

* قَرَّاحٌ مِّنْهَلِ جِ مَنَاهِلِ

There used to be this idea that in a democracy power had to be distributed somehow. And that if one were excluded from this distribution, one could steal back power and obtain a destiny.

But this idea was wrong before and it's absurd today.

Now power explicitly exhibits all the violence it needs to conserve itself, and the ones who attack the state of things do it with the consciousness that they are going to pay. Because everywhere the logic of war has replaced that of struggle, in the office as well as on the barricades.

We could say that there have been harder, more painful times than these, but at least in the past the oppressed managed to name themselves as subjects of their own history, while the oppressors had to experience some moments of decline. The collective subjects that could once raise their voice have lost the words to scream their crisis from the stomach of Capital, which now digests them all and dooms the survivors to die in war. This radical modification of democracy comes as no surprise: power's totalitarian temptation is in its nature, and it's never an accident.

Meanwhile, the space of representation expands selectively while decreasing in general intensity. More and more things are said and made visible, but less and less does the proliferation of meanings and forms disturb the smooth voice of propaganda. In the flood of images that includes us even before we become aware of it, a subtle and inexorable privatization is taking place. Our bodies no longer embody the values we embrace but are only bodies available for filming. "Public" is nothing but an adjective used to define order and a noun to describe the audience.

One is always governed as a part of the mass, and the only way for us to accept this is to believe that we are all *individuals*, "the same but different." But the more we are governed the more we are referred back to our whatever-singularity and to the angst of sharing its misery: governmenta reason has made us into creatures that never leave their infantile state, and this eternal childhood makes the task of loving each other impossible. What we have to share and what we are able to put in common decreases in proportion to the diminishing of our subjective specificity.

This crisis of the experience that begins in 1914 is a *crisis of use* – not only the use of objects but of situations, a *crisis of the use of our lives*. Transforming a urinal into cultural merchandise and using the Mona Lisa as an ironing board are two strategies for replacing the question of the use of life with that of its traces, and for avoiding the experience of freedom by reducing it to the problem of its representation.

Ours is the time of *ready-made artists* who occupy their place in an incompetent way and only reaffirm their blatant lack of qualities - who have no influence over the cultural apparatus, even less over its political function. If the construction site of subjectivity remains open, it's because all our works are sponsored by the same ones who sponsor the disaster.

It's true that art - which is always quick to serve power, although without flattering it – needs democracy and from time to time even hopes for inconsequential revolutions. But now that all the avant-garde dreams have become so many children's tales, the role models that once accompanied them have also been dismissed. Gone is the revolutionary hero who was meant to live a passionate life at the heart of the world as it is and to burn with the desire for this very same world's destruction. Today we know these impasses by heart: there is no more hope of adjusting our lifeform to our ability to recognize the state of oppression.

Those who rebel have been stripped not only of their legitimacy but of their dignity, and this is probably the most pernicious effect of the new world-wide governmental regime.

In this cartography, Claire Fontaine is nothing but the *nth* ready-made artist, the *nth* meaning transmitter in the general buzz, the only difference being that she chooses political impotence as both the means and subject of her work.

To treat political impotence in the contemporary art context is to question the effects of symbolic practices in the current year 2005, in New York and everywhere else. Art - they never stop telling us - is not destined to act directly on reality. Nevertheless, the declining efficacy of political movements and their transformation into pure image-machines sheds a different light on the two places where freedom was produced throughout the twentieth century: art and political space.

It was reassuring for a part of the avant-garde to denounce the passivity of its spectators, to pretend that those who don't participate in the movement block the dialectics of emancipation. But this contempt ignores the fact that any behaviour – especially a rebellious one – that doesn't contaminate the others eventually becomes a theatrical performance, an aesthetic practice, and that the despised spectators are as necessary for the show to go on as its “actors.” If the failure of twentieth-century political movements has made them into aesthetic objects, this means on the one hand the museification of the promises of freedom, but on the other hand the possibility of seeing the entire aesthetic field as a data bank of potential uprisings. To create images for a mutiny to come, to reproduce the affective ambience of a malaise, to transcribe some symptoms of the crisis, visually or conceptually... these are not acts with an abstract and constant value through different times. The history of art doesn't materialize itself as a gallery, as a museum or as a catalogue, but as a series of electromagnetic fields that cross our bodies and that we cross.

The political impotence we have here diagnosed is neither a disease to be eradicated nor a state of things that disqualifies us ethically. It points to our present obligation to always act upon an action, to always face the power relations that pass through bodies, rather than orienting our becoming and creating liveable spaces.

The impotence of the police before the effects of the ongoing disaster and also of our own works that only stand in for an impossible action are two aspects of a desert that it is not, however, impossible to cross. Because ignoring the fact that our shared impotence contains a hidden power is also an effect of the present domination.

Claire Fontaine modestly attempts to open the question of the collective re-appropriation of the means of production of the present.

*Claire Fontaine