

I: RADICAL ACTIVISM

Who doesn't long for a bygone era of answerable questions and clearer intentions? More concrete dilemmas like "Given this great mass of limestone and these Hebrew slaves, how do I construct a pyramid" rather than "What the hell am I doing?" Most people born into the Western world in the last fifty years have been afforded a relatively stable material existence (food, water, shelter), and furnished with large blocks of time for socialization, entertainment, and some kind of education, whether standardized or freestyle. Given this globally-speaking, disproportionate prosperity, the children of the latter twentieth-century, innately grasping this injustice have developed some pretty twisted coping mechanisms. The (predominately white) children of the sixties fomented a benevolent and drug-fueled cultural revolution in the colleges, eager to allay their bourgeois boredom, be accepted as "down" with the real shit that was going on in ghettos across America. The well-meaning youth of morally-bankrupt Western countries, entombed in the realm of material certainty quickly spiraled into intellectual dementia, writing pamphlets about the poverty of student life, the abolishment of boredom, appropriating struggles left and right, and dutifully sewing together patchwork quilts of oppression. This often led to assumptive displays of theatrical terrorism like exploding bags of shit on US Embassies in the name of the indigenous people of unpronounceable countries, that many said radicals later recant when the pendulum finally swings back the other way and they have morphed into soccer moms and small business owners.

II. MODERN ART

While some strap on the bombs, the rest of us are packing bongos, slouching towards oblivion, our potential energy to do cool stuff is frozen by some paralyzing understanding of its futility. Art: it's no longer a career path sure to lead to pariah social status. The only picture that it seems appropriate to paint is a painting of people having their picture taken by famous paintings. We're running away from original ideas, down a mirrored hall of irony and reference refracting in on itself into infinity. My peers, I must ask: who among you is missing digits? Will those prodded on by some deep-seated compulsion, damned to feed inner demons and always sweat-drenched seconds away from cutting off an ear or sticking your head in the microwave please stand up? Our bodies are on lease, and we choose to live crisp stainless lives obsessed with the condition in which they will be returned to the cleaners? When the time comes, everyone soils themselves in fear. As the cold-blooded O.G. Werner Herzog once put it, echoing the sentiments of the late, great NWA: "I believe the only underlying elements of the universe are Chaos, Hostility, and Murder." So, I implore you, my friends—Smoke cigarettes, debauch your name, sully yourself in misguided action and let your well-pressed human-skin suit be dragged through the mud and cold rain.

III. MOVE BACK HOME

Generation X rationalized our glacial laziness, gave it philosophical ground with masturbatory one liners such as "Who's ever written a great work about the intense effort required *not* to create?" We shrug as the creative impulse floats into our field of vision, ripe for the picking—"Hey, there it goes..." idly watching Law and Order as it drifts away, unfulfilled.

I stumbled upon a disturbingly accurate statistic in my amateur sociological research--People born between 1975 and 1986, my specific age group, have been dubbed by theoreticians the "Boomerang Generation". We are alleged to be united by only a single common thread—a tendency to go out and experience life, travel, work and maybe go to college but eventually move back home. Well-accustomed to sloping worldwide homogeny by now, bored by the weight and accomplishment of history, the urban benefits of an "intellectual life" now available for download on the internet, we've discovered a cynical truth—there's nowhere left to run. Go out and experience the world like the caricature of a haughty Southern aunt—begrudging from the moment we leave, complaining about the food, the rent, strange mores and customs, too much subculture, lack of Starbucks, etc., thinking we somehow know a place intimately just by judging it primarily from it's external cultural indicators. That said, in a city I find it hard to leave the apartment, because although the vast, metropolitan area spreads out limitlessly with things to explore, there's nothing to really see but the spinning rotoscope

of ugly apartment buildings, parks, bodegas, and bars. The self-questioning and untrustworthy sense of intuition that some of the more shiftless among us have come to expect. Failing to halt the Iraq war, my generation has taken up nostalgic pastimes like “crafting”, “croquet” and “zines” to fill up the empty space between the yawns.

IV: SUFJAN STEVENS, UBERMENSCH

The world cries out for confidence and determination, for someone with a plan. Look at the widespread adoration afforded to singer-songwriter Sufjan Stevens after announcing his intentions to make an album about each of the fifty-states. Despite being only two states into it and in his early thirties, making the likelihood of him actually finishing it pretty low, his popularity continues to balloon. Look at those relatively successful fascists like Hitler and Mussolini who really took care of business, compared to farm-league guys like George W. Bush who come off as fidgety and unsure, like the rest of us, without a five-year plan. Ambitious undertakings like scale model-train recreations or building the Taj Mahal are absorbing preoccupations that provide a lifelong sense of fulfillment, but they are ultimately just distractions--skeletal architectures meant to immure life with a degree of manageability.

V: MODERN ART REVISITED

Flashback to my college independent study art class. It's the end of the year, a show-and-tell session of what you've been working on all semester. One particularly quiet and demure sorority girl gets up and in front of the class gingerly places her rectangular canvas up against the blackboard. In the center of the canvas is a flat, gray two-dimensional square, surrounded by four light blue parallelograms, detailed with the kind of marshmallow clouds that you would see and imagine were drawn by a third-grader. To me, it looks like a slapdash, late-night job. She begins her “crit”:

“This painting is about being boxed-in. The gray at the center of the painting is representative of my life. It's dull, bland and seems to continue without purpose. See the clouds? The blue surrounding it represents my freedom, my choices. I'm boxed in. What kind of jelly to buy at the supermarket, whether I want to have kids or go to grad school. What brand or shade of gray to paint my little square. I am stupefied by the minute indecisions that add up to form who I am, whether or not I want to make something of myself. It all boils down to chance and factors: if I'm at the right place at the right time. Where I live, what job I work, how many hours a day I spend on the Internet. This is about wishing I had one sole purpose in life, rather than this potpourri of options that I'm presented with. I guess that's it.”

VI: HAPPINESS AND ITS DISCONTENTS

Sometimes the worst thing that can happen is to have all of your wildest dreams come true. It's good to leave something to hope for. Like Andy's faux-hobohemia fantasies of finding a wealthy older woman to nurture and take care of him. Sure enough, in his travels through a small town in Mexico, a wealthy, beautiful girl who loved Russian literature and Japanese film became enamored with him. Two days later, she confided,

“I want you to stay here and be my boyfriend.”

“But where am I going to live?” he asked, no doubt sweating, checking his flanks for an exit.

“My father has this building you can stay in.”

“But how much will rent be? I don't have any money.”

“Oh, you!” she giggled, “You'll stay there for free, silly.”

Obviously, this sounds like the kind of story that crusty old hobos tell each other over trashcan fires to keep warm on lonely frostbitten nights, the kind of event that would warrant some kind of world-encircling celebratory round of the chorus of Tom Petty's “Even the Losers”, but it's all true. Andy

stayed in the immaculately well-kept building and played the role of the girl's import-boyfriend. He shakes his head, telling the story to me as we look out onto toxic waste from the Williamsburg Bridge.

“It lasted about a week. Then it drove me crazy, man. I just couldn't do it. I wish for things and then they just come true. It got too weird, and I had to skip town.”