

“Dr. Freudlove, or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Patriarchal Theory,” a presentation



What I decided standing there while being introduced, what I was thinking, was, "Should I give the impression I am educating the

audience, an audience of intelligent friends? What if I just show y'all a picture and it's like a, "Where's Waldo game"? Where's the vulnerability of patriarchy? What dimensions of patriarchy are available to be rearranged or dismantled? And where's the feminist potential in this picture? And some of the photos, I know that it's going to be pretty blatant. For instance we can imagine all the implications of the East Texas Beauty College.



I am not a good girl, and I'm fuzzy on the whole fact-fiction thing.

In what way are the soft underbelly of patriarchy or the strategic moves of feminism embedded in each of these images? Am I bad to say, "Well, you-all are sitting out there. I put a lot of thought and experience into choosing these slides. You figure it out"? There's patriarchy everywhere and there is the potential for feminism everywhere. What I wish is that my autobiographical fragments will reveal a deeply subjective dimension of a feminist's life, a dimension that is always present but unspecified and possibly unique whenever you talk with me. I'm trying to conjure an atmosphere and a fragment of a dialogue here that brings forth the fiery background of my particular feminism, as a case in point. I openly ask whether or not it is advisable to erase my idiosyncrasies when you readily accept my feminist stance. So that's why I will show you moments from my childhood, as if you have to know that I am not speaking as an Everywoman. And maybe you might find yourself wanting to enter these images, to infer or confer, to suffer or ruffle. There are so many more ways for speculation and fruitful suppositions to become manifest if, seeing no reason to exploit my possession of this microphone, I leave the insinuations to you-all instead.

...Keep in mind a multitude of apparently insignificant elements whose correlations are only to emerge later on.

J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, 1973

Laplanche and Pontalis have shown us how to listen to free association, and also how to look closely at pictures. Their emphasis is on the insignificant details. The creativity of the audience emerges when something insignificant glimmers. This potential for correlations to emerge later on — would not something insignificant, for you-all, reveal a latent insight?

Can insignificant details disclose the productivity of something unofficial? What is it worth for me to speak to you-all, to bother with these images, unless your own projects benefit, unless your own practice welcomes some insignificant glimmering detail?

Praxis: (Gr. praxis) Activity that has its goal within itself; conduct; distinguished from poiesis, or production (which aims at bringing into existence something distinct from the activity itself)

from Dictionary of Philosophy, ed. Dagobert D. Runes (Totowa, new Jersey: Littlefield, Adams) 1970, p.248.

You're walking down the street and here comes someone wearing a t-shirt with a definition on it. Like “peanut butter, noun [pee-nuht butt-ur]: The goo holding this body together.”

Laplanche and Pontalis gave us too many words to put on a t-shirt. And the definition of praxis would have to carry over from front to back, thereby communicating a concept that cannot be consumed at a glimpse. Thereby communicating a supposition that *cannot* be consumed at a glimpse. Anyway, the point is I am not making a point. I wouldn't know a point if it came up and pointed at me or appointed me or anointed me or disjointed me or disappointed me. I've always thought that what I am doing when you shine a light on me is that what I am doing up here is activity; it is praxis. It's in motion without any A to Z.



There is no hypothesis and there will be no conclusion. I have complete faith that y'all there, y'all in the audience, can concoct

conclusions that suit your own agenda, get an inkling to adapt to your own projects. I'm just mulling around up here. I can't help it. I do call it research. I call it research for good reason. Free association is pointless, but it is research. In our mass mediated, instrumentalized visual culture free association is a special kind of pointless. Free association is not empty disheartened pointless. Free association is without closure, without a bottom line. It cannot be crammed into a slogan.



We trust in the bounty of a meandering human mind. The mind of the human meandering, meandering of the humming mind, the hum of the meaning, the hum of the nameless, the unnamed sum.



Here's an icon, or is it a cliché? This is the delusion of patriarchy. This is the oh-so-old-school-global patriarch. This is the fantasy that patriarchal types try to make realistic. This guy is an actor; this guy's job is to represent the authoritative perspective that supposedly is male; yet the perspective itself is one of the many fabrications of patriarchy, as if any human could be natural in this position. The actor himself might be addicted to nasal decongestant spray, on his third wife and hate his boss. Just like

the rest of the TV-viewing audience, he's a victim of capitalism, whether or not he thinks capitalism is the patriarch's safe haven. Oh! did I say he thinks patriarchy is the capitalist's safe haven? Oh! Did I say patriarchy is the racist's safe haven?



