels.” And so we look for market squares and coffee houses and unified facades pressing closely onto narrow streets (the markers of an older constructed urban-ness) and decry their absence, while failing to see, for example, the poly-ethnic dynamism of Highway 99—because the highway doesn’t look urban.

Another overriding concern is the automobile. Both socially and ecologically, the predominance of cars undermines the sustainability of urban values. “Politics,” Sieverts says, “must seek to minimize use of the car.” But cities have proven no more effective at this

than have outlying areas, and the crisis of car-dependent culture presses on the whole of the *Zwischenstadt* equally, because decisions that could actually reduce dependency cross municipal boundaries to affect the whole fabric of the *Zwischenstadt*. Sieverts stresses the importance of a robust, de-centralized transportation network, connecting the *Zwischenstadt*'s many nodes directly, rather than going through the old center, which remains the predominant pattern in Seattle. In Portland, by contrast, a strong regional transit authority is already building peripheral light rail; further, that city's most densely populated "suburban" county, Washington, has balanced jobs with residents for a "zero commute" in relation to the city. Car dependency does not reliably distinguish the suburb from the city.

A third characteristic is density. Our expectation that city neighborhoods are densely built, and suburban ones not, leaves us unprepared for the patchwork reality. In Washington, Seattle is the only city with higher densities than what we call suburbs: Mountlake Terrace, Des Moines, Edmonds, Kirkland, Burien, and Shoreline round out the state's top ten city densities. (The much smaller cities of Mabton, Mattawa, and Toppenish, all less than 10,000 in population, are second, fifth, and sixth.) In Oregon, Portland is actually third in density, well behind neighboring "suburbs" Beaverton and Gresham.

Bruegmann, the polemical champion of sprawl, uses these figures to argue for the vitality of the suburbs against the smug elitism of the emptying city centers. But Sieverts makes a more far-reaching claim, which is that the data simply shows how meaningless city boundaries have become in sorting out evolving patterns of urbanity.

Sieverts never casts this as a victory of the suburbs over the city. Rather, the old logic separating the two has failed. In the *Zwischenstadt* there are many intensifications, and no center; urban concentrations multiply like knots in an endless net. Among these, the historic center is unique and should be protected, Sieverts affirms, but as a kind of museum of an older urbanity. Nearly every American city has done this, as in Pioneer Square where planners arrange the trappings of a disappeared history as a stage on which revelers can enact a shadow play of the city. Meanwhile, one block away, an abandoned lot may give rise to new green space, while beside that a glass tower rises. North of downtown, Vulcan has embraced this as a strategy, spatchcogging the fine grain of the *Zwischenstadt* willynilly onto a compact swath of the city. Block by block, the whole patchwork of this great ecosystem, from green space to car parks, unfolds.

Increasingly, these dense micro-ecologies are viable

in every part of the *Zwischenstadt*. Wetlands lay pinioned between off ramps downtown, while a vibrant urban mix grows from a repurposed suburban strip mall backed by mid-rise condos. In such a dynamic landscape, urban planning that proceeds from center to edge will inevitably fail. There are too many “centers,” shifting too quickly, resolvable only at the micro-level of the block or street or, in broad planning terms, at a much larger regional level. The old city is, in sociologist Alain Touraine’s words “too big for the little problems and too small for the big problems.”

So, how to live here now? How to move past the divisive dramas of city boosters and make the *Zwischenstadt* the “subject of our politics”? Sieverts calls for better art, better novels and music. Architects cannot help us now. “The reading of texts of modern literature, or the experience of certain pieces of non-classical music, [will] possibly lead us further than the futile attempts to create order with architecture. For architecture and architecturally shaped urban space form only individual, important components, but can no longer determine the form of the *Zwischenstadt*.” Older stories, our nostalgia for the 19th century city, must be displaced by newer ones. He quotes John Cage: “Our intention is to affirm this life, not bring order out of chaos or to suggest improvements in creation, but

simply to wake up to the very life we are living, which is excellent once one gets one's mind and one's desires out of the way and let it act of its own accord."

Sieverts's slim, remarkable book brings no news, nothing novel or surprising, only a stunningly simple argument. In this, *Cities Without Cities* is similar to Thomas Kuhn's landmark *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, the 1962 book that crystallized the notion of the paradigm shift as a description of intellectual change. Like Kuhn, Sieverts marshals a mere handful of well-known examples to make his point. Like Kuhn, he simply reorganizes these pieces to reflect current conditions and helps us see our place in them.

Twelve Suburbs of Rome

In a concrete sense, the use of collage and assemblage, of re-use and reconstruction, of un-building and deformation, of ephemeral form and utopian or dystopian imagery, and the posing of the ugly, the unformed and the undecided or blurred are all possibilities. In reality, there is a secret history of architecture separate from the progression of styles and the vagaries of technological perfection that has used such forces to produce an other architecture.

- Aaron Betsky

Around noon she drove off the freeway, crossed several fields of cord grass planted for migrating birds, and came to rest in a paliurus hedge at the base of a hill. It might have been close to dinnertime; she was hungry. She had driven a long way without noticing and was lost. The sky was deep blue and pretty, like a painting (“picturesque” she thought, looking up into it), littered with tall puffy clouds that were generic and gave no clue to her location. The clouds drifted like traffic, all going in the same direction. She scanned the horizon for factory smoke or the dull haze above the city, but everywhere was the same, like a great flat canvas or a dead channel on television. Near to her, block towers emerged from trees, not the original trees, but newly planted ones interrupting the fields like the fingers of a

hand that held the long lines of towers until they met in the palm, which was a kind of empty plaza with a water feature she could smell but not see. She looked around to see where she'd come from.

This was a strange kind of lost. She could see the freeway from where she stood, even be soothed by its sibilant hum, but she could not reach it. Dogs barked imprecisely, and the unenthusiastic play of children swirled around the nearby trees. At least a dozen people were within earshot, but they were also somehow unreachable, as though there was a dimension she lacked. The heavy summer air shifted, mixing gasoline with the chemical steam that rose from her engine. The leaves of the paliurus where her car came to rest were mottled and torn. The car looked broken and would be of no use now, but she was oddly content. She listened to the bird-like sound of the children. Her accident was of no consequence to anyone, and this relaxed her. She took another pill, chewing it this time, and smiled at her good luck.

1. Michael Jackson

Men from Nigeria (Nigerians?) went in and out of the building all the time. They had some business there, papers or heavily wrapped and twined packages, mostly, to pick up or drop off. Some of them had drums

slung over their shoulders on frayed, leathery cords, and from inside the lobby you could hear the echoing puzzle of their drumming from an interior courtyard that was out of sight. It was a non-descript building, not Nigerian in any way, except for some words painted on the glass curtain wall near the entrance. The parking lot was so rarely used that it had cracked and heaved open like some kind of garden, and the men had strung up hammocks in the screen of trees planted between the empty lot and the building. They barbecued fish on a fire set in an old metal barrel.

Planners had day-lighted a creek, a ditch for sewage that was covered up when the put in the parking lot and which they dug open again. Phragmites were planted, and a stream was diverted into it. The Nigerians fished there, but there was nothing to catch, so they grilled fish they'd brought with them from home or the market. It was a nice spot, a kind of oasis, really, but the men frightened me and so I always walked past without stopping.

The building had been planned as a car dealership, which explains the huge lots, but the dealership grew and moved and the building became headquarters for a business that designed exhibitions and light shows. Michael Jackson was a client. I grew up near here, and I remember the huge flats set up in the parking lot. Michael Jackson never came, but several times they

had a double, a man who would stand there at Michael Jackson's height, so they could aim the lights at him. Then they'd pack the whole thing in semi-trucks and ship it to wherever he was playing. I think they made the Pepsi set that caught his hair on fire. In any case, a lot of the fabrication was toxic, and they had to close the building and clean it. The company went bankrupt and no one who wanted the building would pay to clean it, so the state took possession and turned it into a community center. And that's what brought the Nigerians here, after the civil war had displaced them. I always loved Michael Jackson. I think it's terrible what they've done to him. He sang that song for the children of Africa, and we should all be grateful.

2. Technical Death Metal

MS: Hello Caesar! I want to thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to do this interview!!

CA: hey thank you for helping us spread the word and for the support!

MS: Give us a brief history about Empire of Death and your decision to change the name and the style of music from thrash to technical death metal. What led to these changes?

CA: History. Death metal goes way back in Rome

and these changes go back to the years I was in love with the Scandinavian death metal scene (Dismember, Entombed, etc.). The name change was because of the similarity with Sepultura: I love their first albums, but we wanted to have a name that was ours, not “similar to that band”. Empire of Death fitted the music we were playing those days.

MS: So how is the “Death Cums from Inside” video looking? I know you were doing some filming last Sunday. When can we expect to see it???? I’m so excited I can’t wait!!!! Can you tell us what the video is about? Is there going to be a story to it?

CA: We’re as much excited as you are! The video was to be linked to a mini movie made by a friend, but the whole thing got fucked and we kinda rearranged the scenes and had to cut some story parts. Mirko still beheads this zombie Chewbacca. A fan used some CGI and made it really sick. And there’s a spaghetti evisceration, very old school, at Paolo’s parents’ apartment, and that cuts straight to the art lady’s video of geeks biting chicken heads without much explanation, so that it’s more of a pastiche of our themes, I guess, than a story with characters. The movie is dedicated to this pill head art lady who shows up at all our gigs and gave us the geek footage plus some crucial help that we’re sworn never to divulge...HA! HA! HA!

