

# BLINDSPOT

JAN RITSEMA, SANDY WILLIAMS

**Text and Commentary**

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## **BLINDSPOT**

Made and performed by JAN RITSEMA and SANDY WILLIAMS

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Set, Light and Photos: Herman Sorgeloos

Production: vzw AVEC JAN JIB CO

Email: [jritsema@gdt.nl](mailto:jritsema@gdt.nl)

## **BLINDSPOT (the text)**

**Jan Ritsema and Sandy Williams**

**Jan:**

Dear Leonard: Should we fill the space with politics and counter it with dance?

The greatest danger to democracy will come from an angry army of the unemployed led by millionaires, preaching the sermon on the mount (de bergrede)– George W. Orwell

George W. Bush

11/9 I need some wine

11/8 I need some weight

11/7 I need some heaven

11/6 show some pics

11/5 I need a wife

11/4 will do a whore?

11/3 it is only me

11/2 and you

11/1 ....

First lesson: A system is complex if a great many independent agents are interacting with each other in a great many ways.

Complexity Complexity

But Einstein left Germany already in 1932.

Because?

Because?

Because he saw what he saw and not what he wanted to see.

Dear Leonard: Can we do everything but perform a dance piece and therefore perform a dance piece?

(as a hysteric lady): we will fail, we will fail

Dear Niklas: Can we create the piece in front of ourselves. Both watching and doing it at the same time?

(as hysteric lady): we will fail, we will fail

**Sandy:**

I had hopes for all this. I used to be thin. I thought I might live in one place and know one woman. I walked through.....this morning. I made my way through...to.... I had on my red apron and I had the woman I loved. You have to understand that I wanted to end it...I had pledged my deepest health to work this out.

The working was way beyond this. I see this now. I was ashamed and I ask you for money Not that you have not paid more for less. You have. You do. But I need it to keep my different lives apart. Otherwise I will be crushed when they join.....

I am not talking about Russia or America. I am not talking about politics. I am talking about your bodies, the ones stretched out on the beach, the ones you've just smeared with sun-tan oil. Some of you are overweight and some are too thin, and some are very proud. You all know your bodies. You know your tits, your dicks. You know what they look like. You have looked at them in mirrors, you have waited to hear them complimented, or touched with love for she touched your perfect body with your mind. You see? You hear? I'm not talking about Russia and America. I am talking about your bodies, which are all we have, and no government can restore one finger, one tooth, one inch of normal skin that is lost because....Because silence is the other half of communication. This is why I can't not answer you when you ask: «Do you love me?» Silence is just as much an answer as «Yes» and «No».

**Jan:**

Dear Sandy: What can a body do?

What affects is it capable of?

Sometimes affects weaken us as they diminish our power to act and decompose our relationships.

You can also call this sadness.

Sometimes relations make us stronger in so far as they increase our power and make us enter into a more vast individual.

You can also call this joy.

Every now and then I experiment with what will bring me joy. Only every now and then because I often confuse myself and end up in sadness again, its really easy to end up in sadness.

We talked about: that the audience is indispensable, that there are no mysteries nor secrets, that everything should be verifiable, equal and that there is sovereignty on both sides: on the stage and in the audience.

Then I mentioned the principle of the 'ici et ailleurs', the here and there, and the therapy: how much of my qualities and weaknesses are in the table and how much of the qualities and weaknesses of the table are in me.

This va et vient, the importance of what is happening between the here and there, the table and me and me and the table.

And we talked about: not to fill it in with yourself. Not to think: what can I do with it, but to think about making a performance from the bird's eye perspective. The thing. The object. Watching the piece and creating it at the same time. That they see us dancing

and at the same time hear us thinking and at the same time be indistinguishable and undecidable, incomplete and inconsistent. Dear Niklas: A communication does not connect the world, it divides it. Like any operation of living or thinking, communication produces a split, a caesura. It says what it says; it does not say what it does not say. It does what it does, it doesn't do what it doesn't do. It differentiates.

**Sandy:**

Dear Jan: In bed the lovers, slowly and deliberately and silently  
Perform the act of love  
Their eyes closed  
Their lips bruised with new and old bruises  
Her hair and his beard are hopelessly entangled  
When he puts his mouth against her shoulder  
She is uncertain whether her shoulder  
Has given or received the kiss  
All her flesh is like a mouth  
He carries his fingers along her waist  
And feels his own waist caressed  
She holds him closer and his own arms tighten around her  
She kisses the hand beside her mouth

Dear Jan  
What she did what she did what she did

Dear Sandy  
These people are half right about you, you're an emotional imperialist

Dear Hitler  
Take away the torches I'm not guilty I had to have this

Dear Sandy  
She was made of flesh and eyelashes

You thought about that a while didn't you?

A while

Its good

Dear Jan  
Soon, very soon, she and I will be in a room. We will be in a room together. There's going to be a room around us.

Then I was undressing her. I couldn't believe my hands.

Then she said no and bundled her clothes against her breasts.  
I felt like an archeologist watching the sand blow back.  
She was putting on her bra. I helped her with the clasp just to  
show that I wasn't a maniac.  
Then I asked why four times.  
Then I stood by the window  
Tell her you love her, that's what she wants to hear. I came back  
and rubbed her back.

Say I love you. Say it. One two three, now.  
I was getting an occasional finger under the elastic.

She crossed her ankles and seemed to squeeze her thighs together  
in some kind of private pleasure. The gesture made her spine  
shiver.

Then I walked her home. It was my personal time of the morning.  
The sun was threatening to the east. The newsboys were limping  
with their grey bags. The sidewalks looked new.

He took her hands in his hands and exceeded the philosophical  
determination of the possibility of the possible, and by the same  
token exceeded the classical opposition of the possible and the  
impossible.

Dear Jan: I can say what I say. I can't say what I don't say. I can't  
say what I do. I can do what I do.

**Jan:**

Dear Sandy:  
What she did what she did what she did.

Dear Leonard:  
What is at stake is the question, not what is missing.

Dear Sandy:  
An observer cannot see what he cannot see. All observers are  
constituted with a necessary blindspot that only other observers can  
see. The observer of the observer can see the blindspot of the  
observed and of course not his own blindspot.  
While this is being said, technicians set up four chairs (like car  
seats) facing the audience, upstage right.  
While speaking Jan and Sandy cross up to the car, Sandy in front.  
Jan in the back.  
They sit a while as though driving the car.  
Meanwhile the opening credits to films and performances both like.  
When this ends:

Jan: what are you doing, we don't stop here.  
Sandy: just a surprise, some joy, you know.  
Sandy makes the hysterical noise of teenagers tearing down a hill.  
When he stops, Jan says: Ah, and our social space is saturated with fear, our social space is saturated with fear.  
Sandy makes the click of a gun being cocked.  
Sandy makes the sound of his door opening and then closing and then opening Jan's door.  
Jan makes the ambient music of a thin suspense.  
Sandy chimes in with a sad and drunken Cohen song.  
Jan: You came here to save yourself?  
Sandy: I came here to get rid of this God awful feeling.  
Sandy points the gun at me and blows my head off.  
Dear Sandy: Observe Compare Verify Translate Transfer Repeat  
Relate Observe Compare and Verify.  
But this we did not hear anymore as Sandy started too early, much too early the Sonaten and Partitas of Bach interpreted by Itzhak Perlman



## **A Dress Rehearsal for an Even Darker Future Or He Who Falls, Becomes**

**Sandy Williams**

I don't want to generalize but I am also willing to say that we can't wait for it to happen.

"It" being anything, the event, the action, the moment etc, etc, etc. We know this, we know that an event is something we prepare to meet (certain events we prepare to avoid), then we catalogue our experience of the event in a list. Lists are important; memory protects against death.

"I just want to have a story to tell, a few scars to show. Chicks dig scars. I want to tell about how I was young; how I used to smoke, do drugs. Once I shaved my head, I once grew my hair long, I once died it purple. I've had sex in cars, in parks, in beds and in elevators. I've had sex with a fair few people but not too many; enough to know what I'm doing. I have bought shoes that were ridiculously coloured and whose soles are a little too prominent. I've driven, sailed and flew to other countries and seen how different and how similar it is to where I am from, I've earned my own money and I have paid my taxes, I have bought some things that were expensive but well worth it. I have fought and won a fist fight. I have photos."

A fine recipe for a medium length, none too presumptuous epitaph; "He was a good man, worked hard, played hard. A survivor, a man like us. He was a role model." Follow the easy recipe and bake a tasty cake to be served at the wake.

Ordinary people like us all experience something extraordinary at one time or another. Survival is itemized. Should the worst happen and we do not survive a particular event, we still have all the items that came before that fatal last. The terminal last item is then inscribed in bold letters and read first by those you left behind. Once you have *done* something, once something has happened, it changes everything that came before. Re-format, re-order, assimilate, summarize.

But the epitaph could also come out like this; "He was a nice guy, kept to himself mostly. A bit odd, a bit shy, never dated. He used to shovel my sidewalk for me when it snowed. I always appreciated that. I can't believe he was capable of such horrible acts! It just

goes to show you; who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men... and don't judge a book by its cover." The portrait of a killer.

Just as telling the story neatly places the tellers life in a picture-box, the bereaved also need a summary report. Actions are packaged along with the body for easy memorial, the memorial keeping just a little bit us alive in others after we are gone. Until they are gone to.

So we go about compiling lists that are then ordered in whatever way the collector fancies; chronologically, in order of importance, etc. Be creative. In our minds we build a frame with this ordered list and by looking through this frame we see the world around us and plot our trajectory through it. The order of your list is the structure of your world. When we come across an "It" that we don't recognize immediately, the frame gives us an easy reference point and allows us to place that foreign "It" with a similar "It". This ensures that we don't get lost or disoriented. The structure of our world should not be confused with the organization of our world; our organization (namely the notion that memory protects us from death) is a principle that cannot be changed without transforming completely the "what" the something "does". In essence, if you change the organization, you change what the thing is. For example, in a toilet the organization of the system of water-level regulation consists of relations between a part that detects water level and another that stops the water from coming in. The whole contraption is made of porsalin, plastic and metal. Changing the structure would be like changing the porsalin parts to wood. The basic doing, the organization, of the toilet remains the same, it's still a toilet. Change, on the other hand, the organization of the toilet by widening the bowl, narrowing the drain and placing the part that detects water level in a different place and what we have is better called a bathtub than a toilet.

There is a third possible epitaph. John Maynard Keynes said "In the long run, we are all dead."

Try saying this one exactly like it is written, maybe add a bit of an accent; British or even Southern United States, and something strange can happen. Every item on your item list can become as generic as and obvious as the statement. Sure it seems to belittle them a bit but the interesting thing is that the lists organization is suddenly called into question; it renders the extraordinary *ordinary*. It equalizes every item and takes them out of order, spreading them across the landscape. No one of your "Its" necessarily leads to the next one anymore, none of these things necessarily allow the another to happen. The toilet gets disassembled on the floor in front of you; it is now a group of fractions instead of a sum total

and all of these parts can now be used in what ever way you can possibly think to use them. A bunch of toilet parts may not seem so exciting but you could build a really great bidet or use the ball-cock to ward off intruders.

Play along a little longer and single out one item from your now indiscriminate list. You now cannot say that; "When I saw the way they lived in that shanty town in Malaysia....when I ate rat meat in the market place... then I felt I was able to be a stronger and better person...what I saw widened my view and I was more...after that..." When the view from your frame is no longer a portrait but a Pollock, experience does not necessarily mean crossing boundaries. We no longer transcend with each item acquired. One thing doesn't lead to another and we are no longer better in grace of named events. It is not only the interface with external events that forms the internal landscape.

Organization involving Keynes' slogan proposes a different kind of frame; not necessarily a climb to the peak but a fall from the very beginning. When falling; " 'Like' events rush past. No sooner does one happen than it is a has-been. The who? What? When? And where? Become a *whatnot*?"\* Direction is maintained through gravity and the need for definition becomes meaningless. The illusion of reliable location becomes just that; a self validating sensation. In falling, we scatter the list of our internal landscape ("I am...I am not...") but surprisingly we can find ourselves bouncing off some of the same vistas we were formerly toiling towards. Bouncing off means opening to potential; "I am/am not" still exists but these definitions are transparent. Transparency comes due to the lack of concrete belief in them by the faller, definition articles or "It" stories don't encapsulate but are played with for their combinations but only insofar as they are active relations. "Its" are only insistent in their potential to be *used* and are willing to be abused if this increases their potential.

