









# The Meaning of Greatness



Rector announced that Karel was the next speaker and Karel got up. He began:

I am glad, in a way, that I was asked to contribute to this symposium on political freedom, because it struck me when I was asked, first of all: I did not have anything to say on the subject; and then: I might have something to say, for after all political reality may govern more of each of us than most of us take the trouble to consider—I mean of course that politics, which is socially determined, may have more effect on our personal lives than we give its civic, state and national agents credit for—and by ‘we’ I mean those of us who have felt that a personal life, intelligently conducted from within, is about the most that may be done for the individual...

Will you have this light cut out Mr. chairman it’s shining in my eyes... thank you.

The adorable Karletta Frederick giggled.

He continued:

On the face of it, I am not concerned one way or the other about political freedom, because I have been accustomed to think of myself as an individual and not as a member of the mass society. I feel

that I am as “free”, in the ethical sense, as the limitation (that is, the inherent limitations) of the individual permits me to be. I can never govern myself perfectly, because I am a mechanism full of defects, and when I do not think of myself as a mechanism, I am aware of my inability to reach the ideal state of spiritual serenity.

Frederick wondered to Julian where Karel’s feather fan was.

However, the idea of personal freedom must open for anyone the vista of a kind of Utopian existence, where one is free because his fellows are also free. We realize of course that political freedom for the mass and therefore for the individual signifies in theory the official power of the mass of the people to control its social destiny, presumably with more satisfaction than the existent system of government provides.

Of course, this is familiar ground, because we all know what the minor political parties such as the communists and the socialists are fighting for: a new system of government, and, as I have just explained, the obvious interpretation which we give the phrase, political freedom, is the right accorded by legislature to the mass of the people to govern itself—that is, to see that it is governed in a superior manner than that in which it is now governed.

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I said at the beginning that the reason my second thought prompted me to say something on this subject is that, notwithstanding the way this phrase was intentionally put tonight, or may be put at any time, it may be interpreted to mean something more immediately significant to every individual—strange as it may seem—and I come to a conclusion different from what my impulse intended.

Now before going any further I want to say that I don’t doubt for a moment that the economic handicap, which communism proposes to dispel, is a very important one—it is above all important to such as I am, the artist, who if he is really an artist and is not especially lucky, leads a hand to mouth existence. I even grant that a successful application of some new theory of government may relieve nearly all the civilized world of what is known as the economic burden. I even grant that this theory might be communism, when it has come to be understood and not reviled by rabid prejudice.

BUT—I am convinced that for most of us—for all of us I must

say who are aware of the possession of a soul—the secret of political freedom does not lie in the removal of our economic difficulties.

Thus, I posit that man is not concerned primarily with the conceptual realization of his material welfare but with the conceptual realization of his spiritual welfare. Accordingly we may reason that it is when a man feels most like a well-fed pig that his spiritual responsibilities should occur to him with the most force. Perhaps to some of you this idea of spiritual responsibility may seem almost cosmic if you have had the ill fortune as I have to go hungry for a day; at such a time the solution to all enigmas seems a thoroughly good meal...

(Applause from a run-down looking individual in the rear.)

...but upon reflection this notion will be found to be childish—  
(Laughter and necks craning at the abashed applauder.)

The artist, whose mental activity goes at a greater rate of speed than the mental activity of anyone else, finds absent meals, bedless nights and overcoatless cold are merely incidental; he can think just as sharply and rapidly in a cold doorway as he can in a steamheated room after a heavy meal—in fact, if his physical being is thoroughly comfortable he may be inclined to nap rather than to think. I don't think any artist, at bottom, resents his past unhappiness in the material world; his critic's sense of detachment saves him from such a nostalgia. What the artist may resent is the pettiness of other men, who cannot realize that at a very minimum sum all his needs may be taken care of—and still the affluent man, through his stupidity of selfishness, withholds this sum. Yet this resentment that the artist holds is momentary; it is the result of a circumstantial thing which will not, in the last resolution of experience, affect his work, if he has a pound of good luck.

I cite the artist's attitude to show merely that any acute man will reason that activity is the secret of accomplishment—to speak vulgarly: if we do not move, we will not get anywhere; and, at least, when we are in physical want, action becomes assured, because it is necessary.

Any artist, of course prefers leisure to a routine of eight hours a day, the absence of which is leisure to him. All of us, in fact, prefer

leisure. But the work of the world must go on. It is really, to the ordinary person, his economic obligation, which he cannot escape in some way, which chains him to an uninteresting reality. Therefore, while this dull part of life forms an inevitable part of his being, it is to his spiritual nature to which he is compelled to turn for a refreshment of his interest in life—hence his enormous attendance of the movies and his excursions to amusement parks on Sunday.

To the average person, then, political freedom may mean in pretty accurate substance an economic serenity which will give him a comfortable home, money to go to the movies every night, to go to Coney Island on Sunday, to buy a radio, and even a fur coat if such his heart desires.

But to the slightly above average person, the means for the satisfaction of his desires are more complicated, because his desires are more complicated and potential. Political freedom for this person signifies his lonely braving of contrary spiritual elements, his gauntlet-down challenges to ideas, which may be friendly or inimical, life-giving or deadly...

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Indeed, *this* sort of political freedom is the sort for which relatively few of us are really prepared.

Karel went back to his table. There was some applause around.

Whatever occurred after you closed your lips on the last syllable certainly throttled Gabriel said.

Well I pointed out some things that shouldn't be lost on the immediate public said Karel.

Perhaps the most fruitful distinction with which the sociological imagination works is between 'the personal troubles of milieu' and 'the public issues of social structure.' This distinction is an essential tool of the sociological imagination and a feature of all classic work in social science.

Troubles occur within the character of the individual and within the range of his or her immediate relations with others; they have to do with one's self and with those limited areas of social life of which one is directly and personally aware. Accordingly, the statement and the resolution of troubles properly lie within the individual as a biographical entity and within the scope of one's immediate milieu – the social setting that is directly open to her personal experience and to some extent her willful activity. A trouble is a private matter: values cherished by an individual are felt by her to be threatened.

Issues have to do with matters that transcend these local environments of the individual and the range of her inner life. They have to do with the organization of many such milieu into the institutions of an historical society as a whole, with the ways in which various milieux overlap and interpenetrate to form the larger structure of social and historical life. An issue is a public matter: some value cherished by publics is felt to be threatened. Often there is a debate about what that value really is and about what it is that really threatens it. This debate is often without focus if only because it is the very nature of an issue, unlike even widespread trouble, that it cannot very well be defined in terms of the immediate and everyday environments of ordinary people. An issue, in fact, often involves a crisis in institutional arrangements, and often too it involves what Marxists call 'contradictions' or 'antagonisms.'

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In these terms, consider unemployment. When, in a city of 100,000, only one is unemployed, that is his personal trouble, and for its relief we properly look to the character of the individual, his skills and his immediate opportunities. But when in a nation of 50 million employees, 15 million people are

unemployed, that is an issue, and we may not hope to find its solution within the range of opportunities open to any one individual. The very structure of opportunities has collapsed. Both the correct statement of the problem and the range of possible solutions require us to consider the economic and political institutions of the society, and not merely the personal situation and character of a scatter of individuals.