MS: So what can we expect from Empire of Death in 2009? Do you think you'll do any touring?

CA: We're fucking EVERYWHERE in 2009. Roman technical death metal is the shit. I'm always searching for contacts who can help us touring (send your info to me at this address), and to be honest, our target is the US: our music perfectly fits the extreme metal tastes of your country.

MS: Caesar, you're also a bass player for a female-fronted band called Snuff Film. I've listened to Snuff Film and Kharf Jordan has such a beautiful voice, much different from the Empire of Death vocalist Besnick Ciocan who you describe as a great resource of rage, throat, and endlessly flowing speech. What inspired you to join Snuff Film with such a different style of music? Which band were you in first?

CA: Actually in BOTH! HAHAHA!!

MS: You're everywhere! Is there anything I haven't asked that you would want our readers to know?

CA: Nothing special, just...hey, BUY THE FUCKING records... hehe.

MS: Right on. Last rites?

CA: ...drive slow, and don't drink too much... oh well.. screw that! ROCK'N'ROLL!!!!!! See you around.

MS: Big hugs and take care!! :)

CA: I will! You do that too ;)

3. Utopia

Suddenly you were nearly there. A crop of trees, stacked lumber, new houses, leveled earth where houses would be, the ground erupting with cables, and off the broad-shouldered exit that oft recurring drive-through, freed of specificity but with its excellent mayonnaise, had grown in this germless environment serving superbly refined, they called them sandwiches, but the bread, fresh and warm, was not exactly bread, and inside there was a complete meal that seemed to have come from everywhere, chick peas from the Levant, soy paste, saucison, jicima, a smear of beans, crema Rooster sauce, or not, and some kind of meat like a chicken but without any of the complications, so perfect that you craved it as often as it came, seemingly at every exit, with a smoothie made of that day's fruit, or every fruit, or some new single fruit that magically combined the virtues and tastes of all other fruits, plus bran, which settled your stomach and kept things moving. This thing, this sandwich, that was the pure

product of travel, its bread a perfect hybrid of pita and tortilla, baguette, pistolet, Wonder bread, was the opposite of nowhere. It was here, now, exactly in your hands, suddenly, the very moment you thought of it, and no theory of displacement or simulation could tell you this meal was not perfect, or this moment wrong in any way, and you longed for it and loved it, savored it, until it was gone. And then along it came, again. There was hunger and satisfaction, but are they enough to give shape and heft to a life? What of all the other feelings — pride, ambition, hope, resentment, wonder, futility — too hard to hold on to around a highway bend so slight your sigh of forgetting is sufficient to navigate the turn, the past curling away behind you, closer than it appeared in your mirror? And what new exit was this? What great new sandwich around this bend in the road? Wow, great! If thoughts, like meals, can repeat themselves without ever being the same, who would be so dull as to forsake the fresh pleasures of this old thought, suddenly changed? And who does not get hungry again, for the very same sandwich, the very same idea, mile after mile?

A man who she thought resembled a cow because he walked slowly and did not seem bothered by it, came within earshot, and he asked if she was lost. “Maybe you took a wrong turn,” he said, standing at a distance that he might have read about in a safety manual. At

least his smile reached her. She smiled back...wrong turn. She had heard the same phrase in a meeting, earlier that day. A colleague had said “the self-consuming post-Modernism of the 1980s, was a tragic wrong turn that took us off course.” What could he have possibly meant? “What made any turn ‘wrong?’” she remembered thinking, pointlessly, during the meeting. She was adroit enough to self-censor most of what she thought, and rather than speaking out loud and asking “Wrong turn? What could make a turn be wrong?” she had nodded sagely, as if in agreement, and then mimed writing a note, as if this nonsense was important enough to her to make a note of. Her scribble wasn’t a note at all, not even written English, just the action of scribbling. Wrong turn?

Now, in the pleasant air with this cow-like man beside her she thought: a ‘wrong turn’ only happens when we imagine some different direction (the coveted ‘right turn’), and convince ourselves that every fantasy we project down the road of this never-taken correct turn — this better path that we have never seen nor walked along — is somehow ‘right,’ while the path we actually tread in life is ‘wrong.’ A wrong turn is cousin to all of our other dreams of Eden: that is, a dream of a place that is better because we have never been there to spoil it.

4. KAZAKH supermodel with ‘fairytale’ beauty, age 20, plummets to her death

A stunning Kazakh supermodel plunged to her death from the ninth floor of her lower Manhattan building on Saturday in an apparent suicide, police sources and neighbors said. Ruslana Korshunova, 20, a long-haired lovely who once graced the cover of Russian Vogue, plummeted onto busy Water St. in the Financial District around 2:30 p.m., according to sources and building residents.

Matthew Stadler

“I turned around just as she was about 3 feet off the ground and then, boom, she hit,” said witness Ahmed Saad, 22, who was manning a nearby halal food cart. Dubbed “fashion’s muse of the moment” by the Sunday Times of London in 2005, Korshunova distinguished herself with locks of hair that once draped down to her thighs. She was often photographed with her mane cascading around her.

Long hair is a symbol of beauty in Kazakhstan, where she was born in the then-capital city of Almaty on July 2, 1987. “She was like an angel,” a friend, Kira Titeneva, said. “She was just working, working, working.” The friend said Korshunova had recently returned from spending a few weeks in Paris and did not appear troubled.

“There’s no way she would have killed herself,” said Titeneva. “She loved life so much.”

The nearly 5-foot-9 model’s interest in German led to her discovery in 2003. A journalist from All Asia magazine visited her German language club and featured her photo in a story, according to an article in *Continent*, a Kazakh magazine. During a flight, booker Debbie Jones of Models 1 spotted her picture in the magazine and called the article’s author for help in tracking Korshunova. “I saw her by chance and she looked like something out of a fairy tale!” Jones told *British Vogue*. “We had to find her and we searched high and low until we did! She’s really incredible, with feline features and timeless beauty.”

5. The Sweetness to Live

Instead of moving from journalism to the higher realm of writing he contemplated, Matthew sells out to become a public relations hack, a drunk, a decadent party boy, now within the milieu that he previously saw as the outsider, the reporter observing.

The editor beckons:
Sit you.
There is not a chair!
Crouch down.

How roguish!
 Because you are a rogue.
 Humph!
 You know... I am going to break your small muzzle.
 I must report what I see. It is my profession.
 You are not a journalist!

Research begins:
 Again Rome, what boredom!
 All goes amiss, tonight. I would like to live in another city.
 Me, I like Rome. It is a species of jungle... tepid, restful, where one can hide well.
 Me, I would like to hide, but I don't arrive there. Let's make a small tour...I would prefer to have an island.
 Buy one.
 But would I go?
 Your misfortune? To have too much money...
 And yours, not to have enough...
 With your money, while falling, you fall up!
 I even am not held standing.
 Why this is not a car, it is a room!
 Come. Let's make a tour with the girl.
 Where do you want to go?
 I live in a suburb...Whose car is this?
 It's her father's!
 It's the slap he gave to me. I fell on a funny... one thousand bullets, a packet of "blue."

Where do we go?
Mildly now... everybody sleeps. Lower the radio.
Is there someone at home?
You won't find a palace! What a dirty trick! It is flooded
again! Go in my room to lie down...Install yourselves,
and during this time, I am going to make coffee.

And then a trip to the country...
Where do you go?
To Bassano, my fiancé's castle.
Can we go? I have a friend with me.
Ah, he is one of your gigolos...Put yourselves behind.
Follow us!
At this hour only the fossils are awake. Take this
species of dog. What language do you speak?
Eskimo!
Hey! My whore!
Who asked you to come? Are you a journalist? I need
a nurse who gets in bed.
Would I need to wash you?
I stink!
You have a marvelous odor!
My husband was a journalist. But his news was
exaggerated. Peace to his ashes!
Better to have exaggerated news than no news at all.
My husband thought the same thing. Me, I would like
to give you the news.
Don't exaggerate.

I am...well I am intoxicated. Do you know Jane? The American painter who lives in Rome as if it was a colony?

She is very funny.

Observe, my family, The Montalbans...

They are paintings.

Very old. Federica, The Wolf: loved to nurse the young. The Gonfaloneiris: they own half of Calabria...

The small Eleonora: many hectares...two unsuccessful suicides. The Sanseveris: castles in Tuscany. Don Giulio with Nico, his friend the Swede.

She will be a princess.

Don't make that face!

Do you believe that we are better?

They at least made some elegant things.

And the villa over there...who is home?

It is uninhabited.

Yet it is the most beautiful.

Me also, I am uninhabited, do you know it?

I know this perfume...

We go to hunt the ghosts.

I spent the night in a castle...

We saw a small girl with a candle in her hand...

You know that it was not a small girl, and even less a candle.

You are deprived of imagination...

I would like to make there a magnificent pied-à-terre.

It is full of rats, cockroaches, vipers, owls, vampires...

And now, full of prostitutes!