"It" events will happen whether we actively seek them or not and it is our method of negotiation with them that determines which direction the body may go next. If I am interested in depositing "Its" in the Bank of Me, I organize my input, I assess where I am standing in my list of pasts and pyramid of future desire, I am always in a state of negotiation with myself, half inside half outside. If I am falling, I don't specifically position myself in my past and future, as much as I intersect with it. I don't negotiate with me, the fall and the impact as much as I mediate. It is the "...uncontained ability to affect and be affected."\*

If I am a list-er and I retroactively assume "It" as part of *Me*. If I am a faller, I can only "have been" because as I encounter something on the outside and assemble myself I get scattered by the impact. If my passing is marked at all it is marked by yet another bruise or cut among many others and in such a fall no one cut can be any more fatal because "In the end, we are all dead." The fancy catch phrase for the fall is that *it is pure activity uncontained by identity* (written and said in italics please).

With the knowledge of the potential of Keynes' statement we can examine closer our previous Framed-Insurance-Policy-Organization and identify two common conditions to all our items; we are / were constantly on uncertain ground, and the consumption of these events is not the end, it is the means. The defining experience was the peak experience who's peak and originality (novelty, singularity, desirability) was immediately stripped the moment the potential for another peak was identified. Once you have climbed Everest; you better climb K2 without oxygen, in your swim trunks.

But before the external peak event can become the defining mechanism of the internal landscape, we first have to install something in our perception of the outside so as to be able to facilitate our accumulation of items. To assist life in the "It Happened" collection model, we must first send one thing, and one thing only, from the inside out to the outside, before beginning to assume all else from the outside in. We must make everything on the outside appear perilous and loaded with danger. We must identify everything and everyone that is not us as the jungle, the mountain, the ghetto. We are now not free falling through time, we are pushing and driving ourselves through the Odyssey, every day the Iliad. Every move may mean death or at least delay, every choice demands careful calculation of risk versus payoff. Simplistically, we put a madman in the alleyway we pass on the way home everyday, and pat ourselves on the back every time we succeed in getting in the house and locking the door firmly behind us.

"Wow, what a day! Miller time!"

In the list, "the content of the disaster (event, accident, item) is unimportant, what registers is its magnitude."\*

A potential flaw that can arise in our reliance on lists of accumulated events and the ease and speed at which we itemize current and even future events, is that we are bound to our memories and are doomed to repeat them. The un-nameable "Its" are so smoothly lumped in with the familiar and established that

there is little or no chance to act anything but habitually. Instead of our cache of stories being a testament of our freedom and mobility they are our increasingly narrow path and each item must be constantly organized so that it may be the next rung on the ladder that hopefully leads us to the next item. Finally, our highest hope can only be that the next item will be The Item; the final bit of shading in our painting so that we may spend the rest of our days simply admiring our colourful masterpiece. Unfortunately we end up spending our days peeking onto a half finished painting of a battle; our field of potential is one of constant fight and flight. This can be seen as very reassuring though, this scene of imminent disaster because what solidifies strength in oneself more than being able to say that one has slain dragons and is ready for whatever comes next? This substantiates me in the world, establishes due course and allows for more accumulation. This fills the space between me and the world of objects, the unknown and me, between me and how things should be and will be, between the world looking back at me through the screen, the paper, or the speaker and me sitting. Me sitting and getting more and more afraid, scaring myself more and more, so that I can become better, so that I can keep stepping forward, over another boundary and become more myself.

"I did, therefore I am" is the axiom for the list maker. "I am doing and I am" is the maxim of the faller. The first places infinity on the outside; list making as a strategic action and a contingency plan versus what has/is/will happen. The other makes the outside a verb and this is essentially the only thing she/he places inside; thus the outside remains fluid and contingent even during interaction. One holds, the other lets go. Both are just tactical methods, ways of dealing with an often conflicting double mystery; experience and interface on one hand and our inner desire for direction, confirmation, control and evolution on the other. In and of themselves these elements are not so enigmatic but they bind together to become the boundaries that delineate our world. The binding of these elements is not a complete fusion though for where the two meet there remains a space. A vacuum, a seemingly promiscuous space in between that appears to offer many potential bridges for crossing yet all of them come up short when traversing. The space between is a negative, a lack, one defined more by what it could be, by its potential, more than what it is. Choose one bridge and all the other bridges re-shuffle, merge, deviate and divide.

"It is argued that the limits...have become immanent...This does not mean that boundaries have broken down. They have been made to coincide really, in *virtuality*: every boundary is

really, *potentially* present at every space-time co-ordinate.  
Not particular boundary is *necessarily* in effect at any given  
time...the subject-form is the form of the virtual, pure potential:  
in principle, it has no limits. In practice, it does. *Boundaries are  
effectively set in movement from "principle" to "potential", in other  
words in the actualisation of the subject form.*"\*

were at the cemetery  
yesterday.

*Interlocutor: Tambo, I understand you*

*Tambo: Yessuh!*  
*Interlocutor: Who died?*  
*Tambo: Everyone in the graves!*  
*Interlocutor: Then why did you go to*  
*the cemetery?*

*Tambo: I went there to read the*  
*epitaphs on the tombstones.*  
*Interlocutor: That's a funny way of*  
*spending your time.*  
*Tambo: That's where I get all my*  
*material for my jokes.*

*- Blackface and Music: A New*  
*Minstrel Folio (1936)*

\* Massumi, Brian. "Everywhere You Want To Be; Introduction to  
Fear." *The Politics of Everyday Fear*, University of Minnesota Press,  
Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1993.

## **A possible introduction**

Jan Ritsema

Sorry, we start with a little essay.

Sorry that we have to start with this, that we didn't find any transformations, metaphores or whatever poetic imagination to say, to show, to make it an experience, an event of what we want to say.

So, please. Read this as separate of the performance.

The performance is one thing and this is another. It is not even a prologue. It is what we want to share with you.

But let me first explain the difficulty. The difficulty not to be able the transform reasonable meaning.

Our social space is saturated with fear. Fear is thought to be everywhere. From natural disasters, transportation accidents, famines and droughts, serial killers, sex addiction, fluoridation, pharmaceuticals and medicines, terrorism, rock, rap, house music, assassination, global warming, wrinkles, ozone depletion, satanism, aging, right wing politics, the other, the boss, etc.etc What aspect of life, from the most momentous to the most trivial, has not become a workstation in the mass production line of fear.

Again, our social space is saturated with fear.

Fear-producing mechanisms have become so pervasive and invasive that we can no longer separate ourselves from our fear. If they have, is fear still part of an emotion, a personal experience, or is it what constitutes the collective ground of possible experience. Is it primarily a subjective content or part of the very process of subject formation. Are we produced to fearfull and no longer to fearless people? And if so, is the way we try to cope with this fear, the many different ways we buy protection, a substituted projection in sex, in pleasure, in commodities and one to one in concrete security measures and products?

Did I explain the difficulty of why we were not able to transform the essay into something more performative? No. I digressed into the subject of the saturation of the social space with fear. The fear is not something outside of us: we are the fear, we are fear. Like fearfull animals, like rats and pitbulls. Their constitution is fear. Impossible to separate from it.

It is exactly difficult for the same reason as transforming this essay into a performative action, just as it is difficult to distance oneself from the fear we cannot separate ourselves from. How can we transform this essay, these notions into some performativity without strongly simplifying it. And by this reduction totally ignore it. The

complexity of this immanent fear doesn't even allow simplification. BUT, the great but, and this is where Systems Theory enters the stage, the great but is: how can we resist this fear. Can we reinvent resistance. For if the enemy is us, analysis, no matter how necessary, is not enough to find a practice of resistance. Fear, under conditions of complicity, can neither be analyzed nor opposed without at the same time being *enacted*. We need to perform our object of inquiry. Or as William S. Burroughs stated: Never fight fear head-on. That rot about pulling yourself together, and the harder you pull the worse it gets. Let it in and look at it. You will see it by what it does.

He is right, but this is sixties talk which later on transformed into hippie talk and then into good willing but excluding and seperative new-age talk. Times they are a changin. And there is nothing more that Sandy hates than Hippie-talk (were his parents hippies?)

SANDY: and there is nothing more that Jan hates than new-age talk. (are his children members of that church?)

JAN: I have no children and this is no therapy. There is no therapy. This is theory.

As I said: it is here in the realm of complexity that systems theory, the theory of the functioning of systems, natural systems, social systems, artificial and virtual ones, and BACH, Bach and systems theory, enter the stage. The father of social systems theory Niklas Luhmann produced this one liner: only complexity can reduce complexity.

What did he mean by this? (Sorry for this explanation but in a moment we happily will produce and share a complex system in front of you with Bach,two Bodies and 60 Observers. And you should be prepared for this otherwise it is very boring.)

Only complexity can reduce complexity. Systems theory, doesn't, deny, or otherwise devalue difference, but rather *begins* with difference—namely, the difference between system and environment, and the assumption that the environment of any system is always already much more complex than the system itself.

Systems handles the problem of overwhelming environmental complexity by reducing it in terms of the selectivity made available by the particular system's self-referential code. Every system in order to survive selects from the overwhelming offerings of the environment. This specific system functions because of its specific selection. A cat, this system, makes different selections than an eagle although they go for the same prey. A cat prefers not to fly but to be on the ground, the system eagle (which is constituted like the system cat is, out of billions of bigger and smaller subsystems) hates to be on the ground. (By the way a system consists of a *structure*; the bone structure, the piles, walls, floors and roof which



make a house and an *organisation*, a restaurant is differently organised than an office or a family house. It is the organization that defines the system.)

The system's inferiority towards its environmental complexity must be balanced by strategies of selection. Complexity, in this sense means being forced to select, and thus, Luhmann's winning formulation: "Only complexity can reduce complexity". Under pressure to adapt to a complex and changing environment, systems increase their selectivity—they make their environmental filters more finely grained, if you like—by building up their own internal complexity. And thus determining the complexity of the environment that is possible for the system. This selection is always determined by the system's redundant possibility of selecting one thing to be connected with, of selecting one thing to give meaning, meaning for the system, the survival of the system and not the other thing. It selected the actual selected and not the possible one, the one that could have been selected. Or as Luhmann puts it: "one could say that meaning equips an actual experience or action with redundant possibilities"—namely, what *was* selected (the actual) and what could have been (the possible)—and this is crucial for any system's ability to respond to environmental complexity by building up its own complexity via the form of meaning. This selection process, this process of meaning is a non-stopping one, as every possible can be potentially actualised which leaves a range of new possibilities and so on and so forth. The genesis and reproduction of meaning presupposes an infrastructure in reality that constantly changes its states. Every new selection makes a difference, and every difference extracts meaning (which only as differences have meaning). One begins not with identity but with difference. (This paragraph is from quotations of Wolfe's 'Adventures of the Event-Machine'.)

Back to the fear, the immanent fear, the fear we cannot separate ourselves from. Are there ways to resist this? Is it our selection? Is it possible that this is obstructed, that someone; myself or input from the outside has put sand into the motor, sabotaged me or I myself, which makes that I select from the environment mostly fear and therefore make me work hard to make me purchase a fortress against the fear.

Would resistance be possible to change this selection attitude, to look in another way at the world, to make other selections which really make a difference. But then we have to change ourselves, then we have to make ourselves a difference that makes a difference. But how can we ever resist the influence from the outside of which we are part of ourselves.

Would this be possible? Or do we enter here finally the poetic realm of utopia?

OR is it possible, but with the help of a friend, an observer, who is able to see the blindspot that I oversee.

And then I will explain the functioning of the BLINDSPOT, and the observers which are needed to tackle this, overseeing their own blindspots, the observers observed. We need the observers to see what we can't see, we are not separated from the performance and its meaning as we are not separated from the fear.