McLuhan: **We don't see things the way they are, we see things the way we are.**

This stop sign is in my hometown in Texas. I learned the lesson of the stop sign. When someone tells you to stop; if someone tells you to stop doing something because it's not for girls, you just shoot their hooley full of holes with sure-fire reasoning of your own. In my youth I had interpreted this stop sign plugged full of bullets as some kind of public service announcement for women. But charming as that is, where else did those bullets fly? And if not

bullets, bullying and beating. Who got shot? Black women, that's who.

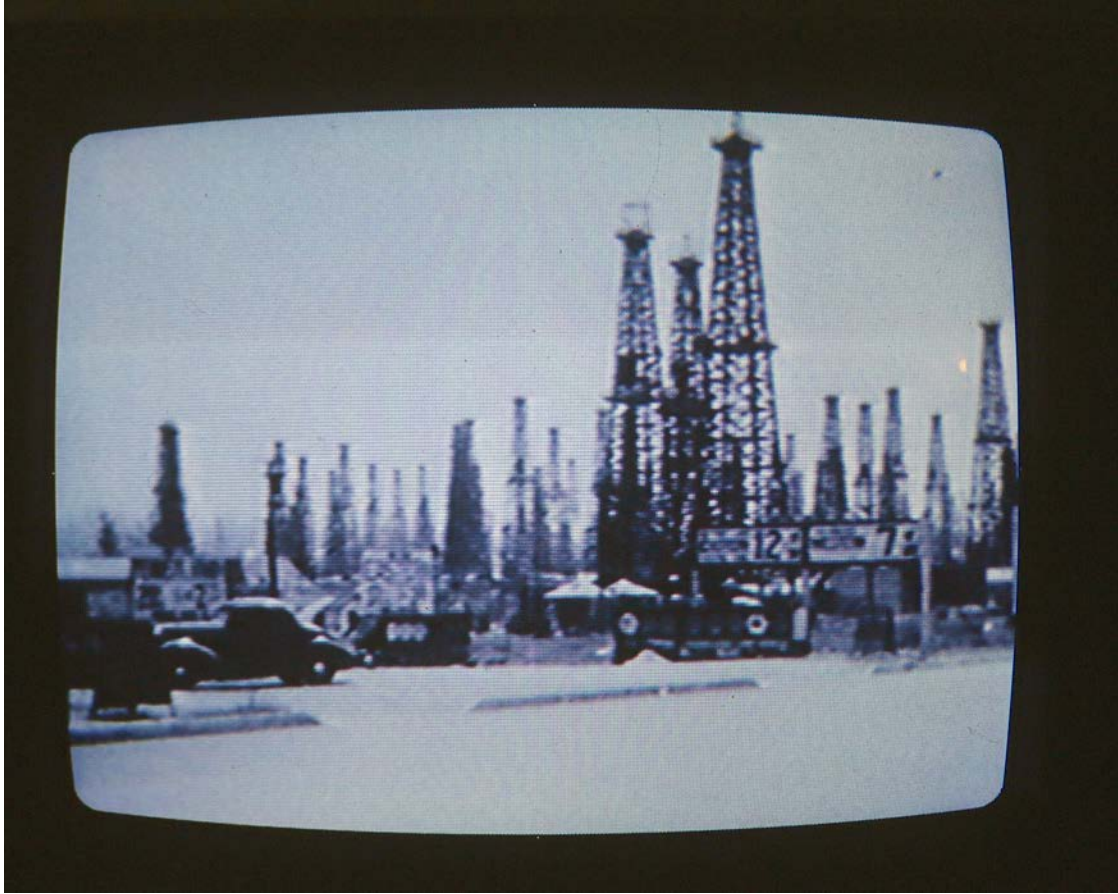


Oppenheimer: **The physicists have known sin; and this is a knowledge they cannot lose.**

I was born in the era of the atom bomb and of course it informed and deformed our consciousness. And I want to remind everyone that there would have been nothing you could have done about

this fucking arch-cauliflower. Everyone knew it. It is no trouble to remember its impact on those of us who were young enough to think we were going to be incinerated in our beds. To grow up with the dread that in a split second you would feel a blaze of total incineration, this formed me as a citizen. Obviously every child had to create a relationship with this Instant White Hot Death, invented, it was proclaimed, by brilliant men.