6. Fucked

Driving 500 miles from the border at Nogales through Arizona and California to the sea in a sensible German car whose engine stays cool even as the temperature outside approaches 136 degrees, burning gallon after gallon of gasoline to drive and keep the cold air circulating — this refrigerated stream of comfort that mixes with our favorite bands from Portland: Eux Autres, Viva Voce, Elliot Smith — seductive voices of smart resignation reminding us that we are better than this, that our intelligence makes us blameless by keeping us one or two steps removed from the barrels of the guns or the desks of bureaucrats killing people we tell our children about, solemnly, each evening after the news. In Iraq, Afghanistan, Mexico, people whose lives stand between us and this necessary road, this ribbon of highway speeding away from the hellish deserts of Mexico and Arizona toward the succor of the cool, blue Pacific...to home. We are West Coasters, suburbanites — fond of believing we are the last hope of Europe — and our nine-year old is in the back seat chanting “We’re in the USA! We’re in the USA!” because he has just crossed the border ending 10 months spent in Mexico, in Spanish, in chiles and limes, in old women touching his hair and murmur-

ing “guerrito,” in packs of boys without supervision rhyming his name with “ca-ca” the sweetest children on earth, full of sugar and soap and God, and didn’t we kill them once? For oil and fruit and land? These sweet children who must crawl now across the border or come entombed in broiling semis to hide from immigration so they can save us from our sloth and send the money they make back to Mexico to help their families pay for the corn and oil that fuels their lives? So that someday they can afford to move to the suburbs? We are driving across the suburbs of Rome, feuding with the neighbors, again, building a fence to keep the countryside separate from the city. The rural idiocy. The rustic laborer. Europe recoils from the horrifying end of the city and the countryside and asks how we will write our novels now, or cuckold strangers, or compel whole landscapes to express the last iterations of this same tired division between bourgeois urbanity and the surrounding fields of dumb, green beauty? She was a flower of the earth. There are a thousand ways to fuck, and they begin by splitting opposites, and then the artful re-conjoining. This is urban planning. I write this essay in the quiet, cool car — the new “live-work space” — to meet deadlines from Rome, the old Empire still broadcasting its directives. It will always be Imperialism, until we are done with it. No matter how far we drive, it will always be Rome.

The nearby trees were new, but a distant fringe looked familiar to her, a profile she knew from childhood. She stared past the bovine man, her attention caught by the trees' saw-toothed profile, dark green against the blue. They were pine trees crowning an asymmetrical hillside, somewhere beyond the freeway. The hill was round and squashed, like the head of a man who'd fallen on his face. This shape was a memory from her childhood, a sight she saw every morning from the glassed-in balcony where her mother served them breakfast. But it was an image lodged deep inside her, wed to the smell of coffee and Nutella, and she could not place it in any geography. It did not belong out there.

"No," she said, "I don't think I took a wrong turn." He smiled back at her. "I'm just lost."

7. The Departure of Charley and the Arrival of New Settlers

During the summer of 1851 Captain Purrington and myself had lived alone, as Toke's people had gone to live in their lodge near the house of Mr. Barrows, near Toke's Point. Toward fall, a young Indian from Chenook, named Hay-e-Mar, and by the whites called Charley, came and stopped with us. He was smart,

active, intelligent, a good carpenter and hunter, and capable of being very useful, but he was generally disliked by both whites and Indians. He had learned all sort of slight-of-hand tricks, with which he would astonish the young Indians, and was regarded by the old ones as a sort of devil.

One day he came home with the report that salmon had commenced running up the Whil-a-pah River, and he proposed going with me the next day to get some. I had not been up that river before, and was quite willing to start. It was about the first of October, and, although the days were warm and pleasant, the nights were quite chilly and long. The next morning, after breakfast, we fitted ourselves for the expedition, and started in my small canoe, Charley in the stern to steer, and I with my gun in the bow. We soon reached the mouth of the river, where we found innumerable flocks of curlew and plover, but could not get near enough for a shot, and, having a fair but light wind, kept on our course.

It was nearly night when we hauled up our canoe at an Indian lodge, near Captain Crocker's landing. This was occupied by old Chillewit, a famous Indian doctor, and his brother Whilmarlan, who had with him two children. The old doctor did not seem at all gratified at seeing Charley, although he was a relative, for he

was evidently afraid of some of his pranks. However, he told Mary to give us some supper of boiled salmon, and soon after we lay down to sleep.

I was quite tired with my trip, and expected, of course, to sleep all night and get rested, but Mr. Charley had no such idea. About midnight, as near as I could determine, he roused me up, and said it was time to go fishing. It was intensely dark, as the sky was overcast with clouds, and the river being narrow at this place, the great fir-trees cast a still deeper gloom upon the water. In fact, I could not discern my hand before my face; I was entirely blind, to all intents and purposes. Still, Charley insisted that he could see well enough, and guided me into the canoe, with instructions to keep in the stream, while he sat in the bow to hook the fish. This was all very well to talk about, provided I could see; but as, to my blindness, he added the injunction not to speak a word for fear of scaring the fish, I could not ask which way to go. So we floated along with the current at a pretty rapid pace and in a very uncertain manner.

All at once I received a blow in the face that nearly knocked me overboard, and caused a most brilliant display of pyrotechnics to appear before my disordered vision.

“Look out!” says Charley. “Look out!” said I; “why, I am nearly knocked out. Why did you not speak before? What was that that hit me just now?” “Only the limb of a tree we just went under,” said he. He then promised to speak when we were about to run afoul of any more snags, and we kept on, till, coming to some deep water, he began to find and catch the fish. But sitting still in the canoe had chilled me through, and the fish, splashing and thrashing about, had covered me with blood, and water, and slime, and I told Charley I would not remain any longer for all the salmon in the river. He had by that time caught six splendid ones; and, being quite as much chilled as I was, he consented to paddle back to the lodge, where I hoped to get a map. But he had no idea of such a move. He merely brought our blankets and our things down, and, having stowed them, shoved off again. His excuse was that we should catch the tide at the mouth of the river; but I think the real truth was his being vexed with old Chillewit, for I never knew an Indian before make quite so much dispatch.

Captain Purrington and I tried every means of getting rid of Charley, but to no purpose, for we could not drive him out of doors, he was such a comical chap. But his own superstition at last induced him to leave. He was possessed of the power of seeing spirits of the dead, memelose, and, if he had not been so full of

mischief, would have been considered a great doctor. One night, after we had gone to bed, as Charley was lying before the fire, which was burning brightly, I noticed our two dogs, which had hid themselves under the captain's bed, come out into the floor, jumping and wagging their tails as if they were rejoiced at meeting some one. I was up in an instant and drove them out of the house, as their services in keeping watch outside were of more importance than their gambols inside. As I closed the door, Charley said, with a sigh, "What did you speak for and drive out those dogs? Did you not see the memelose?" "No," said I; "who were they?" "They were," he said, "Que-a-quim, who had died at Russell's of small pox, and George, who died and has been buried a short distance from the house in a camphor trunk." "What does he say?" asked the captain. I explained what Charley said. "Ha! ha! ha!" roared the old man; "memelose, hey? Well, Charley, what did they tell you?" Charlie said they had asked him what he was doing there; that it was not his land, and they did not want him to stop there. The next day two Indians came from Chenook, and they made Charley believe that it was necessary for him to leave, and he did so, that very day.

8. Where We Live as International Phenomenon

This landscape where we live now, which is neither city nor country but has characteristics of both, has no suitable name nor is it visually remarkable. Despite its namelessness it can be found all over the world: with the globalization of capitalist-industrial modes of production, the concomitant ways of life and land-use patterns have spread everywhere.

The urban periphery, the urbanized countryside — or, as I call it, where we live — is generally seen as a cultural void. The cultural content of the landscape where we live cannot be held up against any existing measures of high culture or popular culture, of landscape or natural beauty. Nor can its visual and formal possibilities be grasped in this way. To comprehend and unfold the in-between landscape's formal composition, other sources and perspectives will have to be found.

Between extremes, we find the everyday elements of where we live: colonies of single-family houses; light-industry tracts comprising the most astonishing mixture of still-functioning workshops, but also villas, empty sheds and warehouses; overgrown gardens and abandoned fields; nightclubs and discount superstores. Also hospitals, stables, and remnants of farms;

groves and ponds; power lines, old train tracks, berms, and footpaths.

Entry points for an interpretation of and a formal reckoning with where we live are likely to be found in the concept of the heterogeneous landscape, in the image of almost incomprehensible milieus, in the experience of time in its different dimensions, in notions of mood and atmosphere found in many modern films (in jump cuts, in shifts and disruptions; also in TV commercials that present visual sequences without a narrative thread). These offer the most fitting models for interpreting where we live.

Analogies with reading texts of modern literature, or with the experience of listening to certain types of new music, will perhaps lead us further than futile attempts to impose order with architecture. Architecture and the way it shapes a certain type of urban space are only individual components of the landscape where we live (even if they are important components); architecture can no longer determine the form of these landscapes as a whole.

9. http://www.goodbye_suto!.blogspot.com

Monday, March 3, Torino: La Dolce Vita:
This weekend started out on a very positive note. We

were so excited for Besnick to finally get to play a BMX race, after having his first two canceled on account of rain. At this level of play a muddy track can be a very boring place. Only one racer made it without falling. I think Besnick spent more time watching the birds flying overhead than the race.

After the race I got my kids, plus a few of their gadge friends to work on getting the cars clean. Once everyone had completely soaked each other, they didn't get much work done. Ferka was the only one that stuck it out until the job was finished. That's why he got paid in cash, while everyone else got paid in ice cream.