Consider war. The personal problem of war, when it occurs, may be how to survive it or how to die in it with honor; how to make money out of it; how to climb into the higher safety of the military apparatus; or how to contribute to the war's termination. In short, according to one's values, to find a set of milieux and within it to survive the war or make one's death in it meaningful. But the structural issues of war have to do with its causes; with what types of people it throws up into command; with its effects upon economic and political, family and religious institutions, with the unorganized irresponsibility of a world of nation-states.

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Consider marriage. Inside a marriage a man and a woman may experience personal troubles, but when the divorce rate during the first four years of marriage is 250 out of every 1,000 attempts, this is an indication of a structural issue having to do with the institutions of marriage and the family and other institutions that bear upon them.

Or consider the metropolis – the horrible, beautiful, ugly, magnificent sprawl of the great city. For many members of the upperclass the personal solution to 'the problem of the city' is to have an apartment with private garage under it in the heart of the city and forty miles out, a house by Henry Hill, garden by Garrett Eckbo, on a hundred acres of private land. In these two controlled environments – with a small staff at each end and a private helicopter connection – most people could solve many of the problems of personal milieux caused by the facts of the city. But all this, however splendid, does not solve the public issues that the structural fact of the city poses. What should be done with this wonderful monstrosity? Break it

all up into scattered units, combining residence and work? Refurbish it as it stands? Or, after evacuation, dynamite it and build new cities according to new plans in new places? What should those plans be? And who is to decide and to accomplish whatever choice is made? These are structural issues; to confront them and to solve them requires us to consider political and economic issues that affect innumerable milieux.

In so far as an economy is so arranged that slumps occur, the problem of unemployment becomes incapable of personal solution. In so far as war is inherent in the nation-state system and in the uneven industrialization of the world, the ordinary individual in her restricted milieu will be powerless – with or without psychiatric aid – to solve the troubles this system or lack of system imposes upon him. In so far as the family as an institution turns women into darling little slaves and men into their chief providers and unweaned dependents, the problem of a satisfactory marriage remains incapable of purely private solution. In so far as the overdeveloped megalopolis and the overdeveloped automobile are built-in features of the overdeveloped society, the issues of urban living will not be solved by personal ingenuity and private wealth.

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What we experience in various and specific milieux, I have noted, is often caused by structural changes. Accordingly, to understand the changes of many personal milieux we are required to look beyond them. And the number and variety of such structural changes increase as the institutions within which we live become more embracing and more intricately connected with one another. To be aware of the idea of social structure and to use it with sensibility is to be capable of tracing such linkages among a great variety of milieux. To be able to do that is to possess the sociological imagination.

Shop for dress at Shirley Janes  
Quebec student arrives  
S. Trip to the zoo  
T. Goes to the circus  
Girls riding lessons  
R. Baseball practice  
Fashion show 7.30  
Gerbils go to school  
Meet Gairlock group w/husbands  
Drive to pottery - new carpool  
S. Skating  
B. Philharmonic - pick up  
P.T.A  
Ballet rehearsal at Queen Eliz. Park School  
Equis at the Royal Alex.  
Groceries  
Piano tuner  
Girls swimming 4:30  
Wash rugs  
T. To dentist  
Substitute teach kindergarten  
Substitute teach grade 1  
Car brakes at 2:00  
Clean tux  
R. banquet - bring salad  
Haircuts for girls  
Repair volvo arial  
A.G.O trip  
2 Doz cookies for crescent  
Tea with D.

The common name is partly visible and partly concealed, it is a name that each in their own different way seeks to articulate. 13

The story of the common name and its many formulations can be related in gigantic even cosmic terms. The general title of this story is ‘Materialism,’ the ‘great irreducible other of power,’ and it is a tale of resistance and insurgencies against an official history produced in the image of power. This history, spoken in a binding sequence of words exists within homogeneous time, it stretches endlessly back into the past and is echoed in the future by its mirror image ‘progress.’ Worldwide movements have risen under the sign of the common name and challenged this official history, producing their own structures of power and binding official narratives as its diametrical opposite. But

currently such movements are in disgrace, and the names that they once operated under are ringed around with caution, mentioned only as a footnote in the margins, or worse, as the last remaining obstacle in official history's path towards resolution and conclusion. However this common name remains in evidence everywhere, except that like the wood and the trees it is invisible, spectral in its ubiquity, it is both present and not present at the same time. You can see it in the 'explosion of behaviours' and ways of living that have emerged in the wake of modernity and in particular since the second half of the nineteen sixties. Witness it reasserting itself in the forces of labour, the processes of production and reproduction, as they mutate and take on new forms under the present conditions of capitalism. See it living but latent in the enormous network of intelligence which capitalism has both fostered and subsumed, in the threads that connect these forces in a web of language across the field of biopolitical activity. Poverty provides the conditions of necessity that generate new being at each moment in time, through the powers of invention and imagination; and love assembles the pieces together into a statement, articulated out loud in the world. It is in this way that 'poverty and love constitute the common name,' and propel it forward.

He saw in the distance among the vivid fields a long smudge of white, which broke into cubes, like spilt salt, as the dirigible came over. A cluster of dazzling flashes at the east edge of the city made him wink and see dark spots for a moment: the big parabolic mirrors that provided solar heat for Abbenay's refineries. The dirigible came down at a cargo depot at the south end of town, and Shevek set off into the streets of the biggest city in the world. They were wide clean streets they were shadowless, for Abbeney lay less than thirty degrees North of the equator, and all the buildings were low, except the strong, spare towers of the wind turbines. The sun shone white in a hard, dark blue-violet sky. The air was clear and clean, without smoke or moisture. There was a vividness to things, a hardness of edge and corner, a clarity. Everything stood out separate, itself.

The elements that made up Abbeney were the same as in any other Odonian community, repeated many times: workshops, factories, domiciles, dormitories, learning centres, meeting-halls, distributaries, depots, refectories. The biggest buildings were often grouped around open squares, giving the city a basic cellular texture: it was one subcommunity or neighbourhood after another. Heavy industry and food- processing plants tended to cluster on the cities outskirts, and the cellular pattern was repeated in that the related industries often stood side by side on a square or street. The first such that Shevek walked through was a series of squares, the textile district, full of holum-fibre processing plants, spinning and weaving mills, dye-factories, and cloth and clothing distributaries; the centre of each square was planted with a little forest of poles strung from top to bottom with banners and pennants of all the colours of the dyer's art, proudly proclaiming the local industry. Most of the city's buildings were pretty much alike, plain, soundly built of stone or cast foamstone. Some of them looked very large to Shevek's eyes, but they were almost all of one storey only, because of the frequency of earthquakes. For the same reason windows were small, and of tough silicon plastic that did not shatter. They were small, but there were a lot of them, for there was no artificial lighting provided from an hour before sunrise to an hour after sunset. No heat was furnished when the outside temperature went above 55 Fahrenheit. It was not that Abbeney was short of power, not with her wind turbines and the earth temperature-differential generators used for heating; but the principle of organic economy was