And maybe the performance means something completely different than what we think it means. One thus begins not with identity but with difference—with two differences, in fact: the difference inherent in every experience, between what is *actually given* and what can *possibly* result from it. And this perpetuates as every actualised possible will create other possibles. I only have to steer the selection myself and not have it steered by the environment of which I easily become part of, not being able to make a difference anymore. Not being able to communicate anymore. Then communication does not connect the world it divides it. Like any operation of living or thinking communication produces a split, a *ceasura*.

And then Leonard Cohen comes in with Susanne who: «touched her perfect body with my mind?» A similarly self-enclosed process as the fear we can't separate us from.

And then the detachedness of Leonard Cohen and maybe the stand-up-comedian act which he did as an introduction to his reading poetry for a vast university audience and maybe we do the screaming of the sad song of Leonard Cohen.

And then we start dancing. 52 min.

We stop the Sonaten and Partitas of Bach interpreted by Izthak Perlman.

We stop dancing.

Black out. The end.

By the way, it is pure coincidence but Sandy, Leonard Cohen and Brian Massumi are all from Montreal.

# The Politics of Everyday Fear

## Preface

Brian Massumi

Fear is a staple of popular culture and politics. There is nothing new in that. In fact, a history of modern nation-states could be written following the regular ebb and flow of fear rippling their surface, punctuated by outbreaks of outright hysteria. No doubt several parallel histories could be written, so copious is the material. One might begin with witch-hunts accompanying the national unifications of the early modern period and end with gay bashing and violence against women at the close of the cold war. This perspective on gendering as a matter of national concern would be well complemented by a look at the body as fright site from the point of view of its medicalization. Its starting point might be Renaissance syphilis and its end point the mid-1980s shift from herpes to AIDS as privileged locus of biofear production. Then there is always horror at the body as pleasure site: from opium to Ecstasy, from temperance to the war on drugs, from chastity movement to chastity movement (some things never change). These histories might combine into a genealogy of the modern self as seen through the social technologies mounted for its defense and care. A racial-ethnic perspective could follow periodic crime scares, accounting for the variation of the criminalized group: from "Indians," to Irish, to Jews, to blacks and Hispanics. This could find a parallel history in the story of anti-immigration campaigns, leading up to the internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II, the Yellow Peril, and English-only laws. A class history would find much common ground with the racial-ethnic narrative as it followed the trajectory from "dangerous classes" to the Reagan specter of drug-addled welfare cheats. The surveillance, policing, and intelligence-gathering procedures of the national security state itself have their own voluminous history. The list could go on. Natural disasters, transportation accidents, spies, famines and droughts, serial killers, sex addiction, fluoridation, terrorism, rock music, assassination, global warming, Willie Horton, wrinkles, ozone depletion, Satanism, aging... What aspect of life, from the most momentous to the most trivial, has *not* become a workstation in the mass production line of fear?

As originally conceived, this volume was to serve as prolegomena to these social histories of fear, with a special focus on the United States, where the tools of the organized fear trade seem to have undergone a particularly complex evolution adapting them to an

everwidening range of circumstances. The emphasis was to have been on charting the saturation of American social space by mechanisms of fear production, with special attention to the role of the mass media. The regularity, perhaps cyclic nature, of media scare campaigns would have been emphasized. A central concern would have been to highlight the materiality of the body as the ultimate object of technologies of fear, understood as apparatuses of power aimed at carving into the flesh habits, predispositions, and associated emotions--in particular, hatred--conducive to setting social boundaries, to erecting and preserving hierarchies, to the perpetuation of domination. Although the organizing concept would have been *low-level fear*--naturalized fear, ambient fear, ineradicable atmospheric fright, the discomfiting affective Muzak that might come to be remembered as a trademark of the late-twentieth-century America--special attention would have been given to fear to the extreme, to the great symphonies of collective hysteria, panic, and national paranoia.

Many of these issues are addressed in the present volume. But the project's overall orientation changed. Part of the reason for its reconception was the sheer mass of available material. No single volume could do justice to the number and variety of fear mechanisms at large in American society. Beyond that practical problem, it soon became apparent that the original design, which was to follow frightful lines of continuity through history, glossed over an issue of tremendous importance: rupture. There was no reason why the history of popular fear production should be unaffected by the kind of epistemic breaks privileged by Foucauldian analysis. A new set of questions came to the fore, revolving around the likelihood that the social landscape of fear had been fundamentally reconfigured by the cultural break that many commentators identify as having occurred after World War II. The volume is not meant to address itself to issues of periodization per se: if, at what point, and in what way a break between "modern" culture and "postmodern" culture, between "industrial" society and "postindustrial" society may have occurred. Rather, it asks what rethinking of fear-functioning is necessitated by the hypothesis of such a break. The volume shifted from social history to political philosophy. *The Politics of Everyday Fear* can be read as a contribution toward a political ontology of fear, post-"post-."

Many of the recurring questions addressed implicitly or explicitly by the essays gathered here concern the consequences of saturation of social space by fear. Have fear-producing mechanisms become so pervasive and invasive that we can no longer separate our selves from our fear? If they have, is fear still fundamentally an emotion, a personal experience, or is it part of what constitutes the collective ground of possible experience? Is it primarily a subjective content or part of the very process of subject formation? Is it ontic or

ontogenetic? Empirical or virtual? If, in a sense, we have become our fear, and if that becoming is tied up with movements of commodification carrying capital toward intensifying saturation of the same social space suffused by fear, does that mean that when we buy we are buying into fear, and when we buy into fear we are buying into our selves? How does capitalized fear circulate? Implant and reproduce itself? If we cannot separate our selves from our fear, and if fear is a power mechanism for the perpetuation of domination, is our unavoidable participation in the capitalist culture of fear a complicity with our own and others' oppression? If we are in collective complicity with fear, does that mean that fear no longer sets social boundaries, but transcends them? If so, how does domination function without set boundaries? If not, how can the boundary be reconceptualized to account for the confluence of fear, subjectivity, and capital? Most of all, how, now, does one resist?

The pieces in this volume address questions such as these from many different perspectives, often obliquely. There is, however, a general consensus that we cannot in fact separate ourselves from fear, thus that it is necessary to reinvent resistance. This orientation is expressed in the performative nature of many of the texts. For if the enemy is us, analysis, however necessary, is not enough to found a practice of resistance. Fear, under conditions of complicity, can be neither analyzed nor opposed without at the same time being *enacted*. The decision to include graphics and "contributions" from "primary" sources such as Aryan Nations, Hitler, Charles Manson, and the government of Canada followed from the conviction that the volume as a whole had in some way to *perform* its object of inquiry.

The contributions to *Fear* are grouped under a number of headings. Essays under the same heading do not necessarily share a theoretical approach or topic. The methods are many; the topics overlap. Rather than delimiting a fixed intellectual territory, the headings invite the reader to invent an itinerary through possible landscapes of fear whose contours they minimally suggest.

Never fight fear head-on. That rot about pulling yourself together, and the harder you pull the worse it gets. Let it in and look at it. You will see it by what it does.

--William S Burroughs

## **EVERYWHERE YOU WANT TO BE**

### **Introduction to Fear**

#### **They Take a Licking, But They Keep on Ticking**

Lynn Hill, the world's top female rock climber, fell 85 feet and landed on her tailbone after she failed to secure the knot in her safety harness. A twenty-foot fall can be fatal. Her worst injuries were a dislocated elbow and a "sore butt." Lynn is wearing a dress watch from the Timex women's fashion collection. It has a very secure buckle. It costs about \$45.

Pilot Hank Dempsey fell out of an airplane at 2,500 feet when a rattling door he was checking suddenly opened. He hung onto stairs outside the plane and was inches from the runway when his co-pilot landed twenty minutes later. Hank is wearing our flight watch, the Timex Zulu Time. It has three time zones, and costs about \$60.

Helen Thayer, age 52, skied to the magnetic North Pole with her dog. She pulled a 160-pound sled for 27 days and 345 miles, surviving seven polar bear confrontations, three blizzards, near starvation, and several days of blindness. Helen is wearing a very civilized watch from the Timex women's fashion collection. It costs about \$40.

The most remarkable people in this world don't appear on movie screens or in sports arenas or on television tubes. They drive cabs and work in offices and operate machinery. They're just ordinary people like us who happened to have experienced something extraordinary. And survived.

#### **Name That Fear**

"We" are all survivors. "People like us." "We" have all fallen. Perhaps not from a cliff or a plane, but at least down the stairs. That can be fatal, too. We "ordinary people" confront our polar bears in the neighbor's pit bull. Our North Pole is the nearest mall. With "parking-lot crime" at "epidemic" proportions "we" might just as well make a polar expedition as hazard a run from the car to the store after sundown. "We" have all heard about the cabbie shot for small change. Even the office is a danger zone, with stress ailments a leading white-collar killer. And don't the papers say that work-related accidents are on the rise? "Ordinary people like us" all

experience something extraordinary at one time or another. Some, in fact, do not survive. Did I say some?

**BERLIN DISCO \* MOGADISHU \* MUNICH OLYMPICS \*  
ACHILLE LAURO \* MCDONALD'S**

In the long run, we are all dead.  
--John Maynard Keynes

On December 6, 1989 a lone gunman entered the University of Montréal engineering faculty. He walked into a class room and ordered the women to one side and the men to the other. Then, screaming epithets at "feminists," he sprayed the women with bullets. Fourteen women died in that volley and the shooting spree that followed.

The shock was palpable throughout the city. Nerves were raw. Emotions flared. There was a sense of collective mourning that seemed to leave no one untouched.

The press was quick on the uptake. Within minutes, "man"-in-the-street interviews were registering the reactions of "ordinary" people. Disbelief. "Things like that happen all the time in the United States, but *never* in Canada. We're just not used to it here." Incomprehension. "He was a madman." Empathy. "It could have been *my* daughter in there." One of the women was the daughter of the city police director of public relations, who arrived on the scene just in time to see her body carried to the ambulance. Tears.

The press loved it. In particular, the madman theory. Within minutes, TV reporters were busy piecing together a portrait of the killer. Mug-shot style photographs appeared in all the papers the next morning. A slight problem arose. The landlord, family, roommate and acquaintances, all emphasized how embarrassingly ordinary the "madman" was. A bit odd, a bit shy, never dated, but nothing anyone could remember in his past or manner prefigured the extraordinary act he would commit. For most commentators, that made the story all the *more* extraordinary. "It could have been *my son*." Who knows what lurks in the hearts of men?

The few feminists given a chance to speak in the media questioned the way in which the press had turned the event into a fifties horror flic starring the nice post-adolescent male with girl trouble mysteriously metamorphosing into a monster. What was remarkable from their point of view was not that the ordinary could conceal the extraordinary, but that the extraordinary had *become* the ordinary. There is only a difference of degree, they argued, between the spectacular deaths of the women at the Ecole Polytechnique and the

less newsworthy deaths and injuries suffered by the thousands of women who are mentally and physically abused each year by men. There is a difference of degree, not of nature, between the terror provoked by a mass-media anti-feminist massacre and the everyday fear that has become as pervasive a part of women's lives in North America as the polluted air they breathe. Over the next twelve months, Montréal recorded the steepest rise in its history in the incidence of rape, battering, and murder by male partners.

The anniversary observances were for the most part a solemn affair. The women of the Polytechnique were now in august company. Their day of mourning fell two weeks after the seventeenth anniversary of the assassination of John F. Kennedy, one week after John Lennon's tenth, and a little more than a month before the twelfth anniversary of Martin Luther King's assassination. Now images of blood-spattered school desks joined Kennedy's famous flying skull-and-scalp fragments and the pathos of the Memphis balcony scene in framing the Christmas shopping season. Some observances were disrupted by feminist activists enraged by the way in which the media's canonization of the fourteen women had erased the specificity of their deaths and women's grief, and the social issues they raised. But it was too late. They were martyrs now. The Montréal massacre had entered the annals of media history. It was an event to be remembered. Vaguely. Blurred into the series. Like the others, all that would remain of it, in its annual re-screening, would be an aftertaste of fear and a dim foreboding of future events of the same kind. "Like the others ... of the same kind." The media event is the generic event. Broadcast as the advent of the event without qualities.