I wonder whether, whether maybe I thought, “when I grow up, I'm going to be such a mighty intellectual I'll be like the atom bomb of intelligence, incinerating stupidity, pretension and racism.”



As for these phallic oil drill thingies... This refinery was in my home town. Because of this industry's effluvia my home town was, for a decade or so, known as "The Cancer Capital of America." Where to begin accounting for everything that led to these gargantuan machine-age dunce-caps and their consequences. For what you-all are thinking, looking at this scene, for your own creative purposes, there's plenty.

If we are to take into consideration the background, knowing my background is brutal racism, convoluted misogyny, devastation of the land and degenerate Christianity, we certainly won't wait very long for the significant details to emerge with feminist correlations.

Perhaps we can have hope that emergent insignificant details will emerge to propel ethical changes.



Sartre: **Words are loaded pistols.**

Where is the patriarchal vulnerability in this scene? And where is the potential for feminist work? So many of us as children, we walked past here on our way to school. And I don't know who among us thought, "Oh, this red and white clinic is so pretty. When I grow up I am going to be a doctor," without ever wondering what exactly is a gun doctor anyway? This is Texas and I just want you to know it's a different kind of violence because it's in here, it's in your heart and it's in your mind and gut as well as in your gun. To a Texas gal violence is not compartmentalized, kept on hand for certain occasions. I bring the idea of violence to everything. It is a template to test everything or anything said or done around me. I can perceive violence — I sense patriarchal violence in the covert shadows of words and gestures.



Nietzsche: **The true man wants two things: danger and play.**

Here's an idea that I should have read about. I should have gone to the books. There's lots of books being written by brilliant feminists. Yes probably someone's written about being a feminist jock but I've been too self-confident to bother reading it. I forgot to look for a book about this question: What does the little gal from Texas — What does a little gal do when she's totally male-identified? I always preferred the aggressive humour of teenage boys. I always liked having muscles and endurance enough to win races in competitive swimming contests. I liked using my intellect aggressively to make self-righteous teachers shut the fuck up. I wanted to be like The Wild One on the motorcycle, not like the doe-eyed gal in the tight sweater.



Adorno: **Normality is death.**

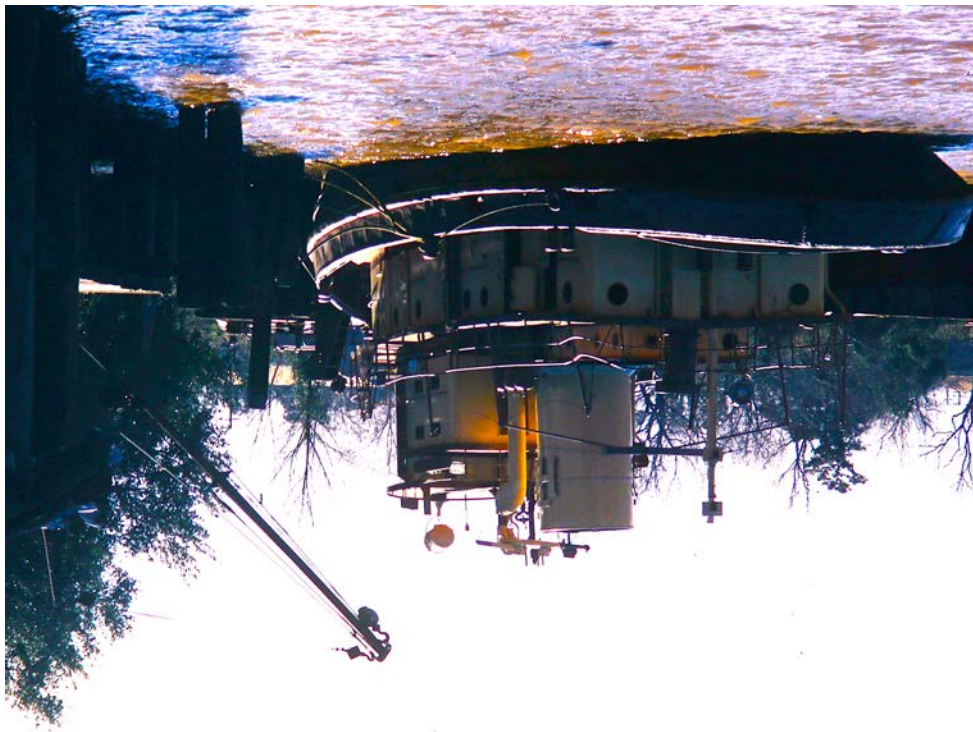
Through what lens and with what medium would I represent my own male-identified interpretation of patriarchy? I will represent patriarchy as the swimmer in the next lane that I can probably beat by at least one tenth of a second.

