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from **Conditions of Poetic Production and Reception**

Part 3. “Ritualized sacrifice, gauging the material-social”

NK: In theatre, specifically in Artaud's theatre-world, there is this way of approaching some felt “pre-” that lingers into the “now,” so felt and so lingering as traces of violence wreaked in and on the subject, through the very emergence of the “subject” as such. Social aversions (verbally or physically spanked into us as children) always form in reference to some socially-shared pleasure once felt, now demoralized, so subversive it threatens society's structures in this “now.” Homosexuality; cannibalism; polyamory; miscegenation. Ourselves as subjects rise up out of learning these social aversions; sacrifice (of pleasure, Eros, Dionysian compulsions) is paramount; Artaud's theatre-world births itself. Transgression of social aversions becomes stage energy (whether pornographic, theatrical, private), simulations of what's sacrificed through self-preservation in order to succeed within legal and moral modern society. Adorno: “In class society, the self's hostility to sacrifice includes a sacrifice *of the self*, since it was paid for by a denial of nature *in* the human being for the sake of mastery over extrahuman nature and over other human beings.”

Whereas poetic discourse chats up, theatre ritualizes in order to make live this site of birth (of the modern human) and violence (to the human)... while I write around this site of violence “now,” I could be “performing” it, embodied.... “poetic discourse” becomes non-transgressive, in this light....

RT: Totally, I hear you on this question of controlled, non-harmful (to persons) consensual violence. Just recently, I made a near total mess of my “respectable” “poetic” self at a gallery in the Chelsea art district here in NYC. The event was for the launch of a poetry journal, Eco Poetics, which is edited by Jonathan Skinner, somebody who I consider to be an ally in the world of poetry, who's always edging poetic discourse to the “outer” somewhere and sometime else's—away from the glitzarama of urban <exchange-value fixated> poetics.

There were a only handful of poetic compeers present at the event, a teeny spectatorship, to be precise. I felt comfy cozy, but also, something was gyrating inside of me, something unstable, eruptive, something impossibly total feeling. The posh district in the midst of a recession, the national cultural liberal-left slumberama under Obama, my actual twitchy cock alerted (unsure), the burning afterglow of six mile sub 7 min. pace training run, a “poetics theater” praxis on the verge of *collapse* (this always, hence a “performative” calm *heating up*), the Belgian yeasty brew in my water bottle, these factors and a half-dozen more (many half-consciously known to me) I gave into as fully as I could, there, then.

Right off, I should say that I found people's readings before me to be quite interesting; each one had an amazingly ample perspective on cultural matters, each reader stimulated me. So the run-up was a launching point too.

When I got up, I initially felt like tossing the podium out onto the street; short of that, after crawling on my knees toward it (a half-committed snarky gesture that I critically disagree with in retrospect, in that it served as a mere stand-in to a more thorough act), I tipped it on its side (left to right, back and forth), very slowly, carefully, feeling/reading its “tip-point,” the point at which if I let it go, it would crash on the ground. From that point on, the podium (which I didn't “use” at all for the rest of my reading) became a kind of “tested” partner in the space.

Next, I distributed several sections from “Feel Your Media—*Bitch*” to several people present. We read passages like this out loud:

R: You interested in mind-fucking?

S: Mhm.

R: You want to see the poets mind-fucking poets?

S: Yeah.

R: You sure you want' em?

S: I'm sure.

R: They're going to give you an overall physical first...alright?

S: Ok.

R: Okay?

S: Yeah, that's fine.

R: Yeah?

S: Mhm.

R: Are you stupid?

S: Hardly.

R: You're not?

S: No.

R: You know what you want?

S: —I know what I want.

Afterwards I got on the ground and did “plank tumbles” (on my back, legs flung high in the air, then plopping down really hard; incidentally, I re-injured a gimpy ankle doing that). During that exertion, I had two spectators alternatively say, “mm—*hm*” and “siddown, slut!” After that, I put my ear to the ground, and began to very forcefully “ass-slap” the ground in offset jaunty rhythms to lines like these:

“Every single minute, second, of people—around the globe—recording—distributing—their plight—for all the world—to see—to become—us—for a minute, a second, is—”

“Every single—bone—broken—gash—sustained—*retained*—by the people—is a plexiglass crack—on the snazzy eye of—the idol’s—crooked—face”

Anyway...there were about six more such physical-verbal activities...and it sounds rather fitful all of it (about 12 minutes total), and it no doubt came off as such to some—and how not?