### **LOCKERBIE \* CANARY ISLANDS \* KAL 007**

He who falls, was.  
--train surfer,  
Rio de Janeiro

Timex wearers Lynn Hill, Hank Dempsey, and Helen Thayer are extraordinary people, not because they have qualities that place them a notch above the rest of us in the chain of being, but because of something that happened to them. An event. They experienced danger, and lived to tell the story (and buy a watch). What is remarkable about them is something that befell them--or in the first two cases, something they fell from. Their noteworthiness is external to them. It is not *of* them, but comes *to* them, by chance. Their personal value is a contingency, their distinguishing quality of the nature of the *accident* (in the case of Helen the musher, the accident avoided, in spite of her heroic self-exposure to danger).



The identity of these model consumers is defined by an external event. The event is the accident, or its avoidance. The exact nature of the accident, even whether it happened, is not terribly important. What is important is a general condition, that of being on uncertain ground. Taking the cue from Lynn and Hank's overdetermination of the experience, *falling* can be taken as the exemplary accident or event founding the consumers' identity. It would be more precise to say that their *generic* identity--their belonging to the class of remarkable people--is defined by the condition of groundlessness. Their *specific* identity is defined by a commodity and a price tag: what individuates Lynn is her fancy ("women's dress") watch with a secure buckle (\$45); Hank has a most masculine "Zulu" timepiece (\$60--he's a top earner in an exciting profession requiring multiple time zones); plain Helen has a merely "civilized" watch weighing in at a rock-bottom \$40 (evidently a home-body when she's not out staring down polar bears).

Timex philosophy (axiom 1): identity is an act of purchase predicated on a condition of groundlessness.

**BUDDY HOLLY \* OTIS REDDING \* JAMES DEAN \*  
JANE MANSFIELD \* LYNRYD SKYNYRD**

Who among us has not fallen? If you haven't yet, you will--"in the end, we are all dead." The most remarkable people in this world don't appear on movie screens. They're ordinary stiff "like us." "We" are all Lynns or Hanks or Helens. "We" are all Otis Redding and Jane Mansfield. "We" are all subsets of the class of remarkable people. "We" are Timex philosophers.

The commodity endows us with identifiable qualities. It registers our gender, social status, and character traits: buckled up and prudent but still stylish; multi-time zoned jet setter; home-bodyish, with an adventurous streak. The commodity stands (in) for our existence. The ground(lessness) it stands *on* is the accident in its most general expression--the accident-form, exemplified as downfall, the unqualified or generic founding event. Our generic identity (our subject-form, or humanity) is the generic event (the accident-form); our specific identity (the content of which is our "individuality" or "self") is the sum total of our purchases (axiom 2). In other words, contingency is the form of identity, and identity is determined (given content) through the serial commission of the act of groundless consumption. We buy and buy, until we die. We are in free-fall, held aloft by the thinnest of credit cards. "Shop till you drop" is our motto. We know we are alive--or at least in a state of credit-suspended animation--as long as we are shopping. "I buy therefore I am" (axiom 3). The commodity encounter not only

specifies but actualizes the subject of the purchase. The subject of capitalism cannot be said to exist outside the commodity relation.

In the *Vogue* magazine issue in which this Timex ad is found (December 1990) there are what would seem to be an unnatural number of watch ads (fifteen). Almost all revolve around the accident or tradition. Tag Heuer warns a ski racer not to "crack under pressure." Movado exhorts us to "share the heritage," while Noblia asks that we buy an expensive watch "for our great-great-grandson". Accident and tradition as two dimensions of time are not contradictory. Fendi tells



why. This mountain goat of a "timepiece" is perched on top of a craggy peak. The sky above is an ethereally white, and somewhat out-of-focus, statue of a Greek goddess. If we don't fall during our ascent up the mountain we not only become a watch-owner but share in and reflect the subtle glow of cultural tradition personified (generic culture). The continuity of time hovers above the summit of the accident avoided. The seemingly smooth horizontal timeline of tradition is in fact discontinuous: the flash of a peak experience separated from others of its kind by deep ravines. To reach the next cultural high we have to descend again, then climb the neighboring summit. The mountains, of course, are price-tags. The peaks are purchases. Diachrony is an aura or optical effect emanating punctually from the purchase, as accident (avoided). The apparent continuity is the result of commodity afterimages blurring together to fill the intervals between purchases. The filler material is use-time, the time of consumption: the buyer coasts on credit to the next purchase by wearing or otherwise consuming the commodity, in combination with other commodities. Consumption is not the end, but the means. The defining experience is the peak experience. Time of consumption is a secondary extension of the prime time: buying time, the time of consummation. It is a lag-time, climbing time, during which the lingering afterglows of past ascents form interference patterns dopplering into a personal "presence" (seemingly continuous aural spectrum). The consumer's identity is a mix-and-match body-specific tradition self-applied through serial purchasing. A supplemental optical effect filling the void of the accident.

The commodity is the hinge between two temporalities, or two time-forms: the primal accident-(avoidance)-form constituting the consumer's generic identity or humanity; and its derivative, the

personal-cultural purchase tradition constituting the consumer's specific identity or self. Specific identity is duplicitous, having as it does two modes, consummation and consumption, whose difference it blurs into an atmosphere of self-sameness. Generic identity, or the capitalist subject-form, is not a "synchrony" in answer to this diachrony-effect. It is neither a simultaneity nor a synthesis of successive moments. It is the complete interpenetration of two mutually exclusive tenses. The founding event is at once instantaneous and eternal. It has always already happened ("the world's top female rock climber *fell*"), yet persists as a possibility (don't fall, "don't crack under pressure"). The accident as advent and threat: the pure past of the sudden and uncontrollable contingency, and the uncertain future of its recurrence. Future-past. The hinge-commodity, in its double modality of consummation/consumption, fills the hyphenated gap between past and future, holding the place of the present (Lynn *is wearing* a dress watch ... it *has* a secure buckle ... it *costs* ...). Buying *is* (our present/presence). The commodity is a time-buckle, and the time-buckle is a safety belt. The consumer "good" reassures us that we are, and, traditionally, will continue to be, unfallen from our groundless peak. Buying is prevention. It insures against death.

The inevitable. We all know our time will come. But if we follow the existential imperative of capitalism--don't crack under pressure (pick the right watch)--we don't have to worry about never having been. Even if we take a licking, our consumer heritage will keep on ticking. We will live on in the sparkle of our great-great-grandchildren's fashion accessories. Our purchasing present may vanish, but our future past will never end. We will glow on, dimly, the afterimage of the afterimage of our former ravine-riven presence, now stabilized into an objectified memory. We will not be forgotten (unless it is we who forget--to write a will). The future perfect--or to translate the more suggestive French term, the "future anterior"--is the fundamental tense of the time-form constitutive of the consuming subject ("will have...": also readable as an imperative, the existential imperative of capitalism in its most condensed expression). "Will have bought = will have been": the equation for capitalist salvation.

### **What, in the Real, Takes the Place of the Possible?**

"If this isn't terror, it is difficult to know what terror is,"  
Begin said, referring to Arafat's renunciation of terror ...  
--Montréal Gazette, *March 27, 1989*

The assassination of John F. Kennedy marks a divide in American culture. It was the end of "Camelot." No longer was it possible for Americans to have a sense of oneness stretching back in time to a golden age waiting just over the next horizon for the long-expected return of the citizens of progress. The far past of the founding age and the imminent future of its utopic repetition were telescoped into the instant, in the view-finder of a high-powered rifle. It was the end of mythic cultural time as the dominant temporal scheme of American society. Diachrony would never be the same.

In the immediate wake of that too-sudden event, it was still possible to believe. What many believed was conspiracy. Oswald was KGB. He was an aberration, an agent of subversion who slipped in through the cracks. The enemy, in that age of brutal "innocence," was still primarily on the outside, beyond the borders of the nation-state. The specter of the subversive, however, had brought it closer and closer to home. The borders were as much ideological as geographical. The black lists were a constant reminder that even a red-blooded American could turn--Red all over. The Cold War was a war on two fronts. As Vietnam was soon to suggest, if the war was to be lost, it would be lost on the home front.

The defeat would not be of one ideology over another. It was to be of ideology itself. The winner was not the rifleman. If there was a winner, it was the bullet. The senseless, instantaneous impact of the "will have been."

Cracks began to open all around. There was no longer any safe ground. The shot could come from any direction, at any time, in any form. Oswald's direct inheritor was not James Earl Ray, Martin Luther King's assassin. It was the gunmen in the Texas Tower, who shot passers-by at random for no reason comprehensible to the "ordinary American." The incomprehension spread. Why Watts? A rift opened between the races. What is becoming of our children? The "generation gap" threatened to undermine any possibility of cultural tradition based on shared values passed from progenitors to offspring. Gender became a battle-field in the "war between the sexes." About that time, planes started raining from the skies. It was bad enough that Ralph Nader had already soured the romance with the car, turned killer. Even pleasure no longer felt the same. Smoking was the insidious onset of a fatal ailment. Food became a foretaste of heart disease. The body itself was subversive of the "self": in the "youth culture," the very existence of the flesh was the onset of decline, which could be slower or faster depending on the beauty products or exercise accoutrements one bought, but was ever-present in its inevitability. Industrialization, once the harbinger of progress, threatened the world with environmental collapse. Terrorists, feminists, flower children, black power militants, people

who don't buckle up, guilty smokers, eaters, polluters, closet exercise resisters ... Everywhere, imminent disaster.

**THREE MILE ISLAND \* CHERNOBYL \* SEVESO \* ALASKA \*  
BHOPAL \* LOVE CANAL**

"We" live there. It is our culture: the perpetual imminence of the accident. Better, the immanence of the accident. Today, conspiracy theories for both JFK and King favor a domestic culprit, the CIA. "We have met the enemy and he is us" (Pogo). The enemy is no longer outside. Increasingly, the enemy is no longer even clearly identifiable as such. Ever-present dangers blend together, barely distinguishable in their sheer numbers. Or, in their proximity to pleasure and intertwining with the necessary functions of body, self, family, economy, they blur into the friendly side of life. The Cold War in foreign policy has mutated into a state of generalized deterrence against an enemy without qualities. An unspecified enemy threatens to rise up at any time at any point in social or geographical space. From the welfare state to the warfare state: a permanent state of emergency against a multifarious threat as much in us as outside.

**BLACK PLAGUE \* SYPHILIS \* TUBERCULOSIS \*  
INFLUENZA \* CANCER \* AIDS**

Society's prospectivity has shifted modes. What society looks toward is no longer a return to the promised land but a general disaster that is already upon us, woven into the fabric of day-to-day life. The content of the disaster is unimportant. Its particulars are annulled by its plurality of possible agents and times: here and to come. What registers is its magnitude. In its most compelling and characteristic incarnations, the now unspecified enemy is infinite. Infinitely small or infinitely large: viral or environmental. The Communist as the quintessential enemy has been superseded by the double figure of AIDS and global warming. These faceless, unseen and unseeable enemies, operate on an inhuman scale. The enemy is not simply indefinite (masked, or at a hidden location). In the infinity of its here-and-to-come, it is elsewhere, *by nature*. It is humanly ungraspable. It exists in a different dimension of space from the human "here," and in a different dimension of time: neither "now" of progress, nor the cultural past as we traditionally knew it, nor a utopian future in which we will know that past again. Elsewhere and elsewhen. Beyond the pale of our accustomed causal laws and classification grids. The theory that HIV is the direct

"cause" of AIDS is increasingly under attack. More recent speculations suggest multiple factors and emphasize variability of symptoms. AIDS, like global warming, is a syndrome: a complex of effects coming from no single, isolatable place, without a linear history, and exhibiting no invariant characteristics.

The pertinent enemy question is not Who?, Where?, When?, or even What? The enemy is a *Whatnot?*--an unspecifiable may-come-to-pass, in an other dimension. In a word, the enemy is the virtual.

Discovery Countdown  
So Smooth It's Scary

--headline, *Montréal Gazette*, September 30, 1988

*Challenger* was scary. Explosively so. But the faultless *Discovery* lift-off? Nothing happened! Precisely the point.

Not only have the specific qualities of the threat been superseded by the strange perpetuity of its elsewhen and the elsewhere-ness of its ubiquity; whether or not the event even happens is in a strange way a matter of indifference. The accident and its avoidance have come to be interchangeable. It makes little difference if the rocket goes up or comes crashing down. Not throwing a bomb will get the Palestinian nowhere. The event is by definition "scary," just as the political opponent is by definition a "terrorist."