too essential to the functioning of the society not to affect ethics and aesthetics profoundly. "Excess is excrement," Odo wrote in *Analogy*. "Excrement retained in the body is poison; Abbeney was poisonless: a bare city, bright, the colours light and hard, the air pure. It was quiet. You could see it all, laid out as plain as spilt salt. Nothing was hidden. The squares, the austere streets, the low buildings, the un-walled workyards, were charged with vitality and activity. As Shevek walked he was constantly aware of other people walking, working, talking, other faces passing, voices calling, gossiping, singing, people alive, people doing things, people afoot. Workshops and factories fronted on squares or on their open yards, and their doors were open. He passed a glassworks, the workmen dipping up a great molten blob as casually as a cook serves soup. Next to it was a busy yard where stonefoam was cast for construction: the gang foreman, a big woman in a smock white with dust, was supervising the pouring of a cast with a loud and splendid flow of language. After that came a small wire factory, a district laundry, a luthier's where musical instruments were made and repaired, the district small goods distributary, a theatre, a tile works. The activity going on in each place was fascinating, and mostly out in full view. Children were around, some involved in the work with the adults, some underfoot making mudpies, some busy with games in the street, one perched up on the roof of the learning centre with her nose in a book. The wire-maker had decorated the shopfront with a pattern of vines worked in painted wire, cheerful and ornate. The blast of steam and conversation from the wide-open doors of the laundry was overwhelming. No doors were locked, few shut. There were no disguises, and no advertisements. It was all there, all the works, all the life of the city, open to the eye and to the hand. And every now and then down Depot Street a thing came careening by clanging a bell, a vehicle crammed full of people and with people festooned on stanchions all over the outside, old women cursing heartily as it failed to slow down at their stop so that they could scramble off, a little boy on a home-made tricycle pursuing it madly, electrical sparks showering blue from the overhead wires at crossings: as if that quiet intense vitality of the streets built up every now and then to discharge point and leapt the gap with a crash and a blue crackle and a smell of ozone.

These were the Abbeney omnibuses, and as they passed one felt like cheering. Depot Street ended in a large airy place where five other streets rayed in to a triangular park of grass and trees. Most parks on Annarres were

playgrounds of dirt or sand, with a stand of shrub and tree of Holums. This one was different. Shevek crossed the trafficless pavement and entered the park, drawn to it because he has seen it often in pictures, and because he wanted to see alien trees, Urrasti trees, from close up, to experience the greenness of those multitudinous leaves. The sun was setting, the sky was wide and clear, darkening to purple at the zenith, the dark of space showing through the thin atmosphere. He entered, under trees, alert, wary. Were they not wasteful, those crowding leaves? The tree holum got along very efficiently with spines and needles, and no excess of those. Wasn't all this extravagance foliage mere excess, excrement? Such trees couldn't thrive without rich soil, constant watering, much care. He disapproved of their lavishness, their thriftlessness. He walked under them, among them. The alien grass was soft underfoot. It was like walking on living flesh. He shied back onto the path. The dark limbs of the trees reached out over his head, holding their many wide green hands above him. Awe came into him. He knew himself blessed although he had not asked for blessing. Some way before him, down the darkening path, a person sat reading on a stone bench. Shevek went forward slowly. He came to the bench and stood looking at the figure who sat with her head bowed over the book in the green-gold dusk of the trees. It was a woman of fifty or sixty, strangely dressed, her hair pulled in a knot. Her left hand on her chin nearly hid the stern mouth, her right held the papers on her knee. They were heavy, those papers: the cold hand on them was heavy. The light was dying fast but she never looked up. She went on reading the proof sheets of the Social Organism.

Shevek looked at Odo for a while, then he sat down on the bench beside her. He had no concept of status at all, and there was plenty of room on the bench. He was moved by a pure impulse of companionship. He looked at the strong sad profile, and at the hands, an old woman's hands. He looked up into the shadowy branches. For the first time in his life he comprehended that Odo, whose face he had known from infancy, whose ideas were central and abiding in his mind and in the mind of everyone he knew, that Odo had never set foot on Anarres: that she had lived, and died, and was buried, in the shadow of green-leaved trees, in unimaginable cities, among people speaking unknown languages, on another world. Odo was an alien: an exile. The young man sat beside the statue in the twilight, one almost as quiet as the other. At last, realising it was getting dark, he got up and made off into the streets again, asking directions to the Central

Institute of Sciences. It was not far; he got there not long after the lights went on. A registrar or vigil-keeper was in the little office at the entrance, reading. He had to knock at the open door to get attention. "Shevek," he said. It was customary to start conversation with a stranger by offering your name as a kind of handle for him to take hold of. There were not many other handles to offer. There was no rank, no terms of rank, no conventional respectful forms of address.

18 It must be possible to go beyond judgement and still be critical. Such ethics would not attach positive or negative values to actions based on classification in a moral system of judgement. We try to go beyond personal feelings or emotions and perceive affects instead. Affects are basically ways of connecting to others and to other situations. A body's ability to affect or be affected - its charge of affect - isn't something fixed. Affects are our angle of participation in processes larger than ourselves. Ethics in this sense is totally situational. Totally pragmatic. And the high art of not taking the situation personally implies seeking a depersonalised way of thinking rather than operating with hurt feelings. This is an important starting point for reformulating resistance on an ethical basis. We are not exactly sure what this kind of politics would look like. This is a deliberately vague, a micro strategy that needs to remain invisible. We need to become invisible in order to gain the privilege of experience and channel this into a new opportunity of actually thinking, not representing. We don't want to be invisible

towards each other; we just want to dodge the representational level. We need to create much smaller holes in reality. Otherwise they would be immediately swallowed by media representation, normal institutions.

It's all about creating spaces that might not be there forever but will nevertheless resist time. They puncture a hole in reality. These holes are a potential, there are openings in the grey areas, floating in the blur where you're susceptible to affective contagion, or at least capable of spreading it. This practice wouldn't start from excluding minorities but from a non-voice, a community with shared interests that aren't based on representation. We are not doing business, we are not creating enterprises or firms. We have other aims that are kind of undercover, they are secret and sometimes they are even so secret that we don't know where they are. As Beatriz Preciado put it, there is a kind of political joy and it is a kind of pleasure that resembles nothing, none of the other pleasures, its has nothing to do with money, it has also its own glamour and perversity but it has a very particular quality, precisely as this micro-quality.

On the twenty-eighth of February, 1936 (on the third day that is, of the February 26 Incident) Lieutenant Shinji Takayama of the Konoe Transport Battalion—profoundly disturbed by the knowledge that his closest colleagues had been with the mutineers since the beginning, and indignant at the imminent prospect of Imperial troops attacking Imperial troops—took his officer’s sword and ceremonially disemboweled himself in the eight-mat room of his private residence in the sixth block of Aoba-cho, in Yotsuya Ward. His wife, Reiko, followed him, stabbing herself to death. The lieutenant’s farewell note consisted of one sentence: “Long live the Imperial Forces.” His wife’s after apologies for her unfilial conduct in thus preceding her parents to the grave, concluded: “The day which, for a soldier’s wife had to come, has come...” The last moments of this heroic and dedicated couple were such as to make the gods themselves weep. The lieutenant’s age it should be noted, was thirty-one, his wife’s, twenty-three; and it was not half a year since the celebration of their marriage.

