

# Beyond the Mantic Ray

## Notes on the Archeological Daydream

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### 1.

I am a sick man...a spiteful man. I think there is something wrong with my liver. I don't think it was properly prepared. A crow keeps trying to snatch it from my plate with pearl-inlaid tongs, muttering about vedic wars in the wall, the wall which separates me from the world, the world where cities are demolished by gigantic mechanized pelicans awaiting the mass strike. But I hardly notice, I am listening to your acidic echoes as you read the poems you wrote last night. I am propped up like a corpse against a bombed out wall. Your voice mingles with the drone of a police helicopter which has flattened against the window like a pulverized hummingbird.

"Do the police raid poetry readings?" you ask nervously.

"On the contrary," replies the sawhorse metamorphosing into a dying jellyfish, "they encourage them."

The sculptor of bloodstains has stolen a blind and ghostly dance from the forest. He plunged into the mirrored glass of hallucinated districts, pursuing sleight-of-hand birds transmitting hypnotic fanfares. The statue that he fashioned never lived. Registering the brittle meadows of longing on an oneiric seismograph, he stirred blood and ash into a gourd.

Vengefully he covered his skeletal statue with a tarpaulin of knives. He began to write wounded telegrams in tentacled patterns on its parchment, in wasp-like letters of poison.

Even his handwriting resembled him. His statue rotted, begging to be murdered. He took a job, left his life closed up in a room. He who once wrote musical comedies about the half-eaten banquet of Dan-ton now only plucks a banjo and sings love songs. I want to see him when he is starving.

### 2.

An anarchist knight once wrote that the civilizations of the past may be judged by their pots and pans. Today's pots and pans—not fit for a cacophonous dirge. They can't be worn as hats, or masks. They have no power. Once I thought they could at least bring a dictator down and turn the cops into a bitter stew, but for too long they have been too empty and too full. Little flecks of pot and pan grind their teeth and pierce invisible holes in the heart. These grey scorpion utensils cook human flesh and feed it to forks, adding only a stale spice called art.

Beauty, terror, desire: suicided by self-immolation (a daily dose of vitamin napalm) or servility (mannerist Q-tips). Art: banks. Art: guards. Art: plexiglass. Art: air conditioning. Art: business. Art: work. Art, said Hulsenbeck, "Art regarded from a serious point of view is a large scale swindle."

If we want beauty, we must forsake art. Our dwellings must become erotic, their portals narcotic, our movements dance, our language song. The novel of the future will be telepathic. In a world of fragmented lives and fragmentation bombs, to live for art is to sing for the Pavlovian morsel. Art is only a splinter of rubble. For the sake

of business the gold of the tigers has been refined into high-powered fuel for melancholy hotrods, in which the artists pass their days peeling rubber. Let us prefer to play a special kind of wild card to reverse this losing game, chopping this stacked deck into confetti with scimitars of ivy, with the mating song of the mantic ray.

Reducing beauty to art is like putting on shoes and never walking in them. Let us discard not only the shoes, but the putting on, and walk out of the back door into paradise. The artist interested only in art is interested only in sales. The artist who wants to live beautifully can only heed one call: change life.

### 3.

What matters now is all or nothing. Like magic mushrooms, cafeteria style, hinged police of the underworld, the fluidity of manifest being on its way to work, the postcards postmarked “nirvana” in the monastic libraries, the poisonous messages, the terminal salad.

After the fall of the commune and the bloody reconquest of proletarian paradise, Rimbaud took a vacation to Africa. No—can I help it if he suicided himself after discovering the poverty of art? Look at his flight, carrying the severed hands of the working girl in his pockets like his own. I would like to kiss those small brown hands, those thorny hands, those transparent hands, those bleeding claws, each holding its treasure of dove eggs, those miniature worlds in Rimbaud’s trouser pockets, along with all the other baggage: some moons and comets, ammunition, a mirror in the shape of a swordfish, one-way tickets to Utopia, a revolver perturbed by lightning, some pocket change cowries, a broken pocket watch. He left it all on a beach in Libya and went off naked into the bush—can I help it if he carried the plague with him, turned Africa into a brokerage? Didn’t a gangrenous life bring its own reward? I want to be the wave that carried off his treasures, those dread hands become crabs, I want to be that wave that swept it all away like a mob of looters. Rimbaud was smoking an unnamed root and dancing nose to spinal column—I want to be that root, not a tap-dancing artist who suppressed art merely for this world, not from the other side of the wall, the wall I prop up now like a dead rider on a straw horse propping up the dreams of a dying city.