What in the world was I after? (Also, given that “Feel Your Media—*Bitch*” was written to be “performed” (god I hate that word) by five people along with music, the piece lasting just under one hour). Well, I have a hard time answering that straight out, to be honest with you. I wasn’t in pursuit of anything that would “stick” or necessarily “make a scene,” that’s for sure. It seemed more a moment of pure *expenditure* without any “lift” (artistic or even immediately political poetic lift) from the event. I also don’t think I was being “transgressive” per say, nor do believe I was force-feeding a “critique” of anything specific. Was it a series of “compulsions” dumped on people, just because I could? The day after, I definitely felt so, but now, I most decidedly say *no*.

Ok—I *should* take a crack at it—what was I doing? Well, your excellent gloss on Adorno’s quote about social-material “personal” sacrifice is very clutch for me to even begin to think of it. So, I’d say my action

that night was a ritualized “sacrifice” of *self-preservative* moments previous to the “event,” specifically, political representative moments (as *expended* by text, as *re-potentialized* by several psychodynamic bodily responses to those text-meanings). Perhaps it was a desperate way of hailing & demonstrating the *very ability* to have social-political art “act out” of its “own” accord (a neo-modernist illusion, to be sure, but still, different orders of action angling in on the problematic of political representation).

Question (feeling rather empty now): how does one gauge *connection*—in full disbelief—and still have it mean something?

R: You interested in rotating devices?

S: Mhm.

R: You want to see gauges gauging gauges?

S: Yeah.

R: You sure you want’ em?

S: I’m sure.

R: They’re going to give you a sensation of expanding fast—at first...alright?

S: Ok.

R: Okay?

S: Yeah, that’s fine.

R: Yeah?

S: Mhm.

R: Are you naturally artistic?

S: Hardly.

R: You’re not?

S: No.

R: You know what you want?

S: —I know what I want.

NK: *Connection*—in full disbelief—to me, implies the fundamental mediation of everything thus connected. Wish I could have seen this playing (rather than performance) at the gallery; what I imagine you to be enacting, in part, is a living illustration of the ways that sensuous, human, bodily energies (including those energies that go into the pretty much aesthetically-not-sensuous drudgery of rote, repetitive jobplace work) get ossified in material things, and how these things can “dominate.” That podium, it needed to come down, feel its foundations rocked, why? So that the conceptual, theoretical assumptions of the audience are rocked—that podium placed in front of poets at a gallery opening being like a manifestation of Aesthetic Assumptions as such.

There's something here, about how to mediate the very mediation of connections between things and people – how to intercede in that. Even in the title of your piece, “Fuck Your Media—Bitch” (FYMB), I think there's an implied compulsion to intercede into the mediation of media (if I can get away with that), to foreground that, to portray “intimate” one-on-one sensuous interactions as hyperreal experiences of media, to suggest media as the real-ist that this world gets, and, like in an later episode of FYMB, to actually bring a laptop on stage and present the “intimate” relationship between machine and body that many of us experience daily.

Where I find the “gauging” of connections most creatively (and, even, politically) charged, for me at this moment, is in looking at subjectivities – of role-players, and how these roles mediate our subjectivities to such a total extent, who's to say what lies “outside” the roles we inhabit? In that later scene in FYMB, with a laptop on stage and players reading from the screen (with certain quite subtle role-affectations developed in the poetics themselves), the *thing*, the computer, is what “delivers” the subject positions to these role-players. I mean that they literally find their expression (their lines) *inside* the thing, but also more abstractly depend on this object to facilitate their social relationship to both the artificial “scene” and poetics theater space, as well as to the audience and the porous sociality of the world that continues to drudge no matter what subversive piece is performed in whatever hallway or closet. The agency given, lying in, exorcised out of, the object in the episode...fascinates me.

Because: as if it's not hard enough to deal with the connective mediations (and antagonisms therein) between yourself and another body; as if it's not enough to attempt communication while speaking out of the *multiple* masks you don, layered to ridiculousness—it's in part only *in* interaction with some inanimate object (computers, increasingly) that you're able to make manifest, for a flicker of a moment, the felt and projected traces of an identity that's socially validated, verifiable. It's like...the most magical theatre Artaud could have posited becomes increasingly necessary, possible, and utterly subsumable in the encroaching of objects into our subjective roles. What makes us...*us*...is what, very tangentially, I see FYMB grabbing at—what says my face isn't merely a trace of my media?

Well (phew) there's still body-to-body contact. Can't stay subjectively mediated through virtual wavelengths forever, luckily. I guess returning to your question, it seems like foregrounding where and how the subjectivity of an individual slips into some personification of an object, how objects seem to require their presence in order for bodies to make manifest a socially valid identity (even if it lasts only momentarily) *necessarily* gauges connection while *necessarily* proving it trouble-laden. To me there's an absolutely immediate relationship, one that jumps out, between this and political, global concerns—where objects and subjects and their antagonisms are totally charged roles in which to analyze events.