Later I watched Paolo do a little planting in the garden. We are crossing our fingers that the frosty nights are behind us.

Matthew Stadler

Posted by Madalena at 9:22 AM 5 comments

Thursday March 13, My Old Friend

It's hard keeping our horse in Torino, but here are a few tips. I use a 30' picket rope and only graze the horse at night. We have a yard with excellent soil and I planted fescue and orchard grass that I also irrigate. Paolo lined the yard with fast-growing hedges, and when the animal is healthy it is nearly silent at night. Ferka would have died rather than give up the horse, but our neighborhood doesn't allow them. So far, we haven't had any complaints. During the day, she stays

in her stall in the garage. It's much nicer than a barn (central heating!), and we park the cars outside. The backyard lets on to an overgrown greenbelt that leads to the river, and Ferka can ride her there if he leaves before sunrise. We also had milk goats that we kept near the house, in the greenbelt, but they bleated and were going to be taken away, so Paolo butchered them. Puri daj sent along a thrift tip, and I promised her I'd post it to the blog. A simple homemade washing machine: Clean out a 5-gallon pail with lid. Cut a hole in the lid just big enough for the handle of a plunger (the kind with the rubber bell to unclog toilets) and put a short-handled plunger through it, add clothes, water, and soap, close lid and voila! Thanks Puri daj! UPDATE: To all you haters (especially you, Stefano of Liguria) eat shit and die. My husband knows some very nasty people, nastier than you cowards, and you should LEAVE MY BLOG ALONE. This is a family zone.

Posted by Madalena at 11:38 PM, 27 comments

Friday March 21, Keeping it real:

Yesterday Stevo and I went downtown to run some errands. While we were there we happened to drive by a big toy store, with a sign out front announcing "Final 3 days, 70% off everything." My first instinct was that they must not have anything good left, but

I decided it was worth a look. I managed to fill a cart with things for all the kids, and at an amazing price. According to my receipt I saved almost 50 euro, and have lots of leftovers “on hold” for birthdays or next Christmas. The funniest part is that Stevo got so excited when we stopped for lunch at Burger King on the way home that he seems to have completely forgotten about all the toys. He didn’t even tell the other kids we went to a toy store.

Posted by Madalena at 9:16 AM 7 comments

Matthew Stadler

Urban planning? How about more pills, more babies, and no laws. Then all our problems would be about the future. Architecture can be changed without being modified. At last, I am leaving Rome.

10. Change Comes

Revolutionary change comes in an atmosphere of great unreality because there is so wide a gap between the old realities that are being overturned and the living reality of the coming being. Those living in the coming being do not fight against old habits and structures so much as they just marvel, agog, at the baroque phantasms of the old reality, its excesses and violence, mourning the considerable losses (of lives and things), as they try to understand the new life they are already

living. Great change comes not by winning “the struggle” against older structures, but by withdrawing from struggle: withdrawing the tremendous investment of our imaginations that struggle demands, with its obligation to constantly think about and know about and oppose — and thus prop up — what is dying. As the old reality spirals higher and higher into ever more insane and unsupportable phantasms of “common sense,” those living in the coming reality finally just give up and proceed with living. That is how change comes.

11. GORJAN ¥ :: Profile (9277 views)

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View All 30 Photos

Add as a Friend Add as a Friend Send Message Send Favorites Add to Favorites Use this Skin Use This Skin

Block User

Report Abuse

Status: if???.....IF YOU get a CHANCE, its once in a LIFETIME with ME!!! be carefull what you gonna PLAY!!! - Comment »

<http://gorjan21.hi5.com> - Send it to your friends

Sex / Age

Male / 23

Birthday

February 19

Location

Skopje, Macedonia

Languages

French, English, Croatian

Stats

5496 Friends

1593 Profile Comments

2241 Photo Comments

535 Fives

80 Scraps

About Me

Nema sto mn... mn... da seram i da se pretstavuvam po sajtov, ke kazam 2-3 zboraz za mene a drugoto ke go doznae toj sto saka!!!

Jas sum GORJAN JOVANOVSKI a.k.a. Skipi Beat!!! sakam se sto e zabraneto!!! sakam da pravam muzika!!! sakam da SAKAM!!! i sakam cokolado!!! peace!!! p.s. JAS SUM JAS!!!

Interests

TO FALL IN LOVE AGAIN!!!

Favorite Movies

MAN ON FIRE, HOW HI, HONEY, The Blue LAGOON, INSIDE MAN, JAMES BOND site!!!, TRAINING DAY, WAIST DEEP, CITY OF GOD, KAMA SUTRA, SOUL PLANE. FEAR AND LOATHING IN LAS VEGAS, SPUN, REQUIEM

FOR A DREAM, TETOVIRANJE, RANE!!!

Profile Comments

We are currently experiencing technical issues with our comments system. We apologize for this inconvenience. You may experience various problems using the comment system, rest assured we are working hard to restore the comments system back to normal and again apologize for inconvenience.

Leave a comment for GORJAN ¥

Jun 26, 2008 11:38 AM

Aleksandra says:

Ne si fer u sabota vecerta ke idam na odmor a te nema nekolku dena za da se vidime! c c c..

Jun 26, 2008 4:27 AM

Stefanovska says:

hugs

Jun 22, 2008 9:20 AM

bojana says:

SONCE,POZDRAVCE I MN BACKIIII:)))

Jun 22, 2008 6:40 AM

Stefanovska says:

MyHotComments.com

Jun 17, 2008 3:38 PM

ivana says:

Girly Comments & Graphics

I JAS SAKAM COKOLADO :)

Jun 17, 2008 3:22 PM

Iva says:

GORJAN BE STO E SO POZADINAVA SO
 ANOREKSICNAVA!?!?!VAKVI LI GI SAKAS;););)
 POZDRAAAAV

Jun 17, 2008 7:42 AM

Iva says:
 cocktail

12. The Sweetness to Live, conclusion...

What did they eat?

The prince ate some snails.

And did they drink..?

They drank the Valpolicella.

And what do you make in Rome?

We make a movie.

And these small bills?

I don't sign.

You ate greedily everything!

It is not true.

You were not...writer or journalist, once?

I left the literature and the journalism. I am "public relations" to the satisfaction of the concerned persons.

I know: to live, it is necessary to write whatever, but that! Dress yourselves. Outside!

It is a remedy against the headache.

This girl is sick.

Take a little air in the pine grove...

I am sick!

Does one make a beautiful big hen?
I don't want to be a big hen!
What do they make of him?
That we are all indeed completely equal!
Do you want to dance?
It is daylight.
The dawn always moves me...
I feel all gluey.
Behind you! What do you make of it?.
Your fortune is made with that fish!
My children, come see! A monster!
But is it alive?
It died three days ago.
Where is it from?
From Australia!
What is the front and what is the behind?
The poor!
And it looks at you!

The air was brackish, like metal, softened by the perfume of the paliurus her car had come to rest in. The clouds had passed now and the sun warmed her car hood. She lay down on it and slept.

— END —

A note on sources:

This essay was composed through collage, assemblage, re-use, and reconstruction. Among the original sources are:

An interview with guitarist MonTagna of the death metal band VII Arcano on the Cemetary Gates website <http://blog.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=blog.view&friendID=11188113&blogID=358546773> [for section 2. Technical Death Metal]

An excerpt from the book *Zwischenstadt*, by Thomas Sieverts, translated from German by Diana George [for section 4. Where We Live as International Phenomena]

An Internet-generated translation of *La Dolce Vita*, by Federico Fellini, found online at http://www.script-o-rama.com/movie_scripts/l/la-dolce-vita-script-transcript.html [for sections 5. and 12. The Sweetness to Live]

An excerpt from *The Northwest Coast (1852-1855)*, by J.G. Swann [for section 7. The Departure of Charley and the Arrival of New Settlers]

The blog *Living With Wild Monkeys* at <http://living->

withwildmonkeys.blogspot.com/ and the May 1999 issue of Dwelling Portably, a zine by Bert & Holly of Philomath, Oregon. [for section 8. http://www.goodbye_suto!.blogspot.com]

The New York Daily News of June 27, 2008 [for section 9. KAZAKH supermodel with 'fairytale' beauty, age 20, plummets to her death]

The HI5 profile of Gorjan Jovanovski at <http://hi5.com/friend/97403609--GORJAN%2B%25C3%2582%25C2%25A5--Profile-ht-ml> [for section 11. GORJAN ¥ :: Profile (9277 views)]

Love and War: WTO 1999

I GUESS THIS IS A LOVE STORY. The World Trade Organization came to Seattle last week. I had come home after six months in Portland to be here for it. A lot of protesters were here too, but the love story that played out was about the city and its people and its police force. Visitors always get the blood flowing. WTO and its attendant dissenters became the third leg in a couple's love triangle, the intriguing stranger propped up to generate enough friction for a fight; a domestic drama that, in our case, shaded into violence and real damage.

As I drove into town Sunday night, the city's skyline made my heart swell, like it always does, with its excellent profiles, black and sparkly against the mountains, a kind of fantasy boyfriend whose vacant eyes are so beautiful you keep forgetting there's actually no one home. From the south, I-5 runs right up its throat, and that's pretty awesome too. It was nice to be home.