Was this seppuku?—he was thinking. It was a sensation of utter chaos, as if the sky had fallen on his head and the whole world was reeling drunkenly. His willpower and courage, which had seemed so robust before he made the incision, had now dwindled to something like a single hairlike thread of steel, and he was assailed by the uneasy

feeling that he must advance along this thread, clinging to it with desperation. His clenched fist had grown moist. Looking down, he saw that both his hand and the cloth about the blade were drenched in blood. His loincloth too was dyed a deep red. It struck him as incredible that, amidst this terrible agony, things which could be seen could still be seen, and existing this existed still.

It is the moon that disappears  
It is the stars that hide not I  
It's the City that vanishes, I stay  
with my forgotten shoes,  
my invisible stocking  
It is the call of the bell.

21

Delicate eyes that blinked blue Rockies all ash  
nipples, Ribs I touched w/my thumb are ash  
mouth my tongue touched once or twice all ash  
bony cheeks soft on my belly are cinder, ash  
earlobes & eyelids, youthful cock tip, curly pubis  
breast warmth, man palm, high school thigh,  
baseball bicep arm, asshole anneal'd to silken skin  
all ashes, all ashes again.

Three weeks ago a man named Allen Ginsberg died, at the age of 70. If you were a university student in the 1960s or 1970s, his name will be very familiar to you. He was the person chosen by the media to be the number-one guru for America's youth during

that period. He's been a sort of secondary guru ever since, and if you studied literature even in the 1980s or 1990s you got a dose of him. He always was treated in a worshipful sort of way by the media, in order to make the more gullible young people believe that he was some sort of genius who was to be taken very seriously. We could see this same worshipful attitude again when the media people reported his death earlier this month. I listened to NBC's Tom Brokaw talk about Ginsberg on the evening television news. Brokaw behaved as if he were reporting the death of George Washington or Thomas Jefferson. He spoke of Ginsberg as if he had been a talented and sensitive poet, a great soul who had passed away, leaving us all sadder and poorer for the loss. He even read the first line of one of Ginsber's so-called "poems," Howl. And he did it all with a straight face. There was no hint in his facial expression or tone of voice that he wasn't completely serious. I didn't see the way the other TV-news anchor-people dealt with Ginsberg's death, but I presume it was similar to the way Brokaw did it. Certainly, the tone of all of the print media that I saw also was worshipful.

22

Let me tell you about Allen Ginsberg, this great and sensitive soul who contributed so much to America and whose passing we all should mourn. Ginsberg was a drug-crazed, homosexual, Communist Jew. I do not use any of those terms lightly. He was very homosexual, very Communist, and very Jewish, and he was a big promoter of drug use by young people back during the 1950s and 1960s. He was not a guru, if we intend the normal meaning for that word, which is "spiritual teacher." Judging from what he said and wrote during his life, he never had a spiritual impulse. Nor was he a poet, if we have any reasonable definition of what constitutes poetry. Of course, he pretended to be both a guru and a poet, and the media vigorously supported his pretensions. He was simply a degenerate piece of filth. His mind was a sewer. He was a con man, who made a good living from his pretensions.

To realize the full truth of this you need to read - actually read for yourself - what Ginsberg wrote, which his media promoters call "poetry" - in fact, "great poetry." I intended to quote a few samples myself, but I couldn't find anything that I'm willing to repeat. His writing is almost indescribably filthy and perverted. I am not a prude, I am not sexually repressed, and I'm sure that I often say or write things which are offensive to many people. So when I tell you that there's nothing Ginsberg wrote that I'm willing to quote, believe me, it's pretty sick stuff.

The best I can do is to paraphrase a couple of his poems to give you an idea of their content. His best-known poem is Howl. That's the one that attracted the attention of the big media Jews back in 1956 and resulted in their decision to promote him as a "guru" and a cultural icon for young Americans. I repeat, Tom Brokaw read the first line of Howl with a sober expression on the NBC Evening News - and without mentioning that Ginsberg was a homosexual or a Communist. The poem begins like this: "I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed . . . ." That's as far as Brokaw went, giving the average listener a very limited impression of what Ginsberg had in mind when he wrote Howl. A few lines later the poem describes homosexual couplings with motorcyclists and sailors in the most graphic possible language.

23

Another of Ginsberg's better-known writings is Kaddish, which he wrote in 1961 about his mother, who had died five years earlier. He describes in revolting anatomical detail his fat, aging mother lying naked on a bed while he contemplates having sex with her, thinking maybe that's what she wants. He also describes, in the same revolting detail, his mother vomiting into a toilet and having a bowel movement on the bathroom floor.

In 1995 Ginsberg had a collection of his poems published under the title *Cosmopolitan Greetings: Poems 1986-1992*. One of the poems in this collection is titled *Sphincter*. It's a poem about

his anus - that's right, his anus - and the various uses it's been put to in his homosexual activities. Very graphic. This collection was in the finals for the Pulitzer Prize in 1995.

I won't cite any more of Ginsberg's so-called "poetry." But I want you to understand what it's really like. The examples I've mentioned are by no means exceptional. They are typical of the sort of filthy scribbling that Ginsberg called "poetry." They are representative. They display the infantile, narcissistic attitude that underlies liberalism. They are the barely coherent expressions of a child playing with his own feces and his own genitalia, looking for new ways to gratify himself. And that's all that Ginsberg wrote: nothing serious, nothing except drugs, homosexual activity, degeneracy. If there is any idea that characterizes Ginsberg's writing, it is the liberal idea that everything is relative, nothing is evil, no attitude or life-style or sexual orientation is better than any other, and the purpose of life is self-gratification.

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Ginsberg is said to have launched the hippie movement of the 1960s, not to mention the "beat" movement of the preceding decade. I don't know about that, although certainly the hippies shared a similarly infantile outlook. Ginsberg has, however, had a substantial influence on many people who grew up during the 1960s and 1970s - not as a consequence of his own efforts, but because the Jewish media establishment made the conscious decision to make him influential, to hold him up as a cultural icon. Because of this conscious effort of the Jewish media bosses, books of Ginsberg's scatological, homosexual, drug-induced ravings are found in nearly every public and school library in the country. Ginsberg received all sorts of academic and literary awards. One book of his scribblings was given the National Book Award in 1974. He was nominated to the American Academy and the Institute of Arts and Letters. He was given a faculty position at Brooklyn College, which he still held at the time of his

death. He was a favored speaker at hundreds of colleges around the country. And the media were always praising him, always taking him seriously, always holding him up as a model for young, impressionable students. Reviewers in Jewish papers like the New York Times referred to him as “America’s greatest living poet” and called his poetry “brilliant.” They used the same sort of meaningless double-talk to make fools take him seriously that the art critics use to make other fools take the hideous daubings of modern “artists” seriously. One reviewer wrote of Ginsberg’s poetry: “The Judeo-Christian dualism of good versus evil is obliterated by an oriental relativism that neatly does away with the consequences of the spiritual pride that has bloodied the pages of Western ecclesiastical history.” Another wrote that Ginsberg’s poetry is “in one of the oldest traditions, that of Hosea or the other angry minor prophets of the Bible.” Some of the literary critics claimed to see parallels between Ginsberg’s literary efforts and the mission of Jesus to redeem the world. This sort of nonsense impresses many people, unfortunately.