"Scary" does not denote an emotion any more than "terrorist" denotes an ideological position or moral value. The words are not predicates expressing a property of the substantive to which they apply. What they express is a mode, the same mode: the imm(a)(i)nence of the accident. The future anterior with its anteriority bracketed: "will [have (fallen)]." *Fear is not fundamentally an emotion. It is the objectivity of the subjective under late capitalism.* It is the mode of being of every image and commodity and of the groundless self-effects their circulation generates. The terms "objectivity" and "being" are used advisedly. "Condition of possibility" would be better. Fear is the translation into "human" terms and onto the "human" scale of the double infinity of the figure of the possible. It is the most economical expression of the accident-form as subject-form of capital: being as being-virtual, virtuality reduced to the possibility of disaster, disaster commodified, commodification as spectral continuity in the place of threat. When we buy, we are buying off fear and falling. Filling the gap with presence-effects. When we consume, we are consuming our own possibility. In possessing, we are possessed, by marketable forces beyond our control. In complicity with capital, a body becomes its own worst enemy.

Killer Said Mickey Mouse  
Took Over Husband's Body  
--headline, Montréal Gazette, February 24, 1989

Fear is the direct perception of the contemporary condition of possibility of being-human. If "HIV" is the presence in discourse of the ungraspable multicausal matrix of the syndrome called AIDS (its sign), fear is the inherence in the body of the ungraspable multicausal matrix of the syndrome recognizable as late-capitalist human existence (its *affect*).

### ***Dress Rehearsal for an Even Darker Future***

Was Discovery scary because Challenger was a premonition of (desire for?) an even worse accident the possibility of which the next launch reminded us? Was it scary because we saw in Challenger our future-past--the eternal return of disaster?

Or on the contrary, was the *nonevent* of Discovery the "darker future" for which the Challenger crash was a "dress rehearsal"? A future that was to be the TV present of image-consumers attracted to satellite-beamed lift-off like flies to a live media corpse.

Which is more frightening: the future-past of the event or the present of consumption? The accident or its avoidance?

**1789 \* 1848 \* 1871 \* 1917 \* 1936 \* 1968 \* 1977 \* 1987 \*  
1929**

The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the "state of emergency" in which we live is not the exception but the rule. We must attain to a conception of history that is in keeping with this insight.

--Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (257)

John Maynard Keynes believed in equilibrium. His economic philosophy was marked by two events: 1917 and 1929. Two crises, one striking capitalism from the enemy outside, the other a self-propelled "crash." The Keynesian wager was to exorcise both threats--worker revolution and industrial overproduction--by *internalizing* them into the ordinary, everyday functioning of capital. Social equilibrium was to be attained by integrating the working class, giving it a measure of decision-making power through collective bargaining and legal strikes: the recognition and institutionalization of the union movement. Economic equilibrium was to be accomplished by increasing demand to meet supply, through Fordism (the principle that workers should earn enough to buy the products made with their labor) and welfare (enabling even the unemployed to participate in the economy as buyers). In return

for this universalization of the right to consume, the workers would agree to safeguard management profits by increasing their productivity apace with their wages. Capitalism with a human face: everybody happy, busily banking or consuming away.

The internalization of the two catastrophic limits of capitalism worked, after a fashion. Yet equilibrium proved elusive. Part of the problem was that the integration of the working class involved translating what were fundamentally qualitative demands (worker control over the labor process and collective ownership of the means of production) into quantitative ones (raises and benefits; Alliez and Feher, 320). The success of this strategy meant that unfulfilled qualitative expectations were automatically expressed as escalating quantitative demands which soon outstripped increases in productivity. The response from management to this new threat to profit was to regain productive momentum through automation. But to do so was to fall into a classic trap of capitalist economics described by Marx as the law of the tendential fall of the rate of profit (the higher the proportion of fixed capital, or equipment, to variable capital, or "living" labor, the lower the profit rate over the long run). A complicating factor was that several decades of accelerating production and increased consumer spending had already come close to saturating domestic markets. By the late 1960s, another crisis point was being reached. Not only was management losing all patience with the now chronic profit problems flowing from the Keynesian social contract, but workers and consumers, glutted with commodities, were becoming less willing to content themselves with quantitative expectations. Demands were being retranslated into "quality of life" issues that were in some respects more radical than the classical communist concerns with workplace control and ownership of the means of production: the very concept of productivity, the industrial model of production, and even the institution of work itself were called into question in the sudden wave of revolt that spread across the globe in 1968-1969, continuing into the 1970s and in some countries (most notably, Italy) almost to the end of that decade.

According to Antonio Negri (1988), the 1970s and 1980s saw a radical reorganization of capitalism. The self-proclaimed "humanism" of the integrative strategy of the Keynesian era was abandoned for often unapologetically ruthless strategies of displacement, fluidification, and intensification that once again averted both social revolution and self-generated collapse.

Displacement: Large segments of industrial production were exported to the "Third World," where growing (if still minute in terms of percentage of population) middle classes provided much-needed market outlets for consumer durables. A coinciding move realigned the economies of the "center," shifting their



emphasis from durables to intangibles: information, communication, services (the "tertiary sector"). This move into new and largely ununionized domains undermined the power base of the institutionalized labor movement, freeing capital from onerous collectively-bargained contracts and constraining government regulation. The new jobs created were overwhelmingly part-time, or if full-time "unguaranteed" (unprotected by seniority systems, affirmative action agreements, etc.). Employment for growing numbers of people became precarious, regardless of class. Many professionals (especially baby-boomers newly arrived on the job market, and older professionals less able to adapt to the new technologies and super-competitive atmosphere) lived in fear of falling into the middle class, which was itself on a precipice overlooking the "permanent underclass" created by the partial dismantling of the welfare state. For the underclass, it was not only employment that had become precarious, but life itself, as infant mortality and murder rates soared and life expectancy declined. The abandonment to conditions of extreme hardship of the predominantly nonwhite urban poor constituted a final displacement: the "Third World" transposed into the heart of the "First World."

Fluidification: These displacement strategies had the combined effect of increasing the fluidity both of the work force and of capital. The employed were more easily dismissed, retrained, or transferred; the un- and underemployed provided a pool of potential labor that could be dipped into as needed. Investments could more easily be shuffled from region to region or sector to sector. The commodification of information and services meant that it was not only new products that were entering circulation; the means of producing new products themselves became products (computer programs, design systems, management consulting, etc.). Product "turnover" was now concerned as much with moving from one product to the next as with moving units of the same product. This was the economy's way of responding to the retranslation of social demands into qualitative terms. Qualitatively new products would be created almost instantaneously to fill any perceived need or desire. A new glut: of the qualitatively new. Response: market the qualitiveness of the qualitatively new--sell "image." What was marketed was less and less a product designed to fulfill a need or desire than an image signifying fulfillment and the power to fulfill. The adjective of the eighties was "power" (as in "power lunch"). Use-value was overshadowed by fulfillment-effect, or image-value. Images, the most intangible of intangible products, circulate faster than uses. Turnover time was reduced to almost nothing. New products could be marketed as fast as styles could be created or recycled.

Intensification: With the advent of the power lunch, eating became a productive activity. What was formerly in the realm of "reproduction" entered the sphere of production. The distinction between "unproductive" and "productive" labor has become entirely obsolete. "Culture," for example, is a source of capital. Even those in the "underclass" are "productive workers" to the extent that they invent new styles that are commodified with lightning speed for "cross-over" audiences. Education has become more and more explicitly a matter of professional training, though often of a nonspecific kind. If "liberal" education is back in vogue, it is likely because versatility of thought and character have become necessary survival skills in the super-fluid work/consumer world, rather than for any inherent value it may have. "Leisure" has disappeared. With the advent of people-meters, switching on the TV has become tantamount to punching a time-card for a marketing company. Keeping up with the "avant-garde" music scene is often a question of image-building to enhance one's personal saleability or, for the growing number of workers in the "culture industry," direct market research. Time spent off the job is dedicated to "self-improvement," most often oriented toward increasing one's competitiveness in getting or keeping a job, or improving one's health to live long enough for a raise. It is just as well that image-value has replaced use-value--no one has time anymore to enjoy the fruits of their labor. A state-of-the-art stereo system is more a promise of consumption than its realization. People who have managed to stay employed work harder and harder to buy more and more impressive gadgets they no longer have the time to use. What buyers buy are images and services directly implicated in production, or consumer durables that no longer represent anything but the continually deferred promise of enjoyment. The commodity has become a time-form struck with futurity, in one of two ways: as time stored (in an object of perpetually future use) or as time saved (a productivity enhancer optimizing future activity; Alliez and Feher, 351). The two futurities join in a buckle: increase productivity in order to save time and thus earn more in order to buy more objects with which to store the time saved by being more productive in order to buy more objects ...

Time is everything, man is nothing; he is at most the empty carcass of time.

--Karl Marx

Image-building, self-improvement: what we buy is our selves. Time saved equals time stored: in buying ourselves we are buying time. Once again, the subject of capital appears as a time-form: a future (fulfillment) forever deterred (signified) buckling back with accelerating velocity into an "having been" (productive). This is the same absencing of the present by the future-past as established by Timex philosophy. Here, the formula of the future-past has been

arrived at from the angle of work (the wage relation) rather than that of consumption (the commodity relation). When reproduction becomes productive, the commodity relation and the wage relation converge. They become formally identical and factually inseparable. If the commodity is a hinge between the future and the past, the subject-form with whose empty present it coincides is a hinge between the two axes of the capitalist relation. The subject of capital is produced at the point of intersection of the wage relation and the commodity relation. It is that intersection, the point at which lived space is temporalized and temporality capitalized. "Capitalization" means "potential profit." All of existence is now subsumed by the capitalist relation. Being has become surplus-value: the capitalist expression of the virtual.

The growth in the information, image, and service markets constitute a second axis of capital expansion. Answering to the extensive expansion of industrial production and consumption to the "Third World" is an intensive expansion of the capitalist relation at the "center," where it becomes coextensive with life. And death. Producing oneself through consumption has its dangers, particularly when the consumption is of cultural images, so free-flowing and seductive. Dangerous it is, but not abnormal.

Roseann Greco, 52, of West Islip, was charged with second-degree murder for killing her husband, Felix, in their driveway in 1985. She insisted at the time that the cartoon character had taken over her husband's body. Roseann Greco was found mentally competent to stand trial.

**ROADRUNNER & COYOTE \* MICKEY MOUSE \*  
FLINTSTONES \* SIMPSONS \*  
TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES**

It is simplifying things to say that capitalism has internalized its two catastrophic limits. At first glance, the formulation is incomplete, because capitalism has internalized other limits as well: its extensive expansion has internalized the boundary between the "First" and "Third" worlds; its intensive expansion has internalized the boundaries between the reproductive and productive, commodity circulation and production, consumption and production, leisure and work, even life and death, for example when what is sold is "health" or when death thumbs a ride on a consumed image turned all-consuming (Mickey). But ultimately, it is the notion of "internalization" that proves inadequate. For if the capitalist relation has colonized all of geographical and social space, it has no inside into which to integrate things. It has become an unbounded space--in other words, a space coextensive with its own inside *and*

outside. It has become a field of immanence (or exteriority). It has not "internalized," in the sense of "integrating"; it has displaced and intensified, coaching mutually exclusive forms into uneasy coexistence. The "Third World" meets the "First World" in the South Bronx. The future meets the past in a Timex watch. No dialectical synthesis has been reached. Capitalism has not after all internalized, or overcome in any way, its two catastrophic limits, social revolution and collapse on the heels of overproduction.

Social revolution has already come, and keeps coming, in the form of accelerated systemic change and, for some in society, as the possibility of breaking free from disciplinary and normative institutions and inventing a self as if from scratch. But that self is invented in and through the commodity. Social revolution comes, but its coming is pre-capitalized. It coincides absolutely with its own "appropriation" (self-turnover). Extreme change accompanied by utter conservatism: a possible definition of "postmodernism." (If "postmodernism" is so "radical," why do people go on behaving as if nothing happened? Why are men still men, and whites still racist? Explain the resurgence of the traditional wedding. Explain baby boomers making a baby boomlet and returning with their spawn to church. Everything happened, but nothing seems to have changed.)