Seattle may look stunning, but anyone living here knows the spark of Eros has been pretty much snuffed. Public life is as charged and stimulating as an NPR broadcast. Good neighbors are cordial and cold, never hot or passionate. Discourse flies toward the purely mental. And if sparks fly, let alone turn to flames,

the city feels menaced. Eros is feared, so when it does sweep through in a crowd or in a crisis, it comes as a blind, violent God, a permanently fucked-up lover who can't get passionate without drowning in self-hatred and getting a little rough. I hoped our visitors would bring a little Eros with them.

Mayor Paul Schell began the week saying the confluence of WTO and protestors posed no problems. "I look on this as a chance for the city to initiate a global conversation." Even as the WTO pursued its closed sessions, off-limits to many who have to live with their edicts, the city would be open. Schell made room for everyone, and not as a token -- he regarded protesters as citizens, co-equal with anyone else, and he made plans to protect their right to use downtown, the city's core. It cannot be overstated how radical a stance Schell had taken. The mayor was not creating penned-off protest areas, was not directing demonstrators to the margins, nor undermining their import. He treated them as citizens whose business on the street was as pressing and legitimate as anyone else's. It was this crucial faith, this first act of love that made our marvelous, horrifying week possible.

On Monday morning I went to 420 East Denny, where demonstrators had set up a makeshift clubhouse/headquarters. Scores, maybe hundreds, milled inside

and around the door. Inside -- post-hippie vibe, tons of posters, soup and tea on a counter, scattered couches, kids galore -- huge butcher-paper signs over manned tables of pamphlets and clipboards suggested some sort of organization, but the room was chaotic. It was no one's room -- therefore everyone's -- a down-at-the-heels emporium of information and supplies. Kids talked in knots with friends who, in the context of this week, formed "affinity groups." Unified action -- like the choice to gather the next morning at Seattle Central Community College for a march to downtown -- emerged from collaboration among these autonomous groups. Love was definitely in the air. Tim, the publisher of this paper, says the anti-WTO protest was about getting laid, but what does he know?

Matthew Stadler

A lot of agony has been wasted over whether these demonstrators knew or cared anything about the WTO. Were they "sincere" or committed in their opposition? This faux question packs the implied criticism that no, they were not, and therefore what they did and said was frivolous. The distinction -- clueless, frivolous protesters are not real protesters -- reminded me a lot of my own anxieties about writing, which is so fun and based so deeply in my own ignorance that I often doubt my professionalism. Like me, these people seemed to be winging it on a blend of passion and desire, as much learning as time allows, and a great deal of misplaced hope.

Those I spoke with came to protest because their communities and economies have become strange to them. They don't know where the stuff in their lives comes from or goes. Increasingly that stuff includes people, ideas, even affinities. Anxiety about change, about localities that seem to blossom and dissolve according to the needs of distant corporate bodies, about losing connection to the people and places near to them, drove thousands into the streets downtown. "Shut down the WTO" let them see what happens when business gets stopped, and people gather in the streets with no business but each other.

Tuesday morning, 7 a.m.: still dark, wet, and cold. I biked to SCCC for the early march downtown. The school's mossy bricks get slimy whenever it rains, so the few hundred costumed and placard-waving demonstrators who'd arrived skated cautiously around, milling in knots looking for their friends. One man held a cardboard cut-out black cat ("for section J affinity group"); kids, small kids, were dressed as butterflies; corn and trees ambled past; a terrifying Munch-esque papier-mâché head, appended with great cloth arms to grabby, wobbling hands, rumbled by on shopping carts. A panoply of speakers exhorted the crowd until the butterflies were called to the front, and the march began.

Critics say WTO support for unfettered free trade will lead to a dismantling of environmental protections, fair labor laws, and other local regulations. If the free-flow of goods is the paramount value, then a lot of inconveniences -- like curbing pollution, paying fair wages, and subsidizing small economies -- have to fall by the wayside. Many protesters connect this ideology to the unpleasant experience of corporate power in America. Free trade, as enforced by the WTO, favors large global corporations that take advantage of cheap labor or lax regulation in one country to produce goods for affluent customers in another. As the march slid down the hill, noisy and ebullient in the light morning traffic, it became clear that people saw the enemy all around: Starbucks, Ford Motor Company, Niketown. WTO was the flash point for anxieties that were much more pervasive and personal.

At Boren, the first line of police arrived, blocking Pine into downtown, and the first stretch limo ran over the first bicycles, scattering protesters in its wake. Pike and Pine were both blocked by police, so marchers went south to Seneca. Hundreds came down that steep street, aimed toward the lovely gray Sound, then simply walked past the imposing line of helmeted police. Schell's welcome: The police were symbolic. They stood to mark the line the city hoped to draw, but if you chose to pass, you would not be

stopped. It struck me that Schell's strategy was very WTO, removing any barriers to the free exchange of ideas. At their core, these ideologies, Schell's and the WTO's, are consonant -- statements of faith in the essential goodness of people. If we allow everyone to carry out their impulses, unfettered by the fears or values of others, the vigorous exchanges that result will yield the best result for all. It is an enlightenment faith -- expose everything to the open light of day and let it run its course; the world we live in should not inspire fear.

For Schell, this suggests a Zen-like policing strategy. Enable all citizen initiatives equally -- protest, trade conventions, counter-protest, reconciliation, all of it. Allow things to happen without hindrance so they complete themselves. Events disappear more rapidly if the city cooperates. To resist initiatives simply prolongs them (and prolongs the resistance), burdening the city in every way. For the WTO, openness is a rockier road. Critics point to secretive decision-making and the disproportionate power of the U.S. and other developed countries. But the WTO's core ideology -- global standardization and uninhibited trade -- points them, and will take them, to their stated goals of "transparency and broad inclusion"; Schell's global conversation. In only five years, the WTO has grown to include 134 nations. Their global imperative drives

this and further expansion. And (oddly in common with this week's protesters), binding decisions are made by consensus, a fact that allowed developing nations to frustrate U.S. initiatives at the Seattle ministerial.

These tendencies have an intriguing corollary in the eagerness of news organizations to find and amplify all events of the day. The news accelerates the erasure of events. Reporting as much as possible, quickly and exhaustively, saturates us with successive waves of stories. The process is so unbridled, events seem to dissolve in the sheer abundance of information, and are thereby erased. It's no accident that this city, which cannot remember even the brief history of yesterday or last year, is also the place from which the most powerful engines for disseminating information have been launched. The technologies deployed here flood the world with so much data the whole blurs and becomes a nullity. This too is very Zen (and very Seattle, a city where "I agree," is the first line of attack on anyone with whom you disagree).

Watching Tuesday's protest tumble forward toward its inevitable disappearance, I wondered if there was anyone who could observe, legitimize, or help preserve these events without also dissolving or usurping them. Yes, as I soon learned, the police could; not the chatty, friendly cop, but the silent, faceless cop who beats you.

I found my brother at Sixth and Union, shooting. He's a cameraman for KIRO-TV, burdened with the massive truck and camera, the KIRO parka, and, that day, a fidgety, pee-on-the-floor puppy of a reporter dragging him around for stories. Major media sometimes get targeted -- partly for covering things poorly, and partly for being corporate, the common enemy to everyone at this protest -- so I was a little worried for him. He and this eager reporter both looked young and friendly, so despite their logos, no one threw knives or wrenches (like I saw happen to a woman from KOMO-TV a few blocks away). We chatted for a while about the chained circle of demonstrators taking up the intersection, then I bicycled toward the Sheraton Hotel.

The rain had stopped and a fresh breeze blew off the Sound. I biked through blocks thick with jubilant, dancing people; no cars, no business, just strangers and noise vibrating within the grid of tall buildings. The police were cheery. At Sixth and Pike they chatted with demonstrators, sharing details about strategy. No, the demonstrators could not go near the Paramount. Yes, they could remain on Pike and along Sixth. The talk was cordial, stiff but friendly. Cops' faces were still visible, so it was clear they too were people, though that was all about to change.

I heard explosions at Sixth and Union and bicycled back to check on my brother. By the time I arrived,

he was crouching on the floor of a bathroom, blinded and choking on police tear gas. Outside, the breeze had blown most of the gas back toward police. Demonstrators scattered, except for a core of 20 or so, chained together in the intersection. Police rushed them when the crowd parted, then protesters re-gathered, surrounding the police. Now the police held the street, and the people had them surrounded.

Those few hours before the explosions were among the most wonderful hours I've spent here. Frankenstein had come to life. Seattle's downtown, that gray, clumsy accumulation of dead parts, flickered its eyes open and breathed. The air fairly buzzed, vibrant and unpredictable. I felt solidarity with strangers -- the very reason for cities -- in a place where I'd rarely felt anything but boredom and fear. People strolled and talked and shouted, buying nothing. This animated crowd included police and delegates, protesters, residents, and workers who'd come down from the offices towering above us. Anyone who tells you the political is not personal is seriously fucked up. Paul Schell's beautiful vision swelled in my heart as, for too few hours, I walked and breathed inside his ideal of an open, living city. First date, in this love story, was that morning of celebration, Seattle broadly alive for the first time in decades.

As in many romances (including the instructive one of Frankenstein), when the dead embers are brought blazing to life, someone is bound to get burned. Primarily that has been Paul Schell, tied to a public stake and roasted in the flames of the fire he set. A Seattle Times editorial blames “the mayor’s naïve trust” for putting us face to face with our own brutal, erotic impulses. In this story, the starry-eyed mayor’s ‘60s vision of “peaceful protest” blinded him to ‘90s-style “senseless violence,” and downtown got trashed. The story rests on the polarity between “peaceful protest” and “senseless violence.” No one questions it. To vandalize our prosperous, sparkling downtown, we say as one, could only be senseless.