I mean, when you say it that way, it makes sense, doesn't it? An athlete, a feminist jock doesn't borrow her killer instinct from patriarchy; a feminist can move and play in competition with patriarchy. Competitiveness and a killer instinct are outside patriarchy. Don't be fooled. They are.



I want you to see what passed for the grandeur of my hometown. Here we see desolate, magnificently hopeless Front Street. The signs are missing, but this large building on the left is The Temple of Male Goodness. And this one on the right is actually a Soda Fountain; the missing sign said, “no coloured people allowed.”

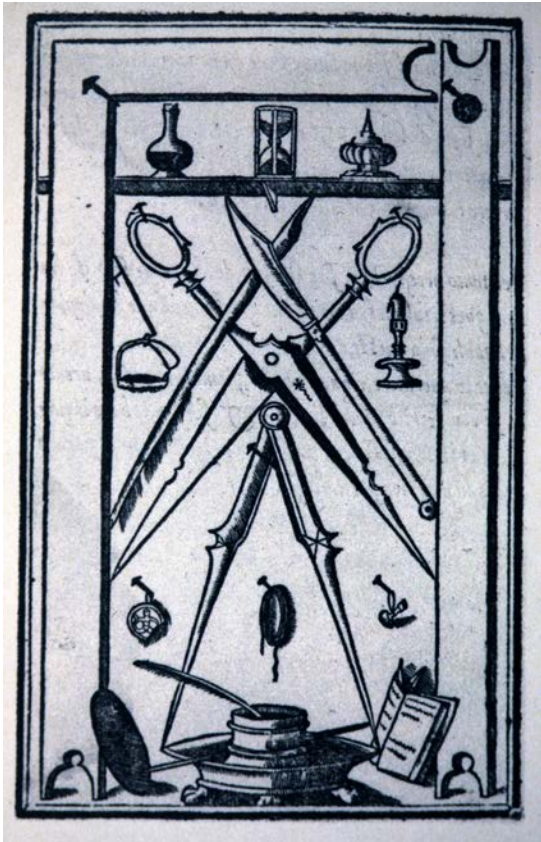
I am showing you such personal slides, believing that you would know my feminist praxis comes from somebody not entirely like you, offering the possibility that if someone’s feminist practice developed out of someone unlike yourself, in what way could that matter?



Schopenhauer: **The difficulty is to try to teach that something can be true and untrue at the same time.**

This is the Neches River that flows through Orange, Texas where I spent my youth, sent a proof of rue and ruth, a long-forgotten azimuth, before vermouth had bent the truth.

If you think of a woman's life as a tugboat on the Neches River I would say for my life as a woman, I think my life has been much better upside down. You've got considerable leeway if you're living your life upside down. You can see the devastation from a very revealing vantage. Oh the organizers of this presentation told me, they said people like to know when did I become a feminist. Like, "When did you stop being impressed by violent male supremism?" Let's see. I think I was pretty near six hours old.



Karl Marx: **The only antidote to mental suffering is physical pain.**

One thing that I realized very early in my life, I'm a masochist. There's a unique stinging pain from trying to write. It just slits the gizzard right out of you. And I kind of like that feeling. These are the writers tools way back when it was much more complicated to put ink marks on paper. These were the weapons for defending ideas. Now, what does a masochist gal from Texas do when so many forms of patriarchy are so painful? When writing without respect for patriarchy is painful in and of itself? Whoa, whoa, whoa. You like a little pain? Well, I'm just asking the question. But let's not get into the titillating features of my personal masochism. The question remains, if a Texas gal likes a little pain, what

bearing might that have on how she is living as a feminist in a patriarchal society? And could her writing break through patriarchal ideology?