The overproduction/depression cycle, for its part, has been compacted into the perpetual menace of "stagflation" (the inflation associated with oversupply together with the economic stagnation characteristic of depression), relieved only by interludes of dangerously rapid deflation. Precariousness is by no means limited to employment. Capital has been as fluidified as labor. Corporations die and are born with lightning speed. In the eighties, fortunes were made with corporate take-overs and dismantlings, and through trading in debt (junk bonds). Unprofitability was made profitable. The inability to compete fueled competition. The effects of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall could be avoided by the adroit money manager through the simple mechanism of continually turning over *capital* rather than commodities. The crisis of production has been made productive by inventing ways in which the *circulation* of capital can create surplus-value. No longer is Keynes's goal of "protecting the present from the future" of catastrophe the guiding principle of economics (Negri, 1988:25). The trick is instead to figure out "how to make money off the crisis." The classical problem of the capitalist cycle, or the inevitability of periodic economic collapse, has been solved--by eternalizing crisis without sacrificing profits. The future-past of the catastrophe has become the dizzying ever-presence of crisis. Capitalism has spun into free-fall, held aloft by the thinnest of Savings and Loans. In the crash of '29, capitalists jumped from high ledges. In the crash of '87, they didn't, because the notion that equilibrium was attainable or even desirable had already gone out the window. Being on the

brink is now as "normal" in money matters as the courts appear to think being unbalanced is in subjectivity. Just as insanity is no longer necessarily incompatible with being judged mentally competent to stand trial, insolvency is no longer necessarily incompatible with being judged financially competent to turn a profit.

## **NEIL BUSH**

The policeman isn't there to create disorder, the policeman  
is there to preserve disorder.

*--Former Mayor Richard J. Daley of Chicago*

There is an identity between the destitute train surfer in Rio de Janeiro and the Wall Street financier. Both are defined by the statement, "he who falls, was." For both, the subject-form is the accident-form. There is an identity between them to the extent that the capitalist relation has expanded its reach to every coordinate of socio-geographical space-time. Their identities are joined in the ecumenism of the capitalist economy that subsumes them both, along with everyone and every thing on earth and in orbit.

Yet there is at the same time an undeniable difference between them. Capitalists put their money on the line; train surfers, their bodies. Capitalists may indirectly risk their lives to stress-related ailments, but their immediate threat is no worse than bankruptcy. Although the subjectivity of the capitalist and of the member of the underclass are both determined by the intersection of the wage relation and the commodity relation, they are determined by them in radically divergent ways: the former by what kind of access he/she has to them, the latter by her/his exclusion from them. Those excluded from the capitalist relation incarnate its form directly in their bodies: they fall, they were. They are not remembered. Since they do not have access to capitalized presence-effects, they cannot fill the gap. They directly embody the ungraspability of the capitalist present: disaster. North American ghetto dwellers are in a similar position that is different again: they have access to the commodity relation, and can therefore create presence-effects with gold and gait, but since the wage relation is closed to them they must commodify themselves in ways that are just as apt to earn them an early death as clinging to the tops of trains (drug-dealing and other criminalized forms of unsalaried capitalist endeavor).

The capitalist relation produces a subjective sameness, but not without creating differences. It does not unify without dividing. This statement, and the many like it in the preceding pages, is not a dialectical contradiction begging for synthesis. Neither is it a paralogism or logical paradox. It is a *real coincidence*. It was argued

above that the limits of capitalism have become immanent to it. This does not mean that boundaries have simply broken down. They have been made to coincide really, *in virtuality*: every boundary is really, *potentially* present at every space-time coordinate. No particular boundary is *necessarily* in effect at a given time. Nothing in *principle* prevents a black from the South Bronx from getting a job, or even becoming a big-time capitalist (a few rappers have done it). The accident-form that is the subject-form is the form of the virtual, pure potential: in principle, it has no limits. In practice, it does. *Boundaries are effectively set in the movement from "principle" to "practice," in other words in the actualization of the subject-form.*

Another way of putting it is that the generic identity of the subject of capital is a global form of infinite possibility, but that it cannot come into existence without alienating its form in determinate content, in specific identities whose presence-effects are necessarily limited and divergent. A specific identity is defined by whether or not a given body is allowed access to the wage relation and the commodity relation, and if so in what way (how will it be self-consuming? what kind of presence-effects will it produce? what peaks will it climb?). There is an entire technology dedicated to determining the divergent limits of specific identity based on age, gender, sexual preference, race, geography, or any number of such socially-valorized distinctions. Foucault's "disciplinary" institutions and "biopower" and Baudrillard's "testing" procedures (marketing feedback loops between production and consumption that make the relationship between the product and the needs or desires it supposedly fills a pomo update of the chicken and the egg riddle) are examples of just such apparatuses for the actualization of the subject-form of capital. There is no contradiction between the different kinds of apparatuses of actualization. They coexist quite comfortably. There is a kind of nonexclusive triage of bodies. Bodies are selected, on the basis of certain socially-valorized distinctions, for priority access to a certain kind of apparatus. African-American men, for example, are favored for prison and the army on the basis of their skin color. Women of all races are favored for biopower on the basis of gender: the medicalization of child-birth and social engineering of the child-rearing responsibilities women still disproportionately bear. Priority access to one apparatus of actualization does not necessarily exclude a body's selection by another. The same body can, inevitably is, selected for different apparatuses successively and simultaneously. Prison follows school follows family. Each of these disciplinary institutions is penetrated by varying modes of biopower and testing. A black woman's bodily functions are medicalized and at the same time prioritized for disciplinary institutions. Generic identity is the coincidence of functions that may in practice prove mutually exclusive (capitalist

and worker, producer and consumer, criminal and banker)--but then again may not. Specific identity involves a separation of functions in their passage into practice, sometimes but not necessarily with a view to exclusivity, often for mixing and matching. The result is a complex weave of shifting social boundaries. The boundaries are not barriers; they are not impermeable. They are more like filters than walls. A black from the South Bronx *may* become a big-time capitalist. But the chances are slim. Boundary-setting--or the separation/combination of social functions through a triage of bodies based on valorized distinctions--works less by simple exclusion than by probability.

The apparatuses of actualization governing this process are power mechanisms. *Power* is not a form. It is not abstract. It is the movement of form into the content outside of which it is a void of potential function, of the abstract into the particular it cannot be or do without. It is the translation of generic identity into the specific identities outside whose actualization it does not exist, of humanity into the selves comprising it. Not a form, but a mechanism of formation; not a being, but a coming to being; a becoming. Neither generic nor specific. Power is as ever-present as the subject-form and as infinitely variable as its selves. It is neither one nor the other, and nevertheless not indeterminate. It has definable modes, like the three just mentioned, which are distinguished by the kinds of functions they separate out for actualization in a given body (by the kind of socially recognizable content they give a life). Power mechanisms can also be defined, perhaps more fundamentally, by the temporal mode in which they operate. They may seize upon the futurity of the future-past, in which case they can be characterized as strategies of *surveillance*: on the look-out for the event. Or they may seize upon its dimension of anteriority, in which case they are *statistical and probabilistic*: analyze and quantify the event as it happened. The past tense in the Timex ad went along with a fixation on numbers: 85-foot fall, 2,500-foot altitude, inches from the runway, 25-minute flight before landing, aged 52, 160-pound sled, 27 days and 345 miles, three blizzards ... Mechanisms of surveillance and of statistical probabilization buckle into prediction. A power word for prediction is *deterrence*. Deterrence is the perpetual co-functioning of the past and future of power: the empty present of watching and weighing with an eye to avert. It is the avoidance of the accident on the basis of its past occurrence. It is power turned toward the event: in other words, as it approaches the subject-form, the virtual.

Power under late capitalism is a two-sided coin. One side of it faces the subject-form. On that side, it is deterrence. Deterrence by nature determines nothing (but potential: the potential for the multiform disaster of human existence). On the other side, power is determining. There, discipline, biopower, and testing give disaster a

face. They bring specificity to the general condition of possibility of deterrence by applying it to a particular found body. They give a life-form content. A self is selected (produced and consumed). The in-between of the subject-form and the self, of the generic identity and specific identity--the come and go between deterrence and discipline/biopower/testing, between the virtual and the actual--is the same intensive and extensive terrain saturated by the capitalist relation. Power is coincident with capital as social selection and probabilistic *control* (Deleuze 1990). Power is capitalization expressed as a destiny. But in this postequilibrium world of deterrence in which the accident is always about to happen and already has, disorder is the motor of control. And destiny in the final analysis is only the necessity of chance: the inevitability of the event, the evanescence of consumptive production, a life spent, death.

The act of purchase constitutive of the capitalist self seemed, from the view of the commodity relation alone, an unfettered act of consummation/consumption. It now appears to be universally determined as to its form, at the intersection of the commodity relation and the wage relation. The wage relation may impose exclusions, and always dictates a forced translation or accompanies a retranslation of perceived needs and desires. Power mechanisms specify the translation, or give subjective form socially recognizable content, in a basically probabilistic way. What we call "free choice" is a layering of different social determinations on the foundation of a necessary subject-form, the accident-form, which is the form of chance. The syndrome of the self is the product of a functional coincidence between free "play" (free-fall, the absence of solid qualities) and multiple determinations of evanescent content (concretized precariousness; turnover).

The functional coincidence of freedom and determination is an ontological alienation. The subject-form *is* only at the price of alienating itself in content. "We" cannot realize our unity without in the same stroke being divided. Power under late capitalism is a state of continual warfare against an elusive enemy that is everywhere "we" are. Our "self"-determination is deterrence incarnate, the actualization in our bodies and our selves of the immanence of the unspecified capitalist enemy.

If the capitalist economy is indeed a war economy, only able to proceed by an always more advanced and intense colonization of terrestrial space, it must be recognized that this economy implies an administration of the prospective terror which radically modifies this space. In order to make fear reign a space of fear must be created; the earth must therefore be rendered uninhabitable. The appearance of habitats was a defense, a first form of resistance to colonization.



Their current destruction no longer leaves them with more than their function as a refuge, a hiding place. Now, it is not solely by means of "flows of stupidity" that the State produces this fear with regard to space, but by rendering space truly, biologically uninhabitable.

--Jacques Donzelot, *"An Anti-Sociology"*

Replace "terrestrial space" with "cultural space," "earth" with "city," "habitat" with "neighborhood," and "biologically" with "socially"--and we are back at the Montréal massacre. Capitalist power actualizes itself in a basically uninhabitable space of fear. That much is universal. The particulars of the uninhabitable landscape of fear in which a given body nevertheless dwells vary according to the socially-valorized distinctions applied to it by selective mechanisms of power implanted throughout the social field. An urbanized North American woman dwells in a space of potential rape and battering. Her movements and emotions are controlled (filtered, channeled) by the immanence of sexual violence to every coordinate of her socio-geographical space-time. The universal "we," that empty expression of unity, inhabits the in-between of the gunman, his victim, and the policeman. "We" are Marc Lépine, at the same time as "we" are the fourteen women of the Polytechnique, and the police official whose daughter has just died. "We" are every subject position. "We" extraordinary ordinary people are men or women without qualities, joined in fear. "She," however, has regular qualities, a "privileged" specific identity, a predictable function: victim. Capitalist power determines being a woman as the future-past of male violence.

Now, that *could* be the Montréal massacre. But then again it could also be *Twin Peaks*. Hard to tell.

The "flow of stupidity" in contemporary society consists in the translation of the "she" to the "we," of everywoman to everyone: a loss of the specificity of the landscape of fear. It is a re-virtualization of the already-actualized accident, its re-coinciding with its own variations. It is a retranslation, of content back into form. A commodity-form, of course: the media image in its perpetual self-turnover. The mass media, in their "normal" functioning, are specialized organs for the inculcation of stupidity. Stupidity is not a lack, of information or even of intelligence. Like fear, it is an objective condition of subjectivity: a posture. Stupidity is the affect proper to the media, the existential posture built into the technology of the broadcast apparatus and its current mode of social implantation. It is the inherence in the buying-viewing body of the despecification of intellectual content. A viewer is stupefied to the extent she or he fails to counteract that in-built posturing (through humor, cynicism, appropriation, anger, zapping ... ). Uncountered, the media's serial transmission of frightful images

results in a loss of detail in the who? what? when? and where? This blur-treatment is not restricted to women. It is applied to all specific identities, with variations depending on a limited range of particular characteristics that persist in the vocal and visual residue of the broadcast body: often skin color and gender (but not always: Michael Jackson); sometimes nationality, age, or profession.