What reason could there be for attacking the bounty and beauty of downtown? I puzzled over exactly this question, drifting past the locked, gated entrance to Pacific Place, the sound of glass shattering down the block. The terms of our citizenship downtown have been drastically altered in the last 10 years. You don’t have to be a vandal to feel the deep divisions built into the grid of new development. All of the city’s vigor, its investments and energies, surge upward in concentrated pockets of commercial property addressed expressly to a mere fraction of the city. To walk downtown now is to face -- block after block -- one’s own poverty. Even the middle class does not belong in much of

this emporium. Walk there without money, walk there among a group of teenagers, walk there black or poor, and you'll know whose downtown it is. Even those who are not excluded, not belittled or alienated by the ownership of downtown, feel embarrassment at the ostentation of this temporary, fleeting wealth. Drifting past the locked, gated entrance to Pacific Place on my bike that day, I wondered why vandals did not damage the city every day of the year.

The sense behind the violence is the same sense that brought peaceful protesters downtown. The city's core ought to be public, civic in the deepest sense, placing all on equal footing. Our citizenship Tuesday morning, our sense of belonging there, threw bright light on the restricted terms of privilege every other day of the year. That downtown, by design, demeans and belittles many citizens, made it both a target for violent attack, and a territory for peaceful reclamation. Notably, the police solution to these radical disturbances was to ban anyone "without legitimate business." Ownership of property, membership in the WTO, and the daily conduct of commerce became tickets into a privatized zone -- vandals had managed to make the city literalize and expose what had been true for too long.

A last, frightening, reminder of the boundaries that persist in the city came on Wednesday night, when

Seattle City Council Member Richard McIver, a black man, was stopped twice by police while trying to get to a WTO reception at the Westin Hotel. Police pulled him from his car, threw his wallet and ID to the ground, and tried to handcuff and arrest him. “I have been treated like a nigger before,” McIver said, “and that’s what this was.” If you’re young, black, or poor, the violence we saw last week does not end. That can never be forgotten.

The most disturbing and lasting alchemy of the week was this transformation of the police into a mute, faceless apparatus of fear. It took only a matter of hours. Around 10:30 a.m., at Fourth and Pine, I watched six masked, helmeted warriors descend from their armored car. I couldn’t keep my eyes off them. I drifted in circles on my bike, never straying more than a dozen yards from the scene, awed by their discipline and reserve. I have friends who are cops, and I know them to be decent, even goofy people. But now... these men! I searched the curious masks, the bodies shrouded in metal and hard plastic, looking for a clue. How they had changed, and us along with them -- in the eyes of the police, we had all become criminals, wanted.

I biked home, fleeing these desirous pursuers. The vacant face of downtown sparkled behind me, bathed in gas and twilight. Police choppers beat their trill-

ing thrum into the cold air. Bands of demonstrators, entranced by the police, backed up the hill, eyes riveted on the masked men below. On TV that evening, a KIRO reporter intoned her litany of the day's events: "the trashing of stores, the fires, the beating of drums, and the constant enticing of the police." The Enticing of the Police. No one can live without love, and now here it came, in all its terror and embrace, stalking us, hunting us down from above with searchlights, like it never had in life. Love was in the air.

The accidental genius of this reporter's remark was in contrast to the petty moral scolding of the studio-bound anchors. A photojournalist, wearing WTO credentials, wrestled to the ground by police (who thought he was with the protesters he'd been following) "should have known better than to track so close to them." Three men held without charges after they climbed a fire escape (blocks away from a protest) "should not need reminding that it's illegal to climb fire escapes." In the dysfunctional family our city was becoming, these older-sibling nags kept imposing themselves between us and the increasingly schizophrenic, brutal daddy whose love now spread out of downtown to find us in our neighborhoods and homes. Under attack by the media and business owners, the mayor altered his tactics, which now became an almost textbook case of bad parenting. Trust was withdrawn and replaced by a

carousel of threats and promises. We knew the mayor cared deeply -- as every forward thrust of his faceless, mechanical police showed us -- yet we shuddered in fear.

While our private affairs spiraled toward violence, the WTO and much of the opposition continued with the business of public discourse. I was struck by how productive, forward-looking, and incredibly tedious all of it was. The coalescing of well-modulated voices into a melodious conversation lacked any particularity or stasis. It just kept flowing forward, faster and faster, cascading toward some ideal of complete comprehension. The world of particularity and difference spiraled away into abstraction. By contrast I was drunk on apprehension -- my own failure to get anything, to comprehend even what was happening in front of my face. Black-clad vandals with no clear agenda haunted my dreams. An army of masked, armed men compelled me, merely by their constant, sightless gaze. Why should this mute regard, this static refusal to be understood, enchant? Here was the commonality between the two decisive factions, cops and vandals -- obfuscation; scrambling, the "wild weasel," the bizarre policing move in which cops turn on every siren and light they've got, then drive madly in circles to confuse the victim. Here was the true anti-WTO, the real force against enlightenment -- cops and vandals. Why did they beguile me so?

On Wednesday night my love story found its climax. I was at home, writing this essay, when explosions and gas burst a few blocks away. The riot police, those paramours of terror, had come for me. They'd made their way through the dark with batons and tear gas. Police marched up Broadway sending volleys of gas, then charged to clear the blocks. I met them at Harrison, where a man lay on the sidewalk, bludgeoned by a cop. Crossing at Republican, a block distant from the exploding canisters, I was blinded and sickened by clouds of gas. Restaurants kept their doors locked, diners pressed against the windows. It was horrible and wonderful, feeling the warm hum of solidarity this unprovoked attack kindled; all the criminalized citizens of the city were as one. That night the police held us, and the rest was tear gas and weeping.

Their paroxysm must have satiated something, for by Thursday, police had shed the black love-costumes and exposed their bright faces again to the sunshine. Moreover, they began inviting protesters into conversation, responding to the day's demonstrations with negotiations and talk. The invitation was always accepted, as it would have been any day earlier. WTO critics -- like the organization itself -- were dedicated to inclusive dialogue: a conversation among autonomous groups, decisions reached by consensus, open discussion. The police were late in catching on (they had other needs to attend to), but throughout the week, the

most forward-looking coalition builders in Seattle had been making bridges between the WTO and its critics, capitalizing on exactly this commonality. All parties wanted a unified conversation. A broad cross-section of people and organizations had begun creating the infrastructure that would link the discussions of the WTO and its critics. By Friday, links involving NGOs, delegations within the WTO, the Internet, and the press were in place to facilitate this expanded discussion in the coming years. Was there anyone now not rushing toward the global goal of transparency, clarity, total integration, and comprehension? Yes: cops and vandals.

And why would they resist the global conversation? Why would anyone withhold names, not give reasons, refuse to speak, act in secret? There is something about secrets, about silence and the dark bruise left by violence. It is unforgettable, unforgivable. If love is a perverse, recalcitrant, or senseless thing, like a wound that never heals but simply retreats further inside, maybe there is a reason this perpetually reasonable city is so vacant and cold. Now police are backpedaling toward justifications, and Paul Schell has promised to “re-establish our city as a place where people can shop freely.” It’s the typical aftermath of domestic violence, the veneer of normalcy painted thinly over open wounds. Even as we finger these bruises desir-

ously, we will be told, over and over, this was a story of poor planning, of events that spiraled out of control; but really it's the story of men and what the difficulty of loving drives them to.

Feels Blind: Bjarne Mastenbroek

The sweet young barista at my local cafe told me he'd seen a "spaceship grotto" at the Museumpark. He's an art student; he goes to the Museumpark a lot. The spaceship grotto was the New Pavilion, and I asked him what he thought of it. He said it looked "kind of scary" and he didn't go inside. Yes, this is anecdotal; but I start here because I was also scared by the pavilion's green scrim of innocence. It frightened me too, many times, in many different ways. But I went inside.

His remark reminded me of endless encounters I had in the 1980s when friends would tell me that punk rock was interesting, but the shows were too frightening, so they never went. Had they bothered to walk through the door, they would have found the sweetest, most timid people, bedecked comically in safety pins and chains, trying to hold convincing sneers despite laughing and smiling all of the time. In the assaultive musical environment we endure today, punk's basic sweetness and humanity is crystal clear, but back then it seemed scary to exactly those for whom it could have been liberatory.

Not everyone is scared of the New Pavilion. I asked a man emerging from its doorway in a cloud of marijuana smoke what this building was. "This is a temple",

he told me, nodding sagely. Every morning scores of empty bottles remain from the parties Rotterdamers improvise on the pavilion's verdant exterior. During the day teens slouch on its shoulders, remote and sullen on 'smoker's hill', while fashion photographers circle models posed by the pavilion's steel door before swooping inside, where the models stretch and swing their hair across the tropical greenery.