RT: I think you just hit on it—why it bugged me kneel-walking up to the podium. At that moment, it wasn't about the podium (its object <social> status)—it was about a solitary-subjective moment, a “me,” what He “thought” about it. You know, I could have just said that, “and then...he kneel-walks up to the podium, the gesture, a mock reverence of still-bodied utterance; it collapses into its opposite; mock becomes frock of podium-authority, oops.” What followed though, I think speaks to your “connective mediations.” The actual tipping of the podium, demonstrated a tension between it and me, and by apprehension of that “what's going to happen; what do I want to see happen” moment, a tension between the spectators themselves is brought into momentary being. The realization of points-of-no-return in social relations is still what's on the table, politically, for me. The word is still Revolution. Tipping points, tons of them, building up toward it. But the object (touched, handled, engaged) *wasn't* tipped, it *wasn't* crashed on the ground, so the object-status of the language that followed after that activity can be said to be neither prologue nor epilogue to that act of tipping. What is it? It's the *politically intentional* positing of an unstable field of possibilities, not “random” or “chance” based possibilities, but rather, body-based, the actual impulse someone felt to come and help hold it up or to knock it down, that was *preserved*. The “drama” from that moment on is—how is this *us*—going to be expended. *Feel Your Media—Bitch.*

But these are Poetics Theater *tactics*. I want to return to your notion (the way I read it) of a PT *strategy*, beginning with this “lingering traces of violence wreaked in and on the subject, through the very emergence of the “subject” as such,” the stuff about “social aversion,” as made—how to put it—sensible (?) through “sacrifice.” What's haunting me is your suggestion of (actual) body-rupture as poetic strategy.

Can “social aversion” *hold up* (long enough) to detourn it?

What might be the opposite of “mastery over extrahuman nature and over other human beings (in order to succeed within legal and moral modern society)”?

Can the commodity be made to bleed?

NK: That the podium wasn't tumbled is indeed revealing. The challenges of articulation have been, and will be, many. But articulate we must—Revolution, or “the realization of points-of-no-return,” as apt as any a place to “begin.” I get this uncanny, almost fateful sensation in articulating myself right now, because there's a dire risk of receding from this moment of unleashed potential that you speak about. Language comes *right now* (or is always already here) to flatten me out, skewing allusions to action into mere verbal traces of those actions as soon as they're articulated. *Right now* I can't write real-time, that's the necessary element *to* writing, versus song, play, theatre (embodied forms). Hence I think your language in FYMB was neither prologue nor epilogue to Revolution (symbolized by a tipsy podium) because it was mediated by body movement. There's no direct antagonism between language and action; instead I think there's multiple, simultaneous antagonisms, and because of this, the artist can find ways to skirt and shimmy into, between, amongst these antagonisms. If it was a direct, binary relationship of opposition between action and language, or speech and writing, we'd be screwed.

And so I guess I'm starting out by talking about tactics here, as well. The ideas of sacrifice and ritual are really important to me right now because in them I see a zone where these multiple antagonisms are not flattened, nor presumed “over,” nor abhorred. They're lived through and they threaten, and when we sacrifice to them we risk losing identity—and walk into that, knowing it's likely a space we'll inhabit. If the object-world seems to subject us to its own rules and regulations, if we're increasingly asked to find our reflections through the mediation of exchange, sacrifice removes the quasi-autonomous, concealed agency in the object by setting up parameters. I think certain ritualized practices, by making equivalence overt rather than hidden, create a space where *we can imagine* a world in which commodities no longer assert themselves as social entities. By setting up something to sacrifice, or to sacrifice to, what's concealed in an exchange relation is brought into full relief. I *don't* mean, however, constructing a wide system of sacrifice that defers responsibility to some kind of myth or messiah “beyond” the lived world—just that ritualized spaces *in* the lived world are generative. I think there's a major relationship between the (inherently exclusionary) recuperation of a person's identity through the mediation of objects and the concealed nature of the object-world itself. Exploring one of these sites affects, or bleeds into, the other. This begins to suggest where *actual* body-rupture might be political action. Body-rupture would be a tactic. Inhabiting social aversions causes identity to reconstitute—this is body-rupture.

How to place this historically. One thing I'm starting to think is that an historical placement isn't necessarily antagonistic to real-time. That it has been from the... I don't know, inception of Western philosophy, okay, but it doesn't *have* to be. You are interested in and so talented at revealing those points-of-no-return because I think you're really aware that these moments are also *spaces* in which energy is contributing. Points-of-no-return are so-named because from an historical glance-back, we perceive them as such—they can't be called that unless we're straining our necks behind us to see how the world appears in perspective. So you can't “see” it, a point-of-no-return, as it's happening, because it qualitatively isn't that. Quantitatively it isn't that either; I mean that the historical glance-back also necessarily changes the elemental structure, adds and subtracts the quantitative parts that we say constitute that “period of Revolution.” The way a bank of statistics hones in on particularities, while therein excluding others, quantifying (therefore qualifying) some while disquantifying and disqualifying others.