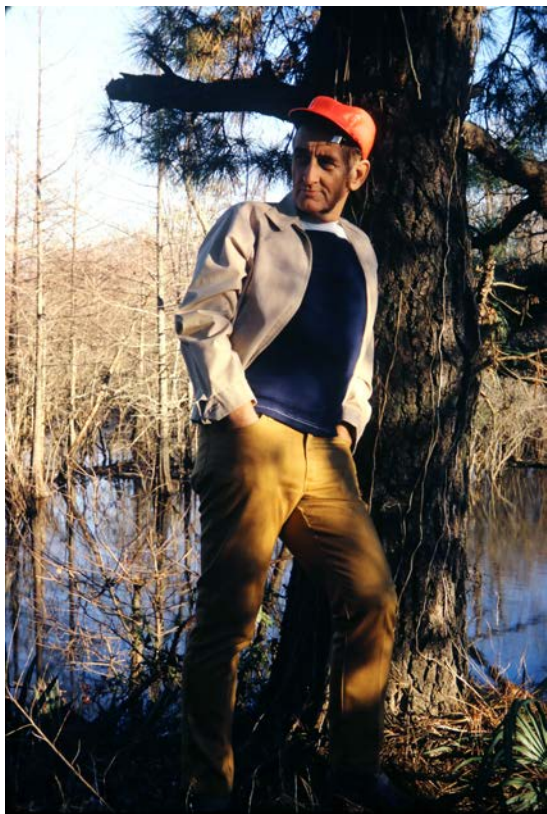
Heidegger: **Making itself intelligible is suicide for philosophy.**

You could, you could, you could break through, you could break through patriarchy. You can't break out of it, but what does it mean to break through? Some gal broke through this window. She jumped through because shards of glass in her flesh were not the pain for her that they would be for someone who avoids getting hurt.

When you write feminist theory must it follow the logic that patriarchal institutions valorize? And if it doesn't will it be intelligible? And even if it isn't intelligible will it reveal the urgency of feminist practice? And how close can remembering feminist

theory come to that path on which you yourself are found? Theory that is going to be with you, not just in your head; something that seems muscular.

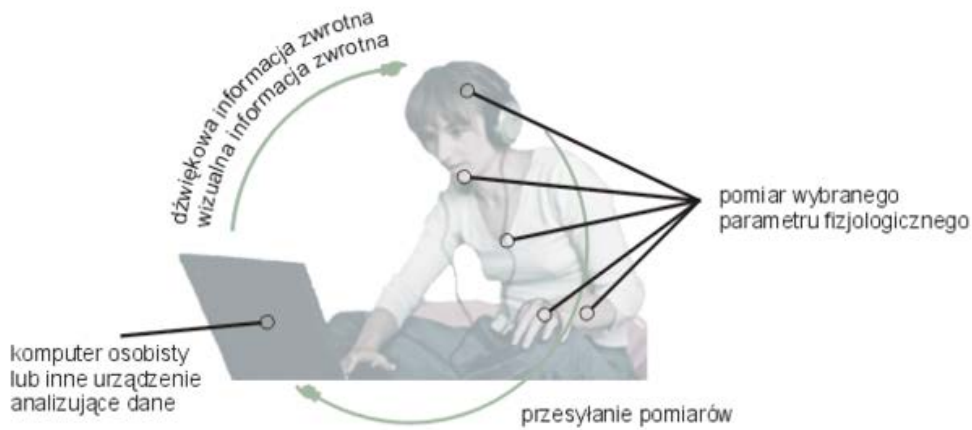
When anyone tells me they are a feminist, my response comes straight from my memories of a nasty little Texas town. You may not realize when you tell me, “I am a feminist,” that I am expecting you to collude with my killer instinct. And that I am looking for how your feminism is a contentious practice, suffused with a killer instinct, not just the proper attitude.



And now I boast that my family was not patriarchal. And this gentleman, my father, he was not a patriarch; he didn't say things a patriarch would have said; he obviously didn't believe things a patriarch would believe. He didn't care about power and control over anyone. Whatever formed him as a man and as a father, the

delusions bestowed by patriarchal institutions did not make sense to him.

I wonder whether you believe that there is a psychological explanation for how some people can be so unimpressed by patriarchal bunk?



Would psychological science account for someone like me never having been intimidated by patriarchal demands? Could it be that psychology itself, with its rhetoric and foundational narrative, is too deep within the domain of patriarchal assumptions, and thus irrelevant for explaining anyone's feminism?