Skaters have tried skating the interior walls; impromptu concerts are held; tourists pose; children squeal with excitement and speak of Teletubbies. In time it has become active. Oddly, this is largely through neglect. An ambitious program of deliberate 'activation' proved impossible and the Pavilion spent most of the summer alone in the rain. Then the creatures of the night came out and began to leave their traces, the residue of their pleasure. It reminded me of the American city where I once lived, where skaters roamed the streets a few steps ahead of the police, looking for neglected places to colonize. In Portland, the underside of a bridge proved foul and hidden enough that the skaters managed to build an entire park out of poured concrete, the Burnside Skatepark, without anyone stopping them. Eventually the city bought the land and granted it back to the skaters, rather than chase them further, or destroy what they'd built. Maybe neglect can be a deliberate part of city development.

The New Pavilion looks both futuristic and pre-historic, as much like Fred Flintstone's cave/house as like George Jetsons' saucer-shaped home in the sky. Its relation to time – to other buildings, past or future, to the grass which enfolds it, to the city it is part of, to this greater world that connects to it in infinite, precise, nearly invisible ways – is scrambled and vast. The love I feel for this confounding, unresolved building nests inside this confusion of time and effects. Robert Smithson described something like it in his 1966 essay 'Entropy and the New Monuments'. (Bjarne Mastenbroek pointed me to this.) "Instead of causing us to remember the past, like the old monuments, the new monuments seem to cause us to forget the future. Instead of being made of natural materials, such as marble, granite, or other kinds of rock, the new monuments are made of artificial materials...they are not built for the ages but rather against the ages. They are involved in a systematic reduction of time down to fractions of seconds, rather than in representing the long spaces of centuries. Both past and future are placed in an objective present. This kind of time has little or no space; it is stationery and without movement, it is going nowhere."

This systematic reduction of time – which, as it approaches zero, becomes also a boundless exploding of time – this confounding of time's measure – fits well

the New Pavilion's blunt affect. It bears no mark of time because nothing is remote or discontinuous from it. In this it also resembles the 16th-century monad of John Dee, a densely overloaded symbol that purports to collect all human knowledge in the modest labyrinth of a mark on a page.

I've grown to love the New Pavilion, despite strong negative first impressions that deepened with repeated viewing. This building does not seduce you. It actively repels some, and I only grew to love it because I love poetry. I kept coming back and listening. I paid attention. I accepted its contradictions and broadened my view. I heard the music it takes part in. The New Pavilion is one of the most challenging and honest contributions to Dutch architecture in the last few years, and it rewards serious engagement – it even demands it. I'm not surprised a building like this is rare. Architects are rarely asked for honesty or conflict. Bjarne Mastenbroek had the advantage of an ambitious client, Het Nieuwe Instituut, who really needed something smart, and of a brief that expressly called for a challenge. (The brief specifically asked the architect to “design a 1:1 model of a process to be”, not “a house of the future with the usual emphasis on technology”. So, this is not Rotterdam's ‘Tomorrow Land’.)

You've no doubt noticed that it is impossible to sit in the shadow of the New Pavilion, which cannot be said of the client's HQ, Het Nieuwe Instituut by Jo Coenen. This modesty is just one of the myriad, poetic and contradictory assertions made by Mastenbroek's design. Among the others is boastfulness, beauty, harsh ugliness, innocence, blindness, vision, tranquility, imprisonment, vitality, death, and, underlying them all, I believe, a barely repressed rage.

They're all part of what the brief called for – an example of process; the way the architect thinks – not a futurist's prognostication of how we'll live. The New Pavilion is a tool for thinking – thinking by building – not the house we'll live in in 2050. It's interesting to see the Sonneveld House sitting confidently across the street, a house we visit by imagining the pleasures of living in it. Mastenbroek concedes that pleasure to the Sonneveld and its neighboring villas. His New Pavilion has little or no dialogue across the street, despite sharing a home address. The pavilion is too strange, too indifferent to middle class notions of comfort. It is completely alien, babbling alone in a foreign language, like a refugee family that's been plunked down on the block who, in their incoherent way, have no thoughts about comfort because they are simply hoping not to die.

The pavilion is more obviously tied to the bulky headquarters it sits beside, like a broken water main fountaining in the yard. But nothing has burst, yet. The swelling in the grass betrays some sort of pressure deep in the bowels of Dutch architecture. But is the New Pavilion a disaster about to explode upon us or the reassuring performance of a reliable back-up system, that admirably resilient bladder called ‘the architect’ – a miraculous organ into which rivers of poison can be poured that the architect will smilingly swallow so the system can bring forth its great, golden stream of buildings; how much abuse can be heaped into this holding tank without breaking it?

About this question, the New Pavilion is poker-faced, or no-faced. There is no façade, only this pressured swelling of the earth. Architecture, here, is completely interior. It makes no sculptural claims. True, the architect’s process distorts the earth, pushing against the surface, but it barely breaks the skin. The breaks are in two places – on top, to open a kind of defenseless eye that can only see the sky, and nothing else; and on the front, to open the throat that lets us pass and be swallowed. The pavilion’s interplay with the external, material context is as close to zero as Mastenbroek could dial it, so that all that’s left is this set of buried pressures shaping whatever the architect can give us to help relieve the pressure; which, given the brief,

must be ‘architecture’, or all that’s left of it. So, how does that feel?

All the doves that fly past my eyes
Have a stickiness to their wings
In the doorway of my demise I stand
Encased in the whisper you taught me

How does it feel?
It feels blind
How does it feel?
Well, it feels fucking blind
What have you taught me? Nothing
Look at what you have taught me
Your world has taught me nothing

If you were blind and there was no braille
There are no boundaries on what I can feel
If you could see but we’re always taught
What you saw wasn’t fucking real yeah

How does that feel?
It feels blind
How does that feel?
Well it feels fucking blind
What have you taught me? Nothing
Look at what you’ve taught me
You’re world has taught me nothing

As a woman I was taught to always be hungry
 Yeah women are well acquainted with thirst
 Yeah, I could eat just about anything
 I could even eat your hate up like love

I eat your hate like love
 I'd eat your fucking hate up like love

The poem on the pavilion's door, composed by Mastenbroek's design team, led me to this. Near the bottom, the door says 'FEEL BLIND'. The song is 'Feels Blind', by Bikini Kill. I saw the band in Olympia, Washington: Kathleen Hanna, Billy Karren, Kathi Wilcox, and Tobi Vale, circa 1992. Another band there, then, (Tobi's boyfriend Kurt's band), was recording 'Smells Like Teen Spirit'. But "Feels Blind" is the song that history will remember. Such majesty. That beautiful pale flower that blossoms open at the end, Tobi Vale's desultory cymbal crash, is exactly where Bjarne Mastenbroek's angry pavilion begins. He has swallowed the considerable rage that precedes it, knowing that rage was not part of the brief, even if it is part of his process. But he has barely swallowed it, and it keeps pushing up, like a gut full of bile. If the New Pavilion is "kind of scary", that's maybe because the swollen pregnancy it houses begins in these deeply negative emotions of refusal, a refusal that feels so urgent it threatens to annihilate hope.

The pavilion does not offer us any easy way out. We can only exit through the same narrow passage that led us in. Mastenbroek has rigorously stripped the interior of decoration or distractions, except, notably, the plants. Which is not to say the building is indifferent to context. The New Pavilion is a more deeply contextual and engaged building than, for example, the larger one it sits beside. Context is not only visual or material; it also lies hidden in massive accumulations of pressure, adjacency, and connections from which visual pleasures and play often distract us. The New Pavilion foregrounds this web of connectedness by stripping away the distractions we normally fix upon.

Mastenbroek has subtracted all of the pleasantries, the aesthetic and intellectual puzzles of style and context that normally take up the attention of architecture's consumers. He's robbed us of the chance to consume, giving us, anyway, hammocks, so we can sway while we wait, but for what? The green is nice, but the plants are also prisoners, refugees. And they look beaten. Huddled together, their tips burned by the sun, their tops broken, they might be victims of a hate crime.

They've come from across the globe. Not one of them belongs here. They have been pulled from their beds and put on life-support. Now, in the lean-to refugee

shelter, the provision even of that is in question. But isn't this the case for architecture now? That the lives it must house, those who need shelter, are as displaced and complex as these plants? Their faces are just as pleasant to look at as the relaxing green of the prisoner-plants, but their lives are as intractably difficult.

Hosting these alien, imported plants, the New Pavilion gives us green ecology, the nonhumans with whom we must share our destiny, while refusing to give us 'Nature'. The same can be said for the industrial lawn that's been rolled over the pavilion's steel shell outside. It looks like 'nature' but it was trucked here from an indoor grass factory that produces the stuff by the meter using (one imagines) the most hideous of chemical processes. In the New Pavilion we are undeniably enfolded in a green world, the realm of the ecology-minded architect, literally so; but we are equally enfolded in the brutal politics and economics that frame that puzzle. Writer and literary critic Timothy Morton calls this entanglement the 'dark ecology'.

The 'dark ecology' is a universe of things – including the 'things' that are writing and reading this text, you and I – as well as the things it is printed on and that move through the world in concert with it. Persons, animals, objects, concepts, have an equivalent complexity and shroudedness in this densely

interconnected world. All are shaped mutually in a ‘mesh’ – to use another of Morton’s terms – that was well described by Darwin. Morton extends Darwin’s deep, agnostic appreciation for the incredible surprise and specificity of living things to a world, our world, riven too with the virtual, the remembered, the forgotten, and the merely imagined. To inhabit this world, Morton says, is to fall into the shadow of ‘the ecological thought’.