25

Even when Ginsberg bragged in public about his pederasty or his illegal drug use, he continued to be held up as a great, creative genius, and he continued to be given awards. In 1995, just two years ago, he bragged to a newspaper interviewer, “I sleep with young boys,” but that didn’t discourage Stanford University from setting up a Ginsberg Center and buying all of Ginsberg’s personal papers, manuscripts, and so on to preserve them for posterity.

You know, Ginsberg was just a filthy, little, perverted, drug-crazed, Communist Jew. The world would be a lot cleaner place if all of his kind were swept up and buried in a deep hole somewhere. But Ginsberg, by himself, was not especially dangerous. The things he wrote were not likely to influence any healthy person. They were attractive only to sick creatures like himself.

Ginsberg, for all of his depravity, must take second place to

the truly evil and destructive creatures who promoted him, who decided to make an icon of him, and who still praise him. Ginsberg became dangerous only after the big Jews, the media bosses, decided to use him as a weapon against White society and began promoting him. But even the Jewish media bosses are what they are. Everything they do is destructive to us. It is in their nature.

Pederasty in *The Immoralist*, like nude sunbathing, is the narcissistic expansion of the desiring skin, and it too works against the narcissism of a securely mapped ego. Potentially everywhere, attuned to the multiple correspondences between himself and the world, the Gidean homosexual is unidentified and even unlocatable. There is no ‘homosexual psychology’ here, for even Gide imagines homosexuality as a gliding into impersonal sameness ontologically incompatible with analysable egos. Such self-impooverishing self-expansions block the cultural discipline of identification. The possibility of Michel’s being saved for the state depends on his friends being able to identify him, and this is what his account of himself — designed, presumably to do just that — makes impossible. His secret turns out to be that he has nearly disappeared into a ‘place’ where there are no secrets. Michel’s friends are psychological missionaries. They have come not to bring him back to France but to do exactly what we see them doing: to listen to Michel in the hope of bringing him back to himself, to a self — the precondition for registration and service as a citizen. Michel’s pederasty is, then, self-less. If his homosexuality strikes us as elusive, this is undoubtedly because it is a subtraction from his being. His sexual preference is without psychic content; there are no complexes, no repressed conflicts, no developmental explanations, only the chaste promiscuity of a body repeatedly reaching out to find

itself beyond itself. Furthermore, with remarkable consistency, Michel realises that his psychic denudation must also be a mutual denudation. His pederasty provides a sensual motive for an attack on all forms of property — on the self that belongs to him and also on all his possessions. In *The Immoralist*, this self-divestiture is enacted as a wilful pursuit of abjection, a casting away not only of possessions but also of the attributes that constitute the self as a valuable property. “I had sought and found” Michel says of his trip to Africa, “what makes me what I am: a kind of persistence in the worst” “the dregs of society” he tells his friends, “were delectable to me” and in Kairouan he sleeps amidst a group of Arabs lying in the open air on mats and returns “covered in vermin” to his hotel and the dying Marceline. That scene could be read — if, say, we adopt the point of view of the friends listening to Michel — as an ironic commentary on the earlier tableaux of the convalescent Michel sitting among the healthy Arab boys in the public park and gardens of Basra. The purity has ended in filth; the sexuality, still not wholly acknowledged, at once expresses and exasperates itself in camaraderie with debauched and diseased bodies. Not only that: nowhere is Michel’s difference from the colonised men whose lives he would share more evident than in his touristic identification with them. He realises this: “Here too (in Syracuse, where he sought out the dregs of society) the brutality of passion assumed in my eyes a hypocritical aspect of health, of vigour. It was no use reminding myself that their wretched lives could not have for them the savour they assumed for me.” And yet “each man’s worst instinct seemed (to him) the most sincere,” and he insists, as he tells of his prowling in the slums of Italy and North Africa: “I feel nothing in myself except nobility.”

27

There is no need to resolve these contradictory judgements; indeed it is one of the strengths of *The Immoralist* (and one of Gide’s strengths in all his work) that it asks more questions than it claims to answer. But we might in conclusion try another view of Michel’s radical slumming. In his psychically and materially stripped down state, Michel could be seen as a threat to the state. His friends’ mission is not merely psychological (to restore him psychologically); perhaps they not only have to save him from the state but also have to save the state

from him. The mild sensuality of Michel's convalescence is politicised during his journey through Italy to Africa with the dying Marceline. His longing "to roll under the table" with tramps and drunken sailors aggravates his "growing horror of luxury, of comfort." It not only makes him approach his luxurious hotel with an hallucinated sense of the words "No Poor Man enters Here" written over its door (an echo of the warning Dante sees above Hell's gate), Michel's puritanically prurient will to get to the most intimate details of impoverishment and debauchery is accompanied by a kind of Christ-like or utopian militancy:

"Human poverty is enslavement; to eat, a poor man consents to joyless labour, and all labour which is not joyous is drudgery, I thought. I would pay one man after another to rest, saying 'stop working — you hate what you're doing.' For each man I desired that leisure without which nothing can lower — neither vice nor art."

That leisure prefigures a new society, one "liberated from works of art" (the Arabs "live their art...they don't embalm it in words"), a society in which vice might be reinvented as art. *The Immoralist*, it is true, has nothing specific to tell us about such a society. The renunciation of work from below would be nothing more than a disempowerment of the worker if it were not accompanied by reorganisation of the conditions of work itself. Michel's itinerary does, however suggest that if a community were ever to exist in which it would no longer seem natural to define all relations as property relations (not only my money or my land, but also my country, my wife, my lover), we would first have to imagine a new erotics. Without that, all revolutionary activity will return, as we have seen it return over and over again, to relations of ownership and dominance. Michel's pederasty is the model for intimacies devoid of intimacy. It proposes that we move irresponsibly among other bodies, somewhat indifferent to them, demanding nothing more than that they be as available to contact as we are, and that, no longer owned by others, they also renounce self ownership and agree to that loss of boundaries which will allow them to be, with us, shifting points of rest in a universal and mobile communication of being. If homosexuality in this form is

difficult to know, this is because it no longer defines itself. At once much less and much more than sexual preference, it may also as Marceline perceptively remarks “eliminate the weak.” But the way we live already eliminates the weak, the familiar piety she expresses serves to perpetuate their oppression. Nothing could be more different from the strength of Michel’s self-divestiture, from the risks he takes in loving the other as same, in homo-ness. In that love (for want of a more precise word) he risks his own boundaries, risks knowing where he ends and the other begins. This is lawless pederasty – not because it violates statutes that legislate our sexual behaviour, but because it rejects personhood, a status that the law needs in order to discipline us and, it must be added, to protect us. If Michel’s immoralism defies disciplinary intentions, it also gives up protection. And this should help us to see what is at stake in Michel’s timid sexuality. He travels in order to spread his superficial view of human relations, preaching, by his anomalous presence among foreign bodies, a community in which the other, no longer respected or violated as a person, would merely be cruised ass, another opportunity, at once insignificant and precious, for narcissistic pleasure.