The media affect--fear-blur--is the direct *collective* perception of the contemporary condition of possibility of being human: the capitalized accident-form. It is the direct collective apprehension of capitalism's powers of existence. It is vague by nature. It is nothing as sharp as panic. Not as localized as hysteria. It doesn't have a particular object, so it's not a phobia. But it's not exactly an anxiety either; it is even fuzzier than that. It is *low-level fear*. A kind of background radiation saturating existence (commodity consummation/consumption). It may be expressed as "panic," or "hysteria," or "phobia," or "anxiety." But these are to low-level fear what "HIV" is to AIDS. They are the presence in the discourse of the self of the condition of possibility of being the mediatized human victim we all are in different ways: signs of subjectivity in capitalist crisis. The self, like AIDS, is a syndrome, one with a range of emotionalcrippings rather than a range of diseases as its symptoms.

**JOHN LENNON \* JFK \* MARTIN LUTHER KING \*  
ANWAR SADAT \* INDIRA GHANDI \* (RONALD REAGAN)**

The emotional organization of a given fear-riven self is a particular limited and divergent actualization of the subject-form: the socially meaningful expression of the "individuality" of the specific identity attached by power mechanisms to a found body. Emotions and the character types they define are the specific social content of the fear-affect as the contemporary human equation. They are derivatives of that equation: secondary expressions (in the mathematical sense) of capitalist powers of existence. Character is the derivative of a power equation. It is power determined, as presence-effect. Emotional make-up is the face power turns toward the predictably unbalanced, saleably empty content of an individual life (serialized small-scale capitalist crisis). Life's a soap--when it's not a disaster with your name written on it.

**JOHN HINCKLEY \* CHARLES MANSON \*  
HILLSIDE STRANGLER \* MARK CHAPMAN**

Personalized stationery is one of the small but truly necessary luxuries of life.

--*Ted Bundy, mass murderer*

The mass media works to shortcircuit the event. It blurs the event's specific content into an endless series of "like" events. (Stupidity may also be defined as perception and intellection restricted to a recognition reflex; difference subordinated to an a priori similarity-effect.) "Like" events rush past. No sooner does one happen than it is a has-been. The who? what? when? and where? become a *whatnot?* ("anything can happen") and what's *next?* ("what is this world coming to?"). Retrospective analysis is replaced by a shudder and a shrug, memory quickly elided by expectation. Broadcast is a technology of collective forgetting. It is not that the event is lost. On the contrary, it is accessible for immediate recall: instant replay. Broadcast (in a widened sense, including the mass-circulation print media) is the tendential supplanting of individual memory and introspection by collective technologies of storage and screening.

The externalization and objectification of memory and the infinite repeatability of the event distances cause from effect. The event floats in media-suspended animation, an effect without a cause, or with a vague or clichéd one. Thus the Montréal massacre becomes an opportunity to explain away men's violence toward women as the sudden onset of an individual case of "madness." A threat can be easily displaced, as has been the case during the AIDS crisis, which evoked hysterical and socially damaging reaction from precisely those groups least at risk (for example, straight non-intravenous-drug-using nonhemophiliac white males like Jesse Helms).

The jarring loose of cause and effect does not, as has often been argued from a Baudrillardian perspective, make power mechanisms obsolete. Quite the opposite, it opens the door for their arbitrary exercise. The media-induced public conviction during the early to mid-1980s that violent crime throughout America was rising at epidemic proportions (despite statistics to the contrary, also reported in the media) enabled Ronald Reagan to expand police powers beyond anything Richard Nixon could have dreamed of. The collective difficulty with attributing cause opens the way for even the most seemingly archaic of disciplinary institutions to expand their arena. Even the family made a comeback in the eighties, in reaction to a panoply of dangers from child abduction to pornography to STDs. The early eighties obsession with child abuse and abduction (remember milk cartons?) is especially instructive. The facts that the overwhelming majority of abusers are family members and that 98% of kidnapped children are taken by their fathers did not prevent the "crisis" from being used to "defend the

family" (whatever that might mean, in the era of the one-person household and single parenthood). As if "the family" weren't part of the problem. The enemy is not "out there." Once again, "we" are it.

The media shortcircuiting of the specificity of the event opens the way for mechanisms of power to reset social boundaries along roughly historical lines. In other words, in favor of traditionally advantaged groups (whites, males, heterosexuals). It is only an apparent contradiction that these are the very groups in the best position to profit from the socio-economic fluidity of late capitalism. Fluidity and boundary-setting are not in contradiction, for two reasons. First, the boundaries themselves are as easily displaceable as the perception of risk. "The family" is a code word for an immensely complex set of laws, regulations, charity campaigns, social work, medical practices, and social custom that varies locally and is under constant revision. The boundaries of "the family" fluctuate as welfare, abortion, and tax laws change, as church influence and temperance movements rise and recede ... "The family"--any bounded social space--simply does not exist as an effectively self-enclosed, self-identical entity. "Bounded" social spaces are fields of variation. The only thing approaching a structural invariant is the high statistical probability that wherever the boundary moves, the (im)balance of power will move with it (the advantaged group will stay advantaged, in one way or another). The second reason is that the nature of the "boundary" has changed. The individual is defined more by the boundaries it *crosses* than the limits it observes: how many times and with whom has one crossed the boundary of the family by growing up, getting married/living together, and divorcing/breaking up? how many times has one been in and out of prison, and for what? how does one negotiate the everyday yet elusive distinction between work and leisure? how many jobs or professions has one had? how many sexual orientations? how many "looks"? how many times has one gone from consumption to self-production by buying to be? The self is a process of crossing boundaries. The same could be said of the state. With the transnationalization of capital and the proliferation of world trade and political organizations (IMF, World Bank, World Court, UN, EEC, US-Canada free trade) a state is defined at least as much by the way in which it participates in processes greater than itself--none of which exercises full sovereignty over it, or "encloses" it in an all-encompassing higher power on the nineteenth-century nation-state model--as by the way it exercises its own brand of partial sovereignty over processes smaller than it (in the US, domestic apparatuses of power operating on a "checks and balances" principle). The generalization of the capitalized accident-form has virtualized the boundary, which now exists less as a limit than an immanent threshold. Every boundary is present everywhere, potentially. Boundaries are set and specified in the act

of passage. The crossing actualizes the boundary--rather than the boundary defining something inside by its inability to cross. There is no inside, and no outside. There is no transgression. Only a field of exteriority, a network of more or less regulated passages across thresholds. What US president will not push the jurisdictional limits of the executive branch? Particularly as regards war powers. What country will the US not invade if it sees fit? And what country invaded by the US will not open the war on the US home front through the threat, implied or stated, of terrorism? The borders of the state are continually actualized and reactualized, on the domestic side by constant fluctuations in jurisdiction, and internationally by regular flows of people and goods (customs and trade regulations) and exceptional flows of violence (invasion, terrorism).

This will not be another Vietnam.  
--George Bush

The capitalist relation cannot unify without at the same time dividing. It cannot optimize and globalize the capitalized flow of people and goods without producing local rigidifications. It cannot fluidify without concretizing here and there, now and again. It was inevitable that the end of the Cold War and the opening of the "Soviet bloc" to the world capitalist economy would multiply regional "hot" wars. The political-economic expression of the capitalist accident-form (generalized deterrence) cannot actualize itself without simultaneously alienating itself in the often horrendous content of a local disaster. The immense but geographically specific destruction accompanying the "Gulf Crisis" was motivated by the deterrence of another crisis, global in scale (an oil crisis). For this round, the military got media-wise. Photos of mangled bodies were not allowed. No pictures of body bags, or even coffins: reporters were banned from the port of Dover, where the fallen defenders of Texaco landed on their way to eternal rest. No casualty counts. No un-"pooled" reports from the front. The event was strangely absent in its ever-presence. Everyone was held in continual suspense: will war break out? will Scuds be launched against Israel? will Iraq use biological or chemical weapons? will the ground war begin? will US troops push on to Baghdad? Speculation, expectation. When something did happen, it failed to make an impression because images and information were not immediately forthcoming, and when they did come the actual event paled in comparison with all the things reporters have established *could* have happened. Scuds hit Israel, but they carried no chemical warheads and casualties were light. Relief. Before we knew what hit, we were waiting for the next blow. The myriad mini-events that make up a war hardly registered. The war was systematically transformed into a nonevent as fast as it happened. Future-past: expectation-relief. The present of flowing blood neatly elided. Tens

of thousands die, as if abstractly, their suffering infinitely distanced, their lives doubly absented, once by the fall of a bomb, again by their pain and anguish failing to register in the collective perceptive apparatus of the enemy. In an antiseptic war, relief quickly turns to boredom. It happened, it all happened, but nothing changed. The unthinkable came, and we were bored. George Bush could only benefit by that. After all, he is boredom personified. The popularity of the "killer wimp" crests.

**KOREA \* DOMINICAN REPUBLIC \* VIETNAM \* GRENADA \*  
LIBYA \* PANAMA \* IRAQ**

There will be more Vietnams. Any number of them, in any number of guises. Crime "war," drug "war," "battle" for the family ... Wherever there is a perceived danger, there is deterrence; wherever there is deterrence, there are immanent boundaries; and wherever there are immanent boundaries, there is organized violence. For having boundaries that are actualized by being crossed is a very precarious way to run a world. It leaves little space for negotiated crisis management. Either the crossing trips established regulatory power mechanisms into operation as it actualizes the boundary, and the traditional imbalance of power holds; or the crossing eludes or overwhelms regulatory mechanisms, and the only ready response to the threat to the privilege of the traditionally advantaged groups is "offering" the enemy a "choice" between unconditional surrender and maximum force (this could be dubbed the George Bush "Saddam Hussein theory" of political free will). The social and political fluidity of late capitalism has not been accompanied by a withering away of state violence. On the contrary, it has also been fluidified and intensified. The rapid deployment force is the model of late capitalist state violence, on all fronts: the ability to descend "out of nowhere," anywhere, at a moment's notice--the virtualization of state violence, its becoming-immanent to every coordinate of the social field, as unbounded space of fear. Rapid deployment is a correlate of deterrence. The ever-ready exterminating SWAT team is as characteristic of late-capitalist power as productive mechanisms tied to surveillance and probabilization, which virtualize power as control.

The virtualization of power as violence through rapid deployment is accompanied by a displacement of command. Command is depoliticized, in the sense that it is not open to negotiation through elective or administrative channels but remains fully in the "untied" hands of delegated "experts" (Bush: "I will not tie the generals' hands"). Command turns absolute and unyielding. War, crime, drugs, sexual, educational or artistic "subversion": on every front of

the capitalist warfare state a rapid deployment force will enter into operation, if not officially then on a vigilante basis. To each "enemy" its custom-tailored SWAT team. Media watch groups are examples of how rapid deployment operates in the cultural sphere: the absolute vigilance of obsessive surveillance, then the second an offending image sneaks past, a preemptive strike against future incursions in the form of instant boycott.

### **Abjection and Affirmation**

War comes, and with it street protests. Women are massacred; teach-ins are held on sexism and violence. But demonstrations happen all the time. They were even easier for the media to shortcircuit than the war they responded to. Teach-ins are not "newsworthy" enough even to be shortcircuited. They are simply ignored. Government lobbying sometimes works, but only up to a point. The only noticeable government (non)response in Canada to the Montréal massacre was to slash funding for rape crisis centers. The economic "crunch," however, did not prevent the same government from immediately allocating three million dollars a day to stay on Bush's good side by sending a puny expeditionary force to the Gulf. It seems difficult, if not impossible, to "set the record straight" and change the space of fear and suffering that is the late capitalist human habitat, especially in light of the rapid response mechanisms ready to spring into action against any budding militant opposition. It is difficult to know what to do. It is difficult not to despair. The globality of the media and of power mechanisms with which it is in complicity dwarf local efforts to fight back.