I just want to say that whatever feminist interventions there are, whatever interventions can be imagined, they are legion. Feminist interpretations of patriarchal predicaments are legion. The demands and effects of patriarchy are also legion. We are in the situation where patriarchy has nothing to do with what your gender is. Is it enough that feminism is a good attitude? Is it enough that it

is an ethical opinion? Can a person's feminism be relative, and if so, relative to what?

A carefree white woman such as myself is a very superficial feminist, nothing compared to a feminist who takes action against male supremacy, someone who takes action to weaken the patriarchy. Women living where the power of patriarchy is massive, brutal and personal, where misogyny must be abolished, where it seems there is no end to misogyny, that's where you will find unequivocal feminists, sharing their killer instinct with the wretched of the earth, one of which great expanses of earth has been named Canada .



.....Now for a moment of reflection while I prepare to read to you,

I'm going to read something from *Blueprint: Moving Images in the 21st Century*. The Toronto Pleasure Dome film group published this book in 2003. They had made an international call from which they had chosen nine short films that presented what the 21st century might mean for us. They had kindly asked me to write something for that occasion. And here we are:

A. Twilight in Burning River, West Virginia. Twilight came with pine warblers, rosy tobacco blossoms, and the flutter of dog-face bats. When I was a mere child, I watched these in pink and green sundowns through the kitchen screen door. On Saturday evenings, the kitchen would be hotter than usual with extra pots bubbling and extra cooks nibbling. My uncles, the Gashe Brothers and my great uncle Dorr. Uncle Dorr was as skinny as a coat hanger. His gabardine suit hung to the ankles without a wrinkle. The fabric was cave, puddle brown of thousands of dark blue and rusted threads spreading across his shoulders down his sleeves, down his legs to his pointed pig skin floor shims. Uncle Dorr was clean shaven, pale, his sepia hair comb so flat that the lines looked like they were ink across the scalp. His muddy eyes were shrunken in shadows.

He would sit beside me on the linoleum, not bothering about the effects of the floor upon his suit. Round and round and round she goes, was his incantation as he spun my painted rubber ball. A thick skinned orb with three wide, equators. A purple, a yellow and a blue. Its polar regions are also blue with four white circumpolar stars in the regions between the blue equators and the stars were human figures, circulating the globe, holding hands like paper dolls do. Every figure, each symbolizing a different nation was stencilled yellow. A man in loincloth and huge feathered headdress held the right hand of a man who wore an earring, a sword at his

pantaloon waist and a boot on the leg that wasn't peg. He held the hand of a man in a colourless shirt and cuffless trousers.

His hairdo ended in a pigtail. This man held the hand of a man and a bowler, folded umbrella hooked under the arm, linked to the hand of a burly man in a parka and mukluks who held the hand of a man in the ten-gallon hat who wore chaps and pointy boots. Himself holding the hand of a naked fella with earrings. And he held the left hand of the fella in the loincloth and headdress.

Uncle Dorr would spin the ball so fast, the equators turned blueish green, the stars spun in cloudy white, and the accelerating silhouettes became a buttery blur.

The aromatic atmosphere in which my rubber ball gravitated was an acceleration of wild Turkey bourbon and Lucky Strike. "Round and around and round she goes," Uncle Dorr droned. The painted ball spun well and long. "Round and round and round she goes and where she stops?" Uncle Dorr would stare at me, "And where she stops? Nobody knows." Uncle Dorr threw his glance at the whirling ball. It slowed and wobbled. True to Uncle Dorr's prediction when the globe waltzed to a standstill against the table leg or came to a halt of the tip of my knee, I could not possibly discern whatsoever whether there was a designated nation upon which it had been said to have stopped. I could not perceive where on the globe a stopping point was revealed. Not by any cryptic measure, Uncle Dorr had managed to imply not by any criteria of man or star.

Of course the future takes no rest, never comes to a stop. Of course, the ability to understand the future is a rare human gift. Of course, it is a communal task and I quote, "To create not only the ideas but also the facts of the future."

In the 20th century, I would nominate advertising as the most successful communal project ever creating ideas for the future and having created also the facts of the future.

Z. The old one was brought to the last bed in which he would sleep. He was dying. He was not the first of the Gashe lineage, but he was the first to achieve modern wealth, qualitatively different wealth, not the abundance of land crops, herds, and the trust of local voters. He built his mansion from Number Six well, "The Money Farm." The old one was dying in the middle of the 20th century, dying rich. Not an oil baron of course, dying a Gashe not a Rockefeller, dying the modern way, in a hospital.