**T**he rumour is that Bashai Tudu is dying in the forest, or to be precise, that he is dying in the forest again. Bashai has engaged in armed encounters with the police before and has been executed in these encounters, his body identified and even exhumed – yet he is once again at large. Bashai has died four times between 1970 and 1976 and this fact haunts the imagination of the local police. Each time they go through the same identification routine that involves calling up the elderly Kali Santu who was once a colleague of Bashai’s when they worked in the ‘peasant movement’ and asking him to inspect the body. Kali Santu is a member of the CPI (M) part of the Left Front of West Bengal, a man who has served his party well, not least by adhering to its stated principles. For example he was one of the few that

gave up his inheritance (of ten acres of land) when he joined the party in 1943, thinking that a revolution would quickly follow, and the whole country of India would be covered with communes providing for everyone's needs. Now, disappointed by the course that events have taken, Kali wonders if the word 'revolution was only one of those many words bandied about, as expendable as the tinsel wrap around a paan.' But nevertheless, as some sort of reward for toeing the line at least, Kali has a stable if impoverished grip on his own mortality. He 'knew he would not be killed by a bullet, the way Bashai had died the first time his body riddled with bullets. He would not die impaled on a bayonet, the way Bashai died the second time, his face and his abdomen torn open by a bayonet. He would not die in an armed encounter the way Bashai died the third time, lashed to a tree, his bones all crushed and splintered. He would not die of gangrene, the way Bashai died the fourth time, his body swollen purple and shining.'

30

Once Bashai like Kali had believed that the party would improve the lot of the agricultural labourers, who were the lowest rung of the peasantry. Now, in his eyes, this group had been abandoned by the party, fed only on rhetoric and served by laws that were never implemented. Laws designed to put a ceiling on land ownership and lay down a minimum wage for the agricultural labourer, evaporated into thin air when confronted by the vested interest of the big landlords. However, unlike Kali, Bashai's disappointment does not take the form of regret eked out slowly into old age. For him if the party line has failed, then another line must be found, and in this spirit he has 'torn himself free from the old ties that had once bound him.' He has moved beyond the official party line and entered into a shadow politics, becoming incomprehensible to the administration. Now a ghostly figure in their minds, he appears before them momentarily at the centre of armed insurrections – when the landlords have pushed the agricultural labourers to despair – and then he disappears again back into the land. For them he is like a strange landmass split off by a 'sea of incomprehension.' He is maddeningly beyond their reach, elusive in his many incarnations like a continent that one cannot 'attack, explore or colonise.'

Coming from the Santal tribe, Bashai is outside the parameters of mainstream Hindu society, outside of the caste system, outside even of the agrarian peasant economy. As a landless labourer, under the sharecropping system he has no choice but to work for the Jotedars without rights and at a rate below the minimum wage. He is beyond the reach of those systems designed to save him and is the 'flotsam' of nationalist and emancipatory movements. He is a figure that can neither be 'excluded or recuperated for the cause' that he once served, and so instead he overturns the cause, changes its course to take a violent turn, alters the manner in which it is inscribed onto a territory beyond its 'natural soil.'

He says of himself:

I'm Bashai the Santal, one of those who go almost naked, and feed on mice and snakes when there's a famine.... Can you give us a country where Party comrades at least will not make distinctions between Santal comrades, Kaora comrades, and comrades from the upper castes? Can you? Can you have all of them flying to Delhi, the Soviet Union and America, riding motor cars, wearing nylons? Can you or maybe the other way round, can you have all of them wearing a loin cloth around their waist, being kicked by Surja Sau, and desolation burning in their hearts to see the paddy they had sown being harvested by others?

And so 'Operation Bashai Tudu' spreads out across the region and 'all over the tribal belt which is seething with resentment against the Front.' Bashai himself seems to be 'driven by some terrible urge to move through the villages where the agricultural labourers live, move through the forest and the paddy fields, staying in many different places and making alliances here and there. These circuitous and unpredictable movements, his constituency of outcasts, and the manner by which he supports their cause, to the point of violence, compound the authority's conclusion that 'Bashai must have become a Naxalite.' But Bashai rejects this label, realising that it is simply used by them 'to write him off,' and to take the same measures against him

as were laid down against the Naxalites,' who had previously been put out of action.

His is 'the way that works... Where the law serves, we'd go for the law. Where the jotedar defies the law, we'd step beyond the law. If the Naxalite stands by me, Ill accept their support.'

Despite his denial, Bashai moves through Naxalite territory, and in turn their 'guerrilla style insurgency' provides 'something of the spirit' that goes into his making. The tools of his trade are forged out of gross injustice and from the revolutionary texts that he has read. Like the Naxalites who are a 'peculiar coalition of peasant and intellectual,' he undoes the 'opposition between reading (book learning) and doing.' While his aim is to achieve agrarian reform, his practice has the power to confound its opponents with the 'undoing of opposites,' chipping away at the divide between 'intellectual-rural and 'tibalist-internationalist,' in a manner that leaves collapsing structures in its wake. The desire to 'fix' Bashai permanently, either epistemologically through the elite methodologies of 'knowing', or through an armed encounter with the police, or indeed by way of an autopsy – are met with his endless ability to evade capture. He is beyond the reach of any text; and in their attempts to pin him down, the first world scholar, the police and the army officer all occupy the same role. Bashai is a mythic figure who produces his own name within a tradition of revolutionary practice. He holds this name out for the agricultural labourers to use when they come under threat, and the closest he gets to being caught, is during 'the-death-of-Bashai-and-his-identification-routine' – that slippery point of contact between Bashai and the authorities, which is for them, perpetually inconclusive.

