

Hong-Kai Wang & Bill Dietz

“靡靡之音 / With a sound of no substance”

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A right to obscurity is not a right to oblivion

¹ In Peter Gorsen's sense, via Kerstin Stakemeier.

² Fred Moten, “whatnot to the music” in *Triple Canopy* (August 14th, 2015), <https://www.canopycanopycanopy.com/contents/whatnot-to-the-music/> (last accessed on July 8th, 2019).

If the secret is legible for the other of the other, then the question is of another legibility?
an other audibility?

"The aesthetic inhabits the suppressed contradictions of modernity. The subjective experience of art, of difference, as a realm that has been subordinated to general Reason names modernity's alterity. The aesthetic is, categorically, the particular that is subsumed by the universal."³

"Neither hope nor despair, but simply to work that is under way and that needs doing in order to proliferate the humanities after Man"⁴

A different common sense

WHAT HAVE WE BEEN DOING?

IS THIS AN ART PROJECT?

We recognize and hear it without being able to articulate it

Awkwardness, indirection, poorly fitting

What it means to desire rupture, to break away from an organization of modernity within us

Co-conspirators

NO SHARED FORM

Not essentializing our sources as "real" or authentic but as places we hear another recognition

³ Kandice Chuh, *The Difference Aesthetics Makes: On the Humanities "After Man"* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2019), p. 21.

⁴ Chuh, *ibid.*, p. 25.

Pop is too universal

"Singing" in "singing is what makes work possible" is not necessarily singing but the trace of another illiberal aesthetic practice

Meeting AS WHAT

Meeting AS WHO

Consciously creating a space for the encounters that happen all the time valuelessly

That "consciously" being the trace of our persistent modernity

Improvisation not vulnerable enough, too formal an informality

Not autonomous uselessness but LOITERING

Ralph Lemon, Hicks Walter, "Paradance"⁵

Teresa Teng over coffee

⁵ Thought here via Ciarán Finlayson's "Perpetual Slavery: Ralph Lemon, Cameron Rowland and the Critique of Work," in *Parse Journal* (Spring 2019), <https://parsejournal.com/article/perpetual-slavery-ralph-lemon-cameron-rowland-and-the-critique-of-work/> (last accessed on July 8th, 2019).

Dermot

1. How do you think about value other than monetary value?

I like old things if they show their age, even (and especially) when they're not worth much. I love junk shops, antiques, old houses, time capsules. If a building or an object evokes its history or its past life, it has value. Broken or discarded things, forgotten corners of a city, living rooms filled with pictures, furniture, carpets, etc. which refer back to a past network that's no longer current but saturated with memory and present nonetheless. When these kinds of things have significant monetary value I think it actually makes the encounter with the past more difficult.

2. Do the non-monetary things you value ever come into conflict with work, practical life?

Insofar as they are often peripheral, they're usually sidelined by work and the demands of everyday life. It's hard to create time to experience these other interests. It's like feeling an attraction that's not strong enough to pull me out of the everyday stream of life. It's subtle and it's there, but I imagine I will have time for them in a future which never seems to arrive.

3. What role to aesthetics (pleasure, beauty, etc.) play in your everyday life?

Mostly listening to music playing from youtube on my phone while driving. I am a youtube subscriber. I struggle to pick the next song on my phone before the light turns from red to green.

4. What do you do everyday to make life livable?

I drink coffee. At least two cups a day. If I'm in a new city (like right now, I'm in LA) I like to drive around and get lost. Or take time to go to a bookstore. But mostly I like hanging out at the end of the day. Reading the news and discussing. Pleasant interactions with strangers. Honestly though I don't think I have a strategy for this. I feel like everyday life is the one living me. Everyday life is in the driver's seat. A little too much in my opinion. I'd like to be much more deliberate.

Notepad

For whether demon or divinity, the Absolute for Genet is perceptible neither in the form of human identity nor as a personified deity, but precisely in what, after everything is said and done, will not settle down, will not be incorporated or domesticated. That such a force must somehow be represented and cared for by people who are absorbed in it and, at the same time, must risk its own disclosure or personification is Genet's final, most intransigent paradox. Even when we close the book or leave the theater once the performance is over, his work instructs us also to block the song, doubt the narrative and memory, disregard the aesthetic experience that brought us those images for which we now have a genuinely strong affection. ⁶

⁶ Edward Said, *On Late Style: Music and Literature Against the Grain* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007) , p. 155.

Saidiya Hartman: So what does it mean to try to bring that position into view without making it a locus of positive value, or without trying to fill in the void? So much of our political vocabulary/imaginary/desires have been implicitly integrationist even when we imagine our claims are more radical.

Frank Wilderson: This is one of the reasons why your book has been called "pessimistic" by Anita Patterson. But it's interesting that she doesn't say what I said when we first started talking, that it's enabling. I'm assuming that she's white - I don't know, but it certainly sounds like it.⁷

⁷ Saidiya Hartman & Frank B. Wilderson, III, "The Position of the Unthought," *Qui Parle* (Vol. 13, No. 2 Spring/Summer 2003), p. 185.