### 4.

Poetry is senescent and literature flourishes everywhere. The poets who bang their pots and pans, the poets in their brokerage house processing words in microwaves—they need to be sent packing. Only it won’t be the boorish fascists who terrified old Unamuno on his balcony that toss these charlatans out on their ears. We have in mind a herd of armadillos.

Answer to nobody: paint your critique into a corner and dynamite the room. We, too, once manufactured culture in sweat shops, packaging our dreams in disposable containers, in throw-away pots and pans. We, too, marketed the memoranda of the hierarchs. We, too, lived to see our inventions fail. So we changed genres and began to manufacture dynamite. Now we perform elaborate deceptions to smuggle the wolves into the theaters: the feature is about to begin. Nothing will save you from our revenge.

### 5.

Beauty can live in powerful objects, objects like enigmatic metals which emit unsettling signals. Beauty can exist as a lure which pulls us away from the wall, away from the city, away from art. Beauty is like the Lady of the Lake: we have to drown to follow her. Beauty does not tolerate life jackets.

## 6.

The ancient Egyptians mummified everything: themselves, first of all, but also their world—slaves, children, cats, gazelles, lizards, snakes, falcons, deer, vultures. Everything orbited in an eroding spiral around the tomb. Life was colored in somber greys of death. They collected everything and discarded nothing. Form crushed their world just as the pyramid stones crushed their architects and slaves. The ancient Egyptians invented the card catalogue, the inventory, the information bank. But they were done in by the sand. It covered everything until no trace was left. Of course, the Egyptians loved it, they never resisted, choking on the sand contentedly, in a sleepy rapture. It was all expected, awaited. Nothing was left to chance. It blew in from the south, from the place where Rimbaud sold his blood for some shoes, and it covered everything.

The Egyptians packed everything away in trunks and suitcases, placed each internal organ in its appropriate resting place, left a note for the archeologists, and went happily to sleep. But now they realize their error; they've grown bored in their confinement, and are preparing to release the entire, mummified menagerie, to stalk the earth in search of disorder. Somewhere, the archeologists actually have everything planned in advance for them: conference centers, catering, the proper number of folding chairs in place, speakers tables, pitchers full of ice water and sleeping potion. We'll be in the alley, cleaning our fingernails with our switchblades, ready for the archeologists when they leave.

## 7.

In his film *The Decameron*, Pasolini, playing an artist, reflects on his completed fresco (which is also his completed movie) and says to himself, "Why realize a work of art when it is so marvelous just to dream of it?" One need not finish (or even begin) a film or fresco to ask this question.

Another image comes to mind, a dream I had some time ago. The scene was a storage room about which I had repeatedly dreamt years earlier. I hadn't dreamt of this room, returned to this room, in a long time. It seems that in previous dreams I had stored away all sorts of bric-a-brac from my life—in fact the room was a storeroom in the middle school I attended, and the lights in the hallway were out and the school was closed permanently. In the recent dream I have reentered this room and found it as I left it. But now I am throwing away all of the junk that had once seemed so important, important enough to save. I am clearing it out, throwing it all into trash barrels. Some Andalusian music plays from somewhere. Now I seem to be bailing out a boat, or paddling on some shallow, silent sea, I am throwing weight out of a boat which floats above the water... I am clearing out just as I am clearing out the room. One era is coming to a close, but no new era is about to begin—there is only some wild and unexplored presence ahead, a weightless plenitude.

Anything here that you want you can have. It is of no use to me any longer, only dead weight. Use this incomplete manuscript as kindling, there, at the base of the wall. And this broken compass. I won't be needing it, though it would serve me infinitely better than one which works. Inward and outward are the same direction.

## 8.

The Maya are leaving the city now, wearing necklaces of fox, amulets of rain. Before the flower wilts and dies they want to taste its bitter nectar. They've left their baggage at the station, their phones off the hook, their letters unopened and unanswered. Slowly they trickle into the jungle and disappear. We, too, are preparing our departure. We, too, shall disappear.

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