This strategy repels the force that wishes to identify it. It takes the mechanics of myth-making out of enemy hands and puts their techniques to a different use. It posits the notion that myths are not only useful but indeed necessary. It is a strategy that seems to work across different time zones and within different historical periods. Look for example at the group who put Luther

Blisset together – the mythological nom de plume of artists and anarchists in Italy and elsewhere with the ‘subversive reputation of an imaginary Robin Hood.’ Blisset is quite consciously produced as a myth and made up from a mixture of ‘ancient legends regarding folk heroes, the language adopted by EZLN, genre cinema and Western pop culture in general.’ Like Bashai, he has a set of stock characteristics that identify him. Bashai’s traits are carried to the authorities by word of mouth: he has a scar, his eyebrows meet in the middle, and when he gets agitated he makes a motion that resembles someone ‘wringing the neck of the wind.’ Blisset has his features posted up on the Internet: his face is angelic, his hair is neatly combed, he wears a suit and tie and can be seen against a backdrop of billowing clouds. Blisset’s makers conceived him as an experiment in mythopoesis and a way of helping to ‘keep mythologies lively flexible and in motion.’ They refer to the words of George Sorel, according to whom, the proletariat need an image of the ‘general strike’ in order to picture any future conflict as one in which their ‘cause is certain to triumph.’ They set about updating this ‘image’ in a non-alienating fashion, and without Sorel’s patronising tone. But concurring with him that ‘people do not fight the present state of things if they are not inspired by some narrative.’

33

One of the groups that have learned from Blisset’s ‘theoretical – practical findings’ are the ‘Tute Bianche’ (or white overalls), a group of activists who appear at demonstrations wearing surgical gowns. Like Bashai they manage their myth, stay one step ahead of the commentators, and refuse to be cast into opposites such as violent/non-violent, legal/illegal or mainstream/marginal. This group first appeared on the streets of Milan in 1994, as participants in violent demonstrations against the city’s right-wing mayor Formentini, who had declared that the squats known as Leoncavallo should be closed down and their inhabitants evicted. In response the demonstrators took to the streets in spectral white costumes, their presence a mocking retort to the mayor who had declared that henceforth, the squatters would be ‘nothing more than ghosts wandering about the city.’

“I have a poetic notion of the grass. / And I know poetry’s excess. / Which is why I have commissioned lines, / for my consecration (!) / ...to pray in this sacred space / (where, to tell the truth, I don’ t walk with bare feet).” The grass Pasolini talks about is that of the small football ground in Ostia where he “prayed” on the night of Sunday, November 2, 1975, and celebrated the myth of resurrection from death. He was thus following a ritual he himself had ordered and described in advance: “by constantly making their presence felt, martyr directors (end) by their own choice when they finally get what they aggressively want: to be wounded and 34 killed with the weapon that they themselves offer to the enemy.” The fact is that Pasolini, a “martyr director by choice,” also prophesied when his expressive strategy would be understood as authentic and comprehensible after he had fixed the year, the month, the day, and the order of events in the “cultural ritual” that would be celebrated in the spavin sacro in which he “would enter as Christ without taking off his shoes.” “As long as I am not yet dead, no one can claim to know me, i.e. make sense of my actions, which is, linguistically considered, therefore difficult

to 'decode.' ” A reader who wants to unravel the “project and secret” of Pasolini’ s death now, thirty years after it happened, cannot avoid testing the following three “working hypotheses.” After comparing the consistency of the ascertained facts with each other, he can make his choice. The first two hypotheses have been peddled by the mass media time and again, whereas the third - which I presented at the University of California Berkley in 1983 - was published in the Stanford Italian Review under the title “Total contamination in Pasolini” Pasolini was a victim of any number of possible murders; Pasolini was assassinated by the secret services because of his attacks on the Christian Democratic government; Pasolini himself was the “organiser” of his own death, which, conceived as a form of expression, was intended to give meaning to his entire oeuvre. And that is perhaps the reason why I am telling the story of a friend who was found dead on a football pitch in the grey light of dawn on Sunday, November 2, 1975, with his face so disfigured that only after repeated examination did it become clear that it was not a “pile of rubbish” (as someone said) but the massacred body of Pier Paolo Pasolini.

*Untitled*: This is the successor to *Right After*, its "ugly" counterpart. It was first made by Hesse directing David Magasis (a friend who had nothing to do with art): "It was something she'd had in mind. [She had made notes and drawings for it as early as November 1969.] *Life* magazine was coming to photograph in a couple of days. I went to my uncle's place and got cable cord of all sizes. I came back and she said 'Do something.' 'What?' 'Whatever you feel like doing. . . . Do you want to make a knot?' 'Yes.' So I made a knot." He dunked it in liquid rubber and strung it up; "She really had self-confidence at that time." Later Bill Barrette rubberized some more ropes with her and the piece got moved to the corner of the studio. Her notes indicate how free she wanted it to be: "hung irregularly tying knots as connections really letting it go as it will allowing it to determine more of the way it completes itself. Make it with at least 2 or 3 of us, connecting from wires from ceiling and nails from walls and other ways let it determine more itself how floppy or stiff it might be. Colors, how much rope/must be rope piece." From there she hoped to go, according to her notes, into pieces described as "non forms, non shapes not planned."

The piece has been called "unfinished"; its installation is half the work and must be done by someone extremely familiar with Hesse's ideas. LeWitt hung it at Documenta in 1972; it took two days and even then he felt he could have continued. It would look right from one angle and wrong from another. Nancy Graves, who installed it in Philadelphia the first time it was shown, remembers that Hesse was not happy with this piece, but was too sick to be sure about it. Its "unfinished" quality may, however, have been what Hesse wanted. Everything that the graceful *Right After* is not, this is—an apparently random tangle of lines which she once referred to as "the knot piece." The inevitable comparison to Jackson Pollock's painting is not unreasonable and she herself was quoted in *Life* as saying: "This piece is very ordered. Maybe I'll make it more structured, maybe I'll leave it changeable. When it's completed its order could be chaos. Chaos can be structured as non-chaos. That we know from Jackson Pollock." It does have the gestural intensity of Pollock's most passionately disturbed surfaces, and its sculptural suspension in mid-air, its central weight, deepens the sense of risk.

*Three Untitled Glass Cases:* The idea of putting her small and test pieces into a glass pastry case came from LeWitt, who had found one in a store on the Bowery and put Hesse's small gifts to him in it. She liked the way it looked, and made the second one herself, as a "piece," and later a third one. A note from August 1967 reads: "Three levels—small pieces related by context by box which encloses them; otherwise independent. 1. rubber sheets. 2. sculpmetal. a) all rubber b) rubber, filler and sand c) rubber with filler and black and white powdered pigments." These are Hesse's most Surrealist works, due partly to the box format and partly to the juxtaposition of unlike or unrelated forms which produce, in turn, a "new reality." A natural outgrowth of early concern with collage, they are also very "precious objects," possible in this "play" context. The first case seems rather clinical because the floors are plain glass and there are two objects on each level, like removed organs lined up neatly for inspection—tubes sewed onto fiberglass cloth, a miniature umbilical bucket, a shiny visceral form emerging from a cut skin-like sleeve, a shallow rubber tray filled with bland plaster, another larger and empty lopsided rubber tray, a shriveled latex fish-like shape cast around a popped balloon. The second case has something of the same aspect except for the middle layer, which is like a landscape of rubber "grass" inhabited by a slumped rubber disc; the layer below is patterned with washers under the glass. The materials range from clay to rubber to plaster to fiberglass to screen to string to clear plastic tubes. The third includes a similar grouping, with three overlapping, almost flat objects on the top shelf, three still quite flat pieces on the second, four slightly higher-profiled pieces on the third, and, on the bottom, a gray-green latex scalloped screen curving up like waves and lying on a large gray plaster plaque with numbers in it.