Consideration of the capitalist accident-form may be of modest help in inventing new analyses and strategies for radical change, although it is easier to conclude from it the incompleteness of certain approaches currently in use.

Reconnecting cause to effect and using "knowledge" of the "real" roots of a certain crisis to reestablish social equilibrium misses on two counts. The distancing of cause from effect is not simply a "mystification" of the truth. It is *real*, co-produced by mass media shortcircuiting and the intensive/extensive colonization of existence by the capitalist relation. The convergence between the previously distinguishable domains of production and reproduction, the feed-back of production into consumption, and the buckling of past and future, and of power in its prospective and retrospective modes (surveillance and probabilization)--all of this means that even without the despecification function of the media, causality would

no longer be what it was (or what we perhaps nostalgically desire it to have been). It is a return to notions of linear causality that would constitute a mystification. Even the application of catastrophe theory to media analysis is inadequate (Doane, Mellencamp), since it presupposes periods of continuity and balance punctuated by discontinuity. If the contemporary condition of possibility of being human *is* disequilibrium, continuity and balance are no longer relevant concepts, even when subordinated to the notion of catastrophe. Apocalyptic visions are equally suspect. If the apocalypse is already as here as it will get, there's no need to keep on announcing it (Kroker and Kroker). Apocalypse is the nonevent of the millenium. Base/superstructure paradigms, for their part, are clearly obsolete in a situation where the ground of economic no less than subjective existence is free-fall. The idea of causality needs work. Recursivity and co-causality (multi-factor analysis) may be beginnings. But in the end, the very concept of the cause may have to go, in favor of effects and their interweavings (syndromes). Syndromes mark the limit of causal analysis. They cannot be exhaustively *understood*--only pragmatically altered by experimental interventions operating in several spheres of activity at once.

The virtualization of boundaries raises another set of issues. For example, analyses of the social functioning of fear in terms of "moral panics" rests on the Freudian notion of the projection of individual phantasies and desires onto collective processes. In this view, the boundary between self and other is porous; but it remains structurally intact. The self is still basically conceived of as a bounded space. Approaches centered on the psychic or discursive constitution of the "Other" are also of limited usefulness if they fail to draw the consequences of the fluidification and coincidence of boundaries for the "interiority" of the "Same." Strategies for overcoming "alienation" and reorganizing society along "human" principles ignores the possibility that the "human" does not exist outside its "alienation"; that the utter inability to coincide with itself is the only place the "human" has to be; that division is the only universality of "man." What these approaches have in common is that they treat boundaries as founding. They consider *limitation* to be constitutive. But if limits are fluctuating and intermittent; if they have no effective limitative capacity outside their actualization of a form that is of another nature than they; in other words, if they are *derived*, and if the equation they are a derivative of is one of *potential*--then the entire problem shifts ground.

This tectonic shift has serious consequences for any strategy championing collective defense of a specific identity. An identity politics whose primary goal is to represent the perceived interests of a group defined according to existing social distinctions is an incomplete project: it too easily reduces to embracing already



functioning thresholds, settling on (settling for) pre-capitalized bounds. The thresholds adopted as one's own, adapted as one's home, delimited as a social territory, exist, even as reformed and revalorized, only at the discretion and as effects of the capitalist equation and its powers of actualization. These continue to operate according to capitalism's fluidity requirements. In other words, surrounding bounds continue to shift. Some of these shifts may well be systemic adjustments made in response to the crystallization of the specific identity as an interest group whose claims can no longer be ignored. Still, a politically entrenched specific identity is at best an oasis of relative stasis in the global capitalist tide: a local reterritorialization, guarded frontiers in an uncertain landscape. The collectivity consolidated by an identity politics is an instant archaism, if not in spite of then because of its own success. Its revolutionary potential is curtailed by a constitutional inadaptation to the deterritorialized ground it falls on. The weakness of identity politics is that it makes a dwelling of the derivative. The equation escapes. A corporate identity built on the basis of socially recognizable distinctions of gender, sexual orientation, class, race, ethnicity, nationality, or belief, is always at least one step behind reconfigurations taking place in the surrounding social field. The identified group is sapped by a continual battle with the "outside" for access to mirage-like social thresholds (leading to jobs, public office, civil rights) that have a habit of dissolving into thin air only to reappear farther down the road, at the same time as it is sapped from "within" by an ongoing fight to retain its constituency, to discipline its own inevitably mutating members into remaining in the fold. The specific identity of the group represents the group in linear time. It indexes itself to a collectivity defined in empirical terms, understood as a presence progressing from a pained, fearful past to a hopeful future. It strives to preserve a present, when the ground its members walk on is ever already future-past. Specific identity climbs into being, when everything else, including the group it identifies, is taking a tumble in becoming.

This is by no means to say that groups rallied around a shared specific identity should cease to act in concert to defend their members and to win them the right to cross critical thresholds of power. Neither is it to say that the familiar tactics of oppositional politics in the name of an identifiable group (demonstrating, lobbying, consciousness-raising, civil disobedience) should be abandoned. Whatever mode boundaries may take, the fact remains that they *are* set, and reset. If specific identities do not define themselves, it is certain that it will be done for them, to often viciously exclusionary effect. It is less a question of abandoning the politics of specific identity than of supplementing and complicating it.

First, by adding a perspective. The attempted being-specific of the corporate identity in linear time can be seen as a becoming-*of-the-specific* in a fractured time in which the identity is always other than it was. This amounts to a recognition of the continual self-deviation striking a specific identity as its members mutate. That recognition is an acceptance of openness to forces greater than one's identity, and to the charge of the unknown they carry. Rather than defining a specific identity as an empirically existing entity, rather than trying to make it what it *is*, rather than *positivizing* it--*affirm* it, take it as it is *and* is not (but might be), assume it, undefining. In short, embody it, as potential--explicitly including its potential to become other, in connection with as yet unknown forces of the outside (the accident, the event). But if subjectivity and capital are now hinged and have become isomorphic, embodying potential means embodying a generic equation.

This is the second step: add a movement. The added perspective set a process in motion leading from a specific-identity to its splintering, from a being-specific to a multiple *becoming-singular* of the specific. This first movement releases the transformational potential adhering to specific identity. That coming to and coming of potential creates a reflux of genericity: a specific identity whose members have become-singular is a set that has exploded into a changing constellation of new sets, each with a membership of one. Each singularized member constitutes a species of which it is the only living specimen. Each defines a *genericity entirely devoid of content, having no specificity other than itself*. Singularization changes the meaning of the generic. The generic is no longer a form of identity filled by a content whose relation to it is one of specification (each content falling into a subset defining a standard variation of the form). The generic itself mutates, from an empty container of being to a teeming site of transformation. Any body anywhere may accede to it, without it taking even the most evanescent of content. For if the site is one of transformation, to accede to it is to immediately to exceed it. Access to the potential gathered at the generic site is no longer restricted according to existing social distinctions. There can be no question of empirical fit in the case of a "form" of deviation lacking all pretense to content; there can be no question of externally determined criteria of access to a site that is self-distancing. The generic, as singularly mutated, is no less empty than before, but in a different way. It is the void of immediate access to unlimited potential: virtually unbound. This is the second movement, the *becoming-generic* of the singular under capital (Badiou 1989: 85-92) in a way that unbinds (deterritorializes) the full range of capitalized potential. It is a supplemental movement, inseparable from and doubling the first movement, the becoming-singular of the specific.

The first movement is "simulation," or the production of "a copy without a model." The second movement is "*fabulation*," or the production of a model without a copy. The concept of the "generic" at issue here can be freed from the usual connotation the word carries (that of identical degraded copies) by foregrounding alternate terminology. If simulation is a becoming-singular, and becoming-singular is becoming a species of one, then simulation can be thought of as the birth of a monster (Haraway 1991:21-22): *monstration*. Demonstration is to monstration as empiricizing designation is to fanciful *exemplification* (Agamben 1990: 15-17). If simulation is the concrete irruption of a singular creature, fabulation is the abstraction of its example--an example exemplifying nothing (other than singularity).

Movements of simulation (the activation of the pure copy, of the copy as such: deviation) and fabulation (the emission of the pure example, the exemplary as such: attraction) are two indissociable, mutually supplementing aspects of becoming. They are paradoxical but noncontradictory movements which approach each other as their respective limits, neither of which can ever be crossed. "Simulation" and "fabulation" are not binary opposites. They are *stitched distinctions*: words expressing movements that run in different directions, but always together, like fibers in a weave.

If singularization is deviation and fabulation is attraction, both are immediately collective. Singularization is shared departure: members of a constituted collectivity taking leave of it and one another, at least as they are. Fabulation is the attraction of deviant singularities into a new constellation, the crystallization of a new collectivity. But it is a collectivity that no sooner comes together than launches a new departure. Identity defines the individual. Becoming trips the *dividual* (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 341, 483); it is the setting in motion of a collectivity that cannot step without falling away from itself, cannot move in unison without dividing. Like the system of capitalism, a collectivity in becoming cannot unify without in the same stroke dividing. But the meanings of "unify" and "divide" have changed. "Unity" is no longer the presumed eternity of a subsuming totality, but the ever-as-always future of coordinated divergings. "Division" is no longer the present of competition, but the always-already past of grouped convergings. Unity and division are taken out of opposition; they are still in tension, but in a way that is mutually supplementing. Capitalism universalizes generic conditions (of free-fall) that self-divide into specific conditions (of staying afloat). Free-fall and staying afloat aggravate rather than encourage one another. They define a contradiction resolvable only through a self-expiring act of purchase. The "individual" or actualized capitalist subject is the spark ignited, at the buying site/being site, by the friction between the generic and specific conditions of consuming existence.

Although becoming in this context extends certain movements begun in capitalism, is in many ways an extension of capitalism, the two paths part in the end. Rather than unifying in division in the capitalist sense, becoming *globalizes singularity* (the global and the singular: another stitched distinction, an alternative to the binary oppositions of the universal versus the particular, whole versus part, society versus the individual, unity versus division, global versus local). Becoming is a cascade of simulations and fabulations that overspill buying. The dividual is fundamentally without purchase. It is a becoming-singular that exceeds specification, conjoined with a becoming-generic that splinters the form of identity.

If becoming-singular (simulation) is affirmation, becoming-generic (fabulation) is *abjection*. Abjection: literally, "throw-off." To fabulate is throw off the very form of identity in the process of singularizing one's specificity. It is to gather up one's ground. It is to become the free-fall one formerly bought into being. It is pure fear, fear as such, uncontained by identity, unintersected by the axes of the capitalist equation, struck by the accident, undissuaded. It is not low-level. It is intense. In intensity it is matched only by the exhilaration of simulation, with which it is in a relation of mutual supplementarity.

The individual or actualized capitalist subject arose at the hinge between generic and specific identity, which was also the point of intersection between the commodity relation and the wage relation. Becoming displaces the site of actualization. The dividual is the hinge between the singular and the exemplary. Since the singular and the exemplary are limits, thresholds that can never be crossed, their hinging is tendential. Together they determine a tendency, a tending, a *yearning* (hooks 1990: 27). Yearning is the becoming-for-itself of the subject whose being-in-itself was bought. It is not an emotion (the content of a specific identity) nor even an affect (the inherence of an emotion in the body), but free-floating affectivity: uncontained ability to affect and be affected. Yearning is a tendency without end; it is unexpiring, unself-consuming. It is a supplementarity of paradoxical movements, a kind of excess that is neither being nor surplus-value, an excess that can neither be identified or calculated, even fleetingly, let alone purchased or accumulated--that can be only embodied. Becoming is virtuality detached from the universality of capitalized specification and returned to the body as local site of global deviation. It is the exemplary incarnation of singularizing excess. Becoming is the temporality of the future-past woven into a de-ontology of the unworkable: the pragmatics of postcapitalist affectivity.

The one who falls, becomes. The one who falls together, becomes singular. The one who falls together becomes singular, in global embrace of the other. The one who falls together becomes singular

in global embrace of the other, under the shared momentum of an ethic of yearning. The equation to derive is one of reciprocal addition, replacing capitalist division. Or, in less binary language: it is the capitalist equation thrown off, so that it does not divide without changing in nature.

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