A small rented room was a laboratory for trying to live free in a world where freedom was thwarted, elusive, deferred, anticipated rather than actualized. Mattie was a hunger artist wasting away before the eyes of the world for lack of opportunity while everyone gawked and watched. *And like any artist with no art form, she became dangerous.* Mattie was desperate not to be a servant or drudge, but there was no ready blueprint for another life that she could follow besides the one she crafted, an inchoate plan and radical thought in deed were her resources. *If she could feel deeply, she could be free.*⁸

Inside Herman Hawkins's bedroom, a young laundress, an exhausted drudge, a clothesline muse, and reckless dreamer tried to unmake the colored girl scripted by the world. Two lovers huddled in a rented room engaged in chance acts of intimacy that might well be blamed on the promiscuity afforded by crowded city streets and by young women navigating the world on their own. The things experienced and explored surpassed the status crimes—the disorderly conduct, moral depravity, vagrancy, and prostitution—for which black girls and young women were regularly convicted. The modern existence wrought by girls like her was apprehended as crime and ascribed to the backwardness of “plantation holdovers.” Mattie has been credited with nothing, deemed unfit for every role except servility, condemned in advance of wrongdoing, and destined to be a *minor figure* even in her own *verified history*. To esteem her acts, to regard rather than vilify Mattie's restive longing, is to embrace the anarchy—the complete program of disorder, the abiding desire to change the world, the tumult, upheaval, open rebellion—attributed to wayward girls. It is to attend to other forms of social life, which cannot be reduced to transgression or to nothing at all, and which emerge in the world marked by negation, but exceed it.⁹

⁸ Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2019), p. 59-60.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 61-62.

This type of work dedicates itself to managing the universe and its energies. I'm not sure what it is when it is at rest (not in performance). It may or may not be a "work" then. A mask may only have the power of presence during a ritual dance and the rest of the time it may merely be a "thing." Some works exist forever invoked, always in performance. I'm thinking of totem poles, cave paintings. Invoked art is communal and speaks of everyday life.¹⁰

¹⁰ Gloria E. Anzaldúa, "Tlilli, Tlapalli / The Path of the Red and Black Ink" in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987), p. 67.

It is an unspeakable impertinence to arrogate the term “fine art” to one small section of this quest and declare it to be culture. Luckily, the people refuse to be bothered. This does not alter the gross falsification of history and the perversion of values which is the result. ¹¹

We may someday be able to answer Tolstoy’s exasperated and exasperating question: What is art? - but only when we learn to integrate our vision of Walcott [a cricketer] on the back foot through the covers with the outstretched arm of the Olympic Apollo. ¹²

¹¹ C.L.R. James, “What is Art?” in *Beyond a Boundary* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013 [originally 1963]), p. 209.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 211.

Lily

1. How do you think about value other than monetary value?

你認為生活裡有什麼不能用金錢衡量的價值？

Above all else, health is the most important thing. Without health, one has nothing. What do I want all the money for? I exercise to stay healthy. Everyone ought to have a hobby. Even though I work so hard, I still manage to go to dance class every Friday.

健康，對每個人來說最重要的問題，如果你沒有健康，什麼都沒有，要金錢幹嘛？我平時保持健康的方法就是運動，每個人最好要有個嗜好，我現在這麼辛苦，也要保持每星期五學跳舞。

2. Do the non-monetary things you value ever come into conflict with work, practical life?

你看重的人事物（不能用金錢衡量的），是否曾與現實生活發生衝突？

Familial love. Nothing can compare to the love for my children. Life is actually quite simple. Money is not that important and can't buy one's health back. As long as you have your health, you have everything. We need to be happy from the inside out. Everything else is up to ourselves. Everyone is different and is after different kinds of thing.

親情，比如說親情不能比量兒女的感情啊。生活其實是蠻簡單，金錢不是很重要，健康無法賺回來，有了健康什麼都有，一定要心裡開心，其他生活調整要靠自己，每個人不一樣，追求的東西不一樣。

3. What role to aesthetics (pleasure, beauty, etc.) play in your everyday life?

美感（比如樂趣，賞心悅目）在你的每天生活裡扮演什麼角色？

One needs a long-term hobby to keep going in life. Beside dancing, I enjoy listening to music and talking to my children. One son lives with me, but the other two are not around; I miss them every day.

追求生活需要長期保有一種樂趣，除了跳舞，還有聽音樂與子女聯繫，有兩個還在不在身邊，有一個兒子在身邊，住在一起，但每天還是會想念子女。

4. What do you do every day to make life livable?

你每天會做什麼事，讓生活比較好過一點？

What makes me the happiest is listening to music, watching TV news, and dining with my family at night. Doing all of these gives me a great deal of joy.

平常生活最開心的事情就是，沒有工作時每天會享受聽聽歌、看看新聞、晚上跟家人吃吃飯，就很開心。

Credits

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