So an historically engaged rupture might be kind of what we're talking about here. Your work, I think, tends to construct and allude to that time and space of rupture, attempting to tactically produce and

embody it. Maybe one way of gauging a work's rupture is whether or not the work itself *bleeds*: how does it leave traces, and does it trickle.

Are we asking for blood, then? In a way I think I am, in a ritualized way I am. Man, if you or I could articulate an alternative to that mastery (and slavery) required in the individual in order to *be* an individual in modern society—we'd have some things solved, huh! A giant conversation. Well, I think part of the problem is how we suffer from internal and external equivalences between radically nonequivalent parts (in ourselves and – expanded – to the global). A rupture of the object and of the body (however poetic you want to take that) exposes this fetishism. Would that, could that make something bleed? Would it point towards something else besides a recuperated individual? Would that also be a fundamentally different set of material relations? Yeah, I think so. What “comes first,” though? That's – the point-of-no-return perspective; right now what we can do is revel in contributing energy.

RT: Stealing, the solitary (or shared solitary) pleasures of stealing, comes from re-routing the *location* of objects without crossing the requisite gates of exchange (to “skirt” to “shimmy”). Ok, let's say it's a bag of fancy ground coffee at your local (chain) coffeehouse. One might say, it's “there,” right? “There it is, on the shelf, gleaming, aching for location-transfer.” Well, it isn't “there.” Boulders tossed up by a volcano end up as “there.” Commodities are never “there.” They are always in motion—as dynamic social relations. So, if, as *proletariats* [classic nomenclature retains grains of ground pleasure & pain]—if as proles, our human labor-power (as commodity) is never “there” either (no matter how much lotus meditative stillness is flung at it), then, where is it? It is, as we've been saying, *bleeding*, bleeding onto others' (approximate) locations (“affect”). Save for solitary sages proclaiming otherwise, the jig is on, we're both in circulation and are *circulatory* entities. “Current mood”—ekphrastical.

So location of objects (which I'd prefer to call *bobjects*, so as to induce objects to bob on up, pop, rupture) is not just about rational “decisions” and civic “negotiations,” but largely about subtle spatial power struggles (what we used to call the “distributive dimension of production”). These spatialized antagonisms are the very pulse of the post-modern city, sometimes inaudible, sometimes quite deafening (btw, “struggles” without attention to location, let's call them stroogles, ie, “a stroogle for justice;” too many stroogles on the Literary Left, actually).

Ok, what are the requisite gates of exchange as regards Aesthetics?

At the level of the Art Bobjectry (text, film, “a night of multimedia blah blah...”), I'd say, the gates appear as *abstractions*, degrees of bodily-impulses that get marked-up as ideological bruising, gashing, and that ever-so-slight blush on the pate of “taste.”

R: You interested in rotating devices?

S: Mhm.

R: You want to see gauges gauging gauges?

S: Yeah.

It's by confronting (engaging-to-bypass) abstractions (masks) that we start to “heat up” in terms of a desire to construct a more naked, less recuperable individual TM.

Say I'm a “random passerby” walking into a gallery space in Chelsea. Say I'm an historically-always-teething actor never quite synchronized to “my time?” I'm no titanium cheetah stolen from some other district, I am homo laborans in *this* district in search of a steal myself. What *is* my time? What's here for me? Will the whole mass of the cities' proles “receive” my love tonight? Will it accept “rejection” too? Will the bribes be

prickly funny, or with they fall flat? The requisite gates of exchange, what are they?

{S on knees into “patty cake” position; R on knees, arms up in surrender position; J on knees in arms over head arrested position; N on knee clasping hands together in solidarity hand-shake position; M on knees, with both hands into Muslim death-mourning position (hands outstretched, clasped together as if offering a meal, but close to face, head bent downwards; all hold positions for 30 seconds}

{voice clip (N)} *Confirm me, baby.*

{full-body position rotations: S now with arms up in surrender position; R into knees in arms over head arrested position; J on knee clasping hands together in solidarity hand-shake position; N on knees, with both hands into Muslim death-mourning position (hands outstretched, clasped together as if offering a meal, but close to face, head bent downwards; M into “patty cake” position; all hold positions for 20 seconds}

{voice clip (N)} *Yeah I'll play patty cake with you alight!*

Parts 1 & 2 of “Conditions of Poetic Production and Reception” can be found at Jacket Magazine:
<http://jacketmagazine.com/39/index.shtml>