I stood at the bed. He was so long and thin he looked like an icicle. I was proving I'd stay with him undaunted right to the doors of death. Although he took no notice of my devotion as he was getting all tangled up in the sheets. There were four hospital attendants trying to smooth him into the bed, in this fine public hospital as an all fine public hospitals in the south of the 1950s the attendants were strong, young African American women. The four of them could have flipped old Gashe like a flapjack, but they were intently professional. There's a method for moving an ancient shard of porcelain into its shroud. "I can't find my penis!" The old Gashe yelled. "It's still there, sir," said one of the attendants and then she glanced at me. I rolled my eyes, but the attendant's expression stayed relaxed. "You can wait in the hall till we get him settled," she said.

Technically I was in the corridor but standing as near as possible to old Gashe's doorway, tethered to him by my conscience. Except for nurses and technicians, attendants and the occasional doctor scuttling past, there were only two other people in the corridor, a couple, brother and sister, maybe cousins. The woman was talking. The man was facing her as if he was listening. He'd just rushed in from the golf course or the fishing pier, judging by his polo shirt and

blue Bermuda shorts. The woman's bones and breath were held together by panic and poise, ornamented by pancake makeup, cotton candy hair, a tiny pastel green rayon dress, a string of pink pearls bubbling around her neck. Her little nylon ankles sloped down into white, open toe high heels. Her words rattled to the floor, like a dropped bag of marbles.

“It was so hot I drank three Cokes and the ice cubes melted before you could finish, but it was worth it to see all the shops. They were all air conditioned. Of course we walked from store to store. The district was only two blocks long but in this heat, we drove up from West Palm. You would've loved it. I'd gone down to see Linda's new patio. There was time to shop. We'd taken the Lincoln. I meant to show you the earring set I got before Easter. I showed Linda. I'm just wearing my little gold earring set today. I'll never forget when I first got my ears pierced. I was so nervous. My mother said, 'Don't you dare.' And I was so scared she'd notice, but it didn't matter. Linda said there's a Mexican silver shop so we parked there and you would not believe it was so swanky.

Just beautiful. I don't like turquoise. You see a lot of that. No, not on everything though. They had bracelets with a little palm tree design. I don't know how they do it. These tiny little silver palm trees. You could see every leaf, not leaf, you know how palm trees have those little special not-leaves. You know what I mean? But they were so tiny and so perfect. And Pippy was so well behaved. I thought she'd be too much trouble, but she loves the Lincoln and it's okay in the shops with a little dog. They don't mind. She was so good. I must have stood at the scarf counter at Mimo's for half an hour. Do you know Mimos? Pippy sat right there. The whole time. Everything is silk and hand painted and the colours, bright colours. I love bright colours. I like everything to look cheerful.

And I just couldn't decide which one I want, their scarves are all so pretty and happy. I got three and one was pink with a green, not

pale, what color was that? Like a lime, pink and green with gold borders and Mimo's signature in gold. That just beautiful handwriting, bold and all swirly. Mimo, all in gold. And I got the rose one with all the beautiful little kittens and their eyes were gold, big gold cat's eyes. And the kittens are just so cute. Pippy would be so jealous. Mommy got a scarf with kittens all over it. And the orange one with so many clouds, all the colours of clouds, not like in real life but cheerful blue clouds and pink clouds, there's golden clouds and lavender clouds, every colour of clouds, golden and bright red ones. And I saw my scarf, not the cloud one, but the kitten one on their movie.

Yes, movie. It's very glamorous. They have a movie screen on one whole wall on the side in a dark overhang. Like it's all in technicolor. And you could see these beautiful models walking down the runway, wearing the clothes you can buy right there at Mimo's. And there were like cartoons, not real cartoons not funny, but beautiful moving pictures. Almost like paintings, except they're moving. And it's the scarf I got or like the scarves you'd see there and waving like flags and turning into stories like for mine the kittens all started singing and the music was so pretty. And then the kittens stand around and make patterns and the colours change, not like mine where I have blue kittens, but pink kittens, gold kittens, and orange kittens. And they line up and march and make patterns. It's so pretty. Going all the time in technicolor, these different moving pictures. And it's like, they come to life. Like in a fairy tale and we didn't just go there, of course. We also went shopping at Foley's..."