8 - 9 dish wash  
9 - 10 shop  
10 - 11 letters  
11 - 1 studio  
1 - 2 lunch  
2 - 6 studio  
6 - 8 dinner etc.  
8 - 12 reading, letters  
16 hrs.  
for myself 10 hours

38

**W**hat does Hesse's art look like? The question is simple—it sits docilely enough on the page—but answers to it obey more complex laws than might be assumed.

**I** spend a dark winter in Stockholm looking for a coat. That is, I spend a dark winter in Stockholm looking for a more fashionable replacement for my twelve-year-old-navy-puffy-down Eddie Bauer ski jacket. By April, I

don't have a new coat, but I have gone into countless clothing stores on the walk to and from the studio. Oddly, this behaviour is familiar to me, although I wonder if it is particular. I suppose each of us knows the moment of suspension, when something exists for us only through its evocative possibility. Did I actually want a new coat? Every time I put my old one on I think it isn't so bad...

I make two excursions during my stay in Stockholm: one to speak at a symposium in Utrecht; the other for an exhibition in Belgrade, to which I haul along a hardback edition of Lucy Lippard's *Eva Hesse*, only to not open it once for the 10 days I'm there. (Besides coat hunting, I'm reading biographies on Eva Hesse). Getting to Utrecht is a bit of panic, but despite being busy and needing time to focus on my work; despite my work never being done and having troubles of my own, I go. The topic of the symposium is feminist legacies in art. I recall a college professor who taught a course called, 'Intro to Literature in the 60s'. He used to say, "I'm not a woman, but I consider myself a feminist."

39

There is a section in Anne Wagner's essay "Another Hesse," that describes Hesse's journals and how to read them. Wagner points to various instances, from catalogue texts to reviews written after Hesse's death, where biographers and critics have turned to own Hesse's journals to find meaning in her work. What is read as the tragedy of Hesse's death, becomes the

(feminine) genius of her work. However, were we to read Hesse's journals in the context of her life (rather than her death), we might discover a different Hesse, someone less "damaged and chaotic" (words that have described both Hesse and her work) than we imagine. We might discover an at times anxious, yet searching, intelligent young woman, absorbed with her work, whose hopes and fears for her career (she strove to be accepted as an artist by her peers, her family and her husband) are in places more revealing of the times she lived in than her inner soul. Read uncut, Hesse's journals are in places about as remarkable as the lists she scribed to organise her time. Time spent on 'us', meaning her marriage, and 'me', meaning her career.

40 This fact does not make her *work* less significant, but it does make some of the *writing* about her work by others since her death less potent.

"The wish to know Hesse is deeply nostalgic: it voices the desire for a return to the past to recover the Hesse who disappeared there, the woman who in 1970 died of a brain tumour at the age of thirty-four. She is the only Hesse we have, after all: she is the person preserved in a finite number of photographs and on a few feet of film: she is the author of a finite body of work and words. When we import her into our present, she appears there unchanged; she does not emerge, like some returnee from Shangri-La, only to age instantly and assume the guise of the woman she would have become had she lived. Hesse in late middle age, I feel certain, would have been a

considerably less attractive cultural commodity (though no less interesting an artist, I wager) than the Hesse fate has provided.”

It occurs to me, my desire to know Hesse has little to do with her, or her death, but is no less nostalgic. My mother and Hesse were born in the same year. They grew up just a few miles from each other; my mother in Port Washington, Long Island, Hesse in Washington Heights. Both came from families with moderate incomes and educated parents. Both attended college in the late fifties. Hesse took a while to settle on a school, going to Pratt and Cooper Union, before getting a degree in Studio Art from Yale. My mother went to Brown, majoring in Art History and English. Other minor coincidences include Hesse’s time at the Art Students League where my mother’s father taught, and marriages within a few years of each other. In short, Hesse’s and my mother’s lives were at one time in sync—not with each other’s (the above is not a demonstration of a particularised relationship between two women) but with their times, their backgrounds and American culture.

41

In Belgrade, I find myself negotiating other legacies. In 1972, the newly formed Student Cultural Center (founded by the Yugoslav government) held its first “April Meeting.” My exhibition in SKC’s gallery coincides with this year’s event. What in the past was an open gathering of art students and young artists from across Yugoslavia, has devolved into a sparsely

attended open video call.

I decide to work with the SKC archive and with art students at the University of Belgrade, and to involve the legacy of the April meetings in some way in the exhibition. As part of these plans, I arrange to meet Zoran Popović and Raši Todosijević in their studios. Both are artists in their 60s living in Belgrade, and both are associated with SKC's beginnings. I see Zoran first, and then Raši, and each in his own way, tells me about his work—pronounced openly by Raši as 'genius' and by Zoran as underappreciated (but I suspect 'genius' nonetheless).

42

When Sandra and I visit Belgrade's Faculty of Art, the students are game. We explain that we want test pieces and not finished work. I meet most of them individually and, pointing, ask: "What about that?" "That's my final project from last year." "Mmmm, yes... I see. What about that?" "That's a candle." And so on. We laugh. The word gets around and we leave with all we can manage. Some of the students' test pieces are remarkably like Hesse's in both their materials and form. We display the student work in the gallery, along with reprints of archival photographs, taken in the same gallery in the 70s. We crop each image, cutting out the performers and the art so that all that remains is the audience. During the opening people start to spot now

famous faces in the crowd shots (Marina Abramović's, among them), and by the end of the night the stockpile of photographs has seriously dwindled.

My college art teacher, Linda Lyke, was at Kent State University on May 4, 1970, the day the National Guard shot and killed four students during an anti-war protest on the campus. She tells me this while we are in Japan together on a grant in the summer of 1989—the same summer the Chinese government killed protesters in Tian'anmen Square. Years later while looking into the subject of student activism, I accidentally discover that she donated a dossier of papers to the university—mostly condolences sent to the KSU student government directly after the shootings.

Writing for the wall of a student gallery in Belgrade, in 2006. In black paint.

43

PICTURE THIS:

A GROUP OF 20 – 30 PEOPLE ARE SITTING ON THE FLOOR, IN THE BUILDING WHERE YOU ARE NOW.

THEY ARE YOUNG, IN THEIR 20s. SOME ARE ART STUDENTS.

THEY ENTER THE ROOM. AT A CERTAIN MOMENT THEY SIT DOWN, CROSSING THEIR LEGS, LEANING ON THE WALLS AND EACH OTHER.

THEIR EYES FOLLOW THE ACTION OF AN EMPTY VOID. THEY SPEAK TO ONE ANOTHER IN OCCASIONAL WHISPERS.

## LIST OF TEXTS

- page 5–8 Charles Henry Ford and Parker Tyler  
The Young and Evil (1933)  
from Chapter 11: Love and Jump Back  
(Metronome Press 2005)
- page 9–11 C. Wright Mills  
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# THE MEANING OF GREATNESS

Selected by Sarah Pierce and Grant Watson

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