“The ecological thought”, Morton wrote in his 2010 book of the same name, “is a virus that infects all other areas of thinking. Ecology isn’t just about global warming, recycling, and solar power – it is not just to do with everyday relationships between humans and nonhumans. It has to do with love, loss, despair, and compassion. It has to do with depression and psychosis. It has to do with capitalism and what might exist after capitalism. It has to do with amazement, open-mindedness, and wonder. It has to do with doubt, confusion, and skepticism...Like the shadow of an idea not yet fully thought, a shadow from the future (that wonderful phrase of the poet Shelley), the ecological thought creeps over other ideas until nowhere is left untouched by its dark presence.”

The New Pavilion is Morton’s ‘ecological thought’ expressed as architecture. It is the spot where this

shadow from the future touches ground. But Morton's time-sense is rather like Robert Smithson's. Things run backwards, so that causality is inverted. The future arrives to tell us what happened, not what will be happening next. There is no element of prediction in Morton's work, nor in the New Pavilion, just this radical overloading of the present moment so that our view broadens, bringing time to a standstill by crowding as much as possible into a singular present, what Morton has also called "ecology without nature".

"One of the things that modern society has damaged", Morton says, "along with ecosystems and species and the global climate, is thinking." The ecological thought is a way of thinking, a quality of attention, a breadth and generosity of regard – it is very specifically not a laundry list of correct positions but the complete absence of such a list. The ecological thought is the demand that we, at each moment, remain thoughtful, that we be intelligent in public. Morton sees specific barriers to our public intelligence in the long Romantic discourse of Nature. "Like a dam, Nature contained thinking for a while", he writes, "but in the current historical situation, thinking is about to spill over the edge. ...the concept 'nature' has had its day and no longer serves us well. The main reason is that nature is a kind of backdrop – and we are living in a world where there is no backdrop: it's all foreground now.

When we replace nature with the ecological thought, we discover a much stranger, more intimate, more jaw-dropping world.”

The New Pavilion is a portal to this intimate, stranger world. There is no getting out of it. The pavilion presents a kind of Klein’s Bottle (that Möbius 3D space) melding inside and outside, plants and man, shelter and threat, so completely they become legible only as a totality, a permanent temporariness that holds us in our constant flight. Structurally, the pavilion is built, as a Klein’s bottle, around the outside’s clever interpenetration of the putative “interior”. The green environment circles back in through the ground to erupt inside the sterile white room, in the form of the hostage plants, bathed in the world’s natural light that enters, also Möbius-like, through the dome’s open eye, above.

There is no clear inside or outside to the Pavilion, just as there is no separation of human and nonhuman, temporary or permanent, refuge or prison. For all of its solid clarity, the structure simply shapes a permanent entanglement in flux, a vast yet precise dynamism that is the world we live in, the world we’re part of – ‘the Ecological Thought’. This is a setting without shelter because there is no separation of parts, no other to be threatened by or take shelter from. Old dichotomies

have collapsed. What is 'home' when there is no place apart? With no domus there can be no domesticity.

The New Pavilion keeps our attention fixed on this condition, the pleasures and perils of the permanent refugee; rather than indulging the usual distractions of virtuoso engineering or visual fondling that most architecture invites us to consume. Mastenbroek gives us the bare minimum that architecture can do – and it doesn't look like much – only a distortion in the course of things, the accommodation an inherently violent system makes to house us. Which again reminds me of punk rock, which turned out to be such a utopian movement, so full of vegans and macrobiotic saints, neo-hippies, really, wearing their scuffed fake leather, refusing all the crap.

At the heart of Mastenbroek's refusal is his disgust with all of the glittery extras that threaten to crowd out architecture's core mission, its gift – the intelligent provision of shelter to those who need it. He stages our encounter with 'the ecological thought' as honestly and efficiently as possible. Architects are typically asked to make villas for rich people, a degrading task Mastenbroek convincingly describes (in the case of Zaha Hadid's villa for Naomi Campbell) as providing a starlet with a cross between a rocket and a shoe.

Architecture has become such an incredibly huge accumulation of stuff, of ambitions and purposes, of capabilities – the architect’s eager and constant offer to help – anything the architect can horde or claim as his own, wanting an identity, a reassurance, like a layer of fat, as bulwark against his disappearance. There are many things more virtuous than making rocket-shoes for starlets and which architecture has also become – visual entertainment, branding apparatus, social control, a substitute for democracy or an advanced cultural weapon – but I’ll let Mastenbroek’s “designing rocket-shoes for starlets” stand in for them all. If the architect is not providing intelligent shelter for those who need it, what is he doing? The bloating of architecture is precisely corollary to the incredibly swift, internal shrinkage of the profession’s native purposes and identity. The architect is willing to take on, to be anything, so desperate is he to survive, and so uncertain is he of architecture’s survival.

The New Pavilion is, first and foremost, a refusal to continue with all of the nonsense that architecture has become. It is a zero re-set for the profession. Henceforth we get the bare minimum, a distortion in the system that swells to shelter us, and that will shrink again or disappear in time.

And yet, miraculously, the New Pavilion also refuses to look like poverty. Exploring the minimum, the pavilion nevertheless insists on industrial materials and a machine-tooled finish. Structurally, it is nothing more than a lean-to with a tarp roof – about as distant from designing rocket-shoes for starlets as you can get. This is architecture’s equivalent of the 1-4-5 blues chord-structure off which 90% of punk rock built its culture (‘Feels Blind’ cleverly inverts this formula into a 5-4-1) – but its materials and the precision of its engineering invite a wholly other discourse than the one invited by, say, the work of Samuel Mockbee/Rural Studio or, in art, Oscar Tuazon. The New Pavilion does not trade in any coin except architecture, not even the paradoxical glamour of arte povera. It is architecture minus everything that architecture is not.

Matthew Stadler

Formally, the New Pavilion is a poem constructed with a purely architectural vocabulary. Poetry – with all of its complexity, its internal contradictions, its unresolvability, its compact concision and resistance to either mastery or complete surrender – a form that I understand to be relational, demanding a fully-engaged reader, yielding its meanings only via the vibrant agency of both writer and reader committed to a shared text – is the design process evident in the New Pavilion.

Poems oblige all of us – author and audience – to live cheek-by-jowl with unresolved paradox, fear, hope and failure. We are, after all both ethical and rational creatures. We can't help but want to do right, to be virtuous, even while knowing we'll fall short. We will try and fail, and try and, as Beckett said, fail better.

Of the many 'right responses' to the poem of Bjarne Mastenbroek, I include the herb smokers, those who lay back in the hammocks and deepen their entanglement by smoking the dried leaves of the plant world that died to become their sacrament. I also include the daily ministrations of Het Nieuwe Instituut's staff who figured out which plants needed how much water and endeavored to give it to them, to lengthen their lives, even amidst such suffering, to save some, even if they could not save them all. And I include the initial act, the architect's response to a challenging brief in the form of serious, deeper challenge. He followed his instincts to undefended assertions, the unresolved beauty of this peculiar structure. He took risks in public.

Robert Smithson, in his last, most productive years, focused on the exhausted sites of old strip mines, using art to turn the dead residue of that industry into new life. His most completely realized project was in the Netherlands, near Emmen, where he built 'Broken

Circle and Spiral Hill', in 1971. Smithson had no interest in disguising the industrial past that defined his sites. He did not do as, say, James Turrell, find rich art patrons and troll for unencumbered real estate on which to impose his artistic vision. Smithson worked directly with mining companies and municipalities. His interventions are a kind of last phase of mining, after the industry arrives at its deepest contradictions – strip mining destroys the earth it profits from – his work finessed a future out of it.

In 1972, a year before his death, Smithson wrote, “a dialectic between mining and land reclamation must be developed. The artist and the miner must become conscious of themselves as natural agents. In effect, this extends to all kinds of mining and building. When the miner or builder loses sight of what he is doing through the abstractions of technology he cannot practically cope with necessity. The world needs coal and highways, but we do not need the results of strip-mining or highway trusts. Economics, when abstracted from the world, is blind to natural processes. Art can become a physical resource that mediates between the ecologist and the industrialist. Ecology and industry are not one-way streets; rather they should be cross-roads. Art can help to provide the needed dialectic between them.”

It's possible that the industry of architecture has reached the same deep contradictions as mining. The work is exhausted. It's renewal depends on a kind of intellectual jiu-jitsu, like Smithson's, to redirect the considerable force that expended itself making rocket-shoes for starlets. I see Mastenbroek's pavilion as similar to Smithson's strip-mine recoveries. This is architecture, pure and simple. Mastenbroek does not mask its contradictions or brutalities; he finesses them into something possible, something with a future. And it doesn't look like much.

In keeping with Smithson's radically collapsed time sense, the New Pavilion has already become a ruin. The tarp ceiling caved in and the pole that once held it taught now protrudes from the hole like the broken mast of a shipwreck. The captive plants look alternately liberated, as if this pole were the lead thrust of their break-out, and in agony; they are neglected, broken, turning brown, and dying. As a ruin, the New Pavilion is the site of radical upheaval and change. But the door is locked. Legal requirements make closure the only possible institutional response to the pavilion's structural failure. The next step will be removal, expulsion. It's only a pavilion, after all, and all pavilions are built to be temporary. So it is with any refugee. The end of the story is always the same. Asylum ends, the refugee center is closed, and everyone must move along. But to where?