Q. Every one of the images rolling up from her throat supposedly represents the shard of our late 20th century anti-selves. But somehow we begin the 21st century claiming it's futile to have a purpose other than self preservation. In the late 20th century, we discovered the self to be nothing but a pack of cards. But now, first

thing in the 21st century we're left with the package. With such a contradiction all the early 20th century philosophies of "Why?" are now entombed beneath the technologies of "How?" And if *Just Doing It* is its own reward, one thing we could do is, and I quote,

"Free humans from the curse of economic exploitation and political and social enslavement for this remains the problem of our time."¹

That's Chomsky. Now that we've finally gotten ourselves to the 21st Christian Era, well into modernism's future, we behold in all directions a super-abundance of imagery; public space has mutated into one long wide protean billboard. Presently, the bright images that whirl around us, never rest nor will we, if we care enough to keep account of them.

Millions of people, and relatively speaking this includes most artists in Canada, live in decent conditions, the basis of a system of abundance and peace, which it was foretold, would set the stage materially such that, and here I quote again,

"The real and functioning sovereignty of the people will be possible."²

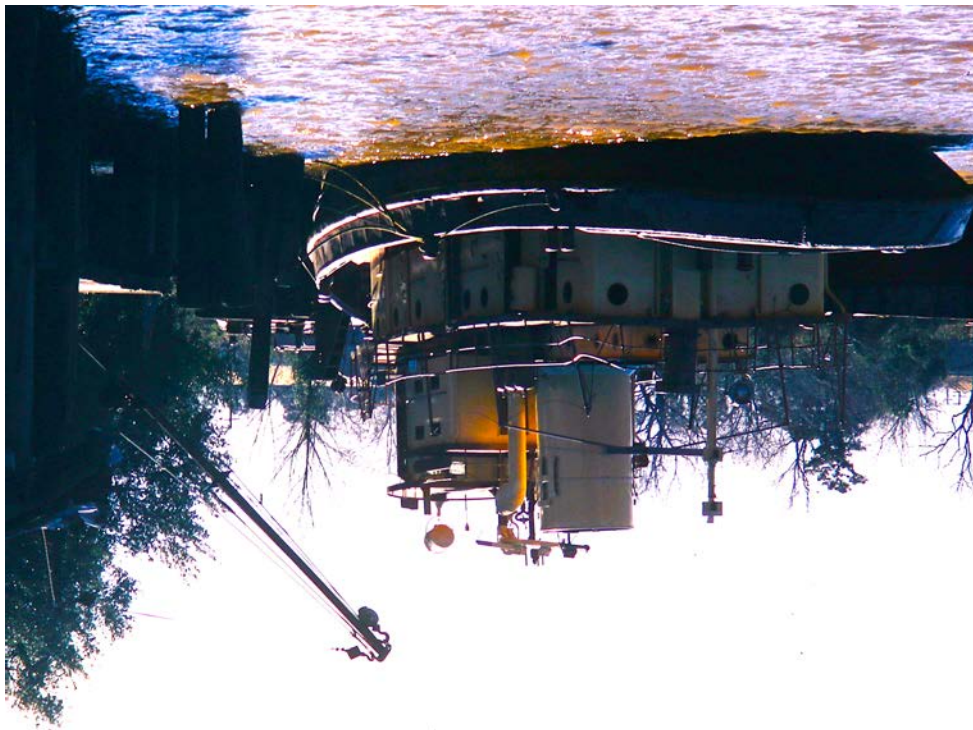
These people, ourselves, who have a good enough material utopia cannot discern for sure whether or not we're still continuing to create, "The objective and subjective conditions, making social transformation ripe,"³ transformation on other continents and transformation of the miserable enclaves literally next door, where none of this talk of "good enough" remotely applies.

For us, the millions who already live on an island of good enough utopia, our ears ring to the roar of the marketplace. Our eyes reflect the golden glow of advertising and we are baptized in a burning river of doo-dads. Our island utopia is already good enough, whether we sense it or not. Utopia feels normal, but it doesn't feel great.

1 Bakunin, as quoted by Chomsky in his “introduction” to Daniel Guerin, *Anarchism* [New York and London: Monthly Review Books] 1970, p. ix

2 Herbert Aptheker, *The Nature of Democracy, Freedom and Revolution* [New York: Little New World Paperbacks] n.d. p. 127

3 Aphteke, p. 127



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